



*Dr. John Curtis, keeper of Western Asiatic Antiquities (left) & Mr. Michel Eddé, Minister of Culture and Higher Education*



*Mr. Phillipe Marquis (left) & Dr. Camille Asmar*



Part of the many activities organized by the Lebanese British Friends of the National Museum was a recent two-day symposium in London which was made possible thanks to the support of the Center of Lebanese Studies at Oxford (Nadim Shehadi) and UNESCO (George Zwein). Under the aegis of His Excellency Mr. Michel Eddé, Lebanese Minister of Culture and Higher Education and Mr. Camille Asmar, Director General of Antiquities, various members of the archaeological world as well as members of the Lebanese and British community in London were invited to a lecture at the British Museum by Mr. Philippe Marquis, an Urban Archaeologist on detachment to Beirut from the Ville de Paris.

The lecture, "Downtown Beirut and its Archaeological Excavations" was held on the 3rd of March 1995 in the prestigious Duveen Gallery where the Elgin Marbles are housed and was preceded with a brief address each by Mr. Eddé and Mr. Asmar. A reception was held afterwards in the no less important Egyptian Sculpture gallery where guests were free to roam among the towering giants of antiquity. Both galleries were graciously put at our disposal by the British Museum. The latter's keen interest and generous participation in this event was further endorsed by the attendance of Miss Jean Rankin (Deputy Director), Dr. Andrew Burnett (Keeper of Coins and Medals), Dr. John Curtis (Keeper of Western Asiatic Antiquities), Mr. Robert Knox (Keeper of Oriental Antiquities), Mr. Geoffrey Howse (Head of Press and Public Relations) and Dr. Venetia Porter (Coins and Medals).

The seminar on the 4th of March was held at the Institute of Archaeology through the kind auspices of Dr. Harriett Crowfoot and Mrs. Kathy Tubb. This was chaired by Professor Peter Parr and Mendelson, John Curtis, George Zwein, James Black, Amelia Youssef, Andy Garrard, Anïèce Rousseau and Claude Doumet-Serhal. The seminar afforded those present the opportunity to discuss the present day downtown-Beirut excavations. Where and how they are being conducted. The importance of the ruins that outline the historical continuity of a city in the Near East from as far back as the ancient Bronze and Iron Age right up to the Mameluke period and thus the search for the original coastline of the city through the various stages of its ancient lineage. The discoveries also encompassed the improvements that have been made at the Beirut National Museum. All that remains to be done and where help is needed in order to progress more efficiently in the restoration of the Museum and its collections.

The purpose of such events was clearly to herald the cultural rehabilitation of a country whose heritage was near decimated by war. In the words of John Curtis (Keeper of Western Asiatic Antiquities, British Museum) in his introductory speech: "What started out as a lecture became a landmark in Lebanese British rela-

tions." A sentiment that was fully reciprocated by his audience and one which underlined the need to nurture and maintain such initiatives in order to encourage the exchange of ideas and to further the cause of learning, the very "raison d'être" of a museum.

Nevertheless, the restoration of the Museum and its contents along with these events would not have been possible without the approval and support of the relevant authorities as embodied by HE Mr. Michel Eddé and Mr. Camille Asmar. Along with the aforementioned we would also like to set aside a special thanks to all those who helped make the event such a success namely; Kiki Salhab, Amal Rassamny, Philippe Jabre, Alain Gargour, Mr. and Mrs. Eugène Saad and Mr. and Mrs. Farid Naayem.