

# The Photographic Laboratory

*Jean Grant*

While most photography at the Oriental Institute uses large-format negatives, four by five inches and up, sometimes we must sacrifice some quality for the sake of speed. If a photo is worth a thousand words, we sometimes have to settle for 999.

One such job was the Bab edh-Dhra exhibit in the Palestinian hall, which incorporates many objects. The fastest way to shoot them is to sort them by size and/or shape, so we made a set-up on a table and were able to record numbers of objects between changes of the lighting or the position of the 35mm camera before they were transported to a higher plane (the first floor). To get as many items as possible done quickly, the photographer needs an assistant. Both David Nascowitz and the Photo Lab's regular volunteer, Barbara Watson, were helpful in selecting objects, marking down object numbers, and returning objects to the line-up while I checked the lighting, turned the subject, and clicked. From what I hear of the number of Bab edh-Dhra objects, the "few" we took were like a drop of water in the Dead Sea.

The Nubian objects for the Art Institute show presented a different problem, in that they were not mine exclusively to handle. They were being recorded by the registrar or checked over or sometimes conserved, so I could not sort them by size—and they range from finger rings to pieces of architecture, from ear studs to offering tables. I worked with the 35mm camera for the smaller pieces and the view camera for the larger ones, but toward the end I was doing a lot of adjusting of lights and camera. The more adjusting, the less photography you can do, but the adjusting is necessary in order to impart as much information as possible. There were further difficulties in collating museum and field numbers to include in the picture, and again Barbara Watson was

very helpful; we at least tried to get the scale into every shot.

We also did more Nubian bowls, etc., for Bruce Williams' publication, but if I've learned one thing about Nubian bowls, it's that there are always more Nubian bowls.

Another project is getting the Fustat collection on film—I hope it's at least half done—but one problem with a big job is that it is always getting interrupted by regular orders, until the regular orders have to be backlogged in order to return to the big project. Most of the regular work is printing five by seven and eight by ten glossies for all sorts of clients. We are grateful for the help of Barbara Watson and Gretel Dreyfuss, who have done a lot of these this year. We also had a number of oversize prints this year, for the Syrian *suq*, the Demotic Dinner display, and the Palestinian hall; and several oversize orders, such as three hundred eight by ten prints for study of our Islamic bookbindings, and Mr. Carswell's Sri Lanka expedition.

We even had a professor from Israel looking over our shoulder while we photographed some Egyptian objects. He hadn't liked the way one of our stelas had been done in the past (I'm happy to say I satisfied him). He also helped in getting some scarabs the right way up for their pictures—after all, I'm neither an Assyriologist nor an Egyptologist, and on some things, like tablets, it makes a difference!

The hardest work of all, though, was taking pictures at the members' dinners. Trying to drink, eat, say hello, *and* getting as many of you as I can to photograph as happy and as good as you look is tough. Sorry to say, I'm still trying for some of you, but I hope you'll keep coming back anyway.