

INTRODUCTION

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On a visit to Chicago this year, the distinguished archaeologist Robert McC. Adams, former Director of the Oriental Institute (before going on to be Provost of the University of Chicago and later Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution), commented that in his view, the Oriental Institute is now embarking on its “second golden age.” As incoming director, the more I learn about the people and projects of the Oriental Institute, the more convinced I am that Bob Adams’s assessment is absolutely correct. As documented in this year’s *Annual Report*, the range of Oriental Institute projects and the significance of this work of discovery are quite simply breathtaking. This unique research institute, eighty-three years old, continues to break new ground as a center for innovation and scholarship in the use of textual and archaeological data to reconstruct the ancient civilizations of Egypt, the Levant, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Iran.

The central mission of the Oriental Institute is discovery. Oriental Institute scholars bring to life the richness of ancient civilizations through the exploration of ancient sites and landscapes, through the study of textual materials, through the recording and preservation of monuments, and through the development of fundamental research tools such as dictionaries designed to give scholars worldwide access to the written record of Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Egypt. In each of these avenues of discovery, Oriental Institute researchers have consistently been at the cutting edge — most notably by applying advanced technology to the understanding of ancient civilizations.

The cover art and the pages dividing each section of this *Annual Report* bring home this innovation and intellectual integration in a particularly striking way. The photographs are recently declassified CORONA intelligence satellite images, created in the 1960s and 1970s, showing archaeological sites in north Syria and southeast Anatolia. These provide an invaluable tool to Oriental Institute researchers, enabling them to identify archaeological sites and settlement patterns from space, while also allowing them to reconstruct patterns of ancient land use for agriculture, herding, and trade. By integrating the satellite imagery with the results from excavations, archaeological survey, and the analysis of surviving cuneiform documents from relevant sites, it becomes possible to put together a completely new picture of how the ancient city states and empires of Mesopotamia and north Syria developed, functioned, and eventually collapsed. This entirely new interdisciplinary framework for reconstructing the past lies at the heart of a new Oriental Institute research unit with the wonderfully appropriate acronym of CAMEL — the Center for the Archaeology of the Middle Eastern Landscape — established by Senior Research Associate Tony Wilkinson. CAMEL’s integration of remote sensing and archaeology is already making major contributions to two major Oriental Institute projects — McGuire Gibson’s investigations at the site of Hamoukar in northeast Syria, and Aslihan Yener’s Amuq Valley Regional Projects in southeast Turkey. I am confident that we will soon be able to extend these research methods to Egypt and other parts of the Near East as well.

One of the most interesting uses of advanced digital and information technology can be seen in the Oriental Institute’s Diyala Project. All too often, the objects recovered in old excavations quietly gather dust in museum basements and are almost inaccessible to modern scholarship. However, in this innovative effort, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, McGuire Gibson and Clemens Reichel are working closely with Oriental Institute

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volunteer George Sundell to combine the field notes, photographs, stratigraphy, architecture, and artifact data from the Oriental Institute's excavations in the 1930s at the Mesopotamian sites of Tell Agrab, Tell Asmar, Ishchali, and Khafajah into an integrated searchable database. When completed, the Diyala database will not only publish these materials fully, but will also make it possible to study these materials in ways undreamt of by their original discoverers.

Oriental Institute dictionary projects are also using web-based information technology in important and creative ways. The Chicago Hittite Dictionary, under the direction of Theo van den Hout, is simultaneously publishing in both paper and World Wide Web formats. On a parallel track, the Demotic Dictionary Project, under Janet Johnson's direction, has been using the web not only as a venue for publication, but also as a tool of discovery in which Demotic scholars around the world are involved in the process of commenting on problematic lexical items.

The Oriental Institute continues to excel in other fields of research as well. To name but a few, the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, under Martha Roth's direction, is now within four years of completion, capping one of the most remarkable intellectual endeavors of ancient Near Eastern studies anywhere. The Epigraphic Survey, under Raymond Johnson's direction, continues its vital work of recording and preserving ancient Egyptian monuments, reliefs, and inscriptions to insure their accessibility to future scholarship, despite the ravages of modern economic development, salinization, and groundwater damage.

The tremendous accomplishments of the Oriental Institute in 2002 are a credit not only to the individual researchers, but also to the able leadership of outgoing director Gene Gragg. Gene oversaw the reinstallation of the Egyptian and Persian Galleries in the museum and has strengthened our research efforts through his successful hiring of two extraordinarily promising younger scholars — Sumerologist Christopher Woods and Egyptologist Stephen Harvey. I think I can speak for all of us when I express to Gene our deepest thanks for his leadership, his support, and his dedication to strengthening the Oriental Institute.

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