CONFERENCE ON: OTTO NEUGEBAUER, A MATHEMATICIAN'S JOURNEY BETWEEN HISTORY AND PRACTICE OF THE EXACT SCIENCES— A REPORT*

A two-day conference entitled "Otto Neugebauer : A Mathematician's Journey between History and Practice of the Exact Sciences" was held on November 12-13, 2010 at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University.

The focus of the conference, as its title indicates, was on Otto Neugebauer (May 26, 1899-February 19, 1990), the renowned historian of ancient mathematics and astronomy. Neugebauer was born in Innsbruck, Austria, and studied mathematics at the Mathematisches Institut of the University of Göttingen under the famous Richard Courant from 1922 to 1924. He eventually became interested in the history of mathematics and wrote a dissertation on fractions in ancient Egypt. He also founded the *Zentralblatt für Mathematik und ihre Grenzgebiete* in 1931, an immense contribution to modern mathematics. When the Nazis took power in Germany, Neugebauer refused to sign an oath of loyalty and was suspended. Then he left Germany and accepted a position at the University of Copenhagen in 1934. In 1939 he moved to the United States of America, where he took up a position at Brown University, eventually founding the Department of the History of Mathematics there in 1947.

During his career, Neugebauer made an immense contribution to our understanding of ancient mathematics and astronomy, especially as a pioneer in the decoding of Babylonian mathematics and astronomy. His long and distinguished career easily justifies the conference.

The conference brought together scholars from many countries and with many different backgrounds. Topics explored were Neugebauer as a mathematician, a historian of mathematics, and a historian of astronomy. The conference also looked at broader topics, such as mathematicians fleeing from the Nazi Germany

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to the United States. As such, it brought to light the many sides of the multifaceted Neugebauer. The talks of the conference were excellent and fostered lengthy and valuable discussions. One understands that the conference papers will be published. It is hoped in addition that someone, maybe one of the conference participants, will take on the enormous task of writing a biography of Otto Neugebauer. One hopes furthermore that the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World will continue to host such conferences.

The conference was organized by Alexander Jones (Institute for the Study of the Ancient World), Christine Proust (Institut Méditerranéen de Recherches Avancées), and John Steele (Brown University). The late John Britton, who passed away on June 8, 2010, was also involved in organizing the conference, but sadly he was not there to witness it.

The sessions and speakers of the conference were as follows:

Session I. From Mathematics to History of Mathematics

Jens Høyrup (Roskilde University, Denmark): The Outsider Walked In — The Historiography of Mesopotamian Mathematics until Neugebauer.

Jim Ritter (University of Paris and team 'Histoire e Archéologie de l'Orient Cunéiform,' CNRS, France): Otto Neugebauer and Ancient Egypt.

Christine Proust (Institut Méditerranéen de Recherches Avancées, Marseilles, France): Mathematical and Philological Sights on Cuneiform Texts: The Correspondence of Neugebauer with Assyriologists.

Duncan Melville (St. Lawrence University, Canton, USA): The Recent Revolution in the Study of Babylonian Mathematics.

Response by: Sylvain Cappell (Courant Institute, New York University).

Session II. From Europe to America: The Mathematical Community

David Rowe (University of Mainz, Germany): Neugebauer and the Exact Sciences in Courant's Göttingen.

R. Sigmund-Schultze (University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway): Not in Possession of any Weltanschauung: Neugebauer's Flight from Nazi Politics and his Search for Objectivity in Mathematical Reviewing.

Lis Brack-Bernsen (University of Regensburg, Germany): Neugebauer's Stay in Copenhagen and his Connection to Denmark.

Lewis Pyenson (Western Michigan University): Neugebauer: Historian of Science.

Response by: Peter Lax (Courant Institute, New York University).

Keynote lecture

R. Sigmund-Schultze (University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway): Mathematicians Fleeing from Nazi Germany: In Particular the Impact on Applied Mathematics and Historiography in the U.S.

Session III. From History of Mathematics to History of Astronomy

Teije de Jong (University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands): Babylonian Astronomy: 1880-1950.

John Steele (Brown University, Providence, USA): The Impact of Neugebauer's Astronomical Cuneiform Texts on Twentieth Century Assyriology and History of Science.

Hermann Hunger (University of Vienna, Austria): The Study of Not-so-Mathematical Babylonian Astronomy.

Mathieu Ossendrijver (University of Tübingen, Germany, and Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University): Translating Babylonian Mathematical Astronomy: Neugebauer and Beyond.

Response by: J. Z. Buchwald (California Institute of Technology)

Session IV. From Assyriology to Renaissance Art

Agathe Keller (CNRS, Paris): Exact Sciences and Astrology: Reflecting on Neugebauer's Historiography of Scientific Transmissions.

B. R. Goldstein (University of Pittsburgh, USA): Evidence for the Transmission of Astronomy in the Medieval Alfonsine Corpus.

Dennis Duke (Florida State University, USA): Early Mathematical Astronomy – The Lost Years.

George Saliba (Columbia University, USA): Those Wretched Sciences Again: The End of the World that never came with the Planetary Conjunction of 1186 in Islamic Tradition.

Karine Chemla (CNRS, Paris): Otto Neugebauer, a Mathematician Turned Historian of Ancient Mathematics and Astronomy.

Response by: Harold Edwards (Courant Institute, New York University).