

Fulfilling Breasted's Vision

The Oriental Institute Integrated Database Project

By Scott Branting, Jack Green, and Foy Scalf

Since its foundation by James Henry Breasted, scholars at the Oriental Institute have devoted time and effort to investigating the many aspects of the ancient Near Eastern world. An irreplaceable wealth of knowledge has been amassed by this industrious effort. Housed primarily here in this building, but also in facilities around the globe, is the treasure trove of objects, excavation photographs, and paper records that preserves the evidence of the past. The heart of the Oriental Institute's mission is the collection, preservation, analysis, and sharing of the fruits of this labor.

However, managing, disseminating, and accessing this wealth of knowledge is complicated by the size, diversity, and nature of the collections. Artifacts from millennia ago and archival paper records from decades ago are both fragile and in need of constant care and attention. Every human touch, no matter how careful, contributes to their wear. Preservation of this irreplaceable resource must always remain of paramount concern, in case it disappears completely. Devoted specialists are tasked with attending to these materials at dedicated locations in the building. They are all doing remarkable work to organize and preserve the cultural heritage in our custody.

The necessity of caring for these collections in a responsible manner has a side effect of making access to them more difficult. A scholar can't stop by when inspiration strikes and draw together a group of objects and attendant

records on a moment's notice. Time and advanced planning are required to even begin gathering together such an assemblage, and in certain cases it might not be possible at all. They also have no way to share what they have assembled with a colleague halfway around the world unless they physically bring the colleague there at that exact point in time to view them. This reality places restrictions on the ways in which our evidence could be applied to research questions devised by scholars and interested in-

civilizations and from various groups of sources. Some form of catalogue or index is therefore indispensable" (p. 406). The Integrated Database Project (IDB) is providing a conduit for improving access to our unique, world-class collections. The database is a complement to Breasted's vision and provides an integrated environment for accessing, querying, and working with the wide-ranging information related to the mission of the Institute. Public access via the Oriental Institute website will allow

anyone with an Internet connection the capability to conduct research and make "instructive comparisons" of any material under our care.

Integrating the data of various departments fulfills critical needs of researchers, teachers, and students. This environment will be integrated in three different ways. First, it will be integrated in that it will allow a user to track related pieces of information about an object or document across the various different units that maintain that information. An object on display in the museum could be linked to photographs of it being excavated, to

the pages of the original excavator's notebook describing its context, to places where it has been published, and to other objects found in close proximity to it. Each of these different pieces of information will be able to be brought together instantly and examined in an online environment, even while the physical originals for many of these documents are safely tucked away in their different locations in the building. Second, there will be integration in the sharing



Groundbreaking ceremony for the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute, April 28, 1930. University president Robert Maynard Hutchins (center left) looks on as Dr. James H. Breasted uses a shovel to break ground

dividuals at the Oriental Institute and around the world.

In order to make use of the vast data pool available, it is necessary to have a catalog. As Breasted himself noted in his 1933 monograph *The Oriental Institute*, "the volume of evidence left us by ancient civilizations of the Near East is ... so vast that it is impossible for any single brain to carry the details which would make possible instructive comparison of evidences from all the different

of information between different users. This environment will allow users to create a space in which to store their queries or assortment of data, to share those collections and their comments instantaneously with others around the world, and to form collaborative groups for jointly working on research projects. Third, the environment will allow users to integrate the information they collect with external software packages that the user might wish to use for further

analysis and exploration. Exported information from the IDB such as query results, digital records, or metadata will then be available to be used or analyzed in more detail. The results of this analysis can then be uploaded back into the environment and immediately shared with other users.

This long-term vision for the IDB will be years in the making. However, the Oriental Institute has never shied away from projects that can take decades to

complete, such as the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary project. On January 31st of this year, the first version of the database portal was launched (oi.uchicago.edu/idb, or follow the "Search Our Collections" tabs on our website). This was the culmination of numerous years of hard work by past and present members of the project, as well as financial support from the Institute of Museums and Library Services (IMLS), the University of Chicago, and Aimee



FEATURED EVENTS

[OI Launches Adopt-a-Dig Program!](#)

Home > Search Our Collections Print this Page

SEARCH OUR COLLECTIONS

Welcome to the online home of the Oriental Institute's Integrated Database. This is an on-going project that aims to provide public access to information about the diverse research and object-based collections managed and cared for by the Oriental Institute.



Museum Collection

Explore over two hundred and seven thousand registered objects in the permanent collection and special exhibitions galleries.



Research Archives

Browse over four hundred and fifty thousand entries that represent complete analytics (volumes, manuscripts, essays, articles, and book reviews) for all cataloged Research Archives materials.

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Keyword

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Collections search page of the Oriental Institute website (oi.uchicago.edu/idb)

Drolet Rossi. This initial launch takes the first steps toward realizing our broader vision for the IDB. Currently, users can search and view over 207,000 objects from the Oriental Institute Museum collection and over 450,000 bibliographic records from the Research Archives, the Oriental Institute’s library. In addition, bibliographic records can be exported to your local computer for sharing and for

incorporation into research. Unique to this project is that searches can be conducted across disparate datasets simultaneously. For instance, a query can be constructed to search for a name such as “Shulgi” and to find in return both books and articles referring to him as well as objects such as baked bricks from the site of Bismaya in Iraq, ancient Adab, inscribed with his name.

A great deal of additional work remains to be done before we can fulfill this long-term vision for the IDB. Queries can’t yet be saved or shared, and a whole host of new types of data remains to be incorporated. The current version also includes only a portion of all the objects and their metadata housed within the Oriental Institute Museum. This is because only a portion

Home > Search Our Collections
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Begin a New Search
Revise Your Search
Search Within Results

View citations

You searched for:
shulgi

Research Archives
Museum Collection
Search All

Relevance ▾
1 - 15 of 15 < >
Page 1 ▾
50 results per page ▾

#	Result	Refine Results
1	<p>BRICK</p> <p><small>M</small> Description: CRACKED IN TWO PIECES, INSCRIBED SHULGI. "FOR THE GODDESS NINHURSAGA, HIS LADY, SHULGI THE MIGHTY MAN, KING OF UR, KING OF SUMER AND AKKAD, HAS BUILT HIS LOVELY WEIR." Material: CLAY, BAKED Dimensions: 320X320X66 MM</p> <p>Country: IRAQ Place/site: Bismaya Place/other: -- Period: UR III Date: SHULGI Registration Number: A 1143</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid #800000; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>Object Type/Description</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Classification Broad + Classification Specific + Description </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #800000; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Materials Broad + Materials Specific </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #800000; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>Place Name</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Region + Country + Various Sites No facets + Locus </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #800000; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Culture No facets </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #800000; padding: 5px;"> <p>Dating</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Period + Date + Dynasty No facets </div>
2	<p>BRICK</p> <p><small>M</small> Description: ONE CORNER BROKEN, INSCRIBED ON FRONT. SHULGI. "FOR NINHURSAGA, HIS LADY, SHULGI, THE MIGHTY MAN, KING OF UR, KING OF SUMER AND AKKAD, HAS BUILT HIS BELOVED WEIR." Material: CLAY, BAKED Dimensions: --</p> <p>Country: IRAQ Place/site: Bismaya Place/other: -- Period: UR III Date: SHULGI Registration Number: A 1140</p>	
3	<p>FOUNDATION PEG</p> <p><small>M</small> Description: FOUNDATION PEG FIGURE OF SHULGI CARRYING BASKET ON HEAD, REMAINS OF TEXTILE. Material: BRONZE Dimensions: 297 MM H 115 MM W.</p> <p>Country: IRAQ Place/site: Nippur Place/other: -- Period: UR III Date: SHULGI Registration Number: A 31017 A</p>	

Current Gallery: Mesopotamian Gallery

Museum collection search results

of this wealth of data is yet in digital form. Years and years of effort lie before us to complete the vast undertaking of eventually digitizing the millions of fragile records. These include photographs, conservation information, letters, hand-written notes, maps, bibliographic references, registration cards, and numerous other precious fragments of information yet to be entered into the database. In the next phase, partially

funded by a second IMLS grant, you can look forward to seeing hundreds of thousands of digitized photographs of our expeditions and artifacts. In addition, we are building a new component of the database for conservation records, which will be of huge benefit to our conservation laboratory staff. The current phase is but a foretaste of what is to come. Please, try it out. Researchers from around the world are already using it to

discover artifacts that they never knew we had. Quite a number of our readers were brave enough to have participated in our focus groups, whose feedback helped to shape the form that the interface has taken so far. We'd very much welcome feedback from everyone as we move forward in order to help shape the form that it takes going forth.

In the second quarter of the twentieth century, Breasted had similar visions.

Home > Search Our Collections
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Begin a New Search
Revise Your Search
Search Within Results

View citations

You searched for: **shulgi**

Research Archives
Museum Collection
Search All

Publication Date ▾
1 - 35 of 35 < >
Page 1 ▾
50 results per page ▾

Add results 1 - 35 to citations

#	Result
1	<p>The Chronology of Shulgi Again</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Cite R</p> <p>by Goetze, Albrecht (Author)</p> <p>Published in: Iraq 22:-- (1960), 151-156. Journal Stacks J/IRQ/22 Online Access via JSTOR</p>
2	<p>Inanna and Shulgi: A Sumerian Fertility Song</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Cite R</p> <p>by Kramer, S. N. (Author)</p> <p>Published in: Iraq 31:-- (1969), 18-23. Journal Stacks J/IRQ/31 Online Access via JSTOR</p>
3	<p>Shulgi-simti and Her Libation Place (ki-a-nag)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Cite R</p> <p>by Gomi, Tohru (Author)</p> <p>Published in: Orient: Report of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan 12:-- (--), --. Journal Stacks J/ORJ/12 Online --</p>
4	<p>Three Sulgi Hymns: Sumerian Royal Hymns Glorifying King Shulgi of Ur</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Cite R</p> <p>by Klein, Jacob (Author)</p> <p>--: --:-- Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1981 Monograph Stacks --</p>
5	<p>Review of: Klein, Jacob. Three Shulgi Hymns: Sumerian Royal Humns Glorifying King Shulgi of Ur</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Cite R</p> <p>by Frayne, Douglas R. (Author)</p> <p>Published in: Bibliotheca Orientalis 40:-- (1983), 92-101.</p>

Refine Results

Format

- Journal Volume Article (21)
- Monograph Section (10)
- Series Volume (2)
- Series Volume Section (2)

Authors

- Klein, Jacob (6)
- Frayne, Douglas R. (2)
- Gomi, Tohru (2)
- Peterson, Jeremiah (2)
- Yuhong, Wu (2)
- [More](#)

Publication Year

- Last 10 years (2)
- Past 50 years (17)
- Older than 50 years (1)

Journals

No facets

Series

No facets



Assistant Registrar Susan Allison enters data on recently registered objects from the Oriental Institute's collections directly into the new Integrated Database (photo by Anna Ressler)

In his book *The Oriental Institute*, he recounted the plans for an "Archaeological Corpus project," a card catalog consisting of a combination of object data, illustrations, and bibliographic information organized according to various criteria. Comparing the project to the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, Breasted said, "What the Dictionary is doing for a language should likewise be done for the whole range of evidence surviving from the ancient oriental civilizations as a whole." Breasted believed that "The project is one of the most important in the whole range of humanistic research" and cherished "the hope that the larger and more comprehensive plan ... envisaged may eventually be carried out by the Institute" (*The Oriental Institute*, pp. 406-07). At long last his pioneering vision is coming to fruition.

Sunday Films

Join us on the following Sunday afternoons to enjoy the best in documentary films on the ancient Middle East at the Oriental Institute. Unless otherwise noted, films begin at 2:00 PM and running times range from 30 to 50 minutes. Admission is free. Docents will be available in the galleries following each film screening.



Building Pharaoh's Chariot

August 11
2:00 PM

3,600-year-old reliefs in Egyptian tombs and temples depict pharaohs and warriors proudly riding into battle on horse-drawn chariots. Some historians claim that the chariot launched a technological and strategic revolution and was the secret weapon behind Egypt's greatest era of conquest, known as the New Kingdom. But was the Egyptian chariot really a revolutionary design? How decisive a role did it play in the bloody battles of the ancient world? In *Building Pharaoh's Chariot*, a team of archaeologists, engineers, woodworkers, and horse trainers join forces to build and test two highly accurate replicas of Egyptian royal chariots. They discover astonishingly advanced features, including spoked wheels, springs, shock absorbers, anti-roll bars, and even a convex-shaped rear-view mirror, leading one of them to compare the level of design to the engineering standards of 1930s-era Buicks! By driving our pair of replicas to their limits in the desert outside Cairo, NOVA's experts test the claim that the chariot marks a crucial turning point in ancient culture.

Braving Iraq

September 15
2:00 PM

Since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, news about the fate and future of this Middle Eastern country has been at the forefront of our national consciousness, making an impact on our daily lives, appearing in every newspaper and news program, the subject of endless numbers of personal and political discussions. But if you think you've heard every imaginable story about life within Iraqi borders, think again. There is at least one major element in this geopolitical drama that the American media has mostly overlooked, and it lies at the cross-section of regional politics and the natural environment. Nature's *Braving Iraq* unravels this tale about what was once one of the richest and most important wetlands in the world — from its virtual destruction by Saddam Hussein's regime to its exciting, new prospects for a miraculous recovery.