

An Unpublished Drawing of Louvre AO 19914 in the British Museum

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In his volume concerned with the sculptures of Ashurbanipal, R. D. Barnett briefly mentions a drawing made by William Boutcher in 1854 showing only the upper portion of the so-called "ziggurat" relief.¹ The drawing was not reproduced in that volume and it is published here for the first time, with permission of the Trustees of the British Museum (Fig. 1).

The drawing has been in the museum's possession for a long time, since it is located in the folio of Original Drawings, vol. V, pl. 1, kept in the files of the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities. It is on the same page, below the drawing illustrating the entire ziggurat slab, including the portion shown in Fig. 1. This second drawing was also executed by Boutcher at the time of the discovery of the ziggurat relief in 1854; in 1936 it was published in C. J. Gadd's volume (Fig. 2).² There is still a third drawing of the ziggurat relief showing only the lower register of the slab and, in addition, a section of an adjoining slab. This drawing is one of several which long had been thought to be lost until they were discovered by Julian E. Reade in a portfolio kept in the Royal Asiatic Society.³ A major portion of the upper part of the ziggurat relief itself survives in the Louvre as AO 19914 (Fig. 3)⁴; the remainder of the bas-relief as shown in Fig. 2 is now missing. Sometime after the extant slab was placed on view in the Louvre, a drawing of it was prepared and reproduced in Victor Place's volume published in 1867 (Fig. 4).⁵

1 *Sculptures from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh (668-627 B.C.)* (London, 1976), 43. This relief was discovered by Hormuzd Rassam during his excavation activities in Nineveh in 1854. Boutcher was the draftsman assigned to record the subject matter carved on the wall reliefs.

2 Gadd cites this drawing as the "single example" of the ziggurat relief preserved among the Museum's collection; the drawing illustrated in Fig. 1 seems to have been unknown to him; *The Stones of Assyria* (London, 1936), 206, pl. 28.

3 "More Drawings of Ashurbanipal Sculpture," *Iraq* 26 (1964), pl. IV, a. It might be pointed out that this drawing was not reproduced in its entirety in Barnett's volume, cited in n. 1, pl. XXV. The drawings discovered by Reade are now kept in the British Museum, in the folio of Original Drawings, vol. VII.

4 For a general discussion of these bas-reliefs, see Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace*, 10, 14-15.

5 *Ninive et l'Assyrie* (Paris, 1867), 3: pl. 40, 1.

The upper register of the ziggurat relief shown in the drawings of Figs. 1–2 depicts an expansive triple-walled city situated along a river. Within the protective wall of the inner city rise what appear to be two structures adjacent to one another; the wall of a third building is still visible on the extreme left. Although the second building to the right is mostly missing, the columned entrance of this structure makes it possible that it is a royal residence.⁶ To its left the battlemented edifice possessing a pair of round-topped standards

⁶ For a brief comment on Assyrian palaces, with bibliography, see P. Albenda, "Landscape Bas-Reliefs in the *Bit-Hilani* of Ashurbanipal, I," *BASOR* 224 (1976), 49–53, n. 1.

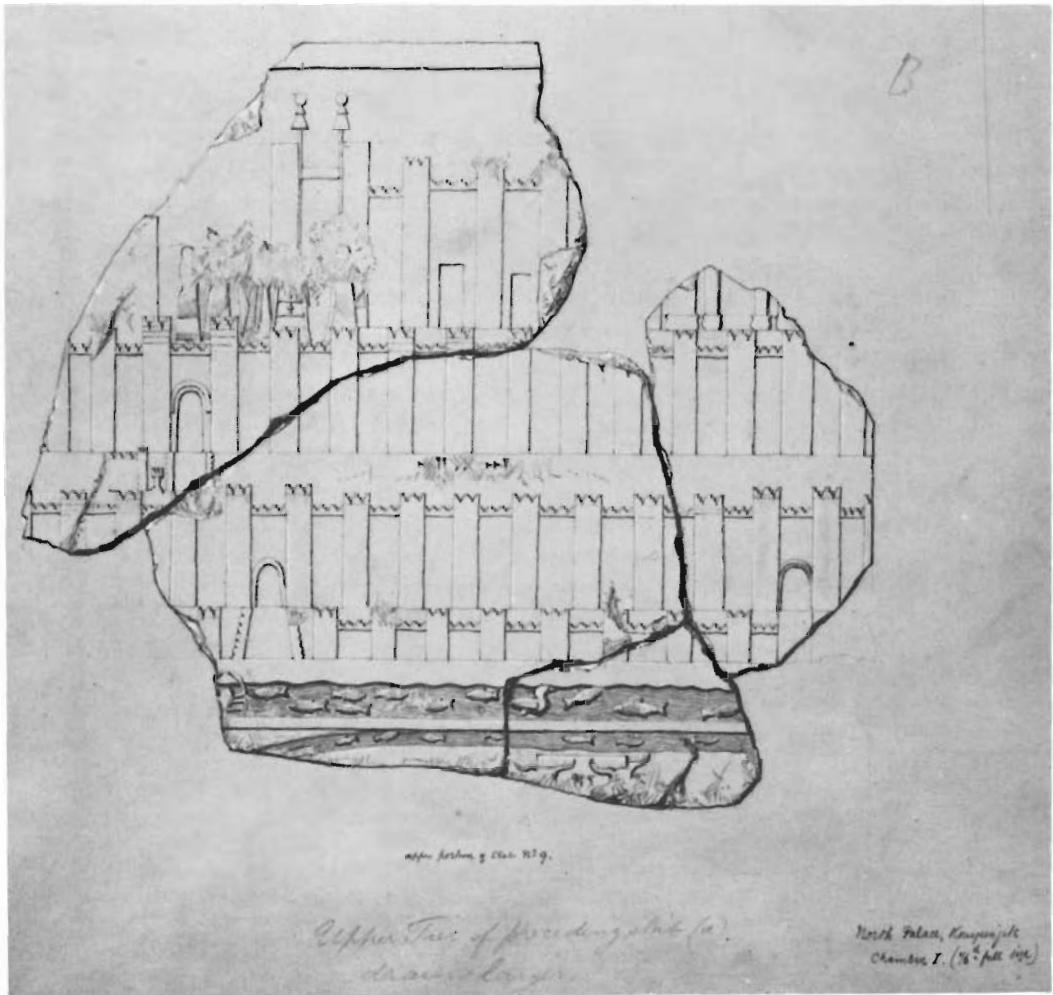


Fig. 1. Original drawing showing a segment of the so-called ziggurat relief; courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

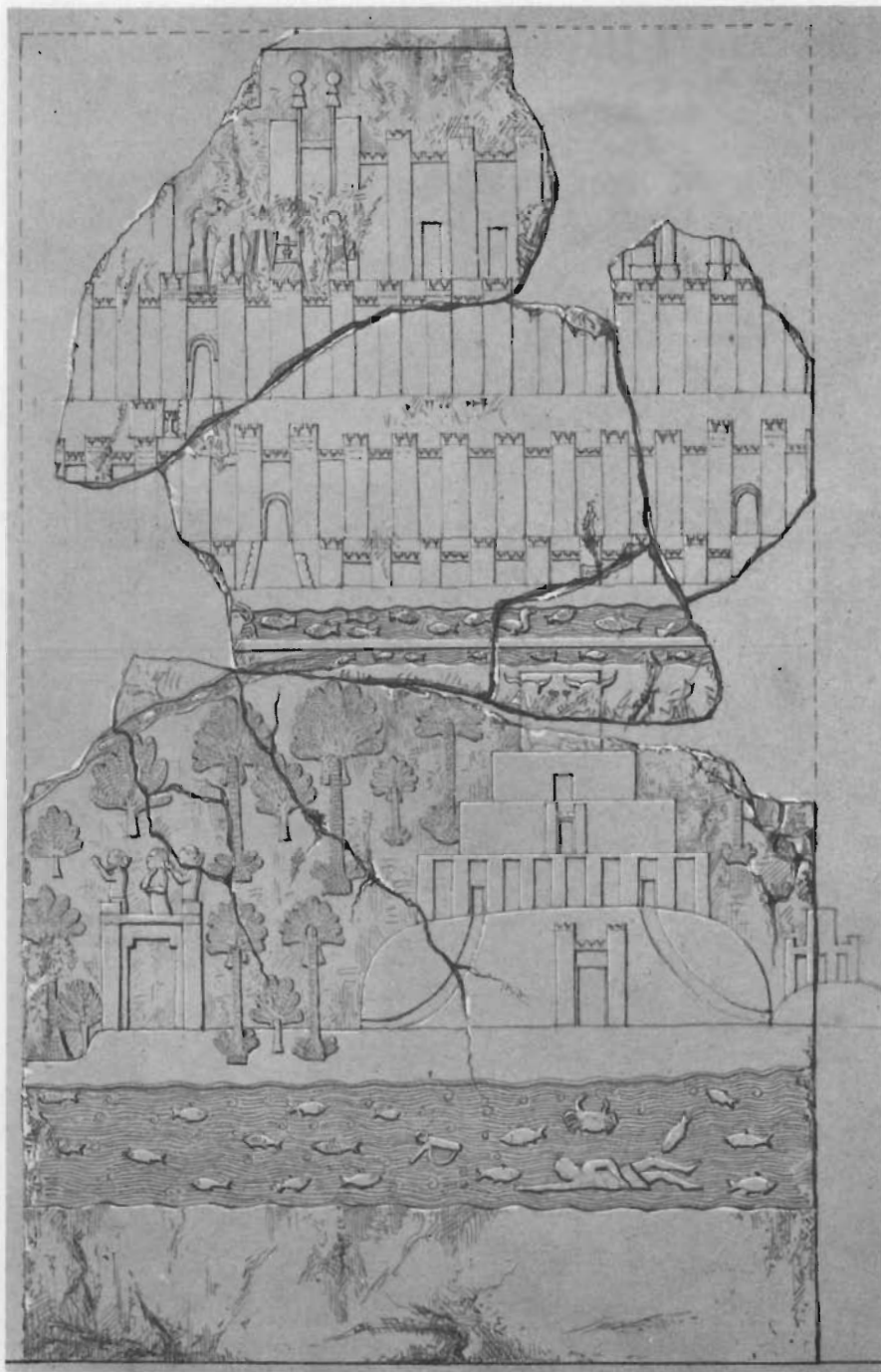


Fig. 2. Original drawing showing the entire ziggurat relief at the time of its discovery; courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 3. Extant fragment of the ziggurat relief in the Louvre, AO 19914; by permission of the Musée du Louvre.

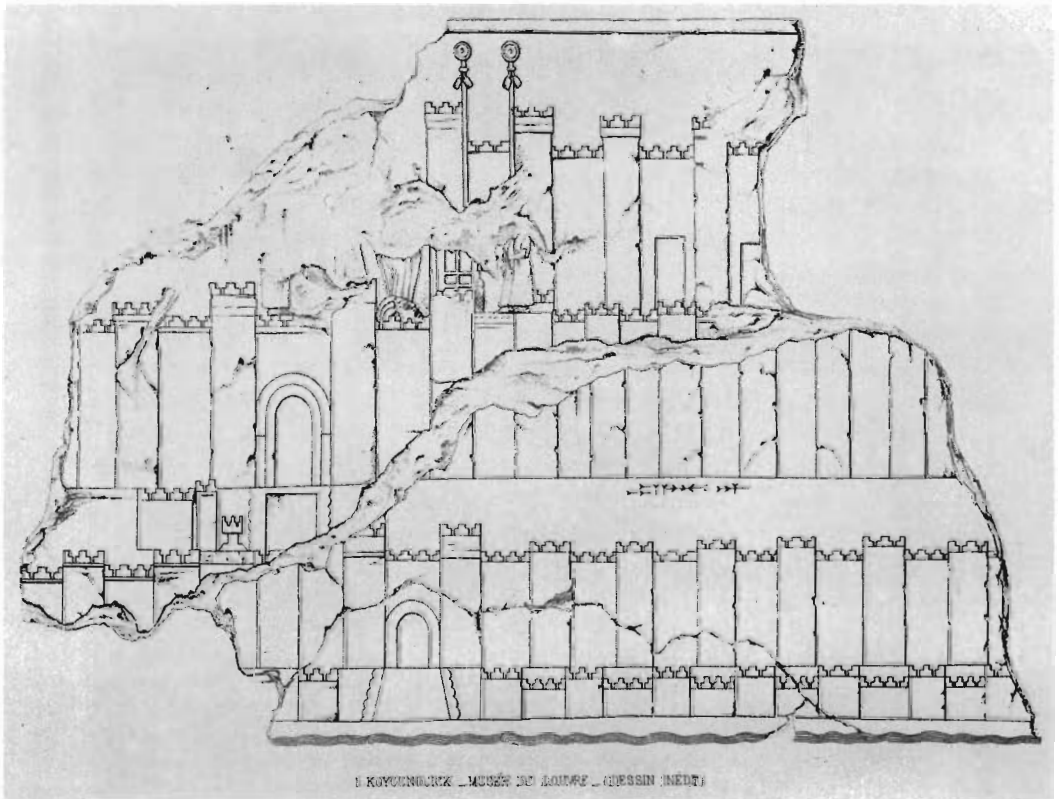


Fig. 4. Original drawing reproduced in V. Place, *Ninive et l'Assyrie*, 3, pl. 40, 1; by permission of the Musée du Louvre.



Fig. 5. Detail: the severed head as it appears on AO 19914; photograph, author.

flanking the front facade is to be identified as a temple.⁷ In front of the religious structure several persons participate in a religious ceremony. In spite of the damage to the surface of the stone, we can still recognize the figure of the Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal, wearing a tall headdress and gripping an upright bow and facing an altar and table (Figs. 1–3). On the opposite side, facing him, are two persons standing side by side, who may be priests; behind the royal personage stands an attendant. The religious ceremony may be related to the series of military events shown on the preceding slabs (known only through drawings), where the battle scenes displayed in the lower registers have been identified as the defeat in 653 B.C. of the Elamite king, Teumman, and the subsequent installation of his successor, Ummanigash.⁸ The upper registers of these slabs depict the triumphal procession of

⁷ Important Assyrian shrines and temples were sometimes adorned with flagstaves or religious standards, described in the texts as *šurinnum*. For the various meanings of this term, see B. F. Batto, *Studies on Women at Mari* (Baltimore, 1974), 97. Archaeological evidence for paired standards set up beside temple entrances occurs at Khorsabad and possibly Tell al Rimah. See G. Loud and C. Altman, *Khorsabad II. The Citadel and the Town*, OIP 40 (1938), 44–45; D. Oates, “The Excavations at Tell al Rimah, 1967,” *Iraq* 30 (1968), 122–25. Portable versions of the religious standards, carried during military campaigns, are shown in Assyrian pictorial arts. Paired standards occur in ritual scenes and comprise part of the accouterments required for the ceremony. In other instances, the religious standards are shown located before a large tent-like structure within an oval fortified camp. See: B. Hrouda, *Die Kulturgeschichte des assyrischen Flachbildes* (Bonn, 1965), pl. 52,4; E. Unger, *Die Wiederherstellung des Bronzetores von Balawat*, MDAI 45 (1912), 8, pl. I,7; R. D. Barnett and M. Falkner, *The Sculptures of Aššur-Nasir-apli (883–859 B.C.), Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 B.C.), Esarhaddon (681–669 B.C.)*, (London, 1962), 18, pl. LX. The portable religious standards were transported in specially-designed chariots, identified as the “Gotteswagen”; P. Calmeyer, “Zur Genese Altiranischer Motive. II. Der Leere Wagen,” *AMIran* N.F. 7 (1974), 59–61.

⁸ Reade, *Iraq* 26 (1964), 6–7.

Assyrian militia towards the fortified city shown in Figs. 1–2. An inscription on the extant relief preserved in the Louvre identifies this city as Dēr⁹ or, more likely, *Arbailu* (Erbil).¹⁰

Concerning the Elamite king Teumman, the annals of Ashurbanipal and epigraphs preserved on tablets probably intended for the king's wall reliefs record the following information: at the time of the defeat of Teumman, this king was decapitated; the severed head was placed on the neck of his ally, Dunanu, a chief of Gambulu, and in this way it was brought into Nineveh; the head was then publicly displayed in front of the gate inside Nineveh; and on another occasion the severed head of Teumman was brought into Arbela "amid rejoicing."¹¹ We may assume that the joyous procession described in the text led into the temple of Ishtar, the building and outer wall of which had been completed early in Ashurbanipal's reign,¹² since an oracle of this goddess had prophesied the overthrow of the Elamite king.¹³ Therefore the drawing reproduced in Place's volume (Fig. 4) serves to strengthen the conclusion of Barnett¹⁴ and Reade¹⁵ that the head at the base of the altar (but not drawn in either of Boutcher's original drawings, Figs. 1–2) belongs to the decapitated Elamite king; for indeed, a human head does appear on the extant Louvre slab (Fig 5.)¹⁶

However, several years ago the writer questioned whether a severed head originally existed on the bas-relief.¹⁷ The basis for this doubt resulted from a comparison between the two original drawings made by Boutcher (Figs. 1–2) and that prepared at a later date and published in Place's volume (Fig. 4). In the former instance, in both drawings where one expects to find a head—if we follow Place's drawing—there are only sketch lines indicating surface abrasion or damage. And although one of Boutcher's drawings focuses upon the ceremonial scene in an architectural setting, an indication that this subject was carefully studied by him, he obviously did not discern any distinguishable detail on the ground adjacent to the altar. The absence of a head in both of Boutcher's drawings contradicts what is clearly visible on the Louvre slab itself and in Place's drawing.

9 Gadd, *Stones of Assyria*, 206.

10 Reade, *Iraq* 26 (1964), 6–7; and Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace*, 15. In the Neo-Assyrian period this city was situated at the start of several major routes leading from the plains into the Zagros. L. D. Levine, "Geographical Studies in the Neo-Assyrian Zagros—I," *Iran* 11 (1973), 13–14.

11 D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* (Chicago, 1928) 2: nos. 865–66, 1041, 1043, 1045, 1047. A discussion of Teumman and the battle scenes depicted on the wall reliefs is given in P. Albenda, "Landscape Bas-Reliefs in the *Bit-Hilani* of Ashurbanipal, II," *BASOR* 225 (1977), 29–33; and J. E. Reade, "Narrative Composition in Assyrian Sculpture," *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 10 (1979), 96–101.

12 Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, 2: no. 982.

13 *Ibid.*, nos. 858–64.

14 *Sculptures from the North Palace*, 42. Note, however, that Gadd's discussion of the possible identity of the walled city on the Louvre slab makes no reference to a severed head; *Stones of Assyria*, 205, 207.

15 *Iraq* 26 (1964), 6–7.

16 A more recent photograph of the Louvre slab (Fig. 3) is published in Barnett's volume, *Sculptures from the North Palace*, pl. XXVI. A comparison of the heads shown in the two photographs seems to indicate stylistic difference (e.g., profile, hair texture); however, Madame Françoise Tallon, *Dépt. des antiquités Orientales*, Louvre, informs me (written communication) that the earlier photograph (Fig. 3) was taken about 15 years ago, and the more recent one was taken about 10 years ago, and "les différences entre les deux photographies viennent vraisemblablement de l'éclairage."

17 *BASOR* 224 (1976), 55, n.2.

During the summer of 1979, the writer was able to examine the Louvre slab and to photograph the head, measuring about 4 cm. wide (Fig. 5).¹⁸ With the aid of a magnifying glass, I observed the following: the profile of the head as it now exists has an angular nose and forehead that is composed of two unconnected irregular lines incised with a fine, pointed implement. The same implement was used for the series of striations that give texture to the hair. These lines do not actually define a shape carved in relief (compare the altar, table, etc.), although the lines occur on portions of the slab raised from the background. In contrast, the over-size lips project in shallow relief, as does the outline of an eye, which is barely visible. The chin and lower edge of the head share the same outlines as the stepped crenellations of the wall. We should note the omission of an ear, a detail of the head that was always included in Assyrian art.

Surprisingly, the severed head, which is now clearly visible on the Louvre slab and has just been described, is quite detailed. Why, then, does no severed head appear in either of Boutcher's drawings whereas, in contrast, both the drawing in Place's volume and the Louvre slab show a head? First, it is evident that a head as detailed as that shown in the last two examples could not possibly have been overlooked by Boutcher. It might then be supposed that sometime after the slab had reached Paris in 1855 someone determined that a severed head had existed and accordingly had the stone retouched to bring out this noteworthy detail.¹⁹ This action must have occurred before the drawing that appeared in Place's volume was made, that is, prior to 1867.²⁰

The doubts here as to whether there was ever a severed head do not preclude the possibility that something was originally sculpted in the area of the head on the Louvre slab. Between the king's bow and the altar appears a broad, vertical line in relief that touches and merges with the upper part of the visible head. To my mind, this line most probably represents the liquid poured from the vessel held in Ashurbanipal's other hand during the ritual. While the only parallel known in Neo-Assyrian art has the liquid touching the lions killed in the hunt,²¹ on the Louvre slab the liquid may have been illustrated as spreading out upon the ground. There also remains the possibility that the liquid flows upon an object.

18 I am grateful to Dr. Pierre Amiet for making the Assyrian reliefs available to me, and to Madame Tallon for her kind assistance.

19 It would seem that the severed head as it now exists betrays, I suggest, an awkward attempt to create a head similar to the one that occurs on the famous Ashurbanipal relief of the garden scene discovered in 1854. See Albenda, *BASOR* 225 (1977), Figs. 27-28.

20 It should be mentioned that a common practice in the past, particularly during the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries, was to restore ancient works of art. In addition, the reconstruction of missing portions on a large number of these objects has on occasion raised doubts as to the accuracy of the proposed solution. Concerning restored ancient Near Eastern art works see, for example, an Anatolian relief from Bor: O. W. Muscarella, "Fibulae Represented in Sculpture," *JNES* 26 (1967), 84, pl. V, fig. 6; and a section of the Ashurbanipal banquet scene: Albenda, *BASOR* 224 (1976), 65-67.

21 Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace*, pls. LVI, LVII, LIX. Representations which show the Assyrian king holding a vessel and bow in each hand, respectively, occur frequently in the reign of Ashurnasirpal II. Cf. S. M. Paley, *King of the World. Ashurnasirpal II of Assyria 883-859 B.C.* (Brooklyn, 1975), pls. 3b, 6, 18b, 19c. The iconography of showing liquid flowing from a vessel, during a ritual, was well-established in Mesopotamia in the 3rd-2nd millennia B.C. Its reappearance in the art of Ashurbanipal's reign may reflect a revival.

In the final analysis, it is not possible to be categorical concerning the alleged modern addition, especially because at present a head is evident. Nevertheless the problems reviewed here are significant, I suggest, with regard to the methodology employed in art historical research. In many instances we depend upon the excavator's drawings as our only documents of the Assyrian wall reliefs, and where restoration on extant reliefs has occurred in the past, there is often no record of this activity. The question still remains: was there originally a head on the Louvre relief and, if so, why was it not drawn by Boucher? Could he have simply overlooked it twice?

Postscript: I visited the Louvre again in November 1980 at which time Dr. Pierre Amiet graciously examined the bas-relief in my presence. He did not detect any unusual surface alteration in the area of the severed head. He indicated, however, that he would ask the Louvre laboratory to examine it. Subsequently, Dr. Amiet informed me that he examined the relief with an ultra-violet lamp and: "Les cassures restaurées sont apparues en noir, mais rien de suspect n'a été visible sur la tête coupée. Je crois donc que celle-ci a vraiment été sculptée en même temps que le reste, et donc que les premiers dessinateurs ne l'ont simplement pas vue."