

LAMASSU IN THE MODERN WORLD

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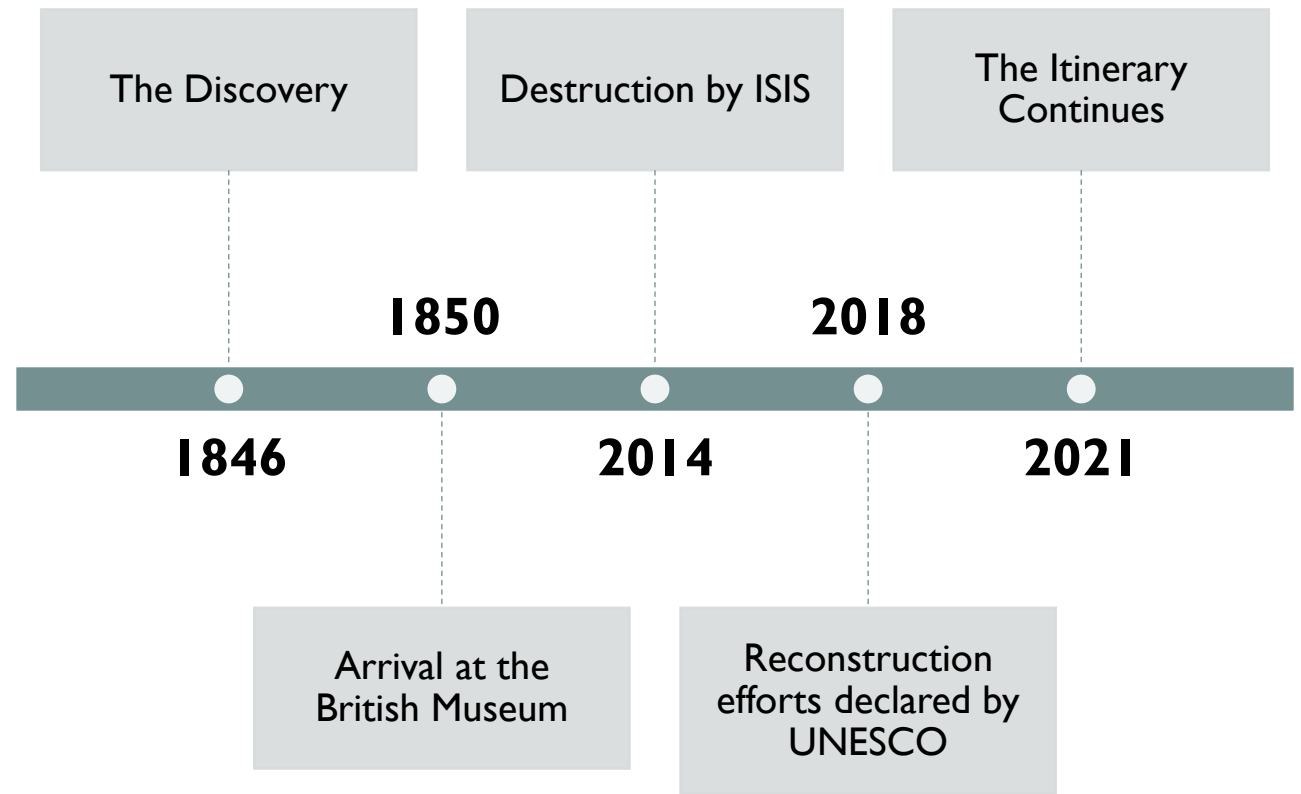
Thursday 7th January 2021



Figure 1: Winged Human-Headed Bull, Nimrud, 883-859 BC
(metmuseum.org, 2020)

TIMELINE

Itinerary: “Routes by which things circulate in and out of places where they come to rest or are active ... the value of circulating objects for the production and reshaping of relations among humans” (Joyce and Gillespie, 2015: 29)



THE DISCOVERY

By

Sir Austen Henry Layard

1846

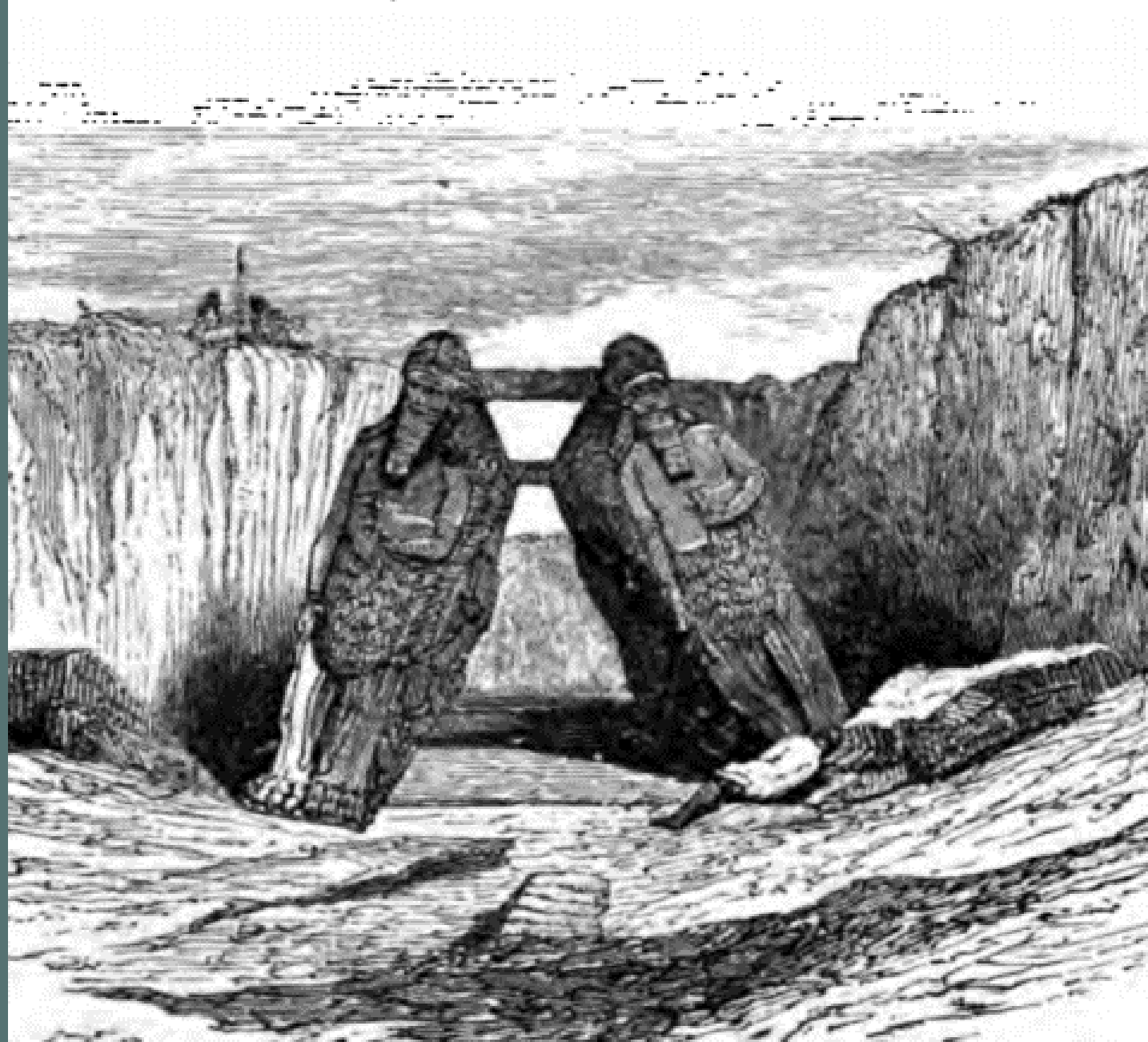


Figure 2: Sketch of the Winged Human-Headed Bull and Lion at Nimrud, 1846 (Layard, 1867: 52)

THE REMAINS OF NINEVEH

- 1846: Austen Henry Layard lead an excavation of Nimrud, the remains of which are found on the outskirts of modern day Mosul, Iraq.
- The first discovery of the sculpted human-head kickstarted the itinerary of this representational form in this time.
- *“As I had expected, the report of the discovery of the gigantic head, carried by the terrified Arab to Mosul, had thrown the town into commotion... I consequently received a somewhat unintelligible message from his Excellency, to the effect that the remains should be treated with respect, and be by no means further disturbed.”* (Layard, 1967: 51-52)
- After some persuasion the excavation continued and subsequently a winged human-headed Bull and Lion were discovered.

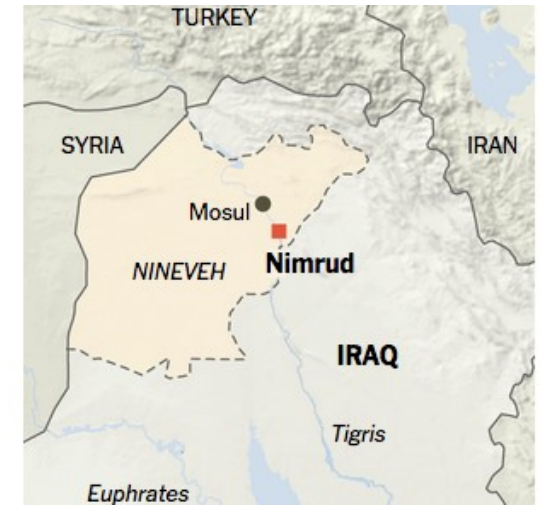


Figure 3: Map of Nimrud near modern day Mosul in Iraq. (Gladstone and Sengupta, 2015)



Figure 4: Sketch of the discovery of an elaborately sculpted human-head, Nimrud, 1846. (Layard, 1867: 49)

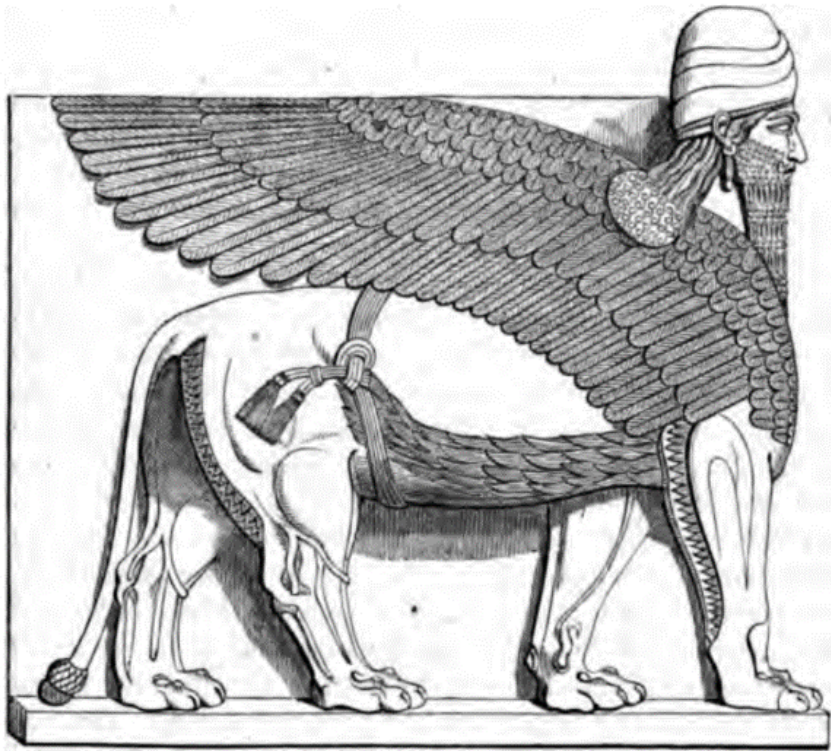


Figure 5: Sketch of a winged human-headed lion at the entrance to the North West Palace, Nimrud, 1846 (Layard, 1867: 53)

CHANGING PERCEPTION AND SHAPING REALITY

- Before Layard's discovery there was little interest in Mesopotamian art. (Hoeks, 2018)
- However, after Layard's description of these representations the academic world began to take notice. (Reade, 1998; Hoeks, 2018)
- Although, the art of the Graeco-Roman world remained the "pinnacle" of art in the ancient world. (Reade, 1998)
- Moving sculptures of these representations to the British Museum in 1850 (The British Museum Blog, 2019) sparked the interest of the public.
- The sculptures and the inscriptions around them stimulated a debate about "the origins of Christianity and Classical civilization." (Reade, 1998)

IN-BETWEEN DISCOVERY AND DESTRUCTION



Figure 6: Wall relief with a portion of Assurnasirpal's Standard Inscription, Nimrud, 865-860 BCE. (Amin, 2014)

- Surrounding the Winged-Human headed bulls at Nimrud was an inscription written in Cuneiform.
- It was during the 1800s that Cuneiform was deciphered by various scholars (Mark, 2018).
- That is how they were able to discern that this text was Assurnasirpal's Standard Inscription.
- Part of the inscription reads: *"Beasts of the mountains and the seas, which I had fashioned out of white limestone and alabaster, I had set up in its gates. I made it [the palace] fittingly imposing."* (metmuseum.org, 2020)

FASCINATION = CONTINUED RESEARCH

- Winged human-headed bull/lion = Lamassu. (Danrey, 2004: 134)
- The meaning of this word was researched in order to ascertain the purpose of the colossi beyond aesthetics.
- Lamassu (Lama) = a female deity of protection according to Landsberger. (Danrey, 2004: 134)
- However, the term aladlammu was found in texts that described these colossi and their position at the gates. (Danrey, 2004: 135)
- During the Assyrian period the representation of the goddess Lama changed to that of the winged human-head bull/lion. (Danrey, 2004: 135)
- Thus the debate continues.

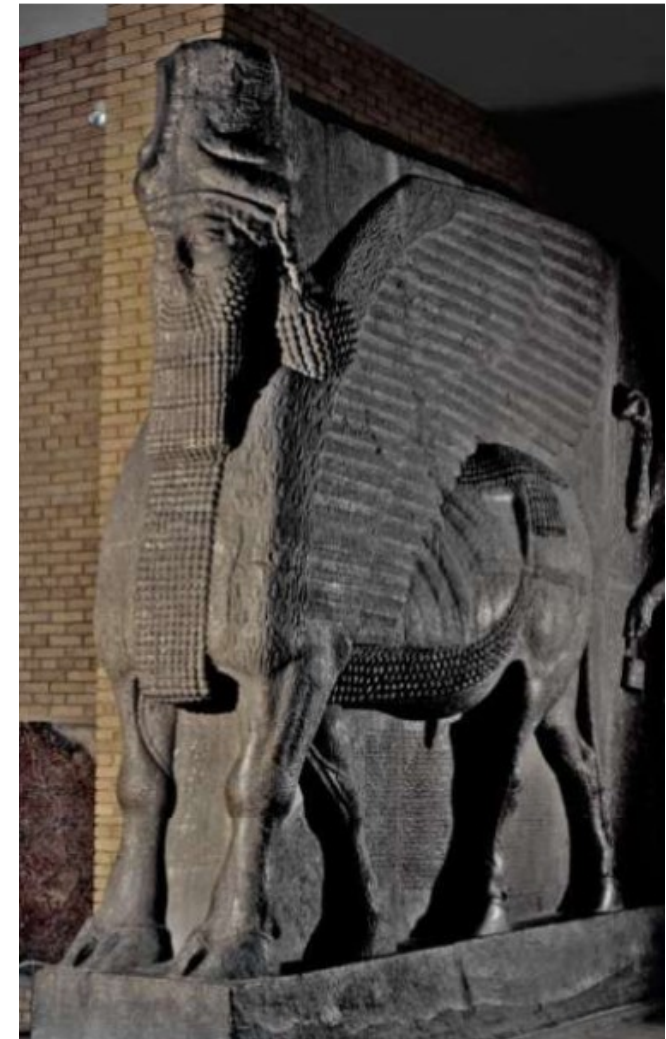


Figure 7: Winged Human-Headed Bull, Khorsabad, 710 BCE (Google Art and Culture, 2021)

DESTRUCTION



Figure 8: Destruction of Winged Human-Headed Bull, Mosul, 2015 (Williams, 2015)

- **26 February 2015:** ISIS released a video showing them destroying various artifacts inside the Mosul Museum. (Williams, 2015)
- “In terms of heritage destruction, once they had captured the city of Mosul, the IS undertook a systematic iconoclastic programme which saw the razing of countless cultural and religious sites.” (Isakhan and Meskell, 2019: 1189)
- **Before ISIS** – Lamassu meant protection and represented a once great civilization.
- **After ISIS** – Just another representation of destruction.

RECONSTRUCTION



Figure 9: Winged Human-Headed Bull and Lion, Nimrud, 883-859 BC (metmuseum.org, 2020)

- **June 2017:** Mosul was liberated from ISIS.
- **February 2018:** UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay launched the 'Revive the Spirit of Mosul Initiative'.
- By reconstructing these heritage sites and their artifacts it is thought that it will empower “the population as agents of change involved in the process of rebuilding their city.” (UNESCO, 2018)
- The Lamassu will then become a symbol of empowerment and resilience, as well as a warning to any who would attack the region again, their original purpose somewhat restored.

THE ITINERARY CONTINUES



Figure 10: Winged Human Headed Bulls, Baghdad Museum, 2018 (Tharoor and Maruf, 2018)

- The Itinerary of these objects began again in 1840, after 2000 years of darkness.
- The interest that was sparked in this period has lasted and grown to this day.
- The Lamassu continue to shape reality, through people researching them or destroying them.
- The continued efforts to restore them and the region they were found in means that the itinerary of these objects will continue to evolve for some time to come.

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