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MESOPOTAMIA +

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MESOPOTAMIA +

It is easy to overlook the fact that Mesopotamia's 7,000 years legacy also has contemporary relevance by being that of modern Iraq. This sets the background for the first two articles, sharing a critical perspective for developing and framing cultural heritage as the use of the past at the service of present. In "Mesopotamian Heritage and Hope" it is the period from antiquity to the Mongolian Sacking of Baghdad in 1258 AD that is in focus, consolidating the hope generated by the recent historic visit of Pope Francis to Iraq. In the second piece, "Owning the Past", Paul Collins develops this further by describing the actual experience of staging an exhibition in which museum culture is utilized for countering current Mesopotamian impasses. Suha Rassam echoes this in the third piece. Her passionate discourse includes early Christianity and the impending existential threats faced by Christianity in Iraq.

Of course, Britain has had a long association with modern Iraq, and this is pointed out in the fascinating piece by Ghanim Alsheikh. Here we are presented with the case of the little known British monument near Basra. In addition, Hugh de Saram and John Osborne take us back in time to the Mesopotamian clay tablet records. Hugh highlights his journey discovering the richness of Biblical Archaeology and John informs us about one of the most important discoveries in Nineveh, the Flood Tablet - literature in its infancy. The final article is about the journey of the Winged Bull from Nimrud in Mesopotamia to Victorian London. This Mesopotamia+ on-line edition was developed for extra content and improved aesthetics. We are grateful to the individual authors.

Raik Jarjis, Editor
Jonathan Jarjis, Sub-Editor

Front cover: The Ashmolean Museum (University of Oxford)

CONTENTS

Editorial 01

Mesopotamia in a Nutshell 03

Mesopotamian Heritage and Hope 04

**Owning the Past: From Mesopotamia to Iraq
at the Ashmolean Museum 11**

Christianity in Iraq 17

The Concealed British mausoleum in Mesopotamia 22

**Biblical Archaeology: Documents from Old
Testament Times 28**

The Story of Gilgamesh 32

Rendezvous at Margil 36



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Mesopotamia in a Nutshell Raik Jarjis

Mesopotamia is derived from the ancient Greek word, Μεσοποταμία, used to describe the historical western-Asia land between the two great rivers, Tigris and Euphrates. It is widely recognised as the Cradle of Civilization and “open” society (c 4000 BC) - the Sumerian, Babylonian, Akkadian and Assyrian Empires are credited with developing writing, agriculture, first cities and written laws. 1st century Christianity reached Mesopotamia, and it was here that Islamic Civilization reached its zenith (8th to 14th centuries AD), linking Greek and Western Civilizations.

The Ottomans ruled over Mesopotamia from the 16th century until the end of WWI, when Modern Iraq was formed incorporating most of Mesopotamia. Iraq is a multi-faith, multi-ethnic and oil-rich country. With Baghdad as its capital, Iraq conjures fabled thoughts of the “Arabian Nights” plus memories of such luminaries as T.E. Lawrence, Gertrud Bell, Freya Stark and Agatha Christie. It was at the archaeological sites of Ur, Nineveh and Nimrud that the mystery writer Agatha Christie assisted her archaeologist husband Max Mallowan and wrote several of her books. In recent times, Iraq has been devastated by geopolitical conflicts, including the fateful western invasion of 2003. Pope Francis visited Iraq in March 2021.



The Ziggurat of Ur

Mesopotamian Heritage and Hope

RAIK JARJIS

The location of Mesopotamia, (Iraq), between the warring Persian and Byzantine empires, proximity to the Holy Land, and its Christian and Islamic roots shaped its destiny. Western interest gained momentum during early parts of the 19th century by those curious about the roots of Western Civilization and archaeological treasures. This continued well into the 20th century, when interest in another treasure, oil, was also ignited. Below is a highly selective overview of Mesopotamia's ancient and Islamic heritage, plus diversity, aimed at making some sense of the aftermath of the fateful 2003 western invasion of Iraq. The text includes the recurring theme of the March 2021 visit to Iraq by Pope Francis– viewed here as a declaration of hope.

Ur to Nineveh

It was Neil MacGregor who whilst at the helm of the British Museum in London stated the following: "modern cities everywhere have Mesopotamia in their DNA". His reasoning is well supported by the archaeological evidence of developed urbanisation, including governance and administrative written records. In addition, MacGregor went further by including several objects from Mesopotamia, (modern Iraq), in his acclaimed radio broadcasts, 'A History of the World in 100 Objects'. One of them is the Standard of Ur from 2600-2400 BC, a finely wrought wooden box inlaid with shells and lapis lazuli with panoramas depicting life in ancient Sumer. It was excavated at the Sumerian city of Ur which recently captured the international headlines, for it was at the plain of Ur, the birthplace of Abraham, that on 6 March 2021 Pope Francis celebrated diversity in Iraq by presiding over an inter-faith meeting.



Fig. 2 The Standard of Ur (British Museum)

A 3100 – 3000 BC clay writing tablet measuring 9x7 centimetres was also

rightfully chosen by Neil MacGregor. This Lower Mesopotamia object is in fact one of the earliest examples we know of writing and how to use it to administer society. We should note that, as pictographic writing developed into cuneiform, the foundations of civilized society that rest on written language came into being.

Fig. 3 Lower Mesopotamia 3100-3000 BC Writing Tablet (British Museum)



From this era thousands of documents have been excavated, including the earliest known written code of law, that of the Sumerian King Ur-Nammu. The custom of recording on clay tablets then spread north with the rise of the Babylonian and Assyrian empires during the second millennium BC.

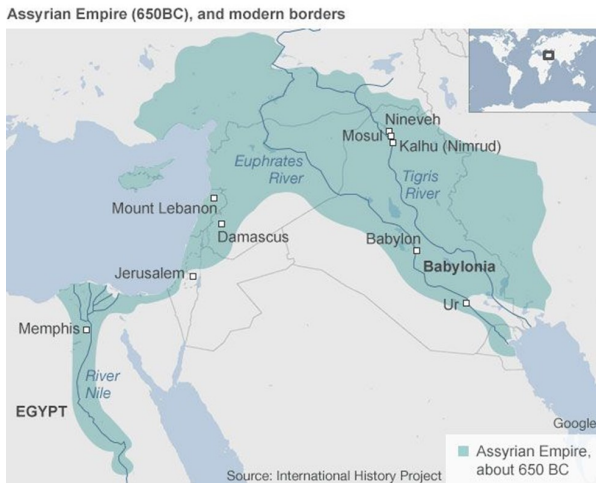


Fig. 4 The Assyrian Empire (650 BC), and modern borders. At its height, this was an empire that stretched from the shores of the Persian Gulf to the mountains of Anatolia and the flood plains of Egypt. It had the most advanced civilization in antiquity for the period between 900 and 600 BC due to its wealth, technical advancements, and military strength. (Note the locations of Nineveh, Mosul, Nimrud, Babylon and Ur)

In fact one of the greatest discoveries of cuneiform inscriptions was the first millennium BC library of Assurbanipal at Nineveh, the capital of Assyria near Mosul in northern Iraq, which was excavated in the 1850's by a British archaeological team led by Layard & Rassam. Its 25,000-odd tablets and fragments

are inscribed in bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian texts containing literary and religious works, incantations and letters, as well as diverse astronomical, medical and lexicographical writings. The library was established in the seventh century BC by the Assyrian King Assurbanipal, and it contained among its tablets that of the Flood, (featuring in *History of the World in 100 Objects*).

Fig. 5 The Flood Tablet (British Museum) and The Lamassu with a second winged figure (by Layard, New York Public Library)



The Nineveh Plain is, of course, where the human-headed winged bull Assyrian colossus, Lamassu, originated. History was made here in 1845 following the arrival of an educated and artistic British Adventurer named Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894) at a house in Mosul that overlooked the Tigris in order to meet Christian Anthony Rassam, (1808-1872), a Chaldean Christian, explorer and British vice-consul at Mosul.

The vice-council introduced Layard to his talented 19 years old brother, Hormuzd Rassam, (1826-1910); and the pair soon bonded strongly, discovering shared captivation by the ruins around Mosul. Layard and Rassam went on to reveal the archaeological secrets of Assyria, including its Lamassu and the library of Assurbanipal. Rassam became the first archaeologist born and raised in the Middle East; and he continued working when Layard retired to join the Diplomatic Service. Rassam spoke Arabic, Turkish and Syriac Aramaic, the language of the Assyrian Christians. He admired his loyal friend Layard, briefly attended Oxford University, and finally lived in England as a Protestant Victorian Gentleman. Rassam is credited with discovering the Flood Tablet in 1853 at Kouyunjik in Nineveh. However, deciphering of the tablet in 1872 is credited to George Smith (1840-1876), who whilst working at a backroom in the British Museum in London read in the tablet a story about a world drowned by a flood, about a man who builds a boat, about a dove released in search of dry land. Smith soon realised that he was

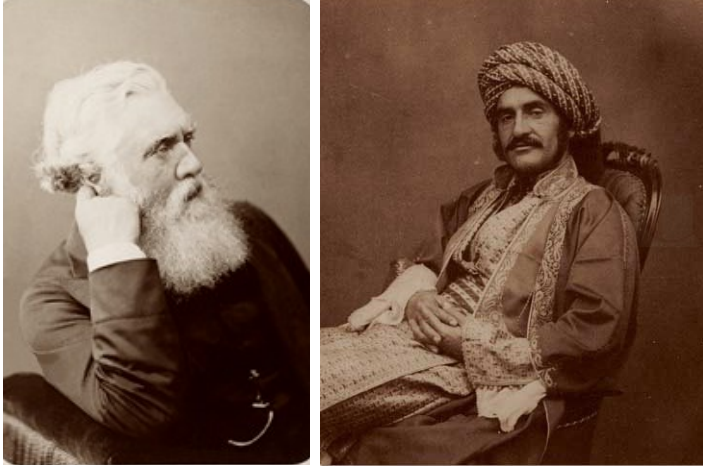


Fig. 6 Austen Henry Layard (l) (1883) and Hormuzd Rassam

not looking at Genesis but Gilgamesh.

Hormuzd Rassam is also credited for the 1879 discovery in Babylon of the famed Cyrus Cylinder (see History of the World in 100 Objects). Now at the British Museum, this 6th century BC clay cylinder contains a charter by the Persian King Cyrus the Great of a declaration in Akkadian cuneiform script of religious tolerance and multi-culturalism, the earliest known form of Human Rights Proclamation.

In March 2021 Pope Francis pronounced a Prayer for the Victims of the War within Mosul's ruins close to the rubble of the house where Layard and Rassam first met.

Fig. 7 The Cyrus Cylinder



'They Came to Baghdad' ⁽¹⁾

Zoroastrianism from Persia plus the flourishing of the Abrahamic faiths have had a direct effect on the course of Mesopotamian history - Judaism first in 597 BC, instigated by exiles in Babylon, then Christianity, arriving during its 1st century. This cosmopolitanism proved to be significant in the aftermath of the Arab Muslim conquest of 636 AD - native Christians and Jews played important roles during the golden age of Islam when the empire was ruled from Baghdad, founded by the Abbasid Caliph Mansur in 762 AD.



Fig. 8 The Abbasid caliphate (750-1258)

The Abbasid court admired scholarship and noted relevant practices of the Sassanians in Iran and also of their caliph predecessors, the Umayyads in Damascus. They established in Baghdad Bayt Al-Hikma (House of Wisdom), to which multi-lingual Christian scholars belonged, joined by converging thinkers from the Islamic empire in order to preserve the heritage of Greek knowledge and expand on it in mathematics, astronomy and medicine.

(1) 'They Came to Baghdad' is the title of the 1951 adventure novel by Agatha Christie.

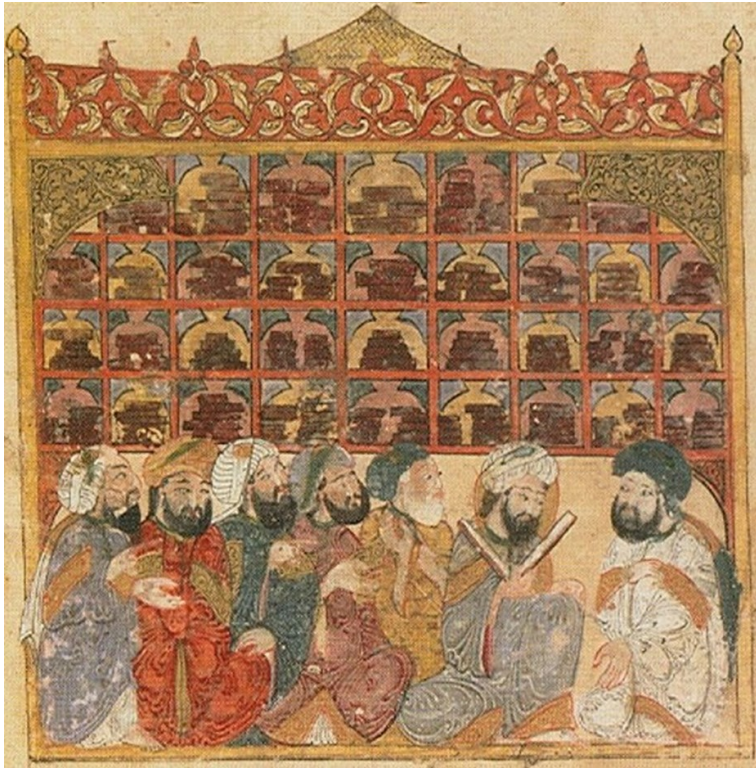



Fig. 9 Scholars at the library of the House of Wisdom (from "Maqamat al-Hariri". Baghdad 1237 AD) <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8422965p/f20>

It was under Al-Mansur, Al-Rashid and notably Al-Ma'mun (813–833 AD) that Arab scholarship, art and architecture reached their zenith, turning the period into yet another Mesopotamian epoch in human history.

However, this all came crashing down when the terror from the Mongolian steppes of Central Asia finally arrived. Three armies of Hulegu, the grandson of Jingiz (Genghis Khan), converged on Baghdad in 1258 AD, massacring its population and decimating its heritage.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a small, ancient stone figurine. The figurine has a human-like face with large, dark, circular eyes and a simple, somewhat abstract expression. Its body is covered in vertical, ribbed lines, suggesting a textured surface or a specific material. The hands are positioned to hold the figurine from the sides and bottom, showcasing its form. The background is dark and out of focus, emphasizing the object.

OWNING
THE PAST

PAUL
COLLINS

OWNING THE PAST: FROM MESOPOTAMIA TO IRAQ AT THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM

The Ashmolean Museum at the University of Oxford is home to one of the UK's major collections from the Ancient Middle East. The material ranges from the earliest farming village communities such as Jericho around 9000 BC, to cuneiform tablets such as the famous Sumerian King List (about 1800 BC) from Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), and stone fragments from Persepolis in Iran, centre of the great Achaemenid Persian Empire of the fifth century BC. These objects, along with many others, will be redisplayed as part of a refurbishment of the Museum's Ancient Middle East gallery, scheduled to open in June 2021. The new displays will focus on the lives of the ancient inhabitants of the region, providing context through the arrangement of objects with photographs and reconstructions.

A number of projects have taken place over the last few years to help develop and shape the narratives in the gallery. This includes a temporary exhibition called *Owning the Past: From Mesopotamia to Iraq* which explores the history of how ancient objects from Iraq came to the Ashmolean in more detail than will be possible in the permanent gallery. Crucially, it highlights the impact that these events have had and continue to have on the lives and identities of people from the Middle East. The approach is part of a museum-wide strategy designed to proactively address issues of equity and inclusion. Called 'Ashmolean for All', it aims to improve the way the Museum represents, works with, and includes diverse communities and individuals: existing visitors, potential visitors, staff, and volunteers. Part of this work involves rethinking our institutional history and the stories we tell in the galleries.

The exhibition was inspired by the attempts of so-called Islamic State or Daesh to eradicate the borders of Iraq and the lives of many of its peoples in the years 2014-17. The Ashmolean seemed the perfect place to consider the origins of these borders, especially in the context of the region's archaeology and heritage, as a number of the Museum's employees and Oxford alumni were instrumental in their creation as well as the formation of the University's ancient Middle East collection: David Hogarth (Keeper of the Ashmolean from 1909 to 1927), T.E. Lawrence, Leonard Woolley, and especially Gertrude Bell. They were fascinated by the ancient Middle East because they considered it to be at the root of 'Western Civilization'. A number of cuneiform tablets had entered the Bodleian Library in the later 19th century, but it was Hogarth who began to acquire examples for the Ashmolean, while Bell, Lawrence and Woolley contributed seals and other objects they had purchased

on their travels or excavated in Syria.

Fig. 2 Gertrude Bell in Iraq in 1909



Their knowledge of the Middle East became important when the Turkish Ottoman Empire decided to enter the First World War on Germany's side in 1914. Britain sent troops to protect its route to India and oil supplies in Iran by invading the Ottoman province of Mesopotamia through Basra. By 1917 British forces (mainly soldiers from India) had entered Baghdad. The region's ancient objects now made unusual and portable souvenirs for the occupying soldiers and two were donated

at that time to the Ashmolean and are displayed in the exhibition. One is a Sumerian statue uncovered by soldiers of the Indian army serving with the British, digging trenches at Istabulat, 13 km south of Samarra on the River Tigris. It dates to around 2400 BC and had almost certainly been dedicated in a temple. The front of the figure has been damaged by the pick of the soldier who discovered it. The commanding officer of the 14th King George's Own Ferozepore Sikhs, an Englishman called Colonel Earle, donated it to the Ashmolean in 1919. In the same year a brick stamped with a cuneiform inscription reading 'Palace of Shalmaneser, son of Adad-Nirari, King of Assyria' that had been picked up by British soldiers passing by the remains of ancient city of Ashur was also donated to the Museum.

After the war, Britain was granted authority over Mesopotamia by the League of Nations and Gertrude Bell was instrumental in helping to establish a Kingdom of Iraq. As Honorary Director of Antiquities, she also wrote Iraq's antiquities laws and established an archaeological museum in Baghdad. British colonial control of Iraq now allowed the University of Oxford and Chicago's Field Museum to jointly undertake an excavation at the site of Kish between 1923 and 1933. It was led by Stephen Langdon, Oxford's Professor of Assyriology. His aim was to find cuneiform tablets, while the Field Museum was interested in archaeological and ethnographic artefacts.

As a result, the agreement of 1922 with the Antiquities Department of Iraq allowed that after the official division of objects, Oxford was to receive all the remaining inscribed objects, while Chicago received archaeological, skeletal and scientific material; both institutions would also get representative collections of the categories not allocated to them for museum display. Hundreds of local men and boys were soon digging vast holes in the tells in a search for objects.

In 1926, Langdon in one of his rare visits to Iraq also conducted the first of two seasons of excavation at the site of Jemdet Nasr, thereby adding some 200 proto-cuneiform tablets – some of the world’s earliest writing - to the Ashmolean’s collections.

As thousands of antiquities were being removed from Iraq to museums around the world throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, the challenge of finalising the borders of Iraq proved to be less than straightforward. It would take more than a decade of discussion and debate to decide where the borders should be drawn since any line on a map inevitably meant separating communities or including some within new states while denying others; people’s individual and group identities were challenged, disrupted and even erased.

To explore the impact of these events on people in the region, we involved local members of the Syrian, Iraqi, and Kurdish diaspora, with the help of paid Community Ambassadors, in the development of the exhibition. Listening to their views about the events of 1914 to 1932 (when Iraq nominally gained independence of Britain), and what these meant to them as individuals as well as to their communities, we have sought to represent them in the exhibition. Together, in a series of workshops, we discussed whether archaeological objects were important in telling their stories and how their sense of identity and community has been maintained in a distant land. The exhibition is therefore an opportunity to highlight the long-lasting impact of the past on the present, explore what is meant by heritage, the role of museums, and introduce voices and stories of people not previously visible in displays devoted to the very histories and heritage of their homelands. To help make the exhibition as accessible as possible, it was decided that it should be dual language – Arabic and English.

One of the most significant recent challenges to their heritage had been the attack on both historic monuments and the modern borders of Iraq by ISIS/Daesh. This was an attempt to destroy heritage as part of the lived experience of people, their very identities. To explore that question of relationships between the past and present identities through objects we have included a response by the artist Piers Secunda. He made a copy of an Assyrian relief in the Ashmolean collection (that had arrived in Oxford in 1852), damaging it by imposing ISIS bullet holes into the broken blocks using moulds of he had taken of sculptures in Mosul museum in



2018.

The exhibition concludes with reflections on Iraq's heritage today and questions who should be making decisions about it, not least the heritage that now lies outside Iraq's borders. We highlight the Nahrein Network <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/nahrein/> as a successful model for helping to support Iraqi researchers in reclaiming their own heritage as local history, putting it to constructive use for their communities.





Owning the Past: From Mesopotamia to Iraq runs until 16 May 2021 (discussions are currently underway which may allow for an extension of the closing date): <https://www.ashmolean.org/event/owning-the-past> For a BBC report on the exhibition: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgM7k34L-JI>

Paul Collins, BA, MA, PhD is Jaleb Hearn Curator of Ancient Near East in the Department of Antiquities at the Ashmolean and is currently a Hugh Price Fellow at Jesus College and holds a supernumerary Fellowship at Wolfson College. He has worked previously as a curator in the Middle East Department of the British Museum and the Ancient Near Eastern Art Department of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. He is currently Chair of the British Institute for the Study of Iraq.



Christianity in Iraq

SUHA RASSAM

Christianity was established in Mesopotamia during the first Christian century and emerged as a well-organized church by the end of the second century. It flourished despite resistance and persecution from the occupying Persians and became independent of other churches at the beginning of the fifth century (AD 424). This church was called 'The Church of the East' or 'The Persian Church'. The bishop of the capital of the Persian Empire, Seleucia Ctesiphon, became the Patriarch, the leader of this church. The remains of its famous cathedral 'Kokhe' can be found south west of Baghdad. The missionaries took their faith east to Iran, Central Asia, China, India, and south to the Arabian Peninsula, establishing prominent Christian centres of learning.

In the fifth century another denomination was established 'The Syrian Orthodox Church', whose centres were in Tikrit, Der Mar Mattai and Qaraqosh. When Mesopotamia came under Muslim rule in AD 637, Christians were allowed to practice their faith, but treated as second class citizens. During the first three centuries they contributed in various fields of learning, especially in medicine, education and translation. The latter was of vital importance, as the availability of Greek literature in Arabic was essential for the emergence of the Abbasid civilization. Christians were the only people who could do it because they were steeped in Greek learning, and knew Arabic well. They had already translated Greek works to their sacred language Syriac, which is similar to Arabic.

However, Abbasid tolerance ceased by the tenth century and Christians suffered discrimination and persecution which forced many to leave for the mountains in the north.

Abbasid rule was ended by the Mongol Hulagu in 1258, who favored the Christians. But that lasted only a short period, after which the Mongol Khan Kublai converted to Islam and persecuted the Christians. Mesopotamia was occupied by the Muslim Ottoman in 1534. They allowed the Christians to practice their faith but treated them as second class citizens. During World War I, they inflicted atrocious massacre on the Armenians and Syriac Christians that some claim amounted to genocide. The Syriac Christians, who lived in south Turkey bordering Iraq and Syria, lost their homes and about half million individuals. Those who survived took refuge in Iraq and Syria.

After World War I, the modern state of Iraq was established under the leadership of King Faysal I. Most of the Christians were concentrated in the city of Mosul and its environs and constituted about 30% of the population in these areas. Christians and other minorities were treated as equal citizens. Christianity flourished despite change of regime after the overthrow of the monarchy, the Kurdish uprising, the Iraqi Iranian war and the cruelty of the regime of Saddam Husain. The



Dair Mar Elia, known as St. Elijah's Monastery was built during the 7th century AD south of Mosul in Northern Iraq. Destroyed by IS in 2016. (Source: Associated Press)

situation changed dramatically after the occupation of Iraq by US and British forces in 2003. Islamic fundamentalists started to attack Christians and other minorities with abductions, extortions and killings. Twenty of the clergy were abducted and six were killed. Over fifty churches were burned or damaged. In one mainly Christian district of Baghdad, Christians were given the ultimatum: 'convert to Islam or leave your home, otherwise you will be killed'.

As a result of all these atrocities, Christians started to leave either to nearby countries with the intention of emigration to western countries or to safer areas of Iraq, mainly Kurdistan. All this happened before the occupation of Mosul by the Islamic state in 2014. Abu Bakir al-Baghdadi occupied the city of Mosul on 9.6.2014 and gave an ultimatum for Christian to leave Mosul within 24 hours. Soon after, the villages of the Nineveh Plain were also threatened, forcing people to leave their homes. Thousands left in haste to Kurdistan, becoming refugees in their own country.

Although the Islamic state was defeated in July 2017, it took time to rebuild some of the destroyed homes and churches in Mosul and the Nineveh Plain and more

Christians left the country intending to emigrate. It is estimated that since 2003



Baghdad's Christians Gather Defiantly for Christmas Eve Mass (Source: Newsweek)

about a million Christian emigrated, 70% of the original population. Those who are still there do not feel safe since the political situation is still problematic, with corruption and the increasing influence of neighbouring Iran.

The recent visit of Pope Francis to Iraq gave great impetus to the remaining Christians and everybody hopes that his message of peace and reconciliation in the Middle East will bear long term fruit.

Suha Rassam was born in Mosul, (Iraq), to a medical family. She was an Assistant Professor of Medicine in the University of Baghdad, and came to England in 1990 to do further research. She then worked at hospitals in London and studied Eastern Christianity at London University. Suha Rassam is the author of "Christianity in Iraq" (3rd edition , Gracewing Publishers in Leominster, Hertfordshire)



Prayer for the Victims of the War by Pope Francis at Hosh Al-Bieaa, (Church Square), in Mosul (Source: The Vatican). The square contains the ruins of four churches, including the Immaculate Church of the Syrian Catholics (shown below. Source: Facebook).





**THE CONCEALED
BRITISH MAUSOLEUM
IN MESOPOTAMIA**

GHANIM ALSHEIKH

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) cares for the 1.7 million men and women of the Commonwealth forces who died in the First and Second World Wars, ensuring they will never be forgotten. Funded by six member governments, its work began with building, and now maintaining, cemeteries and memorials at 23,000 locations all over the world.

In 1914, Mesopotamia was part of the Ottoman Empire. Mesopotamia was strategically important because of British oil interests in neighbouring Persia. A force was sent from India to Mesopotamia in late 1914, to secure the oil refineries at Abadan. It was designated Indian Expeditionary Force D (IEF D). Throughout the campaign, India would provide the majority of manpower and supplies. Capturing Basra was the first objective of the campaign and one of the early successes of the whole campaign in the Middle East theatre of WWI (1914-1918), fought between the Allies, represented by British Empire troops mainly from India, against Central Powers, troops, mostly from the Ottoman Empire.

The small force that arrived in 1914 was reinforced considerably by the end of March 1915 and secured the oil fields. British Indian forces continued to advance further north, spurred by this early success. In November 1915, the advance was finally halted at the Battle of Ctesiphon, resulting in heavy losses. Between January and April 1916, British and Indian troops fought up the River Tigris in an attempt to relieve the garrison at Kut. However, they failed to break through Ottoman defences and ultimately lost more men than the number under siege at Kut. British and Indian forces suffered casualties of more than 85,000 killed, wounded and captured in Mesopotamia. It was a campaign fought largely by the Indian Army, often in challenging conditions with limited supplies and medical care. After the war, the Ottoman Empire was dismantled and its territories partitioned. Mesopotamia became modern day Iraq.

In 19 locations throughout Iraq, the CWC commemorates the more than 54,000 Commonwealth deaths in Iraq during the two world wars. Only in France, the United Kingdom, Belgium and India does the CWGC have a larger commitment. The British architect and archaeologist, Edward Warren (1856-1937) was appointed Principal Architect for Mesopotamia in 1919, a difficult position in such a remote and inhospitable region. He designed the Memorial to the Missing in Basra and the Tomb of General Maude in Baghdad. The memorial of Basra recalls the more than 40,500 Commonwealth troops who were killed in operations in Mesopotamia from the Autumn of 1914 until the end of August 1921 and whose graves were unknown. The memorial was unveiled by Sir Gilbert Clayton on March 27, 1929.



Fig. 1 Basra Memorial 1934

The Basra Memorial was built on shores of the Shat Al-Arab waterway just south of the Basra Margil Port and close to the main offices of the British forces commanding headquarters. Over the years, the memorial was the site of many ceremonies and events and was guarded and maintained by Iraqis employed by the CWCG via the British embassy.



Fig. 2 Basra Memorial 1938



Fig. 3 New Year day 1938

Due to military conflicts with Iran, then President of Iraq Saddam Hussein in 1997 established a special task force to dismantle the original memorial and transfer it to a safe location. The new location was chosen to mark The Battle of Shaibah (12–14 April 1915), one of the fiercest battles between British-Indian and Ottoman armies in what is now desert just c.10 miles west of present-day Basra. They used the same bricks and slabs, the same architecture. The Memorial has been re-erected in its entirety.



Fig. 4 Basra Memorial 2006

The Battle of Shaibah was a World War I battle fought between British and Ottoman forces, the latter trying to retake the city of Basra from the British. By capturing Basra, the British had taken an important communications and industrial centre. It is also the location where, in 1920, the British Royal Air Force established its “RAF Station Shaibah” at a small airfield in the desert with a harsh, hot and humid climate.



Fig. 5 Current position of the Memorial west of Basra

When the British army occupied Basra in 2003, they renewed the desert-based memorial and built a protective wall around the site. After an enforced absence of more than 12 years, staff from the CWGC made a historic return to Iraq and soldiers started to visit and celebrate the November 11 Memorial Day. Casualties are listed under the regiment they served with in rank order. Whilst the current climate of political instability persists it is extremely challenging for the CWGC to manage or maintain its cemeteries and memorials located within Iraq. Alternative arrangements for commemoration have therefore been implemented and a two volume Roll of Honour listing all casualties buried and commemorated in Iraq has been produced. These volumes are on display at the CWGC's Head Office in Maidenhead and are available for the public to view.

The CWGC continues to monitor the situation in Iraq and once the political climate has improved to an acceptable level the Commission will commence a major rehabilitation project for its cemeteries and commemorations.

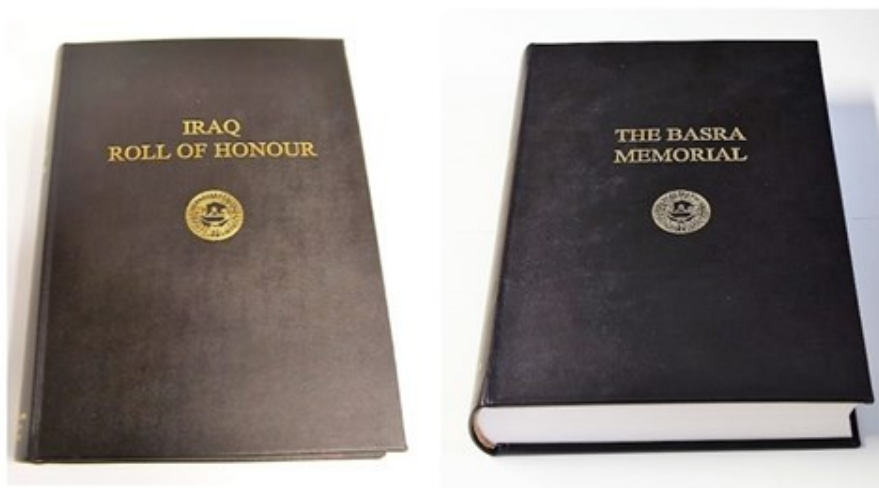


Fig. 6 Rolls of Honour, Basra

Ghanim Alsheikh, MD, PhD (Lond), FFPH-RCP. Professor Alsheikh is a specialist in Neurosciences, Public Health and Medical Education. He was the founding dean of two medical schools in Iraq and Yemen (1988-2000) and served as WHO regional coordinator for the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Educated in Iraq and the UK, he currently holds an honorary post at Imperial College London WHO Collaborating Centre and lives in Brighton, East Sussex.



THE PROPHET JONAH BEFORE THE WALLS OF NINEVEH (REMBRANDT)

BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

DOCUMENTS FROM OLD TESTAMENT TIMES

HUGH DE SARAM

One of my first adventures on going up to Cambridge in 1965 to read Theology was being sent on a long bike ride down to the department of Oriental Languages for a class under the tutelage of the Regius Professor of Hebrew, David Winton Thomas. However, this was not a Hebrew class – that took place in the Divinity Schools with a delightful and inspired Franciscan – but an Introduction to Biblical Archaeology. It was indeed an adventure, introducing a whole world that I never knew existed, one of those great experiences where the mind is blown wide open and the horizon expanded beyond all expectation. To this day, I treasure my well-thumbed copy of Winton Thomas's *Documents From Old Testament Times*.

What was so fascinating? Well, it put the narrow world of Biblical Israel into a much wider context, that's what was fascinating. And we discovered that the Middle East is literally littered with that most romantic of objects, the clay tablet.

We all know the story of Noah's Ark and the great flood that landed him eventually on Mt Ararat. What we discovered under Winton Thomas was that this story was most probably not originally an Israeli story but a Mesopotamian story far older than its version in the Bible. Cuneiform clay tablets discovered in archaeological digs at Nineveh show it as part of a larger work, the Epic of Gilgamesh, and other fragments of the same story dating from much earlier have been discovered in similar digs elsewhere in Mesopotamia. There is even speculation – very speculative, I should say – that the story derived from the experience of populations fleeing the cataclysmic overflowing and collapse of the land bridge between Europe and Asia at the Bosphorus when sea levels rose at the end of the last ice-age and the fresh-water lake that was the Black Sea was inundated with sea water from the Mediterranean.

It should be said at this stage that, for us freshman students, the realisation that the Bible is not the last word on many, many things and has to be rigorously fact-checked against other sources was quite disruptive. The ground shifted beneath our believers' feet. Yet this was a kindly introduction, given that the Mesopotamian original behind our beloved Flood Story is delightful in its own right. For example, where the Bible ends the story with a rainbow, the original has a mother-goddess raising her jewelled necklace into the sky. None of this felt like a contradiction of the Bible exactly, but it required an expansion of view.

Moving on, we learned that the Biblical mention of camels in the Abrahamic period is an anachronism, a retro-fit by people writing much later, since the camel had yet to be domesticated in the time of Abraham. The clay tablets tell us of donkey caravanners but not camel caravanners. These semi-nomadic people, circulating around around the edges of the Fertile Crescent (and sometimes referred to in the tablets as *Habiru* or *Apiru*), often clashed with more settled people, whether over their herds trampling the crops in the fields or in more war-like encounters.

We are lucky enough to have visual evidence of what these people may have looked like from a tomb painting in Beni Hasan, central Egypt. The colourful dress of the donkey caravaners, complete, it seems, with bellows for sustaining their fires (it is surmised that they traded in metal implements, the tinkers of their day) contrast sharply with the simple white dress of their Egyptian hosts. It is tempting to equate such scenes with Joseph's brothers seeking food in wealthy Egypt.

Beni Hasan Painting



The Tel el Amarna letters (Egyptian clay tablets dating from the 14th century BC) is a collection of reports to the Pharaoh from governors in Canaan containing amongst other things complaints about attacks on their cities by *Apiru* (Habiru ... Hebrew?) who appear to be disrupting settled life in Canaan. Were these the loosely organised bands that eventually elbowed the Canaanites aside and coalesced into the people of Israel? It seems likely that not all, perhaps not even many, of those who ended up as the twelve tribes in Israel came from the group that left Egypt in Moses' train: many were there already but not as settled inhabitants. The Bible, archaeology suggests, gives us a selective, over-dramatised version.

Another cause for reflection is the story of Jericho and Joshua's fabled tumbling of its walls. From 1952 to 1958 Dame Kathleen Kenyon led what has come to be regarded as an exemplary archaeological dig – at Jericho. The key thing we learned

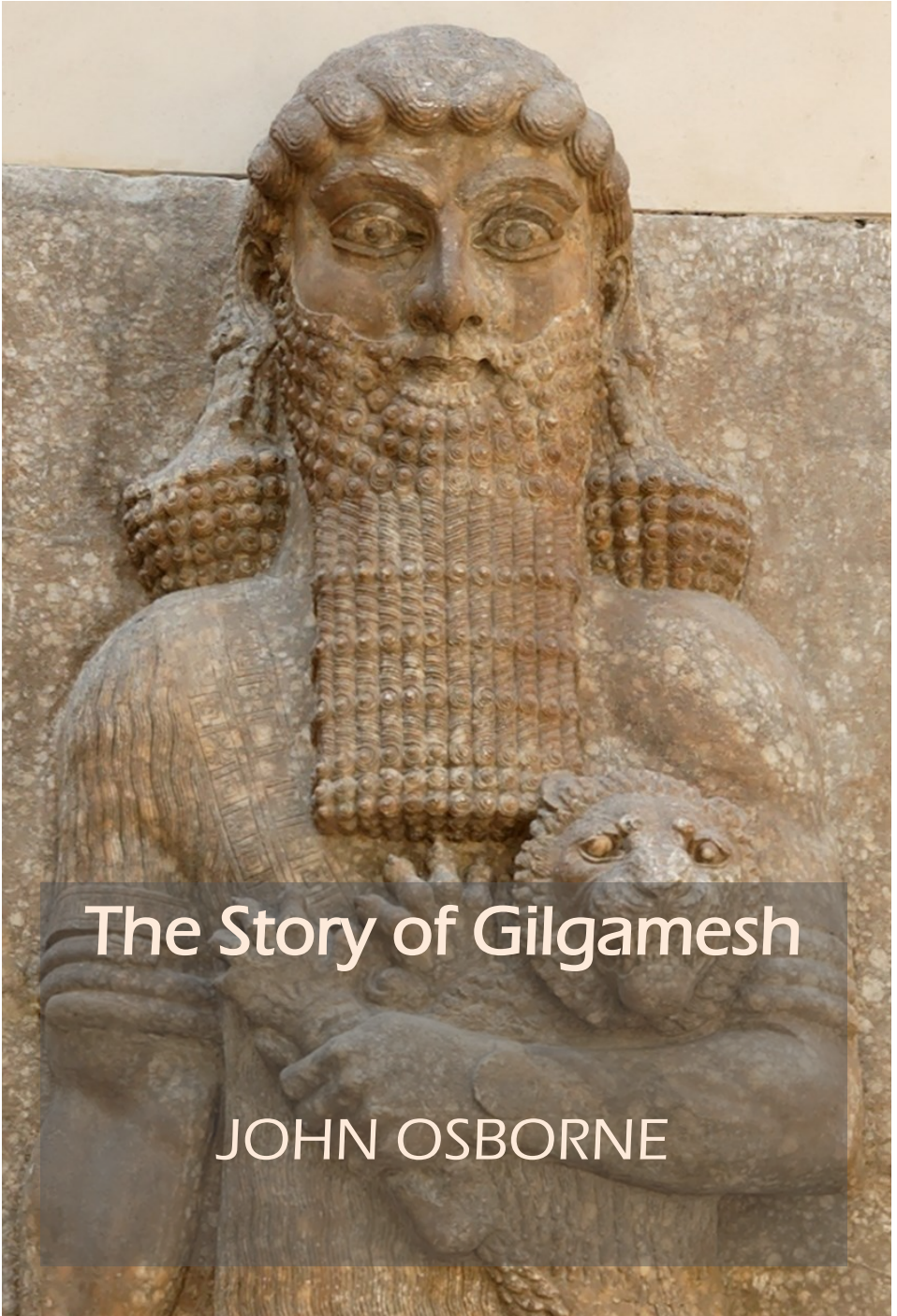
here was to do with dates. Kenyon found strong evidence that at the time when Joshua arrived before the walls of Jericho, those walls were probably already flat and had been so for some 200 years. So how come the discrepancy?

The answer came one evening when I attended a lecture by a prominent archaeologist specialising in the Middle East and speaking on Biblical Archaeology. He confirmed that there was now wide agreement among scholars that the Jewish Bi-

ble, our Old Testament, had largely been edited and compiled during and after the Babylonian exile, thus 6th century BC and later. Not surprisingly, the accuracy of their data seems to have diminished the further their subject matter was from the time of writing. Fair enough, perfectly human – but that's the point, isn't it: the Bible was actually written by humans, normal, fallible humans.



Where clay tablets could be found—Konyunjik archaeological dig across the Tigris from Mosul (North Mesopotamia)



The Story of Gilgamesh

JOHN OSBORNE

The discovery of the story of Gilgamesh around 150 years ago in Mesopotamia was sensational. The most complete version was discovered by the Mesopotamian archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam at Nineveh, inscribed on clay tablets dating from the 7th century BC. But earlier sections of the same story, dating from between 1800 and 1300 BC, were discovered on tablets at other sites, thus making the epic the oldest literature known to us. Scholarly thinking reckons that an even earlier version existed before 2000 BC.



Gilgamesh was the heroic King of Uruk, with some divine ancestry, but with an arrogant attitude towards the gods as well as towards his own people. With his best friend and companion, the wild man Enkidu, whom contact with women had civilized, Gilgamesh journeys to the forbidden Cedar Forest, where they kill the guardian and cut down several cedars. Angered, the goddess Ishtar sends the great Bull of Heaven against them and Gilgamesh's kingdom; they kill the bull, but in revenge for this Enkidu have to die.

Devastated by his friend's death, Gilgamesh sets out on a vast journey beyond the ends of the earth to seek wisdom from an old man reputed to have found everlasting life. After several adventures en route he finds the ferryman to take him across to the other side of the Ocean that surrounds the world – a journey not permitted to ordinary mortals - in order to meet the old man who is 'Faraway', Utnapishtim.

Utnapishtim entertains Gilgamesh on his arrival there to the story of the flood, in most essentials identical to the story of Noah's flood in Genesis: Utnapishtim was advised that the gods were angry with mankind, but that he and his family could be the sole survivors of the flood to come, saving themselves and 'the beasts of the field' by building a boat ... and so on, as in the Old Testament. This

account, when it was translated and published in Victorian Britain, caused amazement. (The archaeologist and scholar who first publicized the Mesopotamian account of the flood is still referred to as ‘Deluge’ Smith.) Scholarly opinion has been divided about whether the account of the Noah flood in Genesis is based on this Mesopotamian version, and whether the latter is a reflection of the annual inundation of the Mesopotamian plain by the Rivers Tigris and Euphrates.

But the flood story is really an interlude in the story of Gilgamesh’s quest for eternal life. Utnapishtim challenges Gilgamesh to stay awake for a week; Gilgamesh inevitably fails this test, thus demonstrating that if man cannot overcome sleep it is not possible for him, a mere mortal, to overcome death. But for Gilgamesh’s return journey across the Ocean, Utnapishtim tells him of the clue to eternal youth - a spiny rose, which grows on the seabed and which Gilgamesh must find and take with him.

Gilgamesh succeeds in this task and crosses back to his world. He comes to a spring, but while he is bathing in it a snake spots the rose, which Gilgamesh has left on the bank, swallows it and immediately sheds its skin, revealing a new one underneath. Gilgamesh, witnessing all this, is devastated, recognising immediately that the snake, not he, is now the possessor of the clue to life.

The impact of this poignant mythical story - part adventure and part allegory - does not come from Gilgamesh’s return to Uruk, where he resumes his rule over his people and eventually dies. It is the failure of his quest that makes the point, as many a myth from around the world does, that however mighty a ruler and however brave a traveller Gilgamesh may be, and though ‘he was wise, he saw mysteries and knew secret things’, through human weakness and mischance he is unable to escape the fate of a mortal man.

There are two Penguin Classic editions of “The Epic of Gilgamesh”, the older in prose, the more modern in verse; both are slim, readable and have excellent introductions.



(Top) Uruk. Archaeological site at Warka (Iraq) (Source: SAC Andy Holmes (RAF)/MOD)

(Bottom) Sculptured vase. This stone piece is carved with a scene depicting Gilgamesh wrestling two bulls. Two lions also appear. From the Shara temple at Tell Agrab, Diyala Region, Iraq. Early Dynastic period, 2600-2370 BCE. On display at the Iraq Museum in Baghdad, Iraq (Source: Dr Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin)



Shipping the Great Bull from Nimrud

Rendezvous at Margil

*A construct of when the winged
bull left Nimrud*

RAIK JARJIS

The genesis of Assyrian archaeology owes its origin to the 19th century pioneering excavations in Upper Mesopotamia which unearthed ancient artefacts that found their ways to international museums. Included in this are the colossal winged human-headed bulls and lions currently exhibited in Europe and the USA. The excavating and exhibiting of the Assyrian bull of the British Museum have been discussed in the past. In this instance, however, a different approach is presented - not least in recounting for the first time contemporary British journalism, Victorian and Mesopotamian introspections, the shipping from Mesopotamia, and indeed the ingenious ancient method for navigating the waterways of Mesopotamia.

Colossus

The central theme of this article is the 19th century transfer from the east to the west of the Assyrian human-headed winged bull sculpture, dating from c 883-859 BC, excavated from the entrance of the throne room of the palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, Iraq (some 35Km south of Mosul). The Assyrian lamassu, or 'winged bull', is a stone mythological guardian up to 30 tons in weight.

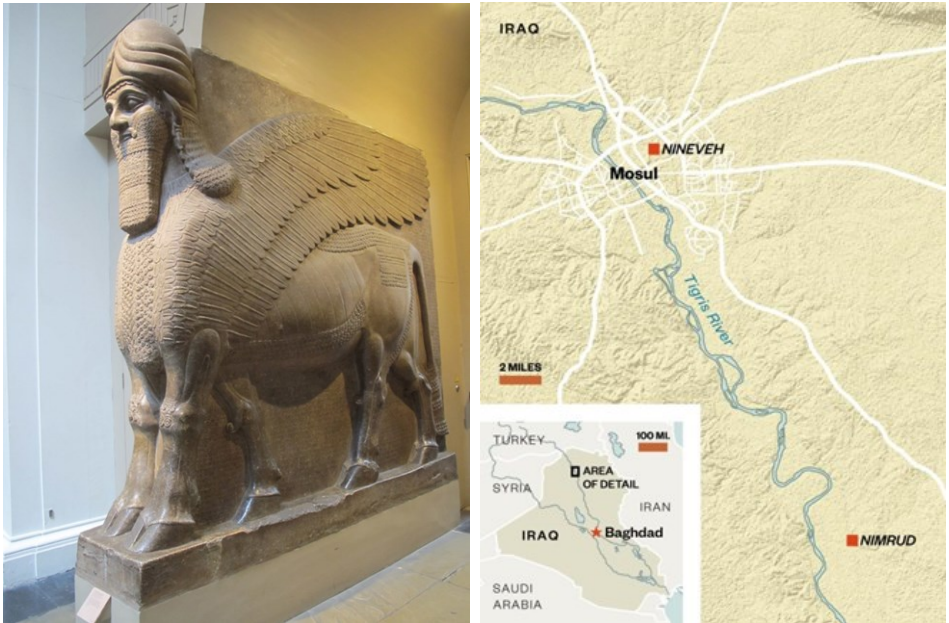


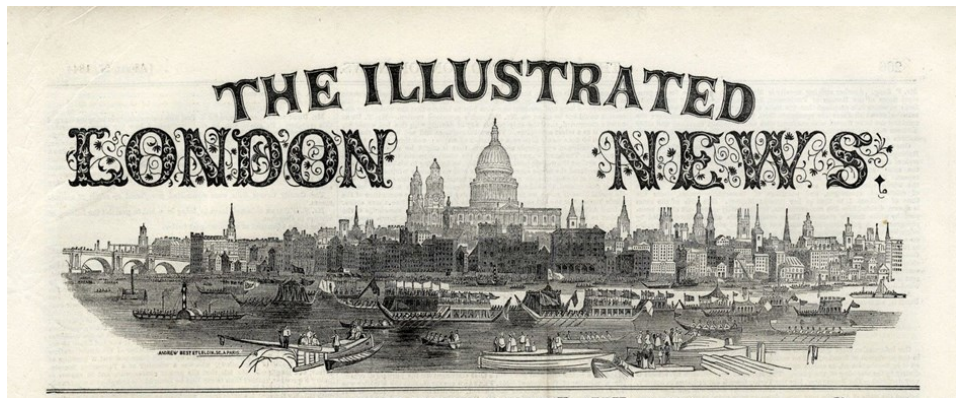
Fig. 1 The Winged Bull from Nimrud now at the British Museum. Please note in the adjacent map location of its origin (Nimrud) by the Tigris, south of Nineveh and Mosul.

It was customary to place bull pairs at the gateways of Assyrian citadels or palaces to protect them from demonic forces. The Assyrian collection at the British Museum in London includes the winged bull in question and a winged lion, both from Nimrud. It also includes a pair of winged bulls from the Khorsabat palace in Nineveh, Iraq, built for the Assyrian king Sargon II (721-705 BC) some 200km north-east of Mosul.

Victorian Strides

At the zenith of what some historians came to recognise as Britain's Imperial Century (1814-1915), and when Queen Victoria had reigned but five years, the world's first illustrated magazine was born. In May 1842 the conservative-leaning broadsheet news magazine, *The Illustrated London News*, began its weekly publication. This was two years before the invention of the telegraph by Samuel Morse, 13 years ahead of the American weekly entitled *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, and some forty years ahead of the other great illustrated magazine, the *National Geographic* of America.

Fig.2 19th century title banner of the *Illustrated London News*.



The magazine came to reflect the Victorian Era with its full coverage of the monarchy, the colonies, and British ingenuity and discoveries. One notable outcome was an appreciation of ancient history facilitated by the reported discoveries of British archaeologists. To some, however, interest went beyond that of expanding knowledge and Striding Britannica (although plenty of that was served up at the time) to the actual realm of faith. This is because Christianity within some British circles at that time was undergoing a period of introspection that manifested itself in seeking interpretations and tangible proofs that might emerge from discoveries in the lands where Christianity began and became established. This was, of course,

22 years before the 1872 London lecture by George Smith in which he read his translation of the Flood Tablet, bring a Judeo-Christian angle to Mesopotamian Biblical Archaeology . It was the first time an audience had heard the Epic of Gilgamesh for more than 2,000 years.

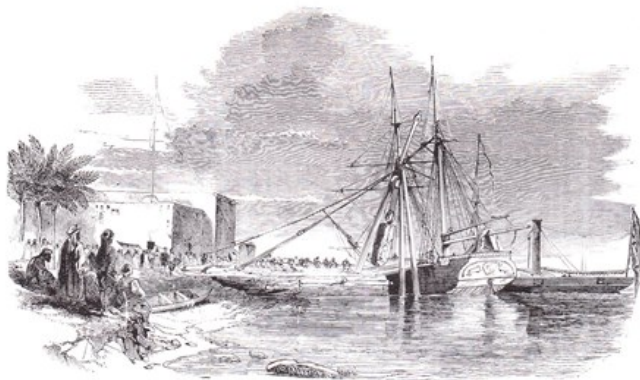
It was within this cultural ‘cauldron’ and nine years before the construction of the Suez Canal began in 1859 that the *Illustrated London News* issue of 27 July 1850 carried the following item in relation to a heavy shipment on board the Royal Navy’s *Apprentice* from Margil, in southern Mesopotamia.

Fig. 3 As reported in The Illustrated London News .

July 27, 1850

THE NIMROUD SCULPTURES AFLOAT

The English public will be rejoiced to hear that the Great Bull and upwards of a hundred tons of sculpture, excavated by our enterprising countryman, Dr. Layard, are now on their way sterling qualities which so strongly characterise her natives – that she is not only distinguished by her arms and commerce, but that she uses these means to extend and disseminate the



8 Shipping the great bull from Nimroud

to England, and may be expected in the course of next September.

It is gratifying that England has not only rendered herself the first of the nations by those

wealth, and comfort, and advantages produced by the arts of civilisation, at the same time that she administers happiness and contentment by inculcating the tenets of a pure religion. . . .

Margil was wrongly reported to be on the river Euphrates. In fact Margil is a port located just north of Basra on the Shat Al-Arab waterway (Confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates in southern Mesopotamia). The *Apprentice*, with its special cargo destined for the British Museum in London, had subsequently had to voyage some 12,000 miles by first sailing south, through the Arabian/Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean, past the horn of Africa to the dividing line between the Indian and Atlantic Oceans at Cape Agulhas, (southern tip of Africa), before sailing north past the Cape of Good Hope towards England.

Mesopotamian Strides

What the *Illustrated London News* didn't disclose at the time was that the transfer of the historic cargo to London became possible due to the *Apprentice's* rendezvousing at Margil with a large Kalek, an ancient floating craft, that delivered the cargo in question following a 600 miles voyage south from the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud in the Nineveh province of northern Mesopotamia. The Mesopotamian crew of the Kalek navigated the Tigris downstream past Baghdad. They then cleared the water turbulence at Al-Gurna, the confluence location of the Tigris and the Euphrates north of Basra, and preceded south along Shat Al-Arab to Margil where the bull rendezvoused with the *Apprentice* for its 12,000 mile journey to England.

The Winged Bull's actual journey from Nimrud began two years after the beginning of excavation at Nimrud, and the whole project is credited to the imagination and resilience of the pioneering British archaeologist Austen Layard plus his excellent teamwork with Hormuzd Rassam, the native Christian Chaldean whom he inspired to take up archaeology. Thanks to this enduring partnership, and funding by the Trustees of the British Museum, secrets of the Assyrian Empire were revealed and the demanding logistics for transporting artefacts to England were put in place.

So it was in April 1847 that 300 workmen turned up to drag the colossal statue of the Winged Bull down to the river Tigris and to float it on a waiting Kalek, (a raft of wooden planks tied together with ropes to numerous inflated goatskins).

Mesopotamian engravings dating back to about 4000 BC reveal that navigating the waterways using different manmade crafts was a commonplace. In fact the design and use of these crafts remained virtually unchanged well into 20th century Iraq.



Fig. 4 Map of modern-day Iraq showing Basra, (where Margil is located), in the south on Shut Al-Arab Waterway, (Confluence of Tigris and Euphrates), that feeds into the Gulf. Crew of the Kalek raft bearing the Winged Bull navigated the Tigris 600 miles from the north on 22 April 1847, (Nimrud is situated 20 miles south of Mosul). They then passed Bagdad heading south to the confluence of the Tigris with the Euphrates in order to reach Margil at Basra. With the Winged Bull on board the Royal Navy Apprentice started its 12,000 mile voyage to England, sailing south to the Cape . (Map Source: ChrisO at English Wikipedia)



Fig. 5 Austen Layard and the Statue of Nimrud

Layard describes the removal of the winged bulls from the site of the mound of Nimrud in 'Nineveh and Its Remains, (1849)', where they had lain for approximately the last 2,730 years.



Fig. 6 An etching depicting the removal of the Winged Bull of Nimrod



Fig. 7 Raft Conveying Winged Bull to Baghdad.

Water Colour by Frederick Charles, Cooper, born 1817 (Source: V&A)

