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GERMANY'S MESOPOTAMIA, 1899 TO 1915: BEYOND
THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY HORIZON

Nineveh, the palace of Sardanapalus-England's fame is forever entwined with these names. Babylon, the royal city of Nebuchadnezzar-might it be a mission worthy of Germany to be associated with these names?

Friedrich Delitzsch, 1899¹

The words of Friedrich Delitzsch, in his time the central impresario of Germany's Mesopotamia, articulate a national aspiration. Taking as model the association of ancient Assyria with modern England, Delitzsch's venture is to wrest a comparable prize for Germany. His terms hark back to the earlier milieux of reception in another way. Bringing to imperial Germany an association with the renowned ancient king of Babylon is reminiscent of *L'Illustration's* observation over fifty years earlier about the French display of Botta's finds bringing one king to the palace of another.

By Delitzsch's time, however, such a commonality of ancient and modern would not have been possible in newly republican France. In Germany, indeed in Berlin, its royal capital, we thus find a curious and sometimes deliberately backward looking re-enactment of aspects of the earlier Assyrian receptions, despite the other varieties of Mesopotamian discoveries in the intervening years. The project which Delitzsch promoted, begun in the very year of his essay, was dedicated to the archaeological recovery of the one ancient Mesopotamian site whose name loomed as large in Western imagination as the Nineveh of Layard and Botta: Babylon. It was a site, moreover, which had been as obsessively sought after as Nineveh, and yet which had eluded the vast machineries of influence and knowledge of the established colonial powers. The one term left to be located on the West's imaginary map of Mesopotamia, Babylon was thus an obvious tool for Germany's parvenu entry into the imperial contest.

The nature of German engagement with the Orient during the nineteenth century was somewhat different from that of France and England. Said described its basic tendency thus:

What German Oriental scholarship did was to refine and elaborate techniques whose application was to texts, myths, ideas and languages almost literally gathered from the Orient by imperial Britain and France.²

We shall see throughout the distinct influence of this tradition of scholarly achievement, as well as signs of dissatisfaction with the "second-order" Orient it assumes, one distant from tangible objects. At the same time, looking more closely at Germany's reception of Mesopotamia, we will also see how it relies at key points upon many of the same tenets that we have seen elsewhere, both for Mesopotamia and for exoticism in general.

The remarkable fact is that a German team did succeed in locating and excavating Babylon after more than a millenium of attempts. Yet even though the forecast made by Delitzsch was actually realized, its result for Germany was nothing like the national success achieved in England. This climactic discovery led to no such climactic or sustained reception. Instead, it was closer to disastrous.

This chapter will be devoted both to detailing these events and considering the structural reasons behind them. Delitzsch's retrospective terms for measuring national fame were fundamentally in conflict with the changing terms of reference and media of circulation in Germany at the time. In examining the German reception of the Babylon discoveries, from their beginning through the start of the First World War, we find evidence of a basic horizontal shift from earlier times. It is not that of the Jaussian gradualism involved with the assimilation of a new term, but rather a more Benjaminian one of shock, involving a fundamental discordance in imagined histories, in genealogies of the present, tied to changes not only of audience structure, but also of the period's prevailing media.

At the same time, here too we can find evidence of a continuing aesthetic evaluation of Mesopotamian objects, but now dislocated into a situation of marginalization and contestation, which itself says much about the milieu of the time. Next to Delitzsch's nationalistic appeal, we set the recollection of Emil Nolde, who wrote of the years around 1900 as follows:

The art of the Egyptian and Assyrian stood before me like something unique, something mystical. I could not, like almost everyone [else] at the time, consider them only as "historical artifacts." I loved these great works, even though I was not supposed to. But sometimes such a love burns the brightest.³

Aged thirty-three in 1900, Nolde at the time was nearing the end of what he called his period of youth, and embarking on a full-blown Expressionist style. The artist's

attraction to Mesopotamian work is comparable to that we have seen during the same period by artists from Jacob Epstein to Picasso.

But following Nolde's account, we can also see that Mesopotamia's absorption in the concerns of "Primitivism" also involved its marginalization. In fact, it is doubly marginalized. Nolde's own account describes Ancient Near Eastern artifacts as lacking compelling interest to the majority. At the same time, for Nolde, as surely for Picasso, Assyria no longer marked the tantalizing edge of the exoticist horizon. In Nolde's own account, Assyria is only the start of a host of newer interests.

The following decade, as Nolde continues just after the passage above, he learned of further remarkable objects such as Indian, Chinese, and Pre-Columbian artifacts. In precisely the same defensive rhetorical structure employed for Assyria, he notes "These were not only 'Curiosities,' as the professional experts [die Zünftigen] deemed them. No, we raised them in estimation to what they are: the singular, rough 'Urkunst' of primitive peoples."

Nolde's words hark back to the terms of contestation in the English situation around the initial reception of Assyria. They again pit the aesthetic sympathy of an idealized spectator against the denigration of a privileged caste: the "Zünftigen" who deemed the works mere curiosities. In fact, Nolde specifically names a central opponent: Wilhelm von Bode, director of the Berlin Gemäldegalerie, and later director of Prussian state museums.

Bode was a great opponent of valuing artistically the "Primitives." His sense of vision was buried under a mountain of conventional experience and knowledge.⁴

While still charged, and addressed within a conflict waged through aestheticization much like that we have seen previously, Mesopotamia is thus now also submerged within the newer constellation of "Primitivism." Its place is taken by newer discoveries, objects less assimilated and of greater defamiliarizing potential. Hence, while he employed many other "Primitive" objects and cultures, Nolde's own artwork contains virtually no specific Mesopotamian references. In this, it is part of a larger tendency in Germany art of the period, both academic and avant-garde, in which Mesopotamian imagery is largely absent. With a few notable exceptions, which we will consider in the last section of this chapter, German art of the time presents few of the sorts of contemporary engagements with ancient Mesopotamia which we have found elsewhere.

Throughout this book, we have found the possibility of Mesopotamia's aesthetic treatment to be near the heart of the dynamics of its reception. The paucity here of such aestheticizing is evidence not only of its being supplanted by other forms of artistic "Primitivism," but also of the situation of Mesopotamian sponsorship itself. The artistic/aesthetic employment of Mesopotamia serves us as a frame around the milieu with which we begin and end. As we move now back to Delitzsch, and the

office from which he spoke, we can also find traces of aesthetic evaluation even among figures more closely associated with the excavation, but again they are shunted aside in favor of other evaluative terms.

As we shall see, the dominant associations of Mesopotamia and its exhibition in early twentieth-century Berlin had shifted from those in the earlier milieu, and modes of its public circulation had metamorphosed by means of the very different popular media which were to become characteristic of the new century. In addition, Germany itself offered both different patterns of patronage and of audience response, so that the public image of Mesopotamia, even at the time of its greatest success, was fundamentally different and less fortunate than in earlier receptions in Britain and France. The sum of these changes is the end of the dominant nineteenth-century horizon.

In this chapter we will examine parallel concerns to those considered earlier in England and France. We will first consider the institutional history of Mesopotamian excavation and circulation in Germany, focusing on the sponsorship and publicization of the remarkable, seminal excavation of Babylon begun in 1899. Two subsequent sections trace the more dubious, if not disastrous, history of promotion of Mesopotamia in Germany in the same period: through the "Babel-Bibel" debate of 1902-3 and the royally sponsored production of the opera *Sardanapal* in 1908. The extraordinarily vituperative, sarcastic defeat of an attempt to introduce and justify Babylonian culture, in "Babel-Bibel," led ultimately, in *Sardanapal*, to a retrenchment toward the better-known and established image of Assyria. Strikingly, it is a development that led back not merely to the earlier English and French discoveries, but to the period even before discovery. A final section considers Mesopotamian imagery in contemporary German art and visual culture. Considering a number of examples presents a varied range of treatments, testifying to the means and motives for Mesopotamia's virtual dissipation.

FRIEDRICH DELITZSCH AND THE INSTITUTIONS OF GERMANY'S MESOPOTAMIA

As the Louvre had at mid-century, the Berlin museums created an entirely new division in connection with its excavation in Mesopotamia. The museum's Near Eastern Section (Vorderasiatische Abteilung) was created in 1899, the same time the Babylon excavation was begun. More than an administrative parallel, in the German situation this also indicates the extent to which the excavation was depended upon to enrich the museum's collections. Indeed, Suzanne Marchand describes the rise of German archaeology at this time, and its disentangling from philology, as symptomatic of nothing less than "a desperate desire to bring the Berlin museum collections up to the level of those of the Louvre and the British Museum."⁵

Key to the decision to excavate was the remarkable appearance of the vividly colored, enamelled brick reliefs that were already known to be on the site. The leader of the excavation, Robert Koldewey, had visited Babylon several times in the decade before 1899 and brought a number of reliefs back to Berlin. He showed them to Richard Schöne, then director-general of the Royal Museums, as part of the deliberations on excavation. As Koldewey recalled, "The peculiar beauty of these fragments and their importance for the history of art was duly recognized by his Excellency R. Schöne . . . and this strengthened our decision to excavate the capital of the world empire of Babylonia."⁶

Koldewey spent nearly fifteen years in Babylon, leading more than 200 workers on the excavation. He was thus central to the rediscovery of Babylon, but also remained aloof from the promulgation of the discoveries. This is all the more striking as, although Koldewey played nothing of Layard's role in the public reception of the finds, his background and motivation toward archaeology were not at all dissimilar to those of Layard. He had studied and taught art and architecture without precisely specializing and had excavated irregularly at sites in Greece and the Middle East. Not a man of the highest official standing at home, Koldewey's time in Babylon was an immediate relief from an unhappy four years teaching at an architectural school in Görlitz. Finally, his attraction to Babylonian artifacts, as we have already seen evidence, was as much aesthetic as historical.

There are considerable parallels with Layard here, who was also the aesthetically minded misfit. Yet though his steadfast devotion to the excavation was legendary, Koldewey's diffidence about public life and politics, as well as lack of scientific/scholarly credentials kept him from emerging as a central figure comparable to Layard in England.⁷ The particular bar represented by lacking credentials, further, points to a feature quite different in the German reception from that of the earlier countries: the effect of an incipient specialized, hierarchical discourse of expertise and knowledge, particularly presented in its university system. In Germany, the public promulgation of Babylon was not then overseen by, or even closely associated with, the archaeologist Koldewey, but rather a figure raised to attention by his previous scholarly activity.

The reception and public fortune of Mesopotamia in late Wilhelmine Germany is uniquely tied to a single figure: Friedrich Delitzsch. Delitzsch was named director of the Near Eastern Section from its foundation in 1899. Delitzsch also took a prominent public role in promotion, more than any museum figure we have seen hitherto in France or England. Yet Delitzsch's actions hardly met the same public acclaim. To the contrary, the sort of clash staged over Mesopotamia in Germany of the time highlights the growth of certain characteristically twentieth-century norms of circulation and discourse, fundamentally discontinuous with and incommensurable to nineteenth-century expectations.

Most strikingly distinct from the previous milieux we have examined is the new significance and authority accorded to a figure of academic scholarship. Delitzsch had only just come to Berlin in 1899, aged forty-nine, for not one but two related posts, both as museum functionary and professor at Berlin University. But while the museum job was of a type completely new to him, the university responsibility was a clear continuation of Delitzsch's previous experience. Delitzsch was then at the center of the nascent science of Assyrian textual scholarship. From his studies in Jena and Leipzig in the 1870s through his first post as professor in Breslau in 1893, Delitzsch had published a series of seminal books and articles, seeking comprehensively to detail the grammar and language of Assyrian cuneiform as well as pointing to aspects of its puzzling relations to other cuneiform and related languages such as Hittite, Sumerian and Old Persian. He clearly stood in the top rank of the first full generation of German Assyriologists educated by Eberhard Schrader, the essential father of the discipline.

The rise of Assyriology as science has significant roots in the earlier French and English realms we have previously examined. For almost all of the second half of the nineteenth century cuneiform was fundamentally decipherable. The efforts of H. C. Rawlinson were central to the development. Yet Rawlinson is the same figure, as we have seen, who had done so much to attempt to counter Layard's aesthetic understanding of ancient Assyrian artifacts. A successful juxtaposition of independent translations of an Akkadian inscription by four English and French scholars in 1857 is often considered the watershed date by which the language was mastered.⁸ But textual Assyriology flourished particularly in the burgeoning academic philological tradition of Germany.⁹ Items such as grammars, syllabaries, sign lists, dictionaries, and corpuses of inscriptions proliferated as Assyriology emerged in the same years after the Franco-Prussian war that saw the founding of the German empire itself. Delitzsch's ascension to the Berlin position, and the establishment of the Near Eastern section itself, mark a new legitimacy for this incipient cultural formation: an embrace of the scholarly practice within a powerful, but still emergent, national framework. This clearly marked a triumph for the new science as well as a translation of earlier models of archaeological sponsorship into an arrangement that tied it to Germany's own unique strength, its then-unparalleled university system. Yet precisely through this new gesture of acceptance in the museum, Mesopotamia took a place among a far wider and more dangerously heterogeneous horizon than that of a small circle of scholars.

The import of German academic Assyriology marks a departure from previous modes of promulgating Mesopotamia that we have seen, but one especially suited to the Berlin collection. While the Berlin Museums did possess a representative collection of Mesopotamian artifacts, it was hardly of a comparable size to those of London and Paris.¹⁰ Assyriology (an activity completely separate from art history

in the academic structure) offered a certain compensation. It marked an absorption of artifacts into meaning, of object into text. This is indeed precisely the approach we have seen recommended in England not only by Rawlinson, the philologist, but also by Richard Westmacott, the academic sculptor. But whereas in England their approach was stridently opposed by forces gathered around Layard, one finds few public adherents of the sheer physical and aesthetic nature of Mesopotamia, only the young Nolde on the periphery of official discourse, and diffident Koldewey in distant Babylon.

The philological, academic nature of discourse on Mesopotamia was thus a central fact of the Berlin milieu, but just as significant was the specific nature of the Berlin collection. The textual model was all that much more dominant in light not only of the smallness of the collection but also the unique bar to actually viewing Assyrian art in Berlin at the time. For all of Mesopotamia was a small and especially remote outpost in the grand collections of the Berlin central museums.

At the time of Delitzsch's entry, in 1899, the German Royal Museums consisted of a number of disparate buildings and collections clustered on the "Museum-Island" in central Berlin. They were centered in Schinkel's Altes Museum, the Paintings Gallery, and the Neues Museum located between the two. The vast majority of paintings, sculpture, prints and antiquities (Greek and Egyptian) were divided among these three large buildings. In 1901, the Pergamon museum opened, displaying remarkable holdings from excavations for Greek antiquities in Asia Minor, most of all, the renowned Pergamon altar. Three years later, the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum was opened farther to the north, allowing a consolidation of earlier postclassical works and freeing space for unifying other collections elsewhere.

It had been planned to display the Ancient Near Eastern collection with the Egyptian holdings in the Neues Museum. But this was endlessly deferred. A guide from 1902 tells the reader "The Near Eastern antiquities are housed in the provisional building north of the Neues Museum." The sentence is repeated in a guide of 1907. As late as 1911, another puts it only slightly differently, noting the collection was "preliminarily in a special building and soon to be housed in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum."¹¹ The two descriptions confirm that plans for the future were hazy, even changing the site of the promised future installation (from Neues Museum to Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum). They confirm, too, that whatever was promised for the future, the collection spent more than a decade (indeed the entire period up to the First World War) in a small, temporary building separate from all else in the museum complex, which is barely discernable in the guide's own diagram of the museums. The structure that enclosed the collection of the Near Eastern section was the only one in the entire complex of the Royal Museums which perpetually required an appointment for general viewing, a considerable anachronism for German national

museums in 1900. Though there was no admission charge, this building was uniquely separated from the rest of the collections. It is perhaps the only major exception to Schöne's attempts in the 1890s to open the collections to visitors, from laborers to students.¹²

Even as Delitzsch came to Berlin to manage a newly elevated role for the Ancient Near East, then, the space set out for him to define was largely empty. Mesopotamia was both central and distanced in the scheme he inherited, an established term with a uniquely deferred referent. This proved to be both his great advantage and extraordinary misfortune.

Delitzsch's appointment in Berlin coincides with a larger initiative, one designed to catapult the Berlin collection into more direct comparison with England and France. The German attempt to rival the great British and French collections of Mesopotamian antiquities demanded competition on their terms, through excavation. In this light, in addition to the museum spaces and the rise of Assyriology, a third enterprise requires discussion, in which Delitzsch also played a central role: archaeology itself. The quasi-private sponsorship of German archaeology presents a contrast to the more public and state-controlled archaeological endeavors of England and France even though it was designed partly to emulate them.

Throughout the later nineteenth century in Germany, there had been calls for direct archaeological activity in the Ancient Near East. In 1887 the "Orient-Comité" was founded, combining a group of scholars with moneyed patrons. Its subsequent expedition to Zincirli in northern Syria netted nothing like the vast corpus desired for the goal of museum aggrandizement, prompting instead such a response as the sarcastic speech of Rudolf Virchow in the Prussian Landtag.

[The French] in the Near East have collected extraordinary treasures. The English have explored Assyria. We have gotten little. We have long contented ourselves with large plaster casts which have been ceremoniously displayed in museums. It is no small advantage, and certainly cannot be denied, that the originals are more interesting than the plaster casts.¹³

Virchow's diatribe clearly shares the themes of Delitzsch's harangue quoted above, published the following year: a call to appropriation of artifacts as token of national will, following the terms set decades earlier by rival imperial powers. An announcement in the *National-Zeitung*, moreover, prophetically places this development within the wider horizon of expectation of the time. It notes first that "Germany's inferior position with respect to excavations in Asia Minor, especially in Babylon and Assyria . . . stands in sharpest contrast to the intensive and successful research in philology, general history and cultural history we have conducted in precisely this area."

This inferior position [it continued] affects not only our museum collections, but also is reflected in the public's prevailing view [of oriental history and artifacts]. Outside professional and scholarly circles, many regard Babylonian and Assyrian history and culture as curiosities and frequently make fun of them.¹⁴

Beyond its intention, this comment well describes not only the striking division of expectation about ancient Mesopotamia in German society of the time, between scholarly and popular audiences, but also forecasts some of the reaction to Delitzsch's later attempt to bridge this gap.

Delitzsch served as director of the new organization founded specifically to work with the museum in archaeological acquisition in the Middle East: the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft (DOG) [The German Orient Society]. The DOG brought together a number of the richest and most powerful figures in Germany. Among them were such still-famous names from finance and industry as Krupp, Siemens, Rothschild, and Mosse, together with high civil servants and politicians. Though these few led the membership, by far, in contributions (Krupp's 3,000 marks being the highest subscription), by the end of its first full year the DOG had attracted members from all over Germany, accepting contributions of as little as 10 marks.¹⁵

The DOG had been designed on the model of the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum Society, a group of wealthy Berlin art collectors, who provided private funds for fine arts purchases. The founding of the DOG consolidated a number of interests and power-bases, bringing a structure derived from a purchasing syndicate for artworks to the more nebulous engagements of foreign archaeology. Local pastors, scholars, connoisseurs, and parvenus coexisted in a single organization run by captains of industry and bank directors. Not least among the members of the DOG were those with direct business ties to the Middle East, notably the German banking and railroad interests headquartered in Constantinople, whose project for a "Baghdad-Bahn" loomed throughout the period.

Perhaps most crucial, at the top of this complex alliance lay the influence of the richest and most powerful of all, Kaiser Wilhelm II. The Kaiser took a direct personal influence in the DOG, putting it under his personal "Protectorate" in 1901. After offering extraordinary financial bequests in previous years (20,000 and 15,000 marks in 1898 and 1899), it became a portion of the museum bureaucracy, which was largely supported by the Prussian state.¹⁶ The Kaiser had long taken a personal interest in the Near East and developed a special fascination with ancient Mesopotamia (which only increased during his deposition after the First World War).¹⁷

In the years around 1900, Germany's unique domination of the Ottoman empire, and Berlin's mounting collections of antiquities from Ottoman-controlled sites – such as Priene, Miletus, and most of all, Pergamon – were material and geo-political

expressions of this blend of personal, economic, and commercial interests. The fortune of the Pergamon altar itself best embodies this amalgamation of motives. Discovered by a German railway engineer, Carl Humann, in the 1870s, it was quickly shipped to Germany, later celebrated in a public "fest," and ultimately enshrined in a museum that bore its name and was designed as a sort of reliquary for it. On the opening of the initial, interim Pergamon museum in 1901, the Kaiser delivered a speech praising the works for embodying an artistic ideal, and recommending their beauty to artists and public.¹⁸

Germany's activities mark a new inflection on the patterns of imperialist interchange established by France and England. Germany's commercial, quasi-private interests directly coexisted with national, and royal, demands. As justification and funding now came from a variety of sources, it also marked a new heterogeneity of motives for backing archaeology: a new variety of differing burdens channeled uniquely into a single enterprise. The foundation of the DOG in 1899 established this complex within a single, if capacious, organizational structure, one turned specifically toward archaeological excavation.

The DOG's balance sheet for 1899, its first full year of operation, listed over 112,000 marks in its control, which was vastly more than the 24,000 the "Orient-Comité" had had just two years earlier. In the years through the first World War, the DOG's membership and finances grew steadily. It sponsored crucial archaeological excavations at many sites in Mesopotamia as well as Anatolia, Egypt, Palestine, and beyond.

Nonetheless, Babylon was the primary goal for the founding of the organization. Babylon is the only potential archaeological site mentioned in the DOG's earliest literature. Initial reports of the excavation there begun by Koldewey in March 1899 stressed not only that it completely realized the historical and artistic expectations of the organization, but even promised "large sculptures" that had barely been hoped for.

The choice of Babylon was as brilliant from a propagandistic standpoint as it turned out to be from an artifactual one. Babylon was the one great magical place left to uncover in Mesopotamia. Paired in Western discourse with Nineveh, Babylon was renowned as a central locale of the biblical narrative, seat of majestic kings from Hammurabi to Nebuchadnezzar. From the earliest visualizations of Turner and John Martin we have considered above, indeed throughout the history of art, the two have accompanied each other.

Babylon had been sought by travelers for millenia and disappointingly unfound despite the best efforts of earlier forays. The German activities, in this sense, bring to completion the revelations begun with the French and English discoveries of (and around) Nineveh in the 1840s. On the geo-political stage, they compete with, and in

some sense trump, the French and English achievements. For Layard and Botta, like innumerable others, had also sought Babylon. But its mud-brick remains proved largely undetectable, quite unlike the more distinct limestone reliefs of Nimrud, Khorsabad, and Nineveh.

Koldewey, indeed, had succeeded where they failed.¹⁹ Within just weeks he had located and uncovered a foundational wall of Babylon's mud-bricked precincts. Koldewey spent over fourteen continuous years of work on the site, but already only a short time after the start of the excavation the general shape of Nebuchadnezzar's capital was made clear. Babylon was a huge complex of squarish, often monumental structures. The glazed mud bricks such as Koldewey had seen before adorned a large area, and comprised not only animal imagery but a complex of architectural and floral ornamentation. The remarkable tiled façade of the Ishtar Gate was largely amassed and shipped to Berlin by 1902. Much of the rest of the massive Babylonian finds, as well as those of Assur, the DOG's other great Mesopotamian excavation, did not arrive until the 1920s. And little was displayed at all, in the period up to the First World War, as we have noted.

However much of the work of excavation was performed by Koldewey, the unique intersection of authorities enjoyed by Delitzsch offered him the privileged position of communicating the discoveries to the larger world. Delitzsch was a charter member of the DOG, and served on its "scholarly commission." His actions were as essential to the activities of the DOG as those of Koldewey. In terms of Adorno's "force field" model of a museum, we must consider the two dialectically interlocked, one specializing in objects and the other providing an interpretive commentary around them. Yet considered from the viewpoint of reception (particularly a reception in which many of the actual objects are held aloof, and the museum collection in any case difficult of access), Delitzsch's publicizing activities, his attempt to summon Babylon in the minds of his audience, is paramount, fundamentally mediating Germany's Mesopotamia. Thus Delitzsch's unparalleled actions to promote Mesopotamian archaeology deserve attention in their own right. In the remainder of this section we will consider some of his words up to the "Babel-Bibel" debate, before going on, in the following section, to his, and Mesopotamia's, watershed.

Delitzsch's work had always accommodated an interest that went beyond scholarly concerns with the Ancient Near East itself, and engaged more basic and popular questions. Most notably, in his 1881 book, *Where was Paradise?*, Delitzsch used a series of philological deductions to conclude that Babylon was the place of the biblical paradise.²⁰ Nearly two decades before the start of the Babylon excavations, then, Delitzsch had fixed on the importance of the site.

The very founding of the DOG in 1898, at which time Delitzsch was still a professor in Breslau, spurred him to his greatest achievement in this line. Delitzsch's *Ex Oriente Lux!* was subtitled "A Word in Support of the German Orient Society." The work, in

general, was a brief, intense harangue calling for Germans to sponsor archaeological excavation.

... so may this great national and scientific enterprise confidently rely upon the sympathy and unselfish support of all men and women inspired by the renown of Germany and German scholarship.²¹

Delitzsch reviewed the activities of France and England, while also noting the particular prominence of Germany in Assyriological linguistic research, from the discoveries of Grotefend in the early nineteenth century.

The DOG's proposed activities offered Delitzsch the opportunity to crystallize themes he had propounded for years before, in which the purely nationalistic advantage of knowing and capturing ancient Mesopotamia, Babylon particularly, was imbued with both historical and philological significance. His later "Babel-Bibel" lectures adhered to precisely these themes.

As Delitzsch emerged into national prominence, his words faced new kinds of associations and perceptions, far different from the realm of scholars and patrons. As a bridge to "Babel-Bibel," and offering a direct German parallel to a central aspect of Mesopotamian promulgation in France and England, we track Delitzsch's words into a new, popular medium. Merely six months after the start of the Babylon excavations, he published an essay that presented the DOG's activities to this new sphere. In October of 1899, Delitzsch published an article about the Babylon excavation, trumpeting its immediate results, in the *Illustrierte Zeitung*.²² This is the article we have quoted from Delitzsch at the start of the chapter. But the venue must be considered along with the words, as it allows us to gauge quite particularly this situation in connection with the earlier milieux of France and England.

Like *L'Illustration* in France, *Illustrierte Zeitung* [The Illustrated Journal] was founded soon after the *Illustrated London News* and based largely on *ILN*'s model. Precisely like the French and English journals, *Illustrierte Zeitung* soon came to dominate its chosen audience, German-speaking Europe, and remained in that position for most of the second half of the nineteenth century.²³ It too was essentially a miscellany, again trumpeting in the title its unique feature of copious illustration. By 1900, little had changed in the essential format of *Illustrierte Zeitung* beside the occasional direct use of photography. Most articles (like Delitzsch's own, see Fig. 71) were still illustrated by engravings, though made directly after photographs, as a caption assures the reader. It is a format that clung to the traditional medium of the illustrated journal, engraving, even while it answered to the new visual expectations of photography, by this time triumphant throughout as the paradigmatic imaging system of modernity.

Delitzsch's article, then, marks an overlap between Mesopotamian archaeology and the leading representative of the popular illustrated press, of precisely the sort

Die deutsche Expedition nach Babylon.



Robert Koldewey, der Führer der Expedition.

Entdeckungsgelände und durch die Überreste der alten Städte...



Überblick über Babylon, nach dem Norden.

Mitgliedern und Mitarbeitern sind die Großbauten, die nach ihrer Größe und Wichtigkeit...



Das Expeditionslager in Babylon. Die deutsche Expedition nach Babylon. Nach photographischen Aufnahmen.

71. Die Illustrierte Zeitung, "The German Expedition to Babylon," October 19, 1899.

we have previously examined in both England and France. In fact, the article itself begins with such a retrospective frame, setting the German expedition in the context of the great previous achievements of its rivals.

Renowned and admired throughout the world are the great exploits which French, English, and recently American researchers have accomplished, and continue to accomplish, in the piles of debris of the Euphrates and Tigris.

Delitzsch then describes in overheated, almost lustful, details the fruits of such labors. Here is just a small portion of the passage, part of a single sentence:

The discovery of all these palaces and temples from the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires has yielded not merely a great number of statues and obelisks, colossal bulls and alabaster reliefs as well as an inexhaustible wealth of small objects of fine and applied art in gold, silver and bronze, in ivory, glass and precious stones, but just as much a literary treasury of an undreamt of age and scope, and astonishingly varied content...

The extraordinary attention to the material goods of such an enterprise is Delitzsch's prelude to the news of the German discovery. But Delitzsch, the philologist, also counts the scholarly recapture of the textual remains of ancient Mesopotamia among this project of Western rediscovery and possession. In all, the force of Delitzsch's article was to heighten and transplant directly into the popular sphere the language of Ex Oriente Lux!

Although Delitzsch's essay in Illustrierte Zeitung is comparable to earlier publicity, it outdoes anything in the French and English milieux we have previously examined. It marks the direct address of a popular audience by an official responsible for excavation and museum display.

Compared to so much of what we have seen before throughout Mesopotamia's reception: Westmacott's fear of appearing in print, Sarzec's complete lack of public writing, the forbidding price and size of Botta's Monument de Ninive, and especially the downright hostility toward the public and its journals of the British Museum's directors, Delitzsch's position marks an unparalleled confluence of constituencies and would seem to demonstrate a remarkable solidarity.

In fact, the public fortunes of Delitzsch and Mesopotamia more generally in Germany up to the First World War could not have been more different from the triumphant solidarity seemingly forecast above. Delitzsch may well have succeeded brilliantly in the nineteenth-century terms he inherited. But tracking his major public actions and their reception in the first decade of the twentieth century shows, in stark detail, how the discursive horizon that characterized the earlier milieux - their

assumptions of audience and dominant media – was fundamentally dissipated and exposed to new social and ideological formations. Far from pointing him toward success, Delitzsch's public persona was, in fact, raised barely an instant before it was lowered. He was no more destined to pure success than *Illustrierte Zeitung* was to remain in its position as dominant medium.

In the following two sections, we will examine the presentation and reception of the major attempts at Mesopotamian promotion of the period: Delitzsch's lectures on "Babel and Bible" in 1902–3, and the Berlin operatic production of *Sardanapal* in 1908. Though concerted attention to these activities, we can specify the means and social forces around the waning of the nineteenth-century horizon, and its extraordinary effect on the public reputation of Mesopotamia in Germany.

STAGING THE "BABEL-BIBEL" CONTROVERSY AND ITS CASUALTIES

"Babel and Bible" was the title of an illustrated lecture delivered by Delitzsch in Berlin on January 13, 1902. It was the first in a series of three planned public talks on the significance of Ancient Near Eastern research and archaeology for contemporary Germany. Kaiser Wilhelm, the patron and royal protector of the DOG, was present and had already arranged to have the lecture repeated in his palace several weeks later.

Delitzsch's lecture was designed most directly to justify the DOG's archaeological activity. However, Delitzsch, the philologist, chose not to praise material treasures, as he had in the *Illustrierte Zeitung*, nor even to describe much of archaeology at all, but rather to present an interpretive tour de force, drawing upon his own scholarly capabilities. His goal was to apply insights gained through recent scholarship on the Ancient Near East to understanding the culture, narrative, and context of the Bible, specifically the Old Testament.

As Delitzsch and many others later observed, the great innovation of his "Babel-Bibel" lectures lay not in their substance, but their circulation of established material beyond narrow scholarly circles. It is a question, paradigmatically, of reception. Moreover, when the outcry began over Delitzsch's words, it was not merely what he said, but that it had the ear and apparent sanction of the Kaiser that activated further criticism. Thus, through "Babel-Bibel" Mesopotamia again triggered an interpretive controversy in a Western milieu of reception comparable (although even more vituperative) to the aesthetic controversies we have seen previously.

Yet now, compared to the structure of oppositions and audiences in England, the tables are turned. The configuration of audiences and media in Germany specifically inverts the situation which we analyzed in England. The differing reception of Delitzsch's words in different media presents a situation in which the more hostile reception takes place among the new, burgeoning media audience, while a positive

reception is confined to a far smaller, traditionally conceived circle. Far from promoting Babylon, the predominant coverage of Delitzsch in the ever-increasing net of periodical representation worked instead to constrict it. Whereas the accretion of information on Assyria, in the mid-nineteenth century, and Sumer, in the later French discovery, worked productively to inflect the image of Mesopotamia, the treatment of Delitzsch and Babylon in Germany effectively counters, or even repudiates, this progressive development.

Delitzsch's ecstatic article in the *Illustrierte Zeitung* [IZ] had appeared in a journal no longer dominant in its time. IZ's close and intentional similarity to the *Illustrated London News* betrays its foundation in the technological and ideological norms of the mid-nineteenth century. The length of Delitzsch's article, its rhetorical flourishes, narrative emphases, and visual format for illustrations all fit the periodical formula developed over half a century earlier. Nonetheless, the journal continued throughout the early twentieth century and steadfastly supported Delitzsch during the "Babel-Bibel controversy," running articles supporting him and praising the advance of knowledge through Biblical research.²⁶

We've introduced Delitzsch in IZ, in his own terms and chosen format. By contrast, specifically through "Babel-Bibel," Delitzsch appeared very differently to another, and far larger, readership. In 1904, the following words appeared in a newer, competing weekly, the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* (BIZ), as part of a sarcastic chronicle in verse describing the previous year.

Im Februar im Jahr des Heils
Kam Delitzsch mit der Schrift des Keils
Und das bekam ihm übel:
Die Welt verkeilte ihm den Schopf
Und er bekam 'nen roten Kopf
Infolge Babel-Bibel²⁷

[In February in the year of our Lord/ Came Delitzsch with cuneiform/ And that gained him misfortune:/ The world thrashed him on the crown/ And he got a bloody head/ In the wake of Babel-Bibel]

In 1900, *Illustrierte Zeitung* had approximately 26,000 subscribers, a steady base which it maintained through the First World War. The *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, by contrast, had 220,000 subscribers in 1904 and was still growing wildly in circulation, reaching over 800,000 by 1915. As even its title indicates, BIZ appropriated even the very title of IZ, but now tied it to the unique conditions associated with Berlin, the imperial capital then undergoing extraordinarily rapid and far-reaching modernization. BIZ, by far the most popular periodical of its time, exemplifies the new conditions under which Delitzsch's activity was circulated to the majority of the public.

The *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* was fundamentally a photographic picture magazine, focused on topical news. Begun in 1894, it is said to have inaugurated an “optical age” in publication, identified more recently with magazines such as *Life* and *Look*.²⁸ *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* took the innovation begun with the *Illustrated London News*, the addition of images, and made that its central feature, but now it was one completely reliant on unadorned photography. Further, much unlike the prolix and respectful tone of *IZ*, *BIZ* presented shorter, snappier texts, designed more for quick amusement than dutiful edification.

BIZ's reliance on photography, untreated with familiarizing print-hatching (as in *IZ* and its relations), marks the emergence of the unadorned photographic vision. It was the agent of a Benjaminian distraction, which trafficked in a synchronic miscellany of modern life. Indeed, Benjamin was born (in Berlin) two years after the founding of *BIZ*, and its unique, hugely successful approach may well have served as paradigm for Benjamin's thoughts on media. Celebrity, fashion, gossip, leisure, and curiosity: all were displayed in a visual framework that now jettisoned the material for earnest edification which could still be found in the *Illustrated London News* and its inheritors.

The change of periodical leadership and approach had clear implications for the circulation of Mesopotamia. Thus while *IZ* covered Delitzsch and Babylonian finds from the first year of excavation in 1899, only the second “Babel-Bibel” lecture clearly made Delitzsch enough a celebrity for the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*. He appeared on the cover of the March 1st issue of 1903 in a simple half-length portrait photograph over the caption that read: “On the Babel-Bibel controversy: Professor Friedrich Delitzsch, whose lectures on the Babylonian origin of the Bible have influenced the Kaiser's presentations of his religious beliefs.”²⁹ A brief text inside describes some of Delitzsch's heterodoxies, while reporting as news that Delitzsch was apparently thwarted as an influence on the Kaiser.

Compared to the earlier milieu, what is most striking about Delitzsch's appearance in this central popular organ of the time is the cursory nature of the coverage, that so little is presented to read about the professor's lectures, much less the objects on which they are based. What exists as an issue of interpretation in *Illustrierte Zeitung* becomes a matter of individual personality and public celebrity in *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*. Identities are subsumed in stereotypes, just as Delitzsch's importance is enunciated through his relation to the Kaiser.

As we shall see, the reaction of the Kaiser, who capped the capacious structure of patronage of the DOG, was crucial to the public apprehension of the affair. It should be clear already that even as Delitzsch mastered constituencies and modes of communication – from scholarly to popular – that were decisively split in earlier milieu of reception in England and France, the achievement was lost in the new media and configurations of audience emerging in early twentieth-century Germany.

Delitzsch could be said to have reached an unparalleled mastery of nineteenth-century horizons of expectation, just at the point in which they were becoming irrelevant, supplanted by the discursive norms of newer media.

“Babel-Bibel” indeed brought Delitzsch and his scholarly ideas to a far wider constituency than any other comparable action. But rarely, as the rhyme of *BIZ* above testifies, in a good light. More than *IZ*, *BIZ*'s much more widely circulated coverage exemplifies Mesopotamia's entry into the larger horizon of public discourse active at the time.³⁰ Further, differently from the other locales we have considered, the German reception highlights questions of power and its exercise on behalf of the excavations. For Delitzsch did not draw criticism alone, but on behalf of the unparalleled orchestration of interests – commercial, political, and royal – that benefited him. In this process, nationalistic and antiquarian interpretations dominated, while the possibility of an aesthetic approach to the works was largely foreclosed. Even more, a further interpretive mode is active, which we have previously seen, in England, as the very antipode of the aesthetic, namely the understanding of Mesopotamian artifacts on religious or theological grounds. Here too, in terms of the prevailing range of interpretation, the horizon of Delitzsch's Germany was weighted in a way precisely opposite to that of Layard's England.

Just as Delitzsch found, in earlier scholarly work, insight into the Hebrew language through the Assyrian, so too did his lecture suggest that many Hebrew beliefs and practices described in the Old Testament could be understood in the larger context of the peoples of the Ancient Near East.

Now that the Pyramids have opened and the Assyrian palaces have disclosed themselves to view, the people of Israel with their writings appear one of the youngest among their neighbors.³¹

Delitzsch's approach to the Mesopotamian discoveries was introduced as a thoroughly pluralizing and historicizing one. But as he moved from Assyria to Babylon, the central topic of the lecture, it was not merely commonality with the Hebrews that he emphasized for the Babylonians, but an originary priority.

Delitzsch ascribed to the ancient Babylonians the invention of an extraordinary array of practices then popularly attributed to the Hebrews. He deemed dominant ancient systems of coinage, weights and measures to be of Babylonian origin, and likewise the observance of a holy seventh day. Even more, Delitzsch also described Hebrew forms of law and ethical beliefs as being of Babylonian origin, and adduced precise Babylonian precedents for such central Hebrew myths as those of the Biblical deluge, creation, and fall of man.

Though such “pan-Babylonism” had been common among scholars for some time, Delitzsch's view provoked excoriating attacks from Evangelical Christians and other conservative groups. Pamphlets and articles were circulated by the hundreds,

coining a new term, "Kampfschriften," in the process.³² Delitzsch's apparent denial of divine revelation as the unique source of Hebrew practice, disregard of the vaunted distinction between poly- and mono-theistic cultures, and, in general, resolutely historical and secular attitude toward the Ancient Near East were deeply offensive to some.

Three lectures had initially been planned, but after the reaction to the first, Richard Schöne, Delitzsch's superior at the Berlin museums, providentially sent Delitzsch away from Berlin for most of the rest of the year.³³ Delitzsch returned by the end of 1902 and soon proceeded, confusedly, both to compensate for and compound the difficulty he had created. First, Delitzsch presented an almost paradigmatic Orientalist travelogue of his voyage to the Kaiser and Queen. It is a glowing, entranced vision of an unchanged, ideal nature, fouled by an unruly but colorful people. He assures his audience, "Everything in tropical lands has remained exactly as it was in ancient times."³⁴ Highlights of the excavations were presented, with Koldewey's own photographs. Much was devoted to asserting the DOG's good treatment of the indigenous inhabitants.

The publication of this lecture, entitled *In the Land of Ancient Paradise*, was the second most popular of all of Delitzsch's publications.³⁵ It marks a sort of a forced vacillation in Delitzsch's thought, from a challenging position that met vast resistance to one of stereotypical, denatured otherness that flattered audience expectations. After which, strikingly, Delitzsch bounced back immediately to his previous position.

Delitzsch's most popular work, his second "Babel-Bibel" lecture, was published in the same year, 1903. It sold over 45,000 copies by 1910, but 40,000 of them in the first year (in versions from a straightforward book to a 4 mark luxury edition).³⁶ The lecture doggedly continued, indeed amplified, the theme of the first, challenging established belief.

The second lecture was delivered in the same location as the first, to the same royal audience, on January 12, 1903. Delitzsch returned with more bluster than even before, not only directly attacking the concept of revelation, but the uniqueness of the Hebrews.

Instead of immersing ourselves in "thankful wonder" at the providential guidance shown by God in the case of our own people, from the earliest times of primitive Germany until to-day, we persist – either from ignorance, indifference, or infatuation – in ascribing to those old-Israelitish oracles a "revealed" character which cannot be maintained, either in light of science, or in that of religion or ethics.³⁷

Delitzsch assails the incoherence of the Biblical account. As much as he attempts to bring down the status of the Hebrews he also exalts the features analogous to Hebrew myth in Babylonian culture. Delitzsch complains, for example, that the tale of the

madness of Nebuchadnezzar given in the book of Daniel (as we have seen above portrayed by Rochegrosse) is a false notion for which Assyriological research can provide the "purer and more original" version, with a nobler, prophetic Babylonian king.

In the year of his greatest public fame (or notoriety), the juxtaposition of Delitzsch's travelogue with his second "Babel-Bibel" lecture is striking. The travelogue goes as far to confirm received opinion of the contemporary East as "Babel-Bibel" did to unsettle it about the ancient East. The travelogue's allochronism, an established exoticist convention depended upon in his account of a contemporary Eastern culture, was challenged (to the upset of many) in discussion of its past. Delitzsch's view of the ancient Babylonians insisted on a particular history in which their culture was corrupted and misunderstood by later Hebrew and Greek commentators.

But Delitzsch elevated the ancient Babylonians and sought to release them from an inherited view as evil pagans for quite specific contemporary reasons. To exult the name of Nebuchadnezzar was crucial to Delitzsch as publicist because Nebuchadnezzar was known as the major king of Babylon in the age being excavated by Koldewey. But this was just the beginning of the project to rescue and elevate Babylon.

Delitzsch's key move was his attempt to distinguish ancient Mesopotamian culture from the Semitic culture of the Jews. Accordingly, he highlighted throughout the roots of Mesopotamian civilization among the Sumerians, whose language he deemed distinct from Semitic or related languages. Indeed, Delitzsch's final major work, *The Great Deception* of 1920–1 was openly anti-Semitic, attempting to wrest all of Christianity, and Jesus himself, from Semitic identity. As early as the first "Babel-Bibel" lecture, Delitzsch had explicitly suggested an alternative identity for the inhabitants of ancient Mesopotamia in mentioning that an image of a consort of Assururbanipal (on an Assyrian relief) "was a princess of Aryan blood, and may be imagined with fair hair."³⁸ Even while acknowledging the formative power of the subjectivity in viewing art, this testifies to an extraordinary will to distinguish Mesopotamia from Semitic identity. Indeed, in Delitzsch's very own words, he does not merely deduce but permits the viewer to imagine an Aryan Assyria. This is a departure from virtually every image of ancient Mesopotamia we have considered from Delacroix to Long to Rochegrosse. The stakes of the racialized history always implicit in Mesopotamian research, but perhaps first articulated systematically in the French reception, rise here to fundamentally reimagine ancient Mesopotamia.

As Mesopotamia is deemed Aryan, so Babylon's exalted identity overlaps with that of contemporary Wilhelmine Germany. Delitzsch's assertion of Germany's continual divine guidance supplants the unique authority previously attributed to the

Israelites. The divinity and messianic leadership that are removed from the Hebrews are not directly bestowed on the Babylonians so much as on contemporary Germans and their own king.

To see figures on Assyrian reliefs as blonde-haired Aryans moves not only to colonize an entire artifactual field for a contemporary system of racial/national identity, but to appropriate the identity of an ancient empire renowned for its military might to that of a contemporary nation that sought to match it. As constructed, both the ancient and modern cultures could be seen as distinct from, if not opposed to, a tendency labeled "Semitic."

Delitzsch strove to give this distinct identity a tangible form. Here alone appears a touch of aesthetic praise. A portion of the second "Babel-Bibel" lecture is devoted to images on the Ishtar Gate, a huge double-gated entrance to Babylon that had been uncovered by Koldewey.

How the pulses quicken when . . . the great double-gate of Babylon, flanked northward by three mighty towers, emerges from the bowels of the earth in splendid preservation. Whichever way we look . . . every part swarms with reliefs, *remu* [wild oxen] coloured on their surface with enamels standing out against the background of deep blue.³⁹

At other points Delitzsch compares Babylonian objects directly to modern works of art. For example, he exalts the Babylonian treatment of women, in part, by comparing Babylonian images of the goddess Ishtar with the sculpture of Eve with Cain and Abel by the contemporary German sculptor Adolf Brütt. Such comparisons extend the terms of reference for Babylonian artifactual production to those of a widely beloved work of modern art.

Modern frames of reference abounded for the reception of Babylon. This was perhaps most obvious in connection with the single privileged observer to whom all was directed: Kaiser Wilhelm. The description of Paul Carus, a German-American observer of "Babel-Bibel," of the influence of Delitzsch on the Kaiser clearly mentions reasons behind the Kaiser's support of archaeology, but also discloses perhaps more than was intended on the specific public awareness of the nature of Mesopotamian art and culture.

Through Delitzsch, the emperor became familiar with the religion of ancient Babylon, and he took a liking to the Assyrians. The Assyrian guards were so much like the Prussian grenadiers; their kings were generals enjoying the display of armies; they believed in the religion of the mailed fist and bestowed much attention upon the military, even as to the minute details of hairdressing . . . Certainly the similarities were so many and so striking that the emperor felt the thrill of kinship and showed himself willing to transfer the nimbus from the chosen people to the rulers of ancient Babylon.⁴⁰

While, as Carus noted, the Kaiser may have been able to transfer allegiance quickly from the Holy Land to Mesopotamia (whether Assyria or Babylonia), other parties were less willing. The outcome of the second "Babel-Bibel" lecture shows that, although Delitzsch's presentation may well have accorded with the wishes and suppositions of the Kaiser, he could also be directly attacked for them as the Kaiser himself could not be. As much as he was the beneficiary of royal power, he became a lightning rod for criticism of that power. A brief survey of the periodical circulation of, and reaction to, the second "Babel-Bibel" lecture will elaborate the situation.

Delitzsch's views, first of all, were not at all universally abhorred. The Aryanness of the Assyrian princess, for example, seems rarely to have been disputed, a striking measure of the general acceptability of Delitzsch's anti-semitic tendency. Further, his views on the commonality of Babylonian and Hebrew doctrine were largely supported by the scholarly figures who entered the fray.⁴¹

But Delitzsch's increasingly hardened hostility to aspects of established religious doctrine was not forgivable. Extraordinary and repeated attacks against Delitzsch, and even the Kaiser's support of the DOG, appeared in leading newspapers of conservative and reactionary religious audiences, not only Evangelical Protestant but also Catholic.⁴² Their disapproval of the lectures frequently mentioned the liberal theology of Adolf von Harnack, which they feared was tied to the lectures. Sloganeering against the lectures frequently tied the name "Bebel" to the lectures.⁴³ August Bebel was a central figure in the Marxist Social Democratic Party with little other direct connection to the controversy beside an unfortunate homonymic quality. Nonetheless, this bizarre conjunction of perceived enemies of a reactionary religious movement exemplifies the ideological refiguration of Delitzsch's words, and Assyrian research more generally, through the political crux around it. Much as Delitzsch invoked a kind of imagined community of Berlin and Babylon, another one was invoked in opposing it.

We have already noted briefly the coverage of Delitzsch in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, which was initially neutral while later mocking. Although it was the single most-circulated periodical of its time, its doggerel verse only begins to reflect the coverage of Delitzsch. Many satirical periodicals relentlessly and publicly lampooned Delitzsch. For "Babel-Bibel" Delitzsch was raked over the coals of the generally savage and reactionary humor magazines of the time. Such magazines were hardly a new invention, but this sort of treatment is a development largely unprecedented in the previous milieu. It testifies in another way to the ending of the general consensus of coverage that characterized the nineteenth century.

Foremost was *Lüstige Blätter*, published in Berlin and itself with a circulation of nearly double that of *Illustrierte Zeitung*. The magazine devoted much of the entire

year's coverage in 1903 to lampooning and denigrating the affair as in this excerpt from a "lullaby" [Wiegenlied].⁴⁴

Babel Bibel Bebel
 Der Mensch braucht einen Säbel
 Denn wenn er ohne Säbel ist
 So wird er nie ein guter Christ
 Babel Bibel Bebel
 Babel Bebel Bibel
 Das Wissen ist vom Uebel;
 Die Wahrheit, die gebraucht man nicht
 Und für den Klerus taugt sie nicht
 Babel Bebel Bibel

[Babel Bibel Bebel/ Man needs a Sabre/ And if he is without a sabre/ Then he can't be a good Christian/ Babel Bibel Bebel//Babel Bebel Bibel/ Learning is no good;/ Truth, which is not needed/ And for the clergy is worthless/ Babel Bebel Bibel]

Much more existed in this vein. Delitzsch had presented a situation ripe for two major themes of *Lustige Blätter*, its religious intolerance and relentless, sarcastic hounding of academic/intellectual figures. A poem on the following page demanded that the Kaiser make his own opinion clear.

The pressure on Kaiser Wilhelm was considerable. He soon acceded to the demands of the dominant, reactionary coalition. Even while the Kaiser himself characterized the outbreak as a misunderstanding, he issued a public letter distancing himself from the theological overtones of Delitzsch's position and entreating the professor to confine his remarks to more scholarly publications.⁴⁵

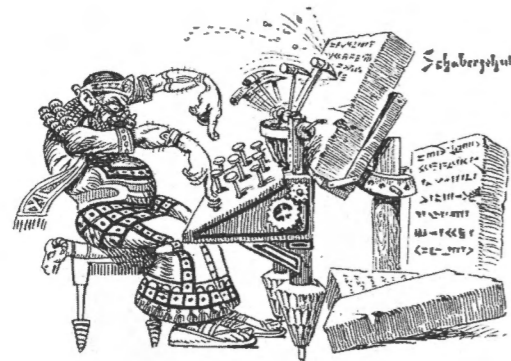
Five weeks later, an entire "Babylon number" of *Lustige Blätter* was devoted to lampooning not only Delitzsch but Mesopotamia as a whole. Its cover (see Fig. 72) was drawn in a mock Mesopotamian style on a seeming ancient tablet and depicted a battle between Delitzsch and the conservative theologian, Adolf Stoecker, dueling with published tracts and brochures. Within the issue were numerous satirical and anachronistic images and articles. A sample page (see Fig. 73) presents a cuneiform typewriter as well as a scene on "Unter den Cedern" paralleling the contemporary Unter den Linden in Berlin. The same Assyrian "Gilgamesh" relief in Paris, which we have seen variously figured throughout the French reception, now becomes a cautionary public sign from the ancient "Polizei-Praesidium" reminding citizens that dogs must be walked with leashes. The issue of *Lustige Blätter* exemplifies a new kind of public arena into which Mesopotamia is drawn. Its sarcasm is amusing, but also distinctly hostile to the interests of Delitzsch. Indeed, the brief article on the same page, entitled "the Secret of Cuneiform" is devoted to lampooning the idea that there is any such secret. Compared to the diligent treatment of cuneiform



72. *Lustige Blätter*, Babylon Number, cover, 1903.

by *The Illustrated London News* that we have seen previously, this strikes a new note of hostility even toward the unique linguistic focus of Germany's particular Assyriological effort.

At the same time, ironically enough, these images demonstrate the continuing currency of Assyrian artifacts. They stage the very association between ancient Mesopotamia and contemporary Germany appealed to in the lectures. Further, a later parody of Delitzsch, among a rogue's gallery of "Vivant Professores" shows him "pinned by a Babylonian bull against the church wall." The Assyrian bull (though here rechristened Babylonian) in fact remains the invariable trademark of Mesopotamia. Yet even, then, if "Babel-Bibel" was harmful (though not fatal) to Delitzsch as a public figure, the imagery of Mesopotamia itself was not fundamentally disrupted or amended. Perhaps the only real effect it may have had on state policy is to support the continual deferral of opening to the public the museum's Ancient Near Eastern collections.



Schreibmaschine für Keilschrift.

Das Geheimniss der Keilschrift.

Für den Laien, der sich niemals mit derlei Dingen beschäftigt hat, ist die Entzifferung von Keilschriften keine ganz einfache Angelegenheit. Die nachstehenden Winke werden ihm indes die Aufgabe wesentlich erleichtern.

Man verschaffe sich zunächst eine altassyrische Tafel, auf der die betreffenden Zeichen eingraviert sind. Alsdann versuche man es von rechts nach links, und wenn dies kein Resultat ergibt, von links nach rechts, und zwar solange, bis man sich an die merkwürdigen Schriftzüge gewöhnt hat. Bald wird das Auge einzelne Schriftgruppen unterscheiden lernen. Diejenige Gruppe, die am häufigsten wiederkehrt, bedeutet natürlich den König Sargon I., und man erkennt nunmehr den Werth der einzelnen Buchstaben, nämlich:

𐎶	= S	𐎶	= G
𐎵	= A	𐎵	= O
𐎴	= R	𐎴	= N

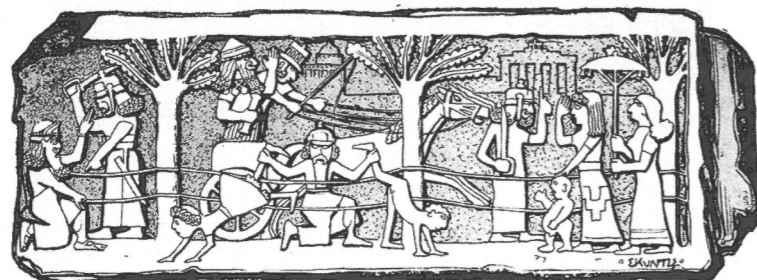
Auf diese Weise fährt man fort, bis man alle Buchstaben ermittelt hat, wonach die fließende Lektüre des Ganzen nur noch eine Frage der Geduld ist.

Das Berliner Museum verleiht und verkauft solche Tafeln zu billigen Preisen. Will man eine Reihe von Keilschrift-Büchern zu einem Bande vereinigen, so vermeide man den gewöhnlichen Buchbinderleim und nehme lieber Cement oder Mörtel. Zur Bettelkürze eignen sich nur die leichteren Keilschriften, weil die schwereren zu sehr auf den Brustkasten drücken. Ergiebt sich irgendwo eine Leseschwierigkeit

(Das Geheimniss der Keilschrift) oder vermuthet man einen sinnstörenden Druckfehler, so sende man das Exemplar mit einer höflichen Anfrage an Delitzsch und erbitte es sich unter Kreuzband retour. Bei ausgeleihen Keilschrift-Steinen beachte man, dass das Museum die Platten nur dann zurücknimmt, wenn keine Easiohären hincingemacht worden sind. In jedem Falle hüte man sich davor, mit den Keilschrift-Tafeln einen Postiv-Glänbigen anzupresseln oder einen Synodalen vor den Bauch zu stossen.



RELIEF VOM POLIZEI-PRAESIDIUM VON KARKEMISCH.



Absperrung der Strasse „Unter den Cedern“ in Ninive. Bei Babylonern und Medern ... Die Avenue „Unter den Cedern“ War Königsfest oder Concert ... War abgeperrt!

6 LUSTIGE BLÄTTER No. 71

73. Lustige Blätter, Babylon Number, sample page, 1903.

The Kaiser, further, did not completely abandon Delitzsch, or Mesopotamian archaeology. But the last of Delitzsch's three lectures was ultimately delivered away from Berlin and far from any royal palace. Its ultimate publication, and even that of a summary pamphlet by Delitzsch, *Babel-Bibel: Retrospect and Prospect* received barely a mention in the publications that had so protested the earlier lectures. The books also sold considerably less.

The "Babel-Bibel" affair was perhaps the most politically trying situation in which ancient Mesopotamia had been caught since its initial discovery. Far from

marginalizing the Ancient Near East, this is a symptom of its successful absorption in a Western milieu. From the start of its Western reception, we have seen how Ancient Near Eastern artifacts have entered into larger contexts and forced disruptions of established orders and terms. The deeper that disruptive agent penetrates into Western discourse, the more bitter can be the struggle. Ultimately, however, an exotic object can become fully domesticated in its horizon as the horizontal shift makes way to accommodate it. After which, the exoticist process begins anew. To one figure, the bitter divisions of "Babel-Bibel" even provided a model for emerging conflicts in the art world itself.⁴⁶

Germany's Babylonian archaeology continued, unearthing artifacts of a truly unprecedented aesthetic. But they remained housed at Koldewey's site in Babylon or otherwise unavailable and had little Western presence until much after the First World War. Nor have they supplanted Assyria in the popular imagination in more recent times. In any case, both the material circumstances of Koldewey's finds and the overwhelmingly negative response and public rebuke to Delitzsch blocked his promotion of Babylonia, including whatever particular or even aesthetic interest could be mobilized for the formal specifics of its artifacts. The continued public association of Mesopotamia with Assyrian forms, despite the vast increase in knowledge of other genres of Ancient Near Eastern production by the early twentieth century, testifies to the hardening and conventionalizing of the Mesopotamian referent.

Indeed, this very process began in Germany at just this time. A retrenchment in circles of power led to a retrenchment in the image of Mesopotamia itself, turning away from Babylon altogether. Significantly, the last of the Kaiser's official German actions promoting Mesopotamia in the early twentieth century, the 1908 production of *Sardanapal*, explicitly relies on the predisccovery image of Mesopotamia, though fused by Delitzsch to archaeological and historicist detail. Only here, as alternative to the interpretive modalities of "Babel-Bibel," is Mesopotamia presented in an aestheticized context. At the same time, the conditions of the institutional staging of the opera leave no doubt about the continuity of power behind the continued privileging of Assyria.

SARDANAPAL, HISTORISCHE PANTOMIME

Vexed as it was, then, the "Babel-Bibel" controversy was hardly fatal to Delitzsch's interests or German archaeology in the Middle East. The controversy clearly indicates a striking antipathy, both social and ideological, between audiences in Germany at the time. But it also displays, in a way unlike either the English or French receptions, the continuing dominance of centralized, royal power in promulgating Mesopotamia.

Delitzsch's earlier, almost instant turn from the challenge of the first "Babel-Bibel" lecture to the entertaining travelogue of *In the Land of Ancient Paradise* is a mark of his continuing control under a structure of absolute power culminating in the Kaiser himself. After "Babel-Bibel," Delitzsch again retreated, returning to previously successful forms of publicization of German archaeology, following the theme of his *Ex Oriente Lux!* of 1899 with *More Light* in 1907.⁴⁷

Yet this seeming retrenchment continued efforts at publicization. As the Kaiser himself recalled it:

After I realized that Assyriology, which concerned so many significant people, including many religious figures of both [Protestant and Catholic] faiths, had nonetheless not been understood and appreciated for its significance by the general public, I had my old and trusted friend, and brilliant theatrical manager, Count Hülsen-Haeseler produce "Assurbanipal," which was staged after a long preparation under the supervision of the German Orient Society.⁴⁸

In effect acknowledging it as a reaction to "Babel-Bibel," Kaiser Wilhelm represented his action as one of public benefit, a corrective to misguided resistance to the archaeological efforts he continued to sponsor. At the same time, his action had the effect of reasserting his dominance upon the representation of Mesopotamia and indeed moved the construal to a field in which he had more direct control: from popular press to royal opera house. Not merely Delitzsch, but many of the DOG's leading figures were directly employed in the enterprise.

The stated goal of *Sardanapal*, *Historische Pantomime* was nothing less than an exact recreation of ancient Assyria as detailed by the most advanced scholarship. The Kaiser's official invitations to the premiere on September 8th, 1908 at the Berlin Royal Opera House describe the production simply as one "in which will be presented an archaeologically true representation of ancient Assyrian life."⁴⁹ A brochure accompanying the production acknowledged in detail how features were copied from original Ancient Near Eastern monuments as well as accepted scholarly reconstructions.

Its historicized, researched nature was the production's hallmark and was referred to in almost all publicity and reviews. The Kaiser's stated wish begot an operatic production whose visual detailing (of sets, costume, etc.) was derived as completely as possible from contemporary research. Moreover, as we shall see, the greatest innovation of the production was its thematizing of this research itself within the play. And yet, at the same time that Germany's unprecedented new discoveries and heightened scholarly capabilities would seem to mark new progress in revealing Mesopotamian antiquity, *Sardanapal*'s claim of more "truly" realizing and communicating ancient culture through modern discoveries was thoroughly chimerical.

A brief treatment of the work's substance (both visual and textual) and its reception will reveal that even as *Sardanapal* trumpeted its advanced and authoritative

conception, it actually presented a melange of features derived from earlier representations together with archaeological and philological material from a variety of sources. Further, in its reception the play augmented, indeed virtually completed, the absorption into Western expectation of long-held stereotypes of ancient Mesopotamia. By this process it attempted to undo the damage of "Babel-Bibel," cementing the relationship of Mesopotamian archaeology and established power. This too is a retrospective and reactionary stance.

Sardanapal took as its subject not Babylonia, but Assyria. That is, it turned away from the unique discovery of German archaeology, presenting instead the most conventional and best-known of all Western tales associated with Mesopotamia, that of the end of the Assyrian empire. Indeed, as theatrical production, *Sardanapal* harked back to the highly successful formula of Charles Kean's *Sardanapalus* we have seen previously. Both embellished an inherited, unsubstantiated story with the fruits of modern discovery. Delitzsch's attempt in "Babel-Bibel" to revise positively the estimation of ancient Mesopotamia is now neutralized. Instead the view promoted of ancient Mesopotamian culture is now as conventionalized as was his travelogue account of modern Mesopotamia.

Indeed, despite the vaunted effect of scholarly effort, what is most striking about the Berlin production of *Sardanapal* is how much it shares not only with the London play, but even the (similarly spectacular) predisciplinary conceptions of Delacroix and Martin with which we began this study. The story represented in Berlin was essentially the same one shared by all the earlier sources: of the refined/effete despotic ruler whose tantalizing, troubled kingdom comes to an end in a huge, self-made conflagration. Though the Germans' scholarly and archaeological discoveries did in many ways outdo the labors of the French and English even on ancient Assyria (much less in trumping the inability of the other powers to find Babylon), this choice of opera marks a sort of epistemological retreat: a folding of difference into sameness, acknowledging more publicity is to be gained by confirming rather than amending expectation.

The opera's very title, *Sardanapalus* (in English), serves as emblem of the production's conscious harking back. Despite the particular claim to knowledge of the language of the Ancient Near East (the singular expertise of German scholarship of the time, as asserted even within the play), the central character is not even construed through his own name, Assurbanipal, but rather the more fanciful name, *Sardanapalus*, bequeathed by Greek historians.

In notes to the libretto as well as a more scholarly excursus on the production, Delitzsch rationalized the choice.⁵⁰ The name *Sardanapalus* is associated, he asserted, with the highest renown of the Assyrian "Weltreich." Moreover, he emphasized and praised particularly the militarist, empire building activity associated with the Assyrians, ultimately even deeming them true "Übermenschen."⁵¹ Delitzsch's turn to

Assyria, then, was accompanied by a deliberate framing of it in terms of a contemporary language of German aspirations to dominance. Some version of these claims might have been made on behalf of Babylon as well, had not "Babel-Bibel" intervened in the public associations of the term. Yet Delitzsch now deliberately attempted to accept the ancient tales of Greeks and Hebrews about the Assyrians, which he had previously devoted more time to undermining.

Delitzsch's approach had the effect of opening up the production to the specifics of Ancient Near Eastern art and culture. As the twenty-six-page accompanying brochure to the production acknowledges, many features of set, costume, and decor were copied from Ancient Near Eastern monuments, in the British Museum and elsewhere. The sets as a whole, however, were adapted from designs by Walter Andrae. Andrae was a talented artist, and, together with Koldewey, Germany's leading Mesopotamian archaeologist.⁵² Having begun under Koldewey's excavations at Babylon, he soon was chosen to lead a further excavation sponsored by the DOG to Assur: the first Assyrian capital. While still on site in Mesopotamia, Andrae had been commissioned by the Royal Opera to design stage sets for the Berlin production and had sent three watercolor drawings. The following year, as he put it on attending the production "In Berlin one thought anxiously about these three sketches, and I almost fell over when my little colored impressions appeared on the vast stage of the opera."⁵³

Andrae's sketches were treated with an unexpected authority. He noted in his memoirs that, although the demands of the stage production would have seemed to be easily accommodated from what was known from recovered Assyrian reliefs, in fact there was much that was quite difficult, if not impossible, to deduce. Yet whatever misgiving Andrae himself might have had of the veracity of his sketches, the opera's claim to being "archaeologically true" depended on them.

As Andrae's sketches migrated from Assur to Berlin, they moved from the edge of a power structure to its center. For the archaeologist himself, seeing the effect of the move caused something like vertigo. In the process, Andrae's visual musings were recontextualized as authority. If the move was heady for Andrae, it only points out how well-oriented within the sphere of reception was Delitzsch, the primary guarantor of scholarly veracity. In fact, on the evening of the premiere, through which Delitzsch bestowed "scholarly [wissenschaftliche]" authenticity on the opera, the Kaiser bestowed on Delitzsch membership in the Royal Order of the Red Eagle. *Sardanapal* thus reinforced the tie between Mesopotamian archaeology and its sponsorship. Delitzsch bore overall responsibility for assuring the utmost authenticity to the production, supervising such features as costume, set decoration, and choreography. The opera's accompanying brochure describes him as the work's fundamental author.

Sardanapal's one great innovation lay in an abstracted, allegorical feature that gently reframed its subject content. While the narrative line was essentially unchanged from earlier versions of the subject, an original introductory scene specifically introduces the play as a fruit of German scholarship. In this "Vorspiel," two allegorical figures of "the past" (die Vergangenheit) and "research" (die Forschung) discuss the state of affairs around Mesopotamian archaeology. Alone, the past laments her fall into oblivion,

... der Tod schluckt meinen Ruf
Wie Wasser schluckt das ausgebrannte Land
Und das Vergessen sitzt auf einem Stein
Und weint um mich. . . .⁵⁴
[Death swallows my voice/ Like water swallows the burnt land/ And oblivion sits on a stone/ And cries for me]

until the unexpected entrance of research halts her fatalistic tone. Research speaks forthrightly and at considerable length.

Die eingesunkenen Thore deiner Welt
Sind neugerichtet unter meiner Hand
Und aufgethan – und feiernd steigt das Licht . . .
Sie reden eine Sprache, die wir fühlen
Die Eins mit der ist, die auch dich bewegt
Und dich befreit aus Nacht – und Todesbanden⁵⁵
[The sunken towers of your world/ Are restored anew by my hand/
And opened-And the light rises in celebration// They speak a language,
that we know/ That we are one with, which moves you/ And frees
you from night, and death's prison]

The German *Sardanapal* celebrates not only archaeological discoveries, but also allegorizes the contemporary process of discovery and decipherment. This specific internalization of the fruits of research and knowledge is the unique hallmark of the play overseen by the scholar Delitzsch.

But if *Sardanapal* acknowledged contemporary motivations more explicitly than earlier productions, it still drew on problematic, if not contradictory, sources. While Andrae, as we have seen, freely admitted the dubiousness of the claim to archaeological "truth," the production nonetheless depended on this belief. The set of the second major scene, for instance, the audience hall of Sardanapalus, is replete with reliefs, furniture, and decorative motifs from Assyrian sources (see Fig. 74). The king reclines on a couch in a manner derived from the Assyrian banquet relief in the British Museum (see Fig. 45), while the passageway to the left of the couch even includes the cuneiform "standard inscription" found innumerable times in Assyrian palaces. With Delitzsch in charge, philological precision was practiced even on stage.



74. *Sardanapal*, *Historische Pantomime*, scene from Act 2, 1908. *Der Weltspiegel*, September 6, 1908.

Yet far from merely reflecting antiquity by copying known objects or designs, *Sardanapal* worked to actually produce antiquity. In fact, Delitzsch promised to put the furnishings from the production directly on display in the Ancient Near East Section of the Royal Museums, next to Mesopotamian antiquities themselves.⁵⁶ In remarkable contrast to Andrae's acknowledgement of the incompleteness of contemporary knowledge, Delitzsch's proposal for museum display offered the contemporary knowledge of the Mesopotamian past as contiguous with Mesopotamian antiquity itself.

The logical assumption of Delitzsch's action at the museum is precisely that contained in the "Vorspiel" to *Sardanapal*, that through contemporary research the present viewer is one with ("Eins mit") the ancient past. This, in turn, underlies what is implicit throughout Delitzsch's popular writing: that (especially after the German discovery of Babylon) the great Mesopotamian discoveries, both artifactual and linguistic, had all been made. The paradigm had been assembled and only details were left.

Yet despite this claim to closure, to a sufficient and systematic knowledge of Mesopotamia, when one looks at the opera setting as historicized construct, traces of mediation and invention stand out immediately. The lion head rugs at far right, for example, have no referent in Assyrian reliefs, but do, of course, bespeak barbarism

and luxury in a modern Western manner, tied loosely to an animal associated with Assyrian kings. More central, and traceable even to Andrae's original designs, are the squat animal figures with nearly human faces holding up a decorated column at far left in the photo. This jarring feature derives from the guardian lions of Zincirli in north Syria, fruit of the single major German excavation in the Ancient Near East before the DOG, as we have noted. While the North Syrian forms may well have been somehow related to those of ancient Assyria, they are culturally and geographically distant from it. Nonetheless, much was made in the opera of these Zincirli lions, becoming a virtual emblem of Germany's archaeology in the region.⁵⁷ The juxtaposition of Zincirli's forms with those of Nineveh took place not on the basis of ancient precedent so much as their common connection to Germany's archaeological activity. The insertion of the Zincirli forms projected, literally, a German claim on the image of Assyria, visually disputing those of France and England.

Delitzsch's design for the actions of the opera did not neglect prevailing expectations of sex and violence. Much of the second scene was taken up with dramatic dancing, notably by odalisques. The program specified one female each of Phoenician, Chaldean, Egyptian, Ethiopian, and Jewish origin. Only in this indirect manner were the "Aryan" Assyrian rulers distinguished from the subject female dancers, which grouped Semitic and African peoples. Thus too its hierarchical display of races bore an ordering of gender.

Much was made throughout the opera of both forms of racial and gender distinction, with dramatic contrasts of skin color as slaves and concubines populated each act. Such effects hark back precisely to the themes of Orientalist painting with which we have begun. The dramatic entry of the triumphant Medes, and Sardanapalus' conflagration, in effect combined the conceptions of Delacroix and Martin with the historicist literalness of Rochegrosse.

Delitzsch's opera, then, used some of the latest methods and findings to confirm the national, gender, and racial assumptions and prejudices of his audience. Even as he was built up as a distant forbear, the eventual demise of Sardanapalus keeps him from serving as a real threat to contemporary identity, precisely as we have seen in images of the subject as early as Delacroix's.

In all, even though *Sardanapal* was shrewdly produced to fit the needs of its unique milieu, it shows just how much the image of Delitzsch's time shared and depended on the models of Mesopotamian representation which had emerged previously among Germany's rivals. "Babel-Bibel"'s attempt to establish Babylon as a new term in the public consciousness, with specific ties to Germany, was thus decisively turned away from in favor of the wider and more established image of Assyria.

Reviews of *Sardanapal* were largely positive. Most were polite and many enthusiastic. *Neue Preussische Zeitung* praised the opera's "beautiful and true images." The

Berliner Lokal Anzeiger, one of the city's predominant daily newspapers, deemed it not only a vivid, living picture of history (much as Kean's production was praised), but also an attempt at a new kind of historical/scholarly theatre piece. "It was an attempt to claim a new field for the stage, and the attempt has been crowned by the most glorious success." Most reviewers used the opera to speak proudly of Germany's scientific progress in unearthing Mesopotamia.⁵⁸

As Jauss describes it, objects migrate within the quasi-assimilative horizon of expectation, so that readers find their texts and texts find their readers.⁵⁹ Analogously, we might say that with the representation of Mesopotamia in early twentieth-century Germany not only do audiences find images, but images find audiences. Audiences, that is, clearly judged images, while images changed in response to audiences. Mesopotamia's migration from the political hurly burly of "Babel-Bibel" to the rarefied realm of high opera, and its metamorphosis from Babylon to Assyria, testifies to the continuing power of Assyria over the popular image of Mesopotamia. This is also a figure of the formative role of England, its reputation now clearly linked to Assyria, just as we have seen forecast by Rossetti and acknowledged from the start by Delitzsch.

But it is the fundamentally retrospective nature of Delitzsch's claim to go beyond England that is at the heart of his failure to surpass it with the name of Babylon. For beyond the particulars of geopolitics lay the transformations of audiences and media from nineteenth-century England (and France) to those coming onto the scene in early twentieth-century Germany. The England Delitzsch looked back at was no longer there, no longer addressable in the same way. Having seen how fundamental *The Illustrated London News* was to Assyria's rise in England, we now see the consequences of a new generation of popular journal coming into dominance, as represented by the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung's* taking of the lead from the older *Illustrierte Zeitung*.

We return, then, briefly to the realm of art to see what is visually figured within this situation. Notably, there is far less Mesopotamian imagery of any kind than in the previous milieu, symptomatic of the waning of the entire sequence of Mesopotamian reception. Nonetheless, considering three points in contemporary art and visual culture we can gauge the visual elaboration of Mesopotamia within the milieu we have analyzed.

MESOPOTAMIA IN GERMAN VISUAL CULTURE

Nolde's reminiscence of the public's largely disdainful attitude toward considering Assyrian artifacts as works of art, with which we began this chapter, does indeed appear characteristic of the German milieu, despite (perhaps even because of, for some) Delitzsch's occasional words of aesthetic praise for Mesopotamia. It also

holds true despite the absorption of Assyria in universal narratives of art history in Germany at the time, a central sticking point of the mid-nineteenth century in both France and England.⁶⁰ Finally, as we have seen, Berlin's Mesopotamian collections languished in a separate building with irregular hours, its renovation continually deferred, a situation that both reflected and contributed to Assyria's marginalization. All of this suggests a situation in which the artifacts of Mesopotamia now presented neither an exceptional resistance to, nor prominence within, established artistic schemes and institutions. This is the very meaning of absorption within a Jaussian horizon: the achievement of unexceptionalness.

Indeed, even as he used his love of Ancient Near Eastern art to distinguish himself from others, Nolde's activity as artist also continued the public skirting of Mesopotamia. Even though he saw Egypt and Assyria as their vanguard, Nolde's work was more beholden to later-arriving "Primitivist" objects (from African masks to South Sea implements to Native American figurines). A look at Nolde's pragmatic, object-oriented drawings from the time turns up no Assyrian imagery and few of Egypt, but numerous studies of Korean, Nigerian, Yoruban, Native American and other "ethnological" artifacts from the Museum für Völkerkunde.⁶¹

Mesopotamia itself was not unknown in German art and visual culture of the time, but distinctly constrained in a way that visualizes some of the tensions and arguments we have seen. In 1899, the year the Babylon excavations began, an Assyrian object (as a figure of all Mesopotamia) had already been enshrined in a learned, academic context in Germany. That year the prominent Düsseldorf history painter Fritz Roeber completed a series of paintings in the "Aula" (auditorium) of the Royal Academy (later University) of Münster.⁶² These works celebrated the educational and civic function of the school. A series of portraits of politicians and personnel of the academy, as well as the emblematic Alma Mater took up a considerable portion of the wall space. But place of pride was devoted to four monumental paintings allegorizing the four main areas of instruction: law, theology, natural science, history, and philology.

Roeber's image devoted to the last of these areas (see Fig. 75) is of interest here. In the artist's own description, the precise title is "*History and Philology Wake the Forms of the Past to New Life*."⁶³ The subject is an allegorical one, in the tradition established by artists such as Peter Cornelius and Roeber's teacher, Eduard Bendemann. At left is the portal of the temple of history, guarded by two female figures. One holds a book, in which great deeds are recorded for posterity. The other holds a wreath, and in bestowing it presents the judgment of history. Directly below them are two other figures, representing the teaching of the faculties. The female figure is Philology, "the greatest transmitter of all historical knowledge." She holds the Rosetta stone inscription in her left hand while viewing other ancient inscriptions at right. Below her is a figure described as "the god of time" who sits by a prehistoric



75. Fritz Roeber, *History and Philology Wake the Forms of the Past to New Life*, oil sketch for ceiling painting, University Auditorium, Münster. Completed 1898. Photo: Universitätsarchiv, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster.

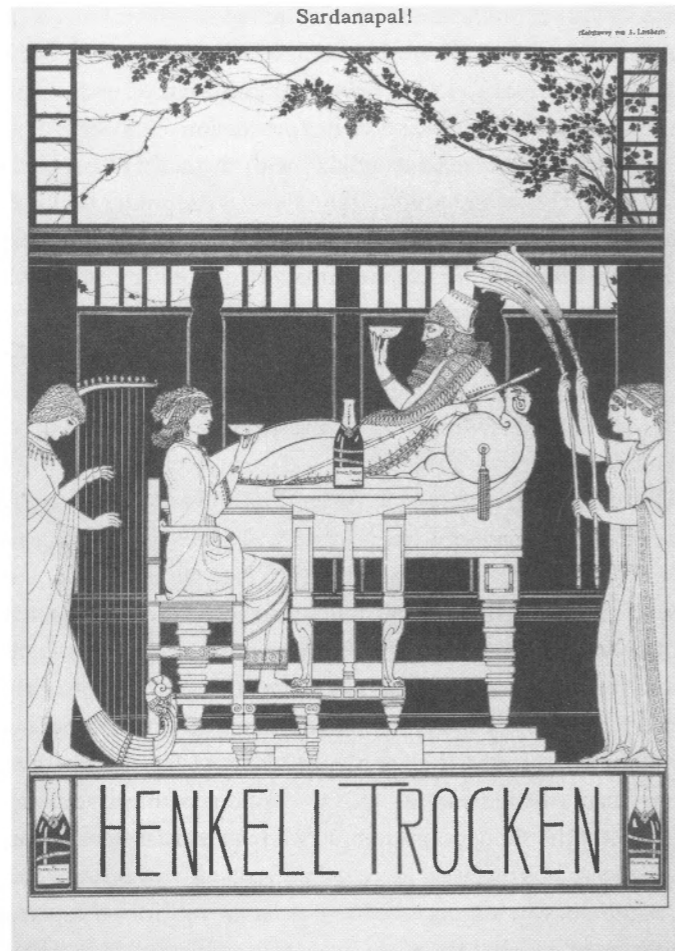
grave with works “as yet unilluminated by the torch of linguistic knowledge.” Representing history, he has pulled to the side a veil, which he holds with both hands, so that it no longer obscures the view of many figures from the historical past.

These figures of the historical past float in a procession to the right of the didactic figures. At the front is “Pharaoh’s daughter” with the child Moses. Behind her is Ramses the great, the Pharaoh himself, while above is Alexander the Great, bestride a horse. Alexander has caught with his sword the laurel thrown by the figure of judgment. Farther back is Julius Caesar surrounded by senators, while a group of angels floats at the top of the image, bringing the historical lineage into the present and suggesting the future.

This range and grouping is roughly conventional, but for one additional figure almost exactly at the center of the composition. Behind Ramses, and before Alexander, holding a pike in a muscled arm, is a figure described as Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king “who enslaved Jerusalem.” His headdress, beard, anatomical details, and likely even the three-quarters view, all derive from the characteristic forms of the Assyrian winged bull and genies (cf. Figs. 23, 34).

In this allegory of academic interpretation, the same philology which then was being raised to prominence in Delitzsch’s appointment in Berlin is made virtually supernatural in its ability to summon the forms of the past. In this, it closely resembles the conception we have seen acted out in Delitzsch’s *Sardanapal*. Yet, unlike Delitzsch, Roeber presents Assyrian imagery as Babylonian. Although the conflation may be particularly striking in an academic context, it amounts to but another iteration of the slippage, or mobility, of the exoticist signifier we have seen at work throughout. It is precisely the same move made by Rochegrosse in his *Fall of Babylon*. But there is an important difference between the two. Rochegrosse’s salon painting is historical, and (however dubiously) retrospective. Roeber’s subject, made for an academic context, is history itself, and prospective, forward-looking. It celebrates, like Delitzsch, Germany’s own intellectual power, and channels it toward the future, in the drive toward Babylon that dominated the time. Roeber’s image, made in almost the same year Rochegrosse abandoned Mesopotamian exoticism, is perhaps the last to employ the pattern of mobility, the exoticist calculus of representation, we have seen at work throughout the nineteenth century. It sees the future of understanding Mesopotamia, that is, as its past. In this, Roeber’s work too announces a closure, one symptomatic of full assimilation within a milieu of reception. It is the end of the Mesopotamian dream world, the waning of the expectation of a now-established visual typology being superseded. This can perhaps be made more evident by confronting Roeber’s work with another Mesopotamian image, from somewhat later in the reception and a very different realm of circulation.

A 1911 magazine advertisement for a popular brand of champagne (see Fig. 76) was titled “Sardanapal!” and adapted the same Assyrian banquet image we have



76. Alfred Lambert, *Henkell Trocken Advertisement*, engraving, *Simplizissimus*, 1911.

seen reused throughout the reception (see Fig. 45).⁶⁴ Many details of furniture and setting are copied precisely from the relief (beside the largely invented setting at the top of the image). The advertisement medium would seem to make none of the claim to learning and precision of Roeber's vast and lauded wall painting. Yet, like Delitzsch's opera, with which it shares a title, the advertisement shows considerably more knowledge of the specifics of Assyrian imagery than the work of the academic painter. The inclusion of the king's helmet displays a knowledge of the costume proper to an Assyrian king, extending beyond the information in the banquet scene relief. This degree of specificity and concern about the king is reminiscent of the detailed treatment we have seen earlier in Brown's *Dream of Sardanapalus* (see Fig. 44), in which the same helmet is included.

Even more, this advertisement shares with the opera a retrospective focus, a returning to Assyria that enacts in another way a closing of the sequence of exoticizing Mesopotamia. With the same force as the opera, it grafts a modern kind of gendering onto the ancient image. The generic treatment of the women in the image directly contravenes the treatment of the king in a way that transforms the Assyrian original. In the Assyrian relief (see Fig. 45), king and queen seem to be drinking to one another, with heads clearly raised above those of the attending servants. But what is a dominant difference of class in the Assyrian relief is recoded in the modern version as a difference of gender. The advertisement lowers the queen to precisely the level of the attendants, whereas the head of the king is raised even further by portraying him with royal headgear. Further, the women in the image are derived more directly, in coiffure, costume, and facial detail from ancient Greek imagery rather than any Assyrian source.

Among Delitzsch's many claims in "Babel-Bibel," he asserted that Babylonian women were treated as social equals to men. The advertisement image represents a counter-vision of gendered inequality, subordinating all females in the image, queen and servants alike. Moreover, it keeps them aloof even from the representational assumptions of Assyrian art, preferring the delicacy of Grecian-derived female imagery. Finally, one can hardly ignore the phallic champagne bottle which perches on the king's lap at the center of the image, prefiguring what remains one of the most common and blatant devices of alcohol advertising. This advertisement, then, is clearly a beneficiary of the awareness of Mesopotamia promoted, for good or ill, by Delitzsch's activities. It elaborates, in a different register of visual culture, the same neutralizing logic of reaction and stereotyping as the opera itself, the same anchoring of the dominant image of Mesopotamia within the expectations of a contemporary status quo.

As a final image suggests, in the highly nationalistic nature of the milieu of late Wilhelmine Germany, the failure to establish Germany's Babylon as an independent term, and subsequent retreat to Assyria, may have had its own constraining effect. Lacking the ability to truly "Germanize" Assyria (despite the best efforts of the decor of *Sardanapal*), a focus on Assyria inevitably brought up the image of England now encoded within it.

A final image, also chronologically last, deliberately makes use of nationalistic overtones. Made early in the First World War from a standpoint of direct national opposition, it specifically pictures England through its Assyrian acquisitions. Significantly, it is perhaps the most direct and detailed German visual reference to Assyrian artifacts of the entire period. August Gaul's 1916 lithograph (see Fig. 77), given place of pride on the cover of *Der Bildermann*, fundamentally copies one of the most striking images of any Assyrian relief, a unique and specific one in the



77. August Gaul, *Kut el Amara* from *Der Bildermann: Steinzeichnungen fürs deutsche Volk*, no. 4, May 20, 1916, lithograph. Photo: © 2003 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

collection of the British Museum.⁶⁵ In Gaul's image, the Assyrian "Dying Lioness" relief from Nineveh (see Fig. 78) is reversed and the great paws of the animal in the relief are transformed, almost willfully disempowered. But the most striking change is that by which the entire image is fundamentally recontextualized. Whereas in the original the animal strides a thin ground line that extends into a larger composition, Gaul's figure is tightly framed and placed on an isolated block. Rather than ground line, the area below the animal in Gaul's figure is treated as a sculptural pedestal and inscribed with the words "Kut El Amara."

Kut was the site in Mesopotamia of a British surrender to German forces early in World War One. This dying animal is thus a reference to the emblematic British lion, pictured hopefully in death throes.⁶⁶ Gaul uses an English acquisition to project England's doom. Assyria is most directly detailed where England is directly addressed.



78. Assyrian, *Dying Lioness* from Nineveh, 7th c. BCE. London, British Museum, ANE 124856. © Copyright, The British Museum.

Gaul was the most popular artist of animal subjects in Germany of the time. Yet, Assyrian animal imagery is notably absent from the rest of his work. Compared to the many Assyrian-influenced works by Briton Riviere considered above, product of a roughly contemporary English artist with similar interests, this wrests further significance from the undeniable paucity of Mesopotamian imagery in Germany of the time. This difference in artistic practice, among otherwise comparable painters, focuses in artistic representation Mesopotamia's different norms of circulation in the different milieux we have examined.

The retrospective and reactionary tone in Germany completes a range of representations over nearly a century. With Germany's late entry in a sort of colonization of the nonclassical past, and despite the real importance of its archaeological discoveries, ends an entire sequence of the European reception of Mesopotamia.

Throughout the time-span of this book, from England to France to Germany, Assyria thus largely maintained its unique appeal, even as further excavation and research broadened and complicated the knowledge of what lay buried in Mesopotamia. Even the country that discovered Babylon, whose efforts had been inspired by, and succeeded, at outdoing those of the major Assyrian excavations, ultimately retreated to the prestige of the more established historical reference. Whatever Germany's victory in archaeology itself and the production of the ancient past, it fell short in the criteria of art and reception.

TOWARD A CONCLUSION

In the continuous time flow of reception, there is no absolute stopping point, beside that of the present. Berlin marks an end only as it exemplifies the negative consequences of maintaining norms of nineteenth-century promulgation in a milieu in which were evolving patterns of media, audience, and promotion characteristic of the twentieth century.

First, as we have seen, by the time of the Berlin controversies, dominant modes of periodical circulation of Mesopotamia began to change fundamentally. The detailed, informational format we have seen from *Illustrated London News* to *Illustrierte Zeitung*, so essential to the earlier milieux of reception, was supplanted by the new dominance of the impressionistic and sarcastic mode we have found in *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*. Second, though much further archaeological inquiry remained, after the German discoveries both the central terms of European reference for ancient Mesopotamia, Nineveh and Babylon, were identified. No further discovery was so resonant to the inherited European image of its ancient Other. In a fundamental way, the West's imaginary repertoire was exhausted. Both the reception of "Babel-Bibel" and the conception of *Sardanapal* testify to a certain hardening of the horizon of expectation: a fixity achieved after a horizontal shift. This shift does not mark a revolutionary change in paradigm but rather an assimilation, as established terms and beliefs are connected to new material and used as supplement to an established whole. In the process, what ideological threat that may have been posed by the unprecedented objects from Mesopotamia was largely neutralized.

Assyria's power to offer material for opposition, which we have seen seized upon from the enemies of the established British Museum to Ruskin to Péladan to Nolde, is dissipated over time, as it is progressively more domesticated within the Western horizon of expectation, and fit to differing ideological uses. We have followed artifacts such as the winged Assyrian colossal or the Louvre's "Gilgamesh" relief on a complex, discontinuous representational trajectory through varied configurations of audiences, nations, and media.

Mesopotamia, as we have seen, could be made soulful or warlike, doomed or heroic, refined or barbaric, even Semitic or Aryan, as demanded. Whatever challenge to Western expectation it may have presented on discovery, it was thus soon forged into a synthesis, a hybrid of past and present demands, clearly responsive to both. But, far from an equal meeting of East and West or past and present, Assyria (and Mesopotamia more generally) was also inevitably a hybridity directed by Western agendas and disciplined by Western power structures.

Finally, underwriting so much of Mesopotamia's rich range of representations and interpretations, we have seen a consistent understanding of it as art. This visually based approach stands at the farthest remove from the textual/philological one

employed in connection with antiquarian, and often religious, authority. The loose and varied framework of aesthetic approaches to Assyrian and other forms of ancient Mesopotamian artifacts – like those of Ruskin, Rossetti, Moreau, Ledrain, Gauguin, or Nolde – served often as an impetus to production. Even more, its different forms and relative strengths in different milieux of reception present perhaps the most sensitive index of the nature and controversy involved in particular moments of reception.

We have seen Mesopotamia as a sort of archaeological battleground throughout this book, and have concluded with an image from it as a military one as well. Whether archaeological or military, it is clear that differing national interests in Mesopotamia were always a factor in differing representations of it in the diachronic interval from Assyria's initial discovery through the First World War. At the same time, having looked closely at a number of cultural moments in England, France, and Germany, we can see that national audiences were divided in different ways, in conflicting social and cultural patterns. As we have seen in detail, in sites of conflict we find conflicting images of Mesopotamia. The varied interpretations and emulations of Mesopotamian art are testimony to the variety and differentiation of the West itself. They testify as well to the fundamental challenge of reception, of its fracturing of unitary identity in the contingencies and complexities of culturally grounded experience. Ultimately, they suggest that, far from a monolithic locale, the unitary "West" may be as fictive, as much a dream, as the exotic "East" of its own presumptions.