

RESEARCH ARCHIVES

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Introduction

It is frequently remarked upon by visitors, friends, and inmates of the Oriental Institute that there exists a culture here which is hyper-conscious of its own history. Hardly a discussion passes without the question “What would Breasted do?” being asked in one form or another. Many colleagues are fathomless sources of oral history and institutional memory. Time is measured in units not usually associated with clocks or office-calendars. The call for contributions to the *Annual Report* which the faculty and staff receive each spring offers us all a point of punctuation and an opportunity to reflect collectively on our achievements, goals, and expectations, and on the role each of us plays as individuals or representatives of departments and projects within the bigger story of the Oriental Institute and its history.

In preparing my contribution, my practice has always been to look back at last year’s *Annual Report*, and indeed all of the *Reports* back to 1954 (when their known history begins, ten of which are accessible at: http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/AR/Annual_Reports.html). The realization that the Research Archives has just begun its thirtieth year of operation, and that I am now well into my twentieth year as the Librarian, gave me an added incentive to read the old reports this year and see how far we’ve come.

I offer a few observations:

- The first *Annual Report* for the Research Archives claimed a collection of just under six thousand volumes. Eleven years later, after my first full year on the job, I reported a collection of just over seventeen thousand volumes. This year we claim thirty-six thousand volumes. These figures show a consistent growth rate of a thousand volumes per year over a thirty year period.
- In its first year, the staff of the Research Archives consisted of one Librarian and three part-time graduate student assistants. Eleven years later, after my first full year on the job, the staff of the Research Archives consisted of one Librarian and three part-time graduate student assistants. This year with a collection six times larger than on opening day, the staff of the Research Archives consists of one Librarian and three part-time graduate student assistants.
- When I was appointed Research Archivist, the office equipment consisted of a desk, a chair, and a 1936 Remington Noiseless manual typewriter [upon which I ultimately typed about fifty thousand catalog cards]. In 1986 we introduced a desktop computer — the first one employed in an administrative function in the Institute. Our office equipment now consists of three administrative computers, six public access terminals, two CD-ROM jukeboxes, two file servers, two photocopiers, and a venerable IBM Selectric typewriter.
- Shirley Lyon, the Librarian in the University system who oversaw the transfer of the old Oriental Institute collection to the newly built central library at Regenstein in 1970 reported the number of books shelved at forty-eight thousand — this being the combined total of the ancient Near Eastern and Islamic collections — rightfully calling it “probably the finest collection of Near Eastern materials in the United States.” Charles C. Van Siclen, the first Research Archivist at the Oriental Institute, estimated in 1974

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that “a complete library [for the ancient Near East] would contain approximately 20,000 volumes.” We surpassed the latter estimate in 1987, and we are rapidly approaching the former (see Current Acquisitions below).

- When the Research Archives opened in 1973, it inhabited the reading room and the immediately adjacent suite of offices and workspace on the second floor. Books were shelved in four banks of freestanding bookshelves at the south end of the reading room and in the built-in cabinets. When I was appointed Librarian a decade later, the number of freestanding bookshelves had doubled and all of the built in bookshelves were “double-shelved.” As we begin our thirtieth year, we inhabit a fully renovated, wired, and climate-controlled reading room, an adequate pair of office and workspaces, the mezzanine, a suite of offices on the third floor, and a spacious (though nearly full) stacks space in the new wing. Solutions to the always looming future space needs will certainly include a combination of compact shelving, remodeled and reconfigured existing space, and the as yet incalculable consequences of digital reproduction and delivery of books and journals.

The Research Archives, like all of the Oriental Institute, is an extraordinary place. In the course of thirty years it has developed from a small but respectable collection of inherited books to what is surely the finest and most accessible research collection for the study of the ancient Near East in North America and among the very best in the world. In the last decade we have managed seamlessly to integrate a research paradigm ascendant for centuries with the emerging paradigm incorporating the promise of the technological revolution, without sacrificing or compromising the goals of either.

Acquisitions Lists and On-Line Catalog

As those who use it quickly come to understand, the Research Archives has a unique system of organization. It is essentially an expanded concept of the scholarly bibliography without the added level of any of the standard library classification systems. It is simply learned and easily extended. It makes possible the ability to “dead-reckon” the location of any particular volume in the collection with an extraordinary degree of success. It is nevertheless the case that we seek to provide the standard tools of the library, the primary one being the Library Catalog. Following in the footsteps of the procedures adopted by Johanne Vindenas, who for forty years was the Librarian of the old Oriental Institute Library, we seek to provide a catalog of the highest order of usefulness. Under this scheme we create records not only for each volume in the collection, but also for each essay, article, and review relating to the ancient Near East which appears in any of the volumes we hold. Needless to say, it is the development and maintenance of this catalog that is the most time consuming of the many tasks facing the staff of the Research Archives. At present the catalog holds 111,822 records; 20,460 of them created, edited, and added during the past twelve months — more than two and a half times the rate of accretion recorded last year. The catalog is available on-line at:

<http://oilib.uchicago.edu/oilibcat.html>

Another product of the library is the acquisitions list. As recorded in the last two *Annual Reports* we have revived the Research Archives Acquisitions lists and provided them free of charge, delivered electronically to the desktop of anyone who is interested. Readers have the option of viewing them on the website, or of receiving them by e-mail when they appear. In the past year we have produced four lists:

Acquisitions — March–April 2001

Acquisitions — May–June 2001

Acquisitions — July–August 2001

Acquisitions — September–October 2001

Information on how to read them on-line and how to subscribe to the mailing list is available at: <http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/DEPT/RA/RABooks.html>

We currently have 443 subscribers to the mailing list. The on-line version of the lists are viewed (and perhaps read?) several hundred times a week.

The on-line version of the catalog is available globally. Nearly sixteen thousand unique visitors have made nearly thirty-eight thousand visits to the catalog this year — more than twenty seven hundred of them came back for more. These numbers are a little hard to understand. The repeat visitors alone account for more than forty-two times the seating capacity of the reading room. The visitors of a single year gathered together would fill a stadium. We are clearly providing a service that we could not provide on-site. Comments, though few, have been positive and encouraging.

Publications and Projects

For nearly a decade we have been working towards a suite of tools that would take advantage of the digital infrastructure to allow for increased communication and productivity among the ancient Near Eastern scholarly community. These consist of a communications network, ANE-ANENews, and an index of resources, Abzu. Both of these have taken a leap forward this year.

ANE-ANENews: Early in 2002 we switched from a locally provided mailing software product to a more robust and sophisticated mailing list management system operated and supported by the University of Chicago. The system allows each subscriber to manage her own preferences for communication and therefore frees the list “owner” (Jones) from quite a lot of repetitive and routine administrative obligation. It also provides a more useful archival system for the presentation of the list traffic on-line. Those interested can direct their browsers to the new ANE pages at:

<https://listhost.uchicago.edu/mailman/listinfo/ane>

and

<https://listhost.uchicago.edu/mailman/listinfo/anenews>

Together ANE and ANENews have 1,671 subscribers.

Abzu — ETANA — Core Texts: In last year’s *Annual Report*, I discussed a collaborative project, ETANA, in which Charles Jones (and the Research Archives) is a senior participant. Almost before that *Annual Report* went to press, we were pleased to announce that ETANA was the recipient of a \$100,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The goals of that project under the terms of the grant include the development of the Abzu project of the Research Archives, the premier Internet portal devoted to the ancient Near East, to a more robust database structure and make it part of the developing ETANA comprehensive portal for ancient Near Eastern studies, and experimenting with the digitization of 100 core texts important to scholars of the ancient Near East. I am pleased to say that we have met these goals. Abzu is now rebuilt and accessible at:

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<http://www.etana.org/abzu/>

In late spring we shipped nearly seventy volumes of Core Texts to the Preservation Department of the Library at Case Western Reserve University — our subcontractor for scanning and markup of this component of the ETANA project. We expect to have this substantial corpus available on-line presently. You can read more about it at:

<http://www.etana.org/coretexts.shtml>

Core Texts will be available on the Internet universally and free of charge.

ETANA is now engaged in the development of an electronic “Archaeological Tool-kit” to supplement Abzu and the Core Texts. I trust I will be able to report more success from this collaboration in next year’s report.

Current Acquisitions

Following are the acquisitions statistics for the past year:

| | <u>May 2001–April 2002</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| Monographs and Series | 756 | 25,628 |
| Journals | <u>240</u> | <u>10,454</u> |
| Total Books | 996 | 36,082 |

This year’s acquisitions statistics are consistent with the trends of the past few years. We continue to be committed to acquiring all the basic published resources for the study of the ancient Near East.

Staff

I am pleased to have had several excellent employees this year. Ali Witsell, second year student in Mesopotamian Archaeology, worked in the Research Archives for most of the year, leaving in the winter to work for McGuire Gibson. Vanessa Davies, who has just completed her first year in Egyptology, has worked for the Research Archives since last autumn, and taken the largest share of the task of analytical cataloging of new records. Sandra Morrison, erstwhile Departmental Secretary in Near Eastern Languages and Civilization, worked during the autumn. Emily Hartsay, first year student in Egyptology, and Kathy Wagner, from the Master of Arts in the Social Sciences program, have both worked since winter — and have made considerable improvement in the condition and orderliness of the bookstacks. I am grateful to each of them for their effort and initiative — and especially because they allow me go home at night and on the weekends.

Acknowledgments

I gratefully acknowledge herewith the support and assistance of a cadre of friends and colleagues of the Research Archives too large to list individually. My immediate colleagues in the Oriental Institute Computer Laboratory, Publications Office, Administrative Offices, and the Journal of Near Eastern Studies are, as always, working shoulder to shoulder for the mutual benefit of each of these entities and of the Oriental Institute as a whole. I am grateful to them for the constant support both material and moral.

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