



ORIENTAL INSTITUTE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

ORIENTAL INSTITUTE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO, a major research center devoted to the study of the history, languages, and archaeology of the ancient Near East and Egypt.

The origins of the Oriental Institute can be traced back to 1892 and the foundation of the new University of Chicago in its present location in Hyde Park (Daniels 1979). The first president of the University, William Rainey Harper was also a professor of Semitic languages. Upon moving from Yale to Chicago to assume his new position, Harper invited a pupil of his, James Henry Breasted, and his younger Assyriologist brother Robert Francis Harper, to join him in the new Department of Semitic Languages.

William Harper nurtured a strong interest in the ancient Near East (called the Orient in those days) and set Oriental studies as a major goal for the University of Chicago. In doing so, in addition to his own intellectual aspirations, Harper was also joining up a trend that was sweeping across American institutions of higher education in the latter part of the nineteenth century (Kuklick 1996), so that Chicago would not fall behind other major schools such as Harvard, Yale, Johns Hopkins, and especially the University of Pennsylvania, which were already actively engaged in Oriental studies (Meade 1974).

During his first few years as the president of the University of Chicago, Harper



raised funds for a series of new buildings, including one to house his own Department. In 1896, the Department of Semitic Languages moved into the Haskell Oriental Museum whose construction had just finished with financial support from John D. Rockefeller, Sr. and Mrs. Caroline Haskell.

With a museum in need of antiquities and one of the strongest departments in the country in those days, which included an Egyptologist (Breasted) and two Assyriologists (Robert Harper and Ira Price), William Harper personally traveled to Constantinople in 1903 to negotiate with the Ottoman officials to secure a permit for excavations at Bismaya (ancient Adab), a Sumerian site in southern Mesopotamia. The next year, the University of Chicago Oriental Exploration Fund commenced its first season of fieldwork in the Near East at Adab, with Robert Harper as epigrapher (Banks 1912). Two years later, an Epigraphic Survey was launched as part of an ambitious project to record and publish all the Pharaonic inscriptions from Egypt and Nubia. While the Adab expedition soon encountered a series of problems and came to a halt, the Epigraphic Survey, headed by James Henry Breasted, flourished and turned into the most enduring American expedition to Egypt.

The success of the Epigraphic Survey can largely be attributed to the virtuosity of James Henry Breasted (1865-1935), the father of American Egyptology and founder of the Oriental Institute (Breasted 1943). Originally trained as a pharmacist, Breasted later turned to Oriental studies and after earning an M.A. at Yale under William Harper, he traveled to Berlin to study Egyptology. Upon receiving his Ph.D. in 1894, Breasted was appointed by Harper the professor of Egyptology at the University of Chicago, the first such chair in the U.S.A. After Harper passed away in 1906, Breasted became the chairman of the Department of Semitic Languages and, despite financial constraints imposed by the University's new administration, pushed forward with Near Eastern studies.

Building upon Harper's ideas, Breasted stressed the significance of the ancient civilizations of the Near East and Egypt and emphasized their profound contributions to the foundations of the Western civilization. His comprehensive and absorbing book *Ancient Times* (Breasted 1916) – in which he coined the famous term “The Fertile Crescent” to refer to the region from the eastern Mediterranean coast up to southern Anatolia to Mesopotamia and western Persia – became an instant best-seller, fueling interest in the Near East in the U.S.A.



Breasted further underlined the importance of a holistic study, incorporating textual and archaeological evidence in its broadest sense, in order to arrive at a better understanding of Oriental civilizations. Breasted envisioned a scientific center with philologists, archaeologists, and historians where these scholars could work together towards the common goal of a more in-depth understanding of Oriental civilizations (Breasted 1922).

The momentum arrived in 1919, when Breasted persuaded John D. Rockefeller, Jr., to contribute a generous sum towards the foundation of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (hereafter OI). To initiate the OI, in 1920 Breasted personally led a reconnaissance mission to Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt to acquire artifacts for the OI Museum and to search for promising sites for excavations.

With the completion of its new building in 1931, the OI moved into its permanent headquarters on the southeast corner of East 58th Street and South University Avenue. As part of expanding the OI's overseas outreach, in 1924, the Epigraphic Survey established a permanent headquarters in Luxor (the Chicago House) from which work on Egyptian monuments has continued to the present.

Breasted laid the groundwork for a number of major long-term projects of philological nature at the OI, first and foremost the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (commenced in 1921, expected to be completed by 2006) (Reiner 2002). This initiative was followed in the following decades by the *Chicago Hittite Dictionary* and the *Chicago Demotic Dictionary*, transforming the OI into the undisputed center for the study of ancient Near Eastern languages. The *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* brought together a stellar group of scholars, many expatriates from Europe, who proved to be instrumental in promoting Near Eastern studies in the U.S.A. and training the early generations of American students of the ancient Near East. The most notable of this group included D. D. Luckenbill, Arno Poebel, Edward Chiera, A. Leo Oppenheim, Thorkild Jacobsen, and Ignace J. Gelb (Assyriology), Benno Landsberger and Samuel N. Kramer (Sumerology), George G. Cameron and Richard T. Hallock (Elamitology), Albert T. Olmstead and Nelson Debevoise (ancient history), and Hans Güterbock (Hittitology).

An institute of this caliber required a comprehensive publications program. While at Yale, William Harper had founded the journal *Hebraica* in 1884. He transferred *Hebraica* to the University of Chicago where it was renamed



American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures in 1895 and *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* in 1941. Over the years, *JNES* assumed a vital position in the field as the flagship journal for Near Eastern studies in the U.S.A. While *AJSL* and later *JNES* continued to publish scholarly papers of analytical nature, Breasted felt the need to launch publications series devoted to straightforward philological and archaeological studies. In consultation with his editorial staff, he therefore introduced five series of publications: 1. *Oriental Institute Communications* (OIC) to present preliminary field reports in a non-technical language to a general audience; 2. *Oriental Institute Publications* (OIP) as specialized and detailed reports of field expeditions; 3. *Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization* (SAOC) as collections of papers discussing a certain topic; 4. *Assyriological Studies* (AS) on presentation and discussion of topics based on cuneiform sources; 5. *Ancient Records* (AR) presenting the English translation of ancient documents. More recently, other series have been added to the OI publications, including *Oriental Institute Essays* (OIE) described as “monographs on special subjects, comprehensive in scope and interpretive in character”; and the *Oriental Institute Museum Publications*, including “illustrated educational brochures, catalogues, pamphlets, and books describing the various Near Eastern Collections in the OI Museum” (for a comprehensive and annotated list of OI publications up to 1991 see Holland 1991).

With philological research at the OI well underway and an extensive publications program, Breasted turned his attention to archaeology, somewhat eclipsed after the failure of the Adab expedition and World War I. In 1925, the OI launched an ambitious series of excavations at the site of Megiddo in Palestine that, under a series of directors, especially Gordon Loud, cleared a large portion of the site prior to the outbreak of World War II (Lamon and Shipton 1939; Loud 1948). The Hittite Survey (1926-27) and the Anatolian Expedition (1927-1934), both under Hans Henning von der Osten, surveyed parts of central Anatolia and explored the sites of Alishar Höyük, Kerkenesdag, Gavurkale, and Terzili Hamam (cf. von der Osten 1927, 1932). In Mesopotamia proper, the OI resumed excavations at Khorsabad in 1928. These excavations continued until 1935 under Edward Chiera and Gordon Loud, clearing parts of the capital city of Sargon II (Loud 1936; Loud and Altman 1938). From 1929 to 1931, Chiera was assisted by a young Pinhas Pierre Delougaz (1906-1975), who later traveled south to join the Diyala project. The winged human-headed bull now forming the centerpiece of the OI Museum’s Mesopotamian gallery was discovered during these excavations and shipped to Chicago by Delougaz. In



conjunction with the OI project in Khorsabad, Thorkild Jacobsen and Seton Lloyd conducted a study of the Assyrian aqueduct system, the first example of a landscape archaeology research combining archaeological and epigraphic evidence (Jacobsen and Lloyd 1935; Ur 2005).

The most important OI project in Mesopotamia in pre-World War II years was in the Diyala region where, from 1930 to 1937, a large and well-equipped OI team conducted a series of large-scale excavations at the sites of Tell Asmar (ancient Eshnunna), Tell Agrab, Khafajeh, and Ischali in the Diyala region to the northeast of Baghdad. The main reasons for choosing this region, as opposed to southern Mesopotamia where most excavations were carried out in those days, were the unexplored nature of the Diyala compared to southern and northern Mesopotamia, and the flow of an increasing number of objects from this region to the antiquities market. Further, Edward Chiera had already picked up from the surface of Tell Asmar some inscribed bricks with the names of the rulers of Eshnunna, a discovery that pointed to the significance of the site and the region. The Diyala expedition brought together a group of remarkable scholars: Henri Frankfort as the director of expedition, Thorkild Jacobsen as epigrapher, and Gordon Loud (who left in 1935 to direct the ongoing excavations at Megiddo), Seton Lloyd, and Pinhas Delougaz as archaeologists.

The Diyala excavations were important in raising the bar in Mesopotamian archaeology. The OI expedition advanced the excavations techniques developed by the Germans at the turn of the century at sites such as Ashur and Babylon, especially the painstaking task of uncovering mud-brick structures, as well as accurate and detailed recording of finds based on excavation loci. As a result, the numerous publications presenting the results of the OI excavations at the Diyala region (cf. Frankfort 1939, 1943, 1955; Frankfort et al. 1940; Delougaz 1940, 1952; Delougaz and Lloyd 1942; Delougaz et al. 1967; Hill et al. 1990) are still highly regarded in Near Eastern archaeological community as models of superb reports.

By 1930, the OI expeditions were engaged in field research in Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Palestine, and Egypt. The only major land not yet explored was Persia. Establishing a foothold in Iran was important for the OI for two reasons: first, the French had held a monopoly on Iranian archaeology since 1896, an obstacle that the Americans were eager to remove and begin exploring an archaeologically-rich land (Majd 2003); second, the long-time rivalry between the OI and the University of Pennsylvania Museum of



Anthropology and Archaeology (henceforth Penn) was reaching a critical point, especially over the most precious prize to be claimed: the permit for excavations at Persepolis.

The catalyst for the OI to enter into the field of Iranian archaeology was Ernst Herzfeld, a noted scholar of many skills, who had already been active in Iran for some thirty years (Gunter and Hauser 2004). Breasted and Herzfeld knew each other through Eduard Meyer, Herzfeld's mentor at Berlin. When they met in Oxford in 1928, Herzfeld shared with Breasted his plans for excavations at Persepolis (Mousavi, 2004, p. 463). He also expressed his desire to work for the OI, as opposed to Penn which was also entertaining the idea of excavations at Persepolis and was apparently willing to provide Herzfeld with more funding.

Shortly after the abolition of French monopoly on Iranian archaeology and the ratification of the new Antiquities Laws in 1930, Breasted applied to the Iranian government for a permit for excavations and restorations at Persepolis on behalf of the OI. With permission granted, Herzfeld was appointed by Breasted as the director of the OI excavations at Persepolis. Herzfeld led the excavations at Persepolis from 1931 to 1934 during which he cleared the Gate of All Nations, the Apadana, the avenue and courtyard between the latter and the Hall of One Hundred Columns, the so-called Harem building that was turned into the dighouse, and parts of the fortification on the northern edge of the terrace that led to the discovery of a large collection of tablets known as Persepolis Fortification Tablets inscribed mainly in Achaemenid Elamite (Hallock 1969) and impressed with an array of seals (Garrison and Root 2002).

A series of mounting problems between Herzfeld and the Iranian government, on one hand, and Herzfeld and the OI, on the other (Mousavi 2004) including the fact that he did not publish much about his excavations (Dusinberre 2004), led to Herzfeld's replacement in 1934 by Erich F. Schmidt. Schmidt, who had already worked for Penn at Fara (ancient Shuruppak in Mesopotamia), and Tappeh Hissar and Ray in Iran, continued with excavations at Persepolis until the outbreak of World War II in 1939, clearing a large part of the terrace buildings, especially the Treasury (Schmidt 1939, 1953, 1957, 1970) that led to the discovery of another, smaller group of tablets called Persepolis Treasury Tablets (Cameron 1948) and a set of stone tableware with Aramaic inscriptions (Bowman 1970) among other things.

In addition to Persepolis, Schmidt expanded OI's field research in Iran by



expanding on Herzfeld's earlier excavations at Istakhr (Estakr) from 1934 to 1939, leading one of the first expeditions to Lurestan in 1934-1935 and 1937-1938 (Schmidt, van Loon, and Curvers 1989) and carrying out the first aerial reconnaissance in western Iran from 1935 to 1937 (Schmidt 1940). During the excavations at Persepolis, the OI team also excavated at the nearby site of Bakun for two seasons, in 1932 under Alexander Langsdorff and Donald McCown (Langsdorff and McCown 1942) and in 1937 under Schmidt and McCown (Alizadeh 1992).

World War II brought archaeological fieldwork in the Near East by foreign expeditions to a halt. But the time was put into good use by OI researchers on producing excavation reports and analytical studies. Henri Frankfort (1897-1954) was arguably the intellectual driving force at the OI in this period. A native of the Netherlands, Frankfort, who joined the OI at the behest of Breasted to lead the Iraq project, was already an experienced archaeologist with a broad interest (van Loon 1995). After the Diyala project came to a close, Frankfort moved to Chicago as a Research Professor at the OI where he devoted his time to teaching, research, and writing. In 1939, he organized a graduate seminar on comparative stratigraphy of different regions of the Near East that led to two major monographs synthesizing the available evidence from Iran (McCown 1942) and Mesopotamia (Perkins 1949), still serving as the framework for the culture history of the two regions. In his years at the OI, Frankfort also produced some of his most outstanding analytical contributions to Near Eastern studies (cf. Frankfort 1948, 1954; Frankfort et al. 1946).

A major development during the early post-War years was the emergence of a younger generation of more anthropologically-oriented archaeologists who were instrumental in introducing the New Archaeology to the Near East. Most important among the pioneers of the new approach were Robert J. Braidwood, Robert McCormick Adams, and Karl Butzer. While professors at Department of Anthropology, they also held positions at the OI (Adams even served as the Director of the OI, 1962-68 and 1981-83) thus bringing these two institutions closer together. From this fertile ground rose a new breed of Near Eastern archaeologists including Frank Hole, Kent Flannery, Patty Jo Watson, Henry Wright, and Charles Redman who, in turn, played a crucial role in training students and introducing new concepts and techniques to the traditionally conservative field of Near Eastern archaeology (Hole 1995).

The first post-War OI field project was launched in Iran. Donald McCown, a member of the Persepolis team under both Herzfeld and Schmidt conducted a



survey of the Ram-Hormuz Plain in eastern Khuzestan and parts of lower Khuzestan between 1946 and 1948 (Alizadeh 1985) and excavated at Tall-e Ghazir (Qasir) in 1947 and 1948 (McCown 1949; Caldwell 1968).

From 1949 Robert Braidwood began a series of surveys and test excavations in northern Mesopotamia aimed at exploring the transitional period from food procurement to food production, especially the questions of domestication of plants and animals and the beginning of sedentary life (L. Braidwood et al. 1983). After several seasons of excavations at a number of sites in Iraqi Kurdistan, the work of Braidwood's "Iraq-Jarmo Project" came to a halt with the 1958 coup in Iraq. The team was, however, invited by Ezat Negahban (a recent graduate of the University of Chicago and then a faculty member at Department of Archaeology, Tehran University and a Technical Advisor to the Archaeological Service of Iran) to shift their work to Iran (Braidwood and Braidwood 1999). The resulting "Iranian Prehistory Project" conducted a series of surveys and test excavations in western Iran, especially in the Central Zagros in 1959-60 (cf. R. Braidwood 1961) that still form the basis of our understanding of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods of western Iran (Hole 1987).

While Braidwood later shifted his field research to eastern Anatolia and began the "Joint Chicago-Istanbul Project," work continued in Iran by junior members of the Iranian Prehistory Project, including a survey of the Susiana Plain by Robert McCormick Adams in 1960-61 (Adams 1962) followed in 1963 by test excavations at the Sasanian site of Jundi Shapur (Adams and Hansen 1968), and excavations in 1961 and 1963 at a number of sites on the Deh Luran Plain by Frank Hole (a recent graduate of the University of Chicago) and Kent Flannery (then a graduate student at the University of Chicago) (Hole, Flannery, and Neely 1969). With Hole being hired by the Rice University and Flannery by the University of Michigan, the "Prehistory of Southwestern Iran Project" shifted into other orbits, while the OI maintained its presence in Iranian archaeology with a long-term project at Chogha Mish in Susiana.

Initiated by Pierre Delougaz in 1961, the Chogha Mish project became the most enduring OI field research in Iran (Delougaz and Kantor 1996). After the last season of excavations at Diyala, Delougaz moved to Chicago and served as a professor of archaeology at the OI from 1960 to 1967 when he moved to UCLA as a professor of Near Eastern archaeology. While working in the Diyala, Delougaz developed a keen interest in Proto-Literate period (now commonly called Late Uruk and Jemdet Nasr periods in Mesopotamian chronology and



Susa II-III in Susiana chronology). Although Delougaz seems to have obtained a permit from the Iranian government to conduct fieldwork in Khuzestan in 1947 (Delougaz and Kantor, 1996, p. xix), actual work at Chogha Mish did not begin until 1961. Primarily aimed at studying the Proto-Literate period, the project, with its excavations at Chogha Mish (Delougaz and Kantor 1996) and the nearby sites of Chogha Bonut (Alizadeh 2003) and Boneh Fazili, grew into a full-fledged study of the prehistoric Susiana sequence dating back as far as the beginning of village period in the seventh millennium B.C.E. This was due much to prehistoric interests of Delougaz's co-director, Helene J. Kantor (1919-1993), also a professor at the OI, who took over the sole directorship of the project in 1975 after Delougaz passed away of a heart attack in the field in 1975.

In the meantime in Iraq, the OI continued its field research in the Diyala region with a brief season in 1957-58 by Thorkild Jacobsen and Robert McCormick Adams, exploring the patterns of settlement and irrigation in the region from prehistoric to Islamic times (Adams 1965; Jacobsen 1982). With this project also coming to a halt with the 1958 coup, Jacobsen devoted his time to Assyriology (Jacobsen 1995), while Adams divided his survey effort between Iran (Adams 1962) and Iraq (Adams 1965, 1981; Adams and Nissen 1972; Yoffee 1997). Another OI team returned to the Diyala region some twenty years later as part of the Hamrin Dam Salvage Project (Gibson 1981).

The most enduring OI project in Mesopotamia has been excavations the at Nippur. After four seasons of excavations between 1889 and 1900 by the Babylonian Exploration Fund of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology (Zettler 1992), in 1948 a joint OI-Penn expedition resumed work at the site under Donald McCown. The OI-Penn collaboration continued for three seasons, until Penn withdrew in 1953, to be briefly replaced by the Baghdad School of the American Schools of Oriental Research after which the OI continued to work alone. Until the outbreak of the Persian Gulf War in 1991, the OI carried out nineteen seasons of excavations at Nippur under a succession of directors including Richard C. Haines, James Knudstad, and McGuire Gibson (see Bregstein and Schneider 1992 for comprehensive bibliography). In conjunction with the Nippur Project, Donald P. Hansen carried out two seasons of excavations at Abu Salabikh in 1963 and 1965 (Biggs 1974).

Thanks to these and other archaeological projects, the OI boasts one of the few museums in the world with its collection almost entirely from proper



excavations and therefore with reliable provenience. This extraordinary advantage has given the OI Museum an edge as an outstanding research and teaching tool. The extensive renovation and addition of a new wing between 1996 and 2001 provided the Museum with a more up-to-date exhibition of its collection and a chance to put on display hitherto stored artifacts.

Apart from the major projects briefly discussed above, over the years the OI has also sponsored many other smaller or short-term archaeological projects, including the Nubian Project (1960-64), the Yemen Project (under different rubrics, starting from 1978), the Al-Quseir Project (1978-80), and the Aqaba Project (1986-93), as well as an array of projects of philological nature, including the Coffin Texts Project, the Book of the Dead Project, the Cushitic Lexicon Project (later renamed Afroasiatic Index Project), and the Achaemenid Royal Inscriptions Project (a description of these and other projects, as well as their bibliography, can be found at the OI website: <http://www.oi.uchicago.edu>).

With the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the Persian Gulf War of 1990-91, work in Iran and Iraq, two major centers for archaeological field research by the OI, came to a halt. While some of the OI staff sought fieldwork opportunities elsewhere, Helene Kantor continued with preparing the Chogha Mish reports (Delougaz and Kantor 1996), but with her death in 1993, the responsibility fell upon her Iranian student Abbas Alizadeh (now a Senior Research Associate at the OI) to see the reports to press. This coincided with relative easing off of restrictions on archaeological activities by foreign or joint expeditions in Iran, a development that Alizadeh put into good use by reviving the Iranian Prehistory Project and conducting a series of surveys and excavations, including a survey of the headwaters of the Kur River in 1995 (Alizadeh 1995), to be followed by excavations at Chogha Bonut in 1996 (Alizadeh 2003), survey and test excavations in eastern Susiana in 2002 (Alizadeh et al. 2004), and excavations at sites of Mushki, Jari, and Bakun in 2003 (Alizadeh 2004). Work in Iraq, however, is still hampered (as of October 2005 when this entry is prepared) as a result of the U.S. embargo on Iraq during the 1990s and the 2003 U.S.-British invasion of Iraq and the ensuing turmoil.



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