

News & Notes

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IN THIS ISSUE

A New Era for the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary	4
Hervé Reculeau	
The Chicago Hittite Dig-tionary	10
Theo van den Hout	
The Tomb of Khentika, Saqqara	14
Anna-Latifa Mourad-Cizek	
Faculty Update	20
Susanne Paulus	
My Favorite Object	24
Shirlee Hoffman	
Where History Meets Family History	26
Adult Education Classes	30

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ON THE COVER: Eflatun Pinar in Türkiye.
Photo by Theo van den Hout.

THIS PAGE: Eflatun Pinar in 1887
(see page 11).





MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

I am finding myself easily distracted by the beautiful view outside my window. It is the summer field season at Tayinat, and I am on-site at our bustling expedition compound. We are now three and a half years removed from the devastating earthquakes that hit this region in winter 2023, and the signs of healing and restoration are everywhere. Our prefabricated “container camp” is now fully furnished and functional; the grounds are literally bursting with foliage, brilliant flower arrangements, and the saplings of almost a dozen tree species; and our meals are supplemented with tomatoes (organic!) from our own garden. The energy and optimism of our team, meanwhile, is palpable, and our research mission once again the animating focus of their work.

This past year has seen a surge in ISAC research that engages fundamentally with the computational and data sciences. The inauguration of the ISAC Data Research Center under Foy Scalf’s leadership has been a catalyst, helping conceptualize and launch numerous exciting initiatives. The Electronic Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, or eCAD, is one such project. As Hervé Reculeau, associate professor of Assyriology, writes in this issue, the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary—a collective effort of over a century of foundational scholarship—is the definitive guide and repository of knowledge about Mesopotamian language, literature, and culture, and it is justifiably celebrated as one of the great achievements of humanistic scholarship in the twentieth century. The creation of a fully digital, searchable, and evolving resource that builds on this remarkable legacy has long been a desire of ISAC’s Assyriologists. As Professor Reculeau reports, advances in artificial intelligence have now brought this elusive goal within reach, promising to transform the field of Assyriology and opening new avenues of scholarly inquiry that were once thought impossible. This issue’s article by Theo van den Hout, Arthur and Joann Rasmussen Professor Emeritus of Hittite and Anatolian Languages and executive editor of the Chicago Hittite Dictionary (another of ISAC’s long-running philological projects), also illustrates the important role these vast repositories of knowledge play as cultural encyclopedias, bringing material culture and texts together to achieve deeper insight and understanding—in this case, of the enigmatic Bronze Age Hittite monument in south-central Türkiye known as Eflatun Pınar (“Plato’s Spring”).

ISAC’s faculty also continue to initiate exciting new field research projects. Anna-Latifa Mourad-Cizek, assistant professor of Egyptian archaeology, reports on her recently launched investigation at the tomb of Khentika, a large mastaba in the Saqqara cemetery associated with the pyramid of Teti, the first king of the Sixth Dynasty in the Egyptian Old Kingdom. In this issue’s faculty profile, meanwhile, Susanne Paulus, associate professor of Assyriology and curator of the ISAC Tablet Collection, describes her research on the administration of one of Mesopotamia’s great religious centers, ancient Nippur, which she was able to visit in 2025, fulfilling a lifelong dream. As Professor Paulus notes, the oversight and management of the annual harvests at Nippur produced a rich documentary trail and a wealth of knowledge about the economic life of the community. This study, part of a larger investigation of Mesopotamian economic institutions during the Kassite period, will appear in her forthcoming book, *Banking with Barley*, which was recently awarded a prestigious fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies.

For this issue’s featured ISAC Museum object, dedicated ISAC volunteer Shirlee Hoffman shares one of her favorites: a cast copy of the Rosetta Stone, which, for her, exemplifies some of the underlying complexities of the Museum’s collection.

Finally, I am pleased to report three recent faculty promotions and recognitions: Jana Matuszak, associate professor of Sumerology with tenure; Augusta McMahon, Glen A. Lloyd Distinguished Service Professor of Mesopotamian Archaeology; and Brian Muhs, full professor of Egyptology. I also wish to highlight the publication of *Divine Enlightenment: The Making of a Mesopotamian King and His Legacy*, by longtime ISAC supporter Philip Halpern. Please join me in celebrating these important achievements.

TIMOTHY P. HARRISON
Director

A NEW ERA FOR THE CHICAGO ASSYRIAN DICTIONARY

by Hervé Reculeau



Chicago Assyrian Dictionary research associate Miguel Civil examining cuneiform tablets in the ISAC storeroom, circa 1960s.

For nearly a century, the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary (CAD) has been the definitive guide to the language of ancient Mesopotamia—the “Oxford English Dictionary” of Akkadian. Now, more than a hundred years after the project began, it is entering a new era: a fully digital, searchable, and evolving resource powered by artificial intelligence (AI). One hundred five years after its inception, seventy years after the first CAD volume came off the press, and fifteen years after the publication of volume U/W, which marked the completion of its print edition, we are on the cusp of launching an electronic version of the dictionary that will transform the field of Assyriology and the ways through which we understand one of the world’s earliest civilizations (fig. 1).

When the CAD was completed in 2011, it was legitimately celebrated as one of the greatest achievements of the humanities during the twentieth century (Solash 2011). However, even then, scholars knew that its story was not over and that, one day, this monument of Assyriology would have to reinvent itself to keep up with changes in research methodologies, which increasingly rely on digital databases of texts instead of, or in addition to, print publications. Likewise, an up-to-date dictionary needs to account for the ever-expanding corpus of cuneiform documents, as well as new and refined understandings of Akkadian words proposed by scholars. With approximately 10 million words, the Akkadian corpus is one of the best-attested languages of antiquity, orders of magnitude vaster than the other Middle Eastern languages written in cuneiform (Streck 2010). To this dataset can be added the more than 300,000 words of Eblaite and other

dialects from third- and early-second-millennium Syria, which were not integrated into the CAD because they were discovered and/or understood only after the 1960s, when the project was well underway and the dictionary corpus already set. The scale of the data makes any project for a comprehensive dictionary of the Akkadian language and its two main dialects, Assyrian and Babylonian, daunting.

The sheer monumentality of the CAD only confirms the difficulty of the task. Upon completion, the print edition of the CAD, which had seen four editors-in-charge supervise its development since the resumption of activities after World War II—I. J. Gelb, A. Leo Oppenheim, Erica Reiner, and Martha T. Roth (figs. 2–4)—spanned over 10,000 pages in twenty-one volumes divided into twenty-six physical books (fig. 5; because of their size, the volumes for letters A, M, and N were split into two books, and that for letter Š into three, while I/J and U/W were each grouped into one volume), and it covered some 28,000 lemmas, with attestations spanning from the late third millennium BCE to the first century CE. The tens of thousands of cuneiform tablets and inscriptions that were used to build the corpus of citations for the dictionary entries, which currently exist only in the form of index cards that were produced at various stages of the editorial process, represent an unparalleled corpus for the study of Akkadian that, even though in need of updating, remains invaluable.

While I have wanted to restart the CAD as an online dictionary ever since joining the University of Chicago in 2015, it



Figure 1. Preliminary designs for the CAD database by Scott Bell and Afraaz Ali of Stauffer.



Figure 2. Ignace Jay Gelb.



Figure 3. Erica Reiner and Leo Oppenheim.



Figure 4. Martha Roth.

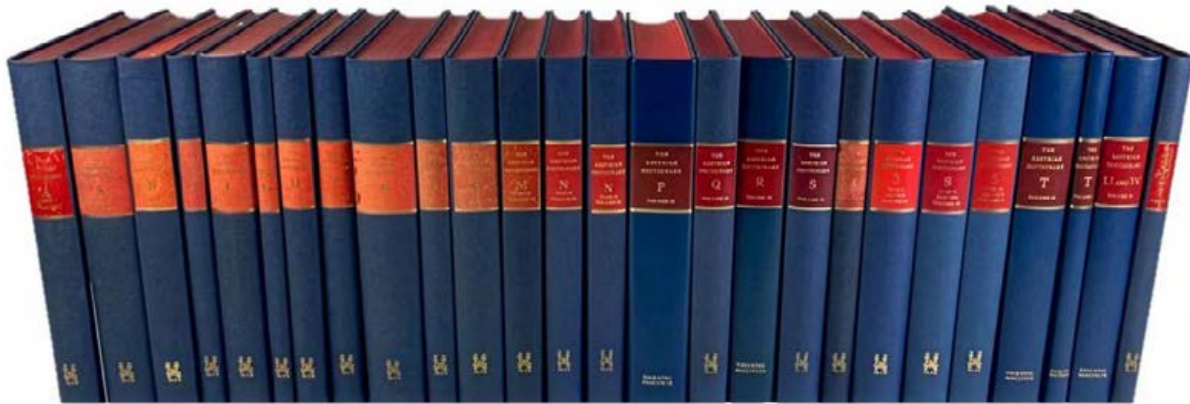


Figure 5. The twenty-one volumes (twenty-six physical books) of the original Chicago Assyrian Dictionary.

was only in academic year 2025–26 that this desire could finally become reality, thanks to the AI Pillar initiative “AI and Human-Environment History: Ancient Cultures, Modern Insights” (Alivisatos 2025) spearheaded by professor of Near Eastern archaeology and ISAC director Timothy Harrison in collaboration with the University’s Research Computing Center (RCC).

In many respects, the history of the “adventure of great dimension” that was the CAD—to quote Erica Reiner (2002), herself quoting Benno Landsberger—mirrors that of the institute that has been its academic home since the beginning, and it is only fitting that this new era also corresponds to ISAC’s commitment to computational research and the use of cutting-edge technology to address humanistic questions (UChicago News 2025).

The brainchild of ISAC’s founder and first director, James Henry Breasted, the CAD was officially funded in 1921 and announced to the world as “the Assyrian-Babylonian dictionary” in 1922 (Breasted 1922). As an Egyptologist, Breasted saw the need to develop for the languages and cultures of ancient Mesopotamia an equivalent to the Egyptian dictionary that was then being prepared in Berlin, drawing inspiration also from James Murray’s *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED). From the beginning, the build-

ing that would host the Institute was designed with the needs of the CAD in mind, giving it its distinctive pattern of interconnected offices on the third floor and an expansive research library. What was originally considered to be a matter of years turned into an endeavor almost a century long, and Breasted’s vision was dramatically altered in the process to reflect the choices and preferences (often contradictory) of the dictionary’s main actors.

Much has been written about the incredible human and humanistic adventure that was the CAD, its notorious interpersonal conflicts and rifts, and how it forever changed Akkadian lexicography (Gelb 1964; Stolper 1991; Reiner 2002; Roth 2010). As the current editor-in-charge for the dictionary’s new era, I prefer to focus on two founding principles that have set the CAD apart from all the other existing dictionaries of Akkadian, and that reflect the personalities and academic priorities of its founding editors, Leo Oppenheim and Jay Gelb. The first principle, which we owe to the former, is that the CAD has always tried to situate words in their context, with citations and translations that reflect the broader cultural milieu (Oppenheim 1966); the second, for which we are indebted to the latter, is the CAD’s attachment to the principles of historical linguistics and the diachronic develop-

ment of the language, and to the aspiration for complete inclusion of the cuneiform record within the CAD's corpus (Gelb 1964)—a dream that proved to be unachievable with the technology of the time but anticipated the turn toward corpus linguistics that lexicography would take in the final decades of the twentieth century, as personal computers became more accessible. These founding principles shaped the dictionary for ninety years, and they will continue to shape its digital future in a uniquely distinct way.

In the fall of 2025, a small team at ISAC—comprising myself; Foy Scalf, director of the ISAC Data Research Center (DRC) and Research Archives Library; and Assyriology PhD candidate Christian Borgen (joined in spring 2026 by another PhD student, Anthony Ray), assisted by University of Chicago undergraduate and master's students and ISAC volunteers—started laying the groundwork for the digitization of the CAD as it currently exists in print. Through hundreds of hours of work by team members, this “electronic Chicago Assyrian Dictionary” (eCAD), as it has come to be known internally, is the first of several platforms and tools that we aim to provide to the community of scholars and the general public.

Our first task was to turn the existing PDF files of the CAD (available online in an open-access format as part of ISAC's Electronic Publications Initiative, and most of them scans) into a fully machine-readable text. Optical character recognition (OCR) of the scanned volumes only partially managed to recognize the complex formatting of the CAD, and the gargantuan efforts required to correct these digitized files manually has always been the main stumbling block to creating an online CAD. Recent advances in AI have made it possible to convert the dictionary into a highly accurate digital text in a fraction of the time previously required—turning what once seemed an insurmountable task into a practical reality. This is where the recent rapid development of large language models became a game changer: as part of the AI Pillars initiative, we partnered with RCC to leverage the technology using Anthropic's Claude, which in our test phase provided the best results (fig. 6).

Thanks to research data scientist Himanshi Yadav's expertise in engineering prompts to guide the AI model toward greater accuracy, we were able, after just a few months of trial and error, to produce a fully digital version of a twenty-page sample of various CAD volumes in which, on average, more than 98 percent of the characters and 95 percent of the words were correctly identified. By January 2026, roughly three months into the project, the dictionary was completely digitized. The final cleanup of the data, which is currently underway, consists of a manual proofreading of all the files by the ISAC team, which, though still tedious, is only a tiny portion of the work that would have been required if we had to manually correct the original PDF files. Using a dedicated platform custom-made for us by Mohsen Zand at RCC, we should have a fully operational eCAD—that is, a fully Unicode and machine-readable version of the printed dictionary, with only residual errors in the encoding of the data—by the time this issue of *News & Notes* is published (fig. 7). Making this digital CAD accessible to the public will be the first step, but by no means the last, in the evolution from the printed CAD to the purely digital, ever-evolving CAD of the future.

OCR Performance Comparison

Prompt 13: Sonnet 4.5 vs Opus 4.5 vs Opus 4.6

Metric	Sonnet 4.5 CER %	Sonnet 4.5 WER %	Opus 4.5 CER %	Opus 4.5 WER %	Opus 4.6 CER %	Opus 4.6 WER %
Average	3.57	10.61	1.60	5.29	1.45	5.75
Std Dev	1.45	3.24	1.02	2.40	0.69	2.29
Min	1.35	4.76	0.55	1.94	0.53	1.81
Max	6.51	18.85	4.50	10.41	3.59	9.01

■ Sonnet 4.5
 ■ Opus 4.5
 ■ Opus 4.6

CER = Character Error Rate | WER = Word Error Rate | Lower values indicate better performance

Figure 6. Error rate analysis for Claude models performed by Himanshi Yadav.

The next step, which we started in the spring of 2026, consists of turning these data into a database, which will be the engine of the future online dictionary. One of the key features of the original CAD is the way meaningful information is presented, for each entry, in at most five sections: heading, lexical section, semantic section, discussion, and bibliography. Each of these sections is identifiable through different typography, formatting, and/or positioning of the data. While such characteristics allow the metadata to be immediately identified by the human brain, they do not carry over to the computer simply as a result of the digitization process. We therefore have to turn them into discrete fields, such as the lemma itself, the part of speech it belongs to, whether it is a homonym, its distribution over time, its various spellings, its meanings in English according to specific uses, the sources cited, both in Akkadian and in translation, their references, and so on. Here again, Himanshi Yadav's expertise (this time in natural language processing) will help automate much of the work and fast-track the process. In parallel, we are building the database that will host these newly atomized data, effectively turning the printed CAD into a fully modular relational database in which all items can be linked and queried, as well as the web application through which the dictionary will be accessible to the public. Thanks to the generous support of Flora Yelda and the Yelda Family Fund at ISAC, we were able to hire the Los Angeles firm Stauffer, which is currently redesigning the ISAC website, to do much of the technical work in collaboration with ISAC's new web application developer, Tommy Thomas. If things go well, we hope to launch the online CAD publicly by the end of 2026.

Once we are done turning the CAD into a fully searchable online database that anyone in the world can access freely, the promises made decades ago by some of its pioneers will be fulfilled in a way that their authors could hardly have conceived of;

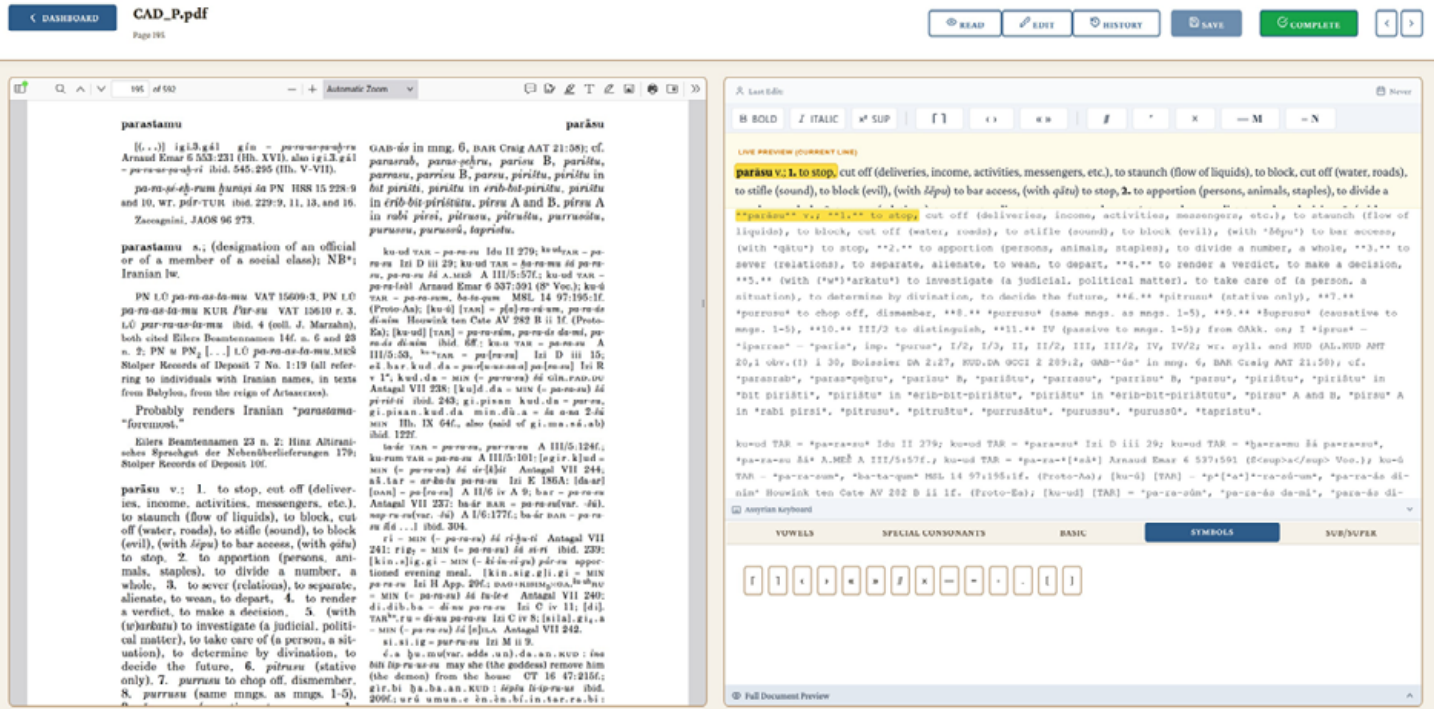


Figure 7. Platform made by Mohsen Zand for manual corrections to the digital dictionary dataset.



Figure 8. A Chicago Assyrian Dictionary index card.

not only will it be possible to look up the meaning of Akkadian words, as in the print dictionary, but reverse searches on the English meaning will also be possible (other languages, including Middle Eastern ones, will be added at a later stage). Not only will words be presented through their diachronic development, but the lexicon and its specific meanings attested for a given period of time will be readily available through simple filtering of the results. A researcher will, within seconds, be able to trace how the meanings of words changed across centuries or how related terms clustered in specific regions. This does not mean, of course, that our work will be done—in fact, we anticipate that the new online CAD will never be completed, as it will keep evolving alongside the understanding of the Akkadian language, in the same way the OED continues to evolve. One of the important future tasks will be to make corrections and updates to the existing data, as many new meanings and discussions that have appeared since the original volumes were published need to be added, and some meanings currently in the dictionary will need to be changed or even removed.

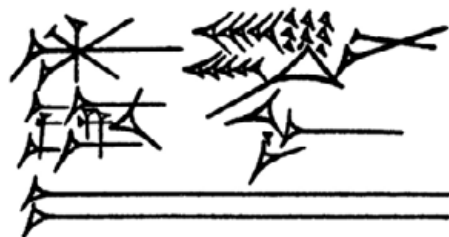
To integrate the complete corpus of cuneiform texts used for the original dictionary into the online environment, we are digitizing the index cards used to produce the printed volumes (fig. 8), which will ultimately be linked to the lemmas—that way, a word will be presented not only within a short citation, as is currently the case, but in connection to the whole text in which it appears. Updating the corpus (and fulfilling Gelb's dream of a comprehensive corpus of Akkadian) will also require adding to the existing corpus the many texts that have appeared since the CAD volumes were published, a task in which we hope to partner with colleagues around the world who have been developing specialized databases for specific subcorpora of the cuneiform record—discussions are underway with some of the leading projects, but still only in a very preliminary phase. Another area of development will be to include as much of the correspondence and memoranda related to the editing and publication of the original dictionary as deemed necessary, in conjunction with ISAC's head archivist, Allie Scholten, and the ISAC DRC.

In its new form, the CAD will be no longer a static reference work but a living resource—one that continues to grow alongside new discoveries and opens the languages of ancient Mesopotamia to scholars, students, and the public in entirely new ways. More than just an electronic version of the existing dictionary, the CAD of the future will be a multimedia environment, fully accessible online and integrated with ISAC's other digital resources and partners across the world. Through the use

of cutting-edge technologies such as AI and natural language processing, the new CAD will allow users to investigate in innovative ways the linguistic, cultural, and historical legacy of ancient Mesopotamia as preserved in its written words on clay, stone, and other materials.

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The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary "logo."

THE CHICAGO HITTITE DIG-TIONARY: WHERE WORDS AND MATERIAL CULTURE MEET

by Theo van den Hout



Eflatun Pınar with the still partially submerged mountain gods. Photo by the author.



Figure 1. The Eflatun Pinar monument in 1887. Albumen print by John Henry Haynes. Image courtesy of the Harvard University Fine Arts Library.

In south-central Türkiye, in a barren landscape, seemingly in the middle of nowhere and recalling the monolith in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, a wall of stones some 7 meters high and 7 meters wide rises out of a pool of water. The pool is an artificial and somewhat asymmetrical structure measuring roughly 34 × 31 meters. The monument, called Eflatun Pinar ("Plato's Spring") in Turkish, dates to the period of the Hittite kingdom (ca. 1650–1200 BCE), and a single glance suffices to see that it has suffered badly over the millennia (fig. 1). The godlike figures making up the sculpted wall are badly worn. The monument's state became painfully clear when joint excavations by the Konya Archaeological Museum and the German Archaeological Institute finally drained the pool and brought to light the lowest tier of sculpted gods, who turned out to be much better preserved because they had spent most of their lives underwater (fig. 2). They weren't even known until 1996, when the excavations started.

The pool is fed by a strong karstic spring located almost immediately next to the wall's northeastern corner and is an example of a type of Hittite water management structure that we find at several places throughout the country. Many subterranean watercourses and the places where they burst to the surface are often marked by reliefs and sculptures because such springs were regarded as divine, the realm of mountain gods. In Hittite art, these mountain gods are represented as wearing a conical

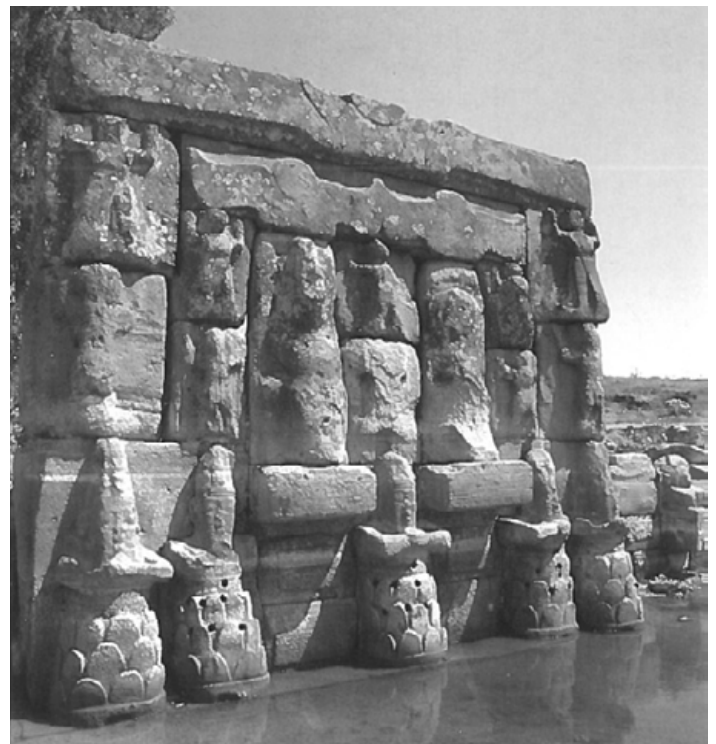


Figure 2. The Eflatun Pinar monument as excavated (Bachmann and Özenir 2004, 86 fig. 2).

hat resembling a mountain top reaching into the heavens, while their lower body—rising from unknown, earthly depths—shows a mountain structure spurting water like the spring in our example. The Hittite engineers and designers made use of the strong current by drilling holes in the “skirts” of the mountain gods and forcing the water, diverted through the side of the wall, through these holes, thus turning the facade into a veritable fountain (fig. 3).

The monument as a whole is a typical piece of Hittite visual culture, with a high degree of symmetry and built of tiers of animal-headed beings surrounding the two main deities of the Hittite pantheon, the Storm God and the Sun Goddess. On the left, the former can be recognized by his high, conical headdress,

while the Sun Goddess is characterized by the halo around her head. Visually, each tier between and around them literally supports the one above it, held up by the raised arms of the animal-headed creatures. The top consists of a huge, winged sundisk. A closer look makes it clear that the tips of the wings and the upper part of the disk itself are cut off, indicating that at least one more stone layer was originally on top. Beneath the large sundisk are two smaller ones, each of them marking the place where the Storm God and the Sun Goddess are sitting. As far as can still be recognized, the two largest animal-headed creatures have leopard heads; others may have been bull headed, but the poor state of preservation often makes it hard to see any details. A perfect example of this kind of structure—although likewise

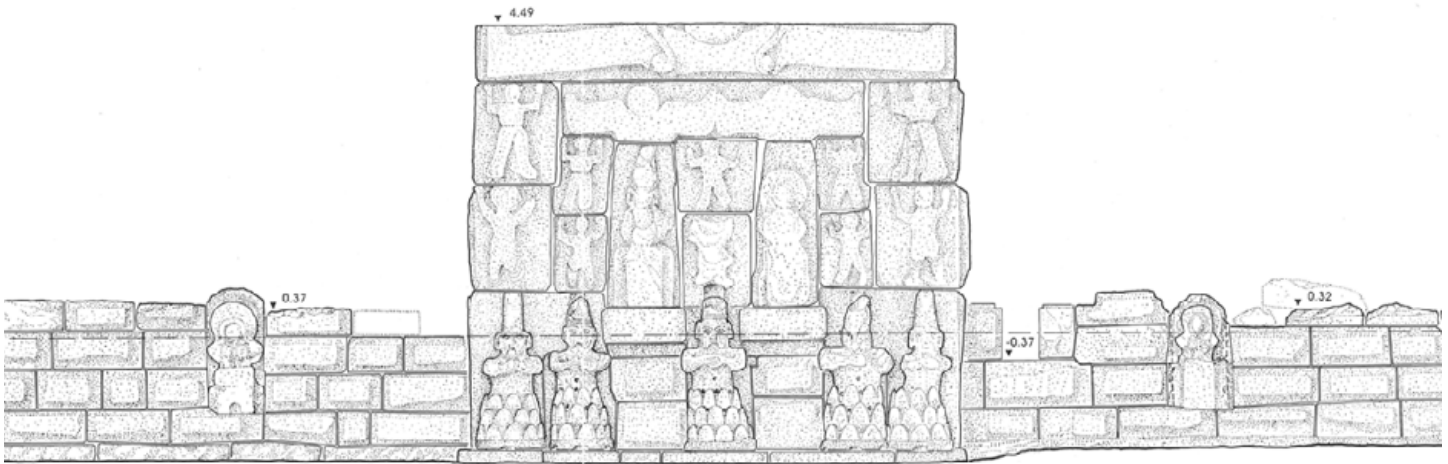


Figure 3. Drawing of the northern side of the pool with the sculpted wall and two goddesses on either side (Bachmann and Özenir 2004, fig. 32).



Figure 4. LEFT, Megiddo ivory ISACM A22292. RIGHT, reconstruction by D. Alvarado (Alexander 1991, 163).

very damaged—is one of the so-called Megiddo ivories in ISAC's own Anatolian gallery (fig. 4). Although excavated at Megiddo in northern Israel, it must have come there as part of a diplomatic gift exchange in the Late Bronze Age, because it was unmistakably manufactured by a Hittite artist.

The facade is not the only artwork of the Eflatun Pinar monument. On either side of the sculpted wall, two goddesses are rendered as if sitting on the edge of the pool, waiting to jump in (fig. 3). On the eastern wall (and probably originally also on the facing western wall, but now lost) is a relief of two male figures; although the upper portion of the relief is lost, it probably depicted a god taking a king by the hand. On the southern side, opposite the facade, was a sizable (6 × 8 meter) platform with, again, the Storm God and the Sun Goddess as a divine pair, although the figures may also represent the king and queen. Finally, when archaeologists drained the pool in 1996, they discovered large sculptures of two couchant, roaring lions and no fewer than twelve deer or bovines, likewise reclining on the ground with their legs tucked under them. On the basis of the remaining architecture and all the adjacent sculptures, the excavators reasonably, perhaps even convincingly, imagined a complex of a grandeur whose scope and scale were almost unmatched in the history of the Hittite kingdom. The only known structure comparable in size, and surpassing Eflatun Pinar in artistic finesse, would be the famous, open-air rock sanctuary of Yazılıkaya, right next to the capital Hattusa.

But all in all, the Eflatun Pinar complex remains mute, a silent yet fascinating witness of Hittite state religion. Are there any texts that might shed more light on it, that might give it a voice of some kind? In general, it is exceedingly difficult to link material culture—that is, individual objects or sometimes even entire sites—to texts. Hittite texts do mention objects that were dedicated to gods and played a role in the cult, such as “silver fists” or “silver stags”—that is, silver cups in those shapes used to toast the gods. If you have been to either the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston or the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, you may have seen examples in the galleries there, but are they the actual ones our texts talk about? On a much larger scale, when archaeologists uncover a new site and find tablets there, it is not always easy to identify the ancient name of the site in those texts.

“SPELL OF THE STONES”

One Hittite text bears a more than coincidental resemblance to what we see at Eflatun Pinar. It is part of a collection of benedictions for the Hittite royal couple, a collection of short prayers or invocations, each independent of the others. One of them is called the “Spell of the Stones,” and it reads as follows:

The well of the Sun Goddess has come into being. How is it [made?] From the bottom up it is built with stones, cla[d] in [t]in(?). Leopards guard it while its water [...] flows from the spring. May the stones protect him, the *lab[arn]a*, the king, and [may?] he, O Sun Deity, be made (of) iron!

They're making the well of the Storm God. “How is the spring made?” With copper it is built, with tin it is

plastered, in iron it is clad. The Storm God's mother has twice gone [dow]n into it, and she has sat down in it. For the Storm God she is his mother, for the *[lab]arna* she is his mooring.

Spell of the stones, finished.

The tablet and the language on it clearly date to the Hittite Old Kingdom (1650–1400 BCE). The passage takes the form of a dialogue, with somebody wanting to know “how the well is made.” The answer provides a description that, in some points, strikingly recalls the monument of Eflatun Pinar. The prayer is in two parts, but they clearly belong together under a single title. The first part prays for the stones to protect the king and for him to be made of iron—stone and iron probably being the two hardest materials the Hittites could think of. Stone is what their world was made of, and they became masters at shaping and working it. Meteoric iron, on the other hand, was seen not only as a precious metal hurled down from heaven by the Storm God himself, but unbreakable as well. A frequent formula in Old Hittite legal texts says: “The word of the *tabarna*, the Great King, is made of iron, indisputable, unbreakable, and whoever changes it, his head will be chopped off!” The first words of the first paragraph of the “Spell of the Stones” attribute the spring to the Sun Deity and explain the heavy presence of the no fewer than three winged sundisks on the central panel.

The second paragraph talks about the “well of the Storm God.” For that reason, scholars have assumed two separate installations, one for the Sun Goddess and one for the Storm God. But given the consistent duality of the monument, with the two deities prominent not only on the sculpted wall but also on the platform across the pool, this assumption is unjustified. Moreover, the line about the Storm God's mother having twice “gone [dow]n into it” (i.e., the pool) and “sat down in it” echoes exactly the two goddesses on either side of the wall. In conclusion, the text and Eflatun Pinar have a lot in common: a well or pool with water flowing from a spring; the two heads of the Hittite pantheon, the Sun Goddess and the Storm God; the latter's mother twice; leopards guarding them; the king; and the stones of which the monument was built and that give the spell its name.

Ideally, philology (the study of texts and language) and archaeology go hand in hand. Texts can give objects or even entire sites a voice and unlock necessary historical context. The Chicago Hittite Dictionary aims to be a cultural encyclopedia, bringing material culture and texts together whenever possible. In the case of Eflatun Pinar, the text places the monument within the rich cult of the two most important Hittite deities, provides valuable information about its potential date, and gives an impression of the cosmic forces associated with it and the role it played in the religious propaganda of the Hittite state.

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NEW PROJECT AT THE TOMB OF KHENTIKA, SAQQARA

by Anna-Latifa Mourad-Cizek



The interior of the Khentika mastaba as viewed upon entry, with its reconstructed limestone walls and wooden roof. Photo by Jack Bettar.

A new project was launched in July 2025 at the tomb of Khentika at Saqqara, located in the cemetery associated with the pyramid of Teti, the first king of the Egyptian Sixth Dynasty. Jointly directed by me and Professor Naguib Kanawati of Macquarie University, the project's main objectives are to record, publish, conserve, and restore the mastaba so that it can potentially be opened to the public. We have thus far conducted two seasons at the tomb, the second one in January 2026 (fig. 1), and have made great progress in documenting its scenes, inscriptions, and architectural elements. However, much work remains.

The tomb was excavated, documented, and likely reconstructed by C. M. Firth and B. Gunn in 1922–23. It was first published thirty years later by T. G. H. James (1953). His report presents the most complete published record of the mastaba so far, though James himself notes that he was unable to clear the entire tomb because of limited time and resources (James 1953, 1). Subsequently, the tomb was used for storage by the local inspectorate, with only a few scholars accessing it for research purposes. In the past decade, the stored items were moved to nearby magazines, making the tomb available for renewed archaeological work.

We discovered the mastaba partly buried under layers of sand, especially around its exterior (fig. 2). Our first season was dedicated to clearing the southern facade and the eastern facade, the latter with the tomb's entrance, as well as cleaning the interior. In the process we came across several objects, including inscribed limestone fragments, beads, and pottery sherds, that we dated to different periods across pharaonic history (fig. 3). The objects outside the mastaba could have been deposited at

any point in the past, with some perhaps belonging to the nearby mortuary temple of the Teti pyramid; those inside were feasibly left behind when the chapel was used for storage.

The tomb's interior, aboveground chapel contains twelve rooms, which include a pillared hall, two offering chapels, three false doors, and a serdab. Several of the rooms' limestone walls are beautifully decorated in high-quality carved reliefs that preserve a variety of scenes depicting activities such as manicuring and pedicuring (fig. 4) and pottery making. Many walls, however, are incomplete and fragmentary, and a few have been damaged since James's exploration, having been subjected to rain and sand that entered via exposed areas of the reconstructed roof (fig. 5). Several of the damaged areas required urgent attention in our first season, and we collaborated with Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities conservators at Saqqara to clean them.

The mastaba further features two original shafts, each leading to a decorated burial chamber. Parts of the chambers' walls are now extremely fragile and in danger of collapsing (fig. 6). Fragments of decorated scenes and inscriptions were also found strewn across the floors. In January 2026, we began documenting the fragments from the southern (main) burial chamber of Khentika, and we were surprised to learn that the majority of them do not belong to the tomb itself. Like the fragments left in the aboveground chapel, it is feasible that they, too, were items kept in the tomb for storage.

After two seasons of work on the tomb, we have confirmed that it undeniably belonged to Khentika, a vizier who served pharaohs Teti and Pepy I in the Sixth Dynasty of the Old Kingdom (ca. 2305–2228 BCE). Historically the period was politically



Figure 1. The team and members of the local inspectorate at Saqqara, standing in front of the tomb of Khentika in January 2026.



Figure 2. The eastern facade of the mastaba of Khentika, showing the uncleared sand covering the exterior in January 2025. The remains of the Teti pyramid are visible at left behind the mastaba. Photo by Jack Bettar.



Figure 3. Fragment SQ_KHEN25_81 found in the accumulated surface debris at the southern facade of the mastaba of Khentika. Photo by Anna-Latifa Mourad-Cizek.



Figure 4. A scene of manicuring and pedicuring in Room I of the mastaba of Khentika. Photo by Dr. Osama Bassiouny.



Figure 5. Detail of the south wall of Room IX, showing water damage from rain. Photo by Anna-Latifa Mourad-Cizek.

unstable, witnessing the possible assassination of Teti, his succession by the enigmatic Weserkare, and the following ascension of Pepy I to the throne. Khentika, however, was able to retain his important role across this transitional period in ways that we still need to explore. To decorate his tomb he commissioned the artist Mesi, who also designed two other famous tombs in the Teti cemetery, those belonging to Ankhmahor and Nikauisesi

(Kanawati and Hassan 1997; Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000). Unsurprisingly, all three tombs share artistic details, but they also have one other surprising element in common: the absence of elite women. Women are not represented anywhere in the tombs of Ankhmahor and Nikauisesi, and we have yet to find any scene or fragment that depicts female family members in the tomb of Khentika. Since women held important roles at the royal court



Figure 6. East wall of the southern (main) burial chamber of Khentika, showing damaged areas. Photo by Dr. Osama Bassiouny.

of the time, their omission from these tombs, and by apparently the same artist, also deserves further investigation.

Beyond its historical significance, the tomb also presents fascinating architectural details. James postulated that it was constructed in two separate phases. However, our recent architectural examination revealed an even more complex history. Not only was one of the walls (the east wall in Room II) likely constructed using reused blocks from at least one other, as-yet-unidentified tomb, but the tomb's northern shaft did not originally lead to the decorated burial chamber published by James. Instead, a rough opening was cut into one of the shaft's walls, giving access, we now believe, to the burial chamber of another Khentika buried nearby. Following its Sixth Dynasty construction and these later modifications to the northern burial chamber, the tomb was then reused for burial shafts, likely in the Late Period. Incised graffiti and hieratic writing also remain on the chapel walls, offering pertinent clues about the continued importance of the tomb in the Saqqara landscape across antiquity.

Work remains to be done at and on the tomb of Khentika. Its walls, roof, and burial chambers urgently need conservation and restoration, and the enigma of the family of Khentika and its

connections to turbulent times still require examination. In the forthcoming season, we plan to inch closer to our project objectives by clearing the mastaba's western and northern facades and by continuing to document the many finds and fragments from its burial chambers. Pending funding, we also intend to begin the complex restoration of the tomb, first focusing on the walls of its undecorated rooms. Eventually, we envisage a restored tomb that is open to visitors to the Teti cemetery at Saqqara, with its physical remains preserved and digital assets of our work available for generations to come.

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PROMOTIONS AND RECOGNITIONS

Please join us in celebrating the recent promotions of three ISAC faculty members.

JANA MATUSZAK

Associate Professor of Sumerology with Tenure

Jana Matuszak is a Sumerologist with a research focus on editing, translating, and analyzing Sumerian literature. She is particularly interested in recovering lesser or hitherto unknown texts—an undertaking that requires close engagement with original cuneiform manuscripts, which she has studied in collections across Europe, America, and Asia. Her work, which combines basic philological research with analytical methods derived from literary and cultural studies, has led her to explore intricate problems of grammar and lexicography as well as broader questions about gender, law, religion, and poetics in ancient Iraq.



AUGUSTA McMAHON

Glen A. Lloyd Distinguished Service Professor in the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, the Department of Middle Eastern Studies, and the College

Augusta McMahon is professor of Mesopotamian archaeology in the University of Chicago's Department of Middle Eastern Studies and ISAC. She returned to Chicago in autumn 2022 after teaching at the University of Cambridge, in the United Kingdom, since 1995. She is currently the director of ISAC's Nippur excavations in southern Iraq and has excavated widely in Iraq, Syria, Türkiye, Egypt, and Yemen, including directing excavation projects at Chagar Bazar and Tell Brak in Syria and at Lagash in southern Iraq. Her research focuses on late prehistoric and historic Mesopotamia during the fifth through first millennia BCE, particularly issues of early urbanism and urban boundaries, social stress and warfare, demographic diversity, and sensory archaeology.

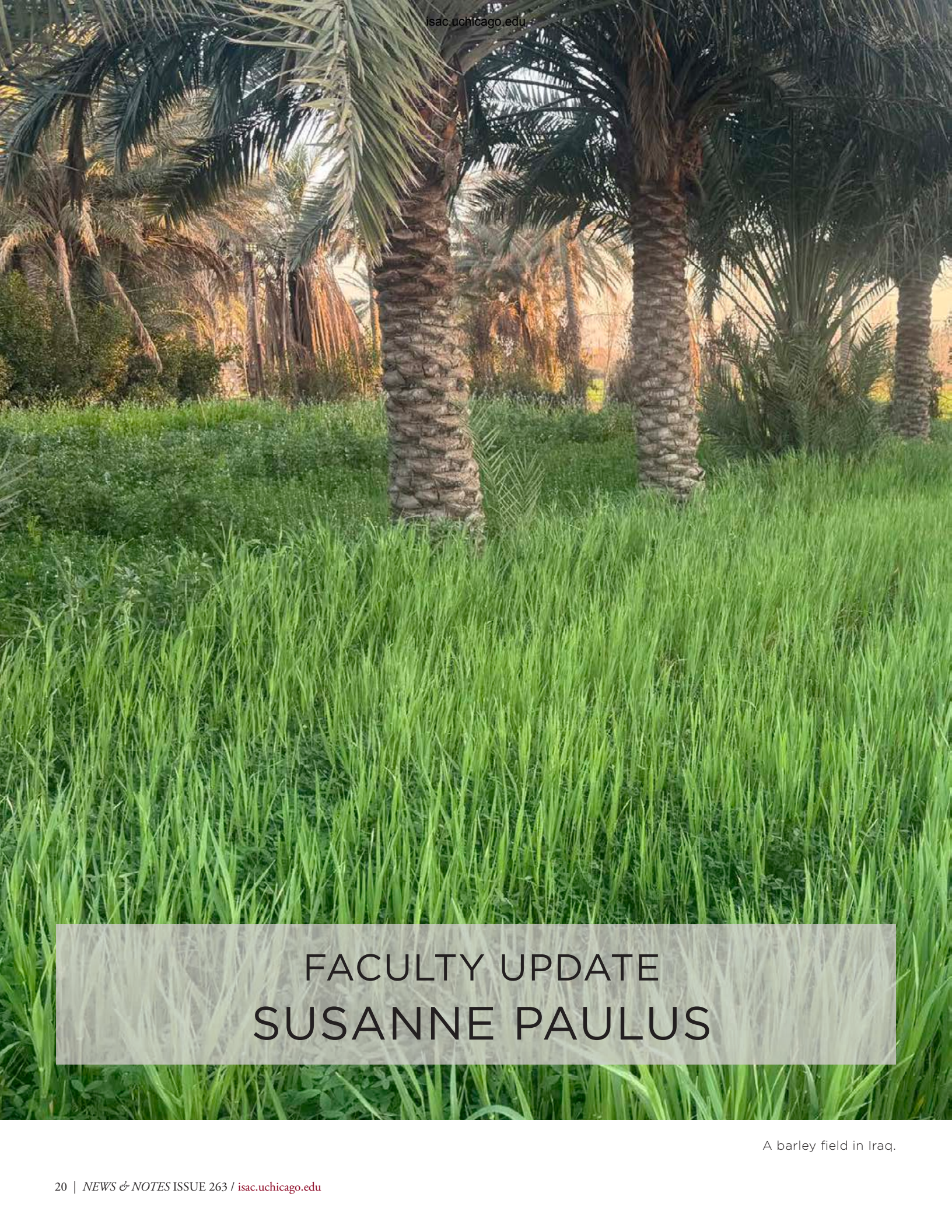


BRIAN P. MUHS

Full Professor of Egyptology

Brian Muhs is a historian of ancient Egyptian social, economic, and legal institutions, particularly but not exclusively during the transition from pharaonic to Ptolemaic and Roman rule. He is also interested in language contact and interaction, especially between Demotic and Greek, and in the reconstruction of ancient Egyptian textual archives that have been dispersed by antiquities dealers and collectors. He came to the University of Chicago as an associate professor in 2011, after teaching at Leiden University in the Netherlands since 1997.



A photograph of a lush green barley field in Iraq. In the foreground, there is a dense field of tall, green barley. In the background, several palm trees are visible, their trunks and fronds creating a silhouette against a bright, hazy sky. The overall scene is a vibrant green landscape.

FACULTY UPDATE SUSANNE PAULUS

A barley field in Iraq.

In 2025, a dream of mine came true. Sitting on the roof of ISAC's mudbrick excavation house in Nippur, Iraq, I looked out over the broad mounds that mark the remains of one of ancient Mesopotamia's great religious centers (figs. 1–2). Where sand and sherds now cover the ground, monumental buildings once stood. Administrators issued orders to ensure that the gods were fed and workers compensated, scribes recorded incoming taxes, and people took out loans to finance new ventures. During the Kassite period of the Late Bronze Age (1400–1150 BCE), many of those transactions took place not in silver or gold but in barley, grown in the irrigated fields of villages surrounding the city. Looking at the dry landscape today, it can be difficult to imagine.

In antiquity, when the barley harvest reached Nippur by boat or wagon, its movement and use left behind an extensive documentary trail—not on paper but on clay tablets. Those records allow us not only to trace the grain itself but also to understand how people used a bulky and perishable commodity to organize economic life (fig. 3). Rather than move sacks of barley for every exchange, they relied on systems of credit, debt, and recordkeeping that allowed barley to function in remarkably flexible ways. My forthcoming book, *Banking with Barley*, explores the mechanics of this system and its social consequences and has now been



Figure 1. The author at Nippur.



Figure 2. The view from the roof of ISAC's excavation house.



Figure 3. Obverse and reverse of a multicolumn tablet containing a series of model contracts for barley loans. ISACM A30212A (3NT-318A).

generously supported by a fellowship of the American Council of Learned Societies. Although Nippur stands at the center of the project, the book also draws on sources from other Mesopotamian cities, including Babylon and Ur, which I was fortunate to visit during my recent travels in Iraq.

Nippur, however, has held a special place in my research since I joined ISAC in 2015 as Tablet Collection curator and began directing the Nippur Tablet Project. Beginning in 1948, the University of Chicago conducted excavations at the site, and under the system of find division in place at the time, hundreds of cuneiform tablets from Nippur came to ISAC, while others remained in Iraq or went to other institutions, including the Penn Museum and the Yale Babylonian Collection. ISAC also preserves extensive records relating to objects now housed elsewhere, including plaster casts that reproduce tablets in remarkable detail and archival documentation recording where and when they were found.

The tablets from Nippur span a long history. The earliest ones date to the Early Dynastic period, around 2600 BCE, and the latest ones to the Achaemenid and Seleucid periods of the first millennium BCE. Some tablets, such as a small archive found in a jar near the North Temple, directly inform my research on socioeconomic behavior in the Kassite period. Others shed light on the religious importance of Nippur, the daily care of the gods, and the intellectual life of ancient Babylonia. Yet despite their importance, many of these texts remain unpublished, and in some cases still uncataloged.

The Nippur Tablet Project seeks to publish these tablets and make them accessible to scholars and the public alike. In collaboration with the ISAC Tablet Collection team, which includes postdoctoral fellow Nicholas Gill, PhD candidates Marta Díaz Herrera, Jane Gordon, and Madeline Ouimet, and undergraduate researchers Bryce Hoenigman and Ryan Witter, we are systematically cataloging and digitizing the objects. In partnership with ISAC's new Data Research Center, we are also working to make

the tablets available not only through ISAC's Integrated Database but eventually through a geospatial platform that emphasizes archaeological context. This platform will allow researchers to explore where tablets were found at Nippur and alongside



Figure 4. The author with colleagues at Al-Qadisiyah University in Iraq, including Professor Jaafar Jotheri.



Figure 5. The lush barley fields of Iraq at sunset.

what other kinds of objects. At the same time, we are preparing scholarly publications of the texts. At present, the whole team is working together to translate the Kassite tablets found in Nippur's Scribal Quarter, investigating activity in a later phase of the same area as the famous House F, known to many in the ISAC community through the 2023–24 special exhibition *Back to School in Babylon*.

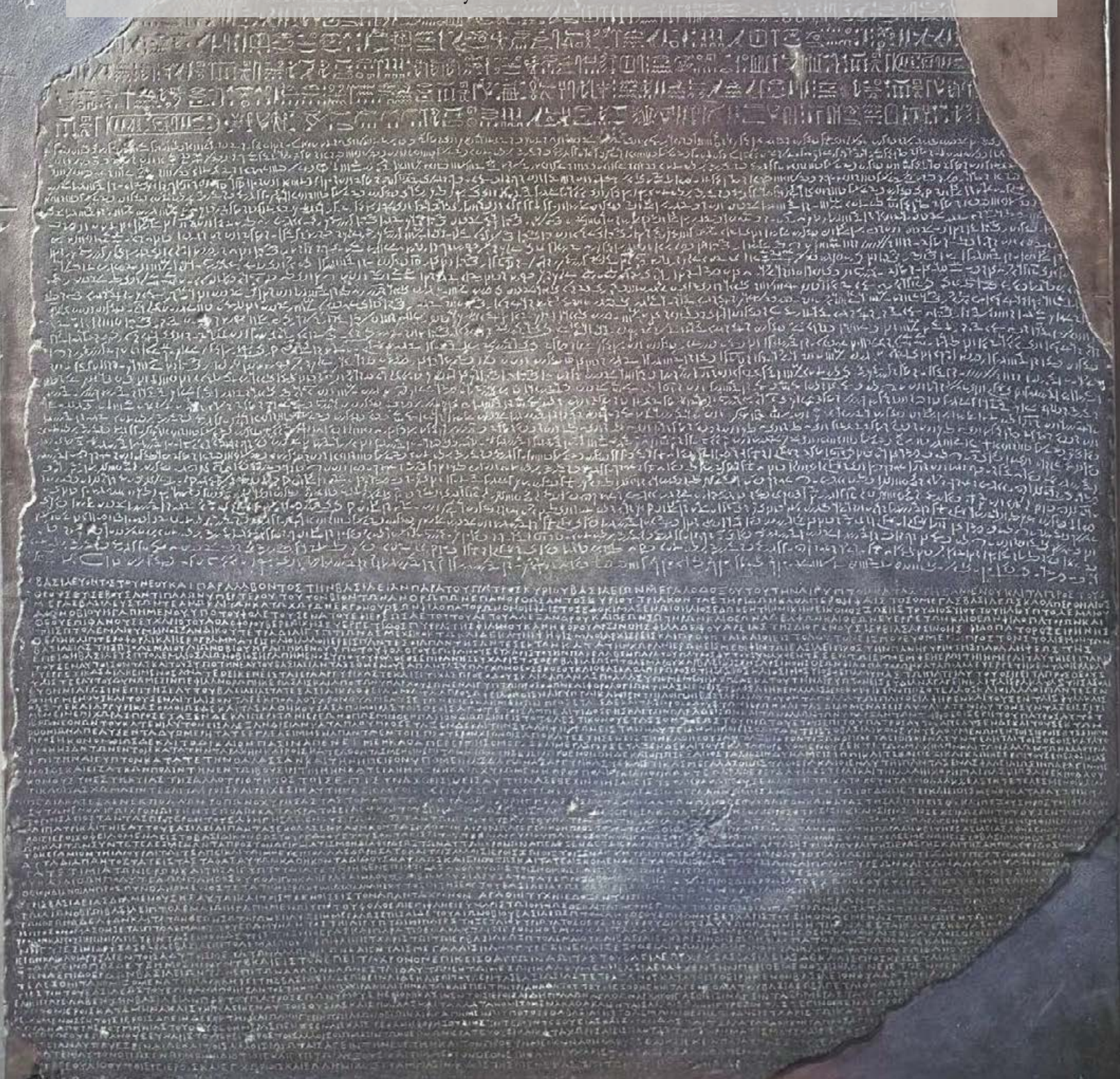
Babylonian education was the focus of that exhibition, which I curated together with the Tablet Collection team, but my own approach to teaching has also evolved significantly during my time at the University of Chicago. It has been a great pleasure to bring objects, especially cuneiform tablets, into the classroom. My courses, from "Introduction to Babylonian" to advanced graduate seminars, draw on the extraordinary resources at ISAC; some of them, including my signature course, "The Age of Innovation—Mesopotamian Writing through Objects," focus almost entirely on the collection in Chicago. When students work directly with ancient objects, their questions become sharper and their understanding deeper. Seeing, and carefully handling, the physical traces left

by ancient users is one of the most powerful ways to convey why the cultural heritage of Iraq and the ancient Middle East matters.

Teaching about Babylonia is always a joy for me, but this winter I also had the privilege of teaching cuneiform studies at Al-Qadisiyah University in Iraq. Few things compare to the pleasure of reading royal texts from Nippur together with people who are connected to the cultural heritage from which those texts emerged. Over two and a half weeks, before the outbreak of war cut the visit short, I had lively discussions with Iraqi faculty and learned a great deal about their research, methods, and challenges (fig. 4). I was received with extraordinary warmth and generosity, and our conversations led all of us to a deeper understanding of how Babylonia can be studied and taught in a dialogue between Western and Iraqi scholars. Beyond that intellectual exchange, the experience gave me an even greater appreciation for the deep continuities within Iraqi culture. It may not surprise anyone that standing in a lush Iraqi barley field at sunset (fig. 5) and eating homemade barley soup moved me just as deeply as standing among the ruins of an ancient city.

MY FAVORITE OBJECT THE ROSETTA STONE

by Shirlee Hoffman



The Rosetta Stone cast in the ISAC Museum collection. ISACM Archive P. 60693 / N. 40370.

When I was asked to write about my favorite ISAC Museum object for *News & Notes*, I was initially bewildered. Although I have been volunteering at ISAC since January 2013, I don't have a favorite among the more than 4,000 artifacts on display in the Museum. Then I realized it would be fun to explore how one quite ugly artifact, the Rosetta Stone, can be seen as exemplifying some of the complexities of the Museum's collection.

IT'S A CAST

Don't be disappointed, but ISAC's black Rosetta Stone in its glass case is a cast! The original, now a uniform gray after being cleaned during the restoration and preservation attempts frequently employed on artifacts in the past (including at ISAC), is on display in the British Museum. Elsewhere in the ISAC Museum you will find casts of significant ancient Near Eastern artifacts located in other museums—for example, the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III, also in the British Museum, and the Hammurabi Stela, in the Louvre. James Henry Breasted, the founder of ISAC, wanted to have casts of artifacts that he considered important on display in the Museum for several reasons, including to facilitate scholarly study and to inform the Museum's visitors.

DISCOVERY

Unlike most artifacts at ISAC, the original Rosetta Stone was not uncovered in an archaeological excavation. A fragment of a granodiorite stela, it had been reused as building material. During Napoleon's Egyptian campaign, French soldiers inadvertently unearthed it in July 1799 when they were demolishing a wall to build a fort in Rosetta (modern-day Rashid).

THE DECIPHERMENT OF ANCIENT EGYPTIAN HIEROGLYPHS

Its importance for the decipherment of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs is the main reason we include the Rosetta Stone in our Museum tours. Having at least bilingual texts with one of the texts in a known language is vital for the decipherment of ancient scripts. The Rosetta Stone's potential for deciphering ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, which had not been understood since the end of the fourth century CE, was immediately recognized. A priestly decree from the time of Ptolemy V (204–180 BCE), the stela contains three scripts: ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic,

Demotic (a later form of Egyptian), and ancient Greek. The Greek portion, which many scholars could read, says that all three scripts convey the same meaning. (For a description of the decipherment of cuneiform writing, the other major ancient Near Eastern script, see the picture of the Behistun Inscription in ISAC's Persian gallery.)

IT'S WIDELY FAMOUS!

If one ancient Egyptian artifact is known by more people than any other, it may be the Rosetta Stone. I discovered that it is even taught in American primary schools when a cousin's eight-year-old daughter, in Boston, immediately and excitedly recognized a picture of the stela in a children's book she was reading. (Okay, it's the children's book I wrote: *I'm Tutankhamun! The Real Story of Ancient Egypt's Most Famous Child King*. I have donated copies to the ISAC Museum Shop, where the book can be purchased both in person and online.)

CONTEMPORARY MEANINGS

The term "Rosetta Stone" has acquired many other contemporary meanings. It can refer to an online program for learning foreign languages; it is used (according to Wikipedia) as a metaphor for the essential clue to a new field of knowledge; and finally, various ancient multilingual documents are sometimes described as "Rosetta Stones" when they have facilitated the decipherment of ancient written scripts. You will easily find other uses of the term on the internet.

REPATRIATION

The original Rosetta Stone is among the many artifacts in museums around the world subject to the repatriation controversy. The Egyptian government maintains that it was taken illegally during colonial times—first by the French and then, as a result of the 1801 Treaty of Alexandria, by the British—and should be returned to Egypt. Meanwhile, the British Museum argues that it holds the stela under the treaty and that it was a legitimate diplomatic gift.

And that's why I see ISAC's cast of this one object as a "Rosetta Stone" for some of the the underlying complexities of the ISAC Museum's collection—the largest collection in North America—of ancient Near Eastern artifacts.



Napoleon in Egypt in 1798 as painted by Jean Simon Berthélemy. Oil on canvas, ca. 1800. France. Image courtesy of Collections du château de Versailles, Wikimedia Commons.

WHERE HISTORY MEETS FAMILY HISTORY

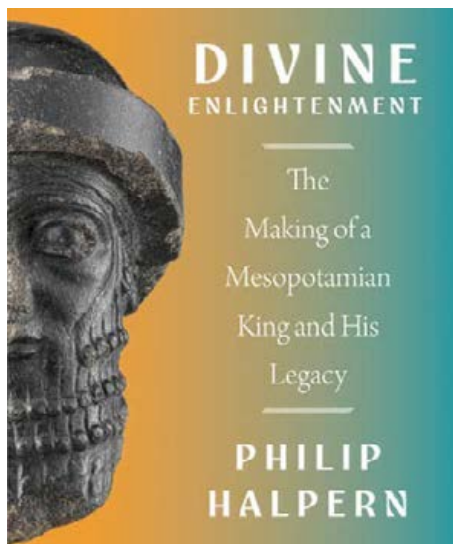
In June 2026, we were honored to welcome a very special guest to ISAC for the first time: Congressman George Whitesides, who represents California's District 27. Representative Whitesides previously served as NASA's chief of staff under the Obama administration and was the CEO of spaceflight company Virgin Galactic. He also happens to be the great-grandson of ISAC's founder, James Henry Breasted. He joined ISAC director Timothy Harrison for a tour of the Institute, during which he learned about his family's legacy and how the Institute has carried on the founding vision of his ancestor for more than a century—uniting cutting-edge scholarship, the conservation of cultural heritage, and the instruction of students across the disciplines of archaeology, philology, and history of the ancient Near East.

Congressman George Whitesides (left) and ISAC director Timothy Harrison (right) in front of the colossal statue of Tutankhamun at the entrance of ISAC's Joseph and Mary Grimshaw Egyptian Gallery. Photo by Carter Rote.



NEW BOOK

Divine Enlightenment: The Making of a Mesopotamian King and His Legacy



Hardcover • 8 × 10 inches • \$39.00
To purchase a copy, visit
www.philiphalpern.com
or contact the ISAC Museum Shop
(773-702-9510, isac-suq@uchicago.edu).

This novel by ISAC docent Philip Halpern is a coming-of-age story about King Hammurabi of Babylon. Based on extensive research and narrated by the god Shamash, the book explores how the king may have arrived at the judicial pronouncements declared in the famous Code of Hammurabi—best known for the phrase “an eye for an eye.”

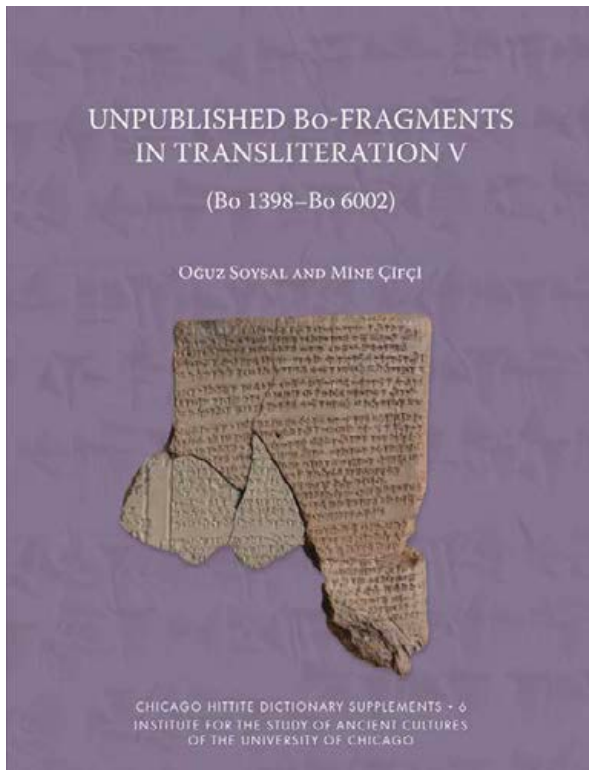
“Halpern’s coming-of-age story, grounded in deep scholarly research and accessible to all audiences, vividly imagines ancient Babylonia through the eyes of a young prince destined to become one of history’s most famous lawgivers. As he journeys through his kingdom, Hammurabi observes and listens to the stories of his subjects, learning what it truly means to rule with wisdom and justice.”

—Martha Roth, Chauncey S. Boucher Distinguished Service Professor of Assyriology at the University of Chicago and former Editor-in-Charge of the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary

“The scope of *Divine Enlightenment* is impressive, its subject extensively researched and sensitively portrayed. Imagining Hammurabi’s coming of age from the standpoint of the god who enlightens him is brilliant and creative. By conveying the personal experiences of characters living during the Old Babylonian period, Halpern brings to life the laws inscribed on Hammurabi’s stele, while communicating the continuing relevance and importance of Hammurabi’s pioneering legal philosophy for us today. I truly enjoyed reading this book.”

—Timothy P. Harrison, Director of ISAC

NEW ISAC PUBLICATIONS



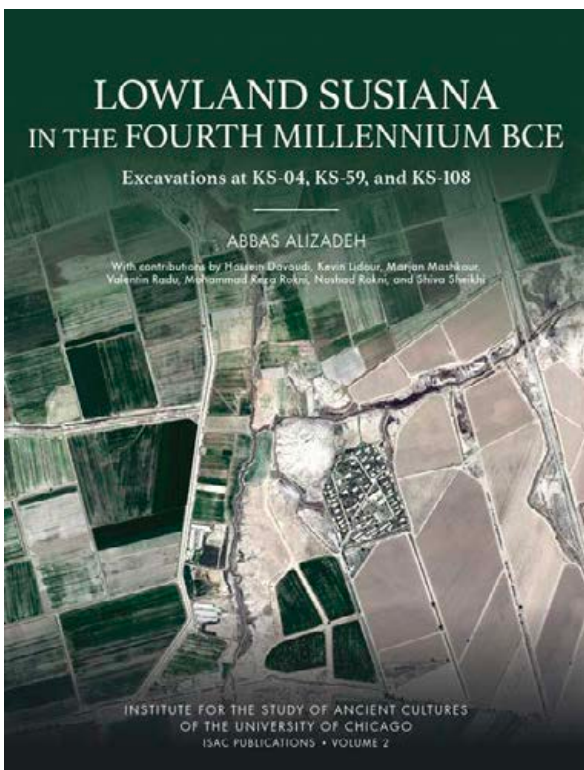
Unpublished Bo-Fragments in Transliteration V (Bo 1398–Bo 6002)

By Oğuz Soysal and Mine Çifçi

Chicago Hittite Dictionary Supplements 6

This volume continues the systematic edition of the unpublished Bo-texts deposited in the Museum of Ancient Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara. As in previous volumes, the tablet fragments are presented in both photographs and transliterations, with succinct philological notes explaining particular forms and relevant text variants. Direct joins with fragments in other museums are shown through digital image processing. Most of the fragments dealt with here are of the usual religious nature—predominantly ritual, festival, cult inventory, and oracular texts. Two fragments provide additions to the genre of royal instructions, while other fragments with the Ullikummi myth, an Old Hittite land grant, a list of towns, a Hattian text, and a medical text represent further text varieties. One small fragment is of special interest because it preserves two distinct layers with cuneiform script in different hands. Each text edition is accompanied, wherever possible, by information about its assignment to a Hittite text or text genre, the date of the composition, the fragment's measurements, and previous bibliography.

For a free PDF download and information about ordering a print copy, visit <https://isac.uchicago.edu/research/publications/chds/chds6>.



Lowland Susiana in the Fourth Millennium BCE: Excavations at KS-04, KS-59, and KS-108

By Abbas Alizadeh

ISAC Publications 2

During two seasons in 2004–2006, the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures excavated three major prehistoric population centers in northern Susiana, in the modern-day province of Khuzestan, Iran. The three sites were chosen because of their large size and the prominent role they have played in analyses of the pottery typology, chronology, and politics of fourth-millennium BCE Susiana. Most researchers consider the fourth millennium to be a pivotal period in the development of state-level organization in southwestern Iran. During this time, KS-04, KS-59, and KS-108, along with Chogha Mish and Susa, constituted the region's major polities. Whereas much of the theoretical framework concerning the local origins of socio-political complexity has been based on excavated materials from Susa and Chogha Mish, interpretations of KS-04, KS-59, and KS-108 have largely been derived from surface surveys. ISAC's stratified excavations at these three population centers have now provided important contextual evidence for the processes underlying socio-political and economic complexity in prehistoric lowland Susiana.

For a free PDF download and information about ordering a print copy, visit <https://isac.uchicago.edu/research/publications/ISACP/isacp2>.

Archaeology & the Bible

A NEW TOUR AT THE ISAC MUSEUM

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13 • 1 PM–2 PM

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18 • 1 PM–2 PM



Drawing on the rich collection of the ISAC Museum, this tour explores artifacts connected to biblical narratives and the cultures, societies, and historical landscapes in which those narratives emerged.

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Child: \$10

With UChicago ID: Free

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ADULT EDUCATION CLASSES

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The ceiling of the Hathor Temple at Dendera. Photo by Kea Johnston.

Ancient Egyptian Religion, Science, and Magic

Instructor: Kea Johnston, PhD | ISAC/Field Museum postdoctoral scholar

6 weeks

Thursdays, August 20–September 24, 6:00–8:00 p.m. Central

Live on Zoom and recorded

In this class, you will learn about Egyptian religion and gain insight into how the Egyptians saw the cosmos and their role in it. You will also learn about how modern, Western ideas of magic and science were not separated from each other or from religion, but were instead integrated parts of a complete worldview—one that has unexpected relevance in the twenty-first century.



Faience scarab on a necklace of scarab beads from tomb W43 at Qustul, Nubia. ISACM E23879A.

Short Class: Scarabs and Sealings in Nubia

Instructor: Tasha Vorderstrasse, PhD | manager of ISAC's continuing education program

4 weeks

Prerecorded half-hour classes drop Sundays at 10:00 a.m. Central, August 30–September 20

Join us for this ISAC short class on the important role scarabs played in Nubia. Although often thought of as an Egyptian phenomenon, scarabs also had a significant presence in Nubia. This class will provide an overview of scarabs in Nubia from the Middle Kingdom onward. For each period, one site will be examined in detail.



An archaeological trowel. Photo by Hannibal21, Wikimedia Commons.

An Archaeological Journey through the South Caucasus: A Nexus of Interaction (a Joint ISAC-ARISC Class)

5 weeks

Wednesdays, September 23–October 21, 5:00–7:00 p.m. Central / 6:00–8:00 p.m. Eastern

Live on Zoom and recorded

Join experts from ISAC and the American Research Institute of the South Caucasus to see what archaeology in the South Caucasus looks like. Learn from specialists on the archaeology of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia and hear about their work in this exciting region on ancient animals, burials, and more.



Terracotta relief head of a woman.
Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum
of Art, MMA 41.162.266.

Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women*: Introduction to Reading Literary Fragments

Instructor: Tasha Vorderstrasse, PhD | manager of ISAC's continuing education program

2 weeks

Wednesdays, October 1 and October 8, 5:00–7:00 p.m.

Live on Zoom and recorded

The Catalogue of Women attributed to Hesiod, a contemporary of Homer, goes beyond Homer's epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* in focusing on heroines and the genealogies that shaped the lives of the Homeric heroes. The original poem has been lost, but fragments survive, largely from Roman Egypt. This class will explore Greek papyri and examine some of the surviving fragments. No knowledge of Greek is required.



Offering scene with hieroglyphs on a
First Intermediate Period stela from
Egypt. ISACM E16959.

Handy Hieroglyphs: A Beginner's Guide to Impressing Friends and Colleagues (in Museums)

Instructor: Kea Johnston, PhD | ISAC/Field Museum postdoctoral scholar

6 weeks

Thursdays, October 15–November 19, 6:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m. Central

Live on Zoom and recorded

Have you ever wondered what those inscriptions say on Egyptian monuments in museums? This class will cover the basics of hieroglyphs, the names of rulers and gods, the so-called "hieroglyphic alphabet," and common phrases and formulae used on museum objects.



Terracotta plaque of Odysseus return-
ing to Penelope. Metropolitan Museum
of Art 30.11.9, Fletcher Fund, 1930.

Short Class: Imagining and Reimagining Homer

Instructor: Tasha Vorderstrasse, PhD | manager of ISAC's continuing education program

4 weeks

Prerecorded half-hour classes drop Sundays at 10:00 a.m. Central, November 29–December 20

Join us for this short class on the interpretations and reinterpretations of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Each installment will examine a particular artwork and place it within its historical context to see what it tells us about the interpretations and reinterpretations of Homer. The class will include a discussion of a statue of Penelope that ISAC found at Persepolis in the 1930s, as well as Robert Duncanson's painting *Land of the Lotus Eaters*.



ISAC

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