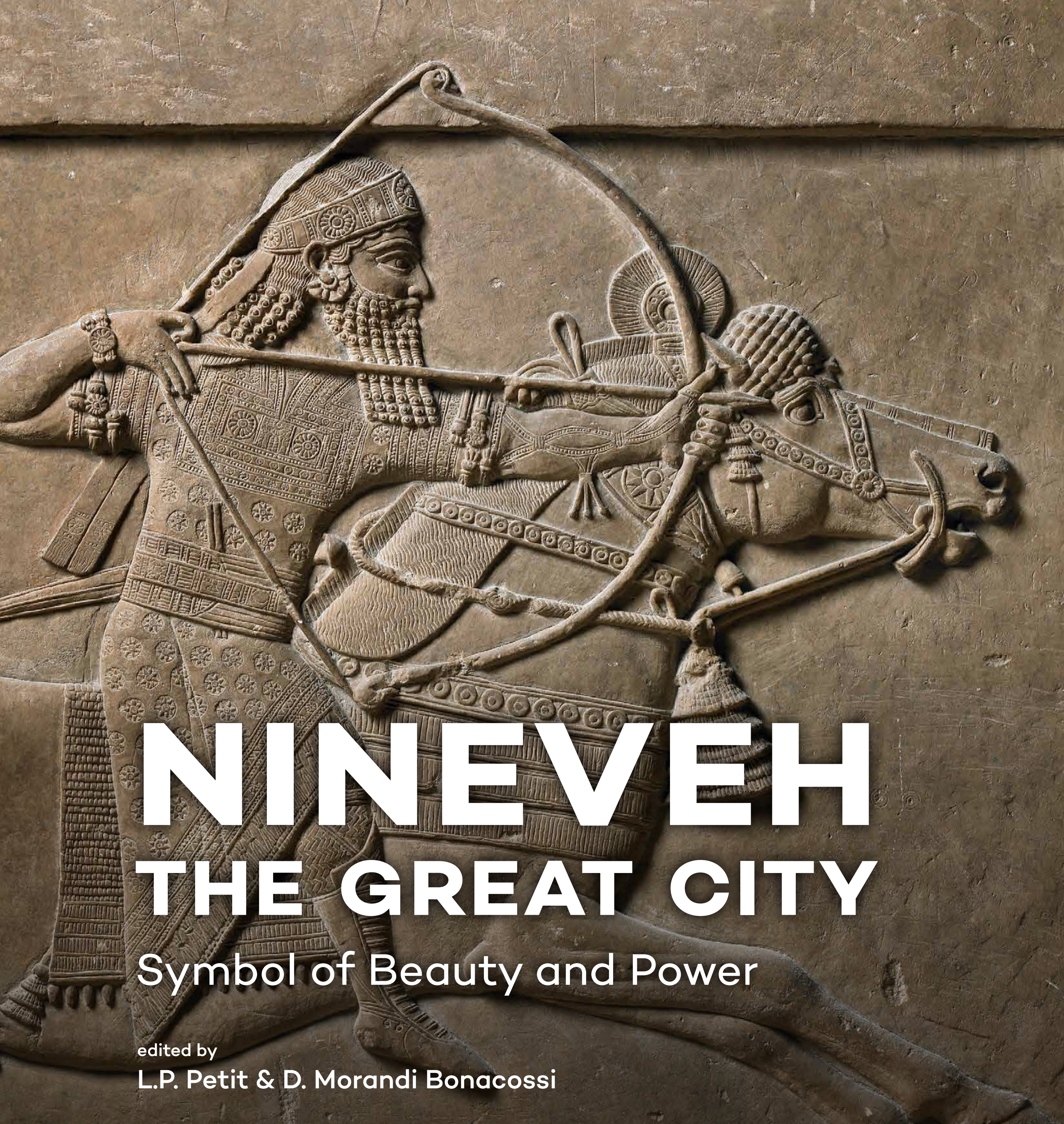

# NINEVEH
# THE GREAT CITY
## Symbol of Beauty and Power

edited by
L.P. Petit & D. Morandi Bonacossi

PALMA 13
PAPERS ON ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE
LEIDEN MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES

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Sidestone Press

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LEIDEN MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES

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# Nineveh, the Great City. Symbol of Beauty and Power

*Lucas P. Petit and Daniele Morandi Bonacossi*

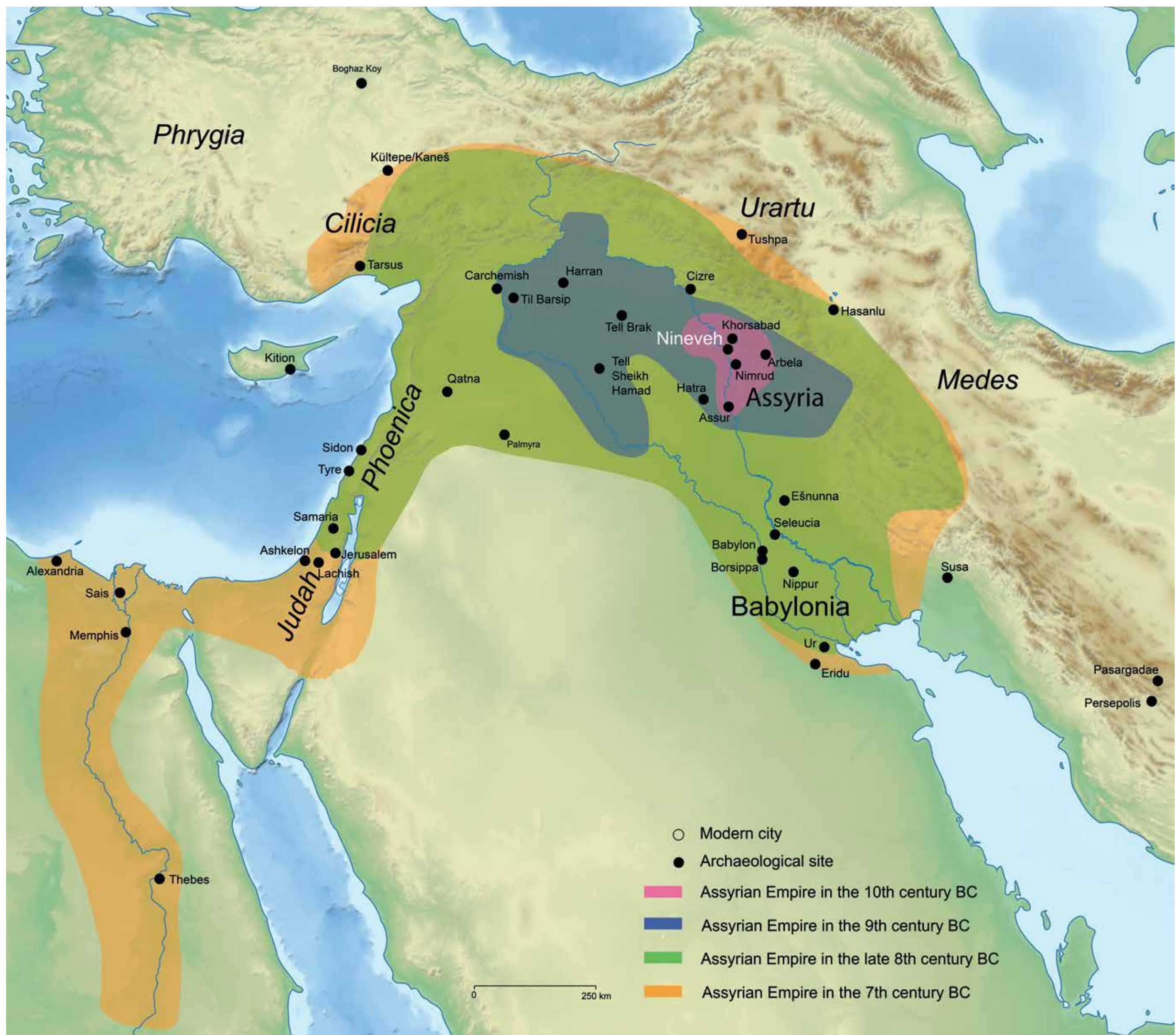
The remains of Nineveh, surrounded and partly encroached upon by the modern Iraqi city of Mosul, have lain for more than 9,000 years on the eastern bank of the River Tigris. Although the site encompasses a wide area of more than 700 ha, it contains but a few ruins that attest to its former beauty and power. Mentioned in classical and religious texts, the city remained known after its total destruction in 612 BC, and it was one of the first archaeological sites in the Middle East to attract travellers and scholars. Its antiquities, whether collected out of scientific interest or for commercial reasons, were transported to museums all over the world, where they continue to inspire visitors to this day. Passing by wall panels and other antiquities, however, few realize that Nineveh is not simply a city from the past, but that it is still producing history today, as sadly shown by the recent destructive events. This volume, written by scholars from all over the world, discusses the occupation history of Nineveh, the diversity of its material culture, how the city has inspired artists and archaeologists, and the way in which the site is maintained and perceived today.

## From a village to the world's largest city

Nineveh is characterized by two artificial mounds, or 'tells': Kuyunjik and the smaller mound of Nebi Yunus, both rising abruptly out of flat plains. Most of the excavations were carried out on these two hills, which contained the remains of temples and palaces. The area that was formerly occupied was many times larger, however, if we assume that the walls formed the outer limits of the Assyrian capital in the seventh century BC. A small river, the Khosr, which brings water from the mountainous area to the north, divides the site in two before joining the Tigris immediately west of Nineveh. The large southern part includes Nebi Yunus and is today partly covered by concrete houses, whereas the northern part remains relatively undisturbed.

The ancient city of Nineveh is situated in an area that is able to support a large population. The plains around the city are extremely fertile, and there is certainly enough precipitation to allow for rain-fed agriculture. With the kilometres-long irrigation channels constructed by the Assyrian kings, the inhabitants were able to survive long periods of drought. The city also occupied a strategic position along two rivers and formed one of the most important trade routes between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. Considering all of these factors, it is hardly surprising that Nineveh became one of the most important cities in the world during the first millennium BC.

More than 2,000 years earlier, the site had already been home to a regional sanctuary dedicated to the goddess Ištar. Early cuneiform texts mention the importance of this town to the area, and excavations have revealed evidence, albeit sparse and patchy, of prehistoric and early historic occupation. In the second millennium and at the beginning of the first millennium BC, the inhabitants of present-day Northern Iraq – the Assyrians – gained in economic and political importance, and Nineveh, together with other Assyrian




*The extent of the Assyrian Empire with the main sites mentioned in this volume. Topographic map © Sémhur/ Wikimedia Commons.*

cities, grew to be a symbol of beauty and power. Its impressive temples and large palaces were visible from far and wide, and the whole city, including its many domestic buildings, open places and agricultural land, was surrounded by a massive stone and mud brick wall. Busy roads led from fourteen gates to other cultural and economic centres in the Assyrian Empire, which stretched from present-day Egypt to the deepest interior of Iran.

It was Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC), son of the great Assyrian king Sargon II, who moved the empire's capital to Nineveh shortly after his father died on the battlefield in 705 BC. The young king turned his back on Sargon's capital Dur-Šarrukin, afraid that this city would bring him misfortune. The body of his father was never returned and buried – a fate the Assyrians would not wish on their worst enemies. Sennacherib immediately ordered the construction of public and private buildings, the interiors of which not only survived successive kings, but also the sack of Nineveh and beyond. The kilometre-long scenes on wall panels provide a wealth of information for historians and archaeologists. Scenes showing construction techniques, the landscape, clothing, warfare, campaigns, ceremonies, means of transport and even daily life were meticulously cut into the limestone slabs.

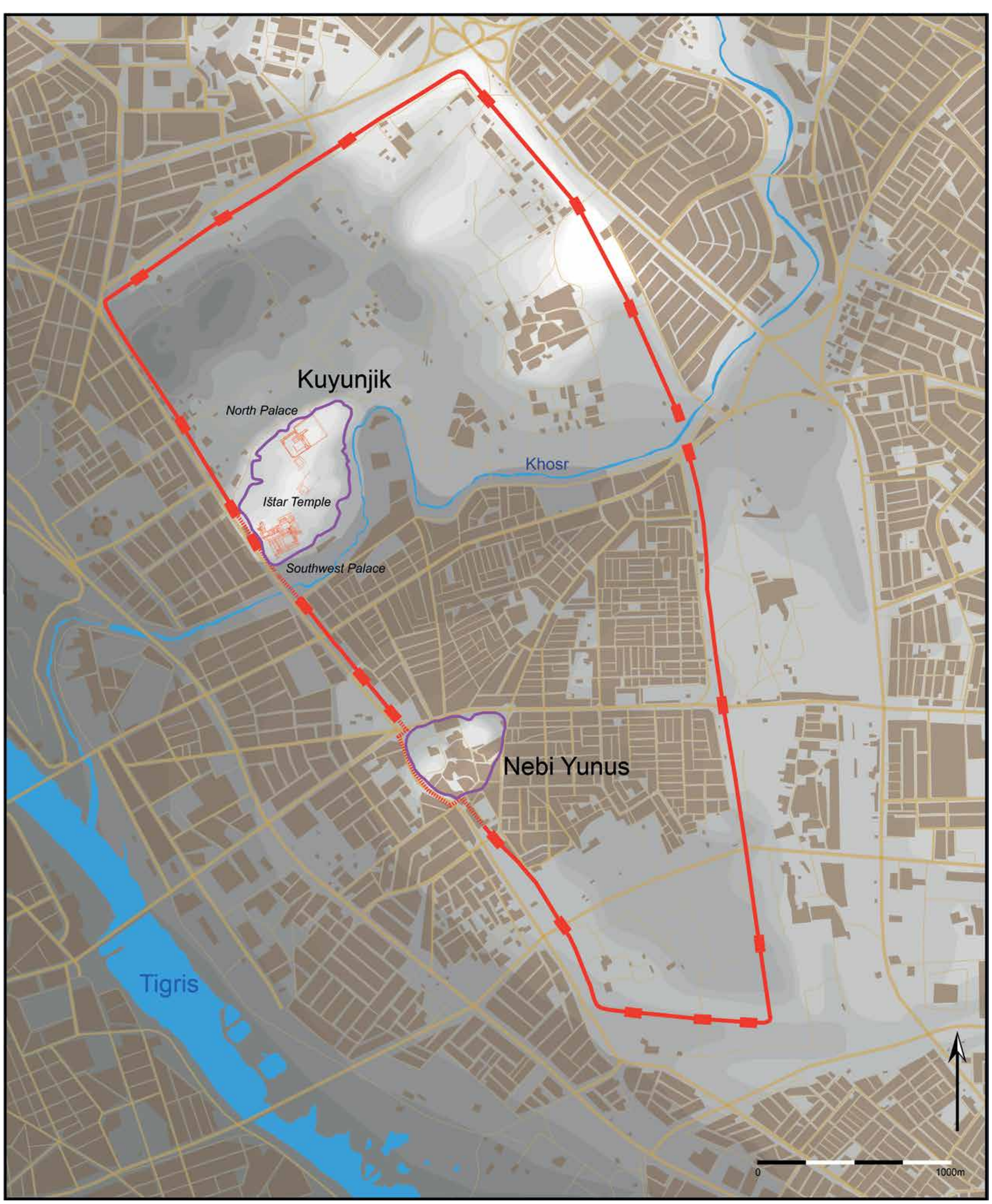
*The site of Nineveh, May 2008. Photograph by Diane Siebrandt.*

But there is more that makes Nineveh a heavenly site for archaeologists and historians. Tens of thousands of clay tablets addressing a wide range of topics were discovered in the palace rooms. Many of them had belonged to the famous library of Ashurbanipal (reigned 668 – c. 627 BC), founded by a grandson of Sennacherib and one of the few Assyrian kings who was literate and highly learned. He gathered wisdom in Nineveh on a completely new scale, from every part of his empire and in every field of knowledge. Unfortunately for him, the Assyrian Empire could not be saved by knowledge alone. The many campaigns and oppressive actions of the Assyrian army caused a coalition of its former subject peoples to annihilate Nineveh in 612 BC, thus marking the end of almost 1,500 years of Assyrian domination. In the years that followed, only a few survivors remembered its great history, and soon after that, even this history became blurred. The ancient city of Nineveh became part of a lost past.

## Famous, but lost

Classical writers were in agreement that Nineveh had been impressive, and that it was maybe even the largest city ever built. Diodorus of Sicily and Xenophon used exaggerated measurements to describe the ancient city, though, which already lay in ashes at that time. News of the destruction of Nineveh reached the Mediterranean and was described in numerous sources. At the time of the imaginary king Sardanapallos, Nineveh had been besieged by an alliance of forces, among them the Babylonians and the Medes. Described as an oriental king who had more time for earthly pleasures than the serious business of governing, Sardanapallos was naturally destined to lose this battle. In the classical literature, Nineveh became a city of the past.

The image of Nineveh as an impressive oriental city whose final destruction was caused by bad governance and the indulgence of its avaricious king and inhabitants

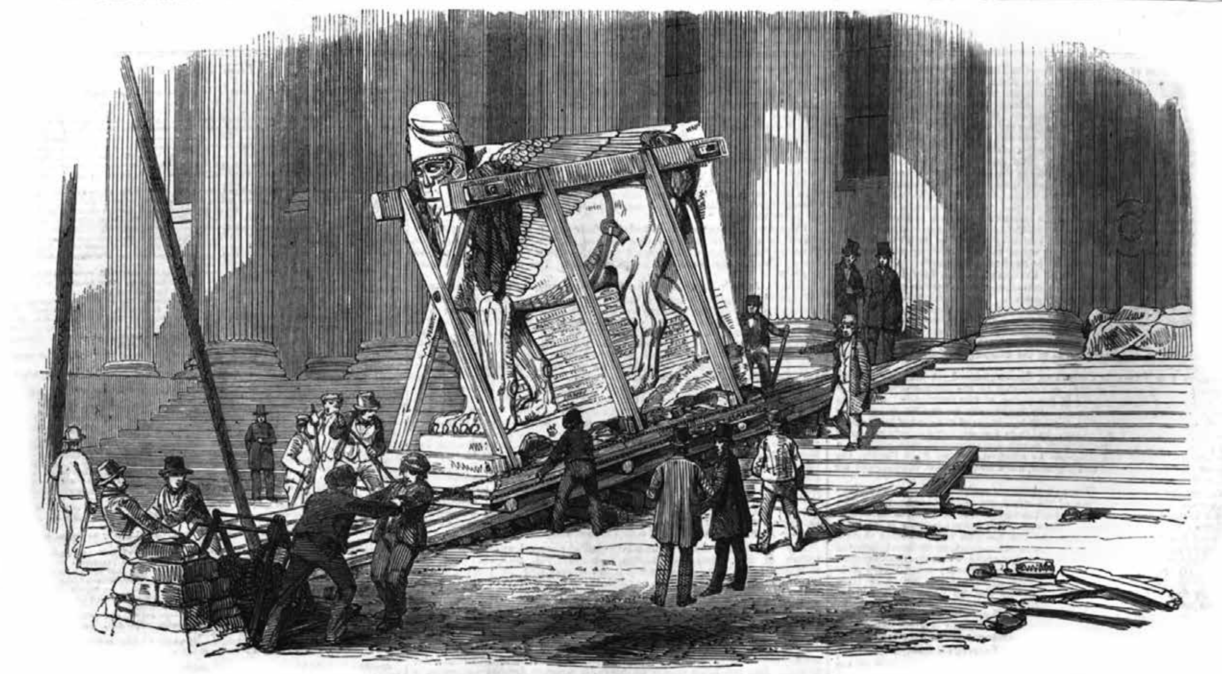



*The archaeological site of Nineveh surrounded and partly encroached by the modern city of Mosul (Neo-Assyrian walls in red).*

*Computer reconstruction of the Assyrian upper town (Kuyunjik) of Nineveh. Courtesy of Learning Sites, inc.*

would be remembered and repeated long after. Raging Neo-Assyrian kings from the city of Nineveh appear frequently in biblical and early Christian traditions, although they were not all-powerful, according to the narratives. In an echo of classical accounts, the city of Nineveh was described as a symbol of arrogance, idolatry and atrocity, but God showed the Ninevites his mercy because of their unexpected repentance. Nevertheless, Nineveh fell in the end, as the prophet Jonah had so ardently hoped.

Medieval writers and early Western artists echoed these biblical and classical ideas. Nineveh had been, in their view, a large oriental city that deserved its complete destruction, owing to the dishonest behaviour of its inhabitants. But information about the city's layout or outlook remained scarce and based on rumour. European representations of Nineveh were highly westernized, hardly distinguishable from any regular European city of the time. No one knew what this huge, important city might have looked like before its total annihilation. Shortly before the first explorations at Nineveh, several artists, poets and writers used the enigmatic story of Nineveh in their works. John Martin depicted the city's last, distrustful king Sardanapallos and the apocalyptic burning of Nineveh marvellously in his work *The Fall of Nineveh* (1828), and Lord Byron's tragedy *Sardanapalus* (1821) is just as well known.



184 THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS. [FEB. 28, 1852.

RECEPTION OF NINEVEH SCULPTURES AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

*The arrival of an Assyrian lamassu at the British Museum in London. This sculpture with a weight of more than ten tons was discovered at the site of Nimrud, erroneously identified in 1852 as ancient Nineveh. Reproduced from The Illustrated London News, 28 february 1852.*

## Investigating Nineveh: a great adventure

After the ruins of Nineveh were discovered by Western travellers, most famously Carsten Niebuhr (1733-1815), it would be another 54 years before the first scientific prospection was carried out. Claudius James Rich (1786-1821), a British consul, explored the ruins in 1820 and drew the first reliable map of the site. He paved the way for Layard, Rassam, and all the other scholars who, perhaps with the exception of Botta, were equally impressed by the beauty of this once-flourishing city on the banks of the Tigris River. They were excavating not only a city, but also a symbol of wealth and power, struck down by God's wrath at its citizen's behaviour. In Nineveh, early Western excavators found the ideal case to which all known sources at that time, as well as Christian traditions, could be applied.

Work at Nineveh continued in the twentieth century, when increasing urbanization around the city of Mosul slowly enclosed and partly incorporated the ancient ruins. The impressive restoration work on the city wall and some of the gates by Iraqi archaeologists protected a large part of the site from further urban development. The people of Mosul were involved in maintenance and protection, and several initiatives transformed the site back into a symbol of its glorious past.

## Heritage in times of crisis

In 2014 and subsequent years, we realized that the story of an archaeological site is a never-ending one. The deliberate destruction of the last standing ruins of Nineveh, once a symbol of civilization and cultural progress, was another tragedy in its 9,000 years of history. Coming in the wake of similar destruction at Hatra, Nimrud and Palmyra, it provoked worldwide calls to safeguard our past. Although it is a great good that heritage seems to matter to so many people in so many countries, at the same time, this degree of focus exposes heritage to 'cultural cleansing'. The more we study and try to safeguard the world's heritage, the higher the chance that this heritage will eventually be targeted by fundamentalists and looters. It is a quandary from which there seems no way out:

*Nebi Yunus and the modern city of Mosul, May 2008. Photograph by Diane Siebrandt.*

*The destruction of the Maški Gate in 2016.*

should we highlight the great importance and value of the remains of archaeological sites, exposing them to future treasure-hunters, or should we preserve a state of historical ignorance in order to save such sites for an unknown future? We – a term that includes urban planners and cultural entrepreneurs – have to learn to live in a globalized world where historical remains are valued and appreciated differently. For some, they are symbols of beauty and power, symbols of a civilized world; for others, they are a means of attracting attention to a cause or simply raising money. It seems that we still have a long way to go.

One source of hope is that the study of the past is a way to safeguard our future. Since 200 years, Nineveh has been studied intensively by travellers, archaeologists, historians, Assyriologists and many other scholars from all over the world. The deliberate and systematic destruction of our common heritage remains tragic and is to be condemned, but information about the tangible and intangible heritage of ancient Nineveh has been

and still is being saved. This publication started as an exhibition catalogue,[1] but it grew into a more systematic study of the site itself and its surroundings, as seen from different perspectives. It highlights the tremendous and impressive heritage of Nineveh and is dedicated to all of the inhabitants who lived and are still living in and around the ancient site.


## Acknowledgments

The editors are greatly indebted to all the authors of this volume for their willingness to share their detailed knowledge of Nineveh and the Assyrian culture. It was a joy for us to follow the process that started with short papers and ended with this volume. In each case where we have used images, we have received permission to do so or have done our best to contact the person or organization that we thought is the copyright holder to gain permission. The editors greatly appreciate the many photographs of Nineveh in more recent years provided through the courtesy of Dr. Suzanne Bott, University of Arizona, USA. We also would like to express our gratitude to Karsten Wentink and his colleagues from Sidestone Press for their support and for the design and production of this publication. We thank Vivien Collingwood and Jeroen Rensen for their careful editing work.


1 The blockbuster exhibition 'Nineveh. Hoofdstad van een wereldrijk' was held in Leiden by the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities between 19 October 2017 and 25 March 2018. More than 250 objects were exhibited on loan from 25 institutions, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the British Museum, Musée du Louvre and the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin. For more information, see the Dutch exhibition catalogue Petit & Morandi Bonacossi 2017.

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M. de Vos invent.
Ad. Collaert sculpsit

# PART I

## Nineveh, Famous but Lost

# Part I: Nineveh, Famous but Lost

**1. Nineveh, Famous but Lost**
*Daniele Morandi Bonacossi*

**2. Nineveh in the Cuneiform Sources**
*John MacGinnis*

**3. Nineveh in Biblical, Ancient Jewish and the Earliest Christian Traditions**
*Jürgen K. Zangenberg*

**4. Nineveh in Classical Literature**
*Menko Vlaardingerbroek*

**5. Nineveh in Western Art**
*Jan de Hond*

**6. Early Travellers and Nineveh**
*Paolo Matthiae*

# 1. Nineveh, Famous but Lost

*Daniele Morandi Bonacossi*

Until 1842, when the French-Piedmontese vice-consul in Mosul Paul-Émile Botta (1802-1870) sunk his spade into the ruins of Nineveh for the first time, it was only through the powerful images constructed by Israel's prophets that the name of the last Assyrian capital city echoed through the medieval and modern collective imagination. Isaiah evoked Assyria as 'the rod of my [Yahweh's] anger and the staff in whose hand is my indignation' with which to lash the people of Israel, who lacked faith in their god. Although a tool of divine design, with the destruction of Nineveh, Assyria was punished for its arrogant certainty in its own invincibility, its idolatry, the cruelty of its rulers and its exorbitant wealth. Zephaniah thus prophesied the city's irrevocable condemnation: 'He [the Lord] will stretch out his hand against the north and destroy Assyria, leaving Nineveh utterly desolate and dry as the desert'.

The Greek authors of the Hellenistic and Roman periods wrote of Nineveh as a city that had already disappeared and whose name was hardly remembered, but that had paid a high price for the depravity and effeminacy of its sovereigns, who had lived surrounded by immense riches, concubines and eunuchs, in an inevitable moral condemnation that was fuelled by Greek prejudices against Asia and its culture. A clear echo of this denunciation of Nineveh and its sovereigns, fed by Jewish tradition and the Greek classics, can be seen in the two most grandiose and dramatic representations of Nineveh in Western art: *The Death of Sardanapalus,* painted in 1827 by Eugène Delacroix (fig. 4.4), and *The Fall of Nineveh* by John Martin (1828; fig. 49.1). Both paintings, which refer to the story told by the Greek historian of the first century BC, Diodorus of Sicily, depict the figure of the depraved Assyrian king Sardanapalus at the centre of a cataclysmic scene. The king, besieged by enemies and violent floods, orders the construction of an immense funeral pyre on which he will be burnt to death together with his concubines, eunuchs, horses, and all his treasure, thus fulfilling the scriptural prophecy of the destruction of the city and its cruel ruler recounted in the Book of Nahum.

These ideologically biased literary and artistic representations of Nineveh and Assyrian culture were challenged by the discovery of the ruins of Nineveh, which occurred shortly after Delacroix and Martin had produced their Romantic paintings. The city, which Diodorus had described implausibly as being 27 km by 16 km, had lain forgotten under the abandoned ruins of its temples and palaces in front of Mosul. Shortly after 1165, the Spanish rabbi Benjamin of Tudela (1130-1173; fig. 6.2) had correctly identified its location. Doubts about the exact location of Nineveh continued until the modern age, however; Botta, for example, initially believed that the ancient Assyrian metropolis was hidden under the ruins of Khorsabad (which he investigated in 1843-1844) and not under the ancient mound of Kuyunjik. In 1847, the young British diplomat Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894) discovered the 'Palace without rival', the great royal residence founded in 703 BC by Sennacherib on the main citadel of Nineveh. The subsequent excavations (1849-1851) brought to light the 72 surviving rooms of this magnificent palace and part of the famous Ashurbanipal library, where approximately 31,000 fragments of inscribed texts, collected from Assyria and Babylonia by King Ashurbanipal himself, were discovered. Among the texts found by Layard and later by

*Figure 1.1 The reconstructed walls of Nineveh, May 2008. Photograph by Diane Siebrandt.*

his assistant Hormuzd Rassam (1826-1910), a rich and ambitious Assyrian Christian from Mosul, were the tablets of the Epic of Gilgamesh, which tell the story of the mythological hero-king of Uruk and his search for the secret of immortality after the death of his friend Enkidu, and a narrative of the Great Flood that matches the biblical story so closely that it seems likely that the latter derives from a Mesopotamian account.

The great intellectual adventure of the investigation of Nineveh and Assyrian civilization would soon begin.

# 2. Nineveh in the Cuneiform Sources

*John MacGinnis*

The origins of Nineveh are buried in the mists of time.[2] The archaeology of the mound extends deep into prehistory, but it is not until the latter part of the third millennium BC that textual evidence begins to shed its light. Surviving sources from the Akkadian period make no mention of Nineveh. As we know that the kings of Akkad campaigned far into the north, the omission is striking and perhaps implies that the city was able to resist the advances of Sargon (reigned c. 2334-2279 BC) and Naram-Sin (reigned c. 2255-2219 BC). There is, however, a tradition preserved in a later source that Maništušu (reigned c. 2270-2255 BC) rebuilt the temple of Ištar. Together, these lines of evidence can be taken to suggest that Nineveh was an independent state that already at this stage had a cult of far-reaching fame.

And so it is in the time of the Third Dynasty of Ur that Nineveh really enters history. Only a handful of Ur III texts mention the city, but they are sufficient to establish that Nineveh was an independent state and that diplomatic relations with Ur had been established by late in the reign of Šulgi (reigned c. 2094-2047 BC). In the third year of Šu-Sin, Tiš-atal, 'the man of Nineveh' – his title is elsewhere more specifically given as *ensi* – undertook a state visit to Sumer with an entourage of over 100 men and was received in at least Ešnunna and Nippur (fig. 2.1). This was followed by the marriage of Ti'amat-bašti, generally thought to be a daughter or sister of Tiš-atal, to Šu-Sin. An offering made to the goddess Šauška of Nineveh in Ur in Šulgi year 46 is clearly also a reflection of this diplomatic milieu. The names of both the king and the goddess remind us that in the third millennium the region lay firmly within the Hurrian *Kulturgebiet*.

*Figure 2.1 Clay tablet 6NT-559 witnessing that Tiš-atal the ensi of Nineveh was in Nippur to swear an oath, accompanied on this occasion by a retinue of 80 men. Nippur, Iraq; c. 21st century BC; clay; L 4 cm, W 3.6 cm, D 1.8 cm; Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago (A31210). © Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.*

Following these events, for a while Nineveh slips out of history. But it evidently remained an independent state through the remainder of the Ur III period, a status which it may at least initially have also retained following the empire's collapse. Moving into the early second millennium BC, there is just one reference to Nineveh in the Old Assyrian commercial archives – a record of travelling expenses – a reflection of the fact that the caravan routes from Assur to the trade entrepôt of Kaneš in Anatolia passed further to the west. At some stage, however, Nineveh was incorporated within Nurrugum, a kingdom extending along this part of the Tigris that fell prey to Šamši-Adad I (reigned c. 1809-1776 BC) in the eastern campaigns at the end of his reign. A sizeable number of letters from the Mari correspondence deal with these hostilities and a dozen or so mention Nineveh – variously rendered Ninuwa, Ninet and Ninê – explicitly. The correspondence reports on manoeuvres, the taking of omens and the interrogation of prisoners, among other things. Nineveh had a citadel and had to be taken by siege. Remarkably, we even have the letter sent by Šamši-Adad's son Išme-Dagan (reigned c. 1776-1736 BC) at the moment of triumph – 'I

2 I would like to express my deep thanks to J. A. Brinkman, S. Dalley, J. Dercksen, J. Llop, P. Michalowski and R. van der Spek for their help and comments, and to Walter Faber for supplying photographs from the tablet collection of the Oriental Institute.

*Figure 2.2 (left) The 'White Obelisk', which records the campaigns of the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal I or II. Nineveh, Iraq; 1049-1031 BC; limestone; H 285 cm, W 70.5 cm, D 42.5 cm; British Museum, London (1856,0909.58/BM 118807). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

*Figure 2.3 (top) Clay tablet of the Babylonian Chronicle describing the events leading up to and including the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC. Iraq; 550-400 BC; clay; L 13.6 cm, W 7.1 cm; British Museum, London (1896,0409.6/BM 21901). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

have taken Šimanahe, Ninet and the entire land. Rejoice!'.[3] Following the capture of Nineveh, Šamši-Adad was quick to curry favour by rebuilding the temple of Ištar; he was particularly pleased with the doors – 'I erected the doorframes of that temple, the equal of which for perfection no king had ever built, for the goddess Ištar of Nineveh' (Grayson 1987, 53.ii.11). As the work involved the construction of a ziggurat, the suggestion that Šamši-Adad was really taking over the work of the deposed dynasty of Nurrugum may well be right; he also renovated a temple to Eriškigal which had been built by Ikunum. These activities are certainly the context in which Šamši-Adad directs that a consignment of wood being brought from Qatna – cedars, cypresses and myrtles – should be divided equally between the cities of Nineveh, Ekallātum and Šubat-Enlil.

Nurrugum then became a province in the empire of Šamši-Adad, and a small number of Old Babylonian texts found at Nineveh may date to around this time. But control over the lands east of the Tigris did not last long and the region regained its autonomy. Whether Nineveh established its own independence at this time or reverted into a reconstituted Nurrugum is beyond our ken to say.[4] At some stage, however, Nineveh clearly did once more become an independent state, and a Hittite text records a tradition that a king of Nineveh called Pizikarra was instrumental in the destruction of Ebla some time around 1600 BC. Very little can be said in the context of the rise of Mittanni – Nineveh unquestionably came under Mittanni domination, but whether under direct rule, as a constituent of a client state or as a client state itself is simply not known; the only certain thing we do know is that the Mittanni ruler Saustatar (reigned c. 1441-1416 BC) had the gates of the temple of Ištar – perhaps the very ones installed by Šamši-Adad – taken to his capital city, Waššukani.

What follows next is a critical step in the story of Assyria. In the fourteenth century BC, Aššur-uballiṭ I threw off the yoke of Mittanni and set Assyria on the trajectory that would in the fullness of time transform it into an imperial superpower. It is highly probable that it was at this stage that Nineveh came under the rule of Assur, that is to say, it was incorporated within the Assyrian state. Nineveh again became the capital of a province with a governor, and royal inscriptions record rebuildings of the temple of Ištar and the construction of palaces by a number of kings. Of these, the palace of Tiglath-pileser I (reigned 1114-1076 BC) deserves special mention. His claim 'I portrayed therein the victory and might which Aššur and Ninurta, the gods who love my priesthood, had granted me' clearly refers to a programme of either painted or sculpted decoration (perhaps both), a forerunner, therefore, of the great relief sequences of the Neo-Assyrian palaces. Tiglath-pileser I also carried out work on the fortification walls. Nineveh is mentioned in somewhere between 50 and 60 administrative texts of the Middle Assyrian period. As a province it sent contributions of grain, honey, sesame and fruit as *ginā'u* offerings to the temple of Aššur in Assur, something that can be regarded not just as tax, but also as an ideological statement expressing communal participation in the Assyrian state. Other texts hint at land granted to officials in the vicinity of the city.

With the advent of the Neo-Assyrian period, the cuneiform sources come into their own. There is an explosion in the number and variety of texts at our disposal, with thousands of documents recovered from excavations at Kuyunjik and elsewhere. In addition to the famous library of Ashurbanipal (reigned 668 – c. 627 BC), there are both the formal inscriptions and the royal correspondence of the Assyrian kings, administrative texts, decrees, legal texts, reports on oracles and divinations, hymns and others. Through the first half of this period, until the end of the eighth century BC, the city slowly grew in stature, though still ranking behind the official capital as it was successively located at Assur, then Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), then Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin). But in the seventh century BC, it reached its zenith. Sennacherib made Nineveh the capital of the Assyrian Empire and with that, one of the most dazzling, if not indeed the very foremost, city in the world. It was home to a constellation of palaces, temples and mansions, a massive arsenal, and was the scene of countless celebrations of imperial pomp (fig. 2.2). The end, however, was not far off. A civil war that lasted from 652 to 648 BC between Ashurbanipal and his brother Šamaš-šum-ukin (reigned c. 667-648 BC), king in Babylon, was followed by further rebellion in Babylonia. The empire began to crumble and then entered free-fall collapse. The iconic event was the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC, achieved through an alliance of the armies of Babylonia and the Medes. Extraordinarily, a surviving tablet of the Babylonian Chronicle (fig. 2.3) records this very event. In the words of the chronicle, 'They camped against Nineveh. For three months they subjected the city to heavy siege. They inflicted a major defeat upon a great [people]' (Grayson 1975, 94). And so an imperial super-city met its end. The destruction may not have been total, as the Babylonian king Nabopolassar is reported to have resided there for a period later in the same year, but it marked the end of its status as a geopolitical megalopolis (Van De Mieroop, this volume). And with that, Nineveh passes from the cuneiform sources.

3 ARM I 124.

4 In the prologue to his law code, Hammurabi calls himself 'the king who proclaimed the rites of Ištar in the Emešmeš in Nineveh', which clearly indicates that he did something in the temple, but does not imply that he had taken direct control of the city; as in the case with Maništusu, it would be surprising if the taking of the city by Hammurabi were not mentioned elsewhere.

# 3. Nineveh in Biblical, Ancient Jewish and the Earliest Christian Traditions

*Jürgen K. Zangenberg*

According to biblical tradition, Nineveh's history begins in the distant, mythical past, like many other factors that determined the everyday lives and experiences of the inhabitants of Israel and Judah. According to Gen 10:8-9, it was the proverbial hero Nimrod, 'a valiant warrior on earth' and 'a mighty hunter', who founded Nineveh together with many other metropolises in Mesopotamia. As one can see on many reliefs, war and hunting were indeed the most conspicuous attributes of Assyrian rulers, and therefore fitting symbols for a city that has been associated with Assyrian domination like perhaps no other.

During the expansion of the Neo-Assyrian Empire to the west during the eighth century BC, the mighty Assyrian army moved closer and the Israelites' trepidation and fears became reality. After the Assyrians had crushed the Aramean kingdoms of Syria to punish them for insubordination, the northern kingdom of Israel became the next victim in the late eighth century BC, when the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V (reigned 727-722 BC) marched south, laid waste to all enemy lands, captured the Israelite capital Samaria (722 BC) and exiled the elite (2Kg 17).

With the Assyrian war machine moving ever closer, King Hezekiah of neighbouring Judah (reigned 728-699 BC) was terrified (fig. 3.1). Many fortresses, among them the famous Lachish (2Kg 18, 19:8-13), had already fallen to the Assyrians' military power, and Hezekiah soon found himself encircled by mighty Assyrian armies in his capital Jerusalem. But the prophet Isaiah Ben-Amoz was sent by God to encourage Hezekiah; the Bible preserved the following drastic invective against the Assyrian king:

> *Because of your raging against Me,*
> *And because your arrogance has come up to My ears,*
> *Therefore I will put My hook through your nostrils,*
> *And My bridle between your lips,*
> *And I will turn you back by the way which you came,* 2Kg 19:28 par. Is 37:29.

And Isaiah comforted Hezekiah with another prophecy:

> *(32) Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria:*
> *'He will not come to this city nor shoot an arrow there;*
> *and he will not come before it with a shield nor throw up a siege ramp against it.*
> *(33) By the way that he came, by the same he will return,*
> *and he shall not come to this city', murmured the Lord,* 2Kg 19:32-3 par. Is 37:33-4.

And indeed: soon after Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC) had begun his siege (702 BC), he was forced to abandon it and return home after 'the angel of the Lord'

*Figure 3.1 King Hezekiah on a 17th century painting in the choir of Sankta Maria church in Åhus, Sweden.*

had miraculously killed 185,000 soldiers in the Assyrians' camp (2Kg 19:19-37 par. Is 37:21-38).

The real reasons for Sennacherib's move being unknown to the biblical authors, the unexpected lifting of the siege could only be interpreted as divine intervention. Though it helped Judah to survive for another century, the tiny kingdom remained a vassal under the heavy yoke of the Assyrians. Sennacherib, however, 'stayed in Nineveh' (2Kg 19:36), his magnificent new capital. When he went to the temple of his god 'Nisroch' (unknown in Assyrian sources) one day, he was assassinated by two of his sons and Esarhaddon, his third son, succeeded him.

The harsh experience of Assyrian domination shaped the tone of most late seventh-century BC biblical passages. Full of hate and the desire to overcome their powerlessness and finally take revenge for all the injustice Israel had suffered from the Assyrians,

*Figure 3.2 The city of Nineveh from Liber chronicarum produced in 1493 by Hartman Schedel. Special Collection University of Leiden (1402 A5 21.233 E). © Leiden University Library.*

the prophet Nahum anticipates God's judgement over Nineveh in a dramatic vision of its devastation:

> *(1) Woe to the city of blood,*
> *full of lies,*
> *full of plunder,*
> *never without victims!*
> *(2) The crack of whips,*
> *the clatter of wheels,*
> *galloping horses*
> *and jolting chariots!*
> *(3) Charging cavalry, flashing swords*
> *and glittering spears!*
> *Many casualties, piles of dead,*
> *bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses –*
> *(4) all because of the wanton lust of a prostitute,*
> *alluring, the mistress of sorceries,*
> *who enslaved nations by her prostitution*
> *and peoples by her witchcraft.*
> *(5) 'I am against you,' declares the Lord of Hosts.*
> *'I will lift up your skirts*
> *high over your face.*
> *I will show the nations your nakedness*
> *and the kingdoms your shame.*
> *(6) I will pelt you with filth,*
> *I will treat you with contempt*
> *and make you a spectacle.*
> *(7) All who see you will flee from you and say,*
> *"Nineveh is in ruins–who will mourn for her?"*
> *Where can I find anyone to comfort you?',*
> Nah 3:1-7, see the entire passage 2:2-3:19.

And after the great enemy had finally fallen in a joint attack by the Babylonians and Medes in 612 BC, Zephaniah gloated over Nineveh's demise, because God had kept his promise:

> *(13) And He will stretch out His hand against the north*
> *and destroy Assyria,*
> *And He will make Nineveh a desolation,*
> *parched like the wilderness.*
> *(14) Flocks will lie down in her midst,*
> *all beasts which range in herds.*
> *Both the pelican and the hedgehog*
> *will lodge in the tops of her pillars.*
> *Birds will sing in the window,*
> *desolation will be on the threshold*
> *(for He has laid bare the cedar work.)*
> *(15) So this is now the exultant city*
> *which dwelled securely,*

*Figure 3.3 (left) Jonah and the fish in a soothsayers book. India; 16th century; paper; Wereldmuseum, Rotterdam (71803/17). © Wereldmuseum.*

*Figure 3.4 (bottom) Tobacco box with scenes from life of Jonah. The Netherlands; 18th century; brass, copper, silver; L 15.9 cm, W 3.8 cm, Th 6.2 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (57.108.17).*

*who said in her heart, 'I am, and there is no one*
*besides me.'*
*How she has become a desolation,*
*a resting place for beasts!*
*Everyone who passes by her will hiss*
*and wave his hand in contempt*, Zeph 2:13-5.

With the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and its capital, Nineveh no longer posed any real threat to the inhabitants of the Land of Israel. But the memories remained strong, and many of Nineveh's negative connotations of arrogance, idolatry and atrocities were passed on to its successor, Babylon. Nineveh was transformed into a useful literary figure.

The first and perhaps most powerful and creative example is the book of Jonah, a third-century BC narrative centred on the prophet Jonah Ben-Amittai (2Kg 14:25). Jonah very effectively plays with the image of Nineveh as the primordial city of sin and evil. How, its author asks, would God have reacted if the Ninevites had listened to His warnings and had repented? The short book is full of wisdom and irony and offers a wonderful reflection on human stubbornness and God's power to forgive. Realizing how evilly the Ninevites were behaving, God sent his prophet Jonah Ben-Amittai to warn them that judgement was imminent. Jonah, however, did not want to go and tried to escape to Tarshish, 'far away from the

*Figure 3.5 Etch made by Philips Galle depicting Jonah in Nineveh. Antwerpen, Belgium; 1547-1612; paper; H 20 cm, W 22.6 cm; Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (RP-P-1980-18).*

*Figure 3.6 Etch made by Jan Luyken depicting Jonah in Nineveh. Amsterdam, the Netherlands; 1708; paper; H 25.2 cm, W 20 cm; Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (RP-P-OB-45.391).*

Lord', because he was afraid that the Ninevites would repent and then the merciful God would spare them (Jon 1:3; 4:2).

But God intercepted Jonah and renewed his mandate. This time, Jonah obeyed and went to Nineveh, 'a very large city, requiring a three-day journey to cross through it' (Jon 3:3). As soon as the prophet started preaching, the Ninevites turned away from their evil ways, fasted and repented with full hearts. And when God saw this, he held back His punishment and forgave the Ninevites. Jonah, however, was displeased with God, angry that even one's arch-enemies could get a second chance – and grasp it.

It is no wonder that the Ninevites' unexpected repentance had a major impact on later commentators. Babylonian rabbis, for example, emphasized the sincerity of the Ninevites' penitence and elaborately described their prayers and acts of remorse, certainly as encouragement for the audience of their own times (bTa'an 16a; c. 4th – 6th century AD). Palestinian rabbinic tradition, on the other hand, declared that the Ninevites' repentance was superficial and dishonest:

> *What the Ninevites had in their hands they gave over, but what they had in their chests, drawers and cupboards they kept,* yTa'an 2:1 65b.

Thus after 40 days the Ninevites fell back into their sinful ways and the punishment predicted by Jonah struck them, so that they were swallowed by the earth (Pirqe de-Rabbi Eli'ezer, 43).

One reason for such diverse explanations of the Ninevites' penitence is rooted in a literary problem: what is the chronological relationship between Jonah and Nahum or Zephaniah? If Jonah came earlier than Nahum and Zephaniah, which 2Kg 14:25 seems to imply, how could Nahum announce Nineveh's destruction after Jonah had already made the Ninevites repent and God had forgiven them? The Targum, collections of Aramaic paraphrases of the books of the Hebrew Bible possibly dating from the second century BC to the fourth century AD, accepts the precedence of Jonah and claims that the Ninevites had indeed repented, but that they had then sinned again, only to be punished as Nahum had announced (TgNah 1:1). The *Life of Jonah* in the *Vitae Prophetarum* also presupposes Jonah's precedence (c. first century AD), but here Jonah is said to have lied about the Ninevites, so that their repentance was in vain when God punished them (11:2-3). Apart from the *Life*'s awkward implication that God cannot be reconciled by human repentance, the figure of a lying prophet is no less unusual. At any rate, the *Life of Jonah* knows to report that the prophet subsequently took his mother, went into exile in a distant land and lived there as an alien to atone for his shame.

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, however, follows a different path in his paraphrasing of biblical history in *Jewish Antiquities* (9:239-242; written in Rome at the end of the first century AD) and dates Nahum far back into the eighth century BC (i.e., to before Jonah). Josephus' chronology is problematic and many logical questions remain unanswered, but Josephus – like the authors of the other texts – is convinced that the judgement prophesied by Nahum did in fact happen.

Following the Jewish tradition, the Ninevites are also presented as examples of repentance in one of the earliest sources of the New Testament Gospel tradition. In the hypothetical Sayings-Source ('Q'), the Ninevites will even testify against the Jews who reject Jesus as prophet of repentance and refuse to turn away from their sins (Mt 12:38-41 par Lk 11:29-32Q). It is highly conceivable that this text is witness to a broader Christian usage of the Jonah tradition in anti-Jewish polemics, perhaps countered by the negative assessment of the Ninevites' sincerity in the Palestinian rabbinic tradition.

# 4. Nineveh in Classical Literature

*Menko Vlaardingerbroek*

The cities of ancient Mesopotamia made a deep impression on the Greeks.[5] In Herodotus' *Historiae* and Ctesias' *Persika,* Nineveh and Babylon grew to almost mythical proportions. These authors tell us about city walls that were almost 90 km long and colossal statues of pure gold. And yet, Greek historians and geographers knew little of Nineveh (Greek Νίνος), the Assyrian capital that the Medes and the Babylonians had conquered and laid waste to in 612 BC, long before the first Greek authors of the classical period wrote their works. The main events of which these authors speak are the founding of the city by Ninos and the fall of Nineveh during the reign of Sardanapallos.

## 4.1 Sources

Nineveh is mentioned in one of the aphorisms of Phocylides of Miletus, a Greek poet from the sixth century BC. It is cited by Dio Chrysostom (*Discourse* 36) and reads: 'A small town on a cliff that is well governed is stronger than foolish Nineveh' (Diehl 1925, frg. 4; West 1978, frg. 8). Some attribute these words to a Hellenistic Jewish author known as pseudo-Phocylides (Korenjak & Rollinger 2001), but it is more likely that they were written by the sixth-century BC poet Phocylides (Burkert 2009, 502). Apparently, he thought that Nineveh was badly governed, but why he thought so is not clear. Perhaps stories about weak Assyrian kings, as found in later sources, were already known in the sixth century BC.

The most extensive history of Assyria, including stories about the founding and the fall of Nineveh, can be found in the *Bibliotheke*, a universal history written by Diodorus of Sicily in the first century BC. Diodorus made use of a number of older works. His second book, which contains the history of Assyria, is based on Ctesias' *Persika*.[6] Ctesias of Cnidus (late fifth, early fourth century BC) had been a physician at the court of the Persian king Artaxerxes II Mnemon (Brown 1978; Eck 1990). After his return to Greece, he wrote his *Persika* about the history of Asia. The *Persika* is lost, but a large number of quotations and excerpts has been preserved.[7] Although it is not clear what kind of work Ctesias intended to write – historiography, a novel, a didactical work (Madreiter 2011, 25-7; Stronk 2011) – his work was usually read as historiography. Ctesias was regarded as an authority on Assyrian history and his *Persika* formed the basis for later historians writing about Assyrian history.

5 This paper is based on my unpublished dissertation (2014, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam).
6 Translations: Oldfather (Loeb 1933); Murphy (1989); Eck (Budé 2003).
7 Editions and translations: Jacoby (*FGrH* 688), König 1972, Auberger 1991, Lenfant 2004, Llewellyn-Jones & Robson 2009 and Stronk 2010.

*Figure 4.1 Fragment of the throne of Leopold I depicting king Ninos. Gdańsk, Poland; c. 1677; amber; H 10.9 cm, W 12.4 cm; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (KK_3561). © Kunsthistorisches Museum.*

### 4.2 The largest city ever

According to Ctesias, the founder of the Assyrian Empire and of its capital Nineveh was an Assyrian king called Ninos (figs. 4.1-3). Many attempts have been made to identify this Ninos with one of the many Assyrian kings that are known from the cuneiform sources: Tukulti-Ninurta I (reigned 1245-1207 BC; Speiser 1967, 50-2), Sargon II (reigned 721-705 BC; König 1972, 36-7) and Sennacherib (reigned c. 705/704-681 BC; Lewy 1952), among others. But none of these attempts is really convincing. Ninos is a Greek invention, an eponymous hero, a typical empire builder and city founder (Boncquet 1987, 45-7; Lenfant 2004, XLII – XLIV). According to Ctesias, Ninos decided, after having conquered all of Asia, to found a new city to ensure that his name would live on for generations to come. On the river Euphrates (sic) he founded a city of unsurpassed magnitude, to which he gave his own name, Ninos. Ninos always remained sketchy: he never captivated the imagination of the Greek historians the way other Assyrian monarchs such as Semiramis and Sardanapallos did (fig. 4.4).

In Antiquity, Nineveh was thought to have been an exceedingly large city, perhaps even the largest city ever built. Diodorus of Sicily, whose figures are based on Ctesias' *Persika*, writes that 'the longer sides of the city were each one hundred and fifty stades in length, and the shorter ninety' (Diod. 2.3.2).[8] This means that the longer sides were believed to have been 27-28 km and the shorter ones 16-17 km (one stade = 600 feet = 180-190 m), giving Nineveh an area of c. 450 km$^2$. The walls of the city were equally impressive: 'For the wall had a height of one hundred feet and its width was sufficient for three chariots abreast to drive upon; and the sum total of its towers was one thousand five hundred, and their height was two hundred feet' (Diod. 2.3.3). Xenophon, who saw

8 Translation: C.H. Oldfather 1933.

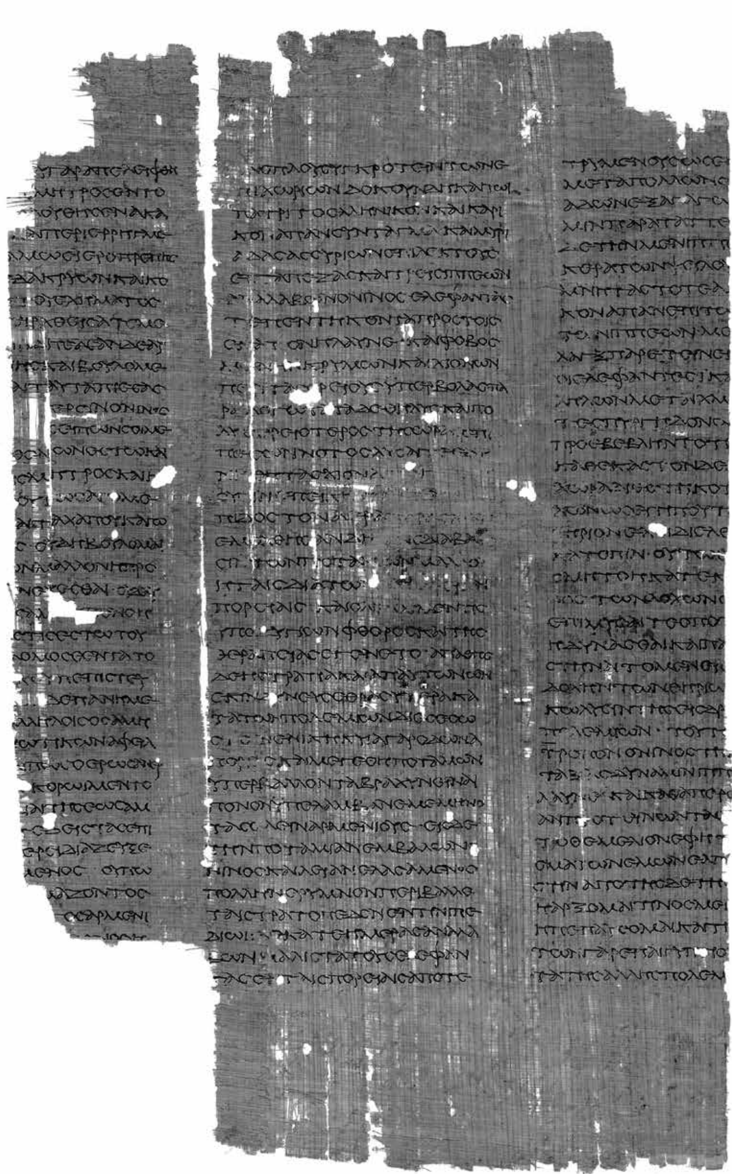


*Figure 4.2 Papyrus with love-story between king Ninos and Semiramis. Fayyum (?), Egypt; 1st century AD; papyrus; L 30.4 cm, W 19.3 cm; Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Berlin (P 6926/B).*
*© bpk-Bildagentur/ Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung.*

the ruins of Nineveh with his own eyes, although he did not know it as Nineveh, but as Mespila, also describes it as a large city. His figures are more modest, but still not realistic: 'the circuit of the wall was six parasangs' (Xen. *An.* 3.4.10); that is, c. 30 km. While it is true that Nineveh was a large city, it was not that large: in reality, it covered some 750 ha and its wall was more than 12 km long (Frahm 2008, 13; Ur, this volume).

## 4.3 The fall of Nineveh

According to the Greeks, the last king of Nineveh was called Sardanapallos. He is mentioned often in classical literature, for example by Herodotus (2.150), Hellanicus (*FGrH* 687a F2), Clitarchus (*FGrH* 137 F2), Diodorus (1.23-27), Strabo (16.1.2) and Arrian (*An.* 2.5). Sardanapallos is the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, although the difference between Sardanapallos and the real Ashurbanipal is great (Lenfant 2004, XLV – XLVIII; Burkert 2009). In classical literature, he is rich, effeminate and indolent. The Greek image of the king is epitomized in a famous epitaph: 'eat, drink, and play, for everything else in the life of a man is not worth this' (Ar. *An.* 2.5; *cf.* Athen. 12.39 p. 350ab; Strab.

*Figure 4.3 Engraving made by Adriaen Collaert showing king Ninos of Nineveh. Amsterdam, the Netherlands; c. 1570-1643; paper; H 21.8 cm, W 26.4 cm; Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (RP-P-1976-30-213).*

14.5.9). On the other hand, Ctesias tells us that Sardanapallos valiantly defended his kingdom when the Babylonians and Medes had laid siege to Nineveh (Diod. 2.25-27). This contrast is perhaps the origin of the idea, found in Hellanicus (*FGrH* 4 F63) and Callisthenes (*FGrH* 124 F34), that two kings of the same name had existed, one effeminate and one brave (see Schneider 2000).

During the reign of Sardanapallos, the Babylonians, Arabians, Medes and Persians revolted against Assyrian rule (Diod. 2.24-27). At first the Assyrians had the upper hand, but, while Sardanapallos was celebrating his success, the tide turned, and the king was shut up in Nineveh and besieged there. The siege proved a protected affaire, 'but in the third year, after there had been heavy and continuous rains, it came to pass that the Euphrates, running very full, both inundated a portion of the city and broke down the walls for a distance of twenty stades' (Diod. 2.27.1). The king lost all hope and 'built an enormous pyre in his palace, heaped upon it all his gold and silver as well as every article of the royal wardrobe, and then, shutting his concubines and eunuchs in the room which had been built in the middle of the pyre, he consigned both them and himself and his palace to the flames' (Diod. 2.27.2; fig. 4.4). Of course, this story is not historically accurate. In reality, Nineveh was taken by the Medes and the Babylonians during the reign of one of Ashurbanipal's successors. The story of Sardanapallos' death by fire is perhaps inspired by the death of the Babylonian king Šamaš-šum-ukin (reigned c. 667-648 BC; MacGinnis 1988; Dalley 2007, 50).

## 4.4 Lost splendour

Greek authors often saw Assyrian and Babylonian cities as something of the past, once great, but now disappeared or at least in decay. To Herodotus, the greatness

*Figure 4.4 Death of Sardanapalus painted by Eugène Delacroix. France; 1827; oil on canvas; H 392 cm, L 496 cm; © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Angèle Dequier.*

of Babylon is still of his own time, but Nineveh is already a city of the past. This feeling of Assyrian cities being in decay is especially strong in Greek texts from the Hellenistic and Roman periods, for example in Lucian (second century AD): 'Well, as for Nineveh, skipper, it was wiped out long ago. There's not a trace of it left, and one can't even guess where it was. Babylon's over there [*pointing it out*], the place with great towers and a huge wall round it – but before long it will be just as hard to find as Nineveh' (Lucian *Charon* 23).[9] The same sentiment is expressed by Pausanias (second century AD), when speaking about the fickleness of Fortune: 'Mycenae, which led the Greeks in the Trojan war, and Nineveh, seat of the Assyrian kingdom, are deserted and demolished' (Paus. 8.33.2).[10] Nineveh had once been a great city, but in the days of Lucian and Pausanias it was almost forgotten. In reality, the decline of the Mesopotamian cities was not that rapid, but the representation of Mesopotamia as a dying culture was widespread in classical literature.

### 4.5 Conclusion

The Greek image of Nineveh was very different from the modern image of the city. In classical literature, Nineveh is represented as a typical oriental city: it was very rich and very large, perhaps even the largest city ever built by man; it was governed by kings who spent their lives in their harems, surrounded by concubines and eunuchs, and who were luxury-loving, sluggish and effeminate. In other words, it was badly governed. This image is not very specific and it is based mainly on Greek stereotypes of Asia and its inhabitants, and only for a small part on knowledge of Nineveh and its history.

9 Translation: Paul Turner 1961.
10 Translation: Peter Levi 1971.

# 5. Nineveh in Western Art

*Jan de Hond*

The west portal of Amiens' early thirteenth-century cathedral is adorned with a series of 44 quatrefoils depicting Old Testament prophets. Seven of these relief scenes are set in the Assyrian city of Nineveh, and four of them depict the city itself (fig. 5.1). These images are typical of medieval European representations of Nineveh, which was portrayed almost exclusively in the context of Bible stories – and more specifically their prophecies and the ultimate fulfilment of the same. In Amiens, Nineveh appears in scenes from the lives of the prophets Zephaniah, Nahum and Jonah. Of the three, Jonah's prophecy is by far the most commonly depicted in Western art. Nineveh as it appears in the Amiens reliefs does not in any way resemble a true Eastern city, let alone an Assyrian one. In this matter too, Amiens Cathedral does not deviate from the norm: medieval art shows Nineveh as European, and all but indistinguishable from an actual Western city. One splendid exemplar of this phenomenon is the woodblock print of Nineveh in Hartmann Schedel's *World Chronicle* (1493; fig. 3.2).

It was only in the sixteenth century that increased importance came to be attached to more accurate representations of history and regional differences, a phenomenon that was particularly evident among artists with a humanist background. Nevertheless, rendering a print or painting that took Nineveh as its subject was certainly a more complex endeavour than making one of Ancient Rome, for example, because hardly anything was known about Nineveh's appearance; its ruins still lay hidden at this time, buried in the ground. And the absence of knowledge in the West about the Assyrian artworks – or Babylonian, or Sumerian, for that matter – meant that no reference material was available. To compound matters, the biblical and classical authors gave almost no information regarding the visual aspect of Nineveh. This left artists such as Maarten van Heemskerck (1498-1574), a Dutch painter with a solid humanist background, with an almost insurmountable problem. Like his fellow artists, he had no visual examples to hand for *The Walls of Babylon* (1572; fig. 5.2), a print from his eight-part *Wonders of the World* series. Nonetheless, he was able to refer back to classical writers such as Herodotus, Diodorus of Sicily and Strabo, who had all described various structures and buildings in the city (Veldman 1986, 103-5, cat. no. 12.7). At the top right is a terraced edifice with arched colonnades: the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. In the foreground we can see the famed walls of the city (rendered here as three concentric circular surrounds) and, adjacent to them, a portal crowned with a statue and the tomb of the legendary Queen Semiramis. The building with the tall tower could be mistaken for the biblical Tower of Babel, but is in fact the Bel Temple complex. Van Heemskerck transforms this ziggurat into a remarkable concoction comprising a gothic base topped with a spiralled upper section. Ultimately, of course, this city view is primarily a product of the artist's imagination, but learned contemporaries would doubtless have still been able to identify the distinctly Babylonian structures.

In contrast to their extensive descriptions of Babylon, classical authors provide almost no information about Nineveh's architecture, mentioning only that the city was exceptionally large and that it was intersected by the Tigris River. Van Heemskerck was therefore unable to render an even remotely recognizable depiction of the Assyrian

*Figure 5.1 (right) Relief on the west portal of Amiens Cathedral depicting Jonah under a gourd outside Nineveh, made c. 1230.*

*Figure 5.2 (bottom) The Walls of Babylon made by Philips Galle and Maarten van Heemskerck. The Netherlands; 1572; coloured print; H 20.9 cm, W 26.1 cm; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (RP – P-2005-214-25-1).*

*Figure 5.3 Jonah Seated under the Gourd made by Philips Galle and Maarten van Heemskerck. The Netherlands; c. 1596-1633; engraving; H 20.6 cm, W 24.8 cm; Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (RP – P-1904-3288).*

capital; his engraving *Jonah Seated under the Gourd* (fig. 5.3) is testimony to this fact. It shows the prophet looking out over a city crammed with a jumble of medieval steeples and other expressions of Western architecture. The only likely references to the East are the obelisk and – possibly – the huge and highly fanciful tower on the right.

In the early eighteenth century, the Dutch artist Jan Luycken (1649-1712) attempted to add a little more 'local flavour'. His etching entitled *Jonah Foretells the Destruction of Nineveh* (fig. 3.6) incorporated several structures with an 'Eastern' association. The domed building in the background, for example, is a possible reference to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. A more interesting feature is the ruinous tower situated to the left of the prophet. This spiral tower recalls the one we saw earlier in Van Heemskerck's *The Walls of Babylon*.[11] Might these spiroid structures have been inspired by Herodotus' description of the tower on the temple complex in Babylon: 'the ascent to the top is on the outside, by a path which rounds all the towers'? Or are they perhaps based on the similar design of the Samarra mosque minaret (c. 850) or of Cairo's Achmed

11 Van Heemskerck incorporated a similar spiral-shaped tower in *The Lighthouse at Alexandria* from the same series, *The Eight Wonders of the World* (1572).

Ibn Tulun (c. 1300), which derived its structure from the mosque in Samarra and is far better known among Western travellers?[12]

The architect Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach (1656-1723) believed that he, at last, had found a reliable visual source for Nineveh. Published in 1721, his illustrated history of architecture *Entwurff einer historischen Architektur* contains an engraving of Nineveh that is unique in many regards (fig. 5.4). Fischer von Erlach claimed that the design was based on an ancient coin; the renowned Italian antiquarian and art theorist Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1613-1696) had shown him this coin, which the scholar claimed depicted Nineveh (Neville 2007, 163). A rendering of the coin is located to the top left in Erlach's print and shows a central building surrounded by four pillars topped with cressets. No such coin is known to have existed in antiquity and this may have been a seventeenth-century counterfeit (by no means a rare phenomenon), but it might equally have been the product of Bellori's or Erlach's imagination.[13] The resulting work is a bizarre cityscape mixing medieval, Renaissance and preponderantly Baroque architecture – none of which have anything at all to do with Assyrian building styles.

As chance would have it, the period immediately prior to the rediscovery of the city's ruins in the early nineteenth century produced the two most famous paintings set in Nineveh: 1827's *The Death of Sardanapalus* by Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) and 1828's *The Fall of Nineveh* by John Martin (1789-1854). Both artists took as their subject the self-chosen death of King Sardanapalus, the mythical last ruler of Assyria, who refused to surrender to the enemy forces that overran and plundered Nineveh. He locked himself up in his palace along with his concubines and his treasures and gave orders for the building to be set alight. This tale was a perfect reaffirmation of traditional perceptions of the Ancient East in Europe, where Assyria had since antiquity constituted its opposite; Greco-Roman and biblical authors maintained that traditional Eastern cultures were the very antithesis of their own idealized and much-cherished self-image. Nineveh stood for sinfulness, decadence, shameless sensuality, barbarism and violence, and the story of Sardanapalus contained all of these elements. In the Romantic period, however, with its attendant predilection for grand gestures, intense emotions and the sublime, artists started showing an interest in this Eastern antithesis to Western tradition. In 1821, the poet Lord Byron published his tragedy *Sardanapalus*, which reportedly inspired Delacroix to paint his spectacular canvas (fig. 4.4). It shows the sombre and indifferent Assyrian sovereign staring blankly before him while his concubines are murdered at the foot of his bed. The floor is littered with treasures and on the left we can see the first plumes of smoke rising. This orgy of violence and sex is set in a strangely indefinable chamber that combines traces of Egyptian architecture (top right) and Indian elements such as the elephant head (Farwell 1958, 66-71; Steinke 1984, 318).

John Martin also took inspiration from a contemporary literary source – not Byron's play this time, but Edwin Atherstone's poem *The Fall of Nineveh*. His painting was

*Figure 5.4 The City of Nineveh drawn by Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach in 1721 (Entwurff einer historischen Architektur, Pl. X).*

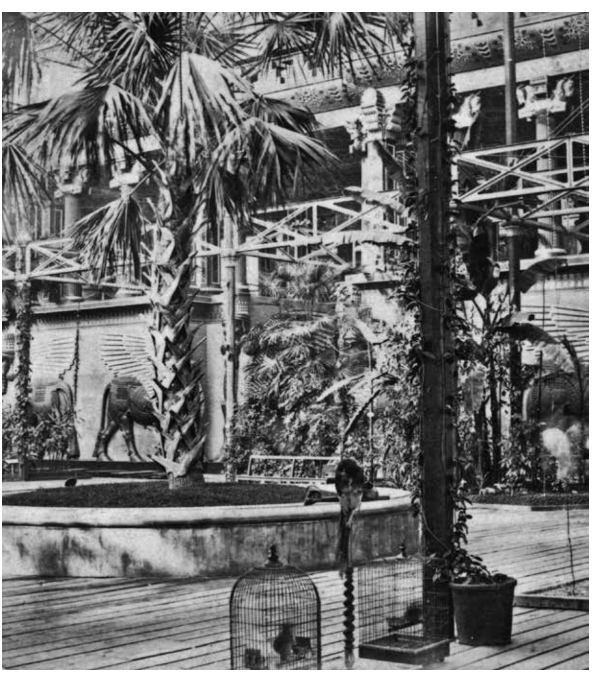


*Figure 5.5 The Nineveh Court at the Crystal Palace in Sydenham, London, in c. 1854. Courtesy of Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (RP-F-F05040).*

12 For the possible relationship between spiral minarets and Western representations of the Tower of Babel, see Seipel 2003, 72.

13 The author would like to thank Paul Beliën for the numismatic information.

*Figure 5.6 The Dream of Sardanapalus made by Ford Madox Brown in 1871. UK; 1871; watercolour and gouache on paper; H 47 cm, W 55.9 cm; Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington (1935-38). © Delaware Art Museum.*

accompanied by a detailed 'descriptive catalogue' which references the contemporary poem as well as recent historical studies and the original biblical and classical sources; the text throws light on the central figures and the most important buildings, with numbers located at various points in an enclosed engraving to aid identification of the elements in the painting. The impression is thus given that this is a historically accurate reconstruction, but Martin does ultimately acknowledge that in fact nothing was known for certain about Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire – although this proved to be no obstacle at all to the artist. Quite the contrary, because it actually offered some advantages: 'Seen through the mist of ages, the *great* becomes *gigantic*, the *wonderful* swells into the *sublime*' (Martin 1828, 5). And there is certainly no lack of the gigantic and the sublime in Martin's impressive painting (fig. 49.1). We see the Babylonian and Median forces entering the city beneath dramatic clouds, the walls of Nineveh having already been partially destroyed by the flooding Tigris. Sardanapalus stands at the foreground, on the verge of leaping with his favourite concubines into the flames rising from the great mound of treasures from his treasure chamber. The artist explains that the fantastical structures are based on Egyptian and Indian architecture – Mesopotamia was located directly between these civilizations, after all. This tableau was the perfect complement to Martin's earlier works set in a spectacular and apocalyptic antiquity, such as *The Fall of Babylon* (1819), *Belshazzar's Feast* (1820) and *The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum* (1822).

Excavations of ancient Nineveh started in 1842. The most important discoveries were carted off to Europe, to be exhibited in the Louvre and the British Museum (Collins, Curtis and Thomas, this volume). The public thronged to museums in droves to gaze in wonder at this 'new' art – despite the cultural elite's distinct lack of enthusiasm for the artistic qualities of the Assyrian remains and its determination, whatever the cost, to preserve in aspic the prevailing Greco-Roman arts canon.[14] In 1854, the general public

14 For a discussion of the 'status' of Assyrian art and the first exhibitions of artworks from Nineveh in the British Museum, see Frederick N. Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture: Imagining Mesopotamia in Nineteenth Century Europe*, Cambridge 2003, 98-131.

even got the opportunity to visit the 'Nineveh Court', a reconstruction of an Assyrian palace at the Crystal Palace, which had been partially rebuilt in Sydenham following the Great Exhibition of 1851 in Hyde Park (fig. 5.5). Popular events such as this ensured that Assyrian art would gradually gain a place within the artistic canon (Bohrer 2003, 212-8).

Assyrian motifs now also started permeating into history painting. For example, the English artist Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893) studied recent archaeological discoveries and drew inspiration from the Assyrian sculptural tradition in his attempt to create an authentic setting for *The Dream of Sardanapalus* (1871; fig. 5.6); the winged bull on each side of the door opening and the king's day bed are based directly on a Nineveh relief in the British Museum. Brown's painting presents an array of ancient Assyrian artefacts, but that does not prevent its being instantly identifiable as a nineteenth-century creation; note, for example, the Victorian parquet floor. The painting as a whole is a direct interpretation of the scene from Byron's tragedy: Sardanapalus returns wounded from the battlefield and in a prophetic dream he witnesses the impending demise of the Assyrian Empire; his concerned Greek slave covers him up (Bohrer 2003, 194-6).

The preoccupations of the day shine through even more powerfully in the 1894 painting *Jonah* by George Frederic Watts (1817-1904; fig. 5.7). He, too, places his prophet in an Assyrian *mise en scène*, the background relief clearly having been inspired by comparable carvings in the British Museum. But the artist evidently wanted to do more than render a realistic, biblio-historical setting, because he was also commenting on the excesses of his own nineteenth-century society. In a catalogue from 1895, Watts discusses the relief forming the background of his Jonah: 'on a mural tablet, are depicted scenes representing the sins of the people, drunkenness, gambling, racing, &c' (Blunt 1975, 213-4). These sins are clearly a reflection of Victorian fixations, rather than any supposed Assyrian 'vices'. So in addition to tracing the progression in the European understanding of the Assyrian past, the Western depictions of Nineveh from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century combine to form an even more compelling narrative about coeval fascinations and presumptions.

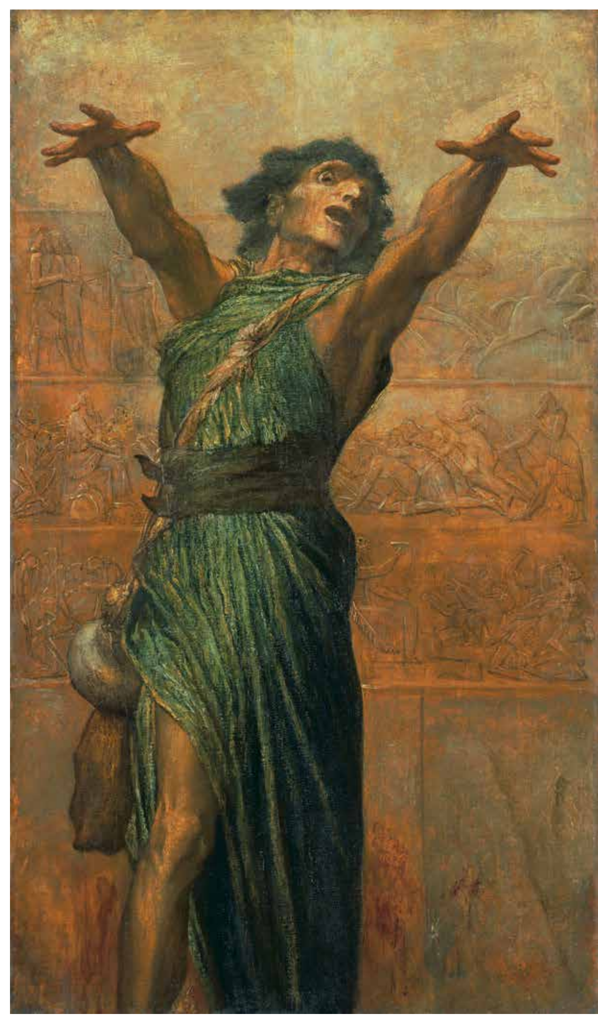


*Figure 5.7 Jonah painted by George Frederic Watts in 1894. UK; 1894; oil on canvas; H 155.5 cm, W 91.4 cm; Tate Britain, London (NO1636). © Tate Britain.*

# 6. Early Travellers and Nineveh

*Paolo Matthiae*

The historical centres of the Mesopotamian world were probably hidden under the decomposed ruins of their own monuments as early as the end of the Hellenistic period and the first centuries of the Roman Empire. Those that were not settled by Parthians lay unseen as scattered and irregular artificial mounds. Even the memory of that world had long been lost, notwithstanding Berossus's efforts to preserve it: he dedicated three books of 'Babyloniaca' to Antiochus I Soter. Composed in Greek, the books collected together part of the original cuneiform sources – to which he had access, being a priest in the Esagil of Babylon – as well as very ancient legends, albeit twisted. In Late Antiquity, scattered biblical references, which were strongly hostile and to be found in the Prophets of Israel, and the ideas of the classical Greek and Latin authors – which oscillated between admiration for antiquity and the wisdom of that world and contempt for its irrational cognitive systems, such as astrology – led to a mental representation of the great lost civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt as arrogant, obstinate worlds of misleading polytheism, of false idols and of the stubborn immorality of pride, tyranny and lust (Vlaardingerbroek, this volume). The Fathers of the Church added yet more negative judgements.

Those civilizations were seen as structurally negative and static, particularly due to the monolithic and inflexible mental attitude of the redactors of the Old Testament to civilizations that they doggedly saw as idolatrous when it came to religion, and hopelessly dissolute when it came to morals. These considerations naturally descended into a historic-teleological conception in the Western Middle Ages, and something not unlike this in the Islamic Middle Ages: the great pre-classical civilizations of the Ancient Orient were seen as a kind of structural prehistory, an era of darkness, never enlightened by Grace; an older, darker age, contrasted to the subsequent age of light spread by monotheistic Revelation (De Hond, this volume).

Yet it was precisely this teleological perspective of the Western world that held, already in the Middle Ages and later at the beginning of the Modern Age, following the late antique tradition, that the great empires of the Ancient Orient, with their climax in the extended Roman Empire, had developed in accordance with a divine plan. It was their role to form the unitary background to the diffusion and success of the Christian faith. An admirable synthesis of this concept can be found in an engraving by Pieter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), to illustrate the frontispiece of the 1645 edition of the *Romanae et Graecae Antiquitatis Monumenta e priscis numismatibus eruta* by Hubertus Goltzius (1526-1583; fig. 6.1). Rubens created a composition with a circular rhythm, where the destruction of the ancient world was symbolized by the four great empires of the Romans, Macedonians, Persians and Medes, who frequently take the place of Assyrians in this kind of vision; on the other hand, the rebirth of the ancient world was marked by the finding of statues and coins. The inexorable Time, with his deadly scythe, and Death, with a skull for a head, cast the empires into hell; the wise Athena and Hermes, carrying a spade, recover busts of philosophers and statues of emperors from the soil. In the centre of the composition appears Antiquity, still veiled and bearing on her head the phoenix, the mythical bird symbolizing the rebirth of the knowledge of lost civilizations.

*Figure 6.1 Frontispiece of Romanae et Graecae Antiquitatis Monumenta e priscis numismatibus eruta made by Pieter Paul Rubens in c. 1645.*

The distant and almost indistinct echo of the ancient splendour of the most ancient of these empires, Assyria, which the Prophets of Israel called 'Yahwe's lash' – which was to fall on the Hebrew people in order to punish them for their frequent infidelities to their god – attracted Hebrew, Muslim and Christian travellers to the Mosul region from the Middle Ages onward, looking for traces of that ruthless, albeit luxurious power. Thus, shortly after 1165 the Spanish Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela (1130-1173; fig. 6.2) visited Mosul and correctly identified the place of Nineveh in the invisible ruins, which seemed to emerge east of the Tigris, just in front of Mosul. The story of his travels, however, was published in Istanbul only in 1543. In 1184, another traveller from Spain, the great and pious Arab geographer and polymath Ibn Jubayr (1145-1217), made the same discovery and declared that in front of the wonderful Mosul, on the left bank of the Tigris, a site where traces of very old ruins could be seen was still known by the name of Ninawa, and therefore had to be the site of the pagan Nineveh. Yet later, the famous Maghrebi traveller Ibn Battuta (1304 – c. 1368) stopped in Mosul in the summer of 1327, and, recalling the presence of the tomb of the prophet Jonas, located in front of the walled medieval town on the eastern bank of the Tigris, wrote that near that revered shrine there was a large village with extended ruins, 'which they pretend is the place of the town known by the name of Ninawa, the town of Jonas'.

In the sixteenth century, several European travellers spent some time in Mosul: they were all clearly and strongly influenced by biblical and classical narratives, often peculiarly blurred, and made generic observations that nonetheless all correctly identified the location of Nineveh in front of the outskirts of Mosul, on the other bank of the Tigris. In 1575, the German physician Leonhart Rauwolff (1535-1596) maintained that the hillock of Kuyunjik, the dwelling place of poor Bedouin, had to be the ancient Nineveh. Slightly later, the Englishman Sir Anthony Sherley (1565-1635) observed that not even one stone was left standing of the famous urban centre known in the Bible as 'the great town'. During the following century, the Englishman John Cartwright stayed for some time in Mosul and claimed he had made a very accurate study of the ruins of Nineveh. His statement is blatantly contradicted by the fact that he maintained that the town stretched over a huge quadrangle with long sides of up to 30 km, and short ones of up to 18 km, with 96-km city walls with 1,500 towers and of such an impressive thickness that three chariots could run on top of them. These astonishing claims were not the result of his observations, but rather gathered from various classical sources, in part from Diodorus, and referring, in fact, not to Nineveh, but to Babylon. Regarding the latter city, Ctesias had written that the perimeter of the walls was 450 stadia in length and that more than two war chariots could be driven side by side on top of the walls.

*Figure 6.2 Engraving of Benjamin of Tudela in the Sahara, made by Dumouza in the 19th century.*

The site of ancient Nineveh, in front of Mosul on the east bank of the Tigris, was once again correctly identified by a Roman knight, Pietro della Valle (1586-1652), who recalled that according to the inhabitants of Mosul, the Assyrian metropolis was located less than a mile from the river (fig. 6.3). By contrast, in 1743, the French Arabist Jean Otter (1707-1748) claimed that he had heard in Mosul two different hypotheses about the location of Nineveh: first, the traditional one, placing it in front of Mosul; and second, an odd theory that claimed that the Assyrian town was further north, on the site of Eski Mosul, 'Ancient Mosul'. The latter hypothesis was probably quite widespread in Mosul: in 1781 another Italian traveller, Domenico Sestini (1750-1823), reported it as the most likely hypothesis, although he had neither grounds nor explanation for this claim, save its name.

*Figure 6.3 Engraving of Pietro della Valle made by Thomas Hirschmann between 1669 and 1691.*

Between the visits of Otter and Sestini, decisive progress on the identification of Nineveh on the ground was made by the great German explorer Carsten Niebuhr (1733-1815; fig. 6.4), famous for the precision of his observations. He reported that he was familiar with both hypotheses, but he resolutely maintained that Nineveh had to be in front of Mosul for three reasons: first, the concordance between the Judaic, Christian and Muslim traditions about the prophet Jonas; second, for the fact that there were two hillocks in that place, one containing the presumed tomb of Jonas, certainly Tell Nebi

Yunus, and the other the site of the village of Kuyunjik, which had kept the Arabic name of Qal'at Nunya, 'Citadel of Nunya'; and third, for the presence on that same site of the clear remains of ancient fortifications, which he himself had initially assumed to be a natural hillock with an elongated shape (fig. 6.5). In 1779, the French geographer Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville (1697-1782) also accepted the claim that Nineveh was located in front of Mosul.

The final confirmation of the hypothesis came at the beginning of the nineteenth century, thanks to Claudius James Rich (1786-1821; fig. 6.6), a representative of the British East India Company and general consul of the British Empire at Baghdad. In 1820 he went to Northern Mesopotamia and visited Erbil, ancient Arbela, Nimrud (which would later be identified with ancient Kalhu, mentioned in the Bible as Kalah) and lastly Mosul. Rich's visit to Mosul had memorable consequences: he established that Kuyunjik and Tell Nebi Yunus both belonged to ancient Nineveh, whose city walls he traced precisely in their entirety. At Tell Nebi Yunus he bought the famous cuneiform Bellino Cylinder (fig. 6.7), with its important descriptions of two of Sennacherib's campaigns and an extended description of the 'Palace without Rival'. These were published by Georg F. Grotefend (1775-1853) in 1850, leading to important progress in the decipherment of cuneiform.

Rich's stay in Mosul marks the end of the age of travellers and explorers to the region that had been Assyria. After slightly more than twenty years, the region had become more secure and the capitals of the European great powers of that time – Paris and London – decided to open a consulate in Mosul. They asked those in charge of this modest diplomatic adventure to undertake a search for Nineveh, with an objective that would have been unthinkable until then: to excavate the extraordinary ancient site, depicted in biblical texts as a city whose wealth and corruption matched its power and ruthlessness.

Shortly after his arrival in Mosul in December 1842, the French-Piedmontese Paul-Émile Botta (1802-1870; fig. 9.1) – the son of a Turin intellectual who had migrated to France from his homeland because he was a fervent admirer of revolutionary ideals – started what were the first excavations of oriental archaeology in Asia in the hillock of Kuyunjik, looking for the ruins of Nineveh (Thomas, this volume). Although he was disappointed in the poor results, the consequences were momentous: in March 1843 Botta himself, and shortly afterwards in November 1845, the other great protagonist of the first epic excavation enterprises in Mesopotamia, the English Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894), brought to light -at Khorsabad and Nimrud, respectively – extraordinary remains of the royal palaces of Assyria in two other imperial capitals (Fales, this volume).

While the exceptional results of the Khorsabad and Nimrud excavations moved public opinion in Europe and America, from June 1847, under Layard's direction and shortly before his return to London at the end of his first excavation campaign, the huge urban area of the true Nineveh, in the main citadel of Kuyunjik, soon became the third and the most dramatic and fascinating episode in the great epic of the rediscovery of Assyria.

*Figure 6.4 Carsten Niebuhr.*

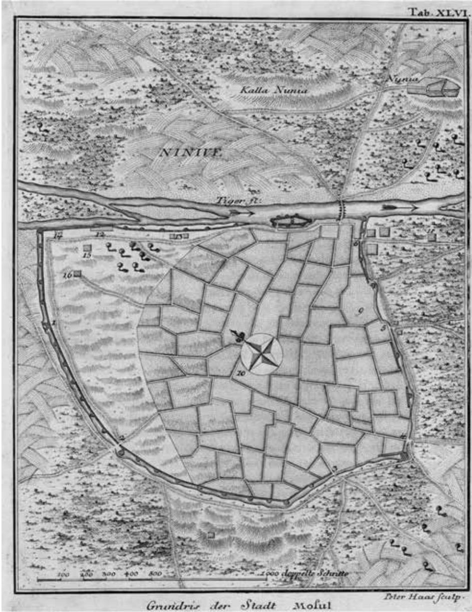
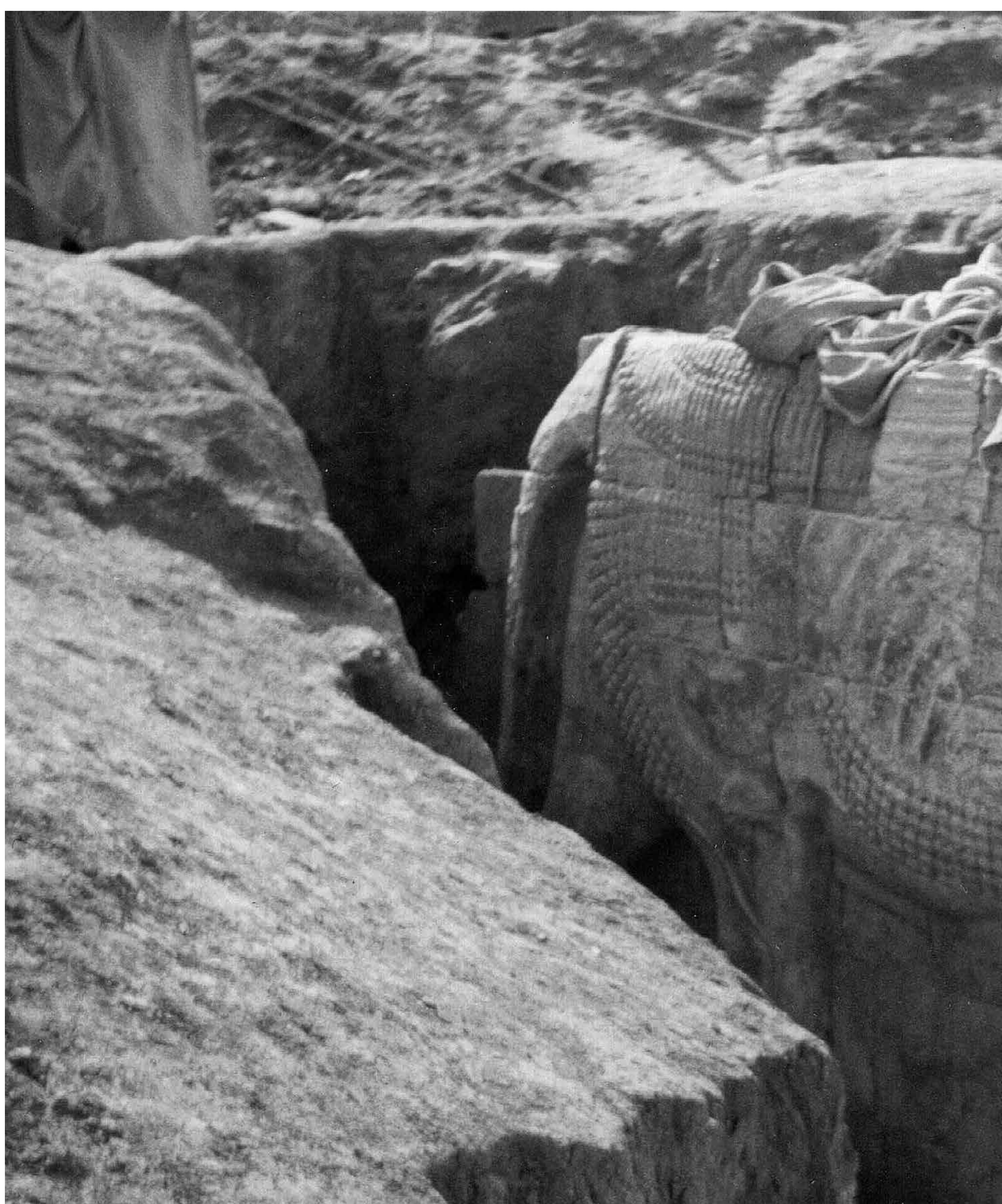
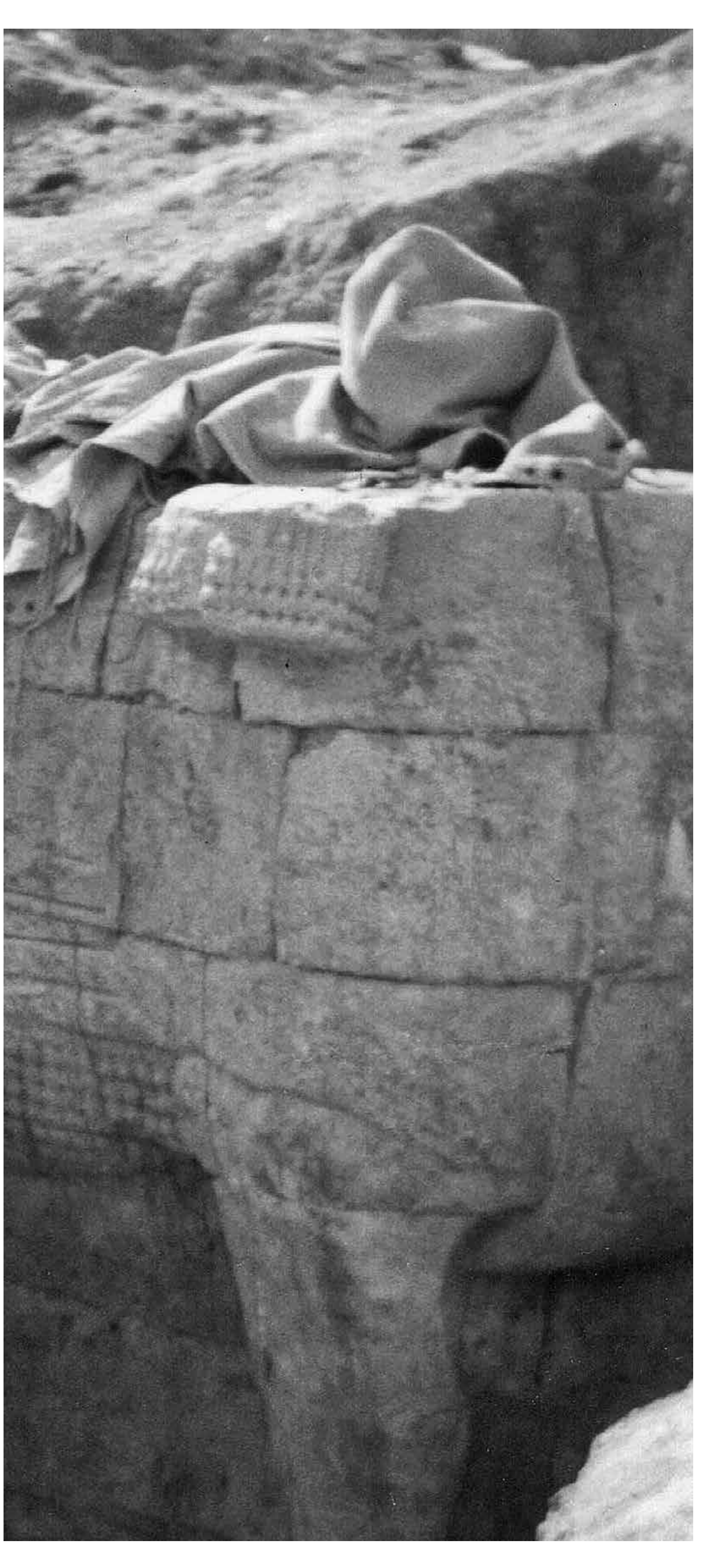



*Figure 6.5 Plan of Mosul and Nineveh made by Carsten Niebuhr in March 1776. Reproduced from Niebuhr 1776-1780, Tab. XLVI.*

*Figure 6.6 (right) Portrait of Claudius James Rich painted by Thomas Phillips in 1825. UK; oil painting on canvas; H 76.5 cm, W 63.4 cm; British Museum, London (Painting.22). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

*Figure 6.7 (bottom) The Bellino Cylinder acquired in 1820 by Claudius James Rich. It describes the first two campaigns of king Sennacherib. Nineveh, Iraq; 705-681 BC; clay; L 25.4 cm, W 12.1 cm; British Museum, London (1825,0503.102/BM 22502). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*





# PART II

## Investigating Nineveh: a Great Adventure

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# 7. Investigating Nineveh: a Great Adventure

*Lucas P. Petit*

When Paul-Émile Botta's (1802-1870) spade hit the site of Kuyunjik in December 1842, little did he know that this marked a new era in the discipline of archaeology: the beginning of controlled excavations in the Middle East (although it is debatable whether the word 'controlled' can justifiably be applied to archaeology at this time). Having found 'nothing but bricks and insignificant fragments', he moved shortly afterwards to the site of Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarukkin). Despite this intermezzo, Nineveh, including the strategic settlement mounds of Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus, did not have to wait long for new devotees. The spectacular material from Khorsabad that the public could admire in Paris evoked great pride and enthusiasm in France, but also feelings of rivalry in Great Britain; the British wanted a similar collection. In 1844, the British archaeologist Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894; fig. 7.1) was given permission to start fieldwork on the Assyrian site of Nimrud, which he believed to be ancient Nineveh. He revised his opinion shortly after he started extensive excavation work on Kuyunjik in 1849, exposing the immense treasures of Sennacherib's palace. This had to be ancient Nineveh. It brought him fame and recognition, but only a few years later – after an unsuccessful attempt to excavate Babylon – he transferred the Nineveh project to his younger partner, Hormuzd Rassam (1826-1910). The British Museum continued to explore the immense site of Nineveh until Reginald Campbell Thompson (1876-1941) left the site in 1932.

Quarrels over Nineveh marked the continuing rivalry between France and Great Britain; in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, archaeological excavations became deeply interwoven with politics and international disputes. Although hampered by shipping accidents, local problems and sickness, archaeologists continued to unravel Nineveh's history. The focus of the investigations shifted from object-oriented studies in the nineteenth century towards a more historical-based project by Thompson and Max Mallowan (1904-1978), the husband of Agatha Christie. After World War II, talented Iraqi archaeologists – backed by their own Iraqi Department of Antiquities – continued to explore the ancient remains at Nebi Yunus and Kuyunjik, and managed to save the site from modern construction works by restoring the impressive ancient walls and towers. Foreign expeditions to the site were rare, with one exception being the project directed by David Stronach (1931) of the University of California between 1987 and 1990. At the Halzi Gate, this American team uncovered a battleground with multiple victims, probably the last survivors of Nineveh before its total destruction in 612 BC.

*Figure 7.1 Austen Henry Layard at Nineveh. Drawing by Solomon Caesar Malan, 1850.*

Exploring the site of Nineveh was and still is an adventure for both Western and local scholars. In the past, many of these explorers were politically engaged or instructed by their home country to survey the position on the ground. Nineveh, strategically located close to the important city of Mosul, became not only a battleground for archaeologists, but was also the site of disputes between France and Great Britain in the nineteenth century, the territorial division of the Middle East, the construction of the Baghdad railway and, more recently, the destruction of its heritage by ISIL.

# 8. The Topography of Nineveh

*Jason Ur*

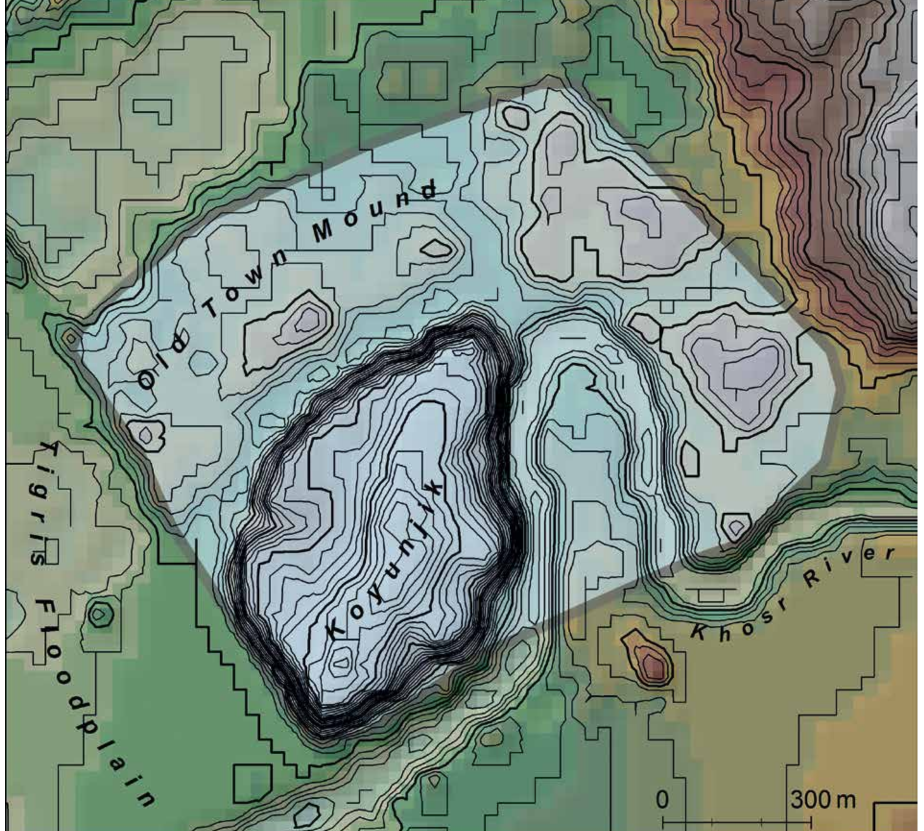
The visitor to the archaeological site of Nineveh most often approaches it from the city of Mosul. Crossing the Tigris, two high mounds come into view. The largest is called Kuyunjik, and it rises 40 m over the plain and encompasses about 45 ha. Starting in the 1840s and intermittently ever since, it has been the scene of archaeological excavation, and its summit and slopes bear the scars of trenching and tunnelling (fig. 8.1). Toward its southern end, scaffolding covers the cleared remains of the throne room of the palace of Sennacherib, the king who made Nineveh the political capital of the empire; visitors can view the battered remains of the marble reliefs that lined its walls. Along the eastern and southern edges of Kuyunjik, the Khosr River flows past on its way to the Tigris. Across it, and a kilometre to the southeast, rises the smaller and lower mound of Nebi Yunus. Unlike Kuyunjik, Nebi Yunus bustles with life; at its summit is the mosque of the prophet Jonah (Arabic Yunus), who is buried in the mound, according to local tradition, and the houses of a small town cover its slopes.

These two mounds represent a small area of the site itself, however; linear ridges of earth link Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus and stretch beyond them to the north and south. They turn east to extend over higher terraces. These ridges are the remains of Nineveh's

*Figure 8.1 Aerial oblique of Kuyunjik taken by the Royal Air Force on 1 November 1933 showing the shafts of nineteenth century excavation tunnelling by Layard and his successors. The town of Mosul is visible in the background, beyond the Tigris River.*

*Figure 8.2 (top) The reconstructed Maški (Watering) Gate, from inside the city, with the remains of elite residential houses in the foreground. Photograph taken in 1990. Courtesy of Augusta McMahon.*

*Figure 8.3 (right) The Old Town Mound and Kuyunjik.*



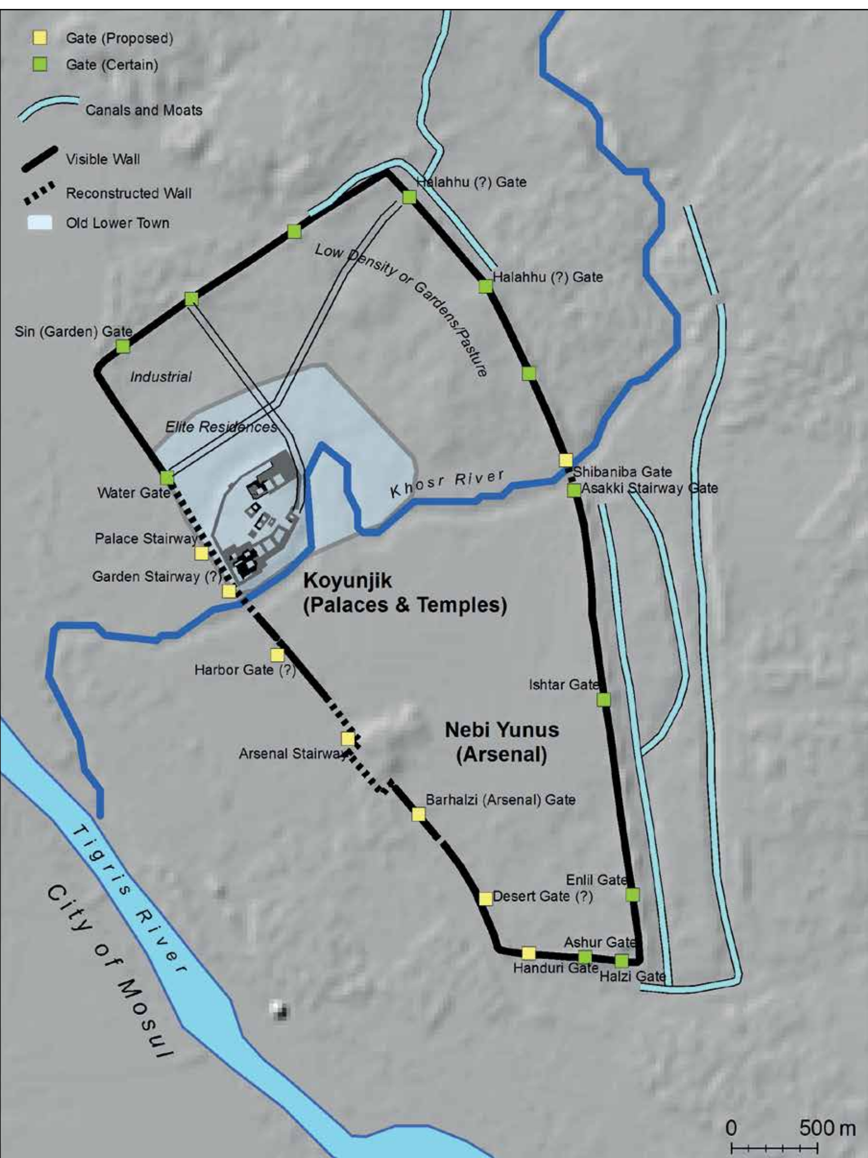



*Figure 8.4 Nineveh in the seventh century BC. Gate designations follow Reade (2016).*

great city walls, and in several places gates through them have been reconstructed in stone and mud brick (fig. 8.2). Immediately outside of them, modern Mosul presses inward, and these reconstructions are deliberate attempts to remind its people that within these walls are the city's history, cultural heritage that is worth protecting from the pressures of development. Within the walls, most of the central lower town south of the Khosr has been consumed by the town below Nebi Yunus, but the northern half and the far southern end are patchworks of cereal fields, small gardens and isolated farmsteads.

Reversing the clock by more than 2,500 years, however, would reveal Nineveh at the height of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, when it was a very different place. By piecing together clues from over 150 years of archaeological investigation, archaeologists and historians can reanimate the imperial capital. Settled life began around 6500 BC, some three millennia before its zenith, when the massive bulk of Kuyunjik was probably a small agricultural village, founded on the edge of the Tigris terrace where the Khosr River flowed into it. Because its earliest villages are so deeply buried, it is almost impossible to say much about them, but by c. 3500 BC the mound could have been as large as 40 ha and already 20 m high (Stronach 1994, 90), making it one of the largest prehistoric towns in northern Mesopotamia. Historical inscriptions suggest that Nineveh continued to grow in importance, especially its Temple of Ištar, but there is very little archaeological evidence from the citadel, and even less from beyond it.

At some point, probably early in the first millennium, the old mound could no longer hold Nineveh's population. A new lower settlement grew in the lower area north

of the old mound (fig. 8.3). The area of this early first millennium lower town can be seen in the contours of the terrain. Excavations in this area revealed 7 m of Neo-Assyrian occupation.

The best-known form of Nineveh took shape when Sennacherib (705/704-681 BC; fig. 35.1) ascended to the throne (fig. 8.4). His transfer of the capital to Nineveh involved massive investments in its urban structure (Reade 2000; Stronach 1994). Sennacherib's engineers shored up the edges of the old mound. Atop it, they razed an old palace, built a massive mud brick terrace, and placed upon it an enormous new palace that Sennacherib named his 'Palace without Rival' (Russell 1991). It may have occupied a full 5 ha, and its bulk on the southern mound probably contributed further to displacing residents from the old mound. Beside the palace was a 'botanical garden' of various tree species from the lands his army had conquered. The mound at Nebi Yunus became the locus of his 'review palace', or 'arsenal'.

Shortly after work had begun on the palace, Sennacherib's work teams began to build a new wall around the city. According to his inscriptions, it was not the first city wall; a predecessor extended some 5 km, which is roughly the circumference of the proposed early first millennium lower town. Sennacherib's new wall extended for 12 km and had as many as eighteen gates; it was 25 m thick and could have been as high as 30 m. It encompassed not only the palaces on Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus, but also the entirety of the old lower town and vast areas to its north and south. It included the low Tigris terraces as well as a large area of upper terrace to the east. Its 750 ha were more than double the size of the former capital cities at Nimrud (ancient Kalhu) and Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin).

The palaces on Kuyunjik and the city wall were highly visible elements of Sennacherib's city, but the vast bulk of the city's space consisted of the low areas within the wall; in this space would have been found the majority of its inhabitants. In his royal inscriptions, Sennacherib expressed a desire to straighten the streets, open them up to sunlight, and to build open plazas within the city. Indeed, there is evidence for broad paved boulevards within the city: a stone-paved street ran from the north end of Kuyunjik straight through the old lower town and on to the Nergal Gate on the north; from there, it is possible that a paved road continued along the edge of the Tigris to the nearby town of Tarbisu (modern Sharif Khan) and possibly beyond. Excavations in the lower town have been very limited (Stronach & Lumsden 1992), but at the time of Sennacherib and his successors, this old town may have housed elite residents. Further to the northwest, near the Sin Gate, surveyors found a heavy concentration of slag. This corner is also one of the lowest areas within the city, and it is possible this industrial area was dedicated to brick-making and firing. The nature of residential life throughout the rest of the lower town is largely unknown. At the first capital, Assur, excavations revealed dense residential settlement. Analysis of satellite photographs of Nimrud suggested variable density, with tight occupation close to the main mound, but more dispersed or low-density settlement further away within the lower town (Ur 2013). Nineveh may have matched the pattern at Nimrud. The high land to the northeast of the citadel had very few surface artefacts, unlike the old town closer in. This region might have been home to gardens, or perhaps intramural pasturelands, or low-density elite residential areas; it might have been a combination of such land uses.

The impact of Imperial Nineveh extended far beyond its walls. Sennacherib describes parks, gardens and even a marsh, with imported plants and animals that made a microcosm of the conquests of the empire. The actual location of these gardens is subject to intense debate. Aerial and satellite imagery show abundant but fragmentary traces of channelling around all sides of the city, and it is certain that the Khosr River was redirected at least in part from flowing through the city's centre. Starting about 10 km up the Khosr, a canal could be traced via satellite imagery, which extended to the northern corner of the city (Ur 2005). Sennacherib mentioned this canal as extending from the town of Kisiri, and we can envision this stretch of the Khosr and the terraces around Nineveh as being well watered and productive of cereals and orchards. Later in his reign, Sennacherib commissioned the construction of canals farther upstream, extending the greater hinterland of Nineveh to the mountains bordering Urartu (see Ur 2017; Morandi Bonacossi, this volume).

Nineveh's final days were violent. Several of its gates were narrowed in anticipation of the Median and Babylonian assault, and when its defences collapsed, many of the bodies of its defenders were left were they fell (Pickworth 2005; Stronach, this volume). The great palaces on Kuyunjik were put to the torch. The survivors of the assault seem to have abandoned the city altogether, which suggests that many of them may have been deportees (or their descendants) who held little allegiance to Assyria. There is scant evidence for later settlement within the ruins of the lower town and atop the fallen remains of the Kuyunjik palaces.

The Medes and Babylonians have long departed, but the threats to Nineveh continue. In recent years, the government in Baghdad and Mosul has been unable to prevent increasing encroachment on Nineveh's lower town (Hanson 2012, 137-49). With the fall of Mosul to ISIL in 2014, artefacts in the city's museum were destroyed, but so was one of the winged *lamassu* guardian statues at the Nergal Gate. In 2016, with the city in dire economic straits, thieves stole the protective roofing over Sennacherib's throne room, exposing to the elements what was left

of its reliefs. Most recently, the ISIL regime sent bulldozers to dismantle the walls and reconstructed Maški and Adad Gates to the city. Even with the liberation of eastern Mosul, including the site of Nineveh, by the Iraqi army in January 2017, the modern threats to Nineveh are as great as anything it has faced in the past two millennia (Bianchi *et al.*, this volume; fig. 8.5).

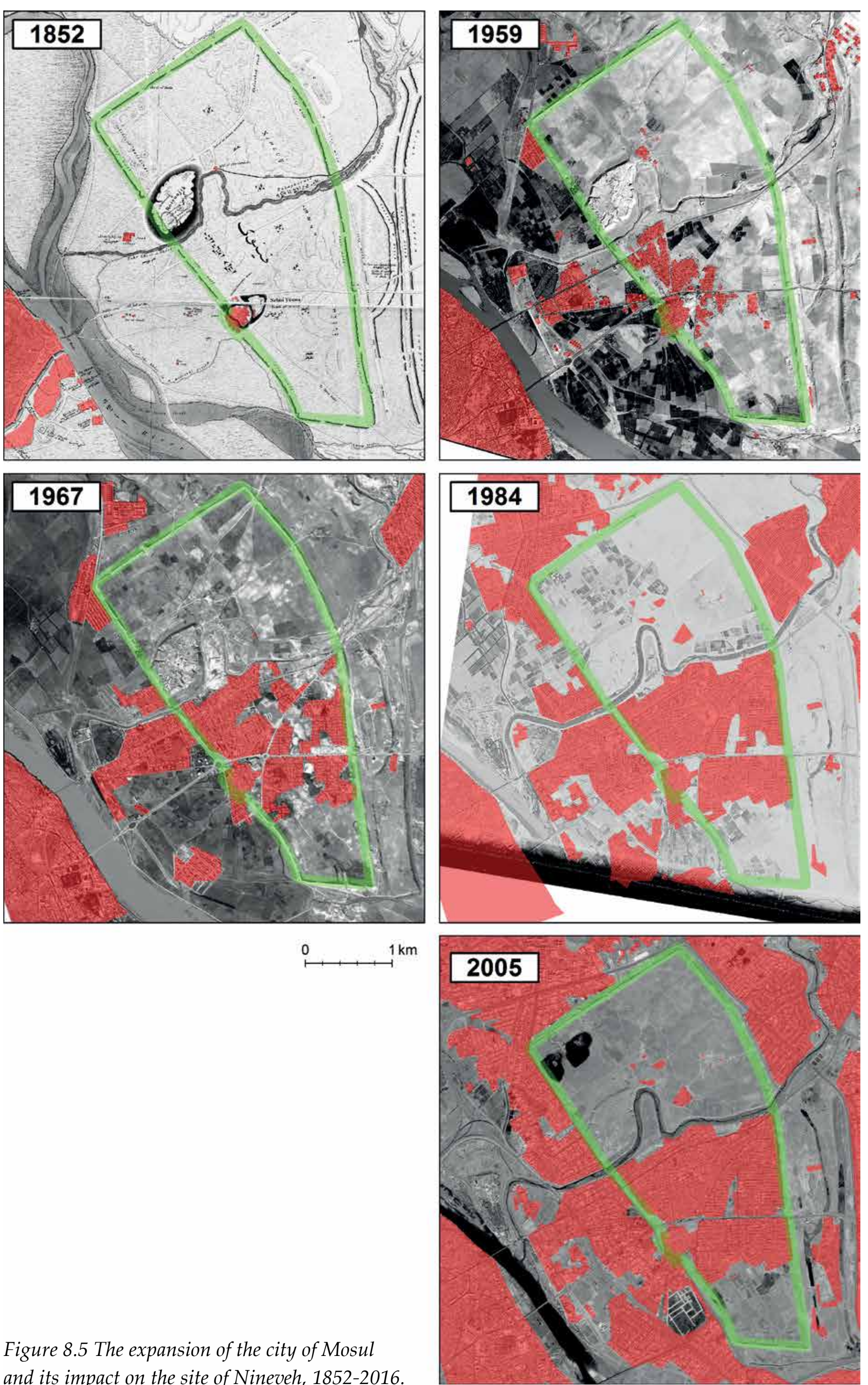



*Figure 8.5 The expansion of the city of Mosul and its impact on the site of Nineveh, 1852-2016.*

# 9. French Research at Nineveh

*Ariane Thomas*

From the eighteenth century onwards, European scholars became increasingly interested in antiquity. The earliest traces of these civilizations were to be found in Middle Eastern countries, under Ottoman rule at that time. Although biblical accounts and Greek and then Latin authors were in agreement that Assyria and Babylonia had been almost entirely destroyed, in the first half of the nineteenth century, travellers to Mesopotamia, most of whom were British, recognized monuments and mounds that seemed to be of archaeological interest, judging from what was visible on the surface.

## 9.1 Paul-Émile Botta, the discoverer of the 'Ninevite' ruins

After seeing in London the collection of Claudius James Rich, the British consul in Baghdad, Jules Mohl (1800-1876), Assistant Secretary to the Société Asiatique de Paris, 'sensed and divined, from rather vague information provided by travellers, the riches lying in store for science in a land so long forgotten' (Place 1867, I, 7). As a result, he informed Paul-Émile Botta (1802-1870; fig. 9.1)[15] of the archaeological interest of the area before the latter departed to take up the newly created post of French consul in Mosul. Botta, who set out in 1842, decided to begin by excavating the Kuyunjik mound, with the mound of Nebi Yunus where the memory of the prophet Jonah[16] was honoured (fig. 9.2).

Between December 1842 and 10 March 1843, Botta explored Kuyunjik, which was situated only half an hour's journey from his Mosul residence (fig. 9.3).[17] He abandoned his investigations after this three-month period, however, considering them fruitless, as they had revealed nothing but 'bricks and insignificant fragments' (Mohl 1845, 2; Pillet 1918, 103).[18] Having been informed of discoveries made at Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin; fig. 9.4), he decided to move his teams there, and remarkable vestiges were soon unearthed, arousing great interest in France. But Botta, who had thus far financed his research himself, met with opposition from the local authorities and ceased excavations in October to wait for the arrival of a *firman* (permit) from the Ottoman authorities that would allow him to continue. The permit – and funds – were brought by the artist Eugène Flandin, appointed to the Khorsabad mission by the French Minister of the Interior.

Work recommenced in May 1844 and continued until the end of October.[19] Meanwhile, the English archaeologist Austen Henry Layard, who had just returned

*Figure 9.1 Portrait of Paul-Émile Botta painted by Charles-Émile Callande de Champmartin. France; 1840; oil painting on canvas; © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Thierry Le Mage.*

15 P.-E. Botta (1802-1870), who had served in Egypt and Yemen, was the son of a Piedmontese historian who emigrated to France after the fall of Napoleon.

16 This mound could not be explored because of its religious significance, even though Rich had previously observed subterranean walls there (Bonomi 1853, 9).

17 The building in this picture looks more like the French consulate in Diyarbakir, but it gives one an idea of the consul in Mosul.

18 According to Place 1867 II, 101, the first trenches were dug too low down on the mound.

19 Both Botta and Place sang the praises of their workforce, especially of the head foreman, Naouchi or Neuman Naouch.

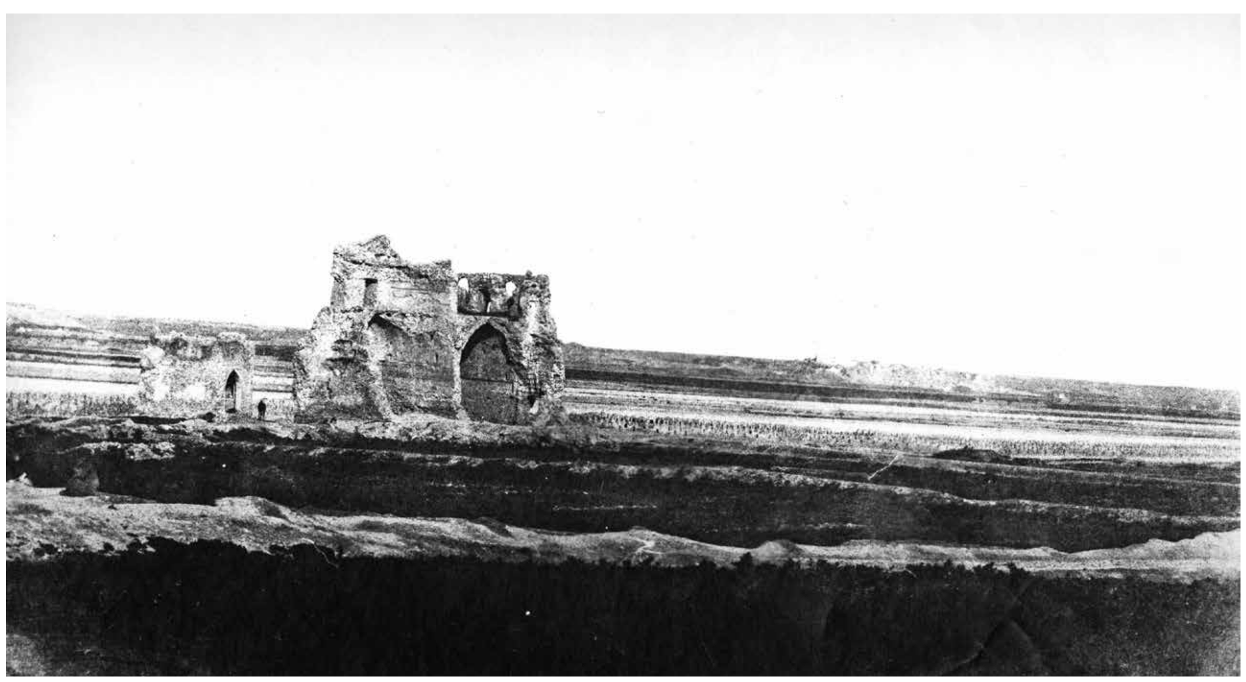


*Figure 9.2 The ruins of the palace of Sultan Lu'lu' on the banks of the Tigris with Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus in the background. Photograph taken by Gabriel Tranchand in c. 1852-1854. Courtesy of Fond Maurice Pillet (print no. 40).*

*Figure 9.3 The French consulate in Diyarbakir or Mosul (one of the two figures on the balcony is thought to be Victor Place). Photograph taken by Gabriel Tranchand in c. 1852-1854. Courtesy of Fond Maurice Pillet (print no. 31).*

*Figure 9.4 Visit of the Pasha of Mosul to the excavations of Khorsabad, painted by Félix Thomas. France; c. 1863; oil on canvas; H 100 cm, W 160 cm; Musée du Louvre, Paris (RF 2010-2). © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Stéphane Maréchalle.*

*Figure 9.5 (top) A necklace made of stone beads found by Victor Place on February 17th, 1852. Iraq, Khorsabad; unknown date; Musée du Louvre, Paris (N 8308). © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Mathieu Rabeau.*

*Figure 9.6 (right) A head of an Assyrian sceptre. Iraq, Khorsabad; 8th century BC; bronze, silver and iron; H 8.6 cm; Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels (O.04784). © Royal Museums of Art and History.*

*Figure 9.7 Victor Place in Mosul. Photograph taken by Gabriel Tranchand in c. 1852-1854. Courtesy of Fond Maurice Pillet.*

from Khuzestan in southwest Iran, went to see Botta before excavating at Kuyunjik, the Frenchman being too busy in Khorsabad to continue with the trenches he had dug at Kuyunjik. Moreover, Botta and the scientific community considered that with Khorsabad, 'Nineveh was found' (Place 1867, I, 6).[20] His finds, sent first to Mosul and then to Baghdad in June 1845, were embarked for transport in March 1846 and reached Paris in February 1847 (figs. 9.5-6). The 'Assyrian Museum' inaugurated at the Louvre in May was the very first in the modern world. Botta and Flandin were quick to publish their remarkable *Monuments de Ninive*.[21] After the French Revolution of 1848, Botta was sent in disgrace to Tripoli in modern Lebanon, but his 'name (…) remained thereafter associated with the resurrection of Nineveh and the reconstruction of the history of Assyria' (Place 1867, I, 7).

### 9.2 Victor Place and courteous rivalry with the English

The lead taken by Botta,[22] the true pioneer of archaeological research in Mesopotamia after the previous reconnaissance trips and surface investigations, naturally prompted emulation by the English. Layard's discoveries at Kuyunjik entered the British Museum in their turn, and the first Assyrian rooms were inaugurated in 1851. After visiting them

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20 Nonetheless, we should not forget the strong opposition of J.C.F. Hoefer to the authenticity of the Assyrian discoveries. He was convinced that they were much more recent, as he argued in two memoires on the ruins of Nineveh (Hoefer 1850) and many papers in the popular newspaper *L'illlustration,* especially against F. de Saulcy.

21 Produced in 300 copies, published in large folio with prints of Flandin's drawings, and a text and drawings of inscriptions by Botta. Contrary to the English strategy, the French published at great expense, drawing from the funds allotted to the excavations and the transportation of finds.

22 Botta himself was reluctant to let the English finish what France had begun (Chevalier 2002, 50).

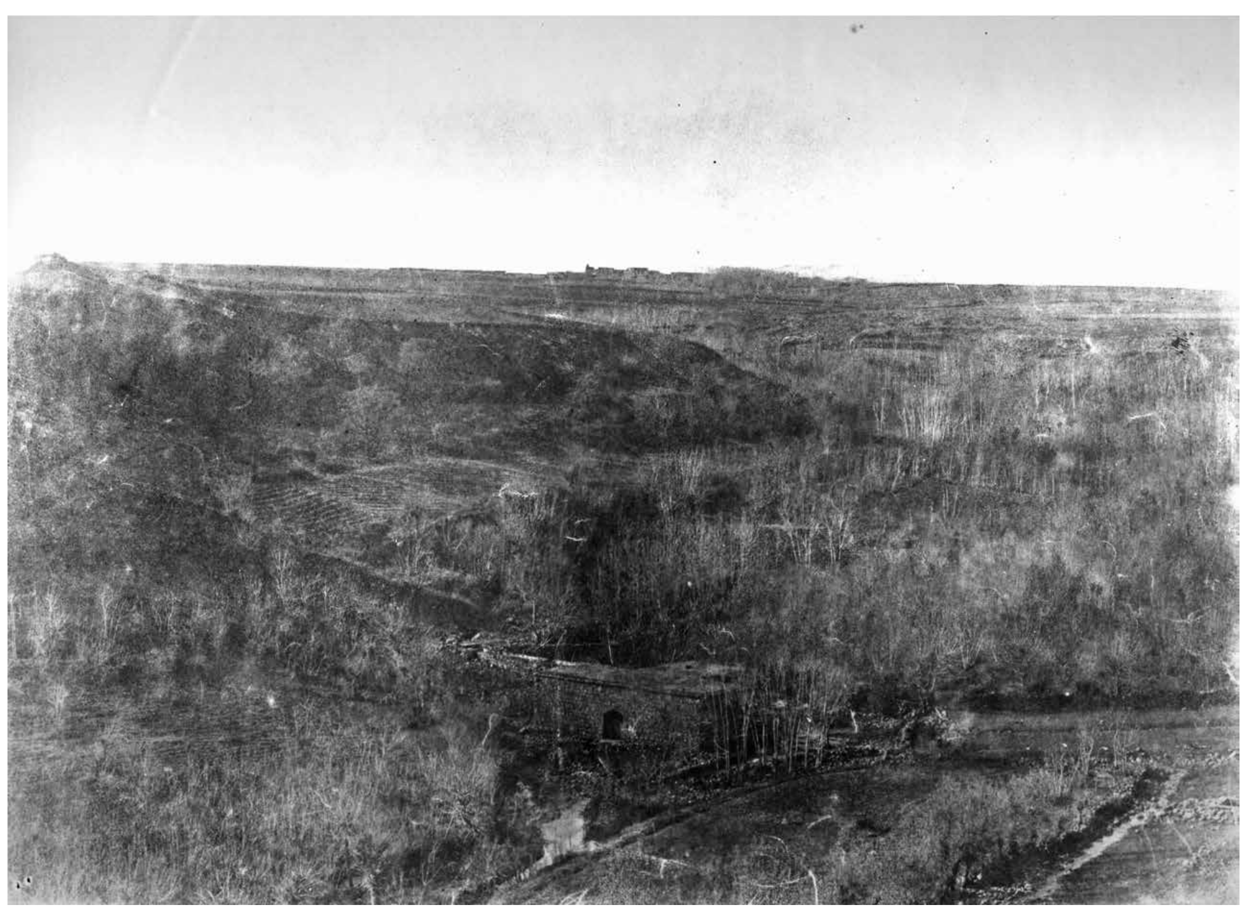


*Figure 9.8 Possibly the site of Nineveh. Photograph taken by Gabriel Tranchand in c. 1852-1854. Courtesy of Fond Maurice Pillet (print no. 9).*

the same year, the French Interior Minister Léon Faucher (1803-1854), impressed by the richness of Layard's Assyrian collection, decided that French research in Assyria should immediately be resumed – a decision enthusiastically supported by the Director General of Museums, Émile de Nieuwerkerke (1811-1892), and by the committee of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres (Chevalier 2002, 51), which had supported Botta. The consular post in Mosul was thus re-established for Victor Place (1818-1875; fig. 9.7),[23] who was given an ambitious agenda: to resume excavations[24] at Khorsabad and to investigate the whole Assyrian region,[25] including several sites that had already been explored by the English.

From the time of his arrival, Place established friendly relations with Colonel Henry Rawlinson (1810-1895), the British Resident in Baghdad, and in January 1852 he was able to record a series of inscriptions at Kuyunjik (fig. 9.8). There, he realized that the English were only investigating a third of the vast site, and a courteous rivalry developed between the French and the English, neither wanting to be outdone by the other,[26] both

23 This was the first consular post for Place after various missions in Haiti, Cadiz, Naples and Saint-Domingue (Chevalier 2002, 26).

24 Mostly tunnel excavations by the French and English, apart from very large or less covered areas that were explored in the open air. Place's publication, coming after Botta's book, shows a great interest in architecture and a desire to recreate the maps, plans and elevations of the explored ruins. Place was assisted in this by the architect and painter Félix Thomas, and by Gabriel Tranchand, who put the brand new technique of photography to the service of archaeology.

25 Place 1867, II, 145-190 lists the sites explored in Assyria. The general goal was to explore all of Mesopotamia, in addition to the scientific expedition to Media and Mesopotamia directed by Fulgence Fresnel, the former French consul in Jeddah, authorized by the same permit.

26 This was more between individuals, at a time when the two countries were allies in the Crimean War.

wanting to preserve good relations. Rawlinson went so far as to suggest that France should choose reliefs for the Louvre, in exchange for the transportation to Brest of boxes containing the English excavation finds (Thomas, this volume). He also suggested to Place that they should share the Nineveh site, the English keeping the southern section, but Place was unable to take up his offer due to lack of funding. In December 1853, having dismissed his workforce and assembled his findings on the banks of the Tigris, Place looked on with regret as Rawlinson's agent, Hormuzd Rassam (1826-1910), unearthed the palace of Ashurbanipal with its famous hunting reliefs and library, in the northern section of the mound. Rassam is reported to have told Place, 'You were wrong not to accept our offer, as we have found these beautiful things on your land, using your workers'.[27] This version by Place differs considerably from Rassam's account, according to which he entered the northern section of the site at night, unknown to the French (Rassam 1897, 24). The lack of funding had already obliged Place to make way for Hilmi Pasha, the governor of Mosul, who had begun excavations on the mound of Nebi Yunus in October 1852 (Chevalier 2002, 29). Disillusioned by his experiences and by the tragic shipwreck in the Tigris of his excavation finds in May 1855 (Petit, this volume), Place published *Ninive et l'Assyrie* in 1867, in which he detailed his work at Khorsabad and throughout Assyria. He expressed his belief that Khorsabad was the true Nineveh, the city that Diodorus of Siciliy had intended to describe but had confused with other memories (Place 1867, II, 194-5). The title of Place's publication, like that of Botta's, was probably chosen not because of confusion about the identification of Khorsabad, but because of the perception of the Nineveh of biblical and secular texts as a whole complex, an image that applied as well to Khorsabad as it did to the precise site of Nineveh at Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus. It should be remembered that the word 'Nineveh' and adjective 'Ninevite' were commonly used at that time as synonyms for 'Assyria' and 'Assyrian' (see especially Place 1867, I, 7, 301 and II, p. 1, 82, 84, 87, 95, 148, 192-3). Finally, the title reflects the work of Botta and Place, who had also excavated at Kuyunjik before the English and then alongside them (albeit modestly), as is apparent from drawings of reliefs found there by the English excavators (Place 1867, III, pl. 44bis, 45, 49, 50-66).

After the arrival in 1856 of the works that had miraculously survived the shipwreck of the finds excavated by Place, Fresnel and the English, France conducted no further campaigns in Assyria, despite the efforts of Francisque Bouvet, Place's successor in Mosul.[28] French research at Nineveh as a site, and on Assyriology in general, was continued by museums and other research institutes, inspired by the pioneering work of Botta and Place at Kuyunjik and Khorsabad.

27 AN, F21, 546 verso. Place to AE, January 26, 1854 (quoted by Chevalier 2002, 57).

28 Pillet 1918, 109 mentions the letters he sent on this subject to the Ministry in November 1856, then in February and April 1857, to which it was replied that too much money had already been spent.

# 10. The British Museum Excavations at Nineveh

*John Curtis*

Amongst the early travellers to the site of Nineveh was Claudius James Rich (1786-1820; fig. 6.6), but the credit for the first proper archaeological examination of the site must go to the French Consul Paul-Émile Botta (1802-1870; fig. 9.1). His work was confined to Kuyunjik, where he dug near the western extremity of the mound for three months in the winter of 1842-43, but the results seem to have been disappointing (Botta & Flandin 1849-1850, V, 4).

In 1845 Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894; fig. 11.1), without doubt the greatest of the early Assyrian explorers, arrived on the scene. Although the main focus of his work was Nimrud, he also undertook extensive excavations at Nineveh between 1846 and 1851 (fig. 10.1; Fales, this volume). He was even able to dig for a short time on Nebi Yunus (Layard 1853, 596-8), but seems to have found little apart from some slabs inscribed with the titles and genealogy of Esarhaddon (reigned 681-669 BC) and a few bricks. His main discovery on the Kuyunjk mound was the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC), best described in his own words:

> *In this magnificent edifice I had opened no less than seventy-one halls, chambers, and passages, whose walls, almost without an exception, had been panelled with slabs of sculptured alabaster recording the wars, the triumphs, and the great deeds of the Assyrian king. By a rough calculation, about 9,880 feet, or nearly two miles [3.2 km], of bas-reliefs, with twenty-seven portals, formed by colossal winged bulls and lion-sphinxes, were uncovered in that part alone of the building explored during my researches, Layard 1853, 589.*

In spite of the grand scale of Layard's excavations, however, it is estimated that he investigated less than half of the building. Nevertheless, amongst the many reliefs he uncovered were series showing the siege and capture of Lachish, a campaign in the marshes, and the quarrying and transportation of winged bulls for the palace (fig. 10.2). Although this palace was sacked and burnt in 612 BC, it was surprisingly devoid of small finds, with the exception of cuneiform tablets. A large number of these were found, particularly in Rooms 40-41. Layard describes how tablets and tablet fragments covered the floors of these rooms to 'the height of a foot or more' (c. 30 cm) (Layard 1853, 345).

After Layard's return to England in the spring of 1851, operations at Kuyunjik continued under the general control of Colonel Henry Rawlinson (1810-1895), the British Resident in Baghdad, with Christian Rassam (1808-1872), British Vice-Consul in Mosul, responsible for the day-to-day running of the excavations. During this time, little was found at Kuyunjik except for an interesting group of Parthian period tombs, in several of which the faces of the corpses were covered with gold masks (fig. 10.3; Curtis 1976).

In 1853 the mantle was picked up by Layard's former assistant, Hormuzd Rassam (1826-1910; fig. 10.4). He worked at Kuyunjik from 1852 until the spring of 1854, during which time he found the White Obelisk (fig. 2.2), probably dating from the

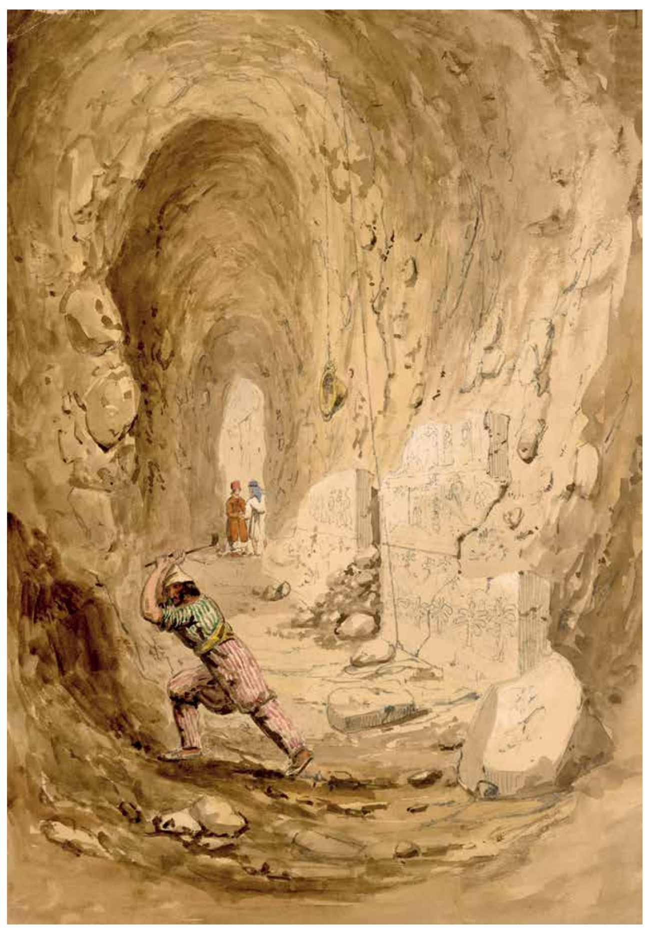


*Figure 10.1 (left) Tunnel excavation in c. 1850 at Kuyunjik. Watercolour made by Frederick Charles Cooper. Paper; H 31.9 cm, W 22 cm; British Museum, London (2010,6001.3). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

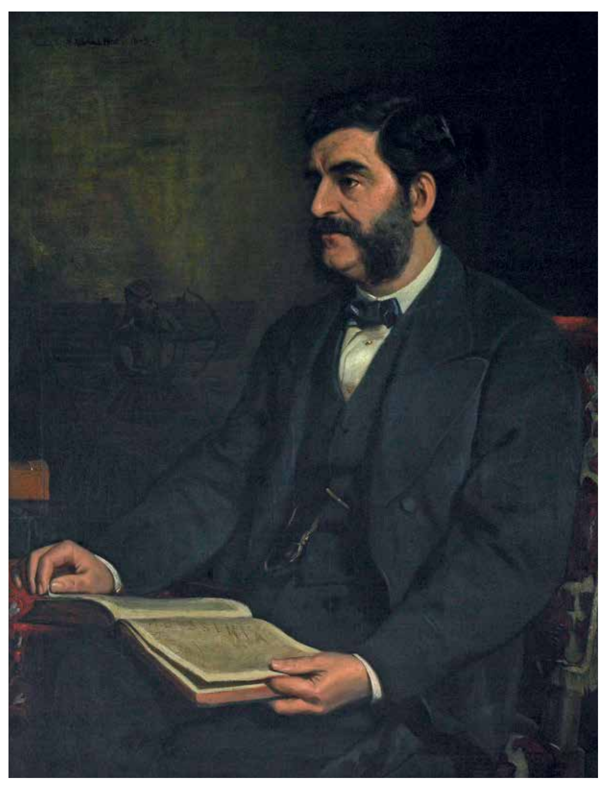
*Figure 10.2 (top) Relief depicting Babylonian prisoners and Assyrian soldiers. Nineveh, Iraq; Room LXX (GGG), SW Palace; 7th century BC; gypsum; H 71 cm, W 113 cm; Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (AN 1933.1575). © Ashmolean Museum.*

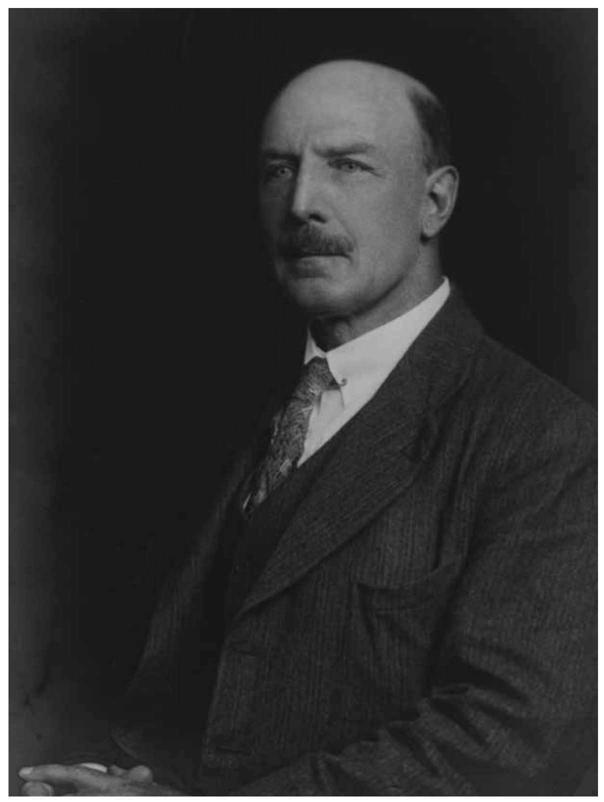
reign of Ashurnasirpal I (1049-1031 BC), and the stone statue of Ištar with the inscription of Ashur-bel-kala (reigned 1073-1056 BC). His greatest achievement, however, was the discovery of the North Palace of Ashurbanipal, with reliefs that included the magnificent series from Room C showing the royal lion hunt. These are now in the British Museum. Large numbers of cuneiform tablets were also found in the North Palace, which together with the tablets from the Southwest Palace form the bulk of what is known as the Kuyunjik Collection in the British Museum. This is now a valuable resource for Assyriologists.

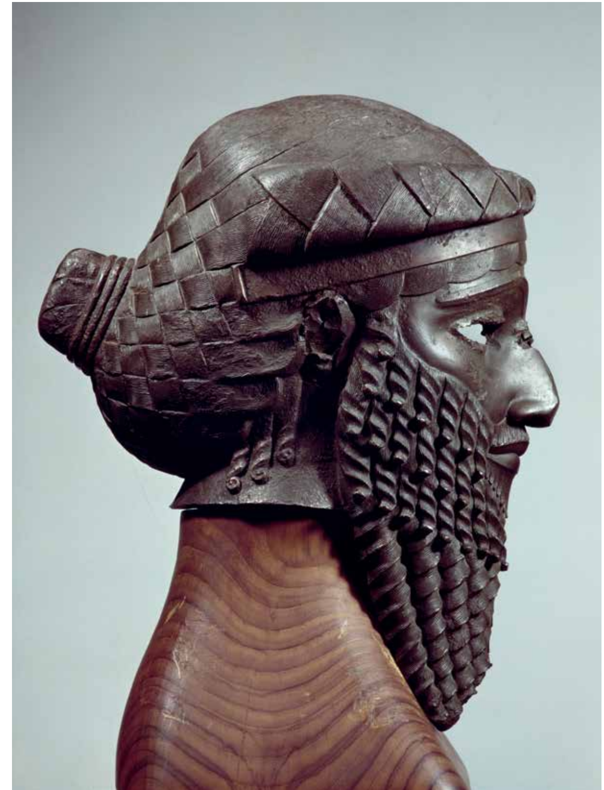
In 1854 Rassam was succeed by William Kennet Loftus (1820-1858), who, along with the artist William Boutcher (1814-1900), worked at Kuyunjik until March 1855 on behalf of the so-called Assyrian Excavation Fund. Their efforts were mainly directed at the North Palace, which they continued to clear and in which they found much of interest, including further series of lion hunts.

After 1855 there was a lull in archaeological work at Kuyunjik until George Smith (1840-1876) of the British Museum arrived in 1873. He had already become famous by discovering in the British Museum amongst the Kuyunjik Collection the Babylonian account of the Biblical flood, and he was sent out to find the missing portion. In this quest he was successful, but otherwise his excavations were not very productive. Smith worked on the site for two months in 1873 and again in 1874. He returned to Mosul in 1876, but in that year was able to do little work and died near Aleppo on his way home. Finds made in the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib included 'part of a crystal throne … in too mutilated condition to copy, but as far as it is preserved closely resembling in shape the bronze one discovered by Mr Layard at Nimrud' (Smith 1875, 98, 432), and a stone lintel featuring two winged felines on either side of a vase (Smith 1875, pl.

*Figure 10.3 Golden foil face-mask from the Parthian period.*
*Nineveh, Iraq; c. 2nd century AD; gold; H 17 cm, W 16 cm;*
*British Museum, London (1856,0909.67/BM 123894).*
*© The Trustees of the British Museum.*







opp. p. 308). This is clearly of Parthian date (c. 1st – 2nd century AD) and must date from a later occupation of the site.

Between 1878 and 1882 Hormuzd Rassam was again engaged by the British Museum to excavate in Mesopotamia, and during this time he worked at Kuyunjik as well as Nebi Yunus. He was able to do the latter by buying some houses on the Nebi Yunus mound, but in spite of this he found little. Rassam reports, though, that during building works before 1878, the mosque authorities found 'a bronze throne covered with inscriptions and representations of animals and bronze figures' (Rassam 1897, 302-3). It was broken to pieces and divided amongst officials. Some iron helmets found by Rassam at Nineveh are of Sasanian date. British Museum excavations at Nineveh were resumed by Ernest Alfred Thompson Wallis Budge (1857-1934; fig. 10.5), who worked at Nineveh for two seasons in 1888-89 and 1890-91, but he was mainly concerned with finding tablets (Budge 1920, II, 22).

The British Museum excavations were reopened by Leonard William King (1869-1919) and Reginald Campbell Thompson (1876-1941; fig. 10.6) in 1903-5. In 1903-4 King excavated on the sites of the Southwest Palace and the North Palace and sunk a large number of shafts all over the mound, and in 1904-5 Campbell Thompson focused on the temple of Nabû.

Twenty years later, Campbell Thompson returned to Nineveh and in 1927-28 worked again in the temple of Nabû. In the 1929-30 season he concentrated on an area on the east side of the Nabû Temple, which he wrongly believed to be the site of a small palace of Ashurnasirpal II (reigned 883-859 BC). In 1930-31, attention was focused on the temple of Ištar in the centre of the Kuyunjik mound. Although it was known that Ashurnasirpal II had rebuilt the temple and that it was probably used until the end of the Neo-Assyrian period, little of the building remained except the mud brick platform on which it had stood, which was built over earlier prehistoric levels. The most remarkable discovery of this season was in fact the cast bronze head of an Akkadian ruler, c. 2100 BC, which is now one of the treasures of the Iraq Museum in Baghdad (fig. 10.7; Reade 2000, fig. 68). Also in the 1930-31 season, on a site next to the Ištar Temple, Max Edgar Lucien Mallowan (1904-1978) dug a sondage right down to virgin soil at a depth of 27 m beneath the modern surface of the mound (fig. 20.2; Thompson & Mallowan 1933; Rova, this volume). This sondage was 15 $m^2$ at the top, decreasing to 2 $m^2$ at the bottom, and revealed a sequence of occupation at Nineveh stretching back to the Hassuna period in the sixth millennium BC. The results of this work have proved to be invaluable for an understanding of the prehistoric archaeology of Northern Iraq.

*Figure 10.4 (top left) Portrait of Hormuzd Rassam painted by Arthur Acklant Hunt in 1869. UK; oil on canvas; H 110 cm, W 85 cm; British Museum, London (1955,0630.1). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

*Figure 10.5 (top right) Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge photographed in 1930 by Bassano. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.*

*Figure 10.6 (bottom left) Reginald Campbell Thompson photographed in 1934 by Walter Stoneman. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.*

*Figure 10.7 (bottom right) Bronze head of an Akkadian ruler found in 1930-1931. Nineveh, Iraq; c. 2100 BC; bronze; H 36.6 cm; Iraq Museum, Baghdad (IM 11331).*

# 11. Austen Henry Layard

*Frederick Mario Fales*

Born in 1817 to a British family of Huguenot origin, Austen Henry Layard (fig. 11.1) spent his childhood basking in a cosmopolitan atmosphere, enhanced by extensive travel in France and Italy. His formal education in England after the early death of his father was not painless, due to his multilingual rearing and his personal penchant for romantic, exotic literature. At seventeen he was apprenticed to his uncle Benjamin Austen's law firm, but he detested the routine, preferring social encounters and summer travel abroad to Northern Europe and Italy. By 1839, having passed his exams, it was clear to Layard that he was unfit to be a London lawyer; but luckily, his uncle Charles recommended him for a post with the colonial administration in Ceylon. To reach the island, Layard joined the slightly older Edward Mitford, who was headed for a coffee-farming future but dreaded the sea; thus an unusual trip on horseback, across the lands described in Layard's exotic texts, was planned.

Starting out from Belgium, the travellers crossed Albania and Macedonia, reaching Constantinople, and then proceeding through Anatolia to Aleppo and Jerusalem, finally arriving in Mosul in March 1840. At Layard's request, the couple visited Northern Iraq, admiring the vast site of Nimrud (ancient Kalhu) on the Tigris, and then travelled downstream to Baghdad and Babylon. By now utterly enthralled with the East, Layard dreamed of visiting inner Persia, even of crossing through wild and lawless areas to Seistan, but Mitford would have none of it and the two parted company. Now by himself, Layard spent almost two years in the rebellious tribal areas of Khuzistan and Luristan, often skirting physical danger or suspicion of espionage against the *shah*, who was in conflict with the Ottoman Sultan and distrustful of westerners. Having returned from his adventures, Layard left Baghdad in late 1842 for Constantinople, passing again through Mosul. Here he met the newly appointed French vice-consul Paul-Émile Botta (1802-1870; fig. 9.1), and the two immediately struck up a friendship based on their fascination with the vast and inscrutable mound of Kuyunjik, facing the city beyond the Tigris. In the Ottoman capital Constantinople, Layard gained the ear and sympathy of Ambassador Stratford Canning (1786-1880), who was interested in the young man's unique knowledge about events in Khuzistan. Canning confided a series of diplomatic tasks to Layard, who, in the meantime, was corresponding with Botta and writing newspaper reports on the latter's attempts on the mound of Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin), northeast of Mosul. A plea to Canning to support the excavation of Nimrud largely fell on deaf ears until Botta's major Assyrian discoveries made the news in late 1844. At this point, the pressure of Anglo-French diplomatic competition prevailed and Layard's wish was granted, albeit accompanied by a limited budget.

Haunted by 'visions of palaces underground, of gigantic monsters, of sculptured figures, of endless inscriptions', Layard began work at Nimrud with a small team in November 1845, rapidly proceeding with crude techniques in digging up structures that appeared on the surface (fig. 11.2). To counteract the religious hostility of the local Muslim population, Nestorian Christian workers from the hilly regions, themselves often harassed by the Kurds, were employed. Despite numerous squabbles with the Mosul civil and religious authorities and the new French vice-consul (Botta was now in

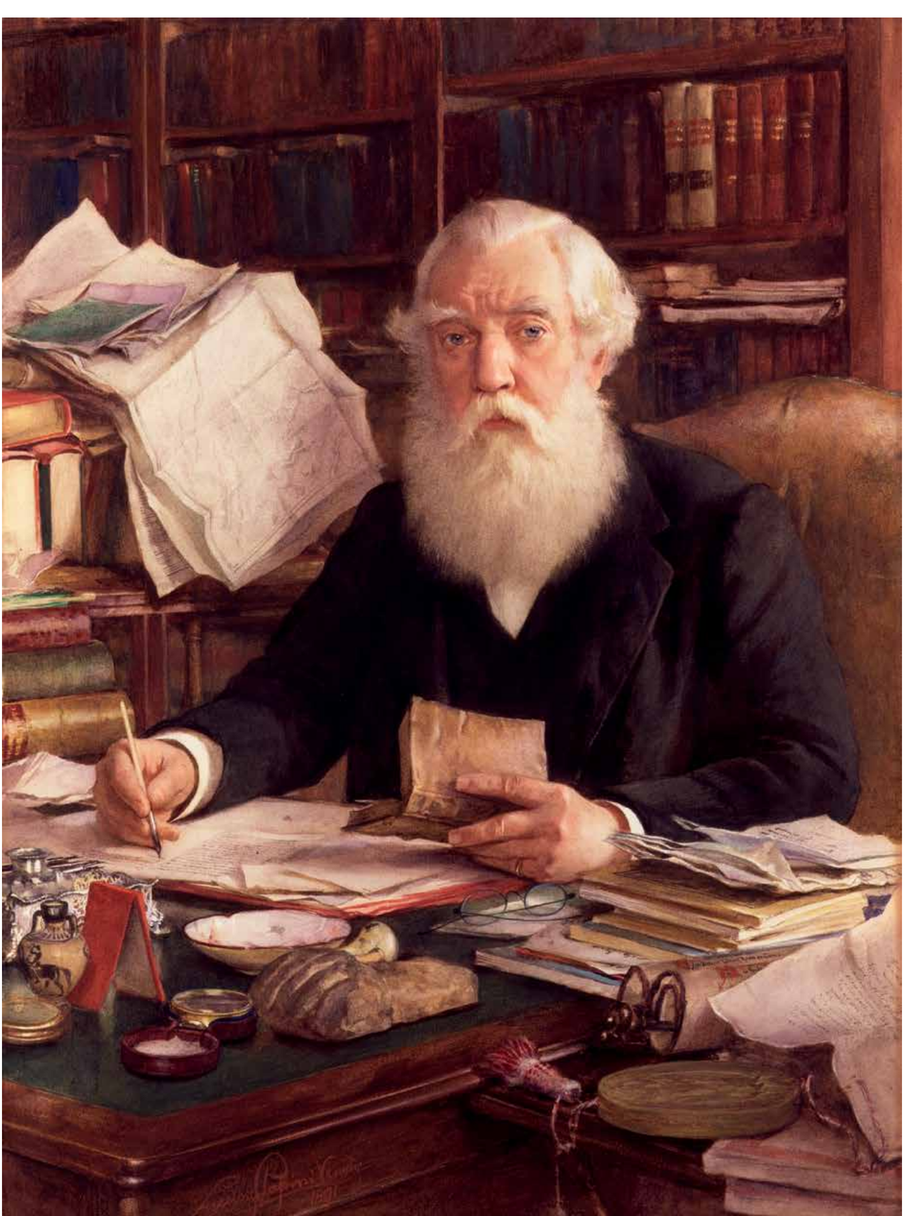


*Figure 11.1 Portrait of Austen Henry Layard painted by Ludwig Johann Passini, 1891. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG 1797).*

Basra, shipping his finds to the Louvre), the winter passed and Layard finally received the long-awaited legal permission (*firman*) to continue working from the imperial Grand Vizier, obtained by a now incensed Canning. The first crates of amazing Nimrud finds of statuary, reliefs and texts sailed for Baghdad in July 1846. Late in the summer, the British Museum nominated Layard as its 'agent' and assumed responsibility for the excavation and its funding, although the latter was inadequate. At the beginning of 1847, Layard discovered the 'Black Obelisk' (fig. 11.3) that portrayed and described the submission of Jehu of Israel to Shalmaneser III (reigned 859/858-824 BC) – although neither Layard nor his correspondent Henry Creswicke Rawlinson (1810-1895), the decipherer of Behistun, could yet understand the text. In late spring, the Nimrud excavation was closed. With much difficulty, Layard removed the colossal Assyrian statues, placing them on wooden rollers and then on barges for Basrah. Before ending his eighteen-month stint in Mesopotamia, Layard also dabbled in digs at Kuyunjik and Qalat Shergat, and left for Baghdad and London in June 1847, just as the first cases of finds with reliefs were arriving at the British Museum.

Figure 11.2 Layard's drawing of the site of Nimrud. Reproduced from Layard 1849, Pl. 98.

Personal appreciation and rapid fame awaited the 30-year-old discoverer. After speaking, at Botta's friendly request, for the Academy in Paris, Layard spent the year 1848 nursing his health and pondering his future at home. For the publisher John Murray, he wrote a two-volume work (*Nineveh and its Remains,* 1849) that became the first archaeological bestseller, skilfully blending travel accounts and reports of discoveries (fig. 11.4). In the meantime, his Assyrian finds were beginning to challenge the very underpinnings of Bible-based British education, while art historians debated the aesthetic quality of the Nimrud reliefs versus that of the Elgin marbles, and a small host of experts (led by Rawlinson) were hard at work on deciphering Assyrian cuneiform, which they succeeded in doing in 1857.

Layard was back in Mosul in 1849, with the young Assyrian Christian Hormuzd Rassam (1826-1910) as his assistant. The mound of Kuyunjik was thoroughly excavated and revealed its immense treasure of reliefs from Sennacherib's palace (Kertai, this volume). In the meantime, the Ninurta Temple was brought to light by Layard's workers at Nimrud, and inscribed clay tablets were beginning to appear in vast numbers at both sites. But disputes over funding from the Museum and an unsuccessful dig at Babylon finally sapped Layard's enthusiasm for the East. He left Mosul for the last time in April 1851, conferring Kuyunjik to Rassam.

Layard's archaeological career ended at the age of 34. He devoted the remainder of his working life to politics, both under Palmerston and Gladstone, but his heated and controversial reports on Eastern questions failed to elicit Queen Victoria's sympathy. His foreign appointments were as an envoy in Madrid, and then as Ambassador to Constantinople under Disraeli (a friend since his early youth). After 1880, he retired with his wife Enid to Venice, where he had co-founded the Murano glass factory; here he wrote his memoirs, and acquired (aided by the connoisseur Giovanni Morelli) a vast number of Venetian artistic masterpieces, now housed in the National Gallery in London. He died in 1894.

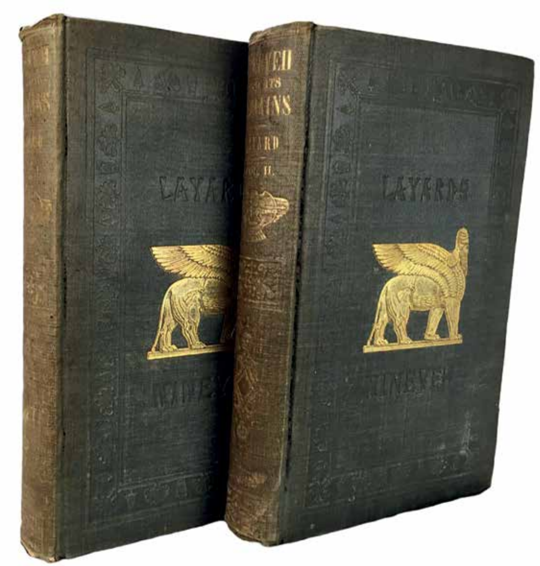



*Figure 11.3 (left) The 'Black Obelisk' recording the achievements of king Shalmaneser III. Nimrud, Iraq; 825 BC; limestone; H 197.5 cm, W 45.1 cm; British Museum, London (1848,1104.1/BM 118885).*
*© The Trustees of the British Museum.*

*Figure 11.4 (right) Frontispiece of Layards book Nineveh and Its Remains (1849).*

# 12. The Curse of the Tigris River

*Lucas P. Petit*

> *To the king, my lord: your servant Assur-bani. Good health to the king, my lord! Assur-sumi-ke'in called me to help and loaded the bull colossi on the boats, but the boats could not carry the load [and sank]. Now, although it cost me a great trouble, I have now hauled them up again,* Parpola 1987, SAA 1 no. 119.

This Assyrian cuneiform tablet describes a shipping accident in the eighth century BC. Most Neo-Assyrian cities were founded directly along the Tigris (fig. 12.1); the river acted as an important means of transport from prehistoric times onwards, beautifully shown on Neo-Assyrian reliefs found in Nineveh. To bring excavated material to their museums, nineteenth-century explorers used very similar techniques: rafts made of inflated sheepskins and wood (fig. 12.2). But the slow-moving ships were vulnerable to the elements and made easy prey for pirates.

In April 1850, Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894) fell victim to the curse of the river Tigris. After a dry winter, he was finally able to send the sculptures he had found to Europe. But the waters had risen far above their usual level and an embankment had given way, causing one of the rafts to drift about one mile away from the Tigris (Layard 1853, 174). Captain Jones, commander of a British flotilla, managed to reach the uncharted swamps and convey the second raft to Basra (Larsen 1996, 257).

*Figure 12.1 Women washing clothes in the Tigris near Mosul, 1932. Courtesy of the American Colony, Jerusalem. Matson Photograph Collection.*

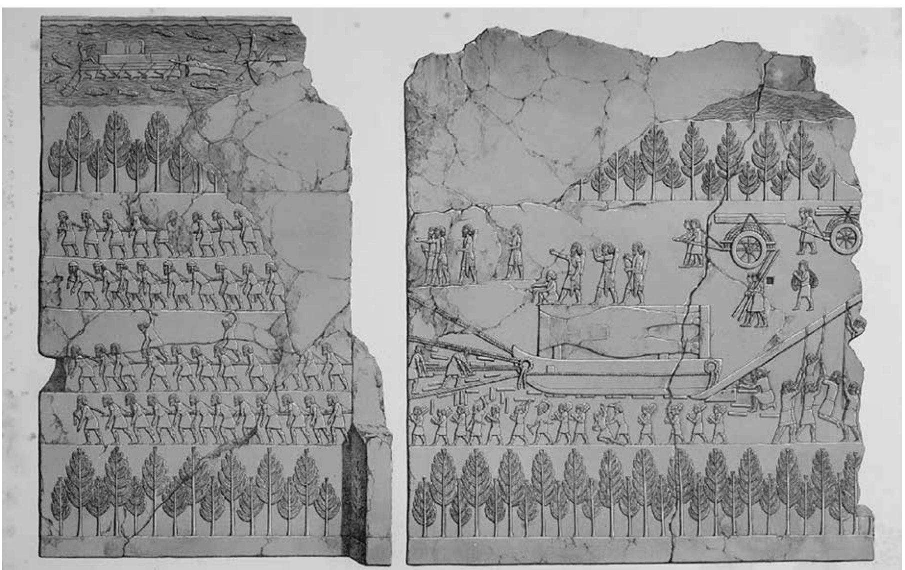


*Figure 12.2 Drawing of relief with a transportation scene. Reproduced from Layard 1853, Pl. 13.*

Pirates were also becoming a problem for the archaeologists. One common practice was to sacrifice a sheep to ensure the success of a voyage, but this offering did not always help. On 21 July 1851, Rassam, Layard's right-hand man, lost eleven crates during an attack by Bedouin just below al-Sharqat. They opened the crates and destroyed the slabs (Layard 1852, xxi). We have no idea what the content was and how much of Nineveh's treasure was left in the Tigris mud.

Most influential was the event that occurred in May 1855 (Larsen 1996). In this year, the French consul Victor Place (1818-1875) wanted to send a shipment to the Louvre. Fifty tons of finds from Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin), Nineveh and Babylon were loaded in Baghdad onto one large but very old boat and four rafts. Place appointed a language teacher, M. Clément, as the commander. After the first confrontation, Clément lost all of his valuable material and fell into serious trouble at the next customs checkpoint. On 21 May, the flotilla was boarded by heavily-armed men and the ship was violently driven into the riverbank. The crew was beaten and robbed, and Clément reached the British residence in Basra in a terrible condition. The pirates were looking for wood – a valuable material in this woodless area – and had no interest in the excavated objects. The rafts were also plundered and were left barely able to float. One raft with a bull colossus and numerous crates sunk close to al-Qurna, and another was lost altogether. Only two rafts reached Basra with part of their cargo. Place was in shock when he heard the news: he had lost all of his finds, notes and drawings from the Khorsabad excavations, and Fresnel's work on Babylon had also vanished. The absence of any inventory list for Place's shipment makes it hard to tell exactly what was lost. We know that of the 235 cases, only 28 were saved. Sixteen cases were filled with finds from Nineveh,[29] two cases with private material belonging to Place (a trumpet!), eight cases were filled with unknown content, and there was one bull from Khorsabad[30] and one colossal figure of a blessing genius.[31] Some attempts were made to rescue the finds, which resulted only in the recovery of a few crates. Unlike the Neo-Assyrian king Sargon II (reigned c. 721-705 BC), they were unable to haul up the sculptures. What remained was the curse of the Tigris: Fresnel, the excavator of Babylon, died a few months later; Victor Place, depressed by the turn of events, left archaeology and died poor and alone in Romania in 1875; and the unfortunate Clément was soon forgotten.

29 Musée du Louvre, Paris (AO 19903-11).

30 Musée du Louvre, Paris (AO 19857).

31 Musée du Louvre, Paris (AO 19863).

# 13. Archaeology, Politics and Espionage

*Frederick Mario Fales*

The connection between archaeology in the Near East and politics and espionage is a recurring theme in various categories of popular fiction, from mere whodunits to genuine spy-novels, meaning that the subject is often dismissed as quite improbable in real life. But it is a fact that between the early nineteenth century and the Second World War, a number of cases linking archaeology, politics and espionage were documented in the history of excavations in the Fertile Crescent, including Nineveh. They all concerned attempts by the European powers to establish footholds in the Ottoman Near East for their imperialistic schemes; and archaeologists were enrolled or signed up as 'agents', due to their first-hand knowledge of the land, its people and its languages.

The story begins with the deep-seated rivalry between Napoleonic France and England over territorial control of Mesopotamia, as a potential strategic gateway to British-ruled India. In this light, a representative of the British East India Company, Claudius James Rich (1786-1821; fig. 6.6), was sent in 1808 to Baghdad to evaluate

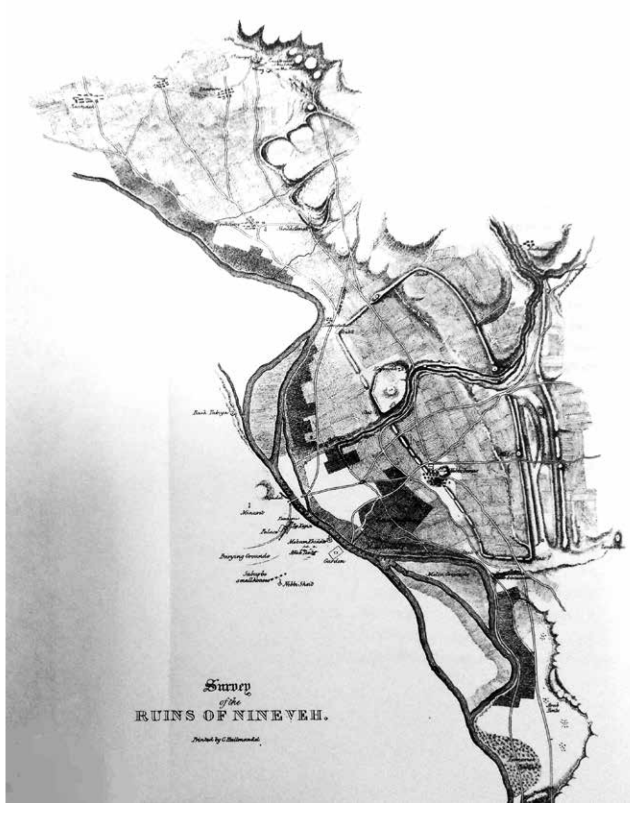



*Figure 13.1 Plan of Nineveh made by Claudius James Rich in 1820. Reproduced from Rich 1836, 34.*

*Figure 13.2 Detail of a Dutch map of 1918 with the proposed route of the Berlin-Baghdad Railway. The Hague, the Netherlands; 1918; H 42 cm, W 60 cm; paper; Universiteitsbibliotheek Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (LL.10155gk).*

French relations with local authorities. As a trained geographer, Rich conducted extensive explorations at Babylon and later at Nineveh, of which he drew the first reliable ground-plans, before dying of cholera at the age of 34 in 1821 (fig. 13.1). Rich's presence was merely the beginning of the long-standing Anglo-French 'sparring contest' in Mesopotamia, albeit with genteel undertones, which would characterize later decades. In the mid-1840s the French consul Paul-Émile Botta (1802-1870) and the adventurer-diplomat Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894) unearthed two different Assyrian capital cities (Khorsabad [ancient Dur-Šarrukin] and Nimrud [ancient Kalhu], respectively, both believed to be the biblical Nineveh). They thereupon rushed their extraordinary monumental and textual finds by boat down the Tigris and over the seas to be displayed in their respective national museums in 1847: while the Louvre bested the British Museum by a few months, the latter comfortably prevailed when it came to the popularity of the discoveries.

The last chapter in this Mesopotamian-staged contest for national prestige took place a few years later (1852-1855). Amongst numerous squabbles and recriminations over digging rights, also involving the local nomad population, a new generation of archaeologists (the consul

*Figure 13.3 Woolley and Lawrence at Carchemish in 1913. © The Trustees of the British Museum, London.*

Victor Place [1818-1875] for the French, the Christian Assyrian Hormuzd Rassam [1826-1910] for the British) took up activities at Khorsabad and Kuyunjik, respectively (Kuyunjik later proved to be the actual site of Nineveh). A final truce between the teams led to a joint shipment downriver on a French-manned ship in 1855. Unfortunately, after an attack by rebel tribesmen in the Shatt el-Arab, the vessel sank with its precious cargo of sculptures, most of which was destined for the Louvre (Petit, this volume). After this tragedy, the French never returned to Assyria, and the British only sparingly until 1949.

Let us now move some fifty years forward. German intervention in Near Eastern archaeology, after successful acquisitions of Hellenistic material from Turkey for the Berlin museums (such as the Pergamon altar), began belatedly but in earnest around the turn of the century. This was due to the energetic thrust of Kaiser Wilhelm II and the German Oriental Society, which led to the excavations in Babylon (Robert Koldewey [1855-1925]) and Assur (Walter Andrae [1875-1956]). At the same time, however, the Germans developed a vast and ambitious project with the Ottoman sultan Abdul Hamid II to build a Berlin-Baghdad railway for economic and strategic reasons, again threatening Britain's hold on India (fig. 13.2). As the enterprise developed, despite enormous costs for the German *Reich* and immense technical difficulties, the British decided to keep a close eye on the action. Thus the archaeologist Leonard Woolley (1880-1960), field director of the British Museum excavation at Carchemish (at the present Syrian-Turkish border), and his young assistant Thomas Edward Lawrence (1888-1935), sent first-hand dispatches on the *Baghdadbahn*'s progress to the Foreign Office between 1910 and 1913, under the supervision of David George Hogarth (1862-1927), keeper of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and head of the expedition (fig. 13.3). In this way, the British were apprised of the increasing difficulties experienced by the Germans, who left the railway unfinished on its last lap in Iraq (to England's later gain). When the First World War broke out, two of these Oxford men would again be reunited, but this time in Cairo, where from late 1915 Hogarth headed the Arab Bureau, an intelligence branch that spied on German-Turkish activities, and whence Lawrence was posted, rising to greatness as the mastermind and leader of Arab guerrilla expeditions in 1917, which led to the capture of Aqaba and the breakdown of Turkish defences in the Levant. They were also joined by the experienced scholar and Oriental traveller Gertrude Bell (1868-1926), who was thereupon sent to Mesopotamia as a political officer (Cooper, this volume). After the conquest of Baghdad in 1917, Bell became a key political and cultural figure in the early years of the British mandate in Iraq. Partly thanks to her friendship with King Feisal I (1883-1933), she founded what would become the Iraq Museum in 1923 (Lippolis, this volume).

But the Germans also had their archaeologist-spies. Prominent among them was Max von Oppenheim, born in 1860 to a well-known Jewish banking family from

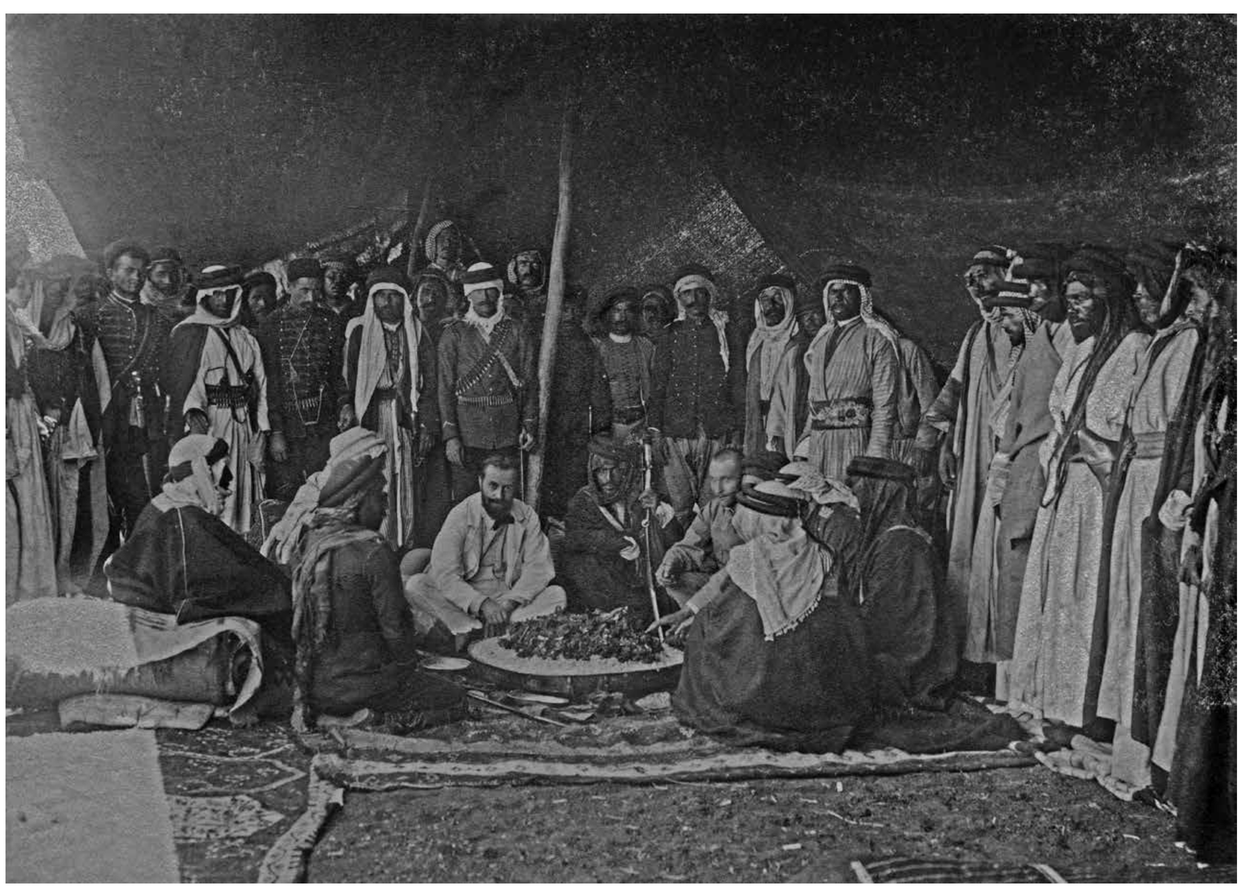


*Figure 13.4 Max von Oppenheim in the tent of Ibrahim Pasha, 1899. Courtesy of the Max Freiherr von Oppenheim Stiftung.*

Berlin (fig. 13.4). After completing his military service in the Uhlan Guards in 1879 (where he met the future *Kaiser*), he deliberately eschewed the family business and took to travel in Syria and Mesopotamia, the observation of Bedouin tribes and the study of Arabic. Despite his Jewish background, he managed through his connections to obtain a post as attaché at the German Consulate in Cairo in 1896, where he remained until 1910. His frequent political reports to Berlin again brought him close to Wilhelm II, whom he advised on the alliance with the Turks and the need for an *Orientpolitik* against England. Dismissed from the consulate under British pressure – despite reneging Judaism and having acquired a noble title – between 1911 and 1913, he organized an archaeological expedition to the site of Tell Halaf in Northern Syria, where he brought to light the substantial Aramean city of Guzana (900 BC), as well as a new typology of Neolithic painted pottery (since known as 'Halaf ware', c. 6000-5000 BC). After Germany allied with Turkey in the First World War, Oppenheim returned to politics with an ill-fated plan of stimulating an Arab *jihad* against the British, which achieved limited overall results. In his later years, after siding with Hitler (1940), he displayed his handsome finds from Tell Halaf in a private museum in Berlin. The latter was razed to the ground by Allied bombing in 1945, however, and he died a bitter man in 1946. In recent decades, the thousands of basalt fragments of the Tell Halaf statues have been patiently and competently re-assembled, and they have been on display in the Berlin Museum since 2011 (Martin, this volume).

# 14. Max Mallowan and Agatha Christie Mallowan in Nineveh[32]

*David Stronach*

When Max Mallowan (1904-1978) completed his bachelor's degree at Oxford in the summer of 1925, he had very little idea of what the future held for him. But shortly thereafter David George Hogarth (1862-1927), the keeper of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford (who had earlier dug at Carchemish, with both Charles Leonard Woolley [1880-1960] and Thomas Edward Lawrence [1888-1935] among his assistants), recommended Mallowan for the position of archaeological assistant on the dig at Ur. As the youngest member of Woolley's small staff of five or six persons, Mallowan was more than happy to meet whatever demands were made of him (fig. 14.1). That is to say that on those occasions when he was given charge of one of the more outlying mounds, he was perfectly content to rise at 4 a.m., to walk for a distance of several kilometres, and to be ready to start the day's work – together with the local workers who had often walked for even longer distances – soon after the sun rose. The fact that Max, as I must call him in the rest of this informal account, was expected to drive to the nearest town in order to obtain supplies at regular intervals was also something that he was more than willing to do. Indeed, such trips became all the more enjoyable after Katharine Woolley (1888-1945) invited her friend, the noted author Agatha Christie (1890-1976), to make an extended visit to Ur in 1930, during his fifth season at the site. Since Agatha was not an archaeologist and therefore had no fixed duties to perform within the context of the ongoing work, it became only natural for her to accompany Max in the weekly expeditions to purchase supplies. And if the vehicle happened to stick in the deep ruts of some muddy track, Agatha was always ready to 'get out and push' or to try to find some other way to remedy the immediate situation. In this way, their friendship grew until one day – back in Britain – Max proposed. Agatha relates that when she took the news of Max's proposal to Katharine Woolley, her good friend received the tidings with something less than heartfelt approval. Almost certainly dubious about the wisdom of a marriage between a young man in his mid-twenties and a divorced woman in her late thirties, she advised Agatha that it might be a good idea to keep Max waiting 'for at least two years' (Christie 1977, 418). With some spirit, Agatha writes of her dismay at the nature of this response. Accordingly, after he and Agatha had proceeded with their wedding in September 1930, the Mallowans decided that, following a short holiday in Greece, Agatha would return to Britain while Max continued onward to Ur for his sixth and final season at the site.

Digging at Ur gave Max a taste for excavating at large sites, and this may have been one of the reasons why, when he was at liberty to look for another site at which to work, he elected to take part in the British Museum's excavations at Nineveh. In all respects, Max's single season at Nineveh was a decidedly happy one. Agatha, long since recovered

32 This is a shorter version of the paper 'Max Mallowan and Agatha Christie Mallowan: Some Memories from Iraq and Iran', published in *Backdirt* 2014, 68-75. We thank the editors of *Backdirt* for their permission to publish this extract from Professor Stronach's account.

*Figure 14.1 Max Mallowan (third person from the left) at Ur in the 1920s, together with Hamoudi, Leonard Woolley, Katharine Woolley, and Eric Burrows. Courtesy of the Penn Museum Archives (image 191365).*

from her indisposition in Greece, was at his side (fig. 14.2), and it emerged that he found a singularly congenial colleague in the director of the dig, Reginald Campbell Thompson (1876-1941). In the winter of 1931-2, Thompson engaged him to take charge of an unusually challenging project. This was to sink a vertical sounding from the surface of Nineveh's tallest mound – Kuyunjik – down to virgin soil. The Nineveh 'pit' was a forbidding and dangerous place by the time that the earliest archaeological deposits were exposed almost 30 m below the mound's surface (fig. 20.2). The brief seven weeks that were occupied by this considerable undertaking left little time to explore 'the occasional scraps of wall' that were encountered, but this single operation still provides the only broad brush picture of the full prehistoric sequence that lies beneath Nineveh's vaunted Assyrian palaces. It might be added that Max was not a little pleased to find that, when he at last reached virgin soil, he still was left with a quite creditable trench, 'at least 2 x 2 m in size'. From the start, in other words, the overall size of the trench could hardly have been more finely judged. It was also while she was on the dig at Nineveh that Agatha decided that she would continue (at least when she wished to do so) to practise her craft as a writer, even at the same time as her husband was occupied with his own separate researches. As she put matters to an initially horrified Dr Thompson (who was doing his best to excavate a vast site on a very tight budget), 'I am a writer and I need to have a proper chair and a proper table – and I propose to arrange for these items to be made for me in the Mosul bazaar'. Until that moment, Thompson, a noted Assyriologist, had been very largely of the view that 'dig furniture' consisted of temporarily empty packing crates, variously arranged to meet the not-too-demanding requirements of his steadfast staff! For his part, Max was especially taken by the presence, toward the base of the deep sounding, of elegant sherds of finely painted Halaf ware (Rova, this volume). Always on

good terms with his workers, many of whom hailed from adjacent villages, he was soon apprised of the fact that painted pottery of exactly the same kind was scattered over the surface of a low mound that stood only a few kilometres to the northeast of Nineveh. With this critical information in hand, he decided in 1933 to embark on his first independent excavation at the prehistoric site of Arpachiyah.

*Figure 14.2 Agatha Christie and Max Mallowan visiting the excavations at Nippur in Iraq. Courtesy of the Penn Museum Archives (image 49024).*

# 15. Gertrude Bell and the Monuments of Nineveh

*Lisa Cooper*

The Englishwoman Gertrude Bell (1868-1926; fig. 15.1), an enthusiastic explorer of the lands of the Near East in the early twentieth century, was especially remarkable for her interest in all periods of the Near East's tumultuous ancient past, and her determination to find and document archaeological traces of those eras. Her fascination with the civilization of Assyria was kindled by her first journey into the heart of Mesopotamia in 1909, when she visited several Assyrian-period sites, including Nineveh, Nimrud (ancient Kalhu) and Assur on the Tigris River. Her fondness for venturing far off the beaten track brought her to additional Assyrian period remains. Her photographs often provide, even to this day, an indispensable record of these monuments.

In early May 1909, after having already seen Assur and Nimrud (Cooper 2016, 154-66), Bell crossed over from the city of Mosul to the ancient site of Nineveh, looming large on the opposite bank of the Tigris. Climbing up to the top of the site's principal mound, Kuyunjik, her attention turned to the deep excavation trenches dug by the archaeologist Austen Henry Layard several decades earlier, now home to the burrows of blue bee-eaters who flew in and out of their nests. She also marvelled at the massive vestiges of the ancient city walls that stretched away both to the north and to the south, and took several informative photographs (fig. 15.2; Bell 1911, 262).[33]

Still eager to see more Assyrian monuments, and informed by Leonard William King (1869-1919) of the British Museum, with whom she had been in contact,[34] Bell included a stop at Bavian – more appropriately named Khinis after the village to which it is more closely located – some 50 km northeast of Nineveh. Bell set up her campsite by the river's edge, below a suite of Neo-Assyrian reliefs and inscribed panels carved in the precipitous rock face of the cliffs above (Bell 1911, 271). These panels celebrate the place where, in the fourth stage of an ambitious hydraulic engineering project undertaken around 688 BC, King Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC) constructed a massive weir that diverted water from the Gomel River into a long canal. This system served to water the fields, gardens and parks of Nineveh's hinterland as well as the regions to the north-east of that city (Jacobsen & Lloyd 1935; Reade 1978; Bagg 2000b; Ur 2005; Morandi Bonacossi & Iamoni 2015). King – referred to as 'Meesterr Keen' by Bell's servant Fattuh, who had evidently accompanied King to this spot a few years before (Bell

33 For other views of Nineveh, Gertrude Bell photographs, Album M_011-013, Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University.

34 L.W. King makes it clear that Bell had been in communication with him before her 1909 trip, as she knew about the carved Assyrian panels he had found near Šakh on the Judi Dagh, and set out to look for them herself (King 1913, 70). At that time, King no doubt also told her about Bavian, since he had visited that site as well. Bell continued to correspond with King after her trip: she credits him with additional information about Bavian and Maltai (Bell 1911, x, 272 note 1, 291 note 1), she sent him her photographs of the Assyrian panels at Judi Dagh (see note 37), and one of his letters to her, written in 1910, is housed in the Gertrude Bell Archive in the Newcastle University Library (Miscellaneous, Item 13).

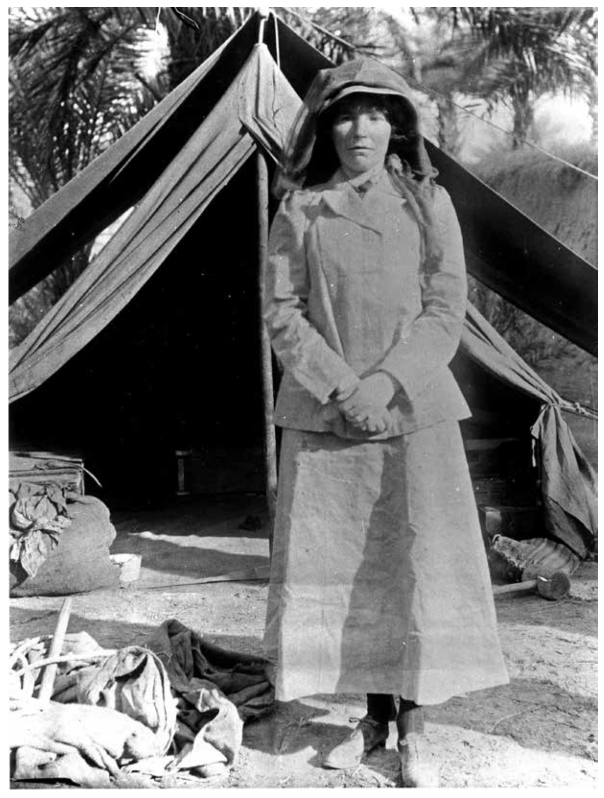


*Figure 15.1 (left) Gertrude Bell standing outside her tent in Babylon, April 1909. Courtesy of Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University (K_218).*

*Figure 15.2 (bottom) Bell's photograph from Kuyunjik towards Nebi Yunus, providing a valuable glimpse of Nineveh's lower town at a time before the modern suburban sprawl of Mosul had encroached upon it almost entirely. Courtesy of the Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University (M_010).*

*Figure 15.3 One of the carved panels at Maltai, showing King Sennacherib and a procession of gods. The rectangular hole was cut into the panel in the 1st – 3rd centuries AD to accommodate a tomb and has, since Bell's time, become enlarged. Courtesy of the Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University (M_055).*

1911, 271) – had endeavoured to make new squeezes of the rock-cut inscriptions in the cliff-side, supplementing those already produced by Layard (Layard 1853, 207-16; Bachmann 1927, v-vi; Grayson & Novotny 2014, 311-2). Bell's own visit to Bavian-Khinis resulted in several crisp black and white photographs – among some of the earliest to be taken of the site – which documented the singular landscape at the gorge, the carved panels on the cliff-side, and the massive sculptured stone blocks lying half-submerged in the river below, these once forming a monumental head to the canal at the point where it diverged from the river (Bell 1911, fig. 176; Jacobsen & Lloyd 1935, 44-9).[35]

Further Assyrian monuments seen by Bell included the rock-cut reliefs on the face of a precipitous mountain spur at Maltai, located some 70 km north of Nineveh, which she visited a few days after Bavian (Bell 1911, 283-4). Here too was another site associated with one of Sennacherib's hydraulic projects for supplying water to Nineveh (Boehmer 1975, 84; Reade 1978, 166; Ur 2005, 327). Commemorating this prodigious feat are four carved panels – all expertly photographed by Bell – depicting an Assyrian king in an attitude of worship facing a procession of seven gods (fig. 15.3; Bell 1911, 284; Reade 1988, 120-2).[36] Finally, travelling further north, Bell went out of her way to climb the slopes of the rugged Judi Dagh mountain, not only famous as a purported resting place of Noah's Ark, but also the locale of Sennacherib's defeat of several hostile mountainous towns (Grayson & Novotny 2014, 308-10). Once again, King was the individual who had alerted Bell to the Assyrian monuments' existence. In the autumn of 1903 he had discovered six sculptured rock panels on the mountain above the village of Šakh, five of these containing the images and inscriptions of Sennacherib (King 1913). For her part, Bell saw three of the panels, then two additional ones on the mountain above the village of Hasanah (fig. 15.4; Bell 1911, 290-1, 296, figs. 182-3).[37] Significantly, one of Bell's photographs of the Assyrian reliefs appeared in King's 1913 publication of the Judi Dagh site, while three were subsequently reprinted in a more recent report, these

35 For additional photographs of the landscape and Assyrian monuments at Bavian, see Album M_034-038, and M_040, Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University.

36 For additional photographs of the Maltai panels and an instructive view of the landscape below the mountain, see Album M_053-054, and M_056-057, Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University.

37 For additional photographs of the Judi Dagh relief panels, see Album M_075-076, Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University.

*Figure 15.4 One of the carved panels of king Sennacherib found above the village of Hasanah on the Judi Dagh mountain. Courtesy of the Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University (M_068).*

attesting to the images' clear, informative quality (King 1913, pl. XI: 10 and p. 70 note 9; Börker-Klähn 1982, nos. 181, 183a and 184).[38]

Bell's visits to the remains of Nineveh and associated Assyrian sites amply testify to her superb skills as a photographer of monuments, and her dogged determination to see and experience the places in which they existed.

38 Of the three photographs reproduced in Börker-Klähn 1982, two (nos. 181 and 184) are attributed to L.W. King in the image registry (and have BM negative numbers) (Börker-Klähn 1982, VII), but these images were clearly originally taken by Bell, who then gave copies of her negatives to King for his use. See Album M_068 and M_075, Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University.

# 16. Iraqi Excavations at Nineveh

*John MacGinnis*

The period following the Second World War saw a flowering of research, spearheaded by an exceptional group of talented Iraqi archaeologists.[39] From the early 1960s onwards Nineveh benefitted from a series of major projects directed by the likes of Mohammed Ali Mustafa (1910-1997), Tariq Madhloom (1933-2007) and Manhal Jabur (?-2003), legendary names in Iraqi archaeology. Firstly, on Kuyunjik excavations were resumed on the palace of Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC), concentrating on the western parts of the palace, re-exposing the throne room and preserving the remains in situ as an on-site museum. Secondly, attention was given to Nebi Yunus, the other great mound of Nineveh and the site of the ancient arsenal and review palace, the *ēkal māšarti*. The work undertaken in 1954 on the north-eastern corner – the only major excavations to have ever been carried out on the mound – revealed the remains of a three-chambered monumental gateway guarding a stone-paved road leading up into the complex (fig. 16.1). There were rich finds – inscribed bricks and stone vessels, a cache of cuneiform tablets, three statues of the Egyptian Pharaoh Taharqa (reigned c. 690-664 BC; fig. 16.2), a statue of the goddess Anuket to name just some. Subsequent smaller excavations on Nebi Yunus revealed a short section of wall lined with reliefs depicting horses and grooms and two human-headed winged bulls (fig. 16.3), possibly the same seen by

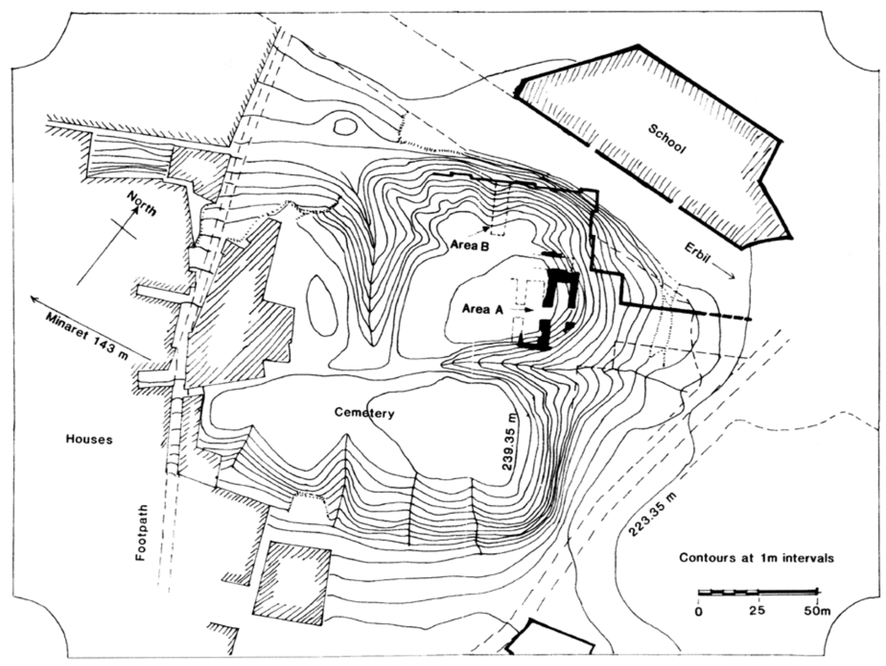



*Figure 16.1 Plan of the 1954 excavations at Nebi Yunus. Reproduced from Mustafa 1954.*

39 Madhloom and Mahdi 1976 give an overview of the earlier Iraqi work at Nineveh; see Scott & MacGinnis 1990 for a summary of work in Nineveh (excluding Kuyunjik) up until that time.

*Figure 16.2 Statues of Taharqa in the conservation laboratory. Photograph taken in 1954.*

Rassam in 1852. The third focus of Iraqi operations has been on the city gates. In all, seven gates have been investigated to one degree or another. The most striking is the Šamaš Gate, excavation of which again revealed a three-chambered design, and which was magnificently restored up to its crenellations and as far as the fifth tower to each side (fig. 16.4). The Nergal Gate was also fully restored, including re-installing two very fine winged bulls first observed by Layard (Salih, this volume); an inscription found here in 1992 records Sennacherib's construction of an *akītu* house opposite the gate. The Maški Gate was also fully restored, including its two towers; the excavations carried out at the Adad Gate were initially conducted specifically to learn about the curvature of the arch for the restoration on the Maški Gate. Other, smaller operations examined the Assur Gate, where two chambers lined with uninscribed orthostats were exposed, the Sin Gate and the Halzi Gate; excavation at the last was resumed by the University of California expedition directed by David Stronach in 1989 (Stronach, this volume). Apart from these major projects, numerous chance finds in the lower town of Nineveh led to further investigations. Very important is the palatial building with looped Syro-Hittite convex column bases, possibly a *bit hilāni,* discovered in the fields north of the Mosul-Erbil road; the finds included alabaster jars bearing inscriptions of Ashurbanipal (reigned 668 – c. 627 BC). North of Nebi Yunus, the discovery of a statue of Hermes led to the uncovering of a small shrine and evidence for a Hellenistic-Parthian settlement. Also north of Nebi Yunus, further evidence for the occupation of this period came from a rectangular offering table bearing a dedication to the Sibitti by Shalmaneser III (reigned 859/858-824 BC), but also bearing a later re-dedication in Greek. Other discoveries included a set of horse troughs from the reign of Sennacherib and two Parthian vaulted tombs. Finally, in 2011 the College of Arts of Mosul University inaugurated a new campaign of excavations on the palace of Ashurbanipal, exposing some rooms of the palace and recovering numerous fragments of sculpted reliefs, as well as evidence for occupation dating to the Hellenistic-Parthian and Byzantine periods (Aljuboori 2016).

*Figure 16.3 Nebi Yunus, winged bull assembled in blocks. Photograph taken in 1987.*

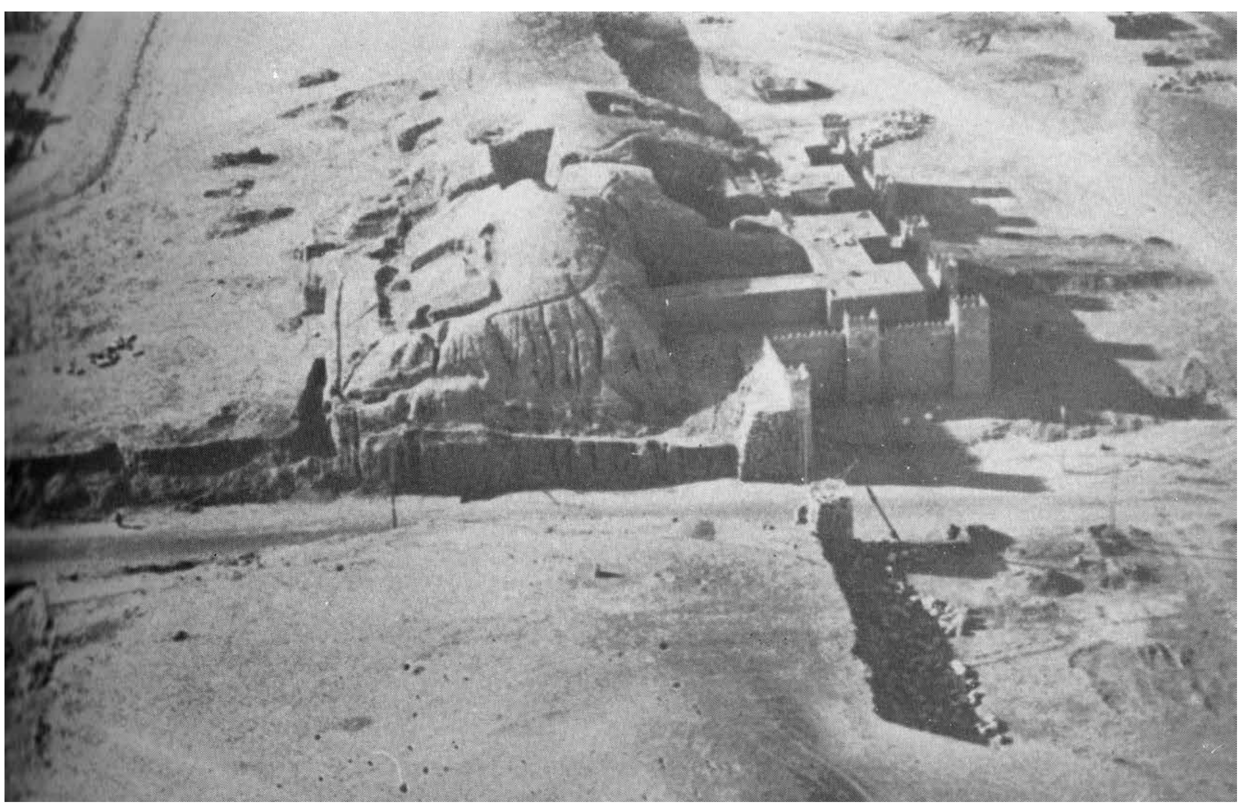


*Figure 16.4 An aerial view of the Šamaš Gate. Photograph taken in 1976.*

# 17. The Nergal Gate: a Calamitous History

*Layla Salih*

Due to its strategic location, the Nergal Gate (fig. 17.1) has been, and still is, a key feature for many archaeologists and travellers. It is considered to be the main gate of Nineveh, leading to the town of Tarbisu.[40] Owing to its importance, it is flanked by a couple of winged bulls, a feature that distinguishes it from the other six gates that have been unearthed until now (Nergal, Adad, Sin, Maški, Šamaš and Halzi). Reports by foreign archaeologists and travellers during the Ottoman period are a hitherto little-used but most valuable source of information. They constitute some of the few reliable sources, besides more recent discoveries. These latter discoveries at the Nergal Gate have reaffirmed the integrity of earlier archaeologists, who were often criticized for their supposedly inadequate documentation.

## 17.1 Foreign expeditions

The first scholar to examine the Nergal Gate was Claudius James Rich (1786-1821; fig. 6.6), in the summer of 1820. His colleague, Sir Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894; fig. 11.1), arrived at Nineveh in the summer of 1849 and started working at the southern aperture of the gatehouse. He discovered a pair of human-headed bulls and a colossal figure, as well as a pavement of limestone slabs still showing the marks of chariot wheels. Layard's artist, Mr Cooper, made sketches of the site, after which Layard re-covered all of the remains in 1851, in order to protect the immobile objects from further damage.

In 1891, Sir Ernest Alfred Budge (1857-1934) arrived at the site and discovered the upper part of the sculptures, which had probably been exposed shortly beforehand by rain. Budge mentions that 'one bull left in situ… was in a perfect state' (Budge 1920, 23). The head, however, was taken the following year by a local stonemason. Edgar Thomas Ainger Wigram (1864-1935), a British traveller who arrived in Nineveh in 1910, describes, without going into detail, how a couple of winged bulls at the Nergal Gate had been destroyed. Meanwhile, Reginald Campbell Thompson (1876-1941), who was on site between 1904 and 1905, states that 'two winged figures (…) actually remained in situ until 1905' (Thompson & Hutchinson 1929a, 33). These sources indicate that the bulls must have been destroyed between 1905 and 1910.

## 17.2 Iraqi excavation and conservation works

In the spring of 1941, an Iraqi expedition started excavation and conservation works at the Nergal Gate and Nebi Yunus. They discovered a couple of winged bulls on the northern side of the Nergal Gate. They then reconstructed the gate in a style similar to

40 Tarbisu is an Assyrian city that corresponds to Sherif Khan, near the al-Rashedia district, 5 km north-west of Nineveh. The site was excavated by Layard in 1850 (Layard 1853, 598-9) and Rawlinson in 1852, and in 1968 by Mosul University (Suleiman 1982, 32).

*Figure 17.1 The Nergal Gate, May 2008. Photograph by Diane Siebrandt.*

*Figure 17.2 Renovation activities at the Nergal Gate in the 1950s.*

that of the Khorsabad gates, which had been discovered during the 1930s (Madhloom 1971, 26).

The archives of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) contain documents that mention some maintenance work at the Nergal Gate in 1954. In order to transform the gate into an on-site museum, a couple of halls were built and the winged bull was temporarily covered (figs. 17.2-3). This new museum contained originals and replicas of reliefs, a model, and a cuneiform text that was discovered at the entrance to the gate. It is likely that this work continued until at least 1963,[41] but the most important work at the Nergal Gate was undertaken in 1973. To the south and west of the gate, archaeologists discovered a new hall (10 × 6.6 m), with an entrance in its western wall leading to another hall (4.55 × 3.5 m). All of the walls were covered in reliefs showing a couple of winged bulls and a winged human figure carrying a pine cone and a basket.[42] Most recently, in 2007, restoration work was carried out at the Nergal Gate when its towers revealed some serious cracks.

## 17.3 Remarks

During the twentieth century, especially due to the work carried out by the SBAH, the amount of information we have about the gate increased considerably. I would like to use this opportunity to clarify some of the issues surrounding the excavation results. Researchers have been critical of Layard and his artist, Cooper, claiming that the description and drawing had been completed from notes that were inadequate or misplaced, and that their combined memories had played a trick on them. In my opinion, however, both Layard's descriptions and the drawings are reliable. They drew the right hand of the winged bull and the figures as they found them, after which they re-covered them. These drawings were of different winged bulls, however, from those discovered by the SBAH in the twentieth century. Layard worked from 'the southern aperture of the gatehouse to its northern one', which means that he stopped at the place where the SBAH's excavations had started (Finch 1948, 15). The latter completed their excavation work at the Nergal Gate in 1973, when they reached Layard's trenches. They then rediscovered the couple of winged bulls at the Nergal Gate that had been found by Layard over a century beforehand.

Another remark relates to the prevailing opinion that the left horned head of one of the winged bulls was removed in the past and used to construct a local mill nearby the Nineveh site. If we consider the geographical location of Nineveh and the Khosr River, it seems that it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to transfer building materials from the Nergal Gate to the mill. A more likely suggestion is that it was stolen by locals and sold to illicit traders.

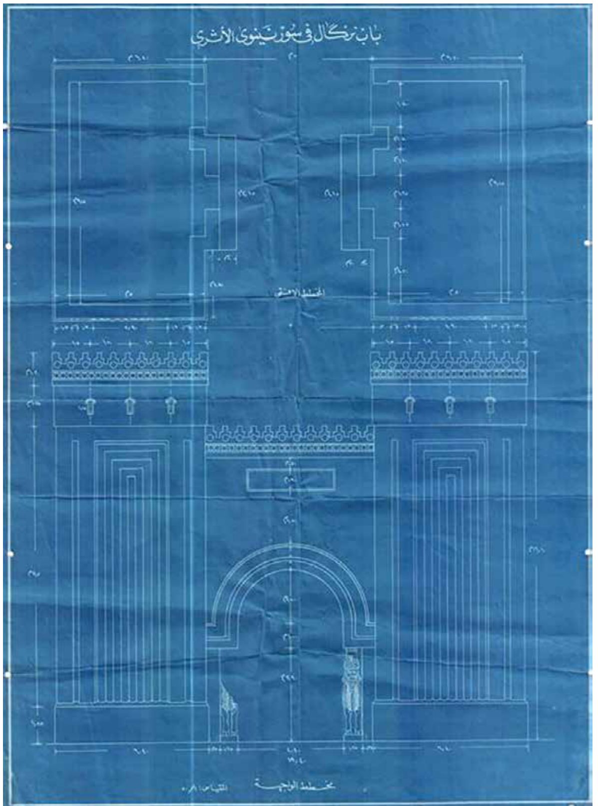


*Figure 17.3 Drawing of the Nergal Gate.*

## 17.4 Repeated devastation

The Nergal Gate has faced many calamities since its discovery by Layard. Although it was partly damaged during Layard's excavations in the nineteenth century, weathering and climatic conditions eventually caused serious damage. Iraqi archaeologists were extremely successful in their efforts to maintain and conserve the gate and its material culture from the 1940s onwards, although by that time, part of one of the bulls had already been wilfully destroyed (fig. 17.4). Most recently, the Nergal Gate was completely destroyed by ISIL. However, the work of archaeologists and travellers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did at least ensure that we have information about this tremendous piece of architecture, which functioned as the gate to one of largest cities in the world during the Neo-Assyrian Empire (fig. 17.5).

41 According to a receipt found in the abovementioned archives for the budget for excavation and maintenance works at the Nergal Gate, without any details.

42 Iraqi expedition headed by Manhal Jabur, SBAH archives, Nineveh.

*Figure 17.4 Winged bulls of the Nergal Gate, May 2008. Photograph by Diane Siebrandt.*

*Figure 17.5 Reconstruction of the Nergal Gate. Courtesy of Learning Sites, inc.*

# 18. Italian Research in the Nineveh Region: Archaeological Investigation and Cultural Heritage Protection and Management

*Daniele Morandi Bonacossi*

The countryside north of Nineveh, located in what today is the north-western part of the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan (fig. 18.1), has been the subject of only occasional and unsystematic archaeological research due to the political unrest that affected the region during the period of Ba'ath Party rule and the years immediately following the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq in 2003. As a consequence, the lowlands of Dohuk, Faideh, Al-Qosh, Ba'dreh, Sheikhan and the Navkur Plain located east of the Tigris – partly in the Dohuk governorate and partly in the disputed territories of the Nineveh governorate controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government – have long been neglected in an archaeological sense. French and British diplomats and pioneers, such as the French consul at Mosul, Simon Rouet, who in 1845 discovered the Assyrian rock reliefs of Maltai and Khinis, conducted early investigations with remarkable results. Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894; fig. 11.1), who carried out a short and unsuccessful excavation at the site of Jerahiyeh in the Ba'dreh Plain, was the first European to describe the Khinis rock reliefs in 1851 and the monumental Neo-Assyrian aqueduct at Jerwan, which he erroneously interpreted as a causeway. In 1933, a team from the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago headed by Thorkild Jacobsen (1904-1993) and Seton Lloyd (1902-1996) excavated the aqueduct during the Institute's excavation campaign at the nearby Assyrian capital of Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin)(fig. 18.2).

Since then, no survey or excavation using modern, systematic methods has been conducted in the plains of the Nineveh hinterland to the east of the Tigris. The stabilization of Iraqi Kurdistan in the last decade, however, has resulted in significant developments, including in the area of scientific research. Thanks to the launching of many new national and international excavation and survey projects, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has become a locus of thriving archaeological activity, to a degree that is hardly paralleled in any other region of the Near East (Kopanias *et al.* 2015; Kopanias & MacGinnis 2016). Among the first new archaeological missions initiated in Iraqi Kurdistan was the Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project (LoNAP), a research endeavour in the northern part of the Nineveh Plain (fig. 18.3) launched by Udine University in 2012. The aim of this undertaking is to understand the formation and transformation of the cultural and natural landscape of an important area of Northern Mesopotamia embracing large parts of the governorates of Ninawa and Dohuk from the Palaeolithic to the Islamic period. The research is based on a regional archaeological surface survey and the excavation of Tell Gomel, a site of approximately 30 ha that appears to have been continually inhabited from the fifth millennium BC onwards, located in the heart of the fertile Navkur Plain. The

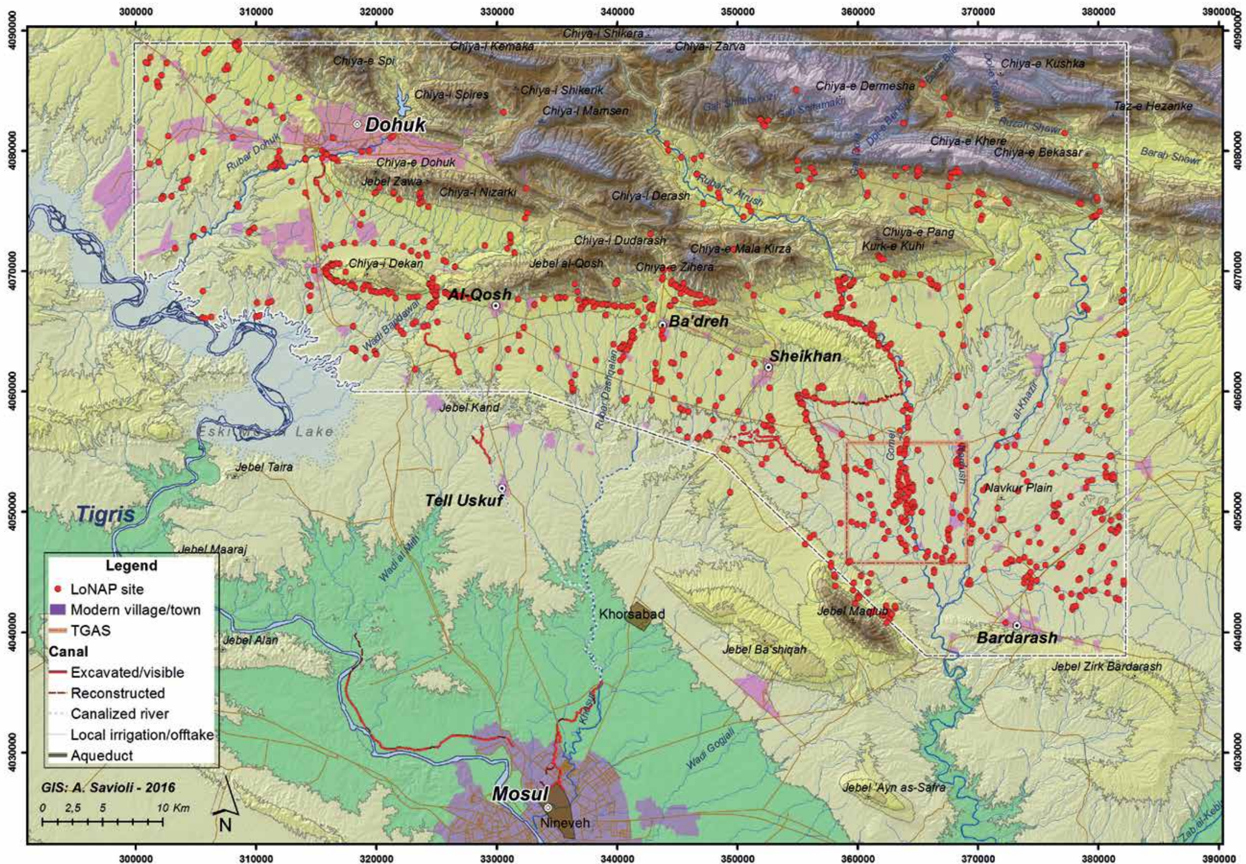



*Figure 18.1 The LoNAP research area in the 'Land behind Nineveh' and preliminary distribution of archaeological sites discovered in the 2012-16 survey campaigns.*

site has been tentatively identified as the ancient Assyrian city of Gammagara, known from an inscription carved on the Jerwan aqueduct, and as the later Gaugamela, where Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) defeated the Persian King Darius III (381-330 BC) in 331 BC, leading to the definitive collapse of the Achaemenid Empire and the rise of Macedonian dominion.

During the early centuries of the first millennium BC, the region was the geographical and political core of the Assyrian Empire. Little is known, however, about the patterns of settlement and land-use in this area, which, with its agricultural production, supported the economic and demographic development of Khorsabad and Nineveh. LoNAP is the first systematic, interdisciplinary archaeological research project to investigate the hinterland of the last two Assyrian capital cities and to study, record, and protect the exceptional Assyrian monuments in the region. The Assyrian king Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC) built an impressive network of canals and monuments (Morandi Bonacossi, this volume), including rock reliefs carved where the canals were diverted from rivers or fed by springs, such as at Khinis, Shiru Maliktha, Faideh and Maltai, and aqueducts constructed to bridge the seasonal watercourses that intersected them, such as at Jerwan. Together with the cultural landscape and the monuments associated with it, this regional canal system, which was designed to irrigate Nineveh's countryside and carry water to the capital, will be the focus of an extensive archaeological and natural park project. This will provide the basis for an important programme of cultural heritage protection and management and public awareness-raising, aimed at future tourism, both national and international.

The Assyrian kings transformed the 'Land of Ashur', as the Assyrian core territories are described in contemporary royal inscriptions, into the centre of an expanding empire. In order to administer and materially and ideologically shape and commemorate the landscape associated with this new territorial entity, the empire made a series of top-down technological interventions for the purposes of control (Morandi Bonacossi 2018a). This elite-driven agenda included the founding of large fortified capital and provincial cities and the forced migration of deportees to be used as labour for the construction of public works and the controlled population of the new urban centres and their surroundings. In parallel, the creation of a dense network of small rural sites in the environs of the

*Figure 18.2 Thorkild Jacobsen and Seton Lloyd at the Jerwan aqueduct in 1933. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum, University of Chicago.*

administrative centres and the expansion of settlement into agriculturally marginal areas so as to improve the empire's overall rural productivity was made possible by the construction of hydraulic systems on a regional scale (Morandi Bonacossi, this volume). Furthermore, the landscape engineering was commemorated with royal images, such as stelae and rock reliefs set in ideologically-charged locations – such as frontier landscapes and other symbolically, geopolitically or ritually significant places, like mountains, springs, rivers, or seashores – or linked to wondrous waterworks. Fieldwork conducted by LoNAP has shown that the imperial 'signature' left on the landscape by these emblems of power is archaeologically mirrored and deeply imprinted in the Nineveh hinterland.

Enormous new capital cities with the attributes of royal presence (palaces, elite residences, temples, monumental sculptures, city walls and gates) were built by Sargon at Khorsabad (320 ha) and his son Sennacherib at Nineveh (750 ha), immediately south of the LoNAP survey region. The forced migration of deportees played a particularly important role in the settlement and growth of the political and regional capitals, which had a deep impact on the demographic landscape of the empire (Oded 1979). From the late tenth century BC onwards, the Assyrian kings' inscriptions boast of the deportation of more than 1.3 million prisoners of war. In his royal inscriptions, Sennacherib – the most prolific promoter of deportations among the Neo-Assyrian rulers – recorded almost half a million deportees, whose primary destination was Nineveh and its rural hinterland (Oded 1979, 33 and 61).

The centres of the Assyrian heartland were surrounded by densely settled and highly productive rural areas populated by the re-settled deportees. Survey projects throughout the Assyrian homeland have indicated a diffuse Neo-Assyrian settlement pattern based on a scattering of small sites, probably agricultural villages and farmsteads (fig. 18.4). With 320 settled sites identified so far, the Neo-Assyrian epoch was the one in which human occupation in the LoNAP region expanded more significantly than ever before or since. Compared to the preceding Middle Assyrian period, the Neo-Assyrian epoch witnessed a 65% increase in the number of settlements. Furthermore, about 40% of the Neo-Assyrian sites did not represent a continuation of previous Middle Assyrian occupation, but were rather newly established

*Figure 18.3 The Nineveh plain in 2012. Courtesy of Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project.*

*Figure 18.4 A small site in the Nineveh plain in 2013. Courtesy of Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project.*

*Figure 18.5 The Khinis commemorative rock complex in 2012 with the 'Large Panel' (right), 'Rider Relief' (left) and three rock stelae in the upper part of the image. Courtesy of Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project.*

*Figure 18.6 Panel 2 at Maltai in 2013. Courtesy of Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project.*

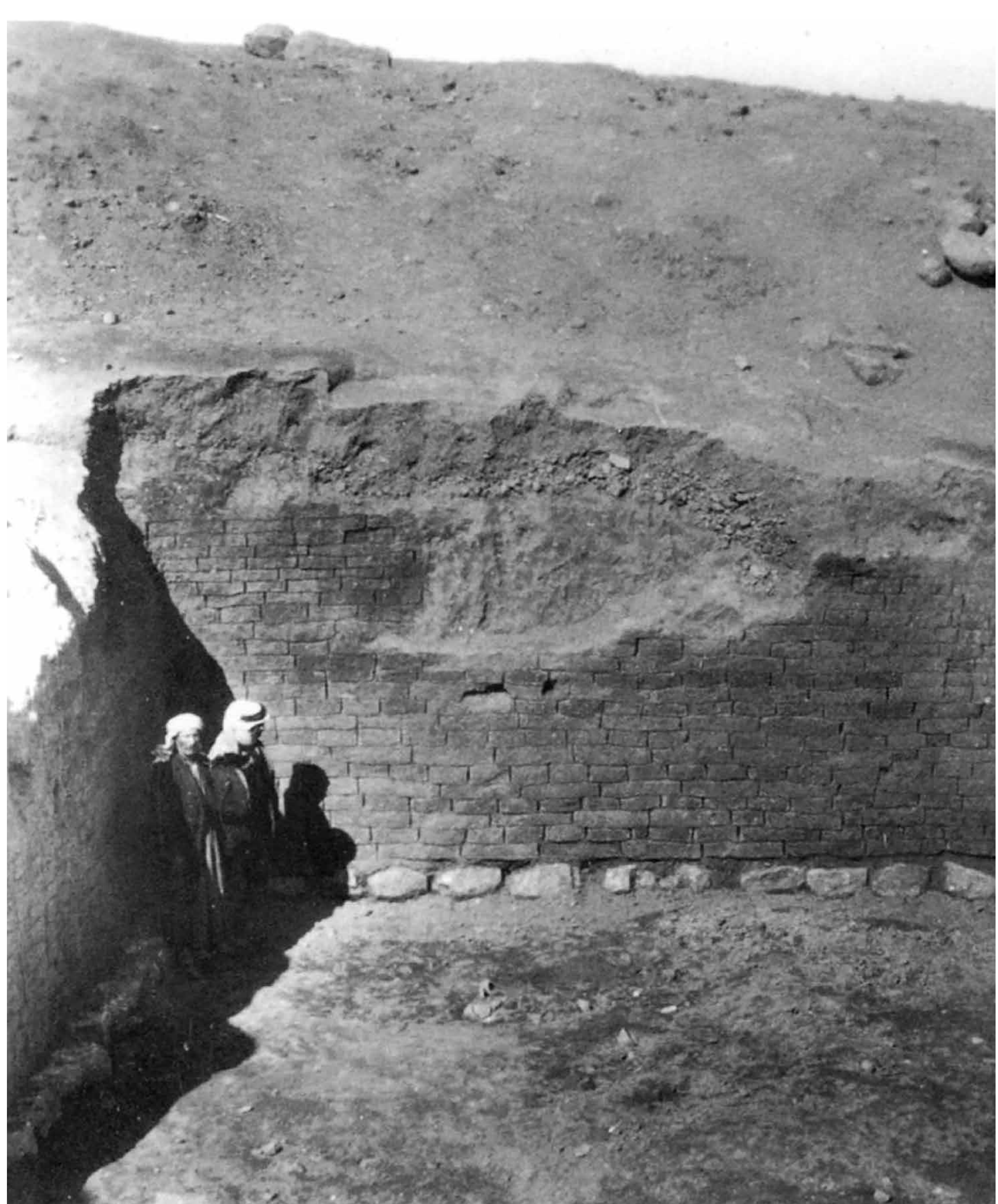
villages in the heartland of Nineveh. Such a widespread scattering of Neo-Assyrian sites across the landscape and the foundation of new settlements led to the 'infilling' of previously unsettled areas (which in the late second millennium BC would have been uncultivated land). New territories were thus brought under cultivation to provide and increase reliable sources of food and to ensure the economic stability of the capital city and its hinterland.

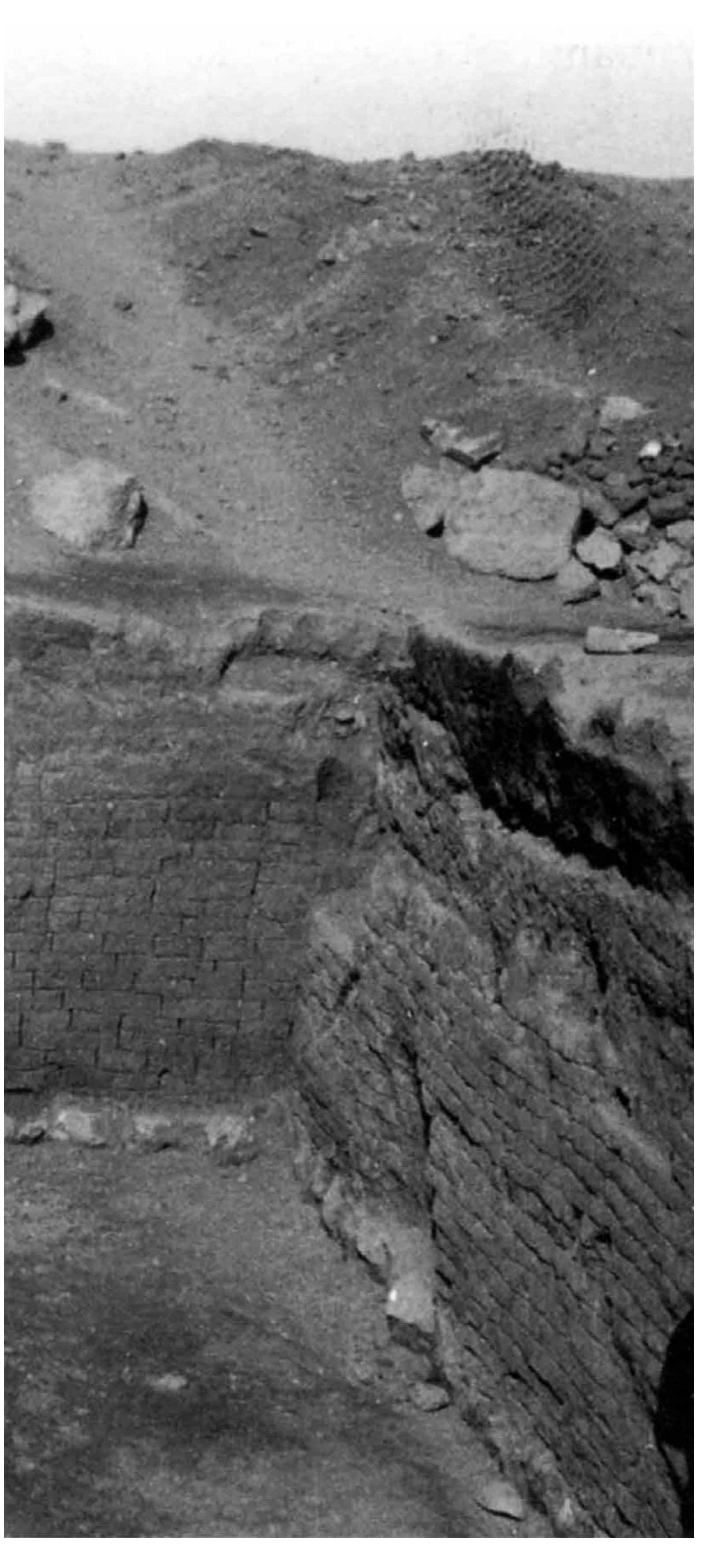
The spread of dense Neo-Assyrian rural settlement in the environs of Khorsabad and Nineveh was made possible not only by the forced allocation of deportees, but also by a change in agricultural strategy accomplished through the introduction of new farming technologies. The creation of a massive regional irrigation programme by Sennacherib – who redirected the hydrology of the entire region upstream of Nineveh – transformed the traditional, comparatively low-productivity dry-farming cultivation system of Upper Mesopotamia by integrating it with high-output, intensive farming technology based on artificial irrigation (Morandi Bonacossi, this volume). This marked transformation in the land-use patterns of Upper Mesopotamia was commemorated by the king through the imposition of a royal signature on this newly engineered landscape. On the cliff of Khinis, where the waters of 'Sennacherib's canal' were diverted from the River Gomel, royal artists carved impressive commemorative monuments depicting the king worshipping the gods Aššur and Mulissu, the supreme divine couple (fig. 18.5). Further downstream, where the canal crossed a seasonal watercourse on the great Jerwan aqueduct, commemorative cuneiform inscriptions were chiselled into its limestone blocks: '[…] I had a canal dug to the plain of Nineveh. I had an aqueduct constructed (by packing down) white limestone over deep wadis (and thereby) enabled those waters to flow over it' (Grayson & Novotny 2014, 319).

Similar sculptural programmes, intended to create a new imperial landscape infused with royal legitimation and religious symbols, are also associated with other branches of Sennacherib's hydraulic system. At Shiru Maliktha, at the exit of a subterranean rock-cut tunnel, which supplied the 'Northern System' with the water of the Bandawai watercourse (Morandi Bonacossi, this volume), a niche with the image of an unknown Assyrian king, normally identified as Sennacherib, was carved at the back of a larger wedge-shaped recess cut into the hillside.

Other similar rock reliefs in the LoNAP region had perhaps already been carved during Sargon's reign on a cliff overlooking the Maltai canal head and the spring that fed it (Morandi Bonacossi, this volume). Here, four panels carved in the rock bear the images of an Assyrian king and seven statues of Assyrian gods mounted on their symbolic animals (fig. 18.6). Nine apparently similar – though still buried – rock panels have been discovered by LoNAP along the rock-cut Faideh canal.

Archaeological fieldwork has thus shown that Assyrian royal power commemorated the newly engineered landscape of the Nineveh hinterland in the form of systematic, monumental and symbolically charged sculptural and architectural programmes and royal inscriptions pertaining to the hydraulic works built in the 'Land behind Nineveh'. For the first time since their discovery in the mid-nineteenth century, these unique monuments have been recorded by Udine University using modern technologies (drones, laser scanning and digital photogrammetry), and conserved, protected and managed within the framework of a wide-ranging open-air archaeological and environmental museum that will include not only the Assyrian canals and monuments, but also the entire cultural and natural landscape associated with them.





# PART III

## From Prehistory to the Arrival of the Neo-Assyrian Kings

# Part III: From Prehistory to the Arrival of the Neo-Assyrian Kings

**19. From Prehistory to the Arrival of the Neo-Assyrian Kings**
*Daniele Morandi Bonacossi*

**20. The Prehistoric Roots of Nineveh**
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**21. The Ninevite 5 Culture at Nineveh**
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# 19. From Prehistory to the Arrival of the Neo-Assyrian Kings

*Daniele Morandi Bonacossi*

Given the grandeur and splendour of the buildings of the great cities of antiquity at the height of their glory, one can easily overlook the fact that these wonderful monuments were often built on thousand-year-old stratifications and were the culmination of long historical processes. It is often forgotten that cities such as Pericles' Athens or Caesars' Rome were built on centuries of history. The same is true of Nineveh. When, at the end of the eighth century BC, the Assyrian king Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC) made the city the capital of the Assyrian Empire, Nineveh had already existed for nearly six millennia. The remains of a prehistoric village, established in the second half of the seventh millennium BC in a very fertile and well-irrigated area at the confluence of the River Khosr with the Tigris, are buried under the ruins of temples and palaces built on the acropolis of Kuyunjik by the rulers of the third, second and first millennia BC. We know almost nothing about this village, except that it probably housed a small community of cereal-growers and breeders of sheep and goats. For thousands of years, this community lived a simple agrarian life, one shared by dozens of small villages that dotted the Nineveh plain, until, in the fourth millennium BC, the site was gradually transformed into an urban centre that attained an area of 40 ha, corresponding to the extension of the entire mound of Kuyunjik. Nineveh's location on an important trade route, running up the Tigris to the resource-rich region of Anatolia to the north and Syria to the west, was certainly one of the main reasons for the transformation of this site from a rural village into an urban centre; one that belonged to the network of northern Mesopotamian cities and was connected with the towns of southern Mesopotamia.

It is likely that Nineveh was an urban centre even in the first half of the third millennium. It is to this period that the typical painted and incised ceramics of the Ninevite 5 culture have been attributed, found together with numerous seals and seal impressions on sealings that demonstrate the presence in Nineveh of a centralized economic administration. The development of an urban settlement from the end of the fourth millennium BC had certainly favoured the emergence of Nineveh as a religious centre, too; one linked to the cult of the goddess Ištar at least from the Akkadian period, when Manishstushu built the first temple of the divinity documented in written sources. However, it was only with the conquest of the city by Šamši-Adad I (reigned c. 1809-1776 BC) – who rebuilt the temple of Ištar and integrated the city into a kingdom that in the first half of the eighteenth century BC would stretch from the plains east of the Tigris to the Euphrates – that the site became an important religious centre. The Mesopotamian rulers of the second and, later, of the first millennium BC, looked to Nineveh as one of the most important holy cities of Mesopotamia. The temple of Ištar and the ziggurat associated with it were restored by all of the major Middle Assyrian kings, and the flourishing of the goddess' cult gave the city a special role within the kingdom. Rulers such as Shalmaneser I (reigned c. 1263-1234 BC), Aššur-reš-iši I (reigned c. 1133-1115 BC) and Tiglath-pileser I (reigned 1114-1076 BC) built palaces and gardens on the Kuyunjik citadel, thereby prefiguring the subsequent large-scale construction work carried out by

*Figure 19.1 Sheep and goats in the Nineveh plains of Northern Iraq. Courtesy of Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project.*

the Neo-Assyrian kings. The favour granted to the city by the Assyrian kings of the last centuries of the second millennium also determined its urban expansion, as the city probably extended to occupy even the lower city area located north of the acropolis of Kuyunjik.

Archaeological research on the site of Nineveh's main acropolis shows that the roots of the great Neo-Assyrian metropolis of Sennacherib and his successors lie deep in an ancient past; one that, over the millennia, saw a thriving community of Neolithic farmers and herders transformed into the capital of the first global empire in history.

# 20. The Prehistoric Roots of Nineveh

*Marco Iamoni*

Nineveh is well known for having been the monumental capital of the Assyrian Empire during the late eighth and seventh centuries BC. Yet few know that the city had a long history previous to this, with its origins in the earliest phases of the human occupation of Northern Mesopotamia. Indeed, in an extreme synthesis of Nineveh's history, it could even be said that the city's core, which is formed by the two mounds of Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus, derives mostly from its prehistoric occupation rather than from the historic and monumental urban phase (fig. 20.1). The massive works carried out by the Assyrian kings – in particular by King Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC) – have substantially contributed to concealing much of this prehistoric sequence. Little is therefore known of the prehistoric and protohistoric occupation that gave birth to the great Nineveh. The most relevant information comes from a famous sounding excavated on the top of Kuyunjik in the early 1930s by the English archaeologist Max Mallowan (1904-1978), when he was a member of the British mission directed by Reginald Campbell Thompson (1876-1941; Thompson & Mallowan 1933; Gut 1995). Tell Nebi Yunus, the mound of the prophet Jonah surmounted by the mosque containing his tomb,[43] has been the object of very limited investigations that have added little to the Kuyunjik data.

According to Mallowan's account, the 27.5 m-deep sounding – variously known as the 'Deep Pit' or 'Prehistoric Pit' – into the mound of Kuyunjik reached the virgin soil after excavating five different levels of occupation, accordingly renamed Ninevite 1-5 (fig. 20.2). The lowest and earliest four date to prehistoric periods, whereas the fifth and uppermost concerned the earliest part of the third millennium BC and coincided with a ceramic tradition that is now considered a hallmark for all of Upper Mesopotamia (Rova, this volume). Due to the limited size of the operation (the sounding started with a surface area of about 300 m$^2$ and ended with an area of less than 75 m$^2$), many of the excavated levels are difficult (if not impossible) to interpret reliably; most of them consist merely of sequences of deposits characterized by different types of pottery, rather than by comprehensible changes in the occupation of the site. Even the demarcation between the five Ninevite phases has been in most cases arbitrarily fixed, since clear distinctions (i.e., apart from a gradual change in the pottery) that could justify the subdivisions were absent.

Research into the most ancient history of Nineveh thus lacks significant data that might shed light on the site's earliest occupation and, at the same time, help us to understand the reasons for Nineveh's incredible growth during the Bronze and Iron Ages. One relevant point is the origin of Nineveh's fame as a 'holy city' for the cult of the goddess Ištar: local worship of Ištar may perhaps have begun before the traditional accounts dating back to Akkadian times (MacGinnis, this volume). If so, this may explain the city's important role in the cultural landscape of Assyria before its designation as capital

43 The tomb was destroyed by ISIL after the occupation of Mosul in June 2014.

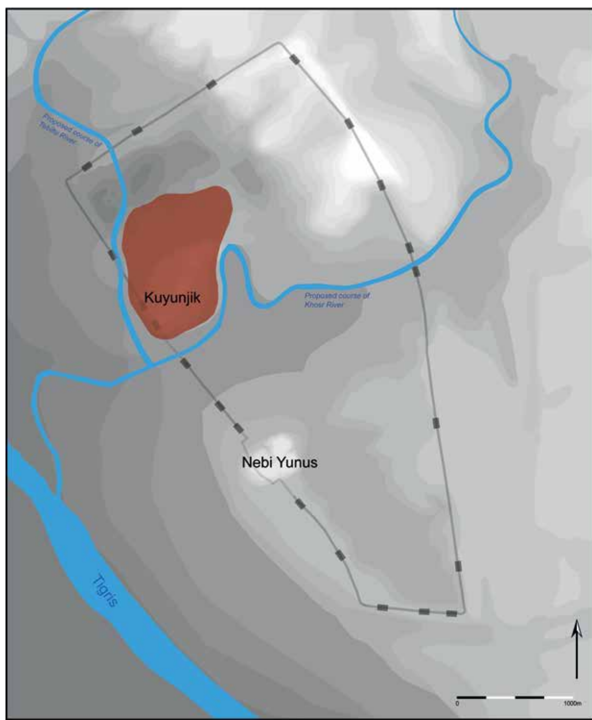


*Figure 20.1 The probable extent of prehistoric Nineveh (in red).*

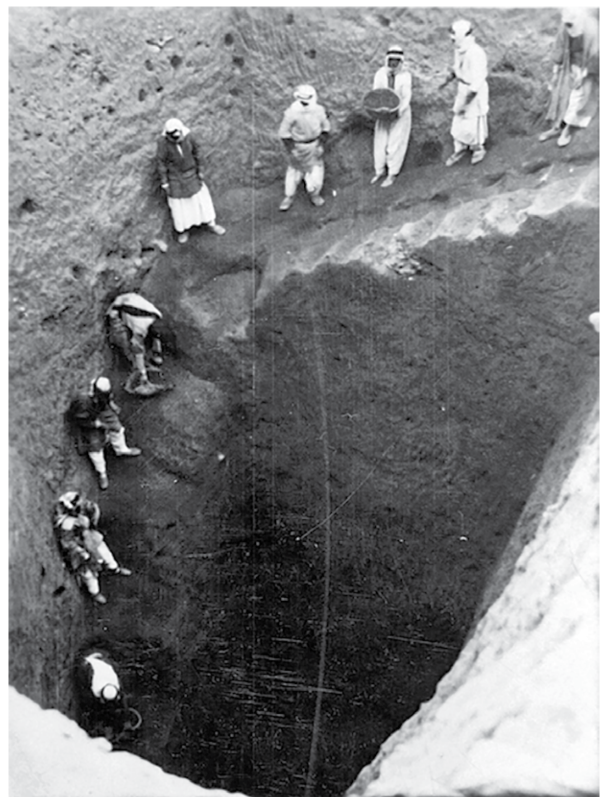

*Figure 20.2 The 'Deep pit' of Mallowan in 1931-1932. Reproduced from Gut 1995, Tafel 138c.*

*Figure 20.3 Flint tool found in the 'Deep Pit' at Nineveh. Iraq; prehistory; flint; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (ANE.21k.1928). © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.*

of the empire in the first millennium BC. Nineveh might have been a northern counterpart of Southern Mesopotamian sacred cities such as Eridu, where a famous temple dedicated to the god Ea existed from prehistoric times. The Assyrian themselves were apparently aware of the long tradition preserved in Nineveh, referring to the city as 'the eternal foundation' (Grayson & Novotny 2014).

The Ninevite 1-4 phases excavated by Mallowan span from the Pottery Neolithic (with the typical Hassuna and Samarra horizon of painted ceramics), through a substantial Late Neolithic phase (corresponding to the Halaf period), until the end of the Late Chalcolithic period. Viewed in terms of absolute chronology (i.e., calendar years), the original settlement of Nineveh might have been inhabited in the early to mid-seventh millennium BC and continued to be occupied until the end of the fourth/very early third millennium BC (after which the site entered into its historical epoch without apparent settlement gaps; fig. 20.3).

Although the site lacks a fine-tuned occupation sequence for these early periods, overall settlement continuity seems highly likely. Nineveh must have been a prominent site in an area suitable for Neolithic settlement – as the proximity of Arpachiyah, an important site 4 km east of Nineveh with a similar prehistoric sequence, would seem to suggest (fig. 20.4). On the basis of comparison with nearby contemporaneous sites such as Tepe Gawra and Arpachiyah, it is likely that prehistoric Nineveh originally grew during the seventh and sixth millennium BC as a simple village with a community dedicated to a mixed subsistence economy, based on the exploitation of domesticated plants and animals as well as, to a minor extent, hunter/gatherer activities.

A substantial change must have occurred during the passage from the Neolithic to the Chalcolithic. Unfortunately, we do not know the modalities of these changes: the corresponding phase in the Deep Pit, that is, the Northern Ubaid period, is poorly attested, with only a

*Figure 20.4 Aerial photograph of Arpachiyah. Reproduced from Mallowan & Cruikshank Rose 1935, Pl. II.*

few levels characterized by the typical painted pottery of the fifth millennium BC.

To judge from the excavated artefacts, however, the subsequent transformation during the Late Chalcolithic (late fifth – fourth millennium BC) must have been striking. During this period, Nineveh seems to have flourished into a fully urban settlement that might have also played a major commercial role in the region. Investigations carried out more recently suggest that the entire mound of Kuyunjik may then have been settled (Stronach 1994). If this is confirmed by more intensive future survey investigations, then Nineveh may have already achieved the status of a significant urban centre during the fourth millennium BC, with an extension of more than 40 ha – which is comparable to some of the largest cities of the period in both Northern (e.g., Tell al-Hawa and Tell Brak) and Southern Mesopotamia (Uruk and Eridu). Architectural finds from the 'Deep Pit', as well as from excavations carried out on the mounds of Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus, do not help very much in this respect. Apart from the so-called 'vaulted tombs' in the area of the Temple of Ištar – whose chronology has long been debated, with proposals ranging from the Late Chalcolithic to the third millennium BC (or perhaps even later) – no other clear traces of substantial buildings datable to the fourth millennium have been found.

The nature of the first urban Nineveh itself remains vague and undefined. Yet, the number and type of objects dating to the fourth millennium BC confirm that Nineveh had by then definitely changed its status and was no longer a simple rural centre on the Tigris. Among these, the presence of a number of artefacts – including pottery, a numerical notation tablet and a clay sealing with seal impressions, all of them of clear Southern Mesopotamian inspiration – suggest the occurrence of significant contact between Nineveh and the Land of Sumer, at that time also a region characterized by influential changes related to incipient urbanization on a large scale. One of these contacts might have been the city of Uruk, in those times a predominant centre in the south (Algaze 1986). This contact also suggests that the site possessed the key elements needed to sustain activities typical of modern

*Figure 20.6 Clay tablet describing a shipment of silver and gold from Anatolia. Assur Iraq; 2000-1740 BC; clay; Netherlands Institute for the Near East, Leiden (LB 1200). © NINO.*

urban settlements, such as labour specialization and administration. This, in turn, has given rise to a number of different interpretations of early urban Nineveh's status, seeing it as a Southern Mesopotamian colony, a local settlement characterized by the presence of a significant Southern Mesopotamian outpost, or an urban site with significant contact with southern centres of comparable importance. In the absence of clearer data, it is difficult to accept or reject any of these hypotheses. Nevertheless, the settlement of Nineveh during the fourth millennium BC had indeed changed, and the likely growth in size combined with the presence of material culture traditionally associated with areas located very far away (such as Southern Mesopotamia, which lies 800 km south of Nineveh), indicate that the site was already a crucial node in the north-south trade route that crossed all of Mesopotamia along the Tigris River. The subsequent emergence during the Bronze and Iron Ages (third – first millennium BC) of an intricate network of commercial routes in Upper Mesopotamia, of which Nineveh was one of the major crossroads, confirmed the site's emergence as a supra-regional centre in the landscape of Upper Mesopotamia.

# 21. The Ninevite 5 Culture at Nineveh

*Elena Rova*

The sequence of occupational levels discovered in Max Mallowan's 1931-32 'Prehistoric Pit' (figs. 20.2 and 21.1; Mallowan 1933) in the Ištar Temple area on top of the Kuyunjik mound at Nineveh provided the backbone for the ceramic-based periodization of the pre- and protohistorical cultures of Upper Mesopotamia, which we still use today (see Gut 1995). The Ninevite 5 culture, which flourished in Northern Iraq and in the Khabur region of North-eastern Syria between the end of the Uruk and the late Early Dynastic period (c. 3100/3000-2600/2550 BC)[44] is named after the fifth level of Mallowan's deep sounding, where it was first defined (fig. 21.1).

Ninevite 5 is one of the regional cultures, mainly defined through their distinct pottery productions, which follow the end of the Late Uruk 'internationalism' in the area of Mesopotamia and the immediate surrounding regions. It developed, presumably in the Upper Tigris area of Northern Iraq, from a local 'Terminal Uruk' horizon through a 'Transitional' stage, which runs roughly parallel to the Jemdet Nasr period in Central and Southern Mesopotamia. Different styles of pottery decoration (both painted and incised/excised), which occur on a number of characteristic shapes (carinated jars, bowls and stemmed 'chalices') probably used for the consumption of food and beverages, represent its most distinctive feature (figs. 21.2-5). Painted pottery – associated with fine grey ware and, later, joined by Early Incised pottery – characterizes the earlier phase of the culture. It went out of use in the later phase, which is characterized by Incised and Excised pottery. Other categories of artefacts are not equally distinctive; glyptic art, for instance, is mainly represented by styles (e.g., the so-called Glazed Steatite/Piedmont style) that originated outside of the Ninevite 5 area, in Central Mesopotamia and Western Iran.

Compared to the preceding Uruk period, the Ninevite 5 period exhibits hardly any element of a complex urban society: occupation apparently consisted of a network of small rural settlements, rather evenly distributed across the territory, with a few larger towns, not exceeding 10-15 ha in size, located in between; public architecture is limited to small temples or shrines and grain-storage facilities, and burial goods are generally rather modest, with only a few better-equipped graves. Only in the final (Late Excised) phase of the culture (c. 2600 BC) does a new wave of urbanization appear to start, at least in the Khabur region of North-eastern Syria; for example, at Tell Leilan, Tell Hamoukar and Tell Brak (Lebeau 2011, *passim*).

This reconstruction may be biased, however, due to the fact that excavations concentrated on rural areas[45] and levels dated to the earlier Ninevite 5 period were hardly investigated at larger sites. In fact, although excavated evidence for this period is on the whole

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44 For general information about the Ninevite 5 culture, see Roaf & Killick 1987; Rova 1988; Roaf 2000; Rova & Weiss 2003; for North-eastern Syria, also Lebeau 2011; for Northern Iraq, Rova, in press.

45 This is the case, for instance, for the area located along the Tigris to the north of Nineveh excavated in the early 1980s in the framework of the Eski Mosul Salvage project.

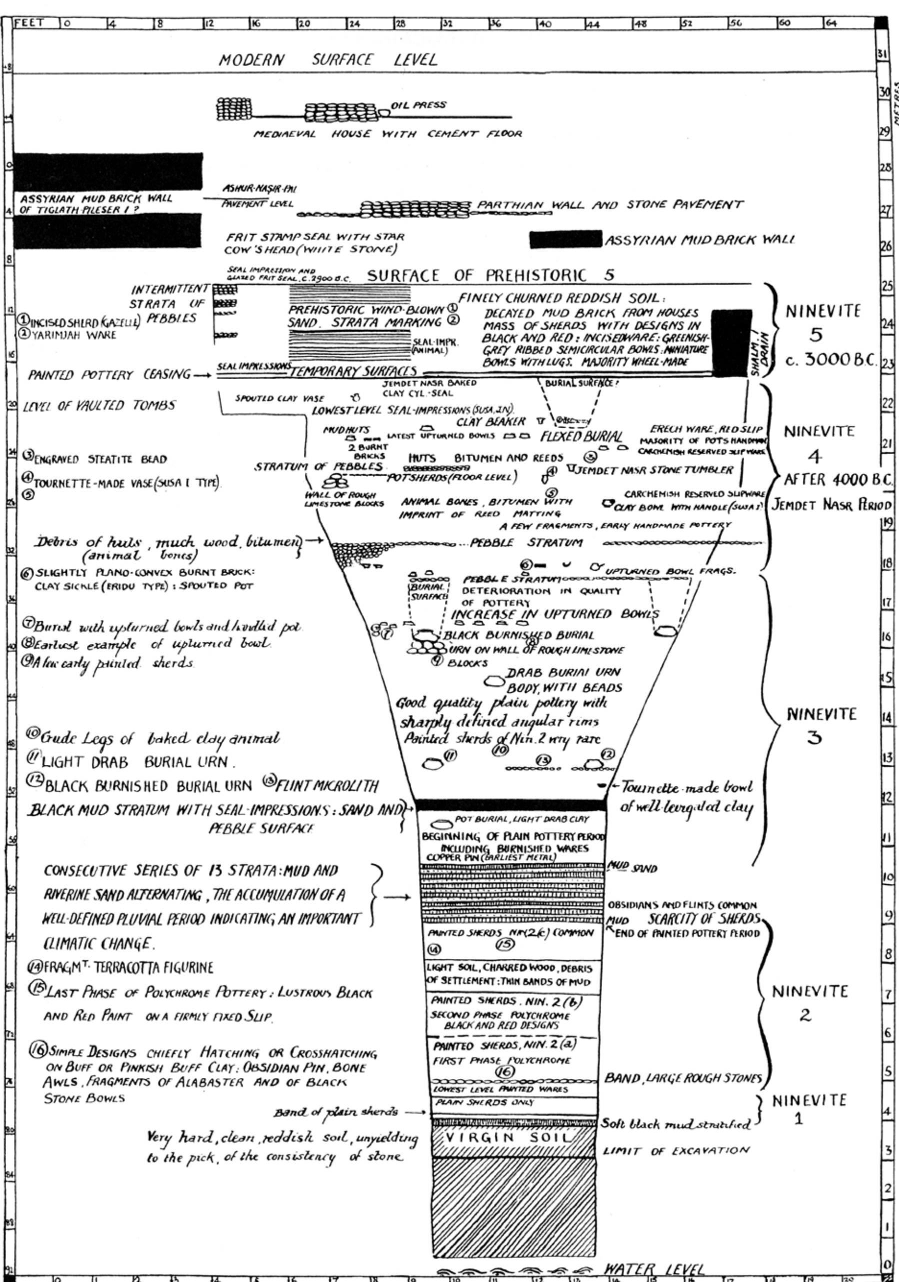



*Figure 21.1 Schematic stratigraphic profile of the 'Prehistoric Pit'. Reproduced from Thompson & Mallowan 1933, Tf. 73.*

rather meagre at the site due to the presence of massive later occupation, there is reason to assume that Nineveh may have been one of the largest, if not the largest, Ninevite 5 centre. David Stronach (1994, 92f.) argues that the entire Tell Kuyunjik (c. 40 ha) and possibly also part of the Lower Town (fig. 20.1) were settled at that time, and Julian Reade (2005, 354-5) suggests that a room measuring 24 m by 7.7 m with 4 m-thick mud brick arched walls with stone bases in the area of the Ištar Temple (fig. 21.6), which was attributed by Thompson to Šamši-Adad I, actually represents a Ninevite 5 'bent-axis' Ištar shrine.[46]

46 Renate Gut (1995, 40), however, considered it to be post-Ninevite in date (see also S. Renette, in press).

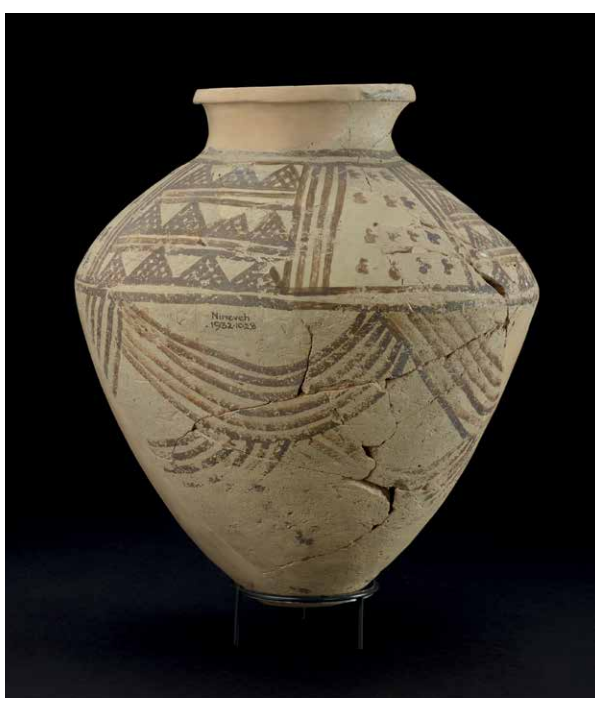



*Figure 21.2 Painted pottery jar, Ninevite 5 period. Nineveh, Iraq; 3000-2500 BC; pottery; H 31 cm, D 26 cm; Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (AN 1932.1028). © Ashmolean Museum.*

*Figure 21.3 Painted pottery jar, Ninevite 5 period. Nineveh, Iraq; 3000-2750 BC; pottery; H 11.4 cm; British Museum, London (1932,1210.121). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

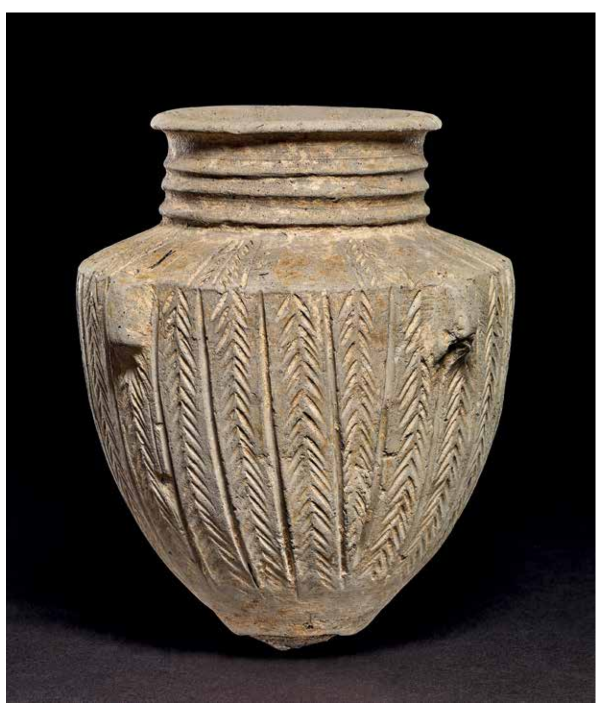


*Figure 21.4 Incised pottery jar, Ninevite 5 period. Nineveh, Iraq; 2750-2550 BC; pottery; H 11.4 cm; British Museum, London (N.1590/BM 92828). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

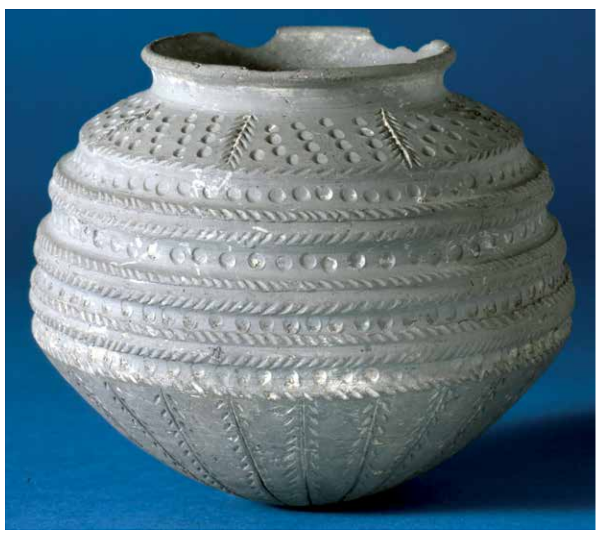


*Figure 21.5 Incised pottery vessel, Ninevite 5 period. Nineveh, Iraq; 2750-2550 BC; pottery; H 10 cm, D 7.5 cm; British Museum, London (1932,1212.38). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

*Figure 21.6 Possible Ninevite 5 shrine of Ištar. Reproduced from Thompson & Hamilton 1932, Pl. XLVII.1.*

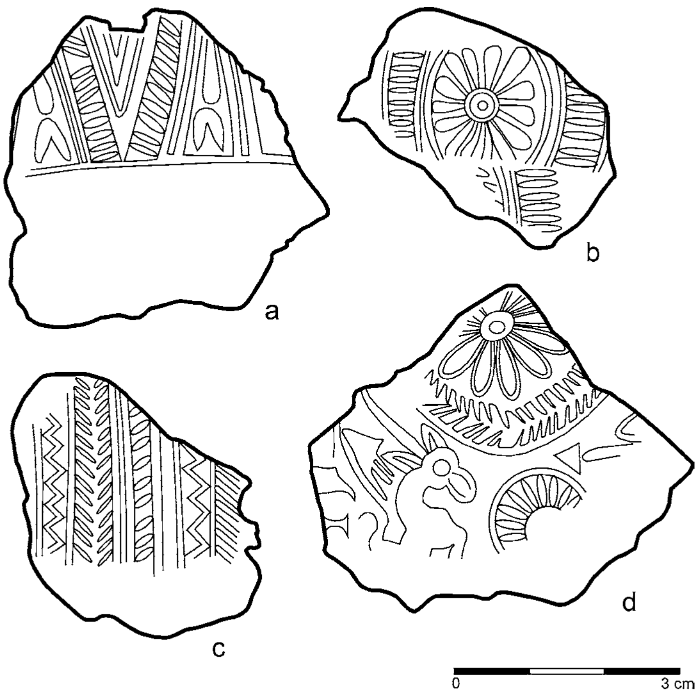



*Figure 21.7 Examples of Ninevite 5 sealings from Nineveh. Adapted from Collon 2003, fig. 3, 1, fig. 4, 18, fig. 6, 49, fig. 8, 76.*

*Figure 21.8 Animal figurine found in Nineveh. Iraq; 3000-2500 BC; terracotta; H 4 cm, L 6.2 cm; Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (AN 1932.1105). © Ashmolean Museum.*

Furthermore, early excavations at Nineveh produced more evidence for glyptic art than any other Ninevite 5 site, in form of c. 90 clay sealings and a dozen of original cylinder seals, although none of them has precise stratigraphic context, and they are therefore dated according to style (Collon 2003; Pittman, in press). The dominant style is the Glazed Steatite/Piedmont style, which is represented in its full variety of designs. Also well represented are related geometric styles, which find parallels in Central and Southern Mesopotamia and at Susa in a horizon which in general terms corresponds to the Early Dynastic I/II periods (fig. 21.7). The majority of the impressions are on container sealings (baskets, jars, bundles), but a few door sealings can also be identified: this suggests some sort of large-scale administrative use of seals at the site.

Early excavations reached Ninevite 5 deposits in several areas around the later Ištar Temple, but the results of these excavations were often left unpublished (Gut 2005; *cf.* also Renette, in press). The Ninevite 5 stratum appears to have been between 1.5 m and 4.5 m thick, but had been heavily damaged by later constructions, which had probably truncated its upper part, corresponding to the phase of Incised/Excised pottery. The area exposed in Mallowan's deep sounding measured approximately 12 m by 12 m;[47] its stratigraphy was reconstructed by Renate Gut (2005, 51 ff.) on the basis of absolute depths of finds in combination with excavation notes. To judge from the recovered ceramics, all the phases of the Ninevite 5 period are represented. The Ninevite 5 level consisted of a c. 2.5 m-sequence of relatively undisturbed layers (from -18 to -10 ft.; fig. 21.8), spanning the 'Transitional' and 'Painted/Early Incised' phases, followed by c. 3 m (from -10 to 0 ft.) of mixed deposits. Mud brick architecture was present, but it was fragmentary and difficult to interpret.

Recent, better stratigraphically controlled excavations in 1989-90 at the 'Kuyunjik Gully sounding' on the eastern side of the Kuyunjik mound (McMahon 1998) unfortunately unearthed Ninevite 5 material, mainly of the Painted/Incised phase, only on a very small and rather disturbed area.

47 Or, possibly, a maximum of 20 m x 15 m (Gut 1995, 51, fn. 74).

# 22. Nineveh in the Second Millennium BC: the Birth of an Assyrian City

*Aline Tenu*

In the first half of the eighteenth century BC, Northern Mesopotamia was unified under the rule of a king named Šamši-Adad (reigned c. 1809-1776 BC). His realm extended from the Euphrates to the Tigris. Located beyond the Tigris was the independent kingdom of Nurrugum, to which belonged Nineveh, at that time called Ninet. In the spring of 1751 BC, for reasons unknown to us, Šamši-Adad decided to conquer Ninet. To that aim, he sent his son Išme-Dagan (reigned c. 1776-1736 BC) with 60,000 men. According to Nele Ziegler (2004, 23), this number is exaggerated, but it reveals the importance that Šamši-Adad attached to the operation's success and the means used to achieve it. After few weeks, Ninet was taken. Soon afterwards Šamši-Adad himself settled in Ninet/Nineveh, where he learned about the capture of the capital Nurrugum, whose location remains unknown.

Very soon after the conquest of Nineveh, Šamši-Adad undertook the reconstruction of the Ištar Temple and of the ziggurat that had been erected seven generations earlier by the Akkadian king Maništušu (reigned c. 2270-2255 BC; Ziegler 2004, 26).

The dating of the architectural remains in the area of the Ištar Temple is very complicated, and Julian Reade (2005) recently proposed a complete reassessment of our understanding of the site. The temple – only the southwest part of the building survived – was reconstructed on the basis of a new plan, upon a mud brick platform (fig. 22.2). The building measured some 55 m wide and 106 m long. The external walls were 4.5 m thick! An entrance flanked by two towers was located to the south-west. A small room gave access to a large courtyard (c. 40 m x 16 m), carefully paved with baked bricks. The main court of the building was probably further north. A projection on the outer face of the north-western side may correspond to what was the main entrance of the sanctuary.

Julian Reade (2005, 364) suggested the reconstruction of a symmetrical building, reminiscent of the Aššur Temple in Assur. The plan of the Ištar Temple in Nineveh, deeply influenced by the Babylonian tradition, remained essentially unchanged for more than one millennium. Šamši-Adad built or restored at least one other temple dedicated to the goddess of the underworld, Ereškigal. This sanctuary, known from a single tablet, once stood at Kuyunjik. In a Mari letter, Šamši-Adad asked his other son Yasmah-Adad to send to Nineveh cedars, myrtle and cypress beams from the site of Qatna in Syria. This wood was perhaps intended for building these temples, which were certainly richly ornamented.

After the reign of Šamši-Adad, we have few data pertaining to Nineveh, except for those relating to the worship of Ištar. The Ištar Temple is mentioned in the Prologue of the Code of Hammurabi (c. 1750 BC; fig. 22.3), and in the first half of the fourteenth century BC two Mittannian kings sent the statue of the deity to the pharaoh in Egypt. One of them, King Tušratta, saw Ištar of Nineveh as 'his goddess'. The influence of Ištar of Nineveh may imply that Nineveh was integrated into the kingdom of Hammurabi

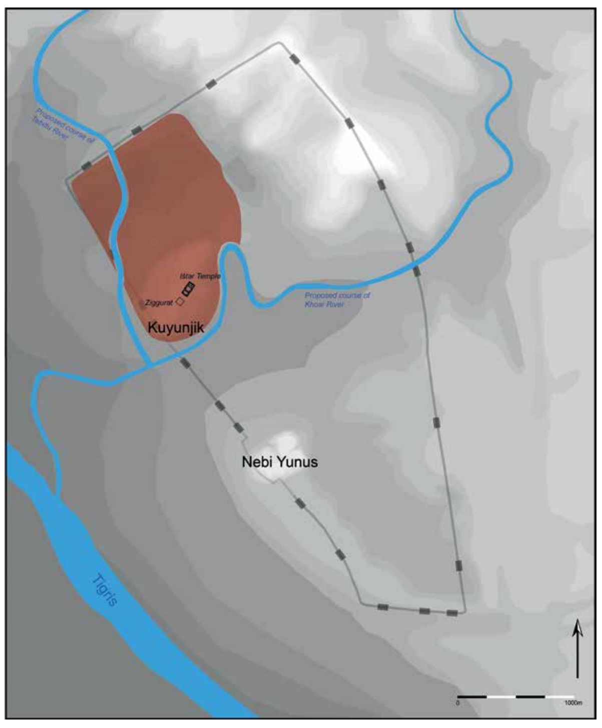



*Figure 22.1 Probable extent of the Middle Assyrian remains at Nineveh. Adapted from Stronach 1994, figs. 3-4.*

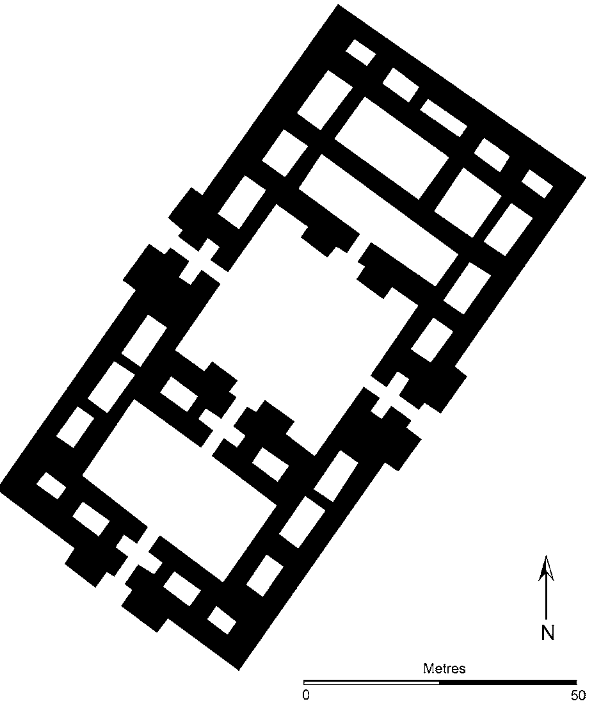



*Figure 22.2 Plan of the Ištar Temple at Nineveh. Adapted from Reade 2005, 365, fig. 12.*

*Figure 22.3 Fragment of a clay tablet with a copy of the Code of Hammurabi. Nineveh, Iraq; 7th century BC; clay; H 8 cm, W 7.5 cm; Musée du Louvre, Paris (AO 7757). © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Franck Raux.*

*Figure 22.4 Limestone statue of a woman, possibly representing Ištar. Nineveh, Iraq; 1073-1056 BC; limestone; H 93 cm, W 48 cm; British Museum, London (1856,0909.60/BM 124963).*
*© The Trustees of the British Museum.*

*Figure 22.5 The 'Broken Obelisk' showing king Aššur-bel-kala facing defeated enemies. Nineveh, Iraq; 1083-1056 BC; limestone/gypsum; H 63 cm, W 41 cm; British Museum, London (1856,0909.59/BM 118898).* *© The Trustees of the British Museum.*

(reigned c. 1792-1750 BC), and then into the Mittannian Empire. However, no other text supports this hypothesis (MacGinnis, this volume).

No later than the mid-fourteenth century BC, Nineveh became part of the Middle Assyrian kingdom, ruled by King Aššur-uballit I (reigned 1353-1318 BC). Besides the Assyrian capital of Assur, Nineveh was the only town where Aššur-uballit I undertook building works. No architectural remains can be connected to this activity, which is only attested by a fragmentary basalt inscription found in the temple and by later mentions in the records of Shalmaneser I (reigned 1263-1234 BC) and Ashurnasirpal II (reigned 883-859 BC). Shalmaneser I conducted important restorations in the temple and in the ziggurat associated with it after they were partially destroyed by an earthquake. Both were struck by a new seism during the reign of Aššur-dan I (reigned 1168-1133 BC), but repairs were made later by his grandson Aššur-reš-iši I (reigned c. 1133-1115 BC). We only know of these repairs from textual sources: the façade was raised significantly, from barely 2 m up to 6 m! We also know that monumental lions stood in the temple forecourt. Lions are often associated with Ištar, and stone lions were discovered in the Ištar Temple of Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), built in the ninth century BC. Relying on this parallel, we may assume that the main entrance on the north-western side was flanked by two monumental lions that had been erected before the reign of Aššur-reš-iši.

The son of Aššur-reš-iši I, Tiglath-pileser I (reigned 1114-1076 BC), undertook no substantial works on the temple itself, but on a terrace connected to it. Two relief fragments erroneously attributed to Assurbanipal's North Palace were correctly dated to the Middle Assyrian period by Edith Porada. Julian Reade (2005, 373) suggests that they belong to an obelisk erected by Tiglath-pileser I, perhaps at the north-west front of the temple. They may represent scenes of royal deer-hunting.

Two important later discoveries were ascribed to Aššur-bel-kala (reigned 1073-1056 BC), son of Tiglath-pileser I. In 1853, in a very unclear context between the Ištar Temple and the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib, the archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam (1826-1910) found the statue of a woman, maybe Ištar herself (fig. 22.4), and the so-called 'Broken Obelisk' (fig. 22.5). On the carved panel located

on the top of the latter, the king is shown holding two pairs of prisoners, possibly Phoenicians or Arameans.

A third obelisk, the 'White Obelisk' (fig. 2.2), has been discovered in Nineveh. It is now attributed to Ashurnasirpal I (reigned 1049-1031 BC), who wrote a hymn dedicated to Ištar, thanking her for her help and support at the time of his accession to the throne. The king redecorated her shrine; a very important event that he represented explicitly on the 'White Obelisk'. Other panels show military campaigns, tribute scenes or royal hunting expeditions. The original location of the obelisks is unknown, but as Aššur-bel-kala was defaced on the 'Broken Obelisk', Julian Reade has suggested that it was still visible when the city fell in 612 BC (fig. 22.5; Reade 1998-2001, 273).

The cult of Ištar of Nineveh, which developed continuously, gave the city a prominent position despite its lack of a specific status in the Middle Assyrian administration. In addition, several Assyrian monarchs developed an inclination for Nineveh, where they built palaces for their own residence (Tenu 2004).

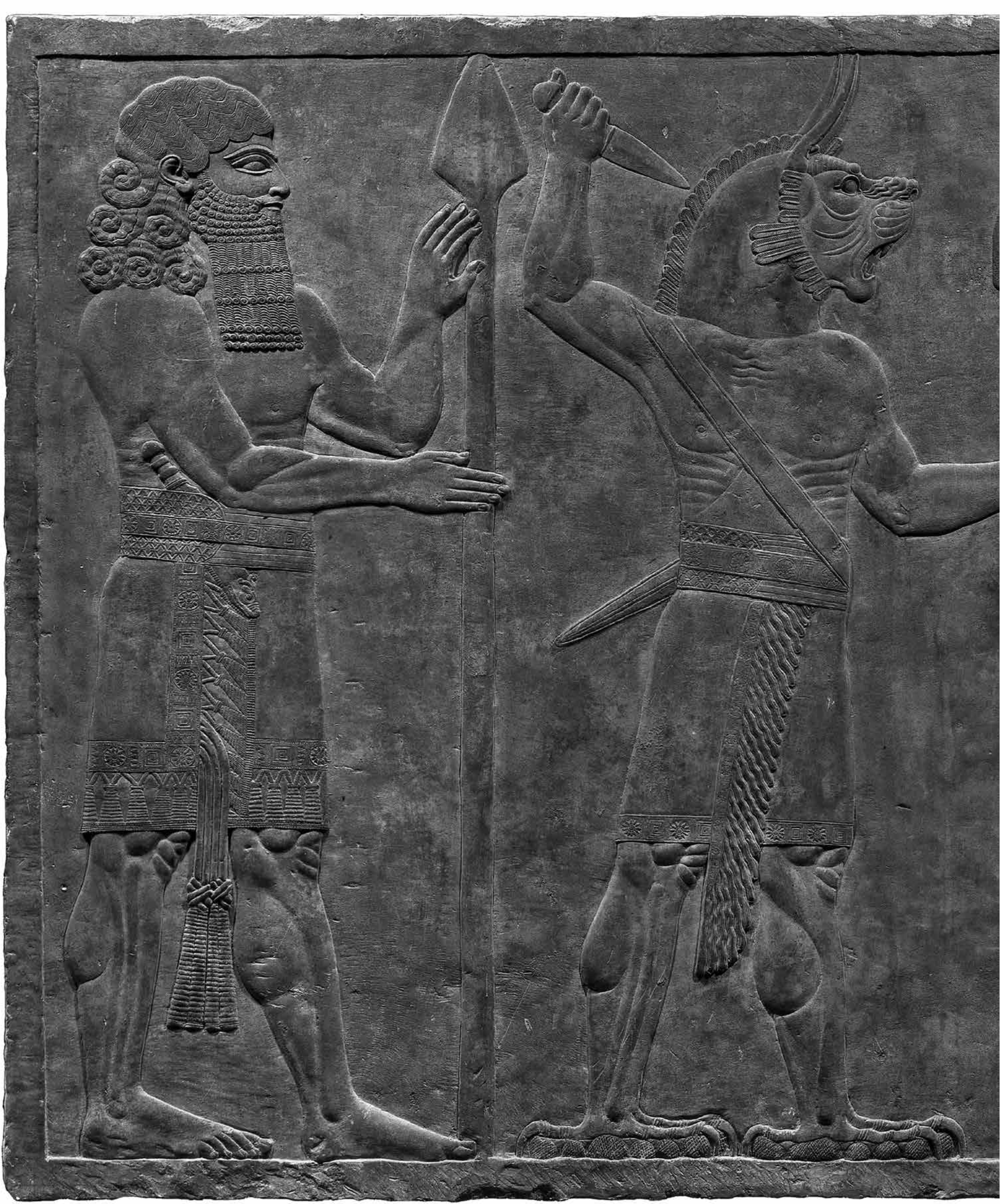
Tiglath-pileser I (reigned 1114-1076 BC) mentioned three different palaces in his inscriptions. The oldest probably dates back to Shalmaneser I (reigned 1263-1234 BC), whose palace in Nineveh is known from a single fragment of a clay cone. It was later restored by Mutakkil-Nusku (1133 BC) and then by Tiglath-pileser I. No detail is given concerning its ornamentation, but it is said to be on a terrace, by the Ištar Temple. The building of a second palace in Nineveh was undertaken by Aššur-reš-iši and completed by his son Tiglath-pileser I. The latter described a façade of coloured glazed bricks, replicas in obsidian of date palms, knobbed nails of bronze, high doors of fir, reinforced with bronze bands. The third palace was probably a summer house (Reade 1998-2001, 411). Erected in a garden planted at that time, its decoration celebrated the accomplishments of the king.

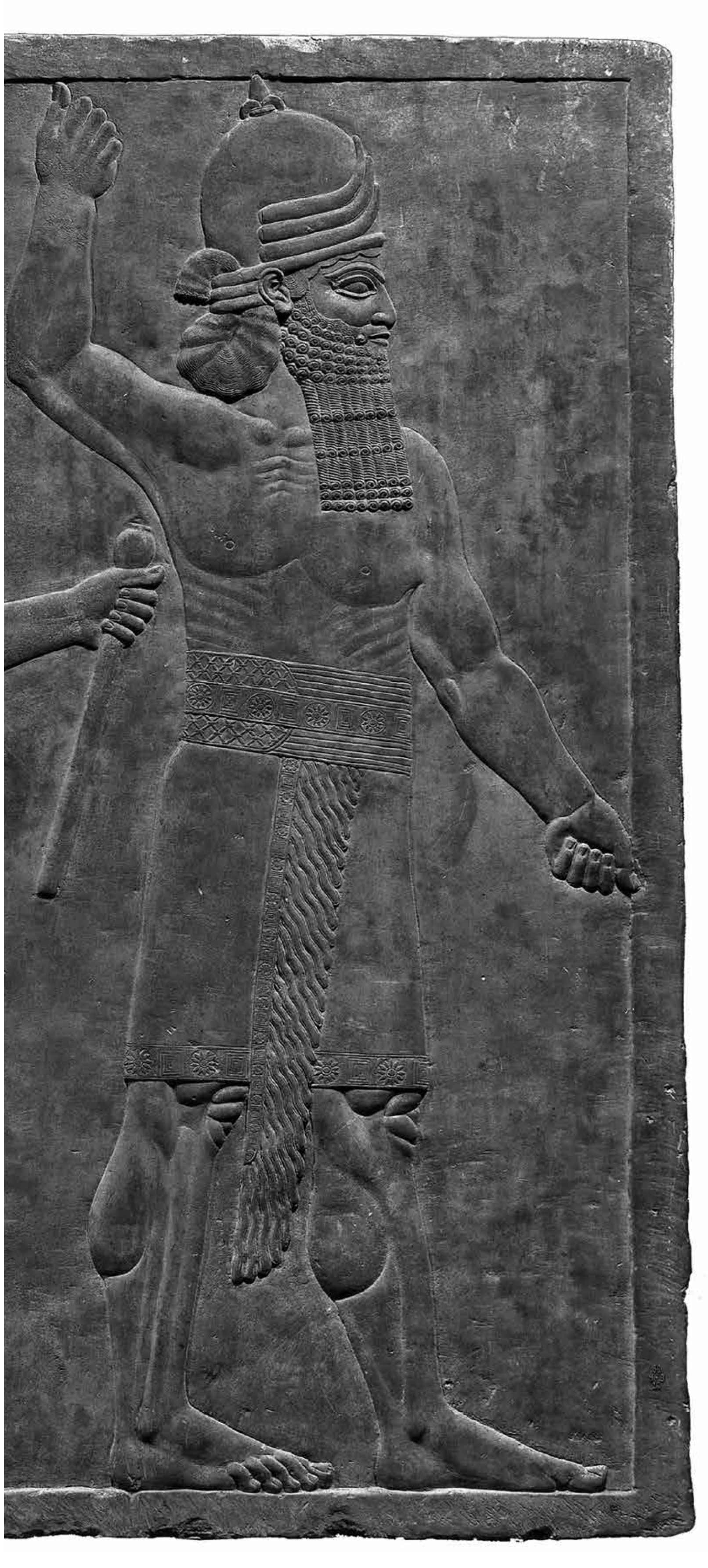
Many attempts have been made to correlate these three buildings with the Neo-Assyrian Southwest and North Palaces. Indeed, they were probably erected where previous palaces already stood, and are in all likelihood the successors of the Middle Assyrian constructions. Unfortunately, the massive works undertaken in the first millennium BC preclude any firm identification of Tiglath-pileser's edifices. The most ancient one, built in the thirteenth century BC, might be the later Southwest palace of Sennacherib; the one erected by Aššur-reš-iši might be the precursor of the North Palace of Ashurbanipal.

Originally reputed for its temple dedicated to Ištar, Nineveh became a major city of residence for the Assyrian kings. Even if the capital remained in Assur, Nineveh seems to have been an extremely pleasant city in which to live. The Assyrian monarchs of the second millennium BC built palaces and planted gardens there, prefiguring the imposing construction activities of the great kings of the first millennium BC. However, our knowledge of the extent of the city during the second millennium BC is still very limited (fig. 22.6).

No traces remain of the city wall restored by Tiglath-pileser I. Inscriptions of Aššur-reš-iši record the erection of a *bīt kutalli*, an arsenal. This building was later destroyed by Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC), who abandoned the site in favour of a new one in Nebi Yunus, Nineveh's second acropolis. We thus have no indication of the location of the ancient arsenal, although we may suppose that it was probably situated in the lower city, where large open areas were available. A tablet discovered near the Maški Gate to the north-west of Kuyunjik and attributed to Ashurnasirpal I (reigned 1049-1031 BC) evokes an Adad Temple that could have been located in the vicinity. By the end of the Middle Assyrian period, Nineveh enjoyed unquestioned royal favour, which stimulated the development of the city. David Stronach (1994, 95-6) has hypothesized that a large lower city extended to the north of Kuyunjik, but its limits remain undetermined.

*Figure 22.6 A cylinder seal from the Middle Assyrian period showing a ruler and attendants. Nineveh, Iraq; 1300-1200 BC; jasper; L 2.1 cm, D 1 cm; British Museum, London (1854,0401.12/BM 89806). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*





# PART IV

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# Part IV: Neo-Assyrian Nineveh: the Largest City in the World

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# 23. Neo-Assyrian Nineveh: the Largest City in the World

*Lucas P. Petit and Daniele Morandi Bonacossi*

Compared to other Near Eastern entities, Assyria remained relatively powerful and well organized during the so-called Dark Ages (between c. 1200 and 900 BC), albeit significantly reduced in size. It was a time when formerly stable and powerful empires, such as those of Egypt and Babylon, and regions like Anatolia and the Levantine coast, experienced socio-economic and political collapse caused by climate change and the infiltration of new groups. The maintenance of stability at a time when others were struggling certainly aided the relatively fast and successful foundation of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, probably around the time that King Adad-nirari II acceded to the throne in 911 BC. With a few exceptions, the Neo-Assyrian kings who succeeded him developed an empire that by the seventh century BC controlled an area from Egypt to Western Iran, and from Turkey to parts of the Arabian Peninsula. Using chariots and new means of warfare gave them a major advantage over their enemies. They were able to travel relatively fast from one side of the empire to the other, also thanks to the Assyrian 'Royal Road' that traversed the empire. Nationalist sentiments, even revolts among the subjugated nations, were suppressed with severe punishments, mass deportations, and the appointment of Assyrian governors. The Assyrian Empire was the first global empire in history and Assyrian material culture spread to the most remote areas of the Near East.

The geographic and political centre of the Neo-Assyrian Empire lay in the plains to the west and east of the Tigris River in Northern Iraq. The location of the official capital was changed a number of times. The first kings settled in Assur, the southernmost city of the Assyrian core area. Their palaces were decorated with flat stone slabs, an architectural style that the Assyrians continued to use until the end of the empire in the late seventh century BC. King Ashurnasirpal II (reigned 884-859 BC) moved the capital to Kalhu (Nimrud), the seat of the empire until 722 BC, when Sargon II decided to construct a completely new town. He named his capital Dur-Šarrukin – meaning 'fortress of Sargon' – with the intention that its scale and appearance should eclipse those of all previous cities. When he died and was left on a battlefield, his son Sennacherib abandoned this ghost-city and moved to Nineveh, a city with a long history. Together with his successors, of whom Ashurbanipal (reigned 668 – c. 627 BC) is certainly the most renowned, he made the Neo-Assyrian Empire more influential than ever and Nineveh the largest city in the world.

Nevertheless, little is known about the everyday inhabitants of Nineveh. Was the area in between the heavy walls densely built up, or did it also include animal pens, orchards and other open spaces? Most of the excavations concentrated on the royal buildings, not least because the institutes and museums providing funding wanted

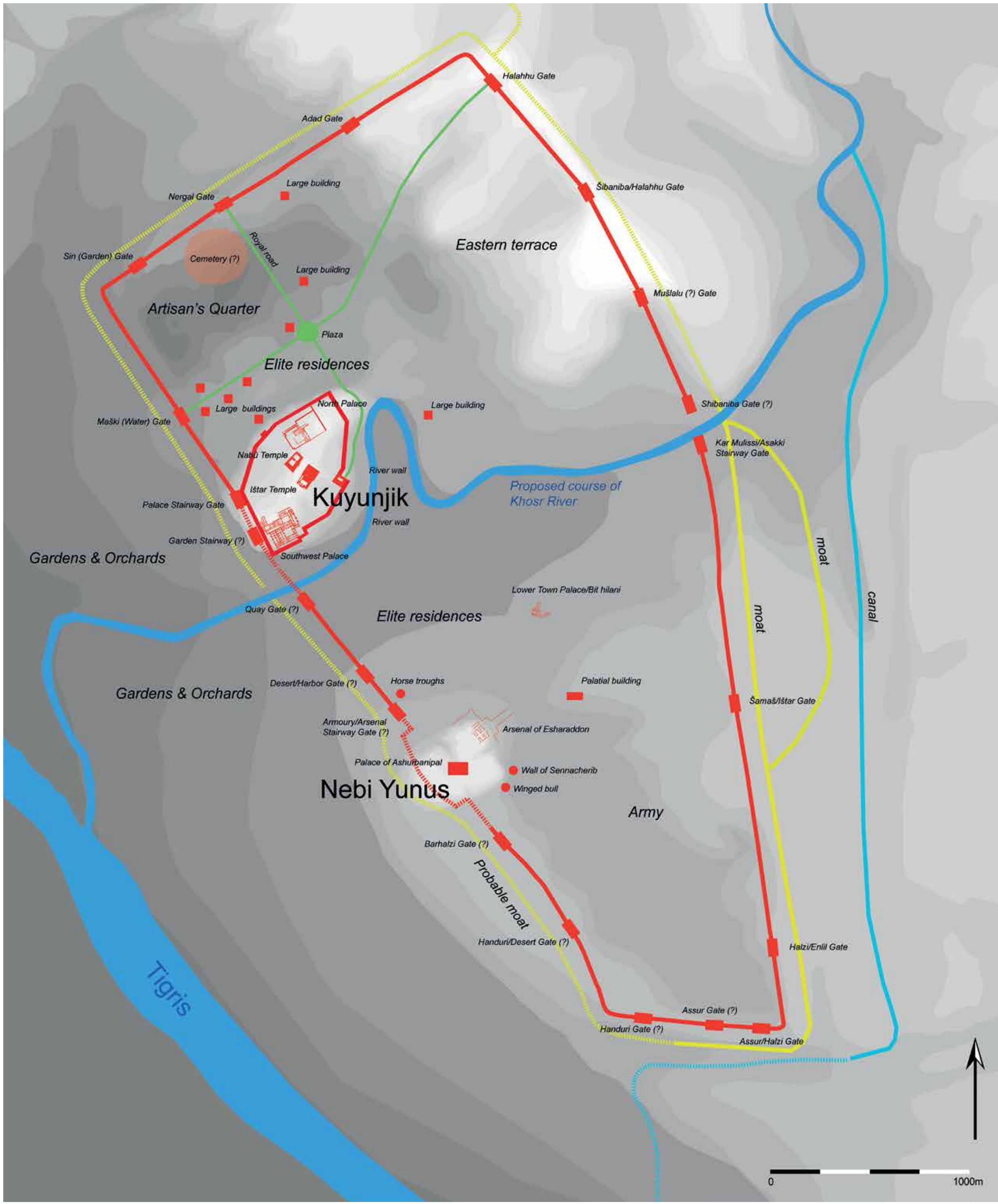



*Figure 23.1 The extent of Neo-Assyrian Nineveh.*

to obtain pretty and valuable artefacts – objects that one would not expect to find in domestic areas. The information that we have about royal Nineveh is extremely valuable, but there is still a lot of work to be done before we really understand how the ordinary residents behaved and thought.

# 24. Neo-Assyrian Town Planning

*Mirko Novák*

Although Assyrian cities were amongst the first Ancient Near Eastern sites to be excavated by European scholars in the nineteenth century, our knowledge of Neo-Assyrian town planning is still surprisingly limited. The reason for this is the focus on palaces and temples during the early excavations and the long interruption of scientific research in Northern Iraq in recent decades, when modern techniques such as geophysical prospection would have provided new tools for advanced urbanistic research. Nevertheless, some provincial Assyrian towns have been thoroughly investigated, which has helped us to gain additional knowledge.

The heartland of the Neo-Assyrian Empire contained three types of cities, based on their genesis: first, old towns with a long and uninterrupted settlement history, which gave them an appearance of successive growth; second, newly founded towns with a properly planned outline reflecting the idea of a 'perfect' settlement; and third, a combination of the two: significantly transformed old towns. The first type is represented by Assur; the second by Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin); and the third by Nineveh, a city with a long history, which was significantly restructured and reshaped when it became the new capital.

The city of Assur was the eponymous core of Assyria, its ancient capital and seat of the national god Aššur; god, city, and country bore the same name and were of crucial importance for Assyrian identity (figs. 24.1-2). Already flourishing in the late third mil-

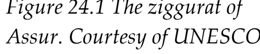


*Figure 24.1 The ziggurat of Assur. Courtesy of UNESCO.*

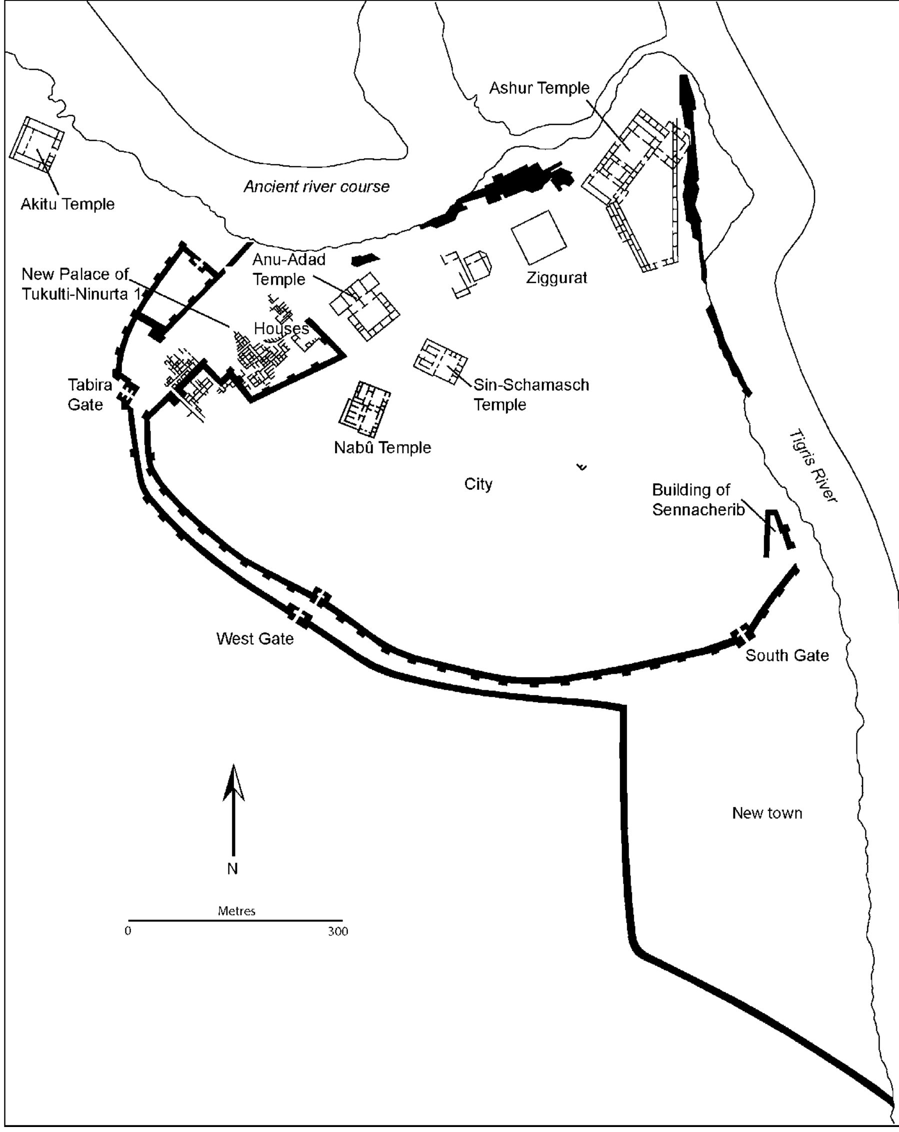



*Figure 24.2 Plan of Assur.*

lennium BC, the city was of some importance due to its role as trade centre in the early second millennium. Unlike Babylonian cities, which were centred on the temples and ziggurats of their tutelary gods, Assur's main sanctuary, dedicated to the god Aššur, was situated at the city's northernmost periphery, on a peak of a steep mountain ridge overlooking the river valley. In its immediate vicinity was the palace of the ruler, who was at the same time high priest and representative of the god. The spatial vicinity of temple and palace, perceivable from inside and outside the city, represented the ideological connection between the city god and the king. This provided the pattern for all later Assyrian capitals.

The limited extension of available urban space and the location at the southernmost periphery of the dry-farming Assyrian heartland meant that Assur was neither big nor economically powerful enough for the ambitious building programmes of the Neo-Assyrian kings: the enormous administration and the wish for gigantic palaces as symbols of royal power required more space. Hence, large residential cities became political capitals beside Assur, which continued to be the religious centre. The separation of political and religious capital was a characteristic feature of the Assyrian Empire (Novák 2014). This process had already started in the late Middle Assyrian Period with the foundation

*Figure 24.3 The site of Nimrud, October 2009. Photograph by Mary Prophit.*

of Kār-Tukultī-Ninurta, situated opposite Assur on the eastern bank of the Tigris.

The first Assyrian residential city built in the first millennium was Nimrud (ancient Kalhu; fig. 24.3). In the ninth century BC, the ruins of this once occupied but now abandoned city were chosen by Ashurnasirpal II (reigned 883-859 BC) as his new residence. Nimrud was situated close to the confluence of the Tigris and Greater Zab rivers, in between the two major cities of Assur and Nineveh. The city was surrounded by extra-urban royal gardens and a 'zoo', to which plants and animals from conquered countries were brought. In the city itself were settled deportees from all the countries that were under the yoke of the Assyrian king, making the city an illustration and symbol of the whole world. All of the public buildings were situated on top of a fortified and elevated citadel on the edge of the city, with the temple of the tutelary god Ninurta standing at the north-western corner. The element of the citadel was previously unknown to Babylonian and Assyrian urban architecture, being inspired by Northern Levantine patterns and at the same time the result of the elites' growing wish for security against their subjects. Again, the temple and the palace formed a close spatial connection, higher in elevation than the dwelling quarters. Since the citadel was physically connected with the lower city walls, the public buildings were visible from the outside and could be perceived as towering over the fortification walls. During the reign of Shalmaneser III (reigned 859/858-824 BC), a second citadel was added on top of an artificial terrace towards the south-eastern corner of the city. This secondary citadel, 'Fort Shalmaneser', was the seat of the military palace of the city.

This newly established pattern of a 'typical' Assyrian urban layout was copied 150 years later by King Sargon II (reigned 721-705 BC) when he founded the next residential city, Khorsabad, on virgin ground (fig. 24.4). Here, an almost square layout was chosen for the city. Its main elements were again the citadel with the royal palace and the temples of the gods of the city, and a secondary citadel with the military institutions.

The last Assyrian residential city was Nineveh (fig. 23.1), an existing city that was rebuilt and significantly enlarged by Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC). Again, the environment was transformed into an artificial landscape consisting of parks and gardens. Two citadels dominated the skyline of the city: the larger one (Kuyunjik) was the main citadel, whilst the smaller one (Nebi Yunus) was the secondary one. On top of the main

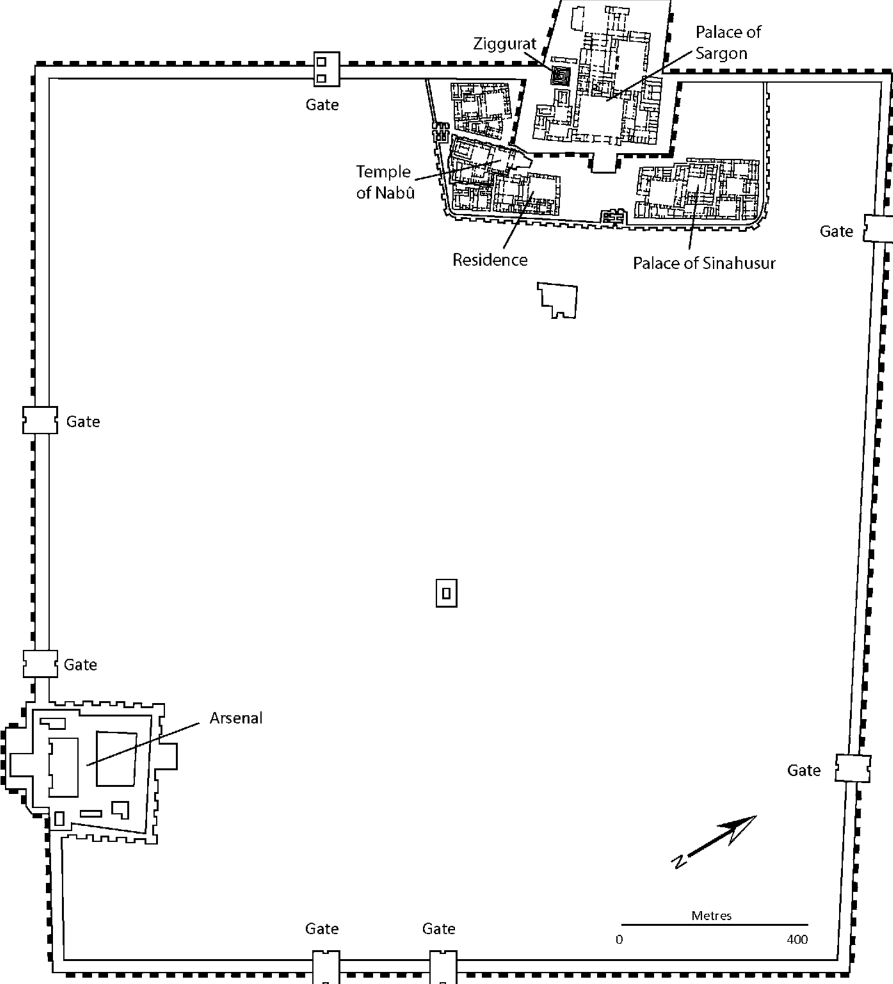



*Figure 24.4 Plan of Khorsabad.*

citadel and close to its edges, the palaces of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal were erected, whilst temples occupied the area in between them. Since the palace of Sennacherib lay close to the western slope of the citadel, it overlooked the riverside and the gardens, just as the palaces of his predecessors had done.

As far as we know, smaller sites tended to follow the pattern of these capitals. Of course, we should make a distinction between newly founded towns and those towns with a long occupation history, as we should likewise differentiate between notable seats of provincial administration and modest villages of only local importance.

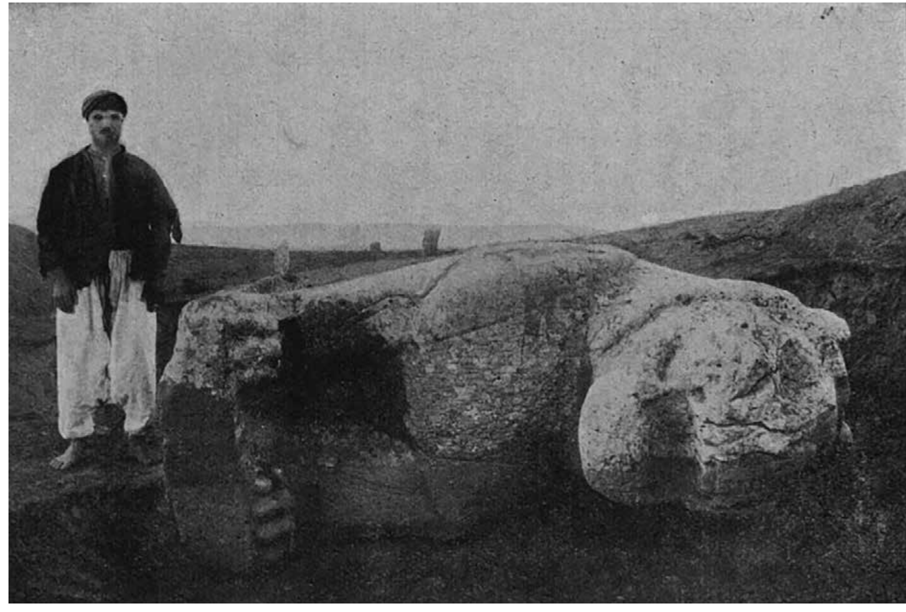
Tell Halaf (ancient Guzana) (fig. 24.5; Novák 2013), Til-Barsip (fig. 24.6) and Tell Sheikh Hamad (ancient Dūr-Katlimmu) (Kühne 2013) are all provincial centres, but they have very different histories. Irrespective of this, they share some common features, such as fortified citadels on the periphery, situated close to a river passing by the city. The governors' palaces were all situated on the citadel's edge, in several cases on top of artificial mud brick terraces, thus imitating the situation in the capitals. The outer shape of the cities often followed geometric outlines.

The alignment of the streets differed according to the occupation history of the cities: the dwelling quarter in Assur shows irregular alignments of streets, most of them relatively narrow; in Nineveh, Sennacherib mentioned in his building inscription broad and straight streets, and private constructions were forbidden, under the threat of punishment, from encroaching on the street. Thus, a rather regular street system seems to have existed here, which is confirmed by the situation at Tell Sheikh Hamad, where the geophysical prospection indicates a geometric grid system.

Questions concerning segregation patterns – social, ethnic, religious, and so forth – remain unanswered, due to the scarcity of data. However, the proximity of big, complex elite houses to small houses, as attested in Assur and in Tell Sheikh Hamad, may be taken as an indication of patron-client relationships, rather than social segregation.

*Figure 24.5 (top) Tell Halaf. Photograph made by Günther Mirsch. Courtesy of the Tell Halaf Project.*

*Figure 24.6 (right) One of the lion statues found at Til-Barsip. Reproduced from Thureau-Dangin 1930, 13.*



# 25. Water for Assyria: Irrigation and Water Management in the Assyrian Empire

*Daniele Morandi Bonacossi*

The history of Assyria unfolded through a long process of territorial expansion, sustained by an ideology of universal conquest, which culminated between the eighth and seventh centuries BC in the formation of what became the most extensive territorial empire in the history of the Ancient Near East prior to the rise of Persian power. Assyrian royal elites narrated the empire by means of a rich written and iconographic documentation, supported by the construction of a vast array of imperial infrastructures, such as massive regional hydraulic systems, road networks and the foundation of new capital cities and large urban centres administering the provinces of the empire. Assyrian bureaucracies conceived of this interrelated network of infrastructure and the landscape resulting from its territorial realization as a means to reinforce an official narrative that aimed to enhance the success and supremacy of the empire and the legitimacy of its rulers.

With the sole exception of Assur, seat of the national god and religious capital of Assyria, the empire's capitals were located in the dry-farming belt of Northern Mesopotamia, that is to say, in the region where the relatively abundant rainfall theoretically sufficed for the extensive cultivation of cereals with no need for artificial irrigation of the fields. However, rainfall irregularity and frequent droughts, which today in Syria and Iraq typically take the form of multi-year dry periods often lasting four or five years, could determine repeated crisis episodes followed by harvest loss and famine. Indeed, cuneiform texts describe recurring food shortage events hitting different regions of the empire. In a letter sent in 657 BC to King Ashurbanipal (reigned 668 – c. 627 BC), the astrologer and priest Akkullanu mentioned a major episode of severe and apparently widespread drought that caused the total loss of the harvest: 'this year's rains were diminished and no harvest was reaped' (Parpola 1993). The health of the empire's economy naturally depended greatly on the success of the harvest and repeated droughts would have inflicted considerable economic damage on the growing imperial economy. During the late eighth and early seventh centuries, the Assyrian heartland had undergone a population explosion, largely due to the forced resettlement by the Assyrian kings of conquered peoples within the empire (Oded 1979). Overpopulation and repeated drought may have been strong elements of weakness and instability in the Assyrian economic and political system (Schneider & Adalı 2014). To curb the risk posed by environmental, climatic and later in Assyrian history also demographic factors, the Assyrian rulers built gigantic and highly sophisticated hydraulic engineering networks that deeply transformed the landscape of Assyria (fig. 25.1; Morandi Bonacossi 2018a). The excavation of impressive irrigation systems across the country profoundly modified the space and settlement patterns in the core of the Assyrian Empire, along with people's mental and symbolic perceptions of this newly created cultural landscape and its collective memory. The newly engineered waterscapes were in fact associated with commemorative monuments (rock reliefs, stelae and royal inscriptions) placed at symbolically

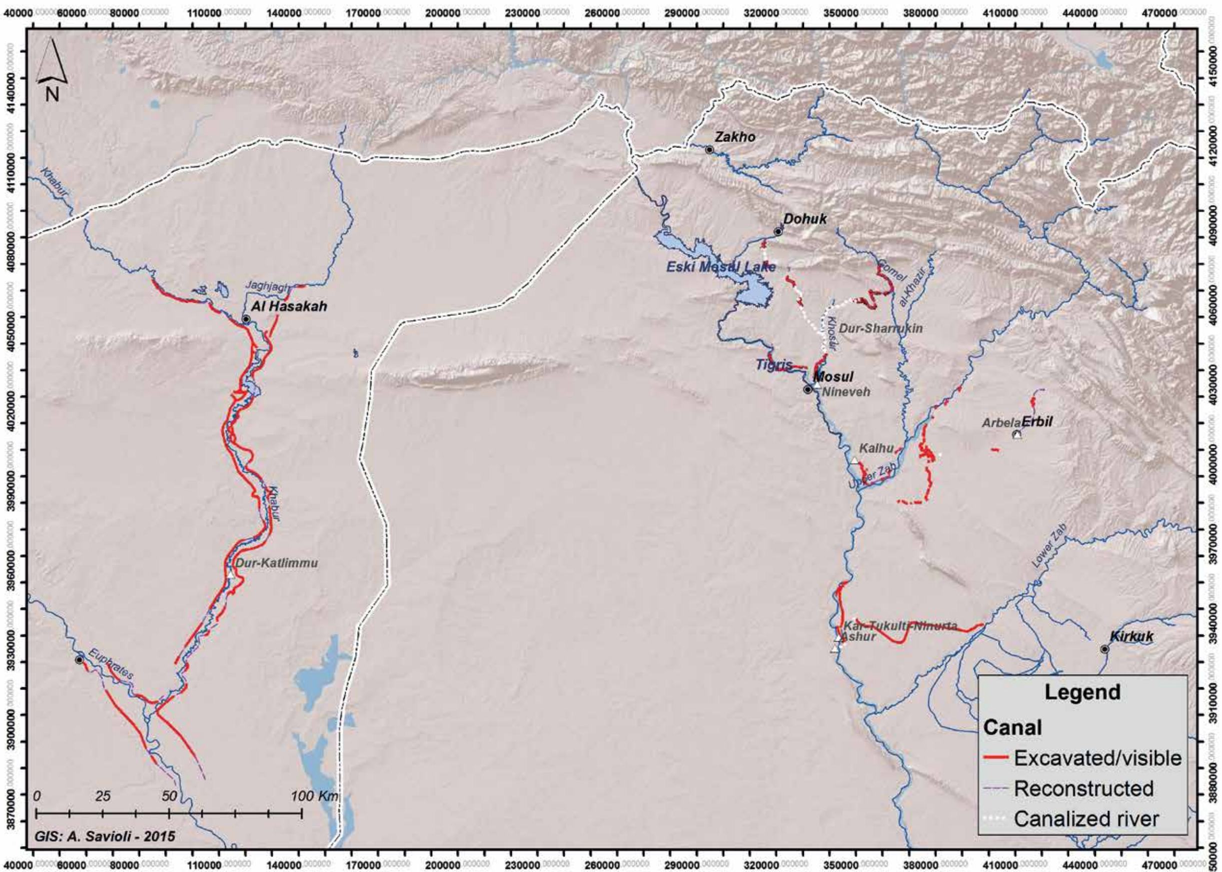



*Figure 25.1 Map with the main water systems in the Assyrian Empire.*

charged locations, for example where the water of a river or a spring was diverted into a canal, or at other liminal places linked to the presence of water, such as springs, sources of rivers like the source of the Tigris in Eastern Turkey, or river gorge outlets, such as the Nahr Al-Kalb in Lebanon and Khinis in Northern Iraq. These Assyrian monuments were scattered throughout the landscape as symbols of royal power and its divine legitimation and were embedded in foreign or frontier landscapes as a 'royal signature', marking their incorporation into the 'Land of Aššur', as the Assyrians called their country. In the Assyrian homeland, between the Tigris and Khabur valleys, massive canal networks were excavated, which engineered and redirected the surface hydrology of rivers, wadis and the numerous karst springs into canals that fed cities and irrigated the countryside, thus sustaining the empire's urban and demographic development.

## 25.1 Middle Assyrian beginnings

The archaeological and textual evidence shows that the Assyrians had already built regional irrigation systems by the second half of the thirteenth century BC. Tukulti-Ninurta I (reigned 1245-1207 BC) established a new capital on the eastern bank of the Tigris, only 3 km upstream of the city of Assur, and called it Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta ('Harbour of Tukulti-Ninurta'). The new capital city (which covered the enormous area of 500 ha, seven times the size of Assur) and its hinterland were economically supported by the creation of a regional irrigation programme based on the construction of the *Pattu meshari*, the 'Canal of Justice' (Dittmann 1990). 'I opened the "Canal of Justice" wide and [let it flow] to its sacred places. From the yield of the water of that canal I arranged for regular offerings to the great gods, my lords, forever' (Bagg 2000a, 307). This canal system, which – as the king states in another inscription – 'preserves life in the land, carries abundance, and transformed the plains of my city into irrigated fields', can be linked to a large-scale irrigation network, that has been partly archaeologically investigated on the ground and partly identified on satellite imagery. It consisted of a canal running along the Tigris and crossing the upper river terraces east of the city and a second system diverted from the Lower Zab (fig. 25.1).

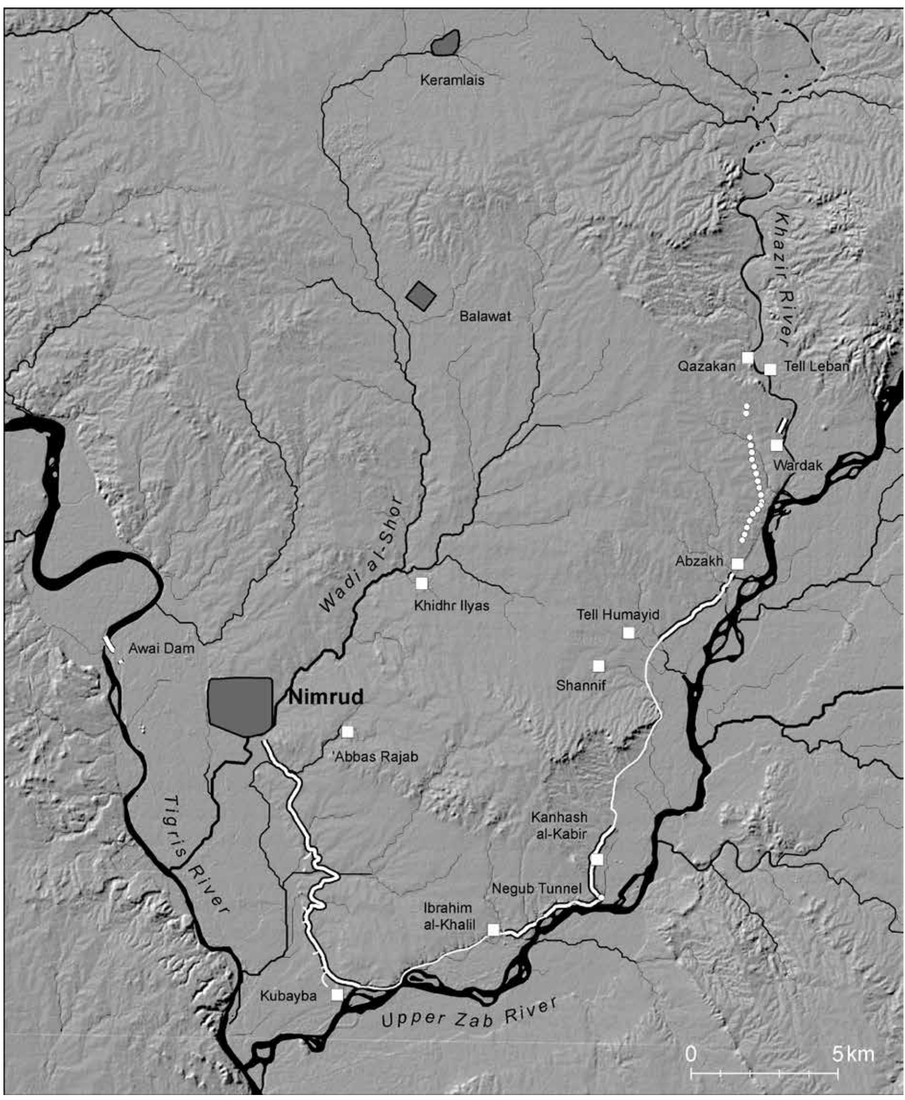



*Figure 25.2 The Nimrud irrigation canal. Courtesy of Jason Ur, Harvard University.*

## 25.2 The massive Neo-Assyrian canal networks and the creation of a planned engineered landscape

The transfer of the political capital from Assur to Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta was followed in the first millennium by the creation of new capitals at Nimrud (ancient Kalhu) by Ashurnasirpal II (reigned 883-859 BC), Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin) by Sargon II (reigned 721-705 BC) and Nineveh by his son, Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC). Provincial centres of a large size were also founded from the Middle Assyrian period onwards (*e.g.*, Tell Sheikh Hamad [ancient Dur-Katlimmu] on the Lower Khabur River and Erbil[ancient Arbela]). These cities became the hubs through which the territory of the empire, divided into provinces, was administered. In the Neo-Assyrian period the development of these new urban centres was supported by the systematic creation of huge hydraulic infrastructure, which grew in size and complexity in comparison to the previous centuries and permitted intensified irrigation and agricultural production, thus protecting the Assyrian staple crop economy from the uncertainty associated with irregular rainfall.

The Nimrud regional irrigation system created by Ashurnasirpal II (reigned 883-859 BC) is described on a stela found in his royal palace. The inscription celebrates the inauguration of the building in 879 BC with a ten-day ceremony to which the

*Figure 25.3 Intelligence imagery (CORONA KH-4a mission 1039, 28 February 1967) of the primary canal on the left Tigris terrace, south of Nimrud. Courtesy of Jason Ur, Harvard University.*

king invited more than 69,000 guests, including Assyrian citizens and inhabitants of Nimrud, officials from foreign countries and dignitaries from his palace:

> *I dug out a canal from the Upper Zab, cutting through the mountain at its peak,* [and] *called it Patti hegalli* ['Canal of Abundance']. *I irrigated the meadows of the Tigris* [and] *planted orchards with all kinds of fruit trees in its environs. I pressed wine* [and] *offered first-fruit offerings to Aššur, my lord, and the temples of my land. I dedicated this city to Aššur, my lord. In the lands through which I marched and the highlands which I traversed, the trees* [and] *plants which I saw were:* [list of 41 plant types]. *The canal cascades from above into the gardens. Fragrance pervades the walkways. Streams of water* [as numerous] *as stars of heaven flow in the pleasure garden,* Grayson 1991c, 290.

The Nimrud irrigation canal, which was designed to permit the intensive cultivation of the Tigris floodplain and upper terraces below Nimrud and the watering of the royal gardens where the king had symbolically planted trees from all conquered countries, is an approximately 35 km-long multi-phase hydraulic structure, which followed the contour of the river terrace firstly to the south-west and then north, finishing in the area of Nimrud (figs. 25.1-3). The system's intake works were fed by the river Khazir, a tributary of the Upper Zab, through a subterranean canal drawn from the river at a weir and visible at the surface as a series of vertical shafts dug at regular intervals to excavate the underground canal (Ur & Reade 2015). Two further tunnel systems were located downstream at Negub.

A recent reassessment of the hydraulic system has shown that the canal could have irrigated the terraces on the left bank of the Tigris and at the same time transported cereals from the rain-fed Navkur Plain (located about 50 km north of the canal head) to the capital city (Ur & Reade 2015). The presence of quay walls along the river courses crossing the fertile Navkur Plain suggests that this region was integrated into a wider area of intense agricultural production and that low-friction river and canal transport of people and bulk commodities (staple food items and raw materials) linked it to Nimrud and its countryside.

An even larger, more complex and branched network of canals was built by Sennacherib in the hinterland of his new capital, Nineveh, from 703 to 688 BC (fig. 25.1; Bagg 2000b; Ur 2005; Morandi Bonacossi 2018b). The new regional canal system was the most ambitious hydraulic engineering project undertaken in the history of Assyria (for more details, see Morandi Bonacossi, this volume): 240 km of canals and channelled seasonal water-

*Figure 25.4 The 'Large Panel' rock relief depicting king Sennacherib (left and right) and the two supreme Assyrian gods, Aššur and Mulissu, at the head of Sennacherib's Canal at Khinis. Courtesy of Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project.*

courses, embankments, tunnels, aqueducts, weirs, dams, impounding basins and reservoirs and monumental rock reliefs commemorating the king's hydraulic achievements (fig. 25.4).

Hydraulic engineering structures were not just built in the very core of the empire to supply the Assyrian capitals and their environs with irrigation water, however, but also around provincial capitals and in the western homeland provinces. Sennacherib supplied the large urban centre of Arbela with water through a subterranean channel 23 km long (fig. 25.1; Safar 1947). Another impressive regional canal network has been discovered in the Khabur Valley of North-eastern Syria (Ergenzinger & Kühne 1991), a 200 km-long system branching out on either side of the Khabur (fig. 25.1). The western canal was fed by the Upper Khabur, while the eastern one extended east of the Kaukab volcano and received its water from the Jaghjagh, the main tributary of the Khabur. The exact construction date of this massive hydraulic system is still a matter of debate, but – notwithstanding a disputed proposal to date the digging of the eastern canal down to the site of Tell Sheikh Hamad as early as the Middle Assyrian period (thirteenth century BC; Kühne 2012) – it can be reliably demonstrated that the extended regional canal network was created during the Neo-Assyrian epoch.

No information has yet been gathered on the fate of the grandiose engineering projects accomplished by the Assyrian kings to boost the economic development of their empire and strengthen their official narrative of achievement and success after the collapse of Assyria at the end of the seventh century BC. The disappearance of centralized political power probably led to their progressive abandonment, but ongoing field projects will hopefully throw light on the last historical phase of these monumental hydraulic accomplishments.

# 26. The Rural Landscape of Nineveh

*Daniele Morandi Bonacossi*

The spectacular results of the excavations conducted at Nineveh since the mid-eighteenth century – in particular, the discovery of Sennacherib's 'palace without a rival' and Ashurbanipal's palace, with their reliefs, and the extensive library of cuneiform texts – focused the attention of the early pioneers of Near Eastern archaeology and their successors on the exploration of the great Assyrian metropolis. In contrast, the countryside around Nineveh has remained on the sidelines of archaeological field research and – as with the hinterlands of the other great Assyrian capitals – is still *terra incognita*. In fact, no archaeological surveys using modern methods have been carried out on the Plain of Mosul, and excavations conducted in the area around the last Assyrian capital – with the exception of those at Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin) – have been sporadic, anecdotal and brief.

Notwithstanding the undoubtedly unsatisfactory state of archaeological research, however, the study of satellite imagery of the land around Nineveh has revealed that the plain was dotted with dozens of variously sized and diverse settlements: farms, small rural towns and villages, productive facilities, towns and provincial capitals (fig. 26.1). Very few of these sites have been investigated archaeologically. The excavations carried out to date have been limited to the sites of Sharif Khan (ancient Tarbisu), a royal Sargonid residence 5 km north-west of Nineveh; Khorsabad, the imperial capital during the last years of Sargon's reign and a provincial capital from 717 BC onwards; Tell Billa

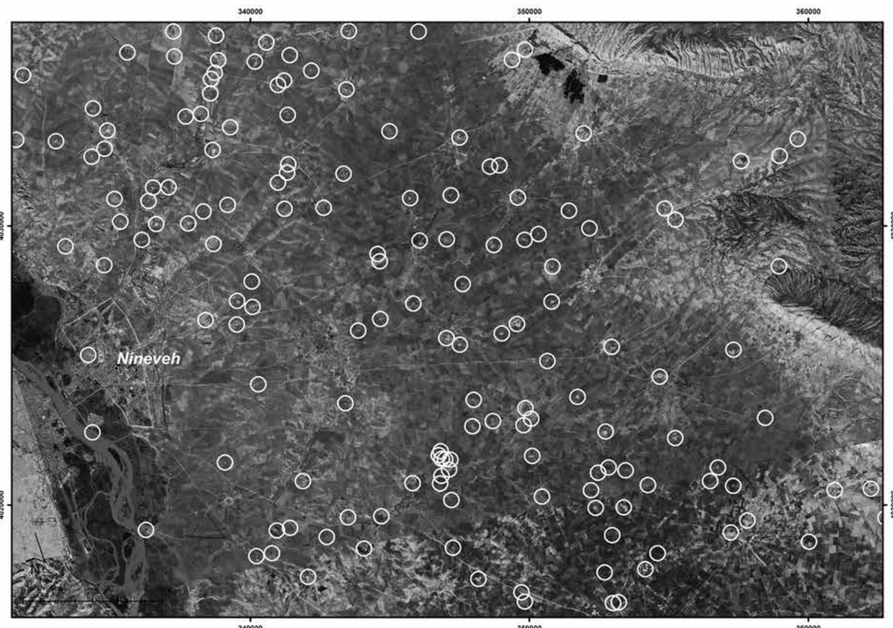
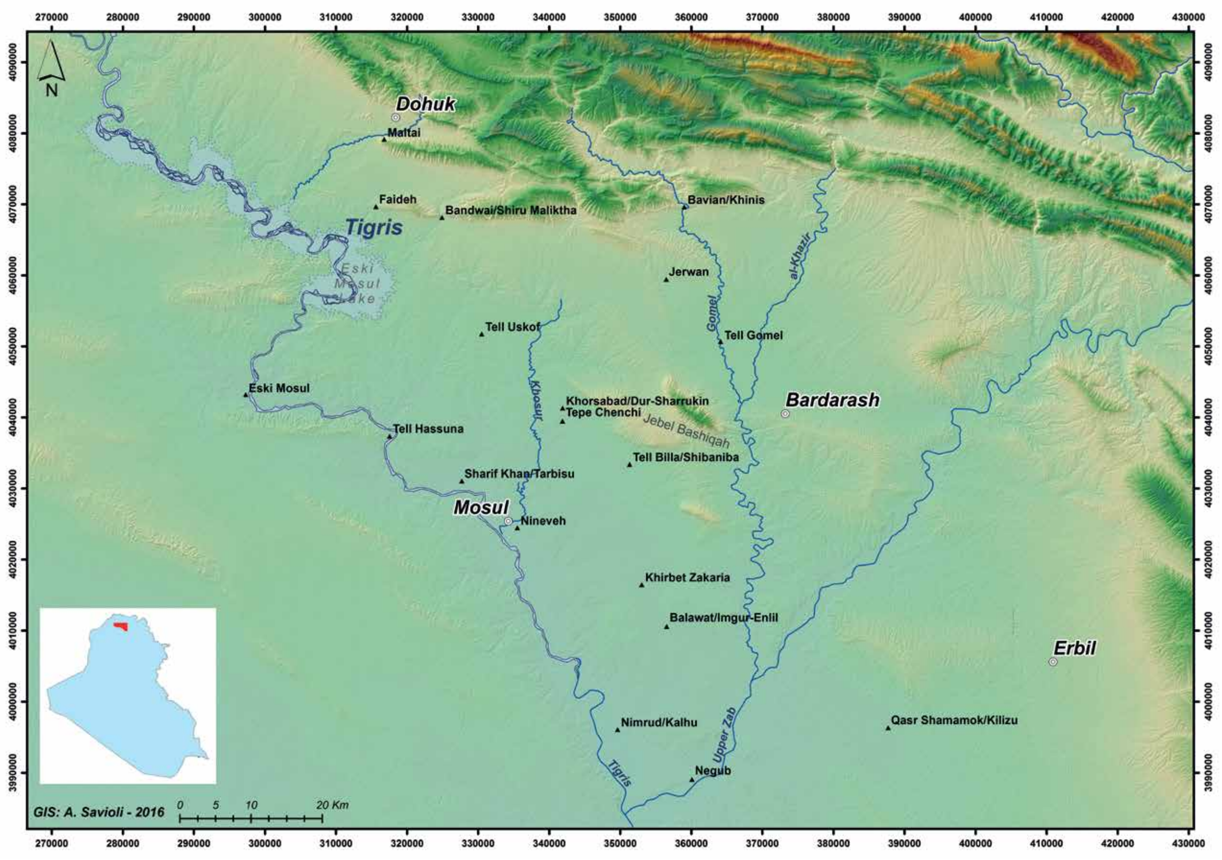
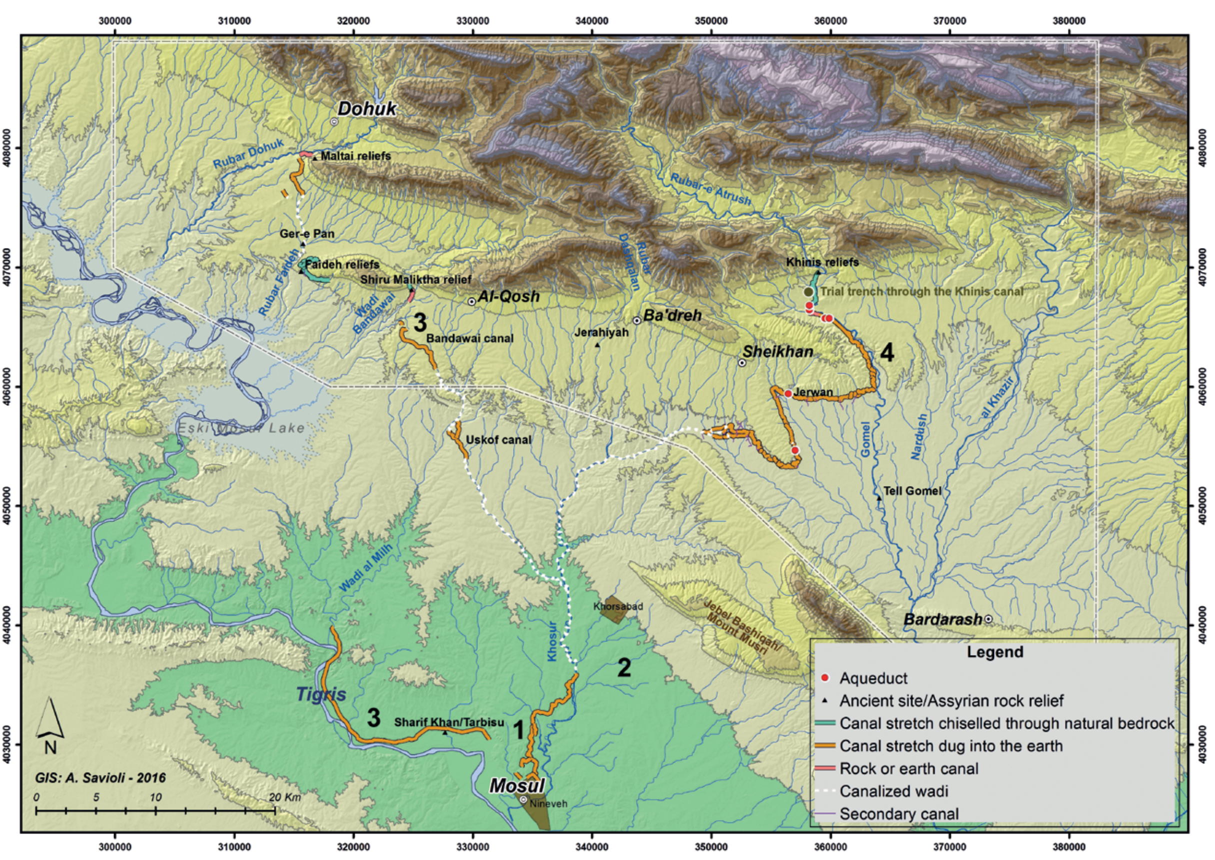



*Figure 26.1 Ancient settlements in the Nineveh countryside. CORONA scenes KH-4a and KH-4b, missions 1039 and 1104 (22 Feb 1967 and 7 Aug 1968).*



N
Dohuk
Maltai
Faideh
Bandwai/Shiru Maliktha
Tigris
Eski Mosul Lake
Bavian/Khinis
Jerwan
al-Khazir
Gomel
Tell Gomel
Tell Uskof
Khosur
Eski Mosul
Khorsabad/Dur-Sharrukin
Tepe Chenchi
Jebel Bashiqah
Bardarash
Tell Hassuna
Tell Billa/Shibaniba
Sharif Khan/Tarbisu
Mosul
Nineveh
Khirbet Zakaria
Balawat/Imgur-Enlil
Erbil
Nimrud/Kalhu
Qasr Shamamok/Kilizu
Upper Zab
Negub
Tigris
GIS: A. Savioli - 2016
0 5 10 20 Km

Dohuk
Rubar Dohuk
Maltai reliefs
Ger-e Pan
Rubar-e Atrush
Faideh reliefs
Rubar Faideh
Shiru Maliktha relief
Wadi Bandawai
Al-Qosh
Rubar Dashtazan
Ba'dreh
Khinis reliefs
Trial trench through the Khinis canal
3
Bandawai canal
Jerahiyah
Sheikhan
4
Jerwan
Eski Mosul Lake
Uskof canal
Gomel
Nardush
al Khazir
Tell Gomel
Wadi al Milh
Khorsabad
Jebel Bashiqah/Mount Muqlub
Bardarash
Khosur
2
Tigris
3
Sharif Khan/Tarbisu
1
N
Mosul
Nineveh
GIS: A. Savioli - 2016
0 5 10 20 Km
Legend
Aqueduct
Ancient site/Assyrian rock relief
Canal stretch chiselled through natural bedrock
Canal stretch dug into the earth
Rock or earth canal
Canalized wadi
Secondary canal

*Figure 26.2 (left page) The rural landscape of Nineveh in the Neo-Assyrian period: the archaeologically investigated sites. Courtesy of Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project.*

(ancient Shibaniba), a provincial capital in Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian times located about 20 km north-east of Nineveh; and Balawat (ancient Imgur-Enlil), an urban centre and royal residence 28 km south-east of Nineveh (fig. 26.2). The extensive lands around Nineveh, the dense network of Assyrian villages whose agricultural production sustained the capital, and the productive infrastructure distributed throughout this territory are still substantially unknown with regard to their archaeology.

It is beyond doubt that without an agricultural economy that was strong and reliable (due to the guarantee of a regular and abundant water supply) and whose products could easily be transported to Nineveh (*i.e.*, concentrated in the lowlands around the city and the immediate surrounding area), Sennacherib's newly-founded capital – a metropolis covering 750 ha, presumably inhabited by a large population – would have been economically and demographically unsustainable. In order to provide an extensive and reliable base for Nineveh's economic growth, the Assyrian sovereign built a network of irrigation canals that brought water to his palace and royal parks (Dalley, this volume), as well as irrigating Nineveh's fields and orchards and thus sustaining the capital and surrounding towns and villages, facilitating urban development of dimensions and a density hitherto unprecedented in Assyria (fig. 26.3). Information regarding the creation of this impressive regional hydraulic system, fed by water from the rivers and springs of the Zagros foothills about 60 km to the north (in the modern Dohuk region of northern Iraqi Kurdistan), is given in the royal inscriptions of Sennacherib found in Nineveh and on monuments located along the path of one of the canals (Reade 1978, 61-72 and 157-70; Bagg 2000b, 169-224). Further important data have come from recent studies based on the analysis of satellite images of the Assyrian canal system (Ur 2005), and the archaeological research currently underway in the Dohuk governorate (Morandi Bonacossi 2018b). Unfortunately, for reasons of safety it has not yet been possible to conduct fieldwork on the canals in Nineveh's immediate hinterland.

Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC; fig. 35.1) accomplished the construction of the 240 km-long Nineveh hydraulic engineering projects in four stages in only fifteen years, from 703 to 688 BC. The first stage of Sennacherib's irrigation programme was the Kisiri canal, which was diverted from the river Khosr some 16 km upstream of Nineveh by means of the Shallalat dam. The second stage of Nineveh's canal system is mentioned for the first time in the octagonal prism of 694 BC, when Sennacherib conducted a survey campaign on Mount Musri, now Jebel Ba'shiqah, to look for new water sources. He enlarged karst springs at the foot of Mount Musri, creating reservoirs, and directed the water from mountain streams through a canal or canalized wadis into the Khosr.

The third and fourth stages of the system are presently under study in the field by the Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project (Morandi Bonacossi 2018b; Morandi Bonacossi, this volume). They are mentioned in the 'Bavian' inscription of c. 688 BC, which was carved in three rock niches depicting Sennacherib beneath twelve divine symbols on the Khinis cliff. In the past, stage 3 was thought to have been a system of five distinct, archaeologically recognized canals (fig. 26.3): the Maltai canals; the Faideh, Bandawai and Uskof canals; and the Tarbisu canal (Oates 1968; Reade 1978). Ongoing fieldwork has shown that a different reconstruction is possible, and indeed more likely (Morandi Bonacossi 2018b). The Maltai and Faideh canals were probably built initially as two separate local irrigation systems during the reign of Sennacherib's father, Sargon II (reigned 721-705 BC), in order to increase the agricultural productivity of the eastern Tigris plain located between modern Dohuk and the area south of Faideh. On the other hand, the Bandawai-Uskof regional system, which carried water to Nineveh through the first and second stages of Sennacherib's hydraulic system and the Tarbisu canal, was constructed by Sennacherib.

Lastly, the Khinis canal system, built around 690 BC, was the fourth and final stage of Sennacherib's irrigation programme. Water from the river Gomel was diverted into a tributary of the Khosr by means of a 51 km-long canal that started at Khinis (ancient Khanusa) at the exit of the river from a narrow mountain gorge. Water for the canal,

*Figure 26.3 (left page) Map of the Neo-Assyrian canals in the Nineveh hinterland. Courtesy of Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project.*

*Figure 26.4 The sculpted monolith at the Khinis canal-head. Courtesy of Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project.*

which the king called 'Sennacherib's Canal', was taken from the Gomel upstream of the site of Khanusa, where the remains of the impressive intake works, the *bab nari* (the sluice gate), have been identified (fig. 26.4). On the cliff face in the Khinis gorge, Sennacherib had a series of commemorative reliefs carved marking the imperial transformation of the region through a programme of centralized landscape planning based upon the reorganization of its watercourses.

Along its upper course, Sennacherib's canal passed a series of deeply incised wadis of various widths. In order to avoid its destruction by the wadis' violent seasonal flash floods, the largest wadi was bridged by the construction of an impressive five-arch stone aqueduct at Jerwan (fig. 26.3; Jacobsen & Lloyd 1935). This imposing structure was almost 300 m long, passed 9 m above the wadi bed and was built of more than 400,000 limestone blocks. Five other smaller stone aqueducts have recently been identified upstream along the Khinis canal. The unexpected discovery of these shows that the famous Jerwan aqueduct was not an exceptional, unique achievement of the Assyrian hydraulic engineers – indeed, wherever it was necessary to bridge wadis, the Assyrians built stone aqueducts of varying size and complexity, well before the earliest stone aqueducts built by the Romans in Italy and throughout the empire from the late fourth century BC onwards.

The construction of this extraordinary irrigation system transformed the region's extensive, traditionally rain-fed territory into an intensive, predictable and high-productivity rural landscape based on irrigation, which supported Nineveh's massive urban and demographic development. An estimate of the surface areas of zones where intensive cultivation was made possible by the construction of the canal network indicates that overall, the irrigable and intensively cultivable land in the Nineveh region was increased to 220 km$^2$ (Morandi Bonacossi 2018b). This evidence strongly suggests that the Assyrian canal network was constructed both to supply Nineveh and to irrigate the capital's wider hinterland in order to increase yield, thus reducing the dry-farming risk across

the piedmont belt of the Zagros foothills and making this strategic and fertile region into one of Assyria's most important granaries.

In addition to the capital city, other urban centres and provincial capitals developed in the environs of Nineveh along the hydraulic works created by Sennacherib. Tarbisu (present-day Sharif Khan) was a royal residence and seat of the Assyrian crown prince located on the Tarbisu canal (stage 3 of Sennacherib's irrigation system). Excavations conducted at the site have unearthed a temple dedicated to the god Nergal and a palace (Sulaiman 1971b). Brick inscriptions from the latter record construction activity by Sargon, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. Neo-Assyrian occupation was also identified at the provincial capital of Shibaniba, modern Tell Billa, which was one of the Assyrian towns that controlled stage 2 of Sennacherib's canal network.

Another important Assyrian centre was buried under the site of Balawat, south-east of Nineveh, where excavations conducted by Hormuzd Rassam (1826-1910) in 1878 and Max Mallowan (1904-1978) in 1956-57 documented a large walled Assyrian city enclosing an area of about 64 ha (Oates 1974). The city was an important site linking Nineveh with the provincial capitals of Kilizi (modern Qasr Shemamok) and Arrapha (modern Kirkuk) through the 'Royal Road' and seat of a temple of the dream god Mamu, and a palace of Ashurnasirpal II (reigned 883-859 BC) and Shalmaneser III (reigned 859/858-824 BC). Three sets of bronze repoussé strips decorating the wooden doors of these buildings with scenes of the military campaigns conducted by the Assyrian sovereigns were discovered. Two of these were associated with large marble palace thresholds and belonged to Ashurnasirpal (the smaller and less well preserved set; Curtis & Tallis 2008) and Shalmaneser (the larger set; Schachner 2007). The third set, with an inscription of Ashurnasirpal II, was found by Mallowan in the ante-cella doorway of the Mamu temple (Curtis & Tallis 2008).

Excavations have also recorded Assyrian occupation at a few other minor rural sites in the Nineveh region, such as Tepe Chenchi, Khirbet Zakaria and Hassuna (Altaweel 2008, 25-7). The cuneiform sources also mention productive sites, such as the quarries that supplied the gypsum-alabaster from which were carved palace reliefs and the huge human-headed winged bulls that protected the city and palace gates of Nineveh. Two quarries were located on the Tigris at Balatai (probably present-day Eski Mosul) and Tastiate, to the north and south of Nineveh respectively (Bianchetti, this volume).

As this brief overview shows, little is known to date about the occupation of the countryside around Nineveh and its exploitation during the Neo-Assyrian period. However, the albeit scanty information available from archaeological research and textual records suggests a settlement pattern characterized by a high density of small towns, rural sites and farmsteads scattered across the landscape, and a network of branched primary and secondary canals irrigating a broad expanse of countryside that had previously relied upon the caprices of rainfall. This occupation and land-use pattern is now also being investigated in the more remote Nineveh hinterland of the lower Zagros foothills, where the fertile Navkur and Dohuk plains (fig. 26.2) saw a strong increase in settlement characterized by widespread rural occupation based on small agricultural villages (Morandi Bonacossi, this volume).

# 27. The Neo-Assyrian Kings in Nineveh

*Bradley J. Parker*

Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC; fig. 35.1) was crowned monarch of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in what must have been a hastily arranged coronation that took place in or around 705 BC (Millard 1994, 60). His father, Sargon II (reigned 721-705 BC; fig. 27.1), had died in battle. What's worse, his body was never recovered. Sennacherib suddenly found himself thrust into absolute power over an empire that covered most of the present-day Middle East. Faced with the potentially disastrous implications of his father's untimely and unseemly death, Sennacherib made a bold move. He abandoned his father's unfinished capital at Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin) and moved the centre of the empire to Nineveh. There he built a palace worthy of a Neo-Assyrian monarch – Sennacherib's 'Palace without a Rival' (Russell 1991) – and remodelled large parts of the ancient city. Sennacherib's new home was lavishly decorated with carved stone wall panels depicting scenes of battle, construction and religious rites. Giant human-headed bulls graced many of the arched doorways and the palace complex included a constant supply of running water, a harem, and garden containing exotic trees, rare plants, and animals from the far reaches of the empire.

*Figure 27.1 Relief depicting king Sargon II. Khorsabad, Iraq; 8th century BC; limestone/gypsum; H 89 cm, W 52 cm; Museo Archeologico, Turin (10407). © Museo Archeologico, Turin.*

Sennacherib's years of training as the crown prince during his father's reign made him a shrewd politician and an able military leader (Lanfranchi & Parpola 1990). However, his position and upbringing must also have infused him with a vengeful temperament and a large dose of hubris. These components of the king's personality are apparent both in his well-documented campaign in Palestine and in his efforts to deal with Assyria's perennial entanglements with Babylon. The rare correlation of textual and art historical data regarding Sennacherib's Palestinian campaign portrays a king well versed in siege warfare (fig. 38.7; Ussishkin 1982) who was also able to use effectively the threat of force to advance the Assyrian cause (Machinist 1983). It is quite possible, however, that Sennacherib's Palestinian campaign was also beset by a serious miscalculation of the strength and resolve of the Egyptian military. More is revealed about Sennacherib's personality in the way he dealt with the so-called 'Babylonian Problem'. Although the Assyrians dominated the political landscape of the Ancient Near East during the first half of the first millennium BC, the ancient city of Babylon remained the cultural and religious centre of the ancient world. This, and the physical proximity of Babylonia to the Assyrian heartland, meant that Babylon held a special position in Assyria's foreign policy (Brinkman 1991). Sennacherib focused much of his political capital and military energy on Babylonia. But this effort led to a long and arduous conflict that drew in many of the ancient urban centres of southern Mesopotamia. After expelling a much reviled Chaldean (Merodach-baladan) from the Babylonian throne (Brinkman 1964), Sennacherib tried placing a puppet king on the throne and may even have delegated rule to his son and heir (Ashur-nadin-shumi), who was later kidnapped and presumably killed (Grayson 1991a). The loss of his son and the crown prince of the empire must have taken a heavy toll, as Sennacherib's military tactics soon came to resemble revenge more than strategy.

*Figure 27.2 Detail of a relief showing an Assyrian siege engine during the siege of Lachish. Nineveh, Iraq; Room XXXVI (OO), SW Palace; 700-692 BC; gypsum; H 167.6 cm, W 190.5 cm; British Museum, London (1856,0909.14/BM 124906). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

After being outflanked, outrun and simply out-smarted on numerous occasions, Sennacherib eventually lost all patience with the Babylonians. He besieged the city, causing months of famine and pestilence before eventually capturing it in 689 BC. The king's rage was apparent in his treatment of the city and its inhabitants; he boasted that he demolished its buildings, looted its temples, destroyed divine statues, and even diverted canals to flood the remaining ruins. The capture and sack of Babylon was a military victory, but it was a diplomatic disaster that marks a turning point in Assyrian political history. Far from solving Assyria's 'Babylonian Problem', Sennacherib's actions set in motion a series of events that would eventually lead to the unravelling of the empire. The first of these events was Sennacherib's murder.

On the twentieth day of the month of Tebet (probably December) in 681 BC, shortly after Sennacherib named Esarhaddon heir to the throne, Sennacherib was murdered by one or more of his sons (Parpola 1980). The culprit or culprits, who were older brothers of Esarhaddon, had been passed over by Sennacherib, probably because they had the unfortunate distinction of being born to one of Sennacherib's Babylonian wives. After quelling the unrest precipitated by these events, Esarhaddon ascended the throne of the empire in 680 BC.

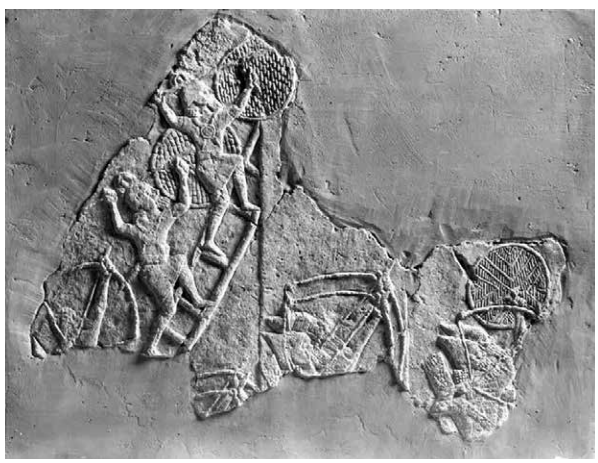


*Figure 27.3 Relief depicting a siege of a city by Assyrian archers and spearmen. Nineveh, Iraq; Room XXXII (EE), SW Palace; 704-681 BC; gypsum; H 60.3 cm, L 83.2 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (32.143.15).*

*Figure 27.4 Detail of a clay prism recording the deeds and building achievements of Esarhaddon including wars against the Pharaohs of Egypt. The object was found in 1955 by the expedition of the Directorate General of Antiquities at Nebi Yunus. Nineveh, Iraq; 7th century BC; clay; H 30 cm, D 14 cm; Iraq Museum, Baghdad (IM 59046). Reproduced from Heidel 1956, Plate 12.*

Esarhaddon was not a healthy man. Although the disorder from which he suffered may never be known (although see Parpola 1983a, 229-38), a number of texts indicate that his affliction was both chronic and debilitating. He regularly suffered from vomiting, rashes, skin blotches, nosebleeds and perhaps seizures. Numerous letters from physicians (Parpola 1993) as well as queries addressed to the sun god (Starr 1990) show that Assyrian scholars, exorcists, and omen priests struggled with how to treat the king. Esarhaddon's physical condition may have been the reason why he and his son Ashurbanipal had a particular devotion to divination, which they conducted with great regularity. Esarhaddon's obsession with divination and his dependence on the court's omen priests are exemplified by the fact that on at least three occasions, he performed a ritual in which a substitute king was placed on the throne to ensure that fatal omens were directed at the substitute, rather than the actual, king. In spite of his physical condition, Esarhaddon accomplished great things in his twelve-year reign. This included the conquest of much of the Nile Valley (fig. 27.4; Grayson 1981; Spalinger 1974) and the partial reconstruction of the city of Babylon (Porter 1993). For obvious reasons, Esarhaddon was particularly concerned with ensuring a smooth succession. To this end, Esarhaddon anointed his son Ashurbanipal heir to the throne of Assyria and at the same time appointed another son (Šamaš-šum-ukin [reigned 667-648 BC], who was half-Babylonian) heir to the throne of Babylon. Esarhaddon died of his illness en route to Egypt in 669 BC.

Ashurbanipal (reigned 668 – c. 627 BC) came to the throne of Assyria when the empire was at the apex of its power, and for the first part of his reign he proved to be a skilled leader and military tactician. He consolidated Assyria's grip on the Levantine coast, increased the empire's holdings in Iran, and conducted two military campaigns to Egypt. In doing so, Ashurbanipal pushed the Assyrian Empire to its maximum extent. Like his fathers before him, he also undertook great building projects, including the construction of the spectacular North Palace at Nineveh (Grayson 1991b).

Of Ashurbanipal's personality, we have a reasonable amount of evidence. Ashurbanipal enjoyed hunting, riding, and archery. Palace reliefs depict him participating in these activities in the royal garden and game park that he constructed at Nineveh. Ashurbanipal was also the only Assyrian monarch said to be literate. Ashurbanipal's devotion to the scribal arts is clear: he went to great effort to collect and presumably catalogue texts from all over the empire, and it was under his patronage that the so-called 'Library of Ashurbanipal' was assembled (Frame & George 2005; Fincke, this volume). In fact, we owe much of our current knowledge of Mesopotamian literature to this monarch (fig. 27.7). Ashurbanipal's love for

*Figure 27.5 (top left) Clay tablet recording a prediction of a gecko. Nineveh, Iraq; 650 BC; clay; H 7.5 cm, W 8.5 cm, T 2.2 cm; The Netherlands Institute for the Near East, Leiden (LB 1322). © NINO.*

*Figure 27.6 (bottom left) Stela witnessing the conflict between the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal and the Elamit king Te-umman. Iraq; c. 645 BC; limestone; H 48 cm, W 52.5 cm; Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels (O.00782). © Royal Museums of Art and History.*

*Figure 27.7 (top right) Clay tablet from the library of king Ashurbanipal recording a fragment of the Gilgamesh epos. Nineveh, Iraq; 7th century BC; clay; H 22 cm, W 3.3 cm, T 0.8 cm; The Netherlands Institute for the Near East, Leiden (LB 2110). © NINO.*

*Figure 27.8 Detail of a relief showing a dying lioness. Nineveh, Iraq; Room C, N Palace; c. 645 BC; limestone/gypsum; H 160 cm, W 132 cm; British Museum, London (1856,0909.15/ BM 124856). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

the arts is also reflected in the famous lion hunt reliefs from his palace at Nineveh. The realism depicted in Ashurbanipal's rendering of the dying lioness, for example, is unique in Mesopotamian art (fig. 27.8). Although the monarch would not have been directly involved in the crafting of these scenes, one presumes that he did have some say in their execution.

In spite of his cultural sensitivity and military prowess, Ashurbanipal shared with his grandfather a propensity to allow personal rivalries to influence his decision-making. This is best exemplified by the fact that he was incapable of holding together the alliance that his father had brokered when he installed Ashurbanipal's half-brother on the Babylonian throne. The face-off between the two began with a halting of both the reconstruction of the city of Babylon and the repatriation of divine statues to shrines in Babylonia. This led to a domino-like series of events, until full-scale rebellion broke out. In the hostilities that ensued, the Assyrians managed to undo the diplomatic gains that Esarhaddon had made and in doing so, reignite Assyria's conflict with the Elamites. Ashurbanipal's reign, which had begun with such promise, degenerated into a civil war between the half-brothers. The culmination of this conflict was the vengeful and expensive campaign to destroy Elam utterly (Grayson 1991b).

The Neo-Assyrian monarchs residing in Nineveh ruled over an empire larger and more complex than any the world had yet seen, and the charismatic personalities of these rulers clearly played an essential role in building and maintaining the empire. At the same time, however, the personal traits that solidified Assyrian rule also contributed to its collapse. The lofty goals of imperial aggrandizement pursued so diligently by the Assyrian monarchs built an empire that was too large to maintain. At the same time, lavish construction projects and costly campaigns rooted at least partially in vengeance drained imperial coffers. For better or for worse, the Neo-Assyrian kings in Nineveh were the central actors in the important chapter of world history that the current exhibit commemorates.

# 28. The Palaces of Nineveh[48]

*David Kertai*

Our knowledge of the Neo-Assyrian palaces of Nineveh is limited to the seventh century BC, when the royal court resided in the city. Little is known about the city's earlier palaces. The seventh-century palaces were mostly built during Sennacherib's reign (reigned 705/704-681 BC, fig. 35.1). The Southwest Palace (figs. 28.1 and 28.4) was built between 703 and 692 BC on the city's main citadel (Kuyunjik). It acted as the empire's primary palace throughout the seventh century BC, replacing the short-lived royal palace at Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin) and the preceding Northwest Palace in Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), which had formed Assyria's primary palace from c. 860 BC onwards.

The military establishment, which was built on the city's second mound (Nebi Yunus), functioned as the city's second main palace. Construction started around 691 BC after the Southwest Palace had been finished (Reade 1998-2001, 419). The royal texts describe a monumental, sumptuously decorated palace, which appears to have been used for the accommodation, education and training of princes and foreign elite children.

An additional monumental palace, the North Palace (fig. 28.2), was constructed on the main citadel during the reign of Ashurbanipal in c. 646-643 BC. Much less is known about the other less monumental palaces that must have existed in the city.

## 28.1 What is an Assyrian palace?

The royal palaces of Assyria were the centre of the Assyrian state, the residence of the royal family, the treasury of the empire and the place where foreign dignitaries were entertained. The palaces were among the largest buildings of their time. They were sumptuously decorated, especially with stone reliefs (fig. 28.3). Architecture, texts and iconography provide valuable information on events taking place in the palace, but our knowledge of the daily life within these palaces remains minimal.

The king was placed front and centre within his own palace. His main rooms were the first to be encountered and his image was prominently depicted throughout the palace. Though access will have been restricted, the architecture of the palaces suggests that they were organized to accommodate large groups. Most reception rooms could easily accommodate up to a hundred people and the palaces themselves would have had no problem in entertaining even larger groups. Presumably, most activities involved much smaller groups, but even these will have included the sizeable royal entourage.

Most architectural changes over time can be understood as aiming to accommodate larger groups within the palaces. These developments can be correlated to the empire's increasing size, which raised the number of Assyrian officials as well as those of provincial and foreign representatives working and visiting the palaces.

The more monumental rooms were concentrated in the centre of the palace. Of these rooms, the throne room was always the first to be encountered, functioning as a threshold

48 This article is based on Kertai 2015a.

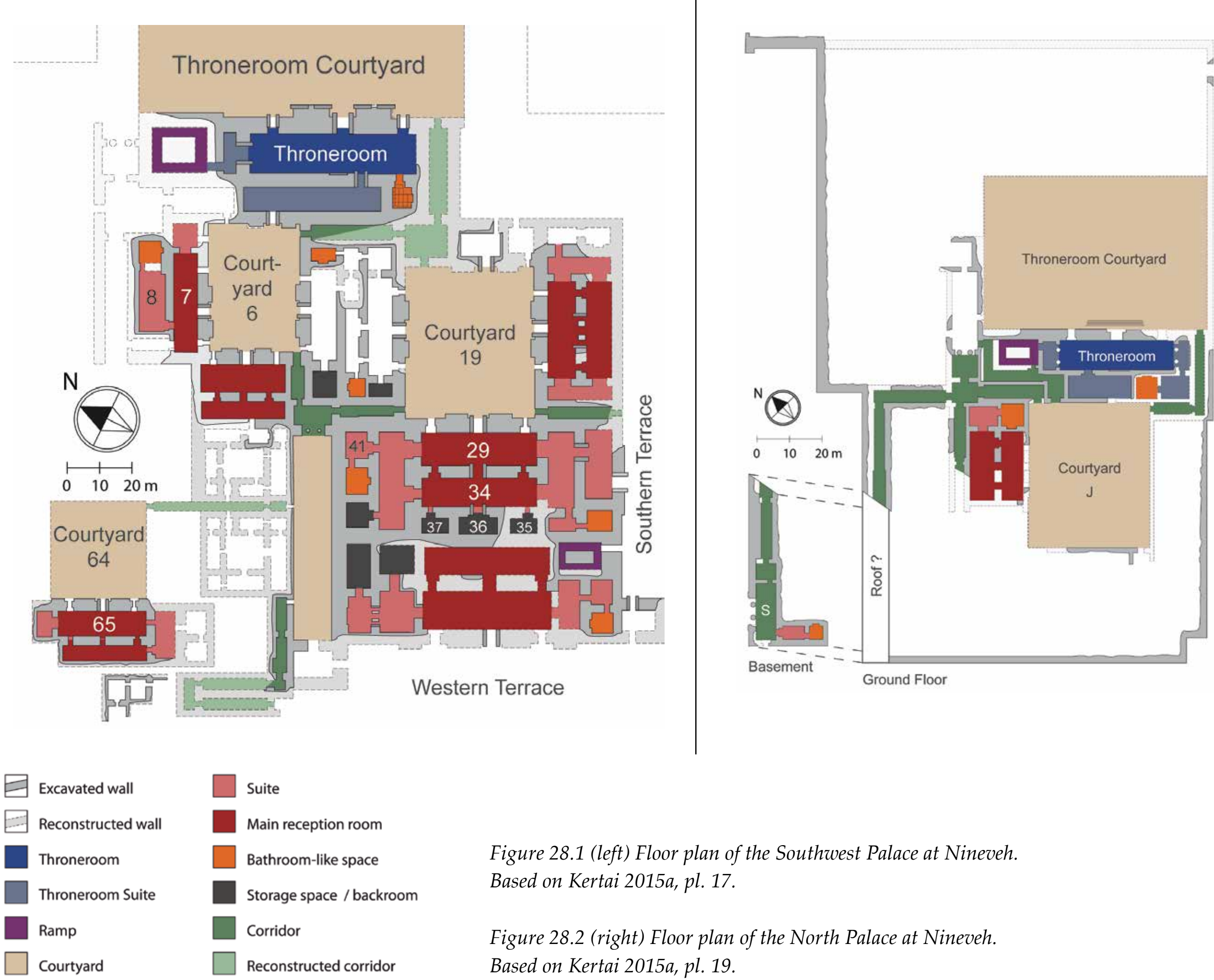



*Figure 28.1 (left) Floor plan of the Southwest Palace at Nineveh. Based on Kertai 2015a, pl. 17.*

*Figure 28.2 (right) Floor plan of the North Palace at Nineveh. Based on Kertai 2015a, pl. 19.*

into the rest of the palace. Throne rooms were especially monumental, measuring c. 500 $m^2$ with a probable height of between 15 m and 18 m.

The palaces were organized into suites, that is to say, autonomous groups of rooms (Kertai 2015a, 205-29; Turner 1970). The suites were arranged around large multi-functional rooms, which were the first to be entered and could not be bypassed. These large rooms were surrounded by additional rooms, including a bathroom. The suites were generally not connected to each other. This made routing dependent on courtyards and the corridors connecting them. Concentrating movement into a few corridors facilitated control and made it easy for areas to be closed off without hampering the accessibility of other areas.

Some of the reception suites can be interpreted, based mostly on their location within the palaces, as residential. A specific architecture of sleeping was missing, however. The known architecture and decoration are related to the reception of guests associated with the large estates of individual royal family members, especially the queen and crown prince. Sleeping arrangements must therefore have been situational and were probably created through the addition of furniture. Though the size and nature of the Assyrian court is still debated, the palaces were unlikely to have been able to accommodate more than the royal family and some of the lower-ranking palace officials.

*Figure 28.3 Relief showing a spearman with a round shield, an archer with the head of an enemy and two cavalrymen carrying spears. Nineveh, Iraq; Room XXII (XX), SW Palace; 7th century BC; gypsum; H 47 cm, W 31.1 cm; Museo Archeologico Civico, Venice (DC 46). © Museo Archeologico Civico.*

## 28.2 The Southwest Palace (Sennacherib)

The Southwest Palace follows the basic rules of Assyrian architecture (figs. 28.1 and 28.4): its rooms were grouped into distinct suites, movement was organized through courtyards and corridors rather than rooms, and the central part of the palace was fronted by the throne room. The central part of the palace was organized around three internal courtyards. This allowed the different areas within the palace to be separated from each other, while keeping the distances between them to a minimum.

The Southwest Palace drastically increased the number, size and monumentality of the reception suites in comparison to the preceding royal palaces of Khorsabad and Nimrud. The biggest suites were grouped around courtyard 19, which could be reached directly from the throne room courtyard. The largest suite was formed by rooms 29 to 41. The famous 'library' of Ashurbanipal was found in a vestibule (room 41) connecting to a bathroom in the northern wing of the suite (Fincke, this volume). Three smaller rooms (35-37) were placed at the back of the suite, the central of which was decorated with the siege of Lachish (room 36; Ussishkin 1982; Ussishkin, this volume). As became common in the seventh century BC, the suite's core consisted of two large parallel rooms.

*Figure 28.4 (left page top) Reconstruction of the Southwest Palace at Nineveh, produced by Learning Sites, inc. Courtesy of Learning Sites, inc.*

*Figure 28.5 (left page bottom) The Southwest Palace at Nineveh, May 2008. Photograph by Diane Siebrandt.*

This created a spatial hierarchy that was markedly different from that which had typified Assyrian architecture before.

Traditionally, as still epitomized by the palace's throne room, the first room to be entered was the most important room. A typical throne room included two settings for the king: in front of the wall opposite its central entrance and at the end of room. These settings were based on ancient Mesopotamian traditions. They were highlighted by elaborate niches, which depicted the king. At the end of the throne room, a large stone dais elevated the actual throne (which has not survived). This throne formed the most important place within the palace. Other reception rooms created similar but less distinct settings, especially at the end of the room.

Most seventh-century suites no longer followed this scheme. The blank walls, in front of which a throne could have been placed, were replaced by doors, which created a more integrated space, connected by monumental axes running through the suite. This put more emphasis on the rooms at the back of the suite. These suites were likely intended for banquets and other courtly activities that differed from the gatherings within the throne room.

The more residential suites of the palace must have been located in the mostly unknown, western part of the palace. This area was separated from the main reception suites, but did not lack in monumentality. The area contained at least one large courtyard (64) and a monumental suite to its west. Inscriptions indicate the suite to have been built for Sennacherib's queen Tašmetum-šarrat (Galter *et al.* 1986, 31-2). Nothing in its architecture or decoration, which depicted the same type of military scenes prevalent throughout the palace, would otherwise have associated the suite with the queen. The suite resembles the monumental reception suites of the palace and was probably intended for receptions and meetings related to the wide-ranging estate of the queen.

The most monumental residential/reception suite (rooms 7/8) flanked courtyard 6, which gave it a location between the western area of the palace and the throne room. The suite is likely to have been intended for the king. In contrast to most of the other reception suites in the palace, its doors are asymmetrically placed, creating a more secluded interior. This aspect and its location within the palace are reminiscent of the king's suite in Ashurnasirpal's Northwest Palace in Nimrud (Kertai 2015, 40-1, 133-4). Such similarities with the earlier palaces at Nimrud are otherwise rare (Russell 1998).

*Figure 28.6 Floor plan of the Lower Town Palace at Nineveh. Based on Kertai 2015a, pl. 23c.*

*Figure 28.7 Reconstruction of the North Palace looking northwest. Produced by Learning Sites, inc. Courtesy of Learning Sites, inc.*

### 28.3 The North Palace (Ashurbanipal)

The purpose of Ashurbanipal's North Palace remains unclear (figs. 28.2 and 28.7). It was considerably smaller than the Southwest Palace, which was still in use and was renovated during Ashurbanipal's reign. The palace is therefore unlikely to have been designed as a replacement for the Southwest Palace. It is often assumed to have been intended for the crown prince, due to its name *bīt redûti,* 'House of Succession', which formed part of the crown prince's title. Such association is, however, problematic. As typical for the royal palaces of the seventh century BC, a monumental corridor led down towards a back entrance (room S). Such entrances had existed earlier as well, but had become much more elaborate in the seventh century BC. Its entrance was formed by a large portico. Such porticoes were rare in Assyria (Miglus 2004) and were mostly, as was the case here, relegated to the vestibules of corridors. Their rareness reflects the inwardness of Assyrian rooms, which did not open up towards the outside. The North Palace's portico probably connected to a royal park surrounding the palace.

### 28.4 The Lower Town Palace

Although the lower city must have been full of elite residences, the Lower Town Palace is currently the only one known in some detail (fig. 28.6). The building is said to have included inscribed bricks of Sennacherib and inscribed column bases of Ashurbanipal. These texts suggest that the residence was a royal gift, probably constructed for an Assyrian prince. Its floor plan is comparable with those of the North Palace and Esarhaddon's unfinished Southwest Palace in Nimrud. The main suites are typical for a seventh century BC elite residence. The biggest suite was centred on two large rooms, with a monumental axis leading to a smaller room in the back. The main interior doors were decorated with columns, a type of decoration that was likely described, at least in royal settings, as a *bīt hilāni*.

# 29. The Production and Use of Reliefs

*Paolo Matthiae*

The Italian Renaissance saw the birth of theoretical conceptions of the patronage, production and fruition of artistic works, the first two concepts being particularly well represented in the work of Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574). The intervening centuries saw the progressive development of these concepts, with a particular focus on the third, based on notions of modern aesthetics, in the twentieth century. It would seem that this third concept, fruition, is by far the most difficult: on the one hand, it takes place in culturally diverse contexts and involves different agents, both in terms of social provenance and cultural information; while on the other hand, artefacts may become decontextualized as a consequence of illegal or unsystematic excavations, as has recently happened. Yet the concepts of patronage and production, which focus on the ways in which artefacts are created, are undoubtedly much more complicated than would first appear, even though they are apparently limited to two agents – he who asks for the production of an artefact and he who produces it – and they should be articulated differently in different historical realities, particularly when these concern pre-classical and classical Antiquity.

Concerning the large-scale production of artistic works of palatial art during the Neo-Assyrian Empire, particularly between the ninth and the seventh centuries BC, official chancery inscriptions always attribute the decision to build a new royal palace – both for Nimrud (ancient Kalhu) and for Nineveh – to the king, acting on divine inspiration. Only Sargon II (reigned 721-705 BC; fig. 27.1), in the case of Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin), repeatedly recalled in detail how divine inspiration manifested itself; this is probably due to the fact that he was planning a new capital at Khorsabad, which, in the contemporary Assyrian way of thinking, might risk eliciting divine disapproval, as an evident mark of *hybris*. The unexpected death of the king during a military campaign, and above all the loss of the dead king's body – both extraordinary events – would certainly have convinced many that Sargon II had sinned gravely against the gods; and the foundation of a new capital, modelled on the tradition of Sargon of Akkad (reigned c. 2340-2284 BC), may well have been the presumed sin. It is likely that Ashurnasirpal II (reigned 883-859 BC) did not risk anything at Nimrud, because the town had been founded by Shalmaneser I (reigned 1263-1234 BC), and he was only enlarging it – albeit significantly – and essentially transforming its role. At Nineveh, Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC) certainly did not risk anything, because, as he explicitly recalled, Nineveh was a very ancient, very beautiful and very holy town, particularly due to the presence of Ištar's temple, and it was thus certainly beloved of the gods (MacGinnis, this volume).

Sennacherib pursued three major programmes in Nineveh: one relating to the environment, aimed at land reclamation; one relating to urban planning, aimed at enlargement and a new town plan (Lumsden, this volume; Novák, this volume); and one architectural, the aim of which, following in his father's footsteps, was to build a royal palace without rival (Kertai, this volume). It is not possible to identify who was responsible for the accomplishment of these programmes because unlike for the reign of Sargon II

Figure 29.1 (left) Relief showing Assyrian officials. Nineveh, Iraq; 7th century BC; limestone/gypsum; H 42 cm, W 39 cm; Vatican Museums (VAT 14998). © Vatican Museums.

Figure 29.2 (right) Relief depicting an equid, two female deportees and an archer. Nineveh, Iraq; Room XXXII (EE), SW Palace; 7th century BC; gypsum; H 64 cm, W 53 cm; Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels (O.03869). © Royal Museums of Art and History.

from which several letters sent by the king to high dignitaries and officials have been preserved, a large part of Sennacherib's royal correspondence has been lost. However, it is quite likely that Sennacherib followed in his father's footsteps in organizing the works very efficiently. He probably involved one of the aristocratic members of the so-called royal cabinet, in a role similar to that played by Tab-shar-Ashur at Khorsabad, and quite a few provincial governors provided specialized workmen for the building works and the production of the huge amounts of mud brick necessary for the walls, the monumental city gates and the vast royal palace.

It is likely that Sennacherib created a very complex system for the huge works of land reclamation, town planning and architecture: it was probably deeply hierarchical, involving several of the most energetic and authoritative officials in the kingdom. For the vast number of carved decorations, a palace workshop is likely to have been active, whose members were probably as numerous, competent and talented as those of the celebrated temple workshop of Assur – the *bīt mummi* of the temple of the god Aššur, praised in the texts. Ashurnasirpal II and Sargon II, in the Northwest Palace of Nimrud (with completed works) and in the Royal Palace of Khorsabad (with a largely incomplete programme due to the patron's untimely death), respectively, frequently requested repetitive themes for their wall decorations. Sennacherib, whose carved decorations are even vaster and spread even further over the building, asked for subjects that, though mainly concerning war and building themes, were extremely varied (figs. 29.5-6). The same is true of Ashurbanipal, whose artists worked initially in the Southwest Palace and then in the North Palace of Kuyunjik. It is likely that he had teams of carvers, some already active in Sennacherib's time, probably divided into several workshops with masters and assistants. The former were certainly active at the beginning of the work, summarily sketching the general structure of the scenes, and at the end, completing and refining every detail, whereas the assistants would have carried out the work in the central phase. The relation between the artists of the workshops of Khorsabad to those of Kuyunjik is unknown. Notwithstanding important elements of thematic and compositional continuity, there is a significant gap between the formal values in Sargon II's reliefs and those in Sennacherib's. It would seem strange, though, if Sennacherib had not inherited for Nineveh at least some of the artists, certainly those of a high level, who had worked at Khorsabad.

*Figure 29.3 (left) Relief depicting marsh dwellers hiding in reed beds. Nineveh, Iraq; Room XXVIII (FF), SW Palace; 7th century BC; gypsum; H 43 cm, W 64 cm; Barracco Museum, Rome (MB 50). © Barracco Museum.*

*Figure 29.4 (right) Clay tablet containing a list of captions for a series of reliefs. It remains unclear whether the tablets were written in the course of designing the series or as a record of existing reliefs. Nineveh, Iraq; 645 BC; clay; L 5.7 cm, W 5.1 cm; British Museum, London (SM.1350). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

Concerning production, some suggest that the procedure outlined above was used in the palace workshops of Nineveh. Concerning patrons, we can only propose hypotheses, also in view of the lack of evidence from the times of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal, compared with that which we fortunately have for the reign of Sargon II. In order to propose a plausible reconstruction, however, one might assume that with respect to patrons, the basic starting plan and the interventions during the works may have entailed actions by court figures under the two great sovereigns of the seventh century BC that were not unlike those which took place for the great painted cycles of the Italian Renaissance. It would seem quite sensible to imagine that the true protagonist of the plan was the king himself, whether Sennacherib or Ashurbanipal, and he would have articulated the themes and their placement within the palaces. Expert court technicians, mostly scribes of the royal chancery, probably supervised the creation of the reliefs in terms of their composition and antiquarian and environmental details. It also seems quite likely that, as happened with Tab-shar-Ashur at Khorsabad, also in the Southwest and in the North Palaces of Kuyunjik, a high official, probably from the royal cabinet itself, took care of the coordination of royal orders, scribes' suggestions and the artists' and their assistants' accomplishments.

Concerning the debated question of the fruition of the reliefs, there would certainly have been differences in the fruition of the 'public' areas of palaces – conventionally called *babānu* – and the 'private' areas – known as *bitānu*. It seems most likely that there was very limited access to and attendance of the *bitānu*, whereas there would have been more open access to and attendance of the *babānu*, albeit in relative terms. It seems that we can now rule out the idea that the motivation for the choice of themes – even in the case of the more brutal subjects – was royal 'propaganda' in the modern sense of the word, as was maintained in past decades, in the sense that it was meant almost exclusively to intimidate potential rebels against the power of the Assyrian kings.

It seems more likely that for the royal palaces of Assyria, from Nimrud to Khorsabad and, even more so, to Nineveh, the choice of the themes for the reliefs and their placement within the palaces should be considered from an ideological point of view. From this perspective, the reason for the choices would be similar to the well-known and documented reason in the Old Babylonian period for the stelae and statues in temples: the wish to enter into direct dialogue with the divine world. The stelae and statues dedicated in the main sanctuaries of Babylonia had to report to the gods about the king's deeds, attest

*Figure 29.5 Relief depicting two women during deportation, one carrying her child. Nineveh, Iraq; Court XIX (U), SW Palace; 7th century BC; gypsum; H 36 cm, W 29 cm; Vatican Museums (VAT 14982). © Vatican Museums.*

*Figure 29.6 Relief showing an archer about to cut off a falling man's head with a dagger. Nineveh, Iraq; Room I, N Palace; 7th century BC; limestone/gypsum; H 37 cm, W 31 cm; Musée du Louvre, Paris (AO 22199). © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Franck Raux.*

*Figure 29.7 Relief with floating corpses in a river with fishes. Nineveh, Iraq; N Palace; 7th century BC; limestone/gypsum; H 44 cm, W 52.5 cm; Vatican Museums (VAT 14999). © Vatican Museums.*

for the correspondence between accomplished deeds and divine will, and express the hope that the gods, acknowledging the sovereign's correct initiatives, would grant the king and his dynastic descendants a long life. In other words, it was mainly a dialogue between the king and the divine world in which the public was only the third protagonist, acknowledging the sovereign's deeds and waiting to ascertain whether those deeds would be received well by the gods. In the thought system of Mesopotamian culture, the divine world's positive or negative judgement on the king's deeds was revealed in the fate granted the king by the gods. The case of Sargon II is paradigmatic: his extraordinary death in battle and the loss of his body, preventing his funeral, was a mark of the gods' disfavour. His son Sennacherib immediately took note of this mark, leaving Khorsabad, a city that he, as Crown Prince, had actively helped to found.

The royal palaces of Assyria formed, in time and space, the physical image of the power, accomplishments and extent of the empire. In official inscriptions by the imperial chancery, two sentences are frequently repeated as the reasons for the construction of the luxurious palaces and their carved decorations: 'for the king's pleasure' (*ana multa''ūti bēlūtiya*) and 'for the peoples' admiration' (*ana tabrâti kiššat nišê*). Palaces were built and decorations made in order to eternalize the empire's power, deeds and duration, the sovereigns' proud complacency and the peoples' astonished admiration; to promote, with the benevolent will of the gods, the repetition of what had happened in the past and present in an everlasting future.

# 30. Sennacherib's Quarries and the Stones of the Southwest Palace Decoration

*Pier Luigi Bianchetti*

Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC; fig. 35.1) is the only Neo-Assyrian king to have provided us with detailed information about the stones used for building his Southwest palace in Nineveh. The extraction techniques and block transport are precisely documented in the bas-relief cycle covering the internal Court VI northern and eastern walls, now exhibited at the British Museum.[49] The king, standing on a chariot, turns his right hand towards the panel on which is carved 'land of Balaṭai', the name of the place where the king, by divine inspiration, found the finest stone for his palace. It is believed to be the medieval city of Balad, now Eski Mosul, on the banks of the Tigris northwest of Nineveh. The places where the Southwest Palace courtyard stones were extracted are listed in Table 30.1, obtained from written records and archaeological research (fig. 30.1; Russell 1991, 94-116).

As far as we know, Kapridargilâ stone was used for the uncarved covering slabs. In some rooms bas-reliefs are made of fossiliferous limestone from Mount Nipur, but we have no precise information about the Mount Ammanana stone used for larger sculptures. Nodular gypsum, a soft and coherent material that lends itself easily to finely engraving, was extensively used in the royal suite complex for both orthostats and statues. It was extracted from Balaṭai after the Tastiate quarries had been abandoned.

In the past, the Assyrian sculptures stone was identified on the basis of visual inspection without analytical petrographic studies. In early 1950s, optical, chemical and X-ray diffraction analyses revealed that lions and bulls from Sargon II palace at Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin), now at the British Museum, had been carved out of nodular gypsum (Middlemiss *et al.* 1953, 141). Two carved wall panels from the Ashurbanipal palace, belonging to the Layard collection from *Museo Civico* of Venice, were analysed in the Rome *Istituto Centrale del Restauro* laboratories. In this case, too, the reliefs had been carved out of nodular gypsum.[50]

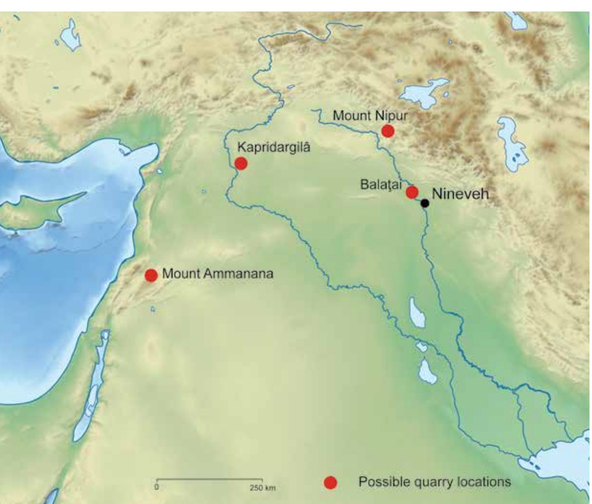
A detailed petrographic study of reliefs from various Southwest Palace rooms was performed by the British Museum Scientific Research Department. Most of the slabs are carved out of nodular gypsum, while one bas-relief was created with Mount Nipur organogenic limestone (Mitchell & Middleton 2002, 93-8). In 2002, the orthostatic slabs from Sennacherib's palace on Kuyunjik were examined (figs. 30.2-3). They were obtained from a single kind of stone, a 'nodular gypsum facies' common in northern Mesopotamian lowland areas, in the so-called 'Assyrian triangle' where the Neo-Assyrian sites of Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), Balawat, Nineveh and Khorsabad are located (Bianchetti 2011, 129-35).

49 The British Museum, London (1851,0902.2/BM 124824).

50 Analyses carried out by the author during the restoration of the Layard collection slabs, 1996.

*Table 30.1 Types of stones used for the production of reliefs and possible quarry-locations.*

| Stone sources | Geographical setting | Rock type |
|---|---|---|
| **Tastiate** | Ancient quarries south of Nineveh on the right bank of the Tigris[1] | Nodular gypsum-alabaster |
| **Balaţai** | New quarries north of Nineveh on the left bank of the Tigris (near Eski Mosul) | Nodular gypsum-alabaster |
| **Mount Nipur** | Judi Dagh, southern Turkey (near the modern town of Cizre) | Bioclastic limestone (with small snails) |
| **Kapridargilâ** | Tell Ahmar on the Euphrates (ancient Til Barsip north-eastern Syria) | Breccia (grained magnesian limestone red with white veins) |
| **Mount Ammanana** | Anti-Lebanon ridge (northern Syria, north and west of Damascus) | Calcite-alabaster |



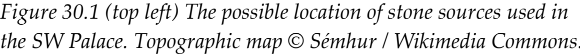


*Figure 30.1 (top left) The possible location of stone sources used in the SW Palace. Topographic map © Sémhur / Wikimedia Commons.*

*Figure 30.2 (top right) The colossal winged bull in the entrance of Court VI in the SW Palace is headless and in a poor state of preservation, fully exposed to severe weathering. The stone is a gypsum-alabaster with a nodular structure. The brown veins within the whitish gypsum mass, which make the stone similar to a breccia, are composed of silicates. This aspect is typical of gypsum evaporite deposits. All rights are reserved to Angelo Rubino, ISCR (High Institute for Conservation and Restoration, Rome), MIBACT (Ministry for Cultural Assets and Environments, Rome).*

*Figure 30.3 (right) Detail of relief from the SW Palace carved out of gypsum alabaster with the typical rhomboidal lattice structure (chicken-wire structure). Nineveh, Iraq; Room V, SW palace; 7th century BC; on site. All rights are reserved to Angelo Rubino, ISCR (High Institute for Conservation and Restoration, Rome), MIBACT (Ministry for Cultural Assets and Environments, Rome).*

# 31. (De)colouring Ancient Nineveh using Portable XRF Equipment

*Dennis Braekmans*

Although several optical and chemical analytical methods are available to provide characterizations of and source-discrimination between archaeological ceramic materials, their specific sampling requirements often damage the nature of the archaeological artefacts (Tykot 2004). This is something to be avoided in most cases, certainly in the case of the Assyrian reliefs studied here, which require a full non-destructive analysis in the museum itself. In recent decades, the development of portable XRF (pXRF; fig. 31.1) devices has facilitated the non-destructive and local determination of the chemical composition of various archaeological artefacts (Shugar & Mass 2012). In archaeological science, pXRF was initially used mostly on obsidian, but many other materials are now being studied, including various types of geological materials, glass, ceramics, metals and sediments. This type of analysis holds great potential for the characterization of all non-moveable or restricted museum artefacts, but the results need to be carefully examined and contextualized in order to obtain meaningful conclusions. This paper will offer a brief, explorative and qualitative assessment of the observed pigments on three Assyrian reliefs exhibited in the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities (NMA).

X-ray fluorescence[51] equipment (type: Bruker Tracer III-SD) was used for determining the chemical composition of the clay and the potential pigments of three selected fragments. The instrument is equipped with an Rh anode X-ray tube and a Peltier-cooled Silicon Drift Detector (~150 eV). Spot size is approximately 2 mm by 3 mm. Due to the spot size of a pXRF device and homogeneity considerations, it is important to concentrate the measurements on a flat and fine-grained part of the object in order to achieve the most consistent bulk chemical data. Measurements were taken in air for 120 seconds with beam conditions of 40 keV and 10µA in order to detect a wide range of elements. Through the use of known reference samples, it is possible to semi-quantitatively determine the elemental composition of the samples. The precision of the measurements was tested through multiple spot measurements.

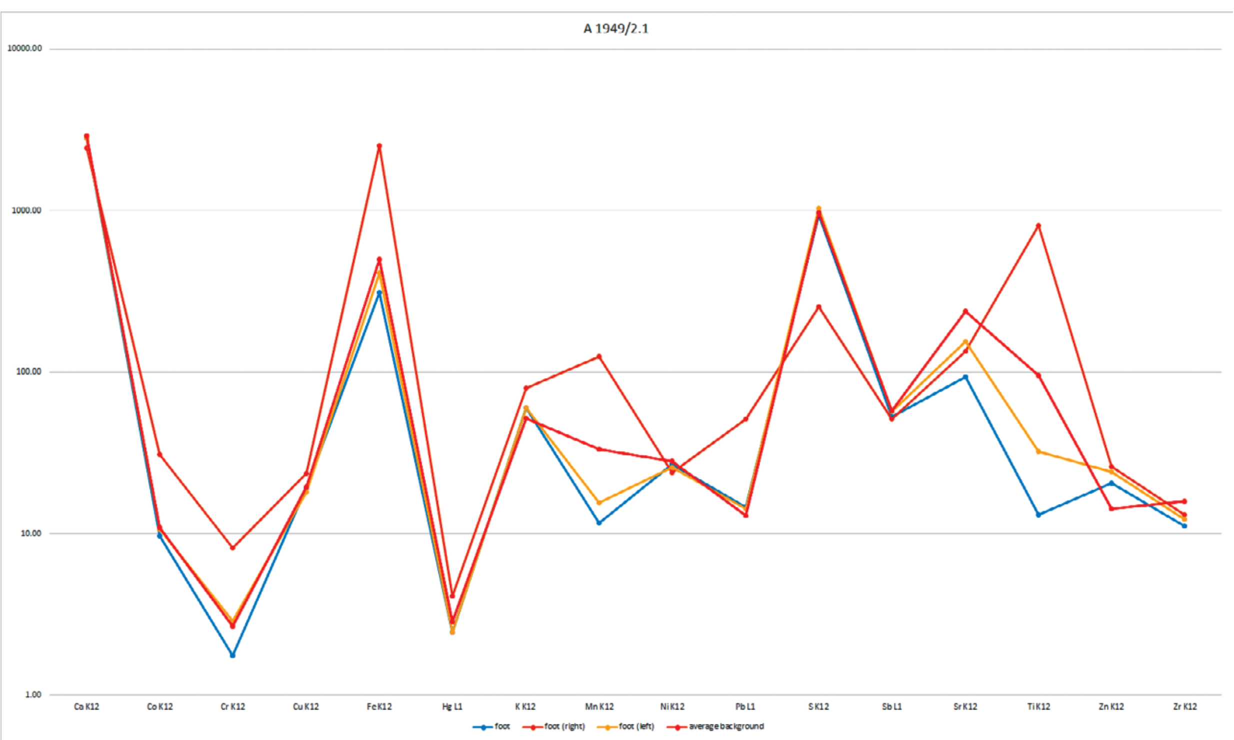
51 The emission of photons of sufficient energy (*i.e.*, X-rays or Rontgen radiation) by the instrument will result in movements in the electron cloud of the atoms within the sample, in this case both the potential pigment and the wall fragment. The atom will potentially emit photons (or X-ray light) in order to return to a stable state, creating a wavelength of fluorescent light that is characteristic for a specific atom. This specific fluorescence is detected by the pXRF detector and then plotted in a spectrum. Analysis of the spectrum is conducted with reference to data from international standards.

*Figure 31.1 (right) Portable XRF equipment in use during a non-destructive measurement at the National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden, in 2015.*

*Figure 31.2 (bottom) Coloured cast of an Assyrian relief made in the 19th century. Germany; gypsum; H 102 cm, W 185 cm; Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (VAG 00019, original VA 959). © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Vorderasiatisches Museum, photograph made by Olaf M. Teßmer.*

*Figure 31.3 (left) Relief depicting a soldier and two deportees. Nineveh, Iraq; SW Palace; 7th century BC; gypsum; H 50 cm, W 41 cm; National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden (A 1949/2.1).*

*Figure 31.4 (bottom) Spider diagram of the background (limestone – red line) and the colours potentially present on both feet in relief A 1949/2.1.*



## 31.1 Can we identify traces of colour?

The explorative approach used for the pigments here entails a purely qualitative approach, identifying the presence of elements and not necessarily their accurate quantities. By direct comparison of spectra obtained from both potentially pigment-rich as well as multiple background areas of the limestone, potential differentiation can be documented. This difference can be directly connected to a variation in surface composition. In antiquity, for example, both iron oxides (such as red ochre) and manganese sources were commonly utilized for red to brown and black colourations. However, many pigments were also based on organic components, which cannot be detected with this type of instrumentation. Analysis was conducted on three NMA pieces: A 1934/6.1, A 1949/2.1 and A 1952/12.1.

## 31.2 Results

Data were evaluated for the relative presence or absence of chemical elements and their differentiation with the background chemical composition of the limestone (based on an average of five areas). The analysis is based on Rh normalized ROI data. The main difficulty in this study is the visual absence of any pigment, meaning that potential remaining layers will be exceedingly thin, which can be problematic for the detection limit of the system.

While the obtained spectra of the studied NMA pieces are consistently similar, variation was observed in particular with regard to Fe, Mn and Pb content. Each of the statues is represented by a so-called spider diagram. In each of these plots, the measurement data is plotted in comparison to the background signal (limestone) of the wall pieces. In this way, a direct comparison of the measurements taken on various parts of the relief with the background signal (red line) can be carried out and thus differences potentially attributed to different colouring on the reliefs.

Object A 1949/2.1 (figs. 31.3-4): apart from the difference in Iron (Fe), Titanium (Ti) and Manganese (Mn) content (right foot), no other elements show anomalous compositions compared to the general background. The Fe enrichment on the right foot might point to the utilization of red ochre (due to hematite presence) and subsequently would indicate red pigments. Given the enrichment in manganese this could, however, also point at a more brown pigment, originating from either umber or black-brown mixtures of iron and manganese oxides.

A 1952/12.1 (figs. 31.5-6): numerous measurements were taken on this fragment, including the shield, clothing, bow, beard and a previously identified strange drop of pigment. Most of the selected spots showed no significant differentiation from the background signal (red line). Although this does not necessarily mean that no pigment was present, there are no significant traces that can be detected using pXRF technology. Two areas, however, show promise for pigment identification: the shield with an enriched Titanium content, and a drop with enriched Chromium (Cr), Lead (Pb) and Zinc (Zn) values. This drop, however, can be attributed to remains of 'modern' paint (potentially lead chromate – yellow – 2nd decade of the nineteenth century). Although the connotation of titanium remains inconclusive, it might indicate dark brown/black colours similar to pigments retrieved and analysed from shells (Moorey 1999).

A 1934/6.1 (figs. 31.7-8): although some variation was attested in comparison with the background signal (red line), only one significant variation could be deduced that might indicate the use of a pigment on the crown of Tiglath-pileser III (reigned 745-727 BC). On this location, an enriched lead content (yellow line) was detected during the measurements. Pb is present in several pigments and it is therefore difficult to attribute a specific colour. Pb can for example point at admixtures of lead yellow (PbO) or red lead ($Pb_3O_4$). Pb traces can also associated with iron rich (such as natrojarosite or hematite) or clay materials but the quantities here seem higher than generally encountered which indicates another lead source.

*Figure 31.5 (left) Relief showing three soldiers. Nimrud, Iraq; Central Palace; 745-727 BC; limestone/gypsum; H 71 cm, W 71 cm; National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden (A 1952/12.1).*

*Figure 31.6 (bottom) Spider diagram (Rh normalized) of the background (limestone – red line) and the colours potentially present on the shield, clothing, bow and beard in relief A 1952/12.1.*

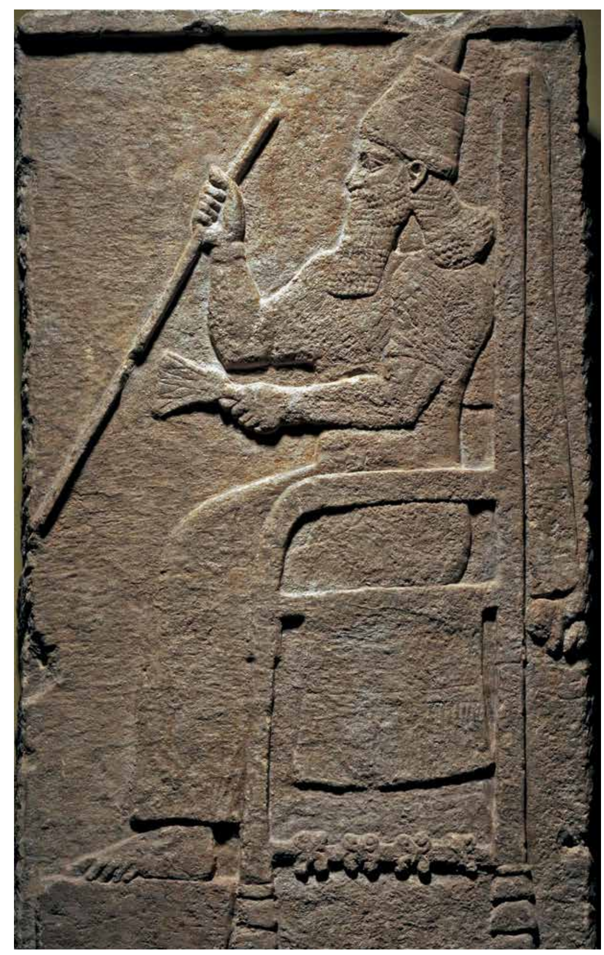
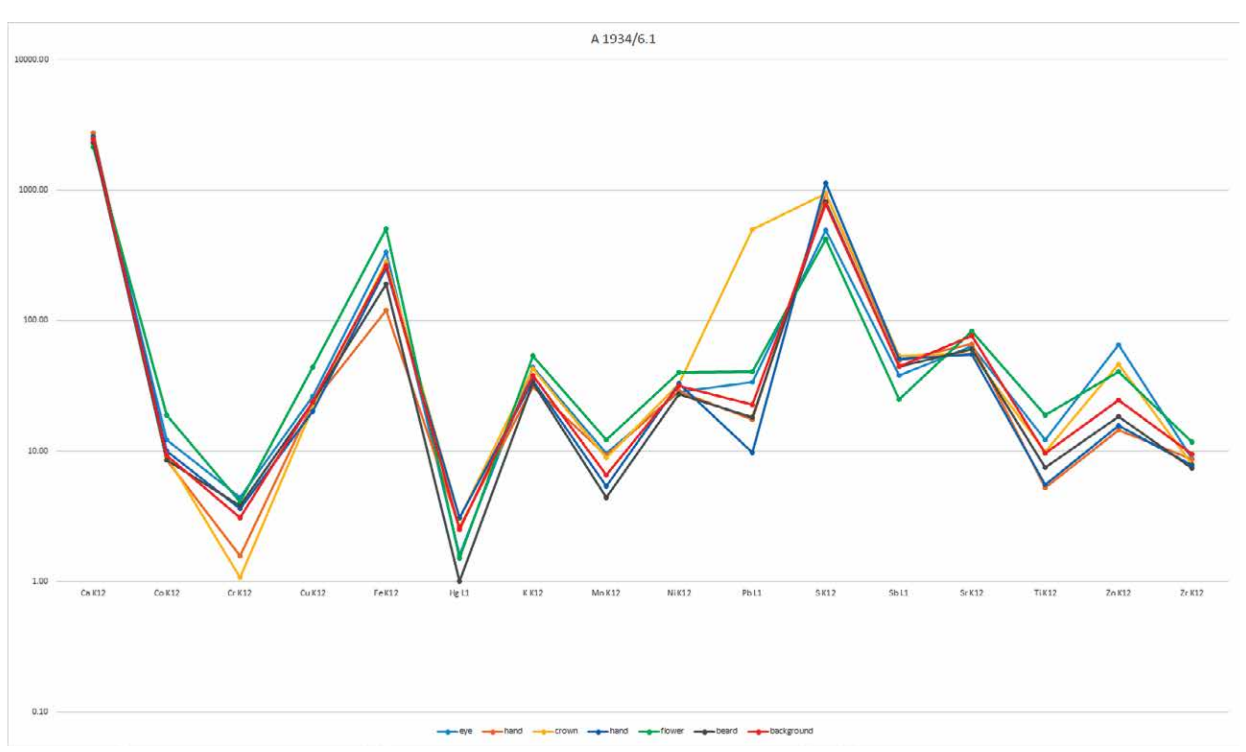


*Figure 31.7 (right) Relief depicting king Tiglath-pileser III. Nimrud, Iraq; Central Palace; 745-727 BC; limestone/gypsum; H 93.8 cm, W 52.1 cm; National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden (A 1934/6.1).*

*Figure 31.8 (bottom) Spider diagram (Rh normalized) of the background (limestone – red line) and the colours potentially present on the crown, hand, flower, eye and beard in relief A 1934/6.1.*



### 31.3 Conclusions

The measurements on three Assyrian reliefs provided a few details about the original colouring of the wall fragments; they revealed the use of red ochre (iron-rich)/Fe-Mn red brown oxide, a potential lead-based pigment and the potential presence of modern contamination (nineteenth-twentieth centuries). The element lead was detected in a few instances in the above-mentioned wall fragments. Lead can be attributed to various sources that cannot be discerned with this technique. As a possible explanation, it may occur as an admixture in independent minerals such as plattnerite (black), cerussite (white), galena (grey) or minium (red), or it may be associated as a tracer component with iron-containing minerals. There are several forms of lead oxide, and the colour of lead can range through white and black to shades of yellow and red. Nevertheless, when chromium is also present, it is highly likely to be modern contamination in the form of lead chromate. The presence of chromium is therefore also a marker.

At present, no elements have been detected that point to other colours, such as the well known and frequently encountered Egyptian blue, for example, on the measured spots. This could also be a result of the equipment used, however, as the device may not be sensitive enough to detect this important colour as used in antiquity. The remaining colours may be too thin, or they may be composed of organic-based materials, which cannot be detected in this case. Based on these explorative preliminary results, the use of higher resolution equipment might further clarify the nature and composition of the observed pigments and anomalies.

# 32. Nineveh in the Assyrian Reliefs

*Davide Nadali*

The city of Nineveh was a huge metropolis of the ancient world, a place that still evokes admiration and wonder, in a balanced oscillation between history and myth. From a historical point of view, Nineveh was an important and flourishing urban centre from the most ancient times, becoming the capital of the Assyrian empire in the seventh century BC under the reign of King Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC; fig. 35.1). From a mythical point of view, the Assyrian themselves held the sacredness and importance of Nineveh in special regard. The myth of Nineveh as a metropolis and as an ordered cosmological project, where different elements of nature (such as the diverse botanical species of trees that were planted in the gardens) and built architecture coexisted within the same space, can in fact be traced in the representation of the city in the bas-reliefs of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal (reigned 668 – c. 627 BC).[52] Those pictures offer a window on how the ancient city of Nineveh looked, and thus on how the Assyrians themselves regarded and perceived their city. The bas-reliefs of both Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal show monumental public works and magnificent architecture, with an emphasis on the use and transformation of the landscape and the adaptation of space. In particular, the pictures of Nineveh and the archaeological discoveries disclose the special attention paid by the Assyrian kings to creating an organic urban space, where the balance between open and closed spaces, between built and free areas, was purposely designed (figs. 32.1 and 37.2).

The pictures of Nineveh in Assyrian visual documents point to these aspects of the ancient city, with representations of the defensive walls, the palace, and the public works promoted by Sennacherib (gardens, parks, and water management with the construction of the aqueduct). All of these works are also listed and described in the royal inscriptions of Sennacherib and, although the content of the texts is not precise, cuneiform sources can also be considered a kind of guide to the ancient city of Nineveh, with references to its archaeological features. As they were not intended as a precise description of the city, the royal inscriptions of Sennacherib list the works without a specific indication of places or locations, except for few generic references to places within the city, by the city, or next to other existing places and monuments.

The palace of Sennacherib on the main hill of Nineveh, Kuyunjik, was the result of the most ambitious project in Assyrian times: in fact, Sennacherib himself called his residence the 'Palace without a Rival' (Russell 1991). The dimensions, quality, and variety of the materials employed for the construction point to the high originality and eccentricity of the project. The different versions of the royal inscriptions actually allow us to follow the phases of the construction of the palace that finally reached a total size of 503 m in length by 242 m in width, raised upon a platform made of 190 courses of

52 Bas-reliefs from the Southwest Palace and the North Palace of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal, respectively, depict glimpses of Nineveh, in fact showing the works promoted by Sennacherib. For an overview of the illustration of Nineveh in the reliefs of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal, see Reade 1998c.

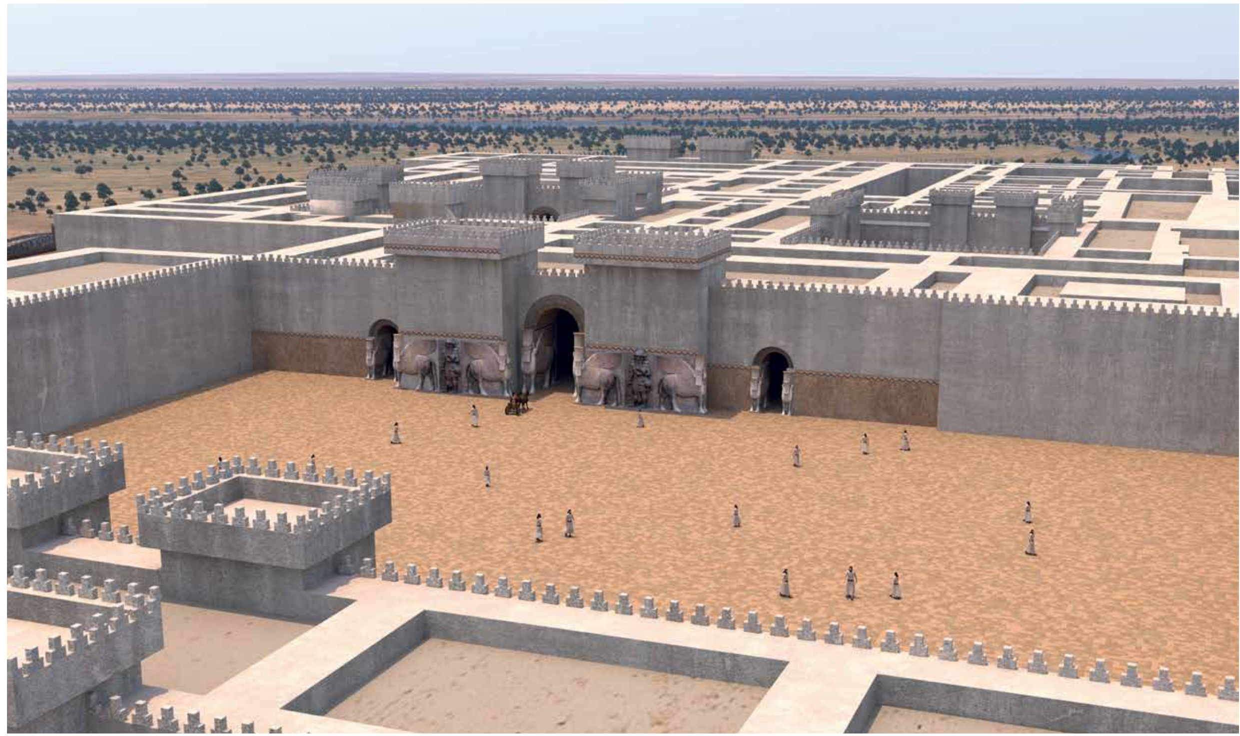


Figure 32.1 Reconstruction of the Neo-Assyrian Southwest Palace looking west. Courtesy of Learning Sites, inc.

brick.[53] Not only the materials, but also the choice of the shape of the palace added a distinctive element: 'For my lordly pleasure, I had a portico, a replica of a Hittite palace, which is called *bīt hilāni* in the language of the land of Amurru, constructed inside them' (Grayson & Novotny 2012, Sennacherib 1 82; Thomason 2001). A relief from Room H of the North Palace of Ashurbanipal has been rightly interpreted as the representation of this portico on the south-western façade of Sennacherib's 'Palace without a Rival' on the hill of Kuyunjik at Nineveh (fig. 32.2).

The same relief shows the western side of the defensive walls of the city: the picture portrays the citadel of Kuyunjik (with Sennacherib's palace on the top) and the outer façades of the walls as seen from outside the city, in a perspective that ranges from the plain to the west of Nineveh, where the river Tigris originally flowed. The relief precisely shows the external wall ('Wall, Terrorizer of Enemies') and the inner wall ('Wall Whose Brilliance Overwhelms Enemies'): archaeological excavations proved that the inner wall was 15-16 m wide and presumably 25 m high, and the external wall was 11 m thick and 4.5 m high (Madhloom 1967; 1968; Reade 1998-2001, 398-9). The relief shows three lines of fortification: the first at the bottom corresponds to the external wall; the second line with turrets to the inner wall; while the third line is the representation of the fortification wall of the citadel of Kuyunjik. It seems clear that the walls with turrets correspond to the outer façades of the walls, while the plain section of the walls might indeed be the representation of the space in-between, between the outer and inner sides, used to patrol and walk along the perimeter of the walls. Although the citadel was as high as the defensive walls (25 m) – meaning that looking from outside the city, it would have been impossible to distinguish the fortification wall of Kuyunjik, as it would have been covered by the second line of wall – the relief clearly represents the three lines according to a vertical perspective whereby the citadel and its fortification seem to be higher than the external defensive walls, as if we were not looking at the city from a distance, but rather from the base of the external wall.

53 For a description of the works in the versions of the royal inscriptions, see Grayson & Novotny 2012, 17.

*Figure 32.2 Relief depicting the city of Nineveh in the upper register. Nineveh, Iraq; Room H, N Palace; 7th century BC; limestone/gypsum; H 192 cm, W 118 cm; British Museum, London (1856,0909.35/BM 124938).* *© The Trustees of the British Museum.*

# 33. Nineveh and Neo-Assyrian Trade: an Active Hub with Far-Flung Contacts

*Diederik J.W. Meijer*

To the modern world, aside from recent news headlines concerning the destructive activities of religious zealots, Nineveh is mainly known from the fascinating palace reliefs now housed in the British Museum and elsewhere. These reliefs inform us about the valiant activities of the kings and their armies, and their cuneiform captions really are 'captions': the texts narrate what is depicted, providing a rich source of historical facts regarding the elites of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

Nineveh as an important ancient centre and capital had, of course, been celebrated long before the archaeological excavations started there in the mid-nineteenth century. Both the Old and New Testaments mention Nineveh a number of times, albeit mainly in negative terms (Zangenberg, this volume). Yet the city, certainly at the time of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, was a centre of learning and culture, as well as of comfort – at least for the elite – with parks and ponds and shaded gazebos near the palaces and temples. We know this in particular from the reliefs and from the cuneiform texts on clay tablets, many of which were found in the famous Library of Ashurbanipal (Fincke, this volume). Nineveh has yielded more cuneiform texts than any other Mesopotamian site.

Situated near the confluence of the Tigris and its tributary the Khosr, and close to a fordable part of the river, Nineveh seems to have been in an ideal position as a port of transhipment. Indeed, from the early strata onward, the site produced some evidence of external contact in the form of Uruk-period-style cylinder seal impressions, of the kind found in Uruk in Southern Mesopotamia itself and elsewhere; this indicates commercial contacts that stretched from Southern Iraq to Eastern Turkey, and from North-western Syria to Western Iran, between c. 3500 and 3000 BC (fig. 33.1). We can only guess at the amount and character of traded goods, but agricultural produce would certainly have formed an important part of this, as would have precious stones such as carnelian and lapis lazuli.

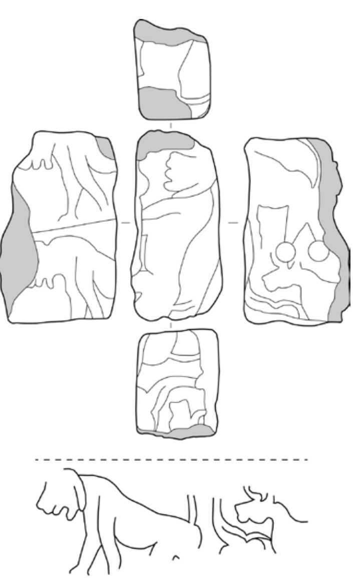


*Figure 33.1 Drawing of a seal impression in Uruk style, Nineveh. Adapted from Collon & Reade 1983, fig. 1.*

Although Nineveh has been the subject of excavation since 1842, it must be said that the ins and outs of ancient daily life are less well known than one might hope. It is mainly the large buildings such as palaces and temples that have been excavated, whilst relatively little attention has been given to domestic architecture, with its inventory of normal household articles. A compounding factor for Nineveh is that the archaeological stratigraphy leaves much to be desired, as does the publication of the excavation results.

We do know of many Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals from various sits and locations, but relatively few from controlled excavations. Cylinder seals are important for their iconography, which provides insight into household religion, for example, but also for the information that their impressions on tablets yield, such as manifesting a witness' presence at the conclusion of a deal or at a court case. Unfortunately we have very few published sealings on tablets from Nineveh, and it is these in particular that might inform us about the dating and content of cultural and economic relations. In fact, what we know about

*Figure 33.2 (right) Clay tablet recording trade between Anatolia and Assyria. Kültepe, Turkey; 2000-1800 BC; clay; L 4.3 cm, W 5.2 cm; Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels (O.03919). © Royal Museums of Art and History.*

*Figure 33.3 (bottom) Relief depicting the head of a horse with bridle against a mountain background. Nineveh, Iraq; SW Palace; 7th century BC; gypsum; H 17.2 cm, W 23.2 cm; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (ANE 151.1920). © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.*

the economic life of Assyria in the first millennium BC stems from a few palace archives and the archives of high officials; mundane daily records were obviously kept on perishable material (and mostly not written in cuneiform Akkadian, but in the Aramaic alphabet), and the bullae or dockets that do remain were mostly sealed with stamp seals, which are far less informative than cylinder seals and hardly ever inscribed. Furthermore, Assyrian cylinder seals carry very few inscriptions, let alone datable ones, and very few published Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals actually stem from Nineveh excavations. Thus the iconography is well known, but only datable through stylistic analysis. As stated above, Nineveh was an important cultural centre, something that we know especially from the texts (fig. 33.2). It is these that shed some light on the business dealings of the Neo-Assyrian elite.

Various studies have been written on the details of Neo-Assyrian trade, but textually speaking, Nineveh occupies a lesser place in these. The texts from the 'other capital', Assur, are very informative, as are those from Nimrud (ancient Kalhu). Nevertheless, we can glean enough information to place Nineveh in the context of Neo-Assyrian trade. But how can we define trade? We should not overlook this simple question, because the many articles and commodities that feature in the texts were moved around as a result of four main mechanisms: war-spoils, tributes, (diplomatic) gifts and actual reciprocal barter (*i.e.*, 'pure' trade), and the last three are sometimes difficult to disentangle. Thus trade is observable in different ways: an archaeologist deals with these four complex factors, whereas a philologist just reads the texts, but then has to decide on their truth-factor. The character of our sources – royal and other elite archives – predisposes us to see the trade in expensive, rare and 'foreign' products; everyday victuals, shoes, normal furniture, and so forth, do not figure in these texts. For the more elitist goods, however, we have rich documentation.

Precious stones, expensive wood (cedar, boxwood), ivory, wine, honey, linen (both woven and as yarn), wool, metal (such as copper, tin, glass, ostrich eggs, incense, bronze, iron and silver and gold), and also horses (fig. 33.3) and exotic animals such as monkeys were procured from various regions, many of them beyond the confines of the empire. For example, wine came from Northern Syria and Southern Turkey, ivory from Syria and Phoenicia, cedar wood from Lebanon, the metals from various sources including silver from Turkey's Taurus mountains, where it is still mined today, and horses probably from Urartu in modern Eastern Turkey and Western Iran. As said, procurement could involve warfare, but also tribute as a means for vassal states to avoid war and enjoy the safety and peace guaranteed by Assyrian military prowess. Tribute and diplomatic gifts are difficult to distinguish, and would largely have been a question of bulk versus incidental commodities. Nominally, everything in the nation was seen as belonging to the king, but in practice private ownership did of course play a major role – be it that tax returned a nice percentage to the court, at any rate.

There was, however, an important economic role reserved for traders, Assyrian *tamkare*. These were traders, or rather large-scale entrepreneurs, who could become very rich in their own right, even to the extent that they lent money to the kings; an early form of 'Rothschild'. They have also been compared to royal emissaries like Sir Francis Drake or Christopher Columbus, for their activities took them on long and often dangerous journeys. They often worked in the service of the kings and could combine business with diplomacy.

A perhaps 'lower' category of tradesmen was that of the *bel ḫarrani*, literally the 'masters of the road'. They could form partnerships or investment groups, and could amass sizeable amounts of capital in various sorts of commodities; this category is known mainly from archives found in Assur. Tradesmen of both kinds travelled, but they could also stay in a foreign town for longer periods of time, as commercial agents. Their jobs were not reserved for 'native Assyrians', for they could be foreigners, such as Phoenicians (fig. 33.4). Arabs on camels were also employed to provide caravan transport. Famous trading ports such as Tyre, Sidon and Carchemish were used by the Assyrians, but not annexed for a long time, leaving their age-old successful infrastructure unimpaired; taxes saw to it that the Assyrians got their share. Tyre in particular enjoyed a measure of productive freedom in this system: it maintained free access to the cedars of Lebanon used in the construction of ships and palaces, whereas the surrounding areas were subject to Assyrian rule.

What of all this can actually be found in the excavations of the Neo-Assyrian strata? Archaeologically speaking, the things one should look for in terms of external contacts and their cultural influence are objects and iconographic and architectural styles that stem, demonstrably, from foreign parts. The above-mentioned perishable commodities cannot be found in excavations, and metals were melted down to be reused and eventually taken away by conquerors after the end of the Assyrian Empire. Some precious stones remain, for example in body ornaments in burials, but our main archaeological tokens of external contact in Nineveh can be said to be architectural in character, especially in the form of loggias and gardens.

Various Neo-Assyrian kings built themselves 'loggias'. This is a good translation of the Assyrian term *bīt hilāni*, whose etymological source is still unknown. Archaeologists have adopted this term, which was used by the kings in their annals, and have applied it to buildings with a rectangular plan and a columned entrance in the long wall

*Figure 33.4 Relief showing a Phoenician ship on the Euphrates. Nineveh, Iraq; Room VII (R), SW Palace; 705-681 BC; gypsum; H 66 cm, W 100.3 cm; British Museum, London (1851,0902.30/ BM 124772). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

that gives access to a sequence of wide rooms flanked perpendicularly by smaller ones. Kings such as Tiglath-pileser III (reigned 745-727 BC; fig. 31.7) and Sargon II (reigned 721-705 BC; fig. 27.1), as well as Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC; fig. 35.1), built such little palaces 'for [their] pleasure', and they added and acknowledged explicitly that they had borrowed the idea for this particular type of building 'from the west', together with the term *bīt hilāni* itself! There was at least one such building in Nineveh (fig. 23.1), and one a little outside of the same town, built for the crown prince. Also borrowed from abroad were exotic plants and trees that were imported to adorn the palace gardens; these were likewise created to provide comfort and enjoyment to the king and his family, at the same time as demonstrating the king's far-reaching geographical and social control. The garden that Sennacherib had laid out in Nineveh was famous for its flora and waterworks, and may in fact have served as a source for later myths about the 'hanging gardens of Babylon' (Dalley, this volume). It is depicted on a relief from his grandson Ashurbanipal's palace in Nineveh, which also shows the front of a *bīt hilāni* (fig. 37.3).

As is to be expected from the capital of a large empire, there is thus much evidence of far-reaching contact and reciprocal cultural and economic influence to be found in Nineveh. The last capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire after Assur, Nimrud and Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin), the city was sacked in 612 BC and burnt, never to rise again to its former glory (Van De Mieroop, this volume). It is to be hoped that future controlled excavations will enlarge and enhance the picture of a vibrant international cultural hub that has thus far been painted by the texts and the archaeology.

# 34. Nineveh and Foreign Politics

*Giovanni-Battista Lanfranchi*

It is not clear why King Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC; fig. 35.1) insistently stated in his royal inscriptions that 'since time immemorial, earlier kings', his own ancestors, 'exercised dominion over Assyria' in Nineveh, where 'annually, without interruption, they received an income unsurpassed in amount, the tribute of the rulers of the four quarters'.[54] In fact, Nineveh never was the Assyrian 'capital' before Sennacherib: this status had always been assigned first to Assur, then to Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), and only for four years to Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin), the short-lived capital built totally anew by Sargon II (reigned 721-705 BC; fig. 27.1). Perhaps Sennacherib, who totally restructured Nineveh, built his splendid 'Palace without a Rival' there and made it his royal seat of government, was attempting to justify his apparently sudden decision, which had the shocking consequence of lowering the status of the other major Assyrian towns.

Nonetheless, Sennacherib's statement succinctly captures the main role of Nineveh as the capital of the Assyrian Empire when it came to foreign policy. Until the fall of the Assyrian Empire, Nineveh was the centre of the network that connected Assyria and foreign, still-independent states as regards both the exchange of communications and the flow of humans, animals and goods.

Although a good number of letters sent by Assyrian officials to their king has been preserved, there is only one chancery copy of a letter sent by an Assyrian king (Esarhaddon [reigned 681-669 BC]) to a foreign king (the king of Elam). The reasons for such scarcity are unknown; it may have resulted from the turmoil that preceded the fall of Nineveh into the hands of the besiegers in 612 BC. Nevertheless, we may assume that there was a constant flow of letters between the Assyrian kings and their foreign counterparts, consigned by ambassadors or dignitaries residing in the capitals or brought by horse-mounted messengers – such as that sent to Ashurbanipal (reigned 668 – c. 627 BC) by Gyges, king of Lydia, whose language was so unfamiliar as to require local interpreters.[55] We may also assume that a number of permanent emissaries at the Assyrian court resided in Nineveh, lodging in various buildings, perhaps with restricted access, and visited Assyrian royals, courtiers and officials to give and receive political information.

According to some royal inscriptions of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, which repeated a literary *topos* widely used in the ninth and eighth centuries BC, while residing in Nineveh the king was often notified by a messenger that some enemy king was behaving maliciously or had attacked Assyrian territory:[56] 'A messenger came to me, to Nineveh,

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54 RINAP 3/1 p. 37 no. 1, 66-67; p. 45 no. 2, 37-38; p. 53 no. 3, 37-38; pp. 66-67 no. 4, 64-65; pp. 98-99 no. 15, v 28-39a; p. 118 no. 16, v 51-61; p. 137 no. 17, v 34-47.

55 BIWA p. 182 Pr. E, Stück 16, 1-8.

56 Esarhaddon: RINAP 4 p. 15 no. 1, ii 51. Ashurbanipal: BIWA p. 215 Pr. B ii 17 (§ 13) has a messenger arriving in Nineveh, announcing that Prince Tanutamon, son of King Taharqa, had left Thebes and conquered Memphis (the second Egyptian campaign); p. 222 Pr. B iv 35-41 (§ 28) has a messenger arriving in Nineveh, announcing that Urtaku, king of Elam, had attacked Babylon (confirming similar messages from other officials), although the Elamite king Urtaku had sent various messages to Nineveh about his peaceful submission to Assyria.

and reported to me [that Taharqa, king of Ethiopia, had taken Memphis]'.[57] Ideology dominates this *topos*: the Assyrian king is peaceful in his palace, while his enemies are always conspiring against him and his country.

Much more space is given in the royal inscriptions to the arrival in Nineveh of humans and goods from abroad as an effect of the international supremacy of the Assyrian kings. The arrival in Nineveh of foreign rulers with gifts and tribute, almost invariably followed by their kissing the king's feet, is frequently mentioned in the texts of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. Three rulers of the farthest mountain lands in the east of present-day Iran entered Nineveh with a quantity of lapis lazuli as a gift for Esarhaddon, asking for his protection;[58] similarly, the rulers of Cappadocia, Cilicia and Philistia in the west came to Nineveh to pay homage to Ashurbanipal, bringing their royal daughters, possibly as spouses for him, and received luxurious gifts in return.[59] Many foreign kings were expected and generally obliged to visit the Assyrian king and bring him tribute every year. Once in Nineveh, they were dressed in purple, given golden bracelets and adorned like the Assyrian princes in what seem to have been important ceremonies, doubtless most spectacularly performed at the royal court, but also probably in public parades along the city streets.[60] On some occasions, foreign kings sent their own sons to Nineveh to 'kiss the feet' of the Assyrian king,[61] probably with the aim of officially legitimating their dynasty at the Assyrian court. We cannot exclude the possibility that some of these foreign princes were asked or obliged to remain in Nineveh as honoured hostages, so as to guarantee their fathers' loyalty towards the Assyrian kings.

Other foreign rulers sent their gifts as an act of diplomatic courtesy, but also as a more or less masked request for political friendship or support. In the Assyrian texts, this kind of gift is often designated as 'tribute': a customary definition in the ideological system of unequal relations between the Assyrian dominion and external powers. Otherwise famous rulers are mentioned by name: Hezekiah

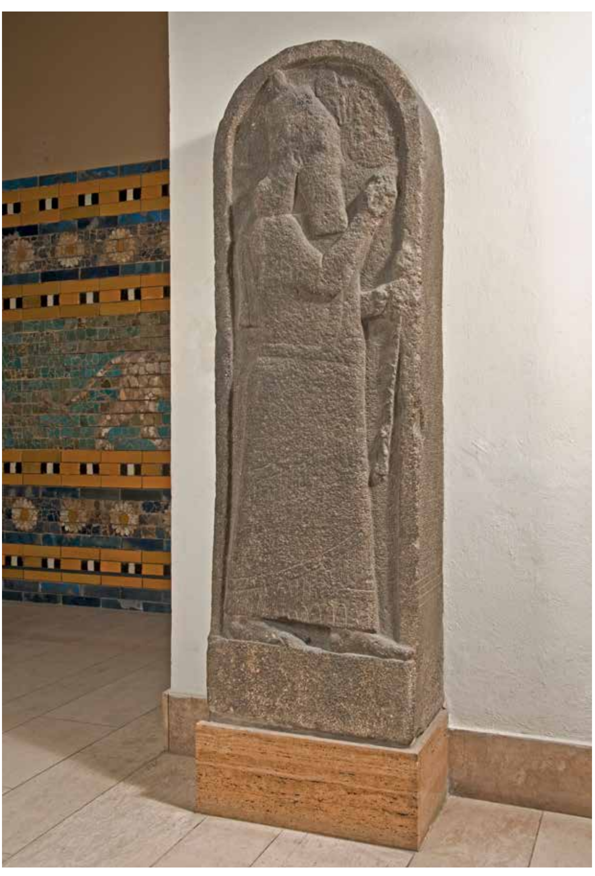


*Figure 34.1 Stele of king Sargon II found in Cyprus memorising his military successes. Larnaca, Cyprus; 722-705 BC; basalt; H 209 cm, W 68 cm; Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (VA 968). © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Vorderasiatisches Museum, photograph made by Olaf M. Teßmer.*

king of Judah (tribute to Sennacherib),[62] Gyges king of Lydia (two Cimmerian chieftains to Ashurbanipal),[63] and Cyrus I, an ancestor of Cyrus of Persia (his own son to Ashurbanipal, to be raised at court in Nineveh).[64] Only tiny traces of what must have been a huge accumulation of precious gifts from abroad survived the terrible but meticulous sack following Nineveh's falling into the hands of the Medes and the Babylonians in 612 BC, such as the small cylinder-shaped beads in agate, onyx, chalcedony, and precious stones with short cuneiform inscriptions mentioning the foreign donors (especially Arabian rulers,

57 BIWA p. 212 Pr. B i 63-64 (§ 7) (first Egyptian campaign).

58 RINAP 4 p. 20 no. 1, iv 39; p. 32 no. 2, iv 11; p. 50 no. 6, iii 32'.

59 BIWA p. 216 Pr. A ii 68-74 (§ 21): Mugallu king of Tabal (Eastern Anatolia, Cappadocia) came to Nineveh bringing his daughter as a spouse (variant: in homage) (second Egyptian campaign); p. 217, Pr. A ii 75-80 (§ 22): Sandišarme king of Ḫilakku (south-eastern Anatolia, mountainous region north of Tarsus), *idem*.

60 RINAP 4 p. 16 no. 1, ii 64; RINAP 4 p. 30 no. 2, ii 30; RINAP 4 p. 48 no. 6, ii 8'; RINAP 4 p. 50 no. 6, iii 32'; RINAP 4 p. 75 no. 30, 1': after Esarhaddon's campaign against Nabû-zēr-ketti-lēšir, Naʾid-Marduk of Babylon came to Nineveh every year, bearing tributes and kissing Esarhaddon's feet.

61 BIWA p. 221 Pr. B iii 93-99 (§ 25); p. 221 Pr. J Stück 4 2-8; Pr. H H1 iii 1'-9': Uallî, king of Mannea (in Western Iran), sent his son Erisinni together with his daughter to Nineveh to kiss Ashurbanipal's feet.

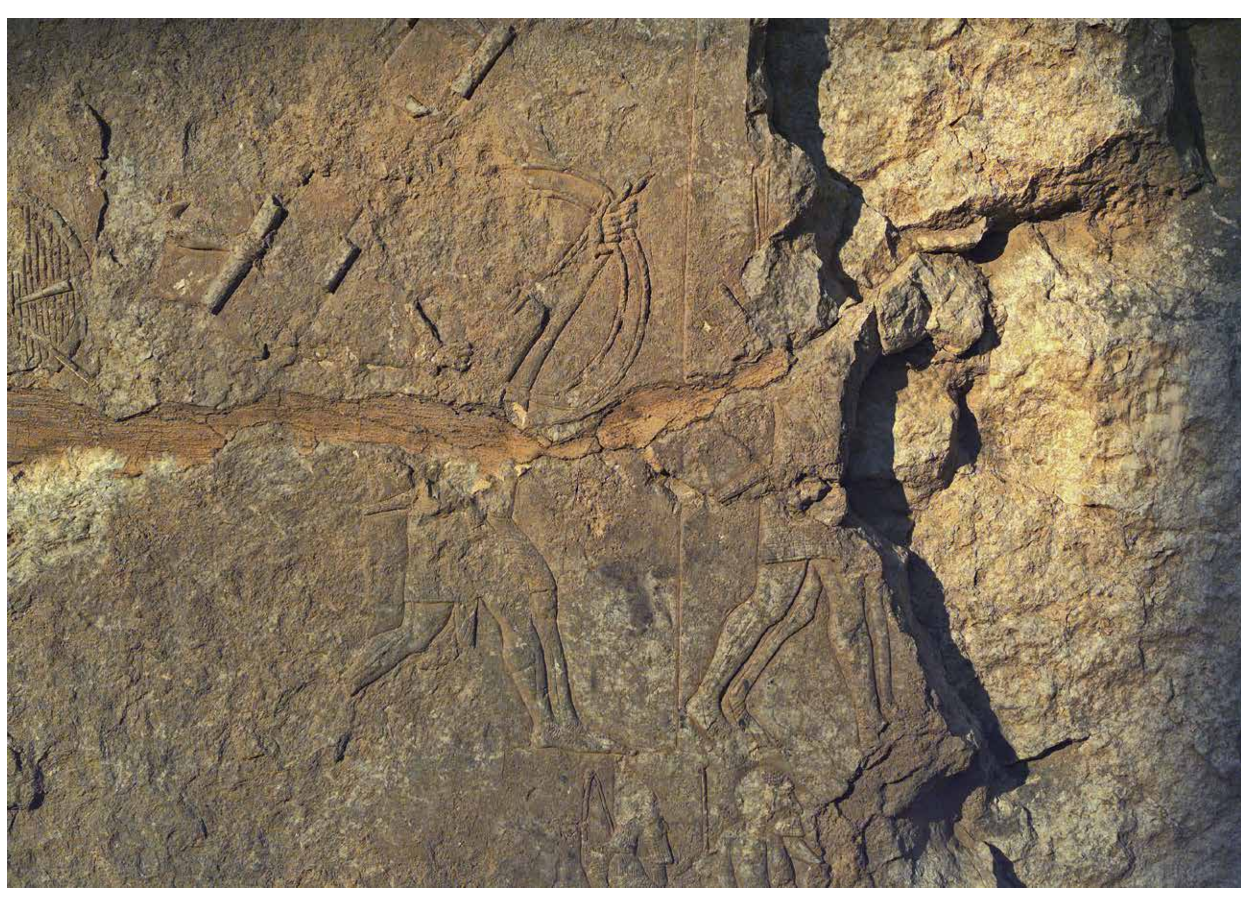
62 RINAP 3/1 p. 66 no. 4, 58; p. 97 no. 15, iv 1'-14'; p. 116 no. 16, iv 22-37; p. 133 no. 17, iii 66-81; pp. 162-163 no. 19, i 3'b – 14'; p. 177 no. 22, iii 37b – 49; p. 194 no. 23, iii 33-42; RINAP 3/2 pp. 80-81 no. 46, 30b – 32; p. 185 no. 140, r. 19-21.

63 BIWA p. 218 Pr. B ii 98 – iii 4 (§ 18).

64 BIWA p. 250 Pr. H H2 ii' 7'-13'.

*Figure 34.2 (left) Relief depicting two Elamite archers with bows. Nineveh, Iraq; Room XXXIII (BB), SW Palace; 7th century BC; gypsum; H 20 cm, W 19 cm; Barracco Museum, Rome (MB 53).*
*© Barracco Museum.*

*Figure 34.3 (bottom) Detail of a relief depicting a siege of a city by Assyrian archers. Nineveh, Iraq; Room V, SW Palace; 704-681 BC; gypsum; in situ until 2016.* *All rights are reserved to Angelo Rubino, ISCR (High Institute for Conservation and Restoration, Rome), MIBACT (Ministry for Cultural Assets and Environments, Rome).*



such as Karib-il, king of Saba).[65] In all probability, these beads were consigned to the Assyrian kings during official, perhaps public, state visits, aimed at the acknowledgment of a vassal status.

As is attested in the royal inscriptions, Nineveh was involved in the follow-up to the constant Assyrian military activity during the final phase of the construction and stabilization of a structured world dominion under the reigns of kings Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. All victorious military campaigns were followed by the plundering of the defeated countries and the taking of war booty, part of which was transported to Nineveh to be stored in the royal treasury or distributed to the royal family and to imperial magnates and officials. The transport of the booty through the capital was performed in solemn public processions similar to Roman triumphs, often depicted on the marble slabs adorning the ceremonial rooms of the royal palaces; and most probably the distribution was effected in similar ceremonies, so as to show the flow of wealth granted by the king to his subjects.

Only tiny traces of the enormous accumulation of booty taken from abroad in Nineveh survived the city's final sack. Once more, cuneiform notes show some cylinder-shaped beads to be booty from abroad, specifying their exact origin – an inventory mark for the officials of the royal stores.[66] The royal inscriptions, however, very often include long and detailed descriptions of the triumphant king transporting war booty to Nineveh at the conclusion of his military campaign. Particularly rich and varied must have been the booty taken by Assurbanipal at the end of his first and second campaigns in Egypt, following the defeat of the Ethiopian king and the quelling of the revolts driven by local rulers; first Memphis, then Thebes was sacked, and most probably the Egyptian royal palaces and stores were meticulously cleaned out. Ashurbanipal proudly states that he had two enormous columns, perhaps obelisks, made of shining silver alloy, transported from Thebes to Nineveh.[67]

Along with the booty, on some occasions the Assyrian kings would bring the kings or rulers they had defeated in war to their capital, exhibiting them in public as prisoners in chains and often subjecting them to severe punishment. Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal organized many such triumphal ceremonies in Nineveh, as duly described in their royal inscriptions. One particularly spectacular occasion must have been Ashurbanipal's triumph after his first Egyptian campaign, when he had twenty defeated Egyptian rulers and princes – including Necho, who would start the new independent Egyptian dynasty some years later – enter Nineveh with the enormous booty extracted from Memphis and the towns of the Delta.[68] On some occasions, the king's triumphal entry was accompanied by the public humiliations of the defeated kings and their troops. Esarhaddon states that he had a defeated Arabian king enter Nineveh with his whole army in chains and tightly bound together,[69] and that he had the inhabitants of two western cities enter Nineveh to musical accompaniment, with the heads of their kings hanging around their necks.[70] His son Ashurbanipal, entering Nineveh with the war booty taken during his second campaign against Elam, likewise had one of the Babylonian rebels he had captured march with the head of the Elamite king hanging around his neck.[71]

Special space is given in the royal inscriptions of the last three major Assyrian kings to the severe and often very cruel punishments inflicted on the rebel or enemy kings in particular sites in Nineveh: as often attested in the past, the capital could be transformed into a true public theatre, where the power and the inflexibility of the king was exhibited without any concession to human piety or diplomatic fair play. These texts bear many horrifying descriptions, although some of them might be attributed to the repetition of literary *topos* rather than reality (fig. 40.1). Sennacherib had an Anatolian prince from Cilicia flayed in public;[72] Esarhaddon had the ruler of a

65 All of the cylinder-shaped beads are labeled as the property of Sennacherib: one in stone from the Phoenician king Abi-Baʾal of Samsimuruna (RINAP 3/2 p. 145 no. 102), six from Karib-il of Saba (p. 146-147 nos. 103-104, 108 in agate; p. 147-148 nos. 105-106 in chalcedony; p. 149 no. 107 in onyx), one from Nabû-zēr-ketti-lēšir, the short-lived king of Babylon, son of the arch-enemy Babylonian king Marduk-apla-iddina II (Merodach-baladan), evidently before his rebellion against Sennacherib (RINAP 3/2 p. 150 no. 109, in onyx); one from a ruler whose name is lost in a break (RINAP 3/2 p. 151 no. 110, in agate).

66 These beads, which were excavated in the remains of Sennacherib's palace, are also labelled as coming from Arabia (town of Adumutu): RINAP 3/2 p. 151-153 nos. 111-113, in onyx; RINAP 3/2 p. 154-155 no. 114-115, in agate.

67 First Egyptian campaign: BIWA p. 20 Pr. C ii 101-104 (§ 16) (the parallel text Pr. A i 116-117 has 'Assyria' instead of Nineveh). Second Egyptian campaign: BIWA p. 26 Pr. A ii 41 (§ 18) (the parallel text Pr. H ii 11', p. 190, has 'Assyria' instead of Nineveh).

68 First Egyptian campaign: BIWA p. 212 Pr. E Stück 11, 42-43 (kings Necho, Šarru-lu-dari and Paqruru); p. 214 Pr. A ii 5-7 (twenty Egyptian 'kings' who had rebelled and conspired with Necho and his comrades).

69 Uabu, an Arabian king: RINAP 4 p. 78 no. 31, r. 11. British Museum, London (1929,1012.1/BM 121005).

70 Abdi-milkutti, king of Tyrus in Phoenicia, and Sanduarri, king of Kundu and Sissu in southeastern Anatolia (eastern Cilicia): RINAP 4 p. 17 no. 1, iii 38; p. 29 no. 2, i 56.

71 BIWA p. 227 Pr. B vi 49-51 (§ 36) (= Pr. C § 46).

72 Kirua, city lord of the town Illubru, probably in Cilicia: RINAP 3/1 p. 136 no. 17, iv 82-86.

town near Egypt exposed at one of the gates of Nineveh, bound in chains together with a bear, a dog and a pig;[73] Ashurbanipal had a Chaldean king taken to the 'bank of the flaying' and killed 'as a goat',[74] the sons of the rebel Assyrian governor in Chaldea were forced to grind their father's bones in public;[75] and an Arabian king had to stand at a gate of Nineveh with a horse bit in his mouth and a dog collar around his neck.[76] Such cruel and humiliating punishments were aimed at celebrating not only the military power of the victorious Assyrian king, but also and principally the unavoidability of a final sanction for those who failed to show respect, awe and fear to Assyria and to the Assyrian king. We should note that in official Assyrian texts, such punishment did not take place at the external frontiers or in the conquered or defeated countries, locations that would have certainly allowed for the dissemination of the concepts of respect, awe and fear among local populations. Rather, the punishments are all described as taking place in Nineveh, so we can assume that Nineveh, in fact, was considered the most efficacious theatre for the exhibition of Assyrian power. Considering Nineveh's role as imperial 'capital', such spectacle seems to have been reserved for and dedicated to the Assyrian imperial elite residing there or frequenting the royal palaces and temples. But given the location of many such exhibitions at an urban gate, which was traditionally the most 'public' building in a Mesopotamian city, the spectacle seems to have been designed to involve the larger population of the capital and all the people who entered Nineveh for official or private reasons. Accordingly, Nineveh was not only the seat of the magnificent court of the most powerful Assyrian kings, but also a true agora for the exhibition of, and meditation about, the effects of Assyrian activity upon the surrounding countries, aimed at unifying, organizing and stabilizing the whole world.

73 Asuhili, king of the town Arzâ on the Egyptian border, was exposed at the 'Citadel Gate': RINAP 4 p. 18 no. 1, iii 41; p. 29 no. 2, i 61; according to a different text, he was also bound as a pig, RINAP 4 p. 78 no. 31, r. 2.

74 Dunanu, king of Gambulu (Southern Mesopotamia): BIWA p. 228 Pr. B vi 87-89 (§ 41 = Pr. C § 52).

75 Nabû-šumu-ereš, governor of Gambulu: BIWA p. 228 Pr. B vi 97 – vii 2 (§ 41 = C § 52).

76 Uaiteʾ, an Arabian king, was exposed at the Eastern Gate of Nineveh, also called the 'Gate of the dominion upon the world': BIWA p. 249 Pr. A ix 107-110 (§ 80).

# 35. Sennacherib

*Carlo Lippolis*

Long before the palaces of Nineveh were brought back to light and their inscriptions deciphered, Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC; fig. 35.1) was already well known, due to a passage from Herodotus (II, 141) and, even more so, from the tale of the siege of Jerusalem told in the Bible (2 Kings 19-20; Isaiah 36-39).

At that time, the Assyrian Empire had already reached its apex and Sennacherib found himself, as the heir to the throne, carrying out heavy institutional and coordinating duties in Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), Nineveh and, in particular, in his father's capital, Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin). Of the skills the young Sennacherib was to acquire, it was his technical legacy that would draw the highest praise in successive royal inscriptions.

Ascending the throne after the sudden demise of his father, Sargon II (reigned 721-705 BC, fig. 27.1), while fighting in Anatolia in 705 BC, Sennacherib immediately took distance from his predecessor's policies. His father's unheard-of fate (his body was never retrieved, meaning that he was not buried in his homeland, a serious issue according to Mesopotamian beliefs) was felt to be a divine punishment and a negative omen: hence not only the decision to avoid all mention of Sargon's name in his own royal inscriptions, but also to move the capital from Khorsabad to Nineveh, an ancient religious, political and economic centre, not to mention a crossroads between two important communication axes, those between Northern and Southern Mesopotamia, and between the Zagros mountains and the Syrian Euphrates.

It was here that he had his new residence erected, named the 'palace without a rival', with the phases of its construction duly noted in royal texts (fig. 35.2; Kertai, this volume). The palace was adorned with cycles of panels carved in bas-relief illustrating Sennacherib's military enterprises, for a total length of more than 3 km. The scenes were set in an omnipresent and realistic landscape, the outcome of a new, original 'far away' point of view elaborated by Nineveh's artists. His enterprises as a builder were also celebrated, however, such as the extraction of a monolith from a quarry and the transportation of one of the man-headed bull colossi (weighing several tons) to Nineveh (fig. 35.3). The city's rebuilding under Sennacherib had not only planned for its edifices to be taller, bigger and with deeper foundations than the previous ones (a widespread stereotype in all royal inscriptions), but also for its roads to be straight, its squares wider, all buildings to be artistically finished, their materials to be polished and shiny: here, the idea of a cosmic, ordered town affirming itself over the preceding chaos is manifest.

The whole city was thus enormously expanded, to the point of reaching 750 ha; eighteen monumental city gates now opened in the new double walls (Ur, this volume). The fortifications, surrounded by a moat, consisted of external walls in blocks of limestone, and inner, taller (reaching 25 m) walls of sun-dried brick, rising on stone foundations (fig. 35.4). The internal citadel itself, Kuyunjik, where the palace and the main temples stood, was protected by walls with a main east entrance (the so called 'entrance for the inspection of the people').

Not just the defensive system, but also the street grid, the whole building plan of the lower city (not very well known from an archaeological point of view), the water

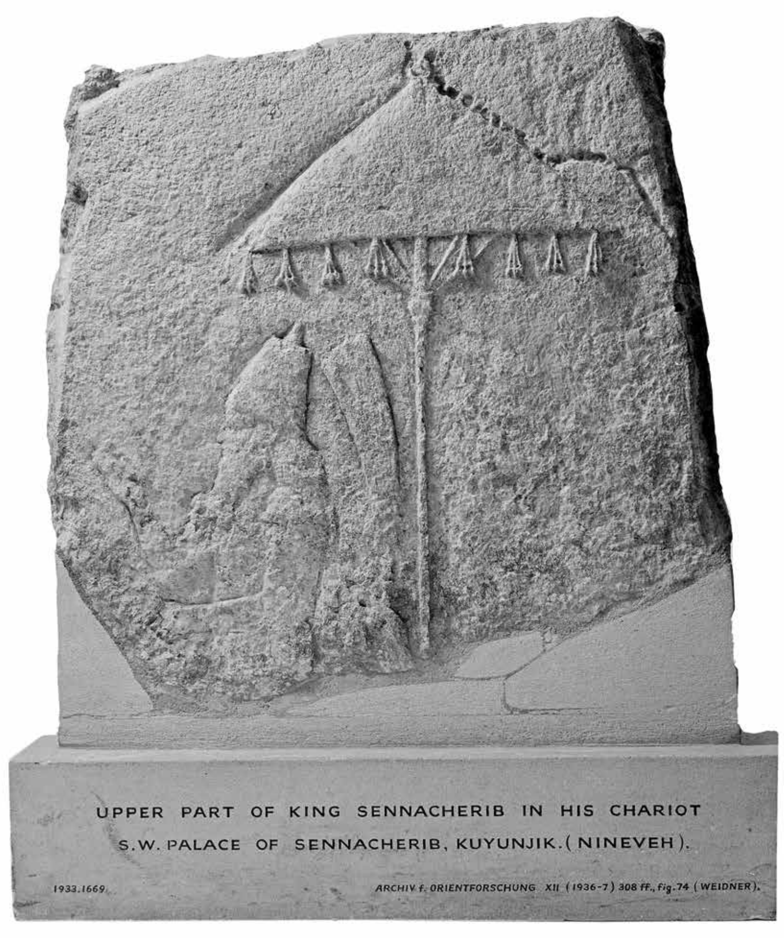



*Figure 35.1 Relief showing king Sennacherib under a sunshade. Nineveh, Iraq; Gallery XLIX (O), SW Palace; 7th century BC; gypsum; H 53 cm, W 55.8 cm; Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (AN 1933.1669). © Ashmolean Museum.*

supply and the irrigation system of the city were completely reorganized. Sennacherib transformed Nineveh in a splendid metropolis, whose reflection we can still perceive today from its archaeological remains, from the magnificent palace bas-reliefs and the royal inscriptions.

If the Assur monarchs had previously constructed hydraulic structures and canals, Sennacherib's hydraulic engineering feats remain marvels to this day (Morandi Bonacossi, this volume). Huge quantities of water were required to satisfy the needs of the new great capitals: for the agricultural hinterland, for gardens and parks, and for their inhabitants. In Nineveh, the water from the mountains to the north and northeast of the city was regimented and channelled via canal systems, underground tunnels, sluices and aqueducts, while artificial embankments and alluvial plains were created to protect the capital against sudden floods or overflows (fig. 35.5).

As regards his military campaigns, the siege of Jerusalem in 701 BC (celebrated in texts but actually a failure) and the siege of Lachish (depicted on the entirety of the walls of Hall XXXVI of the palace; Ussishkin, this volume) are famous. Many campaigns were conducted in Babylonia, relations with which had long been problematic. Babylon was the main religious and cultural centre of the whole of Mesopotamia, and thus could not be treated as a normal province of the empire. The picture was further complicated by the complex social and ethnic puzzle that was the southern region of the Land of Two Rivers. Sennacherib conducted many military campaigns against the then Babylonian sovereign Marduk-apla-iddina II (reigned 722-710 BC and 703-702 BC), who sought refuge in nearby Elam, an ally at that time, from which he would continue to carry out an anti-Assyrian policy. In any case, the Babylonian political situation remained

*Figure 35.2 Clay cylinder containing a foundation record of Sennacherib's palace. Nineveh, Iraq; 704-681 BC; clay; H 23.5 cm, W 13.5 cm; British Museum, London (1915,0410.1/BM 113203). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

*Figure 35.3 A relief depicting the transportation of a winged bull. Nineveh, Iraq; Court VI, SW Palace; gypsum; H 205.7 cm, W 223.5 cm; British Museum, London (1851,0902.4/BM124822). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

*Figure 35.4 The Nergal Gate and reconstructed walls of Nineveh, November 2008. Photograph by JoAnn S. Makinano/ Wikimedia Commons.*

uncertain and tense, climaxing in the murder of Sennacherib's son, Ashur-nadin-šumi, who had been placed by the former on the throne of Babylon. The Assyrian response did not enjoy immediate success, and it was only in 689 BC that Sennacherib managed to capture Babylon, this time treating the city particularly harshly. According to what he himself reported in his inscriptions, the city was destroyed and partially dissolved in the diverted waters of the Euphrates, and the statues of the main city divinities were deported to Assyria. An act of wilful and total destruction that, perpetrated against an ancient religious centre such as Babylon, was felt to be ungodly and sacrilegious by contemporaries. An act that was certainly not instinctive, but that was probably a deliberate political and religious strategy on Sennacherib's part, since he was also trying to transfer to Assyria the cultural and religious primacy for central Southern Mesopotamia. Sennacherib was to die in 681 BC in a court conspiracy in one of the temples in Nineveh, having designated his youngest son Esarhaddon (reigned 681-669 BC) as his successor.

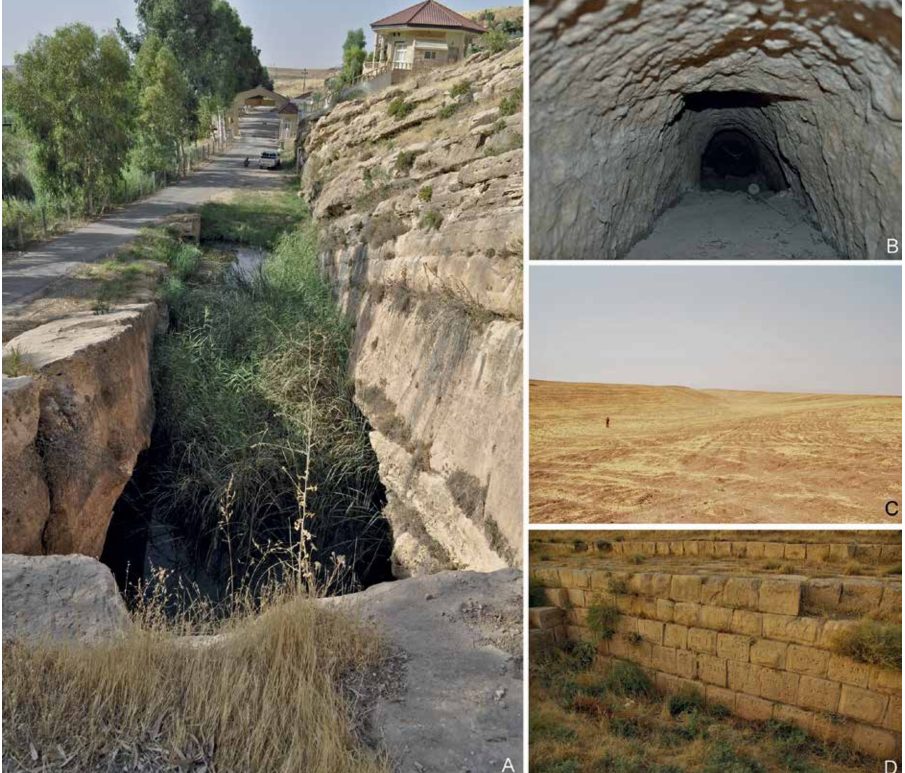



*Figure 35.5 Four different technical components of the Assyrian hydraulic system: canal stretch chiselled through natural bedrock in Khinis (A), tunnel at Shiru Maliktha (B), canal stretch dug into the earth at Bandawai (C) and aqueduct in Jerwan (D). Courtesy of Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project.*

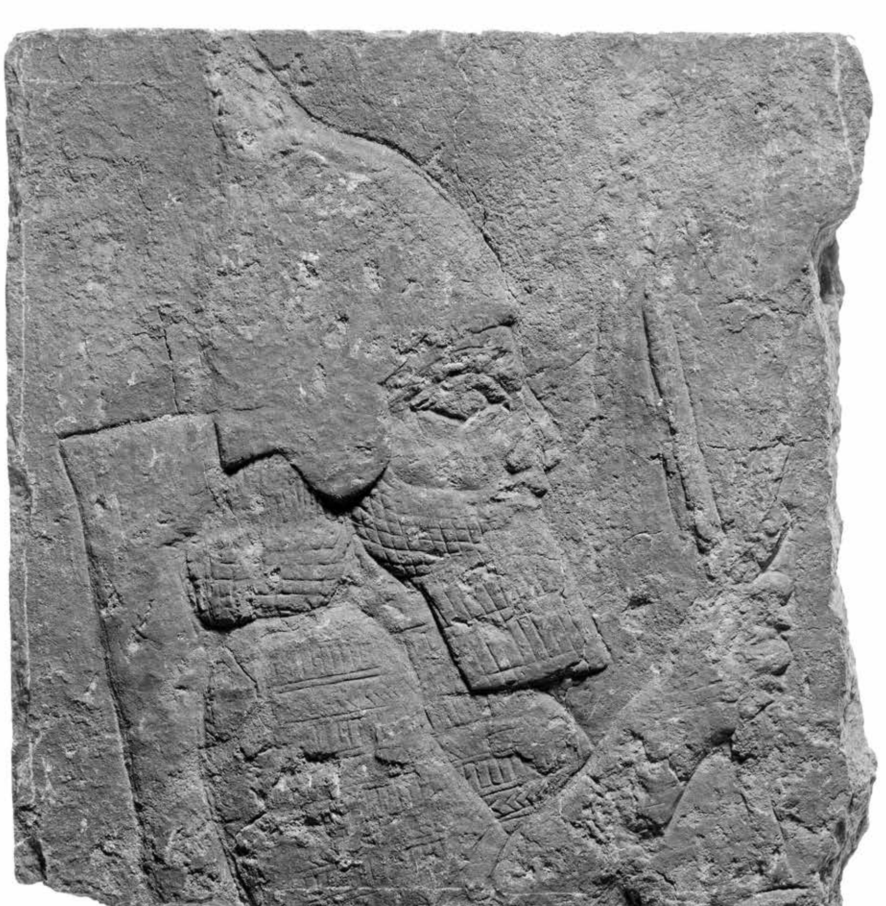


*Figure 35.6 Relief depicting an Assyrian soldier holding a mace. Nineveh, Iraq; 7th century BC; limestone; H 18 cm, W 18 cm; Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (AN 1940.202). © Ashmolean Museum.*

# 36. Sennacherib's Nineveh and the Staging of Atmosphere

*Stephen Lumsden*

Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC; fig. 35.1) was an innovator. The founding of his new imperial capital at Nineveh is a good example of this penchant for 'thinking outside the box'. Unlike previous new urban foundations, Nineveh was an ancient, essentially Assyrian and sacred city, home to the worship of the world-famous Ištar of Nineveh (MacGinnis, this volume). Before the founding of Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), the main royal palace was located at Nineveh (Kertai 2015a), and many military campaigns had been launched from there. This move was key to Sennacherib's larger plan: to refocus on the Assyrian heartland of the empire rather than its expansion (Grayson 1991a, 103; Lumsden 2001, 35; Reade 1978, 47; Russell 1991, 260-1; Tadmor 1999, 61-2). As part of his project, he expanded previous rulers' policies of integrating conquered populations into the imperial elite, forming a new hybrid Assyrian identity (Lumsden 2001; 2006; see also Parpola 2004; Zadok 1997, 216). Nineveh played a fundamental role in this process; its long history as a central Assyrian city gave this development a 'sense of ancestral lineage and continuity' (*cf.* Hamilakis 2013, 190), contributing social memory to a shared sense of collective identity (Lumsden 2001; 2006; see also Harmanşah 2013).

I submit that an essential element in Sennacherib's goal to solidify the creation of a broader and more inclusive Assyrian identity was the staging of an atmosphere at Nineveh. Archaeologists have begun to investigate such intangibles as the senses and sensorial experience, emotion, and atmosphere (Bille *et al.* 2015; Davidson *et al.* 2005; Hamilakis 2013; Harris & Sørensen 2010),[77] and Sørensen argues that atmosphere in archaeological investigations can be inferred from the material environment (2015b, 65). Atmosphere is crucial for the human experience of the world; it can 'transform, structure and shape the lives of people' (Bille *et al.* 2015, 31). Yet, it is vague, indistinct and all-pervading, and emerges 'in between' subject and object so that the perceiver and the perceived are mutually constitutive (Böhme 1993; Sørensen 2015a; 2015b, 65). Atmospheres can be staged through objects and the material environment, and be imbued with power and politics (Böhme 2014). Moreover, staged atmospheres are also a way of 'bringing together, of sharing a social reality' (Bille *et al.* 2015, 34).

Sennacherib created something new at Nineveh, in terms of grandeur, scale and topography, and in the intensification of ceremony and performance. The natural and built environments incorporated within the walls of the expanded city produced a new kind of arena for the staging of atmosphere. Here, I confine my remarks to that part of the city north of the Khosr River (fig. 36.1), the location of the Lower Town Project (Lumsden 2000; 2004; 2006), where the topography within the city is most dramatic (Ur, this volume). In expanding the walled city north and east of Kuyunjik to an area of about 300 ha, around the same size as the two previous imperial capitals, Sennacherib created a vast space of varying elevation; the inclusion of a high old Tigris river terrace

77 See also Thomason 2016 for the application of a multi-sensory approach to the bodily experience of Neo-Assyrian capital cities.

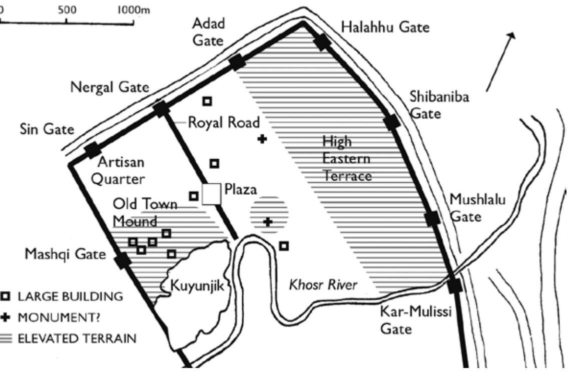



*Figure 36.1 Layout of the northern part of Nineveh suggested by survey and excavation in 1989-90.*

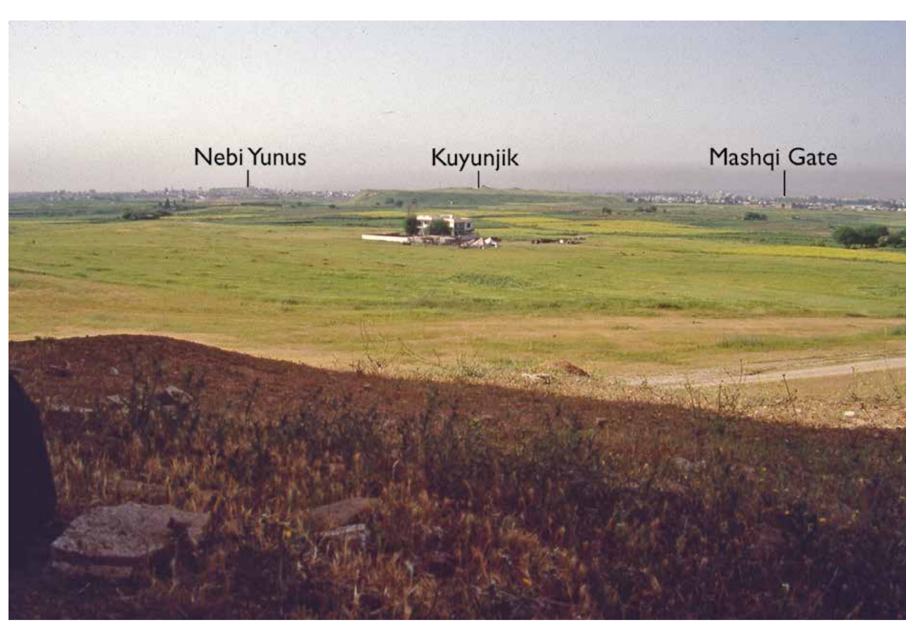



*Figure 36.2 View south from the Adad Gate, on the edge of the high eastern terrace. Courtesy of Stephen Lumsden.*

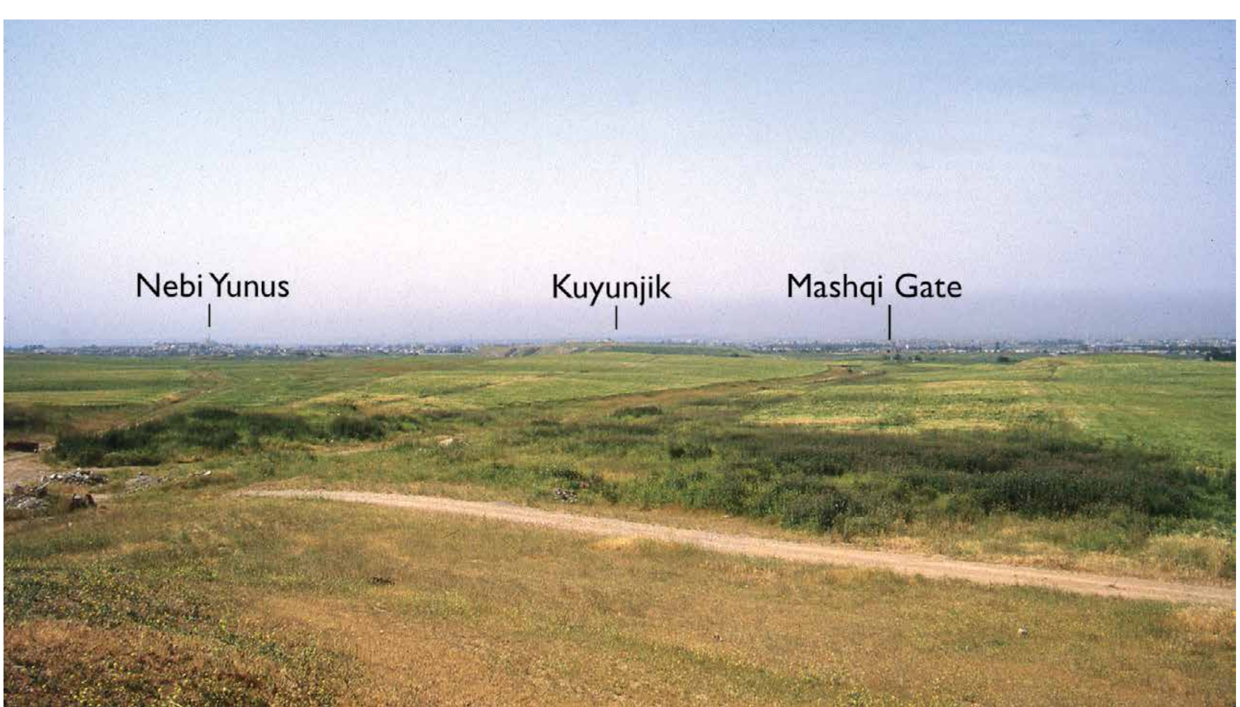
in the eastern part offered new urban vistas (Lumsden 2004). Beyond the Old Town Mound, probably thick with large homes, temples and other important buildings, the built environment seems to have been less dense, open areas perhaps accommodating gardens and orchards (Lumsden 2000, 818).[78] Sennacherib describes how he 'widened the squares, made bright the avenues and streets and caused them to shine like the day' (Luckenbill 1927, 162-3). The stone-paved Royal Road, over 30 m wide, traversed over a kilometre along level terrain in a straight line from the Nergal Gate to the north end of Kuyunjik, affording a 'memorable kinetic experience' (Favro 1996, 208; Lumsden 2006). This overall design would have served as a 'socio-spatial management tool' that generated a new experiential landscape, 'directly affecting the feel and atmosphere' of this part of the city (*cf.* Degen & Rose 2012, 8).

A newcomer to the city, emerging from the shadow of a city gate into the intensely bright light of day, may have been momentarily dazed (see McMahon 2013, 174), and then, perhaps, overwhelmed by such emotions as surprise, shock and awe at the vastness and beauty of the city, re-enchanting the familiar urban realm (fig. 36.2; see Edensor & Sumartojo 2015, 259). The atmosphere at Nineveh may have been especially powerful, 'something which can come over us, into which we are drawn, which takes possession of us like an alien power' (Böhme 2013). This happens through the co-presence of the

78 For a similar situation at Nimrud, see Fiorina 2011; Ur 2013.

Figure 36.3 (left) Head of a guardian figure in Mosul marble at the Nergal Gate. Courtesy of Stephen Lumsden.

Figure 36.4 (bottom) View across the eastern terrace from near the Halahhu Gate. Courtesy of Stephen Lumsden.



staged material environment and the emotional state of the populace moving about within it, occurring instantaneously as an embodied, multi-sensorial experience. While it may be that Sennacherib established a new way of looking (Lumsden 2004; see also Hamilakis 2013, 20), all the senses would have worked together in the experience of the atmosphere at Nineveh.[79] For instance, smell is often the most persistent memory of a place. Assyrian kings boast of adorning their cities with aromatic plants and fruit trees from throughout the empire, evoking strong nostalgic recollections of place.[80]

There is also a strong pedagogical dimension to sensory capabilities in experiencing and sharing an atmosphere (Hamilakis 2013, 48). People from throughout the empire would have visited Nineveh, many with different prior experiences and backgrounds. Certain competences and behaviours, such as posture and body language, ways of walking and gesturing, are not universal (Mauss 1973) and would have to have been learned to warrant inclusion in the collective choreography of Nineveh (see Löfgren 2015). This process in the 'formation of a new embodied person' (Hamilakis 2013, 23) may be reflected in texts that exhort native Assyrians to instruct conquered populations 'how to behave' (Dalley 1985, 35; Lumsden 2001, 43).

In addition to a more or less consistent, dominant atmosphere, dynamically changing atmospheres at Nineveh could be associated with particular parts of the city or with particular events (*cf.* Edensor & Sumartojo 2015, 253; Pallasmaa 2015). A highly staged atmosphere of choreographed movement and sensation would have infused ceremonial events along the Royal Road, including royal and cultic processions and victory celebrations (see Sørensen 2015b, 71). Entering through the only known city gate decorated with guardian figures (fig. 36.3), participants would have moved in a linear fashion along the broad, stone-paved avenue towards the north end of Kuyunjik and the ascent on to the citadel. The dynamically changing atmosphere as one moved closer to Kuyunjik would have channelled an increasingly intense and focused perception (*cf.* Sørensen 2015b, 70).

Yet, in many respects, everyday practices and repetitive mundane tasks played a more crucial role in the production of atmosphere at Nineveh than occasional ceremonial events (see Böhme 2014). Habitual and routine practices connect experiences and memories to place (Tuan 1977). The Adad Gate led to the game park, so perhaps ceremonial processions took place along the eastern terrace; however, the Halahhu and Šibaniba Gates – 'Bringing the Products of the Mountains' and 'The Choicest of Grain and Flocks Are Ever within It', respectively (Reade 1978, 51) – suggest that mundane, everyday movement also gave meaning to this elevated section of the city (fig. 36.4). The incorporation of this high terrace into the city – it rises as much as 20 m above the lowest parts of the city here – also transformed the urban environment, altering everyday experience. Unlike the focused perception of movement on the Royal Road, a sense of 'insideness' from the everyday movement on the high terrace and descent into the city below called for 'unfocused, peripheral, enveloping and enfolding perceptions' (*cf.* Pallasmaa 2015).

It was Sennacherib's emphasis on the whole city, rather than just the royal palace on its huge platform, as at Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin) (Lumsden 2006), that altered the experience of urban space. Sensing the staged atmosphere in this environment was integral to the merging of self and place in the creation of the seventh-century BC collective Assyrian identity. Presumably, much of the populace formed particularly responsive participants; however, there was no guarantee that all would succumb (see Borch 2014, 85). Indeed, a group of old Ninevite families did not, and moved away to Nimrud (Lumsden 2001, 44; Tadmor 1982, 451). They may have fallen prey to social exclusion and marginalization orchestrated through the staging of the new urban atmosphere at Nineveh. Or, perhaps their experiences of the new Nineveh were tainted by memories of how it used to be, alienating them from their hometown.[81]

Atmospheres change, and are 'susceptible to how the material environment changes' (Bille *et al.* 2015, 34). The history of Sennacherib's staged atmosphere at Nineveh throughout the vicissitudes of the seventh century BC is unclear. Perhaps it survived the murder of its architect, since Ashurbanipal celebrated the city early in his reign (Lumsden 2000, 819). It could not have lasted much longer.

79 See Böhme 2013; 2014; Brennan 2004, 1; Pallasmaa 2015 for the notions of co-presence and the multi-sensory experience of atmosphere.

80 For the sense of smell and aromatic plants, see Kertai 2015a; Pallasmaa 1995, 54; Thomason 2016, 247, 257-9.

81 For these notions of exclusion and alienation, in general, see Bille *et al.* 2015, 36; Degen & Rose 2012.

# 37. Sennacherib's Palace Garden at Nineveh, a World Wonder

*Stephanie Dalley*

Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC; fig. 35.1) stated, in his prism inscriptions of 694 BC, that he had raised the ground beside his new palace, which we now call the Southwest Palace, and planted a garden. He created, in his own words, 'a wonder for all peoples', implying that the palace and garden were one harmonious whole. They stood on Nineveh's high citadel Kuyunjik, overlooking the Tigris River to the west and the Khosr River to the east. The term 'wonder' had been used by previous Assyrian kings for particularly spectacular buildings; by adding 'for all peoples', Sennacherib made the expression superlative.

The garden was 'hanging' in the sense that it was built upon stone terraces supported on arches, so that plants relied upon the external provision of water. His palace garden has recently been identified as the legendary Hanging Garden of Babylon. The attribution to the city of Babylon arose from several confusions: between Nineveh and Babylon, Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, the Tigris and the Euphrates.

Sennacherib described how he had cast in bronze two forms, *gišmahhu* 'tree-trunk/ cylinder' (used in mathematical problem texts) and *alamittu* 'a type of palm tree/spiral', which 'instead of a shaduf' (a bucket lowered and raised from a counterweighted tip-beam) continuously raised water. *Alamittu* has been identified as the male date-palm, rendered on Mesopotamian sculptures with a spiral pattern on its trunk, to distinguish it from the female date-palm, represented by a scallop or diamond pattern. The cylinder and the spiral (or screw) are the two components of a so-called Archimedes screw which, Strabo wrote, was used to lift water up the terraces in the fabled Hanging Garden. This device, miraculous for the ease with which it lifts water, partly accounts for why Sennacherib's garden was known as a world wonder, for it included a marvel of engineering, defying gravity. The king emphasized that he had cleverly invented a new method for casting large objects in bronze.

From a gorge in the mountains of Kurdistan far to the northeast of Nineveh (fig. 37.1), a canal led off water from the river Gomel and then linked up with lower streams and crossed valleys by aqueducts along the way to reach a high point on a citadel (Morandi Bonacossi, this volume). The scheme extended for about 95 km towards Nineveh and was so carefully graded that it brought water on to the citadel, again along an aqueduct, half way up the garden. This end-point is perhaps shown on a palace sculpture panel carved in the time of Sennacherib's grandson Ashurbanipal; it shows stone terracing and an aqueduct, as well as a pillared pavilion (fig. 37.2). The planting is shown with basic stereotypes of an evergreen pine-tree type and a deciduous fruit-tree type, representing the fragrant and shade-giving trees of the Amanus mountains in Northwest Syria and Southeast Turkey, a beautiful environment which Sennacherib states he aimed to recreate for his garden. It has not proved possible to identify them. In other inscriptions he

*Figure 37.1 Mountains and water of Kurdistan. Courtesy of Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project.*

mentions rare plants brought back from abroad, but they may have been planted in other gardens in and around the lower city.

The long canal and its aqueducts are dated by panels of sculpture showing the king, and by inscriptions naming him, carved in stone at particular points along the way. The enterprise of bringing water up to the citadel was another extraordinary feat of engineering.

Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) camped for several days before the Battle of Gaugamela, which took its name from the river Gomel and the town Tell Gomel. He took with him historians to record his travels and triumphs, and they would have seen the canal and the aqueducts with their inscriptions and sculptures, and heard tales of their purpose. They would have recorded the marvels, but none of their writings have survived. Much later, from the last century BC onwards, Classical writers included extracts and paraphrases from those now missing histories. From Diodorus of Sicily comes the information that the garden resembled a Greek theatre for size, shape and terracing, roughly 120 m in length and width. Particular emphasis is placed by Philo on the top terrace, where stood a pillared walkway. It was roofed so ingeniously with layers of palm trunks and soil that mountain trees were planted upon it, so that trees affording fragrance and extra shade grew above those who strolled alongside the pillars. This gave a miraculous appearance to the whole garden.

When the palaces with their panels of sculpture were excavated in the mid-nineteenth century, just before the advent of photography, many of the panels were drawn soon after they were found. To help with accuracy and speed, a camera lucida was used. The original drawings are now collected in four huge volumes in the British Museum. One of them shows three adjacent, badly damaged panels; at the top of the garden scene, a row of pillars is shown roofed with several distinct layers, which are planted with trees (fig. 37.3). This feature corresponds to that described by Philo.

*Figure 37.2 Relief depicting the parkland in Nineveh. Nineveh, Iraq; Room H, N Palace; 645-635 BC; limestone/gypsum; H 208.3 cm, W 129.5 cm; British Museum, London (1856,0909.36/ BM 124939,a). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

Overall the garden and its water supply as described by Sennacherib, and the panels of sculpture from the palaces showing a garden at Nineveh, correspond in important respects with Classical descriptions of the Hanging Garden as a world wonder. The Assyrian images of the garden that survive focus on the structure and architecture of the garden, as do the Classical accounts. But there may have been sculptures, undiscovered or destroyed, that gave details of plants, for a small fragment of sculpture in the British Museum shows a foreground with plants in detail, one of them definitely a lily, another definitely a vine; the colours once painted on them have vanished.

Robert Koldewey (1855-1925), who excavated Babylon from 1899 to 1917, suggested that a vaulted building within his Southern Palace might have had a roof garden to be identified with the world wonder. But he was well aware that no Babylonian or Classical texts matched any details, regretfully concluding that there was no place on the site for an alternative location.

Rather than earlier, fanciful pictures showing a roof garden, or a temple tower, or a courtyard garden, or watering by a wheel, a new reconstruction can now be given from details that match Assyrian sources with Classical ones, based on evidence (figs. 37.4-5).

*Figure 37.3 Drawing of relief from the Southwest Palace showing the pillared walkway roofed with trees. British Museum, London (Original Drawing IV 77). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

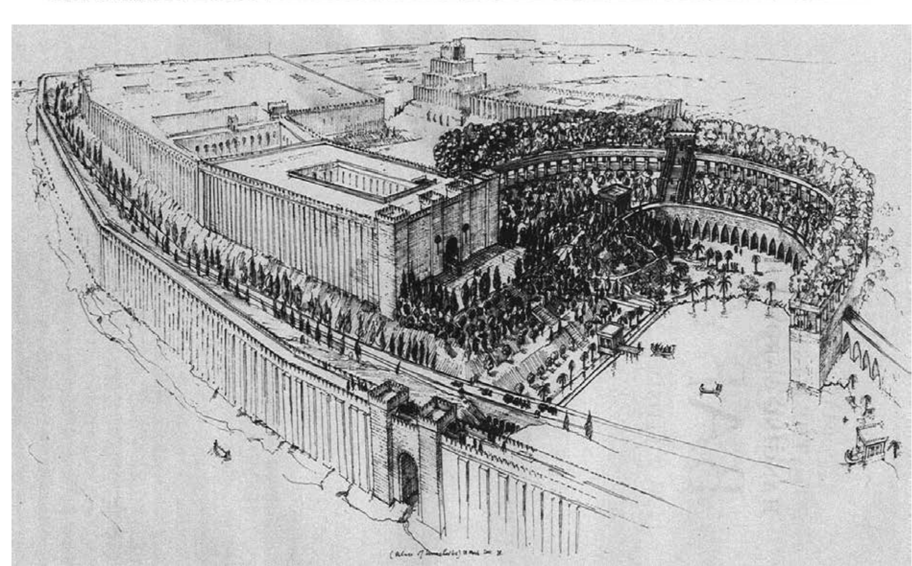


*Figure 37.4 Reconstruction of Sennacherib's palace garden at Nineveh, by Terry Ball. Courtesy of the author.*

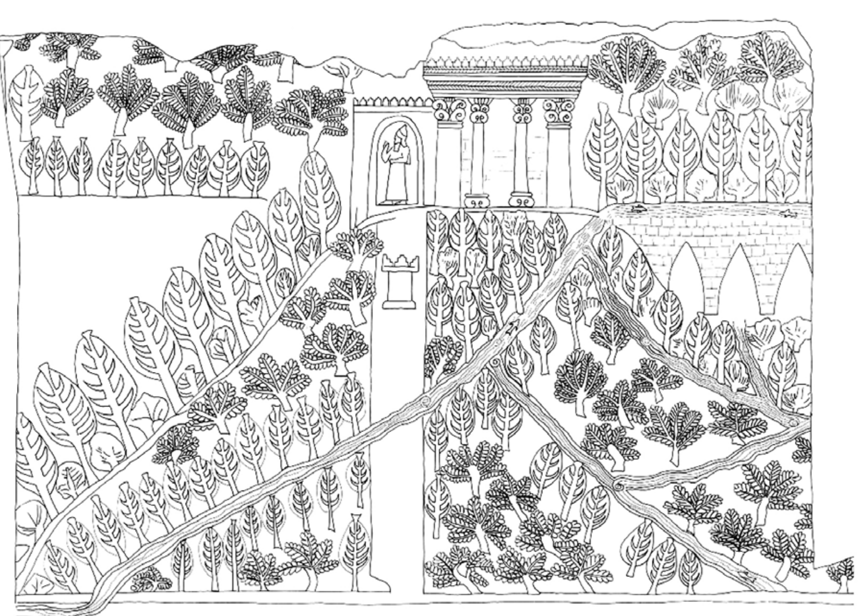


*Figure 37.5 Author's drawing of Ashurbanipal's garden sculpture.*

# 38. The Lachish Reliefs

*David Ussishkin*

In 701 BC Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC; fig. 35.1) conducted his third campaign, this time to the Levant (fig. 38.1). During that campaign he invaded Judah in order to suppress the revolt against Assyrian domination in the region, which was led by Hezekiah, king of Judah. Sennacherib turned first against Lachish, the main fortress city of Hezekiah. He laid siege to the city, conquered it in a fierce battle, exiled its inhabitants, and destroyed the city completely. Only then did he turn against Jerusalem, Hezekiah's capital. Lachish has been extensively excavated, and the remains of Sennacherib's siege have been studied (fig. 38.2; Ussishkin 2014).

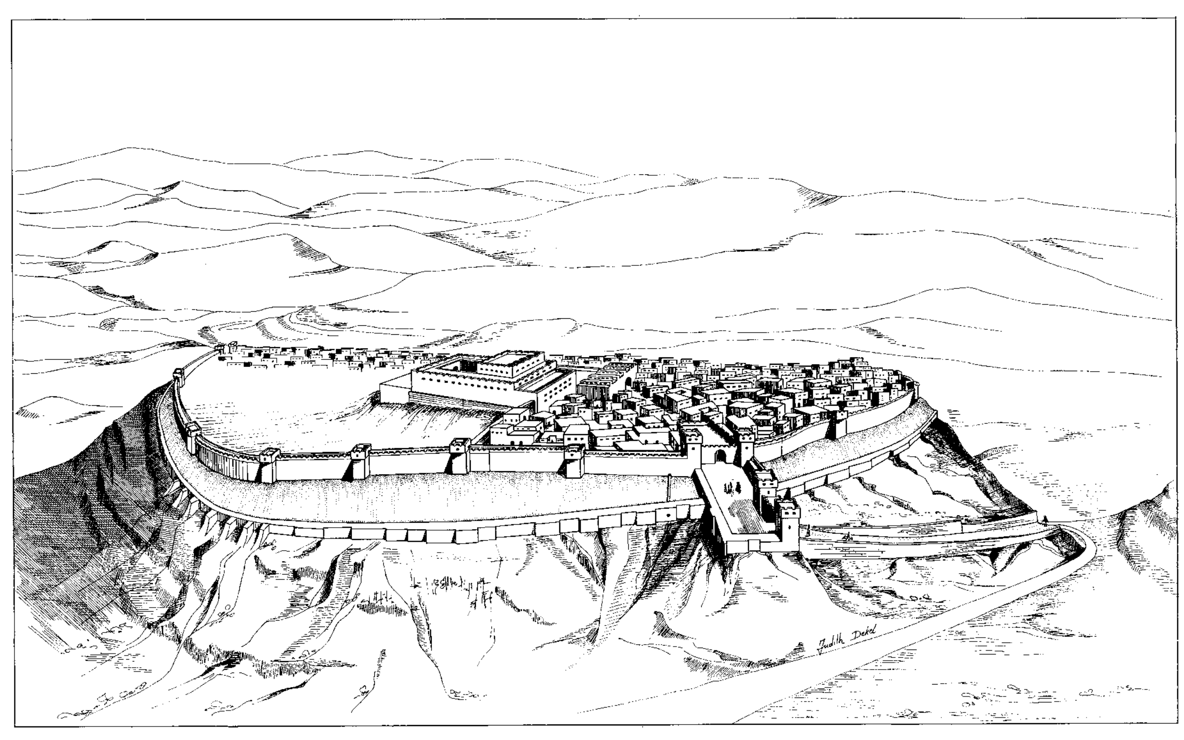
Several years after the campaign to Judah, Sennacherib erected his new, magnificent royal palace in Nineveh. The palace was excavated in 1850 by Sir Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894), on behalf of the British Museum in London (Curtis, this volume; Fales, this volume). A series of stone reliefs depicting the conquest of Lachish was erected in a special room of the palace – known as the 'Lachish Room' or Room XXXVI – where the building's architects sought to emphasize the importance of the event immortalized on the reliefs (Ussishkin 1982). This room was the focal point of a ceremonial wing in the palace building.

The visitor who arrived at the ceremonial wing entered from a large courtyard to an outer hall, from there to an inner hall, and finally from there to the Lachish Room. These three entrances were built along one straight axis and were decorated with large stone colossi of winged bulls. The outer of the three entrances and its winged bulls were larger than the middle entrance and its winged bulls. That entrance and its colossi were larger than those of the third inner entrance, which opened onto the Lachish Room. Thus, the visitor entering the ceremonial wing saw in front of him the three magnificent entrances, one inside the other, and behind them, along the back wall of the room, the relief depicting the siege of Lachish (figs. 38.3-4). This arrangement of entrances is unique in Assyrian monumental architecture and emphasizes the singular importance of the Lachish Room.

All the walls of the Lachish Room were decorated with reliefs (fig. 38.5). Layard left in Nineveh the relief slabs on the left side that depicted 'large bodies of horsemen and charioteers'. The rest of the reliefs included twelve alabaster slabs with a total length of 18.85 m, which Layard sent to the British Museum. Assuming that the missing portion was about 8 m long, the entire series was 26.85 m long and 2.74 m high. It is the largest and most detailed relief series depicting the siege of a single city that had ever been installed in any Assyrian royal palace. This is another tangible indication of the importance of the battle of Lachish.

The arrangement of the various scenes on the relief series was precisely planned by the artists. We have here a whole harmonious composition divided into pictures. On the left, as noted, cavalry and charioteer units are depicted. After them, archers and slingers are shown shooting at the besieged city. Going on, the fortress city is shown under assault, with the city gate at the centre. Further to the right, Assyrian soldiers are shown carrying away spoils from the city and killing prisoners, and columns of the city inhabitants going

*Figure 38.1 Clay prism containing victory accounts of king Sennacherib in the Levant. Nineveh, Iraq; 691 BC; cay; H 31 cm, D 17 cm; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem (71.72.249 and 70.62.398). Photo © The Israel Museum, by Meidad Suchowolski.*



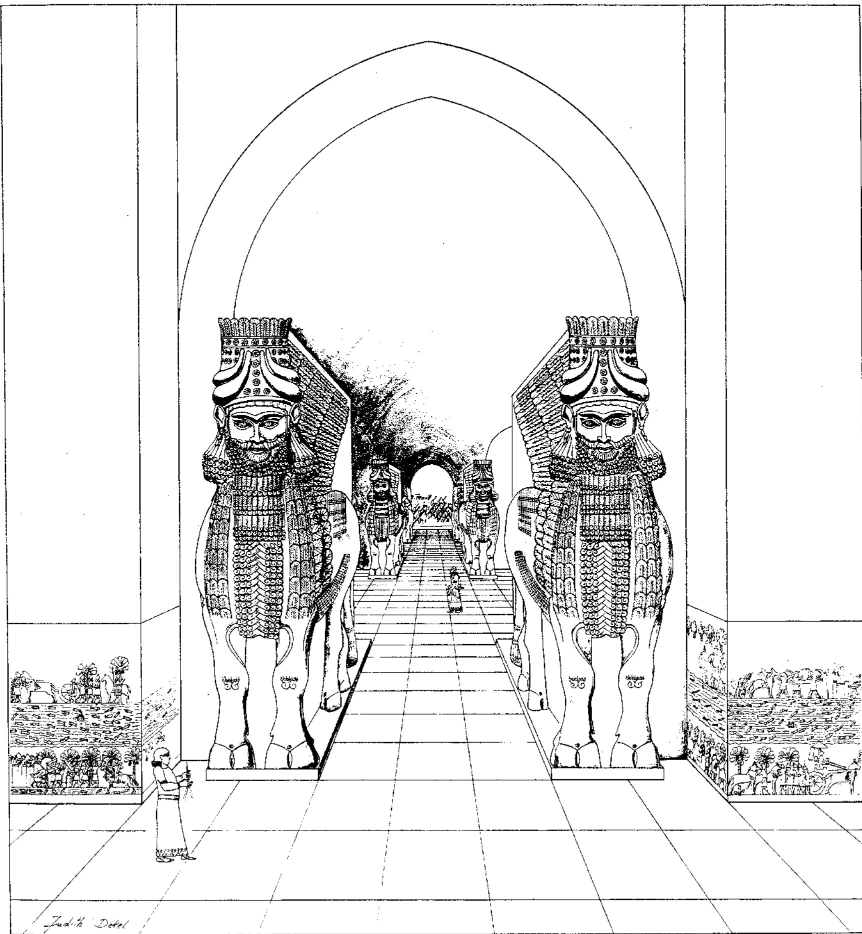


*Figure 38.2 Reconstruction of Lachish on the eve of the Assyrian siege. Drawing by Judith Dekel.*

*Figure 38.3 The three entrances leading to the Lachish Room (Room XXXVI) in Sennacherib's SW Palace. Reconstruction by Judith Dekel.*

*Figure 38.4 Reconstruction of the Lachish room. Courtesy of Learning Sites, inc.*

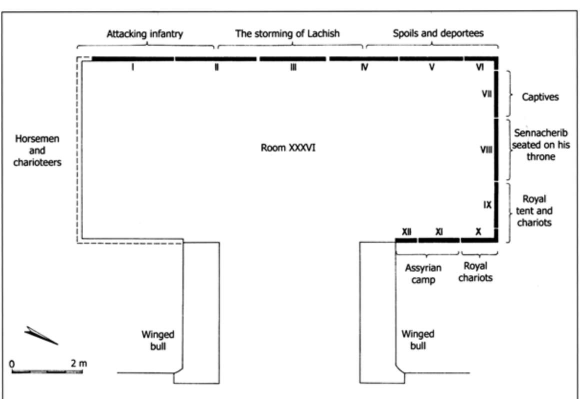



*Figure 38.5 Plan of the Lachish Room in the SW Palace of Sennacherib.*

*Figure 38.6 Relief showing the beginning of the assault on Lachish. Nineveh, Iraq; Room XXXVI (OO), SW Palace; 700-692 BC; gypsum; H 177.8 cm, W 228.6 cm; British Museum, London (1856,0909.14). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

*Figure 38.7 Detail of a relief depicting king Sennacherib sitting on his throne facing the city of Lachish. Nineveh, Iraq; Room XXXVI (OO), SW Palace; 700-692 BC; gypsum; H 251.5 cm, W 177.8 cm; British Museum, London (1856,0909.14).*
*© The Trustees of the British Museum.*

*Figure 38.8 Aerial photograph of Lachish in Israel.*

*Figure 38.9 Assyrian arrowheads found during excavations at Lachish. Israel; c. 700 BC; iron; L c. 7.6-7.9 cm; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem (IAA 1984-106 t/m 117).*

into exile. Further to the right, Sennacherib is seated on his royal throne. Behind him are the royal tent and chariots, and finally the Assyrian camp.

The besieged city is depicted on three separate slabs (fig. 38.6). The Assyrian artist succeeded in conveying the magnitude and fierceness of the battle. The city has two walls, which are portrayed on either side of the picture, with towers at regular intervals. At the centre of the picture is the city gate. Arrows fired by the attackers can be seen embedded in the wall and towers. A siege ramp – or perhaps more than one – is laid against the city wall and gate. The ramp is shown schematically, covered with wooden beams. Seven battering rams standing on the ramp assail the wall and the gate, with archers covering from behind. The Judean warriors defending the city stand on the balconies atop the city wall and towers, and on top of the city gate, shooting arrows and sling stones, and throwing burning torches and heavy stones on the Assyrian soldiers and their siege machines. Reliefs of Sennacherib's other sieges usually show one or two battering rams; the seven shown here constitute additional testimony of the powerful nature of the assault.

Most of the people leaving the city are families, shown the way typical refugees are shown throughout the ages. Among them are men, women and children; some have wagons loaded with their belongings, pulled by oxen, on which women and children are sitting. The deportees are attired in a particular manner, apparently clothing typical of Judah at that time.

Sennacherib sits on his throne facing the deportees leaving the city and the executed prisoners (fig. 38.7). Three officials stand before the king, and two eunuchs holding fans stand behind him. In front of Sennacherib the inscription identifying the conquered city as Lachish is engraved in cuneiform. The royal throne is raised above ground and the king's feet rest on a footstool. The king's throne, as the inscription emphasizes, is ceremonial and must have been brought to Lachish from Nineveh. The throne and the footstool are apparently adorned with ivory inlays. Sennacherib holds a bow and arrow – symbols of the battle and victory.

The Lachish reliefs provide a rare opportunity to compare a detailed visual Assyrian portrayal in stone of a fortified city with the actual site of that city, whose topography and fortifications are well known (figs. 38.8-9). I believe that the city is depicted in a schematic, Assyrian style from a vantage point to the southwest of the site. We can theorize that this is the very place where Sennacherib sat on his ivory-inlaid throne during the siege and directed the battle. If this hypothesis is correct, then Lachish was depicted in the relief from the very perspective of the king himself.

# 39. Ashurbanipal and the Lion Hunt Reliefs

*Pauline Albenda*

In his youth Ashurbanipal (reigned 668 – c. 627 BC; fig. 40.3) learned to shoot with bow and arrow, hurl a lance, ride a horse, control the reins of a chariot, and hunt. As king of Assyria, his hunting activities were represented on carved stone panels, which lined the walls of several chambers in his North Palace at Nineveh. Fortunately many of the bas-reliefs survive, while others are recorded in line drawings made by William Boutcher (1814-1900) at the time of their discovery in 1854 (Barnett 1976, 11, 16-7). The scenes of Ashurbanipal's hunts disclose his expertise in the use of weaponry, his bravery against attacking lions, and his pursuit of wild animals in the field and woodland.

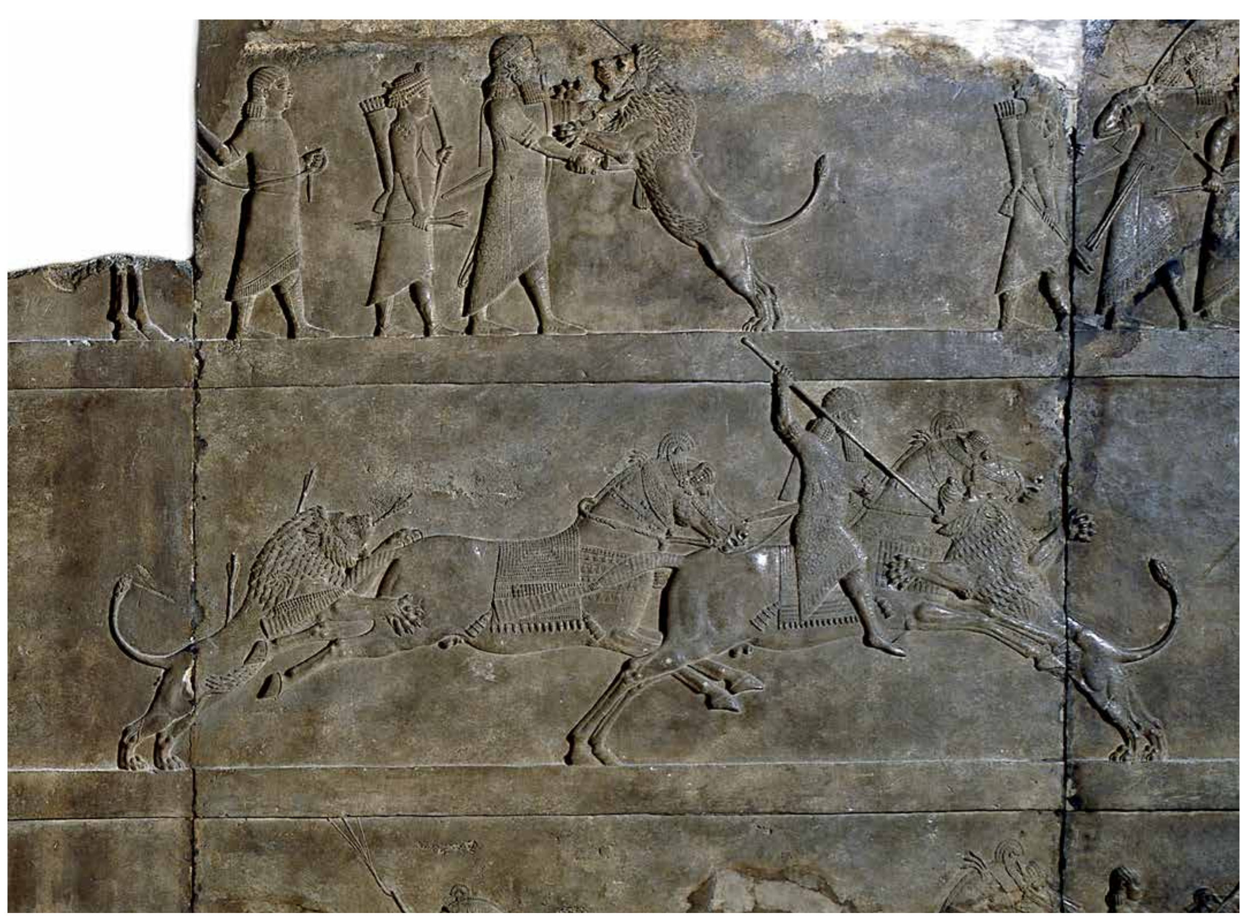
Among the many carved panels, which had fallen from an upper chamber into that labelled room S, five that were connected illustrate hunting scenes arranged in three registers, one above the other, each measuring about 30 cm in height and separated by a narrow band. The images on these bas-reliefs depict Ashurbanipal's specific actions against lions (Barnett 1976, 53-4, pls. LVI – LXIX). He is distinguished by his tall headdress and his patterned ankle-length dress. Several times Ashurbanipal is represented in his fast-moving chariot, together with a charioteer and two protective spearmen, attacking and overtaking lions with his bow and arrow. The king also appears on foot. Once, Ashurbanipal takes hold of an upright lion by the neck and at the same time plunges a sword into its body. Elsewhere, he thrusts a spear through the body of an upright lion while grasping its ear. In another anecdote, the Assyrian king boldly clutches the tail of a lion attempting to flee at the instant that he smashes its skull with a mace. In a different act Ashurbanipal, protected by his shield-bearer, stands and aims his arrow towards a fast approaching lion, now released from a wooden cage.

Several cuneiform captions added to the upper chamber bas-reliefs function as explanatory comments to the king's actions. One caption occurs at the conclusion of the royal hunts, above the head of Ashurbanipal who stands triumphantly over the bodies of four dead lions, and nearby is a food-laden table and an incense burner. The text credits the goddess Ištar for the king's fierce bow, and states that Ashurbanipal made an offering and libation over the lifeless lions (Barnett 1976, 54; Gerardi 1988, 27-8). In the pictorial version, the Assyrian king raises his bow and arrows upright at his left side and in his right hand is a small vessel tilted forward, from which a twisted liquid flows downwards to touch the lifeless animals.

The theme of the king's lion hunts continues on the three-register carved panels that decorated the four walls of room S (Barnett 1976, 50-2, pls. XLVI – LIV). Ashurbanipal's costume varies, however. He wears an open crown in the form of a broad rosette-decorated band, its cloth end hanging pendant at the back, and his dress is shorter at the front. These garment styles would have been practical during those times when Ashurbanipal rode on horseback. In one place on the bas-reliefs Ashurbanipal, astride on his caparisoned horse, fearlessly thrusts a long spear into the open mouth and through the body of a lion leaping up in close assault, while at the same time another lion attempts to take down the king's spare horse (fig. 39.1). This incident of Ashurbanipal's unfalter-

*Figure 39.1 (right page top) Detail of a relief showing the king on horseback and two lions. Nineveh, Iraq; Room S, N Palace; 645-640 BC; limestone/gypsum; H 165.1 cm, W 114.3 cm; British Museum, London (1856,0909.48/ BM 124876). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

*Figure 39.2 (right page bottom) The series of relief in the British Museum depicting the lion hunt.*



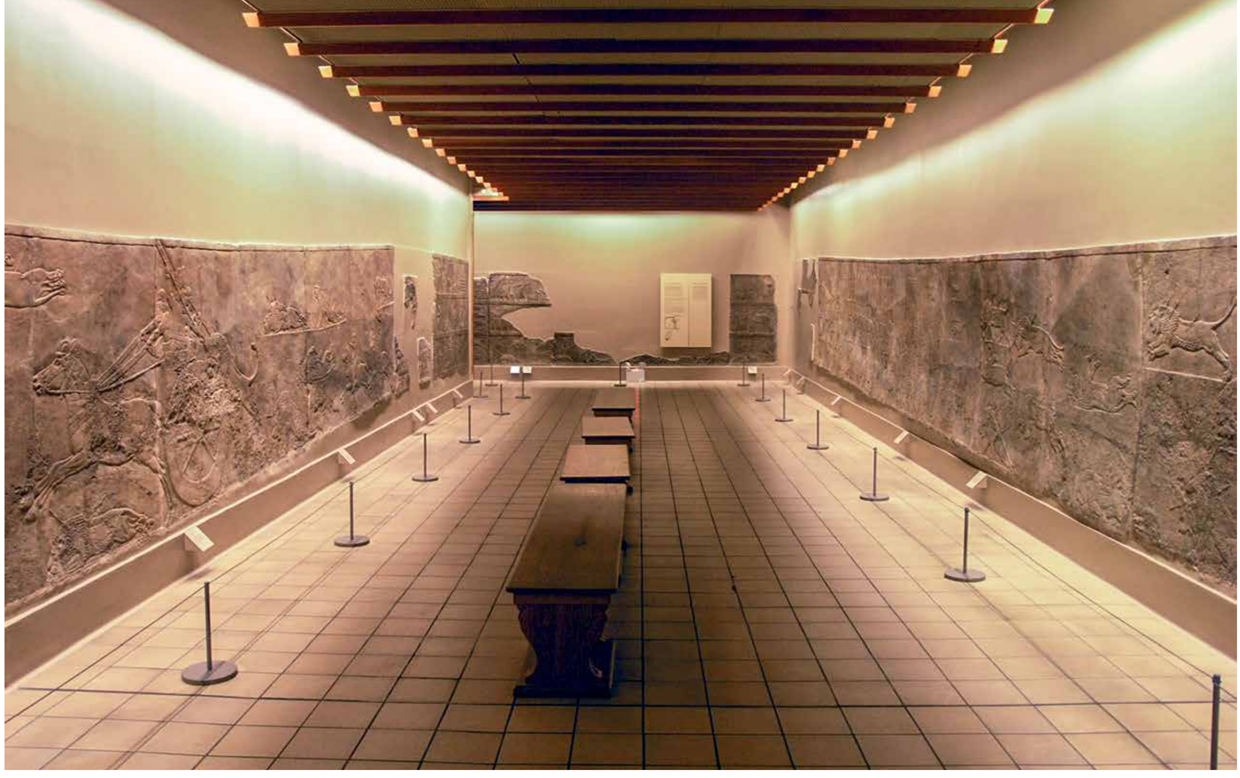


*Figure 39.3 A relief showing the king in a chariot driving a long spear into the neck of a lion. Nineveh, Iraq; Room C, N Palace; 645-635 BC; limestone/gypsum; H 160 cm, W 170.1 cm; British Museum, London (1856,0909.15/BM 124855). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

ing action against imminent peril is artfully designed and articulates the ideal image of the Assyrian king as defender against all enemies, here symbolized by the aggressive lions. Elsewhere on the bas-reliefs the Assyrian king on horseback, armed with his bow and arrows and assisted by attendants and trained dogs, chases after a herd of equids, identified as wild horses. Other animals that are hunted include deer, stags and gazelles.

Some 29 carved panels measuring about 1.60 m in height lined the walls of room C, and they are mostly preserved (fig. 39.2; Barnett 1976, 37-8, pls. V – XIII). Two single-register narratives extend along the walls of the chamber, each illustrating Ashurbanipal's superb skill in killing lions and lionesses from his moving chariot. The first royal hunt begins with Ashurbanipal, in formal dress and bejewelled, standing in his chariot within a temporary enclosure, while preparations are made for the lion chase that is to take place. Long lines of palace guards and soldiers representing different military units come after this scene. Many spectators on a hillside nearby are witness to the king's killing of lions in an open arena. What follows on the bas-reliefs is the representation of Ashurbanipal in his chariot taking down the animals spread out in an open field, in front of and behind the royal chariot. He uses his bow and arrows against eighteen lions and lionesses previously released from wooden cages, each creature depicted in a different phase of its ultimate death.

The second narrative, illustrated on the panels lining the opposite wall of room C, twice repeats the image of Ashurbanipal in his chariot attacking lions and lionesses. Once, the king stabs a lion with his broad sword, and another time he drives a long spear into the neck of a lion that bites vigorously at the chariot wheel (fig. 39.3). Of the total 34 renderings of lions on the surviving wall panels of room C, many show them stunned, twisted, frozen, or limp, and exuding much despair and pain. Their pitiful images contrast with the serene and elegant portrait of Ashurbanipal, the heroic hunter. The Assyrian king's lion hunts in the plain and arena are recorded in several cuneiform clay tablets. One such tablet contains a votive inscription commemorating the consecration of the hunting arena to the goddess Ištar of Nineveh (Weissert 1997, 341).

*Figure 39.4 Fragment of a stone dish carved in relief with two lions. Nineveh, Iraq; 700-625 BC; limestone; H 4.7 cm, L 15.7 cm, W 12.4 cm; British Museum, London (1890,0101.8/BM 135450). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

# 40. Language and Writing in Nineveh

*Jan Gerrit Dercksen*

## 40.1 Introduction

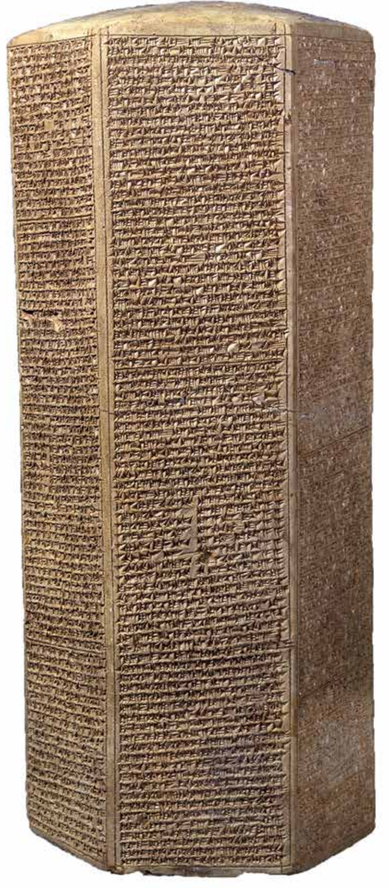
Cuneiform writing spread from Sumer to the rest of the Ancient Near East soon after its invention in South Iraq during the Uruk period. Developed initially for noting down the Sumerian language, cuneiform later became the vehicle for writing other languages as well, notably Akkadian and, from the second millennium BC onward, its dialects Babylonian and Assyrian. The cuneiform characters were used to express words and syllables; carefully formed clay tablets were the standard medium onto which these signs were inscribed with a stylus (Cammarosano 2014). Tablets were primarily used to record administrative documents of all sorts, as well as letters and contracts, literary compositions and scholarly works. From the twenty-first century BC onwards, cuneiform was also written on wax-covered writing boards, which became a common medium for writing during the Neo-Assyrian period. Monumental inscriptions were often inscribed on more durable material, such as stone (plaques, statues and obelisks, on the surface of rock) and metal (vessels, statues, weapons), especially when they were put on display. Elaborate clay forms were invented during the second millennium and in Assyria prisms became a medium for recording royal annals (fig. 40.1).

Although languages other than Sumerian or Akkadian could be rendered in cuneiform, this occurred only exceptionally in Mesopotamia. If the spoken language of the population at Nineveh were, for example, Hurrian, the texts drawn up for administrative or other purposes would have been in a form of Akkadian, reflecting the training of the scribe. With the rise of Aramaic in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, some scribes would add a short Aramaic summary in alphabetic script of the transaction recorded in cuneiform. Aramaic was written in ink on leather and potsherds, and sometimes even inscribed on clay tablets (fig. 43.1; Fales, this volume).

## 40.2 Texts and languages

The oldest written document found at Nineveh is a broken numerical notation tablet dating to the Uruk period (c. 3500-3000 BC), offering no information about the language (Collon & Reade 1983, 33-4). From the Early Dynastic period there exists a stone fragment with an Akkadian inscription (Reade 1998-2001, 396).[82] This inscription is possibly connected with the obscure period of the Old Akkadian presence there, since King Maništušu carried out building works on the Ištar Temple, according to a later inscription of Šamši-Adad (reigned c. 1809-1776 BC) (*cf.* Goodnick Westenholz 2004). However, judging by the Hurrian names of the city's deity Šauška or Šawuška (Richter 2012, 341) and of its ruler Tiš-atal, Nineveh (Ninua) was under Hurrian

82 British Museum, London (1904,1009.405/BM 99372).



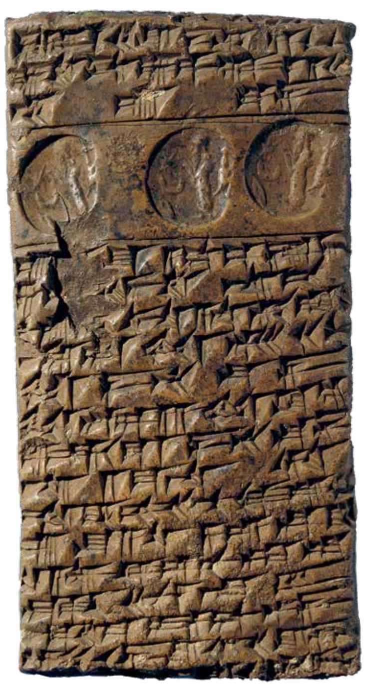


*Figure 40.1 (top left) The 'Taylor Prism', thought to have been found by Colonel Taylor, is a foundation record that lists the campaigns of King Sennacherib and the construction of the Review Palace. Nineveh, Iraq; 691 BC; clay; H 38.1 cm, W 16.5 cm; British Museum, London (1855,1003.1/BM 91032). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

*Figure 40.2 (top right) Clay tablet containing a private contract for the sale of a house. Nineveh, Iraq; 625 BC; clay; L 10.2 cm, W 5.4 cm; British Museum, London (K.311). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

*Figure 40.3 (bottom) Detail of a relief showing King Ashurbanipal with a stylus in his belt. Nineveh, Iraq; Room S, N Palace; 645-635 BC; limestone/gypsum; H 30.5 cm, W 91.4 cm; British Museum, London (1856,0909.48/BM 124874). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

influence by the twenty-first century BC, perhaps from as early as the Sargonic period onwards (see also Buccellati 2010, 89). The Hurrians were living north of Nineveh. Šauška of Ninua is first attested on a Sumerian tablet dating to the 46th regnal year of King Šulgi (reigned c. 2094-2047 BC) and Tiš-atal is attested in other texts from the Ur III period (Whiting 1976; Zettler 2006, 504 text 6 NT 559).[83] Hurrian influence is still apparent from the name of Ištar's shrine, *bēt nathi* 'Bed-house', mentioned on the White Obelisk of Ashurnasirpal I (fig. 2.2; Reade 2005, 357; Richter 2012, 269; Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 431). During the early second millennium BC, rulers of Assur left inscriptions in Nineveh, often commemorating a pious deed,[84] but this does not provide any clue as to the language spoken there at the time.

According to the palace archives of Mari (early eighteenth century BC), Nineveh was also known as Ninet, which functioned as the cult centre of Nurrugum (possibly Mosul; Ziegler 2004, 20; Ziegler 2011). Shortly after the death of Šamši-Adad, the Turukkaean ruler from the Northern Zagros, Zaziya, resided in Nineveh. Some tablets written in the Old Babylonian form of Akkadian have been found in Nineveh, including letters and a literary composition (Dalley 2001).

The mention of an individual called Pizikarra of Ninua in a broken context in the Hurrian *Song of Release* suggests that Nineveh still was under Hurrian influence during the seventeenth century BC (De Martino 2014),[85] as it will have been during the following Mittanni period.

Nineveh was the seat of the Assyrian province by the same name from the fourteenth century until the fall of the city in 612 BC. The written and spoken language became the Middle and Neo-Assyrian forms of Akkadian. Only a few Middle Assyrian texts have been unearthed (Postgate 1973, 16-8; 2013, 66-7; Pedersén 1998, 81).

Some 31,000 inscribed documents from the Neo-Assyrian period have been found at Nineveh (Reade 1998-2001, 421-7; Pedersén 1998, 158-65; Radner 1995). These stem from different periods and archives. The majority were excavated in the Southwest Palace, where, as in the Review Palace (the Arsenal on Nebi Yunus), scholarly, administrative and legal texts were found (figs. 40.1-2). The scholarly tablets from the Southwest and North Palace belonged to the royal collection of Ashurbanipal (Fincke, this volume). This collection comprised texts written in Babylonian, Standard Babylonian (royal inscriptions and literary compositions were written in this literary form of Babylonian with occasional interference from the scribe's Assyrian mother tongue), and also in Sumerian. Assurbanipal was one of the few Mesopotamian kings who could read and write cuneiform (Livingstone 2007). On the reliefs showing the king hunting lions, he is depicted with a stylus of the sort used to inscribe wax-covered writing boards stuck in his belt (fig. 40.3; Seidl 2007). The royal correspondence and administrative and legal texts from Nineveh have been edited in the series *State Archives of Assyria*.[86]

### 40.3 The use of Aramaic

The incorporation of large numbers of Aramaic-speaking people in the Assyrian Empire caused the dissemination of the Aramaic language and the alphabetic script used to write it across the empire, and it even assumed the status of a language second to Assyrian (Fales, this volume). Since Aramaic was often written on perishable material, few texts written in it have survived. Some cuneiform tablets have a caption in Aramaic (fig. 43.1). The popularity of Aramaic was not undisputed. In the copy of a letter found in Kuyunjik to an official in the Babylonian city of Ur, King Sargon II (reigned 721-705 BC; fig. 27.1) replied: '[As to what you wrote]: "[…] if it is acceptable to the king, let me write and send my messages to the king on Aram[aic] parchment sheets" – why would you not write and send me messages in Akkadian?'[87] The oldest dated Aramaic text from Nineveh is a debt-note from 674 BC (Hug 1993, 17-8 CIS II 39). An ostracon with a letter in Aramaic was found in Assur, dating to c. 650 BC, the time of Ashurbanipal, dealing with the rebellion of his brother Šamaš-šum-ukin (reigned c. 667-648 BC; Lindenberger 1994, 18-20 no.1). Scribes of Aramaic, writing on leather, are depicted next to cuneiform scribes holding a tablet or a writing board on palace reliefs from Nineveh from the time of Sennacherib onwards (fig. 40.4).[88]

### 40.4 Other languages and scripts

The imperial policy caused documents written in languages other than Akkadian or Aramaic to arrive in Nineveh during the Sargonid period. A rare instance of Egyptian hieroglyphic script is attested on the impression of a seal of the Kushite Pharaoh Shabako (reigned 721 BC – 707/706 BC, 25$^{th}$ dynasty) on a jar-stopper (fig. 40.5). A number of Egyptians settled in Nineveh, but

83 Both texts date to the year Šu-Suen 3.

84 Ilušumma: inscribed spearhead (Reade 2005, 358); Šamši-Adad: RIMA A.0.39.2-3.

85 Neu (1996) regarded the *Song* as a Hurrian text originating from around the seventeenth century BC, recorded with a Hittite translation in Hattusha around 1400 BC.

86 For the attested titles of scribes in Nineveh, see Radner 1997, 93-9.

87 SAA XVII 2.

88 For some illustrations, see Barnett *et al.* 1998, plate 176; plate 195, no.277b; plate 213; plate 222, no.303. The oldest document mentioning an Aramean scribe (a.ba *ár-ma-a*;) is from 697 BC, see Radner 1997, 95.

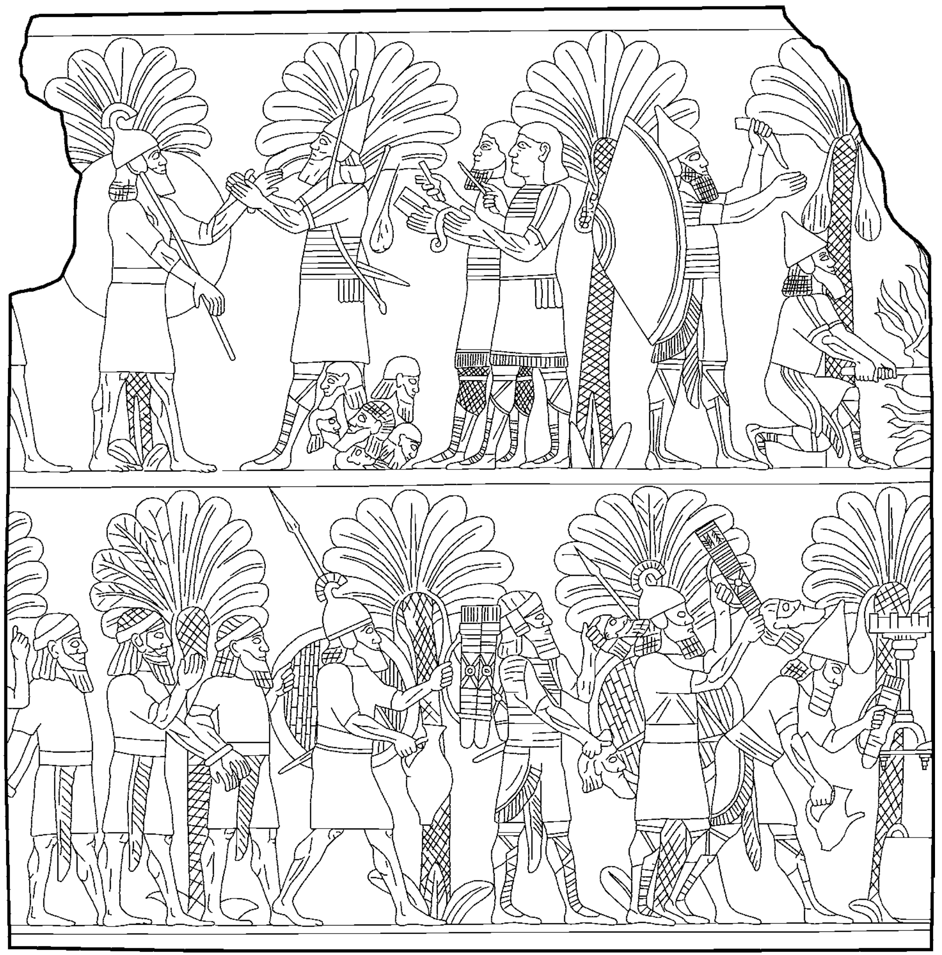


*Figure 40.4 Drawing of a relief found in Room XXVIII of the SW Palace at Nineveh, showing scribes of Akkadian and of Aramaic. Adapted from Barnett et al. 1998, pl. 256, no. 346c [detail s9].*

no documents written in their native script have survived. A contract dating to the reign of Sennacherib records the sale of a house in the city to a man called Ṣilli-Aššur, who is qualified as an 'Egyptian scribe'.[89] Four of the witnesses bear an Egyptian name, among them Šusanqu, the king's relative by marriage, whom Radner (2012) identified as an in-law of Sennacherib staying in Nineveh as a royal hostage. Another Egyptian prince living in Nineveh was Nabû-šēzibanni, the future Psammetichus of Sais, who lived there during the reign of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal.[90] From about the same period is a tablet enumerating scholars at the royal court, among them three 'Egyptian scholars' (*har-ṭi-bi*) and three Egyptian scribes (a.ba.meš [*m*]*u-ṣur-a-a*), who may have possessed some form of scholarly library in Nineveh (Radner 2009).[91] Several documents (among which a clay tablet and bullae) with Hieroglyphic Luwian inscriptions (Hawkins 2000, 566-7, 581-2) and tablets (letters) inscribed in Neo-Elamite (Weissbach 1902; Walker 1980, 79; Potts 1999, 301) were excavated in Kuyunjik.

## 40.5 The fall of Nineveh

The cuneiform tradition ended in Nineveh after the city's fall in 612 BC (Van De Mieroop, this volume). The site seems to have been reoccupied during the Hellenistic period and votive inscriptions in Greek have been found (see Thompson & Hutchinson 1929b; Walker 2006-2007, 494; Reade 1998b; Palermo, this volume).

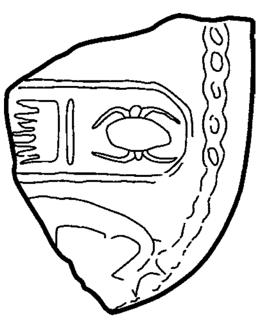


*Figure 40.5 Egyptian hieroglyphic inscription on a baked clay sealing. Nineveh, Iraq; 25th – 18th dynasty (?); clay; L 4.1 cm, W 4.1 cm; British Museum, London (1851,0902.42/ BM 84526). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

89 SAA VI 142 from 692 BC.
90 PNA 2/II, 881 no.12.
91 SAA VII 1.

# 41. Intellectual Life in Nineveh

*Eckart Frahm*

Shortly after his accession to the throne in 705 BC, the Assyrian king Sennacherib decided to relocate the royal court to Nineveh. This move marked the final apotheosis of a city that had been important for a long time, politically and economically, but also as a religious and spiritual centre. Sennacherib emphasizes this last aspect in several of his inscriptions, calling Nineveh 'the exalted cult centre, the city loved by Ištar, in which all of the rituals of the gods and goddesses are present … a site of secret lore in which every kind of skilled craftsmanship, all of the rituals, and the secrets of the *Lalgar* (the subterranean abode of Ea, the god of wisdom) are gathered' (Grayson & Novotny 2012, 63-5).

The description is quite apt. From the third millennium BC onwards, Nineveh had been home to the temple of Ištar-Šauška, a goddess of love and war worshipped all over the ancient Near East, from Babylonia to Anatolia. Due to the chances of discovery, little direct evidence survives, but there is no doubt that the Ištar Temple served for many centuries as Nineveh's 'intellectual' centre, where priests and local elites were engaged in discourses not only related to theological issues, but also to literary, scholarly, and political ones (fig. 41.1). In the eighth century BC, the temple of the scribal god Nabû, founded by Adad-nirari III (reigned 810/806-783 BC), became another place where the *literati* of Nineveh would study texts and exchange ideas.

Once Sennacherib had established himself in his newly built Southwest Palace, close to the Ištar Temple on the citadel mound of Nineveh, large numbers of scribes and

*Figure 41.1 Relief from a passage to the Ištar Temple with depiction of Assyrian priests, two of them with hats in the shape of a fish-tail, playing harps. Reproduced from Hall 1928, Pl. XXXVIII: 2.*

*Figure 41.2 (left) Clay tablet inscribed with legal formulae in both Sumerian and Akkadian. A subscript added later names Ashurbanipal as the owner of the tablet. Nineveh, Iraq; 7th century BC; clay; L 21 cm, W 14 cm; British Museum, London (K.251). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

*Figure 41.3 (top right) Clay tablet with a list of astrological omens. Nineveh, Iraq; 669-627 BC; clay; L 9.5 cm, W 8 cm; The Netherlands Institute for the Near East, Leiden (LB 1321). © NINO.*

scholars moved to the city, and the royal court began, slowly but surely, to replace the temples as the main arena of intellectual pursuits. While excavations at Nineveh have produced few texts related to scholarly endeavours from Sennacherib's own reign, thousands of such texts are available from the time of his two successors, Esarhaddon (reigned 680-669 BC) and Ashurbanipal (reigned 668 – c. 627 BC). These texts provide remarkably detailed insights into the intellectual life that thrived in Nineveh during the period when the city served as the capital of what many scholars consider the first empire in world history.

Much information can be derived from several hundreds of letters exchanged between the two aforementioned kings and a host of physicians, exorcists, priests, astronomers, and divination experts, both from Assyria and Babylonia (Parpola 1983a; 1993). The letters discuss a wide range of issues, from treatments for the physical and psychological ailments plaguing the ruler and other members of the royal family to rituals aimed at warding off the evil indicated by inauspicious signs. Particular emphasis is placed on celestial phenomena such as lunar eclipses, which scholars writing to the king linked to specific omens from the astrological series *Enūma Anu Enlil*. By sponsoring the systematic observation of the movements of the moon, the planets, and the stars, the Late Assyrian kings may have triggered a paradigmatic shift towards a new, mathematically informed 'science' of astronomical prediction (Brown 2000). Occasionally, the Assyrian kings also consulted specialists from Syro-Anatolian cities and from Egypt, among them augurs and physicians (Radner 2009).

Esarhaddon began, moreover, to encourage the organized copying of ancient texts, especially omen treatises and rituals. Most of these texts had originally been composed in Babylonia, whence the Assyrians imported many of their religious and literary traditions. A memorandum from Esarhaddon's reign (Fales & Postgate 1995, no. 156) reports that the sons of the mayor of Nippur and other prominent Babylonians who were held hostage in Nineveh were forced to copy texts such as the exorcistic

series Udug-ḫul, before being 'put into iron fetters' again. Apparently, the transfer of knowledge promoted by the Late Assyrian kings was not always an entirely voluntary affair.

Nineveh reached its peak as a centre of intellectual activity during the reign of Esarhaddon's son and successor Ashurbanipal, a king deeply interested in the scribal arts. In an autobiographical sketch about the education he received in his youth, Ashurbanipal claims:

> *I have learnt the craft of the (antediluvian) sage Adapa, the hidden secret of all scribal learning. I have become well read in the signs of heaven and earth, discussing them in the assembly of scholars. I have analysed the (omen commentary) 'The liver is a mirror of heaven' with expert diviners. I can solve complicated divisions and multiplications that do not have an easy solution. I have read cunningly written kammu-tablet(s), whose Sumerian is obscure and whose Akkadian is difficult to unravel. I have examined cuneiform signs on stones (dating) from before the Flood, whose (meaning) is sealed, inaccessible, and confusing,* Frame & George 2005, 279-80.

Ashurbanipal's passion for the life of the mind did not diminish when he ascended the Assyrian throne – reliefs depicting him as king on a hunting expedition show him with a stylus tucked into his belt (fig. 40.3). The most remarkable testimony to Ashurbanipal's devotion to the scribal arts is the large library that he created (Fincke, this volume). The majority of the roughly 30,000 tablets and fragments uncovered at Nineveh since excavations there began are literary, religious, lexical, and scholarly texts copied on behalf of Ashurbanipal (fig. 42.3; table 42.1). Several hundreds of the tablets are commentaries on other texts (Frahm 2011a, 272-85). The tablets were stored in various locations on the citadel mound: in a room on the second floor of Sennacherib's old Southwest Palace, in the temple of Nabû, and in a new residence built for Ashurbanipal, the so-called North Palace (fig. 41.2; Pedersén 1998, 158-65; Fincke 2003-2004).

A number of letters known from later copies (Frame & George 2005) suggest that Ashurbanipal began assembling his library in the 660s by asking leading scholars from Babylon and Borsippa to send him copies of every important text they could obtain. At that time, Ashurbanipal's brother Šamaš-šum-ukin served as king of Babylon, and Assyro-Babylonian relations were cordial. This changed during the four years' war between the brothers that began in 652 BC. Library records indicate that in 647 BC, one year after Šamaš-šum-ukin (reigned 667-648 BC) had been defeated and the war had come to a close, large numbers of scholarly tablets from various Babylonian libraries were again transferred to Nineveh. It may well be, as suggested by Simo Parpola (1983b), that these tablets were brought to Assyria as war reparations. Many of the Babylonian texts that arrived in Nineveh were copied in Neo-Assyrian script, while others were reorganized in new textual series. One of these series, a botanical handbook, was apparently created by King Ashurbanipal himself, if we are to believe the subscripts accompanying the pertinent tablets (Frahm 2011a, 332).

Each Neo-Assyrian king employed numerous scholars, including a chief-scribe who was, among other things, responsible for the composition of royal inscriptions (Frahm 2011b, 516-24). Even though the texts produced by this inner circle served, as a rule, the interests of the kings, a few critical assessments have come to light too, among them a text that questions the religious politics of Sargon II (reigned 721-705 BC; fig. 27.1) and Sennacherib (Livingstone 1989, no. 33). Another text, probably written in connection with Sennacherib's destruction of Babylon in 689 BC, ridicules the mythological underpinnings of the Babylonian *Akītu* festival (Livingstone 1989, nos. 34-5).

Not every Assyrian scholar who lived in Nineveh in the seventh century BC was content with his personal situation. The exorcist and physician Urad-Gula, a member of one of Assyria's most influential scribal families, complained bitterly, in a letter to Ashurbanipal:

> *In (the days of) the king's father …, I got to receive gifts from him …; he used to give me a mule* [or] *an ox, and yearly I earned a mina or two of silver. … (But now) I cannot even afford a pair of sandals. …I have not got a spare suit of clothes, and I have incurred a debt of almost six minas of silver. … (People) say: 'Once you have reached old age, who will support you?',* Parpola 1993, no. 294.

Even scholars holding very high offices at the Nineveh court were apparently not particularly affluent. One letter describes the house of the king's chief-scribe as 'tiny' and claims that 'even a donkey would not want to enter it' (Luukko & Van Buylaere 2002, no. 89).

The conquest and destruction of Nineveh by Babylonians and Medes in 612 BC marked the end of the city's political and intellectual glories (Van De Mieroop, this volume). But at least in Babylonia, Ashurbanipal's great project of creating a 'universal library' was not entirely forgotten. An exorcist in Uruk who lived in the last decades of the fourth century BC kept a commentary from Ashurbanipal's library as a precious heirloom (Frahm 2011a, 295), and (real or fabricated) letters from the correspondence in which Ashurbanipal and various Babylonian scholars had discussed the creation of the Nineveh libraries were copied by scribes in Babylon and Borsippa as late as in the second century BC (Frame & George 2005; Frahm 2005).

# 42. The Library of Ashurbanipal

*Jeanette C. Fincke*

When Ashurbanipal was suddenly appointed crown prince of Assyria in 672 BC, he set out to advance his political power. He had grown up in an environment that systematically adopted knowledge from priests and scholars for the benefit of the kingship. That had worked well for his grandfather Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC; fig. 35.1) and for his father Esarhaddon (reigned 681-669 BC). For his part, Ashurbanipal acquainted himself with literature and science, including divination and mathematics. He claims to have mastered Akkadian and even Sumerian. Even at that time, that language could have been described as dead, being restricted in use to highly qualified scholars; a position comparable to that of Latin in Europe until the nineteenth century. Ashurbanipal was more literate than most of his predecessors, but the scholars of his day may have made a different judgement about his competence (Livingstone 2007).

As the king of Assyria (reigned 668 – c. 627 BC) he built up a comprehensive library in Nineveh, which has been called 'the first systematically collected library of the Ancient Near East' (Oppenheim 1960, 411-2). Like his father, he employed Assyrian and Babylonian scholars at his court in Nineveh. Those experts brought their own tablets with them or wrote them out from memory in the palace scriptoria (fig. 42.1). Thus he accumulated documents from Assyria and Babylonia. Library records from 647 BC found in Nineveh[92] list clay tablets as well as wooden writing-boards, all acquired from various Babylonian and Assyrian scholars. These show that more than 1,469 clay tablets and 137 writing-boards had been added to the royal library (fig. 42.4; Fincke 2003-2004, 124-5, 134-5). Ashurbanipal even brought tablets from famous temple libraries in Babylon and Borsippa to his own royal library at Nineveh (Frame & George 2005).[93] He probably did this after he had become the supreme ruler of Babylonia in 652 BC (Fincke 2003-2004; 2004; Frahm 2005; Goldstein 2010). The clay tablets that went into the royal library were first marked with the name of Ashurbanipal in ink to denote he owned them (fig. 42.2). Some texts for the library were copied in Nineveh, often from waxed wooden writing-boards that have not survived.[94] The king himself supervised the layout of some of the new tablets[95] and chose which sections of longer series were to be preserved.[96] The library had examples of new compositions (Livingstone 1989) and of new genres of text, including commentaries on scholarly and religious texts (Frahm 2011a), oracle enquiries (Starr 1990) and prophecies (Parpola 1997).

Nineveh was looted in 612 BC. Buildings were set on fire and collapsed (Van De Mieroop, this volume). The first floor of the Southwest Palace, where the main part of the library was located, crashed through the ceiling into rooms on the ground floor. The cuneiform tablets broke and fragments were scattered everywhere (fig. 42.3). Then pillagers seem to have kicked about among the tablets in the burning palace, which

92 SAA VII 49-56.
93 SAA XVIII 131: 22 – rev. 6.
94 SAA X 101, 102.
95 SAA X 177.
96 SAA X 373.

*Figure 42.1 A library tablet with bilingual hymns and prayers to the sun god Šamaš. Nineveh, Iraq; 7th century BC; clay; L 14.9 cm, W 13 cm; British Museum, London (K.4872, K.5196, K.15251 and Rm.110). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

added to the chaos. The cuneiform tablets and fragments found in the ruins of Nineveh were brought to the British Museum, London, and registered there between 1848 and 1932. The very small fragments were never separately numbered, but the approximate total number of inscribed pieces is generally agreed to be 31,000. Joining broken fragments to restore a more complete tablet is a major task for epigraphists today; at present (February 2016) 6,063 fragments have been joined.[97] To calculate the number of tablets, we assume that each one on average comprised four or five fragments, which produces a figure of between 6,200 and 7,750 tablets in the library when it was destroyed. About 3,000 tablets and fragments from Nineveh comprise royal correspondence and administration, which belong in an archive rather than in a library (Pedersén 1998, 2-3). We are unlikely to have saved all the tablets that were in the library in Ashurbanipal's lifetime. During the attack some could have been 'rescued' by royal scribes, and the wooden writing-boards have been lost completely.

About 14% of the fragments found at Nineveh were written in a Babylonian ductus. They had been assigned 4,283 acquisition numbers; of these, 789 pieces have now been joined, so we have a provisional total of 3,494 tablets and fragments written by Babylonians, broadly classified as follows:

Library Texts: 1,548
Archival texts: 1,079
Divination Reports and Oracle Enquiries: 657
Not Classified: 210

Of the library texts written in Babylonian ductus (table 42.1), many are concerned with divination procedures (722 = 46.64%). Similarly, we note that there are a large number of reports on actual divinations (657). A

97 See www.fincke-cuneiform.com/nineveh/index.html.

*Figure 42.2 Colophons with the name of Ashurbanipal written in ink on cuneiform tablets to mark the ownership. Nineveh, Iraq; 7th century BC; clay; L 5.1 cm, W 3.8 cm; British Museum, London (DT.273 and K.10100). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

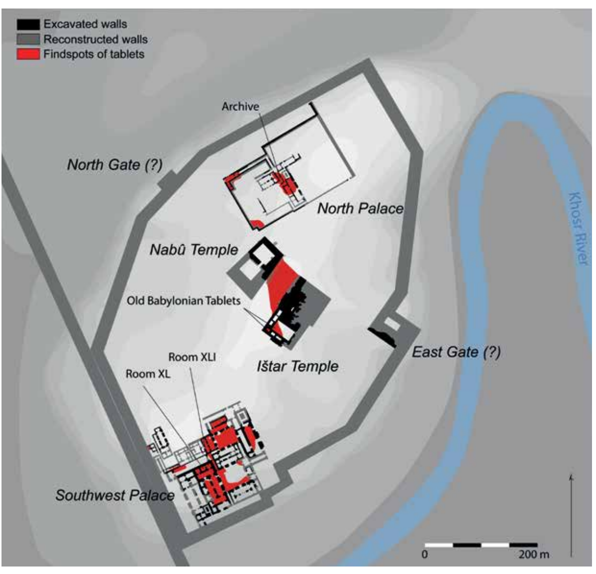



*Figure 42.3 Find spots of cuneiform tablets at Kuyunjik.*

*Figure 42.4 Clay tablet containing a private contract, part of the library of Ashurbanipal. Nineveh, Iraq; 624-615 BC; clay; L 8.3 cm, W 4.4 cm; British Museum, London (K.329). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

| Text genre | Texts and series | Four library records from Nineveh: tablets (W = writing-boards) | | | | Ashurbanipal's library: Babylonian library texts | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Divinatory texts | Celestial omens (*enūma anu enlil*) | 73 | (3 W) | 5.0 % | (2.2 %) | 341 | 22.03 % |
| | Extispicy (*bārûtu*) | 0 | (69 W) | – | (50.4 %) | 105 | 6.78 % |
| | Terrestrial omens (šumma ālu) | 161 | (1 W) | 10.9 % | (0.7 %) | 75 | 4.85 % |
| | Physiognomic omens (*alandimmû*) | 39 | (1 W) | 2.7 % | (0.7 %) | 0 | – |
| | Dream omens (*iškār zaqīqu*) | 16 | (0 W) | 1.1 % | (–) | 0 | – |
| | Teratomantic omens (šumma izbu) | 9 | (7 W) | 0.6 % | (5.1 %) | 6 | 0.39 % |
| | Omens series *iqqur īpuš* | 4 | (0 W) | 0.3 % | (–) | 6 | 0.39 % |
| | Hemerologies (ūmē ṭābūti) | 3 | (0 W) | 0.2 % | (–) | 1 | 0.06 % |
| | Various divination | 0 | (0 W) | – | (–) | 9 | 0.58 % |
| | Unclassified omen fragments | | | | | 179 | 11.56 % |
| Religious texts | Ritual texts and incantations | 18 | (4 W) | 1.2 % | (2.9 %) | 288 | 18.61 % |
| | Cult songs, and hymns | 2 | (12 W) | 0.1 % | (8.8 %) | 11 | 0.71 % |
| | Sumerian and bilingual prayers | 0 | (0 W) | – | (–) | 95 | 6.14 % |
| | Akkadian prayers | 0 | (0 W) | – | (–) | 36 | 2.33 % |
| | Various texts and fragments | 9 | (0 W) | 0.6 % | (–) | 129 | 8.34 % |
| Medical texts | Medical and magical treatments of sick people | 7 | (27 W) | 0.5 % | (19.7 %) | 78 | 5.04 % |
| Lexical texts | Lexical series | 6 | (0 W) | 0.4 % | (–) | 59 | 3.81 % |
| | Syllabaries in archaic characters | 0 | (0 W) | – | (–) | 27 | 1.74% |
| Literary texts | Epic, myths, etc. | 1 | (0 W) | 0.1 % | (–) | 9 | 0.58 % |
| | Various compositions | 24 | (13 W) | 1.6 % | (9.5 %) | 15 | 0.97 % |
| Miscellaneous | Historical texts | 0 | (0 W) | – | (–) | 28 | 8.81 % |
| | Mathematical text | 0 | (0 W) | – | (–) | 1 | 0.06 % |
| | Catalogue | 0 | (0 W) | – | (–) | 1 | 0.06 % |
| | Laws | 0 | (0 W) | – | (–) | 1 | 0.06 % |
| | Fragments of colophons | 0 | (0 W) | – | (–) | 15 | 0.97 % |
| Unidentified | Fragments | 0 | (0 W) | – | (–) | 33 | 2.13 % |
| | Unknown compositions and series | 1,097 | (0 W) | 74.7 % | (–) | 0 | – |
| Total | | 1,469 | (137 W) | 100 % | (100 %) | 1,548 | 100 % |
| | | (+ 188 tablets and W) | | | | | |

*Table 42.1 Literary and scientific texts of the library of Ashurbanipal.*

similar proportion (or perhaps a higher one) of divinatory library tablets were written in an Assyrian ductus. From this, we suggest that there was a focus on this subject in the library. The group of religious texts is the second largest one in the library tablets written in Babylonian ductus (559 = 36.13%), followed by medical texts (78 = 5.04%). The Babylonians took the lead in investigating these disciplines. Most of the epics and myths were written by Assyrian scribes, but no systematic survey of the Assyrian material has been made, so at present giving even an approximate number may be misleading.

The focus of the library was on maintaining the wellbeing and power of the king, by collecting so many texts on divination in order to 'influence the future' (Maul 1994), as well as religious rituals, incantations and medical manuals (fig. 42.4). It aimed to accumulate rather than to select, as can be seen from the various texts describing events associated with celestial phenomena (Fincke 2013, 598-605). In fact, Ashurbanipal's library managed to include at least one copy of every composition that was known in the first millennium BC, making those cuneiform tablets from Nineveh an essential source for understanding the literature of the time, and also religious and scientific texts and many other genres of text.

# 43. Aramaic Epigraphs in Nineveh

*Frederick Mario Fales*

Aramaic was the native language of the inhabitants of the vast steppe region of north-western Mesopotamia, before it was conquered by the Assyrians in the mid-ninth century BC. But this West Semitic language was also spoken by the many mobile pastoral tribes along the Tigris in south-eastern Mesopotamia, which were subjugated by the Assyrian rulers of the late eighth and seventh centuries BC, with ensuing mass deportations all over the empire. Mainly for these reasons, over time Aramaic became the widespread vernacular of the Assyrian Empire, probably blending to some extent with the official language, Assyrian (Fales & Postgate 1992; 1995). The use of writing may have helped this state of affairs: whereas the intricacies of Assyrian cuneiform script (Dercksen, this volume) were known to few, the 22-sign Aramaic alphabet, which could be written on any surface with a colour-dipped paintbrush, was surely accessible to a much wider audience.

The Assyrian rulers and elite stuck steadfastly to their official tradition of written communication, and even letters on everyday matters were made out in Assyrian cuneiform. However, beginning with the late eighth century BC, a set of official bronze weights in the form of recumbent lions were issued with bilingual texts in Assyrian and Aramaic indicating their weight 'by the standard of the king'. It thus stands to reason that Aramaic also became an alternative form of written expression for the practical needs of a vast and multi-cultural empire; a few descriptions attest to the existence of bilingual administrative lists, and of 'Aramean (*i.e.*, alphabetically-trained) scribes' as opposed to 'Assyrian' ones. On the other hand, since the pliable media (parchment and papyrus) on which this script was usually practised are irretrievably lost to us, there is no way to gauge the statistical impact and geographical range of Aramaic writing at this time.

What remains is a small body of clay tablets, mainly legal in character and private in scope, in which the recorded transactions (sales or loans, etc.) present a main cuneiform text and a smaller summary of one or two lines in painted/incised Aramaic script (fig. 43.1). Fully bilingual deeds are rare, but they existed, as did (in greater number) monolingual Aramaic ones. The juridical basis is Assyrian, but there are some intriguing clues of a 'native' legal system that finds parallels in later Aramaic law and in biblical tenets. Although the first main evidence for such epigraphs comes from Nineveh and Assur, they now appear to be occurring more frequently in the western reaches of the empire, as proven by the multiple finds from Syrian sites excavated in the 1990s. So perhaps Assyria was not only a basically bilingual empire, but it was also specifically so along geographical lines; and part of the resilience of the Aramaic language, which after some 3,000 years still has sparse surviving communities of speakers today, may be credited to the open-minded Assyrian linguistic policy of yore.

*Figure 43.1 Clay tablet in Akkadian with an Aramaic caption, describing a claim of 15 shekels of silver. Sippar, Iraq; c. 495 BC; clay; L 5.5 cm, W 4 cm; The Netherlands Institute for the Near East, Leiden (LB 1650). © NINO.*

# 44. Demons, Deities and Religion

*Barbara N. Porter*

For the Assyrians of ancient Nineveh (and for the ancient Mesopotamians in general), religious life was everywhere, in the sense that each powerful aspect of the universe, from the moon to barley, or water, or writing or warfare, was thought of as divine, as being a living DINGIR or *ilu*; or in our terms, a deity. The workings of the universe were understood to be the actions and interactions of these great *ilus*. They were imagined in many forms, first and foremost as taking the form of great divine superhuman persons, but equally present on earth in their emblems and statues (brought to life through elaborate rituals of 'washing the mouth' and 'opening the mouth') and also present and active in objects such as planets, and active above all in the aspect of the world they embodied, such as water or storms or date palms. The goddess Ištar (figs. 44.1-2, 45.1-3), for example, was thought of as being simultaneously a great anthropomorphic superhuman figure, the planet Venus, sexual love, ecstatic prophecy and warfare, vividly present and active wherever battle occurred. The god Šamaš, similarly, was thought of as the sun itself, as a great lord in anthropomorphic form, and as justice, which he embodied, because in his daily travel across the heavens he could see and judge all that happened. The god Nergal was death, the plague or battle that caused it, and lord of the Netherworld. Each great deity lived in a temple in one of the major cities of Assyria, and many gods were worshipped in several cities, often under different aspects. Their temples were managed as if they were the great houses of divine lords, and in them the gods were clothed, fed, and cared for daily. The equally divine members of their families, their servants, and their courtiers were thought of as minor gods, and lived there with them. In addition, temples housed and cared for various divine objects that were also treated as gods and provided with food offerings (although not called upon to help worshippers), including in many temples objects such as the beds, chariots, boats and weapons belonging to the great gods who lived there; in addition, parts of the temple itself, such as doors, were sometimes also seen as having acquired a 'charge' of divinity from the gods who lived alongside them, and were also given offerings and labelled as divine in their own right.

In the city of Nineveh the main temple from time immemorial had been Emašmaš, residence of the goddess Ištar of Nineveh, worshipped here above all as a goddess of war and recognized as a powerful patron of the Assyrian king. As a great war goddess, Ištar of Nineveh had been important to the Assyrian state and its king from the days of Assyria's earliest conquests, but when King Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC; fig. 27.1) chose Nineveh as his new royal residence and the seat of his administration of the empire, the goddess Ištar of Nineveh took on even greater importance as divine protector of the city that was now the heart of his great empire. Other gods had temples in Nineveh as well. These included Nabû, prince of the gods, the god of scribal arts, and the controller of the Tablet of Destinies that decreed the future of king and state; Aššur, king and head of all the gods of Assyria, who (with Ištar as his consort) also had a specialized temple for celebrating Nineveh's version of the annual New Year's Festival; Sin and Šamaš, gods of the moon and sun; the Sibitti, Seven Celestial Warriors; and special forms

*Figure 44.1 Terracotta plaque with possible representation of Ištar. Otba, Iraq; 1700 BC; clay; H 6.7 cm, W 7.1 cm; National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden (A 1932/7.91).*

*Figure 44.3 Bronze statue of an Assyrian god. Assur, Iraq; 8th – 7th centuries BC; bronze; H 11.4 cm; Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (VA 6989). © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Vorderasiatisches Museum, photograph made by Olaf M. Teßmer.*

*Figure 44.2 Terracotta plaque with possible representation of Ištar. Iraq; 2000-1700 BC; clay; H 5.6 cm, W 6 cm; National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden (A 1932/7.7).*

*Figure 44.4 Stone bowl in form of a hand, probably used in religious ceremonies. Syria or Turkey; 9th century BC; steatite; L 2.6 cm, W 7.4 cm, T. 4.4 cm; National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden (B 1981/4.12).*

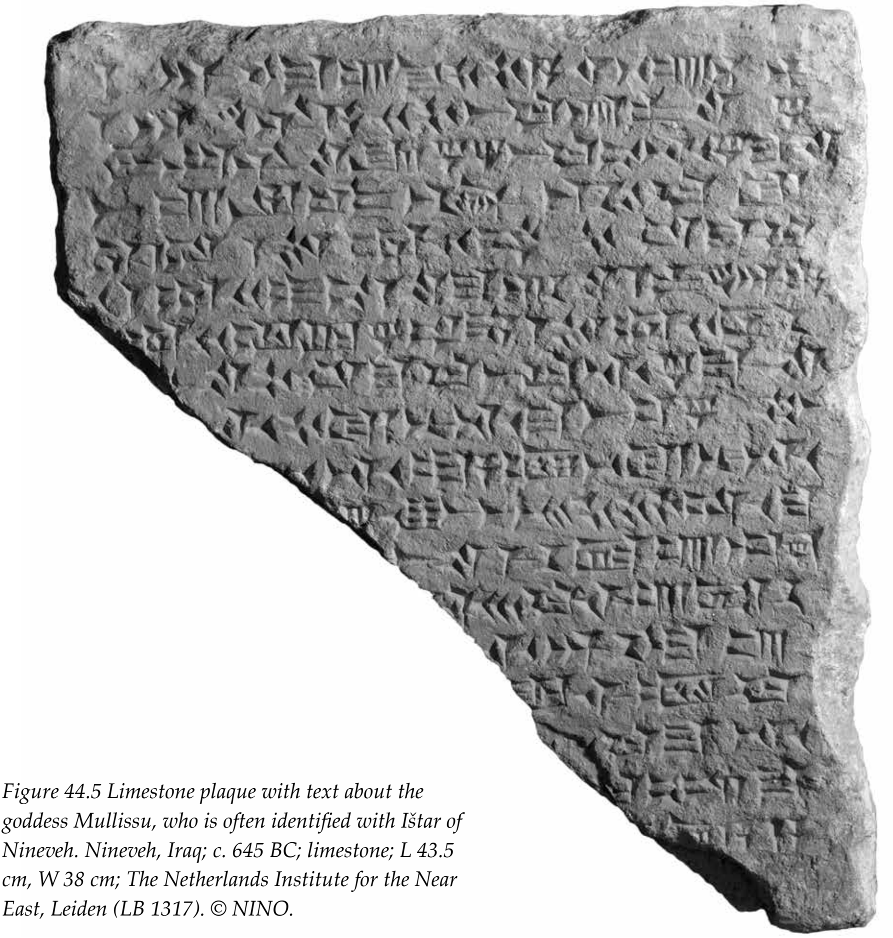


*Figure 44.5 Limestone plaque with text about the goddess Mullissu, who is often identified with Ištar of Nineveh. Nineveh, Iraq; c. 645 BC; limestone; L 43.5 cm, W 38 cm; The Netherlands Institute for the Near East, Leiden (LB 1317). © NINO.*

of Ištar, such as the custodian of the rules that ordered the workings of the universe, and probably also the god Adad, a god of storm, water, and war.

But the gods of Nineveh, as an imperial capital, included not only the gods resident in the city, but also the gods of the whole country, as King Esarhaddon (reigned 681-669 BC) made clear in his building inscription for a new arsenal he built there. It is both an expression of Ninevite religion as practised by the elite in the late days of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and a joyful exclamation of the 'king of the four quarters [of the world]' (Leichty 2011, 11) as he says, who has just given his warlike gods a fine new arsenal for the Assyrian army, which is their military arm on earth. Dedicating the building for the imperial army 'with rejoicing, jubilation, [and] melodious songs', he reports, 'I invited the gods Aššur, Bel, Nabû, Ištar of Nineveh, [and] Ištar of Arbela, the gods of Assyria, all of them, into it. I made sumptuous pure offerings before them and presented [them] with my gifts. Those gods, in their steadfast hearts, blessed my kingship' (Leichty 2011, 25). Minor protective gods who had no temples, represented in the form of great winged bulls or lions carved in stone, were installed in the palace's doorways to 'guard my royal path [and] … make me happy' (Leichty 2011, 25).

The Assyrian king's three main duties, according to royal inscriptions, were all religious in nature: to serve Assyria's gods as high priest, to build and provide for their temples, and (in order to be able to afford this temple construction and to support the gods in the elaborate style to which they were accustomed) to conquer (and thus collect tribute and booty) 'from the rising sun to the setting sun' at the gods' command (Leichty 2011, 15).

In his role as high priest, the king travelled from Nineveh to the national religious centre of Assur to perform the main state rituals, and also performed rituals in the cities

of Kalhu and Arbela, where the army's military victories were celebrated. In Nineveh itself, the king had local religious duties, performing the city's version of the annual New Year's Festival and personally offering food and drink to Nineveh's resident gods once a year as their part of the state-wide *tākulti* ritual, an annual religious ceremonial in which the king, aided by a priest, personally presented food and drink offerings to all the nation's gods in their temples in cities across the land.

His role as commander in chief of the army was also understood to be a religious one. As this passage from Esarhaddon's arsenal text makes clear, the king won his battles because he was the tool of the gods, their military executive force on earth, carrying out their command to conquer the earth:

> *The god Aššur, the father of the gods, gave me [the power] to let* [cities] *fall into ruins and to* [re]*populate [them, and] to enlarge Assyrian territory; the god Sin, lord of the crown, decreed heroic strength* [and] *robust force as my fate; the god Šamaš, the light of the gods, elevated my important name to the highest rank; the god Marduk, king of the gods, made the fear of my kingship sweep over the mountain regions like a dense fog; the god Nergal, mightiest of the gods, gave me fierceness, splendour, and terror as a gift;* [and] *the goddess Ištar, the lady of battle and war, gave me a mighty bow* [and] *a fierce arrow as a present,* Leichty 2011, 15.

With such support, how could a king lose? And in appreciation, the kings of Assyria built temples for the gods, provided for them, and invited them into royal palaces as honoured guests.

Lurking behind the great gods of Nineveh were demons, minor beings often labelled as gods who did not receive worship or live in temples. These evil creatures brought disaster and illness. They were not made welcome, but fended off, or (when they moved in anyway) persuaded to leave. Elaborate procedures for doing this were the professional purview of special priests. Demons could be discouraged with images of protective gods worn around the neck, or with clay plaques carrying images of protective minor deities, that were buried with appropriate incantations in the corners of rooms and beneath doorways and windowsills. If an evil demon nevertheless succeeded in making a person insane or deathly ill, elaborate rituals involving bells and lion suits might drive it away (as pictured in a protective plaque showing the demon Lamastu riding away in a boat after proper procedures; Black & Green 1992, fig. 151).

In Neo-Assyrian Nineveh, both ordinary people and kings lived a precarious and uneasy existence, subject to the will and whims of divine beings, some usually benevolent but subject to fits of anger, and others by their nature bent on doing harm.

# 45. Ištar of Nineveh

*John MacGinnis*

Ištar of Nineveh was at the centre of the royal ideology of the Assyrian Empire (Wilcke 1980; Menzel 1981, 116-18; Beckman 1998; Krebernik 2001; Lambert 2004; Porter 2004; Meinhold 2009, 168-83). Her origins can be traced back to the third millennium BC, when, as Šauška, she was one of the leading deities of the Hurrian pantheon. In the second millennium her fame spread far and wide, not least to Anatolia, where she rose to a prominent place in the Hittite world. She was particularly famed as a goddess of healing and magic – it was in this capacity that the Mittanni kings Šuttarna II (reigned c. 1400-1385 BC) and Tušratta (reigned c. 1380-1350 BC) sent effigies of her to the Egyptian pharaoh Amenophis III (reigned c. 1386-1353 BC) – and dedications of weaponry highlight a martial aspect. While we cannot say when her temple in Nineveh, the Emašmaš, was first constructed, historical sources refer to work on the temple as early as the Akkadian king Maništušu (reigned c. 2270-2255 BC), and thereafter by a long succession of Assyrian kings (fig. 22.2; Reade 2005).

By the time of the Neo-Assyrian Empire it was clearly a magnificent edifice, guarded by monumental lions, gleaming in silver and gold, decorated with glazed brick panels and sculpted reliefs depicting the king hunting and receiving tribute. The temple housed splendid treasures – spoils of war, votive statues, vases and other objects presented by the goddess' adherents. Her iconography is imperfectly known, however, something that touches on the complex problem of the many forms of Ištar. On the one hand, Ištar of Nineveh is carefully distinguished from both Ištar of Arbail and Ištar of Assur. On

*Figure 45.1 Terracotta plaque with a possible representation of Ištar. Iraq; 1830-1531 BC; clay; L 5.4 cm, W 6.5 cm; National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden (A 1932/7.183).*

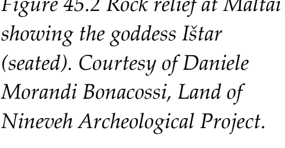


*Figure 45.2 Rock relief at Maltai showing the goddess Ištar (seated). Courtesy of Daniele Morandi Bonacossi, Land of Nineveh Archeological Project.*

*Figure 45.3 Impression of a cylinder seal made of chalcedony. The seated goddess on the right is certainly Ištar, and it may be that the line of stars down the back of the throne is diagnostic in identifying her as Ištar of Nineveh. Nineveh, Iraq; 800-750 BC; chalcedony; H 3.5 cm, D 1.5 cm; British Museum, London (1928,0609.24/BM 119426). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

the other hand, all three could be referred to simply as Ištar, suggesting or implying a level of shared identity, and all three were moreover syncretized with other goddesses such as Mullissu (Ninlil), Innin, Anunitu, Belet-ekalli, Irnini and Šarrat-nipha; disentangling these identities presents pretty much intractable problems.

Only in the case of Ištar of Arbail do we have a clear idea of how she was envisaged (MacGinnis 2014, 40-3): that goddess was depicted standing on a lion, with a bow in one hand and a sword in the other, a pair of quivers, a star atop her headdress and surrounded by dazzling radiance – the two last features perhaps being distinguishing features. But the situation with Ištar of Nineveh is not so clear. The White Obelisk depicts the goddess sitting on a throne wearing what appears to be a feathered headdress. Ashurbanipal's Hymn to Ištar of Nineveh states, 'Like Aššur she wears a beard and is clothed with brilliance […]. The crown on her head gleams like stars; the luminescent discs on her breasts shine like stars' (Livingstone 1989, no.7), but the most diagnostic feature of this description – the beard – has yet to show up in the recovered iconography. Perhaps the best evidence comes from the rock relief at Maltai, where the goddess is shown sitting on a throne wearing a high headdress which does *not* have a star, but rather a conical projection; it may be that both this and the row of orbs/stars down the back of the throne are diagnostic traits (fig. 45.2). More research, and above all more finds, are needed (Seidl 1980; Collon 2001, 127-9). Ištar of Nineveh was a goddess of immense power – 'the Queen of the gods'. As 'Lady of war and battle' she supported the kings in their campaigns and on return her *akītu* house, for which Ashurnasirpal I (reigned c. 1049-1031 BC) commissioned a bed of gold inlaid with precious stones, was the scene of joyous festivities culminating in a lion hunt, the dedication of spoils and the ritual torture and execution of prisoners (Ahmad & Grayson 1999; Frahm 2000).

# 46. Apotropaic Figures in Nineveh

*Carolyn Nakamura*

Ancient Mesopotamians inhabited a world in which they were surrounded by supernatural powers, both benevolent and malevolent: divine and demonic power immanent in various substances, objects, places, natural phenomena, plants and animals. This ancient world, created and ordered by the gods, also provided the medium through which its mortal administrators – the king and his close advisors – communicated with the divine. Almost any object, substance or event could be read as a message from the gods. Purity indicated divine favour – a necessary condition for power – and so maintaining such a state was of paramount concern. In the ongoing pursuit of protection and purity, the king and his cadre of 'priest- scholars' deployed a number of apotropaic[98] rituals, many of which included the installation of a particular set of characters, in highly visible monumental works, in the secret recesses of building infrastructures, and on personal items such as clothes, amulets and seals. Threats and evil came in all kinds of forms: from demons and ghosts to disease, misfortune and anxiety. Apotropaic power needed to be effective against any and all of these perils. And it was the 'monstrous' that would come to meet this demand.

By the seventh century BC, a set of recognizable apotropaic figures – part-human, part-animal, part-divine – took their places in a mythical narrative of world order.[99] These composite creatures included primordial sages (with special knowledge of the civilized arts, including magic) and fierce warriors (Ti'amat's creatures) who were defeated and subjugated by the Babylonian god Marduk. Thirteen basic types of two-legged[100] apotropaic figures have been found at Nineveh in buildings that date from the reigns of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal, but only five of these occur in significant numbers: the fish-*apkallu*, Lulal/Smiting God, *la‹mu*, *uridimmu*, and *ugallu* (figs. 46.1-3). The first two have mythological and divine origins, while the latter three derive from Ti'amat's creatures and are servants of Marduk (or Aššur, who became the supreme deity under Assyrian rule).

The animals combined with anthropomorphic forms in these figures – bulls, lions, eagles and fish – had specific and often accumulative histories and characteristics that contributed to their broad-ranging protective power. For instance, carp found in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers were associated with the water god Enki, the god of wisdom, magic, and the arts and crafts of civilization, who reigned over the subterranean freshwater ocean (*abzu*). Carp thus instantiated primordial wisdom and power and also, importantly, a link to the divine. In Mesopotamian literature, lions were favourite metaphors for warlike kings and warrior deities (like Ninurta and Ištar), and became associated with

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98 The term apotropaic is of late-nineteenth-century origin from the Greek apotropaios, 'averting evil,' deriving from apotropein (apo- 'away from' + trepein 'to turn'), meaning 'to ward off', 'to turn away from'.

99 See the *Enuma Elish* and Babylonia Epic of Creation.

100 Monumental lamassu or colossi, the human-headed and winged lions and bulls with four legs, are not discussed here, as they are somewhat different from the two-legged apotropaic figures.

| GUARDIANS | | | DOORKEEPERS | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Apotropaic figure* | *Appearance* | *Function* | *Apotropaic figure* | *Appearance* | *Function* |
| **1 HUMAN-APKALLU** Human with 2 or 4 wings (various attributes) | | To purify | **4 URIDIMMU** Human head and torso + lion lower body and tail | | To let in good |
| **2 FISH-APKALLU*** Human with fish skin carrying bucket and purifier | | To purify | **5 KUSARIKKU** Human head and torso + horns and lower body and tail of a bull | | To let in good /keep out bad |
| **3 BIRD-APKALLU** Eagle-headed and winged human carrying bucket and purifier | | To purify | **6 LA›MU** Human with six curls carrying a spade | | To let in good /keep out bad |
| | | | **7 URMA›LULLÛ** Lion head and lower body + arms and torso of a human, often wears horns of divinity | | To keep out bad |
| | | | **8 UGALLU** human body + lion head and upright ears (of donkey?) + feet of a bird; one hand raised holding dagger and in other lowered hand, a mace | | To keep out bad |
| | | | **9 SIBITTI – SEVEN GODS** Humans wear cylindrical hats and carry an axe, knife, bow and quiver | | To keep out bad |
| | | | **10 DOGS*** Dogs bearing five different colors | See fig. 46.5 | To keep out bad |
| | | | **11 LATARAK*** Human figure in lion's pelt carrying a whip (including head) | | Unknown |
| | | | **12 LULAL/SMITING GOD*** Human with raised fist | | Unknown |
| | | | **13 MUŠUŠŠU** Snake body + horns + lion's forelegs + bird's hind legs | | Unknown |

*Table 46.1 Apotropaic figures found at Nineveh. Most figures appear as monumental reliefs and figures, but some also occur as figurines (indicated with an *). Adapted from Black & Green 1992.*

*Figure 46.1 (left) Terracotta plaque with an apotropaic function. Assur, Iraq; 800-600 BC; clay; H 12.3 cm, W 5.4 cm; Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam (APM 1698). © Allard Pierson Museum.*

*Figure 46.2 (middle) Terracotta plaque with an apotropaic function. Assur, Iraq; 800-600 BC; clay; H 14.5 cm, W 8.8 cm; Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam (APM 1695). © Allard Pierson Museum.*

*Figure 46.3 (right) Terracotta plaque with an apotropaic function. Assur, Iraq; 800-600 BC; clay; H 12 cm, W 5.5 cm; Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam (APM 1702). © Allard Pierson Museum.*

divinely sanctioned royal power and aggression. Similarly, bulls accompanied the storm god Adad and also Ištar, both known for their fierce warrior-like characters. Finally, birds were symbols of the avian war god, Ninurta, and certain bird traits such as wings and talons may have become associated with death and the underworld in the Late-Assyrian period (Black & Green 1992, 43). These recombinant figures of humans, lions, bulls, birds and fish condensed specific mythological, political, divine and natural forces into potent figures of protection. Frans Wiggermann has suggested that the figural composition of each character revealed its function: the *apkallu* (fish+human) worked to purify and guard, the *la‹mu* (human with curls) protected life, the *uridimmu* (lion/dog+human) brought enduring well-being and prosperity, while the *ugallu* (human+lion+bird) acted as decisive defender (for detailed discussion, see Wiggermann 1992, 148-50).

The multi-scalar apotropaic landscape of Nineveh strategically utilized the specific characters of the figures, and appears to have been especially tailored to protect the royal body and domicile.[101] The placement of large-scale apotropaic figures in Sennacherib's Southwest Palace (and to some extent in Ashurbanipal's North Palace) followed a general logic of situating the aggressive defenders (table 46.1, types 7-13) at transitional and vulnerable areas – external/internal thresholds, and washrooms with drains – while the guardians (types 1-3) protected the more internal spaces and private suites (see Kertai 2015a, Figs. 1-2, 16). Certain internal transit ways, such as a ramp in room 61 giving roof access, and the doorway from courtyard 6 into corridor 12, seemed to require the protection of both guardians and warriors. Most strikingly, the *uridimmu* (type 7, usually paired with an *apkallu*), which bestowed benevolence and prosperity, guarded the most internal, private rooms of the palace (rooms 25-7, 44, 46-7, 66-8).

The almost exclusive placement of apotropaic figures flanking doorways throughout the Southwest Palace thus created a kind of three-tiered scheme of protection specifically aimed at bodies moving through the palace. Fierce warrior-types provided a first line of

101 Notably, apotropaic figures were not only found in temples and royal buildings, but also in private houses, as in Assur (see Nakamura 2004).

*Figure 46.4 (top) Relief showing apotropaic figures. Nineveh, Iraq; Room B, N Palace; 645-640 BC; limestone/gypsum; H 157 cm, W 189 cm; British Museum, London (1856,0909.26/BM 118918). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

*Figure 46.5 (right) Fired clay dog figurines originally covered with black pigment and inscribed with warnings. Nineveh, Iraq; c. 645 BC; clay; H 5.6 cm, L 7.3 cm, W 2.8 cm; British Museum, London (1856,0903.1509/BM 30005). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

defence and together with purifying guardians enclosed vulnerable and dangerous areas prone to malevolent ingress. Beneficent rather than defensive figures were more suitable for the most internal rooms where entering bodies would have already passed through at least one purifying threshold.

Unlike the highly visible threshold guardians that protected the inhabitants of Southwest Palace, the figurines concealed in boxes underground found elsewhere at Nineveh served rather different purposes. Figurines of Lulal and Latarak were found in the corners of the courtyard at the ill-fated Halzi Gate, one of the entries to the royal city (Pickworth 2005). A set of five dogs was also concealed in a doorway niche under a relief at an outer gate to the North palace (fig. 46.5). The diminutive hidden figures likely addressed the divine and supernatural world rather than the human world through a faceted gesture that both immobilized evil and also reproduced divine world order. As examples (defeated enemies) and extensions (servants) of divine power, apotropaic agents strategically placed beyond the human realm (and in their proper place) could effectively turn away or trap forces of evil and prevent their further ingress.

Strikingly, the placement and types of figurines, however scant, followed the prescription of ritual handbooks, while the installation of more visible figures in palace architecture did not reproduce any known cosmological tradition (see Kertai 2015a, 349). Perhaps when it came to the maintenance of divine design and world order, rulers took fewer liberties with tradition. Concerning the protection of their bodies and space, however, they welcomed intellectual innovation in creating potent combinations and distributions of apotropaic power.

# 47. Music in Nineveh

*Theo J.H. Krispijn*

## 47.1 Images of musicians in the palace reliefs of Nineveh

Those who take the time to stroll through the corridors lined with Assyrian palace reliefs in the British Museum in London will find, among the many battle and hunting scenes, some images of musicians and musical instruments. Three series of reliefs with musicians deserve special attention.

The first series (fig. 47.1), from the palace of Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC; fig. 35.1), includes images of male and female musicians in a procession of soldiers. The women wear headbands. Some of the men have beards, but the others are evidently eunuchs. Three men play square frame drums on a belt; five female musicians play cymbals and round frame drums; and four men, two with beards and two without, play horizontal harps. There are other men in the group wearing distinctive fish-tail hats to show that they are ritual singers (*kalû*). It is not entirely clear how the men played the frame drums, since only their upper right arms are visible and not the fingers, but the arm position suggests that the drums were struck in the middle of the drumhead. Those playing horizontal harps hold a plectrum in their right hands while their left hands deaden the vibration of certain strings. This relief makes it clear that more than one string was activated, so that the melody exhibited a simple form of polyphony.

In the second series (fig. 47.2) we see a large ensemble followed by women clapping and children walking towards the victorious army. We can count seven harps, held vertically with 22 strings, one horizontal harp with eight strings, two double oboes, and a drum. The harp is being plucked with both hands. The leader of the women and children claps with her hands above her head. One woman behind the others holds her hand to her throat and her tongue protrudes from her mouth. She is ululating, singing with a high-pitched vibrato to accentuate the sound of her voice (Rashid 1984, 138).

The third series (fig. 47.3) shows a garden under grapevines. In the middle we see King Ashurbanipal lying on a bed and holding a drinking bowl. His wife Libbali-šarrat

*Figure 47.1 Drawing of a relief from the SW Palace depicting a walkway between the palace and the temple of the goddess Ištar of Nineveh. Adapted from Barnett et al. 1998, Pl. 487-95, Fig. 670a – 674b.*

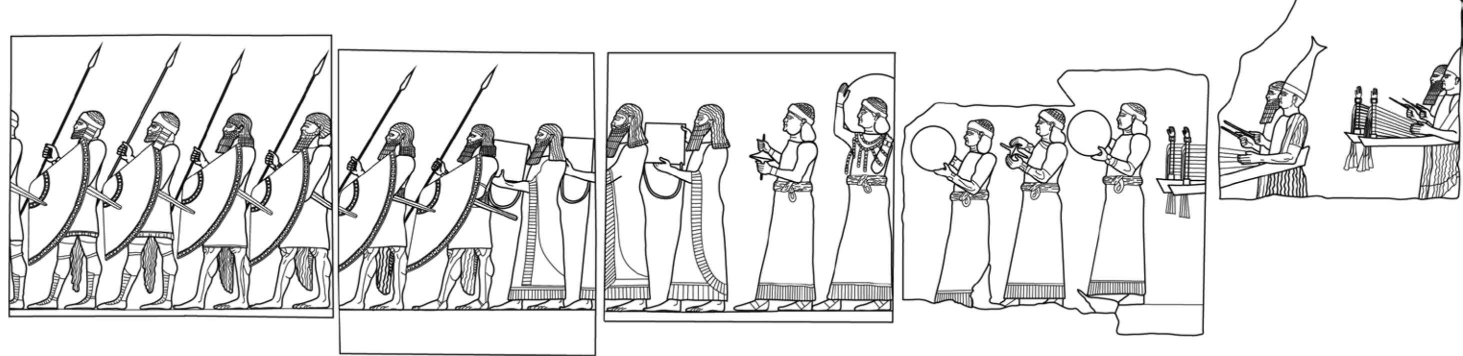


*Figure 47.2 Detail of relief depicting a large ensemble of musicians. Nineveh, Iraq; Room XXXIII, SW Palace; 660-650 BC; gypsum; H 246.4 cm, W 154.9 cm; British Museum, London (1851,0902.7.a/BM 124802,a). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

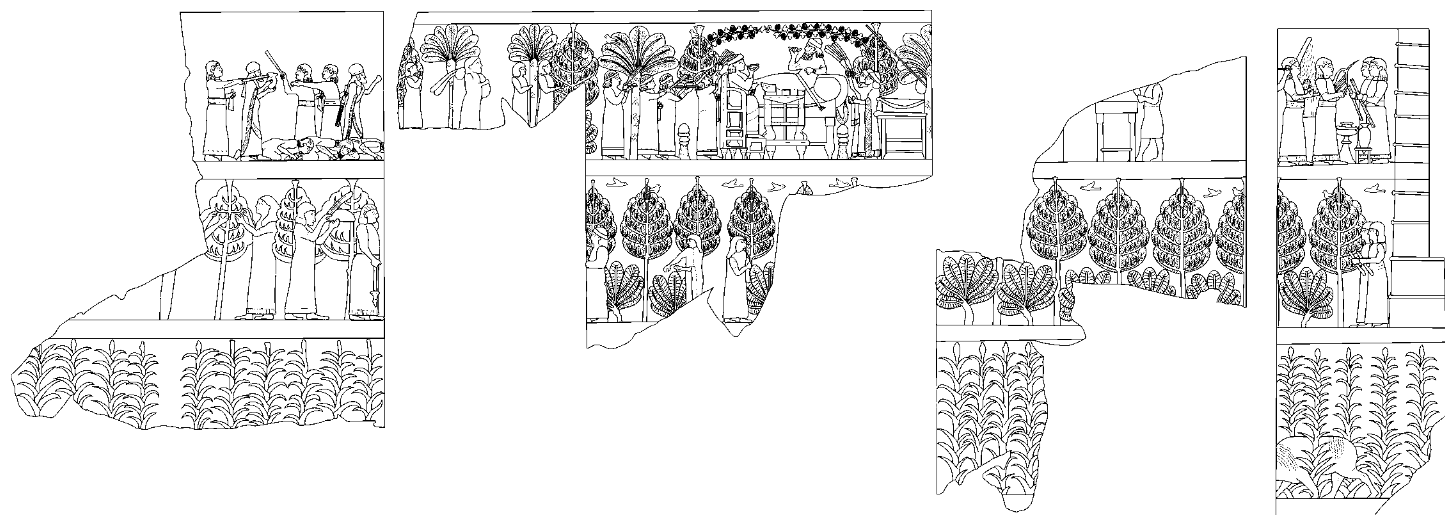
sits beside him. They are celebrating a victory over the army of Elam in Southwestern Iran, with the severed head of King Te-umman (reigned 664-653 BC), the king of Elam, suspended from the branch of a tree. Under the trees, to the left of the king and queen, there are some women holding fans and trays and others, presumably the ensemble of the queen, playing musical instruments: three harps, a drum, a lute, and a double oboe.[102] The harps are depicted in detail, with a perforated sound box and a leather covering fixed with nails. The strings are wound around a horizontal bar with tassels on the end of them. To the right there is an ensemble of eunuchs. Three of them are waiting to play with two double oboes and an asymmetrical lyre, and two are actually playing a harp and a double oboe.[103] It is tempting to assume that the women of the ensemble on the left are playing in harmony with the eunuchs to the right. In the reconstruction by Barnett (1976, Fig. H), there are more musicians in the ensembles: a female playing the double oboe on the left, and on the right an ensemble of three eunuchs, two playing double oboes and one playing a harp.

## 47.2 Music in the inscriptions and correspondence

Different terms for musicians occur in the Neo-Assyrian texts from Nineveh. Most common are *nuāru* and *nuārtu* for male and female musicians respectively. A chief musician supervises them. Ritual singers (*kalû*) are always male, but recent discussion (Gabbay 2014, 63-79) tends to conclude that the chief musician is associated with the so-called 'third gender' (Peled 2016, 91-153). Cultic songs for the temples in Assyria were usually written in a special dialect of Sumerian called *emesal* 'fine language', and they can be classified in the Mesopotamian 'psalter' as lamentations (*balaĝ*) or hymns (*eršema*). They were sung by the *kalû* and accompanied with percussion and stringed

102 It is unclear whether they are double oboes (with a double reed, corresponding to the Grecian *aulos*) or double clarinets (with a single reed). It is known that there were double clarinets in Egypt from the New Empire onwards (Hickmann 1961, 120).

103 These figures are depicted on a lower level, signifying that in reality they stood in front of the musicians represented above them.



instruments (*cf.* fig. 47.1). Choirs of *kalû*'s performing dirges antiphonally with singing priestesses are mentioned. The reliefs show that some foreign musicians were also active in Nineveh (Rashid 1984, Figs. 142 and 149), a fact that is confirmed in the royal correspondence (Borger 2006, 69, 75: Taylor Prism I 32 III 39; Fales & Postgate, 1992, 32-4).

*Figure 47.3 Drawing of a series of reliefs depicting musicians. Detail of top right corner is shown below. Nineveh, Iraq; Room S, N Palace; 645-635 BC; gypsum; British Museum and Vorderasiatisches Museum (1856,0909.53; 1969,0416.6; 1969,0416.1; 1969,0416.2; 1969,0416.3; 1969,0416.4; 1856,0909.56; VA 967; VA 969). Adapted from Gadd 1936, pls. 39-42 and Barnett 1976, PL. LXIII and F, Fig. Or. Dr. V 42-467).*

### 47.3 Music in school

Students of music in Nineveh acquired a thorough knowledge of music and musical instruments. In a large section of an encyclopaedic dictionary entitled *Ura,* about 100 entries relate to musical instruments (Landsberger 1958, 119-27: Ura VII B 39-13). We even know of a specimen question for the final examination on types of songs:

> *Do you know the song of the hymn singer, the song of the … singer, the song of the lamentation singer, the song of the high priest, the song of the mighty ones, the song of the firm ones? Do you know how to discern the antiphon, to recite the couplet and do you know the finale?,* Exam Text A 24; c. 600 BC; see Sjöberg 1974.

### 47.4 Music theory

Some texts found in Nineveh help us to reconstruct the theory of Mesopotamian music. Of central importance is tablet 32 of the dictionary *Uktin = nabnītu* from the library of King Ashurbanipal (Finkel 1982, 249-54). It gives the names of nine individual strings and also the names of string combinations. These are in fact names for the modes, or scales, of the nine-stringed lyre (*sammû*). Tuning instructions from Ur (1800 BC), in which the names of these keys are used, indicate that the lyre was tuned diatonically, because in some cases both the first and the eighth strings had to be tightened or loosened. So it is natural to assume that the interval between the ninth and the second strings corresponded to an octave. These same names for modes recur in texts from Babylonia and Assyria from the eighteenth to the seventh century BC, showing consistent usage for more than a thousand years in both regions (Krispijn 2002).

*Figure 47.4 Relief depicting two female musicians in front of a palm tree. Nineveh, Iraq; Room S, N Palace; 7th century BC; limestone/gypsum; H 39 cm, W 18 cm; Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (VA 967).*
*© Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Vorderasiatisches Museum, photograph made by Olaf M. Teßmer.*

# 48. The Last Days of Assyrian Nineveh: a View from the Halzi Gate

*David Stronach*

A little over thirty years ago I happened to learn that, following a considerable period of time during which rescue excavations had been a distinct priority in Iraq, the Iraqi archaeological authorities had decided to make a number of major sites unconnected with any specific 'rescue digs' available for excavation – and that Nineveh was likely to be one of the sites in question (fig. 48.1). As one result of this welcome development, it was not too long before the Iraqi Directorate General of Antiquities responded in positive terms to UC Berkeley's application to excavate at Nineveh, beginning in the spring of 1987.

I subsequently found myself in a position, in 1989 and 1990, to undertake two seasons of work – in concert with other UC Berkeley projects at Nineveh – at the Halzi Gate, located near the southern end of Nineveh's long east wall. Accordingly, it may be appropriate in the context of the present volume to take a further look at this same gate (fig. 48.2), which appears to shed an unusual degree of light on events that can be associated with the last years of Assyrian Nineveh.[104]

With reference to the construction of the gate, it was presumably within the first few years of the reign of Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC; fig. 35.1) that this monarch's skilled work force was able to lay out at least the ground plan of the Halzi Gate, one of three monumental city gates that lie near the southeast corner of Sennacherib's extended capital. And although less than half of the plan of this substantial gate (fig. 48.2) has been exposed to date, it is clear that it originally shared numerous features with the nearly equally large Šamaš Gate, located 1,200 m to the north (figs. 48.1 and 48.3), as well as with aspects of the plan of one slightly earlier gate at Khorsabad.

While Dr. Tariq Madhloom's prior excavations at the Halzi Gate, conducted during his initial 1965 season at Nineveh, were limited in scope and do not appear to have reached floor level at any point (Madhloom 1967; Madhloom & Mahdi 1976; MacGinnis, this volume), his contour plan of this particular area provides a useful general impression of the immediate setting of the gate (fig. 48.4). To the east, for example, it is possible to make out the deep trough of one of Sennacherib's main moats as well as the point at which this large moat was bridged. To the west, moreover, the highest contours can be assumed to correspond to the approximate line of the city's tall mud brick east wall. At the same time, the one specific structural element that is shown within the former limits of the gate itself (fig. 48.4) can now be understood to illustrate the much-narrowed condition of part of the outer passage of the Halzi Gate in its final, constricted form. And while this unusual feature did not benefit from any very explicit commentary at the time

104 For very brief notes on certain of the historical circumstances of this extraordinary time, see, not least, chapter 48.11.

Figure 48.1 (right) Sketch plan of Nineveh. Reproduced from Stronach 1997, fig. 2.

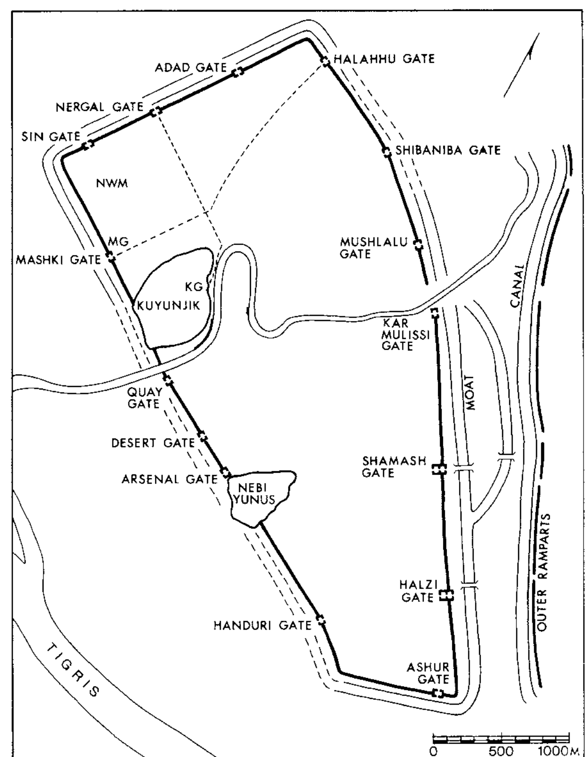
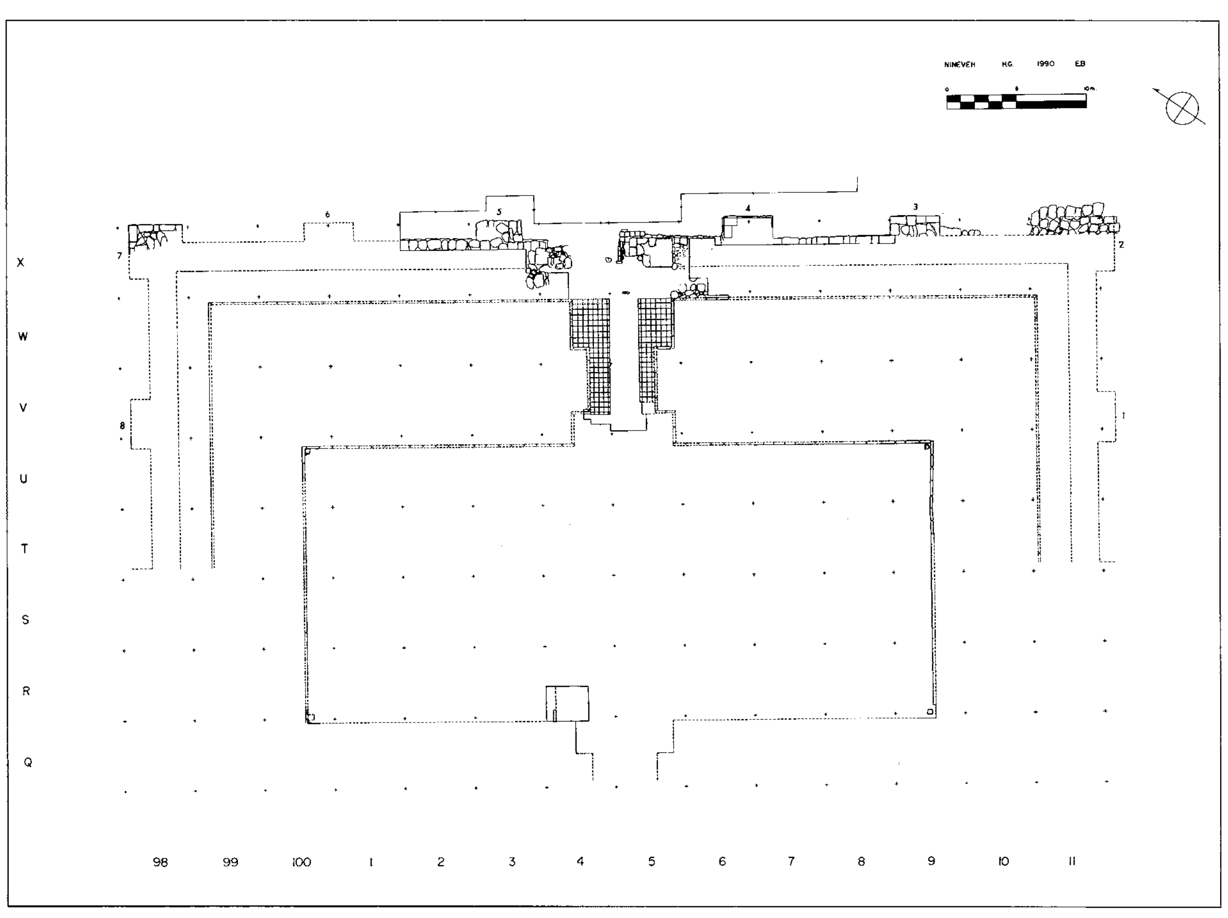



Figure 48.2 (bottom) A partly restored plan of the projecting, outer portion of the Halzi Gate. Note especially the blocks of secondary brickwork that narrowed the outer roadway from 7 to 2 m in width.



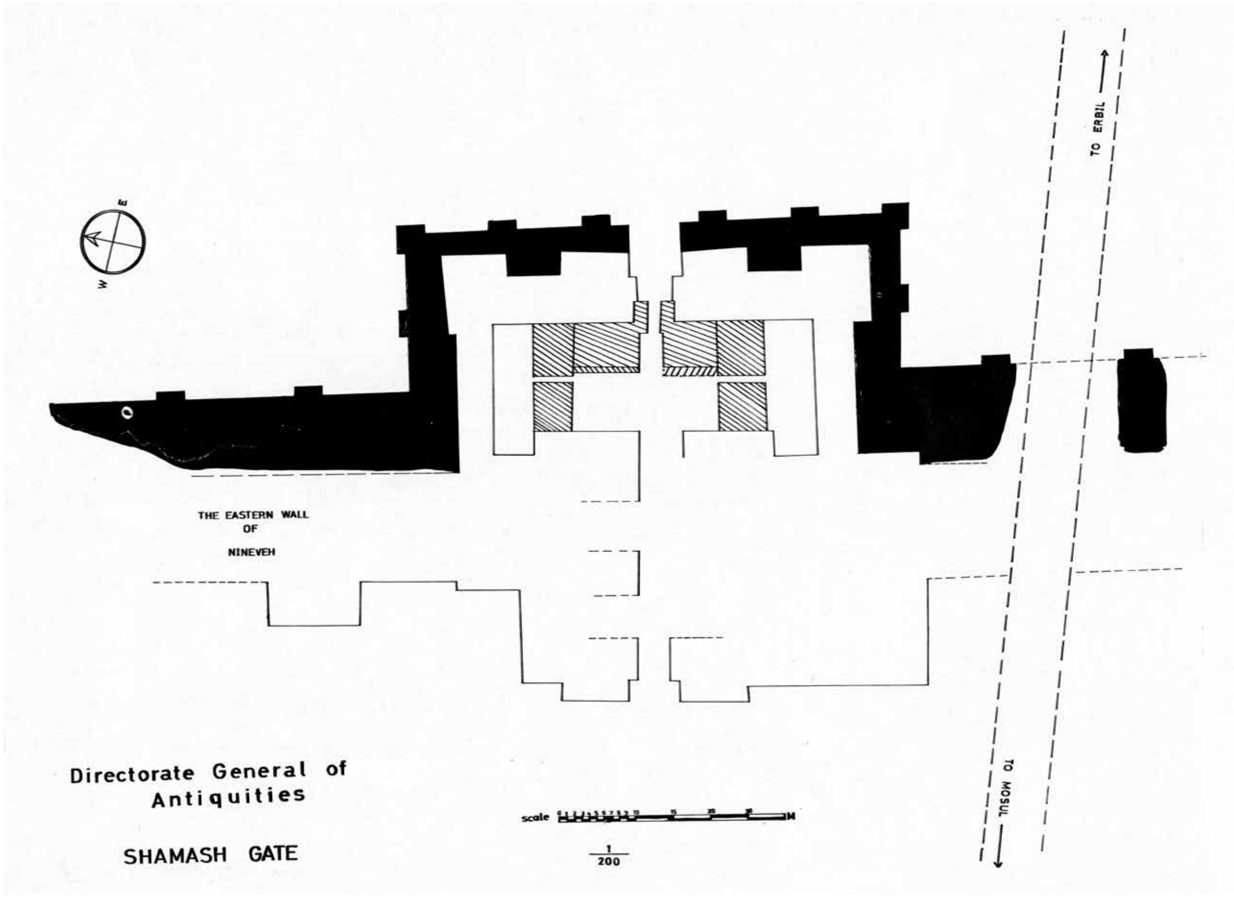



*Figure 48.3 Plan of the Šamaš Gate. Reproduced from Madhloom & Mahdi 1976, pl. II.*

that it was first brought to light, it definitely seemed to call – at least in my estimation – for further investigation.[105]

In the course of our work at the gate, beginning in April 1989, we were fortunate to be able to record a number of significant details (fig. 48.5). These included major elements related to the all-stone curtain wall; much of the original and the secondary ground plans of the gate's outer passageway; and, quite apart from all else, the notable human skeletal remains that were discovered in the vicinity of the gate's outer passage (fig. 48.6). Also, even if it proved impossible to recover almost any information about the deeply buried inner corridor of the gate during the quite limited time that proved to be available to us, our two brief seasons of work at the gate greatly benefited from the fact that we were able to take close account of the related plan of the adjacent, more fully excavated Šamaš Gate.

Indeed, both the Halzi Gate and the Šamaš Gate can now be said to document a relatively rare form of late Assyrian gate with a projecting, rectangular court; and, since the full length of the projecting eastern façade of the Halzi Gate is now known to have measured 70 m (as opposed to a measurement of 66 m for the corresponding eastern façade of the Šamaš Gate), it is more than likely that the eastern façade of the Halzi Gate could have projected for as much as 24 m (as opposed to a more limited projection of 22.5 m for the Šamaš Gate). In addition, the fact that the Šamaš Gate stretched

105 For prior reports on UC Berkeley's work at the Halzi Gate, see Stronach 1989; 1994; 1997; Stronach & Lumsden 1992; and Pickworth 2005. Those members of the 1989 and 1990 teams who took part in the work at the Halzi Gate included, in addition to the writer, Eleanor Barbanes, Stefan Beverly, Pierre Bikai, Stuart Brown, Constance Gane, Roy Gane, Marianne Marek, Augusta McMahon, Diana Pickworth and Noel Siver. Special thanks are also due to Khalaf Bedawi, the expedition's highly experienced foreman.

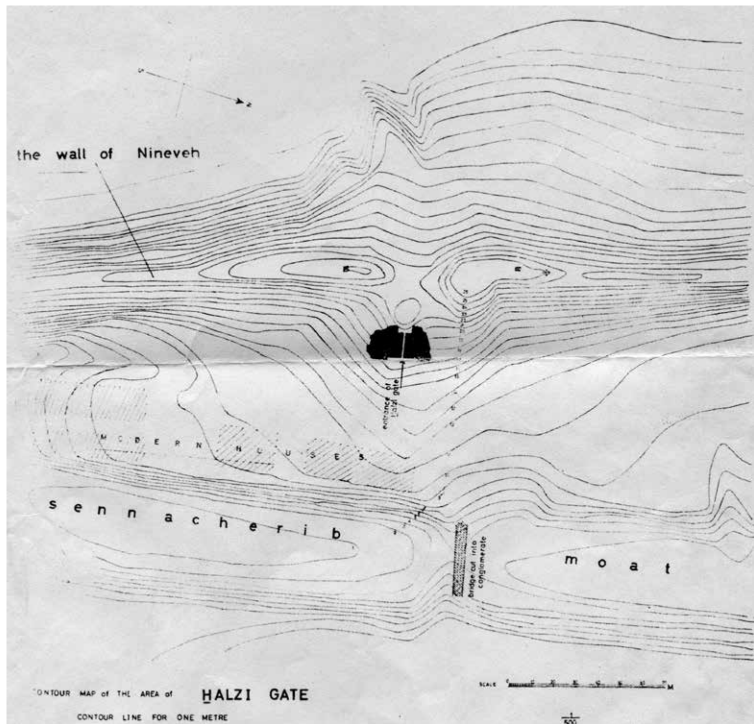



Figure 48.4 (right) Madhloom's contour plan of the vicinity of the Halzi Gate. The plan includes a small (incorrectly represented) portion of the fabric of the narrowed, outer part of the gate (shown in black). Reproduced from Madhloom 1967, pl. XIII.

Figure 48.5 (bottom) A detail of the plan of the outer entrance of the Halzi Gate. Reproduced from Stronach 1997, fig. 5.

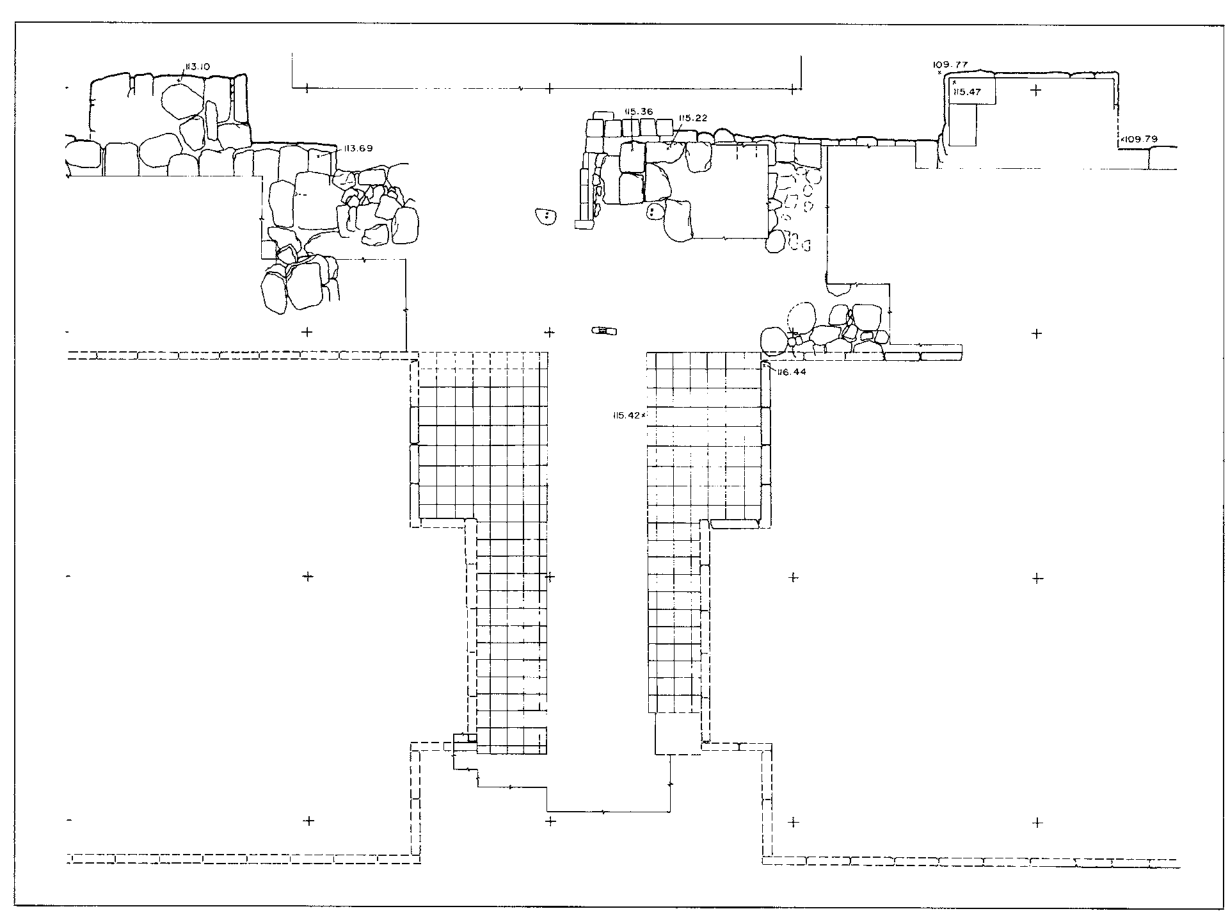


*Figure 48.6 The partly excavated entrance to the Halzi Gate, seen from the east. The photograph shows the stone orthostats of the original 7 m wide entrance, the opposed blocks of brickwork that eventually reduced the central roadway to a width of 2 m, and the first of the tangled skeletal remains to be encountered on the surface of the roadway. The baked brick drain in the foreground also marks the axis of the very narrow passage that still led through the stone curtain wall during Nineveh's last days.*

to c. 61 m from east to west could well suggest that the corresponding depth of the Halzi Gate was close to 65 m.

With the exception of the (partly blocked) court of the adjoining Šamaš Gate, no such court exists at any of the other excavated gates at Nineveh, nor at any of the excavated gates at Assur or Nimrud (ancient Kalhu). Furthermore, given that such a large court is not likely to have provided too many advantages from a strictly defensive standpoint, it may be suggested that it could have served on occasion to accommodate significant ceremonies.

In the case of the Halzi Gate, it is also not irrelevant to note that this substantial gate was almost certainly associated with one of the principal highways that led south-eastwards from Nineveh. As the name of the gate – 'Sennacherib's Gate to the Land/Town of Halzi' (*cf.* Reade 2001, 401) – clearly indicates, the road passed through the not-far-distant district of Halzi[106] before it presumably continued in a southerly direction.[107]

106 Note too that a tablet excavated at Nimrud records a payment of grain made by a township that bore the name of Halzi (Parker 1961, 54; Pickworth 2005, 295).

107 Although the precise routes that were followed by even the most frequented roads in Assyria will probably never be known for sure, it may be proposed that the adjacent Šamaš Gate was the chief point of access for the main highway that led from Nineveh to the almost equally venerable city of Arbela (fig. 48.1). In addition, it would be quite logical to suppose that the Halzi Gate provided access to the chief route leading southwards to Nimrud.

## 48.1 The entrance ramp

One of many variables connected with the city gates of Nineveh may be said to have been the type of surfacing that was applied to one or another entrance ramp. In the case of the Assur Gate (fig. 48.1), which appears to have been built more or less within the width of the city's south wall, the low-lying ground in front of the gate represents an area that was very probably damp for the greater part of the year. Accordingly, the ramp that led up to this gate was surfaced by several courses of baked bricks set in bitumen.

Since there is no longer any surviving evidence to show exactly how the surface of the sloping conglomerate ramp at the Halzi Gate was treated, the best available information comes from the closely adjacent passageway within the outer gate structure. Here the natural conglomerate surface of the passage was covered with a layer of medium-sized grey-black cobblestones, some of which showed traces of having been set in sand. In view, therefore, of the presence of a stone-paved surface that once appears to have run all the way up to the outer entrance of the Nergal Gate (fig. 48.1; *cf.* Madhloom & Mahdi 1976, pl. XIII), and in view of the not-too-hard nature of the conglomerate ridge that supports the east wall as a whole, a similar cobbled surface could have originally covered all, or most, of the length of the c. 30 m-long ramp of the Halzi Gate.

## 48.2 The perimeter wall

As described by Sennacherib, the perimeter wall of his unrivalled capital consisted of two separately named walls: the shorter stone outer wall (otherwise known as 'The Wall that Terrifies Evil') and the 'great (inner) wall' (otherwise known as 'The Wall Whose Splendour Overwhelms the Enemy') (Luckenbill 1924, 170-1; Reade 1998-2001, 399). Since the former wall is described as an all-stone construction that was built 'of great limestone blocks' and since the latter is said to have been made of bricks set on 'a limestone (foundation)' (Reade 1998-2001, 399), it is possible to identify these named walls with two still extant, adjoining features on the ground. Indeed, the still partly intact defences of Sennacherib's spacious capital make it possible to assert that the city's 12 km-long perimeter wall was made up of two *contiguous*, complementary structures that were designed (in concert with a number of outlying moats and/or dry ditches) to go a long way to defeat almost any form of direct attack.

This massive 'twinned construction' allowed the all-stone curtain wall to act as a protective shield for the lower part of the towering inner mud brick wall. Viewed as one unit, in fact, Sennacherib's contiguous (and complementary) twin walls represented a formidable defensive barrier and a vivid illustration of the extraordinary scale of Assyria's resources in the early seventh century BC.[108]

In keeping with the physical character of these two complementary parts of the city's perimeter wall, it would seem logical to refer to them, respectively, as the 'curtain wall' and as the 'main wall'. In addition, it should be noted that Reginald Campbell Thompson (1876-1941) was wholly in error to maintain that Sennacherib erected two totally distinct walls that were separated, at times, by more than a kilometre of open ground.[109]

While the work at the Halzi Gate did not reveal any evidence for the local presence of a postern that led from the interior to the exterior of the perimeter wall, Donny George's (1950-2011) excavations on the east wall of Nineveh exposed just such a feature in the course of his single 1988 season.[110] Indeed, the presence of a postern situated only a short distance to the south of the point where the Khosr enters the city (fig. 48.1) could very well reflect an extra degree of concern for the security of the city's defences at this critical location.

## 48.3 The parapet-walk

There is some evidence to suggest that the parapet-walk that capped Sennacherib's all-stone curtain wall rose to slightly different heights above ground level in different parts of the city. On the north side of the protruding part of the Šamaš Gate, for example, the partly restored west end of the parapet-walk (where it makes a right-angled turn to join the parapet-walk on the east face of the adjacent main wall) probably approached 4.5 m in height. In contrast, the parapet-walk in the vicinity of the Adad Gate stood no more than 4 m above ground level. This discrepancy suggests that the long eastern wall, which faced the open plain to the east, was probably viewed as the wall that was most likely to be the target of an all-out assault.

The stepped limestone crenellations (or merlons) – each c. 1.76 m in height – that originally capped the whole length of the parapet-walk at the top of the curtain wall are so far only known from secondary contexts, that

108 In this same broad context the extant remains of the Šamaš Gate still reached a height of 23.25 m above the surrounding ground level at the time that the Iraqi excavators began their work at this location in the mid-1960s (Madhloom & Mahdi 1976, 27). In their original condition, therefore, both the Šamaš and the Halzi Gates could have reached a height of at least 25 m; and, by the same token, the main wall between these two gates could have reached a height of c. 20 m.

109 This misconception is most clearly documented in Thompson's map of Nineveh, where the extensive heaps of excavated earth on the east bank of the post-Assyrian Damalmaja Ditch are labelled as 'outer walls'. *Cf.* Thompson & Hutchinson 1929a, fig. 1.

110 Personal information from the late Dr. George.

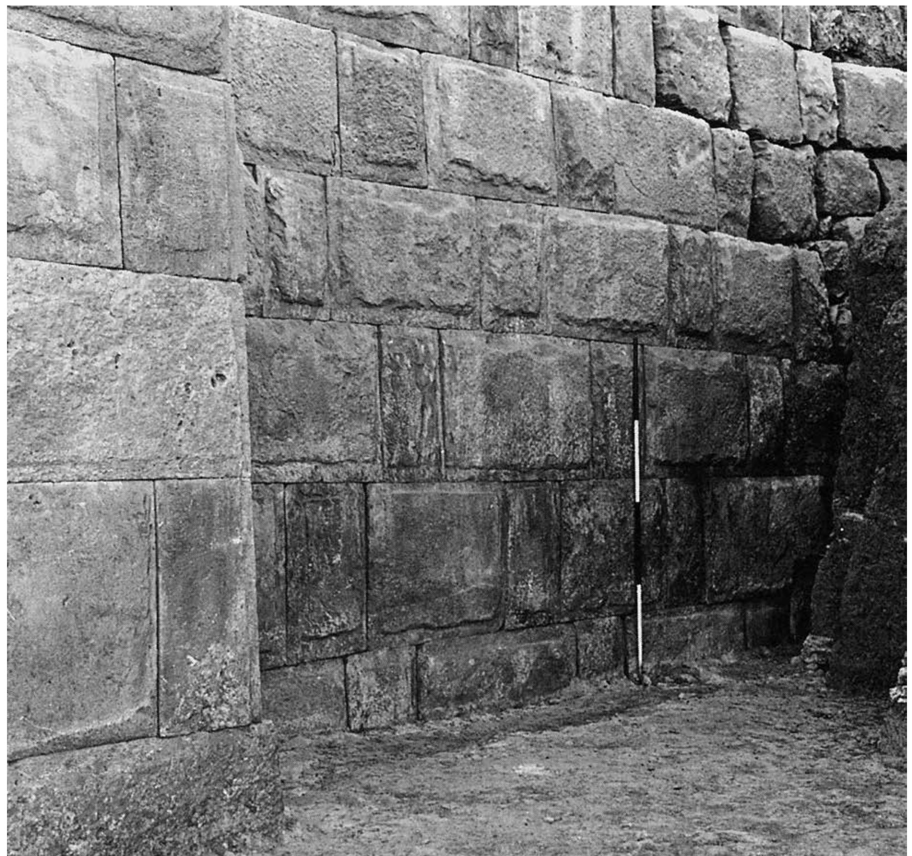


*Figure 48.7 Part of the east façade of the stone curtain wall of the Halzi Gate, seen from the east. Note the well-dressed masonry of Tower 3 and the comparable quality of most of the masonry in the adjacent wall-face. The decidedly rougher stonework that lies above and to the right of the 2 m scale is likely to be representative of a late, hurried repair. Note also the white, plastered ground surface that extends outwards from the base of the wall.*

is, from areas of loose fill that lie outside the line of the curtain wall. The original location of such stepped stones is not in any doubt, however. It is only logical to presume, for example, that any such merlons that chanced to remain *in situ* following the destruction of Assyrian Nineveh would have eventually been tossed aside during the construction of the adjoining township of Mosul, beginning, quite possibly, in the sixth century AD (Al-Aswad, this volume). At that time the local builders would have assuredly concentrated most of their efforts on recovering the finely dressed, readily re-usable limestone ashlars that were originally employed to create the external face of the curtain wall.

An examination of the known parapet-walks in prior Assyrian architecture suggests that one of the prototypes for the elevated all-stone walkway at Nineveh was the type of elevated, external mud brick walkway that was a prominent feature in the strong mud brick defences of late Assyrian Assur. The outer edge of such a mud brick walkway was not only marked by mud brick crenellations, but the crenellations in question were placed on top of a low wall with two internal steps (Andrae 1913, figs. 185-6). These provisions appear to have been designed to let skilled archers stationed on the walkway either shoot at more distant targets from behind the cover of the crenellations or, just as importantly, to direct their arrows almost directly downwards through closely spaced arrow slits. In the case of an actual siege, in other words, one of the principal tasks of those archers who were stationed on the parapet walks at Assur would have been to frustrate the efforts of any sappers who tried to reach and damage the base of the city's mud brick perimeter wall.

One distinct drawback in this defensive scheme stems from the fact that the only available access to such a walkway appears to have been from the top of one of the ramps in front of one or another city gate. In the case of a long-running siege, in short, any archers stationed on Assur's parapet walks would have found themselves vulnerable to both frontal and flank attacks.

Since there is no conclusive evidence (such as that provided by the arrow slits at Assur) to suggest that the parapet-walk at Nineveh was intended to serve as a realistic 'fighting platform', and since the very presence of a solid stone curtain wall would probably have been enough to defeat the best efforts of any sappers of the time, its other main function (apart from its signal representational value) was presumably to facilitate the unceasing rounds of the city's ever-vigilant sentries. But whenever dire circumstances called for a full closure of the individual city gates, it is only logical to suppose that these same sentries were withdrawn from such exposed forward posts in order to take up other duties.

### 48.4 The foundations of the long east wall

The foundations of any major wall are invariably an important structural element – and Sennacherib's architects appear to have made every effort to locate as much as possible of Nineveh's long east wall on the elevated surface of a single ridge of rock that may once have formed part of an ancient terrace of the Tigris. In the case of the Halzi Gate, for example, the whole of this formidable structure was erected at a distance of c. 700 m from the south end of a dominant conglomerate ridge (fig. 48.1). But since conglomerate is not a particularly hard rock, further precautionary measures appear to have been taken at specific individual points. Thus, when we were excavating in the area of the much-denuded southeast corner of the protruding portion of the Halzi Gate, we found evidence that the lowest course of the stone curtain wall did not rest on the surface of the native conglomerate. Rather, the whole area of the southeast corner buttress (Buttress 2), and a further area that extended well beyond the footprint of this same buttress, was founded on a layer of large, more or less flat limestone pavers. In addition, the outlying pavers that protruded beyond the limits of the buttress were covered by a thick white plaster floor that ran up to meet the lower half of the first course of the stone curtain wall (fig. 48.7).

### 48.5 The physical characteristics of the curtain wall in the vicinity of the Halzi Gate

As has already been noted, the eastern façade of the stone curtain wall of the Halzi Gate was 70 m in length and, especially from the remains of its relatively well-preserved southern half, it is evident that there were three buttresses on each side of the gate's outer entrance. In contrast, the short north and south walls of the protruding portion of the gate would each appear to have been strengthened by the presence of a single central buttress.

On the basis of measurements taken from the surviving remains of Buttress 3, it is clear that each individual buttress on the curtain wall of the Halzi Gate must have possessed a distinct batter.[111] The presence of such a batter is not a matter for surprise, however, especially when it is remembered that the Assyrians customarily built in mud brick, where battered walls were the norm. Note too that Assyrians quay walls – each necessarily built of stone – regularly display a step-battered profile (*cf.* Mallowan 1966, fig. 31).[112] Further, it can be presumed

*Figure 48.8 A detail from the outer wall face of Buttress 3. Note especially the low, raised central boss with drafted margins on each ashlar block as well as the vertical, indented corner moulding above the level of the first course.*

111 Madhloom calculates that the buttresses of the curtain wall in the protruding portion of the Šamaš Gate originally tapered at a rate of 3 cm per metre (Madhloom & Mahdi 1976, 27).

112 Also, for the step-battered stone quay wall that was discovered near the Maški Gate, see Madhloom & Mahdi 1976, pl. XXIII.

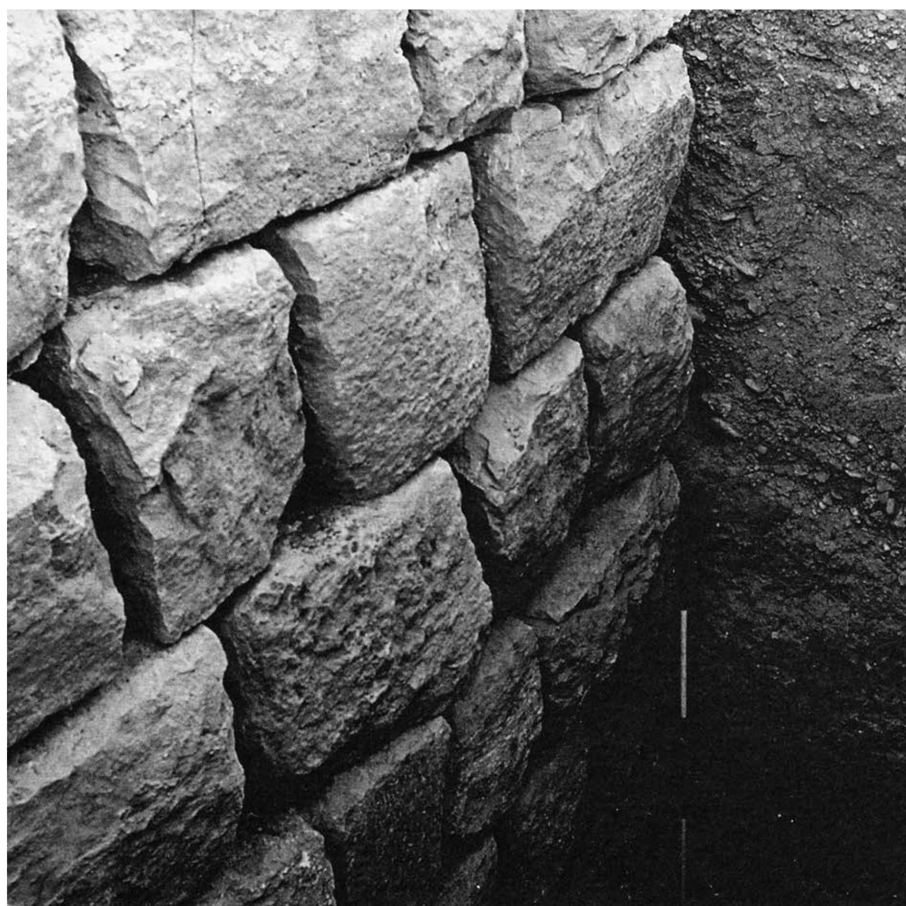


*Figure 48.9 A detail of the poorly jointed, secondary stonework of Tower 4. This tower stands within the evident area of an extensive reconstruction, situated directly to the south of the entrance to the Halzi Gate.*

that Sennacherib's main (mud brick) city wall would have shared similar tapered proportions.

Any visitor approaching the Halzi Gate from the east at a time when it was still in its original, pristine condition would have not only been impressed by the height of the main wall, but also by the high quality of the limestone masonry that distinguished the outer face of the regularly buttressed curtain wall (figs. 48.7-8). Had the curtain wall been more complete in this given area, we might, in fact, know less about it. But since it was unevenly preserved, it is possible to report on both the core of the wall as well as on the characteristics of the dressed stones that were used to create the wall's external appearance. Thus the core was found to consist of large, roughly shaped rectangular stones that were laid in more or less level courses – and it can be inferred that such stones stretched back to the outer face of the mud brick main wall.

The finely dressed masonry in the façade of the curtain wall consisted of tightly jointed ashlar blocks (laid, needless to say, without mortar) that rose in regular horizontal courses, each c. 75 to 80 cm in height. Most of the original ashlars (now best represented by those that survive in Buttress 3 as well as those that are found in the southern part of the outer wall face between Buttresses 3 and 4) exhibit a low, raised central boss bordered by drafted margins (fig. 48.8). In addition, the ashlars in each course were comprised of alternate headers and stretchers. Apart from the visual attraction of header-and-stretcher masonry, walls that were constructed in this fashion were normally of considerable strength in that each header was designed to penetrate into the rough stone core of the wall: an arrangement that provided a strong bond between the wall's finely dressed outer surface and its deep, solid core.

In keeping with customary late Assyrian practice, the joints between any two ashlars proved to consist of 'oblique joints'. In joints of this kind, the joining stone surfaces consisted of no more than two opposed, carefully smoothed *vertical* bands, each of which was placed as close as possible to the external face of the wall. This technique ensured a tight joint in the outer face of the wall itself, even if the rest of the hidden 'joining surface' was usually cut away, often at an oblique angle. As Carl Nylander (1932-) has noted, this particular type of joint had a number of advantages. That is to say that, even if it may not have been quite as strong as a more rare type of 'flat joint' (*i.e.*, a joint between two stone blocks, each with a uniformly smooth joining surface), an oblique joint still provided a tight, secure join at the point where a connection was most needed – and it did so without the inordinate amount of extra work that was required to produce an overall flat joint (*cf.* Nylander 1970, 58).

## 48.6 The outer gate passage of the Halzi Gate

From evidence recovered during the recent excavations, it is apparent that the outer part of the outer entrance to the Halzi Gate was distinguished by a partly orthostat-lined open space – a form of miniature 'courtyard' – that was up to 7 m wide and 3.40 m deep (fig. 48.5). At this point the plain limestone orthostats that line the opposed sides of this 7 m-wide open space can be seen to step in for a distance of 1.20 m on each side – an arrangement that reduced the width of the passageway that stood beneath the original outer arch of the gate to approximately 4.60 m. On reaching the inner, unroofed portion of the gate structure the orthostats step out for an identical distance of 1.20 m on each side and a second, smaller unroofed space within the length of the gate passage proved to have a depth of 2.35 m.

The closeness of these details to the plan of the corresponding outer, axial portion of the Šamaš Gate is demonstrated by the fact that the width of each of the opposed, unroofed portions of the outer gate chamber at the Šamaš Gate was 6.75 m (as opposed to 7.00 m) and that the width of the actual roofed passageway was 4.35 m (as opposed to 4.60 m). At both the Halzi and the Šamaš Gates, in other words, there appears to have been adequate room for chariots moving in opposite directions to pass each other without difficulty.

No part of the original arch of the outer entrance of the Halzi Gate appears to have survived the calamities that took place towards the end of the seventh century BC. It is most likely, in fact, that the original arch was destroyed, together with a significant portion of the adjacent stone curtain wall, in 614 BC when the Medes not only captured Assur, but also the well-appointed nearby site of Tarbisu, the sometime residence of the crown prince. Furthermore, if the sturdy but still unquestionably hurried reconstruction of Buttress 4 of the Halzi Gate (fig. 48.9) is anything to go by, the replacement of this key feature could well have taken place within the brief period that intervened between the successive sieges of 614 and 612 BC.

Excavated evidence from a number of other late Assyrian gates, such as the west gate of Fort Shalmaneser at Nimrud, may also be used to suggest that the height of the arch in the protruding outer portion of the Halzi Gate could have been relatively close to its width. As to the nature of the vault in question, it would also seem not unreasonable to suggest that the brick vault of the entranceway consisted of a barrel vault with two inner concentric rings of radiating bricks (*cf.* Oates 1962, 10 and pl. 2). And, since somewhat similar proportions have been proposed for the outer arch of Gate 7 at Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin) (Loud 1938, fig. 4), a height of 5 m would appear to represent a probable *minimum height* for the no longer extant arch of the Halzi Gate's original outer gate passage.

At the same time, certain details from another city gate at Nineveh – namely the Adad Gate (fig. 48.1) – call for close attention in the present context. Since the excavated remains of the Adad Gate appear to have stood more or less within the sheltering breadth of Nineveh's north wall, and since the original fabric of this latter gate also proved to be narrowed and reinforced at various key points by secondary skins of brickwork (such as can almost certainly be ascribed to the two-year interval between the first and second Median assaults), the original outer arch of the Adad Gate has managed to remain in a remarkably intact condition. It is true that the top of the reinforced (triangular) arch has slumped to a slight extent, but as 'Amr Suleiman has pointed out, the underside of this arch still stands c. 7.5 m above the floor of the Adad Gate's outer passage (Suleiman 1971a, 58).

Whether or not the protruding eastern portion of the mud brick fabric of the Halzi Gate ever rose to the same height as the tall Adad Gate is doubtful. But even if the east wall of the protruding part of the Halzi Gate only rose to a height of perhaps 15 m at the most, a wall of this height could presumably have accommodated an entrance-arch that rose to between 5 and 7.5 m in height.

## 48.7 The court

As has already been mentioned, the presence of a large protruding court is a feature that distinguishes the Halzi Gate and the adjacent Šamaš Gate from all other excavated gates at Nineveh. This partly protruding form of gate appears to have been first introduced in the late eighth century by Sennacherib's father, Sargon II (reigned 722-704 BC; fig. 27.1), at his own newly built capital at

*Figure 48.10 Skeletons of individuals who met their death on the roadway of the Halzi Gate during the siege of Nineveh in 612 BC. The spreadeagled figure at the left lies face downwards.*

Khorsabad. This innovative plan first came to light when Victor Place excavated the important city gate now known as Gate 3 (originally replete with giant bull colossi and four-winged genii) in the mid-nineteenth century.[113]

It is notable that the external wall of the court of Gate 3 at Khorsabad was only buttressed at two points: namely at the two opposed outer corners of the outer wall. In contrast, the exterior protruding portions of the Halzi Gate and the Šamaš Gate (fig. 48.3) each appear to have been reinforced by a total of eight buttresses – an indication, in all probability, of a new awareness, especially following the death of Sargon II on a distant battlefield, that even the most significant sites in the Assyrian homeland now needed to be ready to contend with the possibility of direct attacks.

As can be seen from figure 48.3, the spacious rectangular court of the Halzi Gate is oriented transversely, with dimensions of 45 m from east to west and 19 m from north to south. The lower part of the inner and outer faces of the north, east and south walls of the court were also lined with plain, tightly jointed limestone orthostats, each of the same height and thickness.[114]

113 For the numbers that are currently assigned to the city gates of Khorsabad, see, *e.g.*, Strommenger 1964, fig. 52.

114 In one case, however, we intentionally examined the normally hidden, rear surface of one of the orthostats located near the southeast corner of the court. In this instance the rear surface of the otherwise smoothly dressed stone was found to carry an abbreviated version of one of Sennacherib's longer inscriptions. The present text reads, as my colleague Professor N. Veldhuis has kindly affirmed, 'Sennacherib, king of the land of Assur, built anew the wall of Nineveh'. *Cf.* Luckenbill 1924, 124; also Pickworth 2005, 305.

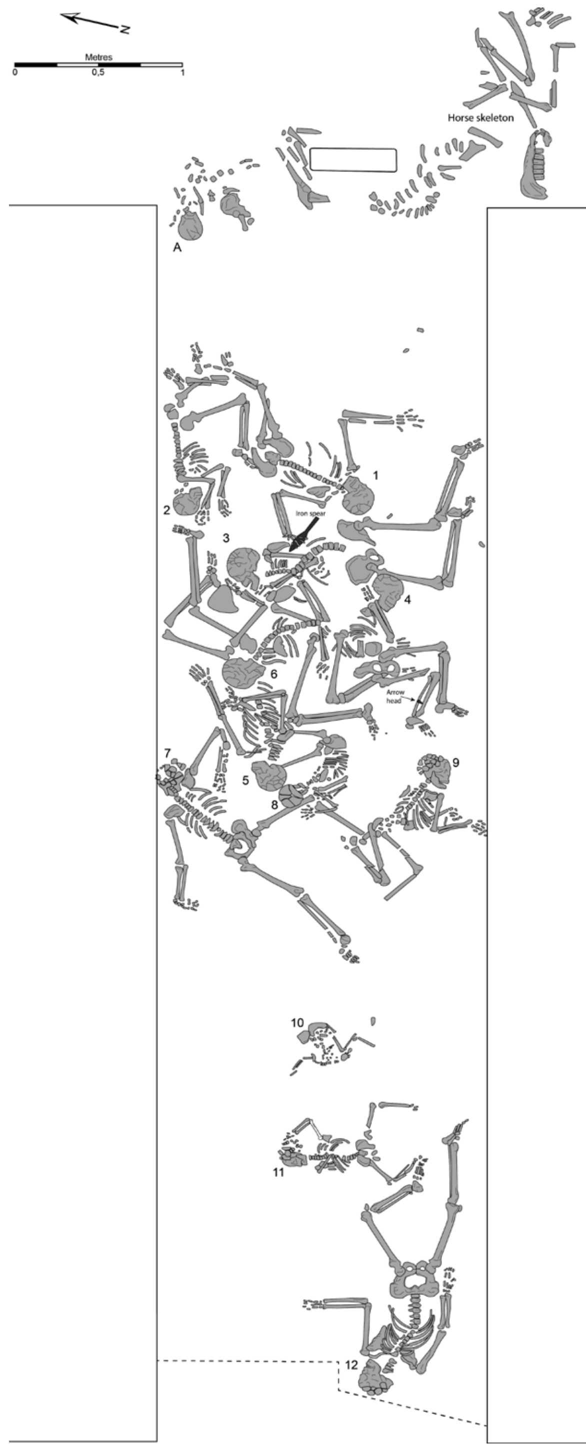



*Figure 48.11 A general plan of the skeletal remains found at the Halzi Gate. The plan is adapted from Eleanor Barbanes' original plan of the skeletons (cf. Pickworth 2005, fig. 1) completed in May 1990.*

Two of the orthostats that lined the east side of the court were apparently destroyed or robbed out in antiquity. Since the missing stones consisted of the adjoining second and third orthostats that once stood immediately to the south of the inner entrance of the outer gate passage, it would seem more than likely that they were displaced at the time that this part of the gate was attacked in 614 BC – and that, amidst many other pressing tasks, no attempt was made to replace them.[115]

The supernatural protection that was extended to this spacious 'great court' also remains to be mentioned. Most notably, this appears to have been provided by two pairs of protective baked clay figurines that stood in foundation boxes in the corners of the court (fig. 48.2). In the front (or eastern) corners, one still extant apotropaic figure consisted of a representation of Latarak, and in the rear (or western) corners, the one excavated sub-floor foundation box (in the southwest corner of the court) contained what was very possibly a representation of Lulal.[116]

## 48.8 Secondary construction in the outer entrance of the Halzi Gate

It goes without saying that the most immediate concern of the defenders (after what appears to have been an abortive attack on the Halzi Gate in 614 BC) was to repair the essence of the gate's external fortifications. To this end, it was apparently deemed necessary to rebuild Buttress 4 from the ground up – apart from reusing various displaced, finely dressed stones to repair the upper courses of the adjacent curtain wall.

The contrast between the finely dressed, original masonry of Buttress 3 and the distinctly rough-hewn masonry of Buttress 4 could hardly be greater. Almost as much as anything else, therefore, the stonework of these two adjacent buttresses may be said to underscore the signal change in Assyria's overall condition between the beginning and the end of the seventh century BC.

Of equal interest is the way in which matching areas of mud brick blocking were used to narrow the interior of

115 In this connection it is of interest to note that the original stone door sockets of the west gate of Fort Shalmaneser were removed during the attack on the outer town of Nimrud in 614 BC. Further, it would appear that those charged with repairing the damage to the west gate only had time to replace one of the two sockets (together with its companion stone cover) before the subsequent sack of the entire site of Nimrud took place two years later. *Cf.* Oates 1962, 10 with pl. 2.

116 Unfortunately, constraints of time and space do not allow the present contribution to include a catalogue of the excavated small finds from the Halzi Gate (including the above-mentioned foundation figurines). But for two brief references to objects found at the gate – objects that will find more extended notice in a forthcoming final report (Niniveh II) – see Stronach 1997, 117-8 and Pickworth 2005, 305-7 and 311-6.

the outer passage of the Halzi Gate from as much as 7 m to no more than 2 m. This drastic reduction in the width of the passage was clearly designed to enhance the defensive properties of the gate at a moment of uncommon danger.

The Halzi Gate was also not the only city gate at Nineveh to be drastically narrowed immediately before the onset of the final siege. In the case of the Šamaš Gate, it is clear, for example, that the outer gate passage was narrowed over at least part of its length by the addition of opposed, matching skins of mud brick. Furthermore, several separate rectangles of mud brick blocking were also erected within the large transverse court of the Šamaš Gate in order to convert the greater part of this once sizeable open space into what would appear to have served as an additional 'guardroom' on the main axis of the gate (fig. 48.3).

In the case of the Adad Gate (fig. 48.1), which was excavated by Dr. 'Amr Suleiman of the University of Mosul in the 1960s, it is also evident that the defenders took steps to narrow the outer gate passage to 2 m shortly before the fall of the city.[117] In addition, Suleiman's excavation team uncovered numerous bronze arrowheads as well as the skeletons of a number of individuals, each of whom would appear to have met a violent end within the confines of this narrowed, northern entryway (*cf.* Suleiman 1971a, 81-2).

### 48.9 Skeletal remains encountered in the vicinity of the outer gate passage of the Halzi Gate

This strictly abbreviated account of the recent excavations at the Halzi Gate cannot be concluded without reference to the skeletal remains that came to light during the 1989 and 1990 seasons. As figure 48.11 indicates, we were able to reveal parts of the skeletons of some thirteen individuals, each of whom would appear to have died at virtually the same moment.[118]

Many of the skeletons were lying in one or another outstretched or contorted position (figs. 48.10-1). One individual lay face-downwards; another seems to have fallen on his back with his arms stretched out on either side of his body; and a boy who was twelve to thirteen years of age was found to have a bronze trilobate arrowhead lodged in a lower leg. In all, some twenty arrowheads were found in the vicinity of these not seldom overlapping skeletons – and the majority of the arrowheads (quite often of a bronze trilobate form) would seem to have been discharged from east to west, that is, they were very largely shot into the gate passage from outside the eastern limit of the gate. And wherever this stream of arrows was not responsible for the carnage that took place, it would appear that falling debris, including falling mud bricks and burning beams, played a conspicuous role.

A very fragmentary adult male skeleton – skeleton A – was found near the hindquarters of a young stallion (and this individual may indeed have been the rider of the horse). Then, as the excavations proceeded towards the interior of the narrowed outer gate passage, the rest of the excavated skeletons were numbered from 1 to 12. In all, the twelve numbered skeletons included six males of adult or almost adult age; three individuals who were between the ages of eleven and thirteen; one child of seven or eight; another child of about three; and one infant, who was still less than a year old.

In individual terms, the twelve numbered, more or less complete human skeletons, included:

1. An adult male who was 1.74 m tall and who was 30 to 35 years old.
2. A pre-adolescent male who was 12 or 13 years old.
3. An adult male, 1.80 m tall, who was 22 to 24 years old.
4. A pre-adolescent male who was 11 or 12 years old.
5. An adult male, 1.72 m tall, who was 35 to 40 years old.
6. An adolescent male, who was 17 to 18 years old.
7. An adult male, 1.68 m tall, who was 35 to 40 years old.
8. A child who was 7 to 8 years old.
9. A pre-adolescent individual who was 11 to 12 years of age.
10. An infant who was 10 months old.
11. A child who was 3 years old.
12. An adult male, 1.66 m tall, who was 27 to 30 years of age.[119]

### 48.10 Conclusion

Various interpretations of the traces of battle that have come to light at different points on Nineveh's perimeter wall can be put forward. At one time, I took the view that the signs of physical confrontation that were encountered

117 Personal observation, supplemented by details provided by T. Madhloom, who had overall responsibility for all Iraqi excavations conducted at Nineveh during the second half of the 1960s.

118 There is also excavated evidence to suggest that further skeletons may have stretched westwards into a limited part of the 'great court', even if there was insufficient time within the limits of our two-month 1990 season to extend the work any further in this direction.

119 The above-mentioned particulars are drawn from Dr. Ethne Barnes' report on the human skeletal remains that were found at the Halzi Gate – and this same account will be cited at greater length in Nineveh I, one of two final reports that are currently in the course of preparation. *Cf.* also Pickworth 2005, 306-14.

at the Adad Gate, located at the northern limit of the city, and those that were discovered at the Halzi Gate near the southern limit of the extended city (but not, to the best of my knowledge, at any of the other gates located between these specific gates), could point to the possible existence of a carefully calculated strategy on the part of those who besieged the city in 612 BC. In this tentative reconstruction I suggested that the attackers could have attempted to draw the defenders into two widely separated areas of the elongated city before conceivably releasing the dammed waters of the Khosr at the mid-point of the long east wall and that, following this same strategy, they could have succeeded in overwhelming the defenders at this especially vulnerable point in the overall defensive system (*cf.* Stronach 1997, 318-22).

I now prefer to think that this hypothesis does not take adequate account of the many variables that were undoubtedly at work. Indeed, we shall probably never know where the first breaches of the perimeter took place. Effectively, all that can be said is that we now have some detailed knowledge of those who lost their lives in the constricted outer passage of the Halzi Gate in the course of the final siege – and that these same individuals were almost certainly among those who were trapped inside the city. A final report on the excavations at the Halzi Gate will also provide additional details concerning the health of many of these individuals; their nutrition; their old and new wounds; their personal adornments; and their surprisingly unsubstantial military equipment.

The composition of the group, including the presence of children, also raises larger questions about the condition of the civilian population at Nineveh during the three-month siege of the city, quite apart from even wider questions about the fate of children at times of conflict in the ancient Near East. Also, given that five of the twelve skeletons in the narrow passage were those of children who were aged between three and thirteen and that a sixth skeleton was that of an infant who was less than a year old, it has to be conceded that this small group of human beings could never have represented a regular detachment charged with defending the gate. Instead, the currently available evidence would appear to bear witness to a bleak moment when a conceivably random, ill-equipped group of individuals (at least some of whom may have had close family ties) were trying to find a way to leave Nineveh. We will probably never know whether it was the besiegers who forced open the secondary, outer doors of the gate or if it was this same group of local inhabitants who themselves opened the outer door leaves in order to try to break out of the beleaguered city. But whomsoever may have opened the gates, the city's besiegers apparently took this opportunity to release their arrows into the crowded outer passage of the gate with stark results for all who were packed into that confined – and already burning – space.

## 48.11 Appendix: The last years of the Halzi Gate in historical context

While Assyria still stood close to the apex of its power for much of the long reign of Assurbanipal (reigned 668 – c. 627 BC), a distinct decline begins to be evident by about 640 BC. By this approximate date the Assyrians appear to have lost control over Egypt and a good part of the Levant.[120]

In one clear sign of Assyria's steadily eroding strength, the Babylonians succeeded in throwing off the Assyrian yoke in 626 BC, the same year in which Nabopolossar (reigned 626-605 BC) ascended to the throne of Babylon.[121] Hostilities between the Assyrians and the Babylonians continued unabated for the next ten years, but neither side appears to have had the resources to deliver a decisive blow against the other.[122]

In 615 BC, however, there was a crucial change. For the first time the Babylonians were able to make their armed presence felt in the Assyrian heartland, when they invested the city of Assur. It is true that an Assyrian army, led by Assurbanipal's near successor, Sin-šarru-iškun (reigned 627-612 BC), was able to break the siege.[123] In the same year, however, the Chronicle also refers to the presence of a Median army within the bounds of Assyria. In an unprecedented event, the Medes would appear to have attacked the city of Arrapha,[124] situated a little over 100 km to the east of Assur.

In 614 BC the Chronicle describes a series of events that may be said to find an at least partial reflection on the ground from, respectively, the Halzi Gate at Nineveh, the outer town at Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), and the city of Assur. In this same year (the twelfth year of Nabopolassar), it is recorded that 'the Medes, after they had marched against Nineveh […] hastened and … captured Tarbisu, a city in the district of Nineveh.'[125] The Chronicle next recounts that the Medes proceeded 'along the Tigris', presumably on a southerly path that followed the east bank – a route that would have assuredly brought them to Nimrud. Kalhu is not named in the Chronicle in connection with this march, but it can be inferred from detailed archaeological evidence that was recovered at Fort Shalmaneser

120 For recent comments on the final decades of Assyrian rule, see, *e.g.*, Brinkman 1998, 183-4 and Novotny 2002, 1143-5. Also, for a general introduction to the Neo-Babylonian Chronicle Series (cited, in part, below), see Grayson 2000, 8ff.

121 Chronicle 2, lines 14-15 (Grayson 2000, 88).

122 *Cf.* Chronicle 3, lines 1-15 (Grayson 2000, 91-2).

123 Chronicle 4, lines 16-18 (Grayson 2000, 92).

124 Chronicle 3, line 23 (Grayson 2000, 92).

125 Chronicle 3, lines 24-25 (Grayson 2000, 93). From this account it may be inferred, in fact, that Nineveh was attacked first and that the Medes only turned to the lesser target of Tarbisu when their attempts to carry the Halzi Gate (if not still other locations as well) were thwarted.

in the late 1950s and the early 1960s[126] that the outer town at Nimrud was captured by the Medes (even if the tall, strongly fortified citadel temporarily eluded the same fate).

Subsequently, the Medes presumably continued southwards to Assur, located on the opposite, west bank of the Tigris, where they 'did battle against the city' before they inflicted, in the words of the Chronicle, 'a terrible defeat upon a great people'.[127] The Babylonians appear to have hastened northwards with the intention of taking part in the siege, but they apparently arrived too late to do so. Nevertheless, Nabopolassar and Cyaxares (reigned c. 625-585 BC), the king of the Medes, were able to meet and to enter into 'an entente cordiale'.[128]

As far as Nineveh is concerned, matters were very different in 612 BC. For a period of three months, from the month of Sivan until the month of Ab (*i.e.*, from the month of May/June to the month of July/August), the combined forces of the Medes and the Babylonians laid siege to Nineveh.[129] In the latter month the city fell; Sin-šarru-iškun (the reigning Assyrian monarch) died; and the besiegers not only carried off 'vast booty', but are also said to have turned the city 'into a ruin heap'.[130] No more than three years later, in 609 BC, the last Assyrian king, Assur-uballit II, and the last vestiges of the Assyrian army suffered a final defeat in the vicinity of Harran, some 400 km to the west of Nineveh.

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126 See n. 115 above.

127 Chronicle 3, lines 26-27 (Grayson 2000, 93). With reference to recent archaeological evidence from Assur, two complete skeletons found in Level IIa – an occupation level that was destroyed by a large conflagration – have been tentatively identified as victims of the Median attack. *Cf.* Dittmann 1990, 161-4, Abb. 3.

128 Chronicle 3, line 29 (Grayson 2000, 93). *Cf.* also Smith 1925, 126-31; MacGinnis 1987-1988, 40.

129 Chronicle 3, line 42 (Grayson 2000, 94). Gadd (1923, 17) asserts that the siege lasted for two and a half months.

130 Chronicle 3, line 45 (Grayson 2000, 94).

# 49. The Sack of Nineveh in 612 BC

*Marc Van De Mieroop*

In the month Simanu of the fourteenth year of the Babylonian king Nabopolassar's reign (626-605 BC), that is to say, May/June of the year 612 BC, the king's troops started to lay siege to the Assyrian capital Nineveh. On their march to the north, they had joined forces with the Medes from the Zagros Mountains of western Iran, men whose forefathers had served as bodyguards to the Assyrian kings. The siege lasted three months. On an unknown day of the month Abu (July/August) they managed to break through Nineveh's defences and turned the city into a ruin. The king of Assyria, Sin-šarru-iškun (reigned c. 627-612 BC), died at that time, possibly in battle, and the victors carried off a vast amount of booty. On 14 September 612 BC the Medes returned home, while Nabopolassar used Nineveh as a base for further military action against the remnants of the Assyrian Empire.

The sack of Nineveh was a crucial moment in the war between Assyria and its former subjects, the Medes and Babylonians, which had started at least five years earlier. Nabopolassar, who probably came from a prominent family that had collaborated with the Assyrians, had established an independent dynasty in Babylon in 625 BC. After ridding the region of Assyria's influence, he started to invade its heartland in 615 BC. At the same time the Medes also raided Assyria, capturing its ancient religious centre Assur in 614/613 BC, after which they concluded an alliance with the Babylonians against their common enemy. The Babylonian source reporting on this event states that 'the king of Akkad [*i.e.*, Babylon] and Cyaxares [king of the Medes, reigned c. 625-585 BC] met outside the city and concluded a mutual accord and a total peace'. The coalition sacked the empire's political capital two years later, but this did not put an end to the war. The Assyrians resisted fiercely for several more years. Correspondence from provincial centres shows that local officials sought troops to defend their cities (Parpola 2008, 86-95), and the last Assyrian king, Aššur-uballit II (reigned 612-609 BC), still managed to recapture territory in northern Syria in 609 BC. He received support from the Egyptians and populations of the western Near East, and it took Babylonia another decade to impose its will upon the territories Assyria had previously controlled. The attack on Jerusalem in 597 BC and the city's destruction in 587/586 BC, described in the Hebrew Bible, were part of this arduous process.

Babylonian sources give remarkably few details on these wars. The military history of the Assyrian domination of the ancient Near East is easy to write, as the events are exceedingly well documented in the empire's accounts. The Babylonians did not write such texts, however, focusing instead on non-military actions when they celebrated their kings. Information about wars is found exclusively in terse chronicles that list military clashes in a straightforward, non-celebratory fashion (especially Glassner 2004, 218-25). The end of Nineveh does not really stand out in these accounts, but it was indeed a very significant moment, which justifies the modern historians' decision to use it as the marking point of the end of the Assyrian Empire. Archaeological evidence and reflections on the city's fall in Greek and Biblical sources confirm this view.

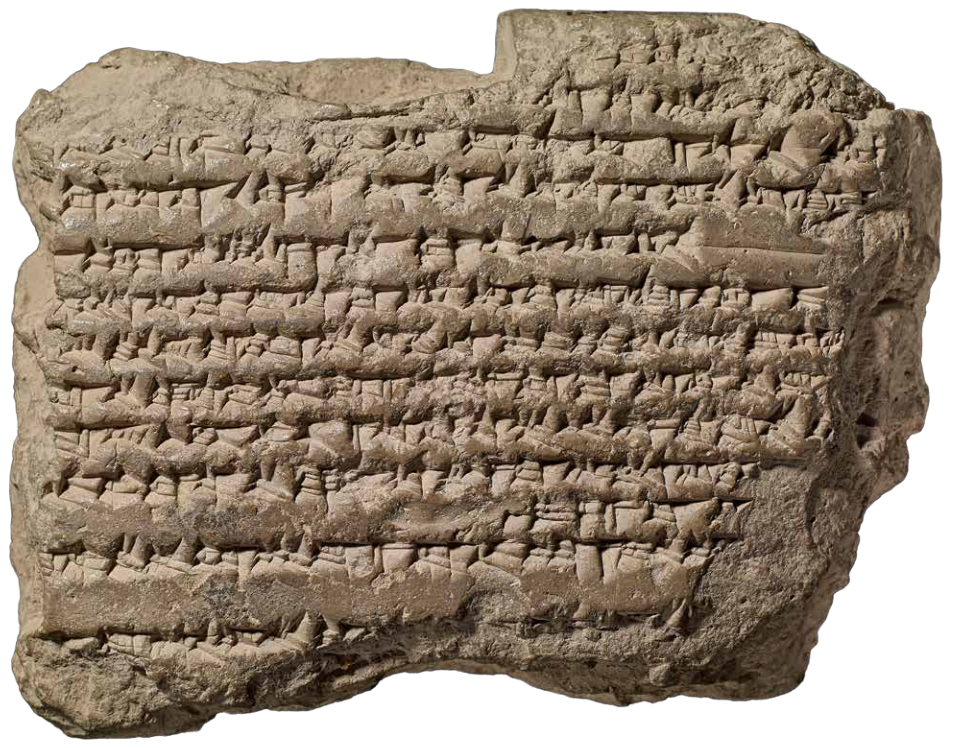
*Figure 49.1 Fall of Nineveh made by John Martin in 1829.*

Archaeology shows that the attack by the Babylonian and Medes was not unopposed and confirms that a long siege took place. Excavations in the 1990s at the south-eastern Halzi Gate showed that the 7 m-wide stone-lined entrance had been narrowed to 2 m with mud brick blocks to limit access, a feature also noticed at two other gates (fig. 48.6; Pickworth 2005; Stronach, this volume). The finds of skeletons illustrate the horrors of the conquest: in the Halzi Gate, for example, were excavated the remains of twelve individuals, among them a few adult males, but also adolescent boys, two children and a ten-month-old infant. That they died as the result of battle is clear from the arrow-heads, lance heads and spears discovered alongside them. Of course, such carnage must have taken place whenever a city was captured, and we should not be too surprised that the remains of innocent victims were found. We know, however, that Nineveh received special treatment after the conquest.

The chronicle states that the city was turned into a heap of ruins, and early archaeological explorations of the site in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries show that was indeed the case. In various places, 5 cm-thick layers of ash were discovered (Stronach 1997, 313). Yet, the destruction was far from mindless and did not occur the minute the city was taken. When we look closely at the remains of the stone reliefs that lined the palace walls, we see that specific images were defaced, cutting out people's eyes and noses and, if present, the inscriptions that identified them (fig. 49.2). The targets for such treatment were carefully selected, and included, for example, the Assyrian king and queen, an Elamite collaborator with the Assyrians, and a soldier who was shown decapitating the king of Elam; the focus on men who had harmed Elamites in the past suggests that descendants of those people participated in the destruction (Reade 1976, 105). The men who demolished the images did not use sledgehammers to smash everything in sight, but ritually annihilated especially despised images to render them powerless (Bahrani 1995). Most likely the Medes and Elamites focused on King Ashurbanipal, who had sacked the capital city Susa of Elam in western Iran, while the Babylonians directed their anger against King Sennacherib, who had annihilated Babylon. To identify the correct people, they must have walked through the palaces and careful studied the intricate reliefs, reading inscriptions when available. They did so before they burned down the buildings.

*Figure 49.2 (right page) Detail of a relief showing a defaced soldier. Nineveh, Iraq; room V, SW Palace; 7th century BC; gypsum; in situ until 2016. All rights are reserved to Angelo Rubino, ISCR (High Institute for Conservation and Restoration, Rome), MIBACT (Ministry for Cultural Assets and Environments, Rome).*

Why was Nineveh so thoroughly destroyed? An unusual document written for Nabopolassar gives us insight in the matter. It is a declaration of war in which the attacker lists the former crimes of Assyria against Babylon: 'You became hostile to Babylon, [the

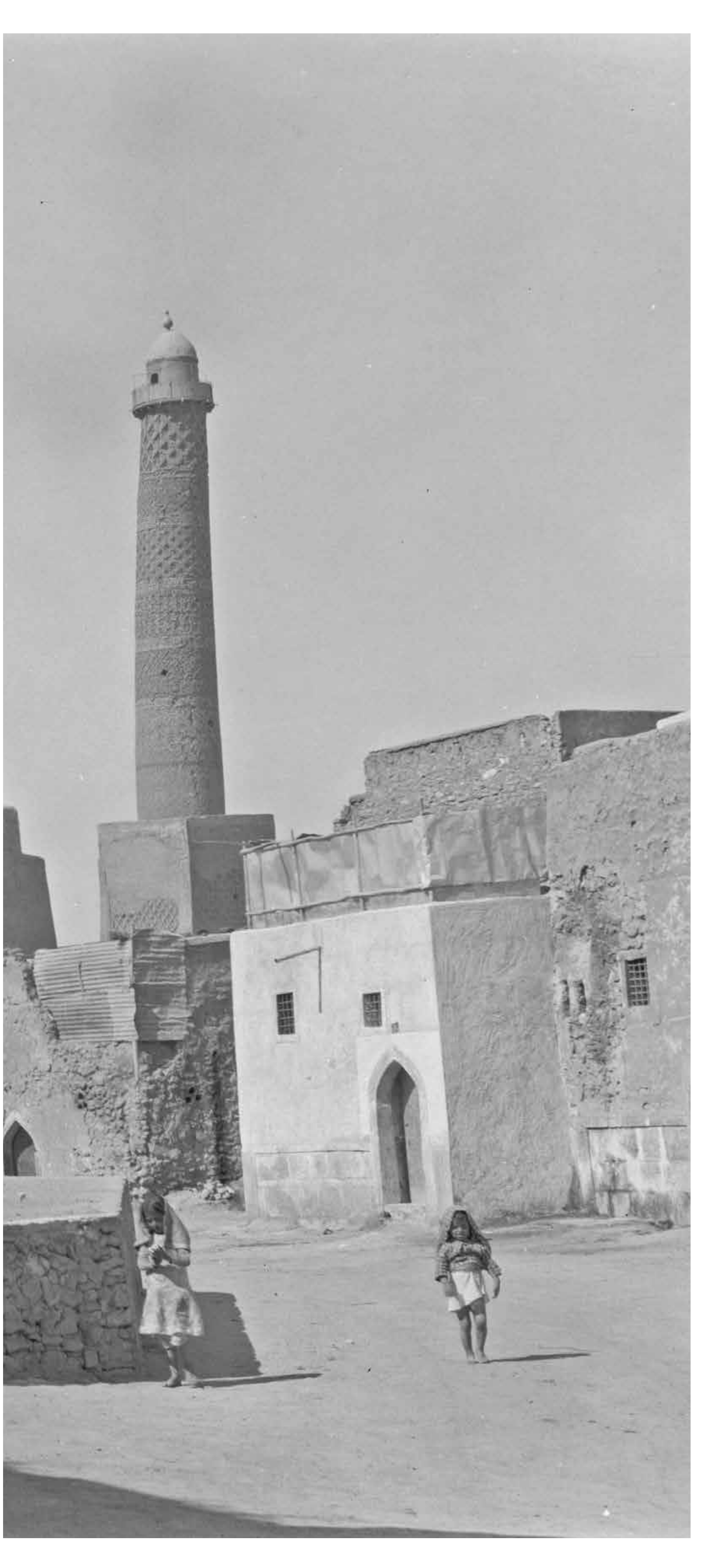


booty] of the lands you plundered and removed to Assyria. The property of the Esagila [*i.e.*, the god Marduk's temple] and Babylon you brought out and sent [to Nineveh]. You killed the elders of the city'. Nabopolassar vouched to do the same to Nineveh: 'I shall avenge Babylon. The property of the Esagila and Babylon I shall bring down … The wall of Nineveh, which is made of stone, by the command of Marduk, the great lord, I shall pile up like a mound of sand. [The city] of Sennacherib, son of Sargon, child of a domestic slave, conqueror of [Babylon], plunderer of Babylonia, its roots I shall pluck out and the foundations of the land I shall obliterate' (fig. 49.3; Gerardi 1986, 35-6). He clearly refers to the sack of Babylon by Sennacherib, which took place in 689 BC, some 75 years before the attack on Nineveh. No one lived to remember that event, but people could still read Sennacherib's description of it, which was especially vivid and detailed. It had been a daring deed and Sennacherib's Assyrian successors had struggled with its aftermath, as it pitted the Assyrian against the highest god of the Babylonian pantheon, Marduk. Nabopolassar portrayed himself as taking revenge for this misdeed and he re-enacted what Sennacherib had done – or at least, he repeated Sennacherib's claims in his own writings. This we know, not from preserved Babylonian texts, but from later accounts by Biblical and Greek authors, who must have had access to such materials, as the details of their stories show.

*Figure 49.3 Clay tablet with a stylized declaration of war. A Babylonian king, most likely Nabopolassar, accuses the Assyrian king of having become an enemy since he took Babylonian temple treasures to Nineveh. Babylon, Iraq; 626-605 BC; clay; L 12.7 cm, W 9.8 cm; British Museum, London (1882,0704.40/BM 55467). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

The biblical prophet Nahum (it is unclear exactly when he lived) and the Greek historian Ctesias, who stayed at the Persian court around 400 BC, both report that Nineveh was flooded on purpose during the Babylonian attack. It is very difficult to find a factual explanation for such a feat, however inventive modern scholars have been, and it makes much more sense to read the statements as inspired by a piece of Babylonian rhetoric in imitation of the Assyrian accounts of Babylon's sack. In those, Sennacherib had declared that he washed away Babylon from the face of the earth by diverting the Euphrates River, and that he had returned its site to the primordial condition of watery chaos. Nabopolassar must have claimed the same for Nineveh, even if this was physically impossible. He did unto Nineveh as had been done to Babylon. Ctesias continued his

story with a description of the death of Sardanapalus, that is, the last great Assyrian emperor Ashurbanipal rather than the much less famous Sin-šarru-iškun (reigned c. 627-612 BC), who, according to the Babylonian chronicle, had died during the siege. Sardanapalus prepared a gigantic pyre, heaped up all his gold and silver, and locked himself into a chamber in its midst together with his concubines and eunuchs, before he set fire to the whole. This tragic end so fascinated European romantics of the early nineteenth century that they fantasized about it years before the actual archaeological exploration of Nineveh (De Hond, this volume). Most famous today is Eugène Delacroix's painting from 1827, *The Death of Sardanapalus*, now in the Louvre, in which he let loose his imagination, depicting the Assyrian as a Middle Eastern sultan reclining in apathy on his lavish couch, surrounded by nude harem women (fig. 4.4). The reality must have been quite different, but the sack of Nineveh was indeed an important event in the history of the ancient Near East, one that through the ages rightly continues to intrigue.



# PART V

## Nineveh after the Destruction in 612 BC

# Part V: Nineveh after the Destruction in 612 BC

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*Daniele Morandi Bonacossi*

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# 50. Nineveh after the Destruction in 612 BC

*Daniele Morandi Bonacossi*

The sack of Nineveh in the summer of 612 BC by the combined armies of the Medes, Babylonians, Cimmerians and Scythians marked not only the momentous collapse of the Assyrian Empire, but also a violent break in the millennial history of the Assyrian metropolis. At Nineveh, extensive traces of this destruction have been identified in the palaces, temples, gates and outer town. But how did the life of the city continue after its devastation? With the exception of limited repairs to the temples of Nabû and Ištar and to the Southwest Palace, and some signs of squatter occupation in the lower town, there is little evidence to date of the city's occupation in the years immediately following its destruction. We know only of elusive traces of occupation during the subsequent period of Achaemenid domination (c. 539-330 BC). Xenophon, who passed by Nineveh (then known as Mespila) in 401 BC with the remnants of a 10,000-strong Greek mercenary army after the defeat of Cyrus the Younger at Cunaxa, mentions only a deserted city lying in ruins. Archaeological data from Nineveh would seem to confirm Xenophon's description, although Classical authors recounting Alexander's victory over Darius III at nearby Gaugamela locate the battlefield with reference to Nineveh. This suggests that the city might have remained well-known until the end of the Achaemenid period.

During the Graeco-Parthian period, Nineveh and the surrounding region became part of Adiabene, a state that emerged when the Seleucid Kingdom started to fragment. The discovery of Hellenistic coins and two inscriptions at Nineveh, together with Hellenistic ceramics from the lower town north of Kuyunjik, points to the occupation of the site between the third and second centuries BC. After the dissolution of the Seleucid Kingdom, in the second half of the second century BC Nineveh was conquered by the Parthian King Mithridates I. There is evidence of Parthian occupation at Kuyunjik, including a possible temple complex; a limestone statuette of Heracles was found in the Southwest Palace and a statue of Hermes in the lower town north of the Nebi Yunus mound. No indication of a Roman presence at Nineveh has been recorded so far, but a large number of early third century AD coins from the site reveal the city's economic connections with the Roman military outposts along the Roman eastern frontier of the Tigris.

Christianity spread into Mesopotamia from the first century AD onwards and grew rapidly, especially after the Church of the East was established in the sixth century. Nineveh became the seat of the dioceses of Nineveh and Mosul. Archaeological evidence demonstrates the strong presence of Christianity in Kuyunjik, and at Nebi Yunus a monastery dedicated to the prophet Jonah was established in the fourth century AD. The arrival of Islam in AD 637-40 led to a rapid increase in the importance of Mosul on the west bank of the Tigris, which remained the main urban centre in the region until the Ottoman period.

Sadly, the conquest of Mosul and the ruins of Nineveh on 10 June 2014 by ISIL fighters was followed by an immense wave of destruction that did not spare the city's historical, archaeological and religious heritage. The Mosul Museum and the city library

*Figure 50.1 The Great Mosque in Mosul seen from Kuyunjik, May 2008. Photograph by Diane Siebrandt.*

were severely damaged and looted; Islamic shrines, mosques, churches and monasteries were destroyed. Nor did Nineveh escape this awful devastation: two city gates (the Nergal and Maški gates), the protective roofs and the reconstructed architecture of Sennacherib's Southwest Palace, sections of the restored city walls, the medieval Nebi Yunus mosque and the underlying Assyrian palace erected by Sennacherib and completed by Esarhaddon as an armoury and military parade palace were severely damaged or entirely destroyed. Looting tunnels dug through the city walls rapidly appeared, and ISIL's abrogation of the heritage protection acts resulted in the gradual encroachment of new constructions into previously undisturbed parts of the archaeological site.

Several international initiatives by Italy, Spain, Germany and the US are currently monitoring the damage caused to Nineveh, comparing high-resolution satellite images taken before and after the occupation of the archaeological site by ISIL. An open-source crowd-funding platform will be used to recreate digitally the lost monuments of Nineveh and Mosul through virtual reconstructions.

Since the liberation of Nineveh in January 2017, the last capital of the Assyrian Empire has been awaiting its renaissance.

# 51. Nineveh in the Achaemenid Period

*John Curtis*

Traces of Achaemenid occupation at Nineveh are elusive. This is unexpected, particularly as there is evidence of Achaemenid occupation, although meagre, at all the other major centres in the Assyrian heartland, namely Nimrud, Assur and Khorsabad (Curtis 2005). It is all the more surprising in that there is evidence of occupation at Nineveh both before and after the period of Achaemenid domination (c. 539-330 BC).

For the so-called post-Assyrian period (612-539 BC) there is evidence of limited occupation at Nineveh, as there is at the other major Assyrian sites (Curtis 2003). At Nineveh itself, which may well have been the chief target of the allied Medes and Babylonians, there are extensive traces of the destruction of 612 BC, in the palaces, in the temples, in the gates and in the outer town. Reade has reviewed the evidence for occupation after the sack, and notes repairs to the Nabû Temple and later structures in the Southwest Palace (Reade 1998-2001, 428, with refs). On the site of the Ištar Temple, a wall made of chunks of marble clearly post-dates the sack of 612 BC and could be sixth century in date; other secondary walls may be Greco-Parthian (Reade 2005, 385-6). In area KG to the east of the Kuyunjik mound, excavations by the University of Berkeley uncovered three levels (4-6) which were thought 'to represent squatter occupations of probable sixth century date' (Stronach 1990, 108).

The extent of any rebuilding at Nineveh, however, is likely to have been limited, to judge from the presence in the Halzi Gate of at least a dozen bodies thought to have been killed in the assault on Nineveh in 612 BC (figs. 48.10-1; Pickworth 2005; Stronach, this volume). The bodies were left as they had fallen, to be covered by the collapsed brickwork of the gate, with no attempt made to repair the gateway.

The limited textual evidence that is available only covers the few years after 612 BC (Curtis 2003, 157-8). Thus, we know from the Babylonian chronicles that in 612 BC the Babylonian king received at Nineveh booty and prisoners from a western campaign, and in 611-610 BC the Babylonian army marched around Assyria. In 608 BC a Babylonian army followed the River Tigris into territory that formerly belonged to Urartu, presumably passing through Nineveh *en route*. Thereafter, the sources are silent. Stephanie Dalley has suggested (1993, 143ff) that a group of 25 Neo-Elamite tablets from Nineveh now in the British Museum should belong to the period after 612 BC, but Reade has argued that as they are part of the Kuyunjik Collection they should, like other tablets in the archive, be dated to the period before the destruction of 612 BC (Reade 1992; 1998-2001, 428).

This evidence for post-Assyrian occupation at Nineveh is admittedly slim, but certainly sufficient to show that there was limited occupation at the site after 612 BC. By contrast, the evidence for settlement at Nineveh in the Hellenistic, Parthian and Sasanian periods, with associated pottery and small finds, is well attested (Reade 1998b; Palermo, this volume). For part of this time, Nineveh was an important centre in Adiabene, a state which came into being when the Seleucid kingdom started to disintegrate (Reade 1998b; 2001; Marciak & Wójcikowski 2016).

*Figure 51.1 Assyrians on the Apadana reliefs at Persepolis.*

*Figure 51.2 The gateway reliefs at Pasargadae with a fish-cloaked genie inspired by Assyrian art. © Livius.org / Jona Lendering.*

Let us now review the evidence, or lack of it, for the Achaemenid period at Nineveh. Firstly, we have the testimony of Xenophon, who passed by Nineveh (Mespila) in 401 BC with the remnants of the 10,000 Greek mercenaries on their homeward march following the defeat at Cunaxa of Cyrus the Younger, whom they had come to help. He records:

> *From this place* [Larisa/Nimrud] *they marched one stage, six parasangs, to a great stronghold, deserted and lying in ruins. The name of this city was Mespila, and it was once inhabited by the Medes. The foundation of its wall was made of polished stone full of shells, and it was fifty feet in breadth and fifty in height. Upon this foundation was built a wall of brick, fifty feet in breadth and a hundred in height; and the circuit of the wall was six parasangs,* Anabasis III.IV. 10-11.

As a parasang equals about 5.5 km, this would give a figure of 33 km for the length of the walls. In fact, the wall are 12 km in length (Reade 1998-2001, 389-90), which immediately calls into question the veracity of Xenophon's account. We may also ask, given the size and height of the mounds of Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus, and the extensive area of the outer town, whether Xenephon might have been mistaken in believing the huge site to have been deserted. Reade notes (1998-2001, 428) that there must have been people in the vicinity of the site to inform Xenophon that it was called Mespila.

The archaeological record would seem to confirm Xenophon's impression, but it is unlikely to have been completely barren. The post-Assyrian occupation that we referred to above in the Nabû Temple, the Southwest Palace and the Ištar Temple could easily have persisted into the Achaemenid period, and Stronach's level 3 in area KG, sandwiched between levels 4-6, which were provisionally dated to the sixth century BC, and level 2, which was identified as Parthian, is perhaps Achaemenid. The pottery (presently unpublished) is said to be of a type not previously recorded at Nineveh (Stronach 1990). However, it has to be admitted that none of the objects or pottery published from the various excavations at Nineveh or now in the British Museum[131] are obviously Achaemenid, although the well-known difficulty of identifying Achaemenid period pottery might preclude us from recognizing Persian presence at Nineveh. It used to be thought that Nineveh was mentioned in the Cyrus Cylinder as one of the places to which cult statues were returned, but Irving Finkel has shown that this identification is based on an erroneous reading (Finkel 2013, 6, lines 30-31). Lastly, if Dalley is right that the Neo-Elamite tablets from Nineveh should be dated after 612 BC, then they could as easily be dated to the Achaemenid as to the post-Assyrian period, but as we have noted, their post-612 date is disputed.

We should now consider whether it is credible that Nineveh was only very sparsely occupied or not occupied at all in the Achaemenid period. Although by comparison with its former prosperity, Assyria was clearly impoverished in the Achaemenid period, it was not entirely destitute and may have been quite rich agriculturally. This is indicated by the depiction of Assyrians on the Apadana reliefs at Persepolis (fig. 51.1). The Assyrian delegation (VIII) brings rams, lengths of (woollen?) cloth, animal skins (probably sheepskins) and bowls. We may surmise that at this time Assyria was an area that was well known for breeding sheep. In fact, the low, undulating and seasonally lush hills of Assyria are ideal for breeding sheep and it is likely that if nothing else, Nineveh would have been an important market town. We should also remember its strategic location, probably on a branch of the Persian royal road that would have followed the east bank of the Tigris as far as Cizre, where it would have crossed the river. Another branch of the road probably crossed the Tigris at Nineveh and thence went across the Jazireh to Nisibin. Visitors may have inspected the ruins, even if there was not large scale settlement there. There is even some indication of this. Thus, it is clear that the fragmentary stone gateway reliefs in Palace S at Pasargadae, with figures that include a lion-demon, a fish-cloaked genie and a bull-man, were directly inspired by the palatial art of Assyria (fig. 51.2; Stronach 1978, 74-5). Trudy Kawami has suggested that the closest parallels to these sculptures, which date from the time of Cyrus, can be found in the palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh. If this is so, the implication might be that Persian artists visited Nineveh in the reign of Cyrus, at which time some sculptures might still have been visible. Lastly, it is interesting that Classical authors recounting the victory of Alexander over Darius III at Gaugamela refer to Nineveh to give geographical context (Reade 1998b, 65-6; Briant 2002, 380-1), perhaps implying that the city remained well-known until the end of the Achaemenid period. For all these reasons, it seems highly unlikely that there was no substantial Achaemenid occupation at Nineveh; it only remains to find it.

131 An unpublished bronze ladle handle from Nineveh in the British Museum (1905,0409.468/BM 98962), with the handle terminating in an ibex head, has sometimes been regarded as Achaemenid, but is more likely to be Hellenistic in date. Two cylinder seals from Nineveh in the British Museum (1854,0401.7/BM 89673 and 1932,1210.670/BM 136999) are probably pre-Achaemenid. See Curtis 2005, 184-5.

# 52. Graeco-Parthian Nineveh

*Rocco Palermo*

## 52.1 History

It is highly unlikely that a city such as Nineveh was immediately vacated and abandoned after the end of the Assyrian Empire. Nevertheless, the evidence from the Graeco-Parthian period is relatively vague. In the last centuries of the first millennium BC, the region of Nineveh was known as Adiabene, which most likely extended from the Tigris eastwards to the foothills of the Zagros. In 401 BC, Xenophon mentions the city by calling it *Mespila* (Anab. 3.4.10), once inhabited by Medes. The name could both refer to the Akkadian word *mušpalum* (used in Sennacherib's inscriptions referring to Nineveh) or to the Aramaic term *mšpyl'* (a light depression or a hollow in the ground), but the entire passage, as well as the correlation between *Mespila* and Nineveh, is extremely problematic (Pinker 2009, 2-5).[132]

When Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) approached the battlefield of Gaugamela, where he ultimately defeated Darius III (c. 380-330 BC), paving the way for the conquest of the former territory of the Achaemenid Empire, he certainly passed by or visited Nineveh, which lies approximately 40 km southwest of the battlefield. At the end of the first century BC, Strabo mentions the destruction of the city at the hands of the *Syrians* while narrating the military campaign of Alexander (16.1.3-4). The correlation between Nineveh and Gaugamela is also present in Diodorus of Sicily (17.53) and in Tacitus (12.13). Here the existence of a *castellum* at *Ninos* (Nineveh) is also mentioned: a possible clue for a military presence of some sort in the early centuries of our era.

Despite the proximity of Nineveh to Gaugamela, however, there is no indication of a symbolic (re)foundation of the site in the Seleucid period (4th – 1st century BC). One might expect a re-naming such as *Nicopolis* or *Nicephorion,* which may have been given to the Jebel Maqloub, not far from Nineveh and overlooking the supposed location of the battle, east of the Tigris.

A coin hoard (2nd – 1st century BC) could prove, according to Le Rider (1967, 4-17), the existence of a mint in the city, mostly because of the unlikely mobility of a hoard and the presence, on a single coin (no. 597), of the legend 'close to the Tigris', a formula commonly used in other Hellenistic cities when specific geographic features became fundamental parts of the name. Other coins have been unearthed: one from the reign of Antiochus IV (175-164 BC), an unidentified one from the area north of Kuyunjik (fig. 52.1), and a coin from the reign of Antiochus VII (138-129 BC).

Neither are there archaeological or textual indications of the municipal organization of Nineveh in the Hellenistic period. An inscription in Greek on a column found in the Nabû Temple might aid a possible reconstruction. Although the only surviving evidence of the artefact is a photo taken by Thompson (Thompson & Hutchinson 1929b, 140-2; Reade 1998b), the inscription is easily readable as a dedication by Apollophanes, son of Asclepiades, on behalf of Apollonios, who is remembered here as general and overseer

132 On Nineveh between the Assyrians and Alexander, see Curtis, this volume.

*Figure 52.1 A 2016 Bing satellite image of the area of Nineveh within modern Mosul. Green dots indicate the supposed locations of the evidence mentioned in the text. Courtesy of Bing 2016/ map by R. Palermo, adapted from Reade 1998b, 67.*

of the city (both titles attested also at Dura Europos) and it is dated to 32/31 BC. Further evidence for the municipal organization, dated alternately to the very early first century AD or to the mid-second century AD, comes from the area south of Kuyunjik: it is a Greek dedicatory inscription on a reused Assyrian altar, made by a certain Apollonios (identified as *archon*, 'civic magistrate'), son of Demetrios, 'to the city'.

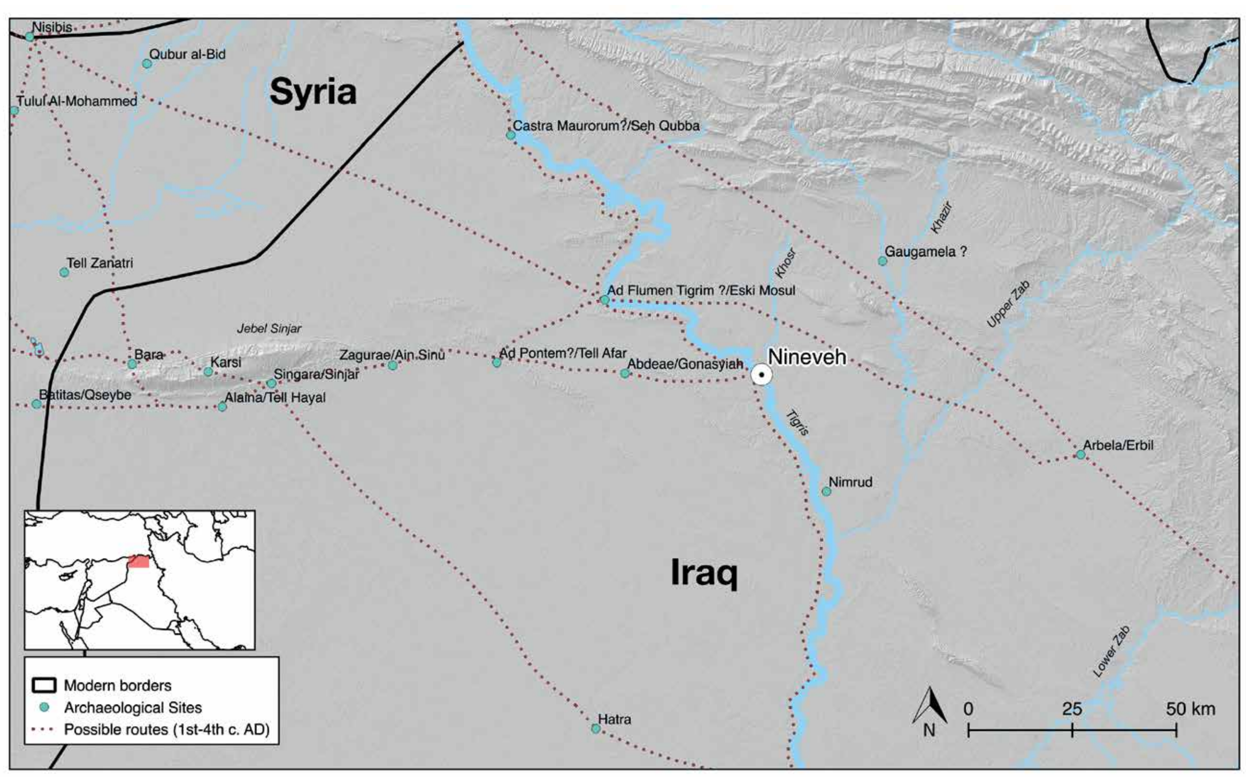
After the dissolution of the Seleucid kingdom, Nineveh was conquered by the Parthians (Mithridates I) in the second half of the second century BC and, later, by Tigranes I of Armenia (90 BC). Reconquered by the Parthians in the first century AD (the event is also mentioned by Tacitus), Nineveh and its surroundings were probably, but not certainly, visited by Roman troops on multiple occasions, perhaps during the easternmost military operations under Trajan (115-116 AD), Lucius Verus (166 AD), Septimius Severus (195-199 AD), Caracalla (216 AD) and, as a consequence of Adiabane's support for the Sasanian kingdom, during the campaigns of Alexander Severus (232 AD), Gordian III (234 AD), Galerius (298 AD) and possibly Julian (363 AD). During Julian's military campaigns, Ammianus Marcellinus visited Nineveh, describing it as a *great city in Adiabane* (18.7.1). The city continued to exist during the Sasanian throughout the Islamic period, until it was eventually eclipsed in importance by Mosul.

## 52.2 Archaeology

The layout of Seleucid Nineveh is barely perceivable through the archaeological record, and only a possible gap in the southern defensive wall and the vaulted structure of the Damlamajah spring, east of the city, are supposedly dated to this phase (Reade 1998b, 75-6). There is also no indication of a residential area, although several Hellenistic sherds were found north of Kuyunjik (notably fragments of the so-called *fish plates*), which at least indicate a Seleucid period occupation. Recent archaeological investigations have

Figure 52.2 A (right) limestone statue of Herakles Epitrapezeios sitting on a rock. Nineveh, Iraq; AD 1-50; limestone; H 52.9 cm; British Museum, London (1881,0701.1). © Urban / Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 52.3 (bottom) The location of Nineveh in the context of the Roman eastern frontier between the late second and the fourth centuries AD. Map produced by R. Palermo.



also demonstrated how the entire region was densely settled in the Hellenistic/Seleucid period, evidence which leaves almost no doubt as to the occupation of Nineveh as well (Morandi Bonacossi & Iamoni 2015; Palermo 2016).

The Parthian period, by contrast, is better represented. Besides some sporadic grave goods (some of which include Roman imperial coins), two levels of occupation are attested at Kuyunjik, including a functional mud brick platform on the south-eastern slope and a possible temple complex, both dated to the 'Parthian period' (Stronach 1990, 107). Parthian ceramics were also unearthed at Kuyunjik, whereas the presence of some Terra sigillata sherds (the most representative pottery of the Roman world) might testify the trans-regional contacts of its inhabitants. A bone handle with a Parthian name ('Tiridates [son] of Bay') and an inscribed scapula,[133] found in the Nabû Temple area, have been dated to this phase. A significant piece of evidence of the Parthian period also comes from the Southwest Palace: it is a limestone statuette of Herakles Epitrapezeios (seated), now in the British Museum (fig. 52.2), which recalls a Lysippos bronze model (Bollati 2007, 174). The Greek inscription on the base commemorates the dedication (in fulfilment of a vow) made by 'Sarapiodoros son of Artemeidoros', whereas a second one, less readable, tells us: 'Diogenes made it'. The cult of Herakles/Nergal is extensively attested by similar findings throughout Northern Mesopotamia in the Seleucid-Parthian period. Other sculptural findings come from this location: a sandaled foot, a carved architrave and a re-modelled Assyrian capital with acanthus leaves, very similar to those found at Hatra, a major Parthian city and religious centre c. 95 km southwest of Nineveh. Another Greek inscription[134] on a base (on which were originally placed three small statuettes, now almost completely lost) seems to be paleographically similar to the one from the Herakles. The inscription simply reads: 'for luck' (perhaps a reference to the Tyche, a sort of civic goddess associated with many cities from the Hellenistic period onwards). All these pieces of evidence are dated to the second and the third centuries AD.

Although the majority of these objects were found on Kuyunjik, there are some indications that the city also extended into the surrounding area. North of Nebi Yunus mound, for instance, a Hermes statue was unearthed in a structure that might resemble that of a temple with an Assyrian architectural layout. Stylistically, the statue is reminiscent of the Parthian cultural sphere and it is dated between the second and the third centuries AD. The presence of significant remains in zones other than the two easily defendable hills might also indicate more extensive occupation of the site during Hellenistic and Parthian times, though to a lesser extent than in the Assyrian period.

The strategic location of Nineveh during the military confrontations between the Romans and the Sasanians in the third and fourth centuries AD may be mirrored by some scattered but significant finds. Most of these are forms of military equipment: iron buckles, mounts and fibulae. An iron mount[135] depicting an eagle and the legend CON OPTIME MAXIME, which stands for '*conserva optime maxime*' (preserve [us], best and greatest [of the gods]) is particularly significant. The eagle in the middle is reminiscent of the Roman cultural sphere: mounts such as this one are common in third-century AD contexts along the Roman frontiers, both in Europe and in North Africa (Reade 1999, 286-8). Parts of helmets were also discovered at Kuyunjik, roughly dated to the Parthian and/or Sasanian period.

There is no indication of a Roman presence at Nineveh, but a substantial number of coins found scattered all over the site and dated to the early years of the third century AD reveal the city's economic connections during this phase. The proximity of the Roman military outposts along the Tigris (*Ad Pontem*, possibly Tell Afar, and *Ad Flumen Tigrim*, not far from modern Mosul) may have encouraged the circulation of people and goods in the period between the late second and the fourth centuries AD (fig. 52.3).

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133 British Museum, London (DT.503/BM 127401).

134 British Museum, London (1856,0903.1504/BM 115642).

135 British Museum, London (1930,0508.133).

# 53. Nineveh and the City of Mosul

*Hikmat Basheer Al-Aswad*

Nineveh and Mosul: two names for one and the same city, a site of human occupation from the seventh millennium BC (fig. 53.1). The history of Nineveh is well known. It reached its apex in the seventh century BC, when it became the capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Russell *et al.* 1997, 95) and probably the largest city in the world. Shortly after its complete destruction in 612 BC (Van De Mieroop, this volume), the rest of the Assyrian Empire also collapsed, having been a world power for more than 700 years. Nineveh was abandoned and only sporadically visited (Curtis, this volume). When the Greek historian Xenophon passed through the Assyrian heartland in 401 BC, he discovered the great city of Assyria, destroyed and looted. But the Assyrian people did not become extinct; some of them remained in the surroundings (Parpola 1999) and others moved towards the Assyrian mountains, known as Kurdistan today.

## 53.1 From Mépsila to Mosul

Whereas the ancient city of Nineveh is well studied, the occupation history of the west bank of the Tigris is often forgotten. Archaeological and historical information has proven that this settlement dates back at least to the Middle Assyrian period, when Nineveh, on the east bank of the river, was an important political and religious centre. During this and the succeeding Neo-Assyrian period, the Assyrians constructed several strongholds to defend their capital. One of these strongholds was situated on the western side of the Tigris, directly opposite its centre. It was set on a mound that is known today as Tell Kulaiat (Al-Tabari 1979, 35-6). After the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC, some of the former residents seem to have moved to this mound. It was this place that was mentioned by Xenophon in his Anabasis (III.iv.10) when he visited the region in the late fifth century BC: 'a fenced castle dilapidated and abandoned, located near the city of Mespila'. The word 'Mespila' originates most likely either from the Assyrian word 'mushpallu' (Black *et al.* 2000, 222), which means the lower floor or lower ground, or 'mashpel', meaning dilapidated or damaged. After the arrival of the Greeks, the name was changed into 'Maciel' or 'Moselle', and slowly developed into 'Mawsil' or 'Mosul', the modern name of one of the largest cities in the Republic of Iraq. In its current Arabic form, the city's name means 'meeting place', and it is said to be the bridge between the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant (Al-Hamadani 1885, 128).

## 53.2 Christianity in Nineveh and Mosul

Historical documents indicate that Christianity spread into Mesopotamia from the first century AD onwards (Baumer 2006, 15-6). The Assyrians were the first people to be converted; a process that, intriguingly, followed the biblical prophecy made by Isaiah many centuries previously (Isaiah 19:24). Arameans also embraced Christianity and Aramaic became the main language for expressing their religious rites, and later the

*Figure 53.1 The old city of Mosul, 2009. Photograph UNESCO.*

language of all missionaries. The Jewish community, which was already living in the area when the missionaries arrived, would also essentially be merged into the Christian groups (Al-Aswad & Khodady 2013, 15-6). All of these groups developed into parishes and were the ancestors of the Syriac people that live in Mosul today (Abona 2004, 151). Christianity grew rapidly from the sixth century AD onwards, especially due to the founding of the Church of the East. Mesopotamia was organized into dioceses, among them the dioceses of Nineveh and Mosul (Habi 2001, 17-34). Archaeological evidence indicates a strong Christian presence in Kuyunjik (Simpson 2005, 289-99). At Nebi Yunus, a monastery was established even earlier, in the fourth century AD, to honour the prophet Jonah. One century later, during the Byzantine period, this building became the seat of the Bishop of Nineveh. After the arrival of Islam in AD 637-640, the position of Mosul on the west bank of the Tigris increased rapidly in importance, and in AD 650 the episcopal seat was transferred to this town.

### 53.3 Mosul during the Islamic period

Mosul and other villages on both sides of the river Tigris fell peacefully into Muslim hands in AD 637, and Mosul developed into a flourishing town. It saw the foundation of religious institutions and the construction of several public facilities, streets, castles, palaces, marketplaces, schools, mosques, churches and other buildings. Mosul became a regional centre, reaching its peak under the rule of Badr al-Din Lu'lu' (died in 1259), one of the Islamic leaders in the thirteenth century (fig. 53.2; Al-Sayegh 1923, 28-45). Certainly the most prominent architectural achievement of this time was the beautifully decorated Al-Nuri mosque, constructed by Nur ad-Din Zangi (1118-1174) in c. 1170 (Al-Jumie 1992, 298). The minaret, almost 50 metres high and with two flights of stairs leading to the top, was until its destruction in 2017 one of the highest in Iraq.

*Figure 53.2 (top) Gold coin of Badr al-Din Lu'lu'. Mosul, Iraq; 1233-1258; gold; H 2.8 cm, W 2.9 cm; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (CM.PG.6743-2006). © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.*

*Figure 53.3 (bottom) Coin of Nasir Al-Din Mahmud depicting a human face. Mosul, Iraq; 1219-1233; copper; H 2.9 cm, W 3 cm; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (CM.IS.626-R). © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.*

The flourishing town became an important regional centre for metalworking during the late Islamic and Ottoman periods. It was home to schools in which the students established their own styles (Ibn al-Faqih Al-Hamawi 1997, 177). Under the Atabeg dynasty in Mosul, when the area was politically relatively stable, this industry reached a particularly high standard, something that was also noticed by the British traveller Jackson in 1767 (Al-Obeidy 1992, 410-28; Jackson 2000, 119). The metalworking industry in Mosul produced household equipment and tools, weapons, doors, tillage tools and jewellery. A typical feature was the abundance of human and animal images on the objects. The craftsmen of Mosul were famous and their products were exported to Asia and Europe (Al-Qazweny 1660, 416).

Along with the metalworking industry, as described above, coins were also minted in Mosul. When Imad Al-Din Zangi became the first Atabeg leader in 1128, he created his own coinage that was characterized by a high purity of metal and the use of Naški or Kufic inscriptions. The coins were made of copper (Floos), silver or bronze (Dirhams) and gold (Dinars). Some of the coins depicted representations of humans or animals, a rare phenomenon in the late Islamic period (fig. 53.3; Al-Husseni 1960, 30-6).

## 53.4 Mosul and Nineveh in recent times

From the early Islamic period onwards, the inhabitants of Mosul viewed the heritage of their community, which included the remains of Nineveh, with pride. Nineveh was considered to be one of the most important cities of the ancient world and part of the long history of Greater Mesopotamia. It played and still plays an important role in

*Figure 53.4 The city of Mosul in the early twentieth century. Courtesy of the American Colony, Jerusalem.*

several religious traditions, including the Christian and Islamic ones. The writers of the Old Testament, Classical authors such as Herodotus and Xenophon, and many Arab and Islamic historians and geographers knew of Nineveh, and some visited the ancient ruins and Mosul (Qasha 1977, 377-407). Archaeological explorations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the discovery of thousands of intriguing Assyrian objects changed Nineveh from an enigmatic and lost city into a real and existing symbol of beauty and power.

The inhabitants of Mosul began to care for their heritage and culture in the late nineteenth century, much earlier than in other Iraqi cities. The remains of Nineveh were seen as an on-site museum that was used for education (students and schools), but also for picnics and family gatherings. The aim was to spread knowledge about a common past and to motivate people's interest in their own history. Archaeological sites such as Nineveh represent an important period in the nation's past, something that is shared by all Iraqis. One important message that has been exemplified in Mosul and Nineveh is that you should not look to the future without examining the past.

The Mosul Museum (fig. 53.5), founded in 1952, is a good example of the degree of cultural interest shown by the city's residents. It is considered to be the most important museum in Iraq after the National Museum in Baghdad. The present building was constructed in 1974, covering an area of 1,500 m$^2$ and consisting of exhibition galleries, offices, lecture halls, a library and a store for antiquities. The exhibition is divided into four rooms: prehistory, Assyria, Hatra and the Islamic period. After it was exposed to looting in 2003, the museum was renovated and re-installed in April 2009, with the help of UNESCO museology expert Stuart Gibson. It was officially opened three years later and was once again able to receive students from schools and colleges; at least, until the arrival of ISIL.

## 53.5 Mosul, Nineveh and ISIL

On 10 June 2014, ISIL militants took control of the city of Mosul and the ruins of Nineveh. They immediately started to destroy most of the city's historical, archaeological and religious symbols in order to erase the roots and identity of the population. One low-point was the destruction of the Mosul Museum, which was broadcast to the world on 26 February 2015 (Brusasco 2016). As a consequence, archaeological sites in the surroundings of Mosul, including Nineveh, were exposed to looting and destruction. In the area of Mosul, the damage resulting from the recent crisis has been severe: several cultural institutes, including museums, libraries and public archives, have been looted; more than 25 shrines, 37 churches and monasteries and 70 mosques have been wilfully destroyed; and the site of Nineveh was razed to the ground in 2016 (Bianchi *et al.*, this volume). Nineveh has fallen twice in its long history, and it can only be hoped that the evidence that does remain can be protected forever.

*Figure 53.5 The Mosul Museum, October 2008. Photograph by Diane Siebrandt.*

*Figure 53.6 Google image of the modern city of Mosul and Nineveh in the centre.*

# 54. Monitoring Damage to Iraqi Archaeological and Cultural Heritage: the Case of Nineveh

*A. Bianchi, S. Berlioz, S. Campana,*
*E. Dalla Longa, D. Vicenzutto and M. Vidale*

Between December 2014 and March 2016, the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism undertook an initiative, promoted by its International Co-operation office (MAECI), to safeguard Iraqi cultural heritage. Forming part of a project financed by the General Directorate of Development Cooperation and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the initiative was managed in collaboration with the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities. The aim was to assess and monitor the degree and extent of damage that ISIL had inflicted on Iraqi archaeological and cultural heritage through an analysis of recent high-resolution satellite imagery.

The first step in our project was to create a database of archaeological and cultural heritage sites in Northern Iraq from prehistory up to the Ottoman period, organized in line with the internal administrative division of the five Iraqi governorates (Nineveh, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, Diyala and Anbar). We listed around 2,000 sites and monuments that had been dug or reported since the mid-nineteenth century, and we are currently extending the survey to all sites and features visible in the presently declassified Corona satellite images from the 1960s. At the same time, we monitored and evaluated damage in selected sample areas through the analysis of recent high-resolution satellite imagery taken before and after the occupation by ISIL, drawing up technical reports on the damaged sites and monuments, including historical background, a description of the property, damage assessment and a typology of the damage. We are updating this growing body of information with a critical evaluation of incoming media reports, and are also taking information from related scientific projects into account.

The sample areas, selected in close collaboration with Iraqi colleagues from the State Board of Antiquities, were the five great Assyrian capitals – Assur, Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin) and Nineveh – and the historical centre of Mosul. In the coming months we will monitor new areas in the governorates of Nineveh and Salah al-Din. In January and February 2016, in collaboration with the Baghdad State Board of Antiquities, we transferred know-how on remote sensing technologies and archaeological mapping (GIS-based) to our Iraqi colleagues so that they would be able to pursue the same lines of enquiry independently. Concerning Nineveh, we have compared archived images taken on 15 November 2013 – thus before the occupation by ISIL – with images taken on 29 August 2015 (fig. 54.1); more images of the same area will become available in the coming months.

By comparing the old images with more recent ones, we were able to do a preliminary identification of different types of damage. Some attacks on the Nineveh archaeological complex that were 'marketed' to the world by ISIL and later amplified by the media are not easily recognizable from the satellite images. This is the case for the repeated

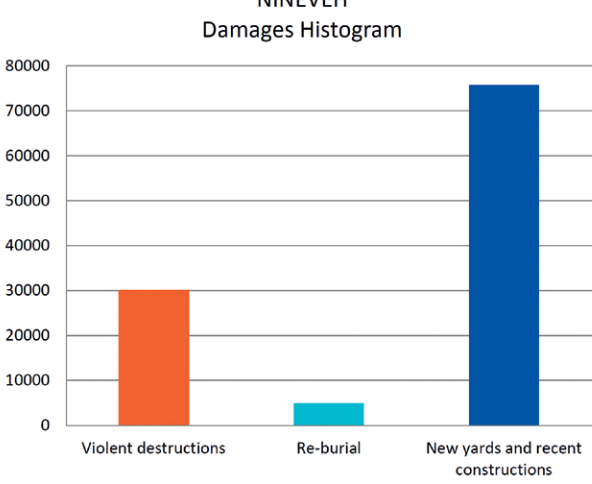



*Figure 54.1 (top) A satellite image of the archaeological complex of Nineveh, showing the localized damage identified up to August 2015. The white stars show the loci of more recent tunnels, probably dug by looters, located by American colleagues at ASOR up to April 2016. The arrow marks a recent parking lot for trucks and a nearby earthen rampart across the river that was not visible in 2015.*

*Figure 54.2 (left) A bar graph showing the extent (sq m) of various types of damage at Nineveh recognized on satellite images up to August 2015. New illegal constructions, the most important disturbance, probably attest to the ongoing privatization of the site's land.*

*Figure 54.3 Two satellite views (a and b) of part of Sennacherib's wall near the south-eastern corner of the fortification, taken in November 2013 and August 2015, respectively. A part of the wall was destroyed with bulldozers to open up a wide dirty road, while the pond visible in figure 3a, which seems to surround a mound, was also drained.*

blasting of the 'city walls' in late January/early February 2015: this attack needs to be independently verified, because – without underplaying the significance of this destruction – the greatest part of the damaged architecture was made up of low-quality modern reconstructions. Neither could the criminal, irreparable vandalizing of the colossal Assyrian sculptures at the Nergal Gate (Salih, this volume), protected under a roofed construction, be identified through our satellite images.

The archaeological area west of the Nebi Yunus Mosque – a complex that was completely destroyed by ISIL in July-August 2014 – was also affected. On this occasion, part of the rubble that was produced was dumped into the archaeological trench immediately to the west, which had previously preserved on site some Assyrian ruins of the so-called Armory of the Esarhaddon Palace. Near the south-eastern corner of Sennacherib's fortification (a 6-m-high stone retaining wall surmounted by a 10-m-high and 15-m-thick mud brick wall, with regularly spaced projecting stone towers), a substantial part of the defence wall, and possibly the edges of a minor mound that rose just outside the urban defences, were severely damaged by bulldozers (figs. 54.2-3a). This appears to be a major drainage and surface-levelling yard for paving the way to a planned metal road, which will cross the southern part of the walled enclosure from west to east.

Moreover, in February 2016, ASOR (Danti *et al.* 2016a)[136] reported a project to build another major thoroughfare that should cross the whole northern part of the walled area from west to east, an area that has so far been undisturbed. In the meantime, several new constructions have appeared in the archaeological site of the ancient Assyrian city. While in 2011 the percentage of new constructions encroaching the archaeological complex of Nineveh was estimated at around 46%, our data reveal that between 2011 and 2015, this percentage increased to 49%. Illegal occupation of the site's protected areas, in fact, represents by far the most widespread type of damage (fig. 54.2).

Although not all damage was visible from the satellite images, our study indicates that for up until August 2015, the above-described approach can account for the reality of what is happening on the ground and its rapid development, beyond the veil of propaganda. At the time, our survey suggested that the main damage at Nineveh was not illegal digging for antiques, but, on one hand, the systematic destruction of the old reconstructions and infrastructure built for the accommodation of tourists, regardless of the authenticity of the cultural assets; and on the other hand, the factual abrogation of the heritage protection acts, that resulted in the gradual encroachment of new constructions into previously undisturbed parts of the archaeological site.

The situation is changing rapidly, however: the most recent ASOR report (Danti *et al.* 2016b) mentions a series of new excavations, reportedly in form of tunnels dug by looters through the city wall (white stars in figure 54.1), particularly at the corners of the fortification; and, at the centre of the compound, the construction of a large parking lot and a nearby earthen bank that interrupts the course of the river (white arrow in figure 54.1). There has thus been an acceleration in the various types of illegal activities and excavations at Nineveh.

136 Files from the ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives (CHI) (http://www.asor-syrianheritage.org/) update the damage at crucial sites in Iraq and Syria, including Nineveh and the Assyrian capitals, almost in real time.

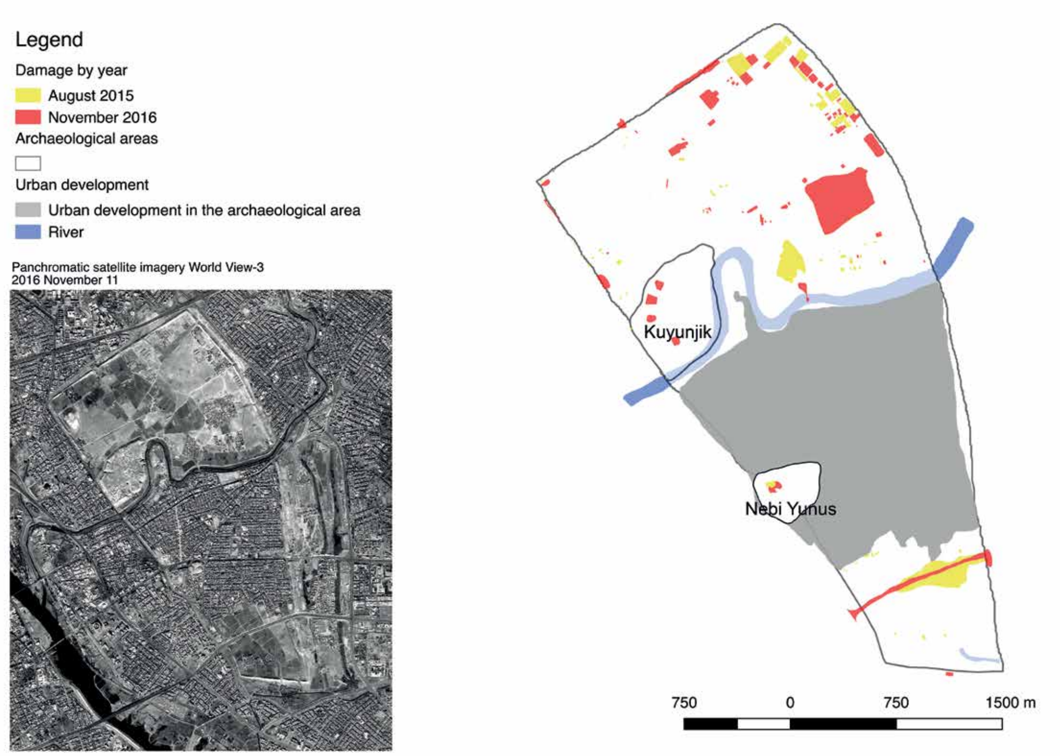



*Figure 54.4 Chronological development of various types of damage and disturbance to the archaeological complex of Nineveh from 2013 to 2016.*

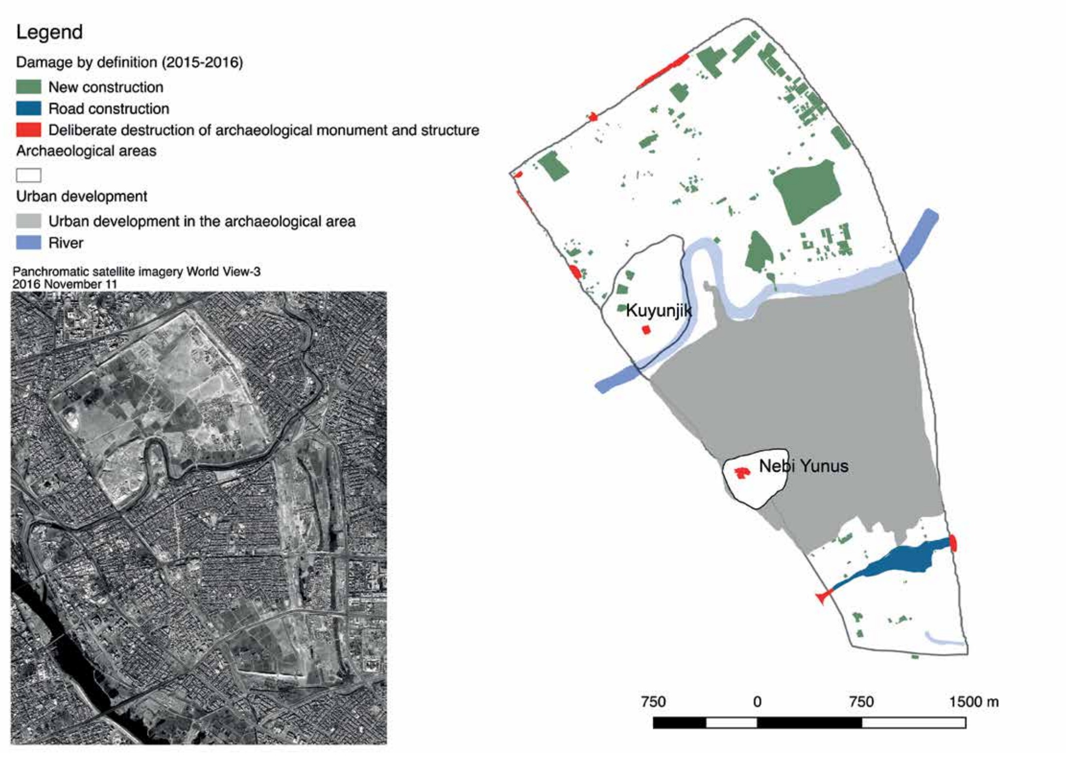



*Figure 54.5 Map of damage to the archaeological site of Nineveh (within Sennacherib's city wall), distinguished by category.*

## 54.1 An update (November 2016)

The last survey of the archaeological complex of Nineveh was made in November 2016, through careful scrutiny of World View-3 panchromatic satellite images. At the time, the archaeological area was still under military occupation by ISIL. The results are summarized in the maps in figures 54.4 and 54.5, which show, respectively, the chronological development of various types of damage and disturbance to the site from 2013 to 2016 (fig. 54.4), and the same damage distinguished into categories (new constructions and roads and the deliberate vandalizing of archaeological monuments and other features; fig. 54.5).

Figure 54.4 includes information about the destruction of the city gates (Nergal and Maški) that was widely disseminated in ISIL propaganda, as well as the systematic dismantling of the shelters and the architecture of Sennacherib's South-west Palace (Tell Kuyunjik) that, by contrast, was not 'advertised' via the media. Rubble and reliefs have apparently been moved to other locations. Figure 54.4 also confirms the trend mentioned in the previous report of the uncontrolled growth of construction in 2015 and 2016, particularly in the north-eastern corner of the area enclosed by Sennacherib's wall.

Figure 54.5 provides an impression of the intensity of building activities (houses, but also, apparently, greenhouses and well-managed orchards) in the northern sector of the compound. The green areas in the same sector also suggest that illegal occupation of the site is accelerating in accordance with some kind of plan or collective agreement, after the careful partition of land lots whose orientation is still dictated by the ancient topography of the Assyrian city. South of the river, the completion of a paved road that caused serious disturbance to the site's surface and to the city walls may have precluded, at least as far as the intentions of the illegal ISIL occupants are concerned, the further privatization of common heritage and new building activities.

# 55. Deir Mar Behnam: the Destruction of Iraq's Christian Heritage

*Bas Lafleur*

Whilst the damage and destruction of ancient sites such as Nineveh, Nimrud (ancient Kalhu) and Hatra committed by ISIL has shocked the world, the tragic loss of Iraq's rich Christian patrimony has received far less attention. The obliteration of this heritage is all the more regrettable in view of the relative lack of scholarly documentation.[137] To date, more than 70 churches and ecclesiastical institutions have been targeted throughout Northern Iraq. In Mosul and the vicinity alone some 50 churches and monasteries have been damaged or destroyed, many of which date back to the pre-Islamic and medieval periods (Al-Aswad, this volume). One example is Deir Mar Behnam (fig. 55.1), a former Syriac Orthodox monastery situated southeast of Mosul. Until its occupation by ISIL forces in July 2014, the relics of Mar Behnam attracted pilgrims of various religious groups, Christians, Muslims and Yezidis, a practice that can be traced back to the thirteenth century. Besides the religious convergence and joint Christian-Muslim veneration, the enormous scholarly importance of the monastery lies in the fact that it contains the only full programme of medieval church decoration to have survived from Iraq, as well a particularly rich collection of Syriac inscriptions.[138]

The monastery comprises a fortress-like complex, the main buildings of which are the monastic church and a separate octagonal mausoleum housing the relics of Mar Behnam. According to the hagiographical sources, it was built in the fourth century on the site of the graves of the martyrs Mar Behnam and his sister Sarah. Secure evidence of the existence of Deir Mar Behnam is encountered in the historical sources only from the twelfth century onwards, one of the earliest being a dedicatory inscription in the sanctuary of the church reporting that a significant restoration took place there in AD 1164. These restoration activities also seem to have occasioned the writing down of the life of Mar Behnam. Functioning as a monastic charter, the foundation legend of the saint provided the Syriac Orthodox Church in general, and the monastery in particular, with credentials of fourth-century origin. Considering that the Syriac Orthodox, as *dhimmis*, fell under the protection of Islamic law, which prohibited the construction or renovation of Christian houses of worship, but upheld the security of churches and monasteries that were built prior to the Islamic conquest, it makes sense to suggest that this pre-Islamic dating was the result of a deliberate hagiographical strategy aimed at safeguarding the monastery from Muslim attacks or confiscation.

137 The systematic study of medieval Christian art and architecture from the Middle East in general and Iraq in particular is a fairly recent phenomenon. For recent overviews and further references, see: Immerzeel 2009; 2017; Snelders 2010.

138 On Deir Mar Behnam, see: Snelders 2010, Ch. 6; 2012; Harrak 2010, cat. no. AE.01; Wolper 2015; all with further references.

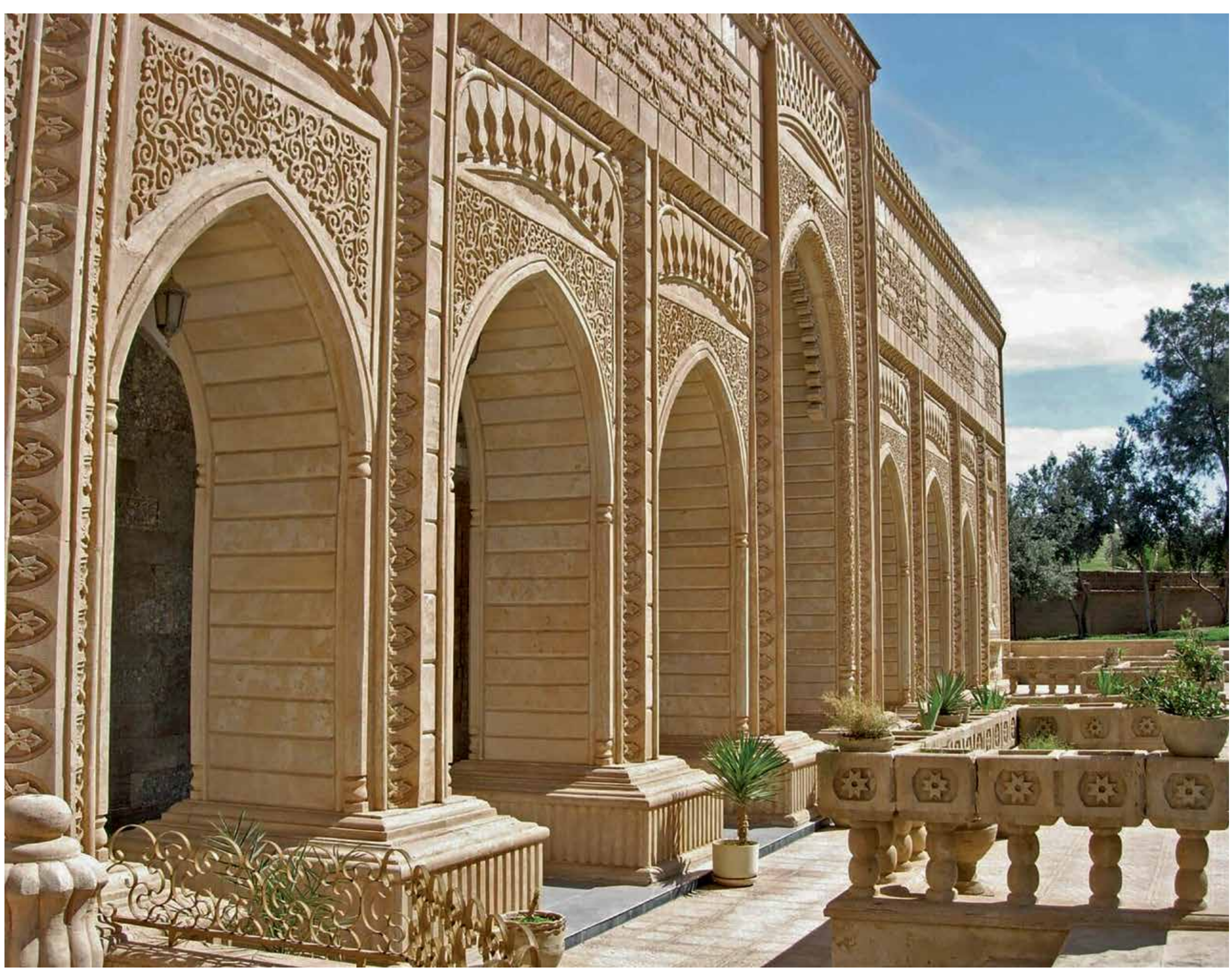


*Figure 55.1 The monastery of Deir Mar Behnam, March 2009. Photograph by Suzanne Bott.*

Similar functions appear to have been fulfilled by Deir Mar Behnam's monumental decoration (figs. 55.2-4). The decoration programme is closely tied to regional artistic developments, both in terms of style and iconography. Stylistically speaking, most of the monastery's sculptured reliefs and stuccoed domes are entirely interchangeable with those encountered in Islamic contexts in the Mosul area, especially with monuments erected or renovated by Badr al-Din Lu'lu' in the 1240s. As elsewhere in the Middle East, the region witnessed a remarkable flourishing of Christian culture during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which was characterized by intensive interaction and collaboration between Christians and Muslims on a day-to-day basis. Although at present only one medieval wall painting has come to light in the area, the output of monumental sculptural decoration, manuscript illustration and metalwork connected with this community is considerable.

As with the reliefs at Deir Mar Behnam, these works of art – perhaps with the exception of the painting – are commonly characterized by their close connections with Islamic art. In addition to a shared style, the adaptation of a wide range of interchangeable images and patterns to differing purposes illustrates the cultural symbiosis between the two communities. Nothing in the style of Deir Mar Behnam's art can properly be called 'Christian' or 'Syriac Orthodox'. This conclusion does not hold true for some of the iconographic elements of the monastic decoration programme. One of its most conspicuous features is the juxtaposition of motifs familiar from Islamic art, more specifically a rich variety of decorative patterns and animal motifs such as lions and dragons,

*Figure 55.2 The façade of the southern exterior gate at Deir Mar Behnam. Courtesy of A. Harrak Collection.*

*Figure 55.3 The Royal Gate; east wall of the nave at Deir Mar Behnam. Courtesy of A. Harrak Collection.*

with distinctively Christian themes. These include figures of saints, martyrs and monks.

In this respect, the decoration of the monastery contrasts with that of Syriac Orthodox parish churches in the Mosul area, which feature representations familiar from the 'Princely cycle', a set of images based on the pastimes of the royal court. For example, while the entrance to the sanctuary at Deir Mar Behnam is decorated with two mounted saints slaying a dragon and a devil (fig. 55.3), its counterpart in the Church of Mar Ahudemmeh in Mosul is embellished with enthroned figures holding goblets and a pair of mounted falconers. This distinction finds a parallel in the use of languages: the inscriptions at Mar Ahudemmeh are in Arabic, the language of the people – Muslim and Christian – whereas in the monastery the liturgical language, Syriac, takes a dominant position. Although the decoration of Deir Mar Behnam represents an amalgamation of Christian and non-Christian symbols, the Christian component is dominant. Obviously, the distinctively Christian elements were intended to mark off the monastic space as Christian. Moreover, the images of saints such as Mar Behnam can be considered markers of a specifically Syriac Orthodox identity. In an intricate process of interaction, the monastic community selected iconographic elements from both the local Christian and Islamic artistic traditions, and in combining them defined a position of its own.

Whilst in the case of the parish churches it is even possible to say that the intention of those responsible for their commissioning was to align themselves positively with the Muslim upper class, the decoration programme of Deir Mar Behnam, with its iconographic emphasis on the struggle between Good and Evil, and the cross as the sign of victory, was arguably much more concerned with underlining the patrons' own traditions and demarcating the boundaries between the Syriac Orthodox and the surrounding Muslims. The proliferation of Islamic *ziyara* culture at the time may have played an important role

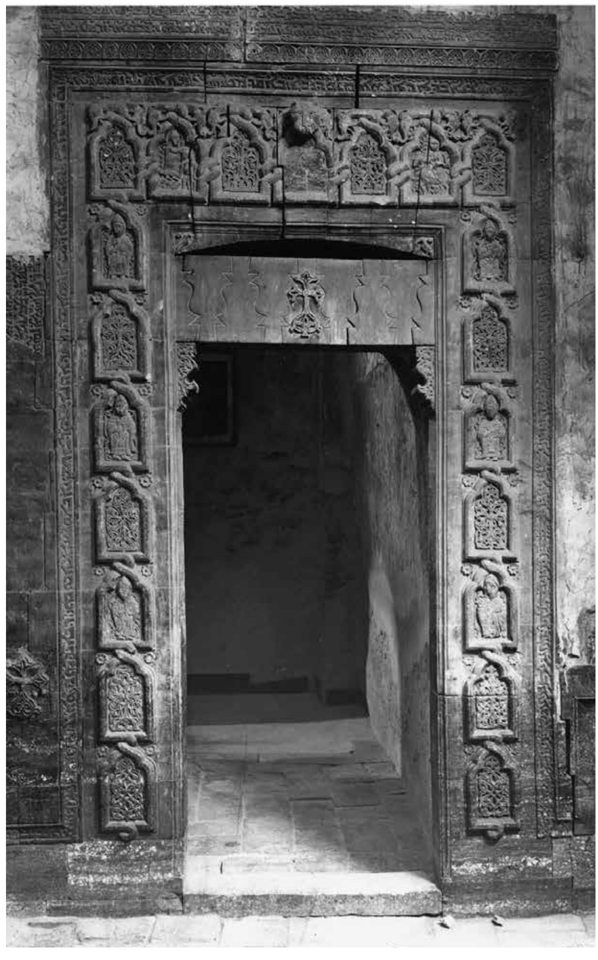


*Figure 55.4 Gate of the Two Baptisms; south wall of the nave at Deir Mar Behnam. Courtesy of A. Harrak Collection.*

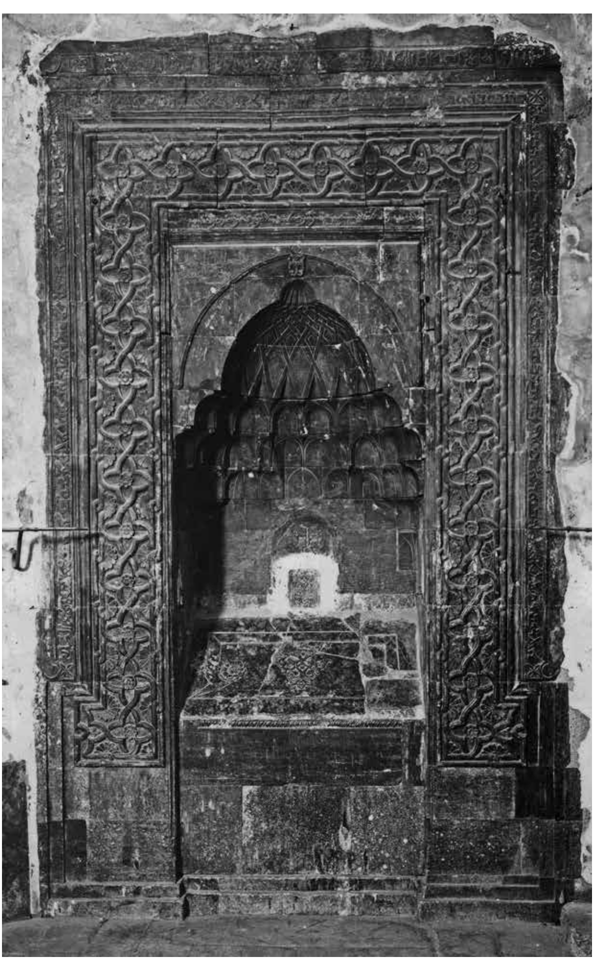


*Figure 55.5 Mausoleum of Mar Behnam at Deir Mar Behnam. Courtesy of A. Harrak Collection.*

in this respect. As the monastery was also frequented by Muslim pilgrims in search for *baraka*, it is not far-fetched to assume that the religious fluidity, which resulted from the joint Christian-Muslim veneration taking place at the site, called for a decoration programme with a more distinctively Christian profile. Perhaps the marked emphasis on the symbol of the cross, with its triumphal and apotropaic connotations for Christian viewers, but negative connotations for Muslim audiences, was intended to ward off confiscation or destruction.

Not all the architectural reliefs at the monastery belong to the same building campaign. A Syriac inscription in the nave of the church states that the monastery and the mausoleum were looted in AD 1295 by the invading Mongol army of Il-Khan Baidu. According to the inscription, the abbot of the monastery astutely reported his grievances to the Il-Khan. The abbot's diplomatic skills must have been excellent, for he was able not only to retrieve all the objects that had been stolen, but also to persuade Baidu to make a donation to the monastery's patron saint. This donation was apparently used for the construction of a new grave monument to hold the saint's relics (fig. 55.5), which were transferred to the mausoleum adjacent to the monastic church. An Uighur inscription dating from AD 1300 and placed above the monument, in which the monastery's patron saint is invoked under the name Khidr-Ilyas, reveals the Mongol contribution.

It would seem that the association between Mar Behnam and Khidr-Ilyas, a composite saint who enjoyed great popularity among Muslims at the time, was consciously forged by the monastic community itself in an ingenious attempt to safeguard the monastery from any possible future attacks. We now know that Deir Mar Behnam was never taken or destroyed by Muslims, at least not until its occupation by ISIL militants, but at the time the monastic community's concern for preserving their monastery in the face of continuing Islamic pressure must

*Figure 55.6 Still photo of the destruction of the Mar Behnam mausoleum, released by ISIL in March 2015.*

have played an important role in their daily lives and arguably affected their internal and external policies. Unfortunately, while the monastery survived the Mongol incursions of the late thirteenth century and the Nadir Shah attacks on Mosul in the eighteenth century, in March 2015 the mausoleum of Mar Behnam was completely blown up (fig. 55.6). At the time of writing, it is unknown whether the monastic church is still standing or if the sculptural reliefs are still intact, but one cannot but fear that they will also be reduced to rubble as part of ISIL's campaign to destroy Iraq's Christian heritage.

# 56. Rekrei: Crowdsourcing Lost Heritage

*Matthew Vincent and Chance Coughenour*

Rekrei, formerly Project Mosul, is an online platform for crowdsourcing digital reconstructions of lost heritage. It was established in response to the destruction of the Mosul Cultural Museum, one of many losses of cultural heritage in recent memory, which was filmed and uploaded to the Internet by ISIL. The project was founded by Matthew Vincent and Chance Coughenour, two PhD students from the University of Murcia and the University of Stuttgart, respectively, who were working together on an EU-funded research project. About ten days after the release of the videos depicting the destruction of the museum, Rekrei went live (fig. 56.1).

### What is crowdsourcing?

The term 'crowdsourcing' was coined in the mid 2000s by Jeff Howe of Wired magazine (Howe 2006). While the general public had been engaged in solving large problems in the past, the Internet has certainly allowed this phenomenon to become commonplace

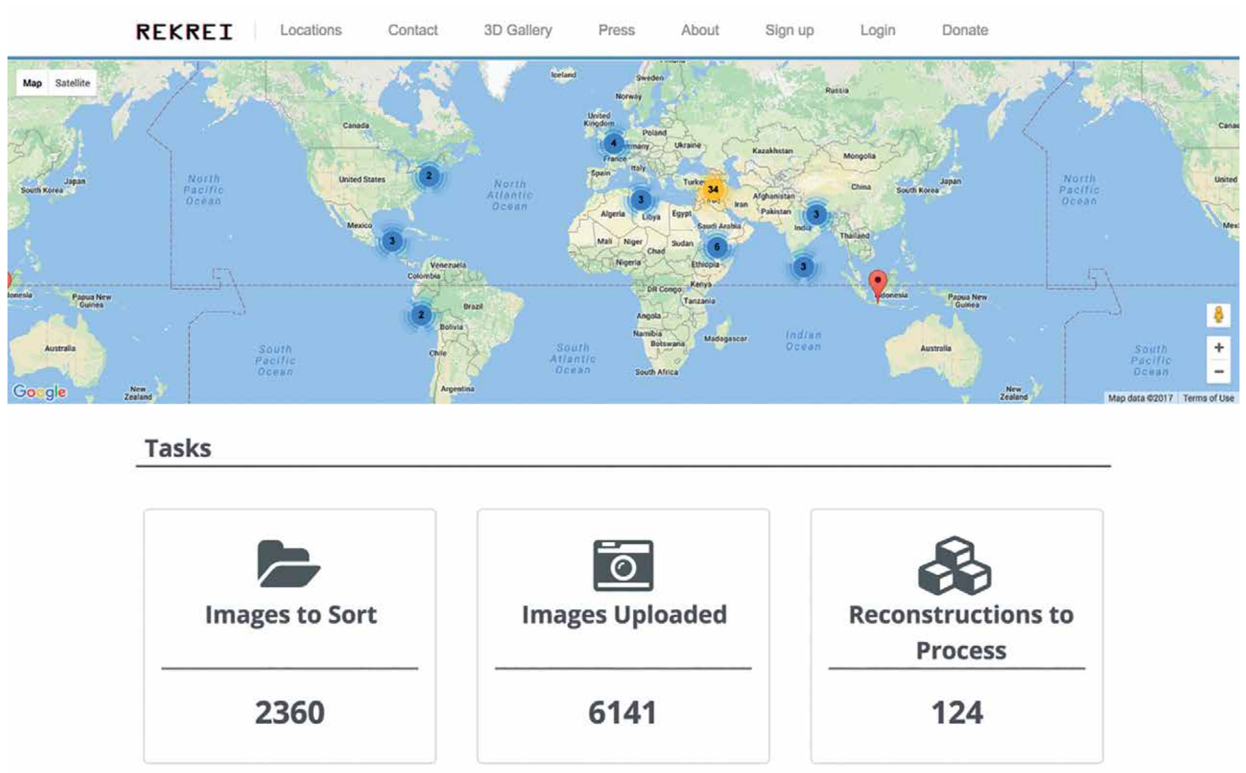



*Figure 56.1 Website of Rekrei.*

*Figure 56.2 Lost heritage map on the Rekrei website.*

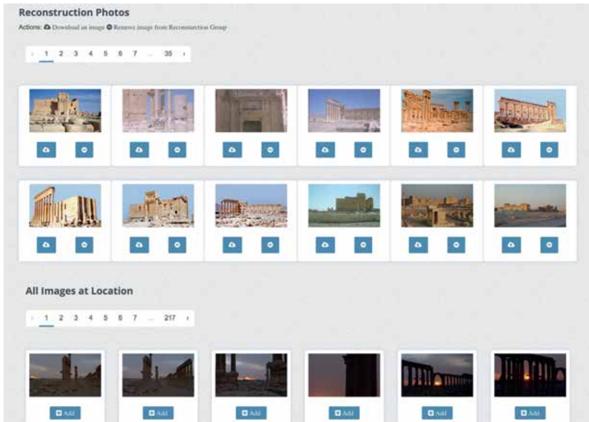



*Figure 56.3 Photographs of lost heritage on the website.*

*Figure 56.4 3D model of an entrance at the site of Nimrud, Iraq, made by Sketchfab.*

*Figure 56.5 Virtual Cultural Museum at Mosul. Courtesy of the Economist.*

in business today. Crowdsourcing can now take the form of volunteer contributions to projects, paid atomic tasks, or any number of conceivable iterations that involve harnessing the power of many minds and individuals to solve problems or deal with tasks that might have previously been assigned to single individuals.

Crowdsourcing has certainly made its way into heritage as well. Prominent projects include Heritage Together (Karl *et al.* 2014; Miles *et al.* 2014; 2016;), which crowdsources the digitization of megalithic monuments across Wales; or MicroPasts (Bevan *et al.* 2014; Bonacchi *et al.* 2014; 2015; Keinan 2014), a crowdsourcing platform for managing atomic tasks related to heritage, where specific projects can be created and presented to the public and which usually have a clear beginning and end. One book (Ridge 2014) highlights the variety of projects that used crowdsourcing to achieve specific goals, and demonstrates that it is not just the ability of this approach to achieve results, but also the sense of ownership and engagement that crowdsourcing produces amongst its participants.

## The Rekrei platform

Rekrei is an open-source platform that allows for contributions from the public, even of the tools that power the overall project. The platform itself has four major tasks: identifying sites, uploading, organizing and processing. Each of these tasks can be undertaken by any user, although the processing of the 3D reconstructions requires some expertise, or at least access to software that allows for these data to be processed. While more and more free software solutions are becoming available, the software that tends to offer the best results usually requires some sort of license.

The first task, identifying a site, is fundamental to the project. Anyone can log in to the platform and drop a pin anywhere on the globe where heritage has been lost (fig. 56.2). This is not limited to the destruction of heritage in conflict zones, but can range from a fire claiming a historic building to an earthquake or landslide, or any number of reasons why heritage has been lost. Once a pin has been dropped on the map, users are able to upload photographs to the site and start work on organizing and digitally reconstructing the material.

The second task, uploading photographs, is one that virtually any member of the public can undertake. Photographs are potentially invaluable for digitally recreating monuments, particularly photographs taken by individuals who have travelled to some of the sites where heritage has been destroyed. The ideal photograph comes from a digital camera and contains all the original EXIF data describing the sensor, lens, focal length, and so forth. Even scanned negatives and slides are useful, however, and as photogrammetric processing improves, these images may play an invaluable role in improving the 3D reconstructions.

The third task, organizing the photographs, can likewise be carried out by members of the public. Once photographs have been uploaded to a location, they are then organized into logical groups. A photograph can belong to any number of groups, and represents an effort to reconstruct a whole monument or just a part of it. Users might find that they have enough photographs to reconstruct one part of a monument, but lack sufficient coverage for other parts, and therefore organize those photographs into a group that represents the available resources. As more photographs become available, new groups can be created, or photographs added to existing groups.

The final task, that of digitally reconstructing lost heritage, does require some specialist knowledge. However, with free software available, such as Autodesk's™ ReMake, users can undertake reconstructions with little or no previous knowledge of photogrammetric processing. The final result, once processed, is uploaded to Sketchfab (fig. 56.4), where it is then presented on the 3D gallery of Rekrei, allowing the public to see and experience lost heritage through virtual means.

## Virtual museums

Rekrei was founded with the idea of one day achieving a virtual reconstruction of the Mosul Cultural Museum (fig. 56.5). Less than a year after the founding of Rekrei, RecoVR Mosul was launched as a collaboration between the Economist Media Lab and Rekrei, telling the story of the destruction of the Mosul Museum as well as the use of crowdsourcing to retell the story of lost heritage through virtual reality. We believe that virtual reality is one of the best means of preserving the memory of lost heritage, while forcing us to confront the reality of that loss. We can see, experience and interact with lost heritage through virtual reality, but when we disconnect from the virtual world, we must face the dangers of extremism and radicalization and remember that heritage everywhere forms part of a shared global past.

# 57. Building a 3D Reproduction of the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib

*Boris Lenseigne and Naphur van Apeldoorn*

Using modern 3D printing techniques to build a full-scale reproduction of a room in the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib not only allowed us to provide the public with a realistic impression of a remote site, but it also offered an interesting test case for advanced digital restoration techniques.

In order to achieve this goal, we needed detailed 3D models of the room. While a general model of the room could be built from topological data gathered during various excavations, we needed more detailed models of the bas-reliefs. The word bas-relief probably originates from the Italian word *bassorilievo*, which means 'low relief'. It describes a flat object on which sculptures are visible due to depth changes in the surface. An example is shown in figure 57.3, where the changes in height are observed as lines. Although it is possible to build 3D models of these bas-reliefs nowadays using laser

*Figure 57.1 Room V of the Southwest Palace in Nineveh, 2002. All rights are reserved to Angelo Rubino, ISCR (High Institute for Conservation and Restoration, Rome), MIBACT (Ministry for Cultural Assets and Environments, Rome).*

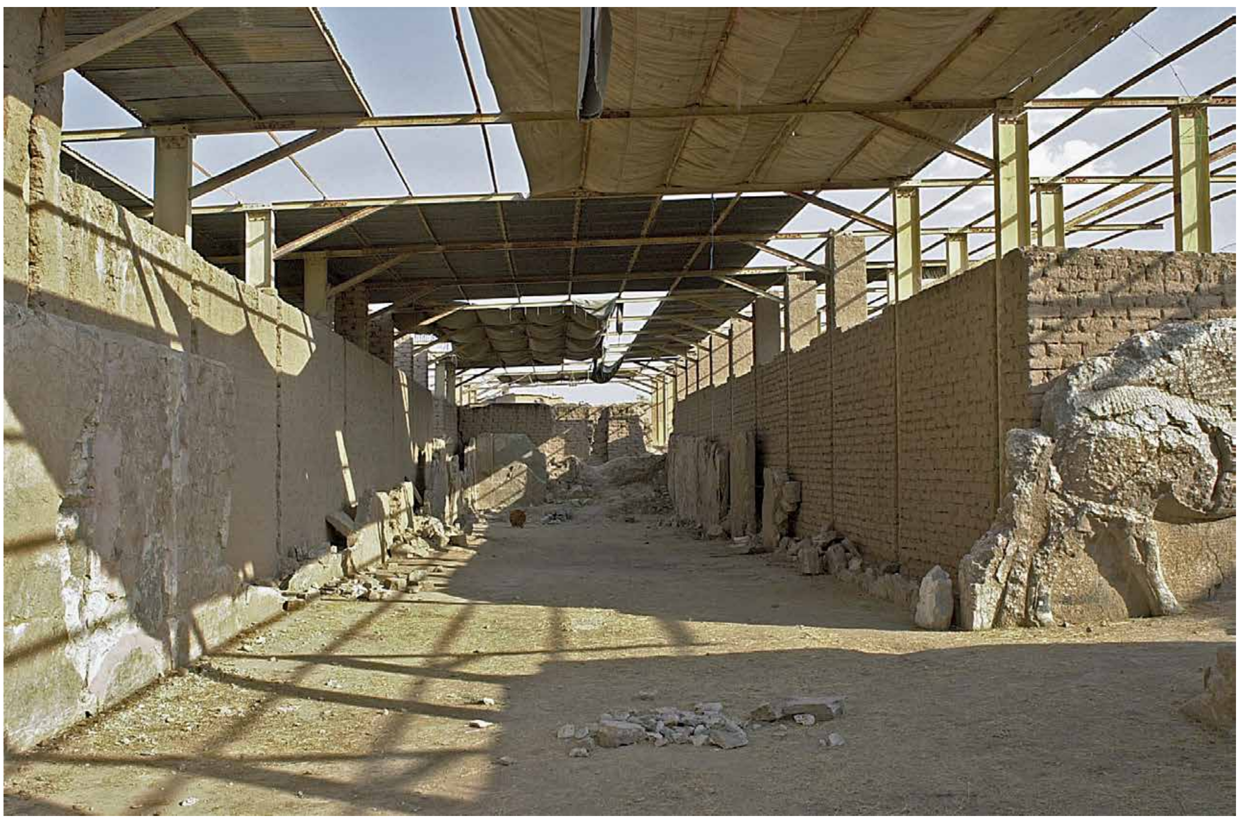


*Figure 57.2 Detail of a relief no. 34 from Room V in the SW Palace in Nineveh depicting an Assyrian soldier. This relief was used as input for the reconstruction. All rights are reserved to Angelo Rubino, ISCR (High Institute for Conservation and Restoration, Rome), MIBACT (Ministry for Cultural Assets and Environments, Rome).*

*Figure 57.3 The final surface reconstruction from the algorithm of relief no. 34. Both the stone structure and the distinctive shape of the sculpture are preserved in the final result. The next step is to create a physical reproduction.*

scanners, this requires having physical access to the site and the bas-reliefs. This is not possible in the case of Nineveh in Iraq, due to the destruction caused by the ongoing war. The only data available for reconstruction of the bas-reliefs were digital photographs taken in 2002 by an Italian team of archaeologists (fig. 57.1).[139] The photographs were not taken for the purpose of building a 3D reconstruction, which meant that we needed to design a specialized digital restoration technique in order to recover the models of

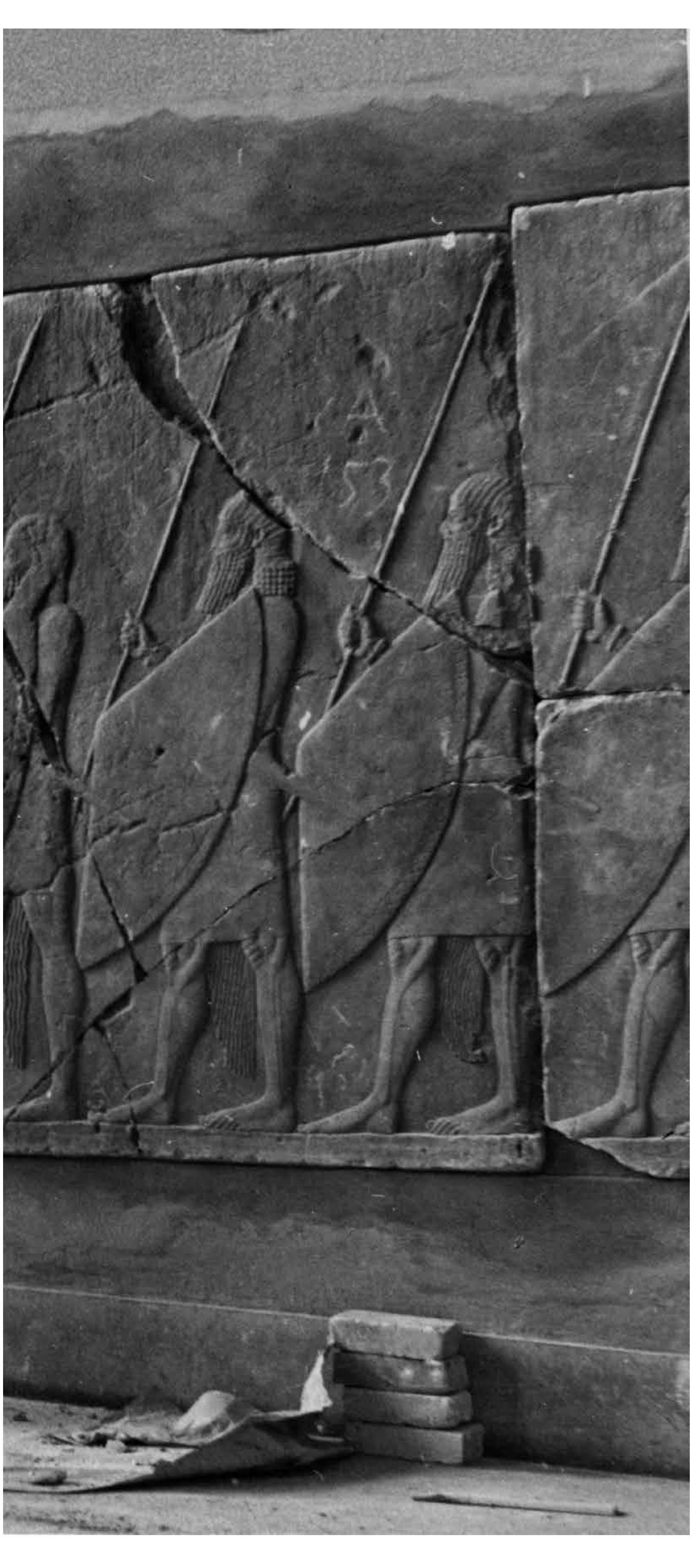
139 In 2002, on the eve of the Second Gulf War, the Central Restoration Institute in Rome (IsCR) of Italy's Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities (MiBACT) together with Centro Ricerche Archeologiche e Scavi di Torino per il Medio Oriente e l'Asia (CRAST) and the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage of Iraq, began a campaign for documenting and verifying the state of conservation of the structures of the royal suite (rooms I, IV, V) of Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh.

the bas-reliefs.[140] The digital models could be arranged together to produce a complete model, in which every separate part could be 3D-printed in order to rebuild the entire room.

When using 2D photographs, the only clue for reconstruction that can be used is the casting of light and shadows over an object. Such techniques have existed since man took his first steps on the moon; NASA used the shapes found from the shadows technique to build maps of the earth's satellite. However, the situation is slightly different for the bas-reliefs of Nineveh. First, the photographs made by NASA were made in controlled conditions with the intention of building a 3D map of the moon, whereas the photographs of Nineveh were made to support archaeological studies. Second, illumination provides a fundamental clue for depth extraction from a single photograph. However, this requires the light to be cast over the scene in a specific way. While the moon is illuminated by a single light source, the sun, a bas-relief suffers from the light reflected by surrounding objects. This distortion in the illumination makes it difficult to determine the shape of an object, since the exact direction of the light is unknown. Lastly, while an object (for example, the moon) at a large distance appears to be made from a uniform and diffuse material, a close up of a bas-relief will exhibit many variations due to cracks, the grain of the carved stone, and even changes in colour over the surface of the sample.

To overcome these challenges, a specific technique had to be used that first separates colour, texture, and illumination from the image to transform the picture artificially into a 'moon-like' view. This made it possible to relate the pixel intensity (illumination) directly to a change in the curvature of the surface of the object. The next step was to convert this transformed image into a 3D surface. The required technology was provided by the company QdepQ, a partner of the project, and was specially adapted to the properties of bas-reliefs. The algorithm separates the local changes in the illumination corresponding to the texture variations in the image to preserve the smaller details of the bas-relief, as well as the global illumination over the image to reveal the shape of the entire object. Finally, the separated parts of the illumination signal were used to build a 3D model of the relief, together with prior knowledge about the bas-reliefs' structure. Using this information, a model of the object could be built in which every pixel of the input image is given a specific depth. The resulting 3D model, as shown in figure 57.3, contains only relative dimensions. The 3D model could be scaled to the correct dimensions with the topological data on the palace room provided by the Italian researchers in 2002, so that the bas-reliefs could be reproduced by additive manufacturing or CNC milling.

140 The authors of this article would like to thank Carlos Lippolis, the Istituto Superiore per la Conservazione ed il Restauro (Rome) and the Centro Ricerche Archeologiche e Scavi di Torino for allowing us to use their data for the 3D model. The copyright of the original images is retained by Istituto Superiore per la Conservazione ed il Restauro and the Centro Ricerche Archeologiche e Scavi di Torino.



# PART VI

## The Material Culture of Nineveh

# Part VI: The Material Culture of Nineveh

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# 58. The Material Culture of Nineveh

*Lucas P. Petit*

Since its first exploration by the British traveller Claudius James Rich (1786-1821) in the early nineteenth century, countless numbers of archaeological objects have left Nineveh. Some items simply followed the footsteps of the excavators to their home-countries, others ended up on the local markets of Mosul and Baghdad, or were picked up by travellers. The national museums of nineteenth-century great powers, such as the Musée du Louvre, the British Museum and the Vorderasiatisches Museum, could obtain large collections of objects, including numerous series of bas-reliefs. At the end of the nineteenth century, the European public was well aware of the rich and beautiful culture made by the Assyrians in the first millennium BC.

The export of antiquities from Nineveh continued in the twentieth century, even though countries in the Middle East were establishing antiquity laws. In Iraq, this process was initiated in the 1920s by the historically-minded King Feisal I (1883-1933) and the Englishwoman Gertrude Bell (1868-1926). They also founded a national museum and an Antiquity Department. But this new department had little effect on site exploitation in the countryside. Only in the years after the ratification of the UNESCO Convention in 1973 was Iraq able to regulate the transportation of cultural goods. According to this convention, all excavated material had to remain in the country, with only a few exceptions. Archaeological work at Nineveh continued in the 1970s and 1980s, the discovered objects were divided between various domestic museums. The inhabitants of Iraq were proud of their heritage, and archaeological and historical sites were preserved for tourism. Due to the First Iraq War in the early 1990s, the Second Iraq War, and the

*Figure 58.1 World map showing the dispersion of Nineveh's material culture. Additional locations can be emailed to l.petit@rmo.nl.*

recent conflict with ISIL, many Iraqi sites including Nineveh are now subject to more wanton destruction and looting than ever before.

Nineveh's material culture can be appreciated in more than 39 countries and 100 institutes (fig. 58.1). Hardly any archaeological site in the world has seen as much dispersion as Nineveh. Each of those objects forms a highlight, no matter its size or condition. Neo-Assyrian kings tried to conquer the world, but not one of them really managed to live up to his title of 'king of the four directions of the wind'. They would be proud to know that today, Nineveh's material culture, symbolizing power and beauty, inspires millions of people in all four directions of the wind.

# 59. The Material Culture of Nineveh in France

*Ariane Thomas*

Although the site of Nineveh was first investigated by the French, the brief and relatively unproductive French excavations led to the prevailing belief that the Musée du Louvre held little material from Nineveh, and that any such material had entered the museum through acquisitions. Archival research has nonetheless revealed a total of some 39 pieces, several of which came from the French and English excavations, supplemented by long-term loans and a set of drawings, photographs and other archival materials (table 59.1). With the exception of two prehistoric sherds (No. 39)[141] donated by A. Parrot in 1972, together with the long-term loan by the British Museum of a vase from the Ninevite V period (No. 40), the material from Nineveh that is now in the Louvre collection dates from the Assyrian period and consists mainly of orthostat fragments, tablets, bricks and a few articles of furniture and tableware. In addition, several pieces from Nineveh can be found in a few other collections in France.

## 59.1 Objects from the French and English excavations at Nineveh

The only objects to enter the Louvre from Paul-Émile Botta's rapid exploration of Kuyunjik in 1842-1843 were a slab and four bricks (Nos. 34-38), as noted by Longpérier (1854, 6, 111-3). In 1855, however, Colonel Henry Rawlinson (1810-1895) made an arrangement with Thomas-Victor Place (1818-1875; Pottier 1917, 19; Pillet 1918, 13-4), according to which a ship (called 'Le Manuel') that had arrived to collect the French excavation finds would also take some 50 crates, destined for the British Museum, that were still awaiting transportation. In return, the Louvre would be given a number of relief carvings. Paradoxically, after the loss of most of Place's finds by shipwreck in May 1855 (Petit, this volume), this group of reliefs (Nos. 6-20) found by the English was Place's main contribution to the Musée du Louvre. After the Second World War, long-term loans from the British Museum supplemented the Louvre's collection of ceramics and major texts (Nos. 40-44).

## 59.2 Acquisitions reputed to have come from Nineveh

Some objects are thought to be from Nineveh based on indications given by the seller or donor (Nos. 24-32 and 39), such as the information provided in Louis de Clercq's catalogue,[142] or Salomon Reinach's declaration that he had been given the object (No. 32) by General Callier, who reputedly found it at Nineveh around 1830-1834. Other

141 This small fragment, associated with a larger one (Barnett 1976, pl. XX), may have come from the excavations at Nineveh. The numbers in brackets refer to those in the annexed table.

142 In 1967, Louis M. M. de Boisgelin, the grand-nephew and heir of L. de Clercq, gave the Louvre most of the reliefs in his collection. Four of the bas-reliefs said to come from Nineveh did not enter the museum (Clercq 1903, 125, no. 15, pl. XIV, 129, no. 17, pl. XVI, 141, no. 25, pl. XXIII, 135, no. 19, pl. XVIII).

relief carvings were attributed to Nineveh on the basis of their style (Nos. 1-2, 5, 21, 23; fig. 59.2). Finally, the origin of the tablets and prism (Nos. 3-4, 24 and 33)[143] was deduced from their inscriptions, the colophon in particular.

### 59.3 Lost objects from Nineveh

Some objects from Nineveh were lost to the French collections. These include the pieces that remained on site after Botta's departure (Pillet 1918, 3-4) and major purchases by Place that were ultimately lost, such as a bull, in late 1852 (Pillet 1918, 10).[144] Lastly, several reliefs from Kuyunjik, Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin) and Nimrud (ancient Kalhu) and the objects from the Fresnel mission at Babylon (Pillet 1918, 30) were lost in May 1855, in the shipwreck in the Tigris that destroyed most of Place's excavation finds (Petit, this volume).

### 59.4 Other documents

The French collections include a set of documents concerning the site of Nineveh and its material culture that have gradually acquired collection value. These are essentially the casts made by Place in Nineveh in 1852, in cooperation with Major Rawlinson, using the recently developed 'Lottinoplastique' technique. Drawings of the reliefs from Nineveh (fig. 59.3) were also made by Felix Thomas (Place 1867, III, pl. 44bis, 45, 49,

*Figure 59.1 (left) Relief depicting a bearded soldier and a chariot wheel. Nineveh, Iraq; Room F, N Palace; 7th century BC; limestone/gypsum; H 53 cm, W 44 cm; Musée du Louvre, Paris (AO 2254). © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Christian Larrieu.*

*Figure 59.2 (right) Relief depicting three Assyrian spearmen on a ladder. Nineveh, Iraq; Room XXII, SW Palace; 7th century BC; gypsum; H 20 cm, W 21 cm; Musée du Louvre, Paris (AO 19920). © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Daniel Lébée.*

*Figure 59.3 (right page) Relief showing the warrior king on his chariot with his servants and prisoners. Nineveh, Iraq; Room V'/T', N Palace; 7th century BC; limestone/gypsum; H 163 cm, L 77 cm; © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Franck Raux.*

143 Acquired from M. Labat (No. 24) and M. Ihler, a tablet (No. 4) from the collection of Henri Pognon (1853-1921), professor of Assyrian languages at the École des Hautes Études before becoming French consul in Baghdad (Chevalier 2002, 60, n 188), and from the antiques dealer Géjou (No. 3).

144 In 1852, Place purchased a bull that had been found by local people on the reputedly sacred mound of Nebi Yunus, but was prevented from removing his purchase; as compensation, he obtained from the English six fine sculptures from Nimrud.

*Figure 59.4 Relief depicting Assyrian slingers followed by Egyptian prisoners. Nineveh, Iraq; Room M, N Palace; 7th century BC; limestone/ gypsum; H 25.5 cm, W 28.5 cm; Musée de la Vielle Charité, Marseille (1518). © Musée de la Vielle Charité.*

50-66, corresponding to some 50 drawings), and photographs were taken by Gabriel Tranchand.[145]

## 59.5 Nineveh's objects in French collections other than the Louvre

Apart from those of the Louvre, the other major French collections, such as that of the Cabinet des Médailles or the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, contain no objects from Nineveh. Nevertheless, one fragment of a wall panel showing King Ashurbanipal with two followers belongs to the Musée Auguste Grasset in Varzy, having been acquired by Édouard Grasset (1802-1865) when he was consul at Aleppo between 1853 and 1855 (Matoïan & Loffet 1997, 87). The Musée de la Vieille Charité in Marseilles has two fragments of wall panel from Nineveh given by Henri Guys (1787-1878), who was also consul in Aleppo (fig. 59.4). Finally the former Musée Guimet of Lyon housed three fragments of wall panel and one weight said to be from Nineveh.

Though relatively restricted, the material from Nineveh in the Louvre, and more generally in France, is a reminder of the crucial role played by French scholars in the rediscovery of ancient Assyria, and of the complex but ultimately cordial spirit of competition with other countries, above all with England.

145 Prints nos. 9 and 40 at least have been identified; see the essay 'French research at Nineveh' in this book. We know he used prints on sensitized paper (annexed to the reports of 7, 8 and 20 April and of 28 May 1852), daguerreotype prints (report no. 15 Khorsabad, early February 1853) and perhaps collodion, according to a letter of 25 February 1853.

*Table 59.1 Table recapping the material from Nineveh in the Musée du Louvre (in italics: on long-term loan from the British Museum).*

| | Type | Museum number | Other numbers | Provenance | Method of acquisition | Main reference |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Wall panel: soldier and chariot | AO 2254 | | Nineveh (?) according to style | Gift of Maciet, 1892 | Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 79; Barnett, 1976, pl. XXI |
| **2** | Wall panel: attack of a city | AO 2255 | | Nineveh (?) according to style | Gift of Maciet, 1892 | Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 80 |
| **3** | Tablet: dictionary of synonyms | AO 7092 | T. 2172 | Nineveh according to inscription | Purchased from Géjou, 1918 | Thureau-Dangin 1919 |
| **4** | Tablet: fragment of Hammurabi Code | AO 7757 | | Nineveh according to inscription | Purchased from Commandant Ihler (Pognon coll.), 1921 | Laessøe 1950 *Rest of the tablet in the BM* |
| **5** | Wall panel: two soldiers | AO 17152 | | Nineveh (?) according to style | Purchased from Vasseur, 1933 | |
| **6** | Wall panel: three walking soldiers | AO 19901 | Nap 2438 Nap. III, no. 313-314-315 | Nineveh, North Palace, room A | Transferred from Place, 1856 | Place 1867, III, pl. 62, no. 3-3bis; Pillet 1918, p. 93; Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 59; Barnett, 1976, pl. XVI |
| **7** | Wall panel: horseman | AO 19902 | Nap. 3439 Nap. III 216 | Nineveh, North Palace, room R | Transferred from Place, 1856 | Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 60; Barnett, 1976, pl. XL |
| **8** | Wall panel: lion hunt | AO 19903 | Nap. 3435; N III, 304 | Nineveh, North Palace, room S1 | Transferred from Place, 1856 | Place 1867, III, pl. 62, no. 1-2; Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 61; Barnett, 1976, pl. LVIII |
| **9** | Wall panel: military scene with the king | AO 19904 | Nap. 3434; Nap. III no. 303 | Nineveh, North Palace, room V'/T', slab F | Transferred from Place, 1856 | Place 1867, III, pl. 66; Pillet 1918, 15 et 93; Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 62; Barnett, 1976, pl. LXVIII |
| **10** | Wall panel: attack of a city | AO 19905 | N III 305; Nap. 3436 | Nineveh, North Palace, room S1 | Transferred from Place, 1856 | Place 1867, III, pl. 58, no. 3 (detail); Pillet 1918, p. 94; Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 63; Barnett, 1976, pl. LXI |
| **11** | Wall panel: deportation scenes | AO 19906 | Nap 3436 N III 305 | Nineveh, North Palace, room S1 | Transferred from Place, 1856 | Place 1867, III, pl. 58, no. 2-4 (detail); Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 64 (?) and 70; Barnett, 1976, pl. LX – LXI |
| **12** | Wall panel: war prisoners | AO 19907 | Nap. 3443; NIII, 310 | Nineveh, North Palace, room V'/T' | Transferred from Place, 1856 | Place 1867, III, pl. 60, no. 3 (details); pl. 60, no. 3-4; Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 65; Barnett, 1976, pl. LXVII |
| **13** | Wall panel: musicians | AO 19908 | Nap. 3440; NIII, 306 | Nineveh, North Palace, room V'/T' | Transferred from Place, 1856 | Place 1867, III, pl. 59, no. 1, no. 2, no. 3, no. 4; Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 66; Pillet, 1918, 93; Barnett, 1976, pl. LXVIII |
| **14** | Wall panel: war chariots | AO 19909 | Nap. 3441; NIII, 307 | Nineveh, North Palace, room V'/T' | Transferred from Place, 1856 | Place 1867 III, pl. 60, no. 1 and 2; Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 67; Pillet, 1918, 94; Barnett, 1976, pl. LXIX |
| **15** | Wall panel: war prisoners | AO 19910 | Nap. 3444; NIII, 309 | Nineveh, North Palace, court J | Transferred from Place, 1856 | Place 1867 III, pl. 63; Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 68; Pillet, 1918: 94; Barnett, 1976, pl. LXXIX |
| **16** | Wall panel: war prisoners | AO 19911 | Nap. 3447; NIII, 312 | Nineveh, North Palace, court J | Transferred from Place, 1856 | Place 1867 III, pl. 65; Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 69; Barnett, 1976, pl. LXXIX |
| **17** | Wall panel: soldiers | AO 19912 | Nap. 3445; NIII, 311 | Nineveh, North Palace, room M | Transferred from Place, 1856 | Place 1867 III, pl. 61; Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 71; Pillet 1918, 94; Barnett 1976, pl. XXXIV |
| **18** | Wall panel: camp of prisoners | AO 19913 | Nap. 3442; NIII, 308 | Nineveh, North Palace, room V'/T' | Transferred from Place, 1856 | Place 1867 III, pl. 64, no. 1 à 4; Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 72; Pillet 1918, 93 ; Barnett, 1976, pl. LXIX |
| **19** | Wall panel: attack of a city | AO 19914 | N III 319 Nap. 3427 | Nineveh, North Palace, room 1, NW angle | Transferred from Place, 1856 | Place 1967, III, pl. 41, no. 1; Rassam 1897, 34; Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 73; Gadd 1936, 206-207, pl. 28; Barnett 1976, 42-43 and 15, fig. 5, pl. XXV – XXVI |

| | Type | Museum number | Other numbers | Provenance | Method of acquisition | Main reference |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **20** | Wall panel: door sill | AO 19915 | Nap. 3448; NIII, 318 | Nineveh, North Palace, room I, entry | Transferred from Place, 1856 | Place 1867, III, pl. 40, no. 1; Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 74; Pillet 1918, 94; Barnett, 1976, pl. XXVII |
| **21** | Wall panel: attack of a city | AO 19920 | | Nineveh (?) according to style | 19th-century collection | Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 81 |
| **22** | Wall panel: fragment of vegetation | AO 19921 | | Nineveh, North Palace, room M (?) | Transferred from Place, 1856 (?) | Pottier 1917; 1924, no. 81bis; Barnett 1976, pl. XXXIV |
| **23** | Wall panel: on a boat | AO 19923 | | Nineveh (?) | 19th-century collection | Barnett, 1976, pl. XX |
| **24** | Tablet: "prism F" | AO 19939 | | Nineveh | Purchased from Labat, 1948 | Aynard 1957 |
| **25** | Wall panel: war scene | AO 22199 | | Kuyunjik palace after Clercq 1903 | Gift of Henri de Boisgelin, 1967 (Louis de Clercq coll.) | Clercq 1903, 137, no. 21, pl. XX; Barnett, 1976, pl. XXIV |
| **26** | Wall panel: soldiers | AO 22200 | | | | Clercq 1903, 139, no. 23, pl. XXI; Barnett, 1976, pl. LXII |
| **27** | Wall panel: soldiers | AO 22201 | | | | Clercq 1903, 138, pl. XXI, no. 22; Barnett, 1976, pl. XXIV |
| **28** | Wall panel: deportation | AO 22202 | | | | Clercq 1903, 140, no. 24, pl. XXII; Barnett, 1976, pl. XXII |
| **29** | Wall panel: horseman | AO 22203 | | | | Clercq 1903, 136, no. 20, pl. XIX |
| **30** | Wall panel: soldiers | AO 26521 | | Nineveh, South-West Palace (?) | 19th-century collection | |
| **31** | Wall panel: war scene | AO 26577 | | | | |
| **32** | Furniture: animal head | AO 2168 | | Nineveh around 1830-1834 by General Callier | Gift of S. Reinach 1891 | |
| **33** | Tablet: letter to Sargon | N III 3158 | | Nineveh (?) | 19th-century collection | Contenau 1926, 67 |
| **34** | Slab: inscription (11 lines) | N 8420 | | Nineveh, western face and near southern extremi-ty of Kuyunjik | Botta mission, 1842 | Longpérier 1854, 6, no. 531 |
| **35** | Brick: inscription (5 lines) | N 8421 | | | Botta mission, 1842 | Longpérier 1854, 6, no. 532 |
| **36** | Brick: inscription (5 lines) | N 8422 | | | Botta mission, 1842 | Longpérier 1854, 6, no. 533 |
| **37** | Brick: inscription (2 lines) | N 8423 | | | Botta mission, 1842 | Longpérier 1854, 6, no. 534 |
| **38** | Brick: inscription | N 8424 | | | Botta mission, 1842 | Longpérier 1854, 6, no. 535 |
| **39** | Obeid sherds (2) | SH086986 | Nineveh 26 II; Nineveh 26 II 52 (?) | Nineveh | Gift of A. Parrot, 1976 | |
| ***40*** | *Ninevite vase* | *DAO 12* | *1932-12-10, 122* | *Kuyunjik* | *On long-term loan from the British Museum since 1973* | |
| ***41*** | *Assyrian vase* | *DAO 13* | | *Nineveh* | *On long-term loan from the British Museum* | |
| ***42*** | *Assyrian vase* | *DAO 14* | | *Nineveh* | *On long-term loan from the British Museum* | |
| ***43*** | *Tablet: Ludlul Bêl nêmeqi* | *K 2518, DT 358* | | *Nineveh according to inscription* | *On long-term loan from the British Museum* | |
| ***44*** | *Tablet: incanta-tions, prayers* | *K 7593, K 2784* | | *Nineveh according to inscription* | *On long-term loan from the British Museum* | |

# 60. The Material Culture of Nineveh in Italian Collections

*Daniele Morandi Bonacossi*

On 17 February 1847 two crates containing Assyrian reliefs from Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin), the monumental capital of Sargon II of Assyria (reigned 721-705 BC; fig. 27.1), arrived at the Egyptian Museum in Turin. The world's first museum of Egyptian antiquities, the Egyptian Museum had been established in 1824 thanks to the Savoia family's purchase of the great collection belonging to Bernardino Drovetti, an officer in Napoleon's army during the Egyptian campaign and then French consul in Alexandria. One of the two crates contained what is still undoubtedly the most famous and evocative portrait known to us of the great Assyrian king, Sargon II, father of Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC; fig. 35.1), who made Nineveh the capital of the empire[146]. The first Assyrian reliefs reached Italy and France at the same time. Just seventeen days earlier, the first crates had arrived at the Louvre containing precious sculptures brought by the sailing ship 'Cormoran', on which the crates destined for Turin also travelled (Bergamini 1995).

The arrival in Italy of archaeological material from the heart of ancient Assyria was closely connected with the events of the Italian Risorgimento (the nineteenth-century movement for Italian unification that culminated in the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861) and in particular with Paolo Emilio Botta, the first excavator of the great imperial capitals in Northern Iraq (fig. 9.1). This native Italian, born in Turin in 1802, was the son of Carlo Botta, a patriot and historian who was elected to the French *Corps législatif* after Piedmont was annexed by Napoleonic France, and later became rector of the universities of Nancy and Rouen (Bergamini 1994). Launched by his father on a diplomatic career, Paolo Emilio became French Consul at Mosul in 1842. There, since he was more interested in archaeology than diplomatic matters, he began – with little success – the earliest archaeological investigation of the mound of Kuyunjik in ancient Nineveh, which he soon abandoned in favour of new and much more satisfying excavations in nearby Khorsabad. In recognition of the city where he was born, Botta donated two Khorsabad reliefs to the Egyptian Museum in Turin. The arrival of the first Assyrian reliefs in Italy occurred in a political and cultural atmosphere that was dominated by the rise of a new ruling class of aristocrats and bourgeois who were open to the ideals of the French Revolution – and, in the field of science, guided by the principles of the *Encyclopédie*. The newly arrived exotic artefacts enriched what was then the world's largest Egyptology collection with the first evidence of another lost civilization, that of Assyria, revealed by the research of a Franco-Piedmontese archaeologist (Bergamini 1989). In the mid-nineteenth century, the two great museums of Turin and Paris had complementary collections, offering the most wide-ranging and comprehensive vision then available of two great civilizations that had flowered in the Nile Valley and between the Tigris and Euphrates. Their discovery significantly altered scientific knowledge of pre-classical

146 Museo Archeologico, Turin (TO 10407). The relief has been kept in the Turin Museum of Antiquities since 2010.

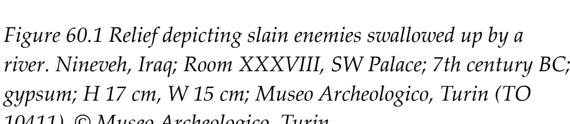

*Figure 60.1 Relief depicting slain enemies swallowed up by a river. Nineveh, Iraq; Room XXXVIII, SW Palace; 7th century BC; gypsum; H 17 cm, W 15 cm; Museo Archeologico, Turin (TO 10411). © Museo Archeologico, Turin.*

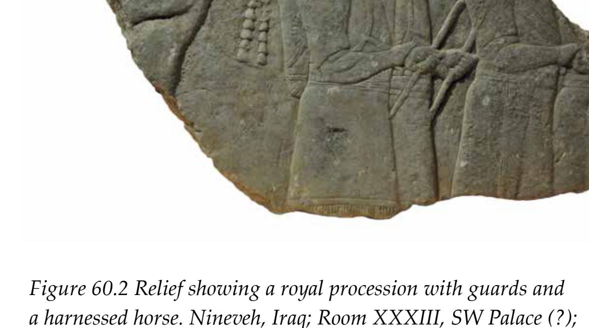

*Figure 60.2 Relief showing a royal procession with guards and a harnessed horse. Nineveh, Iraq; Room XXXIII, SW Palace (?); 7th century BC; limestone/gypsum; H 49 cm, W 55 cm; Museo Archeologico, Turin (TO 10410). © Museo Archeologico, Turin.*

Egypt and the East, finally freeing it from biblical traditions and Greek and Roman sources (Bergamini 1995).

In 1856 the Egyptian Museum received the first relief fragment from Nineveh, depicting slain enemies swallowed up by a river (fig. 60.1). Its portrayal of the waves was similar to that on reliefs in the Southwest Palace and the North Palace, and thus attributed to the reign of Sennacherib or Ashurbanipal (reigned 668 – c. 627 BC). The acquisition of a fragment of a slab from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal, showing a procession of royal guards and a horse, occurred several years later (fig. 60.2; Bergamini 1995).[147]

In 1896 the Egyptian Museum acquired another oriental collection, this time due to the dismantling of the Kircher Museum in Rome. The latter was a *Wunderkammer* founded in 1651 by the Jesuit priest Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680), which had put on public display a huge collection of antiquities and curiosities accumulated over the centuries, including an inscribed brick from the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib and a collection of Egyptian antiquities.

In the same period, just after the beginning of Layard's extensive excavations at Nineveh (1849; Fales, this volume), the Vatican Museums also began to receive a significant collection of Assyrian reliefs from Nineveh, as well as from Nimrud (ancient Kalhu) and Khorsabad. These were monuments that had been found in the palaces of Nineveh and brought to Rome in 1854 by an unknown missionary (Vattuone 1995). The following year, Giovanni Bennhi, brother of the archbishop of Mosul and a passionate archaeology enthusiast – to the extent that he worked at Nineveh as the assistant of Botta, Layard and Rassam (Nigro 2000) – sent sixteen fragments of reliefs and inscriptions from Nineveh to Pope Pius IX as a sign of homage. These included outstanding reliefs from Sennacherib's Southwest Palace, such as two fine fragments showing Assyrian archers in action[148] and the head of an Assyrian soldier;[149] and fragments of slabs from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal depicting the siege of the Elamite city Bit-Bunakki,[150] horses held by the bridle by grooms,[151] and the devastation of an Arab encampment by the Assyrians (fig. 60.3). At present, there are 33 Assyrian pieces in the Vatican (some of which were perhaps obtained through the flourishing nineteenth-century trade in antiquities), of which 21 are fragments of reliefs from Nineveh and one a fragment of a Ninevite cuneiform inscription.

As well as the Vatican and Turin museums, a further two Italian museums hold significant collections of Assyrian reliefs from Nineveh: the Barracco Museum

147 The fragment is first mentioned in an 1872 description of the museum collection.

148 Vatican Museums (VAT 14993).

149 Vatican Museums (VAT 15001).

150 Vatican Museums (VAT 14985 and 14996).

151 Vatican Museums (VAT 14988).

*Figure 60.3 Relief depicting Assyrian soldiers burning Arab tents. Nineveh, Iraq; Room L, N Palace; 7th century BC; limestone/ gypsum; H 39 cm, W 115.5 cm; Vatican Museums (VAT 14997). © Vatican Museums.*

in Rome and the Venice Museum of Archaeology. The Barracco Museum collection stands out among all the Italian collections of Ninevite material for its homogeneity, especially because its composition was determined by the precise scientific objectives of its founder Giovanni Barracco (1829-1914), who aimed to document the development of ancient sculpture in the civilizations that had flourished around the Mediterranean from a comparative perspective (Nota Santi 1995). Barracco, born into a noble Calabrian family, was a pro-unification patriot who followed the vicissitudes of the Kingdom of Italy as a senator. He was also a refined private collector, and gathered in his house in Rome 380 works of Sumerian, Assyrian, Egyptian, Cypriot, Etruscan, Greek and Roman sculpture, accompanied by a well-stocked research library, which he donated, together with his collection, to Rome City Council in 1904. The Barracco Collection contains ten fragments of Nineveh reliefs, purchased from the Gréau and Sabatier Collections at auctions held in Paris in 1891 and 1893, and in part from the collection of Mrs A. Hall. The latter had received the reliefs from Mr. Francis Sloane, a family friend of Layard who owned mines in Tuscany and a Medici villa in Careggi, near Florence, where Lorenzo de' Medici died and where Layard himself had stayed (Layard 1853). It was Layard who had given these fragments of reliefs to Sloane.

Among the Ninevite reliefs in the Barracco Collection, the slabs from Ashurbanipal's North Palace portraying grooms and bridled horses (fig. 60.4), Elamite archers and

*Figure 60.4 Relief showing Assyrian grooms leading horses to the right. Nineveh, Iraq; Room I, N Palace; 7th century BC; limestone/ gypsum; H 31 cm, W 21 cm; Barracco Museum, Rome (MB 51). © Barracco Museum.*

*Figure 60.5 Relief showing an Assyrian soldier deporting the statue of a goddess, donated by Layard, 1891. Nineveh, Iraq; Hall LXIV (?), SW Palace; 7th century BC; gypsum; H 35 cm, W 21 cm; Museo Archeologico, Venice (DC 47). © Museo Archeologico, Venice.*

foot soldiers,[152] and Assyrian archers[153] and horsemen and slingers[154] stand out for their fine workmanship and state of preservation. While the collections of Ninevite reliefs in the Vatican Museums and Turin Museum are heterogeneous, having been accumulated on an occasional basis and not necessarily guided by systematic criteria, the Barracco Collection, on the other hand, was clearly composed in accordance with Giovanni Barracco's intention to acquire significant pieces from each of the last three capitals of the Assyrian Empire (Nimrud, Khorsabad and Nineveh) and of their sovereigns, from Ashurnasirpal II (reigned 883-859 BC) to Ashurbanipal, thus revealing that he was a scholar rather than a collector.

Chance events, on the other hand, determined the formation of the collection of Assyrian reliefs in the Venice Museum of Archaeology, to which Layard, at the end of his Venetian sojourn in 1891, donated ten relief fragments, of which nine were from Nineveh and one from Nimrud (Falkner 1952-1953; Fales 1990). The quality of the pieces that Layard gave to Venice is extremely high, as shown, for example, by the depiction of an Assyrian soldier carrying off a statue of a deity (perhaps the western Semitic goddess Ashratu of Ashkelon, linked with the God Amurru) from the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib (fig. 60.5).

Two Nineveh reliefs were taken to Como in 1886 by Alfonso Garovaglio (1820-1905), an archaeologist, traveller and collector from Lombardy. He had travelled to central Syria and Mesopotamia, visiting Nineveh, where he acquired two relief fragments from the Southwest and North Palaces. When he died in 1905, the reliefs were left to the Como Civic Archaeology Museum in his will (Nobile De Agostini 1995).

Lastly, two Assyrian relief fragments from Nineveh are kept in the Florence Archaeological Museum (fig. 60.6) and in the Archbishop's residence in the same city,[155] to which they were donated, respectively, by a collector and art dealer (Nicosia 1995), and by Cardinal Agostino Bausa (1821-1899), a Dominican monk who was a missionary in Mosul from 1849 until 1856 (Aranci 1995).

The great majority of the reliefs and the few inscriptions from Nineveh that found their way into Italian museums over time thus did so as a result of high-quality nineteenth-century antiquities collecting, together with the impromptu and often disorganized acquisition of fragments of Assyrian slabs donated by missionaries, travellers and collectors. Nonetheless, the peninsula's collections of Assyrian reliefs, which began to accumulate in the years immediately after the first excavations by Botta and Layard at Nineveh, Khorsabad and Nimrud, form a good illustration of the cultural climate of the 1800s and the exchange of gifts between archaeologists and collectors who sustained the formation of the early collections of Assyrian art in Italy. The only happy exception to this picture is the remarkable collection of the Barracco Museum, assembled over time on the basis of the explicit scientific objectives of its founder. Its purpose was to allow systematic comparison between the artistic production of the great ancient civilizations that had existed around the Mediterranean and to gather together examples of the relief sculptures that were produced to decorate the palaces of the most important sovereigns of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

152 Barracco Museum, Rome (MB 52-53).
153 Barracco Museum, Rome (MB 57).
154 Barracco Museum, Rome (MB 58).
155 Museo Archeologico, Florence (FIR 1, North Palace).

*Figure 60.6 Relief showing Assyrian deportees pulling on a rope. Nineveh, Iraq; Hall XLIX (?), SW Palace; 7th century BC; gypsum; H 29.8 cm, W 22 cm; Museo Archeologico, Florence (93806). © Museo Archeologico, Florence.*

# 61. Nineveh in the United Kingdom

*Paul Collins*

The British Museum, London, was probably the first public institution anywhere in the world to receive archaeological material from Nineveh. Three very worn fragments of sculptured stone, each approximately 6.5 cm high, and nine cuneiform tablets were recovered from the surface of the site by Claudius James Rich (1786-1821) in 1820 and entered the museum's collections in 1825 (Simpson 2003, 199). Although four large fragments of sculpture were sent to London soon after the discovery of the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib by Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894) in 1847, it was his excavations on Kuyunjik between 1849 and 1850 that established the museum as the repository of the greatest collection of finds from Nineveh. By 1854 the numerous reliefs that had been despatched by Layard to the museum were ready for public display, many having been backed with slate, a technique 'rendered necessary by the calcinated state in which they were recovered' (quoted in Jenkins 1992, 162). As recorded in the 1855 guide to the museum's collections, the reliefs were arranged in the northern gallery of a 'suite of three long and narrow apartments, running North and South to a length exceeding 300 feet, with an additional room, or transept, crossing from their Southern extremity' (British Museum 1855, 135). Arranged along the walls of this 'Kouyunjik' room were casts of reliefs not removed from the site, small carved fragments, and a series of large sculpted panels depicting campaigns in the Babylonian marshes, the siege of the city of *Alammu*, a procession of servants carrying food in one direction and horses led by their grooms the other way, scenes showing the battle of Til-Tuba (c. 653 BC) and its aftermath, the movement of a bull colossus across a landscape, the siege of a city and

*Figure 61.1 Stereoscopic view into the 'Kouyunjik' gallery from the Assyrian 'Central Saloon', photograph by Roger Fenton about 1855-59. Private Collection.*

*Figure 61.2 Photograph of a table case in the 'Kouyunjik' gallery containing cuneiform tablets including the 'Flood Tablet', about 1880-1900. Image courtesy of Dr Jonathan Taylor.*

its aftermath, and human-headed and lion-headed genies.[156] In the middle of the gallery was placed a large limestone bowl – in fact a podium reused as a door-socket (Searight *et al.* 2008, no. 644) – carved with scenes of a warrior fighting a lion.[157]

In 1855 the 'White' (fig. 2.2)[158] and 'Broken' (fig. 22.5)[159] obelisks discovered by Hormuzd Rassam (1826-1910) at Nineveh were placed in the centre of the 'Kouyunjik' gallery together with table cases containing cuneiform tablets, cylinder seals and terracottas (fig. 61.1). Rassam had also arranged for the transport to London of more reliefs from the Southwest Palace while his own discoveries, and subsequently those of William Loftus (1820-1858), in the North Palace were added to the museum's Nineveh collection. This necessitated the creation of additional gallery space and the so-called 'Assyrian Basement Room' (later renamed the 'Assyrian Saloon') was completed towards the end of 1859. In early 1860 the sculptures were installed along a walkway around the room at ground level – where visitors could see reliefs depicting the siege of Lachish and the lion hunts of Ashurbanipal – before descending some stairs to examine reliefs showing Ashurbanipal's Babylonian, Arab, Elamite and Egyptian campaigns as well as the carved scene of the king and his queen drinking in a garden.[160]

The museum had also received thousands of cuneiform tablets from these and later excavations. From 1892, when some of the smaller objects from Nineveh were moved

156 British Museum, London (BM 124774; 124784-7; 124792; 124795-9; 124820-26).
157 British Museum, London (N.2051/BM115040).
158 British Museum, London (1856,0909.58/BM 118807).
159 British Museum, London (1856,0909.59/BM 118898).
160 British Museum, London (BM 124904-10; 124850-99; 124926-7; 124920; 124928-37; 124946).

*Figure 61.3 Relief showing male and female deportees driven out of a city. Nineveh, Iraq; Room LI, SW Palace; 7th century BC; gypsum; H 69 cm, W 76.2 cm; Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (AN 1971.994). © Ashmolean Museum.*

upstairs into a 'Babylonian and Assyrian Room', several hundred of 'the most valuable and interesting tablets' remained in the 'Kouyunjik' gallery where they were displayed in nine table cases (British Museum 1892, 87). These included the famous Flood Tablet (fig. 61.2).[161]

During the nineteenth century a few relief fragments from Nineveh, generally small and portable pieces, were also passed by the excavators to family members, friends and supporters. Thus, for example, Layard sent some pieces to his cousin Lady Charlotte Guest (1812-1895; Russell 1997). These were subsequently sold and dispersed and one is now in the British Museum. The family of one of the excavation artists, William Boutcher (1814-1900), retained the so-called 'dying lion' relief, also now in the British Museum (Curtis 1992). Two small pieces of relief from the Southwest Palace in Magdalen

161 British Museum, London (K.3375).

*Figure 61.4 Brass lamp with a shield in the form of an equal-armed cross excavated by Reginald Campbell Thompson. Nineveh, Iraq; Temple of Nabû; AD 400-600; bronze; H 8 cm, L 11.5 cm, W 5 cm; British Museum, London (1905,0409.436/BM 98930). © The Trustees of the British Museum.*

College, Oxford, are probably to be connected with Rassam since he had studied there for eighteen months in 1848-1849. Other fragments passed from private into public collections and today one or two fragments can be found in a number of regional and university museums, the largest groups being eight sculptured slabs in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (figs. 10.2, 35.1, 35.6, and 61.3), seven in the Burrell Collection, Glasgow, and five in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.[162]

Significant numbers of objects from Nineveh entered British collections in the first half of the twentieth century as a result of the excavations led by Reginald Campbell Thompson (1876-1941). The British Museum received many hundreds of items including cuneiform inscriptions, ceramics, seal impressions, metalwork, and coins (the latter assigned to the museum's department of Coins and Medals). This widened the museum's coverage of Nineveh's archaeology as, although some important non-Assyrian objects were recovered by the nineteenth-century excavations, the material is representative of cultures dating from prehistory through the early Islamic period, with important groups belonging to the Ninevite V and Sasanian periods (fig. 61.4). Campbell Thompson's excavations had been sponsored by Sir Charles Hyde (1876-1942), the wealthy proprietor of the Birmingham Post and associated newspapers, and he received a division of the finds from Nineveh, as was the practice at the time. This comprised a similar range of material as allocated to the British Museum. Amounting to some 1270 objects, the collection included ceramic vessels and sherds, glass fragments, painted and inscribed bricks, spindle whorls, lamps, pieces of metalwork, and beads. These were gifted by Hyde

162 For a concordance of reliefs from the Southwest Palace in museums see Barnett *et al.* 1998, 145-48; for the North Palace, see Barnett 1976; for the Burrell Collection see Peltenburg 1991.

Figure 61.5 (left) Restored ceramic vessel with painting. Nineveh, Iraq; Ninevite V, 2900-2600 BC; pottery; H 11 cm, D 13 cm; Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (AN 1932.1092). © Ashmolean Museum.

Figure 61.6 (right) A new display of Ashurbanipal's Library in the Later Mesopotamia gallery of the British Museum. Photo by Alberto Giannese. Courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum.

to the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.[163] Other collections that received objects from these excavations (similarly representative of the long history of the site) are the Fitzwilliam Museum (371 objects, of which 347 are sherds; fig. 20.3) and the Ashmolean Museum (approximately 380 objects, of which 150 are sherds; fig. 61.5). Visitors to these institutions can see the most attractive and interesting objects from Nineveh in their public galleries, with access to the rest of the collections by appointment.

It is perhaps inevitable that the material from Nineveh in the British Museum has dominated public reception of the site in the United Kingdom. Following the First World War, all small-scale objects previously displayed in table cases were relocated to the upper floor galleries where the material was divided between texts (a 'Semitic Inscription Room' renamed as the 'Room of Writing') and rooms devoted to geographical-cultural regions including Assyria. A major rearrangement of the reliefs was undertaken over a number of years leading up to 1970, during which time a mezzanine floor was introduced at ground level in the Assyrian Saloon and the sculptures were arranged closer to their original layout within individual halls of the different Assyrian palaces: the Til-Tuba reliefs were moved from the Nineveh Gallery to the basement (Barnett 1970). In the same period, the density of displays on the upper floors was much reduced, with the bulk of the collection made available via a study room. During the 1990s the museum's upper floor galleries devoted to the ancient Near East were dismantled and objects from Nineveh were redisplayed in rooms devoted to 'Early Mesopotamia 6000-1500 BC' and 'Later Mesopotamia 1500-539 BC', integrating texts with other objects (Reade 1991; 1993). The closure of the basement galleries to the public in 2006 means that the Assyrian reliefs in these spaces are accessible only by appointment, although several of the more famous carvings, such as the battle of Til-Tuba, the banquet scene, and a relief showing parkland at Nineveh, have been included in travelling exhibitions or as temporary loans to other institutions.[164] More recently, as part of a programme of enhancing the displays, one of Ashurbanipal's reliefs showing the siege and capture of an Egyptian city[165] has been moved from the basement into the Later Mesopotamia gallery on the upper floor, where a case devoted to the Kuyunjik royal library has also been redesigned to suggest one of the methods by which ancient scribes stored their tablets (fig. 61.6).

163 I am grateful to Adam Jaffer for this information.
164 See, for example, Curtis & Reade 1995; Aruz *et al.* 2014.
165 British Museum, London (1856,0909.33/BM 124928).

# 62. Nineveh in Berlin

*Lutz Martin*

## 62.1 Introduction

The Vorderasiatisches Museum of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin possesses thirteen reliefs on alabaster panels from Kuyunjik. The orthostats, acquired in 1855, 1858 and 1885, are, together with the stele of Sargon II (reigned 721-705 BC; fig. 27.1) from Kition that was purchased in 1846 (fig. 34.1), among the Museum's oldest acquisitions and give impressive testimony to the art of Assyrian sculpture.

## 62.2 From Nineveh to Berlin

The Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm IV (1795-1861), very interested in the arts, was a patron of the Königliche Museen (fig. 62.1). It thus comes as no surprise that his enthusiasm for Assyrian art was aroused by the discovery of monumental stone sculptures in the French and English excavations in Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin), Nineveh and Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), which were displayed in the Louvre in Paris and the British Museum in London in 1847. The king attempted to acquire similar monuments for Prussia by participating in the Assyrian Excavation Fund, which was founded in 1853. The outbreak of the Crimean War in that same year, however, put a damper on new excavations in the main Assyrian centres. Nevertheless, the opportunity to acquire a series of reliefs from the Crystal Palace Society arose, which had been put aside for a Nineveh Court in Sydenham (fig. 5.5). The Society was offering the reliefs for sale because it had run into financial difficulties. Ignaz von Olfers (1793-1871), General Director of the Königliche Museen in Berlin, seized the opportunity to purchase a number of alabaster

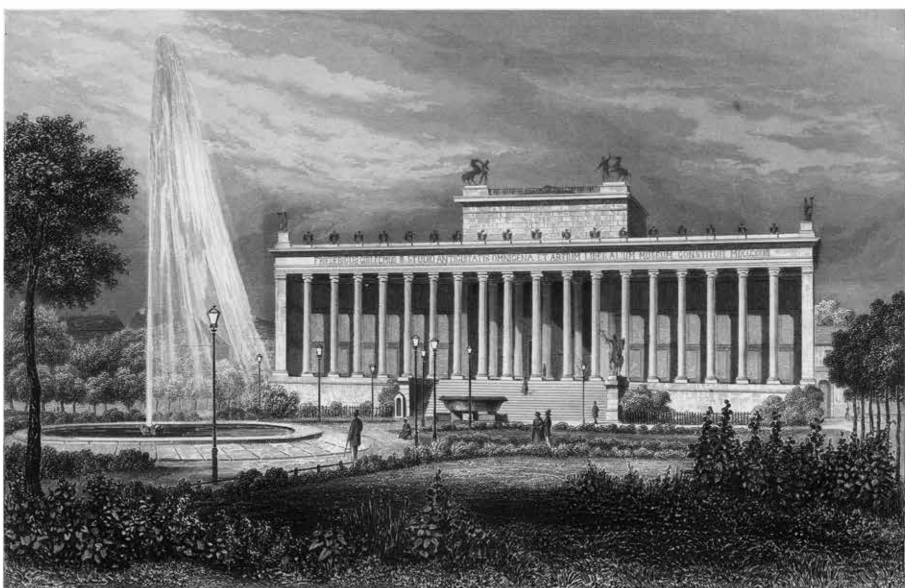

*Figure 62.1 Altes Museum in Berlin, steel engraving by Johann Poppel (about 1850). Copyright bpk-Bildagentur.*

slabs from Nimrud and Nineveh for 550 pounds sterling (or 3,850 marks) in 1855. The money was made available by the king from 'His Royal Highness' Disposition Fund'. In 1856, fourteen reliefs still in their original packing, five of them from the excavations in Nineveh,[166] arrived in Berlin. The acquisition was greeted enthusiastically in the Prussian capital: finally, the museum could present Assyrian art to rival its numerous Egyptian monuments (Crüsemann 2000, 30-1 and fn. 138).

Further reliefs were purchased in 1858 directly from William Kennett Loftus (1820-1858), who had kept them for himself from his excavations in Kuyunjik in 1854 and 1855.[167] This time the Königliche Museen paid the purchase price of a thousand thalers from its own funds (Crüsemann 2000, 31 and fn. 147). One further panel came from a collection sold to the museums by Bernard Maimon.[168]

## 62.3 The origin of the reliefs and their depictions.

All the Ninevite reliefs and relief fragments of the Vorderasiatisches Museum stem from the palaces of the last Assyrian kings Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC; fig. 35.1) and Ashurbanipal (reigned 668 – c. 627 BC).[169] They belonged to series of reliefs whose pictorial narratives illustrated the topics of war, hunting and processions. The original context is almost impossible to reconstruct. Only the two reliefs VA 953 – three panels depicting soldiers and musicians – and VA 955 (fig. 62.2) and VA 956 – showing a high-ranking official and servants drawing a royal carriage, of which only the shaft, whose end is in the shape of a horse's head, is visible – suggest possible content and spatial context. These reliefs may have been situated on a ramp that led up from Sennacherib's Southwest Palace to the Ištar Temple. In all likelihood, the relief panel BM 124900 (1856,0909.7), which is in the British Museum and might be a join with VA 956, also belongs to this set (Gadd 1936, 217; Klengel-Brandt 1992a, 176). Perhaps the fragment 32.143.13 of the Metropolitan Museum should even be seen in this context, because it is very similar to the orthostat VA 955. It can be assumed that it could come from the immediate vicinity of the reliefs VA 955, VA 956 and BM 124900 (1856,0909.7) (Gadd 1936, 239).

The orthostat VA 957 depicts two soldiers, each armed with a spear and a shield and wearing a plumed helmet. The relief was found near the Southwest Palace. It was perhaps situated at the point where the ramp became horizontal, because the soldiers are shown marching on a level surface.[170] To judge by the stone and the craftsmanship, this panel seems to be closely connected with the alabaster relief BM 124950 (1856,0909.3) in the British Museum (Gadd 1936, 217) and the reliefs VA 955 and VA 956 described above.

Reliefs VA 960 and VA 963 come from room S of Ashurbanipal's North Palace and obviously belonged to a cycle of slabs showing the king hunting (fig. 62.3). There are other fragments from this room showing hunting scenes that are now kept in the Louvre and the British Museum (Gadd 1936, 218; Klengel-Brandt 1992b, 185).

On the left we see the king, who is thrusting his spear into the head of a lion. Behind the king stands an archer. The adjoining panel shows a servant holding the king's horse and, to the right, two archers and the king with an upraised spear.

Orthostat VA 961 shows a chariot with a charioteer, an archer and two shield-bearers (fig. 62.4). Due to similarities with a relief in the Louvre, which was found in Ashurbanipal's North Palace, it is conceivable that the Berlin relief is part of the very same context (Gadd 1936, 205 and 218; Klengel-Brandt 1992c, 183-4).

*Figure 62.2 (right page) Relief showing the crown-prince followed by two officials and servants. Nineveh, Iraq; Passage to Ištar Temple; 7th century BC; alabaster; H 174 cm, W 142 cm; Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (VA 955). © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Vorderasiatisches Museum, photograph made by Olaf M. Teßmer.*

166 These were the orthostats VA 953 and VA 955-8.
167 Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (VA 960, 961, 963, 965, 966, 967 and 969).
168 Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (VA 210). On Bernard Maimon see Crüsemann 2000, 68-70.
169 On the palaces, see Heinrich 1984, 173-9. On the arrangement of the reliefs in the palaces, see Gadd 1936, 251-2.
170 A. Moortgat in a letter to C. J. Gadd dated 24 November 1934 (Zentralarchiv 1934, Bl. 94).

*Figure 62.3 Relief depicting the king killing a lion, followed by two grooms and his horse. Nineveh, Iraq; Room S, N Palace; 7th century BC; alabaster; H 52 cm, W 98 cm (VA 960); H 51.5 cm, W 55 cm (VA 963); Vorderasiatisches Museum-SMB, Berlin (VA 960 and 963). © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Vorderasiatisches Museum, photograph made by Olaf M. Teßmer.*

*Figure 62.4 Relief showing a royal chariot with a charioteer, an archer and two shield bearers. Nineveh, Iraq; N Palace; 7th century BC; alabaster; H 35 cm, W 44.5 cm; Vorderasiatisches Museum-SMB, Berlin (VA 961). © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Vorderasiatisches Museum, photograph made by Olaf M. Teßmer.*

*Figure 62.5 Relief showing an Assyrian camp with camels. Nineveh, Iraq; Room S′, N Palace; 7th century BC; alabaster; H 39 cm, W 19 cm; Vorderasiatisches Museum-SMB, Berlin (VA 965). © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Vorderasiatisches Museum, photograph made by Olaf M. Teßmer.*

One of the most impressive pieces in Berlin is the relief fragment VA 965, which gives us an insight into an Assyrian military camp at the time of Ashurbanipal (fig. 62.5). In a tent, a bed is being prepared for a returning officer and a meal is being served. Dromedaries and sheep lie outside the tent. At the upper edge of the panel the walls of a city can be seen. The orthostat fragment, discovered by William Kennett Loftus (1820-1858) in 1854 in the rubble of room S, probably came from one of the upper rooms of the North Palace (Gadd 1936, 219; Klengel-Brandt 1992d, 184-5).

Another orthostat fragment shows a soldier with a prisoner. This relief bearing the inventory number VA 966 is, like the alabaster slab VA 967 – two musicians facing right, standing before a palm (fig. 47.4) – most likely connected with the so-called 'garden party' of Ashurbanipal[171] from the North Palace. There may also be a connection with the 'garden party' in the small fragment VA 969. Of outstanding workmanship, it shows two servants standing before a table on which a horse's bridle has been placed (Gadd 1936, 219).

The origin of VA 210 showing a battle scene is unknown; it is not certain that it actually comes from Nineveh. Its assignment to the period of Ashurbanipal is based solely on the assumption that the fragment might have come from the excavations at the North Palace (Gadd 1936, 219).

### 62.4 The presentation in Berlin's museums

After the second lot of Assyrian reliefs arrived in Berlin in 1858, the orthostats were assigned to the collection of ancient sculptures, where they were shown in the so-called Assyrian Room on the ground floor of the Altes Museum, as a precursor to archaic Greek art. This immediate proximity to Greek art was maintained even after the ancient Near Eastern antiquities were merged with the Egyptian department in 1885 on the main floor of the Neues Museum (Crüsemann 2001, 70). Here, the orthostats were affixed to the walls of the Assyrian Room, which had been divided into sections, but no distinction was made as to the place of origin, either Nineveh or Nimrud. Although the Babylonian Room had a central function in the presentation of ancient Near Eastern antiquities, the Assyrian reliefs dominated the exhibit due to their dimensions, the subjects illustrated, and their artistic execution. In 1889 a catalogue of the ancient Near Eastern antiquities and plaster casts was published for the first time, presenting the Assyrian reliefs in great detail (Königliche Museen zu Berlin 1889).

Ten years later, after the Vorderasiatische Abteilung was founded in 1899, the collection of Near Eastern antiquities was moved to a temporary storage space, which then had to be vacated in 1911, when work began on the construction of the new museum, the building that

171 Relief BM 124920 (1856,0909.53) from Nineveh, now in the British Museum, London, shows Ashurbanipal with his consort at a banquet in the royal gardens (Reade 1998a, 88-90, figs. 106-7).

*Figure 62.6 Room 12 of the Vorderasiatisches Museum in 1958: Reassembly of the Assyrian relief slab VA 953. Courtesy of the Vorderasiatisches Museum-SMB, Berlin.*

is today the Pergamon Museum. The collection was next housed in rooms in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, which has been known as the Bode Museum since 1954. Both locations were able to accommodate visitors only to a very limited extent (Crüsemann 2000, 143). It was not until 1930 that the Vorderasiatische Abteilung was assigned its place in the south wing of the Pergamon Museum. The basic concept, devised by the then director of the Vorderasiatische Abteilung, Walter Andrae (1875-1956), and still largely in place today, called for the Assyrian antiquities to be displayed on the northern side on the first floor. The reliefs from Nineveh were now shown in a room together with a large water basin from the time of Sennacherib in Assur. The inauguration of the so-called Assur Rooms took place only in 1934, and with the outbreak of war in 1939 they soon had to be closed again. Unlike the directors of the collection of Classical Antiquities and the Department of Islamic Art, Andrae decided not to evacuate his collection due to the expected air raids in the Second World War (Andrae 1988, 292-3). He had the movable objects transported to the museum's cellar, while the fixed exhibits were protected by wooden planks and sandbags. The orthostat reliefs survived the war largely undamaged. The confiscation of the museum's holdings by the Trophy Commission of the Red Army, which had begun on 7 May 1945, continued in December 1945 (Kühnel-Kunze 1984, 72-3). The Assyrian reliefs were detached from the museum's walls and brought to Leningrad, or St Petersburg as it is now known. As part of the restitution campaign in 1958-1959, the Soviet Union returned numerous collections, including the Assyrian orthostats (fig. 62.6), to the government of the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

In the new permanent exhibition, which will open in 2030 when the overall refurbishment of the Pergamon Museum has been completed, these collections will attest to the magnificent decoration of Assyrian palaces and the professionalism of the sculptors working in Assyrian times.

# 63. The Material Culture of Nineveh in Belgium and the Netherlands

*Lucas P. Petit and Bruno Overlaet*

The number of objects from Nineveh in Belgium and Dutch institutes is surprisingly small compared to other European countries. Financial crises during large parts of the nineteenth century had hindered the acquisition of foreign material culture. Archaeological museums in the 'Low Countries' were forced to prioritize local materials, whereas other European museums could fill their showcases with amazing objects from the Ancient Near East. Only at the end of the nineteenth century were the Dutch National Museum of Antiquity in Leiden (NMA) and the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels (RMAH) – the two main national museums with ancient Near Eastern collections – financially able to search for Ninevite objects.

The first artefacts from Nineveh were added to the NMA collection as early as 1835, shortly after the tragic death of its founder and first director, Caspar Reuvens. He had visited the British Museum in London multiple times and brought back replicas of seals – not for the museum, but for his private collection. After Reuvens' death, his wife sold these objects to the NMA, including a few seals found in Nineveh by the famous Englishman Claudius Rich (fig. 63.1).[172] Well before the first excavations at Nineveh, there was no realization in Belgium and the Netherlands of the importance of this royal Assyrian city.

This situation changed after Dutch newspapers reported the impressive discoveries in Nineveh, Khorsabad and Nimrud during the 1840s. The first shiploads with excavated objects arrived in Europe and many museums tried to get a piece of the pie. The new director of the NMA, Conrad Leemans, must have felt pretty helpless when he was unable to buy any of these objects. In 1858 he narrowly escaped having to reject a gift of several large casts from the Berlin Museum, when the Dutch government promised to pay the transport bill. Among those casts were two reliefs from the Southwest Palace of Nineveh (fig. 63.2).[173] In 1892, another five casts of Nineveh reliefs were acquired from Berlin.[174] In Belgium, too, original artefacts from the Ancient Near East were largely absent during the nineteenth century. The RMAH concentrated on casts, especially after the founding of the Plaster-cast Workshop in 1889 (Montens 2008). This workshop was also for wealthy Belgium inhabitants who wanted to decorate their private homes with Assyrian reproductions.

The first original object from Nineveh – a limestone tablet with cuneiform – arrived in Leiden in 1889.[175] This object from the time of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC) was probably used as a floor tile. But the Near Eastern collection of the NMA remained small

172 National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden (P.44 and P.78).
173 National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden (AB 4-5).
174 National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden (A 1892/3.1-7).
175 National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden (LKA 1157).

*Figure 63.1 Replica of a seal discovered by Claudius James Rich in 1820. The original is located in the British Museum (1825,0503.135). Sulfur; L 3.8 cm, W 5.4 cm; National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden (P.58).*

*Figure 63.3 Relief depicting a small pomegranate with fruits. It belongs to the same series of reliefs as the 'Banquet Scene' of king Ashurbanipal now located in the British Museum (1856,0909.53/ BM 124920). Nineveh, Iraq; Room S', N Palace; 7th century BC; limestone/gypsum; H 26.5 cm, W 18.5 cm; The Netherlands Institute for the Near East, Leiden (LB 1319). © NINO.*

*Figure 63.2 Cast of a relief from the SW Palace depicting two auxiliary archers in procession. The original is located in the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (VA 957). Gypsum; H 182.5 cm, W 126 cm; National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden (AB 4a – b).*

*Figure 63.4 Relief showing two bowmen with feather headdresses. Nineveh, Iraq; Room S', N Palace; 7th century BC; limestone/gypsum; H 19 cm, W 17.3 cm; Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels (O.01923). © Royal Museums of Art and History.*

*Figure 63.5 Relief showing deportees advancing towards the left shouldering their sacks. Nineveh, Iraq; SW Palace; 7th century BC; gypsum; H 37 cm, W 33 cm; Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels (O.03870). © Royal Museums of Art and History.*

until the 1920s, when the archaeologist and language specialist Franz Marius Theodor de Liagre Böhl (1882-1976) entered the scene (Petit 2013). During his professorships in Groningen and Leiden he promoted the Ancient Near East in all its facets, including material culture. He was convinced that the public, students and even heritage would gain from a collection of artefacts in the Netherlands (Petit 2014, 83). In the following years, he acquired a large private collection with numerous cuneiform tablets from Nineveh. In 1951 his objects were handed over to The Netherlands Institute for the Near East (NINO), where it is still housed today (Van Zoest & Berntsen 2014). Among the Nineveh objects are numerous clay tablets from the library of Ashurbanipal,[176] as well as other objects, such as a small fragment of the Garden-Scene relief (fig. 63.3).[177] Böhl made multiple trips to the Middle East and during one of these journeys, in 1932, he bought a Nineveh clay plaque for the NMA.[178]

The financial situation of the different Belgium and Dutch museums improved at the beginning of the twentieth century. Both the NMA and the RMAH were

176 The Netherlands Institute for the Near East, Leiden (LB 1318 and LB 2110).

177 The Netherlands Institute for the Near East, Leiden (LB 1319).

178 National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden (A 1932/7.90).

now occasionally able to acquire archaeological masterpieces. In the Netherlands this was made possible by the 'Reuvensfonds', a financial organization for the NMA founded by prominent figures in Dutch society. This resulted, for example, in the acquisition of a large relief from Nineveh.[179] The RMAH could acquire at least four wall panels originating from Nineveh in the first half of the twentieth century[180] and two reliefs from the famous 'Palace without rival' in 1981 (fig. 63.4; Homés-Fredericq 1982, 36-7; Gubel 2007).[181]

Thus during the nineteenth century, there was certainly a realization of the importance of Nineveh, but financial constraints prevented museums from making purchases. Although this would change in the twentieth century, the number of objects from Nineveh in the Netherlands and Belgium would remain relatively small. Museums such as the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam[182] and the RMAH in Brussels continued to buy and produce Ninevite casts. In a few cases, the biblical association was an important reason for interest in the ancient city of Nineveh; for example, this lay behind the acquisition of a replica of the flood-tablet by Museon, a museum for culture and science in The Hague.[183]

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179 National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden (A 1949/2.1).

180 Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels (O.01818, O.01856, O.01923 and O.01930).

181 Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels (O.03869 and O.03870).

182 Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam (APM 16270).

183 Museon, Den Haag (42639).

# 64. The Material Culture of Nineveh in Collections in the United States

*Michael Seymour*

*Figure 64.1 Relief depicting an Assyrian crown-prince. Nineveh, Iraq; Passage to the Ištar Temple; 704-681 BC; limestone/gypsum; H 66.5 cm, W 35.5 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (32.143.13).*

The United States' engagement with ancient Assyria differed significantly in timing and emphasis from that of England, France, or Germany. It was arguably closest to the latter, since like newly unified Germany, the United States became directly engaged in Mesopotamian excavations only at the end of the nineteenth century, when the great Assyrian collections of London and Paris were already largely formed.[184] Unlike Germany, however, the United States did not have ambitions of territorial or commercial empire in the Middle East, and indeed the motivation and organization of Mesopotamian expeditions lay far further from the political centre. Whereas it is hard to discuss the German Oriental Society's groundbreaking work at Babylon and Assur without reference to Germany's political interests in Mesopotamia, the drivers of American involvement were first religious and then scholarly.[185]

The first Assyrian reliefs to reach America were individual examples of winged protective figures from Nimrud (ancient Kalhu): two examples at Williams College Museum of Art, Massachusetts, are probably the earliest to have arrived, in 1851.[186] Despite the fact that no two are truly identical, these 'genie' figures, human- or eagle-headed, were considered 'duplicates' by Henry Rawlinson (1810-1895), who as British Consul-General in Baghdad (from 1851 until 1855) was in a position to allow American missionaries in Mesopotamia to take and export individual examples, often to their alma maters, as visual evidence for biblical Nineveh and its destruction (Cohen & Kangas 2010).[187] The Williams College reliefs are a classic case, acquired by the missionary Dwight Whitney Marsh (1823-1896) (albeit slightly earlier, in 1850, with the assistance of Austen Henry Layard [1817-1894]) and given to his college explicitly for religious instruction: in Marsh's words, 'May they [students looking at the sculptures] remember that God is older than the ages – that the glorious future of America is not eternity' (Dwight Marsh, 1855 letter, quoted by Gonzalez 2001). Following an initial suggestion by Layard, rejected by other scholars,[188] a modern tradition quickly developed of identifying the eagle-headed figures with Nisroch; in the biblical account, the god whose temple Sennacherib was said to be visiting at the time of his murder (2 Kings 19:37).

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184 Beginning with the University of Pennsylvania's Nippur expedition. For a list of early US archaeological expeditions to Mesopotamia and Iran, see Meade 1974. On the history of US fieldwork in the Middle East, see also Kuklick 1996, Rakic 2010, Kawami & Olbrantz 2013. On initial US reception of the British and French Assyrian discoveries, see Holloway 2004.

185 For Germany's new engagement in Near Eastern studies, see Marchand 2009; for Mesopotamian archaeology in particular, see also Bohrer 2003, 272-313; Seymour 2014, 185-216. For early US projects in Mesopotamia, see esp. Kuklick 1996.

186 Williams College WCMA 1851.1, 2. Gonzales 2001; Aruz *et al.* 2014, no. 13.

187 For most in the nineteenth century, 'Nineveh' could refer equally to the city or to Assyria generally.

188 Layard 1849, II, 458-9. The idea is rejected by Rawlinson 1850, 27 and later publications.

*Figure 64.2 (left) Relief showing a battle scene of Assyrians storming a citadel. Nineveh, Iraq; Room XLIII, SW Palace; 704-681 BC; gypsum; H 125.7 cm, W 85.1 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (55.121.4a, b).*

*Figure 64.3 (right) Relief showing a siege scene. Nineveh, Iraq; Room XXXII, SW Palace; 704-681 BC; gypsum; H 17.8 cm, W 20.2 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (54.136.1a-c).*

The reliefs found at Nineveh itself contained more varied imagery, including extensive depictions of military campaigns that were of obvious importance to historians even if – as was possible at the time, even for those as deeply engaged with Assyria as Rawlinson – one placed little or no value on Assyrian art (Seymour 2014, 141-3). Many of these campaign reliefs were therefore sent to the British Museum; others were recorded by Layard or his successors but remained *in situ*, or came ultimately to be housed in the Iraq Museum or Mosul Museum, or were lost. Nonetheless, examples did find their way into a range of other museum and private collections around the world, including in the United States.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art was the ultimate beneficiary of Dikran Kelekian's (1868-1951) purchase and subsequent sale to John D. Rockefeller Jr (1874-1960) of the sculptures of the 'Nineveh Court', the architectural folly built at Canford Manor, Dorset, to house the Assyrian sculptures given by Austen Henry Layard to his cousin and patron, Lady Charlotte Guest (1812-1895), and her husband Sir John Guest (1785-1852) (Russell 1997; Rakic, this volume). Most of these came from Nimrud, but several important pieces were from Nineveh. Perhaps the most intriguing of these is a panel showing the head and body of a male figure (fig. 64.1).[189] Probably moved from its original position in antiquity, this sculpture's most likely original context was the passage leading from the Southwest Palace to the Ištar Temple,[190] where it formed part of a long procession scene. The bearded figure

189 The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of John D. Rockefeller Jr (1932, 32.143.13).

190 The piece finds a good parallel in one from the passage to the Ištar Temple (Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin, VA 955); the two are probably partners, one from the 'uphill' and one from the 'downhill' processions seen on opposite walls of the passage. However, this area was excavated not by Layard, but by Hormuzd Rassam in 1853. Reade (1967, 47-8) suggests that the piece may have been moved in antiquity and discovered by Layard elsewhere in the palace. In addition to this suggestion, Russell (1997, 208-9) raises the alternative possibilities that the piece was sent to Layard by Rassam (an 1852 letter includes an offer of sculptures), or that the sculpture belonged originally to a different series such as that of Passageway LI.

*Figure 64.4 (left) Relief showing a deportation scene of a female prisoner followed by two male deportees wearing animal skins. Nineveh, Iraq; SW Palace; 704-681 BC; Limestone/gypsum; H 43.1 cm, W 39.8 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (32.143.17).*

*Figure 64.5 (right) Clay prism with the annals of Sennacherib. Nineveh, Iraq; c. 691 BC; clay; H 38, W 14 cm; The Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago (A 2793).*
*© Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.*

wears a decorated diadem, large earrings, a long robe and shawl bearing incised designs, and a bracelet consisting of several rosettes. He also wears a sword whose scabbard is elaborated with a pair of lions. The face is severely damaged, probably by deliberate chiselling following the sack of Nineveh in 612 BC. He most likely represents the crown prince,[191] although this is not Esarhaddon (reigned 681-669 BC), who became crown prince only later in Sennacherib's reign (705/704-681 BC) in what seems to have been an unusual process (Porter 1993, 16-21).

Other panels from Nineveh in the Metropolitan Museum show soldiers leading horses, prisoners under guard in the marshes, and scenes of battle and war. A siege scene in the collection is interesting for the modern response it draws (fig. 64.2).[192] Biblical tour groups invariably make this relief a stop, since it can stand in for the siege of Lachish reliefs now in the British Museum (Ussishkin, this volume), and by extension Sennacherib's famous siege of Jerusalem (c. 701 BC). The scene does indeed come from a Sennacherib campaign, though more probably one in Elam or Babylonia.[193] Such a relief would be unremarkable amongst those in the British Museum, but since campaign reliefs were not as widely dispersed as the magical protective imagery from Nimrud, there are very few siege scenes in American collections. This piece thus plays a special role for a particular American public. The Metropolitan Museum reliefs were acquired as gifts; later, in 1987 and 1990, the museum would also support new excavations at Nineveh by the University of California at Berkeley (Stronach, this volume). By this time, the

191 On the comparators, Reade 1967, 47.

192 The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1955 (55.121.4a, b).

193 Probable attribution to Sennacherib: Russell 1991, 139; probable Babylonian or Elamite campaign: Barnett *et al.* 1998, 112, no. 481.

old division of finds system had long-since ended, and all finds remained the property of Iraq.[194]

One important distinction between American and European reception of ancient sculpture generally is the relative dominance in the United States of a fine art museum model, whereby the public's main access to ancient material culture in the museum context is as part of a global history of art – often with contemporary art under the same roof – whereas in Europe such material is more likely to be displayed in a more exclusively ancient or archaeological setting. The British Museum, for example, though housing much of the world's great ancient sculpture, would consider its remit quite different from that of an art museum. Reliefs from Nineveh have reached collections across the United States, with some in major art museums such as the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, or the Seattle Art Museum,[195] but more in smaller institutions or occasionally private collections, with many institutions holding a single piece.[196] The relief fragments themselves are widely dispersed: one fragment showing four Assyrian soldiers is housed in the Honolulu Museum of Art, Hawaii, almost as far from Nineveh geographically as is possible on Earth.[197]

Other material from Nineveh is concentrated in major centres of Assyriological study in the United States, notably the University of Chicago Oriental Institute and the Yale Babylonian Collection. Both of these collections hold significant texts from Nineveh. The Oriental Institute Museum houses an important prism containing one of the most complete texts of Sennacherib's annals: eight campaigns, including that against Hezekiah of Jerusalem, again lending the object special biblical interest (fig. 64.5; Luckenbill 1924; Grayson & Novotny 2012, no. 22.1). The prism was purchased in Baghdad by the Egyptologist, archaeologist, and founder of the Oriental Institute James Henry Breasted (1865-1935) in 1920. Much of Breasted's work, including fieldwork and the creation of the Oriental Institute itself, was funded by John D. Rockefeller Jr, who as noted above was also responsible for the acquisition of the Canford sculptures for a US collection. Among the highlights of the Oriental Institute Museum is an exceptional collection of sculptures and other artefacts from the palace of Sargon II (reigned 721-705 BC; fig. 27.1) at Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin) received under Iraq's division of finds system from the Institute's excavations there in 1928-1935.

The Yale Babylonian Collection also began with a gift, this time from John Pierpont Morgan (1837-1913) in 1909, of substantial funding both for a professorship, first held by Albert Tobias Clay (1866-1925), and for the acquisition of a collection of cuneiform texts from which the present encyclopaedic collection has grown.[198] Among the Assyrian texts in the collection are building inscriptions and cylinders of the Neo-Assyrian kings, including Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal (reigned 668 – c. 627 BC), many acquired and first published by Clay, or by Ferris J. Stephens, curator of the collection 1933-1962.[199] The collection also holds reliefs from both the Southwest and North Palaces at Nineveh.[200]

The Nineveh sculptures, texts, and seals that reached American collections during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries came through what at the time were normal channels, but they should be the last, unless as loans. The modern market for illicit antiquities poses a grave threat to archaeological sites by incentivizing looters, and stringent efforts are needed to enforce the strong legislation that now exists to protect Iraqi cultural property. Nonetheless, the history that has led some material from Nineveh to travel so far afield also holds potential benefits. Certainly the presence of Assyrian objects in multiple museums around the world has led to their greater and more widespread study worldwide. Just as important, however, is the potential for any museum visitor to see and form a connection with the history and archaeology of another place. This capacity to inspire interest and empathy is hugely valuable, arguably one of the most important functions of museums. In the case of Assyrian material, such engagement offers access to aspects of Iraqi history and culture rarely seen in the media, and to a rich heritage that belongs to both Iraq and the world.

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194 An antiquities law of 1969 marked the end of the division of finds system, following other legislation moving in this direction in earlier years. On the evolution of Iraqi government attitudes to and legislation for ownership of finds from foreign excavations, see Bernhardsson 2010.

195 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: 33.683, 33.684, 33.685, 53.13, 60.133, 60.134; Seattle Art Museum: 46.49, 46.50, 57.54. This essay is limited to the United States, but there are at least two Southwest Palace relief fragments in Canada, at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

196 Too numerous to list here, but, e.g., Indiana University of Art Museum, Bloomington, IN; Museum of Science, Buffalo, NY; Museum of Art, Toledo, OH. They are geographically widely dispersed, although numerically somewhat concentrated in the northeastern states. A concordance of institutions holding relief fragments from the Southwest and North Palaces of Nineveh can be found in Barnett 1976; Barnett *et al.* 1998.

197 Honolulu Museum of Art, Hawaii (HAA 3608).

198 Other Mesopotamian material from Morgan's collection went to The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Morgan Library and Museum.

199 Clay 1915: nos. 40-2; Stephens 1937: nos. 70, 71, 76-9.

200 Yale (YBC 2355, 2356).

# 65. Nineveh, Lady Charlotte Guest and The Metropolitan Museum of Art

*Yelena Rakic*

Among the many great works on display in The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (MMA) is the collection of Assyrian relief and colossal sculptures originally from the ancient sites of Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), Nineveh and Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin). Today, the majority of these sculptures are installed together in one gallery, in an arrangement designed to evoke a royal audience hall, giving visitors the sense of entering an Assyrian palace (fig. 65.1). Assyrian reliefs came to The Metropolitan in varied ways, but a group of eighteen of these sculptures have a particularly fascinating past, as they lived part of their lives on a private estate in nineteenth-century England. The story of these sculptures is well known, having been most extensively recounted by John M. Russell (1997), who follows the travels of these artefacts from their ancient past through their post-discovery history in his book *From Nineveh to New York*.

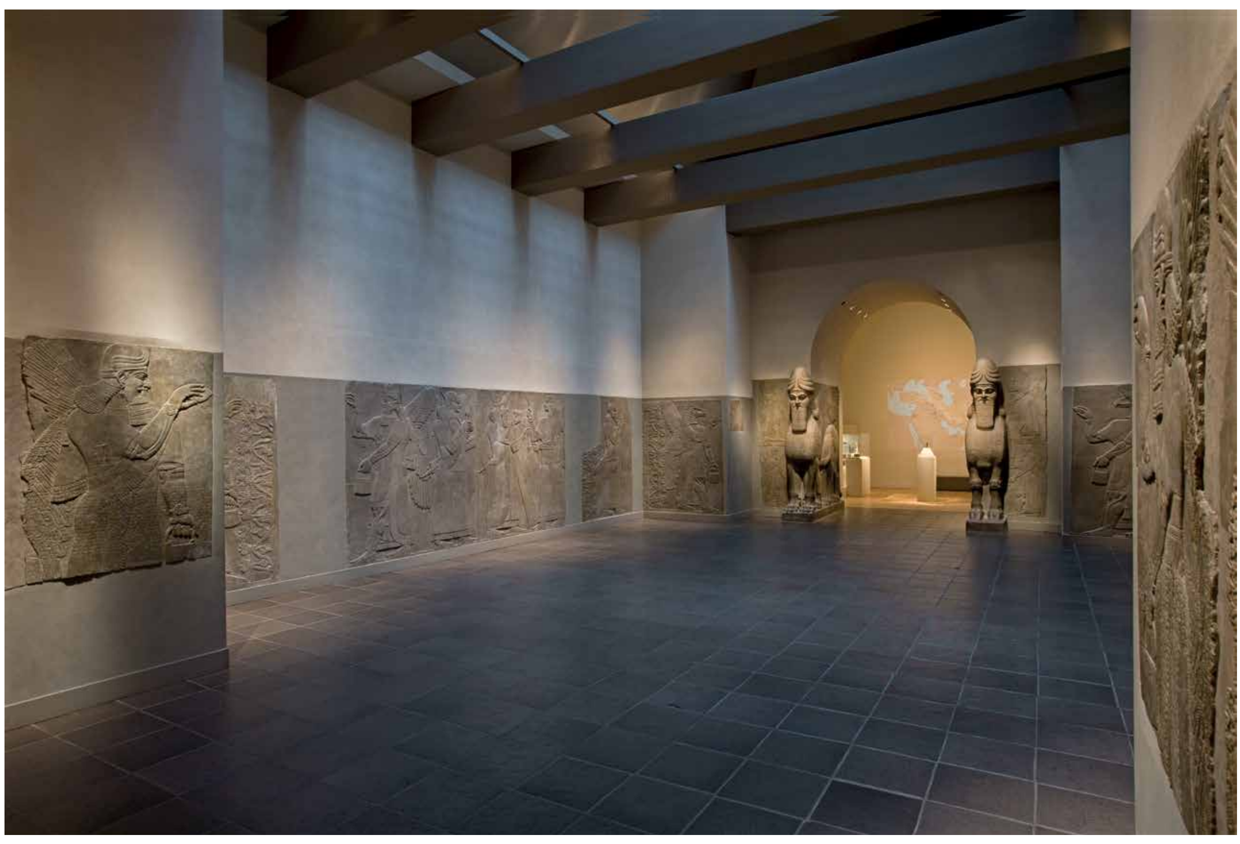

*Figure 65.1 View of the Raymond and Beverly Sackler Gallery for Assyrian Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010. Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.*

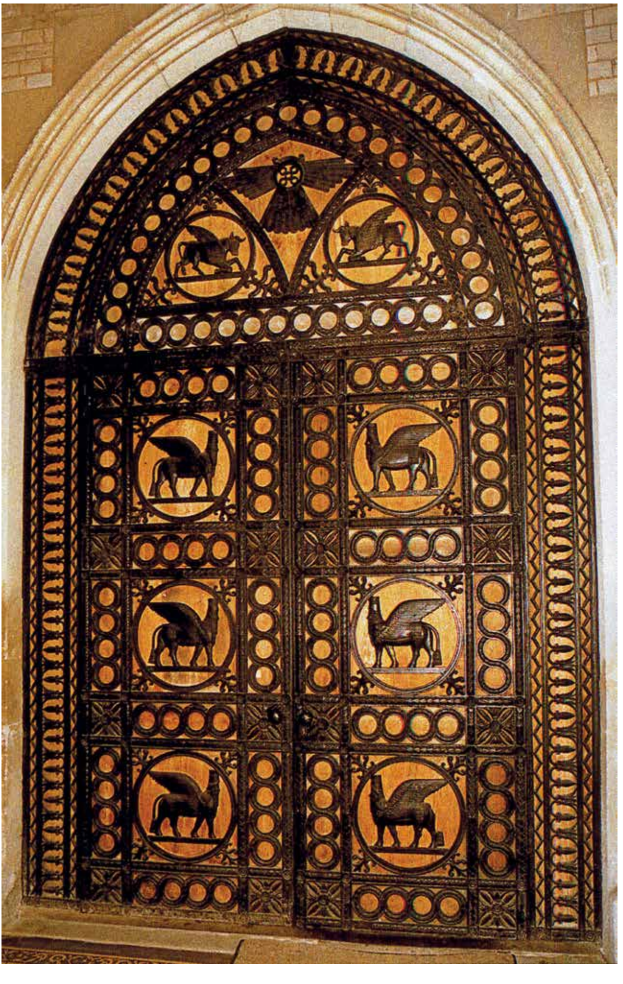

*Figure 65.2 Door from the Nineveh Porch at Canford Manor in Dorset. Courtesy of Judith McKenzie.*

Sir Austen Henry Layard's (1817-1894) excavations at Nimrud and Nineveh between 1845 and 1851 not only unearthed a huge amount of sculpture, but were also the stimulus for the popular reception of ancient Assyria and fascination with all things Assyrian in mid-nineteenth century England (Bohrer 2003; Russell 1997). Most of Layard's finds were sent to the British Museum; however, several found their way to other institutions or into private hands. Layard himself sent 26 sculptures between 1849 and 1852 to his cousin, friend and supporter Lady Charlotte Guest (1812-1895), a scholar of Welsh literature, mother of ten, and wife of the wealthiest industrialist in England. Lady Charlotte displayed the sculptures at Canford Manor, her country home in Dorset, in a garden pavilion built especially for them by Charles Barry (1795-1860), the architect of the Houses of Parliament. Known as the 'Nineveh Porch', the enclosed freestanding structure combined gothic architecture with Assyrian sculpture and featured stained-glass windows composed of patterns from wall paintings found at Nimrud, a ceiling painted with cuneiform texts, and cast-iron doors decorated with human-headed bull colossi (fig. 65.2).[201] The collection of Assyrian sculptures at Canford Manor, which included human-headed, winged bull and lion colossi, was surpassed at the time only by

201 While the majority of the sculptures were from Nimrud, some fragmentary pieces came from Nineveh. Assyrian discoveries at the time were generally referred to as coming from 'Nineveh', regardless of whether they were from Nineveh, Nimrud, or Khorsabad, as it was thought that they all shared a 'Ninevite' culture (Russell 1997, 15).

*Figure 65.3 View of installation of Assyrian sculpture in the Great Hall in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1933. Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.*

the Assyrian relief collection in the British Museum, where the counterparts of the bull and lion are still on display today.

In 1919, 24 years after the death of Lady Charlotte, her grandson Ivor Churchill Guest (1873-1939) sold sixteen of the reliefs and the two colossal winged guardian figures to the New York dealer Dikran Kelekian (1868-1951), evidently to raise funds for inheritance taxes. The sculptures first travelled to New York, where they remained in storage for four years, and then to the University Museum in Philadelphia, where they were placed on display while attempts to secure funding for their purchase were made. During this time, Kelekian looked for other buyers, and after extensive negotiations and deliberations John D. Rockefeller, Jr (1874-1960) purchased the collection in 1927. Rockefeller embarked on a mission to determine the best home for the collection, where it could be of the greatest public service as well as most useful in the study of the History of Art. He ultimately chose The Metropolitan Museum of Art, where a direct consequence of the Rockefeller gift was the creation in 1932 of the Department of Near Eastern Art encompassing the arts of the ancient and Islamic Near East.[202] Shortly after their arrival the Assyrian sculptures were installed in a prominent position at the south

202 The reliefs (MMA 32.143.1-18; figs. 27.3, 34.7, 64.1 and 64.4) were gifted to the Museum in 1930, but not accessioned until 1932. Rockefeller donated an additional five reliefs to the Museum between 1931 and 1933: three reliefs from Nimrud (MMA 31.72.1-3) acquired by American missionaries (Crawford *et al.* 1980); and two fragments from Khorsabad (MMA 33.16.1-2) from collections in England (Collins 2010).

end of the Great Hall, where they were exhibited as a foundational branch on the family tree of art and culture (fig. 65.3).

The Canford Manor sculptures were not the first Assyrian reliefs or even the first objects from Nineveh to be acquired by The Metropolitan – nor would they be the last.[203] Soon after the founding of the Museum in 1870, its inventory quickly grew to include a wide selection of objects from Mesopotamia such as clay tablets inscribed with cuneiform, cylinder and stamp seals, and even a fragment of an Assyrian relief from Nimrud.[204] These early acquisitions reflected growing American interest during the nineteenth century in the art and culture of peoples and lands mentioned in the Bible and were frequently collected by American missionaries working in the region (Cohen & Kangas 2010). In 1886 a collection of over 500 objects purchased from the Reverend William Hayes Ward (1835-1916), who had led the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe exploratory expedition to Babylonia two years earlier, was given special attention in the Museum's *Annual Report of the Trustees,* highlighting its importance. Included were inscribed objects most likely from Nineveh: two clay cylinders with cuneiform inscriptions of Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC) and Esarhaddon (reigned 681-669 BC); and a fragment of a stone slab with a cuneiform inscription from the annals of Ashurbanipal (reigned 668 – c. 627 BC).[205]

Over 80 years have passed since the Rockefeller gift in one fell swoop enriched The Metropolitan's encyclopaedic collection in immeasurable ways. The majority of Assyrian objects which subsequently entered the museum were acquired through excavations at Nimrud conducted by the British School of Archaeology in Iraq and supported by The Metropolitan in the 1950's and 1960's (Rakic 2010). The provenance history of other acquisitions, such as three relief fragments and a Parthian period earring from Nineveh, help to shed light on the nineteenth-century collecting practices of private individuals in America and England.[206] The modern lives of all these objects from ancient Assyria not only reflect The Metropolitan's history, but serve to educate and delight all who visit them.

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203 Most relevant perhaps to the Rockefeller gift were six almost complete reliefs (MMA 17.190.2077-2082) gifted to the Metropolitan in 1917 by the estate of John Pierpont Morgan (1837-1913).

204 The relief (MMA 84.11) was gifted to the museum by Benjamin Brewster in 1884. A pavement slab with carpet design (MMA X.153), probably from Nineveh, entered the museum before 1904.

205 MMA 86.11.197; MMA 86.11.55; MMA 86.11.413 (Spar & Jursa 2014, nos. 156-7, 162).

206 Two fragments (MMA 54.136.1a – c,2a-d; fig. 64.3) were given by Layard to an American missionary; the third fragment (MMA 55.121.4a, b; fig. 64.2) and earring (MMA 1995.366) were in private collections in England.

# 66. The Iraq Museum in Baghdad

*Carlo Lippolis*

*Figure 66.1 King Feisal I.*

*Figure 66.2 Relief depicting an Assyrian war camp; Iraq Museum, Baghdad (IM 31065).*

*Figure 66.3 Baghdad Museum in 1926. Reproduced from BASOR 22.*

The Iraq Museum in Baghdad was founded in 1923, when Iraq had only recently become an independent state. Great Britain, the main architect of the creation of a unified Iraqi state, but at the same time exercising significant political and economic control over the country, favoured the ascent to the throne of King Feisal I (1883-1933; fig. 66.1), who belonged to the same clan as the Jordanian royal house. The creation of Iraq was the result of a difficult process that brought together a population not only divided in terms of its religious diversity, but also in its ethno-linguistic character. For both the British and the Iraqi leadership, it was absolutely essential to try to identify and emphasize those features that were shared by the entire Iraqi population, in order to reinforce a country that was in fact characterized by a high degree of diversity.

The archaeological excavations carried out in Mesopotamia by European countries in the second half of the nineteenth century and the treasures stored in the museums of Paris, London and Berlin had already spread knowledge of the great Mesopotamian tradition far and wide. The recovery and enhancement of this tradition appeared to be an appropriate way to create a sense of national unity. Mesopotamian heritage and history would become the bearers of a message of national unity, and at the same time they would evoke a distant (pre-Islamic) past, devoid of any elements that could lead to conflict or be considered disagreeable by some components of Iraqi society.

The creator of the Baghdad Museum was a woman, Gertrude Bell (fig. 15.1). Born in 1868 to a wealthy British family, after graduating in History at Oxford in 1888, she travelled throughout Europe and in 1898 arrived in Constantinople. This city inspired her to explore the Near and Middle East, and she began to travel throughout Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine and Persia. During her journeys, Bell met the great personalities of the age who were staying in those countries, such as Lawrence of Arabia and the archaeologist Leonard Woolley (1880-1960), and she visited all the major archaeological excavations then in progress. She described the places, emotions and memories of these trips in a series of books, which brought her international renown (Cooper, this volume).

When the Iraqi Ministry of Education had to choose a British consultant for the design of the Baghdad Museum, Bell was the obvious choice; already a well-known writer, an expert on archaeology and well established both at the British administration and at Feisal's court. In 1924, the first law on the protection of archaeological heritage was promulgated in Iraq. Bell played a key role in defining this law, which entailed a pair division of the findings between Iraq and the country that had sent the archaeological expedition to Mesopotamia. While in other countries, exporting any archaeological find was already forbidden, this Iraqi law was favourable to foreign countries. It was thanks to this law that the number of archaeological expeditions sponsored by European and American universities and museums increased considerably, whilst the collections of the Baghdad Museum could increase as well. Gertrude Bell obtained new headquarters for the museum in 1926, but even these were too small for the increasing number of archaeological artefacts (fig. 66.3). In the early 1930s, the Iraqi king supported the project to give the museum a larger location (it would have been on Ma'moun Street), but a severe economic crisis and then the Second World War prevented the fulfilment of this aim.

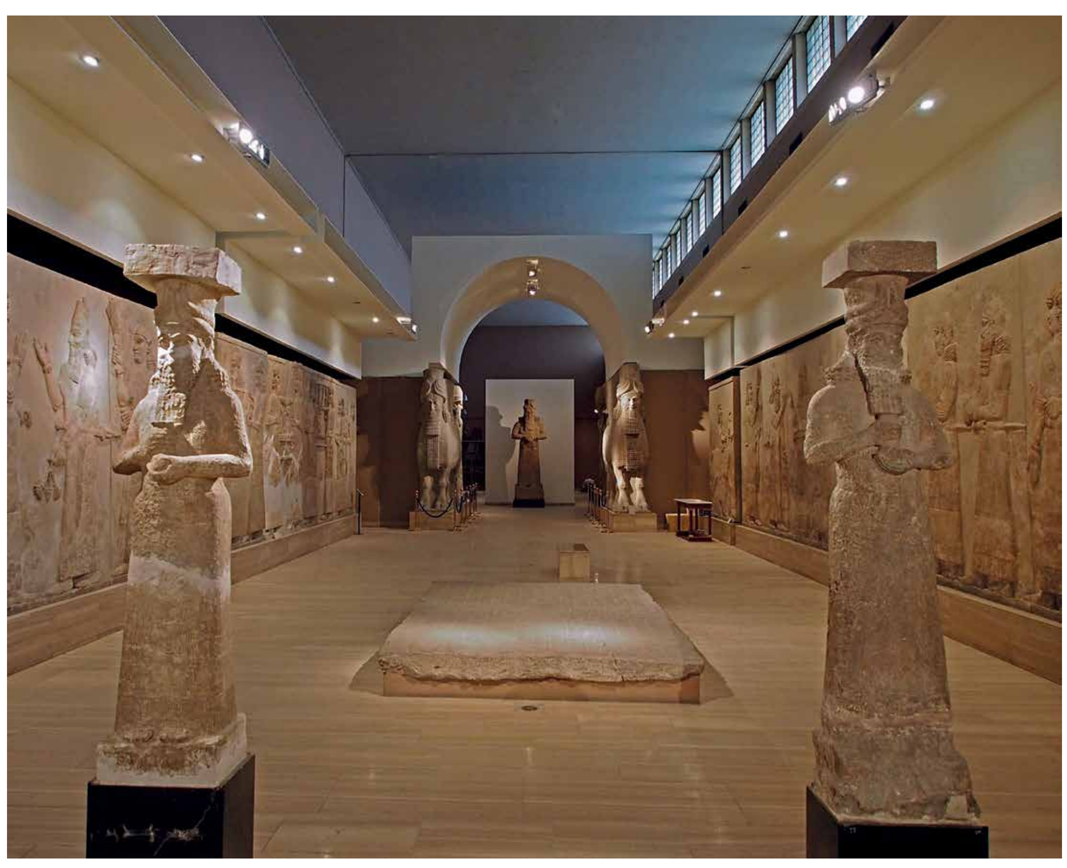


*Figure 66.4 Interior of the renovated Iraq Museum in 2006. Courtesy of the author.*

*Figure 66.5 Reopened Iraq Museum in 2015. Courtesy of the author.*

In the 1950s the king of Iraq, Feisal II, once again gave his support to the enlargement of the Museum. In 1957 the architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959), no less, was asked to design a project. However, the coup that devastated Iraq in 1958 and overthrew the monarchy prevented the construction of the new museum. The work only began in 1960, in a very different political situation, but one that was still favourable to promoting Mesopotamian archaeological heritage. In the years between 1964 and 1966, when the archaeological artefacts were waiting to be placed in the new museum's headquarters, a large travelling exhibition (Cologne, Berlin, Lisbon, Paris and even Turin) was established, bringing the collections from Baghdad to Europe for the first time. The new museum, designed by the German architect Werner March (1894-1976), was finally inaugurated in 1967; the building still houses the Iraq Museum in Baghdad today (fig. 66.5). The museum was home to the most significant finds in Iraqi history, from the most ancient prehistoric and protohistoric periods to the Islamic age.

From 1979, Saddam Hussein (1937-2006), due both to his wish to make Iraq the leading country in the Middle East and to his overwhelming yearning for supremacy, used ancient Mesopotamia as an instrument of propaganda. The long-lasting Mesopotamian political and cultural dominance over large areas of the ancient world became an ideological justification for the Iraqi claim to superiority over the Middle East. Saddam therefore promoted the 'enhancement' of Iraqi archaeological heritage, albeit in accordance with a vision involving invasive restorations and massive reconstructions.

On the day following the entry of the occupying troops into Baghdad (9 April 2003), several clashes in front of the museum forced many managers and guards to leave the building. This was followed by three days of destruction and looting within the museum, transmitted by media all over the world. Those distressing images represented the first evident act of destruction of cultural heritage, which is still crumbling under the blows of barbaric devastation.

Thanks to a well-established relationship with the Iraqi authorities, Italy was able to intervene immediately after the looting. Planning on the project to renovate part of the Iraq Museum started in 2003 by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture, together with the Centro Scavi of Turin and the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage of Iraq. The project, funded by the General Directorate for the Mediterranean and the Middle East of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, received further contributions from the Department for Research, Innovation and Organization of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture and the Foundation of the National Bank of Communications, with the constant support of the Italian Embassy in Baghdad.

The works started in 2006 and initially involved the Assyrian monumental sculpture gallery, the Islamic architectural decoration gallery and the central courtyard. The two main galleries were renovated, with a new distribution of spaces and a new lighting system. In the great Assyrian gallery, after restoration and cleaning, the reliefs of the palace of Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Šarrukin) were placed along the walls of the room, recalling their original location (fig. 66.4). Similarly, above the two monumental human-headed bulls, the guardians of the main entrances to the Assyrian palaces, an arched covering was recreated, based on the original architectural model.

Since 2012 a new project has been underway, including the establishment of a second large gallery on the ground floor (the so-called Middle Assyrian Gallery) with materials from Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), along with other objects dating from the second half of the second millennium and the first millennium BC. In addition to the structural works, the objects have been replaced on suitable supports and within showcases in a room with opaque windows. The most delicate operation has been the placing of two human-headed bulls from Nimrud, each weighing more than three tons, which were previously exhibited in a secondary wing of the museum. Educational panels have been designed in both English and Arabic, on the history of the museum and the research and on the main historical and artistic developments in Mesopotamia. The Baghdad Museum was officially reopened to the public in February 2015 (fig. 66.5).

# 67. The Material Culture of Nineveh in Turkish Collections

*Ayşe Tuba Ökse, with contributions from*

*Zeynep Kızıltan and Gülcay Yağcı*

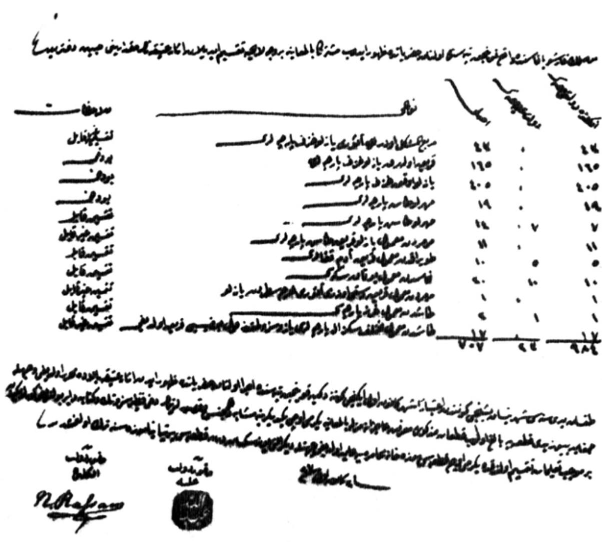
Archaeological excavations in Ottoman territory, including Nineveh, began in the early nineteenth century, and the antiquities from these sites were brought to the museums supporting the excavations. Documents preserved in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum shed light on the situation between 1873 and 1904 (Koşay *et al.* 2013b, 178-99).

## 67.1 The Law on Antiquities and Ottoman documents on the excavations

Following the founding of the Imperial Museum (Müze-i Hümayun) in 1869, the Law on Antiquities came into force in 1874. According to this law, finds uncovered during excavations had to be shared between the Ottoman State, the landowner and the excavators charged by European museums. Moreover, a representative of the sultan had to be present during fieldwork (Koşay *et al.* 2013a, 88, 749-893). During the excavations of George Smith (1840-1876) at Nineveh in the 1870s, the governor in Mosul demanded half of the antiquities. Despite this, fragments of c. 3,000 tablets were sent to the British Museum in 1874-1876 (Barnett 1976, 22-3). In 1877, Hormuzd Rassam (1826-1910), the British vice-consul, aimed 'to try and find as many fragments as possible from the libraries of Ashurbanipal and Sennacherib, for the completion of the records which were already amongst the national collection in London'. Many sculptured slabs and inscriptions found during his excavations are said to have disappeared (Koşay *et al.* 2013a, 893). In 1879, Rassam was prevented by the Turkish authorities from making any finds, aside from a few enamelled bricks and small objects of interest.

Although Rassam's request to dig in Nebi Yunus had been rejected in 1878, he nevertheless conducted excavations at Kuyunjik in 1878-1882 and brought all the tablets he had found to the British Museum. In an act dated 14 December 1881, Rassam's delivery to the Imperial Museum comprises only 23 artefacts (stamped terracotta pieces, broken terracotta figurines, stone pieces and coins) from a total of 707 (fig. 67.1). Another document dated 27 September 1882 claims that Rassam withheld the Ottoman State's share (fig. 67.2).

The Law on Antiquities was revised in 1884 to prohibit the export of antiquities to foreign countries. A document (dated 1 November 1902) rejected a request by Leonard William King (1869-1919) and Ernest Alfred Thompson Wallis Budge (1857-1934) to continue the excavations, because of the very large size of the area to be excavated; on 2 December 1902, excavations were permitted only at Kuyunjik. Between 1903 and 1904, Reginald Campbell Thompson (1876-1941) and King directed the excavations at the temples of Nabû and Ištar, the Ashurbanipal library, and the Southwest Palace. A document dated 22 March 1905 relates to the delivery of selected artefacts to the Imperial Museum. In an act addressed to the director of the Imperial Museum on 31



**Karton: 60**

Musul'da bulunan eserlerden alınacak Devlet Hissesi
Konusunda Bedri Bey'in uyarı yazısı

Müze-i Hümayun Müdiriyyet-i Aliyyesi
Canib-i sâmîsine[78]

İngiltere Devleti Müzesi'yçün mukaddem âsâr-ı atîka taharrisine mezun Mr. Rassam'ın Musul'da icra eylediği hafriyatta zuhur edip Müze-i Hümayun hissesine isabet eden mermerden iki adet heykel ile keza mermerden etrafı yazılı bir iskemle mahall-i mezkûrda toprak ile üzerleri örtülü olduğu halde bırakılmış idi. Âsâr-ı mezkûrenin nefaseti hasebiyle bunlardan devlet-i müşarinileyha hissesine ait olan iki adedi ol vakit Londra'ya nakletmiş olduklarından bu suretle devlet-i aliyye hissesi bulunan mezkûr heykellerin orada bulunmaktan ise zamaniyle buraya celp ve vaz'ını muktazi gibi tasavvur ve mülâhaza olunuyor ise de her halde emr-ü ferman …

15 Eylül 98 (1298/ R.27.09.1882 M.)

**Ahmed Bedreddin**
(mühürü)

*Figure 67.1 (left) Rassam's delivery to the Imperial Museum (document no. 3177). Reproduced from Kosay et al. 2013b, 180-2.*

*Figure 67.2 (right) Translation of the original document stating that Rassam is withholding the Ottoman State's share (Kosay et al. 2013b, 185).*

December 1913, the Governor of Mosul reported the smuggling of antiquities from Kuyunjik and Nineveh, and that the only information about the excavations consisted of the reports made by the representatives every fifteen days.

## 67.2 Ninevite material in the Ancient Orient Museum, Istanbul

In 1917, the Imperial Museum was moved to the building of the Ottoman Academy of Fine Arts. The material from ancient Near Eastern sites, including artefacts from pre-Greek Anatolia and Mesopotamia, pre-Islamic Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula, became the collection of the Ancient Orient Museum. Only a small portion of the antiquities came from Nineveh, consisting of c. 50 limestone reliefs (twenty with inscriptions), one basalt statue, and groups of terracotta nails, inscribed bricks, vessels, and so forth. Of the nine galleries in the Ancient Orient Museum, four are assigned to Mesopotamian collections, and the material from Nineveh is exhibited in Gallery 6 (fig. 67.3). The Neo-Assyrian limestone relief collections from Nineveh comprise 36 pieces from the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib (reigned 705/704-681 BC; fig. 35.1) and six from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal (reigned 668 – c. 627 BC) (Gadd 1936; Paterson 1915; Kalaç 1954; Falkner 1954-1955; Barnett 1976; Barnett *et al.* 1998).

Assyrian soldiers are depicted on nine pieces found in Court VI (I) of Sennacherib's Palace. On one slab, a six-line cuneiform inscription is carved between two scenes depicting a row of Assyrian soldiers above, and two rows of workmen in the quarry below (fig. 67.4). The inscription deals with obtaining white limestone in Balaṭai for the bull colossi for Sennacherib's palace gates (Barnett *et al.* 1998, 68, Pl. 120, no. 158b). Other pieces relate to an Assyrian overseer giving orders to men pulling double ropes,[207] officers,[208] and pieces showing hilly scenes with trees.[209] Three fragments from Room XLVI (II) show Assyrian soldiers[210] and a woman sitting on a chariot,[211] resembling a deportation scene after a victory by the Assyrian king. Nine fragments from Room XXXIII (BB) most probably belong to a composition of a war and triumph scene;

207 Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul (AM 0416, 0461).
208 Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul (AM 0032, 6340).
209 Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul (AM 0003).
210 Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul (AM 0461).
211 Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul (AM 0034).

*Figure 67.3 Gallery 6 with Nineveh reliefs at the Ancient Orient Museum in Istanbul. Courtesy of the authors.*

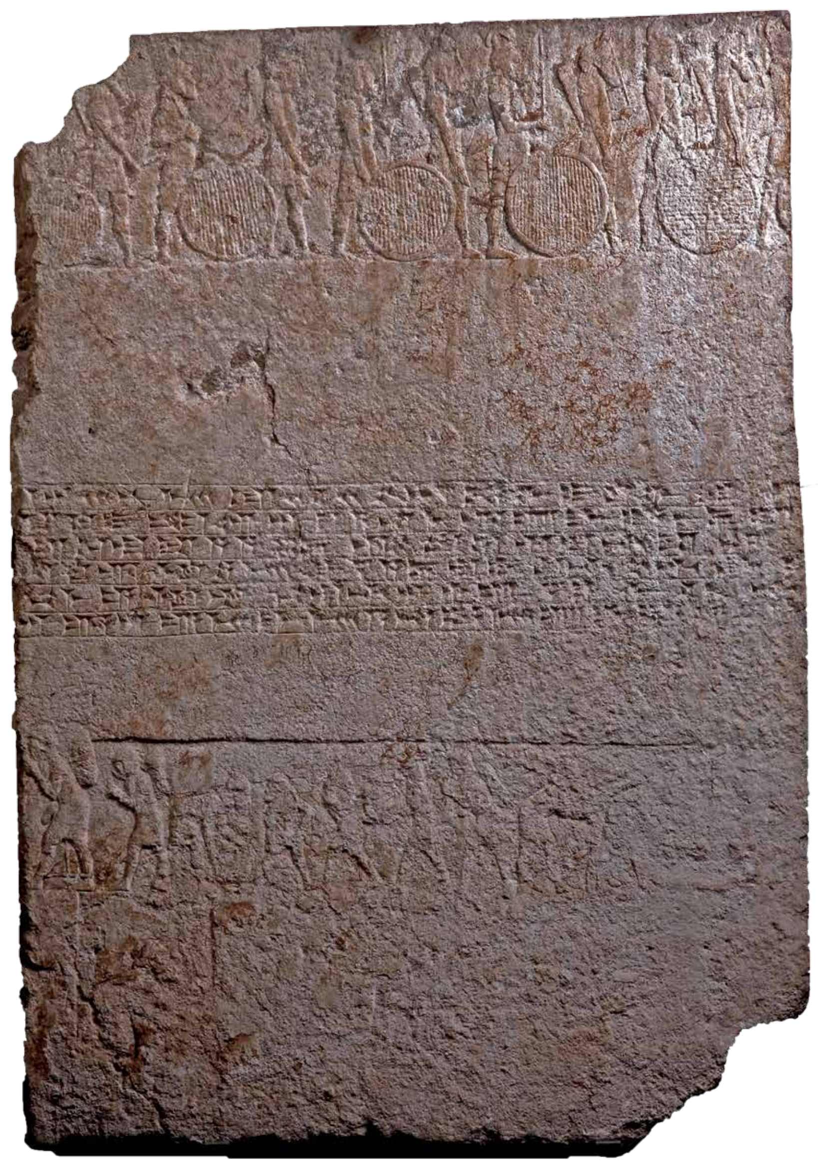


*Figure 67.4 Relief depicting a row of Assyrian soldiers on guard and workmen. Nineveh, Iraq; Court VI, SW Palace; 7th century BC; gypsum; H 132 cm, W 93.9 cm; Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul (AM 0002). © Arkeoloji Müzeleri.*

*Figure 67.5 Relief with Persian auxiliary bowmen marching to the Assyrian triumphal reception. Nineveh, Iraq; 7th century BC; gypsum; c. H 45 cm, W 95 cm; Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul (AN 0019). © Arkeoloji Müzeleri.*

Assyrian soldiers and Elamite archers are depicted on fragments in the Ancient Orient Museum.[212] A fragment from the Throne Room I (B) probably shows a war gallery with warriors.[213] Other fragments include pieces of camp scenes,[214] fishes,[215] a chariot scene,[216] and a fragment from the Sloping Passage LI (T).

A slab from Room G of the North Palace of Ashurbanipal shows Elamite captives descending into a reed boat, followed by Assyrian soldiers carrying several heads[217] – part of the same scene is located in the Louvre (Meissner 1934, 32).[218] On other fragments, decapitated bodies beside a stream and beardless courtiers on the river bank have been carved.[219] Two fragments from Room S form part of a scene with Persian auxiliary bowmen marching to the Assyrian triumphal reception, and other slabs show Assyrian soldiers in promenade (fig. 67.5).[220]

The limestone relief stele of Sennacherib was found between Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus during the excavations in 1888-1889 (fig. 67.6). It is supposed to have been erected on the 'King's Road', opposite a symmetrical carved stele found in 1848 that is now in the British Museum (Börker-Klähn 1982, 54-5, 209, Nr. 203-4; Sevin 2010, 173-4, Res. 207).[221] The stele has a standard arched form and its relief placed on the upper part depicts the king standing in front of divine symbols; triple-horned crowns (Aššur, Anu and Enlil) and stylus (Ea) on the upper row, and crescent (Sin), winged sun disc (Šamaš), bundle of lightning (Adad), star (Ištar) and the seven deities (Sibitti) on the lower. The king raises his right forefinger and holds a mace in his left hand. He wears high conical headgear, a short-sleeved robe and a shawl that leaves the right shoulder open, with one end forming the belt, and sandals. The 27-line cuneiform inscription

212 Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul (AM 6330-36, 6338-39).
213 Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul (AM 6337).
214 Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul (AM 6341 a – d, 7851).
215 Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul (AM 0066-9, 7852, 2564).
216 Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul (AM 0035).
217 Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul (AM 1001).
218 Musée du Louvre, Paris (AO 22202).
219 Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul (AM 0029).
220 Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul (AM 0019, 0032, 0041).
221 British Museum, London (1851,0902.9/BM 124800).

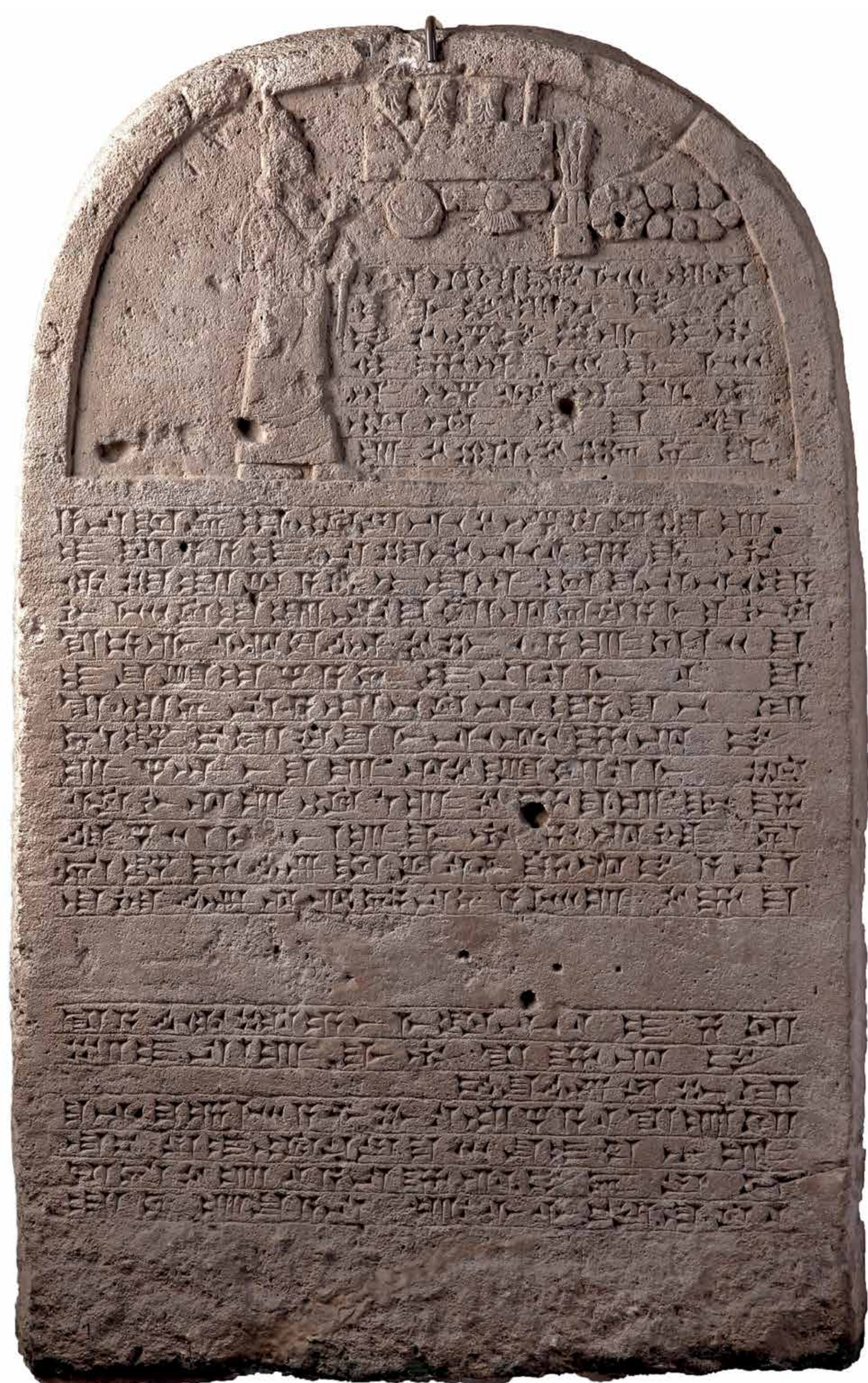


*Figure 67.7 An inscribed stele of king Sennacherib memorising his achievements and expansion. Nineveh, Iraq; 705-681 BC; limestone; Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul (AM 0001). Photograph made by Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin.*

carved below the divine symbols and the relief frames deals with Sennacherib's great feasts of war, the building works and the construction of the 'King's Road' at Nineveh.

The material from Nineveh in Istanbul forms only a small part of the large collections exhibited in several European Museums; nevertheless, it fills the gaps, enabling the reconstruction of relief slabs erected at Assyrian palaces.

# Abbreviations

ARM – Archives royales de Mari
ASOR – The American Schools of Oriental Research
BIWA – *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals. Die Prismenklassen A, B, C=K, D, E, F, G, H, J und T sowie andere Inschriften,* by Borger, R. & A. Fuchs
CNC – Computer Numerical Control
FGrH – *Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker,* by F. Jacoby (1923-1959)
GIS – Geographic Information System
IsCR – Instituto Superiore per la Conservazioneed il Resrauro
ISIL – Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
LoNAP – Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project
MAECI – Ministero degli Affari Esteri
MARV – Mittelassyrische Rechtsurkunden und Verwaltungstexte
MMA – The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA
NASA – National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NINO – The Netherlands Institute for the Near East, Leiden, the Netherlands
NMA – National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden, the Netherlands
RINAP 3/1 – *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704-681 BCE), Part 1*, by Grayson, A.K. & J. Novotny
RINAP 3/2 – *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704-681 BCE), Part 2*, by Grayson, A.K. & J. Novtony
RINAP 4 – *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680--669 BCE)*, by E. Leichty
RMAH – Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels, Belgium
SAA VII – *State Archives of Assyria Volume VII: Imperial Administrative Records, Part I: Palace and Temple Administration*, by Fales, F.M. & J.N. Postgate
SAA X – *State Archives of Assyria Volume X: Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, by S. Parpola
SAA XVIII – *State Archives of Assyria Volume XVIII: The Babylonian Correspondence of Esarhaddon and Letters to Assurbanipal and Sin-šarru-iškun from Northern and Central Babylonia*, by F. Reynolds
SBAH – State Board of Antiquities and Heritage of Iraq
TAVO – Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orient
XRF – X-ray Fluorescence

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# Concordance of Museums and registration numbers*

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APM 16270 – 312

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* – Not all objects originate from Nineveh.

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# NINEVEH, THE GREAT CITY

'*Well, as for Nineveh, skipper, it was wiped out long ago. There's not a trace of it left, and one can't even guess where it was*' (Lucian, 2nd century AD).

Nineveh, the once-flourishing capital of the Assyrian Empire, has fascinated writers, travellers and historians alike since its complete annihilation by allied forces in 612 BC. It was said to have been a great and populous city with 90-km walls, stunning palaces and colossal statues of pure gold. Since 1842 archaeologists have been investigating the ruins of Nineveh, which are located on the eastern banks of the river Tigris, near the modern Iraqi city of Mosul. The hundreds of thousands of objects that have been collected tell an intriguing story of life and death in a remarkable Mesopotamian city.

The edited volume *Nineveh, the Great City* contains more than 65 articles by international specialists, providing the reader with a detailed and thorough study of the site of Nineveh. It describes the history of the city, the excavations and the dispersed material culture that can today be appreciated in more than 100 museums and institutes around the world. Special attention is paid to the endangered heritage of Nineveh, which recently faced destruction for the second time in its history.

This lavishly illustrated volume is intended to appeal to readers interested in culture and heritage, as well as to students and professional academics.

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