

Since January 1995, the Beirut National Museum has been echoing the sounds of stone-cutters and masons working round-the-clock on the façade of the building. This operation is the starting point of a long term plan of restoration and inner refurbishment.

The Ministry of Culture together with the Department of Antiquities have arranged for a team of specialized craftsmen and general laborers to work non-stop on finishing the job. One of the difficulties encountered involves quarrying a special stone, native to the Lebanon, and matching its color to that used in the original construction of the building. It must often be cut and shaped to recreate the frames for the windows and doors. Time is also at a premium because of the continuing damage from the elements.

When work will be completed, most of the first floor will be converted into large workshops where restorers and archaeologists will be able to work on items that have been laying for the better part of twenty years in the basement store rooms. Most of these will need restoration work, hence the need to refurbish and equip the laboratory.

A new concept of museological display will be implemented which will emphasize the museum's role not only as an exhibition center but also as a focal point for educational recreation and communication purposes with a wider public. Given that this process of rehabilitation is a long term project we intend as a first step to open the ground floor and the basement for exhibiting such artifacts as the sarcophagi of Tyr, Ahiram and those of the "Ford" collection.

Such a colossal and complex task will also be a tribute to the late Emir Maurice Chéhab and all those who have worked at the museum since it was opened in 1930.



*Remains of original card index*

The project to overhaul the index records of the museum's collection is vital as it is the prerequisite to the opening of the depositories. It involves establishing a registry that would eventually connect the documentation to the relevant pieces of the collection. The size of the task came to light soon after the end of the war, when a large number of the museum's files were found strewn across the floor of the archive. Some are badly damaged others partially erased. The oldest date back to 1919 but it seems that most were created between the thirties and seventies.

In view of the situation, the first phase of this rationalization has begun (Indexing team: Anne-Marie Afeiche, Lydia Debbas, Catherine Younès). The aim is not simply to preserve data. An understanding of how these documents originated is paramount as is the creation of a common terminology that will establish the roots of the filing system, something that had not previously been done. Ultimately, an amalgamation of all data relevant to the items in the collection such as provenance, description, iconographic and bibliographic references, state of conservation and location, must be accomplished.

The sorting and tidying that has been done up until now is aimed at creating a mutually correlated base of information that is not only essential to the needs of the National Museum's collection but also to that of the Department of Antiquities. This is now well under way. Ultimately, the collecting, classifying and storing of these documents will allow us to reach our objective which is the establishment of a comprehensive inventory, which is fundamental in the reorganization of the museum.