

## **Assyrians**

### **The British Museum**



Although Assyrian civilization, centred in the fertile Tigris valley of northern Iraq, can be traced back to at least the third millennium BC, some of its most spectacular remains date to the first millennium BC when Assyria dominated the Middle East.

The Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC) established Nimrud as his capital. Many of the principal rooms and courtyards of his palace were decorated with gypsum slabs carved in relief with images of the king as high priest and as victorious hunter and warrior. Many of these are displayed in the British Museum.

Later kings continued to embellish Nimrud, including Ashurnasirpal II's son, Shalmaneser III who erected the Black Obelisk depicting the presentation of tribute from Israel.

During the eighth and seventh centuries BC Assyrian kings conquered the region from the Persian Gulf to the borders of Egypt. The most ambitious building of this period was the palace of king Sennacherib (704-681 BC) at Nineveh. The reliefs from Nineveh in the British Museum include a depiction of the siege and capture of Lachish in Judah.

The finest carvings, however, are the famous lion hunt reliefs from the North Palace at Nineveh belonging to Ashurbanipal (668-631 BC). This king is also renowned for the vast library he created at Nineveh.

Copies of some of the greatest literary works from ancient Iraq, including the "Epic of Gilgamesh" as well as writings on divination, astrology, medicine and mathematics, are among the thousands of tablets now in the British Museum.

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Image caption: The Dying Lion, a stone panel from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal  
Nineveh, northern Iraq. Neo-Assyrian, around 645 BC

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