

Notes from Christies Auction House

## TWO HIGHLY IMPORTANT ASSYRIAN RELIEFS

THE PROPERTY OF CANFORD SCHOOL

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A GYPSUM BAS-RELIEF WALL-SLAB FROM ROOM C, THE NORTH-WEST PALACE OF ASHURNASIRPAL II AT KALHU (NIMRUD), 883-859 B.C., depicting a beardless royal arms bearer/eunuch (sla reshe) and a bearded winged divine figure (apkalle) about to come into the king's presence. The eunuch wears a tasselled and fringed upper garment, pendant earring, necklace, arm and wristlet with rosette design; he carries a rosette-headed mace, bow and quiver decorated with rosettes, cones and palmettes. The divine figure wears a horned cap, pendant earring, necklace, arm- and wristlet; two daggers, one with decorated handle, and a calf-headed whetstone are inserted in his waist-band; in his right hand he holds a cone with which he 'anoints' the attendant and in his left he would have held a situla. Across the lower part of their bodies are bands of the standard cuneiform inscription listing the king's titles, claims and achievements including the building of his palace 72 x 46in. (183 x 117cm.), 2½in. (6.4cm.) thick.

Ashurnasirpal II, the son of Tukulti-Ninurta II, inherited a large empire which he had to consolidate through numerous military campaigns. Early in his reign he moved his capital from Ashur to a modest site

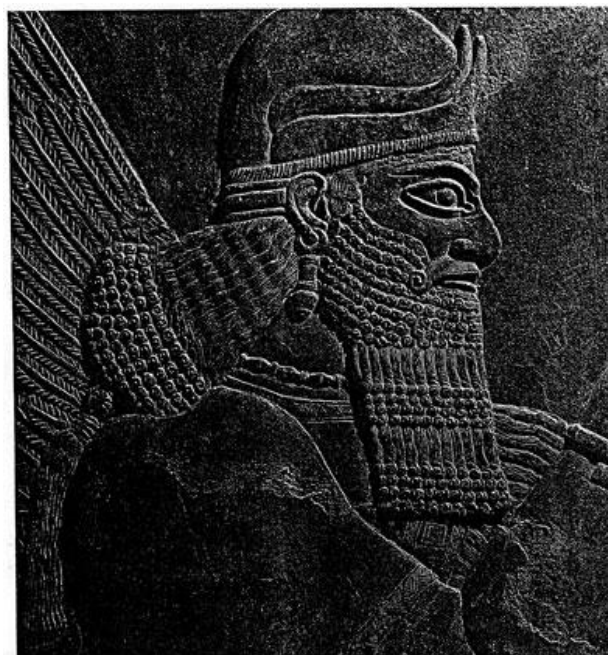
on the Tigris which then became a vast administrative centre with temples, palaces, canals and gardens. Carved reliefs adorned the palace depicting the king as the spiritual, military and political leader of his people. The 'anointment' of the king and his attendants by a protective deity maintained the potency of the royal figure. The cone, which is self-pollinating, has also been identified as a male date which is used in pollination and appears on reliefs with the sacred tree. Kalhu (biblical Calah) remained the capital for the next 150 years.

The queens would have been buried under the palace, but their tombs were mostly looted. However, three intact tombs were recently discovered under the royal palace and in one of the queens' tombs was discovered an inlaid gold wristlet similar to that worn above, cf. M. Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia*, Oxford, 1990, pi. 165; *National Geographic*, Vol. 179, no. 5, May 1991, illus. p. 111

The standard inscription reads as follows:

*"Property of the palace of Ashur-nasir-apli, vice-regent of Ashur, chosen of the gods Enlil and Ninurta, beloved of the gods An and Dagan, destructive weapon of the great gods, strong king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, son of Tukulti-Ninurta (II), great king, strong king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, son of Adad-nerari (II) (who was) also great king, strong king, king of the universe, (and) king of Assyria; valiant man who acts with the support of Ashur his lord and has no rival among the princes of the four quarters, marvellous shepherd, fearless in battle, mighty flood tide which has no opponent, the king who subdues those insubordinate to him, he who rules all peoples, strong male who treads upon the necks of his foes, trampler of all enemies, he who breaks up the forces of the rebellious, the king who acts with the support of the great gods his lords and has conquered all lands, gained dominion over all highlands and received their tribute, capturer of hostages, he who is victorious over all countries:*

*When Ashur, the lord who called me by name (and) made my sovereignty supreme, placed his merciless weapon in my lordly arms, I felled with the sword the extensive troops of the Lullumu in battle. With the help of the gods Shamash and Adad, the gods my supporters, I thundered like the god Adad, the devastator, against the troops of the lands Nairi, Habhu, the Shubaru, and the land Nirbu. The king who subdued at his feet (the territory stretching) from the opposite bank of the Tigris to Mount Lebanon and the Great Sea, the entire land Laqu, (and) the land Suhu including the city Rapiqu; he conquered from the source of the River Submit to the land Urartu. I brought within the boundaries of my land (the territory stretching) from the pass of Mount Kurruru to the land Gilzanu, from the opposite bank of the Lower Zab to the city Til-Bari which is upstream from the land Zaban, from the city Til-sha-Abtani to the city Til-sha-Zabdani, the cities Hirimu, Harutu, which are fortresses of Karduniash. I accounted (the people) from the pass of Mount Babitu to Mount Hashmar as people of my land. In the lands over which I gained dominion I always appointed my governors. They entered servitude.*



*Ashur-nasir-apli, attentive prince, worshipper of the great gods, ferocious dragon, conqueror of cities and the entire highlands, king of lords, encircler of the obstinate, crowned with splendour, fearless in battle, merciless hero, he who stirs up strife, praiseworthy king, shepherd, protection of the (four) quarters, the king whose command disintegrates mountains and seas, the one who by his lordly conflict has brought under one authority ferocious (and) merciless kings from east to west:*

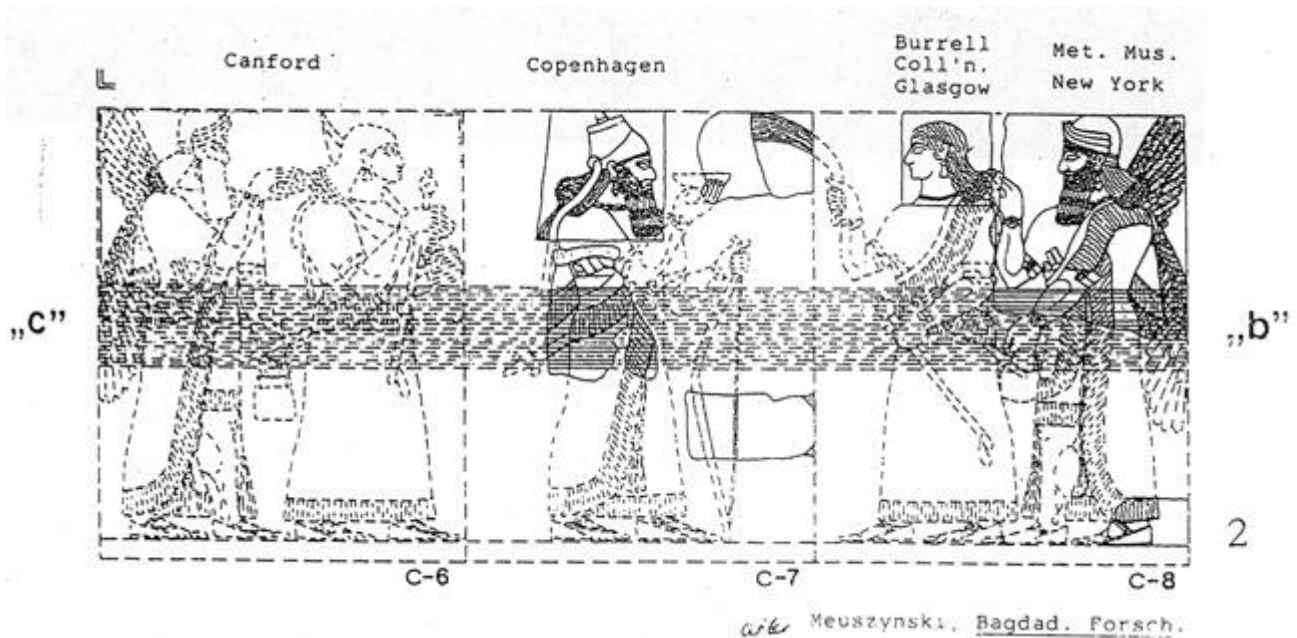
*The ancient city Kalach which Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, a prince who preceded me, had built- that city had become dilapidated; it lay dormant. I rebuilt that city. I took people which I had conquered from the lands over which I had gained dominion, from the land Suhu, (from) the entire land of Laqu, [the text on this relief ends here] (from) the city Sirqu which is at the crossing of the Euphrates, (from) the entire land of Zamua, from Bit-Adini and the land Hatti and from Lubarna, the Patinean. I settled (them) therein. I cleared away the old ruin hill (and) dug down to water level. I sank (the foundation pit) down to a depth of 120 layers of brick. I founded therein a palace of cedar, cypress, dapranu-juniper, box-wood, meskannu-wood, terebinth, and tamarisk as my royal residence (and) for my lordly leisure for eternity. I made (replicas of) beasts of mountains and seas in white limestone and parutu-alabaster (and) stationed (them) at its doors. I decorated it in a splendid fashion; I surrounded it with knobbed nails of bronze. I hung doors of cedar, cypress, dapranu-juniper, and meskannu-wood in its doorways. I took in great quantities and put therein silver, gold, tin, bronze, iron, booty from the lands over which I gained dominion." (Assyrian Royal Inscriptions, pp. 165-167)*

#### PROVENANCE:

Sir (Austen) Henry Layard's excavations at Nimrud 1845-1848. Donated to his principal benefactor, Sir John Guest, whose daughter Sir Henry later married. In 1851 Sir Charles Barry was commissioned to design 'Nineveh Court', an adjunct to the home of the Guest family, Canford Manor, which would house their Assyrian antiquities. The bulk of the collection, including monumental gateway human-headed bulls and palace reliefs, was sold by the grandson, Lord Wimborne, in 1919 and bought by John D. Rockefeller who donated them to the Metropolitan Museum, New York. In 1923 Canford Manor became an independent school and 'Nineveh Court' was converted into the school tuck-shop, affectionately known as 'The Grubber'. Seven further reliefs were sold in 1959 leaving behind what were thought to be three plaster casts. However, in 1993 the whitewash was removed, revealing one of them to be missing slab 6 from Room C of the Palace at Nimrud and hitherto thought to have been lost in the Tigris (cf. Meuszynski, 29; Reade, Iraq 27, 134). Room C was situated directly west of the Throne-room, with which it was connected by a single gate. Other reliefs from Ashurnasirpal's palace are in the major museums throughout the world. Fragments from Room C are in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, the Burrell Collection, Glasgow, and Copenhagen Museum.

This is the most important Assyrian relief to come on the market since the 'Sandon Hall' relief figure, London, December 1979 (sold £240,000), and a damaged head of a horned divinity in New York, November 1986 (sold \$451,000). These both came from Ashurnasirpal's palace at Kalhu.





*Royal Attendant, palace of Ashurnasirpal II 28-35*

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