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RESEARCH PAPER

'Many Great Treasures' of 'Great Beauty', or 'Crude and Cramped'? The Appraisal of 'Nineveh's Remains' by Austen Henry Layard, Stratford Canning, and Henry Rawlinson

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One need only point to the destruction caused to the archaeological sites of Iraq and Syria by Islamic State to see an example of the role heritage plays in the construction of identities, and of a past serving a contemporary agenda. Credit for the 'discovery' of the antiquities of Mesopotamia goes to Paul-Émile Botta (1802–1870), and Austen Henry Layard (1817–1894). Most British scholars had long considered the Mesopotamian antiquities to be inferior to Greco-Roman antiquities. Before the 1840's, this group of upper-class critics had been the most important public of the British Museum. During the middle of the nineteenth-century, however, Layard's Assyrian remains became both symbols of, and stakes in, a struggle for wider public access. Their rejection by the critics was contrasted with both historical and aesthetic admiration by the middle- and working classes. Simultaneously, the critics stood on one side of a developing rift between themselves and the archaeologists of a new discipline. In this article I analyse the appraisal of the Mesopotamian sculptures through a critical appraisal of the historiography and an analysis of the Layard Papers, in order to gain a better insight into the reception of the Assyrian antiquities in Victorian Great-Britain.

> *'Nineveh, the great city "of three days' journey," that was "laid waste and there was none to bemoan her," whose greatness sank when that of Rome had just begun to rise, now stands forth again to testify to her own splendor, and to the civilization and power and magnificence of the Assyrian Empire.'* (Layard, 1854, p. I: iii)

This quote, coming from Biblical scholar Edward Robinson's (1794–1863) introductory note to the American version of Austen Henry Layard's (1817–1894) *Nineveh and its remains: with an account of a visit to the Chaldaean Christians of Kurdistan, and the Yezidis, or devil-worshippers, and an inquiry into the manners and arts of the ancient Assyrians* (1854), goes a long way in explaining why members of the European elite have for a long time been fascinated by the history of Mesopotamia. The Biblical quotations show an important origin of European images of Mesopotamia, while the reference to Rome highlight the difference in culture – or 'otherness' (Said, 1978) – between Nineveh and the better-known, and more highly treasured, civilisations of Greece and Rome. When, around the middle of the nineteenth century, this fascination with Mesopotamia started to reach a wider public, two persons can be said to bear most responsibility: Paul-Émile Botta (1802–1870), the Italian-born Frenchman who was the first to start 'archaeological' excavations in Khorsabad, and Layard, who continued Botta's work and also played a major role in popularising Mesopotamian history through his writings and their popular renderings.

Almost all of Layard's works (1849a, 1849b, 1851, 1853, 1887, 1903) became best-sellers, despite the fact that British classical scholars and art critics considered the Mesopotamian antiquities to be unworthy of comparison with those of the Greco-Roman world. Before the 1840's, art critics had been the most important public of the British Museum, the place where Layard's finds would be exhibited (Bennet, 1995, p. 70). During the middle of the nineteenth-century, however, voices demanding full public access to the Museum, something which had been included in the Museum's statutes from its foundation, had started to gain a greater influence. For these voices, with progressive religious thinker William Johnson Fox (1786–1864) as one of their most prominent advocates, Layard's Assyrian remains became both symbols of as well as stakes in this struggle. It must be noted that Layard did not explicitly take a position in this debate, though his later political career would be characterised by his aspiration for working-class voting rights as part of the Liberal Radical Movement.

The upper class critics' rejection of the Assyrian sculptures was contrasted with both historical and aesthetic admiration by the middle- and working classes, for whom

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his publisher, John Murray (1808–1892), urged Layard to write a popular version of *Nineveh and its Remains*: *A popular account of discoveries at Nineveh* (Bohrer, 2003, p. 40 and 106–114; Layard, 1849a, 1851). Simultaneously, at a scholarly level, the art critics stood on one side of a developing rift between themselves, committed to a 'neo-classical system of fixed values' derived from Johann Joachim Winckelmann's (1717–1768) work, and the archaeologists of a newly developing discipline seeing archaeological objects as historical sources. Furthermore, these archaeologists saw the sculptures of 'primitive' (i.e. non-Greek) cultures as valuable on their own terms, even though they were still considered to be steps in a progressive movement which had the Elgin Marbles at its summit (Jenkins, 1992, p. 9–11 and 68).

In this article, I explore this tension between the appraisal of these strange new Mesopotamian sculptures on the one hand, and the Greek and Roman 'specimens of the very highest art' on the other (Rawlinson, 1846c). I do so by analysing the correspondence Layard maintained during his excavations with Lord Stratford Canning (1786–1880), the British ambassador in Constantinople, and Henry Rawlinson (1810–1895), a military and diplomatic agent stationed in Baghdad, and an oriental scholar. In this correspondence, part of the 'Layard Papers' now kept in the British Library in London, lie clues to the aesthetic appreciation of the Mesopotamian antiquities by Layard, Canning and Rawlinson.

Through a critical appraisal of the historiography on Layard and an analysis of the Layard Papers, this study unveils Layard's position on the aesthetic value of the sculptures he found, as well as that of Canning and Rawlinson. What is more, historiography on Layard up to this point has often uncritically used Layard's own *Autobiography and letters from his childhood until his appointment as H.M. ambassador at Madrid* (1903). Consequently, Rawlinson and Canning are often considered to be of a higher social class and different education than the rebellious Layard, an assumption used to explain conflicting opinions on the aesthetic value of the discoveries between Layard, and Canning and Rawlinson. By taking Layard's own correspondence with Rawlinson and Canning as a starting point, I map the positions of Layard, Canning and Rawlinson diachronically to gain better insight into the receptions of the Assyrian antiquities in Great-Britain. Finally, through this research I explain the different assessments of the aesthetic value of the discoveries, and the shifts therein, by Layard, Rawlinson and Canning.

Layard's Early Life

Layard was born in Paris in 1817 into an upper-middle class British family. After the birth of Austen Henry in Paris, his father's chronic asthma forced them to look for a more favourable climate. This meant the family would regularly move from one place to another, usually within France and Italy. (Parry, n.d.; Layard, 1903, p. I:9–36).

In the spring of 1829 Layard was sent to his uncle and aunt in England, for a 'proper' education. There, Layard received the standard grammar school education in Latin and Greek. During this time, Layard socialised with the men in his aunt's salon, among whom was Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881). After leaving school in 1833, Layard started working at his uncle's legal office.

During this period, Layard took several long vacations in Europe, often, such as in Northern Italy and Poland, meeting with local political groups. Layard eventually decided to travel over land to Ceylon for work, departing in 1839 (Layard, 1903, p. I:43–101). His journey brought him through the Ottoman Empire. However, little over a year after having set off, Layard abandoned the idea of Ceylon. He travelled around the region and visited the mounds near Baghdad and Mosul, where Botta had recently started excavating. Subsequently, Layard found informal employment under Canning, for whom he fulfilled various semi-official diplomatic roles. In 1845, he convinced Canning to support excavations on the mounds near Mosul.

Regarding the motives for these excavations Layard himself remained relatively vague, only citing his interest, which had been triggered after his earlier travels in the area and his correspondence with Botta (Layard, 1849a, p. I:31; 1903, p. I:152). He seems to have handily combined this interest with a role that he, as an aspiring diplomat, could play as Canning's informant, the latter more fitting with his ambitions. In this sense, Layard's excavations and travels in the area fit perfectly with the idea of archaeology as informal imperialism. At the same time, archaeological excavations were a way of extending British economic and strategic influence in Mesopotamia, an area which had started to grow in importance due to its place along the British route to India (Malley, 2012, p. 3–4; 2011, p. 99–123, 100 and 105; Abdullah, 2003, p. 100–101).

Until July 1847, Layard occupied himself with the excavation of the mounds of Kuyunjik and Nimrud. There, Rawlinson convinced Layard that he had discovered Nineveh (Parry, n.d.). In December 1847, Layard returned to London and the following year wrote *Nineveh and its remains* (1849a). This monograph was published when Layard had already returned to Constantinople. *Nineveh and its remains* was met with an enthusiastic reception and became a bestseller (Altick, 1986, p. 239). This was partly due to the arrival at the British Museum of Layard's first exported monuments.

Another aspect of the popular reception was the discussion raging in and around the British Museum about its mission. The intensity of this debate is illustrated by an episode in April 1848 where Museum staff were armed and supplemented by veterans to defend the Museum against an imagined attack by Chartists, a political group promoting working-class rights (Bohrer, 2003, p. 111). Layard himself would pursue one more excavation campaign from October 1849 until April 1851, funded by the British Museum, after which he devoted himself to a political and diplomatic career (Parry, n.d.; Layard, 1853). In Layard's *Autobiography*, which was posthumously edited and published in 1903, the editor speculates that due to 'private troubles and anxieties, combined with frequent attacks of fever' Layard decided not to return after his second expedition (Layard, 1903, p. II:194).

Layard of Nineveh: A Basis for Further Historiography?

Most of what is known of Layard's life stems from this *Autobiography*. The earliest source of information on Layard's life not written by the archaeologist himself is *Layard of Nineveh* (1963), which was written by Gordon Waterfield (Hodgkin, n.d.). Waterfield's references indicate that underlying the chapters dealing with Layard's early life, is, however, his own *Autobiography* (1903). It could therefore be argued that Layard himself wrote *Layard of Nineveh*, or at least these first chapters.

Curiously, when dealing with the early life of Layard, most scholars seem content to follow the narrative of these two publications. Thus when Mogens Trolle Larsen states that Layard 'was a man of little formal schooling, but with a rich and varied adolescence, during which he acquired knowledge and interests which were to characterise his entire life' (1996, p. 34), Larsen perpetuates the image Layard himself set up in his autobiography. Similarly, Joan Oates takes the autobiography at face value when she writes '1001 Nacht [*The Arabian Nights*] war Layard sein Lieblingsbuch, dem er später seine Reiseleidenschaft, Abenteuerfreude und lebenslange Begeisterung für den Nahen Osten zuschrieb' [*1001 Nights* was Layard's favourite book, to which he later attributed his passions for travel and adventure, and his lifelong fascination with the Middle East.] (2010, p. 309).

It is important to note, then, that where scholarship regarding the informal imperialistic motives involved in Layard's later adventures in Mesopotamia have been thoroughly influenced by postcolonial theories, the same cannot be said of scholarship on his *Autobiography* and, especially, his early life. This is unfortunate, since in later historiography, information uncritically taken from his *Autobiography* or from *Layard of Nineveh* is used to contextualise Layard's later actions and ideas.

The reason for the lack of a critical approach to these two sources may be that Waterfield's biography continues to be the starting point for such investigations, closely followed by the *Autobiography* itself. *Layard of Nineveh* was published in 1963, a decade in which a new approach to the study of autobiographies began start to develop, the details of which are described in more detail below. What is more, the sections on the early life of Layard in his *Autobiography* have never been critically analysed. In Waterfield, this can be seen by the following passage on *The Arabian Nights:* '[h]is favourite book was *The Arabian Nights* and he used to spend hours on the floor under a great gilded table in the [Florentine] Rucellai Palace "poring over this enchanted volume"' (Waterfield, 1963, p. 13). This is a close copy of Layard's own text: '(...) but the work in which I took the greatest delight was the "Arabian Nights." I was accustomed to spend hours stretched upon the floor, under a great gilded Florentine table, poring over this enchanting volume' (Layard, 1903, p. I:26).

The development of a new approach to autobiography has been described as a transition from 'historical' approaches to autobiography to 'fictional' ones. The older historical approaches saw autobiographies as self-biographies and regarded them to be sources of factual, biographical information. The fictional approaches, on the other hand, consider autobiographies to be imaginative acts of self-definition in which an author usually both consciously and unconsciously constructs an image of himself (Carlson, 2009; Spengemann, 1980, p. xii). These fictional approaches are drawn from theories such as those of Jacques Derrida regarding the interdependence of different discourses, and Paul De Man regarding the distinction between the autobiographical, authorial, and subjective 'I's' (Carlson, 2009). More recently, this has led Paul Eakin to distinguish different 'selves' within the autobiographical self, each with their own discursive realm (Carlson, 2009; Eakin, 1999).

From all these theories a general middle position has arisen which is attentive to the presence of powerful discourses of self and their influence on autobiographical writing, but also leaves open the possibility of individual agency within these discourses. A critical historical approach of autobiography, therefore, should strive to bring the personal narrative present in the text into an intertextual relationship with other evidence in order to implicitly question the truth claims of the autobiographical narrative and will show where and under what circumstances other discourses have influenced the author (Popkin, 2005, p. 11–32). In the case of Layard, these other sources are mostly limited to the archival material in the 'Layard Papers' and other relevant archival collections.

Layard's Self-fashioned Image

As both these theoretical discussions on the nature of autobiographical writing and research into, for example, Heinrich Schliemann's autobiographical writing has shown, it is a genre that should not be taken at face value: '[r]omantic enhancement of mundane biographical details seems to have been more acceptable in the nineteenth century than today' (Traill, 1985, p. 14). The fact that Schliemann repeatedly shaped and reshaped his own life-story should be considered a warning. Therefore, and without being able to provide a complete analysis of Layard's *Autobiography*, it is fruitful to investigate some of its passages to identify the narrative Layard set up for his own life, and which have been used to explain his disposition towards the Assyrian discoveries. For the sake of analysis, we have divided these passages into four categories: family, heroism, archaeological foreshadowing, and radicalism and rebelliousness.

In the opening pages of his *Autobiography*, Layard is concise in tracing his family history. He mentions different theories regarding his family history, places family members at a variety of different important moments and associates some of them with notable historical figures and societies. All together, this creates an image of Layard as member of an illustrious English family of the highest class, while at the same time emphasising that he himself is no longer part of this high society. Later in the *Autobiography*, Layard repeatedly drawing attention to his father's taste for the fine arts, despite lacking the education of a Victorian English gentleman (1903, p. I:12 and 20–21).

The passage quoted earlier from Layard's *Autobiography*, which shows his interest in oriental heroism through his

fascination of the Arabian Nights, can be placed in the category 'archaeological foreshadowing'. Other passages take the form of Layard praising his father and others for the development of his taste in literature and the fine arts. Still others show off his own progress: '(…) I was soon able to make a pretty good guess at the name of any picture in the Florentine school that was shown to me' (1903, p. I:27, see also I:26, 28 and 33). Similar passages exist dealing with Layard's education in Greek and Latin, and his questioning of Disraeli on his eastern travels (1903, p. I:25 and 49–50). Perhaps most notable are passages concerning two vacations at Perga (near the originally Etruscan city of Cortona) during Layard's 'Florentine period', and a later vacation at Aosta. In Perga he visited the Etruscan remains being excavated and the local museum, while at Aosta he explored the Roman remains and made his first 'archaeological discovery' near the Little St Bernard Pass in the form of the 'Cercle d'Annibal' (Layard, 1903, p. I:35 and 72–73).

Several passages seem intended to explain Layard's radicalism and rebelliousness. For example, he describes fleeing a Catholic procession in France (Layard, 1903, p. I:15). A similar incident occurs when Layard is at school in Florence, on which he notes: '[i]t appeared to me a degrading ceremony, to which an Englishman ought not to submit' (Layard, 1903, p. I:23).

Regarding Layard's *Autobiography* one final note is in order: according to himself, most information of his life is based on his personal recollections, as 'I have not kept a journal or diary. (…) (1903, I:1). Reality is that even though this might be true for his early life, several diaries and notebooks exist in the Layard Papers.

In the first chapters of his *Autobiography* Layard thus seems to have wanted to tell the story of an adventurous, brave, and somewhat rebellious boy coming from a relatively (for British higher middle-class standards) poor, yet ancient and noble family. This boy quickly developed and refined a taste for history, as well as for travelling, an activity which forms an important background to his life, all the time whilst cultivating connections to people fighting for freedom throughout Europe. Consequently, the image Layard created in his *Autobiography* helps back up his argument that he wanted to carry out excavations in Mesopotamia out of pure interest.

Layard's Image in Later Historiography

The 'chronicle of discovery' (Trigger, 1994, 117) of *Layard of Nineveh* firmly rooted this image of Layard in historiography, as for several decades no studies on Layard were published and neither the *Autobiography* nor *Layard of Nineveh* were critically appraised. This long silence was interrupted only by a dissertation on Layard's geopolitical role, published in 1983 (Swails).

Close scrutiny of Layard and his excavations only started to take place after the discipline of archaeological history went through a period of theoretical discussion, somewhat unduly termed by Bruce Trigger (1994) as the externalism-internalism debate. Oscar Moro Abadía has shown that the internalist approach to archaeological history, which conceived the history of archaeology as 'an intellectual enterprise largely independent from the socio-political context in which archaeology is practiced', was replaced, or complemented as Trigger would argue, only during the 1980's by an externalist approach which 'regards archaeological interpretations as significantly influenced by the social, political and economical background' (2009, 14). Abadía traces the reasons for this switch to the larger impact of postmodernism on the social sciences, which gave birth to more relativistic approaches to archaeology, and the role anthropology and archaeology itself started to play in supporting the postmodern claim that academic research is determined by personal and social biases (2009, 2013, 91–92). Even more exact, Trigger sees an important impulse for the externalist viewpoint in the first World Archaeological Congress of 1986 (1994, 116).

Where in general works dealing with the history of archaeology Layard was usually mentioned as one of the pioneers of archaeology (see: Daniel, 1950 and 1975, recent examples are Fagan, 2007; Oates, 2010), as a result of the development of externalism, scholars started to look into specific aspects and periods of Layard's work and life. A first attempt at this came in 1996 from M. T. Larsen. He explores the archaeological rivalry in Mesopotamia between France and Britain in this period. Although M. T. Larsen still for the most part uncritically uses Waterfield and Layard's *Autobiography* as prime sources, he also adds chapters dealing with specific aspects of Layard's work, such as the aesthetic value of the objects he uncovers. According to M. T. Larsen, Rawlinson only saw the historical value of the discoveries, whereas Layard also recognised their aesthetic value, a difference the author traces to the fact that 'as a child, Layard had learnt to appreciate Italian Renaissance art (…), which was not really accepted in learned art-historical circles' (1996, 104). This argument, then, also touches upon the discussion raging in the British Museum. Thusly, the first new scholarly impulse regarding Layard continues the narrative Layard set up and uses it as an explaining principle: Layard's different education, onto which was added his rebelliousness and travel experience, made him see the aesthetic value of the Mesopotamian sculptures where the 'classical English gentleman' Rawlinson could not.

Two publications (1998 and 2003) by Frederick Bohrer may be considered the first 'true' externalist works on Layard. In them, Bohrer places the discovery of Mesopotamian art in the dominant discourses of nationalism, antiquarianism, and aestheticism in contemporary France and Britain, spotting several differences between the two countries. Bohrer also explores the active part played by Layard in aestheticising his discoveries to great length, quoting both articles written by Layard in different magazines and newspapers as well as letters between Layard, his family and his superiors. Unfortunately, he seems to make little distinction between these, even though the two media are obviously meant for different (sizes of) audiences (2003, p. 98–115). Furthermore, he builds on the same presupposition as M.T. Larsen, seeing Layard's different youth as the reason for his aestheticisation of his discoveries. Bohrer finds an extra argument for this in the difference in reception of the Mesopotamian sculptures in France and Britain: in France, 'reproduction and circulation of Assyrian artefacts was constrained by

the dominant structure of archaeological sponsorship, largely directed by the small group of scholarly and political figures authorising the effort.' This meant that the social groups which may have been open to seeing the artefacts as art were marginalised from the discoveries. According to Bohrer, this were the middle- and working classes, who had not had an education based on the exceptional position of Greek and Roman art. He counts Layard as one of them (2003, p. 161–167). In Britain, on the other hand, the reception was more diffuse, which meant that this aestheticisation did take place (Bohrer, 1998, p. 346).

The differences noted by Bohrer between France and Britain are extended by Margarita Díaz-Andreu, who discerns two models of nineteenth-century archaeological practice. The first is the European continental/state-interventionist model, in which excavations were backed by national governments (such as in France). The second is the Utilitarian model, where excavations relied on private funding (such as in the United States and Britain). In the chapter on Biblical archaeology, she does not share Bohrer's view that Layard aestheticised his discoveries: 'his view, shared by many others, was that Assyrian art was an inferior ancestor to classical art' (2007, p. 142). Another study linking Layard with Biblical archaeology came in 2009 in the form of Timothy Larsen's '*Austen Henry Layard's Nineveh*'. T. Larsen notes, in contrast to Díaz-Andreu, that Layard's 'real interest' was in art and not the Bible. On Layard's assessment of the art-value of the objects, T. Larsen notes: 'Layard's initial discoveries led him to concede that Assyrian art could not rival Greek, but he quickly revised this assessment (...)' (2009, p. 75).

Historiographical explanations for Layard's assessment of his finds, then, rely not only heavily on his own *Autobiography*, but also on the idea of class conflict in mid-nineteenth-century Britain. In this period, the working and middle classes had found a new sense of identity, expressed in two radical organisations with similar goals of democratisation: the Anti-Corn-Law League for the middle classes, and the Chartists for the working classes (Royle, 2012, p. 148). Furthermore, Layard would in his later political career become a proponent of the Radical Movement campaigning for working class rights. In this light it is not surprising to see him positioning himself as rebellious, hardly educated, and of relatively low descent in his *Autobiography* (Parry, n.d.; Bohrer, 2003, p. 105–114). Against this background of class struggle, and with help of Layard's self-fashioned image, later historians have built Layard, and his assessment of Assyrian art, into the ideological faction of the middle- and working classes.

Layard's Correspondence with Canning

In general, Layard's letters to Canning contain the most extensive descriptions of his finds. They are therefore a suitable source to examine both gentlemen's assessment of the remains. That said, Canning in his answers hardly ever responds to Layard's enthusiastic description of the finds. Instead, he focusses more on geopolitical developments in the area, making clear that he saw Layard first and foremost as semi-official diplomatic agent (see: Canning, 1845). From a letter from Layard dated 17 November 1845, just after he had arrived at the mounds near Mosul and had started excavating, it becomes clear what Canning expected him to provide: 'I have every reason to think that figures exist' (1845a). This emphasis on sculptural remains is later reinforced by one of the few letters from Canning which mention the excavation-results: 'the public, who, like their children, like to talk about the paintings' (1845, emphasis in original).

The emphasis on the acquiring of sculptures suitable for shipment to England continues in later correspondence. Several weeks after the letter of 17 November, Layard opens one of his letters telling Canning he had finally found sculptures (1845b). Of these sculptures, Layard notes that they were 'both designed and executed with considerable spirit' (1845b). While this may perhaps be viewed as a first attempt at aestheticising the sculptures, Layard immediately emphasises that they are 'worth sending to England' (1845b). This letter thus indicates a trend which can be found in most of Layard's letters to Canning: after a description of the discovery of the sculptures and their properties, both historical as well as aesthetic, he relates the state of preservation of the sculptures. He then concludes whether they are worth sending to England, which depends on their state of preservation and 'uniqueness'.

In the first months of the 'experiment' – as Layard calls his excavations – this motif is central to Layard's letters to Canning. It is in this context that Layard also starts describing his opinion on the aesthetic value of the sculptures. When doing this, he is composed in his choice of words, stating that sculptures may be 'highly curious and interesting' (1845e), and 'splendid' (1846a). An interesting contrast is formed when Layard reports finding what he believes to be a Sasanian palace. The sculptures he encounters here – of one of the most important enemies of Rome – he considers 'of inferior design and execution, and not worth removal' (1846c). This clearly shows that what Layard was looking for – and what Canning wanted to see – was Assyrian remains.

During these months, Layard also heightens his expectations of the sculptures, and keeps searching for new types. He writes Canning in a letter dated 15 December: '(...) the other sculptures discovered are bas-reliefs similar to the first. I have not uncovered them and have merely satisfied myself of their existence' (1845d). Similarly, in the run up to his discovery of two winged bulls in the mound at Nimroud, Layard first comes across other, less perfect, examples: '(...) the head and wings have been destroyed, but I have reason to hope that others will be found in a perfect state' (1846a). Later, he '(...) excavated an immense head (...) a most splendid specimen of Assyrian art.' (1846b, emphases in original). Consequently, in the letters leading up to and describing this discovery, the same motifs are present: the search for sculptures which are well enough preserved to be sent to England, and the aestheticisation when these are found to convince Canning of the importance of the excavations.

A second way of emphasising the importance of the excavations, again often combined with a strategy of aestheticisation, is Layard's frequent invocation of the Anglo-French rivalry. The letter of 17 November 1845 mentioned above was followed by a letter expressing his belief: 'that the

latter tablet is fully equal, if not superior, to any of the ones at Khorsabad' (1845c). A section in a letter from 15 December 1845 in which Layard sets out a strategy of moving his discoveries from Nimroud to London notes that the sculptures 'would be in England by next autumn, long before the French can transport theirs to France' (1845d).

The national importance Layard tries to attach to his excavations is also visible in a letter, dated 21 April 1846, which seems to mark a change in Layard's tactics. This letter is regularly quoted as an example of Layard's supposed attitude to the sculptures he discovered, as it contains the passage '(…) they [the sculptures] are undoubtedly inferior to the most secondary works of Greece and Rome' (1846d). The most significant passage of this letter sees Layard denying the 'intrinsic value for their beauty' of the sculptures he discovered, which contrasts with the praise he gave them in his earlier letters (1846d). In the months after this letter, Layard only occasionally re-uses his earlier tactic, and, at least during his first excavation campaign, references to his aesthetic appraisal of the sculptures become scarce, with only small passages in letters sent on 29 June 1846(e), 28 December 1846(f), and 14 January 1847.

The reason for this change in attitude is difficult to pin down. It may be that Layard felt that his excavation now was sufficiently established for him to be able to make these remarks, which earlier may have had a negative impact on his future, to his prime protector and sponsor. This possibility is reinforced by a passage in *Nineveh and its remains* which seems to coincide with Layard's letter to Canning. In the passage, Layard states that he had received a 'vizirial letter (…), authorizing the continuation of the excavations and the removal of such objects as might be discovered' (1849a, p. I:130). Shortly after having received the letter, Layard dispatched the first shipment of sculptures to Rawlinson in Baghdad. They were subsequently bought by the British Museum, which may have raised Layard's confidence. Furthermore, some months later, in August 1846, the British Museum reserved £2.000 for further acquisitions from Layard (Layard, 1849a, p. I:141; Jenkins, 1992, p. 155). An indication of this raised confidence can also be found in his attitude towards the British Museum at the end of 1848 regarding his second campaign, as he demanded the museum establish this campaign on some official footing (Jenkins, 1992, p. 184). Seemingly contradictory to this possibility of Layard's raised confidence are remarks in the 21 April letter, again accenting the value of his excavations to the fields of 'literature, philology and history', although, as with the aesthetic appraisals of sculptures, this seems to be the last time during this excavation campaign that Layard emphasises this (1846d).

Our emphasis on Layard's description of sculptures may have made it seem that any mention of literature, philology and history is unique, but it must be noted that mentions of inscriptions are present in nearly all of Layard's letters to Canning. This contrasts with the image of Layard as treasure hunter which appears in some of the historiography (see Larsen, 2009, p. 74–75). In April 1846 Layard even states '[t]he sculptures (…) are really of a secondary consideration' (1846d, see also: 1846f and 1850). The inscriptions are also made part of a perceived national rivalry between France and Great-Britain (see: Layard, 1846d).

Finally, Layard's letters to Canning during his second excavation campaign follow a similar pattern. In the first months, Layard tries to emphasise the importance of his excavations through mentioning, sometimes in a national context, and aestheticising sculptures and inscriptions. After these initial months, he does this less so. During the whole of the second campaign, his confidence does seem to be stronger than during his first campaign, most likely because it was completely funded by the British Museum.

Layard's Correspondence with Rawlinson

A large portion of the rest of Layard's correspondence during his excavations was with Rawlinson, somewhat boastfully – and incorrectly – celebrated by his brother George (1812–1902) as the decipherer of the cuneiform script (Rawlinson, 1898; Ferrier, Dalley, n.d.). Unfortunately, few letters from Layard to Rawlinson survive in the Layard Papers, but an inference to their contents can be made through Rawlinson's responses. Most of the letters deal with the deciphering of the various languages written in cuneiform (examples are: Rawlinson, 1845; Rawlinson, 1846a; Rawlinson, 1849), but an interesting exchange of letters regarding the value of the uncovered sculptures begins when Layard's first shipment of sculptures arrives in Baghdad, where Rawlinson was based for most of the time of Layard's excavations.

In a letter dated 5 May 1846, Rawlinson lets Layard know that his 'cases arrived all right', and that he found the contents very interesting – he even mentions his favourite pieces – and 'curious'. However, Rawlinson then goes on to state that he does not think 'they rank highly as works of art'. Furthermore, he criticises the style as 'crude and cramped', although he does admit that the 'curiosity of the thing is (…) very great' (1846b).

Layard's response to this letter must have been a very spirited defence of the value of the sculptures, as Rawlinson found it necessary to include a large explanation on his position in his next letter. Interestingly, Layard's response must have contrasted with the letter he sent to Canning two weeks earlier in which he denied the sculptures 'intrinsic value for their beauty' (1846d). In his response, Rawlinson, states he 'never pretended to depreciate the value of the marbles', explaining: 'I look upon the Nimrud slabs as invaluable (…) their value consists in (…) filling up an enormous blank in our knowledge of the early history of the world.' Near the end of his explanation, he puts the sculptures in a Classical framework: 'I look upon the sculptures as of more value than Pompeii or Herculaneum and view every new inscription as equal to gaining one of the lost decades of Livy' (1846c, emphasis in original).

At the same time, Rawlinson explains that he still does not see the sculptures as highly valuable works of art, categorising them with other non-classical works of art: '[b]ut I still believe that the Nineveh marbles are not valuable as works of art (…), they are in the lower category with the paintings and sculptures of Egypt and India.' Consequently, as the sculptures are not 'specimens of the very highest art', they are, according to Rawlinson, 'valueless.' These 'specimens of the very highest art', are, of course, the sculptures of Classical Greek and Roman

art, of which he mentions the Elgin marbles and the Apollo Belvedere: '(…) when I criticise design and execution (…) I do so merely because your winged god is not the Apollo Belvedere' (1846c). This way, Rawlinson seems to embody both the position of the archaeologist, seeing the historical value of the discoveries, and of the aesthete, 'testing' the sculptures on the paradigm of ancient art, the Elgin marbles: a test they obviously fail (Jenkins, 1992, p. 9–11 and 68).

The Different Opinions Explained?

It is clear that the three men each valued the Assyrian sculptures differently. A close look at the education of Canning and Rawlinson shows that the difference in education, and, to some extent, class, seems not to be the reason for this. Of the three, only Canning followed what could be considered a version of the traditional English gentlemanly education, starting at a dame school, followed by a preparatory school, which was followed by Eton College. After Eton, he was sent to King's College, but remained there for only two terms, after which he left for a post at the Foreign Office (Chamberlain, n.d.). In this light, it is noteworthy that Layard's correspondence with Canning does not include a discussion on the aesthetic value of the sculptures. Rather, this discussion is contained within a small number of letters to and from Rawlinson, who went into the army aged seventeen, having only attended a primary school in Wrington, Somerset, and a private school in Ealing (Ferrier and Dalley, n.d.). Furthermore, although fragmented, Layard's own education made him sufficiently acquainted with the world of Greeks and Romans to use quotations of classical authors to contextualise his finds, to relate a helmet-type he saw depicted on Assyrian marble slabs to a Greek counterpart, and to give a concise overview on classical sources dealing with 'the field of Assyrian antiquities' in *Nineveh and its remains* (examples include: 1846b; 1846c; 1849a, p. I:9–17).

But, if education or class are not the factors explaining the perceived difference in evaluation, it leaves little other possibilities that may be determined through historical research. I therefore argue that the idea that Layard valued the Assyrian sculptures significantly differently to Canning and Rawlinson may be wrong. The main argument for this idea, the difference in education between Layard, and Canning and Rawlinson, stems from the image Layard himself invented, and which, against the background of class struggle and his later political career, was subsequently rooted firmly in historiography. As can be seen in his letters to Canning, Layard's praise of the sculptures is closely connected to concerns about the future of his 'experiment' – not without reason the word he chooses for his excavations during their first months. This future depended on Canning's willingness to continue to support the excavations financially, which, in turn, depended on several factors. One of these was the amount and quality of the sculptures that were found and that could be transported to London. Another was Layard's position as the informal 'eyes and ears' of Canning in the region. This explains why large sections of the correspondence between Layard and Canning are descriptions of local geopolitical and social developments. Finally, the historical value of the inscriptions recovered was a greatly significant factor, which may have been more significant than the other two. All these three factors were, moreover, steeped in imperial competition: for the cultural prestige of the respective National Museums, for geopolitical influence in Mesopotamia, and for the scientific prestige of being the first nation to decipher the cuneiform script.

Layard's first letter to Canning after starting the excavations, dated 17 November 1845, illustrates Layard's archaeological value perfectly: '[s]hould I not ever find sculptures, I trust the rich collection of inscriptions, which have already been discovered, and which cannot but form a very small portion of those contained in the whole building, will repay the expenses of the experiment' (1845a). By the end of April 1846, when the tone of Layard's letters to Canning changes, developments such as the vizirial letter, the first shipment of sculptures to Baghdad and then London, and simply the continuation of the excavations since November make Layard more able to speak freely on the aesthetic value of the sculptures. Consequently, it is in this period that Layard writes to Canning that the sculptures are '(…) undoubtedly inferior to the most secondary works of Greece and Rome' (1846d).

This statement closely lines up with Rawlinson's appraisal of the sculptures as pieces of art. Yet Rawlinson takes this position to a greater extreme by stating 'we have specimens of the very highest art, and anything short of that is, as a work of art and a work of art merely, valueless' (1846c). That Layard does not subscribe to this extreme position is evident from his response to Rawlinson's letter of 5 May 1846 in which the latter denounces the sculptural style as 'crude and cramped' (1846b). This exchange of letters, when contextualised with Layard's pragmatic change in tone in his letters to Canning only several weeks earlier, shows that, on the one hand, Layard does not see the Assyrian sculptures as worthless as pieces of art, as does Rawlinson. On the other hand, he clearly also does not place them on the same level as Greek and Roman art, nor on a lower level than '(…) the bulky antiquities of Egypt of doubtful merit (…)' (Layard, 1846d). This way, Layard places his discoveries in the 'chain of art' which progressively connects 'primitive' art with classical Greek sculpture (Jenkins, 1992, p. 65–74).

Conclusion

Since the externalism-internalism debate, historiography on Austen Henry Layard has critically covered a wide range of specific topics. In some of the works, the question of how Layard, Canning and Rawlinson placed the discoveries in the classical discourse of art history is also touched upon. In these cases, when a difference between Layard on the one hand, and Rawlinson and Canning on the other, is found, it is ascribed to various combinations of the difference in education or social class between them, or the 'rebellious nature' of Layard.

These explanations, however, are strongly indebted to several characteristics of the image Layard created for himself in his *Autobiography*: most notably his rebellious nature, his relatively low social class (when compared to Canning and Rawlinson), and his 'alternative' education. Furthermore, this alternative education was often used by

Layard for 'archaeological foreshadowing', such as in the case of his knowledge, at a very young age, of Florentine painters, or his visits to Perga. These, then, should be appreciated for what they are: characteristics Layard wanted to be ascribed to himself, possibly to emphasise his early commitment to the Radical Movement. They should not, however, simply be used to explain the perceived difference between the evaluation of the Assyrian sculptures without further detailed research, exactly because of Layard's role in their construction. Also significant in discrediting this argument is the fact that from the three, Rawlinson seemed to assign the most value to Greek and Roman antiquities, while he had had the shortest classical education.

This appraisal of the education-argument is reinforced by a close examination of the correspondence between the trio, as then it becomes clear that the differences between their evaluation of the aesthetic value is not as significant as it seems at first sight, nor as confused as the historiography would let on. Analysing the letters sent between Canning, Layard, and Rawlinson, it is clear that Canning seemed to be hardly interested in the Assyrian sculptures from a scholarly standpoint. Rather, his interest lay in the geopolitical situation in the area, as well as British national prestige and the public reception of the results of the excavations. Rawlinson, on the other hand, was more interested in the scholarly value of the sculptures, taking up the extreme position that the Assyrian remains are 'valueless' as pieces of art, since they do not compare favourably to Greek or Roman art.

Layard himself took a pragmatic, and fluid, middle position in this discussion. During the first months of his excavations, when uncertainty still loomed large over them, he emphasised their importance to his major sponsor Canning through appeals to national rivalry with France, the value of the inscriptions uncovered, and by praising the aesthetic qualities of the sculptures he found. Some months into the excavations, when the uncertainty over the continuation of the excavations had diminished, this emphasis decreased. In this same more certain period, however, Layard defended the aesthetic value of the sculptures in his correspondence with Rawlinson. This shows, I would argue, Layard's pragmatic approach: he was very aware of the fragility of his employment, as well as of his position vis-à-vis the recipient of the letters and their expectations. In this sense, his own fragility corresponds closely with the ancient remains he uncovered, which, as may easily be forgotten when confronted with the huge sculptures on display in the British Museum, consisted mainly of mud-brick walls. Furthermore, this research into Layard offers a warning for contemporary historians to not too easily fit the subject of their research into a certain ideological corner, as in this specific case the influence of class struggle on the reception of Assyrian art seems to have been overstated.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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