

# INTRODUCTION

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The 2006–2007 academic year has seen major developments in virtually every aspect of the Oriental Institute. The scale and scope of the work presented in this *Annual Report* are so broad that I can only call your attention to a few highlights.

Oriental Institute archaeologists have launched two important new field projects. David Schloen has begun what we hope will be a long-term program of excavations at Zincirli, near the Syrian border in southeast Turkey. Zincirli can be identified from inscriptions as ancient Sam'al, one of the most important Neo-Hittite and Neo-Assyrian cities. Zincirli boasts not only extraordinary monumental architecture and carved basalt reliefs, but more importantly provides the rare opportunity to make broad horizontal clearances that we need in order to understand the workings of this important Iron Age center. When compared with the results of Scott Branting's ongoing excavations at Kerkenes on the plateau (also presented in this *Annual Report*), we have the chance to do serious comparative studies of first-millennium urbanization in highland versus lowland Anatolia.

The second new Oriental Institute excavation begun in the past year is Geoff Emberling and Bruce Williams' program of rescue archaeology in Nubia, modern Sudan. Construction of the Merowe Dam along the Fourth Cataract of the Nile will flood a large, and so-far poorly known, area of ancient Nubia. We have only two years to learn as much as possible about this area before its ancient sites disappear beneath the rising waters of the dam reservoir. Our excavations at el-Widay and at Hosh al-Guruf provide a fascinating look at the rural economic foundations of the Kerma state. Most notably, at Hosh al-Guruf, Geoff and Bruce's team has recovered a small rural gold processing center. By tracking the production and exchange of gold — probably the most important export of Nubia — we can begin to understand the economic underpinnings of Kerma, the earliest known powerful indigenous state to emerge in this part of the Nile Valley.

In tandem with our archaeological projects, two new text-based projects have started to make vital contributions to both scholarship and the protection of cultural heritage.

The Syriac Manuscript Project, co-directed by Oriental Institute Research Associates Stuart Creason and Abdul Masih Sa'adi, is scanning and cataloging thousands of images from the Vöobus photographic archive — about 70,000 images of the texts from almost 700 manuscripts in Syriac — a dialect of Aramaic once widely spoken across the Near East. These manuscripts, recorded from twenty-three different monasteries and other locations, cover a time span of almost 1,500 years and provide a priceless record of Syriac Christian culture from Byzantine times up to the late nineteenth century. By making digital scans of the images on the decaying emulsion film of the photographic archive, we will be able to preserve this extraordinary heritage and make it available to both scholars and to modern Syriac-speaking communities around the world.

The Persepolis Fortification Texts are a second priceless archive under grave threat of destruction. Excavated by the Oriental Institute in the 1930s and brought to Chicago on a long-term loan from Iran for purposes of translation and study, the Persepolis texts are a unique, irreplaceable

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record of the inner administrative workings of the Persian empire in the time of Darius, ca. 500 B.C. This archive is currently the subject of a lawsuit seeking damages from the state of Iran; if successful, the suit could result in the confiscation, sale, and dispersal of these texts, which have both extraordinary scholarly importance, and the highest value as the cultural heritage of the Iranian people. To counter this threat, Prof. Matt Stolper has successfully organized the Persepolis Fortification Archive Project to make high resolution digital scans of as many of the texts as possible. Matt has been working in partnership with Prof. Bruce Zuckerman and his team from the University of Southern California to apply the most advanced imaging technologies to this important material.

In addition to these new initiatives, ongoing Oriental Institute projects continue to make major contributions to archaeology, philology, and cultural heritage preservation. Clemens Reichel's excavations at Hamoukar in Syria are reshaping our ideas about the roles of warfare, trade, and geography in the origins of ancient Near Eastern cities. In Egypt, under the able direction of Ray Johnson, the Epigraphic Survey is documenting the reliefs at Medinet Habu, while stabilizing and reconstructing the architecture and carvings at Luxor. The Epigraphic Survey has also been instrumental in preserving the site of Luxor through its work with USAID on a large-scale project to lower the water table around the site as a way to protect the fragile sandstone architecture from decay and collapse.

Our three dictionary projects continue their work of generating the fundamental research tools for scholarship on the ancient Near East. The final U/W volume of the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary (CAD) is on the verge of going to press. At the same time, CAD editor-in-chief Martha Roth has taken on major new duties as the new Dean of the Humanities at the University of Chicago. The Demotic Dictionary, under Jan Johnson's able direction, has made major progress with the infusion of new staff and new computer systems. We estimate that the Demotic Dictionary will be completed within five years. Under the co-directorship of Harry Hoffner and Theo van den Hout, the Chicago Hittite Dictionary has now moved into the third floor space formerly occupied by the CAD. By doing so, the entire research team and its indispensable files are finally all in one work area, greatly facilitating the work of this ongoing project.

In parallel with our research programs, the museum has implemented and regularized our new program of presenting two new special exhibits every year. Museum Director Geoff Emberling and Special Exhibits coordinator Emily Teeter have done a wonderful job in planning these exhibits and in turning them into a physical reality. This year's exhibits — *Embroidering Identities: A Century of Palestinian Clothing* (guest curator Iman Saca) and *Daily Life Ornamented: The Medieval Persian City of Rayy* (guest curators Tanya Treptow and Donald Whitcomb) have given us all fascinating windows into the material culture of the ancient and modern Near East.

The Oriental Institute has made significant progress in information technology as well. John Sanders played an instrumental role in coordinating with the University to completely redesign the Oriental Institute's Web site, which was successfully launched in February 2007. The new site is beautiful to look at, easily navigated, and a remarkably rich source of information about the ancient Near East. At the same time, under Scott Branting's direction, our CAMEL laboratory continues to grow as one of the world's leading digital archives of maps, aerial photographs, and satellite imagery of the fertile crescent. The CAMEL lab has rapidly become an indispensable resource for virtually all of the archaeologists here at the Institute. Our Research Archives (library) has made great progress in expanding its electronic catalog as a vital research tool, thanks to the efforts of Magnus Widell. Magnus will be leaving Chicago to take up a new position in Assyriology at the University of Liverpool, but he leaves the Research Archives in wonderful shape.

One final noteworthy aspect of information technology at the Oriental Institute is that of publications. For the last few years, the Institute has been committed to the simultaneous publication of our research in both print and electronic form, with the latter freely available to any interested researcher as a downloadable PDF file on our Web site. The many letters we have received from scholars all over the world are a wonderful testimony to the value of this commitment. We are now extending the availability of this resource to include our earlier publications as well. Publications Department editor-in-chief Thomas Urban, working in tandem with Leslie Schramer, has now made an additional forty-six previously published Oriental Institute publications available online. In doing this, our highest priority has been to scan publications on Mesopotamian archaeology and philology, as a way to help our Iraqi colleagues, whose research is greatly hampered by the catastrophic destruction of libraries and archives in Iraq.

In order to insure our continuing ability to carry out our work of exploration and discovery, in this last year we launched the Research Endowment Campaign — a five year initiative aimed at raising three million dollars to double the size of those endowments at the Oriental Institute that specifically support research. We have targeted five areas: Archaeological Fieldwork, Ancient Languages, Technology, Research Archives, and the Museum as key areas of research infrastructure. The campaign is ambitious in the sense that we have made the commitment to build future capacity, while at the same time continuing to raise funds to support our existing projects. Development Director Monica Witzak has been working tirelessly to insure that both areas of fund-raising proceed apace. Oriental Institute Executive Director Steve Camp has played a key role in the planning and implementation of this campaign. I especially want to single out for thanks the members of the Oriental Institute's Visiting Committee. These devoted friends and supporters have collectively committed to raise one million of the three million dollars needed for the Research Endowments Campaign. Their gifts to date and pledges have brought us extremely close to fulfilling that part of the campaign at the end of our first year. All of us here at the Oriental Institute deeply appreciate this enthusiasm and support. This brief overview of the past year's work and of the Research Endowments Campaign points the way toward our next steps.

What challenges face the Oriental Institute, and what directions should we follow over the next decade?

I see several areas where we can and must move if we are to maintain our position as one of the world's leading centers of research on the civilizations of the ancient Near East. If we rest on our laurels, we will be left behind. First and foremost — we must rebuild our excavation and fieldwork programs in Israel, Iran, and Iraq. We can do so quickly in Israel, but will obviously have to wait until political conditions in Iraq and Iran improve to the point where we can resume our work in those countries. In the meantime, we will work consistently to maintain ties with scholars in Iraq and Iran while retaining our own expertise in these core research areas.

Our second challenge is that of resources. The Research Endowments Campaign is an important first step toward insuring that we will have the resources we need to develop and carry out important new research throughout the Near East. However, even after the successful conclusion of this five year initiative, we will need to plan carefully and continue to build our own endowment resources much further as the costs of excavations, digital technology, and skilled expertise continue to rise.

A third challenge is that of people. We must develop the next generation of Oriental Institute members and supporters through education programs, outreach, public presentations of Oriental Institute research through the media and our membership program, and through innovative special exhibits in the museum. We must wholeheartedly embrace the expansion of Web-based resources for both teachers and students, and through our publication program.

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If we can meet these three challenges successfully, then the Oriental Institute will flourish in the coming decades and will continue to enrich our understanding of ancient civilizations.

The Oriental Institute is a uniquely valuable center for scholarship and it is a precious cultural resource for the general public. The work presented in the pages of this *Annual Report* is a tribute to this talented group of researchers, staff, membership, and supporters.

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