

# **“Remember me, but ah! forget my fate.” Aspects of the Reception of Neo-Assyrian Art in Belgium.**

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## Abstract

Assyromania, as a special brand of Orientalism, is well-attested in Victorian art. A first survey is given here of XIXth-century examples of the reception of Neo-Assyrian art in Belgium. These occur especially in masonic contexts, such as the temples build for “Les Amis Philanthropes” and “Les Vrais Amis de l’Union et du Progrès”, two lodges active in Brussels. A subtle re-use of “classical” Neo-Assyrian themes is to be found in the “The Death of Dido” by Joseph Stallaert, dated 1872. This is a magnificent example of the so-called Neo-Pompeian style, which deserves to be better-known.

## Keywords

Assyria; Assyromania; Belgium; Freemasonry; Hiram; Reception; Joseph Stallaert; Louis Delbeke; Jean Gouweloos.

I still think the Nineveh marbles are not valuable as works of art...  
Can a mere admirer of the beautiful view them with pleasure?  
Certainly not, and in this respect they are in the same category  
with the paintings and sculptures of Egypt and India...

Letter signed Henry Rawlinson to Austen Layard, 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1846<sup>1</sup>

## **Introduction: The Reception of Neo-Assyrian Art**

The reception of ancient Egyptian art, with its rich and varied iconography, has been the subject of many studies now,<sup>2</sup> while that of Near-Eastern art, and even of Neo-Assyrian art, which are quite rich and varied too, have not received the same attention, until quite recently.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Bohrer, “Inventing Assyria”, 343.

2 Moser, “Reconstructing Ancient Worlds”.

3 Bohrer, “Inventing Assyria”; Bohrer, *Orientalism* are pioneering contributions; also see, lately, with many variations on the theme Verderame and Garccia-Ventura, *Receptions of the Ancient Near East*.

We shall not elaborate here on the rediscovery of ancient Assyria. The narrative reliefs from its palaces first came to light in the 1840s, during excavations led by Paul-Émile Botta, and by Austen Henry Layard. The former went to the Musée du Louvre in Paris, the latter to the British Museum in London, to be viewed by the cultivated public. The fact that the Neo-Assyrian kings are mentioned in Biblical texts enhanced its interest for the art that the likes of Ashurnasirpal II commissioned.

Assyromania, as a particular brand of Orientalism, as exemplified by “Belus’ fiancée”, a canvas by the French “peintre d’histoire” Henri-Paul Motte, assyromania, thrives on what Charles Baudelaire so aptly calls “luxe, calme et volupté”<sup>4</sup> (Fig. 1). Maria Gabriella Micale summarizes it this way: “In a western cultural context according to which past and present of a generically located Orient were mixed, the osmosis between image and imagination was easily created. Archaeology and cultural stereotype mixed with each other and reciprocally served the creation of allegedly historically based settings and, conversely, influenced the interpretation of archaeological data”.<sup>5</sup>

Testimonies of what is often called “Egyptomania”, are not rare, and sometimes extravagant, in Belgium,<sup>6</sup> while those of what we could call “Assyromania” are certainly less numerous, but worthy of looking at. They remain virtually unexplored.<sup>7</sup> They often appear in combination, as an expression of a general interest in the oldest pre-Christian civilizations, as was emphasised by freethinkers and freemasons. However, as the discoveries in the Near East, i.e. Assyria (as excavations were concentrated there), were not deemed art, though, Assyromania only begins to play a more important role when archaeology comes to the fore.

Meanwhile, as soon as 1854, Antoine Guillaume Schayes, keeper of the Museum at the Porte de Hal in Brussels, did buy a Neo-Assyrian relief from Khorsabad, but it was soon forgotten.<sup>8</sup> He acquired it from the Italian painter and engraver Luigi Calamatta, who was active in Brussels between 1837 and 1860, and was the son-in-law of the French archaeologist and numismatist Désiré Raoul-Rochette, who died that very same year, 1854. The sculpture is still part of the collections of what is nowadays called the Art & History Museum of Brussels.

4 His poem “L’invitation au voyage”, with this celebrated expression, was published in “Les Fleurs du Mal” in 1857.

5 Micale, “The Use and Abuse”, 430–431.

6 Warmenbol, *Le lotus et l’oignon*; Warmenbol, “L’égyptomanie et l’égyptologie”.

7 Gubel, “A l’ombre de Babel”; Gubel, “De herontdekking van het Oude Nabije Oosten”.

8 Gubel, “De herontdekking van het Oude Nabije Oosten”, 27 and 30, fig. 27.



**Fig. 1:** Henri-Paul Motte, *Belus' fiancée* ("La fiancée de Bélus") (1885), acquired for the collections of the Musée d'Orsay in 2013 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris, RF 2013 8 – photo and © Galerie Vincent Lecuyer, Paris).

Louis Delgeur, doctor of philosophy and letters, but not an academic,<sup>9</sup> indeed wrote two papers, one in 1856, the other one in 1862, on Neo-Assyrian monuments, the first entitled “Le règne de Sennacherib, d’après les monuments assyriens nouvellement découverts” (1856), and the second “Ninive et ses antiquités” (1862). These show that he was not so much an Assyriologist or an Egyptologist, but an historian and geographer of Biblical antiquity, and a very pious man indeed.<sup>10</sup>

He was, incidentally, also the man who in 1860–1861 wrote the hieroglyphical texts (in Ancient Egyptian) accompanying the scenes in Egyptian style of the Egyptian Temple built in the Antwerp Zoo in 1855–1856.<sup>11</sup> The spectacular building was erected to house the larger African animals, and was inaugurated by the future King Leopold II, who was then just back from his first visit to the Valley of the Nile, where he would return in 1862–1863, in search for a colony.<sup>12</sup>

As Eric Gubel wrote:<sup>13</sup>

In Belgium [...] where the rediscovery of Ancient Egypt leaves its mark on architecture and the decorative arts at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, [that of Ancient Assyria and Babylonia marks little]. This is certainly to be explained by the fact that Assyriology and other disciplines studying the Near East, establishes itself later than Egyptology, and have to do with remains that are far less spectacular (our translation).

The fact there were no collections of ancient oriental antiquities in Belgium, and no scholarship on the subject to speak of, certainly also played a role.

Eric Gubel adds:

The [Brussels] Courthouse might be the exception that proves the rule. Though the variety of neo-styles the architect Poelaert puts to use in his creation does not include the architecture of Mesopotamia, the Viennese psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud as well as the French poet Paul Verlaine, compare the building, after their visit to

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9 Warmenbol, “Louis Delgeur”; Warmenbol, “Louis Delgeur (1819–1888)”.

10 Warmenbol, *Le lotus et l’oignon*, 483.

11 Warmenbol and Delvaux, “Oud-Egyptische teksten”; Warmenbol and Maclot, “Tempel en stal in één”.

12 Van Rinsveld, “La collection égyptienne”; Van Rinsveld, “‘Souvenirs’”.

13 Gubel, “A l’ombre de Babel”, 26–27.



Brussels, with an Assyrian palace and a Babylonian extravaganza respectively (our translation)

The building is indeed neo-classical in style, but its sheer size, its “*démeseure*”, brought the Orient and its alleged excesses to the mind of Western intellectuals.<sup>14</sup>

We propose a first assessment of Assyromania in Belgium, with a much-forgotten painting by the “Neo-Pompeian”<sup>15</sup> Joseph Stallaert as a starting point (fig. 2), a canvas actually detailing an episode from classical literature, “The Death of Dido”. It is a sturdy painting (265 x 412 cm), dating to 1872, in the collections of the *Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts* of Brussels.<sup>16</sup>

We will show that Assyromania, as does Egyptomania, plays a prominent role in the art and architecture of Freemasonry, with its strong interest in its assumed roots in the religion and philosophy of Egypt and the Orient.<sup>17</sup>

### “The Death of Dido”

As noted by the art critic Lucien Solvay (1924, 565):

[...] nothing could ever [...] distract [Joseph Stallaert] from his path towards the idealisation of classical purity, with somewhat mixed references to Greco-Roman art. *Hero Illuminating Leander's Crossing* had closely followed his *The Cellar of the Villa of Diomedes*. – *The Swan*, *Young Girl with Doves*, *The Thorn*, *Ulysses Recognized by his Nurse*, faded away by comparison to *The Death of Dido*, exhibited in 1872. This important painting [...], illustrates Stallaert's best period, and is assuredly his best work. A graceful feeling, somewhat theatrical, gives it, through its discreet colouring, something harmonious, yes, almost Virgilian (our translation).

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14 See also Pedde, “The ‘New Babylon’”.

15 Querci and De Caro, *Alma Tadema*.

16 Inventory number 2522; *Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts, Catalogue inventaire*, 580. Colour photographs in Ollinger-Zinque, “Stallaert, Joseph”, pl. XV and in Gubel, “Reflections on Carthage”, 126-127 and 129.

17 Curl, *The Art and Architecture*; Hamblin and Seely, *Solomon's Temple*.

“The Death of Dido” by Joseph Stallaert ([Fig. 2](#))<sup>18</sup> follows Virgil’s *Aeneid* almost to the letter. Dido’s suicide is described in Book IV,<sup>19</sup> from which follow two excerpts, that describe, or, better put, explain the painting:

IV, 642-652:

But Dido, trembling and frantic with her dreadful design, rolling bloodshot eyes, her quivering cheeks flecked with burning spots, and pale at the imminence of death, bursts into the inner courts of the house, climbs the high pyre in a frenzy and unsheathes the Dardanian’s [Aeneas’s] sword, a gift not sought for such purpose. Then, as she saw the Trojan dress and the familiar bed, pausing awhile in tearful thought, she threw herself on the couch and spoke her last words: “O once beloved gear, while God and Fate allowed, take my spirit, and release me from my woes”;<sup>20</sup>

and

IV, 663-673:

She ceased; and even as she spoke her handmaids see her fallen on the sword, the blade foaming with blood and her hands bespattered. A scream rises to the lofty roof; Rumour riots through the stricken city. The palace rings with lamentation, with sobbing and women’s shrieks, and heaven echoes with loud wails – as though all Carthage or ancient Tyre were falling before the intruding foe, and fierce flames were rolling on over the roofs of men, over the roofs of gods.

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18 A very “classical” subject indeed: Balmelle and Rebourg, “Didon et Enée”; De Los Llanos, “Didon et Enée”; Hano, “L’épisode d’Enée et Didon”. After the publication of Gustave Flaubert’s novel carrying her name (1862), the fictional character of Salammbô does appear more often than the character of Dido, indeed also fictional: Daguerre De Hureaux, “Salammbô”; Pelletier-Hornby, “Salammbô”; Siebenmorgen, Hattler, and Krause, “Karthago”.

19 “The Death of Dido” by Joseph Stallaert, 554–705.

20 “At trepida et coepitis immanibus effera Dido / sanguineam volvens aciem, maculisque trementes / nterfusa genas et pallida morte futura / interiora domus inrumpit limina et altos / conscendit furibunda rogos enseque recludit / Dardanium, non hos quaesitum munus in usus. / Hic postquam Iliacas vestis notumque cubile/ conspexit, paulum lacrimis et mente Morata / incubitque toro dixitque novissima verba: / ‘Dulces exuviae, dum fata deusque sinebat / accipite hanc animam meque his exsolvite curis.’ / [...]”.

Swooning, her sister heard, and in dismay rushed through the throng, tearing her face with her nails, and beating her breast with her fists, as she called on the dying woman by name.<sup>21</sup>

Dido dies on the “familiar bed”, in front of which Joseph Stallaert, displays Aeneas’ gear (harness, helmet, shield etc.), while the “Dardanian’s sword” lies on the bed. But the sheath is next to his gear, as Dido’s sister Anna covers the fatal wound with her hand, and Bercea, Sycheus’ nurse, leans over her. Sycheus was Dido’s husband, murdered by her brother Pygmalion.

According to Vergilius, before her suicide, Dido had indeed displayed upon the familiar bed or couch “the gear he wore, the sword he left, and an image of him [Aeneas]”,<sup>22</sup> while further on, describing the suicide, the poet mentions a “Trojan dress”,<sup>23</sup> again, his “once beloved” gear<sup>24</sup> and again of course, the fatal sword, which has meanwhile been unsheathed.<sup>25</sup>

One wonders if the richly decorated textiles upon which Dido is lying are mere sheets on the couch or are an evocation of the “Trojan dress”, otherwise not represented, and if so, whether the painter enhanced the “Trojan dress” with a Neo-Assyrian hunting scene.<sup>26</sup> The bed is placed upon wooden beams that make up the Virgilian pyre. At the top left of the painting, the boats taking Aeneas and his companions towards their destiny sail away.

### Neo-Assyrian details

The central pattern of the drapery on Dido’s couch (Fig. 3) is quite easily identified as a reproduction of a Neo-Assyrian hunting scene. The original bas-relief

<sup>21</sup> “Dixerat, atque illam media inter talia ferro / conlapsam aspiciunt comites, ensemque cruore / spumantem sparsasque manus. It clamor ad alta / atria: concussam bacchatur Fama per urbem. / Lamentis gemituque et femineo ululate / tecta fremunt, resonat magnis plan-goribus aether / non aliter quam si immissis ruat hostibus omnis / Karthago aut antiqua Tyros, flammaeque furentes / culmina perque hominum volvantur perque deorum. / Audiit exanimis trepidoque exterrita cursu / unguibus ora soror foedans et pectora pugnīs / per medios ruit, ac morientem nomine clamat”.

<sup>22</sup> IV, 507-508: super exuvias ensemque relictum effigiemque toro locat.

<sup>23</sup> IV, 648: Iliacas vestis, again his “once beloved” gear.

<sup>24</sup> IV, 651: dulces exuviae. Many translators use the word “relict”, which is most probably appropriate. Exuviae are the gear out of which trophies are made. They stand for what a warrior is, or has been.

<sup>25</sup> IV, 646: ensemque recludit Dardanium.

<sup>26</sup> Aeneas’ and Dido’s love affair ignites during a hunting party: Aeneid IV, 129-159 et 160-172.



Fig. 2: Joseph Stallaert, *The death of Dido* (“La Mort de Didon”) (1872) (Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels, 2522 – photo and © Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles).

showing a lion hunt belongs to the reign of Ashurnasirpal II. It was scrupulously copied by Joseph Stallaert after plate 10 of Austen Layard’s *Monuments of Nineveh from Drawings Made on the Spot*, published by John Murray in 1849.<sup>27</sup> It seems unlikely, but not unheard of, that Joseph Stallaert copied the bas-relief at the British Museum in London, where it has been kept since 1849 (Fig. 4).<sup>28</sup> It was part of the decorative program of the throne-room (Room B) of Ashurnasirpal’s North-West palace in Nimrud, where Austen Layard discovered it in 1846.<sup>29</sup> The scene has been frequently studied and reproduced, in drawings as well as in photographs.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Layard, *The Monuments of Nineveh*, pl. 10. Austen Layard notes: “This bas-relief, which may be considered one of the finest specimens hitherto discovered of Assyrian sculpture, is remarkable for the spirit of the grouping and the careful and faithful delineation of the forms, particularly of the lions”. Curtis, “*Assyria revealed*”, 214–215.

<sup>28</sup> BM 124534. See also Guha, “*Nineveh*”.

<sup>29</sup> Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains*, 308–310; Meuszynski, *Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen*, 17–25.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. Budge, *Assyrian Sculptors*, pl. XII; Gadd, *The Stones of Assyria*, 133; Albenda, “*Ashurnasirpal II*”; Strawn, *What is stronger than a lion?*, fig. 4.117; Lion and Michel, “*Les chasses royales néo-assyriennes*”, fig. 1.

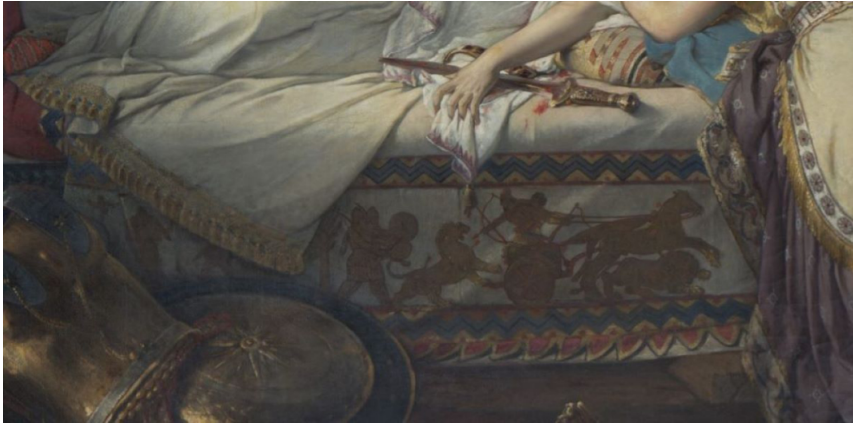


Fig. 3: Joseph Stallaert, *The death of Dido*, detail: an interpretation of Ashurnasirpal II's lion hunt (photo and © Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles). See Fig. 4.



Fig. 4: Ashurnasirpal II's lion hunt, from Nimrud (British Museum 124534 - © Trustees of the British Museum).

Partially covered by a fold in the drapery, one can distinguish another pattern (Fig. 5), which is a (partial) reproduction of a bas-relief dating from the reign of Sargon II. It can also be described as a hunting scene, with the archer to the left of the bas-relief, though without *regalia*, to be identified as the King. It was discovered by Austen Henri Layard in the *bit hilani* of Khorsabad, where he excavated in 1850 after the site was abandoned by the French.<sup>31</sup> It was illustrated in the *Second Series* of the *Monuments of Nineveh*, also published by John Murray,

<sup>31</sup> Layard, *Discoveries in the ruins of Nineveh*, 130.



**Fig. 5:** Joseph Stallaert, *The death of Dido*, detail: an interpretation of Sargon II's hunt "in bosco" (cliché et © Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles). See [Fig. 6](#).

in 1853 ([Fig. 6](#)).<sup>32</sup> Again, nothing allows us to surmise that Joseph Stallaert saw it at the British Museum in London, where it has been kept since 1851 (BM 118829). Most artists of the period obviously prefer to work after the lavish lithographs that were published then, and most academies provided a library for professors and students alike. The bas-relief was part of a series, with a somewhat surrealistic atmosphere, with other scenes in the collections of the Musée du Louvre in Paris.<sup>33</sup> As with the previous one, it has often been studied and reproduced.<sup>34</sup>

The androcephalous bulls or *lamassu*, that one can see between the columns of the Egyptianizing building at the far right of Stallaert's painting, which were designed as sculptures in the round flanking the entrance of a second Egyptianizing building, in the distance, were also found by the painter in Layard's *Monu-*

<sup>32</sup> Layard, *A Second Series*, pl. 32.

<sup>33</sup> Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture*, 124–126, fig. 6 et 7.

<sup>34</sup> E.g. Smith, *Assyrian sculptures*, pl. 31; De Maigret and Fozzati, *Gli Assiri*, n° 27a et 27b. Alessandro de Maigret considers it "una delle più grandi opere dell'arte assiriana" and adds, that "chi guarda, del resto, non può fare a meno di entrare effettivamente, anche per un attimo, nel mondo incantato del bosco". Albenda, *The Palace*, 169 et fig. 76; Lion and Michel, "Les chasses royales néo-assyriennes", fig. 4; Alaç, *The Mythology*, 53 et fig. 44.





**Fig. 6:** Sargon II's hunt "in bosco", from Khorsabad (British Museum 118829 - © Trustees of the British Museum).

*ments of Nineveh*.<sup>35</sup> What seems very typical to us is the indiscriminate mix of Egyptian, Assyrian and Greco-Roman elements, to be found in the work of most Neo-Pompeian painters.

The magnificent plates edited by John Murray,<sup>36</sup> mostly in colour, were probably available at the Académie des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles,<sup>37</sup> or at the Bibliothèque des Arts Industriels, which were transferred to the Académie in 1886,<sup>38</sup> with the knowledge that Joseph Stallaert was a professor there.

We have not discovered in which publication Joseph Stallaert found the winged scarab decorating the façade of the first building (Fig.7). The volumes of the *Description de l'Égypte* and the *Denkmäler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien* were certainly available at the Bibliothèque des Arts Industriels, and were deposited at the Académie in 1886. Joseph Stallaert would become its director.

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<sup>35</sup> See, among others, Layard, *The Monuments of Nineveh*, pl. 2 and pl. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Layard, *The Monuments of Nineveh*; Layard, *A Second Series*.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Deleu-Doyen and Mayer, *Trésors de la Bibliothèque artistique*.

<sup>38</sup> Warmenbol, *Le lotus et l'oignon*, 138, note 17.



**Fig. 7:** Auguste Raynaud, *Sphynx* (or “*La belle égyptienne*”) (1882) (private collection, sold at Sotheby’s Paris, 23d of October 2014). Note the richly embroidered textiles covering the beauty’s couch.

## Joseph Stallaert

Joseph Stallaert was born on the 19th of March 1825 (in Merchtem, to the north-west of Brussels), and died on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 1903 (in Ixelles, a part of Brussels). He began his career as director of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Tournai, in the province of Hainaut (1852-1865), and ended it as director of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Belgium’s capital, Brussels (1895-1898), as the successor of the better-known Jean Portaels. By 1865, Joseph Stallaert had already been his replacement as “first professor of drawing and painting after nature”.<sup>39</sup>

As observed a century ago by his primary biographer, Lucien Solvay: “he made Greek and Roman antiquity his field of predilection” and “lived there with delight, not wanting to leave it. He was Navez’ continuator, as David was Ingres’ in France, with lesser, but similar merits” (our translation). There has been very little interest in his work since. Lucien Solvay concludes that “Stallaert will have been the Ingres of Belgian art; -and this description is not banal, and has nothing, in short, that could diminish the memory of this sincere and thoroughgoing artist” (our translation).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> “Premier professeur de dessin et peinture d’après nature” Ollinger-Zinque, “Stallaert, Joseph”, 228-229.

<sup>40</sup> Solvay, “Notice sur Joseph Stallaert”, 45.

He certainly was one of the better history painters, and history painting was a specialty of the Brussels and Antwerp academies, where the greatest of them all, Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema received his training.

Another of Solvay's comments clearly applies quite well to "The Death of Dido":

the gray and faded tones, the subtle layering of the paint, the sharp style of drawing, with definite contouring - a testimony to his constant research of a sober harmony, voluntarily inconspicuous, without accentuation -, and also a somewhat puerile research into archaeological detail, characterise Stallaert's manner throughout his work, in all its variety, and its very lack of diversity (our translation).<sup>41</sup>

Joseph Stallaert was a Freemason, a member of the Brussels Lodge *Les Amis Philanthropes*, at the rue du Persil, in the town's centre (not far from the Cathédrale des Saints Michel et Gudule). He was initiated on the 21st of April 1879, shortly after the consecration of their new Neo-Egyptian Grand Temple. He became a Fellow on the 3rd of January 1880, and Master Mason on the 3rd of April 1880.<sup>42</sup> He affiliated with the Lodge *Les Amis Philanthropes n° 2*, and painted the portrait of its first Worshipful Master, Eugène Goblet d'Alviella, in 1882.<sup>43</sup> He was thus commissioned to restore the paintings of the Grand Temple (see further on).

Among his work curated in public collections, allowing the larger public to get acquainted with Joseph Stallaert, the painting that is the main subject of this contribution stands apart. We also noticed two variations on "Polyxena sacrificed on Achilles' Tomb", one in the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen (inv. nr. 1243) (1875),<sup>44</sup> the other one in the Museum voor Schone Kunsten Gent (inv. nr. 1877 E) (1877) (Fig. 8), and "The Cellar of the Villa of Diomedes" at the Hôtel Communal of Schaerbeek (Brussels, inv. nr. 38752).

### The Grand Temple, rue du Persil

As we will see, Joseph Stallaert contributed to the effort that made this lodge room, with its many Neo-Egyptian elements, and its few Neo-Assyrian elements,

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<sup>41</sup> Solvay, "Notice sur Joseph Stallaert", 49.

<sup>42</sup> Peellaert, *La représentation maçonnique*, 359.

<sup>43</sup> Pecheur and Warmenbol, *Le Grand Temple*, fig. 6.1.1.

<sup>44</sup> The collections in Antwerp also have the painter's self-portrait (inv. nr. 1590) (1899).



**Fig. 8:** Joseph Stallaert, *Polyxena sacrificed on Achilles tomb* (“Polyxène immolée sur le bûcher d’Achille”), preparatory study (1877) (photo Galerie Horta, Brussels; collection of the author).

one of the most remarkable of its kind. As we will see, Freemasonry’s references are mostly Biblical, and the Neo-Assyrian kings do feature in the Holy Script, which accounts for the Neo-Assyrian touch.



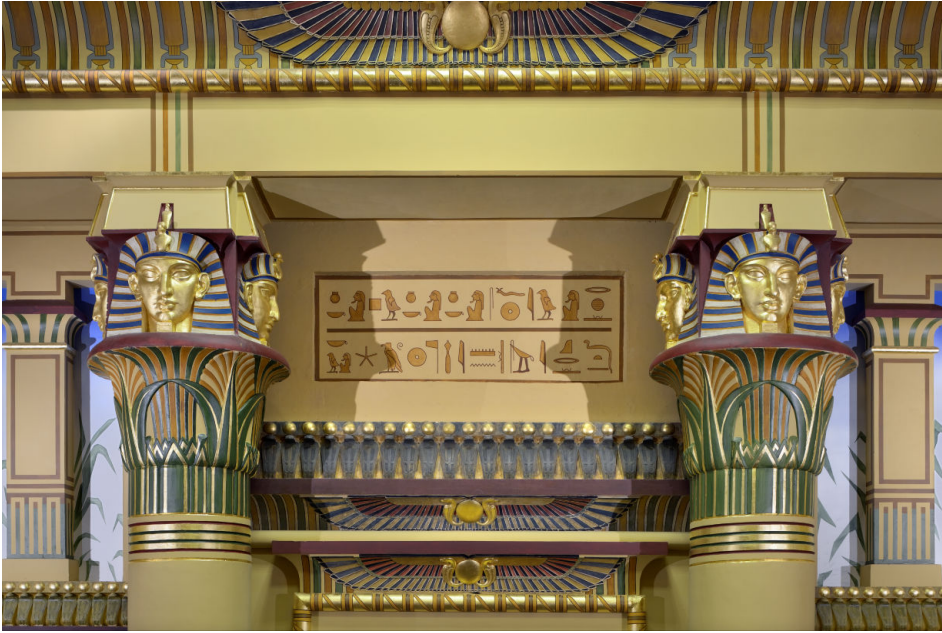


Fig. 9: The hieroglyphic inscription above the entrance to the Grand Temple of the rue du Persil in Brussels (photo and © Georges de Kinder).

The lodge room, restored in 2014–2015,<sup>45</sup> is now called “Temple Amon-Râ”, a clear reference to its Egyptian style, reminiscent of the Ancient Egyptian complexes of Karnak and Luxor, which were sources of inspiration.

We have provided its description elsewhere,<sup>46</sup> so it will suffice here to draw attention to the remarkable hieroglyphic inscription crowning the entrance to the temple (Fig. 9): “I am who I am. I am yesterday and I know tomorrow, I, the Great God, whose (divine) appearance is hidden for eternity”.<sup>47</sup>

Eugène Goblet d’Alviella, the key figure at *Les Amis Philanthropes* in those years, was, among many other things, professor “en religions comparées” at the Université libre de Bruxelles, and a pantheist. He was Orator of the Lodge, and

45 See Pecheur, “La restauration” and Pecheur and Bovyn, “Reconstruction”. Spectacular, but clandestine, photographs of the restoration work in Moati and Nussbaumer, *Temples maçonniques*, 176–177.

46 Warmenbol, “Les tableaux”; Warmenbol, “Les tableaux sur toile du Grand Temple”; Warmenbol, “Wiedererstandenes Ägypten”.

47 Full study in Leclercq, Van Rinsveld and Warmenbol, “Goblet d’Alviella et Maspero”, with the following rendering of the sentence in French: “Je suis qui Je suis. Je suis hier et Je connais demain, (moi) le Dieu Grand, dont la (litt. Sa) forme (divine) est cachée pour l’éternité”.

asked no one less than the great French Egyptologist Gaston Maspero, to write this inscription for him. A letter in the Archives of the Institut de France,<sup>48</sup> to be dated towards the end of 1878 leaves no doubt about this. And it is quite clear that Gaston Maspero refers to the Bible (Exodus), as well as to the Book of the Dead (Chapter 17), but also that he used P. Berlin 3048 (a hymn to Ptah-Tatenen), in a quest for authenticity, which is also to be found in the architecture of the room, and the paintings that enhance it.

All over the room, about 20 winged discs, also above and below the inscription substantiate the Great God, the Great Architect of the Universe, as the light that emanates from the disc is a manifestation of his existence, while making him invisible at the same time.<sup>49</sup>

### Solomon's Cycle, rue du Persil

The paintings in the Grand Temple at the rue du Persil had sustained "serious damage", as a consequence of the bad condition of the roof, or such was stated on the 15th of December 1896. Two artists, Joseph Stallaert and Jan Verhas, the latter one of the original painters (the other one, Louis Delbeke, had died in 1891) were consulted, and "urgent repairs" were decided upon, to be followed by "restoration work",<sup>50</sup> taken up by the two aforementioned painters, both of whom were members of *Les Amis Philanthropes*.<sup>51</sup>

All 12 canvasses had to be restored, six for Solomon's cycle, i.e. the building of Solomon's Temple honouring Yahweh, and six for Hiram-Abi's cycle, i.e. the "Passion" of the Temple's architect. The Temple is the theoretical model for all masonic temples (see also further on), and Hiram-Abi, the alleged architect of the building, is the theoretical model for all ("operative") Freemasons.<sup>52</sup>

Solomon's cycle shows, from left to right (**Fig. 10**): 1. King Hiram of Tyrus receiving Solomon's ambassadors, 2. King Solomon discussing the plans with the architect, 3. The stone masons and the woodcutters at work, 4. The burial of the foundation deposits, 5. King Solomon visiting the construction site, and 6. The Arch of Alliance solemnly carried into the Temple.

Hiram-Abi's cycle today shows, from left to right (**Fig. 11**) but originally from right to left, 1. Hiram under the menace of the three bad fellows, 2. Hiram

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48 Fonds Maspero, Ms. 4020 – Comte Goblet d'Alviella n° 276.

49 Leclercq, Van Rinsveld and Warmenbol, "Goblet d'Alviella et Maspero", *passim*.

50 "Travaux de reprise".

51 Pecheur and Warmenbol, *Le Grand Temple*, 43 et 116.

52 Hamblin and Seely, *Solomon's Temple*; Langlet, *Les sources chrétiennes*.





**Fig. 10:** The “northern” side of the Grand Temple of the rue du Persil in Brussels, with the six canvasses recounting the building of Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem (photo and © Georges de Kinder).

about to be hit for the third time, 3. Hiram dying, making the masonic sign of distress, 4. The discovery of Hiram’s tomb, on which an acacia has grown, 5. The exhumation of Hiram’s body, heavily putrefied, and 6. Hiram’s apotheosis, and his adoration.

The scenes were painted in 1878–1879 by Louis Delbeke (1821–1891), who was not a Freemason, but who was under the supervision of Jan Verhas, who was one. According to Gustave Vanzype the painter from Ypres did not keep “to his job as a painter, fully and exclusively. He represents, Vanzype writes, a world far away, unreal, fabulous, and the fable is happening in a mythical Orient, in a mythical past which is almost undocumented. The artist is here outside the domain of reality, almost outside, he adds, the domain of painting” (our translation).<sup>53</sup>

Louis Delbeke actually found his models in the best reference works, such as the *Monuments of Nineveh* by Austen Henry Layard,<sup>54</sup> also well known to Joseph Stallaert, or the *Histoire de l’art égyptien* by Emile Prisse d’Avennes.<sup>55</sup> This is particularly obvious, for the Neo-Assyrian details, in the first scene of

<sup>53</sup> Warmenbol, “Les tableaux”; Warmenbol, “Les tableaux sur toile du Grand Temple”; See Vanzype, *Maître d’hier*, 87.

<sup>54</sup> Layard, *The Monuments of Nineveh*.

<sup>55</sup> Prisse D’avennes, *Histoire de l’art égyptien*.



**Fig. 11:** The “southern” side of the Grand Temple of the rue du Persil in Brussels, with the six canvasses referring to the death and resurrection of Hiram, the architect of Solomon’s temple (photo and © Georges de Kinder).

Salomon’s cycle, where Hiram of Tyrus is represented on a throne “borrowed” from Ashurnasirpal II (**Fig. 12**).<sup>56</sup> The original relief, discovered in Nimrud, is to be seen in the British Museum (BM 124565), and was scrupulously copied, including the footrest.<sup>57</sup> The same source is also clearly present in the second scene of the same cycle, where we find Solomon seated on a somewhat hybrid throne, with a backrest featuring a vulture holding a kind of *shen*-sign, inspired by Egypt, but with armrests decorated with a lion again “borrowed” in Nimrud, as are those enhancing the wainscot of the room wherein Salomon is enthroned (**Fig. 13**).<sup>58</sup> It is also quite evident that King Hiram and the architect Hiram-Abi, in all the scenes that features them, have a Neo-Assyrian “profile”, including the crown worn by the king.

Sketches by Louis Delbeke, kept in the Stedelijk Museum of Ypres confirm, through the handwritten notes on them, that the painter indeed used Layard’s work as a reference (**Fig. 14**).<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Layard, *The Monuments of Nineveh*, pl. 5.

<sup>57</sup> Warmenbol, “Les tableaux sur toile du Grand Temple”, fig. 4.1; Pecheur, “La restauration”, fig. 5.6.

<sup>58</sup> Warmenbol, “Les tableaux sur toile du Grand Temple”, fig. 4.3; Pecheur, “La restauration”, fig. 5.7.

<sup>59</sup> Dewilde, *Louis Delbeke*, E1-3, ill. 20-21.



Fig. 12: Louis Delbeke & Jan Verhas, King Hiram de Tyrus receiving Solomon's ambassadors (photo and © Georges de Kinder).



Fig. 13: Louis Delbeke & Jan Verhas, King Solomon discussing the plans of the temple with the architect Hiram (photo and © Georges De Kinder).





**Fig. 14:** Louis Delbeke, Ashurnasirpal II, after the *Monuments of Nineveh* by Austen Henry Layard: the obvious model for King Hiram of Tyrus in figure 12 (photo and © Stedelijk Museum, Ieper).

## Solomon's Cycle, rue des Ursulines

Another cycle showing the construction of Salomon's Temple to Yahweh was to be found in another Lodge room in Brussels, built in the years 1898-1901 for the brethren of *Les Vrais Amis de l'Union et du Progrès Réunis*, on rue des Ursulines (near Notre-Dame de la Chapelle), a building that was demolished as early as the years 1909-1910. This cycle is also made up of six scenes, and is also "sprinkled" with Neo-Assyrian accents, probably because of the Biblical context.

On the other side of the Grand Temple, six more paintings make up another cycle, which might also have been dedicated to the "Passion" of Hiram-Abi, but this requires further study.

The twelve canvasses did actually not disappear when the building was demolished, and 10 of them are now to be seen in the "new" Grand Temple of *Les Vrais Amis de l'Union et du Progrès Réunis*, rue de Laeken (near the Eglise du Béguinage), a(nother) Neo-Egyptian masterpiece. As already observed by art historian Eric Hennaut, the original sequence of the paintings was not respected in their new environment.<sup>60</sup>

The 12 canvasses decorating the Grand Temple in the rue des Ursulines were painted by Jean Gouweloos (1868-1943), whose favourite subjects were more or less dressed young women.<sup>61</sup> Just like Louis Delbeke, he was not a Freemason, at least when Jean Gouweloos was working on these canvasses, i.e. he was not introduced into masonic symbolism. Jean Gouweloos' biographical note published in *Nos contemporains*,<sup>62</sup> indeed stresses that "he owed it solely to his merits as an artist, to have been chosen for the realisation of this important commission" (our translation).

The architect Alban Chambon, the contractor of the Grand Temple of *Les Vrais Amis de l'Union et du Progrès Réunis*, who was responsible for its Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid appearance, had already worked with him while decorating the Kursaal (or casino) in Ostend.<sup>63</sup> As with many of the great Art Nouveau architects, such as Paul Hankar and Victor Horta, he was a Freemason.

Jean Gouweloos quite obviously made use of Georges Perrot's and Charles Chipiez' *Histoire de l'art dans l'Antiquité*, volume II ("Chaldée et Assyrie") and

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<sup>60</sup> Hennaut, "Le Temple 'assyrien'", 248, note 7.

<sup>61</sup> Vanzype, *Nos peintres*, 78-87.

<sup>62</sup> Breuer and Donos, *Nos contemporains*, 237-238.

<sup>63</sup> His workshop, rue d'Irlande in Ixelles, was designed by Paul Hankar, the celebrated Art Nouveau architect.

volume V (“Perse, Phrygie, Lydie et Carie, Lycie”) as his (exclusive?) literary sources.<sup>64</sup>

Hiram-Abi in the scene that depicts him designing the temple for Yahweh, as well as King Solomon, in the scene showing him visiting the building works, are indeed dressed in a mixed fashion with Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid accents, but the artist apparently did not copy a specific model (Fig. 15).<sup>65</sup> The most evocative canvas is, in our opinion, the one showing the architect Hiram at work. From the background, a *lamassu*, or human-headed, winged bull, looks at the beholder (Fig. 16).

To the far right, the chair he has pushed away, so as to work standing, seems to offer a slight variation on the throne occupied by Sennacherib in one of the scenes illustrating the taking of Lachish, in Judea.<sup>66</sup> The bas-relief was discovered in 1849 by Austen Layard in the South-West Palace of Nineveh and deposited by Hormuzd Rassam in 1853.<sup>67</sup> It is part of the collections of the British Museum (BM 124911) and, just like the bas-reliefs mentioned before, is to be counted among the best-known and most often illustrated ones of the Neo-Assyrian collections (Fig. 17).

To the left, the table on which Hiram is working is a rather faithful copy of one of the pieces of furniture in the well-known banquet scene showing Ashurbanipal and his queen under a climbing vine.<sup>68</sup> This bas-relief, found and deposited by Hormuzd Rassam in 1854<sup>69</sup> was discovered in the North Palace of Nineveh. Again, it is part of the collections of the British Museum (BM 124920) and is, once more, one of the great “classics” of Neo-Assyrian art (Fig. 18).<sup>70</sup>

These paintings were shown in the rue des Ursulines, in a Grand Temple not inspired by ancient Egyptian architecture, as was usual during this period, but by Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid architecture (Fig. 19). As Eric Hennaut stressed correctly,<sup>71</sup>

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64 Perrot and Chipiez, *Histoire de l'art II*; Perrot and Chipiez, *Histoire de l'art V*.

65 Warmenbol, “Wiedererstandenes Ägypten”, Abb. 27; see Perrot and Chipiez, *Histoire de l'art V*, Pl. XII for the Louvre's archer's frieze.

66 Perrot and Chipiez, *Histoire de l'art II*, Fig. 237.

67 Gadd, *The Stones of Assyria*, 174.

68 Perrot and Chipiez, *Histoire de l'art II*, Fig. 28.

69 And not William Loftus: Rassam, *Asshur and the Land of Nimrod*, 38-40; Gadd, *The Stones of Assyria*, 193.

70 Lately Aruz, Graff and Rakic, *Assyria to Iberia*, n° 22.

71 See also Hamblin and Seely, *Solomon's Temple*.





**Fig. 15:** Jean Gouweloos, Solomon contemplating the Temple to the glory of Yahweh (now in the Grand Temple, rue de Laeken) (photo Alfred de Ville de Goyet and © SPRB).



**Fig. 16:** Jean Gouweloos, Hiram drawing the plans for Solomon's Temple de Yahweh. A lamassu in the background looks at the beholder (now in the Grand Temple, rue de Laeken) (photo Alfred de Ville de Goyet and © SPRB).

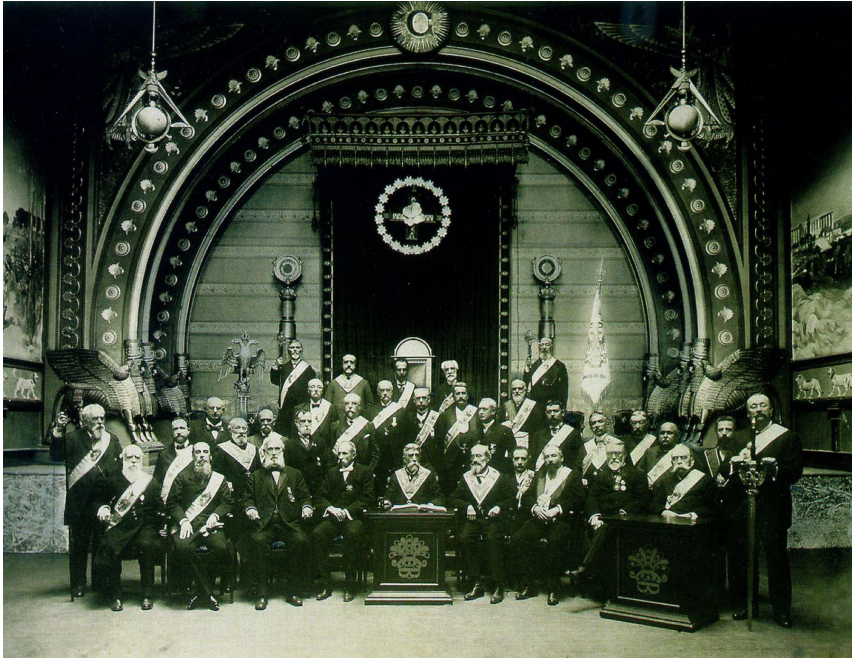


**Fig. 17:** Sennacherib receiving the submission of the City of Lachish, from Niniveh (British Museum 124911 - © Trustees of the British Museum).



**Fig. 18:** Ashurbanipal II and his queen banqueting under a climbing vine, from Niniveh (British Museum 124920 - © Trustees of the British Museum).





**Fig. 19:** The Grand Temple of the rue des Ursulines, in Brussels (demolished), towards the East, with its lamassu supporting the arches above the throne of the Worshipful Master. Photograph taken on the occasion of the “Conférence internationale des Suprêmes Conseils”, in June 1907, with Eugène Goblet d’Alviella presiding (Centre de Documentation maçonnique, Brussels).

more effectively than the Egyptianising approach, the reference to the Assyrian architecture, could lead to an understanding of what the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem must have looked like, the Temple that was supposedly the prototype of the Masonic Temple (our translation).

He then adds: “The project is also contemporary with a specific interest in ancient Persian spirituality among Belgian Freemasons (**Fig. 20**) and historians” — and these individuals were not necessarily the one and the other.<sup>72</sup>

“Look around you: you are in a Mithraeum”, says Eugène Goblet d’Alviella (him again...) in March 1900, then newly installed Sovereign Grand Commander of the Supreme Council, to his brothers surrounding him in the rue des Ursulines.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Hennaut, “Le Temple ‘assyrien’”, 238.

<sup>73</sup> Hennaut, “Le Temple ‘assyrien’”, 239.



Fig. 20: Joseph Stallaert, *Deo invicto Mithrae*, dedicated to “Eug. Goblet de Alviella Pater Patrum” (about 1900 ?) (photo Serge Marteaux and © Kris Thys, Huis van de Reguliere Vrijmetselarij, Brussels).

### Neo-Assyrian Street-Art

Another example of Belgian Assyromania related to Eugène Goblet d’Alviella, who we met at the rue du Persil, is to be found rue du Méridien 27 in Saint-Josse-ten-Noode, now part of Brussels. The facade of the building, is indeed covered with a variety of winged sun-discs (see above), the most prominent among them being quite obviously modelled on one illustrated by the great comparatist in his “Recherches sur l’histoire du globe ailé hors de l’Egypte”, published in 1888, where he describes it as its Neo-Assyrian variation (Fig. 21).<sup>74</sup> The edifice knew two building phases, to judge by the fact that the owner twice asked for a building permit, the first to be dated about 1887–1888, the second around 1903–1904. The decoration probably belongs to the first building campaign. The owner was one Jules-Emile Six-Erambert, an artist who was sometimes active as an architect.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Goblet, *Recherches*, fig. 4.

<sup>75</sup> Warmenbol, “L’égyptomanie et l’égyptologie”, 181–182, fig. 20. He must have been the son of Pierre-Adolphe Six-Erambert, a French military man, who was exiled to Brussels after Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte’s coup on the 2d of December 1851 (Saint-Ferréol, *Les proscrits français en Belgique*, 64). He was then described as “démagogue dangereux, [...] affilié aux sociétés secrètes” (Archives Nationales, Paris, F/7/\*/2590). We read “Freemasonry”,



**Fig. 21:** Detail of the facade of the house Rue du Méridien 25, in Saint-Josse-ten-Noode, with its Neo-Assyrian winged disc (photo Région de Bruxelles-Capitale. Inventaire du Patrimoine architectural and © MRBC).

and this might explain the “link” between Goblet d’Alviella and Six-Erambert, possibly members of the same Lodge.





**Fig. 22:** Assyrian art (“L’art assyrien”) by Henri Devillez, in the background, with, in the foreground Egyptian art (“L’art égyptien”) by Alphonse de Tombay (Jardin des sculptures des Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles – Warmenbol 2016 b, fig. 12).

## Conclusion

One could form the impression that most examples of Egyptomania or Assyriomania in Belgium are in one way or another related to Freemasonry, and that both are most often to be found in combination with each other, almost to the point that the latter could be considered to be a sub-genre of the former. This is almost completely true, and there is indeed a special relationship, exceptions being what they are. Here are some of these exceptions, to be detailed in future studies.



**Fig. 23:** The interior of the Sint-Laurentius church in Antwerp, with its gigantic capitals referring to Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid art (Wikimedia Commons).

Above the Sculpture Garden of the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, on the balcony of the Musées, towers an impressive allegory of “Egyptian art” by Alphonse de Tombay (1843–1918) (**Fig. 22**),<sup>76</sup> and just next to it, there is another one, as impressive, of “Assyrian art”, by Henri Devillez (1855–1941), both cast after a project signed Xavier Mellery (1890).<sup>77</sup>

Somewhat unexpected are the gigantic capitals in the Sint-Laurentius church (1934–1941), in Antwerp,<sup>78</sup> a Neo-Byzantine building, with four piers supporting the dome, each with a capital referring to one of the four evangelists.

Those referring to Luke and Matthew, in particular, are clearly inspired by Achaemenid art (the winged bull), or, respectively, Neo-Assyrian art (the winged man, or angel) (**Fig. 23**). They are the work of sculptor Rik Sauter (1885–1952), a man who was mostly active for Catholic patrons.<sup>79</sup>

Not unexpected are the casts of Neo-Assyrian reliefs decorating the house of architect Henry Lacoste (1926–1928), avenue Jean Van Hoorenbeeck 145 in

<sup>76</sup> Warmenbol, “L’égyptomanie”, fig. 12.

<sup>77</sup> Van Lennep, *Catalogue de la sculpture*, 412.

<sup>78</sup> Scheerlinck, *Sint-Laurentiusparochie*.

<sup>79</sup> Engelen and Marx, *La sculpture en Belgique*, 3156–3157.

Auderghem, on the outskirts of Brussels,<sup>80</sup> an architect well known for his role in the excavations, between the two World Wars, of the Roman city of Apamea in Syria. A cast of a Neo-Assyrian bas-relief showing horsemen, takes pride of place (Fig. 24), and the cast was actually produced by the section d'Art monumental of the Musées des Arts décoratifs et industriels, which will later become the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire de Bruxelles.<sup>81</sup>

Other examples await discovery...

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<sup>80</sup> Pecquet, "La maison personnelle d'Henry Lacoste", with bibliography. The paper by Barbara Pecquet is based on her Master thesis, presented at the Université Catholique de Louvain (2014). Another Master thesis on the same subject, by Brigitte Cruysmans, presented at the Institut Supérieur d'Histoire de l'Art et Archéologie de Bruxelles (1991) is well worth mentioning here.

<sup>81</sup> Montens, *Les moulages des Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire*; Montens, "La création d'une collection nationale", 10-15.



**Fig. 24:** The entrance hall of the house designed by architect Henry Lacoste for himself, in Auderghem, with, to the left, a cast of a Ne-Assyrian bas-relief showing horsemen (photo Alfred de Ville de Goyet and © SPRB).



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