

INTRODUCTION

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As you see from the articles in this *2004–2005 Annual Report*, the past year has been one of remarkable achievement for the Oriental Institute.

In January 2005, we opened the three newly installed galleries in the museum's East Wing — the Dr. Norman Solhkhah Family Assyrian Empire Gallery, the Henrietta Herbolsheimer, M.D. Syro-Anatolian Gallery, and the Haas and Schwartz Megiddo Gallery. These exhibit spaces are designed to show how each region of the Near East gave rise to a highly distinctive and unique local culture. However, at the same time, we want our visitors to understand that the different cultures that made up this rich mosaic of civilizations did not exist in isolation. Instead, from Neolithic times (ca. 8000 B.C.) onward, they were always interacting with one another in many different ways — through trade, the spread of technology, the use of writing, the borrowing of symbols of kingship and religion, and lastly through the harsh medium of warfare and the incorporation of these cultures within the powerful empires of the Hittites, New Kingdom Egypt, and Assyria. The result of these different forms of interaction was the development of richly cosmopolitan cultures throughout the Near East.

Building on the earlier work of Dr. Karen Wilson, Museum Director Dr. Geoff Emberling and his colleagues have created a series of exhibits that are both beautiful to look at and a uniquely important educational resource for general visitors and scholars alike. I am proud to say that the opening weekend for the East Wing galleries set a new record for attendance at our museum.

We are now building on that success and are close to the completion of the Robert F. Picken Family Nubian Gallery, which will share the West Wing with the Doris and Marshall Holleb Family Special Exhibits Gallery. We are on schedule to open the Picken Family Nubia Gallery in February 2006.

With these achievements, the Oriental Institute now stands on the cusp of an important historical transition. The 2006 opening of the Picken Family Nubian Gallery will mark the long-awaited completion of the ten-year process of museum reinstallation. During the past decade, the Institute has worked mightily to fund the enormous (almost 15 million dollar) cost of constructing the new wing and installing the galleries while still supporting our research. We will now be able to shift the lion's share of our efforts back to the support and expansion of the Institute's core mission: *the rediscovery of ancient civilizations in the Fertile Crescent through archaeological and textual research, and the communication of that knowledge to both scholars and the public through publication, education, and outreach.*

As the contributions to this year's *Annual Report* so clearly show, Oriental Institute researchers are making extraordinarily important contributions to scholarship. One of the great strengths of the Oriental Institute is that it has a "critical mass" of textual and archaeological researchers. This allows Oriental Institute scholars to define and carry out large-scale, long-term projects aimed at addressing the major questions in ancient Near Eastern studies. Much of this work involves the development of fundamental research tools that make it possible for researchers throughout the world to conduct more productive research. The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary under the direction of Prof. Martha Roth, the Chicago Hittite Dictionary directed by Prof. Theo van den Hout, and the Chicago Demotic Dictionary under the direction of Prof. Janet Johnson

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are three classic examples of the massive effort needed to develop fundamental research tools that benefit the entire discipline.

But Institute researchers are creating other tools as well. Let me give two examples of this unique work.

Under the direction of Dr. Scott Branting, the Center for Ancient Middle Eastern Landscapes (CAMEL) is assembling the scholarly world's most comprehensive digital archive of remote sensing images and satellite photographs of the entire Near East. By systematically collecting, processing, and integrating these images (from LANDSAT, CORONA, ASTER, and other satellite sources), we are building a library that will allow us to map ancient archaeological sites and preserved landscapes from Egypt across to Iran. This work has already revolutionized the practice of archaeological survey. At the same time, the "Chicago Protocol" for processing satellite imagery has become the standard procedure for archaeologists using these images in the Near East.

Another important scholarly tool in development is the Diyala Project, directed by Dr. Clemens Reichel. With the crucial assistance of (technically) retired database specialist-volunteer George Sundell, Dr. Reichel is developing an integrated, relational database of more than 15,000 artifacts excavated by the Oriental Institute in the Diyala region of Iraq during the 1930s. This database links the artifacts with the stratigraphic contexts from which they were excavated and assembles the field notes, photographs, and text translations in a way that allows researchers to "re-assemble" the four sites from which they were excavated. Recognizing the innovative and important nature of this research tool, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) recently awarded the Diyala Project a two-year, \$100,000 grant. We can reasonably expect that, when completed, the Diyala relational database will become the model or template for archaeologists looking for ways to analyze and publish the masses of data from their excavations.

In addition to these projects that organize knowledge and develop basic analytical tools, Oriental Institute researchers are actively expanding the scope of new field research. In Egypt, Dr. Stephen Harvey continues his important excavations at Abydos. The Epigraphic Survey under the direction of Dr. W. Raymond Johnson continues its vital work of recording and conserving the monuments at Luxor and Medinet Habu, in a race against the destructive forces of modern development and the changed ecology of Egypt after the construction of the Aswan Dam. Our archaeologists are making remarkable discoveries at sites such as Atchana, Çadır, and Kerkenes in Turkey, and in Khuzestan and the Marv Dasht (Persepolis) Plain in Iran. I am happy to report that this past year saw the reactivation of the Oriental Institute's permit to excavate at the early urban center of Hamoukar in northeast Syria as well.

A crucial part of the Oriental Institute's mission is the communication of our discoveries to both the scholarly and general public. Here too, I am happy to say that the talented people at the Institute are at the cutting edge of innovation. In the past year, our Publications Office started a policy of making all new publications available simultaneously in both digital (Web-based) format and in print. For the first time, the work of the Oriental Institute will be available to anyone, anywhere in the world with access to the Internet. In parallel, our Education Section, under Carole Krucoff and her colleague Wendy Ennes, is developing new Web-based tools to make the highlights of our museum accessible on-line, while also expanding the Web-based resources for public school teachers throughout the Chicago area and beyond.

This is an exciting time of transition. I am confident that we can look forward to an accelerated pace of discovery, communication, and outreach in the years ahead.