

Assyrian sculpture at the British Museum ~ Nimrud and Nineveh

I went to the British Museum this week and found that I was not the only person taking an interest in the sculpture and bas reliefs from Nimrud and Nineveh in the Assyrian rooms. Several school parties were being shown round, which can only be a good thing.



These little girls are examining one of a pair of human headed winged lions (865 – 860 BC) from Nimrud. Specifically the doorway to the throne room of the palace of Ashurnasirpal II. They were meant to be viewed either straight on, or from the side. Viewing from an angle one can see that they were carved with 5 legs so that they looked right from the side, or front. The smaller pair below (and I didn't make a note of where these are from) show the practice better. I have seen this done on English sculpture in the gate of a west country 'big house' as well.



The beautiful beast below is a lion which symbolised Ishtar the Goddess of War. She was one of several pair guarding the temple of Ishtar in Nimrud.



There were also wall panels from inside the temples and palaces. A lot were of various guardian spirits. Most of these were holding a cone and bucket, the significance of which was not explained. But some (didn't photograph well) were holding conventional weapons.



The scenes depicted in the wall reliefs were very manly, hunting and war, fishing and sailing. If there were domestic scenes or depictions of industry they either didn't survive or are elsewhere. There is hunting of deer



Hunting with dogs (I liked these dogs – no idea what breed but nice ears.)



on horseback and from a chariot.




Hunting lion was the sport of kings. And it all looked very kingly, and very macho and manly, until you saw the little lad in his very own protective cage letting the pre-trapped lions out of the cage ready for the king and nobles to chase.



From Nineveh there were some reliefs of war, or more accurately the aftermath of battle and conquest.



 Sadly some things do not change.

Photographs E Weatherwax

London March 2015