Sennacherib, of whom Byron wrote “The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold, and his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold,” is the best known of the Assyrian kings. His unsuccessful siege of Jerusalem and the sudden end of his campaigns in Syria and Palestine are recorded in the Bible in a vivid and stirring manner. All the strongholds of Judah had fallen and Jerusalem was the next objective. But, perhaps because he had had news of an Egyptian army approaching for a showdown with the Assyrians, Sennacherib tried to avoid a costly assault upon the heavily fortified city or an extended siege and sent three of his officers to try to frighten Hezekiah, the king of Judah, into surrendering. But Isaiah, having been consulted by Hezekiah, encouraged him to hold out with the prophecy, “... concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into the city, nor shoot an arrow there, Sennacherib nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return.” The fulfillment of the prophecy is recorded in the verse, “... and it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred and fourscore and five thousand.” We do not know whether it was a plague or some other disaster that hit the Assyrian army at that time. At any rate the Assyrian annals agree with the Bible that without having taken Jerusalem Sennacherib returned to Nineveh, where he had built his “palace without a rival.”

The precision of detail in the biblical account of more than 2,600 years ago is very striking. We are told, for example, that the Assyrian king’s emissaries “came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is in the highway of the fuller’s field.” The speech of the chief officer, the Rabshakeh (cupbearer), is excellently observed and reported: his confidence in the organized military power behind him; the clever way he played up the material advantages of accepting the pax Assyriana; and his calculated propagandist trick of addressing himself to the people, in their own language, over the heads of the Jewish king’s representatives, who wished to keep the conference secret by carrying it on in Syrian. What we get from this passage is something like a sudden close-up of the period.

The reliefs from the palace of Sennacherib, of which the Museum has six fragments, give the same sort of feeling of immediate contact with these ancient people of the Near East. As some of the fragments are badly damaged and even the most self-sufficient of them are only parts of a gigantic decorative scheme, we have to seek the aid of drawings made by Sir Austen Henry Layard and his assistants in order to visualize the minute detail in which Sennacherib set forth his deeds.
Layard discovered the palace at Kuyunjik (Nineveh) in the middle of the last century. He opened "in this magnificent edifice . . . no less than 71 halls, chambers and passages whose walls almost without exception" were paneled with slabs of sculptured alabaster recording the exploits of the Assyrian king. Not all the reliefs were in good condition when Layard uncovered them, for many of them had been badly damaged in the fire that raged through Nineveh and destroyed the palace when the city fell in 612 B.C. Today the largest collection of Sennacherib's reliefs is in the British Museum, and smaller fragments, given by Layard and his associates to friends or picked up after the close of the expeditions, are dispersed in private and public collections all over the world.

The fragment illustrated on page 152 is so badly damaged that the casual observer may find it difficult to discern more than the outlines of a bearded man clasping his sword. But if we look closely we can see that this figure differs only slightly from that of the officer preceding the king's chariot in the drawing above. Posture and accouterments are almost identical, especially the scabbard with the large tassel and the two entwined lions. Because of this close resemblance Mr. Gadd, in *The Stones of Assyria*, suggested that our fragment belonged to a similar group from the same vicinity as the sculptures of which Layard's drawing shows one section. These sculptures, presumably from the walls of one of the ramps leading to the palace, show Sennacherib drawn in his chariot in a procession which ascends on one side of the ramp and descends on the other. The festive attire and ceremonial attitudes of the figures suggest that they were going to and returning from the temple of Ishtar, in the direction of which the ramp led. The artist was evidently trying to give a lifelike portrayal of an actual procession of votaries as it went up and down the ramp.

The relief on the next page shows cavalrymen leading their horses along a stream. Layard published only one of his drawings of the room from which this fragment, and possibly the one below it, came, but he described the
reliefs in this room as follows: “The Assyrian army was seen fording a broad river amidst wooded mountains. The sculptor had endeavored to convey the idea of a valley by reversing the trees and mountains on one side of the stream. Rivulets flowed from the hills to the river, irrigating in their course vineyards and orchards. The king in his chariot was followed by a long retinue of warriors on foot and on horses richly caparisoned, by led horses with even gayer trappings, and by men bearing on their shoulders his second chariot, which had a yoke ornamented by bosses and carvings. He was preceded by his army, the variously accoutered spearmen and the bowmen forming separate regiments or divisions.”

The sculptor indicated the fording by showing the Assyrians advancing in the river, surrounded by its waters.
This solution of the problem, although not found elsewhere on Sennacherib's reliefs, is nevertheless characteristic of the methods of his sculptors and of Mesopotamian art in general. Had the artist tried to represent a soldier according to our conventions with the lower part of his body submerged and invisible, the king would probably not have understood, since in reality the man was still whole and no part of his body had disappeared.

Instead of a visual impression of the event the Assyrian artist thus drew a representation which exacted from the spectator the mental effort of reading and solving it like a rebus: a band of wavy lines was the traditional "graph" for a water course and the spectator was expected to know that the Assyrian horseman would not step into the river except to ford it. Of course, it was easier for the Assyrians to "read" these representations than it is for us, as they were used to seeing mountains marked by a cone pattern and rivers indicated above.
by wavy bands both on pictorial representations and on maps. Yet even we can recognize some of the localities recorded on Sennacherib’s reliefs. For example in the panels of the siege of Lachish the outline of the slopes corresponds to the present degree of slope in the mound of Lachish. Further indications of the regions covered by the king’s campaigns on the reliefs were given by the different types of trees and animals and by the varying costumes of the conquered peoples. Accurate reporting, the principal aim of Sennacherib’s artists, was thus satisfactorily achieved by conventionalized graphic elements that formed the background.

In portraying the human and animal figures that were placed upon this background the same desire for accuracy caused the sculptors to strive towards the most detailed execu-

**ABOVE:** A soldier ferrying captives. From one of the reliefs of Sennacherib’s campaigns in the marshlands round the Persian Gulf. **BELOW:** Drawing of a battle scene in the marshes. Fugitives hiding in the canebrakes are revealed to view as the reeds bend under the impact of their boats.
tion of their silhouettes in low relief and towards the most faithful rendering of their movements. A very striking example is furnished by the fragment at the top of page 154. The first of the two cavalrymen is walking up, the second is about to lead his horse down a small elevation on the bank of the river. The hand of this second spearman is slightly lowered, the horse's rein held a little tighter than the first, who, of course, has to give the horse all possible freedom of movement. Other details in the minute execution of the soldiers' equipment and the horses' trappings—for instance, the heavy tassels, whose threads seem almost soft to the touch—are made strikingly real.

Two rooms, one court, and the western façade of Sennacherib's palace were decorated with reliefs showing his campaigns in the marshlands of the region around the Persian Gulf (see drawing). Here Sennacherib attacked the inhabitants from the sea on boats built in Nineveh for that purpose by Phoenician captives from the Syrian harbor towns and then floated down the Tigris. The fragment on the opposite page, an Assyrian soldier ferrying captives across a stretch of water, is probably from a relief of this type. This marshy landscape must have had a curious fascination for Sennacherib. He even tried to recreate such scenery in Assyria in the area flooded by the superfluous waters of the aqueduct that he built to supply Nineveh with good water. He had thickets of reeds planted, and water birds, swine, and other creatures let loose in them—as he had seen them in the south. Sennacherib's feeling for the beauty of scenery is remarkable for his time. As a rule the Assyrians were afraid of the canebrakes, the dense forests, and the desert, where they believed that evil demons roamed. For them, as for most peoples of antiquity, the beauty of nature was limited to a well-tended, well-watered garden.
The siege of a city in the mountains of Armenia or Persia is portrayed in two rooms of Sennacherib’s palace, a section of which is shown in the drawing on these two pages. In the relief at the left, a fragment broken from this section, the soldiers are represented with varying equipment and attire. The pair at the right consists of a spearman who protects with his shield the archer standing beside him. They have the same equipment as the cavalryman on page 154, probably the typical Assyrian outfit; this also applies to the two soldiers behind...
them. Another pair of archers, however, of which only the hands and part of the bows are visible on the fragment, have no armor and are barefooted. These light archers possibly represent foreign contingents that were incorporated in the Assyrian army to swell its ranks in the same manner as the auxiliaries of the Roman Empire. Also the spearmen on the ladders, who have nothing more to protect them from the hail of stones hurled down by the defenders of the city than small breast-plates and their shields, may be such foreigners, perhaps Ionians.

The sculptor’s detailed rendering of the costumes worn by the different peoples subjugated by Sennacherib permits us to assign the fragment on page 160 to the same series of reliefs as those on these pages. The male captives who are being led down from their mountainous strongholds wear capes or mantles of animal skins. Scarcely more than the outlines of the figures is preserved. Never-
Nevertheless, the prisoners driven along by the threatening stick of the Assyrian soldier—one of the male captives raising his shackled hands—give a very real impression of the “deportation” here portrayed.

This striving towards realism and the stressing of detail on Sennacherib’s reliefs seems to be compatible with the king’s character as it reveals itself in his inscriptions. Every small event of his campaigns is recorded in his annals—even such a personal detail as the fact that in the course of climbing a steep mountain he had to sit down to rest on the bare ground and (like the plain soldiers) drink from water-skins to quench his thirst. In the same meticulous manner, with the same desire for realistic detail, we may suppose that he followed the progress of his sculptors’ representation of the battles he had fought and all the other activities that are shown on the walls of his palace.

Comparison with the battle reliefs from Ashurnasirpal’s throne room in his palace at Calah brings out the characteristic way in which Sennacherib’s artists achieved the impression of a realistic rendering of an event. Obviously, the primary concern of Ashurnasirpal’s artists was the expression of Assyrian force and destructive power, and the portrayal of action was merely the most effective means to this end. Another means of achieving the impression of power was the use of narrow bands in which the massive figures with their steely muscles were compressed. In spite of the fact that the subject rendered in these bands extended over two or more of the sculptured alabaster slabs lining the walls, the representation on each slab was treated as a unit. In the rhythmic composition by which the Assyrian sculptor tried to express the forcible motion of his subject, the single slabs thus provided the measures.

In Sennacherib’s reliefs, on the other hand, the representation in narrow bands has given way to scenes spread over entire walls with only the landscape background as a unifying element. The rhythmic division of the space is formed by the vertical, horizontal, or diagonal lines provided by the background. Within these lines the figures are often assembled in a scene that is an entity in itself. This is very clearly seen in the siege reproduced on pages 158-159. It is for this reason that fragments torn from these reliefs (for instance that on page 156, and the one illustrated here) can stand alone as fully balanced compositions. They are the single verses in the narrative of Sennacherib’s feats.

The drawings made by Layard and his assistants have been reproduced from Layard’s great folio Monuments of Nineveh (2nd series, London, 1853, pls. 25, 31); from the lively account of his excavations, Nineveh and Babylon (London, 1853, pl. opp. p. 290); and from C. J. Gadd’s Stones of Assyria (London, 1936, pl. 23). This last-mentioned book contains the history of the Assyrian reliefs since their discovery and, with the aid of the published and unpublished material left by the excavators, attempts to localize the surviving sculptures in the palaces of the Assyrian kings. Historical information concerning Sennacherib is found in Olmstead’s comprehensive History of Assyria (New York, 1923). The map on page 155 is from Nuzi, by R. F. S. Starr (Cambridge, Mass., 1937, pl. 55 U).