

Restoration

Lion, Bc, 1

The restoration concept of the Tell Halaf-Project allows extensive surface completions or reconstructions only in areas crucial for static stability or in case the overall appearance of a sculpture demands the closing of gaps to achieve a conclusive image. It is not intended to re-create the complete surface of the objects with modern materials as it seems preferable to use additions cautiously and leave as much of the original stone visible as possible. Generally relief decoration is not imitated on completed surfaces. Every fragment that does not join another piece directly undergoes a minute investigation determining if it indeed belongs to a specific sculpture or not. In case of doubt it will be left out of the reconstruction. Fortunately as a result of the sorting and identification work several fragments that had not been attributed to any object in von Oppenheim's time have now been assigned to their original monuments. With the insight gained it will be possible to achieve a more authentic and in some cases even more complete reconstruction of sculptures in comparison to the state of restoration that was attained prior to the Second World War.

Body Bc,1

In February of 2002 the stone restorer of the Museum of Ancient Near Eastern Art Eastern Archaeology, Dipl.-Rest. Stefan Geismeier, started the restoration of the first animal base from the Western Palace, a lion labelled Bc, 1 (according to Tell Halaf III). During the different work phases a number of questions concerning for example antique stonemason techniques could be answered. The damage symptoms observed led to the conclusion that the entrance façade was intentionally destroyed in ancient times: None of the column elements was entirely preserved when excavated as opposed to the small orthostats from the wall base at the back of the building. It was the Russian artist Igor von Jakimow who, hired by Max von Oppenheim, made the first attempts to piece the sculptures back together, who also created moulds for plaster casts and designed completed plaster models.

Head Bc,1

The temperature shock caused by fire and extinguishing water put enormous strain on the basalt and has ultimately weakened its structure. Finest fissures affect the stability of the fragments making the consolidation of the pieces the highest priority. Next to the stabilization of contour scales the grouting of ruptures takes up most of the time. Dowels, metal anchors and old cement additions have to be removed and/or replaced trying to minimize bonding seams and to obtain optimal accuracy when re-joining the fragments. Missing parts of the upper and lower jaw of the lion Bc, 1 were mirrored according to preserved fragments so that the shape gained represents a plausible approximation to the original image.

Griffin

Some segments for example the head and the chest of the griffin from the second doorway of the Western Palace were better protected during the fire because they were embedded in some substantial mortar completions. Subsequently they could be salvaged still being more or less

complete. In order to preserve von Jakimow's earlier restoration casts were made from both segments before taking them apart. Thereby a solution of historic value is conserved and documented, at the same time the casts allow to use the previous shape as reference even after the disassembly, for instance when it comes to placing controversial fragments. The exposed pieces were consolidated, cleaned and glued together with epoxy resin. Gypsum was the obvious choice for re-building the chest while the head's core was reinforced with a special solvent-free mortar. Re-surfacing could be achieved by using a material-imitating mortar applied in a thin layer, a development by Berlin-based restorer Gerhard Kunze.

Orthostat

The inferno in the museum destroyed also numerous smaller objects; all limestone relief slabs and stone implements as well as the majority of the small finds were burnt beyond retrieval. In the first year of project activities nine small orthostats could be attested through fragments. Restorations on the 'female sphinx' (A 3,151) have been concluded; furthermore work on a relief slab depicting an animal combat (A 3, 108) is in progress. Minor gaps on the front were closed under surface level and retouched with colour pigments without obscuring the actual state of preservation.

Statue of a seated couple

Especially complex is the cleaning of surfaces that were spoiled with tar dripping from the burning roof into the exhibition hall. The sculpture of a seated couple is covered with a thick layer of tar that even penetrated the stone to the effect that the surface structure was unrecognizable. A residue less removal of the discolouration is not always possible, yet a combination of different cleaning methods can achieve a satisfying result.

Max von Oppenheim, Tell Halaf III: Die Bildwerke, bearbeitet von A. Moortgat, Berlin 1955