

The Oriental Institute Museum

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During the past few years, the objective of the Museum's exhibition policy has been to strengthen, improve, and modernize the displays of the Institute's permanent collection. Recently, most of the available means and effort have gone into the exhibits of sculpture and funerary equipment in the Egyptian Hall. Three developments in other areas took place in the year just past: the acquisition by exchange of two new Assyrian reliefs, a temporary exhibition celebrating the centenary of John Davison Rockefeller, Jr., and the formation of plans for a thorough revision of the Babylonian Hall.

Now mounted in Alcove M of the Assyrian Hall, the new reliefs come from the Palace at Nimrud (ancient Kalhu) of King Ashurnasirpal II, a ruler of great historical importance who reigned from 883 to 859 B.C. They, with many others transported to the British Museum, were recovered by Sir Austen Henry Layard in his first excavation at Nimrud in 1846. Our new pieces and one of two Persepolis column bases, which came to the Oriental Institute in 1936, were the substance of an exchange with the British Museum. Under negotiation for some years, this exchange was first discussed by Professor P. P. Delougaz, the former Curator here, and Dr. R. D. Barnett, former Keeper of the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities in the British Museum, and was concluded with Dr. Edmond Sollberger, the present Keeper.

The smaller relief shows the head of King Ashurnasirpal II himself, recognizable by his royal tiara. The larger is a full-length figure of a protective and beneficent minor deity of the Assyrian religion, conventionally—and for want of a better identification—called a Winged Genius. His horned headdress as well as the wings demonstrate his divine nature; his raised right hand holds something resembling a pine cone, and his left, a bucket. Both pieces are of very fine workmanship and in excellent condition, and the subject matter of



Photos by Jean Grant



each fills a vacancy in the Institute's collection. Being a century and a half older than the Museum's reliefs from the Palace of King Sargon II found in our own excavation at Khorsabad, they show differences of style that now give our exhibits another broad dimension.

At the request of President Levi, the Museum presented in December a commemorative exhibition in honor of the centenary of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (1874-1960). The exhibition focused on Mr. Rockefeller's relationship with James Henry Breasted (1865-1935), the founder of the Oriental Institute, in full consciousness of Mr. Rockefeller's many generous benefactions to other parts of the University and to his other large-scale humanistic undertakings. Using original letters and documents, photographs, publications, and antiquities, the exhibition highlighted two incidents in the long association of the two men, as well as those Oriental Institute and related enterprises in which Mr. Rockefeller was most actively interested. The first event, in early 1919, was the founding of the Institute upon Breasted's proposal and Rockefeller's initial and long-continued support, leading directly to Breasted's Near Eastern trip of exploration and reconnaissance, diplomacy, and acquisition of antiquities in that year and the next. A selection of the finest objects purchased during this trip formed part

of the exhibition. The second event, in 1929, was a grand tour of the Nile and of Palestine and Syria, upon which Breasted conducted a party headed by Mr. and Mrs. Rockefeller and their son David. The scientific work commemorated by the exhibition included Breasted's discoveries at Dura (Salihiye), Syria, in 1920; the excavations of Megiddo in Palestine and of Khorsabad in Iraq; the Palestine Museum in Jerusalem; Amice M. Calverley's publication, *The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos*; and Nina M. Davies' two splendid volumes of *Ancient Egyptian Paintings*. The Oriental Institute is deeply indebted to the Rockefeller Family Archives, the Rockefeller Foundation Archives, and the University of Chicago Libraries, Special Collections, for the loan of materials for this exhibition. Its preparation was a challenging and illuminating experience for the Museum staff, all of whom participated in it.

By spring, 1974, plans were under way for the reorganization of the exhibits in the Babylonian Hall, under a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, matched by University funds. With the growth of the collection and the installation of special exhibits over recent years, some of our best material has been displaced and the general organization of the hall has become less clear and comprehensible to the visitor. Present plans call for a generally topical arrangement of materials somewhat like that of the Egyptian Hall and for a comprehensive view of the successive stages of Mesopotamian civilization from the prehistoric Ubaid period to the Late Babylonian of the sixth century B.C. This project may be expected to produce a long-range improvement of the Museum's capacities in the areas of interpretation, labeling and display.

Closely related to effective exhibition is the function of adequately informing the public and the professional world about our collections by other means. The Museum has long felt the lack of an adequate handbook. The National Endowment for the Arts has awarded another grant, generously matched by the Barker Welfare Foundation, for the preparation of copy for such a publication over a two-year period running from 1974 to 1976. In the year past, necessary information has been compiled on important parts of the Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Iranian collections, by Susan J. Allen, David P. Silverman, Elizabeth Stone, Donald Whitcomb and Richard Zettler, all advanced students or recent graduates, under the supervision of Assistant Curators Judith A. Franke and David W. Nisgowitz. Plans for the coming year provide for the writing of sections on Egypt and Mesopotamia, and for efforts to secure publication.

It is a pleasure, as always, to express one's gratitude for the skill and energy of the Museum staff, whose names are given elsewhere, to the Museum volunteers whose help has come to mean more and more, and to the volunteer docents who contribute so greatly to the Museum's effectiveness and liveliness.