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Decolonizing the cuneiform corpus

An Arabic version of the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative

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Decolonizing the cuneiform corpus

An Arabic version of the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative

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Since the first discoveries of cuneiform inscriptions in the 18th century, this invaluable part of Iraq's national heritage has been disseminated worldwide through excavation, trade, and looting. Most cuneiform inscriptions known today are located in museums and collections outside of Iraq and have been published and studied in journals, books, and databases written predominantly in English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish. This situation significantly inhibits researchers and general audiences in the Arab-speaking world from accessing and exploring their own national heritage.

We present the results of an initiative to translate the database of the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (www.cdli.earth) into Arabic. When completed, this will, for the first time, provide audiences in Iraq and elsewhere with full access to an open-access, open-source, community-based digital platform of cuneiform inscriptions, containing approximately 400,000 records distributed across approximately 600 archaeological sites and 1,200 museums, in their own language. This will enable Arabic language users with limited or no proficiency in English to freely search, explore, download, and reuse data from the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative for research, teaching, and communication purposes.

The project is an international collaborative effort between researchers at Al-Qadisiyah University and staff at Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative, involving assyriologists, archaeologists, digital humanists, translators and research engineers from Iraq, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Sweden. The project has received support from the British Institute for the Study of Iraq, the General Fund for Assyriology at the University of Oxford, and private donations to the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative.