

THE ARTISTIC DISCOVERY OF  
ASSYRIA BY BRITAIN AND  
FRANCE 1850 TO 1950

D ESPOSITO

PbD

2011

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**THE ARTISTIC DISCOVERY OF ASSYRIA BY BRITAIN AND FRANCE 1850 TO 1950**

by

**DONATO ESPOSITO**

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth in partial fulfilment for the  
degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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Faculty of Arts**

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## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Committee.

I, Donato Esposito, confirm that the work in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Signed..........

Date.....15/8/11.....

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I have taken the pragmatic decision to standardise the transcriptions of nineteenth-century texts and word usages to avoid having to insert numerous, and distracting, 'sic' throughout. Thus, for example, 'water-colour' has become 'watercolour', 'to-day' 'today', 'Alma Tadema', 'Alma Tadéma' and 'Tadema' 'Alma-Tadema', 'Phygalia' 'Phigalia', 'Armytage' 'Armitage', 'Nimroud' 'Nimrud'. Unless stated otherwise, scriptural quotes are taken from the King James Version of the Bible, abbreviated [KJV].

## ABSTRACT

DONATO ESPOSITO

### THE ARTISTIC DISCOVERY OF ASSYRIA BY BRITAIN AND FRANCE 1850 TO 1950

This thesis provides an overview of the engagement with the material culture of Assyria, unearthed in the Middle East from 1845 onwards by British and French archaeologists. It sets the artistic discovery of Assyria within the visual culture of the period through reference not only to painting but also to illustrated newspapers, books, journals, performances and popular entertainments.

The thesis presents a more vigorous, interlinked, and widespread engagement than previous studies have indicated, primarily by providing a comprehensive corpus of artistic responses. The artistic connections between Britain and France were close. Works influenced by Assyria were published, exhibited and reviewed in the contemporary press, on both sides of the English Channel. Some artists, such as Gustave Doré, successfully maintained careers in both London and Paris. It is therefore often meaningless to speak of a wholly 'French' or 'British' reception, since these responses were coloured by artistic crosscurrents that operated in both directions, a crucial theme to be explored in this dissertation. In Britain, print culture also transported to the regions, away from large metropolitan centres, knowledge of Assyria and Assyrian-inspired art through its appeal to the market for biblical images. Assyria benefited from the explosion in graphical communication.

This thesis examines the artistic response to Assyria within a chronological framework. It begins with an overview of the initial period in the 1850s that traces the first British discoveries. Chapter Two explores the different artistic turn Assyria took in the 1860s. Chapter Three deals with the French reception in the second half of the nineteenth century. Chapter Four concludes the British reception up to 1900, and Chapter Five deals with the twentieth century. The thesis contends that far from being a niche subject engaged with a particular group of artists, Assyrian art was a major rediscovery that affected all fields of visual culture in the nineteenth century.

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(fig.101) Georges Rochegrosse (after), *Le mort de Babylone (The fall of Babylon)*, 1891. Process print, 10.1 x 13 cm. From 'Catalogue illustré de peinture et sculpture: Salon de 1891' (Paris: Ludovic Baschet, 1891), p.310.

(fig.102) Louis Chalon (after), *La mort de Sardanapale (The death of Sardanapalus)*, 1891. Process print, 15 x 10 cm. From 'Catalogue illustré de peinture et sculpture: Salon de 1891' (Paris: Ludovic Baschet, 1891), p.313.

(fig.103) Henri Paul Motte (after), *Baal Moloch dévorant les prisonniers de guerre à Babylone (Baal Moloch devouring the prisoners of war in Babylon)*, 1876. Process print. From 'Gazette des Beaux-Arts', June 1876, p.11.

(fig.104) Frederick Arthur Bridgman (after), *Divertissement d'un roi assyrien (The diversion of an Assyrian king)*, n.d. Process print. From an unknown publication (Witt Library, London).

(fig.105) Jean Léon Gérôme, *Pollice verso*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 96.5 x 149.2 cm. Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona (1968.52).

(fig.106) Briton Rivière, *Daniel in the lions' den*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 98.5 x 152.5 cm. Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (WAG 2700).

(fig.107) Charles George Lewis after Briton Rivière, *Daniel*, 1875. Mixed method on *chine collé*, 59.5 x 87.5 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1886,1127.75).

(fig.108) François Lematte (after), *Judith*, 1886. Process print, 10 x 14.7 cm. From 'Catalogue illustré du Salon [de 1886]' (Paris: Ludovic Baschet, 1886), p.83.

(fig.109) Cham [Amédée de Noé] after Alexandre Cabanel, *Thamar et Absalom (Tamar and Absalom)*, 1875. Process print. From 'L'Univers Illustré', 5 June 1875, p.364.

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(fig.111) Smeeton & Tilly [Joseph Burn Smeeton and Auguste Tilly] (after an intermediary drawing by J Pélissier) after Aimé Morot, *La captivité de Babylone (The Babylonian captivity)* (detail), 1873. Wood-engraving, 22.2 x 17 cm. From 'L'Illustration', 4 October 1873, p.224.

(fig.112) Émile Charles-Bitte (after), *Dalila (Delilah)*, 1891. Process print, 5.8 x 10.1 cm. From 'Catalogue illustré de peinture et sculpture: Salon de 1891' (Paris: Ludovic Baschet, 1891), p.91.



(fig.113) Auguste Rodin, *Studies for a portrait of Victor Hugo*, c.1883. Pen and ink, 8.2 x 13 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris (D.2166 recto).

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(fig.115) Anonymous after Percy William Justyne, *Central Assyrian Saloon, British Museum, London*, before 1883. Wood-engraving, 10.8 x 14.3 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1939,0116.10).

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(fig.117) Auguste Rodin, *Study of a leaping lion, from an Assyrian bas-relief in the British Museum*, c.1913. Graphite, 8.3 x 14.1 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris (D.7022).

(fig.118) Auguste Rodin, *Study of a dying lion, from an Assyrian bas-relief in the British Museum*, c.1913. Graphite, 8.3 x 14.1 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris (D.7015).

(fig.119) Auguste Rodin, *Study of a dying lioness, from an Assyrian bas-relief in the British Museum*, c.1913. Graphite, 8.3 x 14.1 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris (D.7018).

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- (fig.129) Frank Dicksee (after), *Elijah meeting Ahab and Jezebel in Naboth's vineyard*, 1876. Wood-engraving, 22.1 x 29.6 cm. From 'The Graphic', 6 May 1876, p.448.
- (fig.130) Thomas Matthews Rooke, *King Ahab's coveting*, 1879. Oil on canvas, 110 x 168 cm (with frame). Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth (BORG M RC01891).
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- (fig.133) Thomas Matthews Rooke, *Herod's feast*, 1895. Watercolour, heightened with white and gouache, over graphite, with scratching out, 75 x 156.2 cm. Current location unknown (Christie's, London, 16 June 2010, lot 157).
- (fig.134) *Interior of Gyrn Castle, Flintshire showing John Rogers Herbert's 'The hunting leopard'*, n.d. Photograph. Private collection (Courtesy: Christie's, London, 17-18 July 2006, lot 118).
- (fig.135) George Frederick Watts, *Jonah*, 1894. Oil on canvas, 155.5 x 91.4 cm. Tate, London (N01636).
- (fig.136) Ernest Normand, *Vashti deposed*, 1890. Oil on canvas, 161 x 244.5 cm. Gallery Oldham, Oldham.
- (fig.137) Ernest Normand, *Esther denouncing Haman to King Ahasuerus*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 167 x 244.5 cm. Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens (TWCMS: B5635).
- (fig.138) Ernest Normand, *David and Saul*, 1891. Oil on canvas, dimension unknown. Current location unknown (Witt Library, London).
- (fig.139) Maurice Lefèvre-Lourdet, *David calms the wrath of Saul* (*David calming the wrath of Saul*), 1886. Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Current location unknown (Witt Library, London).
- (fig.140) Herbert Schmalz, *The daughters of Judah in Babylon*, 1892. Oil on canvas, 157.5 x 81 cm. Current location unknown (Sotheby's, London, 19 June 1991, lot 238).
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(fig.143) Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *Zal and Rudabeh*, 1882. Etching on Japan paper, 14.8 x 20.3 cm. British Museum, London (PD 2002,0728.26).

(fig.144) W A Mansell & Co, *Detail from Neo-Assyrian relief of 'The banquet scene' (King Ashurbanipal and his queen relaxing outdoors), from the North Palace, Nineveh, 645–35 BC* [Mansell 522c], c.1870. Photograph. Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham (Alma-Tadema Collection; Portfolio 20, no.8354).

(fig.145) Anonymous after Briton Rivière, *Daniel in the lions' den* (detail), 1879. Wood-engraving. From 'Magazine of Art', 1879, p.256.

(fig.146) Edwin Long (after), *The Babylonian marriage market*, 1889. Photogravure, with etching and roulette on *chine collé*, 56.5 x 87.4 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1974,0301.11).

(fig.147) John Reinhard Weguelin, *Herodias and her daughter*, 1884. Oil on canvas, 123.8 x 86.3 cm. Current location unknown (Christie's, London, 25 November 1988, lot 115).

(fig.148) John William Waterhouse, *Mariamne*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 259 x 180 cm. John Schaeffer, Sydney.

(fig.149) Neo-Assyrian, *Lion weight, from North-West Palace, Nimrud*. Copper alloy, 28.57 cm (length). British Museum, London (ME 91220).

(fig.150) Edward John Poynter, *The visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon*, 1884–90. Oil on canvas, 234.5 x 350.5 cm (with frame). Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (acc.no.898).

(fig.151) Charles Carbonneau, *'La Reine de Saba' ('The Queen of Sheba'), Act III*, 1862. Wood-engraving, 21 x 24 cm. From 'L'Univers Illustré', 6 March 1862, p.105 [front-page].

(fig.152) Walter Crane, *Tree of typical pattern forms, units, and systems*, 1898. Process print. From 'The bases of design' (London: George Bell & Sons, 1898), p.93.

(fig.153) Louis Édouard Fournier (after), *Les grandes époques de l'art (Great periods in art)* (detail), c.1899–1900. Mosaic, dimensions unknown. Façade of Grand Palais, Paris.

(fig.154) Jacob Epstein, *Oscar Wilde monument*, 1909–12. Hoptonwood stone. Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris.

(fig.155) Fernand Léger, *Le mécanicien (The mechanic)*, 1920. Oil on canvas, 116 x 88.8 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (No.14985).

(fig.156) Charles Sargeant Jagger, *Royal Artillery Monument (West side)*, 1921–25. Hyde Park Corner, London.

(fig.157) Detail of fig.156.

(fig.158) Anonymous, *Charles Sargeant Jagger in his studio modelling*, c.1928. Photograph. Private collection. From 'The sculpture of Charles Sargeant Jagger' (Much Hadham and Aldershot: Henry Moore Foundation and Lund Humphries, 2004).

(fig.159) Neo-Assyrian. *Scene from a sequence of lion hunting, from Room S, North Palace, Nineveh* (detail), 645–35 BC. Gypsum, 165.1 x 116.84 cm. British Museum, London (ME 124876).

(fig.160) *Detail of Neo-Assyrian bas-relief depicting King Ashurbanipal lion hunting, from Room S, North Palace, Nineveh, 645–35 BC, 1933*. Photograph. From Charles Sargeant Jagger, 'Modelling and sculpture in the making' (London and New York: Studio Ltd and Studio Publications, 1933), plate XXVI.

(fig.161) Charles Sargeant Jagger, *No man's land*, 1919–20. Bronze, 126.4 x 307 cm. Tate, London (N01354).

(fig.162) Gilbert Ledward, '*18-pounder gun in action*', from the '*Guards' Division Memorial*', 1922–26. Bronze, 168 x 305 cm. St. James' Park, London.

(fig.163) Gilbert Ledward, *Study from a sketchbook for the 'Guards' Division Memorial'* (detail), c.1922–26. Graphite, 12.5 x 17.7 cm. Royal Academy of Arts, London (LED/23, folio 42 verso).

(fig.164) Anonymous, *Handy with British guns in Italian heights*, 1918. Half-tone, 29.3 x 23 cm. From 'The War Illustrated', 19 August 1918, p.442. Royal Academy of Arts, London (LED/23, n.p.).

(fig.165) Mark Rothko, *The Syrian bull*, 1943. Oil on canvas, 100.2 x 70.2 cm. Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio (1991.41.1).

(fig.166) Mark Rothko, *Israel*, 1928. Half-tone. From 'The graphic Bible' (New York: MacMillan Company, 1928), p.64.

(fig.167) Roger Hilton, *Sardanapalus after Delacroix*, 1973. Gouache over charcoal, 37.4 x 56 cm. British Museum, London (PD 2003, 0601.20).

(fig.168) Gillian Jagger, *Of the hunt* (detail), 1998. Tree trunk, meat hooks and chains, dimension unknown. Current location unknown ([www.artseensoho.com/Art/KIND/jagger99/jagger.html](http://www.artseensoho.com/Art/KIND/jagger99/jagger.html)).

(fig.169) Eduardo Paolozzi, *Untitled* (from '*Museum Series*'), 1993. Etching, 32 x 27.7 cm. Tate, London (P20149).

(fig.170) Anish Kapoor, *C-Curve*, 2007. Installation: Cour Khorsabad, Musée du Louvre, Paris, 2007. Stainless steel, 220 x 770 x 300 cm. Collection of the artist.

(fig.171) Different view of fig.170.

## INTRODUCTION

This empirically driven study explores the reception of Assyrian artworks — primarily the bas-reliefs recovered and relocated during the mid-nineteenth century to the British Museum and the Musée du Louvre — by British and French artists in the period circa 1850 to 1950. It sets the artistic discovery of Assyria within the visual culture of the period through reference not only to painting but also to illustrated newspapers, books, journals, performances and popular entertainments.

The discovery of the material culture of Assyria in 1845 occurred during an interesting and turbulent time in the genesis of the history of art, not least because the Western artistic canon was still being formed. Therefore the reception and accommodation of Assyria into the canon at this time had to be negotiated. The turn to Assyrian art thus runs alongside a number of nineteenth-century contexts and issues, including museum building, and matters of national pride; the art movements of Pre-Raphaelitism of the 1850s and Aestheticism of the 1860s; the genres of biblical and history painting; French Orientalism; and the rediscovery of the ancient world. Assyria works as a useful mirror to reflect these trends because the year 1845 provides a clear *terminus post quem* for the revival. Unlike other Victorian revivals, such as that of its counterpart ancient Egypt, nothing of Assyria was previously known. The revival of Egypt had a much longer history, which began in antiquity with the Romans. The starting point for this study of the Victorian art world's engagement with Assyria begins with the excavations and publications of the widely influential discoveries by Austen Henry Layard (1817–1894).

## Assyrian revivalism before 1845

Like other Victorian revivals, the turn to Assyria post-1845 did not occur completely in a vacuum. Although Layard's discoveries provided the first visual record of Assyria, there previously existed a cultural interest in the 'idea' of Assyria. This concept of Assyria — before the joint discoveries by the archaeologists Layard, working for Britain, and Paul Émile Botta (1802–1870), working for France — was informed by various written sources. These were scanty at best and contained within no single book, but were to be found in influential sources including passing references in Old Testament accounts in the Bible and in classical writings.<sup>1</sup> The latter includes the *Bibliotheca historica* by Diodorus Siculus and *Historica* by Herodotus. Diodorus' multi-volume work was intended to be a complete history of the world. Book Two (of 40) relates to the history of the Middle East, and encompasses the history of Assyria, part of Mesopotamia. The first biblical mention of Assyria or its capital Nineveh is in the Old Testament Book of Genesis that describes its foundation: "Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh" (Genesis 10:11 [KJV]). The city expanded to an enormous size, but because of its inhabitants' idolatry, would eventually be destroyed by a vengeful God, as the Old Testament prophet Nahum warned:

And the LORD hath given a commandment concerning thee, that no more of thy name be sown: out of the house of thy gods will I cut off the graven image and the molten image: I will make thy grave; for thou art vile. (Nahum 1:14 [KJV])

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent concise overview see Eckart Frahm, 'Images of Assyria in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western scholarship' in Steven Holloway (ed.), *Orientalism, Assyriology and the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), pp.74–94.

Indeed, the title of the poem by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The burden of Nineveh*, first published in 1856, is directly taken from scripture (Nahum 1:1). The turn to the Bible by nineteenth-century painters also provided a context for Assyrian engagements and this will be a major theme of this dissertation. Michaela Giebelhausen has recently outlined the renewal of biblical work as a primary goal of the Pre-Raphaelite movement.<sup>2</sup> In fact this dissertation shows how biblical painting was continued with enthusiasm in the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s, and the part Assyria played in this renewal.

The fascination with the idea of Assyria as a centre of vice was long-standing, since biblical accounts stressed the avarice, decadence, and corruption found in both Nineveh and its ancient neighbour Babylon. Babylon, though, was the more notorious of the two. Lynda Nead sets the expansion of metropolitan London in the nineteenth century against a biblical framework, which aligned the British capital with its Mesopotamian forebear.<sup>3</sup> Babylon became a sign for the corruption of the city and of the entire world's ungodliness: Babylon was the "mother of harlots and abominations of the earth" (Revelation 17:5 [KJV]), and Nineveh was described thus: "Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery" (Nahum 3:1 [KJV]). Elsewhere, the Book of Ezekiel provides vivid descriptions of Assyrian art that prefigured the carved bas-reliefs discovered by Layard and Botta, and already gave a sense of Assyria as an artistic culture: "...men pourtrayed upon the wall, the images of the Chaldeans pourtrayed with vermilion" (Ezekiel 23:14 [KJV]).

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<sup>2</sup> Michaela Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible: Representation and belief in mid-Victorian Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, streets and images in nineteenth-century London* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2000).

The fall of the city of Babylon – an enemy of Assyria and of Israel – is foretold by the Old Testament prophet Isaiah (around 700–690 BC): “And Babylon, the glory of kingdom, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah” (Isaiah 13:19 [KJV]). But “Babylon the great” is also used as a symbol for a corrupt, apostate and satanic world order whose doom is likewise envisioned by John the Divine in chapter 18 of the eschatological Revelation (dated between AD 70–95), the final book of the New Testament. The historical city itself was conquered in 539 BC, a period covered in the Book of Daniel, which recounts the sins of the Babylonian kings Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. The latter gave a banquet serving wine from sacred vessels taken from Jerusalem and was condemned to death by God (Daniel 5:1–6, 25–28 [KJV]). The story inspired the oratorio *Belshazzar* by Handel (1745) and Byron’s poem *Vision of Belshazzar* (1815), which concludes with the lines: “The Mede is at his gate! The Persian on his throne!” describing the collapse of Babylon under a combined attack by Media and Persia.<sup>4</sup> The fate of the collapse of these once powerful ancient biblical states fascinated European poets, painters, and playwrights throughout the nineteenth century.

Before the discoveries of 1845 made Assyrian art actually visible, the theatrical and musical worlds had already begun to ‘visualise’ Assyria on printed scores and set designs from the textual references outlined above. The premier of the British performance of the tragedy *La morte di Semiramide* (*The death of Semiramis*) (1801) by the composer Marcos António da Fonseca Portugal (1762–1830) took place at the King’s Theatre, London in December 1814. The lead role of

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<sup>4</sup> See Ernest Hartley Coleridge (ed.), *The works of Lord Byron [Poetry]: A new, revised and enlarged edition, with illustrations*, 7 vols (London: John Murray, 1898–1904), vol.III (1900), pp.397–98. See also Byron’s poem *To Belshazzar*, first published in 1831, *ibid.*, pp.421–23.



the Assyrian queen, Semiramis, was played by the celebrated soprano Angelica Catalani (1782–1849) and an anonymous contemporary satirical print provides a souvenir of her performance (fig.1). The 'Assyrian' palace is a fusion of ancient Egyptian architectural elements including a cavetto cornice, an obelisk and hieroglyphics. In addition to the satire, Richard Dighton (1752–1814) also published his hand-coloured etching *Madame Catalani in Semiramide* (1806) in the same role. Dealing with the same Assyrian subject, the cover to the musical score for Rossini's *Semiramide* (*Semiramis*), published in London circa 1842, also exploits ancient Egyptian sources to visualise the 'lost' world of Assyria. An ancient Egyptian winged solar disc surmounts the lithographed vignette (fig.2). It is significant that Egypt had to be the visual source at this time. As stated earlier, there was no visual record of Assyria before 1845. Egypt therefore stood for the entirety of the ancient Middle East. This was because there was already a widely available visual language for Egypt, such as the comprehensive *Description de l'Égypte*, published in 1809–29.

Byron's *The tragedy of Sardanapalus*, first published in 1821, also did much to invigorate interest in Assyria before Layard and Botta. The play followed the fate of the Assyrian ruler Sardanapalus, and his eventual death upon a funeral pyre with his mistress Myrrha, set in the royal palace at Nineveh. The drama was first performed on the stage at the Théâtre Royale in Brussels in January 1834, and premiered in London at the Drury Lane Theatre on 10 April 1834. It is noteworthy that it was next revived in London in June 1853, after Layard's discoveries had ignited interest in the subject. It is interesting that where Rossetti drew on the

Bible in the 1850s in keeping with that period's interest in biblical subjects, Byron's work is largely based upon the classical writings of Diodorus Siculus.<sup>5</sup>

Byron's work is also credited with the inspiration for the "most famous representation of Assyria (and Mesopotamia in general) in the entire nineteenth century": Eugène Delacroix's *La mort de Sardanapale* (*The death of Sardanapalus*) (fig.3).<sup>6</sup> Byron's play was first translated into French in 1822. For much of the nineteenth century it was in a succession of British private collections, and was widely exhibited and reproduced in London and Paris.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, John Martin (1789–1854) exhibited a succession of paintings at the British Institution, London with Assyrian or Babylonian subjects: *The fall of Babylon* (in 1819), *Belshazzar's feast* (1821), *The fall of Nineveh* (1841). Martin himself executed large mezzotints based upon these works for sale as single-sheet prints. In addition, he provided numerous wood-engraved illustrations for editions of the Bible. For example, the subject *The fall of Nineveh* was published as a large single-sheet print in 1830 (fig.4)<sup>7</sup> and in a reduced version in 1835, one of twenty plates intended to make up the series, *Illustrations of the Bible*, but which in fact were sold separately (fig.5).<sup>8</sup> Martin's close friend Edwin Atherstone (1788–1872) wrote a poem called *The fall of Nineveh*, published in 1828, to which Martin supplied the mezzotint frontispiece, a third and different rendering of the subject (fig.6).<sup>9</sup> The above depictions paved the way and set the scene for the taking up of Assyria by artists after Layard's discoveries brought its material remains to light.

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<sup>5</sup> For a summary of Byron's sources see Coleridge, *op.cit.*, vol.V (1901), pp.3–5.

<sup>6</sup> Frederick Bohrer, *Orientalism and visual culture: Imagining Mesopotamia in nineteenth-century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.54.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Campbell *et al.*, *John Martin: Visionary printmaker* (York and Tunbridge Wells: Campbell Fine Art and York City Art Gallery, 1992), pp.102–03, no.82.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.150, no.111.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.99, no.80.

## Literature on the rediscovery of Assyria

Individual articles on single artists and their engagement with Assyria began to emerge from the 1960s onwards. Robert Alexander explored the self-styling of Gustave Courbet (1819–1877) in the mid-1850s with his ‘Assyrian’ beard, particularly in the painting *The meeting (“Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet!”)* (1854; Musée Fabre, Montpellier).<sup>10</sup> Robert Burge identified the source of Pablo Picasso’s sculpture *Man with a sheep* with an Assyrian bas-relief in Paris.<sup>11</sup> However, the first published overview of the topic was an essay by Henrietta McCall in 1998. In her essay, McCall explores the cultural legacy of Assyria in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Britain and France, and takes as her starting point the works of Martin, moving through (chronologically) Delacroix, Edgar Degas, Gustave Doré, and Edwin Long. She concludes her artistic exploration with Georges Rochegrosse’s *The fall of Babylon*, first exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1891.<sup>12</sup> McCall examines the wide currency of Martin’s paintings, and the prints he made after them, in the 1820s and 1830s. Following the discovery of Assyria in 1845 and Martin’s death shortly afterwards, in 1854, McCall outlines the decline in his profile when his “paintings lost their popularity”.<sup>13</sup> The first post-Layardian examples that she identifies are the painting by Edgar Degas, *Sémiramis construisant Babylone (Semiramis building Babylon)* (fig.7), and the illustrations from the *The Doré Bible* (1866) by Gustave Doré. McCall argues that Degas’ canvas,

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<sup>10</sup> Robert L Alexander, ‘Courbet and Assyrian sculpture’, *Art Bulletin*, 47 (4), December 1965, pp.447–52.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Burge, ‘Pablo Picasso’s *Man with a sheep*’ in *Source: Notes in the history of art* 2, 3, 1982), pp.21–26.

<sup>12</sup> Henrietta McCall, ‘Rediscovery and aftermath’ in Stephanie Dalley (ed.) *The legacy of Mesopotamia* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.183–213.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.191.

despite a Mesopotamian subject, in fact “owed nothing to the [Assyrian] sculptures in the Louvre”.<sup>14</sup> Her survey includes Charles Kean’s performance of *Sardanapalus* (1853), jewellery design, architecture and film, and she concludes her study with D W Griffith’s *Intolerance* (1916), which is heavily indebted to Long’s painting *The Babylonian marriage market* (fig.8). She, like other authors, identifies a basic canon, against which I wish to show that Assyria was far more a mainstream subject for painters on both sides of the Channel than the literature has so far recognised.

Frederick Bohrer’s doctoral thesis (1989) laid the foundations of all subsequent work in the field, which though concentrating on Britain included examples from contemporary France.<sup>15</sup> Numerous articles by Bohrer published in the 1990s, in the journals *Culture and History* and *Art Bulletin*, began to deal with key aspects of the scope of the Western reception of Assyria, namely the publications of Layard and the construction of Assyria as an exotic ‘Other’, examined by Bohrer through the lens of contemporary Orientalist discourse.<sup>16</sup> While acknowledging the Assyrian source for the chariot in Degas’ often-cited painting of Semiramis, for Bohrer, Degas “excludes Mesopotamian sources from a Mesopotamian subject”.<sup>17</sup> Bohrer argues that in other work, by Gustave Moreau (1826–1898), the engagement with Assyria continues (as for Degas) to be fragmented and marginalised, which became the common factor in the French reception. The work of contemporary British artists, he argues, was entirely

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.204.

<sup>15</sup> Frederick Bohrer, ‘*A new antiquity: The English reception of Assyria*’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 1989).

<sup>16</sup> Frederick Bohrer, ‘The printed Orient: The production of A H Layard’s earliest works’, *Culture and History*, 11, 1992, pp.85–103 and ‘Inventing Assyria: Exoticism and reception in nineteenth-century England and France’, *Art Bulletin*, 80 (2), June 1998, pp.336–56. The latter was republished in Steven Holloway (ed.), *Orientalism, Assyriology and the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), pp.222–66.

<sup>17</sup> Bohrer (1998), *op.cit.*, p.348.

different, and taking Ford Madox Brown's watercolour *The dream of Sardanapalus* (1871; Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, Delaware) as an example, he identifies more definite "Assyrian signifiers" in the work. Yet despite the seeming authenticity of Brown's work it is nonetheless "no less composite, no less the result of a discontinuous array of references" even in the post-Layardian context in which it was made.<sup>18</sup> Bohrer further argues that Long's *Babylonian marriage market* adheres to the "general mode of conception of Martin and Delacroix".<sup>19</sup> Moreover, he finds Long's painting a conflation of both Babylon and Assyria, like Martin before him, and one that reiterates the gendered (male) power structure and gaze epitomised in the work of Delacroix.

Bohrer's book-length study *Orientalism and visual culture*, published in 2003, expanded the subject of his thesis and these articles,<sup>20</sup> encompassing Germany as well as Britain and France. The scope of Bohrer's book spans essentially the middle to the end of the nineteenth century, beginning with Delacroix and Martin, and ending with Jacob Epstein and his tomb for Oscar Wilde, executed in 1909–12. In France, the first work Bohrer discusses is Gustave Courbet's *The meeting ("Bonjour Monsieur Courbet!")*, with a self-portrait of the artist sporting his distinctive 'Assyrian' beard. Bohrer finds the reception of Assyria in France characterised by a marked disjuncture, which he labels "French disconnections". He outlines a narrative in which the French reception was fragmented, controlled and erased, building on the arguments outlined in his 1998 article. For him the "diachronic continuity of this narrative" also accommodates

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.349–50.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.351.

<sup>20</sup> Frederick Bohrer, *Orientalism and visual culture: Imagining Mesopotamia in nineteenth-century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

“points of synchronic discontinuity”.<sup>21</sup> Drawn copies by Moreau of Assyrian artefacts Bohrer has found, for example, subvert their authority with embellishments that sometimes add or subtract elements. The French reception in the period immediately following the discovery of Assyria, in the 1850s and 1860s, was a “largely unsustainable event”.<sup>22</sup> Degas’ painting, begun around 1860, launches the French reception proper.

Bohrer points to an entirely different mode of operation in the reception of Assyria by Britain, one in opposition to the French model. By contrast the British reception is marked, he argues, by the “reinterpreting and indeed reconstructing” of Assyria between, within and around audiences.<sup>23</sup> The British engagement with Assyria, Bohrer contends, was the deepest and most extended of the nineteenth century. However, William Etty’s early *A group of captives* (1848; Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston) responded to the discovery of Assyria but “completely bypassed” Layard’s artefacts.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, so indelible was the mania for Assyria in the 1850s that mapping the progress provides almost a “snapshot of the visual culture of the time”.<sup>25</sup> However, he identifies Assyria ‘on view’ in this period only through portraits of prominent figures in the scholarly field or views of the excavations. He first identifies William Holman Hunt’s *The finding of the Saviour in the temple* (1860; Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery) as the first English example of Assyria ‘on view’ on an exhibition wall.

The reception in the 1890s, seen in some late works by Briton Rivière, such as *The king’s libation* (fig.9) for example, approaches a “sort of closure” which moved Assyria away from its “artefactuality” towards the prevailing artistic

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.67.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.224.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.98.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.187.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.98.

climate.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, Assyria could be moulded to suit the individual mood of the time and reflect wider cultural, social and political concerns.

Bohrer's work sits alongside that by Shawn Malley, who in two articles also explored Layard's writings in relation to the periodical press, and the displays of Assyrian artworks at the British Museum, London.<sup>27</sup> More recently Malley has focused on an important restaging of Lord Byron's play *Sardanapalus* in 1853.<sup>28</sup> This production, by the leading Victorian actor-manager Charles Kean (1881-1868), was important in the British reception of Assyria because it was the first example to have merged elements from actual Assyrian sculptures with artworks themselves inspired by 'Assyria' in the design of his sets and costumes. Therefore, the play betrayed a range of influences, from both primary and secondary sources. According to Malley, *Sardanapalus* closed the distance for the Victorian public between themselves and once-remote Assyria. As one critic described it rather humorously: "one performance gave us a better insight into the manners and habits of the Assyrians, than a whole lifetime has enabled us to acquire of the French".<sup>29</sup>

Malley's study explores the place of *Sardanapalus* in a wider historicising trend in visual culture, especially in theatrical performances, throughout the nineteenth century. This reveals the sometimes complex interconnectedness of the reception, as not solely an engagement between artists and Assyria, but in wider discourses too, and between artists themselves.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.205.

<sup>27</sup> Shawn Malley, 'Austen Henry Layard and the periodical press: Middle Eastern archaeology and the excavation of cultural identity in mid-nineteenth-century Britain', *Victorian Review*, 22, 1997, pp.171-89 and 'Shipping the bull: Staging Assyria in the British Museum', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 26 (1), 2004, pp.1-27.

<sup>28</sup> Shawn Malley, 'Theatre/archaeology: Performing material history in Charles Kean's *Sardanapalus*, 1853', *Nineteenth-century Studies*, 21, 2007, pp.139-61.

<sup>29</sup> *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 15 June 1853 quoted in Bohrer (1998), p.353.

Martin emerges as an important figure in studies by Ziter and Malley. *The fall of Nineveh*, a large canvas exhibited in 1828, overwhelmed contemporary audiences with Martin's depiction of the "famed Assyrian empire" and his grasp of the "remotest horizon of accredited history".<sup>30</sup> Martin's work provided early evidence of the "gorgeousness of the Assyrian court"; a trait that came to define the later reception in the nineteenth century with its focus on accurate and closely observed details – in short, on the archaeologically 'real'.<sup>31</sup> The nineteenth-century demand for historicist veracity pertained before 1845. The same critic of *The Examiner* noted the eclecticism of Martin's sources, another defining factor in the reception of Assyria also to be explored further in this dissertation. The same processes operated both before and after 1845 regardless of the 'real' details on offer, it would seem. For the critic, Martin invoked the:

recondite knowledge of the antiquarian, by novelly introducing the mixed Egyptian and Indian styles of architecture, which, from the geographical situation of Nineveh, most likely composed the Assyrian style.<sup>32</sup>

Martin's work enjoyed much exposure and currency in Victorian London after his death in 1854, and therefore provides an important mediation for Victorian audiences of Assyria post-1845 and one which, despite the abundance of Assyrian artefacts, looked back to Martin's art and vision.

Recently two doctoral studies have expanded the field in two focused ways. Michael Seymour's 2006 thesis explores the 'idea' of Babylon in Europe and sets

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<sup>30</sup> 'Fine arts: Mr. Martin's Fall of Nineveh', *The Examiner*, 1 June 1828, p.357 (357).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.357.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.357.



this against the history and historiography of archaeology in Iraq itself.<sup>33</sup> He examines the artistic and literary representation of Babylon from the Middle Ages up to the present day, and analyses key figures and moments within this exploration. The nineteenth century's fascination with Babylon, he argues, begins with Claudius Rich and his work for the East India Company 1808–21 in Baghdad, whose publication *Memoir on the ruins of Babylon* (1815) later captivated the young Layard so that the two cultures were linked by archaeologists as well as in the public mind. Seymour found Rich's account centred upon previous accounts in the Bible and classical sources, especially Herodotus. Seymour argues that Babylon as an 'idea' persisted throughout the nineteenth century despite late excavation at the very end of the century, in 1898. He gives coverage to the work of Layard and Botta and the "entry of ancient Mesopotamia into modern imperial competition".<sup>34</sup> Seymour extends his coverage, from Britain and France, to include the United States and Germany and examines a late production based on Byron, *Sardanapal, Historische Pantomime* (1908) that played an important role in the German reception of Babylon, which sought to overthrow the overtly nationalistic "English and French [excavations] at Khorsabad, Nimrud and Nineveh".<sup>35</sup> Seymour argues that in representations of Babylon "we see fantasies of [sexual] transgression again and again".<sup>36</sup> *The Babylonian marriage market* by Long, he argues, is a classic example of "Orientalist sexual exotica" which, despite its seemingly accurate and 'authentic' referencing, was an "authentification of the fantastic".<sup>37</sup> Seymour includes an exhaustive corpus of sources or representations (of all kinds) arranged

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<sup>33</sup> Michael John Seymour, *The idea of Babylon: Archaeology and representation in Mesopotamia* (Unpublished PhD, University College London, University of London, 2006).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.179.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.269.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.237.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.238.

chronologically, to which he assigns catalogue numbers, and which runs from the Book of Genesis (as Seymour 1) to a film still from Oliver Stone's film *Alexander* (2004; Seymour 296). Like Bohrer, Seymour lays stress on Degas' painting *Sémiramis construisant Babylone (Semiramis building Babylon)* (Seymour 237) from around 1860, and moves through work by Edward John Poynter and Ford Madox Brown, concluding with *Semiramis at the corpse of Ara, the beautiful* by the Armenian painter Vardges Sureniants (1860–1921) from 1899 (Seymour 261).

Philipa Kaina explored in her 2008 doctoral thesis the comparatively neglected early work of Degas, dating before 1874 when he exhibited at the first Impressionist exhibition.<sup>38</sup> She devotes an entire chapter to Degas' *Sémiramis construisant Babylone (Semiramis building Babylon)*. The large canvas was intended as a potential Paris Salon submission. Kaina distances Degas' depiction of the mythical Assyrian ruler from earlier, more bombastic depictions of Mesopotamian subjects, notably Delacroix's *The death of Sardanapalus*. For her, Degas' unfinished painting "flatly refuses to facilitate such Orientalist fantasies" as Delacroix's work so clearly invites, indeed demands.<sup>39</sup> She traces the multicultural influences at work in Degas' canvas from Moghul miniature paintings in the Bibliothèque Royale in Paris, Egyptian wall-paintings taken from illustrations in John Gardner Wilkinson's *Manners and customs of the ancient Egyptians*, Assyrian bas-reliefs in the Musée du Louvre and other 'Oriental' sources. The chariot seen in Degas' work "closely resembles that of King Sargon's on the [Assyrian] palace reliefs [in the Louvre]".<sup>40</sup> However, she argues that Degas deliberately rejected the conscious archaeological referencing seen in the work of his contemporaries, such

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<sup>38</sup> Philipa Kaina, *Between history and modernity: Negotiating subjectivity in the early work of Edgar Degas, c.1854–1870* (Unpublished PhD, University College London, University of London, 2008).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.59.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65.

as Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904). For example, the Egyptian hieroglyphic pattern on Semiramis' sash is a clear indication for Kaina of the “decisive rejection of their authenticating exotic *bric-a-brac*”.<sup>41</sup> She emphasises the closeness of the professional relationship between Degas and his friend Moreau. She sees that relationship as a “creative dialogue” in their engagement with Assyria, and one in which Moreau appears to have had only a superficial interest, limited to the decorative aspects of these objects.<sup>42</sup> From the many surviving drawings for Degas' painting, Kaina finds it “impossible to reconstruct the [sequential] order”.<sup>43</sup> The disruptive and troubling emergence of Assyria, she argues, like Bohrer, was unable to be adequately accommodated into the existing artistic canon, and through a series of insidious processes of repression and occlusion Degas effectively obliterated this newly excavated history. Instead, he turned away from Assyria itself and looked to the earlier art of Nicolas Poussin and Piero Della Francesca for meaningful inspiration to complete his project. However, the canvas was soon abandoned and left unfinished, remaining with the artist until his death in 1917. The Assyrian rediscovery in France was more widespread than Kaina, Bohrer *et al.* have recognised; thus in the case of Degas, he may simply have been experimenting with a fashionable arena of thought.

The approach in this dissertation has been informed by an archivally driven agenda that seeks a thorough recovery of the depth of the Assyrian revival, exposing the extent of the trend on both sides of the English Channel as well as a sense of exchange that has not previously been acknowledged in earlier studies. The theoretical approaches that have shaped much of the work by Bohrer and

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.60.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.63–64.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.78.

Kaina are not the focus here. The empirically driven impetus of my approach seeks to reconnect artistic responses within the immediate contemporary context. Sometimes theoretical approaches divorce the artistic material from both this context and, more importantly, the artists themselves and the relationships the material might offer within itself through interconnected dialogues. Instead I intend to provide a larger corpus of works than previously considered, and expand the fairly limited existing canon. This corpus particularly encompasses history and religious painting.

This dissertation's geographical scope is focused on Britain and France, since these two nations were the sole excavators in the field at the middle of the nineteenth century. (Germany, for example, did not excavate in Mesopotamia until the last decade of the century). It is therefore necessary to focus only on these two nations, and consider the two national collections formed and housed in the British Museum in London, and the Musée du Louvre in Paris. The study's temporal concern begins in the late 1840s and looks at artists based in either London or Paris, since in these capitals are located the preeminent collections of Assyrian artworks, which began arriving in those cities from 1847 onwards. The British Museum and the Musée du Louvre were the recipients of the separate, though simultaneous, state-sponsored excavations in Assyria. In the mid-nineteenth century this area was under the control of the Ottoman Empire. Although other cities in other countries have since acquired sizeable collections of Assyrian material culture — such as in New York, Chicago and Berlin — none can compare (especially until 1900) with the enormous swathes of bas-reliefs housed in either Paris or London; hence my concentration on the artistic activities in these two capital cities. Notwithstanding this claim, in Britain my study also encompasses the provinces, where the craze for Assyria spread; and I examine exhibitions and

performances in Exeter, Glasgow, Belfast and Dublin, thus creating a broader regional dimension to the reception which, for too long in studies of the reception of Assyria, has centred exclusively upon London. Through both primary contact, in exhibition and performances, and secondary contact, in print through newspapers and books, the regions engaged with Assyria in a variety of forms. Thus this study also aims to begin to redress the regional imbalance in the narrative of the British reception of one particular non-European visual culture (Assyria) in the nineteenth century.

The dissertation also places new emphasis on surviving preparatory work. These have been consistently overlooked. Despite Kaina's claim that the sequence of drawings by Degas for his *Sémiramis construisant Babylone* (*Semiramis building Babylon*) is impossible to reconstruct, some drawings nonetheless betray Assyrian markers that allow some sense of the sequential ordering of the many extant studies. The status of Degas' painting is crucial. It is unfinished and therefore the preparatory drawings betray unrealised thought processes. New work by artists already in the discourse allows the proper agency of their various engagements with Assyria to be properly explored, and in relation with that of other artists. Expanding the current field to be more than a subset of key works by key artists is an overarching concern of the present study. The recent publication of the catalogue raisonnés of William Holman Hunt in 2006 and Ford Madox Brown in 2010, has aided the process enormously. For example, Hunt's *Daniel praying*, of c.1849, can be newly added to the corpus and was properly published for the first time in 2006 (fig.30).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Judith Bronkhurst, *William Holman Hunt: A catalogue raisonné*, 2 vols (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), vol.II, pp.23-24, no.D40.

The dissertation extends and expands the temporal scope of the reception outlined by Bohrer, and others, in both directions: backwards to 1850 and forwards to 1950, with a nod also to the first decade of the twenty-first century. It encompasses a wide range of artistic productions from painters, draughtsmen, sculptors, set-designers and printmakers, and both original and reproductive printmaking. It likewise considers an expanded corpus, both with new artists previously overlooked, and new artworks by previously considered artists, from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. The thesis argues for a more sustained, vigorous and deeper reception history in both France and Britain. It seeks to uncover what was both unique, and common, among these different media. The dissertation challenges recent arguments made by Paul Collins that Assyrian “sculptures rarely figure” in nineteenth-century French or British art.<sup>45</sup> Collins continues, “only a few contemporary painters, such as Briton Rivière and Frederick Arthur Bridgman, were inspired to produce finished works”.<sup>46</sup> Particular attention is paid to the exhibition histories of artworks, since individual pieces enjoyed repeated exposure throughout the period, and often were later seen in company with other related artworks influenced by Assyria. These groups of assembled works by different artists displayed together in large exhibitions present numerous dialogues, both with Assyria, and between themselves. This represented a more complex pattern in the reception of Assyria, which included the interrelationships between artworks themselves. New artists explored in the dissertation for the first time, such as Auguste Rodin and Edward Armitage, add to an expanding field.

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<sup>45</sup> Paul Collins, *Assyrian palace sculptures* (London: British Museum Press, 2008), p.15.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

The contemporary reproduction of artworks is also considered — something overlooked by Bohrer — since Victorian print culture was both wide-reaching in scope and range, but also socially, and therefore hierarchically, driven. The artistic discovery and commodification of Assyria operated within these boundaries. The artistic reception of Assyria was further bound within networks of commercial operations, the commodification and consumption of art by dealers and institutions. Wood-engravings produced for the popular weekly newspaper *Illustrated London News* enjoyed a different status from that of the single-sheet prints produced by leading London-based art dealers and print publishers, intended to provide a staple of middle-class interior décor. The market forces in operation, which controlled the output of these prints, were important. Contemporary press reviews, previously unrecorded in the literature, reveal the indebtedness of Kean's *Sardanapalus* not only to recently-discovered Assyria but also to artworks from the pre-Layardian age, notably work by Martin. This amplifies the suggestion made recently by the theatre historian Edward Ziter in 2003 that Martin was a key mediator for Victorian audiences of Assyria.<sup>47</sup> Martin's influence, I will argue, extended more widely, and into Mesopotamian subjects painted right up and into the 1890s.

Lastly, the dissertation will moreover uncover some trends in the commission and collecting of artworks influenced by Assyria. This too was an aspect overlooked in all former studies. Some of the key artworks in the reception of Assyria (such as Long's *The Babylonian marriage market*), now residing in institutional collections once formed the décor of bourgeois interiors. The emphasis then falls upon the collecting and former owners of works influenced by

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<sup>47</sup> Edward Ziter, *The Orient on the Victorian stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.137–38.

Assyria. The company in which the works were most welcomed is crucial to a closer, nuanced understanding of the circumstances of production, and therefore engagement, both with Assyria and other wider trends in the period — particularly during the second half of the nineteenth century — such as the status of religious painting and the overall reduction in narrative content.

The chapters of the dissertation are ordered chronologically. The first two chapters deal with the British reception in the 1850s and 1860s, which cover the earliest reception of Assyrian artworks, beginning with the first examples in 1850. The third encompasses the whole of the French reception in the second half of the nineteenth century. The fourth chapter concludes the British reception from 1870 to 1900. The last chapter covers broadly the twentieth century, in both Britain and France, and takes in some interesting moments in the Modernist reception of Assyria by artists as varied as Léger and Rothko. The Assyrian rediscovery in the nineteenth century was essentially a painterly response but changed in the twentieth century to be one almost entirely by sculptors, and one that would see this shift become newly important for most modern sculptors.



## CHAPTER ONE

### 'Sermons in stone': The dawn of a new age, Assyria on view

The simultaneous discovery of the material culture of Assyria by Britain and France in 1845 unearthed swathes of bas-reliefs carved in long sequences, and various other artefacts. Central to the narrative, and becoming a personality in his own right soon after the discovery, was Austen Henry Layard (1817–1894). Drawings of these sculptures, sent from the field in the Middle East in what is now modern Iraq, were quickly disseminated as printed reproductions in journals with wide circulations. Foremost among these was the *Illustrated London News*, which became an ardent supporter of these discoveries, commissioning large full-page illustrations for inclusion in its weekly numbers. The illustrated press began in the 1830s but it was this particular weekly, founded in 1842, which “first successfully yoked news and pictures in a sustainable and enduring publication”.<sup>48</sup> Rivals came that coupled image and text, with *The Pictorial Times*, *Illustrated Times*, and *Illustrated News of the World* in 1843, 1855, and 1858 respectively, but these were short-lived publications. The *Illustrated London News* enjoyed an initial circulation of 41,000 that rose in the following three decades — the period of intense media interest in Assyria — to a peak of 110,000 by 1870.<sup>49</sup> The issue for 26 June 1847 saw the first detailed report of these finds, complete with lavish illustrations. Others would follow on, for example, 16 December 1848 and 31 March 1849. Layard, after his initial somewhat accidental discovery, was charged with acting as

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<sup>48</sup> Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor, 'Introduction: The lure of illustration', in Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (eds), *The lure of illustration in the nineteenth century: Picture and press* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp.1–13 (2).

<sup>49</sup> Lorna Huett, 'Among the unknown public: *Household Words*, *All the Year Round* and the mass-market weekly periodical in the mid-nineteenth century', in Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (eds), *op cit.*, pp.128–48 (135).

an agent for the British Museum and funded indirectly by the British government via the ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, under whose territorial control the remains fell. Layard's mother, writing from Cheltenham to her son in the Middle East, captured the feverish excitement the first arrivals into the British capital in 1847 aroused. Undoubtedly the strongest influence on Western thought about Assyria came from repeated accounts in the Bible, but initially the latest finds from the Middle East were received as a great novelty. Layard's mother informed her son that:

all the learned and really intellectual people seem delighted with them...they are in very low relief I find, but the beauty of execution exceeded my expectations, in every way! [...] I long for the remainder to arrive. These do not attract the common herd of sight-seers, but they are of the highest order of interest...they are much talked of in the high quarters, and they speak of building another wing on purpose [at the British Museum] for the Assyrian antiquities, if those expected equal those already arrived!<sup>50</sup>

The discovery of Assyria had prompted particular excitement as a result of the romanticism attached to the burial and subsequent discovery through excavation:

Those [antiquities] of Egypt have long been open to us. Those of Assyria have lately been unexpectedly exhumed from their ashes and tomb like Pompeii and Herculaneum, but on a vaster scale, and after a far longer burial.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Letter to Layard from his mother, Marianne Layard, in Cheltenham, 11–12 August 1847 (British Library, London; Add. 58150, 64–66) quoted in Mogens Trolle Larsen, *The conquest of Assyria: Excavations in an antique land 1840–1860* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p.133.

<sup>51</sup> 'School of sculpture at Sydenham: The Assyrian Court', *The Art Journal*, October 1854, pp.301–03 (301).

As we shall see, there was a fascination with the latest fashion for 'Assyria' in the 1850s, newly unearthed and, before long, encountered at first hand in the galleries of the British Museum in London. It was one of the latest 'must-see' fashions of the time. The topicality of newly unearthed Assyria meant that the successive arrivals into London, of sculptures and artefacts from the field, were reported as current news, with one article in the *Illustrated London News* in 1852 placed beside the latest Parisian fashion update.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, one commentator, in a theatre review in 1853, casually remarked that to modern audiences "Nineveh is as familiar as the pattern of the last new Parisian bonnet".<sup>53</sup> This comment also reveals the power and wide currency of illustration at the time, since the primary means of communicating news about fashion — and Assyria — was through the graphic media.

The simultaneous excavations of Assyria by both Britain and France, though at different palatial complexes, took on a nationalist dimension. The two European imperial powers competed to speedily transport their finds from Assyria to their respective capitals. In addition, national pride was stirred and the Musée du Louvre in Paris won the race to unveil to the French public the first specimens of Assyrian sculpture on 1 May 1847, much to the annoyance of those at the British Museum, an institution which had done much to promote and financially support the wider excavations beyond the recovery of finds. In a context of nationalist drives in the rediscovery of past art and the building up of large national collections, the political support needed for the excavations would reach the summit of British government. In a letter to the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel

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<sup>52</sup> 'Reception of Nineveh sculptures at the British Museum' and 'Paris fashions for March', *Illustrated London News*, 28 February 1852, p.184 (184).

<sup>53</sup> 'Princess's Theatre', *The Times*, 14 June 1853, p.7 (7).

(1788–1850), the British ambassador in Constantinople to the Ottoman Empire, Sir Stratford Canning (1786–1880), underlined what was at stake:

On the banks of the Tigris not far from Mosul there is a gigantic mound called *Nimrud*. My agent [Austen Henry Layard] has succeeded in opening it here and there, and his labours have been rewarded by the discovery of many interesting sculptures, and a world of inscriptions. If the excavation keeps its promise to the end there is much hope that Montague House will beat the Louvre hollow.<sup>54</sup>

The competition between London and Paris was reported with ardent nationalism in contemporary journalism. Typically, for example, *The Times* reported in July 1850, with some tension in tone:

It is said at Nineveh that the French Government are determined to excel us in the exhibition of Assyrian works of art, in order to compensate the comparative deficiency which the Louvre is obliged to acknowledge as to the treasures it possesses...and that large sums have been accordingly voted for the expenses of excavation.<sup>55</sup>

The feeling, indeed exact wording, was repeated days later in the weekly *Athenaeum*.<sup>56</sup> This piece was also reprinted in other newspapers of the time, highlighting the topicality of the subject. It appeared, for example, later the same month in many London-based presses but also extended beyond England's borders to be found in the *Glasgow Herald* and Dublin's *Freeman's Journal*.<sup>57</sup> The Louvre's status in the nineteenth century was largely founded upon the wide coverage of its collections, which extended from antiquity to the present day and included

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<sup>54</sup> Stanley Lane-Poole, *The life of the Right Honourable Stratford Canning, Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1888), vol.II, p.149 quoted in Larsen, *op.cit.*, p.96.

<sup>55</sup> 'The great bull from Nineveh', *The Times*, 23 July 1850, p.8 (8).

<sup>56</sup> 'Fine art gossip', *Athenaeum*, 27 July 1850, p.794 (794).

<sup>57</sup> 'England: The great bull from Nineveh', *Glasgow Herald*, 29 July 1850, p.4 (4) and 'Shipping of the great bull from Nineveh', *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 24 July 1850, p.3 (3).

sculpture, decorative arts and paintings. Paris' museum was, in effect, like London's British Museum and National Gallery combined under one roof. The French museum could not match the range and depth of the superb archaeological collections of the British Museum, and 'star objects' from antiquity were few in number. The British Museum's sculptures from the Parthenon propelled it to a pre-eminence and London also had the famous Rosetta Stone, which had allowed the translation of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs early in the nineteenth century. Assyria offered Paris the chance to "compensate the comparative deficiency" in its uneven representation from antiquity and was greeted enthusiastically by France, government and public alike. Other European collections, such as those in Berlin, lacked the encyclopaedic reach of London and Paris' national collections of antiquities. Berlin's spectacular Pergamon altar and Babylon's Ishtar Gate were acquired only at the very end of the nineteenth century.

In the notional 'progress of art', Assyria had come to occupy an important, if still junior role, one that represented a transitional phase in the unerring rise to fifth-century BC Greece: the missing piece before Greek antiquity. In 1860, when the British Museum's Bloomsbury site had reached capacity, a Select Committee was established by the Government to see what portions of the collections could be removed to another building or site, with South Kensington the preferred new location. Newspaper reports lamented the prospect of the break-up of the collections at the British Museum and were buoyed to discover that even the supporters of any break-up had "advocates of separation admit[ting] that the removal of any portion of the collection involves a disconnection in the chain of

archaeology”.<sup>58</sup> The collection was clearly envisioned as a series of linkages with interconnectedness: removing one part would affect another and, in turn, disturb the supposed orderly sequence of artistic ‘progress’. The discovery of Assyria had therefore provided the smooth transition of the historical development of sculpture of antiquity, examples of which were found in the British Museum. The erection of the historic sculpture courts at the newly reinstalled Crystal Palace in 1854 included a Nineveh or Assyrian Court.<sup>59</sup> There the intellectually driven sequential ordering took on a physical presence, mirroring that at the British Museum. Before the relocation of the Crystal Palace from Hyde Park in central London, to Sydenham Hill in south London, the media speculated on the reconfigured contents and new programmatic layout. Commentators hoped for an unbroken continuity in the intended sculptural displays, which Assyria had facilitated by recently closing the ‘gap’ in the notional ordering:

Assyria has risen from the grave of centuries, within our own period, to add its important *quota* to the history of sculpture, and form the connecting link between Egypt and early Greece.<sup>60</sup>

In early reports from the field of the discovery of Nineveh and Nimrud, the immediate context for the eventual home of the archaeological finds at the British Museum was clearly laid out, though unusually in neutral terms, avoiding any artistic ‘grading’ or placing of any value judgements:

...[the British] Museum is now enriched by many collections, each of which would be considered a treasure by any other country. We have the Elgin

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<sup>58</sup> ‘The British Museum’, *The Daily News*, 31 August 1860, p.3 (3).

<sup>59</sup> See Jan R Piggott, *Palace of the people: The Crystal Palace at Sydenham 1854–1936* (London: Hurst and Co, 2004), pp.109–12.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Museum of sculpture at the new Crystal Palace’, *The Art Journal*, September 1853, pp.209–11 (210).

and Phygalian marbles, the Lycian and Bodrum, and we are now forming a magnificent series of Assyrian sculptures. The four former collections are unique, but the latter is equalled [only] by that in the museum of the Louvre.<sup>61</sup>

The initial reception of Assyria was greeted with unbounded enthusiasm which was followed by critiques, as we shall see, ascribing the position of Assyria within the artistic canon. Clearly the 'grading' would come following first-hand contact. In 1844 James Stephanoff (1788–1874) had exhibited *An assemblage of works of art, from the earliest period to the time of Phydias* at the Liverpool Academy of Arts (fig.10). A year later it was exhibited in London at the Royal Watercolour Society in 1845, with a long quote that articulated the work's invented hierarchy from the 'lowest' forms of art from Asia to the 'highest' at the summit occupied by selections from the Parthenon sculptures in the British Museum. Stephanoff's watercolour neatly encapsulates mid-nineteenth-century attitudes to ancient Near Eastern art prior to the discovery of Assyrian artefacts at Nimrud in 1845. Stephanoff represented the Near East with comparable examples from Assyria's closer geographical and cultural neighbours. These included monumental Achaemenid and Sasanian sculpture from Persepolis and elsewhere (based on prints) and enlargements of much smaller examples from the British Museum's collection, such as the so-called Darius agate cylinder seal.

The argument embodied in the Stephanoff watercolour, of the incremental development of the evolution of sculpture, found expression elsewhere and was circulated in different forums. In 1852 *The Times*, keen to find a future purpose for

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<sup>61</sup> 'Shipping the great bull from Nineveh', *Illustrated London News*, 27 July 1850, p.71–72 (71). This review spoke of the "precious relics of a great empire — bringing to our shore the monuments and trophies of what we had been apt to regard as the semi-fabulous metropolis of the antique world" (72).

the recently redundant Crystal Palace, proposed a comprehensive display housed under the glass and iron structure which would be an:

...illustrative series of the art [of sculpture which] might commence with the *first rude carvings by the races emerging from barbarism*. The deities and symbolic objects of reverence of the Polynesians, Hindoos, and Chinese Buddhists, might be *followed by the sculptures and monuments of Assyria and Egypt*. The earlier productions of the colonists of Greece and Asia Minor would *follow...successive steps by which the Greeks attained the perfection of the noble art in the times of Phidias and of Praxitiles and Lysippus*.<sup>62</sup>

The development of sculpture is envisioned as a continual refinement from the “first rude carvings” in the Far East, and through successive stages (including Assyria) to the culminating “perfection” of fifth-century BC Greece. Other commentators repeated this view, with the *Manchester Examiner and Times* noting, in 1854, the jarring qualities of the Nineveh Court at the Crystal Palace that “contrasts boldly with the refinement and delicacy of the Greek [Court]”.<sup>63</sup> This perceived cultural positioning of the art of Assyria as ‘primitive’ or ‘juvenile’ by comparison with ancient Greece extended to those within the close circle of Layard, including the resident consul in Baghdad with whom Layard first shared his discoveries, Henry Creswicke Rawlinson (1810–1895). In a letter of August 1847 to Layard he attempts to explain his initial lukewarm response to the archaeological finds. Rawlinson articulates the same cultural reference points expressed in the Stephanoff watercolour and elsewhere, which valued the art of ancient Greece above all others:

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<sup>62</sup> ‘A plea for the Crystal Palace’, *The Times*, 16 April 1852, p.8 (8). The italics are mine.

<sup>63</sup> ‘What is the Crystal Palace? (From a special correspondent)’, *Manchester Examiner and Times*, 3 June 1854, p.6 (6).



I never pretended to depreciate the *[artistic] value* of the marbles. I merely objected to their style & execution, which in my opinion have nothing whatever to do with value. You ask by what standard I compare them. Why of course, in any abstract matter we adopt the highest standard available — and I say therefore the Elgin Marbles...Why quarrel with the Assyrians because they were not as far advanced in the arts of design & execution as the Greeks in the time of Pericles?...your winged god is not the Apollo Belvedere.<sup>64</sup>

Canning's pivotal role in securing political and financial expedience for Layard's excavations in the field belied a common mindset of the period. His attitude was that while Assyrian sculpture was a necessary and valuable addition to the national collection, these objects "cannot have any intrinsic value for their beauty, and... are undoubtedly inferior to the most secondary works of Greece or Rome."<sup>65</sup> The view that the nation had acquired 'sufficient' examples from the excavations to adequately represent Assyria in the British Museum had gained some currency by 1850 and therefore further efforts by Layard, or his successors, were considered unnecessary. The *Athenaeum* in 1850 expressed the hope that the British Museum ought not to devote more efforts to acquiring and displaying "primitive specimens of sculpture" from Assyria.<sup>66</sup> Others shared this view.

Richard Westmacott (1775–1856) was a prominent and influential figure in the art world in the first half of the nineteenth century. He was Professor of Sculpture at the Royal Academy from 1827 to 1856 and throughout his life had championed what he regarded as the supremacy of Greek art. In 1816, at the government select committee that convened to gather evidence for the purchase for the national collection at the British Museum of the sculptures from the Parthenon (the so-called Elgin Marbles), his opinion was sought. He had no

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<sup>64</sup> Letter from Rawlinson to Layard, 19 August 1846 (British Library, London; Add. 38977, 25–27) quoted in Larsen, *op cit.*, pp.102–03.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.95.

<sup>66</sup> 'Fine arts: The Nineveh marbles', *Athenaeum*, 26 October 1850, p.1121 (1121).

hesitation in claiming that the sculptures were in the “first class of art”.<sup>67</sup> In the 1853, at another select committee, convened to decide on the status of the National Gallery, his opinion was again requested. He was asked about the acquisition and display of the recently discovered Assyrian remains. His reply was firm and unequivocal:

...The Nineveh Marbles are very curious, and it is very desirable to possess them, but I look upon it that the value of the Nineveh Marbles will be the history that their inscriptions, if ever they are translated will produce [...] they would consider them as very curious monuments of an age they feel highly interested in; but the interest in the Elgin Marbles arises from a distinct cause; from their excellence as works of art.<sup>68</sup>

Bohrer has demonstrated that Westmacott’s statements of taste and of progress reveal “interlocking systems of exclusion”, which valorised ancient Greece at the exclusion of (among others) Assyria.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, Westmacott considered Assyrian art unworthy of aesthetic merit, and providing unsuitable models for artistic study. He remarked to the 1853 select committee that the “less people, as artists, look at objects of that kind [from Assyria], the better”.<sup>70</sup> Westmacott must have been concerned at the dramatic increase in the allocation of gallery space at the British Museum for the display of Assyrian artefacts. From 1834 to 1851, though, the space devoted to classical material doubled, and it was the dramatic increase in

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<sup>67</sup> *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Earl of Elgin’s collection of sculpted marbles* (London: 1816), p.80 quoted in Marie Busco, *Sir Richard Westmacott: Sculptor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.21.

<sup>68</sup> *Minutes of...the Select Committee on the National Gallery* (Parliamentary Paper; 1852–53), vol.31, p.9050ff quoted in Frederick Bohrer, *Orientalism and visual culture: Imagining Mesopotamia in nineteenth-century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.124.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.125. See also Jonah Siegel, *Desire and excess: The nineteenth-century culture of art* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp.138–39.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.125.

non-classical (especially Assyrian) material that is impressive. Siegel has shown this increase to be from 218 square feet in 1834 to 2,736 square feet in 1851.<sup>71</sup>

Westmacott's last major sculptural project before his death embodied his belief in the sequential development of history. His pediment on the façade crowned the newly completed, remodelled British Museum. The frieze *The progress of civilisation* (1847–53), occupies a conspicuous position in the architectural ensemble beneath which every visitor to the museum had to pass to enter through the portico below (fig.11). Westmacott left a vivid description of the scheme in a letter from 1815:

Commencing at the eastern end...man is represented emerging from a rude savage state through the influence of religion — He is next personified as a hunter...The worship of the heavenly bodies...led by the [ancient] Egyptians, Chaldeans and other nations to study astronomy...Civilization is now presumed to have made considerable progress.<sup>72</sup>

The statement allows us to easily follow the teleology at stake, and replicates the description by Stephanoff of his watercolour in the accompanying exhibition catalogue. Stephanoff's "races emerging from barbarism" is matched by Westmacott's "emerging from a rude savage state".

The first of Layard's Assyrian antiquities arrived, and were displayed, in basement galleries at the British Museum in 1849. The Museum was coming to the end of an ambitious scheme to enlarge and replace its original eighteenth-century home, Montague House, and the Museum's first building. The architect Robert Smirke (1781–1867) had designed a purpose-built complex with galleries and offices for the ever-growing collection of natural history, books, archaeological

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<sup>71</sup> Siegel, *op.cit.*, p.138.

<sup>72</sup> Letter to Sir Henry Ellis, 23 May 1851 (British Library, London; Add.38626,198) quoted in Busco, *op.cit.*, p.121.

material and attendant curatorial and support staff. It was the growth in archaeological material that made the matter particularly pressing since the great weight of many pieces precluded their display in any galleries except those on the ground floor.

The ambivalent reception of Assyrian art was demonstrated by the accommodation provided for the new finds at the British Museum. The discovery of Assyria in 1845 meant that with the rebuilding process, new accommodation could not be found but had to be delicately negotiated within the concluding layout: Assyria seems to have been, at least temporarily, in limbo. Some medium-sized panels of bas-reliefs were displayed in the front entrance-hall (fig.12). Other larger panels were displayed in other improvised public areas adjacent to the front entrance-hall (fig.13). However, most of the sculptures were accommodated in an adapted basement gallery (fig.14). The rumoured building of another wing, mentioned in the letter from Layard's mother, was not realised. And indeed, the basement galleries could only be a short-term solution since the later arrival of the colossal winged bulls and lions in the early 1850s meant that the problem of space was brought pressingly to attention. *The Times* complained that:

Each new cargo of the marvellously preserved monuments of Assyrian art that is deposited beneath the Grecian portico at Bloomsbury elicits fresh groaning, or is received with aspects of mute despair by the unhappy and tantalised officials of the already over-crammed British Museum.<sup>73</sup>

The solution might have been found in the recently redundant Crystal Palace made for the Great Exhibition in 1851. The problem of over-crowding continued to blight the British Museum throughout the 1850s. By 1859 the arrival of the colossal fragments of stone sculptures from the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus

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<sup>73</sup> 'A plea for the Crystal Palace', *The Times*, 16 April 1852, p.8 (8).

(Bodrum in modern Turkey) had placed the Museum in an embarrassing situation.

The lack of accommodation inside the crowded galleries meant that these sculptures, from one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, had to be housed in temporary wooden sheds beneath the entrance portico. The *Illustrated London News* took up the problem:

For some time past marbles of the rarest interest, not only from their high artistic merits, but also in consequence of their being examples of the progress of art, have continued to arrive at the British Museum; and so precious have been those additions that we have heard no critic remark that any of them are superfluous; they have, however, crowded all the available space provided for this purpose within the walls; and the rude hoarding shown in the engraving [on p.85] is in course of erection along the colonnade of this important building for the exhibition of this far-famed monument...It is a painful sight to see the front of the British Museum, a building of so much cost and consequence, disfigured by those sheds...<sup>74</sup>

Even as early as 1850, the topicality of museum building and the pressure on space was satirised in a poem in *Punch*. Titled, 'Wanted — Warehouse-room for art' and penned by 'John Bull', the fictive British hero, it made a particular plea to the plight of the British Museum and the recently received monumental sculptures from Assyria:

Keep your Wilson, your Gainsborough, your Lely,  
Your Hogarth, your Reynolds, your Kneller—  
If you give them to me, I say freely,  
I shall go put 'em all in the cellar.  
My gallery won't hold one master more;  
Michelangelo could find there no locality,  
And if Raphael himself came to the door,  
With Ferguson he'd taste like hospitality.

Mr. Layard here just has been sending  
From Nineveh various antiquities,  
Its manners to illustrate tending,

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<sup>74</sup> 'The arrival of the remains of the tomb of Mausolus at the British Museum', *Illustrated London News*, 22 January 1859, p.83 (83).

And customs, and sins, and iniquities.  
But then there's my Museum stuffed so full,  
If Nimrod's self applied there'd not be room for him;  
As for that what d'ye call it — wingèd bull —  
I've no accommodation but a tomb for him.<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, as the immortalisation in satirical verse suggests, by 1850 the newly installed Assyrian sculptures, despite their temporary accommodation in basement galleries in Bloomsbury, were an already established route on the tourist circuit. *The Daily News* noted with glee that:

Easter Monday is the Londoner's holiday. Pleasure seeking is his business upon this anniversary, and in conformity with his natural character, he pursues it as ardently and anxiously as any other occupation of his life...The Londoner has, in one respect, a decided advantage...namely, in the various characters of the amusements which are open to him. He may take his recreations either among the Nineveh sculptures, or in witnessing the pranks of Punch [and Judy].<sup>76</sup>

The reference to popular, indeed populist, entertainments suggests a widespread broad-based appeal. Despite the ambivalence with which Assyria was received in some quarters, and the extreme pressure of space at the British Museum, Assyria would soon occupy coveted ground-floor gallery accommodation in Bloomsbury, in a suite of top-lit galleries. In early 1853 'The Nineveh Room' opened, located immediately beside existing galleries dedicated to the display of ancient Egyptian sculpture (fig.15). The officials at the British Museum favoured the proximity of Assyria with Egypt. Recently, Stephanie Moser in her study on the display of ancient Egypt at the British Museum found that curatorial control strongly favoured the proximity of Assyria and Egypt. In 1850 Edward Hawkins (1780–1867), Keeper of the Department of Antiquities, suggested that a new gallery built

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<sup>75</sup> 'Wanted — Warehouse-room for art', *Punch*, 16 November 1850, p.210 (210). See Appendix, pp.294–95 for the complete poem.

<sup>76</sup> 'London, Monday, April 1', *The Daily News*, 1 April 1850, p.4 (4).

alongside the Egyptian gallery should be devoted to Assyrian artefacts, allowing “one continuous line” that would emphasise the “systematic and chronological arrangement” of the antique sculpture.<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, the new display brought Assyria into close proximity with the ‘hallowed’ artworks from Greece and Rome. On Saturday 23 June 1855, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert visited the British Museum to visit “the new Assyrian antiquities lately arrived from Nineveh”.<sup>78</sup> Rawlinson, as former Consul-General in Baghdad and leading cuneiform scholar, was in the welcoming party to escort the royal couple around the latest acquisitions at Bloomsbury.

Both specialist and non-specialist literature spread knowledge of the new finds. In Britain, on his return from the Middle East, Layard between 1849 and 1853 published *The monuments of Nineveh*. The publisher John Murray had commissioned the design of the impressive title page from the designer and ornamentalist Owen Jones (1809–1874), who was among the first to reveal the imaginative possibilities of the newly discovered Assyrian visual vocabulary. The assemblage of disparate decorative elements with stylised cuneiform script set a course that others would soon follow in their search for the visualisation of Assyria in other forms. For example, the cover of the musical score *The Assyrian March* by Stephen Glover, published in late 1850, was indebted to the latest Assyrian discoveries (fig.16). The colour lithograph by John Brandard (1812–1863) depicted the triumphal entry by an Assyrian king through a gateway flanked by human-headed winged lions, with the music’s title composed from wedge-shaped ‘cuneiform’ script. The music-cover was praised by one contemporary critic,

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<sup>77</sup> Stephanie Moser, *Wondrous curiosities: Ancient Egypt at the British Museum* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp.178–79.

<sup>78</sup> ‘The queen at the British Museum’, *The Daily News*, 26 June 1855, p.4 (4).

writing in the Bangor-based *North Wales Chronicle*, for having the “grandeur” typical of the Middle East:

Another splendid title page, taken from Layard’s erudite work on Nineveh, to whom the march is dedicated. The music is in the key of C, and is strongly marked with the grandeur which is understood to be inseparable from all [Middle] Eastern subjects of interest...[and] will become deservedly popular.<sup>79</sup>

Murray’s predilection for the popularisation of ancient history was a trend that continued in the coming decade, with such titles as Carl Engel’s *The music of the most ancient nations, particularly of the Assyrians, Egyptians, and Hebrews: with special reference to recent discoveries in Western Asia and in Egypt* (1865). Assyria was frequently associated with Egypt, its biblical neighbour. Engel made full use of the recent discoveries made by Layard, and others in the field, and that he had been “directed to the Assyrian monuments in the British Museum” in order to advance modern knowledge about ancient instruments, which could be studied from numerous depictions in bas-reliefs.<sup>80</sup> 1850 saw the publication of the English translation of the letters of Paul Émile Botta, the French consul in Mosul, responsible for the initial explorations of buried Assyrian palace complexes. In France, Botta’s account had appeared in 1849 as *Monuments de Ninive* and, like Layard, he capitalised on the evocative associations of that most notorious of Assyrian cities that, once great, had vanished from sight for over two and a half millennia. Murray published smaller and less costly publications and had shown himself to be a publisher of popular, even populist, histories of ancient cultures in the 1850s. Other writers in the field sought to capitalise on the growing lucrative

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<sup>79</sup> ‘New music: Messrs. R Cocks & Co’s publications’, *North Wales Chronicle*, 21 September 1850, p.6 (6).

<sup>80</sup> Engel quoted in ‘Reviews’, *The Art Journal*, February 1865, p.63 (63).



market of the recent discoveries and the part they could play in the illumination of biblical narratives. In 1850 Rev. J P Fletcher had his travel notes from his journeys in the Middle East published.<sup>81</sup> One reviewer was prompted by the author's timely work to capitalise upon the "great interest lately excited respecting Nineveh".<sup>82</sup> The book was nonetheless compared with Layard's efforts in this area and the volume could not hope to compete with the vividness, and productivity, of Layard's contact with the region. Critics launched upon the book for its inevitable weakness:

who wants notes about Nineveh, when he can read Layard's story of his discoveries day by day as they were made, and receive an ocular impression of its art from the remains at the [British] Museum?<sup>83</sup>

Moreover, as Layard had done with his ingenious marketing, Fletcher invoked the Bible by referring to Nineveh and exploited the well-known biblical connections in the choice of his locale: Nineveh was a powerful marketing tool. Nineveh was associated with corruption and decadence, and famed for its architectural magnificence, which the Bible described as "Nineveh, that great city" (Jonah 1:2 [KJV]). Phillips' portrait of Layard, discussed shortly, was the basis of a wood-engraving by Frederick James Smyth in the *Illustrated London News*, which accompanied a biographical account in the weekly newspaper. The piece spoke eloquently of his work in the field, the recovery of sculptures so ancient as "the days of Noah after the deluge", the subsequent pride of the British Museum, and

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<sup>81</sup> The Rev. J P Fletcher, *Notes from Nineveh, and travels in Mesopotamia, Assyria and Syria* (London: Henry Colburn, 1850).

<sup>82</sup> 'Literature', *Illustrated London News*, 17 August 1850, p.150 (150).

<sup>83</sup> 'Books: Fletcher's notes from Nineveh', *The Spectator*, 31 August 1850, pp.833-35 (833).

the central role the weekly itself had played in the popularisation of Layard's excavations:

With the rich fruits of Dr. Layard's researches, the public have become familiar through their frequent representation in the ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS. We have sought to picture the most attractive specimens of each cargo as soon after its reception [into London] as possible, and we are fully convinced that such early illustration has been the direct means of popularising the interest and value of these speaking relics of ancient art.<sup>84</sup>

Biblical references always coloured early perceptions of Assyria in the 1850s. The archaeologist and public showman, and creator of popular entertainments, Joseph Bonomi published *Nineveh and its palaces: the discoveries of Botta and Layard, applied to the elucidation of Holy Writ* (1852), which made these current thoughts explicit in a book-length form. For critics and public alike, Layard and the British Museum were inseparable and his achievements were seen as representative of all that could be learned of biblical archaeology and Assyria. Nineveh sprung up in unexpected places, a measure of its wide currency. The biography of the surgeon and later zoologist Frank Buckland (1826–1880), published in 1885, recalled his youth passed at the London deanery of his father, The Rev. William Buckland, Dean of Westminster Abbey. There Buckland junior met leading figures of the day, including the veteran war hero, the Duke of Wellington. His diary informs us that, on 23 March 1849, he and Wellington “talked about chloroform and the Nineveh monuments”, both topics of extreme novelty at mid century!<sup>85</sup> Buckland had visited the British Museum twice, a few weeks before, “to see the Nineveh

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<sup>84</sup> ‘Dr. Layard’, *Illustrated London News*, 11 January 1851, pp.23–24 (23).

<sup>85</sup> George Cox Bompas, *Life of Frank Buckland* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1885), p.65.

sculptures (at the British Museum); very beautiful and interesting” he recorded in his diary.<sup>86</sup>

In 1854 came *A popular account of the ancient Egyptians* by John Wilkinson Gardner, ‘illustrated with 500 woodcuts’. We know from surviving letters from artists that these illustrated volumes were extensively pored over and assimilated by artists. William Blake Richmond (1842–1921), for example, elucidated in a long letter to his eldest brother about his work, “I have just finished reading one of the most interesting books ... *Wilkinsons’ Ancient Egypt* and have I hope got some good out of it. They indeed have been extraordinary people, full of genius and taste”.<sup>87</sup> Wilkinson’s published work on ancient Egypt proved immensely popular with artists in mid-Victorian London.<sup>88</sup> In many ways Layard’s numerous publications, and to a lesser extent those by Fergusson and others, were the Assyrian equivalent of Wilkinson’s Egyptian works. Owing to their enormous popularity, Wilkinson’s book extended to three editions during the course of the 1850s and the following decades. It was this thirst for the visual details of history that could serve painters with a one-stop sourcebook that made Layard’s and Wilkinson’s works so attractive to them.

Interest in Layard himself grew and his portrait by Henry Wyndham Phillips (1820–1868) was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1848 with the suffix ‘the Persian traveller, some of whose discoveries in Nineveh now enrich the British Museum’. It was reproduced by Samuel William Reynolds (1794–1892) in 1850

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p.64.

<sup>87</sup> Letter to Thomas Knyvett Richmond (1835–1901), 16 October 1862, in the Royal Academy of Arts, London (RI/1/11/2) quoted in Robyn Asleson, *Albert Moore* (London: Phaidon, 2000), p.27.

<sup>88</sup> Donato Esposito, ‘From ancient Egypt to Victorian London: The impact of ancient Egyptian furniture on British art and design 1850–1900’, *Decorative Arts Society Journal*, 27, 2003, pp.80–94.

and issued as a single-sheet print by Colnaghi for the decoration of middle-class homes (fig.17).<sup>89</sup> The print was itself lettered: “Austen Henry Layard Esq. DCL/Discoverer of the ruins of ancient Nineveh”. In 1850 Phillips had exhibited at the same venue his portrait of Rawlinson, who was from 1851 to 1855 Consul-General in Baghdad, and played a large role in the translation of cuneiform. Colnaghi also commissioned Cousins to make a print of this portrait, published in 1860 (fig.18).<sup>90</sup> Cylinder seals and transcribed cuneiform passages cover the table, threatening to spill over into the viewer’s space. The crowded table separates the viewer from direct engagement with Rawlinson, and he is contained and defined by his erudite learning. In contrast, Layard’s portrait by the same painter presents a casual and relaxed attitude. Phillips’ portrait caught the supposed Romanticism of Layard’s work in the field, his adoption of exotic dress and the ‘chance’ discovery of a few lines of cuneiform script upon a boulder upon which he leans. This Romantic attitude is echoed in a slightly earlier watercolour portrait by Amadeo Preziosi (1816–1882), from his time in Constantinople in 1843, in the British Museum (PD 1976,0925.9). Here Layard is dressed in traditional Bakhtiari dress from Persia. In Phillips’ portraits the loose-fitting ‘Oriental’ clothes of Layard are set against the formal black frock-coat of Rawlinson, the scholarly office versus the outdoors, the seated and arms-folded pose of Rawlinson set against Layard’s standing and rather nonchalant posing. Nonetheless, Layard is every part the master of the cultural and topographical landscape he is credited with ‘discovering’. In 1856 the portraitist William Menzies Tweedle (1828–1878) exhibited his portrait of Layard at the Royal Academy (untraced).

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<sup>89</sup> Alfred Whitman, *Samuel William Reynolds: Nineteenth-century mezzotinters* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1903), p.132, no.505.

<sup>90</sup> Alfred Whitman, *Samuel Cousins: Nineteenth-century mezzotinters* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1904), p.93, no.134.

Layard's wide currency in mid-Victorian British culture meant that his name could be inserted into various contemporary cultural musings beyond the discussion of the sculptures themselves. In 1854, noting the decline of the traditional Easter gathering for the Greenwich fair in south London, the journalist for *The Era* weekly amusingly noted:

Greenwich fair is, in truth, certainly passing away [in popularity], and some future Layard will yet find in its temples of gilt gingerbread, should any of them remain in a state of tolerable preservation, as wonderful food for the curiosity of the learned in ancient art as anything that has been turned up at Babylon or Nineveh.<sup>91</sup>

The passage celebrates both Assyria and Layard. The fame of Layard himself attached itself to the romance of Assyria. The nineteenth-century equation of modern London with these celebrated ancient cities is also explicit in this note, and repeated elsewhere in other examples. One London newspaper in an editorial about the provision and attendance of religious services on Sundays approximated the number of those ordained in London to be "some twelve hundred clergy (church and dissent) in this great Babylon".<sup>92</sup> Contemporary exhibition reviews of cityscapes, especially London, frequently invoked the comparison too. In 1854 the reviewer in *The Preston Guardian* noted that *The pool of the Thames, with river craft, etc. — sunrise* by the landscape painter Henry Dawson (1811–1878) had "great merit...the 'modern Babylon'...executed with great truth and power".<sup>93</sup> Howdon, in his *Exploration of the valley of the Amazon* imagined the idealised conditions for the commercial exploitation of the River Amazon, and conceded that the "power and wealth of ancient Babylon and modern London" would be

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<sup>91</sup> 'Exhibitions, etc.', *The Era*, 23 April 1854, p.15 (15).

<sup>92</sup> 'The London pulpit', *Daily News*, 26 April 1854, p.2 (2).

<sup>93</sup> 'Exhibition of paintings, sculpture, etc. (Seventh notice)', *The Preston Guardian*, 29 April 1854, p.3 (3).

outmatched by his calculations for the Brazilian basin.<sup>94</sup> The impending release of the 1855 edition of the *Post Office London Directory* caused the authorities of the Post Office to republish flattering criticism in advertisements. *Bell's Weekly Messenger* noted that "many similar marks of attention to the ever changing events of 'the Great Babylon' [may be made]; but these few will suffice to show how differently the Post Office Directory is managed to that of a rival...[publication which] reiterates the same unpardonable blunders year after year".<sup>95</sup> Lynda Nead in her insightful study of the growth and modernisation of the metropolis in *Victorian Babylon: People, streets and images in nineteenth-century London* (2000) makes explicit this connection between the ancient populous biblical city and the modern British metropolis, with a rapidly expanding building programme and population. Confusingly too, the Victorians confused and conflated the identity of the Babylonian and Assyrian empires. Her introduction begins with an anonymous quotation from the period:

In forming our idea of the great capital of the British Empire and of the nineteenth-century, we naturally look for models in the great cities of the past, and the centres of other empires. We compare London with Imperial Rome; and when we would express in one word the idea of her greatness, we call her 'the Modern Babylon'. It is natural, then, that in trying to form an idea of London we should think of that great Assyrian capital, with her lofty walls, her hundred brazen gates, her magnificent palaces, and wonderful hanging gardens.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> 'Literary extracts', *Derby Mercury*, 12 July 1854, p.6 (6).

<sup>95</sup> [Classified Advertisements] *Daily News*, 13 November 1854, p.8 (8).

Advertisement repeated in same newspaper on 21 November 1854, and again in *The Examiner*, 25 November 1854, p.759.

<sup>96</sup> 'London, as it strikes a stranger', *Temple Bar*, June 1862, p.381 quoted in Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, streets and images in nineteenth-century London* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p.3.

One newspaper critic even called the Crystal Palace at Sydenham the “Crystal Babylon”.<sup>97</sup> London and Babylon were thus intricately associated at mid-century.

Assyria, through both inherited and constructed traditions, came to mean and represent different things to different audiences and camps. On the one hand its artefacts brought vividly to life a world that had been known from numerous biblical and Classical accounts and was therefore venerable. On the other, it embodied the spirit of the modern age that had discovered, transported, displayed and published these Assyrian antiquities from the field to London (or Paris) in a matter of a few years.

The process of commodification of these antiquities for consumption by metropolitan museum visitors has recently been labelled “shipping the bull”, identifying this sculptural type, the human-headed winged bull, as the paradigm of Assyria.<sup>98</sup> Malley argues that these particular sculptures were “important discursive tools for importing Assyria into England” and through print culture form a “coherent narrative of excavation, transportation, and display”.<sup>99</sup> The *Illustrated London News* was the first to publish an illustration of the arrival of one winged lion (fig.19), describing it as the “striking and important” sculpture, boasted as the “largest monolith which has reached England from the buried city of the East”.<sup>100</sup> It was the arrival of one of these enormous sculptures being bizarrely dragged up the front steps, for entry into the British Museum by the only route then possible, which made a strong and lingering impression on the Pre-Raphaelite

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<sup>97</sup> ‘Sunday according to Act of Parliament’, *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 23 July 1854, p.6 (6).

<sup>98</sup> Shawn Malley, ‘Shipping the bull: Staging Assyria in the British Museum’, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 26 (1), March 2004, pp.1–27.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Reception of Nineveh sculptures at the British Museum’, *Illustrated London News*, 28 February 1852, p.184 (184). The ancient Egyptian obelisk, known as Cleopatra’s Needle, was not unveiled on London’s Embankment until 1878.

poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti. He subsequently penned the long poem *The burden of Nineveh*, first published in 1856, a poem that responded to the connections made by *Punch* and others between Assyria, Catholicism and Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics, each the subject of repeated suspicion and scorn and openly attacked in the early 1850s in the pages of the printed press. Reading Babylon as a figure of Rome and the contingent association of Assyria with its offspring Babylon (close neighbour), Catholic excess was aligned with Assyria's massive and overblown religious iconography.<sup>101</sup> This volatile mixture saw pictorial expression in a number of anti-Catholic and anti-Pre-Raphaelite satires that appeared contemporaneously in other publications, such as the *Illustrated London News* and *The Art Journal*, which also championed these monuments of a newly discovered Assyria. Recently Deborah Thomas has explored the political, as well as religious, underpinnings of the interest in Assyria (and Layard) in the 1850s; and the particular appeal, shown in *Punch* and elsewhere, of the colossal human-headed winged guardians.<sup>102</sup> These hybrid sculptures, she contends, fascinated but also repelled Victorian audiences "uneasy about the freakishness" of the heterogeneous combination.

The association of Rome and hence the Papacy with Babylon was not a new one in the nineteenth century. Earlier in seventeenth-century Holland and Germany, broadsides depicted the Whore of Babylon with Papal tiara, in virulent anti-Catholic attacks.<sup>103</sup> Closer to home, in British art satires of the seventeenth century depicted the Pope seated upon a Whore of Babylon or the seven-headed

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<sup>101</sup> Andrew M Stauffer, 'Punch on Nineveh, and the PRB', *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 10 (1) [New series], Spring 2001, pp.58–69.

<sup>102</sup> Deborah A Thomas, 'Assyrian monsters and domestic chimeras', *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, 48 (4), Autumn 2008, pp.897–909.

<sup>103</sup> Frances Carey (ed.), *The Apocalypse and the shape of things to come* (London: British Museum Press, 1999), pp.198–99, 201–02, nos.106, 107 and 110.



Beast of Rome and uttering 'Babylonish blasphemies'.<sup>104</sup> In a 1679 broadside *Babel and Bethel: or, the Pope in his colours*, the luxury associated with the Papacy is contrasted with the benign rule of King Charles II. In the early nineteenth century William Blake (1757–1827) in a watercolour *The whore of Babylon* (1809; British Museum, London; PD 1847,0318.123) depicts the *femme fatale* with a Papal-like tiara.<sup>105</sup> The discovery of the material remains of Assyria, complete with winged bulls with tiara-like crowns, proved the bizarre imagery of the anti-Catholic satires did have a physical counterpart in the strange sculptures of the more ancient culture unearthed from 1845 onwards. *Punch* noted how curiously the "old papal design should have been brought to light" by Layard.<sup>106</sup> Therefore Assyria came under attack from some quarters. The political situation heightened these concerns since the authority of Queen Victoria was challenged by the Papacy in Rome in the early 1850s. In November 1850 anti-papal meetings with banners proclaiming 'no popery' and 'down with the pope' were common sights.<sup>107</sup> In June 1851 *Punch* published a British lion astride a 'Catholic' Assyrian bull (fig.20).<sup>108</sup>

The genesis of Rossetti's *The burden of Nineveh*, which was probably begun in October or November 1850, took place against this Catholic reading of the discovery of Assyria in the first years of the early 1850s.<sup>109</sup> The poem was first published in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* in August 1856, and he describes

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p.233.

<sup>105</sup> Martin Butlin, *The paintings and drawings of William Blake*, 2 vols (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1981), vol.I, p.370, no.523, vol.II, plate 584. Interestingly, the work was purchased by the British Museum in 1847 in a post-Layard world.

<sup>106</sup> 'Punch's popish relics', *Punch*, 1 March 1851, p.84 (84).

<sup>107</sup> See 'The papal aggression: Great meeting in the City of London', *Illustrated London News*, 30 November 1850, p.420.

<sup>108</sup> I am grateful to David Jeremiah for this reference.

<sup>109</sup> Andrew M Stauffer, 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the burdens of Nineveh', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 33 (2), September 2005, pp.369–94. For the complete poem (1870 version) see Appendix, pp.294–304.

his encounter at the British Museum (“In our Museum galleries”) with “A wingèd beast from Nineveh”. Rossetti’s particular spelling of “wingèd” might reflect that found in the third stanza of the poem published in *Punch* in November 1850, as we have already seen above. Rossetti’s poem was subsequently revised for publication in the New York-based journal *The Crayon* in May 1858, and revised again for the definite edition edited by his brother William Michael Rossetti, published in 1870.<sup>110</sup> Rossetti made numerous amendments to the poem to reflect both public sensibilities and exposure to the publications of Layard. For example, he downplays the imperial overtones of the excavations for the first publication in 1856, replacing the explicit line “In thy reconquered Nineveh?” in the original manuscript for “Not to thy strength — in Nineveh” in the published version.<sup>111</sup> However, Rossetti emphasises the imperial continuity of ancient Nineveh with modern London with the replacement of “grey stones” for “London stones”.<sup>112</sup> He also removes the early reference to the idolatrous deity Nisroch, encountered in Isaiah 37:38, which Layard describes as a bird-headed winged figure and not, as Rossetti had first imagined, a human-headed winged bull or lion.<sup>113</sup> In the run-up to the publication of his collected poems in 1870, Rossetti wrote to his friend Alicia Margaret Losh in October 1869 and informed her that: “The ‘Nineveh’ I reckon on as destined probably to be the most generally popular thing in the book”.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> See Andrew M Stauffer, ‘Dante [Gabriel] Rossetti’s *The burden of Nineveh: Further excavations*’, *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 16 (1) [New series], Spring 2007, pp.45–58 for the complex evolution of the poem through various proofs and editions.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.52–53.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p.51.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.52–53.

<sup>114</sup> William E Fredeman (ed.), *The correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Chelsea years, 1863–1872* (Cambridge: D S Brewer, 2004), vol.IV, letter 69.186, p.310 quoted in *ibid.*, p.47.

The commercial exploitation of Assyria began soon afterwards. Layard's popular publications joined growing newspaper column inches in the regional and metropolitan presses. The mid-Victorian interest in a vast range of scholarly matters was widespread. Scholarly subjects were written up at length in a variety of outlets, aimed at both specialist and general readerships. For example, close attention was paid in the 1850s to the wider scholarly consequences of the discovery of the material culture of Assyria. The progress of the translation of cuneiform, the wedge-shaped writing system employed by the ancient Mesopotamians, received the following commentary, for example, from *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post* in January 1850:

Major Rawlinson having returned a few days since from Syria and Assyria, where it is known, he has been so long and so anxiously engaged on matters relating to the discoveries of Mr. Layard at Nimroud, and Kouyunjik [Nineveh] and other places, intends, as we are informed, on Saturday next to enter into some discussion of the important subject at a meeting of the Asiatic Society [...] If Major Rawlinson has indeed found the key to this dead language, which has been buried during perhaps the last 2,000 years, and the characters of which are so strange and incomprehensible, he will have conferred an inappreciable benefit upon all who have studied the lost history of Assyria in connection with the events of the Bible.<sup>115</sup>

The wider public experienced Assyria on display away from the hallowed confines of Bloomsbury in other ways, one of which was through the popular entertainments known as dioramas. Dioramas were to a great extent the natural extension to fine art practice and normative modes of display and production.<sup>116</sup> Many successful late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century painters such as David Cox and Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg had initially trained as scene-

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<sup>115</sup> 'Tuesday's post: The Nineveh marbles', *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post*, 24 January 1850, p.4 (4).

<sup>116</sup> See Bernard Comment, *The panorama* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999) and Ralph Hyde, *Panoromania! The art and entertainment of the 'all-embracing' view* (London: Trefoil and Barbican Art Gallery, 1988).

painters for commercial theatres and the diorama was itself in turn an extension of this activity, both in terms of its production and its audience. The idea of the diorama arrived from France in the 1840s, and the specially fitted out circular constructions that housed these entertainments began to appear as far afield as Edinburgh and Dublin. In the early 1850s dioramas catered for both exotic escapism and grounded didacticism. In 1851 a variety of dioramas were available in London. These included *Burford's Royal Panorama*, two *Dioramas of the Holy Land* — one at the Egyptian Hall on Piccadilly and the other at St. George's Gallery at Hyde Park Corner — and *The Nile*, which promised “stay-at-home travellers a just idea of the nature of Eastern civilisation”.<sup>117</sup> In 1852 Londoners could see at the St. George's Gallery the *Diorama of Jerusalem and the Holy Land* that contained “scenes mentioned in Scripture, and which are to be met with in a pilgrimage”.<sup>118</sup> Elsewhere in the capital the fame of Layard himself was exploited alongside Assyria's celebrity in the depiction of the now-famous archaeologist *in situ* in the field in another entertainment at Burford's Diorama, in which can be seen the “Nineveh excavations...by Mr. Layard and his colleagues in the course of their labours...[and] seemed to attract yesterday the greatest degree of attention”.<sup>119</sup> Managed by Robert and John Burford since 1824 at Leicester Square, London, the attraction was among the most prominent in the capital. Late December 1851 saw the opening of *Burford's Panorama of Nimroud* painted by Robert Burford and Henry Courtney Selous (1803–1890). As it was excitedly announced by *The Era*:

Now you can go to Nimroud for a shilling! [...] Great entrances, guarded by human-headed and winged lions, colossal heads, and other figures, have been dug up, and there they lie before you. We have all read of Nineveh. Scripture

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<sup>117</sup> ‘Holiday amusements’, *Morning Chronicle*, 27 December 1851, pp.5–6 (5).

<sup>118</sup> ‘Holiday amusements’, *Morning Chronicle*, 28 December 1852, pp.5–6 (6).

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

says it has become 'a desolation and a dry wilderness' and here it is! We live, indeed, in a marvellous age!<sup>120</sup>

The review continued its energetic pace in recommendation of the panorama that was "more engaging than pen can [ever] describe." Despite Burford describing the amusement as the "excavations at the Mound of Nimroud" the organisers must have felt compelled to lean to popularity, and include the better-known Assyrian capital of Nineveh alongside that of Nimrud, which "doubtless induced Mr. Burford to add Nineveh to his series of interesting panoramas."<sup>121</sup> The visits to these entertainments by the celebrities of the day were reported with vim in the contemporary press, such as the Duke of Wellington's visit to Burford's panoramas of Salzburg and Nineveh on 2 June 1852, announced in both the *Morning Chronicle* and *The Era*.<sup>122</sup>

In London the spacious surroundings of Regent's Park and Hyde Park proved attractive sites for dioramas and panoramas, close as they were to the rapidly expanding metropolitan areas of north and central London. These entertainments functioned with two principal emphases, which were not always necessarily mutually separate. The treatment on the one hand of the contemporary and near contemporary was counterbalanced on the other with depictions of the remote past, especially the biblical past and its many associations. In 1843, for example, at Marshall's Panorama in Edinburgh, visitors could enjoy both *Jerusalem and Thebes* and the *Battle of Waterloo*.<sup>123</sup> John Orlando Parry (1810-1879) painted the watercolour *A London street scene* (1835; Alfred Dunhill, London) in which a myriad of advertisements for entertainments are shown: *Destruction of Pompeii*

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<sup>120</sup> 'Burford's Panorama, Leicester Square', *The Era*, 21 December 1851, p.11 (11).

<sup>121</sup> 'Holiday amusements', *Morning Chronicle*, 27 December 1851, pp.5-6 (5).

<sup>122</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 4 June 1852, p.5 (5) and *The Era*, 6 June 1852, p.11 (11).

<sup>123</sup> Hyde, *op.cit.*, p.71, no.41

*every evening, Last days of Pompeii and Jerusalem.* Here the past mingled seamlessly with the present in a multi-layered fashion as above. In 1849–50 the Egyptologist Joseph (Giuseppe) Bonomi (1796–1878) capitalised on the allure of ancient Egypt with a moving diorama in London's Egyptian Hall, itself a pseudo-Egyptian designed building made to house commercial ventures on Piccadilly, and called the entertainment (which opened in July 1849) the *Grand moving panorama of the Nile*. The earliest advertisement promised the authenticity of the production, incorporating “drawings made by Joseph Bonomi during a residence of many years in Egypt.”<sup>124</sup> He worked on the presentation with the painters Henry Warren (1794–1879) and James Fahey (1804–1885), and the advertisement strategy included a wagon that he strategically parked in front of the British Museum. The experience promised to transport “the visitor along the banks of the Nile, and displays all the monuments of antiquity.”<sup>125</sup> Hence interested visitors could move with ease between ‘real’ presentations of ancient Egypt in the galleries of the British Museum and contemporary views of ‘modern’ Egypt with painted backdrops in Piccadilly. The interest in offsetting the stage-set culture with the high-minded atmosphere of the British Museum spaces is noteworthy. The real and imaginary spaces merge to form a convincing assemblage. The arrangement of the British Museum was in many ways itself ‘artificial’ in the juxtapositions and arrangement of the antiquities, and its display was far from neutral. The features of the brightly painted advertising carriage used to advertise Bonomi’s enterprise survives in an annotated sketch by George Scharf (1788–1860), who was an avid recorder of London life, and his drawings, of which over a thousand are known (mostly in the British Museum) provide vivid descriptions of life in the bustling

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<sup>124</sup> [Advertisements & Notices], *The Daily News*, 13 July 1849, p.1 [front-page].

<sup>125</sup> ‘The forthcoming Easter entertainments’, *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 31 March 1850, p.10 (10).

capital (fig.21). The sides each depict the ancient and modern worlds: pharaonic pyramids and contemporary group of travellers on camels. The carriage itself has been given ancient Egyptian detailing with cavetto cornice (with rearing cobras), corners edged with torus moulding, a pylon-shaped aperture at the front, and at the rear, ornamented with a winged disc.<sup>126</sup> Bonomi's marketing method extended those established decades before in connection with other Egyptian-themed entertainments. For example, in 1821 the Egyptologist Giovanni Battista Belzoni (1778–1823) had exploited 'genuine' ancient Egypt detailing in advertisements for his reconstruction of the tomb of the pharaoh Seti I, which he had discovered in 1817. Placards advertising his reconstruction at the Egyptian Hall (the subsequent location of Bonomi's later panorama) are brightly coloured and surrounded by hieroglyphics (fig.22). The marketing of Assyrian-themed entertainments in the 1850s must have followed these similar methods, and incorporated appropriate Assyrian detailing, though none seem to survive. Bonomi's diorama, like others, had a commercial life beyond the metropolis of London. His diorama later toured the British Isles, with showings in Liverpool in December 1852<sup>127</sup> and Dublin in March and April 1852.<sup>128</sup> Egypt shared a biblical heritage with Assyria and, like the latter, was frequently seen in the reflection of accounts in the Bible and archaeological finds. Thus during Passion Week in the run-up to Easter in March 1852, Dubliners could catch a lecture, delivered twice daily, with a diorama which illustrated "Egypt's testimony to the truth of the Holy Scriptures".<sup>129</sup> Assyria proved, like ancient Egypt, a lucrative marketing tool. Advertisements for

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<sup>126</sup> I am grateful to Henrietta McCall for this information.

<sup>127</sup> [Advertisements & Notices] *Liverpool Mercury*, 3 December 1852, p.1 [front-page].

<sup>128</sup> [Advertisements & Notices] *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 16 March 1853, p.1 [front-page].

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1 [front-page].

dioramas were pasted beside the routes of busy thoroughfares and issued in leading newspapers of the day and often these advertisements are the sole record of these entertainments.

In 1850 the *Illustrated London News* directed its large readership to the current amusements on offer in London:

Beyond all question, the most important and successful of the moving panoramas provided during the past season for the sightseeing public, was that which represented the OVERLAND JOURNEY TO INDIA...this panorama proved a 'hit'...crowded at each representation, and numbers failed to obtain admission. Ultimately, the projectors were compelled to give an additional representation, making three every day.<sup>130</sup>

The Gallery of Illustration was described throughout the day as “visited by a large number of sightseers”.<sup>131</sup> It was composed of many scenes; and surviving preparatory studies by John Absolon (1815–1895) for some sections, now in the British Museum, reveal that one of these was set in a courtyard in Assyria flanked with human-headed winged deities at the two entrances, and walls decorated with polychrome bas-reliefs (fig.23).<sup>132</sup> Surmounting the interior space appears to be rows and rows of cuneiform inscriptions. *The route of the overland mail to India*, was initially at the Gallery of Illustration in London but in 1852 toured the regions.<sup>133</sup> Local newspapers were filled with advertisements and glowing reports from previous installations: that in the *Manchester Examiner and Times* was effusive and declared that the diorama about to open at Manchester's Free Trade Hall was previously “exhibited in the Gallery of Illustration, Regent Street [in

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<sup>130</sup> ‘The panoramas’, *Illustrated London News*, 17 August 1850, p.147 (147).

<sup>131</sup> ‘Exhibitions, etc’, *The Era*, 23 April 1854, p.15 (15).

<sup>132</sup> Three preparatory watercolours for the diorama were donated in 1947 by the grandson of John Absolon (British Museum, London; PD 1947,0619.7, 1947,0619.12 and 1947,1027.1).

<sup>133</sup> It played in London from April 1850 to February 1852. See Hyde, *op.cit.*, p.143.



London], seen upwards of 1,000 times and during that period has been seen by not less than half a million of people. It is the largest work of the kind ever presented to the public, each view being painted upon a canvas 42 feet by 27 feet".<sup>134</sup> The diorama was seen previously in Birmingham's Bingley Hall in April and May 1852.<sup>135</sup> However, by 1862 that diorama was already consigned to history of art, and in an article in *The Art Journal* on the art of Absolon it was remarked: "That very interesting entertainment called *The [route of the] overland mail*, which had so long a 'run' at the Gallery of Illustration, was the joint production of and property of Messrs. Absolon, Grieve, and Telbin; to the first of these three artists was allotted chiefly the task of painting the figures in the landscapes".<sup>136</sup> By July 1853 the Gallery of Illustration had reopened a new diorama designed by Thomas Grieve and William Telbin, *The ocean mail to India and Australia* that began with a view of Plymouth Sound, to replace *The route of the overland mail to India*.<sup>137</sup>

*The route of the overland mail to India* was not the sole entertainment to have launched Assyria onto the regions. For example, in late May 1850 John Braham and Thomas Mountain exhibited at the Royal Subscription Rooms in Exeter "The ruins and antiquities of Babylon and of the monuments and sculptures of Nineveh". It was produced to accompany a series of 'descriptive lectures' that ran for five days. It was described (by themselves) as "the most interesting exhibition ever witnessed". The advertisement on 16 May 1850 in the *Exeter Flying Post* was the sole occasion of the series. Early that month the newspaper had

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<sup>134</sup> [Advertisements & Notices] *Manchester Examiner and Times*, 2 June 1852, p.1 [front-page].

<sup>135</sup> 'Theatrical and amusements at Birmingham', *The Era*, 18 April 1852, p.12 (12).

<sup>136</sup> James Dafforne, 'British artists, their style and character, with engraved illustrations: No.LXII — John Absolon', *The Art Journal*, October 1862, pp.201-03 (203).

<sup>137</sup> See 'Minor topics of the month: The ocean mail to India and Australia', *The Art Journal*, July 1853, p.178 (178).

reported that: “Our Bristol contemporaries speak in high terms of the mode in which Mr. Braham treats this very interesting subject”. Later, in 1852, the painter (and former companion of Layard in the field) Frederick Charles Cooper was in Exeter with *Cooper’s Grand Moving Diorama of Nineveh* also at the Royal Subscription Rooms.<sup>138</sup>

Cooper had accompanied Layard in Assyria and was a painter trained at the Royal Academy. His diorama had first opened to the London public in May 1851 and afforded him the role of intermediary in which he adjusted appearances rather than transcribing them.<sup>139</sup> The diorama proved immensely popular. Bohrer has rightly detected the presence of Layard in all manifestations of ‘Assyria’, and cites that even in advertisements of Cooper’s diorama, the painter’s name was lost in the sea of accompanying text, though Layard’s name was reserved for the largest type.<sup>140</sup> Cooper provides a link between these popular entertainments and the rarified Royal Academy walls in the 1850s. His submission in 1852 was the *Scene from the excavations of Nineveh, taken on the spot, while engaged with A H Layard, Esq.* (Private collection, Washington, DC). In Edinburgh, Mr. C Fiott Barker’s *Morning and Evening Oriental Divertissements on Nineveh* played at the city’s Hopetoun Rooms in June 1852, in which “95 views with dioramic effect, by the oxy-hydrogen light, embracing the whole route from the coast of North Syria to Nineveh and back” were performed.<sup>141</sup>

Important influences for the artistic reception of Assyria stemmed from Byronic literature. Byron’s tragedy *Sardanapalus*, published in 1821, was first performed on stage on 10 April 1834 at the Drury Lane Theatre in London and by

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<sup>138</sup> ‘Cooper’s diorama of Nineveh’, *Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post*, 17 June 1852, p.8 (8).

<sup>139</sup> Bohrer, *op.cit.*, p.183.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p.183.

<sup>141</sup> [Advertisements & notices] *Caledonian Mercury*, 10 June 1852, p.1 [front-page].

5 June 1834 had had a run of twenty-two performances.<sup>142</sup> It was simultaneously performed in Liverpool's Theatre Royal from 30 May onwards.<sup>143</sup> In Manchester's Theatre Royal the production *Sardanapalus, or the fall of Nineveh* ran for five performances in February 1835, where the scenery was singled out for particular notice, in newspaper advertisements which trumpeted: "Grand portal of the palace, with distant view of Assyria; spacious Hall of Nimrod; conflagration and fall of Nineveh, from [John] Martin's celebrated picture".<sup>144</sup> The discoveries of Assyria must have stimulated a revival in the play's fortunes, for *Sardanapalus, King of Assyria* was produced at the Royal Princess's Theatre in London's Oxford Street from 13 June to 2 September 1853. The set designs themselves were based upon Assyrian sculptures, and one scene was composed of a hall lined with dozens of human-headed winged creatures. The theatre's artistic director Charles Kean (1811–1868) played the role of the Oriental despot himself. Advertisements of the production itself cited the new-found historicism of Layard and his publications, noting that the "costume and architecture throughout the play [has been] selected from Layard's discoveries of the monuments of Nineveh."<sup>145</sup> Critics too applauded the "representation of a great civilization dead to the world" and commended the spectacular production under the direction of Kean, in which:

Nothing could have been happier than the idea of representing upon the stage the buried glories of Nineveh, as they have been disinterred after a sleep of nearly three thousand years, and of representing them with the most painstaking and minute accuracy — every detail of architecture, of costume,

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<sup>142</sup> Ernest Hartley Coleridge (ed.), *The works of Lord Byron [Poetry]: A new, revised and enlarged edition, with illustrations*, 7 vols (London: John Murray, 1898–1904), vol.V (1901), p.2.

<sup>143</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*, 30 May 1834, p.1 [front-page].

<sup>144</sup> 'Postscript: Theatre Royal, Manchester', *Manchester Times*, 7 February 1835, p.2 (2).

<sup>145</sup> [Advertisements & notices] '[Royal] Princess's Theatre', *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 29 May 1853, p.8.

of posture, of implement, and of manner, having been copied, with the most persevering fidelity, from the scriptures and frescoes in the British Museum, and from the drawings and diagrams of Layard and Botta.<sup>146</sup>

Indeed the detailed referencing noted by the same critic included the opening scene, one of three in total, as having been “copied from the frontispiece of Mr. Layard’s great work” and the guards’ costume taken directly from “from the [Assyrian] friezes”. For some:

...the Layard monuments of the British Museum have started into life. The stiff, formal positions of the sculptured records doubtless arose from the inability of the artists to communicate an appearance of real movement to the figures they delineated; for the Assyrians, great as they were, were not Greeks, they were as good Pre-Raphaelites as Van Eyck himself.<sup>147</sup>

The recent discovery of the material remains of Assyria provided a fresh sweep of re-staging of Byron’s poem in the 1850s. *The Times* conceded that the poem was “an admirable peg whereon to hang those Assyrian antiquities of which Lord Byron never dreamed”.<sup>148</sup> The same critic lauded the production and heaped praise upon Kean himself for his topical restaging of the play, and noting the current fashionability of Assyria:

The researches of Mr. Layard have not only rendered ancient Assyria an object of interest to professed antiquaries, but have actually brought it into fashion. Winged lions and bulls with human heads are not merely gaped at by a knot of dry *savants*, but they are all the rage with the softer sex. Everyone knows the form of an Assyrian monarch’s umbrella, and the fashion of the royal crown of Nineveh is as familiar as the pattern of the last new Parisian bonnet.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> ‘Princess’s Theatre: Sardanapalus’, *Morning Chronicle*, 14 June 1853, p.6 (6).

<sup>147</sup> ‘Sardanapalus’, *Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post*, 16 June 1853, p.4 (4). This was reprinted from ‘[Royal] Princess’s Theatre’, *The Times*, 14 June 1853, p.7 (7).

<sup>148</sup> ‘[Royal] Princess’s Theatre’, *The Times*, 14 June 1853, p.7 (7).

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

Fashionable reports of London life made Kean's production an essential point of reference for regional newspapers. Dublin's *Freeman's Journal* reported that "all London has been, for weeks past, running mad after the *spectacle*".<sup>150</sup> The *North Wales Chronicle* reported to its readers that distant Londoners were enjoying the production of the year, and while many new productions abounded with plentiful audiences, the critic singled out Byron's adaptation on the stage for high praise:

But the place for drawing [large] houses, is *Sardanapalus*, at the Princess's. It is a facsimile of ancient Nineveh, as we may imagine it, from the remains in the British Museum, and from Layard's descriptions. Mr. Kean must have been at an immense expense; but all critics agree, that nothing can exceed the *mise en scene*.<sup>151</sup>

The centrality of Layard and the British Museum in constructions of 'Assyria' was emphasised time and again by commentators in relation to Kean's production.

Comparison too was made with other forms of popular entertainments, as noted by one critic:

The effect is as though the whole of Assyria had been put into a moving panorama, and was being quietly unrolled, with music and action before you...He [Kean] has done his work like a magician. With his managerial rod he has made Nineveh spring out of the pages of Mr. Layard's monumental book, and to become endowed with all the awe and grandeur of the living thing. He has built a new empire upon the stage. At his command, the scattered monster statues of the British Museum have entered the stage-door...The result is a thing to remember for life.<sup>152</sup>

On 10 October 1853, after the summer break, the Princess's Theatre resumed its popular production in which the "public interest of *Sardanapalus* is too

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<sup>150</sup> 'The Malachean Orphan Society', *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 25 July 1853, p.3 (3).

<sup>151</sup> 'What they are doing in the great metropolis (from our own correspondent)', *North Wales Chronicle*, 17 June 1853, p.6 (6).

<sup>152</sup> 'Theatres: A double visit to the Haymarket', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 19 June 1853, p.8 (8).

multitudinous to be soon exhausted.”<sup>153</sup> The same critic continued to heap praise upon the production which took “hold on the public imagination” with the:

...grand panoramic series of illustrations to ‘Layard’, a strange and interesting revivification of the friezes and reliefs of old Nineveh, and the bringing back of the pomp and glitter of the splendour-loving and warlike Assyrians.<sup>154</sup>

The great success of Kean’s production inspired imitation. The ‘grand new burlesque’ of *Sardanapalus, or the last King of Assyria* was staged in London’s Adelphi Theatre Royal in July to September 1853. But as in its model at the Princess’s Theatre *The Daily News* saw whole “groups and figures in Mr. Layard’s curious pictures invested with life and motion.”<sup>155</sup> The fever spread elsewhere. In Dublin’s Queen’s Royal Theatre *Sardanapalus, or the fall of Nineveh* was performed in July and August 1853.<sup>156</sup> Later in the nineteenth century the play *Sardanapalus* enjoyed other performances.<sup>157</sup> In Berlin a ballet was adapted from Byron’s *Sardanapalus* whose scenery was “magnificent, and in accordance with the remains of Nineveh in various European museums.”<sup>158</sup> In Belfast a new production *Sardanapalus, or the fall of Nineveh*, described as a “grand original Oriental burlesque”, took place in June 1868 at the Theatre Royal.<sup>159</sup> Theatrical productions, together with dioramas, capitalised on the craze for all things

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<sup>153</sup> ‘Princess’s Theatre’, *Morning Chronicle*, 11 October 1853, p.5 (5).

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>155</sup> ‘Drama: Adelphi’, *Daily News*, 21 July 1853, p.3 (3).

<sup>156</sup> *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 25 July 1853, p.1 [front-page].

<sup>157</sup> *Sardanapalus, in four acts*, was performed at the Theatre Royal, Manchester 31 March – 28 April 1877. Charles Calvert (the adapter) played the lead character of *Sardanapalus*, which toured to Royal Alexandra Theatre, Liverpool on 26 June – 27 July 1877. Coleridge, *op.cit.*, p.2.

<sup>158</sup> ‘Foreign dramatic intelligence (written exclusively for *The Era*)’, *The Era*, 23 April 1865, p.11 (11).

<sup>159</sup> [Classified advertisements: Amusements] *The Belfast Newsletter*, 20 June 1868, p.1 [front-page].

Assyrian and produced a 'recycled' culture of the ancient civilisation. The art world provided its own responses and the walls of two London establishments, the Royal Academy and the Royal Society of British Artists, saw painters vying to incorporate Assyrian subjects and motifs. These artworks had a life beyond London through reproduction (and criticism) in the contemporary press and showings in regional centres, such as Birmingham or Liverpool.

The geographical size of the British Empire across the globe meant that the new 'reach' of Assyria was large and international. The *Illustrated London News* was mailed and read all over the world. In Calcutta, India, in January 1855 audiences were treated to an illustrated lecture – more performance – lasting over two hours, by The Rev. J M Bellew:

It was a superb work of art. A complete stage had been built, the proscenium being one of the water-gates of the Palace of Sennacherib, and drawn from one of Mr. [James] Fergusson's sketches. All the appliances of scenery and machinery were brought to bear on the subject, and everyone declares that even in London anything more perfect was never witnessed [...with] a series of scenes showing how the excavations were carried on, so that one could actually imagine oneself in the tunnels and chambers cut out by Mr. Layard at Nineveh.

The audience was treated to "slabs represented the exact size of life, precisely as they now appear at the British Museum, so that the public of Calcutta have now been made familiar with the labours of Mr. Layard."<sup>160</sup>

The geographical reach of the knowledge of Assyria through print culture was global, and spread beyond the confines of the British Empire. In the USA in the 1850s some commentators saw themselves in the reflection of Assyria, once lost and now 'returned' to the historical record, their youthful nation a worthy

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<sup>160</sup> 'A lecture at Calcutta', *The Lady's Newspaper*, 24 February 1855, p.121 (121).

successor. Mid-nineteenth-century America took the discoveries as evidence that all civilisations perpetuated themselves in their constructed monuments, whether bridges, palaces, amphitheatres, or telecommunication networks:

Each age, each race, inscribes itself, with more or less distinctness, on history's dial. Nineveh, almost faded from our traditions of the world's youth, revisits us in her exhumed sculptures...ancient Rome lives for us in the Capitol and the Coliseum...So we Americans of the nineteenth century will be found in due time to have inscribed ourselves [...with] a railroad over the Rocky Mountains, a telegraph [system] across the Atlantic...<sup>161</sup>

America's vastness was celebrated in this passage and Assyria's appeal lay in the connection with this vast empire, inscribed by traces of past human activity. For America the opportunity arose to 'update' these markers with current telecommunication and transportation networks and leave, as others before them had done, an indelible legacy for the historical record.

Early accounts of the discoveries in Assyria, upon which these dioramas by Burford, Cooper and others capitalised, made strong and frequent references to the Bible. This penetrated sites where the autonomy of Assyrian sculpture as 'art' might have otherwise won out, such as the pages of *The Art Journal* which was the essential read for those of an artistic bent in London throughout much the nineteenth century, and especially so at mid-century, when it had few rivals. In July 1850 the serial carried a full-page review of W S Vaux's weighty publication *Nineveh and Persepolis* (1850) and expounded the joy that, at long last, "Assyria has given up its history of the past...to bring forth its witnesses to biblical truth in its wondrous sculptures — these extraordinary 'sermons in stone' ".<sup>162</sup> The review concluded by commending the "beauty of execution" of Assyrian sculpture,

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<sup>161</sup> 'The Crystal Palace and its lessons: A lecture by Horace Greeley', *The New York Times*, 1 January 1852, p.6 (6).

<sup>162</sup> 'Nineveh and Persepolis', *The Art Journal*, June 1850, p.225 (225).



especially its bas-reliefs. The fusion of aesthetic and religious description in the review is marked. In 1850 *The Times* received a letter from a reader calling the government to extend its financial commitment to support the Assyrian excavations, labelling the finds a “supplemental book of the Bible that is being revealed to us”.<sup>163</sup> Vaux’s book was co-published by Virtue & Co, publishers of the journal, and so free use was made of the illustrations first used in Vaux’s book. This suggests the interlinked commercial networks of interest in Assyria at a time when few publishers could rival the readership (and influence) of journals such as *The Art Journal*. It would be many decades before *The Portfolio, Magazine of Art* and others would present serious challenges to its authority.<sup>164</sup> The ‘authority’ of the newly unearthed material from Mesopotamia, as both ‘literature’ and ‘sculpture’, caused them to be labelled “stone-books of Nineveh” by some reviewers.<sup>165</sup> The discovery of Assyria usurped the popularity of the previously well-known Achaemenid remains at Persepolis, incorporated in Stephanoff’s previously mentioned watercolour. Moreover, Assyria relegated their display at the British Museum, with abundant examples as both originals and plaster casts, to a secondary position. Vaux’s publication title *Nineveh and Persepolis* addresses the two former regional powers.

The Bible was never far from any imaging of Assyria. In 1853, Layard was presented with the Freedom of the City of London. His silver-gilt cast casket was decorated with Assyrian motifs and at each corner was a winged bull or lion, and inscribed with over ten lines of text outlining his achievements and the gratitude of

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<sup>163</sup> F M, ‘The Ruins of Nineveh: [Letter] To the Editor of The Times’, *The Times*, 5 August 1850, p.8 (8).

<sup>164</sup> See Hazel Morris, *Hand, head and heart: Samuel Carter Hall and ‘The Art Journal’* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 2002).

<sup>165</sup> ‘Literature: Memoirs of libraries, including a handbook of library economy, by Edw. Edwards, 2 vols, 8vo, Trubner and Co.’ [review], *The Leader*, 28 May 1859, pp.667–68 (667).

London in having secured for them the great treasures from Assyria. One line on the box was however inscribed in bold lettering 'ACCURACY OF SACRED HISTORY'.<sup>166</sup>

The sentiments expressing beauty in relation to the Assyrian sculptures and their delicate modelling by *The Art Journal* was found elsewhere, in other artistic circles. The teenage Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898), writing in 1850 to his father Edward Richard Jones (1801–1889) in Birmingham, relayed the excitement of his visit to London:

Today I went over to the British Museum and spent a considerable time in the Nimroud or Assyrian Room [...] The bas-reliefs seem to be as perfect as when they emerged from the workman's shop, tho' not quite so clean. They seem to have had a very good idea of anatomy, in which they far outstrip the Egyptians; the feet and hands seem to have been their chief study and the muscles of the arms and legs are finely portrayed. A new light upon Ancient History will soon be elicited when the inscriptions with which all the monuments abound, can be read. One black granite monument contains 210 lines of cuneiform writing. In most of the bas-reliefs the king forms the most prominent object. He is in some hunting the wild bull, in others pursuing his enemies, to whom he bears the most gigantic proportions, always accompanied by the 'feronher' or sacred bird, a kind of talisman.<sup>167</sup>

Burne-Jones' letter is the earliest example (with artworks) of artists' writings to make reference to Assyria. The year 1850 marked the beginning of the artistic discovery of Assyria with a number of canvases, which were exhibited for the first time at the Royal Academy of Arts, London.

The first painters to make artworks that operated as public statements of the new taste for Assyria were two painters of the same generation, indeed exact

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<sup>166</sup> Judy Rudoe, *Decorative arts 1850–1950: A catalogue of the British Museum collection* (London: British Museum Press, 1991), 1994 edition, pp.57–59 (57), no.127.

<sup>167</sup> Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan & Co, 1904), vol.I, p.45. The "black granite monument" refers to the so-called Black Obelisk from Nimrud, made for King Sargon II, and dates to 725 BC. It was acquired by the British Museum in 1848 (ME 118885).

contemporaries, Henry Nelson O'Neil (1817–1880) and Edward Armitage (1817–1896). Their exhibiting trajectories and critical receptions both followed similar paths, a feature of the narrow practices and support structure that artists in the mid-nineteenth century operated within. Both of their exhibited productions from 1850 were premiered at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, and based like all early assimilations of Assyria, upon biblical accounts in the Old Testament in which Assyria dominated: O'Neil's on the Book of Esther and Armitage's on Ezekiel.

Throughout the 1840s O'Neil had forged his reputation with pictures based on biblical episodes: some of these were set in the ancient Near East. He depicted the Jewish captivity in Babylon in *A Jewish captive* (1843; Untraced), exhibited at the Liverpool Academy in 1843 with a quote from Byron's *Hebrew Melodies* in the exhibition catalogue. This picture was probably of the 'character head' type, and would have had little distinguishing input from other such 'heads', judging by O'Neil's other work. In 1846 he took up the same theme of Babylonian captivity in *By the rivers of Babylon* (1846; Untraced).<sup>168</sup> The discovery of Assyria encouraged O'Neil to take up other, more pictorially challenging, Mesopotamian subjects. In 1850 he exhibited at the Royal Academy *Esther's emotion* (1848; Untraced) in which O'Neil betrays his unfamiliarity with Assyrian iconography, applying Assyrian images of warfare found on bas-reliefs to non-Assyrian circular columns.<sup>169</sup> These scenes were probably taken from illustrations in the *Illustrated London News* and Layard's *Nineveh and its remains* (1848). The canvas found its way into the collection of Thomas Birchall (1809–1878), a solicitor and Mayor of

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<sup>168</sup> Christie's, London, 21 July 1894, lot 59. It sold for 15 guineas.

<sup>169</sup> Sotheby's (Belgravia), London, 29 June 1976, lot 68.

Preston 1847–48, who lent it to the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1855.<sup>170</sup> His tastes were largely confined to contemporary British art, and included Paul Falconer Poole's *The gipsy queen*, William Edward Frost's *Chastity*, and Charles Locke Eastlake's *An Italian family*, all three of which he allowed *The Art Journal* to reproduce in 1864–67, citing Birchall as the owner.<sup>171</sup> He later built a new home called Ribbleton Hall in Preston (now demolished) in 1865, perhaps to accommodate his art collection and this address was duly cited in the lettering accompanying the print in *The Art Journal*. The patronage of the pictures inspired by Assyria is a loose thread that I wish to pursue and might suggest avenues of patronage and taste. The 1860s was a period of remarkable self-publicity for Birchall and his art collection.

Meanwhile, in 1851 O'Neil exhibited at the Royal Academy the more ambitious composition *The scribes reading the chronicles to Ahasuerus*, based on the Book of Esther. It is set in Assyria's eastern successor, Achaemenid Persia, and O'Neil's nocturnal depiction depicts one episode when, unable to sleep peacefully one night, the Persian King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) demands a book at bedtime: "On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king" (Esther 6:1 [KJV]). O'Neil disregards geographical specificity and selects instead a non-Assyrian subject from the Bible, which contrasts with Armitage's careful selection into which he can

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<sup>170</sup> See John Bailey, *Thomas Birchall Junior of Ribbleton Hall* (Unpublished [?MED] thesis, Chorley College of Education, 1969) and Henry Fishwick, *The history of the parish of Preston: In Amounderness in the county of Lancaster* (Rochdale and London: James Cleggs & Elliot Stock, 1900), p.81.

<sup>171</sup> The engraving *The gipsy queen* by Ferdinand Joubert (1810–1884) appeared in December 1865, opposite p.364; *Chastity* by Thomas Garner (1789–1868) appeared in March 1866, opposite p.76; *An Italian family* by Samuel S Smith (1810–1879) appeared in November 1867, opposite p.244.

'accurately' incorporate Layard's latest finds from ancient Assyria. In common with the mania for Assyria the *Illustrated London News* published a wood-engraving of the work as part of its 1851 review of the Royal Academy exhibition (fig.24). The lost canvas was later engraved by *The Art Journal* in 1867, and given as in the collection of James Spence, Liverpool (fig.25).<sup>172</sup> The canvas was sold in April 1855 from the large collection of William Llewellyn, Park Street in Bristol, at an auction in London that also included John Martin's *Nineveh*.<sup>173</sup> Here again though, as before in *Esther's emotion*, O'Neil failed to take note or was utterly unconcerned by his anachronism, and applied eagle-headed winged deities, from bas-reliefs for example, to circular columns (fig.26). The odd details in the canvas betray his close study of Assyrian motifs, though overall the effect lacks conviction and is little removed from the generalised view of the Middle East, either ancient or modern, which was so beloved of Western painters. Critics cited the Assyrian source of this work with others, such as that for *The Times*, drawing the common link with Armitage's untraced *Samson in the hands of the Philistines* (fig.27) in 1851 as having "pursued the [same] Oriental subjects as illustrated by the late discoveries at Nineveh".<sup>174</sup> Note that Nineveh became the paradigm of Assyrian cultural prowess and production itself, and like the title in Layard's many publications — and elsewhere — met and served the public's expectation of what Assyria had, or could, represent. In 1850 The Rev. John Blackburn published *Nineveh: Its rise and ruin, as illustrated by ancient scriptures and modern discoveries* which sought to equate (or more accurately re-equate) and conjoin these old biblical and new

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<sup>172</sup> Spence is likely to have bought the picture from the Liverpool exhibition in the autumn of 1852, or (perhaps) at least, first seen it there.

<sup>173</sup> Foster & Son, London, 4 April 1855, lot 84. The painting measured 41.5 by 60 inches (105.4 by 152.4 cm). Martin's "grand composition" *Nineveh* was lot 45 and measured 35 by 47 inches (88.9 by 119.4 cm).

<sup>174</sup> 'Exhibition of the Royal Academy: Second notice', *The Times*, 7 May 1851, p.8 (8).

archaeological authorities.<sup>175</sup> Frederick Richard Pickersgill (1820–1900) had exhibited at the 1850 Royal Academy exhibition in London, a large biblical painting *Samson betrayed (Samson disarmed)* (1850; Manchester Art Gallery; 1882.19) that one critic, mistakenly, had cited as having been influenced by the recent Assyrian discoveries (fig.28). *The Times* contrasted the submissions by Pickersgill and Armitage in the exhibition and noted the supposed common source of both works:

As a powerful contrast to this work, and as an example of the abuse of those resources which Mr. Pickersgill [in *Samson disarmed*] has skilfully employed, we turn with reluctance to Mr. Armitage's *Aholibah* (486). There, too, the recent discoveries of the palaces of Nineveh have suggested a more lively portraiture of Babylonian splendour, and the mere scene, though with little artistic merit, might escape criticism.<sup>176</sup>

Critical confusion over the source of motifs, and other details, continued into the 1880s.

The other exhibited work at the 1850 Royal Academy that was directly influenced by the latest Assyrian archaeology was an untraced biblical work by Edward Armitage, *Aholibah* (fig.29). The same canvas was later exhibited the same year at the Birmingham Society of Artists, with the following quote: “when she saw men pourtrayed upon the wall, the images of the Chaldeans pourtrayed with vermilion, 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: And as soon as she saw them with her eyes, she

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<sup>175</sup> [Advertisement] *The Times*, 12 November 1850, p.10. Hanbury & Co, London published the book.

<sup>176</sup> ‘Exhibition of the Royal Academy: Second notice’, *The Times*, 6 May 1850, p.5 (5). The work was later exhibited at the Royal Manchester Institution in 1851, where it was purchased for the collection. It was subsequently transferred to the Manchester Art Gallery in 1882.

doted upon them, and sent messengers unto them into Chaldea" (Ezekiel 23:14–16 [KJV]). The story revolves around two adulterous sisters, the elder Aholah and Aholibah. Armitage focuses on the younger Aholibah, who is "more corrupt in her inordinate love" than her sister, and depicts her in her private apartment dreaming of her lovers, the Bible informs us, the "Assyrians her neighbours, captains and rulers clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding upon horses, all of them desirable young men" (Ezekiel 23:12 [KJV]), her thoughts stimulated by the military depictions of the bas-reliefs that decorate the walls. Bare-breasted, she is fanned by a female attendant and lulled by music from a harp, on a terrace glimpsed through two flanking human-headed winged deities. The canvas is replete with Assyrian motifs, the source of Aholibah's moral downfall.

Armitage had just launched his career in London following time spent in France, where he had trained at the Parisian *École des Beaux-Arts* under Paul Delaroche (1797–1856). Delaroche was noted for his grand history paintings and powerfully conceived *femme fatales* from Hebrew scripture, such as Judith and Salomé, which his younger pupil would absorb and take with him on his return to London. Armitage had launched his French career with his Paris Salon *début* in 1842 with *Prométhée enchainé (Prometheus chained)* (Untraced). Armitage returned to London in 1843 and won some fame with his submissions to the newly launched programme to decorate the Houses of Parliament, where he was selected to make two frescoes for the House of Lords' chamber, off the Upper Waiting Hall: *The Thames and its tributaries* in 1852, and *The death of Marmion* in 1854. In 1847 Queen Victoria purchased his painting *The Battle of the Meeanee* (1847; Royal Collection, London). His first submission to the Royal Academy, the crucial path for critical acclaim and wider public recognition, came in 1848 with the history painting *Henry VIII and Catherine Parr* (Untraced). Thereafter there followed a

series of biblical works and the depiction of *femme fatales*, from the 1850 canvas *Aholibah* to that in his 1852 submission *Hagar*, both of which are now untraced. However, both compositions were reproduced as small wood-engravings in the *Illustrated London News*, an important site both for the discovery of Assyria through archaeological finds themselves, and the artistic discovery through the mediation of painters and their artworks.

Armitage's submissions to the Royal Academy drew widespread criticism in the contemporary press. While lavishly heaped with praise as regards draughtsmanship and technical execution, his two submissions were nonetheless attacked for their 'inferior' cultural references, choosing Assyria over hallowed Greece, which animated debates about the status of the newly found material remains by Layard. Many felt it was inappropriate for pictorial inspiration. The critic of *The Daily News* had this to say of *Aholibah*:

Mr. Armitage, nevertheless, in selecting a vision of Ezekiel, has, like Raphael of old, been guided by sculptural inscription, only eschewing Greek art for the lately exhumed ruins of Nineveh: and whilst Raphael recalled Olympus, Mr. Armitage dwells on the banks of the Chebar. The figure of Aholibah gazing on the images of the Chaldeans, is masterly and full of energy. But however admirable a subject for developing feminine character and beauty, its mystic meaning is beyond the capabilities of the pictorial art.<sup>177</sup>

The critic of *The Examiner* went further:

Mr. Armitage's choice of a subject would lead us to fear that he has a coarseness of imagination unfavourable to eminence in art. In the selection he appears to have been guided by a wish to avail himself of an opportunity of introducing the Nineveh sculptures — a resource betraying poverty of the imagination.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> 'Fine arts: Royal Academy', *The Daily News*, 6 May 1850, p.6 (6).

<sup>178</sup> 'Fine arts: Eighty-second exhibition of the Royal Academy (concluding notice)', *The Examiner*, 25 May 1850, p.326 (326).



The critic of *The Times* perhaps most forcefully expressed the strong negative criticism:

As a powerful contrast to this work, and as an example of the abuse of those resources which Mr. Pickersgill [in *Samson disarmed*] has skilfully employed, we turn with reluctance to Mr. Armitage's *Aholibah* (486). There, too, the recent discoveries of the palaces of Nineveh have suggested a more lively portraiture of Babylonian splendour, and the mere scene, though with little artistic merit, might escape criticism. But the subject of the picture — an impersonation of the coarsest metaphors of prophetic imprecation — and the reality given to the impure desires of the condemned cities, which the names of Aholah and Aholibah conveyed in the language of Ezekiel — imply a depravity of taste, and have found a pruriency of execution, which do no credit to Mr. Armitage. We regret that after the merited success of his cartoons this picture should have appeared to the great injury of his reputation, but the sooner *Aholibah* ceases to gloat upon “her Chaldeans, portrayed with vermillion”, the better it will be for himself and the public; nor can we allow a certain amount of power to be pleaded in extenuation of offences against taste, propriety, and judgement.<sup>179</sup>

Armitage's canvas offended core notions of “taste, propriety, and judgement” which was reflected in the canvas' commercial standing. It must have gone unsold from London because it was submitted later in 1850 to the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists. Undeterred, the following year Armitage exhibited another biblical canvas, *Samson in the hands of the Philistines* in 1851 (fig.27). *The Times* commented:

Mr. O'Neil's *Ahasuerus* is, on the contrary, extremely powerful, and is esteemed by some artists [as] his best work; but it is artificial and theatrical, though not deficient in grace of arrangement, and the glare of the concealed torch, though ingeniously diffused over the Assyrian's tent, is far from pleasing. Mr. Armitage has also pursued the Oriental subjects as illustrated by the late discoveries at Nineveh, and his picture of *Samson in the hands of the Philistines* (631) is very preferable to his strange production of last year.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> 'Exhibition of the Royal Academy: Second Notice', *The Times*, 6 May 1850, p.5 (5).

<sup>180</sup> 'Exhibition of the Royal Academy: Second notice', *The Times*, 7 May 1851, p.8 (8). *Samson in the hands of the Philistines* was formerly in the collection of Bristol City Museum & Art Gallery, was de-accessioned in 1947 and remains untraced.

Clearly the critic thought that Armitage's canvas had an Assyrian source, like that of O'Neil's work in the same exhibition. In fact the bas-reliefs in the background appear to be modeled on examples from ancient Egypt and not Assyria; the figures appear attenuated and hieratic in pose. Moreover, one figure depicted in the bas-relief at the right of the composition wears a double-plumed headdress common in ancient Egypt, but unknown in Assyria. Clearly some critical confusion was common in the period with regards Assyria. Immediately following its excavation, despite widespread publication, it continued to remain largely unfamiliar.

In 1851 the veteran historical painter Abraham Cooper (1787–1868) exhibited at the Royal Academy an unusual work that depicted contemporary Arabs on horseback staring in amazement at a piece of Assyrian bas-relief depicting a royal lion hunt in progress, seen poking through the desert landscape, *He was a mighty hunter before the Lord* (fig.31). The three figures stare intently at the fragmentary bas-relief (fig.32). The work brings the distant biblical past into the contemporary mid-Victorian world: here biblical narrative (from which the title is derived) and modern archaeology are reconciled. The lion hunt relief in Cooper's untraced work is based upon a bas-relief in the British Museum, acquired in 1849, and published by Layard in *The monuments of Nineveh* (1849), as plate 31 (fig.33). The work would ordinarily have been an example of genre painting but the biblical title that Cooper gave his painting makes it clear that, with writers in the field and others, faced with the challenge of assimilating Assyrian imagery in their work, the Bible offered the best possibility of orientating themselves with the recent discoveries. Cooper appended a line from the Old Testament Book of Genesis, making reference to "Nimrod, the mighty hunter", and which locates the work and its wider meaning firmly with the arena of biblical painting, despite

'updating' the depiction to include contemporary dress and allude to contemporary events; "He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord" (Genesis 10:9 [KJV]). This same biblical passage would later inspire Rivière four decades later in his Royal Academy submission in 1891 (see Chapter Four). In France the curious mixture of the remote past and the contemporary world were also evoked in a painting by the French painter Félix Thomas (1815–1875), *Sentinelle devant les ruines de Ninive* (*Sentinel before the ruins of Nineveh*) (Private collection), of the same subject, with a modern Arab equestrian rider gazing down at the top of a winged guardian poking evocatively through the shifting sand dunes. Notions of sand-buried remains in Egypt must also have inspired Thomas: Assyria, by contrast, is far from sandy. The picture combines Romantic notions of the origin of the emergence of the Assyrian empire into 'view' in the nineteenth century. Thomas had accompanied an official French expedition force in Mesopotamia in 1851–52 and may have been inspired by his first-hand experiences in the field.

The progress of the 1850s saw other artists take up the challenge to reinvent their history paintings and make them 'modern'. Paul Falconer Poole (1806–1879) had exhibited in 1850 at the Royal Academy *The messenger announcing to Job the irruption of the Sabeans and the slaughter of the servants* (fig.34) where he took up the:

...assumed authority of Assyrian sculpture, has laid out his materials in an extensive composition. To the true expression of his subject there are wanting elements of a higher and more touching nature than he has commanded. If the mere sum of archaeological truth being adequate to such

expression — the disregard of such accessory, though a defect of property, may where strong feeling and passion are produced be overlooked.<sup>181</sup>

The critic was challenging the authority, both in their status and the use made of them by the artist, of Assyrian models. Either way, for them the Assyrian sources were ambiguous. The assemblage of disparate archaeological artefacts was troubling for some critics. For others it was much less so. The work was shown in Birmingham in the autumn of 1866 and was met with high praise and singled out as a “really great work...grand in conception, picturesque in arrangement, vigorous in drawing, and fine in colour”.<sup>182</sup> The profile and beard of Job are based upon Assyrian prototypes (fig.35). The work entered the collection of John Rushout, Lord Northwick (1769–1859), who favoured Old Masters and Victorian paintings painted in this style.<sup>183</sup> He lent Poole’s painting to the Exposition Universelle, Paris in 1855.<sup>184</sup>

In 1854 Joseph Paul Pettit (1812–1882) exhibited at the Royal Society of British Artists in London an enormous canvas, over nine feet in length, *The golden image in the plain of Babylon*. The work was met with negative criticism, which ranged from a too-close reliance upon or unsophisticated use of Assyrian sources over ‘effect’, producing an overall lack of narrative. *The Art Journal* thought the

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<sup>181</sup> ‘Fine arts: Royal Academy [Second notice]’, *Athenaeum*, 18 May 1850, pp.533–35 (534).

<sup>182</sup> ‘The Society of Artists’ exhibition (First notice)’, *The Birmingham Daily Post*, 3 September 1866, p.5 (5).

<sup>183</sup> See Richard Beresford, *Victorian visions: Nineteenth-century art from the John Schaeffer collection* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2010), pp.22–25 for another painting in Lord Northwick’s collection by Anna Blunden (1830–1915). Poole’s painting was later sold anonymously (Christie’s, London, 17 May 1884, lot 78) and soon afterwards entered the collection of John Marshall of Red House, Great Barr, Staffordshire (Christie’s, London, 26 May 1888, lot 167).

<sup>184</sup> (No.917) as ‘Job et les messagers’. He also lent James Clarke Hook’s *A dream of Venice* (no.832) as ‘Venise comme on la rêve’ (1850; Museums Sheffield).

work so closely concerned with Assyrian models that the work failed to adequately communicate the narrative:

The picture [*The Golden Image*] is painted professedly from the third chapter of Daniel, but really suggested by the Nineveh marbles and Mr. Layard's narrative. If — and we are serious in saying this — if it be intended as an essay in Assyrian art, the highest praise that can be pronounced upon it will be to grant it the full merit of successful imitation.<sup>185</sup>

The architecture dominated the composition so that the “eye is continually diverted by the lines and square forms”. But the critic concluded the “there is no doubt that the impersonations here presented are nearer the truth than those of any previous version of an Assyrian subject”. *The Times* agreed with the above critic and noted the minute detail in the work:

...every detail being finished off with the accuracy which Canaletti [sic] would have bestowed upon a view of Venice [...The] aim is evidently a reproduction of that angular aspect of life which we are taught to associate with ancient Assyria, and he has decked out his canvas as one would fit up a museum, claiming no praise beyond that of correct combination, and laborious manipulation.<sup>186</sup>

Charles Rolt (fl.1845–67), perhaps inspired by Poole, exhibited two canvases of the same subject at two different venues in the 1850s, the Royal Academy and the Royal Society of British Artists. The canvas at the Royal Academy in 1855, *From the Book of Job* (untraced), was exhibited with the description: “This is the story of Job's comforters: — ‘So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great’ ” (Job 2:13 [KJV]). Critics were somewhat impressed with his borrowings, which were readily identified. Unfortunately, the pictures were not

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<sup>185</sup> ‘The Society of British Artists’, *The Art Journal*, May 1854, pp.125–28 (127).

<sup>186</sup> [Royal] Society of British Artists’, *The Times*, 27 March 1854, p.7 (7).

reproduced in the press at the time and only the published criticism sheds light on Rolt's debt to Assyria in these pictures. The critic for *The Art Journal* thought:

Job himself is a good conception, but the others are too much dressed. The artist here follows the authority of the Nineveh antiquities: he is right to do so: but it should not be felt that the exact forms have been copied. Costume and characteristic thus transferred, should be treated according to the condition of the art of our own time.<sup>187</sup>

Rolt's other canvas, *Job and his friends* (untraced), exhibited in 1856 at the Royal Society of British Artists, London, also betrayed absorption of Assyrian models. The following year the same publication identified the common source as his previous picture from the year before. The critic noted that: "The force and substance which the artist has given to the patient man diminishes the reality of the other figures. The artist has had recourse to the Nineveh marbles for his costume."<sup>188</sup>

Pettit belongs to the same generation as Armitage, O'Neil, and Poole, indicating that initial artistic interest in Assyria came from an established group of practitioners in mid-career. The artistic discovery, at least at a public level, lay with an older generation of painters in which their maturity was marked with a casual absorption into their work of some Assyrian motifs. This pattern would soon change in character, with younger artists making the artistic turn towards Assyria; and the following decade (the 1860s) saw a public demonstration of a wider and more nuanced reception of Assyria opening up the bounds of visual expression.

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<sup>187</sup> 'The Royal Academy: The eighty-seventh exhibition, 1855', *The Art Journal*, June 1855, pp.169-84 (174).

<sup>188</sup> 'The [Royal] Society of British Artists: The thirty-third exhibition', *The Art Journal*, May 1856, pp.133-36 (136).

William Holman Hunt (1827–1910) caught this potential in a sensitive pen-and-ink drawing circa 1849, *Daniel* (fig.30). Made at the start of his long career, it depicts a scene from the biblical Book of Daniel. A Jewish exile in Babylon, Daniel has risen to high office; but jealous rivals have plotted his downfall via an edict forbidding worship of anyone but the king. Hunt captures both the stillness and dramatic spiritual tension as Daniel prays to God as usual, at the window in his room — open facing towards Jerusalem — while, unseen by him, his enemies gloat (Daniel 6:10–11). Daniel would also star in many later productions by Edward John Poynter and Briton Rivière. Indeed, Poynter depicts the same moment in his illustration for the *Dalziels' Bible Gallery*, considered in Chapter Two. Hunt's tenderly drawn subject was essentially the first response to the newly discovered Assyrian sculptures themselves rather than a generic 'idea' of Assyria, or even more generally, the ancient Near East. The composition has a frieze-like quality and the two figures drawing back the curtain to reveal the praying prophet were based on real Assyrian prototypes, with their 'Assyrian' beards. It was, though, never exhibited in the artist's lifetime and remained a private reflection of that ancient civilisation. Indeed, the work was unpublished until its appearance for sale at Christie's, London in 2005.<sup>189</sup>

The early and concentrated effort by painters to make use of the discovery of Assyria in 1845 was marked. The Royal Academy became the premier venue for public displays of modes of absorption, curiosity, and careful research. Public entertainments, such as dioramas, and popular literature exploited the keen interest the general public had in the newly found 'sermons in stone'. The 1850s

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<sup>189</sup> Judith Bronkhurst, *William Holman Hunt: A catalogue raisonné*, 2 vols (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), vol.II, pp.23–24, no.D40.

saw these pictures largely made by groups of artists whose reputations were already made and secure. Younger artists would be drawn to Assyria for artistic inspiration in the following decades as its position became firmly and permanently established in museum displays, the printed page and elsewhere. The 1860s saw Assyria become more public and more 'visible' and the artistic use made of it more widespread among a wider group of newly emerging young artists.





## CHAPTER TWO

### Consolidation and expansion: Assyria in the 1860s

Every painter now...is bound to be an archaeologist (1865)<sup>190</sup>

Messrs. Dalziel enjoy a pre-eminence as *the* establishment for wood-engravers (1866)<sup>191</sup>

The 1860s saw a consolidation in Britain of the products of the artistic discovery of Assyria, in both exhibited artworks and on the printed page. These public statements contrasted with other more 'private' responses that also emerged in the period. It was a time when the discovery of and engagement with Assyria was perhaps at its most concentrated and widely felt, with diverse numbers, range, and media of artworks. More artists and (for the first time) groups of artists, linked both socially and professionally, looked to Assyria. This chapter will focus on the decade following that of the first impact during the 1850s discussed in Chapter One.

The broader turn to the Bible, as before, continued to provide the overarching framework for these engagements with Assyria. But at the same time other reference points were opening out, allowing greater artistic freedoms away from the restrictions of biblical narratives. The theatrical productions and operas outlined in Chapter One had brought Assyria out from the confines of the British Museum (and other displays) and the printed page. Assyria took to the stage again in the 1860s. In May 1862 London audiences marvelled at Her Majesty's Theatre's

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Portions of this chapter were previously published in Donato Esposito, '*Dalziels' Bible Gallery* (1881): Assyria and the biblical illustration in nineteenth-century Britain' in Steven Holloway (ed.), *Orientalism, Assyriology and the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), pp.267–96.

<sup>190</sup> 'The Royal Academy', *The Art Journal*, June 1865, pp.161–72 (163).

<sup>191</sup> 'How to become a wood-engraver', *Ladies' Treasury*, 1 September 1866, pp.154–57 (157).

production on Haymarket of Rossini's opera *Semiramide* (*Semiramis*), in which "the piece on the stage [was] in the most Assyrian style of art...[with the] eminently Assyrian garb worn by both Semiramis and by Arsace".<sup>192</sup> Parisian audiences enjoyed a similarly Assyrian-styled contemporary staging of the same opera (which will be discussed in Chapter Three), performed simultaneously.

Although the emphasis will be on British work produced by British artists, some of the artists under discussion in this chapter exhibited or had their Assyrian work published (for the first time) in France, and the crosscurrents came from the other direction too, with the work of French artists in circulation in Britain in the 1860s. Foremost among the latter was Gustave Doré (1832–1883), who reappears at various times as an important influence, particularly through his book illustration.

The exhibition picture continued to be the most important and prestigious arena for the public engagement of artists with Assyria. Both established painters, and emerging ones, chose such arenas as the annual summer exhibition at the Royal Academy to showcase their latest work. But emerging competitors, such as the Dudley Gallery from 1865, challenged the safe position of the Royal Academy.<sup>193</sup> Besides new artistic arenas, the 1860s saw the emergence of new media into which Assyria infiltrated, with the rise of independent works on paper, with exhibition watercolours shown at the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolour, and with the new inclusion of both drawings and sculpture at the Royal Academy, among prominent examples.

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<sup>192</sup> 'Opera and concerts', *Illustrated Times*, 10 May 1862, p.34 (34).

<sup>193</sup> See Colin Cruise, 'Poetic, eccentric, Pre-Raphaelite: the critical reception of Simeon Solomon's work at the Dudley Gallery' in Michaela Giebelhausen and Tim Barringer (eds), *Writing the Pre-Raphaelites: Text, context, subtext* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), pp.171–92 for a discussion of the Dudley Gallery's formation.

Printmakers too took up Assyria amidst the surging demand for printed materials of this evocative Bible-land. The most important of these graphic projects was the *Dalziels' Bible Gallery* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1881), first planned in the 1860s, and long considered a milestone of late nineteenth-century book-illustration.<sup>194</sup> However, less well known is the fact that a number of the illustrations in this compendium are the fertile products of an engagement with Assyrian antiquities. Interestingly, the *Bible Gallery's* wood-engravings articulate original responses by artists, with varying aesthetic agendas, to the pressing 'need' (from a direct commission) to provide illustrations for a lavish Bible, and many turned to Assyria for some of these solutions.

The extraordinary popularity of the Assyrian exhibits at the British Museum — leading, for example, to a second edition in 1868 of Layard's *Nineveh and its remains*, and increased permanent gallery space at Bloomsbury — was coupled with cost-effective improvements in the creation and distribution of graphic reproductions. This ensured that the 'monuments' from the Bible-land of Assyria would begin to figure in the illustrations of Bibles, biblical commentaries and other related art objects marketed in Great Britain. The growth in the distribution of copies of the Bible throughout the mid-nineteenth century was considerable, and establishes some of the commercial background for the decision by the Dalziel Brothers to launch such a venture onto what appeared to be an already crowded, though ever-expanding, market. The British and Foreign Bible Society, for example, saw a rise in distribution of more than three hundred per cent between

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<sup>194</sup> Gleeson White, *English illustration: 'The Sixties' 1855–70* (London: A Constable & Co., 1897), pp.146–47 and Forrest Reid, *Illustrators of the [eighteen] sixties* (London: Faber & Gwyer Ltd, 1928), p.49.

1831 and 1861.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, by 1861 nearly four million Bibles were issued annually in Great Britain.<sup>196</sup> London could boast huge bookshops packed with many tens of thousands of Bibles, prayer books and other religious publications. The busiest emporia were those located among bus shopping districts in the West End of the metropolis. Advertisements for them placed in the *Illustrated London News*, published weekly, attest to their great size: John Field's Great Bible Warehouse at 25 Regent Quadrant (near Piccadilly Circus) had a stock of 50,000 publications and grandly claimed to have "without exception the largest collection of family Bibles in the [United] Kingdom", while Parkins & Gotto's Bible Warehouse at 24-25 Oxford Street stocked 25,000 examples.<sup>197</sup>

The Dalziels were far from alone in their venture to tap into the market for illustrated Bibles. Simultaneously, the publishing magnate Joseph Cundall (1818-1895) was intent on producing a similar compendium to that envisioned by the Dalziel brothers. Cundall was well prepared for the field. In 1843-44 he published four volumes of scriptural works, entitled *Bible Events*, aimed at the burgeoning middle-classes as part of his 'The Home Treasury' series.<sup>198</sup> These were illustrated with prints after the Old Masters, including Holbein the Younger, Dürer, Raphael and Michelangelo. Cundall did this both to enhance the prestige of his publications by their association with these great names from the art historical canon and, more prosaically, to avoid any issue over copyright. He had also co-published single-sheet colour wood-engravings after religious Old Master works with his business

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<sup>195</sup> 'Bibles', *Illustrated London News*, 5 October 1861, p.344. The Society was founded in 1804.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p.344.

<sup>197</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 3 December 1859, p.541. See too, for example, the advertisement for Parkins & Gotto in the *Illustrated Times*, 31 October 1857, p.303 that also listed 25,000 Bibles etc. In 1856 the firm advertised a 'mere' 15,000 Bibles etc (*The Picture Times*, 5 April 1856, p.224).

<sup>198</sup> Ruari McLean, *Joseph Cundall: A Victorian publisher; Notes on his life and a checklist of his books* (Pinner: Private Libraries Association, 1976), pp.48-49.

partner Addey.<sup>199</sup> The prints included *The adoration of the shepherds* by William James Linton (1812–1898) after Rembrandt (1606–1669), among others.

Surviving documentation from one of the artists involved in the *Dalziels' Bible Gallery*, Ford Madox Brown, illustrates the delicacy of the commercial arrangements, with permission granted solely for specific outlets that excluded, for example, the sale of photographs of any original artworks in the possession of the Dalziel brothers. In 1844 Cundall released *The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, portrayed by Albert [sic] Dürer* that continued his preference for the use of past art long out of copyright. His decision to produce an illustrated Bible by contemporary British painters was therefore unusual and one that would require complex negotiations in order to publish the work of living artists. Moreover, Cundall approached the same artists that the Dalziels had enlisted for their project. The two camps were in direct competition for illustrators and, under mounting pressure, Cundall decided to abandon his projected Bible. Exasperated, the publisher candidly wrote to his rivals in September 1863:

I find that it is quite impossible for me to carry on my project for an Illustrated Bible without in some degree clashing with yours. We go to the same artists, we are getting the drawings of the same size, and however I may endeavour to steer clear of yours, there must be a certain similarity [remaining] between them.<sup>200</sup>

Cundall then detailed what could be done to resolve the issue. He elected to relinquish his project and to dispose of the drawings already received, together with others in hand, to his rivals for their market value. The Dalziels appear to have taken up his capitulatory offer, as Cundall never did issue an illustrated Bible.

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<sup>199</sup> 'Wood-engravings', *The Spectator*, 24 May 1851, p.500 (500).

<sup>200</sup> Joseph Cundall to Dalziel Brothers, 7 September 1863 (British Library, London; Add. 39168,50).

We might surmise this because five months later the artist William Dyce died, and the single drawing he had supplied to Cundall, *Jacob and Rachel*, passed into the possession of the Dalziels, and was included in the later edition of the *Bible Gallery* in 1894.

The immediate artistic precursors for large-format publications in Victorian Britain that the Dalziel Brothers had in mind included the Nazarene painter Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld's *Bible pictures*.<sup>201</sup> The volume originally appeared in 1851 in German and was translated into English in 1860. The full-page illustrations were never accompanied by any substantial biblical text or commentary and the illustrations were evidently intended to stand alone. Though the style of Schnorr's designs is markedly different from any in the Dalziels' publication, the German's crisp linear style proved influential upon several painters who specialised in biblical depictions, such as William Dyce (1806–1864) and John Rogers Herbert (1810–1890).<sup>202</sup> Elsewhere in another example, *Cassell's illustrated family Bible* (1859–63), issued in four volumes, sought to “historicize, particularize and orientalize the biblical event”.<sup>203</sup> The fascination with the exoticism of the Bible provided a context for the turn to Assyrian motifs for biblical illustration.

In addition, the work of the French émigré painter and printmaker Gustave Doré (1832–1883) may have presented itself as a powerful example. Certainly his technical mastery of wood-engraving would have appealed to the Dalziels, and the French painter's substantial (and profitable) biblical *œuvre* may have guided them

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<sup>201</sup> Julius Schnorr, *Schnorr's Bible pictures: Scripture history illustrated in one hundred and eight woodcuts from original designs* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1860).

<sup>202</sup> Paul Goldman, *Victorian illustrated books 1850–1870: The heyday of wood-engraving* (London: British Museum Press, 1994), p.105.

<sup>203</sup> Michaela Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible: Representation and belief in mid-Victorian Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p.141.

in the planning and eventual format of their *Bible Gallery*. *The Doré Bible* (Old and New Testaments), first published in 1866, was reissued in 1870 as the *The Doré Gallery*.<sup>204</sup> In France, Doré's biblical illustrations were met with warm praise in which he had "rebuilt lost worlds, created Nineveh".<sup>205</sup> In Britain, contemporary critics responded well to Doré's subjects. Doré led the fashion for biblical exotica with Egyptian and even Assyrian subjects. The *Illustrated London News* admired his biblical illustrations in which:

M. Doré has evidently made considerable researches to secure local and archaeological verisimilitude. This is principally apparent in his Egyptian and Assyrian architecture.<sup>206</sup>

The Dalziels too, in the choice of their publication's title, might have appropriated the compact title: *Dalziels' Bible Gallery*. *The Doré Gallery* represented a formidable body of designs even for an artist as prolific as Doré, who designed many thousands of book-illustrations. The two enormous volumes were accompanied by a revealing comment: "The artist has no personal knowledge of the [Middle] East, and has therefore been obliged to compile his accessories...from books and museums".<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> *The Doré Gallery: Containing two hundred and fifty beautiful engravings selected from the Doré Bible, Milton, Dante's Inferno, Dante's Purgatorio and Paradiso, Atala, Fontaine, Fairy Realm, Don Quixote, Baron Munchausen, Croquemitaine [...]*, 2 vols (London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co, 1870).

<sup>205</sup> Charles Yriarte, 'La Sainte Bible, avec les dessins de M. Gustave Doré, publiée par la maison Alfred Mame et fils, à Tours', *Le Monde Illustré*, 2 December 1865, pp.364–65: "une imagination brillante et par un crayon réfléchi" (364) and "reconstruit des mondes disparus, crée Ninive, et suspend aux faîtes des palais, les jardins de Babylone...*Babylone en ruine* est un rêve reconstruit." (365).

<sup>206</sup> 'Gustave Doré's Bible illustrations', *Illustrated London News*, 17 March 1866, p.268 (268).

<sup>207</sup> *The Doré Gallery*, vol.I, p.22. Edmond Ollier (1826–1886) supplied the letterpress and a 'critical essay'.

Foremost among the latter, of course, were the Louvre in his native Paris and the British Museum in London, where Doré resided intermittently. Doré seems to have relied primarily upon published sources for the Assyrian motifs found in his illustrations. In one example, *Daniel interpreting the writing on the wall*, set in King Belshazzar's palace in Babylon, the human-headed winged bull to the right of the composition has an awkward perspective, with legs oddly aligned along the temple floors (fig.37): it was probably derived from tracings the artist made from one of Layard's numerous publications, the exact model has not yet been identified. In another example, *Jonah calling Nineveh to repentance*, Assyrian motifs are mixed with ancient Egyptian details, such as cavetto cornicing (fig.38). In the illustration *Queen Vashti refusing to obey the command of Ahasuerus*, Doré has applied 'genuine' Assyrian winged guardians away from ground level as normally found (fig.39). Despite the *Illustrated London News*' admiration of the archaeological atmosphere of his work, Doré was unconcerned with the archaeological precision that characterised the work of some of his contemporaries on both sides of the Channel. His insertion of winged bulls in Mesopotamian and Persian settings seems to have been the extent of his researches, serving to suggest rather than imitate the 'authentic' reconstructions of Nineveh by Layard, Fergusson and others. Both Schnorr's and Doré's publications included the Old and New Testaments but Assyria was almost exclusively put to the service of those artists engaged with subjects from the Old Testament, which makes numerous references to this ancient locale. These texts held strong narrative possibilities and provided the lucrative chance to incorporate the latest archaeological discoveries in the Near East.

However, the influence of Doré extended beyond his illustrated Bible. From the late 1860s until his death, the French artist entered into a unique commercial



partnership that saw him contribute annually to a semi-permanent display of his work in the heart of London's art scene, at 35 New Bond Street, which was called the Doré Gallery. This semi-commercial space, which charged admission and took subscriptions and sold prints of Doré's work, saw the London début of Doré's *The fall of Paganism or The triumph of Christianity over Paganism* (1867–68; Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton, Ontario), an enormous canvas over ten feet high, which was sent there in late 1868. The art critic Tom Taylor (1817–1880) wrote a lengthy description of the subject of the huge canvas:

Far below in the darkness [below Christ] of the shadow of failing Heathenism floats the earth, which till now has been the place of power for false gods, and of worship of their idols, the work of men's hands. Below the radiant form of Michael the powers of Heathenism, Greek, Roman, Babylonian, Assyrian, Egyptian, Scandinavian, and Celtic, are confounded in what is at once precipitate flight and headlong ruin...the gods of Greece and those of Asia, the hybrid monsters of Nineveh and Persepolis — made up of man and eagle, lion or bull, Baal and Nisroch, Remphan and Moloch, who fill the foreground on the right-hand of the picture.<sup>208</sup>

The composition was disseminated by the Doré Gallery as a print by William Henry Simmons (1811–1882) in 1899 (fig.40). At the lower right of the composition can be seen the Assyrian human-headed winged deity in flight (fig.41). John Alfred Vintner (1828–1905) had exhibited in 1866 at the Royal Society of British Artists his *Worshippers of Baal* (Untraced), the antithesis in subject of Doré's huge canvas. The speedy influence upon British biblical depictions by this influential artist was already felt in 1866. The watercolour by Henry Warren (1794–1879) *The judgment of Deborah* at the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolour "borrowed rather from the illustrations of sacred history which M. Gustave Doré has recently favoured us

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<sup>208</sup> Tom Taylor, *The Doré collection* (New York: Carnegie Music Hall, 1892), p.25, no.8, quoted in Sotheby's, New York, 20 October 1980, lot 40.

with than the solemn grandeur and severe beauty of the Raphaelesque ideal".<sup>209</sup> Doré's continued influence is also discussed in Chapter Four.

*Dalziels' Bible Gallery*, though begun in the 1860s, took decades to complete and eventually publish. The originality of the designs, although no longer strictly contemporary, was unambiguously guaranteed by a brief statement dated October 1880 and placed at the beginning of the *Bible Gallery*: 'Original drawings made expressly for us, and have never before been published. Dalziel Brothers.' This suggests the artistic import of the project that took it beyond illustration. The date of the drawings (where given) varies from Simeon Solomon's *And David took an harp* and *Jewish women burning incense* of 1862 to three much later works, William Small's *Cushi brings to David news of the death of Absalom*, his *Job receiving the messengers* and Francis Sylvester Walker's *Elijah fed by the ravens*, all from 1876. The completion of the *Bible Gallery* as issued in 1881 seems to have been done with the late, and hurried, intervention of the artist members of the Dalziel family. Thomas Dalziel had seven designs included in the *Bible Gallery*, but none were used in the later 1894 edition. He was clearly out of favour with the new publishers. Unusually, these designs are somewhat smaller than the other contributors and often two designs were prints on a single page, diluting their impact and visual clarity. The smaller designs could be engraved with speed and worked upon simultaneously, suggesting Thomas' late inclusion in the project. The range of artists is noteworthy. Moreover the high profile of Assyrian art within the project makes the *Dalziels' Bible Gallery* worthy of some detailed consideration and

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<sup>209</sup> 'Fine arts: The watercolour exhibitions: Both the societies of painters in watercolours', *The Daily News*, 1 May 1866, p.7 (7).

the main product in the second decade of the artistic rediscovery of ancient Assyria.

Interestingly, Henry Hugh Armstead (1828–1905) was the sole sculptor chosen for *Dalziels' Bible Gallery*. He exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1851 onwards and only occasionally made illustrations: his speciality was relief carving, and the flattened perspective of this technique made him well suited to illustration. He is perhaps best known for two of the four panels of celebrated figures from history commissioned for the Albert Memorial in Hyde Park, London. This commission included a representation of an Assyrian monarch known from the Bible, Sennacherib, and Bohrer has related how this figure is evidence of the “normalising” of Assyria for Victorian audiences by 1872, when the monument was complete.<sup>210</sup> Once an ‘outsider’ (in many ways), Assyria by then had been comfortably accommodated into the history of art and later schemes reinforced its place in this notional progress of art.

Armstead contributed two designs to the *Bible Gallery*, one of which includes Assyrian references. *The sun and moon stand still* illustrates the miraculous defeat of the five Amorite kings by Joshua at Gibeon (fig.42). Joshua stood before the Israelite army and cried: “Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon” (Joshua 10.12 [KJV]). Armstead depicts the Israelite leader in strong silhouette against a brilliant sunlit sky with a gesturing hand to the sun behind him, while below is conveyed a sense of anguish, chaotic disorder and destruction of tangled horses’ legs, crashing chariots, spears and fallen soldiers. The principal focus in the foreground is a chariot rapidly losing control, carrying one of the Amorite kings, wearing a distinctive conical tiara like

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<sup>210</sup> Bohrer, *op.cit.*, pp.220–21.

those worn by the Neo-Assyrian monarchs; a tasselled umbrella used to protect the Assyrian kings from the sun falls behind in the general rout. The royal chariot and equipage are based on numerous examples seen both in British Museum bas-reliefs and Layard's publications. Joshua's horse wears a headdress that was described by Layard in *Nineveh and its remains* as "surmounted by an arched crest and round the neck was an embroidered collar, ending in a rich tassel" (vol.II, p.275). In the immediate foreground, an Amorite soldier wearing an Assyrian arched crested helmet supports the sagging weight of a fallen comrade, perhaps even a king, judging from his dress, which is similar to that of the royal rider in the chariot. The dynamism of the illustration drew praise from the critic of the *Athenaeum*, who considered that the design is "full of movement...and tells the story perfectly".<sup>211</sup>

The Royal Academy has two preparatory studies for *The sun and moon stand still* in which Armstead's techniques of resolving black and white and the massing of forms are strongly evident: he designed his illustrations with a sculptor's eye and fondness for sculptural expression. The linearity of the Assyrian bas-reliefs he could see at the British Museum was particularly evocative for Victorian sculptors at a time when relief sculpture was becoming fashionable again. By 1877, for example, Walter Pater had written his essay *In the Renaissance* on the low-relief sculptors of the early Renaissance, the Della Robbia family. One study by Armstead has little overall resolution of the composition: the primary focus is the handling of the chiaroscuro (fig.43). In a later sheet, Armstead focuses detailed attention on the important decorative elements in the foreground of the illustration (fig.44). In the work of Armstead, the markers of Assyria, the borrowed

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<sup>211</sup> 'Fine art gift books', *Athenaeum*, 13 November 1880, p.6 (646).

details from Layard and elsewhere, were applied not in early studies but to later studies, and to the final works themselves as a final layering or dusting of 'authenticity' onto the surface of the solid forms. A similar approach was widespread in France, leading one French critic to label one such work as "superficial".<sup>212</sup>

There is also at the Royal Academy two sheets of studies by Armstead after bas-reliefs in the British Museum, one which records a figure from the celebrated Nineveh banquet relief of Ashurbanipal playing a harp, together with other figures (including a king) from other unidentified reliefs (fig.45). The banquet relief was widely reproduced after its acquisition by the British Museum in 1856, including an illustration in the *Illustrated London News* in 1855 from a drawing sent ahead from the field before the relief's actual arrival in London in April 1856 (fig.46). The arrival of the shipment containing the piece, though not individually picked out, was reported in the contemporary press.<sup>213</sup> Joseph Bonomi included it in the third edition of his *Nineveh and its palaces*, published in 1857, and evocatively described the piece as a "stone picture".<sup>214</sup>

The other sheet of Assyrian studies by Armstead are after two lions from a relief also acquired in 1856 (fig.47). The relief, also in the British Museum, depicts various scenes of lion hunting by a royal party (fig.48). The artist has focused his attention on two lions, one running towards the royal party in the upper register and the other lying on the ground growling at his aggressors (fig.49).

An important prototype for Armstead's composition was John Martin's *Sturm und Drang* painting *Joshua commanding the sun to stand still upon Gibeon*

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<sup>212</sup> See Chapter Three, p.173.

<sup>213</sup> See, for example, 'Assyrian antiquities', *Athenaeum*, 5 April 1856, pp.426–28.

<sup>214</sup> Joseph Bonomi, *Nineveh and its palaces: The discoveries of Botta and Layard, applied to the elucidation of Holy Writ* (third edition; London: H G Bohn, 1857), p.404.

(1816; National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; 2004.64.1), which was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1816 and widely circulated in a mezzotint by the artist himself. The large scale of the work meant that it would certainly have attracted attention. It was later exhibited at the 1862 International Exhibition in London and Armstead might have seen it there.<sup>215</sup>

The 1894 reissue of the *Bible Gallery* revealed Armstead's proficiency at absorbing other Assyrian motifs into his illustrative work. The adaptation of examples of carved door-sills, with their lotus-and-bud and rosette decorations, form the principal point of interest in one of two newly-selected illustrations for the later edition, *Samuel and Eli*. Here the prophet confronts the aged Eli with news of impending trouble caused by the actions of his two wayward sons.

The contributions of Arthur Murch (fl.1859–77) are remarkable for the completeness of their Assyrian borrowings: the source of almost every inch can be deduced. Murch is not known to have exhibited any work, and his two contributions to the *Bible Gallery* are the only examples of his work extant in the near-exhaustive collections of British art held in the Tate, Victoria and Albert and British Museums. He was a friend of Frederic Leighton, perhaps from the latter's sojourn in Rome in the 1850s, when many young British artists gathered there (including Poynter), and Murch is thought to have lived there for a while. Later he lived in Paris and in 1859 was a pupil there, with Poynter, of the history painter

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<sup>215</sup> The previous year another version of the painting was sold from the collection of Charles Scarisbrick (1800–1860), a collector from Lancashire, who also owned a now untraced version of Martin's *The fall of Nineveh*. The sale at Christie's, London, 17–18 May 1861 was reviewed by the art press of the time, astonishing *The Art Journal* by the low prices to which some of Martin's "grand and poetical compositions were knocked down" ('Picture sales', [July 1861], pp.214–15 [215]).

Charles Gleyre (1806–1874).<sup>216</sup> His wife is known to have exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in London in the 1880s and listed her address as Rome.<sup>217</sup> The illustrator Walter Crane (1845–1915) remarked that Murch was in Capri in 1872 when he passed through and noted what a “painstaking artist” he was and how little he seemed to produce as a consequence.<sup>218</sup> Crane was impressed by his two designs for the *Bible Gallery*, which he described as “striking” and compared them in spirit to the work of Poynter in the same publication.<sup>219</sup> Both Murch and Poynter shared a fascination with fastidious archaeological referencing. In the late 1860s, Murch, like Poynter, lived in close proximity to the British Museum and was on friendly terms with the American expatriate painter James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903). Murch allowed Whistler to stay in his apartment on Great Russell Street, directly opposite the British Museum, when he was away.<sup>220</sup> Murch, like Whistler, was a member of the Arts Club between 1865 and 1877 and he is thought to have died sometime before 1891.<sup>221</sup>

Crane’s comment about Murch’s habits was perceptive. Murch contributed the most remarkably ‘Assyrian’ illustrations in the entire *Bible Gallery*: *The arrow of deliverance* (II Kings 13:17; fig.50) and *The flight of Adrammelech* (II Kings 19:37; fig.51). The latter captures the moment of high drama when, having

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<sup>216</sup> William Hauptman, *Charles Gleyre 1806–1874*, 2 vols (Zurich, Basle and Princeton, NJ: Swiss Institute for Art Research, Wiese Publishing and Princeton University Press, 1996), vol.1, p.349.

<sup>217</sup> Exhibited 1880–81 and 1885.

<sup>218</sup> Walter Crane, *An artist’s reminiscences* (London: Methuen, 1907), p.142.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p.142.

<sup>220</sup> Letter from Whistler to Charles Augustus Howell (1840–1890), 7 January 1869, University of Glasgow <[www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence](http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence)> [#02825; accessed 22 September 2005].

<sup>221</sup> This was because his wife Edith (*née* Edenborough; 1850–1920) later married, in 1891, the landscape painter Matthew Ridley Corbett (1850–1902) <[www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/people/biog/?bid=Murc\\_A&initial=M](http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/people/biog/?bid=Murc_A&initial=M)> [accessed 22 September 2005]. Crane, *op.cit.*, p.239, records that Arthur and Edith Murch, and Corbett, were living in Rome in the early 1880s, among a larger group of British expatriates. It is likely that Edith and Corbett met there.

murdered their father Sennacherib in cold blood in the temple of “Nisroch his god”, Adrammelech and one of his brothers, Sharezer, flee for their lives. The tableau is a brilliant compendium of British Museum artefacts and reconstructions of Neo-Assyrian architecture lifted from the pages of Layard and those of the architect and architectural historian James Fergusson. The most prominent visual presence is the colossal sculpture of an engaged lion, which originally guarded the gateway leading to the temple of Ishtar at Nimrud (fig.52). Frederick Charles Cooper, one of the artists assigned to Layard by the British Museum, made a watercolour of the newly-excavated lions and flanking tall crenellated altars,<sup>222</sup> that undoubtedly served as the key organising architectural elements in Murch’s *The flight of Adrammelech*. Cooper exhibited work at the Royal Academy and British Institution and was perhaps most widely known for his *Cooper’s grand moving diorama of Nineveh* in the 1850s.<sup>223</sup> The sculpted carpet under the assassins’ feet replicates the designs of several such objects excavated at Nineveh and Nimrud. Several examples of the human- and bird-headed genies or *apkallu* in Murch’s composition figured in the British Museum display, and many others had been published in the 1840s and 1850s from the British and French excavations of the ancient Assyrian capital cities. The elevated clerestory with the chevron-adorned square pillars and coffered ceiling owes more to the fanciful architectural reconstructions of James Fergusson than the mud brick palaces and temples built by the Assyrians, but the design was adopted for the popular polychrome ‘Nineveh Court’ at the Sydenham Crystal Palace, and Murch probably followed Fergusson’s illustrations in this

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<sup>222</sup> Austen Henry Layard, *Discoveries in the ruins of Nineveh and Babylon: With travels in Armenia, Kurdistan and the [surrounding] desert, being the result of a second expedition undertaken for the trustees of the British Museum* (London: John Murray, 1853), p.360. Concerning his interesting role in the circulation of paintings of the contemporary Middle East, see Bohrer, *Orientalism and visual culture*, pp.183–84, 187–91.

<sup>223</sup> See Chapter One, p.54.



matter.<sup>224</sup> Murch's exquisite attention to atmosphere in *The flight of Adrammelech* includes the shadow of an otherwise unseen bird of prey in flight at lower left, evoking in striking chiaroscuro the headlong flight of the parricides.

In *The arrow of deliverance*, Murch illustrates the narrative moment when, at the behest of the dying prophet Elisha, King Joash of Israel is instructed to take bow and arrow and open a window that faces east. "Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the LORD'S deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them" (II Kings 13:17 [KJV]). Behind Joash the wall is carved with an illegible inscription imitating early northwest Semitic script, surrounded by an Egyptianising lotus-and-papyrus design, historicising elements that situate Israel in the Egyptian *Kulturkreis*.<sup>225</sup> While the dying prophet rests in shadow, covered with a garment that suggests the stripes of a Jewish prayer shawl, the sunlit Israelite king wears a fringed tunic and bears arms more in keeping with Assyrian examples. Many British artists of the 1860s and 1870s engaged in illustrating the Old Testament elected to dress their evocations of Israelite and Judahite kings in the style of the Assyrian emperors: this despite the fact that the only Assyrian relief image of an Israelite king, Jehu, identified as such since 1853, bore no particular similarity in royal apparel to the figure of Shalmaneser III before whom Jehu bows in submission. The attractiveness of Assyrian sources for artists of these styles of painting must have been strong and outweighed the 'authentic' offering, recognition operating at a ready and superficial level.

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<sup>224</sup> James Fergusson, *The palaces of Nineveh and Persepolis restored* (London: John Murray, 1851).

<sup>225</sup> The Moabite Stone, discovered in 1868 and widely published thereafter, probably supplied Murch with a template for his convincing—and accurate—archaic script, and is now in the Musée du Louvre, Paris (AO 5066). I am grateful to Steven Holloway for this information.

Murch may have been influenced in his choice of subject by William Dyce, whose *King Joash shooting the arrow of deliverance* (1844; Kunsthalle, Hamburg), was first shown at the Royal Academy in 1844 and again in 1870–71, when Murch may have seen it in person or in reproduction.<sup>226</sup> The painting was reproduced in an article about William Dyce in *The Art Journal* in 1860.<sup>227</sup> Frank William Warwick Topham (1838–1924) exhibited *An arrow of deliverance* (untraced) in Liverpool and he may too have been inspired to treat this subject after Dyce's canvas. Dyce's work (though painted before the discovery of Assyria) seemed to capture the spirit of the times in the 1850s, for one commentator even remarked that:

The composition is unusually severe, as there is an entire absence of accessory; a studied denegation of allusion to the regal state of one, or the prophetic character of the other. We recognise in Joash a conception gathered from the Nineveh sculptures.<sup>228</sup>

Dyce's canvas in fact contains no Assyrian details but Joash's elaborately woven and tasselled tunic triggered associations with the recent archaeological discoveries from Assyria.

The recruitment of Ford Madox Brown (1821–1893) and his involvement with the Dalziel Brothers' *Bible Gallery* can be more precisely detailed because of surviving documentation, which is the most complete of the artists under

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<sup>226</sup> A proof of a wood-engraving by an unknown printmaker, after the painting, is in the British Museum (PD 1976,0619.29). It is not known where the print was published, if at all. *The Art Journal* held that Dyce's two "well-known pictures, *Jacob and Rachel* (59), and *Joash shooting the arrow of deliverance* (99), both lent by Mr. [Gustav Christian] Schwabe, take their place in the gallery as a learned academic Art" ("The Royal Academy: Second exhibition of works by old, and deceased, masters", [February 1871], pp.49–50 [50]).

<sup>227</sup> James Dafforne, 'British artists: Their style and character, with engraved illustrations: No.LI — William Dyce RA', *The Art Journal*, October 1860, pp.293–96 (293).

<sup>228</sup> 'Visits to private galleries of the British school: The collection of Elkanah Bicknell at Herne Hill [London]', *The Art Journal*, January 1857, pp.8–10 (8).

discussion regarding the Dalziels' project. Brown's solo 1865 exhibition in a commercial gallery space on Piccadilly, in the heart of London's commercial art district, provides a useful reference point.<sup>229</sup> One-man shows were comparatively novel at that time and this particular example is the more significant because the commentary in the accompanying catalogue was written by the artist himself and provides an unusually rare insight into an artist's working methods and thought processes. It bears direct relevance here since in that exhibition a clutch of three works was labelled as "first sketches and small works" intended for "Messrs. Dalziel's [sic] illustrated Bible". Brown cites the dual influence of ancient Egyptian and Assyrian sources for much of the costume in these designs and "other nearly contemporary remains". His borrowings were decidedly eclectic, but his designs for the *Bible Gallery* nonetheless reveal his historical leanings.

Brown's involvement with the *Bible Gallery* began in November 1863. The oil painting *Elijah and the widow's son*, based on a design for the project of the same title, was commissioned by the Brighton collector John Hamilton Trist (1811–1890) in 1864 and completed in time for inclusion in Brown's show the following year. Brown had previously worked with the Dalziel Brothers on one of the firm's most celebrated publications, Dyce to which he contributed *The prison of Chillon* in 1857 for a collection of poetry edited by The Rev. Robert Aris Willmott, *Poets of the nineteenth century* (London: George Routledge & Co, 1857). His son-in-law, Ford Madox Hueffer, considered Brown's *Bible Gallery* submissions "some of his most dramatic and successful".<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> *The exhibition of 'Work', and other paintings, by Ford Madox Brown, at the Gallery, 191 Piccadilly* (London: Gallery, 1865). The exhibition was held from March to June 1865.

<sup>230</sup> Ford Madox Hueffer [Ford Madox Ford], *Ford Madox Brown: A record of his life and work* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1896), p.197.

Brown's diary entries from 1847 to 1868 provide evidence of the source for the motifs in his designs for the *Bible Gallery*. The diary was a 'working diary' and hence is fashioned in note-like brevity but nonetheless provides valuable written testimony in his 'distinctive spelling'.<sup>231</sup> In 1855 he went "to the Cristal [*sic*] Palace with whole Family & one servant" in Sydenham and again the following year visited "the Cristal [*sic*] Palace with [my wife] Emma". He is unlikely to have made any sketches or drawings of the displays while in company but would no doubt have been impressed by the larger-than-life reconstructions of ancient architecture, including the so-called 'Nineveh Court'. Brown had much to say in his entry on his Assyrianising *The death of Eglon* (fig.53):

The costume and accessories of this cartoon are taken from Assyrian and Egyptian remains of a remote period. These alone, it seems to me, should guide us in Biblical subjects...The Moabites having remained in Palestine from the time of Abraham and Lot, I have [therefore] given a more Assyrian character to Eglon. Ehud on the contrary, I have thought necessary to represent with more of the Egyptian character, the Israelites having come from that country.<sup>232</sup>

Brown mentioned the "Assyrian [antiquities]...and those of their neighbours, the Egyptians, which we have in the British Museum" available for perusal by interested parties. In a letter of October 1864 he outlined his current and forthcoming submissions for the Dalziel Brothers. *Elijah and the widow's son* had by this time been accepted and his latest design *Joseph's coat* he wished to be considered "on the same terms agreed for the Elijah drawing".<sup>233</sup> He added that the next subjects he "should like to begin [designing are] *Rahab letting the spies*

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<sup>231</sup> *The diary of Ford Madox Brown* (ed. Virginia Surtees; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), p.xv.

<sup>232</sup> Brown, quoted in Kenneth Bendiner, *The art of Ford Madox Brown* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), p.147.

<sup>233</sup> British Library, London (Add. 39168,55).

down from her window Joshua II.15 [and] *Ehud slaying Eglon King of Moab* [Judges III.17–20”, the former of which was not undertaken. Brown eventually published the latter composition as *The death of Eglon*, the design for which was complete just five months later when his solo exhibition opened in March 1865. *Elijah and the widow's son*, *The death of Eglon* and *Joseph's coat* may have been the ‘finished’ pen-and-ink drawings shown in this exhibition that were subsequently photographed, transferred to wood-blocks and cut — thus preserving the original drawings, which are all extant, and have Dalziel Brothers provenances.<sup>234</sup>

Despite Brown's knowledge of the collections of the British Museum, he seems to have based his design for *The death of Eglon* almost entirely on published sources, in particular the numerous small wood-engraved illustrations dotted throughout Layard's *Nineveh and its remains*. This popular source had a wide influence that carried across a range of audiences. Eglon's dais and a section of the wall behind Ehud are inscribed with the distinctive wedge-shaped cuneiform scripts commonly found carved or impressed in Assyrian artefacts, although the texts are gibberish. The goat-headed anthropomorph clutching two small goats to the left of the Israelite is entirely the artist's invention, although possibly inspired by British Museum reliefs of human-headed genies in profile holding deer and goats. Eglon's thick and tightly curled ‘Assyrian’ beard partly obscures the emblems hung around his neck that follow Layard's description of “figures of the sun, moon, and stars, suspended round the neck of the king” seen in several bas-reliefs of Assyrian kings and, again, illustrated in *Nineveh and its remains* (vol.II,

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<sup>234</sup> See Mary Bennett, *Ford Madox Brown: A catalogue raisonné*, 2 vols (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2010), vol.II, pp.470–74 (hereafter Bennett). The exhibited works were (no.67) *Ehud and Eglon, King of Moab* [Johannesburg Art Gallery; Bennett C97], (no.68) *Elijah and the widow's son* [Victoria & Albert Museum, London; Bennett C95] and (no.69) *Jacob and Joseph's coat* [British Museum, London; Bennett C96].

p.338). The dagger heads protruding from Eglon's ample girth are likely to have been taken from Layard's book, which gives a single example of a group of these without citing the source of the illustration. In Brown's composition, two daggers terminate with a chevron pattern, accompanied by a third ending with the head of a horse, exactly, and in the same configuration, as in Layard's illustration (vol.II, opposite p.228). The reversal of the arrangement suggests that Brown may even have made a tracing of the group. The decorative frieze behind Eglon is composed of honeysuckle interspersed with other motifs, again as illustrated from a pattern by Layard from Nimrud. The throne and footstool are composites from various sculpted examples, though the side-table resembles an example from the Northwest Palace at Nimrud in the British Museum. Brown's eclecticism confused some viewers and one critic claimed that he had "found models for his faces in the barbarians on Chinese tea boxes".<sup>235</sup>

Brown becoming known for his handling of Assyrian models through his solo exhibition in 1865 won a commission to illustrate Lord Byron's poem *Sardanapalus* (1821), which appeared in *The poetical works of Lord Byron* (ed. William Michael Rossetti; London: Moxon, 1870). The design was repeated shortly afterwards in a watercolour *The dream of Sardanapalus* (1871; Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, DE; DAM 1935-38), which was commissioned by Frederick Craven (1818-1894), a calico printer from Manchester who collected watercolours, especially reduced watercolour versions of paintings.<sup>236</sup> Craven

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<sup>235</sup> 'Dalziel's [sic] *Bible Gallery*', *Glasgow Herald*, 13 November 1880, p.4 (4).

<sup>236</sup> Craven, late of Thornbridge Hall, Bakewell, Derbyshire formed a large collection of watercolours, including others by Brown, including *Romeo and Juliet* (1867; Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester; Bennett A89), *Jacopo Foscari* (1870; William Morris Gallery, London; Bennett A92), *Elijah and the widow's son* (1868; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Bennett A82.2) and *Cordelia's potion* (1865; Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight; Bennett A87). Craven also owned work by Simeon Solomon, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Edward Burne-Jones,

commissioned this directly from the artist in 1871. Brown also began an oil version in 1873 and another watercolour of 1875, both of which remain untraced.<sup>237</sup> The 1875 watercolour was etched by George Woolliscroft Rhead (1855–1920), who made several prints after Brown, and published by the etcher in 1890 (fig.54). The lost oil version was abandoned until 1890, when it was taken up as a commission from the brewer and leading Manchester civic member Henry Boddington (1849–1925) and completed the following year, in March 1891.<sup>238</sup> Like the *Bible Gallery* designs before them, Brown's rare foray into historical pictures proved commercially lucrative for the artist and popular with his patrons, providing further opportunity for Brown's knowledge of Assyrian motifs to be explored and reworked in each successive version. No repetitions are known to have been made by Brown of *The death of Eglon* but, judging from the many made from his other *Bible Gallery* contributions, it seems entirely possible.<sup>239</sup>

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including the latter's painting series, *Pygmalion and the image* (Private collection) which was bought from the artist; *The dream of Sardanapalus* (1871) was sold at Christie's, London, 18 May 1895, lot 41 to Thomas Agnew & Sons, London for £236 5s for Samuel Bancroft (Bennett 94). See Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class: Money and the making of cultural identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.407 for a brief account of the art collection and biography of Craven.

<sup>237</sup> Stephen Wildman *et al.*, *Waking dreams: The art of the Pre-Raphaelites from the Delaware Art Museum* (Alexandria, VA: Art Services International, 2004), pp.98–99 (98), no.5. The second watercolour (Sotheby's, London, 14 November 1962, lot 83; Bennett A94.1) is known only from an etching made after it by George Woolliscroft Rhead (1855–1920) and exhibited at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in London in 1890 (no.627), an impression of which is in the British Museum (PD 1916,0809.26).

<sup>238</sup> Bennett, *op.cit.*, vol.I, p.257. Macleod, *op.cit.*, does not list Boddington in her appendix of major Victorian art collectors. He did though own, and commission, dozens of work, by Brown, including family portraits.

<sup>239</sup> One design, for example, *Elijah and the widow's son*, was reworked into an oil version of 1864 (Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery; Bennett A82.1) and two watercolours, one in 1864 and until recently in the collection of Seymour Stein (Sotheby's, New York, 11 December 2003, lot 109; Bennett A82) and the other in 1868 (Victoria & Albert Museum, London; Bennett A82.2).

The largest group of designs came from Edward John Poynter (1836–1919) who contributed twelve designs for the *Bible Gallery*. One of these makes clear Assyrian references. His contributions match those of Murch in ambition to provide complete ‘self-enclosed’ worlds entirely centred on archaeological remains, usually Assyrian. Poynter first began exhibiting at the Royal Academy from 1861 onwards and throughout the next decade built a solid reputation as a leading painter of both the historical genre and history painting proper. His works dealt mainly with Egyptian subject matter, sometimes based on episodes from the Bible. In 1864 he exhibited *On guard in the time of the pharaohs* (1864), which personalised this moment from history by focusing on the dutiful action of one attentive guardsman.<sup>240</sup> In 1867–68 he showed at the Dudley Gallery *Adoration to Ra* (1867) that again focused on personal self-absorption, here the individual religious ritual of a single devout Egyptian that was praised for that “rare combination of imagination and patient archaeological research...[of] the thousand details of Egyptian polychromic decoration”.<sup>241</sup> But the undoubted masterpiece from this time was his *Israel in Egypt* (1867; Guildhall Art Gallery, London) shown to singular praise at the Royal Academy in 1867. The *Illustrated London News* marvelled at the “successful application of the modern principle of wedding archaeology with art”.<sup>242</sup> This large canvas, over two meters in length, illustrated the biblical book of Exodus: it was crowded with references to antiquities taken primarily from his close study and intimate knowledge of the Egyptian artefacts on display in the British Museum. The work was reproduced as a double-page

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<sup>240</sup> Sotheby’s, London, 14 June 2001, lot 43.

<sup>241</sup> ‘Fine arts: Winter exhibition at the Dudley Gallery, Piccadilly’, *Illustrated London News*, 9 November 1867, p.522 (522). The work was last sold at Sotheby’s, London, 19 June 1990, lot 53.

<sup>242</sup> ‘Fine arts: Exhibition of the Royal Academy’, *Illustrated London News*, 11 May 1867, p.478 (478).



illustration by the wood-engraver William Luson Thomas (1830–1900) for the *Illustrated London News* in January 1868 and hailed as the perfect “union of archaeology with art”.<sup>243</sup> Throughout his long career, spanning more than six decades, his association with the Royal Academy was close and he eventually rose to become its President in 1896. Poynter later found himself in academic and administrative roles, which saw the tailing off of his artistic practice.<sup>244</sup> Moreover, in the 1880s, his time was increasingly devoted to the history of art and he began publishing a number of textbooks focusing on the major schools of European painting.<sup>245</sup>

Poynter’s contribution to the *Bible Gallery* project consolidated his reputation, made during the 1860s when he exhibited in quick succession a series of history paintings of an ambition rarely seen in British art of the period. Poynter was recruited on the strength of a single work that caught the attention of the Dalziels at a small exhibition in 1862. The work was a watercolour, *Egyptian water-carriers*, which they considered “small, but charming” and which they promptly bought.<sup>246</sup> The strongly defined female profiles and the picture’s

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<sup>243</sup> ‘Israel in Egypt’, *Illustrated London News*, 25 January 1868, pp.84–85 (84).

<sup>244</sup> He became the first Slade Professor of Fine Art at University College London (1871–75), President of the Royal Academy of Arts (1896–1918) and Director of the National Gallery in London (1894–1905).

<sup>245</sup> For example Edward John Poynter and Percy Rendell Head, *Classic and Italian painting* (Illustrated Text-Books of Art Education; New York: Scribner & Welford/London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Co., 1880), Harry John Wilmot-Buxton and Edward John Poynter, *German, Flemish and Dutch painting: Illustrated text-books of art education* (New York: Scribner & Welford and London: Samson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1881) and Edward John Poynter, *Painting, Classic, Early Christian, Italian and Teutonic: Illustrated Handbooks of Art History* (London: Samson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1882).

<sup>246</sup> The work was seen in a small exhibition in Newman Street, possibly an exhibition at Leigh’s Academy (*The Brothers Dalziel*, p.250). The Dalziels probably worked solely with the watercolour for engraving purposes and may not have had the need to commission from Poynter a pen-and-ink drawing of the composition. It

historicist vein must have appealed to Edward Dalziel, who purchased the work from the exhibition and had it translated into the wood-engraving *The Israelites in Egypt: Water-carriers*, evoking the title of Poynter's early masterpiece: it remained in his collection until it was sold in 1886.<sup>247</sup> The work is the only one in the entire *Bible Gallery* that is not directly based on a scriptural episode. By May 1863 Poynter's friend from his Parisian student days, the satirist and illustrator George Du Maurier (1834–1896) wrote that "Old Poynter...intends to keep himself by 'wood' and 'glass' — he has done two very nice drawings for the illustrated Bible which the Dalziels are bringing out & which promises to be a very crack affair".<sup>248</sup> Poynter had completed one of these designs by October that same year and it was praised by his friend as the "best thing he has yet done".<sup>249</sup> Throughout the period of his engagement with the designs for the *Bible Gallery*, Poynter always lived in close proximity to the British Museum, and for several years literally across the street.<sup>250</sup> Surviving drawings of his — now held, appropriately enough, in the British Museum — of identifiable Roman and Egyptian antiquities seen there, attest to his close study of the collection. Poynter undertook extensive research for some of his large paintings — more than seventy drawings can be associated with

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may have been converted into a drawing by one of the firm's in-house draughtsmen, perhaps Thomas Dalziel; Poynter's signature is clumsily drawn, a fact supporting this suggestion.

<sup>247</sup> The watercolour was sold from the (partial) sale of Edward Dalziel (Christie's, London, 19 June 1886, lot 58) and was recently in the collection of Seymour Stein (Sotheby's, New York, 11 December 2003, lot 89).

<sup>248</sup> Letter to the painter and art administrator Thomas Armstrong (1832–1911), in *The young Du Maurier: A selection of his letters 1860–67* (ed. Daphne Du Maurier; London: Peter Davies, 1951), p.204. I am grateful to Alison Inglis for this reference. The two designs Du Maurier refers to are *Moses slaying the Egyptian* and *Moses keeping Jethro's sheep*, and both the drawings on the woodblock for them are in the Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro. Therefore Du Maurier may refer specifically to these two (drawn but uncut) woodblocks.

<sup>249</sup> Du Maurier, *op.cit.*, p.215.

<sup>250</sup> 28 Grafton Street, off Fitzroy Square (1861–64), 62 Great Russell Street (1865–66) and 106 Gower Street (1867–69).

*The Queen of Sheba's visit to King Solomon* (1884–90; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney).<sup>251</sup>

Poynter's interest in the exotica of ancient history extended also to Assyria. His *By the rivers of Babylon* illustrates the plight of the Israelite captives in Babylon as recounted in Psalm 137:1–3 (fig.55):

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.

For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. [KJV]

The three 'Babylonians' engaged with the Israelite harps and harpists are dressed from sandals to diadem or tiara in clothing and ornaments meticulously copied from many examples of Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs in the British Museum. The harps themselves replicate those depicted on Assyrian palace reliefs, as do the beards and male coiffeurs. In the absence of comparable remains from the southern Mesopotamian kingdom of Babylonia, artists like Poynter routinely exploited the Assyrian visual repertoire for models for other Mesopotamian civilisations and, as we shall see, even for Achaemenid Persia. The draperies and hairstyles of the women are in keeping with conventional Greco-Roman historicist artworks, although the two rosette bracelets worn by the figure on the far right might have been inspired by Assyrian prototypes. These seem to have similarly inspired Poynter's friend Simeon Solomon in designs for some of his book-illustrations, which will be discussed shortly. The floral pattern surrounding the

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<sup>251</sup> Alison Inglis in St John Simpson (ed.), *Queen of Sheba: Treasures from ancient Yemen* (London: British Museum Press, 2002), p.23, no.1.

doorway replicates characteristic Assyrian ornamental motifs. Poynter's other Assyrianising contribution, *Daniel's prayer* (based, like Holman Hunt's *Daniel* (fig.30), on Daniel 6:10–11) locates the prophet in an imaginary chamber opulently carved with repeating patterns of Assyrian rosettes, guilloche, lotus-and-bud, and kneeling quadrupeds (fig.56).

Mid-nineteenth century Europe, especially Britain, saw a proliferation of the subject of the Babylonian captivity of the Jews in art because it gave them the opportunity to assimilate the newly-found remains of neighbouring biblical Assyria. In 1846 Henry Nelson O'Neil exhibited at the Royal Academy *By the waters of Babylon* (untraced), exhibiting the canvas later that same year in Liverpool.

John Prescott Knight (1803–1881) submitted in 1853 at the Royal Academy *The prophet Daniel* (untraced) with the line 'By the waters of Babylon' appended in the catalogue. Joseph Bouvier (fl.1839–88) had in 1850 exhibited at the same venue *By the waters of Babylon* (untraced). Later still, in the winter of 1858–59 Simeon Solomon, a *Bible Gallery* contributor, exhibited at the French Gallery *The waters of Babylon* (untraced).<sup>252</sup> The rage for subject matter of the Israelites' captivity in Babylonia spread beyond the confines of the metropolitan exhibition venues centred on London. Liverpool held an annual exhibition in the autumn of contemporary art to which many London-based artists contributed in the hope of

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<sup>252</sup> The work was accompanied in the exhibition catalogue by the following quotation: 'They that carried us away captive required of us a song, and they that wasted us required of us mirth. O Daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed, happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us'. Psalm 137:3,8.

securing a wider market and currency.<sup>253</sup> Solomon exhibited his early masterpiece *The mother of Moses* there in 1862, and *Hosannah!* in 1867, both of which were incorporated into the Dalziels' project.<sup>254</sup> In 1846 at the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolour, London, immediately after the discovery of Assyria, an untitled watercolour was shown by Henry Parson Riviere, appended to which in the catalogue was the familiar quote from Psalm 137:1: 'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion'. In 1860 Chester Earles showed at the Liverpool Society of Fine Arts *The exiles* (untraced), appended to which was a line from Psalm 137:4: 'How shall we sing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land'. The potency of the influence of the Israelites' captivity was felt in other fields beyond the visual arts. In 1865 a new musical score for duet, *By the waters of Babylon* by F F Courtenay, became available for the first time.<sup>255</sup>

The young painter and friend of both Poynter and Du Maurier, Philip Hermogenes Calderon (1833–1898) exhibited at the 1853 Royal Academy a small picture *By the waters of Babylon* (1852; Tate, London; N03677) in which brightly clad and minutely observed figures are set within an overtly English landscape, clearly in direct reference to the emerging Pre-Raphaelite group of painters. Calderon maintained his interest in Mesopotamian subjects throughout his artistic career. His 1880 submission to the Royal Academy, *Captives of his bow and spear*

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<sup>253</sup> O'Neil sent there in 1851 *The scribes reading to the chronicles to Ahasuerus* after it failed to sell at the Royal Academy that summer. It was later owned (by 1855) by James Spence from Liverpool (see Chapter One, p.65).

<sup>254</sup> *Hosannah!* was lent by George Rae (1817–1902), a Liverpoolian banker. He also owned a version of Brown's *Joseph's coat* (1866; Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool; Bennett A83) that he commissioned in 1864. See Macleod, *op.cit.*, pp.463–64.

<sup>255</sup> 'New music', *Illustrated London News*, 13 May 1865, p.459. Ollivier & Co, 10 Old Bond Street, London published the score.

(untraced), was noted by one art critic for its kneeling supplicants before an “Assyrian-looking warrior”.<sup>256</sup>

It is interesting to note that the internationalism of published art criticism allowed exhibition reviews, for example, to be widely circulated across the Western hemisphere. Notices of exhibitions and pictures reached across the Atlantic to the United States to inform American readers, though not (yet) American artists.<sup>257</sup> Calderon’s work thus received international coverage, with *The New York Times* noting that there was “enough good in the side view of the Assyrian conqueror to make one ready to forgive the namby-pamby faces of the women captives kneeling before him”.<sup>258</sup>

Indeed Assyria was often fashioned as an aggressive, and almost exclusively male, force. This aspect of Assyria’s reception was manifest from the first artistic discovery of Assyria in the 1850s and continued into the early work of Mark Rothko a century later, to be discussed in Chapter Five. This view was fashioned, in part, from the biblical accounts of Assyria with its ambitious and aggressive military reach. Poynter’s and Murch’s friend Frederic Leighton in the 1860s looked to Assyria for the model of his powerful male protagonist Elijah in his 1863 Royal Academy picture *Jezebel and Ahab, having caused Naboth to be put to death, go down to take possession of his vineyard; they are met at the entrance by Elijah the Tishbite. ‘Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?’* (fig.57). The biblical source (in I Kings 21) recounts the murder by Ahab, King of Samaria, and his wife Jezebel of a subject, Naboth, to secure his vineyard that lay close to the palace walls.

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<sup>256</sup> ‘The Royal Academy exhibition’, *The Art Journal*, June 1880, pp.186–88 (187).

<sup>257</sup> The first American responses emerged in the 1890s with the work of William de Leftwich Dodge (1867–1935), see Chapter Four. See also the work of the American painter Frederick Arthur Bridgman (1847–1928) who worked in Paris in Chapter Three.

<sup>258</sup> ‘London art galleries: Some characteristics of English painters’, *The New York Times*, 5 June 1880, p.3 (3).

Leighton was at this time working for the Dalziel Brothers and the painting might have been a rejected design of a wood-engraved illustration. In 1862 he wrote to his employers:

I have begun to consider the subjects you propose to me, and will shortly send you a list of the passages in the stories of Samson, of Elijah, and of Jezebel, which appear to me particularly to suggest illustrations.<sup>259</sup>

Elijah offered the chance to portray fashionably masculine bodies and was relevant for Leighton's wider projects to direct British art towards High Renaissance models, typified by Michelangelo. The subject was a popular one for artists working with ancient Assyria. James Thomas Linnell (1823–1905) sent *Elijah running before the chariot of Ahab* to the Royal Academy in 1856 and Bristol in 1859; it might have had Assyrian influence, but reviews of the untraced work are unrevealing.<sup>260</sup> Albert Moore exhibited *Elijah running to Jezreel before Ahab's chariot* in 1861 at the Royal Academy, and *Armitage Ahab and Jezebel* in 1864 at the same venue — both of these works will be discussed shortly. John Absolom (1815–1895) exhibited the watercolour *Elijah's defiance of the priests of Baal (Elijah admonishing Ahab)* with the quote 'If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him' (I Kings 18:21) at the 1866 Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolour, London.<sup>261</sup>

Leighton imparts the forceful message of good versus evil, heroic versus cowardly action. For him the tropes of masculinity were bound up with 'body types'. The healthy muscular body embodied goodness and moral purity. Assyria

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<sup>259</sup> Dalziel Brothers, *op.cit.*, p.238.

<sup>260</sup> 'Academy of the Fine Arts: Fourteenth exhibition of pictures', *Bristol Mercury*, 28 May 1859, p.6 (6).

<sup>261</sup> 'Fine arts: The watercolour exhibitions: Both the societies of painters in watercolours', *The Daily News*, 1 May 1866, p.7 (7).

provided Leighton with these male body types and a ready-made cast of muscular bodies. Elijah opens the vineyard door and discovers the wicked couple. He confronts them with the divine statement; 'Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?' Ahab bows his head in shame but Jezebel is unrepentant and challenges Elijah face-on. Leighton reinforces the divine authority over worldly authority and kingship, with Elijah's tall and erect body dominating the composition. Leighton provides little direct archaeological referencing in this, or other, of his biblical work. Leighton's large picture, over two metres in each dimension, was critically well received.<sup>262</sup> But one critic noted the source of one particular, and distinctive, feature of Leighton's canvas:

The type of head [for Elijah] chosen shows great originality in the painter, who might have contented himself with the old Academic model; he has taken a suggestion from the Nineveh sculptures, and represented Elijah as a dark, thick bearded man, with massive features, and an eye that strikes like lightning from a thunder-cloud upon the miserable Ahab, who cowers as if blasted by the look of superhuman power...<sup>263</sup>

So for Leighton, Assyria provides a model of masculinity, rather than a pattern book of historical emblems. Therefore Assyrian tropes were diversifying into the general artistic cultures of the nineteenth century. Leighton's large painting was first owned, from 1865 to 1882, by Lewis Pocock (1808–1882), the founder of the Art Union of London.<sup>264</sup> Leighton subsequently sent the painting to the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists in late 1863, being keen to secure a purchaser for the work, as many other painters did in the 1860s by sending their works to the

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<sup>262</sup> See Stephen Jones *et al.*, *Frederic Leighton 1830–1896* (London and New York: Royal Academy of Arts and Harry N Abrams, 1996), pp.132–33, no.28.

<sup>263</sup> 'Fine arts: The Royal Academy (Second notice)', *The Daily News*, 7 May 1863, p.3 (3).

<sup>264</sup> Leonée Ormond and Richard Ormond, *Lord Leighton* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1975), p.154, no.86.



many regional centres that showcased contemporary art.<sup>265</sup> In 1864 Leighton sent the work to Liverpool's Institution of Fine Arts.

The appeal of the Elijah subject (with its themes of masculinity) to the budding disciples of Aestheticism, is confirmed by Albert Moore's execution of the same subject. Simeon Solomon's close contact in the 1860s with two artist friends, though not involved in the *Bible Gallery*, William Blake Richmond (1842–1921) and Albert Moore (1841–1893) provided a fertile arena in which Solomon's work for the Dalziels' project found parallels and exchanges in his other work at the time, and in that of Moore and Richmond.

In 1861 Moore showed a somewhat large monochrome drawing *Elijah running to Jezreel before Ahab's chariot* as his principal exhibit at that year's Royal Academy (fig.58). His other contribution to this exhibition was the small oil *The mother of Sisera looked out at a window* (1861; Tullie House Museum, Carlisle). Both works illustrate Old Testament subjects, and mark out the young and ambitious painter seeking altogether higher aims, at historical subjects, for his artistic practice. Up until then his submissions to the Royal Academy were undistinguished still-lives. The decisive shift, and the pertinent timing, seems to have originated from his close contact with Solomon, whom he had met at the Royal Academy Schools in 1858. Richmond recalled the unusual style that Solomon was experimenting with at this time. Richmond noted that Solomon had begun to make a "noble series of designs wholly inspired by the Hebrew Bible, which were indescribably ancient looking and strangely imbued with the semi-

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<sup>265</sup> 'The Society of Artists' exhibition', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 20 August 1863, p.5 (5). The picture was (no.89) in the Great Room.

barbaric life it tells of in the Book of Kings and in the Psalter of David".<sup>266</sup> Moore was probably familiar with Solomon's 'ancient looking' pen-and-ink drawings and he may well have encouraged Moore to produce some in a similar vein.

In the previous year's exhibition, Solomon had shown a work inspired by, but not strictly illustrative of, an episode from the Old Testament: *The mother of Moses* (1860; Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, Delaware), which was critically well received; and official confirmation quickly followed, when the Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts awarded him a medal for it in its category of history painting.<sup>267</sup> The award was received early in 1861, when that year's new submissions were no doubt being decided upon. History painting, which included work illustrating the Bible, of course occupied a privileged position in the artistic canon and many aspiring young painters channelled their initial efforts into this area, until their positions became secure enough to pursue other genres. The high promise of future success for Solomon may well have encouraged Moore to try his hand at biblical subjects, an area he had not previously explored. However, the choice of subject matter — an obscure episode from the Old Testament Book of Kings — and limpid media (pen and ink with sepia wash), may account for the singular lack of critical attention attracted in the press. In contrast, the relatively small oil *The mother of Sisera looked out at a window* was universally positively received, if rather quickly passed over in reviews.

In 1861 Solomon chose to exhibit a dazzling work, replete with numerous patterned surfaces and a vivid palette, *A young musician employed in the Temple service during the Feast of Tabernacles* (fig.59). The work could be seen as a

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<sup>266</sup> Simon Reynolds, *The vision of Simeon Solomon* (Stroud: Catalpa Press 1984), p.5.

<sup>267</sup> 'Society for the Improvement [sic] of the Fine Arts', *Morning Chronicle*, 11 January 1861, p.2 and 'Our weekly gossip', *Athenaeum*, 12 January 1861, pp.53–54 (53).

precursor of the pursuit of abstract beauty that Solomon and others, but principally Moore, would champion in the coming decade. The juxtaposition of patterns with objects and the arrangement of sprigs of foliage hint at later preoccupations. Nonetheless the lengthy title leads us to assume that Solomon was keen to locate the work within a religious context. One perceptive reviewer, Frederick George Stephens (1828–1907) writing in the *Athenaeum*, spotted the origin of the elaborately inlaid ebony and ivory harp carried by “a youth of the highest Jewish type [who] is seen bearing the immemorial ten-stringed harp, such as we find sculpted on the Ninevite bas-reliefs”.<sup>268</sup> Interestingly, both *The mother of Moses* and *A young musician* were bought by the Pre-Raphaelite Leeds-based collector Thomas Edward Plint (1823–1861) shortly before his death.<sup>269</sup>

Solomon had been interested in ancient Near Eastern subject matter for a number of years and it is thought that his Jewish upbringing had fostered a deep interest in his ancestors, who were the subject of so many episodes in the Old Testament and had been famously brought into captivity in Babylon at the instigation of Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>270</sup> In 1859–60 he had exhibited at the French Gallery at 120 Pall Mall a highly worked pen-and-ink drawing *Babylon hath been a golden cup* (fig.60), from the biblical reference to the corrupting influence of Babylon, which has made the “earth drunken” (Jeremiah 51:7 [KJV]). Here drunken revellers cavort and dance, some in a state of undress. A reclining panther laps spilled wine from a fallen vessel. The popular equation of Babylon with licentiousness is made explicit. A figure of undeterminable gender is strumming

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<sup>268</sup> ‘Fine arts: Royal Academy [Fourth notice]’, *Athenaeum*, 25 May 1861, pp.698–700 (698).

<sup>269</sup> Christie’s, London, 7–8 March 1861, lot 286 *The mother of Moses*, and lot 261 *A young musician*. See Macleod, *op. cit.*, pp.460–61.

<sup>270</sup> Reynolds, *op.cit.*, p.5.

on a large harp decorated with inlay. The musician has chunky golden bands from one of which hangs a trinket in the form of an Assyrian deity, Ashur, contained within a winged disc (fig.61). Both the bracelets and the winged disc occur in many Assyrian bas-reliefs unearthed after 1845. The depiction of Ashur features prominently, for example, in one bas-relief acquired by the British Museum in 1849, from the North-West Palace, Nimrud (fig.62).

In 1860 Solomon had also incorporated Assyrian reliefs into the background of the bedchamber of Queen Esther, in another pen-and-ink, *Queen Esther hearing the news of the intended massacre of the Jews under Xerxes* (1860; Private collection, New York), based upon the biblical Book of Esther. The Persian queen, herself of Jewish origin, is pained at hearing the anguish of the imminent slaughter of the Jews in Persia. The table seen in Solomon's drawing was derived from the sculpted table in a panel now in the British Museum that, as we have seen, had also attracted Armstead. From the North Palace in Nineveh, this finely carved panel showing a royal couple at a banquet in the garden, also depicts the harp seen in Solomon's depiction of Esther (fig.63). The same year, Solomon produced another drawing, *David dancing before the ark* (1860; Private collection) with a troupe of musicians equipped with the now ubiquitous harp. This drawing has an affinity of style with Moore's *Elijah running to Jezreel before Ahab's chariot*, with the frieze-like processing figures coming in from the right, as well as the shared technique and monochrome palette. *David dancing before the ark* was also owned by Plint and when sold, in March 1861, was claimed by *The Times* to have carried "ugliness and grotesqueness to their height".<sup>271</sup>

One of Solomon's submissions for the *Dalziels' Bible Gallery* was a reworking of *A young musician employed in the Temple service during the Feast of*

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<sup>271</sup> 'Sale of Pre-Raphaelite pictures', *The Times*, 10 March 1862, p.10 (10).

*Tabernacles*, retitled as *Hosannah!* (fig.64). The *Bible Gallery* was not accompanied by any biblical texts and the titles alone located (or not) the religious settings of the numerous illustrations. The reduced title of Solomon's *Hosannah!* lent towards a more secularised reading of the design, perhaps even towards a meditative celebration of the dual arts of music- and picture-making much in the vein of Aestheticism. Perhaps Solomon had intended the renaming of this work to be an *hommage* to his friend Walter Pater and to his celebrated remark that "all art constantly aspires to the condition of music".<sup>272</sup> In another of these designs commissioned by the Dalziel Brothers, *And David took an harp* (fig.65), King Saul is shown wearing a bracelet, decorated with a single large rosette, lifted straight from one of many Assyrian panels (fig.66).<sup>273</sup> The convergence of interest in the material culture of Assyria ran not only generally between Moore and Solomon but also even to identical pieces. The background of *A young musician employed in the Temple during the Feast of the Tabernacle* (and carried over into *Hosannah!*) has as part of its decoration a peculiar pattern composed of an embracing couple, the source of which it has not been possible to identify (fig.67). Contemporary critics noted that "great inventive skill is shown in the details of the background and ornamentation of the instrument" in Solomon's painting.<sup>274</sup> But the motif seen in the background was not of Solomon's invention, for Moore drew the very same motif, circa 1856–62, on the verso of a sheet of studies after identifiable Assyrian bas-reliefs then on display in the British Museum galleries (fig.68). It can be assumed that the source of the curious intertwined form shares the same origin as

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<sup>272</sup> Walter Pater, 'The school of Giorgione' (1877) quoted in Robyn Asleson, *Albert Moore* (London: Phaidon, 2000), p.95.

<sup>273</sup> This design was not selected for publication in 1881. It was first published in 1894 by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge as *Art pictures from the Old Testament*.

<sup>274</sup> 'Fine arts: Royal Academy (Third notice)', *The Spectator*, 25 May 1861, pp.556–57 (556).

the British Museum illustrations on the recto, the artist keen to record attractive motifs on whatever was to hand, including the verso of already worked sheets. Moore did this a number of times, to judge from surviving examples of the records he made from past art.<sup>275</sup>

Indeed, in 2000 a clutch of drawings by Moore surfaced for the first time that yields many new insights into his early working practices and methods. The drawings comprised, as Christie's noted:

Egyptian architectural details, studies of ancient musical instruments, bridles and costumes, flowers, studies of female figures in classical and ancient Egyptian dress, studies from nature including horses, plants, trees and landscapes, and a caricature of [Algernon Charles] Swinburne.<sup>276</sup>

The drawings are datable to circa 1856–62 by comparison with other dated work. The seventy-nine drawings were pasted down into an unknown number of pages of an album (which no longer survives), and came with an incomplete provenance. It is not known who collected these drawings or when the album was assembled and most are in graphite. The bringing together of these sometimes disparate studies was almost certainly not by Moore himself. Since many of the sheets are worked on both sides, pasting down would have prevented access to the numerous studies that he had built up with the aim, no doubt, of forming a cache of motifs that he would turn to in the course of his future historical work. The drawings all seem to date soon after the move, in 1855, of the Moore family from York to London, and the beginning of Moore's formal art education. One dated drawing in the group, a study of a sprig of ivy in pen and ink, from 1857, gives an approximate

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<sup>275</sup> A number of these are in the British Museum, London. One sheet in particular of studies after Egyptian furniture has other studies after (?) Greek terracottas on the verso (PD 2002,1026.8).

<sup>276</sup> Christie's, London, 8 June 2000, lot 31.

date for the commencement of the remainder, the outer date range determined from Moore's datable work of around 1862-63. It was at about this time that his interest began to turn towards Classical art, and away from the Egyptian and Assyrian sources that formed much of the impetus for the largest group of drawings in the album, and of which the British Museum acquired examples in 2002 and 2003.

So although Christie's did not highlight it in their lot description, focusing on the readily identifiable ancient Egyptian drawings, Moore was deeply interested in Assyria. In particular he made studies of the animated scenes of lions being hunted down with spears by King Ashurbanipal, with chasing lions making desperate last bids of attack, to the careful record of the elaborate equipage of horses being harnessed in preparation for a hunt and other minor studies of stationary horses' profiles (fig.69). The many small studies, some overlapping with one another, are difficult to precisely identify but the leaping lion, at the lower right of the sheet, is from one of the lion-hunting scenes from Nineveh's North Palace in the British Museum (fig.70). His interest also stretched to more contemplative scenes such as that of a lion and lioness relaxing in a garden of luxuriant foliage made up of palm trees and lilies (fig.71). This last drawing was also carefully copied from a bas-relief from King Ashurbanipal's North Palace at Nineveh, and far removed from the bloody arena in which lions are normally depicted in Assyrian art (fig.72).

Moore was deeply influenced by patterns and systems of pattern-making found in numerous surviving examples of elaborately carved stone door-sills. By 1856 several of these were on display at the British Museum.<sup>277</sup> There were

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<sup>277</sup> The contemporary press noted "four or five pavement-slabs are exhibited in the small room adjoining the Assyrian Gallery in the [British] Museum. We have

principally two types and Moore was aware of them both and recorded these in two separate sheets. The first, slightly overlain by the copy of the relaxing lion and lioness panel, is the more complex of the two types, being composed of squares of stylised pine cones, surrounded by rosettes, acanthus, another border of rosettes and the whole finished with a border of the lotus and bud motif (fig.73). Moore had copied the pattern from the sole example for this type of door-sill in the British Museum (fig.74). The other sheet is entirely given over to the study of patterns found in Assyrian art, both representational and non-representational (fig.75). The less complicated version of the door-sill was made up of a continuous series of overlapping circles (giving the appearance of a sea of six-petalled flowers) surrounded by the same rosettes as in the other version and the lotus and bud motif (fig.76).<sup>278</sup> The geometric patterning found on examples of stone buckets typically carried by winged deities also caught Moore's eye, and recorded on this drawing. The stylised representation of trees was noted in this sheet, with the artist questioning whether the trees represented oak or pollarded willow (as indicated by the inscriptions in the upper margin), though we are left in no doubt as to the ultimate source of all these patterns: "Oak (?) Pollar[...]ed willow (?) /Fir/assyria". The trees seem to be from bas-reliefs from the South-West Palace of Sennacherib, Nineveh in the British Museum, though the precise panel is difficult to identify.

The numerous studies of Assyrian lion hunts and decorative elements derived from door-sills, and elsewhere, were utilised by Moore to the full in his 1861 pen-and-ink *Elijah running to Jezreel before Ahab's chariot*. Another sheet of

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engraved two specimens. They are admirably cut, and the relative proportions of the different ornaments well studied" ("The British Museum: Additions to the Assyrian sculptures", *Illustrated London News*, 24 May 1856, pp.553-54 (554)).  
<sup>278</sup> Two examples of these carved door-sills are in the British Museum (ME 118910 [fig.78] and 118913 [fig.75]). Both were acquired in 1856.



studies of horses' legs can be related to this work and while there is nothing to suggest that they were taken from Assyrian reliefs there is equally nothing to discount that they were not; and being associated as they are with these other studies whose origin is certain, it seems that Moore having decided his composition, made auxiliary sketches of equine anatomy.<sup>279</sup> The 'awkward' quality found in the exhibited work may be accounted for by the study of Assyrian-sculpted equine anatomy rather than from life. This was an entirely deliberate choice on the part of the artist — as, for example, a surviving drawing for the head of Elijah (c.1861; Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery) shows. As noted by Asleson, it betrays an assured draughtsmanship quite different from the stilted work as completed.<sup>280</sup> Moore consciously adopts the 'archaising' style derived from the ancient Assyrian prototypes. He signals a move from Assyrian 'subject' toward Assyrian 'style' in which the painted representation adopts some of the essentially two-dimensional organisation of the pictorial space seen in Assyrian bas-reliefs.

The interlocking circular patterning seen in Assyrian door-sills continued to haunt the artist when he had departed from his archeologically-focused work of the early 1860s and assumed his path toward the exploration of Classical and abstract beauty. A cartoon for *Birds of the air* (c.1878; Victoria and Albert Museum, London) is scored with the aid of a compass with this same pattern of overlapping circles that traces, literally, the articulation of the single female body within the overall composition so that the entire canvas is underpinned by a rigid geometric order. Moore did this, as has been recently noted by Asleson, to "transform a cacophonous medley of patterns into a perfectly balanced and harmonious

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<sup>279</sup> See, for example, one such drawing in the British Museum, London (PD 2003,0429.6 recto).

<sup>280</sup> Asleson, *op.cit.*, p.30.

picture".<sup>281</sup> The simple sheet of studies from different Assyrian bas-reliefs prefigures the approaches that he would later adopt in his mature output. It has seldom been acknowledged that the pattern forms of Assyria provided an early inspiration for the later classicising style of Aestheticism.

Other artists in the 1860s were also attracted to Assyrian art for its abstract decorative, beyond the usual biblical framework. The painter Frederick Goodall (1822–1904), like William Holman Hunt before him, sought to immerse himself in the authentic landscape of the Bible and set off for extended sojourns in the Holy Land. He later remarked that his "sole object in paying my first visit to Egypt [in 1858–59] was to paint scriptural subjects".<sup>282</sup> For Goodall the aim was to produce numerous sketches and studies that would serve as the basis for large exhibition paintings to be executed on his return to London. Following his first visit to Egypt in 1858–59, Goodall exhibited at the Royal Academy, and elsewhere, a virtually unbroken sequence of pictures inspired by the topography and associations of biblical Egypt. His first work in this vein was *Early morning in the wilderness of Shur* (1860; Guildhall Art Gallery, London). Goodall was well acquainted with the collections in the British Museum and occasionally inserted objects into his canvases in a vague attempt at historicism, but never shared the passion or inclination towards archaeological exactitude of other artists such as Poynter or Alma-Tadema.<sup>283</sup>

Goodall turned to Assyria for purely decorative purposes, unlike many other colleagues, who explored other layers of meaning. In 1868 at the Royal

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<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, p.146.

<sup>282</sup> *The reminiscences of Frederick Goodall RA, with two portraits* (London and Newcastle-on-Tyne: Walter Scott Publishing Co Ltd, 1902), p.97.

<sup>283</sup> Donato Esposito, 'From ancient Egypt to Victorian London: The impact of ancient Egyptian furniture on British art and design 1850-1900', *Decorative Arts Society Journal*, 27, 2003, pp.80–93.

Academy Goodall exhibited a pair of paintings, *Mater dolorosa* and *Mater purissima* (fig.77), emblematical representations of motherhood that partly derived from the Christian iconography of the Virgin Mary, in which single female figures are set in a temple interior. The latter work was later described by A G Temple in his history of Victorian art:

In it is shown a young Israelitish woman with downcast eyes and in grey and white vesture, bearing to the door of the tabernacle, in accordance with the levitical law, her offering of two turtle-doves. It is a work of great beauty and dignity, and admirable as an example of finish.<sup>284</sup>

Indeed, the figure in this picture stands before an elaborately carved wall, and replicates exactly a Neo-Assyrian door-sill from Ashurbanipal's North Palace at Nineveh, acquired by the British Museum in 1856 (fig.78). Goodall has upended the floor covering that originally flanked important palatial entrances and arbitrarily adapted the elaborate pattern of interlocking circles to form a foil to the simply robed, brooding female figure. Critics seem to have been unaware of the artist's source since the borrowing went unobserved. Like a magpie Goodall has selected and inserted the patterning into his painting for decorative effect alone. Divested of an explicit biblical setting, the pair of works instead functioned as explorations of contrasts: light and dark, plain and decorated, contentment and sorrow. The oppositional nature of the two works was reinforced when translated into print form since prints were (essentially) a play of contrasts, of black ink and white paper. Ernest Gambart (1814–1902) had commissioned reduced replicas of the pair for large mixed-method prints by Samuel Cousins (1801–1887) that were published in July 1869. Pairs of prints were an attractive commercial proposition,

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<sup>284</sup> A G Temple, *The art of painting in the Queen's reign: being a glance at some of the painters and paintings of the British school during the last sixty years* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1897), p.138.

and the monochromic tones of the paintings facilitated the reproduction into black and white prints, intended for the middle-class interior. The works gained therefore in visibility. The original pair of paintings remained together and in 1897 were recorded in the collection of Lawrence James Baker (1828–1921), of Ottershaw Park, Surrey but are now both untraced.<sup>285</sup> The reduced replicas also appear to have separated at an early time. *Mater purissima*, with Assyrian patterning, was in 1875 with the art dealer Arthur Tooth and displayed in his winter exhibition that year.<sup>286</sup> *Mater purissima* was sold at Christie's in 1894 from the 'collection of a nobleman': *Mater dolorosa* was by 1897 in the possession of William Knox D'Arcy (1849–1917), of Stanmore Hall, Middlesex.<sup>287</sup>

The study of Egypt and Assyria evidently went hand in hand, as a letter from William Blake Richmond (1842–1921) demonstrates. Richmond was Moore's other great friend, beside Solomon, that he had while a student at the Royal Academy Schools. A revealing letter he wrote to his brother in 1862 gives good evidence as to the sort of approaches he (and Moore) would have taken in the planning and research for their pictures:

I have just finished reading one of the most interesting books...*Wilkinsons' Ancient Egypt* and have I hope got some good out of it. They must indeed have been extraordinary people, full of genius and taste. The British Museum has been a source of much pleasure to me, I have been making drawings from some of the Assyrian sculptures and learning something about the costumes etc.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Temple, *op.cit.*, p.138.

<sup>286</sup> 'Mr. Arthur Tooth's Gallery', *The Era*, 26 November 1876, p.6 (6).

<sup>287</sup> Temple, *op.cit.*, p.138. D'Arcy had commissioned from William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones the tapestry series *The Holy Grail* (1890–95), see Stephen Wildman and John Christian *et al.*, *Edward Burne-Jones: Victorian artist-dreamer* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), pp.298–304.

<sup>288</sup> Letter to Thomas Knyvett Richmond (1835–1901), 16 October 1862, in the Royal Academy of Arts, London (RI/1/11/2) quoted in Asleson, *op.cit.*, pp.27, 30.

The British Museum then (as now) offered the visitor a bewildering assortment of ancient civilisations in juxtaposition to one another, and many first learned of the riches contained within from publications of the specialist and non-specialist variety, encouraging visitors to seek out the actual sources of the illustrations. The publication that Richmond was referring to was John Gardiner Wilkinson's *Manners and customs of the ancient Egyptians* (1837), which went into three editions, and the young painter was probably referring to the 1854 edition. It was much used by artists for securing details for their historical subjects. The Assyrian equivalent was Layard's *Monuments of Nineveh* of 1849 and *Nineveh and its remains* of the following year. Sometimes the use of them was made too closely and the painter Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836–1912) fell foul of using publications too closely. He had used a reproduction of a harpist for his early work *An Egyptian widow in the time of Diocletian* (1872; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) despite the harpist being accidentally reproduced upside down in Wilkinson's publication.<sup>289</sup> Alma-Tadema then reproduced in his painting the harp exactly as in the illustration, upside down!

The lack of colour in these illustrations too, only introduced in publishing much later, would have encouraged painters to seek out the actual examples for themselves. The material remains of Egypt often retained their original bright colouring, in contrast to those from Assyria where colour was rarely preserved. This may have encouraged Moore, for example, towards the sombre monochromatic palette of *Elijah running to Jezreel before Ahab's chariot*; while, in his oil painting, Sisera's mother wears a pearl necklace with an elaborate green

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<sup>289</sup> Edwin Becker *et al.* (eds), *Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema* (New York: Rizzoli 1998), pp.170–71; Swanson, *op.cit.*, p.165, no.141.

pendant formed of the Egyptian god Bes in faience and a lotus-decorated enamel. Moore certainly was interested in the most colourful examples of Egyptian art in the British Museum's collection, the numerous fragments of wall-paintings — principally those from the tomb of the scribe Nebamun, two of which Moore had made drawings after: the goose census (fig.79) and another untraced example after the garden scene with the pool surrounded by trees and inscribed by Moore 'trees from a conventional Egyptian fresco'.<sup>290</sup>

Moore undoubtedly drew directly in the galleries of the British Museum — unlike Alma-Tadema, who usually made drawings or tracings from publications and only seemed to have ventured into the galleries when he required aspects of colour, not decipherable from the black and white wood-engraved illustrations then current. Thus the few drawings by Alma-Tadema of antiquities are watercolours in which he captured the inlay of the decoration of ancient Egyptian wooden furniture or the colouring of tomb wall-paintings.<sup>291</sup> Moore, on the other hand, was attracted to the linear aspects of ancient art available in the British Museum, and this was especially directed towards Assyrian reliefs in which deep three-dimensional modelling was sacrificed for clear silhouettes in shallow relief. In Moore's *Elijah running to Jezreel before Ahab's chariot* he displays this angular, rather awkward, quality seen in these ancient prototypes. Moore was even taken by the emphasis on crisp outline from bright polychromatic art works seen, for example, in painted Egyptian wall-paintings. In the drawing from the goose census he was attracted by the play of the sweep of the birds' necks, craning forward around the feet of the Egyptian official (fig.79). Moore did not seek official permission to sketch in the antiquities galleries of the British Museum, and it is

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<sup>290</sup> Reproduced in the Christie's sale catalogue of 2000.

<sup>291</sup> Examples of these are in the collection of the University of Birmingham Library.

thought that he avoided the need for this by sketching during normal museum opening hours.<sup>292</sup> The drawings are made on white thin card that could be held in one hand. Because several are known to have been worked on both sides it is likely that he had a small pack of these cards and wandering through the galleries he would sketch attractive objects, frequently utilising both sides of blank card to quickly record as one side became full. Occasionally Moore produced exquisite drawings, carefully centred on the sheet and free from any *pentimenti* or annotations, of particularly cherished items. One of these, after an ancient Egyptian limestone double portrait of a nobleman and his wife, reveals a confident and fluent draughtsmanship (fig.80). The crisp linear qualities of the stylised pleated dress and wigs must have appealed to Moore.

The taste for biblical subjects was for Moore and Solomon short-lived. By 1863 Solomon was exhibiting work devoid of narrative and focused on explorations of harmonious colour and forms, although, as we have seen, Assyria fed into this melting pot. Moore exhibited his last Old Testament subject in 1862 and was by the following year developing themes that would form the new direction of his artwork. The Old Testament figures from the biblical Song of Solomon formed the inspiration for the large oil *The Shulamite* (1864–66; Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool) but eschewed any ancient Near Eastern referencing and instead owed a clear debt to the east pediment of the Parthenon in the British Museum. Though informed by art of the past, Moore became utterly unconcerned with archaeological exactitude, treating the elegant figures robed in pastel-coloured drapery as abstract forms arranged within the pictorial space. His interest in pattern-making as the principal vehicle of his practice was coming to the fore, and in a work such as *Dancing girl resting* (1863–64; Private collection)

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<sup>292</sup> Asleson, *op.cit.*, p.22.

Moore juxtaposes geometric tiled floor and wall hangings with variegated marble, rippling drapery and mottled fur. The shared explorations, by Moore and Solomon, took their inspiration from their early interests and established an unlikely root of Aestheticism in the newly discovered remains of Assyria.

However, while Moore and Solomon were in the mid-1860s moving away from biblical work and towards Aestheticism, the official acceptance of Assyria into the art establishment, which had not been the case in the 1850s, was taking hold. It was adopted by a younger generation of artists including Louisa Starr, née Canziani (1845–1909), who in December 1867 won the gold medal for the best historical painting at the Royal Academy Schools biennial student competition. Nine paintings were submitted for this category of the competition. The winning work *David brought before Saul (or David showing the head of Goliath to Saul)* received widespread acclaim, in which the “composition is simple, and the artist acted wisely in not loading it with numerous figures and accessories, as under the circumstances she might well have been tempted to do”.<sup>293</sup> The critic seems to warn against proliferation of archaeological “accessories”, suggesting a weariness in some quarters with the historical genre painting of the 1860s. Others marvelled at the work’s fine “tone” and “colour”.<sup>294</sup> The composition illustrates the biblical passage: “And as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand” (I Samuel 17:57 [KJV]).

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<sup>293</sup> ‘Selected pictures: David brought before Saul: Louisa Starr, painter. S S Smith, engraver’, *The Art Journal*, April 1871, p.100 (100).

<sup>294</sup> ‘Fine arts’, *The Examiner*, 14 December 1867, p.793 (793).



Starr's professional career was different from that of many women artists, as outlined by Deborah Cherry.<sup>295</sup> Her upbringing was cosmopolitan and privileged. Born in Philadelphia to Anglo-Italian parents, her father was a banker, and she came to England in 1858 and studied at both Heatherley's School, and the Royal Academy Schools from 1862–67. However, the course of her intended career (like other women artists) was not smooth, though eventually Starr "won the reluctant consent of her parents to study art".<sup>296</sup> From 1866–68 she lived at 14 Russell Square in Bloomsbury, a mere block away from the British Museum. The national collection functioned to mediate artistic responses to Assyria in the 1850s and 1860s, accommodating both established and emerging artistic practices. It did so despite the proliferation of Assyria on the printed page. The primacy of the British Museum in Assyria's reception underscores the primacy of direct engagement with artefacts in the artistic mediation of Assyria.

Starr's work was soon reproduced as a wood-engraving the following month in the *Illustrated London News* (fig.81).<sup>297</sup> The print was subsequently re-published a few months later in France in the weekly-illustrated journal *L'Univers Illustré*.<sup>298</sup> Starr first exhibited the work at the 1868 Royal Academy. The wooden throne of King Saul incorporates a motif from a carved Assyrian ivory with a winged demon, but which has yet to be identified (fig.82). Samuel S Smith's engraving that appeared in *The Art Journal* for April 1871 further enhanced the work's prestige. Critics applauded the "originality in the conception...good

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<sup>295</sup> Deborah Cherry, *Painting women: Victorian women artists* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p.33.

<sup>296</sup> Ellen Clayton, *English female artists* (London: Tinsley, 1876), vol.II, p.133 quoted in Cherry, p.31.

<sup>297</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 4 January 1868, p.12. The print was accompanied by a short review ('Fine arts: The Royal Academy gold medals for painting and sculpture', p.13).

<sup>298</sup> L De Morancez, 'David présentant a Sâul la tête de Goliath', *L'Univers Illustré*, 18 April 1868, pp.247–48.

drawing, and many passages of good, if low-toned, colour” seen in the work.<sup>299</sup> Starr was the first woman to win the prestigious medal.<sup>300</sup>

Despite the later fame of the *Dalziels' Bible Gallery*, during the 1860s it was known solely within the artistic circle of the contributors. The public knew nothing of it. For them the prominent arena for the artistic engagement with Assyria was the exhibition picture. Aside from the Royal Academy, Royal Society of British Artists and British Institution encountered in Chapter One, where oil paintings were privileged and other works unfavourably treated, other arenas in the 1860s, ones that championed watercolour, began to feature in the engagement. One of these was the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolour, founded in 1831. Edward Henry Corbould (1815–1905) showed there a number of Assyrianising works in the 1860s. The first of these, in 1860, was *Saul and the witch of Endor* (1860; Private collection), which depicts Saul's visit to the witch of Endor and the appearance of the ghost of Samuel, who predicts Saul's forthcoming defeat and death (I Samuel 28:3–20).<sup>301</sup> It was shown later that year at both the Royal Manchester Institution and Liverpool and, like other works seen in Chapter One, it had a life beyond its *début* in London. Later, it remained unsold and the artist sent the watercolour to the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists in 1863. By 1870 it had

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<sup>299</sup> '[Royal] Academy exhibition (Third notice)', *The Times*, 2 June 1868, p.6 (6).

<sup>300</sup> 'Fine arts', *The Examiner*, 14 December 1867, p.793 (793) and 'The distribution of the medals at the Royal Academy', *The Era*, 15 December 1867, p.5 (5).

<sup>301</sup> Sotheby's, London, 8–9 June 1993, lot 101. Corbould's large exhibition watercolours rivalled oil paintings in both size and minutely observed detail. For example, two works now in the Royal Collection that are each slightly larger in dimension than one by one metre, and which were both exhibited at the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolour, *The woman taken in adultery* (1842; exhibited 1842) and *The coronation scene from Meyerbeer's 'Le Prophète'* (1850; exhibited 1851). See Kate Heard in Jonathan Marsden (ed.), *Albert and Victoria: Art and love* (London: Royal Collection Publications, 2010), pp.136–37, no.72 and pp.138–39, no.73 respectively.

sold and was in the hands of a Scottish art dealer. The rise of the dealer and commercial art spaces with exhibition cycles is a frequently overlooked arena in nineteenth-century discourses. The work appeared in the third annual exhibition of watercolours at the art dealer James McClure & Son of Buchanan Street, Glasgow in 1870.<sup>302</sup>

The watercolour is heavily indebted in composition to past art, specifically Benjamin West (1738–1820) and his earlier depiction of the same subject, *Saul and the witch of Endor* (1777; Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Conn.).<sup>303</sup> The composition was engraved on three occasions: the most notable was that by William Sharp (1749–1824). In 1779 the canvas was in the collection of Daniel Daulby (d.1799), Liverpool. Corbould ‘updated’ West’s composition with the insertion of a carved altar from Khorsabad, illustrated in Layard’s *Nineveh and its remains*.<sup>304</sup> The altar, with its distinctive outline, is dimly visible in a surviving preparatory monochrome wash drawing for the watercolour (fig.83).

Corbould might have previously, with *Salome dancing before Herod*, shown in Liverpool in 1851, explored Assyrian motifs. The work remains untraced and no reviews appear to have been written, but it was a subject that other artists later used in the exploration with Assyria, such as Georges Rochegrosse (see Chapter Three). Later in 1868 Corbould exhibited in London at his usual venue a work with the same title, which might (in the light of his Assyrian interest in the 1860s) be indebted to Assyria, but again the untraced work appears not to have been reviewed, making this supposition difficult to prove. In 1866 Corbould submitted *The entry of Jehu into Jezreel* to the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolour,

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<sup>302</sup> ‘Exhibition of Watercolours’, *Glasgow Daily Herald*, 29 January 1870, p.4 (4).

<sup>303</sup> Helmut von Erffa and Allen Staley, *The paintings of Benjamin West* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), pp.311–12, no.275.

<sup>304</sup> Layard, *op.cit.*, p.113.

London (henceforth RI). It is based on the biblical passage: "And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at the window. And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Had Zimri peace, who slew his master? And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, Who is on my side? who? And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs; and he said, throw her down. So they threw her down: and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: and he trode [sic] her underfoot." (II Kings 9:30–33 [KJV]). Corbould looked to Assyria for the source for the decoration of the pelmets hung from Jezebel's balcony, and the equipage of Jehu and his companions are taken from Assyrian bas-reliefs of horses and their riders. The work was met with a torrent of negative criticism, with some offended by the irreverent "spectacular operatic gaudiness...and the showy parade of the hippodrome".<sup>305</sup> This sentiment was felt by others who deplored the supposed similarity to contemporary popular entertainments in which the work:

...has certainly the merit of being bold, energetic, and original; but, from the trappings of the horses to the violent demonstration of the charioteer, Jehu, the whole work has too much the character of an Astley's [Royal Amphitheatre] Circus to please us.<sup>306</sup>

Corbould also faced accusations of mistreatment and confusing his supposed sources, with one critic in particular noting "the whole group [of figures in the watercolour] being more suggestive of Peruvian history than of the ancient [Near] East".<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> 'Fine arts: Exhibition of the Institute of Painters in Watercolour', *Illustrated London News*, 28 April 1866, p.411 (411).

<sup>306</sup> 'Institute of Painters in Watercolours: Thirty-second annual exhibition', *The Era*, 29 April 1866, p.14 (14).

<sup>307</sup> 'Fine arts: The watercolour exhibitions', *The Daily News*, 1 May 1866, p.7 (7).

Other painters of a greater stature and popularity than Corbould also failed to escape the charge of confusing their sources. But critics were equally at fault. Despite the increased visibility of Assyria in museum galleries, photographic reproductions and in books and other printed matter, it was sometimes glaringly misinterpreted and misidentified. In 1864 Alma-Tadema exhibited at the Paris Salon his early masterpiece *Pastimes in ancient Egypt 3,000 years ago* (1863; Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston) as *Les Égyptiens de la XVIIe Dynastie*, depicting feasting and dancing set in ancient Egypt.<sup>308</sup> Encouragingly, for both the young artist and the category of historical genre, the work won a medal.<sup>309</sup> The work was immediately purchased from the artist by the art dealer Ernest Gambart and in early 1865 exhibited by him (with two others by Alma-Tadema) at his French Gallery at 120 Pall Mall, London. Unfortunately, Alma-Tadema's canvas was accidentally listed as 'An evening party in Nineveh'. Significantly, the mistake passed unnoticed from under the noses of several critics and one review, unknown to Swanson in his *catalogue raisonné* of 1990, heaped misguided praise upon the painter's supposed source:

The first [of three works] is a large and fanciful picture, helped out in its design by a little authority from Mr. Layard's exhumed marbles, and a large increment of imagination.<sup>310</sup>

In France the leading art periodical *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* greeted the work, in 1864, as a specimen of "archaïsme".<sup>311</sup> Perhaps the archaic historicising tendency

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<sup>308</sup> Vern Swanson, *The biography and catalogue raisonné of the paintings of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema* (London: Garton & Co, 1990), pp.131–32, no.56.

<sup>309</sup> 'Récompenses: Décernées aux artistes pour l'exposition de 1864', *L'Univers Illustré*, 18 May 1864, p.315 (315).

<sup>310</sup> 'French Gallery of Fine Art, 120 Pall Mall: Twelfth annual exhibition of the French and Flemish schools', *The Era*, 16 April 1865, p.6 (6): Not cited in Swanson, *op.cit.*

of the painter's early work was too dense with references to meaningfully unravel or interpret. His work at this time openly evokes Armitage's successful Royal Academy submissions from the 1850s and 1860s, for example; but unlike Armitage, Alma-Tadema channels his energies not towards the problems of contemporary religious representation (as, for example, Giebelhausen asserts) but towards the 'dead' pursuit of historical genre.<sup>312</sup> *Pastimes in ancient Egypt 3,000 years ago* is not a religious painting, but nonetheless makes overtures to that genre. Alma-Tadema's friendship with the Scottish painter William Bell Scott (1811-1890) might have encouraged the latter to submit his *The eve of the deluge* to the winter exhibition at the French Gallery in 1865-66. It depicts the loading of the Ark before the Flood and is based upon the following biblical passage: "For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe [Noah] entered into the ark" (Matthew 24:38 [KJV]). Two versions of the composition, both from 1865, are known: one in a private collection (fig.84), and the other in Tate, London (N01322), which was the example exhibited at the French Gallery. The work is full of Assyrian motifs. The clay pots in the foreground are studded with Mesopotamian cuneiform script (fig.85), the harp is from a bas-relief, perhaps from the so-called 'The banquet scene' (fig.63). Scott's painting, with Noah and his family entering the ark while their neighbours scoff, emphasises the sensuality of those left behind in their comfortable surroundings, to be swept away by the rising waters. with their comfortable surroundings. The spectator looks past a prince embracing two bare-breasted young women, at the left, who observe a sceptical drinker mockingly offer

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<sup>311</sup> Léon Lagrange, 'Le Salon de 1864: V', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1864, pp.526-36 (530).

<sup>312</sup> See Michaela Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible: Representation and belief in mid-Victorian Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

Noah and his family a toast. The prince has a distinctive 'Assyrian' tightly-curved beard (fig.86). The patriarch is shown about to enter the ark, above which has suddenly appeared the only cloud in an otherwise empty sky. Alarmed, one of the servants points to it, but no one else has yet seen the approaching danger. Scott had close contact with the Pre-Raphaelites and their circle, chiefly through his friendship with Rossetti. In this picture he contrasts the debauched Eastern prince and his court, with Noah and his family who, only too aware of the significance of the ominous cloud in the sky, are entering the Ark. *The Times* critic greeted the work with praise for Scott's archaeological research but was equivocal about which course that research should have taken, towards ancient Egypt or ancient Assyria:

The scene is under the open verandah of a palace, where an antediluvian chieftain sits surrounded by his concubines and attendants and all the paraphernalia of a luxurious feast, mocking at Noah and his sons, as they work at the ark below. No indication of the coming Flood is visible but one huge pile of storm cloud on the remote horizon, reflecting the glow of sunset, which steeps the whole picture. Mr. Scott has availed himself of all recent antiquarian research in contriving the dresses, accessories, and architecture of his picture. Of course, all he has done in this way is open [himself up] to the question by what right he has assigned Assyrian and Egyptian fashions to the world before the Flood.<sup>313</sup>

So Assyria was a controversial topic in some quarters, concerning the question of religious authenticity. Scott made a larger version of the painting now in Tate (also dated 1865) and sent that to Edinburgh's Royal Scottish Academy in early 1867, where it immediately sold.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> 'Winter picture exhibitions, at the French Gallery, 120 Pall Mall, and the Gallery of British Artists, Suffolk Street', *The Times*, 1 November 1865, p.7 (7).

<sup>314</sup> It was recently in the collection of John and Julie Schaeffer, Sydney (Christie's, London, 9 June 2004, lot 22).

For some artists Assyria was a mere passing concern, a slight 'turn' in their practice and passed over for another fashion, but for others it became a matter of priority. During the 1860s Armitage's take-up of Assyria, which began as early as 1850 with his canvas *Aholibah*, as we have seen in Chapter One, might now in the following decade be described as a mania amongst his other productions. His minor submissions to the 1861 Royal Academy were greeted with hails of complaint, one critic lamenting, "When shall we see the like of his *Aholibah*?"<sup>315</sup> In 1864 the artist submitted the untraced *Ahab and Jezebel*. The work was satirised in graphic form in the newspaper *Fun* (fig.87). The background of the chamber has a pastiche of a human-headed Assyrian deity, placed before a row of archers. The Assyrian debt is clear too from the criticism the canvas received in the press. The *Illustrated London News* declared:

The Assyrian character of the ornaments seems to indicate the influence of the neighbouring empire, and the inclination of Ahab towards the fashions as well as the gods and prophets of his heathen enemies.<sup>316</sup>

Armitage sent *Ahab and Jezebel* to Birmingham in 1865. There one critic enjoyed the subject of the picture, describing how there was "enough attention to detail to satisfy an archaeologist".<sup>317</sup> Other reviews from London allow the "large picture" to be reconstructed, in which "Ahab lies upon a couch, looking envious, but irresolute, while Jezebel leans on the head of the couch, and seems to whisper murderous

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<sup>315</sup> 'Fine arts: Royal Academy [First notice]', *Athenaeum*, 4 May 1861, pp.599–601 (599).

<sup>316</sup> 'Fine arts: Exhibition of the Royal Academy', *Illustrated London News*, 7 May 1864, pp.454–55 (455).

<sup>317</sup> 'The [Royal] Society of Artists' exhibition', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 28 August 1865, p.5 (5).



thoughts into his ear".<sup>318</sup> The couch is based upon that depicted in 'The banquet scene' (fig.63).

The lost work is difficult to judge properly from the satirical sketch derived from it that was reproduced in *Fun*. Nonetheless one critic noted a shift in the use Armitage made in it from Assyrian sculpture. The critic of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* noted the "literal detail which is now dominant in our modern school" but found in the work something more: effectively, the move from Assyrian 'subject' toward Assyrian 'style', in which the painted representation adopts some of the essentially two-dimensional organisation of the pictorial space seen in Assyrian bas-reliefs. The critic observed admiringly the:

Rich regal robes and sumptuous palatial decorations are studiously transcribed from the works of Mr Layard, or taken direct from the Assyrian remains in the British Museum. It is also interesting to mark how the artist has given to his picture the manner of an ancient bas-relief, how he has brought the liberty allowed to the one art under subjection to the severity imposed by the other.<sup>319</sup>

Armitage in his painting exploited the "severity" of Assyrian art, as Moore had done in his work of approximately the same date, *Elijah running to Jezreel before Ahab's chariot*. The juxtaposition of rich patterns against plainer surrounding areas, a reduction in the pictorial perspective space and an overall simplicity in arrangement to prominent silhouettes, point to a close absorption of Assyrian prototypes.

However, the undisputed masterpiece of Armitage's Assyrian engagement and one of the most 'totalising' Assyrianised works is his *Esther's banquet*, and it was also one of the most visible, if not *the* most visible, and publically known

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<sup>318</sup> 'Fine arts: The Royal Academy', *The Daily News*, 2 May 1864, p.6 (6).

<sup>319</sup> 'The London art season', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, July 1864, pp.86–104 (87). I am grateful to Jill Armitage for this reference.

Assyrian-influenced work from the mid-1860s onwards. First submitted to the Royal Academy in 1865, it was later that year shown in Liverpool. In 1866 it was exhibited at both the Royal Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts and Royal Birmingham Society of Artists. The following year it was Armitage's sole representation at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1867. It was also a star attraction at the influential 'National Exhibition of Works of Art' in Leeds in 1868 and can clearly be seen in a view of the main gallery containing contemporary British painting (fig.88). It was also exhibited at the London International Exhibition in 1871. The work appeared as a full-page illustration in the *Illustrated London News* in October 1865 (fig.89).<sup>320</sup> The composition was subsequently reworked into another version, dated 1865, and formed the painter's Diploma Picture upon his election as a Royal Academician, being accepted in 1873 (fig.90).

The picture was based upon the dramatic moment when Haman, the former favourite and Prime Minister in the Persian court of King Ahasuerus, is denounced by Esther (Book of Esther VII:7-8). Haman had intended to massacre all Jews in Persia and Esther, herself Jewish, pre-empts the plans and informs her husband. The feast takes place during the Jewish fast. Haman must be removed to save the Jewish population and he is seen pleading with Esther before he is manhandled away to death. The background is decorated with a bull hunt, taken exactly from a relief in the British Museum, which was first published in the *Illustrated London News* in 1847. The appearance of the sculpture, with others at the time, "excited the curiosity not only of the antiquarian but of all scriptural students, from the illustration which they afford of passages in Holy Writ, of which all material traces

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<sup>320</sup> Wood-engraving by William Luson Thomas (1830-1900); *Illustrated London News*, 28 October 1865, p.424.

appeared to be lost".<sup>321</sup> Armitage was the first to use this relief in his work. Critics greeted Armitage's new work as a triumph: a triumph of invention, a triumph of his Continental training and a triumph of archaeological referencing. The *Illustrated London News* followed up its 1847 illustration of the British Museum relief with its full-page illustration of Armitage's *hommage*. Meanwhile, the *Athenaeum* declared:

No more forcible contrast to these works could be devised than that which is afforded by Mr. Armitage's severe, solid and powerful picture, *Esther's banquet* (422). The prayer of Haman for his life is the subject which has given Mr. Armitage a noble opportunity for the display of extraordinary skill in design, power with human expression, and very learned drawing...<sup>322</sup>

The British public were becoming familiar, through the work of Paul Delaroche (1797–1856), with the French school of archaising historical genre. Many knew Armitage's training under Delaroche in Paris. Indeed, *The Examiner* was impressed with this Continental training, which few British artists enjoyed:

The work has in every figure sterling thought, and is worthy to sustain the credit of an artist who, with genius of his own, has had a Delaroche to teach him how to use it.<sup>323</sup>

Critics at its regional showings were as impressed as their London counterparts.

The critic of the *Glasgow Evening Herald* was gushing in its praise:

The figure of Esther is skilfully drawn and draped...The countenance, and indeed the whole attitude of the wretched Haman, is admirably conceived and powerfully delineated; and equally effective is the figure of the angry

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<sup>321</sup> 'The Nimroud sculptures', *Illustrated London News*, 26 June 1847, pp.409–10 (409).

<sup>322</sup> 'Fine arts: Royal Academy', *Athenaeum*, 6 May 1865, pp. 626–29 (627).

<sup>323</sup> 'Fine arts: Pictures of the year (Concluding notice)', *The Examiner*, 10 June 1865, pp.361–64 (361).

king, who stands clutching his sword hilt, and scowling ominously on the supplicant. There is much forcible painting, too, in the three cut-throat looking ruffians who have laid hold of the fallen minister [Haman], and are about to drag him to his doom. In the accessories of his picture, Mr. Armitage has made good use of the Assyrian sculptures, and has thus been able to impart to the scene a striking air of verisimilitude.<sup>324</sup>

So while Aestheticism was taking hold in some quarters, the fashion for historicist detail continued simultaneously elsewhere.

Armitage exhibited another work at a new venue set up along democratic lines that bypassed membership, in contrast to the traditions of the Royal Academy, Royal Watercolour Society and other venues, which favoured work by members. In the winter of 1867–68 Armitage sent *Bel and the dragon* to the Dudley Gallery, London. The now untraced work received a lengthy review in the *Illustrated London News*, which offers both glimpses into the pictorial elements and explains the obscure back-story of the narrative:

Mr. Armitage, wherein this artist draws upon the Assyrian discoveries, as he had already done in *Esther's banquet* (which we have engraved [fig.88]) and other works. The subject is a pictorial commentary on the apocryphal story of *Bel and the dragon*. In this picture we have a supposititious restoration of the interior of the Babylonish temple to Bel, the colossal hawk-headed idol being raised on a platform to the right, round him are the remains of the enormous quantities of flour, and sheep, and wine offered as his daily provisions. On the other side Daniel is pointing out to King Cyrus the footsteps of the priests. 'Under the table' is the 'privy entrance, whereby they (the priests) entered in continually and consumed those things'; and down which is seen slyly descending one of those 'esurient phantasms and the sons of Bel and the Dragon' as Carlyle would call them.<sup>325</sup>

It was perhaps natural that the archaeological reconstructions of Assyria, by artists such as Armitage, would be celebrated and supported by the more documentary

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<sup>324</sup> 'Fine Art Institute [of Glasgow]: Third notice', *Glasgow Daily Herald*, 24 February 1866, p.6 (6).

<sup>325</sup> 'Fine arts: Winter exhibition at the Dudley Gallery, Piccadilly', *Illustrated London News*, 9 November 1867, p.522 (522).

strand of the press, and the popular cultural reportage seen in, for example, the *Illustrated London News*.

Armitage's depiction of the denunciation of Haman might have also directly inspired the sole contribution to the *Bible Gallery* project by Edward Frederick Brewtnall (1846–1902). His print, *Haman supplicating Esther*, signals the assimilation of Assyria in a variety of ways (fig.91). Instead of the banquet hall of Armitage's work, the scene is Esther's bed-chamber, the walls of which are decorated with *sgraffito*-like figurative panels intended to suggest sculpted bas-reliefs. The suite of furniture, the couch upon which Esther reclines and the side-table beside it are taken directly from the carved bas-relief depicting Ashurbanipal and his queen at a banquet from the North Palace, Nineveh, and acquired by the British Museum in 1856 (fig.63). The bas-relief became one of the most celebrated Assyrian artworks from the 1860s onwards, and the *Illustrated London News* published a detailed account of the romantic discovery of the piece in 1855, together with an illustration of the piece as it was found (fig.46), slightly damaged:

In the centre of this [important space] and the two adjoining rooms were tumbled in wild confusion with the mass of earth which filled them, a large number of sculptured slabs, which must have fallen from some superstructure. They varied considerably in subject and size; one measured fourteen feet by ten feet, and contained some 150 figures, processions, battles, chariots, warriors, and horsemen; but, perhaps, the most important of the fallen sculptures is that which we this week engrave, a quarter its real size. The remainder of the slab was broken, and its fragments irrecoverably lost. It is the first representation of an Assyrian Queen found on a bas-relief. She wears a mural crown, is seated on a high-backed chair, and has a carved footstool. Behind are attendants fanning her and bringing refreshments. The King, similarly attended, is reclining on a couch. Beside him is a table, on which is a small box ornamented with two small winged-bulls. The whole of these articles of furniture are elaborately carved. Their majesties each hold a cup, and seem to be drinking one another's health right royally beneath an arbour of grapes.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> 'Recent discoveries at Nineveh', *Illustrated London News*, 3 November 1855, pp.521–22 (522).

Relatively little Persian art was on display at the British Museum at this time or even known, so Brewtnall, in keeping with his contemporaries, conjured up the Achaemenid court using Neo-Assyrian visual elements familiar to museum visitors and, as we have seen, widely circulated in the press. Brewtnall may also have seen the relief in books. Bonomi included the banquet relief, as we have seen, in the third edition of his *Nineveh and its palaces*. Bonomi's book, originally published in 1852, quickly went into a second edition in 1853, and three subsequent editions in 1857, 1865 and 1869. The historian George Rawlinson illustrated the bas-relief in his four-volume *The five great monarchies of the ancient world; or the history, geography and antiquities of Chaldea, Assyria, Babylon, Media and Persia* (London: John Murray, 1862–67). In Brewtnall's image, the side-table, formed of intersecting cross-bars with a single central support, the two bands of incised decoration, lion's paws supported upon a bar and in turn terminating in conical feet, is exactly as in the celebrated Ashurbanipal relief. Haman's sandals and rosette bracelet are lifted from numerous sculpted examples in the British Museum's collection. The glowering Ahasuerus, with full square-cut beard and peaked headpiece, unmistakably mimics an Assyrian king in full royal regalia. The turn to Assyria, then, for some biblical work, even for non-Assyrian subjects, was marked. Assyria, then recently unearthed and 'novel', offered the possibility to explore Mesopotamian subjects that must have, for so long, frustrated nineteenth-century artists and the strict demands for 'authenticity' that they, and their publics, sought in biblical work. Yet as we have seen, these demands were ambiguous. On the one hand artists were praised for the archaeological referencing in their work, and on the other some were accused of being too 'severe' and unimaginative.

During the 1860s, the rising visibility of the artistic discovery of Assyria was felt in London and in the expanding artistic horizons of the regions too. Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester saw exhibition pictures (paintings and watercolours) engaging with Assyria. Mass-produced prints of these works appeared in the *Illustrated London News*, together with more expensive single-sheet prints intended to furnish middle-class interiors. In many ways, the expanded turn to Assyria during this decade piggy-backed on the turn to Egypt. The twin influencing factors of the British Museum and the Bible continued to mediate the response to Assyria. But gradually the biblical ties, which tightly bound Assyria's reception in the 1850s and 1860s, were loosening. Beyond the biblical narrative Assyria also offered abstracted systems of pattern-making and design, which appealed most strongly to an emerging artistic youth that internalised these engagements with Assyria, even if they moved on from them to a fully-blown classicising Aestheticism. As we shall see in Chapter Four, by the 1870s the engagement took place on its own terms of reference, which allowed Assyria some artistic autonomy in the linked artistic landscape of Britain and France.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Imagining the exotic: The French reception of Assyria

Throughout the nineteenth century the cities of London and Paris, which were (and remain) disproportionately large in relation to their respective countries, were envisioned as 'modern Babylons'. In an article on the late painter Benjamin West (1738–1820), as early as 1825, *The Examiner* had written: "London, increased and still increased London: 'Not Babylon of old, more fam'd than she' ".<sup>327</sup> In April 1865 *The Times* reported with horror the unrelenting "pressure of the population of this ever-swelling Babylon" in reference to London.<sup>328</sup> The painter Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), and a central character in the French artistic discovery of Assyria, wrote to a close friend in 1848 of Paris and confided that he hoped he would "have fewer unpleasant excitements in the country than we do in our Babylon".<sup>329</sup> Similarly referring to another period of political turmoil in Paris, Émile Zola (1840–1902) in his novel *La débâcle* (1892) evoked the lost glory of the Parisian capital torched by the insurgent Communards during the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71, likening the city to a "Babylon in flames".<sup>330</sup> The French press, in comparing the geographical spread and population size of the British and French capitals, invoked "Londres la Babylone des nations...Ninive

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<sup>327</sup> J H, 'Fine arts: National Gallery — Works of the late President [of the Royal Academy: Letter] to the editor of the Examiner', *The Examiner*, 6 November 1825, pp.707–08 (707).

<sup>328</sup> 'London, Tuesday, 11 April, 1865', *The Times*, 11 April 1865, p.8 (8).

<sup>329</sup> Eugène Delacroix: *Selected letters 1813–1863* (ed. Jean Stewart; London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1971), p.282.

<sup>330</sup> Émile Zola, *La débâcle* (translation by Elinor Dorday; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.491.



moderne".<sup>331</sup> The appellation extended to other cities, especially large mercantile centres such as Manchester, which was described in the 1850s as one "huge manufacturing Babylon".<sup>332</sup> The comparison came again when Manchester was described in 1857 with a population "half million swarming in her streets...no-one knows where the huge manufacturing Babylon terminates".<sup>333</sup> Undoubtedly the most notorious evocation of 'Babylon' in nineteenth-century parlance came in July 1885 when the journalist William Thomas Stead (1849–1912), editor of the daily *Pall Mall Gazette*, issued a four-part *exposé* of child prostitution called 'The maiden tribute of modern Babylon'.<sup>334</sup> It sent shock waves throughout British society and brought to the surface uncomfortable social, moral and sexual issues. The first part began 'In ancient times...', underscoring the connection between the squalid present and the inglorious distant past. Stead's exposure of child prostitution quickly led to the raising of the age of consent from 13 to 16 in the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885), passed the following month, in August 1885.

The arrival of the large quantities of Assyrian artefacts into both London and Paris in the late 1840s galvanised public perceptions and identification with the ancient, barbarous Babylonian empire that had captured Assyria in 612 BCE and absorbed much Assyrian art into its own artistic vocabulary: in the nineteenth-century mind, the two had become intertwined. Indeed, in 1871 the publication by Anna de Godefroy-Ménilglaise, *Sodome, Ninive, Jérusalem: Admonestation à Paris* used the recent discovery of Nineveh in the contemporary Middle East to warn

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<sup>331</sup> 'Paris monumental: Place de la Concorde', *Journal des Beaux-Arts et de la Littérature*, 1839, pp.3–9 (3).

<sup>332</sup> 'Fine arts: The Art Treasures [of the United Kingdom] Exhibition (by a foreign traveller)', *The Daily News*, 28 May 1857, p.2 (2).

<sup>333</sup> 'Fine arts: The Art Treasures Exhibition (by a foreign traveller)', *The Daily News*, 28 May 1857, p.2 (2).

<sup>334</sup> For the detailed back-story and consequences of the articles, see Judith R Walkowitz, *City of dreadful delight: Narratives of sexual danger in late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992), pp.81–120.

French readers against moral bankruptcy, her message's urgent relevance no doubt heightened by the devastation of Paris in the Franco-Prussian War. She wrote of the rediscovered Nineveh that she was perhaps too much self-enamoured, too "proud of her magnificence".<sup>335</sup> Indeed, the shared context of interest in Babylon and Nineveh in Britain and France was a very real one in the nineteenth century, not least because it was these two countries who led the excavations at the mid-century, as we have seen in Chapter One.

The French excavations centred on the late Assyrian capital at Khorsabad, while those of Britain centred on Nimrud, and later Nineveh. The French agent in the field, Paul Émile Botta, soon published a sumptuously illustrated history, *Monument de Ninive* (Paris: 1849–50), which sought to expand the cultural and imperial ambitions of the famous Napoleonic publication *Le description de l'Égypte* (1809), and in which he hailed the discovery of ancient Assyria as "un nouveau monde d'antiquités" (a new world of antiquities).<sup>336</sup> The Louvre formally opened the permanent display of Assyria on 1 May 1847 as the Musée Assyrienne, ahead of the British display in London.<sup>337</sup> The designation of the display as a 'musée' (museum) is revealing. Kaina has suggested that the term deliberately distanced Assyria as wholly separate, and independent from, normative non-Western cultures such as Greece or Rome, which underscored the alienness of the finds.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> Anna de Godefroy-Ménilglaise, *Sodome, Ninive, Jérusalem: Admonestation à Paris* (Paris: Jouby & Roger, 1871), p.27; "s'enorgueillit de sa magnificence".

<sup>336</sup> Paul Émile Botta, *Monument de Ninive* (Paris: 1849–50), vol.V, p.5 quoted in Philipa Kaina, *Between history and modernity: Negotiating subjectivity in the early work of Edgar Degas, c.1854–1870* (Unpublished Ph.D., University College London, University of London, 2008), vol.I, p.65.

<sup>337</sup> Elisabeth Fontan, 'Adrien de Longpérier et la création du musée assyrien du Louvre' in Elisabeth Fontan (ed.), *De Khorsabad à Paris* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1994), pp.242–47 for a discussion of the foundation of the display.

<sup>338</sup> Kaina, *op.cit.*, p.68.

The same applied to the other neighbouring 'musée' with which Assyria was (literally) positioned by France, such as the 'Musée Egyptien' in adjoining galleries. Moreover, the prefix 'musée' discursively appropriated the ancient civilisations into the overarching canon that, at the same time, internalised them, forming and maintaining the "self-contained worlds within themselves", as Kaina describes it.<sup>339</sup> Nonetheless, the Musée Assyrien had quickly found popularity with the general museum-visiting public and, by 1854, the Assyrian antiquities had become a firm favourite at the Louvre: "Some [visitors] have been loitering in its long picture galleries, some have preferred the rooms consecrated by the royal relics, and some have been gazing at the Nineveh Marbles".<sup>340</sup> As in Britain, Assyria was subsumed under a single term: Nineveh. Guides to the collection were produced in the 1850s and 1860s.<sup>341</sup>

The French reception of Assyria tended to avoid the confines of biblical narrative and authority. However, Victor Place (1818–1875) the French consul in Mosul who oversaw the work of Botta, from 1851 to 1861, had entrenched views. He published a letter in the weekly newspaper *La Gazette du Midi* that affirmed the biblical authority of the finds that he himself, with others, was responsible for unearthing: "It is with the Bible in our hands that we must visit Assyria: there all the past remains are still in existence".<sup>342</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, the specific reference to Nineveh was erased from the displays at the Louvre in a climate that now privileged the new cultures of anthropology over biblical

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<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, p.68.

<sup>340</sup> 'A Sunday in Paris', *Bristol Mercury*, 7 October 1854, p.4 (4).

<sup>341</sup> H L Feer, *Les ruines de Ninive, ou description des palais détruits des bords du Tigre, suivie d'une description du musée assyrien du Louvre* (Strasbourg: Veuve Berger-Levrault, 1864).

<sup>342</sup> Quoted in 'Discoveries in Western Persia — The Tower of Babel', *The Blackburn Standard*, 18 March 1857, p.4 (4).

reference points. Instead, all the ancient Near and Far Eastern material was merged to form an amorphous cultural grouping in sculpture galleries that were now labelled 'Musée des antiquités asiatiques'. The new designation can be seen in tourist guides to the city, such as one published in the popular Baedeker guide to Paris from 1898.<sup>343</sup>

Like the response in Britain, France saw Assyria within the overarching hierarchy in which Greece was the pinnacle. In a review of the Paris Salon in 1846 one newspaper critic spoke of the "immense superiority of the Greek antique" (immense supériorité de la Grèce antique) in relation to history painting and ideals in art.<sup>344</sup> France too, like Britain, engaged with Assyria at many levels, both scholarly and popular. An equal, but slightly earlier, correspondence across the Channel matched the explosion of illustrated journalism in the 1840s in Britain. *Le Magasin Pittoresque* appeared in 1833, but the format was modest and the illustrations few. The first important publication to properly match the *Illustrated London News* was the weekly *L'Illustration*, which began publication in 1843. Others, such as *Le Monde Illustré* and *L'Univers Illustré*, both started production the following decade. *Le Magasin Pittoresque* quickly reported to its readers the recent rediscovery of ancient Assyria in the Middle East.<sup>345</sup> Other early newspaper reports in 1846 of the rediscovery were impressed with the great size of the finds

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<sup>343</sup> Karl Baedeker, *Paris and its environs, with routes from London to Paris: Handbook for travellers* (13<sup>th</sup> edition; Paris: Leipzig and London: Karl Baedeker and Dulau & Co, 1898).

<sup>344</sup> 'Beaux-arts: Salon de 1846 (Premier article)', *L'Illustration*, 21 March 1846, pp.35–39 (35).

<sup>345</sup> 'Découvertes archéologiques: Faites a Ninive, en 1843 et 1844, par M. Botta (Premier article)', *Le Magasin Pittoresque*, 1844, pp.283–86.

and the planned logistics of the transportation to France.<sup>346</sup> Thus in France, as in Britain, the timely rediscovery and appearance of Assyria as topical news coincided with technological innovations that disseminated Botta's "new world of antiquities" widely throughout France.

Yet the French art world seems not to have engaged with Assyria until relatively late, many decades after its discovery in the 1840s, and later than the British response. The first in-depth article published in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* on Assyria did not appear until 1868.<sup>347</sup> Furthermore, the French artistic response to Assyria was patchy and uneven. Many artists took it up on a single occasion, but a few took the interest to a deep and sustained level as some artists did in Britain. Many adopted the motifs in a superficial way, introducing borrowings simply within the narrow confines of decoration. Others looked to the novel material culture of Assyria to expand the subject matter of Salon submissions, which were important at the time, but these were few in number. Bohrer notes that "to look for Assyrian imagery in France is, quite literally, to search for glaring absences as well as almost ghostly presences".<sup>348</sup> But since Bohrer's *Orientalism and visual culture: Imaging Mesopotamia in nineteenth-century Europe* (2003), both new names, and works, can be added to those he had considered, to form an expanded French corpus and one in which the "ghostly presence" takes on a more palpable form with subtle nuances and artistic turns.

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<sup>346</sup> 'Découverte des antiquités de Ninive a Mossoul', *L'illustration*, 27 June 1846, pp.267-69.

<sup>347</sup> François Lenormant, 'Les antiquités de l'Assyrie de Babylone: Premier article', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 24 [Premier période], March 1868, pp.201-18.

<sup>348</sup> Bohrer, *op.cit.*, p.258.

The publicly exhibited picture was the dominant artistic response to Assyria in France, and remained so throughout much of the nineteenth century. This turn to Assyria could be argued to have begun, quite neatly, with the late inclusion in the Paris Salon of 1827–28 of Delacroix's immense canvas *The death of Sardanapalus* (fig.3).<sup>349</sup> The work would cast a long shadow upon French, and British, artistic responses to Assyria throughout the nineteenth century. It was first exhibited at the Salon in 1827 and based upon Byron's drama *Sardanapalus* of 1821. Byron's conception of the doomed King of Assyria faced with certain defeat by insurgent armies in his palace at Nineveh, focused on the king's dramatic choice to instead die an inglorious death by ordering the destruction of his own possessions and himself, upon a funeral pyre. Byron based his play on the description of the monarch given by a Roman source. Here, the Roman historian Diodorus Siculus in *Bibliothek historica [Library of history]* (II, xxiii, 1–2) describes the Assyrian ruler:

He was the last monarch of the Assyrians and surpassed all his predecessors in luxury and sloth. For besides keeping hidden from everyone outside the palace, he lived the life of a woman. Consorting with concubines, and also spinning purple thread of the softest wool, he wore the dress of a woman and, by means of white lead and other viles of the courtesans, he rendered his face and his entire body more delicate than any girl's; he even took pains to have a voice like a woman. In his revels, he not only indulged in those foods and drinks most capable of stimulating continual lust, but he also partook of the carnal delights of a woman as well as those of a man; for he practices sexual promiscuity toward either gender without restraint, caring not a bit for the disgrace attending this behaviour.

Almost every year throughout his career Delacroix painted some theme from Byron and here, though deviating from the actual narrative described by Byron, he nonetheless pays tribute to his greatest idol. The painter himself described the

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<sup>349</sup> Lee Johnson, *The paintings of Eugène Delacroix: A critical catalogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), vol.I, pp.114–21, no.125, vol.II, plate 125.

painting in rather dispassionate tones, in answer to an enquiry about a forthcoming article on his publicly exhibited work: "Sardanapalus, besieged in his palace by his rebellious subjects, has all his women put to death and burns himself alive with all his treasures".<sup>350</sup> Yet it is a scene of tremendous carnage. Just glimpsed top right, enemy forces penetrate the walled city of Nineveh but rather than face the enemy, or at least take charge, the ruler has withdrawn to his private chambers and prepares for death. Perhaps his avoidance of a confrontation and resignation to defeat is the cause of his demise. His exit strategy, one that I would like to call the 'inglorious death', was strangely attractive (at least sometimes) in French nineteenth-century culture, in both the visual and literary fields.

Sardanapalan imagery is recalled, for example, in an episode in the sensational Émile Zola novel *Nana* (1880). Elsewhere, as noted by other commentators, in Zola's *L'Assommoir* (1877) a wedding party finds themselves in the Musée Assyrienne at the Louvre.<sup>351</sup> But in the later work the reference is more subtle. *Nana*, the successful courtesan, has just won a small fortune on a horse race at the annual Grand Prix de Paris. In her apartment a few days later she is chatting with her aunt Madame Lerat about the exposure of Count Xavier de Vandevres, a client of hers, as a race fixer and his exclusion from polite society: "Nana was all agog

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<sup>350</sup> *Delacroix: Selected letters, op.cit.*, p.211.

<sup>351</sup> "When the wedding party entered the Assyrian Gallery, on the lower level, they all gave a little shiver. Christ, it wasn't exactly warm! The room would have made a first-rate cellar. Slowly, tilting up their chins and blinking their eyes, the couples walked along between the giant stone statues, the silent gods of black marble in their rigid hieratical poses, and the monstrous creatures, half-cat, half-woman, whose pinched noses and swollen lips made their faces look like death masks. They thought them all very ugly. People worked stone a lot better these days. An inscription in Phoenician characters left them flabbergasted. No, it wasn't possible, nobody had ever read that scribbling! But Monsieur Madinier, who'd already reached the first landing with Madame Lorilleux, was calling to them, shouting under the vaulted ceiling: 'Come along! Don't bother about those contraptions...It's the first floor [with paintings] you want to see!': Émile Zola, *L'Assommoir* (translation by Margaret Mauldon; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995; 1998 edition), p.75.

with a story that had set all Paris talking: Bandeuvres had been warned off every racecourse and that same night blackballed at the Imperial Club. Next day, he'd set fire to his stables and been burnt to death with all his horses".<sup>352</sup> He, like Sardanapalus when faced with defeat, had chosen an inglorious exit, and to destroy all he held dear — his prized thoroughbreds — and himself, in a great inferno. Monsieur Labordette shortly joins Nana and Madame Lerat and, continuing the thread of conversation, finds their male friend defending Vandeuvres' actions. Nana revels in the prurient details:

It's not ignominious to go up in flames like that in his stables. I think it took real guts to die like that...apparently it was dreadful, enough to make your flesh creep. He'd arranged for everybody to keep away and shut himself in there with some kerosene...You should have seen the blaze it made! Just imagine, a building made almost entirely of timber and full of straw and hay...The flames were shooting up almost as high as a church tower...the best part was the horses who didn't want to be roasted to a cinder. You could hear them lashing out and smashing against the door and crying out like human beings. Yes, a lot of people had a deathly feeling afterwards.<sup>353</sup>

The description markedly evokes that seen in Delacroix's own vision of the fiery death throes of Sardanapalus and the fate of his steeds and other possessions, animate or otherwise, in the cool determination of his decision. Religious overtones, in the reference to the church tower, set the moral compass regarding this self-inflicted madness. Nana concludes her gory account with a fantastic admission: "Poor man! It was such a wonderful way to go!".

Indeed, nineteenth-century France held a special attachment to the powerful association of long-lost empires and civilisations. The description of the concluding chapter of *Nana* in a letter to Zola from his friend, the novelist Gustave

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<sup>352</sup> Émile Zola, *Nana* (translation by Douglas Parmée; Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.340.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, p.341.



Flaubert, caught the mood of the time and confirmed the association with 'Assyria': "Chapter 14, unsurpassable!...Yes!...Christ Almighty!...Incomparable...Straight out of Babylon!".<sup>354</sup> Other literary works by Zola reference Sardanapalan imagery. In *Doctor Pascal* (1893), the burnt remains of the drunkard Antoine Macquart are discovered in his home after a social visit by his nephew Doctor Pascal, and by his great-niece Clotilde Rougon, having grown anxious at his disappearance. Uncle Macquart had accidentally burned to death from having set himself alight with his fallen pipe, after falling asleep during a heavy bout of drinking. His nephew, having deduced the events of his clumsy death, declared ruefully: "...and now he dies a royal death, like the prince of drunkards, blazing away of his own accord, consumed in the funeral pile of his own body!"<sup>355</sup> The reference to drunkenness and the royal 'funeral pile' points squarely to Sardanapalus.<sup>356</sup> The publication of *Doctor Pascal* in 1893 coincides with the then-recent appearance at the Paris Salon, of two monumentally sized depictions of this notorious Assyrian monarch's suicide, in 1891. These works by Georges Rochegrosse and Louis Chalon, to be considered later, might have vividly suggested to Zola the consumption by flames of the hapless monarch which he later evoked with the inveterate drunkard Uncle Macquart.

The first tangible artistic response to Assyria came in an early work by the Impressionist painter Edgar Degas (1834–1917) in the 1860s. Henri Loyrette in the monumental Degas exhibition of 1988–89 shown in Paris, Ottawa and New

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<sup>354</sup> See Wayne Andersen, *Cézanne and the eternal feminine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), especially chapters seven and eight.

<sup>355</sup> Émile Zola, *Doctor Pascal* (translation by Vladimir Kean; London: Elek Books, 1957), p.179.

<sup>356</sup> See F W J Hemmings, 'Fire in Zola's fiction: Variations on an elemental theme', *Yale French Studies*, 42, 1969, pp.26–37.

York devoted one of the longest entries in the exhibition catalogue to Degas' early unfinished work *Sémiramis construisant Babylone* (*Semiramis building Babylon*) (fig.7).<sup>357</sup> The painting was the subject of a lengthy article by Geneviève Monnier in 1978 in which she attempted to chart the evolution of this complex work, using the many surviving preparatory and related drawings, all of which are now in French national collections.<sup>358</sup> Degas' engagement with the horse is well known. In 1998 there was a large exhibition of his equestrian works at the National Gallery of Art in Washington which considered the multi-faceted relationship the French painter had with horses and equestrian subjects, both on and off the track.<sup>359</sup> Included in the exhibition was an early drawing, from about 1855–56 in black chalk, of a section of the west frieze of the Parthenon from Athens.<sup>360</sup> This sensitive rendering of the particular anatomy and external musculature of the horse is among the first depictions by the artist of the subject that would engage him throughout his long career. The drawing was most likely executed at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, where the artist had registered as a pupil on 6 April 1855, with Louis Lamothe (1822–1869). (Lamothe was himself a pupil of Ingres, an artist Degas would come to admire. In later life, with growing wealth, Degas came to own a clutch of drawings and paintings by Ingres. The drawing was purchased by the French State at the first *atelier* sale of the artist in 1918, following his death.<sup>361</sup>) The artist in the 1870s came to London to consult the vast swathes of the ancient

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<sup>357</sup> Henri Loyrette in Jean Sutherland Boggs *et al.*, *Degas* (New York and Ottawa: Metropolitan Museum of Art and National Gallery of Canada, 1988), pp.89–92, no.29.

<sup>358</sup> Geneviève Monnier, 'La genèse d'une œuvre de Degas: *Sémiramis construisant une ville*', *La Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France*, 5–6, 1978, pp.407–26.

<sup>359</sup> Jean Sutherland Boggs *et al.*, *Degas at the races* (Washington: London and New Haven, CT: National Gallery of Art and Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>360</sup> Musée du Louvre, Paris (RF 15529).

<sup>361</sup> *Vente atelier Edgar Degas [Vente I]*: Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 6–8 May 1918, lot 7b (part of lot; not illustrated); Musée du Louvre, Paris (Fonds d'Orsay; RF 15529).

Greek friezes and pedimental sculptures housed in the British Museum, but this particular section remained in Athens and Degas could only have made such a delicate drawing, with special attention to the shadows made by the relief, from a plaster cast of the original. In another small sketchbook dating from approximately the same time he records other sections of the equestrian cavalcade and its preparation depicted on the frieze. These first tentative forays into past art coloured the artist's first public submissions at a time when he was launching his career following a three-year trip of artistic discovery in Italy. Indeed, *Sémiramis* bears some resemblance to the work of Piero Della Francesca as well. For Degas, Babylon was not only seen through Assyrian eyes; other influences were also in operation, and that of Piero Della Francesca has been noted in several examinations.<sup>362</sup>

The Parthenon frieze has often been used to explain the organisation of Degas' early racing pictures. Of interest here of course is the influence of Assyria and its part among other past cultures, in the conception and evolution of the early masterpiece by Degas, *Sémiramis construisant Babylone* (fig.7). Conceived around 1859, the painting was intended to be among the first the artist was contemplating submitting to the annual prestigious Paris Salon, the crucial forum for artistic production in mid-century France. But it was abandoned unfinished around 1861 and never exhibited during the artist's lifetime. The work has attracted the attention of recent scholars engaged with the mapping of French artistic responses to Assyria, especially in the first few decades following the discovery by the French of Khorsabad in 1845. Bohrer, for example, has drawn attention to a number of drawings in Degas' notebooks of Assyrian sculpture he had studied in the Louvre but concedes that although painting displayed "a certain ancient Near Eastern

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<sup>362</sup> See, for example, Loyrette, *op.cit.*, pp.89–92.

currency in artistic discourse, [it was] a degree of reference with little consistent visual definition to articulate it".<sup>363</sup> Henrietta McCall too admits that Degas' canvas "owed nothing to the [Assyrian] sculptures in the Louvre".<sup>364</sup> Most recently, however, Julia Asher-Greve has pointed out the Assyrianised chariot to the right and that Semiramis' headdress is "reminiscent of those worn by Assyrian kings".<sup>365</sup> These references are in addition to the frieze-like composition, horizontal frame and profile views of the composition that are reminiscent of much Assyrian art, especially sculpture.

Indeed, the frieze-like quality of the composition prompted one of Degas' close friends, Édouard Manet (1832–1883), to exclaim that the budding history painter should receive a commission to decorate the new Paris Opéra then under construction in the early 1870s: "Degas should have decorated the foyer of the Opéra...Post-*Sémiramis* Degas, that is. He would have created a series of absolute masterpieces".<sup>366</sup> Manet clearly considered the painting a watershed in the artist's development and one that signalled a newly found ambition, one grounded in history painting. However, the unfinished canvas remained hidden from public view throughout Degas' lifetime, and despite being known to close friends who

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<sup>363</sup> Frederick Bohrer, *Orientalism and visual culture: Imagining Mesopotamia in nineteenth-century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.88–89.

<sup>364</sup> Henrietta McCall, 'Rediscovery and aftermath' in Stephanie Dalley (ed.), *The legacy of Mesopotamia* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.183–213 (204).

<sup>365</sup> Julia Asher-Greve, 'From 'Semiramis of Babylon' to 'Semiramis of Hammersmith' in Steven Holloway (ed.), *Orientalism, Assyriology and the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), pp.322–73 (349).

<sup>366</sup> Juliet Wilson-Bareau (ed.), *Manet by himself: Paintings, pastels, prints and drawings* (London: Macdonald & Co, 1991), p.162 and 185, quoted in Jeffrey Meyers, 'Degas and Manet: A study in friendship', *Apollo*, February 2005, pp.56–63 (63).

visited the artist's studio, was only first published in Degas' studio sale catalogues in 1918.<sup>367</sup>

Rossini's opera *Semiramide* (*Semiramis*) provides an interesting back-story to the artistic discovery of Assyria in the second half of the nineteenth century. First performed in 1823, the libretto is based on Voltaire's tragedy *Sémiramis* (*Semiramis*), in turn based on the ancient Roman writings of Diodorus Siculus and Herodotus. Set in ancient Babylon, the Queen of Babylon, the eponymous Semiramis, with her accomplice Prince Assur, has secured the murder of her husband, King Nino. Her son Arsace escaped and, unknown to his mother, is a successful commander of the rival Assyrian army. However, he returns to Babylon, falls in love and is unwilling to support Prince Assur in the latter's bid for the throne. Semiramis falls in love with Arsace and declares him king and her consort. Arsace, in the tomb of his father, meets King Nino's murderers and, seeking to strike Assur, kills Semiramide. Eventually he is declared king. The work received repeated revivals at mid-century in Paris and London. In October 1841 it was revived at the Théâtre-Italien (Théâtre-Ventadour) in Paris.<sup>368</sup> In the 1860s, and following the French discoveries at Khorsabad, the stage designers could wallow in historical veracity with the added detail of apparent reportage. Charles Antoine Cambon (1802–1875) designed the stage-set for the Théâtre de l'Opéra-Le Peletier production in July 1860.<sup>369</sup> The press, including *L'Illustration*, lauded the "opéra Babylonien de Rossini".<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> *Vente atelier Edgar Degas [Vente I]: Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 6–8 May 1918, lot 7a (illustrated).*

<sup>368</sup> Octave Fouque, *Histoire du Théâtre-Ventadour, 1829–1879* (Paris: G Fischbacher, 1881), p.87.

<sup>369</sup> One preparatory drawing, on tracing paper, is now in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. See Kaina, *op.cit.*, vol.I, p.75, vol.II, fig.55.

<sup>370</sup> Gustave Héquet, 'Chronique musicale', *L'Illustration*, 21 July 1860, pp.45–47 (45).

Degas was, we can be sure, familiar with the splendid examples of Assyrian art housed in the Louvre, and must surely have been aware of the Rossini opera performed in 1860. Asher-Greve points out that the painting does not 'illustrate' the opera since Babylon was already built when the curtain rises in the dramatic production. Certainly the stage-designers were not blind to the recent discoveries made in the Middle East and surviving depictions of the sets attest to a deep, though eclectic, knowledge of Assyrian sculpture complete with winged bulls and authentic chariots. Two previously overlooked depictions from the French weekly presses, as we shall see, can be added to that published in *L'Artiste*, recently noted by Jill DeVonyar and Richard Kendall.<sup>371</sup> Degas' painting makes no obvious reference to such stage-sets, yet perhaps Degas conceived his painting nonetheless, as DeVonyar and Kendall have suggested, "out of a complex dialogue with a topical theme, perhaps offering a rebuke to the excesses of the Opéra and its extravagant characterisations".<sup>372</sup> Kaina also agrees that the Oriental excess of the stage production is entirely lacking in Degas' interpretation of the Babylonian subject.<sup>373</sup> An idea of the costumes can also be found in an illustration of those worn by Carlotta Marchisio (Semiramis) and her sister Barbara Marchisio (Arsace), with fringed garments and daisy-motifs lifted from Assyrian prototypes, which were published a few months later in the *Illustrated London News* in November 1860.<sup>374</sup> Nonetheless, Kaina concedes that some of the surviving preparatory work for

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<sup>371</sup> The depiction from *L'Artiste* is reproduced in Jill DeVonyar and Richard Kendall, *Degas and the dance* (New York: Harry N Abrams, 2002), p.47, fig.44.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>373</sup> Kaina, *op.cit.*, vol.I, p.75.

<sup>374</sup> "The sisters Marchisio", *Illustrated London News*, 17 November 1860, p.478 (478).

Degas' canvas is like a stage-set and contains "scenic detail".<sup>375</sup> Degas' painting in some ways reconciles the Classical and the non-Classical worlds evoked by the Greek Parthenon and Assyria.

The restaging of Rossini's opera, in a post-Botta world, made widespread use of genuinely Assyrian-style artefacts for the scenery. The first contemporary depiction of the stage-set was published on the front-page in the French newspaper *L'Univers Illustré* on 19 July 1860 (fig.92). The illustration is taken from the second act and shows Semiramis in her palace. Her throne is flanked by two recumbent lions, enlarged from small bronze examples in the Louvre collection, such as one from Khorsabad (Musée du Louvre, Paris; AO 20116). Behind her a carved panel depicts an eagle-headed winged deity. Another scene, from the same act, was illustrated a few days later in another French newspaper (fig.93). Here the depiction is dominated by a pair of human-headed winged guardians, flanking the entrance to a compound located towards the right. Behind these figures are details derived from ancient Egyptian sources, such as cavetto cornicing. The set-designers were liberal in their use of ancient historicising details.

Classical Greece offered for Degas a means of surveying the terrain and negotiates a delicate pathway in which he aligns himself, and at the same time problematises, some key issues. These include the reconciliation with the Classical and non-Classical world offered by the Greek Parthenon and Assyria. Similar processes operated in a later British work by Frank Dicksee of 1875 that combined knowledge of the sculptures from the Parthenon and Assyria in his 're-enactment' of a biblical episode.<sup>376</sup> Degas' vision of the ancient Near Eastern world is at best an approximated one and more importantly, coloured by the Classical world offered

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<sup>375</sup> Kaina, *op.cit.*, vol.I, p.76.

<sup>376</sup> See Chapter Four.

by Greece and the Parthenon sculpture, which the Western world had raised as the golden example at this time. Museum displays, especially those in the British Museum, articulated their display to expound this message (see Chapter One). Degas, as budding artist, could do little to escape the stranglehold the Parthenon sculptures held upon Western art, being bound up as he was in its frameworks.

Although, as we have seen, Degas' preparatory sketches for Semiramis show the influence of Greece, another shows figures saddling a horse that seems to have been based on an Assyrian prototype.<sup>377</sup> This is an Assyrian relief that Degas is likely to have known of first-hand at the Louvre, showing two courtiers saddling horses from façade L of the palace at Khorsabad (Musée du Louvre, Paris; AO 19883). The Khorsabad figures share the same orientation and direction as in Degas' drawing and painting. The horse confirms the reference with a double-row of tassels at the nape of the neck, seen in numerous examples of Assyrian horses in royal circles. In turn this study was combined with that of the Parthenon sheet to produce a splendid study of equine anatomy, and one of Degas' finest early drawings (fig.94). He has relegated the figures behind the horse, though they remain in more or less identical positions on the (unfinished) canvas. The use of green crayon at the top left of the sheet reveals the artist's intention of integrating the horse into the coloured design, perhaps one familiar with the hanging gardens of Babylon, in which foliage and vegetation predominate. Another study of a horse in the Louvre is on a sheet on which Degas has written several times the letter 'S', no doubt for Semiramis, casting light on the artist's wondering mind contemplating the pivotal female protagonist in his Salon submission (Musée du Louvre, Paris; Fonds d'Orsay, RF 15503). Boggs has suggested that Degas' attention

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<sup>377</sup> Musée du Louvre, Paris (Fonds d'Orsay; RF 15528).



to the Assyrian ornamentation of the horse may have derived from Gustave Moreau, a close friend of the artist whom we know was familiar with Assyrian art from the numerous surviving studies he made, many in watercolour, of Assyrian sculpture, weights and glazed bricks.<sup>378</sup> Moreau, to be discussed shortly, indeed seems a likely conduit for the transfer of ancient Near Eastern culture to the younger artist, who does not seem to have had a natural affinity for Assyria. Kaina describes the period of the engagement with the Semiramis canvas as a “creative dialogue” between the two artist friends.<sup>379</sup> This possible influence remains to be explored a little further. The double-row of tassels, which I take to be an important Assyrian marker of the project, is retained in subsequent monochrome and colour studies that Degas continued to make in the realisation and completion of his project, some late in the process. One watercolour study of the composition shows that Degas has retained this telling sign of Assyria, with the pencil lines visible beneath the thin washes of watercolour (Musée du Louvre, Paris; Fonds d’Orsay, RF 12275). Kaina rightly considers this watercolour study indebted to stage productions, perhaps the contemporary staging of the Rossini opera, and formed by two horizontal planes, the terrace and the background, with no illusionary recession of space.<sup>380</sup> Another pencil drawing — perhaps drawn after the watercolour, judging from the refinement in composition — also now in the Louvre, has the tassels reduced to a single row, the Assyrian element gradually being erased and drained away (Musée du Louvre, Paris; Fonds d’Orsay, RF 15527). The drawing must be late since it closely corresponds, regarding the composition and level of detail, with a lost small oil study, which is frequently

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<sup>378</sup> Bohrer, *op.cit.*, pp.94–95.

<sup>379</sup> Kaina, *op.cit.*, vol.I, p.63.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*, p.76.

overlooked (fig.95). The work remained, like the larger unfinished canvas, in Degas' studio and first appeared in his studio sale in 1918.<sup>381</sup>

The Musée d'Orsay recently acquired, in 2007, a small oil study, quite detailed in finish, which saw the 'Assyrian' double-row of tassels reinstated (fig.96).<sup>382</sup> Certain elements of the composition point to this being a work made in the late stages of the scene, when all the elements were decided upon and the general arrangement of figures and composition fixed. A late pastel in the work's genesis, acquired by the French State in 1976, has the tassels missing and complete erasure of Assyria, in effect, has taken place (Musée d'Orsay, Paris; RF 36085), a process frequently noted by Bohrer regarding Degas and other artists.

Both Degas and Delacroix unite a quintessentially Assyrian subject with non-Assyrian sources and produce an atmospheric rather than archaeologically authentic milieu. For Linda Nochlin, Delacroix's *Sardanapalus* is really about the "ideology of male domination: the connection between sexual possession and murder as an assertion of absolute enjoyment".<sup>383</sup> The Orientalism of the scene is nevertheless used to enhance the "extreme state of psychic intensity". Delacroix produced a smaller version of the picture (now in Philadelphia) which, with its "looser handling and less aggressive colouring", has proved more attractive to some modern commentators.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> *Vente atelier Edgar Degas [Vente I]*: Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 6–8 May 1918, lot 21 as 'Sémiramis construisant une ville'. It was later sold at Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 22 June 1925, lot 63 and is now lost.

<sup>382</sup> Sotheby's, London, 6 February 2007, lot 443.

<sup>383</sup> Linda Nochlin, 'The imaginary Orient', *Art in America*, 71, May 1983, pp.118–31, 187, 189, 191 (125).

<sup>384</sup> Jane Munro in Mary Anne Stevens (ed.), *The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse, European painters in North Africa and the Near East* (London: Royal Academy of Arts and Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), pp.125–26 (125), no.14. See also Patrick

Degas' unfinished Semiramis painting has many areas with little overworking in oil paint which reveal the detailed preliminary underdrawing in graphite that the artist had made. These unworked areas reveal many areas of his archaeological research not previously noted in any of the surviving drawings made in connection with the canvas. Close inspection reveals the characteristic double-headed bull capital from the Hall of a Hundred Columns from Persepolis in Persia, an ancient rival to Assyria, and further reinforces the sense of a mix of ancient references. One of these unusual bull capitals was in the collection of the Louvre. This 'chapiteau Persépolitain' was illustrated in an article in the leading art journal of the time, and essential reading for young art students, the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in 1860, exactly the time Degas was planning his composition.<sup>385</sup> Might this neighbouring state and ancient rival with its celebrated, though incomplete, architecture have caused Degas to leave Assyria to one side and take up Persia instead? Other areas of the canvas have papyrus reed columns derived from ancient Egypt, possibly too from examples housed in the Louvre. The Louvre was an important *locus* of inspiration for Degas, more so it seems than printed reproductions; he responded more to the actuality of lived experience. He met Manet there, so legend goes, in front of an Ingres that he was copying in the painting galleries.

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Noon *et al.*, *Constable to Delacroix: British art and the French Romantics* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), pp.152–53, no.78.

<sup>385</sup> C Ferri-Pisani, 'L'art Asiatique ancien', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 8 [Premier période], 15 October 1860, pp.65–87 (68).

Regarding the extent to which we might consider Degas' Semiramis an 'Assyrian' painting, Bohrer concludes that Degas largely "excludes Mesopotamian sources from a Mesopotamian subject".<sup>386</sup>

Since Degas' Semiramis was never exhibited, Moreau was the first French artist to publicly exhibit a work in response to Assyria, in 1869. This was almost two decades after the first British response in 1850 by Armitage and O'Neil outlined in Chapter One. Moreau's use of Assyria was indiscriminate and his referencing of motifs occurs in unusual compositions, such as the use of stylised daisies seen in the decorated background of the watercolour *Sainte Élisabeth de Hongrie* (1882; Private collection). In the Paris Salon of 1869, for example, Moreau showed *Jupiter et Europe* (*Jupiter and Europa*) (fig.97).<sup>387</sup> The famous critic Théophile Gautier, noting the resemblance of the figure of Jupiter to Assyrian prototypes, reviewed the work:

This human, or rather divine, head, in the Aegeneic style, with its curly beard and its fluted beard, is a pendant to the bulls of Nineveh, guarding the palace of Khorsabad, and gives an exotic feeling to the adventure, which takes on an Assyrian look.<sup>388</sup>

Exoticism was a significant concern for French artists and critics in the context of the fashion for Orientalist history painting typified by Gérôme and others.

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<sup>386</sup> Bohrer, *op.cit.*, p.256.

<sup>387</sup> Paris Salon 1869 (no.1747); Pierre Louis Mathieu, *Gustave Moreau: Complete edition of the finished paintings, watercolours and drawings* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1977), p.312, no.105.

<sup>388</sup> ['Salon de 1869'] "Cette tête humaine ou plutôt divine, de style éginétique avec ses cheveux boucles et sa barbe cannelée, fait pendant aux taureaux ninivites, gardiens du palais de Khorsabad et dépayse un peu l'aventure, qui prend un air assyrien." Quoted in Peter Cooke, 'Gustave Moreau and the reinvention of history painting', *Art Bulletin*, 90 (3), September 2008, pp.394-416 (416).

It is relatively easy to locate Moreau's sources since he made many studies of Assyrian art in the 1860s, both drawn and traced from publications, some of which he seemed to have (at one point) owned. Many drawings are inscribed 'Louvre', which suggests that he may have made these in front of the motif in the museum galleries, especially watercolour studies of objects that are reproduced in black and white. Thus the watercolour study of a bronze lion weight is likely to have been made directly in front of the object (Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris; D.966). Many of these studies he had mounted into albums that he kept and referred to later in his practice. The sources he turned to include Frédéric Hottenroth's *Le costume: Les armes, les bijoux, la céramique, les ustensiles, outils, objets mobiliers etc chez les peuples anciens et modernes* (Paris: Armand Guérinet, n.d.), which remains in his personal library in the Musée Gustave Moreau in Paris.<sup>389</sup> The volume's lithographic plates are loose, facilitating Moreau's tracing of motifs. Many such tracings can be linked to this volume. Moreau went to the Bibliothèque Nationale, then known as the Bibliothèque Impériale during the Second Empire, and he records the titles of books he consulted there in his notebooks.<sup>390</sup> There he is likely to have consulted the expensive volumes by Botta that few, if any artists, could have afforded to own.<sup>391</sup> This might explain why France was behind Britain in the artistic response to Assyria, since British audiences enjoyed a cheaper range of Layard's popularly published books.

Moreau also owned a French edition of Owen Jones' *La grammaire l'ornement (The grammar of ornament)* (Paris and London: Cagnon Hottenroth and

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<sup>389</sup> Inv. 10391. The volume has a paper label attached inside indicating that he had obtained the volume from Maison Martinet, 12 Boulevard des Capucines, Grand Hôtel, Paris. Dieren dates this to the 1890s (Dieren, *op.cit.*, p.225).

<sup>390</sup> For example see Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris (D.12746 [24.1]).

<sup>391</sup> Moreau inscribed one drawing: 'Botta/monument de/ninive' (D.12746 [33]).

Day & Son, n.d.).<sup>392</sup> He made elaborate watercolour copies after Egyptian plates from Jones' work, which he subsequently incorporated into his paintings.<sup>393</sup> He is also known to have sketched and made tracings from illustrated magazines such as the weekly *Le Magasin Pittoresque* that featured Assyrian art in its pages.<sup>394</sup>

Bohrer makes an interesting comparison, and in my view a plausible one, with the *sgraffito*-like ornamentation that Moreau frequently covered his canvases with — probably with the tip of his brush — to the cuneiform texts that cover Assyrian bas-reliefs and specifically the way that both methods of production seem to produce a layering and that the visual whole is made up of these two distinct but related visual operations. One might literally cover the other but only as a veil or gauze allowing the message — whatever that is — to be reinforced or amplified.

The turn to Assyrian subjects was not always followed by the turn to Assyrian art. Jean Joseph Benjamin-Constant (1845–1902) had based his early composition *The death of Jezebel* (1868; Untraced) upon the same biblical passage, II Kings 9, that would inspire the British painter Rooke in a series of canvases now in Bournemouth (see Chapter Four).<sup>395</sup> The subject was full of dramatic potential with an Orientalist interest centred upon a female protagonist. Jezebel, thrown from her palace, lies dead on the ground, and dogs prepare to devour the scheming temptress. An equestrian rider, Jehu, glances at the dead body from the right. His fluttering drapery and the pose of the horse are taken straight from the Parthenon

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<sup>392</sup> Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris (Inv. 14806).

<sup>393</sup> *Orestes et les Erinyes* (1885–92) and *Salomé tatouée* (1876). See Carol A Hrvol Flores, *Owen Jones: Design, ornament, architecture and theory in an age in transition* (New York: Rizzoli, 2006), p.248, fig.5.17.

<sup>394</sup> Bohr, *op.cit.*, p.94.

<sup>395</sup> The National Gallery of Australia, Canberra has a preparatory drawing, in black chalk with graphite by Benjamin-Constant for the picture (41.6 x 57.9 cm; NGA 83.1464).

frieze and illustrate how the primacy of the Greek model was difficult to avoid. For Constant, a student under Alexandre Cabanel and still to make his Salon *début*, the Greek model was a strong pull and acted upon him in much the same manner as Greece had influenced Degas in the course of his design for *Semiramis building Babylon*. Constant had also depicted *Herodias* (1881; 129.5 x 95.6 cm; Private Collection), another subject exploited by British painters for its associations with Assyria, though Constant chose to ignore these: he locates the protagonist in a non-specific Oriental setting, wearing contemporary Middle Eastern jewellery.<sup>396</sup>

It is hard to say whether Degas planned his *Semiramis* to be a specifically 'Assyrian' Orientalist history painting. Perhaps the late oil study recently acquired by the Musée d'Orsay, with the fully ornamented Assyrian equipage, suggests that historicism and design did matter to him. He may well have intended to more strictly adhere to historicist tendencies than he attained. The many remaining studies go some way to address the gaps left by the unfinished state of the abandoned canvas. Degas' *Semiramis building Babylon* followed his *Young Spartans exercising* (c.1860; National Gallery, London; NG 3860), of the same date, in which Kaina has noted the gradual editing out of Classical references that were present in early drawings and oil sketches.<sup>397</sup> For the latter work this involved the removal of the stone pavilion in the centre and the rearrangement of the robed group of figures placed before it. Perhaps the turn away from history painting developed as Degas formed his own style, taking in the influences of Impressionism and painting subjects from modern life.

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<sup>396</sup> The canvas was etched by Léopold Flameng (1851–1911) for the British and American markets, since impressions are known lettered 'Painted by Benjamin Constant/ Etched by Leopold Flameng' (Witt Library, London). In a mixed portfolio of proofs (with no lettering) with other printmakers and painters (example in National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh).

<sup>397</sup> Kaina, *op.cit.*, vol.I, p.79.

Yet Degas retained his memory of his Classical student upbringing and of the Parthenon marbles in particular, long after he abandoned any attempt at history painting or historical genre and became a fully-fledged 'independent'. Around 1878, when making preparatory drawings for a racetrack painting, *Jockeys* (c.1882; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT), he evoked an image of the famous horse of Selene from the east pediment of the Parthenon in the British Museum, based on a sketch he had made as a student.<sup>398</sup> He must first have known of the piece in reproduction, almost certainly a plaster cast, but by the time he made this graphite drawing, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (23.230.13), he had seen the original (possibly several times) during the numerous visits he had made to London in the early 1870s.<sup>399</sup> We know from other drawings, such as that of an Assyrian winged lion now in Bremen, that he was familiar with the collections at the British Museum first hand (fig.98). The winged lion was never reproduced in the unusual viewpoint Degas has chosen. It must unquestionably have been drawn before the original in London. Perhaps these visits revived his interest in the breathless and exhausted horse, with gaping mouth and flared nostrils. Despite Degas' reputation now as the defining painter of modern life it is important to recognise the ongoing influence of prototypes from past art as it was being rediscovered and presented by museums and critics in nineteenth-century France.

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<sup>398</sup> Paul André Lemoisne, *Degas et son œuvre*, 2 vols (Paris: Arts et Métiers Graphiques, 1946), vol.II, p.48–49, no.98. Lemoisne dates the lost painted sketch to about 1861–64.

<sup>399</sup> Jean Sutherland Boggs came close when she described the drawing as "sculptural". See Boggs in Boggs *et al.*, *Degas at the races* (Washington and New York: National Gallery of Art and Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), p.115. The drawing has been cut along the left-hand side before it entered the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1923. See *Vente atelier Edgar Degas [Vente IV]: Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 2–4 July 1919, lot 233f* (illustrated).



Although there is no evidence to suggest that Degas was specifically following Delacroix, his influence was felt throughout the nineteenth century, and numerous retrospectives held in Paris during the mid to late nineteenth century focused strong attention on him. His work, particularly *Sardanapalus*, was reproduced in a variety of media. In 1861 the large lithograph by Achille Sirouy (1834–1904) was published: the image measures 42.9 by 53.8 cm (fig.99). The print was exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1861.<sup>400</sup> The first Delacroix retrospective was held in 1864 at the Société des Beaux-Arts; it included both a study for *Sardanapalus* and a reduced replica that Delacroix had made for himself in 1844 upon selling the large canvas to a British collector, John Wilson, in 1846, shortly before his death.<sup>401</sup> In 1885 came a larger retrospective at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris that included these two Sardanapalan works.<sup>402</sup> The large canvas itself was exhibited at the Société de l'Union des Arts in 1874, and reproduced by *Le Monde Illustré* (fig.100).<sup>403</sup> It reappeared in the commercial gallery space of Durand-Ruel in Paris in 1878 and 1887.<sup>404</sup> Durand-Ruel also showed the large work at their New York premises in 1887. Jack Spector's monograph on Delacroix's *Sardanapalus*, published in 1974, devoted a chapter to Delacroix's possible sources

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<sup>400</sup> (no.3963) as *Sardanapale, d'après M. Eugène Delacroix*. Sirouy exhibited two other prints at the same exhibition (no.3964) *Halte de bohémiens, d'après M. Knaus* and (no.3965) *Portrait de Mlle. Rosa Bonheur, d'après M Édouard Dubufe*.

<sup>401</sup> *Exposition des œuvres d'Eugène Delacroix* (Paris: J Claye, 1864), no.106 as 'première pensée du tableau de Sardanapale' (Johnson 124; Musée du Louvre, Paris; RF 2488) and no.144 as 'réduction du tableau de Sardanapale' (Johnson 286; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; 1986–26–17).

<sup>402</sup> *Exposition Eugène Delacroix* (Paris: Pillet et Dumoulin, 1885), no.8 (reduction, as 'réduction du grand tableau de 1827' [Johnson 286]) and no.174 (sketch, as 'première pensée du tableau (1825–26)' [Johnson 124]).

<sup>403</sup> *Le Monde Illustré*, 16 May 1874, p.308. Print by Émile Thomas (1841–1907) after an intermediary drawing by Albert Duvivier. Johnson (*op.cit.*, vol.I, p.116) did not know these details and gave only that the print dated "before 1885".

<sup>404</sup> Johnson, *op.cit.*, vol.I, p.115.

and, in turn, the canvases that may have been inspired by it.<sup>405</sup> He cited *La morte de Babylone (The fall of Babylon)* by George Rochegrosse (1859–1938), first shown at the Salon of 1891 (and now untraced), as having been directly inspired by Delacroix's composition. Rochegrosse must have thought highly of the picture. When, the following year, American journalists pressed him for his representation to a forthcoming event, The World's Fair: Columbian Exposition (to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in the New World in 1492), to be held in Chicago, the French painter admitted rather humorously "I shall probably send my *Destruction of Babylon*, which figured in last year's Salon, if American modesty does not prevent it".<sup>406</sup> The huge painting was indeed lent, with many others of Rochegrosse's works, to the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, where critics noted another (untraced) work in relation to it, Rochegrosse's *Le butin (The booty)*:

[The public] weary of his gigantic and crowded canvases, he has here, for the moment, settled down to the study of the *morceau*, that is to say, of a single group, with only a suggestion of his far-reaching archaeology thrown in the costume of the armed guard and in the bit of enamelled brick wall behind him and his unhappy captives, perhaps a bit of one of those walls that M. and Mme. Dieulafoy unearthed in their last Persian expedition. Perhaps this 'booty', feminine and otherwise, is part of that which Cyrus carried off from that immense plunder of Babylon which Mr. Rochegrosse figured so vigorously at the Salon of 1891.<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> Jack J Spector, *Delacroix: The death of Sardanapalus* (London: Allen Lane, 1974), pp.47–59.

<sup>406</sup> 'Foreign art at the Fair: French sculptors and painters whose works will be exhibited', *The New York Times*, 13 May 1892, p.2 (2).

<sup>407</sup> Hugh Howe Bancroft, *The book of the Fair: An historical and descriptive presentation of the world's science, art, and industry, as viewed through the [World's] Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893* (Chicago and San Francisco: Bancroft Company, 1893), pp.34–35. He is referring to the discoveries made by Jane and Marcel Dieulafoy at Susa in Iran, and displayed at the Musée du Louvre from 1886. See Bohrer, *op.cit.*, pp.226–27.

The critic continued to describe the “immense and dislocated composition”.<sup>408</sup>

Roche-grosse’s canvas operates similarly to *Brennus and his loot* (1893; Musée des Beaux-Arts, La Rochelle) by Paul Joseph Jamin (1853–1903). Here the subject has been culturally transposed to Anglo-Saxon times, though the connection to barbarism is equally explicit. Interestingly, like Roche-grosse, Jamin was a pupil of Jules Joseph Lefebvre (1836–1911), who may thus have encouraged the turn to a broad range of historicist examples. The canvas was later shown at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1900.<sup>409</sup> Another canvas by Roche-grosse, his *Bûcher de Sardanapale* (untraced), was once owned by a friend of Delacroix, Auguste Constantin (1824–1895), which Spector, in 1974, writing on Delacroix, describes as “tame” in comparison; in addition to the enormous *La mort de Babylone* (*The fall of Babylon*) that Spector found “spectacular”.<sup>410</sup> Critics at the time were well attuned to Roche-grosse’s agenda and working methods. Roche-grosse’s canvas was offered as a deliberate response to Delacroix’s work, matching it in scale and exceeding it in ‘authenticity’ and thereby satisfying the nineteenth-century demands for historicism.

The reference quoted earlier, by a Chicago critic at the World’s Columbian Exposition, was to Roche-grosse’s untraced mature masterpiece *La mort de Babylone* (1890–91), which was widely reproduced in contemporary publications and printed material associated with the 1891 Paris Salon (fig.101). The painting was in many ways the culmination of a meteoric rise in fame. His art centred on vivid reconstructions of usually opulent, bloody episodes from the historical past.

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<sup>408</sup> William Walton, *Art and architecture*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: George Barrie, 1893), vol.I (art), pp.34–35, 35.

<sup>409</sup> See Ann Dumas in Robert Rosenblum *et al.*, *1900: Art at the crossroads* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2000), pp.90–91, no.19 (illustrated). It was described as “kitsch”, p.74.

<sup>410</sup> Spector, *op.cit.*, p.56.

Roche-grosse had his début at the Paris Salon in 1882 with *Vitellius traîné dans les rues de Rome par la populace* (*Vitellius dragged through the streets of Rome by the people*) (1881–82; Musée de Sens, Sens) that was “récompensé par une médaille” and bought by the French State.<sup>411</sup> The following year his submission *Andromaque* (1883; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen) won double official acclaim: it won the ‘Prix du Salon’ and was immediately bought by the French State.<sup>412</sup> In the 1880s his work continued to find official favour, his canvas *La Jacquerie* at the Salon in 1885 just missing State purchase as it was already sold.<sup>413</sup> In 1887 the French State purchased the untraced *La curée* (*The kill*).<sup>414</sup> Roche-grosse’s work was widely reproduced on both sides of the Channel and though he never exhibited at the Royal Academy he did exhibit small works at private exhibitions at dealers’ premises, a practice widely adopted at the time in London. In 1887 he had shown at the Hanover Gallery at 47 New Bond Street where, according to *The Times*, he had sent a “small picture of old Assyrian life”.<sup>415</sup> It is difficult to know which canvas this was but the same critic from *The Times* had described him succinctly as the “fashionable young painter of huge scenes of ancient war”. In France critics were

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<sup>411</sup> Paris Salon 1882 (no.2323). *Direction des Beaux-Arts. Ouvrages commandés ou acquis par le Service des Beaux-Arts. Salon de 1882. Photographié par G. Michelez, plate 14.*

<sup>412</sup> Paris Salon 1883 (no.2085). *Direction des Beaux-Arts. Ouvrages commandés ou acquis par le Service des Beaux-Arts. Salon de 1883 et exposition triennale. Photographié par G. Michelez, plate 2.*

<sup>413</sup> Letter from Roche-grosse to the Sous Secrétaire d’Etat, 30 June 1885 informing him that the “tableau ne m’appartient plus” (Institut Néerlandais, Paris; 1972–A.85).

<sup>414</sup> Paris Salon 1887 (no.2058). *Direction des Beaux-Arts. Ouvrages commandés ou acquis par le Service des Beaux-Arts. Salon de 1887. Photographié par G. Michelez, plate 4.*

<sup>415</sup> ‘Hanover Gallery’, *The Times*, 17 October 1887, p.4 (4).

typically less equivocal about his “brutal, violent style” (la manière violente, brutale).<sup>416</sup>

1887 had been a great year for Rochegrosse, exhibiting two stunning works replete with references to archaeological material. He received a coveted critical accolade when *La mort de César* (*The death of Caesar*) was bought by the French State, though it now remains untraced.<sup>417</sup> Despite Rochegrosse’s *Babylone* being of immense size (seven by nine metres) by November 1902, it was in the collection of a Mr. Carver, Boston.<sup>418</sup> However, the work had a curious afterlife as a few years later, in 1909, it formed the dramatic centrepiece to an enormous ‘Assyrian’ themed, newly opened restaurant in New York’s Time Square, the Café de l’Opera, whose decoration cost over \$1,000,000 — evoking, according to *The New York Times*, the “luxury of the Orient”.<sup>419</sup> *The fall of Babylon* hung over the staircase, the size of which was the “same as the famous great staircase of Persepolis” in ancient Persia, upon which were placed “a series of small bronze crouching Assyrian lions, on the back of each is a tiny flame flickering”.<sup>420</sup> The effect rather resembles the staircase in King Solomon’s throne room in Poynter’s *The visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon* (1884–90; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney), which is flanked by small bronze lions.<sup>421</sup> The principal decoration of Café de l’Opera was formed of “balustrades and pergolas of black marble in the glare of brilliant lights,

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<sup>416</sup> Jean Darric, ‘Salon de 1891 : La peinture a l’exposition des Champs-Élysées’, *La Nouvelle Revue*, 1891, pp.150–63 (153).

<sup>417</sup> Maurice Hamel, ‘Le Salon de 1887: Premier article’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 35 [Deuxième période], June 1887, pp.473–511 (494).

<sup>418</sup> ‘G Rochegrosse a son atelier’, *The New York Herald (Supplement d’Art)*, 16 November 1902 in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 36 [Troisième période], September 1906, n.p.

<sup>419</sup> ‘Dine amid splendor of Café de l’Opera: New restaurant de luxe in Times Square opens with a private celebration’, *The New York Times*, 15 December 1909, p.4 (4).

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>421</sup> See Chapter Four for a discussion of the Assyrian debt in this work.

statues and sculptures, winged bulls and other fantastic and artistic conceits” and “window curtains, both of the balcony and of the main floor, [which] carry out the idea of Assyrian empire effect, [with] figures of deities worshipped by the Assyrians being embroidered”.<sup>422</sup> Rochegrosse’s painting, within the sumptuous décor of the New York eatery, provided the authoritative stamp of an historical document conferring glamour and validation on the scheme.

Curiously, in his Delacroix monograph, Spector was unaware of the equally monumental effort *La mort de Sardanapale* by Louis Chalon (1862–1916), shown at the same exhibition as the huge work by Rochegrosse (fig.102). British critics, including the *Illustrated London News*, attacked Chalon’s picture for its “showy composition...[which is] glaring in colour, and, in fact, little more than a confused mass of gorgeous Eastern draperies, nude women, and brilliant light”.<sup>423</sup> The British evidently preferred the straightforwardly historicist turn in painting, to the sensuality of French Orientalism.

Chalon’s canvas borrows (perhaps ‘translates’ is a better word) iconographically from Delacroix’s great canvas, including the rearing elephants, black female attendants and naked white female flesh dominating the foreground. He makes a conscious change in his dialogue with Delacroix’s work in the alteration of the orientation of the composition; Chalon orders his canvas in a vertical orientation, with the dramatic scene of chaos below marking out the cool detachment of Sardanapalus high above. Unlike Delacroix however, Chalon inserts into his canvas ‘genuine’ Assyrian motifs such as eagle-headed winged genii around a sacred tree formed into elaborate textile hangings, daisy patterns taken from carved stone door-sills formed into drapery designs, and bronze lion weights

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<sup>422</sup> ‘Dine amid splendor of Café de l’Opera’, *op.cit.*, p.4.

<sup>423</sup> ‘The [Paris] Salon’, *Illustrated London News*, 23 May 1891, p.688 (688).

have been transformed (and greatly enlarged) into stone attendants flanking the doomed monarch's throne. These lion weights had recently been included in Gustave Le Bon's *Les premières civilisations* in 1889, illustrated on both the title page and elsewhere.<sup>424</sup> The architecture, with multi-storied crenellated structures, is based on James Fergusson's reconstruction, then recently re-published in Le Bon's *Les premières civilisations*.<sup>425</sup> Both Chalon and Rochegrosse could thus draw on recent publications, such as Georges Perrot and Chipiez Charles' volume on Chaldea and Assyria in 1884, which was part of the series *Histoire de l'art dans l'antiquité*, and complete with over 400 illustrations, some in colour.<sup>426</sup> In addition, Joachim Menant's *Ninive et Babylone* (1888) privileged examples of Assyrian art from the British Museum, with a full-page illustration of the famed 'The banquet scene' relief and the lion and lioness in the undergrowth celebrated, despite extensive damage, as one of the "masterpieces that sculpture from all periods could envy (chefs d'œuvres que la sculpture de toutes les époques pourrait envier)".<sup>427</sup>

French commentators in the late nineteenth century commonly cited the number of Assyrian masterpieces housed at the British Museum; such was the superiority of its collection to that of the French national collection at the Louvre. Georges de Dubor (1848–1931) declared in 1878 that the British Museum's sequence of lion hunt bas-reliefs from the Palace of Ashurbanipal was a "magnifique chef-d'œuvre" (magnificent masterpiece).<sup>428</sup> In 1889 Le Bon generously conceded that the British Museum had "the most complete collection of

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<sup>424</sup> Gustave Le Bon, *Les premières civilisations* (Paris: C Marpon and E Flammarion, 1889), p.593, fig.305 and 306.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, p.569, fig.293.

<sup>426</sup> (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1884).

<sup>427</sup> Joachim Menant, *Ninive et Babylone* (Paris: Hachette & Cie, 1888), p.127.

<sup>428</sup> Georges de Dubor, *Assyrie et Chaldée* (Montauban: Forestié, 1878), p.28.

Assyrian antiquities in the world” and filled his book with numerous illustrations drawn from objects in the Bloomsbury collection.<sup>429</sup>

Regarding these works by Rochemgrosse and Chalon, critics frequently noted the theatricality of the compositions, suggesting the interlinked framework of the worlds of art and performance in nineteenth-century France. Recently, a conference at the National Gallery, London explored these interconnections in relation to the art of Paul Delaroche (1797–1856) and the exhibition *Painting history: Delaroche and Lady Jane Grey*.<sup>430</sup> Alfred de Lostalot (1837–1909) writing in *L'illustration* gave a lengthy review:

The painting that will certainly draw the most attention at the Salon is M. G. Rochemgrosse's *La mort de Babylone*. This painting of gigantic proportions depicts the final orgy of the last Babylonian King, the banquet of Balthazar, with, as a dessert, the arrival of the Persian army led by Cyrus. The painter, who is well-informed on archaeological matters after having studied the documents brought by the Delafoy mission which was recently mentioned in *L'illustration*, did not simply exhibit his knowledge. He showed a great deal of imagination in the setting and no less talent in the execution. This painting, a strange blend of qualities and flaws, of seriousness and comedy, would make a wonderful stage set. The foreground is a trompe-l'œil boasting a great measure of thick strokes; I draw your attention to the heap of leftovers from the feast, on the left — a heap that threatens the cohesion and the balance of the scene — among other victuals, some crenellated foie gras pâté, executed in high relief, would certainly have had the dubious honour of being exhibited at the Exposition des Incohérents. Nevertheless, *The fall of Babylon* is the work of a highly talented artist. Whilst dealing with a similar subject, M. Louis Chalon's *Death of Sardanapalus* is much quieter and more serious, but less touching. A little bit of madness is not unwelcome in art.<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> Le Bon, *op.cit.*, p.479; “la plus complète collection d'antiquités assyriennes qu'il y ait au monde”.

<sup>430</sup> The conference 'Correspondances: Exchanges and tensions between art, theatre and opera in France, c.1750–1850' was held 26–27 March 2010.

<sup>431</sup> Alfred de Lostalot, 'Le Salon de 1891', *L'illustration*, 2 May 1891, pp.2–3 (2); “Le tableau le plus remarqué au Salon sera certainement *La mort de Babylone* (sic), par M. G. Rochemgrosse. Dans cette toile de proportions gigantesques est représentée l'orgie finale du dernier roi babylonien, le festin de Balthazar avec, au dessert, l'entrée d'armée perse conduite par Cyrus. Le peintre, très informé des choses de l'archéologie, ayant surtout étudié les documents rapportés par la mission Dieulafoy dont *L'illustration* parlait très récemment, ne s'est pas contenté d'exposer son savoir: il a fait de très grandes dépenses d'imagination dans la mise en scène et de talent dans l'exécution. Cette peintre, étrange amalgame de qualités



Chalon also found himself confounding critics with his choice of subject matter. In an article on the artist in 1900 the writer Pascal Forthuny (1872–1962) was perplexed by the painting, decidedly unimpressed by the painter's effort and thought the work misguided. His acid conclusion was devastatingly dismissive:

With as much calm as another artist would have had in depicting a river landscape, with a few scattered trees, a washerwoman's boat and the horizon, Chalon dreamt of a *Sardanapale* agonizing over the weeping city, the herd of kneeling women, arms stretching out towards their master, the glistening cascade of the unfastened necklaces and the hair streaming loose like gold flowing on amber shoulders, the city in the distance, the smoke of the sacrifices. Overall, over thirty metres of superficial canvas.<sup>432</sup>

Perhaps by 1900, in a climate of tremendous artistic change — and especially the wide currency of photography — history painting might have appeared, for some, dated. However, Chalon's canvas can be seen in the context of other contemporary works made in France that dwelt on the collapse of great cities and empires. For example, *Le dernier jour de Corinthe* (*The last day of Corinth*) (Musée d'Orsay, Paris; Inv. 20123) was first exhibited by Tony Robert-Fleury (1837–1912) at the Paris Salon in 1870, and shown later that same decade at the Exposition Universelle,

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et des défauts, de sérieux et de comique, ferait un merveilleux décor de théâtre. Les premiers plans en sont peints en trompe-l'œil, à grand renfort d'empâtements; je signale dans l'amoncellement des reliefs du festin, sur la gauche-amoncellement préjudiciable à l'unité et l'équilibre de la scène-au milieu d'autres victuailles, certain pâté de foies gras à créneaux, traité en haut relief, qui aurait certainement eu les honneurs de la cimaise à l'Exposition des Incohérents. Mais il n'empêche, *La mort de Babylone* est l'œuvre d'un peintre de grand talent. M. Louis Chalon, dans sa *Mort de Sardanapale*, un sujet analogue, est beaucoup plus calme et plus sérieux, mais il nous touche moins. Un peu de folie ne messied pas dans l'art."

<sup>432</sup> Pascal Forthuny, 'Louis Chalon', *Revue des arts décoratifs*, April 1900, pp.97–112 (100–02); "Avec autant de sang-froid que tel autre eût mis à broser un coin de rivière, avec quelques arbres, un bateau de laveuses et un horizon, Chalon rêva *Sardanapale* agonisant sur la ville en pleurs, le troupeau des femmes agenouillées, bras tendus vers le maître, le ruissellement des colliers dégrafés, des chevelures dénouées, flots d'or sur l'ambre des épaules, le panorama de la cité lointaine, les fumées des sacrifices. Au total, une toile de plus de trente mètres superficiels."

Paris in 1878. It depicted the fall of the city-state of that name in ancient Greece and was reproduced in the contemporary illustrated press.<sup>433</sup>

It is worth exploring further that from the 1870s onwards, there emerged a tradition among critics of labelling painters like Gustave Moreau the 'archaeologists'. The art critic Gabriel Marc noted the surfacing trend from a group of painters exhibiting at the Paris Salon to depict history painting and historical genre with an archaeologically aware, even precise, practice. In a lengthy review of the Salon of 1877 he labelled this group of painters the 'archaeologists' and cited such exponents as Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Gustave Moreau, Hector Leroux and Henri Paul Motte (1846–1922). Many of these names had been touched by Assyria and that in part may explain the vogue, as Marc saw it, for "bizarre temples" and "ancient ceremonies" that broke away from the Davidian school of a mere nod to historicism and whose "Greek columns, the tripods with three branches and the eternal drapery with straight pleats" no longer satisfied the late nineteenth-century demand for strict historical referencing.<sup>434</sup>

Marc singled out Motte's extraordinary painting *Baal Moloch dévorant les prisonniers de guerre à Babylone* (*Baal Moloch devouring the prisoners of war in Babylon*) (1876; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Algiers), depicting a group of prisoners made to work upon the growing edifice of ancient Babylon (fig.103). Motte borrows many details from Assyrian reliefs, including the pointed helmets of the guards, carved reliefs for the decoration of the lower portion of the buildings and other details derived from published sources. For example, the stepped

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<sup>433</sup> See *Le Monde Illustré*, 14 May 1870, p.308.

<sup>434</sup> Gabriel Marc, 'Au Salon de 1876' (from Gabriel Marc [1899], pp.90–91) from Roger Diederer, *From Homer to the Harem: The art of Jean Lecomte du Nouÿ* (New York: Dahesh Museum of Art, 2004), p.67.

crenellation forming the distinctive roofline, at the left of the composition, seems to have been taken from illustrations of restored parapets from publications such as Henri Cavaniol's *Les monuments en Chaldée, en Assyrie et à Babylone* (1870).<sup>435</sup> Motte's art was the product of a "deep study" and "foolproof patience", resulting nonetheless, thought the critic, in a "strange scene".<sup>436</sup> Marc's criticism helps us to appreciate the influence Alma-Tadema could have, though based in London, by choosing to exhibit at the Paris Salon. The coming decades would see the emergence of a group of painters who would successfully make the genre their public platform. Salon reviews from other critics in 1877 pressed home Marc's point and singled out Alma-Tadema's dominating force in "archaeological painting", succinctly defined as that:

...recent form of art where everything is submitted to the meticulous accuracy of detail; an art made to preserve, an art which above all is fake since accessories prevail over human truth, which is either missing or relegated to a position of secondary importance.<sup>437</sup>

This 'archaeological' style thus divided critical opinion and provoked discussion.

In 1875 one critic noted of Motte, the young painter's desire to follow in the footsteps of Alma-Tadema, who had successfully married "art and archaeology".<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Henri Cavaniol, *Les monuments en Chaldée, en Assyrie et à Babylone, d'après les récentes découvertes archéologiques* (Paris: A Durand & Pedone-Lauriel, 1870), opposite p.144.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, p.144.

<sup>437</sup> Jules Comte, 'Le Salon: V', *L'Illustration*, 2 June 1877, pp.354–55 (354); "[c'est le non qu'on donne à une] espèce d'art d'invention récente où tout est sacrifié par avance à l'exactitude minutieuse du détail; art de conservation, art faux par excellence, puisque les accessoires y sont tout, au détriment de la vérité humaine, absente ou reléguée au second plan."

<sup>438</sup> Francion, 'Le Salon de 1875: III', *L'Illustration*, 22 May 1875, p.339 (339); "à l'intention de suivre les traces de l'artiste belge [Lawrence Alma-Tadema] continue la série de ses études antiques, où il marie si heureusement l'art à l'archéologie [dans *A picture gallery in Rome* (1874; Towneley Hall Art Gallery and Museum, Burnley)]".

The same points were raised in British art criticism and allowed Alma-Tadema's successful reception to dominate the field of historical genre on both sides of the Channel and exert powerful influences in London and Paris. Regarding Anglo-French exchange, it is also interesting to note that the critical responses to Motte's *Baal Moloch dévorant les prisonniers de guerre à Babylone* from the Salon of 1876 reinforced the primacy of the British Museum (the location of the 'supposed' brick cited below by one critic) over the Louvre as a source of inspiration for French painters. Charles Yriarte (1832–1898) writing in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* noted:

To be able to paint Baal, to recreate Babylon and reinvent a lost civilization like Tyre or Numantia, and to manage to create a painting convincing in its broad lines, right down to its smallest details, is quite an uncommon feat, and one cannot help but feel the immense work of research and study that went behind it. That the real Babylon truly resembled M. Motte's vision as exposed in his *Baal devouring the prisoners of war of Babylon*, I would not swear to it. Only M. Flaubert, M. Renan, M. Léon Rénier et M. Texier could tell whether it is indeed the case, but there is nothing that strikes me as implausible in this ideal restoration. However I still see too many things happening in the painting and too many strange details: where did the artist find his information, did he read them on a brick at the British Museum? Did a new, bespectacled Oppert,<sup>439</sup> next to whom the cuneiform decipherers would seem insignificant, make a confession in the secrecy of his studio? Has he got any kind of secret acquaintance with Clermont-Ganneau?<sup>440</sup> What kind of special aptitude graces the likes of M. Alma-Tadema, M. Motte, M. Hunt, and allows them to dream the reconstruction of these vanished worlds?<sup>441</sup>

<sup>439</sup> Jules Oppert (1825–1905) French archaeologist and author of *Expédition scientifique en Mésopotamie* (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1859–63).

<sup>440</sup> Charles Clermont-Ganneau (1846–1923) was a French archaeologist.

<sup>441</sup> Charles Yriarte, 'Le Salon de 1876: Deuxième article', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 14 [Deuxième période], July 1876, pp.5–49 (12); "Peindre Baal, reconstruire Babylone et inventer à nouveau un monde disparu comme Tyr ou comme Numance et arriver à établir un tableau, non seulement fraîchement dans ses lignes mais même dans son détail, c'est une tâche qui n'est pas commune et on sent là tout un monde de recherches et d'études. Que Babylone fût ce que l'a faite M. Motte, l'auteur du *Baal dévorant les prisonniers de guerre à Babylone*, je n'en jurerais pas; M. Flaubert, M. Renan, M. Léon Rénier et M. Texier pourraient seuls dire ce qu'il en est, mais rien ne me heurte dans cette restauration idéale. Je vois cependant trop de choses dans le tableau et des détails étranges; où le peintre a-t-il puisé ses renseignements, les a-t-il lus sur une brique conservée au British Museum? Un Oppert inédit, en lunettes, auprès duquel les déchiffreurs de cunéiforme sembleraient des hommes sans consistance, a-t-il fait des aveux spécialement pour

Interestingly, the French critic associated this kind of painting with the British artist William Holman Hunt's depictions of the Bible-lands, further emphasising the special exchange of visual cultures across the English Channel in the nineteenth century.<sup>442</sup>

In France during the 1870s, few artists referenced Assyrian art outside the biblical arena. Publications such as Fulcran Vigouroux's *La Bible et les découvertes modernes en Égypte et en Assyrie* (Paris: Berche & Tralin, 1877) helped formulate for French audiences these associations between archaeology and the Bible. Paul Bréham's *L'adoration des Mages* (*The adoration of the Magi*) at the Salon of 1877 is replete with Assyrian references in its flywhisks, conical hats and chariots. These have been inserted in an attempt to 'update' the Oriental accessories of the visiting kings and align the painting with some notion of 'contemporaneousness' and the recently discovered remains, despite the antiquity of the artefacts. 1889 saw the publication *Les découvertes de Ninive et de Babylone au point de vue biblique* by J Walthar which also made the link between biblical Mesopotamia and modern archaeology explicit.<sup>443</sup>

An important work in the imagining of Assyria in France was the painting *Divertissement d'un roi assyrien* (*The diversion of an Assyrian king*) by Frederick

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lui dans son atelier? A-t-il avec Clermont-Ganneau quelque secrète accointance? Par quelle singulière disposition du cerveau un homme arrive-t-il, comme M. Alma-Tadema, comme M. Motte, comme Hunt, à rêver la reconstruction de ces mondes qui se sont évanouis?"

<sup>442</sup> For a recent survey of these exchanges see Edward Morris, *French art in nineteenth-century Britain* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2005).

<sup>443</sup> *Les découvertes de Ninive et de Babylone au point de vue biblique* (Lausanne: Georges Bridel, 1889).

Arthur Bridgman (1847–1928).<sup>444</sup> Its context says much about the internationalism of the trend and about the fashion for such subjects (fig.104). The American-born painter arrived in Paris in 1866 and became a pupil under Jean Léon Gérôme (1824–1904) at the *École des Beaux-Arts* the following year, making his *Salon début* in 1868 with a rural genre subject *Jeux bretons*.<sup>445</sup> He travelled extensively in Egypt in 1872–74 and sketched avidly, and on his return made his *Salon* comeback in 1877–79 with monumental ancient Egyptian and Assyrian subjects. The tone of these works, brimming with historical and archaeological veracity, set them apart from his previous submissions. The expatriate chose to settle in France, hence his inclusion in this survey of French responses to Assyria. *Divertissement d'un roi assyrien*, shown at the *Salon* in 1878, came after *Les funérailles d'une momie* (*The funeral of a mummy*) (Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky) in 1877, and before *Procession du bœuf Apis* (*Procession of the bull Apis*) (Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC) in 1879.<sup>446</sup> The 1870s was an important phase in his early career, expanding his exhibition submissions to include the National Academy of Design in New York, from 1871, and the Royal Academy in London from 1877. His *Divertissement d'un roi assyrien* was also shown in London in 1879 (as *A royal pastime in Nineveh*), and the impact it enjoyed there is discussed in Chapter Four. Here the rôle it played in fashioning a French mode of imagining Assyria is considered, and in particular a mode that privileged 'British Assyria', that is, Assyrian art in the collection of the British Museum, at the expense of the French material in his 'adoptive' Musée du Louvre in Paris. In doing so, the

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<sup>444</sup> Sotheby's, New York, 12 May 1978, lot 235.

<sup>445</sup> See Ilene Susan Fort, *Frederick Arthur Bridgman and the American fascination with the exotic Near East*, unpublished Ph.D., City University of New York, 1990 for the most complete survey of his career.

<sup>446</sup> *Procession du bœuf Apis* was on the New York art market in 1988 (Sotheby's, New York, 24 May 1988, lot 41).

primacy of the British Museum in all matters Assyrian (and much else in connection with antiquities from all cultures) is underscored.

Bridgman's *Divertissement d'un roi assyrien* shares many compositional devices with Gérôme's *Pollice verso* (fig.105).<sup>447</sup> Goupil had published photographic reproductions of Gérôme's work from 1873 to 1875, and it was available in four different formats.<sup>448</sup> It was also reproduced as a double-page spread in a wood-engraving by the British printmaker William Biscombe Gardner (1847–1919) for the French weekly *L'Univers Illustré* in 1874, by which time it was already so popular that the newspaper heralded the work that "all the world knows the subject of this magnificent composition".<sup>449</sup> Fort also notes the influence of Alma-Tadema upon the young Bridgman.<sup>450</sup> The Assyrian pictures followed the great success he had from the first trio of his grand historical works, which secured his first Salon medal and which was immediately bought by a wealthy and prominent American collector, James Gordon Bennett, owner of the *New York Herald*.<sup>451</sup> The following year's Salon submission in many ways might have been hoped by Bridgman to at least equal the acclaim won with *Les funérailles d'une*

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<sup>447</sup> Philippa Kaina (Personal communication, 4 December 2009). The work was begun by 1869, and exhibited once in Paris in 1873 before entering a succession of British and American private collections from 1873 onward. See Gerald M Ackerman, *The life and work of Jean-Léon Gérôme, with a catalogue raisonné [sic]* (London and New York: Philip Wilson and Sotheby's Publications, 1986), p.232, no.219 and Laurence des Cars in Laurence des Cars et al. (eds), *The spectacular art of Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904)* (Paris: Skira Flammarion, 2010), pp.126–29, no.71.

<sup>448</sup> Hélène Lafont-Couturier et al., *Gérôme and Goupil: Art and enterprise* (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2000), pp.104–07, no.53.

<sup>449</sup> "Tout le monde connaît le sujet de cette magnifique composition" (F Ricard, 'Les gladiateurs (Pollice verso)', *L'Univers Illustré*, 11 July 1874, p.439 (439)). The print was published in *L'Univers Illustré*, 11 July 1874, pp.440–41 as 'Les gladiateurs (Pollice verso), tableau de M. Gérôme (publié avec autorisation de M. Goupil)'.

<sup>450</sup> Fort, *op.cit.*, p.143.

<sup>451</sup> Fort, *op.cit.*, vol.I, p.147. A single American critic gave it much notice (Lucy Hooper, 'Art in Paris', *The Art Journal* [American edition], December 1877, p.381). The British reception is discussed in Chapter Four.

momie. The critic Jules Comte, writing in *L'Illustration* about submissions at the 1878 Salon, noted the popularity of subjects engaging with antiquity (of all kinds):

Mais que dire du *Passage du Rhône par l'armée d'Annibal*, de M. Motte, de *L'Empereur Commode, en Hercule, quittant l'amphithéâtre à la tête des gladiateurs*, by M. Blashfield<sup>452</sup>, *Divertissement d'un roi assyrien*.<sup>453</sup>

The painting received a lukewarm reception by both French and British critics, and Fort has suggested that might be because it differed so much from the work of his teacher Gérôme.<sup>454</sup>

Perhaps also the veracity of the depiction challenged the supremacy of the most 'faithful' of documents: the photograph. In 1880 at a solo exhibition in New York, at Mr. Avery's Gallery, some critics were amazed. One thought that Bridgman with *Divertissement d'un roi assyrien* had "put before your very eyes a photograph of what took place in Assyria 3,000 years ago".<sup>455</sup> Other commentators, too, seized upon the supposed veracity of the ancient Near Eastern archaeological reconstruction: "M. Bridgman [has] used all the scientific discoveries and one might truly believe he reproduced an actual part of the palace at Khorsabad or at Kouyunjik [Nineveh] in this painting".<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> Edwin Howland Blashfield (1848–1936), American painter, studied in Paris and was a friend of Bridgman (Fort, *op.cit.*, vol.I, p.141).

<sup>453</sup> Jules Comte, 'Salon de 1878', *L'Illustration*, 3 August 1878, pp.71, 74 (74): "Mais que dire du *Passage du Rhône par l'armée d'Annibal*, de M. Motte, de *L'Empereur Commode, en Hercule, quittant l'amphithéâtre à la tête des gladiateurs*, par M. Blashfield, du *Divertissement d'un roi assyrien*, de M. Bridgman? L'antiquité, dans ces diverses toiles, n'est plus qu'un prétexte à évocations bizarres, rendues avec plus ou moins d'habileté, mais qui ne seront jamais prises au sérieux par les hommes instruits, et qui n'ont pas davantage le don d'intéresser la foule; la peinture ne peut que perdre à s'égarer ainsi hors de son domaine naturel."

<sup>454</sup> Fort, *op.cit.*, pp.150–51.

<sup>455</sup> 'A young American artist', *New York Times*, 22 March 1880, p.8 (8).

<sup>456</sup> Antony Valabrègue, 'Frederic-A. Bridgman (Suite)' in *Galerie contemporaine des illustrations françaises, artistique, nouvelle série* (Paris: Ludovic Baschet, 1881–82),



The painting depicts an arena, with tiers of spectators, in which the royal party gathered at the left of the composition despatches caged lions released for public entertainment. The viewer is placed as if on the bloodied sand beside the royal party, casting them in an active, participatory role. Gérôme chose this same viewpoint for his *Pollice verso*. The hunting and killing of lions in ancient Assyria was an exclusively royal preserve and commemorated on reliefs from Ashurnasirpal II's palace at Nimrud and, even more vividly and extensively, on Ashurbanipal's palace at Nineveh. It was the latter which depicted the release of caged lions, although the concept of a tiered arena of spectators is a Roman not an Assyrian one.

Fort has fully described the sources of the numerous Assyrian motifs available to Bridgman, those in museum collections and the numerous publications by Place, Botta, Layard and Bonomi alike.<sup>457</sup> For example, she identified the bronze gates in the painting as of the artist's own invention, having no prototype in any surviving examples, at least not in the form the artist has given them. Moreover, she has precisely identified the origin of the sacred tree decoration found on the doors to have been taken directly from the embroidered decoration of a royal garment illustrated in Layard's *Monuments of Nineveh* (1849), together with the curvilinear motif of the winged horse on the door, from another illustration of an ivory carving in the same publication. Bridgman includes a famous bas-relief from the Louvre collection of a male figure subduing a lion (Musée du Louvre, Paris; AO 19861-2). However, the painting pays homage not to French Assyria available at the Louvre, but to British Assyria in the British Museum. The roaring lions

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vol.I [new series], part 3, n.p. I am grateful to John Collins for help in obtaining this reference.

<sup>457</sup> Fort, *op.cit.*, pp.171-72.

surmounting the doorposts are adaptations from the single oversized Neo-Assyrian example in the British Museum from Nimrud (fig.52), as is the source of the bas-relief of a royal party confronting a pair of demons. Ultimately, the entire composition was inspired by the lion-hunting reliefs at the British Museum, and widely published in France. Indeed, the scene of the caged lion released from captivity (complete with cage) exactly replicates the depiction of an early sequence of the highly organised and ritualised performance of lion 'hunting' in a Neo-Assyrian bas-relief from Ashurbanipal's palace at Nineveh acquired by the British Museum in 1856 (fig.48). Through the emphasis on balanced composition, and focusing attention upon the royal party, Fort has taken Bridgman's painting not to represent a 'savage' civilisation and exotic 'Other', keen on blood sports, but rather the theme of human domination over the natural world.<sup>458</sup> Assyria offered then, as well as a licence to paint bloody and sexually engaging subjects, an exemplar of a sophisticated and developed society. Moreover, Bridgman's work was the first exhibited work in either Britain or France that completely eschewed any biblical framework or referencing, in either subject or title, upon which earlier painters had so heavily depended. Therefore, the work marked the departure of the autonomy of Assyria capable of inspiring 'independent' artistic production.

Bridgman's *Divertissement d'un roi assyrien* was then heavily dependent upon excavated material by British archaeologists, or their agents, for the British Museum. The 1878 Exposition Universelle in Paris included a number of British Assyrian subjects, including Briton Rivière's *Daniel in the lions' den* (1872; Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool), which secured a medal (fig.106). Bridgman might have known the large mixed-method print after the work by Charles George Lewis (1808–1880) published by Thomas Agnew in 1875, the year after the American

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<sup>458</sup> Fort, *op.cit.*, p.183.

painter returned to Paris from his sojourn in Egypt (fig.107). Bridgman himself showed work at the Exposition Universelle in 1878 and is likely to have seen Rivière's *Daniel* there. Edward Armitage's *Esther's banquet* (1865; Untraced) was shown at the 1867 Exposition Universelle, and Henry Nelson O'Neil's *Esther's emotions* (1850; Private collection) in 1855. The modest canvas *David brought before Saul* (1867; Untraced), by Louisa Starr Canziani (1845–1909), with its Assyrian winged monster motif-decorated throne, was published in the French illustrated weekly *L'Univers Illustré* in 1868.<sup>459</sup> Through first-hand experience of British pictures at exhibition in Paris, or from secondary knowledge of them through illustration, France received powerful examples of the originality of the apparent 'exacting' historicism common to much contemporary British ancient Near Eastern subjects, especially biblical ones.

Assyria was most strongly asserted in the Parisian Salons through a particular subject: Judith, a Heroine from the Apocrypha, and her slaying of the Assyrian general Holofernes. The book bearing her name begins with the asserting line: "It was the twelfth year of Nebuchadnezzar, who reigned over the Assyrians in the great city of Nineveh" (Judith 1:1 [The Jerusalem Bible]). The Assyrian army, instead of attempting to force the pass, lay siege to a city in Judea and cut off its water supply. Judith, the magnificent widow, works deliverance for her city — and thus saves the kingdom of Judea — by charming the Assyrian captain, Holofernes, then cutting off his head as he sleeps, thus foiling the military campaign. The subject was an attractive one for the Old Masters, and Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Cristofano Allori (1577–1621), Artemisia Gentileschi and Donatello all treated it. It was popular in continental Europe and a popular German example is August

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<sup>459</sup> The print was first published in the *Illustrated London News*, 4 January 1868, p.12. In France the picture received a brief notice (L De Morancez, 'David présentant a Saül la tête de Goliath', *L'Univers Illustré*, 18 April 1868, pp.247–48).

Riedel's *Judith* (1840; Munich, Neue Pinakotech). But it became an urgent and dominant theme in late nineteenth-century painting, especially in France, where the figure of Judith was cast as the ultimate *femme fatale*, the fatally attractive woman. The French Salon in Paris saw many Judiths: gloating Judith, decadent Judith, scheming Judith and detached Judith.

In 1874 at the Paris Salon, Jules Constant Destreez (1831–1894) exhibited a plaster *Judith* that received official sanction and was bought by the French State.<sup>460</sup> In 1885 Edouard Zier (1856–1924) exhibited a Judith at the Salon, now untraced. From contemporary illustrations we learn that Judith points to the decapitated Assyrian general, to the surprise of her maidservant who has been summoned to help remove the head and appears behind a curtain. This dramatic foil of the drawn curtain — seen often in French depictions because of the exchanges already noted between canvas and stage — emphasises the confined and narrow space the viewer notionally occupies and allows the viewer to voyeuristically appraise the unfolding scene, more intimately than a stage-set. One previous salon exhibit of Zier's had drawn on, in 1883, the Book of Esther for inspiration.<sup>461</sup>

One other dramatic depiction of Judith is that by François Lematte (1850–1929) from 1886 (fig.108). The dim lighting adds drama and Judith's shadow on the back wall amplifies the intensity of the action and suspense. Holofernes has the distinct Assyrian profile seen in reliefs and he reclines on a couch modelled on the famous banqueting scene of Ashurbanipal and his queen in the British Museum (fig.63). To the left is a side-table with pinecone feet taken from this same relief. Judith's frontally lit naked torso occupies centre-stage of the composition and

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<sup>460</sup> It was exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1874 (no.2814).

<sup>461</sup> It was exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1883 (no.2475), and bought by the French State.

reminds us of the opportunity such subjects presented for exotic and erotic sensuality.

Lematte won the Prix de Rome in 1870 and made his Salon *début* that same year. He was a pupil of Alexandre Cabanel (1824–1889), a painter familiar with ancient Near Eastern referencing, judging by his canvas *La Sulamite* (*The Shulamite*) (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art) from the 1876 Salon and etched by Léopold Flameng (1831–1911) for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*.<sup>462</sup> It was also published in photogravure by the major international art dealer and print publisher Goupil. The previous year, 1875, Cabanel had shown at the Paris Salon *Thamar et Absalom* (Musée des Beaux-Arts Jules Chéret, Nice), in which the female protagonist is seated upon a “Turkish divan decorated with Assyrian designs”.<sup>463</sup> The picture was parodied in a satire by ‘Cham’ (Amédée de Noé) (1819–1879), published in the newspaper *L’Univers Illustré*, one of a series based upon Salon submissions called ‘Revue comique du Salon, par Cham’ (fig.109). *Thamar et Absalom* was shown again shortly afterwards at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1878, whereupon it was reproduced in *L’Univers Illustré* (fig.110). Lematte won the Prix de Rome in 1870 and made his Salon *début* that same year.

Cabanel seems the likely conduit for these ancient Near Eastern depictions. One other pupil of his, Aimé Morot (1850–1913), a student with Benjamin-Constant, was inspired to submit a winning canvas to the Concours de peinture du Grand Prix de Rome, *Le captivité de Babylone* (fig.111).<sup>464</sup> The prominent harp seen

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<sup>462</sup> *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 14 [Deuxième période], August 1876, opposite p.134.

<sup>463</sup> Francion, ‘Le Salon de 1875: III’, *L’Illustration*, 22 May 1875, p.339 (339).

<sup>464</sup> A Darlet, ‘Bulletin’, *L’Univers Illustré*, 23 August 1873, p.534 (reproduced as a wood-engraving by Auguste Trichon after J Pélissier [intermediary draughtsman] after a photograph by M. Hôpital, p.537 [173 x 138 mm]). It was also reproduced as a wood-engraving by Smeeton & Tilly [Joseph Burn Smeeton and Auguste Tilly] after J Pélissier [intermediary draughtsman] as *Les juifs pleurant leur captivité a Babylone*, *L’Illustration*, 4 October 1873, p.224 [222 x 170 mm] when shown in the

in the work seems to be based upon Assyrian prototypes seen in bas-reliefs; but the inlaid decoration is inspired by ancient Egyptian furniture. The work combines then a range of 'ancient' sources.

The following year, in 1887, saw Charles Landelle (1821–1908), an artist from an older generation, exhibit his *Judith* at the Salon. He later made a version in 1895 which is now in the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth. The solitary figure in dramatic silhouette surveys the bedchamber with icy detachment. Landelle's intense and contrasting colourway heightens the expectant atmosphere while throwing into relief Judith's splendid jewellery and garments that are adaptations of contemporary Middle Eastern examples. He had previously shown some interest in Mesopotamian subject-matter in his large 1861 Salon exhibit of the Babylonian Captivity, exhibited as *Les Femmes de Jérusalem captives à Babylone* (Musée Ingres, Montauban), bought by the French State that year.<sup>465</sup> There is no attempt at archaeological referencing. Clearly for Landelle subject alone, and not content, was the driving force behind these depictions.

In 1889 Eugène Aizelin (1821–1902), an exact contemporary of Landelle, exhibited a plaster *Judith*, which may have helped him to win a gold medal at that year's Salon.<sup>466</sup> Later, at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the

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exhibition 'Exposition de prix and envois de Rome' at the École des Beaux-Arts, Paris. Morot married Suzanne Gérôme (1867–1941) and so he must have been closely connected to her father, Jean Léon Gérôme.

<sup>465</sup> The original frame carried the painted inscription 'Super Flumina Babylonis' seen in Ambroise Richebourg's official photographic survey of the French State purchases and commissions shown in the 1861 Salon. The Landelle is illustrated on folio 22 and measures 232 by 163 cm.

<sup>466</sup> Paris Salon 1889 (no.3971), see *Salon de 1889: Catalogue illustré, peinture et sculpture* (Paris: Ludovic Baschet, 1889), p.331 (illustrated). A bronze was cast and acquired the following year (now lost, formerly Musée Mans). Aizelin presented a duplicate plaster with the bronze and is now in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Another duplicate plaster is in the Musée départemental de l'Oise, Beauvais. The Louvre holds a drawing of the composition by the artist made for reproduction (RF 22484).

piece was reproduced in porcelain. Judiths were but one of a group of powerful female characters that were brought to life in dramatic Salon exhibits in late nineteenth-century France. These tended to favour the gory aspects of these female lives, be they Jezebels, Zenobias, Semiramises, Esthers, Salomes, Delilahs, Cleopatras, Herodias or Jahels.<sup>467</sup> In the Book of Judges is related the successful surprise attack by the Israelites in which 900 of Sisera's charioteers were defeated, but Sisera escaped and sought refuge in the tent of the young female, Jahel. She gave the terrified Canaanite food and drink, but when he fell asleep, she drove a tent peg into his brain. Herodias surfaced many times and in 1885 the subject was exhibited by Constant, who also depicted *Judith* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Constant painted two versions of Judith and made replicas of each of these in turn. The canvas in New York was reworked in 1886 and recently sold,<sup>468</sup> and the other variant, full-length and stripped to the waist, again exploiting the opportunity, is in the Maharaja Fatesingh Museum, Baroda (1885) and was itself reworked in a small now untraced panel.<sup>469</sup>

In many ways the story of female connivance seen in Judith is also active in the biblical story of Samson and Delilah. Samson, the mighty Jewish hero, fell in love with Delilah. She was bribed by the Philistines, and famously discovered that his strength came from his long hair that had never been cut. While he was asleep Delilah cut it, Samson was drained of his strength and the Philistines were able to capture him (Judges 16:17–20). In a late untraced canvas *Dalila (Delilah)* by Émile

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<sup>467</sup> *Jahel* (1874) by François Grellet (1838–1908) exhibited Paris Salon 1874 (no.851). See *Direction des Beaux-Arts. Ouvrages commandés ou acquis par le Service des Beaux-Arts. Salon de 1874. Photographié par G. Michelez, plate 29.*

<sup>468</sup> Christie's, London, 17 June 2004, lot 105.

<sup>469</sup> Fleischmann, Munich, 21 March 1906, lot 16 (illustrated); 57 x 39 cm. The work in Baroda was etched by Eugène Champollion (1848–1901) and reproduced in *Les lettres et les arts: Revue illustrée*, in 1886 (British Museum, London; PD 2008,7034.4).

Charles-Beule (1866–1895) at the Salon of 1891 we see the same iconographic device of the naked heroine drawing back a curtain, as in numerous Judith pictures, showing the contemporary reference (fig.112). The floor has a pattern derived from the open and closed lotus motif seen in Assyrian carved door-sills, which Cabanel had also been inspired by, and examples of which were in the Louvre. Mere efforts by French artists at historicism seemed a reasonable course to take. Critics at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 in Chicago summed up the difference between the interests of the British and French neatly when they complained that the "thirst for exactness of archaeological information which still sends the English painters to the British Museum and South Kensington before they begin their erudite compositions, these Frenchmen know it not".<sup>470</sup>

The shift in responses in France from an archaeological or antiquarian interest to a 'purely' artistic one, is signalled most interestingly by Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) — whom, it has turned out, was among the subtlest and most sensitively engaged with the Assyrian material, of artists from anywhere.<sup>471</sup> In about 1883 Rodin was working on a bust of his close friend Victor Hugo, for which he made many drawings, including one now in the Musée Rodin (fig.113). The drawing has on the verso a beautiful and rapidly executed sketch of a leaping Assyrian lion (fig.114). It is also recognisably from the famous lion-hunt series of bas-reliefs in the British Museum, which the artist saw on a number of repeated visits in the early 1880s. Nonetheless it presents considerable difficulty to precisely identify which leaping lion Rodin took as his model for the spirited drawing. The silhouette of the lion is characterised by the hind legs firmly planted

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<sup>470</sup> Walton, *op.cit.*, p.30.

<sup>471</sup> Some of these ideas are discussed briefly in Donato Esposito, 'French Mastery', *British Museum Magazine*, 56, Autumn/Winter 2006, pp.40–41, 43–44.



on the ground and exerting these muscles to prepare for forward flight. His front legs are parallel with the bottom of the sheet and the supposed ground level. Thus the drawing suggests the moment immediately before flight, with the emphasis on the rear musculature.

There are four potential candidates for the source of Rodin's drawing. It appears that the drawing was later cut down: irregularly at the top, for the lines appear to extend beyond the current sheet's edge. The single line along the belly of the beast is Rodin's abbreviated notation of musculature that is seen in several examples of Assyrian reliefs. The angle of the tail does not conform to any of the four possibilities but usually Rodin does not follow closely the source before him. The firmly planted hind legs indicates that his source was a lion newly released from his cage and about to leap to the aid of his companion, who has been speared — seen in the upper register of the British Museum panel (fig.48). This possibility seems most likely, judging from the later knowledge he would demonstrate in other drawings from the same bas-relief.

One other drawing from the same date as this sheet is now in a private collection in Japan and, because of the drawings of Hugo associated with it, was in all likelihood given away by the artist to a close friend and thus separated from the great cache of his material in the Musée Rodin in Paris. The quality of the drawing is very different from Rodin's later explorations of feline morphology, with great control and firmly articulated though florid penmanship.

Rodin's physical, and deeply personal, encounters among the Assyrian artefacts at the British Museum, and especially the bas-reliefs, are paralleled in contemporary literature. In an early novel by Thomas Hardy (1840–1928), first published in book form in 1876, one of the characters describes the experience of finding themselves in a room at the British Museum lined with bas-reliefs: "Don't

you feel as if you were actually in Nineveh; that as we now walk between these slabs, so walked Ninevites between them once?".<sup>472</sup> The seclusion and contemplative spaces offered by the Assyrian galleries of the British Museum are described in the same episode in the novel when Christopher goes in search of Faith, whom he had not found on his return home:

He entered the spiked and gilded gateway of the [British] Museum hard by, turned to the wing devoted to sculptures, and descended to a particular basement room, which was lined with bas-reliefs from Nineveh. The place was cool, silent, and soothing; it was empty, save of a little figure in black, that was standing with its face to the wall in an innermost nook. This spot was Faith's own temple; here, among these deserted antiques, Faith was always happy.<sup>473</sup>

The reference to "cool, silent, and soothing" in Hardy's novel might offer parallels with Rodin's drawn responses to his experiences in front of these bas-reliefs, in which the Frenchman erases the actuality of hunting. He removed all traces of the piercing arrows, as we shall see, from his drawings of lions and lionesses after the hunts of King Ashurbanipal in the British Museum, to which he was so attracted. The erasure of the evidence of the hunt divorced these numerous studies from their source. He was perhaps the first artist to separate Assyrian 'subject' entirely from Assyrian 'style' in his response, and so instead use Assyrian art to explore Modernist concerns, such as the flattening of form and the reordering of space. Rodin's interest in these qualities coincided, as we shall see in Chapter Five, with other avant-garde sculptors looking to Assyrian sculpture in the first decades of the twentieth century for these same abstract properties.

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<sup>472</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The hand of Ethelberta* (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1951), p.189. See also Bohrer, *op.cit.*, p.2.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, p.188.

The 1900 Exposition Universelle was important for Rodin, allowing him the privilege of a one-man exhibition space. He made preparations for an enormous 'Monument to Labour' and set about designing the lower portion, which would be open with four open rooms, as he himself said, "like the ones you find in the British Museum where they show the famous Assyrian reliefs" (fig.115).<sup>474</sup> In about 1913 Rodin filled a sketchbook with studies after the Assyrian lion-hunts in the British Museum. Nothing remotely comparable exists in the Louvre; and indeed, every single drawing — about fifteen in all — that Rodin made after Assyrian art can be traced with confidence to those in London. As a source of inspiration for artists, it leaves the Louvre in shadow.

These later drawings, treated separately on each fresh page of the sketchbook, are freer as regards line, deflated in potential action and occasionally reveal superb silhouettes. Rodin was seized by particular sequences in the lion-hunt and he set about recording them for his study of abstracted silhouette. In one example, a lion is released from the cage (fig.116), seen at the right of a panel in the British Museum (fig.48). Rodin then draws the same lion he noticed thirty years before, with the emphasis now not on musculature but on line alone (fig.117). Rodin also pays attention to the dead and dying. He treats the scene he is confronted with, with emotion (like the Assyrian sculptors), drawn to the poignancy of the slow and agonising death from flesh wounds. A skirmish of lines defines the tangle of limbs. Rodin has removed the piercing arrows from the animal's body (fig.118). Other sensitive studies focus on limp legs and the spasms of a dying lioness, beside which Rodin has written 'expressive' (fig.119). The great hulk of a large lion has been brought down and his sagging tongue hangs down

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<sup>474</sup> Catherine Lampert, 'Introduction: Rodin's nature' in Catherine Lampert, Antoinette Le Normand-Romain *et al.*, *Rodin* (London: Royal Academy, 2006), pp.15-25 (25).

from his flopping head. His legs are caught beneath the weight of his body and he is unable to move (fig.120). Here again Rodin has removed the arrows. The sequence of the drawings in the sketchbook is interesting too, followed by a scene of waving legs, of a beast in its death-agony, the upturned limbs an indecipherable tangle (fig.121). The tangled foreleg of another beast is captured in another drawing, in which the final death-spasm has left the creature oddly contorted (fig.122). Rarely is Rodin interested in the fighting lion, but in a single example a growling lion looks back at his royal aggressor in anger (fig.123).

Rodin occasionally depicts other animals seen in these reliefs, such as a horse and barking dogs (fig.124 and 125). But essentially the lions are what interested Rodin above all else and the repeated contours of the death-agony. They offer sensitive meditations on death so at odds with the bombastic approach to the kill seen in such contemporary works as Frederick Arthur Bridgman's *Divertissement d'un roi assyrien (Diversion of an Assyrian king)* (1877; Private collection) discussed earlier.

This body of work by Rodin both cemented his interest in Assyrian art and assisted him in capturing a likeness or the essence of a likeness of Victor Hugo, one based on Assyrian prototypes. The sequence of drawings presents a method of looking at sculpture and studying principally silhouette, one in which Rodin explored the potential for the expression of emotion in bas-relief and (perhaps) in sculpture more generally. He picked out the varied emotional pitch from aggression, agony, resignation, self-defence and defiance. In Rodin's selection of the many body types available to him in the lion-hunting scenes of King Ashurbanipal in the British Museum, he often emphasised the expressive qualities of the head, whether thrown back in quiet resignation or reared up in defiant though agonised pain or protectively curled under the body. Rodin's response is

quite different than that of the French Orientalist painters, yet perhaps, surely owed something nonetheless to the general fashion for Assyrian subjects in late nineteenth-century France.

As we have already seen, the rise of the large world fair towards the end of the nineteenth century, with the display of hundreds of works of art, especially painting, meant that Assyrian-inspired pictures remained current after their initial debut at the Royal Academy, Salon or elsewhere. This provided a valuable vehicle for works to be reproduced and discussed anew. In 1889, for example, at the Exposition Universelle in Paris, Lematte's *Judith* was joined by Leroy's *Mardochée*, which had both been previously shown that decade for the first time at the Salon. The World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 provided an opportunity for British and French pictures to be seen in dialogue with each other, and their relationship with Assyria was given added weight by displays of religious archaeology organised by the educationally-driven Smithsonian Institute from Washington.

The 1880s had also seen the British Museum championed in the pages of the august *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in two lengthy articles that did much to consolidate the high reputation and prestige of the Assyrian collection in London.<sup>475</sup> It voiced official approbation, joining those that had long known of the treasures, Assyrian and otherwise, housed at the British national collection in Bloomsbury. The dedicated art journal usually ran articles that focused on some aspects of French public collections, such as the holdings of the work of Leonardo da Vinci in the Louvre, so the departure to a foreign institution was all the more

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<sup>475</sup> Maxime Collignon, 'La sculpture antique au British Museum', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 35 [Deuxième période], February and May 1887, pp.89–108 and pp.379–403.

remarkable. The author of the articles was Maxime Collignon (1849–1917) a specialist in Greek art and archaeology, and his work was translated into English for the market across the channel.<sup>476</sup> Collignon was enraptured by the ancient Near Eastern holdings of the British Museum, which he declared had “an incomparable suite of [Assyrian] bas-reliefs” that he considered “magnificent”.<sup>477</sup> The language is more eloquent and poetic than had previously been used in assessments of these sculptures. The illustrations that he chose tended to focus on the delicacy of carving and the sculptural expression of isolated motifs, such as a single dying lion.<sup>478</sup> The full-page illustrations of a lion in its death throes or the hiding lioness in the luxuriant undergrowth reveals a shared interest in, if not an influence upon, that found in the drawings by Rodin after these sculptures, who also focused and extracted prized examples from groupings for their expressive possibilities.

This interest in Assyrian sculpture by both critics and artists in France also reveals a changing view of Assyria, away from biblical illustration to inspiration for stand-alone artworks. At this time, the corresponding move in Britain had not happened. Even the influential art writer and former head of the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, Charles Blanc (1813–1882), had routinely ignored Assyria in his seminal publication *Grammaire des arts du dessin, architecture, sculpture, peinture* (1867). He began his ‘evolution’ of sculpture in Western art with ancient Egypt, with no reference to Assyria at all. His position softened somewhat later in life, in a posthumously published edition of his writings on sculpture, when he conceded that the sculpture of ancient Egypt and Assyria was “sometimes sublime” but for

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<sup>476</sup> Maxime Collignon, *A manual of Greek archaeology* (translated by John Henry Wright; London: Cassell, 1886).

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid*, p.91; “Il y a là une suite incomparable de bas-reliefs”.

<sup>478</sup> One plate had been previously published in the journal. See François Lenormant, ‘Les antiquités de l’Assyrie de Babylone (Troisième et dernier article)’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 25 [Premier période], November 1868, pp.422–37 (433).

him, could never attain the 'ideal', that came from a close understanding of naturalism.<sup>479</sup>

Despite the riches of the Assyrian holdings in the Louvre on public view from 1847, French artists turned, time after time, to the collection housed in the British Museum. Supplementing their reading with actual visits, French artists, from Degas to Rodin, encountered Assyrian sculptures in London at first hand, which were better represented and available in greater number than in Paris. This was particularly so with the lion-hunting scenes that were entirely unrepresented in Paris. Throughout the nineteenth century these grew in stature to become masterpieces both of Assyrian art, and the British Museum itself. These sculptures not only inspired artists but also helped secure for the British Museum the pre-eminent position it enjoyed internationally in the mid to late nineteenth century and into the beginning of the following century, to be explored in Chapter Four.

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<sup>479</sup> Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des arts du dessin: La sculpture* (Paris: Henri Laurens, 1888), p.16; "L'art de l'Egypte et plus tard celui des Assyriens...ont été quelquefois sublimes; mais ils n'ont jamais atteint à la beauté ou bien ils l'ont dépassée, parce qu'ils n'ont point possédée, dans une juste mesure, les deux éléments qui la constituent, savoir: la vérité naturelle, et l'essence de cette vérité, qui est l'idéal."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Religious history painting and Assyria, 1870–1900

Babylon itself, the mighty Babylon, has so far yielded little return to the explorer (1880)<sup>480</sup>  
...what a reflex of Nineveh's palmy days are the winged lions exhumed by Layard! (1875)<sup>481</sup>  
Layard and Nineveh will be indissoluble names for all time (1894)<sup>482</sup>

Despite long delays stretching over two decades, and clouded by financial insecurity, the *Dalziels' Bible Gallery* was finally published in 1881. It met with a lukewarm reception but nonetheless paved the path for painters, like their early counterparts in the 1850s, to follow the course of an Assyrian influence firmly laid down within biblical narratives.<sup>483</sup> Thus having witnessed a period of secularisation by such painters as Frederick Arthur Bridgman, Edwin Long and Briton Rivière in the 1870s, Assyria was once again put to the service of biblical painting. The last decades of the nineteenth century saw a rise in the scale and ambition of religious paintings generally and official recognition of them came with their purchase, among other kinds of work, for Britain's newly opened and rapidly expanding art collections, particularly those in Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and Glasgow. For example, *Esther denouncing Haman to King Ahasuerus* (1888; Sunderland Museum and Art Gallery) by Ernest Normand (1859–1923) was purchased for the collection in 1892 from Arthur Tooth & Sons, a major London dealer. *Samson* (1887) by Solomon Joseph Solomon (1860–1927) was presented to the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool in 1887 by the ship-owner

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<sup>480</sup> William Watkiss Lloyd, 'Chaldean and Assyrian art', *The Portfolio*, 1884, pp.53–58 (54).

<sup>481</sup> A N N, 'Some notes on sculpture', *The Treasury of Literature and the Ladies Treasury*, 1 March 1875, pp.135–39 (135).

<sup>482</sup> 'The man about town', *The Country Gentleman*, 7 July 1894, pp.854–56 (855).

<sup>483</sup> See Chapter Two.



James Harrison (1812–1891). These were among the first Assyrian-influenced paintings to enter (and remain) in public collections. The trend to acquire these works spread to colonies abroad and the new public art collections in, for example, Melbourne (founded in 1861), Sydney (1880) and Adelaide (1881) in Australia, and to Dunedin (1884) and Auckland (1888) in New Zealand. The move of the Royal Academy to Burlington House in 1868 from its previously cramped accommodation in a wing of the National Gallery must, in part, account for the increase in physical scale of work submitted to the Royal Academy from this time onwards. The loss of the Assyrian Court in the devastating fire at the Crystal Palace in January 1871 seems to have made little impact upon Assyria's reception, fuelled by continued publication in scholarly and non-scholarly works and the reproduction of Assyrian art in photographic form by the firm W A Mansell & Co, London. However, the decision to rebuild the damaged Egyptian Court, though not the Assyrian one, could be seen as evidence of the 'lesser' status that Assyria enjoyed officially, compared to its more celebrated ancient neighbour, both in Victorian museum displays and in other areas more generally.

Yet the period witnessed a continued publication of books on Assyrian art and collections. The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge published a popular history of Assyrian and Babylonian antiquity, as part of a series on ancient civilisations that included *Egypt and Persia*.<sup>484</sup> Samuel Birch (1813–1885) had founded and become first president of the Society of Biblical Archaeology in 1870.<sup>485</sup> He became head of the Department of Oriental Antiquities at the British

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<sup>484</sup> George Smith, *Assyria and Babylonia* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1874).

<sup>485</sup> F Legge, 'The Society of Biblical Archaeology', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1919, pp.25–36.

Museum, under whom Assyrian finds fell, from 1866 to 1885 and published a guide to the British Museum collection in 1883.<sup>486</sup> The most lavishly illustrated publication from this period was the English translation, by Walter Armstrong in 1884, of Georges Perrot and Charles Chipiez's *A history of art in Chaldæa [sic] and Assyria*, with more than 450 illustrations within the text and fifteen separately printed full-page prints.<sup>487</sup> The work was part of a ten-volume series by the two Frenchmen on the entire history of art in antiquity, and that which covered Assyria was the second volume published in France, after the first on Egypt and before the volume on Phoenicia and Cyprus. Despite its hundreds of illustrations it was praised by contemporary critics for its affordable and compact form. The critic of *The Portfolio*, a specialist art journal that promoted printmaking, praised the work for providing a "popular, condensed, and summarised review" of the field since:

...very much more is only accessible in the engraved illustrations of works which, from their expensiveness, are only accessible in great libraries, and even these are too large and unwieldy to invite frequent use, unless by special students...<sup>488</sup>

Layard had published in 1887 his two-volume *Early adventures in Persia, Susiana, and Babylonia*.<sup>489</sup> Rossini's opera *Semiramide* (*Semiramis*) enjoyed repeat performances throughout the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>490</sup> Moreover, the historicist

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<sup>486</sup> Samuel Birch, *Assyrian antiquities: Guide to the Kouyunjik Gallery, with four autotype plates* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1883).

<sup>487</sup> Georges Perrot and Charles Chipiez, *A history of art in Chaldæa [sic] and Assyria* (Walter Armstrong (ed.); London and New York: Chapman & Hall and A C Armstrong & Son, 1884). Paul Hachette & Cie first published this in French in 1884 (as volume 2 of 10 in a series on world art).

<sup>488</sup> William Watkiss Lloyd, 'Chaldean and Assyrian art', *The Portfolio*, 1884, pp.53–58 (54).

<sup>489</sup> Austen Henry Layard, *Early adventures in Persia, Susiana and Babylonia* (London: John Murray, 1887).

<sup>490</sup> See, for example, 'The royal Italian opera season', *The Era*, 25 July 1880; 'Her Majesty's Opera', *The Times*, 21 April 1873, p.8 (8).

leanings of the majority of these productions meant that the set designs and costumes looked to link the 'authenticity' of the productions to Assyrian prototypes, found both in museums and publications. These opera designs themselves assumed an independent authority that could comfortably be accommodated within the authoritative space of a museum display, as contemporary critics noted of one London production in 1871:

It would be difficult, in any case, to find a more a more vocal or more Assyrian-looking Assur than Signor Agnesi in his assumption of that character. His head requires nothing but petrification to entitle it to a prominent place in a museum of Babylonian antiquities...<sup>491</sup>

In a lengthy notice in the *Illustrated London News* in 1867 on the election of two painters as new associate members of the Royal Academy, George Frederick Watts and Edward Armitage, summaries were given of their respective careers thus far. Armitage was singled out for particular praise in the great decorative schemes he had undertaken, in full or in part. These included assisting Paul Delaroche (of whom he was a pupil) on his *Hémicycle* for the *École des Beaux-Arts*, Paris, from 1839 to 1841; and the frescoes in the Palace of Westminster, London, having won one of the three first prizes of the competitions held in 1843, 1845 and 1847. The painter's 1851 submission to the Royal Academy *Samson* (1851; Untraced) was lauded for its noteworthy historicism:

The picture of the blind Samson grinding in the Philistine prison was a very original and powerful work, in which the painter appeared as one of the first to set the example of striving to secure probable archaeological accuracy in the representation of scriptural subjects...<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> 'Royal Italian opera', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 31 October 1871, p.12 (12).

<sup>492</sup> 'The new associates of the Royal Academy', *Illustrated London News*, 9 March 1867, pp.238-39 (239).

The work shared the same attempts as had the Pre-Raphaelites in their early submissions to the Royal Academy in the 1850s, to ground religious painting on an 'authentic' footing. But Armitage, unlike the Pre-Raphaelites, believed in using past depictions of art from the High Renaissance to form the basis of his compositions, in exacting studies from the live model, but in the elevation of religious subjects from everyday and 'experienced' life seen typically in genre pictures. The severe critical attacks on Millais' *Christ in the house of his parents (The carpenter's shop)* (1849–50; Tate, London) were levelled at the inappropriateness of the detailed 'lifelike' depiction, which came at the expense of an elevated grandeur deemed appropriate for such a subject. Historicism was a key issue for the early painterly use of Assyria in the 1850s and 1860s, in both religious and non-religious contexts, and one that remained current in the following decades. Indeed, the issue saw renewed investment in the last decades of the later nineteenth century that coincided with the emergence of the reputations of a number of key exponents of Assyrian imagery.

The exhibition of *The Babylonian marriage market* in 1875 by Edwin Long (1820–1891) was a significant moment in the reception of Assyria and one which Bohrer has termed a "key monument" of this kind (fig.8).<sup>493</sup> The work is one of the most celebrated pictures of Victorian Britain and for many years held the world record for the most expensive by a living artist, after it was sold to Thomas Holloway at Christie's in London in 1882. The newly founded Art Gallery of New

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<sup>493</sup> Frederick Bohrer, *Orientalism and visual culture: Imaging Mesopotamia in nineteenth-century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.196.

South Wales in Sydney in 1880 was an underbidder.<sup>494</sup> Its size, 1.82 by 2.69 metres, makes the work a grand public statement and elevates the place of Assyrian motifs within it. The scale of Long's enormous masterpiece took the use of Assyrian motifs and imagery to its zenith and raised the bar for future efforts in that direction. It marked the artist's arrival, securing his contemporary reputation, and remains his best-known work today. The work is filled with references to the British Museum's ancient Near Eastern collection, and Long makes skilful use of artefacts for deeper symbolic meanings beyond what Bohrer refers to as "validating decor", a trend other painters would follow in the coming decades, as we shall shortly see.<sup>495</sup>

The exhibition catalogue of the Royal Academy had a brief quote from the translation (some even argue version) of George Swayne's recently published history of Herodotus, that sought to locate the source of Long's unusual subject:

Herodotus records one of their customs, which, whether in jest or earnest, he declares to be the wisest he ever heard of. This was their wife-auction, by which they managed to find husbands, for all their young women. The greatest beauty was put up first, and knocked down to the highest bidder; then, the next in order of comeliness — and so on to the damsel who was equidistant between beauty and plainness, who was given away gratis. Then the least plain was put up, and knocked down to the gallant [male] who would marry her for the smallest consideration — and so on till even the plainest was got rid of to some cynical worthy, who decidedly preferred lucre to looks. By transferring to the scale of the ill favoured the prices paid for the fair, beauty was made to endow ugliness, and the rich man's taste was the poor man's gain.<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>494</sup> Ursula Prunster, 'From empire's end: Australians as Orientalists, 1880–1920' in Roger Benjamin (ed.), *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1997), pp.41–53 (42).

<sup>495</sup> Bohrer, *op.cit.*, p.201.

<sup>496</sup> George Swayne, *The history of Herodotus* (London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1870), pp.36–37.

The dubious source of Long's supposed 'impeccable' historical record has been called into question for relying on 'second-hand' literature.<sup>497</sup> The painting was undertaken as a commission, unusual at the time for this genre of work, and the origin of the large painting was described in a contemporary account, though written over ten years later in 1888, by the art historian Marion Harry Spielmann (1858–1948):

Fired in his imagination by the types to which he had been devoting himself, and ambitious of producing a work more important than any he had yet painted, he set about the study of ancient history, so that he might combine art and archaeology in a more thorough manner than he or others were at the time attempting.<sup>498</sup>

Spielmann is keen to make the claim for Long for both the novelty and scale of this painting, and one that appears to have been based upon secondary sources alone. Spielmann wishes to separate Long, and the work, from the range of other responses to Assyria whose foundation was archaeological representation and exactitude. It is extraordinary that not a single drawing is known in connection with the painting: indeed no preparatory drawings survive for any of Long's pictures. He seems to have been sensitive to his poor draughtsmanship and may well have destroyed any drawings that he might have produced.<sup>499</sup> Spielmann's review may provide evidence to explain this remarkable lacuna:

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<sup>497</sup> Amanda Vickery (Personal communication, 16 November 2004). See Mark Bills *et al.*, *The price of beauty: Edwin Long's 'Babylonian marriage market' (1875)* (London: Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and Royal Holloway College [University of London], 2004).

<sup>498</sup> Marion Harry Spielmann, 'Painters in their Studio II: Mr. Edwin Long RA', *The Graphic*, 9 June 1888, pp.612–14 (612) quoted in Mark Bills, *Edwin Longden Long RA* (London and Cranbury, NJ: Cygnus Arts and Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), p.106.

<sup>499</sup> The sole drawing by Edwin Long is one made in connection with a wood-engraving for the frontispiece to Henry Blackburn, *Academy notes: No.XI 1885* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1885), which would have been sent by Long to the

Suddenly, one night, whilst playing whist, as I have heard him tell, the whole picture, much as it stands now, with the figures of the maidens all in a row, flashed across his mind, and he could hardly sleep that night for the eagerness with which he waited for the morning.<sup>500</sup>

By contrast, Poynter made copious drawings of individual figures, architectural elements, drapery — including *in situ* copies of Assyrian artefacts in the British Museum — for his late masterpiece *The visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon* (1884–90; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney), which will be discussed shortly. Happily, for this painting approximately seventy drawings survive.<sup>501</sup> The lack of any surviving drawings by Long points to the use of his sources from secondary material alone, such as book illustrations or photographs, and suggests an impulse at once removed from the ‘originals’ on display, say at the British Museum. He seems not to have made visual records of his visits to the British Museum and, as Spielmann points out, the composition of the painting “flashed across his mind”. Close inspection of the painted surface of Long’s vast canvas reveals numerous *pentimenti*, which concurs with the design and elements of the work evolving once the canvas was begun.

The glazed colour brickwork seen behind the auction, however, reproduces the lioness in the undergrowth bas-relief in the British Museum. The critic of the *Illustrated London News* noted the “wall of painted Babylonian bricks”.<sup>502</sup> Long

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publisher to be photographed and made into a woodblock for printing. For this reason alone it seems to have survived and is now in the British Museum (PD 1939,0731.10), as part of a donation of other drawings that share the same purpose. This drawing was unknown to Mark Bills at the time of the publication of his *catalogue raisonné* in 1998 and is unpublished.

<sup>500</sup> Spielmann, *op.cit.*, p.612.

<sup>501</sup> The painting measures 234.5 x 350.5 cm.

<sup>502</sup> ‘Royal Academy exhibition’, *Illustrated London News*, 1 May 1875, p.415 (415)

'restores' the damaged sculpture in which a lion is seeing off a potential amorous competitor for his female partner. This frieze was interpreted in contemporary reviews as an ancient equivalent of certain London localities where liaisons and flirtation, by both sexes, was prevalent — Rotten Row in Hyde Park being among those mentioned.<sup>503</sup> Long's painting was shown in the Manchester Royal Jubilee Exhibition of 1887, where it was included in the survey of British painting celebrating the fifty years of Queen Victoria's reign.<sup>504</sup> Despite Long's small number of purely 'Assyrian' pictures, though often large in physical dimensions, the laudatory obituary in *The Graphic* listed his achievements with Assyria at the head of a procession of ancient cultures he 'revived', and reveals the now visible face of 'Assyria' attached to an otherwise 'Babylonian' body, seen best in the example of *The Babylonian marriage market*:

Mr. Long's most important works were all inspired by classical and Oriental antiquity, and he was remarkably successful in presenting in a popular form the glories of Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt in the days of their glory.<sup>505</sup>

The painting was commissioned by the cotton textile manufacturer, politician and art collector Edward Hermon (1822–1881). He served from 1868 to 1881 as the MP for Preston, Lancashire. His collection varied in subject from genre pictures, such as John Everett Millais' *Getting better* (1876; Private collection),

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<sup>503</sup> 'The Royal Academy exhibition (Third notice)', *The Times*, 24 May 1875, p.5 (5): "The subjects of the painted slabs which line the wall are significant. A successful bidder in the shape of a lion stands by his lioness; his unsuccessful rival stalks away discomfited".

<sup>504</sup> See John Evans Hodgson, *Fifty years of British art, as illustrated by the pictures and drawings in the Manchester Royal Jubilee Exhibition* (London and Manchester: John Heywood, 1887), pp.82–83.

<sup>505</sup> 'The late Edwin Long RA', *The Graphic*, 23 May 1891, p.585 (585). *The Leeds Mercury* similarly spoke of his inclination towards "Oriental antiquity, and especially dwells on scenes of imaginative history derived from the records of Egypt, Assyria, and Judea" ('Death of Mr. Edwin Long RA', *The Leeds Mercury*, 16 May 1891, p.3 (3)).



depicting a sickly child in bed receiving visitors, and recently in the collection of John and Julie Schaeffer, Sydney;<sup>506</sup> to contemporary subjects, such as the large masterpiece of Social Realism by Frank Holl (1845–1888), *Newgate: Committed for trial* (1878; Royal Holloway College, University of London), which deals with the personal effects of crime on family life.<sup>507</sup> Hermon owned work by James Tissot and the Italian Impressionist Giuseppe De Nittis that displays some advanced taste, though the collection was nonetheless rather conservative in breadth, and formed by a “supporter of Royal Academicians”.<sup>508</sup> Hermon unsurprisingly owned several canvases by Edwin Landseer, David Cox and John Phillip, along with historical genre by Edward Matthew Ward. Long’s painting was the largest and single most important work.

*The Babylonian Marriage Market* presents a fascinating representation of gender issues in the late nineteenth century, and their interplay with Assyrian sources. Bohrer notes that the work “conflates Assyria and Babylonia”, in treating a Babylonian subject taken from Herodotus and fusing it with Assyrian artefacts from the British Museum.<sup>509</sup> The subject of the marital customs of Babylonia, an

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<sup>506</sup> Angus Trumble *et al.*, *Love and death: Art in the age of Queen Victoria* (Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2001), pp.150–51. The painting was on the London art market in 2003 (Christie’s, London, 26 November 2003, lot 28).

<sup>507</sup> Mary Cowling *et al.*, *Paintings from the reign of Victoria: The Royal Holloway collection, London* (Alexandria, VA: Art Services International, 2008), pp.66–67, no.5.

<sup>508</sup> See Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class: Money and the making of cultural identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.428–29; Christie’s, London, 13 May 1882, lot 18, *Vesuvius* by De Nittis (untraced) and lot 80, *Chrysanthemums* by Tissot (Sterling and Francine Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass). See Piero Dini and Giuseppe Luigi Marini, *De Nittis: La vita, I documenti, le opere dipinte*, 2 vols (Turin: Umberto Allemandi, 1990), vol.I, p.157 for Hermon’s purchase of De Nittis’ painting *I crateri del Vesuvio* (*The craters of Vesuvius*) (1872) in mid 1874.

<sup>509</sup> Frederick Bohrer, *Orientalism and visual culture: Imaging Mesopotamia in nineteenth-century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.198.

ancient neighbour of Assyria, is the subject of the painting and the placement of the imagined nineteenth-century (male) viewer in the narrative of the painting is interesting to consider. Bohrer considers that the work is in many ways an inheritor of the gender dynamics from earlier depictions by Martin and Delacroix, from the first half of the nineteenth century, namely the 'dominant/powerful' male and the 'submissive/weak' female. Moreover, for Bohrer, Long's painting unsettles its "unquestioned binarism of male versus female roles, and even activates a certain disbelief in the representation itself".<sup>510</sup> McCall considers the work "an alluring and seductive scene of pretty and not-so-pretty girls" bound into marriage through a commercial transaction.<sup>511</sup> The ancient and contemporary worlds meet in Long's picture. In the background of the chamber in the painting can be seen a mural formed from the reconstruction — with damaged and missing areas 'repaired' — of the celebrated bas-relief depicting a lion and lioness in a garden, in the British Museum (fig.72). Long has inserted the prominent Assyrian reference in a witty parody of the depiction below. The male lion closest to the lioness in the mural is seen fending off a male aggressor and rival suitor, which mirrors the fierce bidding war seen below in the chamber, where rich men vie with one another for their desired bride. Contemporary reviewers of the painting in 1875 were keen to see contemporary resonances in Long's work, and specifically an activation of contemporary gender relations. The reviewer of the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* caught the mood:

We should not wonder if the young women, flower of English youth, who gather round [Long's painting at the Royal Academy] with a curiosity not

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<sup>510</sup> Bohrer, *op.cit.*, pp.196–97.

<sup>511</sup> Henrietta McCall, 'Rediscovery and aftermath', in Stephanie Dalley (ed.), *The legacy of Mesopotamia* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.183–213 (205).

unmixed with personal feelings, found something like a revelation in the picture. One sees them glance at each other with a half smile, half blush, sometimes with subdued awe or indignation, 'Is that how they think of us, these men, though they dare not look it?' the girls ask themselves.<sup>512</sup>

Bohrer takes this review as evidence of the problematic gender unity of the intended contemporary viewers, in which the work activates at the same time issues for both men and women. However, Bahrani considers the painting to be unquestionably a "commodification of women and of female beauty in contemporary Victorian society" and the range of racial types made familiar from the growing British Empire.<sup>513</sup> Long is ambivalent about whether the intended contemporary viewers were intended to be male or female. The line of females awaiting auction present themselves directly to the viewer, of whatever gender, head-on. Perhaps the intended viewer is backstage and therefore inhabits the 'female' space of the intended brides, soliciting empathy. On the other hand, if the intended viewer were male, then this would duplicate the crush of male figures seen on the other side of the dais, especially male figures in company (such as at an art exhibition). This would complete the enveloping male presence around the isolated female figures seen in the painting's foreground. The painting's exhibition at the crowded galleries of the Royal Academy of Arts would, though comprised of mixed gender, mimic the latter proposition in which the intended viewers were formed mostly of crowds of men. Despite it, for Bohrer, activating a "certain disbelief in the representation itself", nonetheless he sees the work as essentially the "transformation of woman into currency".<sup>514</sup> But Bohrer also takes the

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<sup>512</sup> Quoted in Frederick Bohrer, 'Inventing Assyria: Exoticism and reception in nineteenth-century England and France', *Art Bulletin*, 80 (2), June 1998, pp.336–56 (352).

<sup>513</sup> Zainab Bahrani, *Women of Babylon: Gender and representation in Mesopotamia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp.174–75.

<sup>514</sup> Bohrer (2003), *op.cit.*, p.197.

outward gaze of the line of females, especially the central female figure whose gaze directly confronts the viewer, as therefore challenging the normative gender politics and undermining the “men viewing and women being viewed” model.<sup>515</sup> Long’s composition is some ways similar to Edgar Degas’ contemporary painted depictions of ballerinas and dancers seen resting backstage, or chatting to male theatre or ballet goers. Both Long’s and Degas’ females are ‘available’ for male (visual and sexual) consumption.

The period 1870–1900 was remarkable for the opportunities it provided for the bringing together of many artworks, all influenced by Assyria, from disparate locations, collections, and dates, together in several large-scale exhibitions. As stated previously, Long’s *The Babylonian marriage market* was displayed at one such occasion, at Manchester’s Royal Jubilee Exhibition in 1887. It joined Ford Madox Brown’s 1871 watercolour *The dream of Sardanapalus* (Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, DE), which had been lent by the Mancunian calico printer Frederick Craven (1818–1894); and was joined by several ‘versions’ of Briton Rivière’s *Daniel in the lions’ den*: the original painting lent by the ship-owner Thomas Henry Ismay (1837–1899), from 1872 (fig.106); the later undated watercolour lent by Edward Cross (untraced); and the mixed-method print from 1874 by Charles George Lewis (fig.107). Moreover, the watercolours by Rivière and Brown were exhibited together in the same room (Gallery 12) and possibly beside one another. The Assyrian presence in several ‘versions’, in conversation with one another, occurred throughout the period at a number of other times.

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<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*, p.200.

The mid-1870s saw a dramatic rise in the public visibility of Assyrian influenced artworks, especially on the walls of the Royal Academy at Burlington House, of which Long's dramatic canvas was simply one of many. In 1877 Long sent *An ancient custom* to the Royal Academy.<sup>516</sup> The picture was subsequently commissioned for reproduction as a single-sheet print and accordingly Long produced a reduced version of the picture expressly for this purpose later that same year (fig.126).<sup>517</sup> The *catalogue raisonné* of Long's work, published in 1998, seems to confuse the identity of these two versions. Long once spoke of one of these works as having been "afterwards completed for the purpose of engraving".<sup>518</sup> Bills considers that Long sent the unfinished canvas to the exhibition, but surely as a newly elected associate of the Royal Academy Long is unlikely to have sent in an 'uncompleted' picture to the summer exhibition, just two years after his great critical and popular success in 1875 with *The Babylonian marriage market*.<sup>519</sup> *An ancient custom* was hung in the same gallery as the much larger and important *An Egyptian feast* (Cartwright Hall, Bradford) by Long, which dominated reviews of the exhibition. *An ancient custom* is dated 1876 and so is unlikely to have been completed after its first public showing, as it was most probably already signed and dated by the time of the exhibition opening in May 1877. The work "afterwards completed" is undoubtedly the reduced replica (in Long's word, a "duplicate"), probably a sketch or study for the 1876 canvas, and

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<sup>516</sup> Bills, *op.cit.*, p.109, no.145 [1]. The work was on the New York art market in 2000 (Christie's, New York, 1 May 2000, lot 45).

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*, p.109, no.145.1 [2].

<sup>518</sup> Edwin Long, 'Original and duplicate pictures', *The Times*, 7 June 1879, p.8 (8).

<sup>519</sup> Long was elected an Associate Royal Academician on 26 January 1876. See 'Recently elected associates of the Royal Academy: Edwin Long ARA', *Illustrated London News*, 6 May 1876, p.436-37.

which was worked up to have sufficient detail to be used as the model for printmaking.<sup>520</sup>

In the 1880s Long's main dealer seems to have been Fairless & Beeforth, who commissioned from him several paintings, usually pendants, which were intended to be published as prints.<sup>521</sup> The commissioner of the print of *An ancient custom* is not known, but would likely only have come after first seeing the work at its *début* in May 1877 at Burlington House. In any case, Long described the composition of *An ancient custom* as the "original study" and basis for a much larger and multi-figure work based on the biblical Queen Esther, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1879. Long has employed in *An ancient custom* a favourite Orientalist trope in the contrast between a light-coloured female in rich attire attended by a darker-skinned female applying her make-up.<sup>522</sup> The chief attraction of the work was for some unequivocal: "The merits of Mr. Long's work lie in his archaeological knowledge".<sup>523</sup> In the background is the bas-relief of the lioness in the undergrowth, from the British Museum (fig.72). Despite Long not specifying a location or period but simply 'an ancient custom' and the inclusion of the unique Assyrian bas-relief, some critics thought the work depicted an "Egyptian mistress".<sup>524</sup> The 1877 version of the work was first owned by R A Cosier, who sold it in 1887, and later ended up in the collection of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter. It was subsequently sold by Exeter in 1954 and was on the art

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<sup>520</sup> Bills, *op.cit.*, p.109, no.145.1.

<sup>521</sup> See, for example the biblical heroines *Merab* and *Michal* commissioned in 1883 (Bills, *op.cit.*, pp.137–38, no.194 and pp.138–39, no.195 respectively) and made into prints by Herbert Bourne (1820–1907). Later, the commissions were more ambitious with *The search for beauty* and *The chosen five* in 1885 (Bills, *op.cit.*, pp.146–47, no.209 and pp.148–49, no.210 respectively).

<sup>522</sup> Ursula Prunster in Roger Benjamin (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.97, no.38.

<sup>523</sup> 'The Royal Academy exhibition', *The Art Journal*, July 1877, pp.197–200 (197).

<sup>524</sup> Henry Blackburn, *Academy notes: No.III 1877* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1877), p.21. Others repeat this view. See for example, 'Exhibition of the Royal Academy', *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*, 13 May 1877, p.5 (5).

market in 2002.<sup>525</sup> The bespoke frame has a beautiful lotus-and-bud pattern forming an integral ensemble (fig.127). The acanthus patterning is derived from one of two Assyrian carved door-sills (fig.74 and 78), thereby making the painting a 'complete' synthesis of Assyria for the contemporary nineteenth-century viewer and importantly, owing to the production of different versions and replicas, for the collector.

The last work by Long to engage with Assyrian artefacts was *An Assyrian captive*, first shown at the 1880 Royal Academy (fig.128).<sup>526</sup> Bills has suggested that the composition was based upon a passage from George Rawlinson's *The five great monarchies of the ancient world*, from 1862, in which he describes:

The employment of captives as musicians is interesting, though we cannot say that the captives are Jews. It shows us that the Assyrians, like the later Babylonians, were in the habit of 'requiring' music from their prisoners, who, when transported into a 'strange land', had to entertain their masters with their native melodies.<sup>527</sup>

The work depicts a female harpist resting after a performance. The lack of strong narrative prompted the *Magazine of Art* in a review of the year's pictures to say "The great beauty...more solid drawing and the finer completeness of the painting, are no slight advantages to compensate for the absence of a story".<sup>528</sup> Behind the figure is 'The banquet scene' bas-relief in the British Museum, one of many pictures to 'insert' the celebrated panel into their compositions (fig.63). The critic of *The Times* was unimpressed by the picture, assigning it to a long line of such work, and considered it as one of Long's "many studies for his pictures of ancient

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<sup>525</sup> Christie's, London, 12 June 2002, lot 47.

<sup>526</sup> Bills, *op.cit.*, p.124–25, no.173.

<sup>527</sup> George Rawlinson, *The five great monarchies of the ancient world; or the history, geography and antiquities of Chaldea, Assyria, Babylon, Media and Persia*, 4 vols (London: 1862–67), vol.I (1862), p.cxxxvii quoted in *ibid.*, p.124.

<sup>528</sup> 'Pictures of the year: III', *Magazine of Art*, 1880, pp.348–52 (352).

Oriental life, nothing more".<sup>529</sup> The picture was thus condemned as simply a study for a more important work. Others saw it as the work that "reminds us of past triumphs" and hinted at Long's move towards lucrative portrait commissions.<sup>530</sup> Indeed, the model was a favourite of Long's who appears in many of his pictures, and might be a rejected figure in the line of unfortunate females awaiting auction in his large *The Babylonian marriage market*.

The Royal Academy's move in 1868 to the more spacious accommodation of Burlington House, as noted, encouraged history painting on a grander scale. Many took up the challenge this opportunity offered. The young painter Frank Dicksee (1853–1928), a future President of the Royal Academy, had won the biennial Royal Academy Schools' student competition gold medal in December 1875 for his historical painting *Elijah confronting Ahab and Jezebel in Naboth's vineyard* (1875; Untraced).<sup>531</sup> It was subsequently first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1876. The work was the second painting to have been influenced by Assyria to win this award, after Louisa Starr's *David brought before Saul* in 1867.<sup>532</sup> Dicksee's work was reproduced in *Academy notes* in 1876 and as a full-page illustration in the popular illustrated weekly *The Graphic* (fig.129).<sup>533</sup> Dicksee's work was also available as a photographic reproduction by the photographer Frederick Hollyer (1837–1933), intended to be framed to decorate middle-class homes.<sup>534</sup> The work

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<sup>529</sup> 'Royal Academy exhibition (Second notice)', *The Times*, 6 May 1880, p.10 (10).

<sup>530</sup> 'The Royal Academy exhibition (From our own correspondent)', *Bury and Norwich Post, and Suffolk Herald*, 18 May 1880, p.8 (8).

<sup>531</sup> 'Fine art gossip', *Athenaeum*, 18 December 1875, p.837 (837).

<sup>532</sup> See Chapter Two for a discussion of this work.

<sup>533</sup> Henry Blackburn, *Academy notes: No. II 1876* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1876), p.59 and *The Graphic*, 6 May 1876, p.448.

<sup>534</sup> In 1907 a published reproduction of the painting was captioned 'From a photograph by F. Hollyer'; See Austin Chester, 'The art of Mr. Frank Dicksee RA', *The Windsor Magazine*, December 1907, pp.2–24 (4).



caught the critical attention of the reviewer for *The Times*, whose flattering description was validatory:

The picture is very creditable; well composed throughout; the figure, and above all the head of the prophet, is duly defiant and denunciatory, and the personage, as a whole, fairly well conceived.<sup>535</sup>

No mention was made of the obvious references to Assyrian sculpture, especially with regard to Ahab's clothing and footwear. The rider seems to have been based on the Parthenon sculptures, and like Degas' the decade before, the work shows the conflicting sources of many 'Assyrian' pictures and the constant grounding of Assyria within classical models. Thomas Matthews Rooke (1842–1942), a pupil and assistant of Edward Burne-Jones, entered the same Royal Academy Schools student competition as Dicksee in December 1875. In 1876, at the same exhibition as Dicksee's gold medal painting, Rooke showed *Ahab and Jezebel in the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite* (Untraced). Rooke's competency in the borrowing of Assyrian motifs developed in the 1870s and in 1879 he exhibited *King Ahab's coveting* at the Royal Academy (Russell-Cotes Museum & Art Gallery, Bournemouth).<sup>536</sup> The work consists of six small panels set into an elaborate carved frame set with Assyrian couchant lions (fig.130). Each panel is heavily indebted to Assyrian prototypes, especially the carefully studied costume from bas-reliefs depicting Assyrian kings. For example in one panel, *Naboth refuses Ahab his vineyard*, King Ahab's costume and 'Assyrian' beard are taken directly from numerous prototypes that could have been seen in the British Museum (fig.131).

Rooke's story of Ahab was widely exhibited, and reviewed in the press, in

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<sup>535</sup> 'The Royal Academy: Fourth article', *The Times*, 31 May 1876, p.5 (5).

<sup>536</sup> Mark Bills in Simon Olding *et al.*, *A Victorian salon: Paintings from the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum* (Bournemouth: London: Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum and Lund Humphries, 1999), pp.77–79, no.41.

the 1880s. In 1881 it was exhibited in Bristol's annual display of contemporary British art.<sup>537</sup> Later that year it was included in a large mixed exhibition of contemporary and Old Master works in Cardiff, at which some thought so highly of *King Ahab's coveting* that it deserved "the palm" for first place.<sup>538</sup> In 1889 it was exhibited at the Yorkshire Fine Art and Industrial Institution, York.<sup>539</sup> In 1892 critics, matching previous opinion, considered the work deserved "amongst the figure pictures...[the] foremost place" at the exhibition in London's newly founded New Gallery.<sup>540</sup> Yet it seems that the work remained unsold until purchased by the hotelier, and future Mayor of Bournemouth in 1894–95, Merton Russell-Cotes (1835–1921) in 1892 from the New Gallery. Interestingly, the two works by Dicksee and Rooke were both once owned by Russell-Cotes. However, by 1893 Russell-Cotes had certainly bought the work, for he was the lender to the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago. The Rooke was retained and remains in the collection he founded in Bournemouth, the Russell-Cotes Museum and Art Gallery, while the Dicksee was sold in 1919.<sup>541</sup>

Rooke reworked one of these panels the following year into a large single work, *Elijah, Ahab and Jezebel in Naboth's vineyard* (1880; South London Gallery, London). The print and book publisher Virtue & Co had it engraved by Thomas

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<sup>537</sup> 'The exhibition of fine arts academy', *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 7 March 1881, p.3 (3).

<sup>538</sup> 'Fine art and industrial exhibition at Cardiff: Introductory sketch; Description of the exhibits; Fine art collection; Machinery, models, and scientific apparatus', *Western Mail*, 29 July 1881, p.3 (3).

<sup>539</sup> 'York exhibition: The picture galleries; The saloon', *York Herald*, 13 September 1889, p.3 (3).

<sup>540</sup> 'Art notes', *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*, 16 October 1892, p.3 (3). The New Gallery, at 121 Regent Street (near Piccadilly Circus), was founded in 1888 by Joseph Comyns Carr (1849–1916) and Charles Edward Hallé (1846–1914) after the closure of the Grosvenor Gallery.

<sup>541</sup> Christie's, London, 16 May 1919, lot 89.

Sherratt for their monthly periodical *The Art Journal* in June 1880 (fig.132).<sup>542</sup> The print by Sherratt was itself exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1880, on view at the same time as its appearance in the pages of the art monthly. Rooke's work was widely published in photographic and print form elsewhere.<sup>543</sup>

Rooke was also an adept watercolourist and he strove for membership of the Royal Watercolour Society, becoming an associate in 1891 and full member in 1903. In 1895 he submitted *Herod's feast*, a large watercolour that was on the London art market in 2010 (fig.133).<sup>544</sup> He was inspired to paint the subject after hearing the oratorio *St John the Baptist* by Sir George Macfarren (1813–1887) at Exeter Hall, London.<sup>545</sup> First performed in 1873, it was repeated many times in the 1870s and 1880s. Rooke's canvas came a year after the publication of Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations for *Salome* by Oscar Wilde in 1894, and was one of many depictions of the biblical subject. Rooke's watercolour rivals oil painting in both size and ambition. Critics admired the "elaborate" watercolour "with its loving, excessive detail" which was combined with many "fine colour passages".<sup>546</sup> Others noted the "daring and gorgeously-coloured imagination" of the biblical subject.<sup>547</sup> *The Standard* thought that "every inch is painted with scrupulous care, and the arrangement is good...yet, with all its merits, it is dry in quality and ineffective".<sup>548</sup> One other critic thought that the work was:

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<sup>542</sup> *The Art Journal*, June 1880, opposite p.172 and lettered below 'in the possession of the publishers [J S Virtue & Co]'. Virtue & Co might have commissioned the work expressly for reproduction, which was their usual custom.

<sup>543</sup> See, for example, Henry Blackburn, *Academy notes: No.V 1879* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1879), p.45.

<sup>544</sup> Christie's, London, 16 June 2010, lot 157.

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>546</sup> 'Royal Society of Watercolour Painters (from our special correspondent)', *Glasgow Herald*, 19 April 1895, p.9 (9).

<sup>547</sup> 'Our London letter (from our own correspondent)', *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 19 April 1895, p.4 (4).

<sup>548</sup> 'Royal Society of Painters in Watercolours', *The Standard*, 22 April 1895, p.3 (3).

Suitably awarded a place of honour in the centre of the array on one of the end walls, for there is originality in his treatment of his subject; the numerous figures have a suitable semblance of action and animation, and the multifarious details have all been wrought out with painstaking exactitude.<sup>549</sup>

Critic after critic noted the exactitude of the detailing in the work. The precise source of Rooke's ornamentation is difficult to identify but the floor pattern seems to have been taken from the pattern of Assyrian carved door-sills in the British Museum, and widely published. In common with other artists, and works, the Rooke watercolour was sent, after the close of its London *début* in 1895, to that year's Liverpool annual autumn exhibition of contemporary art. There it received more praise from the regional newspapers. One thought it "abounds in Oriental glitter and splendour. The airily draped *danseuse* evokes the admiration of Herod and his guests as they recline, in gorgeous robes and jewels, after the feast".<sup>550</sup> The work was viewed as the epitome of Orientalist escapism and excess. The following year (1896), it was at York Art Gallery summer exhibition where it was "probably the most notable work" of the exhibition full of "so many interesting details of Oriental luxury and costume...that the study and preparation necessary must have been an occupation of some magnitude".<sup>551</sup>

The unfolding Pre-Raphaelite project in many ways overlapped with the career of the painter John Rogers Herbert (1810–1890). He exhibited *Judith in the tent of Holofernes* (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool) in 1876, with Dicksee's and Rooke's Assyrian canvases at the same Royal Academy exhibition. (The French

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<sup>549</sup> 'The Royal Society of Painters in Watercolour', *Morning Post*, 24 April 1895, p.3 (3).

<sup>550</sup> 'The Liverpool autumn exhibition of pictures (from our special correspondent)', *Glasgow Herald*, 29 August 1895, p.4 (4).

<sup>551</sup> 'Pictures at the York Corporation Art Gallery: Second notice', *Yorkshire Herald*, 25 August 1896, p.5 (5).

Salon, as we have seen, witnessed an avalanche of such depictions, exploiting the full potential for drama and history combined with sometimes titillating female nudity). Herbert had previously shown his knowledge of Assyrian art in *The hunting leopard* (1853; Private collection) (fig.36). This work was once owned by Edward Bates (1816–1896), the Conservative MP for Plymouth from 1871 to 1880, and was on the London art market in 2006, having remained in Bates' family collection in Gyrn Castle, Flintshire, north Wales until that time.<sup>552</sup> The painting was hung with other work that shared the same subject matter (fig.134). Beside it hung a stag hunting painting by Richard Ansdell (1815–1885) that might be *The death; stag hunt in the olden time*, exhibited at the British Institution, London in 1847 and which was also sold in 2006.<sup>553</sup>

In 1881 Herbert had a retrospective exhibition at the Hanover Gallery on Bond Street, run by the dealers Hollender and Cremetti. There his *The judgment of Daniel against the false elders* caused critics to marvel at his erudition and scholarly exactitude:

The central group [of figures] is remarkable both for composition and colour, and the accessories give evidence of equal skill and research. The great palace which forms the background has been designed with infinite care after consulting the best authorities...Attention to archaeological detail...<sup>554</sup>

The repeated use of the word archaeology or archaeological in the criticism closely aligns Herbert with Alma-Tadema and Long's practice. Others thought Herbert's work was the product of:

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<sup>552</sup> Christie's, London, 17–18 July 2006, lot 118.

<sup>553</sup> Christie's, London, 17–18 July 2006, lot 119. I am grateful to Sarah Kellam for this information.

<sup>554</sup> 'The Herbert exhibition', *The Daily News*, 23 June 1881, p.2 (2).

Research of painstaking perseverance is manifested in the details of costume, of incident, of type, and in the carefully ordered background of the Assyrian palace of Neboplassa [sic], the hanging gardens and the Tower of Belus.<sup>555</sup>

The critical response seems exaggerated. The work as a whole resists referencing, and except for the stepped crenellation it is difficult to spot anything Assyrian or historicising in the work. Herbert later showed *The judgment of Daniel against the false elders* at the Royal Academy in 1884.

One of the key pictures of the later phase of the artistic engagement with Assyria was George Frederick Watts' *Jonah* (1894; Tate, London) that the artist himself presented to the national collection (fig.135). The work is based upon the biblical account of Jonah preaching at Nineveh (Jonah 3:1–10). The painting exploited the symbolic potential of Assyria, beyond its role as historical or cultural marker. Watts bypassed the official sanction others sought from the commercial art world and donated a number of his works directly to the national collection recently formed at Millbank, now Tate Britain. Behind the aged prophet are figural groups arranged in registers, which are adapted from Assyrian reliefs that the artist would have known of in the British Museum. But these groups have been transformed to form contemporary commentaries on gambling, poverty and degeneracy. Watts engages with key social debates of the period through his biblical picture and warns modern London, as Jonah warned ancient Nineveh, of the ills of gambling, drink and other social depravities. Watts and his contemporaries' reaction to the present was deeply bound up with notions of the past, that helped invigorate their artistic practice and form responses to key social issues of the time. Spielmann noted of this picture:

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<sup>555</sup> 'Art chronicle', *The Portfolio*, 1881, p.119 (119). The reviewer is referring to Nabopolassar.

In this impressive — it might almost be said, this oppressive — work, so powerfully does it affect the beholder, the artist has given us the type and symbol of religious prophet and fanatical preacher: a symbol as felicitously befitting a latter day Solomon Eagle prophesying [sic] the destruction of London, as Jonah threatening the believers of Nineveh. Behind the figure of the fierce seer are appropriate reliefs, and lower down on the wall marks of blood, to illustrate the lawlessness, crime, and wickedness that have attracted the wrath of God.<sup>556</sup>

Watts' deeply felt social conviction underpinning his religious work, including *Jonah*, compelled him to seek the betterment of mankind by eradicating ill-treatment, abuse, neglect and greed. These feelings might have prompted him to seek in Assyrian art a foretaste of the downfall of the once-powerful nation, and to counter Britain's slide into debauchery, perhaps offering salvation. The 1885 four-part *exposé* of child prostitution by William Thomas Stead (1849–1912) called 'The maiden tribute of modern Babylon' brought these fears to the unwelcomed attention of the larger British public. The equation of London as a 'modern Babylon', discussed in Chapter Three, must have intensified the look back upon Assyrian art.

The painter Ernest Normand (1859–1923) exhibited a number of paintings in the last quarter of the nineteenth century that betray a deep and engaged interaction with Mesopotamian art. He made his Royal Academy *début* in 1881. In 1890 he exhibited *Vashti deposed*, which incorporated ancient Persian artefacts from the British Museum (fig.136). Normand had trained in Paris and was probably aware of the new Persian galleries that had recently opened at the Louvre in 1888.<sup>557</sup>

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<sup>556</sup> Marion Harry Spielmann, *Royal Academy pictures* (London, Paris and Melbourne: Cassell & Co, 1895), p.vii.

<sup>557</sup> See Bohrer, *op.cit.*, pp.226–28 for a discussion of these new galleries.

The Assyrian *Esther denouncing Haman to King Ahasuerus* by Normand, shown at the Royal Academy in 1888, drew adverse criticism from contemporary critics (fig.137). Some critics thought it was “somewhat stagey”<sup>558</sup> with others concurring that it was “somewhat theatrical in arrangement but painted with great power”.<sup>559</sup> The theatricality of the picture was clearly a cause for alarm and was a criticism routinely thrown at these large biblical ‘machines’ both in Britain and France, in the work of Chalon, Rochegrosse and Doré. This was not only the case with French and British critics regarding French work exhibited in France, but also in British criticism levelled at British work exhibited on native ground.<sup>560</sup>

In 1891 at the Royal Academy Normand exhibited the *Saul and David* (fig.138) inspired by Robert Browning’s poem *Saul* (1855) that was, in turn, based on a biblical passage (1 Samuel 16:23). The theme of David and Saul had been popular with many painters in the preceding decades. Louisa Starr’s gold medal-winning painting, with overt Assyrian referencing, is one example that was widely known from reproduction and which Normand may have been aware of (fig.81). Normand decorates King David’s throne with two winged deities with stone buckets, seen in numerous reliefs in the British Museum and the Louvre. The canvas shares much with that by Maurice Lefèbvre-Lourdet (1860–1934), *David calmant les fureurs de Saul* (*David calming the wrath of Saul*), that was exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1886 (fig.139). Perhaps these two young artists had met in Paris, where Normand had briefly trained in the 1890s, or else he might have seen a reproduction of the French painting. Both artists might have in turn known a

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<sup>558</sup> ‘Fine Arts: The Royal Academy (Third notice)’, *Athenaeum*, 9 June 1888, pp.731–33 (733).

<sup>559</sup> *Royal Academy pictures: Illustrating fifty-three of the principal pictures and sculptures in the one hundred and twentieth exhibition of the Royal Academy* (London: Cassell & Co, 1888), n.p.

<sup>560</sup> See, for example, the critical attacks on Chalon in Chapter Three, pp.172–73.



slightly earlier work that shares their same subject, now untraced, called *David calmant les fureurs de Saul* by Arsène Rivey (1838–1903), shown the previous decade at the Paris Salon in 1878. Normand's *David and Saul* was exhibited in Blackburn in 1894 with Schmalz's *The daughters of Judah in Babylon*, and was one of many occasions (as we shall see) when Assyrian artworks were united, in primary forms in exhibitions, and secondary forms in printed publications.<sup>561</sup> There followed in 1892 *Mordecai refusing to do reverence to Haman* (Untraced), which also incorporates Assyrian motifs.

The success of these pictures was crowned with *Bondage* (1895; Private collection) in which Normand's knowledge of the ancient Egyptian sculpture collection at the British Museum was evident. The work is dominated by a recumbent lion, taken from one of the two red granite examples in the British Museum which had been donated to the institution in 1835 by Lord Prudhoe. The lions were celebrated examples of the collection in Bloomsbury and Poynter had used them to dazzling effect as the centrepiece of his *Israel in Egypt* (1867; Guildhall Art Gallery, London) from three decades before. But Normand's picture baffled some critics who were confused by the "pseudo-Oriental potentate" presiding over the scene and thought the artist had failed, unlike painters such as Edwin Long, to "carefully let us know [whether] he meant Egypt or Assyria".<sup>562</sup> The diplomat and collector Christopher Henry Hawkins, who divided his time between London and Trewithen House, Cornwall, bought the picture and subsequently

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<sup>561</sup> 'Blackburn's tribute to art: A splendid collection of pictures', *Weekly Standard and Express*, 1 September 1894, p.5 (5).

<sup>562</sup> 'Fine arts: The Royal Academy (Fourth notice)', *Athenaeum*, 22 June 1895, pp.810–12 (811).

presented it to Truro. The Royal Cornwall Institution de-accessioned the picture in 2010.<sup>563</sup>

The exhibition of pictures at the annual Royal Academy in London and the Salon in Paris became, for much of the nineteenth century, the prime painterly mode in the artistic dissemination of Assyria and the dissemination of its imagery. Rooke, Watts, Herbert, Long and Dicksee all chose to premier their Assyrianising works at the Royal Academy. In the latter half of the century painters would increasingly choose to exhibit their work in both venues to capitalise on both the lucrative French and British art markets, and the priming of those markets ready to absorb prints made after these paintings. Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Frederick Arthur Bridgman and others would fully exploit these artistic channels, regularly shipping pictures of all kinds and genres across the Channel for exhibition.<sup>564</sup> However, the tendency was towards historical paintings and historical genre that frequently needed much exposure to sell because of its unusually large size. This makes it difficult to speak always of a distinct British and French reception of Assyria. The painter who most defies easy classification and exploited every mode of display is Gustave Doré (1832–1883), aspects of whose work were discussed in Chapter Two, who arguably had a greater impact, critically and commercially, in Britain than in his native France.

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<sup>563</sup> Christie's, London, 15 June 2010, lot 40.

<sup>564</sup> Alma-Tadema sent *Joseph, overseer of Pharaoh's granary* (1874; Dahesh Museum of Art, New York) to the Royal Academy in 1875 and then later to the Paris Salon 1876 (no.18) as *Joseph, intendant des greniers de Pharaon*. William Adolphe Bouguereau (1825–1905) exhibited *La nuit* at the Paris Salon in 1883 and the Royal Academy the following year. Albert Aublet (1851–1938) exhibited *L'Enfant Rose* at the same respective Salon and Royal Academy exhibitions. It seems to have been a popular strategy.

Doré was prodigiously talented: while still a teenager he had satires published in the *Journal pour Rire* and made his Salon *début* in 1849. He first came to the attention of the British public in the 1850s through his illustrations of the Crimean War that were published by the *Illustrated London News* in 1855 and 1856. The breakthrough came in 1869 when the London dealers Fairless & Beeforth approached him to supply them with religious canvases that they would place in a space solely devoted to his work and which opened that year as the Doré Gallery. Located in the heart of London's fashionable art district, New Bond Street, it was close to the Grosvenor Gallery on the same street. The dealers had a penchant for religious painting and represented Edwin Long and Frederick Goodall, among others. Fairless & Beeforth sought to capitalise on the tremendous impact that *The Doré Bible* had when simultaneously published in London and France in 1866, though long known afterwards through large, and inexpensive, editions. Doré's renown, largely based on his illustrative work, was due to the successful combination of the "modern facilities of printing, and to the enterprise of publishers",<sup>565</sup> His reputation waning in France, Doré first visited London in May 1868 to seek alternative outlets for his practice. The chance to exhibit pictures away from the crowded, and highly competitive, spaces of the Paris Salon or the Royal Academy must have appealed to Doré and the commercial acumen of the dealers meant that prints after his paintings were sold at the Gallery as souvenirs of the visit. Doré never exhibited a single canvas at Burlington House, making the large display of his pictures all the more remarkable.

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<sup>565</sup> 'Fine arts: Paintings by Gustave Doré', *Illustrated London News*, 4 January 1868, p.12 (12).

Religious painting on a grand scale was not without its critics. Doré in particular was attacked many times in relation to some of his more elaborate and full-blown aggrandising canvases. In 1873 at the Paris Salon British critics attacked the now lost *Les Ténèbres (The night of the Crucifixion)* and, though not a response to Assyrian art, it was typical of his religious work in general, including those that were indebted to Assyria. Nonetheless, despite the savage critical response it was subsequently added to the display at the Doré Gallery. The critic of the *Athenaeum* considered the painting little higher than lowly stage-design, describing how “to a fourth-rate French theatre M. Doré would be invaluable as a getter-up of scenic effects” and that the “Jerusalem trumpery” was among the “crudest pieces of clap-trap which M. Doré has [ever] produced” and condemned the painting as “stagey”.<sup>566</sup>

French critics also levelled the same complaints. Similar attacks were launched at Normand’s work in the following decade, as previously noted. The disparity between the critical reception of the painting in art writing and its popular reception by the British public is highlighted by the French response to the painting at the same Salon. Jules Claretie (1840–1913) wrote that the “English are mad about that sort of [large-scale religious] painting” but conceded, like his British critical counterpart, that the large work was rather “a kind of model for an opera set”.<sup>567</sup> Therefore the critical voice was united on both sides of the channel, noting the theatrical aspects of the picture. The illustrations for *The Doré Bible* provided the French artist with a stock of compositions that he would invariably

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<sup>566</sup> ‘Fine arts: The Salon, Paris (Third notice)’, *Athenaeum*, 24 May 1873, pp.667–69 (667–68).

<sup>567</sup> Jules Claretie, *L’art et les artistes français contemporains* (Paris: Charpentier, 1876), p.152, quoted in Eric Zafran (ed.), *Fantasy and faith: The art of Gustave Doré* (New York and London: Dahesh Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2007), p.75.

later return to, to produce large paintings, and other variants. Commercial enterprise might have dictated this practice more than has been comfortable for recent scholarship to recently acknowledge.<sup>568</sup> The insatiable appetite for Doré's religious work, of all kinds, in London, might have prompted the recycling of previous subjects.

In France too Doré received repeated and sustained criticism for his large religious paintings. In 1878 his two submissions to the Salon were savaged by Jules Comte (1846–1912) in *L'illustration* and his painting technique itself was as much the problem as his 'archaeology', which French critics were never mindful to pay too much attention towards:

The palace, the figures and the costumes [of the *Ecce Homo* and of *Moses Before Pharaoh*] are the offspring of the ever-powerful and no less fanciful imagination of M. Gustave Doré; the archaeological reconstructions are no more faithful than the faces are studied. The daylight is wrong, the lighting is illogical; it looks like a drawing reduced in scale and transposed in gigantic proportions onto a canvas, and painted by a hand capable of the most daring gestures; the skilfulness displayed by the artist in gathering figures together is undisputable, but this quality is not enough to constitute a proper canvas when one can neither draw nor paint.<sup>569</sup>

Doré's excursion into Assyrian imagery was, like other painters before and after him, usually limited to the standard repertoire of subjects from Hebrew

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<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65.

<sup>569</sup> Jules Comte, 'Le Salon de 1878: Peinture, III', *L'illustration*, 15 June 1878, pp.391–98 (398); "Palais, personnages et costumes [de *Ecce Homo* et *Moïses devant Pharaon*] sont les produits de l'imagination toujours puissante, non moins souvent fantaisiste, de M. Gustave Doré; les restitutions archéologiques n'y ont pas plus de valeur que l'expression des physionomies n'y est étudiée; le jour y est faux, les lumières y sont inexplicables; on dirait des dessins exécutés à une échelle réduite qui auraient été transportés sur la toile dans des proportions colossales et brossés ensuite par une main capable de toutes les audaces; l'incontestable habileté de l'artiste à grouper des personnages ne saurait à elle seule constituer des tableaux, là où il n'y a ni dessin ni peinture." (Translation by Charlotte Lepetoukha).

scriptures such as Judith and Holofernes, Jonah preaching outside the walls of Nineveh, and so forth. However, he did treat one rather obscure character in *The Doré Bible*, namely Mattathias. The subject derives from the apocryphal First Book of Maccabees (2:22–24), and prominently depicts an Assyrian winged disc, in a scene where Mattathias is seen killing a fellow Jew who is about to offer an idolatrous sacrifice. *The Doré Bible* was republished in a reduced version, with a hundred illustrations, in America in 1889 and 1891.<sup>570</sup> Bohrer contends that for Doré, the inclusion of Assyrian bulls and other iconography, such as the winged disc, was simply one of a host of “exotic signifiers” and that the referencing of this imagery was subordinated into the general scheme of a generic nod to historicism.<sup>571</sup> Doré was happy to include them but made nothing tremendous of them, unlike his British counterparts, and went only slightly further than some of his French colleagues who evoked but ‘erased’ the specificity of Assyria from their Mesopotamian subjects.

1868 was a momentous year for Doré and his position on the London art scene. On Christmas Eve in 1867 “several of the most important paintings by Gustave Doré” went on show at the general entertainment venue at Egyptian Hall on Piccadilly in a charging exhibition that ran until August 1868.<sup>572</sup> The exhibition quickly became known as ‘Gustave Doré’s great paintings’; season tickets for three months could be purchased, and to capitalise on the potential of the working population the venue was “lighted up day and night”.<sup>573</sup> There soon appeared another display of Doré’s work that ran from April to September 1868 at a New

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<sup>570</sup> *The Doré Bible Gallery, containing one hundred superb illustrations, and a page of explanatory letterpress facing each: Illustrated by Gustave Doré* (Chicago, New York and San Francisco: Belford, Clarke & Co, 1889), republished by Belford-Clarke & Co, Chicago in 1891.

<sup>571</sup> Bohrer, *op.cit.*, p.92.

<sup>572</sup> *The Era*, 22 December 1867, p.9 (9).

<sup>573</sup> *The Daily News*, 1 January 1868, p.1 [front-page].

Bond Street gallery space. The London press carried advertisements for them both until August 1868.<sup>574</sup> The Crystal Palace had, by 1868, instituted a Doré Art Union, separate from the Crystal Palace Art Union founded by Thomas Battam (1810–1864), and a dedicated gallery to present a changing display of the Frenchman's work. In 1868 drawings for Tennyson's *Idylls of the kings* were among the prizes for distribution to subscribers. The large canvas *The triumph of Christianity over Paganism* (1867–68; Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton, Ontario), three by two metres, was commissioned from Doré by his dealers in London as the centrepiece for the running show of his pictures. The painting was completed by April 1868, when it was installed — ahead of the Doré Gallery — in a one-man exhibition of over two dozen works, both paintings and drawings, at the commercial space known as the German Gallery at 168 New Bond Street; this ran from April to September 1868. It might have been the commercial test-piece before committing to the semi-permanent space of the Doré Gallery and the financial outlay that would involve. *The triumph of Christianity over Paganism*, singled out as the “most prominent picture”, drew the following criticism:

Immediately beneath are exterminating angels, wielding flaming swords, one of whom takes the lead of the rest as they dart in pursuit of the fleeing gods of heathendom, rushing pell-mell with the symbols of their worship and attributes of their godship into Hades below. The gods and priests of Egypt and Assyria, of Gaul and Scandinavia, of Greece and India, are included in the rout, some standing out defined and prominent, in bright and gaudy tints, and some veiled in shadow and vaguely outlined...contrast of light and shade...of celestial radiance and infernal darkness...<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>574</sup> 'Amusements', *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 15 August 1868, p.102 (102).

<sup>575</sup> 'Fine arts: Gustave Doré's works at the German Gallery', *The Daily News*, 30 April 1868, p.6 (6). See too 'Fine arts: Exhibition of pictures and drawings by M. Gustave Doré', *John Bull*, 25 April 1868, pp.289–90 (289) which described the “Nimrod and Baal, and the bull Apis, are being cast terror-stricken into the abyss”.

Nonetheless the painting was already chastised for its shameless “theatrical tawdriness”. The drawings in the display included *Babylon in ruins* and *Jonah at Nineveh foretelling the destruction of the city*, both now untraced.<sup>576</sup> The description of the painting in the Doré Gallery catalogue makes it clear that Assyria, and its idolatry, was one of the ancient religions that was swept away by the rise in Christianity and is included in the bottom right of the composition as an Assyrian rider on horseback complete with tiered royal crown, seen in many images of Assyrian royalty in bas-reliefs in both London and Paris. For Doré, who held firm religious convictions, this agenda gave a new dimension to the reception of Assyria up to this point. The painting adds a religious imperative to the purely aesthetic one articulated in both literature and art practices in the decades immediately following the discovery of the material remains of Assyria. This was a new departure for the artistic engagement with Assyria and it is surprising that it came, not from the Pre-Raphaelite milieu, but from a Frenchman.

Obituaries provide useful barometers of both past and present critical positions, and often attempt to appraise achievements and critical standing. Doré’s death on 23 January 1883 occasioned an avalanche of laudatory obituaries and notices, and was reported the length of the United Kingdom in regional newspapers within days of his death; and, thanks to the telegraph, the majority of these notices were published the very next day. From Aberdeen, Cardiff, Dublin and Leeds his death was met with shock and disbelief.<sup>577</sup> *The Aberdeen Weekly*

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<sup>576</sup> ‘Fine arts: New series of Doré’s paintings, German Gallery Bond Street’, *The Standard*, 22 April 1868, p.3 (3).

<sup>577</sup> See, for example, ‘Death of Gustave Doré’, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 24 January 1883, p.4 (4), ‘Death of Gustave Doré’, *Western Mail* [Cardiff], 24 January 1883, p.3 (3), and ‘Death of Gustave Doré’, *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* [Dublin], 24 January 1883, p.5 (5).



*Journal* noted his “fame as a marvellously striking” illustrator.<sup>578</sup> The *Leeds Mercury* said that he “succeeded in profoundly impressing the popular imagination”.<sup>579</sup> *The Standard* noted that the “world-famed” Doré would be sorely missed and that his pictures were “even better known in London than here [Paris], for almost all were purchased by an English society which has established a permanent exhibition” but at the same time acknowledged that the work was the “triumphs of a weird genius” which could “move a public”.<sup>580</sup> His large religious works at the Doré Gallery were “calculated to take the public taste” with his “flashy canvases”.<sup>581</sup> The newspaper *The Era* conceded that it was in London that his “greatest popularity was acquired”, and where his unsold “gigantic canvases that had been exhibited without success at the [Paris] Salon” were eagerly admired by Londoners.<sup>582</sup> The French press too echoed similar feeling. *Le Monde Illustré* reproduced Doré’s portrait on the front-page of the 27 January 1883 issue, and noted how his popularity was greater in the British capital than in Paris and how most of his pictures were on long-term display in London at the Doré Gallery.<sup>583</sup> *L’Univers Illustré* also published his portrait on their front-cover on 3 February 1883 and again noted his admiration among the British for his vast canvases and the “specially built” Doré Gallery.<sup>584</sup> Other notices, such as that by the *Illustrated London News*, which had once employed him, provided this summation neatly

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<sup>578</sup> ‘Death of M. Gustave Doré’, *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 24 January 1883, p.5 (5).

<sup>579</sup> ‘The last hours of Gustave Doré’, *Leeds Mercury*, 24 January 1883, p.5 (5).

<sup>580</sup> ‘Gustave Doré (from our correspondent)’, *The Standard*, 24 January 1883, p.5 (5).

<sup>581</sup> ‘Gustave Doré’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 January 1883, p.2 (2).

<sup>582</sup> ‘Gustave Doré’, *The Era*, 27 January 1883, p.13 (13).

<sup>583</sup> ‘Nos gravures: Gustave Doré’, *Le Monde Illustré*, 27 January 1883, pp.53–54 (54): “Ajoutons que la plupart des tableaux de Doré ont été achetés par une société anglaise qui en a fait une exposition permanente à Londres”.

<sup>584</sup> Robert Vallier, ‘Gustave Doré’, *L’Univers Illustré*, 3 February 1883, pp.69–70 (70): “L’Angleterre le dédommagea un peu de ce dédain: on y admirait fort ses grandes œuvres, à l’exposition desquelles une vaste salle était spécialement consacrée, au centre même de la ville de Londres”.

describing the strange, and dialectic, critical reputation he had on both sides of the Channel. The review is balanced in its consideration of popular versus critical reception:

He never won among the artists and more severely critical public of his own country the estimation as a painter that he has largely obtained in this...The vast and crowded canvases at the Doré Gallery, in [New] Bond Street, are too familiar to require enumeration or description. The popularity of these works and the engravings from them with the British public, and particularly the religious section of that public, is explained by their subjects, their grandiose and sensational treatment...<sup>585</sup>

The critic of the *Athenaeum* was less kind:

His reputation was ruined in the eyes of artists by the pictures of which we have had more than enough in New Bond Street [at the Doré Gallery] and in the [Paris] Salon.<sup>586</sup>

It is clear from this unbalanced assessment of his output, citing the Doré Gallery in particular, that the attack was pointedly aimed at his religious pictures which, beyond a narrow pious public that adored them, were generally thought overbearing and thus unpalatable. In both these obituaries his fellow painters are singled out for their disapproval of his artistic practice; perhaps with them remained the marker of superior 'taste'.

Fairless & Beeforth ensured that the Doré Gallery continued after Doré's death in 1883. The catalogues that they had produced describing the pictures on view began in 1875 and were issued until at least 1900, as far as it has been possible to ascertain. Later, Edwin Long was exhibited alongside Doré, and still

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<sup>585</sup> 'Gustave Doré', *Illustrated London News*, 3 February 1883, p.119 (119).

<sup>586</sup> 'Fine art gossip', *Athenaeum*, 27 January 1883, pp.127-28 (128).

later "other well-known" painters were included in the 1900 catalogue.<sup>587</sup> In 1891 Blanchard Jerrold published his *Life of Gustave Doré*.

Herbert Schmalz (1856–1935) was another painter who, like Doré, exploited the burgeoning field of dealer shows and dealer commissioned artworks. In 1890 he travelled to the Holy Land in much the same spirit as the Pre-Raphaelite Holman Hunt had four decades before, to immerse himself in the 'authentic' environment of the Bible. These travels served him in a grand project of biblical painting including one exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1892, and replete with Assyrian motifs, *The daughters of Judah in Babylon* (fig.140). The work was the outcome of "requisite studies for this picture [which] were made by Mr. Schmalz during his recent visit to the [Middle] East".<sup>588</sup> The work also includes coiled serpents flanking the flight of steps in the middle distance. These have nothing to do with Assyrian art, and derive instead from the Mesopotamian depictions by John Martin from earlier in the century, for example *The fall of Nineveh* from 1829 (fig.4), suggesting that artists were now referring back to a mature pictorial tradition.

Schmalz's canvas was published in 1894 to form a pair with another painting, *The King's daughter (The Church in her glory)*, in photogravure by the print publisher Arthur Lucas, London.<sup>589</sup> The 1892 Babylonian captivity had later

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<sup>587</sup> Dan Malan, *Gustave Doré: Adrift on dreams of splendour* (St. Louis, MO: Malan Classical Enterprises, 1995), p.200.

<sup>588</sup> 'Private views at artists' studios', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 5 April 1892, pp.1–2 (2).

<sup>589</sup> The plate *By the waters of Babylon they sat down and wept (The Church in adversity)* was declared on 13 August 1894 to the Printsellers' Association, London that registered all published proofs. 225 artists' proofs were declared for retail at 5 guineas, 25 presentation proofs *hors commerce*, 100 lettered proofs at 2 guineas, and the unlimited edition on India paper at £1 11s 6d. See Charles Frederic Duffell, *An alphabetical list of engravings declared at the office of the Printsellers' Association, London and the Incorporated Printsellers' Association, London, from*

acquired the subtitle *The daughters of Judah in Babylon (The Church in adversity)* and, like Doré and Watts, added a religious dimension to an aesthetic one, of the status of Assyria. The Schmalz painting of the Jews in captivity was widely published elsewhere.<sup>590</sup> The artist C Herbert had exhibited an untraced watercolour *The ruins of Babylon* at the Fine Art and Industrial Exhibition, Cardiff in 1881. Arthur Hacker (1858–1919) exhibited a now untraced work *By the waters of Babylon* at the Grosvenor Gallery, a prominent alternative to the Royal Academy, in 1888 (fig.141). However, the theme of suffering, especially by female protagonists, was taken up by a number of female artists in the 1880s.<sup>591</sup>

Evelyn De Morgan, née Pickering (1855–1919) was a student under Poynter at the Slade School of Art, and began her studies there in 1873. She was a founder exhibitor of the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877 and exhibited *By the waters of Babylon* (1882–83; De Morgan Foundation, London) there a few years later, in 1883. The large work was joined in the same exhibition by another depiction of the same subject, *By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept* by Kate Gardiner Hastings, née Comyns Carr (1837–1925).<sup>592</sup> Hastings' work was reproduced in the

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1892 to 1911 inclusive (London: Incorporated Printsellers' Association, 1912), n.p. (under 'B'). The plate *The King's daughter (The Church in her glory)* was declared on 21 September 1891. 300 artists' proofs were declared for retail at 5 guineas, 25 presentation proofs *hors commerce*, 200 lettered proofs at 2 guineas, and the unlimited edition at £1 11s 6d. See George William Friend, *An alphabetical list of engravings, declared at the office of the Printsellers' Association, London, since its establishment in 1847 to the end of 1891* (London: Printsellers' Association, 1892), p.195.

<sup>590</sup> *Royal Academy pictures 1892* (London, Paris and Melbourne: Cassell & Co, 1892), p.139 and the supplement 'Pictures of the year', *The Graphic*, 14 May 1892, n.p..

<sup>591</sup> See Charlotte Yeldham, *Women artists in nineteenth-century France and England* (New York and London: Garland, 1984).

<sup>592</sup> Christie's, New York, 22 October 2008, lot 115.

contemporary press.<sup>593</sup> She too was a student under Poynter at the Slade in 1871–76. The works approach the same subject matter in different ways. The subject was not, as we have seen in the preceding chapters and examples (including one by Poynter himself, published in 1881), “highly unusual in the nineteenth century”.<sup>594</sup> The meditative quality of the work by De Morgan eschews any historical detailing and exactitude (seen in Hastings’ work) in which a muted autumnal palette of reds, greens and brown predominates. The work internalises the sorrow and various compositional elements identified by Elise Lawton Smith underscore the unity of the forms of the female figures with the redundant musical instruments, such as the curved back of the standing female figure at the left foreground echoing the curved form of the harp, against which she leans.<sup>595</sup> The two works by De Morgan and Hastings are part of a wider trend by female artists in the 1880s to focus on female protagonists in their work. Spiritual captivity and confinement as well as the physical captivity are explored in De Morgan’s painting. The work was the most critically acclaimed of her career and drew the most reviews of any of her subsequent works. Critics saw in the work a fusion of Florentine influences combined with other contemporary references:

The sad faces, attenuated forms and drooping hands, are mannerisms from which the young artist does not seek to free herself...looks at nature, whether in the human form or in landscape, more persistently than ever through the medium of the early Florentine School, illuminated by the sidelights of Mr. Burne-Jones and Mr. Stanhope...her colouring is in its arrangement of isolated masses both rich and noble within a grave scale.<sup>596</sup>

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<sup>593</sup> Henry Blackburn, *Grosvenor notes 1883: No.VI* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1883), p.38.

<sup>594</sup> Elise Lawton Smith, *Evelyn Pickering De Morgan and the allegorical body* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), p.81.

<sup>595</sup> *Ibid.*, p.81.

<sup>596</sup> *The Portfolio*, June 1883, p.125 quoted in Smith, *op.cit.*, p.38.

These depictions contrast with those of their male peers, Hacker and Schmalz. Hastings, like De Morgan, focuses on the female protagonists and foregrounds female figures beside a riverbank, with their discarded musical instruments. Unlike De Morgan, Hastings packs her canvas with Assyrian artefacts, from winged bulls forming part of the palatial complex to depictions of bas-reliefs decorating the perimeter wall. Behind the female figures in the foreground the royal Babylonian captors are dining *al fresco* attended by several servants, some bearing palms to fan their masters. The dining scene is an adaptation of the 'The banquet scene' relief in the British Museum (fig.63). Hastings' large picture is pressingly claustrophobic: the sky beyond, with its intense blue, is the only pictorial release in an otherwise crammed canvas in which the viewer confronts the Jewish, especially female, suffering head-on. The large picture achieves this by occupying much of the viewer's field of vision. The perimeter wall, in the mid ground, underscores the separation of the displaced Jews. As Smith notes, the wall separates the canvas into two physical and emotive states: one relaxed and luxurious, the other uneasy and anxious.<sup>597</sup> Contemporary critics noted the difference in the same subjects by Hastings and De Morgan and remarked upon the former as "after a fashion which is Oriental rather than aesthetic".<sup>598</sup> The myriad historical details and exactitude likened the work to the same 'Oriental' products of Rooke, discussed previously.

Schmalz continued with his biblical project and in 1895 had exhibited the canvas *The Resurrection morn* at the Dowdeswell's Galleries, dealers with premises at 160 New Bond Street and therefore close to the Doré Gallery. This large painting was a companion to *The return from Calvary* of a few years before. The latest arrival met with the criticism that confounded other painters of these works.

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<sup>597</sup> Smith, *op.cit.*, p.38.

<sup>598</sup> 'Picture exhibitions in London', *Glasgow Herald*, 30 April 1883, p.6 (6).

One critic thought that the painting suffered from a “close adherence to the rules of stage effect and stage grouping” but praised the artist for the fact that “he has visited the country in which the solemn scenes he depicts were enacted; he has had the aid of the traveller, of the historian, and of the archaeologist”.<sup>599</sup> Neither of these paintings were exhibited at Burlington House, marking a departure from the officially sanctioned space to the semi-private, commercial one of the dealer’s gallery — a route other painters followed with vigour. *The return from Calvary* was published as a photogravure in 1892, and republished (slightly reduced) in 1896 with *The Resurrection morn*: all three plates co-published by Arthur Lucas and Dowdeswell & Dowdeswell in large numbers.<sup>600</sup> Religious prints were the most commercially profitable of the genres in print publishing. *The return from Calvary*, published in 1896, was the same size as the first (larger) plate of *The Resurrection morn*, and these two prints were intended to form pendants with one another and extend the commercial life of the earlier plate from 1893.

Mesopotamian culture had also penetrated the comic operatic stage by 1879 and was included in Gilbert and Sullivan’s comic opera *The pirates of Penzance* (1879). Towards the end of act one, Major-General Stanley makes his entrance and intercedes on behalf of his four daughters, who are about to be carried off by the bogus ‘pirates’. He reveals his lengthy qualifications as a model of

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<sup>599</sup> ‘Art notes’, *Illustrated London News*, 16 February 1895, p.216 (216).

<sup>600</sup> The print *The return from Calvary* was declared on 3 October 1892. 625 artists’ proofs were declared for retail at 8 guineas, 25 presentation proofs *hors commerce*, 300 before letters proofs at 6 guineas, 750 lettered proofs at 4 guineas, and the unlimited edition on India paper at 3 guineas, or without India paper at 2 guineas. See George William Friend, *An alphabetical list of engravings, declared at the office of the Printsellers’ Association, London, for the years 1892 and 1893* (London: Printsellers’ Association, 1894), n.p. (under ‘R’). The reduced plate of *The return from Calvary* was declared on 31 July 1896 and *The resurrection morn* on 9 June 1896, both reworked photogravures by Edward Gilbert. See Duffell, *op.cit.*, n.p. (under ‘R’).

the 'modern Major General' in the British army, founded upon an impressive but irrelevant education, which includes the ability to descant upon a range of (obscure) facts and figures, take in art historical connoisseurship, and demonstrate his proficiency with ancient languages, in particular one firmly a 'product' of the nineteenth century: "Babylonic [sic] cuneiform". But here Gilbert and Sullivan apply this erudite proficiency in the service of settling lowly domestic matters. The lengthy comic song satirises the buffoonery of such members of the British military in the late nineteenth century:

I can tell undoubted Raphaels from Gerard Dows and Zoffanies,  
I know the croaking chorus from *The Frogs* of Aristophanes!  
Then I can hum a fugue of which I've heard the music's din afore,  
And whistle all the airs from that infernal nonsense *Pinafore*.  
Then I can write a washing bill in Babylonian cuneiform,  
And tell you ev'ry detail of Caractacus's uniform:  
In short, in matters vegetable, animal, and mineral,  
I am the very model of a modern Major General.

Thus Mesopotamian culture joined the modern subjects submitted to the satire of Gilbert and Sullivan, taking its place alongside Aestheticism and the craze for Sandro Botticelli in the 1870s, in their comic opera *Patience* (1881); and thus the Assyrian revival became enmeshed in other rediscoveries and revivals at this time.<sup>601</sup> The Major-General of the opera might have been inspired by Major-General Sir Henry Creswicke Rawlinson (1810–1895), whom we encountered in Chapter One. He had begun his military career in 1827, was later the Consul-General in Baghdad and played a large part in the translation of Mesopotamian cuneiform.

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<sup>601</sup> See Adrian S Hoch, 'The art of Alessandro Botticelli through the eyes of Victorian Aesthetes', pp.55–87 in John E Law and Lene Østermark-Johansen (eds), *Victorian and Edwardian responses to the Italian Renaissance* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).



The reproduction of paintings influenced by Assyria reflected wider trends in the growth, and adaptation, of the Victorian print trade to market forces and taste. In Chapter One we have seen that the first reproductions of these paintings were through the media of wood-engravings and engravings, both for inclusion in the illustrated press. We have seen that Edward Armitage's *Aholibah* was reproduced as a wood-engraving in the *Illustrated London News* in 1850 (fig.29). Henry Nelson O'Neil's *The scribes reading the chronicles to Ahasuerus* was reproduced as an engraving in *The Art Journal* in 1867 (fig.25). But gradually in the coming decades of the 1870s and 1880s, both these forms of reproduction were overtaken by other techniques. Engraving as a reproductive medium declined in print publishing at the time, and in *The Art Journal*, as elsewhere, was usurped by photomechanical methods, particularly photogravure. The decline came in the face of strong competition from etching, long regarded as more 'painterly' and expressive and offering a respite from the *froidueur* of photogravure. The last engraving published in *The Art Journal* was in 1890: after this time only photogravures and etchings were published. Frederick Wedmore, a key proponent of etching, considered that etched lines over engraved ones preserved the 'soul' of an artwork. He rejoiced in the trend towards etching for reproducing paintings and away from the "chilly industry of the contemporary line engraver".<sup>602</sup> Hence, the steady move was made towards etched reproductions from the 1870s onwards. John William Waterhouse's *Mariamne*, from 1887, was reproduced in the issue of the *Magazine of Art* for January 1888, in an etching by James Dobie (1849–

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<sup>602</sup> Frederick Wedmore, 'Modern etching', *The Fortnightly Review*, May 1887, pp.753–63 (761).

c.1911).<sup>603</sup> Briton Rivière's *The king's libation* was etched by Charles Oliver Murray (1842–1924) for *The Art Journal* in 1897 (fig.142).

Assyria also penetrated the sphere of original etching, aside from the reproductive ones made by professional practitioners after the works of others. Lawrence Alma-Tadema was commissioned to illustrate, with two etchings, a translation of the tenth-century Persian epic *Shahnameh* ('Book of Kings') by Ferdowsi (Firdusi in Victorian parlance), published in London in 1882.<sup>604</sup> Rudabeh was the daughter of Mehrab, said to be a King of Kabul. Zal was an equally fictional monarch of Persia. Helen Zimmern (1846–1934) translated the French version of the Persian original by Prof. Jules Mohl, and although an abbreviated English version appeared in 1835 by James Atkinson, this new translation aimed to "popularize the tales told by the Persian poet Firdusi in his immortal epic".<sup>605</sup> The publication was available as an ordinary edition with gold-tooled, coloured leatherette cover, etchings printed on *chine collé* and the text printed on "English-made super-royal paper", and the more expensive *édition de luxe* in which the text was printed on "Dutch hand-made paper, [and] the etchings of which are artists' proofs printed by Mr. Delarue upon Japanese paper and signed [by Alma-Tadema] and numbered".<sup>606</sup>

One of these etchings by Alma-Tadema, *Zal and Rudabeh*, is indebted to Assyrian motifs (fig.143). It illustrates the following lines by Ferdowsi:

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<sup>603</sup> The etching received the following comment: "Mariamne, Mr. J W Waterhouse's original and clever picture exhibited in the [Royal] Academy last season, has been etched with great success by Mr. Dobie for the *Magazine of Art*, the graceful form and expressive face of the ill-used heroine are especially well translated" ('The magazines for January', *The Morning Post*, 3 January 1888, p.2 (2)). The etching was exhibited at the Royal Academy of Art, London in 1888 (no.1615).

<sup>604</sup> *The epic of kings: Stories retold from Firdusi* (translated by Helen Zimmern; London: Thomas Fisher Unwin, 1882).

<sup>605</sup> *Ibid.*, preface [n.p.].

<sup>606</sup> 'Illustrated books', *The Daily News*, 2 December 1882, p.3 (3).

And they gazed upon each other and knew that they excelled in beauty; and the hours slipped by in sweet talk, while love was fanned in their hearts.<sup>607</sup>

The table on the right of the etching is that depicted in the celebrated 'The banquet scene' relief in the British Museum (fig.63). The painter's archive survives at the University of Birmingham and there can be found the three albumen photographs of the relief published by W A Mansell & Co, from about 1870, that the artist once owned.<sup>608</sup> One of these is a detail of a portion of the relief with the table clearly visible (fig.144). The costume and jewelry of Zal is derived from other Assyrian bas-reliefs. In the background is a striding lion from the Achaemenid Persian glazed brickwork from Susa: therefore uniting two disparate cultures in his composition. One of the reasons the *Dalziels' Bible Gallery*, published the previous year, was a commercial failure might be because the autographic nature of etchings 'preserved' the hand of the artist. This was not possible through the mediation of the woodblock cutters employed in the wood-engraved illustrations in the *Bible Gallery*. Original etchings, such as the example by Alma-Tadema, opened up the possibility to disseminate multiples of a composition while retaining the 'soul' of the work, to use Wedmore's preferred term. Alma-Tadema's Assyrian etching was therefore part of the wider trend in print publishing in the last quarter of the nineteenth century towards etching, in both reproductive and original printmaking, aiding further the dissemination of artistic responses to Assyria.

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<sup>607</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49

<sup>608</sup> Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham (Alma-Tadema Collection), Portfolio 18 [Architecture etc], no.8247 [Mansell 522c (detail)] and Portfolio 20 [Costume (Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian and Sassanian II)], no.8353 (Mansell 522b) and no.8354 (Mansell 522c).

Large single-sheet prints became immensely popular, and commercially lucrative, in the second half of the nineteenth century. Mounted and framed, they were intended to form part of the décor of the modern interior. A contemporary description of the home of the tenor singer Edward Lloyd (1845–1927) in Tulse Hill, London, provides a typical insight: “The music room has a grand ceiling. Its walls are incrustated with crimson, with a fresco of black oak. The engravings are after Millais, Alma-Tadema, Sir Frederick Leighton, Luke Fildes, Orchardson, Leader, and Rosa Bonheur”.<sup>609</sup> Large single-sheet prints after paintings and watercolours influenced by Assyria began to appear in the second half of the nineteenth century, which did much to multiply firstly both the image itself, and increase the ‘visibility’ of Assyria in domestic contexts. These prints joined other homeware, such as Parian porcelain vases, paperweights and bookends, fashioned after Assyrian artefacts in the British Museum.<sup>610</sup>

Doré’s paintings, in particular, enjoyed a wide currency throughout the second half of the nineteenth century from the publication of reproductive prints made after them, often in huge numbers. *The triumph of Christianity over Paganism* proved especially lucrative in the market for the sale of these reproductive prints. The painting was a specific commission from his dealer Fairless & Beeforth in 1868, Doré’s first major religious commission from them.<sup>611</sup> On 17 April 1871 Fairless & Beeforth formally declared the published proofs of the print by William Henry Simmons (1811–1882), to the Printsellers’ Association in London, the body that regulated the market for ‘proofs’. The number of available published proofs

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<sup>609</sup> Harry How, ‘Illustrated interviews: No.XXX — Mr. Edward Lloyd’, *The Strand Magazine*, February 1894, pp.175–85 (178).

<sup>610</sup> See Judy Rudoe, *Decorative arts 1850–1950: A catalogue of the British Museum collection* (1994 edition; London: British Museum Press, 1991), pp.30–31, nos.43–48, plates 12–14 for the ‘Assyrian’ porcelain ware produced by W T Copeland & Sons Ltd from 1868.

<sup>611</sup> Malan, *op.cit.*, pp.151–52.

greatly exceeded the usual number, which was typically 100 or 200 in each category.<sup>612</sup> Publishers could issue 'plain' or 'ordinary' prints, in contemporary parlance, beyond the proof impressions that were tightly regulated, in any number they chose and which they believed the market could sustain. In practice the publisher retained the metal plate and any number of 'ordinary' prints could be printed as required. Simmons' print was met with singular praise:

*The triumph of Christianity*, as reproduced by the 'burin' of Mr. W H Simmons, loses nothing of its grandeur and nothing of its imaginativeness. It leaves upon the mind of the spectator the same impression of multitudinousness — the same sense of illimitable space. Nothing, indeed, can surpass the silveriness of the lights in the upper heaven, or the aerial delicacy of that angelic host which circles the majestic figure of Christ...which constitutes the main charm of the engraving.<sup>613</sup>

In addition, the composition was engraved the following year by Herbert Bourne (1820–1907) and duly published by Fairless & Beeforth in 1872.<sup>614</sup> Between 1871 and 1886 twenty large-scale engravings, that were intended to be mounted and framed, were published and the majority were made by Bourne.<sup>615</sup> Simmons' large print was commercially successful, and in 1899 was republished by the Doré Gallery with the new publication line: 'Painted by Gustave Doré/London 1st. October 1899. Published by the Doré Gallery, 35 New Bond St.

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<sup>612</sup> 550 artists' proofs were declared for retail at 12 guineas, 25 presentation proofs *hors commerce*, 50 proofs before lettering (or 'before letters') at 8 guineas, 500 lettered proofs at 6 guineas, and the unlimited edition on India paper at 4 guineas, or without India paper at 3 guineas. See Friend (1892), *op.cit.*, p.383.

<sup>613</sup> 'Fine arts: M. Gustave Doré's pictures', *Morning Post*, 24 July 1871, p.3 (3). See also 'Reviews', *The Art Journal*, May 1872, p.148 (148): "The great charm of this engraving, in addition to its perfect truthfulness of expression, is the rare contrast of its colour...[and] secured for Gustave Doré a record that will endure unchanged, when the finest paintings have yielded to the destructive chemistry of time".

<sup>614</sup> Malan, *op.cit.*, p.175.

<sup>615</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.173, 175.

W. Copyright Registered / Engraved by W.H. Simmons / Printed by Crowdy & Loud, 7 Pall Mall London, S.W.' (fig.40).

The second of these highly successful single-sheet prints appeared in 1875. Charles George Lewis (1808–1880) made a large 'mixed method', measuring 19 by 31 inches, after Rivière's *Daniel in the lions' den*, a canvas exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1872 (figs.106, 107). It was published by Thomas Agnew & Sons, which operated from galleries in London, Manchester and Liverpool. The firm had a virtual monopoly on the reproduction and marketing rights of Rivière. By 1891 they had published 15 single-sheet prints and many of these were intended to form companions with other work. Thus, after the publication in 1875 of *Daniel in the lions' den*, came the companion print *Daniel's answer to the king* by Joseph Bishop Pratt (1854–1910), published in 1892. It reproduced a Rivière painting from 1890, which had been intended for that year's Royal Academy but was instead bought by Thomas Agnew & Sons by April 1890, a month before the exhibition was due to open in May. The painting was displayed for a short time at their Manchester office in April 1890, to promote both the work and the forthcoming print by Pratt, as contemporary notices were aware that the painting "will be engraved...as a pendant to *Daniel in the den of lions*".<sup>616</sup> The print therefore took over two years to produce and represented a considerable financial outlay by the publisher: commercial success was imperative. Marketing prints as companions ensured that the original purchasers of one print might be tempted to form a pair, and to purchase the second print. The prints enjoyed an independence and were often exhibited in their own right, under the name of the printmaker, at the Royal Academy. This pair of prints on the theme of Daniel was not such an

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<sup>616</sup> 'Art notes', *The Liverpool Mercury*, 22 April 1890, p.5 (5).

example, but later Frederick Stacpoole exhibited his print of Rivière's *Persepolis* at the Royal Academy in 1881 and the companion print, *The night watch*, in 1883. By 1891 the 'artist's proof' of *Daniel in lions' den*, which numbered 225, and *Persepolis*, which numbered 250, were all sold out. These were the most expensive category and the painter and printmaker, a sign of the dual authorship of the work, signed each impression. Artist's proofs for *Daniel* had cost 10 guineas, and *Persepolis* 8 guineas. Rivière's historicist work was extremely popular: only *Sympathy*, out of the 15 prints published by Thomas Agnew & Sons by 1891, had not sold out of artists' proofs.

The contemporary fame of *Daniel in the lions' den* meant it was included in the 1978 *Great Victorian pictures* touring exhibition organised by the Arts Council.<sup>617</sup> It had been sold before the opening of the Royal Academy to John Heugh, through Thomas Agnew & Sons, in February 1872.<sup>618</sup> Agnew probably retained the reproduction rights in the initial purchase from the artist. The work then passed into the collection of Edmund Crompton Potter (1830–1883); then to the ship-owner Thomas Henry Ismay (1837–1899), who bequeathed the work to the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool in 1900. The newly established *Magazine of Art* gave Rivière the rare honour of a full-page illustration of his *Daniel* in 1879 (fig.145). Walter Armstrong acknowledged the debt that Rivière's popularity owed

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<sup>617</sup> Rosemary Tremble, *Great Victorian pictures, their paths to fame* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), p.72, no.48.

<sup>618</sup> Edward Morris, *Victorian and Edwardian paintings in the Walker Art Gallery and at Sudley House: British artists born after 1810 but before 1861* (London: HMSO, 1996), p.382.

to the print world, whose art filled “hundreds of homes, both humble and luxurious”.<sup>619</sup>

The 1880s saw many other Assyrian canvases translated into prints. Edwin Long's *An ancient custom* was published as an etching by Charles Théodore Deblois, which was exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1880 and provides further evidence of the crossover between British and French responses to Assyria. Ford Madox Brown's 1875 watercolour *The dream of Sardanapalus* was published as a large single-sheet print, in an etching in 1890 by George Woolliscroft Rhead (1855–1920).<sup>620</sup> This was duly exhibited at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1890, appealing to an audience that cherished the autographic qualities of etching and the ‘painterly’ touch of the medium (fig.54). Other Assyrian-styled artworks also decorated middle-class homes. The Fine Art Society published *The Babylonian marriage market* in 1889 as a large photogravure, reworked by hand by the printmaker Girardet (fig.146). Herbert Schmalz's pair of paintings, *The daughters of Judah in Babylon (The Church in adversity)* and *The King's daughter (The Church in her glory)*, were published by Arthur Lucas, London. The dealer had appended the subtitles to unite the two works and create a commercially lucrative pair of works. Another London-based dealer, Landecker & Brown, owned the copyright at some point, suggesting that it might have been reproduced in another format elsewhere, but the precise details are unknown.<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>619</sup> Walter Armstrong, *Briton Rivière RA, his life and work, with numerous illustrations: The Art Annual* (London: J S Virtue & Co, 1891), p.17.

<sup>620</sup> ‘Art notes: Etchings from Mr. Madox Brown's pictures’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 16 April 1890, p.1 [front-page].

<sup>621</sup> Landecker & Brown are cited as the copyright owner on a double-page wood-engraving (with blank verso) in the Witt Library, Courtauld Institute of Art, London.



Book publishing also embraced this trend towards the etched reproduction. *Chaldée et Assyrie (Histoire de l'art dans l'antiquité)* by Georges Perrot and Charles Chipiez, published in 1884, had numerous etched reproductions by Jean Joseph Sulpis (1826–1911), Edmond Ramus (1822–1890), and Elme Gautier. Many of these etchings were exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1883 and 1884. For example, in 1883 Sulpis exhibited 'Palais de Khorsabad, après M. Chipiez' as (no.4902) and cited it for the forthcoming publication. The following year Gautier exhibited one etching as 'Lion Assyrien' under (no.4375), and Sulpis 'Nabuchodonosor' and 'Sélim 1<sup>er</sup>' both under (no.4619) and cited as 'pour l'*Histoire de l'art* MM. Perrot et Chipiet' [sic].

The work of John Reinhard Weguelin (1849–1927) is a good example of the engagement with Assyria that has escaped the attention of modern scholars like Bohrer, and an early canvas makes a startling intrusion into the discussion of the later decades of the nineteenth century in Britain. His canvas *Herodias and her daughter* (1884) made its first appearance at the Royal Academy in 1884 (fig.147).<sup>622</sup> Weguelin had studied at the Slade School of Art in London under Poynter (like Hastings and De Morgan) and Legros. His *début* came in 1877 at the Dudley Gallery and the following year at the Royal Academy with *The labour of the Danaïdes* (1878; Untraced), which appears to have influenced John William Waterhouse, an artist who frequently evoked the art of Alma-Tadema in his early career. Weguelin can also be added to the list of influences upon the young Waterhouse.

Weguelin worked exclusively in watercolour after 1893, and soon afterwards, when he became a member of the Royal Watercolour Society (in 1897) he stopped exhibiting at the Royal Academy. Weguelin's historicism extended to

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<sup>622</sup> Christie's, London, 25 November 1988, lot 115.

ancient Egyptian subjects, like many other painters at the time, and *The obsequies of an Egyptian cat* (1886; Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, Auckland) reveals his close study of ancient Egyptian objects in the British Museum, from sculptures and wall-paintings to wooden domestic furniture.

*Herodias and her daughter* is based upon a biblical passage relating to the death of St. John the Baptist at the hands of King Herod (Mark 6:22-24 [KJV]):

And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee. And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom. And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist.

The subject was popular with painters seeking to incorporate ancient near Eastern artefacts and the contemporary picture by George Rochegrosse, *Salomé danse devant le roi Hérode (Salome dancing before King Herod)* (1887; Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska), is an illustration of the same biblical episode, and of equally moderate scale, though the moment chosen for portrayal is different. In contrast to Weguelin's canvas, Rochegrosse's serves as a pretext for sensational and titillating imagery with mild nudity; the viewer is invited to form a part of the audience and share the provocative dance. The arrangement of the audience and musicians facilitates this invitation. Weguelin has chosen a less dramatic and private moment between mother and daughter when Salome is horrified at what her mother has asked her to do — to request the death of St John the Baptist, against whom Herodias holds a strong grudge. The daughter recoils with horror though her head is erect and listening to her mother's command intently, she steadies herself by clinging to the pedestal of a sculptural decoration nearby. The artist has in this work transformed Assyria from 'mere' decoration, Bohrer's "validating decor", and

transformed its role into a wider one replete with pregnant cultural signifiers. It locates and defines the boundary of the action, and the aggressive open-mouthed roaring lion seems to evoke the impending brutality of the female-conceived plot. Assyria is here equated with aggression and the brutal dispatch of enemies, real or imagined, seen in actual examples of bas-reliefs of military conquests. Weguelin draws implicitly upon other canvases, which made similar comparisons, away from the fascination with the recently discovered and unearthed. It speaks of an embedded fascination and mind-set. The lion crowns the composition and towers over the conspirators, and the cropping which cuts off the upper portion of the lion's head emphasises the detached brutalism of the plot.

Weguelin's picture received little critical attention, with the exception of a lengthy review in the *Athenaeum*, worth quoting in full, for it reveals a number of issues at stake:

The sentiment of Mr. Weguelin's *Herodias and her daughter* (339) is not obvious. Its picturesqueness is more apparent than real. The attitude of Herodias is not easily accounted for. She is leaning on the pedestal of a gigantic lion carved in that quasi-Romano-Assyrian mode which was affected by the architects of Herod the Great and his successors. Both her attitude and that of her companion are constrained, and belong to an artificial and therefore vicious mode of design. In some respects Mr. Weguelin is a respectful follower of Mr. Alma-Tadema; he would do well to rid himself of affectations. Technically speaking this is a brilliant and powerfully tinted picture, illuminated with brightness, and valuable on account of the attention bestowed on its costume and architectural accessories. Probably it gains by not being hung near the eye.<sup>623</sup>

The picture was difficult to understand then and the attitudes of the recoiling figures puzzling. The vivid description of the 'quasi-Romano-Assyrian' lion refers in fact to a purely Assyrian lion that Weguelin had drawn from in the British

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<sup>623</sup> 'Fine arts: The Royal Academy (Fourth notice)', *Athenaeum*, 7 June 1884, pp.733-35 (733).

Museum's collection that originally flanked the gateway to the temple of Ishtar in Nimrud and which had already been in the Museum's collection for many decades (fig.52). Poynter had previously made a careful drawing of it for the enormous work he was engaged in during the 1880s that would be incorporated into his colossal canvas *The Queen of Sheba's visit to King Solomon* (1884–90; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney), which will be discussed later in this chapter. Poynter may well have alerted his pupil to the unique piece, noted for its fine modelling and unusually without symbolic embellishments. The comparison to Alma-Tadema is telling, for both artists 'played' with antiquity, of all periods, for aesthetic ends. Thus the honey-coloured limestone over-life-sized lion from Nimrud has been shrunk by Weguelin and turned into a 'classically' white marble object that the critic referred to as 'quasi-Romano-Assyrian'. The table beside the sculpture is taken directly from the celebrated 'The banquet scene' from Nineveh and has been transformed by the artist into an ebony table inlaid with gold. The table includes a dish exactly as shown on the Assyrian relief (fig.63). This would have signalled to contemporary audiences his study of 'appropriate' referencing of objects from ancient Near Eastern sources and one that located the action therefore in 'barbaric' cultures. The reviewer was disturbed by the apparent illegibility of the composition, shifting the focus away from the public sphere of Herod and his dinner guests to the private world of subterfuge, intrigue and crazy plotting. The hinted conversation would have been known and certainly the outcome, though this proved unpalatable for the reviewer. French influences can also be added to the background of Weguelin's work, where the story of Salome at the end of the nineteenth century was extremely popular in visual culture. The watercolour by Gustave Moreau (1826–1898), for example, which was included in the inaugural exhibition of the Grosvenor Gallery, London in 1877 was *L'apparition* (*The*

*apparition*) (Musée d'Orsay, Paris; RF 2130), was also based on the biblical narrative of Salome.<sup>624</sup>

Weguelin's canvas exploited the symbolic power of Assyrian art to strengthen the narrative. John William Waterhouse's *Mariamne*, from 1887, reveals his adeptness at utilising Assyrian art for the same purpose (fig.148).<sup>625</sup> Recent scholarship on the picture by Simon Goldhill has highlighted the sexual drama and politics of vision at play in the psychologically complex religious work.<sup>626</sup> Goldhill notes the "threatening and gaping jaws of the lion" seen in the picture's foreground.<sup>627</sup> The lion is an adaptation of an Assyrian bronze weight, discovered by Layard and widely published thereafter (fig.149). The lion signals the fate of the protagonist Mariamne, condemned to death, in the sexual politics of King Herod. The snarling lion equates her doomed fate with the despatch, under Assyrian rule, of the ferocious predator. Like other painters' work, as we have seen throughout the period 1870–1900, critics found this canvas theatrical in appearance, adding that "although a little theatrical in arrangement, it is much better painted than any of his preceding pictures" and it was acknowledged as the "author's best work".<sup>628</sup> The painting was in the prestigious collection of William Cuthbert Quilter (1841–1911) who lent it widely abroad to the Exposition Universelle, Paris in 1889 and the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in

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<sup>624</sup> Geneviève Lacambre *et al.*, *Gustave Moreau, 1826–1898* (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1998), pp.150–51, 153, no.64. This watercolour was previously exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1874 (no.2774), and was sold by the artist to Léon Gauchez (1825–1907) in May 1876, who must have agreed to lend it to London.

<sup>625</sup> Elizabeth Prettejohn in Elizabeth Prettejohn *et al.*, *John William Waterhouse: The modern Pre-Raphaelite* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2008), pp.108–09, no.18.

<sup>626</sup> Simon Goldhill, 'See Josephus: Viewing first-century sexual drama with Victorian eyes', *Victorian Studies*, 51 (3), Spring 2009, pp.470–79.

<sup>627</sup> *Ibid.*, p.470.

<sup>628</sup> Marion Harry Spielmann, 'Mariamne, by J W Waterhouse ARA', *Magazine of Art*, January 1888, p.95 (95).

1893, where it joined other British Assyrian works such as Rooke's *King Ahab's coveting* (1879; fig.130) and Frank William Warwick Topham's *Naaman's wife* (Untraced; 1888), for example, as well as American Assyrianising work such as *St. Stephen stoned* by William de Leftwich (1867–1935).<sup>629</sup> De Leftwich's depiction of the stoning of the Christian martyr outside the walls of Jerusalem includes two human-headed guardians flanking an opening in the city walls. In addition, Rivière's *Daniel in the lions' den* was exhibited at the Exposition Universelle, Paris in 1878.

Twenty years after the exhibition of Weguelin's canvas in 1884, the art historian Alfred Lys Baldry (1858–1939) was keen to distance him from the 'dry archaeology' of history painting and historical genre that must by this date have seemed tremendously *retardaire*. In an article written in *The Studio* magazine in 1904, Baldry remarked that Weguelin's art was:

Not marked by pedantic insistence upon the dry facts of archaeology. He was content for the most part to realise the classic atmosphere by a comparatively free adaptation of the records of the antiquarians and to deal in a more or less irresponsible way with the material he collected from the history of ages long past.<sup>630</sup>

The remark came at a time when Poynter was then President of the Royal Academy and Alma-Tadema and other 'relics' of the Victorian age still exhibited grand historical canvases at the Royal Academy and elsewhere, to great popular acclaim. Such a critical position would have been difficult to imagine ten or twenty years earlier: free adaptation was one thing but woeful irresponsibility another.

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<sup>629</sup> See *The graphic history of the Fair, containing a sketch of international expositions, a review of the events leading to the discovery of America and a history of the World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: The Graphic Company, 1893), p.190.

<sup>630</sup> Alfred Lys Baldry, 'J R Weguelin and his work', *Studio*, 33, 1904, pp.193–201 (193).

There was therefore a wholesale desertion of the principles (largely unspoken) that dealt with history painting and the use it made of archaeological material. The writer may be wishing to stress Weguelin's modernity and 'playful', even subversive, use of the past that would characterise some modern discourses.

Poynter's large work, the largest of any engagement with Assyria, *The visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon* was on display in May 1890 at the premises of Thomas McLean at Haymarket, London (fig.150). Walter Armstrong wrote a lengthy pamphlet on the work. The perceptive critic of *The Times* noted the origin of the twelve "golden lions, which the painter has studied from a well-known Assyrian type in the British Museum" which flank the steps leading to the raised throne.<sup>631</sup> The lions are based upon the monumental guardian flanking a temple from Nimrud, which the artist has considerably shrunk, and transformed into gold (fig.52). The elaborate frame is also based upon an Assyrian artefact, a unique carved door-sill in the British Museum (fig.74).

The artist made a watercolour of the composition, now in a private collection and, with the large painting, it features conspicuously in a dashing portrait of the artist by the photographer Ralph Winwood Robinson, from 1892 (National Portrait Gallery, London; NPG x7386). The valedictory photograph might have been prompted by the imminent sale of the work to Australia, to formally record his late masterpiece. Certainly Poynter considered it his greatest work; and in 1900, having taken both the Presidency of the Royal Academy and Directorship of the National Gallery, he confessed to the English scholar Edward Arber (1836–1912) that "my time is so broken up" that he did "not see how I am ever to paint an

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<sup>631</sup> 'Mr. Poynter's *Queen of Sheba*', *The Times*, 17 May 1890, p.17 (17).

important picture again".<sup>632</sup> The large painting is seen, in Robinson's photograph, in a 'travelling frame' and not the one in which it is now found. The watercolour, seen too in Robinson's portrait, is elaborately framed, but does not seem to have been exhibited by the artist during his lifetime, and is neither signed nor dated, as was his usual custom. The work remains in its original frame.<sup>633</sup>

The dealer and print publisher Thomas McLean published the work as a photogravure in 1892, which he sold to an Australia buyer later that year.<sup>634</sup> But first, the painting went on an extended tour in the British Isles, taking in the mercantile and industrial centres of Birmingham, Liverpool and Belfast. The venues were usually commercial spaces in central locations to capitalise on attendance. The dual motive of the tour was to find a prospective buyer for the large work, possibly a municipal purchase, and to stimulate sales of the forthcoming reproduction. Indeed, early reviewers of the work on its tour must have received prior knowledge (from Thomas McLean), since in December 1890, on its *début* in Birmingham's Collier's Gallery at 66 New Street, readers of the *Birmingham Daily Post* were made aware that Poynter's canvas was in due course "being reproduced as a photo-engraving, finished by Paul Girardet".<sup>635</sup> Alison Inglis has suggested that Poynter might have been influenced by Charles Gounod's opera

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<sup>632</sup> 13 January 1900, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham (EA166).

<sup>633</sup> The present author saw the work in 2002 (see Alison Inglis in St John Simpson (ed.), *Queen of Sheba: Treasures from ancient Yemen* (London: British Museum Press, 2002), p.23, no.1).

<sup>634</sup> The print was declared on 6 July 1892. 500 artists' proofs were declared for retail at 10 guineas, 25 presentation proofs *hors commerce*, 200 lettered proofs at 6 guineas, and the unlimited edition on India paper at 4 guineas, or without India paper at 2 guineas. See Friend (1894), *op.cit.*, n.p. (under 'Q'). One example (artists' proof impression) was on the London art market in 1999 (see *Victorian engravings* (London: Maas Gallery, 1999), p.59, no.93) that had a *remarque* of an artichoke and was signed by both the painter (Poynter) and the printmaker who reworked the plate.

<sup>635</sup> 'Solomon and the Queen of Sheba', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 11 December 1890, p.4 (4).



*La reine de Saba (The queen of Sheba)*, produced in 1862.<sup>636</sup> Contemporary illustrations of the set design support Inglis' suggestion, as the same columned hall seen in Poynter's ponderous painting had precedents in the Parisian production from 1862, in the city where he had been an art student a few years earlier (fig.151). In addition, Poynter may have been aware of the print by Louis Adolphe Gautier exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1861, *La reine de Saba arrivant à la cour du roi Salomon (The Queen of Sheba arriving at the court of King Solomon (after M. Schopin)*.

The death of Layard on 5 July 1894 seemed to crown the period; and it provided an opportunity to reassess his contribution to Mesopotamian archaeology, allowing the British press to reflect upon his monumental Assyrian discoveries half a century ago. The *Illustrated London News*, beneath a late photographic portrait of Layard, enthused about the:

...wonderful relics of architectural decorative sculpture, more graphic than pages of ancient history, which Layard had exhumed. But their effect on the public mind was more startling and exciting than that of later discoveries [by other archaeologists elsewhere and] ... bearing more immediately upon many passages of Bible history.<sup>637</sup>

The tone was repeated by other newspapers that lamented the death of the "well-known diplomatist and the discoverer of Nineveh" whose industrious excavations had been responsible for "exhuming some of the numerous wonderful specimens of Assyrian art which now enrich the British Museum".<sup>638</sup> The London-based newspaper *The Daily News* thought his "discoveries are now among the best-

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<sup>636</sup> Alison Inglis in Benjamin (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp.90–93 (91).

<sup>637</sup> 'Our illustrations: The late Sir Austen Henry Layard', *Illustrated London News*, 14 July 1894, p.35 (35).

<sup>638</sup> 'Death of Sir Henry Layard', *The Times*, 6 July 1894, p.5 (5).

known objects in the British Museum” and his efforts had “laid bare a city and almost a world of the past”.<sup>639</sup> The triumvirate association between Layard, Assyria and the British Museum was firmly inscribed in the reportage. Significantly, the painters Leighton and Poynter were among the pallbearers at his funeral.<sup>640</sup>

Reproductions of all kinds in the period 1870–1900 reached huge numbers and, with exhibition venues from Paris to Chicago, provided primary nodes for the collective display of Assyrian artworks. The printed page too provided sites for the dissemination of physically, and temporally, disparate artworks. A G Temple’s *Sacred art: The Bible story pictured by eminent modern painters*, from 1898 is an important work.<sup>641</sup> Here are brought together between the covers of the book the works of both French and British artists: *Mater Purissima* by Goodall (RA 1868); *Samson* by Solomon (RA 1887); *Daïde calmant les fureurs de Saul (David calming the wrath of Saul)* by Lefèbvre-Lourdet (Paris Salon 1886); *David brought before Saul* by Canziani (RA 1868); *King Ahab’s coveting* by Rooke (RA 1879); Topham’s *Naaman’s wife* (RA 1888); *Jezebel’s question to Jehu [The entry of Jehu into Jezreel]* by Corbould (RI 1866); *Mordecai refusing to do reverence to Haman* (RA 1892) and *Esther denouncing Haman* by Normand (RA 1888); *Esther’s banquet* by Armitage (RA 1865); *The shulamite* by Cabanel (Paris Salon 1876); Hacker’s *By the rivers of Babylon*; Rochegrosse’s *La folie de Nabuchodonosor (The madness of Nebuchadnezzar)* (Paris Salon 1886) and *Salomé danse devant le roi Hérode (Salome dancing before Herod)* (Paris Salon 1887); *Daniel in the lions’ den* by

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<sup>639</sup> ‘Obituary: Sir Henry Layard’, *The Daily News*, 6 July 1894, p.7 (7).

<sup>640</sup> ‘Funeral of Sir A H Layard’, *The Times*, 10 July 1894, p.8 (8).

<sup>641</sup> A G Temple, *Sacred art: The Bible story pictured by eminent modern painters* (London: Cassell & Co Ltd, 1898).

Rivière (RA 1872), and *Jonah* by Watts (RA 1895). Many of these works were already, by 1898, located in public collections.

The continued prominence of paintings on biblical themes in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and one which was grounded on firm archaeological exactitude, is an uncomfortable one for some historians of British art to acknowledge in a narrative in which the emergence of Modernism dominates. The continued currency of Assyria as a potent force for painterly creativity is one that has yet to be acknowledged. The ‘problem’ of accommodating “modern religious art” is also one that remains to be fully explored.<sup>642</sup> The increased circulation of these paintings, as prints to decorate interiors, and in the pages of numerous publications, meant their international audiences grew to an unprecedented size. Responses to Assyria therefore grew in visibility and permanence, with many artworks finding their way into public collections all over the world. The central theme uniting the artworks — artistic responses to Assyria — accommodates a plurality of images with a variety of meanings and possibilities set within these responses.

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<sup>642</sup> Phrase borrowed from ‘Art notes’, *Illustrated London News*, 16 February 1895, p.216 (216).

## CHAPTER FIVE ASSYRIA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

...to know the material completely one must come to London and Paris (1928)<sup>643</sup>

In the middle of winter, in early 1890, Assyria at once entered the modern age, the electrical age. Electric illumination was installed on the ground floor sculpture galleries of the British Museum and, for the first time, the Museum enjoyed evening winter openings, since any naked flames had been previously prohibited because of the fire risk. The Assyrian galleries were illuminated with new arc lamps.<sup>644</sup> In the 1890s Assyria became increasingly incorporated into systems of artistic development and progression, from an imagined infancy to a notional maturity of the history of art. This process had first begun in visual terms with James Stephanoff's watercolour *An assemblage of works of art, from the earliest period to the time of Phydias* in 1844 (fig.10), and had gathered force from that time onwards. The illustrator, art theorist and social reformer Walter Crane (1845–1915) incorporated Assyria into his model of the evolution of design and systems of pattern-making in his *The bases of design* (1898). For Crane, Assyria represented a perfect example of a distilled and sophisticated culture — which he termed the 'racial influence' — that had formed a founding basis of design (fig.152). But as well as admiring the Assyrians' sense of design, he waxes lyrical about the inherent romance and mystique attached to buried objects:

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<sup>643</sup> H R Hall, *Babylonian and Assyrian sculpture in the British Museum* (Paris and Brussels: Les Éditions G van Oest, 1928), p.11.

<sup>644</sup> 'Electric lighting of the British Museum', *Illustrated London News*, 8 February 1890, p.163 (163).

... a scrap of wall-painting, a fragment of an incised slab, a piece of broken pottery, a weapon of bronze, or a jewel, become [...] eloquent books of the life of peoples and powers long ago covered by the drifting sands of time.<sup>645</sup>

This evokes the famous quotation from one of Walter Pater's essays from his *Studies in the history of the Renaissance*, first published in 1873 where, speaking of the reliefs of Donatello, he "asks in vain for more than a shadowy outline of their actual days".<sup>646</sup> Crane's book proved popular and went into a second edition in 1902, and was reprinted in 1904, 1909, 1914 and 1920.<sup>647</sup> He became a keen champion of Assyrian art, and especially admired the purely technical merits of Assyrian bas-reliefs, aside from their status as archaeological artefacts. Separating their subject from their form, and finding in them fascinating systems of pattern-making, he considered them:

...remarkable not only for the combination of great power of expression and energy of action with a very dominant formalizing and ornamental and typical treatment of form, but also for great delicacy of chiseling.<sup>648</sup>

Crane was among the first to consider (and admire) the abstract structure of the bas-reliefs and their underlying formal qualities, which as we shall see, interested others too in the first half of the twentieth century. These formal qualities were analysed in strict mathematical terms that reduced the bas-reliefs into geometrical arrangements, and which were devolved from any subject or narrative content that had dominated previous interests.

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<sup>645</sup> Walter Crane, *The bases of design* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1898), p.186. I am grateful to Jo Briggs for this reference.

<sup>646</sup> Walter Pater, 'Luca Della Robbia' (1872) quoted in Adam Phillips (ed.), *Walter Pater 'The Renaissance: Studies in art and poetry'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp.41-46 (41).

<sup>647</sup> Walter Crane, *The bases of design* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1920), p.iv.

<sup>648</sup> Crane (1898), *op.cit.*, p.196.

In 1900 the main building for the enormous *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, with which that city ushered in the new twentieth century, made demonstrably public and visible some of these ideas of the developmental progression of Assyrian art, with the mosaic decoration on the façade of what is now the Grand Palais. Designed by the painter Louis Édouard Fournier (1857–1917), the scheme was called *Les grandes époques de l'art* (*Great periods in art*), which included the major 'schools' of ancient art such as ancient Greece, Egypt, Assyria, Rome and medieval Europe. Here in this sequence Assyria, represented by a male sculptor carving a winged bull, is placed ahead of Far Eastern sculpture from Asia and before ancient Egypt in the 'progress of civilisation' (fig.153), in much the same mindset as Stephanoff, and others, half a century before. Therefore Assyria 'begins' the historical development of the history of art as imagined by Fournier. The newly heralded twentieth century still 'constructed' Assyria with purely nineteenth-century terms of reference, and set within defined canons and hierarchies.

The first quarter of the twentieth century was one in which two painters encountered in previous chapters would head the Royal Academy and give a character of conservatism to the official art world in this period. Edward John Poynter remained President until 1918, coming to the post on the death of John Everett Millais in 1896; and was in turn succeeded by Frank Dicksee, who remained until his death in 1928. The latter was a signatory to the petition objecting to the memorial to the naturalist and writer W H Hudson, *Rima* (1925) by Jacob Epstein, which was erected in Hyde Park, London, and petitioned its removal.<sup>649</sup> Despite this official tone of conservatism the artistic discovery of

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<sup>649</sup> Sandy Nairne and Nicholas Serota (eds), *British sculpture in the twentieth century* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1981), p.13.

Assyria took new, and reflective, turns as the younger generation of artists replaced their predecessors. This shift took on the form of a sculptural turn, away from painters and paintings, and towards sculptors and sculpture, and especially those associated with the avant-garde Vorticist group in London.

In 1907 the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London staged a cross-media exhibition called *Animals in art*.<sup>650</sup> The exhibition included paintings (mostly Victorian) and plaster casts of sculpture. The exhibition catalogue introduced the temporal and spatial parameters of the subject (and exhibits):

For one reason or another, animals are always with us in art — on the dark cave wall of Prehistoric man, in the Egyptian's elaborate tomb, on the palace walls of Assyrian kings, on the coins and vases and friezes of the Greeks, on the vases and rugs of the Persians, inside and outside the Gothic cathedrals, embroidered on the dame's tapestried walls, flaunting on her knight's crest in battle [...] The Assyrians and other hunting races delighted in carving the animals with whom they spent their happiest days.<sup>651</sup>

Here Assyria is contextualised by the ancient neighbours (Egypt, Greece, Persia) that first shaped much of the initial reception in the 1840s, as we have seen in Chapter One. On Wall II in the Lower Gallery of the exhibition venue were displayed three plaster casts of Assyrian bas-reliefs, which from their descriptions were taken from originals in the British Museum. One (no.13) 'Cast of hunting scene (Assyrian, reign of Assurbanipal 668–626 BC, Koyunjik [sic]' was lent by the firm of modellers and sculptors, D Brucciani & Co, London which specialised in modern plaster facsimiles from ancient models. The lender signals the wider commercial and didactic reach of Assyria, from initial illustrations on the printed page in newspapers and books, to photographic reproductions (by firms such as W

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<sup>650</sup> The exhibition was held from 10 October to 4 December 1907.

<sup>651</sup> *Animals in art*, n.p.

A Mansell & Co, London) and plaster casts intended to equip teaching institutions and sculptors' studios. The other two plaster casts, (no.14) 'Cast of a lion hunt (Assyrian, reign of Assurnasirpal, 885–860 BC)' and (no.15) 'Cast of a wounded lioness (Assyrian)', were lent by the Sir John Cass Technical Institute, a teaching institution founded in 1899, and now part of London Metropolitan University. These were probably casts also made by D Brucciani & Co. The organising committee included the painter Briton Rivière, known for his prolonged engagement with Assyria in the 1890s.

Similarly, in Continental Europe in 1902 Gustav Klimt (1862–1918) had exhibited his biblical canvas *Judith I*, a subject so beloved of the *fin de siècle* in France, in Vienna (1901; Österreichische Galerie, Vienna). He had never been to London but from publications had nonetheless sourced the 'authentic' shrubbery and foliage from the Assyrian reliefs depicting the siege and destruction of the Jewish city of Lachish by the Assyrian monarch Sennacherib, in the British Museum.<sup>652</sup> He thereby added an appropriate, deeper symbolic meaning to one of mere formal convention in his use of this specific source and depiction in a city, Vienna, where Jewish heritage was crucial to many of his patrons. In 1906, Andrew Carrick Gow (1848–1920) had exhibited at the Royal Academy an *Elijah* (untraced) that was indebted to Assyrian art.<sup>653</sup> Indeed, Gow's work evoked the same subject and treatment as Albert Moore had in his 1861 Royal Academy submission, which was itself informed from contact with Assyria (fig.58). Moore's work had been shown at a retrospective at the Grafton Galleries, London in 1894.

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<sup>652</sup> I am grateful to Julian Reade for this information.

<sup>653</sup> See *Royal Academy pictures 1906: Illustrating the hundred and thirty-eighth exhibition of the Royal Academy* (London, Paris, New York and Melbourne: Cassell & Co Ltd, 1906), p.22 and *The pictures of 1906: 'Pall Mall Magazine' extra* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1906), p.14.



Gow was a close friend of Alma-Tadema, who often added inscriptions to his gifts to him.<sup>654</sup> Thus evidence can be found of the cyclical nature of influence at work.

Assyria's influence in the new century was most felt in sculpture and in the wide adoption of Assyrian 'style' — both in terms of decorative motifs (pattern and decoration) and massing (volume and form) — as opposed to Assyrian 'subject', which had characterised the previous half century. The contact between the sculptor Jacob Epstein (1880–1959) and the younger Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (1891–1915) was important in this 'sculptural turn' at the beginning of the twentieth century. Their mutual friend, Frank Harris, recounted to the sculptor Horace Brodzky their first meeting:

...aged about 18 or thereabouts, met Epstein, who said, mustering the thunders of gods and the scowlings of Assyrian sculpture into his tone and eyebrows 'Ummhh! Do...you cut...direct...in the stone?' 'Most certainly!' said Gaudier, who had never yet done anything of the sort. 'That's right' said Epstein, 'I will come around to your place on Sunday'.<sup>655</sup>

Gaudier-Brzeska quickly cobbled something together for Epstein to see that week. In the first decade of the twentieth century 'Assyria' seems to have become associated with strange mutilated forms and exaggerated anatomy. It was evidence of the beginnings of its loss of specificity, especially its biblical specificity, and its evolution into something else, a mutable 'other'. Sophie Brzeska noted her husband's eclecticism, much like Epstein's, in the range of cultural influences upon his work:

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<sup>654</sup> *Egyptians 3,000 years ago* (c.1867–68; Auckland City Art Gallery, New Zealand). See Vern G Swanson, *The biography and catalogue raisonne [sic] of the paintings of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema* (London: Garton & Co, 1990), pp.146–47, no.96.

<sup>655</sup> Richard Buckle, *Jacob Epstein sculptor* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), p.60.

He is much inspired by the works he sees [in public collections] and they make a strong impression on his mind and afterwards he cannot shake off their influence [...] Sometimes it's the Egyptians, sometimes the Polynesians, the Assyrians, the Chinese, the people of the Easter Islands etc.<sup>656</sup>

Gaudier-Brzeska was familiar with collections in both London and Paris. In a sketchbook now in the Musée national d'Art moderne in Paris, drawings made at the British Museum attest to his close scrutiny of the collection in Bloomsbury in April 1909.<sup>657</sup> Assyria for Gaudier-Brzeska was an important vortex, a conduit of the creative energy of a prominent period or culture, and which dominated his so-called 'SEMITIC VORTEX':

The men of Elam, of Assur, of Bebel and the Kheta, and men of Armenia and those of Canaan had to slay each other cruelly for the possession of fertile valleys. Their gods sent them the vertical direction, the earth, the SPHERE.<sup>658</sup>

The references to the biblical geography of the Middle East, which include Elam and Canaan, are partly attempts to situate, and at the same time open out, the scope of the notes Gaudier-Brzeska had made on Assyrian sculpture in the British Museum.<sup>659</sup> He had set the polemic tone in the controversy-courting magazine *Blast* which was edited by Wyndham Lewis, whose first issue included Gaudier-Brzeska's essay. It was launched in June 1914. The quotation might also be about the rediscovery of Jewish-related artefacts and depictions in the biblical heritage of

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<sup>656</sup> Diary, fol.133b quoted in Jeremy Lewison, 'A note on chronology', in Jeremy Lewison (ed.), *Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, sculptor 1891-1915* (Cambridge: Kettle's Yard Gallery, 1983), pp.29-31 (31).

<sup>657</sup> See Paul O'Keeffe, *Gaudier-Brzeska: An absolute case of genius* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), pp.29-30.

<sup>658</sup> The 'Vortex Gaudier-Brzeska' is reprinted in Evelyn Silber, *Gaudier-Brzeska: Life and art, with a catalogue raisonné of the sculpture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996), pp.279-82 (280).

<sup>659</sup> *Ibid.*, p.134.

Assyria. *Blast* attempted to break down long-established systems of all kinds — artistic ones as well as social, imperial and political ones. The poet and critic Ezra Pound (1885–1972), a close friend of Gaudier-Brzeska's and fellow contributor to *Blast*, considered the overriding character of the 'Semitic vortex' period, which included Assyrian art, as one composed of the "lust of war".<sup>660</sup>

Gaudier-Brzeska's Ukrainian friend and fellow sculptor Alexander Archipenko (1887–1964) was also attracted to Assyria. In 1902 he enrolled at the Kiev Art School, in his native city, and studied painting and sculpture there until 1905. The Byzantine icons, frescoes and mosaics of Kiev impressed the young student. Archipenko subsequently moved to Paris in 1908, via Moscow, and briefly attended the *École des Beaux-Arts*, before pursuing independent studies that were tightly focused upon his personal discovery of the rich sculptural collections at the Musée du Louvre. In the Louvre he was drawn to ancient Egyptian, Assyrian, archaic Greek and early Gothic sculpture.<sup>661</sup>

The Hungarian-born French sculptor Joseph Csáky (1888–1971) is another example of the sculptural turn that the reception of Assyria took in the first half of the twentieth century and which was centred on either London or Paris, the internationally preeminent collections of the material culture of Assyria. Csáky studied at the School of Decorative Arts in Budapest from 1904 to 1905. In 1908 he went to Paris and settled in the block of studios La Ruche, where he was a neighbor

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<sup>660</sup> Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A memoir, including the published writings of the sculptor, and a selection from his letters, with thirty-eight illustrations, consisting of photographs of his sculpture, and four portraits by Walter Benington, and numerous reproductions of drawings* (London and New York: John Lane, 1916), p.126.

<sup>661</sup> See Katherine Jánosky Michaelson, *Archipenko: A study of the early works, 1908–1920* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1977), which reprints her 1975 PhD thesis from Columbia University, for a survey of his early career in Paris and his sources, especially ancient sculpture in the Louvre, Paris.

of Fernand Léger, Alexander Archipenko, Henri Laurens, Marc Chagall and Chaim Soutine. He joined the Cubist movement in 1911, and Marcel Duchamp included him in the Salon de la Section d'Or in 1912. Only three Csáky's pre-1914 sculptures survive: two bronzes *Tête (Head)* (1914; Musée d'Art et d'Industrie, Saint-Étienne) and *Figure de femme debout (Standing female figure)* (1913; Paris, Musée National d'Art Moderne), and a marble version of the latter, which show a progression from a style still influenced by Rodin, to a block-like simplification and Cubist planes.<sup>662</sup> Volunteering for the French Army in 1914, he was unable to make any more sculptures until his return to Paris in 1919, when he acquired French citizenship; his immediate post-war work was much more abstract. After making (in 1919) several columnar sculptures with a Léger-like dynamic, tumbling accumulations of pure cylinders, cones, spheres and discs, he began to make (from 1920 onwards) a series of bas-reliefs, heads and figures; smooth, flat planes and straight edges are contrasted with meandering curves and incised patterning or worked areas.<sup>663</sup> These reliefs recall the medium and decorative iconography from the "Assyro-Babylonian and [ancient] Egyptian sections of the Louvre", which is known the Hungarian sculptor visited.<sup>664</sup> This phase, somewhat related to Art Deco but especially to ancient Egyptian and Assyrian art, lasted until the late 1920s; his later sculptures, partly under the influence of Henri Laurens (1885–1954), were of figures and animals in a curvilinear and rhythmical style. One sculpture, *La lionne (The lioness)*, from 1921, has a possible "impetus from Assyro-Babylonian and [ancient] Egyptian art" which Csáky might have seen first-hand after the Louvre

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<sup>662</sup> See Donald Karshan, *Csáky* (Paris: Dépôt 15, 1973), p.83, figs.1–3.

<sup>663</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.40–47.

<sup>664</sup> Edith Balas, *Joseph Csáky: A pioneer of modern sculpture [Memoirs' series, volume 230]* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1998), p.42.

had reopened in 1919.<sup>665</sup> Another work with the same title, from 1922, evinces Csáky's "admiration of [ancient] Egyptian and Assyrian art" that brought his focus away from the human to the animal figure.<sup>666</sup> The massive and bulky form of the work, with incised decoration formed of parallel lines to suggest the animal's mane, as well as the subject itself — think of King Ashurbanipal's lion-hunting bas-reliefs — recalls Assyrian prototypes in collections in both Paris and London. The latter he may perhaps have known second-hand from book-illustrations.

Epstein was propelled forward in a circle of avant-garde thinkers and artists. The most celebrated expression of this new-found sculptural discovery of Assyria, came though, with Epstein's Oscar Wilde monument in Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris of 1909–12.<sup>667</sup> Early photographs of the work show the purity and linearity of the massive sculpture (fig.154). Some of these photographs record the work newly completed in Epstein's studio in London before onward shipment to Paris, and in perfect condition before exposure outdoors saw its present weathered state. Evelyn Silber identifies the human-head winged bull from Khorsabad in the British Museum that "incorporates [uniquely] an abrupt transition between the vertical and horizontal flow of the wing feathers"<sup>668</sup>. Epstein would have seen the examples of these in the Musée du Louvre in his early career before moving to London in 1905. Silber identifies the headdress of the messenger as deriving specifically from a piece in Bloomsbury.<sup>669</sup> Gaudier-Brzeska described these sculptures as "man-headed bulls in horizontal flight-walk", which

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<sup>665</sup> *Ibid.*, p.87. This work is illustrated on p.89, fig.56.

<sup>666</sup> Karshan, *op.cit.*, p.65. The work is illustrated p.62, fig.29.

<sup>667</sup> Evelyn Silber, *The sculpture of Epstein, with a complete catalogue* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1986), pp.130–32, no.40.

<sup>668</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22.

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22.

conveys some sense of the static dynamism that attracted Epstein to them, formally and (perhaps) culturally.<sup>670</sup> His friend Pound was attracted by the “charm of the Egyptian and Assyrian galleries of the British Museum” as an antidote to the mainstay of contemporary art as evinced by the annual displays of contemporary art at the Royal Academy of Arts, London.<sup>671</sup> He was scathing about the overtly sentimental quality of much of the art submitted for display at this venue (then still powerful in fashioning taste) and its preponderance for supplying work for colour reproduction as “Pears Soap’s Annual”.<sup>672</sup> Pound was particularly drawn to the “charm in Assurbanipal’s [lion] hunting [scenes]” which he considered a pan-global “masterwork”, ranking highly with other works from the British Museum’s collection, such as Chinese bronzes and ancient Egyptian sculpture of the god Isis.<sup>673</sup>

Early contemporary writers on Epstein were quick to seize upon his sources. Bernard van Dieren (1887–1936) thought his carving “in soft stone presents similarity with the soft-stone sculptures of the Assyrians and Persians or the older Greek (the *Maternity*, the *Sun god*, and the marble *Oscar Wilde tomb*)”.<sup>674</sup> In 1920, for example, Dieren explains the connection he saw between Assyria and some of Epstein’s sculpture:

Assyrian sculpture whose fantastic imaginings and quaint forms of dream-being (that provide a parallel for Epstein’s *fleshy figures*) are sufficiently well known, we meet with such highly accomplished naturalistic representations as those of which the famous dying lioness is characteristic.<sup>675</sup>

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<sup>670</sup> Pound, *op.cit.*, p.126. The description was first published in the first issue of the short-lived periodical *Blast* in 1914.

<sup>671</sup> *Ibid.*, p.127.

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid.*, p.127.

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.*, p.127.

<sup>674</sup> Bernard van Dieren, *Epstein* (London: John Lane, 1920), p.27.

<sup>675</sup> *Ibid.*, p.30.

Dieren's 'flenite figures' refers to the sculpture *Flenite relief* (1913) that was recently acquired by the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds in 2006. Other writers equated the formal qualities of the originating model with Wilde's tomb. Hubert Wellington observed in a volume in a series on contemporary British artists edited by Albert Rutherston (1881–1953) that Epstein's work, formed of a "massive block of stone, with its carved detail of a rather Assyrian type, does not lack impressiveness".<sup>676</sup> The impact of Assyria's 'impressiveness' was a commonly admired characteristic, as we shall see, by the sculptor Henry Moore among others.

Epstein himself acknowledged the influence of Assyria upon the sculpture in a published conversation he had with Arnold Haskell (ALH) in 1931. He openly confessed that it was "in the Louvre and the British Museum that I found my real inspiration".<sup>677</sup> Epstein described the Wilde monument thus:

JE I conceived a vast winged figure, a messenger swiftly moving with vertical wings, giving the feeling of forward flight. It was of course purely symbolical, the conception of a poet as a messenger [...]

ALH [...] It is deeply impressive. What interested me particularly was its movement. It is the only work of yours in motion. It is surging forward, yet it is not restless [...] What interested me also was the technical treatment of the wings. They are composed of a mass of stone considerably heavier than the body [of the work], yet instead of over-weighing it, they lift it up and actually seem to support it.

JE [...] There is a strange love for the exotic in America. An architect once showed me his plans for a courthouse, in Nebraska I think it was. They were entirely Assyrian. He justified this by saying 'I think our civilisation is almost entirely Assyrian'.<sup>678</sup>

Three preparatory drawings are known for the sculpture. One in the Garman Ryan Collection in Walsall and the carving, as executed, are extremely close to Assyrian models. In 1975 a new drawing was discovered for the tomb,

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<sup>676</sup> Hubert Wellington, *Epstein* (London: Ernest Benn, 1925), p.15.

<sup>677</sup> Arnold Lionel Haskell, *The sculptor speaks: Jacob Epstein to Arnold Lionel Haskell: A series of conversations on art* (London: William Heinemann, 1931), p.16.

<sup>678</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.20, 21–22.

prompting Simon Wilson to describe how the “club-shaped lock of hair which appears in the first two drawings [previously known], is also a feature of the Khorsabad bulls and the soaring diadem of the tomb figure, especially as it appears in the first drawing, is clearly derived from the high headdress of the bulls which rises and swells to become a capital supporting the arch of the gate [above]”.<sup>679</sup> Moreover, one early visitor to the sculptor’s studio during progress on the Oscar Wilde tomb recalled in ecstatic tones:

I went...to see it in his studio in Chelsea...with P G Mairet and there we saw the work nearly done — but it was Eric Gill who was hard at work on those beautiful Assyrian wings!<sup>680</sup>

Gill had therefore assisted Epstein in some of the carving.<sup>681</sup> The visit was recorded decades later in a letter from 1942 and it is difficult to assess whether the recognition of the ‘Assyrian wings’ was made with hindsight, since by then their source had been universally acknowledged in print. Richard Buckle (1916–2001), writing in 1963, eloquently described the origin and form of the most striking aspect of the work:

Highly formalised but meticulously detailed wing, whose rectangular shape respects and emphasises the original cubic form of the stone block, recalls the great Assyrian winged bulls from Khorsabad in the British Museum.<sup>682</sup>

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<sup>679</sup> Simon Wilson, ‘A newly discovered sketch by Jacob Epstein for the tomb of Oscar Wilde’, *The Burlington Magazine*, CXVII (872), November 1975, pp.726–27, 729.

<sup>680</sup> Silber, *op.cit.*, p.131.

<sup>681</sup> Raquel Gilboa disputes this claiming the Gill’s diary makes no mention of any assistance. See Gilboa, *...And there was sculpture: Jacob Epstein’s formative years (1882–1930)* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2009), p.103.

<sup>682</sup> Richard Buckle, *Jacob Epstein: Sculptor* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), p.63.



The feathered wings seen in several winged bulls make it difficult to pinpoint which particular example Epstein was emulating; perhaps a combination. Certainly the treatment of the feathers by Epstein marks the cultural source as Assyria.

Slightly later, the sculptor Henry Moore confessed that upon winning a scholarship from the Royal College of Art and arriving in London in October 1921, he made “hundreds of visits” to the British Museum, and found the collection there as thrilling as Epstein had. In 1921, writing to a former student friend from Leeds School of Art, he confessed: “yesterday I spent my second afternoon in the British Museum with the Egyptian & Assyrian sculptures”.<sup>683</sup> Moore later wrote of this exciting time in an article in *The Listener* in 1941. He lamented the closure of the British Museum during the Second World War and loss of access to the non-classical collections. He recalled his youth in the 1920s while a student in London and his numerous visits to the collection:

At first my visits [to the British Museum] were mainly and naturally to the Egyptian galleries, for the monumental impressiveness of Egyptian sculpture was nearest to the familiar Greek and Renaissance ideals one had been born to [...] The galleries running alongside the Egyptian [ones] contained the Assyrian reliefs — journalistic commentaries and records of royal lion hunts and battles.<sup>684</sup>

Moore was thus rather dismissive of Assyria and recently Jon Wood asserted Moore’s preference and indebtedness to the Mesopotamian predecessor of Sumer, with its purity and simplicity of line and form that Moore felt was lacking in

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<sup>683</sup> Letter to Jocelyn Horner, 29 October 1921 quoted in Alan Wilkinson (ed.), *Henry Moore: Writings and conversations* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2002), pp.44–45.

<sup>684</sup> Henry Moore, ‘Primitive art’, *The Listener*, 24 April 1941, pp.598–99 quoted in *ibid.*, p.103.

Assyrian sculpture.<sup>685</sup> Moore's *Mother and child* (1931) is one example of his response to Sumerian sculpture and was reproduced, in 1932, beside an example from Sumer in R H Wilenski's *The meaning of modern sculpture*.<sup>686</sup> Moore wrote:

For me, Sumerian sculpture ranks with early Greek, Etruscan, ancient Mexican, Fourth and Twelfth Dynasty Egyptian, and Romanesque and early Gothic sculpture, as the great sculpture of the world.<sup>687</sup>

He contrasted it with the later "decadent art of the Babylonians and Assyrians, with their materialist and militarist society, their love of the sumptuous and the colossal, their luxurious palaces and temples".<sup>688</sup> This is interesting both in asserting Moore's preference of a supposed early sculptural purity found in Sumer, free from societal corruption; and the legacy of a mindset that found pronounced expression in nineteenth-century attitudes to Assyria and Babylonia, which were often conflated and usually came to mean one and the same culture. Early examples of this include the 1856 report of the latest finds from Nineveh, for example, from the *Illustrated London News* that described Nineveh as the "capital of a magnificent and barbarous empire".<sup>689</sup> Wood outlines that the turn to Assyrian art in much monumental commemorative work of 1914–25 by Epstein, Jagger and Eric Kennington was unappealing to Moore. His turn to an earlier and 'purer' ancient sculpture, exemplified in Sumerian sculpture, was an attempt to shed the resonance of this militarism prevalent in much contemporary work at that time, in

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<sup>685</sup> Jon Wood, 'Gods, graves and sculptors: *Gudea*, Sumerian sculpture and the avant-garde, c.1930–1935', *Sculpture Journal*, 9, 2003, pp.67–82, especially pp.78, 80–81.

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid.*, p.72.

<sup>687</sup> Henry Moore, 'Mesopotamian art', *The Listener*, 5 June 1935, pp.944–46 (944). This is reprinted in Wilkinson, *op.cit.*, pp.100–02 (101).

<sup>688</sup> *Ibid.*, p.100.

<sup>689</sup> 'Assyrian sculptures: Siege of a city', *Illustrated London News*, 16 August 1856, p.178 (178).

the wake of the First World War, and which was instead “evocative of rebirth and regeneration and replacing war and memorialisation”.<sup>690</sup>

Painterly responses to Assyria from this period were few. One marked example is that of Fernand Léger (1881–1955).<sup>691</sup> From 1914 to 1917 Léger served in the First World War, where he spent “four years without colour”. It is from this environment that Léger attributes his inspiration for the machines and bold, robust figures that appear in works such as *Le mécanicien* (*The mechanic*), now in the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa (fig.155).<sup>692</sup> The mechanic was a figure who, according to Léger, is “the electrician in blue smock, modern god, emperor-king, chief of us and of all”.<sup>693</sup> Léger has almost represented sculpture in paint, taking his cue from Egyptian and Assyrian bas-reliefs in which he has simplified the picture plane and the mechanic’s strong arms are presented as flattened formal considerations and set off against the brilliant clean gleam of geometry behind. The focus of the picture is the musculature of the mechanic and reasserts, as it was in danger of being lost, the human agency in all machinery. Léger’s pronouncement of the ‘emperor-king’ has an echo of the royal origin of much of ancient Egyptian and Assyrian art, which has been convincingly identified as the source of this picture.

Christopher Green has placed much emphasis on the reopening of the Louvre in January 1919, after the end of the First World War, as affecting Léger’s engagement with past art. He writes that this enthusiasm for past art was at least as much a popular one as an avant-garde one. The French newspaper

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<sup>690</sup> Wood, *op.cit.*, p.81.

<sup>691</sup> I am grateful to Lucy Howarth for this information.

<sup>692</sup> Georges Bauquier, *Fernand Léger: Catalogue raisonné*, 8 vols (Paris: Adrien Maeght, 1990–2003), vol.II (1992), pp.102–03, no.254.

<sup>693</sup> Katharine Kuh, *Léger* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1953), p.30.

*L'Intransigeant* declared that "the opening of the Louvre dominates opinion" in January 1919, as "it symbolises the return to peace".<sup>694</sup> For a while, masterpieces of the Louvre were rediscovered, and the return to past art was fostered in part, Green asserts, by a "sense of a revived link with the past [which] after half a decade of chaos must have been irresistible".<sup>695</sup> Green is clear that the reopening of the Louvre and the painting of *Le mécanicien* of 1920 "openly courts comparison" not merely with the Classicising styles then current in Parisian avant-garde circles but absolutely with ancient Egyptian and Assyrian art. He illustrates a winged spirit from Khorsabad from the Louvre and states that the "clear separation and definition of the muscles in the arms recalls the musculature of the eighth century BC Assyrian figures in relief" in the Louvre collection, and the other attributes come unmistakably from Egyptian stelae, transformed here into an interest in the tattoo, rings and cigarette.<sup>696</sup> The frozen dignity of Léger's new man-machine image asserts his belief in the existence of constant pictorial principles, rather than the need for revolution and rejection of all past art, or, as Picasso had done with *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* (1906-07; Museum of Modern Art, New York), severing all polite links with the pictorial past.

The work of the sculptor Charles Sargeant Jagger (1885-1934) is also worthy of some consideration here, making an unexpected dialogue with Assyrian prototypes in his officially commissioned public war memorial sculpture. It was estimated that over eight million horses on both sides died in the war. Despite the importance of machine guns for defensive operations, and claims made for the role

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<sup>694</sup> Christopher Green, *Léger and the avant-garde* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1976), p.233.

<sup>695</sup> *Ibid.*, p.233.

<sup>696</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.199, 201.

of tanks (first used *en masse* from 1917) and aerial warfare, artillery was the dominant field weapon of the period. Principally two types of artillery were used in the First World War. Horse artillery was intended for the support of fast-moving cavalry units for anti-personnel use or destruction of light cover. The other was heavy artillery that developed during the course of the war from launches from semi-permanent positions or warships to mobile weapons, intended to keep up with infantry movements and attack defensive field positions, especially the trenches that became a key marker of the conflict. Jagger's *Royal Artillery Monument* (1921–25) is surmounted by a modern weapon, the large-bore howitzer, which dominates the structure (fig.156). Its thrusting diagonal barrel points skyward to an unknown, and unseen, enemy and perhaps emphasises the victor's modernity and technological prowess. The dominant thrust and diagonal of warfare, as I should like to term the feature of the monument, is repeated in both the large figural bas-relief panels that are found on the two principal flanks of the structure. One represents heavy artillery (east side) and the other horse artillery (fig.157). The language of modern warfare had ancient prototypes, a belief in the continuity of man's activity. Interesting here to consider then is the impact that Assyrian bas-reliefs of lion hunting had upon the sculptor's conception and execution of this strident memorial. In a photograph of the sculptor in his studio, of about 1928, he is seen modelling clay (fig.158). Behind him is a plaster cast of a section of an Assyrian equestrian relief from the British Museum (fig.159).

The treatment of the horses in the horse artillery panel is, I suggest, derived from Assyrian prototypes, and tellingly emblazoned on the monument above is the word 'Mesopotamia', in reference to both modern and ancient scenes of warfare. In the twentieth century the equation of Assyria with warfare, and militaristic

ambition, was widespread. One commentator in 1946 declared that

“Ashurbanipal’s wars were numerous and his conduct often ruthlessly cruel”.<sup>697</sup>

In Jagger’s book *Modelling and sculpture*, published in 1933, the formal aspects of Assyrian bas-reliefs are expounded. Plate XXVI in his book is a detail of a longer sequence of a lion hunt from Nineveh, in the British Museum (fig.160); one of several ancient artworks in his group of ‘Twelve great works of sculpture analysed’. Other examples include some from ancient Greece and Egypt, together with more recent work by the early Renaissance sculptor Andrea Verrocchio and Rodin. Jagger describes the panel, marvelling in mathematical tones:

The general construction of the pattern consists of two arches formed by the belly and legs of the animals, the right-hand arch being surmounted by a rough pyramid formed by the rider of the leading horse. The direction of the principal movement is from left to right, but this is counteracted and balanced by the reverse action of the charging lion on the right, which is also assisted by the direction of the spear in the hand of the huntsman. Even the position and direction of the arrows piercing the lion on the left are calculated to emphasise the forward movement of the main group.<sup>698</sup>

The diagonal thrust is dominant in both ancient and modern forms under discussion. Jagger also admired the juxtaposition of elaborate detail with unworked areas and the primacy of silhouette as the dominant operating force in the reliefs. Moreover, the possible tangle of legs of hunter and hunted had been successfully achieved by “avoid[ing] as far as possible disturbing the comparatively simple outline of the pattern”. The visual language he described was found in Assyrian bas-reliefs, and especially of equine anatomy. In a 1925 article, the year the sculpture was unveiled, D S MacColl notes the “reliefs are very

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<sup>697</sup> Jack Finegan, *Light from the ancient past: The archaeological background of the Hebrew-Christian religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p.118.

<sup>698</sup> Charles Sargeant Jagger, *Modelling and sculpture in the making* (London and New York: Studio Ltd and Studio Publications, 1933), n.p.

effectively related in their composition to the skyward thrust of the gun".<sup>699</sup> Jagger's bronze relief *No man's land* (1918–22) in the Imperial War Museum, London, proves another example of Jagger's suggestive use of empty space, and the articulation of diagonal thrust in the composition.<sup>700</sup> Tate has another casting of this relief (fig.161). Modern writers have noted the indebtedness of Jagger's work to Assyria. James Stevens Curl observes that the *Royal Artillery Memorial's* reliefs have the "vigour yet the control of an Assyrian hunt".<sup>701</sup>

Jagger died prematurely in 1934, less than a decade after his masterpiece was unveiled. His obituary in *The Times* was unequivocal in the mixed status the work had at the time:

Like all monuments of the kind, it was, for practical purposes, a collaboration between architect, sculptor, and a committee. The result is an unsatisfactory compromise between special knowledge and artistic ability [...] The reliefs are good from an illustrative point of view, but they fritter away rather than enhance the fine architectural mass designed by Mr. Lionel Pearson.<sup>702</sup>

The reservation of the newspaper critic is levelled at the 'illustrative' reliefs that describe the minutiae of warfare (like Assyria's ones did too) without any deeper symbolic or allegorical meaning.

The contemporary work of another British sculptor, Gilbert Ledward (1888–1960), provides interesting parallels with the work of Jagger. He, like

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<sup>699</sup> Compton, *op.cit.*, p.109.

<sup>700</sup> *Ibid.*, p.111, no.23.

<sup>701</sup> James Stevens Curl, 'The Royal Artillery Memorial at Hyde Park Corner' in Ann Compton (ed.), *Charles Sargeant Jagger: War and peace sculpture* (London: Imperial War Museum, 1985), pp.80–99 (98).

<sup>702</sup> 'Obituary: Mr. C S Jagger ARA: The Artillery Memorial', *The Times*, 17 November 1934, p.7 (7).

Jagger, was commissioned to produce a prestigious First World War memorial for a prominent London site, St. James' Park opposite Horse Guards Parade, and the result remains his most important and celebrated work: *Guards' Division Memorial* (1922–26). It was unveiled on 16 October 1926.<sup>703</sup>

The work was a collaboration between Ledward and the architect Harold Chalton Bradshaw (1893–1943) and consists of a stone pylon inset with three bronze bas-reliefs, fronted by five life-size bronze servicemen. Jagger had also collaborated with Bradshaw on other post-First World War projects, including the Cambrai Memorial, 1926–28.<sup>704</sup> The largest bronze panel, and the rear of the memorial, depicts guardsmen in frantic action firing artillery, *18-pounder gun in action* (fig.162). Beyond the shared technique the panel also displays common formal affinities with Assyrian bas-reliefs in the British Museum. Both make suggestive use of empty, unworked, areas and are articulated by strong diagonal rhythms. These diagonals are formed in Ledward's work by a succession of upturned field gun barrels set in recession pointing to the right, that is countered by a single diagonal from the left. The thrusting physical effort of the three servicemen is directed to the right, loading the charge into place, at the left of the panel. Their exertion is counteracted by a single static figure on the right, facing his comrades, listening intently through an earpiece, which mirrors this offsetting of diagonals. The underlying dynamics of the diagonal thrust of the work is prefigured in Assyrian bas-reliefs of the lion hunts of King Ashurbanipal in the British Museum, for example, where lances and arrows stand in for modern gun barrels. In these reliefs the compositional rhythm is in large part dictated by the

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<sup>703</sup> Peyton Skipwith, 'Gilbert Ledward RA and the Guards' Division Memorial', *Apollo*, CXXVII (311), January 1988, pp.22–26 and Catherine Moriarty, *The sculpture of Gilbert Ledward* (Much Hadham: Henry Moore Foundation and Lund Humphries, 2003).

<sup>704</sup> Compton, *op.cit.*, p.121, no.57.



parties of royal hunters and hunted lions that typically confront one another from opposite directions, the thrust of the lance typically opposed by leaping lions. The empty space between these opposing groups is crucial in articulating this opposition. Moreover, in other Assyrian reliefs from the British Museum multiple horses are seen in recession; this has a parallel in Ledward's work with the succession of upturned field guns.

Ledward's work on the *Guards' Division Memorial* was itself prefigured in his own *œuvre* in a slightly earlier work, an uncast model in plaster for an intended bronze relief. The plaster relief *Gunners — 8 inch Howitzer in action* (1918–19; Imperial War Museum, London) displays the same formal qualities of the later work.<sup>705</sup> The plaster was exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts, London in 1919 in the exhibition 'British war pictures'. Ledward's surviving sketchbooks confirm knowledge of the Assyrian collection at the British Museum. One contains "notes on the Parthenon frieze, details of a sequence of Assyrian sculptures, and sketches of one or two late nineteenth-century German monuments".<sup>706</sup> The copious notes by Ledward in surviving sketchbooks related to the *Guards' Division Memorial* are accompanied by preparatory compositional studies. One early work, before the final format of the bronze relief was decided upon, established the tentative diagonal thrust of the composition (fig.163).

Ledward also collected clippings from contemporary newspaper reports for his research into modern weaponry. One surviving clipping from *The War Illustrated*, 19 August 1918, tipped into a sketchbook in the Royal Academy of Arts, London, illustrates field guns in action (fig.164). The diagonal thrust of the gun

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<sup>705</sup> Moriarty, *op.cit.*, p.103, no.20.

<sup>706</sup> Royal Academy of Arts, London (LED/22). See Peyton Skipwith, *Gilbert Ledward RA PRBS 1888–1960: Drawings for sculpture, a centenary tribute* (London: The Fine Art Society, 1988), n.p.

barrel is prominent in each of the three depictions of the field gun. Both Ledward and Jagger made novel uses of Assyrian prototypes, borrowing many formal compositional and technical devices. The theme of modern warfare, inherent in much of their work, encouraged them to seek out prototypes from past depictions and seek, particularly, examples from Assyria.

Assyria continued to receive much scholarly attention in the early twentieth century, accompanied by lavish photomechanical illustrations. By 1900 these reproductive techniques had completely usurped the autographic techniques of the previous century, especially wood-engraving, which had propelled Assyria to prominence after its rediscovery in 1845.<sup>707</sup> The Rev. Archibald Paterson published a series, in twelve parts from 1901 to 1907, *Assyrian sculptures* which were in effect 'photographic portraits' with generous reproductions and minimal accompanying text.<sup>708</sup> The text was published in French and German, alongside English, which demonstrates the pan-European ambitious reach of the publication. The British Museum itself inaugurated a number of publications from the early twentieth century onwards. Photomechanical reproduction had reduced the comparative cost of book-illustrations. Notable official publications, published by the trustees of the British Museum, included E A Wallis Budge's *The Assyrian sculptures in the British Museum* (1914), Henry Reginald Hall's *Babylonian and Assyrian sculpture in the British Museum* (1928) and C J Gadd's *The stones of Assyria* (1936). The latter was quickly followed by Sidney Smith's *Assyrian sculptures in the*

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<sup>707</sup> For a recent discussion of these changes see Tom Gretton, 'Signs for labour-value in printed pictures after the photomechanical revolution: Mainstream changes and extreme cases around 1900', *Oxford Art Journal*, 28 (3), 2005, pp.371-90.

<sup>708</sup> The Rev. Archibald Paterson, *Assyrian sculptures arranged and annotated by [The] Rev. Archibald Paterson BD* (Haarlem: H Kleinmann & Co, 1901-07).

*British Museum, from Shalmaneser II to Sennacherib* (1938) that sought a greater pictorial independence for the illustrations; sixty-nine large format plates on thick paper with little accompanying text. The preface outlined new techniques for illuminating the photographic sessions in the galleries, employing “two different types of lighting used for the plates in this volume, the general lighting from both sides and the spot-light from one side”.<sup>709</sup> He continued that these conditions were necessary because Assyrian bas-reliefs typically had a small field of depth and that these reproductions were intended to “supply students with more adequate material for the study of the historic development of a great school of sculpture” and one that “experimented in [representational] methods”.

Many of these publications on Assyria took on distinctly nineteenth-century tones and outlooks. The title of Gadd’s volume and Adrian Stokes’ *The stones of Rimini* (1935), which dealt with sculpture in general, both looked back to that seminal work by John Ruskin, *The stones of Venice*. Stokes had sought to identify and outline the key sculptural development of bas-reliefs, and produce a theological lineage for the medium. The flattened and compressed nature of bas-reliefs was its primary characteristic and the Mesopotamian origin was clearly laid out by Stokes as a possible source. Hall’s publication contained many tones of the former intense rivalry between Paris and London, made evident by the effusive introduction that underlined the “undisputed pre-eminence of the Assyrian collection of the British Museum”, though Hall conceded some territory with respect to Babylonia, on which the British institution “yields the palm to the Louvre”.<sup>710</sup> Hall speaks in competitive terms of “trophies...brought back to

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<sup>709</sup> Sidney Smith, *Assyrian sculptures in the British Museum, from Shalmaneser II to Sennacherib* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1938), n.p. [p.3].

<sup>710</sup> Hall, *op.cit.*, p.6.

England”.<sup>711</sup> Other echoes of the nineteenth-century attitude to Assyria, and its perceived subordination to ancient Greco-Roman art, are found in such passages of the introduction where Hall guides imaginary visitors to Bloomsbury away from “the clarity of Greece and Rome to the mystery of the Orient” seen in Assyria.<sup>712</sup> The zenith of the nineteenth-century artistic canon, the sculptures from the Parthenon, remained prevalent here too in Hall’s writing, and the author considered that “Ashurbanipal’s horses are the most beautiful in the history of sculpture after those of the Parthenon” before comparing at length, on a parity, Assyrian and ancient Egyptian sculpture.<sup>713</sup> Hall published superb large format collotype plates from photographs by Donald Macbeth that were separately printed on thick paper. These reproductions competed with the illustrations of nineteenth-century equivalents such as Layard’s *The monuments of Nineveh* (1849). Hall’s book initiated a radical illustrative departure — reproducing, for example, an extended sequence of bas-reliefs of the lion hunt of Ashurbanipal as one continuous fold-out sheet of narrative art almost a metre in length, to show what he considered “the most famous achievement of Assyrian art, [and one] which hardly needs further words”.<sup>714</sup> This was the same panel that had been singled out for praise by Jagger in 1933, as we have discovered. So Jagger may have been studying Hall’s reproductions for his own publication a few years later. Moreover, Budge published his professional career in a volume that despite the dry title, *By Nile and Tigris: A narrative of journeys in Egypt and Mesopotamia on behalf of the British Museum between the years 1886 and 1913* (1920), forms a continuum with Layard’s more exuberant publications from the mid-nineteenth

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<sup>711</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>712</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>713</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>714</sup> Plate XLVII–XLIX. *Ibid.*, p.46.

century. The interest in the discipline of Assyriology itself, now an established entity, was championed in another of Budge's publications, *The rise and progress of Assyriology* (1925).

Elsewhere, Ernest Gardner (1862–1939) in his *Handbook of Greek sculpture* wrote admiringly, “the magnificent rendering of lions, horses, and dogs in these [Assyrian] reliefs has never been surpassed, if equalled, in a sculpture ancient or modern”.<sup>715</sup> The publishing tradition that began in the nineteenth century continues to this day. In 2008 Paul Collins has continued this tradition, one in which the mediatory role of the British Museum photographers is fully celebrated, as their names now appear in the title.<sup>716</sup> The precision of high-resolution digital colour photography coupled with many close-ups and details, showcases the Assyrian sculptures as never before. Collins even includes a section on the ‘Appreciation of the Assyrian sculptures’ that outlines briefly the artistic reception of the sculptures in the nineteenth century, inserting in a popular ‘coffee-table’ publication the recent scholarly interest devoted to this subject in a broader schematic history of Assyriology itself.<sup>717</sup>

The art of Mark Rothko (1903–1970), with its well-known commitment to abstraction and celebration of non-representational forms, seems an unpromising place in which to seek out the pervasive influence of Assyria. But Rothko's mature work was preceded by periods of figurative work, and one painting in particular shows an indebtedness to that most Assyrian cultural marker, the human-headed winged guardian. Rothko's *The Syrian bull* of 1943, in the Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio is an interesting work to consider in the artistic

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<sup>715</sup> Ernest Gardner, *Handbook of Greek sculpture* (London: Macmillan, 1907), p.21.

<sup>716</sup> Paul Collins, *Assyrian palace sculptures, with photographs by Lisa Baylis and Sandra Marshall* (London: British Museum Press, 2008).

<sup>717</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.14–16.

engagement with Assyria in the twentieth century (fig.165). It was completed in the first half of that year and immediately exhibited in a group show organised by the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors, at the dealer Wildenstein & Company in New York, that opened on 3 June 1943. It was reproduced in an article in *The New York Times* alongside Adolph Gouib's *Rape of Persephone*, quoting a response to previous criticisms of the show in a jointly-worded letter by Rothko and Gottleib with Barnett Newman. *The Syrian bull*, and its singling out in this letter, has caused the modest canvas to become a reference point in the historiography of Abstract Expressionism. In the letter, Rothko described the work as “a new interpretation of an archaic image, involving unprecedented distortions”. He continues:

What you are experiencing is simply another aspect of the preoccupation with the archaic. In naming my picture *The Syrian bull*, I was helping the onlooker by naming our association with the art of the past, which once my picture was done, I could not but observe.<sup>718</sup>

As David Anfam has shown in a note in *The Burlington Magazine* in 1997, the template for the image is an Assyrian winged bull, replete with various distortions and additions.<sup>719</sup> Rothko's likely contact was with the remarkable gift by John D Rockefeller to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1932, which included a winged bull. From this source come the dark cloven hoofs, the striated patterning of the wings and the upward thrusting lobes that echoes the bull's pendulous hair. Anfam convincingly aligns the iconography of the picture — with its sinister zigzag details that plunge downwards, ending in faint schematic claws

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<sup>718</sup> Letter to Edward Alden Jewell (Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles) quoted in Bonnie Clearwater, *The Rothko book* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), p.54.

<sup>719</sup> David Anfam, 'A note on Rothko's *The Syrian bull*', *The Burlington Magazine*, September 1997, CXXXIX (1134), pp.629–31.

or talons, and the way the numerous terminations impregnate the flat terrain upon which they stand — as a monstrous symbol of aggression. Rothko's knowledge of the ancient sculpture is long known. In 1927 he drew illustrations for a book called *The Graphic Bible: From Genesis to Revelation in animated maps and charts*, written by Rabbi Lewis Browne. One of these illustrations shows a map of the Holy Land (fig.166). Rothko here personifies the agent of the defeat of the Jews by the Assyrians in 722 BC, as the human-headed winged bull. Rothko left before the project was complete and, believing that he had failed to receive his due credit, sued both Browne and the publisher, but lost. At the hearing, Rothko asserted that the design on the book-illustration was "an Assyrian symbolic figure" and tellingly, the last line of text on the page in which the illustration is found reads: 'And thus the kingdom of Israel came to an end.' Thus Rothko, as Anfam has noted, in his recourse to an archaic embodiment of power, makes a quiet response to the unfolding sinister imperial forces at work in the coming Second World War, both from Germany and Japan.

The image of the voluptuousness and sexual excess that had sometimes characterised depictions of Assyria in the nineteenth century, especially following Delacroix's canvas in the Louvre of the final moments of the fictionalised Assyrian despot Sardanapalus, occasionally found root in the twentieth century. One of the most ambitious and sexually explicit of the late gouaches from the 1970s by Roger Hilton (1911–1975) is *Sardanapalus after Delacroix* (fig.167). Adrian Lewis has found that it possesses an extreme degree of projection and self-identification that transforms this *hommage* to Delacroix into an autobiographical painting that serves as a fantastic self-portrait. In a lengthy analysis Lewis writes:

One deathbed image is particularly revealing. It is a reprise of Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus* (1827–28, Louvre), but Delacroix's interest in the theme of aloof unconcern at the destruction of worldly power and wealth is not the same as Hilton's. Sardanapalus is undressed and sexually tweaked, surrounded only by female figures whose extended arms constitute (along with the circular forms) projections of frustrated sexual feeling. *Sardanapalus after Delacroix* is also interesting in connecting Hilton with models of cultural behavior from early modern French culture. The epitaph on Sardanapalus' tomb supposedly read: 'I have eaten, drunk and amused myself, and I have always considered everything worth no more than a fillip'. *Sardanapalus after Delacroix* indexes Hilton to cultural themes of the feather bed of debauchery and the philosophical 'dandy'.<sup>720</sup>

Sculptors of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have continued to extend the artistic dialogue with Assyria that first began after its archaeological discovery in the 1840s. This dialogue mostly takes the form of anecdotal, rather than material, responses. Sometimes these beautifully written engagements articulate difficult or troubling responses. The Indian-born sculptor Dhruva Mistry (b.1957) describes his first contact with the collection in Bloomsbury:

There was little to compare with the BM with its ever-imposing building and vast array of collection. Like a labyrinth of visual excitement, the BM was enticing as it lured me to walk into another world. I began to learn to see myself in relation to my collective take on [a] variety of cultures.... I feel spellbound by fragments large and small as they engage me to reconstruct the whole. Assyrian winged bulls, rooms with bas-reliefs reveal extraordinary prowess, power, pain and suffering of war and hunt. I wonder about magnitude of time infused with care, ease and skill. It is astounding to find works retaining perpetual freshness despite their ancient origins.<sup>721</sup>

The sculptor Antony Gormley (b.1950) also captures much the same feeling of awe and the physical and emotional connection with Assyrian sculpture:

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<sup>720</sup> Adrian Lewis, *The last days of Hilton: Gouaches of Roger Hilton* (Bristol: Sansom, 1996), pp.26–32.

<sup>721</sup> Unpublished notes. I am grateful to Mira Hudson for providing me with a copy of these transcriptions.



I can vividly remember the first time I visited the British Museum with my father, my first impression of the Assyrian winged bulls from the palace of King Sargon from Khorsabad, the head of Rameses II, the Assyrian reliefs of war, sacrifice and hunting from the palace at Nimrud. I can remember being amazed by the sheer size of those great winged creatures.... the vitality of the drawing of the lions (dead or alive) in the alabaster panels. The big stone colossi were not just big but made out of single blocks of stone. A single block of stone: a bull with a man's face and wings: mysterious and powerful. An object that came from so far away and yet was so present.<sup>722</sup>

The emphasis on line, and especially drawing, was in sympathy with earlier responses such as that of Rodin in Chapter Three. In 1933, in his book on practical sculpture, Jagger had admired the Assyrian "refinement in drawing".<sup>723</sup> The Portuguese-born painter and printmaker Paula Rego (b.1935) enthuses:

I found the contortions of the animals particularly frightening...It was a totally physical thing. You accept it. The scale, the sense of threat and presence, is enormous. They are frightening...They have incredible vitality and invention. The delicacy and violence and beauty and energy all together give me a frisson.... It is a contained and tight and compact energy, which is more powerful than an expressionistic kind of energy. I have copied lots of animals from books. But these are alive, and you look at them because you get a physical impact from them ... But the Assyrian reliefs are not things to look at in books. To get their presence, you have to go there and be with them, and then you are contaminated by them.<sup>724</sup>

Although material responses themselves to Assyria were few in the late twentieth century, again it was sculptors that enacted this response. Gillian Jagger (b.1930), whose sculpture *Of the hunt* is made of a tree trunk, meat hooks and chains (fig.168) is a notable exception. It was exhibited at the Phyllis Kind Gallery

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<sup>722</sup> Antony Gormley, 'Stones of inspiration', *British Museum Magazine*, 48, Spring 2004, p.5 (5).

<sup>723</sup> Jagger, *op.cit.*, p.30.

<sup>724</sup> Paula Rego, 'Powerful energy', *British Museum Magazine*, 58, Autumn 2007, p.9 (9).

in New York in 1999, and in the accompanying press release she describes the source of the work and its underlining contemporary cultural dimension:

It carries an overtone of the Assyrian lion hunt [bas-reliefs] that I visited at the British Museum. It implies unforgiving, relentless accusation: can we ever reverse direction and address our guilt?<sup>725</sup>

Here Jagger equates the natural world (wood) with the quarry of the Assyrian hunt and the Assyrian royal party with the violent intervention of man (hooks and chains). The work can be taken as a critique of the destruction of the natural world through deforestation, urbanisation, pollution, and climate change. Another experience-induced view is given by the sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi (1924–2005). He describes his encounter with Assyrian cylinder seals:

For two weeks one odd spring [in 1980] I drew, in London's Victoria and Albert Museum in a room full of Japanese treasures, small reliefs the length of a woman's finger with dragonflies and flowers. Earlier I passed a whole winter on a more involved obsession — the Assyrian seals in the British Museum. Going back a decade, I had tried to emulate these little seals while still a student by pressing pieces of shaped wood into a flat piece of clay.<sup>726</sup>

The encounter, not with the usual reliefs, but with these smaller objects reveals a fascination with the delicate imprint of former ages. These relics of former official transactions can be admired as, instead of archaeological artefacts, intricately hand-made objects. Their small size, as opposed to the colossal sculptures and long sequences of bas-reliefs, offers a different view (and scale) of Assyrian life and one that focuses on the individual. One response by Paolozzi was an untitled etching in the series *Museum studies*, from 1993 (fig.169). The print is based upon an as yet

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<sup>725</sup> <[www.artseensoho.com/Art/KIND/jagger99/jagger.html](http://www.artseensoho.com/Art/KIND/jagger99/jagger.html)> [accessed 14 August 2010].

<sup>726</sup> Robin Spencer (ed.), *Eduardo Paolozzi: Writings and interviews* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.234.

unidentified Assyrian carved ivory, where the etching's densely worked surface matches the equally worked surface of the ancient model. The etching is both a copy and a visual counterpoint to the ivory.

However, the most recent example of a material response is also one of the most visually exciting. In mid-2007, the Indian-born British sculptor Anish Kapoor (b.1954) chose to display his *C-Curve* (2007) in the Cour Khorsabad in the heart of the Mesopotamian galleries of the Louvre (fig.170). The work is a reduction of the larger polished chromium steel sculpture *S-Curve* (2006), which reflects innumerable versions of both the spectator and the gallery surroundings.<sup>727</sup> It emphasises the materiality of Assyrian sculpture, and the granular structure of some of the Khorsabad works in particular, which are made up of coarse-grained igneous rock (fig.171). Assyria becomes fragmented; the privileged viewpoint that museum displays must adopt has been, temporarily at least, disrupted. Assyria becomes multifarious. For Kapoor, "these monumental bas-reliefs reflecting power and religion are at the very origin of sculpture and of our civilization, but also this curved mirror-wall bestows on them a quasi-supernatural dimension".<sup>728</sup> The reflection, at the same time both real and fictitious, of the public on this virtual bas-relief, situated in the heart of both the Louvre and (parts from) a former Assyrian palace, creates in effect a *mise en abyme* by the artist on the concept of reality, reflection and contemporaneity.

The series *Contrepoint* (*Counterpoint*) at the Louvre began in 2003, seeking to engage contemporary artistic practice, in all media, in a dialogue with the historic collection. In 2007 it focused on sculpture. Invitations were sent to eleven

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<sup>727</sup> See Rainer Crone and Alexandra von Stosch, *Anish Kapoor: Swayambh* (Munich, London and New York: Prestel, 2008).

<sup>728</sup> Unpublished text panels. Transcription my own.

contemporary sculptors — including Elisabeth Ballet, Richard Deacon, Luciano Fabro, Anish Kapoor, Claudio Parmiggiani, Didier Trenet, Michel Verjux — to take up a range of themes and subjects suggested by the Louvre's collections of sculptures from France and Northern Europe: funerary sculpture, decorative sculpture, the body, gestures and movement, the animal, group sculptures and so on.<sup>729</sup>

The selection of the Departments of Sculpture and Near Eastern Antiquities reflected various concerns: the specific architectural features of certain galleries, such as the Cour Marly or the Cour Puget, whose grand scale allowed for the presentation of monumental works; the desire to encourage the public to discover the Louvre's unequalled, but often overlooked, collection of French, Italian and German sculptures from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, which offer a range of many techniques and subjects; and the intention to demonstrate the lasting presence within contemporary sculpture of certain long-established practices and themes. Although the twentieth century brought a number of major developments in sculpture, with certain artists exploring new domains (light, installations, film) and making use of new materials (resin, plastic, aluminium), many continued to work in plaster, wood or stone while forming an entirely new visual language of representation.

Although they come from different artistic backgrounds, the participants in *Contrepoint III* were primarily sculptors: Fabro, Parmiggiani and Giuseppe Penone, all leading protagonists of the Arte Povera movement, together with the British sculptors Deacon and Kapoor. The artists installed their sculptures, some of them created especially for the display, in galleries (or other spaces) of their own

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<sup>729</sup> See Alain Metternich (ed.), *Contrepoint au Louvre: De la sculpture*, 317 [Hors-série], *Connaissance des Arts*, 2007.

choosing. Therefore, Kapoor chose to locate his work in the Assyrian Cour Khorsabad. This encounter between sculptures of earlier centuries and works of the present twenty-first century provided an opportunity for rediscovering the sculptures in the Louvre themselves, and equally putting them in a new, contemporary perspective. One commentator has described their encounter with *C-Curve* in destabilising, and unsettling, terms:

...I suddenly seem to step forth, third of the way out of the mirror, niftily standing with whoever happens to flank me on grounding conditions expanded and extended.<sup>730</sup>

The twentieth century saw the artistic engagement with Assyria shift from a predominantly painterly concern, which characterised the nineteenth century's position, to one taken up mostly by sculptors. This shift was accompanied by a shift to the interest in the materiality of Assyria and this came increasingly to form the principal point of departure and reference. The massiveness, the substance, the volume and the carving of the sculpture from Nineveh, Nimrud and Khorsabad seemed newly important for most modern sculptors. Members of the avant-garde grouping around the Vorticists in London were particularly drawn to Assyria. The provenance and attendant biblical heritage that was so important in the previous century at the time of their discovery and public display was, despite the occasional re-surfacing, largely cast aside in the twentieth century. Now Assyria could be formalised in abstract terms and set beside, and played off, modern materials such as polished industrial steel, contributing to an infinite number of varied visual and sculptural possibilities. Assyrian art had reached its apogee

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<sup>730</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Signs and trace', in Sandhini Poddar *et al.*, *Anish Kapoor: Memory* (Berlin: Deutsche Guggenheim, 2008), pp.56–75 (70).

having itself, through its rediscovery, been negotiated by the major artistic movements and developments of one hundred years after Layard.

## CONCLUSION

The early and concentrated effort by artists to make use of the material discovery of Assyria in 1845 was marked. In Britain the Royal Academy of Arts became the premier venue for public displays of artistic modes of absorption, and the British Museum of careful research. Public entertainments, such as dioramas, and popular literature exploited the keen interest the general public had in the newly found 'sermons in stone'. The Bible shaped and guided these early responses in the 1850s, largely made by artists whose reputations were already secure. Younger artists would be drawn to Assyria for artistic inspiration in the following decades as its position became firmly and permanently established in museum displays, the printed page and elsewhere. The 1860s saw Assyria become more public and more 'visible' and the artistic use made of it more widespread among a wider group of newly emerging young artists.

During the 1860s, the rising visibility of the artistic discovery of Assyria was felt in London and in the expanding artistic horizons of the regions too. Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester saw exhibition pictures (paintings and watercolours) engaging with Assyria. Mass-produced prints of these works appeared in the *Illustrated London News*, together with more expensive single-sheet prints intended to furnish middle-class interiors. In many ways, the expanded turn to Assyria during this decade piggy-backed on the turn to ancient Egypt. The twin influencing factors of the British Museum and the Bible continued to mediate the response to Assyria. But gradually the biblical ties, which tightly bound Assyria's reception in the 1850s and 1860s, loosened. Beyond the biblical narrative Assyria also offered abstracted systems of pattern-making and design, which appealed most strongly to an emerging artistic youth that internalised these

engagements with Assyria, even if they moved on from them to a fully-blown classicising Aestheticism. Assyria offered new possibilities for pictorial representation and arrangement, and the move from Assyrian 'subject' (and one heavily informed by the Bible) to an independent Assyrian 'style'. By the 1870s the engagement took place on its own terms of reference, which allowed Assyria some artistic autonomy in the linked artistic landscape of Britain and France.

Despite the riches of the Assyrian holdings in the Louvre on public view from 1847, French artists turned, time after time, to the collection housed in the British Museum. Supplementing their reading with actual visits, French artists, from Degas to Rodin, encountered Assyrian sculptures in London at first-hand, which were better represented and available in greater number than in Paris. This was particularly so with the lion-hunting scenes, which were poorly represented in Paris. Throughout the nineteenth century these grew in perceived stature to become recognised as masterpieces both of Assyrian art, and the British Museum itself. These sculptures not only inspired artists but also helped secure for the British Museum the pre-eminent position it enjoyed internationally in the mid to late nineteenth century and into the beginning of the following century.

The continued prominence of paintings on biblical themes in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and one which was grounded on firm archaeological exactitude, is an uncomfortable one for some historians of British art to acknowledge in a narrative in which the emergence of Modernism dominates. The continued currency of Assyria as a potent force for painterly creativity is one that has yet to be acknowledged. The 'problem' of accommodating "modern religious art" is also one that remains to be fully explored.<sup>731</sup> The

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<sup>731</sup> Phrase borrowed from 'Art notes', *Illustrated London News*, 16 February 1895, p.216 (216).



increased circulation of these paintings, as prints to decorate interiors, and in the pages of numerous publications, meant their international audiences grew to an unprecedented size. Responses to Assyria therefore grew in visibility and permanence, with many artworks finding their way into public collections all over the world. The central theme uniting the artworks — artistic responses to Assyria — accommodates a plurality of images with a variety of meanings and possibilities set within these responses.

The twentieth century saw the artistic engagement with Assyria shift from a predominantly painterly concern, which characterised the nineteenth century's position, to one taken up mostly by sculptors. This shift was accompanied by an interest in the materiality and physicality of Assyria, and this came increasingly to form the principal point of departure and reference. The massiveness, the substance, the volume and the carving of the sculpture from Nineveh, Nimrud and Khorsabad seemed newly important for most modern sculptors. This was especially important to sculptors in London and Paris in the first two decades of the twentieth century, such as Epstein, Gaudier-Brzeska and Archipenko. The provenance and attendant biblical heritage that was so important in the previous century at the time of the Assyrian sculptures' discovery and public display (and which shaped and directed the artistic reception) was, despite an occasional resurfacing, largely cast aside in the twentieth century. Now Assyria could be formalised in abstract terms and set beside, and played off, modern materials such as polished industrial steel, contributing to an infinite number of varied visual and sculptural possibilities. Assyrian art had reached its apogee having itself, through its rediscovery, been negotiated by the major artistic movements and developments of one hundred years after Layard.

## APPENDIX

### 'Wanted — Warehouse-room for art', by John Bull (1850)

Why leave me a parcel of pictures,  
And why give me statues — 'od rot 'em! —  
To draw on me foreigners' strictures?  
They're no use to me when I've got 'em.  
They're very fine and splendid, I dare say,  
And so they'd look, no doubt, if I could show 'em;  
But I'm obliged to put 'em all away —  
I haven't one fit place wherein to stow 'em.

Keep your Wilson, your Gainsborough, your Lely,  
Your Hogarth, your Reynolds, your Kneller—  
If you give them to me, I say freely,  
I shall go put 'em all in the cellar.  
My gallery won't hold one master more;  
Michelangelo could find there no locality,  
And if Raphael himself came to the door,  
With Ferguson he'd taste like hospitality.

Mr. Layard here just has been sending  
From Nineveh various antiquities,  
Its manners to illustrate tending,  
And customs, and sins, and iniquities.

But then there's my Museum stuffed so full,  
If Nimrod's self applied there'd not be room for him;  
As for that what d'ye call it — wingèd bull —  
I've no accommodation but a tomb for him.

I don't undervalue the present —  
A painting I love beyond measure;  
To look at fine sculpture is pleasant:  
But where to dispose of the treasure?  
Your pictures and your marbles I'll receive,  
Without the slightest murmur or objection;  
If you be also kind enough to leave  
A proper place for holding the collection.<sup>732</sup>

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<sup>732</sup> 'Wanted — Warehouse-room for art', *Punch*, 16 November 1850, p.210 (210).

***The burden of Nineveh* (first published 1856; revised 1870)**

In our Museum galleries  
To-day I lingered o'er the prize  
Dead Greece vouchsafes to living eyes, —  
Her Art forever in fresh wise  
From hour to hour rejoicing me.  
Sighing I turned at last to win  
Once more the London dirt and din;  
And as I made the swing-door spin  
And issued, they were hoisting in  
A wingèd beast from Nineveh.

A human face the creature wore,  
And hoofs behind and hoofs before,  
And flanks with dark runes fretted o'er.  
'Twas bull, 'twas mitred Minotaur,  
A dead disbowelled mystery:  
The mummy of a buried faith  
Stark from the charnel without scathe,  
Its wings stood for the light to bathe, —  
Such fossil cerements as might swathe  
The very corpse of Nineveh.

The print of its first rush-wrapping,  
Wound ere it dried, still ribbed the thing.

What song did the brown maidens sing,  
From purple mouths alternating,  
When that was woven languidly?  
What vows, what rites, what prayers preferr'd,  
What songs has the strange image heard?  
In what blind vigil stood interr'd  
For ages, till an English word  
Broke silence first at Nineveh?

Oh when upon each sculptured court,  
Where even the wind might not resort, —  
O'er which Time passed, of like import  
With the wild Arab boys at sport, —  
A living face looked in to see: —  
Oh seemed it not — the spell once broke —  
As though the carven warriors woke,  
As though the shaft the string forsook,  
The cymbals clashed, the chariots shook,  
And there was life in Nineveh?

On London stones our sun anew  
The beast's recovered shadow threw.  
(No shade that plague of darkness knew,  
No light, no shade, while older grew  
By ages the old earth and sea.)  
Lo thou! could all thy priests have shown

Such proof to make thy godhead known?  
From their dead Past thou liv'st alone;  
And still thy shadow is thine own,  
Even as of yore in Nineveh.

That day whereof we keep record,  
When near thy city-gates the Lord  
Sheltered His Jonah with a gourd,  
This sun, (I said) here present, pour'd  
Even thus this shadow that I see.  
This shadow has been shed the same  
From sun and moon, — from lamps which came  
For prayer, — from fifteen days of flame,  
The last, while smouldered to a name  
Sardanapalus' Nineveh.

Within thy shadow, haply, once  
Sennacherib has knelt, whose sons  
Smote him between the altar-stones:  
Or pale Semiramis her zones  
Of gold, her incense brought to thee,  
In love for grace, in war for aid: . . . .  
Ay, and who else? . . . . till 'neath thy shade  
Within his trenches newly made  
Last year the Christian knelt and pray'd —

Not to thy strength — in Nineveh.\*

Now, thou poor god, within this hall  
Where the blank windows blind the wall  
From pedestal to pedestal,  
The kind of light shall on thee fall  
Which London takes the day to be:  
While school-foundations in the act  
Of holiday, three files compact,  
Shall learn to view thee as a fact  
'ROME, — Babylon and Nineveh.'

Deemed they of this, those worshippers,  
When, in some mythic chain of verse  
Which man shall not again rehearse,  
The faces of thy ministers  
Yearned pale with bitter ecstasy?  
Greece, Egypt, Rome, — did any god  
Before whose feet men knelt unshod  
Deem that in this unblest abode  
Another scarce more unknown god  
Should house with him, from Nineveh?

Ah! in what quarries lay the stone

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\* During the excavations, the Tiyari workmen held their services in the shadow of the great bulls (Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh*, chapter ix).

From which this pillared pile has grown,  
Unto man's need how long unknown,  
Since thy vast temples, courts and cone,  
Rose far in desert history?

Ah! what is here that does not lie  
All strange to thine awakened eye?

Ah! what is here can testify  
(Save that dumb presence of the sky)  
Unto thy day and Nineveh?

Why, of those mummies in the room  
Above, there might indeed have come  
One out of Egypt to thy home,  
An alien. Nay, but were not some  
Of these thine own 'antiquity'?  
And now, — they and their gods and thou  
All relics here together, — now  
Whose profit? whether bull or cow,  
Isis or Ibis, who or how,  
Whether of Thebes or Nineveh?

The consecrated metals found,  
And ivory tablets, underground,  
Winged teraphim and creatures crown'd,  
When air and daylight filled the mound,  
Fell into dust immediately.



And even as these, the images  
Of awe and worship, — even as these, —  
So, smitten with the sun's increase,  
Her glory mouldered and did cease  
From immemorial Nineveh.

The day her builders made their halt,  
Those cities of the lake of salt  
Stood firmly 'stablished without fault,  
Made proud with pillars of basalt,  
With sardonyx and porphyry.

The day that Jonah bore abroad  
To Nineveh the voice of God,  
A brackish lake lay in his road,  
Where erst Pride fixed her sure abode,  
As then in royal Nineveh.

The day when he, Pride's lord and Man's,  
Showed all the kingdoms at a glance  
To Him before whose countenance  
The years recede, the years advance,  
And said, Fall down and worship me: —  
'Mid all the pomp beneath that look,  
Then stirred there, haply, some rebuke,  
Where to the wind the salt pools shook,  
And in those tracts, of life forsook,

That knew thee not, O Nineveh!

Delicate harlot! On thy throne  
Thou with a world beneath thee prone  
In state for ages sat'st alone;  
And needs were years and lustres flown  
Ere strength of man could vanquish thee:  
Whom even thy victor foes must bring,  
Still royal, among maids that sing  
As with doves' voices, taboring  
Upon their breasts, unto the King, —  
A kingly conquest, Nineveh!

... Here woke my thought. The wind's slow sway  
Had waxed; and like the human play  
Of scorn that smiling spreads away,  
The sunshine shivered off the day:  
The callous wind, it seemed to me,  
Swept up the shadow from the ground:  
And pale as whom the Fates astound,  
The god forlorn stood winged and crown'd:  
Within I knew the cry lay bound  
Of the dumb soul of Nineveh.

And as I turned, my sense half shut  
Still saw the crowds of kerb and rut  
Go past as marshalled to the strut  
Of ranks in gypsum quaintly cut.  
It seemed in one same pageantry  
They followed forms which had been erst;  
To pass, till on my sight should burst  
That future of the best or worst  
When some may question which was first,  
Of London or of Nineveh.

For as that bull-god once did stand  
And watched the burial-clouds of sand,  
Till these at last without a hand  
Rose o'er his eyes, another land,  
And blinded him with destiny: —  
So may he stand again; till now,  
In ships of unknown sail and prow,  
Some tribe of the Australian plough  
Bear him afar, — a relic now  
Of London, not of Nineveh!

Or it may chance indeed that when  
Man's age is hoary among men, —  
His centuries threescore and ten, —  
His furthest childhood shall seem then

More clear than later times may be:  
Who, finding in this desert place  
This form, shall hold us for some race  
That walked not in Christ's lowly ways,  
But bowed its pride and vowed its praise  
Unto the god of Nineveh.

The smile rose first, — anon drew nigh  
The thought: . . . Those heavy wings spread high  
So sure of flight, which do not fly;  
That set gaze never on the sky;  
Those scripted flanks it cannot see;  
Its crown, a brow-contracting load;  
Its planted feet which trust the sod: . . .  
(So grew the image as I trod:)  
O Nineveh, was this thy god, —  
Thine also, mighty Nineveh?<sup>733</sup>

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<sup>733</sup> *The poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A reprint of the volume issued in 1870*  
(London: Arthur L Humphreys, 1912), pp.17-24.

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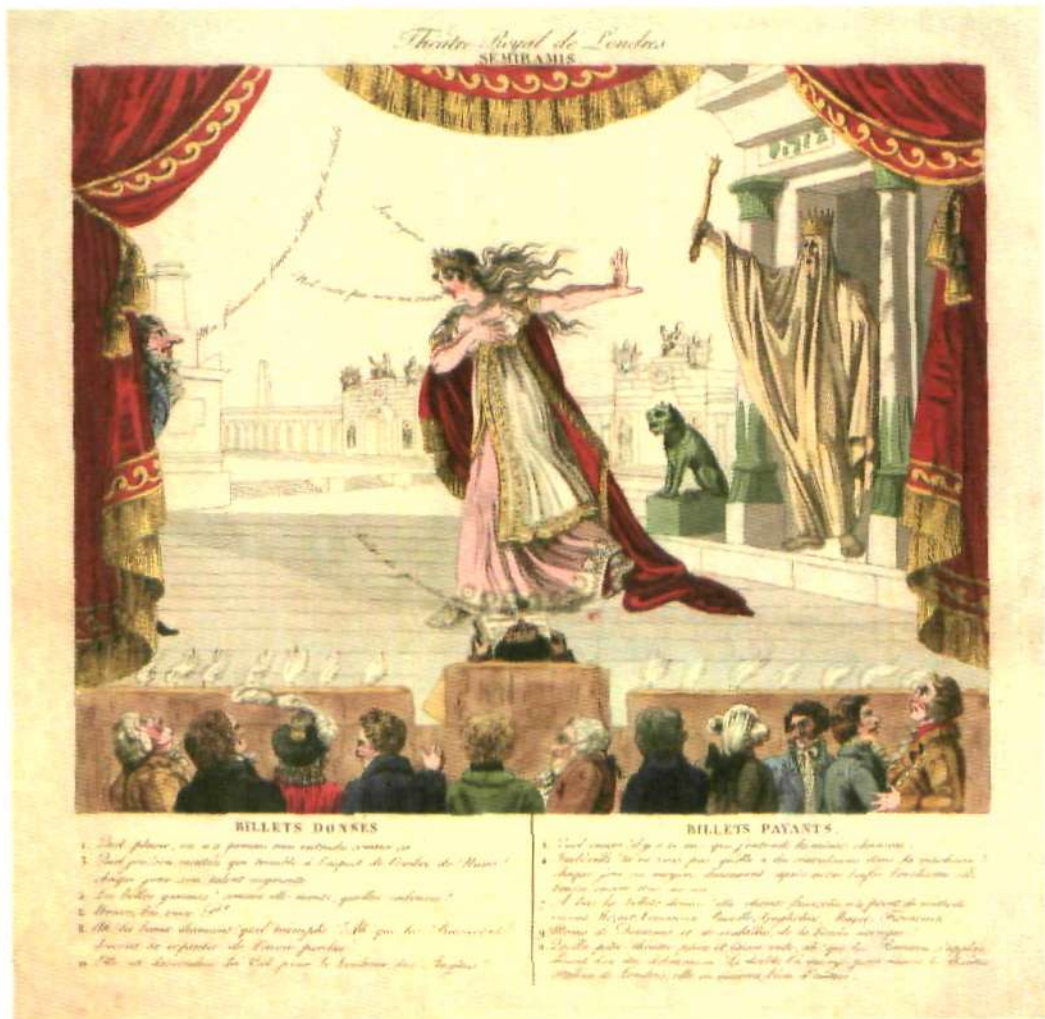
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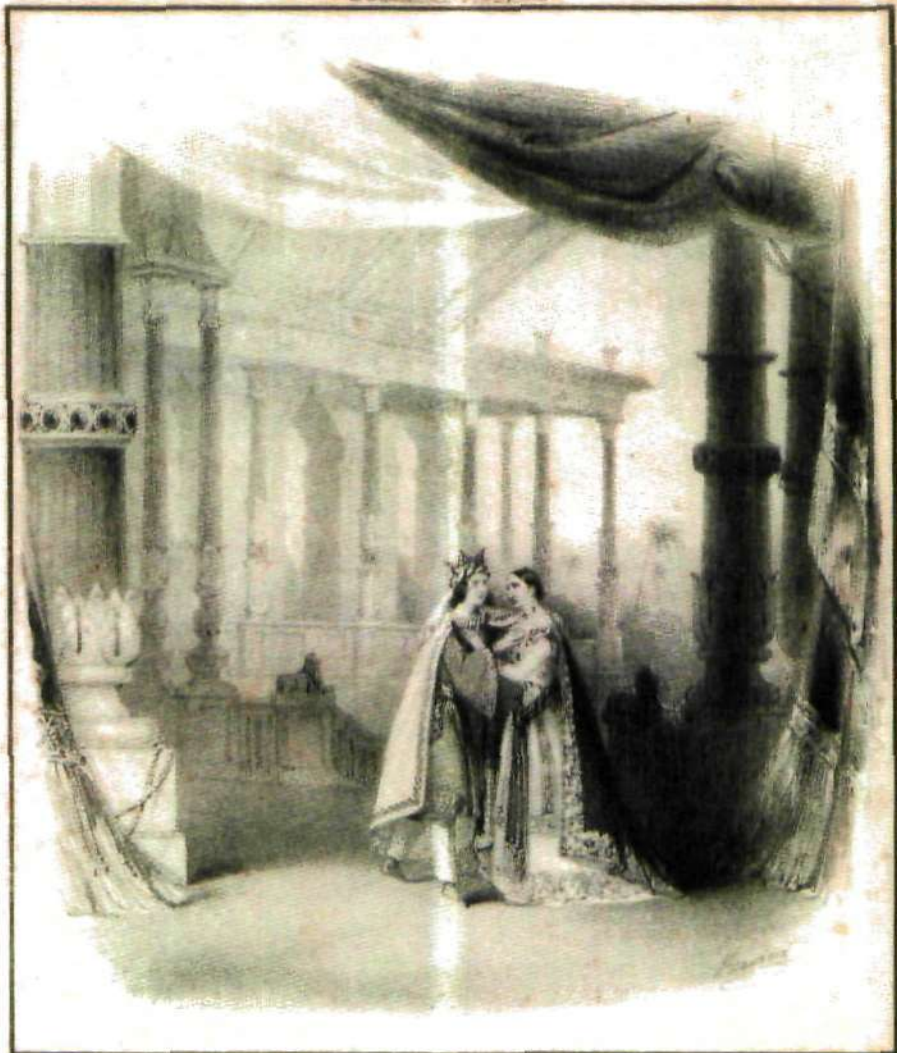
ILLUSTRATIONS



(fig.1) Anonymous, *Théâtre Royal de Londres: Sémiramis*, c.1806.

Hand-coloured etching, 31.7 x 31.6 cm. British Museum, London (PD 2007,7013.1).

# SEMIRAMIDE.



THY SMILE IS JOY INDEED!

*THE DUET SUNG BY*

**MISS ADELAIDE KEMBLE & M<sup>RS</sup> ALFRED SHAW.**

*TRANSLATED EXPRESSLY FOR THE T R COVENT GARDEN BY*

**T. H. REYNOLDSON,**

*ADAPTED TO THE ENGLISH STAGE BY*

**JULES BENEDECT.**

LONDON, JEFFERYS & NELSON, SOHO SQUARE,  
CRAMER, ADDISON & BEALE, 201, REGENT ST.

(fig.2) John Brandard, *Music-cover for 'Semiramide' ('Semiramis')*, c.1842.

Lithograph, 22 x 19.2 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1954,0104.3.48).



(fig.3) Eugène Delacroix, *La mort de Sardanapale* (*The death of Sardanapalus*), 1827-28.

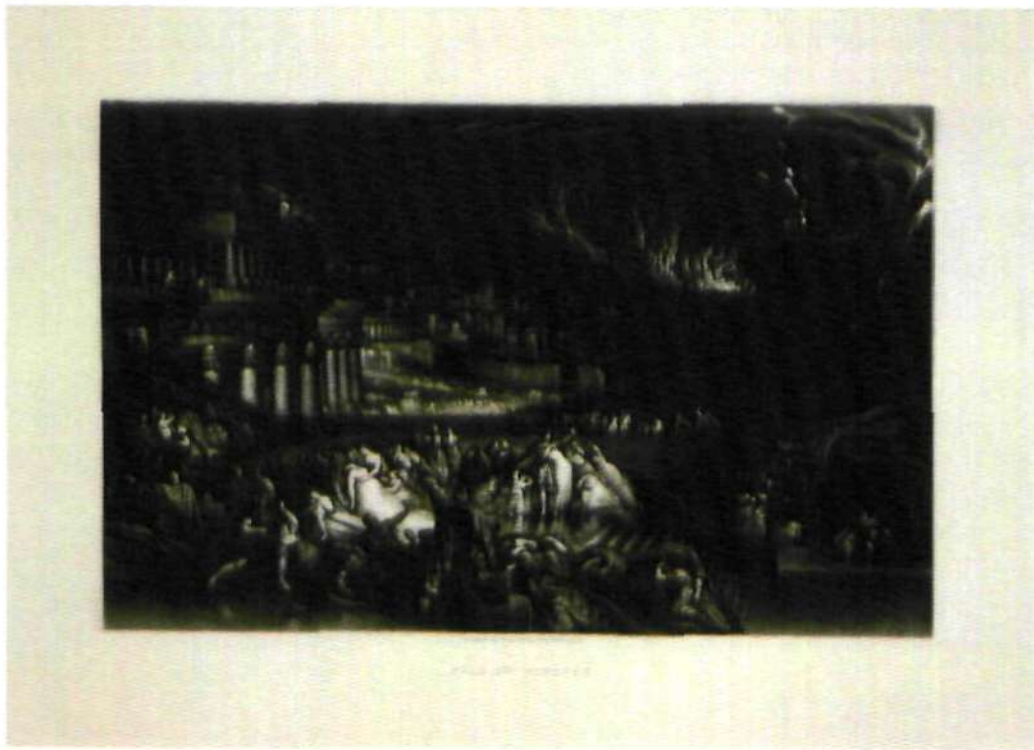
Oil on canvas, 392 x 496 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris (RF 2346).



(fig.4) John Martin, *The fall of Nineveh*, 1829.

Mezzotint, 57.5 x 86.5 cm. British Museum, London (PD Mm,10.5).





(fig.5) John Martin, *Fall of Nineveh* (*Illustrations of the Bible*), 1835.

Mezzotint, 26.7 x 35.9 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1895,0419.1.20).



(fig.6) John Martin, *Nineveh*, 1828.

Mezzotint, 16.7 x 24.2 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1870,0514.165).



(fig.7) Edgar Degas, *Sémiramis construisant Babylone* (*Semiramis building Babylon*), c.1860-62.

Oil on canvas, 151 x 258 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris (RF 2207).



(fig.8) Edwin Long, *The Babylonian marriage market*, 1875.

Oil on canvas, 182.8 x 269.9 cm. Royal Holloway College, London.



(fig.9) Briton Rivière, *The king's libation*, 1893.

Oil on canvas, 177.2 x 232.4 cm. Current location unknown (Sotheby's, New York, 26 May 1994, lot 55).

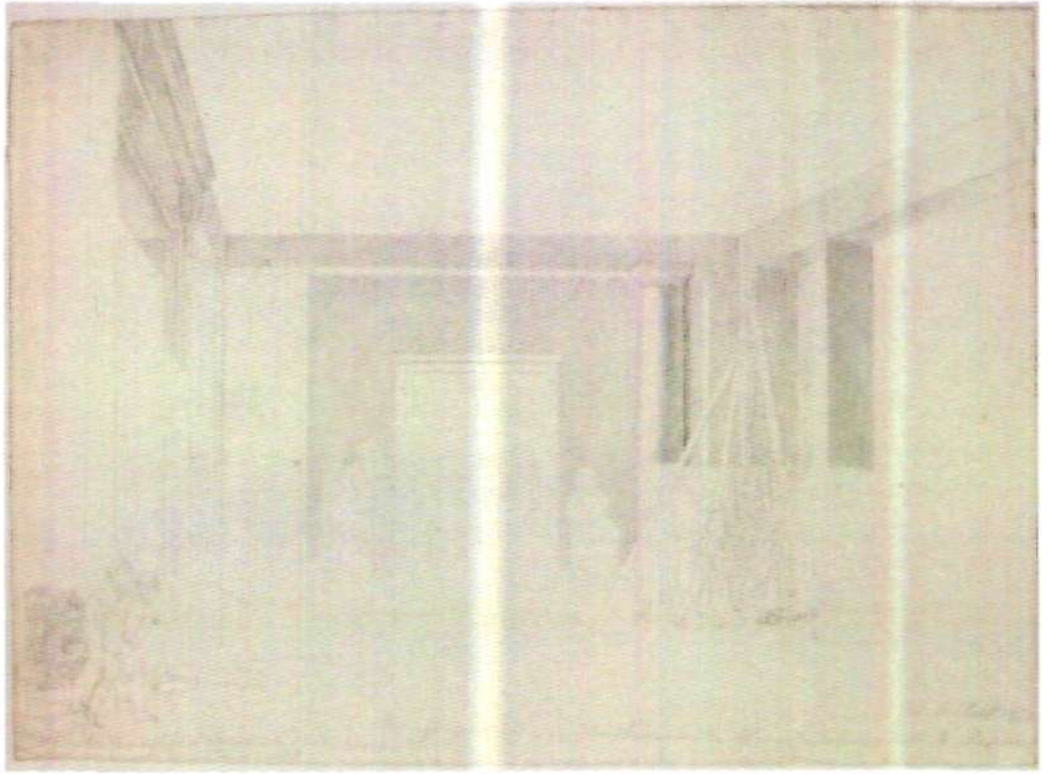


(fig.10) James Stephanoff, *An assemblage of works of art in sculpture and in painting, from the earliest period to the time of Phydias, 1844.*

Watercolour, 74.3 x 62.2 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1994,1210.6).



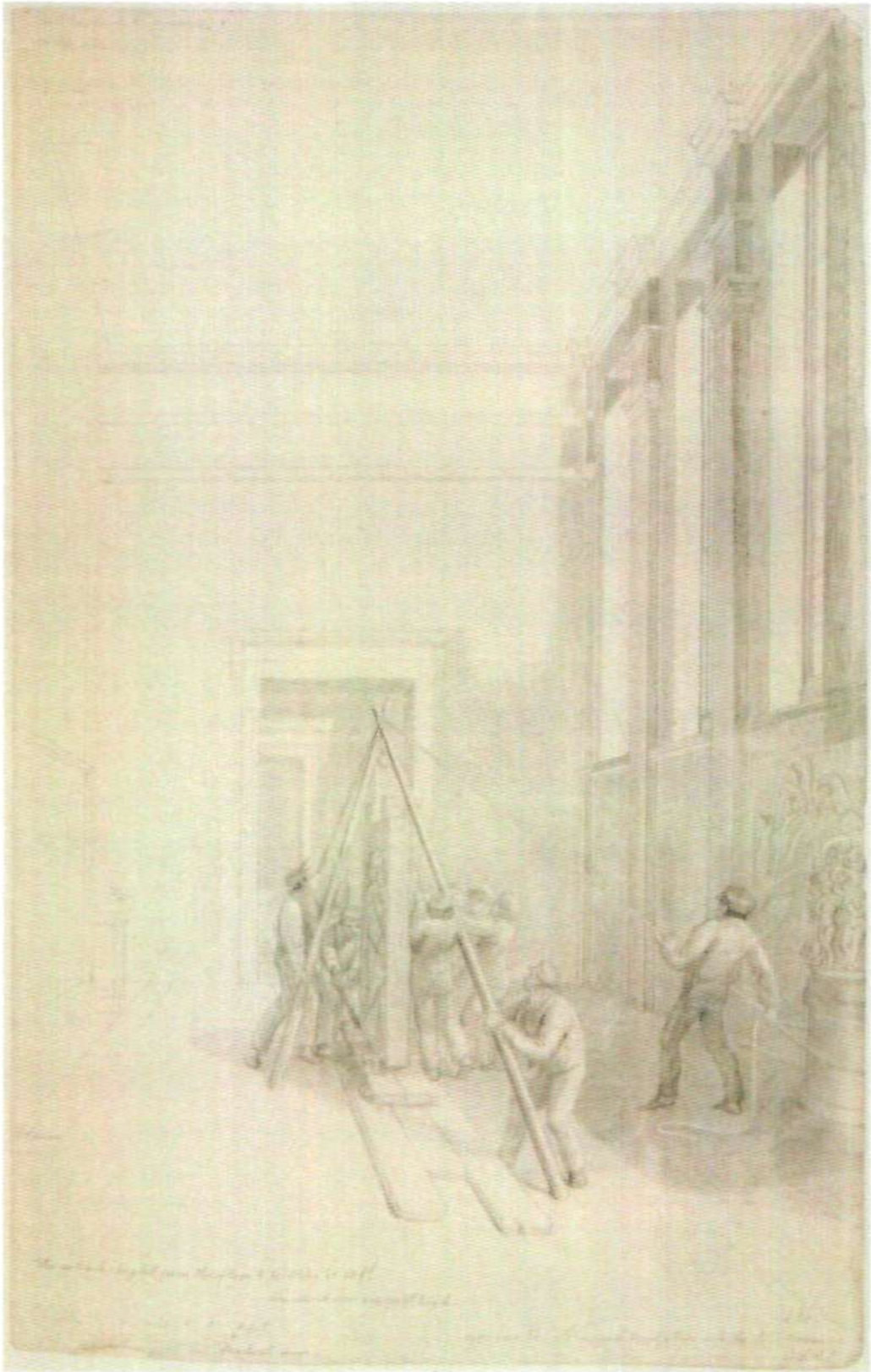
(fig.11) *Façade of the British Museum, London, from the northeast, with Sir Richard Westmacott's pediment 'The progress of civilisation' (1847-53).*



(fig.12) George Scharf, *Temporary placement of Assyrian sculptures in the entrance hall of the British Museum, London, 1850.*

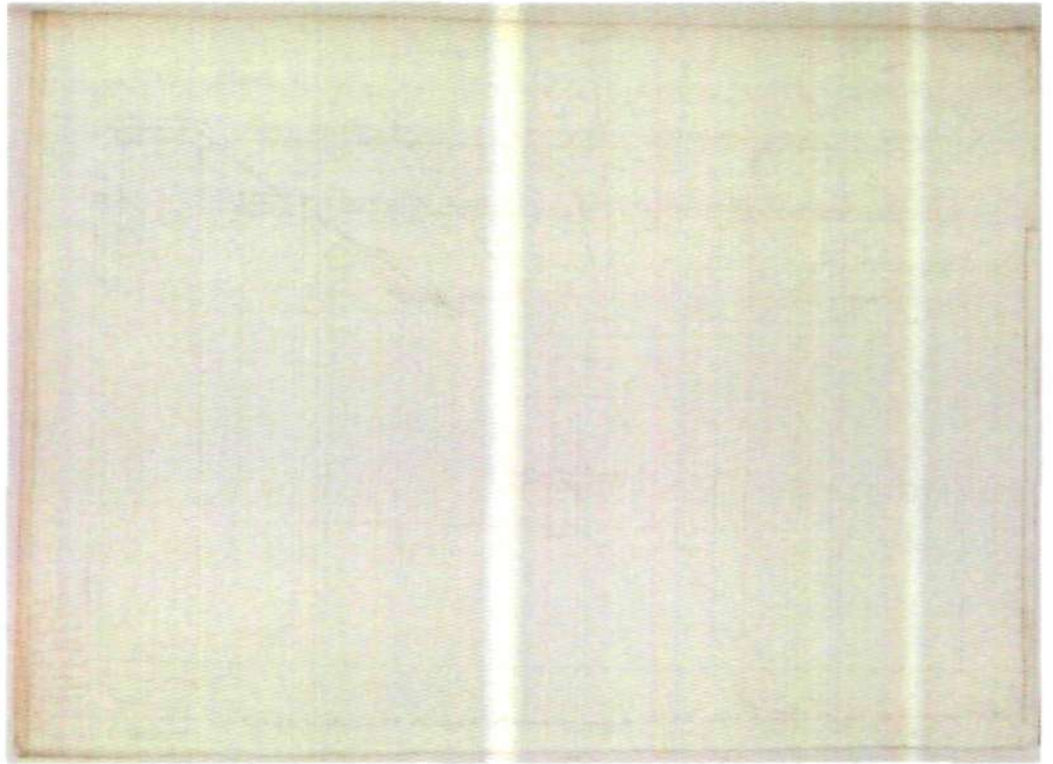
Graphite, 26.8 x 36.9 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1862,0614.623).





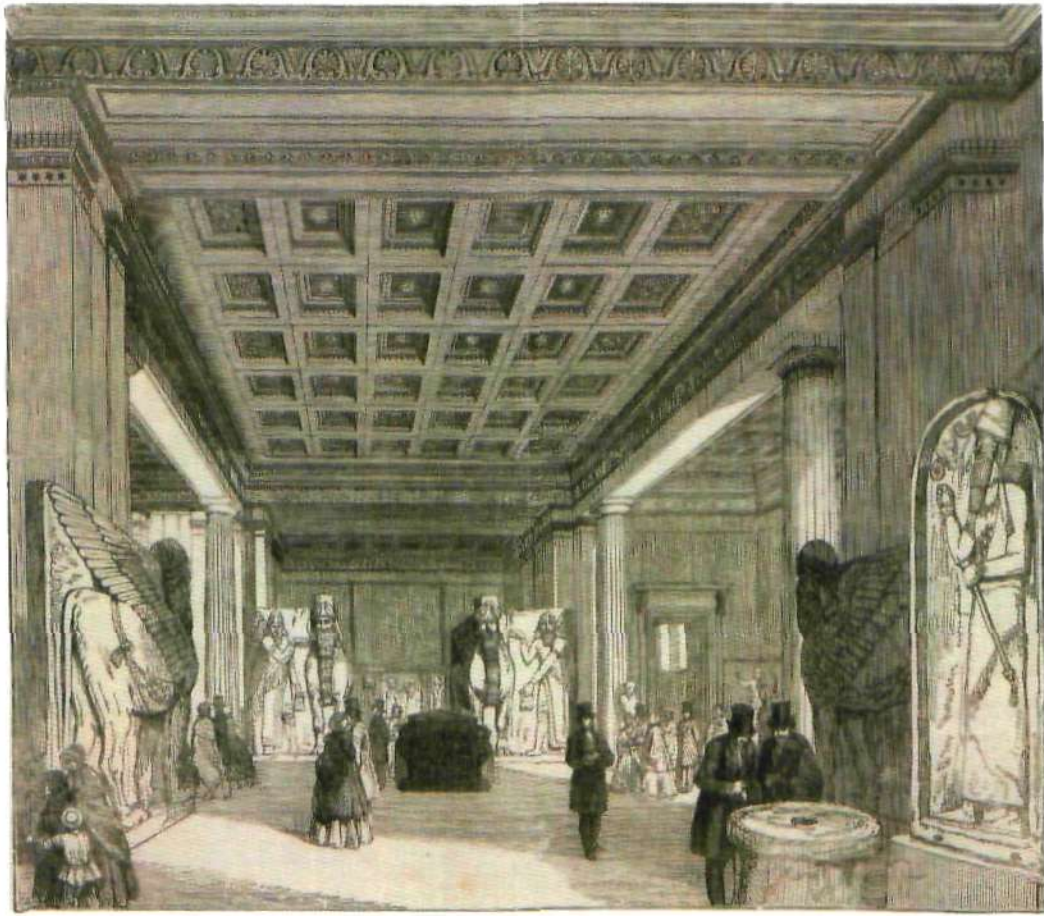
(fig.13) George Scharf, *Moving Assyrian sculptures in the British Museum, London, 1850.*

Graphite, 43.6 x 26.9 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1862,0614.624).



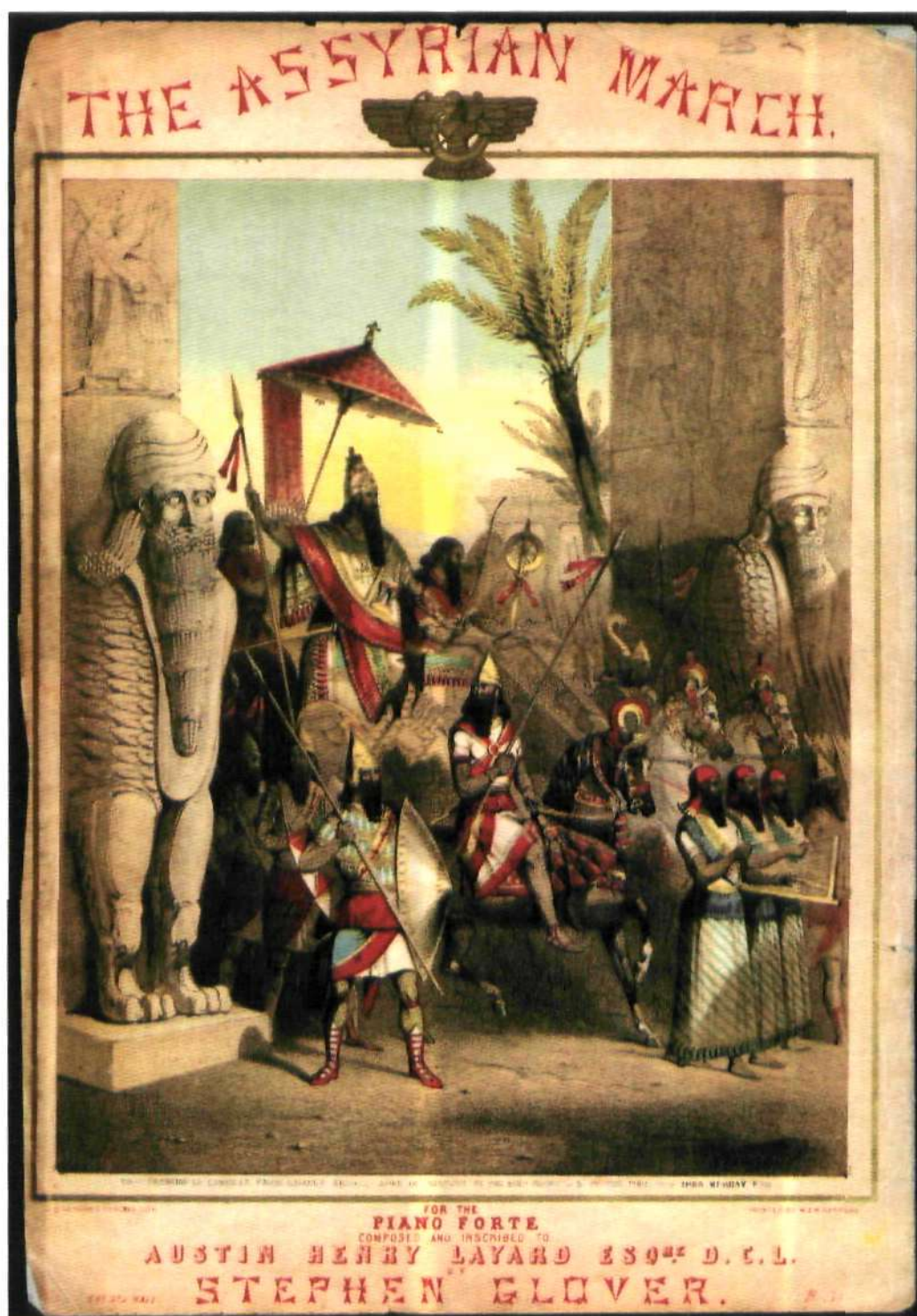
(fig.14) George Scharf, *Basement gallery housing the Assyrian sculptures at the British Museum, London, 1850.*

Graphite, 38.6 x 53.2 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1862,0614.612).



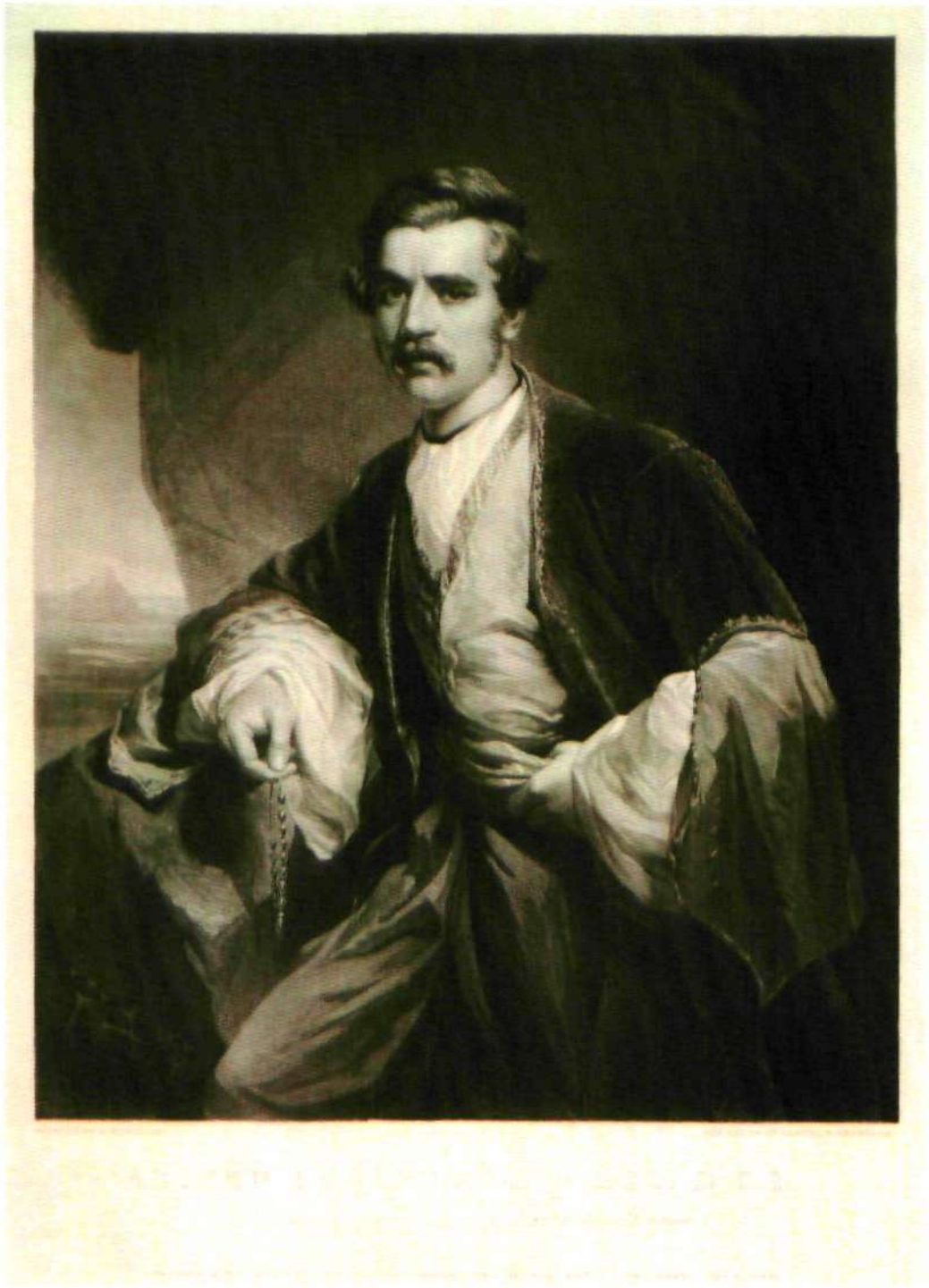
(fig.15) Anonymous, *The Nineveh Room (Assyrian Transept) at the British Museum, London, 1853.*

Wood-engraving, 20.1 x 23.2 cm. From 'Illustrated London News', 26 March 1853, p.225 [front-page].



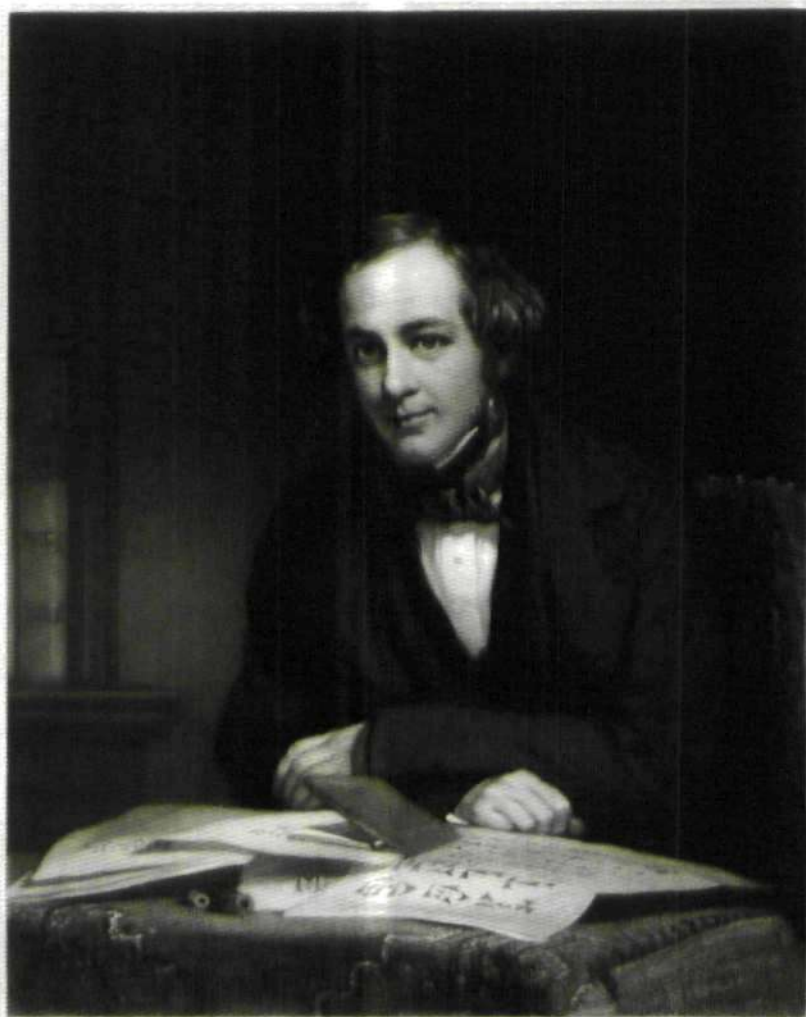
(fig.16) John Brandard, *Music-cover for 'The Assyrian March'*, 1850.

Colour lithograph, 34.5 x 24 cm. British Museum, London (EPH-ME 210).



(fig.17) Samuel William Reynolds after Henry Wyndham Phillips, *Austen Henry Layard Esq. DCL, discoverer of the ruins of ancient Nineveh*, 1850.

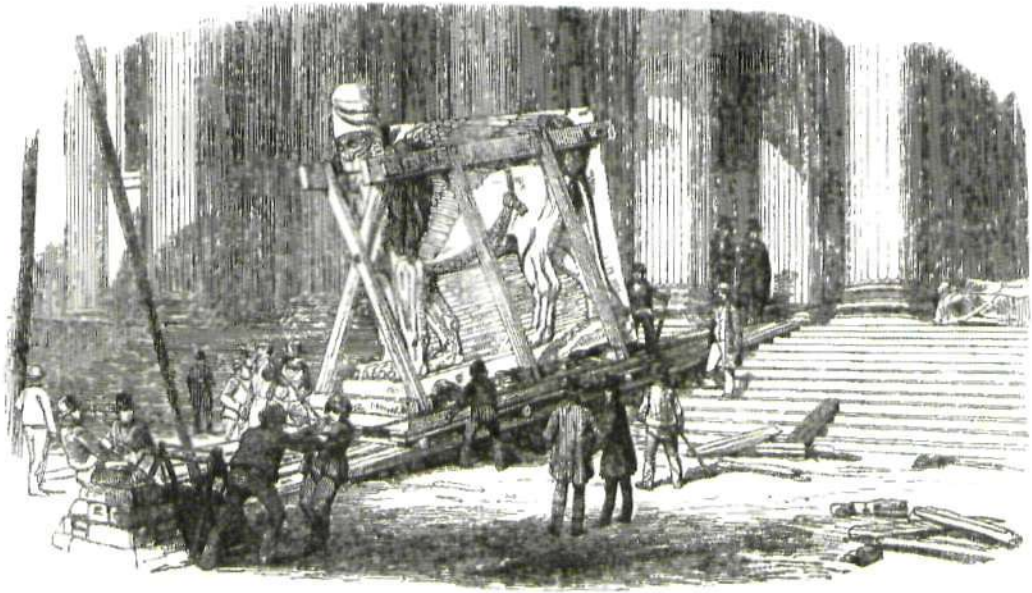
Mixed method on *chine collé*, 50.8 x 37.8 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1895,1015.58).



*H. Rawlinson*

(fig.18) Samuel Cousins after Henry Wyndham Phillips, *Sir Henry Creswicke Rawlinson*, 1860.

Mixed method on *chine collé*, 50.4 x 38.2 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1872,0309.463).



(fig.19) Anonymous, *Reception of the Nineveh sculptures at the British Museum*, 1852.

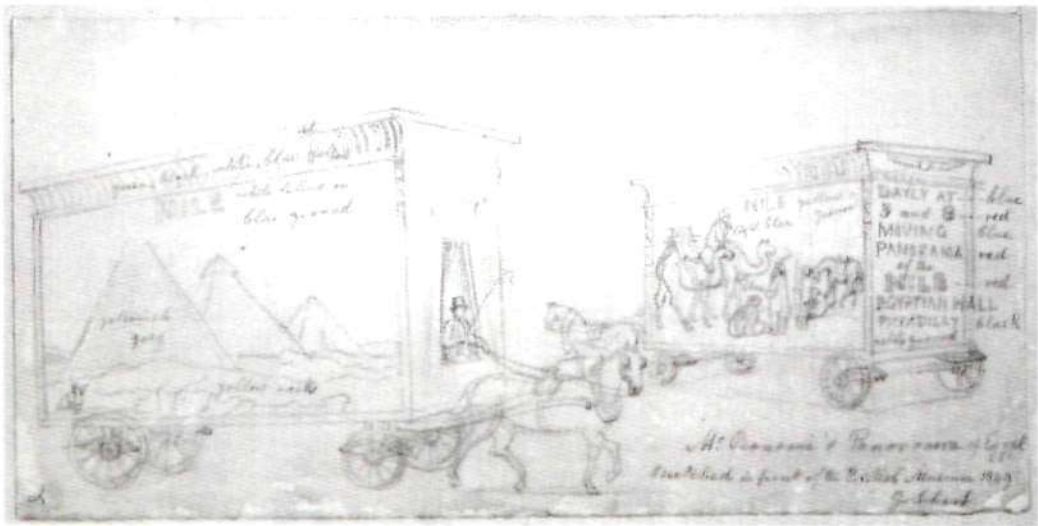
Wood-engraving, 12.5 x 22 cm. From 'Illustrated London News', 28 February 1852, p.184.



(fig.20) Anonymous [W A ?], *Found in the cellar of the 'Punch' office [Punch's popish relics]*, 1851.

Wood-engraving, 8.6 x 8.4 cm. From 'Punch', 1 March 1851, p.84.





(fig.21) George Scharf, *Horse-drawn van advertising Joseph Bonomi's 'Grand moving panorama of the Nile', outside the British Museum, London, 1849.*

Graphite, 13.8 x 27.5 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1862,0614.802).



(fig.22) George Scharf, *Men with billboards advertising election results, exhibitions and entertainments, 1818–25.*

Watercolour, 13.9 x 22.9 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1862,0614.1192).



(fig.23) John Absolon, *Study for one section of the diorama 'The route of the overland mail to India'*, c.1850.

Pen and brown ink and watercolour, heightened with white, over graphite, on buff paper, 8.4 x 35.5 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1947,0619.7).



(fig.24) Anonymous after Henry Nelson O'Neil, *The scribes reading the chronicles to Ahasuerus*, 1851.

Wood-engraving, 15 x 23.1 cm. From 'Illustrated London News', 26 July 1851, p.112.



(fig.25) W M Lizars after Henry Nelson O'Neil, *The scribes reading the chronicles to Ahasuerus*, 1867.

Engraving, 17.8 x 25 cm. From 'The Art Journal', August 1867, opposite p.192.



(fig.26) Detail of fig.25.



(fig.27) William Greatbach after Edward Armitage, *Samson*, after 1851.  
Engraving, 23.4 x 31.9 cm. British Museum, London (PD 2007,7017.1).



(fig.28) Dalziel Brothers after Frederick Richard Pickersgill, *Samson betrayed*, 1850.

Wood-engraving, 16.9 x 21.3 cm. From 'Illustrated London News', 1 June 1850, p.396.





(fig.29) Smith and Charles Cheltnam after Edward Armitage, *Aholibah*, 1850.

Wood-engraving, 15.1 x 21.2 cm. From 'Illustrated London News', 17 August 1850, p.144.



(fig.30) William Holman Hunt, *Daniel praying*, c.1849.

Pen and brown ink, brown wash over graphite, 23.2 x 27.6 cm. Private collection.



(fig.31) Anonymous after Abraham Cooper, *He was a mighty hunter before the Lord*, 1851.

Wood-engraving, 14.6 x 17.5 cm. From 'Illustrated London News', 10 May 1851, p.383.



(fig.32) Detail of fig.31.



(fig.33) Neo-Assyrian, *Lion hunt from the North-West Palace, Nimrud*, 875–60 BC.  
Gypsum, 98 x 139.5 cm. British Museum, London (ME 124579).

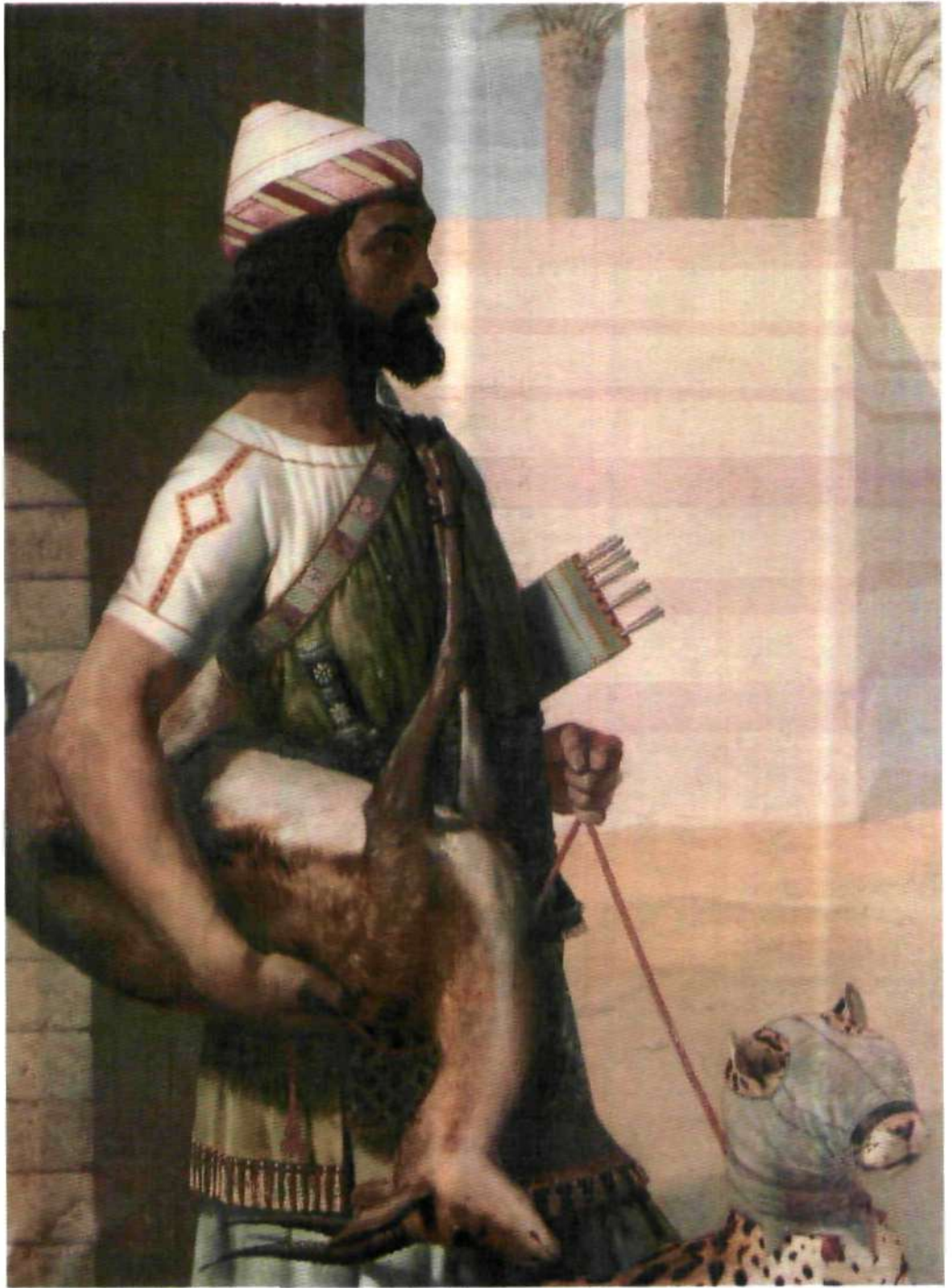


(fig.34) Herbert Bourne after Paul Falconer Poole, *Job and his friends*, 1854.

Engraving, 17.8 x 25.9 cm. From 'The Art Journal', October 1854, opposite p.289.



(fig.35) Detail of fig.34.



(fig.36) John Rogers Herbert, *The hunting leopard*, 1853.

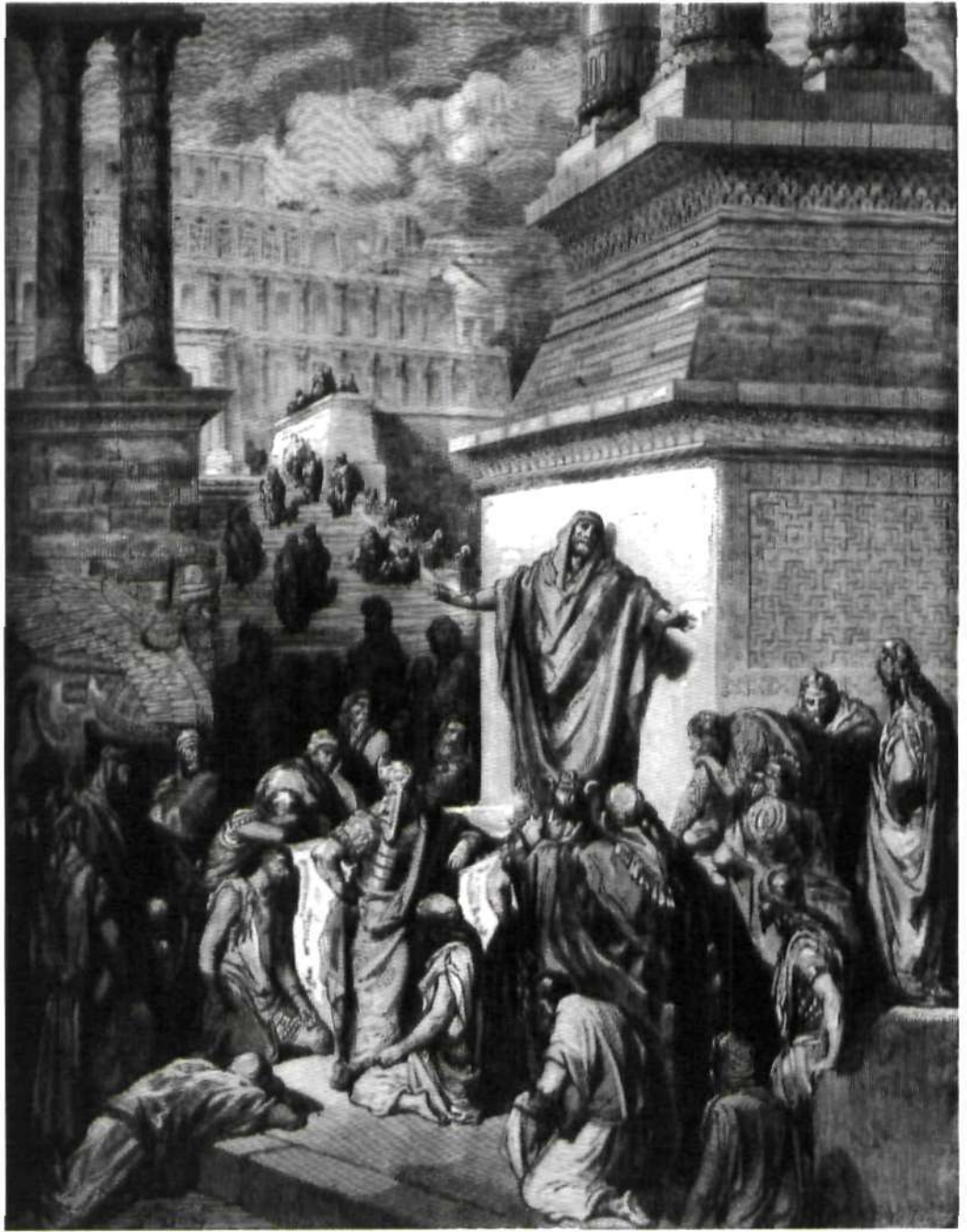
Oil on canvas, 94.5 x 71 cm. Current location unknown (Christie's, London, 17–18 July 2006, lot 118).





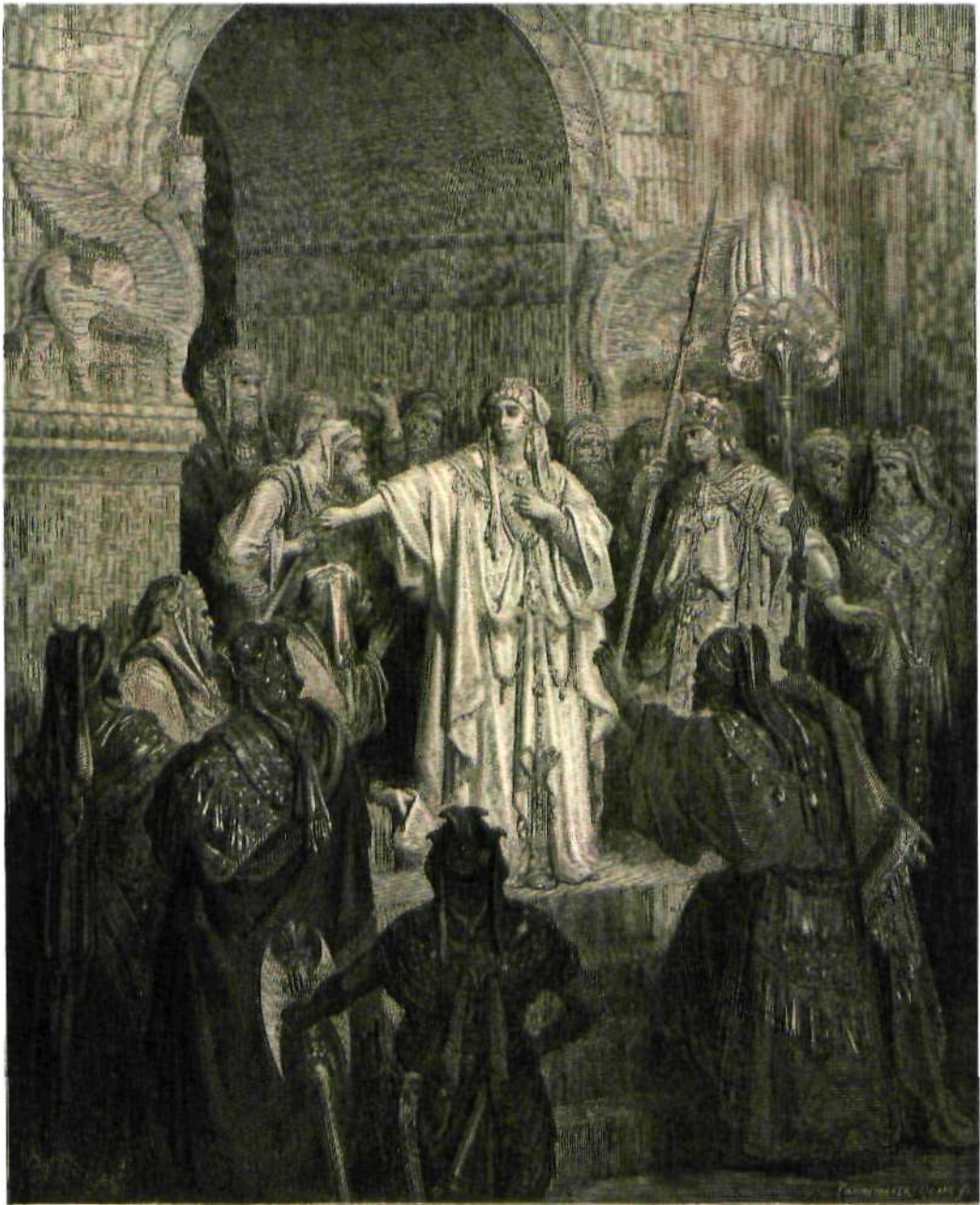
(fig.37) Gustave Doré (after), *Daniel interpreting the writing on the wall*, before 1865.

Wood-engraving, 24.8 x 19.9 cm. Private collection.



(fig.38) Gustave Doré (after), *Jonah calling Nineveh to repentance*, before 1865.

Wood-engraving, 21.8 x 17.3 cm. Private collection.



(fig.39) Gustave Doré (after), *Queen Vashti refusing to obey the command of Ahasuerus*, before 1865.

Wood-engraving, 24.9 x 19.9 cm. Private collection.



(fig.40) William Henry Simmons after Gustave Doré, *The triumph of Christianity over Paganism*, 1899.

Mixed method, 92.5 x 63.8 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1950,0311.13).



(fig.41) Detail of fig.40.



(fig.42) Henry Hugh Armstead (after), *The sun and moon stand still*, n.d.

Wood-engraving, touched with Chinese white (now faded), 17.8 x 15.8 cm. For 'Dalziels' Bible Gallery' (London: George Routledge, 1881). British Museum, London (PD 1913,0415.201.654).



(fig.43) Henry Hugh Armstead, *Study for 'The sun and moon stand still'*, n.d.

Pen and ink, with wash and gouache, over graphite, 19.4 x 17.3 cm. Royal Academy of Arts, London (04/2676).



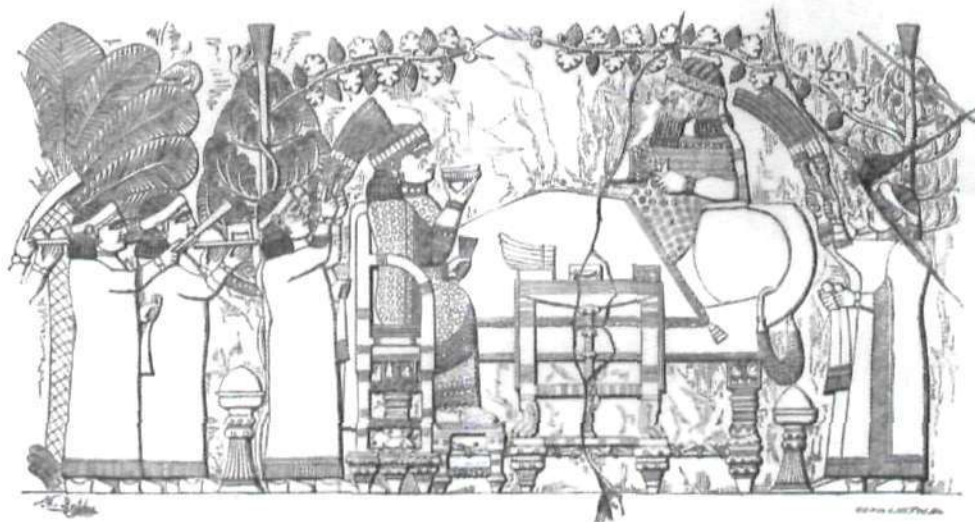
(fig.44) Henry Hugh Armstead, *Study for 'The sun and moon stand still'* (detail), n.d.  
Graphite, 17.7 x 16.2 cm. Royal Academy of Arts, London (04/2792).





(fig.45) Henry Hugh Armstead, *Studies after Assyrian bas-reliefs, including 'The banquet scene' in the British Museum, London, after 1856.*

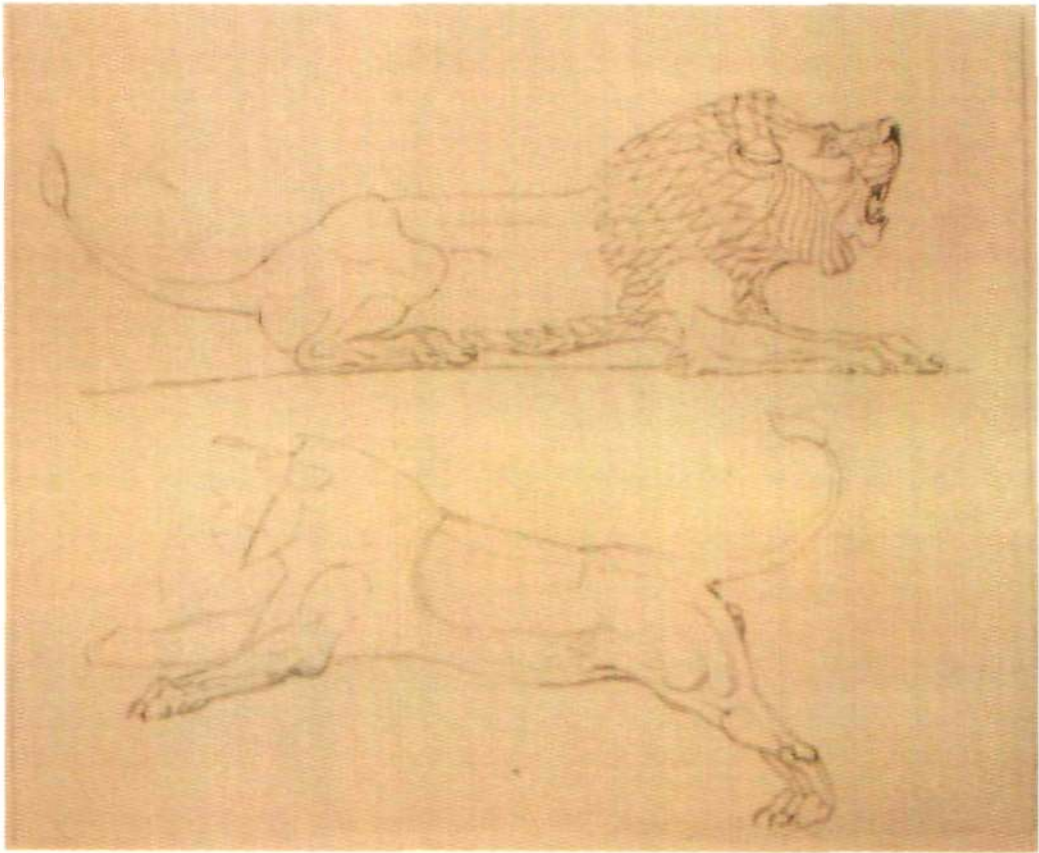
Graphite, 16.7 x 11.3 cm. Royal Academy of Arts, London (04/3584).



THE ONLY DISCOVERED SLAB SHOWING A SCENE OF THE QUEEN.

(fig.46) Harvey Orrin Smith after William Boutcher, *The only discovered slab showing a picture of the queen* [*'The banquet scene'*], 1855.

Wood-engraving, 12.5 x 22.5 cm. From *'Illustrated London News'*, 3 November 1855, p.521.



(fig.47) Henry Hugh Armstead, *Studies after an Assyrian bas-relief in the British Museum, London, of King Ashurbanipal lion hunting*, after 1856.

Graphite, 9.2 x 11.3 cm. Royal Academy of Arts, London (04/3583).



(fig.48) Neo-Assyrian, *Royal lion hunting scenes and libation, from the North Palace, Nineveh, 645–40 BC.*

Gypsum, 159 x 264 cm. British Museum, London (ME 124886–87).



(fig.49) Detail of fig.48.



(fig.50) Arthur Murch (after), *The arrow of deliverance*, before 1872.

Wood-engraving, touched with Chinese white (now faded), 21.5 x 15.9 cm. For 'Dalziels' Bible Gallery' (London: George Routledge, 1881). British Museum, London (PD 1913,0415.201.664).



(fig.51) Arthur Murch (after), *The flight of Adrammelech*, before 1872.

Wood-engraving, 21.5 x 17.3 cm. For 'Dalziels' Bible Gallery' (London: George Routledge, 1881). British Museum, London (PD 1913,0415.201.665).



(fig.52) Neo-Assyrian, *Guardian lion to temple entrance of Ishtar Sharrat-Niphi, Nimrud, 865–60 BC.*

Gypsum, 259 x 396 cm. British Museum, London (ME 118895).





(fig.53) Ford Madox Brown (after), *The death of Eglon*, n.d.

Wood-engraving, touched with Chinese white, 15.2 x 18.7 cm. For 'Dalziels' Bible Gallery' (London: George Routledge, 1881). British Museum, London (PD 1913,0415.201.656).



(fig.54) George Woolliscroft Rhead after Ford Madox Brown, *The dream of Sardanapalus*, 1890.

Etching, 36.5 x 53.5 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1916,0809.26).



(fig.55) Edward John Poynter (after), *By the rivers of Babylon*, 1865.

Wood-engraving, touched with Chinese white (now faded), 22.4 x 18 cm. For 'Dalziels' Bible Gallery' (London: George Routledge, 1881). British Museum, London (PD 1913,0415.201.669).



(fig.56) Edward John Poynter (after), *Daniel's prayer*, 1865.

Wood-engraving, touched with Chinese white (now faded), 19.1 x 17.5 cm. For 'Dalziels' Bible Gallery' (London: George Routledge, 1881). British Museum, London (PD 1913,0415.201.672).



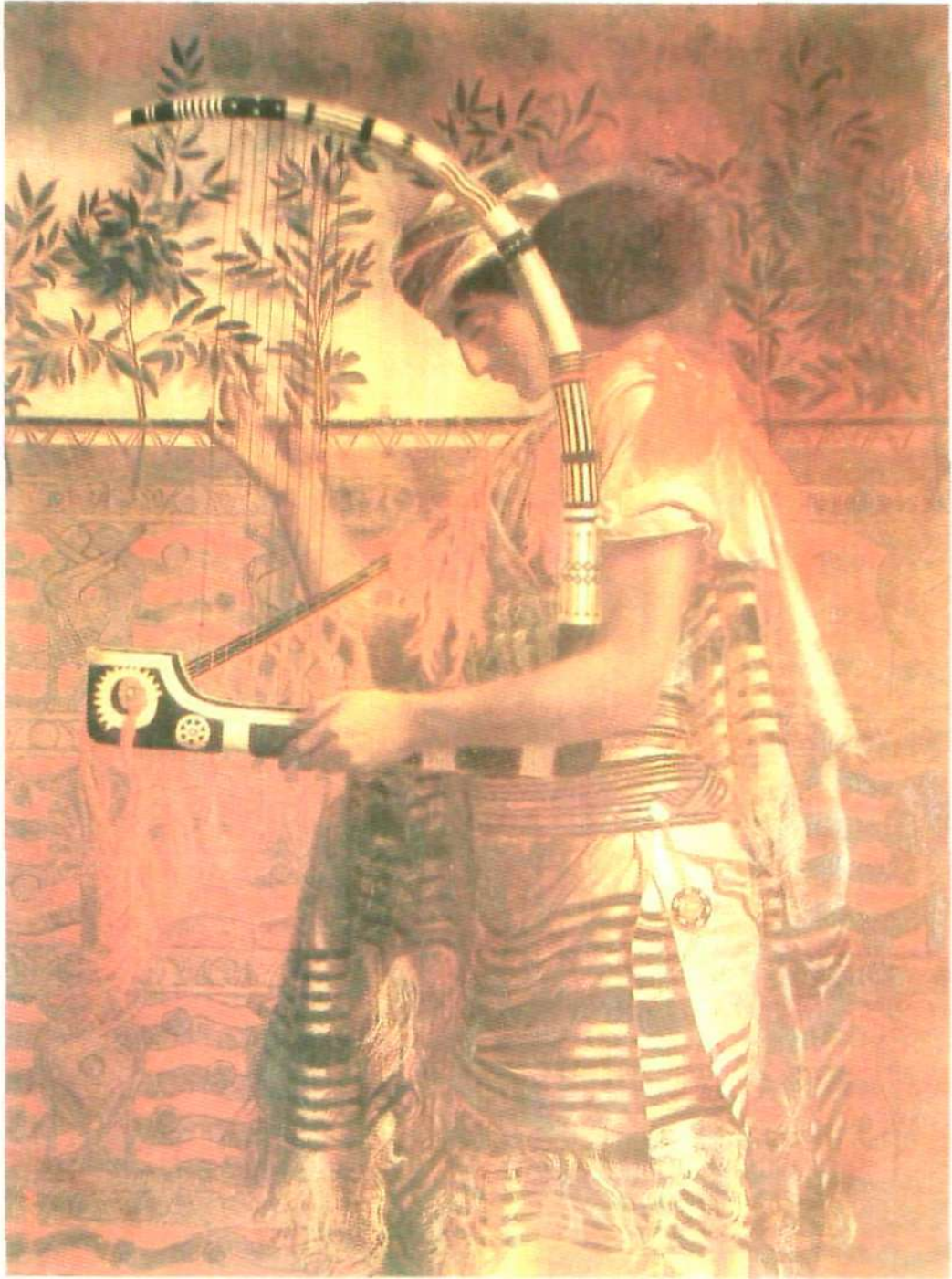
(fig.57) Frederic Leighton, *Jezebel and Ahab, having caused Naboth to be put to death, go down to take possession of his vineyard; they are met at the entrance by Elijah the Tishbite. 'Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?'*, c.1862–63.

Oil on canvas, 238.1 x 231.1 cm. Scarborough Art Gallery, Scarborough (SMG. 289).



(fig.58) Albert Moore, *Elijah running to Jezreel before Ahab's chariot*, 1861.

Pen and brown ink, brown wash, over graphite, with scratching out, 49.2 x 72 cm.  
Dr. Dennis T Lanigan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada.



(fig.59) Simeon Solomon, *A young musician employed in the Temple service during the Feast of Tabernacles (Hosannah!)*, 1861.

Oil on canvas, 56 x 51 cm. Current location unknown (Christie's, London, 30 November 2001, lot 70).



(fig.60) Simeon Solomon, *Babylon hath been a golden cup*, 1859.

Pen and brown ink, pen and black ink, over graphite, 28.3 x 26.6 cm. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1925P452).





(fig.61) Detail of fig.60.



(fig.62) Neo-Assyrian, *Ashur from a triumphal procession of King Ashurnasirpal II, from the North-West Palace, Nimrud (detail), 865–60 BC.*

Gypsum, 91.44 x 243.84 cm. British Museum, London (ME 124551).



(fig.63) Neo-Assyrian, *'The banquet scene' (or 'The garden scene')*, King Ashurbanipal and his queen relaxing outdoors, from the North Palace, Nineveh, 645–35 BC.

Gypsum, 58.42 x 139.7 cm. British Museum, London (ME 124920).



(fig.64) Simeon Solomon (after), *Hosannah!*, c.1860–61.

Wood-engraving, with white heightening, 16.6 x 12.2 cm. For 'Dalziels' Bible Gallery' (London: George Routledge, 1881). British Museum, London (PD 1913,0415.201.670).



(fig.65) Simeon Solomon (after), *And David took an harp*, 1862.

Wood-engraving, with white heightening, 16.3 x 12.7 cm. For 'Dalziels' Bible Gallery' (London: George Routledge, 1881), British Museum, London (PD 1913,0415.201.679).



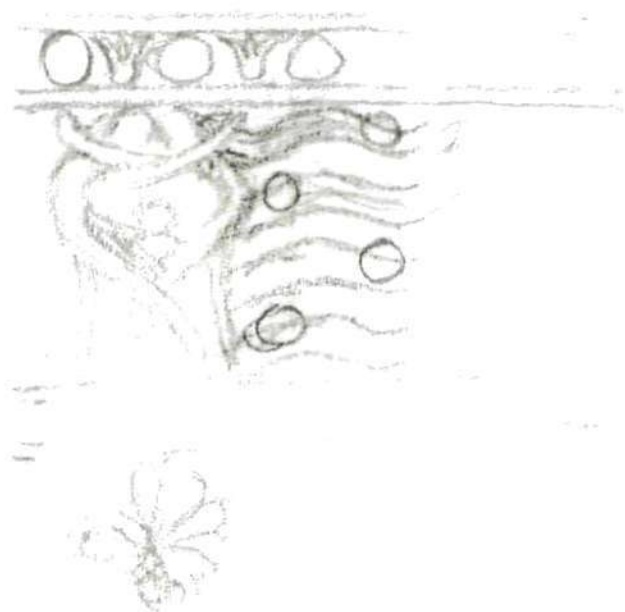
(fig.66) Neo-Assyrian, *King Tiglath-Pileser III, from Central Palace, Nimrud (detail)*, 728 BC.

Gypsum, 108.5 x 107 cm. British Museum, London (ME 118900).



(fig.67) Detail of fig.59.

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(fig.68) Albert Moore, *Studies of an unidentified (Assyrian?) decorative motif* (verso of fig.69), c.1856–62.

Graphite, 13.9 x 22.8 cm. British Museum, London (PD 2003,0429.3 verso).





(fig.69) Albert Moore, *Studies after various Assyrian bas-reliefs in the British Museum, London, c.1856-62.*

Graphite, 13.9 x 22.8 cm. British Museum, London (PD 2003,0429.3 recto).



(fig.70) Neo-Assyrian, *King Ashurbanipal killing a lion biting the wheel of his chariot*, Panel 24 from Room C, North Palace, Nineveh, 645–35 BC.

Gypsum, 160.02 x 124.46 cm. British Museum, London (ME 124854).



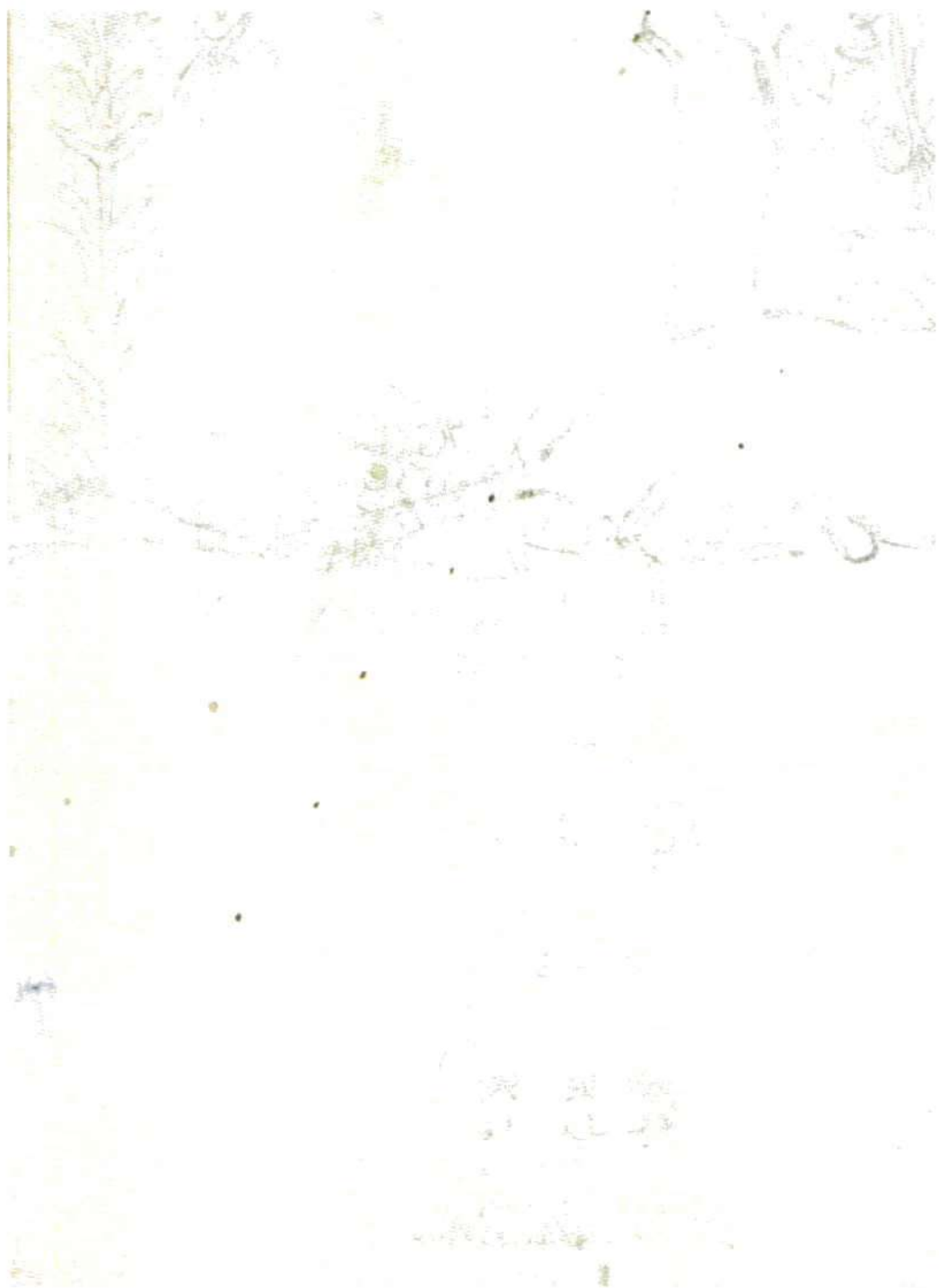
(fig.71) Albert Moore, *Studies after various Assyrian bas-reliefs in the British Museum, London, c.1856-62.*

Graphite, 13.9 x 20.9 cm. British Museum, London (PD 2003,0429.2).

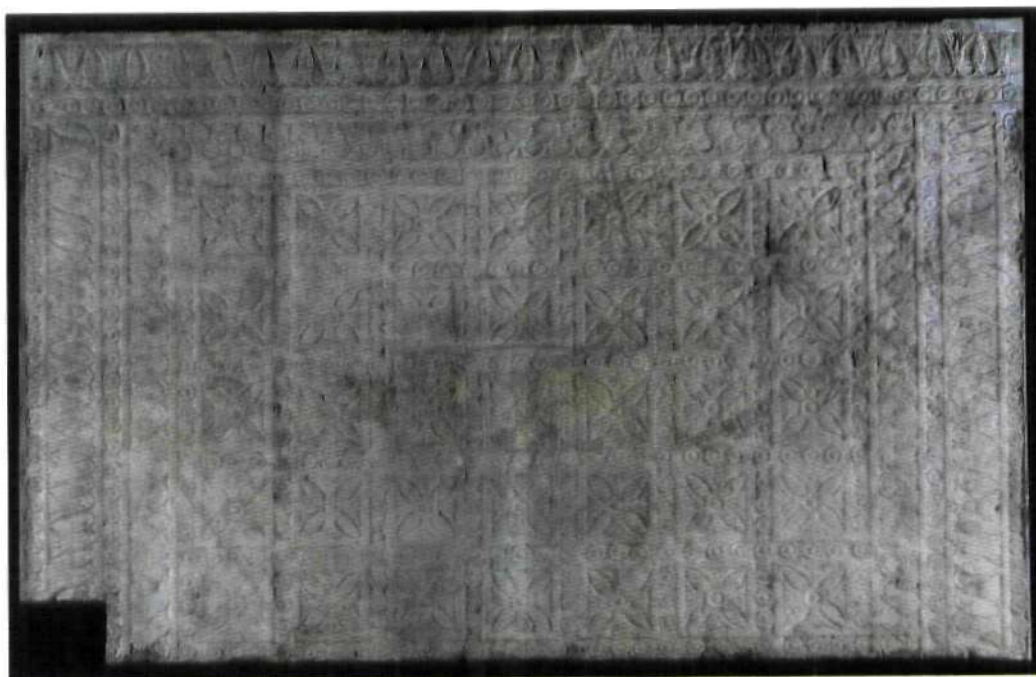


(fig.72) Neo-Assyrian, *Lion and lioness in a garden or undergrowth*, from Room E, North Palace, Nineveh, 645–40 BC.

Gypsum, 98 x 178 cm. British Museum, London (ME 118914).

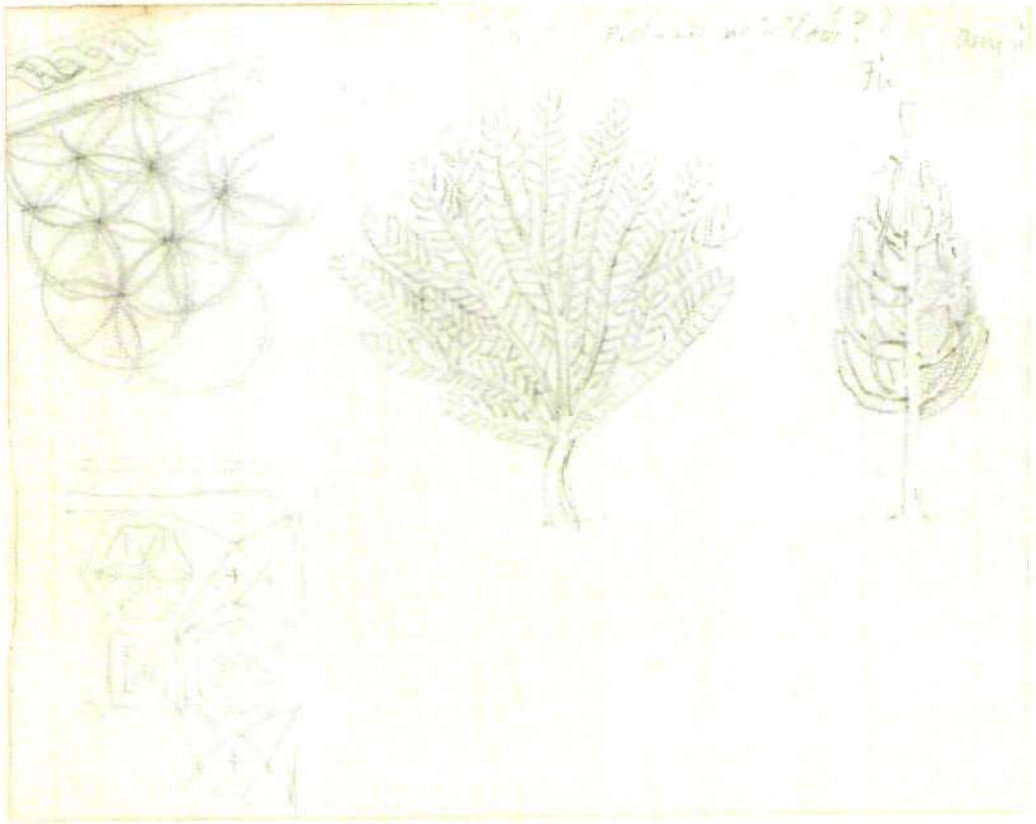


(fig.73) Detail of fig.71.



(fig.74) Neo-Assyrian, *Door-sill from Door C, Room 1, North Palace, Nineveh*, 645–40 BC.

Gypsum, 246 x 304.6 cm. British Museum, London (ME 124962).



(fig.75) Albert Moore, *Study of decorative elements and trees from various Assyrian reliefs in the British Museum, London, c.1856-62.*

Graphite, 13.9 x 17.7 cm. British Museum, London (PD 2003,0429.7).



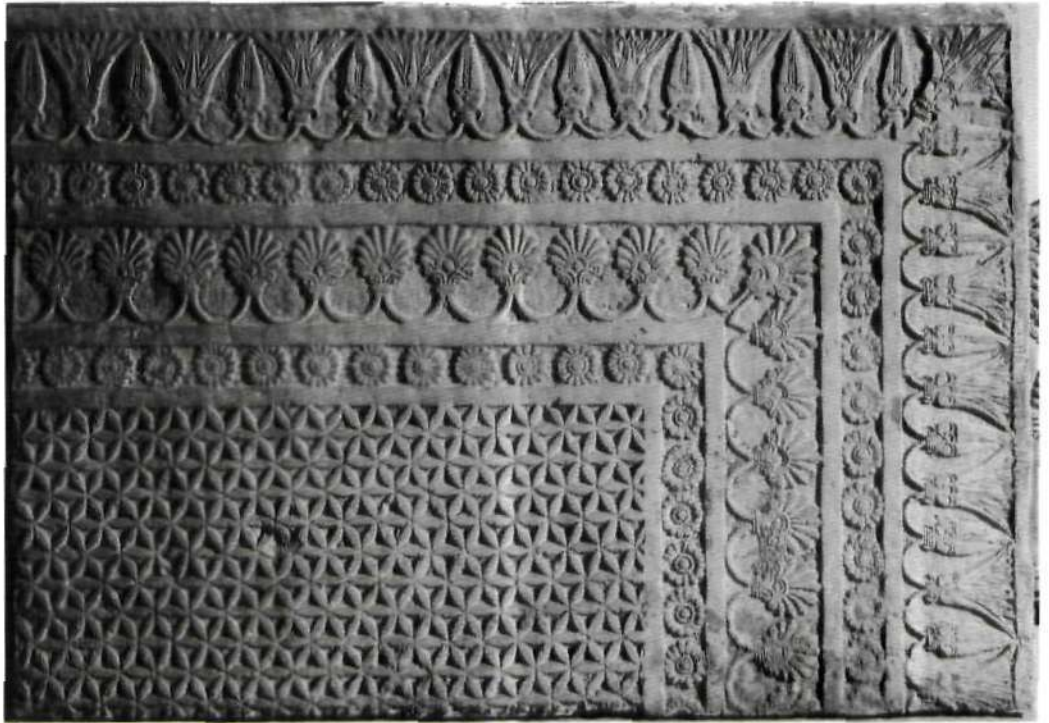
(fig.76) Neo-Assyrian, *Door-sill from Room 1, North Palace, Nineveh, 645–40 BC.*  
Gypsum, 127 x 124 cm. British Museum, London (ME 118913).



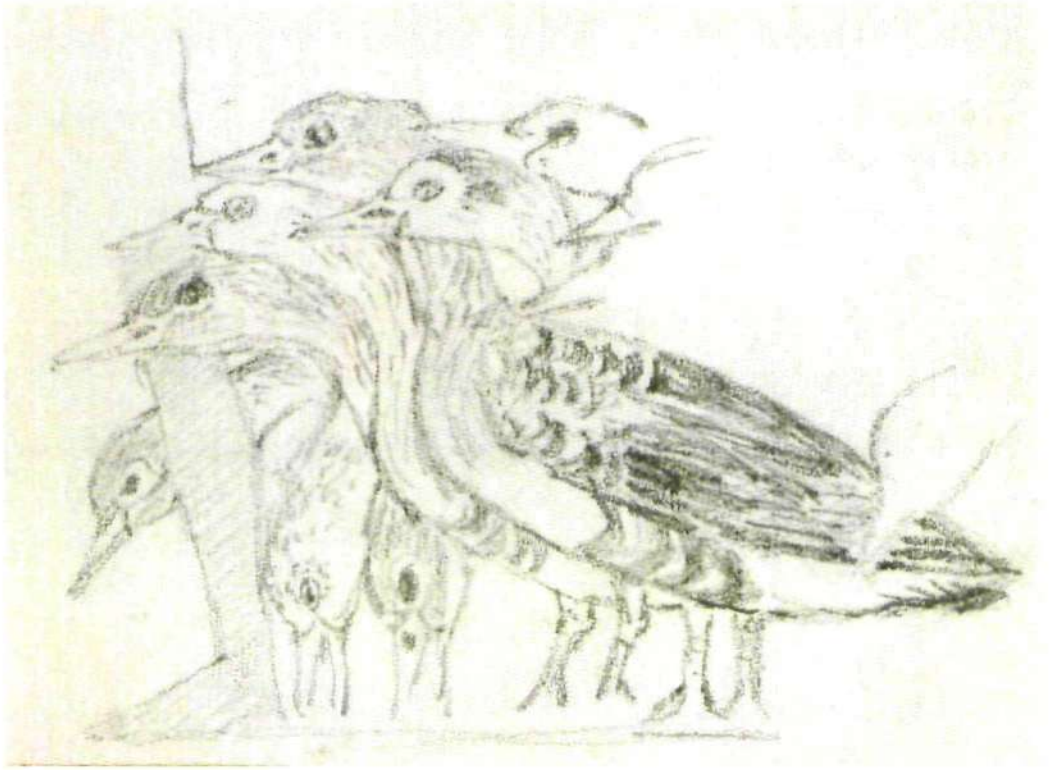


(fig.77) Frederick Goodall, *Mater purissima*, 1868.

Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Current location unknown  
(Witt Library, London).



(fig.78) Neo-Assyrian, *Door-sill from Room 1, North Palace, Nineveh, 645-35 BC.*  
Gypsum, 109.22 x 152.4 cm. British Museum, London (ME 118910).



(fig.79) Albert Moore, *Study after a portion of an ancient Egyptian wall-painting of a goose census, from the tomb of Nebamun at Thebes, in the British Museum (EA 37978), c.1856-62.*

Graphite, 8.3 x 11.3 cm. British Museum, London (PD 2003,0429.5).



(fig.80) Albert Moore, *Study after an ancient Egyptian limestone double portrait, from the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, in the British Museum (EA 36), c.1856-62.*

Graphite, 12.9 x 9.6 cm. British Museum, London (PD 2003,0429.4).



(fig.81) Anonymous (after an intermediary drawing by Thomas Beech) after Louisa Starr Canziani, *David showing the head of Goliath to Saul*, 1868.

Wood-engraving, 20.4 x 24.2 cm. From 'Illustrated London News', 4 January 1868, p.12.

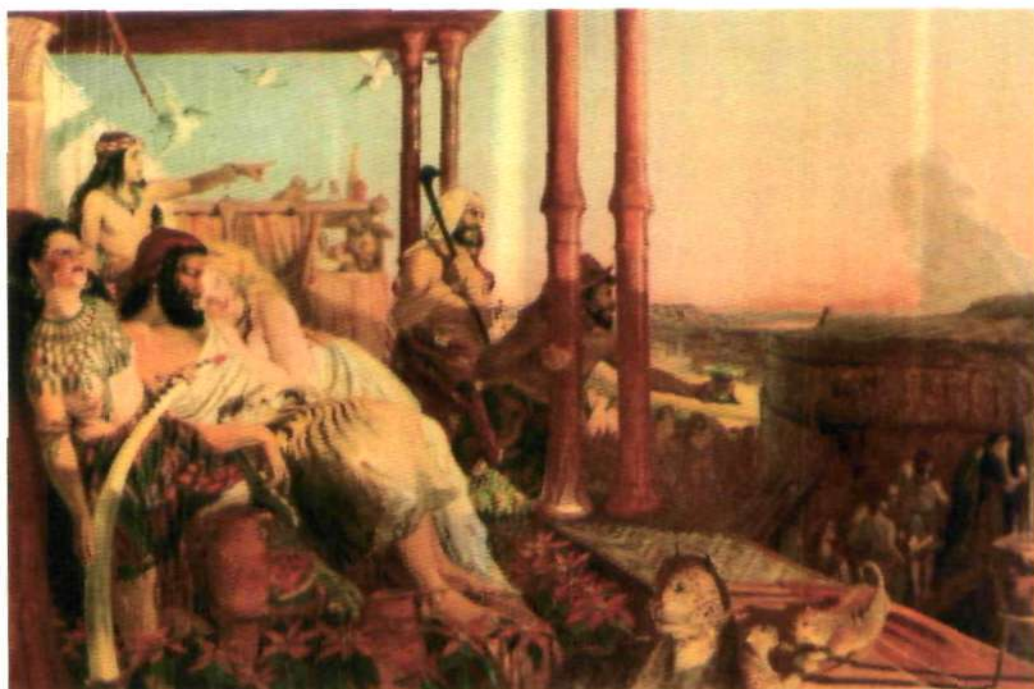


(fig.82) Detail of fig.81.



(fig.83) Edward Henry Corbould, *Study for the watercolour 'Saul and the witch of Endor'*, c.1860.

Brush drawing in brown wash, 34.6 x 46.8 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1951,1110.38).



(fig.84) William Bell Scott, *The eve of the deluge*, 1865.

Oil on canvas, 74.3 x 115.2 cm. Private collection.





(fig.85) William Bell Scott, *The eve of the deluge* (detail of a clay pot in the foreground, with cuneiform inscription), 1865.

Oil on canvas, 62 x 74.5 cm. Tate, London (N01322).



(fig.86) William Bell Scott, *The eve of the deluge* (detail of Eastern prince), 1865.  
Oil on canvas, 62 x 74.5 cm. Tate, London (N01322).



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(fig.87) Anonymous after Edward Armitage, *Ahab and Jezebel*, 1864.

Wood-engraving. From 'Fun', 14 May 1864, p.83.



(fig.88) Mason Jackson, *The Leeds exhibition: The gallery of British living painters in oil* [Leeds General Infirmary, 'Gallery E'], 1868.

Wood-engraving, 17.6 x 34.9 cm. From 'Illustrated London News', 27 June 1868, p.632.



(fig.89) William Luson Thomas after Edward Armitage, *Esther's banquet*, 1865.

Wood-engraving, 22.3 x 33.8 cm. From 'Illustrated London News',  
28 October 1865, p.424.



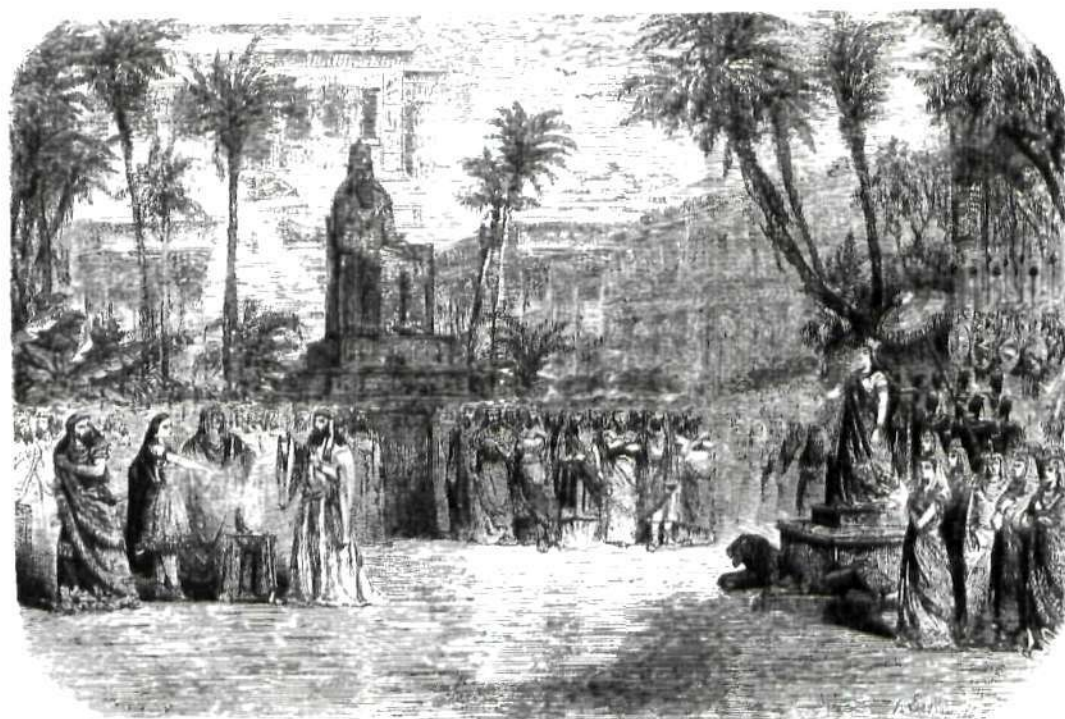
(fig.90) Edward Armitage, *Esther's banquet*, 1865.

Oil on canvas, 120 x 183 cm. Royal Academy of Arts, London (Diploma Collection; 03/1188).



(fig.91) Edward Frederick Brewtnall (after), *Haman supplicating Esther*, n.d.

Wood-engraving, touched with Chinese white (now faded), 22.7 x 17.7 cm.  
For 'Dalziels' Bible Gallery' (London: George Routledge, 1881). British Museum,  
London (PD 1913,0415.201.667).



A. TRICHON DEL. — SÉMIRAMIS. DEUXIÈME ACTE. — SCÈNE DU SERMENT. — FIG. 206

(fig.92) Auguste Trichon after Alphonse De Neuville, *Sémiramis* (*Semiramis*), Act II, 1860.

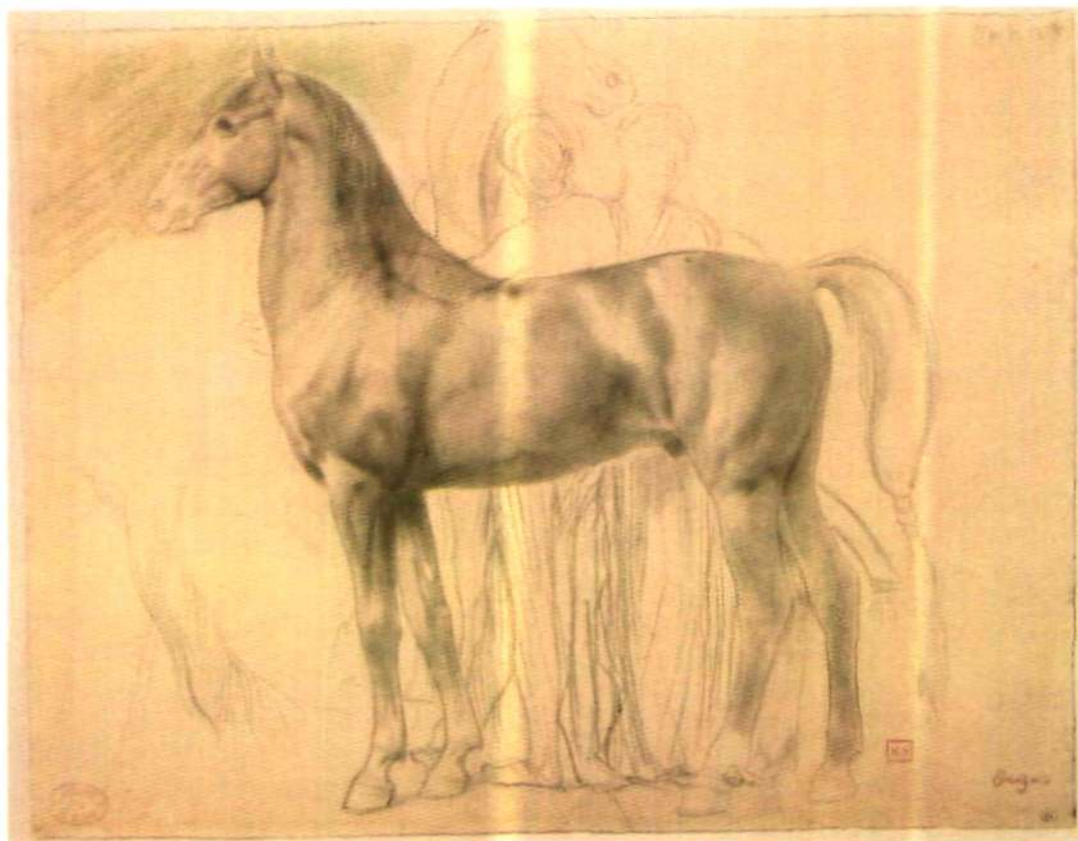
Wood-engraving, 17.3 x 24.7 cm. From 'L'Univers Illustré', 19 July 1860, p.265 [front-page].





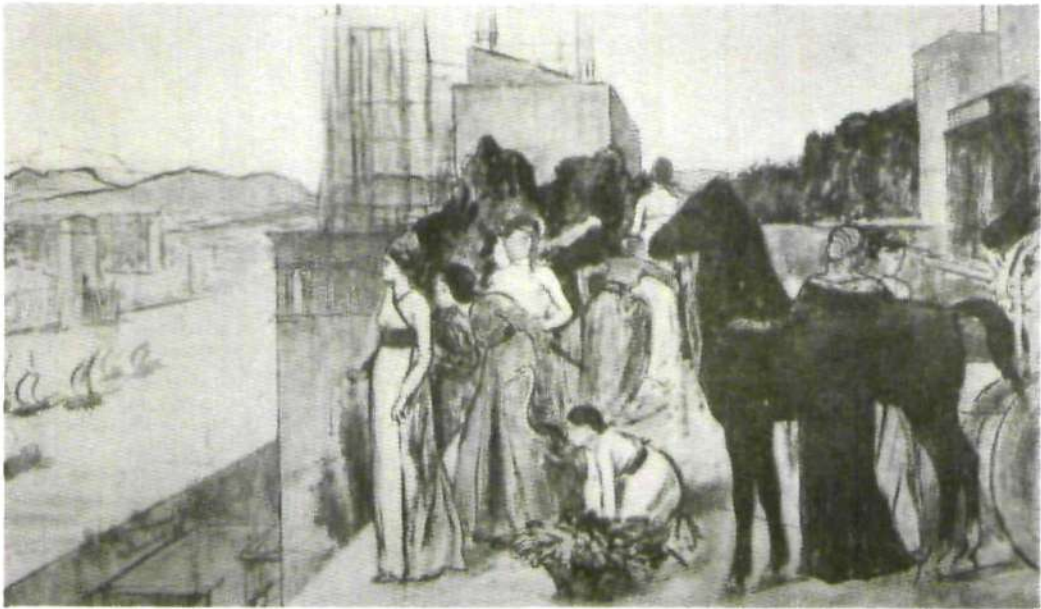
(fig.93) Anonymous after Godefroy Durand, *Sémiramis* (*Semiramis*), Act II, 1860.

Wood-engraving, 22.4 x 31.8 cm. From 'L'illustration', 21 July 1860, p.36.



(fig.94) Edgar Degas, *Study for 'Sémiramis construisant Babylone' ('Semiramis building Babylon')*, c.1860-62.

Black and green chalk, with graphite, 26.7 x 34.7 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris (Fonds d'Orsay; RF 15530).



(fig.95) Edgar Degas, *Study for 'Sémiramis construisant Babylone'*  
(*'Semiramis building Babylon'*), c.1861–62.

Oil paint thinned with turpentine (*peinture à l'essence*) on canvas, 48 x 81 cm.  
Current location unknown (Vente atelier [Edgar] Degas, Paris, Georges Petit,  
Vente I: 6–8 May 1918, lot 21).



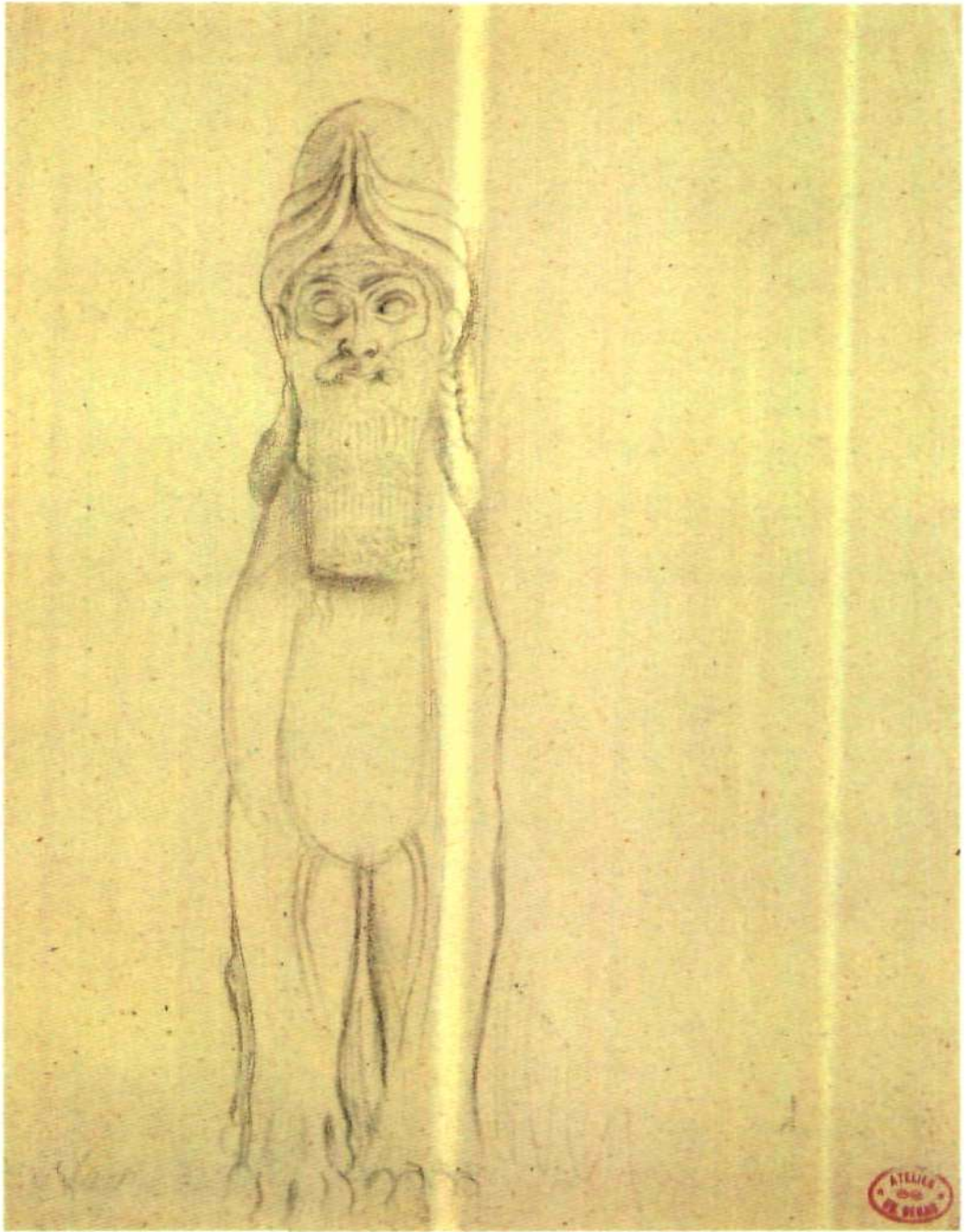
(fig.96) Edgar Degas, *Study for 'Séramis construisant Babylone'*  
(*Semiramis building Babylon*) (detail), c.1861–62.

Oil on paper attached to canvas, 26.5 x 40.5 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris (RF 2007–2).



(fig.97) Gustave Moreau, *Jupiter et Europe* (*Jupiter and Europa*), 1868.

Oil on canvas, 175 x 130 cm. Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris (P.191).



(fig.98) Edgar Degas, *Study after an Assyrian human-headed winged lion in the British Museum, from the North-West Palace, Nimrud (ME 118873)*, n.d.

Black chalk on green paper, 31.9 x 24.5 cm. Kunsthalle Bremen (58/376).



(fig.99) Achille Sirouy after Eugène Delacroix, *Sardanapale (Sardanapalus)*, 1861.  
Lithograph, 42.9 x 53.8 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1888,0619.190).

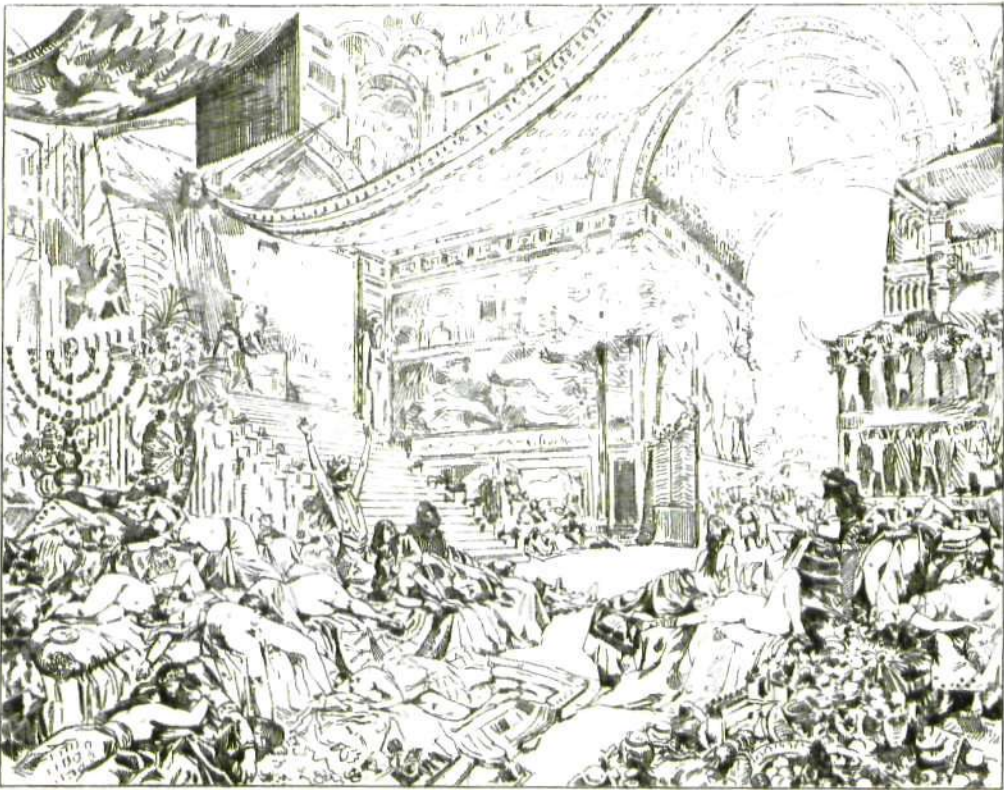


EXPOSITION DE LA SOCIÉTÉ DE L'UNION DES ARTS. — Sculpteur, tableau de Delacroix. — Dessiné par A. Du Vivier.

(fig.100) Émile Thomas (after an intermediary drawing by Albert Du Vivier) after Eugène Delacroix, *Sardanapale (Sardanapalus)*, 1874.

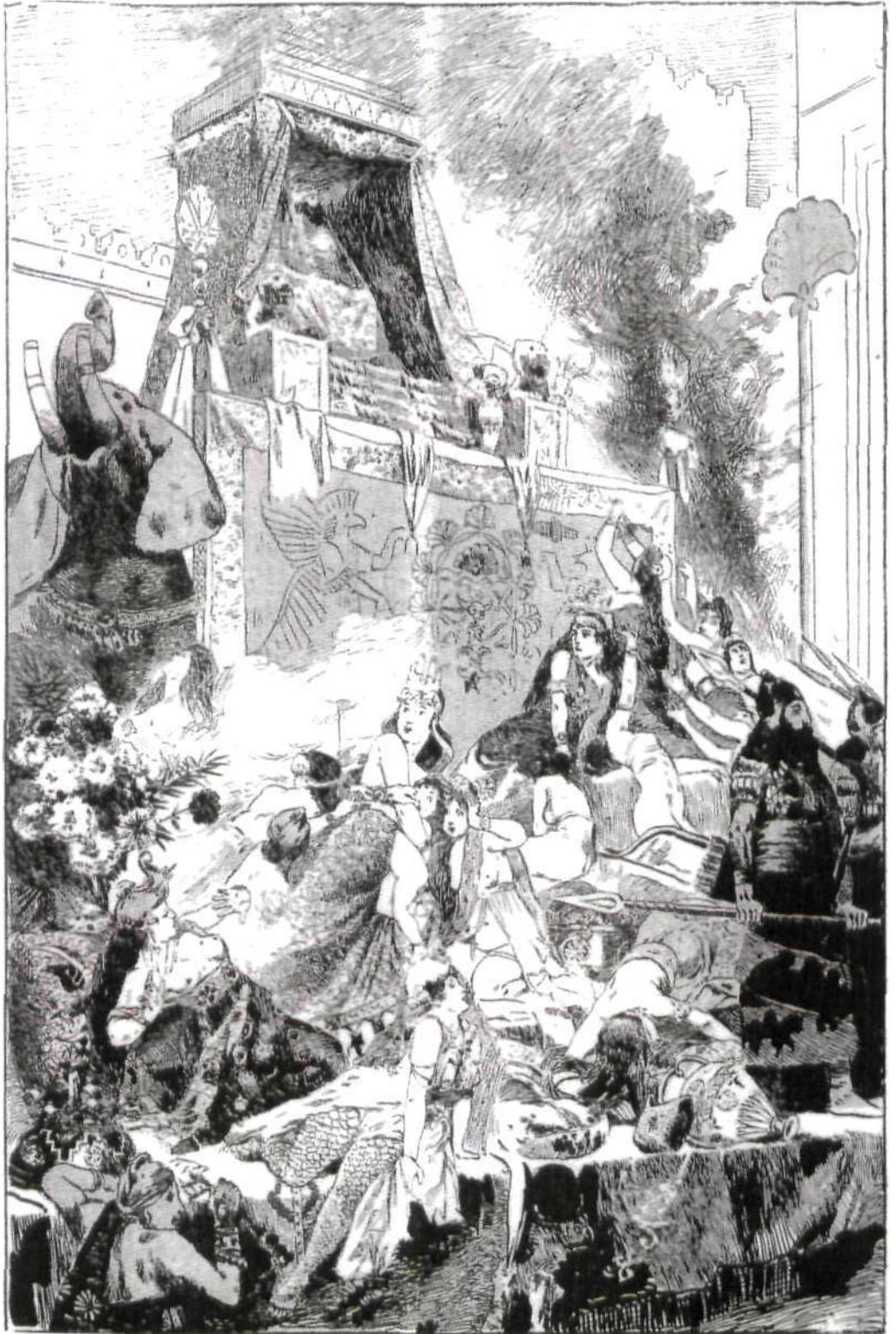
Wood-engraving, 22.1 x 28.8 cm. From 'Le Monde Illustré', 16 May 1874, p.308.





(fig.101) Georges Rochegrosse (after), *Le mort de Babylone*  
(*The fall of Babylon*), 1891.

Process print, 10.1 x 13 cm. From 'Catalogue illustré de peinture et sculpture:  
Salon de 1891' (Paris: Ludovic Baschet, 1891), p.310.



(fig.102) Louis Chalon (after), *La mort de Sardanapale*  
(*The death of Sardanapalus*), 1891.

Process print, 15 x 10 cm. From 'Catalogue illustré de peinture et sculpture:  
Salon de 1891' (Paris: Ludovic Baschet, 1891), p.313.

les portes; entre deux murs s'avance le gros de la force. Quoique la foule ait fait moins de fête à l'artiste que l'an dernier, nous préférons de beaucoup cette œuvre saine et bien équilibrée au défilé qui a mérité



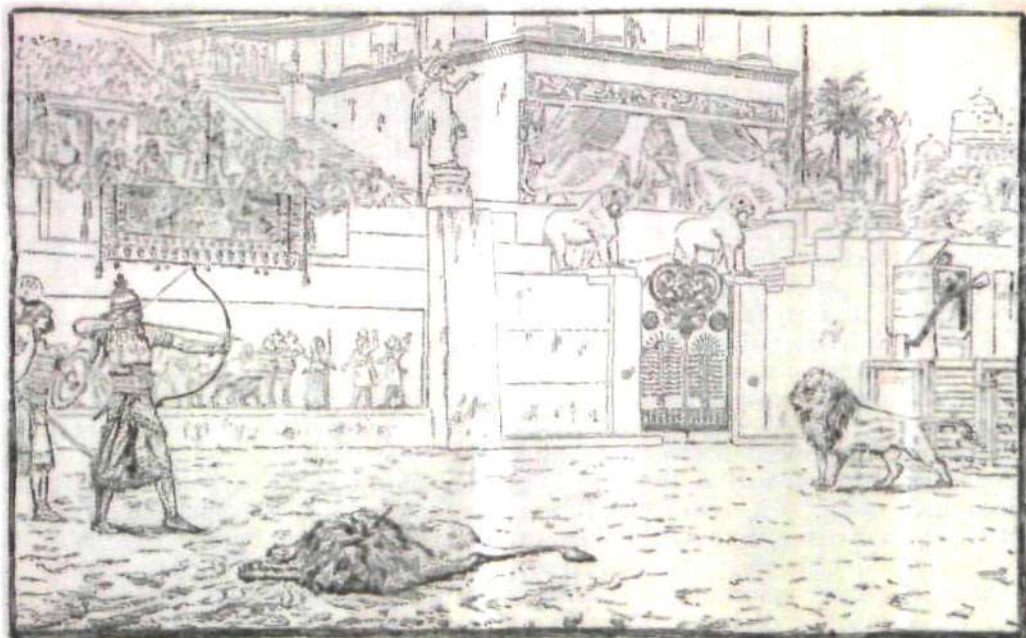
BAAÏ, PAR H. MOTTE

(Cronique de l'Artiste)

tant de suffrages, et dont les personnages, avec les mille intentions diverses dont on les avait animés, éparpillaient l'intérêt et constituaient un tableau moins bien pensé et même moins bien peint que celui-ci, qui est à tous les points de vue l'un des meilleurs du Salon.

(fig.103) Henri Paul Motte (after), *Baal Moloch dévorant les prisonniers de guerre à Babylone* (*Baal Moloch devouring the prisoners of war in Babylon*), 1876.

Process print. From 'Gazette des Beaux-Arts', June 1876, p.11.



(fig.104) Frederick Arthur Bridgman (after), *Divertissement d'un roi assyrien* (*The diversion of an Assyrian king*), n.d.

Process print. From an unknown publication (Witt Library, London).



(fig.105) Jean Léon Gérôme, *Pollice verso*, 1872.

Oil on canvas, 96.5 x 149.2 cm. Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona (1968.52).



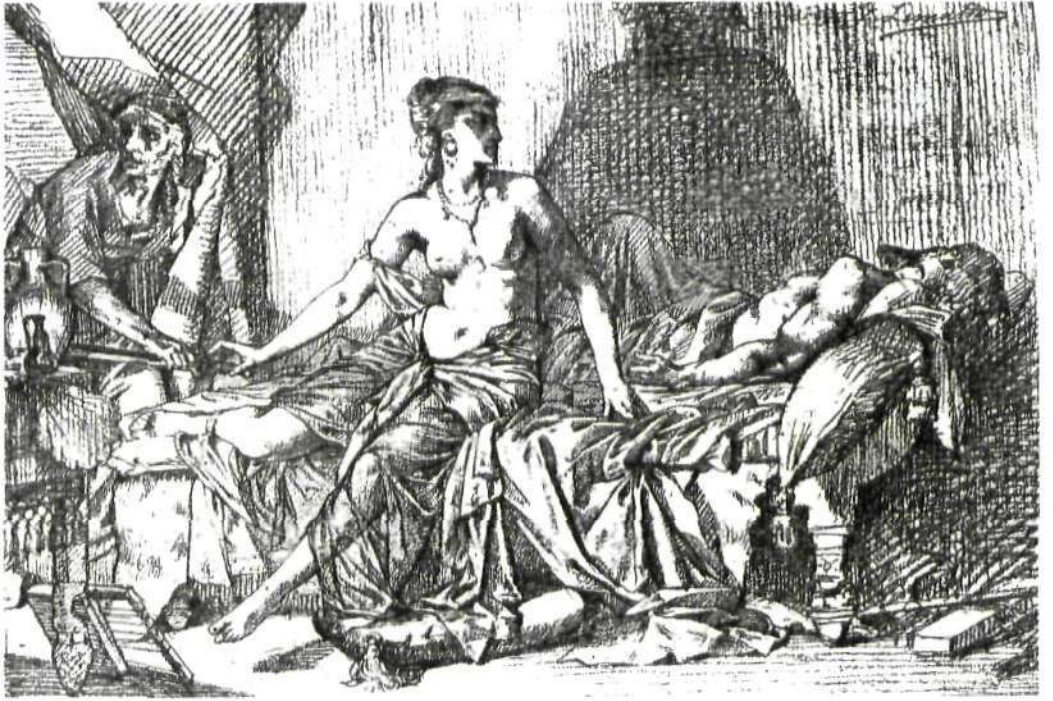
(fig.106) Briton Rivière, *Daniel in the lions' den*, 1872.

Oil on canvas, 98.5 x 152.5 cm. Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (WAG 2700).



(fig.107) Charles George Lewis after Briton Rivière, *Daniel*, 1875.

Mixed method on *chine collé*, 59.5 x 87.5 cm. British Museum, London  
(PD 1886,1127.75).



(fig.108) François Lematte (after), *Judith*, 1886.

Process print, 10 x 14.7 cm. From 'Catalogue illustré du Salon [de 1886]'  
(Paris: Ludovic Baschet, 1886), p.83.





336. — M. CABANEL.

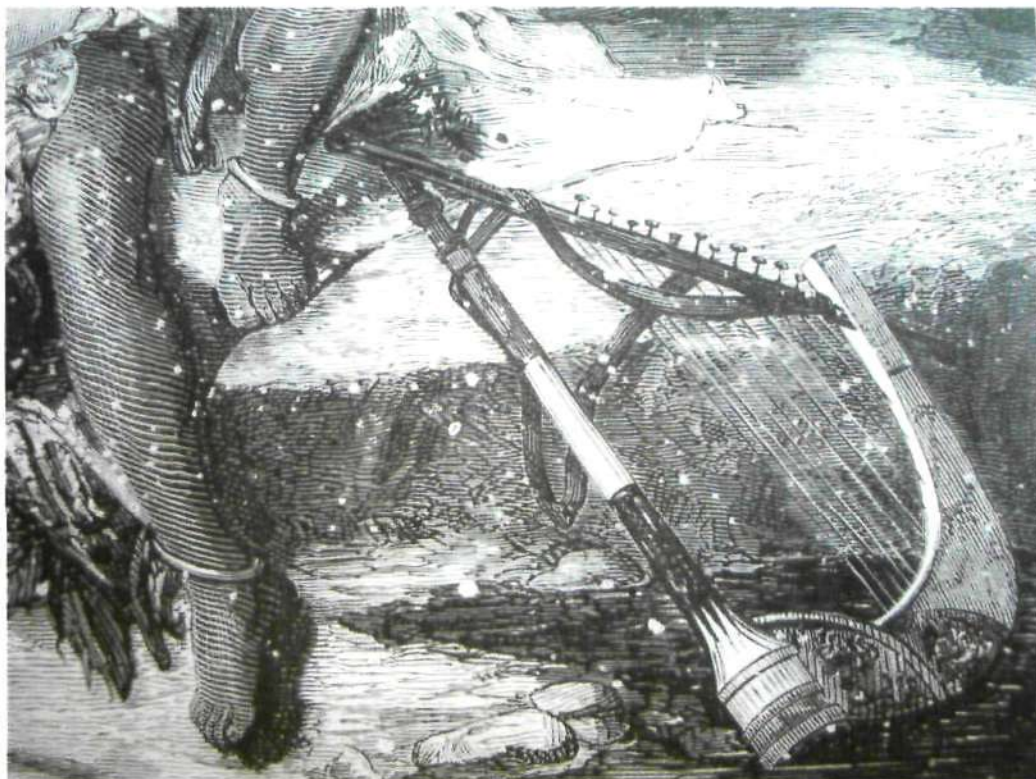
(fig.109) Cham [Amédée de Noé] after Alexandre Cabanel, *Thamar et Absalom* (*Tamar and Absalom*), 1875.

Process print, 7 x 7.2 cm. From 'L'Univers Illustré', 5 June 1875, p.364.



(fig.110) Charles Baude after Alexandre Cabanel, *Thamar et Absalom*  
(*Tamar and Absalom*), 1879.

Wood-engraving, 22.7 x 31.5 cm. From 'L'Univers Illustré', 18 January 1879, p.41.



(fig.111) Smeeton & Tilly [Joseph Burn Smeeton and Auguste Tilly] (after an intermediary drawing by J Pélissier) after Aimé Morot, *La captivité de Babylone* (*The Babylonian captivity*) (detail), 1873.

Wood-engraving, 22.2 x 17 cm. From 'L'illustration', 4 October 1873, p.224.



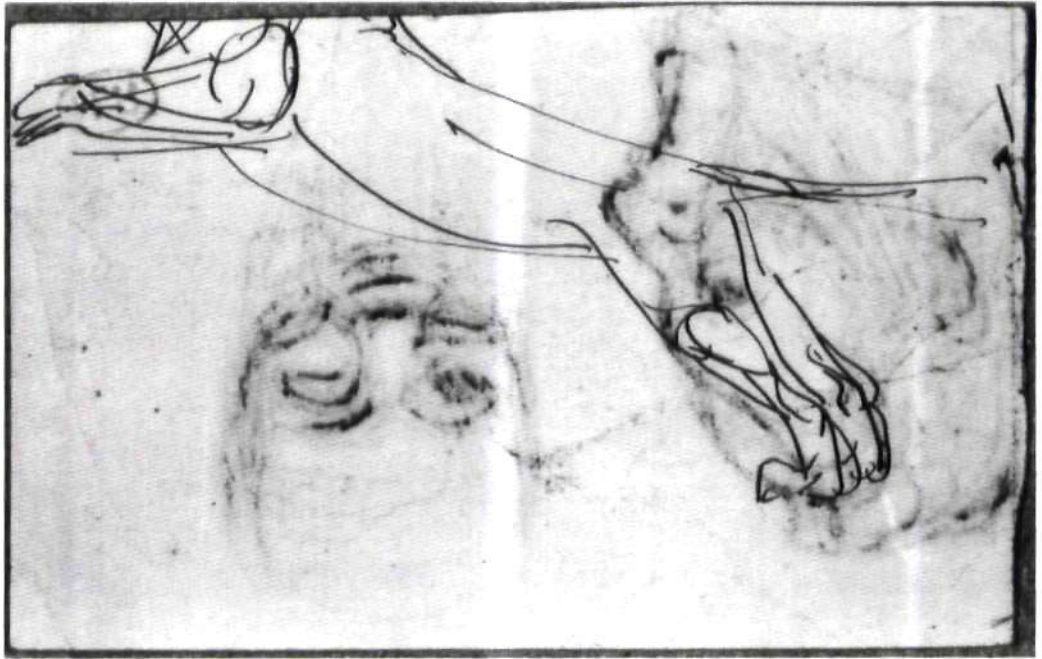
(fig.112) Émile Charles-Bitte (after), *Dalila (Delilah)*, 1891.

Process print, 5.8 x 10.1 cm. From 'Catalogue illustré de peinture et sculpture: Salon de 1891' (Paris: Ludovic Baschet, 1891), p.91.



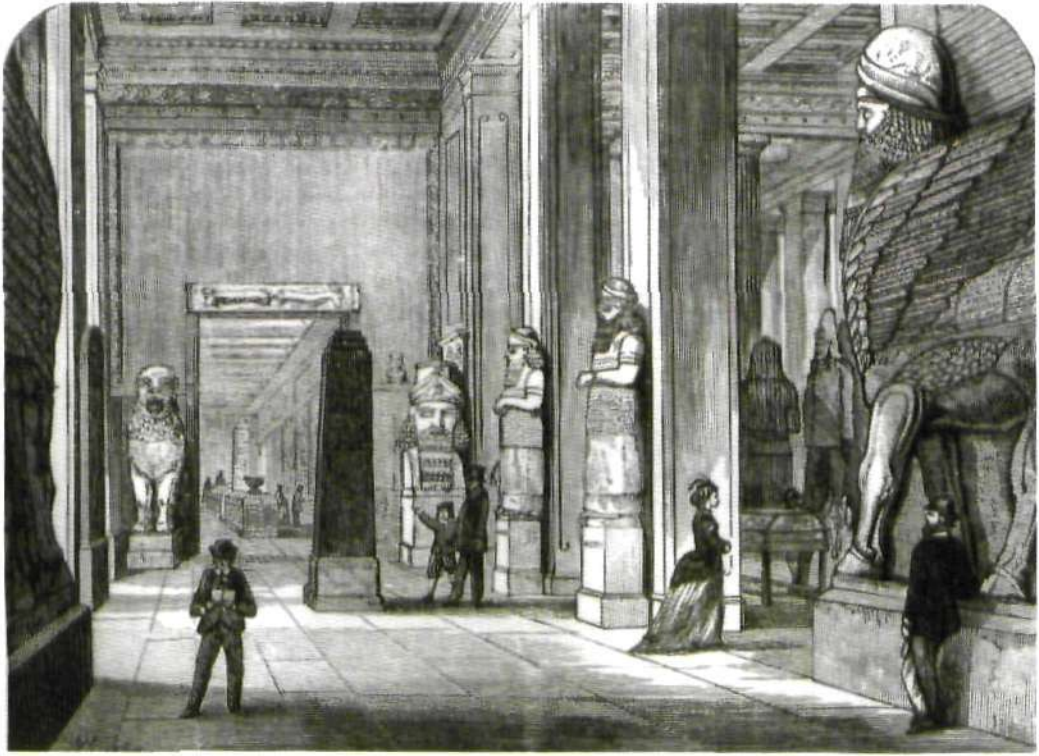
(fig.113) Auguste Rodin, *Studies for a portrait of Victor Hugo*, c.1883.

Pen and ink, 8.2 x 13 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris (D.2166 recto).



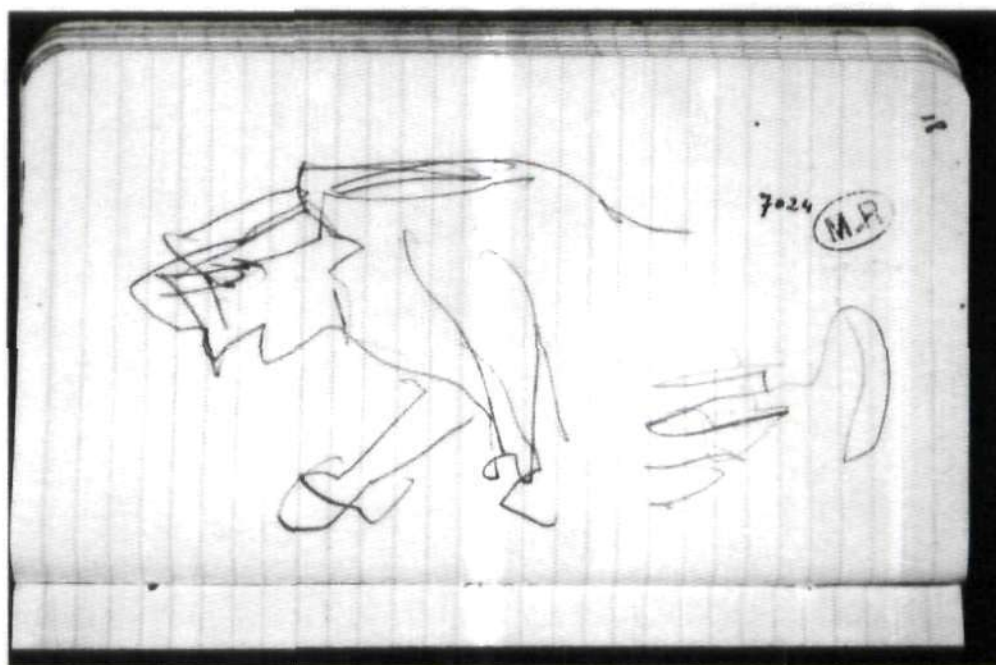
(fig.114) Auguste Rodin, *Study of a leaping lion, from an Assyrian bas-relief in the British Museum* (verso of fig.113), c.1883.

Pen and ink, 8.2 x 13 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris (D.2166 verso).



(fig.115) Anonymous after Percy William Justyne, *Central Assyrian Saloon, British Museum, London, before 1883.*

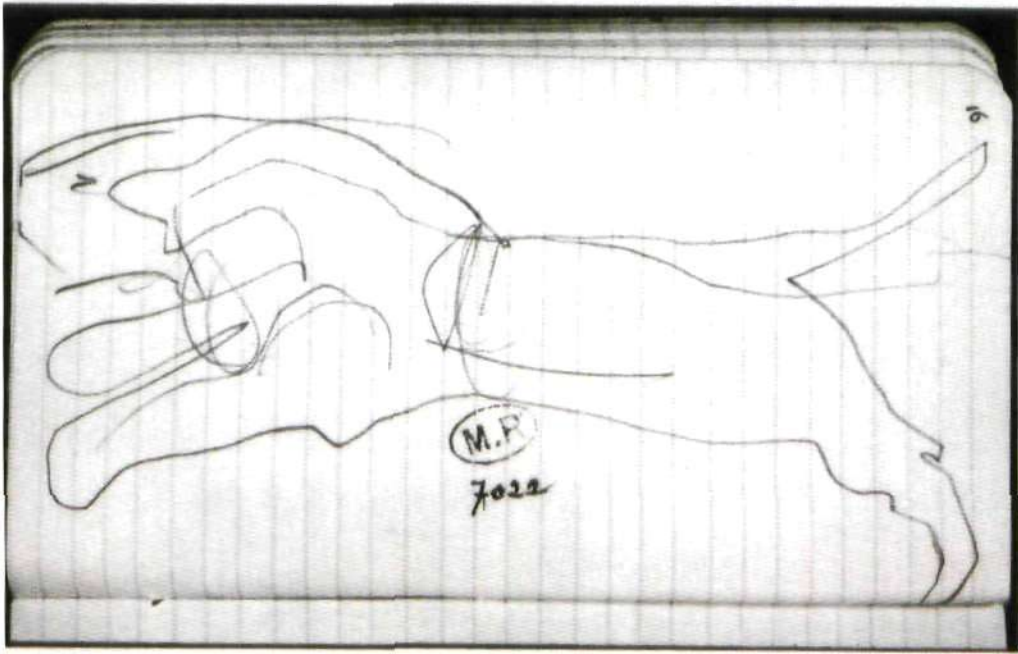
Wood-engraving, 10.8 x 14.3 cm. British Museum, London (PD 1939,0116.10).



(fig.116) Auguste Rodin, *Study of a lion released from a cage, from an Assyrian bas-relief in the British Museum, c.1913.*

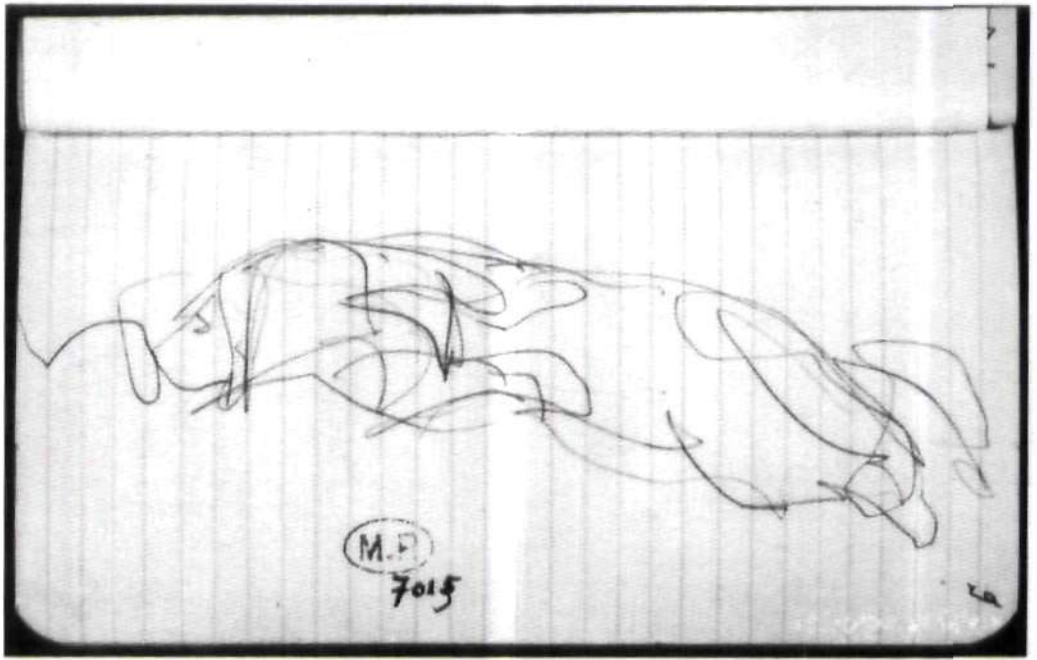
Graphite, 8.3 x 14.1 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris (D.7024).





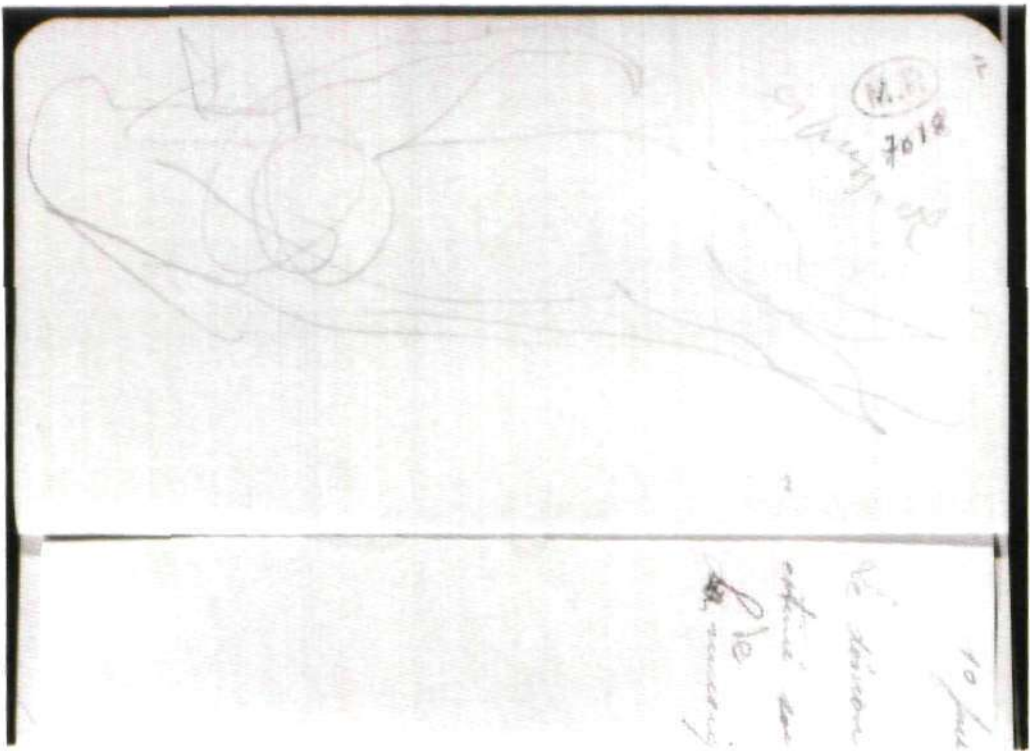
(fig.117) Auguste Rodin, *Study of a leaping lion, from an Assyrian bas-relief in the British Museum*, c.1913.

Graphite, 8.3 x 14.1 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris (D.7022).



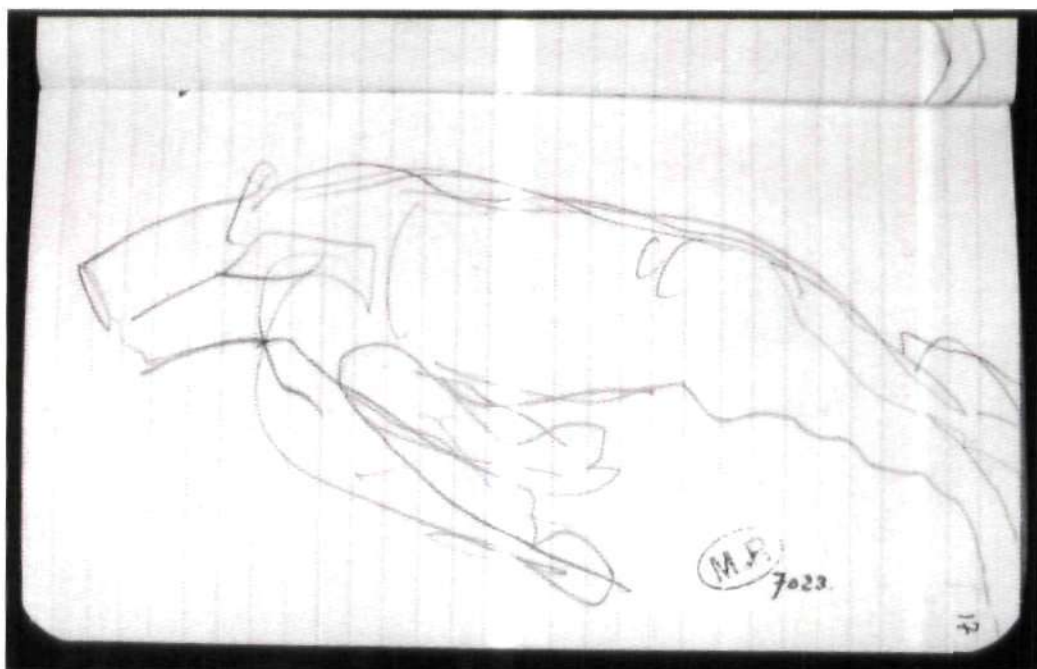
(fig.118) Auguste Rodin, *Study of a dying lion, from an Assyrian bas-relief in the British Museum*, c.1913.

Graphite, 8.3 x 14.1 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris (D.7015).



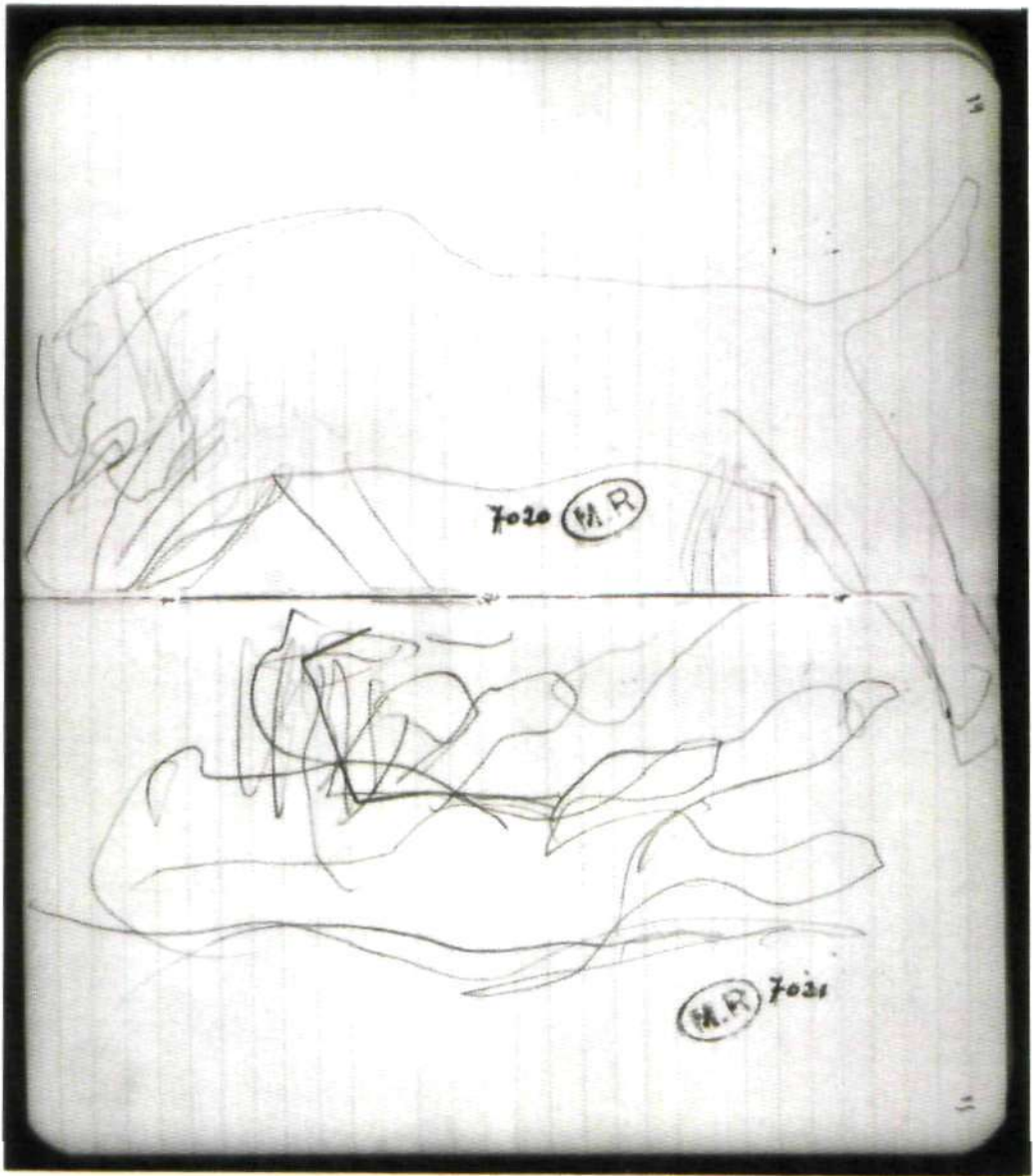
(fig.119) Auguste Rodin, *Study of a dying lioness, from an Assyrian bas-relief in the British Museum*, c.1913.

Graphite, 8.3 x 14.1 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris (D.7018).



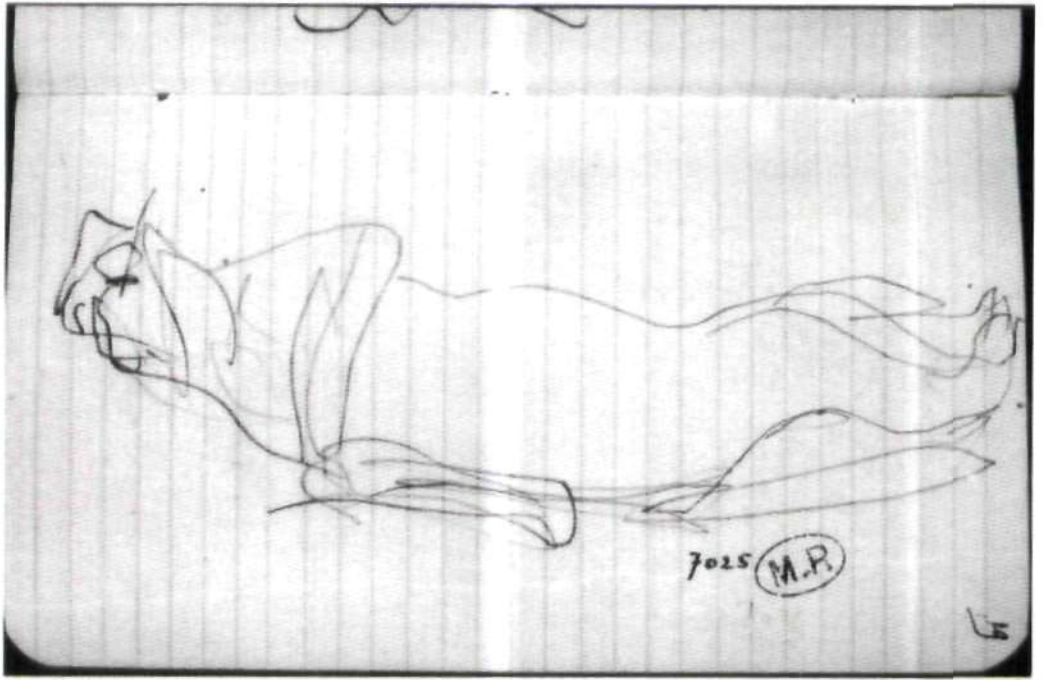
(fig.120) Auguste Rodin, *Study of a dying lion, from an Assyrian bas-relief in the British Museum*, c.1913.

Graphite, 8.3 x 14.1 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris (D.7023).



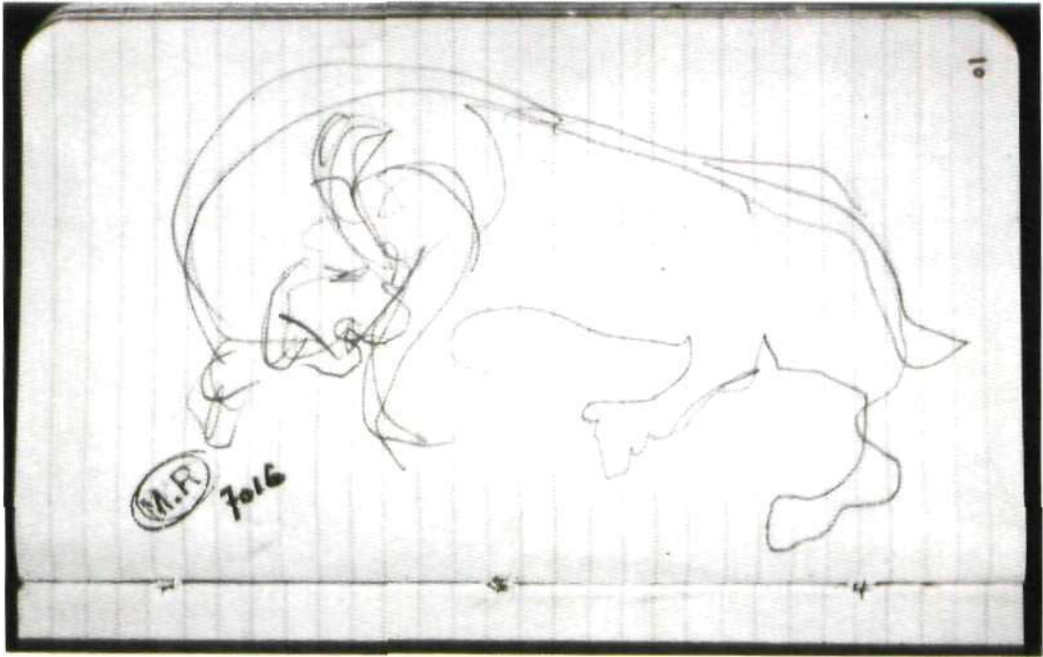
(fig.121) Auguste Rodin, *Studies of a prowling and a dying lion, from an Assyrian bas-relief in the British Museum, c.1913.*

Graphite, 16.6 x 28.2 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris (D.7020-21).



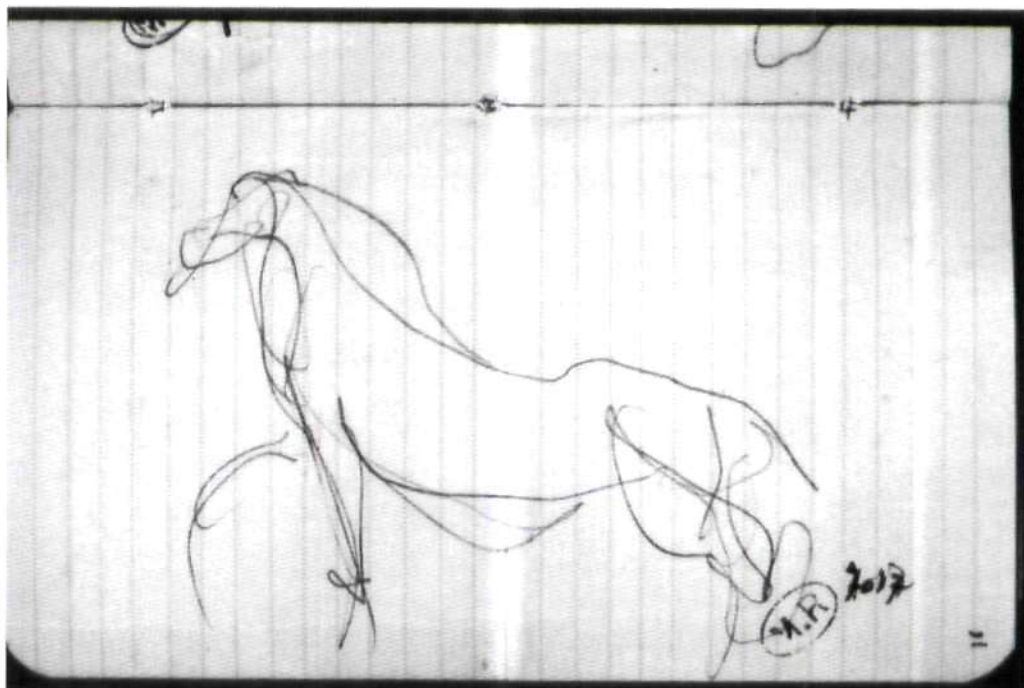
(fig.122) Auguste Rodin, *Study of a dying lion, from an Assyrian bas-relief in the British Museum*, c.1913.

Graphite, 8.3 x 14.1 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris (D.7025).



(fig.123) Auguste Rodin, *Study of a dying lion, from an Assyrian bas-relief in the British Museum*, c.1913.

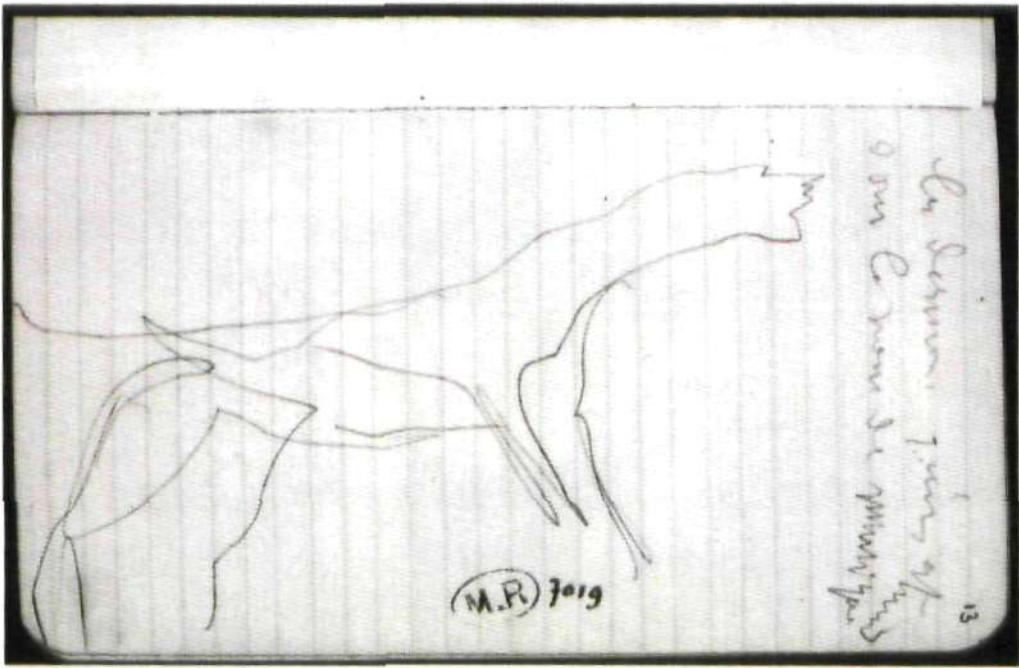
Graphite, 8.3 x 14.1 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris (D.7016).



(fig.124) Auguste Rodin, *Study of a horse, from an Assyrian bas-relief in the British Museum*, c.1913.

Graphite, 8.3 x 14.1 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris (D.7017).





(fig.125) Auguste Rodin, *Study of a barking dog, from an Assyrian bas-relief in the British Museum*, c.1913.

Graphite, 8.3 x 14.1 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris (D.7019).

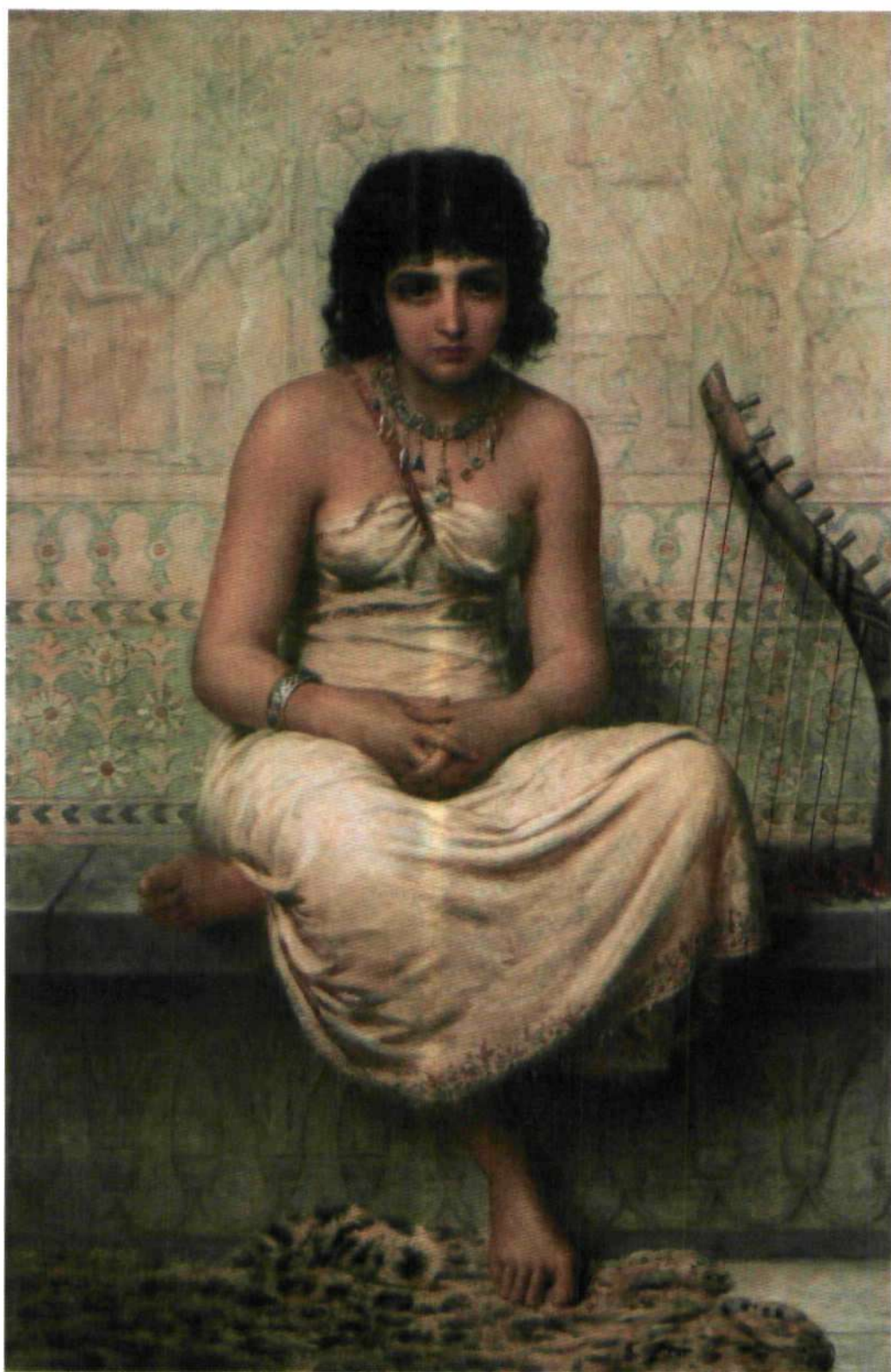


(fig.126) Edwin Long, *An ancient custom*, 1877.

Oil on canvas. Current location unknown (Christie's, London, 12 June 2002, lot 47).



(fig.127) The frame surrounding fig.126 (detail).



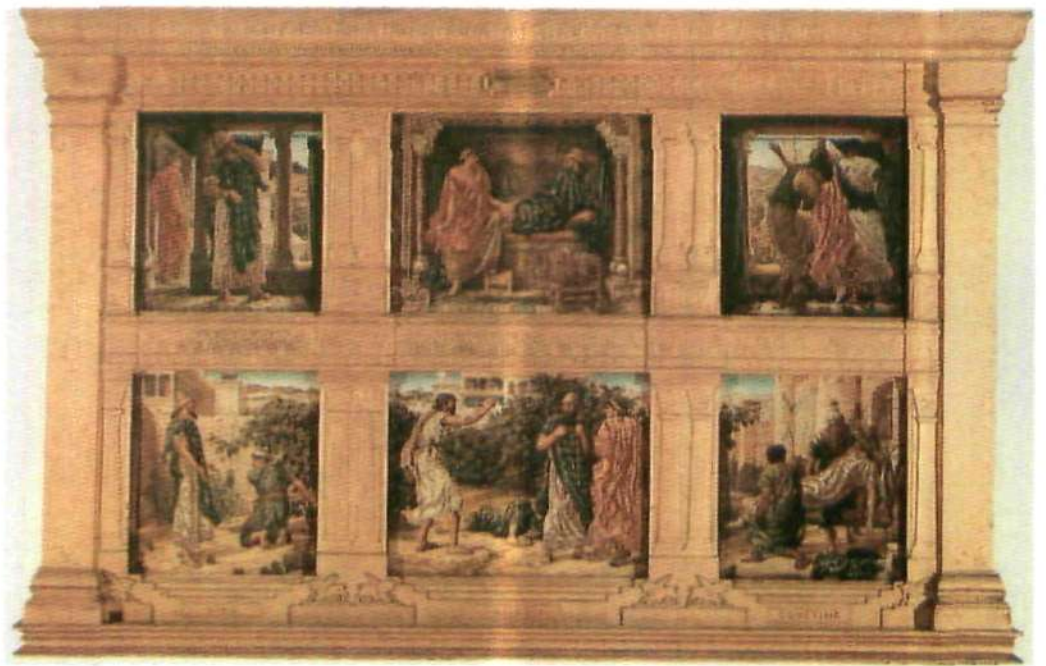
(fig.128) Edwin Long, *An Assyrian captive*, 1880.

Oil on canvas, 139.7 x 91.5 cm. Current location unknown (Christie's, New York, 27 October 2007, lot 115).



(fig.129) Frank Dicksee (after), *Elijah meeting Ahab and Jezebel in Naboth's vineyard*, 1876.

Wood-engraving, 22.1 x 29.6 cm. From 'The Graphic', 6 May 1876, p.448.



(fig.130) Thomas Matthews Rooke, *King Ahab's coveting*, 1879.

Oil on canvas, 110 x 168 cm (with frame). Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth (BORG M RC01891).



(fig.131) Thomas Matthews Rooke, *Naboth refuses Ahab his vineyard* (detail), 1879.  
Oil on canvas, 35 x 31.8 cm. Detail of fig.130.



(fig.132) Thomas Sherratt after Thomas Matthews Rooke, *Elijah, Ahab, and Jezebel in Naboth's vineyard*, 1880.

Engraving, 22.6 x 30.5 cm. From 'The Art Journal', June 1880, opposite p.172.





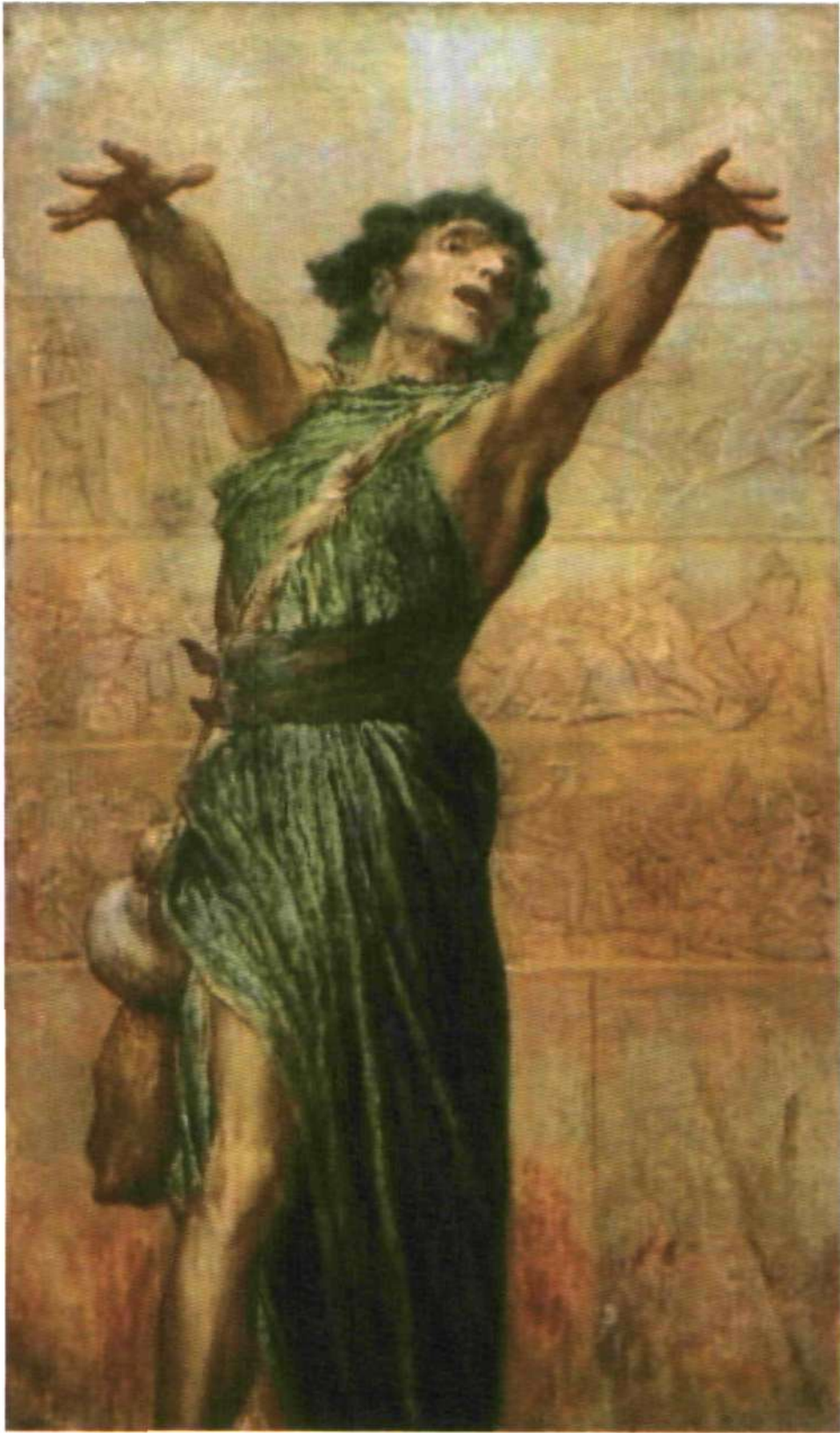
(fig.133) Thomas Matthews Rooke, *Herod's feast*, 1895.

Watercolour, heightened with white and gouache, over graphite, with scratching out, 75 x 156.2 cm. Current location unknown (Christie's, London, 16 June 2010, lot 157).



(fig.134) *Interior of Gyrn Castle, Flintshire showing John Rogers Herbert's 'The hunting leopard', n.d.*

Photograph. Private collection (Courtesy: Christie's, London, 17-18 July 2006, lot 118).



(fig.135) George Frederick Watts, *Jonah*, 1894.

Oil on canvas, 155.5 x 91.4 cm. Tate, London (N01636).



(fig.136) Ernest Normand, *Vashti deposed*, 1890.

Oil on canvas, 161 x 244.5 cm. Gallery Oldham, Oldham.



(fig.137) Ernest Normand, *Esther denouncing Haman to King Ahasuerus*, 1888.

Oil on canvas, 167 x 244.5 cm. Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens  
(TWCMS: B5635).



Ernest Normand, *David and Saul*, 1891. Oil on canvas, 100 x 120 cm. Witt Library, London.

Ernest Normand, Modern British School.

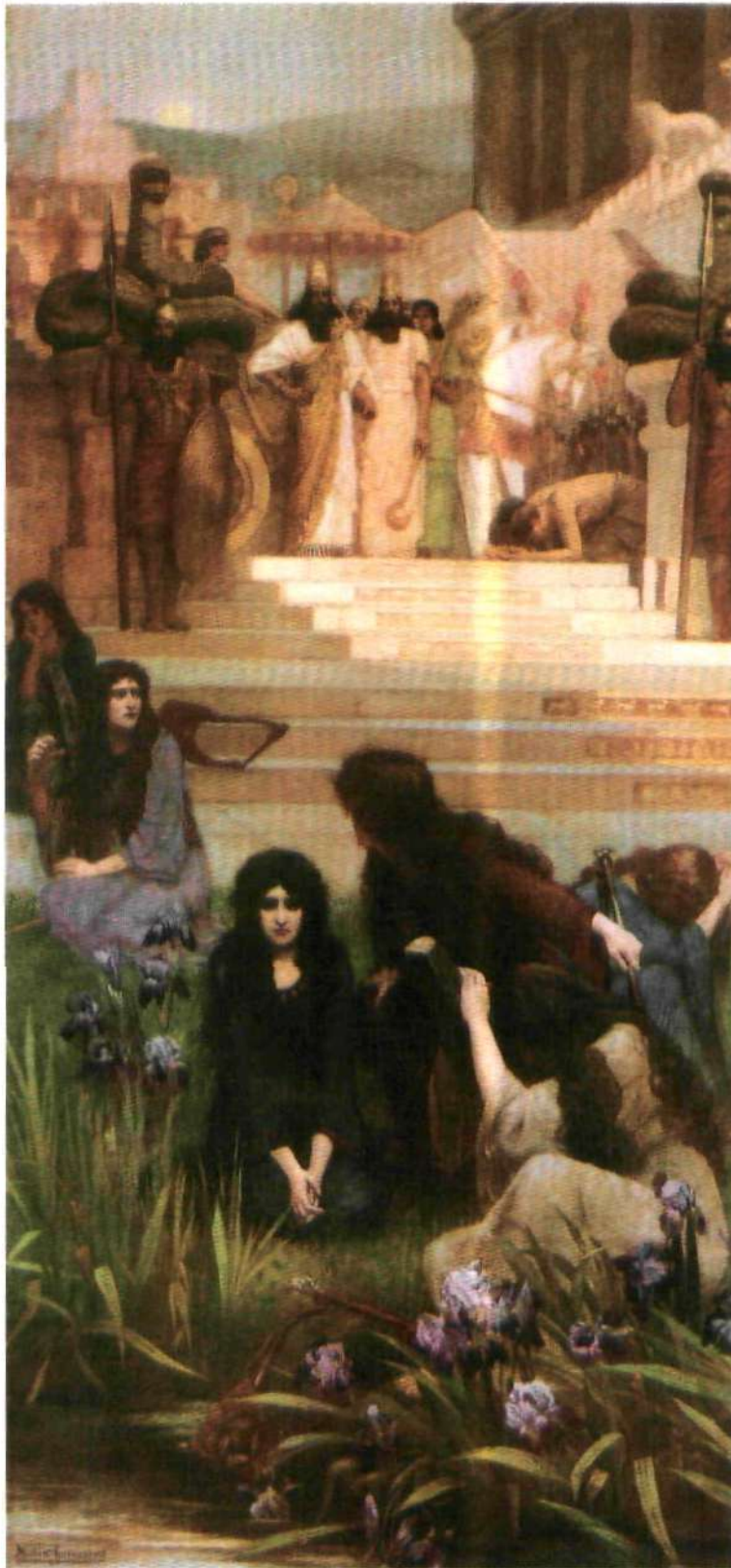
(fig.138) Ernest Normand, *David and Saul*, 1891.

Oil on canvas, dimension unknown. Current location unknown  
(Witt Library, London).



(fig.139) Maurice Lefèvre-Lourdet, *Davide calmant les fureurs de Saul*  
(*David calming the wrath of Saul*), 1886.

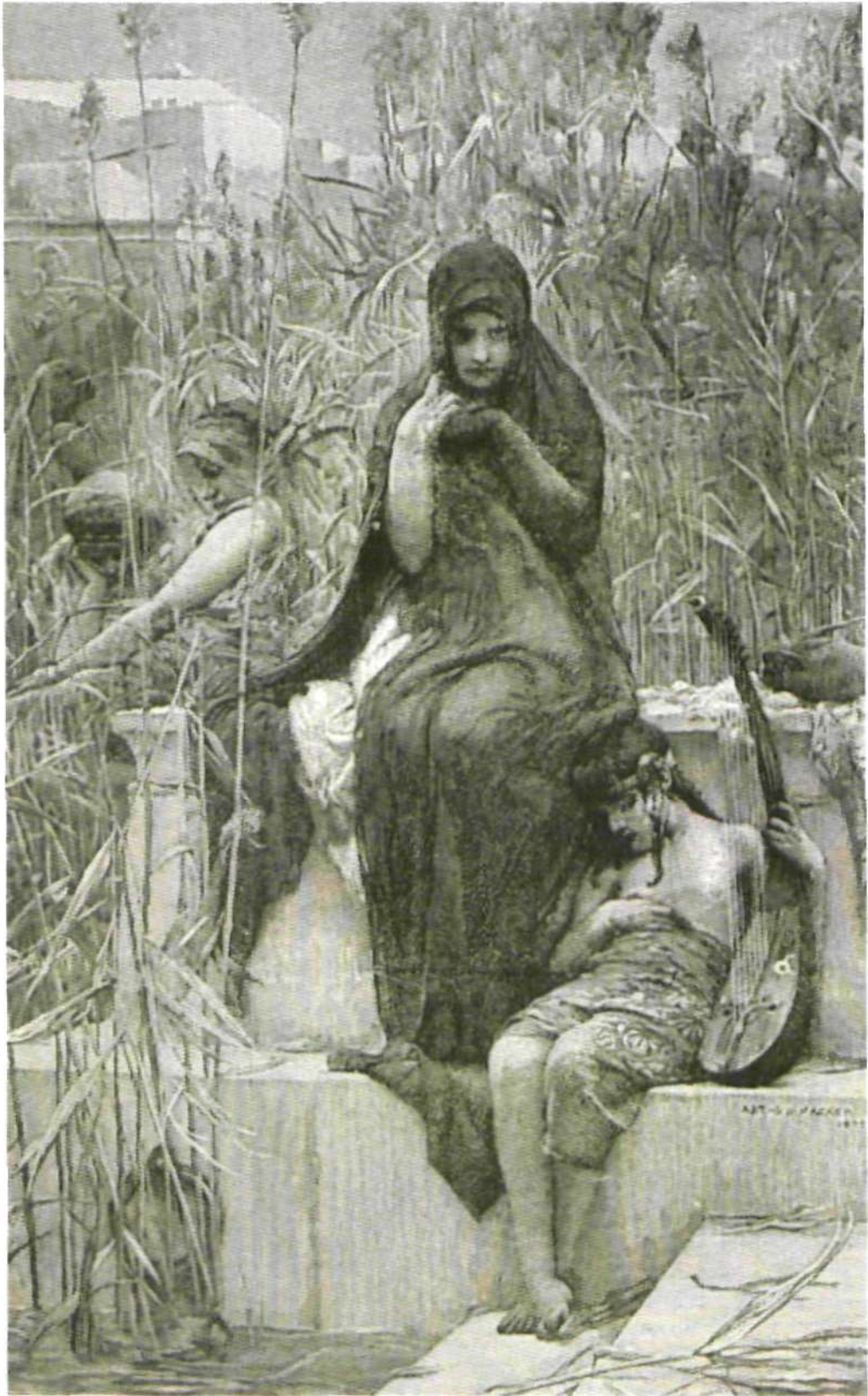
Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Current location unknown  
(Witt Library, London).



(fig.140) Herbert Schmalz, *The daughters of Judah in Babylon*, 1892.

Oil on canvas, 157.5 x 81 cm. Current location unknown  
(Sotheby's, London, 19 June 1991, lot 238).





(fig.141) Arthur Hacker (after), *By the waters of Babylon* (*By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept, when we remembered thee, O Sion*), 1888.

Wood-engraving, 15.1 x 9.5 cm. From 'The Graphic', 14 July 1888, p.44.



(fig.142) Charles Oliver Murray after Briton Rivière, *The king's libation* (detail), 1897.

Etching, 21.1 x 28 cm. From 'The Art Journal', August 1897, opposite p.246.



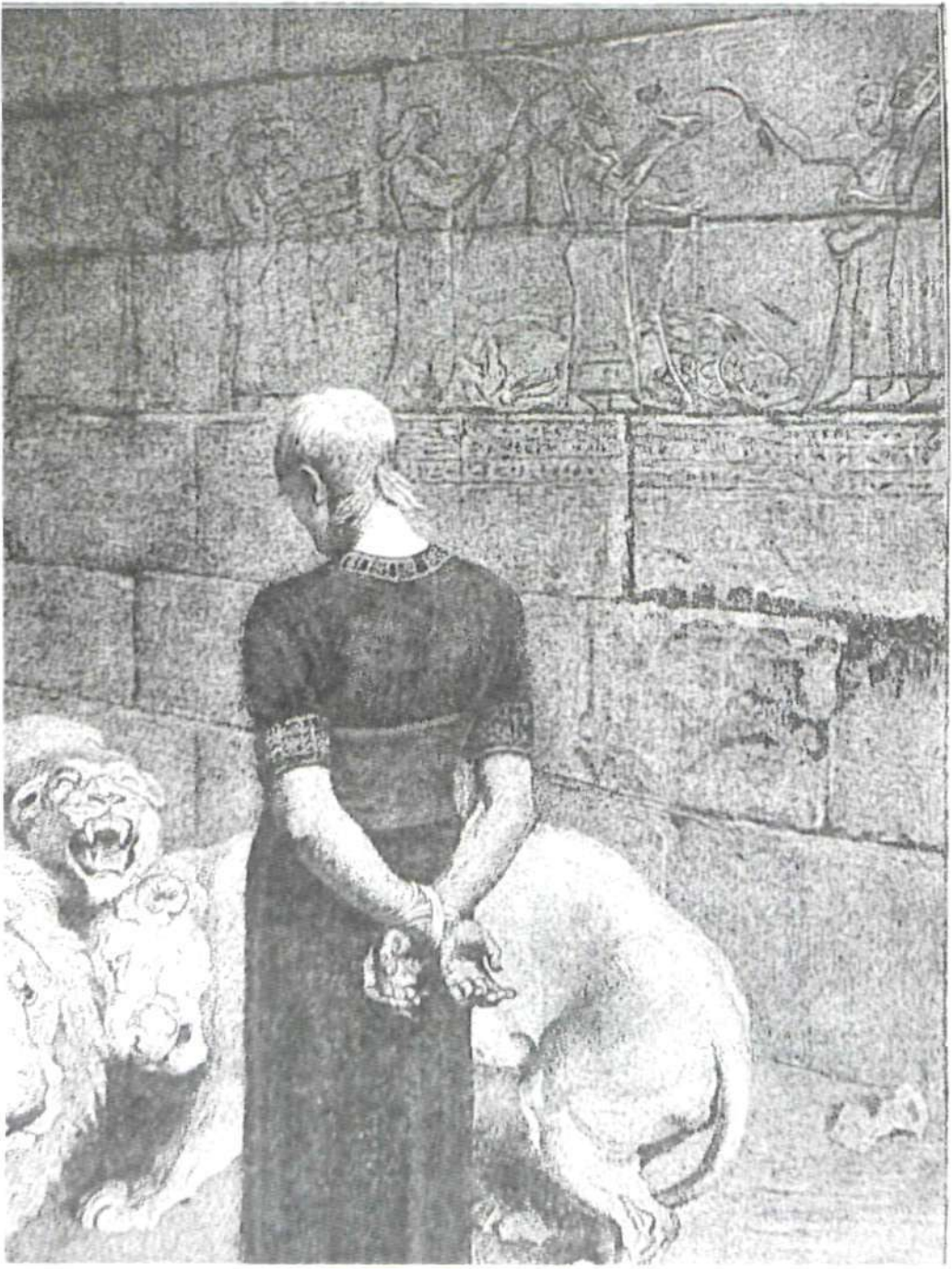
(fig.143) Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *Zal and Rudabeh*, 1882.

Etching on Japan paper, 14.8 x 20.3 cm. British Museum, London  
(PD 2002,0728.26).



(fig.144) W A Mansell & Co, *Detail from Neo-Assyrian relief of 'The banquet scene' (King Ashurbanipal and his queen relaxing outdoors), from the North Palace, Nineveh, 645-35 BC [Mansell 522c], c.1870.*

Photograph. Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham (Alma-Tadema Collection; Portfolio 20, no.8354).



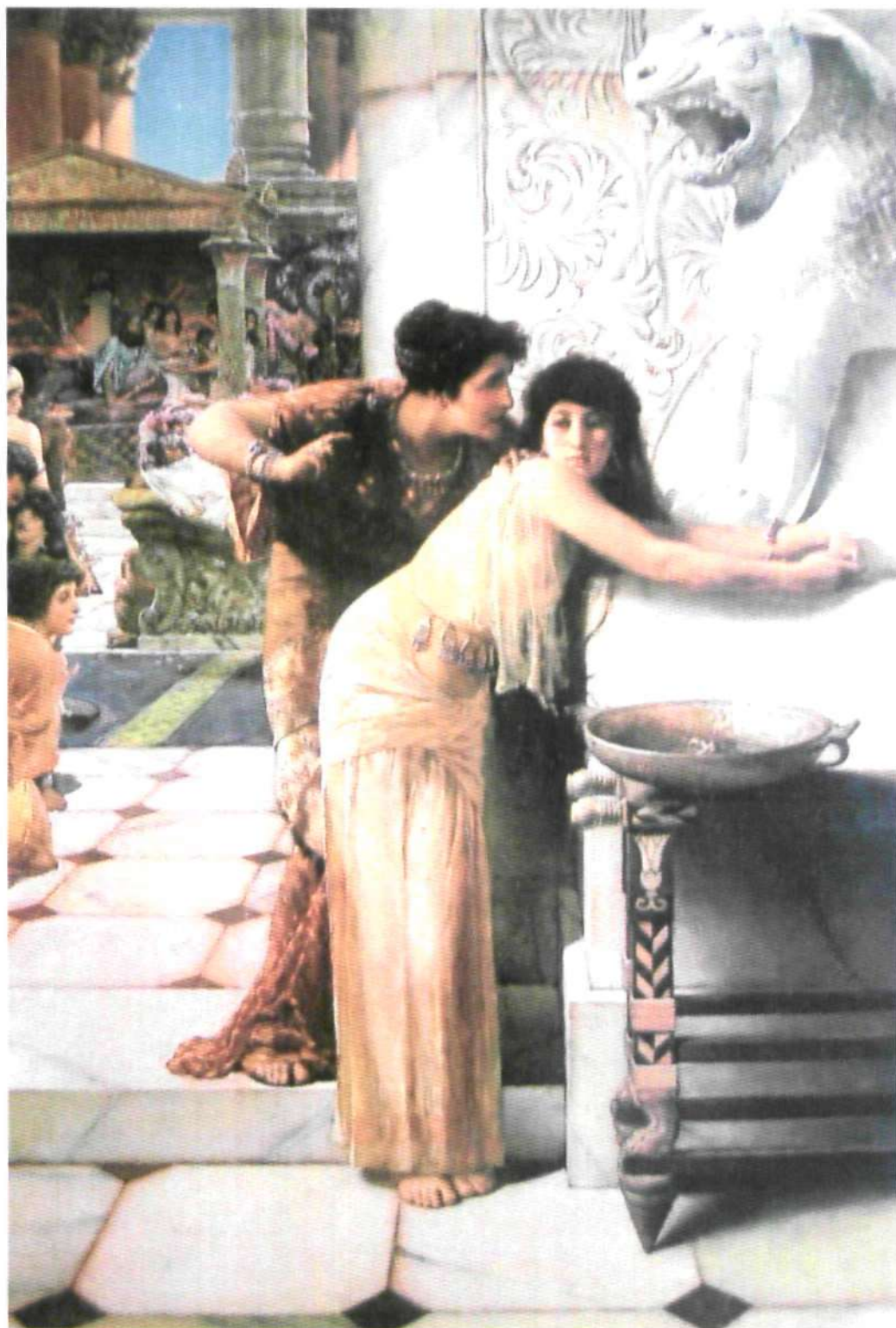
(fig.145) Anonymous after Briton Rivière, *Daniel in the lions' den* (detail), 1879.

Wood-engraving. From 'Magazine of Art', 1879, p.256.



(fig.146) Edwin Long (after), *The Babylonian marriage market*, 1889.

Photogravure, with etching and roulette on *chine collé*, 56.5 x 87.4 cm.  
British Museum, London (PD 1974,0301.11).



(fig.147) John Reinhard Weguelin, *Herodias and her daughter*, 1884.

Oil on canvas, 123.8 x 86.3 cm. Current location unknown  
(Christie's, London, 25 November 1988, lot 115).



(fig.148) John William Waterhouse, *Mariamne*, 1887.

Oil on canvas, 259 x 180 cm. John Schaeffer, Sydney.



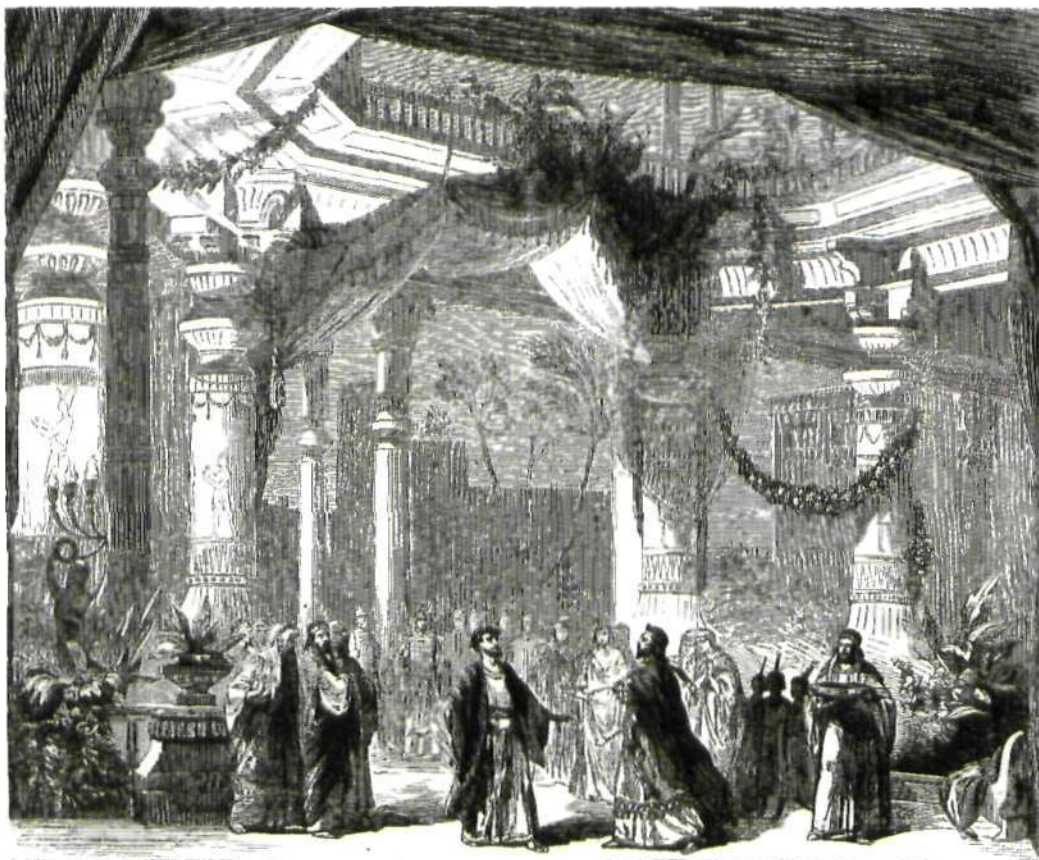


(fig.149) Neo-Assyrian, *Copper alloy lion weight, from North-West Palace, Nimrud.*  
Copper alloy, 28.57 cm (length). British Museum, London (ME 91220).



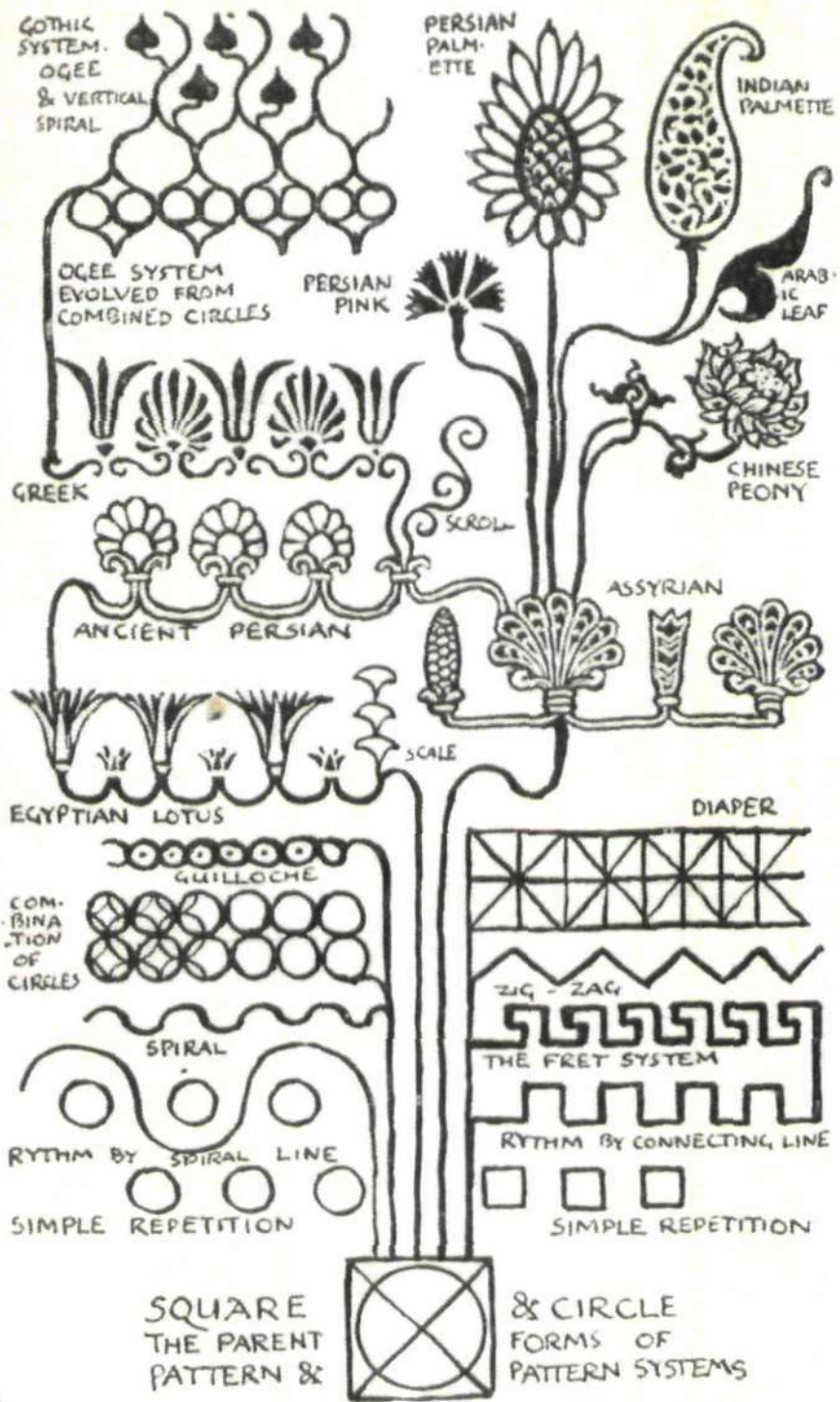
(fig.150) Edward John Poynter, *The visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon*, 1884–90.

Oil on canvas, 234.5 x 350.5 cm (with frame). Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (acc.no.898).



(fig.151) Charles Carbonneau, *'La Reine de Saba'* (*'The Queen of Sheba'*),  
*Act III*, 1862.

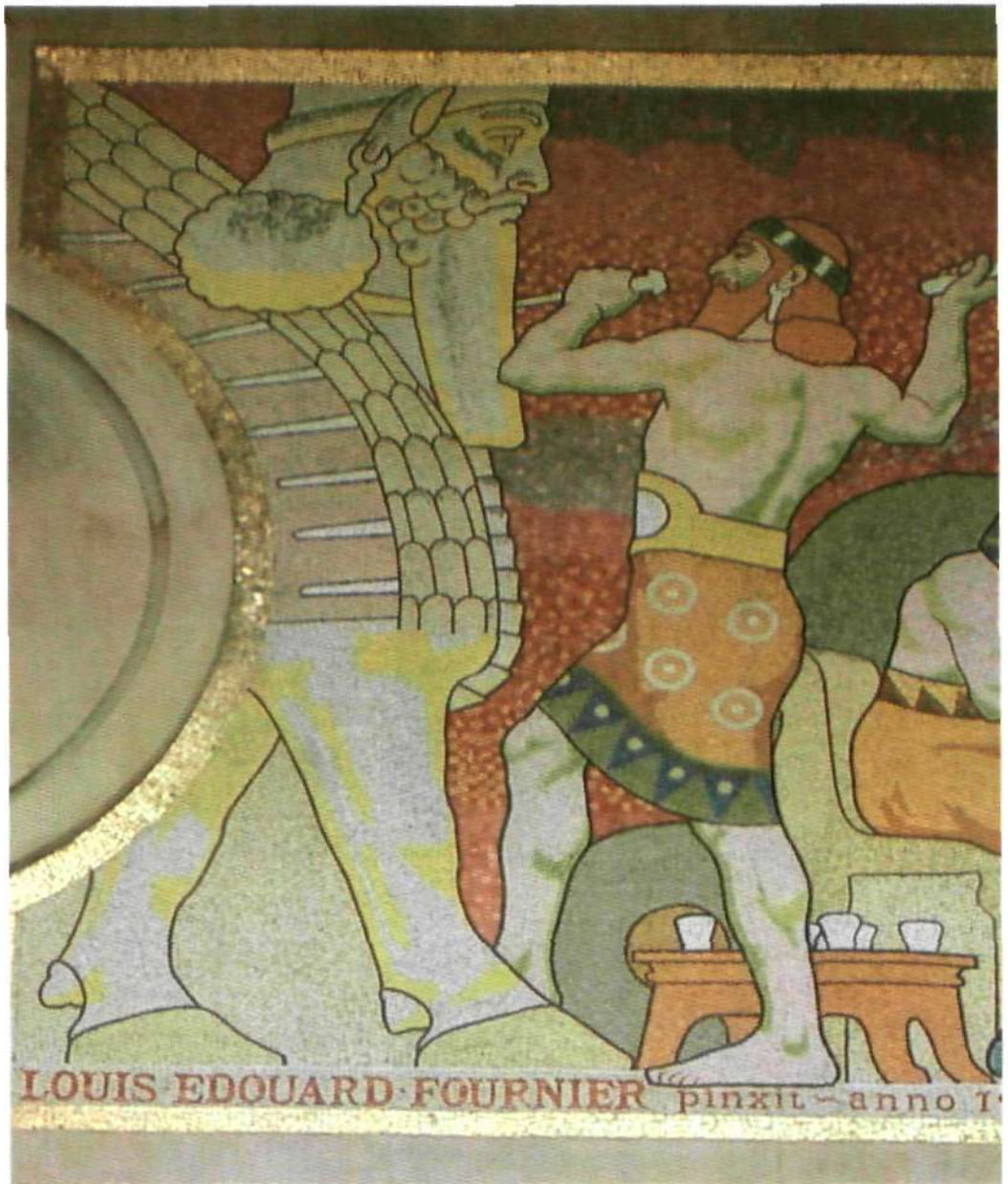
Wood-engraving, 21 x 24 cm. From *'L'Univers Illustré'*, 6 March 1862, p.105  
[front-page].



TREE OF TYPICAL PATTERN FORMS, UNITS, AND SYSTEMS.

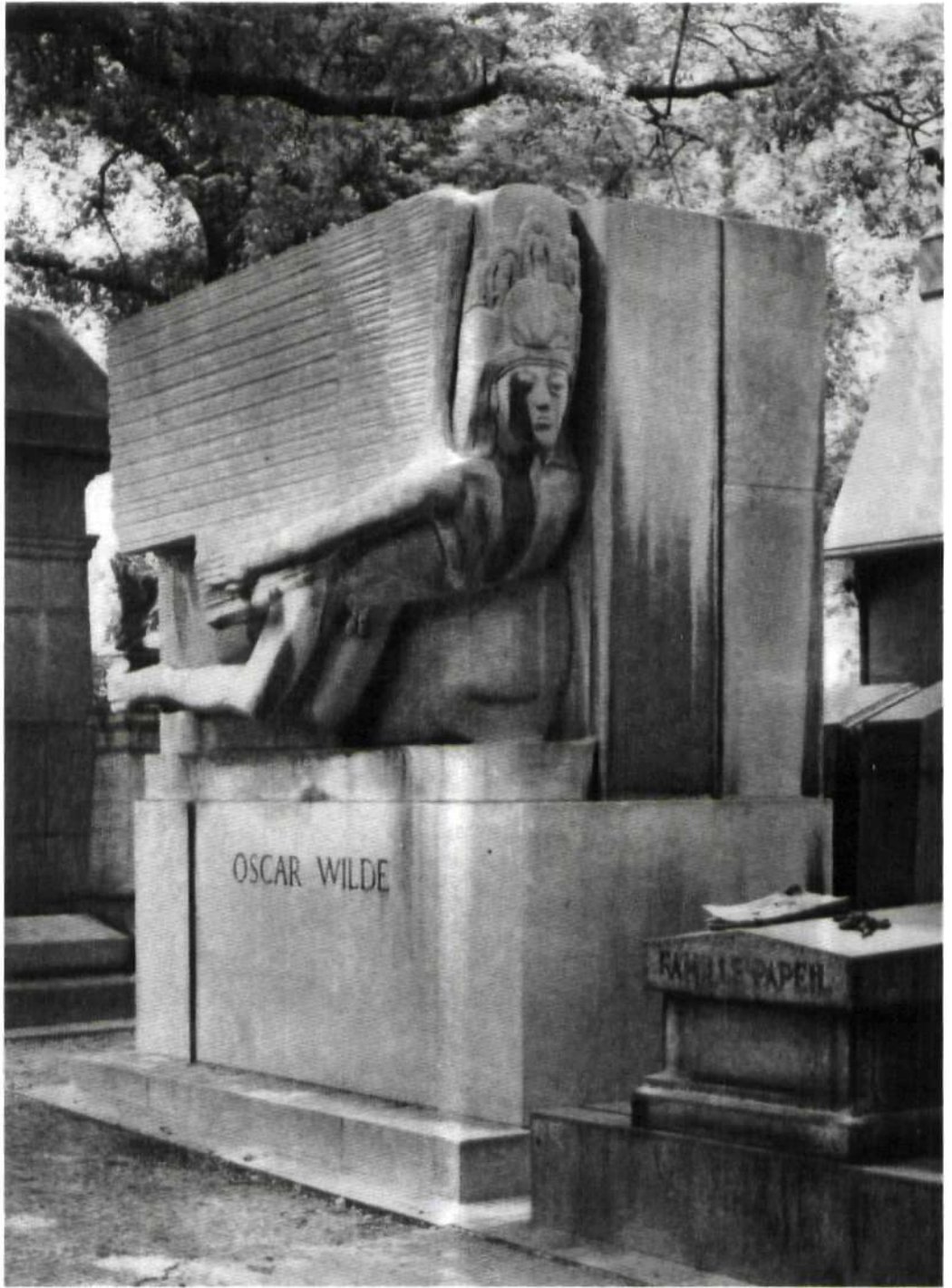
(fig.152) Walter Crane, *Tree of typical pattern forms, units, and systems*, 1898.

Process print. From 'The bases of design' (London: George Bell & Sons, 1898), p.93.



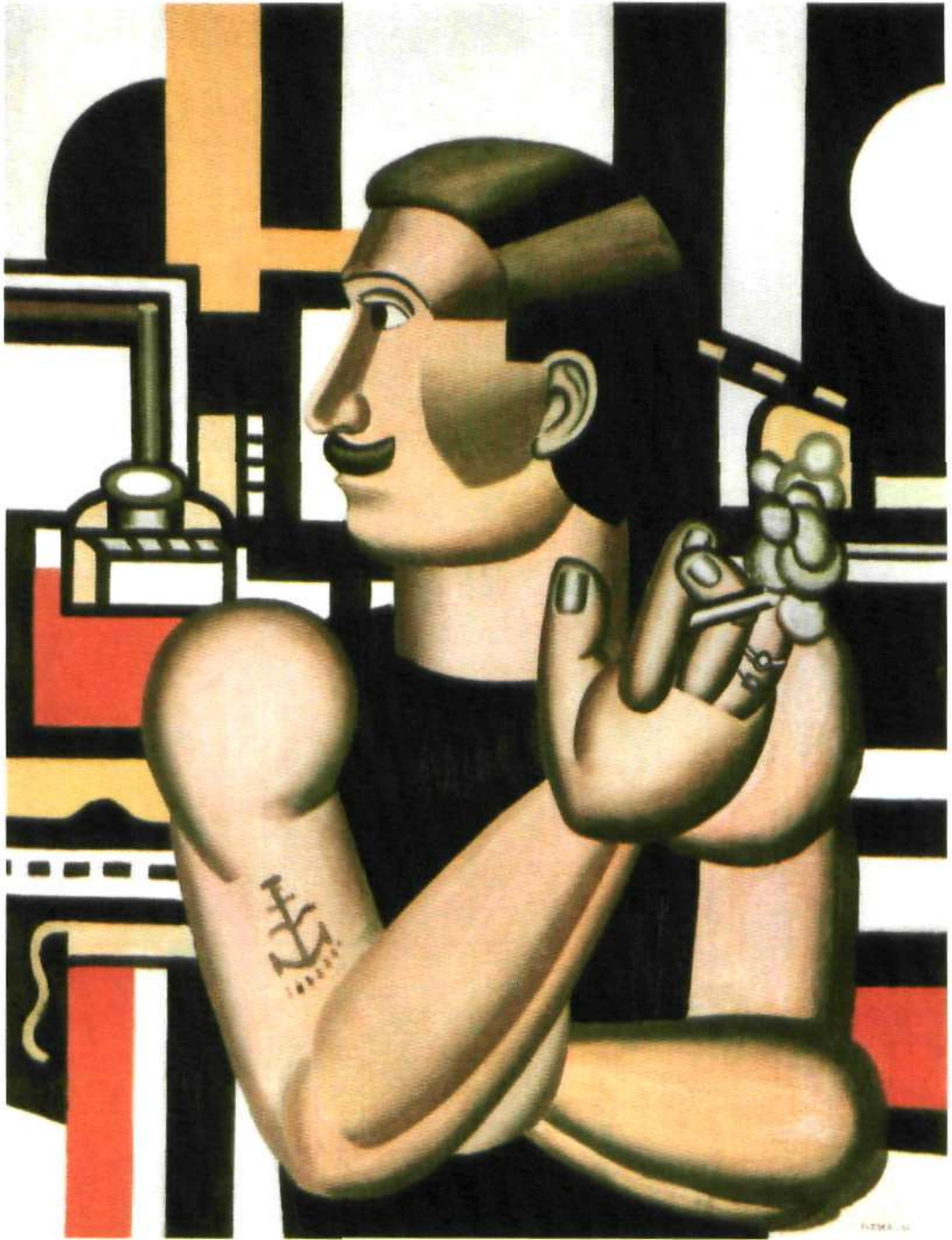
(fig.153) Louis Édouard Fournier (after), *Les grandes époques de l'art* (*Great periods in art*) (detail), c.1899–1900.

Mosaic, dimensions unknown. Façade of Grand Palais, Paris.



(fig.154) Jacob Epstein, *Oscar Wilde monument*, 1909-12.

Hoptonwood stone. Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris.



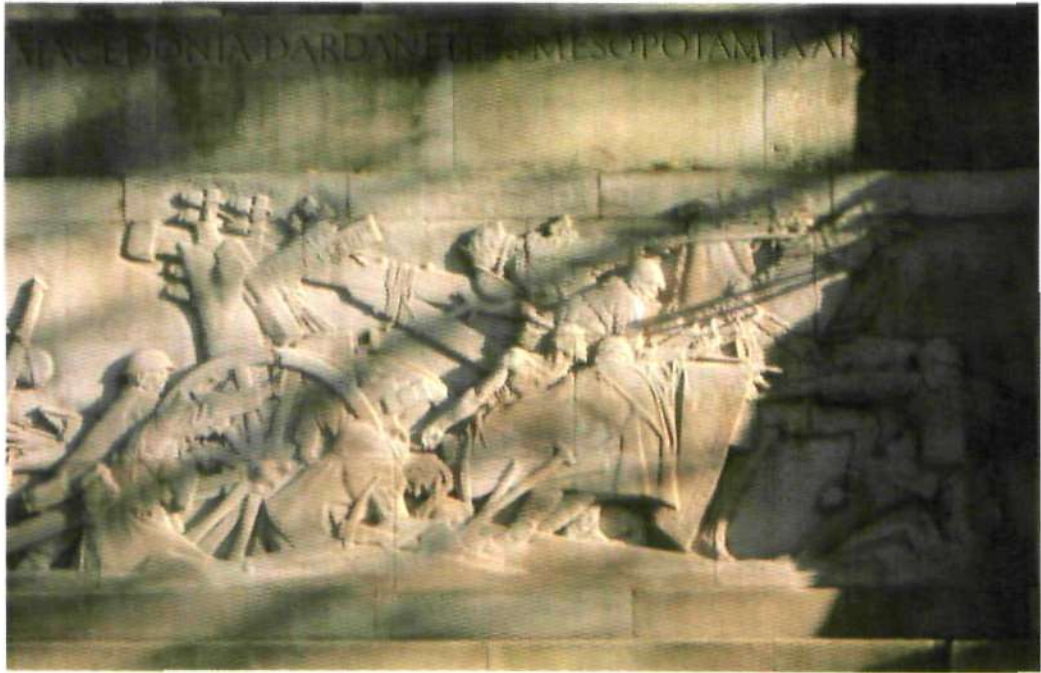
(fig.155) Fernand Léger, *Le mécanicien* (*The mechanic*), 1920.

Oil on canvas, 116 x 88.8 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (No.14985).



(fig.156) Charles Sargeant Jagger, *Royal Artillery Monument (West side)*, 1921–25.  
Hyde Park Corner, London.





(fig.157) Detail of fig.156.



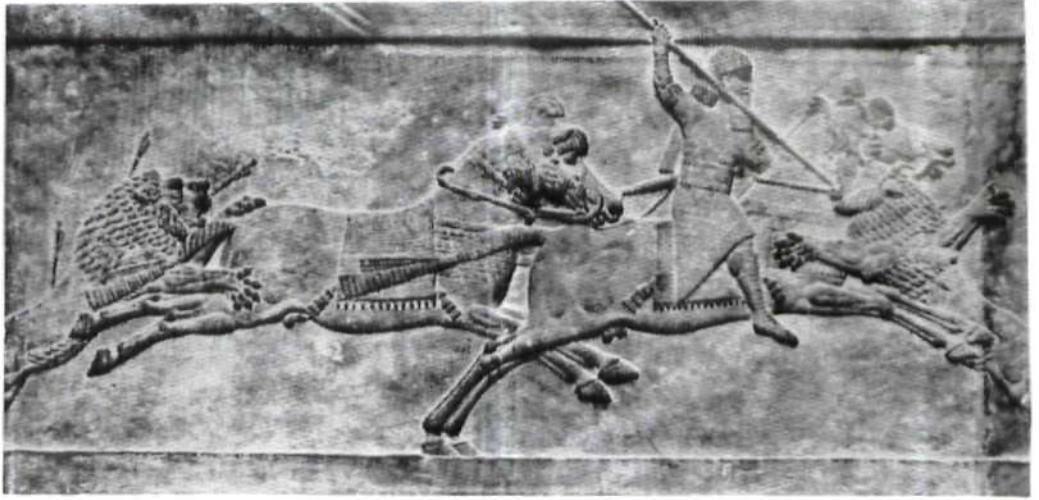
(fig.158) Anonymous, *Charles Sargeant Jagger in his studio modelling*, c.1928.

Photograph. Private collection. From Ann Compton, 'The sculpture of Charles Sargeant Jagger' (Much Hadham and Aldershot: Henry Moore Foundation and Lund Humphries, 2004), p.11.



(fig.159) Neo-Assyrian, *Scene from a sequence of lion hunting, from Room S, North Palace, Nineveh* (detail), 645–35 BC.

Gypsum, 165.1 x 116.84 cm. British Museum, London (ME 124876).



(fig.160) *Detail of Neo-Assyrian bas-relief depicting King Ashurbanipal lion hunting, from Room S, North Palace, Nineveh, 645-35 BC, 1933.*

Photograph. From Charles Sargeant Jagger, 'Modelling and sculpture in the making' (London and New York: Studio Ltd and Studio Publications, 1933), plate XXVI.



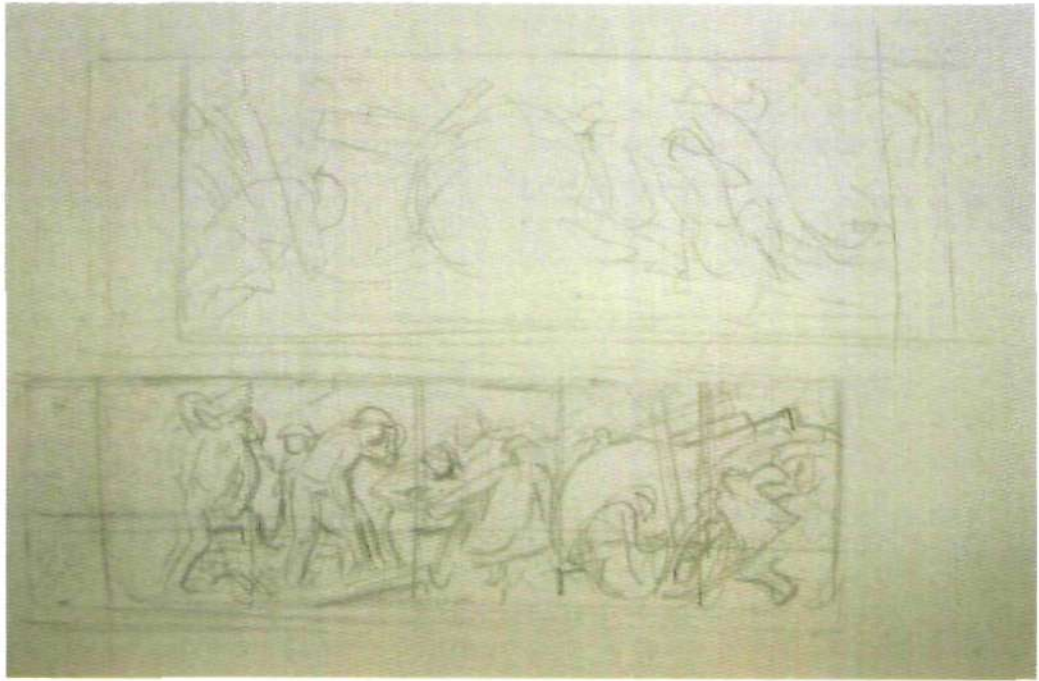
(fig.161) Charles Sargeant Jagger, *No man's land*, 1919–20.

Bronze, 126.4 x 307 cm. Tate, London (N01354).



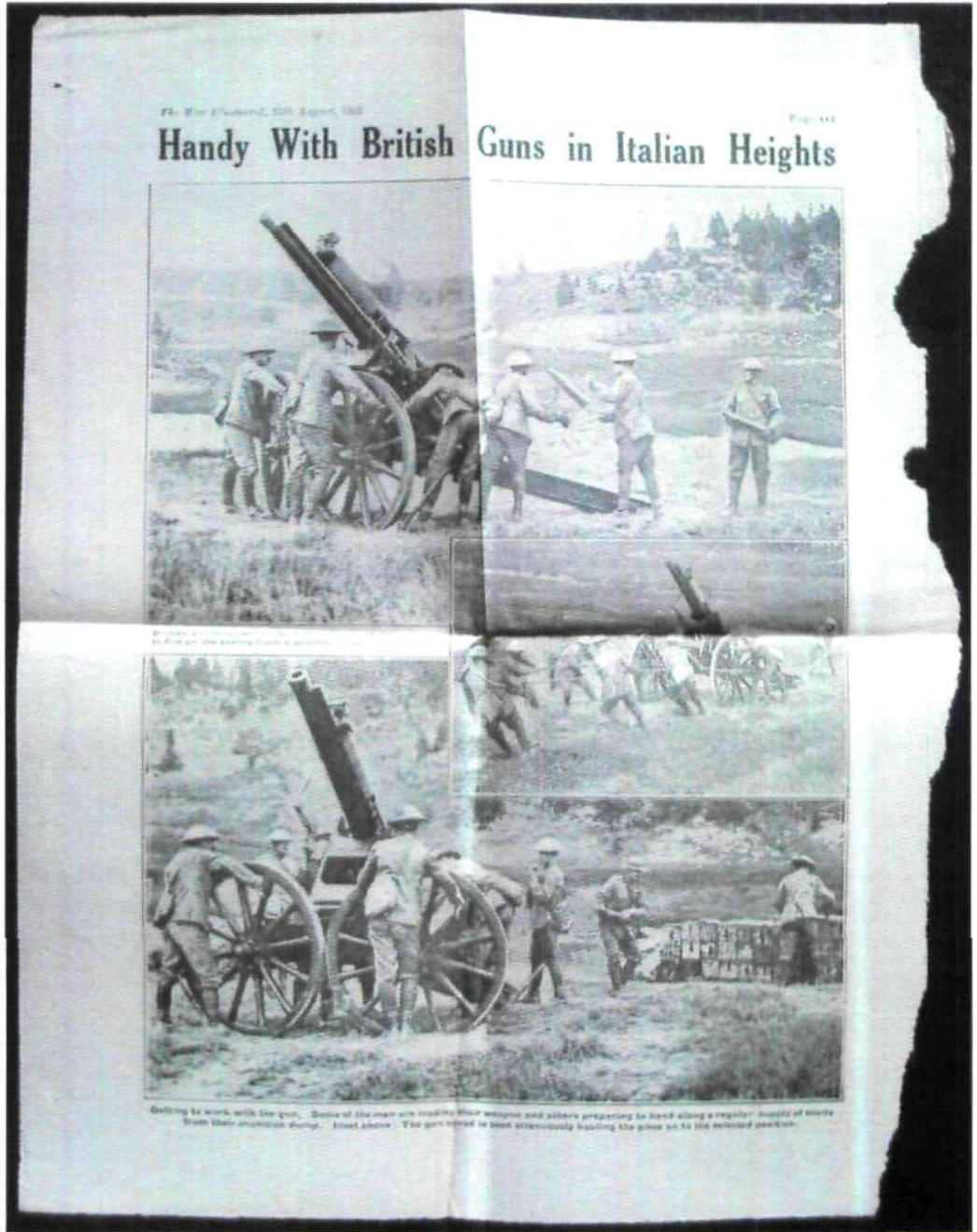
(fig.162) Gilbert Ledward, *'18-pounder gun in action'*, from the *'Guards' Division Memorial*, 1922-26.

Bronze, 168 x 305 cm. St. James' Park, London.



(fig.163) Gilbert Ledward, *Study from a sketchbook for the 'Guards' Division Memorial'* (detail), c.1922-26.

Graphite, 12.5 x 17.7 cm. Royal Academy of Arts, London (LED/23, folio 42 verso).



(fig.164) Anonymous, *Handy with British guns in Italian heights*, 1918.

Half-tone, 29.3 x 23 cm. From 'The War Illustrated', 19 August 1918, p.442. Royal Academy of Arts, London (LED/23, n.p.).





(fig.165) Mark Rothko, *The Syrian bull*, 1943.

Oil on canvas, 100.2 x 70.2 cm. Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio (1991.41.1).



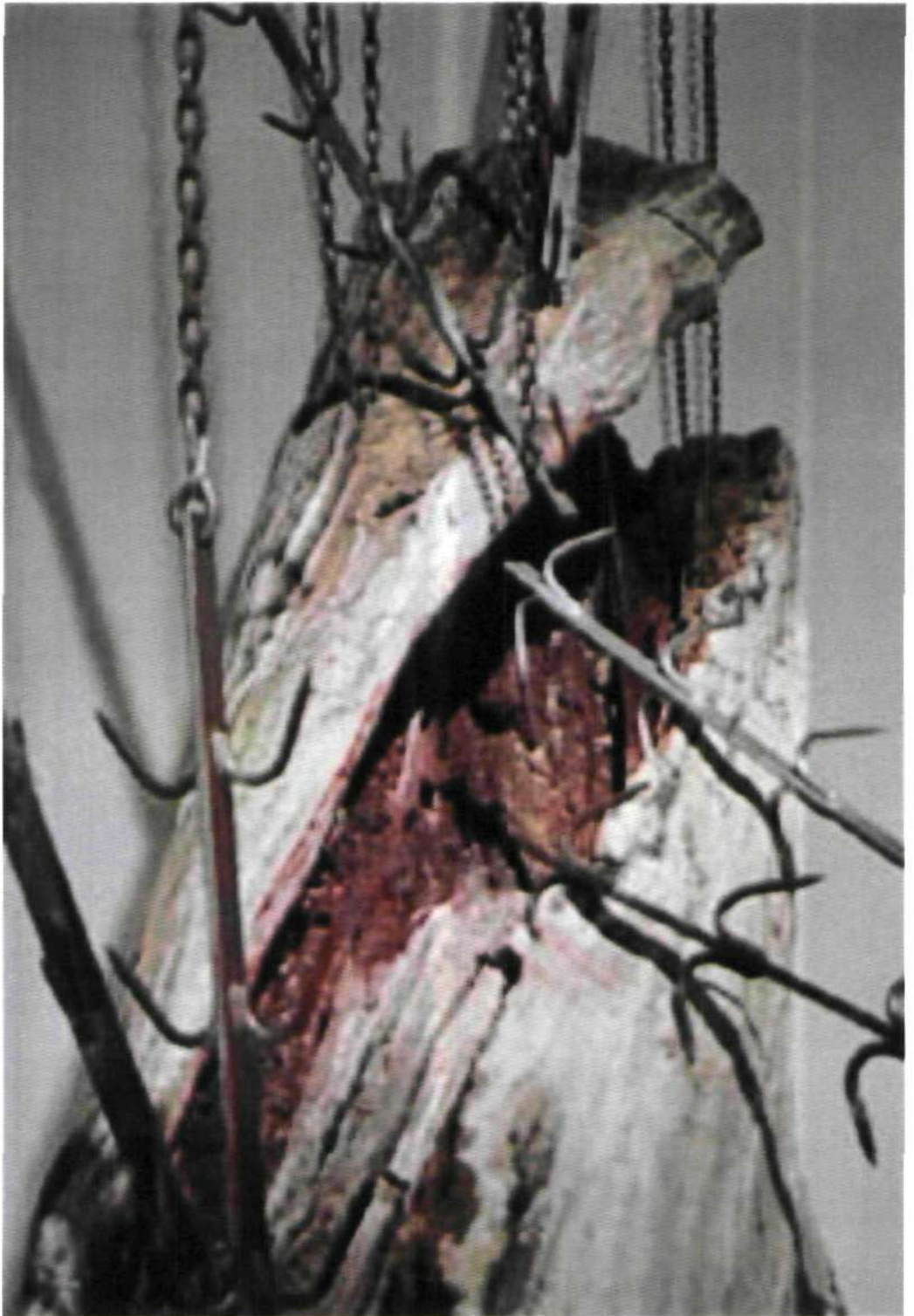
(fig.166) Mark Rothko, *Israel*, 1928.

Half-tone. From 'The graphic Bible' (New York: MacMillan Company, 1928), p.64.



(fig.167) Roger Hilton, *Sardanapalus after Delacroix*, 1973.

Gouache over charcoal, 37.4 x 56 cm. British Museum, London (PD 2003, 0601.20).



(fig.168) Gillian Jagger, *Of the hunt* (detail), 1998.

Tree trunk, meat hooks and chains, dimension unknown. Current location unknown ([www.artseensoho.com/Art/KIND/jagger99/jagger.html](http://www.artseensoho.com/Art/KIND/jagger99/jagger.html)).



(fig.169) Eduardo Paolozzi, *Untitled (from 'Museum Series')*, 1993.

Etching, 32 x 27.7 cm. Tate, London (P20149).



(fig.170) Anish Kapoor, *C-Curve*, 2007. Installation: Cour Khorsabad, Musée du Louvre, Paris, 2007.

Stainless steel, 220 x 770 x 300 cm. Collection of the artist.



(fig.171) Different view of fig.170.

