

Carl W. Bishop papers

0053

Finding aid prepared by Gina Gariffo.

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University of Pennsylvania, Penn Museum Archives

06/13/2012

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Penn Museum Archives
Creator	Bishop, Carl Whiting, b. 1881-d.1942
Title	Carl W. Bishop papers
Call number	0053
Date [bulk]	1914-1918
Date [inclusive]	1914-1922
Extent	0.8 linear foot
Language	English
Abstract	<p>Carl W. Bishop, the first assistant curator of Oriental Art at the University Museum, was a vital force in the advanced knowledge of the Far East for the University Museum. Before Bishop's excavations to the Far East, the Chinese collection started modestly in 1913, with acquisition of small bronzes and some porcelain pieces. Bishop set out to explore other museum's exhibits on China as well as acquire artifacts from Ancient China. Due to the political turmoil in China during Bishop's active years and a lack of funds, the expeditions were not always successful. During the second of the two trips Bishop took to the Far East from 1917-1918, he did conduct archeological reconnaissance, but no excavation was undertaken. The Carl W. Bishop papers consist of ten folders in two archival boxes of correspondence mostly to George Byron Gordan, journals, and photographs.</p>

Biography/History

Carl Whiting Bishop was born on July 12, 1881 in Tokyo, Japan. Spending much of his childhood in Tokyo, Bishop attended the English School from 1888-1897. In 1898, Bishop moved to the United States, attending Northwestern Academy in Evanston, Illinois for completion of his preparatory education. From 1901-1904, Bishop attended De Pauw University and Hampden-Sydney College from 1905-1906. Taking a break from his studies, Bishop set out for the Southwest and Old Mexico for a period of exploration. Upon his return in 1912, Bishop obtained an A.B. degree from De Pauw University and the following year an M.A. in Anthropology from Columbia University. After taking his M.A., Bishop started his career as an archeologist and a member of the Peabody Museum Expedition to Central America which was made possible by a fellowship given to him by Harvard University in Central American Archeology. In 1914, while in Belize, Bishop inquired about a position at the University Museum in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Once he approved Bishop's qualifications, George Byron Gordon, the first director of the museum, appointed Bishop Assistant Curator of Oriental Art at the museum, which he would be until 1918. The Chinese collection at the museum was a modest one. With hopes to expand it, Gordon sent Bishop on a museum-sponsored archaeological reconnaissance in China, Korea, and Japan. This first trip that Bishop took to the Far East proved to be only marginally successful. The majority of 1915-1916 was spent prospecting unsuccessfully for sites in mainland China. However, because China was in an upheaval, there was no better time to purchase existing collections. Before his return to the United States, the Oriental Art exhibition was opened in the new rotunda of the museum on February 12, 1916. In 1917, Bishop once again set out for the Far East, this time with his family. With the conditions in China so bad paired with the lack of funds, no excavations were undertaken. Against Gordon's wishes, Charles Custis Harrison, President of the Board of the Managers of the University Museum, forced Bishop to come back to the United States in 1918. After this recall, Bishop left the museum. From 1918-1920, Bishop served as Assistant Naval Attache at Shanghai. Once back in the United States, Bishop taught archeology at Columbia University from October 1921 – April 9, 1922 upon which time he was called to the Freer Gallery of Art at the Smithsonian with the title of Associate Curator where he would lead expeditions to China. Spending 20 years with the Freer Gallery, Bishop spent 9 of those years in China. In 1923-1927 and again from 1929-1934, Bishop led excavations in northern and central China at large Neolithic sites. Because of the troublesome political period in China, Bishop was forced to return to the Freer Gallery, where he spent the remainder of his life. Bishop died at Alexandria, Virginia on June 16, 1942. Bishop's work with Chinese archeology provided advanced knowledge to both the University Museum as well as the Freer Gallery of Art. Had the political conditions in China during Bishop's active years been better, his contributions would have been much greater. However, he was a great loss to the field of Chinese archeology. Throughout his career, Bishop was a member of many learned societies, such as the American Oriental Society, American Archeological Society, Anthropological Society, and the American Society for the Advancement of Science. At the time of his death he was a member of the Advisory Board of the American Council of Learned Societies.

Scope and Contents

Carl W. Bishop was the first assistant curator of Oriental Art at the University Museum from 1914-1918. During Bishop's time at the museum, the knowledge of the Far East vastly expanded and the exhibit opened in the new rotunda, Harrison Hall. What was previously a modest collection of Chinese artifacts became a million-dollar exhibit of Chinese art.

The Carl W. Bishop papers consist of two archival boxes of textual material of 0.8 linear feet. These boxes are made up of three series: correspondence, journals, and photographs, which make up ten folders. The records have been compiled from Carl W. Bishop mostly in chronological order. See related archival materials note for more information on George Byron Gordan to Bishop.

The correspondence, making up six folders, dated from 1914-1922, consist primarily of letters from Carl W. Bishop to George Byron Gordan regarding Bishop's time in the Far East concerning the excavations in China, Japan, and Korea and the subsequent publication of the findings. Correspondence also includes reports of the political turmoil in China, Bishop's health, and statements of expense accounts and receipts. Other significant correspondents include Charles Custis Harrison, President of the Board of the Managers of the University Museum who acted as director when Gordon was on vacation.

The journals, making up two folders, dated from 1917-1918 are comprised of day-to-day activity while Bishop was in China.

The photographs consisting of two folders of black-and-white prints of Bishop's expeditions and photos from dealers in China and Japan, are dated from 1914-1918. The folder of photographs of Bishop's expeditions contains photos from the landscape, animals and temples of Peking, China and villagers in Hokkaido, Japan. The folder of photographs from dealers contains photos from clay, bronze, and stone artifacts.

Administrative Information

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Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

Additional correspondence with George Byron Gordan can be found in letter books volumes 20-22.

Controlled Access Headings

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Bishop, Carl Whiting, b. 1881-d.1942
- Gordon, G. B. (George Byron), 1870-1927

Collection Inventory

CORRESPONDENCE, 1914-1927.

	Box
1914-1915.	1
1916.	1
1917.	1
1918.	1
1919-1922.	1
1922-1927.	1

JOURNALS 1917-1918.

	Box
China journal (1 of 2).	1
China journal (2 of 2).	1

PHOTOGRAPHS 1914-1918.

	Box
China, Japan (1 of 2).	2
China, Japan (2 of 2).	2