

# RESEARCH ARCHIVES

## FOY SCALF

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In many ways, the 2024–25 report year was fairly routine for the Research Archives library. We acquired books, continued to catalog our collections, and assisted patrons with their on-site research needs. However, in other ways, the year marked a major milestone, and in some respects a turning point, for the library. In the early days of the “Oriental Institute Library,” our collections were managed as part of the central University of Chicago library system. After the consolidation into Regenstein Library in 1970, the Research Archives library was founded as a central pillar of ISAC’s research prowess. From 1973 until 2025, our library functioned on its own, with its own budget and its own reporting line to the director of ISAC. Over the course of 2024–25, a series of wide-ranging discussions across the University of Chicago community resulted in a white-paper proposal to establish a Data Research Center (DRC) within ISAC that would complement the Center for Ancient Middle Eastern Landscapes and the Chicago Center for Cultural Heritage Preservation. At the heart of this proposal was the vision and motivation of ISAC director Tim Harrison, who astutely identified the vast resources of ISAC’s digital data as one of our most important assets for the future.

## ISAC DATA RESEARCH CENTER

At the end of academic year 2024–25, ISAC formally established the DRC as a new unit to support and advance digital scholarship, data stewardship, and research infrastructure across the organization. The DRC was created to centralize and coordinate services related to information science, digital project support, research data management, and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence–assisted scholarship and data enrichment. It is envisioned as a service-oriented hub aligning with ISAC’s mission to foster cutting-edge interdisciplinary research in archaeology, philology, art history, and related fields.

As part of this institutional initiative, the Research Archives library is being integrated into the DRC along with the institutional archives and data services. This strategic alignment ensures that the deep bibliographic, archival, and textual expertise of the Research Archives remains central to ISAC’s evolving research ecosystem. The integration supports expanded services in metadata modeling, research consultation, digital collections access, and data lifecycle management, while retaining the core functions of the library and its vital support for faculty, students, and visiting scholars. Our move to the DRC reflects the recognition that research libraries today must not only curate and provide access to materials but also serve as dynamic partners in digital project design and scholarly innovation. Under this new structure, the Research Archives will continue to provide individualized research support and maintain its stewardship of ISAC’s world-class collection, while collaborating closely with the DRC’s technical staff on projects that require data modeling, digital publication, and preservation planning. This transition positions the Research Archives at the heart of ISAC’s future-facing research infrastructure, thereby ensuring its continued relevance and impact in a rapidly evolving scholarly landscape.

Future versions of this annual report will appear within the scope of the ISAC Data Research Center and its quickly burgeoning projects.

## PATRONS AND USAGE

In 2024–25, the library ID card reader recorded 34,407 transactions; 3,216 unique patrons visited the library in person and swiped an ID card to enter, an increase of 600 visitors over last year. The vast majority of these patrons were students from the University of Chicago; ISAC faculty, students, and staff, along with visiting researchers, remain the most engaged users of the library and its collections.

Over the course of the academic year, 338 volumes (67 journal volumes, 83 monographs, and 188 series volumes) circulated to offices throughout the ISAC building to fill the research needs of students, faculty, staff, and visiting scholars. These publications ranged in date from 1910 to 2025, reflecting the continuing importance of access to reference data both new and old; 97 (28 percent) of the volumes were published in the past decade. The most common publishers represented among checked-out books included Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, Eisenbrauns, Peeters, De Gruyter, Routledge, Brill, and Harrassowitz, while two books tied for the most frequently borrowed: Sophie Démare-Lafon and Daniel E. Fleming's *Judicial Decisions in the Ancient Near East* (Writings from the Ancient World 43; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2023) and Rocío Da Riva's *The Twin Inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar at Brisa (Wadi esh-Sharbin, Lebanon): A Historical and Philological Study* (Archiv für Orientforschung Beiheft 32; Vienna: Institut für Orientalistik der Universität Wien, 2012).

This year the Research Archives library had the pleasure of hosting many visiting researchers, including Rheem Abbas, Solange Ashby, Daphne de Beistegui, Gabriele Biancalani, Sarah Derbew, Peter Dorman, Casey Foubert, Essie Hall, Debora Heard, Dottie Jeffries, Gwyneth Jelinek, Morag Kersel, Lori Livesay, Michelle Marlar, Rachael Maxon, Minh-Tam Trinh, Ashok Rai, Emily Teeter, and Tien Tienngern. We hosted Luke Joyner and Casey Breen-Edelstein for their library science classes and Seth Vanek, Andrea Twiss-Brooks, and Elaine Fetyko Page for Elmhurst University's Great Libraries class. The Research Archives library also hosted the November meeting of the University of Chicago's Reparative Description Interest Group, provided space for researchers using materials from the Museum Archives, and offered orientation tours to new students. Further, we hosted several filming requests from the offices of the University of Chicago's president and provost, as well as from UChicago Creative and other media companies.

## ACQUISITIONS

The Research Archives library had an extremely productive acquisitioning program in 2024–25 (table 1). A total of 1,268 volumes were acquired for the library in 382 accession lots—an average of more than one accession lot every day of the year; 293 accession lots arrived through purchases, 54 through gifts, 25 through exchanges of the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* with other publishers and institutions, and 10 as a result of image permissions granted. For the 293 accession lot purchases, the library expended more than \$55,000, plus approximately \$5,000 in shipping costs (thus approximately \$5,000 per month in direct acquisitions costs). The steadfast support of the Research Archives library by ISAC director Tim Harrison and director of finance and administration Sheheryar Hasnain allowed us to continue this expansion and growth. Yet again, the sale of duplicate books through the library and the ISAC Museum Store with the help of Denise Browning supplemented the budget by more than \$2,000.

## ONLINE CATALOG

Research Archives staff added approximately 12,000 new records to the library's catalog in the EMu collection management system this year (table 2; numbers are rounded up to the nearest hundred). The staff and volunteers of the Research Archives library deserve bountiful thanks and gratitude for diligently entering

Table 1. Research Archives acquisitions, July 2024–June 2025.

Month	Number of accession lots	Volumes		
		Monographs, series, pamphlets	Journals	Total volumes
July 2024	31	68	24	92
August 2024	36	85	17	102
September 2024	21	63	23	86
October 2024	47	184	30	214
November 2024	32	106	83	189
December 2024	22	86	18	104
January 2025	42	69	35	104
February 2025	31	68	12	80
March 2025	22	53	20	73
April 2025	25	50	19	69
May 2025	38	70	16	86
June 2025	35	54	15	69
Totals	382	956	312	1,268

Table 2. Catalog records added.

Year	No. of catalog records added	Total no. of catalog records
2024–25	12,000	612,000
2023–24	10,000	600,000
2022–23	12,500	590,000
2021–22	7,500	577,500
2020–21	5,000	570,000

this data into the institutional digital repository through Axiell’s EMu software (see Acknowledgments below). Records are available online for searching, sorting, and downloading in a variety of formats (<https://isac-idb.uchicago.edu>).

By the end of the report year on June 30, 2025, our library reached nearly 75,000 total volumes (table 3); analyzing the individually authored content of those volumes, we have surpassed 610,000 records in the library’s catalog. In addition to our print materials, 144,940 records include a link to digital content—nearly 24 percent of the entire database. To that number can be added 44,170 records with directly linked PDF files. We are still only in the beginning stage of incorporating the ever-increasing and ever-changing links to other general online resources, such as online dictionaries, grammars, text editions, websites, blogs, and other relevant media.

Table 3. Research Archives analytics.

Type	Total no. of records
Total volumes	74,894
Monographs	18,495
Monograph sections	80,251
Series	2,199
Series volumes	24,140
Series volume sections	112,558
Journals	1,101
Journal volumes	31,160
Journal volume articles	341,025
Theses	1,099
Pamphlets	3375
Reviews	126,957
Festschriften (volumes)	825
Digital invoice records	3,308
Digital cover-art records	22,993
Adobe PDFs	44,170

The online collections search (<https://isac-idb.uchicago.edu>), which includes the catalog of the Research Archives library, saw over 19,296 users conduct more than 35,000 sessions. These users were from all over the world, the top countries represented being the United States, Canada, Singapore, Egypt, Türkiye, Hong Kong, and Australia; 72.3 percent of users accessed the site through a desktop, 26.0 percent used a mobile device, and 1.7 percent used a tablet. The most common browser used was Chrome (58.2 percent), followed by Safari (25.6 percent), Firefox (7.5 percent), and Edge (5.2 percent).

Analytics recorded 359,742 total events (up from 325,551 last year), with an average of 19 events per active user, and 218,755 individual page views (up from 198,809 last year). More than 22,000 sessions by over 13,000 users came from direct traffic, nearly 10,000 sessions by 5,200 users came from online searches, and approximately 1,600 sessions by 933 users came from referral links. Some 1,971 events were related to viewing the record for the iconic *lammasu* (ISACM A7369); 533 events showed users searching for objects on display in the Edgar and Deborah Jannotta Mesopotamian Gallery; during 337 events, the record for the seal ISACM A27903 was viewed; and users employed 837 events to find and view a cuneiform tablet (ISACM A3160). Once again, the most popular record sought from the library was volume 1 of James P. Allen's *A New Concordance of the Pyramid Texts* (<https://isac-idb.uchicago.edu/id/b154b937-6036-43f4-a28d-3c92adc04aab>). Users visited the “saved records” page 2,685 times to export records from the database for their own research.

## DONATIONS

The Research Archives continued to benefit greatly from generous donations of both funds and books. For their thoughtful gifts, we thank the following individuals (listed in alphabetical order): Susan Allison, Melissa Anderson, Alex and Tigran Areshian, Andrew Baumann and ISAC Publications, Bob Biggs,

Gretel Braidwood, Denise Browning, Bill Cosper, Fred Donner, Richard Gibson, James Holland, the ISAC Museum image permissions staff, the ISAC Museum Shop, the ISAC volunteers' library, Janet Johnson, Cray Kennedy, Marc Maillot, Catherine Mardikes, Brett McClain, Carol Meyer, Judy Parillo, Seth Richardson and the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Kevin Sampson, Emily Smith, Emily Teeter, Ray Tindel, Felicia Whitcomb, Bruce Williams, Catie Witt, and Beth Yelda.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To provide the extremely high level of service, research support, and digital resources we offer, the Research Archives library requires the effort of a large team of individuals, as well as close collaboration and integration with virtually all ISAC units, faculty, staff, and students; visiting researchers; and other units around the university. Behind the scenes are nearly two dozen part-time employees and volunteers working hard to make sure the Research Archives library remains unparalleled. Everyone who encounters ISAC or its virtual avatars owes a huge debt of gratitude to the wonderful members of our team, who put in the sweat equity so that we can have such amazing resources at our disposal. A massive thank-you to the following people (listed in alphabetical order): Yasmin Ali, Christian Borgen, Betty Bush, Lucy Clarke, Jane Clinkert-White, Marta Díaz-Herrera, Aiko Hamamoto, Rick Hutchinson, Xilin Liu, Cora Miller, Maria Moreno, Harrison Morin, Lydia Osborn, Erynn Overfield, Luke Ruff, Margaret Schmid, Bri Stellini, Jeremy Walker, Eric Whitacre, Emma Yeager, and Amy Zillman.

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