

# INTRODUCTION

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The past academic year was marked by our name change. On April 4, 2023, the Oriental Institute officially became the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures—West Asia & North Africa, or “ISAC” for short. Accompanying this name change was a new logo, one based on a Near Eastern floral element—the lotus—that may be found throughout the Institute on its artifacts and in its architecture.

But though our name changed, our mission and passion remain very much the same. We continue to excavate and care for cultural heritage in the Middle East, study and edit texts, produce tools for the field, publish books, organize exhibits, educate our visitors, take care of our vast and rich collections, and share our research with everybody who has an interest. A testament to this passion is the fact that our faculty and staff produced eight books, forty articles and scholarly reviews, and a documentary.

We continued building our faculty and staff. Since July 2022, we have been joined by Jana Matuszak, assistant professor of Sumerology; Augusta McMahon, professor of Mesopotamian archaeology; and Mehrnoush Soroush, assistant professor of landscape archaeology. On July 1, 2023, Margaret Geoga started as our brand-new assistant professor of Egyptology. Meanwhile, the search for a professor of the archaeology of the Arabian Peninsula and Gulf States, generously endowed by ISAC Advisory Council member Howard Hallengren, is nearing its end. On the staff side we welcomed Marc Maillot, chief curator of the ISAC Museum, and Marianna Capeles, our new business manager, while Brad Lenz and Emily Smith completed our development team under Bill Cosper as assistant director of development/membership and development/events associate, respectively. Brett McClain took over the reins at Chicago House in Luxor, Egypt, as the new director of the Epigraphic Survey.

On May 25, 2023, we celebrated the retirement of Janet Johnson and Donald Whitcomb. Although no longer official members of the ISAC faculty, they remain active. There are still scholarly projects that demand their attention and that they want to bring to successful completion.

We lost four important members of our Advisory Council this past year: John Rowe, former Council chair; Kitty Picken, generous and long-time ISAC supporter; Arthur Herbst, likewise former Council chair and loyal supporter of ISAC together with his wife, Lee; and Neil King, one of our longest-serving members (since 1999). In deep gratitude for their service, we cherish our memories of each of them. We also welcomed a new ISAC Advisory Council member, Sue Geshwender.

This is my last introduction for the ISAC annual report. By the time you read this, I will have handed over the directorship of ISAC to Prof. Tim Harrison, by now well known to all of you. It has been a true pleasure, and above all an honor, to have served first the OI and then ISAC as interim director for two and a half years. I have learned so much from all of you and am deeply grateful for the trust you had in me. I could not have done it without the support of the entire ISAC community.