The Transformation Continues

This time last year, I wrote you about our ambitious plans to transform the Penn Museum into an institution worthy of our world-class collection. We are delighted with the launch of the Center for the Analysis of Archaeological Materials and the great success of the inaugural year of the Unpacking the Past school visits program. Over the next five years, we will install new, air-conditioned signature galleries showcasing our permanent collections from the ancient Near East, Egypt, and Asia. We are also developing a new Writing gallery and a gallery that will serve as an introduction to the ancient eastern Mediterranean, tentatively titled “Crossroads of Cultures.” Storage areas, research facilities, and the Harrison Auditorium will be renovated, and the Museum will add an additional elevator and ramps to make the building accessible to all.

I am pleased to report that, over the last 12 months, we have made much progress toward these goals. The new Near East galleries—at 6,000 square feet—will be the first galleries to come on line, with a projected opening date of Fall 2017. The Museum has an extraordinary Near East collection, including iconic objects from our early excavations at sites such as Nippur (Iraq), Hasanlu (Iran), Ur (Iraq), and Beth Shean (Israel). Art and artifacts from this collection, numbering over 125,000 objects, will illustrate the pivotal story of daily life in the Near East, from the Neolithic (10,000 years ago) to Islamic cultures of the Middle East. This region, historically known as the “fertile crescent,” was among the earliest places in the world to see agriculture, writing, and trade, and to experience the transition from farming villages to the first cities.

More than ten archaeologists, Near East area specialists, and exhibition developers are currently involved in planning the galleries and selecting objects. The introduction to the Near East galleries will feature a “chronological spine”—a timeline that focuses on major political and historical events in the region. We will then explore themes such as the nature of urbanism, religion and ritual, and family and household. Creative use of technology will allow visitors to dig deeper into areas of special interest to them. Throughout the galleries, the relevance of the past to our lives today will be a constant thread.

The transformation continues, as we work toward making the Penn Museum one of the great museums of the world. I look forward to telling you, our loyal members, more about our progress in the pages of Expedition magazine.

JULIAN SIGGERS, PH.D.
WILLIAMS DIRECTOR

Look for your next issue in January!

We are changing the delivery date of the Winter issue to better coincide with the beginning of Penn’s spring semester as well as the opening of new exhibitions at the Museum. Expedition will be mailed in early January, rather than late December. We will continue to publish three issues each academic year.