

RECOVERING THE LOST STORY OF THE RISE OF MAN: THE RESEARCH ARCHIVES OF THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE

Foy Scalf, Head of Research Archives

James Henry Breasted, founder of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, summarized the goal of the Institute as “an organized endeavor to recover the lost story of the rise of man.”¹ Part of this goal is fulfilled by the Oriental Institute Museum, which houses one of the premier collections of ancient Near Eastern artifacts in the United States. Another part is fulfilled by the scholars toiling away to interpret this bountiful material here at the Oriental Institute and worldwide. Each generation of scholars laboring to fulfill this lofty mission rests upon the shoulders of their predecessors and the work they have left behind. It is this voluminous work, published in an ever-increasing number of pages, that places the library at the very heart of every academic discipline. For ancient Near Eastern studies, the Research Archives of the Oriental Institute holds one of the most significant collections of research materials in the Western Hemisphere.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RESEARCH ARCHIVES

The Research Archives is the scholarly library for the faculty, staff, and members of the Oriental Institute as well as the graduate students in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations of the University of Chicago. While especially rich in the areas of Assyriology and Egyptology, the aim of the Oriental Institute has always been to build a comprehensive collection of materials covering all aspects concerned with the study of the ancient Near East including history, archaeology, and philology. Founded in 1919 as the Oriental Institute Library, the original development of these facilities owed a great deal

to Johanne Vindenas, librarian for the Oriental Institute from 1924 to 1964. Her meticulous cataloging is renowned in library circles² and can be found on display in the sixteen volumes of the *Catalog of the Oriental Institute Library, University of Chicago*, published in 1970 under the supervision of Johanne’s successor as Oriental Institute Librarian, Shirley A. Lyon. This catalog documents the holdings of the Oriental Institute Library before the 1970 consolidation with the University library system in the newly built Joseph Regenstein Library. The magnitude of this work is overwhelming, with its 284,400 index cards covering over 50,000 volumes. Only after twenty years of acquisitions and electronic cataloging are we once again nearing similar numbers.



Johanne Vindenas, Oriental Institute Librarian 1924–1964

The current incarnation of the Oriental Institute library facilities, the Research Archives, was founded in 1972 under the directorship of Dr. John Brinkman at the request of scholars who needed immediate access to research

materials for the various projects being conducted at the Institute. Traveling to the Regenstein Library to check references was terribly inconvenient, further delaying projects already fifty years old. A non-circulating library would be a necessity within the Oriental Institute. Among the projects for which such a library was necessary was the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, initiated in 1921. Checking references for the dictionary projects of the Oriental Institute would be greatly facilitated with an in-house archives. Those working on the dictionary, humorously referred to as “dictionary slaves,” had enough to frustrate them. Erica Reiner captured the arduous journey and scholarly wrestling matches of the Assyrian Dictionary staff in her book *An Adventure of Great Dimension*. Any added aggravation could only delay their work further. Thus, the Research Archives became their home away from the Assyrian Dictionary office.

Initially, the Research Archives collection consisted of the personal libraries of several illustrious scholars, including James Henry Breasted, Keith C. Seele, and William F. Edgerton. Since its outset in 1972, the Research Archives has made an attempt to comprehensively acquire materials, both new and old, relevant to the study of the ancient Near East through purchases and donations. Current acquisitions lists are circulated informally to Oriental Institute faculty, staff, and students, but these will soon appear on the Research Archives Web site (<http://oi.uchicago.edu/research/library/>).

Today there are roughly 50,000 volumes in the collection of the Research Archives, covering all fields within ancient Near Eastern studies. The library

continues to grow by approximately 1,500 volumes per year. Generous donations from the personal libraries of Gregory Areshian and Erica Reiner have added 2,000 volumes to the collection in the last year. These scholarly donations are crucial for the continued vitality of our disciplines by making available priceless scholarly works to future generations of researchers. Being both founded and expanded by such donations, the Research Archives continues to grow, providing its users with extensive coverage of the ancient Near East.

MAKING THE MOST OF THE RESEARCH ARCHIVES

All the publications acquired by the Research Archives after 1990 have been entered into a database that is publicly accessible online (<http://oilib.uchicago.edu>). The collection is cataloged and housed based on a unique call-number system: Journals (call number J/), Serials (call number S/), Monographs (call number = author's last name), Pamphlets (call number pam), and Reference (call number ref). In December 2007, at a reception honoring the generous donation of Dr. Gregory Areshian, the Research Archives inaugurated the Gregory Areshian Collection (call number GAC), a special collection of 1,500 books on the archaeology and history of central Asia, now housed in a separate room for individual study. In addition, the Online Catalog contains over 44,000 links to articles available from all over the world over the Web. Just look for the link called "Online Publication."

We are currently in the process of retrospectively cataloging the entire collection of the Research Archives. All serials have been cataloged, with 65 percent of the monographs and 35 percent of the journals remaining. Material not currently accessible in the Online Catalog can be

searched using the card catalog in the Research Archives. Through our cataloging initiatives, the Online Catalog of the Research Archives has become "an indispensable tool for all research workers in the field of the Near East," as James Henry Breasted described the original card catalog. In addition to the standard library information and following the trend-setting vision of James Henry Breasted, all volumes are analyzed in their entirety, including journal articles and independently authored chapters of monographs and series, producing a nearly comprehensive index of ancient Near Eastern studies.³ The database currently has over 260,000 individual records and will easily contain over 500,000 when the retrospective cataloging is completed over the course of the next few years.

The online catalog of the Research Archives is freely accessible to the public and, as an index to ancient Near Eastern studies, users may search the catalog using their preferred criteria. The results, containing full bibliographic data, acts as an indicator of the work done on a specific topic and the researchers who have tackled the subject. Users may also save individual records using the briefcase function and export them to build their own bibliographies on topics of their choosing. In the future, the Research Archives plans on moving to a more robust

database software environment that will provide users with further sorting flexibility and a more powerful search engine. Information on past and future library projects can be found in the pages of the Oriental Institute Annual Report, editions of which can be viewed on the Web (<http://oi.uchicago.edu/research/library/annualreports.html>).

HOW YOU CAN HELP

There are several ways you can help the Research Archives fulfill its mission. We welcome relevant book donations and volunteer help. Please send all book donation and volunteer inquiries to the Head of the Research Archives Foy Scalf (scalffd@uchicago.edu, (773) 702-9537). Financial donations help as part of the Oriental Institutes Research Endowment Campaign and can be made to the Research Archives in several ways. A simple monetary donation is greatly appreciated, but we also offer potential donors the option to "Adopt a Journal." By helping the Research Archives subscribe to a scholarly journal, you will have your donation commemorated by a book plate permanently placed inside your journal. For further information on making a financial donation or adopting a journal, please contact Development Director Monica Witczak (mwitczak@uchicago.edu, (773) 834-9775).

Notes

¹ James Henry Breasted, *The Oriental Institute*. The University of Chicago Survey 12, p. w. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933. Italics in the original.

² Robert Wadsworth, "Johanne Vindenas Remembered," *Access* 36, No. 23, November 11, 1988: 2-3.

³ Breasted realized immediately the value of indexing the content of periodicals. Already in 1933, the card catalog of the Research Archives was "becoming more and more an indispensable tool for all research workers in the field of the Near East" (Breasted, *Oriental Institute*, p. 403).



The Elizabeth Morse Genius reading room of the Research Archives circa 1931. James Henry Breasted called it the "most beautiful room in the building"