



ASSYRIA III. PARTHIAN ASSUR

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Assur, the old Assyrian metropolis, was once again to acquire a certain importance in the centuries of the pre-Christian era and the early part of the new millennium. In 141 B.C. the Parthian king Mithridates I conquered large parts of Mesopotamia, including probably Assyria. Although the Parthians were soon driven back out of Mesopotamia in (130-29 B.C.), Assur finally fell under Parthian influence from the reign of Mithridates II onwards (ca. 124-23 to ca. 90 or 87 B.C.)—that is to say, from about 113 B.C., when Adiabene became a Parthian vassal state along with several other kingdoms. This historical background indicates that the Parthian settlement of Assur could not have begun before 141 B.C., and probably not before the end of the second century B.C. We do not know for certain whether the city still bore the name Assur in the Parthian period; it may have been called Labbana (see E. Herzfeld, *Memnon* 1, 1907, pp. 231ff.; 2nd rev. ed. by B. Hronca, Munich, 1977, p. 270; W. Andrae, *Das Wiedererstandene Assur*, Leipzig, 1938, p. 188). Our knowledge of Assur is primarily derived from the German excavations under the direction of Walter Andrae in 1903-1914. As far as the Parthian period is concerned, three separate phases of development can be distinguished. The first, the Early Parthian period, is thought by Andrae to have occurred around A.D. 117, the date of the siege of Hatra by Trajan. The most important buildings, the place and the temples, were apparently constructed in this period. The next phase, the High Parthian period which extended up to about



A.D. 200, did not produce any buildings of note. The third phase, the Late Parthian period, came to an end in A.D. 256 according to Andrae (op. cit., p. 188); this was the year in which Hatra was destroyed by the Sasanians. Perhaps the fall of Assur can be dated even earlier; the last memorial inscription goes back to A.D. 227-28 (see P. Jensen, *MDOG* 60, 1920, p. 23).

The largest site is that of the “Parthian palace” unearthed in 1909. The plan, arranged around a large central courtyard, is reminiscent of Assyrian and Babylonian models. On each side of the courtyard stood an *ayvān*. Assur thus furnishes one of the earliest examples of this architectural design which was to become established in the Parthian period (see on this subject E. Keall, in *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History: Studies in Honor of George C. Miles*, Beirut, 1974, pp. 123ff.). The religious architecture of Parthian Assur is situated on the northeastern plateau, in the same location as the earlier Assyrian sanctuaries. The archeologists found evidence of several temples, of which the most important are the Assur “Temple A” and the “Peripteros Temple.” We should also note the “House of Festivals” and the numerous graves and tombs scattered throughout the city. The adornment of the various buildings reveals a predominantly Hellenistic character; the widespread use of stucco represents an innovation. The facades of Assur provide the earliest examples of this new form of wall-coating.

Artistic remains include several reliefs (important for their inscriptions, which are dated), remnants of wall paintings, fragments of graffiti and drawings on pieces of masonry and pottery.

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Figure 54. Assyria and its neighbors under Assarhaddon and Aššurbanipal