

A MODERN ANCIENT WEDDING

A SOCIAL EVENT unique, as far as anyone knows, in the six decades of the Oriental Institute (and, for that matter, in six times six centuries) took place in the Museum on Monday, June 12. At noon that day, before the Assyrian bull, Jo Ann Scurlock, Assyriology student, and Richard H. Beal, Hittitology student, were married in a ritual based on ancient Assyrian practice. Simo Parpola enacted the high priest, reading, in Finnish-accented Akkadian, from a cuneiform tablet he had prepared that morning. The ceremony was attended by the couple's families, colleagues, teachers, and friends.

The proceedings began with a procession down the Institute's grand staircase led by the high priest and the parents of the bride and groom. Attendants escorted the couple: Richard's brother Wayne Beal bore a bread-offering, Peter T. Daniels carried a ewer of ceremonial oil, Denise Browning brought a pair of earrings, and Cynthia Bates presented a red, veiled crown. All these participants wore costumes (made in Kansas City) based on reliefs displayed in the Museum collection. At the end, Mr. and Mrs. Hans G. Güterbock represented a Hittite embassy. MaryAgnes Costello, visiting from New Jersey, joined the party later, garbed as an Egyptian. These three prepared their own costumes.

At the start of the ceremony, Richard anointed Jo Ann, adomed her with the earrings, placed the crown on her head, and drew the veil over her face. (According to the Middle Assyrian laws, only an unmarried woman may go unmasked in public.) Mr. Parpola then read the terms of the marriage-contract, which includes grounds for dissolution of the agreement by either party. The fathers sealed the document with their signet-rings, Mr. Güterbock witnessed it using a cylinder seal, and the other participants as well as Messrs.

Hunger and Brinkman did so with the impression of their thumbnails. Wayne Beal then presented the gift of bread to Mr. Scurlock, and the celebration concluded with Mrs. Güterbock singing an epithalamion she wrote to the tune of the recently deciphered Hurrian song. The wedding-party then adjourned to the Assyrian Hall for the reception, where a Middle Eastern banquet catered by the local Turkish restaurant was served.

It was the consensus of those present that the wedding was a novel and appropriate way for Jo Ann and Rich to commemorate their union. (For those, by the way, who fear that the authority of the kings of ancient Assur does not reach to Michael Bilandic's Chicago, the Museum affair was preceded by a private church wedding celebrated by the Reverend Charles F. Nims.)



Left to right: Jo Ann, Richard, Mr. Parpola, Mr. Scurlock, Wayne Beal