
From Mesopotamia to the Met: Two Assyrian Reliefs from the Palace of Sargon II

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Among the most magnificent works of art given to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, pride of place arguably belongs to the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art's monumental Assyrian relief sculptures presented by John D. Rockefeller Jr. between 1930 and 1931.¹ The story of eighteen of these sculptures—brought to England in the mid-nineteenth century from the Assyrian capitals of Nimrud and Nineveh (in present-day northern Iraq)—is well known, having been most extensively recounted by John M. Russell.² Rockefeller's gift, which also included works that he had acquired from two colleges, joined other reliefs from Nimrud already in the Museum.³ The Metropolitan Museum's acquisition of these remarkable sculptures has tended to overshadow a further gift by Rockefeller in 1933 of two Assyrian reliefs that have an equally compelling story of discovery and display (Figures 1, 3).

The gypsum reliefs that form the subject of this article come from the palace of the Assyrian king Sargon II (r. 721–705 B.C.) at Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Sharrukin), located some fifteen miles to the north of the later royal center of Nineveh (see Figure 5). Campaigns by Sargon had extended the Assyrian Empire from the Persian Gulf to the borders of Egypt, including, perhaps most famously, the completion of the conquest of Samaria, capital of the kingdom of Israel, in 722–721 B.C. The king's hard-won power and prestige were proclaimed in the construction of Khorsabad, which, surrounded by a wall some four miles long, contained an enormous artificial terrace surmounted by temples and a magnificent palace of more than 240 rooms. In the tradition of some earlier Assyrian royal builders, Sargon had the lower walls of principal rooms and courtyards in his palace decorated with carved gypsum slabs depicting his triumphs in battle and the hunt, as well

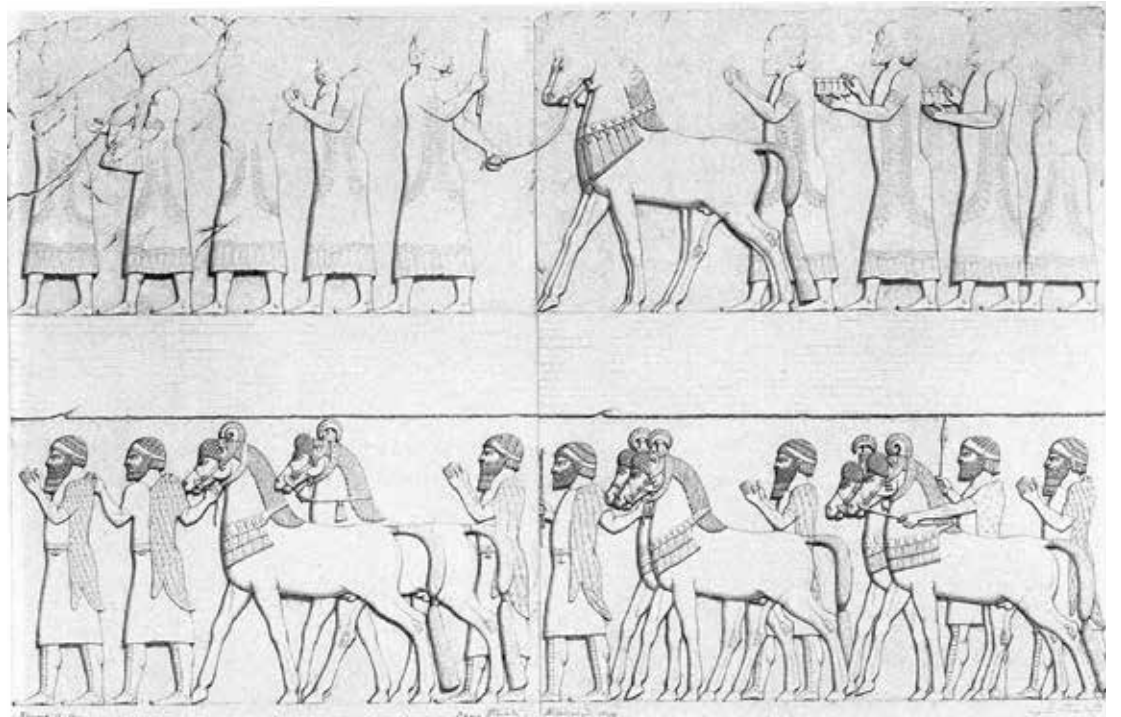
as distinctive banqueting scenes and long processions of tribute bearers from different regions of the empire. These reliefs were part of a wider decorative scheme that included wall paintings and hangings, ceramic plaques, and inlaid metal furniture. Construction at Khorsabad was halted in 705 B.C., when Sargon was killed in battle and his successor, Sennacherib (r. 704–681 B.C.), moved the capital to Nineveh. Khorsabad was largely abandoned, and following the disintegration of the Assyrian Empire at the end of the seventh century B.C., the reliefs were eventually buried by the decaying mud brick walls of the palace.

Some of the reliefs were uncovered between 1843 and 1844 when an area of Khorsabad, then within a province of the Ottoman Empire, was excavated by Paul-Émile Botta (1802–1870), the French consul at Mosul.⁴ This was the first major archaeological exploration of an Assyrian site. Botta had initially dug into ancient mounds that lay across the Tigris River from Mosul—later demonstrated to be the remains of Nineveh—but a lack of major finds led him to shift his attention to the ruins of Khorsabad, where he discovered the palace of Sargon II (see Figure 6). At the conclusion of the excavations, Botta made a selection of the best-preserved sculptures, and these were packed into crates, hauled to the Tigris, floated on rafts to Basra, and shipped to France.⁵ Although a number of the reliefs were sent to Paris, the majority of those uncovered at Khorsabad were left in situ, either because they were considered too fragile to move or because their imagery was similar to the sculptures selected for transport to France.⁶ Nonetheless, they were all recorded in very fine drawings by Eugène Flandin (see Figures 2, 4, 12).⁷

The news of Botta's discoveries at Khorsabad aroused considerable interest both in Europe and among the close-knit network of European diplomats, merchants, and travelers in the Middle East. The site had yet to be firmly identified from the cuneiform texts that were carved across the sculptures because the decipherment of this script was still in its infancy.



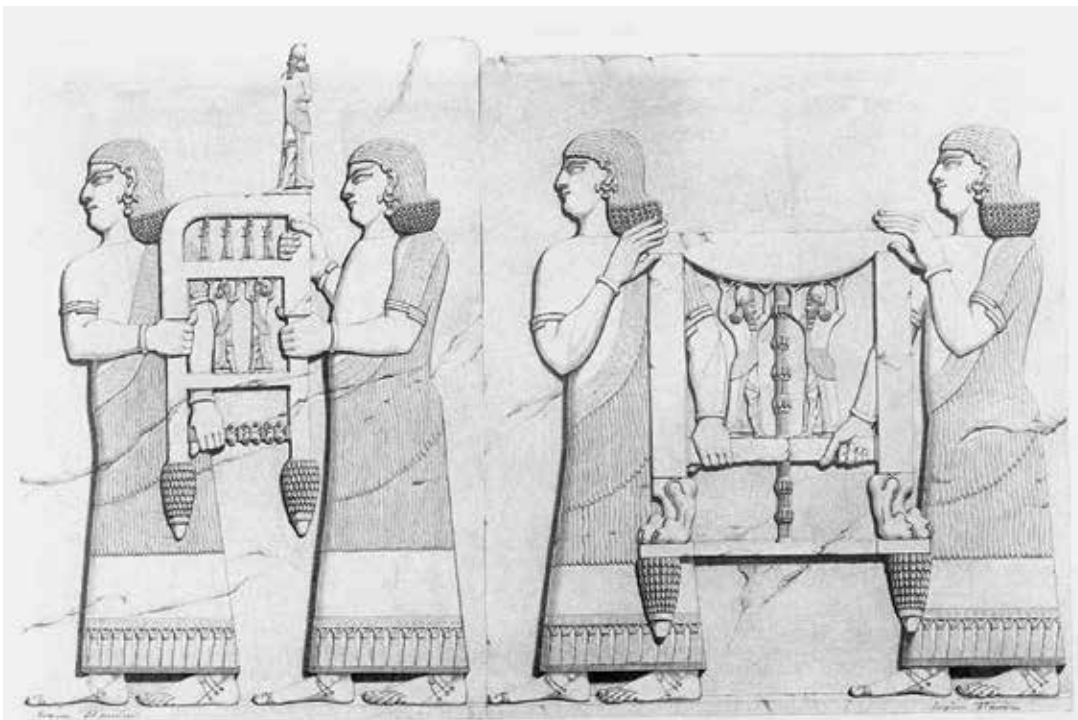
1. Foreign groom in a tributary procession.
Neo-Assyrian, ca. 721–705 B.C., Khorsabad
(ancient Dur-Sharrukin). Alabaster (gypsum),
19¼ x 31 in. (48.9 x 78.7 cm). The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, Gift of John D. Rockefeller Jr.,
1933 (33.16.1). Photograph: Karin L. Willis,
Photograph Studio, MMA



2. Eugène Flandin (French, 1809–1876).
Drawing of relief panels (slabs 11, 12) from
room X at Khorsabad. From Botta and Flandin
1849–50, vol. 1, detail of pls. 132, 133



3. Head of a beardless royal attendant, possibly a eunuch. Neo-Assyrian, ca. 721–705 B.C., Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Sharrukin). Alabaster, 21 ½ x 19 in. (54.6 x 48.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of John D. Rockefeller Jr., 1933 (33.16.2). Photograph: Karin L. Willis, Photograph Studio, MMA



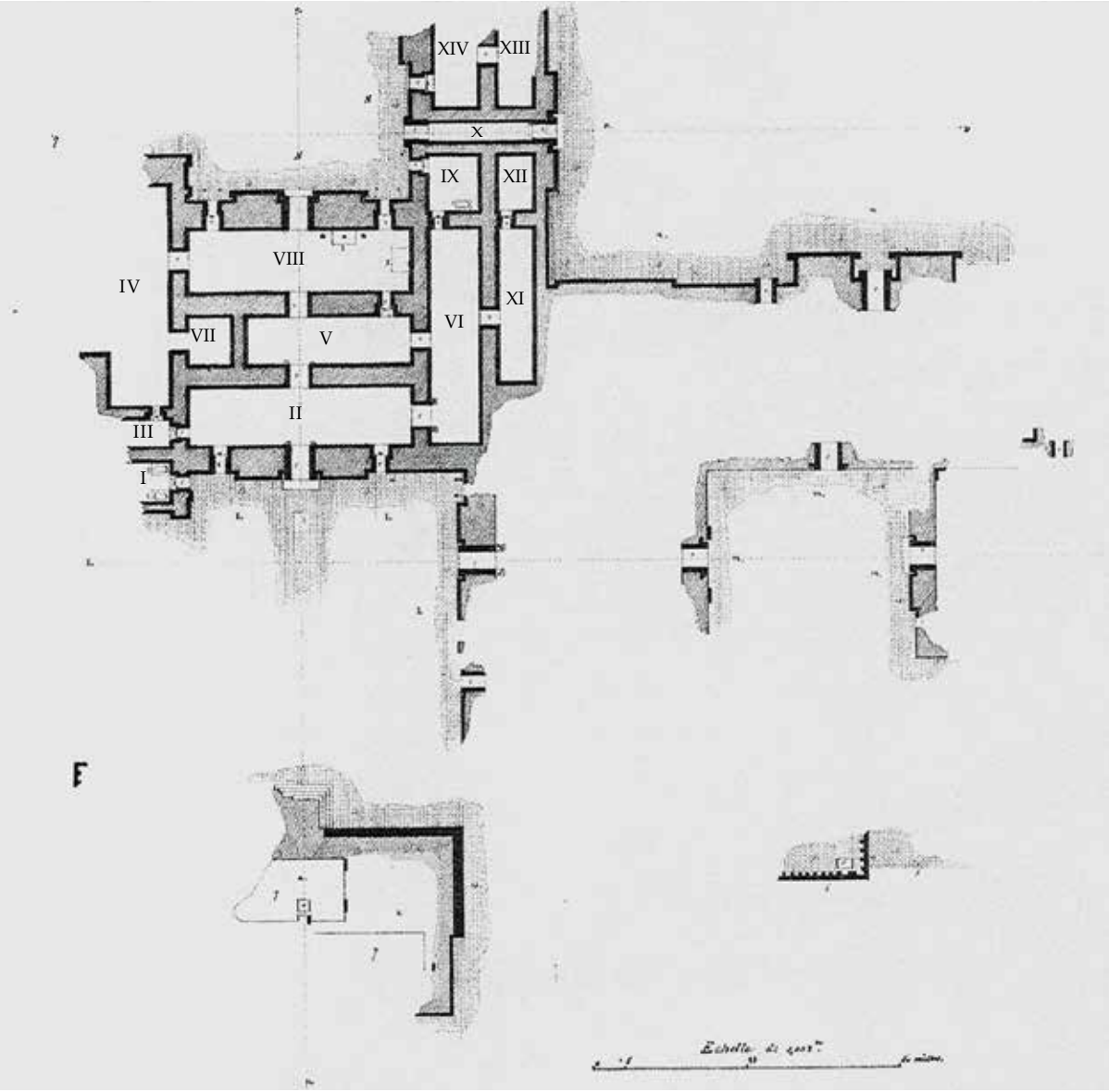
4. Eugène Flandin. Drawing of relief panels (slabs 28, 29) from facade L at Khorsabad. From Botta and Flandin 1849–50, vol. 1, pls. 18, 19



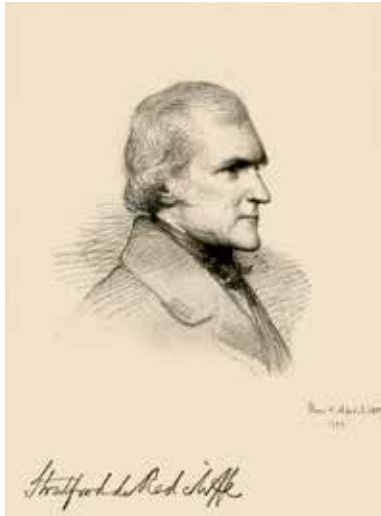
5. Map showing Assyrian capital cities and neighboring regions (modern names in *italic*). Map: Terra Forma 2000, AI Interactive Ltd.

It was already understood, however, that Khorsabad was an Assyrian site, often associated in both scholarly and popular texts with the name of Nineveh. Here was evidence in stone of the Assyrian Empire, famous from accounts in the Old Testament and classical sources. Among those who recognized the significance of these discoveries was the Englishman Austen Henry Layard (1817–1894), an acquaintance of Botta's, who by 1843 was working in Constantinople as both an agent for the British embassy and a foreign correspondent; he wrote excitedly about the French achievements in the *Malta Times*, and his reports were reproduced in a number of European journals.⁸

Layard's enthusiasm for Botta's excavations was shared by his friend Alexander Hector (1810–1875). After joining an expedition led by a certain Lieutenant-Colonel Chesney in 1835–37 to explore the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, Hector had settled in Baghdad, establishing himself as a



6. Plan of the palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad as excavated by Paul-Émile Botta. From Botta and Flandin 1849–50, vol. 1, pl. 6



7. Rudolf Lehmann (German, 1819–1905). *Stratford Canning (Lord Stratford de Redcliffe)*, 1859. Graphite on paper, 10 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (25.6 x 18.9 cm). The British Museum, London (BM 1906,0419.42). Photograph: © The Trustees of the British Museum



8. After Sir Thomas Lawrence (English, 1769–1830). *Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, 3rd Marquess of Lansdowne*, 1827–63. Etching, stipple, and engraving on *chine collé*, 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (21 x 13.4 cm). The British Museum, London (BM 1863,0110.57). Photograph: © The Trustees of the British Museum



9. After Sir Thomas Lawrence. *Sir Robert Peel*, 1836. Mezzotint, 15 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 11 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (38.3 x 28.8 cm). The British Museum, London (BM 1841,1113.122). Photograph: © The Trustees of the British Museum

merchant.⁹ In 1845, following Botta's departure for France, Hector visited the abandoned site at Khorsabad, perhaps on more than one occasion, and removed some reliefs from various areas of the palace.¹⁰ Because of the massive scale of the sculptures (complete stone panels could measure some eight by ten feet and weigh several tons), only sections of the reliefs—generally the heads of humans and horses, as well as inscriptions—were taken. Sawed off from the larger figures, Hector's carvings were more manageable for transport. With their size reduced, they did not need to follow the route taken by Botta's complete reliefs but could travel westward from Mosul by camel caravan to the port of Iskenderun on the Mediterranean.

Given the immense excitement in England aroused by the Khorsabad discoveries, Hector may have recognized a potential market for the reliefs; he would, in fact, sell fifty of his fragments to the British Museum in 1847.¹¹ In addition, however, the sculptures had come to play a role in the imperialist contest between France and England in the Middle East, and Hector's motives were interpreted by some in England as "a patriotic desire to secure to the nation any relics or information of value."¹² In this atmosphere of nationalistic competition, four of the Khorsabad sculptures, which were almost certainly part of the collection gathered by Hector,¹³ were forwarded by Christian Rassam, the British vice-consul at Mosul, to Sir Stratford Canning (1786–1880), the British ambassador in Constantinople (Figure 7).¹⁴ Indeed, the rivalry with the French soon induced Canning to sponsor excavations by Layard at Nimrud beginning in

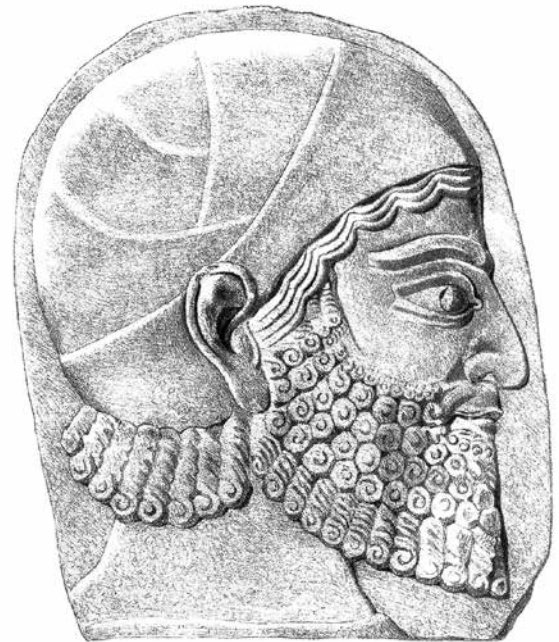
November 1845, in hope of discoveries that would "beat the Louvre hollow."¹⁵

Although not impressed by the artistic value of the Khorsabad sculptures, Canning was keen to be associated with the finds in order to curry favor with two of the most powerful British politicians of the day: the Marquess of Lansdowne (1780–1863) and the British prime minister, Sir Robert Peel (1788–1850) (Figures 8, 9).¹⁶ He sent each of them two reliefs on September 14, 1845. One of the sculptures (Figure 1) sent to Lord Lansdowne was originally part of a series of relief panels that decorated a corridor in the palace at Khorsabad, designated by Botta as room X (see Figure 6).¹⁷ Flandin's drawing of the northern wall of this room shows two registers of carvings divided by a wide band that, on the actual panel, was filled with an inscription (Figure 2). In the lower register a procession of men and horses advances to the left; their distinctive clothing and hairstyles serve to identify the men as foreigners who are bringing the richly caparisoned horses as tribute or gifts. Horses were so valuable to the Assyrian military's chariotry and cavalry that campaigns were regularly launched to acquire them from the mountainous lands to the north and east of Assyria—the likely home of these tribute bearers. The figure in the Lansdowne relief may be identified as the man who appears on slab 12 in Flandin's drawing; he grips a whip in his right hand and leads a pair of horses with his left. His hair falls in ringlets and is secured by a wide headband, and his beard is formed of tight curls. A tufted fleece is draped over the man's left shoulder. His two horses are elaborately adorned

10. Drawing of an Assyrian relief from Khorsabad depicting a beardless attendant. From Birch 1847, pl. XIV



11. Drawing of an Assyrian relief from Khorsabad depicting a foreign tributary. From Birch 1847, pl. XIII



with crescent-shaped, tasseled headdresses and bridles decorated with rosettes. Traces of red ocher on parts of the relief are remnants of more extensive paint (red, blue, black, and white) that once covered all the Khorsabad sculptures.¹⁸

The second of the Lansdowne reliefs depicts the head of a beardless Assyrian attendant, facing left (Figure 3). Such individuals are generally interpreted as eunuchs; their beardless faces and, in the complete figures, their potbellies may indicate that these men were castrated.¹⁹ Eunuch courtiers, known to have occupied key roles in the later Byzantine, Ottoman, and Chinese royal courts, may have held comparable positions in the Assyrian palace. This attendant has wavy hair, which is brushed behind his ears and ends in rows of tight curls at the shoulder. He wears a large three-armed earring, and his fringed garment is ornamented at the shoulder with two bands of alternating rosettes and concentric squares—presumably intended to represent embroidery. The sculpture was possibly cut from carved panels decorating facade L at Khorsabad, perhaps slab 28 or 29 (Figure 4).²⁰ The reliefs depict a procession of attendants who approach the king and carry vessels and furniture in preparation for a celebratory banquet.

Another, very similar head of an Assyrian attendant facing to the left (Figure 10) was sent by Canning to Sir Robert Peel; it may also have been cut from facade L. Peel's second sculpture depicts a bearded foreigner facing right (Figure 11). The turban on his head and the style of his hair identify him as someone from the west of the empire, possibly the Syrian coast. The relief may have been cut from one of the panels from facade *n* in which tributaries lead horses and carry vessels and sacks of goods (Figure 12).

Along with the stone carvings, Canning sent letters with enclosures containing descriptions and background information about the reliefs that were probably composed by Layard. To Lansdowne he wrote:

I am almost ashamed of sending two such scraps of sculpture, as those which accompany this letter, to one who possesses so many beautiful objects of art. But their great antiquity, the curious tomb, or rather buried palace from which they have stepped out after so many centuries of oblivion, and the high state of preservation, which though fragments only, they have interest [*sic*], may possibly give them some little interest even in your eyes.

At all events I hope you will forgive the boldness with which I have taken this opportunity of recalling myself to your recollection.

Allow me to add my respectful compliments to Lady Lansdowne, and with every good wish believe me, my dear Lord, very sincerely and gratefully yours,
Stratford Canning

The enclosure described the carvings as follows:

The two accompanying reliefs were found by M. Botta among ruins near the village of Khorsabad. The beardless head is that of an eunuch who follows the King, as in the sculptures of Persepolis, with a fan or fly-flipper; the other, that of a man, with the heads and necks of two caparisoned horses which he appears to be leading. They have been detached

from the entire figures for convenience of removal, as they were brought by land from Mosul.

Khorsabad is situated some 12 miles from the artificial mounds opposite Mosul, usually known as the ruins of Nineveh. From the nature of the cuneiform inscriptions found with the sculptures, and from some peculiarities in the sculptures themselves, it has been conjectured that the ruins are those of a monument or palace built during the reign of a King of the second Assyrian Dynasty. Since the destruction of the building the earth has accumulated over the remains, and has formed a large mound, which was lately opened by M. Botta, son of the Historian, and French Consul at Mosul.

The valuable and extensive specimens of Sculpture which that gentleman has obtained are by this time probably on their way from the Euphrates or Shet-el-Arab, to France.²¹

In his letter to Peel, Canning similarly noted the historical rather than artistic importance of the works and identified them as “the first arrivals of this kind in England”:

Happening to be in possession of two sculptural heads taken out of the burial place lately brought to light by M. Botta on the supposed site of Nineveh, I take the liberty of sending them to you. They are not remarkable for execution, though better than would have been expected for the time and place, but considering their antiquity and state of preservation you will not perhaps find them without interest. They are likely I understand to be the first arrivals of this kind in England. A few more particulars relating to them are stated in the enclosed note drawn up by a friend of mine.

With many excuses for intruding even in this brief manner upon your valuable time. I beg you will believe me, Dear Sir Robert, much faithfully, and respectively yours,
Stratford Canning²²

The enclosure to Peel repeats the information recorded in the Lansdowne enclosure but includes additional geographic and historical details:

The village of Khorsabad is located about twelve miles from the collection of artificial mounds opposite Mosul, usually known as the ruins of Nineveh. The place is mentioned by Yahuti under the name of Khistabad or Kishtabad and that geographer says that it occupies the site of an Ancient Assyrian city called Sarahan or Saraghan. . . .

Before M. Botta’s discovery sculpture of this epoch were only known by one or two fragments

found chiefly by Mr. Rich at Nineveh. The ruins at Khorsabad are of the highest interest both in an historical and philological point of view. All the scenes represented appear to illustrate events of great importance and are accompanied by long inscriptions in the cuneiform or arrow headed character, and in good preservation.²³

By the beginning of January 1846, the carvings sent to Peel had arrived at Whitehall, the center of government in London; it is very likely that the Lansdowne reliefs arrived in England at the same time. They were indeed the first such reliefs to reach Europe: it would be another eleven months before Botta’s sculptures would arrive in France, and the first of Layard’s discoveries from Nimrud would not be delivered to the British Museum until mid-1847.

Peel, who had been appointed a trustee of the British Museum in 1833, immediately wrote to the museum’s secretary, Reverend J. Forshall, on January 8:

The marbles to which the enclosed letter from Sir Stratford Canning and the accompanying memorandum refer have arrived at Whitehall.

Before I send them to the country, I will—if you think the Trustees of the museum would desire it—forward them to the museum to remain there for a time, in order that they may be compared with other ancient sculpture.

Should the Trustees wish to have casts taken from them I shall not have the slightest objection.²⁴

At a meeting of the British Museum’s trustees two days later, the prime minister’s offer was accepted and the reliefs were sent to Bloomsbury, where the museum’s new

12. Drawing by Eugène Flandin of relief panels (slabs 20–22) from facade *n* at Khorsabad. From Botta and Flandin 1849–50, vol. 1, pls. 36–38



Greek Revival building was reaching completion.²⁵ Samuel Birch, assistant keeper in the Antiquities Department, gave two lectures on the sculptures to the Society of Antiquaries of London, and drawings of the reliefs (reproduced here as Figures 10, 11) were later published in the society's journal.²⁶ The casting of the sculptures was undertaken by one Mr. Pink, who was often employed by the British Museum for such work. The casting process involved either making papier-mâché molds or applying layers of plaster directly on to the surface of the sculpture, which was sometimes oiled to assist in removing the mold. Any traces of paint on the stone might be protected with thin sheets of metal foil. Plaster casts were then made from the resulting negative mold.²⁷

Eight months later the reliefs were returned to Peel. Correspondence between him and the Reverend J. Forshall indicates some discussion of possible damage to the surface of one of the sculptures. Peel wrote to Forshall on August 27, 1846:

On unpacking the Heads from the Ruins of Nineveh which were sent to me by Sir Stratford Canning I think it right to mention to you that one of them from which I believe Casts were taken has been very materially injured by that operation.

The surface which appeared in a perfect state of preservation—when the head was sent to the museum—is taken off in some places.

I mention this here in the way of precaution than of complaint.²⁸

On August 29 Forshall replied, explaining that every care had been taken with the sculptures; that there had never been cause for complaint about Mr. Pink's work; that there was no evidence of color on the reliefs before the cast had been taken; and that the white color of the stone was the result of the "cleaning" of the surface during the casting process but that it would soon regain its original appearance.²⁹ Peel responded two days later: "If there had been mere discolouration I would not have mentioned the subject—but parts of the surface are taken off—particularly in the case of the small circular projections [drawing of six roundels] which are meant to represent the Beard. However as I before said I mention this principally as a caution for the future."³⁰ The matter was taken no further, and the reliefs entered Peel's extensive collection of sculptures and paintings in his country home of Drayton Manor in Staffordshire.

Meanwhile, Lord Lansdowne's two reliefs had joined what was widely regarded as one of the finest private collections of ancient sculpture—the "beautiful objects of art" that Canning had mentioned in his letter to the marquess. Assembled by Lansdowne's father, William Petty-Fitzmaurice

(1737–1805), 2nd Earl of Shelburne and 1st Marquess of Lansdowne, the collection resided in his London home, Lansdowne House, off Berkeley Square in Mayfair.³¹ Many of the pieces had been excavated by Gavin Hamilton from Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli, and the "Lansdowne Marbles" were famous among connoisseurs of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who viewed the Roman sculptures as the next-best thing to the idealized humanism of Greek art, considered the pinnacle of human creativity.

In a culture where classicism reigned supreme, the Assyrian reliefs came to be viewed as an evolutionary link in a developmental sequence that led from Egyptian art to the ultimate triumph of ancient Greece. Direct comparisons were made between the perceived progression of ancient art and that of Europe, beginning with early medieval art and culminating in the work of the cinquecento. Thus, the critic John Ruskin cited the reliefs from Nineveh apposite to the Italian primitives and English folk art, associating them with aesthetic infancy, as distinguished from aesthetic manhood, which he equated with ancient Greek art.³² In assessing the artistic value of the Assyrian carvings, the English connoisseurs paid little attention to the fact that they had been cut down from larger panels. In fact, Ruskin saw fit to compare Assyrian art with that of the early quattrocento with the result that the heads in the cut-down reliefs could be viewed as comparable to fifteenth-century European portrait paintings.³³ It comes as little surprise, therefore, that the two Lansdowne reliefs were not displayed alongside classical sculptures but were consigned to the back garden of Lansdowne House.³⁴ Indeed, by the time that Ruskin was pronouncing on the place of Assyria in the supposed hierarchy of art, many of the magnificent discoveries from Layard's excavations at Nimrud and Nineveh had arrived in London, and the unique status of the Khorsabad reliefs as the only Assyrian sculptures in England had been lost.

The four reliefs remained in their respective homes for more than fifty years until a new chapter in their histories began in the twentieth century. After Peel died in 1850, his heirs failed to manage the fortune he left in his estate. A large number of paintings and drawings were sold in 1871 to the National Gallery in London, and by 1900, financial pressures forced the sale of the remaining Peel family heirlooms. The sale by the London auctioneers Robinson and Fisher took place over two days, May 10 and 11, and attracted great interest. Among an assortment of classical and recent sculptures, the sale catalogue for the second day lists the two Assyrian reliefs, though their description as "a pair of Egyptian bas-reliefs, Heads, male and female, from Nineveh" is inaccurate on almost every point.³⁵

Both the *Times* of London and the *New York Times* recorded the sale of the most famous pieces, which together

earned close to £62,500; the buyers included the art dealers George Agnew and Joseph Duveen. The Assyrian sculptures were not considered worthy of mention in the newspaper reports, nor were details of their purchasers or sale prices recorded in any of the annotated sale catalogues, and their current locations remain a mystery. The author hopes that republishing drawings of the reliefs in this article may bring to light information concerning their whereabouts and later histories.

The provenance of the Lansdowne Assyrian reliefs is better documented than that of the Peel sculptures. In 1929 Lansdowne House was sold and transformed into a private club. During the remodeling, the front of the building was taken down to make way for a new road, and two of the rooms were shipped intact to the United States. The “First Drawing Room” was reinstated at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the dining room was reerected at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.³⁶ On March 5, 1930, the Lansdowne collection of sculpture was sold at auction. Given the collection’s reputation, the sale attracted considerable interest among museums, dealers, and private collectors around the world—including William Randolph Hearst and John D. Rockefeller Jr. (Figure 13). Among Rockefeller’s purchases was a Roman sculpture of a wounded Amazon (which he would later present to the Metropolitan Museum),³⁷ as well as the two Khorsabad reliefs.

Rockefeller, who owned one of the most impressive collections of Assyrian sculptures outside of London and Paris, was clearly fascinated by Assyrian reliefs. In 1927 he had acquired from the art dealer Dikran Kelekian eighteen sculptures from Nimrud and Nineveh that had been on temporary display in the University Museum in Philadelphia since the previous year. By January 1930 he had decided that they should have a permanent home in The Metropolitan Museum of Art and plans were made to install the reliefs prominently in a proposed new wing to be built at the north end of the museum.³⁸

On May 19, 1931, Rockefeller wrote to Joseph Breck, curator of Decorative Arts and assistant director of the Metropolitan Museum, informing him that three Nimrud sculptures he had acquired from Union College and Auburn Theological Seminary could be included with the eighteen Assyrian reliefs he had given to the Museum the previous year.³⁹ Rockefeller concluded his letter with an offer of a temporary loan of his two Khorsabad heads, mistakenly referring to the three college reliefs as also part of the Lansdowne collection: “The two heads from the same collection which are now in my home and which you are going to look at this morning, I shall be glad to lend to the Museum for the present; that is, for a year or two or three, without any committal as to the future, if the Museum would care to take them on those terms.”⁴⁰



13. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Glass negative, approx. 4 x 5 in. (10.2 x 12.7 cm). April 5, 1920. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Gift, Herbert A. French, 1947 (LC-F8-7430)

That day Breck visited Rockefeller’s Manhattan town house at 10 West Fifty-Fourth Street to look at photographs of the college reliefs and took the opportunity to view the two Khorsabad sculptures. He was thrilled by what he saw and asked if they might be put on exhibition at once.⁴¹ The following day Rockefeller replied, correcting his error over the origin of the Nimrud reliefs and suggesting that, since the two Lansdowne heads “come, I assume, from the same palace [*sic*] whence come all the other pieces I have given to the Museum, would it not be better to hold them all until the new wing of the Museum is completed and they can all be installed and exhibited together?”⁴²

The two Khorsabad heads were delivered to the Museum on May 21 and were stored in anticipation of their installation in the planned extension. By early 1932, however, the Great Depression had forced the postponement of the construction of the new wing, and the building project was eventually



14. View of 1933 installation of Assyrian sculpture at the south end of the Great Hall of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photograph: Crawford, Harper, and Pittman 1980, p. 5

abandoned. Late in October, the eighteen Philadelphia reliefs, including the colossal bull and lion guardian figures, arrived at the Museum. Herbert E. Winlock, who had been appointed the new director that year, initially wanted to place them in the Cast Gallery (now the Medieval Sculpture Hall), but it was eventually decided to install them at the south end of the Great Hall, along a narrow passageway at the entrance to the Greek and Roman galleries (Figure 14).

On January 10, 1933, as the installation of the sculptures was nearing completion, Winlock learned that the Khorsabad reliefs were not part of Rockefeller's gift but were merely on loan to the Museum. The following day, he wrote to Rockefeller:

I had been planning to place these two pieces in a very prominent location at the entrance to the Assyrian Gallery, and had chosen one for illustration in an article in the *Museum Bulletin*, when a final check up of the records disclosed this fact.

Before actually placing them upon the walls I am writing to you to ask whether you think it likely that you would desire their return in the near future, as, if you do think you might want them back soon, I should make some slight readjustments in the proposed arrangements which would make their removal more convenient than from the place which I had originally selected for them.⁴³

Rockefeller's reply a week later was welcome: "Why these two smaller pieces were not included with my gift of three pieces of Assyrian reliefs made to the Museum at that time, I cannot now recall. I shall be happy, however, now to present them to the Museum, and to have them exhibited as part of the *collection*."⁴⁴

The reliefs were duly registered, and on February 27, 1933, the display of Assyrian sculptures opened to the public. As Winlock had indicated to Rockefeller, the event was commemorated with an article in the *Museum Bulletin* titled "Assyria: A New Chapter in the Museum's History of Art" and illustrated with a photograph of the Khorsabad relief depicting a tributary with horses (see Figure 1). For twenty-four years the Assyrian reliefs welcomed visitors to the south wing of the Museum. In 1957 they were dismantled and, three years later, reinstalled on the first floor at the north end of the building. It was not to be their last journey within the Museum. In 1967 the reliefs were again deinstalled, this time in favor of Egyptian antiquities, and the Assyrian sculptures were sent into storage in the museum's North Garage. Through the generosity of Raymond and Beverly Sackler, the reliefs returned to public view in a new gallery on the second floor of the south wing in 1981. The Khorsabad sculptures, the first Assyrian art ever seen in Europe, remain one of the highlights of this magnificent display.

NOTES

1. MMA 31.72.1–3; 32.143.1–18; 33.16.1, 2.
2. MMA 32.143.1–18. See Russell 1997; see also Crawford, Harper, and Pittman 1980, Porada 1945, and Gadd 1936.
3. Seven Assyrian reliefs from Nimrud were already in the collection: the first to enter The Metropolitan Museum of Art was a gift of Benjamin Brewster in 1884 (MMA 84.11), and six further sculptures were given by J. Pierpont Morgan in 1917 (MMA 17.190.2077–2082).
On January 13, 1930, Rockefeller sent a list of fifty-five Assyrian reliefs from Nimrud located in various colleges and institutions to the art dealer C. Edward Wells, stating that if any of the sculptures could be obtained he would be willing to buy them (John D. Rockefeller Jr. to C. Edward Wells, January 13, 1930, folder 281, box 28—MMA—Gift of Assyrian Sculpture, 1929–1960, Record Group 2 Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller [OMR], Rockefeller Family Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center). Rockefeller was able to acquire through Wells two reliefs from Union College in Schenectady, New York, and one from Auburn Theological Seminary, New York. These three sculptures had been sent to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century by the Reverend William Frederic Williams (see Franck 1980). See note 39 below.
4. Albenda 1986, pp. 26–27.
5. The Khorsabad reliefs arrived at Le Havre in December 1846 and by February the following year had reached Paris and the Louvre; a public display of the reliefs was opened on May 1, 1847. French excavations at Khorsabad were resumed in 1852–55 under the direction of Victor Place.
6. Within a few years of Botta's departure from Khorsabad, many of the exposed reliefs were disintegrating badly or were being buried by the collapse of the earth walls of the excavation trenches. See Layard 1853, p. 131.
7. They were published in Botta and Flandin 1849–50.
8. Layard 1849, vol. 1, p. 15.
9. Hector returned to England in 1857 with a large fortune. See Elizabeth Lee, "Hector, Mrs. Annie French," in *Dictionary of National Biography: Second Supplement*, vol. 2, Faed–Muybridge, ed. Sidney Lee (New York and London, 1912), p. 236.
10. Bonomi 1875, p. 347.
11. See Gadd 1936, pp. 160–63. Hector consigned the fifty fragments to a colleague, Thomas Stirling of Sheffield, who negotiated their sale to the museum in July 1847 for £400. They entered the collections only a few weeks after the arrival of the first Assyrian reliefs from Layard's excavations at Nimrud.
12. Bonomi 1875, p. 347.
13. Reade 1994, pp. 121–22, fig. 3.
14. The involvement of Rassam as the official conduit of the Khorsabad reliefs to the British ambassador is recorded by Birch 1847, p. 168. By 1845 Canning had nearly thirty years' experience in home and foreign service for the British government, including an appointment in 1819 as minister-plenipotentiary to the United States. In 1825 Canning was sent to Constantinople as ambassador. His second ambassadorship lasted from 1842 to 1852, and in this period he came to be seen as one of the leading figures in Constantinople. In 1852 he was raised to the peerage as Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe.
15. Canning to Sir Robert Peel, April 18, 1846. Quoted in Lane-Poole (1888) 1976, vol. 2, p. 149. Canning provided sixty pounds for Layard, who chose to dig at the site of Nimrud. So successful was the work at Nimrud that in 1846 funding was taken over by the British government and Layard became an agent of the British Museum, where the majority of his discoveries were sent.

16. Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, 3rd Marquess of Lansdowne, was Lord President of the Council from 1830 to August 1841 and again from 1846 to 1852. His social influence and political moderation made him one of the most powerful Whig politicians, frequently consulted by Queen Victoria. Sir Robert Peel, 2nd Baronet, was a British Tory statesman, credited with the establishment of the modern Conservative Party, who served as prime minister from December 10, 1834, to April 8, 1835, and again from August 30, 1841, to June 29, 1846.
17. Opitz 1930–31, p. 126, fig. 1; Albenda 1986, p. 182, fig. 59. The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago conducted seven seasons of excavation at Khorsabad from 1928 to 1935; in the process of these excavations, room X was reexamined, and many of the carved panels were removed to Chicago.
18. See Verri et al. 2009.
19. Julian Reade (1972, pp. 91–92) has discussed beardless men in the Assyrian reliefs and their likely identity as eunuchs. For a recent review of the evidence, see Tadmor 2002.
20. Albenda 1986, pp. 182–83.
21. The letter and enclosure are reproduced in Lansdowne sale 1930, pp. 105–6. My thanks to Ian Jenkins, senior curator, Department of Greece and Rome, The British Museum, London, for bringing this catalogue to my attention.
22. Additional Manuscripts 40582: 21, Department of Manuscripts, British Library, London.
23. Additional Manuscripts 40582: 23, Department of Manuscripts, British Library. A copy of the enclosure also exists in the British Museum Central Archive (C11/1/46), London. The “one or two fragments found chiefly by Mr. Rich” refers to three very small and worn fragments of sculpted stone, each approximately 2½ inches (6.4 cm) high, that had been recovered from the surface of Nineveh by Claudius James Rich in 1820; they entered the collections of the British Museum in 1825 (BM 1825,0503.61, 62, 72). See Simpson 2003, p. 199.
24. Sir Robert Peel to the British Museum Secretary, January 8, 1846, C11/1/46, British Museum Central Archive.
25. Trustees Standing Committee Minutes, January 10, 1846, British Museum Central Archive.
26. Birch 1847.
27. In 1836 the British Museum began to produce casts commercially, and the public could consult lists of available molds. By the late nineteenth century, plaster casts from the British Museum and other international collections had become fashionable both in the home and in museum displays, alongside original sculptures around the world.
28. Sir Robert Peel to the British Museum Secretary, August 27, 1846, C5/9/46, British Museum Central Archive.
29. Letter Book, August 14, 1846–January 22, 1847, number 28, British Museum Central Archive.
30. Sir Robert Peel to the British Museum Secretary, August 31, 1846, C5/1/46, British Museum Central Archive.
31. The Earl of Shelburne was a Whig politician who pursued a conciliatory policy toward America during its fight for independence from the British Crown; he was appointed prime minister in 1782 but resigned the following year. In 1784 Shelburne was made Marquess of Lansdowne.
32. Ruskin 1849, pp. 109–10, para. 31.
33. See Bohrer 2003, pp. 164–65.
34. The location of the Assyrian sculptures within Lansdowne House is recorded in Smith 1889, p. 48.
35. Peel sale 1900, lot 22.
36. MMA 32.12.
37. MMA 32.11.4.
38. Russell 1997, p. 164.
39. The three Nimrud reliefs were duly accepted by the trustees of The Metropolitan Museum of Art at a meeting on June 8, 1931 (MMA 31.72.1–3).
40. Rockefeller to Breck, May 19, 1931, folder 281, box 28, Rockefeller Family Archives. Rockefeller’s mistake in associating these three reliefs with the Lansdowne collection is repeated by Gadd 1936, p. 235.
41. Breck to Rockefeller, May 19, 1931, folder 281, box 28, Rockefeller Family Archives.
42. Rockefeller to Breck, May 20, 1931, folder 281, box 28, Rockefeller Family Archives.
43. Winlock to Rockefeller, January 11, 1933, folder 281, box 28, Rockefeller Family Archives.
44. Rockefeller to Winlock, January 19, 1933, folder 281, box 28, Rockefeller Family Archives.

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