

# MUSEUM

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In a postpandemic era, the main challenge of the ISAC Museum is to keep bringing the audience back in person to the galleries and for special exhibitions. As stated in the 2022–23 annual report, the Museum pursued the expansion of its activities throughout the year.

## GENERAL ATTENDANCE AND MUSEUM SHOP

Thanks to the dedicated team of the Museum and communications staff, guards, and volunteers, we were able not only to maintain our current opening hours but also to continue offering extended Friday evening hours until 8:00 p.m. The idea behind these expanded hours is simple: to allow after-work opening hours concurrent with consistent programming.

Between July 2023 and mid-June 2024, 34,562 visitors viewed the Museum's galleries—an increase of 30.28 percent over last year. Combined with the 6.37 percent increase in 2022–23, audience rates grew by 36.65 percent in less than two years' time. From April to December 2023, 1,201 visitors enjoyed the Friday evening hours in a calm and welcoming environment. Adding to this number the 788 Friday evening visitors from January to June 2024, a total of 1,989 individuals took advantage of the extended opening hours. By the end of 2024, we will more than double the number of evening visitors. Last year's annual report stated that fall 2023 would be a good test, and it showed a steady audience slowly but surely increasing.

As expected, attendance peaks on weekends easily exceeded more than 150 visitors, confirming that our policy and engagement were fruitful. This precious data was gathered thanks to the initiative of Kate Hodge, former Youth and Family Program coordinator, and Dan Bloom at the Visitor Services desk. Strengthened by the numbers and new staff members, we continued striving toward the main goal of the Museum team stated in the previous annual report: to reach and surpass pre-COVID-19 Museum attendance numbers, which during the best years averaged 58,000 visitors annually. Projecting the growth we measured this year, we could surpass this number within three to five years if our audience increases 20 percent per year.

It is pertinent to connect these numbers with ISAC Museum Shop sales. The pandemic disrupted Shop sales dramatically, especially in 2020–21. Those sales have been slowly but surely returning to pre-COVID-19 levels, which is consistent with the 6.37 percent increase in Museum audience rates in 2022–23 and the 30.28 percent increase in 2023–24. The Museum Shop generated \$135,000 this year—a 30 percent increase over last year. Prior to the pandemic, average annual sales were \$200,000, and new merchandising and product development make a return to this level quite reachable going forward.

The Museum Shop's strategy has been to leverage special exhibitions as opportunities to develop new merchandise for long-term sales. The Shop has offered child-oriented products (such as children's activity books) to draw attention to books and other items targeted at adults, made all the more appealing by the high publication standard we set last year for Museum catalogs and monographs. Since the COVID-19 years, the Shop has been open only half the time it used to be—an important point, since sales

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nevertheless reached 67 percent of the total sum the Shop had generated in 2018 and 73 percent of the amount it generated in 2019. Volunteers were brought back to the Shop in March 2024, helping reinforce our customer service.

To accompany this growth, we began working with ISAC's information technology staff and the administration and finance department to create an updated online Museum Shop on Shopify, as half of our customer base is international. We have no doubt that we will surpass pre-COVID-19 sales rapidly once an effective online shop is implemented on our website.

Docent- and curator-led tours of the Museum's galleries were offered, and we were particularly pleased to pursue, in partnership with the Communications department, refresher tours of the main galleries, led by Museum staff, for the docents. In May and June 2024, Marc Maillot and Kiersten Neumann offered in-person tours alongside our virtual options. Regarding the latter, special recognition should be given to Tasha Vorderstrasse for the high quality and consistency of the adult education courses based on our collection, particularly the Juneteenth tour focused on community scholars at the turn of the twentieth century.

## INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH

ISAC is a world-renowned institution, and international outreach is therefore one of our priorities. This year we maintained our already strong relationship with the French Consulate in Chicago, as demonstrated by the French Cultural Service / Villa Albertine event held at ISAC in October 2023. In the frame of the annual Chicago Architecture Biennial, we hosted a panel discussion with the artist and architect Feda Wardak on sustainable development and endangered cultural heritage in Afghanistan. We also welcomed, multiple times, the Chicago chapter of the French-American Chamber of Commerce, most recently on March 12, 2024, with a group of entrepreneurs and businesses for gallery tours and conferences. The Museum also invited Prof. Claude Rilly, from Paris's Sorbonne University, in the frame of our monthly lecture series in Breasted Hall. He presented a talk on the decipherment of the Meroitic language, one of the oldest languages in sub-Saharan Africa. Along with complementary seminars, his lecture helped foster a strengthened network at a fundamental research level, based on artifacts in the ISAC Museum's Nubian section. This connection was particularly timely for ISAC in that it followed up the June 5, 2023, official launch of the International Research Center in Paris and on the University of Chicago campus. The Museum will have a role to play in this arena, as ISAC has been identified as a reference institution in the fields of art history, archaeology, and cultural-heritage management.

The stated intention of connecting our members and audience to the latest news in the field of cultural heritage management was perfectly illustrated by the screening of *Hadda: Rescuing Early Buddhist Art in Afghanistan* as part of Docent Day on March 18, 2024, in Breasted Hall. Prof. Gil Stein engaged with the docents on challenges faced by museums in conflict areas and the universal dimension of the institution in crisis times. The discussion allowed participants to confront experiences in a broad geographical sphere and reflect on the nature of the museum and its role in modern society. The same applies to the lecture delivered by Dr. Pavel Onderka, curator of Egyptian and Nubian art at Náprstek Museum in Prague, on May 20, 2024, on the monumental building program of King Natakamani and Queen Amanitoré at Wad Ben Naga, Sudan, and the challenges of maintaining scientific activity and outreach in conflict areas.

In mid-March 2024, a group of experts from Greece visited the Museum galleries thanks to the Museum of Contemporary Art's chief development officer and Bill Cospers, ISAC's development director. Kiersten Neumann led the tour, accompanied by ISAC director Tim Harrison, Cospers, and assistant director of development and membership Brad Lenz. Principal guests included Lina Mendoni, minister of culture, PhD in archaeology from the University of Athens; Nikolaos Stampolidis, director of the Acropolis Museum; NEON, a nonprofit art organization in Greece founded by Dimitris Daskalopoulos, a collector of contemporary art; Michael Rakowitz, an internationally acclaimed Iraqi-American artist whose "reappearance" of

a relief from the Northwest Palace of Kalhu is displayed in the Assyrian Gallery; and members of the consulate general of Greece in Chicago, including consul general Emmanuel Koubarakis. During the tour, they expressed interest in establishing more concrete cooperation with the ISAC Museum in 2025.

In April 2024, attendees of the annual meeting of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America, held in Chicago, visited ISAC for a series of programs, beginning with tours of the special exhibition *Pioneers of the Sky: Aerial Archaeology and the Black Desert* led by Marie-Laure Chambrade and of the Persian Gallery led by Kiersten Neumann; these tours were followed by presentations in Breasted Hall on ISAC's annual Nowruz celebration by Kate Hodge and on ISAC's Persepolis Fortification Archive Project by Wouter Henkelman, and the series concluded with a viewing of Farzin Rezaian's film *Persepolis Recreated*.

Loans and research requests are further evidence of the excellence of our reputation both domestically and abroad if we consider the increase in inquiries. The total number of research requests and visits this year—more than 115—represents a 20 percent increase over last year. The same applies to loans, as the Museum loaned objects to and borrowed others from several museums for special exhibitions—the Morgan Library & Museum, the University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art, and the University of Pennsylvania's Penn Museum—and we have begun executing collaborations with the Art Institute of Chicago, the University of Chicago's Joseph Regenstein Library, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection in Berlin.

ISAC's international engagement was also visible thanks to conservation training overseas and on-site conservation treatment. Alison Whyte went to Uzbekistan in September 2022 to participate in the fourth workshop of the Conservation Training Partnership in Artifact Conservation organized by Gil Stein, and we will further pursue conservation training of our overseas partner with the help of the Department of State and US Embassy in Tashkent in October 2024 (see Conservation below). In January and February 2024, Whyte also provided support to David Schloen's excavation of the Phoenician site of Cerro del Villar in Málaga, Spain, where she worked extensively on pottery, confirming our reputation of excellence in museum studies at an international level.

This reputation applies also to the ISAC Museum Archives, which worked with the Freie Universität Berlin, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Polytechnic University of Milan, University of Applied Arts Vienna, University College London, and University of Zurich. The Museum Archives continued its commitment to our campus community and with scholars beyond Chicago. This outreach included student engagement and exhibition curation (see Archives below). Indeed, a special exhibition is worth noting this year: the satellite exhibit *Sealing Practices in Ancient Mesopotamia*, located in the lobby of the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business, was changed to a new one, *ISAC's "Fifty-Cent Men": How the Gold Reserve Act Altered the Business of Archaeology* (see Special Exhibitions below). This exhibition was curated by Anne Flannery, head of Museum Archives, and opened on May 6, 2024. The strategy here is to expand our footprint on campus while advertising the incoming fall 2024 exhibition on the centennial of the Epigraphic Survey in Luxor.

On the long-term side, we continued to pursue the very demanding update of the entire collection database and nomenclature regarding our name change to ISAC and our software upgrade (see Registration below). Indeed, of the more than 350,000 artifacts in ISAC's inventory, fewer than 2 percent are on display, and each item requires an updated entry to maintain public access to it in our database by researchers and a general audience. The ISAC Museum was present in several news media this year, including the University of Chicago's "Inside the Lab" series (<https://news.uchicago.edu/inside-the-lab/conservation-lab>), which saw up to 230,000 views. The *Brain Scoop* YouTube channel was also a highlight of the year in terms of our outreach impact, with more than 150,000 views of a deep dive into the ISAC Museum collection and the cat figure in ancient Egyptian art (<https://www.youtube.com/user/thebrainscoop>). We also participated in a panel at the Art Institute of Chicago alongside the city's Field Museum on the challenges of displaying ancient Egyptian art in Chicago and the complementarity of the collections, soon to be aired on YouTube

(<https://www.youtube.com/@artinstitutechi>). Finally, the annual *Chicago Tribune* top-ten list of must-see museums ranked the ISAC Museum among the best collections in the city (<https://www.chicagotribune.com/2024/01/04/top-10-for-museums-for-winter-2024-plenty-worth-leaving-the-house-for/>).

## SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS

The ISAC Museum's special exhibitions program hosted two shows this year that foregrounded ISAC's long-standing contribution to understanding the cultures and history of West Asia broadly and the pivotal role the Museum's collections continue to play in this endeavor. On August 27, 2023, we closed the special exhibition *Artifacts Also Die*, transitioning the space for the fall exhibition *Back to School in Babylonia*, which ran from September 21, 2023, through March 24, 2024 (<https://isac.uchicago.edu/backtoschool>) (fig. 1). Curated by Susanne Paulus, ISAC associate professor of Assyriology and Tablet Collection curator, with the assistance of Marta Díaz Herrera, Jane Gordon, Danielle Levy, Madeline Ouimet, Colton G. Siegmund, and Ryan D. Winters and with support from Pallas Eible Hargro, C Mikhail, Carter Rote, and Sarah M. Ware, the exhibition reunited for the first time since their excavation at Nippur objects now held in the ISAC Tablet Collection, the ISAC Museum, and the Penn Museum. Tablets in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad, were represented by plaster casts. Complementing the display of more than 100 clay artifacts from this Mesopotamian city in present-day southern Iraq was a selection of original archival documents from the Nippur Expedition, including a page from a field catalog, field correspondence, a field notebook (the "Pot Book"), and video footage of the excavations (fig. 2).

The protagonist of the special exhibition narrative was the Edubba'a, a scribal school excavated in 1951–52 by the Joint Expedition to Nippur of ISAC and the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (now Penn Museum). Within the mudbrick walls of these scribal quarters of the Old Babylonian period (2000–1595 BCE) the team excavated texts fundamental to our understanding of Babylonian education and culture, as well as objects that reflect school life. Visitors were invited to enter the Edubba'a, reimagined in the space of the special exhibition, by first passing through an arch that presented a most fitting riddle:



Figure 1 (this page and opposite). *Back to School in Babylonia*, which ran through March 24, 2024.





Figure 2. Archival documents, artifacts, and plaster casts on display in *Back to School in Babylonia*.

*What is a house, set upon a foundation like the heavens,  
 a house, covered with a cloth like a treasure chest,  
 a house, set upon a pedestal like a duck shaped weight;  
 one enters into it blind  
 and leaves it seeing?  
 The answer: the scribal school.*

Within, visitors could explore the school house and its objects, read the school materials, sit on a school bench, and listen to the disputes of Babylonian students, following them on their journey to become scribes, complete with their struggles and successes. Visitors discovered how pupils learned to read and write the complex cuneiform script, while more advanced students studied topics such as mathematics, religion, and law, the overall goal being to gain the knowledge, skills, and character traits necessary to become successful scribes. Ultimately, these skilled professionals worked for the king, temples, and local authorities and were responsible for writing most of the documents that survive from Babylonia.

An exclusive exhibition preview on September 20, 2023, marked the first in a series of programs celebrating *Back to School in Babylonia* (see “Member Programming” in the Development and Membership report). In October, Susanne Paulus delivered a hybrid lecture titled “Back to School in Babylonia: The Aims of Babylonian Education,” the first in a series on scribal education that subsequently included “What Did You Learn in School Today? A Day in the Life of a Mesopotamian Student,” with Paul Delnero in November; “Law and Morality in Sumerian Satirical Tales,” with Jana Matuszak in December; and “Back

to House F: Personal Reflections on 25 Years of Research on Old Babylonian Schooling,” with Eleanor Robson in January. In October, the whole family was invited to experience the exhibition through the family program “Come Learn Cuneiform,” and curious learners had the opportunity to sign up for the education class “Discover the Babylonian Curriculum from Lexical Lists to Literature.”

Two publications brought—and continue to bring—this show to an even wider audience: the exhibition catalog *Back to School in Babylonia* (ISAC Museum Publications 1), edited by Susanne Paulus with Marta Díaz Herrera, Jane Gordon, Madeline Ouimet, Colton G. Siegmund, and Ryan D. Winters; and the children’s activity book *The Adventures of Inanaka and Tuni: Learning to Write in Ancient Babylonia*, with text by Jane Gordon and Susanne Paulus, illustrations by Madeline Ouimet, and layout and design by Sarah M. Ware. Additional promotion of the exhibition included the remarkably popular plushie Tuppi (whose name means “my tablet”) (fig. 3), a mug, a shirt, bookmarks, and cuneiform socks, as well as coverage in several media outlets, including the University of Chicago Division of the Humanities’ online newsletter, the *Thin Edge of the Wedge* podcast, and the *Chicago Tribune*. The exhibition was supported by Deborah and Philip Halpern, Malda and Aldis Livalentals, Catherine A. Novotny, ISAC Museum visitors, and ISAC members; it was organized by the ISAC Museum, with contributions by Erin Bliss and Judy Radovsky.

On April 27, 2024, we opened the special exhibition *Pioneers of the Sky: Aerial Archaeology and the Black Desert*, celebrating a century of work in this pivotal field of archaeology (<https://isac.uchicago.edu/pioneers-sky>) (fig. 4). Curated by landscape archaeologist and ISAC postdoctoral scholar Marie-Laure Chambrade and on display through August 18, 2024, the exhibition began with the 1920s balloon photography of ISAC’s Megiddo Expedition and the 1930s Aerial Survey Expedition in Iran that was part of ISAC’s Persian Expedition. The 1990s saw exceptional advances in the field of aerial archaeology, including developments in GIS (geographic information systems) and remote-sensing techniques, as well as the declassification of Cold War–era satellite imagery and the founding of ISAC’s Center of Ancient Middle Eastern Landscapes (CAMEL). The exhibition concluded with a look at aerial archaeology in the Black Desert of Jordan, featuring previously unpublished snapshots and video footage of this “archaeological paradise.” Visualizing this history of the discipline—alongside numerous digital reproductions of original negatives and digital prints—was a wealth of archival documents, including photographic prints, hand-tinted glass lantern slides, a field notebook, a hand-drawn map of flight routes, flight logs, a topographical map, CORONA negative film strips, and video footage from ISAC’s 1934 film *The Human Adventure*. Lending some three-dimensionality to the show were Erich Schmidt’s 1940 publication *Flights over Ancient Iran* and, from CAMEL’s collections, a 1910 W. & L. E. Gurley surveyor’s wye level and a 1960s KE-6e theodolite by Keuffel & Esser Co., Germany.

Programming held in connection with *Pioneers of the Sky* kicked off with the exclusive preview on April 24, 2024, followed by an exhibition opening lecture in May, “Flying under a Screen of Clouds: A Snapshot of Aerial Archaeology in West Asia,” with Marie-Laure Chambrade. Yorke Rowan followed up in June with a second lecture, titled “Beyond the Fertile Crescent: Late Prehistoric People of the Black Desert, Jordan.” Throughout the course of the exhibition, Tasha Vorderstrasse shared with our social media followers a remarkable variety of personal histories and groundbreaking studies tied to the field of aerial



Figure 3. The Tuppi plushie, from *Back to School in Babylonia*.

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archaeology and the exploration of the Black Desert of Jordan, including a Saturday series highlighting women pioneers in the field (see Public Programming report). Exhibition promotion included a children's activity book, *Fly with Dana over the Past*, by Marie-Laure Chambrade and Jérôme Agostini with the assistance of Marc Maillot, Kiersten Neumann, and Thomas Boudier (fig. 5), as well as stickers of the book's protagonist Dana and a large-scale photographic print of the Black Desert, available



Figure 4 (this page and opposite). The special exhibition *Pioneers of the Sky: Aerial Archaeology and the Black Desert* opened on April 27, 2024.





for purchase through the ISAC Museum Shop. We also worked with colleagues at the University of Chicago's Joseph Regenstein Library on a series called "Museum Reads at the Library: Pioneers of the Sky." This collaboration entailed a curated selection of more than thirty books on the topics of aerial archaeology and the Black Desert on display in the library throughout the course of the exhibition and available for checkout by university faculty, students, and staff for a seven-day loan period.

*Pioneers of the Sky* was supported by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 101033178 (project MARGINS 2022–2025, CEPAM–CNRS UMR 7264), ISAC Museum visitors, and ISAC members and was organized by the ISAC Museum. Further adding to the rigorous narrative and visual impact of the exhibition were the media and support generously offered by the following scholars and projects: Alison V. G. Betts, University of Sydney; the Aerial Photographic Archive for Archaeology in the Middle East based in the School of Archaeology, University of Oxford, including Robert Bewley and David Kennedy; CAMEL, including Christian Borgen, Joseph Harris, Dominik Lukas, Harrison Morin, and Mehrnoush Soroush; the Eastern Badia Archaeological Project and Kites in Context, including Austin "Chad" Hill and Yorke Rowan; the Surezha Archaeological Project, including Gil J. Stein; and the Western Harra Survey, including Marie-Laure Chambrade and Stefan Smith. The fieldwork in the Black Desert and at Surezha featured in the exhibition was authorized by the Department of Antiquities of the Kingdom of Jordan and the General Directorate of Antiquities of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, respectively.

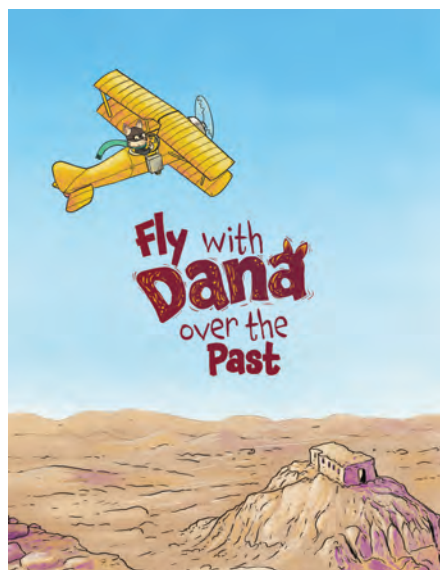


Figure 5. The children's activity book *Fly with Dana over the Past* from the exhibition *Pioneers of the Sky*.



Figure 6. The satellite exhibit *ISAC's "Fifty-Cent Men": How the Gold Reserve Act Altered the Business of Archaeology* at the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business.

Finally, we opened a new satellite exhibit to the public in April 2024 in the lobby of the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business—somewhat of a teaser for the forthcoming fall 2024 ISAC Museum special exhibition *Chicago on the Nile: 100 Years of the Epigraphic Survey*. Titled *ISAC's "Fifty-Cent Men": How the Gold Reserve Act Altered the Business of Archaeology* and curated by ISAC Museum Archives head Anne Flannery, the display-case exhibit tells the story of the United States' abandoning the gold standard by executive order in 1933 and the Gold Reserve Act of January 30, 1934, through their impact on ISAC's Epigraphic Survey in Luxor, Egypt (fig. 6). Although the act was intended to stabilize money supply in the United States—stemming deflation by devaluing the dollar—the law drastically affected markets at home and abroad, ultimately creating turmoil for the staff members of the Epigraphic Survey, whose livelihoods were thrown into question. Featured in the exhibition are a financial memorandum, letters, and telegrams revealing how this crisis played out in communications between Chicago and Luxor. Speaking to the role that gold played in this historical event are two objects from the ISAC Museum collections: a scaraboid inscribed with the cartouches of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III set in a modern gold ring (E25039) and a gold Rasulid coin mentioning the ruler and the profession of the Islamic faith (E13752).

## EXHIBITION DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

In 2023–24, the Department of Exhibition Design and Production's primary projects were the design and production of the Museum's special exhibitions, *Back to School in Babylonia* and *Pioneers of the Sky: Aerial Archaeology and the Black Desert*, as well as the updating of the permanent collection space.

In fall 2023, we opened the exhibition *Back to School in Babylonia* (see Special Exhibitions above). This exhibition involved the in-house design and fabrication of thirteen large display cases; dozens of custom

object mounts; several smaller wall vitrines, pedestals, and other furniture; and a large archway marking the entrance to the gallery. Paint colors were chosen to suggest the student's passage from the bright blue sky of the outside world through a high, arched doorway into the darkness of the schoolhouse. Since this exhibition was presenting the excavation of a school, we designed the large display cases to suggest the appearance of bookcases, full of the schoolwork of students learning to write in cuneiform on clay tablets. These tablets were presented alongside explanations and translations of the students' writing. There was a school bench where visitors using handheld audio players could sit and listen to translations of texts inscribed on some of the displayed tablets. One display case was even designed to resemble a clay-recycling bin, preserved in the scribal house and documented by archaeologists, where the students would deposit used tablets so the clay could be reused (see fig. 1).

The second exhibition opened in spring 2024: *Pioneers of the Sky: Aerial Archaeology and the Black Desert*. Set against dramatic black walls with several new display cases and video and audio elements, the exhibition focused on the historical and ongoing aerial archaeological work of ISAC. Custom display units were designed and constructed in-house to provide lightbox-like displays to present hand-tinted lantern slides and CORONA negative film strips properly. We worked with Anne Flannery, head of Museum Archives, to display all artifacts and documents provided by the Museum Archives safely, and with the CAMEL lab at ISAC to present some of the tools used in aerial archaeology, such as a surveyor's wye level from 1910 and a 1960 theodolite (see fig. 4).

While designing and building these special exhibitions, the Exhibition Design and Production team continued a number of other projects in the permanent galleries. They included the ongoing update of Museum graphics and didactics to accommodate our recently adopted name and identity, as well as the installation of redesigned exhibition cases, additional lighting tracks in the Museum's orientation area and special exhibitions gallery, and several new electrical access points in the galleries for a future project involving the implementation of interactive kiosks.

## CONSERVATION

### *Sin Temple Facade Project*

After a hiatus of nearly fifteen years, the Conservation laboratory's focus has once again returned to a major undertaking: the restoration of the glazed-brick facade from the Sin Temple at Sargon II's palace at Khorsabad, Iraq. Known as Dur Sharrukin (Sargon's Fortress), the eighth-century BCE site was first excavated by the French mission in the mid-nineteenth century. Victor Place, one of the directors of the excavation, produced artist's renditions of many of the architectural elements that were uncovered. Place's nineteenth-century watercolor of the Sin Temple facade reveals an amazing frieze of a plow, a tree, and animal and human figures (fig. 7). ISAC's Iraq Expedition began excavations at the site in 1929, and the Sin Temple facade was excavated during ISAC's 1932–33 season (fig. 8). Though badly damaged, the highly colored glazed surface of the bricks revealed by the excavation were promising enough to make the enormous task of carefully removing and packing the bricks a worthwhile endeavor. As part of the official division of finds by the Iraqi government, ISAC received the frieze to the left of the temple's entrance. The frieze to the right of the entrance was shipped to Baghdad.

Under the direction of the expedition's director, Gordon Loud, the 282 glazed bricks were meticulously packed in more than forty wooden crates and shipped to Chicago. The bricks arrived in Chicago in 1933 during the installation and restoration of the *lamassu* figure and large-scale gypsum (stone) reliefs from Sargon's palace. The significant amount of work that would be required to stabilize and recreate the temple facade was clearly recognized, and the crates of bricks were stored in the Museum's basement until the restoration of the facade could be addressed.

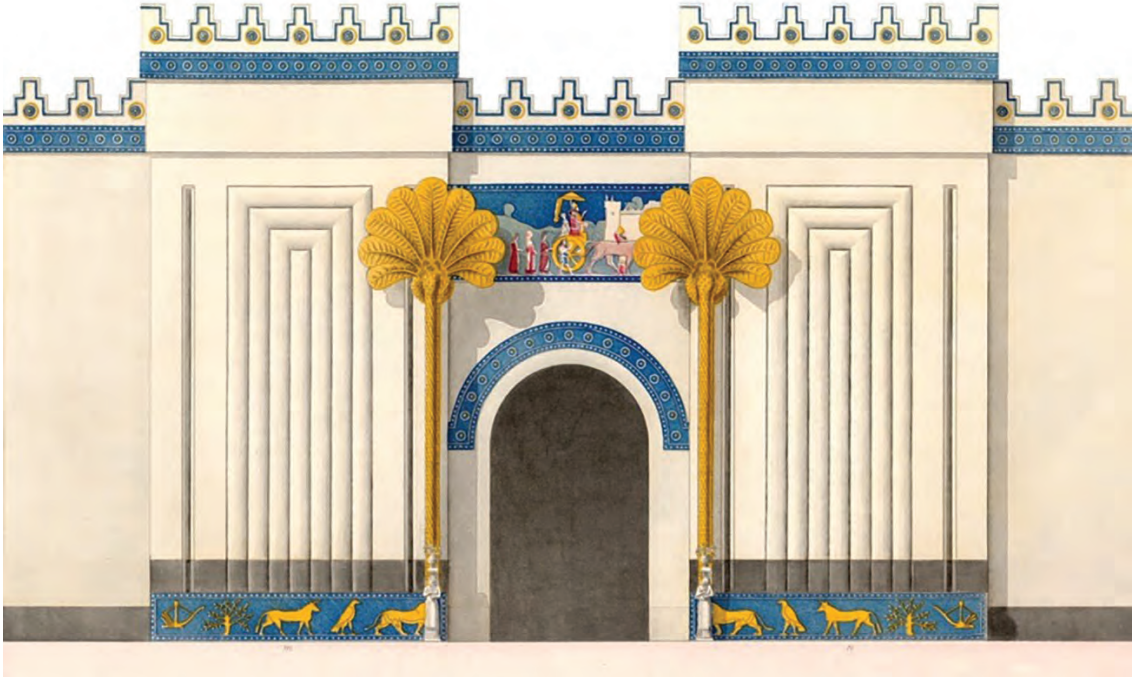


Figure 7. Reconstruction drawing of the Sin Temple at Khorsabad, with the glazed-brick facades visible on each side of the entrance (Victor Place, *Ninive et l'Assyrie* [3 vols.; Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1867-70]).

The crates remained undisturbed until 1990, when Laura D'Alessandro, head of the Conservation laboratory, opened a single crate to assess the current state of the bricks. Field notes from the 1930s excavators indicated that a cellulose nitrate product had been applied to the fragile clay body and glaze during the excavation process to stabilize the material for packing and transport. It was recognized that the condition of the cellulose nitrate and its compatibility with modern consolidants would be a major factor in moving forward with the project to stabilize and recreate the eighth-century BCE frieze in the Museum's galleries. Compatibility tests with modern consolidants were carried out on several of the bricks in 1990, and the bricks were returned to storage.

It was not until 2000 that Conservation staff returned to the project. With the positive results from the 1990 tests as proof of concept, it was decided to uncrate and stabilize the seven bricks that made up the head of the bull. Access to each tightly packed brick was very restricted, and the fragile condition of the bricks and glaze meant that the process



Figure 8. The excavation of the threshold of the entrance to the Sin Temple at Khorsabad, with the glazed-brick facades visible on each side (P. 21764/N. 11660).



Figure 9. Glazed bricks A11810.266 (top) and A11810.265 (bottom) showing the clothing of one of the human figures.

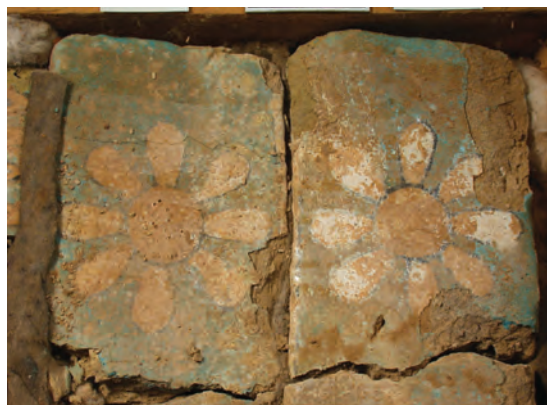


Figure 10. Glazed bricks A11810.271 and A11810.272 depicting rosettes, from the border of the facade.

was slow and painstaking. But the reward was tremendous. Adjacent bricks in the crates that were unpacked presented evidence for the viability of the entire project (figs. 9 and 10). The head of the bull was successfully recreated in the 2009 display *Temples at Dur-Sharrukin* in the newly installed Yelda Khorsabad Court gallery. Preliminary analytical work was carried out on the body and glazes of the bricks by Conservation staff during this period and published in 2004.

In 2023, under the direction of Marc Maillot, the decision was made to bring the Sin Temple facade project to completion. The recreation of the 7 m long and 1.5 m high facade will require skilled Conservation staff to remove the fragile glaze and clay bodies from the crates and stabilize them for display. While we seek funding to support additional Conservation staff for this purpose, efforts are taking a new direction to keep the project moving forward. JP Brown, a colleague at the Field Museum, proposed the idea of using photogrammetry to record the glazed surface of each brick while still in its packing crate. The result of incorporating this step will allow Conservation staff to focus on potential reconstruction possibilities and make accommodations for the more damaged bricks and their overall effect on the tableau both visually and structurally. Our colleague, Kea Johnston, who joined ISAC in spring 2024 as a postdoctoral scholar in a partnership with the Field Museum focusing on digital management of museum collections, will carry out the photogrammetry of each glazed surface and stitch the images of the bricks together to form an accurate digital reconstruction of the tableau. In preparation for this critical step, Alison Whyte, senior conservator, has been opening each crate and, using the field photographs and notations on the crates, identifying the bricks within. She then photographs each brick in detail before realigning loose fragments and removing any dust or debris from the surfaces of the bricks to make the designs as clear as possible (fig. 11).

This step also provides physical access to the entirety of the glazes while the bricks are still in their crates. An important component of the current work includes the resumption of investigations into the clay body and glazes (fig. 12). With this increased access to glazes in different conditions and stages of deterioration, we hope to be able to contribute further information to the current understanding of ancient glazes. Our colleagues in the international scientific community who study these glazes are anxious for us to proceed. We are grateful for their interest in our collection and their willingness to collaborate with us as the project moves forward.

The University of Chicago showed its support for the Sin Temple facade project by dedicating a segment of its series “Inside the Lab” showcasing the work of laboratories on campus. The UChicago Creative team created a dramatic testament to the work on the Sin Temple facade project that has attracted a wide audience (<https://news.uchicago.edu/inside-the-lab/conservation-lab>).



Figure 11. Alison Whyte (left) and Kea Johnston (right) examine an opened crate of glazed bricks from the Sin Temple at Khorsabad.



Figure 12. A cross-section sample from glazed brick A11810.225, mounted in epoxy and ready for analysis at the scanning electron microscope.

### ***Researcher Visits, Loans, Exhibitions, and Teaching***

While excitement over the uncovering of the glazed surfaces of the Sin Temple bricks continues, the regular activities of the lab—researcher visits, loans, and new exhibitions—continued. This year saw a dramatic number of research requests, along with an increase in the size of the collections studied, and the work generated by these visits had a significant impact on the workloads of the various Museum departments. One of the more notable loan requests involved our leather manuscript E10552, a tenth-century CE marriage contract. Last spring it was loaned to the Staatliche Museen, Berlin, for inclusion in their *Elephantine: Island*

of the *Millennia* exhibition. D'Alessandro carried out structural repairs on the manuscript before replacing its forty-year-old glass housing with museum-grade acrylic panels to allow its safe transport. Because of the fragile nature of the leather, very strict conditions were placed on its packing crate and shipping environment, and the manuscript traveled in a high-tech, environmentally controlled shipping container provided by the airline.

In preparation for the fall 2024 exhibition, *Chicago on the Nile*, Whyte treated three faience ushabtis (servant figurines deposited in ancient Egyptian tombs). Each of the objects had been repaired in the past, and the aging adhesive had discolored and become brittle. Whyte removed excess old adhesive and added modern adhesive to ensure that the joins would remain stable for the exhibition.

In January 2024, Whyte traveled to Málaga, Spain, to carry out conservation work on artifacts from the Phoenician site of Cerro del Villar, a joint excavation of the University of Chicago and the University of Málaga. Over the course of the two-week project, Whyte and Charles Wilson, a PhD candidate in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations (NELC) and a ceramics specialist, cleaned sherds discovered during the 2023 excavation season and reconstructed several large ceramic storage jars. Although none of the vessels are intact, enough joins were found to allow partial reconstructions, from which Wilson created profile drawings.

D'Alessandro presented a short segment on studying museum collections and conservation training in Kathryn Bandy's class "Approaches to the Ancient Near East." She also presented a session in Mehrnoush Soroush's class on ancient empires discussing the conservation history of the Persepolis Fortification tablets and provided a brief discussion on analytical work being carried out on the clays by researchers.

The year 2023 marked a pause in the C5 Cultural Training Partnership in Artifact Conservation organized by Gil Stein, Rowe Professor of Near Eastern Archaeology and director of the Chicago Center for Cultural Heritage Preservation; however, a two-week workshop focusing on the conservation of stone, wood, bone, and ivory artifacts will take place in 2024. Whyte began preparing lectures and lab activities, for presentation in Tashkent in the fall.

In February 2024, Whyte led a gallery tour for students in Kiersten Neumann's class "Collecting the Ancient World: Museum Practice and Politics." Using examples from ISAC Museum exhibits, Whyte gave an overview of the history of conservation at ISAC and how attitudes toward restoration have evolved over time. Also in February, Whyte teamed up with Tasha Vorderstrasse, manager of ISAC's continuing education program, to teach "Color in Ancient Art." Whyte's lecture focused on how conservators find, analyze, and identify colorants used to decorate artifacts. She also explained the different strategies conservators use to preserve fragile ancient pigments. The class was the subject of the beautifully illustrated article "Color Unearthed," written by Chandler A. Calderon and published in the spring 2024 issue of *The University of Chicago Magazine*. We were especially honored to see E12072b, the coffin of Ipi-Ha-Ishutef, featured on the cover (fig. 13).



Figure 13. The cover of the spring 2024 issue of *The University of Chicago Magazine*, featuring E12072b, the coffin of Ipi-Ha-Ishutef.

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The return of the Persepolis Fortification tablets research collection to the National Museum of Iran in Tehran continued, as the next batch of completed tablets was prepared for shipment. We were very appreciative of this year's student assistant, Aiyana Leigh, a third-year geophysical sciences major at the University of Chicago who started working with the project in February. Her meticulous work and attention to detail on a project that requires a delicate touch were a perfect fit for the position.

## REGISTRATION

This year, the post-COVID-19 increase in research visits and loans continued. The Museum's Registration staff responded to more than 100 requests this year. Museum staff, student helpers, and volunteers carried out more than 15,000 object movements. More than 2,000 objects were registered. Recently registered material included Iron Age potsherds from Alishar Höyük (Turkey) and flint tools from Palegawra and Gird Chai (Iraq).

***Collections Research Grant Recipients and Other Researchers***

Another of our 2019–20 Collections Research Grant recipients was able to carry out research at the Museum (delayed until now by the COVID-19 pandemic): Alice Williams (research fellow, University College London Institute of Archaeology) visited to study the Amarna House model in person and consult the archival records relating to the model.

Other research visits in 2023–24 were as follows: Tara Draper-Stumm (PhD student, University of Cardiff, Wales, United Kingdom) studied four statues of the lioness-headed goddess Sekhmet in August. Amber Hood (Lund University, Sweden), E. Christiana Köhler (University of Vienna, director of the Abydos Project), and Mathilde Minotti (University of Vienna) studied and analyzed pottery from the tomb of Queen Meret-Neith, excavated by William Flinders Petrie at Tomb Y in Abydos. Lev Weitz (Catholic University of America) studied a selection of Arabic manuscripts. Laura Alvarez (Free University of Brussels Wiener Anspach Visiting Scholar, University of Cambridge College research associate) studied bronze mirrors from Mesopotamia. Joanna Then-Obłuska (University of Warsaw) photographed the garnet beads that had been analyzed using LA-ICP-MS (laser ablation inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry) at the Field Museum the previous year. Holly Winter (research affiliate, University of Sydney) took a brief look at some of the Amuq sherd material. Golan Shalvi (ISAC postdoctoral fellow) examined some Megiddo sherd material. Imane Achouche (PhD student, University of Liège) studied some of the statue fragments from the Diyala (Iraq). Naghme Mazounzadeh (PhD student, University of Vienna) spent a month studying the bronze and iron arrowheads from Persepolis, Iran (some 800 items). Ashley Arico (associate curator of ancient Egyptian art, Art Institute of Chicago) and Katherine Davis (University of Michigan) studied a variety of Egyptian trial pieces and plaques. Eugenio Nobile (PhD student, University of Tel Aviv), accompanied for a few days by Prof. Abraham Gopher, spent a month studying a selection of flint tools from Ain Ghazal (Jordan). Michele Maurici (PhD student, University of Naples "L'Orientale") studied C-group shells and shell objects from Adindan (Nubia, Egypt). Joseph Harris (PhD student, NELC) studied M'lefaat flint tools for a master's paper. Thomas Vachon (NELC student) photographed papyri from Khirbet el-Mird for study. Tasha Vorderstrasse (ISAC staff) was engaged in an ongoing study of coins from the Mannheimer collection.

***Loans***

A sizable loan of tablets from the Penn Museum came to ISAC for the *Back to School in Babylonia* special exhibition (September 2023–March 2024). Two objects—a piece of silver-coil money (A9543) and a stone tablet (A25412)—on loan to the University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art for the *Metropol Drama*



exhibition were returned in February. One object, a censer (E16735), was returned by the Art Institute of Chicago. The Roman statue of a woman (E30992, excavated at Ptolemais, Libya) went out to the Art Institute in June 2024 for exhibition in The Mary and Michael Jaharis Galleries of Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Art. This statue had been displayed in the ISAC Museum's special exhibition *Making Sense of Marbles* in 2022–23 and is considered to be a personification of the continent of Africa; the statue's head, which is in Libya, has an elephant headdress.

### **Class Use**

In the fall quarter, James Osborne again taught the “Ceramic Technology” course. It included a selection of sherds for the classes, and each student chose a pot from the ISAC Museum collection on which to write a final paper. Also in the fall, a small selection of Arabic manuscripts was made available for a class on Islamic history taught by Cecilia Palombo. With the assistance of Conservation, a selection of clay sealings from the Nubian site of Serra were once again made available for a first-year Center for Middle Eastern Studies class taught by Kathryn Bandy, “Approaches to the Ancient Near East.” Bandy also used a few objects from the site of Deshasha (Egypt) for the “Art and Archaeology of Egyptian Funerary Traditions (Early Dynastic through Early New Kingdom)” course. Margaret Geoga used some scarabs for the “Introduction to Middle Egyptian Hieroglyphs I” course in October and a few inscribed statues and stelae for the “Middle Egyptian Texts I” course in the spring. In cooperation with Tasha Vorderstrasse, objects were provided for the following: Mehrnoush Soroush's course on the Achaemenid Empire; Jordan Johansen's course “Queens in a Global Context” (Department of Classics); and Julia Phillips's course “On Objects” (Department of Visual Arts), in which students viewed a selection of objects related to religion.

### **Other Events**

A selection of Egyptian objects relating to cats were brought out for the *Brain Scoop* video (see Public Programming report). The video included Emily Graslie's interview of Emily Teeter regarding the ancient Egyptians' obsession with cats (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74yeRmR2orw>).

### **Photo Permissions and Photography**

More than 180 photo permission requests were processed this year, including external and internal requests for new photography. More than 1,700 images, new and existing, were added to the database. More than 110 objects were photographed, including both photography for publications and research photos. Forty-eight of those objects required new photography for the upcoming Persian Gallery highlights volume. In addition to the foregoing totals, another 9,400 digital-record shots were added to the Integrated Database (IDB) by our student helpers.

### **ISAC Integrated Database**

We upgraded from version 5 to version 9 of our integrated database (EMu collections management system), which required testing the new version and troubleshooting any issues. As part of the IDB committee, associate registrar Susan Allison participated in several IDB demonstrations, given to ISAC staff as an introduction to the type of data we collect and how it can benefit other ISAC departments.

We would like to thank our University of Chicago student helpers and volunteers. Anthony Ray joined us in summer 2023 and continued for the following academic year. He took over 8,000 digital-record shots for inclusion in the IDB and registered a selection of materials, including flints from Paleogawra and relief fragments from Khorsabad (Iraq). Talia Garrido joined us in the fall and continued with the registration of Iron Age sherds from Alishar Höyük (Turkey). In the spring term, Joseph Harris joined us and registered the flint tools from Gird Chai (Iraqi Kurdistan). Our volunteer helpers Terry Friedman

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and Toni Smith continued to make a valuable contribution with inventory and labeling (more than 1,800 items inventoried).

## ARCHIVES

In addition to the day-to-day work of acquiring new collections and providing access to researchers, in 2023–24 the Museum Archives expanded its efforts to promote its collections online and in person through curated exhibits, outreach, classes, and tours. Work continued on the ISAC Digital Archives with the preparation of curated and cataloged archival content; the Cultural Heritage Experiment finished another successful lending period during fall quarter; and significant progress was made in ongoing efforts to finalize and review updates to documentation and the IDB, which underwent a major upgrade in February. Additionally, the archivist provided administrative and logistical support to ISAC as a member of the newly formed IDB committee and by chairing the committee responsible for filling an ISAC senior staff position, which resulted in the successful recruitment of Sheheryar Hasnain as associate director of finance and administration.

***New Acquisitions and Collection Processing***

This year's acquisitions were extensive, expanding the existing collection through gifts on the part of donors from outside the University of Chicago, as well as ISAC faculty. Some examples include the papers of Jan Johnson and Donald Whitcomb, Tell Tayinat Expedition records, and correspondence between Joanne Brandford and Louis Žabkar. These collections will be important resources for future researchers. Some of these collections, in particular those of Johnson and Whitcomb, are still undergoing processing on account of their size and complexity.

Continuing to make photographic material more accessible to the public, summer Museum Archives assistant Xilin Liu (a recent graduate of the University of Chicago's Master of Arts Program in the Humanities) worked on creating a catalog of the ISAC Lantern Slide Collection, as well as cataloging Epigraphic Survey negatives from 2018–24 in the database. Additionally, volunteer Megan Sands spent the academic year 2023–24 creating a deaccession list of critically damaged and vinegar syndrome-impaired negatives. This list will help us document and scan these negatives before their official deaccessioning.

The Archives has been adding to its online collection of images, and during the past year more than 1,200 of John C. Trever's images of the Dead Sea Scrolls, formerly housed at the Claremont School of Theology, were made accessible online through the IDB. To improve future digital access, ISAC purchased a Zeutschel Zeta scanner for the Archives to jump-start a small-scale digitization program for documents. Once up and running, this small-scale program will increase the archivist's ability to digitize delicate paper documents quickly and gradually increase the visibility of unrestricted documents online.

One essential storage upgrade was made this year with the help of Museum preparator Robert Bain. Twentieth-century paintings under the purview of the Archives had lacked a proper home for years, but with some creative thinking and technical savvy, a new storage space was created to hang paintings in the Archives, making their long-term preservation possible (and the paintings more easily accessible) (fig. 14).

***General Overview of Research Requests***

The Archives fielded research requests both online and in person, assisting researchers from all around the globe. In addition to those from the University of Chicago, requests came from institutions as varied as Columbia University, Cornell University, Indiana University, Freie Universität Berlin, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Polytechnic University of Milan, University of Pennsylvania, University of

Applied Arts in Vienna, University College London Institute for Archaeology, Yale University, and University of Zurich.

Collections accessed included, but were not limited to, the ISAC Directors Correspondence; the Papers of Robert and Linda Braidwood, the Papers of James Henry Breasted, and the Papers of Joan Westenholz; and the Records of the Amuq Excavation, the Records of the Epigraphic Survey, the Records of the Korcutepe Excavation, the Records of the Megiddo Expedition, the Records of the Mendes Excavation, the Records of the Persepolis Excavation, and the Records of the Rayy Excavation.

To support the work of the Archives, it is sometimes necessary to conduct research visits at other archives holding documents that bear on the institutional history of ISAC. This year, the ISAC archivist did research at the Penn Museum Archives (fig. 15) with the help of its archivist, Alex Pezzati, to examine the Records of the Rayy Excavation. Documents concerning this joint excavation are housed at both ISAC and Penn, with the vast majority of them kept in Chicago. The archives at the Penn Museum illuminated correspondence missing from the ISAC archival record and uncovered photo index cards needed to complete the Penn Museum's archival record.

Spring 2024 saw the successful installation of ISAC's *"Fifty-Cent Men": How the Gold Reserve Act Altered the Business of Archaeology*, a special exhibit curated by the archivist and housed in the atrium of the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business (see fig. 6). This publicly accessible display presented a series of archival documents, objects, and images related to the economics of ISAC's foreign excavations at the height of the Great Depression. This exhibit forms an important component of the Archives' ongoing efforts to broaden the audience of the ISAC Museum through outreach and education.

### ***Special Projects and Outreach***

Beyond supporting the research projects of scholars outside the University of Chicago, the Museum Archives provided extensive support for the scholarly and curatorial work of ISAC's faculty and



Figure 14. Paintings storage in the Archives space.

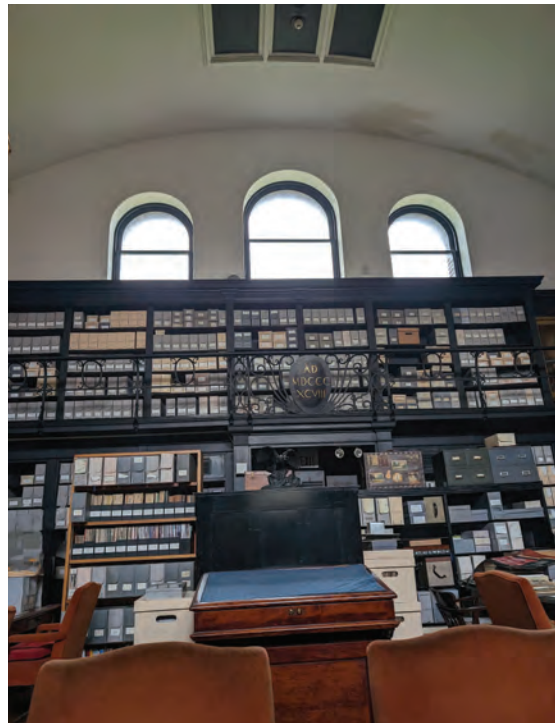


Figure 15. The Penn Museum Archives.



Figure 16. Materials loaned to undergraduates during the 2023 Cultural Heritage Experiment.

staff. In its continuing support of the special exhibitions program, the Archives identified and provided original documents for the fall 2023 exhibition *Back to School in Babylonia* and the spring 2024 exhibition *Pioneers of the Sky: Aerial Archaeology and the Black Desert*.

Undergraduate engagement continued to be an area of emphasis this year, with the department's flagship program, the Cultural Heritage Experiment, enjoying robust student participation. Archival objects were loaned to thirty-five students for the duration of the fall quarter. Students took photographs of the objects in their homes throughout the quarter and participated in ISAC archival tours and a weekly trivia contest about the history of ISAC (fig. 16).

Finally, in response to substantial positive feedback from earlier courses, UChicago Grad solicited the archivist to teach a fall 2023 graduate student professional seminar titled "Managing the Past: Careers in Archives and Special Collections." This course surveyed the history of archives and introduced students to archival and museum practices, concepts, and contemporary challenges facing the preservation of archives in our world today.

## ISAC MUSEUM/FIELD MUSEUM POSTDOCTORAL SCHOLARSHIP

As the first joint postdoctoral researcher of the Field Museum and ISAC Museum, Kea Johnston has been working on developing a quick and accurate way to build 3D models of objects in the collections of both museums using structure-from-motion photogrammetry. This technique uses a collection of still photos to calculate points in space to build a 3D model. Models built from photogrammetry (as opposed to using a laser scanner) can have very fine textures. These textures are the photorealistic colors and patterns one sees when looking at a 3D model as opposed to the points in space that make up its geometry. Traditionally, photogrammetry is cheaper but also slower than laser scanning. Johnston is working on a set of automated



Figure 17. 3D model of Meroitic fine ware E22373, from the site of Ballana in Upper Egypt, along with a rollout of its surface decoration.

tools to make the creation of photogrammetric models fast and easy. To test this process and to make collections in storage available to the public, models are being built of the many pieces of decorated pottery dating from the Meroitic period in ISAC's collections. These artifacts were uncovered during ISAC's excavations in Upper Egypt and Sudan between 1960 and 1968. So far, more than thirty 3D models have been made and uploaded to the Museum's new Sketchfab page (<https://sketchfab.com/uchicagoisac>), as well as being made available on the Museum's collections website under the entry for each individual object. The models showcase the variety of patterns in use on this pottery and the creativity and skill of the artists. These ancient craftspeople decorated their fine cups and jugs with a menagerie of plants, animals, religious motifs, and geometric designs both painted and stamped.

As part of the creation of these models, 2D rollouts are being made of the decoration on the pottery so that viewers can compare the iconography on the pieces side by side and view it in full (fig. 17). With traditional methods, doing so would have required tracing the designs directly from the pottery—an activity that is both detrimental to the pottery and time-consuming for the artist. With a 3D model, it can be done in minutes.

Next year, Johnston will be organizing a conference on the use of digital technology in museums. This endeavor demonstrates one of the many ways in which the ISAC Museum is moving toward incorporating technology into its teaching, in addition to using digital tools to make it easier for scholars and students in Chicago and around the world to access ISAC's collections.