

Latest News from the Directorate General of Antiquities

Andrea Resek
LBFNM

LEBANON
BEIRUT

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FILM « In Defiance of Oblivion » is a forty minute documentary film produced by the D.G.A. and directed by Bahij Hojeij. The film was first shown on the 25th of November 1996 and was attended by the First Lady, Mrs Mona Hraoui. The completion of the film was made possible by the Libano-Francaise bank and Mr. Mario Haddad graciously organised the use of a screening room.

Beginning with archival footage of the museum's construction the film moves on to its survival during the civil war when its very location and its perceived symbolic status made it at times a strategic battlefield and at others a "safe passage" link between the warring sides of the city. Finally the film takes us inside the museum to publicly disclose, for the first time, the unveiling of the museum's large objects from their concrete caissons which had protected them from the ravages of war. There is also graphic footage showing the state in which the museum's basement storage rooms were found to be in once they were opened, also for the first time since the beginning of war.

The audience is left in no doubt about the huge amount of work that staff at the museum have already accomplished and the continuing efforts to save and restore a nation's legacy seem infinitesimal next to the monumental task ahead. Nevertheless, professionals across the

board are involved in the campaign and include several British (1) and one Belgian restorers.

MUSIC - The opera singer Joelle el-Zeeny inaugurated a series of concerts for the benefit of the Beirut National Museum (fig. 1, 2). These were organised by the National Heritage Foundation in order to raise funds for the museum.

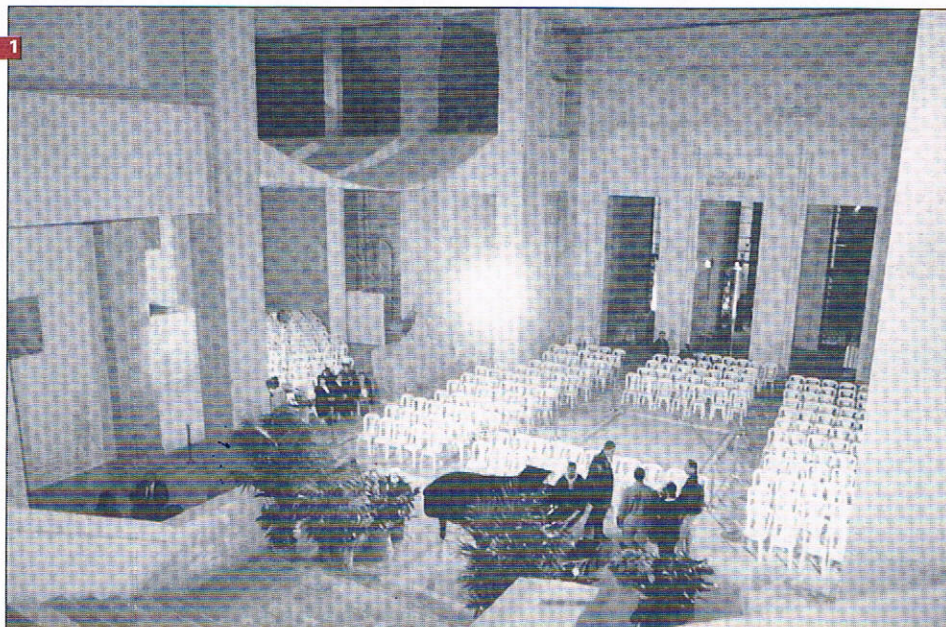
On the 22nd of December 1996 two hundred and fifty music lovers and opera aficionados were admitted to the Hall of the Seven Wisemen to listen to Miss Zeeny perform Verdi and Vivaldi amidst the sarcophagi from Tyre and Ahiram.

Mrs Mona Hraoui, under whose patronage the evening was held, gave a short speech before the beginning of the concert.

SAIDA

EXCAVATIONS - New excavation site in Saida (fig. 3, 4)

Under the management of Dalida Chamseddine and Bahija Traboulsi a new rescue excavation project was started on the 16th of January 1997. Labelled 'Lot SDA 1395 WAS', archaeological remains were discovered on the site when foundations for a new building were being dug out in the Al-Wastani area of Saida's city centre. An area of 40 x 20 square metres is being explored. Itself divided into 5m x 5m squares, the site has so far



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produced 25 tombs of two separate types. Some were directly dug into the earth, others contained sarcophagi (fig. 4). They are all attributed to the Roman and Byzantine period. Aside from the skeletons found inside, the tombs contained numerous terracotta vases, glass phials and coins.

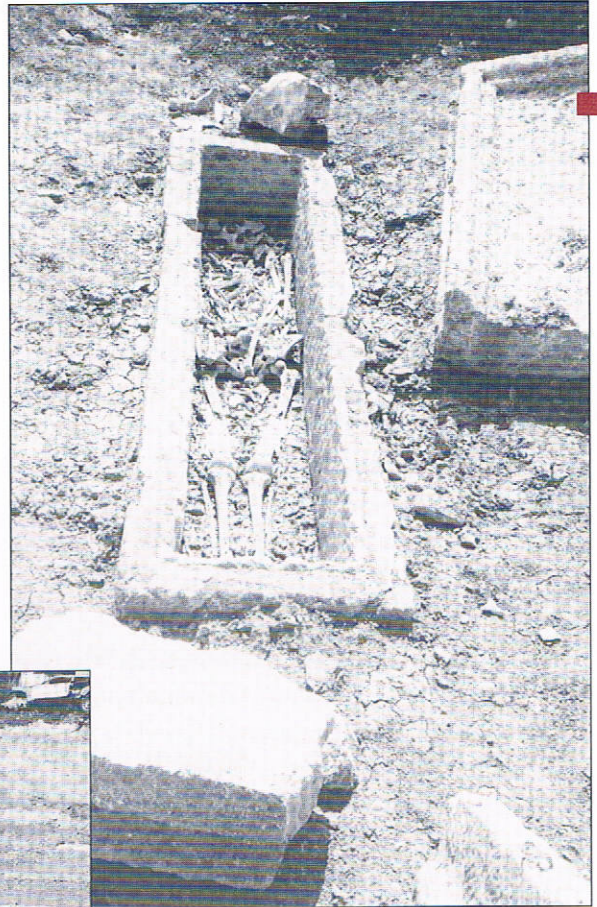
Notes:

1. See article Tracy Sweek, p.21-24.

1.2. Concert in the Museum.

3. The Al-Wastani site.

4. Sarcophagus from Al-Wastani.



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ABROAD

ISTANBUL - The Lebanese British Friends are grateful to Mr. Halil Özek of the Museum of Archaeology of Istanbul for having kindly submitted the photograph below (fig. 5). It features an anthropoid sarcophagus housed in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum. It is in the Egyptian style and its figure is holding a sceptre with a ram's head (Khnum) in its hand. As the photo did not reach us in time to be included in issue 4 (2), we are delighted to be able to publish it now.

LONDON - The British Museum Society offered the Lebanese community of London the opportunity to attend an evening preview of the film "In defiance of oblivion".

In fact apart from generously offering to screen the film, the British Museum's Head of the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities, Dr. John Curtis, very kindly addressed the audience to underline the film's subject which he personally had experienced on a recent tour to the Lebanon where he had seen for himself the current state of affairs in the Beirut National Museum (fig.6). Although unable to attend due to illness, H.E. Mr. Mahmoud Hammoud, the Lebanese Ambassador was well represented by Dr Bassam Naamani, Mr. Jean W. Makaron and Miss Carla Jazzar. Members of the audience were then invited to join further events also taking place or to visit various galleries of the museum open exclusively for the evening.

The L.B.F.N.M who have undertaken the promotion of the film on behalf of the Beirut Museum would like to acknowledge the continued support they and the Beirut Museum receive from the British Museum and its staff and to take the opportunity to thank on this occasion the individual efforts of the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities.

PARIS - Lebanese Heritage exhibition in Paris.

In order to explore the necessary requirements for the major 'Lebanese Heritage' exhibition being planned for the autumn of 1998 at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, the Director of the IMA, Mr Mohammad

Bennouna visited Beirut between the 15th and 25th December 1996 (fig.7). Mr Bennouna was accompanied by Mrs Leila Hazzaz Ltayf, the executive assistant to Mr Camille Cabana who is the Director General of the IMA and by Mrs Hana Chidiac who handles the I.M.A's exhibitions.

Although Mr. Bennouna's visit offered a first-hand opportunity for him to familiarise himself with the Lebanon, it is however the precursor to a series of exchange visits designed to help finalise the Paris exhibition.

BARCELONA - On the 17th of January 1997, the *Centro de Cultura Contemporanea of Barcelona* opened its exhibition of original archaic scale models. As was announced in issue 4 of the *NMN* (3), the National Museum of Beirut contributed two authentic models of Adyton's Temple of Niha (Fig. 8, 9) and Baalbeck's Theatre (Fig.10). These models were made available largely due to the valiant work put in by members of the museum's laboratory in restoring them to the necessary condition in time for the exhibition. A debt of gratitude is also owed to Mr and Mrs Georges Malek who generously provided specialised products necessary for the conservation of the models and which were unavailable in the Lebanon.

Notes:

2. C. Doumet-Serhal, 1996, "Fleurs, fruits et huile parfumée: représentation sur les sarcophages anthropoïdes", *National Museum News*, 4, p.12-19

3. C. Asmar, 1996, "Directorate General of Antiquities Programme of Reconstruction": The Latest Developments", *National Museum News*, 4, p.4

5. The anthropoid sarcophagus from Istanbul.

6. Dr John Curtis addressing the audience at the British Museum.

7. Mr Mohammad Bennouna and Dr Camille Asmar in the Beirut National Museum.

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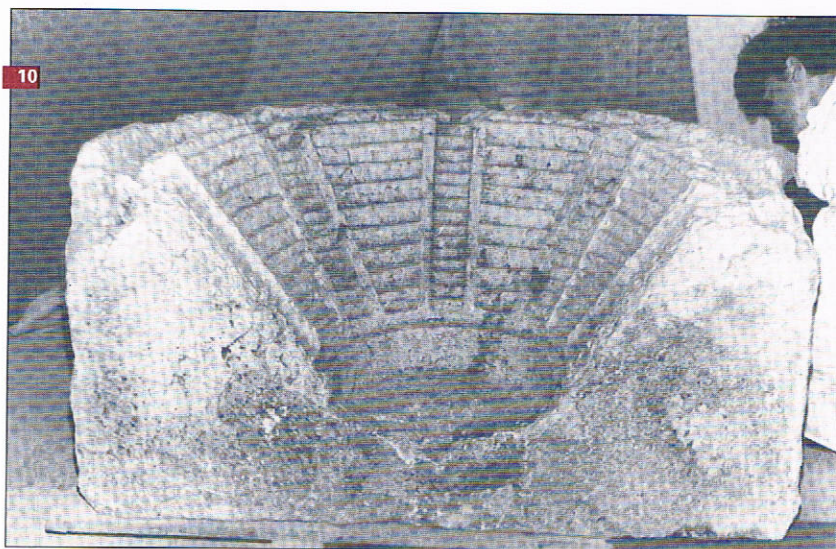
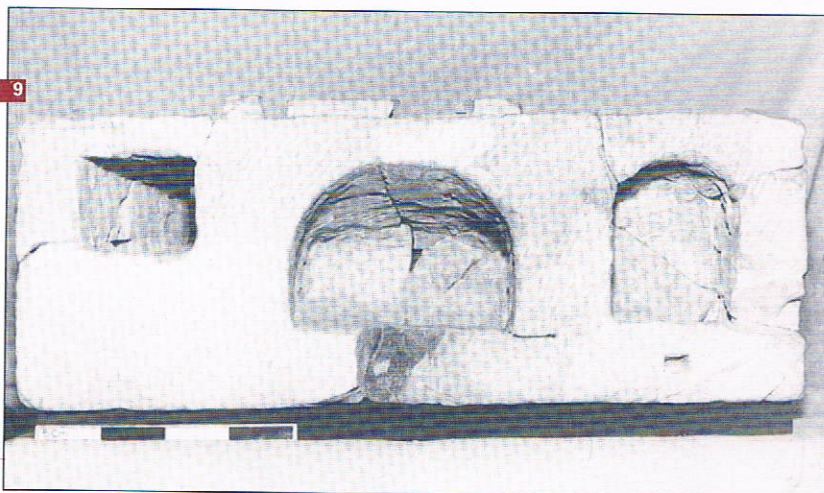
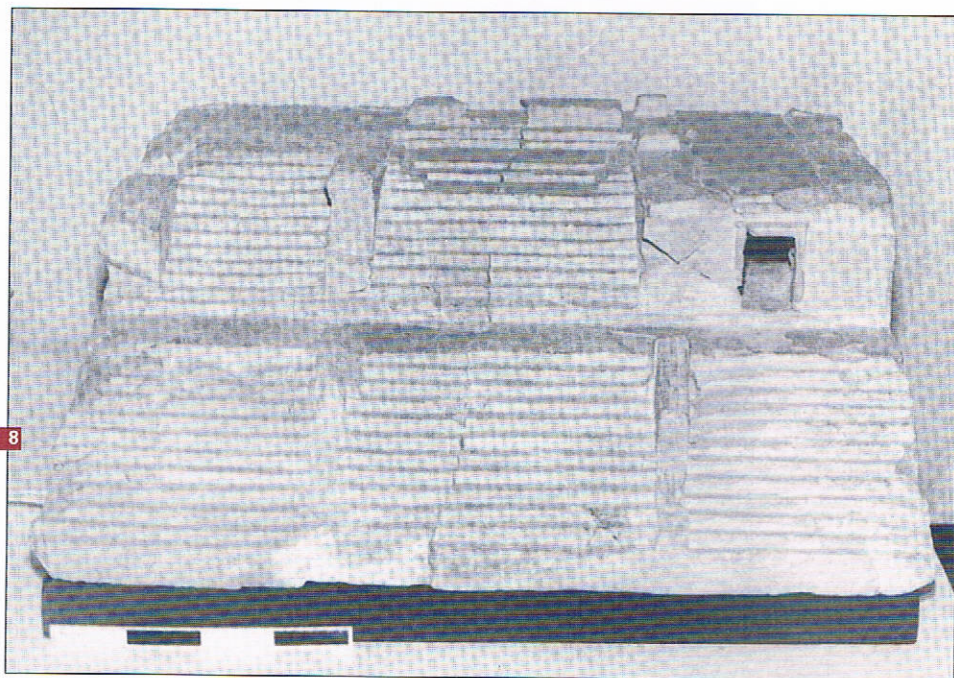


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8.& 9 Adyton's temple
of Niha.
10. Baalbeck's theatre.



In deep appreciation we would like to acknowledge the following contributors to the Lebanese British Friends of the National Museum

Mr. & Mrs. Albert Abela
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