

THE MUSEUM

Karen L. Wilson

From groundbreaking on 15 August 1996 through cornerstone dedication on 12 June 1997, most of the Museum staff's time this past year has been taken up with the renovation and expansion project and the fallout therefrom. Many of us now wear hard hats and work boots on a regular basis and climb through piping, around air-handling units, and over construction debris in an attempt to keep abreast of the pace of building activities (fig. 1).

We celebrated the groundbreaking for the new wing on 15 August with a reenactment of an ancient Egyptian ceremony derived from texts found at Medinet Habu, the temple of Ptah at Karnak, and the temple of Horus at Edfu (figs. 2-3). In our reenacted ritual, Jeremy Walker and Lorna Herron-Wilson played the parts of the king and the divine scribe, respectively. As William M. Sumner, Karen L. Wilson, Emily Teeter, and John Coleman Darnell recited translations of the texts, the children reenacted driving in the stakes, stretching the cord around the perimeters of the building, and scattering bricks of "precious" materials in the foundation trenches. As the modified text related, "Never had the like been done since the time of James Henry Breasted."

Since the groundbreaking was derived from Egyptian texts, it was only appropriate that the next commemoration — the laying of the cornerstone — be of Mesopotamian origin (fig. 4). This event, held on 12 June, was a reenactment of elements of a Neo-Assyrian ritual recorded on tablets, some of which were excavated by the Oriental Institute at the site of Khorsabad. These tablets (and texts from other sites) had been published by Professor Walter Farber and were adapted for our ceremony by Research Associate Claudia Suter and Associate Curator Emily Teeter. The reenactment of the ancient ritual recounted how a priest (played by Jeremy Walker) formed a statue of Ninshubur, the emissary of the god An, from clay, lapis, flour, and beer. This statue and others mimicking originals made of various types of wood were placed in and around the cornerstone. Peter Friedman played the role of the craftsman who fashioned the other statues and Emily Dorman enacted the part of the priest's servant. The audience was amused by the "sacrifice" (knocking to the ground) of a foam sheep, ably carved by Museum preparator Randolph Olive. Professor Farber's recitation of one of the incantations in the original Akkadian was a dramatic moment, as he uttered words that probably had not been spoken for over 2,500 years.

Between these two reenacted rituals, a modern miracle occurred, as the new wing rose above ground and three-quarters of the basement of the current building

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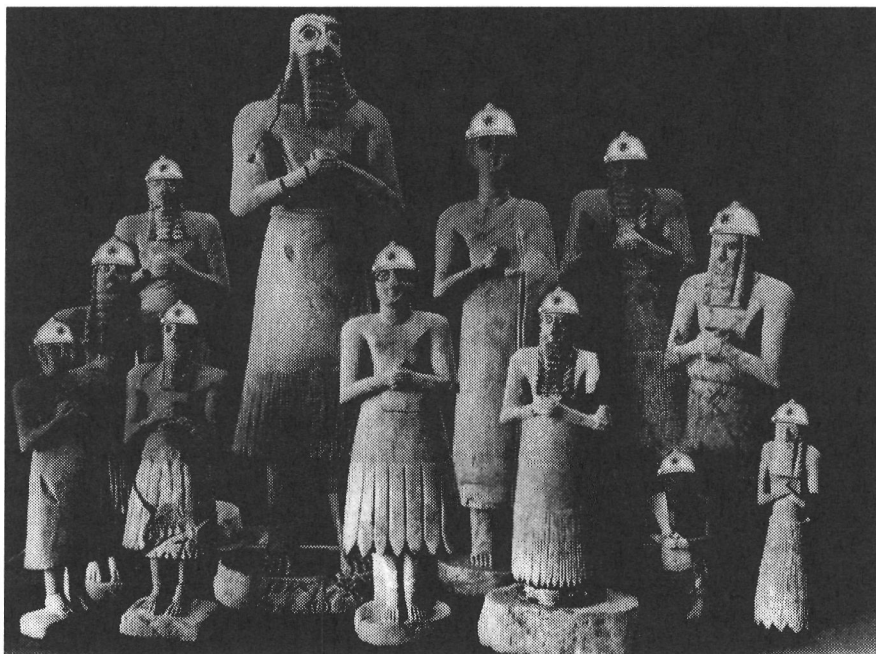


Figure 1. Sumerian statues from Tell Asmar, Iraq, don hard hats to help with the construction project. Photograph modification by Jason Ur

was reformed and renewed. Completion of the structure of the wing was celebrated on 18 March as the final steel beam was raised. Uniquely and beautifully decorated by Chicago artist James Mesplé, the topping out beam bears images of many of the most famous objects in the Museum collection as well as the signatures of numerous members of the Institute and University communities and the construction team. As of this writing, the addition is nearly complete, lacking only some of its limestone facing and red clay tile roof and many interior finishes (fig. 5). The basement of the present building has been transformed into bright and shiny new spaces for artifact storage and registration, and the galleries have been returned to a semblance of their original state as wide open and gloriously impressive halls.

The task of shepherding scholars of things ancient Near Eastern through the intricacies of the world of construction has been ably handled by our project manager, Joseph Auclair. We all know that without his knowledge, enthusiasm, and attention to every detail of our project, the addition and renovation never would have become a reality. Our thanks also go to those in Facilities Services here at the University who have been supporting and shepherding this project and, especially, to University Architect Ken Lyon, who was formerly our project manager and is now Joe's able supervisor. And we owe special gratitude to the other members of the Oriental Institute Legacy Project Team, too numerous to name individually, from the firms of Hammond Beeby & Babka, Inc., Landmark Facilities Group, Inc., and Turner Construction Company. We are going to miss working on a daily basis with many of these individuals when this project has been completed!

Concomitant with construction and renovation, work continued on conserving and framing the Museum's Khorsabad reliefs prior to reinstallation. A generous

grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation was of great assistance in defraying the considerable costs of this project, as was our 1995–1997 IMS General Operating Support Grant. All of the reliefs but one have been taken down from the walls; most are resting on steel cradles so that the conservators can clean, record, and make silicone rubber impressions of the inscriptions on their backs and stabilize them in preparation for framing. Laura D’Alessandro and Barbara Hamann have been joined in this task by Susan Holbrook, an objects conservator hired in April for a year through a Conservation Project Support Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. In addition they had the assistance for several months of Volunteer Vilma Basilissi, an Italian conservator from Rome.

The conservators’ painstaking work on the backs of the reliefs has led them to several very interesting observations about how the inscriptions were carved — observations that never would have taken place if they had not stared at the stones for so many, many hours. It turns out that the inscriptions were not simply carved free-hand but were carefully laid out using inks or a similar pigmented material before the carvers began their work. First, horizontal lines were drawn carefully on the stone in orange. After this ruling, the signs of the inscription were outlined in black — traces of which are still visible where individual carvers did not follow the outlines exactly. Barbara and Susan can even recognize the work of different artisans — those who cut out their wedges carefully and completely and those who did a mediocre job. In January through March, the frames were completed for three reliefs and their decorated faces were revealed for the first time since they were removed from the walls. We were excited (and relieved) to see that our approach to the project was a success and that the surfaces of the reliefs were still in pristine condition! In the midst of all of this, Barbara still found time to attend the annual American Institute for Conservation conference in San Diego in June and Laura maintained her characteristic good humor while supervising workmen and making daily safety checks of the work site after they had left.

Registrar Raymond Tindel spent a hectic summer and fall (and far too many weekends) making sure that the collections were moved from their former location in the basement up into their temporary quarters in the former Egyptian Gallery in preparation for the renovation. The final total of packing boxes, crates, etc., handled by those in registration came to nearly 4,500, all of which are now solidly packed in the gallery, which resembles nothing so much as the last scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Because the collections are so tightly packed, most of the material is inaccessible, and so Registration has managed to enjoy some “calm after the storm”



Figure 2. Lorna Herron-Wilson as the goddess Shefket About inscribing a prayer on papyrus. Photograph by Bruce Powell

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Figure 3. Jeremy Walker as the priest "purifying the foundation trench" with plaster. Photograph by Bruce Powell

(and before the next storm of moving everything into the new wing and renovated basement, probably this coming October). Not ones to slack off, however, Ray and his volunteers have managed to continue with the registration of materials from the Amuq, Tell Fakhariyah, Jarmo, and Matarrah.

Over the past year, the Museum even received some interesting gifts, including a copy of the *Kitab al-jami al-sahib al-Bukhari* from Dr. Abraham Hoffer; a traditional Ethiopian painting on cloth of St. George slaying the Dragon, from Robert Braidwood; and a study collection of sherds from the University of Michigan excavations at Sharafabad, Iran, from William M. Sumner.

We offer our heartfelt thanks to Ray, without whose dedication and hard work none of this would have been possible, as well as to his volunteers who helped us get through this most adventurous past year: Debbie Aliber, Joan Barghusen, Gretel Braidwood, Leila Foster, John

Gay, Peggy Grant, Mary Grimshaw, Janet Helman, Georgie Maynard, Roy Miller, Patrick Regnery, Lillian Schwartz, Kit Sumner, Dick Watson, and Peggy Wick. Thanks also to Museum Preparators Joseph Searcy and Randolph Olive, who dismantled filthy old cabinets, assembled new shelving, made and packed crates, and moved and weighed endless numbers of boxes. We certainly could not have done it without all of you!

Museum Archivist John Larson also spent much of the summer and fall packing up paper records in the Oriental Institute Archives and supervising their move up out of the basement into the former Egyptian Gallery. Once the new wing has been completed, John will supervise the move of the archival collections into a spacious new storage area on the ground floor of the addition and will move the headquarters of the Archives down into new spaces in the basement alongside Registration.

Thanks to John's connection with other archivists in Chicago, at the end of the year the Museum received a generous gift of fifty stereo slides of ancient Egyptian sites and an accompanying audio tape made by the late Charles Francis Nims. Including views of monuments at Mendes, Memphis, Sakkara, Giza, and Luxor, these color stereo slides are a most welcome addition to the Nims papers and photographic images that are already in the collections of the Oriental Institute. We would like to thank Mr. Ron Frederickson of Kenosha, Wisconsin, for this donation.

For 1996/97, the roster of regular volunteers working with John in the Archives included Hazel Cramer, Patricia Hume, Sandra Jacobsohn, Janet Kessler, Joan Kleinbard, Lillian Schwartz, Helaine Staver, and Pamela Wickliffe. Carole Yoshida contributed some of her volunteer time for the benefit of the Slide Library, in connection with her outreach activities for Museum Education. Peggy Grant and Mary

Shea worked at home on a project related to the papers of Helene J. Kantor. We are pleased to record the names of these dedicated volunteers and to thank them for their continuing efforts. Without their enthusiasm and generous support of the Archives with their time and talents, many important long-term projects could not be completed or even undertaken.

In August, Paul Spruhan joined the staff as Museum Office Manager and spent the year keeping our accounts, placing our orders, and managing the Photographic Services under John's supervision. Paul has conscientiously and ably taken care of the necessary paperwork and processing for nearly 120 permissions and 130 photographs during fiscal year 1996/97. Our home page on the World-Wide Web has become an additional means of public contact for the Oriental Institute, especially important while the Museum exhibition galleries remain closed during the construction project. In less than two years on-line, the Oriental Institute's Web site has become a major new source for photographic image and reproduction permission requests.

With camera in hand and hard hat on head, photographer Jean Grant has captured our activities over the past year in many hundreds of images. We thank Jean for her efforts to do so while continuing to work wonders with her regular photography and printing duties. Many times I watched Jean clamber out of the window of the second floor ladies' room, ladder in hand, to photograph the construction site from above! Jean would like to thank her longtime Volunteer Irene Glasner for another year of service and to welcome on board her new volunteer, Hugh Christ.

Margaret Schröder and her staff might have thought that they were in for a quiet year, now that we were closed to the public. However, they found themselves keeping a watchful eye on an endless stream of construction workers active in the basement and galleries, and they may actually be longing for the quieter and much cleaner duty of guarding our exhibitions once they have reopened. In addition to sitting at the desk most days and making a daily safety check of the construction site, Margaret also managed to take part in the Smithsonian Institution's Conference on the Protection of Cultural Properties in Raleigh/Durham, North Carolina this February. There she presented a paper "The Untouchable Mummies: Using Museum Guards in a University Museum," which was subsequently published in the journal *Focus on Security: The Magazine of Library, Archive, and Museum Security*.

Karen and Emily both were able to con-



Figure 4. Emily Dorman, Jeremy Walker, and Peter Friedman reenacting an ancient Assyrian ceremony for the laying of a cornerstone. The actual cornerstone for the new addition is visible to the left. Photograph by Jean Grant

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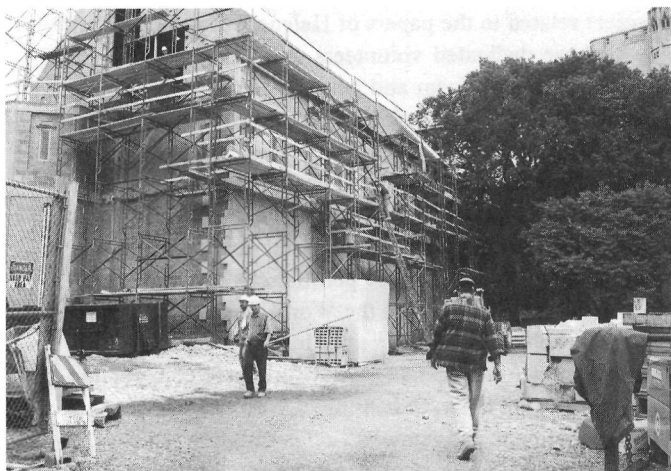


Figure 5. The addition to the Oriental Institute as it appeared at the end of the year. The red tile roof is almost complete and about 50% of the limestone casing on the south facade is in place.

Photograph by Jean Grant

continue their curatorial duties with two interesting and attractive exhibitions presented at the David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art here on campus. The first, organized by Emily, was called *Faces of Ancient Egypt* and ran from 10 September 1996 to 9 March 1997. The show explored the use of human representation in ancient Egypt and included forty-five objects, some of which had not been exhibited

before. It was thrilling to see some familiar objects in entirely new settings, so much so, that some of the experienced docents did not even recognize key pieces. The exhibit garnered considerable notice in the local and specialized press. It also was an opportunity for the docents, who have stood loyally by us during the closure of the Museum, to have “real” objects to discuss with school and adult groups.

The second exhibit, *In the Presence of the Gods: Art from Ancient Sumer in the Collection of the Oriental Institute*, opened on 1 July 1997 and will continue through 8 March 1998. I thoroughly enjoyed shifting my focus a bit from the building project to work on this exhibition, which explores the physical evidence for the daily cult of the Sumerians using forty-three of the most important and visually impressive Sumerian objects from our permanent collection. The statues, relief carvings, stone vessels, and precious inlays all come from temple contexts, and almost all were excavated by the Oriental Institute at the sites of Bismaya, Nippur, Tell Agrab, Tell Asmar, and Khafajah. Like the *Faces* show, this exhibition was a valuable exercise in the rearrangement of materials, which are displayed for their aesthetic qualities as well as their functional use. Richard Born, Curator of the Smart Museum, served as co-curator of both exhibits. Emily and I would both like to thank Richard for his thoughtful attention to the content of each exhibition and to his skillful design of both attractive and informative shows.

Looking toward the future, Emily and I have begun working with John Vinci of Vinci/Hamp Architects, Inc. to come up with a schematic design for the reinstallation of the Museum galleries. The new Mesopotamia (former Egypt) gallery, which is intended to be the primary entrance to the Museum, will include a visitor orientation section with an introduction to the collections and the history of the Oriental Institute and its work. It is probable that in the final design each gallery will have a monumental focus: the Khorsabad Court in the new Mesopotamian gallery; the colossal statue of Tutankhamun, which will be reinstalled freestanding in the new

Egyptian gallery; and, of course, the Persian bull, which will not be moved from its current location. Other priorities will include an exhibition of our Nubian materials, a portion of a gallery devoted to the civilization and history of Megiddo, and space to house changing exhibitions drawn both from our own collection and those of other institutions.

At Emily's initiative, the Museum instituted a new publication project to produce a series of six regional handbooks to the Museum collections (Egypt, Nubia, Mesopotamia, Persia, Anatolia and north Syria, and Israel-Palestine). The books, intended to be guides to the collections rather than to the galleries, will include color photography and histories of the expeditions. The books will be written by Institute faculty and staff and distributed through mass marketing. Funding for their design and production is being sought through various funding agencies.

During closure and construction, the Oriental Institute and the Museum have continued to maintain a presence in the public life of Chicago, in large part due to publicity generated by Emily and William Harms of the University's News and Information Office. We thank Bill, as always, for his generosity with his advice and professional contacts, and for his continuing interest in our work! Part of our success in maintaining a presence in Chicago results from feeding the public's curiosity about behind the scenes events in museums; hosting special events like the groundbreaking, topping out, and cornerstone ceremonies; and offering innovative public education programs unrelated to the galleries. You will see in the Museum Education section how gamely, and with what great success, Carole Krucoff and her staff, as well as the Institute's dedicated team of docents, have risen to the challenge of taking the Museum out into the larger world. We owe them a great debt of gratitude!

The forthcoming year promises to continue to present new challenges to the Museum staff as the building project draws to a close and the reinstallation of the galleries begins to become a reality. I want to thank them all again for their hard work and high spirits, which continue to ensure the success of the Museum during these difficult and yet exciting times.
