



THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE  
2009-2010 ANNUAL REPORT

# INTRODUCTION

**Gil J. Stein**

I am honored to present you with this year's *Oriental Institute Annual Report 2009–2010*. As you can see from the impressive scope of activities by the faculty, researchers, and staff of the Oriental Institute this has been a highly productive year.

Our mission is to explore the ancient civilizations of the Near East through archaeological, textual, and art historical research, and to communicate the results of our work to both scholars and the broader public through our museum and programs of education and outreach.

The Oriental Institute is uniquely valuable in having scholars from complementary disciplines all under the same roof, sharing their insights and applying them toward a deeper, more holistic understanding of the world's earliest civilizations. This work of synthesis and integration of knowledge lies at the core of what we do — the creative work of turning “data” into “knowledge.” As the famous French mathematician Henri Poincaré put it: “Science is built up of facts, as a house is with stones. But a collection of facts is no more a science than a heap of stones is a house.” This synthetic goal animates the Institute's research in archaeology, textual studies, and public education.

The Oriental Institute now has eight archaeological excavations across the Near East — an unprecedented range of projects that testifies to the vitality of our research into the origins of Near Eastern civilizations. In parallel with our existing excavations at Edfu, Giza, Hamoukar, Kerkenes, Zeidan, and Zincirli, in 2009 the Institute conducted the first field season of the Galilee Prehistoric Project, directed by Yorke Rowan. This long-term project investigates the little-known fifth-millennium BC Chalcolithic period in Israel. In the first stage of this project, Yorke is excavating the village site of Marj Rabba to understand the organization of rural life and economy of the Galilee during the Chalcolithic. In a second exciting development, Donald Whitcomb secured the permit from the Palestinian National Authority in the West Bank to excavate at Khirbet el-Mafjar, the early Islamic portion of the fabled city of Jericho. Mafjar was the site of a palace and urban complex dating back to the earliest caliphs of the Umayyad dynasty and can help illuminate the workings of the early Islamic state.

In tandem with our excavations, the Oriental Institute's three dictionary projects — the Assyrian Dictionary edited by Martha Roth, the Demotic Dictionary edited by Janet Johnson, and the Hittite Dictionary co-edited by Harry Hoffner and Theo van den Hout — continue in their pathbreaking work of creating research tools for the entire discipline. We have reached a milestone in that the final volume of the Assyrian Dictionary should be published in the upcoming year.

The Epigraphic Survey under Ray Johnson has been making great strides, not just in the recording of the monuments at Luxor and Medinet Habu, but also in conservation and restoration of these monuments. The protection of cultural heritage has emerged as an important focus of the our work in Egypt. The Epigraphic Survey team has been working with the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities and with USAID in a massive project to lower the water table in the area around the main monuments of western Thebes in order to protect and preserve the architecture.

The Oriental Institute is also breaking new ground in public education. In this past year, Carole Krucoff, Wendy Ennes, and numerous colleagues from the Institute and the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations completed a large-scale project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities to create a Web-based curriculum that gives high-school teachers

## INTRODUCTION

an extraordinary rich resource for teaching students about the ancient and modern Near East. In a parallel project this past year, the Museum opened a fascinating exhibit, *Pioneers to the Past*, which details the intertwined stories of the founding of the Oriental Institute in 1919, the beginnings of American scientific archaeology in the Fertile Crescent, and the origins of the countries of the modern Middle East. It has never been more important for Americans to understand this crucial region of the world, and the Museum and Public Education department have made major contributions toward that goal.

Finally, one of the most important and innovative accomplishments of the Oriental Institute in 2009–10 has been our progress toward the development of an Integrated Database (IDB). This long-term project seeks to link the many different computerized databases from our museum, archives, research archives (library), conservation section, dictionaries, and remote-sensing laboratory (CAMEL — the Center for the Ancient Middle Eastern Landscape). With the help of a large capital-budget grant from the University of Chicago, the Institute has been able to purchase the complex software that will form the heart of our integrative data structure. We are now moving ahead with a pilot project to incorporate the first of our many, formerly independent, databases into a unified structure. When this effort is completed, researchers and the public will be able to search through our collections for artifacts of a certain type, learn about their conservation status, then find and read publications about those artifacts, while also examining maps, plans, and photographs of the sites where they were found. This ability to move seamlessly from one archive of information to another has never been possible before, and it will revolutionize the way we do our research.

Overall, in 2009–2010, the Oriental Institute has made major strides in its work of discovery, while at the same time building new and innovative frameworks for research and the communication of that research to the world at large. I want to thank all the members of the Oriental Institute's community of scholars, staff, and supporters for the role they have played in this effort.

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