

# Directorate General of Antiquities Programme of Reconstruction:

## The Latest Developments

**Camille Asmar**  
Director General of  
Antiquities

2

### Progress in the refurbishment of the museum's interior

Having completed the reconstruction of the museum's facade, reparation work on the interior has begun. In April 1996 a veritable construction site was created within the museum (fig.1) in order to carry out urgent reparations. Larger artefacts that could not be moved were covered so as to be protected from damage while work is being undertaken and the remaining pieces were grouped together in another room under constant surveillance (fig.2,3).

The work consists, in brief, of the following:

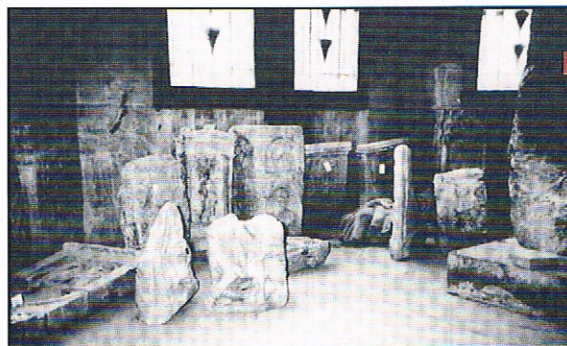
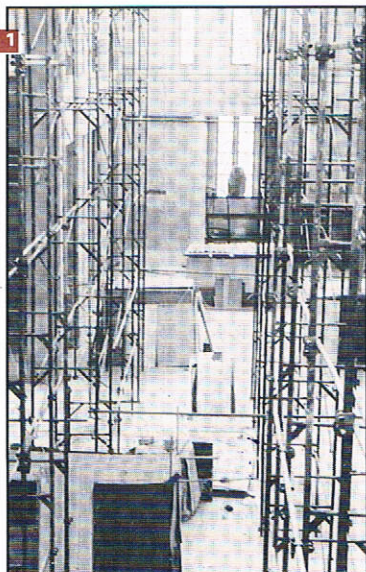
a. The refurbishment of the ceiling (fig.4,5). Namely replacing most of the broken glass panes so as to prevent rain from seeping in as well as endowing the room with natural light. These essential safeguards have been made possible through the very generous support of Mr. *Wafic Reda Saïd* who instructed Mr. Hassan Smadi, Director of the company Weavers s.a.l, to undertake the completion of this primary phase in the general restoration of the museum. This is due to the efforts of Mrs Mona Hraoui, wife of the President of the Republic who is President of the Association "*Fondation du Patrimoine*".

b. The cleaning of the walls (fig.6,7). It became necessary to remove the wall's existing surface, including large tiles that had been added to the wall prior to 1975. Removing these tiles allows the original stone to be uncovered. In other areas, broken and cracked masonry had to be replaced. The work also included the removal of graffiti painted throughout the years of war and sundry building work to refurbish the museum's interior walls.

c. The removal of old display cabinets. The stone pedestals and display cabinets previously used to exhibit the museum's collection of small artefacts were greatly damaged in recent years. State of the art display cabinets conforming to contemporary standards of presentation and security will replace the existing models.

The museum's original planimetric distribution will however, remain unchanged. The proportional harmony, the spatial quality induced by natural light, which exists throughout the various galleries, will remain untouched.

Other miscellaneous activities in the National Museum consist of the following:



1. Reparation work in the museum's interior.

2. Stone objects grouped together to make way for construction work.

3. Stone objects grouped together to make way for construction work.

4. Refurbishment of the ceiling.

5. Replacement of broken glass.

6. Removal of tiles.



# 3

## The opening of the storage rooms

The museum's conservation lab came under intense pressure during the opening of the museum's storage rooms. A team of Lebanese and British conservators (Janet Berry and Graham Langford) working together with archaeologists undertook the task of 'excavating' the artefacts from the basement, cleaning them (fig.8,9), and having the objects inventoried prior to their safe keeping. This painstaking work is being carried out under the supervision of Isabelle Skaf, Head of the Museum's Conservation Department, assisted by Badr Jabbour Gédéon and the following newly appointed archaeologists to the DGA: Rana Andari, Raghida Abillamaa, Marie Lamaa and Houssam Awwad. The artefacts that have been recuperated from the museum's basement had for the most part remained immersed in salty water and thus require a very delicate approach in their care. The desalination process (fig.10), involves repeated bathing of the objects in distilled water in order to dissolve the salt embedded in them. Every time the objects are soaked the salt level in the water is measured and regularly monitored in order to gauge its degree of concentration and subsequent reduction.

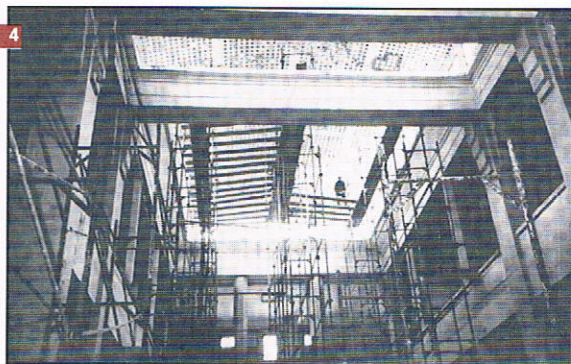
## The collection's inventory

In conjunction with the opening of the storage rooms, an inventory of the museum's collection of stone, glass, terracotta and metal is, at present, being undertaken. There is an urgent need to create a comprehensive list of objects that the National Museum houses. With this in mind and in order to establish a permanent systematic

method of cataloguing the objects in the collection, a tailor-made computer program was designed to cater to the specific needs of the museum. This program was the result of the combined efforts of a team of archaeologists including Suzy Hakimian, Anne-Marie Maïla-Afeiche and Agnès Rousseau who together with Antoine Eid, a computer programmer, produced an appropriate inventory file with an explanatory index attached (fig.11).

## A British conservator of stone objects in Beirut

Tracey Sweek, a member of the Stone Conservation Department of the British Museum arrived on June 28 in Beirut on a 5-day assignment to the National Museum. The British Council funded her trip, largely thanks to the interest shown by Ms. Ann Mallamah-Thomas, whilst the British Museum donated her services in evaluating various stone objects in the National Museum's collection. Over one hundred marble, limestone and sandstone objects were examined and their condition assessed after 20 years of storage. Isabelle Skaf accompanied her throughout and outlined the various problems relevant to each object under assessment. The aim of her trip was to initiate, in conjunction with the National Museum, a program of conservation for each of the artefacts concerned, to evaluate the number of conservators and the equipment needed for this operation (fig.12).





# Directorate General of Antiquities Programme of Reconstruction: *The Latest Developments*

Camille Asmar

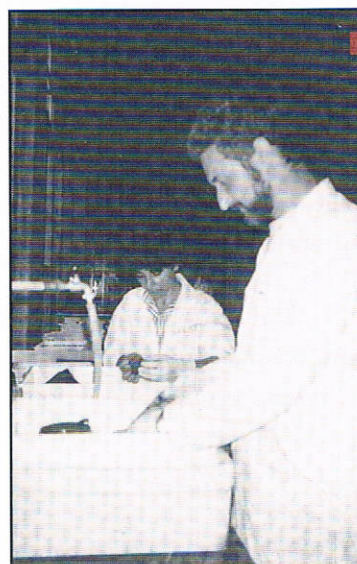
4

## The National Museum's library

During April 1996, the library's first shelf units were installed. Two years before, a group of volunteers cleared and sorted some 17,000 books left in disarray after years of war thus rescuing most of the essential bulk of the museum's original reading room. In the meantime and until a qualified team of librarians takes over the job of managing the library, four young archaeologists newly appointed to the Directorate General of Antiquities are restoring the valuable works and classifying them on the new shelves in relevant order. The task of classifying these volumes, once completed, represents the first stage in the refurbishment of the museum's library offering research facilities to archaeologists in the Lebanon (fig.13).

## Exhibition in Barcelona

At the start of the New Year, Lebanon will be participating in a rather special exhibition abroad. Between January and June 1997, Barcelona's *Centro de Cultura Contemporanea* will be holding an exhibition of a variety of archaic scale models including authentic construction models of houses, temples and other types of edifices. The National Museum of Beirut will be contributing two of its authentic models, namely the Adyton's Temple of Niha and the model of Baalbeck's theatre (fig.14).



7. Stone replacement.

8. Cleaning of objects.

9. Lebanese and British conservators working together with archaeologists

10. Desalination program in the National Museum.





11. The inventory of the Museum's Collection.

12. Tracey Sweek- member of the Stone Conservation Department of the British Museum- in the Beirut National Museum.

13. Classifications of the museum's books in the new library.

14. Preparation for the exhibition in Barcelona.