

the clay was marked while moist by strokes of a stick, sinking deeply at one end and leaving the mark narrower and lighter at the other. The cuneiform symbols are believed to be modifications of a pictorial alphabet. This form of writing continued in the Assyrian period. In the collars of the Ninevite palaces have been found the ancient libraries of the kings—eight-sided bricks covered with cuneiform inscriptions. The Assyrian language was related to the Hebrew, Arab, and Phœnician, and is deciphered with considerable success by the aid of these languages.

The translation of the cuneiform signs into the corresponding sounds was first made possible by inscriptions of the Persian period using the cuneiform symbols for the Persian language. In these inscriptions, certain frequently recurring combinations were presumed to be the names of kings. Guesses at translations of certain combinations as being the names of Darius and Xerxes, were proved correct by a vase (now in the Louvre at Paris), which contained a Persian and an Egyptian inscription side by side. Thus a key was obtained to the cuneiform syllabary. The reading of Assyrian inscriptions in the cuneiform writing was first achieved in connection with a rock inscription at Bagistana in Media, dating from King Darius, and repeated in three languages, Persian, Medish, and Assyrian, with the same cuneiform symbols. The matter of the Ninevite inscriptions contains some interesting legends. They consist mainly, however, of royal chronicles of campaigns and conquests.



Assyrian Divinity.*

The sculptured stone slabs with which the brick walls of the palaces were covered are the most interesting of Assyrian remains. Numbers of these are in the British Museum, London. These reliefs furnish very vivid and spirited pictures of the lives of the Assyrian kings, their warfare, hunting excursions, sacrificial processions, etc. Immense human-headed bulls—emblems, like the Egyptian Sphinx, of combined wisdom and power—flanked the palace entrances. The ruins of Babylon and of Persepolis offer interesting examples of a later period of decorative sculpture based on the same methods. Arched city gates and arched drains have been excavated at and near Nineveh. Beautiful examples of tile work, and many ivory carvings and carved gems have also been found.

* Relief slab from Nimroud, in the British Museum.