

THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE MUSEUM

STAFF

Curator: ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR PINHAS DELOUGAZ

Secretary: DR. WATSON BOYES

Office Staff: LEE SWITALSKI, *photographic archives and services*

JEAN HALL, *office secretary*

NICHOLAS MILLET, *part-time assistant for accessions*

Docent: DR. PENELOPE WEADOCK

Laboratory Staff: ROBERT HANSON, *preparator*

FRED BUCH, *assistant preparator*

URSULA SCHNEIDER, *photographer*

HENRY STEWART, *part-time assistant*

Guards: WILLIAM MORDEN

ROCCO MELILLO

THE CHARACTER OF THE MUSEUM

Chicago has today a number of large museums that quite properly enjoy a high reputation on the national and international scene. In its own limited and chosen field the Museum of the Oriental Institute seeks to maintain the same high standards as they and to supplement the meaning which these institutions have both for the Greater Chicago community and for the University of Chicago of which it is a part.

The relation of the Oriental Institute Museum to other similar institutions in the Chicago area is perhaps most closely analogous to that between the Freer Gallery at Washington, D.C., and the remainder of the Smithsonian, on the one hand, and the larger circle of the local museums—the Corcoran, the Philips, the Textile Museum, etc.—on the other. But the Oriental Institute Museum neither has been separately endowed or founded nor does it receive civic or national support. A small nucleus of the objects it contains came to the University as a collection through the bequest of Mrs. Caroline E. Haskell in 1894 and was originally housed in Haskell Hall. When Breasted Hall was erected in 1931,

the Haskell Collection was moved to the new building, to be the better exhibited there, and a bronze tablet in the Museum's lobby commemorates this fact and the gift of the collection. But what the Oriental Institute Museum has become since 1931, it owes to the University, to those who have guided its work, and to the circle of friends which it has gained in the Chicago area over the years.

Today the Oriental Institute Museum houses the largest and most representative collection of objects of ancient Near Eastern culture and art west of the Alleghenies and in its spread rivals or excels many of the older collections of the eastern seaboard. Its five halls contain materials exhibiting the cultural history and heritage of Egypt, of Anatolia, Syria, Cyprus, and Assyria, of Babylonia, of ancient Iran, and of Palestine, respectively (Fig. 1). In time these materials range from the palaeolithic age of man to late Byzantine and early Islamic times. Much of what has been brought together here derives from the excavations of the Oriental Institute and is thus of particular value because the local and historical context of the materials is known and fully recorded. In-



FIG. 1.—*Egyptian Hall of the Museum, from the lobby*

deed, the intimate connection that thus exists between the archeological field work of the Oriental Institute and its Museum has an important bearing upon the character of the Museum.

The Museum seeks to present examples of all that is best in the cultural achievement of the ancient Near Eastern peoples, including the finest products of their art; but it cannot be merely an art museum. It sees art as one facet of a wide range of cultural achievement. Hence a cooking vessel and a comb, a foundation deposit and a bronze pin, will be found exhibited with the same care as the best Amarna bas-relief or the finest Hellenistic jewelry. Furthermore, all the objects, whether of broadly cultural or of specifically artistic value, tend to be exhibited and seen in historical sequences, showing the cultural and intercultural development of the Near East by periods and peoples over several thousand years. The combination of these two factors gives our Museum its special character and sets it off from the other museums of the city.

A hypothetical analogy will perhaps illustrate the difference. To achieve a similar result, the Art Institute, for example, would need to exhibit its excellent collection of Peruvian pottery in a context representing all the many more facets of the life of the South American Indian, or its Renaissance painting in the context of the daily life of the Florentine nobility, while the Museum of Natural History would need to supply its aboriginal ethnological exhibits with the products of a highly sophisticated culture level never developed by the peoples of the South Pacific. Even if this were possible, it is clearly not the purpose of the institutions in question to proceed in this direction. But for the Oriental Institute Museum the procedure and the character described are basic, and this is what gives the Museum its particular importance for the educational and research work of the Oriental Institute and the University and for the educational and cultural life of Greater Chicago.