

MUSEUM

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This year was an extraordinary one for the OI Museum due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In compliance with public-health protocols, we were closed for two separate periods of time. Our first closure extended from March 17 to September 29, 2020. We reopened in September at 25 percent capacity until November 14, 2020, when we closed for a second time. We reopened again on February 2, 2021, also at 25 percent capacity, and we have remained open since then. Slowly, as public-health protocols have allowed, we have expanded our visitor capacity and hours. We plan to be fully reopened at the beginning of the 2021–22 academic year.

It is remarkable that, given our periods of closure—and our shortened hours and strict capacity limits when we were open—that nearly six thousand visitors still enjoyed the OI Museum. It has been suggested that museums will be able to rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic more quickly than other cultural venues. Museums such as ours offer large, open galleries that allow visitors to practice social distancing and ease back into public spaces. But there is also something more profound driving museum attendance as we emerge from the pandemic. When we experience our own histories in museums, we connect with others. From that connection we can contemplate, process, and make sense of the significance of our collective experiences, including those we had during the pandemic.

At the time of this writing, we have been regularly welcoming more than one hundred visitors each day, and we expect our visitor numbers to grow. To navigate the required capacity limits for visitor attendance when we reopened, we implemented the Tock reservation system, which allows visitors to make reservations online in advance of their visit. A by-product of using Tock is that we have been gaining valuable information about when people prefer to visit the OI Museum. This fall we plan to experiment with our hours so that we can maximize our ability to welcome visitors and continue to grow our attendance—to even greater than prepandemic numbers.

Everyone had to pivot during the pandemic. Staff of the OI Museum maintained an on-site presence for collections care, but many of us worked remotely in some capacity throughout the year. When we were at the OI, we wore masks, maintained the requisite distance from one another, and followed other health protocols. But we were still able to carry out many of our usual work activities.

In the Museum Archives, for example, more than one hundred requests were completed, and more substantial digitization projects were engaged. The Museum Archives also acquired a number of new collections this past year. The Cultural Heritage Experiment (CHE) also continued and accommodated students by adopting an online format. Conservation was able to find workarounds for restrictions that prevented non-University colleagues and contractors from visiting, and they packed some thirty-four hundred tablets for the Persepolis Fortification Tablets (PFT) packing project. I could cite many more examples that attest to the creativity, determination, and hard work of the OI Museum staff.

The virtual programs that emerged as a necessity of the pandemic were very well attended. Again, we pivoted. Our prepandemic gallery talks became Zoom meetings at which various OI Museum staff gave presentations full of behind-the-scenes details about their work. In fact, these presentations were so well attended that we have decided to continue our behind-the-scenes approach

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with a collections series that looks at objects in storage. Although we all look forward to a time when we can confidently say that the pandemic and its restrictions are behind us, we have learned from this challenging time, and we take those lessons with us as we return to a new normal. I would like to thank all the individuals on the OI Museum staff for their hard work this past year.

SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS



The OI Museum special exhibitions program had yet another successful year, despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. The OI centennial exhibition, *We Start Here: The OI at 100*, which opened in fall 2019 in the Marshall and Doris Holleb Family Gallery for Special Exhibits in honor of the OI's centennial, closed in March 2021 and was followed by *Antoin Sevruguin: Past and Present*, which opened in April and runs through December 2021. This exhibit, featuring the late-nineteenth-century photographs of Antoin Sevruguin and curated by Dr. Tasha Vorderstrasse, presents to the public for the first time the OI Museum's collection of more than 150 photographic prints attributed primarily to this acclaimed photographer of Qajar Iran (figs. 1–3). An additional focus of the exhibition is the lasting impact of Sevruguin's unique vision, as demonstrated through the work of Iranian-Canadian artist Yassaman Ameri. Using Qajar photography to investigate her own personal history in a series titled *The Inheritance*, Ameri's work shows how the past and present can come together to create unique artworks that speak across generations. Exhibited are seven pieces from *The Inheritance* (fig. 4).

The accompanying exhibition catalog, *Antoin Sevruguin: Past and Present* (OIMP 40), publishes for the first time the OI Museum's complete collection of photographs attributed to Sevruguin. Accompanying the photographs is a series of essays that investigate Sevruguin's life and photographic career, as well as the lasting impact of his unique vision. The Museum has also hosted a range of associated

Figures 1–3. OI Museum special exhibition, *Antoin Sevruguin: Past and Present*, 2021.



Figure 4. Yassaman Ameri, *The Inheritance* nos. 30, 36, 33, 16 (clockwise, beginning top left).

virtual programs. To mark the opening of the Sevruguin exhibition, Tasha Vorderstrasse gave a lecture titled “Intentionality and Sevruguin.” Museum gallery talks in April, May, and July similarly showcased the work of Sevruguin, including Delphine Poinso’s talk “Antoin Sevruguin: ‘photographies artistiques,’” Polina Kasian’s talk “Antoin Sevruguin in the Context of Russian Culture in the Caucasus,” and Kiersten Neumann’s talk “Capturing Persepolis—From the Camera to the Canvas,” respectively. A guided tour of the exhibition is available to visitors on the OI Museum mobile app, while our website features a virtual tour and a virtual exhibition.

The exhibition and its catalog are supported by the Dolores Zohrab Liebmann Fund, American Institute of Iranian Studies, and the Knights of Vartan Fund for Armenian Studies and the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research. The generous grant from the American Institute of Iranian studies also funded the conservation of the original albumen prints.

CONSERVATION

The 2020–21 year began much as the previous year had ended—the COVID-19 pandemic continued to be a global phenomenon affecting all aspects of our lives. Those of us who routinely work together—curators, registrars, preparators, and conservators formed our own “pod.” We wore masks, maintained the requisite working distance, and were able to function almost normally in terms of our usual work activities. And the nature of a museum means that the work is never done. Most recently, the recalling of objects that were on loan in our galleries necessitated the rearranging and updating of display cases in those galleries. Conservation worked alongside our curators, preparators, and registrars by preparing objects from storage for display in the galleries. Due to the inability of couriers to travel to the OI, conservation oversaw the deinstallation, condition assessment, and supervision of the packing of the loaned objects. The size and weight of the stone stela on loan from the Art Institute of Chicago necessitated bringing in a fine-arts packer/shipper with the necessary workforce and equipment to handle this artifact properly—in one of the few instances in which an outside contractor received permission to work in the OI building during this time.

Work also continued on refreshing The Robert F. Pickens Family Nubian Gallery, with conservation’s being responsible for updating the material identifications where possible based on the

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latest information available. As the material identifications were updated, labels and texts had to be reprinted. Conservation also worked behind the scenes on the special exhibit *Antoin Sevruguin: Past and Present*—we were responsible for the photo documentation of the 152 albumen prints and arranging for their packing and transport to the conservation studio where they are being treated.

Thanks to a generous donation, the OI acquired another portable X-ray fluorescence spectrometer, a second Bruker Tracer 5g. This nondestructive type of device allows for elemental analysis of inorganic materials and has been a mainstay of the conservation laboratory for nearly ten years. With two spectrometers, the OI will be able to maintain one of the machines in the conservation lab, available to conservation staff as well as visiting researchers. The second machine, under the purview of Susanne Paulus, curator of the tablet collection, will become the workhorse for off-site research and will travel abroad as needed. Alison Whyte, associate conservator, spent part of the year preparing for a collaborative workshop that will be conducted next year in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, as part of Gil Stein’s Heritage Site Preservation in the Central Asian Republics grant. Alison will form part of a team of conservators working on the project and will be presenting classes on preventive conservation and materials analysis. She is scheduled to travel to Tashkent in the fall with the Tracer 5g on its maiden voyage.

An aspect of the COVID-19 restrictions that had the greatest impact on us was the restriction of nonessential visitors to campus. This affected our work in unexpected and unprecedented ways. Workarounds became the order of the day, but work was unavoidably delayed where no solution could be found. Despite these restrictions, Whyte was able to maintain her public outreach efforts with a remote gallery talk titled “Conservation of the Coffin of Ipi Ha Ishutef” in November and a remote OI Adult Education course titled “Caring for the Collection” in the spring.

With the visitor restrictions in place, further work on the analysis of our Fayum portraits for the Ancient Panel Painting: Examination, Analysis and Research (APPEAR) project was also stalled. But a senior scientist at the British Museum, Dr. Caroline Cartwright, generously offered to identify the wood used in the panel painting of our Fayum portrait of a male figure (OIM E2053). Wood identification normally requires a 1-cm cube of the wood for a sample with sufficient material to see the anatomy of the wood’s structure. But Cartwright has developed a method of examining the anatomy of wood on a microscopic scale by using scanning electron microscopy (SEM) and light microscopy (LM) to identify the diagnostic cellular structures on very small samples. We were able to take a 2-mm sample from the back of the wooden panel to send to her, and we eagerly await the results of her work.

Our first remote courier “trip” occurred with the return of a tablet on loan to the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History. The opening of the exhibit took place in the prepandemic world, and a courier accompanied the tablet to Yale. But by the time the display was taken down, travel restrictions were in place and forced tablet curator Paulus and me (Laura D’Alessandro) to oversee the deinstallation and packing of the tablet via Zoom. It was an interesting experience, and remote courier work has been temporarily adopted by many museums and other cultural institutions. The limitations imposed by remotely overseeing this critical function, however, were readily apparent. The majority of museums expect to resume more typical courier activities as travel, both domestic and international, once again becomes possible.

Conservation also continued its role in the ancient DNA project involving the Alishar remains. Working with faculty and members of the ancient DNA lab on campus, the remains continued to be recorded prior to the samples’ being taken. Conservation is responsible for the photo documentation of the remains. Josh Tulisiak, from our preparation department, was responsible for capturing 3D images of the skulls and other samples slated for sampling. Personnel from the ancient DNA lab will be visiting the conservation lab next year to acquire the samples from this material.

With the stay-at-home mandate in place much of this past year, the Persepolis Fortification Tablets (PFT) packing project was also affected. Packing of the second shipment of more than thirty-six hundred tablets was well underway when the pandemic hit. Despite the lack of additional helpers, thirty-four hundred tablets were packed by the end of June. The remaining tablets are on track to be packed by the end of the summer. And in April, a graduate student in the University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Grace Clements, joined the project. Working remotely, Grace continued the work of choosing appropriate images of the tablets that would accompany the shipment. Stopping briefly to acquire her master's degree, Grace continued with her work on the project through June.

One very positive development this past year has been the news that the OI finally made the top of the University's capital projects list regarding the necessary upgrading of our HVAC system. The climate-control system that was installed as part of the 1996–98 construction project was considered state-of-the-art at the time of its completion. But twenty-four years later, critical components of the system have aged out, and the need to replace key pieces of equipment had become urgent. The OI has spent the past year working with the facilities department and a contractor to determine the details of the work that will take place while minimizing disruption of work within the building as well as being careful to maintain the necessary levels of humidity and temperature the collection requires to maintain stability. The actual replacement of key components will take place next year, but planning has moved forward despite the pandemic and the difficulty of obtaining parts and equipment. We are pleased that all parties are making the maintenance of the climate-control parameters in the Museum's galleries and storage areas a priority throughout the project. Equipment will be changed out with regard to the seasons: in the summer, when dehumidification is needed, the humidification equipment will be replaced. Likewise in the winter, when humidification is required, the dehumidification equipment will be changed out. We will be monitoring the relative humidity and temperature of all the Museum's gallery and storage areas throughout the project to ensure that the temperature and relative humidity stay within their specified range.

The OI was invited to join an international working group researching gold and silver tablets from the Neo-Assyrian period in collections around the world. The OI's gold tablet (A2529), dating to the reign of Shalmaneser III (ninth century BCE), is the subject of our work. In the fall, Jean Evans, Susanne Paulus, Kiersten Neuman, Alison Whyte, and I will be presenting current research on our tablet to the members of the working group.

Although work on the unpacking and stabilization of the OI's glazed bricks from the Sin Temple at Khorsabad halted once again, research on the analysis of the glazes and brick bodies continued. Conservation was invited to contribute a short appendix to the International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East's publication of its recent workshop on decorated bricks from the Achaemenid period. Conservation is working hard this summer to prepare new samples as well as looking again at older samples to see what new information can be learned from them. Our colleagues at the University's Materials Research Science and Engineering Center (MRSEC) have indicated that we would be welcome to use their facilities. We look forward to taking advantage of this opportunity and welcome ending the year on such a positive note.

REGISTRATION

Once again, the COVID-19 situation has affected many aspects of our work. But it has also given us time to work on a lot of matters in storage, both physical and digital. A clearing out of nonmuseum items in storage was carried out in summer 2020. In addition, nearly 520 temporary storage boxes (TSBs) were moved to make better use of our limited storage space. Twenty-five TS boxes containing

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nearly 430 objects were unpacked and rehoused. We still have more than 2000 TS boxes in use, 1700 in museum storage, and the rest in the archaeology labs. Professor McGuire Gibson has continued to hand over material for storage. Boxes of sherds from the Dhamar survey (Yemen) have been moved to museum storage, rehoused, given TSB numbers, and entered into the integrated database (IDB). The Blosser donation of Iranian pots and objects was unpacked and rehoused by Conservation and Registration.

The Museum staff has been responsible for the movement of 5550 objects this year. In addition, Registration inventoried more than 2690 objects in the Mesopotamian collection. The inventory and other activities in storage brought to light a variety of small groups of unregistered material, so 275 objects have now been registered. Registration is also conducting an inventory of the papyrus collection. The condition of the papyri and their housing is being noted, and measurements and reference photos are being taken. More than 500 papyri have been surveyed so far.”

Oriental Institute Faculty, Staff, Researchers, and Students

The DNA analysis project of skulls from Alishar has been expanded to potentially include skull material from Nahal Tabor, following a successful application to the Neubauer Collegium (by professors James Osborne and David Schloen). More Alishar skull material came to light in storage and was registered. Human DNA was retrieved from the first test sample, and more samples will be taken once all the skulls and teeth have been 3D scanned. Human bone material from Nahal Tabor was unpacked and rehoused by conservator Alison Whyte and registered by Helen McDonald.

Photo Permissions and Photography

We have received more than 200 photo-permission requests this year, including new external and internal photography requests. More than 1,000 images (new and existing) have been added to the database, more than 500 of which were existing images located on the server but never added to the database. All the images required some form of processing before being registered and uploaded to the database. The images came mostly from two large batches found on the server—one a collection of Nubian objects, and the other of Mesopotamian objects. About 170 objects were photographed, including both publication photography and study photos. In addition, as objects came off display from the galleries, we have continued to take the opportunity to take digital-record shots of them for the IDB. The photography of all the new display cases labeled with object registration numbers has been completed.

Loans

When the Centennial exhibit closed, the Japanese bronze flowers borrowed for it were returned to the Smart Museum. The installation of the new *Antoin Sevruguin: Past and Present* special exhibit involved a loan of photographic prints from artist Yassaman Ameri. The loans of art works by two other living artists, Michael Rakowitz and Mohamad Hafez, have been extended. Two objects on loan from the Art Institute of Chicago were returned this year. An orant figure (AIC 1894.375) displayed in the chronology case in the Joseph and Mary Grimshaw Egyptian gallery was returned in August, and the stela (AIC 1920.264) displayed in the mummification case was returned in June. It will, however, soon be on display at the Art Institute in its reinstalled Egyptian gallery. The stela was replaced by one from our own collection, a New Kingdom funerary stela from Petrie’s excavations at Sedment el-Gebel (OIM E11696). (Emily Teeter suggested the latter as a replacement.) Our loan of objects displayed in the lobby of the Booth School of Business has been further renewed to the end of the year, when it will be replaced by a new display. A tablet (A7821) lent to the Yale Babylonian collection

for the *Mesopotamia Speaks* exhibit returned. Preparations have continued for three upcoming loans whose exhibits were postponed for one year. (These loans will be to the Pierpont Morgan Library, the Louvre, and the J. Paul Getty Museum.)

Researchers, Requests, and Collections Research Grant (CRG) Recipients

This year Registration has responded to more than forty requests. They included providing digital-record shots and information to the registration department at the Penn Museum (University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology) for a group of pots we acquired from the museum as part of an exchange. We have also continued with the survey of unregistered Chogha Mish material following a few research queries. The conservation staff took samples from a series of Islamic sherds studied by Kyra Kaercher (University of Cambridge) in 2019. The samples were registered and sent to her for analysis as part of her PhD dissertation.

Due to COVID-19 no one was able to make research visits this year, and visits by most of the 2019–20 CRG recipients are still on hold (Fr. Iskandar Bcheiry, Mudit Trivedi, Moritz Jansen, Alice Williams, and Bart Vanthuyne). We hope that all these visits will be possible in the 2021–22 academic year; however, we have managed to do a certain amount remotely. The preparators uncrated the Amarna house model, which was cleaned by the conservation staff, photographed by Susan Allison, and then shown to Alice Williams in a recorded Zoom call. The registrar took photos of about seventy-five pots excavated by William Flinders Petrie at Naqada and by James Quibell at Ballas for Bart Vanthuyne. The photos enabled him to resolve many site and tomb number issues, and the corrected information has been inputted into the IDB. So this work both assisted with Vanthuyne’s research and improved our own records. Now that that our database and the Petrie and related excavation records are available online, we expect to receive more queries about such material.

While in some ways it has been a quieter year than usual, we have not run out of work! And we have made some useful progress on improving our storage of objects and their documentation.

MUSEUM ARCHIVES

The first full year of work during the pandemic was a productive one for the archives. Workflows and their expectations were successfully shifted online with in-house processing still taking center stage throughout the academic year. Cataloging born-digital materials has become a primary focus, due to the fact that correspondence is almost completely paper free, while podcasts and lectures need to be stored in the database for years to come. More than one hundred research and image requests were completed this year, and more substantial digitization projects, such as those for the Epigraphic Survey team are still ongoing.

New Acquisitions, Cataloging, and Access

The Museum Archives was able to acquire a large number of new collections this year through donation and active solicitation. Some examples include field records from Ain Ghazal; John McLeod images from Megiddo; Trever images



Figure 5. 28_Proph.Isa.Qumran. Trever Images.

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from the Qumran Scrolls formerly held by the Claremont Seminary; Eugene Cruz-Uribe's archival papers; correspondence of Jim Knudstad; and the "Secret History of the OI," written by John A. Wilson. An additional collection was acquired from the library at Tantur in Jerusalem, where the remaining papers of Joan Westenholz were held. These papers were processed via Zoom with the help of Sarah Winitzer, who was able to organize the papers and ship them from Israel this spring.

Special Projects and Outreach

The Museum Archives has become increasingly committed to reaching out to our campus community and engaging with scholars beyond Chicago. This outreach includes undergraduate engagement, conferences, oral histories, and instruction. In 2020–21 the OI's archival lending program, the Cultural Heritage Experiment (CHE), took place with a major pivot to accommodate students during the pandemic. Since students were unable to come to campus and collect new archival objects to live with, the program adopted an online format in which students from previous iterations of the project were invited to share their own personal archive and receive a digital object they could print at home. This program allowed students to interact with the OI Museum Archives from locations as varied as California, Texas, and Florida in addition to Chicago. In commemoration of the 2020–21 CHE, a small exhibit case will be on display in the OI's lobby in time for fall quarter 2021.



Figure 6. Westenholz papers processing in Jerusalem.



Figure 7. Fall 2020 course taught by Anne Flannery through UChicagoGRAD and the Graham School.

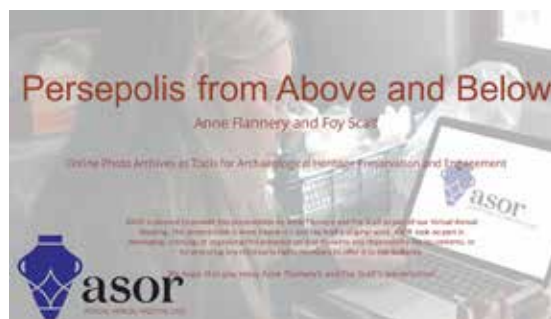


Figure 8. Anne Flannery and Foy Scalf collaborated on a paper for ASOR's November 2020 virtual conference.

Additionally, through UChicagoGRAD and the Graham School, Anne Flannery taught the course *Managing the Past: Careers in Archives and Special Collections* during fall quarter 2020. This course was available to University of Chicago graduate students and covered a short history of archives while introducing students to archival and library practices, concepts, and contemporary challenges. The students took a virtual tour of the OI's archives and were able to create a portfolio that highlighted necessary skills and resources.

The ASOR virtual conference took place in November 2020, and for it Foy Scalf and Anne Flannery collaborated on a paper about photographic archives. This conference examined how flat access to imagery often constrains the methodologies used in cultural-heritage research. What affects could photo archives have on how an ancient city is envisioned? Focusing on the ancient site of Persepolis, this paper explored ways in which the OI's photographic archives in-



Figure 9. Oral History with Matt Stolper, Pierre Briant, Anne Flannery, and Foy Scalf, June 2021.

fluence visualizations of ancient sites and are influenced by ongoing cultural-heritage digital innovations in the research of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

The OI's Oral History Project continues, and despite the restrictions on in-person meetings, the Research Archives and Museum Archives collaborated to produce an interview with Prof. Matt Stolper. This interview was the first fully remote oral history and was able to accommodate an additional interviewer in Prof. Pierre Briant, from France.

Special Exhibit Support

The Museum Archives supported curation and conservation by preparing, cataloging, and rehousing the photographs for the spring 2021 special exhibit on Antoin Sevruguin.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to Susan Allison, Knut Boehmer, Jean Evans, Helen McDonald, Foy Scalf, Josh Tulisiak, and Vick Cruz for all their support of the archives this year. And a general thank you to Chris Woods and Theo van den Hout and the staff of the OI for making sure the building, including the archives, remained safe and secure during the pandemic.

THE SUQ

The Suq was closed during the entire 2019–20 year due to the University's COVID-19 restrictions. We were able to restore our online store starting September 18, 2019. Working from home and with limited access to the OI, we were able to expand our website and realized good online sales, especially during the holiday season.