EXCAVATIONS AT
TELL ZEIDAN, SYRIA

MISTY AND LEWIS GRUBER
BRING ANCIENT EGYPT
TO THE WORLD:
THE ELECTRONIC
PUBLICATIONS
INITIATIVE
The upcoming special exhibit, Pioneers to the Past, to be held in the Marshall and Doris Holleb Family Special Exhibits Gallery, is scheduled to open January 12, 2010. It is true that much of the ongoing work of the researchers at the Oriental Institute derives from the early reconnaissance of James Henry Breasted and his colleagues in the Near East. Where Breasted led, many followed. New surveys and excavations continue today. In this issue of *News & Notes* I offer a report on the Oriental Institute’s 2008 first season of fieldwork at Tell Zeidan, Syria, by a joint Syrian-American team. The site of Zeidan provides a complete stratigraphic sequence spanning the Halaf to Late Chalcolithic 2 periods (6000–4000 BC), which offers great potential for research focused on Ubaid society and economy.

If we broaden the meaning of pioneer, others are noted in this issue of *News & Notes*. Mary J. Grishaw’s contributions to the Oriental Institute are many, and her call to pioneer lies in her family’s gift toward the naming of the re-installed Joseph and Mary J. Grimshaw Egyptian Gallery. This gift would encourage others to follow, and today all the galleries have been named. We sadly announce Mary’s passing. Mary was a longtime member, volunteer, and Visiting Committee member, and she will be deeply missed.

Most recently, the generous support of Misty and Lewis Gruber has made it possible to scan all 125 of the older Egyptological titles published by the Oriental Institute between the 1920s and the year 2000. The books are being uploaded to the Internet as Adobe Acrobat PDF files and distributed at no cost to everyone with access to the Internet, fulfilling a large part of the Institute’s Electronic Publications Initiative. As Tom Urban, Managing Editor of Publications, explains, in October 2004 the faculty instructed that all titles be published as electronic files on the Internet, which is promptly done for new titles but only as time and funding permit for 351 of our older titles. The support of the Grubers for electronic publication has allowed the Institute to accomplish a large and important part of the initiative, to share the research of the Oriental Institute with the world and, we hope, to inspire many more generations of pioneers to the past.
On display in the Oriental Institute Museum are two “magical bricks” from an ancient Egyptian tomb.¹ They are made from a finely sifted Nile clay and left unbaked, rather unlike your typical architectural sun-baked mudbrick. Magical bricks were inscribed with selections from Spell 151 of the Book of the Dead. According to the rubric, which provides the manufacturing and placement instructions, four bricks and four amulets set in the bricks were produced for each tomb. Placed into niches in the wall or on the floor of the burial chamber, magical bricks protected the deceased at the cardinal directions by warding off potentially dangerous entities. The designation “magical brick” derives from their rectangular shape, their designation as “brick” in ancient Egyptian texts, and their apotropaic function within the tomb. There is nothing particularly “magical” in a Western sense about magical bricks, for the properties which we would consider “magical” were notions that existed within the logical cosmology of ancient Egyptian religious traditions.

OIM 6776 and OIM 6777 are two rather small magical bricks measuring 6.5 × 4.0 × 1.5 cm — quite easy to miss with all the other beautiful objects displayed in the Joseph and Mary Grimshaw Egyptian Gallery. Members of the Egyptian Exploration Society excavated them in tomb D13 at Abydos and gave them to the Oriental Institute as part of the distribution of finds to excavation supporters. Buried in Abydos tomb D13 was the Twenty-fifth Dynasty vizier Nespaqashuty C, father of the vizier Nespamedu (Abydos tomb D57) and grandfather of the vizier Nespaqashuty D. Portions of Nespaqashuty D’s tomb (Theban Tomb 312) are also on display in the Egyptian Gallery. If Nespaqashuty C had a complete assemblage of magical bricks, the other two bricks have been lost or destroyed in antiquity. Damage to both bricks occurred at some point since the amuletic figure of OIM 6776 and the amuletic wick of OIM 6777, which left indentations and a hole respectfully, have never been discovered.

NOTE

A Nile Boat with Its Crew. Thebes, tomb of Pere (no. 139). *Ancient Egyptian Paintings 2*, by Nina Davies (Chicago, 1936), plate 56

**CORNER**

**MAGNET**

Photo: Dan Dry  
Design: Diane Hanau-Strain  
Size: approx. 2.5” × 3.0”  
Member’s price: $2.65