

The Oriental Institute Museum

GUSTAVUS F. SWIFT, *Curator*

One new program brought nearly to completion and the visible results of the beginning of another are among the achievements of the Museum staff in the past year.

Starting with the production of a xerox copy of each of some sixty thousand catalog cards in the office files, and with a plan nursed and shaped into innumerable ramifications, the entire office staff has par-



Mr. R. H. Hanson and Mr. H. R. Torres install a fresh exhibit of colorful mummy masks. Photo by Ursula Schneider.

ticipated in the creation of a complete subject index of the Museum collection. After a primary geographical breakdown, the index follows a clear typological path as closely as local conditions permit. We should now be able, for the first time, to furnish readily an inventory

of any class of object that may be needed for research or exhibition purposes, or in answer to frequent outside inquiries.

Revision and rearrangement of exhibits in the east end of the Egyptian Hall have begun in the section devoted to funerary equipment. New selections of Canopic jars, ushebtis, servant figurines, mummy masks and other grave goods have been freshly mounted and installed. The result will be a saving of space sufficient, once a modest amount of new lighting is provided, to bring the large models of the Snefru Pyramid and the Amarna House back into the appropriate parts of the Egyptian Hall. A following step will involve changes in the area devoted to Egyptian sculpture.

These modifications are the beginning of a more general plan, still and perhaps forever in formation, for the exhibition areas of the museum. A following step would be the preparation of a new Palestine exhibit in three or possibly four alcoves of the Assyrian Hall, and, beyond that, a thorough revision of the Babylonian Hall.

A problem looms up constantly in all considerations of planning for the Museum, whether the collections, the exhibits or the research and education functions are being thought of. This is the present severe shortage of space, both in the main floor halls and in the basement storage and work areas. The cause of this is simply the lively interest of the Oriental Institute in new aspects of its field; Chogha Mish, Nippur, Nubia, and the Prehistoric Project have contributed large segments to our collections and generated exhibits which have tended to modify the pre-existing pattern rather sharply.

Certain short-term measures to relieve the space shortage are available. The condensing of exhibits, as in the Egyptian Hall, has already been mentioned. Another is a small silver lining to the cloud representing the departure of the Oriental Institute Library. It has been possible to recover and remodel the original stack area; it will be used as a place to assemble and analyze the copious field records of excavations of many past years, which are now scattered through the building. The result will be a liberation of space and, eventually and more importantly, a great gain of accessibility to the newly inventoried records.

As a long-term solution to the space problem of an institution with a large, growing and important collection in a forty-year-old building, it is clear that new construction must eventually be considered. It is the Curator's present opinion that any new capacity should be devoted mainly to work and study purposes. Relocation of these functions to new quarters would release a valuable increment of storage space, while any gain in exhibition area might well be moderate in size.

A very high priority need of the Museum is a modern program of conservation, which will extend to the maximum the useful life of its collection, protecting it against Chicago's atmosphere and climate. Again, there is a long-term answer, involving the thorough air-conditioning of present and future quarters, and a short-term one. This includes trained staff, equipment and materials adequate to begin a program of treatment of our many classes of antiquities. A proposal has been prepared, in the hope of raising the funds necessary for an initial three-year period.

There are other, more modest needs of the Museum, where timely and thoughtful assistance can advance its work faster than its small budget permits. Thus, we are particularly thankful for the help of the Volunteer Docents, who have offered a part of the funds at their disposal to provide necessary lighting in the Egyptian Hall, several new historical maps, and other amenities for the exhibit areas. Thanks are due to all of the members of this group who have led tours during the past year under the general direction of Mrs. John Livingood, and who have run The Suq, our Museum shop, which is now managed by Mrs. Paul A. Manes.

The small Museum staff has been relatively stable, and very effective, during the past year. Mr. Honorio R. Torres has replaced Mr. Robert Ahlstrom as Assistant Preparator. Miss Signe Magnuson took Susan Allen's place when she was called to field work in Iran. Mr. Abdolmajid Arfaee and Mr. James P. Allen have continued part-time work on the conservation of cuneiform tablets, and Mr. Charles Van Siclen and Mr. David P. Silverman have given very valuable part-time help in the office.

Visitors are welcome in the Oriental Institute Museum every day except Mondays and holidays, from 10:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. The Museum is also open on the evenings of lectures. Guided tours for groups can be arranged by calling the Museum Office at 753-2474.