

Antiquities from Ashur: *A Brief Description of Their Fate with Special Reference to the Royal Inscriptions**

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It is a proverb among specialists in Ancient Mesopotamia that some of the most significant discoveries are made while excavating in museums rather than at ancient tells. Having carried out such excavation for some years I thought it would be useful to present a brief description of what information has come my way on the antiquities from the city of Ashur. I owe a great debt to the authorities and staff of the Arkeoloji Müzeleri in Istanbul, the Vorderasiatisches Museum in East Berlin, and the British Museum in London without whose generous assistance and co-operation this article could not have been written.¹

There have been two archaeological expeditions to Ashur, the first conducted by the Germans at the beginning of this century and the second, which is still in progress, by the Iraqis. It is the earlier expedition and the antiquities discovered then that are of concern here.

In late Ottoman times the tell called Qalat Sherqat, the site of ancient Ashur, was the personal property of the reigning sultan, Abdul Hamid II, who presented the ancient mound as a gift to Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany. The presentation was made so that the German authorities could turn the site over to archaeologists. Walter Andrae, sponsored by the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft, was commissioned to carry out the excavations there and did so from c. 1905 to 1914. The work of the expedition was then interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War, and the long years of strife followed by the socio-economic problems in Germany in the 1920s meant the end of the whole project.

Most of the discovered objects removed from the site were divided into two large lots, one becoming the property of the Sublime Porte and being shipped to Istanbul while the other became the property of the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft and was shipped to Berlin. Those objects which safely reached their destina-

tion in Istanbul may now be viewed and studied in the Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri. Those objects which safely reached Berlin were housed in the Vorderasiatisches Museum located in what is now East Berlin. More will be said about these collections in a moment. But first an unfortunate incident must be described in regard to the group shipped to Berlin.

Not all the shipments reached their destinations intact for with the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 German vessels were fair game for the British Royal Navy, and one victim was the freighter *Cheruskia*, out of Hamburg. This ship was carrying in its hold a large quantity of objects from Ashur which had been loaded in Basra and were destined for Berlin. After clearing the Straits of Gibraltar the captain, threatened by attack, sought refuge in the port of Lisbon, where to the owner's dismay, the vessel lingered for an entire year. At that point Portugal entered the war on the allied side and the *Cheruskia's* cargo, including the finds from Ashur, was immediately seized as war booty. The crates from Ashur were unloaded and eventually the Portuguese conceived the idea of creating a Museo Assyriaco with the contents. All of the boxes were hastily examined but only a few were actually unpacked, the contents being studied by two French Assyriologists present at the time, Thureau-Dangin and Contenau. Those objects that were unpacked were put on display in a small room in the University of Porto, where they remained for several years.

At the end of the First World War Andrae, the director of the Ashur excavation, began a prolonged series of tedious negotiations with the relevant German and Portuguese authorities which ultimately led to the repacking of the Ashur objects and their shipment to the museum in Berlin in 1926, twelve years after they had left Basra.² The ill-fated objects which finally arrived in Berlin by way of Portugal had suffered from the

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Julian Reade (London). A special word of thanks goes to Hans Gustav Güterbock, whose early years were spent in close association with the Ashur project directed by his uncle Walter Andrae and who kindly shared some of his memories with me.

² Andrae, MDOG 65 (1927), pp. 1–6. Also cf. Andrae, *Coloured Ceramics* p. 11, n. 2; WEA² pp. 280f. One of those present on the bank when the finds were unloaded from a canal barge directly into the museum was Andrae's nephew, Hans Gustav Güterbock.

excessive handling and, in addition, the careful system followed in the original packing of the crates had been disorganized.

Not all of the antiquities discovered at Ashur reached Berlin or Istanbul, however, for a number emerged in various cities around the world over a long stretch of time. I am speaking here of objects excavated by the archaeologists and assigned excavation numbers; these are in addition to objects that had been excavated earlier by Sir Austen Henry Layard and others and smuggled antiquities that appeared on the market before and even during the German excavations. Many items from Ashur with Ashur excavation numbers were purchased by museums from private dealers some years before the expedition's close in 1914. After 1914 even more antiquities with Ashur numbers appeared on the market or, in isolated cases, in the possession of British military personnel who had been stationed in Iraq during the First World War. A number of museums, notably the British Museum and the Louvre, acquired objects from Ashur by means of purchase or donation from such sources.³

The task of locating all the antiquities discovered at Ashur has not yet been completed. It is known for a fact that many objects, some of great historical and cultural worth are missing. Photographs were taken of all finds at Ashur as they were unearthed, and in the early years a number of inscriptions were published on the basis of excavation photographs alone. Today some of the texts so published, such as the famous Weidner Chronicle, do not seem to be in Berlin, Istanbul, or any other public collection. Some of these missing items undoubtedly perished because of mishandling before they came into the care of responsible museum authorities. This was the fate of some of the objects from the hold of the freighter *Cheruskia*, which were handled several times as described earlier. The Berlin museum experienced damage and loss during the Second World War and its Ashur collection, like its other collections, suffered from this. As an illustration of the looting that took place during this time Professor H.G. Güterbock in a private communication told me of having seen a gold tablet of Tukulti-Ninurta I, which was in the Berlin Museum before the war (Ass 23553a = VAAss 994 = Schroeder, KAH 2, 52 = Grayson, ARI 1, LXXVIII, 11), in the hands of a dealer in New York in 1954. The Ashur collection that went to Istanbul was neglected for many years, the tablets simply being stacked one on top

of the other so that many crumbled to pieces before responsible curators took charge of them.⁴

The lost group of antiquities from Ashur undoubtedly extends beyond those objects known from excavation photographs to be missing, however. From the facts already outlined it is obvious that many items were removed illicitly from the site both during the excavations and during the hostilities in Iraq in 1914–18. There is good reason to believe that many such antiquities from Ashur still lie unnoticed in public institutions or private hands.

But enough has been said about the wanderings of the objects and it is time to narrate briefly the ill-fated attempts to publish the royal inscriptions since this is the chief concern of the RIM Project. At the time of the excavations, not only were photographs taken of all objects but also copies, casts, and squeezes were made of the inscriptions. As the texts appeared Andrae described them in his frequent reports from the site, the reports appearing in the *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft*, volumes 21 (1904) to 54 (1914). But Andrae was primarily an architect, not a philologist, so that the descriptions of the inscriptions in his reports are of very limited value to the text editor. Fortunately Andrae was able to consult Delitzsch from time to time in Germany, and Delitzsch visited the expedition in the summer of 1905. It was intended that all the royal inscriptions should be presented in full in one publication and the first volume of this work, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur: historischen Inhalts*, appeared in 1911. Considering that the excavations had only begun a few years previously and were actually still in progress, this was a respectably early date of publication. However, this initial effort had suffered problems and delays as described by Delitzsch in the preface.

The work of preparing the texts had been undertaken by Delitzsch with the assistance of Messerschmidt. They prepared their copies of the cuneiform texts on the basis of the copies, casts, squeezes, and photographs made by Andrae in the field and on the basis of copies and collations done by Delitzsch during his stay at Ashur in the summer of 1905. But the fact that the originals were divided between two locations, Berlin and Istanbul, proved to be a serious obstacle. Messerschmidt was prevented from doing the necessary collations of the originals in Istanbul by a fatal illness, and his uncorrected copies were published posthumously by Delitzsch as KAH 1.

3 See excursus for details of Ashur texts in the British Museum.

4 Regarding the care and treatment of the Ashur collection in Istanbul see: Kraus, 'Die Istanbul Tontafelsammlung' *JCS* 1 (1947), pp. 93–119; Çiğ and Kizilyay, 'Studies on the Assur Collection,' *Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri Yıllığı* 11/12 (1964), pp. 185–7, and 'Die Arbeiten an den Keilschriftlichen Urkunden im archäologischen Museum zu Istanbul,' *Unger Memorial* p. 261–9;

Çiğ, 'Neuere Studien über die keilschriftlichen Dokumente an der Tontafelsammlung des archäologischen Museums zu Istanbul,' *Otten Jubilee* pp. 47–51, and 'Nerere Arbeiten an der Tontafelsammlung des archäologischen Museums zu Istanbul,' *Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri Yıllığı* 15/16 (1969), pp. 217–20. Further bibliography is listed by Çiğ in *Otten Jubilee* p. 47, n. 1.

Only one further volume in this series, Schroeder KAH 2, appeared and that was eleven years later (1922). The publication of this tome had been delayed by the First World War and the ensuing politico-economic problems in post-war Germany. By this time the original plan to publish all the royal inscriptions in full had been abandoned, 'wegen der Ungunst der Zeit' as Weber stated in the preface, and only texts of 'Bedeutung' were included. The copies were prepared by Schroeder on the basis of the originals in the case of those objects in Berlin but, in the case of objects that were to be found elsewhere, on the basis of photographs or preliminary copies by others, notably Messerschmidt and Andrae. This was not a satisfactory basis for preparing definitive copies but even worse happened. Before his work was done Schroeder left the service of the Prussian Academy so he was unable to complete his collations of even the Berlin texts before the publication of his copies in KAH 2. Thus the celebrated volumes of royal inscriptions from Ashur, KAH 1 and 2, are neither complete in scope nor reliable in detail, the serious deficiencies being not the fault of the individual scholars but of the times and circumstances in which they lived.

No further attempt was made to publish complete copies of the royal inscriptions from Ashur but in the mid-1920s Weidner, in collaboration with Böhl and Meissner, began a series (*Altorientalische Bibliothek*) which was to publish editions of all cuneiform texts. The one volume of this series that appeared, *Die Inschriften der Altassyrischen Könige* (Leipzig, 1926; edited by Ebeling, Meissner, and Weidner), contained the earliest Assyrian royal inscriptions (down to Shalmaneser I) then known. Unpublished texts from Ashur were included on the basis of copies prepared by Weidner from excavation photographs, and previously published texts were collated by Weidner, as far as possible, with photographs and casts. Even this book, as useful as it is, has serious drawbacks. It is incomplete and out-of-date, and for the texts published no copies were presented. Moreover none of the originals in Istanbul was examined, with the result that there are serious misunderstandings and misreadings.

Weidner published the Ashur inscriptions of some later reigns in a number of articles in *Archiv für Orientforschung* and in his monograph *Die Inschriften Tukulti-Ninurtas I. und seiner Nachfolger* (Graz, 1959). By 1959 he could collate the originals in neither Istanbul nor Berlin and he worked exclusively with his own notes, the excavation photographs, and some copies by Messerschmidt and Köcher. During this same period a number of royal inscriptions were published in one form or another in the excavation reports of the Ashur expedition, the most important being Andrae's *Die Festungswerke von Assur* (Leipzig, 1913).

Before concluding this history of the attempts to publish the royal inscriptions of Ashur one fact must be emphasized. The scholars whose names are connected with this ill-fated enterprise were highly competent and dedicated Assyriologists who did the best they could

under extremely unfavourable circumstances. It was not their fault that only the longest or most interesting texts were published and that even these were often presented without consulting the originals, thus leading to misreadings and misunderstandings. These faults are particularly evident in the texts now stored in Istanbul, the various editors never having examined these in the original.

A catalogue of the inscribed objects from Ashur is being prepared by the RIM Project as part of a programme for cataloguing all royal inscriptions. The basic research is now being done by Hannes Galter, and the computer program is being prepared by Louis Levine. We would welcome any pertinent information from institutional authorities or individuals.

Excursus: Ashur texts in the British Museum

In 1911 the British Museum purchased a group of antiquities from J.E. Gejou of Paris (accession date 1911-4-8). Most of the inscriptions were published in King, CT 32 and 33. The tablets from Ashur are (for details of registration and publication see Walker, CT Index p. 36): BM 103387, 103388, 103391, 103391A, 103392, 103392A, 103393, 103393A, 103394, 103394A, 103395, 103396, 103445. An unpublished tablet, BM 103385 (1911-4-8), 75), also belongs to this group and joins VAT 13651 (LKA 107) and A 3445, the latter purchased for the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, by J.A. Breasted in 1919-20 in Baghdad (information courtesy I. Finkel).

In 1912 Thureau-Dangin published the tablet in the Louvre inscribed with Sargon's letter to Ashur (TCL 3). This tablet came from Ashur - see Weidner, AfO 12 (1937-9), pp. 144-8.

In 1914 a group of objects was purchased by the British Museum from A. Amor and this contained the following objects from Ashur:

- 1914-4-7, 22 = BM 108856 = Walker, CBI no. 189
- 25 = BM 108859 = Smith, CT 37, pls. 24-32
- 26 = BM 108860 = Smith, CT 37, pls. 24-32
- 27 = BM 108861 = Smith, CT 37, pls. 24-32
- 28 = BM 108862 = Leeper, CT 35, pls. 1-8

There is one BM entry from Ashur for 1919:

- 1919-11-10, 1 = BM 114263 = Gadd, CT 36, pls. 8-12; cf. Weidner, Tn. p. ix, no. 12 and Grayson, ARI 1, LXXVIII, 12.

In 1920 two bricks (of Adad-nārārī I) from Ashur were purchased from Colonel R.M. Baron by the British Museum. One of these bricks was not actually given a registration number until 1979:

- 1920-5-20, 1 = BM 114402
- 1979-12-20, 375 = BM 115035
- See Grayson, ARI 1, LXXVI, 29; Walker, CBI no. 124; BM Guide 1922, p. 65, nos. 174 and 175.

The British Museum purchased another large group from Ashur in 1922 (accession date 1922-8-12). The Ashur objects in this group are:

- BM 115687 = Ass 10557 = Grayson, ARI 1, LXXVI, 3
 BM 115688 = Ass 6366 = Grayson, ARI 1, §§173-7
 BM 115689 = Ass 16850 = Grayson, ARI 1, XXXIII, 7
 BM 115690 = Ass 19977 = Grayson, ARI 1, XXXII, 1
 BM 115691 = Ass 18601 = Grayson, ARI 1, LXXVII, 17
 BM 115693 = Ass 18438 = Grayson, ARI 2, LXXXVII, 4 (Schroeder, KAH 2, 66; cf. BM Guide 1922, p. 66)
 BM 115695 = Ass 19820 = Grayson, ARI 1, LXXI, 1
 BM 115696 = Ass 20488 = Grayson, ARI 1, XXXII, 2
 BM 115697 = Ass 13467 = Walker, CBI no. 189
 BM 115702 = Ass 19521 = about two dozen potsherds have this number but only one has the trace of an inscription: [...] *na-din* [...]
 BM 115703 = Ass 5286 = Inscribed door socket of Esarhaddon, duplicate of Nassouhi, MAOG III/1-2, pp. 19ff. (cf. Borger, *Asarh.* pp. 9f. §9)
 BM 115705 = Ass 7433 = Grayson, ARI 2, C, 7; Walker, CBI no. 142
 BM 115706 = Ass 7434 = Grayson, ARI 2, C, 7; Walker, CBI no. 142
 BM 115708 = Ass 7408 cf. Grayson, ARI 2, C, 7; Walker, CBI no. 142
 BM 116399 = Ass 9464 = Andrae, *Festungswerke* p. 7 and pl. C11; Schramm, *EAK* 2, p. 94

BM 120122 ('purchased from Mocatta') is a horse-training text similar to those published by Ebeling, *Wagenpferde* (text identified by D.S. Kennedy, June 1981) and therefore must have come from Ashur.

The 1922 lot also includes over a hundred items from Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta. There is an inscribed brick from Ashur in the City of Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (Walker, CBI no. 123). Another inscribed brick, 'found at Ashur by Lt. Col. P. Weir in 1918,' is now in the Ashmolean Museum (Walker, CBI no. 128).