

The Institute of ARCHAEOLOGY Siegfried H. Horn Museum



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INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY
HORN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MUSEUM
NEWSLETTER

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Nineveh Symposium

Some questions to which biblical scholars and archaeologists would like answers involve the Neo-Assyrian Empire and its capital of Nineveh. How alike and dissimilar were they to their Israelite neighbors? What part of their history and culture can help illuminate the biblical texts? How important is the research and preservation of Assyrian artifacts? To at least partially answer some these questions, Dr. Constance Gane, of Andrews University, directed her graduate students in presenting their respective research in the “Nineveh Symposium,” on March 7, 2016, as part of the Horn Museum Lecture Series.

Jared Wilson began the session with his research which focused on the biblical king Nimrod, the legendary builder of Nineveh. While only mentioned a few times in the Bible (Gen 10:10-12, 1 Chr 1:10, Mic 5:6), extra-biblical traditions (in Philo and Josephus) associating him with the Tower of Babel, led to his reputation (even later appearing in Dante’s Divine Comedy) as a king, who was rebellious against God. In terms of archaeology, a rough estimate on dating Nimrod’s lifetime may be derived from mudbrick technology. Genesis 11:3 states: the people should “burn [their bricks] thoroughly.” From this it can be surmised that by the time of the Tower of Babel, mudbricks were being fired in kilns rather than merely sun baked. Since kiln-fired mudbricks appear for the first time during the Uruk Period (ca. 4000-3100 BC), it would suggest that Nimrod and the events recorded in Gen 11 may have occurred about this time.

Stanley Lebrun’s research was on the origins of kingship in the ancient Near East. According to his findings, it may be suggested that the Babylonian god, Marduk, was the primarily influence

(cont’d on p. 2)



Nineveh Symposium (from l-r): Professor Constance Gane, Michael Orellana, Daniel Ulvoczky, Stanley Lebrun, Dorian Alexander, Jacob Moody, Bruno Barros, Jason Whitley, and Jared Wilson.

behind kingship. The blueprint for kingship seems to be exemplified by Marduk in the epic *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian creation myth, found in the library of Ashurbanipal, at Nineveh. Here, the primordial sea goddess, Tiamat, was killed by Marduk, who then created the world with her dead body. Marduk was subsequently enthroned as king of the gods, and set up a supernatural order and governance for the universe, at Babylon. Tribal elders originally made the decisions, but with the advent of cities, a government, modeled after Marduk's heavenly order of kingship, was developed.

The self-glorification of three Mesopotamian monarchs from various periods of history seems to support this concept of earthly kingship as derived from the heavenly kingship of Marduk, as certain aspects of these king's lives appear to parallel the rise of Marduk as king of the gods. First, Sargon of Akkad (ca. 2334-2279 BC), who established the first empire (Akkad) in Mesopotamia, legitimized his kingship by virtue of his might in battle, just like Marduk. His grandson, Naram-Sin, would later become the first Mesopotamian king to deify himself. Later, Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC) established the Babylonian Empire. In both the prologue and epilogue of his famous Law Code, Akkad is mentioned in a symbolic effort by Hammurabi to demonstrate his own power, by identifying himself with Sargon of Akkad (Babylon being the new Akkad). As to parallels to Marduk, Hammurabi was the first king to maintain order in a multicultural empire, just as Marduk was the first god to establish a firm order throughout the whole universe. Finally, Sargon II (722-705 BC), of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, also deified himself. He modeled himself with Sargon of Akkad, both in terms of power and legitimacy. Just like Sargon of Akkad (and Marduk), Sargon II legitimized his power through strength in battle. Hence, it would seem that the government of the gods was deliberately patterned on the lives of the Mesopotamian kings, with each one building upon his predecessor as a model for kingship.

Michael Orellana also presented his research on syncretism in the cult of Ishtar, which features the earliest temple at Nineveh. Ishtar was an important deity in Mesopotamian religion from as early ca. 3500 BC. She was the counterpart to the Sumerian goddess Inanna, and cognate for the Egyptian Qudshu, as well as the various Semitic goddesses (Asherah, Anat and Astarte), where she is depicted naked, standing on a lion. One of the most famous myths about Ishtar describes her descent to the underworld, and the death/resurrection of her son and consort, Tammuz. Her influence on Mesopotamian culture has been demonstrated variously through the ages, e.g., with queens wielding power almost on same level as kings in Early Dynastic Period, and providing the mythological precedent for theological reproduction. Ishtar herself was influenced by the prototypical mother-goddess, symbolizing sexuality and the source or power of life.

Symbols of Ishtar (from as early as 3200-3100 BC) include a 77 ring-post, a rope on a ring, rosettes, and naked priests (in Mesopotamia, nakedness was a sign of power). Archaeological references to the cult of Ishtar occur as early as the Early Dynastic II Period (ca. 2900-2750 BC), with depictions of priest-kings holding goats and flowers. From Titris Höyük, an Early Bronze Age city dating ca. 2600-2100 BC, there are images of the star symbol (of Inanna) and Ishtar holding her breasts (the typical stance of the fertility goddess). In addition, Ishtar is represented on numerous cuneiform seals from various periods, symbolizing her validation of a king's right to rule.

Jason Whitley compared the Babylonian *Akitu* festival, which was celebrated by the Assyrians in Nineveh, and *Yom Kippur* in the Hebrew Bible. In Babylonian religion, the *Akitu* festival was a 12-day commemoration, dedicated to Marduk's victory over Tiamat, the main purpose being to ensure that the kingdom was in a good relationship with the gods. Marduk had a powerful presence in the *Akitu* festival. In particular, the fifth day of the *Akitu* festival had three distinct

phases: 1) daily sacrifices and the personal purification of the high priest; 2) the purification of temple of Marduk (*Esagila*), which involved the elements of water (a symbol of holiness), loud noises and fire (to scare demons out of the temple), and sacrifice, specifically the decapitation of a perfect sheep; and 3) the humiliation of king, who removed his royal signet ring, appearing as mere man, and is slapped in the face by the priests. All of this, unlike the rest of the *Akitu* festival, occurred outside the city wall.

Comparatively, *Yom Kippur* ("Day of Atonement") had two phases (daily sacrifices and the cleansing of the sanctuary). The sacrifices involved the laying of hands on a bull, slitting its throat and spilling its blood on altar, after which the meat was "consumed" by God. The cleansing of the sanctuary involved the sacrifice of 16 animals, two of which were goats: one for the sins of the people that were brought into sanctuary, and the other for the sins brought out of sanctuary, by laying them upon the goat, which was then released into the wilderness. Both festivals share similarities, including sacrifices, with only priests being involved, the elements of water, loud noises, fire and sacrifices. In both festivals the temple was purged of evil. But there are also differences. For instance, the 5th day of the *Akitu* festival was part of a 12-day observance in the Spring, whereas *Yom Kippur* was held in the 7th month (in the Fall).

Then, Bruno Barros presented his research on the conquest of Lachish, commemorated by the Assyrians by a set of reliefs in the royal palace at Nineveh. The Lachish reliefs, discovered by Austen Layard during his excavations in Room 36 of the Palace of Sennacherib, from 1845-47, and are a set of stone panels narrating the story of the Assyrian victory over the kingdom of Judah during the siege of Lachish, in 701 BC. At the time of the siege, Hezekiah (715-686 BC) was King of Judah. Like Ahaz, Hezekiah had been a loyal vassal of Assyria; but after the death of Sargon II, in 705 BC, he ceased to pay the tribute imposed on his

father and entered into league with Egypt against Assyria. Sennacherib moved west in 701 BC, destroying 46 towns of Judah and deporting 200,150 captives. Although he claimed that he besieged Jerusalem, with Hezekiah trapped “like a bird in a cage,” he was nevertheless, unable to conquer the city.

The reliefs, consisting of 13 slabs, depict eight sequences of the siege of Lachish, and were meant to display the king’s achievements in war. The audience for these reliefs would have been elite visitors to the palace, not just courtiers, and served as propaganda to promote the King’s power, and to intimidate any who doubted it. Although the Lachish reliefs might be seen as compensation for not conquering Jerusalem, their size, position in the central room of his palace, and the fact that they constitute the only battle portrait created by Sennacherib, would also indicate the importance he gave to this battle and his victory over Judah.

Daniel Ulvoczyk focused his research on Assyrian psychological warfare, particularly with regards to Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem in 701 BC. In terms of war strategy, psychological warfare was a major factor in making the Assyrians a successful military power. The use of psychological warfare began even before a military campaign. The Assyrians would consult their gods, using extispicy, and inquire if this tactic would be necessary. This interest was founded in real concerns, as the Assyrians recognized the great expense (in time, resources and human life) in conducting sieges and preferred, if possible, to find ways to succeed without bloodshed. An example is found in 2 Kgs 18-19. Here, Sennacherib sent a delegation of officials and an army of 185,000 to Jerusalem, and delivered a set of options: 1) voluntary deportation, or 2) siege. Thus, the Assyrians are clearly seen to be utilizing psychological warfare by tempting their enemies to surrender peacefully and retain their lives, while reserving siege as a last resort

The delegation was headed and orated by a man, whose title was the *Rabshakeh*, an Assyrian court official

(likely meaning “chief cupbearer”), not a military man, who surprisingly spoke in Hebrew, not Aramaic (the *lingua franca* of the time), and thus was probably an exile or renegade Jew. Psychological warfare was used here to try to get the people to revolt against Hezekiah, by portraying him as the sinner and the Assyrians as the righteous defenders of God. Extra-biblical examples of psychological tactics are attested on palace panels and reliefs, including public torture, cutting down fruit trees, and terrorism (by impaling, or placing the heads of captives on spikes). Hence, much of the evidence of Assyrian warfare reveals their mastery of psychological warfare against their enemies.

Dorian Alexander presented his research on the historicity of Jonah in light of the archaeology of Nineveh. Many scholars question the historicity of the Book of Jonah due to the lack of corroborating evidence. However, the cultural and historical reality of Nineveh during the 8th century BC may provide a plausible historical setting for the events of the Book of Jonah. Three kings stand out as possible candidates for the King of Assyria at the time of Jonah’s ministry: Adad-Nirari III (ca. 811-783 BC), Shalmaneser IV (ca. 783-773 BC), and Ashur-Dan III (ca. 772-755 BC). Military reverses, diplomatic setbacks, plague, famine and domestic uprisings, as well as solar eclipses (interpreted as bad omens), occurred during the reigns of these kings. With such events in conjunction with the ministry of Jonah, it is possible that the Ninevites might have been jittery and ready to pay attention to a foreign prophet, who suddenly appeared in their city. In addition, Adad-Nirari made a radical religious reform in connection with the god Nabu, who is described in dedications of the time, as the only god.

Regarding mass conversion, the Assyrians did not disbelieve in gods of other nations; gods from other lands invited the Assyrians to come and destroy them due to the anger of local god(s). One other factor that may have contributed to the Ninevites reception of Jonah’s message lies within the Mesopotamian tradi-

tion of the “fish-god,” who originated with the figure of the Babylonian Adapa/Uanna, parallel to Dagon (NW Levant), also half-man, half-fish (i.e., Heb. *dag* (“fish”) = Dagon?), among many others in comparative mythology. As for the city of Nineveh, there are several reflections of the local reverence for the “fish-god” and its central role in Ninevite identity. The city’s name is derived from the word “Nineweh,” which translates to “house of the fish,” reflects its status as a cult center of divine fish-god worship. In addition, the fact that Jonah was spewed out of a fish and came to a place where the fish-god was worshipped might have added to the success of his message among the Ninevites. The above evidence suggests a probable setting for the biblical account of Jonah.

Finally, Jacob Moody talked about the current events surrounding Nineveh and the greater Middle East, specifically regarding cultural heritage and the *Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)*, an unrecognized state led by a supreme leader (the caliph), who is believed to be the successor of Muhammad. Part of this movement has included the destruction of cultural heritage sites. *ISIS* deems this material culture to be pagan (and unholy). In 2015, the *American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR)* reported over 700 accounts of cultural heritage destruction in Syria and Iraq, including Nineveh. While little can be done in the areas of *ISIS* influence, salvage efforts are being conducted where possible. Also *ASOR* has set up a Cultural Heritage Initiative, with people documenting cases of destruction and looting, as well as promoting global awareness, and plans for emergency cultural responses to these events. There are also a number of digital preservation projects (e.g., *CyArk* and *Project Mosul*), that work to digitally preserve cultural heritage sites by collecting, archiving and providing open access to data, created by laser scanning, digital modeling, and other state-of-the-art technologies. (Dorian Alexander)



RANDOM SURVEY

Assyrian Palace Found:

Archaeologists documenting the destruction of the Shrine of Jonah, by ISIS, on the mound of Nebi Yubus, in Nineveh, following its recent eviction from the city, have located what appears to be a palace. In one of the underground tunnels built by ISIS beneath the shine, a marble inscription of Esarhaddon, written in cuneiform script, was found. The palace was originally built for Sennacherib, renovated and expanded by Esarhaddon, renovated again by Ashurbanipal, and finally destroyed by the Babylonians in 612 BC.

Excavations in Lower Mycenae:

While the ancient citadel of Mycenae is well-known archaeologically, the 75-125 acre, walled lower town has only recently received attention. Two gates, fresco and plaster fragments from the buildings, seals, ivory objects and numerous other artifacts of this large urban town, that existed from the 13th - 6th centuries BC, have now been discovered.

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Tomb of Osiris Found?

The "Tomb of Min" or mythical tomb of Osiris, has recently been found at the Al-Gorna necropolis near the Valley of the Kings, in Luxor, dating to the 25th Dynasty (ca. 760-525 BC). The tomb consists of shafts, a chapel, a large hallway, burial chamber, and a statue of the god Osiris. The funerary chamber is decorated with reliefs of deities and demons holding knives, the latter presumably the guardians of the tomb's occupant. It is thought that this tomb was a symbolic burial site, with rituals connecting the god's powers with the pharaohs.

New Dead Sea Scrolls Cave Found:

A new so-called "12th Dead Sea Scrolls cave" has recently been found in the Judean Desert. Unfortunately, no new Dead Sea Scroll material has been found. The cave did contain a number of storage jars, including one with a rolled-up piece of parchment inside, prepared for writing, but on which there was none. Cloth coverings and a leather strap, that originally bound some scrolls, were also found. Looters may have already ransacked the cave in the 1950s.

Biblical Tarshish Located?

Scholar have recently done lead-isotope analysis on samples from a number of Iron Age hacksilber hoards from Israel, indicating their origin in Spain and Sardinia, and suggesting a trade connection between the western Mediterranean and the southern Levant.

N E W S L E T T E R



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