

MUSEUM

Karen L. Wilson

This past year saw the completion of the final phase of the renovation, expansion, and climate control project in September and the reopening of the museum to the public at the end of May. It was a hectic, exhausting, and exhilarating twelve months! But it is so wonderful to once again have access to our collections and to be a functioning museum with a public face that it makes it all very much worthwhile in the end.

The new Joseph and Mary Grimshaw Egyptian Gallery has been a tremendous public success, with 11,065 visitors between the first opening event on 22 May and the end of the fiscal year! I wish to express my gratitude to each and every member of the museum staff who made it all possible. Emily Teeter worked indefatigably while I was immersed in the building project to give the exhibition thematic form and to try to choose objects for exhibition when they all were packed away in boxes. John Larson, Carole Krucoff, and Joe Scott worked with Emily and me to finalize selections and display arrangements and to massage into final form the hundreds of labels Emily was cranking out on her computer. The conservators — Laura D’Alessandro, Susan Holbrook, and Sara Caspi — moved hundreds of objects through the laboratory to get them ready for display and, along with many other people, pitched in at the last minute to perform such unglamorous tasks as polishing glass. Preparators Joe Scott, Steve Wessley, and Randolph Olive covered what seemed like miles of plywood with fabric for case buildups, built new walnut case-work, made hundreds of object mounts, produced labels and text panels, and provided valuable input on the design and arrangement of the “finished” gallery. Ray Tindel unpacked objects, kept track of them, and lent his considerable handyman skills to the installation — and was also the only one of us who was here at 7:30 in the morning to let workmen into the gallery. Jean Grant managed to get her photographic studio ready to shoot pictures of the objects of which we had no images, and Margaret Schröder proofread all the labels and text panels, tidied up the other galleries so we would be somewhat presentable to our public, and strung miles of caution tape to keep that public under control. Anne Yanaway made purchases, fielded telephone calls, and — along with John Larson — produced all the final labels and text panels in the course of one Saturday on which we all would have rather been doing other things. Carole Krucoff, Terry Friedman, Cathy Dueñas, and everyone else in Museum Education put in long hours to have docents and programming ready for our many opening events, and succeeded admirably.

In addition to the museum staff, Associate Professor Robert Ritner chose objects and wrote labels and didactic materials for the case on Egyptian Magic and Medicine, and he and the other Egyptologists will be working with us over the next several months to give the gallery its final form. We owe a special debt of gratitude to John Vinci and Tom Conroy of Vinci/Hamp Architects, Inc. for their elegant design and to the staff of Kiple Construction for making that design a reality. It will be exciting over the next year to watch how people use and react to the gallery and to begin work on the other installations.

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Of course, the reinstallation meant that Ray and his “staff” had to retrieve (and, in many cases, first unpack) and keep track of all the objects that Emily was considering for use, which proved ultimately to be nearly a thousand pieces. And it is ironic that never before this year had faculty, students, and visiting scholars made such heavy use of the collections. Apparently, four years of inaccessibility produced a pent-up demand that erupted as soon as we could provide them with materials. For example, records in Registration show that Assistant Professor David Schloen used nearly 300 sherds and whole vessels to teach his Syro-Palestinian pottery course and members of Professor McGuire Gibson’s Diyala Objects Project requested over 500 objects to study. In addition, graduate students Tasha Vorderstrasse and Colleen Coyle both made extensive use of the collections for their Masters theses. Tasha conducted a careful survey of the 600 coins from the Amuq excavations and Colleen is studying and analyzing some 340 Mesopotamian weights. Both students also worked with museum conservation staff on their projects. Conservator Laura D’Alessandro helped Tasha examine the surfaces of her coins to determine their composition and to attempt to read very worn surfaces under the microscope. Colleen made use of the laboratory’s microscope and the conservators’ expertise to examine hematite weights under low magnification to visually identify specific physical characteristics and burial contaminations that are not readily visible to the naked eye.

Registration also hosted visiting scholars Brian Muhs from Leiden University and Ursula Kaplony-Heckel of Marburg University, both of whom were here for three weeks in April to study some 600 Demotic ostraca, and Todd Hickey from Leuven and a colleague from Belgium, who examined nearly 1,900 Greek ostraca. These were only some of the major users of the collection in 1998/99. All told, those in Registration retrieved some 6,500 objects for research and academic purposes over the past year!

After due consideration, the Assyriologists in the building decided that the benefits of moving the tablet collection into a climate-controlled area outweighed the inconvenience of not having the material easily accessible on the third floor, and so, in the fall, the tablets were moved into new climate-controlled quarters in the basement. This entailed transporting 96 cabinets with nearly 500 drawers containing some 7,000 tablets, bullae, cones, and prisms, with as yet uncounted thousands of tablet casts. Ray and his volunteers are now in the process of inventorying the tablets and tablet casts and entering them in the registry database.

As the result of two IMLS Conservation Support Grants, the museum has been able to buy new state-of-the-art storage cabinets to house both the Mesopotamian and Megiddo collections. So, while the reinstallation of the Egyptian Gallery progressed and while scholars came and went, those in Registration also transferred the Mesopotamian collection from cardboard storage boxes to the new cabinets and are now working on unpacking Megiddo material, thus making these two important collections easily accessible for future study and exhibition.

During 1998/99, the museum received two generous gifts: jewelry from the estate of Mrs. John A. Wilson and a triptych in grisaille by Martyl from Dr. Wells and Alexandra Shoemaker.

And, despite everything else that was going on, those in Registration, Conservation, and Preparation enabled the museum to make two loans to important exhibitions. In January, the Kustul incense burner, our bronze statue of a Nubian king, and a ushebti belonging to Queen Amenirdis traveled to the Memphis Pink Palace Museum for an exhibition entitled *Africa's Egypt* that runs from February to September 1999. And four of our Old Kingdom servant statues and a stela fragment are traveling with the major Old Kingdom exhibition, *Egyptian Art at the Time of the Pyramids*, which just closed at the Grand Palais National in Paris, will open at the Metropolitan Museum of Art this fall, and will continue at the Royal Ontario Museum next spring. The Oriental Institute's servant statues seem to be great favorites among the many stunning objects in this exhibition and have been featured as post-cards and in many articles.

All told, between unpacking and the requests of scholars, those in Registration moved over 20,000 objects last year, some of them many times. This would not have been possible without the help of many people. Ray extends his warmest thanks to the preparators and conservators; to registration intern Lauren Zych; to Anne Yanaway, who spent most of her afternoons acting as Ray's assistant; and, most particularly, to the very best corps of volunteers: Debbie Aliber, Leila Foster, Peggy Grant, Mary Grimshaw, Janet Helman, Georgie Maynard, Lillian Schwartz, Richard Watson, and Peggy Wick.

As a result of all this activity, over 500 objects passed through the Conservation Laboratory between July 1998 and the end of June 1999. Of these, approximately 338 were conserved in order to ready them for display in the new Egyptian Gallery. And one of the largest pieces, which didn't pass through the laboratory, but perhaps necessitated the most work, was the monumental statue of King Tut, which Conservation spent much of the late summer putting back together after its move into the new gallery (fig. 1).

In October, the first of our two Getty postgraduate conservation interns, Sara Caspi, joined Laura and Susan in the laboratory to begin her twelve-month internship. And it is a reminder of how time flies that the second internship has just been awarded. Laura sifted through twenty-one applications from a variety of countries (including Japan, Germany, Italy, Portugal, England, Canada, and the United States) before selecting Eric Nordgren, a recent graduate of the conservation program at the Institute of Archaeology, University College, London. Eric will be coming to the Oriental Institute after eighteen months postgraduate work experience at the National Museum of Beirut, Lebanon. Sara will be moving on this fall to the New York branch of the National Museum of the American Indian, where she has been awarded a Mellon Fellowship in Objects Conservation. We will miss her and wish her the best of success.

In May, the Women's Board of the University of Chicago awarded the museum a very generous grant to purchase equipment and analytical time for the new Conservation Laboratory. As a result, the Oriental Institute will soon have a Conservation Laboratory that measures up to the highest standards for such a facility, which is increasingly being used by faculty, staff, and students for teaching, research, and publication.

Publicity continued to be an important part of the museum's effort to remain in the public eye prior to reopening. Thanks to the continued support and indefatigable efforts of William Harms of the University News Office, working primarily with Emily, a well-timed, continuous stream of articles appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, and other major media, focusing on the relocation of the colossal statue of Tutankhamun and activities behind the scenes as we finalized the climate control systems and prepared the new gallery for the public. This sort of coverage is our primary means of keeping the Institute in the public eye, and the number of times that we appeared on the front page of the *Tribune* astounded, and delighted, us.

Far in advance of the opening of the new gallery, Emily and Bill Harms, assisted by Anne and Joe, prepared press packets that were sent to targeted media. A special press preview of the gallery was held on 27 May and was attended by approximately 50 representatives of local and national press. Each press representative had a name tag printed in hieroglyphs which, to our delight, proved to be of intense interest. At one point, the reporters were all comparing their badges to verify the phonetic values used in their names! Docent Mary Jo Khuri supplied beautifully decorated cookies in the form of mummies for the event, and docent guides were posted throughout the gallery to answer questions. The preparation paid off — in the course of the opening weekend more than fifteen features appeared on local and regional television and radio, including several live feeds from the gallery, a twenty minute segment on NPR, and an entire half-hour talk show devoted to the gallery. Important print stories appeared in *Minerva* and *KMT*, *Museum News*, *Home and Away* (the magazine of the American Automobile Association), and in places that we did not expect such as *Discover Magazine* and airline in-flight magazines. A major story in the *New York Times* brought another avalanche of national interest and wire service stories. The tremendous increase in visitations since the gallery reopening is certainly due in large part to this extensive press coverage.

Most of the time spent in the Oriental Institute Archives by John Larson and his volunteers during the year was devoted to unpacking and making selected parts of the collections more accessible for research. Priority is being given to material that will support the reinstallation of the museum galleries and serve the needs of both visiting scholars and researchers within the Oriental Institute's own community of scholars.

Although there are no new acquisitions in the Oriental Institute Archives to report for the current fiscal year, John and his volunteers have been making good use of material relating to the Medinet Habu ostraca studies of the late Professor Allen P. Wikgren, cited in last year's *Annual Report*. Returned to the Institute with the Wikgren Papers were 545 file photographs from the Oriental Institute Photographic Archives that had been on loan to Professor Wikgren since the 1940s. This set of photographs, which was believed to have been lost, is the principal documentary record of the Medinet Habu ostraca that was made at Chicago House prior to 1935, when the ostraca were packed up for shipment to Chicago for a long-term study loan. The original negatives, produced on large-format cellulose nitrate-based film stock that is considered to be an unstable material, were deliberately destroyed at Chicago House to eliminate their potential for spontaneous combustion during the

off-seasons when the staff is not in residence. The data associated with the Medinet Habu ostraca photographs has enabled John and his volunteers to develop a small but useful database that now has some 6,000 entries and is beginning to solve some of the vexing reference number problems that have affected work on the Medinet Habu ostraca for the past sixty-five years.

John is pleased to report that Peggy Grant and Mary Shea completed their long-term project to prepare word-processed text and digitally-scanned illustration figures from a draft manuscript of the late Professor Helene J. Kantor's unpublished dissertation on the development of plant ornament in ancient Near Eastern art. The manuscript, currently numbering 850 pages, has been posted on the Oriental Institute's website to serve as source material for interested scholars.

For 1998/99, the generous and enthusiastic volunteers working with John Larson in the Archives were Hazel Cramer, Lilian Cropsey, Patricia Hume, Sandra Jacobsohn, Janet Kessler, Lillian Schwartz, Helaine Staver, and Carole Yoshida. Since the beginning of the year, the Archives have been able to accommodate a small number of visiting scholars whose projects involve photographic research or a need for access to data from paper records in the Oriental Institute Archives. Without the dedication and good works of all of the Archives volunteers, John would never have been able to schedule such appointments so soon after the completion of our renovation project, and we all thank them warmly for their continuing efforts.

In addition to the regular Archives volunteers, Alison Carter, a student from Oberlin College in Ohio, volunteered in the Archives for two days a week during summer 1998 and one day a week during summer 1999. In May 1999, Margaret ("Meg") Dorman spent most of her "May Project" time near the end of her senior year in the Laboratory Schools high school assisting John in developing an image-based database for the Medinet Habu ostraca.

In the Museum Office, Anne prepared the necessary paperwork and handled other details involved in processing the requests received for photographic image

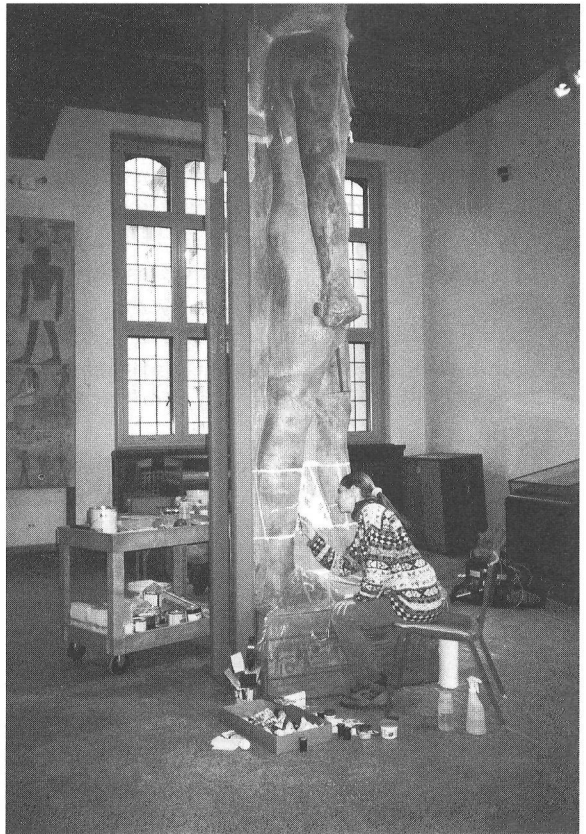


Figure 1. Getty Conservation Intern Sara Caspi works on the restoration of King Tut's legs

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materials and reproduction permissions — a total of 180 transactions during fiscal year 1998/99. She also answered a myriad of telephone calls about the reopening, kept track of all our orders, and looked over the University ledgers each month.

Head of Security, Margaret Schröder, and her guards spent yet another year keeping track of workmen and are busily trying to remember all the ins and outs of dealing with the public now that the museum is again open. Margaret also represented the Oriental Institute Museum at the Smithsonian/Getty Museum Conference on Cultural Property Protection in Los Angeles in late February.

Photographer extraordinaire Jean Grant spent most of 1998/99 getting her studio, office, and darkrooms back up and running. Jean would like to take this opportunity to thank high school freshman volunteer Mara Terras for being so willing to pitch in for scrubbing, repairing, hanging fixtures, and de-boxing, and to thank her stalwart “old-timers” Irene Glasner, Rea Ahlstrom, and Carole Yoshida for all their help.

Having completed the building project and finally reopened our doors to the public, we look forward to an exciting year of planning other new galleries and expect to have many new tales to tell in the next *Annual Report*.
