

INTRODUCTION

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In a flurry of other activity that marked this year, an important milestone has gone pretty much unremarked — the eightieth anniversary of the Oriental Institute. Yes, May 1999 did in fact mark the eightieth anniversary of an institution that was born in May 1919. In the spring of that year a challenge was issued by James Henry Breasted, in a paper delivered at the Philadelphia meeting of the American Oriental Society, about the creation of a new kind of research institute, one that would combine the most up-to-date field, instrumental, and text-linguistic methods into what should be, in his words, a veritable “research laboratory for the investigation of the early human career.” In May, he received a letter from John D. Rockefeller, Jr. His challenge had been taken up. The funding would be available. Could he make good?

The subsequent history of the Oriental Institute marks the paths that have been taken to realize Breasted’s vision. And as I look back over the year narrated in this report, my strongest impression is that of a turning of a major corner in the path we are now engaged on. An unprecedented fund-raising effort, the Legacy Campaign, has been brought to a conclusion; a gallery, the Joseph and Mary Grimshaw Egyptian Gallery, has been opened, and a plan of attack is about to be revealed for the remaining four; archaeologists and museum staff have settled into new laboratory and work spaces; remaining building improvements are on deck; the Oriental Institute enjoys an uncommon level of public interest and support. But the most important thing is research. New knowledge about the ancient Near East is what we have always been about, and as we prepare for the transition into a new century and millennium we do so on a momentum of research activity on all fronts. You can read about this in the pages that follow. I believe that the future is full of promise.

In archaeology we are (almost) all over the map in and near many of the places that have seen Oriental Institute activity over the past eighty years. A wide range of field expeditions are underway. In Turkey, Aslihan Yener and the Amuq Valley Regional Project team have been making discoveries in sixth- to fifth-millennium levels at Tell Kurdu, while the associated survey has pushed the site total in that valley up to 239 — a total that includes some of the most important Bronze Age sites for potential excavation. In Syria, Tony Wilkinson’s Beydar survey has uncovered a revealing pattern of settlement, desertion, and reoccupation which bolsters theories of Bronze Age nomadization in that area, while at the other end of the Oriental Institute’s chronological scale Don Whitcomb has been laying bare some crucial evidence for early Islamic urbanization in Qinnasrin. In Egypt, Ray Johnson and the Chicago House crew continued a remarkable seventy-five year long string of sea-

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sons, opening up a new area of Medinet Habu in the process, in a season whose visitor list included the First Lady and daughter; east of Luxor, Carol Meyer's Bir Umm Fawakhir discoveries, when analyzed, will round off our understanding of that Byzantine/Coptic mining town. Also from Egypt, Mark Lehner's Giza project once again appears in our pages, and will be reported on regularly.

On the home front, archaeological scholarship also goes on when the digging stops (or is temporarily interrupted). In these pages you can see what Oriental Institute archaeologists have discovered in Roman Tell es-Sweyhat (Syria), Bronze Age Dhamar (Yemen), and in the Diyala, Nippur, and Umm-al-Hafriyat (Iraq). Exciting things are about to happen in the world of dictionaries. You will be hearing more about these in future editions of this report, but for the moment you can read about the steady progress of the *Chicago Hittite Dictionary*, and how the *Demotic Dictionary* and, that flagship of Oriental Institute projects, the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* are closing in on their goals. All of these efforts rely heavily, as always, on the research environment provided by the Computer Laboratory and the Research Archives.

Finally, this year of course has been the year of the reinstallation of the Egyptian Gallery. Karen Wilson (and photographs scattered throughout this report) reveals the story behind this capital event, and the accompanying reports give a sense of the transforming effect of this on our Museum Education and Volunteer Programs (a record volunteer class this year!).

This past year has indeed been one of activity, change, and new beginnings. The faculty and staff have prepared the Oriental Institute for the new millennium. I only hope you will continue to journey with us through the next millennium and beyond.
