

# INTRODUCTION

**Gil J. Stein**

As can be seen in the contents of this year's *Annual Report, 2007–2008* has been a year of important milestones for the Oriental Institute.

We continue to build our program of archaeological fieldwork, and during the past year conducted excavations and surveys at six important sites in Turkey, Syria, Egypt, and Sudan. The Neubauer Family Expedition to Zincirli, directed by David Schloen with Amir Sumakai Fink as Field Director, has been making major progress in using both magnetometry and excavation to explore the lower town of this important Iron Age city in southeast Turkey. At the same time, under the co-direction of Geoff Summers from the Middle East Technical University and Scott Branting from the Oriental Institute, remote sensing and excavations at Kerkenes Dağ have continued on the Anatolian plateau of Turkey. Taken together, the Kerkenes and Zincirli projects will allow us to compare the structure of Iron Age urbanism in roughly contemporaneous cities of both highland and lowland Anatolia. In northeast Syria, a joint expedition led by Clemens Reichel from the Oriental Institute and Salam al-Kuntar from the Syrian Antiquities Department has been revolutionizing our understanding of warfare, trade, and early urbanism in north Syria during the fourth and third millennia B.C. In Egypt, Mark Lehner continues his important work on the Giza plateau, investigating the major settlement complex in the shadow of the pyramids. In Middle Egypt, Assistant Professor Nadine Moeller conducted her first season of Oriental Institute-sponsored excavations at Edfu, one of the few surviving tells, or mounds, where it is possible to investigate the organization and functions of a provincial urban center in the Middle and New Kingdom. Finally, Bruce Williams and Geoff Emberling conducted their second season of salvage excavations in Sudan, focusing on the Kerma-period cemetery (ca. 2000 B.C.) at Hosh el-Guruf in the region of the Nile's Fourth Cataract. The archaeological sites in this important part of ancient Nubia will very soon be inundated and lost forever when the construction of the Merowe dam is completed. This project thus not only contributes to our overall understanding of the kingdom of Kush, but also makes a significant contribution to the preservation of cultural heritage in the Near East.

Our text-based research projects continue their work of developing fundamental tools of philological and lexicographic scholarship, while at the same time documenting unique and irreplaceable archives from Mesopotamia, Egypt, Anatolia, and Iran. Theo van den Hout and Harry Hoffner are ably editing the Chicago Hittite Dictionary, aided by Petra Goedegebuure with the assistance of Richard Beal and Oğuz Soysal. Martha Roth continues her work completing the final volume of the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary. Janet Johnson, with François Gaudard, is moving the Chicago Demotic Dictionary toward completion within the next three to four years. Matthew Stolper has been coordinating a large-scale emergency project to generate digital documentation of the Persepolis Fortification Archive, the collection of thousands of tablets that document the inner administrative workings of the Achaemenid Persian empire of Darius, ca. 500 B.C. This archive is threatened by an ongoing lawsuit that could result in its auction and dispersal into private art collections around the world. The University of Chicago and the Oriental Institute are continuing in their efforts to protect this irreplaceable item of cultural heritage from this fate. Finally, the Epigraphic Survey, directed by Ray Johnson, continues with its work of recording, conserving, and reconstructing the reliefs and architecture at Luxor and Medinet Habu. We are happy to acknowledge Oriental Institute Visiting Committee member Dr. Marjorie Fisher for her generous support of the Chicago House Library. This key research resource has now been named

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the “Marjorie M. Fisher Library” in recognition of her commitment to the work of the Epigraphic Survey.

The Oriental Institute Museum has mounted two major special exhibits in this past year, thanks to the efforts of Museum Director Geoff Emberling and his talented staff. In fall 2007, guest curator Ian Manners organized the exhibit *European Cartographers and the Ottoman World, 1500–1750: Maps from the Collection of O. J. Sopranos*. In spring 2008, McGuire Gibson and Katharyn Hanson organized the powerful exhibit *Catastrophe! The Looting and Destruction of Iraq’s Past*.

I think we can all be especially proud of the Oriental Institute’s efforts in the protection of cultural heritage in the Near East. One project in particular stands out in this regard. Oriental Institute Head of Conservation Laura D’Alessandro developed the curriculum and wrote successful proposals for two National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grants; a total of eight archaeological conservators from Middle Eastern countries currently experiencing armed conflict spent six months of intensive training at the Oriental Institute’s Conservation Laboratory. The selection of conservators was completed in consultation with the antiquities services of their home countries and the programs were customized to address the specific conservation needs of each country. Our goal is to develop a locally based core of trained conservation experts in each of these countries.

Education and outreach also form a key part of the Oriental Institute’s mission. One of our major accomplishments in this past year has been the development of the Kipper Family Archaeology Discovery Center, an interactive program in which students learn how to “excavate” and record artifacts buried in a simulated archaeological excavation site that has been constructed in the LaSalle Banks Room of the Oriental Institute. The students then relate their own experiences to the real artifacts in our Haas and Schwartz Megiddo Gallery. Carole Krucoff and Wendy Ennes from our Museum Education department have been instrumental in working with Susan Marcus (formerly of Chicago’s Spertus Institute) in the development of a curriculum and program materials for the Kipper Family Archaeology Discovery Center.

Finally, I am delighted to report that our Research Endowment Campaign, coordinated by Development Director Monica Witzak, has been highly successful in its efforts to build the financial infrastructure that makes possible the Oriental Institute’s work of discovery and education. At the end of year two, we have now raised half of the three-million dollar goal set for this five-year campaign. These efforts are essential to ensure the Institute’s ability to continue in the coming decades as a leader and innovator in research on the ancient Near East.

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