

# News & Notes

The Oriental Institute

Issued confidentially to members and friends

Not for publication

No. 53: May, 1979

## What Happens in the Basement, I:

### The Registrar and her Volunteers

—by Anita Ghaemi, Registrar

Permanent exhibitions represent only one facet of a living museum. Closed off from public view are the offices and storerooms where the daily work of running the museum takes place. One such area of behind-the-scenes activity is that of the Registrar's office, staffed by a full-time Registrar, two part-time graduate students, and six volunteer workers.

When a newly acquired object arrives, it must be registered, catalogued, and stored; when any Museum material changes location (for instance, to go on loan or on exhibition), its new location must be accurately recorded. Sometimes objects have been incompletely or wrongly described, and must be correctly identified through research. The Registrar is responsible for all this, and for the proper physical handling and security of the objects, many of which are extremely old and valuable. Scholars



The location of each of these Palestinian objects presently on exhibit is carefully recorded by the Registrar. An object that cannot be promptly located is, for all practical purposes, "lost."

from across the world come to study our materials; the Registrar provides study facilities and when necessary moves objects off exhibition or out of storage.

Prospective volunteers often think that only people with highly specialized training could be useful. While many aspects



This Islamic glass vessel, excavated at Fustat, Egypt, is being carefully measured by volunteer Gerry Enck, under the watchful eye of Registrar Anita Ghaemi. She is using vernier calipers, designed for precision measurement (up to 1/1000 of a centimeter) of small objects.



Making an inventory of Egyptian amulets in the small object cabinet are volunteers Blanche Hirsch and Bobette Teitelman. Each object must be accurately recorded and put in its proper place for quick retrieval.

NOTE: Not pictured are volunteers Mary Ann Wayne and Peggy Wick, and graduate assistants Peter Lacovara and Frank Yurco.

of the Registrar's job do require a background in Near Eastern art, there are many more jobs volunteers can do, after "learning the ropes." Each volunteer is taught how to use the many files to identify and keep track of the different types of data concerning the objects. A volunteer may make a checklist of Egyptian scarabs brought out for a visitor, or record the new locations of Palestinian pottery exhibited in the gallery. Some volunteers show a flair for measuring, others are happier doing sketches of objects for identification, and some prefer poking about the library checking a reference. In the process, they provide an indispensable service to the Museum and have a unique opportunity to learn something at first hand about the objects with which they are working.

We have close to 75,000 registered objects and an extensive study collection; one of our priority projects is the implementation of a location card system which will enable us to find every object within minutes. We have made considerable progress, and depend upon the volunteers to make its completion possible.



Often a rough pictorial record of a piece affords the best method of identification. Volunteer Gerry Enck is drawing a quick sketch of an Iranian tile from the Seljuq period (about 12th-13th c. A.D.).



Volunteer Lisa Margolin describes objects for registration cards, comparing the objects at hand with other, published examples.

Anyone interested in volunteer work in the Registrar's office should contact Anita Ghaemi at 753-2498.



As they work, volunteers learn the nature and uses of the materials they handle, and learn how to handle the materials themselves. Here the Registrar explains to volunteer Bobette Teitelman that this horse bit from Iran should be handled only with gloves, to prevent damage by oils and salt on one's hands.

## Announcing 1980 Tours

We are pleased to announce the 1980 tour program. These tours offer a special opportunity to translate the mystique of the Ancient Near East into a vivid personal experience while at the same time benefitting from the professional expertise of the Institute's tour lecturer, who will be with you throughout the tour. These deluxe tours have been designed especially for Institute members and offer features not found in other programs. When making your travel plans for 1980, please consider an Oriental Institute tour to the Near East.

### EGYPT

Egypt is a land whose monuments, tombs, and temples offer the visitor an experience of unparalleled richness and variety. You will travel along the Nile with a professional Egyptologist who is intimately familiar with the history, art, and culture of ancient Egypt. Tour members will visit many sites in an active and rewarding itinerary, including the Valley of the Kings, the cliff temples of Abu Simbel, and the long-established Chicago House of the Oriental Institute at Luxor, where by special arrangement, tour members will receive an on-site acquaintance with the Institute's renowned Epigraphic Survey. Also specially featured is a Nile cruise in a newly built deluxe riverboat.

This 17-day tour leaves Chicago on March 6 and returns March 22, 1980.

### SYRIA

Our curator, John Carswell, will guide members through Syria with an experienced eye on art and archeology. As a scholar and an archeologist long familiar with Syria, John Carswell lends a perspective to this journey unavailable with any other tour. Syria, home to civilized society for more than 4,000 years, presents a rich tableau of ancient remains. Damascus, Aleppo, Ugarit, Krak des Chevaliers, Palmyra, and Apamea are some of the places you will visit in an atmosphere of peace, before the blossoming tourist industry in Syria makes these sites popular.

This 13-day tour leaves Chicago on May 7 and returns May 19, 1980.



The tour fees cover air fare and all other transportation and transfers, hotel accommodations (based on double occupancy, with single accommodations available at a supplementary cost), tips, and almost all meals.

All tours are limited to 25 participants but must have 15 persons to operate. If reservations are for fewer than 15 places, the price per person will have to be increased in order to operate the tour.

A detailed itinerary for each tour and further information may be obtained by calling or writing Bernard Lalor, Membership Secretary of the Institute, (312) 753-2389.

## Ancient Textiles from Nubia to be Shown

On May 26, an exhibit, ANCIENT TEXTILES FROM NUBIA, will open at the Art Institute of Chicago, and will run until August 5. The textiles in this display, ranging from whole pieces to tiny fragments, were excavated by Prof. Keith C. Seele of the



*This portion of a wool carpet is a plain weave in light brown with cut weft slip loops in shades of red, light brown, and blue.*

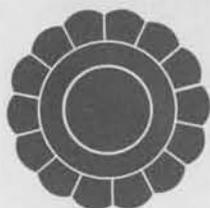
Oriental Institute at Gallana and Qustul in two seasons ending in 1964. After delays caused by the death of the first person approached to conserve the fabrics and several years' work actually cleaning and arranging them, the textiles were transferred on indefinite loan to the Textile Department of the Art Insti-

tute so they could be published and exhibited for the first time by Mrs. Christa C. Mayer-Thurman, the Curator.

The fabrics, made of cotton, linen, animal fiber, or silk, are dated to the Meroitic, X-Group, and early Christian periods of Lower Nubia, ca. 100-600 A.D. Although most are from locally made sheets, mantles, and tunics, other textile objects (such as belts or tapes) are represented, and there are a few exotic pieces. These, imported from the north, include several fragments of carpet (see photo), one with an interesting mixture of architectural, geometric-linear, and possibly floral decoration, and hangings or covers, decorated with the complex interlaced designs common to Coptic Egypt.

As a whole, this textile collection is one of the largest and most interesting groups of excavated textiles of this period from Nubia and it should provide considerable information on trade and culture in Nubia for some time to come.

—Bruce Williams, James Henry Breasted Research Associate



The Oriental Institute  
The University of Chicago  
1155 East 58th Street · Chicago, Illinois · 60637

FIRST CLASS MAIL