
Reviews of Books

NEW LIGHT ON NIMRUD: PROCEEDINGS OF THE NIMRUD CONFERENCE 11TH–13TH MARCH 2002. Edited by J. CURTIS, H. MCCALL, D. COLLON AND L. AL-GAILANI WERR. pp. 290. London, British Institute for the Study of Iraq, 2008.
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This book presents the papers at the conference held on Nimrud (ancient Kalhu, Calah) in the British Museum in 2002. It is in effect a review of the now more than one hundred and fifty years of archaeological explorations of the site; in this role it is stunningly successful.

In the first contribution Julian Reade traces the history of the exploration of Nimrud. The early years read as a roll of honour of the foundations of Assyriology – Layard, Rassam, Loftus, Rawlinson, George Smith and others all came to the site and left their mark in one way or another. Particular attention is given to the history of how sculptures from the site were packed and shipped and how they were treated once in the British Museum. The next chapter, by Anthony Greene, sets out to tell the story of the Swiss businessman Julius Weber who was based in Baghdad and carried out his own excavations at Nimrud in the early 1860s. He sets this in context by reviewing the evidence for both early visitors and early excavators at Nimrud – the latter starting by at least 1815 with the explorations of Ahmed Pasha of the Jalili family. Little is known in detail of Weber's excavations but he did send back to Zurich a number of reliefs originally excavated by Layard in addition to a small collection of cylinder seals and other objects (not all of which however will be from Nimrud). A chapter by David Oates summarising the results of the excavations of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq is followed by a presentation of the Nimrud Database by David Thomas. The excavations carried out by Iraqi archaeologists are summarised by Manhal Jabr with a chapter on restoration by Rabi'a al Qaissi. Paola Fiorina summarises the excavations carried out by Italian teams in 1987–1989 on both a city gate and in Fort Shalmaneser; finds included foundations deposits and a rich selection of ivories. John Curtis describes the excavations carried out by the British Museum in 1989; here the finds again included ivory and in addition numerous artefacts of bronze (weapons, armour, ornaments of equine apparel), inlaid glass and glazed bricks with a range of pictographic and Aramaic alphabetic signs on the reverse. The personal contributions of Max Mallowan and Agatha Christie are celebrated in chapters by Henrietta McCall and Charlotte Trümpler. The following papers deal with more detailed reports on the work of the Iraqi teams – the discovery and excavation of the royal tombs and the underground vaulted complex (Muayyed Damerji, Muzahim Mahmud) and of Well 4 in Courtyard 80 (Junaid al Fakhri). The vaulted complex was an underground construction consisting of a passage, with three vaulted chambers leading off, which had been cleared out in antiquity but in which were found jumbled bones, seals, jewelry and both miniature and larger vessels. The well was dug to a depth of 22 m. The contents were a gruesome mass of tangled skeletons – estimates of the number of individuals vary from 120 to 200 – many with their hands or feet shackled. In amongst this mass were personal effects such as cosmetic bottles, jewelry and seals. Noting the similarity in finds between the well

and the vaulted complex, Julian Reade makes the convincing proposal that the latter was originally used as communal crypt for palace personnel which was subsequently looted by the Medes and Babylonians. He suggests they cleared out the bones of the Assyrian individuals and threw them down the well and then used the complex as a prison, perhaps for the wretched individuals whose manacled skeletons were later deposited down the well. There are then contributions dealing with different aspects of the materials found in the recent excavations – gold working techniques (Donny George), textiles (Elisabeth Crowfoot), ivory (Georgina Herrmann), seals (Lamia al-Gailani-Werr, Dominique Collon), bronze coffins and other metal objects (both John Curtis), ceramics (Arnulf Hausleiter) and inscriptions in Akkadian (Farouk al Rawi), Aramaic (Alan Millard) and on a bowl inscribed with Hittite Hieroglyphs (David Hawkins). Michael Müller-Karpe, Manfred Kunter and Michael Schultz present the results of a paleopathological investigation of the skeletal material. Other contributions explore the identity of the occupants of the tombs (Stephanie Dalley) and examine the tombs in the light of our other knowledge of Assyrian burial customs (Postgate). Moving away from the tombs, the architecture of the Northwest Palace is addressed in thoughts on room function (John Russell) and on the décor of the throne room (Michael Roaf), the two neatly segueing into a virtual reconstruction of the palace (Samuel Paley). Finally, contributions by Christopher Walker and Ali Yaseen Ahmad on archives at Nimrud and by Jeremy Black on the libraries provide excellent surveys of the provenance and distribution of the epigraphic material.

In conclusion, this volume gives an extraordinarily interesting and useful overview of the history and results of work at the site of Nimrud over the period of more than 150 years of archaeological activity. It is an immensely valuable contribution. In conjunction with David and Joan Oates' *Nimrud, An Imperial City Reconstructed* (2001) we have a comprehensive and authoritative guide to this wondrous material. The editors and authors of the present volume are to be most warmly thanked for their efforts in bringing together and producing a volume which will be of lasting significance. johnmacginnis@aol.com

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IVORIES FROM NIMRUD VI. IVORIES FROM THE NORTHWEST PALACE (1845–1992). By G. HERRMANN AND S. LAIDLAW (with a contribution from H. COFFEY). pp. 260 and 137. London, British Institute for the Study of Iraq, 2009.

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This sumptuous and beautifully produced book brings together under one volume all the ivories found in the Northwest Palace of Nimrud over the last 160 years in the excavations of Layard, Rawlinson, Rassam, Loftus, George Smith, Mallowan and the excavations of the Iraqi State Board for Antiquities and Heritage. In addition to the material from the Northwest Palace the volume also includes the material from the Central Palace and from the Town Wall Houses. As noted by the authors, the disruptions, depredations and destruction caused by the Gulf Wars means that many of these pieces may never be seen again.

Chapter One sets the scene with an extremely useful examination of the political scene in the near east in the late second and early first millennia BCE. The background to the explosion of ivory production in this time period is the reconfiguration of the Levant into a network of independent city states following the collapse of the Hittite Empire and the Egyptian Twentieth Dynasty around 1200 BCE. While ivory is listed among the tribute given to Tiglath-Pileser I by Byblos in 1109 BCE it was really in the course of the ninth, eighth and seventh centuries that the huge quantities of ivories