

A NEW SLAB BACK INSCRIPTION ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE KALHU (NIMRUD) AND THE NORTH-WEST PALACE OF ASHURNASIRPAL II FROM THE MUSEUM OF ANATOLIAN CIVILIZATIONS (ANKARA)

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Öz

Anadolu Medeniyetleri Müzesi'nden II. Asurnasirpal'in Kalhu (Nimrud) ve Kuzey-Batı Sarayı'nın İmarını İçeren Yeni Bir Panel Arkası Yazıtı

II. Asurnasirpal, Asur Devleti açısından önemli bir dönüm noktasını temsil etmektedir. Bu kralla birlikte Asur fetihçi bir devlete dönüşerek, imparatorluk olma yolunda önemli kazanımlar elde etmiştir. II. Asurnasirpal, büyük askeri kampanyalarla Asur merkezlerine aktarılan zenginliğin bir kısmını eski bir idari merkez olan Kalhu'nun yeniden ayağa kaldırılması ve burada kendisine büyük bir saray inşası için kullanmıştır. Kalhu'da inşa edilen Kuzey-Batı Sarayı'nın duvarları devlet ideolojisinin bir yansıması olan rölyefler ve yazıtlarla kaplanmıştır. Bu düşüncenin ürünü olarak ortaya konulan eserler ve bu eserlerin duvarlarını kaplayan rölyef ve yazıtlar ciddi bir propaganda araçları olarak hizmet etmişlerdir. Biz bu çalışmada II. Asurnasirpal'in sarayında yer alan bir kraliyet yazıtının, transliterasyon, tercüme ve açıklamalarına yer vermekteyiz. Yazıt Asur kralının soy, unvan, askeri seferlerinin özeti, Kalhu'nun yeniden imarı ve Kuzey-Batı Sarayı'nın imarına ilişkin özet bilgileri içermektedir. Bu yazıt da diğer tüm kraliyet yazıtlarda olduğu gibi devlet ideolojisinin ürünü olarak kralı yüceltici ibaretler içermekte ve onu muzaffer bir savaşçı ve başarılı bir inşaatçı olarak gösterme eğilimindedir. Ancak biz bu yazıtı standart yazıt olarak değerlendirmektense "Panel Arkası Yazıtı" olarak değerlendirmeyi tercih ediyoruz. Bu tür yazıtların varlığı çok az bilinmektedir ve modern araştırmacılar çalışmalarında genellikle bu tür yazıtların varlığını göz ardı etmektedir. Bu çalışma ile bu tür yazıtların tanınır-

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lığının daha artacağı ve ilerleyen yıllarda kraliyet yazıtlarına yönelik çalışmalarda bu ayrımın gözetileceği inancındayız.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Asur, II. Asurnasirpal, Kalhu, Kuzey-Batı Sarayı, Panel Arkası Yazıtı

Abstract

Ashurnasirpal II represents an important turning point for the Assyrian State. With this king, Assyria transformed into a conquering state and made significant gains towards becoming an empire. Ashurnasirpal II used some of the wealth transferred to Assyrian centres through great military campaigns for the reconstruction of Kalhu, a former administrative centre, and the construction of a great palace for himself. The walls of the North-West Palace built in Kalhu were adorned with reliefs and inscriptions, reflecting the state ideology. These buildings, created as a product of this mindset, and the reliefs and inscriptions covering their walls, served as significant tools of propaganda. In this study, we present the transliteration, translation and explanations of a royal inscription in the palace of Ashurnasirpal II. The inscription contains a summary of the Assyrian king's lineage, title, military campaigns, the reconstruction of Kalhu, and the reconstruction of the North-West Palace. This inscription, like all other royal inscriptions, is the product of state ideology and tends to glorify the king and to portray him as a victorious warrior and a successful builder. However, we prefer to consider this inscription as a "Slab Back Inscription" rather than a standard inscription. This feature of the inscription makes our study important. The existence of such inscriptions is lesser-known, and modern researchers often ignore them in their studies. We believe that this study will increase the recognition of such inscriptions and that this distinction will be taken into consideration in future studies on royal inscriptions.

Keywords: Assyria, Ashurnasirpal II, Kalhu, North-West Palace, Slab Back Inscription

Introduction

The Assyrian kings began to regain power in the Near East around 950 BC. The military and political conditions of the period had a favourable impact on Assyria, enabling it to win great victories and expand its borders. When Ashurnasirpal II ascended to the throne in 883 BC, the Assyrian State had expanded almost to the extent of the Middle Assyrian Kingdom. Ashurnasirpal II contributed to this expansion, especially in the northwest, through his successful military campaigns and strengthened the state organization. Although Ashurnasirpal II's western campaigns extended the state's borders up to the Mediterranean Sea, this expansion did not represent a permanent dominance west of the Euphrates and was mainly aimed at collecting tribute¹. The reign of Ashurnasirpal II is one of the most important turning points in Mesopotamian history. This is reflected in the large number of royal inscriptions that provide detailed information on Ashurnasirpal II². Ashurnasirpal II, who initiated the re-emergence of the Assyrian State by regaining its former lands, used the wealth and manpower he gained from the military campaigns for new construction projects and transformed the city of

1 Kertai 2014, 337.

2 Grayson 2008, 253-259.

Kalhu (Nimrud)³ into the new royal centre of the Assyrian kingdom⁴. The king's actions led to the centralization of political power in his hands and the formation of the conceptual foundation of the Assyrian Empire⁵.

Ashurnasirpal II built the North-West Palace, a large royal palace for himself, in Kalhu, and carved reliefs and royal inscriptions on the palace walls to describe his military campaigns and building activities. This study introduces an unpublished royal inscription of Ashurnasirpal II, one of the most important kings who initiated the rise of Assyria, which summarizes his personality, his campaigns, the reconstruction of Kalhu and the construction of the North-West palace. The fact that the inscription is a "Slab Back Inscription" makes this study valuable as such inscriptions are known in very few examples. The rarity of the "slab back inscription" type remains limited to the research in this field. In this publication, we aim to discuss this inscription in all aspects and to share the results obtained. In addition, another purpose is to make some inferences by comparing the results obtained with other findings in the literature. Since the document subject to the study is a royal inscription in the Neo-Assyrian dialect, we use the document analysis method, which includes the transliteration, translation and analysis of the document. In our study, we will first share our findings on the royal inscription in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, then we will talk about the reconstruction of Kalhu and the process of making Kalhu the capital since the royal inscription provides information about the reconstruction process of Kalhu. Finally, we will evaluate the reconstruction process of the Northwest Palace, which is also mentioned in the inscription, based on the information in other inscriptions and archaeological data.

Slab Back Inscription of Ashurnasirpal II from the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations

The royal inscription we are introducing here for the first time has the registration number 3-4-24 in the inventory of the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations (fig. 1-2). Unfortunately, there is no information about when and how the inscription came to the museum. Due to the fact that the stone block of the inscription was broken in half, the left side of the inscription is missing. The preserved parts on the right side of the document allow us to identify this inscription as a duplicate of the inscription published by Grayson, in RIMA 2.0.101.35⁶, and to complete the broken left side of the inscription. The inscription begins with an introduction including the lineage and titles of Ashurnasirpal II, - followed by a summary of the king's campaigns. Since the inscription was separated from the main block by cutting the corners and is a duplicate of RIMA 2.0.101.35, we consider that this royal inscription is a "Slab Back Inscription"⁷. In addition, the

3 Kalhu is mentioned in Middle Assyrian sources and must have been a fairly large town, as it was at the center of the regional network of the Assyria at the time, Yamada 2020, 93-94.

4 Russell 2017, 435-438; Radner 2011, 323-325.

5 Shibata 2023, 217-218.

6 Grayson 1991, 301-302.

7 After Layard, the first scholar to mention a text on the back of palace wall plates was de Filippi, who referred to an unpublished text on the back of a corner plate in the British Museum (British Museum, WA 124557-12455 8), de Filippi 1977, 32 and 40-43. More recently, Reade described

inability to match the number of lines in the inscriptions in the room plans of North-West Palace revealed by scholars such as Meuszyński, Sobolewski, Reade and Paley⁸ reinforces our thought that it is a Slab Back Inscription. Slab Back Inscription is a term coined to describe the inscriptions engraved on the reverses of orthostats in the Northwest Palace. Therefore, this kind of orthostats originally turned towards the walls so that a viewer could not see the inscribed surface of them. In addition, during the first excavations at Kalhu, Layard's practice of cutting the backs of the orthostats to make them lighter and easier to transport resulted in the loss of many of these documents. Layard describes his cutting of such inscriptions in the following words:

*“Without proper materials it was impossible to move the colossal lions, or even any entire slab. The ropes of the country were so ill-made that they could not support any considerable weight. I determined, therefore, to saw the slabs containing double bas-reliefs into two pieces, and to lighten them as much as possible by cutting from the back. The inscriptions being a mere repetition of the same formula, I did not consider it necessary to preserve them, as they added to the weight.”*⁹

Such inscriptions were carved on the back of many of the wall plaques and giant statues in the North-West Palace at Kalhu¹⁰. There must have originally been hundreds - perhaps more than a thousand - examples of this kind of texts in the palace, and many of them survived until Layard's time because of their protected position against the walls¹¹. In order to lighten the weights of the orthostats, Layard cut them into flakes, as he stated. However, he did not neglect to record them while doing so. Layard's notebook, dated 1845-1947, contains notes on variants of such inscriptions. Although Layard did not identify the source of any of the variants of royal inscriptions in his notes, he made an exception for Slab Back Inscriptions, describing them as “Inscriptions on the Back of Slabs”. Unfortunately, in subsequent studies by other scholars, Layard's references to the location of these inscriptions have been neglected and they have been presented as just another variant of the Standard Inscription¹². LeGac, who published five examples of this kind of text based on copies on papers in the British Museum, gave no information about the origin of the plates and simply described the text as a “shortened version” of the Standard Inscription. Grayson, without mentioning the Slab Back Inscription and without any classification, stated that these

such inscriptions as “text was written on the reverse of some of the stone panels”, Reade 1985, 205. Russell, who found the observations and interpretations of de Filippi and Reade noteworthy, described these inscriptions carved on the back of orthostats as “Slab Back Text”, Russell 1999, 21-22. Since the text is a royal inscription, we suggest that such inscriptions should also be called “Slab Back Inscription”.

8 Meuszyński 1981; Paley - Sobolewski 1987 and 1992; Reade 1994.

9 Layard 1852, 101.

10 Meuszyński 1981, 12.

11 Some of these inscriptions are preserved today in western museums behind orthostats. Unfortunately, since museums tend to place orthostats by embedding them in the walls, it is not possible to accurately determine how many of these inscriptions are preserved on orthostats in museums. Howard 2017, 79

12 Russell 1999, 19-20.

inscriptions were found on stone slabs from the Northwest Palace at Kalhu¹³.

The Slab Back Inscription differs from the Standard Inscription in several ways. The Standard Inscription is significantly longer than the others, contains a much-expanded account of title and palace-building, and numerous additional epithets. In addition, the Standard Inscription must have been written after the Slab Back Inscription. This is because the backs of the wall slabs had to be inscribed before they were lifted into place and carved. The Standard Inscription, on the other hand, was carved on the face of the wall slabs after the images were carved on them¹⁴.

Transliteration

- 1' [É.GAL^maš-šur-PAP-A MAN GAL-ú MAN *dan-nu* MAN KUR *aš-šur* A TUKUL-MAŠ MAN GAL-e MAN *dan*]-ni MAN ŠÚ MAN 'KUR' *aš-šur* A 10-^rERIM^r.TÁḤ
- 2' [MAN GAL MAN *dan-nu* MAN ŠÚ MAN KUR *aš-šur-ma eṭ-lu qar-du šá ina* GIŠ.tukul-ti *aš-šur* EN-šú DU.DU-ku]-^rma^r *ina mal-ki*.MEŠ šá kib-rat LÍMMU-ta
- 3' [šá-nin-šú la-a i-šú-ú LÚ.SIPA *tab-ra-te la a-di-ru* GIŠ.LAL *e-du-ú gap-šú šá ma-ḫi-ra la-a i-šú-ú* MAN šá TA *e-ber-ta-an* ÍD.IDIGNA *a-di* KUR.l] *ab-na-na u* A.AB.BA GAL-ti
- 4' [KUR.la-qe-e *ana si-ḫir-ti-šá* KUR.su-ḫi *a-di* URU.ra-pi-qi *ana* ĞÌR. II.MEŠ-šú ú]-^ršék-ni^r-šá TA SAG ^re-ni^r
- 5' [ÍD.su-ub-na-at *a-di* KUR.ni-ri-be šá *bé-ta-a-ni* ŠU-su *ik-šu-du* TA KUR *né-re*]-^rbe šá^r KUR.ḫab-ru-ri *a-^rdi* KUR.<gil>-za^r-ni
- 6' [TA *e-ber-ta-an* ÍD.za-ba-KI.TA *a-di* URU.DU₆-ba-a-ri šá *el-la-an* KUR. za]-^rban^r TA URU.DU₆-šá-ab^r-ta-ni
- 7' [*a-di* URU.DU₆-šá-za-ab-da-ni URU.ḫi-ri-mu URU.ḫa-ru-tu KUR.bi-ra-a-te šá KUR.kar]-^rdu^r-ni-áš *ana* ^rmi-iṣ^r-ri
- 8' [KUR-ia *ú-ter* ù DAGAL.MEŠ KUR.KUR *na-i-ri a-na paṭ gim-ri-šá a-pél*] ^rURU.kal-ḫu^r *ana eš-šú-te* ^raṣ-bat^r
- 9' [É.GAL EN-ti-a *ina qer-be-šú ad-di* É.GAL ší-i *a-na* <na>-an-mar *mal-ki*].^rMEŠ ù NUN.MEŠ^r-e [šá *da-ra-a-te*]
- 10' [DÙ-uš *ú-si-im-ši ú-šar-riḫ-ši ú-ma-mi* KUR-e ù A.AB.BA.MEŠ DÙ-šú-nu šá] ^rNA₄.pá*-li BABBAR-e ù NA₄.pa-ru-te DÙ^r-uš *ina* KÁ.MEŠ-šá *ú-šá-z[i-iz]*

Translation

1'-5a') [Palace of Ashurnasirpal (II), great king, strong king, king of the world, king of Assyria, son of Tukultī-Ninurta (II), great king], str[ong king], king of the world, king of Assyria, son of Adad-nārārī (II), [(who was) also great king, strong king, king of the world, (and) king of Assyria; the valiant man who acts with the support of (the god) Aššur, his lord, and was has no rival] among the rulers of the four quarters (of the world), [marvelous shepherd, fearless in battle, mighty flood-tide which has no opponent, the king who b]

13 LeGac 1907, 166-168; Grasyon 1991, 301-302.

14 Russell 1999, 28-30.

owned down [his feet from the opposite bank of the Tigris River to Mount L] ebanon and the Great Sea, [the land Lāqê in its entirety, (and) the land Sūḫu, to land Rapiqu; he conquered] from the source of [the Subnat River to the interior of the land Nirbu]

5b'-8a') [I returned within the] boundaries [of my land (the territory stretching) from the pass]es of the land Ḫabruri to the land Gilzānu, [from the opposite bank of the Lower Zab to the city Tīl-bāri, which is upstream from the land Za]bban, from the city Tīl-ša-Abtāni [to the city Tīl-ša-Zab-dāni, (and) the cities Ḫirimmu (and) Ḫarutu, (which are) fortresses of] Kar-duniaš (Babylonia) [and I ruled over the wide Na'iri lands, to their (text: its) all border.]

8b'-10': I reorganized the city Kalḫu [(and) founded the palace of my lordly majesty inside it. I built that palace for the eternal admiration of king]s and rulers [(and) splendidly decorated it.] I made [(statues of) all kinds of (lit. “all of them”) beasts (animals) of mountains and seas, by using] white limestone and parūtu-alabaster (and) stati[oned] (them) at its gates.

Commentary

Line 5: KUR.gil^{*}-za-ni: The sign “gil” is not written in the text. Here a haplography error has been made and a sign has been forgotten¹⁵. During the production phase of the standard inscriptions, errors such as forgetting, overwriting or omitting in the scripts of the royal inscriptions occur when illiterate stonemasons engrave the master copies of the royal inscription on orthostats.¹⁶

Line 6: The geographical name written as “URU.DU₆-ša-ab-ta-ni” in the inscription also appears as “URU.DU₆-ša-ab-ta-a-ni” in other inscription variants. This variant involves a complete spelling of a long vowel, not an imperfect spelling. Both spellings are correct¹⁷. However, it is worth noting that this is a geographical name and may not have been as familiar to scribes as other terms with long vowels. Therefore, a full spelling of the lengthened vowel implies that the scribe was aware of the correct vocalization of the term. While it is possible that such a variant was produced by a copyist, it is less likely than such a change in a more common term. The occurrence of this variant in variant profiles suggests that it was transmitted from one or more instances, at least for some manuscripts¹⁸.

Line 10: NA₄.pá-li: The sign “pá” (𐎶𐎠) appears in the inscription as the sign “la” (𐎶𐎠 / 𐎶𐎠) However, while forgetting a sign, writing an extra sign, or confusing similar signs (ur: 𐎶𐎠 and ib: 𐎶𐎠¹⁹) is normal in royal inscriptions because they are produced by copying techniques, the confusing of two signs that are different in writing can be seen as an interesting example. Such errors are common in the royal inscriptions of Asurnasipal II. In similar signs, there are often errors that occur when the sign is missing, usually in the form of a wedge skip. Here, however, there is clearly an extra horizontal mark.

15 Howard 2017, 239-240, 243.

16 Howard 2017, 5-6, 25,219; Delnero 2012, 207.

17 Parpola 1970, 355.

18 Howard 2017, 398; Howard 2023, 47.

19 Labat 1995, 221 ve 235.

This inscription, which we identify as Slab Back Inscription, is not only a duplicate of RIMA 2 A.0.101.35, but also shows parallels with other inscriptions from the North-West Palace in Kalhu: RIMA 2 A.0.101.1 (ii. 125-131 and iii. 114-122), RIMA 2 A.0.101.3 (lines 35-48); RIMA 2 A.0.101.23 (lines 1-8), RIMA 2 A.0.101.31 (lines 5-10), A.0.101.32 (lines 1-7) and RIMA 2 A.0.101.34 (lines 1-22).²⁰ Although the inscription appears to be a shortened variant of the Standard Inscription, such inscriptions should be categorized as Slab Back Inscriptions. However, such inscriptions were probably produced from master copies with some additions and subtractions.

The Reconstruction of Kalhu, Construction and Rediscovery of the North-West Palace

Ashurnasirpal II's most important building project was the new capital, Kalhu, located on the east bank of the Tigris, just north of its confluence with the Upper Zab²¹. Kalhu, located 75 kilometres north of the first capital Assyria, was situated on a fertile plain. It was better connected to the roads crossing northern Mesopotamia and had a richer agricultural hinterland. This new capital covered an area of almost 360 hectares²². Kalhu, with fertile agricultural land, usually received enough rainfall to ensure plenty of grain in the region. The area where Kalhu is located has been inhabited since prehistoric times. But this is an age about which we know very little, as the early remains are deeply buried. From 3000 BC the cultural presence on the mound can be better observed. Kalhu was used as a provincial administrative centre during the Middle Assyrian Period (around 1200 BC). The rise of the city began during the reign of Ashurnasirpal II²³. Ashurnasirpal II moved his new capital to Kalhu, an already existing rather large town, and expanded it considerably²⁴. Ashurnasirpal II recorded in his annals that he rebuilt the city of Kalhu built by Shalmaneser I and made Kalhu his royal city²⁵. The capital was the centre of the monarchy and the focal point of royal power. It contained the royal residence and served as the political-administrative core of the kingdom, where economic resources were brought from different regions²⁶. For this reason, the capital had to be organized in a way that would meet the needs of the state.

Kalhu (fig. 3), Ashurnasirpal II's new capital, consisted of a large fortress mound with a larger, walled outer city. In the northwest corner of the citadel, facing the river, were the ziggurat and the Temple of Ninurta; to the south was the North-West Palace. Central Palace was located further south and finally the South-West Palace, probably built in the seventh century²⁷. Among these buildings, the North-West Palace has a special place. The oldest and largest palace, the North-West Palace was built by Ashurnasirpal II as his main residence. The royal

20 Grayson 1991, 191-302.

21 Oates – Oates 2001.

22 Simpson 2021, 1-2.

23 Reade 1982, 99-102.

24 Otto 2015, 476.

25 Grayson 1991, RIMA 2 A.0.101.17: 55b - v45b.

26 Yamada 2020, 87.

27 Oates 2008, 31.

inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II describe the construction of the North-West Palace of Kalhu as follows:

“I cleared away the old ruin hill (and) dug down to water level. I sank (the foundation pit) down to a depth of 120 layers of brick. I founded therein a palace of cedar, cypress, daprānu-juniper, boxwood, meskannu-wood, terebinth, and tamarisk as a residence of my royal majesty (and) for my lordly leisure for eternity. I made (statues of) beasts of mountains and seas of white limestone and parūtu-alabaster (and) stationed (them) at its gates. I splendidly decorated it. I surrounded it with knobbed nails of bronze. I installed doors of cedar, cypress, daprānu-juniper, (and) meskannu-wood in its gates. I took silver, gold, tin, (and) bronze — booty from the lands over which I gained dominion — in great quantities (and) deposited (them) therein.”²⁸

The North-West Palace was built as the main residence on the west side of the mound just south of the main temple complex. It was over 200 meters long from north to south and at least 120 meters wide. The main entrance to the palace was clearly accessed from the east through a forecourt and opened onto the large outer courtyard, bordered to the north by warehouses and offices (fig. 4). As far as we know, the entire building was originally constructed during the reign of Ashurnasirpal II²⁹. At the outer and inner entrances were huge pairs of statues of winged bulls with human faces depicting divine protectors, called lamassu in Assyrian. The interior walls of the palace were mostly depicted with battle, hunting, and tribute scenes³⁰.

It was a great pride for Assyrian kings to build a new city or to rebuild destroyed ones³¹. Ashurnasirpal II also seems to have implemented an ideological program in both the reconstruction of the city of Kalhu and the reconstruction of the North-West Palace. In these depictions, the king is presented as the representative of the gods on earth and the one responsible for establishing and maintaining world order³². The construction of Kalhu and the North-West Palace was clearly intended to propagate Assyrian ideology to both allies and enemies of the time³³. However, a huge economic resource was required to build such magnificent structures. The power achieved in the economic and political spheres paved the way for reconstruction activities, which were a propaganda tool that revealed the full splendour of the empire. Reconstruction programs were carried out personally by the Assyrian king and his advisors. In a way, these programs were the tools that regulated the king's relations with the people³⁴. The great banquet organized by Ashurnasirpal II after the completion of the construction activities was not only a celebration of the inauguration of the palace but also an exhibition of the works of art both to the public and to friendly and hostile guests from various places and to show the greatness of the Assyrian State. In the annals,

28 Grayson 1991, RIMA 2 A.0.101.2: 55b - 62.

29 Curtis – Reade 1995, 40; Postgate – Reade 1976-1980, 311; Otto 2015, 478; Russell 1999, 9.

30 Meuszyński 1981; Paley – Sobolewski 1987; 1992; Russell 1998; Shibata 2023, 232-233.

31 Novotny 2018, 265.

32 Bunnens 2006, 255.

33 Nadali 2018, 308-311.

34 Porter 1993, 77.

the banquet given after the construction of the North-West Palace of Kalhu is described as follows:

“... when I consecrated the palace of the city Kalhu, 47,074 men (and) women who were invited from every part of my land, 5,000 dignitaries (and) envoys of the people of the lands Sūḫu, Hindānu, Pattinu, Ḫatti, Tyre, Sidon, Gurgum, Melid, Ḫubuškia, Gilzānu, Kummu, (and) Muṣaṣir; 16,000 people of the city Kalhu, (and) 1,500 zariqū of my palace, all of them — altogether 69,574 (including) those summoned from all of the lands and the people of the city Kalhu — for ten days, I gave them food, I gave them drink, I had them bathed, (and) I had them anointed. I honored them (and) sent them back to their lands in peace and joy.”³⁵

The North-West Palace was probably fully completed by the time of this celebration. After the death of Ashurnasirpal II, his son Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC) continued his father’s construction work and also made repairs and some changes. His successors in the 8th century BC continued to maintain the North-West Palace, but Sargon II (721-705 BC), who founded a new capital at Khorsabad (Dur-Šarrukin), was probably the last ruler to use the North-West Palace of Kalhu as his official residence. However, although no longer the official residence of the king after Sargon II’s time, the palace continued to be used as an administrative complex and a residence for court officials and perhaps some members of the royal family until the fall of Assyria in 612 BC³⁶. After the fall of Assyria, the city was forgotten until archaeological excavations were carried out. The first excavations in the city were started by Austen Henry Layard in 1845. After Layard, British archaeologists such as Hormuzd Rassam, William Loftus and George Smith continued excavations at the mound until 1879. After this date, the mound was not excavated for a long time. The excavations were resumed in 1949 by a team led by Max Mallowan on behalf of the British Archaeological School in Iraq. In 1958, David Oates took over the excavations and continued his work until 1963, after which excavations were again suspended. Excavations were resumed in 1974, this time by a Polish team led by Janusz Meuszyński. Later, archaeologists such as Paolo Fiorina and John Curtis conducted excavations at Kalhu. Most recently, an archaeological team from Iraq conducted excavations at the mound³⁷.

The reliefs, inscriptions, and sculptures unearthed during the first excavations are spread all over the world. In the first excavations, which began in 1845, the aim of quickly recovering the artefacts and transferring them to England led to the ignoring of the places of discovery and uncertainty as to which room the artefacts came from. Since 1980, studies and research have focused on identifying which room and part of the palace the artefacts, which are scattered around the world, came from. Meuszyński initiated a project to identify which room of the North-West Palace the artefacts came from. After his death, Sobolewski, Paley and Reade attempted to reconstruct all the relief compositions, taking into

35 Grayson 1991, RIMA 2, A.O.101.30: 140b-154.

36 Oates – Oates 2001, 42.

37 Layard 1949; Mallowan 1966; Meuszyński 1981; Pedersén 1998, 143-144; Oates – Oates 2001; Simpson 2021, 1-2; Russell 1998, 655-657.

account the assumed location of the fragments scattered around the world³⁸. The discovery that the number of lines of the inscriptions on the plates of the same room was the equal and that the number of lines varied from room to room made it possible to identify which room the artefact came from. In addition, the bases of the reliefs cut out during previous excavations were exposed, allowing further observations on the arrangement of the reliefs, and these bases were matched to known reliefs according to their dimensions. In addition, textual variants in the Standard Inscription were analysed and matches were made. As a result of this work, accurate reconstruction drawings of the artefacts in all of the rooms have also been published. With these studies, it has been possible to look at the North-West Palace as a whole since Layard began dismantling the palace in the mid-19th century BC³⁹.

Royal Inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II

Assyrian royal inscriptions constitute a large and heterogeneous corpus within Akkadian literature. In addition to short identification inscriptions on bricks, vessels or precious objects, often bearing no more than the monarch's name and titles, there are long historical narratives on stelae, tablets, barrel cylinders or prisms. There are long and short votive inscriptions on objects offered to the gods, building inscriptions embedded in the foundations or walls of buildings, and annual records inscribed on palace walls⁴⁰. In general, these inscriptions are expressions of royal political ideology. Although the inscriptions are narrated through the mouth of the king, there must have been a wider group of people responsible for their composition. Royal scribes were undoubtedly not only instrumental in transcribing the political ideology and policy of the monarchy but also contributed significantly to shaping it. We can assume that by repeating the royal ideology and persuasive rhetoric in the inscriptions, it was constantly reinforced⁴¹. Ashurnasirpal II was one of the Assyrian kings for whom royal inscriptions were produced with this idea. One of the most important reasons for this is that the king had inscriptions carved into all the stone panels that decorate the interior of the new North-West Palace and the various temples he built in Kalhu. Ashurnasirpal II's royal inscriptions were engraved on the stone slabs lining the walls and paving slabs on the ground, on the huge human-headed and winged guardian bull figures and lion statues placed at the entrances to the palace and temples, and on the royal stelae erected in various places⁴².

The inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II were created according to a certain standard. His Standard Inscription at Kalhu is thought to have been produced in three stages. First, a master copy was created, which was perfected through the joint efforts of the king and his advisors, especially the royal scholars. Over time, some additions and corrections were made to the text of the Standard Inscription, the previous master was discontinued and the new copy was put into use. Unfortunately, we do not have the master and intermediate copies, but their existence

38 Meuszyński 1981; Paley – Sobolewski 1987, 1992; Reade 1994.

39 Reade 1985, 203; Russell 1998, 658.

40 Galter 2022, 91; Pruß 2019, 21 - 22; Öz – Albayrak 2015, 139 -143.

41 Tadmor 1997, 334.

42 Shibata 2023, 218.

has been established on the basis of patterns of common variants in existing manuscripts that attest to these two previous stages. After this stage, the inscriptions were probably created by visually copying the available sample copies on the walls⁴³. Inscriptions were produced by adding, subtracting or modifying words, phrases, clauses or parts of the text from the main text, taking into account the number of signs that could fit on the surface used. This method is described by the term “versatzstück” and was applied to all types of standard inscriptions⁴⁴. In this method, the king’s name and titles (no matter how many were included) were obligatory, while the remaining elements were optional⁴⁵.

According to Paley, the Standard inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II are arranged in a narrative sequence, initially summarizing the king’s lineage, his heroic and warrior character, and his military campaigns, followed by a portrayal of his protective and rebuilding activities⁴⁶. Schramm, on the other hand, says that in the standard inscription, the king is glorified after the official title is given and a summary of the conquests is presented. Schramm suggests that the inscription does not end with these statements, but after adding the king’s self-legitimization statements to the inscription, he mentions his names and titles again and proposes a sequence in which the reconstruction activities of the palace in Kalhu are described⁴⁷.

The Standard inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II are divided into two groups, Standard Inscription A and Standard Inscription B, based on the events described and the geographical descriptions used. The Standard Inscription A version may have been cut on flat panels throughout the palace, probably when the statues were not yet in place⁴⁸. Standard Inscription A uses the phrase “from the source of the Subnat River to the interior of the land Nirbu (*reš ēni Šubnat adi Nirbu ša bētāni qaššu*)”, while Standard Inscription B replaces this phrase with “the source of the Tigris”. The expedition into the interior of Nirbu country in the inscriptions is probably dated 882 BC. An expedition to the source of the Tigris is probably dated to 865 BC at the earliest and 861 BC at the latest. However, the Tigris source is not mentioned in the North-West Palace inscriptions. In addition, Standard Inscription B points to Urartu as the northern limit of Ashurnasirpal II’s conquests. A campaign against the Kingdom of Urartu is depicted on a Balawat bronze and should be dated to an earlier date, around 864-860 BC, probably because Ashurnasirpal died in 859 BC⁴⁹.

Conclusion

Ashurnasirpal II, who ruled between 883-859 BC, expanded the borders of the Assyrian Empire and made Kalhu the centre of the empire by transforming it into a new capital. The construction activities carried out during this period

43 Howard 2017, ii-iii.

44 Renger 1986, 114.

45 Howart 2017, 104.

46 Paley 1976, 125 - 133.

47 Schramm 1973, 41.

48 Reade 1985, 203-204.

49 de Filippi 1977, 46; Grayson 1976, 164-165, no. 13; Paley 1976, 145-158; Grayson 1991, RIMA 2, p. 268; Reade 1985, 203-207.

represent not only the reconstruction of a city but also a magnificent construction representing the political and ideological power of Assyria. Ashurnasirpal II has a special place among the Assyrian kings because of the numerous royal inscriptions he had carved on the walls of his palace. The inscriptions detail Ashurnasirpal II's power and military achievements and show how these achievements were reflected in his building activities. In the royal inscriptions, Ashurnasirpal II presents himself as the representative of the gods on earth and glorifies the splendour and power of the empire through reconstruction activities. In this respect, royal inscriptions should be considered not only as historical documents but also as propaganda tools of Assyria's imperial ideology.

A royal inscription from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, which we examine in this study, provides a summary of Ashurnasirpal II's lineage, titles, and military achievements, as well as the construction of the Northwest Palace at Kalhu. We consider that the text is a special type of so-called "Slab Back Inscription", which was engraved on the backs of orthostats in the Northwest Palace. The possibility that this inscription is one of the inscriptions engraved on the back of orthostats during the first archaeological excavations conducted by Layard should not be ruled out. Although some parts of the inscription have been lost due to physical damage, the similarity with the RIMA 2.0.101.35 inscription published by Grayson has made it possible to complete the missing parts. It is hoped that this study will increase the knowledge about the little-known "Slab Back Inscriptions", make them more accepted in the literature, and that new inscriptions of this type will be revealed by considering this distinction in future studies.

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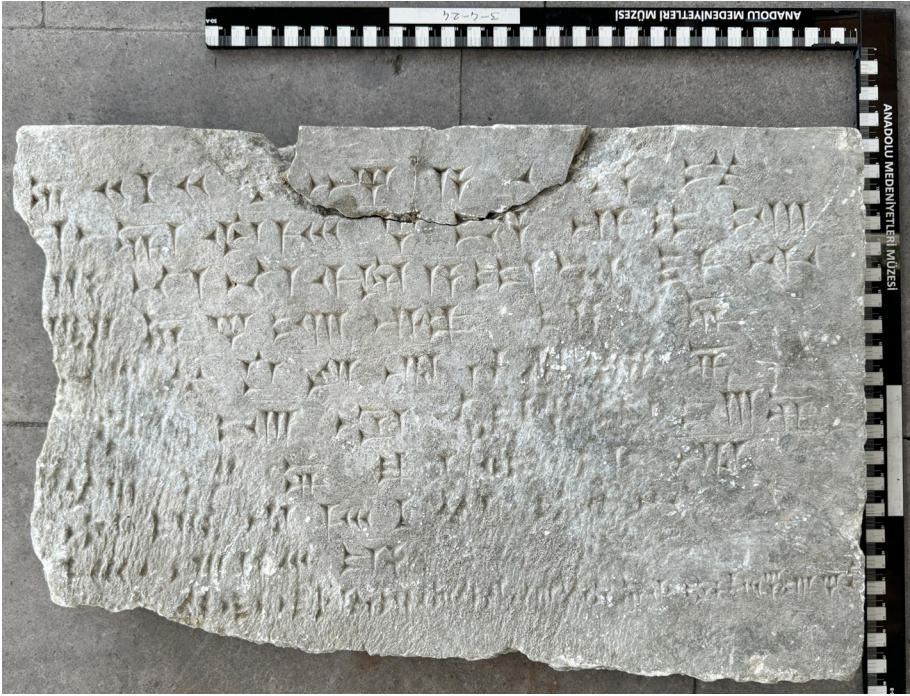


Fig.1 A new slab back inscription of Ashurnasirpal II (AMM 3-4-24).

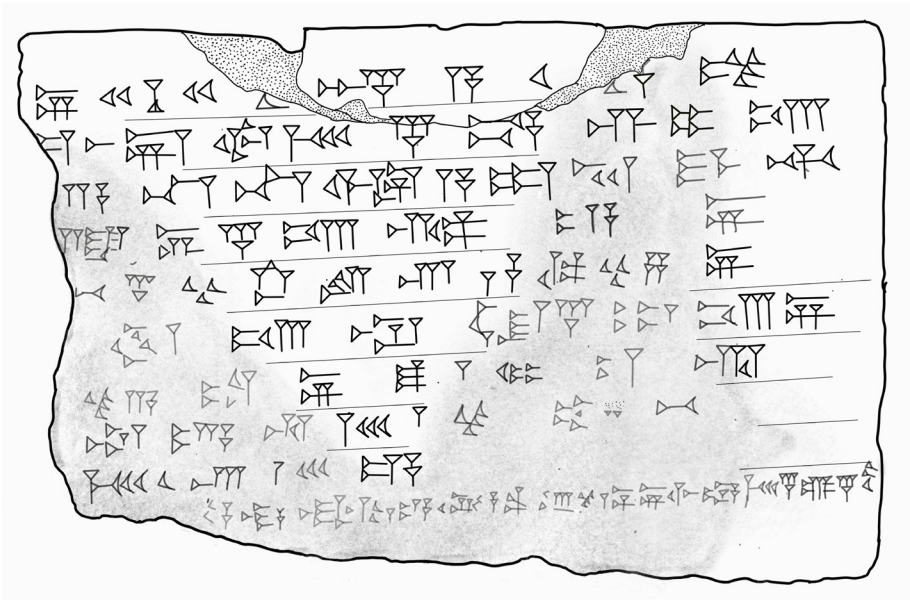


Fig.2 Copy of new slab back inscription of Ashurnasirpal II (AMM 3-4-24).

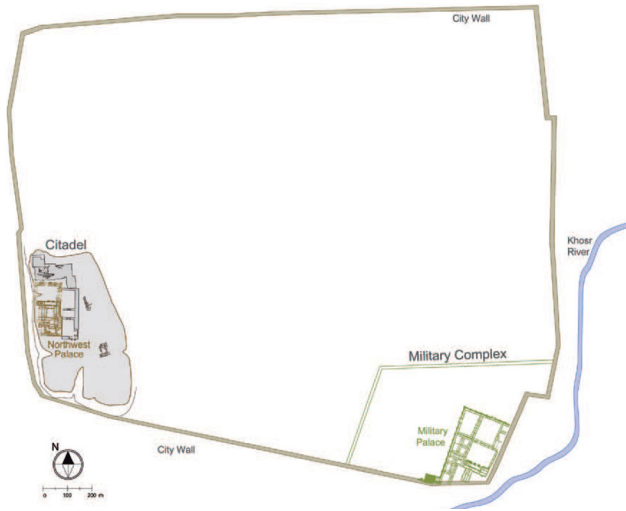


Fig.3 Kalhu city plan (Kertai 2014, fig. 1)

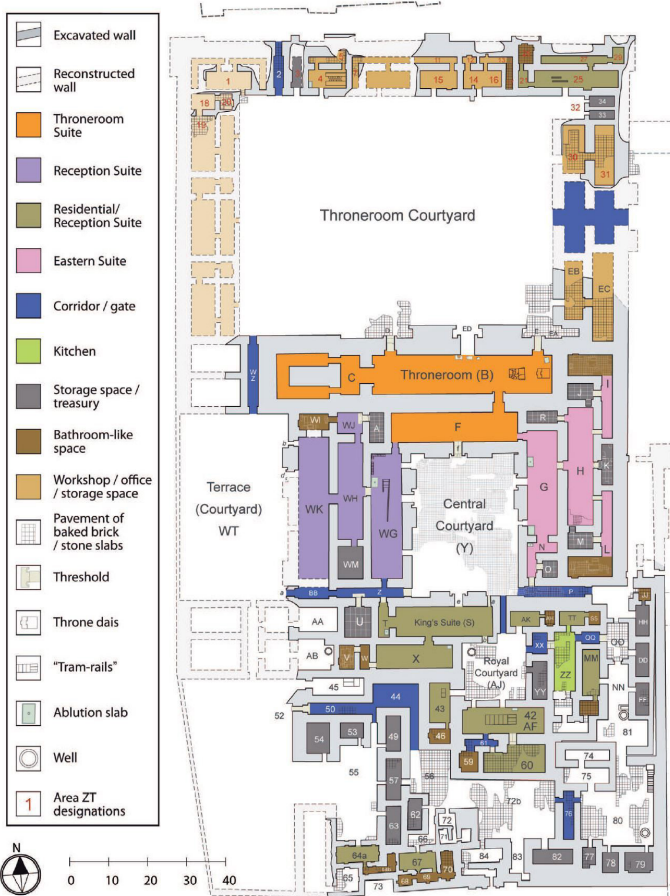


Fig.4 North-West Palace: General distribution of functions (Kertai 2014, fig. 3)