

MUSEUM

Geoff Emberling

Although I was here for just over a month of 2003–04, it is a pleasure both to look back at a productive year past and an extremely exciting few years to come. The last year was a time of change for the museum on many fronts.

After more than two years of intensive work, the Edgar and Deborah Jannotta Mesopotamian Gallery and the Yelda Khorsabad Court opened to the public on October 18, 2003. It is the keystone of the new museum installation — the largest gallery, and the third of five to be installed — and has been an enormous public success. Containing nearly 1,400 objects, most from Oriental Institute excavations, it ranges from the Braidwood Prehistoric Project to the Khorsabad Court. I am perhaps the only person now in the Oriental Institute who did not take part in



Figure 1. Display case for the East Gallery being constructed at Helmut Guenschel Company in Baltimore

work on the gallery. Certainly thanks are due to Mesopotamian Gallery Installation Committee members former Museum Director Karen Wilson, Professor McGuire Gibson, Graphic Designer Dianne Hanau-Strain, Exhibit Designer Joe Scott and his successor, Installation Coordinator Markus Dohner, as well as to the entire museum staff.

Karen Wilson, who was appointed curator of the museum in 1988 and museum director in 1997, stepped down at the end of October 2003 to pursue research on the Oriental Institute's collection of material from Bismaya, ancient Adab, excavated in 1903–05. During her fifteen years leading the museum, she supervised the installation of climate control and the construction of the new wing and began the current series of gallery installations. Less immediately obvious, a great deal of work towards computerizing collections of objects and photographs was done under Karen's watch. The many opportunities that the museum currently has are due in large part to her organizational skills, hard work, and long-range vision. I would like to thank her for her many and long-lasting contributions to the Oriental Institute.

Ray Tindel served as Interim Museum Director from November to May 2004, as he has done several times in the past. During that time, Ray worked closely with Gil J. Stein to develop plans for the East Gallery reinstatement and to keep that project in line and on schedule.

Soon after the opening of the Mesopotamian Gallery, Oriental Institute faculty and museum staff turned their attention to work on the East Gallery, due to open in January 2005. The gallery will present a geographic arc connecting the Mesopotamian Gallery to the Joseph and Mary

MUSEUM



Figure 2. First museum staff meeting, on a Hawaiian theme, in the Conservation Lab. Decorations by Vanessa Muros and Sarah Barack

Grimshaw Egyptian Gallery, while displaying the diverse ancient cultures of ancient Assyria, Anatolia, and Israel. These regions were culturally distinctive but interconnected through trade, technological exchange, and cultural borrowings in political practice, power, and religion. Much of this region was also briefly joined within the Assyrian empire.

Faculty members Aslihan Yener and Theo van den Hout taught a course during the winter of 2004 to examine objects from the Amuq and Alishar projects. As a result of this course,

many previously unpublished and undisplayed objects were examined and will be on view in the East Gallery.

The East Gallery Reinstallation Committee has at various times included Gil J. Stein, Ray Tindel, Laura D'Alessandro, Carole Krucoff, guest curators Seth Richardson (Khorsabad), Aslihan Yener and Virginia Rimmer (Amuq), Theo van den Hout and Ron Gorny (Alişar), Gabrielle Novacek (Megiddo), designers Markus Dohner and Dianne Hanau-Strain, and editor Joan Barghusen. It has been a pleasure to work with such a wonderful group; the East Gallery is shaping up well (fig. 1) and I think it will be a fitting tribute to the efforts of the committee.

There were also other transitions in the museum staff during the past year. Administrative Assistant Evelien Dewulf left for London in June. Tom James replaced her almost immediately and has quickly become an invaluable member of the staff. And finally, I started as director May 26, having just returned from a final field season at Tell Brak in northeastern Syria. June was a whirlwind for me, getting acquainted with people, places, and projects. Most importantly, I began to get a hands-on sense of the reinstallation of the East Gallery, looking at objects case by case, and reading drafts of labels of all sizes.

I have also begun to think about a strategic plan for the museum, helped by Volunteer Shel Newman, an organizational development consultant. Since this process is in its preliminary stages, I will just say that there are opportunities for growth in many parts of the museum — attendance, public impact, revenue, conducting and facilitating research — and we will be evaluating these possibilities in the year to come.

We will, of course, also continue with the reinstallation of the museum's permanent galleries. The Nubian Gallery will open in spring 2006 and at that time we will also have our first special exhibit in the Holleb Special Exhibits Gallery.

We have instituted monthly staff meetings. The museum staff is spread out all over the building, and a meeting just to find out what we are all doing is an important way to stay connected. They have been fun, too. The first meeting, on June 18, was held in the Conservation Lab with model beaches, umbrellas, pineapple, and fresh coconuts (fig. 2).