

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Iraq-bound, Past Meets Present on Library Loading Docks *Rare archaeology books get a state-of-the-art technology boost*



(L) OCLC Online Computer Library Center's Kathy Runnels catalogs one of nearly 1,500 volumes. (Photo: OCLC) (R) Stony Brook University Graduate student Brian Bingham inventories eight pallets of archaeology books headed for universities at Baghdad and Mosul in Iraq. (Photo: J. Pournelle)

Stony Brook, New York, 30 September 2004. Thousands of expertly-selected archaeology books—ranging from rare, out-of-print excavation reports, to state-of-the-art remote sensing studies—are headed for the University of Baghdad and Mosul University in Iraq. Thanks to a ground-breaking partnership between Stony Brook University and OCLC Online Computer Library Center, librarians will get a heads up on what's coming their way, and over half of these will go into circulation immediately upon their arrival at resource-starved libraries.

In March 2004, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) released funds to the State University of New York at Stony Brook (SBU), one of five awardees under USAID's Higher Education and Development (HEAD) program in Iraq. HEAD seeks to address long-term development issues by supporting educational reform at Iraqi universities, and SBU is refurbishing departments of archaeology.

Iraq (ancient Mesopotamia) was the cradle of civilization, where cities, writing, and the rule of law first developed. But the infrastructure for studying and protecting Iraq's world archaeological heritage was shattered by fifteen years of war and embargo. Iraqi universities were bypassed by extraordinary advances in library information technology. What books remained were smoke-damaged during postwar looting.

SBU archaeologist Elizabeth Stone hand-picked nearly 1,500 volumes representing post-1990 scholarship on Mesopotamian archaeology and cuneiform texts—but visits to the Baghdad and Mosul libraries made it clear that librarians were ill-equipped to cope with un-cataloged materials. Books needed to arrive “shelf-ready” so that librarians, accustomed to paper records, can immediately place them into circulation, while the librarians make the transition to computerized library systems.

Chris Filstrup, Dean of SBU's libraries, brokered an agreement with OCLC to create electronic catalog records, mark the spines, and generate catalog cards for books headed to Iraq. The electronic records are stored in WorldCat, OCLC's worldwide union catalog, created and maintained collectively by more than 9,000 member institutions. Adding the University of Baghdad and Mosul University to OCLC's membership brings these universities into the broad cooperative community of libraries and scholars represented by the OCLC membership.

Orchestrated by the SBU-HEAD program's Assistant Director for Archeology, Jennifer Pournelle, this novel partnership required concerted effort among five institutions. Booksellers David Brown Book Company and Eisenbrauns provided substantial discounts and rushed books published around the world directly to OCLC. OCLC cataloged, labeled, and repacked boxes at a furious pace, then shipped them directly to SBU's commercial freight consolidator, where the books were re-inventoried and prepared for customs inspection. Within five months, a substantial, instant archeology collection moved from purchase to pallet.

"This effort represents library diplomacy and a cooperative solution at its best," said Sandi Jones, Product Manager, OCLC Contract Cataloging Services. "Librarians in Iraq are already contributing their own records to WorldCat and sharing knowledge of their own special collections with the world-wide OCLC membership."

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