

INTRODUCTION

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The academic year 2005/2006 marked a major transition for the Oriental Institute, with the completion of our museum reinstallation and the development of an ambitious new program to reinvigorate the infrastructure that supports the core areas of our research.

In February 2006 we opened the last two of the nine galleries that make up the Oriental Institute Museum. The Robert F. Picken Family Nubia Gallery is one of only three display spaces in the United States exclusively devoted to the ancient history and material culture of Egypt's southern neighbor. Geoff Emberling, Steve Harvey, Bruce Williams, and their colleagues on the reinstallation committee did a superb job of presenting the complex history of Nubia in a way that is factually accurate and clearly presented so as to make it accessible and interesting to the general public and scholars alike. They have succeeded brilliantly in the challenge of presenting Nubia as a civilization in its own right, rather than a mere reflection of Egyptian civilization. At the same time the exhibit shows very clearly how Nubia's relationship with Egypt changed over time. Over the course of three millennia, the two regions traded, fought, conquered, and colonized each other. Thus, for example, New Kingdom Egypt ruled Nubia, but in the first millennium B.C., Nubian kings conquered and ruled Egypt as the Twenty-fifth Dynasty. By exploring both the Joseph and Mary Grimshaw Egyptian Gallery and the Robert F. Picken Family Nubia Gallery, visitors can see for themselves the fascinating similarities and differences between these two civilizations.

In tandem with the opening of the Picken Family Nubia Gallery, we also celebrated in February 2006 the opening of the Marshall and Doris Holleb Gallery for Special Exhibits with its first exhibit — Lost Nubia — featuring a haunting series of historical photographs curated by Oriental Institute Archivist John Larson from James Breasted's 1905–1907 expedition to Nubia. The Holleb Special Exhibits Gallery plays an extremely important role for the Oriental Institute and its museum as we move into “life after reinstallation.” We have now started a regularized program in which we will have two to three new special exhibits each year. This will insure that our members and visitors always see something new in our museum, as a complement to our world-class permanent gallery displays. At the same time, we envision the special exhibits program as a way to highlight three different items: (1) visiting exhibits that draw on materials from other institutions and countries; (2) thematic exhibits that showcase aspects of our collections that are not normally on display; and (3) exhibits that highlight the exciting and innovative work of our own Oriental Institute researchers.

With the completion of our ten-year gallery reinstallation process, and the shift to a regular program of special exhibits, we can finally turn our attention back to the core of the Oriental Institute's mission — the work of discovery and research. Oriental Institute scholars continue to be leaders and innovators in both text-based and archaeological research. When considered as a whole, this research effort is extraordinary. We are simultaneously working on three major dictionary projects — the Assyrian Dictionary under Martha Roth, the Demotic Dictionary directed by Janet Johnson, and the Hittite Dictionary, edited by Harry Hoffner and Theo van den Hout. At

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the same time, Matthew Stolper is conducting a large-scale digital imaging program focused on the Persepolis tablets, while other scholars such as Dennis Pardee (Ugaritic), Norman Golb (Hebrew), Peter Dorman and Robert Ritner (Egyptian), Christopher Woods (Sumerian), Rebecca Hasselbach (Comparative Semitics), and Walter Farber and Seth Richardson (Akkadian and Old Babylonian) each conduct important text-based research projects. Ray Johnson and his colleagues continue to move forward with the work of the Epigraphic Survey, while archaeologists such as Abbas Alizadeh, Scott Branting, McGuire Gibson, Clemens Reichel, David Schloen, and Donald Whitcomb are either actively excavating or are analyzing and writing up the results of completed fieldwork in Iran, Syria, Egypt, Israel, and Turkey. Their discoveries are ground-breaking, both figuratively and literally.

No other research institute or university anywhere in the United States comes close to matching this scope of active research. In fact, one of the unique strengths of the Oriental Institute is its ability to undertake large-scale, long-term research projects that tackle the fundamentally important questions in understanding the ancient civilizations of the Near East. While we sponsor these long-term projects, at the same time, we need to have the flexibility to be able to move quickly when new research opportunities arise. The modern Middle East is a highly volatile region where opportunities for fieldwork and research emerge unexpectedly and are often surprisingly fleeting. The Oriental Institute needs to have the resources available to move rapidly to start excavations when conditions permit. At the same time, we need to have the advanced technology and the reference tools to be able to develop these research opportunities into truly innovative projects.

To insure that we will have the resources we need to meet these goals, starting in 2005/2006, the Oriental Institute has inaugurated the Research Endowments Campaign, a five-year plan to increase the size of our research endowments by three-million dollars. By doing so, we will more than double the current size of these endowments, thereby guaranteeing predictable, significant levels of funding for five key areas of research: research archives (library), ancient languages, fieldwork, technology, and the museum. The strengthening of our research infrastructure will enable the Institute to continue its role as America's leading center for innovation and discovery in the study of the ancient Near East. It is my hope that the fruits of this campaign will be seen in the quantity, scope, and quality of the articles you read in this and future *Annual Reports*.
