

Project

Basement

In November of 1943 the Berlin Tell Halaf-Museum was bombed during an air raid and burst into flames. The blaze destroyed all limestone orthostats and plaster casts. The basalt objects could withstand the scorching heat but not the cold water used to extinguish the fire. The temperature shock caused severe fracturing. At this time von Oppenheim was already staying in Dresden having flown from Berlin three months before. For the rescue effort he managed to win over the director of the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art, Walter Andrae. Despite of the difficult circumstances Andrae's salvage operation that was carried out until August 1944 recovered nine truckloads of basalt fragments. These fragments were stored in the basement of the Pergamon Museum where they stayed being mainly ignored until the early 1990s. After the reunification of Germany a first systematic survey of the basalt debris in 1993 raised the hopes that restoration would be possible at least for a few of the sculptures. By 1995 the demand for space had increased on Museum Island, so the fragments were moved to another storage facility.

Masterplan Museum Island

While the survey was conducted the first concepts for a future presentation of the expected art works were developed. The overall renovation of Museum Island, an undertaking of primary importance, offered the opportunity to incorporate the Tell Halaf objects in the newly created *Masterplan Museumsinsel*, thus making them an integral part of the future exhibition. Cologne-based architect O.M. Ungers has designed a glass structure connecting the north and south wings of the Pergamon Museum and providing the place for the entrance façade of Tell Halaf's Western Palace. The façade assembled from restored originals and plaster casts will serve as the new entry to the Near Eastern Museum.

Sorting Hall

Work of the Tell Halaf-Project started officially with another relocation of the basalt fragments in October of 2001. While the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft has agreed to finance the scientific research until January of 2007, the restoration work is funded by the Sal. Oppenheim-Foundation of the Sal. Oppenheim jr. & Cie. Bank (Cologne). Furthermore the von Oppenheim family shows profound interest in the life work of its ancestor by providing additional support through the Alfred von Oppenheim-Foundation. The Foreign Office supplied funds for the restoration of the bull figure from the Western Palace now in the National Museum of Aleppo. In a German-Syrian cooperation the sculpture was transported to Berlin for a thorough restoration and stayed in Germany for a year.

Palette with Fragments

In the course of the first year of project work transport boxes were emptied and approximately 25.000 fragments were spread out on more than 200 wooden palettes. Concurrently with the sorting process all pieces that could be identified because of their relief decoration were separated. In the second year the search criteria became more and more meticulous. Every identified fragment is marked on a picture of the respective object and receives a number thus

creating a 'map' of the recovered pieces that makes further identifications much easier and serves as the work base for the stone restorers. In this manner more than 30 objects have been identified so far, among those the effigy of a seated couple from the 'cult room', the great seated tomb sculpture, four of the six monumental figures from the entrance of the Western Palace as well as several big and small relief slabs.

Further reading:

U. Dubiel – L. Martin, Stier aus Aleppo in Berlin. Bildwerke vom Tell Halaf (Syrien) werden restauriert, *Antike Welt* 3/2004, S. 40-43.

G. Elsen – M. Novak, Der Tall Halāf und das Tall Halāf-Museum, in: *Das Altertum* 40 (1994) 115-126.

N. Cholidis – L. Martin, *Kopf hoch! Mut hoch! und Humor hoch!* Der Tell Halaf und sein Ausgräber Max Freiherr von Oppenheim, Mainz 2002