

# TABLET COLLECTION AND NIPPUR TABLET PROJECT

SUSANNE PAULUS, WITH MARTA DÍAZ HERRERA,  
JANE GORDON, AND MADELINE OUIMET

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First and foremost, we wish to express our gratitude this year for the continued support of our donors, Malda and Larissa Liventals. Following the successful completion of the *Back to School in Babylonia* special exhibition and its accompanying publication, we shifted our focus to research, especially the Nippur Tablet Project, while continuing to support teaching and research alongside a flurry of external requests.

## TEAM AND TRANSITIONS

The Tablet Collection team (fig. 1) consisted of Susanne Paulus (curator), Madeline Ouimet (assistant curator), Marta Díaz Herrera (assistant curator for the Nippur Tablet Project), and Jane Gordon (Nippur Tablet



Figure 1. Core team of the Tablet Collection in 2024-25. From left to right: Jane Gordon, Danielle Levy, Marta Díaz Herrera, Madeline Ouimet, Susanne Paulus, Bryce Hoenigman. Not pictured: Ryan Winters.

Project and internal requests). Several transitions marked the year: undergraduate Danielle Levy, who created Tuppi (the first-ever ISAC plushie) and served as the team's photographer, completed her final year and will pursue a master of arts in religious studies at the University of Chicago. First-year undergraduate Bryce Hoenigman quickly became the core photographer and integrated herself into the team's daily work. Postdoctoral researcher Ryan Winters completed his appointment; an international search for his successor brought outstanding applications, and Nicholas Gill (PhD 2024, Johns Hopkins University) was selected to join in fall 2025 as the Nippur Tablet Project postdoc.

## NIPPUR TABLET PROJECT

The Nippur Tablet Project remains focused on cataloging, digitizing, and ultimately publishing the tablets excavated by the University of Chicago at Nippur from 1948 onward and now housed at ISAC. These tablets are invaluable because they derive from securely excavated and documented findspots, unlike the thousands of tablets uncovered by the University of Pennsylvania's Babylonian Expedition at the site in the late nineteenth century.

Building on earlier progress with tablets found during the excavation's first and third seasons, this year the team completed work on those found during the second season, focusing on tablets from the scribal quarter excavated prior to the discovery of the famous "House F." Díaz Herrera cataloged sixty-three challenging fragments, with other team members and ISAC faculty helping identify difficult pieces. Highlights included identifying a fragment of a school text, *Syllable Alphabet B* (A29957; fig. 2), which Díaz Herrera will publish in a forthcoming note in *NABU: Nouvelles assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires*. Gordon completed proofreading and updating eighty earlier catalog records to provide more information about the texts' content and layout and to reflect up-to-date bibliographic information, while Ouimet provided archaeological contexts.

The year also saw major progress in registering plaster casts created by the excavators to preserve records of tablets divided between institutions. Ouimet inventoried casts from Nippur, Nuzi, Abu Salabikh, and other sites and completed



Figure 2. Clay tablet ISACM A29957 inscribed with *Syllable Alphabet B*. Photo by Danielle Levy.

registrations for tablets found during the first through seventh excavation seasons at Nippur. Toward the end of the academic year 2024–25, all team members began collaborative work on the Middle Babylonian tablets from the second and third seasons, a corpus offering new insights into the economic and scholarly life of private houses in Nippur.

## WORK ON THE COLLECTION

Beyond the Nippur Tablet Project, Winters advanced the cataloging of the regular collection by bringing almost all tablet entries into scholarly catalog form for the first time. This work not only supports research but also enhances ISAC’s public outreach by making information about the tablets more accessible for use in social media features. With the help of Foy Scalf and Díaz Herrera, the updated catalog was also integrated into the two main international databases of cuneiform tablets: the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative and the electronic Babylonian Library.

Photography and digital projects advanced as well. Under Gordon’s guidance, Hoenigman began photographing the Neo-Assyrian prisms to create high-quality images of these many-sided textual objects and to support research on the early mass production of texts that occurred long before the printing press. Hoenigman presented this work at the UChicago Undergraduate Research Symposium in April 2025 under the title “Prisms of the Past: Preserving the Legacy of Ashurbanipal through Photography.”

Additionally, Ouimet reintegrated materials from emeriti professors’ offices into the collection to ensure they are properly cataloged and stored.

## OUTREACH

Outreach remained central to the Tablet Collection’s mission. Díaz Herrera developed a “presentation set” of original tablets representing the collection’s chronological and thematic breadth; the set was first used in a presentation for researchers participating in the October 2024 Neubauer Collegium conference titled “Negotiating Identities, Constructing Territories: Pre-Roman Iberia, 900–200 BCE.” These tablets have since served diverse audiences.

Other highlights included sold-out tours during Humanities Day, when the team showcased all aspects of our work; programs for the University of Chicago Laboratory School; and collaborations with the University of Chicago Library’s Kim-Park Program for the Study of the Book. In partnership with Eric Slauter’s Rare Book School course “An Environmental History of the Book,” Paulus and Gordon introduced students to the Tablet Collection’s highlights, thereby laying the groundwork for future collaborations.

## RESEARCH AND TEACHING SUPPORT

The surge of external research requests this year kept Ouimet and the photographers busy. Scholars visiting the collection included Nicole Brisch (University of Hamburg), Grant Frame (University of Pennsylvania), Clemens Reichel (University of Toronto), Ishbel Russell (Johns Hopkins University), Walther Sallaberger (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, with Bob Biggs), and Mélanie Sorstein (École Pratique des Haute Études, Paris), among others. Compared to previous years, this year we supported a significantly larger number of student researchers working on their dissertation projects; their work included collating some of our tablets, undertaking traditional philological study, and even applying cutting-edge technological

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approaches to materiality, such as the use of reflectance transformation imaging (RTI) to study seal impressions. Of particular note, Faith Myrick (Johns Hopkins University) completed two extended stays digitizing Nuzi tablets and casts with RTI imaging.

In total, the team provided photographs and RTI images for seventeen researchers worldwide. The Tablet Collection also continued to be a vital teaching resource for ISAC faculty, including Susanne Paulus, Martha Roth, Foy Scalf, and Mehrnoush Soroush.

In sum, 2024–25 was a year of transition, growth, and deepened scholarship for the Tablet Collection. With the Nippur Tablet Project advancing steadily, the catalog in great shape, and new digital and photographic initiatives underway, the collection continues to strengthen its dual role as a foundation for cutting-edge research and a bridge to public engagement. These achievements position the team strongly for the 2025–26 year.

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