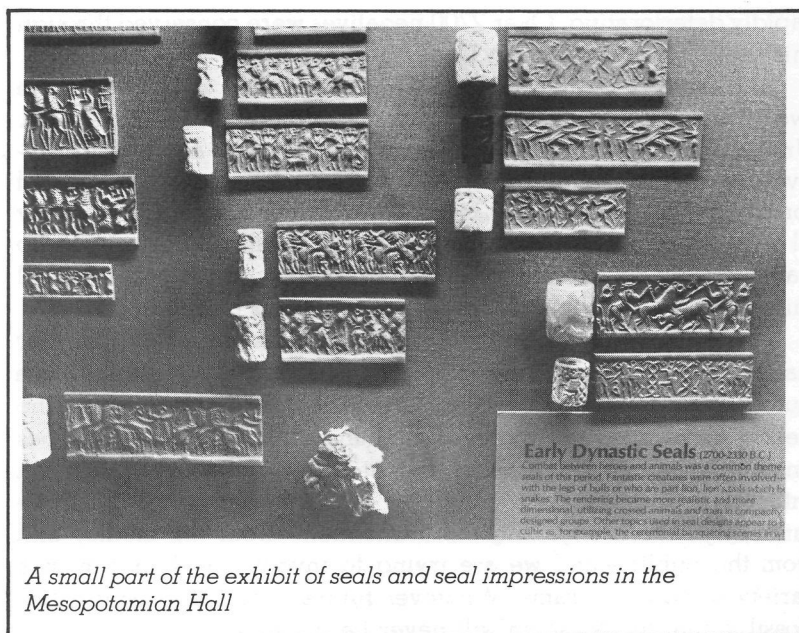

The Conservation Laboratory

Barbara Hall

This year was an especially busy one in the Conservation Laboratory, occupied as we were with the conservation and restoration of objects for the new Babylonian Hall and with the construction of new storage facilities.

The Museum was fortunate to receive a matching grant from the National Endowment for the Arts which enabled us to build a climate-controlled storage room for our metals collection. This room, constructed in a small basement alcove, fulfills a long-standing need both to consolidate the storage of metal artifacts into one secure area and to provide a stable environment with a low humidity of 30% to inhibit the corrosion of iron and bronze objects.

In addition to the NEA Grant, we also received a federally



funded CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act) Grant that is awarded through the city of Chicago and which provided the funds for hiring an apprentice conservator for a one year period. I was fortunate in having close at hand a skilled candidate for the position in the person of Richard Jaeschke, who was already working as a volunteer in the Conservation Lab. Richard did much of the mounting of objects for the new Babylonian Hall and made many of the 225 cylinder and stamp seal impressions now on exhibit. The latter was a tedious job which took several weeks to complete, for not only were two copies—one for the records and one for the exhibition—of each seal needed, but also each seal had to be rolled or stamped many times to obtain a satisfactory impression.

Besides making seal impressions and doing ceramic restoration, many metal objects were cleaned and stabilized for the exhibit. Laborious hours were spent, using a scalpel and working with the aid of a microscope, in the removal of heavy corrosion layers. The work had its reward with the discovery of a dedication inscription to a Mesopotamian god on the bottom of one bronze adze and a fine band of incised meander decoration on another bronze ax. Both objects are on exhibit in the Weapons case.

While doing conservation on objects for the Babylonian Hall, we also managed to fit in conservation on all the objects for "The

Magic of Egyptian Art." Most of the work centered around the cleaning, desalting, and restoring of statues and reliefs and the re-restoration of the Tut funerary jars and bowls obtained from the Metropolitan Museum many years ago. In one case a restoration was removed as we decapitated a 1930's reconstruction of a Tutankhamun/Aye statue that now is thought to be stylistically incorrect.

The highlight of this year was taking part in the Tutankhamun exhibit at the Field Museum. Prior to its opening in Chicago, David Silverman and I went to Washington, D.C., to observe both the condition of the objects and the packing procedure at the National Gallery where the exhibit was first shown. When the objects arrived in Chicago, I worked with the Egyptian representatives and a conservator from the Metropolitan Museum unpacking the objects and doing minor conservation on them when necessary. Most of the objects, e.g. the wooden chests, chairs, alabaster, and gold, are structurally fairly sound considering their great age; but others like the bow, lotus head, and Selket are incredibly fragile, and we preferred to have the Egyptians handle them for fear we would damage them. The conservation done was of a minor nature, usually reinforcing a loose flake of gold leaf, paint, or gesso. But if anyone should ask: one of my most exciting conservation jobs was merely removing a fingerprint from the famous gold mask.