

The Oriental Institute Library

SHIRLEY A. LYON, *Librarian*

Since the founding of the Oriental Institute in 1919, its library has provided the researcher in the Near Eastern field of study—professor, excavator, student—with books and bibliographic services. It was not until 1924, however, with the appointment of Miss Johanne Vinden-
nas, that the systematic acquisition of scholarly monographs and
serials and the preparation and maintenance of a bibliographic cata-
logue came under the control of a trained librarian.

For forty years, under the extraordinarily skilled and dedicated Miss Vinden-
nas, the book collection grew steadily into what even-
tually became probably the finest collection of Near Eastern mate-
rials in the United States and possibly one of a very few such collec-
tions in the world. It ranges through every phase of the Near East:
art, literature, science, history, and philology. Holdings are particu-
larly strong in Assyriology, Egyptology, and Islam (the Islamic col-
lection includes Arabic texts and translations of history and the sci-
ences as well as religious works). Holdings are virtually complete
in Palestinology and Iranology; coverage is also excellent for Turkey
and Northern Syria.

The card catalogue of the library was planned to be a bibliograph-
ic tool of the utmost use. To this end it was decided to include in it
cards representing not only books shelved in the Oriental Institute
Library but also books in other departments of the University of
Chicago Library and other libraries in this country insofar as they
relate to subjects of interest to the Oriental Institute. In addition to

references to books, it was thought that cards for journal articles should also be filed there. The periodicals which have been analyzed fall into two groups: those which deal exclusively with the Near East, and those which touch it only occasionally or in part. Each article analyzed is treated in full, like a book, making it accessible under both author and subject. Long runs of journals have been completely analyzed, for example:

The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature, Vols. 1-58
(1884-1941)

Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Vols. 1-40 (1901-1940)

Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde, Vols. 1-76
(1863-1940)

Although systematic work on analyzing journals has not been done for about fifteen years because of the ever-increasing demands on the library staff time, the card catalogue as it has been constructed and maintained nevertheless remains a unique and indispensable tool for researchers in the Near Eastern field.

The library has so far had two homes. Until 1931 it lived with the Institute in Haskell Hall. Of the stay there remain now only memories and three inscriptions in the stone facing on the north side of the east entrance:

פתח דברִיךָ יאִיר

The unfolding of thy words gives light.

Psalms CXIX:130 (R.S.V.)

LUX EX ORIENTE

Light from the East

HNTOΦΩΣΤΟΑΛΗΘΙΝΟΝΟΦΩΤΙΖΕΙ
ΠΑΝΤΑΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΝΕΡΧΟΜΕΝΟΝΕΙΣ
ΤΟΝΚΟΣΜΟΝ

The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world.

John I:9 (R.S.V.)

The Oriental Institute moved into its present quarters in 1931, and James Henry Breasted observed in his University of Chicago survey volume, *The Oriental Institute*, that the library reading room was



The Oriental Institute Library shortly before it was moved to the new Joseph Regenstein building in 1970. Photo by Ursula W. Schneider

“the most beautiful room in the building. . . .” The high ceiling was done in white, light blue and cream, its beams painted to match. Ten hanging lamps framed the view of the long, lead-paned window at the south end of the room. Heavy, yellow oak reading tables and chairs provided reading space for eighty persons.

Soon after its installation in the new building the library began to feel the need for more space to accommodate the ever-expanding collection. First, book sections were added to the third-floor mezzanine stacks. Then gradually, one by one, the study rooms adjoining the mezzanine, which were originally intended for the use of fellows of the Institute, were absorbed by the library and became part of its stacks. In the middle of the 1960's two of the reading room tables and sixteen chairs were removed to make room for thirty-two free-standing book sections which were installed at the south end of the reading room.

The card catalogue has expanded with the book collection. In December of 1932 the catalogue contained about 85,000 cards, while the number of books shelved was about 8,000. As of the date of this writing the card catalogue contains about 283,000 cards and the books shelved number approximately 48,000. Reader use, also, has increased. When statistics first began to be kept, in 1941/42, book circulation totaled 8,687. Ten years later the figure came to 17,660. In 1961/62 it totaled 24,432, and last year (1968/69) reached a figure of 33,811.

During the summer of 1970 the library will leave the Oriental Institute building and be housed in the new Joseph Regenstein Library, where it will be integrated into the main library's humanities and social sciences collections. The reading room on the fifth floor of Regenstein will combine the reference materials and bibliographic services of what is now the Oriental Institute library, the Classics library, and the South Asian reference collection. Most of the material in the general collections (that is, non-reference) which pertains to these areas will be shelved in stacks close by the reading room. The new facilities will provide far better services for more readers than have been possible for many years.