

# INSIDE HISTORY

## THE ASSYRIAN ARMY

THE BRUTAL FIGHTING MACHINE OF THE ANCIENT WORLD, 911-605 BCE, THE MIDDLE EAST

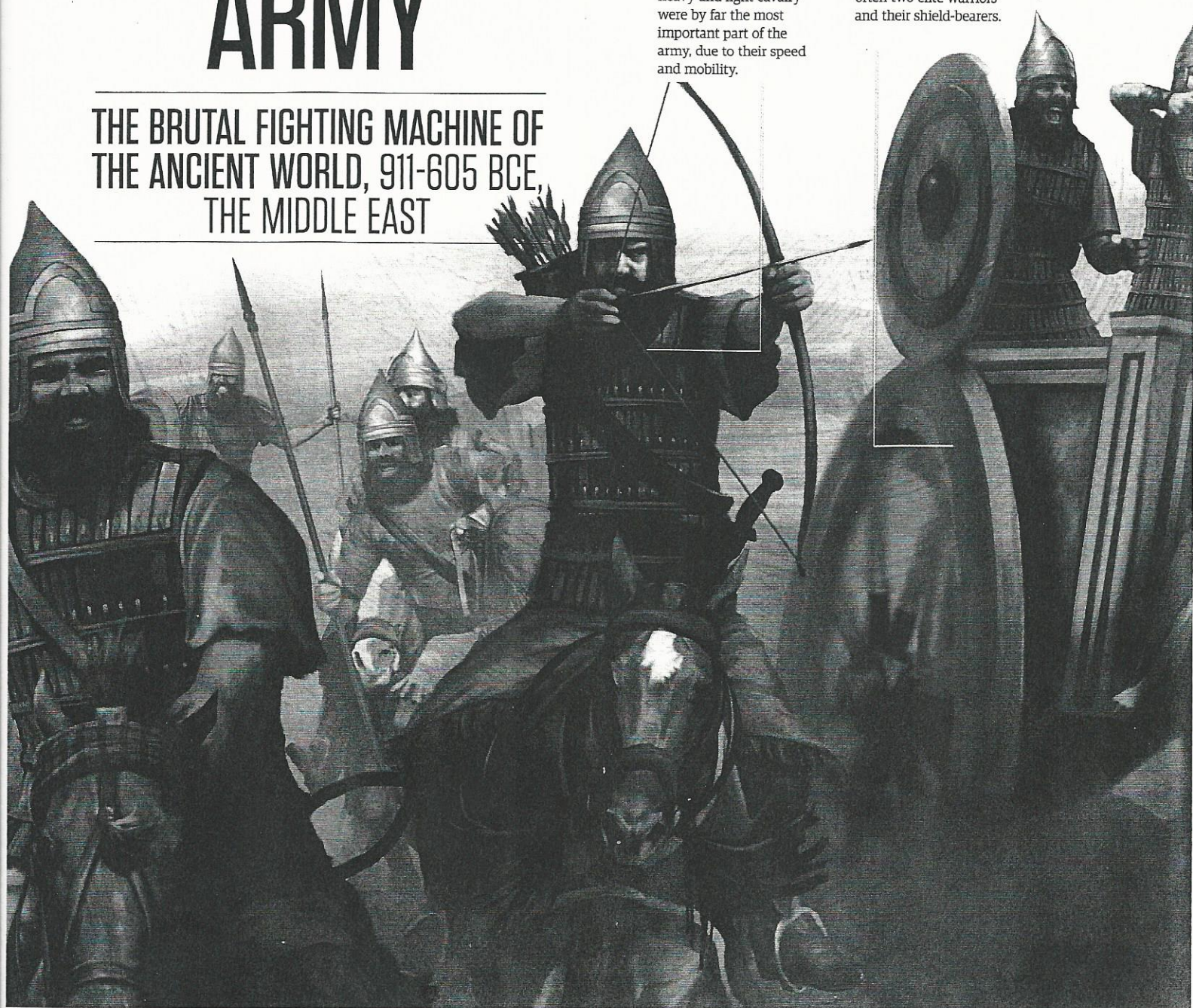
**O**f all the Mesopotamian empires, Assyria is often considered the greatest. At its height, it spread from Asia Minor in modern-day Turkey to Babylonia in today's Iraq and south to Egypt. The reason for its success was largely thanks to its incredibly powerful and efficient army. Rather than having soldiers that served for a short period of time, the Assyrians had a 200,000-strong standing army made up of skilled warriors and prisoners of war. These men fought on foot, horseback and chariots, and were armed with spears, bows and slingshots. This combined with their brutal and relentless approach to combat made the Assyrian army a formidable force on the battlefield, and helped them to conquer even their most powerful enemies.

### Cavalry

The Assyrians were the first to put bowmen on horseback. The heavy and light cavalry were by far the most important part of the army, due to their speed and mobility.

### Chariots

The Assyrians developed heavy four-horse chariots with a four-man crew - often two elite warriors and their shield-bearers.







### Heavy cavalry

Around 3,000 horses were used each month by the Assyrian army.



### Sling throwers

When thrown at maximum power, these shots could be lethal.



### Heavy infantry

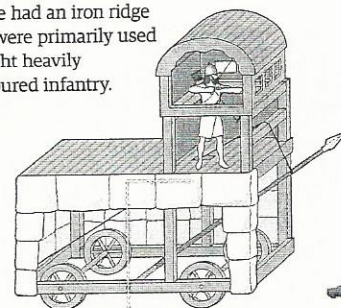
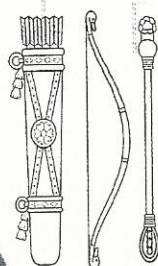
This was made up of warriors armed with a sword, lance and shield.

### Bow and quiver

Bows were specially adapted to allow archers to shoot on horseback.

### Mace

These had an iron ridge and were primarily used to fight heavily armoured infantry.

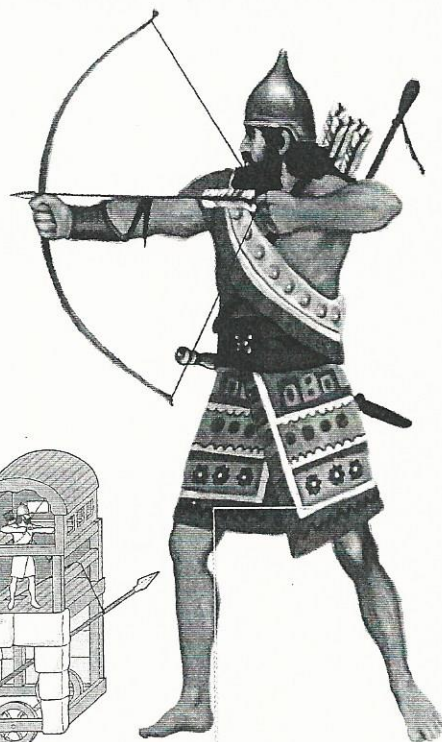


### Siege masters

Assault towers and battering rams like the one pictured here allowed archers to be almost level with the defenders on the city walls.

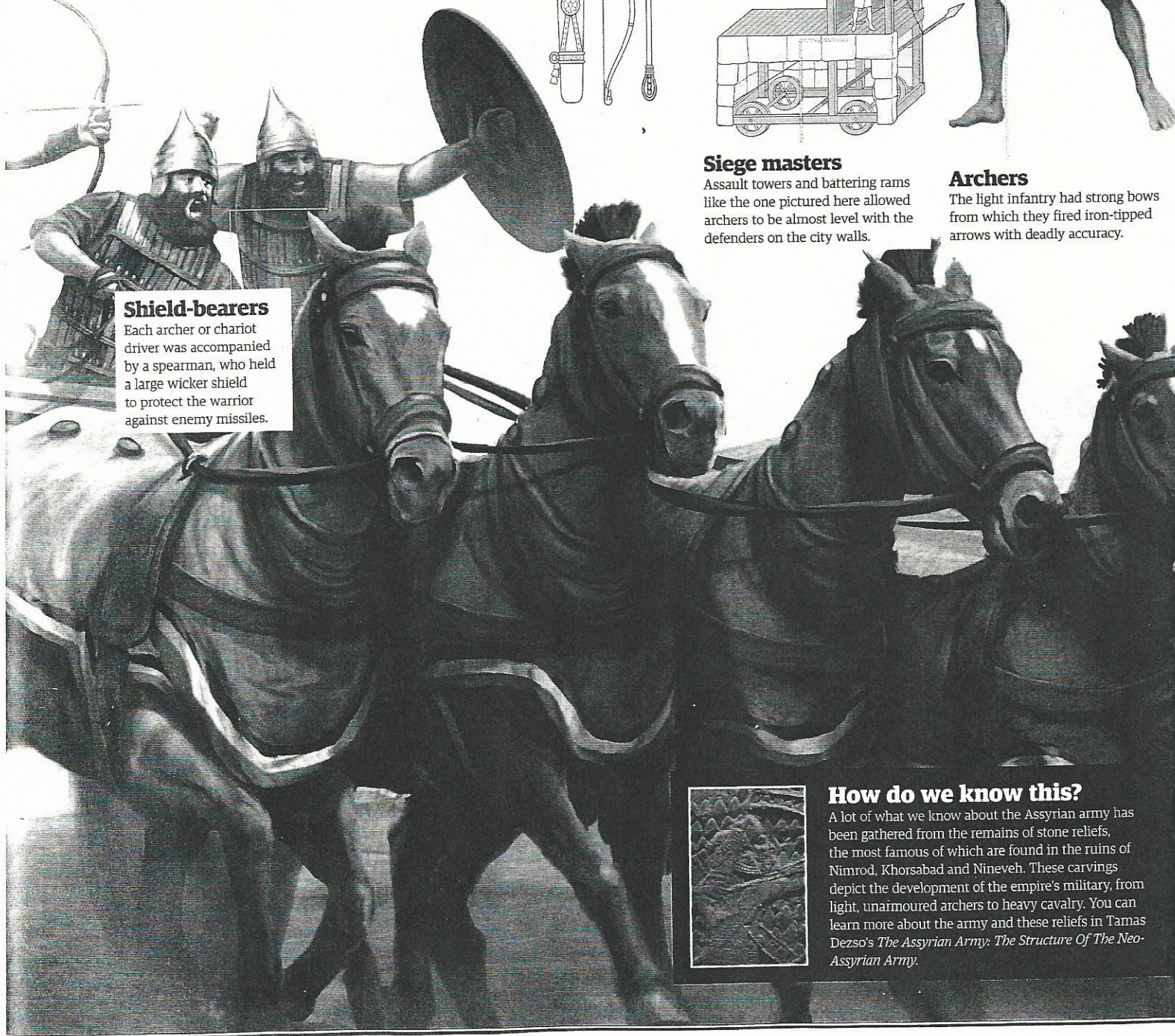
### Archers

The light infantry had strong bows from which they fired iron-tipped arrows with deadly accuracy.



### Shield-bearers

Each archer or chariot driver was accompanied by a spearman, who held a large wicker shield to protect the warrior against enemy missiles.



### How do we know this?

A lot of what we know about the Assyrian army has been gathered from the remains of stone reliefs, the most famous of which are found in the ruins of Nimrod, Khorsabad and Nineveh. These carvings depict the development of the empire's military, from light, unarmoured archers to heavy cavalry. You can learn more about the army and these reliefs in Tamas Dezso's *The Assyrian Army: The Structure Of The Neo-Assyrian Army*.