

## The Descriptive Narrative of the Ashurbanipal Relief Depicting His Fifth Campaign against Elam: An Artistic Study

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### Abstract

This wall relief was discovered in the North Palace of the city of Nineveh. It consists of six wall panels, arranged in two groups of three on each side, forming frieze-like compositions. The panels depict a scene related to Ashurbanipal's fifth military campaign against the land of Elam. The reliefs originally adorned the walls of Room (37) in the South-West Palace of King Sennacherib and portray a battle scene near the Ulai River, located on the western side of the entrance, as well as the death of the Elamite king Teumman.

**Keywords:-** Relief; Wall relief; Nineveh; Elam; Descriptive narrative; Battle; Ulai River.

### Introduction

Art in the Neo-Assyrian period( 911 – 612 BC) began to express the lives and deeds of lords, serving not only as a record of royal conditioning but also as a reflection of religious and temporal values. The Assyrians described battles considerably in their written records; still, they also depicted these events in relief puppets and wall busts. In doing so, they effectively proved their narratives through engraved visual models that illustrated the nature of the regions they described.

Assyrian reliefs may be classified into several orders military, political, profitable, natural, and religious. Among these, military reliefs enthralled a position of particular elevation and regard.

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Given the subject's significance, the relief panel is divided into four or more registers, with the main face devoted to commemorating royal palms. The sculptor presents a prominent scene from Ashurbanipal's (680 – 669 BC) wars against the Elamite king Teumman (663 – 653 BC). The art of relief figure during the reign of Ashurbanipal reflects different and dynamic cultural gestures, pressing the significance of relief form among the Assyrians. The commemoration of reliefs was a defining specific of Assyrian art, intended to express strength, reliability, and royal authority. During this period, the sculptor successfully conveyed the epic and dramatic impact of the Assyrian king through an effective, suggestive visual composition.

As for the reasons behind choosing this content, the idea surfaced from the experimenter's desire to gain detailed knowledge of the descriptive narrative of the relief, as well as to identify the yards and entrances within the palace and the fresh sculpted scenes associated with the reliefs.

Despite the failure of direct information concerning this relief, the available data — deduced from restated papers in English and Persian — constitute an essential source for understanding the details of the descriptive narrative and the styles employed in its cultural treatment.

## **Research Questions**

1. Where is the relief located?
2. What are the reasons for commemorating this relief?
3. What are the carved details depicted in the relief?

## **Chronological Limits of the Study**

The reign of King Ashurbanipal (680–669 BC).

## **Research Methodology**

The descriptive–analytical method applied to the relief.

## **Structure of the Study**

1. The research is divided into four main sections:
2. A historical introduction to the significance of commemorating reliefs among the ancient Assyrians
3. The reasons for commemorating the relief
4. An overview of the Ashurbanipal relief documenting his fifth campaign
5. The descriptive narrative of the relief

## **First: Historical Introduction to the Significance of Commemorating Reliefs among the Ancient Assyrians**

The Assyrian Conglomerate( 911 – 612 BC) surfaced as a prosperous and important state, whose lords were distinguished by political wit and strategic intelligence. They demonstrated a capability to manage events in a manner harmonious with their political and military intentions, supported by a strong, well- organized army. As a result, the conglomerate achieved its pretensions and intentions, attained considerable status and significance, and assessed its control over numerous regions and homes.

The commemoration of military palms was a familiar miracle among autocrats in Mesopotamian societies. similar practices served a cerebral purpose, and two clones of palm stelae were probably produced one placed in the capital, and another erected in the region where the military crusade took place. This practice told the morale of the original population, breeding passions of despair and submission. Accordingly, similar palms were constantly depicted on stelae. really, the Assyrians converted this practice into an art form that was contemporaneously literal and ornamental, serving clear propagandistic and ideological purposes.

During the Neo-Assyrian period, art came to express the lives and deeds of lords while also reflecting religious and temporal values. Assyrian autocrats were well known for their strong inclination to construct palaces and beautify them with reliefs and statues that glorified their courage and celebrated their outstanding achievements. These lords generally followed a analogous architectural approach in erecting their palaces, utmost of which participated a unified general layout. The Assyrian palace generally comported of a series of corridors and halls, with flat roofs and extended sundecks. Monumental winged bulls with mortal heads adjoined the entrances, while the interior walls were occasionally sheathe with precious rustic panels, at other times with glazed slipup, or with engraved crossbeams of white marble. The apartments were plushily decorated with relief scenes, and the cabinetwork was stretched with elaborate inlays, reflecting a distinctive and confident cultural style in both creative design and architectural ways, as art itself had come an integral expression of royal testament and authority.

The Assyrians recorded battles in their written textbooks, but they did not limit themselves to erudite descriptions; they also depicted these events in relief puppets and wall busts. In this way, they visually proved their narratives

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through engraved representations that conveyed the nature of the regions and events described. Assyrian reliefs may be distributed into service, political, profitable, natural, and religious themes, with military reliefs enwrapping a particularly exalted position.

The reliefs of King Ashurbanipal vividly portrayed a prominent scene from his wars against the Elamite king Teumman. The panel was divided into four or more registers, with the main face devoted to commemorating the king's palms. During this period, the sculptor conveyed the scene's epic and dramatic effect forcefully. Relief form under Ashurbanipal reflects different and radiant cultural trials, pressing the significance of relief figure within Assyrian art. The Assyrian cavalry is also shown defying the Elamites during the siege of the Elamite megacity of Murubisu.

Among other scenes depicted in Assyrian reliefs are multitudinous representations of trees and foliage. Of particular applicability is the relief of Ashurbanipal with his queen, who accompanies him beneath connections as they celebrate the palms he achieved over the Elamite king Teumman.

### Second: Reasons for Commemorating the Relief

Urtaki died shortly after he failed to seize control of Babylon and while returning from it. He was succeeded by his brother *Tepti-Humban-Inshushinak*, whose name appears in Assyrian sources as **Teumman**. Several scholars suggest that he was assassinated by one of his followers or by a member of the ruling family.

Without a peace treaty, Assyrian–Elamite relations experienced a period of relative calm and stability; however, this situation did not endure. Teumman sought to eliminate his rivals from among members of the former ruling family, namely the sons of *Humban-Haltash II*: Kudurru, along with the sons of Urtaki—Humban-nikash (known as *Ummanikash*) and Tammaritu, together with sixty prominent nobles and a number of soldiers. Following Teumman's accession to power, these actions significantly altered the political landscape.

The primary ideal of Ashurbanipal's policy was to enkindle civil war in Elam, thereby creating internal chaos that would weaken the area and enable the Assyrians to achieve their intentions. This situation constituted the spark that renewed conflict between the two sides. The bedeviled Elamite tycoons inclusively sought retreat at the Assyrian court, where they were warmly entered. Their end in seeking shelter was to reclaim their throne with Assyrian

backing, an action that unnaturally altered the course of relations between the two powers.

Teumman latterly dispatched a delegation demanding that Ashurbanipal hand over the deportees; still, the Assyrian king refused. Tiglath-Pileser used this turndown as a rationale to declare war against Assyria and launched attacks against abettors hostile to the Assyrian Conglomerate, similar as the Chaldean and Aramean lines, who had mutinied against Assyrian authority.

Hostilities between the Assyrians and the Elamites began, and the Assyrian forces reached the Uлай River (see Fig. 1). The Elamite armies attempted to flee. Still, the Assyrians pursued them, inflicting heavy casualties. Teumman himself was wounded during the battle and tried to escape with his son, urging him to kill him before the Assyrians arrived (see Fig. 2). Nevertheless, he was captured by the Assyrians, who killed him, severed his head, and transported it to the capital Nineveh, where it was hung on a tree. This event constituted the principal reason for King Ashurbanipal's commemoration of the relief, celebrating his victory over the Elamites.

Ashurbanipal appointed *Ummanikash* as the official king of Elam in Madaktu during the period 653–651 BC, while his brother *Tammaritu* was installed as king of Hidalu after the campaign, as indicated by the following inscription: “Ummanikash, king of Elam, son of Urtaki, who before Teumman ascended the throne of Elam had fled to Assyria and kissed my feet—I took him with me to Elam and placed him upon the throne of Teumman; likewise, I installed Tammaritu, who had also fled with him, as king of Hidalu” .

Ashurbanipal held grand celebrations in the capital, Nineveh, during which he bound Dunanu, Samgunu, Abla, and the severed head of Teumman to his chariot as part of the triumphal display commemorating his victories over the Elamites. He further asserted that every defeated Elamite king was bound to the victorious royal chariot, which he described as his mighty war chariot .

### **Third: Overview of the Ashurbanipal Relief Documenting His Fifth Campaign**

This wall relief was discovered in the North Palace of the city of Nineveh and consists of six wall panels, arranged in two groups of three on either side. The panels are arranged as friezes and depict scenes related to the fifth campaign against the land of Elam. The reliefs once adorned the walls of Room (37) in the South Palace of King Sennacherib , portraying the battle scene near the Uлай

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River and, on the western side of the entrance , the death of the Elamite king Teumman.

The wall panels also include a scene of a procession passing before King Ashurbanipal in the city of Arbela, as well as the scene of the installation of Ummanikash, son of Urtaki, in Madaktu, located to the east of the entrance. The scene further depicts King Ashurbanipal and his queen *Ashur-sharrat*, seated opposite him on an elevated throne. She wears a necklace adorned with large stones and a crown, while the severed head of Teumman hangs from a tree. The queen is depicted wearing richly decorated garments.

### The First Scene of the Relief

The first scene depicts taken adversaries, the evacuation of the wounded, and the counting of casualties. The relief vividly illustrates Assyrian artillery, large figures of adversary corpses , and the use of chariots. One Assyrian dogface is shown trying to deliver his wounded companion during the battle, while another Assyrian dogface is depicted cutting off the head of a departed Elamite legionnaire. A third figure uses a mace to strike an Elamite dogface as he attempts to flee from the Assyrian combatant( see Figs. 3 – 5).

The appearance of the queen alongside the king reflects the elevated status of royal women in political and military life, as well as their mindfulness of events beyond the conglomerate's borders. This is farther emphasized by the definition of King Ashurbanipal relating his palms to her. specially, this relief represents the first case in Assyrian Homeric art in which the king is shown drinking wine during a feed.

Music played a significant part in rituals and immolations conducted in tabernacles, as well as in fests marking palms over adversaries. Consequently, the reliefs of Ashurbanipal include musical processions in the triumphal scenes.

### Fourth: Descriptive Narrative of the Relief

#### Room F

The position of Room F, with an opening in its southwest wall, suggests that this chamber may have worked as a bath and potty. During expansive excavation, a large sewage channel was discovered beneath its bottom. The channel was incompletely constructed of moldered bricks in an Assyrian style and preliminarily belonged to an aged structure.

before descriptions of the reliefs were kindly expansive yet deceiving, but the reliefs were in fact completely saved. They're adorned with literal eulogies arranged in two registers, each with its own inferior services. The primary composition consists of a single nonstop narrative that proceeds from the opening to the right around the room. The lower register is read from right to left, while the upper register is read from left to right; both follow the same canonical style. This narrative form, firstly developed for lords, contrasts with Ashurbanipal, who tête-à-tête led juggernauts. The composition begins with the siege of a megacity, continues with the procession of captures, and concludes with the king triumphantly displayed in his chariot, reviewing the pillages of war.

The prisoners depicted in the upper register are undoubtedly from the Elamite city of **Hamanu**, as confirmed by inscriptions detailing the siege and capture on a panel now housed in London. A second inscribed panel, the traces of which remain in front of Ashurbanipal's canopy, repeats this information. The inhabitants of the city shown in the lower register were also Elamites, depicted being ferried across a river after their capture. One fragment of this scene shows three archers firing to the left on the panel (see Fig. 6).

### **Room G**

Panels 3–5 are believed to have been suitable for painting. Two of them are partially preserved, and panel I b appears to link them. Panels 6 and 7 likely represent a battle, while the missing portions of panels 4 and 5 depict the besieged city. The figures forming a stream at the top of panel five clearly indicate that a continuous composition occupied the full height of these reliefs. All the prisoners are depicted as Elamites (see Fig. 7).

### **Room H**

New information indicates that panels 11 and 12 were not completely defaced. They likely depicted a massacre in a palm grove, alongside scenes of “enemy combat with great terror,” situated somewhere west of Room F. This conflict is preserved in the lower register of three reliefs now in London. It is worth noting that the city in the upper register of one panel may have been located near a park shown in the upper registers of the surviving fragments. This park contained various plants and architectural features characteristic of Assyria itself. The city cannot reliably be identified as Babylon, as sometimes assumed; it is more likely to represent Nineveh, surrounded by pleasure gardens. Internal constructions

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may represent the palace of Sennacherib, the most prominent structure in the city, adorned with upright columns supporting colossal lion statues.

The actual arrangement of these reliefs is on the left. This layout is not entirely convincing, as the major river depicted flows at the bottom, ending near the left edge of the panel, while it continues elsewhere. It remains uncertain whether the smaller water stream, indicated above in the panel, extends to the left. Burn marks on both panels support this ambiguity. This issue may be resolved by examining the sides of the panels to determine which were originally corner panels before trimming (see Fig. 8).

### Room I – Entrance (a)

An added observation indicates that the head of a genie from the upper opening was reconstructed from the opposite door jamb, while “the small fragment in the upper-right corner” was missing from both reliefs. Each human-headed lion appears to carry a “giant spear,” although it may have been a staff encircled by a hoop. Similar figures carrying staffs are familiar on clay panels mounted on door jambs or buried under thresholds in Mesopotamia. Still, they typically feature the rear portions of bulls rather than lions. A comparable example was also found in Room S of Ashurbanipal’s palace, and another known instance is on a monument in northern Syria, probably dating to no later than 809 BC. Its purpose may have been to present it to Ashur during the eighth century (see Fig. 9).

### Room I

One panel between doors a and b of this room is known to have survived, although two others appear to belong to the same set. It depicts “an Assyrian soldier on the battlefield about to decapitate an Elamite while destroying his bow,” with an inscription identifying the latter as **Ituni**, an officer of Teumman. The same scene occurs, without inscription, in the Chaldean reliefs describing Teumman’s defeat in 653 BC, executed by Ashurbanipal. Consequently, one can identify the pair roughly in the middle of the lower register of Room I’s panels, which initially contained the complete battle against Teumman. Several carved incidents without inscriptions are also visible on the existing reliefs.

The lower registers of panels 5 depict, after the final defeat of Teumman’s army, a long procession of submissive Elamites led by an Assyrian official by the hand. An inscription identifies this man as Ashurbanipal’s appointee, **Ummanigash**, installed as vassal king of **Susa** and **Madaktu** in Teumman’s

palace. Although no inscription exists on the panels in Room I, the scene evidently represents the same installation. The Elamite surrender procession continues through the panels, culminating with two men and a woman raising their hands in the lower-left corner of panel 9. Madaktu, appearing behind the Elamite procession in the Chaldean reliefs, or Susa, where the Assyrians destroyed glazed and decorated bricks with bronze trumpets around 640 BC.

The upper registers show Ashurbanipal entering the fortified city as victor, followed by soldiers and musicians. The scene depicts Ashurbanipal pouring wine over a human head in front of the temple, possibly representing Teumman. The installation of Ummanigash is depicted similarly (see Fig. 7).

### **Courtyard J**

This inner courtyard of the palace is depicted on the new plan as extending along the southwest facade. The western and northwest facades were decorated with reliefs. Three panels survive, with evidence of four or more additional panels, none of which exceeded half the height, and are not illustrated here.

These panels do not depict the battle. They show Assyrian forces, likely in southern Iraq, attacking several small islands from reed boats and slaughtering Babylonians who sought refuge there. Survivors were loaded into boats, continuing the procession of prisoners, soldiers, and spoils against a backdrop of palm trees. Ashurbanipal is depicted in his chariot, his face not fully preserved, though the king's details are retained.

Undoubtedly, the king appears in a similar posture, and the prisoners depicted are Babylonians, allies of **Shamash-shum-ukin**, in Room M .

### **Conclusion**

Through the preparation of this study, the following conclusions have been reached:

1. The Assyrian Conglomerate expanded significantly during the Neo-Assyrian period, plying control over multitudinous regions of the Ancient Near East. Multiple fronts of conflict surfaced, with the Elamite front being among the most dangerous and strategically important. Due to its propinquity to Babylon, the Elamites sought to undermine security and stability by furnishing material and moral support to sumptuous autocrats in their rebellion against the Assyrian Conglomerate. Accordingly, the Assyrians had to launch multiple military juggernauts against them.

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2. Sources for studying the history of Iran in general impel experimenters to calculate on Assyrian textual records for the chronological reconstruction of Elamite history. These sources include annals, reliefs, and letters. The Assyrian lords conducted multitudinous military juggernauts during their reigns, and they recorded their palms and military conduct on wall reliefs. These reliefs give pivotal sapience into the nature of relations between the Assyrians and the Elamites.
3. The wall panels depict the royal procession passing before King Ashurbanipal in the megacity of Arbela, as well as the installation of Ummanikash, son of Urtaki, in Madaktu, located to the east of the palace entrance. In these scenes, King Ashurbanipal is shown seated on an elevated throne, with his queen, Ashur-sharrat, seated before him. She wears a choker adorned with large monuments and a crown, while the disassociated head of Teumman hangs from a tree.
4. The first scene of the relief includes representations of adversary casualties, the evacuation of the wounded, and the counting of losses. Assyrian artillery and large figures of corpses are depicted, along with the use of chariots. One Assyrian dogface is shown trying to deliver a wounded comrade during the battle, and another is depicted cutting off the head of a taken Elamite dogface. At the same time, a third uses a mace to strike an Elamite trying to flee from the Assyrian combatant.

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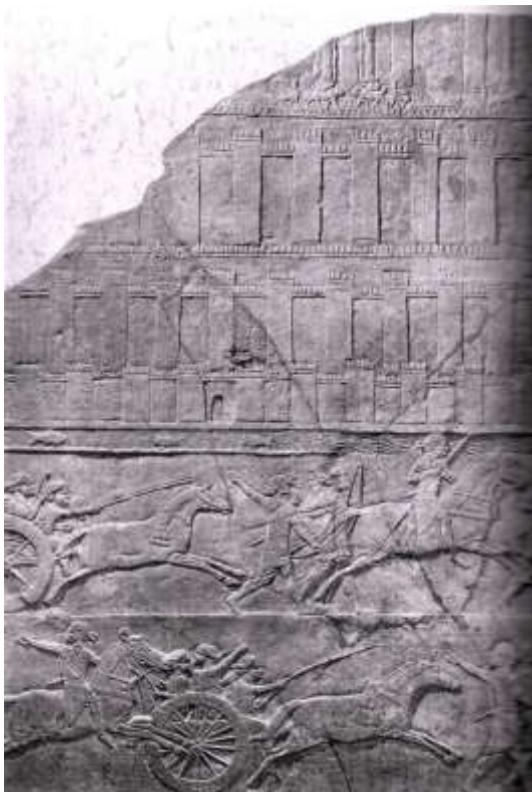
### Appendices

(Figure No. 1)

A sculpture depicting one of Ashurbanipal's campaigns against an Elamite city on the Uлай River.

source:

E. Strommeger, *The Art of Mesopotamia*, (London, 1964), p. 236.



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(Figure No. 2)

The Elamite king Teumman attempting to flee the battlefield while wounded, and asking one of the Elamite officers to assist him.

source: Al-Saadoun, the previously cited source, p. 244.

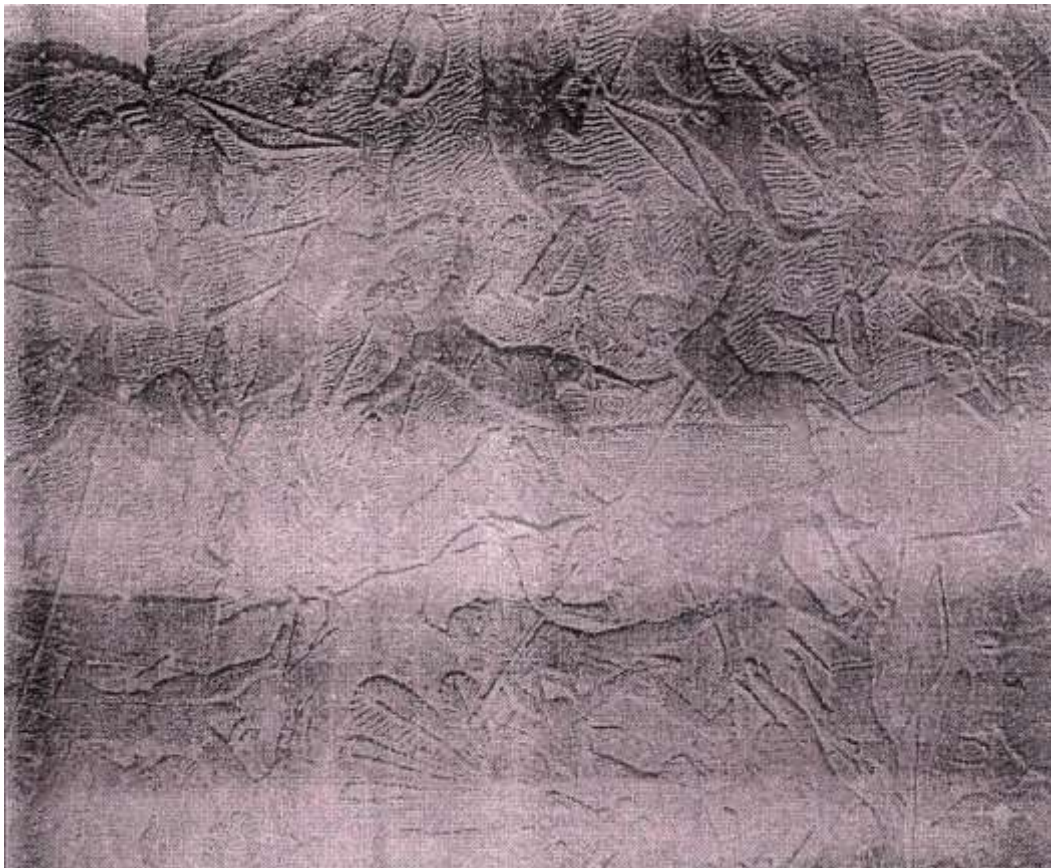


(Figure No. 3)

A scene depicting the fall of Elamite casualties into the Ulai (Karkheh) River.

source:

R. D. Barnett, *Assyrian Palace Reliefs and Their Influence on the Sculptures of Babylonia and Persia* (London, 1960), p. 125.



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(Figure No. 4)

The Elamite corpses cast into the Ulai River

Source:

Barnett, *op. cit.*, p. 127



(Figure No. 5)

The evil king Teumman and his son fall from their overturned chariot, and Teumman is caught and decapitated by an Assyrian soldier.



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(Figure No. 6)

A fragment from Room F shows Elamite prisoners being ferried across the river after their capture, with three archers firing to the left.



(Figure No. 7)

A battle scene from Room G showing Elamite prisoners within a continuous full-height relief composition.



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(Figure No. 8)

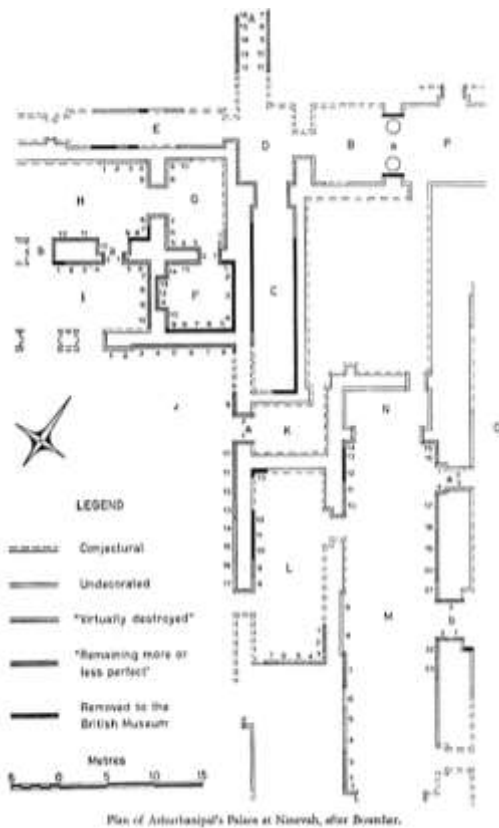
A relief arrangement from Room H showing scenes of massacre in a palm grove and the course of the river at the bottom of the panel.



(Figure No. 9 / Room I)



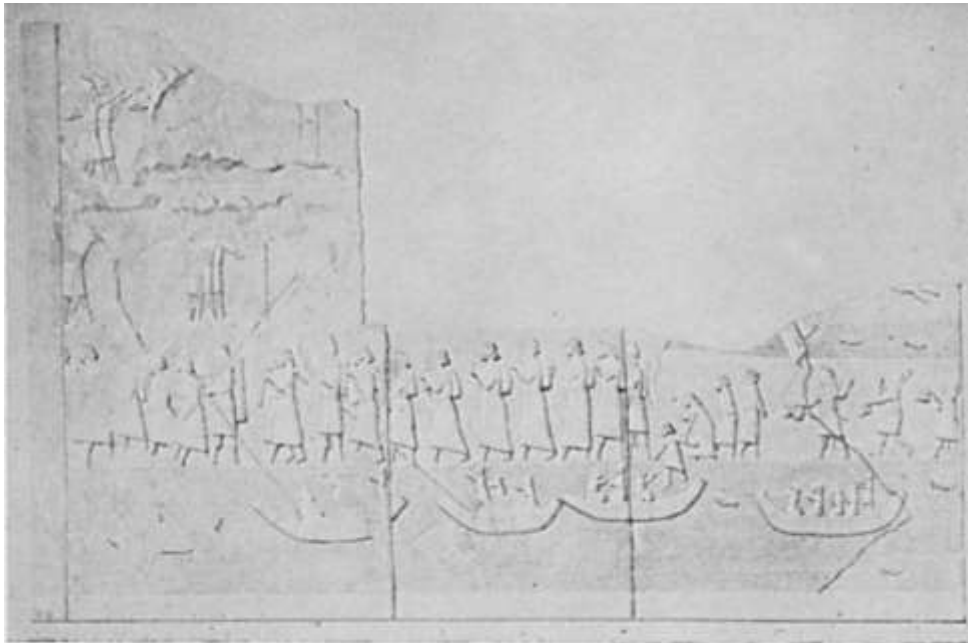
( Room No. F )



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( Room No. G )



Room ( I ) Entrance (a)

