Assyrian Stone Vessels
and related material in the British Museum

Ann Searight, Julian Reade
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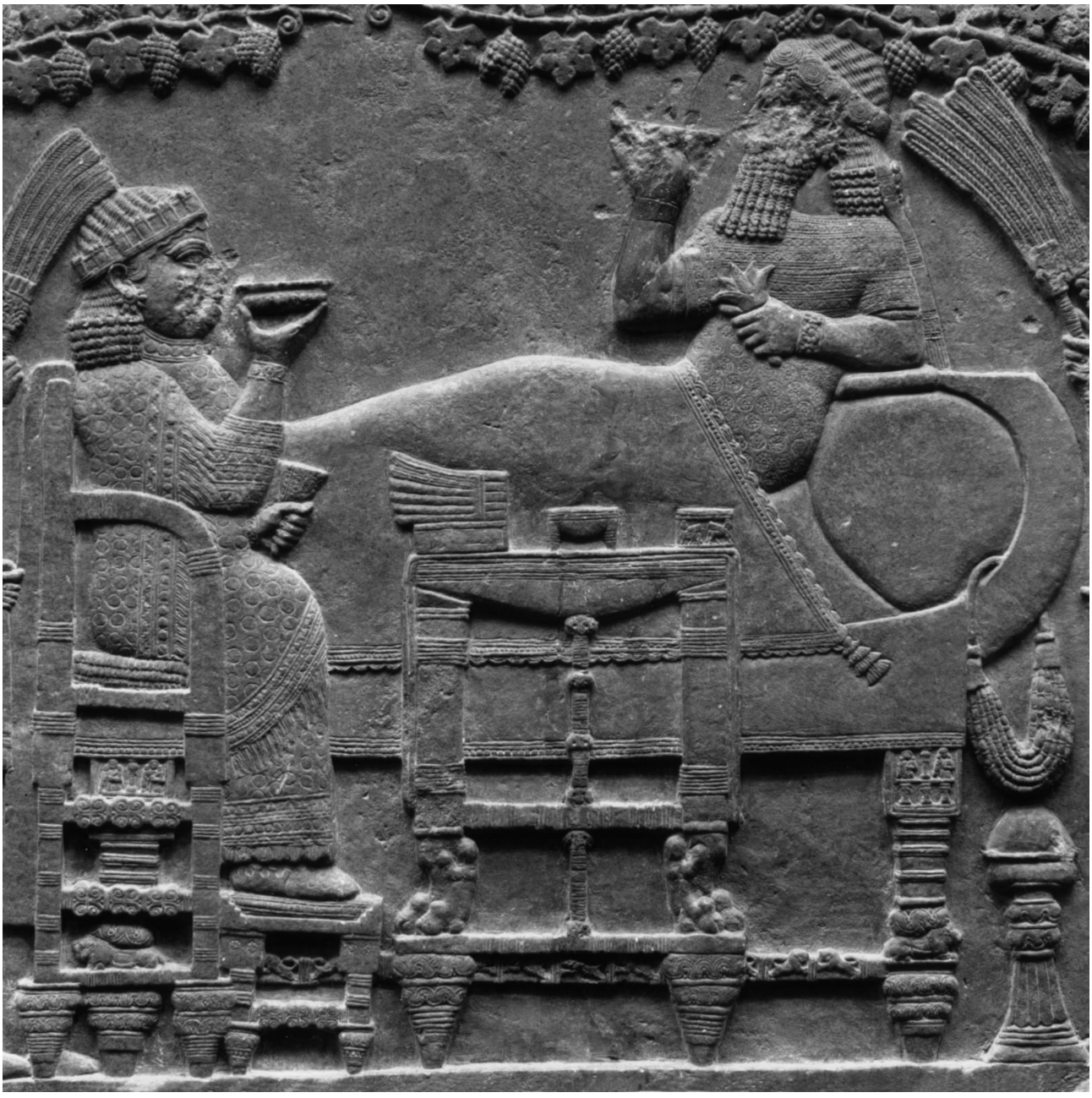

Frontispiece. Assyrian king and queen at table, Nineveh, c. 645 BC (ANE 124920, detail). British Museum photograph.

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by Ann Searight,
Julian Reade
and Irving Finkel

with contributions by
Kenneth Kitchen,
Marcel Marée and
Shahrokh Razmjou

Oxbow Books

Published by
Oxbow Books, Oxford, Uk

ISBN 978-1-84217-312-1

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

This book is available direct from

Oxbow Books, Oxford, UK

and

The David Brown Book Company
PO Box 511, Oakville, CT 06779, USA
Phone:860-945-9329; Fax: 860-945-9468

or from our website

www.oxbowbooks.com

Front cover image: see Frontispiece.
Back cover image: see Catalogue no. 602.

Printed in Great Britain by
The Cromwell Press,
Trowbridge, Wiltshire

Preface

This catalogue makes available to scholars more than 600 complete or fragmentary stone vessels from the Ancient Near East in the rich collections of the British Museum. In common with much other material in the British Museum, many of the pieces were acquired in the nineteenth century, often from excavations, and have therefore an added importance. Some of the pieces have been published before but the vast majority are presented here for the first time. Much of this material is of the type that is often overlooked in museum collections, but although not glamorous it is of great value for studies of material culture, trading connections, technology, and so on. It is therefore expected that the present volume will prove to be an indispensable tool for archaeologists, historians and art historians alike.

The starting-point of this catalogue was some 400 stone vessels and fragments of Late Assyrian date (9th–7th century BC) mostly from sites in the Assyrian homeland in Northern Iraq, particularly Nimrud and Nineveh. In addition there are pieces of comparable date from sites to the west, in modern Syria and Turkey, such as Tell Halaf and Carchemish. As stone vessel forms from the later Babylonian period are closely related to their Assyrian precursors they, too, are included, as are stone vessels of Achaemenid Persian date. It is an interesting fact that some actual Assyrian stone vessels – although not in the British Museum – have been found in the great palaces at Persepolis. Again because of similarities in form and function, prehistoric and early historical period stone vessels from greater Assyria are also included. This brings in sites such as Tell Brak. At the end of the catalogue are assorted stone vessels that will be of great interest for comparative purposes and relate in some way to vessels included in the main part of the catalogue.

This catalogue makes a number of significant contributions but particularly important is the presentation of over 100 pieces inscribed in cuneiform. These are mostly in Assyrian or Babylonian, but there are also examples of Sumerian, Old Persian and Elamite. Other scripts and languages represented include Egyptian hieroglyphs, Aramaic and Luwian. These inscriptions often include important historical information, but in addition they are an important source for dating and provenancing the stone bowls. Very often in the past these inscriptions have been published in isolation and studied for their intrinsic interest alone, but here they are published together with drawings of the vessels on which they occur, so that they can be seen in their proper context.

The selection of the pieces included in this catalogue was made by Julian Reade, who was also responsible for the catalogue entries. The stone vessels were drawn by Ann Searight, and the cuneiform inscriptions were prepared for publication by Irving Finkel. To all of them, scholars will owe a debt of gratitude for making this important material available.

John Curtis, Keeper
Department of the Middle East
The British Museum

Contents

Introduction

1. Collections of stone vessels in the British Museum

The present catalogue fulfils a very long-standing obligation. Between 1845 and 1938 the British Museum financed or sponsored extensive archaeological excavations in the ancient Assyrian territories which lie at the heart of the Near East, in the area now covered by much of northern Iraq and eastern Syria. The purpose, quality and scope of this fieldwork varied over the years, and so did the standards of publication. By now the most spectacular finds have generally been published in some fashion, but much of the more difficult material, including hundreds of stone vessels and vessel fragments, has been neglected. Thus Roger Moorey (1994: 54), discussing the evidence for Mesopotamian stone vessels and manufacturing processes, was led to comment that "persistent inadequacy of publication cripples any attempt to offer a coherent account of the uninscribed stone vessels" from various Assyrian sites excavated by British and other expeditions. Moorey was not even aware how many inscribed and sometimes unique stone vessels also remained unpublished.

This catalogue now brings together for the first time all the stone vessels, complete and fragmentary, inscribed and uninscribed, which were or may have been found in Assyria, and which are kept in the Ancient Near East Department of the British Museum. The principal sources of the material were the palaces and temples of the Assyrian imperial cities destroyed in the seventh century BC, but there is representative material of many other dates from these cities and from other Assyrian sites: it dates mainly from the Halaf and Uruk periods in the sixth and fourth–third millennia BC, through the Babylonian and Persian successors of the Assyrian empire, down to the Greco-Parthian period and the beginnings of the Christian era. The catalogue includes, from the same collection, those stone vessels found at sites in Iran, southern Iraq, Turkey and central Syria, and at Mediterranean sites, which are related to those from Assyria, and a few relevant items made of different materials. The great majority of the items catalogued derive from official excavations; others were acquired by purchase or bequest.

This rich collection includes a high proportion of the known types of stone vessel used in the region over these periods. Entries in the current catalogue concentrate on the date, provenance, purpose and primary significance of the material, with references to comparable finds. Among subjects which could be addressed in further detail are the identification and origins of varieties of stone; the techniques of manufacture; the distribution and frequency of particular types of vessel; traces or residues of the contents of vessels; textual references to stone vessels and their practical uses; and the connotations of some of the inscriptions written on them. Other issues include the interrelationships between stone vessels and other vessels, from both the Middle East and the Mediterranean. which served similar purposes in the same periods but which were made of different materials, notably pottery, ivory, metal, wood, glass, faience and Egyptian Blue. Such themes have the potential to offer broad insights into cultural, social and economic history.

All of Nos **1–620** in the catalogue, except obvious duplicates and small fragments, have been illustrated. Nos **621–626** are a related group of little-known zoomorphic vessels, mainly from southern Iraq. Nos **627–666** are items which might for various reasons

have been expected to appear in this catalogue: summary descriptions are provided, without illustrations.

The Department of the Ancient Near East also holds other groups of stone vessels and fragments not included here. Extensive references have been given in this catalogue to the least-known of these groups, which consists of around fifty jars mostly originating in Babylonia but contemporary with Greco-Parthian jars from Assyria; these were acquired by excavation or purchase, mainly during the nineteenth century. Other groups from Iraq include about ten vessels of around 3000 BC, probably from Warka, which were acquired with other important material from the Mocatta collection (Reade 2000D), and around two hundred vessels from third-millennium tombs excavated at Ur by Leonard Woolley (1934, 1956). There are miscellaneous unpublished stone vessels and fragments from other regions covered by the Department.

Ann Searight was responsible for the drawings throughout this catalogue. Julian Reade coordinated the work and wrote the main text. Irving Finkel and Julian Reade collaborated in the editing of the Mesopotamian inscriptions; further contributions were made by Kenneth Kitchen (Levantine hieroglyphic), Marcel Marée (Egyptian hieroglyphic) and Shahrokh Razmjou (Elamite and Old Persian). We were indebted to other colleagues in the Department and elsewhere for advice and information.

2. The acquisition of the collections

It was Claudius James Rich, the father of archaeology in Iraq, who about 1820 acquired as a casual find the first fragment of a decorated Assyrian stone vessel to enter the British Museum (No. **478**). It came from Nineveh, the seventh-century capital-city, and an inscription indicates that it had belonged in the women's quarters in one of the royal palaces. It was once exhibited in the museum, since it bears an old gallery display label, but like most of the other stone vessels in the collections it seems never to have been published. This is partly because most of them are incomplete, and their original shapes and functions have sometimes been far from obvious. Rich's piece, for instance, only becomes comprehensible when it is compared with several others, again incomplete and largely unpublished, which are not inscribed but are also from Assyrian cities (Nos **479–482**). Together they turn out to form a group of elaborately carved shallow stone mortars, the only other example of which seems to be one from the later Persian capital of Persepolis (Figure 67.2). Stranded out of context, the Persepolis piece, which can now be recognised as Assyrian in origin, had been understandably but wrongly interpreted as an unusual type of lid (Schmidt 1957: 88–9). There are numerous fragments of other types of stone vessel in the British Museum which only make sense once they are placed alongside others related to them.

The majority of the vessels in this catalogue come from excavations conducted in Assyria during the nineteenth century AD, mainly at Nineveh and Nimrud (ancient Kalah), but also at the old capital of Ashur, at Sherif Khan (ancient Tarbiṣu) near Nineveh, and elsewhere. All these sites were situated in the Mosul province of what was then the Ottoman Empire; in the absence of any formal regulations relating to antiquities, the British originally worked and exported their finds with the concurrence of the local governors and the support of a letter from the chief minister in Constantinople. The first excavator, and the one who recorded his work most efficiently, was Austen Henry Layard, during 1845–7 and 1849–51. Afterwards, until 1855, the excavations were nominally controlled by Henry Rawlinson, the Consul General in Baghdad, but he himself was seldom at Mosul and only dug in Assyria briefly in 1852. A succession of other individuals were in charge in the field from time to time: Henry Ross in 1847–8; Christian Rassam the British Vice-Consul in 1848–9, 1851–2 and 1854; Hormuzd Rassam in 1852–4; and William Boutcher and William Loftus in 1854–5. Excavations were renewed by George Smith in 1872–3, Hormuzd Rassam in 1878–82 and Wallis Budge in 1889–91; the latter two delegated much of the work to Christian's son and successor, Nimroud Rassam. Leonard King and Reginald Campbell Thompson excavated in 1904–5. Stone vessels continued to be found throughout this period, especially at Nineveh. The eventual Ottoman Antiquities Laws of 1874, 1884 and 1906 were administered in ways which still allowed the British to keep much of what they found. Stone vessels related to those found in the Assyrian heartland were also reaching the museum from elsewhere before 1914. Several from Babylonia were excavated by or on behalf of Hormuzd Rassam during 1879–82, and others were purchased from dealers based in the Near East.

The very first group of stone vessels to be excavated has its own special place in the history of Assyrian archaeology (Nos **51–54**). It emerged in 1846 during Layard's first expedition, in Room I of the North-West Palace at Nimrud, the city which

kings used as their administrative capital during much of the ninth and eighth centuries. On raising some fallen stone wall-panels, Layard (1849: I, 341–2) "discovered under them – but of course broken into a thousand fragments – a number of vases of the finest white alabaster, and several vessels of baked clay. I carefully collected these fragments, but it was impossible to put them together. I found, however, that upon some of them cuneiform characters were engraved, and I soon perceived the name and title of the Khorsabad king, accompanied by the figure of a lion... From the inscription on the vases, it was evident that this chamber had been opened; or that the building was still standing in the time of the king who built the palace at Khorsabad." This was the first unmistakable indication of a close link between Nimrud itself, excavated by the British, and Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Sharrukin), previously excavated by the French, which had been founded in the late eighth century by the king we now know as Sargon II. The inscribed vessels strongly suggested that the king who built Nimrud was earlier than the one who built Khorsabad, a chronological relationship which had been up to that time entirely uncertain. While some of these inscriptions are preserved, however, Layard decided against sending back the innumerable plain stone fragments of these vessels.

During his 1845–7 expedition Layard also began to find small oil-jars of white stone, or *alabastra*, in graves dug into the ruins after the seventh century, and he was to get more of them during his second expedition of 1849–51. Also at Nimrud there were vessels of special types from the area of the Ninurta Temple, which had been burned when the city was sacked in 612 BC; they dated back to the foundation of the temple in the ninth century, and some were inscribed. There were more vessels in the seventh-century South-West Palace at Nineveh, which too had been sacked and burned in 612 BC; those which Layard recognised as Assyrian included "handles in the form of the heads of lions, and other fragments of vases and dishes" (Layard 1853: 594–5). Just as he had previously discarded the plain fragments at Nimrud, however, he only seems to have retained vessels that were virtually complete and fragments that were inscribed or decorated.

Layard's fragments in the British Museum collection therefore represent no more than a modest proportion of those he had excavated. A further factor affecting the proportion saved is that at Nineveh the workmen were mainly excavating in dark tunnels or deep pits, and the main objective of the excavations was the discovery of stone wall-panels and subsequently, when they began to emerge, cuneiform tablets. Loftus (1857: 409–10) adopted an attitude similar to Layard's when, in 1850–2, he was excavating a Persian palace at Susa, where he too discovered stone vessels. "Decidedly the most interesting objects obtained at this locality were a collection of broken alabaster vases, some of which must have been of large dimensions. A pile of these, sufficient to have filled a large wheel-barrow, were gathered together, and I spent several hours in examining them separately. From among them, I selected four bearing trilingual inscriptions, which are now in the British Museum." The museum in fact has five (Nos **272–276**), out of the several hundred that one might imagine filling a large wheel-barrow.

Parts of almost 300 stone vessels reached the museum from later nineteenth-century excavations at Assyrian sites: at least one of the excavators responsible during 1851–5 must have reckoned that even minor fragments were worth retaining, and so did Smith in 1873. Among material that must come from seventh-century palaces, about 36 jars, 25 bowls and 9 vessels of various types have royal inscriptions, while many others are finely carved or made of very fine stone. Only a few of these, however, are specifically mentioned in the records kept by the excavators who worked in Assyria after Layard. Similarly King (D'Andrea 1981: 110), working in 1904, was to refer casually to finding "fragments of bowls, statuettes and other small objects of stone and alabaster" in the South-West Palace; none seem to survive from his excavations in that area, unless they were sent to the Imperial Museum at Constantinople.

During 1911–3 Max von Oppenheim excavated at the Assyrian provincial capital at Tell Halaf (ancient Guzana), in what is now north-eastern Syria. A load of his finds was captured on the high seas in 1914, and reached the British Museum. It included 31 stone vessels, mainly basalt mortars for everyday use, a type of stone vessel certainly common in the royal cities but seldom preserved among material from the British excavations.

Work at Nineveh before 1914 had produced a few stone vessels that were earlier than the ninth–seventh centuries. Many more were found during 1927–32, when Campbell Thompson and his colleagues renewed the excavations. The site was now in Iraq, where the Antiquities Law of 1924 provided for excavators to keep material which was not needed for the scientific completeness of the Iraq Museum.

The effect was that a few of the best pieces stayed in Baghdad; the remainder were divided between the British Museum, which sponsored the expedition, and other institutions which had provided much of the funding. Campbell Thompson's work concentrated on the Ishtar Temple, where he found alabaster jars and related pieces dating to the late second millennium; his 1931–2 field catalogue referred to "two baskets of broken alabastra," and there are 37 such pieces in the museum, besides many fragments of stone vessels of other dates. Thompson often recorded provenances, and included several relevant drawings in his publications, but he too seems to have discarded the plainer pieces.

Thompson also found prehistoric stone vessels; the relative date of this kind of material was first established by Max Mallowan's deep sounding at Nineveh during the 1931–2 season. At nearby Arpachiyah in 1933, and during his 1934–8 work in north-eastern Syria, especially at Brak, Mallowan found more stone vessels of various prehistoric and later periods. The British Museum and the British School of Archaeology in Iraq were joint sponsors or supporters of all Mallowan's own expeditions in the 1930s. The museum received the principal share of objects allotted to him under the Iraqi and Syrian regulations, including 34 complete or fragmentary stone vessels. Mallowan published most of his Arpachiyah material immediately, but important Syrian material escaped his attention when he was writing his final reports after the Second World War.

In 1949 Mallowan reopened the excavations at Nimrud, on behalf of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq. The finds were divided, under the Antiquities Law of 1934, between the Iraq Museum and the expedition, with Iraq retaining those classified as unique. The expedition's share was largely distributed among organisations which provided financial support for the work. The British Museum eventually received the residue of the expedition's share, including 44 fragments of stone vessels, nearly all unpublished, some of which are broadly contemporary with the first group found at Nimrud by Layard over a century beforehand.

3. Historical background

Stone is a versatile material, which can with patience be ground, chipped or carved into precise shapes, with smooth, sharp or irregular surfaces as required. The basic technology of manufacture (e.g. Moorey 1994: 38–9) was well and widely understood in early prehistory, when containers made of stone must have been preferable for some purposes to those made of unfired clay, plaster or organic materials. After about 7000 BC, with the gradual introduction of plain, burnished and painted pottery, and eventually of highly fired stonewares, many people, perhaps increasingly specialists, could rapidly produce, in quantity, ceramic vessels having many of the same qualities as stone. From the third millennium onwards, there was the development of decorative glazed faience, glass and eventually glazed pottery, and metals became available for high-status purposes. Nonetheless stone vessels were not entirely superseded until about the first century AD. Some types were produced for special utilitarian, cultic and luxury purposes, and production occasionally reached an industrial scale.

An obvious advantage of most varieties of stone is sheer strength and durability; some varieties have other advantages. As a material for containers, stone can be reasonably inert, impermeable, and easily cleaned. Stone jars, with low thermal conductivity, can keep their contents cool and fresh in hot weather. Stone bowls can function as mortars. Some varieties of stone tolerate heat, and may be used for lamps or burners. Stone is liable to be heavy, too, which can be a desirable feature though obviously not for vessels that have to be moved significant distances. Some stones also appeal to the eye or other senses through colour, texture or structure, and may be thought to have supernatural qualities; the appearance can be enhanced with paint, inlay or overlay. Mallowan (1935: 76, 79) commented that many of the stone vessels from Arpachiyah, made in the sixth millennium BC, "are beautifully finished, and have a high polish," and that "many other stone bowl fragments," apparently ones that he discarded, "illustrated the artistry and skill of the stone-worker: there were specially selected fine limestones, chosen for their fine graining, exactly as a wood-worker selects a fine-grained wood." Tobler (1950: 81–2), in contrast, referring to material of the same period found at nearby Gawra, remarked that "stone vessels were a common household utensil, and as such are uninspired articles, lacking any high degree of craftsmanship," but he also commented on the higher quality of later stone vessels made for luxury purposes. Broadly it is plain that, from prehistory on through the historical periods, some stone vessels were intended for strictly practical domestic purposes, and others, while they must have had practical uses, were elite items made with additional aesthetic criteria in mind.

Sources of stone, outside the alluvial plains, were abundant and various. Banks (1912: 262–3),

in discussing a hoard of third-millennium vessels found in southern Iraq, observed that "those who have crossed the Arabian plateau, or followed down the Euphrates, or been in the mountains of Armenia or Persia, find in these places almost every variety of stone. Though Sargon I marched his armies to the Mediterranean, and the Mesopotamian Arabs of today bring great stones from the sacred hills about Mecca to hew into mortars for pounding their coffee, there is no reason why the ancients should have gone far from their valley for their stone. Near Deir on the Euphrates is a hill of a soft, white, marble-like stone; the desert towards Hayil is strewn with boulders of diorite, and in the mountains to the north and east may be found all of the various stones which the vases represented."

The Assyrians had similar options. What happened in practice is that vessels were made from a range of stones. Those used in prehistory are varied, and most of them must have been collected locally as pebbles, cobbles or boulders from riverbeds or rock outcrops (e.g. Nos **322–339**), but stones that had special qualities, such as obsidian, had sometimes travelled considerable distances. Suitable sources must have been recognised and valued. For instance, steatite or dark softstones were the standard material for kohl-jars at fourth-millennium Gawra (Tobler 1950: 208; see Nos **359–360**), and in historical periods particular types of stone were used consistently for common types of vessels. Mortars and bowls were made from many types of stone, but the preferred material for heavy-duty mortars came to be the coarse vesicular basalt, robust but with an abrasive texture, which is common across central and north-eastern Syria (Nos **351**, **343**, **452–472**); it was occasionally available from the sixth millennium onwards in areas further east, to which it must have been imported, and its distribution at different times provides evidence for long-distance exchange of what is basically a commonplace material. In contrast, luxury vessels of various types, made from fine decorative stones such as agate, rock crystal, diorite and fossiliferous limestone, appear in royal palaces, and are especially notable at Nimrud and Nineveh in the eighth–seventh century (e.g. Nos **365–376**, **416–424**, **476–479**); the tradition of using vessels in exotic stones was maintained in fifth-century Persia (Schmidt 1957: 81–91). Jars at all periods were mostly made from whitish varieties of alabaster and limestone, which are widely available (most of Nos **1–314**), while royal oil-jars of the seventh–fifth centuries were often made of fine banded varieties, some being brought from Egypt (Nos **269–277**).

The purposes for which stone bowls were most suitable, even when they were not made of basalt, reflect the sheer sturdiness of the material. All bowl-shaped stone vessels could on occasion have served a range of needs, and some have the same shapes as others made of pottery, but their most important functions were in processes that involved rough handling or firm pressure, notably for the daily preparation of food and drink by grinding, pounding, crushing and mixing grain, meat, vegetables, herbs and condiments, and for the manufacture of medicines, aromatics and pigments; stone mortars are still used in similar ways. Signs of wear are occasionally visible on the bases. While the precise purposes served by such vessels were liable to evolve, the commonest shape for bowls through prehistoric and historical periods alike remained circular (e.g. Nos **322–339**, **362–424**); oblong or elongated bowls or troughs must also have functioned primarily as mortars or palettes, for substances which were ground or rolled with a lateral rather than a circular movement (e.g. Nos **352–355**, **474–484**). Some small vessels could be hand-held, especially those used for the preparation of aromatics or cosmetics; others rested on solid surfaces.

The use of exceptional stone vessels for purposes such as religious ceremonial is also attested through both prehistoric and historical periods. Examples in the collection include a few from Brak and Nineveh (among Nos **586–594**) which have significant resemblances to some examples from southern Iraq of around 3000 BC. Nos **621–624** represent cult vessels from southern Mesopotamia. Another group of vessels illustrating cultic practices consists of stone pails and semicircular saucers (Nos **600–609**) which were mostly made for ninth-century Neo-Assyrian temples.

Although they appear relatively late, in about the fourteenth century, the commonest stone vessels known from Assyria are the jars made of whitish alabaster or limestone. The earliest ones are either Egyptian (possibly Nos **1–2**), or developed from Egyptian prototypes (e.g. Nos **15–46**: see Figures 67.6–7). Their primary use was to hold perfumed oil, such as was sent from Egypt to Mesopotamia, in enormous quantities, attested through diplomatic letters of the Amarna period (Moran 1987: 99–100). While perfumes had been used throughout Mesopotamian history, it is also likely that those then arriving were of kinds seldom available previously, and that they were regarded as particularly desirable. This would have been a natural consequence of the interest repeatedly displayed by Egyptian rulers

in exotic products including fragrant plants and frankincense from areas further south such as Yemen and East Africa. The existence of Assyrian imitations of the Egyptian jars suggests that the latter were highly regarded in themselves. They will have functioned well besides being aesthetically pleasing.

Stone oil-jars reappear in the late eighth century, brought from Phoenicia or Palestine when the Assyrian empire reached the Mediterranean (Nos **51–60**); these were of various shapes, and were again being used as containers for perfumed oil. During the seventh century ovoid lugged jars became standard equipment at the Assyrian royal court and were often inscribed with royal names (among Nos **160–264**). As one purpose of perfume was to sweeten the air and swamp foul smells at banquets and on other formal occasions, such jars were probably used by attendants holding towels or fans (Frontispiece). Clear evidence for such a practice comes from fifth-century Persepolis, where royal attendants holding towels and oil-jars are illustrated on wall-panels (Figure 66.1). An alternative procedure, known both in Assyria and in the west, was to distribute perfume from open saucers (Figure 66.2); several types of these saucers are also known (among Nos **497–522**).

Seventh-century Assyrian palaces produced a range of other stone vessels, including flasks, bowls, dishes, pedestal bowls, mortars, trays and miniature vessels (among Nos **315–320**, **365–425**, **428–434**, **445–446**, **474–484**,**488–496** and **566–572** respectively). Some of them were cut from exotic stones, finely carved in the Assyrian style, or probably decorated with bands of gold (see No. **367**). Some vessels were surely imported (e.g. Nos **429**, **438**, **509**); others (e.g. Nos **378–391, 478–482**) must have been manufactured in Assyrian royal workshops, as probably were most of the jars and bowls with royal inscriptions. The original opulence of the finer vessels is recognisable despite their fragmentary condition, and they provide a rare glimpse into everyday Assyrian court life. The antecedents for these vessels, however, when they can be discerned, are frequently not Assyrian but Mediterranean or western Syrian; some are ultimately inspired from the Egypt of the New Kingdom. Continuity in the manufacture and use of "royal tableware" continued into the Achaemenid period, and the fine stone vessels found at Persepolis fall into the selfsame tradition. Most of them are or must surely be Achaemenid, mainly perhaps fifth-century although the palace was not sacked until 330 BC (Schmidt 1957: 81), but not all of them. Among those which are certainly older, one vessel bears an inscription of Ashurbanipal (Figure 67.1), a mortar is clearly Neo-Assyrian (Figure 67.2: see No. **479**), and two bowls have fair Neo-Assyrian parallels (Figures 67.3–4: see Nos **366–367**); others were made for Egyptian or other rulers (see Nos **441–444**).

An outstanding characteristic of seventh-century Mesopotamia is the degree to which the old Assyrian heartlands, as they absorbed thousands of deportees or immigrants from provinces conquered during the late eighth century, also absorbed elements of their lifestyles and cultures. Stone vessels provide further illustrations of this process. Thus cosmetic palettes of a distinctive eighth- or seventh-century type, probably manufactured in Phoenicia but best known from sites in Palestine, duly appear at Nimrud and Nineveh (Nos **549–550**). Similarly, the double-rim bowl, a type used in western Syria in the eighth century well before the Assyrian conquest, becomes in the seventh century much the commonest type of stone vessel recorded from sites throughout the Assyrian empire (Nos **365–415**).

Similar processes of acculturation continued throughout Mesopotamia under Achaemenid, Greek and Parthian rule, and Assyria was one of a number of regions where stone vessels of closely related types came to be used. They consist of items for personal use, notably small jars, palettes and containers for scents and cosmetics (among Nos **278–312**, **551–565**, **573–575**). While the use of stone rather than pottery, as the material from which the finest such items were made, was not entirely confined to royal palaces in the Assyrian period, small stone vessels appear to have become much more widely accessible to different social classes during the fifth–second centuries BC. Several centres of manufacture can be traced. There are many uncertainties over the dates of vessels of this period, as few have emerged from properly recorded excavations, but by the first century BC stone vessels were becoming increasingly scarce. Their decline can be associated most probably with the invention of blown glass, which made available a far wider range of shapes of vessel, mass-produced in an attractive impermeable material at a modest price (e.g. Barag 1985: 91).

Abbreviations

All catalogued objects are registered in the British Museum Department of the Ancient Near East (ANE). The registration number is followed by the serial number (see below, Documentation of the collections).

All dimensions are in centimeters. L = length, W = width, T = thickness, D = diameter, with rim D estimated from the outer rim.

The stones are described practically, by appearance, as the resources necessary for a comprehensive petrographic study of the entire corpus were not available. The provenances are often uncertain: see individual entries. Provenances given in inverted commas are taken from the British Museum registers; those in brackets followed by a question mark represent suggestions by the author. The various spellings of the principal mound at Nineveh have been normalized here as "Kuyunjik"; "Abu Habba" is used for Sippar, and "Sherif Khan" for Tarbiṣu.

A = Arpachiyah (Mallowan excavations field number)
ANE = Department of the Ancient Near East, British Museum, London
AO = Département des Antiquités Orientales, Musée du Louvre, Paris
AOM = Ancient Orient Museum, Istanbul
Ash. = Ashmolean Museum, Oxford
BL = British Library, London
BM = British Museum, London
GR = Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, British Museum
IM = Iraq Museum, Baghdad
L = Musée du Louvre, Paris
Met. = Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
MM = Mosul Museum, Mosul
ND = Nimrud (Mallowan/Oates/Orchard excavations field number)
OD = Original Drawings (volumes in ANE archive)
OP = Original Papers (volumes in BM Central Archive)
SR = Department of Scientific Research, British Museum
TH = Tell Halaf (von Oppenheim excavations field number)
U = Ur (Woolley excavations field number)
UM = University Museum, Philadelphia
VA = Vorderasiatiches Museum, Berlin

Catalogue

1–3. Calcite jars, fourteenth–thirteenth century BC

Nos **1–3** belong to a family of large jars made of fine white calcite or alabaster, up to 40 cm or more high. Many examples of the fourteenth or thirteenth century are known, especially from Ashur, Ras Shamra and the sacked Mitannian palace at Brak. One from Brak is about 26 cm high, and has a wide flat rim, a straight neck, a flat base, and a pair of handles which reach from rim to shoulder and are decorated with straight incised lines (McDonald 1997: 106–9, 258–9, Fig. 229, No. 96). An inscribed fragment from Ashur retains part of a handle of this kind (Bissing 1940: 175, Abb. 29). Nos **1–2**, which come from Ashur and are inscribed in the same way, probably had similar handles. Some examples from Ras Shamra, however, have integral pedestal bases, and either handles or horizontally perforated lugs (e.g. Figures 67.6–7: Caubet 1991: 211–2, 261–2, Pls XI.9, XII.1). The inscriptions on Nos **1–2** indicate that they had been brought from Syria or Turkey as loot from royal Mitannian cities such as Brak itself (Grayson 1987: 136, 160–1), and had been placed in the palace of Adad-nirari I, c. 1295–1264 BC; a basalt mortar, No. **452**, may have been looted at the same time.

Such stone jars were manufactured in Egypt, especially in the fifteenth–fourteenth centuries (e.g. Brovarski et al. 1982: 127–8), or were made elsewhere following Egyptian models. Hundreds of them are listed in an Amarna letter which describes goods sent as a royal gift from Egypt to Babylonia in the later fourteenth century (Moran 1987: 99–100). Among the fragments found at Ashur (Bissing 1940: 149–53), two from the palace of Adad-nirari I were inscribed with the names of the pharoahs Tutmoses IV(?), c. 1419–1386 BC, and Ay, c. 1325–1321 BC, but another inscribed with the name of Rameses II, c. 1279–1212 BC, came from a level ascribed to Tukulti-Ninurta I, c. 1233–1197 BC, who could have received more jars directly or have collected them when he looted Babylonia. Nos **1–2** may originally have been Near Eastern or Egyptian, but No. **3** was carved (unless recarved) in a Near Eastern not an Egyptian style.

The jars sent from Egypt to Babylonia are said in the Amarna letter to have contained sweet oils, scented liquids, aromatics or perfumes. The primary function of Nos **1–3** was probably similar, but the inscriptions and carving must mean that they came to be valued for their own sake. The prestige and wide distribution of Egyptian products in the Near East in the thirteenth century is confirmed by the large numbers of imitations that have been found, including small alabaster oil-jars such as Nos **16–46** from northern Iraq. The writing of the royal name on jars other than those explicitly dedicated to gods, although not then unprecedented in Mesopotamia (e.g. No. **595**), may also have been a grandiose Assyrian adoption of Egyptian practice; it is notable that Adad-nirari in these inscriptions is given a finer title than his father and grandfather.

1. ANE 90957 = 12089 (Fig. 1)

Jar: part of body; inscription of Adad-nirari I, c. 1295–1264 BC.

Extant H 12.9. Fine white calcite, with slight banding cut horizontally. From Ashur: this provenance ("Kileh Shergat"), for both Nos **1** and **2**, is provided in the original publication. The two must have been found by Rassam in 1853, and should have been registered in the museum with 1855–12–5 numbers. Published: Rawlinson and Norris 1861: Pl. 6.IIIA; Grayson 1987: 160–1.

The text can be restored by reference to thirteen other jar fragments from the German excavations at Ashur, five of which preserve all or part of the name of Taidu.

1. [É.GAL] ⌜^{md}⌝[I]M-ÉRIN.T[ÁḪ LUGAL KIŠ]
2. [DUMU GÍ]D-DI-DINGIR LUG[AL KUR *aš-šur*]
3. [DUMU ^{d}*en*]-*líl*-ÉRIN.TAḪ LUGAL [KUR *aš-šur-ma*]
4. [*ki-ši*]-*ti* URU *ta*-[*i-di*(?)]

"[Palace of] Adad-nira[ri, king of the universe, son

of Ar]ik-den-ili, ki[ng of the land of Ashur, son of En]lil-nirari, king of [the land of Ashur: boo]ty of the city of Ta[idu(?)]."

2. ANE 90956 = 12088 (Fig. 1)

Jar: part of body; inscription of Adad-nirari I, c. 1295–1264 BC.

Extant H 11.9. Fine white calcite, with slight banding cut horizontally. From Ashur (see No. **1**). Published: Rawlinson and Norris 1861: Pl. 6.IIIA; Grayson 1987: 160–1.

The city from which this jar came may have been Taidu, as on No. **1**, but one of the fragments from the German excavations gives Irridi instead, and other Mitannian cities were looted in the same campaigns.

1. ⌜É⌝.GAL ^{md}IM-[ÉRIN.DAḪ LUGAL KIŠ]
2. [DUM]U GÍD-DI-DINGIR L[UGAL KUR *aš-šur*]
3. [DUM]U ^{d}*en-líl*-ÉRIN.DAḪ LU[GAL KUR *aš-šur-ma*]
4. [*k*]*i-ši-ti* UR[U ...]

"[Pal]ace of Adad-ni[rari, king of the universe, so]n of Arik-den-ili, ki[ng of the land of Ashur, so]n of Enlil-nirari , ki[ng of the land of Ashur: b]ooty of the ci[ty of ...]."

3. ANE 1855–12–5, 57 = 118352 (Fig. 1)

Jar: part of body; well carved in low relief.

Extant H 11.0. Fine white calcite, with slight banding cut horizontally. From northern Iraq: perhaps from Ashur, like Nos **1–2** which are of similar stone, shape and date.

The carving shows a bull moving to the left, a spotted feline moving to the right between its legs, a plant underneath the feline, and part of another motif to the left, perhaps another plant. The feline seems to be a cheetah, a predator which survived in the Syrian desert until about AD 1950, rather than a leopard; Divyabhanusinh (1995: 1–3, 177) discussed and illustrated the differences between the two species, and kindly confirmed the likely identification of this animal. No close parallel for the scene has been noted, but the theme and the lively style recall some Middle Assyrian cylinder seals (e.g. Collon 1987: 67), while the hatching on the cheetah's belly, and the appearance of the plant underneath it, are comparable with details on an incised ivory box of the fourteenth–thirteenth century BC from Tomb 45 at Ashur (Haller 1954: 135, Abb. 161). A bull's body is represented in much the same way on an ivory lid from Palestine (Dothan and Gitin 1994: 13).

4–9. Anthropomorphic jars, fourteenth–thirteenth century BC

Nos **4–9** were probably all jars in the shape of naked pregnant women. No. **4** is made of calcite and was found in the Levant; it shows the woman with empty hands, kneeling as if about to give birth, and is a jar or jug with a handle at the back. Nos **5–9** are made of alabaster and may all come from the Ishtar Temple at Nineveh; Nos **6–8**, which are the smallest, show the woman holding something in her hands and with her legs bent in front of her; only the head survives on No. **5** and an empty hand on No. **9**. Despite the differences, jars of the same general type as No. **4** probably provided the model on which Nos **5–9** were based. The latter resemble, in material, condition and likely archaeological context, numerous pedestal jars of this period (among Nos **11–46**). They were also made in the same way, with chisel marks left from gouging out the interior after preliminary drilling; this mode of manufacture is not in itself a dating criterion, however, since many later alabaster vessels had their interiors chiselled out in much the same way (e.g. Nos **10**, **290–292**).

Jars in the shape of people or apes, of types originating in Egypt, were found at Ras Shamra in the later second millennium (Caubet 1991: 212–3). Evans (1928: 255–8) studied the distribution of those showing pregnant women, versions of which have been found as far west as Crete. Others probably travelled eastward, in the same way as Nos **1–2**. Brunner-Traut (1970) proposed that they were designed to hold special oils used in pregnancy, and one could envisage circumstances in which temples issued appropriate blessed oils to devotees. More probably the jars from the Nineveh temple contained scent and were dedicated to the goddess by women who were pregnant or wished to become so.

4. ANE 1884–7–14, 97 = 1969–4–17, 1 = E 48447 (Fig. 2)

Jar or jug: largely complete but for chipped rim, small hole in right side, and missing handle at back; shaped as a kneeling woman, with long hair or head-cloth, who wears a necklace and rests her hands on her stomach.

H 15.9, W 8.5, T 8.7. Yellowish calcite, with slight banding cut at an angle. Purchased from Greville Chester, who reportedly acquired it at or as coming from Gebail, ancient Byblos. Published: Evans 1928: 257, Fig. 151; Brunner-Traut 1970: Taf. 8b: "Elfenbein".

5A. ANE 1930–5–8, 231 = 136996 (Fig. 3)

Jar: part of rim; shaped as the back of a human head; the missing front of the head is perhaps represented by No. **5B**, which was found later.

Extant H 4.7, rim D 3.4. Alabaster. From Nineveh: Ishtar Temple area (C, 20). Published: Thompson and Hutchinson 1931: Pl. XXI.7.

5B. Iraq Museum, number unknown (Fig. 3)

Jar(?): front of woman's head (see No. **5A**).

Extant H c. 5.2. Alabaster. From Nineveh: Ishtar Temple area (MM, 9). Drawing taken from publication: Thompson and Hamilton 1932: 93, Pl. LXIV.4.

6. ANE 1929–10–12, 350 (Fig. 3)

Jar: greater part of body and base, eroded and chipped, especially on the left side; shaped as a seated woman. She holds an object in her right hand, somewhat resembling a bird, and something in her left hand too, but it is hard to distinguish between original and eroded surfaces.

Extant H 7, W 7.6, T 4.4. Alabaster. From Nineveh: Ishtar Temple area (XVIII B, 15). Published: Thompson and Hutchinson 1929: 109, Pl. LVI.334.

7. ANE 1932–12–12, 1154 = 138621 (Fig. 3)

Jar: left side of body and base, very worn; shaped as a seated woman, probably wearing a wristlet on her left arm and holding something in her left hand.

Extant H 5.5, W 3.7, T 2.5. Alabaster. From Nineveh: Ishtar Temple area (NN or YY).

8. ANE SOC 81 = 125329 (Fig. 3)

Jar: right side of body and base; shaped as a seated woman wearing a wristlet on her right arm, and holding a roundish object in her right hand.

Extant H 7.4, W 6.2, T 5.9. Alabaster. Probably from northern or central Iraq: perhaps from Nineveh, Ishtar Temple, as nineteenth-century excavations impinged on this area, and No. **8** resembles Nos **6–7** in type and condition.

9. ANE 1932–12–12, 1153 = 138620 (Fig. 4)

Jar: part of body; a right hand with a wristlet is carved in low relief on the exterior.

Extant H 9.2. Alabaster. From Nineveh: Ishtar Temple area (OO?, 5).

The wristlet and distinct thumb and fingers indicate that the carving on this fragment represents an empty hand rather than an animal's paw; an internal gouge-mark suggests that the hand was pointing upwards. The woman may have had her hands angled upwards as on No. **10**. Alternatively the hand could have belonged to a winged figure on the side of a jar, as on No. **12**; no wings are visible, but such figures sometimes had their hands raised away from the wings (e.g. Reade 2002: 177, Fig. 36).

10. Anthropomorphic jar, ninth–seventh century BC

10. ANE 1882–9–18A, 4 = 91638 (Fig. 4)

Jar: upper part of body, with rim and base missing; shaped as a standing woman of ample proportions. She has sweeping hair, wears a robe with a hem at the neck, and holds in each hand an object, now damaged.

Extant H 21.1, W at waist 8.4. Alabaster, of better quality or better-preserved than that of Nos **5–9**. From northern or central Iraq: "Abu Habba", ancient Sippar, but this is unsure. Babylon is a possible alternative (see Nos **266–267**), and Nineveh is another. Abu Habba provenances were assigned to several objects which do seem more likely to have derived from northern Iraq, notably Nos **517**, **650**, and a game-board (Gadd 1934: 49, Pl. VIIIa: ANE 1882–9–18A, 15 = 118768); conversely a macehead dedicated to Shamash of Sippar was registered as coming from Nineveh (Walker and Collon 1980: 100: ANE 1883–1–18, 700 = 91146). Some objects with suspect provenances, such as No. **10**, are fine pieces and may have been placed on display immediately after arriving in the museum from the concurrent excavations at Sippar, Nineveh, Babylon and elsewhere, with the result that their provenances had been lost by the time, years later, that they came to be registered. Published: Hall 1928: 49, Pl. LVIII.1; Riis 1956: 24, 32, Fig. 1.

No. **10** will have had a rounded base, like other stone and ivory oil-jars representing women which come from sites of the eighth–sixth centuries, especially in the Mediterranean (e.g. Barnett 1957: 94–5). The neck was presumably cylindrical, not unlike the polos hat often worn by goddesses. Hall thought the objects in the hands were doves, which would have had to be very small, but they look more like flowers, as on some other examples. Riis associated such jars with the goddess Ishtar, avatars of whom were worshipped at Sippar, Nineveh, Babylon and elsewhere (e.g. George 1993: 81, 121, 151), which does not help determine the provenance of No. **10**. A jar from a seventh–century tomb at Gordion shows a woman with comparable sweeping hair who holds a miniature lion, Ishtar's animal (Riis 1956: 26, Fig. 2). No. **10**, given its size and quality, was perhaps designed for regular cultic use. Hall dated it to the ninth or eighth century, and Riis to the seventh century BC.

11–48. Alabaster pedestal jars, fourteenth–thirteenth century BC

These jars are made of a greyish white alabaster, and they have, so far as preserved, a distinctive shape. This is based on that of a necked jar resting on a separate pedestal; No. **15** may belong to a pedestal of this kind. Otherwise the pedestal is now an integral part of the jar and has become a stylistic feature, too narrow to hold a jar upright. Between neck and shoulder there is either a single horizontally perforated lug, or a pair of such lugs as on No. **23** and possibly other large heavy jars; the lugs project slightly underneath. Cords passed through the lugs could have helped secure lids or stoppers, or could have been attached to clothing; similar jars from Ashur were closed by circular unperforated stoppers which slotted into the neck (Haller 1954: Taf. 31), and there are two possible stoppers of this kind (Nos **49–50**) in the British

Museum. Nos **11–14** were elaborately decorated on the side with themes probably alluding to Ishtar, but the jars are otherwise plain. Generally the neck of a jar and its exterior are smoothly finished; a central hole into the interior was created with a drill, but the rest was roughly hollowed out with gouge or chisel, so that the walls are very uneven in thickness.

Some of the jars are oval rather than circular in plan. A similar feature has been noted in many small "baggy" jars of the early second millennium which were manufactured in Egypt, as containers for perfume, and often exported to Palestine. Ben-Dor (1945: 101) observed that nearly all those excavated in Egypt are circular in plan, whereas most of those excavated in Palestine are oval, and proposed that this was because "the oval shape was obviously more convenient for export as such vases could be packed closer and with less danger of breakage." A minor advantage of an oval shape might have been comfort and convenience if jars were sometimes hung from clothes. It also seems possible, however, that the workmen making jars received pebbles or irregularly shaped lumps of stone, and that they had no objection to manufacturing oval jars if this seemed the sensible and economical procedure. Vessels from fourth-millennium Gawra (Tobler 1950: Pl. CIV.13–14), and a third-millennium alabaster vessel from Nineveh (No. **594**), have the same peculiarity.

The date of Nos **11–46** was unclear to the excavators. The jars were mostly found at Nineveh during 1929–32, in or near the Ishtar Temple, and those found previously may well have come from the same area. This temple is attested from the third millennium until the seventh century BC (Reade 2005). It was repaired or rebuilt several times, and finally burned in 612 BC; subsequent disturbance, however, destroyed much of the stratigraphy. Most of the jars are badly worn but they have not been burned; there were probably once many more of them than happen to have been recovered. Thompson and Hutchinson (1931: 83) first dated the "alabaster vessels" about the ninth century BC. Thompson and Hamilton (1932: 68–9) referred to "pieces of alabaster vases", including a lion jar (see No. **13**), which lay close to a Neo-Assyrian tablet, though not much above the remnants of a second-millennium temple pavement; some of these vases are similar to ones described as "part of a hoard of alabaster vessels" by Thompson and Mallowan (1933: 148, Pl. LXX.1–6 = Nos **16–18**, **23**, **28–29**), with a tentative ascription to the earlier third millennium; some examples are said to have had "heraldic" attachments (perhaps Nos **11–13**), and there was one "with a figure attached wearing a sheepskin skirt". All the pedestal jars which reached the British Museum, however, can be securely placed in the late fourteenth or the thirteenth century, like many ceramic vessels with similar pedestal bases (e.g. Postgate et al. 1997: Pl. 67); they imitate an Egyptian type best attested in the fifteenth–fourteenth centuries (see Nos **1–3**).

Their date is confirmed by the finds in Tomb 45 at Ashur which contained twenty-two alabaster vessels so similar to those from Nineveh, in range of shape, size and decoration, that they could have been manufactured in the same workshop (Andrae, in Haller 1954: 139–40, 147, Taf. 31–2; Bissing 1940: 163–73). Among other objects from Tomb 45 there were ivories and a seal ascribed to the fourteenth century (Moortgat 1969: 113), and jewellery ascribed to the thirteenth (e.g. Maxwell-Hyslop 1971: 167–77), both of which dates may be correct as the tomb had been used on several occasions. D. Oates (1968: 116, Pl. XXXVa–b) suggested a date centring on 1300 BC for a fine pedestal jar found in the temple area at Tell al-Rimah. A cache of twelve jars, probably late fourteenth-century, was found in a temple at Choga-Zambil in Elam (Ghirshman 1968: 83–4, Pls LI–LIII, XCIII–XCIV); they belong in the same family, though slightly different in shape and method of manufacture. Even a miniature rock crystal jar from Kassite Babylon, that must have held a small quantity of a valuable liquid, has the shape of a pedestal jar (Reuther 1926: 180, Taf. 54c).

Moorey (1994: 52–3), in a full discussion of all this material which cites another possible pedestal jar from Nippur, remarks that "such vessels might well have been manufactured under the influence of Egyptian prototypes in Syria." At Ras Shamra itself, where Egyptian vessels were imported, at least one larger pedestal jar with handles was made of possibly local serpentinite (Figure 67.6: Caubet 1991: 206, Pl. XI.9). Similarly, at Brak, some stone jars of this period were thought to have come from Egypt, but others of comparable shapes were made of alabaster (McDonald 1997: 107–8), a material which is available in both north-eastern Syria and northern Iraq. Nos **11–46** and the jars from Tomb 45 are alabaster, and were presumably made by Mitannian or Middle Assyrian craftsmen. While plain pedestal jars of western design represent the type best known both in northern Iraq and further east, the development of the more elaborately carved types (Nos **11–14**) may have been a local idea.

The obvious explanation for the presence of Nos **11–46** like Nos **5–9** in the Ishtar Temple at Nineveh is that they contained perfumes presented to the goddess. Women with the means to do so could have brought jars whose appearance and contents emulated the prestigious Egyptian or Levantine products that were reaching Assyria because of the kingdom's increasing status; poorer women might have brought cheaper or defective jars such as Nos **20** and **29**. Perhaps sometimes the perfumes themselves were really imported. Such small votive gifts must have accumulated. They could hardly be thrown away, but it would have been appropriate to dispose of them, as was customary with old gifts to temples, by burial beneath new floors in the course of architectural renovations. A suitable occasion would have been during work undertaken towards the end of the reign of Shalmaneser I, c. 1263–1234 BC, after the building had been badly damaged by an earthquake (Grayson 1987: 205–8; Reade 2005: 371). Even if Nos **11–46** were themselves all votive, however, the type was not reserved for presentation to temples. Andrae concluded that Tomb 45 at Ashur housed priestesses of that city's Ishtar Temple, which makes