

Elin Danien collection of Robert Burkitt papers

1148.2003.11

Finding aid prepared by Jody Rodgers.

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University of Pennsylvania, Penn Museum Archives

August 2009

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Penn Museum Archives
Creator	Burkitt, Robert James, 1869-1945
Creator	Danien, Elin C.
Title	Elin Danien collection of Robert Burkitt papers
Call number	1148.2003.11
Date [inclusive]	1903-1913
Extent	0.3 linear foot
General Physical Description note	Some insect damage -- materials range from bad to fair.
Language	English
Abstract	<p>The Elin Danien Collection of Robert Burkitt Papers was discovered by Danien on her trip to Guatemala in 1985. Consisting of notebooks on the languages of the native Indians in the Guatemalan Highlands, the collection was found on the property of a family with whom Robert Burkitt stayed while working for the Penn Museum in Guatemala. Previously thought to be destroyed, the works are from the early portion of Burkitt's time in Central America, 1903 to 1913, before he formally began to collect and catalogue artifacts for the Museum. The collection consists of four linguistic notebooks, a comparative chart of the languages with a word list, a Spanish-Kekchi dictionary created by Burkitt, a portion of Burkitt's Dresden Manuscript, an Index to a linguistic notebook that is not a part of the collection, and loose papers from other notebooks. A</p>

purchased Espanol-Quecchi dictionary from Coban, 1890, is also a part of the collection.

Cite as:

[Item name]. Box [Box number]. Elin Danien collection of Robert Burkitt papers. Penn Museum Archives. Accessed [Date accessed].

Biography/History

The Robert Burkitt Papers were collected by Elin Danien on a trip to Guatemala in 1985. Danien, the Coordinator of Public Programs at the Penn Museum, was also a student in the Ph.D. program in Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania at the time of her trip. She hoped to determine if the writings and notebooks of Robert Burkitt, reportedly destroyed at his death, were indeed lost to history. Robert Burkitt, a Harvard graduate and friend of George Byron Gordon, accompanied Gordon as his assistant on the Fourth Copan Expedition to Guatemala in 1894. Burkitt remained in Guatemala for the rest of his life while Gordon returned to the United States and in 1910 became the Director of the Free Museum of Science and Art (later the Penn Museum). Burkitt developed a unique style in studying the native Indian languages and received some recognition before accepting an informal agreement with his old friend, Gordon, to locate and ship artifacts from Guatemala to the Free Museum of Science and Art. By contacting the relatives of Kensitt Champsey, with whom Burkitt resided during his time in Guatemala, Danien discovered that there were some trunks of Burkitt's work that still remained on the Champsey family property. Danien also tracked down a man who had worked on the Burkitt digs in Guatemala and the widow of Burkitt's college roommate, living in Massachusetts, among others who recalled Robert Burkitt.

Elin C. Danien was born in 1929 in New York. She worked briefly as an actress in New York and in Mexican films and at a major advertising agency before marrying and moving to Philadelphia. Danien came to the Penn Museum as a volunteer and then moved into the Education Department as a part-time guide-liaison. She entered college at age 46, attending part-time in the College of General Studies. While she pursued her degree, Danien was named Coordinator of Public Programs and then Coordinator of Events for the Museum. She attained her B.A. in Anthropology in 1982.

Danien continued her education at the University of Pennsylvania completing her dissertation on Chama Polychromes and her Ph.D. in 1998.

Danien established the Bread Upon the Waters Scholarship Fund at Penn for women over age 30 who wanted to attain a degree by part-time study in the College of General Studies. Her initial endowment has grown along with the number of students who have benefited from her generosity and vision. At the Penn Museum, she created the annual Maya Weekend where upward of 500 professional and amateur anthropologists attend lectures and workshops on Maya archaeology and epigraphy.

Her publications include "Excavating Among the Collections: A Re-examination of Three Maya Figurines" in *New Theories of the Ancient Maya*, which she co-edited with Robert J. Sharer. Danien also

edited, with John M. Weeks, *The Lost Notebooks of Robert Burkitt Maya Linguist; A Record of Languages of Ancient Guatemala*.

Scope and Contents

The Elin Danien Collection of the Robert Burkitt papers consists of ten photos, fifteen plans, six notebooks and assorted papers from Robert Burkitt's work in Guatemala preceding his informal contract with the Penn Museum. These materials were obtained by Elin Danien in 1985 and date from the early period of Burkitt's time in Guatemala, 1903 to 1913.

The collection is contained in nine folders in a manuscript box. They are almost entirely hand-written by Robert Burkitt in his phonetic English style. There is damage from rodents and the papers are in fragile condition.

The contents of the first folder, an Index to XXXI, apparently relates to a volume that has not survived. There are four notebooks labeled by Burkitt as XXXIII which have survived and are in separate folders. These contain extensive linguistic notes on languages of the Indians; Soke(Zoque)(Tuxtla Gutierrez), Tseltal(Ixtapa, Chamula, San Bartoleme and San Cristobal), Chanabol(Comitan), Jsil(Ixil)(Chahul and Nebah),Q'eqchi(Coban and San Pedro Carcha), Maya (Big and Little Santa Cruz), and Mopan(San Luis and San Antonio). Burkitt identifies the native speakers for some of his work but most are identified by a code and the code list has apparently not survived.

Each book follows the same format including lists of common Christian names, counting, places, days of the week, animal names, and other frequently used vocabulary with information on plurals, demonstratives, possessives, predicate and subject, pronouns, prepositions, tenses, and sound and spelling in each language.

Burkitt has amassed a comparative table and a standardized English word list for the table. Table entries give the translation of the word in each dialect. The table references dialects not included in XXXIII and give possible clues to the contents of the missing volumes.

A purchased "Vocabulario Espanol-Quecchi" by Mario Solis Lope, published in Coban by Talleres de El Norte in 1890, is included in one folder.

Robert Burkitt's Kekchi Dictionary labeled "Coban 1901 contains words from "A to Taqsi". The cover is damaged and the damage extends to a few of the front pages.

A separate folder holds Burkitt's Dresden Manuscript which is undated. This appears to be a portion of a longer work, the pages numbered 3567 to 3605.

Several loose pages are contained in another folder. Of different sizes, the pages may have come from other notebooks. The dialects or towns are not identified. The text appears to be phrases, "shall I go to the house?" being an example.

Administrative Information

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Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

Additional material related to Robert Burkitt's linguistic studies is contained in Manuscript 3711, Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives. Entitled, "Notes on the Method of Counting by the Quiches, of Vera Paz", the material also contains a letter from Dr. Cyrus Thomas to Major Powell with comments on the manuscript.

Controlled Access Headings

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Burkitt, Robert James, 1869-1945
- Danien, Elin C.

SUBJECT(S)

- Anthropological linguistics
- Guatemala--Antiquities
- Maya language

The Lost Notebooks of Robert Burkitt

Weeks, John M. and Danien, Elin C., ed. *The Lost Notebooks of Robert Burkitt, Maya Linguist, A Record of Languages of Ancient Guatemala*, Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008.

Collection Inventory

LINGUISTIC NOTEBOOKS, 1903-1913.

	Box
Index to XXXI.	1
Espanol-Quecchi Vocabulario, 1912-1913.	1
Burkitt's Kekchi Dictionary A-Taqs, 1912-1913.	1
Linguistic Notebook XXXIII Tsil, 1912-1913.	1
Linguistic Notebook XXXIII Maya-Mopar, 1912-1913.	1
Linguistic Notebook XXXIII Soke-Tselcal-Chanabol, 1912-1913.	1
Comparative Table, 1912-1913.	1
Dresden Manuscript, 1912-1913.	1
Miscellaneous notebook pages, 1912-1913.	1