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978-1-108-06513-9 - Nineveh and its Remains: With an Account of a Visit to the Chaldaean Christians of Kurdistan, and the Yezidis, or Devil-Worshippers: Volume 1

Austen Henry Layard

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Nineveh and Its Remains

Before abandoning archaeology for politics, Sir Austen Henry Layard (1817–94) carried out major excavations in Mesopotamia between 1845 and 1851, uncovering important evidence of ancient Assyrian civilisation. Although he originally believed that Nimrud was Nineveh, he later confirmed that Kuyunjik was the location of the ancient city. First published in 1849, this two-volume work is a mixture of excavation report, ancient history, anthropology and travel writing. Layard's excitement at the extent and importance of the finds as soon as digging commenced is clearly conveyed, and he places Mesopotamian history in the context of the more familiar biblical and classical worlds. His *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon* (1853) is also reissued in this series. Volume 1 covers the background to the excavations, the first discoveries, and the difficulties with Arab authorities and local workmen. Also included are observations on the inhabitants, culture and history of the region.

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Nineveh and Its Remains

*With an Account of a Visit to
the Chaldaean Christians of Kurdistan,
and the Yezidis, or Devil-Worshippers*

VOLUME 1

AUSTEN HENRY LAYARD



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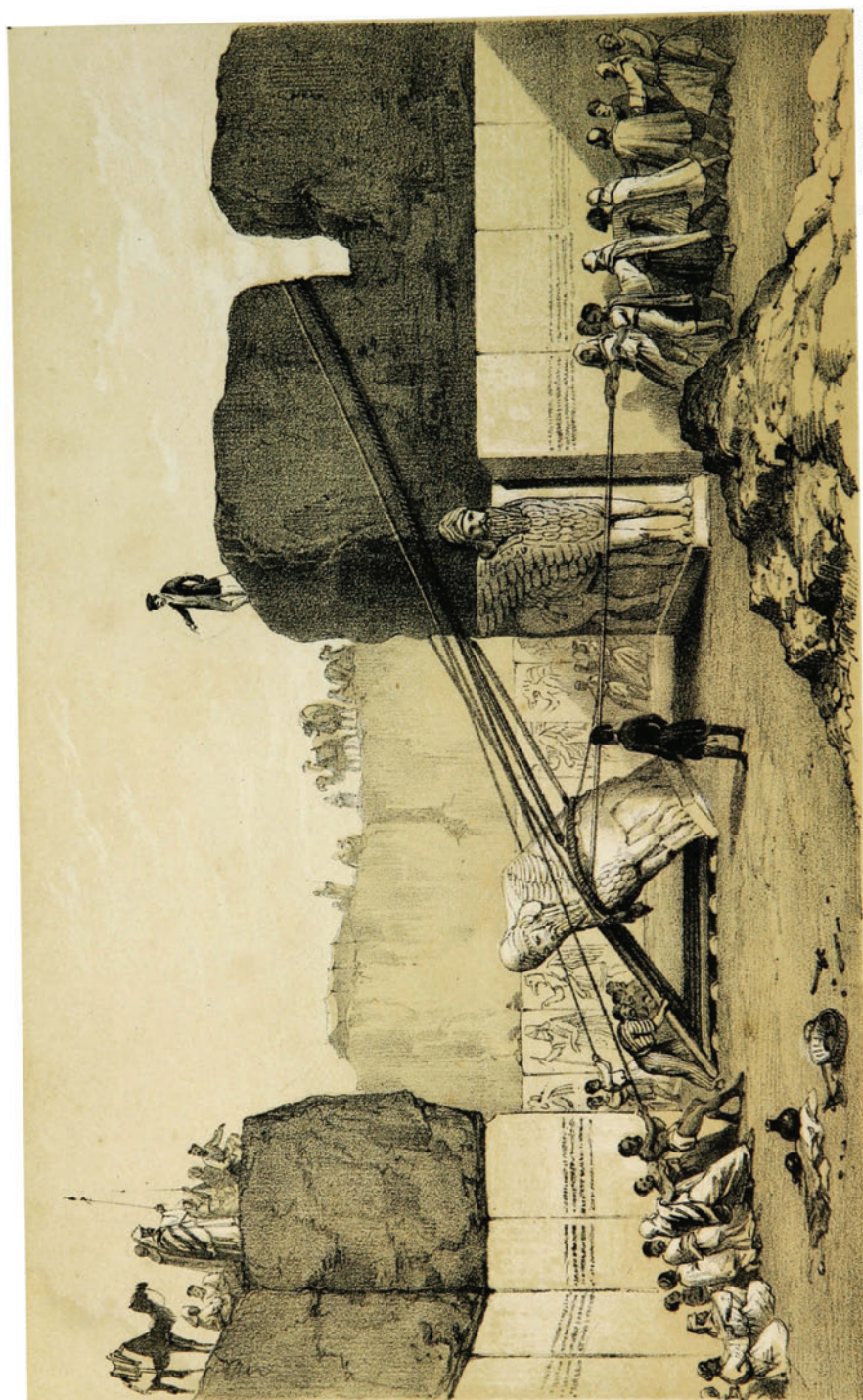
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LOWERING THE GREAT WINGED BULL.

On Stone by W.L. Walton.
Frontpiece, Vol. I

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N I N E V E H

AND

ITS REMAINS :

WITH AN ACCOUNT OF A VISIT TO THE CHALDAEAN
CHRISTIANS OF KURDISTAN, AND THE YEZIDIS,
OR DEVIL-WORSHIPPERS ; AND AN ENQUIRY
INTO THE MANNERS AND ARTS OF
THE ANCIENT ASSYRIANS.

BY AUSTEN HENRY LAYARD, ESQ. D.C.L.



"She saw men pourtrayed upon the wall, the images of the Chaldeans pourtrayed with vermillion.

"Girded with girdles upon their loins, exceeding in dyed attire upon their heads, all of them princes to look to, after the manner of the Babylonians of Chaldea, the land of their nativity."

EZEKIEL, xxiii. 14, 15.

IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. I.

LONDON:

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1849.

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TO

BENJAMIN AUSTEN, ESQ.

THESE VOLUMES

ARE AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

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It is with considerable diffidence that I venture to submit the following narrative to the reader. The opinions of friends, and a desire on my part to communicate the little information that opportunities may have enabled me to acquire, with regard to a country and city so little known as Assyria and Nineveh, have alone induced me to undertake a work of this nature under the united disadvantages of incapacity, literary inexperience, ill-health, and a very short residence in England. When I add that I have, at the same time, been engaged in preparing for the press an illustrated work on the Monuments of Nineveh, and in superintending the publication, for the Trustees of the British Museum, of the Cuneiform inscriptions brought by me from Assyria, occupations which have demanded considerable time and

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care, I may perhaps appeal with more confidence to the kind indulgence of my readers, and particularly of those who are far more competent than myself to enter into the enquiries I have ventured to add to my personal narrative.

A general dissertation, such as that contained in the second volume, requires a very extensive acquaintance with those ancient and modern authors who have written or casually touched upon similar subjects. The necessity of a residence in the country, and the consequent absence of books, have prevented me from consulting many works which might have afforded valuable information, and have rendered difficult the verification of quotations obtained, in many instances, during hurried visits to London.

With more time and opportunities at my command, this dissertation might have been rendered more entertaining and useful. I should not have added it to the narrative, had I not felt that there were many observations which could only have occurred to one engaged, like myself, in a very close examination of the ruins of Assyria, and which, right or wrong, should be recorded, if recorded at all, whilst still fresh in my memory. I may perhaps venture to hope that, although these general remarks may be of little value, they will at least afford some assistance to others who may engage in similar enquiries.

Being anxious to avoid entering upon debateable

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subjects, it was originally my intention to state merely the results of my researches; but, as I proceeded with my work, I found it necessary to touch upon topics connected with Assyrian history and chronology. This was almost indispensable, in order to give the reader an idea of the extent of the discoveries and of the arguments they furnish. The opinions, however, which I have ventured to offer must be considered rather in the light of suggestions. Many things that have appeared to me to be facts may require further proof before they can be generally admitted. An examination of the ruins of Assyria still unexplored, and a fuller acquaintance with the monuments and inscriptions already discovered, are required to enable us to arrive at satisfactory results in an enquiry such as I have entered into. Still it appears to me that we have already sufficient data to warrant the attempt. These words of caution are necessary, and I trust the reader will acquit me of any wish to mislead him, or to make more of my subject than it deserves.

With regard to my personal narrative, I may owe an apology to the reader for introducing subjects not included in the title of my work, for adding narratives of my visits to the Tiyari and Yezidis, and a dissertation upon the Chaldæans of Kurdistan. I have thought that it might not be uninteresting to give such slight sketches of manners and customs,

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as would convey a knowledge of the condition and history of the present inhabitants of the country, particularly of those who, there is good reason to presume, are descendants of the ancient Assyrians. They are, indeed, as much the remains of Nineveh, and Assyria, as are the rude heaps and ruined palaces. A comparison between the dwellers in the land as they now are, and as the monuments of their ancestors lead us to believe they once were, will not perhaps be without useful results. It may give rise to serious reflection, and may even prove an instructive lesson.

With regard to the style of my narrative, I must prepare the reader for such inaccuracies and defects as arise from haste and inexperience. I have preferred sketches conveying a general idea of my operations and adventures to mere dry details, and a continuous relation of incidents which might have led me into frequent repetitions.

In spelling Eastern names I have followed no uniform system — having endeavoured to write them in the best way I could, to convey the mode of their pronunciation by the people of the country. This, I am aware, is contrary to the plan now generally adopted; but I have not had time to reduce the oriental words, in various languages, to one standard.

I have introduced into these volumes as many illustrations of the sculptures and monuments as I

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conveniently could. More careful and elaborate engravings of the bas-reliefs, and objects discovered will be published separately in a larger work on the Monuments of Nineveh, which may, therefore, be considered illustrative of these volumes.

It is a pleasing duty to acknowledge kindness and assistance in such labours as these, and it is with gratitude that I admit the great obligation under which I am to Mr. Birch of the British Museum, for much valuable information and many important suggestions, the source of which, when used, I have not always acknowledged. To Mr. Hawkins and the other officers of the British Museum, whom I have had occasion to consult, I also have to express my thanks for uniform kindness and courtesy. From Mr. George Scharf, jun., I have received great assistance. The plates and woodcuts have been chiefly executed, from my sketches, by him, or under his superintendence; and the reader will no doubt perceive how much my work is indebted to him. To others I would express my grateful obligations; although I am restricted from making any other allusion to the aid I have received from them.

To the Chairman and Honorable Court of Directors of the East India Company, through whose enlightened munificence I am mainly enabled to publish my drawings of the bas-reliefs discovered at Nineveh, I must take this opportunity of expressing that

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gratitude which many, who have been engaged in similar undertakings, have had reason to feel as strongly as myself. In recording a liberality, unfortunately so rare, I become an additional witness to the noble support they have ever rendered to literature and science.

It is to be regretted that proper steps have not been taken for the transport to England of the sculptures discovered at Nineveh. Those which have already reached this country, and, it is to be feared, those which are now on their way, have consequently suffered unnecessary injury. The great winged bull and lion, which, I had hoped, would have speedily formed an important portion of the national collection, are still lying at Busrah; and there is little prospect, at present, of their being brought to this country. Surely British ingenuity and resources cannot, as is pretended, be unable to remove objects which have already with very inadequate means, been transported nearly a thousand miles. The cases containing the small objects, recently deposited in the British Museum, were not only opened without authority at Bombay, but their contents exhibited, without proper precautions, to the public. It is remarkable that several of the most valuable (indeed *the* most valuable) specimens are missing; and the whole collection was so carelessly repacked that it has sustained very material injury. Were these Assyrian relics, how-

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ever valuable, such as could be again obtained, either by ingenuity or labour, their loss might not perhaps be so seriously lamented; but if once destroyed they can never be restored; and it must be remembered that they are almost the only remains of a great city and of a great nation.

*Cheltenham,
October, 1848.*

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BEFORE submitting the following narrative of my labours in Assyria to the reader, it may not be uninteresting to give a slight sketch of what had been done in the field of Assyrian antiquities, previous to the recent discoveries on the site of Nineveh.

The history of Assyria had been written by Herodotus and Ctesias. Unfortunately, the work of the former, who was so scrupulous in recording facts and traditions, has been entirely lost. Not a fragment of it has been preserved by those who, it may be presumed, might have made use of it, and who quote largely from him on similar subjects. This fact has led modern critics to doubt whether Herodotus did really write an Assyrian history, although Aristotle mentions having seen it*; or whether he merely alludes to a projected undertaking. Did such a work exist, there is little doubt that we should

* Hist. Anim. l. vii. c. 18.

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possess a very complete history of Assyria, as Herodotus considered the subject of sufficient interest and importance to demand a separate treatise. This design of writing a distinct account of the Assyrians has unfortunately led him to omit all mention of that nation in his great work; we might otherwise have derived much information from casual notices, similar to those which he has introduced respecting the Egyptians and other remarkable nations of antiquity. Almost the only allusion he makes to an event in Assyrian history — the sudden spread of the Assyrian power over Asia — apparently involves an assertion in direct contradiction to all that we find elsewhere recorded of the antiquity and origin of the Assyrian empire.

Of the history of Ctesias only a few fragments have been preserved, chiefly in the works of Diodorus Siculus and Photius. He was a native of Cnidus, who, either as a prisoner or a traveller, found himself at the Persian capital. Being skilled in medicine, he was taken into favour by the king, and remained seventeen years at his court, where he was treated with great distinction. During his residence in Persia he was able to consult the public archives, and he compiled from them a history of the Persians, and of their predecessors in the empire of Asia.* He also wrote an account of India and its productions; the absurd exaggerations and fables which it contains have caused all his other works

* Diod. Sicul. l. xi.

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to be viewed with suspicion. He is likewise accused of being led, by extreme jealousy of Herodotus, into direct mis-statements, that he may contradict that historian. Aristotle, more than once, declares him to be unworthy of credit*; and modern critics have generally agreed to reject altogether, or to receive with great reserve, all his assertions. Yet Diodorus Siculus, and several ancient authors, appear to have followed and trusted him; and it may be observed, that whilst mere travellers' tales and vulgar traditions were probably the only sources of his Indian marvels, written records and monuments may have furnished him with well-authenticated historical facts, to assist him in compiling the history of the country in which he resided, and of which he had a personal knowledge. Unfortunately, of his history very little remains, except the names of kings. Much relating to Assyria contained in the works of others was, however, undoubtedly copied from him.

Of later writers who have touched upon Assyrian history, Diodorus Siculus, a mere compiler, is the principal. Eusebius, and the Armenian historians, such as Moses of Chorene, have preserved a few valuable details and hints; they also obtained their information from elsewhere, but in some instances from original sources not altogether devoid of authenticity. Many other authors could be cited, who have casually in their works alluded to events in Assyrian history, or have introduced brief notices

* De Generat. Animal. l. ii. c. 2., and Hist. Anim. l. viii. c. 18.

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concerning the Assyrian empire; but any particular account of them, or an analysis of the information they afford, would only weary the reader.* It is remarkable, that none of the authors alluded to, do more than mention by name any of the Assyrian kings, with the exception of the three great monarchs, Ninus, Semiramis, and Sardanapalus, whom traditions have made celebrated, and whose deeds, like those of all prominent characters in an epoch before sober history commenced, have been invested with superhuman features, or have been mixed up with fables. Yet above thirty generations elapsed between Ninus and Sardanapalus, during which a whole line of kings occupied the Assyrian throne, and maintained the power of the empire. Their names have been handed down to us in genealogical series by Eusebius, the Syncellus, and others†; but the lists themselves are more than doubtful, and are generally believed to furnish sufficient evidence against their own authenticity.

With regard to Ninus and Semiramis, I need only here mention that, like all heroes of primitive history and early tradition, their names appear to have become conventional — all great deeds and national events being assigned to them. Originally historic characters, they have been to some extent invested with divine attributes, and have been mixed up with

* I may mention Berosus, Abydenus, Strabo, Nicolaus of Damascus, Castor, Polyhistor, Justin, Suidas, and the Syncellus.

† Abydenus gives a list of kings differing from those of Eusebius and the Syncellus.

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the theology of the race of which they were the first monarchs. This leads to a well known result — the hero-worship of ancient nations. Still, in admitting this fact, we must guard against rejecting traditions, simply because they are connected with these names. Many have a foundation, and were probably derived from events which actually took place. It is the province of the critical inquirer to separate the mythic, from that which comes within the legitimate bounds of history; to trace the origin of fables, and to draw rational conclusions from them.

The Assyrians are not particularly alluded to in Holy Writ, until the period when their warlike expeditions to the west of the Euphrates, brought them into contact with the Jews. The first king whose name is recorded was Pul, who reigned between eight and nine hundred years before the Christian æra; and about two hundred previous to the fall of the empire; consequently he must have been nearly the last of a long succession of kings who, it is generally admitted, had ruled over the greater part of Asia. The later monarchs are more frequently mentioned in the Bible; as their conquests over the Jews, whom they led captive into Assyria, brings them continually under notice. But except when they particularly concern the Jewish people, very little is related of the deeds of even these monarchs.

Of modern historians who have attempted to reconcile the discrepancies of Assyrian chronology, and to restore to some extent, from the fragments to which I have alluded, a history of the Assyrian

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empire, I scarcely know whom to point out. From such contradictory materials, it is not surprising that each writer should have formed a system of his own; and we may, without incurring the charge of scepticism, treat all their efforts as little better than ingenious speculations. In the date alone to be assigned to the commencement of the Assyrian empire, they differ nearly a thousand years; and even when they treat of events which approach the epoch of authentic history, — such as the death of Sardanapalus, the invasion of the Medes, and the fall of the empire, — there is nearly the same comparative discrepancy. The Bactrian and Indian expeditions of Ninus, the wonderful works of Semiramis, and the effeminacy of Sardanapalus, have been described over and over again, and form the standard ingredients of the Assyrian history of modern authors. The narratives framed upon them convey useful lessons, and are, moreover, full of romantic events to excite the imagination. As such they have been repeated, with a warning that their authenticity rests upon a slender basis, and that it is doubtful whether they are to be regarded as history, or to be classed amongst fables. Although the names of Nineveh and Assyria have been familiar to us from childhood, and are connected with our earliest impressions derived from the Inspired Writings, it is only when we ask ourselves what we really know concerning them, that we discover our ignorance of all that relates to their history, and even to their geographical position.

It is indeed one of the most remarkable facts in

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history, that the records of an empire, so renowned for its power and civilisation, should have been entirely lost; and that the site of a city as eminent for its extent as its splendour, should for ages have been a matter of doubt: it is not perhaps less curious that an accidental discovery should suddenly lead us to hope that these records may be recovered, and this site satisfactorily identified.

The ruins in Assyria and Babylonia, chiefly huge mounds, apparently of mere earth and rubbish, had long excited curiosity from their size and evident antiquity. They were, at the same time, the only remains of an unknown period,—of a period antecedent to the Macedonian conquest. Consequently they alone could be identified with Nineveh and Babylon, and could afford a clue to the site and nature of those cities. There is, at the same time, a vague mystery attaching to remains like these, which induces travellers to examine them with more than ordinary interest, and even with some degree of awe. A great vitrified mass of brick-work, surrounded by the accumulated rubbish of ages, was believed to represent the identical tower, which called down the divine vengeance, and was overthrown, according to an universal tradition, by the fires of heaven. The mystery and dread, which attached to the place, were kept up by exaggerated accounts of wild beasts, who haunted the subterraneous passages, and of the no less savage tribes who wandered amongst the ruins. Other mounds in the vicinity were identified with the hanging gardens, and those marvellous structures which tradition

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has attributed to two queens, Semiramis and Nitocris. The difficulty of reaching the site of these remains, increased the curiosity and interest with which they were regarded; and a fragment from Babylon was esteemed a precious relic, not altogether devoid of a sacred character. The ruins which might be presumed to occupy the site of the Assyrian capital, were even less known, and less visited; than those in Babylonia. Several travellers had noticed the great mounds of earth opposite the modern city of Mosul, and when the inhabitants of the neighbourhood pointed out the tomb of Jonah upon the summit of one of them, it was, of course, natural to conclude, at once, that it marked the site of the great Nineveh.* Macdonald Kinneir, no mean antiquarian and geographer, who examined these mounds, was inclined to believe that they marked the site of a Roman camp of the time of Hadrian; and yet a very superficial knowledge of the ruins of Babylonia would have shown at once that they were of a very different period.

The first to engage in a serious examination of the ruins within the limits of ancient Assyria was Mr. Rich, many years the political Resident of the East

* It need scarcely be observed, that the tradition placing the tomb of Jonah amongst the ruins opposite Mosul, is not authenticated by any passage in the Scriptures. It is now received by Christians and Muslims, and probably originated in the spot having been once occupied by a Christian church or convent, dedicated to the prophet. The building, which is supposed to cover the tomb, is very much venerated, and only Mohammedans are allowed to enter it. The Jews, in the time of St. Jerome, pointed out the sepulchre of Jonah at Gath-hepher, in the tribe of Zabulon.

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India Company at Baghdad, — a man, whom enterprise, industry, extensive and varied learning, and rare influence over the inhabitants of the country, acquired as much by character as position, eminently qualified for such a task. The remains near Hillah, being in the immediate vicinity of Baghdad, first attracted his attention; and he commenced his labours by carefully examining the nature and extent of the site they occupied, and by opening trenches into the various mounds. The results of his examination and researches, with an able dissertation on the topography of ancient Babylon, and the position of its principal buildings, appeared at Vienna, in an oriental literary journal called the “*Mines de l’Orient*.” This memoir was translated and published in England, and was followed by a second memoir, called forth by some remarks in the “*Archæologia*,” by Major Rennell. The two have recently been republished in a work containing a narrative of a journey to Babylon, edited by his widow.

I need not trouble the reader with a detailed account of Mr. Rich’s discoveries amongst the ruins of Babylon. They were of considerable interest, though, of course, in results far behind what accident has recently furnished. They consisted chiefly of fragments of inscriptions, bricks, engraved stones, and a coffin of wood; but the careful account which he drew up of the site of the ruins was of greater value, and has formed the ground-work of all subsequent inquiries into the topography of Babylon.

In the year 1820 Mr. Rich, having been induced to

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visit Kurdistan for the benefit of his health, returned to Baghdad by way of Mosul. Remaining some days in this city, his curiosity was naturally excited by the great mounds on the opposite bank of the river, and he entered upon an examination of them. He learnt from the inhabitants of Mosul that, some time previous to his visit, a sculpture, representing various forms of men and animals, had been dug up in a mound forming part of the great enclosure. This strange object had been the cause of general wonder, and the whole population had issued from the walls to gaze upon it. The ulema having at length pronounced that these figures were the idols of the infidels, the Mohammedans, like obedient disciples, so completely destroyed them, that Mr. Rich was unable to obtain even a fragment.

His first step was to visit the village containing the tomb of Jonah, built upon the summit of one of the principal mounds. In the houses he met with a few stones bearing inscriptions, which had probably been discovered in digging the foundations; and under the mosque containing the tomb he was shown three very narrow and apparently ancient passages, one within the other, with several doors or apertures.

He next examined the largest mound of the group, called Kouyunjik by the Turks, and Armousheeah by the Arabs. He only found amongst the rubbish a few fragments of pottery, bricks with cuneiform characters, and some remains of building in the ravines. He ascertained that the circumference was 7690 feet. On a subsequent occasion he made a

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careful survey of the site of all the ruins, which is published in the collection of his journals, edited by his widow.

With the exception of a small stone chair, and a few remains of inscriptions, Mr. Rich obtained no other Assyrian relics from the ruins on the site of Nineveh; and he left Mosul, little suspecting that in these mounds were buried the palaces of the Assyrian Kings. As he floated down the Tigris to Baghdad, he landed at Nimroud, and examined the great mound. He was struck by its evident antiquity, and learnt the tales of the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages connecting the ruins with Nimrod's own city, and the better authenticated tradition that they were those of Al Athur, or Ashur, from which the whole country anciently received its name. He obtained a few specimens of bricks bearing cuneiform characters, and proceeded with his journey.

The fragments collected by Mr. Rich were subsequently placed in the British Museum, and formed the principal, and indeed almost only, collection of Assyrian antiquities in Europe. A case scarcely three feet square enclosed all that remained, not only of the great city, Nineveh, but of Babylon itself!

Other museums in Europe contained a few cylinders and gems, which came from Assyria and Babylonia; but they were not classified, nor could it be determined to what exact epoch they belonged. Of Assyrian art nothing was known, not even by analogy. The architecture of Nineveh and Babylon was a matter of speculation, and the poet or painter restored their

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palaces and temples, as best suited his theme or his subject. A description of the temple of Belus by Herodotus, led to an imaginary representation of the tower of Babel. Its spiral ascent, its galleries gradually decreasing in circumference and supported by innumerable columns, are familiar to us from the illustrations, adorning almost the opening page of that Book, which is associated with our earliest recollections.

Such was our acquaintance four years ago with Nineveh and Assyria — their history, their site, and their arts. The reader will judge from the following pages, how far recent discoveries are likely to extend our knowledge.