

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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February 9, 1994

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The Cambridge City Council
Cambridge City Hall
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138

To The Honorable Members of the Cambridge City Council:

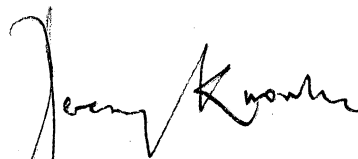
I am writing about Councilor Toomey's order concerning the Semitic Museum at Harvard. I appreciate the opportunity to give the Council an account of recent events concerning the Museum. I enclose an article from the Harvard Gazette that I hope will be helpful. You will observe that actions have been taken to bring the Museum's finances into balance, for the Faculty of Arts and Sciences has a serious budgetary shortfall, and it would be irresponsible of me to allow any unit of the Faculty to continue in deficit. The deficit of the Semitic Museum began accumulating as early as 1985, and has now grown to over \$1 million, and it became imperative to bring the Museum's expenses into line with its income.

The Semitic Museum will not close. We are committed to the Museum and to the areas of scholarship that it represents, and I regret that some newspaper accounts may improperly have left an inaccurate impression. We will see the Museum through this transition to a future in which its scholarly, teaching, and public functions, as well as its fiscal responsibilities, are properly met. This effort is strongly supported by the faculty members of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, whose research and teaching the Museum must primarily support and reflect. The Faculty Advisory Committee took a year to study the situation, to craft a statement of mission, and to recommend actions that represent a renewed and firm commitment to the Museum.

Let me assure you that the Museum will continue to mount public exhibits. The exhibits may change less often and travel less widely than before, as its programming must, of course, be commensurate with the funds available; but the Semitic Museum will remain open and accessible to the public. Future public exhibits will reflect the faculty's research and teaching, as the Faculty Advisory Committee has recommended.

I appreciate your interest, and share your concern and support for the Museum.

Yours sincerely,



Jeremy R. Knowles

Enclosures

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Gazette

November 26, 1993

Vol. LXXXIX

Museum Staff To Be Restructured

Citing an ongoing budget deficit in excess of \$1 million, FAS Dean Jeremy Knowles has decided to accept a recommendation of the Report by the Advisory Committee on the Semitic Museum that keeps the museum open but calls for the elimination of 10 current staff positions and refocuses the Museum's priorities.

"I have reached this conclusion reluctantly, as the new plan involves eliminating positions held by long-term and valued employees," said Knowles in a Nov. 18 letter to Museum employees announcing the decision. "But the Museum's financial condition and the focusing of its efforts on the academic purposes of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations (NELC) leave me little choice."

Affected staff members will remain Harvard employees through February

Semitic Museum Staff To Be Reduced and Restructured

(Continued from page 1)

Each will receive a severance package based on years of service, in addition to individualized assistance with future placement.

The Museum will remain open to the public. A substantially reduced and restructured staff will oversee day-to-day operations, curatorial duties, and the coordination of public programs.

The committee's report said the Museum's primary mission would be to meet the educational needs of Harvard students and faculty through the use of the collections as a teaching and research tool. Some programs, including a guest lecture series, are expected to continue.

Knowles circulated copies of the report to NELC faculty and Museum staff after receiving it from the committee. Knowles

said he "received comments, some of them critical, but many in support of the priorities" before agreeing to the staff reductions.

Future public exhibits will come primarily from the Museum's permanent collections. Assistance in the preparation, interpretation, and presentation of the collection will come from NELC faculty and advanced graduate students within the NELC. Collaborative exhibits involving the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the Center for Jewish Studies, and the Aga Khan Program are also anticipated.

"As difficult as the situation is," Knowles said in his letter, "I am hopeful that we will responsibly begin a new era for the teaching and research done through and with the Museum."

The century-old Museum is dedicated

to the understanding of civilizations of the Near East. It houses over 40,000 artifacts, primarily from excavations in Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Syria, Tunisia, and Cyprus. The collections from the Hurrian city of Nuzi, including 5,000 cuneiform tablets and the world's oldest glass objects, are considered priceless. Ceramic items, dating from Neolithic through Ottoman times and excavated from sites throughout the Fertile Crescent, make up one of the best teaching collections in the hemisphere.

The Museum is also home of the Bonfils Collection, a large and important archive of 19th-century photographs, as well as more recent and contemporary photographs relating to the Middle East. Ethnographic items, including costumes, jewelry, tools and pottery, are also part of the Museum's collection.

The committee, which included directors of the Semitic, Peabody, and Harvard Art museums, as well as NELC faculty and senior administrators, worked for a year in producing its report. The committee was charged with studying the future of the Museum, examining its financial state and mission within the University, and determining its relationship to the NELC department.

The committee found that focusing on core activities—teaching and research—would best meet the educational needs of the academic community and bring programs into line with financial resources. Knowles took under advisement other sections of the report which dealt with possible reassignment of some of the Museum's collections to other Harvard locations, and repairs and improvements to the physical plant.

Consent Communication #9 *S 72*
A communication was received from:
Harvard University regarding
Councillor Toomey's order concerning
the Semitic Museum.

In City Council February 28, 1994

Placed on file.