

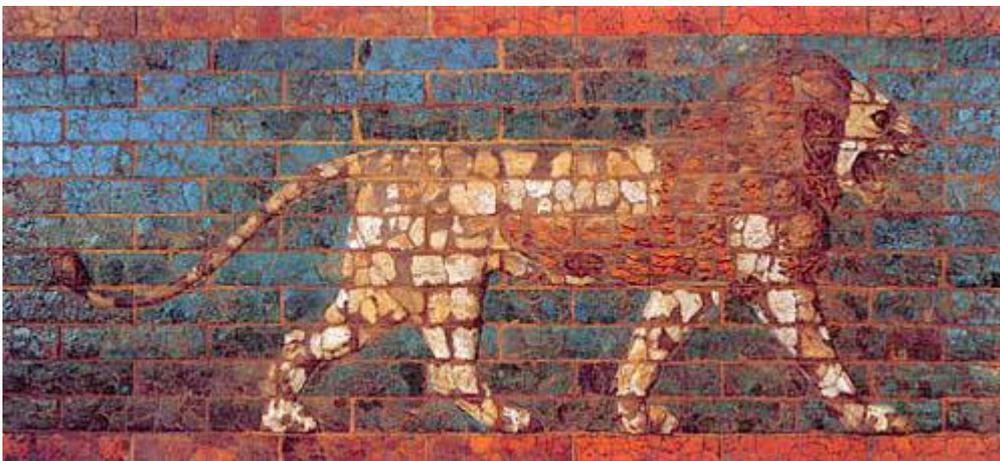
THE EDGAR AND DEBORAH JANNOTTA MESOPOTAMIAN GALLERY



The Edgar and Deborah Jannotta Mesopotamian Gallery of the Oriental Institute Museum opened to the public on October 18, 2003, following a seven year renovation project. The 5,428-square foot gallery displays 1383 objects dating from the Paleolithic Period (ca. 100,000 B.P.) to the Sasanian Period (ca. 5th Century A.D.). The gallery space was designed by Vinci/Hamp Architects of Chicago. New cases, constructed of walnut, were designed by Vinci/Hamp Architects and built by Helmut Guenschel of Baltimore.

For more information, call (773) 702-9520, or email at: oi-museum@uchicago.edu

Directions To The Oriental Institute



With the opening of the Edgar and Deborah Jannotta Mesopotamian Gallery on October 18, visitors to the Oriental Institute Museum may once again enjoy one of the world's great collections of Mesopotamian art and artifacts. A wealth of objects from what may be the world's first urban civilization are displayed, including pottery, clay tablets, stone sculptures, and vessels made of luxurious stones and metals.

The gallery begins with a visitor orientation center that serves as the main point of orientation to the Institute and the Museum. It includes exhibits explaining how scholars from the Oriental Institute have conducted excavations and research since the end of the nineteenth century until today, plus two computer kiosks that currently house interactive programs for visiting families.

The next section of the exhibition is devoted to the prehistory of Iraq. The Robert and Linda Braidwood Prehistory Exhibit highlights the work of these two pioneering Oriental Institute archaeologists beginning in the years just after World War II. It takes visitors back 150,000 years, and follows the development of human society from nomadic groups to settled farming villages.

The next section of the gallery traces the history of Mesopotamia using graphics, pottery, and other artifacts from the dawn of written history up to the Islamic conquest in 642 A.D. Another exhibit in the gallery focuses on writing and Mesopotamia's rich written records. The ancient Mesopotamians invented writing as an administrative tool, but quickly developed a written tradition that included literature, mathematics, and science. Exhibits in this section focus on the development of writing, the training of scribes, and the tradition of royal inscriptions on clay, stone, and metal, including the famous Code of Hammurabi.





Small intricately carved stone seals were another important administrative tool in the region's lively commercial life. Made in the shape of cylinders, they could be rolled across clay sealing doorways or containers to identify the individual or administrative unit that had impressed the seal. The decoration of these seals includes combats between fantastic heroes and wild animals, scenes of worship, and images of lions and other animals once common in the region. A new series of exhibit cases has been created to display the museum's extensive collection of these precious seals and an entirely new exhibit has been produced to show how these seals were made, used, and worn.

The Daily Life section of the gallery focuses on household and family as the basic organizing units of Mesopotamian life. This section gives visitors a picture of how the ancient Mesopotamians lived, what they ate, and the sophisticated crafts that they developed to work materials such as stone and metal, both of which often had to be imported from thousands of miles away.



The most important section of the exhibition deals with cities and their two main administrative units, the palace and the temple. Mesopotamia was essentially an urban society, and cities dotted the countryside. Each city boasted at least one temple dedicated to its patron god or goddess. During the third millennium B.C., devotees dedicated statues and placed them in these temples to stand in perpetual prayer before the divinity. The central display case in this section of the gallery features the Oriental Institute's collection of these votive figures, unrivaled outside of Baghdad, displayed with other treasures that might have stood with them in temple sanctuaries.

And, of course, at the far end of the gallery from the visitor's center stands the most spectacular object in the Mesopotamian collection — the human-headed winged bull from Khorsabad. The bull, which stands sixteen feet tall, now is flanked by six ten-foot-tall stone reliefs that originally stood along with it on the throneroom façade in the palace of the Assyrian king Sargon II, who ruled from 721-705 B.C. The bull and the reliefs were excavated by the Oriental Institute during the 1928/29 season of excavations at Sargon II's capital city Dur-Sharrukin. This stunning new installation, the Yelda Khorsabad Court, which is the result of over ten years of work, evokes the feeling of grandeur and power of the palaces and temples of the mighty Assyrian Empire.



Designing and installing this and the two other galleries has been an amazingly complex task that involves every member of the museum staff (as well as many other individuals in the building). I would like to express my appreciation to all those who have been working on the Edgar and Deborah Jannotta Mesopotamian Gallery for their team spirit and almost constant good cheer. The interviews and photographs in this article will give you an idea of the variety of their perceptions and experiences of the process and amply demonstrate their great enthusiasm for what they do.