

INTRODUCTION

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The past year was a year of milestones for ISAC. Most notable was the centennial celebration of the Epigraphic Survey and Chicago House in Luxor, which was marked by galas both on the University of Chicago campus in September and in the historic (and spectacular) gardens of the Winter Palace Hotel in Luxor in November—the latter fittingly, as it is where James Henry Breasted signed the agreement that launched the expedition a century ago. The Luxor celebration also provided an opportunity to spend time with the team working at Medinet Habu and Luxor Temple under the direction of Brett McClain. It was inspiring to observe the multidisciplinary team of epigraphers, artists, photographers, and conservators working together to achieve the exacting documentation (using the so-called Chicago House Method) of the complex palimpsest of inscriptions that cover the walls and inner chambers of the Small Temple of Amun located within the vast grounds of Ramesses III's mortuary complex, and it was thrilling to witness the captivation and excitement of our members and supporters as the team explained the significance of each subtle epigraphic mark preserving the dynamic record of this ancient monument's rich theological history. The centennial was also celebrated through ISAC's lecture series, a special exhibition, and the publication of a history—Emily Teeter's *Chicago on the Nile: A Century of Work by the Epigraphic Survey of the University of Chicago*.

The vitality of ISAC's research program is reflected in the remarkable number of field and philological projects that were active in 2024–25. More than fifteen projects, ranging geographically from the southern coast of Spain in the west to Uzbekistan in Central Asia in the east, were active or in the field this year, and in keeping with ISAC's commitment to foundational disciplinary scholarship, this research was methodologically innovative and the results groundbreaking, as their reports reveal. Three “new” field projects—the Cerro del Villar excavations in Málaga, Spain, and the Tayinat Archaeological Project and Türkmen-Karahöyük Archaeological Project, both in Türkiye—formally joined the Institute's growing ledger of field expeditions, while preliminary groundwork was carried out at Beni Hassan and in the mastaba of Khentika at Saqqara in anticipation of new projects that will soon be launched at these sites under the direction of Anna-Latifa Mourad-Cizek, who joined ISAC in July 2024 as assistant professor of Egyptian archaeology. Further reflecting ISAC's continuing commitment to faculty renewal, faculty searches this year resulted in the appointments of James Burgin as assistant professor of Hittitology (effective October 1, 2025) and Amber Jacob as assistant professor of Egyptology (with her appointment to begin on July 1, 2026).

ISAC's active program of field and philological research projects was matched by the vigorous scholarly output of our faculty and research staff. Seven monographs were published this year in ISAC's publications series, and in June 2025 a monograph published in March 2024 in the Late Antique and Medieval Islamic Near East series—*An Armenian Futūḥ Narrative: Lewond's Eighth-Century History of the Caliphate*, by Sergio La Porta and Alison M. Vacca—won the Mediterranean Seminar's Prize for Best Edition and Translation. In addition, two children's books were produced in conjunction with this year's two special exhibitions, *Chicago on the Nile: 100 Years of the Epigraphic Survey in Egypt* (September 17, 2024–March 23, 2025) and *Staging the East: Orientalist Photography in Chicago Collections* (April 17–August 17, 2025). ISAC researchers also published three monographs with other publishers, coedited three volumes, and published more than fifty articles in journals or edited volumes, with numerous additional article- and

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monograph-length manuscripts submitted for publication, while the Museum continued its active support of research on the Institute's collections, as well as its loan and conservation programs.

The past year also had its challenges, notably the dramatic developments in federal research funding. While there remains considerable uncertainty regarding the federal government's commitment to research funding in the broader world of higher education, the devastating impact of the shuttering of USAID (the US Agency for International Development), the principal federal agency that has funded cultural-heritage preservation projects in the Middle East over the past four decades, has been unequivocally clear. Documenting, conserving, and preserving the cultural heritages of the ancient sites and communities we study is at the heart of ISAC's research mission, and these activities will continue. Thanks to the visionary leadership of our own Gil Stein, the inaugural director of the recently launched Chicago Center for Cultural Heritage Preservation, ISAC is well positioned in this critical endeavor, and the Institute will continue its commitment to building partnerships with our Middle Eastern interlocutors, while engaging in the crucial effort to raise awareness—and support—in the face of this crisis.

On a more positive note, in spring 2025 ISAC launched an ambitious new initiative, the Data Research Center (DRC), which will bring data science, artificial intelligence, and the humanities together to transform how scholars study the ancient world. The DRC represents a major step forward in the Institute's century-long tradition of pioneering research on the civilizations of the ancient Middle East and North Africa. Under the inaugural directorship of Foy Scalf, the DRC will integrate ISAC's Research Archives library, Museum Archives, and data services, including the ISAC Integrated Database, into a unified center dedicated to supporting digital scholarship, open access, and computational research across all of ISAC's scholarly disciplines. This transformative step will equip ISAC researchers, students, and collaborators with tools to connect data across disciplines—from archaeology and philology to geoscience and computer science—redefining how we explore and study the human past.

ISAC experienced a number of important staffing transitions in 2024–25. In fall 2024, Matt Welton, ISAC's director of membership programming, marketing, and communications, departed for a leadership opportunity at the University of Chicago's Graham School, and in spring 2025 Anne Flannery, ISAC's longtime archivist, moved to eastern Pennsylvania. In fall 2024, we welcomed Elisheva Yardeni, who joined our Conservation department, and Madeleine Roberts-Ganim, who joined the Programs and Education department as Youth and Family Program coordinator. In early 2025, Kate Ayres, as assistant director for Programs and Education, assumed leadership of the ISAC Museum programs and education outreach portfolio.

The year 2024–25 witnessed the loss of several dearly beloved members of the ISAC community. I wish to acknowledge in particular the passing of Robert (Bob) Aliber, a longtime ISAC supporter; Epigraphic Survey artist Margaret De Jong; Howard E. Hallengren, an esteemed life member of ISAC's Advisory Council who supported ISAC for some fifty years, most recently endowing the newly established Professorship in Arabian Peninsula and Gulf States Archaeology; Robert Helman, husband of ISAC Advisory Council life member Janet Helman and a distinguished leader in the Chicago legal and business community; Roger D. Isaacs, a World War II veteran and longtime member of the ISAC Advisory Council; Robert Smither, renowned physicist and husband of ISAC associate Carol Meyer; and Krisztián Vértés, brilliantly innovative and talented epigrapher for the Epigraphic Survey.

I am deeply grateful to all our members, donors, and partners for their generous support, which makes ISAC's groundbreaking research and scholarship possible and undergirds our commitment to the advancement of scholarly understanding and public awareness of the places, peoples, and heritages we study.