

From Artifacts to People Facts at the Oriental Institute

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The Rockefeller Archive Center's (RAC) holdings are vital to my dissertation titled, "From Artifacts to People Facts: The Archeological Origins of Middle East Area Studies," which traces the origins, content, and ramifications of interwar American academic interest in the Middle East, showing how that knowledge was utilized during the wartime and postwar expansion of the U.S. sphere of influence in the Middle East. This project is not about all of America's imaginative investment, but is rather about a relatively small group of scholars who had an outsized influence on America's relationship with the region as a whole. As U.S. interests expanded during and after World War II, this accumulated knowledge influenced governmental policies and actions, including the increased use of propaganda as a method of peddling influence through deception.

After World War II, connections between the United States and the Middle East multiplied in myriad ways, with postwar American interests settled around conflict with the Soviet Union, oil, and Israel. Yet the dominant narrative of pre-1945 encounters remains focused on missionaries, philanthropists, and oilmen, with hardly any attention paid to interwar involvement. Within this narrative structure has been an emphasis on American innocence and/or beneficence in the region, with Middle Easterners holding favorable opinions toward the United States as a bulwark against British and French colonial machinations. My project will re-

conceptualize historical understandings of American involvement in the Middle East between 1920 and 1953. The United States government did not enter the postwar era with no experience in the Middle East. Rather, it leaned heavily on a small cadre of archeologists, anthropologists, and architects who put their cultural knowledge to political usage during World War II. These scholars are the progenitors of political and scholarly relations that became so prominent after the Second World War.

Most scholarship on the Oriental Institute (OI) – an archeological institution established at the University of Chicago in 1919 – focuses on the archeological expeditions and excavations made by the Institute, which were financed through the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) and family, mainly John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (JDR Jr.). Although the discoveries and work completed by the Oriental Institute are significant for the field of archeology, my primary concern is not with the discoveries that were made, but rather with the contacts that were made between the OI and local workers on various expeditions. During and after WWII, American scholars who were trained as archeologists transitioned into ethnological work, where they drew on their experiences on archeological digs in order to bolster their claims about Middle Easterners. Although the RAC does not hold significant archeological expedition reports, it does hold the administrative records that explain how funding was apportioned and justified. Such records are essential to understanding how a shift in foundational emphasis may have affected the OI's scholarly focus.

A great deal has also been written about the founder and the initial driving force behind the OI, James Henry Breasted, but there has been less written about his successor, John A. Wilson. Breasted died in late 1935, so his scholarly focus never shifted from the ancient Near East, although he was not immune from engagement with contemporary political disputes. Due to decreased funding for archeological expeditions after Breasted's death, OI officials contemplated changing the OI's mission to incorporate more study of the contemporary Middle

East. For my purposes, Wilson's role as an analyst of contemporary culture is particularly important, given that he was Coordinator of Information for the Office of War Information during World War II. He held this government position while he was also director of the OI. His specific role for the U.S. government was to formulate war time propaganda and policy towards the Middle East. My project connects the cultural knowledge which Wilson collected during his expeditions in the 1920s and 1930s, with the political uses to which he put that knowledge during World War II. In RAC correspondence, Wilson detailed some of his thinking about the current state of Middle Eastern archeology, as well as the OI's prospects for becoming a center for the study of the contemporary Middle East. Such writings are revealing articulations of Wilson's desire to maintain the OI's relevance, as well as its funding.

There are two ways in which the RAC's holdings are important to my project. The first is in establishing the state of American knowledge of the Middle East during the interwar period. As my project seeks to trace the ways in which Americans' experiences on archeological digs influenced their opinion of Middle Easterners, it is essential that I understand what it meant to be an archeologist during the 1920s and 1930s. Although the RAC has more information on the funding of the expeditions than on the actual expeditions, I have found the RAC archives illuminating in terms of having a clearer idea of what goals archeologists had, as well as how they pitched those goals to potential donors. For the purposes of this report, the experiences of James Henry Breasted will characterize the first, halcyon period of OI archeology. Flush with funds, the OI sponsored numerous expeditions, and gathered many important artifacts to display in its new museum in Chicago. A confluence of ample funding and a favorable political climate enabled Breasted, in only 15 years, to make the OI one of the preeminent archeological institutions in the world.

The second appeal of the RAC archives is to explore the process through which U.S. scholarly emphasis shifted from the ancient Middle East, to a desire to understand the modern Middle East. Occasioned most precipitously by World War II, the academic movement that became known as area studies had its origins in wartime attempts to understand (and propagandize) hostile or neutral populations. In the Middle East, there was a high concentration of valuable oil resources; populations seen as susceptible to German propaganda; and only a small number of scholars who had spent any time in the region. Those scholars, in the United States, were archeologists, and some of the most prominent government workers and early area studies proponents had links to the Oriental Institute. As the RF changed its focus to the modern world, it fielded proposals from a number of institutions that wished to be at the forefront of area studies research (and to receive generous foundation funding). The OI pitched itself as the institution most prepared to meet the challenge of understanding the Middle East, despite its longtime focus on the ancient, rather than contemporary, history of the region. Although the OI did not officially change its research focus, the process of considering the change reveals a great deal about it meant to become a regional expert during this time period.

In what follows, I will narrate my understanding of these two pivotal moments in the history of the OI in particular, and, more generally, the history of 20th century American academic engagement with the Middle East. First, the founding, artifact-centric, exploratory decades of the 1920s and 1930s, and second, the post-WWII shift away from archeology as the principle means of scholarly encounters with the Middle East. Although I will write in general terms based on my overall reading of the archive, when possible I will draw from specific documents that illuminate a particular point.

JAMES HENRY BREASTED AND THE ROARING TWENTIES OF MIDDLE EASTERN ARCHEOLOGY

The Rockefeller Archive Center holds the archival records of the founding, funding, and administration of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago (U of C). The OI was founded in 1919 through a combination of funds from John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the Rockefeller Foundation, and the General Education Board (GEB). Funds were dispersed on an annual and ad hoc basis (i.e. for specific projects or acquisitions) until 1935, at which time Rockefeller officials outlined a process through which the OI would be permanently endowed by a series of donations that would be held and dispersed through the U of C. The Oriental Institute, through the generous (rivals said lavish) funding of the Rockefeller family and the RF and the GEB, arose from nothing to become one of the paramount U.S. centers for research and education in the ancient Near East. As described by John Wilson, Breasted's successor as Director, in a 1944 institutional history, "the first activities of the Institute were devoted to the enthusiastic assembling of materials."¹ Through the leadership of James Henry Breasted, the OI spearheaded a number of important archeological digs in the Near East, including surveys in Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, and Syria. Wilson wrote:

After World War I the opportunities for gathering material were so brilliant that collection became an urgent duty...the field opportunities had just opened up but might be limited in time. Dr. Breasted recognized that finances and politics might take a sudden turn to limit the opportunities for assembling those control materials which went into the making of cultural history.²

Wilson's account of the OI's initial activities was revisionist in the sense that research in the ancient world in the early 1920s consisted in large part of collecting objects. Although Breasted might have later portrayed his collecting as his way of striking while the iron was hot, in essence he was simply partaking in the collecting of antiquities, which was the established mode of doing research about the ancient world.

In other words, while the opportunity may have been greater at that particular moment, the methods were not substantially different than they had been at other times. When JDR Jr. agreed to fund the Oriental Institute, it was with the understanding that “material of untold value is now available as it has never been before.”³ While Rockefeller cited the possible destruction of antiquities as a reason for collecting them, with the war over, it was unclear what the present danger indeed was. Breasted’s primary vision was not that the antiquities were under threat, but rather, he saw them as being under priced, as “for five years the Near East has seen no western travelers nor museum representatives, and a vast treasury of antiquities and priceless records of the past have accumulated awaiting the appearance of the first comers.”⁴ The items, however, were only proverbially priceless, and Breasted accordingly “secured a fund of a little over \$16,000 to be used exclusively as a Purchase Fund in Egypt and Western Asia.”⁵ While he wrote of his desire to “save a great many invaluable records,” his main aim was to “greatly enrich the Chicago collections...building up...a magnificent and unrivaled body of ancient archives and works of early man.”⁶ With the permission of the British governing authority under General Allenby, Breasted and his cohorts secured a number of valuable pieces for the new institution.⁷

Breasted’s task was greatly aided by the help and influence of the Rockefeller family, foundations, and even businesses. Over time, Breasted and JDR Jr. became close; when the Rockefeller family traveled to Egypt in 1929, Breasted was their personal tour guide. In the evening, after touring, JDR Jr. wrote that the family would retire to “the darkened parlor in the Semaramis [sic] Hotel in Cairo, listening to another of your [Breasted’s] fascinating lectures.”⁸ Their correspondence reveals a complex and intimate relationship, with JDR Jr. demonstrating an unshakable faith in Breasted’s scholarship, and with Breasted returning to JDR Jr. again and again with funding requests for new projects and possibilities. The mixing of their personal,

professional, and philanthropic relations sometimes resulted in misunderstandings regarding funding requests.

For instance, in 1923, as JDR Jr.'s funding of the OI was about to expire, Breasted and U of C President Ernest Burton wrote him to secure additional funds for the continuation of the archeological enterprises. He composed a terse reply, expressing his:

bewilderment at the assumption that the Oriental Institute was my baby, and a child to the continuing support of which I was permanently obligated as its father. The fact is, as you will see, that quite the reverse is the case. I had been called in at the birth and had agreed to contribute modestly for the support of the child during the first years of its life, very distinctly stating, however, in the third year and two years before the expiration of my pledge, that at the end of the fifth year period it was not in my mind to make a further contribution.⁹

Yet JDR Jr. also conceded that his correspondence had been with the previous U of C President, who evidently had not shared those conversations with Breasted. JDR Jr. therefore agreed to take up the funding request as a new contribution, and, as he would several times over the next decade, he committed to continue funding the OI.

Rockefeller family business connections also proved to be useful when the Oriental Institute attempted to purchase land near Luxor, Egypt, in 1929. The OI sought the land to establish what would come to be known as the Chicago House, a permanent base for the epigraphic survey of Egyptian temples and monuments. RF officers reasoned that buying the land directly would drive up the asking price through the association of the Rockefeller name with the purchase. They therefore consulted with the Vacuum Oil Company, a local affiliate of Standard Oil, to advance the money for the land purchase. The OI reimbursed the Vacuum Oil Company for at least \$40,916.63 which it had spent on behalf of the OI in the land deal.¹⁰ These examples serve to show, albeit only briefly, the multiple levels of connections between various Rockefeller institutions and Breasted's search for archeological artifacts.

When Breasted died, suddenly, after a return trip from the Near East in 1935, JDR Jr. was shaken and saddened. He wrote to Charles, one of Breasted's sons, "in the going of your father I feel that I have lost a very dear and valued friend. Few men have I found myself drawn to as closely as to him."¹¹ Yet the donor's relationship with the OI, and with Breasted, was already in the process of changing by that time. As Breasted neared 70 he had become increasingly cognizant of his limited time as an active scholar. Accordingly, he felt an intense pressure to accomplish all he could in the terms of field exploration. Despite the worldwide economic downturn of the Great Depression, Breasted continued, and often increased his requests for funding for additional projects. When an opportunity arose to buy a valuable artifact, such as colossal sculptures from Ninevah, in Syria; or to secure a concession at a newly opened dig site, for instance at Megiddo in Iran, Breasted often bypassed official RF channels, writing directly to JDR Jr. to request new funds.¹²

Breasted had learned that he could use JDR Jr.'s personal interest in his work to get more money for his archeological work. I do not wish to suggest that Breasted was exploiting JDR Jr.'s largesse, but Breasted had perfected his pitches to appeal to JDR Jr.'s personal predilections. As Breasted wrote to U of C President Burton, "I know his [JDR Jr.'s] interest in the lands which brought forth the Bible and the life of Jesus will reinforce this appeal."¹³ Breasted was rarely turned down for additional funding requests. Although JDR Jr. expressed an understanding for Breasted's requests, by 1935 he had seemingly grown fatigued by their frequency. He did not wish to cut off funding the OI entirely, but rather desired to make Breasted operate under a fixed budget, rather than continually seeking one-off money for projects.

RF officers were less sanguine about Breasted's frequent requests for funding. Longtime officers like Charles Fahs, and newer ones like John Marshall, came to see the funding of the OI as falling outside the official purview of the RF. Although they continued to fund Breasted's

requests, they considered RF support of the OI to be a function of JDR Jr.'s personal interest in Breasted's work, rather than a core focus of the RF mission. In their internal memoranda which considered Breasted's proposals, then, they became increasingly hopeful that they could lessen Breasted's year-to-year and project-to-project requests through a large, one-time bequest that would permanently endow the OI.

In November 1935, JDR Jr. sent Breasted a letter that outlined the OI funding plan moving forward. The plan was meant to sustain the OI's operations through 10 yearly payments, with the stipulation that additional funding requests would not be considered. JDR Jr. wrote:

The Executive Committee of the Foundation voted an appropriation for the immediate continuation of the work but with the very definite feeling, with which I completely concur, that the whole situation as regards the Oriental Institute and its many undertakings should be carefully reviewed at an early date with a view to the development of some sound and definite program for the future insofar as the Foundation are related thereto.¹⁴

In his roundabout, proper way, JDR Jr. expressed his desire to dissolve his relationship with the OI through a final grant. He continued:

In making the contributions to the work of the Institute in the earlier years of its development, totaling less than \$500,000, I did not for a moment assume I was putting myself in the position of becoming the patron of the vast enterprise that has since developed...in your enthusiasm you have been led to expand the scope of your operations far beyond what was prudent or permanently possible to maintain. I have no thought of making further contributions to the Oriental Institute, and much of the pleasure which I have had in contributing to the various specific projects which grew out of our visit to Egypt would have been taken away had I felt for a moment that gifts that I made from time to time for specific matters could be construed by you as evidences of a larger and more enduring interest in the whole enterprise on my part.¹⁵

JDR Jr. apparently had continued contributing to the OI past his interest, and Breasted had exhausted the Rockefeller largesse by his too-frequent trips to the well.

But news of the RF's stance never reached James Henry Breasted. Although the message was dispatched to the S.S. Conte di Savoia, Breasted's ship, before his death, Breasted fell ill and died of streptococcus before ever opening the correspondence. The new age of austerity for the

OI was to be faced by his successor, John Wilson, who would be forced to reevaluate the OI's core mission and beliefs in light of the reduced budget.

WILSON AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE

John Wilson was named the new Director of the Oriental Institute shortly after James Henry Breasted's death in 1935. Wilson, an Egyptologist who had first worked for the OI on their epigraphic survey of ruins near Luxor, Egypt, was a logical choice who had the support of OI faculty and administrators, as well as that of Rockefeller Foundation officials, and even JDR Jr. himself. Although the RF did not have an explicit say in such administrative decisions, clearly it behooved the OI to choose a leader who could maintain a productive working relationship with those who would fund its work.

Breasted was the only Director the OI had had at the time of his death. There was seemingly some inkling that his son, Charles, who also worked at the OI, was being groomed to follow his father as director. At the RF, however, Charles was viewed as a loose cannon whose brashness was off-putting. For example, after Charles learned of the RF's decision to reduce its funding of the OI, he wrote an embarrassing screed directly to JDR Jr. expressing his outrage and anger that the reduced funding meant the "Oriental Institute as conceived by my father, as a laboratory for the study of the rise of civilization, has ceased to exist."¹⁶ JDR Jr. handled Charles's emotional hyperbole ably, writing to Wilson that although he had read Charles's letter "with complete sympathy and understanding...may there not be danger lest his own sense of disappointment and hurt...color his communications and utterances."¹⁷ JDR Jr. understood that Charles was simply trying to protect his father's legacy, but Wilson was perceived to be a more prudent choice than the founder's impetuous son.

When Wilson took over the OI in 1935, as mentioned previously, his first task was to reevaluate the institute's financial positions. Whether from a change in the core mission of the

Rockefellers, or because of delayed-onset austerity measures as a result of the Great Depression, the OI going forward would never again receive the level of funding it had under Breasted.

Wilson ultimately decided to cut back on all but the most vital expeditions, taking the number of active field commitments of the OI from twelve to three to one in the course of two years. He cut administrative staff and wrote, “our museum staff will be reduced, as we no longer receive antiquities from the field.”¹⁸ He vowed to allocate additional funds to scholarship, identifying the publication of results as a troubling deficiency of the OI, with “70 additional manuscripts in press, on hand, or definitely promised,”¹⁹ that had yet to be completed. The glut of expeditions during Breasted’s directorship resulted in a large number of finds, and a number of invaluable additions to the institute’s collections, but the rate of publishing had not kept pace with the rate of discovery and acquisition. Clay tablets sat un-translated, artifacts languished un-deciphered, and significant finds were unreported. Although the OI was an institution developed for the advancement and spread of knowledge about the ancient Near East, in the realm of publishing, its efforts had not kept pace with its expeditions.

Faced with an opportunity to shift the OI’s research focus, Wilson laid out his priorities. He speculated the institution’s members might “no longer confine ourselves strictly to the Orient,” but rather could look more generally at “the rise of man and his institutions.” He even questioned as to “whether we should be entitled to act under the name of Oriental Institute.” Only six months into his tenure as director, Wilson speculated that the OI would “no longer [be] able to concentrate on archeology,” which had been the OI’s main mission since its inception. Wilson made clear, though, that the OI’s potential shift in focus was partly an attempt to secure future funding, adding, “when such a question is definitely posed, we should apply to the New York Boards for permission to apply the funds which have been appropriated to an institution of slightly different character.”²⁰ Wilson, a man with diverse personal interests, made it clear from

the beginning of his time as director that he would not hesitate to drastically alter the OI's specific mission of Near Eastern archeology if its general mission of humanistic interpretation was allowed to continue.

Wilson did not have Breasted's dynamism, nor did he benefit from the same close, personal relationship with JDR Jr. that had served as Breasted's principle method of seeking funds, but he did put the OI on a path towards long-term viability. He also proved himself to be more concerned with modern happenings in the Middle East than had Breasted. Partly this interest grew from necessity; as a number of scholars have pointed out, nationalist leaders in the Middle East grew increasingly engaged with archeological activities in their countries.²¹ Such efforts served to both aggrandize and aggravate Western archeologists. They were aggrandized because their finds were often heavily promoted by leaders like the Shah in Iran, who sought to connect his modern right to rule to that of the ancient rulers of Persia. In connecting his reign to that of past emperors, the Shah employed archeological finds to bolster the connection. Those Western archeologists who established close relationships with the Shah enjoyed his patronage; those who defied his vision of the past were often ostracized.

But Western archeologists were frequently aggravated by the newfound regional interest in archeology. Whereas previously they had enjoyed a near-complete autonomy, the assertive leaders of the Middle East wanted to control aspects of archeological digs that had previously been left in Western hands. For instance, the division was a longstanding tradition in Western digs in the Middle East. At the end of the season, all the finds were laid out, and representatives of each interested party – the Western institution, and the Middle Eastern government – could choose what they wanted to have. It was essentially a draft for artifacts. Over time, Middle Eastern governments altered the terms of the division to make the terms more favorable towards them. This rankled Western archeologists who had grown accustomed to dictating the terms of

engagement and compensation. No longer were they able to remove substantial artifacts for display, a practice that had provided tangible evidence of an expedition's success, impressing both the general public and donors.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Western archeology in general, and American archeology in particular, was premised on the acquisition and display of ancient artifacts. Developments that hindered access to artifacts created an existential crisis for the field. As competition grew for artifacts both between Western collectors, as well as those in the Middle East, prices rose. Archeological expeditions, already expensive, were made more expensive by the higher cost of artifacts, which was one of the first effects felt by the field. The second move was to actually restrict what could be removed from the country, with native governments increasingly asserting their right to keep the best objects. In other words, first the cost of artifacts became prohibitive – and, shortly thereafter, the removal of artifacts was actually prohibited. Western archeologists might still remove select finds, but most often they were items of negligible significance, particularly for those Westerners who had grown accustomed to picking the most illustrious pieces for their home institutions, and returning like conquering heroes to grandiose expeditions.

American archeologists reacted to the new restrictions on their work. Some initiated digs in countries that did not have antiquities laws. However, it was not long before nearly all Middle Eastern countries had established stricter laws, and many archeologists realized that the opportunities that had long structured their field would no longer be available. Either they transitioned to modes of inquiry that emphasized in situ interpretation, or they left the field entirely. American archeology would never again reach the peaks of funding, finding, and founding it enjoyed during the 1920s. Yet while changing conditions for archeologists within the Middle East influenced a number of changes within the field, those changes did not entirely account for the shift of inquiry from artifacts to people facts – from archeology to area studies.

The changing geopolitical landscape in which American archeologists like Wilson found themselves during and after WWII also influenced many to focus more on the contemporary Middle East.

By the time he began working for the U.S. government in 1941, Wilson had spent the previous six years embroiled in debates that firmly grounded him in concerns of the present. As director of the OI, he was constantly looking for ways to cut budgets and still maintain a semblance of original research, and his pragmatic outlook led him to consider adopting a more present-day approach. From 1941-1943, as Coordinator of Information for the OWI, he saw firsthand the new kinds of research that, he anticipated, would be prioritized during the postwar period. Wilson's willingness to shift directions therefore had both a positive and negative pull. Aware that many simplistic, chauvinist opinions about Middle Easterners were propagated during the war, he wanted his type of humanist scholarship to be at the forefront of any area studies model. Yet he also wanted his department to maintain relevance, and saw that area experts would be sought after in the postwar period. If funding was shifting towards contemporary studies, then Wilson wanted to make a gambit for it, even if it meant sacrificing his pursuit of his original line of inquiry. Wilson therefore understood that departmental relevance was not available in perpetuity, but was, rather, in a state of near-constant contestation. If not actively sought, it could be lost. If the winds of Middle East studies were shifting towards the present, Wilson wanted to hoist the sails.

John Wilson's experience working for the U.S. government during WWII was paradigmatic of the experience many academics had during their forays into government work. He was transformed by it; in particular, he was thereafter more eager to seek forms of engagement between his scholarship and the changing political landscape of the Middle East. Wilson's reaction to government work was frustration with an eye towards reform. In other

words, he thought the process could be improved, but he most assuredly thought academia and government should be partners in trying to figure out the world. More specifically, given his experience with the government during WWII, he realized that government agencies would develop a systematic approach towards the study of the rest of the world's populations, whether trained academics joined the cause or not. As he wrote in late 1944:

During my eighteen months of service in Washington, it became increasingly clear to me that the universities of this country must face a demand for regional studies, with work on the modern world. I was concerned that some universities should undertake regional work in innocence of a demand for 'practical training,' so that world understanding might be based on detached rather than vocational considerations. It seemed to me inevitable that the social sciences would demonstrate interest in regional studies and that the humanities should, therefore, be emphasized in order that the studies might profit by a respect for language, history, and philosophy. When I presented these considerations to the administrative officers of the University, they asked me to return from Washington service and undertake a study of the problems and possibilities of regional work at this University.²²

Although at times he expressed disenchantment with government processes which adulterated humanistic work, he was convinced that such efforts would be completely misguided without the advice of humanities scholars like himself.

In 1944, Wilson took action to force the OI's hand, proposing a new plan of contemporary Middle Eastern research for the OI. His reasoning was seemingly thus: 1.) Wilson himself had made the transition from studying ancient Egypt to making pronouncements about the modern region, and others could do the same; 2.) although the arrangement was not perfect, there were no other Americans with the intimate contacts with the Middle East; and 3.) some university department was going to assume this role, so it should be his. From Wilson's willingness to challenge his department's focus, we can extrapolate that he had a somewhat unconventional view of scholarly expertise – at least one that was, as we will see, out of sync with his colleagues. His viewpoint also revealed his faith in scholarly malleability. To Wilson, even if one's expertise in one region was of a different time period, that already-established

expertise gave the person an advantage in terms of knowledge about that region. For Wilson, familiarity could breed context. Significantly, he acknowledged that he and his colleagues would need additional training in order to be true experts about the modern Middle East, but he was confident in his and their capabilities for reform.

In June 1944, he went to his colleagues with a proposition: to transform the OI into the preeminent center for the study of the contemporary Middle East. He wrote:

This memorandum throws open for discussion several proposed changes in the Oriental Institute and the Department of Oriental Languages. None of the changes is sweeping. None of the changes can be effected without group action and consent. That is why they are being proposed now for consideration in advance of our reorganization at the end of the war... It is proposed that there be a new emphasis on interpretative studies of broad cultural nature... without diverting means or quality from our attack on the problems of the Near East, it is proposed that we welcome added workers in other fields of the Orient, and, most particularly, workers and projects dealing with the modern Orient.²³

Wilson's attempt to diminish the significance of the change – “none of the changes is sweeping” – was likely the most difficult case he had to make. From all indications, his colleagues not only saw the changes as sweeping, but also as a fundamental shift in mission for the institute as a whole, as well as for their own research agendas in particular. Despite Wilson's assurance that there would be no “diverting means or quality,” without a significant infusion of outside funds, the members of the Oriental Institute could see the proposal for what it was: a wholesale change that would require them to develop new fields of expertise.

Wilson's ideas were ambitious and involved large-scale exchange between other regions and American institutions. He understood that the training of qualified educators would be a central conundrum in the development of regional or area studies. Writing to RF officer David Stevens in September 1944, he asserted:

our present interest is a groping search for the correct academic atmosphere for regional work of any kind. That involves experts qualified by experience, visiting professors from world regions, library facilities, and the opportunity to do research in and with contemporary world cultures. We thus approach the problem of teaching from the

standpoint of the scholarly qualifications of a faculty rather than from the anticipated demands of the students.²⁴

Wilson's vision of an area studies model that emphasized the humanities, fostered close collaboration with local experts, and eschewed social scientific inquiry is dramatically different from the way in which area studies would eventually become institutionalized in the United States. Seeing Wilson's proposal as an alternative vision for area studies demonstrates that regional studies could have developed differently. A number of forces large and small, inside and outside the university setting, contributed to making Middle East area studies what it eventually became.

Wilson reported back to Stevens in January 1945 with news that the proposal had been resoundingly rejected. The center of the study of the modern Middle East would not, for the time being at least, reside at the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute. Wilson wrote, "you will undoubtedly detect a note of disappointment that I was unable to persuade my own colleagues that their current interests might legitimately and profitably be extended." Wilson reported several reasons for the faculty's rejection of the proposal. Most significantly, the faculty members "[felt] that their current work is so important that it should receive any benefits forthcoming instead of suffering the competition of new activities." Wilson understood that impulse, and also saw it as a force that would impede any attempts to change faculty missions from within:

That is simply a normal valuation of one's own work. It does, however, indicate the formula prevailing in any group of scholars where the tendency will be to emphasize past and present activities rather than additions of the future. As universities are at present constituted, interdepartmental concerns receive less attention and weight than departmental concerns so that the problem of any change based on faculty initiative is difficult. Nevertheless, I cannot see successful change in a university unless there is faculty participation.²⁵

Wilson was stymied by this faculty model that resisted adaptation. He realized the need for contemporary experts on the Middle East would be fulfilled from somewhere, and remained frustrated that his colleagues could not see their way to provide it.

Yet Wilson may have also provided an impetus for RF officers to take a more activist role in the promotion of area studies. Summarizing the motions passed by the Department of Oriental Languages and Literatures, Wilson maintained the importance of area studies, but acknowledged that change would not come from within the university departments themselves, as “this Department has stated that regional studies of contemporary cultures are a concern of the University at large, and not of a single nuclear department or division.” Wilson anticipated that other departments would react in a similar way, and lamented, “in the absence of any mechanism to express this concern and stimulate individual departments to new interests and activities, the University may have no regional program. There the matter rests at present as far as Oriental Studies are concerned.” The only hope was that “some agency must be designated as a catalyst, if (a) regional studies are a valid concern of a university, and (b) the interdepartmental stimulus to such studies is to be activated.” The external catalyst, Wilson implied, would be a foundation that would provide the financial incentive for universities to establish interdepartmental area studies programs. With support failing, Wilson was convinced that area studies would not get off the ground.

CONCLUSION

During the 1920s and 1930s, the principle American academic interest in the Middle East was expressed through archeological expeditions that sought to illuminate the history of the ancient world. James Henry Breasted, the founder of the Oriental Institute, used Rockefeller money to mount numerous expeditions to the Near East, returning to Chicago with a trove of artifacts. A variety of factors, including the global Depression and Middle Eastern nationalism,

decreased access to artifacts. The shifting interests of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and Rockefeller Foundation officers also reduced the scope and scale of archeological expeditions. Studies of the contemporary Middle East were seen as more relevant to the RF's mission, as well as to the broader interests of the U.S. government. World War II solidified this trend, as many archeologists were brought into government service to formulate propaganda and policy towards Middle Easterners.

Towards the end of the war, John Wilson, Breasted's successor, attempted to make the OI the finest center for the study of the contemporary Middle East. His attempt failed due to the resistance of his colleagues, but his failure pointed towards the ways in which area studies would come to be constituted during the 1950s. The Rockefeller Foundation maintained its interest in the Middle East, but channeled its money instead towards Princeton University, where the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures, under Philip Hitti, would benefit from additional funds that might have gone towards the Oriental Institute. This missed opportunity and subsequent shift eastward is an essential part of understanding how Middle Eastern area studies came into being in the United States during the early postwar period.

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ENDNOTES:

¹ June 1944, John Wilson, "Oriental Studies at the University of Chicago," Rockefeller Family Archives, RG 1.1, Series 216R, Box 18, Folder 247.

² Ibid.

³ 2 May 1919, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to James Henry Breasted, Rockefeller Family Archives, RG 2, Educational Interests, Box 112, Folder 812.

⁴ 16 August 1919, James Henry Breasted to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Rockefeller Family Archives, RG 2, Educational Interests, Box 112, Folder 822.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The focus on collecting objects was emphasized in a recent Oriental Institute exhibit and accompanying text about that initial voyage, "Oriental Institute | Pioneers to the Past: American Archaeologists in the Middle East, 1919–20," n.d., <http://oi.uchicago.edu/museum/special/pioneer/>; Geoff Emberling, editor, *Pioneers to the Past: American Archaeologists in the Middle East, 1919-1920*, First edition. Chicago, Illinois: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2010.

⁸ 23 October 1931, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to James Henry Breasted, Rockefeller Family Archives, RG 2, Educational Interests, Box 111, Folder 802.

⁹ 26 November 1923, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to Ernest Burton, Rockefeller Family Archives, RG 2, Educational Interests, Box 112, Folder 812.

¹⁰ 19 September 1929, Robert Gumbel to James Henry Breasted, Rockefeller Family Archives, RG 2, Box 49, Folder 362.

¹¹ 5 December 1935, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to Charles Breasted, Rockefeller Family Archives, RG 2, Educational Interests, Box 111, Folder 811.

¹² Breasted received \$17,370.70 from JDR Jr. after expenses exceeded his initial estimate of \$10,000 for the transportation of the Khorsabad Lions, 19 December 1929, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to James Henry Breasted, Rockefeller Family Archives, RG 2, Educational Interests, Box 112, Folder 825. Breasted requested \$215,000 over five years to excavate at Megiddo, 15 May 1925, James Henry Breasted to Raymond Fosdick, Rockefeller Family Archives, RG 2, Educational Interests, Box 112, Folder 824.

¹³ 30 November 1923, James Henry Breasted to Ernest Burton, Rockefeller Family Archives, RG 2, Educational Interests, Box 112, Folder 812.

¹⁴ 26 November 1935, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to James Henry Breasted, Rockefeller Family Archives, RG 2, Educational Interests, Box 111, Folder 811.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ 23 April 1936, Charles Breasted to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Rockefeller Family Archives, RG 2, Educational Interests, Box 111, Folder 804.

¹⁷ 6 May 1936, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to John Wilson, Rockefeller Family Archives, RG 2, Educational Interests, Box 111, Folder 804.

¹⁸ 8 May 1936, John Wilson to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Rockefeller Family Archives, RG 2, Educational Interests, Box 111, Folder 804.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ All quotes Ibid.

²¹ Donald M Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002; Neil Asher Silberman, *Between Past and Present: Archaeology, Ideology, and Nationalism in the Modern Middle East*, 1st edition. New York: Anchor Books, 1990; Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007; James F Goode, *Negotiating for the Past: Archaeology, Nationalism, and Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1919-1941*, 1st edition, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007; Magnus Thorkell Bernhardsson, *Reclaiming a Plundered Past: Archaeology and Nation Building in Modern Iraq*, 1st edition, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005; Erez Manela, "'Is this not the ugliest of treacheries?!' diplomacy, culture, and the origins of Anti-

Americanism in Egypt." in Abbas Amanat and Magnus Thorkell Bernhardsson, editors, *U.S.-Middle East Historical Encounters: A Critical Survey*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007.

²² 15 December 1944, John Wilson, "'Regionalism' at the University of Chicago: Reactions of a Department," Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RG 1.1, Series 216R, Box 18, Folder 247.

²³ June 1944, John Wilson, "Oriental Studies at the University of Chicago," Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RG 1.1, Series 216R, Box 18, Folder 247.

²⁴ 15 September 1944, John Wilson to David Stevens, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RG 1.1, Series 216R, Box 18, Folder 247.

²⁵ All quotes above from 10 January 1945, John Wilson to David Stevens, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RG 1.1, Series 216R, Box 18, Folder 247.