



“HANS” FRANKFORT’S EARLIER YEARS
BASED ON HIS LETTERS TO “BRAM” VAN REGTEREN ALTENA

translated and edited by
MAURITS VAN LOON



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"HANS" FRANKFORT'S EARLIER YEARS

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III



"Hans" Frankfort in the late forties, (courtesy Mrs. Enriqueta Frankfort).
photographed by Mrs. Saxl

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with the invaluable help of Miss Heather Willings



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"HANS" FRANKFORT'S EARLIER YEARS

based on his letters to "Bram" van Regteren Altena¹

It is now forty years since the premature death of Henri Frankfort cut short the career of a brilliant mind. Frankfort (1897-1954) put Near Eastern archaeology on the map as a field of methodical scholarship. His scholarly activity took him to London, on to Chicago and finally back to London.

Under his influence, first as director of the University of Chicago Iraq Expedition (1929-1937), then as professor at the University of Chicago Institute (1938-1949), Chicago became a hotbed of Near Eastern scholarship, focusing at first on the methodical excavation of the material evidence, then widening to encompass all areas of ancient civilization and its basic values.

With the new possibilities offered by the generosity of the University of Chicago, Frankfort quickly saw the need to collaborate with younger archaeologists and philologists. His digging strategy, his work of coordination and his interpretation of the Iraq Expedition's finds laid the foundation for early Mesopotamian chronology and history.

Not only did he pay attention to the fine detail of ceramics, sculpture and glyptic art and pick out the essentials, but with his vast command of the textual evidence he was also able to approach ancient civilization on its own terms and present a convincing vision of the whole.

The present study, however, is not intended as another biography or an analysis of Frankfort's outstanding role as a scholar. Such tributes

¹ whose son Hans kindly put these letters at the editor's disposition.

have been paid by others.² Instead, I hope to throw some light on lesser known aspects of his life: the extraordinarily stimulating exchange of views with the young intellectuals among whom he grew up, and the mystic pantheism that became his creed early in life. His letters show him to be constantly aware of the hidden forces of nature and the often irrational workings of the human mind.

Henri Frankfort was born in Amsterdam on February 24, 1897. His father was a merchant who traded mainly with the Near East. Henri's brother eventually went to live in Istanbul for the requirements of the family business. The Frankforts seem to have belonged to the more emancipated wing of Amsterdam's Jewish society.

It was apparently intended that Hans (as his friends called him) should also make his career in the family business. His father sent him to Commercial High School (Hogere Burger School), where he soon attracted notice for his leadership and was elected to the student council. Three young men who were to become his intimate friends, Abraham D. ("Bram") van Regteren Altena (1897-1985), Everhardus J. ("Ee") Korthals Altes (1898-1981), and Hendrik ("Henk") Bruyn (1897-1983) were members of the student body of Barlaeus Latin School (Gymnasium) (Fig. 1). At interschool meetings they made Frankfort's acquaintance and were struck by his brilliance and wide reading. After they had all finished high school and Frankfort has already started to work under a friend of his father's in a leather importing business, the three friends, who were studying law, encouraged Frankfort to give up business and become a historian instead. They pleaded with Frankfort's father to let his son work towards a State Baccalaureate to fill him in on Latin, Greek and other subjects that he had missed.

² A.W. Byvanck, "Herdenking van Henri Frankfort", *Jaarboek der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*, 1954-1955; P. Delougaz & T. Jacobson, "Henri Frankfort", February 24, 1897 - July 16, 1954". *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 14 (1955) 1-13; P. Matthiae, "Introduzione" in Henri Frankfort, *Il dio che muore* (translated from the English by G.S. Matthiae; Scandicci Firenze, 1992) vii-xxi; L. Glynne Davies, "Frankfort, Henri" in *The Dictionary of Art* (London, Macmillan in press).

This would permit him to enter the University of Amsterdam and study history (at that time combined with Netherlands language and literature).

The frequency with which the four young men, who all lived in Amsterdam, corresponded by mail may seem surprising to us who are used to the telephone as a daily means of communication. One must bear in mind, however, that the telephone in the early 20th century still served more as an alarm signal. Weekly or even daily exchange of letters was normal.

In a letter dated September 26, 1916, Frankfort wrote as follows to his friend Bram:

Furthermore my horribly mixed-up Latin-Germanic brain has kept churning on in its old way and has produced a precious crystal, namely the firm resolution to take a State Baccalaureate and then go on to study Netherlands language and literature. For I have done a number of stupid things which have clearly proved that I would only be able to succeed in business if I stifled my spiritual life. I realized that this would be suicide, and thank God I have now been put in a position where I can no longer postpone a decision but have to make a definite choice. I have been obliged to think the matter out in all its ramifications. This took place on Saturday night and Sunday. It exhausted me and left me half demented. It was the hardest dilemma I have ever been faced with. There was no one who could counsel me. I alone had to decide. I will write to you more fully about this, of course. For the moment I don't feel able to set down for the umpteenth time the arguments for and against. You will understand that I had to discuss the matter at length with my father, and we agreed to postpone the final decision until I have done my first week of military service. This is the official version, but in my heart the decision has already been taken. I am now making all kinds of enquiries. It is only if I draw a blank that I might fall back into the world of business. Brrrrrr! Imagine that happening! But it never will! Definitely not! Adieu.

Yours,

Hans.

A year later, at 20 years of age, he expounded his philosophy to Bram. As will be seen, his extensive reading had already taken him far beyond the Judeo-Christian milieu in which he moved. Like a number of his contemporaries, he plunged deep into oriental literature. By reconciling the metaphysical with the intellectual side of human nature it satisfied Frankfort's emotional needs and gave him a unified outlook on humanity that enabled him to understand and interpret civilizations far removed in time and space.

Amsterdam, July 9, 1917

Dear Bram,

*When your letter reached me I was surrounded by great riches hitherto unknown: a harmony of strange, bright, flashing colours, fabulously flowering, sweet-smelling trees, clear exotic chords, wisdom woven like gold thread in multicoloured garments, and all of this so abundant that I revelled in it until I was tired and red in the face, enjoying the beautiful Vasantasenâ and the righteous Cârudatta, in short everything in the wonderful play **The Clay Chariot**. The impression I have just tried to give of my emotions falls as far short, a copper coin does of a gleaming opal. I won't give a full analysis of this play at the moment because I haven't even finished reading it and I am not in a fit state to write, but I will see if there are any passages that I can quote to let you join in this enjoyment. What do you think of the following in connection with our sayings about female intuition and male knowledge? About 600 A.D. they wrote, "Women's wisdom comes from Nature, but the wisdom of men is learned from book." (There follows a page and a half of additional quotations.) The book is also beautifully printed in the old Dutch style and decorated with vignettes by Hart Nibbrig. In short it is almost too beautiful for words.*

And now in answer to your long letter, which gave me great pleasure (you know I am very sensitive to friendship) and which I shall now answer calmly. (One page concerning other persons.) The remainder of your letter gives me solid proof that in spite of certain differences we stand very close to each other. I would like to clarify one point a little more, if I can. There is absolute truth, only in that way can one explain Lao-Tse, Confucius, Plato, Buddha, Plotinus, Hegel, etc. have all come to identical conclusions. This absolute truth is generic, in specifics the various systems differ. I will try to set down some of the elements that create this absolute truth for me. It is nothing new: since such truth is absolute it is impossible for it to be new and original. I don't mean to give a synthesis or compilation of truth, but I feel strongly that this truth is part of my very being. It is one with my deepest essence, and the philosophers have also felt it and formulated it in such a way that I have been able to verify it with my reason and found it entirely true. This is the advantage of systems, my friend. Our knowledge of history, our scattered, fragmented, all-embracing learning makes us lose sight of truth through the accumulation of heterogeneous knowledge without the check of sharp analysis and painfully lucid conscience. We can only achieve this by logical thinking, which does not deny truth but explores the path towards truth that we feel is the right one. In the greyness of our daily existence we must train our thoughts upwards as in a pyramid to more spiritual spheres. For you it is not so necessary because you have never been involved in the trivial fuss of daily life, the struggle for money and bread, the rat race... So you may be able to reach the same state without having recourse to a pyramidal structure. But for us clerks, soldiers, etc., this practice is necessary, in order to keep higher concerns in view in the midst of triviality. As you see, your letter and my reflection on it now make it impossible for me to call your attitude wrong as I once did..

I will now describe my construction to your critical mind. It is not a temple, it is no grandiose synthesis, only a rough clay model of

something that should one day bring harmony to my life. It is a credo that I hold very firmly.

1. This world is an illusion, it is the manifestation of God. (Plotinus, Lao-Tse, Hegel, Fechner, Spinoza, etc.).

2. God is not matter but He penetrates all matter, penetrates the laws, rules, causes, shapes, effects, all of the visible and invisible world. It (I consider God as neuter) is outside time, outside space and also in other respects unknowable by human reason because It cannot be expressed in our existing thoughts or words. (Plotinus, Hegel, Lao-Tse, etc.). My feeling teaches me, although my reason cannot comprehend it, that some definitions are possible, for instance that God manifests Himself in three ways (Plotinus and Lao-Tse.), and that God stands in the world in the same way as a subject in a sentence (Spinoza).

3. The deepest essence of Man and perhaps the deepest essence of everything, the pure ego, is related to or a part of or even identical to God.

4. One cannot know God through one's reason or through meditation or the like. Again my feeling teaches me, although my reason cannot comprehend it, that one can approach God by contemplation because we are related to God and because union is possible. Perhaps this union is the aim of our life (Plotinus, Ruusbroec and all Oriental religions and philosophers). In this union, which is timeless, one can then experience absolute truth, which is not knowable.

5. This mystical experience is not attained by passive waiting but by active striving, by the Amor Dei, by longing, yearning, hankering desire, by thirsting, passionate love towards God.

This, O Abraham Lukasovich, is the purely conscious and rational part of my view of life. As you see, it is only a model in grey clay of what some day I hope will become a resplendently beautiful building. The Amor Dei on which it is founded arises from my feeling and resolve. The emotional part of my view of life is even more beautiful

than the rational part. The emotional part is largely made up of serenity, on a small scale in relation to people and to the humbler things of the earth - I wish I had more of the smiling indifference that the Stoics and Epictetus have taught us - and also serenity on a scale greater than this life. Reaching into the Cosmos, this is a feeling that we are on a path even if we don't realize it, that an evolution is going on although we can't verify it, that a goal is being aimed for. He who wants to see it will be able to see it.

All this gives one a lovely warm serenity. One leaves far behind the anxiety that fills the confused head of modern men, those heads in which the aimless wanderings of decentralized knowledge produce such monstrosities. If one has attained this serenity one knows that anxiety and aimless wandering are unnecessary. It is unnecessary to hurry because time is a fiction, with serenity we recognize the right path. O my friend, if one can only be sure of knowing what is good and of doing good quietly! If one can only feel a divinity growing through one's growing and living through one's life! When I feel at one with the good wise trees and the wise skies, jubilation grips me and I want to adore and glorify, like larks that circle upwards in golden skies. What an unforgettable moment when the movement of my soul becomes visible in sublime clarity for my enlightenment... I have in me an emotion greater than I have ever felt before. I cannot express it, and now it has left me. It was one supreme moment... I think it is better that I stop for tonight. Adieu!

The essence of this mystic pantheism was to pervade his writings for the rest of his life.

In 1917 he performed his military service in the Royal Artillery, teaching recruits "with stunning success", as he said jokingly.

At the University of Amsterdam Frankfort plunged into a multitude of disciplines. Anthropology - or ethnology as it was called at the time - was to have a lasting influence on him. Other subjects such as

Hebrew were soon dropped. His Jewish background was undoubtedly a contributing factor in his interest in the Near East, but Old Testament or related studies do not seem to have attracted him. Some passages in his later works even suggest a preference for the ancient Near Eastern nature philosophy above the austere teachings of the Old Testament.

*In Egypt and Mesopotamia man was dominated, but also supported, by the great rhythm of nature. (...) The depth and intimacy of man's relationship with nature found expression in the ancient symbol of the mother-goddess. But Hebrew thought ignored this image entirely. It only recognized the stern Father.*³

*In Hebrew religion (...) the ancient bond between man and nature was destroyed. Those who served Yahweh had to forego the richness, the fulfilment, and the consolation of a life moving in tune with the great rhythms of earth and sky.*⁴

(In pencil in a different hand: 1919)
Tuesday evening

Blessed are the uncritical, for theirs is the kingdom of endlessly repeated satisfaction - The Gospel of the Art of Living.

*Dear Folks,*⁵

Since I have already torn up two earlier versions of this letter I realize that I shall have to write about myself and my activities,

³ H. Frankfort et al., **The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man** (Chicago, 1946) 37¹.

⁴ H. Frankfort, **Kingship and the Gods** (Chicago, 1948) 343.

⁵ This letter is addressed to all three friends, Bram, Henk and Ee together.

since the narrowness of my interests prevents me from being aware of anything else.

*I am passing through a peculiar phase. I have the impression that my brain capacity is almost unlimited, although I am not conscious of all of it. My present existence is enjoyably complicated. I spend my time between my home, the Concertgebouw, the University and the road running between these wombs of culture. The satisfaction with my studies, which Bram finds so peculiar, and attributes to a lack of critical spirit, is due to the agreeable fact that I give myself completely to each of the subjects taught, and for a few days live entirely in that subject with delightful plunges into fantasy which are most pleasurable experiences. If that is being a dilettante, Bourget is wrong in saying, "le dilettantisme... nous incline tour à tour vers les formes diverses de la vie et nous conduit à nous prêter à toutes ces formes sans nous donner à aucune." (**Psychologie contemporaine**). In that sense dilettantism is a miserable way of picking and choosing here and there, making one blasé to the point of suicide. It is based on narrow self-satisfaction which splits the ego in pieces and cuts it off so that it loses all interest. But the most joyful experience one can have is, on the contrary, to lose oneself and become submerged in something, to re-emerge happier and enriched by its beauty. That is what real study is. This is the way in which the ancient Indo-Europeans live for me on Monday morning (after preparation on Saturday and Sunday), because behind the phenomena of language I see them, I feel them appearing from Asia, splitting up and spreading, mixing, conquering, changing from hunters to nomads, from nomads to farmers, slowly developing a culture, slowly evolving religious concepts, moral concepts and a spiritual life. I realize that I will not always have such experiences but at times curse the grammar of the Gothic tongue, but at the moment I still see all this reflected in the phenomena of language.*

Monday evening an old love of mine was reborn: ethnology. The most primitive peoples with their world of thought, their magic, their

animism, their deep roots in Nature, their close relationship with animals, plants, water, clouds, their totemism, all of these fascinate me as they have always done, while Professor Steinmetz adds new notions and explanations to my knowledge in this field with his lively, amusing and polemic manner.

Tuesday I was free during the day. In the evening Professor Hackmann, a curious chap who has lived as a monk in a lamasery and is a fine connoisseur of art, lectured on Chinese religions among statues of Buddha and China and a frightening number of books in beautifully carved Chinese bookcases. Then came Professor Brugmans, who, although his voice is boring, has nevertheless a certain subdued and typically Nordic enthusiasm for the holy law of cause and effect, the uninterrupted chain that causes everything to follow logically and naturally out of what has gone before. This gives me intellectual satisfaction and accords pleasantly with my deterministic nature, the more so since he brings in psychology quite neatly. I can assure you that after some preparation the Quattrocento which I so admire also comes to life. If you add to all this my study of Hebrew and the concerts that I attend you will see that I live a multitude of lives, miraculously held together by my octopus-like ego, but that nothing else is of importance. What happens in the world outside leaves me cold unless it concerns Syria. At the moment other matters are more real to me. I am very glad that I need not waste time on dancing lessons, student fraternities, dinner parties and so forth. The pleasure I get from studying is all the greater because none of these subjects is strange to me. I can start straight in from a foundation of knowledge that I had already acquired. In addition I have stopped asking why I am doing this. I am more firmly convinced than ever that the wide, diversified training that I have had so far and have partly given myself has resulted in a similar diversification in my capacity for learning. I realize more and more that it doesn't matter if we forget books or theories that we have once known. They have borne fruit and indeed are still bearing fruit, since they have enlarged our mind, making it able to think in

different ways, grasp things by intuition or distinguish the finer points.

I believe that in this respect I have developed in a similar way to Bram. I should of course add that this diversification and enrichment is not an end in itself. This treasure must be put to some use, there must be creation, propagation, undoubtedly the greatest task that anyone can fulfil in his life, if it is carried out in the elevated sense that I mean: creating in the sense of shaping something alive and unique that can inspire others to do the same, or give happiness by breaking through the narrow limits of their consciousness and opening up further, brighter perspectives. Who can tell if any of us will ever be able to do that, but my own development and my present life show that learning can have such an effect. (The remaining page deals with impressions at an exhibition of paintings.)

As early as 1919, during his first year at university, Frankfort drew attention with his book reviews and exhibition accounts in the student weekly **Propria Cures**. As an example, we quote from his December 6, 1919, review of J.A. der Mouw's **Brahman I** (Amsterdam: W. Versluys, 1919).

Everything about this book is strange! The writer, a scholar, lived unknown to the public, appreciated by just a few colleagues. He taught Sanskrit, Greek and Latin, Indian and modern philosophy, and purely for his own pleasure acquainted himself thoroughly with geometry and astronomy.

I don't know whether his few friends and pupils were ever aware of his desperate lack of fulfilment, his long suffering. But no one was aware of his final bliss, because no one knew that this quiet modern scholar was a mystic and a poet. And towards the age of fifty, when other poets mourn their lost youth and know that their creativity has gone forever, his emotions had reached such a pitch that they forced

him to write poetry. By that time his suffering and lack of fulfilment had been resolved in the timeless liberation of Mystical Union.

Out of the scholar Dr. der Mouw was born the poet Adwaita (Sanskrit for "non-duality"). And this poet labored for five years in solitude, unbeknown to all. Then he showed his work to some friends and decided to publish (...). Everything was prepared for publication in two volumes. Then he died.

We now have the first volume. And so strange, so original are nearly all these poems that I fear many readers will be incapable of truly understanding this work and will put it aside as one more modern freak. They will lose thereby, in denying themselves enrichment by a rare treasure: Oriental wisdom transmitted by Western scholarship in verse.

This is the ancient wisdom of the East: that the reality we naively believe we know through our senses is only appearance. In truth there is no division. Everything is One (here he quotes Chuang-Tse). And this Unity is no bloodless abstraction. It is reality, primeval and innermost, seizing and overpowering him who lets himself reach it. All boundaries disappear. The Self becomes one with the All.

In 1919 and also 1920 Frankfort wrote a total of twelve reviews ranging in subject from Rudyard Kipling's **Barrack-Room Ballads** (1892) to the sculpture of Ivan Mestrovic (with the art historian Johan Q. "Jon" van Regteren Altena (1899-1980), Bram's brother). On February 21, 1920, he joined the editorial board of **Propria Cures** with a leading article which we reproduce in full.

ON BEING A STUDENT

(On the occasion of starting work as editor of this weekly)

*The way in which I plan to carry out my task as editor of **Propria Cures** is directly connected with my view on being a student in general, and that is the subject that I wish to deal with on assuming the*

*editorship. These views are not new, since many others have recently felt the need to rethink traditional attitudes to life. The days are over when a student could enjoy total freedom in light-hearted exuberance, just as unlimited individualism has become a thing of the past. It is foolish to try and prolong an attitude that is doomed to disappear because the inexorable march of history will force it to give way to something different. Though we may remember with envy or nostalgia the carefree lifestyle of students in the past we can never hope for it ourselves. A feeling of responsibility that we have not sought but that is taking ever greater hold has made it impossible for us to see pleasure as the only aim in life, because we can no longer see an individual as an isolated independent unit, living according to his own rules, striving towards a selfish goal. Nowadays we see the individual as part of a whole, in an organism governed by innumerable ties and relationships. While realizing how relatively unimportant everything personal has become, we have come to see clearly the important new role of the individual, both an aim and a *raison d'être*, which is to be a perfect working part of the organism of society.*

This realization has caused a feeling of responsibility to grow consciously or unconsciously within us and has impinged upon our lives as students. We no longer wish to enjoy our privileges for pleasure alone. We wish to determine how we can serve a greater cause and thus achieve the way of life that our time demands of us. But in doing this we must steer clear of two extremes. Some students by necessity or inclination rush through their exams in order to play an active part in society as soon as possible. They are admired by some and pitied by others, but they do not solve the problem. They do not know what studying really is. I doubt whether their slogging ever leads to study. Certainly they never become students.

Others give themselves more time for the calm digestion of knowledge that is true study, but their desire for a place in society drives them to cling to their convictions of the moment and seek a role by joining a political party. They too are trying to solve the

problem by avoiding it. In politics one can only help to build up, preserve or destroy if one's convictions are unwavering. But no one with rigid convictions can be a student.

One's student years are a time of preparation, and their greatest boon is still their freedom. It is not the freedom to consider nothing and no one and become brutish and unthinking, following every whim, but the freedom of spirit essential for a proper breadth of mind. Those who do not become students and are forced to enter society with debilitating and doubt-ridden inner conflicts of their youth still unresolved cannot let their thoughts venture too deeply or too far from everyday concerns. In the struggle for material existence they need the protective armour of normality, the ever-available arsenal of established opinions. They lack the time and the opportunity to develop their full potential in a way that would benefit themselves and society. For want of time they use what others have made.

*We students are not subject to such constraints. This makes us feel happy, rich and privileged, but an urge for social responsibility demands to be satisfied and we can only do this by making full use of the most essential aspect of our existence as students, namely our spiritual freedom. Let us therefore bring sincerity to our idealism by thinking through all its consequences, in order that the problems of daily life shall not end by pushing us down into the embittered masses. Let our opinions be broad-minded and honest so that in later years our convictions may not be changed by self-interest into hypocrisy. If we achieve this, we shall truly have earned our spiritual freedom and paid our debt to society because we shall then become one with society as working parts of an organism, valuable not only for our knowledge but also our qualities, by being more broad-minded, clearer-sighted and more finely sensitive. But let us resemble the carefree student generations of other times in one respect, by making the Philistine, the **bourgeois satisfait** our hated enemy.*

H. FRANKFORT

A bookplate designed for Frankfort in the 1920s illustrates the same enlightened elitism that was still the hallmark of students and scholars in prewar days (Fig. 2). The ideal scholar, in white robes, is shown ascending the steps of the temple of learning, high above the smokestacks of the factories where the "embittered masses" toil. Significantly, Frankfort no longer used these bookplates in the more socially conscious postwar years.

He resigned from the editorial board on November 27, 1920, becoming an honorary member.

Other articles of Frankfort's in this weekly pleaded for keeping French as a compulsory subject at high school (with Everhardus J. "Ee" Korthals Altes) and against joining the League of Revolutionary Socialist Students.

Two letters to Bram from the eventful year of 1920 are worth quoting. In the first, dated April 8, he mentions for the first time a plan that he will cherish for a long time: to write a world history.

*(...) it seems to me that we have different views on man's relationship to his surroundings. What you find important is the relationship of man to nature. This leads you into politics and ethics and me into religion. For me the outside world consists firstly of heaven, the stars, the sea, the green trees. I feel that I am not free but bound in some sublime way. I feel that the Force is active through me. I feel that I am part of a larger part, a tiny cog whose only task is to stay in the right place and function effectively. My consciousness of being bound in this way enraptures me, so sublime and inviolate is the Whole. The secret of our life is captured for me in the line from the *Lied von der Erde*, which says "Heaven is eternally blue". I can't express how this simple sentence moves me, and only after immersing myself and quenching my thirst in this feeling can I go to my fellow atoms, my fellow men. To repeat what Tagore has said: "O*

insensé, qui essaies de te porter sur tes propres épaules! O mendiant, qui viens mendier à ta propre porte!". This I think is the conviction that must penetrate mankind and will one day lead to a mighty civilization: the conviction that we are imperfect nonentities by ourselves, but must all work together and be pure and good. In this way the force of life can be active through us without being dissipated or resisted, while it aims at its own high goal that we cannot know. That is why our most precious possession is our conscience and our intuition because in them the force of life manifests itself directly.

This is all a bit vague. I hope to be able to express these ideas more clearly in the future. I will write another time about the subjectivity of God. About history I want to say this: for me history is a fascinating and dramatic illustration of the workings of superhuman forces. One of my boldest dreams for the future is to write a world history in which people and nations appear as instruments, pushed up or pressed down, moved or annihilated against their will, as it were, by the Force that dominates them all.

The other letter, dated May 21, announces his engagement to Henriette ("Jettie") Groenewegen (1897-1982), whose father, a theologian, taught at the Lutheran seminary in Amsterdam.

*Huis ter Heide
May 21, 1920*

(...) Now I am calmly writing here in a room that I did not know a week ago and that is now quite familiar, while Jettie is resting upstairs. It is after lunch and everything is wonderfully calm and wonderfully lovely.

I remember that last night I wanted to write that we cannot expect a new movement in music until society as a whole has come nearer to true civilization, in other words that while material conditions are

*favourable, spiritual ones are lacking. But I can no longer write about these abstract matters. I want to tell you about my engagement. It is a miracle, a great miracle how everything has changed in the last two months. I assure you that I feel like a new person in the world around me. My self-confidence, my strength, my determination to do good, have all grown to an extent that I never felt possible, and they are still growing. I feel a more complete human being and my previous life, which was neither empty nor poor, now seems unhappy, miserable and worthless. It is as if all the various forces in me, all inclinations and all strivings have at last found a focus on which to converge, or should one say a common base from which to diverge. It is a miracle, a real miracle, because it makes me not only a completer but also a **better** human being. (...) The great thing is that everything good in me has been infinitely strengthened while everything weak or puny has shrunk. Of course there is more that is great: assurance and confidence, not to mention all the beauty that I cannot now describe.*

I now feel closer to you two as well. I would love to see both of you oftener than has been the case recently. If we cannot see each other then do write to me. At the moment it is important for me not to lose old contacts. It is a problem that I suddenly have no more time for the many people I had learned to know more than superficially over the last few years. (...) It is impossible for me to mean as much to those other friends as before, since I can no longer put myself in their positions to understand their difficulties and problems as I used to. (...)

Jettie had the silly idea of sending her brothers and sisters the following note: "The future Mr. and Mrs. Frankfort née Groenewegen are happy to announce the birth of your brother-in-law Hans, Zionist." She was referring to our Palestinian plans for the future. This caused great commotion. Everyone thought that she was going to land in a super-orthodox Jewish set and felt anxious as to how that would work out. Jettie was soon able to convince her parents of the contrary. She has told them a lot about me and let

them read some of my writings, and finally I came here on Monday. Two of Jettie's brothers had bicycled over to see this miracle. I was received most cordially and had a long conversation with the Professor⁶, a very pleasant conversation indeed. I did not hide the fact that our future is full of question marks and that many problems will have to be overcome. After this the matter was decided. Everyone was very friendly and cheerful and I feel quite at home here. Jettie joined us on Tuesday.

My parents have not yet recovered from their surprise. As you know, I am their eldest child, while Jettie has four older brothers and sisters who are either married or engaged, so her parents have more experience in these matters. My parents were deeply moved, but this made everything very pleasant and cordial and Jettie is very welcome in my parents' home. You will understand how glad I am. Since Jettie and I had cleared the matter with her parents, my father did not need to go and talk to her father. My parents are coming here next week. After that Jettie and I will get an engagement ring and send announcements to the four corners of the earth. Then, after having satisfied our fellow men, Jettie and I are going to retire in splendid isolation to work on our exams in this divine country place. (...) How pleasant to be here on earth!

Hans

Frankfort would spend hours browsing at Swets & Zeitlinger's bookstore in Amsterdam and became engrossed in Sir Flinders Petrie's writings, in particular his booklet about the aims and scope of archaeology.

Upon obtaining his M.A. degree ("kandidaatsexamen") in Netherlands language and literature on July 7, 1921, he went to London University to study Egyptology with Petrie. Here are his first impressions:

⁶ Professor Groenewegen.

Sunday, October 9, 1921

Dear Bram,

Thank you for your long letter that was standing on the mantel-piece to greet me when I first walked into this little room on Wednesday night. I have now made the room into something more personal. Thus far I have been swept along in the maelstrom to such an extent that I have had difficulty in keeping my head above water and maintaining a sense of direction. Now that is past and I am gradually regaining the peace that has to be the starting point for everything and without which work is nothing but crazy German nonsense.

It is becoming very clear to me that the only way to maintain an informed mind is just to relax and simply remain receptive, sensitive and honest. One must take care not to dabble in everything. That will either drive a man crazy or lead him to propound opinions based on nothing but casual reading. I must be careful not to want to know everything, not to spend my life learning and learning without forming an opinion. To avoid such casual reading I no longer subscribe to the Netherlands newspapers, and I can't be bothered with Action Française or any other European questions. I even read fewer English newspapers than I should. This is balanced by the fact that my fellow lodgers read nothing but newspapers and then recite them out loud. There is only one thing that concerns me here and that is my work. Not only you but even my fellow students, barring one, do not know how demanding, all-encompassing and difficult my work is. Our fellow students consist of hideously ugly, very old and heavily made-up English spinsters who miaow like cats and in an unfortunate moment have transferred their love to hieroglyphs. Hopelessly amateur work is being done in archaeology because no one knows how difficult it is to do serious archaeological work. Petrie does not know it. Petrie is a very exceptional, very fine human being. He is extremely courteous and with his courtesy and patriar-

*chal head he unknowingly charms these damned English bitches. On the other hand the bitches provide him with considerable sums of money for his excavations. Petrie loves artefacts for their beauty and the charms of their age. He and I were the only ones who got angry during his public introductory lecture and were sickened as he told how incredibly much has simply been destroyed, spoiled or thrown away in Mesopotamia by Huns and Americans who were chasing after texts and thought that every little inscription should be analysed, but let a whole **shipload** of the most masterly Assyrian sculpture sink in the Tigris, and **never** took any notice of the everyday objects and small finds. Of course this mostly applies to the Huns, the rotters. Excuse this digression.*

You will have some idea of the multitude of disciplines I have to master if I tell you that not only do I have to be able to carve your name on your tomb in Egyptian hieroglyphs but that I have also spent all of Saturday morning with chains and stadia rods such as you have seen being used by the Public Works Department, carrying out practical exercises in surveying, followed by lessons in drawing objects and plans. I hardly need to tell you that the bitches are not required to take part in these activities. They only dabble in Egyptology. For Egyptology there is one other young student, for Assyriology I am the only student.

In short, I want to submerge myself in the sea of work that has to be done and to surface again fully enlightened about the sublime world that flowered and shone in towering richness around the Mediterranean while the West and North were still shrouded in darkness. All this is of much greater concern to me than Lloyd George's conjuring in Downing Street, through which I pass if I feel like it. I need to limit myself and don't regret it. If I do my work well I can achieve something valuable and coherent, for myself at any rate, and perhaps for others too. By doing my work well I can play a more significant part in the real world, especially as my knowledge increases, more significant than if I were to dissipate my efforts and know just a little of many different subjects to the development of

which I could contribute nothing. By working I can reach a point from which I can go in any of several directions and make effective use of all the powers that are in me. And this work can only be done by dropping everything else. So now no Action Française, no Lyautey, etc. I know myself well enough to realize that I could never specialize completely, but also that if I divided my attention too much I should become no more than a journalist.

This does not prevent me from interesting myself in London and the English people or being aware of my surroundings as I make my way each morning to the delightful attic furnished on one side with long rows of showcases containing the most beautiful objects, and a row of bookcases and map drawers on the other, and between them a wooden table next to a huge mountain of books and papers. Around this table the devotees gather to drink in the words of the grey-haired Flinders Petrie or the equally grey-haired little self-important, old-fashioned, innocently blue-stockinged assistant Miss Murray. Miss Murray enjoys a great respect here. The best Egyptian grammars are by a German and she has translated them in a format which is practical and handy and therefore popular. This has made her the greatest philologist of the United Kingdom. I will write you more about my work later on.

The English are peculiar people. I believe they are superficial in their scholarship but I am not sure they are superficial deep down. They are very curious. You never saw such quietly helpful people. No nonsense or compliments, but they are ready straightaway to help you always and everywhere, students and professors as well as policemen and bus conductors. They refuse tips. Only once have I met what is the rule in Germany, namely a rude ass. But then he was only a post office employee in a suburb, and they are useless idiots all over the world. There is more. It is only thanks to a general sense of responsibility that the lunatic traffic here makes so few victims. No mortal would ever think of ignoring even the slightest gesture of a policemen. The public visibly collaborates. No driver tries to slip through at the last moment or quickly overtake another, and you

never hear sayings like "To hell with him" or "It's for him to give way", so frequent in Holland. When you watch the traffic from the top of a bus it's a pleasure, I assure you, to see this general co-operation in action.

Are the English exclusive? I don't know. They accept every foreigner with great friendliness and interest. Their all-embracing interest is hard to understand. In this city there is not one museum or church (and I saw many during the ten days that my parents were here) which does not have public lectures on all kinds of subjects several times a week. These lectures are crowded. I myself have seen people flocking to such a lecture by Petrie, which must have bored every layman to death. The subject was the sources of earliest Egyptian history (the kind of thing that Professor Brugmans would lecture on, but there is a great difference between Brugman's mumbling and Petrie's conversational attack). Well, the lecture was crowded and not only with bitches, although there was quite a pack of them. What were all those people doing there? I find this very touching, but if I were interested in something I would like to know more about it, go more deeply into it, but they just come and see and go home. What have they learned? Damned little, I would say. What use it is to them the Lord only knows. But they are genuinely interested. They don't just come out of snobbery. Snobbery doesn't get people to attend thousands of lectures year in, year out.

I am questioned about a hundred things concerning Holland and other subjects. If I provide any old answer that is all right. But I have noticed that if I give more detailed and considered explanations they move on to something else after five minutes. And don't blame my bad English for that, because when my English gets to be very bad their interest revives and they watch out for the next mistake. They only stop listening if I speak **good** English and talk about something about which I know more than one can pick up from the newspapers. The only subjects that draw deeper interest are prices, unemployment and the Royal Family. The war is just an episode. "Well, years ago Bismarck gave the Germans what they wanted.

Their population is twice what it was in '70. They have to expand. You can't blame them for that." I was very surprised. I argued that the Germans are still very dangerous. I believe this even more now that I have seen the naïveté here while the Germans are working harder than they ever have before. A charming Scotsman said to me, "Well, we must all just work to get on together. Perhaps everybody will have to lower their sights. You can't expect just the working people to go back to simpler life. Everybody has to do so. We have to simplify our ideals and get back to the basic source of all happiness. And so on." These last words he added shyly because it is not done to speak about profound matters. (...) I believe that the secret key to understanding the English character is the fact that their common sense, in contrast to the Dutch variety, is infused with a certain idealism, which they consider desirable and which inspires them to cooperation. (...)

Adieu,

Hans

A second letter from London shows how his main interest seemed to lie in Syria-Palestine, while his line of attack was first directed at Egypt.

London, November 8, 1921

Messieurs,⁷

You are right, the rumours are true: Jettie will be coming to London, I don't yet know when. The Professor of Dutch here, P. Geyl, D.Litt. (Leyden), as the University College roster calls him, is busy preparing a publication for which he needs copies of documents in

⁷ Obviously addressed to all three friends, Bram, Ee and Henk.

the British Museum, etc., and that will give her a temporary job for some months. Once she is over here, her chances of getting a permanent job will be infinitely better. It still won't be easy, but I have the unbiased conviction that she will succeed. In any case, I shall move heaven and earth to help her succeed.

Meanwhile, I am no longer dazed by a surfeit of work. I can see some lines of attack along which I am working. I now realize that I can never carry out my plan to embrace the whole of Near-Eastern archaeology. More than ever I am determined to concentrate on Palestine and Syria. True, that is the most difficult part, but it is also the most interesting : every new discovery in Egypt, Babylonia or the Aegean shows that there was an exchange of influence between all three; constant traffic, perilous and subject to changing conditions, shifts in power and the dangers of sea travel, but nevertheless the countries around the eastern Mediterranean were linked by intensive trade from the earliest times. The key to this network is to be found in the hitherto unexplored regions of Syria (the land of the Hittites and Amorites) and in Palestine. I have a feeling that the opening up of these regions will do more than complete our hitherto nebulous picture of the emergence of such high civilizations from primitive barbarity. A wider knowledge of such exchanges should clarify our views on the general influence of cultures upon each other. It should enable us to discard such simplistic terms as "derivation" and "imitation" in favour of more sophisticated explanations.

But I cannot handle all of this at the same time, so Egypt is going to be the central point from which I shall conquer the field. The main consideration is that everything here is so exceptionally well equipped for such studies. For Assyriology there is only one little man, clumsy, bourgeois, pitifully harassed, and short-sighted, with an outsize head and a straggly beard.⁸ I don't know whether I have the courage to let him initiate me into the secrets of mind-boggling cuneiform script.

⁸ Theophilus Goldridge Pinches.

*I haven't started on that yet, but I am taking Hebrew and have made myself at home in what is officially the Edward Library and Museum, which I irreverently call Petrie's attic. It is just under the roof, a real attic, and when you come in there is a heavenly mess. One corner is the library: there are some overflowing bookcases and a table covered with illustrated volumes and journals. The chairs around the table are also piled with the latest publications of universities from Boston to Beirut and older books with markers in them, obviously being used by someone. At this table the grey-bearded Petrie or the grey-haired Miss Murray will be reading, comparing or writing. Sometimes an unassuming student like myself may be poring over a grammar written in **German**, which everyone says is the only way of learning the holy language. But when suddenly all the animals start uttering sounds incomprehensible to me I stand up and walk on a little further.*

*The bookcases form partitions, as it were around a closet; the remainder of the attic is filled with showcases containing the harvest from Petrie's forty-one excavation campaigns on the Nile. Of course many of the best pieces are in the museums, but here everything has been chosen and ordered in such a way as to show the development of Egyptian civilization in its various aspects. For this reason some of the best things in each category have been kept here. They have also been illustrated in Fechheimer's **Plastik der Ägypter**: a scribe bending over his scroll, the lovely bust of Akhenaten's daughter and beautiful relief portraits of Akhenaten himself. And I stroll among these marvels and smile in passing at some mummified heads with their sneering expressions. I take pleasure in gazing at beautiful alabaster and diorite vases, I squeeze between some fine sandstone reliefs to look at showcases filled with scarabs. Incised in the cartouches are the names of those who were enthroned and revered as gods, who made the construction of their royal tombs the sole occupation of hundreds of thousands of subjects. I may grasp one of the earthenware jars, some beautifully painted, others plain and simple,*

that stand in rows on the shelves or still sit in the crates that brought them here, embedded in straw, or piled all around on the floor. And there in the earthenware are the fingerprints of the man who shaped this vessel on the wheel three thousand years ago, and I muse over the strangeness of those lives that once existed, as rich and full and ephemeral as ours.

You see, this is the irresistible power that emanates from these relics of the past. A pot is a pot, I admire its pleasing shape, I take it in my hands and suddenly something comes alive. All the mundane facts that I know take their place in a great, living construct. I am not just holding a shapely piece of earthenware, it is a thing shaped by a person who lived as I am now living. I know them, they are no strangers to me with their clean-shaven heads and white loincloths. They lived and loved their wives, whom I also know, who were delicate and slim in close-fitting white garments and beautiful necklaces. I know the funny naked brown children who drove the donkeys into the fields with sticks to trample the seed into the soil. All the facts that I have learned or gleaned in passing from the countless reliefs, ornaments, vessels or tools, all the things that I have around me there, contribute to conjuring up that wondrous, rich, intensely living picture that sometimes overcomes my senses when I wander by myself among these objects. This is true history: the facts as materials for the living, warm, true picture ...

*Will it ever be possible to take all this out of oneself and give it to others? Or will it fall back into unconnected facts and dusty objects? In abstract terms all history is the same and accessible to everyone. But there is only one history that one can experience **deeply** and that is why my historical research is inseparable from my outlook on life. The more clarity I gain in my historical research, the stronger and purer becomes my outlook on life. I wonder if, with my contemplative nature, I shall ever achieve anything concrete in our ever-changing society, outside my work? I still believe this will only be possible for me in Palestine.*

But I was going to report on my work. There is one more field

*that is somewhat outside all this, although I and my teachers consider it useful. I have applied myself to this mainly for the useless reason that I have never understood it, but want to know more about it because there must be greatness there. This is a last shred of my omnivorous interest, and I do not want to give up this shred. Bram will be particularly pleased to hear that it concerns Greek art. Led by a fine Englishman, more sensitive and profound than most, we are getting to know a multitude of people who produced Greek sculpture and vase painting. This brings me to the question of Humanism and its significance for us... I am further removed from Greece and Rome than you three and shall always remain so. But I believe it is good and necessary for Europe always to maintain close contact with ancient Greece and Rome. Not by falsifying and exaggerating the facts, as Léon Daudet does in his *Rentrée des classes*. Greek and Latin grammar are not more logical than any other and have nothing to do with the development of reason and common sense, although it is useful to learn to be aware of one's language and one's power of expression. It is absurd to make the works of the very human and fallible ancients into a series of canonical books as the Chinese do with the works of Confucius. No, the reason why European education should play close but **absolutely honest** attention to classical antiquity is that this out of all great civilizations of the past is the one that is closest to Europe. And it is good to study a civilization that is far enough in the past for us to be able to distinguish what is important from what is not, and great enough for us to see the great thoughts underlying it and the great bonds holding it together. For that is the tragedy of the man whose mind is fixed entirely on modern life: he can never see the really great, superhuman, objective developments of his time because he is part of them, bound by his own condition, trapped by it. The result is pettiness of mind.*

I suppose - I am not competent to judge - that for Europe the classical civilization is the most relevant of the great civilizations of the past. But one must be careful not to present it falsely - that is

*fatal and alienates the public, who see right through the insincerity and falsehood and soon get bored, as we are bored by Schiller's view of the Greek gods. I don't know if a performance of **The Birds** or **Antigone** would not be the best introduction to the subject.*

The Greek lectures have made me think a lot about these matters and I am struggling with countless unanswered questions....

Greetings,
Hans

In London Frankfort's professors noticed his hard work and enthusiasm for the field. In October/November, 1922, the idea of making him Assistant in the Department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities at the British Museum was seriously considered. This plan fell through because he was not prepared to give up his Netherlands citizenship.

London, October 29, 1922

Dear Ee,

I am writing to you, but this is also intended for Henk and Bram, though not for publication as yet. I am staying here for one more week as there is a slight chance of something materializing that I considered a long time ago when I was still in a state of ignorance. I ceased to believe in this possibility as soon as I became more familiar with the situation in my profession. There is a plan to make me Assistant Curator of the Egyptian and Near-Eastern Department of the British Museum. No more and no less. They are in need of someone. Wallis Budge, who has shamefully neglected it, is leaving. King, a great Assyriologist, died two years ago. The Assistant Keeper Hall would have to cope alone, which is obviously impossible.

It would not have entered my head to apply for this job. Although I am no longer a stranger in the field I don't feel that my studies are finished (I don't expect I ever shall). And then, everyone who knows the British Museum, so much a national institution and considered with such national pride, would hold it impossible for a foreigner to be given a post in one of its main departments. But in a typically English way my professors have set the wheels in motion without telling me anything, as they considered me more suitable for the job than anyone else. I am somewhat bowled over by the honour. I have worked very hard this year, and in the small classes that we have there is a lot of personal contact, and they noticed my hard work and my enthusiasm for the field that suits me so well and is truly mine. But the main reason is my scholarly approach and conscientiousness, which are appreciated all the more in a country with so many amateurs.

My B.A. Honours exam went well. I sat it with about three thousand other B.A. candidates from all the London University faculties, in a series of huge halls. In mine the ceiling was decorated with a Taube aeroplane captured from the Germans, which gave me great courage. After my exam the outside examiner who has to sit on each committee in accordance with the rules, in this case the Egyptologist from Oxford, joined the conspiracy. He is an unbelievably self-assured youngster who wished to know me better before he supported my candidature, and invited me to his home. Not only did he ask me all about my past and my future but he grilled me on all subjects including Latin and Greek, and also, in a typically English way, on table manners. It is my firm conviction that he invited me to his home at noon for that reason and practically forced me to stay for lunch, although he knew that Jettie was waiting for me elsewhere. Anyhow, lunch gave me the opportunity not only to help myself to various complicated English dishes, but also to vent a huge amount of information on his wife, a charming Scotswoman who is interested in the field. We all parted as great friends. The major obstacle is the fact that I am a foreigner, because this is an official post in his

Majesty's Civil Service, for life, with a pension and with the considerable starting salary of £400, although I believe that I would have to work for nothing for the first year on account of being a junior in the profession.

*They have told me flatly that naturalization would simplify matters, but despite the theories of Houston Stewart Chamberlain on one side and myself on the other, I could only declare that I didn't feel able to change nationalities as it might be a set of clothes, but that I sincerely felt the responsibility that such a post implied towards the British nation and His Majesty's Government. All this is not to say that the job has been offered to me. But I was quite unprepared for the fact that I was being put forward. It is quite possible that the matter will fall through on account of my being a Dutchman. **Tant pis.***

Nowhere else would there be a comparable opportunity to work in my field. This is an archaeological centre. All new publications arrive here, lectures are given here on all new discoveries. I would also certainly be sent out to Egypt by the Museum every year or every other year. The Museum's collections constitute a treasure, admittedly, but a treasure more appealing to worthy specialists. There are regrettable gaps, making the British Museum's Egyptian collection less important than those of Leyden, Paris or Berlin. Due to the want of artistic feeling in the English in general and Wallis Budge in particular, one misses those few master works of profound universal value that should form the centre of such collection. What we have here is an immense collection of highly interesting objects that are nearly all of low artistic value. In Leyden there are six or seven absolutely sublime works of art. The love that I cherish for Leyden on that account, and because of personal associations, I can never cherish for the British Museum, and deep down I must confess that my ideal would be to work in the British Museum for about fifteen years and then settle for good in Leyden.

It is hard to say what is going to happen next. I am staying here for another week so as to be available for interviews with trustees,

etc. It may never get to that stage. I may get a negative letter tomorrow. I am waiting.

*Adieu,
Hans*

*Union Society
University College, London
Gower Street, W.C.*

November 2, 1922

Dear Bram,

It has ended in disappointment, although my professors gave me extremely warm recommendations. The Director of the British Museum, Sir Frederic Kenyon, told me rightaway that only British citizens had a chance, as the Museum is part of the Civil Service. I was a bit taken aback, and forgot to mention the case of Professor Vogel, who, if I am not mistaken, has also worked in the Civil Service. But I don't think it would have made any difference. At first I intended to ask you to enquire from Professor Vogel whether he knows Sir Frederic, but that would not have changed anything since the testimonial of my own professors as to my being particularly suitable for this post had no effect. It appears that today's regulations make such a thing impossible.

I shall now be travelling either tomorrow or the day after. Although my green hat has seen better days, I cannot part with it. I travel directly to Turin and will be in Rome on November 17th or thereabouts. My address there will be Poste Restante. From there I proceed to Cairo, again Poste Restante. I hope you will write to me there. I shall visit Paris on the way back. As to your exam, I don't think you should postpone it any longer, even though you feel you would be taking a risk. You will always be taking a risk and it's

unhealthy to be forever in a state of dread. I hope to hear about your exam soon. Until we meet again in the spring,

*Yours,
Hans*

Petrie made Frankfort a member of the British School of Archaeology in Egypt and took him along to its excavation at Qau el-Kebir. Upon his return in 1923 he completed his M.A. thesis entitled **Studies in Early Pottery of the Near East I: Mesopotamia, Syria and Egypt and their Earliest Interrelations**. It was in the same year that he married.

*In the train between
Hook of Holland and Amsterdam
December 13, 1923*

Dear Bram and Ger,⁹

I am writing to you in a shaky situation, because this is not a Pullman car. I realize that time has flown since your circular letter reached me, and that you have not heard from me since I was in Berlin. I often wanted to write to you, though it is useless to tell you so. Many important things have happened and been decided, and I am now eager to let you know about them.

First of all, I am very happy that you are fulfilling an ideal and an idyll in your house in the country. I can imagine how you feel, but I myself am not ready yet for that kind of life. As I travel by train through this country that I love, the thought that I might have to stay here is oppressive. I want to end my life here and nowhere else, but I have to follow my calling: the wonderful interplay between the

⁹ Bram's wife, Gerharda C. Evers (1897-1985, married 1923).

changeless Near East and its ancient civilizations. I want to see the moonlight on the endless rocks of the desert once more, a moonlight as bright as our sunlight. I want to see the sun rising and setting in unimaginable glory every day, looking different every time, dominating the earth all day long like a tyrant. I want to hear the shepherd boys singing as they walk behind the camels, and the ineffably melodious sound of the flute in the evening. I want to experience again all the fascination, tension and effort, all the dreams that unfold as the sand is carried away day after day to reveal what has been hidden for three or four thousand years, waiting like a personal friend for me to retrieve it from oblivion with loving care. And I want to see again those other nations, Italy and above all Greece. And having spent one year seeing all this on my own I now want to experience it with Jettie.

We are getting married on the last day of this year. Even though I do not have a job yet, my frowning and sensible friends, we will be going to Switzerland, I think, and then reluctantly to Berlin, where I have been offered some all-consuming work, the extraordinarily fascinating study of the earliest hieroglyphs and those of slightly later date, 2800 B.C., that were used to record mystical texts in the Pyramids of the Kings of the Old Kingdom. It is not work for a philologist, but it does involve a lot of philology, which will be beneficial compulsory exercise, since I have neglected that area of my functions until now.

In the meantime my book is being published. It is a study of archaeological material. The conclusions concern the oldest cultural ties between Babylonia, Syria and Egypt. I hope the illustrations will be pleasing and give you more enjoyment than the long text. As well as the interest of the work itself, I have the satisfaction that several professors in London and Oxford are so enthusiastic about it that it is to be published as a special publication of the Royal Anthropological Institute. One hopes that this will result in a job for me in Cairo or (horror of horrors!) in the United States, with the opportunity to excavate in Egypt. In the meantime I shall be in Berlin and will come

to Leyden at the beginning of the summer to do my Ph.D. exam. I already have my M.A. After that I shall either go abroad or settle in some small town deep in the country, trusting confidently in the future. (...)

Your friend,

Hans

The Frankforts spent most of 1924 and 1925 in Athens, where he was a member of the British School and worked on pottery from Aegean sites. This work was to result in a second volume of **Studies in Early Pottery of the Near East**, entitled **Asia, Europe and the Aegean and their Earliest Interrelations**, which served as his Ph.D. thesis. While announcing the second volume, he commented on Volume One to his friends as follows:

*London,
46 Glenloch Road, N.W.3.
August 5, 1924*

Dear Bram and Ger,

*As you see, we are back at our old address, but during the coming winter you should send your letters to the British School of Archaeology in Athens, as I shall be a staff member there. As a result of our work here in the unrivalled British Museum and in Athens, Tiryns, Crete, etc., a second volume of **Studies in Early Pottery of the Near East** will be appearing. On the strength of it I am to obtain my Ph.D. degree with Professor Byvanck as my thesis adviser. After that the future is uncertain, but the prospect of travelling to Greece together makes us fairly detached about the more distant future.*

We hope to come to Amsterdam about the beginning of September, and if this suits you we shall then at long last make our appear-

ance in your highly praised country house. I am sincerely looking forward to that and will then give you a detailed account of what has been happening in the busy weeks since my Ph.D. qualifying exam: my application for teaching posts, acceptance of a temporary post, second thoughts and ultimate refusal, and finally the Athens plan. As a result, my self-respect and freedom are assured until 1925 or 26.

I imagine that the work I shall now be undertaking will be of greater interest to you than what I have just completed. Whether it will make better reading is another matter. The idea is again to make use of archaeological material, but this time in conjunction with literary traditions (Herodotus, Hesiod, Homer, Pausanias, Thucydides and Strabo. This part, of course, will be Jettie's responsibility). With the help of these two sources I want to follow the earliest developments in Greece, which was closely linked with Asia through Troy and the Cyclades. This will embrace the sublime pre-Greek civilizations of Crete and Mycenae, then the great migrations, the feudal era of Homer and finally the rise of Greece itself. The period covered runs from the earliest traces, about 2800 B.C., to about 900 B.C. The first volume, now in your possession, mainly contains material from 4000 to 3000 B.C. The beautiful pottery of Plates I and II is probably even older, and without parallel.

I wonder if you can follow the method and aim of my work. Clearly, for the earliest periods, which attract me more than anything, romantic as I am, we can only go by the material remains, because there was no writing at that stage. Chapters 4 and 5 explain the special features of such research. Chapter 1 of my book summarises the importance of pottery, provided it is treated critically and methodically. Chapters 6 to 13 give a kind of method or critical principles. If any, Chapters 12 and 13 are the ones most likely to be to your taste, but even this I doubt. Having laid down the principles, I then concentrate on the two oldest and greatest centres, namely the Babylonian, in Chapters 14 to 37, and the Egyptian, in Chapters 38 and 39. It seems that human civilization did not have its beginnings

in one place and then develop uninterruptedly from Sumerian times to our day. It appears that in both Egypt and Mesopotamia, and probably in northern Syria and Asia Minor as well, a civilization with a character and beauty of its own developed in isolation. Only later did they enter into contact with each other. This fascinating meeting of civilizations, which I think I can illustrate, may be clouded for you by all the material that had to be treated in Chapters 40 to 51. Only Chapters 40, 41, 45, 50 and 51 may be readable for you, if any.

I wonder if these hurried explanations will be of any use to you. I shall quite understand if you dismiss the whole thing as an esoteric ceramic apocalypse. Every day I curse my destiny which prevented me from going to Latin school. It is too late now. Tell me if you have survived your equestrian adventures in military service and satisfy my curiosity as to what else has happened in your part of the country.

Hans

He eagerly underwent the Greek experience, in which nature played at least as large a part as culture.

*Hôtel Cavour,
Rue Lafayette 86,
Paris.*

May 7, 1925

Dear Bram,

In Syracuse, which is a disappointing dump of a place, your letter with the marvellous photograph of you with your son finally caught up with me. You cannot imagine how pleased we were. I fully real-

ized how wrong I was in not writing to you, but there are limits to my energy. And then, something deters one from describing the incredible reality around one while it is still present: that blissful reality that cannot be pictured or described and which time and again has surprised and moved us upon meeting what we thought we knew. Sometimes I think you believe I am totally engrossed by my work to the exclusion of all the pleasures that you are enjoying in the country. And it is true that my work is very exacting, that piles of material constantly need to be processed. Much more needs to be melted down and hammered out before the true nugget of gold, a living piece of history, of human struggle, of cultural creation can come painfully into being.

I now know from experience that archaeologists can be as obsessed as philologists, like the Hungarian whose book you once gave me to read. Personally I don't think I am in any such danger. We even find time for literature. We travelled through Syria reading the Tharauds' excellent book called *Le Chemin de Damas*. Anatole France is another faithful travelling companion, but I was disappointed by Barrès' *La Colline Inspirée*. (...)

The first time we saw the Acropolis in Athens it was night and the moon was shining with that bright light that is more brilliant than the sun's, shining through the pure air of the south. But it was stormy, and heavy clouds came racing down from the north. Along the road that leads up to the Acropolis stood strangely self-contained cacti, and agaves flowering briefly on stalks as tall as trees. Once one arrives at the top the view is dominated by irregular rocks, the ground of Greece, and the entire plateau is made of rough rock, since the marble paving slabs have been removed. But in the howling wind, which made it hard to walk or even stand, the divine columns rose up in the brilliant white light which was interrupted over and over by the clouds. One felt the haunting presence of the unfathomable life that had produced such supernatural beauty.

It is harder to find words for the beauty of Greece than for anything else. It is richer in harmony and profound meaning than any-

thing I know, and harder to experience and admire honestly. Archaic Greece gives us easier footholds with its irregularities, imperfections and excesses, and the pernicious classicism that still dominates our education shows us dead and detestable Roman copies instead of letting us revere in silence the very few works that have miraculously come down to us: the west façade of the Temple of Zeus in Olympia, the Delphi charioteer, some heads from the Museo Barracò in Rome, the so-called throne of Aphrodite, and a few archaic statues. But to our mind the miracle of Greek art is inseparable from the miracle of the Greek landscape. It cannot be described or pictured either, my good old friend, but must be experienced in the perfect beauty of the mountains, the boldness of the sky and the scent of the grey-green herbs. Just beyond the sanctuaries of Delphi, there is a cleft in some vertical rocks where water sings and icy winds rush down from the mighty Parnassus, and even today, if someone goes there in reverence and silence, God will speak to him. And there is so much in that wonderland, Mycenae and Crete where huge anemones riot below stunted olive trees, Leucas and Ithaca... But Greece cannot be described in writing. All I can say is, make yourself a promise, start saving money and when Lucas is old enough to look after himself for a month or so, pack your bags with a few necessities and go. Avoid Athens, which is a bad imitation of Paris, being merely provincial and pompous, and seek out the little villages where people are simply dishonest, cordial and curious, with no talents but with the dignity and courtesy that bespeak an ancient civilization. Go on foot, put your backpacks on a mule from village to village, sleep in monasteries and enjoy the unsuspected treasures of early Christian Greece, the Byzantine mosaics. Among the fat stupid monks there are still a few who appreciate them. But when you walk on in the morning mist, before the sun rises over the mountains, all that is unreal, and around you ancient Greece still lives in that incomparable landscape.

Because I intended to follow the tin route of Neolithic times, from the Gulf of Corinth by way of Leucas and Ithaca, we went to Bari

and from there to Sicily and Pompei. We spent one day in unsurpassable Rome and now we are in Paris. The Romans are in relation to Greece exactly what England is in relation to France. Inwardly cultureless, it maintains European culture against the outside world, confirms it and saves it. I can admire them but I cannot like them, except when in their daring and love of fun they make a bronze like the drunken faun in Pompei, lifting a tripod above his fat head with uncoordinated muscles. And now we are in Paris seeing a very few sights very quietly, just enjoying the stimulation that emanates from this strengthening city. We are unable to absorb more than that and want to live quietly for a while now. But that will only last for a few months because the Egypt Exploration Society, a great, respectable English institution, has asked me to take on the direction of its excavations in Egypt for a good salary. Every reason for rejoicing, although we dread the continuance of our nomadic existence, with still no home of our own. There is a faint possibility that after this prestigious and interesting work we may perhaps find one. Though we hope that lack of financial means and discouraging prospects for the future will not force us to surrender to the intellectual strait-jacket of a teaching post in a small town out in the country.

*We shall be arriving in Holland on about the 15th of this month, for a few weeks only because I still need to write out my dissertation in London. The ideas that have to be worked into it are still whirling round in my head, but I hope to defend my thesis in October and return in November to **Ta Meri**, the beloved land, as the ancient Egyptians called their country.*

We certainly hope to visit you, though unfortunately there won't be time to come and stay. (...)

Hans

He hoped to prepare his dissertation in 1925, before taking on the direction of the Egypt Exploration Society's excavations, but it was to

take two more years, until June 24, 1927, for him to finish his thesis and obtain a Ph.D. degree at Leyden University.

At Tell el-Amarna John D.S. Pendlebury was Frankfort's second-in-command and later succeeded him as director. He had great admiration for Frankfort. The two of them used to communicate in a private language they called Hanseatic.

From the earliest days of their collaboration the light could be seen burning in the Frankfort's room through most of the night, while the two of them were arguing some abstract point. (I owe these recollections to Seton Lloyd.)

From those years, 1926-1929, spent digging at Tell el-Amarna, Abydos and Erment, there is little more than a snapshot of the happy couple surrounded by their Egyptian servants at el-Till, near Deir Mowas, Upper Egypt, sent on January 3, 1927, with New Year wishes (Fig. 3). Frankfort's work in Egypt resulted in joint publications entitled **The Mural Painting of El-Amarnah** (1929), **The City of Akhenaten II** (1933) and **The Cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos** (1933).

It was during a visit by Henry Breasted and John D. Rockefeller to Tell el-Amarna that Breasted suggested putting Frankfort in charge of the excavations that the University of Chicago Oriental Institute was planning to undertake in Iraq. A happy coincidence thus brought together an unusually generous financial supporter and an exceptionally gifted archaeologist. The resulting ten years of large-scale excavation, reported in a series of Oriental Institute Publications, were to put our knowledge of early Mesopotamia on a firm footing.

By the end of 1929 Frankfort had given up working in Egypt and taken on the direction of the University of Chicago's Iraq expedition, excavating both at Khorsabad in Assyria and at Tell Asmar and Khafaje near Baghdad.

*The Oriental Institute
The University of Chicago*

Iraq Expedition

(crossed out):
*c/o Ottoman Bank,
Baghdad
in the train from
Aleppo to Istanbul
April 13, 1930*

*Hope this is legible.
The train was jolting horribly*

Dear Bram and Ger,

I owe you both a letter. Ger's letter was a great surprise, although her judgment of "little Johannes"¹⁰ is anything but objective. I was so pleased to hear something about him, because he will have changed from what I remember. And that is why, in spite of your good advice, he will have to come along with us next fall. We live a long way from the city, the air is pure and the house is at least partly clean. Two rooms have a roof that doesn't leak even in a rainstorm. There are Armenian nannies. Why shouldn't it be possible? There is an English doctor in Mosul, 25 kilometres away, which isn't far by car. It must be possible.

At the moment I have no wish to think so far ahead. It is a joy to return to Europe. This time there will be no exhibition of finds and no lecture - just a quiet half year in our new house that Jettie has now found and moved into. Our old problem of "to settle or to travel" has been temporarily solved. I would miss my work in the Near East tremendously if I had the chance of a permanent job. I am also afraid of Holland, that small, self-satisfied backwater. Perhaps I misjudge it. Perhaps it will suit me later, but not now. We cannot sacrifice everything for a child that would gain nothing by its parents growing dull.

¹⁰ The Frankforts' only child, Johannes Benjamin, named "Jon" after Bram's brother, the art historian Johan Q. "Jon" van Regteren Altena.

I know that Bram has found the solution. He is to be admired, but I cannot follow his example. Even a lectureship would not satisfy my need to work unselfishly for the benefit of society as I do directing an expedition, with all the innumerable practical responsibilities that involves. Now, at the end of a campaign, I am fed up with these chores, but they do fulfil a need.

This country (Iraq) and its people are entirely different from Egypt, infinitely wilder. The mountains are covered with snow, the people are fierce and dazed by the hardships of life. But they are fascinating and as yet incomprehensible to us. All this is true of Assyria, where we have been digging this year. Next year we will divide the season into 3 months in the north and 3 months in the south at an early Sumerian city, extremely interesting, with beautiful sculpture (if God wills) but in the middle of a miserable wasteland, not downright desert as in Egypt but dead neglected land not cultivated since ancient times. There will be nothing but our work to provide compensation for the hardships. The workers there are Arabs, so I can at least communicate with them. In Assyria the workers are mostly Kurds and Turcomans, with the addition of some Arabs and "devil worshippers", believing in Zoroastrianism with Christian, Jewish and Mohammedan elements. (...)

As ever yours,

Hans

*7 Cannon Place
Hampstead,
London n.w.3.*

In between digging seasons he still cherished his plan for a general history.

7 Cannon Place,
London N.W. 3.
June 7, 1930

My dear Friend,

*(...) There was also some internal turmoil, a strange feeling that I have not had for a long time and that I welcome because it invigorates me. I mean the insecurity that leads to a complete, critical review of one's achievements, and new plans for the future. True to tradition, this is a situation that I needed to share with you. But we were in Manaton at the time, and if you haven't read it already you must sample Powys's book **Mr. Weston's Good Wine** to know how excessively small a village can be, with not even any mail to bring excitement. However, now I am back in this excellent garret which is always quiet, surrounded faithfully by my books covering every inch of wall, with what would be a view of greenery and flowering hawthorn if it weren't so late and if the orange lights of this fantastic city were not draping themselves around Hampstead, and here I cannot resist burdening you egocentrically with all my concerns.*

Why I have changed, I don't know. One might say prosaically that now that I have secure employment for the first time I am indulging in the luxury of dreaming and writing long letters. Certainly my plans for the future had been concerned for a long time with the practical side of that future. Now I can think about my ideals for the future, I mean the future of my work, that is to say what I most properly consider my work: not digging but writing. And strangely enough, although as an archaeologist I am highly unacademic and frivolous, and admire much that should not interest me, in my own estimation my self-respect depends on that work that is properly my own, with all its possibilities.

I have wasted the last few years on a series of small projects, a succession of articles that were all unsatisfactory because they were fragmentary. I approve of the last of these articles, which has ap-

peared in the March issue of the *Maandblad voor Beeldende Kunst* with fine illustrations. Unfortunately there were too few offprints, but you will undoubtedly see the journal sooner or later. Now that at least I do not have an urgent report to write, and there is no exhibition going on, and I have the whole summer in front of me, and after the winter another summer, now I have conceived a great plan. I want to start right away on a project that I ought not to attempt before my fiftieth year: to write a general history from the beginning up to the Battle of Marathon. I want it to be different from all other histories, a living account with no incidental names and battles, no superstition and no geography, but something that makes everything significant through the dynamic connections. The long-nosed Sumerians and spindle-shanked Egyptians must feature as the people who, to their own astonishment, first created order out of barbarity and observed their own work with admiration mixed with disbelief. Writing this history will take years because I want to avoid all preconceived ideas, and for years nobody is allowed to know about it, nobody in the same field, that is.

I have to let go of Egypt and feel this as a liberation. I would not have been able to do anything there except delve for one detail after another. I shall not be free of that kind of work, and I don't underestimate the value of such delving, but none of it becomes significant until the great pageant marches by in one long sweep from the dimmest past to the bright light of Greece. (...) There is much else I could tell you but that is part of the other half of my life, my life over there where I can do no writing, (...) where I am engaged in purely practical things, where I organize and command, look at the mountains and shiver in the rain of that deserted Assyrian land, and in the evenings unwind with a book. But here, where thanks to God all the practical problems are far-away and peace and quiet and days of undisturbed solitude are suddenly mine, here these chaotic thoughts have now exploded. From sunrise to sunset.



*I am learning Sumerian and besides that, for pure pleasure, am reading Nietzsche's **Von Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie** and Huizinga's **Cultuurhistorische Verkenningen**. (...) After that it is fitting to remain silent at least for tonight.*

Hans

Although his reactions to working in Iraq were mostly negative he noted some redeeming features in a later letter.

P.O. Box 64, Baghdad, Iraq.

February 21, 1931

My dear Bram,

It was good to receive your letter and even if I don't have enough leisure to answer you at length I want at least to send you a greeting that will give you an idea of what we enjoy most of all here. Everything is different from last year. The mountains are just visible on the horizon but all around, for miles and miles (the nearest small town, Baghdad, is twenty miles away), there is nothing but sand desert, wide but with no beauty of its own, all of it deserted fields where old irrigation channels stand out as ridges. But there is the absolute quiet and the strange bird life: brightly colored partridges, ducks, wild geese and the fantastically beautiful silver cranes gather around the pools where the rainwater collects. Around these pools low green vegetation is also appearing, with masses of the pointed leaves of wild tulips, hyacinths and daffodils, that will probably flower a week after we leave. After that everything will become as barren as before. Then there is my work, demanding, fascinating in its complexity, never quite satisfactory because one is swamped with practical problems and can never get away from it entirely, even just for one day, to see things in perspective.

On the way back we will shake off all these burdens, we will have time for ourselves and stay out of reach somewhere in the Peloponnese, and then I long for the quiet of our little flat high up in

Hampstead, where we will be from the 1st of May. Before that we will spend a fortnight in Holland. Our little boy, who is doing very well, will probably take fright when you look at him, just as your son Luuk did when I poked my head into his pram long ago.

All the best to the four of you,

Your Hans

In accepting the direction of the Iraq Expedition Frankfort had made it a condition that Seton Lloyd and Gordon Loud should be taken on as architects and Thorkild Jacobsen as epigrapher. A huge expedition house was built at Tell Asmar, to which water had to be brought from 12 miles away. The direction of the excavation at Khafaje, 20 miles away, was delegated to Conrad Preusser. Frankfort, who detested German and Germans, had his misgivings, and was subsequently proved right. Preusser planned an exploratory trench down to virgin soil, but within the first 1½ metres he destroyed part of the Temple Oval without noticing it. Frankfort sacked Preusser and appointed Pinhas ("Pierre") Delougaz instead. The latter, a journalist from Tel Aviv, was a competent jack-of-all-trades who had picked up archaeology while working with Edward Chiera at Khorsabad (recollections of Seton Lloyd).

The strain of working simultaneously at three major sites in Iraq led to a spell of ill health in October, 1931. Jettie left on time to start the expedition and Hans left six weeks later to join wife, son and staff.

7 Cannon Place, N.W.3.

October 14, 1931

Dear Bram,

If I were more dramatically inclined I would tell you how in the ambulance, on the way to hospital, Hans suddenly said, "You must

tell Bram why I haven't written to him." This is absolutely true, but I must add that I had a good laugh about it because it seemed to me that there was more urgent business to attend to at that moment, such as the start of an expedition without the director.

We have had anxious days. Pneumonia, bladder infection, liver infection, everything seemed more probable to doctors and specialists than what finally appeared to be the sole cause of all the pain and fever, namely a very large and completely ruptured appendix that had formed a great abscess and brought him to the verge of peritonitis. Now the anxious days after the operation are over, Hans is lying lazily, weak but content, in a cheerful room that doesn't look too hospital-like. He can telephone me, finds entertainment in his radio, and has just reminded me of his earlier request to write to you. You already know the most important news.

Johannes Benjamin is staying with my sister in Overveen,¹¹ so I have my hands free to type innumerable business letters. The expedition will start out at the appointed time (Yanks want value for their money). If everything is still going well here I shall travel with them, leaving on October 26 with the little boy, in order to take care of the household, and also because Hans will have no rest unless I tell him exactly how things are going in the camp. He has given the architects orders to restrict themselves to clearing work for the time being. They can do this without risk of destroying anything important. Hans will probably be transported by plane to Holland as soon as he can travel, in order to rest up for a couple of weeks in Overveen before leaving.

Your letters have meant so much to Hans that he wishes to answer them at length and that will take some time. Be kind-hearted and write to him once more, wil you? (...) Greetings to Ger and your big sons. Johannes (we call him Jon) is also a baby no longer. He is wearing braces for the first time. Much love from us three,

Jettie

¹¹ Greet Groenewegen, wife of banker Anton van Nierop.

7 Cannon Place, N.W.3.
October 1931

Dear Bram,

Hans asks me to tell you how glad he was to get your letter. Unfortunately we are still very anxious. One week after the operation Hans caught pleurisy, which led to septic pneumonia. It is a long and exhausting process and the doctors do not hide the fact that it is serious, but Hans is holding his own and it looks as if the temperature is dropping very slowly.

Hans is not to know that it is pneumonia. We call it pleurisy. He also shouldn't know that his convalescence will be long. If only it were over. Could you write to him again? He needs amusement and it is difficult because he is so weak. (...) His resilience should help him, but these weeks have been a great strain.

Cordial greetings,

Jettie

On account of his sickness Frankfort was obliged to delegate the excavation at Khorsabad to Gordon Loud and much of the work at and around Tell Asmar to his other assistants.

My sickness last fall was most beneficial in that it forced me to delegate a lot of practical things to my assistants. They have been working with me for about three years now and everything went very well. So I left things as they were and I am now rid of much boring and time-consuming practical work. I have just kept the direction of the excavation, which is still a lot of work because we are excavating at three different sites at once. I find more time now for reading and writing. The atmosphere is inevitably such that you cannot concentrate on anything that is not somehow connected with the excavation. However, after this last season I feel less dehumanized than in

other years by immersion in purely practical business management, and feel fresher as I return to London.

Although he had been appointed Research Professor of Oriental Archaeology at the University of Chicago in 1932, he accepted the position of Extraordinary Professor in the Archaeology and History of the Near East at the University of Amsterdam in 1933, on the understanding that this task would not claim more than two months a year.

*7 Cannon Place, N.W. 3.
June 11, 1933*

My dear Friend,

After all we have gone through together I have a pressing need to let you know of some of my feelings in the present circumstances.¹² There is something peculiar in the whole affair, because Holland does not seem quite real to me anymore, in the same way as everything that is practical and sociable. Mine is a somewhat unworldly reality. Places in the country like Bergen and the Kromme Rijn belong to it, but they do not help me when it comes to writing to the Mayor of Amsterdam or giving an inaugural lecture in that damned auditorium at the University. As you know, I am not a man for public demonstrations. May Nabo and Sheshat help me.

On the other hand this very official link with Holland gives me the greatest pleasure. And then, we are the Greek slaves of the rich Romans, and the appreciation of Athens, aye, even of Alexandria, is worth more to me than the approval of my employers. As far as the work itself is concerned, it will be curious to see how much one can

¹² He is referring to his recent appointment as Professor of Near Eastern Archaeology at the University of Amsterdam.

communicate to some Dutch students during a three or four week period twice a year. So far I have only spoken in public at professional congresses or meetings of old spinsters and reverends who have subsidized me. In any event there is now a much greater chance that we will eventually settle in Holland, if at a certain moment I feel I simply must concentrate on writing. (...) As far as books are concerned the winter was somewhat barren. We had much sickness, influenza and therefore little rest, even at night, for reading etc. Back here after the confusion of an excavation campaign carried out in such conditions, I am submerged in interesting professional literature. (...)

Cordial greetings also from Jettie for Ger and yourself,

Hans

In his inaugural lecture, which was printed by Swets & Zeitlinger of Amsterdam in 1933, Frankfort attempted to define the Ancient Near East as a historical entity and stressed features that Egypt and Mesopotamia had in common, such as divine kingship, the cult of a dying and resurrected god, and the subservience of art to the expression of ideas. These were to remain basic themes in his later writings.

Relatively few of his great discoveries are reflected in his letters. The circumstances in which these were made are related in Mary Chubb's excellent account in **City in the Sand** (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1957). She also tells how different was Frankfort's affinity for the early periods represented in the Diyala region from his cooler attitude towards the latter periods encountered in Assyria.

Growing familiarity with Iraq does not seem to have softened his feelings for latter-day Mesopotamia.

*The Continental-Savoy,
Cairo.*

November 30, 1933

My dear Friend,

(...) Behind me, Holland regained, my own again but in a different way now, for now I am qualified; also behind me, three days in Paris (...), lovely as always; ahead of me a dry, ugly, dead land that I hate and the many practical matters that I am so well fitted to cope with, with my managerial skills that prevent me from being quiet and concentrated. And as I floated onto the shore I suddenly found myself back in this country that is so familiar to me, where I have experienced so much, my first contact with the Near East and antiquity, the home of a lighthearted well-meaning people, quite different from the sinister ruffians with whom I have to deal at Tell Asmar. I had not been in Egypt since 1929 and it seems three times as long ago. (...) I am spending the whole of tomorrow in the Museum and then fly by KLM to Baghdad. Think of me and greet Ger.

Hans

Tell Asmar

January 27, 1934

My dear Friend,

I have envied you your stay in a part of the world where the seasons have a meaning. Even the fog and the rain in Oberstdorf are more real and meaningful than dry hard sunlight on dead, dry land, where thin grass and miniature irises pierce the superficial crust and wait for a second cloudburst in order to flower quickly before they burn up. It is not cold, but sometimes there is a biting winter wind under an unreal summer sky, and sometimes after the few rains early in the morning there may be a deceptive spring atmosphere, as

*in Hades. But time is going by and not everything is negative. The great emotional void is mitigated by many compensations. Much writing of books (not letters), in which many personal views can be expressed. This is now possible because the other expedition members have grown familiar enough with the routine after all these years to take on many of the burdens that used to rest on my shoulders. The work itself, the excavations, are interesting without leading to sensational finds, such as last year. (...) (The rest of the letter discusses English literature and includes the whole text of W.B. Yeats's *Song from a Play*.)*

Hans

In a 1935 letter we find a first hint of what was to become a great passion - gardening.

7 Cannon Place, N.W.3.

July 23, 1935

Dear Bram,

Whereas we used to travel together, I do not even know where you are, but before going to Highgate Pond on this warm day here are a few lines. For me there will be no summer travel this year. At the end of September I have to go to a congress in Rome and I do not want to break up my summer anymore. I like living here. The garden has changed entirely. Exotic plants which I observe, water, and encourage every day, display themselves in a rockery, which is perfectly at home in this country. (...) I read to Jon about the development of fruit and the different kinds of honey. (...) Over this last year the visual arts have replaced literature in my interest, but I am sure this will only be temporary. More and more I am conscious of the unity of all art. Sometimes I have the tantalizing feeling that I am about to find a formula which will cover all its manifestations. (...)

Since I started this letter my publisher has refused to sink a few hundred pounds in a richly illustrated book that I have written. According to him it will not find as many as a thousand buyers. I feel very small now, and suppose that I shall have to depend on the whims of the Rockefeller Foundation of the like. (...)

Hans

The richly illustrated book that he refers to must be his **Cylinder Seals**, which contains 47 plates and 116 text-figures. It went to press in 1937 but it was not until 1939 that it was finally published by Macmillan & Co. of London. It is dedicated to the memory of Humphry Payne, who in Frankfort's eyes represented the perfect intellectual Englishman; it has frequently been reprinted and has sold several thousand copies.

1936/1937 was to be Frankfort's last excavating season. Two additional short campaigns in 1937 and 1938 were sponsored by the University Museum, Philadelphia, and the American Schools of Oriental Research.

He then took up his teaching post in Chicago. His first reaction to his new surroundings was one of relief after misgivings.

*On board Cunard White Star
"Berengaria"
April 7, 1936*

Dear Bram,

I am writing for a number of reasons. First there is some news on the professional side. As from October 2, 1938 I shall be teaching in Chicago, but I can spend six months a year in Europe, a more advantageous arrangement than I hoped for. America is no longer a horror to me, partly because I shan't be living there permanently. Going there every year will be like going on expedition. How we will

arrange our family and domestic life remains to be seen, but at least there is a feeling of security and plenty of scope for my work. Six months of teaching, six months of research in Europe. It is as easy or as difficult to avoid unpleasant encounters in the States as with us, and it is less obnoxious because it touches a different, unrelated sector of society.

My first two days in New York were as strange an experience as I have ever had. But it is overwhelmingly impressive by its architecture, which has conquered the dimension of height, not in one eccentric push like the Eiffel Tower, but to create a functional machine for daily life. The country is young and raw, the surroundings of New York are beautiful, with forested hills along the Hudson River. After that a plain, more like the plain between Amsterdam and Berlin, and finally the huge industrial city of Chicago on the huge but unimposing Lake Michigan. There are skyscrapers in Chicago as well, but they are fewer and less necessary because there is enough space and no scarcity of land as on Manhattan. The city of Chicago is wide and flat and has little room for Nature. But there is one restful area, the University quarter, which lies like a self-contained suburb, quiet and set apart in the midst of the city's activity and filth. The University buildings are imitation Oxford Gothic, just like the cardboard building sets that we had to cut out and glue together when we were young, only less elaborate, well-spaced and separated by lawns and trees. There were even some American robins that sang early in the morning, large black birds with a black beak and a red breast, as overgrown as Californian pears are compared to our pears. But at least it was the sound of a free animal living in the wild. There are no sparrows either here or in New York because there are no horses anymore.

Around the University quarter there are little streets with little two-storey houses built mostly of wood, and here and there among them an apartment house. Most of my colleagues live there. The single houses are quite old, dating back to about 1890. The people are touchingly cordial and modest, so that one does not only feel mollified but also that it would be beastly to criticize them. In fact

*there is no need for criticism because they see their own shortcomings better than we see ours, and the best of them want to change in the way they should and give me every freedom and opportunity to help them do so. Can one wish for more? (...) (He writes at length about his discovery of Jean Giono's **Le Grand Troupeau** and **Que ma joie demeure**.)*

After November I shall go to Iraq for my last excavating season. After that I shall spend a year finishing my books in London.

Cordial greetings to Ger,

Yours ever,

Hans

It was with regret that he had to leave the Amsterdam Faculty in 1938. The six-months periods in Chicago now alternated with six months in the English countryside, where the Frankforts had found an idyllic retreat at Kimmeridge near Corfe Castle in Dorset. Here he could divide his time between writing and gardening.

*On board S.S. Manhattan
September 24, 1938*

My dear Friend,

(...) The snapshot I am enclosing will give you an idea of the house's situation, surrounded by trees but open to the south, where I can see the sea from my study and you will be able to see it from the guest room. The garden was a jungle, but one day, I hope, will be a delight. The climate is so much warmer than Holland - fuchsias grow into tall bushes that simply stay outside summer and winter and then flower. There are excellent oil lamps with wicks, and there is an excellent acoustic gramophone. We have Bruckner's 9th Symphony to hand, so are not in need of anything.

A little car is essential, but I think you already know that the

police rightly do not trust me with a car, so Jettie maintains a liaison with the outside world. The domestic service is inadequate, quite unpredictable and erratic. The concept of speed is unknown, which is very good for the health. I hope in due course to adapt to the Dorset pace of living. Thus far the bees have been teaching me how far I have progressed. If I am completely relaxed, I can deal with them unprotectedly. But if there is still some urban restlessness in me, they sting me, preferably in the nose. So when in doubt I go about in a veil and gloves.

For Jon all this is ideal. To spend the summer vacation with us alone is of course out of the question. But we had my psychotechnic-pedagogic brother-in-law to stay, with his wife and two daughters, an experiment that I had dreaded, but I have been treated considerably. Every morning everyone went to the beach and I was able to work in peace. Jettie was busy all day, of course, and thanks to her experience as camp-mother and to latent domestic talents, everything went splendidly. On the beach we have a boat-house as our base of operations and a dinghy named Watergeus, light enough for even Jon to row it. The masses of birds, the farm next to our house and the garden are such a continuous source of delight for him that I feel guilty for having kept him so long in London. His interest in biology sometimes has strange consequences. Imagine me walking back to the house at two o'clock across slippery rocks with a stick in one hand and in the other a cow's shoulder blade, undoubtedly washed ashore from one of the cruise liners, which had to be brought back for his museum.

This is going to be a purely retrospective letter. It cannot be anything else, since the future is more unpredictable than ever. Chamberlain's treason has taken us and all our friends unawares. Beautiful, orderly, prosperous England now appears as nothing more than an anachronism surviving by the grace of Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin, without any strength or convictions of her own. "What does England stand for?" is what the English themselves are asking in horror. So now we depend entirely on what we ourselves can do

individually without cohesion or approbation. It is poor consolation for me that I myself am undeservedly leading such a good life while all around me there is no longer any possibility of doing so. Is America the answer? It is immature, raw, the people are enthusiastic but shallow. Perhaps I underestimate them. You will soon hear more on this subject. Please write to me here. I shall need it more than ever. The address is enough to frighten you:

*Oriental Institute,
1155 East 58th Street,
Chicago (Illinois), U.S.A.*

*Jettie has come along since war has been staved off by England's unconditional surrender. Jon is at his boarding school in Swanage, totally absorbed, especially since there are four new boys in his dormitory and he and the headmaster's son are in charge there. He has adapted exceptionally well to life at boarding school and when we are in Dorset he visits us regularly on Sunday afternoons. Jettie goes to fetch him in the little car. And then of course there are the vacations. It is an excellent solution. (There follows a digression on Malraux's **L'Espoir** and **La condition humaine**.)*

The best to all of you,

Hans

The workings of creation remained a source of wonder to Frankfort. Seton Lloyd remembers him standing in the driveway of his house holding a lily of the valley and exclaiming, "But, man, how does this know how to be a lily of the valley?"

The winter routine in Chicago was something of a rude awakening.

*The Oriental Institute,
The University of Chicago
Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.
October 29, 1938*

Dear Bram.

A letter from you would be a lifesaver. The word "vulgar" in its European sense is not adequate to cover the state of affairs here. The country has been raped and drained by agriculture and industry. This city of three and a half million inhabitants, on a spot where eighty years ago buffalos and Redskins still danced the lancers, is a money-making machine without one redeeming feature, in spite of unmotivated skyscrapers (in New York there is a reason for building them) and an artificial esplanade miles long laid out on landfill along a dead lake as large as the North Sea.

The friendliness of the people knows no bounds. The diligence and the heavy accents of the students likewise. I already have four students who want to prepare their doctorate under me. They know the facts and they do useful work, but there is no depth or background. I have the feeling that everything that means most to me, all the essentials, don't count for them at all. The nightmare is all the worse because we feel that behind us Europe is crumbling. Even the memory of our heavenly stay in Kimmeridge is spoiled by the feeling that such an island of insane delight can only be enjoyed by irresponsible egotists who hide their heads in the sand.

Two things have reminded me of you and made me write to you tonight. (...) (There follows a digression on the Verdi quartet and on lectures given by Jacques Maritain.) There is culture of every kind here. A superb collection of pictures, sublime Dutch paintings, Grecos, Cézannes, Renoirs, Degas, Seurats. Every Thursday night we go to Symphony Hall where an excellent orchestra directed by a prewar type of German musician, Stock, presents a strangely mixed programme. Next time, Bruckner's Seventh Symphony. And there are

Harold Bower and Menuhin and Kreisler and Bertrand Russell, and Beneš as a visiting professor for three months, but none of it is integrated. It is slammed together and offered as a commodity. The mainspring of life here is buying and selling grain and playing bridge. What in heaven's name do they need a university for? The idea, of course, is to plant culture, but the human material in which it should take root is in my eyes barren and unsuited for all things spiritual. There is decency, there is an inarticulate probity, stemming from the Puritan immigrants of the past, but nothing ever flowers. I will write to you later about our present circumstances.

Greet Ger and the boys cordially.

Hans

In 1939 he was planning to visit his mother, but on September 3 war broke out.

*Kimmeridge,
Near Corfe Castle,
Dorset.
August 21, 1939*

My Dear Friend,

Next week I shall be in Holland unless Hitler goes on the rampage, from August 29 to September 4. I want to spend the evenings with my mother as much as possible, but let me know if there will be time to have a walk together, at the following address:

*c/o Mevr. Weening
74 Jacob Obrechtstraat
Amsterdam Z.*

The planned visit never took place and the Netherlands was soon overrun by German troops. Frankfort's mother became one of the countless victims of Hitler's genocide of the Jews. The reminiscences of Miss J.A. Groothand, longtime secretary of the University of Amsterdam's Archaeological Institute, make it seem certain that she met a tragic end.

Frankfort was an enormously dynamic personality. He could accomplish more in a day than anyone else in a month, besides being very cheerful and lively. It was not on account of his being busy elsewhere that he had to leave. (...) I saw him again once, after the war, when he came to Amsterdam for a congress. (...)

Miss Bleeker¹³ had been to see his mother and tried to persuade her to go into hiding, but she did not believe that the danger was imminent and refused to leave. When Miss Bleeker returned a few days later with the intention of forcibly moving her to safety, she had already disappeared. We have never been able to find out what happened to her. Miss Bleeker died shortly after the Liberation, so I was unable to tell him more than that. Frankfort found it hard to believe. It was hard to explain what the wartime situation was like here.

Frankfort spent the wartime summers in the mountains of British Columbia. On a peninsula looking down the long vista of Slocan Lake between snow-capped mountains, he prepared some of his finest writings.¹⁴

Despite his grudge against Germany and the Germans, he continued to treat his German colleagues and prewar friends as he had before. There are letters from Dr. and Mrs. Walter Andrae written in 1948 and

¹³ Miss Groothand's predecessor as secretary of the Institute.

¹⁴ Rachel Levy, B.B.C. Third Programme talk, November 5, 1954.

1949 from West Berlin thanking the Frankforts profusely for food and parcels they had sent.

The war years spent in Chicago did not make him anymore tolerant of the shortcomings of that city.

*Cunard White Star
R.M.S. "Queen Mary".
March 24, 1946*

Dear Bram and Ger,

(...) First of all I want to tell you that Kimmeridge awaits you if you are able to get away even for a short time. Ger wrote that you may not be able to take any holiday this year. Not even a week or ten days?

(...) While you are more and more involved in practical life (temporarily, we hope, just until your last collaborator has had his comeuppance¹⁵), I have become more and more detached from everything. I feel certain social and civic obligations towards the United States, but procedures there are strange (even in the University, with powerful trustees who rule in practice as well as on paper), and the atmosphere is anti-spiritual, vulgar, superficial to a degree that one cannot imagine. Since 1939 we only remember the best of Europe: books, memories, landscapes, music. From your letters I gather that this view is biased, but I believe that even if I were in closer contact with present-day life in Holland it would not make me more tolerant towards the United States. On the contrary, I would feel that Holland is only temporarily a prey to disorder. Accordingly, in Chicago I go about preaching the gospel of Europe, with the result that one of my students came to me radiant after her

¹⁵ As a judge, Bram had to sentence persons who had collaborated with the Germans.

Ph.D. exam, saying, "I am very proud. There were four Europeans at my examination." Some of my colleagues think that this is one of my less appealing qualities. The unfortunate thing is that if they know or feel that they want to follow me or another of us "Greeks in Rome", they are totally unable to do so because they have no grounding or civilization and very little indispensable knowledge. If I haven't yet told you what our Dean has said about teaching Plato, let me know because it gives a clear idea of the size of the task facing an American university. (...)

Let me repeat that you could not give us greater pleasure than by coming over to see us. (...) We shall not be coming to the Netherlands this year. (...) Let us hear from you soon.

Hans

This is the last of the letters addressed to Bram that have been preserved. Since this biographical sketch is based on the correspondence with this friend from Amsterdam schooldays, I am not able to throw any new light on the fruitful years that saw publication of **The Intellectual Adventures of Ancient Man** (1946), **Kingship and the Gods** (1948), **Ancient Egyptian Religion** (1948) and **The Birth of Civilization in the Near East** (1951). In 1947 Frankfort started work on **The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient**, the first volume of which, on Western Asia, appeared after his death in 1954. The second volume, on ancient Egypt, was eventually written by W. Stevenson Smith.

In view of Frankfort's nostalgia for Europe it is not surprising that he had accepted the offer of the directorship of the Warburg Institute in 1949, combined with a professorship in the history of preclassical antiquity at the University of London. Others have paid tribute to this great scholar's achievements in these years, from which no letters to Bram have survived. It would be sad to end on a negative note. Happily we have a record of the two friends' last meeting in Bram's diary entry for September 9, 1950.

Visit from Hans Frankfort. Nothing has changed, as I had expected. We immediately understood each other on all subjects. Hardly any explanations were needed despite more than 10 years without contact. He is still prone to making pronouncements like "Americans don't develop mentally beyond the age of 16."

He knows the name of every flower in the garden. He is thoroughly versed in English literature and in most French literature as well. Although completely at home in Humanist and Renaissance studies he has resisted the temptation of entering that field and remained an Orientalist (...).

His vast store of knowledge has not become hidebound as a result of all he has experienced, thought out and put into words, it is as wide open as on that memorable day when we first met. I have boundless admiration for such a complete person with a sublime combination of character and intellectual gifts.

We walked together through meadows and dunes, taking out our notebooks now and then to write down the name of a plant or the title of a book. We discussed Time, one of the hardest concepts to grasp. We spoke about Proust, Thomas Mann, Kerenyi, Gide, Eliot, about music and many other things. Before we knew it the day was over.

Now I am saddened by the fact that we are separated. We have planned to meet at Kimmeridge or in France. Where and when shall we see each other again? Will anything have changed? In one sense everything always remains the same - we know this in advance, yet it comes as a surprise every time. What was it? - what is it? - what shall it be?

Hans and Jettie divorced in 1952, but continued to collaborate professionally. Hans remarried Enrique Harris, a scholar specializing in Spanish painting, who kindly cooperated with her stepson Jon to complete this biographical sketch.

Only 4 years after his last meeting with Bram, in April, 1954,

Frankfort, who had just laid out a new garden in London, had to be operated on for a brain tumour. This cut short his intellectual activity, though he was still able to enjoy music and continued listening to his records. The end came peacefully on July 16, 1954. His friends Bram and Ger survived for another 31 years.

It remains a source of wonderment and gratitude that in the space of his 31 years of scholarly activity, Frankfort almost single-handedly established Near Eastern archaeology as a generally recognized branch of learning, extending history back into the past with a 3000-year sequence of cultural phases.

More important even than the quantity of information that we owe to him is the quality of empathy that he brought to the understanding of ancient civilizations as far removed from ours as those of Egypt and Mesopotamia. This empathy had its roots in the exceptional receptivity of a mind that he had trained from his earliest years to absorb and distil the essentials of many different cultures. As well as this, his feeling for the beauty and human appeal of ancient art and literature enabled him to relive the emotions of long ago and interpret them for us. In this field, which borders on the metaphysical, we see clear traces of Frankfort's lifelong belief in the universality of human experience, as clearly expressed in his letters. This belief implied for him that it is possible, across the millennia, to understand the legacy of our distant ancestors. Nevertheless, while recognizing that parallels can be drawn between Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Western concepts, such as the "Great Mother", his keen mind still allowed him to differentiate between the manifestations of this "archetype" in these civilizations.¹⁶

In seeking to isolate the determining factors of the ancient Near Eastern civilizations, Frankfort's mind turned first to the forces of nature: the annual rise of the Nile in Egypt, the unpredictable thunder-

¹⁶ "The Archetype in Analytical Psychology and the History of Religion" (lecture given before the Joachim-Jungius-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, Hamburg, January 27, 1954, translated in) Henri Frankfort, *Il dio che muore* (see note 1) 47-69.

storms and flash floods in Mesopotamia.¹⁷ Undeniably, these natural features go a long way towards explaining the immutable, optimistic character of the Egyptians and the fatalistic, unstable attitude of the Mesopotamians.

He used other analogies from the natural world when comparing the sudden simultaneous emergence in Mesopotamia and Egypt of the characteristic features of their respective civilizations with the chemical process of crystallization or the biological process of birth.¹⁸

Although Frankfort's mysticism never clouded his sharp scientific mind, it helps explain his often intuitive approach to ancient civilizations. It is amazing how many of his conclusions have been confirmed by later findings. For example, on the basis of his finds from the Diyala region, he assumed that all Mesopotamian art had gone through an abstract stylistic phase during the Early Dynastic II period. Others thought that the provincial provenance of his finds accounted for this style, until new finds made after his death at Nippur, the Sumerian capital, confirmed Frankfort's thesis.

As a result of his clearheadedness, his works have lost none of their validity in the 40 years since his death. The best proof of this is the fact that they continue to be in demand and are reprinted at regular intervals. What better tribute to a scholar whose constant concern was, in his own words, "to fulfil a need"?

¹⁷ Henri Frankfort, *The Birth of Civilization in the Near East* (Garden City, N.Y., no date) 3-4, 49-51.

¹⁸ Henri Frankfort, *The Birth of Civilization in the Near East* (Garden City, N.Y., no date) 25, 50.





Fig. 1. "Hans" Frankfort, "Bram" van Regteren Altena and "Ec" Korthals Altes on a hiking trip from Epen near Maastricht in August, 1919 (photograph taken by "Henk" Bruyn).



Fig. 2. Bookplate designed for "Hans" Frankfort in the twenties. (Courtesy Mr. J.B. Frankfort).

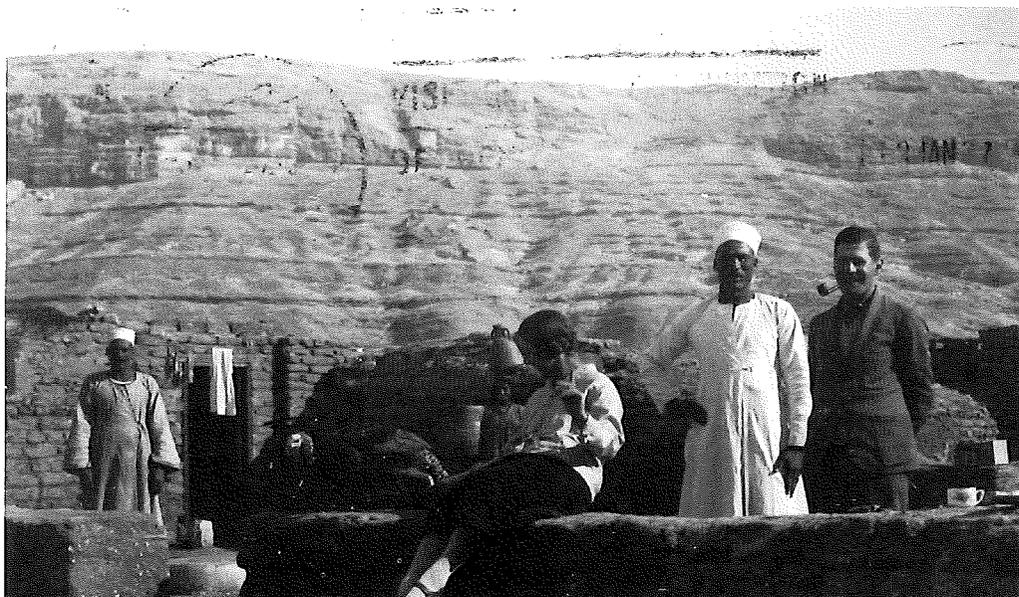


Fig. 3. The Frankforts surrounded by Egyptian servants at et-Till near Deir Mowas, Upper Egypt, January, 1927.

ORIENTALISTE, KLEIN DALENSTRAAT 42, B-3020 HERENT
