

The Conservation Laboratory

*Barbara J.
Hall*

May 15th marked the fifth anniversary of the Conservation Laboratory established with the aid of a Women's Board Grant in 1974. During these five years approximately six hundred objects have been treated, some coming in for minor repairs and cleaning and some undergoing major conservation.

When the lab was set up, there were two serious problems that had priority for treatment. The first was the presence of soluble salts, absorbed during burial, in many of the ceramic and stone objects, and the second was the continuing corrosion of the bronze and iron artifacts in Chicago's high summer humidity. If not removed, soluble salts will over a period of time cause an object to disintegrate; but the salts can easily be removed by soaking an object in changes of tap water for four to six weeks. The thirty-gallon stainless steel tank in the lab has been, and will continue to be for some time to come, constantly in use for soaking the large backlog of pottery, sherds, and limestone reliefs in our collection.

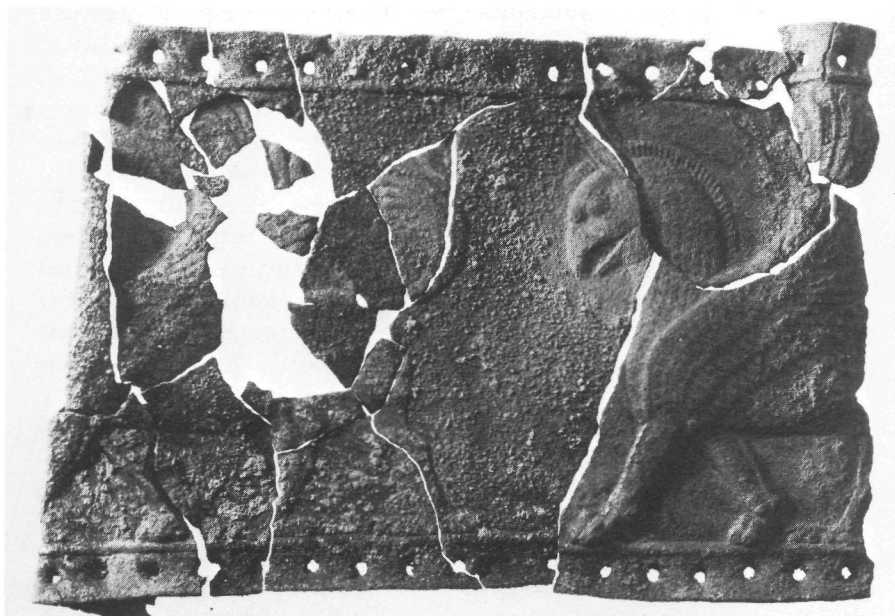
The second problem, that of metal corrosion, could be dealt with more quickly. With the help of a federal grant, we constructed a special climate-controlled storage room in the basement that maintains a low humidity of thirty to thirty-five percent to prevent atmospheric moisture from initiating corrosion. The metal objects are now stable and can be worked on at our leisure.

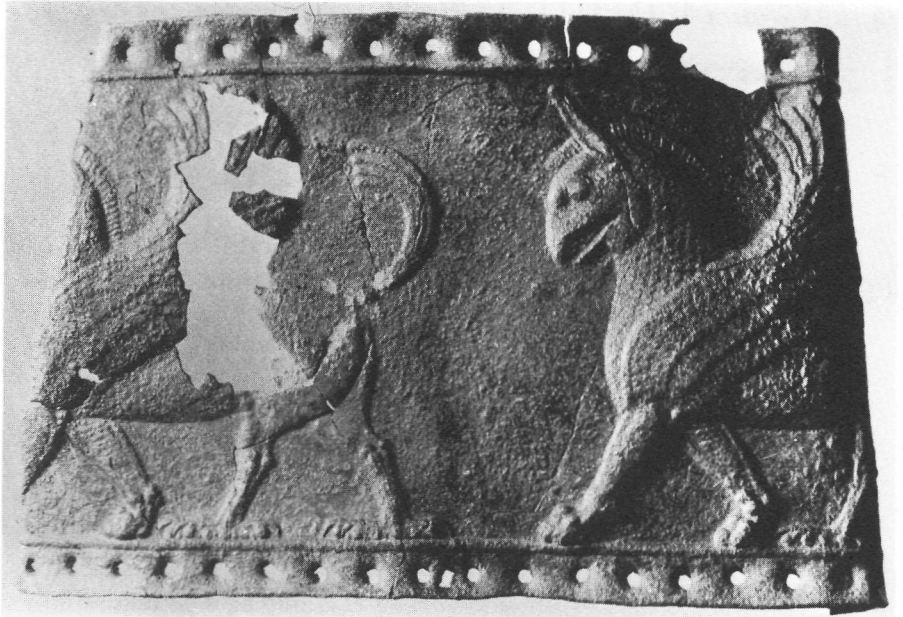
Conservation has also been carried out on a wide variety of other materials. Most of our bone and ivory objects, including the Megiddo Ivories, have been cleaned and restored. Papyri have been unrolled and repaired; textiles have been washed and mounted on fabric backing. Pottery has been restored (much of it by our faithful twenty-eight-year volunteer, Mrs. Elizabeth Tieken). Fragile wood, cartonnage, and gessoed artifacts have

been cleaned and strengthened; and molds and casts of objects have been made when needed.

In spite of a heavy work load in the lab, we have managed to get up to the galleries to do some conservation on our permanent installations. The large Assyrian reliefs and the Persian stone sculptures have been washed, and both the plaster cast over the Egyptian Hall entrance and the plaster restoration on the Ishtar Gateway have been repainted.

Although many artifacts still need treatment, I hope over the next few years to spend more time getting our dismal storage area into better shape. We desperately need to repaint the walls and floors (the last painting was done almost fifty years ago), to purchase more metal cabinets in which to store our Nubian material plus special dustproof cabinets for the more fragile material of leather and textile, and to reorganize our space more carefully. Some work has already been done—the installation of new fluorescent lighting has been an enormous improvement—but there is much to keep us busy for the next five years.





Before, during, and after conservation and restoration of a bronze band of reliefs from Persepolis.