

I'm King of the world- What happened to the Assyrian legacy?

When I first read about this exhibition, I did not think; Empire-building-lion-hunting, King.

The British Museum is a treasury of artefacts- but this exhibition is amazing, donated from around the world, it takes you on a journey of Ashurbanipal's accession, the culture surrounding his reign and enables you to understand a little more about a civilisation that had all but been razed from the earth and severely misunderstood.

https://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/exhibitions/ashurbanipal.aspx?utm_source=fb&utm_medium=smp&utm_campaign=ash&utm_term=4&utm_content=link_21%2F12%2F2018_mktg

It cost me £17 and a little over an hour and a half of my time. It was so cleverly done. (The other thing I really liked were the classes and talks advertised associated with all of this- to be found in the pamphlet. Food for the soul.)

I admit, I knew nothing of the Assyrian empire (640BC at this point) spanning Northern Iraq, Egypt, Syria up to the boundary of Turkey -including others. If that doesn't help contextually- Ashurbanipal's brother ruled Babylon. When I spoke to my colleague later her words were- "was it in the bible?" Yes. (If you refer to the bible for your historical facts you'll also learn that it was apparently destroyed due to depravity and debauchery), more accurate would be that it was one of the greatest civilisations of the ancient world.

Ashurbanipal owned a library of 10,000 texts- all in cuneiform clay tablets covering; laws, medicines and wizardry (augury etc), and there was a postal service which I found impressive. What really struck me though was the level of lion hunting.



Clearly- just like Heracles - killing lions was a big thing in ancient times and this king's walls were covered with it. Alongside really muscular men with amazing beards and accessories.



The number of artefacts after such a period of time is a clear indication of how immense this thing is and made me feel quite irrelevant.

Very cleverly this exhibition has adapted technology to visualise the narratives

carved into the gypsum/ stone over meters and meters more easily, by enabling scenes to be described chronologically. Obviously, the Assyrians didn't carve it that way- so the story is all over the place.

The British Museum has overcome this by allowing a little light from a projector somewhere in the exhibition to outline the same protagonists spotted all over the wall at different time points, while someone narrates what is going on.

So, the story of the traitor who was captured (on the right hand side), bound, had their eyes removed then tongues cut out (somewhere in the middle) and then flayed alive(in the scene directly above) was told and made into a coherent story.



Spot the eye gouging....

Oh, there were also rivers filled with headless corpses (I didn't need the projector for that). Clearly this king was good at making a point.

There was one scene on another carving where he was with his Missus in a garden- but it seemed an afterthought. Compared to hundreds of dead lions and corpses all over the place, that is.

Eventually, Ashurbanipal disappeared after 20 or so years of rule. He'd killed his older brother who had gotten fed up of just ruling Babylon and had tried to depose him. Whether he abdicated, was knocked off or simply died, no one knows.

The empire fell 20 years after that. This amazing vast empire. It strikes me that he had not put things in place for people to take over. Systems of delegation-investing in creating a legacy.

Given the amount of killing all over the walls it would suggest that maybe he didn't trust people or barter with them. The empire was entirely him. And when he died- it went with him.

