

...or equivalent combination of experience and education

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Though I did not set out as a young man to be a librarian, I have now spent a third of a century engaged in that profession. Over the course of my career I have been employed as a librarian by four institutions. Three of them were small, comparatively independent institutions populated by communities of scholars directly engaged in the study of antiquity and the fourth, where I now work, is a large research university. While quite different from one another in many ways, a central component of my own responsibility in each has been collection development and specialized reference service to local and distant scholars and students engaged in the advanced study of antiquity. It was not until I undertook my current position that I had any substantial engagement with undergraduate students, or worked in a large team of librarians representing specializations and disciplines spanning the full spectrum of a large university and a broad range of interests in the discipline of librarianship. Each of these institutions offered its own unique set of challenges and rewards, but at each I have been given what seems in retrospect to have been a remarkable degree of freedom and encouragement to pursue my own areas of interest as they developed over the years.

If forced to characterize the core of my own philosophy, I would say that I am fully committed to the principle that libraries are fundamental stakeholders in the development and implementation of new forms of knowledge management, and that both print and emerging technologies—and the developing relationships between and among them—are essential components of the scholarly conversation. With that in mind, I have participated in partnerships and undertaken my own projects seeking to engage the community of scholars while broadening access to both newer and older modes of scholarly publication. The pair of projects, *Abzu*¹ and *AWOL*², initiated more than 20 years ago, represent probably the longest sustained effort to map the development of open digital scholarship in any discipline. While by many measures they have been successful—and personally gratifying and useful to the field—they remain a provisional and inadequate work-around for the problem of integrating print and digital scholarship. Digital humanities, and digital scholarship more generally, despite rapid development over the last quarter century, is still in its infancy. Already a decade ago Gregory Crane and his colleagues were calling for the field of Classics, to move beyond “incunabular assumptions” embodied in many digital collections (Crane et al. 2006). While many individuals and projects have heeded their call, the publishing industry which controls so much of what scholars do with the product of their work, perpetuates these incunabular assumptions. Because the means to produce scholarship in digital form are in the backpacks and on the desks of all scholars, and because sharing this scholarship over long distances is so simple, the development of digital scholarship has been both democratic and chaotic: A thousand flowers bloom, but there is no garden. Through *Abzu* and *AWOL*, I try to see some patterns in the chaos.

I entered graduate school at The University of Chicago in 1976 with the intention of studying the history of the ancient Near East. At the time, I imagined I would complete my graduate studies and then teach history at the secondary school level, though I had only the vaguest notion of what that might mean in any realistic sense. I was not a particularly talented student, but I was persistent and was fortunate to study under a quite extraordinary community of scholars (and an exceptionally talented cohort of fellow graduate students). We tried to read everything, and we worked collaboratively to support and challenge one another as we worked our way through the core areas of philology, archaeology, history, of our specializations in Assyriology, Egyptology, Hittitology, and Northwest Semitics. Many among this group of students have gone on to become distinguished scholars and teachers. I am fortunate to count many of my teachers and fellow students among my oldest and best friends.

Like most students of the ancient Near East in Chicago, I spent most of my daylight in The Oriental Institute's Research Archives. The institute's director at the time, John A. Brinkman, had established it as a priority to re-assemble in the archives, an on-site, non-circulating, working research library following the centralization of the university's collections in 1970 to the Regenstein Library. In the evenings and weekends when The Oriental Institute (OI) was closed we decamped to the fifth floor of Regenstein, where the old OI Library and its card catalog had been consolidated with the Classics, and South and East Asian collections (University of Chicago 1970). Though some were already experimenting with the use of computers, we were still solidly in the era of paper and approved typists for dissertations. Kate Turabian's often seemingly arcane rules were committed, for better or worse, to our memories. My own studies

followed a more or less standard Assyriological/Mesopotamian history curriculum. My interest in Achaemenid Iran led me to seek out the advice of Richard T. Hallock, now professor emeritus having retired in 1971 (Jones and Stolper 2002). He agreed to help me learn Elamite, and we spent two pleasant years meeting twice a week to read Achaemenid Royal Inscriptions and Persepolis Treasury and Fortification tablets, launching me into a field in which I continue to work in my spare time to this day. It also allowed me to be counted as, in the words of Matthew Stolper, one of about a dozen individuals in the world qualified to say that I do not understand Elamite grammar. While a graduate student, I also served as the manager of the OI Tablet Collection, at that time housed in glorious accessibility of a large office adjacent to the rooms inhabited by the Assyrian Dictionary staff and other members of the faculty on the third floor of the OI. This position afforded me the opportunity to meet and work with a steady stream of visitors to the tablet collection and to the files and other resources assembled to support the Assyrian Dictionary Project. In those days in Chicago there were two occasions in a graduate student's life during which the clock stopped without penalty: between the completion of required coursework and sitting for comprehensive examination, and between the successful completion of these exams and the submission of a dissertation proposal. During the former of these, I had moved to Boston where I was reading (and dithering) in preparation for my exams. One evening I received a call from Alice Schneider, the graduate student responsible for the Research Archives, asking me if I would be interested in succeeding her in the position during a maternity leave and possibly afterwards. This offer came as a surprise since I had not worked with her as a student employee or had I ever seriously considered working in a library (Jones 2013).

This seemed like an opportunity to reengage with my fellow students and scholars; thus, I accepted and moved back to Chicago in early 1983.

I found myself suddenly in sole charge of the OI Library's collection of some 6,800 monographs, and nearly 9,000 serials and bound periodical volumes, housed in a single large and attractive reading room with a pair of offices. As the sole full-time employee, I was responsible for selection, acquisition, cataloging, stacks shifting, and maintenance, as well as all facets of public and reference service. I inherited a procedure manual hand written on a set of index cards, outlining the local classification scheme (which I knew quite well as a user of the collection) and cataloging rules. The office was furnished with a desk, a (broken) chair, a battered file cabinet, and a 40-year-old manual typewriter. It had the strong support of the faculty, and the director of the institute, Robert McC. Adams (who was at that moment simultaneously the provost of the university and soon to leave to become the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution), and the incoming director, Janet Johnson.

Over the next decade, I learned the rudiments of librarianship.³ For a time I seriously considered formal library school training, but shelved the idea when The University of Chicago Library School announced its closure and ceased admitting students. In that decade I more than doubled the size of the collection; re-cataloged nearly the entire collection to a consistent if idiosyncratic standard; instituted the policy and practice of providing catalog records for all essays, articles, and reviews included in all acquired materials; selected and deployed a computerized library management system and catalog; re-established distribution of monthly acquisitions lists; and convinced the administration, already fully in support of the library, of the importance of the librarian as

a permanent member of the institute's staff (Fig. 1). It was also in this decade that desktop computing, e-mail, and networked communication were becoming standard tools in the academy. At some point in this period it was clear that I would not be writing a dissertation, though I never formally withdrew from the program. I nevertheless continued to read widely and more or less comprehensively in my area of specialization and to work in close collaboration with Matthew Stolper as well as a growing cadre of visiting colleagues who were beginning to come to grips with the complexity and depth of the Persepolis Fortification Archive. And I began to think of myself as a librarian.

<Insert Figure 1 here>

In January 1992, after a period of experimentation, I launched the formal publication (on paper) of the *Oriental Institute Research Archives Acquisitions List (RAAL)*.⁴ It listed all items acquired by the OI Library during a given period, but also included indexed bibliographical entries for each essay, article, and review appearing in all books and serials acquired in that time, extracted from the digital library catalog. *RAAL* was an attempt to share the benefit of this local practice and to broaden access to material which was (and remains) overlooked in more mainstream periodical indices. Initially a quarterly, it quickly changed to a semi-annual, but remained nevertheless an enormous undertaking and would last only four years, after which emerging technology rendered it obsolete. In this same period, I produced a second bibliographical serial, *Pirradaziš: Newsletter of Achaemenian Studies*.⁵ It was an outgrowth of the last [10th] Achaemenid History Workshop, held in Ann Arbor, MI, April 6–8, 1990. Appearing eventually in eight irregular issues over a little more than four years, it was a medium for the exchange of bibliographical information in the growing field of Achaemenid studies.

As with the *RAAL*, emerging technology and the appearance of more formal bibliographical tools for the discipline quickly rendered it obsolete.

These technologies were, of course, the establishment of a network and its connections in the OI, the emergence of communication software, then the appearance of the World-Wide Web and the browser. Our experience with this at the OI is a story worth telling at length another time. In short, John Sanders had recently been hired to run the new OI Computer Laboratory and we developed a close friendship and productive partnership. We were able to convince William Sumner, the director, to allow us to experiment with these technologies by setting up the Ancient Near East (ANE) mailing list in 1993, followed a year later by the first iteration of the OI's website; then six months later we launched a second component of the website: *Abzu: Guide to Resources for the Study of the Ancient Near East Available on the Internet*. The launch of *Abzu* marks the start of a program I have now sustained for more than 20 years seeking to understand and document the full range of networked digital scholarly activity relating to the study of antiquity.

All three of these efforts had immediate success. Within a year the ANE list had more than 700 addresses subscribed and enjoying vigorous (if occasionally trivial) conversation. Suddenly, scholars had a forum for ongoing communication with scattered, rarely met colleagues. Questions could be asked and answered publicly; references could be checked remotely and cooperatively. It was an exciting and interesting time, and a new medium that no one really understood. Three years into its existence a controversial episode of communications resulted in the establishment of rules for communication in this list; looking back, this seems obvious and is now customary with similar groups. In

July 1996 we suspended traffic on the list, established a set of behavioral protocols, and re-opened the list in early December. We had at that point about 1,500 subscribers, and ANE slowly re-established its presence under my strict application of the rules and remained in service until I left Chicago in 2005.⁶ It was revived for a short period, without moderation, by my successor. His experiment with unrestrained democracy failed, and the list was permanently closed.⁷ Users of other email lists will find this story familiar. Many lists followed similar trajectories and, as the scholars became more sophisticated in their use of electronic media mailing lists, declined in importance.

Abzu was an instant success. No such tool existed for ancient Near Eastern studies, though a fair number of “links sites” appeared and disappeared—or languished as the enthusiasm of their proprietors waned. But *Abzu* persisted; it established itself and the OI as the place to look for digital scholarship and to announce new resources. In 1999, I was approached by colleagues at Vanderbilt University with the idea that their library might build a portal for ancient Near Eastern studies. I was invited to join the project. We eventually developed a three part plan: (1) rebuilding *Abzu* as a database; (2) developing and digitizing a set of core texts; and (3) developing a digital library infrastructure for the long-term archiving and presentation of primary archaeological data. With the partnership and moral support from several large institutions, along with a grant from the Mellon Foundation, *Abzu* was converted and about 200 volumes were scanned; *Electronic Tools and Ancient Near East Archives (ETANA)* was launched in 2001.⁸ The archaeological component was more complex and slower to start. Though well-supported by a National Science Foundation grant in 2004 and thoughtfully conceived at Virginia Tech, it ultimately failed in its goal of producing a useful product. *ETANA* remains a

useful tool to this day. I still maintain *Abzu* there, though I more actively engage with *AWOL* (see below) as its successor.

When the position of Head Librarian at the Blegen Library at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (ASCSA) unexpectedly was sent in my direction in 2004, it seemed a long shot. I had no academic or other background in classics, aside from its intersection with ancient Near Eastern and Egyptological studies. Nevertheless, the prospect of a giant physical leap to the East and a simultaneous intellectual leap West was alluring to me and my family. So I applied, interviewed, received an offer, and accepted.

In the meantime, I was participating in a committee of faculty and staff in making recommendations to the faculty on matters relating to digital resources at the OI. The principle recommendation to the faculty, unanimously endorsed by them in October 2004, was that all OI publications be simultaneously published in print and online, with the digital versions to be distributed free of charge to the user. In the decade since that decision was made, more than 700 books have been published online—the entire formal product of the OI.⁹ This extraordinary achievement has since provided the inspiration and model for several other institutions to do the same.

In summer 2005 my family and I moved to Athens. At the Blegen Library, I found myself the leader of a staff of half a dozen dedicated and skilled employees, and thrust into a leadership role in an institution to which a large community of scholars is almost fanatically loyal and of whose complex oral tradition I was almost completely ignorant. I was faced with managing a staff (something I had never done); learning a discipline I knew too little about; and deciphering a complex governance structure which

was at the time involved in a period of transitional strife. In partnership with Charles Watkinson, the head of the school's publication office, residing in Princeton, NJ, I worked to develop a proposal to the Mellon Foundation to develop the organization's information technology infrastructure. This would eventually result in a successful proposal to rebuild the website and undertake a sort of self-study to harmonize various organizational practices and information management schemes which had developed organically within various departments or programs of the ASCSA, including the two libraries and the permanent archaeological projects at Corinth and the Athenian Agora. This was not easy, but the results were successful on the whole. I single out in particular the long dialogue, husbanded by our consultant Thornton Staples, about the management of complex and varied archaeological information in a sustainable manner. This dialogue formed the groundwork for a substantial European Union grant, organized and managed by Pandelis Panos, to digitize the records of the Corinth excavations as well as an important component of the archival holdings of the Gennadius Library. Consensus on rationalizing and realigning collections and services among the libraries and archives was more difficult to achieve, but seeds were sown in fertile ground. Despite the hardships caused by the economic crash in 2008, many of the ideas arising from this process are now beginning to bear fruit.

After two years in Athens we were finally settling in. We had developed a circle of friends in the Greek and expatriate communities, and my family—if not myself—were fluently communicating in Greek. As we weighed the prospects and opportunities for permanent residence abroad, I began to hear about a newly emerging Institute for the Study of the Ancient World (ISAW) in New York, being established under the generous

patronage of the Leon Levy Foundation. Within days of each other, several colleagues sent me copies of an advertisement for the position of head librarian there. The position was to be a tenure-track appointment in the New York University (NYU) Libraries with a dual report to the director of the ISAW and the head of collections and research services in the library. The threefold attraction of the possibility of tenure, the infrastructure of a growing and globalizing university library system, and the opportunity to build a new library *ex nihilo* led me to apply.

While in Athens I continued to catalog material into *Abzu*, wondering how to now come to grips with the similar corpus of material arising from classical and Mediterranean archaeology. I also began to experiment with social media and how to integrate them into the work I was doing at the ASCSA. As a consequence of this work, I was invited to attend a meeting of the principal players in the development of a new generation of digital tools for the study of antiquity. Among the many things that bound this community together was (and is) an unwavering commitment to openness and collaboration. At that meeting I met my future colleague Tom Elliott, who had just signed on as the associate director of digital programs at ISAW. Tom and the other participants in the meeting had an infectious enthusiasm and vision for the future which was impossible to resist. My interview at ISAW was equally stimulating. Roger Bagnall, the director of ISAW, had for years been a leading proponent of the use of digital tools in the service of scholarship. His vision of a new institute where the principles espoused by the Digital Classics community were a programmatic part of the central infrastructure was, and is, inspiring. I accepted the offer to become the founding librarian at ISAW.

It was not an easy thing for my family and me to leave the delights of Athens to which we had committed our futures. It was also not easy to leave the ASCSA, where many of the initiatives I had participated in were just getting underway under renewed leadership. But the prospect of life in New York City has its own attractions, and we moved in the summer of 2008.

It becomes more difficult to reflect candidly on the rewards and challenges of an experience at a workplace the more recent that experience is. I thoroughly enjoyed my time at ISAW, my colleagues there and at NYU Libraries, and my co-laborers in the trenches of digital antiquity, Tom Elliott and Sebastian Heath. The staff at the ISAW library worked closely with me to build the beginnings of that collection and the services required to sustain it. Hardly a day in the five years I was there went by without something turning up that we didn't yet know how to do, and collectively we figured it out. Two digital efforts I initiated there stand out: the *Ancient World Digital Library (AWDL)*¹⁰ and the *Ancient World Online (AWOL)*¹¹. *AWDL* launched in 2010 with the intention to collect, curate, and sustain a digital collection of important research material reflecting the cross-boundary and interdisciplinary focus central to ISAW's vision. In May 2015, *AWDL* re-launched with a much improved book viewer and a much expanded corpus of material along with the promise of a steady flow in the future (Fig. 2).¹² As a parallel project, in early 2009, I launched *AWOL*, the successor to *Abzu*, with a broader disciplinary focus. Based on a social media platform, it offers a range of opportunities for interaction by scholars and lay persons alike. It has been astonishingly successful with several million page views and well over 7,000 subscribers. I am proud to say that it

received the Award for Outstanding Word in Digital Archaeology in January 2015 from the Archaeological Institute of America.

<Insert Figure 2 here>

In the winter of 2013, I was invited to consider applying for a position at The Pennsylvania State University Libraries. During the interview, I was surprised to learn that if an offer were made, it would be provisional on a review for immediate tenure and appointment at the rank of full librarian. I thoroughly enjoyed the interview and the colleagues I met on my visit to State College. Apparently they did too, because I was offered the job, contingent upon a successful tenure review process. From my point of view, it was a curiously blind process. I presume that my dossier included my letter of application and curriculum vitae, along with the letters of support written on my behalf; though none of these had been written as a document to support a tenure review, the outcome was successful.

I did not set out to be a librarian but I have now spent a third of a century and half my life as one. Were it not for phrases like "...or equivalent combination of experience and education" in job ads, I would have been unqualified for every job I have considered. Were it not for committees willing to take those phrases seriously, I would not be where I am today. Were it not for the support of friends and colleagues I would have learned little. Were it not for a family willing to take leaps into the dark with me the world would have been less exciting. There remains a sense in the academy of the road to tenure as the noblest path for a scholar. Many teachers still guide their students to seek this Holy Grail, but the vast majority of academic careers will follow other paths. It is essential to prepare for the unexpected, to seize opportunities to use the skills you are developing as a young

scholar in new and imaginative ways. Plan to succeed, and be prepared to learn from inevitable failure. Become an expert in two or more things other people care about and need, and develop that expertise by committing to lifelong learning. Collaborate as often as you can. Find opportunities to teach and to learn from your collaborators. Take risks. Read. Read some more. Write. Write some more, and ask people you respect to read what you have written.

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¹ For more information, go to: <http://www.etana.org/abzubib>.

² For more information, go to: <http://ancientworldonline.blogspot.com>.

³ The Oriental Institute produces a series of Annual Reports, sustained now for well over half a century, in which all members of the faculty and staff are expected to document and reflect upon their own research and the projects and departments they supervise. I know of no other institution which has a comparable record of its activity. Each of these reports has a chapter on the Research Archives contributed by me. All of them are available online at: <https://oi.uchicago.edu/about/annual-reports/oriental-institute-annual-reports>

⁴ For view RAAL's bibliographic record in WorldCAT, go to: <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/25724958>.

⁵ To view Pirradaziš's bibliographic record in WorldCAT, go to: <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/863381899>.

⁶ To access an archive of the ANE List, go to: <http://oi-archive.uchicago.edu/research/library/ane/>.

⁷ A successor list ANE-2, unaffiliated with the Oriental Institute, tried with limited success, to fill the role. It remains active, but quiet, to this day (<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/ANE-2/info>).

⁸ To access the portal, go to: <http://www.etana.org/>.

⁹ To access these publications, go to: <http://oi.uchicago.edu/research/catalog-publications> or <http://ancientworldonline.blogspot.com/2010/10/oriental-institute-open-access.html>.

¹⁰ To access this library, go to: <http://dlib.nyu.edu/awdl>.

¹¹ See n. 2 for web address.

¹² To access this library, go to: <http://dlib.nyu.edu/ancientworld/>.