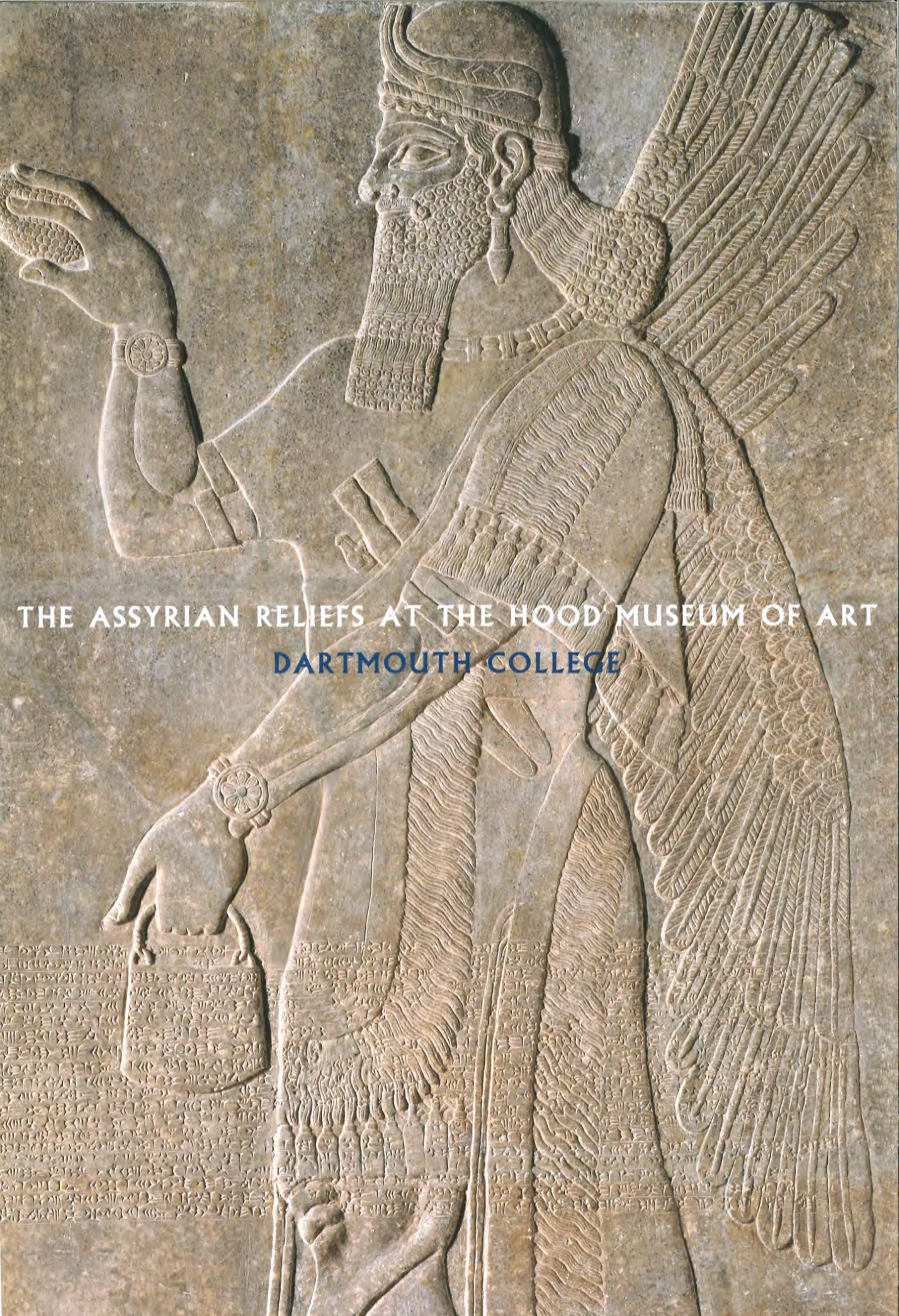


THE ASSYRIAN RELIEFS AT THE HOOD MUSEUM OF ART

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

ON HOW THE ASSYRIAN RELIEFS FROM NIMRUD REACHED DARTMOUTH

Kamyar Abdi

The acquisition of Assyrian reliefs by Dartmouth College is a small chapter in the fascinating history of early explorations and excavation in the Near East, one that involves colorful characters on both sides of the Atlantic, including adventurers with antiquarian interests acting on behalf of colonial powers, early students of the ancient Near East, enthusiastic academics out to compete with fellow institutions, and proselytizing missionaries seeking proof of the Old Testament in the ruins of Assyria.

Unlike the British, whose interest in Near Eastern antiquities, including Assyrian reliefs, was primarily antiquarian, the Americans seem to have been more concerned with the biblical connotations of these remains. It is therefore not surprising to see that American missionaries in the Near East played a crucial role in obtaining Assyrian reliefs for American institutions throughout the 1850s and 1860s, when over eighty Assyrian reliefs were ripped from the walls of Assyrian palaces, sawed into smaller pieces to facilitate transport, shipped to America, and dispersed among various collections, including several colleges throughout New England as well as major museums. The first set of Assyrian reliefs to arrive in the New World went to Williams, the first American college to dispatch missionaries to the Near East. The credit for this feat, soon to be followed by other American institutions, goes to Dwight Marsh, Williams College Class of 1852:

I was the only American at Mosul from 1850 to 1851 and [Austen Henry] Layard was there in his last year of exploration. He was very polite to me—calling upon me, inviting me to dine with him in the city, or at other times in his tents on the mound of Kuyunjik, or at Nimrud, twenty miles below. I suggested to him one day that Americans read his work with great interest and that any of our colleges would highly appreciate some specimens of slabs of old Nineveh. He entered in to the idea with enthusiasm and at once gave me two slabs to dispose of in America as I thought best. Of course I remembered my Alma Mater.

The Reverend Marsh in turn explains his own interest in the Assyrian reliefs in an 1855 letter to Mark Hopkins, president of Williams College:

Map of the Near East around the ninth century B.C.E. Map reprinted with permission of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York © 1980 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

My great desire and prayer is that students who look upon the relics of the past may think wisely of time and be led to take a deeper interest in the efforts made to rescue the degraded from the beastliness of their present life and eternal dangers impending. Would that every active imagination would hear the stones cry out "Asia has claims upon New England." When the young American beholds in your cabinet the glory of the incorruptible God changed into an image made like to corruptible man and to birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things, may their heart be stirred within them.

Similarly, Henry Lobdell, Amherst College Class of 1849, who served as a missionary-physician at Mosul in 1852 and followed Marsh by securing some reliefs for Amherst, points out:

These . . . are perpetual monuments of wicked nations and of the truth of Scriptural prophecies. . . . Heathen artists recorded histories of their heathen masters and sculptured the images of their false gods; but the servants of the one living and true God in these latter days find in them a written commentary on His written word—dead yet speaking witness to the truth of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Oliver Hubbard, librarian of Dartmouth College at the time, did not appear to be much concerned with the religious connotations of the reliefs but seemed to have been eager not to fall behind in a trend that was quickly taking over American institutions. In February 1853 Hubbard wrote to a Dartmouth graduate of the class of 1830, Austin Wright, who was then residing in Iran as a missionary: "Can you, without too great trouble to yourself or them, persuade some of your brother missionaries at Mosul to procure for your Alma Mater some mementoes of the Ancient Cities now opened on the Tigris? Williams College has, from some of her graduates, received some."

A loyal Dartmouth alumnus, Wright wasted no time in contacting Henry Rawlinson, who was then in charge of British antiquarian activities in Mesopotamia. In response, Rawlinson put six slabs at Wright's disposal. Excited by the prospect of receiving the slabs and especially the possibility that one might in fact bear the image of a king, thereby outshining the reliefs in the other institutions, Hubbard convened with Daniel Blaisdell, Treasurer of Dartmouth, and Ira Young, Dartmouth Class of 1828 and Professor of Natural Philosophy and Astronomy, to provide one hundred dollars each to cover the costs of the reliefs' transportation. Amherst's Henry Lobdell was entrusted by Wright with collecting and shipping the reliefs to Dartmouth. Lobdell reported good news to Wright in November 1854: "I have sent off stone-cutters, trench-openers, and a trusty overseer to Nimrood to get the slabs ready for transportation."

Main Players in the Acquisition of the Assyrian Reliefs for Dartmouth College

AUSTEN HENRY LAYARD (1817–1894)

Austen Henry Layard abandoned a career in law and set out for an overland journey from England to Ceylon, during which he became captivated with the Near East. After some years as a diplomat in Constantinople, Layard persuaded Sir Stratford Canning, British ambassador to the Ottoman court, to finance excavations in the mounds of Mesopotamia. Layard began his excavations in 1845 at Nimrud (which he thought to be Nineveh, the main capital of the Assyrian Empire), followed by an excavation at the site of Kuyunjik across the Tigris from Mosul, which turned out to be the real Nineveh. The remains Layard discovered at these sites and shipped back to the British Museum sparked tremendous excitement in England, leading to further support for his work. Layard's accounts of his excavations at Assyrian sites (for example, the book *Nineveh and Its Remains*, London, 1849) became bestsellers in both England and America and brought him fame and fortune.

George Frederic Watts, British, 1817–1904, **Sir Austen Henry Layard,** *1848, chalk on paper. National Portrait Gallery, London, 3787*

HENRY CRESWICKE RAWLINSON (1810–1895)

Henry Creswicke Rawlinson began his career as an officer in the British East India Company but soon discovered a talent for languages, both modern and ancient. He copied and deciphered the trilingual inscription of Darius I at Behistun in 1851, providing a breakthrough in the study of ancient Near Eastern languages. Rawlinson was appointed British consul in Baghdad in 1843, a post from which he resigned in 1853 to dedicate his career mainly to the study of the ancient Near East. During his years as consul, Rawlinson supervised British antiquarian activities in the Near East, including Layard's excavations at Assyrian sites.

Richard Cockle Lucas, British, 1800–1883, **Sir Henry Creswicke Rawlinson,** *1850, wax medallion. National Portrait Gallery, London; NPG 1714*

OLIVER PAYSON HUBBARD (1809–1900) AND AUSTIN HAZEN WRIGHT (1811–1865)

Oliver Payson Hubbard (pictured) graduated from Yale in 1828 and Charleston Medical College in 1837; he served as Professor of Chemistry at Dartmouth from 1836 to 1865 and as the College Librarian from 1851 to 1865. Austin Hazen Wright, Dartmouth Class of 1830, graduated from the Union Theological Seminary in Virginia in 1838 and the University of Virginia Medical School in 1839 and served as a missionary in Iran from 1841 to 1865.

Ulysses Dow Tenney, American, 1826–1908, **Oliver Payson Hubbard,** *1890, oil on canvas. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Gift of the Class of 1856; P.890.2*

The slabs were originally about a foot thick, eight feet high, and eight or more feet wide. To enable transport, however, they were sawed to about four inches thick and cut into smaller blocks. They were then packed and taken by donkey to Mosul. Shortly after the slabs arrived in Mosul, Lobdell succumbed to typhus fever in March 1855. It fell to William Fredric Williams, Auburn Theological Seminary Class of 1847, and Williams's Dwight Marsh to see to the further sawing of the slabs and their packing into twenty-eight boxes that finally left Mosul for Iskanderon (Alexandretta) by a camel caravan in July 1855. From there, the boxes were shipped on a sailing vessel to Beirut, arriving in October 1855, three days too late to catch a vessel for America. The boxes then sat in the Beirut custom-house for some nine months. By this point, however, the costs of acquisition and transportation had already exceeded the allocated three hundred dollars, and delays were leading to a growing exasperation in Hanover. The ever-serene Reverend Wright assured a frustrated Hubbard:

Patience, patience! The hardest work is over. They have been dug up—got off from Mosul, have run the gauntlet of the desert Arabs—and now wait on the seashore. One more move and they will be in the new world. So everything goes in the East. Nothing can be accomplished without wear and tear enough to make any common man mad outright.

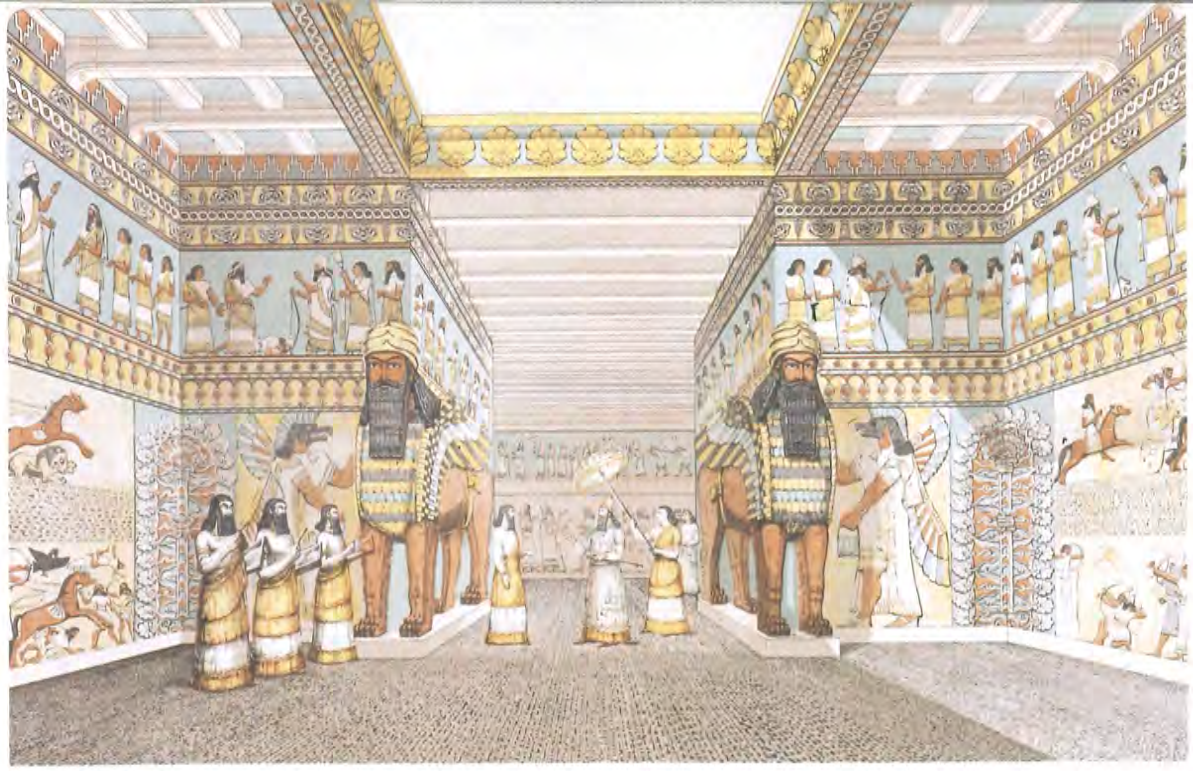
The boxes left for America on a ship bound for Boston in July 1856, finally arriving in Hanover on December 11, 1856, nearly four years after Hubbard initiated the enterprise. The quality of the reliefs was such that any frustration that may have built up soon gave way to great exhilaration, especially considering the privately discussed fact that the entire cost for Dartmouth was about six hundred dollars, a very modest sum compared to the three thousand dollars Yale had had to pay for their reliefs.

The reliefs were set up in the northeast corner of Reed Hall, later to be moved to Butterfield Hall and then the Carpenter Galleries. They were finally installed in their present location in the Hood Museum of Art in 1985.

To show Dartmouth's gratitude toward the individuals involved in the enterprise, Hubbard made arrangements for a copy of the latest German atlas of Persia to be sent to Reverend Wright in Iran. Further, at commencement in 1857 the Trustees of Dartmouth College conferred the honorary degree of L.L.D. to Henry Creswicke Rawlinson. The diploma was forwarded to Rawlinson in London through Lord Napier of the British Legation in Washington but did not reach him until his return from the Near East in 1860, at which point he wrote: "I need not say that amid the many honors I have received from literary bodies interested in Oriental Science there is none which I value more that the diploma which the University of Dartmouth has been pleased to confer upon me."

Whether or not the reliefs were successful in enticing the "young American," as Reverend Marsh had hoped, we can only guess, but it took almost a century for them to entice a thorough study. John Stearns, Professor of Classics at Dartmouth, embarked on a comprehensive study that led in 1953 to the publication of a brochure on the Dartmouth reliefs (in collaboration with Donald P. Hansen, then a senior at Dartmouth and later Professor of Near Eastern Art and Archaeology at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University), and in 1960 to an exhaustive treatise on all of the known reliefs in American institutions, including those at Dartmouth. Another, more modest, study was carried out by Judith Lerner and published as a brochure in 1985 in conjunction with the foundation of the Hood Museum of Art and the installation of the reliefs there.

Assyrian (Iraq), from the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, Genie with Pail and Date-Palm Spathe *(detail of larger panel), 883–859 B.C.E., gypsum. Gift of Sir Henry Rawlinson through Austin H. Wright, Class of 1830; S.856.3.2*



PEOPLING THE RELIEFS

Steven Kangas

Your slabs will be the best lot yet sent across the Atlantic.

—Henry Lobdell, 1854, in John Stearns (1961), "Reliefs from the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II," 13.

In 879 B.C.E. Ashurnasirpal II, king of Assyria (883–859 B.C.E.), chose Nimrud (ancient Kalhu) as his capital. The city, surrounded by a mudbrick wall, covered almost nine hundred acres along the Tigris River in northern Iraq. A fortified citadel of around sixty acres with temples, public buildings, and monuments dominated this urban landscape, and it was there that Ashurnasirpal II built what is today called the Northwest Palace, completing it in 860 B.C.E. It was composed largely out of mudbrick, except for the lower part of the interior walls, which were lined with large alabaster slabs about eight feet high and one foot thick. These slabs were set in bitumen and then secured with clamps and dowels. They were installed not only to protect and reinforce the mudbrick walls but also to provide a durable surface for relief decoration. The use of carved stone slabs on the interior walls was a practice that probably originated in lands to the west of Assyria, such as Syria and Anatolia. However, Ashurnasirpal II utilized this decorative technique on an unprecedented scale.

Like much ancient sculpture, the Assyrian reliefs were once painted. The use of color must have greatly enlivened the figures, allowing them to stand out boldly from their otherwise dull background. In dark halls, lit only by flickering torches and small windows high up in the walls, the figures must have had an eerie, otherworldly aura.

All of the images in the palace were deliberately conceived and arranged so as to express the power of Assyria and to help ensure its survival. The reliefs in the outer and most accessible area of the palace depicted foreign tribute bearers bringing luxury goods and exotica to the king. Farther inside the palace, in the throne room and its surrounding rooms, where access became increasingly more restricted, the images mostly concentrated on narrative depictions of the king participating in scenes of war and the hunt, his primary duties. These activities (and their depictions) proclaimed the king's dominance over both the

Reconstruction of the Throne Room in an Assyrian temple or palace, plate 2 in The Monuments of Nineveh *by Austen Henry Layard (London, 1853). This reconstruction is a pastiche of known and imagined elements; some of the slabs are modeled after those excavated at Nimrud and are shown brightly painted, as they would have been at the time of Ashurnasirpal II.*

Assyrian (Iraq), from the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, Genie with Pail and Date-Palm Spathe and King *(detail of larger panel), 883–859 B.C.E., gypsum. Gift of Sir Henry Rawlinson through Austin H. Wright, Class of 1830; S.856.3.2*

natural and the human world. The reliefs, then, served as a powerful form of propaganda, overwhelming the visitor to the palace with their larger-than-life images of the indomitable might of the king, which was likely reassuring for some but frightening for others.

The slabs in the Hood Museum of Art exemplify a more formal performance, the religious and magical nature of which is communicated by the king's close association with supernatural genies and the so-called "sacred tree." They come from rooms in the vicinity of the throne room (see page 9).

Distributed on six slabs, the seven figures in the Hood's collection are similar in style and pose but are distinguished by some variations in dress, attributes, and gesture. Stiff and upright, they stand at approximately the same height and are shown in a twisted perspective that combines profile and frontal views, a technique commonly employed in ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian reliefs and paintings. This is perhaps most striking on the faces, where we see a profile face with a frontal eye.

The figure on the first slab to the left, an attendant to the king, is the simplest (see left). He faces to the right with his left foot forward. His lack of beard and slightly puffy face identify him as a eunuch. He is adorned with a necklace, a bullet-shaped earring, and arm and wrist bands, and he holds a bow with quiver and arrows. The staff he holds in his upraised right arm is embellished with an eight-point rosette, a motif whose meanings must have varied depending upon the context. Here we may consider it a symbol of royalty, given that this eunuch probably carries the paraphernalia of the king. His long tunic covers his entire body down to his sandaled feet. The hem of his gown is lightly incised with floral designs and representa-

Assyrian (Iraq), from the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, Attendant to the King *(detail), 883–859 B.C.E., gypsum. Gift of Sir Henry Rawlinson through Austin H. Wright, Class of 1830, S.856.3.1*

tions of the king in the company of supernatural genies. These now faint figures were probably painted and served to imitate intricate embroidery, conveying a sense of wealth and luxury.

Eunuchs were featured extensively on the reliefs, and their proximity to the king speaks to their influential role in the Assyrian administration. We know that many were literate, a remarkable quality at a time when even royalty was generally untrained in reading and writing. Some eunuchs rose to high positions as provincial governors and were even able to commission public monuments. Their conspicuous presence suggests the high level of trust they commanded. The Assyrian state had no clear rules for royal succession, and assassination was one of the methods employed for reaching the throne. Therefore, the king had his own very real concerns for his safety and surely depended upon loyal courtiers, including the eunuchs, for protection.

To the right of the eunuch at the Hood Museum of Art is a large slab with two figures: a genie and King Ashurnasirpal II. Genies (apkallu) were minor deities whose presence conveys protection as well as the idea that a person or activity is divinely sanctioned or inspired. This genie is marked by his horned headdress (a symbol of divinity), his wings, a very stylized beard, and a long tunic that opens to expose one leg (see page 4). The detail on the musculature of leg and arms, although not naturalistic, conveys great strength and power. The genie's fearsome nature is enhanced by the daggers he features in his waistband. He stands behind the king with a bucket in his left hand and an object shaped like a pine cone in his right hand, which he raises behind the king's head (see above left). Many scholars identify this enigmatic object as the male flower of the date palm tree, which was used in its fertilization. If this identification is correct, the point here may be that the fertility of the land lies in the hands of the gods and is only bestowed upon Assyria through the direct intervention of the king.

The king faces to the right with one foot forward and stares into the eyes of another genie (see page 11). He is bearded and bejeweled, and he wears a distinctive form of royal headgear, a truncated conelike item with a long tassel (see above left). Despite the absence of enemies here, the king holds a bow with one hand and arrows raised up in the other, and he has daggers stuffed into his tunic. His costume is more detailed than any other figure's, with its tassels and fringe, and it features incised decoration on the shoulder and hem depicting scenes of animal combat as well as representations of the king, the sacred tree, and a deity in a winged disk. Traces of red pigment still adhere to his sandal.

Four other genies are included in the collection. Not all are identical: one has no wings or horned headdress, and some of them gesture with empty hands. They all typically wear wristbands with rosettes (see below), which may be symbols of divinity here, but there are differences even among those, so that the seeming homogeneity begins to break down upon closer inspection. Such differences may have been meaningful, but they may also be attributable to the number of sculptors engaged in the carving of these images over a long period of time.

One of the most important and frequently discussed elements on Ashurnasirpal's reliefs is the sacred tree. It was prominently featured, together with images of the king, behind his throne in the throne room of the palace. In the Hood two partial trees appear on the slab at the far right. With a central trunk and radiating branches ending in palmettes, the tree, scholars generally agree, is a highly stylized version of the date palm. Its varied placement and multiple associations suggest that it may have had more than one meaning. It may have stood for the abstract concept of fertility in general, as well as the king's role in interceding with the gods to provide for the fertility and productivity of the land. The tree was also associated with certain divinities, such as the goddess Inanna/Ishtar, whose presence near the reigning monarch has a long history. It is also endlessly repeated in some rooms, where it may have served a protective function, or, more prosaically, acted as a space filler.

A band of cuneiform writing, the "Standard Inscription," was the final element carved onto the slabs. First written on the stone by a scribe and subsequently engraved by the stonecutter, it served to unify the scenes as well as to proclaim in writing the same message conveyed by the reliefs: the power and the piety of the king (see next page).

Assyrian (Iraq), from the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, Wristband of Genie *(detail of larger panel), 883–859 B.C.E., gypsum. Gift of Sir Henry Rawlinson through Austin H. Wright, Class of 1830; S.856.3.4*

This inscription is a sixteen- to twenty-line text that recounts King Ashurnasirpal II's titles and achievements. It was carved in cuneiform, an ancient writing system comprised of wedge-shaped characters, across the reliefs throughout the palace.

THE PALACE OF ASHURNASIRPAL, PRIEST OF ASSUR, FAVORITE OF ENLIL AND NINURTA, BELOVED OF ANU AND DAGAN, THE WEAPON OF THE GREAT GODS, THE MIGHTY KING, THE KING OF THE WORLD, THE KING OF ASSYRIA; THE SON OF TUKULTI-NINURTA, THE GREAT KING, THE MIGHTY KING, THE KING OF THE WORLD, THE KING OF ASSYRIA. THE SON OF ADAD-NIRARI, THE KING OF THE WORLD, THE KING OF ASSYRIA, THE VALIANT MAN WHO ACTS WITH THE SUPPORT OF ASSUR, HIS LORD, AND WHO HAS NO EQUAL AMONG PRINCES OF THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE WORLD. THE WONDERFUL SHEPHERD WHO IS NOT AFRAID OF BATTLE, THE GREAT FLOOD WHICH NONE CAN OPPOSE, THE KING WHO MAKES THOSE NOT HIS SUBJECT TO HIM SUBMISSIVE, WHO HAS SUBJUGATED ALL MANKIND, THE MIGHTY WARRIOR, WHO TREADS ON THE ROCK OF HIS ENEMIES, TRAMPLES DOWN ALL HIS FOES, AND SHATTERS THE FORCES OF THE PROUD; THE KING WHO ACTS WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE GREAT GODS, AND WHOSE HAND HAS CONQUERED ALL LANDS, WHO HAS SUBJUGATED ALL THE MOUNTAINS AND RECEIVED THEIR TRIBUTE, TAKING HOSTAGES AND ESTABLISHING HIS POWER OVER ALL THEIR LANDS.

WHEN ASSUR, THE LORD WHO CALLED ME BY MY NAME AND HAS MADE MY KINGDOM GREAT, ENTRUSTED HIS MERCILESS WEAPON TO MY LORDLY ARMS, I OVERTHREW THE WIDESPREAD TROOPS OF THE LAND OF LULLUMU IN BATTLE. WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF SHAMASH AND ADAD, THE GODS WHO HELPED ME, I THUNDERED LIKE ADAD, THE DESTROYER, OVER THE TROOPS OF THE NAIRI LANDS, HABHU, SHUBARU, AND NIRBU.

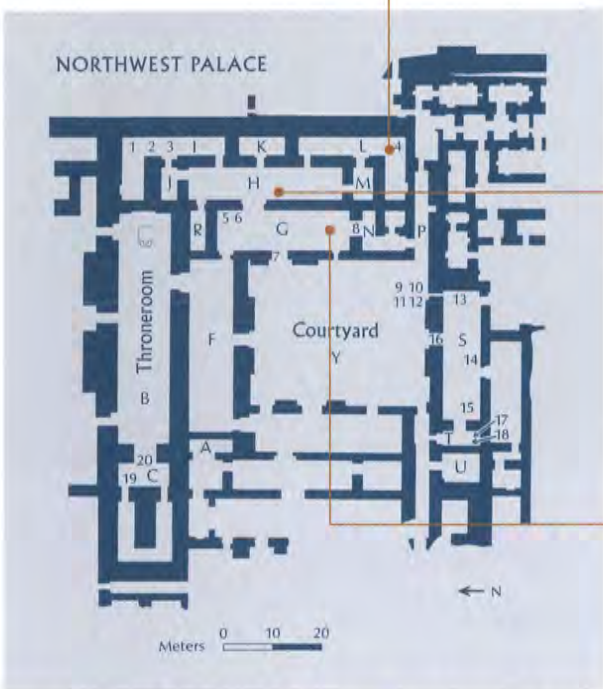
I AM THE KING WHO HAS BROUGHT INTO SUBMISSION AT HIS FEET THE LANDS BEYOND THE TIGRIS TO MOUNT LEBANON AND THE GREAT SEA [MEDITERRANEAN], THE WHOLE OF THE LAND OF LAQU, THE LAND OF RAPIQU, AND WHOSE HAND HAS CONQUERED FROM THE SOURCE OF THE RIVER SUBNAT; ANNEXED AS MY OWN TERRITORY THE AREA FROM KIRRURU TO GILZANU FROM THE BANK OF THE LOWER ZAB TO TIL BARI, FROM TIL SHA ABTANI TO TIL SHA ZABDANI, THE FORTRESSES OF KARDUNKASH I HAVE RESTORED TO THE BORDERS OF MY LAND. FROM THE MOUNTAIN PASSES OF BABITE TO THE LAND OF HASHMAR, I HAVE COUNTED THE INHABITANTS AS PEOPLE OF MY LAND. OVER THE LANDS WHICH I HAVE SUBJUGATED, I HAVE APPOINTED MY GOVERNORS, AND DO OBEISANCE.
I AM ASHURNASIRPAL, THE CELEBRATED PRINCE, WHO REVERES THE GREAT GODS, THE FIERCE DRAGON, THE CONQUEROR OF ALL CITIES AND MOUNTAINS TO THEIR FURTHEST EXTENT, THE KING OF RULERS, WHO HAS TAMED THE STIFF-NECKED PEOPLES, WHO IS CROWNED WITH SPLENDOR, WHO IS NOT AFRAID OF BATTLE, THE RELENTLESS LION, THE MERCILESS CHAMPION WHO SHAKES RESISTANCE, THE GLORIOUS KING, THE SHEPHERD, THE PROTECTION OF THE WHOLE WORLD, THE KING, THE WORD OF WHOSE MOUTH DESTROYS MOUNTAINS AND SEAS, WHO BY HIS LORDLY ATTACK HAS FORCED FIERCE AND MERCILESS KINGS FROM THE RISING TO THE SETTING SUN TO ACKNOWLEDGE ONE RULE.

THE FORMER CITY OF KALHU, WHICH SHALMANESER, KING OF ASSYRIA, A PRINCE WHO PRECEDED ME, HAD BUILT, THAT CITY HAD FALLEN INTO RUINS AND LAY DESERTED. THAT CITY I BUILT ANEW. I TOOK THE PEOPLES WHOM MY HANDS HAD CONQUERED FROM THE LANDS I HAD SUBJUGATED, FROM THE LAND OF SUHU, FROM THE WHOLE OF THE LAND OF LAQU, FROM THE CITY OF SIRQU ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE EUPHRATES, FROM THE FURTHEST EXTENT OF THE LAND OF ZUMA, AND FROM THE LAND OF HATTU, AND FROM LUBARNA, AND FROM THE LAND OF HATINA I TOOK AND MADE THEM SETTLE THEREIN.

I REMOVED THE ANCIENT MOUND AND DUG DOWN TO WATER LEVEL. I SANK THE FOUNDATIONS 120 BRICK COURSES DEEP; I BUILT A PALACE WITH WALLS OF CEDAR, CYPRESS AND JUNIPER, BOXWOOD, TEAK, TEREBINTH, AND TAMARISK. I FOUNDED IT FOR MY ROYAL RESIDENCE FOR MY LORDLY PLEASURE FOREVER.

CREATURES OF THE MOUNTAINS AND THE SEAS I FASHIONED IN WHITE LIMESTONE AND ALABASTER, AND I SET THEM UP AT ITS GATES. I ADORNED IT AND MADE IT GLORIOUS, AND SET ORNAMENTAL KNOBS OF BRONZE ALL AROUND IT. I FIXED DOORS OF CEDAR, CYPRESS AND JUNIPER IN ITS GATES. I TOOK IN GREAT QUANTITIES AND PLACED THERE SILVER, GOLD, TIN, BRONZE AND IRON, BOOTY TAKEN BY MY OWN HANDS FROM THE LANDS WHICH I HAD CONQUERED.

This translation of the Standard Inscription was provided by the British Museum and Susan Ackerman, Associate Professor of Religion at Dartmouth College.



Floor plan reprinted with permission of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York © 1980 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Location of Some of the Dartmouth Reliefs in the Palace

Although the Hood Museum of Art slabs were all found in the east side of the palace, they come from separate rooms. Their present arrangement in the gallery roughly follows the order of figures that can be seen lightly incised on the robe of the king. The first slab on the left in the Kim Gallery, the Attendant or Eunuch, comes from a large rectangular room approximately eighty-two feet long by twenty-three feet wide, designated by scholars as Room G. The entire room was decorated with slabs depicting the king in association with genies and eunuch attendants. The Hood eunuch was positioned next to a doorway, facing away from the door, standing behind an image of the king holding a bow with one hand and a cup or bowl with the other. The end of the king's sword can be seen on the right edge of this slab. The rest of the sword and the king are in the British Museum.

The second slab with King and Genie was found nearby, also in Room G, while the exact findspot of the following slab, Genie with Pail and Date-Palm Spathe, is unknown. A close examination of the style of carving of this slab, however, suggests that it may have come from the west wing of the palace and may have stood in a corner or near a doorway.

The next two Genies, both facing to the right, come from another large rectangular room in the east, designated as Room H. This room was decorated almost exclusively with images of the king with genies, with the image of the sacred tree filling the corners of the room. The wingless genie in the gallery faced a doorway that led into Room G, while the winged genie faced toward a corner and a sacred tree.

The final slab on the right with a Winged Genie gesturing toward one half of a Sacred Tree comes from Room L. This room lacked any image of the king but was decorated with repeated representations of winged genies symmetrically framing sacred trees. The left half of the particular tree in the Hood is currently in the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri.

THE IDEOLOGY OF ASSYRIAN KINGSHIP

Susan Ackerman

The Sumerian Kinglist, which dates from the early second millennium B.C.E., claims to catalog all of the kings who had ruled over the southern region of Mesopotamia, called Sumer, since the beginning of time, or, in the Kinglist's words, from the point "when kingship was lowered from heaven." The reliefs of King Ashurnasirpal II of Assyria that hang in Dartmouth's Hood Museum of Art postdate this document by roughly one thousand years (Ashurnasirpal reigned from 883 to 859 B.C.E.), and Ashurnasirpal's capital city of Calah (Kahlu) or Nimrud, moreover, lies some 350 miles north and a little west of the Sumerian city of Uruk, where the Kinglist was promulgated. The Sumerians of the Kinglist were also of a different ethnolinguistic stock than the Semitic inhabitants of Ashurnasirpal's empire.

Nevertheless, the ideology of kingship found in the Assyria of King Ashurnasirpal's day—and manifest throughout almost all of Mesopotamian history, both north and south—shares with the Sumerian Kinglist the sense that kingship was a divinely ordained institution and that Mesopotamian kings thus ruled as monarchs specially chosen by the gods. Yet these kings had important responsibilities to the gods as well, in particular ensuring the gods' wellbeing by making regular food and drink offerings to them and by overseeing the upkeep of their temples. In Assyria, the king even bore the title of "priest" of the god Assur, who was the patron deity of the Assyrian Empire: for example, in the first line of the so-called "Standard Inscription" that is repeated over and over on Dartmouth's reliefs, King Ashurnasirpal II identifies himself as the "high priest of Assur," as well as the "chosen one" of the gods Enlil and Ninurta and the "favorite" of the gods Anu and Dagan (see page 8). In another one of his palace inscriptions, which stood near the doorway of his throne room, Ashurnasirpal further describes how he erected temples in Calah to some of these same gods, as well as several others. Ashurnasirpal also, this inscription tells us, elaborately decorated these gods' temples, which is only proper, given that the temples were understood to be the gods' actual homes on earth, and he covered the gods' statues, which were understood to be actual manifestations of the deities, with bronze leaf, then lavishing upon them jewelry of gold, lapis lazuli, and other precious stones.

Assyrian (Iraq), from the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, Cuneiform inscription on the panel of Genie with Pail and Date-Palm Spathe *(detail of larger panel), 883–859 B.C.E., gypsum. Gift of Sir Henry Rawlinson through Austin H. Wright, Class of 1830; S.856.3.3*

In return for the king's munificence, according to Mesopotamian thought, the gods would see to the wellbeing of the king and his land, and more specifically to the land's agricultural fecundity, which, in the often marginal environment of the Middle East, was essential for ensuring the kingdom's prosperity. During the period of Ashurnasirpal's Assyrian Empire, the gods in addition were seen to enable the king's military successes, thus allowing the Assyrians to conquer both their neighbors to the south, the Babylonians, and their various neighbors to the west, including the inhabitants of much of the northern part of modern-day Syria; the cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos, on the Mediterranean coast of modern-day Lebanon; and, by late eighth century B.C.E., the Northern Kingdom of biblical Israel (see map on page 2). The inscription at the doorway of Ashurnasirpal's throne room also speaks of how the gods, in response to Ashurnasirpal's ministrations on their behalf, "handed over to [him] all the wild animals," including 450 big lions. Although they are not represented in the Dartmouth collection, the reliefs from the Calah palace that show Ashurnasirpal's lion hunts are some of the most remarkable exemplars we have of ninth-century B.C.E. Assyrian art.

The question remains, though: were Mesopotamian kings like Ashurnasirpal, who were such intimates and favorites of the gods, themselves considered divine? The answer during the earliest part of Mesopotamian history, the third millennium B.C.E., was generally considered to be no, although by the late third millennium we do find indications of kings who identified themselves as gods. For example, Shulgi, who reigned from 2094 to 2047 B.C.E. and whose dominion was centered in the southern city of Ur, is called in inscriptions "the strong god of his land" and as a god received food and drink offerings and had a priesthood to serve him. Artistic representations of Shulgi also depict him as enthroned like a god. Still, Shulgi's throne is differentiated somewhat from those on which "real" gods sit, suggesting that the king, while like a god and often identified with the gods, was not as fully divine as they.

This sense of the king as semi-divine seems also to characterize the royal ideology of the later Assyrian period, which includes Ashurnasirpal's reign. Thus Ashurnasirpal, like other Assyrian kings, could be called by the epithet "son of god," and in his palace's reliefs he is commonly depicted in conjunction with a winged solar disk, the symbol of his divine father, Assur (see right). Ashurnasirpal is also commonly depicted in conjunction with the tree image that is

Assyrian (Iraq), from the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, King *(detail of larger panel), 883–859 B.C.E., gypsum. Gift of Sir Henry Rawlinson through Austin H. Wright, Class of 1830; S.856.3.2*

ubiquitous (it is repeated more than four hundred times) in the reliefs that decorated his palace (see below). This tree is a stylized date palm but, more importantly, it represents the "sacred tree" or "tree of life," a symbol both of the agricultural fecundity that was so important to survival in ancient Mesopotamia and of a vertical axis that connected the heavens above to the earth below and even, as the tree's roots extend downward, to the netherworld that lies under the earth. For the reliefs so frequently to show Ashurnasirpal standing beside this tree is to suggest that he, like the tree, is the symbol of his land's agricultural prosperity and, indeed, as the gods' chief priest, the critical guarantor of it. It also suggests that he, like the tree, is the nexus that binds the heavens, earth, and the netherworld and so plays an essential role in upholding the order of the cosmos. It is no wonder, then, that Ashurnasirpal is so magnificently portrayed on Dartmouth's reliefs, for ideally he, like the deities he represents, is meant to manifest the supreme strength and glory that the gods embody.

Assyrian (Iraq), from the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, Genie and Date Palm, *883–859 B.C.E., gypsum. Gift of Sir Henry Rawlinson through Austin H. Wright, Class of 1830; S.856.3.6*

(cover) Assyrian (Iraq), from the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, Genie with Pail and Date-Palm Spathe, *883–859 B.C.E., gypsum. Gift of Sir Henry Rawlinson through Austin H. Wright, Class of 1830; S.856.3.3*

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