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978-1-108-06514-6 - Nineveh and its Remains: With an Account of a Visit to the Chaldaean Christians of Kurdistan, and the Yezidis, or Devil-Worshippers: Volume 2

Austen Henry Layard

Excerpt

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NINEVEH

AND

ITS REMAINS.

CHAPTER XI.

DEATH OF TAHYAR PASHA. — EXCAVATIONS CARRIED ON. — DISCOVERIES IN THE NORTH-WEST PALACE. — NEW CHAMBERS AND BAS-RELIEFS. — IVORY ORNAMENTS AND CARTOUCHES WITH HIEROGLYPHICS. — PAINTED CHAMBERS. — POTTERY. — DISCOVERY OF UPPER CHAMBERS. — PAINTINGS ON THE WALLS. — PAVEMENT SLABS. — DISCOVERIES IN THE CENTRE OF THE MOUND. — TOMBS CONTAINING VASES AND ORNAMENTS. — THEIR EGYPTIAN CHARACTER. — BAS-RELIEFS COLLECTED TOGETHER. — DESCRIPTION OF THE SCULPTURES. — FURTHER DISCOVERIES IN THE SOUTH-WEST EDIFICE. — CROUCHING SPHINXES. — SCULPTURES. — A DESCRIPTION OF THE BAS-RELIEFS. — SMALL FIGURES IN UNBAKED CLAY. — A BEAM OF WOOD. — DISCOVERY OF MORE TOMBS IN THE SOUTH-EAST CORNER — OF CHAMBERS BENEATH THEM. — OF AN ARCHED OR VAULTED ROOM. — DISCOVERIES IN VARIOUS PARTS OF THE MOUND.

As I was drawing one morning at the mound, Ibrahim Agha came to me, with his eyes full of tears, and announced the death of Tahyar Pasha. The Cawass had followed the fortunes of the late Governor

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of Mosul almost since childhood, and was looked upon as a member of his family. Like other Turks of his class, he had been devoted to the service of his patron, and was treated more like a companion than a servant. In no country in the world are ties of this nature more close than in Turkey; nowhere does there exist a better feeling between the master and the servant, and the master and the slave.

I was much grieved at the sudden death of Tahyar; for he was a man of gentle and kindly manners, just and considerate in his government, and of considerable information and learning for a Turk. I felt a kind of affection for him. The cause of his death shewed his integrity. His troops had plundered a friendly tribe, falsely represented to him as rebellious by his principal officers, who were anxious to have an opportunity of enriching themselves with the spoil. When he learnt the particulars of the affair, and that the tribe, so far from being hostile, were peaceably pasturing their flocks on the banks of the Khabour, he exclaimed, "You have destroyed my house" (*i. e.* its honour), and, without speaking again, died of a broken heart. He was buried in the court-yard of the principal mosque at Mardin. A simple but elegant tomb, surrounded by flowers and evergreens, was raised over his remains; and an Arabic inscription records the virtues and probable reward of one of the most honest and amiable men that it has been my lot, in a life of some experience amongst men of various kinds, to meet. I visited his monument on my return to Constantinople. From the

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CHAP. XI.] RESULTS OF THE EXCAVATION. 3

lofty terrace, where it stands, the eye wanders over the vast plains of Mesopotamia, stretching to the Euphrates—in spring one great meadow, covered with the tents and flocks of innumerable tribes.

The Kiayah, or chief secretary, was chosen Governor of the province by the council, until the Porte could name a new Pasha, or take other steps for the administration of affairs. Essad Pasha, who had lately been at Beyrout, was at length appointed to succeed Tahyar, and soon after reached his Pashalic. These changes did not affect my proceedings. Armed with my firman I was able to defy the machinations of the Cadi and the Ulema, who did not cease their endeavours to throw obstacles in my way.

After the celebration of Christmas I returned to Nimroud, and the excavations were again carried on with activity.

I should weary the reader, were I to describe, step by step, the progress of the work, and the discoveries gradually made in various parts of the great mound. The labours of one day resembled those of the preceding; but it would be difficult to convey to others an idea of the excitement which was produced by the constant discovery of objects of the highest interest. A mere journal of my proceedings would afford but little amusement, and I should have to repeat, over and over again, the same details, and should probably be led into a repetition of the same reflections. I prefer, therefore, describing at once the results of my labours during the first three months of the year; and I will endeavour to explain, as concisely as pos-

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sible, the extent of the operations, and the nature of the buildings uncovered. I must necessarily make frequent reference to the plans; as, without the assistance they afford, it would be difficult to convey an accurate idea of the form of the edifices and position of the chambers.

The north-west palace was naturally the most interesting portion of the ruins, and to it were principally directed my researches. I had satisfied myself beyond a doubt that it was the most ancient building yet explored in Assyria. Not having been exposed to a conflagration like other edifices, the sculptures, bas-reliefs, and inscriptions, which it contained, were still admirably preserved.

When the excavations were resumed after Christmas, eight chambers had been discovered. There were now so many outlets, and entrances, that I had no trouble in finding new rooms and halls — one chamber leading into another. By the end of the month of April I had explored almost the whole building; and had opened twenty-eight chambers cased with alabaster slabs. Although many new objects of sculpture of considerable interest and importance were found in them, still the principal part of the edifice seems to have been that to the north. Chambers B and G contained the most remarkable bas-reliefs; they represented the deeds of the king in war and in the chase, his triumphant return, and the celebration of religious ceremonies. The best artists had evidently been employed upon them; and they excelled all those that had yet been discovered, in the

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CHAP. XI.] DESCRIPTION OF CHAMBERS.

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elegance and finish of the ornaments, and in the knowledge of art displayed in the grouping of the figures. The walls of the other chambers were either occupied by a series of winged figures, separated by the sacred tree, — the figures resembling one another in every respect, — or the usual inscription alone was carved upon the slabs.

It will be perceived that a certain symmetry was, to some extent, observed in the plan of the building; particularly in the arrangement of the chambers to the East; those marked I and L corresponding in form and size, and both leading into small rooms, which do not communicate with any other part of the edifice. Each slab, however, in chamber L, is occupied by only one figure, — a gigantic winged divinity, or priest, — and is not divided into two compartments, as in chamber I. But it is remarkable that on the slab No. 20. there is a figure differing from all the rest, and corresponding with the figures found on the lower part of the slab No. 16. of chamber I. It is that of a winged female deity or priestess, bearing a garland in one hand, and raising the other as if in some act of adoration. Around her neck are suspended, in the form of a double necklace, the star-shaped ornaments already described.* In this chamber also occur niches similarly placed to those in I. In front of the female figure, and forming part of the pavement, was a

* See page 341. Vol. I. This figure has been moved, and is amongst the sculptures which have been secured for the British Museum.

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slab with a hole through the centre. On raising it I found an earthen pipe, about eight inches in diameter and two feet in length, communicating with a drain running underneath, the whole being lined and cemented with bitumen. One or two fragments of ivory were also found in this room.

In chamber H all the groups were similar — representing the king, holding a cup in one hand and his bow in the other, attended by two winged figures with garlands round their heads. The sculptures in chamber G, as I have already observed, were chiefly remarkable for the variety and elegance of the ornaments on the robes of the king, and his attendants. Amongst them were groups of figures similar to those represented on the walls of the palace, such as the king slaying the lion, and hunting the bull; winged figures before the sacred tree; religious emblems; various animals and elaborate scroll work; all furnishing not only beautiful designs, but important illustrations of the religion of the Assyrians.

The entrance *d* to this chamber was formed by two gigantic eagle-headed winged figures, of considerable beauty and finish. One of them was moved, and will be brought to England. In the chamber beyond, were repeated the winged divinities or priests, with the emblematic tree; except on slab 6, which had the king holding a bow in one hand, and two arrows in the other.

The four sculptures in the chamber, or rather passage, P (Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4.), were remarkable for the beauty of the ornaments and details, and their

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THE KING. (N. W. Palace, Nimroud.)

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careful finish. They all represented winged figures either holding a mace, a fir-cone, or some religious emblem. On their dresses, however, were a variety of groups and designs — lion hunts, bull hunts, winged animals, and many groups of winged figures. Amongst the last was a curious representation of the Assyrian Venus, Mylitta or Astarte, in an indecent posture which indicated the peculiar nature of her worship.

On each of the slabs forming the narrow passage *a*, leading from the chamber P, were two winged figures back to back. They were well designed and carefully executed. Beyond them, on slabs 2, 3, and 4 of chamber S; was the king between two eunuchs. The figure of the king, one of the most carefully sculptured and best preserved in the palace, has been removed, and will be brought to England. He is represented with one hand on the hilt of his sword, the other being supported by a long wand, or staff.

On the remaining slabs of chamber S the winged figures were repeated. Some carried flowers of various shapes, whilst others had the usual fir-cone, and square basket, or utensil.

Three sides alone of the great hall Y, were found entire. From its size it is probable that it was not roofed in, but was an open court. It appears to have been nearly square; but the western wall has been completely destroyed; the slabs having perhaps been carried away to be used in the construction of the south-west palace. Three entrances are still stand-

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ing. The one at *b*, formed by a pair of winged lions, — those at *e* and *f*, by winged bulls. There was probably a fourth entrance on the western side, formed by a pair of lions, to correspond with that on the eastern; but I found no remains of it, although some might perhaps be discovered on a more careful examination. The removal of the slabs, which formed the western wall, has caused a depression in the mound; and consequently, if any large sculptures, such as the winged lions, had been left, when the slabs adjoining them were taken away, they would probably have been exposed to decay; and the upper part, remaining longest uncovered, would have been completely destroyed.

Behind the great hall Y, to the south, were a cluster of chambers leading one into another. Their proportions were small. V and W did not contain sculptures. T was surrounded by the usual winged figures; one of its entrances (*a*) being formed by two gigantic priests or divinities, with garlands round their heads, holding in one hand an ear of corn, and in the other an ibex, or mountain goat.

The chamber V is remarkable for the discovery, near the entrance *a*, of a number of ivory ornaments of considerable beauty and interest. These ivories, when uncovered, adhered so firmly to the soil, and were in so forward a state of decomposition, that I had the greatest difficulty in extracting them, even in fragments. I spent hours lying on the ground, separating them, with a penknife, from the rubbish by which they were surrounded. Those who