

## DISCOVERY OF THE GIGANTIC HEAD IN THE PALACE OF NIMROD

(From Nineveh and its Remains)

By Austen Henry Layard  
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Sir Austen Henry Layard was an English traveler, archaeologist, cuneiformist, art historian, and more. He is best known for his work excavating Nimrod and Nineveh.

**I**N a few hours, the earth and rubbish had been completely removed from the face of the slab, no part of which had been injured. The ornaments delicately graven on the robes, the tassels and fringes, the bracelets and armlets, the elaborate curls of the hair and beard, were all entire. The figures were back to back, and furnished with wings. They appeared to represent divinities, presiding over the seasons, or over particular religious ceremonies. The one whose face has turned to the East carried a fallow deer on his right arm, and in his left hand a branch bearing five flowers. Around his temples was a fillet, adorned in front with a rosette. The other held a square vessel, or basket, in the left hand, and an object resembling a fir cone in the right. On his head, he wore a rounded cap, at the base of which was a horn. The garments of both, consisting of a stole falling from the shoulders to the ankles, and a short tunic underneath descending to the knee, were richly and tastefully decorated with embroideries and fringes, while the hair and beard were arranged with study and art.



Although the relief was lower, yet the outline was perhaps more careful, and true, than that of the Assyrian sculptures of Khorsabad. The limbs were delineated with peculiar accuracy, and the muscles and bones faithfully, though somewhat too strongly, marked. An inscription ran across the sculpture.

To the west of this slab, and fitting to it, was a corner-stone ornamented with flowers and scroll-work, tastefully arranged, and resembling in detail those graven on the injured tablet, near the entrance of the southwest building. I recognized at once from where many of the sculptures, employed in the construction of that edifice, had been brought; and it was evident that I had at length discovered the earliest palace of Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-9; 1 Chron. 1:10; Micah 5:6).

The corner-stone led me to a figure of singular form. A human body, clothed in robes similar to those of a winged man on the previous slab, was surmounted by the head of an eagle or of a vulture. The curved beak, of

considerable length, was half open, and displayed a narrow-pointed tongue, which was still covered with red paint. On the shoulders fell the usual curled and bushy hair of the Assyrian images, and a com of feathers rose on the top of the head. Two wings sprang from the back, and in either hand was the square vessel and fir cone.

On all these figures paint could be faintly distinguished, particularly on the hair, beard, eyes, and sandals. The slabs on which they were sculptured had sustained no injury, and could be without difficulty packed and removed to any distance. There could no longer be any doubt that they formed part of the changer, and that, to explore it completely, I had only to continue along the wall, now partly uncovered.



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On the morning following these discoveries, I rode to the encampment of Sheikh Abd-ur-rahman, and was returning to the mound, when I saw two Arabs of his tribe urging their mares to the top of their speed. On approaching me they stopped. "Hasten, O Bey," exclaimed one of them, "hasten to the diggers, for they have found Nimrod himself. Wallah, it is wonderful, but it is true! We have seen him with our own eyes. There is no God but God!" And both joining in this pious exclamation, galloped off, without further words, in the direction of their tents.

On reaching the ruins I descended into a new trench and found the workmen, who had already seen me, as I approached, standing near a heap of baskets and cloaks. While Awad advanced, and asked for a present to celebrate the occasion, the Arabs withdrew the screen they had hastily constructed, and disclosed an enormous human head sculptured in full out of the alabaster of the country. They had uncovered the upper part of the figure, the remains of which was still buried in the earth. I saw at once that the head must belong to a winged lion or bull, similar to those of Khorsabad and Persepolis. It was in admirable preservation. The expression was calm, yet majestic, and the outline of the features showed a freedom and knowledge of art, scarcely to be looked for in the works of so remote a period. The cap had three horns, and, unlike that of the human-headed bulls up till now found in Assyria, was rounded and without ornament at the top.

I was not surprised that the Arabs had been amazed and terrified at this apparition. It required no stretch of imagination to conjure up the strangest fancies. This gigantic head, blanched with age, thus rising from the bowels of the earth, might well have belonged to one of those fearful beings which are pictured in the traditions of the country as appearing to mortals, slowly ascending from the regions below. One of the workmen, on catching the first glimpse of the monster, had thrown down his basket and run off towards Mosul as fast as his legs could carry him. I learned this with regret as I anticipated the consequences.

While I was superintending the removal of the earth, which still clung to the sculpture, and giving directions for the continuation of the work, a noise of horsemen was heard, and presently Abd-ur-rahman, followed by half his tribe, appeared on the edge of the trench. As soon as the two Arabs had reached the tents, and published the wonders they had seen, everyone mounted his mare and rode to the mound, to satisfy himself of the truth of these inconceivable reports. When they beheld the head they all cried out together, "There is no God but God; and Mohamed is his Prophet!" It was some time before the Sheikh could be prevailed upon to descend into the pit, and convince himself that the image he saw was of stone. "This is not the work of men's hands," exclaimed he, "but of those infidel giants of whom the Prophet, peace be with him! Has said, that they were higher than the tallest date tree; this is one of the idols which Noah, peace be with him! Cursed before the flood." In this opinion, the result of a careful examination, all the bystanders concurred.

I now ordered a trench to be dug due south from the head, in the expectation of finding a corresponding figure, and before nightfall, reached the object of my search about twelve feet distant. Engaging two or three men to sleep near the sculptures, I returned to the village and celebrated the day's discovery by a slaughter of a sheep, of which all the Arabs near partook. As some wandering musicians chanced to be at Salamiya, I sent for them, and dances were kept up during the greater part of the night. On the following morning Arabs from the other side of the Tigris, and the inhabitants of the surrounding villages congregated on the mound. Even the women could not repress their curiosity, and came in crowds, with their children, from afar. My Cavass<sup>1</sup> was stationed during the day in the trench into which I could not allow the multitude to descend.



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<sup>1</sup> Armed police officers.