



## From New Haven to Nineveh and Beyond

### Three Centuries of Near Eastern Learning at Yale

by Benjamin Foster

#### DESCRIPTION:

Over the course of three centuries, Yale has been actively and seriously engaged in Near Eastern learning, in both senses of the term—training students in the knowledge and skills needed to understand the languages and civilizations of the region, and supporting generations of scholars renowned for their erudition and pathbreaking research.

This book traces the history of these endeavors through extensive use of unpublished archival materials, including letters, diaries, and records of institutional decisions. Developments at Yale are set against the wider background of changing American attitudes toward the Near East, as well as evolving ideas about the role of the academy and its curriculum in educating undergraduate and graduate students. In the case of the Near East, this also involves considering how several of its disciplines made the transition from biblically motivated enterprises to secular fields of study.

Yale has notable firsts to her credit: the first American professional program in Arabic and Sanskrit; the first American learned society and periodical devoted to Oriental subjects; the first American research institutes in Jerusalem and Baghdad; the first American university to have endowed funds to establish and curate one of the world's largest collections of cuneiform tablets and cylinder seals.

Yet at the same time, especially over the past half-century, Yale has found it challenging to deal administratively with a small humanities department whose standards and philosophy of teaching and learning seemed increasingly at odds with trends in the university as a whole. This book places these tensions in the context of Yale's responses to post-World War 2 interest in the modern Middle East, the rise of government-supported "area studies," and the consequences of American military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Numerous illustrations, many of them previously unpublished and drawn from a wide range of source material, round out the portrait of three centuries of Near Eastern learning at Yale.

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Benjamin R. Foster received his B.A. degree from Princeton; the Higher Standard Interpreter's Certificate from the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies, Shemlan, Lebanon; and his M.A. and Ph.D. from Yale. Appointed to Yale's Department of Near Eastern Languages in 1975, he is Laffan Professor of Assyriology and Babylonian Literature and served as Curator of the Yale Babylonian Collection. He is author and editor of fifteen books and over 250 articles and reviews in Assyriology and the history of Oriental Studies.

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