

50 Museum

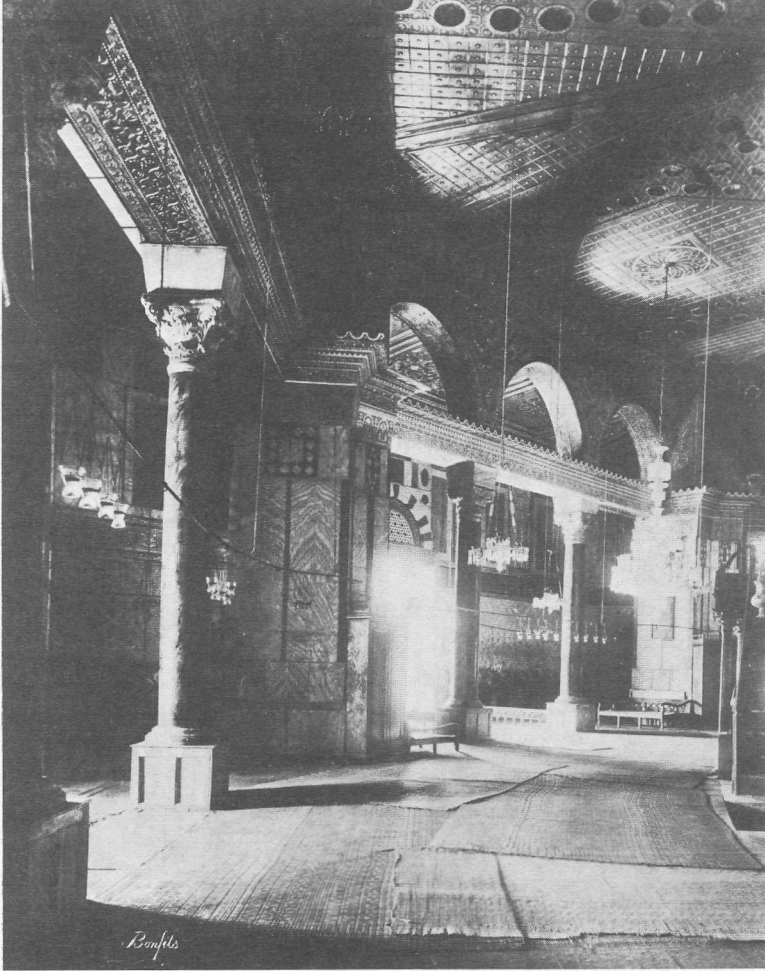
The Museum

John Carswell

Major efforts have been concentrated during the past year on improving museum services. That such a program could take place at all is largely due to a grant from the Institute of Museum Services of the federal Department of Education. For the third year running, the museum was successful in obtaining a grant from this source for general operating support. This year we were awarded \$35,000, the maximum amount allotted to any museum in the country, and a figure more than double either of the two previous grants we received.

At the moment the Institute of Museum Services is scheduled to be phased out, as part of President Reagan's policy of fiscal reform. The American Association of Museums is fighting a vigorous campaign to have this decision rescinded, in which the Oriental Institute Museum has actively joined. We have written to Congressman Yates, Chairman of the House Subcommittee, detailing just how important previous IMS grants have been to our recent development, and received a personal reply from him in which he said he was well aware of the Oriental Institute and the importance of our collections, since he is himself an old graduate of the University of Chicago.

As far as the conservation of our material is concerned, this year has seen a great stride forward in the reorganization of the basement storage facilities in the south wing by Barbara Hall, with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts matched by funds from the Institute. With new cabinets, freshly painted walls, and proper lighting, this area is now a model for what we would like to achieve for all our storage. In the same manner, a grant from the National Science Foundation has continued to provide funds for initiating the preservation of our valuable photographic archives. This has been directed by the acting archivist, John Larson, who also has to his credit the notable achievement of practically eliminating the backlog of over a hundred outstanding orders for pho-



Interior of the Mosque of Omar, Jerusalem (from "Remembrances of the Near East")

tographs of objects in our collection, and reducing the delay for new orders to not more than six weeks.

In the museum itself the new security system is now fully operational, and we also have two full-time museum superintendents, Mr. Walker and Mr. Maadik, aided by well-trained student guards under the close control of Samuel Wolff, the museum assistant. The efficacy of our security arrangements was proved last April, on the occasion of a lecture by the Turkish Foreign Minister in

Breasted Hall. For this, dozens of police from Chicago, the University Security forces, and the Secret Service in Washington were drafted to the area. Early in the afternoon Mr. Walker spotted an unshaven youth in a yellow T-shirt taking photographs and behaving in a generally suspicious manner in Breasted Hall. On investigation the young man was revealed, to his consternation, to be the FBI's top undercover agent, in deep disguise!

Breasted Hall has been more frequently used for lectures, symposiums, and other purposes than anyone can recollect. This has put a considerable strain on the operation of its equipment, and the credit for its success is due to Denise Browning. Numerous lecturers are indebted to her for the calm and cheerful way that she has met their requirements.

Much of the energy of the museum staff this year has been expended on the four exhibitions we have mounted. The first, an exhibit of the photographs of Felix Bonfils and his family, 1867–1907, “Remembrances of the Near East,” on loan from the Harvard Semitic Museum, provided a fascinating view of what many ancient and historic sites looked like in the second half of the nineteenth century. At the same time we displayed a selection of Near Eastern costumes and jewelry from the Klingeman collection (see last year's Annual Report), which complemented the photographs with actual examples of the sort of material they depicted. The popular appeal of these two shows was immediately apparent in a sharp increase in museum attendance figures, helped by an excellent and informative review in the *Chicago Tribune* by Alan Artner.

For the “Search for Alexander” exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago, we were asked by the Director, James Woods, and his Curator, Louise Berge, if we would lend a fragment of sculpture from the Institute's excavations at Persepolis. After agreeing to this, we decided to mount our own exhibition of Alexander-related material, titled “Alexander and the East.” This highlighted material from Persepolis, as well as a number of objects throughout the museum in which the influence of Hellenism can be detected. At the same time this provided an excuse for us to completely clean and redisplay the material in the Persian Hall, and install a new lighting system.

The major exhibition was the “Islamic Bindings and Bookmaking” installation, based on the Institute's fine collection of early medieval Islamic bindings, once part of the Moritz collection and acquired by James Henry Breasted almost exactly fifty years ago and never before shown in their entirety. The exhibition and ac-

companying catalogue took eighteen months to prepare, financed by a special grant of \$62,750 from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The exhibition was the first to use the whole of the Palestinian Gallery, which provided an excellent setting for the show, combining the objects themselves in specially-designed horizontal cases and much interpretive and illustrative material describing the process of Islamic bookmaking. The whole exhibition—and indeed, the other three exhibitions as well—was constructed by Honorio Torres and his assistant preparator, Joseph Karbarz, who worked long hours and many weekends to make sure everything was finished in time, and this in addition to their normal responsibilities for museum maintenance. They are to be congratulated for never missing a deadline. Material for the exhibition was borrowed from the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, and we received much active cooperation from the Special Collections section in Regenstein Library, in particular from Robert Rosenthal, the Curator, and his assistant Jeffery Abt. A second review in the *Chicago Tribune* proved to be equally effective in stimulating public interest.

Numerous scholars and students have used our collections in the past year, and we have made a number of loans to other institutions. The responsibility for this has fallen on the shoulders of our Registrar, Anita Ghaemi, who has handled the many complex arrangements with speed and efficiency. When two small objects belonging to us were stolen from a special exhibition in Peoria, it was her swift action, in alerting all museums and dealers across the country and in insisting that the theft be made known publicly, that was largely responsible for the recovery of the objects and the apprehension of the thief.

Finally, a word about our volunteers. Peggy Grant has described their activities elsewhere in the Report, but I would like to add my thanks to hers for all those volunteers who have given so much valuable time helping the Photographer, Registrar, and Archivist in their work. I am specially indebted to Teddy Buddington, Cissy Haas, Peggy Grant, Peggy Kovacs, and Leonard Byman, who helped to look after arrangements for visitors at the Islamic Bindings symposium. And that we now have a billboard on the street—for the first time in the museum's fifty years existence—is entirely due to the persistence and energy of another volunteer, Albert Haas. It has been an extraordinarily active and often unpredictable year, and our thanks are due to all of the staff, students, and volunteers who have helped in so many ways to make the museum a success.