

Assyrian Times:

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In the first millenium BCE, ancient Mesopotamian civilization gave way to multinational empire in the history. The Assyrian Empire was one of these. The Assyrians expanded their realm to form a huge empire covering a huge area of the Middle East. This report focuses on this era of history, stretching from 911 BCE to 611 BCE.

Assyrian History

One of the earliest and most important rulers named in the Assyrian king list is Shamshi-Adad I. Due to constant wars with northern and southern neighbours, the Assyrians developed armies of battle-hardened warriors. With this military power, a territorial state began to take form, with Assur as the central place of governance. The city-state developed into a stable and powerful organization. They expressed a desire for a unified world, an economy based on taxes and tithes from vassal states that were indirectly ruled. This reveals that the characteristic elements of "empires" were developed and refined by the Assyrians much before the Persians or Romans. The most significant addition to the city during this time was the Old Palace, a 10,500 square meter complex located adjacent to the Ziggurat.

The Middle Assyrian period witnessed Adad-nirari I who was evidently one of the most tireless and active builders in the history of Assyria. His reign oversaw the restoration of the Ishtar Temple, the rebuilding of the Temple of Ashur, the reconstruction of the Old Palace, the erection of city walls and gates, and the modification of the Ziggurat of Ashur.

Assur regained its prominence as a political, religious, and cultural center with the rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Beginning around 911 BCE the Neo-Assyrian Empire began to expand from its homeland around Assur to include the whole of Mesopotamia, the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, and by 680 BCE even Egypt. The New City expanded greatly to the south during the Neo-Assyrian period. Numerous substantially sized buildings were constructed there, including stables

and arsenals for the Neo-Assyrian standing army and storehouses for their trading caravans and tax income. The Akitu Temple, a large structure surrounded by an expansive garden was built outside of the city walls, was built during this period by King Sennacherib.

With the construction of temples, Assyrians started following various Gods and Goddesses.

Mother Goddess and Women of Assyria

People of the ancient mesopotamian times thought that Gods decided their way of life. And hence, a lot of them followed a lot of Gods. One such Goddess was Mother Goddess, who symbolized fertility. Women looked after agriculture in Assyrian households. That, combined with their ability to give birth may have led to Assyrians idolizing Mother Goddess. A large part of the followers were women who later on became priestesses, gaining power. Women in Assur played various roles- from being the heads of the households when their husbands went on trips to sell products, to participating in money transactions, etc. Despite all of this, women in Assyrian cultures had less rights and securities compared to women in Sumerian cultures. The reason behind this could be the formation of a strong patriarchal structure of the society with the growth of money and power.



One of the major strengths of any society is its army. At those times, if an empire doesn't have a strong army, it would be easily wiped out by foreign invaders.

Assyrian Warfare

One thing that the Assyrians were very well-known for was their brutal armies. Assyrians built a standing army. A standing army is a permanent army which is often professional, consisting of full-time soldiers. The Assyrians built iron weapons, used advanced engineering skills and effective tactics in their warfare. They used war chariots. They were the first one to use cavalry. But most of all, they were ruthless. Their army was fearsome. They were a warrior society and they lived off it.

Societal Impact

The Assyrians contributed a lot to the development of the human society, especially in warfare. They were the first to develop iron weapons, which were superior to the generally used bronze weapons at those times. They were the first army to have a separate engineering unit, to set up ladders, dig tunnels, etc. These technological advancements allowed the Assyrians to expand their empire, and also contributed to the future generations by giving them knowledge about these technological advancements.

Cities and settlement in Assyrian period

The grandness of the Assyrian empire and constant expansion of the area proposed many challenges in managing and controlling people, resources as well as land. In order to manage such large areas, political entities and to ensure the land was available for agriculture, dramatic efforts were made by Assyrian rulers.

1. The increased scale of capital cities and other related institutions. Including rural areas in the urban sphere.
2. Land infiling of social organizations in form of dispersed patterns of rural settlement.
3. Construction of canals around the major

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- cities like Nineveh, Nimrud, near Erbil, etc.
4. Better regional road systems. Increasing size and extent of roads.
5. Increase in agriculture production due to increased land. Elites also showed interest in the creation of parks and gardens.
6. The empire was still expanding in the north, south, and west.
7. Changing the political landscape using dispersed settlement in the area between Tigris and Euphrates river.

Major Cities

When one remembers the grandness of the Assyrian empire, one often also refers to its architecture. The cities of Assyria show immense architecture with peculiarities that developed as a result of external influence.

The city of Assur had a quadrantal or fan-shaped plan. The older walls were mainly made of brick and had footings of fragments of gypsum. Later, gypsum was replaced with limestone. Characteristic architecture was one of the prominent features seen in Assur. Relics such as that of a lion and a human headed winged bull were found in Assur.

The city of Nimrud was famous for its mound which was surrounded by solid stone masonry from all its sides. Evidence of ziggurat connected with two small temples and ruins of the temple tower were also found in Nimrud. Several palaces were also built in this city.

In the city Khorsabad, it can be inferred that there was disregard in symmetry in the placing of the opening in the palaces. Moreover, a ziggurat just inside the palace signifies that although the Assyrians were considered ruthless by their opposition, yet they were strong believers in God. Another observation is the use of materials like enameled tiles, limestone, and brick which account for the structural stability as well as the aesthetic appearance of the structures. Thus, it can be concluded that Khorsabad showed dynamic architecture which was different from the conventional idea of symmetry while still focussing on the strength and aesthetics of the buildings.

Similar to Khorsabad, Nineveh also showed disregard in symmetry but to a higher degree. Their method of roofing, that is, building vaults indicates that there might be an abundance of timber. The use of vaults could let more light enter and stay. The detailing in the forms and figures inside the palace direct that the Assyrians were inclined towards their roots and culture and seemingly wanted everyone to know about their glory through these cravings. Also, some structural elements like the Door Lintel in the palace with two winged dragons facing each other is close to the work of medieval sculptor, which indicates the possibility of bringing it from somewhere else. Thus, the Assyrian architecture shows great innovations and technicality with influence from external factors which could be related to their invasion.



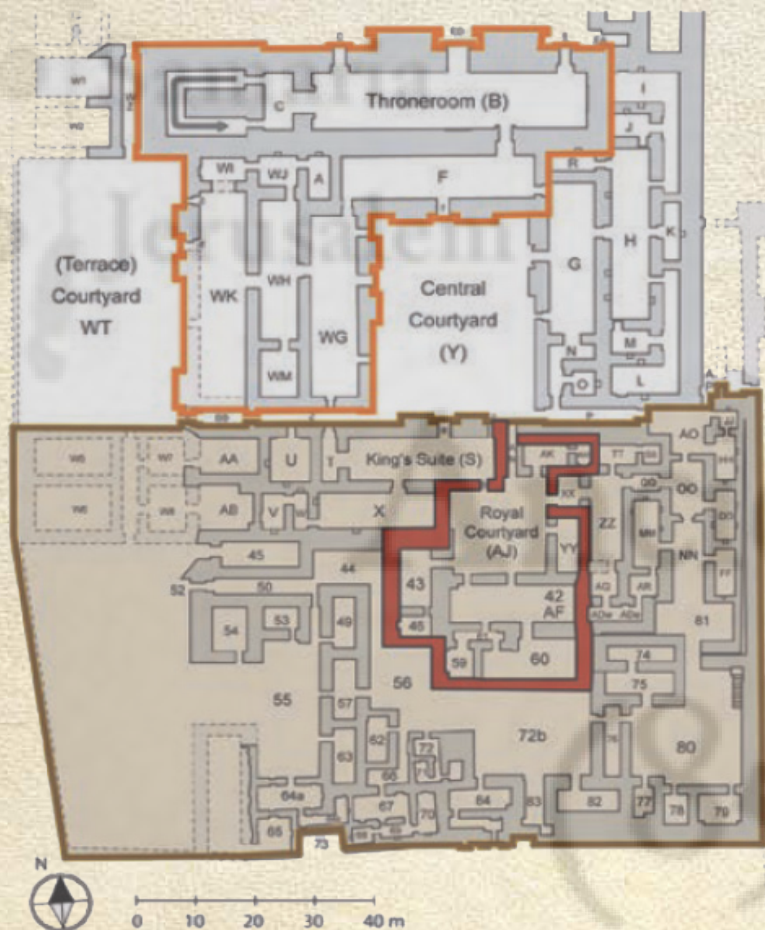
As cities developed and the kings started gaining power, they started building huge palaces for themselves.

Palaces of Assyria

Palace Architecture became more prominent as compared to temple architecture in the Assyrian Empire.

Some of the common features present in the late Assyrian palaces are as follows:

1. Assyrian palaces were inaccessible to the majority of Assyrians.
2. Palaces were raised on brick platforms, and their main entrance ways were flanked by guardian figures of human headed bulls or lions of stone.
3. There were prominent differences between the public and private sectors of the palaces.
4. None of the late Assyrian Palaces possessed substantial upper floors.



Engineering Visions

Assyrian architecture eventually emerged from the shadow of its predecessors to assume distinctive attributes, like domes and diverse building materials, that set it apart from other political entities.

Very less information is known of the event of Assyrian temples with the exception of the distinctive ziggurats and enormous remains at Mugheir. Ziggurats within the Assyrian Empire came to be built with two towers (as against the only central tower of previous styles) and decorated with coloured enamelled tiles. Contemporaneous inscriptions and reliefs describe and depict structures with octagonal and circular domes, unique architectural systems for the time. Little remains of the temple at Mugheir, but the ruins of its base remain quite impressive, measuring 198 feet (60 m) long by 133 feet (41 m) wide by 70 feet (21 m) high.

Building plans were rectangular through much of the empire's history. The fortress of Sargon II (reigned 722–705 BCE) at Dur-Sharrukin, or Khorsabad, was the simplest known. Consisting of a stone foundation punctuated by



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seven gates, the fortress housed the emperor's palace and a ziggurat among massive load-bearing walls with regularly spaced towers.

Not only the intended political symbolism of Assyrian superiority, these fortified walls signify preparation for an attack by enemy invaders. Among the decorative features excavated was a monumental lamassu outside the throne room. After the death of Sargon II, the location was abandoned.

Not only that, Builders increasingly used wood, particularly cedar and cypress, in architecture. As a result, much of the architecture has decayed, leaving archaeologists to supply reconstructions for present-day scholars. Now one example can be the Balawat Gates, from the Assyrian outpost of Balawat, or Imgur-Enlil. Two sets were commissioned during the reign of Ashurnasirpal II and one addition set under the reign of his son Shalmaneser III (859–824 BCE). Assyrian inscriptions suggest the gates were made from cedar. Now it's estimated by the experts that the gates stood over 22 feet high. The metal bands that adorned the gates suggest that they measured 285 feet wide. Lacking hinges, the gates opened by turning enormous pine pillars that rotated in stone sockets. Despite the long-term fragility of wood, the size of the gates and therefore the mechanisms by which they opened and closed point to the political instability of the time and the got to defend all parts of the empire.

Structural Detailing

The Assyrians were fond of leaving their mark in history. They made lots of carvings and detailing in structures, most of them showing depictions of their culture, each king's reign, warfare instructions, etc. They even had instructions on how to cultivate crops, depicted in the form of carvings in their structures.

The architectural styles were evolving from period to period in the Assyrian empire. These changes were noticeable and helped the present historians to identify the period in which a particular structure was built.

These detailing and carvings tell us that the

Assyrians had access to good sculpting and carving tools, and also that there were many skilled craftsmen in the empire.

Writings on the wall

The walls of the Assyrian Palaces were widely carved with line texts and sculptures. The texts talked about the victory of the Assyrian wars, the rituals practiced by the king and the pride of the Assyrian empire. Whereas, the sculptures were mostly of human-headed bull and the lion colossi. The text wall was split into three sections - the upper, lower and the center registers(the actual text). Three types of text were found - Palace Wall Foundation Text, Slab back text and Standard Inscription. The people did not just write just on walls but also on metal alloys like bronze plates in the gates of the palaces.

The fragments of paintings were originally demonstrated on plaster from Kar-Tukulti Ninurta (13th century B.C.). The paintings had red, blue, white and black colours on a yellowish background. The assyrian empire experienced a phase of shift in paintings. Initially, most of the paintings had just patterns, flowers and other simple figures. With time, paintings of human figures and goats started evolving. As time went by, paintings of the depiction of winged genies, goats and agricultural instructions started becoming prominent. In the final phase, wall paintings had started to lose their spread and ornament paintings started increasing drastically.

Conclusion

The Assyrians were very well skilled in warfare. This was also reflected in their art. They were a warrior society. Huge, violent sculptures and relief carvings in stone were used to ornament their houses. Palaces gained much more importance, in comparison to temples. The interiors were usually quite luxurious. Many towers were built close to the walls of the cities, which acted as defensive positions. Even after their fall, Assyria is considered to be one of the most skilled empires to have ever existed.