Dowleh’s village is Sudairah on the east bank of the Tigris opposite the modern town of Sharqat. Just north of Sharqat lies Qalat Sharqat, the present-day Arabic name for Assur, the old tribal capital of the Assyrian Empire. When the Germans excavated at Assur, half a century ago, they employed workmen of the generation of Dowleh’s grandfather. Although these men were farmers, as are their grandsons, some of them excelled and became skilled archaeological workers. Their sons and their sons’ sons learned from their fathers. As a consequence the Sharqatis, as they have become known, comprise an informal guild of craftsmen experienced in recovering from the ancient mounds of their land, Iraq, the remains of the distant past. In fact, some of the current generation are full-time salaried employees working for the Iraq Department of Antiquities.

The Sharqatis are professionals and take great pride in their skill. Any special triumph or disaster of one of their group will be long recounted around future winter fires over countless glasses of tea. “Remember the time when Mohammed dug away the mud-brick wall without recognizing it but saved the mud plaster which had covered its face! Remember when Nejim not only discovered but rescued those unbaked bricks bearing the stamped inscription of Amar-Zuen in the Inanna Temple!” In recent years the Sharqatis have supplied the skilled labor for Danish, English, Japanese, Iraqi, and American expeditions, often traveling far from their homes and remaining away for months, all the while faithfully sending by telegraph a portion of their wages back to their families near Sharqat.

The Sharqatis’ tools are few: two types of picks, a special hoe, and, if the task is delicate, a...
Dowleh unearthing an ivory with a paring knife and a small paintbrush. The first pick is a large, double-headed instrument swung with both hands; it has a sharp point on one head and a wider chisel-like cutting edge on the other. This, the largest of the hand tools, is used only for heavy work, either to remove from a room relatively barren fill well above floor level or to break down mud-brick walls already excavated and mapped. The second pick is a tool easily controlled by one hand. One end of the seven-inch iron head is sharply pointed, and an eighteen-inch haft is attached through a hole to the other end. This pick is the Sharqatis’ most-used implement; so much so, in fact, that the Sharqatis are ordinarily referred to as “pickmen.” The point, which must be resharpened at intervals by the village blacksmith, enables the Sharqati to perform a number of detailed operations. With it he feels the difference in the density of the soil: the difference between a sun-dried brick wall erected long ago and the fill that accrued, for the most part, only after the building was in ruins. With it he flakes straw-tempered mud plaster from the face of a mud-brick wall. With it he frees from the soil an object that has been embedded there for millenniums. With the side of the pick he crushes clumps of dirt to make certain that no small artifact, a cylinder seal for example, is concealed in the mass.

The short-handled, hoelike tool is commonly employed for raking out of the way dirt that has been loosened by the picks. In addition it is used to scrape away the surface when an excavation is just beginning. If the pickman scrapes the surface down to moist dirt, he will often discover the outlines of mud-brick walls previously hidden by the dry topsoil.

The paring knife and small brush are reserved for the most fragile objects such as carved ivories and cuneiform tablets. Shovels and baskets are employed for removal of the excavated earth. These last items, however, are ordinarily the equipment handled by local day laborers from villages near the site of the dig.

For the past two hours, Dowleh has been scraping away clay fill with his paring knife (Figure 2). At appropriate intervals he whisks away the loose dirt with his brush. Now and then he pauses for a cigarette or for a brief chat with his three compatriots, Salih, Mohammed Ali, and Mohammed Rowdhan, who are similarly engaged. He half lies and half sits, changing his position frequently both for the sake of his task and for his own comfort. Beneath him the ground is moist and cool. Overhead the white canvas of
a tent flaps gently in the breeze, shutting out the brilliance of the sun and its drying effects. Moreover, the tent affords protection from late spring showers. Dowleh likes the ground in which he is digging to be neither too wet and soft nor too dry and hard, because he is excavating fragile ivories. They are buried in a long narrow room, S.W. 37, fourteen feet wide and one hundred feet long, in the storage magazines of Fort Shalmaneser. Inside the walls of this room, in fill six feet deep, more carved ivories have been discovered than in all the remainder of Nimrud, where the first such ivories were unearthed on November 10, 1845. How the ivories came to be buried in such a disorderly manner, at so many different levels within the six feet of fill, we can only conjecture. The gold leaf that had originally covered certain portions of the ivories has been stripped off, in all likelihood by the Medes when they destroyed Nimrud in 612 B.C.

Fort Shalmaneser was the anchor of the defenses for the southeast corner of Nimrud’s outer city wall, a wall inclosing some nine hundred acres. From this fort, built in the days of King Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.)—a structure named by the excavators after its builder—the Assyrian armies went out on their annual campaigns of conquest and plunder. A part of the booty brought back from their campaigns in Phoenicia, in the west on the Great Sea, may have consisted of some of the ivories found today by archaeologists of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq. Other ivories were carved at Nimrud itself either by Phoenician artisans or by Assyrians influenced by Phoenician models.

Before Dowleh lies exposed a piece about a foot high, an ivory figure of a hawk-headed man clad in a short kilt (Figure 4). Portions of this ivory in champlevé—that is, engraved or scooped out—were originally filled with red and blue paste, traces of which are still preserved. This piece was no prosaic monotone but was alive

4-6, LEFT TO RIGHT: The hawk-headed man in a chunk of yellow-brown clay, freed from the clay, and restored. Now in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad
7. "St. George and the Dragon" in its clump of earth from either side. This ivory (Figure 7) portrays a winged young man thrusting a lance into the beak of a winged griffin, which he grasps by the comb with his left hand. Dowleh must exercise even greater caution than with the first piece, because much of the decoration was originally held in place by many thin and fragile cloisons, particularly on the wings both of the boy and the griffin.

Dowleh, Salih, Mohammed Ali, and Mohammed Rowdhan are ideally suited by temperament for their task. The fact that they come from the Near East is a part of the answer. There, where time is not so important and where patience is considered a greater virtue than in the West, people are not so frustrated by detailed, time-consuming tasks in which attainment comes slowly. At the end of the day they collect the shallow trays, climb into the expedition Land Rover, and watch over the ivories during the journey of a mile to headquarters on the Nimrud citadel. On either side of the road wheat and barley grow. The rolling countryside is still green from the spring rains, and the wild flowers in red, yellow, white, and blue lean their heads

with brilliant color. Now that the top surface of the ivory is clearly recognizable, Dowleh reaches for a glass jar filled with a diluted solution of polyvinyl acetate (PVA). With a brush he applies PVA to the exposed surface of the piece. The liquid dries quickly, forming a protective and cohesive coating over the ivory. Any attempt to remove the hawk-headed figure from the soil prior to application of the PVA would have revealed that the ivory has split into many pieces. Now Dowleh proceeds to undercut the ivory with his paring knife. In another hour the figure lies on a chunk of yellowish-brown clay in a shallow plywood tray. Final removal from the dirt is the task of restorers in the expedition house.

Before Dowleh now is a second piece, executed in openwork, a type of carving sometimes finished on both front and back faces, made to be viewed

8. Eric von Gericke cleaning pieces of the "St. George and the Dragon"
toward the lowering sun. In the distance the high mountains of Kurdistan to the north and east are still white with snow. Within a fortnight after the first hot blasts of summer, the wheat and barley will be ripe, the grass will be brown, and the wild flowers will be dead and gone until another Assyrian spring.

At the expedition house the screened double doors are pushed open and the trays of ivories are carefully carried inside. An upset tray would mean a multiplication of fragments, because few of the ivories are complete and still fewer are sound after a burial of two and one half millennia. The trays are deposited on tables and plaster-covered benches, waist-high, around the outside walls of the workrooms. Careful appraisal of the ivories in the trays must be made to determine which deserve the most immediate treatment, which are of secondary quality, and which may be discarded altogether.

Although Dowleh’s task is painstaking, the work of the restorer requires even more perseverance. A clear eye, a steady hand, and infinite patience are the most important attributes of a first-class ivory repairer, and the greatest of these is patience. Normally the dirt in which an ivory may still be embedded is allowed to dry a bit before final removal of the piece is attempted. Although many members of the staff take a hand in cleaning the more than three hundred pieces of carved ivory that are eventually given numbers and described in the official 1961 catalogue, the burden of the cleaning and repair falls on Charmian and Eric. Eric
von Gericke comes from South Africa and Charmian Reed from England. Both have studied at the Institute of Archaeology in the University of London where they learned the latest techniques for dealing with antiquities in the field. Charmian is at Nimrud on special leave from the Institute in order to get some field experience. Eric is spending the year in the Near East as a Gulbenkian Fellow. Quite naturally, Eric and Charmian deal with the most difficult pieces while the remainder of us undertake simpler tasks of cleaning and repair.

Among the prime essentials of equipment are a table and chair of the correct working height for the restorer, because the hours spent on the great quantities of ivories that pour forth from Fort Shalmaneser are long and trying, lasting far into the night, lit by the brilliant glare from pressure kerosene lanterns. Having selected a piece for cleaning, in this case the hawk-headed man Dowleh had found, Charmian sits at her table in front of a window. The first problem is to free the piece from the chunk of earth Dowleh has carved out. Since the condition of the figure is relatively good, the piece splits into only a few major fragments. With each piece in position on a clean sheet of paper (Figure 5), the business of restoration is ready to begin. In a tea glass Charmian has acetone or methylated spirits. In one discarded preserve jar she has a medium solution of PVA and in a second a more dilute mixture of the same material. Any loose surface dirt is whisked away with a brush appropriate to the size and fragility of the piece. Then around an orange stick she wraps a bit of clean cotton. This swab she dips into the acetone and then saturates the dirt on a portion of the ivory. The dirt is loosened by the liquid, and she wipes or scrubs a spot of the ivory clean. With a sharp-pointed steel instrument—a dental explorer or a handle into which a strong needle has been inserted—Charmian carefully goes around every tiny groove in the carving. Stop! The ivory has broken! After the first few times, breaks are no surprise, because they will be many before the entire piece is cleaned and reassembled. No matter how delicate her touch, the ivory splits often along the “growth rings” of the tusk from which it was cut. As long as the breaks are new, to reglue the fragments is not difficult. If the breaks are old, however, the chances are that the pieces that once fitted together have warped in different ways so that a good join is no longer possible. Charmian glues the break with the thicker solution of PVA and puts it aside to dry while resuming her task on another portion of the ivory. In a few minutes she returns to the glued pieces and continues to work on them. Just one more stroke with the swab and that particular portion of the ivory will be clean. There is too much acetone on the swab, however, and it dissolves the glued joint. The pieces fall apart a second time! This combination of brushing, swabbing, gluing, regluing, and following the fine lines with the sharp tool continues according to the endurance of the operator until the cleaning and repair is ended. As a final step in her task, Charmian coats the entire piece with a thin application of PVA, which acts both as a binder and shield for the surface. Portions of the hawk-headed figure (Figure 6) are lacking; but if any restoration in wax should prove desirable, that is not a field task but one for the laboratories in Baghdad or London.

Eric’s task (see Figure 8) of cleaning and repairing a type of ivory we call “St. George and the
"Dragon" is frequently one of utter exasperation. Since it is openwork and has at the same time so many very thin partitions in the champlevé portions, the opportunities for fracture after 2500 years in the earth are almost limitless. It is impossible for Eric to free the piece from its mother clump of soil without its splitting into many of the smallest fragments. This is not the kind of piece with which one can work steadily until it is completed. Too great an exposure to its continual breaking and its multiple pieces would rapidly drive a restorer, even with Eric’s skill and patience, mad. After spending perhaps a fortnight, completing numerous more simple pieces in the meantime, Eric places his winged boy, originally thrusting a lance with his right hand into the beak of a winged griffin (Figure 9), in the tray of cleaned ivories to be numbered, catalogued, divided, packed, and shipped to their destinations.

Charmian paints very neat red registration numbers on the cleaned ivories. Jeff, well versed in the phraseology of Egyptian art, is most adept at describing each numbered piece for the expedition catalogue. Next comes Barbara’s turn, or mine, as the case happens to be, for photography. Photographs of all the ivories are taken on black-and-white film, which is promptly developed to see whether the resulting negative is good. The best pieces are photographed in color, not only because some of the ivories are quite photogenic, but also as an aid for lectures both in England and in the United States.

At last the fateful day has arrived. This morning Sayyid Taha Baqir, the Director-General of the Iraq Department of Antiquities, and Sayyid Fuad Safar, the Director of Archaeological Research, have come to effect a division of the ivories between the Iraq Government and the expedition of the British School. The Iraqi antiquities law allows the possibility of a division, and the fact that so many of the ivories appear in multiple duplicates is the good fortune not only of the Iraq Museum but also of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq. First, the unique pieces are set aside for the Iraq Museum; then the remaining ivories are balanced one against another by David Oates, the director of the expedition, and by Barbara Parker, the secretary of the British School in Iraq. They are, of course, rebalanced during the process of the division itself. Sitting nearby are representatives both of the Department of Antiquities and the expedition, each with a copy of the expedition catalogue of ivories at hand. B for Baghdad or E for Expedition is placed opposite the catalogue number of each piece, according to the institution to which it is allotted. In the end, the two copies of the catalogue are checked and the dis-

11. Nosepiece for a horse, portraying the goddess Ishtar, from Nimrud. Phoenician, viii century B.C. Height 6½ inches. Rogers Fund, 61.197.5
crepancies in the $B$’s and $E$’s eliminated. The division is completed. Then comes the packing of the $B$ pieces by Selim el-Jelili, the Iraqi commissioner to our expedition, and of the $E$ pieces by members of the expedition staff. Once transported to Baghdad, the $B$ and $E$ pieces both go to the Iraq Museum, where the $B$ pieces remain, and where the $E$ pieces are approved by Iraqi customs for export from the country. The $E$ pieces are sent to London by plane and from there distributed to various supporters of the British School.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art has been an active and major support of the British School at Nimrud through the Rogers Fund since 1951. Our Ancient Near East gallery bears eloquent witness to the abundance of ivories (Figures 1, 10, 11) produced by the excavations at Nimrud. In the gallery cases, the Nimrud ivories represent fine and often superb works of man’s artistic genius. I trust that this record in word and in photograph has told, at least in part, how a multitude of people, both in the past and the present, have contributed their combined skill and patience to give you the pleasure of viewing Nimrud ivories in New York.

12. Tents over portions of an “ivory magazine”