

## Chiltern U3a Archaeology – 17 July 2020

### Notes for Talk on Ashurbanipal -

### King of the world, King of Syria

**By Guru Guruswamy**

[Note: Part 6 was deferred for another session]

Good Morning.

**[Before starting to share the screen, may I please check if any of you have been to that part of the world or the Exhibition at the British Museum last year].**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION:**

**[001 a]** I have great pleasure in talking to you about Ashurbanipal who was considered to be the most powerful person on the planet between **669 – 631 BC**. He claimed to be the 'King of the World, King of Assyria'. Wonder who is the most powerful person today!

I got some insight into his life and legacy via a special exhibition in the British Museum in January 2019. Today's talk covers those exhibits. **[001 b]** There were over 200 amazing objects on display, and unusually for an exhibition - they let you take photographs - without a flash. Don't worry ... I won't be showing all of them today ... just the ones I liked. That is perhaps most of them!

I did make a second visit in February to complete my photography as I didn't think it was fair to hold my wife's progress round the exhibition during my first trip.

Most of my narrative comes from the display boards, a voluminous special publication and Google Maps.

**[002 a]** This black and white sketch at the entrance was interesting ...it is an illustration from one of the gypsum slabs. It shows Ashurbanipal riding on a horse while hunting. He must have had an excellent PR Guru ... reminds me of a Holbein's painting of Henry VIII ... standing majestically.

**[002 b]** He was brave and strong, educated and clever. Look at the details [Zoom] - the decorations on the horse's head, his royal headband, his beard as a symbol of his virility, embroidered garment with a fringe, chest guard decorated with a ritual scene around a tree, an arm guard on his left forearm to protect him while shooting the arrow, a sword on one side and a reed pen (stylus) ready to write/scribe as he was very scholarly.

In order to get through the large number of exhibits in a digestible manner, I have divided my presentation in eight parts ... **[002 c and d]** we will have a coffee break about half way through.

1. Map of the empire, key archaeologists and family tree of Ashurbanipal
2. Gypsum Panels showing Asurbanipal's hunting skills and some Protective Spirits
3. Assorted items, mainly small and some gold ones.
4. More Panels – The Palace, Palace Banquets, Aqueducts and Canals, Dying Lion
5. Tablets – rectangular, pentagonal and decagonal.
6. Mini sculptures and Cauldrons.
7. Gypsum Panels – covering battles – Booty from Ummanides, Arab encampment, Conquest of Elam and Ashurbanipal sitting relaxed with his Queen.
8. Items recording the fall of Ashurbanipal and Nineveh.

As we will be covering a rather huge number of items, I will not mention specifically the date for each item .... They are mainly within a couple of hundred years on either side of Ashurbanipal's period – 669 -631 BC. The estimated period for each of the items is indicated in my notes which you can access via U3a website along with the photos. I will arrange to send you the links so that you can view them if you wish in your own pace.

### **[003 a] 1. Map of the empire, key archaeologists and family tree of Ashurbanipal**

**[003 b]** A few words about the vastness of the empire ..

Assyria is basically present day Iraq. It has been expanding to become an empire over a period of 300 years when Ashurbanipal came to power.

The empire, shown in maroon colour, covered parts of Egypt along the Nile, Israel, Jordan, parts of Turkey, Iran and Kuwait. I remember learning in my schooldays that the area covering the two rivers Euphrates and Tigris – Mesopotamia - was one of the four cradles of civilization.

[Zoom] His capital was Nineveh. It is in current day's Mosul. You can see it is virtually by the river Tigris.

Mosul was one of the military bases for UK forces during the recent Iraq war. We will be looking at items from various places spread around it – such as Babylonia, Elam, Urartu, Turkey, Cyprus, Phoenicia, Levant and Egypt.

**[004]** Here are a couple of Google satellite views of the location as you see now...[Show Mosul airport, Ninveh]. The plains were subject to flooding. Notice also the absence of rocks – unlike in Egypt. It is one of the main reasons why there are no major ancient stone structures. I have seen an Ishtar temple in Berlin's Pergamon Museum and it is made of glazed bricks.

**[005]** A close up of Ninveh ... the area that is not built up.

**[006]** This shows the location of the palaces – [Zoom] the North Palace and the South-West Palace. The one in the South-West was built by his grandfather Sennacherib and it was known as 'a palace without a rival'. Ashurbanipal built the North Palace. The kings wanted to astonish the world with their splendour. The entrances were protected by colossal human headed winged bulls.

And this **[007]** is a 3-D model of the complex.

**[008]** One of the two famous archaeologists involved in the excavations in this area was Austen Henry Layard ... who later on became an MP in Aylesbury, and his assistant and successor Hormuzd Rassam **[009]**.

**[010]** This is the family tree of Ashurbanipal. He had an older brother and a sister. [Another brother who died is not shown]. Two other names that will crop up now and then during the presentation are his father Esarhaddon and grandfather Sennacherib. The question of succession was not straightforward as the eldest son didn't automatically inherit the throne. There was also an issue of whether the first son was a legitimate one or not etc. This resulted in big battles in the case of Ashurbanipal. You can see a question mark over the mother. I used to think that maternity was a fact and paternity is an opinion.

His sister gave him lot of advice ... and we will see a tablet of that later. His father, grandfather and great-grandfather were all rulers.

His brother was given the throne of Babylon as an appeasement.

## **[011 a] 2. Gypsum Slabs showing Asurbanipal's hunting skills and some Protective Spirits**

**[011 b]** This is a set of four slabs, showing the King attacking some ferocious lions and other animals - in three horizontal bands. The slabs were quite big (15' long x 5'6" high) and I took this picture with people so you can get an idea of the size. For me, this was one of the major highlights.

**[012]** I have some pictures giving overall views as well as some showing details. They had a strange system of story-telling on these slabs.

**In the top band** .... The story starts on the right. It is about hunting of a lion that is let out of a cage. It is a fairly controlled encounter.

**In the middle band** ... the story reads from left to right. It is about hunting of lions in the wild.

Guess where the story starts **on the third band** ... it starts near the middle! There are two little stories. One going from left to right and another, from right to left.

You can see the right side of the display better on this picture.

**Top band** – A lion is let out of a cage. Asurbanipal is on his foot, shoots an arrow. He is protected by a soldier on his left carrying a shield and a spear. [Zoom]. In the next scene, he is plunging of the sword into the lion. This plunging of the sword is used in Assyrian Royal Seal.

**Middle band** – At the far left, there are two men on horseback chasing a wounded lion that is attacking the king's back-up horse. The lion was previously presumed dead. The king is busy trying to thrust a spear into another lion in front of him.

In the next scene, there are two dead lions on the ground and some men lying down apologising for letting his back-up horse die in the encounter.

**In the lowest band** - On the left – you can't see clearly on this slide, a man is rounding up the gazelles and driving them towards the king. On the right, the king is hunting wild asses and a pack of hounds are pulling the wounded animals down. There are two men behind the king – one is carrying spare arrows and the other is managing a back-up horse for the king.

**[013]** Here is a view from the left hand side. You can also see the explanations they had below the slabs.

Here are some close ups **[014] [015]** of better quality. It is hard to believe that these slabs are over 2,500 years old.

**[016]** Some details of middle band showing the thrusting of the spear into the lion is incredible – the front paws of the lions, the costume of the king as we saw in the sketch of my introductory slide, the ornaments on the back-up royal horse – such as tassels, rosettes and a head crest.

The king is portrayed as strong and educated.

He is wearing a royal headband. His beard is a symbol of virility. He is wearing an embroidered garment with a fringe.

There is an arm-guard around his left forearm to facilitate shooting of arrows.

On his belt, he has a sword on one side and a stylus for writing on the other.

I am very impressed with this scene and have used it to flag our chapter headings today.

### **Protective Spirits [645-640 BC]**

**[017]** They believed in Protective Spirits to guard the palace and the king from supernatural forces. There were rules as to what combinations of guardians you have and where you place them.

In this panel, there are three spirits. On the left is a **lahmu ('Hairy')** with ringlets of hair. With tassles hanging from his kilt, he is supposed to have divine status.

In the centre is an **ugallu (Great Lion)** making a threatening gesture with a dagger and a mace to show his authority.

On the right is a '**House God**' and his horned headdress is supposed to indicate divinity.

Amazing details on the kilts on this panel.

**[018]** On the opposite panel, you see the other side of the kilts – relatively plain.

### **3. Assorted items, mainly small and some gold ones.**

**[019 b]** This is a bronze item portraying Ashurbainpal's grandmother, Naqi'a Ashurbani, behind her son Esarhaddon in a ritual procession. She was quite a schemer to get her son to the throne instead of his older brother. A king may have more than one queen. She is smelling a flower in one hand and holding a mirror on the other.

Next, we see a couple of **sandstone statues** of two brothers. There were at least three brothers. The oldest one died.

**[020]** This is the statue of Shamash-shumu-ukin, older of the two brothers [668-665 BC]. He is carrying some materials – to rebuild a temple. The statue has been defaced considerably.

**[021]** This is that of the younger one, Ashurbanipal. He became the king as his father favoured him. This monument commemorates his restoration of the Temple of Nabu. He is carrying a basket of earth for the temple. Apparently, the inscription says he is asking for a blessing for his older brother.

**[022]** This is the first of many tablets you will be seeing today. [Clay, 672 -671 BC]. It is from Ashurbanipal's sister princess Sheru'a-etirat to her sister-in-law,— i.e., to Ashurbanipal's wife. She is telling her off ... 'Why don't you write your tablets and recite your exercises?... you are the lady of the house of Ashurbanipal'.

**[023]** This is Ashurbanipal's wife – Libbali-sharrat. [Limestone, 669-631 BC, Berlin] It is a rare image of the queen. She is wearing a crown representing a city wall with its towers. She is sitting on a high-backed throne, with her right hand raised probably for a royal wave. On the left hand, it is either a stem of a flower or the handle of a mirror.

**[024]** This gypsum stone slab was part of a doorsill from the throne room.[645–640 BC]. It is an indicator of the designs found on woven carpets. Outer border has lotus buds and flowers alternating while the inner border has rosettes. It frames a pattern of interlocking circles representing flowers.

**[025, 026]** The next two are glazed fired clay items used to decorate the walls.

**[027]** This later day illustration shows how they may have used them.

As you can imagine. the palaces were filled with fine furniture. Only some of the fittings – made of bronze, stone and ivory have survived.

**[028]** These lion paws were used to decorate the legs of a table

**[029]** Bronze fittings and some **[030]** in the form of palm leaves.

**[031]** This is an ivory back-rest of a chair or a couch. The style is not Assyrian – it was probably given to the king as a tribute or loot from the Levant.

**[032]** There are four items here showing wall paintings and floor coverings with ritual and narratives scenes.

[Zoom] On the top left is a glazed brick from Nimrud with an Assyrian king holding a cup in one hand and a bow in the other. [875 – 850 BC]

The smaller pieces showing Assyrian soldiers on the march come from the Ishtar temple at Ninveh.[883 – 859 BC]

The framed item showing a bearded man with a head band is part of a wall painting. [850 – 650 BC]

**[033]** Human-headed winged bull. This was quite a small piece.

**[034 x2]** This is part of the lay out of the exhibition hall, showing the location of the next item in the far corner on the right.

**[034 y]** It is the restored head of a 'lamassu' that protected Ashurbanipal's father's palace in Nimrud. The crown is decorated with bulls' horns and indicates divinity. The heavily bearded face and long curly hair display masculinity and strength. [Gypsum 670 BC]

**[035]** This face is made of stone. It is from a sphinx which probably formed the base of a column. Like the Assyrian human-headed winged lions and bulls, sphinxes were thought to have protective magical powers. [700 – 695 BC].

#### **[036 a] 4. More Panels – The Palace, Palace Banquets, Aqueducts and Canals, and a Dying Lion**

**[036 b] The palace** [645 -640 BC]: This gypsum panel shows a palace in the top half, probably the one at Nineveh [Zoom]. It is by a river – you can see some fish as well. There are three sets of walls protecting the palace. You can see a winged bull at the entrance to the building at the top, and the columns have lion shaped bases.

**[037]** [645 – 640 BC] Another panel, with the **top half showing aqueducts** and canals irrigating the orchards and gardens in Ashurbanipal's palace.

**[038]** You can see the details better when they illuminated the display with some coloured lights.

Originally the panels were painted with bright colours. Small traces of original colours still remain.

[Zoom] You can see the pointed arches of the aqueducts, the water channels, a nice path with a stela and a pavilion.

**[039]** This slab of magical guardians cleared up a great deal of confusion in my mind. The top half shows each character with the head of a lion but with only two legs of a lion – whereas the bottom one shows a human head with a body and four legs of a lion.

The figures at the top are called 'ugallu' or 'Great Lions', and the one at the bottom is 'Umahilu' or 'Lion-Man'.

**[040]** This gypsum slab of **The Sebetti gods** can also be better appreciated with some coloured illumination. [645 – 640 BC]

**[041]** It was in Ashurbanipal's throne room and it shows three of the seven Sebetti gods. They are wearing high, flat, horned crowns. Each one is holding an axe on the right hand and a dagger

on the other. Originally, they had bows instead of daggers. The sculptors had made a mistake and had to correct them.

**[042]** These panels show food items for **a banquet**. [700 – 692 BC] They formed part of a series in a corridor of the South-West Palace. You can see grapes, pomegranates and dates. Apparently there are panels showing hares, game birds and skewers of dried locusts!

**[043]** This panel of **dying lion** shows the mortal wound caused by a single arrow [645 – 640 BC]. Blood is gushing out of its mouth as it attempts to squat upright. It symbolises the king's triumph over his enemies.

**[044]** This panel is called the **Pleasure Garden**. [645-640 BC]. A lion is roaming about freely. The kings collected plants and animals from different parts of the empire.

It is very detailed. [Zoom] You can see a palm tree with dates on the left, and some grapes and the vine twisting around a branch.

There are two musicians. The one on the left with the feathered cap is playing a lyre and the other is playing a harp.

**[045]** Here you have four musicians playing horizontal harps. One of them is wearing a tall hat signifying that he is a priest.

**[045 x]** More musicians

We will come back to more panels at a later stage. Next, we look at Tablets.

### **[046 a] 5. Tablets – rectangular, pentagonal and decagonal.**

**[046 b]** The British Museum has unrivalled collection of Tablets of assorted sizes and this was a stunning display of some of them. They are usually made of clay ... and thanks to a great fire in Assyria, they could be preserved better as firing a piece of clay, within limits, preserves it better.

**[047]** Ashurbanipal believed that 'Knowledge is Power' and his royal library contained all written knowledge in the region under one roof. **[048]** It contained all classic reference works. Many are labelled with his name.

**[049]** [668 -631 BC] Not sure if any one in our group can read it. This one is about the ingratitude of Elam, one of the regions he had control over. It goes along the lines: 'From the beginning I have rendered favours to Elam, but they have not returned my favours. I protected their refugees, from kings to noblemen, gave them bread and water, and sent them back to their

country, but they held back the messengers whom I had sent to greet them, neglected returning my servant who had sinned against me ....`

**[050]** [680 -630 BC] They used different languages. The top one is a slave contract written in Assyrian cuneiform with an Aramic note scratched on its edge. The lower one lists the Egyptians in a list of foreign specialists active in Assyrian court.

**[051]** In addition to clay, they also wrote on wooden and ivory boards filled with wax.

**[052]** [672 BC] This is a succession treaty made by Ashurbanipal's father Esarhaddon to ensure that his two sons succeed to the throne of Assyria and Babylonia. The penalty for treason was death for the traitor and his family. People have to swear that they will not poison the king, practice black magic against him, or turn the gods against him.

**[053]** [670 BC] This monument is made of basalt and it marks the restoration of Babylon by Esarhaddon after its destruction by his father. He was keen to rebuild the city and restore the rights of its citizens. I think this is beautiful and you can appreciate the script better because of the contrast in colours.

**[054]** The symbols on the top are hieroglyphic representations of the king's names and titles.

**[055]** [673 – 672 BC] This is an octagonal prism recording **Esarhaddon's (that is Ashurbanipal's father's) succession and achievements**. When Esarhaddon's father Sennacherib named him as the successor, the older brother (Arda-mullisi) was not pleased and he stabbed his father while he was praying between two colossal winged bulls at Ninveh.

**[056]** This is another view of it. Esarhaddon manages to secure the throne and became a successful ruler. Later, he had a mysterious illness and was paranoid.

**[057]** [643 BC] The last major tablet I want to show you is this ten-sided prism recording the chronicles of Ashurbanipal. It records his achievements as a ruler and covers nine of his campaigns against his enemies. It presents the king as a pious, able and just ruler.

**[058]** Here is a close up of a section. Such prisms were buried under important buildings to ensure that his glorious rule would not be forgotten. I suppose it is like a modern day time capsule.

**[059 a] 6. Mini sculptures and Couldrons** [This part 6 is to be covered on another day due to time constraints]

**We will now look at some miscellaneous items and couldrons.**

**[059 b]** This is a fragment of a marble board for the 'game of 58 holes'. [680 – 669 BC]

**[060]** [700 – 625 BC] This is a heavily crushed silver beaker with geometric patterns on the neck and base, overlaid with gold leaf.

**[061]** This basalt monument records the aftermath of an Elamite military victory. On this side, you can see an Elamite soldier raising his axe to execute a naked, bearded captive. Another soldier with a bow and arrow is guarding a captive.

**[062]** On another side of it , you can see a couple of vultures devouring the dead bodies. There is a circular cavity at the top and it may have supported another statue.

**[063]** [600 – 550 BC] This bronze item is from Elam, showing an Elamite female figure. She is seated and holding out her hands as if to present or receive an offering. She is wearing tiered robes and jewellery. She has an Elamite hairstyle and her lower back extends into the headless body of a fish. Apparently it is identical to a couple of figures attached to the handles of bronze and silver vessels found in the tombs of two Elamite princesses.

**[064]** There are three items on this slide, from Susa, Iran.

The first one on the left is a faience vessel (sort of powdered glass with vitreous enamel coating). It is decorated with alternating griffins and winged sphinxes. [900 -700 BC]

The panel fragment in the middle depicts part of a mythological winged spirit with a bird's talons. It stands on a griffin and grapples with feline monsters. [800 – 700 BC]

The third item is a spinner made of a bitumen compound. [800 – 600 BC]. I rather like it. The woman is sitting, with one leg under her on a cushioned stool with lion's feet. She has an embroidered garment and six heavy bracelets on each wrist. There is a servant behind her with a fan .... Like a punkawallah in India. The table also has lion's feet, and there is a bowl with fish and fruits.

A few items from Carchemish in Iraq ...

**[065]** The basalt item on the left is Kubaba of Carchemish [900 – 800 BC, Turkey]. The goddess Kubaba has a mirror in one hand and a pomegranate in the other – symbols of magic and fertility. The city of Carchemish is located on Euphrates river.

The basalt piece on the right is a door jamb forming part of a gateway leading to the citadel. There is a special hieroglyphic inscription saying that the goddess Kubaba is the queen of the city. [900 – 800 BC].

**[066]** This basalt Carved Lion's head formed base of an elaborate statue. [900 – 800 BC]. The statue, perhaps of a deity, stood by the 'Lion's gate of Carchemish'. The lions were held by a griffin demon and one can see its hand on the left of the head.

**[067]** This is a scorpion bird man. To protect them from evil spirits, the Aramean kings guarded their palaces with terrifying monsters. This basalt statue combines the body of a bird, the head of a man and a scorpion's tail. [900 – 850 BC, from Tell Halaf, Syria].

**[068]** I wanted to show you this display board to give you an idea of the size of the next item – a monumental funerary figure. Throughout the exhibition, there were extensive notes of this kind for most of the exhibits – with details of where it was found, the age, material and its current location.

**[069]** The statue was previously in a museum in Berlin and unfortunately it got damaged by an Allied bomb in 1943. She was probably a princess, with curled side locks, sitting on a throne and resting her feet on a foot stool. She had a long robe with a decorated hem but after the damage, you can only just see her feet. She has a cup in her hand.

**[070]** This is a damaged bronze shield with bands of lions and bulls decorating the surface. It is from the kingdom of Urartu – a major metal working centre.

**[071]** You can see part of a quiver for keeping the arrows, and a helmet. Both are highly decorated. The helmet is made of copper alloy and it was a present to god Haldi by one of the earlier kings.

**[072]** These are ivory pieces probably made by Phoenicians influenced by Egyptian subject matter. They were popular among wealthy people. They were found in Nimrud. [900 – 700 BC]

1. Seated lion wearing a Pharaonic Collar
2. Seated figure in Egyptian wig and dress
3. Human-headed winged sphinx
4. Woman at a window ... that is rather sweet.
5. Winged sphinx
6. Egyptian motifs

**[073]** These are some of the luxury furniture parts made of ivory.

**[074]** These are some gold jewellery produced by Greek and Etruscan artisans with eastern designs.[650 -800 BC]

**[075]** In this close up ... 1. Heroes grappling lions ... Not easy to see in this picture. [Italy]

2. Series of Sphinxes [Italy]

3. Winged female deity [Greece]

**[076]** An ornament of winged female deities

**[077]** [900 -700 BC] Made of ivory, this was probably part of a furniture. There is a lioness mauling over the throat of a boy, and he is supporting himself with his hands behind his back. There are lotus and papyrus flowers covered in gold leaf, and inlaid with lapis lazuli and carnelian (orange coloured stone).

**[078]** This is a decorated shell – a cosmetic container with mischievous eyes. [700 – 680 BC]

**[079]** These are a set of bronze weights cast in the shape of snarling lions. They belonged to the palace of a predecessor to Ashurbanipal – Shalmanesser V [727 – 722 BC]

**[080]** There were a couple of interesting bronze cauldrons – the one in the back is big and spectacular .....It was found in a tomb at Salamis in Cyprus. [You may recall that we have covered the Roman remains at Salamis at a couple of our meetings]. [750 – 600 BC].They were probably used for mixing wine.

On the rim, [Zoom] there are four double faced sirens (half woman and half bird, and they are believed to lure the sailors). On the wings of each siren, there are two griffins.

**[081]** This is a smaller one found in Italy. It has lion head attachments. [675 – 650 BC]. It is now in the Vatican Museum.

**[082]** ... another view of it.

**[083]** Starting from far right ...[Zoom]

8. Bronze vessel with two handles cast in the form of a bird-of-prey [700 – 500 BC]

9. Bronze Bowl showing a lion hunt [900 – 500 BC]

10. Bronze Bowl – not easy to see - embossed with lion and sphinxes

11. Gilded silver bowl with Egyptian-inspired design of a lion hunt and a procession of warriors [675 – 650 BC]. From the Vatican museum.

**[084]** These are some of the attachments of cauldrons. Some resembling bulls and lions made their way to Greece and Italy via trade routes. Urartu {region between Black Sea and Caspian Sea} is one of the main sources of bull's and lion's head attachments.

**[085]** These are from the Royal Tombs of Cyprus. There were several horse-drawn chariots and hearses with decorative bronze fittings in one of the tombs. The decorations were similar to what one would find in Egyptian, Levantine and Assyrian art.

1. Horse frontlet
2. Frontlet decorated with winged human figures and stylised lotus flowers
3. Chariot standard attached to the yoke of the chariot – in the form of stylised flowers
4. Lion's head fitting from a funerary hearse
5. Figurine of a warrior, originally attached to the linchpin of chariot axle
7. Side pendant for protecting the horse's legs, decorated with a naked winged goddess holding two lions in each hand
8. Horse breastplate decorated with mythological creatures, winged spirits and ??? 'a tree of life' motif (?)

**[086]** Four horse chariot made of Terracota

**[087]** Monuments in Clay Sculptures were placed by wealthy and powerful families of Salamis in a shrine next to the harbour in Salamis. The statues served as surrogate worshippers, and they were shown wearing the latest fashionable items from Levant and Assyria. Wealthy Cypriots copied the cultural habits of Assyria and Levant. For example, some men had beards and clothing in Assyrian style. [Zoom in on the man's statue]

**[088]** Fabric patterns were painted by hand.

**[089]** This clay prism is like a catalogue of gifts given by ten rulers of Cyprus to Assyrian king Esarhaddon. It also lists the names of the rulers whose nationality include Greece and Phoenicia. Ashurbanipal asked the rulers to support him in his campaign against Egypt.

[090] The contents of this tablet is like a red rag to a bull ... a ruler in Urartia is refusing to send lapis lazuli to Assyria, and says that if Ashurbanipal wants it, he needs to come and get it. He gives the excuse that the stone is sacred as it is used to make images of the gods.

[091] This display shows some of the fittings used on an Urartian throne. One of the items [Zoom] is similar to what have in India... a goddess called Kamadenu ... human like head with a cow's body and wings.

[092] There was a sweet little sketch showing these fittings on a throne.

[093] This is a limestone fragment of a board game of Twenty Squares – supposed to be the world's most popular ancient game. It predates backgammon and chess, and originated in 4,000 BC. It was a race game using a dice and game pieces. [700 - 612 BC]

[094] There is a reference to this game in a letter (in a cuneiform tablet) from Shamash-shumu-ukin to his younger brother Ashurbanipal when their relationship was heavily strained. He is telling off his younger brother as if they were playing the game as children.

[095] The older brother thinks he will triumph in the end with a single move.

[096] This bronze band shows the Assyrian king Shalmanaser III receiving tribute from wealthy Phoenicians. You can visualise its size from this slide. [Iraq, 848 BC]

[097] In the top band, from the left ... [Zoom} You can see a couple, perhaps a king and queen, on an island fortress. The boats have animal-headed paws to bring goods to the mainland. After landing, there is a procession of men carrying goods towards the king. The king is standing under an umbrella with a bow on his hand. His royal chariot and mount wait behind him.

[098] .. detail

**[099 a] 7. Gypsum Slabs – covering battles – A Phoenician warship, Booty from Ummanidesh, Arab encampment, Conquest of Elam and Ashurbanipal sitting relaxed with his Queen.**

[099 b] [705 – 661 BC] Apparently the Phoenicians were experts in building boats and sailing. They traded and established Phoenician colonies in the Mediterranean. This is a gypsum panel showing a Phoenician warship sailing down the Euphrates. It probably belonged to King Sennacherib but built and maintained by Phoenicians.

The pointed prow was used to ram enemy's ship. Shields are held in the upper deck. Do you see something odd about the oarsmen ... there are double the number of oars than men? Did they have one oar on each hand or was there another row of oarsmen or is it just an artistic license?

**[100]** This panel shows **Assyrian soldiers capturing an Egyptian town**. [645 – 640 BC] Ashurbanipal's father died on his way to conquer Egypt. Ashurbanipal just sent his army instead to finish the job.

In the top band, you can see the Assyrian soldiers breaking into an Egyptian fort using ladders. Three sets of ladders are shown leaning against the fort. You can see the defendants [Kushite soldiers] with feathered headdresses at the top and some of them falling to the ground. The Assyrians use a variety of weapons and shields.

In the lower panel, Kushite prisoners with shackles are being marched along. They are walking along a riverside. Two Assyrian soldiers are holding up severed enemy heads. There is also a procession of Egyptian civilians, including two children on a donkey leaving the town.

**[101]** Ashurbanipal fights a four year battle against his older brother Shamash-shumu-ukin in Babylon even though the latter had military support from foreign rulers. The Assyrians besieged Babylon for two years and the war ended with the death of his brother. This panel shows the parading of his possessions in front of Ashurbanipal. [645 – 640 BC].

**[102]** This is the same, from another angle. During the siege, a quote suggests that ... "Instead of bread, they ate the flesh of their sons, instead of beer, they drank the blood of their daughters. From lack of food, their limbs stopped working and withered away; they became corpses".

There are three bands in this composition, and Ashurbanipal is spread out in two of the bands suggesting that he was present at both the events.

**[103]** I want to pick out some details from each of the three bands of this panel.

First, on the right, at the top .... **[104]** Ashurbanipal's men have secured the crown, the seal and the sceptre of his brother.

**[105]** In the next row, two scribes on the right are making records of bows, quivers (arrows) and severed heads. I wonder if the phrase 'head count' comes from that!

**[106]** This is a procession of soldiers carrying the booty, including a couple of chariots. Shackled prisoners are being led out of the city.

**[107]** This panel is about **The siege of Hamanu** [645 – 640 BC] : Following his victory in Babylon, Ashurbanipal focused his attention on attacking Elam as the ruler there supported his brother's rebellion, and provided asylum to wanted men. On the way there he attacked Elam's royal city of Hamanu.

[Zoom to the top] Assyrian soldiers protect their heads with shields while weakening the wall's foundations.

They use siege ladders against the battlements. Elamite soldiers at the top have headbands and you can see them plunging into their deaths in the moat or river below. There are bodies floating.

**[108]** There are three bands on this panel about the **booty from Hamanu, an Elamite city.** [645 – 640 BC]

The **top one** is probably the surrender of an Elamite king. Assyrian soldiers are marching with their shields and spears. The Elamites raise their hands in submission.

The middle band shows the looting and demolition of Hamanu. The citadel and main gate have been set on fire. The Assyrians are demolishing the outer walls with picks. Two Elamite soldiers in shackles around the wrist are being marched out of the city. The loot includes a throne and a cauldron.

In the lowest band, you can see civilian prisoners from Chaldea eating in a temporary camp.

**[109]** This gypsum panel shows the **capture of Ummanaldash, king of Elam.** [645 to 640 BC]

He has a bulbous headdress and long robe. He turns and looks reproachfully towards someone who has refused him asylum. Ashurbanipal's men are usually portrayed with a curly hair and a beard. The Elamite king is being led down a mountain.

In the part on the right, he is being pushed up from behind by one of Ashurbanipal's soldiers and pulled up by his wrist by another of Ashurbanipal's soldiers.

On the bottom left, a lioness is stalking on a wild goat.

**[110]** After the war between Assyria and Elam, Arab leaders raided rulers who were loyal to Assyria. The king's soldiers brought order back to the region.

This panel shows combats between them ... the Assyrian foot soldiers and cavalry against Arabian warriors, some of them mounted back to back on camels **[111]**.

**[112]** In this part of the panel, you can see clearly the Arabs on a camel's back and an Assyrian on a horse.

I was curious to find out the speed of Camel Vs Horse, and I googled. Apparently, **camels** can carry more weight and can move at average **speeds** of about 12 kilometres per hour for as much as 18 hours. A fast, unladen **camel** can attain **speeds** of over 60 km per hour while fast racehorses can peak at about 65 km per hour. On sand, however, the **camel** will beat the **horse** in a race.

**[113]** This panel shows **an attack on an Arab encampment**. [645 - 640 BC]. It is rather unusual in the sense it shows use of violence by Assyrians against Arab women. [Zoom] You can see it clearly in the second row. After attacking them, and perhaps killing them, they set fire to them and their camps – as can be seen in the third row.

**[114]** Scenes of Mass Deportation are shown in the next panel which has four sections. The Assyrians would resettle the inhabitants of the captured cities across the empire to ensure rapid growth. So they transported them safely and in good health. Some would walk, and some were taken in carriages.

This section is very sweet ... **[115]** babies being breast fed.

In this part **[116]**, a little baby is playing with an Assyrian soldier walking behind him.

This whole display could be part of a PR exercise by the king. Apparently, there is another side to the whole story. Some of the captives experienced gruelling journeys. Women and children were distributed among Assyrian troops and sold into slavery.

**[117]** This set of huge panels is in limestone instead of gypsum - unlike most of the others we have seen earlier. There are three panels with four horizontal bands. It is about the **Battle of Til- Tube. [653 BC]**. It is a battle between the Assyrians and Elamites. The Assyrians are chasing their enemies who have been driven into the River. The scene ... cuts from top to bottom ...

One can perhaps allocate a whole hour just to digest this. But we can have a brief look at each panel, and may be one or two details from each section. During the exhibition, they illuminated small sections in a sequence with captions.

**[118]** The first panel

In the top row [Zoom], two brothers are being forced to grind up the bones of their father who supported the Elamites. [Reminds me of the martyrs of Amersham ...where a sister is asked to set fire to a brother]

**[119]** Here Ashurbanipal is travelling in an Elamite cart, showing off the head of an Elamite soldier. There is some description of the scene carved here.

**[120]** Heads of Elamite soldiers are being piled up ....

**[121]** Second Panel ... very busy panels

**[122]** Teumman and his son Tammaritu fall from their broken chariot, The horses, hit by arrows, are running amuck.

**[123]** In this third panel, at the top, you can see women and children walking along - led by Assyrian soldiers.

**[124]** More fighting scenes .. on the left two Assyrians with triangular head gear are right behind the Elamites. On the right, you can see an Assyrian striking on the head of an Elamite, a headless body, and a couple of inscriptions.

**[125]** Called '**Trouble in the East**', this is another huge set of three panels depicting Ashurbanipal's battle on the banks of River Ulai to sort out who gets the throne of Elam.

Just a few words about the background to the battle .... When Urtak, the ruler of Elam. died, his younger brother Teumman seized it rather than the rightful heir Ummanigash. Ummanigash and his family fled to Assyria. When Teumann's request to extradite him was refused, he attacked Assyria. Ashurbanipal retaliated, and sent his army to Elam. Teumman was not only defeated, but his severed head was paraded through the streets of Ninveh and Erbil.

In the words of Ashurbanipal: "... I cut off the head of Teumannan....I filled the plain of the city of Susa with their bodies ...I made the Ulai River flow with their blood; I dyed its water red like red dyed wool".

**[126]** The first panel

**[127]** A detail at the top... Two enemies on the ground, another one receiving a fatal blow

**[128]** [Zoom] Bodies, animals, and chariots floating on the river.

People surrendering by kneeling and prostrating ...

**[129]** On the right side ... In the lower band, Women and children, in the lowest section, marching along.

Above it is a plan of a rather tranquil town surrounded by a river.

**[130]** Ashurbanipal felt it was his duty as a king to ruthlessly crush the enemies and restore order in the world. He recorded his achievements in carved stone panels in a private apartment in his palace. They recorded the conquest of Elam. There were some fragments from this on display and it finished with a scene of **Ashurbanipal relaxing in a tranquil garden paradise with his queen.**

**[131]** This is another view of the curved display. We will look at the three larger pieces.

**[132]** This shows the 'humiliation of Elamite kings at Ashurbanipal's court'. Elamite kings have bulbous hats, and are being forced to carry food and drink for Ashurbanipal's banquet. [645 – 640 BC]

**[133]** A small panel

**[134]** The king and queen are relaxing in the garden.

On the left, you see a musician playing a harp.

Then, there are some maids carrying trays of food and drinks.

There are four maids with fans ... two on either side of the couple ...

**[135]** Ashurbanipal is reclining on a carved couch with his legs covered in a blanket. The couch is decorated with human figures and [Zoom into the horizontal bar at the bottom] leaping lions. He has a drink in one hand and a lotus blossom on the other.

The queen, probably Libbali-sharrat, is sitting opposite him on a throne and resting her feet on a foot stool. Her crown is of unusual design – I can't see it clearly but it is supposed to represent a city wall and its towers. She also has a drink in one hand, and a flower on the other.

Two grapevines from around the pine trees form a canopy of shade over the couple. There is a tall table and the fittings on its legs are shaped like the paws of a lion. The dish contains a bunch of onions, a small bowl, and a box decorated with winged bulls.

The king's weapons – bow, a quiver filled with arrows and a sword are laid neatly on a little table nearby.

**[139]** These are some **fire damaged ivory pieces**. [800 – 600 BC]. They were blackened during the destruction of a palace at Ninveh, and they were thrown into the river along with shackled Assyrian prisoners and other furniture.

You can see carved reclining calves, head of an Assyrian woman and upper part of a female figure. **[140 and 141]** A few more items.

We move on to the final section .... The end comes to all, even if you are the king of the world.

#### **[142 a] 8. Items recording the fall of Ashurbanipal and Ninveh.**

This is the last section, and quite a brief one.

**[142] Ashurnbanipal's last words** are dated 638 BC on this stone. We don't know whether he abdicated or was deposed or died of natural causes. The date of Ashurbanipal's death and the circumstances leading to his death remain a mystery.

Even though there is a wealth of items recording his life, there is a big gap as to what happened to him after 638 BC. His kingship probably ended seven to 11 years later. His death is also not recorded.

He was succeeded by his sons.

He may have been buried amongst other kings of Assyria in the city of Ashur.

This piece was found in Ishtar temple in Ninveh. It portrays an aged Ashurbanipal praying in his palace and reflecting on his past achievements. The gods hear his prayers and strike down his enemies.

**[143] Babylon declares war on Assyria** [626 -605 BC]. Following the death of Ashurbanipal, a rebellious general called Nabopolassar seized the throne of Babylon. This tablet refers to the destruction of Babylon by Ashurbanipal's grandfather Sennacherib, and states that he will avenge Babylon with total destruction of Ninveh.

**[144] Babylonian Chronicles and the fall of Ninveh** [550 -400 BC]. There is a series of tablets now known as the Babylonian Chronicle that record some of the key events in the collapse of Assyrian empire. This says, "For three months they subjected the city to a heavy siege...They inflicted a major defeat upon a great people. At that time, Sin-aharru-ishkun, king of Assyria died ... They carried off the vast booty of the city and temple and turned it into a ruin heap".

**That brings me to make some concluding remarks**

We have covered a great deal today ... in eight bites. **[145. 146]**

1. Map of the empire, key archaeologists and family tree of Ashurbanipal
  2. Gypsum Panels showing Asurbanipal's hunting skills and some Protective Spirits
  3. Assorted items, mainly small and some gold ones.
  4. More Panels – The Palace, Palace Banquets, Aqueducts and Canals, Dying Lion
  5. Tablets – rectangular, pentagonal and decagonal.
  6. Mini sculptures and Cauldrons.
  7. Gypsum Panels – covering battles – Booty from Ummanidesh, Arab encampment, Conquest of Elam and Ashurbanipal sitting relaxed with his Queen.
- ... and finally..
8. Items recording the fall of Ashurbanipal and Nineveh.

I hope I have given you a fairly comprehensive account of what I saw at the exhibition, and learnt subsequently about the items. Preparing for this kept me quite busy during the Covid19 lockdown.

I am so glad that I visited the exhibition. I knew very little about the history and the civilisation in this part of the world. The prospect of visiting the area is almost nil for me. The British Museum has lot more gems in its collection that they could not display in the exhibition. For instance, this winged bull. **[147]** There was a display explaining how it was transported – and its passage in the 1880s is interesting. It travelled overland to the Tigris river, and loaded onto rafts heading for Basra in southern Iraq. Steamships from Basra to Bombay. Then they sailed around Africa to England.

**[148]** Well .... That brings my presentation to the end.

You will be able to access my notes and the slides via the Archaeology section of the Chiltern U3a website to see them in detail in your own time.

I will be happy to field any questions or hear comments from you ...

Many thanks indeed for your attention.