

RESEARCH ARCHIVES

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The library is the most essential feature of scholarship in any humanistic discipline. It encompasses the corpus of primary sources as well as the indices and analyses that permit their continuing interpretation. It is thus both the foundation upon which the scholarly process stands, and the source from which that process draws sustenance. In the final analysis, it is the repository of future as well as past scholarship.

Since the founding of the Research Archives twenty years ago, the Oriental Institute has committed itself to the development of such a tool. In doing so, it has also committed itself to styles of research and pedagogy that are centered on that facility. As a result the Research Archives is the central research and teaching facility of the Oriental Institute. For the student of the ancient Near East, the Research Archives surpasses all other similar facilities in North America and abroad, not only because of the breadth of its coverage, the simplicity and elegance of its organization, and the unparalleled availability of its collections, but also because it represents a standing seminar in which scholars from a wide variety of disciplines and approaches are continuously exposed to each other and to the products of each other's research. It is the availability of such a resource that has made the fundamental scholarly projects of the Oriental Institute possible, and which, to an extraordinary extent, determines the quality of the current projects as well as the nature of those envisioned for the future.

The Research Archives is also an extraordinary collection of artifacts, fully as important as the collections of a museum. It is common for books in our collections to have as many as three generations of scholarly marginalia. One can routinely find editorial and interpretive comments (including significant corrections of text copies) written by such luminaries as James Henry Breasted, John Wilson, William Edgerton, I. J. Gelb, and others. This collection is heavily used and has very specific preservation priorities. The survival of the collection of the Research Archives depends upon the mitigation of environmental factors, such as extreme fluctuations of temperature and humidity, and intense light, which are now uncontrolled.

It has been our exceedingly good fortune over the past decade to have had the opportunity to pursue a policy of comprehensive acquisition of published material on the ancient Near East. We may, in fact, be in the unique position of having an expanding budget at a time when most major university libraries

are undergoing severe across-the-board cutbacks in the material they are able to acquire. The distribution of *The Oriental Institute Research Archives Acquisitions List* [RAAL] is our attempt to discharge the responsibilities consequent to our acquisitions policy by supplementing the existing bibliographical resources in ancient Near Eastern studies. As reported in the last *Annual Report*, we had expanded RAAL in June 1991 to include an analytical listing of essays, articles, and reviews included within the books and periodicals acquired by the Research Archives. We received an immediate and overwhelmingly positive response to that reformatting, and in January 1992 we inaugurated the formal publication of RAAL. This first issue included material acquired and catalogued in the Research Archives during the period August–October 1991; the second issue, which appeared in April 1992, covered material acquired and catalogued during the period November 1991–January 1992; and the third and fourth issues, appearing together and covering material acquired and catalogued during the period February–July 1992, will appear in November 1992. Thus, the first year of the publication of RAAL covers 897 pages of text and includes full bibliographical entries on the 2095 items processed into the collection of the Research Archives and 8509 essays, articles, and reviews.

As a frequent, but irregular, supplement to RAAL we also began this year to publish another series: *Oriental Institute Research Archives Bibliographical and Informational Documents: Supplements to Oriental Institute Research Archives Acquisitions List*. Our intention is to produce a series of topical bibliographical guides to material in the collections of the Research Archives and, eventually, research tools of a more comprehensive nature on subjects related to the study of the ancient Near East. To date each of the Assistant Research Archivists has compiled and prepared an issue of this series:

Paul M. Cobb *Islamic Studies at The Oriental Institute Research Archives* [February 1992], provides a classified listing of more than four hundred publications relating to the study of the Islamic Near East that are available in the Research Archives

Terry G. Wilfong *Women in the Ancient Near East: A Select Bibliography of Recent Sources in The Oriental Institute Research Archives* [May 1992], provides an indexed listing of nearly five hundred recent sources available in the Research Archives

The compilation, preparation, and formal publication of the *Acquisitions List* and its supplements have already become a central feature of daily life in the Research Archives. It provides us with an additional level of editorial

control over our acquisition and cataloguing procedures and encourages each member of the staff to pursue in greater depth particular research interests and problems while developing the resources of the Research Archives and their accessibility.

We have found that the development of the On-Line Catalogue of the Research Archives has had an impact beyond our (guarded) expectations. The database is currently resident on a file serving component of the administrative computer of the Research Archives. We will soon transfer the database to a dedicated file server that will be jointly administered by the Research Archives and the Oriental Institute Computer Laboratory. Upon this move the Catalogue will be the first locally produced, fully accessible resource of the Oriental Institute. The move will also enhance the multi-user searching capabilities as well as the data-entry and editorial procedures. The catalogue can be searched from any Macintosh computer connected to the University of Chicago network.

At the time of writing, the On-Line Catalogue contains slightly more than twenty thousand records. We estimate that the collections of the Research Archives will generate more than one half million records when fully catalogued. Of the two important projects that we intend to initiate in the next few months, the retrospective cataloguing project (which we have been planning for some time, and have mentioned in previous *Annual Reports*) will be the most far reaching. When complete, it will be a unique resource, providing a complete index to all published material on the ancient Near East. The second of the two immediate projects is the establishment of a library-based facility for the access, management, manipulation, and distribution of on-line and digitally based resources for the study of the ancient Near East. Along with the Oriental Institute Computer Laboratory we have begun the process of acquiring the appropriate hardware, application software, and data files that will enable us to provide the rudiments of such a facility in the near future. Indeed, we have already made available to all users of the Research Archives a number of resources that are only available in electronic form. Further developments and the public announcement of this facility will be forthcoming as the project unfolds.

I am extraordinarily fortunate to have had Terry Wilfong and Paul Cobb as Assistant Archivists while both continue to pursue their degrees. Each of them has made an important contribution to the new publication series mentioned above, and Terry has joined me as Assistant Editor of RAAL. They are regularly called to demonstrate their expertise in reference matters both general and specific. I am particularly grateful for their acumen, flexibility, and cheerfulness. Both Terry and Paul will continue to work in the Research Archives in the coming year. John Sanders, Head of the Oriental Institute

Computer Laboratory, has provided us with invaluable support, cooperation, advice, and encouragement in the development of our on-line resources and in the planning and execution of our computer facilities.

In the year ending March 31, 1992, the Research Archives acquired and catalogued 1992 items with the following results:

	<i>April 1991-March 1992</i>	<i>Total</i>
Monographs and Series	960	17,926
Journals	<u>200</u>	<u>8,237</u>
Total Books	1160	26,163
Maps	48	
Pamphlets	279	