

**BUNDESKUNSTHALLE**



**AN ORIENTAL ADVENTURE**  
**Max von Oppenheim and his Discovery of Tell Halaf**  
30 April – 10 August 2014

**Media Conference: 29 April 2014, 11 a.m.**

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HRB Nr. 5096  
Amtsgericht Bonn  
Umsatzsteuer ID Nr. DE811386971

Konto 3 177 177 00  
Deutsche Bank Bonn  
BLZ 380 700 59  
IBAN DE03 3807 0059 0317 7177 00  
BIC DEUTDE3380



## Exhibition Dates

Duration	30 April – 10 August 2014
Director	Rein Wolfs
Managing Director	Dr. Bernhard Spies
Curator	Ulrike Dubiel
Exhibition Manager	Henriette Pleiger
Head of Corporate Communications / Press Officer	Sven Bergmann
Catalogue / Press Copy	€ 29 / € 15
Opening Hours	Tuesday and Wednesday: 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursday to Sunday: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Public Holidays: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Closed on Mondays
Admission standard / reduced / family ticket Happy Hour-Ticket	€ 10 / € 6.50 / € 16 € 6 Tuesday and Wednesday: 7 to 9 p.m. Thursday to Sunday: 5 to 7 p.m. (for individuals only)
Advance Ticket Sales standard / reduced / family ticket	€ 11.90 / € 7.90 / € 19.90 inclusive public transport ticket (VRS) on <a href="http://www.bonnticket.de">www.bonnticket.de</a> ticket hotline: T +49 228 502010
Admission for all exhibitions standard / reduced / family ticket	€ 15 / € 10 / € 24
Audio Guide for adults	€ 4 / reduced € 3 in German language only
Guided Tours in different languages	English, Dutch, French and other languages on request

Guided Group Tours information  
and registration

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[kunstvermittlung@bundeskunsthalle.de](mailto:kunstvermittlung@bundeskunsthalle.de)

Public Transport

Underground lines 16, 63, 66 and bus  
lines 610, 611 and 630 to Heussallee /  
Museumsmeile.

Parking

There is a car and coach park on Emil-  
Nolde-Straße behind the Art and  
Exhibition Hall.  
Navigation: Emil-Nolde-Straße 11,  
53113 Bonn

Press Information (German / English)

[www.bundeskunsthalle.de](http://www.bundeskunsthalle.de)  
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## **Information on the Exhibition**

In 1899 the diplomat and archaeological explorer Baron Max von Oppenheim (1860–1946), a scion of the Cologne banking family, discovered the residence of an Aramaean ruler of the early first millennium BC at Tell Halaf in modern-day Syria. The find was an archaeological sensation of the first order. Oppenheim had found the ruins of the Old-Testament city of Gozan (Guzana). The celebrated Western Palace was embellished with monumental stone sculptures and fantastical stone reliefs. A tomb yielded over-life-size funerary figures and valuable funerary goods.

### **From Cologne to Cairo – Max von Oppenheim as Attaché, Orientalist and Archaeologist**

The exhibition traces Max von Oppenheim's eventful biography and his lifelong love for the East which found expression in each and every one of the lavish oriental costumes and accessories he amassed in his private collection. Having studied law in Germany, Max von Oppenheim was drawn to Cairo, where he learned Arabic and immersed himself in the pleasures of an Oriental lifestyle. A relatively undistinguished diplomat, Oppenheim was catapulted into the limelight of German Near and Middle Eastern archaeology by his discovery of the Tell Halaf in 1899 – a time when renowned German archaeologists were excavating Babylon and Assur. During the First World War Oppenheim's familiarity with the region became a strategic asset, and he – like T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) on the British side – was drawn into the thick of the political conflict.

### **The Tell Halaf Museum in Berlin, its Destruction in 1943 and the Restoration of the Finds between 2001 and 2010**

In 1929 Max von Oppenheim brought numerous Tell Halaf finds to Berlin, where he opened his own museum in 1930. Among the illustrious visitors who signed the visitors' book were Samuel Beckett, Agatha Christie, Emil Nolde and Max Beckmann. The Tell Halaf finds – destroyed during a night-time bombing raid on Berlin in 1943 and painstakingly restored some sixty years later – tell the story of a 3000-year-old civilisation, but they have also become a poignant reminder of Germany's recent history.

### **Tell Halaf – An Aramaean City in the Shadow of the Assyrian Empire**

The central section of the exhibition brings to life the long-lost world of the Aramaeans and presents the unique archaeological finds from Tell Halaf which testify to the wealth of the Aramaean city state in modern-day Syria. Visitors will be able to see the recreation of the famous monumental entrance façade of the Western Palace with the original sculptures. This is complemented by a virtual reconstruction of the entire city of Guzana (modern Tell Halaf, Old Testament Gozan). Today, a replica of von Oppenheim's iconic façade reconstruction of the 1930s frames the main entrance to the National Museum of Aleppo in Syria. The Tell Halaf finds and other important objects of Syria's cultural heritage displayed there are once again threatened with destruction.



The principal lender to the exhibition, the Max von Oppenheim Foundation, set up by Oppenheim himself in 1929, is supporting the exhibition with the loan of some 450 objects preserved at the Rautenstrauch Joest Museum in Cologne and the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin. Both institutions have in the past presented major exhibitions on Max von Oppenheim: *Faszination Orient* 2001 in Cologne and *Die geretteten Götter aus dem Palast vom Tell Halaf* in 2011 in Berlin. The exhibition in Bonn brings together Max von Oppenheim's exquisite collection of Oriental objects from Cologne and the impressive Tell Halaf archaeological finds from Berlin in a comprehensive survey show that is complemented by outstanding loans from the Louvre and the British Museum.



## Wall Quotations

### From Cologne to Cairo

Baron Max von Oppenheim was born in Cologne in 1860 as the scion of one of the leading European banking families. His path seemed set, but he showed little interest in following it. Instead, he was drawn to the Orient. The exotic tales of the Arabian Nights and the adventures of the Africa explorer Gerhard Rohlfs fanned what his father came to see as a 'tragic passion'. To please his father he completed a law degree, but he did not give up his dream of the Orient. Having learned Arabic, he eventually won his family's permission – and financial support – to undertake extensive journeys to the Middle East and North Africa. His hopes of putting his doctoral degree in law, international experience and language skills to use in the German diplomatic service, however, were repeatedly rebuffed. His Jewish background – his father Albert von Oppenheim had converted to Catholicism in 1858 before his marriage – was deemed to outweigh his qualifications, title and wealth. It was not until 1896 that he was assigned to a position as attaché to the German consulate-general in Cairo. Here he lived a sort of double life until 1910. On the one hand he endeavoured to supply the Reich Chancellery with regular updates about social and political developments in British-occupied Egypt, on the other hand the city allowed him to shake off the strict mores of Wilhelmine Germany and to pursue a flamboyantly unconventional lifestyle that combined the best of both Orient and Occident. Furnished in the Oriental style and filled with exquisite treasures which he had collected on his travels, his house in Cairo testified to his sophisticated taste and thirst for knowledge. He surrounded himself with a wide and eclectic range of objects that intrigued his inquisitive mind, their exotic flair was just as important to him as their scholarly value.

### Baron Max von Oppenheim – Chronology

1860 Max Adrian Hubert von Oppenheim is born on 15 July, the son of the Cologne banker Albert Oppenheim and his wife Paula, née Engels  
1879–83 State Examination in Law in Cologne, doctorate in Göttingen followed by several journeys to the Orient (i.e. the Middle East)  
1892–93 Oriental journey with Wilhelm Joest, language studies in Cairo  
1893 Expedition from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, journeys on to India  
1895 Travels to Constantinople and has a private audience with Sultan Abdul Hamid II  
1896–1910 Attaché to the German consulate-general in Cairo tasked with reporting on the countries and peoples of the Arab world  
1899 At the behest of the Deutsche Bank he undertakes a seven-month expedition in northern Syria and Mesopotamia to scout out the best route of the planned Baghdad Railway. Discovery of Tell Halaf near Ras el-Ayn on 19 November  
1911–13 First archaeological campaign at Tell Halaf and systematic registration of archaeological sites in Upper Mesopotamia



1914 Rejoins the Foreign Office in Berlin, compiles the *Exposé Concerning the Revolutionising of the Islamic Territories of our Enemies*, head of the German 'Orient Intelligence Bureau'

1915 Appointment to the German embassy in Constantinople, tasked with spreading propaganda material throughout the Ottoman Empire, further journeys through the Orient

1917 Return to Berlin, works on the publication of his archaeological finds and his study of the Bedouins

1922 Foundation of the Oriental Research Institute

1923 Runs into financial difficulties as the inflation eats into his fortune

1927–29 Preparation of further excavations at Tell Halaf, journey to Syria and official division of finds with the French-Syrian authorities

1929 Foundation of the Max Freiherr von Oppenheim Foundation in Berlin

1930 Opening of the Tell Halaf Museum in Berlin-Charlottenburg on Oppenheim's 70th birthday

1939 Final journey to Syria, plans for new excavations at Tell Halaf are vetoed by the French Mandate government

1943 Leaves Berlin for Dresden after the bombing of his flat, destruction of the Tell Halaf Museum during a night-time bombing raid on Berlin on 23 November, the fragments of the Tell Halaf finds are salvaged and stored at the Pergamon Museum

1945 Flight from Dresden after the bombing of 13/14 February, finds shelter with relatives in southern Germany

1946 Dies on 15 November and is buried in Landshut

### **Diplomacy and Exploration – In Search of a Route for the Baghdad Railway**

Unlike many Europeans in Cairo who tended to avoid all contact with the native population, Max von Oppenheim sought to establish personal relationships with Ottoman officials and religious leaders as well as with Bedouins and people of humble backgrounds. His notes about the Bedouin tribes eventually formed the basis of a multi-volume standard work. Genuinely interested in people, he steered clear of the arrogant attitude of the colonial master, while his proficiency in Arabic allowed him to engage in a true exchange of views and to gain an insight into current social and political affairs from a local perspective.

A topic of great import was Pan-Islamism, a movement that was less interested in theology or religious fanaticism than in a united Muslim response to the pressure of European colonialism. Oppenheim's contacts with representatives of the movement elicited a good deal of distrust and indignation in British and French circles and led to his being portrayed as the 'Kaiser's spy' in a number of defamatory newspaper articles. Buckling under pressure and hoping to avoid an international éclat, the German Foreign Office took him off a prestigious mission to northern Syria, where Oppenheim had been meant to scout out the best route for the Aleppo-Mosul stretch of the proposed Baghdad Railway on behalf of the Deutsche Bank. Since the 1899 expedition was already prepared and organised, Oppenheim decided to travel in a private capacity and to carry out the commission under cover of his ongoing oriental studies.

### **The Discovery of Tell Halaf 1899**

Max von Oppenheim's caravan, which included a German and an Arab secretary and a professional photographer, left Damascus in the summer of 1899, passed through Aleppo and then headed east in the direction of Mesopotamia. On his way Oppenheim made contact with several Bedouin tribes, and it was from Bedouins near Ras el-Ayn (Northeastern Syria) that he first heard an intriguing story. They spoke of stone sculptures that had been found a few years earlier by local Chechens digging a grave. The figures had been so terrifying that the gravediggers hastily covered them up again and buried the body elsewhere. His curiosity piqued, Oppenheim persuaded the Chechens to show him the site. On 19 November 1899 he was taken to an ancient settlement hill, locally known as Tell Halaf.

Although Oppenheim had no excavation licence, he embarked on a surface dig that quickly yielded some remarkable finds. The exploratory trenches cut across the entrance area of a palatial building embellished with large relief panels (orthostats) and basalt jamb figures. As the photographs document, the relief panels were in very good condition, but the sculptures – as well as a giant statue of a bird of prey – had been smashed in antiquity. Although Oppenheim could not attribute the sculptures to a specific culture or period, he was keenly aware of having made an extraordinary discovery. He filled in the exploratory trenches and resolved to approach the Ottoman Directorate of Antiquities to reserve the right to conduct a full-scale investigation at a later date.

### **The Tell Halaf Archaeological Campaign 1911–1913**

In 1910, the year of his fiftieth birthday, Max von Oppenheim was finally forced to accept that his dream of a prestigious career in the diplomatic service was not going to come true. He decided to give his life a new direction and to devote himself to the archaeological exploration of the Middle East and, in particular, of the site of Tell Halaf.

At considerable expense he fitted out an expedition, engaged specialists, among them the architects Felix Langenegger and Konrad Lehmann, as well as a physician and a professional photographer and finally embarked on the excavation of the site he had discovered more than a decade earlier on 5 August 1911. Concerned to make the lengthy stay at Tell Halaf as comfortable as possible for himself and his 'gentlemen', Oppenheim built a large expedition house – referred to as the 'desert palace' – and ensured a generous supply of provision that even included imported luxury goods such as champagne. Tell Halaf turned out to contain the ruins of Guzana, the capital of an Aramaean kingdom of the early first millennium BC. As was the custom of the day, Oppenheim employed up to five hundred local workers to dig up the different areas of the ancient site. He started with the building he had discovered on his first visit in 1899, the 'Western Palace'. Erected on the citadel, the highest point of the city, it was accessed through a gate guarded by two 'scorpion bird men'. The citadel was also the site of another impressive building, dubbed the 'Northeast Palace'. Oppenheim's excavation also unearthed parts of the lower city and the



city walls with their gate complexes, several tombs and a sanctuary or 'cult room'.

### **Archaeology and Politics in the First World War**

Oppenheim's archaeological expedition – financed by himself and his family and equipped with the latest technology – differed markedly from other contemporary German excavations in Mesopotamia, chief among them the prestigious projects at Babylon and Assur. The latter were commissioned by the Museum of the Ancient Near East in Berlin, funded by the Deutsche Orient Gesellschaft (DOG, German Orient Society) and conducted by trained archaeologists and architects rather than an 'educated amateur', as was the case at Tell Halaf. And whereas Babylon and Assur lay in the very heartland of ancient Mesopotamia, the region of Oppenheim's excavation site was still very much a blank spot on the archaeological map of the day. But Tell Halaf yielded rich finds, most notably the monumental sculptures of the Western Palace.

Around the same time a British team – among its members Charles Leonard Woolley and T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) – excavated another Aramaean residence at Carchemish. The international race for the most promising archaeological mounds had reached Upper Mesopotamia. In 1913 excavations at Tell Halaf came to a temporary halt. As Oppenheim had not been able to effect the official division of finds with the Ottoman Directorate of Antiquities, he stored many of the sculptures in the shelter of his 'desert palace'.

Archaeology was and is closely linked to politics. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century archaeological expeditions were tasked with filling national museums with important collections, while their scholarly findings underpinned said nation's claim to the prerogative of interpretation and cultural superiority. At the same time, archaeologists tended to be intimately familiar with the regions they were working in. In times of war and crisis that first-hand knowledge was of great military and strategic value. Max von Oppenheim, Walter Andrae, Charles Leonard Woolley and T.E. Lawrence are just four of the many archaeologists working in the Orient who served the military interests of their countries during the First World War.

### **Return to Syria 1927–1929: The Division of Finds**

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the political reorganisation of the Middle East gave rise to far-reaching changes, the consequences of which are still with us today. States such as Syria and Iraq were created to suit European economic and geopolitical interests. Concerns of the local population, religious differences and tribal affiliations or rivalries were not taken into account when the borders were drawn.

The First World War meant a significant hiatus also for Near and Middle Eastern archaeology. Max von Oppenheim could not resume work at Tell Halaf until Germany had joined the League of Nations. When he finally got back in 1927, he found his 'desert palace' had been destroyed during heavy fighting between Turkish and French troops and that he had to re-excavate the battle-scarred and



vandalized sculptures which he had stored there for safekeeping fourteen years earlier. The French Mandate for Syria granted Oppenheim a generous division of finds, allowing him to export a large number of objects, among them about two thirds of the stone sculptures. Oppenheim built a small museum for the finds that were to remain in Syria; it was later absorbed by the National Museum of Aleppo.

Back in Berlin, Oppenheim was the owner of a spectacular archaeological collection but the Weimar Republic economic crisis and hyperinflation had wiped out his personal wealth, leaving him dependent on the support of his family. But even in times of dire financial straits the Baron remained true to his motto 'Head high! Chin up! Keep smiling!'. He had founded the Oriental Research Institute in 1922; in 1929 he set up the Max von Oppenheim Foundation. The Tell Halaf Museum in Berlin-Charlottenburg opened on his seventieth birthday on 15 July 1930.

### **The Tell Halaf Museum: A Hidden Gem**

Max von Oppenheim had wanted to see the Tell Halaf sculptures installed in one of the grand, temple-like museums in the heart of Berlin's Museum Island. His negotiations with the administration of the state museums, however, came to nothing, not least because of the large sum of money he demanded as compensation. The museum was neither willing nor able to meet Oppenheim's conditions for the acquisition of the collection. Undaunted, Oppenheim accepted the offer of the Technical University to install his museum in the rooms of a disused foundry in an industrial zone between Moabit and Charlottenburg. We have grown accustomed to the presentation of art or antiquities in 'edgy' industrial settings with raw timber floors and cast iron columns – Max von Oppenheim's contemporaries had not. The collector referred to his museum as 'a violet that flourishes in obscurity'.

His curatorial concept was remarkably modern. He complemented the presentation of the original sculptures as freestanding works of art in their own right with a series of true-to-scale architectural reconstructions that displayed plaster replicas of the sculptures in their functional context as architectural decoration. The restoration of the sculptures, many of which had already been damaged in antiquity, and the production of the plaster casts lay in the hands of the Russian artist Igor von Jakimow (1885–1962). A restorer of great sensitivity, Jakimow replaced missing sections of a sculpture only if the structural integrity of the work absolutely demanded it and made sure his additions would be recognised as such. Visitors to the museum were never in any doubt as to which parts of the exhibits were original. If the fragmented nature of an original sculpture did not allow for an upright installation, it was presented lying flat with a plaster replica standing vertically next to it as a didactic visual aid.

### **The Reconstruction of the Entrance Façade of the Western Palace**

As the excavation drew to a close, Oppenheim and his architects found themselves faced with the difficult task of combining archaeological finds and



findings in a compelling reconstruction. A particular headache was the grand entrance area of the three thousand-year-old Western Palace. The large relief panels and the animal-shaped column bases had been found *in situ*, but what kind of column should be envisaged? Among the fragments of numerous sculptures found in front of the palace entrance were the remains of monumental statues of gods with tenons in their base plates. These gave rise to the idea that the animal bases may once have supported figures of gods (caryatids) rather than simple columns. The entrance would thus have been adorned with a triad of gods standing on their signature sacred animals. Oppenheim interpreted the central deity standing on a bull as the weather god Teshup. He was accompanied by his wife Hapat, standing on a lioness on the right, and his son Sharruma, a sun god, standing on the lion on the left. These three, Oppenheim believed, were the principal deities of the Guzana pantheon. Since the headdress of two of the gods had mortises it seemed reasonable to assume that a further element was placed between the head and the entablature. This was reconstructed as a cone-shaped 'head column' intended to recall the tall caps of earlier Hittite depictions of gods.

The scale replica of the entrance façade had a width of roughly 22 metres. The entrance opening was 14 metres wide and 6 metres tall. The impressive ensemble could not fail to make a strong impact. The sheer sight of it dispelled any lingering doubt and compelled Oppenheim and his team, visiting archaeologists and the public at large to accept the hypothetical arrangement as certainty. The partial reconstruction of the back wall of the palace was displayed on the opposite side of the room. Divided into several bastions, the back wall was decorated with a band of alternating relief panels made of black basalt and red (dyed) limestone. Correspondingly dyed plaster casts were set into an architectural backdrop that emulated a mud brick wall with a rendered surface.

### **The Catastrophe 1943**

On the night of 22-23 November 1943 heavy aerial bombardment caused havoc in Berlin. The Tell Halaf Museum suffered a disastrous direct hit from an incendiary bomb and burnt to the ground. Exhibits made of wood or limestone were consumed by the fire, as were the numerous plaster casts. The basalt sculptures withstood the heat of the conflagration but not the cold water used to extinguish it. The thermal shock caused the stone to shatter into thousands of pieces.

Max von Oppenheim, then in his early eighties, never got to see the extent of the destruction. Having lost his home in an August air raid, he had fled to Dresden. It was from there that he begged Walter Andrae, the director of the Museum of the Ancient Near East in Berlin, to salvage the fragments of his life's work. But many months went by before this could be accomplished. Winter frosts and summer heat caused further damage, so that even the seemingly better preserved, larger pieces crumbled into tiny fragments when they were finally taken to the Pergamon Museum.

After the devastating bombing of Dresden in February 1945, Oppenheim was taken in by relatives in southern Germany. Although he had lost everything, he



continued to work, sought to expedite the publication of his excavation and pushed ahead with his autobiography. To the day of his death he firmly believed that one day his stone sculptures would rise again. Max von Oppenheim died in Landshut (Bavaria) in 1946. In the years following his death the Tell Halaf fragments fell into oblivion – the crated rubble, owned by a West German foundation, was housed in the basement of an East German museum, while in the West the collection was written off as a total loss and more or less forgotten. It was not until the German Reunification in 1990 that attention once again focused on the unique archaeological find.

### **The Restoration Project 2001–2010**

In 1999, when the ‘Museum Island Master Plan’, which set out the complete overhaul and reorganisation of the museum buildings in the heart of Berlin, was approved, the idea came up to reconstruct the gate of the Tell Halaf Western Palace as the entrance to the Museum of the Ancient Near East which forms part of the Pergamon Museum. A visual inspection of the basalt fragments in the run-up suggested that at least a few of the sculptures could be restored. With financial support from the German Research Foundation and the foundations of the Cologne-based bank Sal. Oppenheim jr. & Cie. the museum embarked on the biggest restoration project since the reconstruction of the Ishtar Gate and Processional Way from Babylon.

The heavily soiled Tell Halaf fragments – a total of some 80 cubic metres – were laid out on 300 wooden pallets in a large warehouse. Nobody had ever attempted to piece together a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle with 27,000 basalt parts. To reconvert the ‘loose tip material’ into the Tell Halaf treasures was going to take time, custom-made solutions and out-of-the-box thinking.

The first monumental task was to sort the fragments and to identify which sculpture or architectural element each bit belonged to. Max von Oppenheim’s extensive photographic documentation proved to be of great help, and after endless sorting and resorting, grouping and comparing, the material was finally categorised.

The next task was no easier. Restorers faced the challenge of rejoining an enormous number of fragments with utmost accuracy and minimal bonding seams. Each of the large sculptures consists of more than 1000 fragments. In the span of nine years (2001–2010) a small group of scientists and restorers succeeded in recreating more than 30 basalt sculptures and a great number of architectural elements. The result far exceeded even the boldest of expectations – the core of Max von Oppenheim’s archaeological collection was saved.

### **The Ancient City of Guzana: An Aramaean Residence on the Tell Halaf**

The end of the second millennium BC was a period of turmoil and far-reaching change in the Middle East. The great hegemonies of the Late Bronze Age – Egypt, the Hittite Empire and Assyria – were falling apart. Weakened by internal and external problems, the superpowers lost influence and their territories disintegrated into smaller regional centres of power. Independent Neo-Hittite



and Aramaean kingdoms emerged in modern-day Turkey and Syria. *Neo-Hittite* because some of these kingdoms lay on the territory of the crumbling Hittite Empire, the use of Hieroglyphic Luwian continued in these places and the rulers saw themselves as successors to the Hittite kings. *Aramaean* because local and immigrant populations were of Aramaean origin and used the Aramaic language and script. By the beginning of the first millennium BC the Middle East resembled a colourful mosaic of small independent kingdoms that prospered in the absence of a superpower. At the same time, their coexistence was marked by permanent competition and rivalry that led to frequent conflicts between neighbouring states.

The Aramaean city of Guzana (modern Tell Halaf, Old Testament Gozan) occupied a strategic position on the Khabur River. The capital of the kingdom of Bit Bahiani consisted of a lower city with residential buildings and an upper city, the citadel, with palaces and presumably temples as well. Overlooking the city from the height of the citadel was the Western Palace. Short cuneiform inscriptions in the sculptures and reliefs suggest that it was built by King Kapara, the son of Hadianu.

### **New Insights into the Structure of the Entrance Façade of the Western Palace**

The Western Palace of the early first millennium BC corresponds to an architectural type referred to in Assyrian sources as a ‘bit hilani’, a large structure accessed from a forecourt by a broad flight of stairs leading to a columned entrance and a sequence of broad rooms.

Felix Langenegger’s iconic design of three caryatids in the shape of gods standing on their signature sacred animals has indelibly shaped our perception of the palace. The façade of the National Museum of Aleppo is modelled on the architect’s design.

The restoration of the sculptures allows us to reassess Oppenheim and Langenegger’s reconstruction. It has become clear that the accuracy of the fit between ‘head column’, statue and animal base was idealised and that the actual measurements cast considerable doubt on the iconic arrangement.

The motif of a deity standing on a sacred animal is known from numerous sculptures and reliefs. That monumental statues of gods should serve as columns, however, would be a unique occurrence in the Middle East at that time. Small-scale caryatids do feature as decorative elements on luxury furniture. They show leaf-shaped capitals, but never conical ‘head columns’. Contemporary representations show the entrance façades of ‘bit hilani’ buildings with simple column shafts, and perhaps we should assume something along those lines for the Western Palace as well. In his inscriptions Kapara boasted of having achieved what neither his father nor his grandfather had achieved: columns made of stone. Fragments of 14-edged basalt column shafts and diverse capitals were found at Tell Halaf as well.

Perhaps it has to remain a ‘matter of faith’ whether we choose to overlook the very real problems of the grandiose design and accept it as plausible enough or listen to the dictates of reason instead and favour a simpler scheme. Either way,



the Western Palace remains a unique architectural complex that reflects the power and creativity of its builders in the most stunning fashion.

### **Burial Practices and Ancestral Cult at Tell Halaf**

Excavations at Tell Halaf unearthed several funerary structures as well as a building that was described as a 'cult room'. Based on its furnishings it is generally thought to have been a space devoted to ancestor worship. Evidence was found of both inhumation and cremation burials, which suggests the parallel existence of different traditions. Valuable funerary goods such as gold epistomia (coverings for the lips of the deceased) and ornaments on clothing indicate that the deceased were buried in considerable style. Man was conceived to have a physical body as well as some kind of soul or spirit, called *nbs* in Aramaic. Death set the *nbs* free and allowed it to enter a sculpture. The sculpture became the medium between the practitioners of the cult of the dead and the soul of the deceased.

Max von Oppenheim's favourite find, the 'large seated figure', is a funerary statue that was installed above the sepulchre of a cremated body. The pared-down 'modern' form of the figure holds the clue to the sculpture's function. Enthroned, a bowl in her hand and with a table-like lap, the seated figure is ready to receive offerings. The place to which the deceased went after their death was no land of milk and honey in which the dead lacked for nothing, their wellbeing depended on the everlasting care and devotion of their descendants. While the funerary figures could receive real offerings, the idea of providing for the dead was eternalized in numerous stone reliefs. Ancestral rites, however, were not only celebrated in the immediate vicinity of the sepulchre, the existence of the 'cult room' furnished with statues and statuettes, bronze and stone vessels and countless beads testifies to the fact that sacrificial acts and rituals were also performed in separate sanctuaries.

### **In the Shadow of the Assyrian Empire**

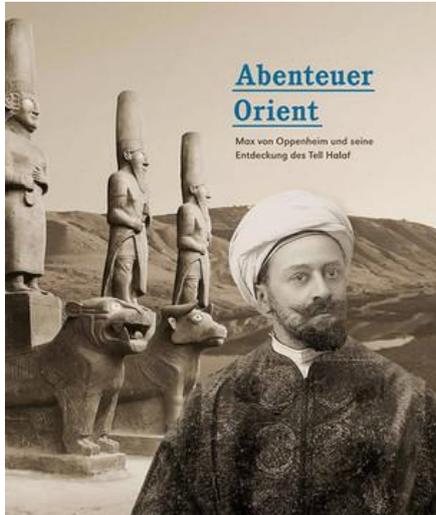
The beginning of the first millennium BC saw the rise of Neo-Hittite-Aramaean kingdoms. Within just a few generations, cities such as Guzana, Carchemish and Sam'al were embellished with grand citadels, large gates with guardian animals, relief panels (orthostats) and monumental statues of gods and rulers. The architectural decoration, carefully positioned for maximum impact, testifies to the rulers' sense of power and importance. The material culture and the visual arts bear witness to regional particularities but also to commonalities that were the result of exchange, adaptation and interdependency. Whereas in Carchemish and Malatya a Neo-Hittite cultural tradition had endured that used Hieroglyphic Luwian for monumental inscription, in ancient Guzana on the Tell Halaf cuneiform script and the Akkadian language were applied, both common in Assyria. In Sam'al, on the other hand, sculptures had Phoenician and Aramaic inscriptions.

The ninth century BC was marked by the upturn in the fortunes of Assyria. With the expansion of the Assyrian sphere of influence, the hitherto independent



kingdoms became vassal states, although they were still nominally ruled by local kings. But by the end of the eighth century BC these vassal states had been annexed and become provinces of the growing Assyrian Empire; the local kings had been deposed and replaced with Assyrian governors. Clay tablets document the implementation of the new power structures in the provinces. Assyrian influence is evident not only in the arts but also in the simplest of everyday objects such as ceramic vessels, cylinder and stamp seals. The Assyrian governor of Guzana resided in the vast newly built Northeast Palace. The Aramaean Western Palace was destroyed, probably in retaliation for an attempted rebellion.

## Catalogue



### **Abenteuer Orient** **Max von Oppenheim und seine Entdeckung des Tell Halaf**

Format: 24.5 x 28 cm, Hardcover  
Pages: 196 with 250 illustrations  
Editor: Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany  
Museum edition: € 29  
Buchhandlung Walther König  
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Trade edition: Wasmuth, Tübingen  
ISBN: 978 3 8030 3365 9 (in German language)



## Current and Upcoming Exhibitions

### KAZIMIR MALEVICH AND THE RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE Featuring Selections from the Khardzhiev and Costakis Collections until 22 June 2014

Kazimir Malevich (1879–1935) is one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century. In the West the painter, theoretician and teacher is best known as the originator of Suprematism, an art movement based on pure, non-objective abstraction. But his oeuvre is rooted at the crossroads between abstraction and figuration, between a universal idea of what it is to be human and the declared ambition to create a new world through art. Presenting a wide selection of paintings, prints and sculptures totalling more than 300 works, the exhibition sheds light on the key phases of Malevich's career, from the Symbolist beginnings through his pioneering abstract works to the figurative paintings of his later years.

Unprecedented in its scope, the exhibition draws on the support from numerous international lenders. It is the first retrospective to present large groups of works from the collections put together by Nikolai Khardzhiev and George Costakis, housed today at the Khardzhiev-Chaga Cultural Foundation / Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and the State Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki. Organised by Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany in collaboration with the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam and Tate Modern, London

### AFRICAN MASTERS Great Artists from the Ivory Coast 28 June to 5 October 2014

Starting point of the exhibition is the general consensus among art historians today that in the so-called primitive societies – as indeed in any of the ancient civilisations of the western world – individual masters created unique works of the highest quality. A selection of approximately 180 masks, figures and everyday objects from Ivory Coast and neighbouring countries, created by exceptionally talented artists working in a wide range of fields, sheds new light on the role of the artist in African society. The exhibition sets out to place these outstanding works – created by great artists whose names by and large we no longer know – in an art historical context that is comparable to that of our great masters, from Michelangelo to Picasso.

An exhibition of the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany in cooperation with Museum Rietberg Zürich

### OUTER SPACE Between Art and Science 3 October 2014 to 22 February 2015

A wide open realm of research and projections, outer space has always inspired a sense of yearning and curiosity. What is the origin of the universe? Where do we come from? Is there intelligent life on other planets? These questions spur



philosophers and natural scientists, writers, filmmakers and artists, fantasists and visionaries in equal measure. There has always been an intense exchange between culture and science: scientific and technological findings have found their way into the work of artists, while conversely, visionary ideas and designs have inspired science. *Outer Space* investigates the interface between culture and science in 12 associative chapters that range from space travel artefacts, scientific exhibits and science fiction to the varied ways artists have responded to the subject throughout history.

An exhibition of the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany, Bonn, in cooperation with German Aerospace Center (DLR)

Subject to change!

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