

A FEAST OF KNOWLEDGE

Libraries and Archives, Past and Present

❧ a james henry breasted society event ❧

by Foy Scalf, Head of Research Archives

On July 8, 2009, the Research Archives of the Oriental Institute was proud to host the event A Feast of Knowledge: Libraries and Archives, Past and Present in the beautiful Elizabeth Morse Genius Reading Room for forty-five members of the James Henry Breasted Society. Highlighting the world-renowned library collection of the Research Archives, attendants were treated to an exhibition of rarely displayed objects from the Oriental Institute Museum, in addition to a delightful selection of food, drinks, and conversation.

Oriental Institute scholars were on hand to discuss the importance of the displayed pieces, as well as their role in library traditions from the ancient past. Emily Teeter, research associate and curator of special exhibits, detailed the important religious aspects of Spell 125 from Papyrus Ryerson (OIM 9787), a Ptolemaic-period Book of the Dead manuscript written for a man named Estphenis (*Ns-šw-tfn.t*). The ancient Sumerian literary text known as the Fable of the Heron and the Turtle, as preserved in cuneiform on a clay tablet

(OIM A30209), was placed in the context of other ancient literary traditions such as Hesiod by Chris Woods, assistant professor of Sumerian. Fred Donner, professor of Near Eastern history at the University of Chicago, discussed OIM 17618, an early example of a ninth-century paper manuscript which contains a series of different texts, including the earliest copy of what is known as the stories of the Arabian Nights. The largest object on display was OIM A12008, a Syriac manuscript written on 628 pages made from gazelle skin. Abdul Massih Saadi, research associate at the Oriental Institute and a professor at Notre Dame University, explained that this wonderful manuscript is just a single example of an otherwise very large and extremely interesting corpus of early Christian literature.

The Research Archives would like to thank our participating scholars, Director Gil Stein, Registrar Helen McDonald, Head Conservator Laura D'Alessandro, Development Associate Kaye Oberhausen, Membership Assistant Brittany Luberdia, and all our Breasted Society Members for making the event such a success.



Chris Woods stands with cuneiform tablet OIM A30209



Fred Donner, left, discusses manuscript OIM 17618 with Breasted Society Member Stan Allan (this photo and that of Christopher Woods, above, by Demsin Lachin)

Donors of \$1,000 or more to the Oriental Institute are invited to be members of the James Henry Breasted Society and are invited to attend exclusive events like A Feast of Knowledge. If you would like more information on becoming a Breasted Society Member, please call Kaye Oberhausen, Development Associate, at (773) 702-5044, or e-mail oberhausen@uchicago.edu



Demsin Lachin (left) and Abdul Massih Saadi with Syriac manuscript OIM A12008 (photo by Foy Scalf)