

# COMMUNICATIONS

KIERSTEN NEUMANN

Over the past year, the OI’s communication efforts increased exponentially as we prepared for the kickoff of the official Centennial campaign at the end of summer 2019 and subsequently to celebrate the centennial throughout the 2019–20 academic year. Throughout 2018–19, we continued existing partnerships and developed new ones with teams across the UChicago campus and within the city of Chicago, to assist us with our marketing, public relations, and branding strategies, the overarching goal of which was to raise the awareness and support of the OI locally and internationally. As Steve Johnson so eloquently wrote in his fall 2019 feature on the OI in the *Chicago Tribune*, “The Oriental Institute has a 100th birthday makeover wish—to no longer be Chicago’s ‘hidden gem.’”

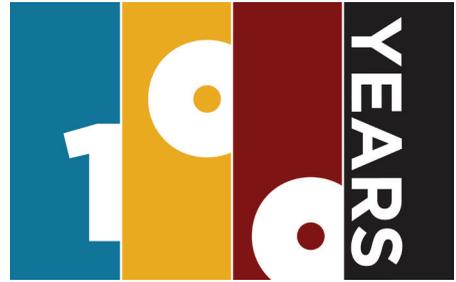


Through the end of 2018, we continued developing new branding and messaging for the OI with central University Communications, UChicago Creative, and consulting firm Lipman Hearne. The product of these efforts is a brand story that effectively and artfully captures the history and romance of the OI, both a pioneering interdisciplinary research center and a world-renowned museum devoted to understanding, revealing, and protecting the earliest civilizations in the ancient Middle East. A visually significant aspect of our rebranding was the creation and launch in April 2019 of a new logo—a new look for a new century! A principal objective in designing the new logo was to increasingly refer to the Oriental Institute as the OI. The term “Orient” originally referred to the OI’s geographical area of research focus—one hundred years ago, the Middle East was known as the Orient, meaning “east” (as opposed to occident, meaning “west”). However, the meaning of orient is no longer part of common American English usage. Our intention is to acknowledge and embrace our heritage and set the stage for our next hundred years. We’re increasingly referring to the Oriental Institute as the OI, similar to MoMA, the Met, and MCA, and the new logo afforded an opportunity to move in this direction.

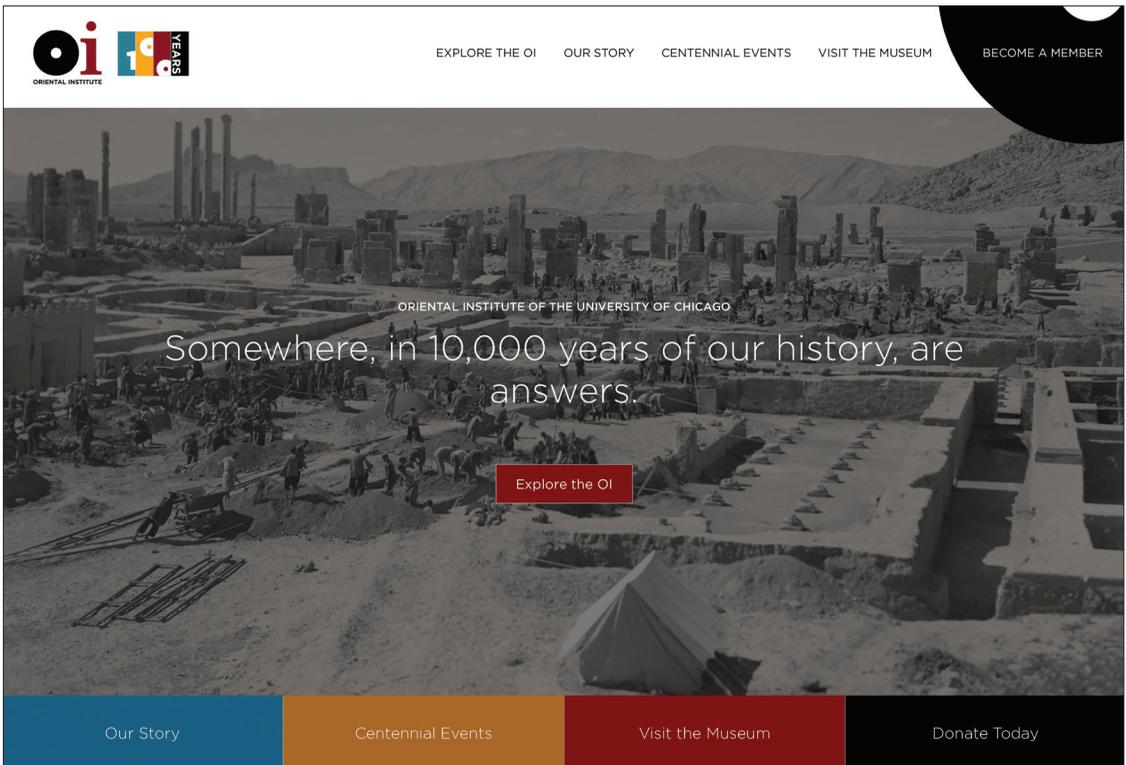
The completed logo—the bold black “O” and serif maroon “i”—is iconic, representative of the institute, and visually impactful in both print and digital platforms. Inspired by artifacts of the OI Museum collection—beads, cylinder seals, maceheads, spindle whorls, and, of course, the wheel—the “O” acts as both letter and graphic element. The lowercase “i” conveys a feeling of humanity through its serif curve and round dot. The “i” is also reminiscent of the “i” symbolizing “information,” a fitting association for an institute whose mission is to advance knowledge and discovery related to the ancient Middle East. The Gotham font and black and maroon color scheme with which “ORIENTAL INSTITUTE” and “THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO” are written situate the logo firmly within broader UChicago branding. The museum logo draws on this same design concept, with



the word “MUSEUM” written in black using the Gotham font. While the OI logo as a whole embraces a sense of the tradition and romanticism of the institute, its clean, modern qualities connect to the present, reflecting an institution whose scholarship and outreach continues to offer new ways of seeing what connects us and why, our lives as humans together. We also designed a special centennial mark to celebrate the OI’s one hundred years of research, fieldwork, and scholarship. The mark is referential to the OI logo, using the same graphic “O.” The horizontal bands employ the maroon and black of the university’s primary palette and the blue and yellow of the secondary palette. The result is a vibrant and contemporary design that stands as a striking complement to the OI logo.



Coinciding with the unveiling of the new OI logo and centennial mark was the launch of the OI Centennial website ([oi100.uchicago.edu](http://oi100.uchicago.edu)). We teamed up with Chicago-based digital branding agency, Sandstorm, to work with us in creating a digital experience to celebrate the OI’s Centennial year, sharing not just the legacy and historical impact of the OI in understanding, revealing, and protecting the earliest human civilizations, but also recognizing that through our ongoing research and public outreach we can offer new ways of thinking about what makes us, us—the beginnings of our lives as humans together. Sandstorm and the OI team underwent a thorough UX and creative UI process, while leveraging the OI’s new branding. The primary goal was to achieve an interactive, high-tech, narrative experience while showcasing the incredible depth of research projects and overall work of the OI. In addition, a key goal was to drive users to engage with the OI: attending exhibits and events (including the Centennial Gala), donating, becoming a member, and visiting the museum. Making sure these



**oi** 100 YEARS  
ORIENTAL INSTITUTE

EXPLORE THE OI | OUR STORY | CENTENNIAL EVENTS | VISIT THE MUSEUM | BECOME A MEMBER

**Iraq** [CLOSE X]

**Exploring Mesopotamia, the Land Between the Rivers**

In 1919, the Oriental Institute made its first field expedition to what is known today as Iraq. A century later, the OI continues to further expand our knowledge of this ancient land and its people.

[Learn about the OI's work in Iraq](#)

Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Levant, Egypt

Our Story | Centennial Events | Visit the Museum | Donate Today

CTAs and conversions link back to the main OI site was key, while also elevating the centennial as a major milestone for the institute. Sandstorm implemented a new Drupal 8 instance for the OI Centennial site and configured the CMS for design flexibility in the future. Over the course of a few months, we worked with Sandstorm to transform key content related to the OI's history, research projects, fieldwork, cultural heritage initiatives, and museum collection into a well-curated, digital microsite experience; a key feature is the interactive map that presents a visual navigational tool to explore the OI's work in different regions of the Middle East. Additional objectives included a mobile-first approach that ensures the user has the same level of interactivity and scannability from any device, and WCAG 2.0AA accessibility standards. The OI Centennial site was recognized with a 2019 Gold MARCOM award by

**Our Story**

Think of the ancient Middle East as the first data point in understanding the story of humans, together.

**This is the beginning of us.**

What are the ideals and ambitions, the rules and tools, the material and conceptual breakthroughs necessary to forge a collective identity and life? How does "me" become "us"—and how fragile or resilient is that sense of unity? We live in a time when these questions have fresh urgency. But at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, we know these are the very same questions that humans confronted thousands of years ago, when they first built lives together in the ancient Middle East, giving rise to the world's first villages, cities, and empires. Understanding how these people interacted with and depended on each other then, offers us new ways to understand who we are now—and who we can be.

**FROM THE OI**  
 "Our purpose involves us in the task of recovering a great group of lost civilizations."  
 James H. Breasted, OI Founder

James H. Breasted at his desk in Haskell Hall

In 1919, James Henry Breasted founded the OI at the University of Chicago with a radical idea. He insisted that who we are—how we live as humans together—began not in Greece or Rome, but rather in the complex civilizations that emerged in an area of the ancient Middle East that he vividly named "The Fertile Crescent." Breasted was appointed as faculty in 1894 by William R. Harper, the first president of the University of Chicago, and received financial support and encouragement from John D. Rockefeller, Jr., for the founding of the OI.

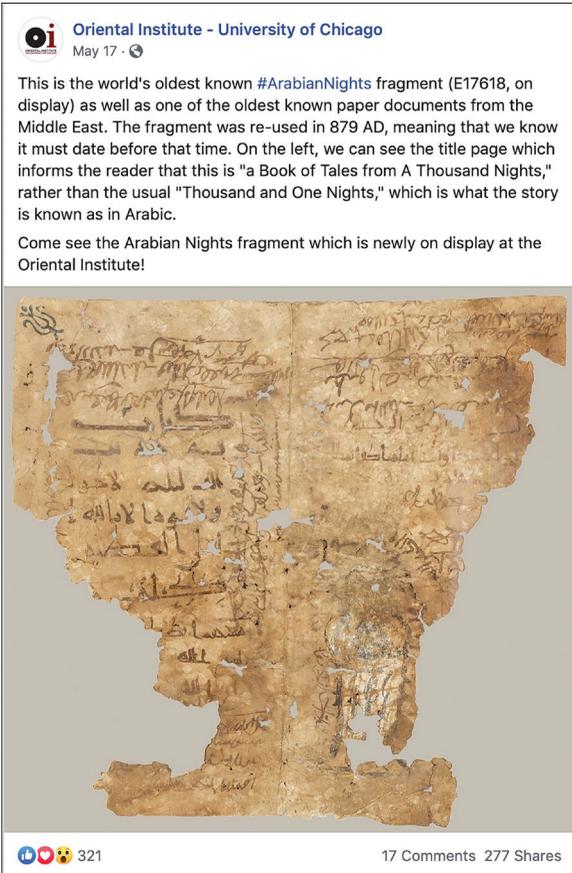
The OI has led a century of excavations and research projects throughout the Middle East, many of which continue today in countries including Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, and Afghanistan. The comprehensive and rigorous work of OI scholars deciphers ancient languages; reconstructs histories, literatures, and religions of long-lost civilizations; and creates transformative dictionaries that serve as cultural encyclopedias essential to our understanding of the ancient world.

**THE OI BY THE NUMBERS**

100 years of research  
 10,000 years of history

the Association of Marketing and Communications Professionals.

In spite of these many efforts, our social media presence did not lapse. We saw a continued increase in our audience engagement across all platforms—Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube—throughout the year. On Instagram, we saw an exceptional rise of 485 percent in follower growth. One of our top engaging posts was a photo of the decadent *lamassu* cake created for the OI birthday celebration on May 13, 2019. Our Facebook base rose 12.4 percent, reaching a total of 26,073 followers; our net page likes (the number of new users who liked our page) rose 144 percent, with a peak in May 2019—also the month of the OI’s actual one hundredth birthday! Our number one most engaging Facebook post was a photo of the world’s oldest known fragment of *A Thousand and One Nights* (E17618) from the



OI Museum collection, which is now on display in the new Islamic exhibit section of the galleries. With the April launch, we were excited to implement our new messaging and visual branding on each of our pages, including the uploading of the new OI logo as our profile picture.

In the first part of 2019, we entered into new partnerships with the Silverman Group, to develop and implement a PR strategy for the centennial year; and Tom, Dick & Harry Creative Co., to design print and digital creative for our centennial marketing campaign. We also continued working with UChicago Creative to develop brand guidelines, stationary, and marketing materials. Guided by these well-curated and strong partnerships, we paved the way for a much anticipated and successful campaign kickoff in August 2019—to be discussed at length in the 2019–20 Annual Report.