

THE MUSEUM

Karen L. Wilson, Curator

92



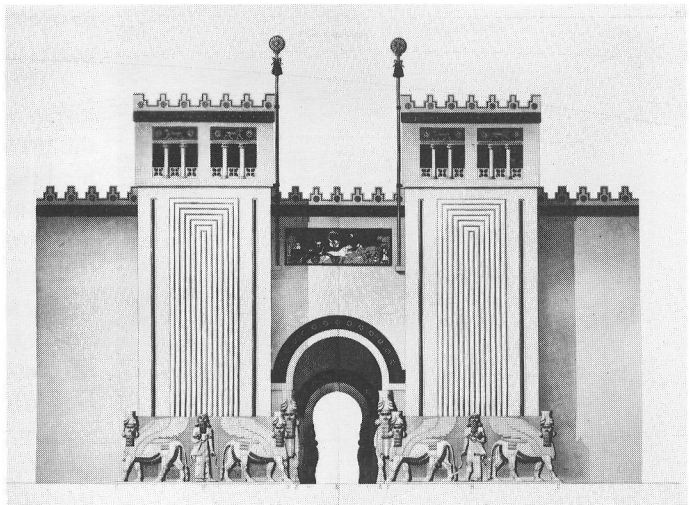
MUSEUM

As I read the notes (amounting to a considerable stack of papers) that the museum staff has prepared to document the activities of the past year, I marvel at the quantity and quality of what has been accomplished in the space of only twelve months. Perhaps we in the museum need more tasks, such as the writing of annual reports, that force us to stop what we are doing in order to take stock of and appreciate what we have done. ▼ The human-headed winged bull from Khorsabad, which stands as a somewhat incongruous focal point at the end of the Egyptian Gallery, was also a focal point for a number of the past year's museum projects. Joan Barghusen, director of museum education, produced a *Featured Object Brochure* about the bull, with text written by myself and a translation of the full inscription provided by John A. Brinkman. (This was the first time that the inscription on this particular bull had ever been translated.) In mid-February, Michel Bourbon arrived from Paris to test the possibility of making a cast of the bull to be used in the upcoming reinstallation of the ancient Near Eastern galleries of the Musée du Louvre. This rather unbelievable project was inspired by the fact that the Louvre possesses the figure that originally stood behind our bull in ancient Dur-Sharrukin

and wishes to reconstruct the entire portal to which the sculptures belonged. Prior to Mr. Bourbon's arrival, the massive bull had to be cleansed of years of south-side soot – so, under the watchful eyes of conservator Laura D'Alessandro, he was, literally, given a bath. Mr. Bourbon's test patches of mold-making materials worked well and he is confident that a cast can be produced. (In addition, upon his return to Paris, he talked the Louvre into providing us with a cast of *their* figure, which will be installed in our gallery in its original position behind our bull.) We are eagerly anticipating Mr. Bourbon's return to produce the mold at a future date to be determined by his busy schedule.

The Khorsabad bull was also the impetus for a project to relight the entire museum in a manner that will make our objects more clearly visible and the galleries as a whole more aesthetically pleasing and dramatic. I had noticed that the bull was often a focus of photography sessions in the Museum – publicity photos for the university as a whole, video taping for programs on the ancient Near East, and so on. During those sessions the photographers or filmmakers brought in additional lights to illuminate the sculpture, in the process revealing details – such as the creature's ribs and the rosettes adorning its crown – that were invisible under normal circumstances. After consultation with other Chicago museums, we hired the lighting design firm of Schuler and Shook, Inc. to draw up a lighting design plan for the entire museum. As a result of their proposal, the fluorescent fixtures in all cases are being changed to provide truer color renditions of the rich tones that characterize our objects, and new track lighting is being installed to highlight certain pieces. Implementation of that design is well underway and the results are astounding. One need only look at the Khorsabad bull and the colossal statue of King Tutankhamun or the painted predynastic Egyptian pottery in the new light to appreciate the quality of the collection housed within our walls.

19th century reconstruction of the main entrance to the throne room at Dur-Sharrukin. The Oriental Institute's bull is on the far right. Victor Place, Ninive et l'Assyrie (3 vols.; Paris, 1867-70), pl. 21.

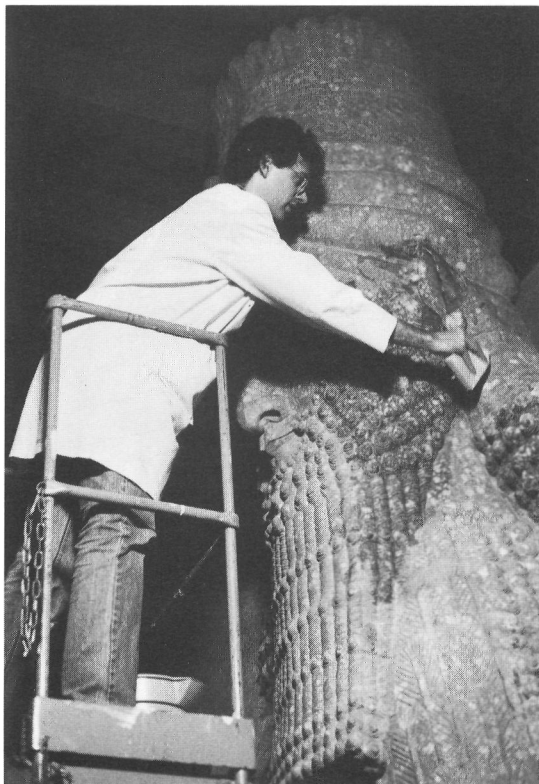


Of course, the bull really belongs in the Assyrian Gallery, adjacent to the other sculptures from King Sargon II's palace in his new capital city of Dur-Sharrukin, and over the past few months we have begun our long-planned renovation of that gallery. Thanks to preparator Philip Petrie and our new assistant preparator Mary Carlisle, the Assyrian hall has now been completely repainted in a color that compliments the reliefs, and a program is underway to make the widely different materials on display more comprehensible to the visitor. Each alcove now bears a color bar and letters identifying the city, region, or country from which its contents come. New labels including drawings of the reliefs in their original positions have been completed, and new graphics and text panels on subjects such as ancient Nimrud and temple architecture at Khorsabad are being produced. Once we have completed our improvements in the Assyrian Gallery, we will turn our attentions to Egypt, which will also be repainted and provided with new graphics and label copy.

Prior to its refurbishment, the Assyrian Gallery was the site of the exhibition "The Arabic Calligraphy of Mohamed Zakariya," which opened November 13 and closed December 20, 1989. Sponsored by the American-Arab Affairs Council, The Oriental Institute, and the MidAmerica-Arab Chamber of Commerce, the exhibit featured the work of a modern American Arabic calligrapher. The

pieces, of a type not usually seen within the walls of The Oriental Institute, were beautifully hung by preparator Philip Petrie and assistant preparator Greg Arahamian and served as a reminder that some of the medieval arts encompassed by our collections are still very much alive.

While obvious improvements were being made in the museum, important behind-the-scenes changes were also taking place. Thanks to the efforts of museum security supervisor Scott Neely, smoke alarms were installed for the first time in the galleries, basement and Breasted Hall in January. Scott has also written a *Guide for Museum Guards*, upgraded guard training, and revamped the



Phil Petrie washing the Khorsabad bull.

key control system for the building as part of the continuing professionalization of Oriental Institute security. In addition, key museum staff are being trained in bomb detection, the use of fire extinguishers, CPR, and First Aid. Scott and Laura are currently completing a written disaster plan – a manual that would serve as a resource in the unlikely but potentially catastrophic event that a disaster such as fire or flood were to affect the Institute.

During the early months of the year, much of the museum staff's time was spent on the production of *The Oriental Institute Museum: Highlights from the Collection*. Assistant curator Kim Coventry coordinated the work of museum photographer Jean Grant, museum archivist John Larson, and photographic intern John Hudson to produce a work that is both attractive and informative, and which has proven to be extremely popular. Kim left us early in the year to become coordinator of exhibitions and conservation in Special Collections at Regenstein Library. Although she is still a frequent visitor, we miss her constant presence.

Highlights from the Collection was designed both as a small handbook to the collection and as a self-guided tour of the museum for the interested visitor. To this end, each object featured in the booklet was given a new, updated label, mounted on Plexiglas the same color as the cover of *Highlights*, so that it would be easy to identify. The production of these labels was undertaken by former assistant preparator, Greg Aprahamian. Greg recently left the museum to hone the carpentry skills he uses in his artwork by participating in the construction of a house.

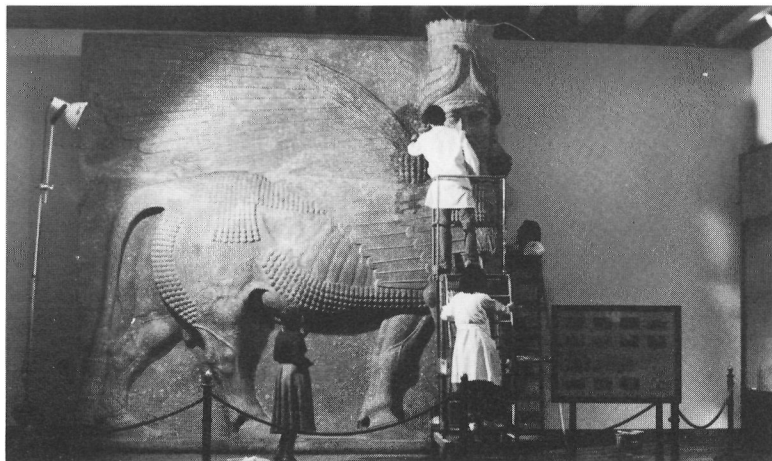
On April 13, 1990, registrar Raymond Tindel and his corps of amazingly dedicated and capable volunteers reached a true milestone in the history of The Oriental Institute Museum – the completion of basic data entry on computer for all-but-a-scattered-few of the 70,000 pieces in our registered collection! Data on the number of museum collections so computerized is not available, but it is significant to note that curators at The Boston Museum of Fine Arts, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and The Brooklyn Museum have all expressed their envy of the ease with which we can now identify groups of objects in our collection, along with relevant cataloguing information, for such purposes as study and loans to other institutions. While this computerization process was in progress, volunteer Lilla Fano was also busy registering (assigning numbers to and computerizing) some 800 objects from The Oriental Institute's Nubian Salvage Project.

Jenny Gersten, an intern from Oberlin College who was participating in the Chicago Semester on the Arts, catalogued and moved into proper storage conditions the bulk of the unregistered Morris Collection of ancient artifacts - a project that was begun by Kim before her departure. In addition, work-study student David Anderson organized and began the inventory and cataloguing of the Prehistoric Project's collections, probably one of the largest single groups of material that the museum possesses. Following his graduation from The University of Chicago, Dave has gone

on to become Assistant Registrar for Loans at The University Museum of The University of Pennsylvania.

The rate of growth of the museum's artifact collections has slowed, but by no means halted, over the past decades, due to more stringent antiquities laws promulgated in many of the countries in which Oriental Institute expeditions work. We are fortunate, however, that private donors continue to consider us the appropriate repository for some of their treasured possessions. In December, Mrs. Maria Horner, of Beverly Shores, Indiana, presented us with a wedding ensemble from turn-of-the-century Syria. The outfit consists of a pair of balloon pants and a scalloped V-necked top, both made of cotton intricately wrapped with silver-plated wire, and a velvet hat with gilt brocade and a striped silk veil. In May, F.G.L. Gremliza – a German physician and long-time friend of Helene Kantor and Pierre Delougaz – donated an extensive collection of sherds that he had collected systematically on sites in Khuzestan during a seventeen-year residence in Iran. This collection, which will soon be published by Dr. Abbas Alizadeh of the Harvard Semitic Museum, is unique in this country and will serve as an important reference tool for any archaeologists engaged in regional studies of southwestern Iran.

The Oriental Institute Museum's public education programs are the most visible way in which the museum reaches out to and educates the non-OI community. However, it is worth noting that twenty-five visiting scholars, with interests ranging from Mesopotamian votive objects to Ottoman firmans, also utilized the museum's collections over the past twelve months. In addition, objects from the collection were loaned to a number of American institutions for exhibit and study – five to the Louisiana Arts and Science Center, two to the Princeton University Art Museum, ten to the Witte Museum of San Antonio, two to MASCA, at The University Museum, The University of Pennsylvania, and one to The Art Institute of Chicago.



Washing the Khorsabad bull.

The many accomplishments of Registration were based on the work of volunteers Debbie Aliber, Ruth Caraher, Elif Denel, Irv Diamond, Margaret Fitzgerald, Lilla Fano, Leila Foster, Betty Geiger, Melana Heinss, Joan Margolis, Georgie Maynard, Lillian Schwartz, and Peggy Wick. This spring, Glenn Carnagey, an advanced graduate student in NELC, was hired to fill the new post of part-time assistant registrar. Glenn can be found in Registration most days between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m., both assisting and filling in for Ray.

Many and varied projects have been underway this year as part of the museum's conservation program. In mid-October, the Mitchell Hospital requested that a new portable x-ray machine they were receiving from General Electric be delivered to us, and members of the hospital's Radiology Department arrived on our premises to x-ray four of our mummies. After the x-raying had been completed, Lady Meresamun, in her brilliantly painted cartonnage, was placed back on exhibit in her case that had been carefully modified in the hopes that it could maintain a constant level of internal relative humidity (RH). To our great satisfaction, this modified case has been able to maintain a consistent RH of 42+2% in the gallery over the past winter and summer.

Laura also has been conducting a conservation survey of the collection, both on exhibit and in storage, to determine future conservation needs and set priorities, and is finishing the writing of a long-range conservation plan. Occasionally her profession takes her on some unusual visits to other institutions. Last year she went to the Entymology Department at the Field Museum to have insects found in our building identified (the beginning of an integrated pest management program at The Oriental Institute) and to the Chicago Police Department Crime Lab to study their latest forensic methods. Laura subsequently hosted a reciprocal visit by members of the police crime lab, who toured the galleries and the basement. This past summer, The Oriental Institute Conservation Lab became the first university member of the Getty Conservation Information Network, a bibliographic and suppliers database for the conservation community. We are pleased to report that the university has agreed to fund a second conservation position at the museum and that an assistant conservator will join Laura in the Conservation Lab in October.

Except for a three-month hiatus during the winter when she was in Iraq as a member of the Nippur Expedition, museum secretary Margaret Schröder continued to assist the museum archivist John Larson in the day-to-day operation of the photographic services program. During fiscal year 1989-1990, we received and processed over 200 requests for photographic materials and reproduction permissions.

As part of the on-going conservation program in the photo archives, a safety cabinet for the temporary isolation and storage of our unstable cellulose nitrate negatives was purchased and installed in the spring of 1989 with monies from a grant from IMS. Archives volunteer Sandra Jacobsohn has nearly completed resleeving the negatives in the main

“museum” numbering system (approximately 46,000 negatives). When all of the stable negatives in this group have been placed in archival (“acid-free”) envelopes, we will begin identifying and transferring our cellulose nitrate negatives – most of them archaeological expedition field negatives from the 1920s and 1930s – to the new safety cabinet.

In August 1989, Professor Edward F. Wente turned over to the Photographic Archives a collection of approximately 1,000 mounted 19th century photographs, mostly of Egyptian subjects, which once belonged to the late Professor Keith Seele. These prints had been deaccessioned in the 1940’s and distributed to interested faculty members. Archives volunteer Carolyn Livingood has dusted and sorted this collection and placed them in acid-free storage boxes. Mrs. Livingood is also continuing with her project to up-grade the storage condition of the print files in the Photographic Archives.

Plans are underway for computerization of the data relating to photographic images in the collections. Computerization of these records should enable us to generate a series of specialized lists and catalogues for outside photographic researchers and for in-house needs. Archives volunteer Kay Ginther is continuing with the computerization of the available data pertaining to the 8,000 Megiddo Expedition field negatives. Archives volunteer Lilian Cropsey has completed the inventory of the Khorsabad Expedition field negatives, which were partially integrated into the main “Museum” numbering system many years ago.

Much work in the Archives over the past year has focussed on the papers of past faculty members of The Oriental Institute. The archivist and volunteers have up-graded the storage condition of about half of the papers of James Henry Breasted, NELC graduate student Terry Wilfong has completed the inventory of the papers of Klaus Baer, and John Larson spent considerable time sorting and organizing the papers of Charles Francis Nims. Archives volunteer Joan Rosenberg completed an inventory–finding aid for the Nims correspondence and listed the contents of the Nims manuscripts and offprints.

In addition to the volunteers mentioned above, the Archives were fortunate to have the assistance of an intern from Lake Forest College, Ms. Kiley K. Mitchell, who worked 300 hours in the Museum Archives between January and May 1990. With Kiley’s help, we were able to begin a long-deferred project to organize the museum curatorial files going back to the 1930s.

Our photographer, Jean M. Grant, returned to work in the autumn, after a six-month medical leave of absence as a consequence of serious injuries which she sustained in an automobile accident. Jean came back to find a wealth of projects waiting for her, and we welcomed her with open arms. I am pleased to say that, as of this writing, things in the museum photography department have finally returned to normal after Jean’s long absence.

Jean notes that volunteer Joe Denov is starting his ninth year at The Oriental Institute in early 1990. Mostly he can be found on Tuesdays in Darkroom C, often hunched over the copy stand. Volunteer Ria Ahlstrom gives generously of her time between other obligations and visits to her only grandchild in London to make things happen in the darkroom. David Dekert put in a short, but sweet, return as a volunteer. Inke Arns, an archaeology student visiting from Berlin, volunteered to work some four-day weeks in March, placing duplicated lantern slides in archival storage boxes.

Assistant curator Lorelei H. Corcoran joined the museum staff in October for an all-too-brief period. Lorelei led a 19-day Oriental Institute Members' tour to Egypt last fall, visiting sites from Alexandria to Aswan. She also supervised the reprinting of the museum brochure and undertook the task of publicizing museum events. New venues for ads procured by Lorelei included *Inside Chicago* magazine and a spot on the Assyrian radio station WEEF. Lorelei also coordinated the assembling of the exhibit "Another Egypt: Coptic Christians at Thebes (7th - 8th centuries A.D.)," which is being curated by Terry Wilfong and will open on October 3, 1990. Lorelei left the museum in July to assume the position of assistant professor in the Department of Art and assistant director of The Institute of Egyptian Art and Archaeology at Memphis State University, Memphis, Tennessee. We all wish her the best of success in her career.

In September of 1989 we said goodbye to our friend and office manager, Pat Monaghan, who accepted the position of Manager of Financial and Administrative Systems for the Office of Facilities Planning and Management at The University of Chicago. Happily, we continue to have a great deal of contact with Pat through her new job. Pat's extremely capable replacement, Regina (Gigi) Weitzel, came to us fortuitously from The High Museum in Atlanta, Georgia, having recently relocated to Chicago. She has spent an active year learning the ropes and not only running the museum office but also taking care of the entire Oriental Institute building.



Laura D'Alessandro, Ray Tindel, and Phil Petrie maneuvering the styrofoam blocks supporting Meresamun to make room for a x-ray plate to be placed beneath her.