

INTRODUCTION

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May of 2019 marked the one hundredth anniversary of the Oriental Institute, commencing the year-long celebration of our Centennial. A century ago, two pivotal events in May 1919 ushered the OI into existence. The first was the May 2nd letter from John D. Rockefeller Jr. to James Henry Breasted approving an initial five-year grant for an Oriental Institute under Breasted's leadership. The second was the May 13th vote of the University Board of Trustees that made the OI a reality. We are the stewards of what Breasted created, the beneficiaries of his vision, ambition, and persistence, and his legacy of intellectual innovation lives on at the OI today. As revealed by the contributions in this 2018–19 Annual Report, our work assumes an extraordinary array of forms. We conduct fieldwork projects that shape archaeology, and we study ancient settlements and their landscapes through state-of-the-art satellite and digital imaging methods. Our linguistic research furthers the decipherment of ancient languages, and we produce dictionaries that serve as cultural encyclopedias for understanding ancient civilizations. We record, document, and preserve imperiled cultural heritage. The OI was founded with a determination to look where others did not, and we continue to offer new ways of thinking about what connects us and why, remaining resolute in advancing our knowledge of the ancient Middle East.

From 1948 to 1990, the OI conducted a robust program of archaeological and philological research at Nippur. After almost three decades of hiatus following the outbreak of the first Gulf War, fieldwork at Nippur resumed in April 2019. Abbas Alizadeh was appointed as the director of the Nippur archaeological expedition after McGuire Gibson retired in 2018. The dig house, which was largely reclaimed by the desert in the interim, was restored and furnished, and archaeological fieldwork conducted in two areas on the western mound unearthed monumental Parthian architecture and a small late Sasanian house. The 2019 season of excavations was primarily an exploratory one to assess the working conditions and feasibility for major exploration at the site. We are now poised to expand our fieldwork in 2020, which will include the new OI archaeological concessions for the nearby sites of Tell Drehem (ancient Puzrish-Dagan) and Tell Dlehem (likely ancient Tummal)—both of which were of major importance in the late third millennium BC. In Egypt, Nadine Moeller and Grégory Marouard continue the Tell Edfu Project, which provides enormous potential for increasing our understanding of ancient urbanism in Egypt. This past year, the sensational discovery of an early New Kingdom urban villa, belonging to a high-ranking elite family, offered the opportunity to investigate a fully preserved domestic shrine dedicated to ancestor worship. This shrine is one of the earliest examples of such an installation excavated so far from the New Kingdom and the first archaeological example outside of the Theban area to be discovered in many decades.

The Epigraphic Survey at Chicago House in Luxor, Egypt—internationally recognized for its detailed, highly accurate drawings of reliefs and inscriptions in Theban temples and tombs—completed its ninety-fifth season this year. This flagship field project continues its commitment to the preservation of Egypt's cultural heritage. The Chicago House team is also leading the way in the development of cutting-edge digital epigraphic recording and publication, including the launch of the [digitalEPIGRAPHY](#) website. Being completely open-ended, this website is capable of changing as quickly as the field does, with instant access to new computerized drawing methods and equipment as the team learns and tests them. Current projects of the Epigraphic Survey include the Luxor

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Temple Blockyard Fragment Database, the Luxor Temple Blockyard Photogrammetric Documentation Project, the Facsimile Documentation of Luxor Temple Imperial Roman Frescos, the Medinet Habu Graffiti Project, the Western High Gate Survey, Database, and Epigraphic Documentation, and the TT 107 Documentation Project. Also, in terms of our philological projects, the Chicago Hittite Dictionary project, led by Theo van den Hout and Petra Goedegebuure, reached an important milestone in completing the fourth and final fascicle of the letter Š.

The staff of the OI Museum, led by Deputy Director and Chief Curator Jean Evans, had a remarkably productive year focused on completing the Gallery Enhancements Project (GEP). While beyond the scope of this annual report, the GEP was completed on schedule in September 2019, and special viewings for the reinstalled galleries were offered at the OI Centennial Gala and at a subsequent public open house. Through the GEP, the OI Museum realized new ways of engaging with visitors. This included bringing some five hundred objects out of storage that had never been on display, including those for a new exhibition area devoted to the Islamic world, the return of a major relief from Persepolis, which had been on long-term loan to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston since the 1930s, and highlighting the fact that our collection was mainly excavated by OI archaeologists. The GEP was initiated in 2014 and, over the course of the project, some fifty-five new cases as well as additional existing cases were curated, designed, and installed. The GEP was made possible through the generosity of a donor who initially wished to remain anonymous. Dubbed “Gilgamesh,” we were able to reveal the identity of the GEP donor at the OI Centennial Gala: Howard E. Hallengren, who was awarded the 2019 James Henry Breasted Medallion for his generosity and for more than four decades of philanthropic support and volunteer service.

We were deeply saddened by the loss of members of our OI community, including Miguel Civil, professor emeritus of Sumerology and my predecessor at the OI, and Lanny Bell, former Epigraphic Survey director at Chicago House, Luxor. Each will be sorely missed.

The contributions that follow detail the extraordinary scope of projects and programs supported by the OI. As you read our report, I hope you will share my appreciation and pride for these impressive efforts undertaken by our faculty, researchers, and staff on the eve of our Centennial.
