

Seth Richardson

This was a year of many conference papers and much behind-the-scenes work for **Seth Richardson**. Pushing forward toward completion of his monograph on the end of the Old Babylonian period, he completed a database of almost 14,000 personal names from published and unpublished texts, polished off the last of ninety-five copies of tablets from the period, and finished archival, prosopographic, and thematic studies critical to writing a history of the decline of this seventeenth-century state. Two longish notes emerged during the year. First was a re-analysis of a New Kingdom Egyptian wooden “furniture attachment” as part of the base for an enthroned divine image (for James Romano’s memorial volume). The second was the publication of data supporting substantial and functioning temple estates at the old Sumerian city of Lagaš well into the Old Babylonian period, still in control of over 40 sq. km of productive land centuries after their last-attested moment of political dominance (for Marcel Sigrist’s *festschrift*). Meantime, he enjoyed three weeks writing at a summer house in Maine and managed to climb every mountain in Acadia National Park while he was at it.

On the conference circuit, in November Seth spoke at the Boston meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research on harmonies between ancient state collapse studies and modern political science work on “failed states,” borderlands, non-state actors, and the ideological failures of “disenchanted communities.” In March he participated in the highly successful two-day Oriental Institute Seminar on divination, delivering a paper he has been writing and revising over almost eight years, to appear in the published conference proceedings as “On Seeing and Believing.” A week later, Seth was in Albuquerque at the American Oriental Society meeting to talk about the last vestiges of Old Assyrian trade in Babylonia. There was also time for a side



Figure 1. Seth Richardson at the Chicago Humanities Festival

trip out to the desert with pals Steve Garfinkle, Alhena Gadotti, Alexandra Kleinerman, and Lance Allred: an effervescent cocktail of mesas, chaparral, Indian fry bread, and Ur III shop talk.

In May, Seth flew to Seattle and drove up to Vancouver, B.C., with Garfinkle to deliver a paper at the annual meeting of the Association of Ancient Historians. The paper there was “*Ex Oriente flux: Problems and Preconditions in Transmission*,” a discussion of theoretical and methodological problems in positing the diffusion of “Oriental wisdom” to Greece in the mid-first millennium B.C. These points were reinforced on the Greek side by a very sympathetic lecture from Kurt Raaflaub — a very enjoyable conference. Back in Chicago, Seth also delivered two public lectures in October. The first was on the image of the Tower of Babylon in historical imagination, as part of a Chicago Humanities Festival panel (fig. 1). The other addressed the role of divine idols in Mesopotamian society called “Idols without Anxiety” in conjunction with the exhibition entitled *Idol Anxiety* at the Smart Museum of Art. His most demanding audience all year, though, without doubt, was his son Benjamin’s first-grade class, which came for a tour of the Oriental Institute Museum galleries in June.

Seth looks forward to a year in which he will conclude his work on Old Babylonian state collapse and liver divination, as well as articles on ancient state competition and the role of geography; on rebellion in the ancient Near East; on a “new” military history of Mesopotamia; and a number of smaller projects.