



Fragment of a relief from the Northwest Palace at Nimrud

Date

c. 883-859 B.C.E.

Medium

Gypsum with remnants of red pigment

Description

Dr. Paul Collins, Jaleh Hearn Curator of Ancient Near East at the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology at the University of Oxford suspects this fragment may come from the so-called 'West Suite' of the Northwest Palace at Nimrud. This section of the reliefs were broken up by the Assyrian King Esarhaddon (680-689 BCE) to reuse the stone panels in his own palace at Nimrud and so we have only limited knowledge of its decorative scheme. He also notes that "although the bucket held by the figure suggests he might be a supernatural spirit, these all wear a distinctive fringed cloak covering their rear leg as well as sandals on their feet. He suggests, therefore, that the relief depicts the lower half of an Assyrian soldier. "Ashurnasirpal II was an ambitious ruler who moved the capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire from the religious center, Ashur, to Kalkhu, better known as Nimrud, in present-day Iraq. There, between 883 and 859 BCE, he built a palace complex featuring an extensive decorative program of bas-reliefs carved in the stone that lined the walls. The reliefs included scenes of war, hunting, and religious rites. Originally brilliantly painted, the images were accompanied by carved cuneiform passages

proclaiming the importance of the ruler and his great deeds. The palace was first excavated by the British archaeologist Austen Henry Layard in 1845–47, at which time, and with the permission of the Ottoman Empire, many reliefs were removed from their original locations, divided into smaller pieces, and dispersed to England, France, and the United States. The Reverend William Frederick Williams, H1870, a missionary posted in Turkey, was integral in arranging the shipments of reliefs—including this one—to American colleges and universities. According to a period notation attached to the back of the slab seen here, it arrived in the United States in 1852 as a gift from Williams to his brother, Henry Dwight Williams, H1869, who presented it, together with a second relief, to the College during the 1868–69 academic year. Both were housed in the Cabinet, Hamilton's first official exhibition space, along with other items donated by Henry Dwight Williams. This fragment depicts the lower half of a figure holding a bucket. The Nimrud reliefs feature a number of such figures, generally considered to be guardian figures—some fully human, others with human bodies and wings or bird's heads—who hold a bucket in one hand and a cone-shaped object in the other. Scholars have debated the meaning of this iconography but have suggested that the figures may be partaking in a religious ritual or pollinating date palms." (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017) "A large and valuable donation has been quite recently made to the Miscellaneous Department of the Cabinets, by Henry Dwight Williams, Esq., Commissioner of the Imperial Customs at Nanking, China. Many of the articles in this collection will serve a good purpose in illustrating the religious rites, domestic habits, and practical arts of the Chinese and Japanese. Of still higher value are two slabs, with cuneiform inscriptions, from the palace of Sardanapalus, at Nimroud, which were sent to this country by Rev. W. Frederick Williams, a Missionary of the American Board, at Mardin, East Turkey, and a brother of the gentleman who presents them to Hamilton College." (SOURCE: Hamilton College Catalogue, 1868-69, p. 22) "All the world is represented in the Cabinet of Hamilton College. All the centuries and all the civilizations have delegates there - or ought to have. Heretofore China has spoken through the brilliant birds, three hundred in number, presented many years ago, when the writer hereof was a Freshman, by Dr. Peter Parker. Now China speaks again, (tacita loquitur,) with a multitude of voices that proclaim the thoughtful generosity, the love for science and the fealty to early attachments of Henry Dwight Williams, a native of Utica, and connected by blood or friendly ties with many of the older families of Oneida County... [a description of many of the items in the gift, most of which are from China] ...A still higher value among scholars will attached to a couple of slabs, with cuneiform inscriptions, from the palace of Sardanapalus, at Nimroud, supposed to date about 760 B.C. These treasures were sent to this country by Rev. W. Frederick Williams, a missionary of the American

Board, at Mardin, East Turkey, and a brother of the gentleman who presents them to Hamilton College." (SOURCE: Hamilton Literary Monthly, November 1868, p. 125-26)

Dimensions

Overall: 23 1/4 x 14 5/8 x 1 1/2 in. (59.1 x 37.1 x 3.8 cm)