

PROJECT REPORTS

ACHEMENET PROJECT

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The Achemenet Project at the Oriental Institute began in April 2014, and although it will take just a year to carry out, its results will have effects for years to come, as the first quarter's work already shows. The aim of the project is to provide an online catalog of more than 2,600 objects of the Achaemenid period (ca. 550–330 BC) in the Oriental Institute Museum's holdings, and to provide high-quality photographs of up to 300 selected objects, including seals and sealings, coins, architectural fragments, jewelry, stone vessels, and other objects of daily life, for the Achemenet website. Some of the key objects are well known, such as sculptural fragments, inscriptions, and architectural elements from Persepolis (fig. 1) and the iconic Persian roundel thought to be from Hamadan, Iran (fig. 2), but others, particularly objects that have not been displayed or that are only published as entries in lists, have been obscure and until now all but impossible to visualize. In the course of investigating these, the Achemenet Project is already “rediscovering” registered objects in the collections that can be reinterpreted in the light of more recent research.



Figure 1. Column capital depicting a human-headed bull, ca. 522–486 BC. Persepolis, Iran. OIM A24066 (photo by Anna Ressman)



Figure 2. Gold roundel, ca. 404–359 BC. No provenance; thought to be from Hamadan, Iran. Diameter 11.5 cm. OIM A28582 (photo by Anna Ressman)

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The project is a new collaboration between the Oriental Institute, the Musée du Louvre, and the Collège de France, Paris. Achemenet is the brainchild of Professor Pierre Briant of Collège de France, who set out around a decade ago to create and direct an online resource for Achaemenid studies which includes an online “museum” of Achaemenid-era material culture from collections around the world. That resource can be found at www.achemenet.com and includes material from collections at the Louvre, the British Museum, and other museums in Europe, North America, and the Middle East. From the inauguration of Achemenet and its companion site, the Musée Achéménide (<http://www.museum-achemenet.college-de-france.fr/>), Briant has considered material from the Oriental Institute’s collections to be indispensable. Above all, items displayed in the Robert and Deborah Aliber Persian Gallery and related collections represent the largest, most significant, well-documented and provenanced collections from Achaemenid Iran in North America, most significantly those that stem from the work of Oriental Institute’s Persian Expedition at Persepolis, Istakhr, and other sites in Iran (1931–1939).

The Oriental Institute Achemenet Project, co-supervised by Jack Green and Matthew Stolper, has been made possible through generous funding provided by the Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute to support project researcher Tytus Mikołajczak (a PhD candidate of the Department of NELC) to lead the research and prepare the materials for Achemenet and the



Figure 3. Project photographer Austin Kramer at work using new photographic equipment (photo by Austin M. Kramer)

Musée du Louvre, which is the main digital repository for all materials for Achemenet. Our project partners at the Louvre include Béatrice André-Salvini, Yannick Lintz, and Salima Amann. We are also grateful for the support of Sue Devine of the American Friends of the Louvre. Mikołajczak is well qualified as our project researcher, given his research focus on Achaemenid seals and sealings. Matching funds from the Oriental Institute were generously provided by Oriental Institute Director Gil Stein to support assigned project photographer Austin Kramer (fig. 3). In addition, the Oriental Institute Museum purchased new photographic and computer equipment to adapt and upgrade the temporary shooting table that had previously been used during Metals Room Project photography. Our head of photography, Anna Resson, has made considerable efforts to ensure that the quality of our equipment, the photographic process, and resultant images are of the desired high standards for the project, while allowing us to photograph a significant number of objects within a short period. The first several weeks of the project were spent acquiring equipment and setting up the studio.

The project could not take place without the support of other members of the Museum staff, including registrars Helen McDonald and Susan Allison, who have already helped to retrieve many batches of objects for Tytus and Austin. Conservators Laura D'Alessandro and Alison Whyte are carrying out conservation assessments of these batches of objects. We are also grateful for the assistance of John Larson, who has provided access to the archives from Persepolis. The processing and formatting of digital images in preparation for transfer to the Achemenet team in Paris is being coordinated by Austin Kramer. In addition, these images and their records are being appended and updated in the Oriental Institute's Integrated Database so that they can be accessed as part of our online collections. Our summer intern for the Achemenet Project, University of Chicago undergraduate student Shoshanah Spurlock, is assisting us in this area, as well as in retrieving relevant object information from the archives. We are grateful for the support of Foy Scalf, head of the Research Archives, for his support as we add and modify records in the Integrated Database. In addition, Annalisa Azzoni of the Persepolis Fortification Archive Project has assisted us with the imaging and research on a number of inscribed objects in the collection.

At the time of writing, approximately 350 objects had been surveyed by the project researcher, and just under 200 cataloged. Of those 200, fifty objects have been photographed by the project photographer, resulting in 200 high-quality images. As a result of Mikołajczak's research, many objects that were only briefly described in Erich Schmidt's publications can now be fully documented, and field information thoroughly reconciled with museum registration records. Among "rediscoveries" are a box of unpublished Aramaic ostraca thought to be from Persepolis, fragments of inscribed Egyptian-blue pegs, fragments of glazed brick belonging to an inscribed panel that were never fully published, a fragment of an inscribed stone "foundation tablet" that probably come from the Elamite version of an inscription previously thought to exist only in Old Persian. Several other objects, such as "stone bowls" and "amulets," can be reclassified, making them much easier for future researchers to locate and study.