

INTRODUCTION

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I am honored to present you with the Oriental Institute's *Annual Report* for 2013–2014. This has been a year of unparalleled turbulence and upheaval across the Middle East, affecting Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Israel, the Palestinian Territories, and Egypt — almost every country in which we conduct our research. The armed conflicts and civil strife across the region have taken a horrific toll on the people of these countries. The impact on the irreplaceable cultural heritage of these areas has also been devastating.

As a result, our work is changing. The political situation makes it much more difficult to do our traditional research. We must face these challenges by recognizing the increasing importance of cultural heritage protection as a central part of the Oriental Institute's mission, and indeed we have begun to do so. At the same time, the closure of countries and the looting of sites demonstrate, as nothing else can, the importance of our museum as a safe haven for the material remains from the cradle of civilization, and the vastly increased importance of our scientifically excavated museum collections as a research resource that can continue despite the disruptions in the Middle East.

When one considers these factors, this *Annual Report* is a truly impressive accomplishment. At 300 pages, this is the longest *Annual Report* that the Oriental Institute has ever published. The length is not due to verbosity (the articles are the same length as always), but rather is a tribute to the scope and energy of the Oriental Institute's talented researchers, who have initiated new projects and made great strides in our existing excavations, textual projects, educational activities, and museum work. As you will see in these pages, the work of discovery continues to have a major impact in the exploration of ancient Near Eastern civilizations and the communication of this knowledge to the scholarly and general public.
