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978-1-108-07899-3 - Assyrian Discoveries: An Account of Explorations and Discoveries  
on the Site of Nineveh, During 1873 and 1874

George Smith

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## ASSYRIAN EXPLORATIONS AND DISCOVERIES.

### CHAPTER I.

#### FORMER EXCAVATIONS AND DISCOVERIES IN THE VALLEY OF THE EUPHRATES AND TIGRIS.

Interest of subject.—Botta's excavations.—Layard's works.—Rawlinson.—Hormuzd Rassam.—Loftus.—Decipherment of cuneiform.—Grotefend.—Rawlinson.—Behistun text.—Hincks.—Oppert.—Later decipherers.

**T**HE interest attaching to the valley of the Euphrates and Tigris is of the widest kind; and, excepting the land of Palestine, no other part of the globe can compare with it in the importance of its traditions, its history, and its monuments.

It is the home of man's earliest traditions, the place where Eden was supposed to have been; some of its cities are stated to be older than the Flood; it is the land of the Deluge and of the tower of Babel, and it is the birthplace of the great race of Israel

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which has played so important a part in the religious history of the world.

In Babylonia arose the first civilized state, and its arts and sciences became the parents of those of the Greeks, and through them also of our own.

Watered by two of the noblest rivers in the world, on each of these stood a great capital, Babylon on the Euphrates, Nineveh on the Tigris; cities which in the earlier period of history were unrivalled, and which even in their ruins have attracted the attention of travellers in all ages, from the time of their overthrow until now. M. Botta, who was appointed French consul at Mosul in 1842, was the first to commence excavations on the sites of the buried cities of Assyria, and to him is due the honour of the first discovery of her long lost palaces.

M. Botta commenced his labours at Kouyunjik, the large mound opposite Mosul, but he found here very little to compensate for his labours. New at the time to excavations, he does not appear to have worked in the best manner; M. Botta at Kouyunjik contented himself with sinking pits in the mound, and on these proving unproductive abandoning them.

While M. Botta was excavating at Kouyunjik, his attention was called to the mounds of Khorsabad by a native of the village on that site; and he sent a party of workmen to the spot to commence excavation. In a few days his perseverance was rewarded by the discovery of some sculptures, after which, abandoning the work at Kouyunjik, he transferred

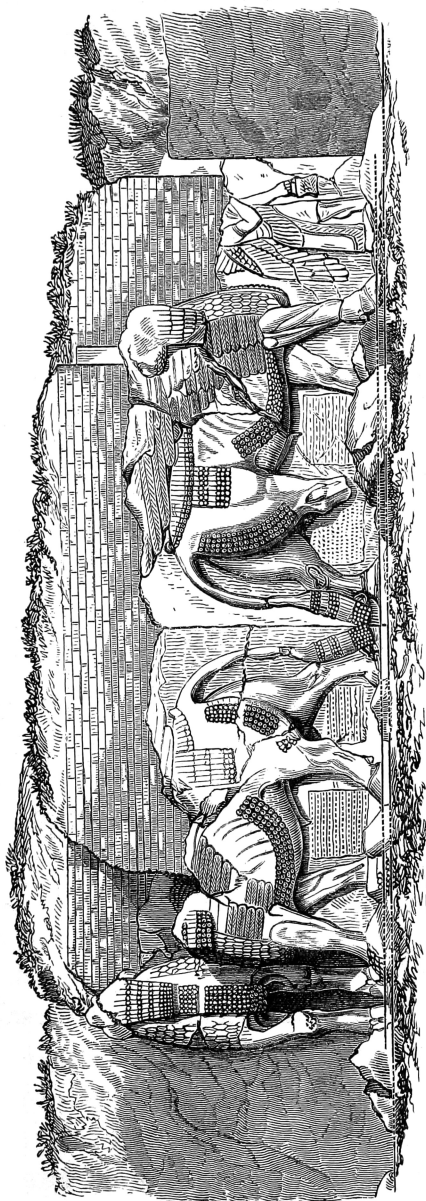
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SIDE OF PORTAL EXCAVATED BY M. BOTTA AT KHORSABAD.

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his establishment to Khorsabad and thoroughly explored that site.

M. Botta's workmen had sunk a well at Khorsabad, and arrived at one of the palace walls. Subsequent excavations led to the discovery of many chambers and halls, faced with slabs of gypsum carved over with mythological figures, battle scenes, processions, and similar subjects. Long inscriptions in the cuneiform character ran along the middle of most of the slabs, and some of them were also inscribed at the back. The palace which M. Botta had discovered was built by Sargon, king of Assyria, B.C. 722 to 705; it is one of the most perfect Assyrian buildings yet explored, and forms an excellent example of Assyrian architecture.

Beside the palace on the mound of Khorsabad, M. Botta also opened the remains of a temple, and a grand porch decorated by six winged bulls, under which passed the road from the city to the palace. The operations of M. Botta were brought to a close in 1845, and a splendid collection of sculptures and other antiquities, the fruits of his labours, arrived in Paris in 1846 and was deposited in the Louvre.

Afterwards the French government appointed M. Place consul at Mosul, and he continued some of the excavations of his predecessor. Among other antiquities he discovered one of the gates of the city to which the palace of Sargon belonged. This gate was flanked on each side by gigantic winged bulls, and the space between them was spanned by an arch springing from the backs of the bulls.

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Mr. Layard, whose attention was early turned in this direction, visited the country in 1840, and afterwards took a great interest in the excavations of M. Botta. At length, in 1845, Layard was enabled through the assistance of Sir Stratford Canning to commence excavations in Assyria himself. On the 8th of November he started from Mosul, and descended the Tigris to Nimroud. Next morning he commenced excavations, and soon discovered the remains of two palaces. Mr. Layard has described in his works with great minuteness his successive excavations, and the remarkable and interesting discoveries he made. At Nimroud he found several buildings, palaces, and temples; at Kouyunjik he found the palace of Sennacherib, and one of the great gates of the city; at Nebbi-yunas a palace of Esarhaddon, and minor monuments at various other sites. After making these discoveries in Assyria, Mr. Layard visited Babylonia, and opened trenches in several of the mounds there. On the return of Mr. Layard to England, excavations were continued in the Euphrates valley under the superintendence of Colonel (now Sir Henry) Rawlinson. Under his directions, Mr. Hormuzd Rassam, Mr. Loftus, and Mr. Taylor excavated various sites and made numerous discoveries, the British Museum receiving the best of the monuments.

The materials collected in the national museums of France and England, and the numerous inscriptions published, attracted the attention of the learned, and very soon considerable light was thrown on the

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history, language, manners, and customs of ancient Assyria and Babylonia.

The key to the reading of the Persian cuneiform writing had been discovered by Grotefend; but it was left to Sir Henry Rawlinson, in his great work on the Behistun inscription, to read the records of Darius and first decipher the accompanying Scythic and Assyro-Babylonian texts; thus giving a clue to the reading of the thousands of inscriptions discovered in Assyria and Babylonia.

The study of the cuneiform writing was carried on with great zeal and success by Sir H. Rawlinson, Dr. Hincks, Dr. Oppert, Dr. Norris, M. Menant, and H. Fox Talbot, Esq., and recently by M. Lenormant, Rev. A. H. Sayce, and Dr. Schrader. Other scholars have also assisted in the work, but have not taken any prominent position in deciphering the inscriptions. Beside the original discovery, the chief merit in deciphering the Assyrian inscriptions belongs to Sir H. Rawlinson, who in 1851 published the discovery of the capture of Samaria by Sargon, the war against Hezekiah by Sennacherib, and the names of many persons and places mentioned in the Bible.

In 1862 Sir Henry Rawlinson published one of the most remarkable Assyrian documents yet discovered, the Assyrian eponym canon, a chronological document giving the outlines of the Assyrian official chronology. This inscription is invaluable in the comparison of Assyrian and Scripture history.

In 1863 he published a number of discoveries, in-



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cluding the tablet containing the synchronous history of Assyria and Babylonia. Next after Sir Henry Rawlinson comes Dr. Hincks, a successful student both of the Egyptian and Assyrian, and on some points the close rival of Sir Henry Rawlinson. Each of the other scholars has contributed his share to the discoveries which have been made from time to time ; these are so numerous that it would take too long to do justice to them here, but the accounts of previous explorations and discoveries will be found in the following works :—

*Botta.* Monument de Ninive, Paris, five vols., 1849-50; Mémoire sur l'Écriture Cunéiforme Assyrienne, Paris, 1849.

*Layard.* Nineveh and its Remains, London, 1851; Nineveh and Babylon, London, 1853; Monuments of Nineveh, London, 1851; second series, 1853; Inscriptions in the Cuneiform Character, London, 1851.

*Loftus.* Travels in Chaldea and Susiana, London, 1856.

*Place.* Ninive et l'Assyrie, Paris, 1870.

*Grottefend.* Zur Erläuter. d. babylon. Keilschrift, 1840; Bemerkungen zur Inschrift eines Thongefässes mit niniv. Keilschrift, Göttingen, 1850-1; Die Tributverzeichniss d. Obeliskens aus Nimrud, Göttingen, 1852; Erläuter. der babyl. Keilinschrift aus Behistun, Göttingen, 1853; Erläuter. zweier Ausschr. Nebukadnezar's in babyl. Keilschr., Göttingen, 1854, and some minor papers.



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*Rawlinson (Sir H. C.)* Commentary on the Cuneiform Inscriptions of Babylon and Assyria, London, 1850; Babylonian text of Great Inscription at Behistun, London, 1851; Memoir on the Babylonian and Assyrian Inscriptions, London, 1854; Notes on the early history of Babylonia, London, 1856; Orthography of some of the later royal names of Assyrian and Babylonian history, London, 1856; Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia, vol. i. 1861, vol. ii. 1866, vol. iii. 1870, and numerous papers in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society from 1850 to 1864, and in the "Athenæum" from 1851 to 1867.

*Hincks.* Numerous papers in the "Athenæum," Transactions of Royal Irish Society, Journal of Royal Asiatic Society, Journal of Sacred Literature, from 1850 to 1866.

*Oppert.* Études Assyriennes, Inscription de Borsippa, Paris, 1857; Rapport au Ministre de l'Instruction publique, Paris, 1857; Expédition en Mésopotamie, Paris, 1863; Éléments de la Grammaire Assyrienne, Paris, 1860, second edition, 1868; Commentaire de la grande Inscription du Palais de Khorsabad, Paris, 1865; Histoire des Empires de Chaldée et d'Assyrie, Paris, 1865; Les Inscriptions de Dour-Sarkayan (Khorsabad), Paris, 1870.

*Norris.* Memoirs on the Scythic Version of the Behistun Inscription, London, 1853; Assyrian and Babylonian Weights, London; Assyrian Dictionary, vol. i. 1868, vol. ii. 1870, vol. iii. 1872.

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Sacred Literature, Journal of Royal Asiatic Society, and Journal of Biblical Archæology.

*Lenormant.* Essai sur un Monument Mathématique Chaldéen, Paris, 1868; Lettres Assyriologiques, Paris, 1871; La Magie chez les Chaldéens, Paris, 1874; Les premières Civilisations, Paris, 1874; Manuel d'histoire ancienne de l'Orient, Paris, 1869; Choix de textes Cunéiformes inédites, Paris, 1873.

*Menant.* Les Briques de Babylon, Paris, 1859; Sur les Inscriptions Assyriennes du Musée Britannique, 1862-3; Inscriptions de Hammourabi, Paris, 1863; Exposé des Éléments de la Grammaire Assyrienne, Paris, 1868; Le Syllabaire Assyrien, Paris, 1869-73; Leçons d'Épigraphie Assyrienne, Paris, 1873.

*Sayce.* On Akkadian Grammar, Journal of Philology, 1870; Assyrian Grammar, London, 1872; articles in Transactions of Society of Biblical Archæology.

*Schrader.* In Zeitschrift d. d. Morgenl. Gesellsch., 1869; Die assyrisch-babylonischen Keilinschriften, Leipzig, 1872; Die Keilinschriften und das alte Testament, Giessen, 1872.

*Brandis.* Ueber d. histor. Gewinn aus d. Entziffer. der assyr. Inschriften, Berlin, 1856.

*De Saulcy.* Recherches sur l'Écriture Cunéiforme Assyrienne, Paris, 1849.

*Rawlinson (George).* The Five Great Monarchies of the ancient Eastern World, second edition, London, 1871; Herodotus, second edition, London.