

C O N S E R V A T I O N

Barbara J. Hall**The Conservation Laboratory**

As many of you know who have visited the Museum on Members' Day, we have a large collection of objects in storage. Over the years, we have loaned out—both to small area museums and to larger major museums throughout the country—hundreds of these artifacts. Some are sent out on a short-term basis for three months to a year and others for a long-term loan that is reviewed and renewed periodically; one Oriental Institute Museum loan that has been in Puerto Rico for thirty years represents the only museum collection of Egyptian material on the island. Other loaned objects have the distinction of becoming part of large traveling exhibits; we recently contributed nine wonderful and important Nubian treasures to the Brooklyn Museums' "Africa in Antiquity: The Arts of Nubia and the Sudan" show which appeared in New York, New Orleans, Seattle, and the Hague.

Borrowing material for special exhibits, especially the "blockbuster" shows that generate so much publicity, public interest, prestige—and needed revenue—is now quite a vogue, and the frequency of requests from museums for our material has increased. The movement and frequent handling from the packing, shipping, and installation that accompany each loan are very hard on ancient, fragile objects, which I know from experience would prefer to sit safe and untouched on our shelves. We are concerned with the safety of each now irreplaceable piece, so we try to ensure that the conditions and people these objects meet while out on loan are of a high enough standard to ensure their safety. Towards this end, we have been revising our loaning procedure in an attempt to foresee problems that could and do occur when an object leaves the building.

A loan request passes from our curator to our registrar, Anita Ghaemi, who has prepared a detailed questionnaire that is sent to the prospective borrower requesting information on environmental conditions (temperature, humidity, light levels), crowd control, security, and professional technical staff. Only if the answers indicate that the museum is well equipped to handle the loan is it approved. We then make a preliminary selection of requested material and eliminate

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those objects with structural faults, flaking surfaces, corrosion problems, and those which are fragile or require extensive conservation. After the borrower has made his selection from the remaining material, the objects are brought into conservation.

In the laboratory, cleaning and minor restoration are done. The objects are carefully examined and a condition report recording all damage, restoration, and special handling or mounting instructions is prepared for each. Our photographer Jean Grant takes detailed photographs of each piece so that its condition is fully documented. Copies of the reports and photos are sent out with the loan so that the borrower is fully apprised of each object's condition.

Meanwhile, Anita is busy preparing an evaluation of each piece for insurance purposes. This is based on the current price similar material is bringing at auction, but is adjusted to take into account the condition and known provenience of our material.

Finally, the objects are packed in reinforced wooden crates padded inside with layers of polyurethane foam cut to the shape of each object; this allows the objects to be repacked easily and safely for their return to the Oriental Institute. Objects which are thought too valuable to ship are often hand-carried to their destination.

By loaning other museums our objects, especially the small museums in the Illinois area, we provide an opportunity for many people to see our material and to learn from it. By taking such time and care with each loan, we ensure the survival of our archeologically unique collection.