

INTRODUCTION

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An *Annual Report* of a research institute like the Oriental Institute is a chronicle of comings and goings, of corners turned, of new paths taken and unexpected transformations as old paths lead into new and unexplored territory, of milestones ticked off and goals attained and set, of pivotal events that in the long perspective might one day be used to help delineate and define significant stages in the development of the Institute over time.

One of these pivotal events is commemorated in the first item in this report, the passing from our midst of Hans Gustav Güterbock, one of the generation of giants who helped define what the Oriental Institute was in the post-World-War-II decades — and ancient Near Eastern studies along with it. Hans Gustav participated actively in ongoing research at the Oriental Institute literally up to his last day. The research goes on, but it will inevitably, I am sure, begin to “look and feel” different from this point on to future generations who look back over this period. Indeed this period of transition is underlined by the retirement of Harry Hoffner as Professor of Hittitology, while remaining co-editor of the Chicago Hittite Dictionary, and the arrival of Theo van den Hout from Amsterdam as new co-editor of the Dictionary, and successor as Professor of Hittitology. And together Theo and Harry will face a new set of challenges in a brave new world of electronic and electronically-assisted lexicography — a challenge you will see more about in coming years, perhaps as soon as next year’s *Annual Report*.

Other new paths are opening up in every domain covered by the Oriental Institute. In the sections on archaeology, philology, and museum, you find mention of new instruments, approaches, and techniques. Among the new terms and acronyms occurring almost matter-of-factly in these sections nowadays you find: SEM (scanning electron microscope), remote sensing, satellite imagery, GIS (geographic information systems), advanced photon source, relational database, and XML (extensible markup language). A story of new opportunities and new goals lie behind each of them. A number of them are certain to coalesce into overarching bodies of methods and approaches that will reset the bar on what it means to reconstruct an ancient society or the lexicon or grammar of an ancient language. Again, more on this later, but see for now the articles of Tony Wilkinson on GIS and remote sensing and David Schloen on electronic publication of ancient Near Eastern texts.

However, in a changing methodological world there are constants. There are fundamental tasks that need to be done by the eye and hand and mind of researchers and assistants. Grasping the subtle shades of difference in the range of meaning in a Demotic or Akkadian word or the significance of a religious symbol still rest on the skill and experience and persistence of a set of individual human investigators — or patiently making emerge from the dust and rubble of millennia the actual artifacts and architecture of long-vanished builders and artisans.

The cover and section divider pages of this year’s *Annual Report* celebrate visually this latter kind of constancy and continuity in ancient Near Eastern archaeology. Some of the techniques and tools may be new, but the task of uncovering an ancient Near Eastern mound comes down to a series of sub-tasks whose scope and difficulty would have been immediately recognized and appreciated by James Henry Breasted and a long splendid line of archaeologists who he set

INTRODUCTION

working, directly or indirectly, on these repositories of the common cultural heritage of humankind. Captured in action by photographs made by expedition member Clemens Reichel, you find a sampling both of the more robust, large-scale and of the fine-grained, minute activity of the Chicago team that revealed this year at Tell Hamoukar a hitherto unsuspected flourishing of early urban society in the northeast corner of Syria. Equally important in these photographs and their captions, and new on the cover of an Oriental Institute *Annual Report*, is that they reveal some of the names and faces of some key members of the “Chicago team” — the skilled Syrian excavators and workmen without whose expertise and experience this work could not be done. And this of course is another constant that has been true of any major archaeological undertaking the Oriental Institute has ever fielded in the Near East during the long history of its presence there.

I invite you then to examine this year’s record of innovation and continuity — and to stay tuned for what I can assure you will be an exciting future.
