

TABLET COLLECTION

Susanne Paulus, Andrew Wilent, and Walter Farber

Report of the Curator

Susanne Paulus

It was a great pleasure and honor to take over the curatorship of the Tablet Collection from my colleague Walter Farber. I want to thank him heartily not only for his many years of service, but also for the support and assistance he provided me during the period of transition. The Tablet Collection of the Oriental Institute, with its thousands of cuneiform tablets and even more casts, is a great treasure of knowledge. Many of the tablets in our collection are still unpublished and are waiting to be discovered. As curator, I see it as my foremost duty to make this knowledge accessible to researchers all over the world, and to advance the publication of the tablets. To facilitate this, the Tablet Room will remain an easily accessible and welcoming space for scholars and students.

To make the scholarly community aware of the tablets in possession of the Oriental Institute, the full catalog of published and unpublished cuneiform objects was made accessible online via the Integrated Database (<https://oi-idb.uchicago.edu/>). I cannot thank my predecessor and his assistants enough for collecting and recording all accessible information about our tablets and for digitizing the Tablet Room catalog cards.

While the existing catalog provides a good starting point, one cannot help but notice that when it comes to our unpublished tablets, information is still sparse. The entries are lacking not only photographs of the tablets, but also a categorization of their content. This information is especially important as it enables researchers to find the texts that they are interested in studying. Therefore, improving the information available about our tablets will be the focus of my work for the Tablet Collection. This is an ambitious project which will need more resources than we currently have. The first step in this process will be evaluating the needs for augmenting the catalog, conservation, and storage of our tablets. With this information, an application for funding will be possible.

Report on Visitors and Publication Projects

Andrew Wilent

The Tablet Collection and its study space, the Tablet Room, once again enjoyed a productive year. Jeanette Fincke of Heidelberg University visited in July 2016 to study a tablet belonging to the series URU.AN.NA in preparation for a new edition. Piotr Michalowski of the University of Michigan visited in March 2017 to study tablets from Nippur. In April, Sebastian Borkowski of the University of Geneva spent three weeks studying tablets from Nippur as part of the research project, “Disputations in Ancient Near Eastern Literature: A Text Editing Project,” under the direction of Catherine Mittermayer. Émilie Pagé-Perron of the University of Toronto also visited in April to study tablets and additional excavated objects from Adab. Magnus Widell of the University of Liverpool visited for a week in May, continuing his project

to publish the remaining Ur III tablets in the Oriental Institute collection (see the 2015–2016 *Annual Report*).

In addition to these visits, the staff of the Tablet Collection provided information and photographs of numerous tablets to scholars around the world, facilitating their research from afar. In one of the more unique requests, a photograph of an Ur III tablet from the Oriental Institute collection was provided to the US government for inclusion in employee training materials related to federal contracts.

The faculty and staff of the Oriental Institute once again made frequent use of materials in the Tablet Collection to enhance their teaching both in the classroom and to the museum-going public and the training of the new docents. John Wee used several astronomical tablets from the collection for a presentation on ancient science to the James Henry Breasted Society at an event in April.

Report on New Acquisitions

Walter Farber

This year also saw the completion of two important donations to the Tablet Collection, by Edith Bingham of Louisville, Kentucky, and by Vytautas Virkau and Henrietta Vepstas of Chicago, Illinois. Both donations had been underway for some time, pending the documentation of pedigree required by the Oriental Institute and final approval by the Acquisitions Committee and the director. The procedures in both cases had been started in 2015 by Walter Farber, then still Curator of the Tablet Collection, and we are very happy that the tablets in question (ten Ur III tablets of varied contents from Ms. Bingham, and one very well-preserved Ur III list of offerings from Mr. Virkau and Ms. Vepstas) have now found a new home and good care in our collection. All eleven tablets are currently being published by Gertrud and Walter Farber. We also want to thank the donors once more for their generosity and thoughtfulness in making their treasures available to the scholarly community and the public as part of the Oriental Institute's collection.
