Art of the Ancient Near East

In 1933 Herbert E. Winlock wrote an article in the Museum Bulletin entitled "Assyria: A New Chapter in the Museum's History of Art." Already in 1917 Mr. Morgan had given six Assyrian reliefs. In announcing the receipt of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s gift of a magnificent group of relief sculptures, principally from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, Mr. Winlock stated that the "superb collection of Assyrian sculptures [is] now installed, with such related objects as were heretofore in our collections, in the south end of the Fifth Avenue Hall and the room opening off it." By 1931 we had completed a set of drawings for an imposing North Wing which was to house the newly acquired Assyrian reliefs. The Front Hall had little to offer as a final resting place for the colossal human-headed winged beasts, and the related reliefs were shown in a narrow passegeway at the entrance to the Greek and Roman galleries. Depression years and the preparation of plans for the new Cloisters necessitated the shelving of large rolls of blueprints which are now only a matter of historical interest. In accordance with our master plan for the reallocation of Museum exhibits, presented to the Corporation in the Annual Report for 1957-1958, an area originally built in the Italian renaissance manner for the Riggs collection of arms and armor, and later used as a temporary Junior Museum, will open on April 21 to display the collection of ancient Near Eastern material so that it can be seen and studied to advantage.

The hall, with the two lions in enameled brick, part of the Sacred Way in Babylon, at the entrance, has been simplified architecturally wherever possible. The great winged human-headed animals placed on either side of the entrance archway can be seen from a distance; together with the surrounding reliefs they give an impression of the boldness and massiveness of a great gate at Nimrud with continuing wall decoration carved in alabaster. Abe Feder, a lighting engineer of wide experience and consummate patience, has helped us in the lighting of the sculptures. Photographs and maps bring the visitor into closer contact with the distant lands from which, through the years, the material has been assembled. From recent excavations in which the Museum has shared some of the findings, and from active international art markets, have come some of the world's great art treasures. Private funds have made it possible for the Museum, guided by the enthusiasm, knowledge, and painstaking care of Charles K. Wilkinson, Curator of Near Eastern Art, to build up in a comparatively short time a world-famous collection. The artifacts of a bygone civilization have been given new meaning: they take their place as never before in our encyclopedic Museum.

James J. Rorimer, Director

Contents

Art of the Ancient Near East

Foreword
By James J. Rorimer 241

Introduction
By Charles K. Wilkinson 242

The Third Millennium B.C.
By Vaughn E. Crawford 245

The Second Millennium B.C.
By Prudence Oliver 253

The First Millennium B.C.
By Charles K. Wilkinson 261

The Recent Accessions Room 269

241