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J. Caleb Howard (ed.)

Architecture, Iconography, and Text

New Studies on the Northwest Palace Reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II

PEETERS

ARCHITECTURE, ICONOGRAPHY, AND TEXT

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The papers in this collection were first presented at a symposium entitled “The Reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II: Architecture, Iconography, and Text” at Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia (USA), during 26–27 August 2019. The purpose of the symposium was to present the cutting edge of scholarship on the reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II from Kalḫu, modern Nimrud, with particular focus on the productive integration of the diverse types of evidence excavated from the Northwest Palace and its related monumental buildings. The papers represent both interpretations of the ancient data in the Neo-Assyrian setting and reflection upon the modern reception of Assyrian architecture, iconography, and texts.

I wish to thank the authors for their participation in the symposium and for their contributions to this volume, as well as their patience as the volume came to fruition. I am grateful, as well, to the administration and faculty of Virginia Theological Seminary, who hosted and funded the symposium, and in particular to Melody Knowles, who graciously invited me to occupy the role of Zabrinski Visiting Professor at VTS during the spring semester of 2019, in order to continue my research on the royal inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II and to organize the symposium. Her hospitality was a truly delightful experience for all participants. Amanda Bourne deserves our thanks for her hospitality and flawless logistical assistance. Finally, I thank Christoph Uehlinger and the editorial board of Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis for accepting this volume into the series and for their excellent editorial support. I am particularly grateful to Marcia Bodenmann for her patience and hard work in copy-editing and formatting a rather complicated manuscript.

J. Caleb Howard
Cambridge
May 2023

INTRODUCTION

J. Caleb Howard[1]

For over one hundred and fifty years the ancient Assyrian civilization has been one of the most productive objects of study for archaeologists, art historians, assyriologists, and other historical disciplines, due largely to its abundant – and monumental – archaeological and textual remains. While Assyria has been a subject of interest for other cultures for millennia, the mid-nineteenth century AD marks the beginning of intensive study of Assyria by western scholars. It was then that adventurer-archaeologists especially from Britain and France began to hunt for the great Assyrian cities known from the Bible and from Classical sources among the myriads of mounds in modern day Iraq – and they found them.[2] The Assyrian capitals of Dur-Šarrukin, Kalḫu, and Nineveh were laid open to the world as these archaeologists brought back artifacts, including monumental architecture, to populate the great museums of Europe. Key figures in the rediscovery of Assyria accomplished great intellectual feats, such as the decipherment of cuneiform and the languages which it represented. They also wrote books in which they presented their adventures to the reading public. The discoveries of this period, combined with philosophical currents in western culture at the time, initiated major shifts in the perception of the past.

One of the most important loci in the scholarly study of Assyria has been the royal city of Kalḫu, modern Nimrud, located between Aššur to the south and Nineveh to the north, on the east bank of the river Tigris. In the mid-ninth century BC, the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II shifted the main locale of Assyrian kingship from the old political and religious capital of Aššur to the city of Kalḫu. It is uncertain precisely why he made this move. Aššur was the fixed location of the temple of the god Aššur and it was where, for centuries, the Assyrian kings had ruled their territory. The importance of the city of Aššur particularly as a religious, but also as a political, landmark in Assyrian territorial conception remained. Nonetheless, the move to Kalḫu initiated a series of shifts in political capitals in the Neo-Assyrian period (ca. 1000–609 BC), from Aššur to Kalḫu (Ashurnasirpal II) to Dur-Šarrukin (Sargon II) to Nineveh (Sennacherib and thereafter). Each move was accompanied by immense building programs, always involving the construction of new palaces and temples, all with monumental architecture in stone, metal, and mudbrick, and which bore complex programs of raised relief scenes intermingled with texts.

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[2] See, e.g., the excellent account in Mogens Trolle Larsen, *The Conquest of Assyria: Excavations in an antique land (1840–1860)* (London: Routledge, 1996).

According to the royal inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II, Kalḫu had been built by Shalmaneser I (though we know that the city was inhabited before him), but it had become a dilapidated city.[3] Ashurnasirpal initiated the construction of a new citadel, fitted with a new retaining wall. On it a new palace was built, which we now call the Northwest Palace because of its location on the citadel. Nearby, new temples were constructed, including a temple for the warrior-deity Ninurta. The city was given a new wall and a canal was dug, the Patti-ḫegalli canal, to provide the city and its environs with water. The inscriptions also indicate that during the reign of Ashurnasirpal II Kalḫu had a pleasure garden and a menagerie. Although Ashurnasirpal did not manage to complete all aspects of the Kalḫu project before his death – his son, Shalmaneser III, completed and extended Ashurnasirpal's building-works – a great deal of it was completed in Ashurnasirpal's reign, including the majority of the Northwest Palace and its associated temples.

While the architectural scope of Ashurnasirpal's project is astonishing on the face of it, the complex program of inscriptions, reliefs, and sculpture which permeates the monumental buildings has received particular attention in scholarship over the past one hundred and fifty years. Along the interior mudbrick walls of the Northwest Palace and the Nimrud temples, Ashurnasirpal's workmen installed a continuous façade of massive gypsum panels placed edge to edge. Before they were installed, the backs of many or all of these panels were incised with a royal inscription of Ashurnasirpal II, which was then invisible to viewers, being turned against the wall.[4] After the installation of the panels, the façade was carved with a mixture of relief scenes and inscriptions in three formats. In most rooms in the Northwest Palace, reliefs were carved first over the full height of the façade and then a ruled register of inscription was carved right across the reliefs. This band of inscription would appear to the undiscerning eye to be a single continuous text inscribed around entire rooms, but in fact a single composition, called the Standard Inscription, was repeated on each panel of the façade.[5] Since there were several hundred panels on the walls of the palace, this meant that there were several hundred copies of the Standard Inscription. This format bore depictions of the Assyrian king (or kings?) with officials, protective spirits called *apkallū* carrying a bucket (*banduddû*) and cone-shaped "purifier" (*mullilu*), and battle and ritual scenes. These are often accompanied by what looks like a stylized tree, an apparently composite structure with a central stem topped by a palmette and with emanating tendrils.[6] In another relief-inscription format, used famously in the throneroom, the façade was divided into three registers: an upper and lower register with separate relief scenes were divided by a central register containing repetitions of the Standard Inscription. A third format had no relief depictions, but only the band of inscription. The façade was interrupted at doorways, which were flanked by stone sculptures of a type of composite creature called *lamassu*. The temples adjacent to the Northwest Palace were similarly constructed, with their own inscriptions and appropriate relief depictions.

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[3] For the royal inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II, see RIMA 2 (= A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (1114–859 BC)* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991]), 189–397.

[4] For this text, see RIMA 2.0.101.35.

[5] For the Standard Inscription, see RIMA 2.0.101.23.

The modern study of the Northwest Palace and the nearby temples was initiated by the discovery of the first reliefs at Nimrud by Austen Henry Layard in the mid-nineteenth century AD. Layard was an enthusiastic adventurer, who was interested in the ruins that he explored as he toured the Middle East. He was deeply absorbed in ancient history and languages, in connecting what he saw in the ruins with figures and events in the Bible and in Classical literature. He was particularly interested in the cuneiform inscriptions which he discovered in Nimrud and other places, and had a lively correspondence with Henry Rawlinson, who would go on to play an important part in the decipherment of cuneiform. Fueled by youthful enthusiasm and curiosity, and no small amount of jealousy of the work of the Frenchman Paul Émile Botta at Khorsabad, Layard obtained official permission from the Ottoman sultan to dig at Nimrud and transport artifacts from the site to London. With the support of Stratford Canning, the British ambassador at Constantinople, Layard was endorsed by the British Museum and financed by the British government to obtain Assyrian reliefs for the museum.

The interest of the British government in Assyrian antiquities was deeply enmeshed with its political and colonial aims, as well as its cultural and political rivalries with other European powers. Not only British, but other European and, eventually, North American museums and universities were keen to get a share of the newly discovered Assyrian antiquities. This interest was driven especially by two questions. First, how do the Assyrian artifacts attest to the ancient past? In the nineteenth century, the ancient world was accessible mainly through the Bible and Classical literature. For many, this was a religious issue, since belief in the Bible as Holy Scripture was common in Europe and North America in the nineteenth century. For local people living near the site of Nimrud, as well, the discovery of Assyrian antiquities was quickly connected to religious concerns within Islam. Even for those who did not share a religious belief about the Bible, but had a broader interest ancient history, Assyrian artifacts and texts were new and exciting witnesses of this history. A second question driving the European exploration of Assyria dealt with how Assyrian art could be situated within a history of art and presented to the public in the great European museums. At the time, Assyrian art was placed within an evolutionary scheme in which Greek sculpture was at the pinnacle of artistic development among the world's cultures. These issues became a Procrustean bed for Assyrian artifacts, represented in the ways in which the excavations of the Assyrian capitals were managed and in how their artifacts were displayed in western museums. The explicit focus of the patrons of the Nimrud excavations was the population of museum and university collections, rather than understanding the site.

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[6] On this, see especially Ursula Seidl and Walther Sallaberger, “Der ‚Heilige Baum‘,” *AfO* 51 (2005–2006): 54–74, and Mariana Giovino, *The Assyrian Sacred Tree: A History of Interpretations*, OBO 230 (Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

The result was that Nimrud was selectively dismantled and the reception of the artifacts largely ignored the contexts from which they were taken.[7] The treatment of the artifacts – their texts, their reliefs, their architectural and cultural roles – was fundamentally marked by fragmentation. By tunneling horizontally into the Nimrud mound, Layard was able to locate and extract the best specimens of reliefs (from the point of view of him and his patrons), which he shipped back to London. Permission was also granted to representatives of other museums and institutions in Europe and North America to take their own reliefs and relief-fragments. Since it was known that the inscription on each relief was (more or less) a duplicate of the others, the three-register reliefs had their central registers, inscribed with the Standard Inscription, sawn from between the upper and lower registers of relief-scenes, before they were shipped to Europe. To lighten the heavy wall-panels, the backs were also regularly sawn off, making them thinner and more prone to fracture. This eliminated important evidence as well, not least since many or all of the reliefs had inscriptions on their backs as well as their fronts. It is unknown how many of these inscriptions were lost through these practices. The effect of all of this, of course, was a chaotic disassembling of the relief program of the Northwest Palace. This situation was exacerbated by the distribution of the pieces of the palace over four continents and many museums. The original integration of reliefs, sculptures, and texts in the Northwest Palace became impossible to study without major reconstruction of the original physical locations of the artifacts.

The fragmentation and reception of the Nimrud monumental program predetermined the nature of progress in its study over the next seventy-five years. This period – the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – saw the decipherment of cuneiform and its main languages, Akkadian and Sumerian, and the initial publication of editions of the inscriptions from Nimrud and other

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[7] See, e.g., Klaudia Englund, *Nimrud und seine Funde: Der Weg der Reliefs in die Museen und Sammlungen*, Orient-Archäologie 12 (Rahden: Verlag Marie Leidorf, 2003).

Assyrian cities. It also corresponded to the earliest interpretations of Assyrian art after modern excavations of Assyrian capitals. This state of fragmentation meant that relief scenes and inscriptions could only be viewed piecemeal, like viewing the world through a porthole. Reliefs which were originally part of a monumental program in series were separated by thousands of miles. In order to more closely approximate the study of the relief programs of Nimrud in their original context, a major reconstruction project was needed, so that the reliefs and architecture of the Northwest Palace could be reconstituted, conceptually if not materially.

Early steps were taken in this work in the 1930s by C. J. Gadd, in his book *The Stones of Assyria*, and by Ernst Weidner, in a series of articles published in *Archiv für Orientforschung*.[8] The work proceeded on two bases, then as it does now. First, in spite of the unfortunate and partly irrecoverable loss of context for the artifacts excavated by Layard at Nimrud, not all was in fact lost. Layard was a gifted artist and kept some records of the excavations, including a catalogue of reliefs from the Northwest Palace and, importantly, the sequence in which they were found. This catalogue was published in an appendix to volume one of his *Nineveh and Its Remains*. He also published his drawings of Nimrud reliefs in *The Monuments of Nineveh*, along with a plan of the Northwest Palace indicating the numbered sequence of reliefs, keyed to the catalogue in *Nineveh and Its Remains*.[9] Layard was also a copious writer, and his unpublished notes, drawings, and copies of cuneiform inscriptions are still held in the British Museum and the British Library. In addition to his published works, these notes are an invaluable source of knowledge about the nineteenth century excavations. Second, it was necessary to travel to the world's museums to catalogue the reliefs and other Nimrud artifacts in them. Some of this work could be accomplished by working in the British Museum, the largest single repository of Nimrud artifacts, including reliefs, in the West. But much was scattered in museums and private collections, and these had to be tracked down, identified, photographed, and published.

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[8] Cyril J. Gadd, *The Stones of Assyria: The Surviving Remains of Assyrian Sculpture, Their Recovery, and Their Original Positions* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1936); Ernst F. Weidner and Giuseppe Furlani, *Die Reliefs der assyrischen Könige, Erster Teil: Die Reliefs in England, in der Vatikan-Stadt und in Italien*, AfO Beih. 4 (Berlin, 1939); Ernst Weidner et al., "Ausgrabungen und Forschungsreisen," *AfO* 15 (1945–1951): 143–144; Ernst F. Weidner, "Tontafel-Sammlungen, Reliefs, Skulpturen," *AfO* 15 (1945–1951): 138–140; Ernst Weidner et al., "Tontafel-Sammlungen, Reliefs, Skulpturen," *AfO* 16 (1952–1953): 352–353; Ernst Weidner et al., "Altorientalische Altertümer in Museen und Privatsammlungen," *AfO* 17 (1954–1956): 183–184, 191–194; Ernst Weidner et al., "Altorientalische Altertümer in Museen und Privatsammlungen," *AfO* 17 (1954–1956): 415–417; Ernst Weidner and William Wells, "Altorientalische Altertümer in Museen und Privatsammlungen," *AfO* 19 (1959–1960): 190–192.

[9] The catalogue is in Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains* (London: John Murray, 1849), 381–390, corresponding to Austen Henry Layard, *Monuments of Nineveh* (London: John Murray, 1849), Plan III.

On these bases, Gadd and Weidner began to piece back together the Northwest Palace and something of the related temples, and their work was carried on in important works by John B. Stearns and Julian E. Reade.[10] Their work represents key stages on the way to a complete catalogue of all reliefs and sculptures from the Northwest Palace and Nimrud temples, along with identification of their sequences and where they are currently kept. The production of such a work corresponded to the joint Polish-Iraqi excavations of Nimrud in the 1970s, led, on the Polish side, by Janusz Meuszyński and Richard P. Sobolewski. Meuszyński not only catalogued and described the reliefs still at Nimrud, as well as those in Iraqi museums, but he also catalogued further reliefs in museums outside of Iraq. This culminated in a series of three volumes by Meuszyński, Sobolewski, and Samuel M. Paley, which provide a benchmark catalogue of the reliefs and sculptures in the Northwest Palace and allow the scholar to envisage most of the relief program, on the basis of accurate drawings of the reliefs and sculptures in their proper sequences.[11] These volumes on the Northwest Palace should be supplemented, moreover, by a fundamental contribution by Reade, who was able to reconstruct, as far as the data allow, the relief and sculpture programs of the Ninurta temple and nearby shrines.[12]

On the basis of these works, it has become possible over the past forty years to integrate the architecture, iconography, and text in the monumental buildings of the Nimrud citadel in ways that were simply not previously possible. The recovery of the original locations of the reliefs and sculptures in the Northwest Palace has revealed a carefully designed relief program, which was calculated to impress upon the viewer with considerable force the weight of the Assyrian king's might in battle and his unique relationship with the gods. A seminal study of the relief program in the throneroom of the Northwest Palace by Irene Winter appeared soon after these volumes and illustrates the research potential of the reintegration of the evidence from the Northwest Palace.[13] Winter immediately recognized the highly meaningful integration of architecture, iconography, and text in Room B, the throneroom, of the Northwest Palace, with its narrative reliefs divided by the Standard Inscription in central registers and punctuated by ritual scenes of the king with *apkallū* and stylized tree, all within a cavernous space. Winter observed that two orthostats bearing identical relief-scenes were strategically positioned, one opposite the central entrance to the throneroom from the outer courtyard (orthostat B-13, center of the southern wall) and its duplicate just behind the throne (orthostat B-23), positioned at the left end of the room (center of the eastern wall). Each of these orthostats was set off from the others in the room by being elevated above the floor. The reliefs both portrayed a symmetrical scene with stylized tree in the center, a divine symbol hovering above it, with mirror images of the king facing the stylized tree on each side, followed by a corresponding pair of mirrored *apkallū*. Winter showed that orthostat B-13 functioned as "the pivot point of the entire room,"[14] as a person entering the throneroom from the outer courtyard would have been confronted with this scene first, and, turning toward the throne, would have met this scene yet again, just behind it. The stylized tree, moreover, was portrayed at the corners of the throneroom, anchoring the room iconographically. Between these were sequential portrayals in two registers, divided by the Standard Inscription, of the king in battle and on the hunt. Plot sequences are clear, as the king advances through battles and hunts to victory, and the plot moves from east to west, emanating from the throne where the king would be sitting. Indeed, these themes – battles, hunts, and relationship with the gods – are central to the king's inscriptions, incised on the faces of these very reliefs, and it may be that portrayals in these narrative reliefs reflect specific conquests of the king in discrete regions around the Assyrian heartland, as recounted in the annalistic and summary inscriptions. While one may quibble with this or that aspect of Winter's analysis, her overall interpretation of the relief program in the throneroom has not, to my knowledge, been superseded, and demonstrates the rich research potential in studying the architectural, the iconographic, and the textual evidence together as a system in the Northwest Palace.

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[10] John B. Stearns, *Reliefs from the Palace of Ashurnaṣirpal II*, AfO Beih. 15 (Graz, 1961); Julian E. Reade, "Twelve Ashurnasirpal Reliefs," *Iraq* 27 (1965): 119–134; idem, Review of J. Meuszyński, *Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen und ihrer Anordnung im Nordwestpalast von Kalḫu (Nimrūd)* (1981), *BiOr* 41 (1984): 482–485; idem, "Texts and Sculptures from the North-West Palace, Nimrud," *Iraq* 47 (1985): 203–214; idem, "Revisiting the North-West Palace, Nimrud," *OrNS* 63 (1994): 273–278.

[11] Janusz Meuszyński, *Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen und ihrer Anordnung im Nordwestpalast von Kalḫu (Nimrūd) (Räume: B.C.D.E.F.G.H.L.N.P)*, BagF 2 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1981); Samuel M. Paley and Richard P. Sobolewski, *The Reconstruction of the Relief Representations and Their Positions in the Northwest-Palace at Kalḫu (Nimrūd) II (Rooms: I.S.T.Z, West-Wing)*, BagF 10 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1987); eidem, *The Reconstruction of the Relief Representations and Their Positions in the Northwest-Palace at Kalḫu (Nimrūd) III (The Principal Entrances and Courtyards)*, BagF 14 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1992).

[12] Julian E. Reade, "The Ziggurat and Temples of Nimrud," *Iraq* 64 (2002): 135–216.

This brief account of the rediscovery, fragmentation, conceptual reassembly, and interpretation, of the Northwest Palace over the past century-and-a-half raises two particular points of consideration. One is the Northwest Palace itself, especially its architecture-iconography-text ensemble, which continues to be a rich subject of research. The other is the late modern reception of the

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[13] Irene J. Winter, "The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II," in *Essays on Near Eastern Art and Archaeology in Honor of Charles Kyrle Wilkinson*, ed. Prudence O. Harper and Holly Pittman (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983), 15–31.

[14] Winter, "Program," 17.

Northwest Palace and its artifacts in western culture and scholarship. The essays in this volume attempt to advance both lines of inquiry, not only to better understand the Northwest Palace as an object of research, but also to learn from the reception of the Northwest Palace and better integrate its rich evidence into broader research aims. During 26–27 August 2019, a group of scholars – archaeologists, art historians, assyriologists, and biblical scholars – gathered at Virginia Theological Seminary to evaluate and build upon the history of scholarship on the Northwest Palace at Kalḫu. Some of the papers from that symposium are presented here. They consider the architecture, iconography, and text of the Northwest Palace both as an ancient object of analysis (Howard, Morello, Portuese) and as a basis for analyzing two important facets of late modern western culture: the integration of Assyrian antiquities into art-historical accounts and museum exhibitions (Sonik and Kertai) and the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible (Strawn).

The first essay, by J. Caleb Howard, addresses the material production of the hundreds of copies of the Standard Inscription on the faces of stone orthostats in the Northwest Palace. More precisely, this essay examines how scribes and masons managed horizontal and vertical constraints on the distribution of the text over the allotted space on the faces of the orthostats. In most rooms in the palace, the middles of the reliefs were ruled continuously from slab to slab with the same numbers of rulings, and it was the aim of the artisans to fit their copies of the Standard Inscription within the ruled space before the final ruling. The set of rulings on an orthostat provided the vertical spatial constraints on the distribution of the text, while the left and right edges of an orthostat provided horizontal constraints. In order to achieve a complete copy, artisans had to manage the size of the signs and their horizontal density in order to fit the signs within the space provided. If they were running out of room toward the end of a copy, it was possible to run past the final ruling no more than one line of text. Since orthostats were of a fairly standard width, this approach worked to fit most copies of the Standard Inscription within the ruled space provided. However, on narrower-than-usual slabs, which had to have the same numbers of rulings as the other slabs in their rooms, more drastic measures had to be taken and the copies could be abbreviated. This was done 1) by simply ending the copy when there was no more ruled space, provided this was at a word-boundary; 2) by ending the copy at a clause-boundary; or 3) by ending the copy at a significant break in the discourse. The latter two methods of abbreviation, especially, suggest that those who were in charge of distributing the text over these orthostats could read it, since they knew where there were meaningful breaks in the syntax or discourse. An even more clear example of how transmitters grasped the meaning of the text that they were transmitting is revealed in one copy in which the text is edited to fit onto a narrower-than-usual orthostat. An examination of the text reveals that the excised text was not grammatically or syntactically necessary and left behind meaningful discourse. Moreover, the way in which the text was edited suggests that the editor knew some of the contents of other Kalḫu inscriptions. Thus, the artisans abided by two norms in their work of incising the Standard Inscription in the Northwest Palace. One was an aesthetic norm, by which the inscriptions needed to be arranged in central bands which were aligned with one another, to produce the visual effect of a continuous inscription around entire rooms. This norm could not be violated by distributing the inscription more than one line of text below the final ruling, since, presumably, this would have disrupted the visual effect of a continuous band of inscription. The other norm was textual, by which the entire Standard Inscription had to be attempted for each orthostat, provided this did not violate the aesthetic norm. If it would violate the latter norm, procedures were available for abbreviating the inscription. All of this underscores not only a kind of aesthetic sophistication which is obvious to anyone who looks carefully at the workmanship of the reliefs, but also the textual skill of the transmitters, including a level of literacy which at least some of those who transmitted the Standard Inscription to the faces of the orthostats in the Northwest Palace must have possessed.

Nathan Morello's paper considers the role of both human and artifact agency in the relationship between text and image in the Northwest Palace relief program. Singling out the three most likely audiences of the reliefs – gods, contemporary people, and future people, including especially kings and scholars – Morello observes that levels of literacy in the "reading" of both text and image are likely. In addition to functional, technical, and scholarly literacy,[15] he proposes to add "professional literacy," i.e., the levels of literacy sufficient to do assigned work, such as the work of masons and scribes in carving monumental inscriptions. He draws a distinction between "text" in the sense of a literary work and "text" in the sense of the physical inscribed signs on a monument. While there are cases in Assyrian reliefs in which text in the first sense interacts directly with relief depictions, e.g., captions which explain the relief imagery, the interaction of text and image in the Northwest Palace reflects the second sense of the word "text." Elements of a given inscription – signs or words – may be transposed semiotically, so that they interact with elements of the relief without direct reference to their meaning in the context of the composition. An example, discussed by Morello elsewhere, is the carving of a GIŠ sign on the raised relief depiction of the trunk of the stylized tree on relief B-23. This wall-panel, strategically installed just behind the throne in the Northwest Palace, is inscribed only on the negative space between elements of the raised relief of the stylized tree, save only in this instance, where the “wood”-sign is inscribed directly in the middle of the tree-trunk. This interaction involves the exertion of agency by the image upon the spatially associated text (inscription in stone) such that the syllabic reading of the GIŠ sign (as *-is* in *mu-kab-bi-is*) is exchanged for the logographic reading (GIŠ = “wood”). Examples of agency in the opposite direction (text upon image) can be observed as well. The audience of such sophisticated interactions would undoubtedly be scribes who understood cuneiform writing and likely produced these interactions. Less capable viewers would not have been able to access or interpret these interactions, although all would have been able to perceive the effect of a continuous band of inscription all around the walls of rooms in the Northwest Palace, which visually promoted the victorious and pious king, who possessed and controlled both image and text. From this multilayered ideological program, Morello infers the presence of a scribal supervisor over its production, who could make spontaneous judgements about space allocation and distribution of image with text which effectively communicated Assyrian royal ideology to audiences with multiple levels of literacy, linguistic and cultural.

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[15] Niek Veldhuis, "Levels of Literacy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, ed. Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 68–89.

Ludovico Portuese addresses the reception of the ninth century iconography of the Northwest Palace by later Neo-Assyrian viewers. Observing that the Northwest Palace was used as a royal residence into the reign of Sargon II and continued in use, at least as a storehouse, until the end of the Neo-Assyrian empire, he infers that later kings and officials would have been audiences of the ensemble of inscriptions, reliefs, and sculptures from the ninth century. The engagement of later kings with the reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II is suggested by the fact that Tiglath-pileser III decorated his new Central Palace like the Northwest Palace, including his own wall-relief sequences. Moreover, restoration efforts on the Northwest Palace, including the addition of at least one new inscription, by Sargon II indicates efforts at preserving the work of his predecessors. Portuese selects one image from the Northwest Palace repertoire, the stylized tree flanked by anthropomorphic figures, and traces its development over time, from the Northwest Palace, through palaces of Shalmaneser III, Tiglath-pileser III, Sargon II, Sennacherib, and Ashurbanipal. Methodologically, he takes his cue from the psychological study of the reception of art by viewers and the concept of intericonicity, in which one image refers to another. He notes especially the importance of proportion between symmetry, which across cultures evokes in viewers feelings of timelessness, stability, and simplicity, and asymmetry, which evokes process, time, and surprise. Artists may make use of these two elements in their work in different measures, not least in the Northwest Palace: the image of symmetrical genii on either side of a stylized tree is the central motif of the restricted space of Room I in the Northwest Palace, while narrative reliefs marked by asymmetry are common in Room B, the throneroom. The effect is one of timelessness and stability associated with the divine world in the restricted interior of the palace, but strong themes of instability and flux (at least for the king's enemies) in the less restricted throneroom, where visitors are most likely to have come. The image of the stylized tree flanked by genii, both of which apparently had an apotropaic function, was then disassociated in later uses in Assyrian palaces, as the stylized tree was flanked by rampant bulls in Fort Shalmaneser (Shalmaneser III), then placed unflanked at corners of rooms in the Central Palace (Tiglath-pileser III) and in Dur-Šarrukin (Sargon II), apparently disappearing in the Southwest Palace (Sennacherib), and finally appearing in a single known miniature example in the North Palace (Ashurbanipal). The genii, on the other hand, appear separately from the stylized tree, at doorways in the palaces of Sargon II and Sennacherib. These diachronic changes in the motif reflect a regular reuse and development of the image of the stylized tree and genii. Those elements which remained, especially the apotropaic function, may have been the best understood by later kings, while the stylized tree flanked by genii fell out of use, suggesting that the ensemble reflected an artistic decision by the designers of the Northwest Palace. Given the consistent symmetry of this motif, this decision may have had the production of timelessness and stability in viewers as its aim. Such a notion is compatible with Ashurnasirpal's own claim that he built the Northwest Palace for his "lordly leisure for eternity."

The contribution of Karen Sonik and David Kertai turns to the reception of the Northwest Palace by western culture, by evaluating the integration of artifacts from the Northwest Palace into western museum collections, especially the British Museum in Victorian England. When sensational reports of discoveries in ancient Assyrian cities reached the British public, intellectuals and politicians exerted considerable influence on the ways in which these finds were received and presented in the British Museum. These figures aimed both to use Assyrian artifacts to edify the public, based on the Bible's assessment of Assyria's depravity and downfall, and to incorporate Assyrian art into a trajectory of artistic development. In their perception, artistic expression had followed a steadily improving course of aesthetic evolution, a "great chain of art," which had its pinnacle in classical Greek art, typified in the British Museum by the Elgin Marbles. This approach regarded Assyrian art, alongside (or beyond) Egyptian art, as both morally and aesthetically inferior steps on the way to Greek art, a process which then culminated in the decline of post-classical art. This sort of art-historical trajectory was applied even to the art of particular cultures, so that Layard regarded the sculpture of Ashurnasirpal II as the pinnacle of Assyrian art, after which Assyrian art was in decline. Modes of artistic valuation are evident in Layard's choosing reliefs of the Northwest Palace for the British Museum collection, where the narrative sequences were regarded as more valuable than the inscriptions with which they were displayed or the reliefs bearing *apkallū* and other figures, which were considered as "portraits" or "duplicates." The notion of an original work played a key role here and copies were regarded as inferior specimens, though certain types of copies, such as plaster casts, were still useful for public instruction. The effect of this system of evaluation was that reliefs and sculpture were torn out of their original settings and forced into a modern perception of their value.

Brent Strawn's contribution brings the Northwest Palace into conversation with the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. Strawn takes as his point of departure the work of Othmar Keel, which uses ancient Near Eastern iconography to clarify biblical texts, especially their symbolism, an approach called "iconographic exegesis." Noting that iconography and forms of literature have mutually clarifying parallels, he compares the narrative scenes in the throneroom of the Northwest Palace with the plots of historical psalms, such as Psalms 78, 105, and 106, which have narrative elements and recount stories known from the Pentateuch. His purpose is to resolve a perennial tension in the interpretation of the historical psalms, namely, their historical and literary functions in relation to the Pentateuchal narratives. There have long been differences of opinion among biblical scholars about whether the historical psalms are prior to or based upon the Pentateuchal narratives and about whether they contain reliable historical information. Strawn turns to the work of Winter on narrativity in the throneroom reliefs of the Northwest Palace as an analogy.[16] She observed that the throneroom reliefs contain a mixture of the narratival and the conceptual, of narrative plot along with still images, of the historical and the ahistorical. "Historical" portrayals are drawn from the events recounted in the inscriptions, but are stylized, so that, e.g., the Assyrians are never at a disadvantage and the king always emerges victorious. Such portrayals are punctuated by "conceptual" images, such as the king(s) on each side of the stylized tree, and these require from the viewer more background knowledge to understand them. This state of affairs can be plotted in an art-historical development between earlier scenes, such as the Victory Stele of Naram-Sin, where the image has little or no narrative, and later scenes, such as the wall-reliefs of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal, where the scenes are largely narratival. This mixture of the historical and the ahistorical in the throneroom reliefs of the Northwest Palace may be usefully compared with the historical psalms, which are amalgams of elements of narrative and lyric poetry, of the historical with the ahistorical. Moreover, as in the narrative reliefs in the throneroom of the Northwest Palace, the historical psalms pull history forward and their punctuation with non-narrative elements aids in applying the significance of the historical events to a later audience. This form of recounting involves the manipulation of the stories for particular rhetorical aims, such as the focus in the historical psalms on the role of God in the events recounted, so that the divine role is fronted while human actors, such as Moses, are somewhat muted. Thus, the historical psalms may be plotted on a continuum between narrative literature, such as most of the Pentateuch, and lyric poetry, such as most of the psalms, much as Ashurnasirpal's throneroom reliefs may be plotted between more purely "conceptual" and more purely narrative portrayals. While the diachronicity implied in this continuum may or may not be appealing, the analogy between image and text has further implications: greater competence is needed to read the lyric text, as well as the conceptual image, than the narrative. Moreover, the combination of these two modes of text and image reveals more than mere history. Rather, the historical is taken up into the lyric in praise of God, as it is in the reliefs in praise of the king. Thus, the relief program of the Northwest Palace may be regarded as mutually clarifying with the Hebrew Psalter, not because of a hypothetical historical relationship, but by analogy.

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[16] Irene J. Winter, "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs," *Studies in Visual Communication* 7 (1981): 2–38.

It is hoped that these latter two essays will presage increasingly more rigorous integration of the evidence from the Northwest Palace into research aims and institutions. Strawn's essay is a model of methodological rigor in the comparison of biblical text and ancient Near Eastern iconography. His focus, especially, on the *analogical* relationships between poetry and iconography is representative of what is commonly the state of affairs in comparative studies, namely, that while a *historical* relationship between biblical and ancient Near Eastern analogues is often desirable or even claimed, evidence is insufficient to demonstrate a historical connection. But analogies between biblical and ancient Near Eastern phenomena may nonetheless be just as revealing. The essay of Sonik and Kertai reveals in a fresh way the inappropriate means by which western institutions have attempted to integrate antiquities into their collections. By demonstrating how Victorian thinkers made Assyrian antiquities to fit their preconceived notions of artistic development – a blunder most readily appreciated in hindsight – the essay raises the question of how institutions and scholars force antiquities into a Procrustean bed today.

A methodological way forward is to build on the work already done to conceptually reconstruct the architectural assemblage of the Northwest Palace. Now that it is possible to study the palace in a state which more closely approximates its original design, what more can be done to understand the integration of architecture, iconography, and text in the Northwest Palace and what can we infer from it about Assyrian history and culture? Portuese's essay ably links the psychology of perception and intericonicity with careful analysis of textual and iconographic evidence from the Northwest Palace and its successor palaces. He demonstrates the fruitfulness of combining appropriate theoretical methods with traditional analysis of textual and archaeological evidence, a model of research which increasingly forms the backbone of the study of the ancient Near East. Morello's paper does this in a different way, considering the particular ways in which text and iconography interface, and drawing implications about scribal production. Given scribal reticence to describe their methods and training in detail, facts which were well-known to all practitioners, the future of our understanding of scribal practice depends a great deal on inferences drawn from observing their work. Howard’s paper attempts to infer modes of production from the distribution of text and iconography over the spaces allotted to artisans on orthostats. All three of these papers attempt to build upon the pioneering work of those who reunited architecture, iconography, and text in the Northwest Palace, by studying its parts in light of the reassembled system. It is this type of integrative agenda, applied comprehensively to the Assyrian data, which will prove most fruitful for ongoing research.

HOW TO DO THINGS WITH TEXTS: THE MANAGEMENT OF SPACE CONSTRAINTS ON THE ORTHOSTATS IN THE NORTHWEST PALACE

J. Caleb Howard[1]

1. INTRODUCTION

In the Ashurnasirpal reliefs from Kalḫu, we have a rare opportunity to study the mechanics of artistic and textual production in stone in the Neo-Assyrian period. Not only are hundreds of the reliefs preserved to some degree, but we can also reconstruct the original locations of the Ashurnasirpal reliefs in their relations to one another along the walls of the Northwest Palace, thanks to the work especially of Meuszyński, Paley, and Sobolewski.[2] CDLI indexes 650 reliefs from the Northwest Palace, over four hundred of which are, or were, extant somewhere in the world, including about seventy of the world's museums.

The fact that the original locations of the orthostats from Kalḫu have been largely reconstructed means that we can consider the reliefs in the context of the palace in their exact original relations to one another. It is possible, on the basis of this type of integration, to address questions of spatial relations and the materiality of the depictions and texts on their stone slabs. In short, we can view these reliefs – and read them – as a more or less complete architectural, iconographic, and textual ensemble. While in this essay I will focus on the version[3] of

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[2] Janusz Meuszyński, *Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen und ihrer Anordnung im Nordwestpalast von Kalḫu (Nimrūd) (Räume: B.C.D.E.F.G.H.L.N.P)*, BagF 2 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1981); Samuel M. Paley and Richard P. Sobolewski, *The Reconstructions of the Relief Representations and Their Positions in the Northwest-Palace at Kalḫu (Nimrūd) II (Rooms: I.S.T.Z, West-Wing)*, BagF 10 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1987); Samuel M. Paley and Richard P. Sobolewski, *The Reconstructions of the Relief Representations and Their Positions in the Northwest-Palace at Kalḫu (Nimrūd) III (The Principal Entrances and Courtyards)*, BagF 14 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1992).

[3] Following Jerrold Cooper ("Right Writing: Talking about Sumerian Orthography and Texts," *ASJ* 22 [2000]: 50), for this essay, a composition is "a literary work" which may be attested in a manuscript, "an exemplar of a composition." A composition may be represented in more than one version ("a manuscript or group of manuscripts whose text shows significant and major variations from other manuscripts of a given literary composition") and more than one recension ("a manuscript or group of manuscripts whose text shows significant but minor variations from other manuscripts of a given literary composition"). The Standard Inscription and the other Northwest Palace inscriptions share long stretches of textual content and are really various versions of Ashurnasirpal II's summary inscriptions. Compare the nomenclature as defined by Martin Worthington (*Principles of Akkadian Textual Criticism*, SANER 1 [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012], 4) and in RIMA 2, p. xiii.

Ashurnasirpal II's summary inscriptions referred to by modern scholars as the Standard Inscription – the text repeated hundreds of times mainly on the faces of the orthostats in the Northwest Palace[4] – it is important to keep in mind that there were multiple related versions of Ashurnasirpal's royal inscriptions incised onto various architectural components in the Northwest Palace and other buildings at Kalḫu. These royal inscriptions are like a web of interconnected texts and architectural components, which were apparently created in a unified construction project. By construction project, I refer not only to the construction of the buildings on the citadel at Kalḫu, but also to text-building, which was apparently done vis-à-vis the particulars of the architecture. As a result, the various versions of Ashurnasirpal II's royal inscriptions incised on his buildings at Kalḫu are, like the architecture and iconography, mutually clarifying. While this situation has been and will continue to be immensely productive for scholarship, the focus of this essay is quite modest, and addresses the management of space constraints as the text of the Standard Inscription was being transmitted[5] to the faces of the orthostats. This phenomenon is best understood as a feature of the embeddedness of the Standard Inscription within the matrix of architecture, iconography, and text at Kalḫu, and especially the Northwest Palace with its royal inscriptions.

For this essay, the means of accessing the textual diversity of this matrix is the complete collation of two hundred forty-five of the manuscripts of the Standard Inscription, which is represented in a score or *Partitur*, in which transliterations of corresponding lines of each manuscript are synoptically rendered one above the other, so that textual variation is easily observable. I have collated one hundred forty-two of these manuscripts through direct autopsy and photographed them thoroughly, documenting variation. The remaining manuscripts in my score have been completely collated through high resolution photographs. This has allowed me not only to collect and analyze all of the textual variants among these manuscripts of the Standard Inscription, but also to observe how each manuscript was distributed and incised into the stone, that is, to access the material realities of these inscriptions, rather than simply their abstract representations in transliterations or text editions. This essay represents a synthesis of the results of observing this material reality.

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[4] A. Kirk Grayson's edition can be found in RIMA 2.0.101.23, or online at http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/riao/corpus/.

[5] The question of how the Standard Inscription was transmitted to the orthostats, i.e., whether it was transmitted by visual copying, by dictation, or from memory, and the division of labor between scribe and mason (if such a division is even detectable or correct), is fraught. In using the words "transmit," "transmission," and "transmitter," I intend to circumvent this issue, though it remains an important one, and I intend to address it further in other places.

2. THE MANAGEMENT OF SPACE CONSTRAINTS ON THE ORTHOSTATS IN THE NORTHWEST PALACE

2.1. *The Nature of the Space Constraints*

The management of space constraints as one wrote a cuneiform text in ancient Mesopotamia was something with which scribes would have had to deal regularly in the course of their training and then during the occupational application of their scribal expertise. Whether they were writing letters or legal documents or literature, scribes writing in clay would have needed to first form a blank tablet of about the right size and shape, and then give it the appropriate number of rulings (in cases where these were used) in which to write their cuneiform text.[6] Rulings would have been added using the length of a stylus[7] or a string stretched across the wet clay tablet.[8] While the shapes and sizes of tablets vary, there are nevertheless formational patterns which presumably would have been learned in the course of the scribe's training and practice of the scribal art, and corresponded, apparently, to certain locations, periods, functions, and text-types. Scribes seem generally to have produced moist clay tablets *ad hoc*, and shaped their tablets to suit their immediate needs.

Having produced a blank clay tablet and, if necessary, added rulings, the scribe would have proceeded to distribute cuneiform text in the allotted space. In order to properly fit the text they were writing into the space they allotted themselves, they could choose how large to make their cuneiform signs and how far apart to distribute them. That the scribes sometimes had trouble fitting their texts into the spaces they had provided for themselves can be seen in cases where their text wraps around the right edge of the tablet, sometimes bending upward or downward along the edge for particularly long lines of text, or adding the final elements of a line just below it, but flush right. This cramping of the text could be necessitated by different features, e.g., in literary texts in which the lineation was intended to be regular or to correspond to exemplars, or in administrative or legal documents in which tablet format helped to organize discrete elements. Scribes were quite accustomed to managing space constraints when they wrote tablets.[9]

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[6] See Jonathan Taylor, "Tablets as Artefacts, Scribes as Artisans," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, ed. Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5–31, and the literature cited there, for the making of cuneiform tablets.

[7] It is common to find a wedge-shaped head at the beginning (left side) of rulings, suggesting that the scribes placed the tips of their styli into the left edge of the face of the tablet, and then laid their stylus down across the tablet to create the ruling.

[8] See Taylor, "Tablets as Artefacts," p. 15, fig. 1.4 for examples of both types of rulings.

[9] Cf. the similar assessment of Taylor, "Tablets as Artefacts," 8: "Generally speaking, tablets fall into a limited number of groups, with the shape of each group reflecting the nature of the text, date and place of production. Tablet size usually depends on the quantity of text to be inscribed,

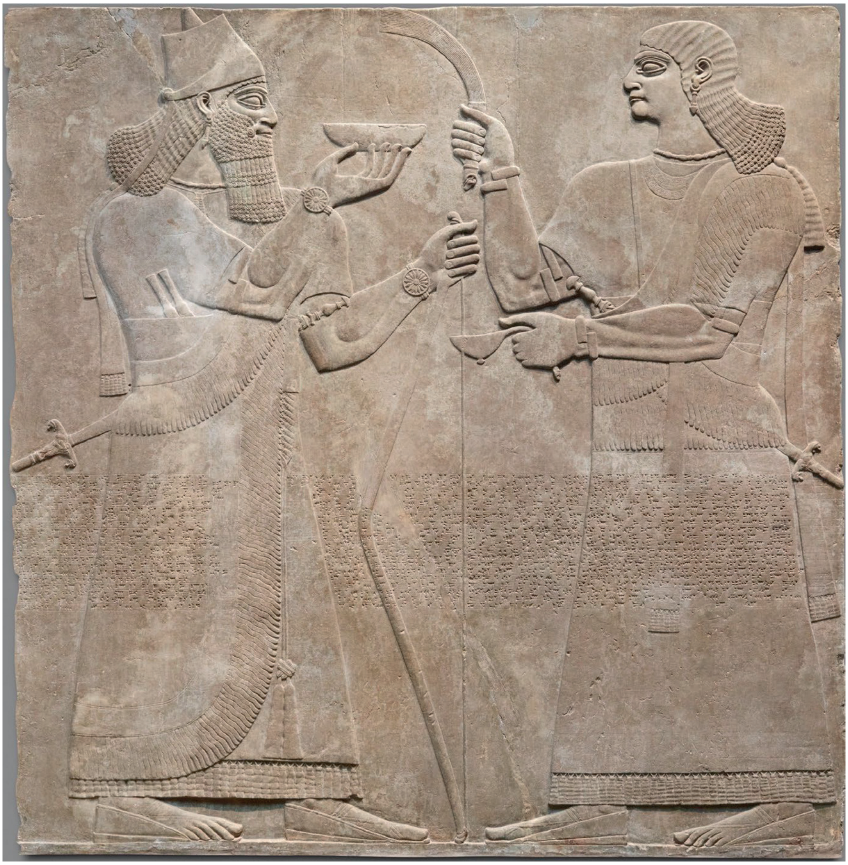

Fig. 1: Orthostat G-8 displaying a coherent subset of a relief scene (Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA 32.143.4, CC0 1.0).

The scribal production of tablets provides an analogy for the management of space-constraints in the production of the copies of the Standard Inscription on the orthostats in the Northwest Palace. The Standard Inscription was incised once on each wall-panel, with rare exceptions, and, in this sense, the wall-panels can be considered, from the point of view of the inscription, on analogy with a clay tablet. And like the inscriptions, relief scenes or subsets of relief scenes are typically limited to the boundaries of individual orthostats. These points can be

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but often a particular type of text will be of more or less standard length, and thus tablets of more or less standard size. This is not to deny the great skill of scribes who were experienced in estimating space."

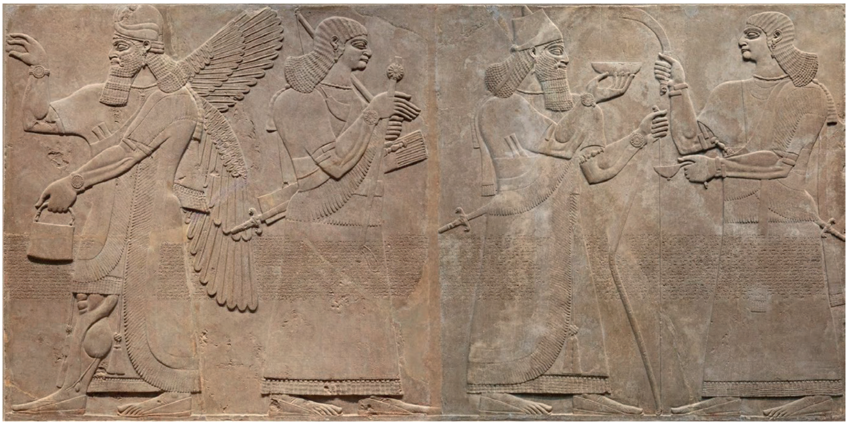

Fig. 2: Orthostats G-7 + G-8 with subsets of separate relief scenes on G-7, left (Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA 32.143.6 + MMA 32.143.4, CC0 1.0).

best demonstrated on the orthostats themselves. Figure 1 presents a typical example of an orthostat in a single register from the Northwest Palace, by far the most common format, and the one that is of greatest interest to us for this essay.[10] The Standard Inscription is inscribed completely (rather than abbreviated) one time on the orthostat, fairly regularly distributed across the width of the stone, in very straight lines. Similarly, the relief scene, with the king and a eunuch, are limited to one orthostat: neither of the figures is divided between the orthostats. The orthostat appears to have been treated somewhat like a painter's canvas, and coherent parts of the scene were fitted into the boundaries of the orthostat.

This analogy breaks down, however, when it is recognized that discrete parts of a single scene could be distributed over more than one orthostat. This can be demonstrated when orthostat G-8 is viewed with its neighbor, G-7 (Fig. 2). The boundary between the orthostats is visible between the left-most eunuch and the king. One can see that each orthostat contains one or more subsets of a scene. The three figures on the right are to be viewed together, with two eunuchs attending to the king, while the *apkallu* on the left goes with an adjacent orthostat, G-6 (Fig. 3). Combined with orthostat G-6, the *apkallu* on G-7 (Fig. 2, left side) can be seen to be holding the cone-shaped purifier (*mullilu*) up to the king, corresponding to the mirror image of the *apkallu* on the opposite side of the king on G-6. This alignment of subsets of relief scenes with individual orthostats is

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[10] Two other formats of orthostats with inscriptions occur: one without relief depictions, but only the inscription, the format used, e.g., in Courtyard Y; and one with two registers of relief depictions with the inscription between them in its own register of flat stone. The latter format is common in Rooms B and I.

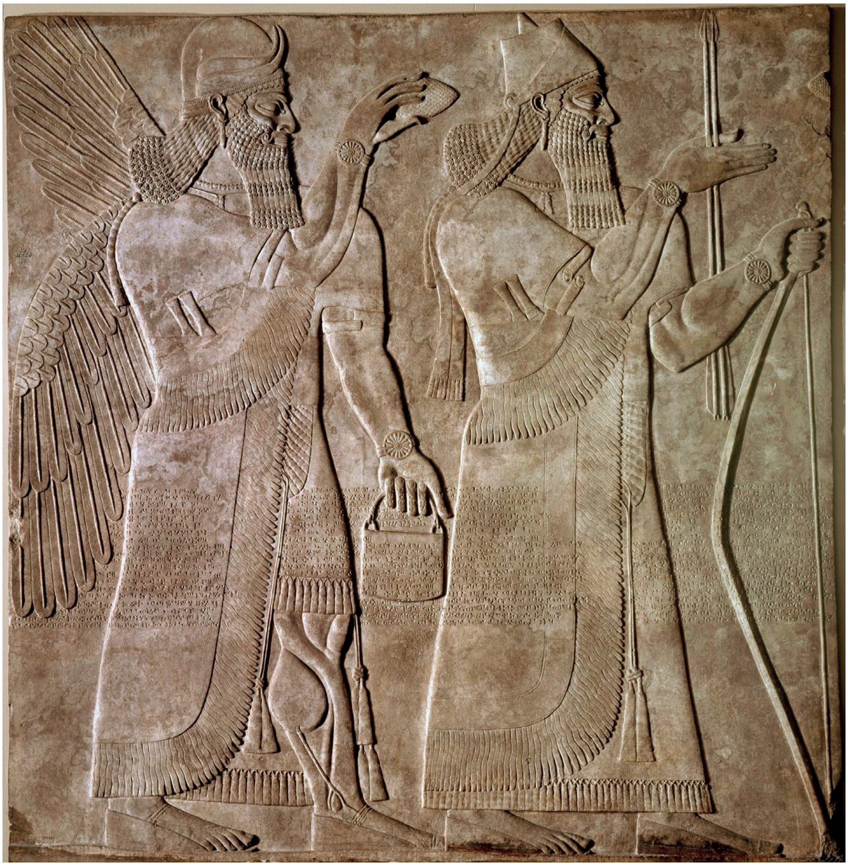

Fig. 3: Orthostat G-6 with the other subset of the relief scene continued on G-7 (British Museum, BM 124567, © Trustees of the British Museum, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

typical throughout the Northwest Palace, with rare exception. The stylized tree is often divided into two, especially at inside corners of rooms, where one-half of each tree is on each side of the corner, and the orthostats are divided into two overlapping panels. Thus, we can retain our analogy of the orthostat as painter's canvas if we imagine a painting ensemble, with each canvas contributing a subset of the whole.

As for subsets of relief scenes, the vertical sides of orthostats typically delimited the inscriptions. The copies of the Standard Inscription used the sides of the orthostats as spatial boundaries, somewhat like the sides of a tablet, and a single orthostat contained a single instance of the Standard Inscription in the overwhelming majority of cases. Thus, it would appear that the persons who designed the relief scenes and transmitted the text of the Standard Inscription to the orthostats in the Northwest Palace purposefully used the vertical edges of the orthostats as spatial boundaries for delimiting their work on its horizontal axis. Subsets of relief scenes were generally limited to the widths of individual orthostats and the sides of the orthostats provided the boundaries of the horizontal axis of the inscriptions.

The vertical axis of the texts and reliefs also had boundaries. For the reliefs, the upper edges of the orthostats provided the upper boundaries and the floor of the palace provided the lower boundaries. For the texts, the boundaries of the vertical axis were more complicated. These boundaries were provided by the rulings, which structured the text. It would appear that entire series of rulings, spanning multiple orthostats, were made *in toto* along discrete segments of wall, such as between doorways. In rooms with single-register orthostats (the majority of the rooms), every orthostat had the same number of rulings: the orthostats from Room F have 18 rulings, those from Rooms G and N have 20 rulings, those from Rooms H and L have 26 rulings, those from Rooms S and T have 19 rulings, and so on. Moreover, the rulings of adjacent orthostats, when they are extant and observable, can be seen to be perfectly aligned with one another, as in the example in Figure 4. The alignment is visible on these orthostats because they are displayed adjacent to one another in the British Museum; this phenomenon can be observed as well on other adjacent orthostats in other museums and can be taken to be the norm.[11] Rulings run continuously from one adjacent orthostat to another.

That the rulings were placed on sequences of orthostats together is further suggested by a case in which a series of three orthostats have two sets of aligned rulings. Orthostats G-9, G-10, and G-11, bear the faint traces of unused rulings between and after the rulings that were used, as can be seen in Figure 5. The unused rulings were further apart than those which were used, and there were originally nineteen of them.[12] By spacing the new rulings closer together, less total space on the orthostat was ruled and there were more rulings (twenty-one, for twenty lines of inscription), so that more text could be incised on the orthostat in less vertical space. The signs were then incised between the new rulings, only partially obliterating the old ones. These orthostats were the first

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[11] Cases where this alignment is visible in museums include: F-3 + F-4 (BM 124584 + BM 124585); G-2 + G-3 + G-4 (BM 124564 + BM 124565 + BM 124566); G-7 + G-8 (MMA 32.143.6 + MMA 32.143.4); G-14 + G-15 + G-16 (VA 939a + VA 939b + VA 939c); H-1 + H-2 (Bristol H796 + Bristol H795); N-16 + N-17 (VA 948a + VA 948b).

[12] As the photograph in Figure 5 shows, the rulings are not always visible on every part of the orthostats. Three of the rulings which are not visible in this photograph can be seen in other parts of the orthostats, and can be inferred from the spaces between the arrows in the missing segments. It seems that the first ruling was in the same place for both sets.

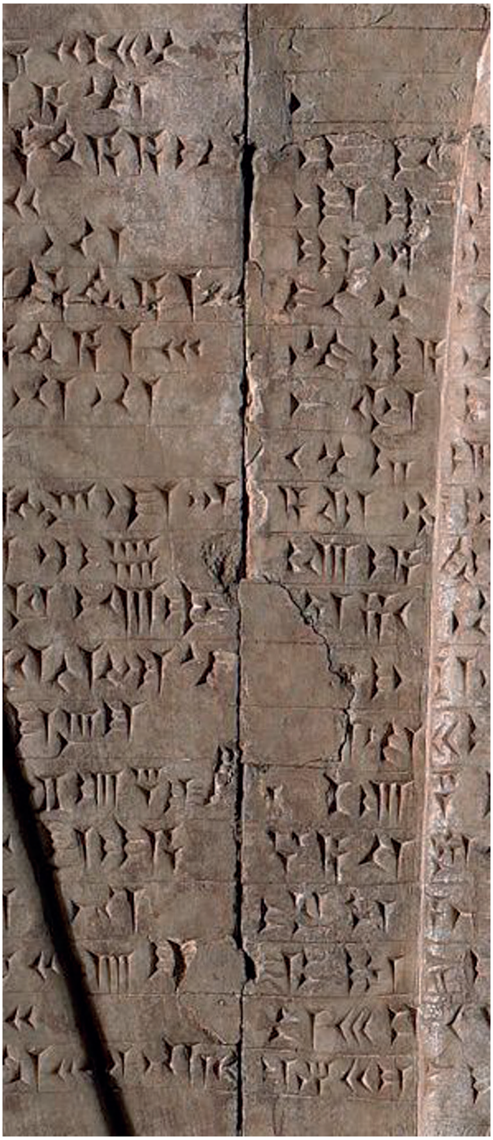

Fig. 4: Alignment of rulings on orthostats G-2 + G-3 (British Museum, BM 124564 + BM 124565, © Trustees of the British Museum, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

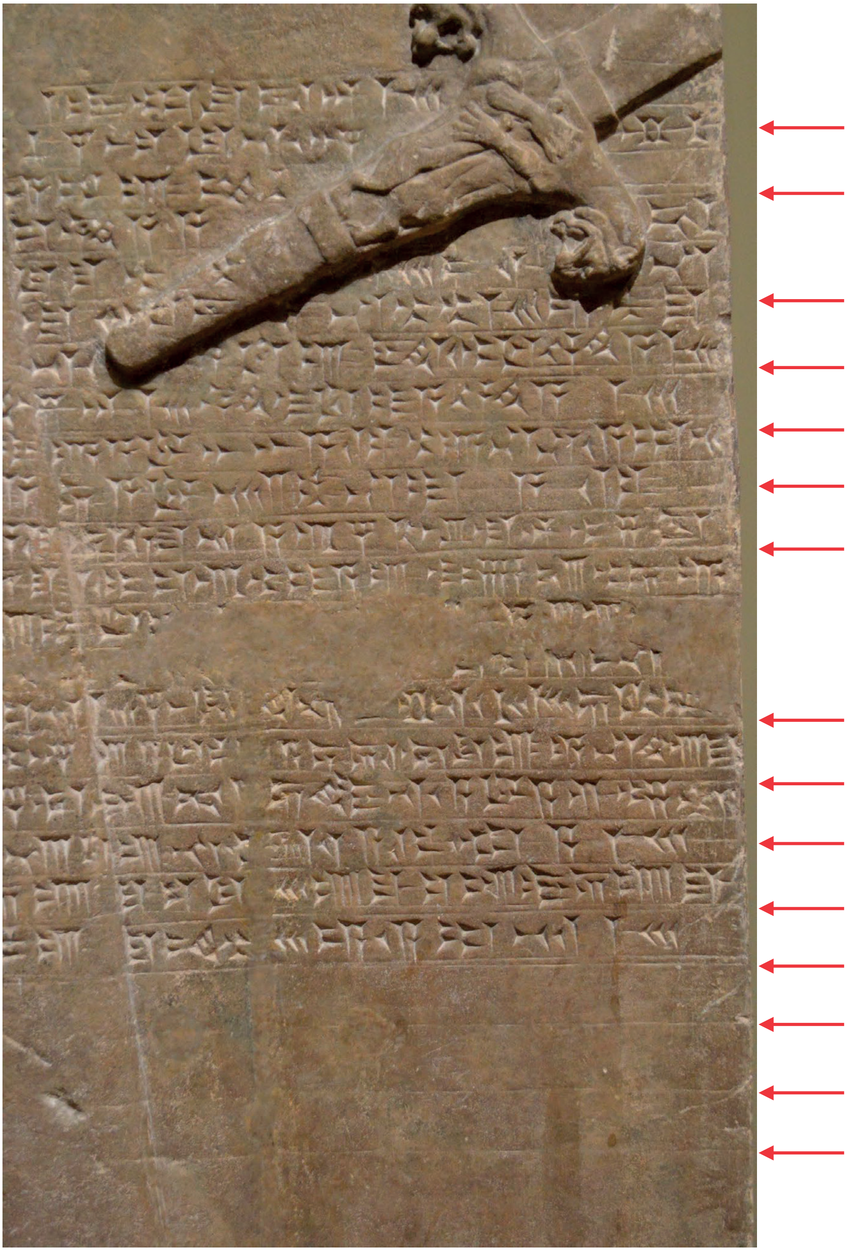

Fig. 5: Orthostat G-9 with old rulings still visible (Hood Museum of Art, S.856.3.1; own work).

three in a discrete series, beginning at door G-e, and the first set of rulings did not extend, so far as I can see, to G-12, a well-preserved orthostat which I have personally examined. The old rulings may not have been removed because to do so would have damaged the relief scene, over which the rulings were carved. But what is important for our argument is that a complete series of rulings were made on three adjacent orthostats, but then replaced by new ones, which were then extended to the remaining orthostats in the sequence.

Thus, the rulings were likely placed onto adjacent orthostats all at once, being incised from orthostat to orthostat in sequence. The rulings (and therefore the lines of inscription) are very straight across multiple orthostats and parallel with the floor, as if they were made using a string and a measuring instrument (cf. the lines of text across two adjacent orthostats in Fig. 2). Presumably the number of rulings and their spacing was planned on the basis of the estimated space needed to complete the Standard Inscription on each orthostat. On orthostats of normal width – typically in the range of 200–220 cm. wide – the entire text of the Standard Inscription was usually completely incised on the single-register orthostats. The rulings and the vertical edges of the orthostats functioned as guides for the writing of the inscription. Not only did they keep the lines of text aligned and parallel with one another and with the horizontal axis of the orthostat, but they also predisposed the writers, to some degree, to draw the signs within a limited range of sizes. They would ensure that the entire text of the Standard Inscription could be written on each orthostat of normal breadth.

2.2. *Textual Strategies of Managing Horizontal Space*

The right and left edges of the orthostats provided the horizontal boundaries of the inscriptions (and of subsets of relief scenes), and the rulings provided the vertical boundaries of the inscriptions, as well as a means of organizing them with regular spacing, parallel to the floor. Observable strategies of space management in the inscriptions on the orthostats correspond to these horizontal and vertical axes. On the horizontal axis, transmitters could manage space constraints by increasing and decreasing horizontal script density, “the size and especially the proximity of signs in a line.”[13] Since all lines of Standard Inscription manuscripts end at word-boundaries, transmitters had to plan the distribution of their text horizontally so as to end their lines in the correct places. Moreover, on orthostats of average width in a sequence,[14]

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[13] This term is borrowed from Jacob Lauinger, “Neo-Assyrian Scribes, ‘Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty,’ and the Dynamics of Textual Mass Production,” in *Texts and Contexts: The Circulation and Transmission of Cuneiform Texts in Social Space*, ed. Paul Delnero and Jacob Lauinger, SANER 9 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 301.

[14] That is, continuous sequences of orthostats, as between doorways or corners on a single wall, typically in the range of 200–220 cm wide.

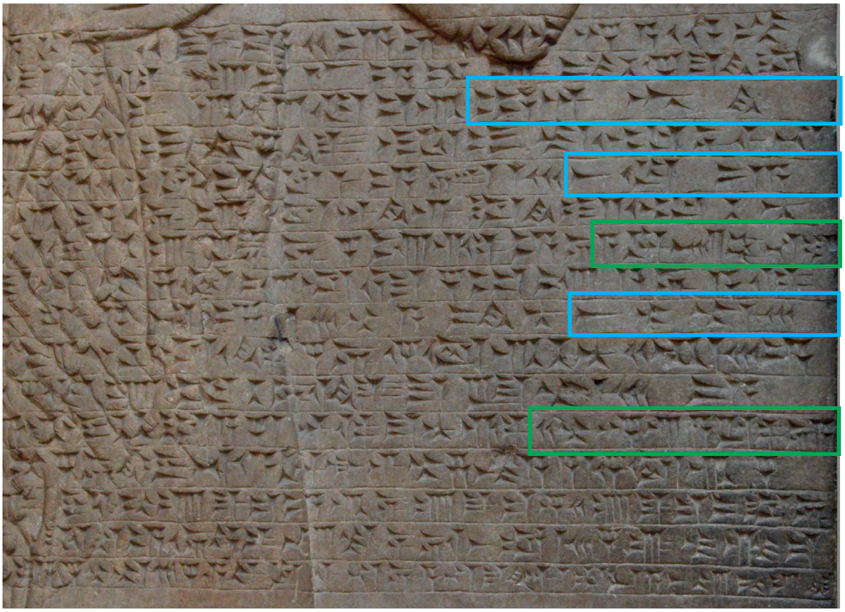

Fig. 6: Orthostat B-30 with increased and decreased horizontal script density at the ends of lines; blue = decreased horizontal script density, green = increased horizontal script density (British Museum, BM 124560; own work).

a complete copy of the entire text of the Standard Inscription was attempted, and transmitters had to plan the distribution of their text to make this possible. As the transmitters neared the ends of their lines or of the ruled spaces on the orthostats, horizontal script density could be increased in order to fit the text into the ruled space (if space was running short) or decreased in order to fill out the remaining space (if more space was left than was needed).

This phenomenon is often visible at the ends of lines, as shown in Figure 6. The text in the rectangles on B-30 in Figure 6 read as follows: Line 3: *mul-tar-ḫi*, "the rebellious"; Line 5: *ina qé-reb*, "in the midst of"; Line 7: ^{íd}*Su-ub-na-at*, "the River Subnat"; Line 9: *ina* KUR.KUR.MEŠ, "in the lands"; Line 12: MAN KUR *Aš-šur* NUN *a-lik pa-ni-a*, "(Shalmaneser,) king of Assyria, a prince who preceded me." The rectangles in blue mark cases in which the signs are clearly spaced apart and the signs are stretched horizontally, in order to fill out the remaining space before the right edge of the orthostat. These contrast with the text marked with green rectangles, in which the text had to be tightened up, so that signs are squeezed together and are horizontally smaller than usual. This can be seen to correspond to word-boundaries, as the transmitters were attempting to fit the final words in these lines into the ruled space.

But the adjustment of horizontal script density is perhaps most prominent on some orthostats as the inscriptions were nearing the ends of the ruled spaces, at the bottoms of the inscriptions. In these cases, the horizontal script density could be progressively or even rather suddenly increased (as in Fig. 7) or decreased (as in Fig. 8), as the transmitters perceived they were nearing the end of their ruled space. On orthostat G-29 (Fig. 7), the horizontal script density of approximately the bottom half of the inscription can be seen to be much tighter than the upper half. It would appear that the transmitter began to think that he was running out of space about halfway through writing the text of the Standard Inscription into the ruled space provided, and in this he was correct. He quite wisely tightened up the horizontal script density and managed to complete the entire text of the Standard Inscription in the ruled space. The transmitter of S-6 (Fig. 8), on the other hand, had the opposite problem: by line 17, if he continued transmitting the text of the Standard Inscription to the ruled space provided as he had thus far, he would finish too soon, potentially leaving some of the ruled space uninscribed. He therefore loosened the horizontal script density noticeably and filled out the remaining ruled space.

Another way in which transmitters managed space constraints on the horizontal axis of the inscriptions was by choosing to inscribe or leave uninscribed complex relief contours. In some rooms, including Rooms G, H, L, and N, certain complex relief contours, e.g., the wings of the *apkallū* or the fringes of garments, were systematically left uninscribed. It is noteworthy that sequences of rulings in these rooms do not extend over these relief contours either, suggesting that this avoidance of complex relief contours was deliberate right from the start of the phase in which the inscriptions were incised. Thus, this practice was apparently planned for entire rooms. This is in sharp contrast to other rooms, including Rooms B, C, D, E, F, P, S, and T, and the West Wing (WFL), where both rulings and text were systematically incised right across such complex relief contours. However, for orthostats in rooms G, H, L, and N, if more horizontal space was needed in lines in order to fit the Standard Inscription into the ruled space provided, writing could be added to the normally uninscribed complex relief contours. This phenomenon is most prominent in these rooms at the ends of the ruled spaces for the inscriptions, as shown in Figures 9 and 10.

In the case of L-7 (Fig. 9), one can see that the transmitter was already increasing horizontal script density in the penultimate ruled space. But this was judged not to be enough to fit the entire Standard Inscription onto the orthostat, so the transmitter resorted to inscribing across the hems of the garment and the wing of the *apkallu*. Something similar occurred on H-34 (Fig. 10), where, in addition to slightly tighter horizontal script density in the last three

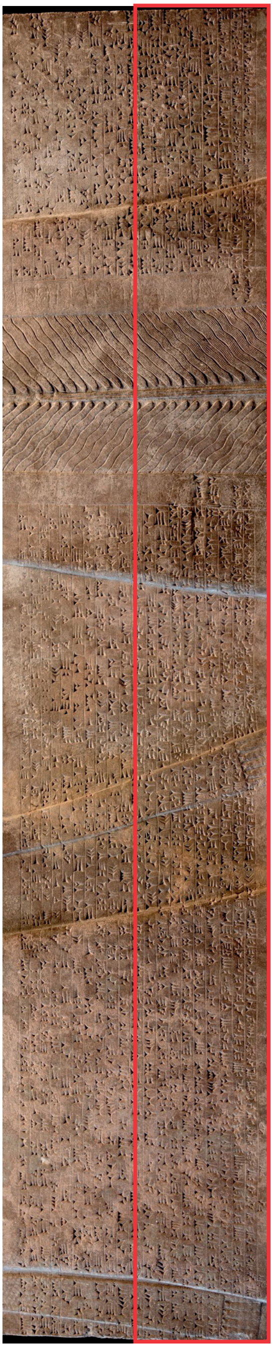

Fig. 7: Orthostat G-29 with increased script density in the last half of the inscription (NMS A.1956.362, © National Museums of Scotland).

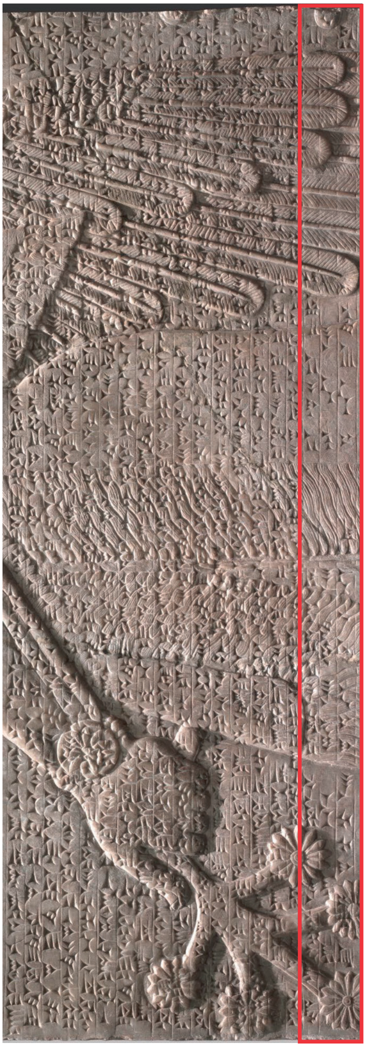

Fig. 8: Orthostat S-6 with decreased script density in the last three lines of the inscription (Cleveland Museum of Art, CMA 1943.246, CC0 1.0).

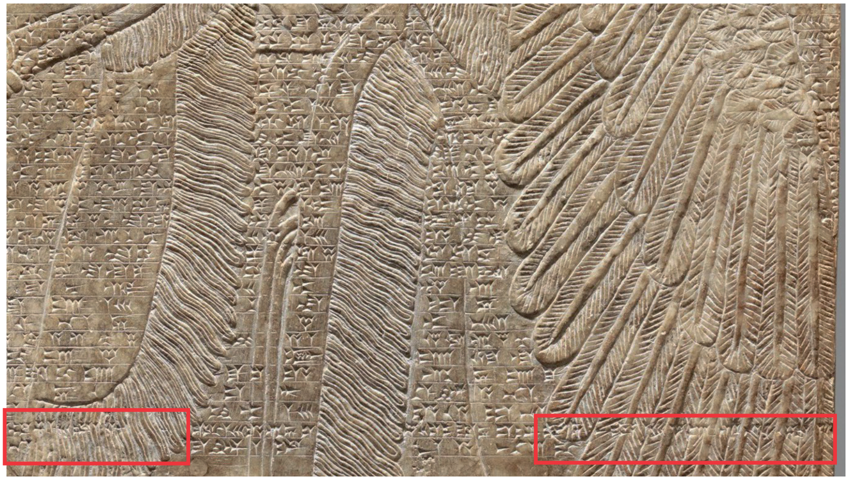

Fig. 9: Orthostat L-7 with complex relief contours inscribed in the penultimate line of the inscription (Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA 31.72.1, CC0 1.0).

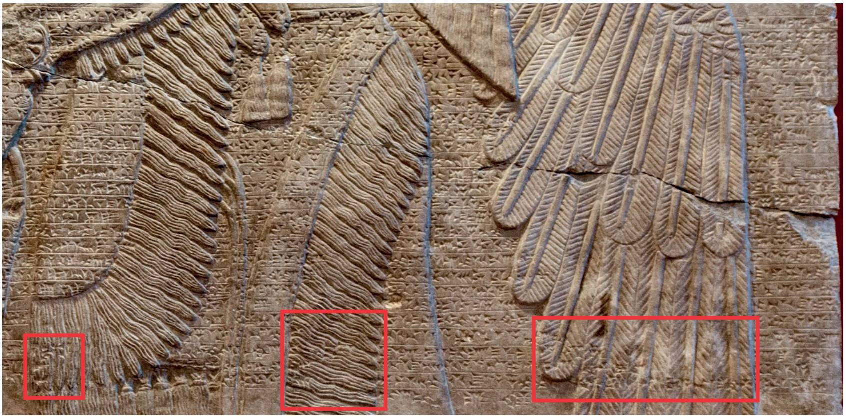

Fig. 10: Orthostat H-34 with complex relief contours inscribed in the final three lines of the inscription (State Hermitage Museum, ДВ-3940, photograph by Don-vip, CC-BY-SA-4.0).

lines of ruled space, the transmitter also began to write on the wings and hems of the *apkallu*. For the wing, this is visible at first only on the left side of the wing, but then increases in the last line so that the entire width of the wing is inscribed, presumably as the transmitter realized that he was rapidly running out of space.

2.3. *Textual Strategies of Managing Vertical Space*

Transmitters managed space along the vertical axis of the inscriptions as well as the horizontal axis. While vertical spacing between lines was predetermined by the spacing of the rulings, it was possible, when extra space was needed, to add a complete or partial line of text just beneath the final ruling. While this was not always necessary, and the final ruling usually follows the final line of text, in several cases an extra line of text had to be added beneath the final ruling. Such lines could be flush left (Fig. 11),[15] centered (Fig. 12),[16] or flush right (Fig. 13).[17]

It should be noted that there is never more than one of these extra lines or partial lines. While this fact can be viewed as a result of the overall precision in estimating the space and text distribution needed for fitting the inscription onto each orthostat, it is also possible that this was a means of avoiding any disruption of the aesthetic continuity in the bands of inscription around the rooms. The addition of more than one extra line may have created an intolerable downward bulge in the band of inscription.

2.4. *More Drastic Strategies of Managing Horizontal and Vertical Space*

These strategies of managing horizontal and vertical space on the orthostats were sufficient for the transmitters to fit the entire Standard Inscription into the allotted ruled space on the vast majority of orthostats. However, some orthostats were much narrower than the other orthostats in their sequences, though they bore extensions of the same sets of rulings found on those other orthostats. Unusually narrow orthostats were typically installed at the ends of series of orthostats, where they filled in the spaces left over just before doors or corners. In these cases, the strategies of managing horizontal and vertical space outlined above were often insufficient for fitting the Standard Inscription into the ruled space provided, forcing the transmitters to abbreviate the text.

Three methods of abbreviation are detectable among the extant manuscripts of the Standard Inscription on single-register reliefs. First, the transmitters could simply conclude the text of the Standard Inscription when there was no more space, in spite of not completing the entire text, provided that this did not fall in the middle of a word. While abbreviated inscriptions always conclude at word boundaries, in several cases inscriptions are concluded in the middle of a phrase[18] or clause.[19] In all of these cases, it is clear that the transmitters simply

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[15] Examples: C-b-2, E-5, G-2, G-29, N-8, P-3, S-4, S-13.

[16] Examples: G-3, G-24, H-34, S-17.

[17] Examples: B-24, H-31, N-13, P-4.

[18] B-26, C-3, G-a-1, G-c-4, S-26.

[19] B-32, C-4, G-9, G-22, N-5, T-5, Z-3.

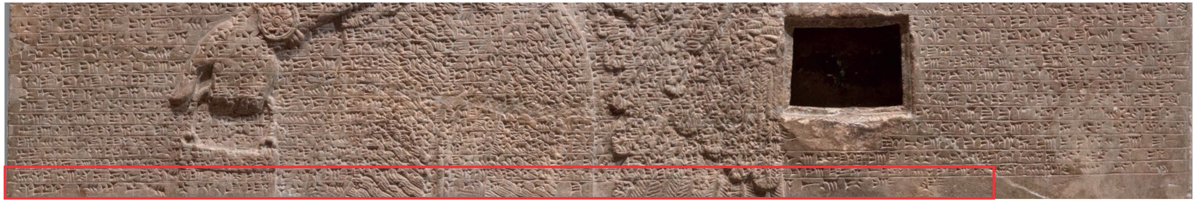

Fig. 11: Orthostat C-b-2 with added line below final ruling, flush left (Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA 32.143.8, CC0 1.0).

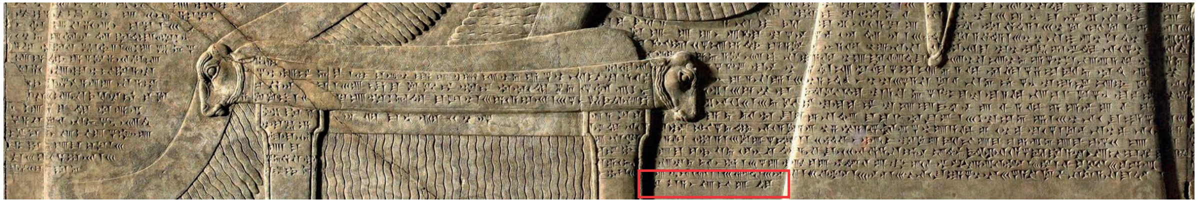

Fig. 12: Orthostat G-3 with added line below final ruling, centered (BM 124565, © Trustees of the British Museum, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

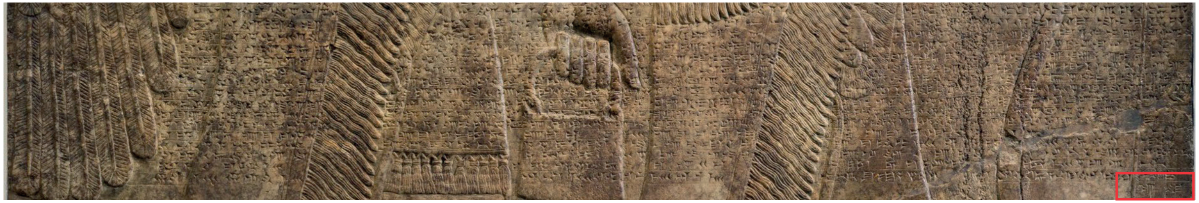

Fig. 13: Orthostat H-31 with added line below final ruling, flush fight (LACMA 66.4.3, © Museum Associates/Los Angeles County Museum of Art).

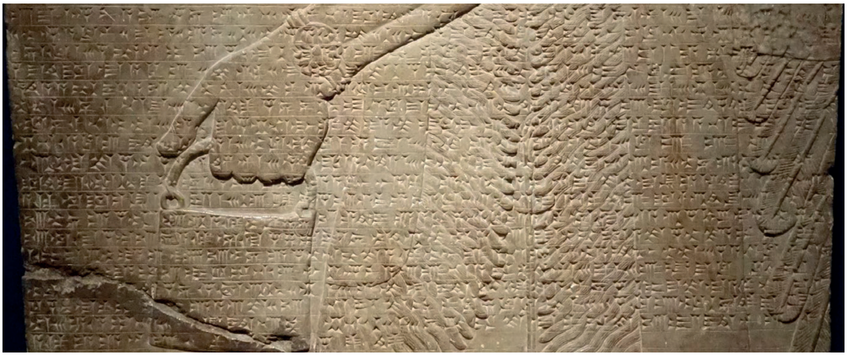

Fig. 14: Unusually narrow orthostat S-12 (107 cm wide) with final line concluding well before the right edge of the orthostat (Brooklyn Museum, 55.149, CC0 1.0).

ran out of space and stopped writing, since the signs are written until there is no more room for another word before the right edges of the orthostats. Second, in some cases inscriptions are concluded at the end of a clause,[20] or a significant break in the discourse.[21] Among these, there are several instances in which the final line ends well before the right edge of the relief or the horizontal script density is drastically decreased at the end of the final line, suggesting that the transmitters were aware that this was a natural break in the discourse, and intended to conclude their inscriptions before they ran out of space.[22]

An example of this is represented in Figure 14, where only about half of the final ruled space in S-12 is inscribed, ending ⸢*ú*⸣-*šá-áš-kín*. This orthostat was originally positioned right next to a doorway, the last in a sequence of four orthostats which measured 107 cm (S-12), 136 cm (S-13); 195 cm (S-14); and 200 cm (S-15). S-12 is by far the narrowest orthostat in this series and contains lines 1–14 of the Standard Inscription, as represented in RIMA 2.0.101.23; S-13 contains lines 1–19 and S-14 and S-15 both have lines 1–22. Thus, the number of lines of Standard Inscription preserved on these orthostats increases according to their widths, as expected. The point of the text at which S-12 ends is a major break in the discourse of the Standard Inscription, the end of a series of epithets of the king, which would have been followed by the building description for the city. This break occurs in line 14 in the edition in RIMA 2.0.101.23, and Grayson, noting this break, indicated it as a paragraph-break in his translation. Since

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[20] G-18, G-27, H-23, H-35, L-15, P-2 (end of a subordinate clause), S-13, S-18, Z-1, Z-2, Z-6, Z-a-1, Z-b-2, WFL-1, WFL-5.

[21] B-1, C-11, C-13, G-c-2, N-3, N-10, S-12, WFL-3. All of these end *ú-šá-áš-kín*, which occurs in line 14 in Grayson's edition in RIMA 2.0.101.23.

[22] End of a clause: G-18, G-27, H-35, P-2 (end of a subordinate clause), S-13, Z-b-2, WFL-1; major break in the discourse: B-1, G-c-2, N-3, S-12.

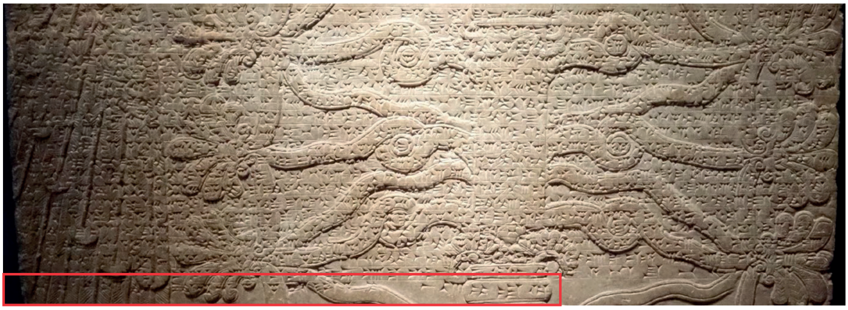

Fig. 15: Orthostat S-13 (136 cm wide) with a final half-line below the final ruling (Brooklyn Museum, 55.150, CC0 1.0).

the conclusion of the inscription on S-12 is well before the right edge of the relief, it would appear that the transmitter of S-12, knowing that it would be necessary to abbreviate this copy of the Standard Inscription, intentionally concluded his copy at a major break in the discourse.

The transmitter of S-13, however, was perhaps not so lucky as to be able to do this. In that case, more space was available, and the copy had to be continued into the building description. Nonetheless, examination of the distribution of the text at the end of the inscription on this orthostat shows that the transmitter did not simply stop writing when he ran out of space as can be seen in Figure 15. The text of S-13 ends at the conclusion of a clause, *ad-de*, "I founded," which occurs in line 19 in RIMA 2.0.101.23. This comes at the end of the statement that Ashurnasirpal founded his palace and before the description of its decoration. Thus, while this orthostat does not conclude at a *major* break in the discourse (like S-12), it does conclude at a *minor* break in the discourse. Moreover, like S-12, the inscription on S-13 is purposeful in its textual distribution. Rather than concluding when out of ruled space, the transmitter added a half-line after the final ruling, so as to complete the text to the desired place in the Standard Inscription. This seems to imply that the same logic of abbreviation was at work here as for S-12: the transmitter kept writing the text until he got to a meaningful (if minor) break in the discourse.

Thus, the second method of abbreviation seems to represent a different attitude toward abbreviating from the first method, which simply concluded the manuscript when out of space. Rather, the second method of abbreviation implies a certain intentionality: the transmitters were apparently aware of where they were in the progress of the discourse of the Standard Inscription and were reticent to break it up by concluding their manuscripts in the middle of a phrase or clause. Thus, the transmitter of S-12 did not use up all of the ruled space on this orthostat, because he had come to a natural breaking point in the discourse

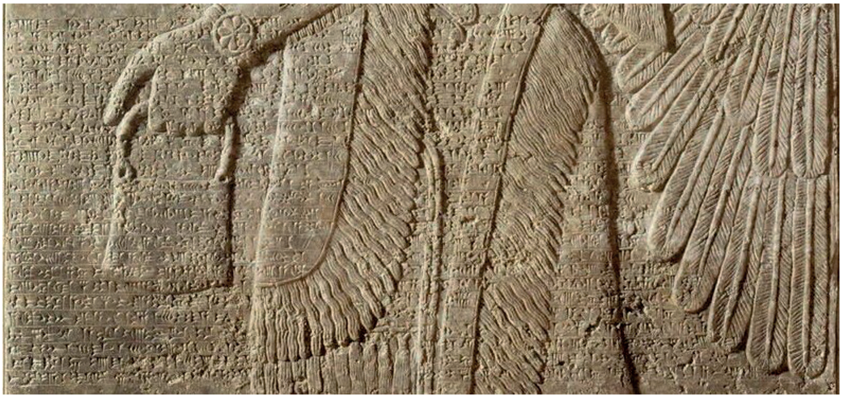

Fig. 16: The inscription on orthostat H-6 (Musée du Louvre, AO 19847 [detail]; © RMN-Grand Palais [Musée du Louvre]/Jean-Gilles Berizzi, https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010123097#).

of the Standard Inscription, while the transmitter of S-13 pressed beyond the ruled space, because he had *not yet* come to a natural breaking point in the discourse of the Standard Inscription.

The third method of abbreviating the Standard Inscription is more complex than the first or the second methods, but implies the same type of intentionality and, what is more, a significant degree of literary skill. This third method is, to my knowledge, clearly attested only once and probably attested one other time. In this method, the text of the Standard Inscription was abbreviated by what appears to be more extensive and complex, but still *ad hoc*, editing.

The clearest example of this approach is the text inscribed on relief H-6 (see Fig. 16), now in the Musée du Louvre. This relief, like the remainder of the orthostats in Room H, had twenty-six ruled lines. The average width of the orthostats in the room was 176 cm; when only orthostats that are not adjacent to doorways or corners are taken into account, the average is 201 cm. The width of H-6 was a mere 123 cm, making it considerably narrower than the majority of the orthostats in this room. All orthostats in Room H omit writing on complex relief contours, including the wings of the *apkallū* and the hems of garments. On H-6, a winged figure is depicted, and the inscription is situated over the widest part of the wings and there are two rows of hems of the garment of the *apkallu*. Thus, not only was this a narrower-than-usual orthostat, but much of its surface was not available for the inscription.

As a result, after the transmitter had written cuneiform text in twenty-three of the twenty-six ruled spaces, he had only transmitted just over half of the Standard Inscription, part way through a section of epithets of the king. This is represented in §1 (the second row) in Table 1.

Table 1: Synoptic comparison of the text of lines 12–22 of the Standard Inscription, as represented in the majority of manuscripts, with the corresponding text on orthostat H-6

Standard Inscription Translation (RIMA 2.0.101.23), ll. 12–22[23]	**Standard Inscription Majority Text, ll. 12–22**	**H-6 Text, ll. 23–26**	**H-6 Translation (following RIMA 2.0.101.23), ll. 23–26**
§1 Ashurnasirpal, attentive prince, worshipper of the great gods, ~~ferocious dragon, conqueror of cities and the entire highlands, king of lords, encircler of the obstinate, crowned with splendor, fearless in battle, merciless hero, he who stirs up strife, praiseworthy king, shepherd, protection of the (four) quarters, the king whose command disintegrates mountains and seas, the one who by his lordly conflict has brought under one~~	§1 ^{m}*aš-šur*-PAP-A NUN-*ú na-a-du pa-líḫ* DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ ~~*ú-šúm-gal-lu ek-du ka-šid* URU.URU *u ḫur-šá-ni paṭ gim-ri-šú-nu* MAN EN.MEŠ-*e mu-la-iṭ*~~ (13) ~~*ek-ṣu-te a-pi-ir šá-lum-ma-te la a-di-ru* GIŠ.LÁ *ur-šá-nu la pa-du-ú mu-rib a-nun-te* MAN *ta-na-da-a-te* ^{lú}SIPA *ṣa-lu-lu* UB.MEŠ MAN *šá qí-bit* KA-*šú uš-ḫar-ma-ṭu* KUR.MEŠ-*e*~~ (14) ~~*u* A.AB.BA.MEŠ *šá ina qi-it-ru-ub* EN-*ti-šú* MAN.MEŠ-*ni ek-du-te la pa-du-te* TA *ṣi-it* ^{d}*šam-ši a-di e-reb* ^{d}*šam-ši pa-a* 1~~	§1 ^{m}*aš-šur*-⸢PAP-A⸣ NUN-*ú na-a-du* (24) *pa-líḫ* DINGIR$^{!}$.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ$^{!}$ <...>	§1 Ashurnasirpal, attentive prince, worshipper of the great gods <...>

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[23] Text in double-strikethrough style indicates omissions from H-6 (represented as <…> for H-6); text in bold indicates changes made to the text of the Standard Inscription in H-6. Text in regular or italic styles is text from the Standard Inscription which is unchanged in H-6. In the text, numbers in parentheses are line numbers, either in Grayson, RIMA 2.0.101.23, for the majority of manuscripts of the Standard Inscription, or in H-6 itself, for the relevant columns.

~~authority ferocious (and) merciless kings from east to west:~~	~~*-en ú-šá-áš-kín*~~		
§2.1 The ~~ancient~~ city Kalḫu ~~which Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, a prince who preceded me, had built – this city had become dilapidated; it lay dormant.~~ I re**built** ~~this city.~~	§2.1 ^{uru}*kal-ḫu* (15) ~~*maḫ-ra-a šá* ^{md}*šùl-ma-nu* SAG MAN KUR *aš-šur* NUN *a-lik pa-ni-ia* DÙ-*uš* URU *šu-ú e-na-aḫ-ma iṣ-lal* URU *šu-ú*~~ *ana eš-šú-te* ***ab-ni***	§2.1 ^{uru}*kal-ḫu* <...> *ana eš-šú-te* ***aṣ-bat***	§2.1 The city Kalḫu <...> I **took in hand** for renovation.
§2.2 ~~I took people which I had conquered from the lands over which I had gained dominion, from the land Sūḫu, (from) the entire land of Laqû, (from) the city Sirqu which is at the crossing of the Euphrates, (from) the entire land of Zamua, from Bīt-Adini and the land Ḫatti and from Lubarna, the Patinu. I settled (them) therein.~~	§2.2 ~~UN.MEŠ KUR-*ti* ŠU-*ia šá* KUR.KUR.MEŠ~~ (16) ~~*šá a-pe-lu-ši-na-ni šá* ^{kur}*su-ḫi* ^{kur}*la-qe-e ana si-ḫir-ti-šá* ^{uru}*sir-qu šá né-ber-ti* ^{íd}A.ŠÌTA ^{kur}*za-mu-a ana paṭ gim-ri-šá* ^{kur}É-*a-di-ni u* ^{kur}*ḫat-te*~~ (17) ~~*u šá* ^{m}*lu-bar-na* ^{kur}*pa-ti-na-a-a al-qa-a ina* ŠÀ-*bi ú-šá-aṣ-bit*~~	§2.2 <...>	§2.2 <...>
§2.3 ~~I cleared away the old ruin hill (and) dug down to~~	§2.3 ~~DU$_6$ *la-be-ru lu ú-na-ki-ir a-di* UGU A.MEŠ *lu ú-šá-píl* 1~~	§2.3 <...>	§2.3 <...>

~~water level. I sank (the foundation pit) down to a depth of 120 layers of brick.~~	~~ME 20 *tik-pi ina muš-pa-li*~~ (18) ~~*lu ú-ṭa-bi*~~		
§2.4 I founded **therein** a palace of cedar, cypress, daprānu-juniper, boxwood, meskannu-wood, terebinth, and tamarisk ~~as my royal residence (and) for my lordly leisure for eternity.~~	§2.4 É.GAL ^{giš}*e-re-ni* É.GAL ^{giš}SUR.MÌN É.GAL ^{giš}*dap-ra-ni* É.GAL ^{giš}TÚG.MEŠ É.GAL ^{giš}*mes-kan-ni* É.GAL ^{giš}*bu-uṭ-ni u* ^{giš}*ṭar-pi-ʾi* (19) ~~*a-na šu-bat* MAN-*ti-a a-na mul-ta-aʾ-it* EN-*ti-a šá da-ra-a-te*~~ *ina* **ŠÀ-*bi*** *ad-di*	§2.4 É.⸢GAL⸣ $^{\text{giš!}}$*e-re-ni* É.GAL ⸢^{giš}SUR⸣.MÌN É.GAL (25) ^{giš}*dap-ra-ni* É.GAL ⸢^{giš}TÚG.MEŠ⸣ É.GAL ^{giš}⸢*mes*⸣*-kan-ni* É.GAL ^{giš}*bu-*⸢*uṭ*⸣*-ni* [*u*] ^{giš}*ṭar-*⸢*pi*⸣*-ʾi* <...> (26) *ina* ***qé-reb-šú*** *ad-di*	§2.4 I founded **therein** a palace of cedar, cypress, daprānu-juniper, boxwood, meskannu-wood, terebinth, [and] tamarisk <...>.
§2.5 ~~I made (replicas of) beasts of mountains and seas in white limestone and parūtu-alabaster (and) stationed (them) at its doors. I decorated it in a splendid fashion; I surrounded it with knobbed nails of bronze. I hung doors of cedar, cypress, daprānu-juniper, (and) meskannu-wood in its doorways.~~	§2.5 ~~*ú-ma-am* KUR.MEŠ-*e u* A.AB.BA.MEŠ *šá* $^{\text{na}_4}$*pi-li* BABBAR-*e*~~ (20) ~~*u* $^{\text{na}_4}$*pa-ru-te* DÙ-*uš ina* KÁ.MEŠ-*šá ú-še-zi-iz ú-si-im-ši ú-šar-riḫ-ši si-kát kar-ri* ZABAR.MEŠ *al-me-ši* ^{giš}IG.MEŠ ^{giš}*e-re-ni* ^{giš}SUR.MÌN~~ (21) ~~^{giš}*dap-ra-ni* ^{giš}*mes-kan-ni ina* KÁ.MEŠ-*šá ú-re-ti*~~	§2.5 <...>	§2.5 <...>

§2.6 I took **in** great quantities and put therein **silver, gold, tin, bronze**, ~~iron, booty~~ from the **lands** over which I gained dominion.	§2.6 KÙ.BABBAR.~~MEŠ~~ KÙ.GI.~~MEŠ~~ AN.NA.~~MEŠ~~ ZABAR.~~MEŠ AN.BAR.MEŠ KUR-*ti* ŠU-*ia*~~ *šá* KUR.KUR.~~MEŠ~~ (22) *šá a-pe-lu-ši-na-ni* ***a-na*** *ma-a*ʾ*-diš al-qa-a ina* ŠÀ-~~*bi*~~ *ú-kín*	§2.6 ⸢KÙ.BABBAR⸣.<MEŠ> KÙ.⸢GI⸣.<MEŠ> AN$^{!}$.⸢NA⸣.<MEŠ> UD.KA.⸢BAR⸣.<MEŠ AN.BAR.MEŠ KUR-ti ŠU-*ia*> *šá* KUR.KUR.<MEŠ> *šá a-pe*$^{!}$*-lu-ši-na-ni* ***ana*** *ma-a*ʾ*-*⸢*diš al-qa*⸣*-a ina* ⸢ŠÀ⸣-<*bi*> *ú-kín*	§2.6 I took **in** great quantities and put therein **silver, gold, tin, bronze** <...> of the **lands** over which I gained dominion.

Knowing that the full form of the Standard Inscription would require much more space, a scribe (for so he must have been) apparently edited the text *ad hoc*, by omitting what were presumably considered thematically and grammatically disposable elements of the discourse, by abbreviating orthography, and by changing some of the contents of the remaining text. The scribe edited a series of sections of the discourse of the Standard Inscription with the following divisions (corresponding to the sections represented in Table 1).

Table 2: Sections of the Standard Inscription which are edited in H-6

- §1. Series of Epithets of Ashurnasirpal (RIMA 2.0.101.23, ll. 12–14): heavily abbreviated in H-6
- §2. Building Description (RIMA 2.0.101.23, ll. 14–22): heavily abbreviated in H-6
  - §2.1. General Rebuilding of Kalḫu (RIMA 2.0.101.23, ll. 14–15): heavily abbreviated in H-6
  - §2.2. Resettlement of Conquered Peoples in Kalḫu (RIMA 2.0.101.23, ll. 15–17): omitted in H-6
  - §2.3. Reconstruction of the Citadel (RIMA 2.0.101.23, ll. 17–18): omitted in H-6
  - §2.4. Founding of the Northwest Palace (RIMA 2.0.101.23, ll. 18–19): lightly abbreviated in H-6
  - §2.5. Decoration of the Northwest Palace (RIMA 2.0.101.23, ll. 19–21): omitted in H-6
  - §2.6. Placement of Booty in the Northwest Palace (RIMA 2.0.101.23, ll. 21–22): lightly abbreviated in H-6

Our editor began to change the text in §1, a major section of the discourse which formed a series of epithets of the king. This pericope, in its complete form, constitutes a sentence fragment: it does not contain a clear predicate, but is simply a list of epithets, beginning with the name of the king, which stand alone in the discourse. As such, individual epithets could be omitted without changing the essential grammatical integrity of the section. The series of epithets found in this section in the majority of Standard Inscription manuscripts is used in other versions of Ashurnasirpal's royal inscriptions with manifold variations.[24] In all of these cases, *Aššur-nāṣir-apli rubû naʾdu pāliḫ ilāni rabûti*, "Ashurnasirpal, attentive prince, worshipper of the great gods," occurs as a unit; the name and these two epithets occur together, in this order, even if it is embedded in different larger units. The unity of this phrase, and its potential literary independence, can be seen, for example, in the annals and in the Nimrud Monolith, where this phrase occurs without any of the other epithets in the Standard Inscription:

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[24] RIMA 2.0.101.1 i 18ff., iii 126ff.; RIMA 2.0.101.2, l. 17ff.; RIMA 2.0.101.17 i 12ff.; RIMA 2.0.101.20, l. 14ff.; RIMA 2.0.101.23, l. 12ff.; RIMA 2.0.101.26, l. 32ff.; RIMA 2.0.101.47 o 7ff.; RIMA 2.0.101.51, l. 26ff.

> ^{m}*Aš-šur*-PAP-A NUN-*ú na-a-du pa-líḫ* DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ *šá bi-ib-lat lìb-bi-šu* ^{d}BAD *ú-šak-ši-du-šú-ma*
>
> "Ashurnasirpal, attentive prince, worshipper of the great gods, whose desires the god Enlil helped him to obtain" (RIMA 2.0.101.1 i 38–9 // RIMA 2.0.101.17 i 49–51).

These cases imply that the phrase *Aššur-nāṣir-apli rubû naʾdu pāliḫ ilāni rabûti* was something of a compositional unit. The editor of H-6 may well have known the royal name with these epithets as a compositional unit, and thus omitted all of the other epithets in this section *except these*. This may explain why the precise epithets that were excised in H-6 were chosen for omission.

This section was followed by §2, the description of the reconstruction of Kalḫu, which is heavily edited and some of what is left is changed from the usual text of the Standard Inscription. In §2.1 of the building account, the role of Shalmaneser (I) and the dilapidation of the city are omitted. What is left is simply ^{uru}*Kal-ḫu ana eš-šú-te aṣ-bat*. The collocation CITY-NAME *ana eššūte aṣbat*, too, is not without precedent: it is common in the other royal inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II and means "to take over a … city for administrative purposes,"[25] or, perhaps better here, simply "*reorganisieren*."[26] This is followed in H-6 by the complete omission of §2.2 and §2.3, then a lightly edited version of the founding of the Northwest Palace in §2.4. The origin of this structure is likely to be found in other versions of Ashurnasirpal II's inscriptions at Kalḫu which include the same or similar contents as found in H-6, §2.1–§2.4. Examples follow, in Table 3:

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[25] CAD Ṣ s.v. *ṣabātu* mng. 3f.

[26] AHw, p. 259a. The collocation occurs in a fragmentary context in an inscription of Aššur-bēl-kala (RIMA 2.0.89.5, l. 15'), then in Ashurnasirpal II's annals and summary inscriptions (RIMA 2.0.101.1 ii 3 // RIMA 2.0.101.17 ii 7; RIMA 2.0.101.1 ii 85; RIMA 2.0.101.1 ii 131 // RIMA 2.0.101.31, l. 11 // RIMA 2.0.101.34, l. 22; RIMA 2.0.101.30, l. 23; RIMA 2.0.101.32, ll. 8–9; RIMA 2.0.101.33, l. 19'; RIMA 2.0.101.35, l. 8 // RIMA 2.0.101.38, ll. 18–19; RIMA 2.0.101.50, l. 21; RIMA 2.0.101.51, l. 28).

Table 3: Building descriptions from the annals, the backs of orthostats from the Ninurta temple, foundation tablets from the Northwest Palace, the backs of orthostats from the Northwest Palace, and orthostat H-6, respectively.

§2.1	Annals (Ninurta Temple)[27]	^{uru}*Kal-ḫu ina eš-šú-te aṣ-bat*
	Ninurta Temple Orthostat Backs[28]	^{uru}*Kal-ḫu ana eš-šú-te aṣ-bat*
	NW Palace Foundation Tablets[29]	^{uru}*Kal-ḫu a-na eš-šú-te aṣ-bat*
	NW Palace Orthostat Backs[30]	^{uru}*Kal-ḫu ana eš-šú-te aṣ-bat*
	H-6	***^{uru}Kal-ḫu ana eš-šú-te aṣ-bat***
		I reorganized Kalḫu:[31]
§2.2	omitted in all	
§2.3.1	Annals (Ninurta Temple)	DU$_6$ *la-be-ru ú-na-kir*$_7$ *a-di* UGU A.MEŠ *lu-ú ú-šá-píl*
	Ninurta Temple Orthostat Backs	DU$_6$ *la-be-ru ú-na-kir*$_7$ *a-di* UGU A.MEŠ *lu-ú ú-šá-píl*
	NW Palace Foundation Tablets	DU$_6$ *la-be-ru ú-na-ki-ir a-di* UGU A.MEŠ *lu-ú aḫ-ṭu-uṭ*
	NW Palace Orthostat Backs	omitted
	H-6	**omitted**
		I cleared the old ruin-mound; I indeed dug down to the water table

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[27] RIMA 2.0.101.1 ii 131–132.

[28] RIMA 2.0.101.31, ll. 11–13.

[29] RIMA 2.0.101.34, ll. 22–27.

[30] RIMA 2.0.101.35, l. 8.

[31] Author's translation, here and in the remainder of the table.

§2.3.2	Annals (Ninurta Temple)	1 ME 20 *tik-pi a-na muš-pa-li lu-ṭa-bi*
	Ninurta Temple Orthostat Backs	1 ME 20 *tik-pi a-na muš-pa-li lu-u ú-ṭa-bi*
	NW Palace Foundation Tablets	1 ME 20 *ti-ik-pi a-na muš-pa-li lu-ú ú-ṭa-bi*
	NW Palace Orthostat Backs	omitted
	H-6	**omitted**
		(and) sank (the revetment) to a depth of 120 layers (of brick).
§2.4	Annals (Ninurta Temple)	É ^{d}MAŠ EN-*ia ina qé-reb-šú lu-ú ad-di*
	Ninurta Temple Orthostat Backs	É ^{d}MAŠ EN-*ia ina qé-reb-šú lu-ú ad-di*
	NW Palace Foundation Tablets	É.GAL MAN-*ti-ia ina qé-reb-šá ad-di*
	NW Palace Orthostat Backs	É.GAL EN-*ti-ia ina qé-reb-šú ad-di*
	H-6	**É.⸢GAL⸣ $^{\text{giš!}}$*e-re-ni* É.GAL ⸢^{giš}SUR⸣.MÌN É.GAL (25) ^{giš}*dap-ra-ni* É.GAL ⸢^{giš}TÚG.MEŠ⸣ É.GAL ^{giš}⸢*mes*⸣*-kan-ni* É.GAL ^{giš}*bu-*⸢*uṭ*⸣*-ni* [*u*] ^{giš}*ṭar-*⸢*pi*⸣*-ʾi* <...> (26) *ina qé-reb-šú ad-di***
		I founded therein . . .

One can see that these texts begin their building descriptions like H-6 (§2.1); §2.2 from the Standard Inscription is omitted in all. This is followed in three of the texts by three clauses describing the clearing of the citadel and the construction of its retaining-wall (§2.3). One of the texts, the one from the backs of orthostats in the Northwest Palace, does not have these clauses, like H-6. The final part of this section in all of these texts is a clause describing the founding of the relevant building – the Ninurta Temple in the case of the first two, and the Northwest Palace for the others – using the verb *nadû* (§2.4). Here, the reference to the Northwest Palace in the text on the backs of orthostats in the Northwest Palace is much shorter (merely É.GAL EN-*ti-ia*) than the one found in H-6, which retained the more extended shape of the description of the palace as a series of palaces made of different kinds of woods, as found in the Standard Inscription. Nonetheless, this section was abbreviated in H-6, with the omission of the statement of purpose for the palace: *ana šubat šarrūtīya ana multaʾʾīt bēlūtīya ša dārâte*, "as a dwelling of my kingship, for the leisure of my lordship forever" (§2.4 in Table 1). In this last clause, finally, these texts, as well as H-6, use the phrase *ina qé-reb-šú/šá*, "therein (I founded)" (§2.4). By contrast, all other manuscripts of the Standard Inscription use the phrase *ina* ŠÀ-*bi* (a semantic equivalent) at this point in the discourse.

Thus, it seems that §2.1–§2.4 in H-6 was patterned after the same pericope as it appears in other versions of Ashurnasirpal II's inscriptions from Kalḫu, most notably the version from the backs of orthostats in the Northwest Palace. This included the replacement of the phrase *ina* ŠÀ-*bi* with its semantic equivalent *ina qé-reb-šú*, so that this edited section in H-6 fully corresponded to the same pericope in these other texts, except that the editor of H-6 retained the extended reference to the Northwest Palace as found in the Standard Inscription. We may infer that the editor of H-6 was familiar with the clauses of the form, *Kalḫu ana eššūte aṣbat* BUILDING *ina qerebšu addi*, "I reorganized Kalḫu (and) founded therein BUILDING," and modified §2.1–§2.4 as represented in the Standard Inscription to conform to them in H-6. The editor repurposed the section by using the shortest possible form of the building description from other texts, most notably the one that would have been incised on the opposite side of the very orthostats to which he was transmitting the Standard Inscription. What was produced here, then, is not a completely new creation by the editor, nor a mere mimicry of another version of Ashurnasirpal's inscriptions, but a combination of these.

The editing of the final sub-section of the Standard Inscription (§2.5) appears, on the other hand, to involve the mere streamlining of the section, rather than the transformation of the section to conform to otherwise attested blocks of text. The number of items in the list of booty is shortened, with AN.BAR.MEŠ excluded, and the plural marker MEŠ is omitted from each item. Lists of booty exhibit considerable diversity in the Ashurnasirpal inscriptions with respect to the presence or absence of the plural marker on the items, as well as the members of the list.[32] Moreover, the further description of the list as KUR-*ti* ŠU-*ia šá* KUR.KUR.MEŠ is maximally abbreviated: KUR-*ti* ŠU-*ia*, "booty," is omitted entirely as well as the plural marker on KUR.KUR, which is, strictly speaking, redundant for indicating the plural. The preposition *ana* in the penultimate clause is written as *ana* (DIŠ) in H-6, rather than as *a-na*, a more compact orthography. From the point of view of Akkadian orthography in the first millennium, this is unremarkable. However, this is the only manuscript of the more than two hundred manuscripts of the Standard Inscription available to me to ever use this orthography for *this instance* of this preposition, in spite of the fact that the orthographies *ana* (DIŠ) and *a-na* are both used frequently in manuscripts for other parts of the text. Given that this is the case, it would seem that *ana* (DIŠ) in H-6 in this line is an intentional abbreviation of the orthography of this preposition. Finally, the phonetic complement in ŠÀ-*bi* is omitted, leaving only ŠÀ. This orthography occurs only one other time among the manuscripts of the Standard Inscription for this context, perhaps an instance of accidental omission. In the case of H-6, given that the editor is apparently trying to streamline his text, we may suggest that the omission of the phonetic complement was more likely intentional. Thus, the resulting text – KÙ.BABBAR KÙ.GI AN.NA ZABAR *šá* KUR.KUR *šá a-pe-lu-ši-na-ni ana ma-aʾ-diš al-qa-a ina* ŠÀ *ú-kín* – is orthographically and grammatically feasible, but greatly abbreviated.

In summary, we may say that the editor of H-6 edited the text of the Standard Inscription to fit into the ruled space allotted to him, by omitting grammatically and thematically expendable text, by orthographically streamlining the text, and by smoothing the text to conform to the literary style and idiom of other Ashurnasirpal II royal inscriptions from Kalḫu.

H-6 is the most extreme case of such editing, but it may also be attested in another orthostat in Room H. Like H-6, orthostat H-34 is a narrower-than-usual orthostat – 146 cm – and has its band of inscription across the wing of the *apkallu*, as well as two rows of hems of a garment. Thus, much of the breadth of H-34 was not available to the transmitter for inscription.

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[32] For example, in the Kurkh Monolith of Ashurnasirpal II (RIMA 2.0.101.19), l. 101, the tribute of Šubria includes KÙ.BABBAR KÙ.GI.ME ZABAR AN.NA AN.BAR *gur-pi-si* ÚTUL.MEŠ GU₄.MEŠ UDU.MEŠ ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ. In the annals (RIMA 2.0.101.1) ii 46, Ashurnasirpal receives from Zamua ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ KÙ.BABBAR KÙ.GI, and imposes on them tribute in the form of ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ KÙ.BABBAR KÙ.GI ŠE.AM *u* ŠE.IN.NU *ka-du-ru* (ii 47). The composition on the throne-base in Room B of the Northwest Palace has the list KÙ.BABBAR.MEŠ KÙ.GI.MEŠ AN.NA.MEŠ ZABAR.MEŠ – omitting AN.BAR.MEŠ – for the same paragraph as our §2.5 in the Standard Inscription (RIMA 2.0.101.2, l. 61).

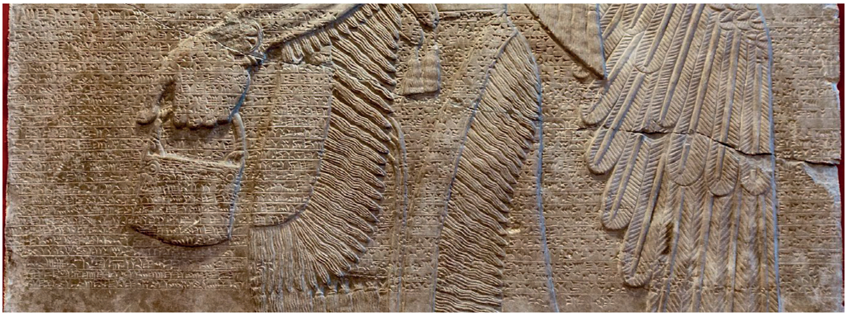

Fig. 17: The inscription on orthostat H-34 (State Hermitage Museum, ДВ-3940, photograph by Don-vip, CC-BY-SA-4.0).

While there was more space available to the transmitter of H-34 than there was on H-6, it is worth noting that in the last three lines of inscription on H-34, the transmitter began to write on the complex relief contours, partially at first, but then completely on the wing in the final line (Fig. 17). Moreover, the transmitter was forced to add a partial line beneath the final ruling. Thus, the other strategies for space management described above were employed, suggesting that the transmitter was struggling with fitting the text of the Standard Inscription onto this orthostat. Nonetheless, the abbreviation of the text of H-34 is not as extensive as it is for H-6, consisting merely of the omission of §2.4–§2.6 from Table 2 above. This is represented below, in Table 4.

The description of the decoration of the palace (§2.5) as known in all other Standard Inscription manuscripts available to me has been completely omitted in H-34. This section constituted a grammatical unit – a series of main clauses with finite verbs – as well as a discrete unit of the discourse. Nonetheless, without it the overall construction of the palace remains described, as well as the booty placed there. Thus, the grammatical integrity of the text was maintained, while effectively abbreviating it. In addition to this, the plural marker MEŠ was omitted from KUR.KUR in §2.6 in H-34. We have already seen that this was probably a feature of the abbreviation of the same section in H-6, and we may suspect that it is so here, given that we know the transmitter was struggling to fit the Standard Inscription into the ruled space provided on H-34.

In light of our analysis of H-6, the similar analysis for the changes in H-34 seem feasible. Nonetheless, it should be considered whether the abbreviation of H-34 and the omission of the plural marker from KUR.KUR are due to scribal error. Two types of scribal error come to mind as possible explanations for this omission. One is parablepsis,[33] when the transmitter's eyes jump from one instance

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[33] Worthington, *Principles*, §3.2.4, calls this *saut du même au même*.

Table 4: Synoptic comparison of the text of lines 18–22 of the Standard Inscription, as represented in the majority of manuscripts, with the corresponding text in orthostat H-34.

Standard Inscription Translation (RIMA 2.0.101.23), ll. 18–22	**Standard Inscription Majority Text, ll. 18–22**	**H-34 Text, ll. 24–27**	**H-34 Translation (following RIMA 2.0.101.23), ll. 24–27**
§2.4 I founded therein a palace of cedar, cypress, daprānu-juniper, boxwood, meskannu-wood, terebinth, and tamarisk as my royal residence (and) for my lordly leisure for eternity.	§2.4 É.GAL ^{giš}*e-re-ni* É.GAL ^{giš}SUR.MÌN É.GAL ^{giš}*dap-ra-ni* É.GAL ^{giš}TÚG.MEŠ É.GAL ^{giš}*mes-kan-ni* É.GAL ^{giš}*bu-uṭ-ni u* ^{giš}*ṭar-pi-ʾi* (19) *a-na šu-bat* MAN-*ti-a a-na mul-ta-aʾ-it* EN-*ti-a šá da-ra-a-te ina* ŠÀ-*bi ad-di*	§2.4 É.GAL $^{\text{giš!}}$*e*$^{!}$*-re-ni* É.GAL ^{giš}SUR.MÌN (25) [É.GA]L ^{giš}*dap-ra-ni* É.GAL ^{giš}TÚG$^{!}$.MEŠ É.GAL ^{giš}*mes-kan-ni* É.GAL ^{giš}*bu-uṭ-ni u* ^{giš}*ṭar-pi-ʾi a-na šu-bat* MAN-*ti-a a-na mul-ta-aʾ-it* EN-*ti-a* (26) [... *d*]*a-ra-te ina* ŠÀ-*bi ad-di*	§2.4 I founded therein a palace of cedar, cypress, daprānu-juniper, boxwood, meskannu-wood, terebinth, and tamarisk as my royal residence (and) for my lordly leisure for eternity.
§2.5 ~~I made (replicas of) beasts of mountains and seas in white limestone and parūtu-alabaster (and) stationed (them) at its doors. I decorated it in a splendid fashion; I surrounded it with knobbed nails of bronze. I hung doors of cedar, cypress, daprānu-juniper,~~	§2.5 ~~*ú-ma-am* KUR.MEŠ-*e u* A.AB.BA.MEŠ *šá* $^{\text{na}_4}$*pi-li* BABBAR-*e* (20) *u* $^{\text{na}_4}$*pa-ru-te* DÙ-*uš ina* KÁ.MEŠ-*šá ú-še-zi-iz ú-si-im-ši ú-šar-riḫ-ši si-kát kar-ri* ZABAR.MEŠ *al-me-ši* ^{giš}IG.MEŠ ^{giš}*e-re-ni* ^{giš}SUR.MÌN (21) ^{giš}*dap-ra-*~~	§2.5 <...>	§2.5 <...>

~~(and) meskannu-wood in its doorways.~~	~~*ni* ^{giš}*mes-kan-ni ina* KÁ.MEŠ *šá ú-re-ti*~~		
§2.6 I took in great quantities and put therein silver, gold, tin, bronze, iron, booty from the **lands** over which I gained dominion.	§2.6 KÙ.BABBAR.MEŠ KÙ.GI.MEŠ AN.NA.MEŠ ZABAR.MEŠ AN.BAR.MEŠ KUR-*ti* ŠU-*ia šá* KUR.KUR.~~MEŠ~~ (22) *šá a-pe-lu-ši-na-ni a-na ma-aʾ-diš al-qa-a ina* ŠÀ-*bi ú-kín*	§2.6 KÙ.BABBAR.MEŠ KÙ.GI.MEŠ AN.NA.MEŠ ZABAR.MEŠ AN.BAR.MEŠ KUR-*ti* ŠU-*a šá* KUR.KUR.<MEŠ> *šá a-pe-lu-ši-na-ni a-na ma-aʾ-diš al-qa-a* (27) *ina* ŠÀ-*bi ú-kín*	§2.6 I took in great quantities and put therein silver, gold, tin, bronze, iron, booty from the **lands** over which I gained dominion.

of a textual element to a later instance of that same element, omitting the intervening text. It is possible that a person copying or dictating H-34 had just heard the syllable /di/ in *ad-di* (cf. Table 4) – either because he had heard himself saying it or because he had read it and “heard” it in his mind in the course of copying it – and, after writing it, his eyes returned to a later syllable in the text, which was composed of a dental followed by the vowel /i/ (/ti/ in *ú-re-ti*), and continued with the text that came thereafter, omitting the segment omitted in H-34. It is also possible that some other mistake caused the transmitter to omit this text, such as accidentally skipping one or more lines on an exemplar during copying or dictating. In this case, the transmitter’s eyes would have viewed the sequence *ad-di* for H-34, moved away from the exemplar, and then back to the beginning of the wrong line on the exemplar, omitting the intervening text.[34]

While these are theoretically possible scenarios, it seems to me more likely that this text was intentionally edited by omitting this section in order to fit the text of H-34 into its ruled space. We know that another orthostat in the same room, H-6, was also abbreviated in this way, though more heavily, apparently in order to fit the text into the ruled space provided. In that case, this very section was completely excised in H-6, which we have argued was an intentional omission. Thus, there is precedent for this kind of phenomenon, in this same room. Moreover, the omission of this section does not seem to be haphazard: it leaves the discourse of the inscription coherent, with no grammatical inconsistencies. We have other clear cases of parablepsis among the manuscripts of the Standard Inscription, e.g., N-13, ll. 8–9, which reads, ^{uru}DU$_6$/<-*šá-Ab-ta-a-ni a-di* ^{uru}DU$_6$>-⸢*šá*⸣-*Za-ab-da-a-ni*.[35] Here, it is obvious that the transmitter’s eyes jumped from one instance of DU$_6$ to the next, skipping the intervening text, producing a text which is unattested anywhere else. In this case, we can see that the change of line (indicated by the forward slash) may have partly caused this omission, since the transmitter would have needed to move the length of the orthostat after writing DU$_6$ to continue his text, creating further potential for losing his place in the text. The error is clear. But what are the chances that a transmitter accidentally omitted in H-6 a section which corresponded precisely with one of the major subsections of the discourse (as we saw in the previous example), leaving a grammatically coherent text?

Furthermore, we must keep in mind that all of the other means of managing space constraints were in use by the time this omission occurred in H-6. The transmitter began omitting text in the last ruled line on H-34 (line 26), but he had already begun to write on complex relief contours two lines earlier (line 24). While omitting part of the Standard Inscription in the final ruled line, the transmitter also continued to write on the hems and wing of the *apkallu*, and finally added a partial line just beneath the final ruling. Thus, there is every reason to think that the transmitter was struggling to manage his space constraints, and the omission of part of the text, coming as it does in the final ruled line, was an essential means of getting through to the last clause of the Standard Inscription.

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[34] In this case, the skipped line or lines would have consisted of about seventy-four signs, the number of signs omitted from this part of the text as represented in the majority of manuscripts of the Standard Inscription. While one cannot know how long the lines in an exemplar would have been, one may speculate that this would likely constitute more than a single line.

[35] N-13 is VA 947 in the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin. The forward slash indicates a line break and <…> indicates an omission.

Thus, it would appear probable that we have two instances of the third method of managing space constraints in the transmission of the Standard Inscription to the orthostats in the Northwest Palace. The case of H-6 seems quite clear: the text was intentionally and quite intelligently edited so that the text of the Standard Inscription could fit on this unusually narrow orthostat. In the case of H-34, we have a probable example of this type of editing, though with less extensive effect.

3. CONCLUSION

I have argued that transmitters of the text of the Standard Inscription to the single-register orthostats in the Northwest Palace used observable methods of managing horizontal and vertical space constraints, imposed on them by the sides of the orthostats and the rulings, respectively. The transmitters could manage horizontal space by increasing and decreasing horizontal script density – the size and distance between signs – at the ends of lines, in order to break lines of text at word-boundaries, and at the ends of the ruled spaces, in order to fit the entire text – or a subset of it – into the space allotted. They could also manage horizontal space by inscribing otherwise uninscribed complex relief contours, such as the hems of garments or the wings of the *apkallū*. Vertically, transmitters could manage space constraints imposed by rulings by adding no more than one partial or complete line below the final ruling. These methods of managing space constraints were usually sufficient for fitting the entire Standard Inscription onto the orthostats.

However, in cases of unusually narrow orthostats, more drastic measures had to be taken, and the text of the Standard Inscription had to be abbreviated. This could be done in three ways. First, the inscription could simply be concluded when there was no more space, provided this was at a word boundary. Second, the inscription could be concluded at a major break in the discourse of the Standard Inscription, provided the transmitter could conclude his text in the final ruled space, or in one extra partial or complete line beyond the final ruling. Third, the inscription could be edited internally, by the omission of thematically or grammatically expendable components of the discourse, by orthographic streamlining, and by changing the text to conform to more concise, but otherwise attested, parallel pericopes.

From these observations, which arise from analysis of the textual and material aspects of the single-register orthostats from the Northwest Palace, we may deduce that the transmitters of the text of the Standard Inscription operated with two related norms in the production of these orthostats. On the one hand, what we might call an aesthetic norm was maintained, namely, that the lines of the Standard Inscription should be well organized – straight, parallel with the floor, and more or less uniformly distributed across the orthostats – in clear monumental script (as compared with writing found, e.g., in letters or legal texts), and that the text should use no more than one line beyond the final ruling. The effect of this was to create continuous bands of inscription around the rooms of the Northwest Palace. On the other hand, a textual norm was maintained, namely, that the entire text of the Standard Inscription should be attempted for each orthostat, so long as this did not violate the aesthetic norm. If the aesthetic norm would have been violated, it was the textual norm which had to bend, and the text was abbreviated, though this was done more or less carefully. The text was always concluded at a word-boundary, though it might be concluded in the middle of a phrase or clause. In several cases, however, we have clear evidence of more intentional abbreviation, so that the text was concluded at major breaks in the discourse of the Standard Inscription. In one and perhaps two cases, we have quite intelligent abbreviation, from a literary point of view, and the text of the Standard Inscription was edited in conformity with grammatical and literary custom. Taken together, this points to a high level of literary skill and care behind the operation of the textual norms, in at least some cases.

In the beginning of this essay, I drew an analogy between the management of space on tablets by scribes and the management of space on the orthostats by the transmitters. The literary skill needed to abbreviate the text of the Standard Inscription as we have observed urges us to consider how far the analogy between scribes with tablets and the Standard Inscription transmitters with their orthostats should go. For the orthostats which represent the second and third methods of abbreviating the text of the Standard Inscription, at least, it seems clear that the persons whom I have called transmitters throughout this essay either themselves had a fairly high level of literacy or were directed by someone who did. This, at least, establishes that scribes had a significant degree of involvement in the transmission of the Standard Inscription from its inception – undoubtedly by one or more highly skilled scribes – to the production of the copies on the orthostats in the Northwest Palace.

HOW TO DO THINGS WITH WRITING: CONSIDERATIONS ON AGENCY AND LITERACY IN RELATION TO ASHURNASIRPAL II'S RELIEFS FROM NIMRUD

Nathan Morello[1]

This chapter investigates the existence of visual and semantic interactions between Assyrian monuments and their inscriptions. I propose some hypotheses on the ways in which such interactions were conceived and at what stage of the production of the monuments they were realized, and by whom. I also argue that there are different kinds of interactions between monument and inscription, which affected different kinds of audiences.[2] Here, I refer to the term "inscription" not as a mere synonym of "text,"[3] but as the physical engraving of signs on the monument surface. My purpose in doing this is to take into consideration two aspects of the inscription, one visual/non-textual and one textual. The visual aspect pertains to how an inscription appears on the surface of the monument, and how it visually interacts with it as a graphic element; this non-textual aspect

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[2] With this essay I also clarify some of the questions left open in my previous work "A GIŠ on a Tree: Interactions between Images and Inscriptions on Neo-Assyrian Monuments," in *Understanding Material Text Cultures: A Multidisciplinary View*, ed. Markus Hilgert, Materiale Textkulturen 9 (Berlin: de Gruyter 2016), 31–68. Some important ideas developed in these pages are the result of discussions with Dr. Caleb Howard and Dr. Jamie Novotny, before and after the occurrence of the Symposium, the proceedings of which are published in this book. In particular, the reconstructions of the figure of the "on-site" scribe, of teams of transmitters of copies of the Standard Inscriptions on the reliefs, and the method used to prepare the inscriptions (as described in the paragraphs "Who was the recipient of Ashurnasirpal's reliefs?" and in the conclusions of this chapter) were matters of discussion between the three of us during Howard's visit in May 2019 to the "MOCCI lab" (the offices of the Munich Open-access Cuneiform Corpus Initiative) in the framework of the Cambridge-LMU Strategic Partnership "Teaching and Researching the Assyrian Empire: Benchmarking best Practices at Cambridge and Munich," led by Prof. Dr. Karen Radner (LMU) and Dr. Martin Worthington (University of Cambridge). I am also indebted to Howard's response during the presentation of my paper at the Symposium, for his punctual comments and suggestions, which I tried to include in this chapter. I am grateful to Jamie Novotny for revising the manuscript and giving some fruitful comments. I am also grateful to Prof. Dr. Jerrold S. Cooper for discussing with me the question of the relationships between text and image in Ancient Near East and for his kind remarks, and to Dr. Gioele Zisa for analyzing with me some crucial points presented here during an inspiring COVID-19 quarantine-enforced telephone conversation between Munich and Tehran. Of course, any errors or omissions are solely my responsibility.

[3] For a definition of "text" in semiotics, see below section 2. "Agency and Monumental Inscriptions," and especially fn. 32. In the rest of the chapter, the word "text" is used in the common sense of verbal composition.

has already, as will be seen, a series of ways of conveying a message to the audience. The second aspect pertains, of course, to the text of an inscription, which represents a literary composition.[4]

This twofold approach allows one to be more specific about the different kinds of relationships that can be observed between inscriptions and monuments. My analysis will not be limited to the comparison between the contents of text and sculpted images, considering how they correspond or diverge. Various degrees of visual, conceptual and semantic interactions between the two will also be considered. Furthermore, this approach permits one to distinguish more clearly between different levels of literacy needed in order to appreciate the various kinds of relationships between inscription, image and monument. Although some comparative examples from other Mesopotamian contexts will be necessary, the focus of this study is the series of sculpted reliefs which lined the many walls of Ashurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace at Kalḫu (mod. Nimrud), inscribed with the so-called "Standard Inscription."

The question of how monuments would be perceived and how they would affect their audience has been analyzed in previous studies from the perspective of *agency*, a concept borrowed from the field of anthropology. In this article, I will attempt to see how relevant and fruitful such a perspective is in the framework of the Northwest Palace's monumental repertoire.

1. MONUMENTAL INSCRIPTIONS AND LITERACY

1.1. *The intended audience of Ashurnasirpal's reliefs*

At the beginning of his reign, Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC) moved the administrative capital of his kingdom from Assur to Kalḫu, a city which he completely rebuilt. There he erected a monumental complex of temples and the "joyful palace, the palace of full wisdom,"[5] or "Northwest Palace" as it was called in modern times because of its position in the city's acropolis. Displayed in a niche in a courtyard of this palace, the so-called "Banquet Stele" records the days of the inauguration of the new city. Almost 70,000 guests were invited from Kalḫu, from the rest of Assyria, and from several foreign regions in northern and southern Syria, the Levant, and the mountain ranges that surrounded Assyria. The inscription describes in detail a Pantagruelian banquet, the exquisite food that was served, and the care with which the guests were treated.[6] We do not know precisely where these people were hosted, but we can presume that at least the delegations from abroad and the Assyrian dignitaries were received at the royal palace, before being honored and sent "back to their lands in peace and joy."[7] However, apart from such exceptional occasions, and other, more frequent, official visits to the king, we still have no evidence on who, besides the king and his entourage, could have access to the rooms of the Northwest Palace.

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[4] Here, I draw upon two methodological approaches. One is followed by Howard, in this volume (see 15 fn. 3 for bibliographical references), adopting the studies of Jerrold S. Cooper and Martin Worthington: a composition is "a literary work" (Cooper) that can be attested on different manuscripts, which are "object(s) … inscribed with writing" (Worthington). They both relate to the definition of "text." The second approach is the one expressed by John Malcolm Russell, *The Writing on the Wall: Studies in the Architectural Context of Late Assyrian Palace Inscriptions*, MC 9 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 7: "a 'text' is a verbal composition, while an 'inscription' is the physical result of replicating all or part of such a text in a durable medium." This second distinction between text and inscription (with the obvious exception of the "Standard Inscription," for conventional reasons) is of great importance in this chapter – and, I would argue, in general when dealing with monumental inscriptions – because it separates and highlights the visual aspects of the inscriptions, including paleographic features, space management, and physical and visual interaction with the monument. Finally, for those "objects … inscribed with writing," which have a monumental nature (e.g., a stone slab or a stele), I adopt here the term "exemplar," over against "manuscript," which was written on any material, in order to underscore its characteristics as a durable medium (dimensions, decorations, position in the architectural space, etc.).

Once admitted to the palace, one would have been "surrounded by texts," as effectively described by John Malcolm Russell at the beginning of his study on Assyrian monumental inscriptions, *The Writing on the Wall: Studies in the Architectural Context of Late Assyrian Palace Inscriptions*: "In the first great Neo-Assyrian palace, the palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Kalḫu, texts were everywhere. The bull and lion colossi in the major doorways carried texts. The pavement slabs in those doorways and in every other doorway, carried texts. Every floor slab in every paved room carried a text. And each one of the hundreds of wall slabs, sculptured and plain, carried a text." Such texts, continues Russell, would have been mysterious to most of viewers "because virtually the only people who could actually read them would have been the court scribes who composed them."[8]

Two questions arise from this vivid description. First, were such scholars indeed the only people who could read the inscriptions? As will be further discussed below, Howard's contribution in this volume suggests that the number of people that would have been able to read at least part of the inscriptions was larger than previously thought. Second, were there ways in which a viewer with no literacy, or limited literacy, could be affected by monumental inscriptions? As Russell suggests, the visual power that these inscriptions possessed had alone an immediate impact on the viewer, even an illiterate one: “At one level was the simple fact of the inscription’s presence. … One need not study the images nor read the text to appreciate that they represent enormous power, a power beyond the means of all but the king. The other level … has to do with the power inherent in the control of the craft of writing. … To the nonliterate majority of courtiers and visitors, the palace inscriptions would have served as a reminder that the king controlled a vast store of information that was a symbol, as well as a source, of immense power.”[9]

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[5] Sargon II (721–705 BC) refers to it as the "Juniper Palace" (*ēkal duprāni ša Kalḫa ša Aššur-naṣri-apli rubû ālik pāniya ina pāna ēpušu*) in one of his inscriptions, see Grant Frame, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sargon II, King of Assyria*, RINAP 2 (University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2020), no. 73, l. 13; see also oracc.org/rinap/Q006554.

[6] A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (1114–859 BC)*, RIMA 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), A.0.101.30; see also oracc.org/riao/Q004484.

[7] RIMA 2, A.0.101.30, ll. 153–154.

[8] Russell, *Writing on the Wall*, 1. Access limitations were not the same throughout the Northwest Palace: for example, there were relief depictions on the outer façade of the throne room, to which people may have had more access.

The intended audience of Mesopotamian monumental art, i.e. those who were in different ways affected by the vision of a monument, were essentially of three natures: divine, future people, and contemporary people. Gods were the privileged entities to be addressed by the monuments. The deeds of the kings were reported and dedicated to them; deities’ features could often be replicated in the form of sculptures or on reliefs. Gods could always understand the content of the inscriptions and were able to read them, we may assume, even when located in concealed spaces, such as within the foundation of a building or on the backs of the orthostats, facing the wall. Furthermore, when court scribes adorned royal inscriptions with elegant verses of poetic and hermeneutic value, they did so in dialogue with those who could fully appreciate them: fellow scholars and ultimately the gods.

Future people, i.e., from a time when buildings and monuments needed restoration, were especially the rulers in line of succession (and the scholars of their entourage). The inscriptions were often explicitly addressed to such an illustrious audience, mostly in their final sections, where the reader would be instructed on how to take care of the monuments, buildings and inscriptions themselves.

The third category, contemporary people, can be divided according to the quality of their literacy, both textual and iconographic, which can be in relation to the quality and visibility of the various phenomena that occur between the monuments and their inscriptions.

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[9] John Malcolm Russell, *Sennacherib’s Palace Without Rival at Nineveh* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 8–10.

1.2. *“Professional” literacy*

In recent years, some important studies like those by Claus Wilcke,[10] Dominique Charpin,[11] and Niek Veldhuis,[12] have shown how literacy in Mesopotamia can hardly be described using a binary distinction between scholarly literacy and complete illiteracy. Rather, at least a few degrees with relative nuances can be detected. Veldhuis distinguishes three types of literacy roughly applicable to three millennia of cuneiform culture: functional literacy, technical literacy, and scholarly literacy. Functional literacy is the one that enables one to read an everyday document, without any particular professional skills, not aimed at “thinking about the universe, but rather at the mundane issues of accounting and communication.”[13] Technical literacy is attributed to a person who acquired the ability to use a specific vocabulary and set of logograms for working with a particular kind of scholarly texts (e.g., extispicy omina).[14] Scholarly literacy “involves knowledge of all the ins and outs of the cuneiform writing system and its history.”[15] To this last category belong the above-mentioned scribes and scholars (*ummânū*), some of them being the very authors of the literary compositions copied on the inscriptions. The people identified in the “Banquet Stele” as the “men (and) women who were invited from every part of my land” (l. 142) include high officials and commoners, with very different degrees of access to the premises of Kalḫu’s citadel, who fell more or less into one of the first two categories or in the group of illiterate people.

Of course, we should not forget that, as Veldhuis also points out, the degrees of literacy described above are based on an overview of data gathered from the entire history of cuneiform culture. Focusing instead on first millennium Assyria, one notes the existence of a central monopoly on cuneiform literacy, witnessed by highly standardized formatting rules for different genres (letters, legal texts, transaction documents, etc.) of texts found in the archives of the capitals (Nineveh, Kalḫu, Assur) and from other cities.[16] Within this context, a further type of literacy can be added to the three summarized above, namely, "professional" literacy.[17] Veldhuis' "technical" literacy is bound to specific technicalities with highly specialized vocabulary and sets of logograms; the notion of "professional" literacy pertains to a larger group of people, whose level of literacy is often rather basic, but sufficient to conduct their profession. One example is the case of Sîn-naʾdi, governor of a province in the Zagros, who writes to the king asking for a scribe.[18] He needs a scribe trained as required, but he certainly knows how to write a letter! As Mikko Luukko points out, "Despite the outright mistakes and somewhat unusual orthographic conventions in the letter, this simple piece of writing is remarkable since it attests to a certain level of literacy, including the knowledge of the standard address and greeting of Neo-Assyrian letters, among the high officials who were not scribes."[19]

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[10] Claus Wilcke, *Wer las und schrieb in Babylonien und Assyrien*, Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften Philosophisch-historische Klasse 200/6 (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000).

[11] Dominique Charpin, “Lire et écrire en Mésopotamie: un affaire de specialistes?” *Comptes rendus de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 148 (2004): 481–501; idem, *Lire et écrire à Babylone* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008).

[12] Niek Veldhuis, “Levels of Literacy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, ed. Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 68–89.

[13] Veldhuis, “Levels of Literacy,” 71.

[14] Veldhuis, “Levels of Literacy,” 73f.

[15] Veldhuis, “Levels of Literacy,” 74.

[16] Such standardization includes the use of ductus. In the Neo-Assyrian period, the difference between monumental and documentary ductus is (in most cases) only a matter of style rather than typology. This is very different from, for example, the Old Babylonian period, when technical in-

The monuments of the Northwest Palace reveal the presence of two types of people with "professional" literacy: the king and the personnel involved in the production of monuments. As for the king, we may presume that a suzerain could

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novations such as cursive ductus with abbreviated signs, crowded writing and unclear sign-boundaries indicate a more utilitarian approach to the scribal art. Moreover, increasing examples of non-institutional, private application of the scribal art seems to point to a use of writing in a wider segment of the population, which is paralleled by the introduction of monumental paleography in solely institutional contexts.

[17] For an overall analysis of the scribal world during the Assyrian Empire, see Karen Radner, "Schreiberkonventionen im assyrischen Reich: Sprachen und Schriftsysteme," in *Assur: Gott, Stadt und Land*, ed. Johannes Renger, Colloquien der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 5 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 385–404. For a study on text formatting during the Neo-Assyrian period, see most recently, Mikko Luukko, "On Standardisation and Variation in the Introductory Formulae of Neo-Assyrian Letters," *Iraq* 74 (2012): 97–115, and Poppy Tushingham, "Uniformity versus regional variation in the legal and scribal practices of the Neo-Assyrian Empire," *Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 25 (2019): 29–53. More generally, and in connection to what is mentioned above at fn. 3, the interactions between writing and media (paleographical features, space management, physical and visual interaction) play an important role not only in the study of inscribed monuments, but *ça va sans dire* already in documents on clay tablets. For a historical overview on formats and features of clay tablet, see C. B. F. Walker, "Tontafel, Tontafelhülle A. In Mesopotamien," *RlA* 14: 101–104, and A. Bramanti, "Dall'Antico Oriente alle nostre mani. La materialità del cuneiforme," *Forma Urbis* XXIII/10 (2018): 27–32; for the case of Assyria, see Karen Radner, "The Relation Between Format and Content of Neo-Assyrian Text," in *Nineveh, 621 BC: The Glory and Fall of the Assyrian Empire*, ed. Raija Mattila (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1995), 63–77. Finally, it should not be forgotten that in this period, there is a dramatic increase in the use of Aramaic in all levels of society.

[18] Andreas Fuchs and Simo Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part III*, SAA 15 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2001), 13, no. 17; see also oracc.org/saao/P334097. Cf. Karen Radner, "Sīn-naʾdi (7)," in *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, Volume 3, Part I*, ed. Heather D. Baker (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2002), 1136; cf. also Luukko, "On Standardisation."

[19] Luukko, "On Standardisation," 103. Also scribes, although they could be defined as such after the centralized training would have prepared them for the profession, cannot be said to have always the same level of literacy, and certainly were not always able to understand "all the ins and outs of the cuneiform writing system and its history" (see, Veldhuis quoted above, fn. 15). See also, for example the analysis of the greeting formulae in F. M. Fales, *L'impero assiro* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2001), 128–133 ("Forme fisse e stilemi individuali").

in most cases master literacy with a quality range that would range from low to excellent competence (e.g., Ashurbanipal's self-praise). He had to understand (even if only from hearing) the numerous letters that he received on a daily basis and discuss administrative matters as well as political and ideological topics with the scholars of his entourage.[20] Furthermore, there are at least three reasons to believe that the king had an active role in the architectural and textual composition of the decorative program of his own palaces: a) written evidence points to the direct involvement of kings in the whole process of composition and realization of artworks, whether iconographic or textual, destined to adorn his palaces;[21] b) the king very likely wanted to have control over the ideological messages communicated through such iconographic and textual media, which, as in the case of the royal palaces, so visibly overwhelmed the spaces where he lived and conducted his reign;[22] c) a comparative view on the repertoires of monumental decorations and collections of royal inscriptions during the second and first millennia BC in Assyria reveals that potentially every ruler had an interest in giving them a "personal touch," usually fairly recognizable, in the form of a particular style of using the ideological, propagandistic, rhetorical, and literary "tools" at his disposal.[23]

The second type of "professional" literacy pertains to the personnel involved in the production of the monuments.[24] The analysis of some of the exemplars of the Standard Inscription produced for the decoration of the Northwest Palace reveals some details of the profile of the persons entrusted with "transmitting" (to use Howard's terminology) the text onto the surface of the monument. These people were sufficiently literate to *consciously* follow the work, i.e., making "intelligent" errors as well as appropriate editorial decisions (concluding the inscription at the end of a sentence, never splitting words, etc.). Moreover, some cases of signs left uninscribed or only scratched into the surface of the stone point to two important deductions.[25] First, for some of the reliefs, before actually chiseling the inscription into the surface of the slab, someone – possibly an on-site scribe, as I argue in the conclusion of this chapter – arranged the distribution of the text in relation to the sculpted images by scratching the text with a pointed tool into the stone surface.[26] Second, an unfinished sign reflects a pause during the work; perhaps a moment of doubt, followed by the need to check uncertain signs against the master text or to ask the opinion of an expert. This kind of behavior shows that the degree of literacy of these persons was rather high, although not comparable to the one held by the scholars who composed the text.

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[20] One assumes (perhaps driven by the unsettling news of the spread of functional illiteracy coming in from all over the world) that the king of Assyria, in order to do his job, must have been able to at least "engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community" (*Records of the 20th General Conference of UNESCO: Resolutions*, 1978, 18).

[21] See, for example: for Sargon II, SAA 15, no. 4 (see also oracc.org/saao/P334103); for Esarhaddon, Mikko Luukko and Greta Van Buylaere, *The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon*, SAA 16 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2002), 106f., no. 125 (see also oracc.org/saao/P313440), and 126f. no. 143 (see also oracc.org/saao/P334433); for Esarhaddon or Ashurbanipal, Simo Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, SAA 10 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993), 295f. no. 358 (see also oracc.org/saao/P334188). For an overview and analysis of the textual evidences for the involvement of the Assyrian king in the production of royal inscriptions, see J. Caleb Howard, *The Process of Producing the Standard Inscription of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud/Kalḫu*, PhD dissertation, Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore, 2017), 116–123 (https://jscholarship.library.jhu.edu/handle/1774.2/58664).

[22] Howard, *Process*, 120.

[23] It is enough to leaf through the pages of any anthology of Assyrian palace reliefs to notice the sometimes radical changes, e.g., in space management, representational style, iconographic-textual relationships, from one reign to the other. Quite similarly, stylistic differences, at times of great ideological relevance, have been analyzed in recent studies for the compositional characteristics of the royal inscriptions; see, for instance, Mario Liverani, *Assyria: The Imperial Mission* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns 2017), 10–25. On the literacy of the king and on the cooperation between king and scholars in the crafting of royal rhetoric, see Eckart Frahm, "Keeping Company with Men of Learning: the King as Scholar," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, ed. Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 508–532, esp. 522.

[24] See also Howard in this volume.

2. AGENCY AND MONUMENTAL INSCRIPTIONS

2.1. *Art (language) and agency*

There are various ways in which monuments could affect audiences with different levels of literacy. A relatively recent debate has been generated on the question of whether an art object, like a monument, can or cannot have *agency*. Some of the scholars involved in this debate have also questioned how the concept of *agency* can be applied to Mesopotamian art.

The debate famously started with Alfred Gell, and his posthumous book *Art and Agency* (1998), where the British anthropologist proposed an "anthropological theory of art" or "a theory of the social relations that obtain in the neighborhood of works of art, or indexes."[27] In his work, "indexes" are extensions of persons[28]

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[25] See, for example, Howard's photo of orthostat G-18 (WAM 21.8) on the homepage of his Oracc project *The Royal Inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II from the Northwest Palace*, where a partially incised UŠ sign is visible (oracc.org/asn2).

[26] Pace previous hypotheses (including mine, in Morello, "A GIŠ on a Tree," 50) on the practice of painting the signs to prepare the inscription, for which no actual evidence has been retrieved. This method was, however, not always used, as a look at many reliefs inscribed with much less carefully distributed text makes clear.

[27] Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 26.

[28] The concept of agency relates to debates over the perceived inability of structuralism to take into account the importance of the individual – its actions, creativity, and its consciousness – in

(artists, patron, prototype)[29] and have agency. People viewing art are *recipients* of this agency, which is received by abduction or inference about what is intended in the index. In using the word abduction, however, Gell is "anxious to avoid the slightest imputation that (visual) art is 'like language' and that the relevant forms of semiosis are language-like."[30]

Irene Winter responded to this work in a 2007 review article, in which she evaluated the notion of art agency in relation to ancient Near Eastern art.[31] Contra Gell, Winter argues that one cannot avoid language when analyzing the agentive value of a work of art, especially of an inscribed monument.[32] She isolates three cases in which agency is marked by language:[33] 1) agency marked by grammar,[34] e.g., the use of the ergative in Sumerian or, also in Akkadian, the use of the past tense, which sets narration in a specific moment in time, therefore

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relation to the social structures in which it lives, and ultimately to determine the degree of its freedom from exterior determination. For an overview of the subject with previous literature, see, among others, Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing, *Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000), 1–9, and Laura M. Ahearn, "Agentività / Agency," in *Culture e discorso. Un lessico per le scienze umane*, ed. Alessandro Duranti (Roma: Meltemi, 2002), 18–23.

[29] The three primary agents in Gell's work are, in fact, the artist, "the one to whom the authorship of the index (as a physical thing) is attributed," the patron, "who caused the work of art to be made," and the prototype, "the entity which the index represents visually (as an icon, depiction, etc.) or non-visually." All of these all have agency, i.e., they affect the recipient or public "in a social relationship with the index, either as 'patients' (in that the index causally affects them in some way) or as 'agents' in that, but for them, this index would not have come into existence (they have caused it)" (Gell, *Art and Agency*, 23–27, 34).

[30] Gell, *Art and Agency*, 14. For Gell, abduction is rather "a tentative and hazardous tracing of a system of signification rules which allow the sign to acquire its meaning."

[31] Irene Winter, "Agency Marked/Agency Ascribed: The Affective Object in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Art's Agency and Art History*, ed. Robin Osborne and Jeremy Tanner (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 42–69; here, quoted after its second edition in idem, *On Art in the Ancient Near East*, CHANE 34/2 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 2:307–331. The main point of her article is "that one must distinguish between agency ascribed by the analyst of a given work from agency marked by cultural practice, and even grammar, within the originating culture, if we are to fully understand the historical role(s) accorded the artwork" (Winter, "Agency Marked/Agency Ascribed," 307). She clarifies further (309): "In my opinion, the concept of agency is most useful when a distinction is made between animate or human agency exerted as physical action and the impact derived from the affective properties of a work, which must then be inferred (Gell's *abduction* of agency) by the entity upon whom or which the affect is imprinted." She therefore suggests a further distinction regarding the locus of agency, between primary agency, referring to the agency of the artist, and distributed agency, referring to the agency extended to the index by the artist.

[32] Winter, "Agency Marked/Agency Ascribed," 323–324: "Social relations are not less encoded than the cultural, linguistic, iconographic 'meaning' Gell claims to eschew … things may be said to happen because of the semiotic relationship between word and image … the image is understood by its originating society *in language*, so that when the art historian is talking about a social history of art or attempting to reconstruct the affective power of the work, correspondences in language, grammatical structure, and idiom need to be part of the analysis."

[33] Winter "Agency Marked/Agency Ascribed," 308–324 ("The Locus of Agency").

[34] For a study of transitivity and agency in grammar discourse, and especially in ergative languages, see Alessandro Duranti, *Linguistic Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 193–197, with previous bibliography.

asserting its historical value; 2) agency marked by narrative, which, as in (1), adds to its historical accuracy through the extended account of the king's deeds (as war leader, as builder, as vicar of the gods), confirmed by comparison with the visible results of his actions (his building works, booty and wealth coming from the frontiers, etc.), a performative celebration of royalty; 3) agency marked semantically, through the peculiar nature of multiple readings of cuneiform writing (e.g., reading a sign as a logogram or as a syllable, homophony of two different signs, etc.) and the consequent development of philosophical and ideological themes based on philological analogies.[35]

2.2. *Agency of monumental inscriptions*

When we deal with monumental inscriptions, however, their linguistic characteristics as literary works constitute only one of two main aspects that call for analysis. The second is the one related to the visual nature of the inscription once it is engraved on the monument. Semiotically, these two aspects of analysis represent two different types of "texts."[36] The first is the "text" of the literary work commissioned by the king and composed by the scribes. This text is codified as a verbal discourse, can be written on any manuscript, and can relate to the iconography of a monument by means of comparison and abduction by the reader.[37] The second is the "text" of the inscription, which has specific visual qualities. Being physically engraved on the surface of a monument, it becomes one element of it. The inscription shares with the monument (the object and its iconography) its non-verbal codification, including its effectiveness as index for the king.[38] Furthermore, the inscription *interacts* with the monument, producing an effect on the viewer.[39]

In his book, Gell considers what happens between the elements represented *within* a work of art. As he writes, "Any representational index, which depicts causal interactions in the prototype (i.e. the represented subject), can also be considered as a *separate domain* of causality unto itself, in which parts of the index *causally interact* with other parts of the index."[40] In the next section, the inscriptions engraved on the Assyrian monuments (and especially on Ashurnasirpal's reliefs) will be treated as "parts of the index" and their relationship with the monument, and its images, will be analyzed on the basis of agent/patient social relationships between them.

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[35] Which constitute, in the words of Jean-Jacques Glassner, "the very basis of Mesopotamian intellectual production"; see "The Use of Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1995), 3:1819.

[36] In semiotics, "text" is any codified message, see Winfried Nöth, *Handbook of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 331. Cf. also Gianfranco Marrone, *Introduzione alla semiotica del testo* (Bari: Laterza, 2011), v, "(a text is) una qualunque configurazione di senso – una novella, una poesia, un'immagine, una canzone, un film, un oggetto, un comportamento, una conversazione quotidiana, un palinsesto televisivo, una cena fra amici, una manovra di seduzione, una campagna pubblicitaria, una città, un progetto di vita… – che si rende empiricamente percepibile mediante una o più sostanze: linguistiche, visive, gestuali, sonore, spaziali, corporee e via dicendo." As a further example, when later in this chapter I refer to Jerrold S. Cooper defying iconographical and textual tradition as "two incongruent corpora," they both need to be considered as texts, the first codified through images, and the second as verbal messages.

[37] This corresponds to what I define in the next section as "distant relationships".

[38] Its "patron," in Gell's words, see above fn. 32.

[39] "Inner relationships," in the next section.

The nature of these interactions can be very diverse and require different levels of literacy on behalf of the viewer: they range from the actual presence of a text inscribed in stone, alone a proof of royal power that does not need any form of literacy to be appreciated, to, at the deepest level, cases of visual and semantic interplays between parts of the inscription crossing parts of the image on the monument, which only a well-trained and cultivated eye is capable of fully appreciating.

In another study on agency in ancient Near Eastern art, Marian Feldman analyses some interesting aspects of the famous Hammurapi stele.[41] Among others, she points to the stele's inscription, which is written in a monumental ductus and vertically oriented. These characteristics can engage the attention of a recipient with a degree of literacy sufficient to recognize them, dragging their eye towards the image engraved on the top the stele. I would also add here that the use of the monumental ductus, with its archaizing qualities, strengthens the message of the king's authority by acting as an index of two royal aspects: a reinforced version of Russell's "control of the craft of [ancient!] writing,"[42] and the authoritative past of which the king is natural heir. This phenomenon is not unknown in Assyria, where several exemplars of royal inscriptions are written in archaic ductus. The stele of Shamshi-Adad V (823–811 BC) from Kalḫu, for instance, seems to evoke a continuity with the tradition of the great Old Assyrian king Shamshi-Adad I (1808–1776 BC).[43] Possibly, a similar background is to be seen in some cases from the monumental inscriptions of the early Middle-Assyrian ruler Adad-narari I (1305–1274 BC).[44] These inscriptions show an interesting feature from the point of view of the relationships between the various components of textual transmission (composition, exemplar, inscriptions): the same composition[45] is written on similar tablets in two different ductus, one contemporary Middle Assyrian and another archaic, for reasons that still escape us.[46]

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[40] Gell, *Art and Agency*, 44, italics mine.

[41] Marian H. Feldman, "Object Agency? Spatial Perspective, Social Relations, and the Stele of Hammurabi," in *Agency and Identity in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Sharon R. Steadman and Jennifer C. Ross (London: Equinox, 2010), 148–165. The article is mainly focused on the social interactions between the sculpted figures of the Old Babylonian king and the god Shamash, caused by the rendering of Shamash's tiara in profile perspective, i.e. turned towards the king, and not towards the viewer of the monument, whose attention is captured by the dynamics happening between the two characters. As a consequence, some fundamental ideological messages are conveyed from the monument through the dynamic relationships between the characters represented on it to the recipient looking at it: the god exercising direct authority on the ruler (god A to king B), the subordination of the ruler to the divine authority (king B to god A) and his authority over the rest of humanity, among which are counted the people viewing the monument (god A to king B to humanity/recipient of the monument R).

[42] See fn. 9.

[43] A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC (858–745 BC)*, RIMA 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 180–188 A.0.103.1; see also oracc.org/rinap/Q004738.

These case-studies suggest that the inscription on a monument, its visual and physical characteristics, and potentially its content (or part of it), can all be added among the elements that *act* in that "separate domain of causal interactions" that Gell describes in his book. Since the inscription should be considered as itself an index of royalty, the ways in which it interacts with the physical aspects of the monument (in which part of the monument is it inscribed? is it visible? does it have visual interactions with the images on the monument?) can also be analyzed under the lenses of social interactions of causality from inscription to monument and from monument to inscription, as well as from inscription to image on the monument and vice versa.

3. INNER RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INSCRIPTIONS AND MONUMENTS

3.1. *Distant and inner relationship between text and image*

This essay investigates the relationships between text and image in Mesopotamian art, which has a long history of research. Jerrold S. Cooper defines the textual and the iconographic traditions in Mesopotamian history as "two incongruent corpora." Through a chronological overview, he argues that the two traditions, although conceived in the same cultural context, developed separately and had very few contacts with one another in their production. Therefore,

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[44] A systematic study of the matter is, however, necessary.

[45] Or so it seems on the basis of major compositional features, see A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia BC (to 1115 BC)*, RIMA 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 128–133. Of interest is also the case, as, e.g., VAT 8808 (RIMA 1, A.0.76.8 ex. 1) from the inscriptions of Adad-narari I, of using two different ductus on the same clay tablet (a foundation text), one for the text in normal Middle Assyrian and one for the colophon-date, which is visibly larger and imitates the "monumental" ductus of other similar inscriptions on stone (cf., e.g., VA 8252, RIMA 1, A.0.76.15 ex. 5).

[46] Among others, all equally possible, these copies may have differed on the basis of where the exemplar was intended to be placed, the intended audience of particular exemplars, or the history of the building to which the exemplar was dedicated. Furthermore, on the matter of ductus and other modes of writing used in monumental inscriptions, one should also consider unusual cases, like inscriptions in mirror writing, the most renowned example being the Old Assyrian Shalim-ahum's only surviving inscription (RIMA 1, A.0.31, p. 14; see also oracc.org/riao/Q005618), or Ikunum's "upside-down-writing" (RIMA 1, A.0.34.2, p. 42; see also oracc.org/riao/Q005640), in which the signs in the lines are written from left to right as usual, but the order of the lines is reversed from bottom to top.

"(even if) iconography without texts is difficult, the instance of Mesopotamia demonstrates that the advent of texts does not necessarily make iconography easy."[47] Such a perspective gives us the opportunity to consider a range of means and removes by which texts can come into relationship with the image of a monument. Here, I will separate "distant" from "inner" relationships, especially focusing on the latter.

Distant relationships are interconnections between elements of text and image that are not necessarily present in the same inscribed monument. Text and image, although conceived and composed separately, often cooperate in order to convey the same message, originating from a similar royal rhetoric. For example, the so-called "historical reliefs," which depict the king in battle against enemies in various regions of the Near East, share with the text of contemporary royal inscriptions a similar attention to geographical and historical detail, even if lacking one-to-one correspondences between the details. The two types of narration cooperate following similar rules and convey the same message, although remaining separate. This type of "distant" relationship, however, pertains to the realm of narrativity, and it works also when text and image are not displayed on the same medium. Distant relationships belong, therefore, to the realm of agency marked by language, as already discussed by Winter, and do not need to be further investigated here.

Inner relationships between text and image occur when the text is inscribed on a monument. They include different degrees of relation, from no visual interaction – when, for instance, the inscription is concealed – to high and complex visual and potentially semantic interaction, when part of the inscription interplays with part of the sculpted image. The levels of literacy needed to appreciate these relationships also vary from illiteracy, when the visual impact of the inscription acts effectively alone, in the frame of royal propaganda, to the highest possible degree of scholarly literacy.

Inscriptions could be engraved and concealed. In this case the inscription was not only separated from the (main) iconographic elements depicted on a monument, but it was also made invisible to contemporaries by inscribing it on a surface of the monument that remained concealed once the monument was installed, like its inaccessible bottom side[48] or its back. If one considers the numerous slab back inscriptions from the Northwest Palace,[49] as well as those from palaces of the later rulers Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, a legitimate question is whether those inscriptions could still convey a message or, on the contrary, the agency marked by them was indeed nullified. I believe the answer to be "diminished but not nullified": we can assume gods could read inscriptions through walls, and future rulers were very much affected by them, since they had to take extreme care of them, acknowledge their origin and, finally, restore them.[50] Did the inner relationships with the monument decay? Not with the monument, as the inscription was engraved on its back, erasing anonymity from that invisible surface; but there was no relationship with the image sculpted on the visible surface, since nothing was given in the text to create any "inner" relation with the iconography on the front.

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[47] Jerrold S. Cooper, "Incongruent Corpora: Writing and Art in Ancient Iraq," in *Iconography without Texts*, ed. Paul Taylor, Warburg Institute Colloquia 13 (London: The Warburg Institute, 2008), 69–95; 69: "This failure may sometimes be ascribed to a complementarity of text and image, but other instances suggest that certain motifs in the repertoire of the artisan remained alien to the repertoire of the scribe."

[48] As an example, of the many inscriptions engraved on Shalmaneser III's throne dais from room T1 in Fort Shalmaneser (Kalḫu/Nimrud), one was inscribed on the lower side of its eastern block, facing the ground on which it was installed. See, Peter Hulin, "The Inscriptions on the Carved Throne-Base of Shalmaneser III," *Iraq* 25 (1963): 48–69. For an elaboration of Hulin's copies with

When the inscription was indeed incorporated on the visible side(s) of the monument, there were various ways in which it could interact with the image: it could flank the image or cross it; it could have a separate space on the monument's surface, which could become a band of its own, following a scheme then repeated on the other reliefs that adorned the same space. In many reliefs from the Assyrian palaces, the inscription would typically be positioned in the middle register of a tripartite relief separating two scenes of cultic and historical-narrative subjects. The inscription could then cross the image, either engraved over the sculpted surface – on steles, statues, and famously on the Ashurnasirpal reliefs – or inserted in the form of an epigraph in a separate space (framed or not) within the sculpted scenes. Epigraphs, for which we have no examples from

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identification of the six inscriptions (according to Grayson's RIMA 3 editions) engraved on this monument, see http://oracc.org/riao/theassyrianempire883745bc/shalmaneseriii/texts2039/index.html#shalmaneser328. For a new critical edition and historical analysis of the throne dais, see Karen Radner, "Mistakes were made … on the throne base of Shalmaneser III of Assyria," in *De l'argile au numérique: Mélanges assyriologiques en honneur de Dominique Charpin*, ed. Gregory Chambon et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 833–840.

[49] It is possible, if not very probable, that all Northwest Palace reliefs had inscriptions on their backs. The data on this matter are however deficient and cannot be recovered, as many reliefs were sawn away at the time of their discovery for the purpose of making them lighter for transport to Europe, see Howard, *Process*, 37–43.

[50] On this last point, however, the case of Nimrud's Southwest Palace of Esarhaddon, who reused reliefs of Tiglath-pileser III and Ashurnasirpal II, could imply that the destiny of palatial reliefs was sometimes governed by different rules than those that pertained to other inscribed monuments. See, David Kertai, *The Architecture of Late Assyrian Royal Palaces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 156: "Esarhaddon's reuse of reliefs from other kings is exceptional and his reasons for doing so remain unclear. Sornach suggested that the sources of alabaster had become depleted, but this seems unlikely as these sources were present again during the reign of Ashurbanipal." For further details on Tiglath-pileser III's reliefs found lying on the floor of a room in the Central Palace, see Jamie Novotny, "Contextualizing the Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel: What Can Assyrian Official Inscriptions Tell Us?," in *The Last Days of the Kingdom of Israel*, ed. Shuichi Hasegawa et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 47–49, esp. fn. 49, and 51 fn. 58, with detailed previous bibliography, especially Richard D. Barnett and Margarete Falkner, *The Sculptures of Aššur-naṣir-apli II (883–859 B.C.), Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 B.C.), Esarhaddon (681–669 B.C.), from the Central and South-West Palaces at Nimrud* (London: British Museum, 1962), 1–7 and 20–23.

Ashurnasirpal II, but several from the reliefs of Tiglath-pileser III, Sennacherib, and Ashurbanipal, *participated* in the action of the depicted scene, to which they gave punctual historical context and accuracy of great impact.[51]

As for the sequence of phases of production of inscribed monuments, the inscription was always incised after the image had been completed. This is evident also in some cases of the tripartite reliefs that had a central band left blank for the inscription. Such exemplars show the inscription clearly encroaching upon the sculpted surface or contorted with the purpose of avoiding it, in both instances pointing to the precedence of the sculpted image.[52]

3.2. *The role of the inscriptions in the monumental project of the Northwest Palace*

A well-known innovative trait introduced with the decorative project of the Northwest Palace is uniform size and perfect alignment of the inscriptions on each orthostat, giving the effect of one continuous and endless inscription. This practice of uniformly integrating the inscriptions into the reliefs allowed for a greater degree of interaction between the two. From the perspective of Gell's concept of "causal interaction" into the "separate domain" of the reliefs, the uniformity of the inscriptions acted as *agent* on the reliefs, because it mirrored and increased *their* uniformity. At the same time, the images of the king in his heroic undertakings, and of the supernatural creatures that pervaded the visual space of the palace, increased the authority of the endless (and for many people indecipherable) lines of cuneiform signs that were crossing them. In other words, the agency carried by the images certified, in the eye of the recipient, the ideological value of the text represented in the inscriptions, so that the two would become together a more effective index of royal power. This phenomenon is even more relevant in the Northwest Palace than in later palatial decorative projects, because each slab contained only one text repeated more than four hundred times on the palace reliefs: the so-called "Standard Inscription."

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[51] Although, as noted by Jamie Novotny (personal communication), we do have at least one example from Ashurbanipal's reliefs (Jamie Novotny and Joshua Jeffers, *The Royal Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal (668–631 BC), Aššur-etel-ilāni (630–627 BC), and Sîn-šarra-iškun (626–612 BC), Kings of Assyria, Part 1*, RINAP 5 [University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2018], no. 35; see also oracc.org/rinap/Q003734), in which the text written in the epigraph does not exactly match with the image narrated in the relief. This might highlight the separation, up to the very last moment of their engraving, of the two phases of realization of the reliefs.

[52] See also later Assyrian palatial reliefs, such as some exemplars from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, e.g., BM 118908 (see, also https://cdli.ucla.edu/dl/photo/P466003_d.jpg), which bears the inscription edited in Hayim Tadmor and Shigeo Yamada, *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC) and Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC), Kings of Assyria*, RINAP 1 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), no. 18 (see also oracc.org/rinap/Q003431). In this relief, the band intended for the inscription is intruded upon by the figure of the parasol protecting the head of the king on the chariot, from the register below. In this case, whoever inscribed the slab was careful to leave the parasol untouched, without engraving signs on it (see Paul Collins, *Assyrian Palace Sculptures* [London: British Museum, 2008], 66f.). Note also that the relief was carefully avoided from the textual perspective, without truncating words, but separating the number "50" from the Sumerogram GU$_4$.NÍTA.MEŠ ("oxen," line 6) and, one line below, *ina* IZI ("with fire") from *áš-ru-up* ("burned," line 7).

As pointed out in Howard's contribution in this volume, the countless "copies" of the Standard Inscription were in fact often not *exact* copies. In many cases, the text of some of them had to be truncated or even *re-edited* in order to fit the required format. He presents several examples of ways in which this happened, but he also considers instances in which narrow slabs were inscribed with a complete version of the Standard Inscription, although this required engraving it with very crowded lines with almost no space between one sign and the other.[53] One wonders if there were specific criteria for deciding whether to abbreviate the text of the inscription. Only a systematic study that compares the sizes of the slabs, the images sculpted, and the completeness of the inscriptions will allow us to estimate whether the presence of specific images could dictate such decisions. There are examples of narrow slabs, which bear the portrait of the king and are tightly filled with signs in order to finish the inscription without abbreviating it, whereas other much larger orthostats sculpted with images of some of the human- and animal-headed winged protective genies (*apkallū*), which are sculpted on many of the palace's reliefs, could apparently easily bear interrupted inscriptions.[54] Such a study might also address the question of whether the images dictated the care with which the reliefs were inscribed: certain reliefs were inscribed with less care than others, carelessly crossing the sculpted images and, consequently, making their reading a far more difficult task. Can this trait be attributed to the rooms in which the slabs were located or to the subject(s) depicted? Were more important rooms – with more prestigious subjects depicted – entrusted to more skillful artisans?

3.3. *Sign-image visual interplays*

In a previous work, I analyzed some cases of interplay between one or more signs of the Standard Inscription and the elements of the image that the inscription crosses, and I described typologies of interactions based on degrees of decontextualization and re-contextualization of the parts involved, and therefore various degrees of knowledge necessary to appreciate them.[55] These cases of de- and re-contextualization can be read as agent/patient interactions, where one part conditions the other to act differently than it would by itself. Such instances of causality can go in both directions, from the inscription to the image and from the image to the inscription, even in the same interplay. Two examples from Rooms B and G of the Northwest Palace will better clarify these phenomena.[56]

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[53] See also J. Caleb Howard, "On Mass-Producing the Standard Inscription of Ashurnasirpal II," *JNES* 79 (2020): 65–82.

[54] See, e.g., Slab H-33 (John B. Stearns, *Reliefs from the Palace of Ashurnaṣirpal II*, AfO Beih. 15 [Graz: im Selbstverlage des Herausgebers, 1961], pl. 2), which measures 1.04 m wide and depicts a king and a complete text of the Standard Inscription, compared to slab B-26 (E. A. Wallis Budge, *Assyrian Sculptures in the British Museum* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1914], pl. 10), which measures 1.31 m wide and depicts an *apkallu*-genie and a truncated Standard Inscription. Russell (*Writing on the Wall*, 40) gives a further example: Slab G-11, 1.12 m, depicting a king and with a complete Standard Inscription, compared with Slab G-9, 7 cm narrower, depicting a simple courtier and with a truncated Standard Inscription.

Room B was the throne room of the Northwest Palace. On its eastern short side was the throne dais and behind it, a relief (slab B-23) depicting two figures of the Assyrian king represented one in front of the other.[57] The two figures greet each other, and between them an Assyrian stylized tree acts as axis of the relief.[58] The images on the relief are crossed in their central part by a copy of the Standard Inscription, whose lines, as mentioned above, are perfectly aligned with those of the other reliefs in the room. The effect is that the entire room appears covered with sculpted reliefs of cultic and historical subjects, all crossed by a continuous inscription. One of the features of slab B-23 that immediately catches the eye is that the Standard Inscription is very carefully and tidily written: the signs are clear, well separated one from the other, and not indiscriminately carved on every part of the image that they cross. The stylized tree in particular is left completely bare, with not a single element of it inscribed by cuneiform signs, with one exception: there is one sign precisely in the middle of the tree trunk.[59] The sign inscribed there is GIŠ, the logogram for “tree.” The syllabic value of the sign, /is/, participates in a sequence of signs which render the participle *mukab-bis*, in the sentence NÍTA *dan-nu mu-kab-bi-**is*** GÚ *a-a-bi-šú* “(the king is a) strong male who treads upon the necks of his foes.”

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[55] Morello, "A GIŠ on a Tree," 31–68.

[56] For a reconstruction of the order of reliefs in the rooms of the Northwest Palce, see Janusz Meuszyński, *Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen und ihrer Anordnung im Nordwestpalast von Kalḫu (Nimrūd) (Räume: B.C.D.E.F.G.H.L.N.P.)*, BagF 2 (Mainz: Phillip von Zabern, 1981); Samuel M. Paley and Richard P. Sobolewski, *The Reconstruction of the Relief Representations and Their Positions in the Northwest-Palace at Kalḫu (Nimrūd) II (Rooms: I.S.T.Z, West-Wing)*, BagF 10 (Mainz: Phillip von Zabern, 1987). For investigations of this decorative project, see, among others, Julian Reade, "Text and Sculptures from the North-West Palace, Nimrud," *Iraq* 47 (1985): 203–214; John Malcolm Russell, "The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud: Issues in the Research and Presentation of Assyrian Art," *AJA* 102 (1998): 655–715; David Kertai, "The Architecture of Connectivity: Ashurnasirpal II's Late Assyrian Palace in Kalḫu," in *Die Architektur des Weges: Gestaltete Bewegung im gebauten Raum*, ed. Dietmar Kurapkat et al. (Regensburg: Schnell-Steiner, 2014), 337–347.

[57] The interpretation that the two figures represent the same king has been undermined by B. Brentjes in "Selbstverherrlichung oder Legitimitätsanspruch? Gedanken zu dem Thronrelief von Nimrud-Kalah," *AoF* 21 (1994): 50–64, and Brian Brown in "Kingship and Ancestral Cult in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud," *JANER* 10 (2010): 1–53.

[58] Also referred to as, among other things, the "Assyrian Sacred Tree" (most commonly) or "Assyrian Tree of Life" (see Simo Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy," *JNES* 52 [1993]: 161–208) this element of Mesopotamian and especially Assyrian decorative repertoire has been one of the most studied subjects in the history of Assyriology. For an accurate historical analysis of this theme, see Mariana Giovino, *The Assyrian Sacred Tree: A History of Interpretations*, OBO 230 (Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007). Here, for the sake of coherence and because I believe this to be scientifically the most sound interpretation, I refer to it as the "Assyrian stylized tree," not only to avoid any forced interpretation of its meaning and possible functions, but as well because it is the most accurate name for its appearance.

[59] Morello, "A GIŠ on a Tree," 38 fig. 2b, and 39.

In this case, therefore, the presence of the tree conditions the viewer to extrapolate a sign from its textual context (/is/) and read it alone as a logogram (GIŠ), in direct connection with the image. The eye, even of a person poorly trained in cuneiform, is attracted by the isolation of the sign, positioned at the center of the “tree” which is the central element of the relief, and by the immediate relation to the word “tree.” The Assyrian stylized tree acts then as *agent* on the cuneiform sign, conditioning the viewer read the sign logographically, corresponding to the image. At the same time, a person belonging to the scribal class would probably have seen in this interaction an ideological trope linked to the everlasting continuity of kingship, which might be further linked, one could say “three-dimensionally,” to the throne dais positioned in front of the relief.[60] However, a consideration of the spatial position of relief B-23 behind the throne dais reveals that the throne would originally have obscured the viewer’s line-of-sight to the GIŠ on the tree. Only a person who could stand behind the throne would have seen it and appreciated the interaction between text and image. One assumes not many people could do this.

A similar case of visual interplay between images and inscription is to be found on slab 3 from Room G, perhaps more easily seen than B-23. Slab G-3 depicts the king seated on a backless throne holding a drinking bowl and surrounded by three eunuchs (one in front of him and two behind) and two winged human-headed genies (*apkallū*). This relief is also very neatly inscribed. In particular, many parts of the image have been left uninscribed in the area around and on the throne, impinging only on the left part of the king’s leg. On the throne, the inscription runs onto the side and the legs, but not on the textile fringes between the legs. The last line of the inscription, comprising only eight signs, are positioned after the right leg of the throne, instead of starting from the left edge of the slab as usual. The “wooden” lower side of the throne’s seat is engraved with nine signs only, with a long empty space (enough for 6–7 signs) between them and the throne’s right leg, as well as below them. These nine isolated signs form the name of Shalmaneser and his epithet “king of Assyria” (= [^{1}]^{d}*šùl-ma-nu*-SAG MAN KUR *aš-šur*).[61] In the text, this king is Shalmaneser I (1263–1234 BC), who founded the city of Kalḫu, which, centuries afterward, Ashurnasirpal II is rebuilding. Moreover, on both legs of the throne we find the word

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[60] For a discussion of the relationship between the Assyrian stylized tree, the sign GIŠ, and ideological tropes linked to Assyrian kingship, see Morello, “A GIŠ on a Tree,” 39–41 with previous bibliography.

[61] RIMA 2, A.0.101.23: 15 (see also oracc.org/riao/Q004477). The DIŠ used as determinative ([^{1}]) before the king’s name was probably lost during the work of the restoration of the relief.

"*musukkannu*-wood" (^{giš}*mes-kan-ni*) from the final description of the construction of the Northwest Palace: "I founded therein a palace of cedar, cypress, *daprānu*-juniper, boxwood, *musukkannu*-wood, terebinth, and tamarisk as my royal residence and for my lordly leisure for eternity … I hung doors of cedar, cypress, *daprānu*-juniper (and) *musukkunnu*-wood in its doorways."[62]

As in the previous example, the name on the throne catches the eye of the viewer because of its being isolated from the rest of the inscription. The image of the throne acts as *agent* on the phrase, "Shalmaneser, king of Assyria," de-contextualizing it from the inscription and re-contextualizing it as a typical label of property. Interestingly, the image in this case is potentially not de-contextualized, as it might depict the very throne belonging to Shalmaneser I's furniture, on which the current king, Ashurnasirpal II, is sitting. Furthermore, the inscription is only partially de-contextualized, because the interaction activates a different reading of the sentence, but within the same context, i.e., the reference to Shalmaneser I as the founder of Kalḫu. On the other hand, the viewers of the reliefs who could perceive this image-inscription interplay, in which the represented throne acted as *agent* on the inscription, conditioning the name of the king to be read separately, might have thought not of Shalmaneser I but of Shalmaneser III, the son of Ashurnasirpal II and heir of his throne. Was this interplay intended by the person who crafted it as a means of conveying an ideological message of legitimation and continuity of the royal line?

A similar ideological message might have been conveyed by the visual interaction between the legs of the throne engraved with the word *musukkannu*. The *meskannu*-wood, a "lasting wood" (*iṣṣu dārû*, because of its being hard and durable),[63] is known to have been used for decoration of buildings and for furniture of value,[64] in particular thrones.[65] This would be another case of partial de-contextualization, which exalts the features of the object and gives a certain materiality to the depiction. In the eyes of a trained person, this word also exalts the everlasting character of Assyrian kingship (as with the GIŠ on the tree), which is metaphorically compared to the everlasting nature of the wood and the ideological motif of the *kussû šuršudu*, the “firmly founded throne.”[66]

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[62] RIMA 2, A.0.101.23, 18–21 (see also oracc.org/riao/Q004477).

[63] See CAD M/2 s.v. *musukkannu* mng. b and J. Nicholas Postgate, "Trees and Timber in the Assyrian Texts," *BSA* 6 (1992): 183. See also, for example, the inscription of Tukulti-Ninurta II (890–884): RIMA 2, A.0.100.5, 70–73a "from Ilī-ibni, governor of the land of Suḫu (I received as tribute): three talents of silver, twenty minas of gold, an ivory couch, three ivory chests, eighteen tin bars, forty furniture legs of *meskannu*-wood, a bed of *meskannu*-wood, six dishes of *meskannu*-wood, a bronze bath-hub, linen garments, garments with multi-coloured trim, purple wood, oxen, sheep, bread, (and) beer."

[64] Especially legs and bands, see Armas Salonen, *Die Möbel des Alten Mesopotamien nach sumerisch-akkadischen Quellen*, Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, Serie B 127 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemian, 1963), 221.

[65] Cinzia Pappi, "Thron A.I.," *RlA* 13: 633–635. See also, from the Mari archives, the throne in *musukkannum*-wood that Zimrī-Lîm donates to Nagatmiš, king of Tigunani (north of Šubat-Enlil), to reward him for his victory against the king of Ašlakka, see Jean-Marie Durand, *La nomenclature des habits et des textiles dans les textes de Mari*, ARM 30 (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2009), 424–426.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In the decorative project of Ashurnasirpal II’s Northwest Palace at Nimrud, the perceived uniformity produced by the incorporation of inscriptions and reliefs allowed for a series of interactions, or agent-patient causal relations, between text and image, which potentially affected the viewer in various ways. The impression of a continuous endless text emphasized the uniformity of the images on the reliefs, also perceived as endless, so that the two parts would mutually increase their value as indexes of royal power. The necessity of writing in full the text of the Standard Inscription on each one of the exemplars was subordinate (or *patient*) to the uniformity of the whole and possibly to the presence of the king depicted on the relief, therefore to the agency marked by his image.[67] The examples of sign-image interplays represented the deepest possible relationship-degree, in which the visual interaction would condition the literate viewer to extrapolate the signs from their original context and read them differently and/or with additional semantic and symbolic tropes. As a consequence, the viewer of the monumental project, once admitted to the presence of the king, would have become, depending on their degree of literacy, the recipient of multilayered ideological messages of more or less explicit nature, all originating from the same source, as when light passes through the many facets of a prism.[68]

Two final questions can be addressed. First, can the cases analyzed here tell us anything more about the relationship between text and image in Mesopotamian art? Are text and image indeed “incongruent corpora,” as suggested by Cooper, or can we see in the examples given in these pages a sort of dialogue between the two? In my opinion, the answer seems indeed to support Cooper’s argument, although with a relevant corollary.

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[66] Pappi, “Thron A.I.,” 635. See CAD R, 189. Cf., e.g., the 7th century letter from the exorcist Urad-Gula, SAA 10, no. 294: 10, “May they (the gods) keep the foundation of the throne of your kingship as firm as a mountain rock forever (*iš-di* GIŠ.GU.ZA LUGAL-*ti-ka ki-ma ši-pik* KUR-*i li-šar-ši-du a-na* UD-*me ṣa-a-ti*).”

[67] However, as already mentioned above, a more comprehensive study is needed to confirm or disprove this hypothesis.

[68] This compositional approach, which allows zooming in and out and does not require “linear reading” recalls the similar non-linear-perspective and multi-centric technique of the narrative reliefs as analyzed by Marco Benetti and Carlo Lippolis in their contribution “Osservazioni sui codici di rappresentazione visive nei rilievi di Seannacherib,” in *The Sennacherib Wall Reliefs at Nineveh*, ed. Carlo Lippolis, Monografie di Mesopotamia 15 (Firenze: Le lettere, 2011), 79–111. See, also Morello, “A GIŠ on a Tree,” 50–58, with previous literature.

Not one of the examples studied here suggests that the images, which we know were the first to be realized, were conceived to participate in the interactions with the inscriptions described above. In my previous analysis of the interplays between signs and image, I concluded that the main trigger that brought the scribes to create them was contextual *opportunity*.[69] Now, with Howard's investigation on the production and transmission of the Standard Inscription at hand, we can try to be more specific and argue that those who realized such interactions were not necessarily the same persons who authored the composition of the Standard Inscription in the first place.

As we have acknowledged, the professionals who were in charge of the production of the inscriptions were literate enough to follow the text they were transmitting, make intelligent errors, and leave dubious signs uninscribed. Based on this assumption, we can speculate the presence of a sort of transmission supervisor, or "on-site scribe," possibly in charge of an entire room, where different teams of professional chiselers-transmitters were inscribing the slabs at the same time. This on-site scribe was responsible for checking errors, answering questions on dubious signs, making decisions about where and how to interrupt the text of the inscription on a narrow slab, and finally check the overall perception of all the slabs together in the room. During the first stages of this process, i.e. before having the Standard Inscription copied onto the relief by the chiselers, the on-site scribe had the chance to recognize an opportunity to create an *ad hoc* sign-image interplay with the relief to be inscribed.

There is no evidence whatsoever of any plan conceived before this moment for putting the GIŠ sign on a particular representation of a tree-trunk, nor for putting a king's name on a particular representation of a throne. Similar reasoning can be inferred for the "rules" that regulated the completeness of an inscription, potentially on the basis of the presence of a specific type of image on the slab. These are all criteria conceived in retrospect, once our on-site scribe found himself in front of a narrow slab depicting the king and wondered what to do.

The interactions between inscription and image are therefore not properly the result of a dialogue. It was rather only the people from the scribal personnel, especially those involved in the transmission of the text on stone, who imagined and performed such text-image interactions. Nevertheless, though driven from one side only, a sort of dialogue was performed, and an extremely productive one. In the context of the Northwest Palace, the visual character of the inscriptions, their uniform inclusion in the iconographic motif, and the interactions between part of the inscriptions and part of the image, even if due to the extemporaneous act of one or a few scribes, are all elements that point to an effort of creatively developing the potential of monumental inscriptions, creating with them a *bridge* between two *otherwise* incongruent corpora.

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[69] Morello, "A GIŠ on a Tree," 63.

Finally, since the above described cases of sign-image interplays were probably not part of a previously conceived plan, and since most of them were invisible to the majority of people that we would expect to have been their recipients, it is sensible to ask whether the concept of agency is, in the end, a useful way of analyzing these phenomena.[70] My opinion on the matter is twofold. First, we need to differentiate between practice and contexts. The practice of "playing" with words and signs is (end)emic to the Mesopotamian scholarly world and is an undeniable product of the cultural milieu in which the reliefs were produced. Such a practice acquires, however, different agentic values, depending on the context in which it takes place. In my previous work, I argued that some interplays between signs and images present in another Assyrian monument (the Esarhaddon's stele at Samʿal, mod. Zincirli), can be said to carry a more evident agentic-propagandistic value, because of their more visible and simpler nature and because of the monument's location in an urban public space in a frontier context.[71] At the same time, I believe that the question around the concept of agency finds its *raison d'être* also in the cases analyzed in this chapter. The sign-image interplays from the Northwest Palace, even if they could not reach the eyes of the majority of their contemporary human public, were destined to affect recipients from two important categories of viewers: present and future scholars (and possibly their kings) and the gods. For the first, the visual interplays are only one – although one of the most elaborated and elegant – among many different means of the type of propaganda called "preaching to the converted," i.e., cultivating and reinvigorating the ideological principles among those who are affected the most by them, and who are, at the same time, the most at risk of conspiring against them, namely, the king's entourage.[72] As for the gods, these phenomena are to be added to the large repertoire of practices aimed at retaining their attention and benevolence.[73] Indeed, the form of agency directed at these two audiences had to be exceedingly efficient. All this said, I do agree with Howard that the future of the studies on the Standard Inscription in particular, and of the Assyrian monumental inscriptions in general, lies in the thorough analysis of the process of their production. The bulk of data that we can retrieve and elaborate – thanks in part to the new digital tools that we now have at our disposal – from the punctual analysis of the hundreds of exemplars on which the Standard Inscription was transmitted is tremendous, and the thought of the results that future philological and historical studies will bring on the matter is indeed thrilling.

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[70] As Howard said in his response to my paper during the Symposium: "I wonder if agency is a useful way of analyzing this phenomenon in our study of ancient Mesopotamian art. Rather, perhaps the focus should be on the production, rather than the reception … and it should be incorporated into a larger study of how such phenomena were produced *ad hoc* in the course of the production of the inscriptions in the Northwest Palace ... This is not to suggest that the same phenomenon in a more visible setting may not have agency-related significance."

[71] Morello, "A GIŠ on a Tree," 58–61; see also Barbara Nevling Porter, *Trees, Kings, and Politics: Studies in Assyrian Iconography*, OBO 197 (Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 59–80.

[72] Cf. F. M. Fales, "Art, Performativity, Mimesis, Narrative, Ideology, and Audience: Reflections on Assyrian Palace Reliefs in the Light of Recent Studies," *KASKAL* 6 (2009): 237–295, here 283, and the still valid Mario Liverani, "The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire," in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires*, ed. Mogens Trolle Larsen (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), 297–317, esp. 298–300.

[73] Cf. Morello, "A GIŠ on a Tree," 61–63, and id., "Percezioni sensoriali del paesaggio montano nell'ottava campagna di Sargon II, 714 a.C.," in *Le aree montane come frontiere. Spazi d'interazione e connettività*, ed. Stefano Magnani (Rome: Aracne Editrice, 2013), 441–462, with previous bibliography.

The second aspect of agency that I consider relevant in the analysis of the relationships between inscriptions and monuments in Assyrian art, and especially in the context of the Northwest Palace project, brings me back to that extemporaneous *act*, as I have just defined it, of the scribe, or scribes, who could and did express their creativity on the very monuments that would have adorned the main spaces of the royal palace. On one hand, this *act* appears as a perfect example of what is meant by "agency" and "creativity" in the anthropological literature: the challenging of the habits, or traditions, of the social structure in which one lives, with acts that can then be absorbed or rejected by it.[74] The on-site scribe, whose existence and agency I have proposed, as responsible for the sign-image interplays on the reliefs, *did* seize upon such opportunities, although this person was perhaps in a somewhat vulnerable position. On the other hand, the environment in which this person lived and worked, an environment that originated from and ultimately responded to the agency of the king, was clearly quite extraordinary. It was an environment in which the whole concept of functions and inclusion of the inscriptions in the monument had been rethought, through an important challenging of traditional architectonic, iconographic and compositional rules. This environment *allowed* that scribe to seize their opportunity and express the highest possible type of creativity: a game, played with kings and gods.

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[74] Rapport and Overing, *Social and Cultural Anthropology*, 3, 8; cf. with Renato Rosaldo et al., "Introduction: Creativity in Anthropology," in *Creativity/Anthropology*, ed. Smadar Lavie et al. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 5–6: "human activities that transform existing cultural practices', activities that, courtesy of a 'creative persona', emerge from traditional forms and yet move beyond them and reshape them."

IMAGES ARE FOREVER:
ASSYRIAN READINGS OF THE KALḪU RELIEFS

Ludovico Portuese[1]

1. ETERNITY AND LIFE OF THE NORTHWEST PALACE

When investigating the evolutionary process of an Assyrian royal palace from its construction to its abandonment, one may note that Assyrian kings painstakingly described each phase in their inscriptions: texts provide information about the king's idea to found a new city, the reason leading a king to build a new residence, the start of construction works, the main building activities, the dedication on completion, the fear (materialized in blessings and curses) of potential abandonment after the owner's death.[2] It is precisely in the account of the phases of the building life cycle that kings communicate the reason for building a new palace and its basic audience. In this regard, Ashurnasirpal II often says in his inscriptions that he built his new palace – called the Northwest Palace – at Kalḫu for his "lordly leisure for eternity" and then "for the eternal admiration of rulers and princes."[3] According to these *explicit* references, one understands that the intended audience of the palace itself, along with its reliefs and inscriptions, was firstly – and obviously – the king himself and secondly the future rulers and princes.[4] More importantly, what emerges is that the key tenet of "eternity" is strictly bound to the eternity of the king's image and his residence. The eternity of a king's activity is regarded as essential and the king himself appeals to future generations to keep alive his name and image engraved on the stone of his palace, thus the palace itself. The king's palace "both preserved the biographical memory of an individual and secured his role in the elite ideological memory of kingship."[5] In other words, the concept of "eternity" in royal inscriptions underpins the "immortalization" task or role entrusted to the royal palace. This notion relies on the general meanings and philosophical concepts of eternity and immortalization underlying the ancient Near Eastern *Weltanschauungen*, which Anton Moortgat had already identified under the term *Unsterblichkeitsglaube*, the "immortality belief," recently revived elegantly by Mehmet-Ali Ataç.[6] This

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[2] E.g. Sargon II's building account (RINAP 2 8: 27b–86). A further good example, in this respect, is offered by the building account of the so-called Nimrud Monolith (RIMA 2 A.0.101.17: v 24b–103), which contains an unusually elaborate list of curses directed towards anyone will do harm to the palace and its buildings (for an in-depth analysis of the text, see Mattias Karlsson, "The Cursed Destruction of the North-West Palace," *SAAB* 23 [2017]: 55–66). For an overall examination of the concluding formulae in the time of Ashurnasirpal II, see Ludovico Portuese, "A New Hypothesis Regarding the Use of *Formulae* in the Ashurnasirpal II Texts," *SCO* 63 (2017): 29–42.

[3] Respectively RIMA 2 A.0.101.2: 58; RIMA 2 A.0.101.35: 8.

[4] Within the academic literature, several experts have touched on the issue of the audience of the Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs and inscriptions. The adjective "explicit" referring to the Assyrian sources is fundamental for general statements on the expected audience, leading scholars to support the assumption that Assyrian royal inscriptions and reliefs were mostly meant for the king himself, an inner palatial audience, for gods and future kings (see, in particular, Mario Liverani, "The Deeds of Ancient Mesopotamian Kings," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East IV*, ed. Jack M. Sasson [New York: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995], 2354–2355; Mario Liverani, "The King and His Audience," in *From Source to History: Studies on Ancient Near Eastern Worlds and Beyond. Dedicated to Giovanni Battista Lanfranchi on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday on June 23, 2014*, ed. Salvatore Gaspa et al., AOAT 412 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 374–379; Hayim Tadmor, "Propaganda, Literature, Historiography: Cracking the Code of the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions,"

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in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki, September 7–11, 1995* (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), 330–332; Nicolas Gillmann, "Les bas-reliefs néo-assyriens: une nouvelle tentative d'interpretation," *SAAB* 19 (2011–2012): 233; Dominik Bonatz, "Funktionen des Bildes in Altvorderasien," in *Methodik und Didaktik in der Ägyptologie: Herausforderungen eines kulturwissenschaftlichen Paradigmenwechsels in den Altertumswissenschaften*, ed. Alexandra Verbovsek et al., Ägyptologie und Kulturwissenschaft 4 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2011), 300; Dominik Bonatz, "Bild, Macht und Raum im neuassyrischen Reich," in *Organization, Representation and Symbols of Power in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 54th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Würzburg 20–25th July 2008* [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012], 51–71). However, more subtle analyses of the composition of images and texts make clear that a wider audience including foreigners or outsiders may have existed and, perhaps, institutionalized by the Assyrian rulers. A more positive and less rigid position on the issue of the audience was taken by a number of scholars (Barbara N. Porter, "Language, Audience and Impact in Imperial Assyria," in *Language and Culture in the Near East*, ed. Shlomo Izre'el and Rina Drory, IOS 15 [Leiden, New York, Köln: E. J. Brill, 1995], 62–70; Barbara N. Porter, "For the Astonishment of All Enemies: Assyrian Propaganda and Its Audience in the Reign of Ashurnasirpal II and Esarhaddon," *BCSMS* 35 (2000): 13–16; Barbara N. Porter, "Intimidation and Friendly Persuasion: Re-Evaluating the Propaganda of Ashurnasirpal II," *ErIsr* 27 (2003): 180–188; Barbara N. Porter, "Ancient Writers, Modern Readers, and King Ashurnasirpal's Political Problems: An Exploration of the Possibility of Reading Ancient Texts," in *Literary Construction of Identity in the Ancient World. Proceedings of the Conference Literary Fiction and the Construction of Identity in Ancient Literatures: Options and Limits of Modern Literary Approaches in the Exegesis of Ancient Texts, Heidelberg, July 10–13, 2006*, ed. Hanna Liss and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 103–120; John M. Russell, *Sennacherib's Palace Without Rival at Nineveh* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 223–240; Ariel Bagg, "Where is the Public? A New Look at the Brutality Scenes in Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions and Art," in *Making Pictures of War.* Realia et Imaginaria *in the Iconology of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Laura Battini, Archaeopress Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology 1 (Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing Ltd., 2016), 57–82; Ludovico Portuese, "'Merciful' Messages in the Reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II: The Land of Suḫu," *EVO* 39 (2016): 179–197; Ludovico Portuese, "Concealed Paternalism of the Assyrian King: Which Audience?" *Mesopotamia* 52 [2017]: 111–128; Ludovico Portuese, *Life at Court. Ideology and Audience in the Late Assyrian Palace*, marru 11 [Münster: Zaphon, 2020]).

[5] Amy Rebecca Gansell, "Prioritized Presence: Rulers' Images in the Neo-Assyrian Palace as Devices of Elite Ideological Memory," in *Envisioning the Past Through Memories: How Memory Shaped Ancient Near Eastern Societies*, ed. Davide Nadali, Cultural Memory and History in Antiquity 3 (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 92.

[6] Anton Moortgat, *Tammuz: Der Unsterblichkeitsglaube in der vorderasiatischen Bildkunst* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1949); Mehmet-Ali Ataç, *Art and Immortality in the Ancient Near East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

notion basically points out the overarching theme in the art and thought of the ancient Near East, which are permeated by concepts of regeneration, conquest of evil and death, immortalization. Suffice it to mention the regular celebration of the ancient Mesopotamian *akītu*, Tammuz's revival every spring, or Gilgamesh's quest of immortality. Eternity and immortality thus build on cyclicality and constant regeneration, with the consequence that both notions are not timeless, but represent another mode of temporality characterized by cyclicality and renewal. As pointed out by Ataç, eternity and immortality fall within the general juxtaposition of the two conceptions of time in ancient Near East, which scholars have distinguished as historical or chronological, characterized by a linear configuration, and mythical or ritual, characterized by cyclicality and renewal.[7] It is the latter that incorporates processes of immortalization. This is what, in other words, is asked of future generations in respect to the royal palace: in the desire to exit the endless cycles of death and rebirth, the author (king and his scribes) requires the cyclical renewal and regeneration of the palace, thus of the author's memory. Both modes of temporality intertwine in the Near Eastern conception of time and spark a consciousness of the future as embedded in the past. This makes clear also why Assyrian kings record in their inscriptions a past or historical event for a future audience. Such a conception of time greatly diverges from our modern perspective: while we advance along a timeline that has us "facing the future," the Assyrian kings advanced along the same time-line but with their eyes fixed on the past. In brief, they moved, as it were, back-to-front – backing into the future.[8] Thus, ancient Assyrian culture was focused on the past, and, ultimately, the starting point of all existence. The progress of Assyria relied on this conception: kings' deeds in the past were "in front" of later kings rather than "behind."[9] This is why each Assyrian king states in his inscriptions that he did things that no prior king had ever done, with the intentional effect of resulting in a reaction in his audience such as "I never saw it that way before."[10] As Cancik-Kirschbaum notes "Der König muss seine Vorgänger übertreffen, muss sich einen Namen machen, der dauerhaft erhalten bleibt und sich auf diese Weise seiner „Geschichtlichkeit bewusst werden"."[11]

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[7] Ataç, *Art and Immortality*, 18–19 refers to the two modes of temporality as profane time and sacral time. On the notions of cyclical time, the perception of time and eternity in ancient Mesopotamia, see Gebhard J. Selz, "Vom "vergangenen Geschehen" zur "Zukunftsbewältigung": Überlegungen zur Rolle der Schrift in Ökonomie und Geschichte," in *Munuscula Mesopotamica: Festschrift für Johannes Renger*, ed. Barbara Böck et al., AOAT 267 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1999), 465–470, 507–512; Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, "Zeit und Ewigkeit: ein Versuch zu altorientalischen Konzeptionen," in *Zeit und Ewigkeit als Raum göttlichen Handelns*, ed. Reinhard G. Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann, BZAW 390 (Berlin and New York: W. de Gruyter, 2009), 29–51; Dina Katz, "Time in Death and Afterlife: The Concept of Time and the Belief in Afterlife," in *Time and History in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 56th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Barcelona 26–30 July 2010*, ed. Lluis Feliu et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 117–125; Àngel M. Rajadell, "Mesopotamian Idea of Time Through Modern Eyes (Disruption and Continuity)," in *Time and History in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 56th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Barcelona 26–30 July 2010*, ed. Lluis Feliu et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 211–228.

[8] Stefan M. Maul, "Walking Backwards into the Future," in *Given World and Time: Temporalities in Context*, ed. Tyrus Miller (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2008), 15–16.

[9] Davide Nadali, *Gli Assiri: Storia di una civiltà* (Roma: Carocci, 2018), 157.

The notion of "eternity" thus becomes clear in the light of the conception of time in the ancient Near East, in particular in ancient Assyria. The reason why kings were then led to emphasize this notion in their royal inscriptions is because any king laying the foundation of a new edifice was certainly aware that after his death a new ruler could reside in his building.[12] This is well demonstrated, in practical terms, by the Northwest Palace, which was used until Sargon II's reign, 150 years after its completion, and also visited by later kings. Ashurnasirpal II's son, Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE), continued the construction work throughout Kalḫu, and probably kept the Northwest Palace as his royal residence. Shalmaneser III's involvement in the construction of the citadel is clear at the East Gate, the only entrance in the citadel-wall leading up from the outer town. Under Shalmaneser III, the palace also probably reached its eventual size about 26,400 m^2.[13] Similarly, the fact that Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 BCE) decorated his new royal palace at Kalḫu in the manner of Ashurnasirpal II's palace, certainly suggests that he visited the latter and had the chance to inspect it.[14] During most of Sargon II's reign, the Northwest Palace must still have also formed the primary palace of the empire.[15] Sargon restored the palace and his interventions are described in a 22-line text that was inscribed above Ashurnasirpal's Standard Inscription. After finishing the restoration of the palace, Sargon invited the gods of Kalḫu and celebrated the palace's re-dedication with festivities.[16] This indicates that the Northwest Palace was still visited by a number of persons, that activities and ceremonies of state would have taken place, and that it was the place where the royal family resided most of the time. Therefore, reliefs and

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[10] Portuese, *Life at Court*, 266.

[11] Cancik-Kirschbaum, "Zeit und Ewigkeit," 45.

[12] It should be pointed out that royal palaces were completed near the end of the king's reign, just before his death. For instance, the Northwest Palace was completed and inaugurated about 864–860 (John M. Russell, *The Writing on the Wall: Studies in the Architectural Context of Late Assyrian Palace Inscriptions*, MC 9 [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999], 44 fn. 64; Julian E. Reade, "The Evolution of Assyrian Imperial Architecture: Political Implications and Uncertainties," *Mesopotamia* 46 [2011]: 114), so it was mostly used by his successors.

[13] Julian E. Reade, "The Ziggurat and Temples of Nimrud," *Iraq* 64 (2002): 138; Reade, "Assyrian Imperial Architecture," 114.

[14] For the reliefs of Tiglath-Pileser III, see Richard D. Barnett and Margarete Falkner, *The Sculptures of Aššur-naṣir-apli II (883–859 B.C.), Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 B.C.), Esarhaddon (681–669 B.C.) from the Central and South-West Palaces at Nimrud* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1962).

[15] David Kertai, *The Architecture of Late Assyrian Royal Palaces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 84–85.

[16] The inscription is carved into the doorway of Room U. For the text, see RINAP 2 73.

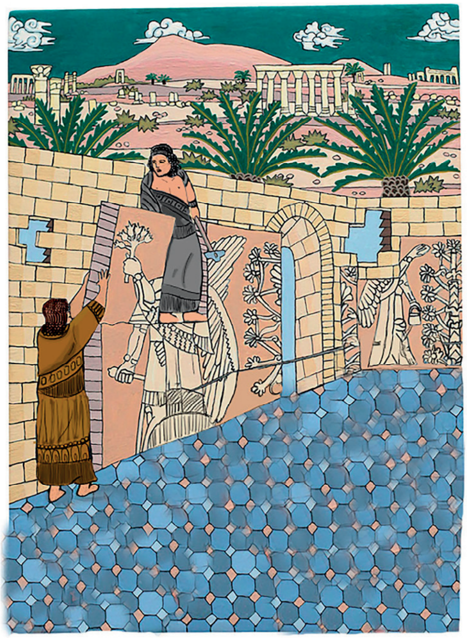

Fig. 1: Assyrians remove sculptured slabs from the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Kalḫu (drawn by Maria Pia M. Portuese, inspired by an original painting by Alina Gallo, "Isis Loots at Nimrud, 2016").

inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal were still exposed at the time of Sargon.[17] There seems to be no evidence for official occupation of the building after Sargon's death, though Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE) removed sculptured slabs from the palace and stored them on the walls of his Southwest Palace at Kalḫu in preparation for reuse (Fig. 1).[18] Ashurbanipal (669–631 BCE) certainly also visited the palace, and repairs to the Nabu Temple by Sin-shar-ishkun (629–612 BCE) and numerous tablets from that time found in the Northwest Palace testify to the palace's survival, at least as a storehouse, until the last years of the Neo-Assyrian empire.[19]

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[17] The royal correspondence dating to the time of Sargon II proves that most of the activities, such as the reception of tribute and audience gifts, took place at Kalḫu, most likely in the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II (see, for instance, SAA 1 29; SAA 1 110).

[18] Pauline Albenda, "Wall Reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II from the Southwest Palace, Nimrud," in *Veysel Donbaz'a Sunulan Yazılar, DUB.SAR É.DUB.BA.A: Studies Presented in Honour of Veysel Donbaz*, ed. Sevket Dönmez (Istanbul: Ege Yayinlari, 2010), 11–26; Russell, *The Writing on the Wall*, 147–148.

[19] Nicholas Postgate and Julian E. Reade, "Kalḫu," *RlA* 5 (1976–1989): 311, 322.

In the light of these uses and re-uses of the palace over time, the visual effect of its interior decoration – mostly made of reliefs lining the walls – was certainly not "eternal" or "immortal" and may have sparked a twofold reaction: some reliefs might have been conceived as a source of inspiration and emulation, while others might, because of their age, have appeared mysterious and puzzling, with their meaning lost accordingly. Focusing on the subject of the Virginia Theological Seminary reliefs, I juxtapose two possible approaches to understanding the life and death, fortune and misfortune of the Kalḫu reliefs: one iconographic, referred to the possible perception and interpretation of the reliefs as conceived by Ashurnasirpal II's contemporaries; and the other intericonical, referred to the way later kings perceived and (re)interpreted those reliefs.

2. GENIES: APOTROPAIC SIGNIFICANCE

The relief held at Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia, shows two humanoid, winged, bird-headed figures, most often called genies or genii, carrying a cone and a bucket and symmetrically flanking a stylized tree (Fig. 2).[20] Together with the human-headed genies, these figures are found repeated over and over in several areas of the Northwest Palace and represent the most widespread subject in the figurative program of Ashurnasirpal II.[21]

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[20] Genies belong to the group of *Zwischenwesen*, figures that stand "in-between" humans and gods. They are substantially distinguished from demons, because of their protective or beneficent role towards humans. The Western term "angel" might encapsulate this role and the angel-demon model could be helpful for understanding the Mesopotamian realm. However, a dualistic polarization of good and evil forces, which is a feature of monotheistic religions, can be inappropriate for the polytheistic Mesopotamian religious thought (for a taxonomy of *Zwischenwesen* in Mesopotamian religion, see Karen Sonik, "Mesopotamian Conceptions of the Supernatural: A Taxonomy of *Zwischenwesen*," *ARG* 14 [2013]: 103–116). The composition showing winged figures flanking the stylized tree was certainly not new and its origin seems already well established in the 14th century northern Mesopotamian tradition. In the late Middle Assyrian period, the form of the stylized tree flanked by bird-headed genies appear in Assyrian glyptic and painting, thus suggesting that Ashurnasirpal II's repertoire has its roots in a specific visual tradition. The meaning, however, may have changed through time (John M. Russell, "The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud: Issues in the Research and Presentation of Assyrian Art," *AJA* 102/4 [1998]: 693–696).

[21] For the distribution of the motif throughout the palace according to a detailed classification built on features and spatial context, see Philipp Serba, *Apotropäische Reliefs aus dem Nordwest-Palast Aššurnaṣirpals II. in Nimrūd* (Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, 2018), 85–88, 198–202. The relief at Virginia Theological Seminary, compared to other examples from the Northwest Palace, bears some prominent differences. From an iconographic viewpoint, the stylized tree is commonly characterized by a garland of palmettes surrounding its crown and trunk. The relief at the Seminary, however, does not show any garland but only a series of unconnected palmettes which do not overarch the crown. Additionally, at a personal close inspection, there seems to be no evidence of engravings on the clothing of the two figures, which very often feature scenes from the reliefs from the Northwest Palace, although not always (for engravings, see Peter V. Bartl, *Die Ritzverzierungen auf den Relieforthostaten Assurnaṣirpals II. aus Kalḫu*, BagF 25 [Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 2014]). From a textual viewpoint, as already pointed out in the past, the inscription differs

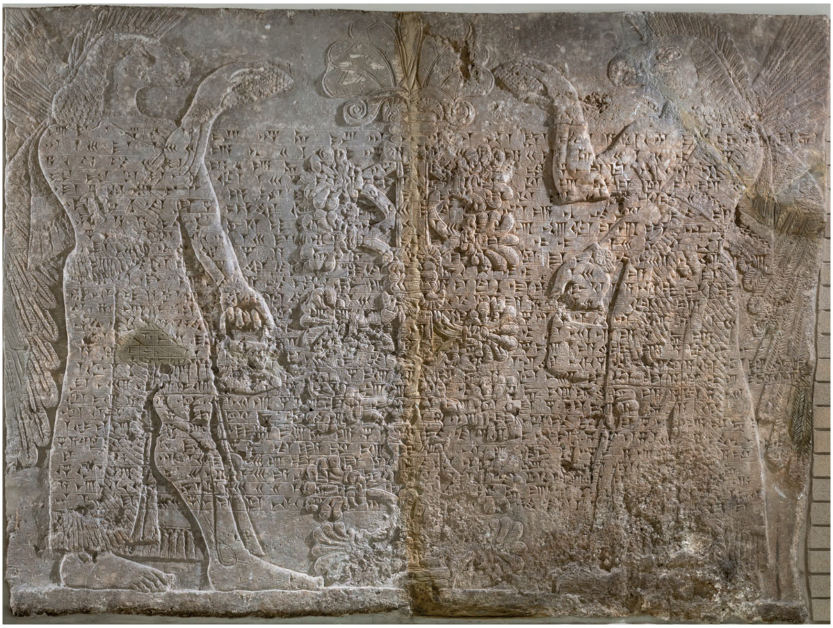

Fig. 2: Virginia Theological Seminary relief (© Virginia Theological Seminary).

Several were identified through textual sources and associated with the antediluvian *apkallu*-sages and distinguished in human- and bird-*apkallū*.[22] The physical features could suggest that they represent different entities, although it

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from other inscriptions from the Northwest Palace compositionally, because its contents are slightly different, and varies from the standard form because it shows deeply cut unusually large characters that cover the figures from the shoulder to the ankle rather than extending through the middle band only. Scholars have used the unusual inscription and the effect of fire on the reliefs as elements to exclude their provenance from the Northwest Palace and to indicate the Ninurta temple as the original location, since it was destroyed by fire (John B. Stearns, *Reliefs from the Palace of Ashurnaṣirpal II*, AfO Beih. 15 [Graz: Im Selbstverlage des Herausgebers, 1961], 23, 45–46; Julian E. Reade, "Twelve Ashurnasirpal Reliefs," *Iraq* 27/2 (1965): 129; James F. Ross, "A Note on the Ashurnasirpal Reliefs at Virginia Theological Seminary," *AfO* 25 [1974–1977]: 166–169). Although the differences with the Northwest Palace reliefs are clear, the provenance cannot be ascertained with confidence and the Northwest Palace might still be a good candidate (in this regard, see the most recent analysis by J. Caleb Howard, "Three Obscure Assyrian Reliefs and Their Inscription," *RA* 115 [2021]: 89–123).

[22] Julian E. Reade, "Assyrian Architectural Decoration: Techniques and Subject-Matter," *BagM* 10 (1979): 35–43; see Frans A. M. Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts*, CM 1 (Groningen: Styx&PP Publications, 1992), 65–79 for a discussion on variations within the group of *apkallū*.

is their distribution within the palace that might suggest a different role.[23] In fact, while the human-headed genie is quite commonly depicted along the walls and at doorways of the palace, bird-headed genies are scattered in a more modest way, being located mostly at a few doorways and in private rooms.[24] In any event, both human and bird-headed genies have been interpreted as giving protection and blessing to the building, and this seems confirmed by the textual evidence that describes the functions of the objects they hold.[25]

Bucket and cone represent the most common combination of objects held by genies and were identified from texts with the *banduddû* (ritual bucket) and *mullilu* (purification instrument or cleaner).[26] The action performed by genies was most likely that of sprinkling by dipping the purifier in the bucket, and then flipped onto whatever or whoever was to be purified (Fig. 3). In this respect, a Neo-Assyrian text describes the duties of priests of the Ashur temple, and lists the cleanliness of some temple spaces such as the door: "To sweep the area from the Kunuš-kadru gate to the threshold, to guard the gods of the *šaḫūru* anteroom, to fill the purification cones, […] is the responsibility of […]."[27] In this instance, the purification cones belong to the area of the door and the anteroom, suggesting that they were used in connection with this space. In rituals we read also that the effect is the "release" of the threatened man by means of holy water sprinkled by the purification instrument or cleaner: "take the bucket …, bring water from the mouth of the twin rivers, over that water cast your holy spell, purify it with your holy incantation, and sprinkle that water over the man […]."[28]

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[23] The functions of the genies, both human- and bird-headed, within the palace may have mostly depended on the gesture they perform (raising the right hand) or the objects they carry, which include goat, tufted rosettes, alternating tufted rosettes and cones, mace, stag, palmettes, palm frond, kid/lamb, pomegranates, rosettes (see Dieter Kolbe, *Die Reliefprogramme religiös-mythologischen Charakters in neuassyrischen Palästen: Die Figurentypen, ihre Benennung und Bedeutung* [Frankfurt am Main, Bern: Peter Lang, 1981], 14–54; Ludovico Portuese, "The Genies of the Northwest Palace of Assurnasirpal II," *Ash-Sharq* 4 [2020]: 253–291).

[24] With the term "private" I refer to the rooms or spaces whose access was not immediate but hindered or served by a tortuous path, made of single doorways, corridors, or rooms. The number of bird-headed genies in the palace is definitely lower than the number of human-headed genies. The former are located in the following rooms and doorways: Room B, door a leading to Room C; the walls of Room F; Room G, doors c and b leading to Courtyard Y; door d leading to Room N; Room H, in correspondence of the ventilation shafts; Room I, the whole lower register and door b; Room S, door c leading to Room X (see also Portuese, "The Genies," 268–269).

[25] Barbara Parker Mallowan, "Magic and Ritual in the Northwest Palace Reliefs," in *Essays on Near Eastern Art and Archaeology in Honor of Charles Kyrle Wilkinson*, ed. Prudence O. Harper and Holly Pittman (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983), 33–39. Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits*, 65–79; Portuese, "The Genies," 258–261; Serba, *Apotropäische Reliefs*, 37–43.

[26] Parker Mallowan, "Magic and Ritual," 33; Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits*, 66–67.

[27] SAA 20 50: ii 20–ii 25.

[28] Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits*, 66.

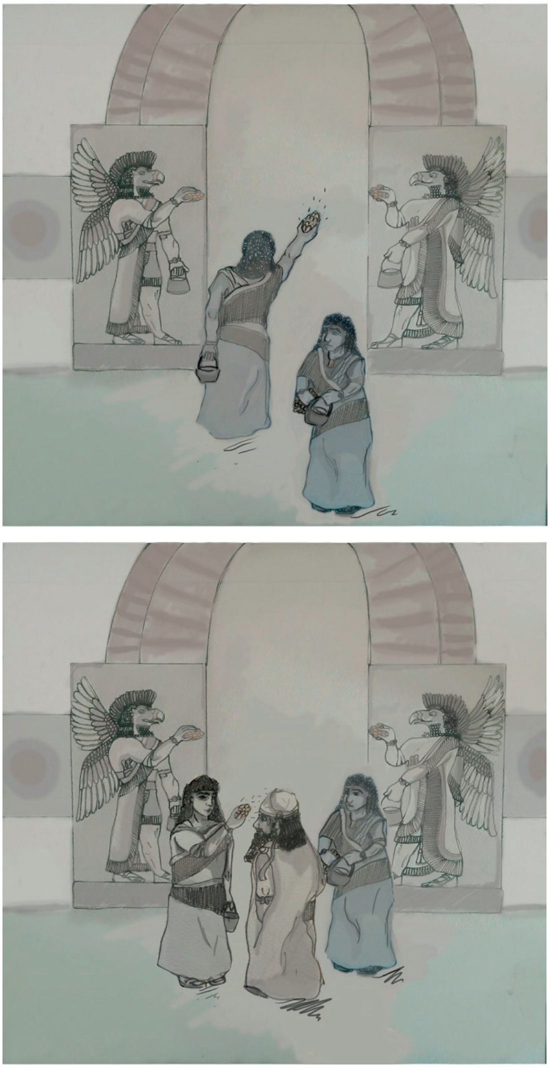

Fig. 3: Reconstruction of the ritual for entrance/building (above) and for persons (below) (drawn by Maria Pia M. Portuese).

Thus, to purify an object or a person the water was basic and an instrument that allowed the water to clean the subject or object was essential for the performance of the action. The nature of the cone is still debated and scholars have a bias towards two interpretations: male inflorescence of the date-palm and cone of a coniferous tree.[29] Although either of these readings may be valid, one must note that there is no explicit textual reference to the material the purifier was made of, but only to its function. As a consequence, the device, cleaner or purifier, could be made of any material and its shape was deemed important in order to easily sprinkle the water. This implies that the word *mullilu* may have referred, in my view, to any object acting as aspergillum rather than to a specific vegetal oval-shaped object. Therefore, definitive answers cannot be offered and since – as previous studies have shown – the identification of many botanical representations on Assyrian reliefs might be always doubtful, I question the readability and reliability of vegetal motifs in the Assyrian art: some of them might have been the "hybrid" creation of artists who combined the features of distinct plants, flowers and fruits.[30]

In sum, the apotropaic value of genies may partly explain their reiterated presence throughout the Northwest Palace, especially at doorways. Doorways in fact were ritually significant in ancient Mesopotamia, since they controlled the admittance to and exclusion from the palace, the seat of the king. The act of crossing thresholds and passing doors symbolized the transition from one part of the world to another realm, but also implied the access or rejection of potential good or evil forces, with the consequence that doorways required a high degree of protection. Genies, along with heavy doors and locks, were accordingly essential for the protection of the whole palace and its occupants.[31]

3. The Stylized Tree: Apotropaic and Transcendent Significance

If the identity of the genies is well defined by texts, by contrast the nature of the stylized tree remains unclear. In literature, some standard names designate the tree as “tree of life,” implying biblical associations, or “sacred tree,” presupposing that the tree is associated to the deities and religious sphere in general. Since both terms involve a certain amount of presupposition about its function or symbolic meaning, the name “stylized tree” seems the most neutral definition for such a motif.[32] In respect to its actual nature, as already stated, vegetal motifs on Assyrian reliefs may have been “hybrid” or imaginative creations of artists, perhaps, even representing an actual wooden or metal object.[33] Nevertheless, scholars associated the stylized tree with the palm tree or suggested that it was inspired by the palm tree.[34] The closeness of the stylized tree to the palm tree cannot be apparently discounted, although no textual evidence offers further hints for new alternatives.

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[29] For references to previous literature, see Stearns, *Reliefs from the Palace*, 24 fn. 43; Barbara N. Porter, "Sacred Trees, Date Palms, and the Royal Persona of Ashurnasirpal II," *JNES* 52/2 (1993): 129–139.

[30] For the difficulties involved in understanding the representations of the tufted rosettes, the lotus flower buds, the pomegranates, or the poppy heads which appear in the times of Ashurnasirpal II and especially of Sargon II, see Pavol Hnila, "Pomegranates or lotus fruits? (Assyrian genii and their hanging attributes)," *Anodos. Studies of the Ancient World 2 in Honour of Mária Novotná* (Trnava: Trnavská Univerzitá, 2002), 121–131; Ludovico Portuese, "The Throne Room of Aššurnaṣirpal II: A Multisensory Experience," in *Distant Impressions: The Senses in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Ainsley Hawthorn and Anne-Caroline Rendu Loisel (University Park, Pennsylvania: Eisenbrauns, 2019), 82–83; Portuese, "The Genies," 258; Portuese, *Life at Court*, 46–47.

[31] As for doors and locks in the late Assyrian royal palaces, see Karen Radner, "Gatekeepers and Lock Masters: The Control of Access in Assyrian Palaces," in *Your Praise is Sweet: A Memorial Volume for Jeremy Black from Students, Colleagues and Friends*, ed. Heather D. Baker et al. (London: British Institute for the Study of Iraq, 2010), 269–280; Portuese, "The Genies," 253–254; Portuese, *Life at Court*, 33–37.

In the light of the apotropaic value of the genies, it seems reasonable to suspect that – as suggested by previous scholars – one of the functions of the stylized tree which the genies flank was apotropaic accordingly.[35] If one considers the stylized tree as based on a palm with palmette, which occur in Assyrian texts as apotropaic instruments for exorcism, it thus was most likely used to defend doors and corners from evil intrusions, protected the image and person of the king, and created highly secure spaces within the palace.[36] The relationship with the genies was probably not one of mutual dependence, but rather functional similarity, since the tree occurs alone on corners and the genies occur at doorways without the image of the tree. Nevertheless, one cannot exclude that the stylized tree may have been not only a source of protection in itself but also a beneficiary of the apotropaic and other rituals going on around it.[37]

From a pure symbolic perspective, the stylized tree motif went down in the history of academic studies as a symbol of Assyrian kingship or as a complex esoteric emblem of the Assyrian pantheon and religion.[38] The stylized tree was also seen as a symbol of abundance and fertility, and the flanking genies were interpreted as performing the fertilization of the female flowers of the date palm with the male flower cluster.[39] This reading was adapted to a more symbolic interpretation of the motif rather than an actual practice, by associating the image of the palm-inspired stylized tree with a goddess, so that it came to be regarded as a marker of femininity. On the other hand, the cone-shaped object, the product of a conifer, was accordingly a symbol of masculinity.[40]

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[32] Russell, “The Program of the Palace,” 687.

[33] Ursula Seidl and Walther Sallaberger, “Der „Heilige Baum“,” *AfO* 51 (2005–2006): 54–74; Mariana Giovino, *The Assyrian Sacred Tree: A History of Interpretations*, OBO 230 (Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 177–196.

[34] See, especially, Porter, “Sacred Trees,” 129–139 and related bibliography. For a discussion about the shared proximity of the stylized tree and the palm tree to the king’s sphere, see Seth Richardson, “An Assyrian Garden of Ancestors: Room I, Northwest Palace, Kalḫu,” *SAAB* 13 (1999–2001): 162; Nathan Morello, “A GIŠ on a Tree: Interactions between Images and Inscriptions on Neo-Assyrian Monuments,” in *Understanding Material Text Cultures: A Multidisciplinary View*, ed. Markus Hilgert, MTK 9 (Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter), 40.

[35] Parker Mallowan, “Magic and Ritual,” 33–39; Barbara Parker Mallowan, “The Assyrian Tree,” *Sumer* 42 (1986): 141–145; Russell, “The Program of the Palace,” 655–715. See Giovino, *The Assyrian Sacred Tree* for a review of previous studies.

[36] Parker Mallowan, “Magic and Ritual,” 38; Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits*, 17: ll. 246–249; Russell, “The Program of the Palace,” 691; Portuese, “The Throne Room,” 73–74.

[37] Reade, “Assyrian Architectural Decoration,” 43.

[38] For the stylized tree as a symbol of Assyrian kingship, see Richardson, “An Assyrian Garden,” 145–216; Brian Brown, “Kingship and Ancestral Cult in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud,” *JANER* 10/1 (2010): 1–53; Morello, “A GIŠ on a Tree,” 36–41. As a complex esoteric emblem, see

Beyond its potential associations with the notion of kingship, abundance and fertility, I believe that the stylized tree was originally a literal tree and any symbolic association must be therefore connected to its primeval nature. It is not easy to expose its original meaning in Assyrian thought, because the tree is necessarily closely bound to the labyrinth of vegetal motifs or vegetal cults in antiquity. Thus, leaving aside all the religious or political implications or rituals connected with the stylized tree, I think it might be wise to circumscribe the discussion to a vegetal motif like the tree which represents something that renews itself, in a kind of immortality. The basic question one should ask in this context is: what common belief(s) underlay the choice of specific vegetal motifs in ancient Assyria? One may reasonably note that of the many vegetal representations, the rosette, the lotus flower and the stylized tree were all well distinguished plants/flowers which populated the figurative program of many kings, from Ashurnasirpal II to Ashurbanipal. The reasons lying behind this choice might have had its roots in the natural properties of each plant/flower. For instance, as pointed out by Gebhard J. Selz, in Sumerian, since the rosette refers to the beginning of life and the creation of the world, the rosette-flower was interpreted as a stylized representation of whatever blossom had connotations of a magically ensured general notion of life.[41] Moreover, the significance of the rosette becomes clear once one observes the rosette in nature. In fact, as noted by Irene J. Winter: "Plants that grow with radiating leaves lying close to the ground (called basal leaves, or rosettes) are among the hardiest of the plant kingdom, living in conditions unsuitable for most plants, resisting weather changes,

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Simo Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy," *JNES* 52/3 (1993): 161–208.

[39] Porter, "Sacred Trees," 129–139. See also Irene J. Winter, "Ornament and the 'Rhetoric of Abundance' in Assyria," *ErIsr* 27 (2003): 253; Dominik Bonatz, "The Performance of Visual Narratives in Imperial Art: Two Case Studies from Assyria and the Khmer State," in *Rethinking Visual Narratives from Asia: Intercultural and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. A. Green (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 197.

[40] Paul Collins, "Trees and Gender in Assyrian Art", *Iraq* 68 (2006): 99–107.

[41] Gebhard J. Selz, "Early Dynastic Vessels in 'Ritual' Contexts," *WZKM* 94 (2004): 201; Gebhard J. Selz, "Plant Metaphors: On the Plant of Rejuvenation," in *From Source to History: Studies on Ancient Near Eastern Worlds and Beyond. Dedicated to Giovanni Battista Lanfranchi on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday on June 23, 2014*, ed. Salvatore Gaspa et al., AOAT 412 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 664.

and reproducing rapidly."[42] Thus, the rosette might represent that which endures and generates, and may have been an appropriate symbol for goddesses associated with fertility accordingly, such as Ishtar.[43] In much the same way, I suggested elsewhere that the lotus flower might be identified with the "plant of life" as used in Neo-Assyrian texts, especially letters.[44] In nature, the lotus flower (*Nymphaea caerulea*), which opens and closes daily, flowering from sunrise to midday, was suggested to be a constant reminder of regeneration and immortality, acting as a symbol of hope for living and dead.[45] Accordingly, the lotus flower was used metaphorically by the Assyrian king to indicate his status/role as a life-giving ruler. Finally, if the stylized tree may have drawn some of its inspiration from the date palm, the latter shows a particular resistance to arid environments and withstands large temperature fluctuations.[46] Accordingly, the date palm was reasonably associated with longevity in the Sumerian poem *Inana and Šukaletuda*, which describes a rural agricultural landscape in Sumer, a vegetable garden, and refers to the date palm as "a tree growing forever."[47] Perhaps not by chance, in ancient Egypt the date palm was also connected to the length of time. The palm branch hieroglyph stood for "year," and multiple palm branches expressed the concept "millions of years," particularly in relation to the years of reign of the king.[48] In this respect, Ataç has proposed a further fruitful parallelism between Assyria and ancient Egypt: he compared the Assyrian stylized tree with the so-called Egyptian *djed* pillar, where in both instances the king is depicted in relation and proximity to the tree and erecting or embracing the *djed* pillar. The concept of *djed* in ancient Egypt – along with the related term *neheh* – is complex and mostly deals with connotations of stability, continuity, and longevity, eternity.[49] In the solar theology of the New Kingdom, the formula for the creator-god Atum was "the master of endless repetition" (*neheh*) and the "great one of endless duration" (*djed*). Accordingly, what Ataç rightly sees in the stylized tree repeated over and over in the rooms of the Northwest Palace is "a symbol of 'eternal duration,' the 'sacred tree,' appearing in 'endless repetition.'" [50]

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[42] Irene J. Winter, "Carved Ivory Furniture Panels from Nimrud: A Coherent Subgroup of the North Syrian Style," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 11 (1976): 46.

[43] See also Ludovico Portuese, "Metaphorical Allusions to Life-Giving Plants in Neo-Assyrian Texts and Images," *Antiguo Oriente* 16 (2018): 97–98.

[44] Portuese, "Metaphorical Allusions," 93–116; Ludovico Portuese, "Live and Let Live Images: Metaphor and Interpictoriality in Neo-Assyrian Art," in *Researching Metaphor in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Marta Pallavidini and Ludovico Portuese, Philippika 141 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2020), 123–127.

[45] Winter, "Carved Ivory Furniture," 45; Dominik Bonatz, *Das syro-hethitische Grabdenkmal: Untersuchungen zur Entstehung einer neuen Bildgattung in der Eisenzeit im nordsyrisch-südostanatolischen Raum* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2000), 100–102.

[46] http://www.fao.org/3/Y4360E/y4360e08.htm.

[47] Jeremy Black et al., *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 199. In this respect, see also Konrad Volk, *Inanna und Šukaletuda: Zur historisch-politischen Deutung eines sumerischen Literaturwerkes*, SANTAG 3 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995).

[48] Mehmet-Ali Ataç, ""Time and Eternity" in the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud," in *Assyrian Reliefs from the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II: A Cultural Biography*, ed. Ada Cohen and Steven E. Kangas (Hanover, New Hampshire: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College and University Press of New England), 174; Ataç, *Art and Immortality*, 212 fn. 68.

In summary, it seems that, as noted by Gebhard J. Selz, the various terms applied by scholars on vegetal motifs of the Mesopotamian textual and visual tradition – such as Plant of Rejuvenation, the Plant of Heartbeat, the Plant of Life, the Tree of Life, the Sacred Tree, the Bread of Life and the Primeval Flower – not only "reflect the more or less successful attempt to render the varying notions behind these vaguely connected Mesopotamian terms," but also highlight the metaphorical use of plants referring to life or the renewal of youth which is based on their natural properties. In other words, many – perhaps all – the vegetal motifs depicted on Assyrian reliefs, included the stylized tree, and mentioned in texts had connotations of stability, continuity, longevity, life, renewal, eternity, because these might have been the notions that some plants evoked in nature. As a consequence, the visual rendering of vegetal motifs had to bear or display these connotations, and artists' efforts in this direction might be aptly glimpsed in the visual code of the stylized tree flanked by genies.

4. GENIES FLANKING THE STYLIZED TREE: PSYCHOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Texts are not always of assistance in the understanding of images. The use of written speech may limit or distort the viewer's perception, comprehension, and appreciation of a work of art, be it a painting or an ancient sculpture. "The visual things cannot be conveyed by verbal language" asserted Rudolf Arnheim in his volume on the psychological approach to art; he continues: "Words can wait and must wait until our mind distills, from the uniqueness of the experience, generalities that can be grasped by our senses, conceptualized, and labeled. […] All seeing is in the realm of the psychologist, and no one has ever discussed the processes of creating or experiencing art without talking psychology."[51] Ernst H. Gombrich also delves into the relationship between art and spectator and the psychology of perception as the key to understanding art, and states that "it cannot be sufficient to repeat the old opposition between 'seeing' and 'knowing', or to insist in a general way that all representation is based on conventions. We have to get down to analysing afresh, in psychological terms, what is actually involved in the process of image making and image reading."[52] The focus of these authors is on how and why people create and appreciate works of art and they conceive art as a thing of the mind, suggesting that any approach to art must be always psychological.[53] Psychology thus has an old interest in art, it entered into the field of art to understand works of art, artists and their relationship with the audience. Not only art, artist, audience, but also aesthetics – the branch of philosophy specifically concerned with the nature of the beautiful – all fall within the purview of psychology. Psychology has, in respect to art, delimited two principal approaches: one is *humanistic*, that is to say it is concerned with emotional and motivational components of art, and one is *scientific*, that is to say it is concerned with perceptual and cognitive aspects of art. Both approaches are predicated on the utility, acceptability, creativity, aesthetics, and meaningfulness of explanation or interpretation in art.[54] Therefore, what follows is an attempt to detect the emotional reactions, behaviors and cognitive operations of a past audience related to the motif of the Assyrian stylized tree flanked by genies. Although the motif is certainly limitless in conception and scope, its visual code may have sparked a desired and specific reaction to it, reactions that the psychology of art may assist in disclosing.

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[49] Jan Assmann, *Zeit und Ewigkeit im alten Ägypten: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Ewigkeit*, Abhandlungen der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter Heidelberg), 12, 29.

[50] Ataç, "Time and Eternity," 169–177.

[51] Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 2–3.

If we take for granted that Assyrian palace reliefs were most likely expected to be seen by a select audience, one should be aware that patron and artists – the king and his unidentified practitioners and executors –[55] made every effort to produce a work of art that contained the necessary strategies or artistic devices to spark an emotional and cognitive reaction in the viewer, to invoke the spectator to process it for a coherent desirable and desired experience. In the field of Greek art, these strategies or devices have been called by Antonio M. Duarte and Manolis I. Stefanakis "cues," that is to say "cues" adopted and used by artists to control spectators' reactions, their emotions, attention, sensorial processing, perception, comprehension, interpretation. Each of these processes involves mental activity describable in terms of cognitive "dispositions," that is to say the ways of reacting to the stimulus provided by a work of art.[56] In detail, the psychology of art has identified a range of correspondent "cues" that catch attention to the image by activating a specific significant reaction to it. Among these, symmetry, which often features in Assyrian motifs, was identified not only as an expression of ideals of formal beauty combined with a concept of world order, but also as a "cue" that aims to seize the viewer's gaze and arouses her/his attention.[57]

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[52] Ernst H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon Press, 1984, seventh edition 1960), 19.

[53] Max J. Friedländer, *Von Kunst und Kennerschaft* (Oxford: Cassirer und Oprecht, 1946), 128 quoted in Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 3.

[54] Marc H. Bornstein, "Psychology and Art," in *Psychology and Its Allied Disciplines*, ed. Marc H. Bornstein (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1984), 2–3.

[55] In the ancient Near Eastern sources, although there is mention of the craftsmanship involved in the execution of the king's projects, nonetheless there is no explicit reference to specific artistic personalities (in this respect, see Ann C. Gunter, "Artists and Ancient Near Eastern Art," in *Investigating Artistic Environments in the Ancient Near East* [Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1990], 9–11; Ann C. Gunter, "The 'Art' of the 'Ancient Near East'," in *A Companion to Ancient Near Eastern Art* (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), 1–21; Davide Nadali, "Categorizing Images and Objects: Where and How Ancient Artefacts Might be Evaluated," in *Proceedings of the 8th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East, 30 April–4 May 2012, University of Warsaw, Volume 1: Plenary Sessions, Township and Villages, High and Low – The Minor Arts for the Elite and for the Populace*, ed. Piotr Bieliński et al. [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014], 467–476; Davide Nadali and Lorenzo Verderame, "Neo-Assyrian Statues of Gods and Kings in Context," *AoF* 46/2 [2019]: 234–248). In any event, the word artist will be used throughout the paper, without drawing controversial distinctions between artist, artisan, and craftsman, since "artist" may refer to anyone who paints, draws, or makes sculptures.

Symmetry has fascinated artists and art historians for a long time and it was often linked with beauty and balance. The psychologist Arnehim, for instance, states that "Symmetry […] is a most elementary manner of creating equilibrium."[58] In much the same way, mathematicians and scientists have acknowledged the properties of symmetry, as shown by the German mathematician, physicist and philosopher Hermann Weyl: "In the one sense symmetric means something like well-proportioned, well-balanced, and symmetry denotes that sort of concordance of several parts by which they integrate into a whole. *Beauty* is bound up with symmetry."[59] Thus symmetry imposes what Gombrich has called "the sense of order,"[60] which contrasts with its antonymic term, asymmetry, instead governed by disorder: "Symmetry signifies rest and binding, asymmetry motion and loosening, the one order and law, the other arbitrariness and accident, the one formal rigidity and constraint, the other life, play and freedom" declares the art historian Dagobert Frey.[61] Arnehim furthers this concept also on the cognitive level: "symmetry may be said to be a special case of the scale leading from simplicity to complexity […]. Simplicity is the state toward which all configurations of physical and psychological forces tend. This being the "natural" tendency, a preference for simplicity differs in principle from the striving for its opposite, complexity. Symmetry requires a less specific explanation than any deviation from it. Correspondingly, a taste for symmetry is based on a more elementary propensity of the mind than its opposite."[62] In other words, the distinction between symmetry and asymmetry may correspond to the dichotomy simplicity-complexity, and symmetry seems to be generally preferred to asymmetry.

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[56] Antonio M. Duarte and Manolis I. Stefanakis, "The Use of Cues for Attention in Ancient Greek Art: Aspects that Influence Concentration in the Work of Art and its Elements," *Arte, Individuo y Sociedad* 27/3 (2015): 518. See also Ludovico Portuese, "Towards a (Neuro-)Psychology of Art: Cues for Attention in Mesopotamian Art," *Ash-Sharq* 4 (2020): 157–186.

[57] Other identified "cues" are amplification, contrast, emotional salience, simplification, distribution of elements, contrasts of elements, salient colour, central positioning of elements, composition regarding the flow of elements, and significant objects (Duarte and Stefanakis, "The use of cues," 519–522).

[58] Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, 21–22.

[59] Hermann Weyl, *Symmetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 3.

[60] Ernst Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (London, New York: Phaidon, 1979).

[61] Quoted in Weyl, *Symmetry*, 16.

Although symmetry may appear attractive and satisfying from a purely aesthetic point of view, philosophers and art historians also recognize that symmetry may be too harsh or rigid, as possessing a certain degree of banality compared to asymmetry. The tension between symmetry and asymmetry in art has been investigated in past studies and both philosophers and art historians seem generally agreed that symmetry forms the basis on which asymmetry can be built, manipulated and used (Fig. 4). In this respect, that symmetry may appear unnatural or even unrealistic was suggested by Gombrich: "Once we have grasped the principle of order, we are able to learn the thing by heart. […] We have easily seen enough of it because it holds no more surprise" with the consequence that "symmetry and asymmetry are seen as, a struggle between two opponents of equal power, the formless chaos, on which we impose our ideas, and the all too easily formed monotony, which we brighten up by new accents."[63] Arnheim expresses similar ideas in this regard: "Symmetry means rest and tie, asymmetry means movement and detachment. Order and law here, arbitrariness and chance there; stiffness and compulsion here, liveliness, play, and freedom there. […] The difference between symmetry and asymmetry is obviously the mere relation between balance and directed forces. On the one extreme, the relation would turn to the stiffness of complete standstill; on the other, it would turn to the equally terrifying formlessness of chaos. Somewhere at the ladder between the two extremes, every style, every individual, and every artwork finds its own particular place" (Table 1).[64]

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[62] Rudolf Arnheim, *New Essays on the Psychology of Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 322.

[63] Ernst H. Gombrich, "Symmetrie, Wahrnehmung un künstlerische Gestaltung," in *Symmetrie in Geistes- und Naturwissenschaften*, ed. Rudolf Wille (Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer, 1988), 113–114; English translation in Joachim Schummer, "Aesthetics of Chemical Products: Materials, Molecules, and Molecular Models," *HYLE* 9/1 (2003), and Cristopher I. McManus, "Symmetry and asymmetry in aesthetics and the arts," *European Review* 13/2 (2005): 159.

[64] Rudolf Arnheim, "Stillstand in der Tätigkeit," in *Symmetrie in Geistes- und Naturwissenschaften*, ed. Rudolf Wille (Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer, 1988), 8, 15. English translation in Schummer, "Aesthetics of Chemical Products," and McManus, "Symmetry and asymmetry," 159.

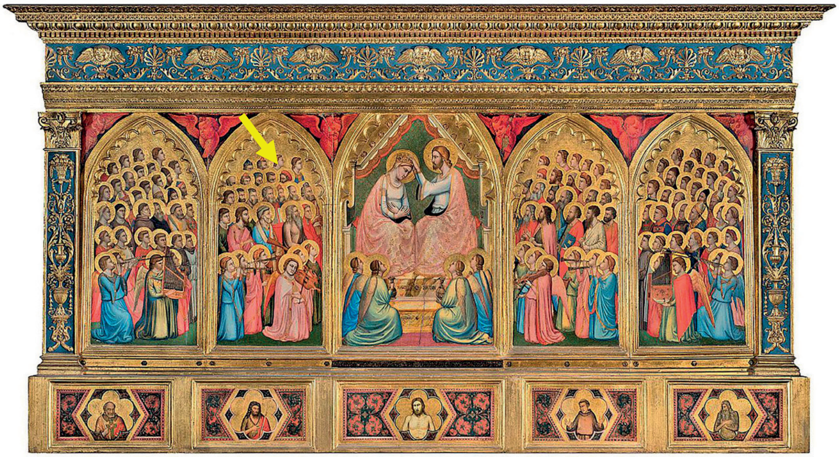

Fig. 4: The Baroncelli Polyptych, Giotto, 1334, Baroncelli Chapel, Santa Croce, Florence. Symmetry here is broken by a solitary saint in the inner of the two left-hand panels, who is looking to the viewer's left and showing the left cheek (Ian C. McManus, "Symmetry and asymmetry in aesthetic and the arts," *European Review* 13/2 [2005]: 159).

Scientists have also made some efforts at confirming or denying the aesthetic properties of symmetry by studying to what extent brain activity is involved in the processing of emotional reactions to symmetrical or asymmetrical images in art. Modern research has empirically explored the neural basis of symmetry perception in humans and showed in fact that when people are asked to explicitly evaluate the aesthetic appeal of abstract patterns, symmetry is a good predictor of preference.[65] Moreover, the attraction for symmetry seems to be a cross-cultural phenomenon, since research has demonstrated that general preferences of face attractiveness seem largely shared by men and women of different cultures and symmetry, in particular, underlies mate choice not only in humans of different cultures and great apes but also in birds and even in insects.[66]

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[65] Participants in the experiment judged novel graphic patterns with respect to their own personal definitions of "beauty." The results showed that there was agreement at the group level, but not at the individual level, since some participants considered nonsymmetric patterns more beautiful (Thomas Jacobsen and Lea Höfel, "Aesthetic Judgments of Novel Graphic Patterns: Analyses of Individual Judgments," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 95 [2002]: 755–766).

[66] David I. Perrett, Keith A. May and Sakiko Yoshikawa, "Facial Shape and Judgements of Female Attractiveness," *Nature* 368 (1994): 239–242; Gillian Rhodes, Fiona Proffitt, Jonathon M. Grady and Alex Sumich, "Facial Symmetry and the Perception of Beauty," *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review* 5(4) (1998): 659–669; David I. Perrett et al., "Symmetry and Human Facial Attractiveness," *Evolution and Human Behaviour* 20 (1999): 295–307; Gillian Rhodes et al., "Attractiveness of Facial Averageness and Symmetry in Non-Western Cultures: In Search of Biologically Based Standards of Beauty," *Perception* 30 (2001): 611–625; Marco Bertamini and Alexis D. J. Makin,

Symmetry	*Asymmetry*
Rest	Motion
Binding	Loosening
Order	Arbitrariness
Law	Accident
Formal rigidity	Life, play
Constraint	Freedom
Boredom	Interest
Stillness	Chaos
Monotony	Surprise
Fixity	Detachment
Stasis	Flux
Simplicity	Complexity

Table 1: Psychological and aesthetic properties of symmetry and asymmetry (McManus, "Symmetry and asymmetry," 169, table 1).

It seems therefore that such a bilateral or symmetrical bias is not a culturally specific phenomenon but applies across the animal kingdom. In other words, research results challenge the view that standards of beauty are cultural artifacts, suggesting that they are biologically based. In this respect, the allure of symmetry has been explained by reference to two evolutionary forces. The first points out that symmetry of many biological objects, such as prey, predator, member of the same species, or mate, all have symmetry in common, diverging from all other non-symmetric vegetal and material objects. This would explain why symmetry grabs our attention and arouses any observer.[67] The second evolutionary force is more subtle and argues that symmetry is unconsciously known as an indication of health, since symmetry of the face is a sign of it. This implies that symmetry is a marker for good health, which in turn is an indicator of desirability. This argument explains why our visual system finds symmetry appealing and asymmetry disturbing. Thus, symmetry indicates good genes, that is to say how capable a person's genome is of resisting disease and maintaining normal development in the face of challenges during growth, challenges to health and

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"Brain Activity in Response to Visual Symmetry," *Symmetry* 6 (2014): 987; Lamberto Maffei and Adriana Fiorentini, *Arte e cervello* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 2008), 238; Anthony C. Little and Jack A. F. Griffey, "Preferring and Detecting Face Symmetry: Comparing Children and Adults Judging Human and Monkey Faces," *Symmetry* 12 (2020): 1–12.

[67] Vilayanur S. Ramachandran, *The Tell-Tale Brain: A Neuroscientist's Quest for What Makes Us Human* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 234.

environmental stress. Moreover, developmental stability is largely heritable.[68] As a consequence, symmetry is beautiful not just for strictly formal and aesthetic reasons but also for what it communicates about the health of a potential mate and the mate's potential offspring. In other words, we have a built-in biological preference for symmetry.

Besides evolutionary accounts of symmetry preference, there is also an idea among scientists that works of art optimally stimulate the perceptual system, that is to say that our visual system is also well tuned to symmetry, especially bilateral or mirror symmetry, namely the two sides are mirror reflections of each other. The results of these studies show that, even though there is still little evidence for an automatic emotional response to abstract symmetry in humans in the strongest sense, nevertheless, people seem to have a near-universal preference for symmetrical over asymmetrical patterns. More interestingly, symmetry seems to be associated not only with equilibrium and balance, as art historians and philosophers have shown, but especially with positive responses. That is to say, aesthetic responses to symmetry involve both positive valence and high arousal and that these emotional responses arise from the perceptual simplicity of symmetry, in line with the fluency account of aesthetics. In a nutshell, people's positive responses to symmetry are built on the notion that things that are easier to process are judged positively, thus symmetrical stimuli are detected faster than asymmetrical stimuli.[69]

Having set out the basic features of symmetry and the corresponding reactions of an observer, I now turn back to the motif of the Assyrian stylized tree flanked by genies. The compositional arrangement of the scene has been already explored by scholars, who have rightly noted its symmetrical appearance and interpreted it as expression of beauty combined with a concept of world order peculiar to Assyrian thought.[70] Strict mirror imagery (reflection symmetry) was utilized specifically in room I of the East Suite in the Northwest Palace, where

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[68] Perret et al., "Symmetry and Human," 295–296; Vilayanur S. Ramachandran and William Hirstein, "The Science of Art: A Neurological Theory of Aesthetic Experience," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6/6–7 (1999): 27; Ramachandran, *The Tell-Tale Brain*, 235; Eric R. Kandel, *The Age of Insight: The Quest to Understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind, and Brain, from Vienna 1900 to the Present* (New York: Random House, 2012), 378–379.

[69] Marco Bertamini et al., "Implicit Association of Symmetry with Positive Valence, High Arousal and Simplicity," *i-Perception* 4 (2013): 317–327; Bertamini and Makin, "Brain Activity," 987–990; Anna Pecchinedda et al., "The Pleasantness of Visual Symmetry: Always, Never, or Sometimes," *Plos One* 9/3 (2014): 1–10.

[70] In particular, see Irene J. Winter, "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs," *Studies in Visual Communication* 7/2 (1981): 10; Pauline Albenda, "Symmetry in the Art of the Assyrian Empire," in *La circulation des biens, des personnes et des idées dans le Proche-Orient ancien: XXXVIIIe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, ed. Dominique Charpin and Francis Joannès (Paris: Éditions recherche sur les civilisations, 1992), 297–309; Pauline Albenda, *Monumental Art of the Assyrian Empire: Dynamics of Composition Styles*, Monographs on the Ancient Near East 3/1 (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1998), 11–14.

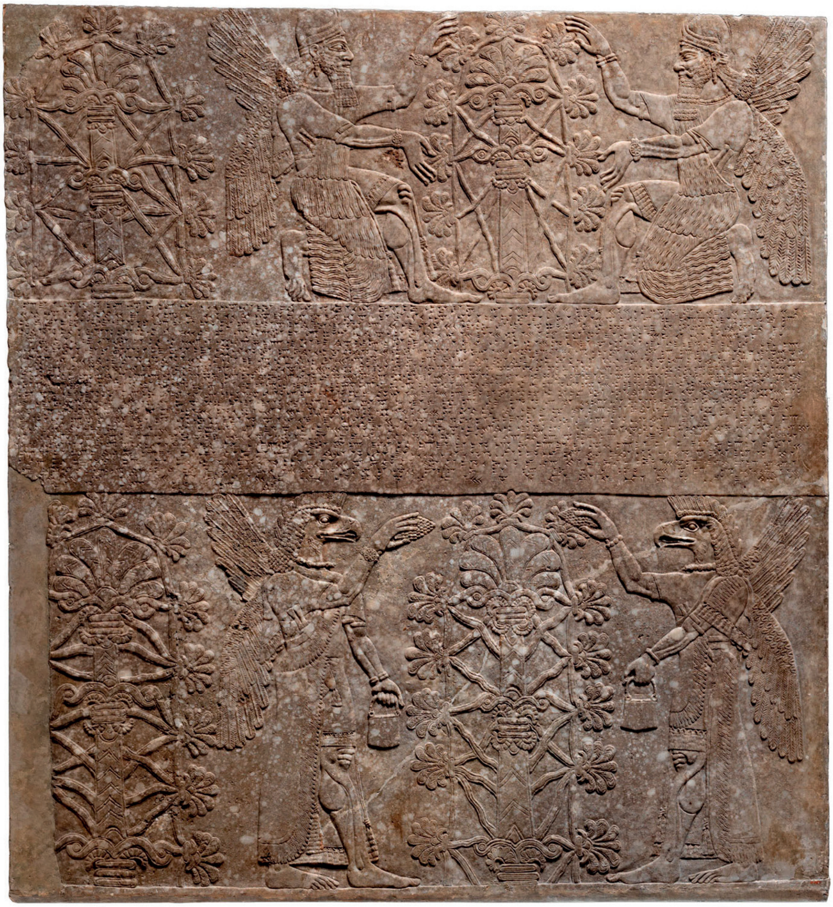

Fig. 5: Bas-relief I-30 from Room I, Northwest Palace, Kalḫu (The Metropolitan Museum of Art 32.143.3).

two-winged genies kneel on either side of the stylized tree: the genie on the left side has the right arm lowered and the left arm raised; his mirror image on the right side has the right arm raised and the left arm lowered (Fig. 5). On the other hand, the doubling image of the genie, such as the one depicted on the reliefs from Virginia Theological Seminary (Fig. 2), combines two kinds of symmetry: rotation and reflection. The former occurs because the torso turns laterally around a vertical axis centered on the tree, so that the gestures of the right and left arms and the objects held in the respective hands are retained in each of the two depictions of the genie. The second takes place because both the head and the lower part of the bodies are reflective, namely they do not rotate in a three-dimensional space.[71]

In the light of the near-universal preference for symmetry in both animals and humans, even across cultures, it seems reasonable to believe that also for Assyrians, or Mesopotamians more generally, symmetry possessed the same qualities as today and was similarly conceived and perceived. This does not imply or suggest an attitude of universal aestheticism for the study of Mesopotamian artefacts. As pointed out by Alfred Gell in relation to the Trobriand canoe-prow which he considers a potent psychological weapon, there is sometimes an innate species-wide disposition to respond to particular stimuli in predetermined ways, that is to say that human beings, apes and other mammals, may be innately sensitive to specific visual patterns.[72] Thus, although when dealing with past societies, how and why emotions are released depends on many factors (context, situation, reception, perception and so on), nonetheless, it seems that primary emotions are somehow universal.[73] In addition, Gell continues, the visual effect some patterns like symmetry produce in the observer must be attributed also to the perceived magical power emanating from that object or artefact. Without the associated magical or numinous ideas, specific patterns are neither adopted nor the desired visual effect achieved.

Therefore, the efficacy of the motif of the genies flanking the stylized tree lies also in what Gell calls the "enchantment of technology," that is the fact that technical processes are construed magically so that they make the products of these technical processes seem enchanted images of magical power.[74] Therefore, trying to reconstruct the psychological significance of the motif of the genies flanking the stylized tree and the emotional, behavioral and cognitive reactions or responses of a past audience when they viewed it, I feel justified to assert that the image most likely attracted attention like a kind of “visual magnet” eliciting positive feelings of beauty and equilibrium, which were otherwise furthered by the very fact that such a balance and equilibrium was sensed as embodiment of the divine order and law. These aspects were further emphasized by the fact that asymmetry results in a sense of movement while symmetry appears more static: since movement is a key factor for visual art to express time, motionless images are to be regarded as timeless.[75] Therefore, the motif of the genies flanking the stylized tree also expressed the timeless divine world, its stability and perfect simplicity.

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[71] Albenda, "Symmetry," 300.

[72] Alfred Gell, "The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology," in *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, ed. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 40–46.

[73] In respect to the display and visualization of emotions in Assyrian art, see Dominik Bonatz, "Der stumme Schrei – Kritische Überlegungen zu Emotionen als Untersuchungsfeld der altorientalischen Bildwissenschaft," in *Visualizing Emotions in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Sara Kipfer, OBO 285 (Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 55–74; Elisabeth Wagner-Durand, "Visualization of Emotions – Potentials and Obstacles. A Response to Dominik Bonatz," in *Visualizing Emotions in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Sara Kipfer, OBO 285 (Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 75–93; Elisabeth Wagner-Durand, "Visualizing and Evoking the Emotion Fear in and through Neo-Assyrian Orthostat Reliefs," in *Proceedings of the 10th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East, 25–29 April 2016, Vienna*, ed. Barbara Horejs et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018), 563–576.

[74] In relation to the Trobriand canoe, Gell states: "It is the way an art object is construed as having come into the world which is the source of the power such objects have over us–their becoming rather than being" (Gell, "The Technology of Enchantment," 46). I would like to thank Karen Sonik for comments and suggestions which helped me to strengthen the article and more specifically this paragraph.

As a concluding remark, I should like to point out a further basic artistic tenet behind the decorations of the palace of Ashurnasirpal II. It seems that symmetrical images, which sparked corresponding emotional reactions of calm, equilibrium, and a sense of order, were found in the less accessible or most private spaces of the palace.[76] However, the Northwest Palace was also populated by images where symmetry was not dominant and depicted complex narrative reliefs showing distinct events which, through the movement of walking and running people, waterfalls, and the like, expressed time, allowing the observer to infer what has gone before and what follows.[77] These images decorated the most accessible areas of the palace, such as the throne room (Room B).[78] Thus, if symmetry expressed order, balance, eternity and these emotional responses were sparked in the few people having access to the private rooms, asymmetry expressed complexity, life, flux, chaos, surprise and corresponding emotional reactions such as alertness, situational awareness, vigilance, and stress were sparked in the people having access to the more public rooms of the palace.[79]

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[75] Henriette A. Groenewegen-Frankfort, *Arrest and Movement: An Essay on Space and Time in the Representational Art of the Ancient Near East* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1951), 5–6; Ernst Gombrich, “Moment and Movement in Art,” *JWCI* 27 (1964): 293–306, in particular, 304; Anton Moortgat, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia* (London: Phaidon, 1969), 134; Winter, “Royal Rhetoric,” 10–11; Laura Battini, “Time ‘Pulled up’ in Ashurnasirpal’s Reliefs,” in *Time and History in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 56th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Barcelona 26–30 July 2010*, ed. Lluis Feliu et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 35–46. See also, in this volume, the contribution by Brent A. Strawn, “*Ut pictura poesis*: The Historical Psalms and the Reliefs from Ashurnasirpal II’s Throneroom in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud.”

[76] See Janusz Meuszyński, *Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen und ihrer Anordnung im Nordwestpalast von Kalḫu (Nimrūd). Räume: B.C.D.E.F.H.L.N.P*, BagF 2 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1981), pls. 4, 6–7, 11–17; Samuel M. Paley and Richard. P. Sobolewski, *The Reconstruction of the Relief Representations and Their Positions in the Northwest-Palace at Kalḫu (Nimrūd) II (Rooms: I.S.T.Z, West Wing)*, BagF 10 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1987), pls. 1–4, 6.

[77] In the broad sense, the term narrative refers to “the semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way. Films, plays, comic strips, novels, newsreels, diaries, chronicles and treatises of geological history are all narratives in the wider sense. Narratives can therefore be constructed using an ample variety of semiotic media: written or spoken language, visual images, gestures and acting, as well as combination of these. Any semiotic construct made of signs, can be said to be a text. Therefore, we can speak of many kinds of narrative texts: linguistic, theatrical, pictorial, filmic. Any representation involves a point of view, a selection, a perspective on the represented object, criteria of relevance, and, arguably, an implicit theory of reality” (Susana Onega and José Ángel García Landa, *Narratology: An Introduction* [London, New York: Longman, 1992], 2–3). For a definition of narrative into the visual realm of Assyrian reliefs, see Winter, “Royal Rhetoric,” 2–3 and, more recently, Davide Nadali, “The Power of Narrative Pictures in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *Image – Narration – Context: Visual Narration in Cultures and Societies of the Old World*, ed. Elisabeth Wagner-Durand et al., Freiburger Studien zur

In short, the symmetry of the motif of the genies flanking the stylized tree evoked a sense of eternity bound to the order and perfect balance of the divine world; by contrast, chaotic and complex narrative images implied the caducity and transient aspect of earthly life: two different visual messages addressed to different groups of people accessing and touring the palace.

5. Genies Flanking the Stylized Tree through Time and Space

The foregoing review offers some of the various meanings the representation of the genies flanking the stylized tree may have had and how they might have been perceived by Ashurnasirpal II's contemporaries. I turn now to consider the perceptions of these images after Ashurnasirpal's death and after the Northwest Palace was no longer used as the primary royal palace. Were all of these meanings correctly perceived and interpreted by later Assyrian rulers during their stay in the palace of Ashurnasirpal II? What features of these images survived in later representations and what passed out of use? Can we trace a later Assyrian reading which sheds light on the primary social and ideological function(s) of the Northwest Palace reliefs in later periods of the Neo-Assyrian period?

To answer these questions, a particularly subtle and versatile research method presents itself, namely, the concept of linguistic intertextuality applied to the realm of visual arts, called intericonicity. This phenomenon is implicitly based on the semantic difference between "picture" and "image," as emphasized by William J. T. Mitchell, where the former is the material object, a thing you can destroy and kill; the second is what appears in a picture, and what survives its destruction – in memory, in narrative, in copies and traces in other media.[80] The

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Archäologie & Visuellen Kultur 1 (Heidelberg: Propylaeum, 2019), 63–80; Elisabeth Wagner-Durand, "'Pious Shepherd' and 'Guardian of Truth': In Search of the Narrative Visualization of the Kings' Piety and Righteousness," in *Tales of Royalty: Notions of Kingship in Visual and Textual Narration in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Elisabeth Wagner-Durand and Julia Linke (Boston and Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 19–48; in this volume, see Strawn, "*Ut pictura poesis*."

[78] Meuszyński, *Die Rekonstruktion*, pls. 1–3.

[79] Portuese, *Life at Court*, 206–207.

[80] William J. T. Mitchell, *Image Science: Iconology, Visual Culture, and Media Aesthetics* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 16–18. The semantic difference

notion of intericonicity – in German *Interpikturalität* or *Interbildlichkeit*, but known also as interpictoriality, intervisuality, and intertextuality of images – is defined as the relationships between images as well as the *modi* of their transformation from one into another.[81] In other words, intericonicity is the process of an image referring to another image. In the past, a variety of terminologies has been used to describe the relation of one work of art to another: imitation, plagiarism, copy, variation, paraphrase, reception, quotation, inversion, allusion, homage, irony, parody or theft. Most of these terms somehow imply a degree of prejudice and denigration of the resulting product. More recently, the term intericonicity has been proposed as an overall term that should capture all the abovementioned relationships without a moral judgement. This concept is widely thought of as analogous to the concept of literary intertextuality and argues that many works of art, as much as literary or non-literary written or spoken verbal texts, contain explicit or implicit references to other works of art or images.[82] The consequence is that cases of interpictoriality spark a kind of déjà-vu effect in the viewer, that is to say a feeling of familiarity, of having already seen that image.[83] This method tries to understand how exactly one image refers to another and/or whether this transfer is based on conscious or unconscious decisions by the artist/patron.

While the matter is complex, this interdisciplinary transfer of literary theory to art history implies that the image is conceived as a sign structure comprising everything from cultural systems and codes to history and the author's personal interest.[84] This is why the definition of intericonicity has been broadened so as to include the transformations between non-linguistic semiotic systems, thus not limiting the semiotic system to language but extending it to non-verbal forms of communication. Any translation or transfer can thus occur across pictorial and icono-linguistic registers, since the intericonic translatability implies that someone repeats something that is already familiar creating something new. In semiotic terms, an artist uses the signifier of another image as a signified for her/his own because the image is seen as a set of signs, a combination in the pictorial code which the artist manipulates in order to produce a new meaning, in the same

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between image and picture belongs not only to the English language but also to other modern and contemporary languages.

[81] "Die Relationen zwischen Bildern sowie die Modi ihrer Transformation von Einem in ein Anderes" (Valeska von Rosen, "Interpikturalität," in *Metzler Lexikon Kunstwissenschaft: Ideen, Methoden, Begriffe*, ed. Ulrich Pfisterer [Berlin: Springer, 2011], 208; English translation in Elisabeth-Christine Gamer, "Configurations of Emptiness: Intericonic Blanks in Louise Lawler's *A Movie Without the Picture* and Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Theaters*," in *Meta- and Inter-Images in Contemporary Visual Art and Culture*, ed. Carla Taban [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2013], 116).

[82] Gamer, "Configurations of Emptiness," 116.

[83] Clément Chéroux, *Diplopia. L'immagine fotografica nell'èra dei media globalizzati: saggio sull'11 settembre 2001* (Torino: Einaudi, 2010), 56–85.

[84] Gamer, "Configurations of Emptiness," 117–118.

register. Intericonicity thus may aim to alienate from the original and may not rehabilitate its meanings. In short, when an image refers to another image, there is a translation from one pictorial sign system into another, an extra-linguistic intersemiosis.[85] The study of intericonicity is thus not so much interested in identifying references per se, since meaning is not only created on a formal level, but is more interested in the reasons that lie behind these references, the intrinsic qualities of a reference which involve more specific expressions of the patron's/artist's position. Accordingly, in addition to the questions where from and what, intericonicity asks also why and how images are reused.[86]

Each work of art may display different kinds of intericonic artistic strategies and the cases of transmission can be diverse, shifting from simple to complex quotation, transformation and re-adaptation of images. Nina Heydemann, in this respect, assessed a number of categories that grasp the diversity in this complexity in order to identify different types of art transference, translation, re-adaptation and re-interpretation. Thus, by focusing on a strictly formalistic system of categorisation, it could be ascertained that in most cases six strategies of representation can be identified. The composition, motif or figure of the artwork being referred to

- is replaced with something else (strategy of substitution);
- something is added to or taken away from the quoted artwork (strategy of addition or subtraction);
- it is multiplied, divided or combined with references to other art-works (strategy of multiplication, division or combination).[87]

In addition, it is essential to direct such an investigation into an archaeology of images, that is to say investigating images starting from the place and the

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[85] Evangelos Kourdis and Charikleia Yoka, "Intericonicity as Intersemiotic Translation in a Globalized Culture," in *Our World: A Kaleidoscopic Semiotic Network. Proceedings of the 11th World Congress of the IASS/AIS, 5–9 October 2012, Nanjing Normal University*, ed. Yongxiang Wang and Haihong Ji (Nanjing: Hohai University Press, 2014), 162–176.

[86] Art history and modern photography show that the phenomenon of intericonicity is found in every epoch and visual culture. In this respect, compare the examples of intericonicity investigated by Dimitri Laboury in relation to copying and imitation phenomena in Egyptian art (Dimitri Laboury, "Tradition and Creativity: Toward a Study of Intericonicity in Ancient Egyptian Art," in *(Re)productive Traditions in Ancient Egypt: Proceedings of the conference held at the University of Liège, 6th–8th February 2013*, ed. Todd Gillen [Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2017], 229–258), and of Clément Chéroux in relation to modern photography concerning the well-known pictures of "Raising the Flag at Ground Zero" and "Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima" which are cases of intericonicity and reveal hidden and intentional meanings that could influence the viewer historically, politically and, especially, psychologically (Chéroux, *Diplopia*, 82–85).

[87] Nina Heydemann, "The Art of Quotation: Forms and Themes of the Art Quote, 1990–2010. An Essay," *Visual Past* 2.1 (2015): 11–64.

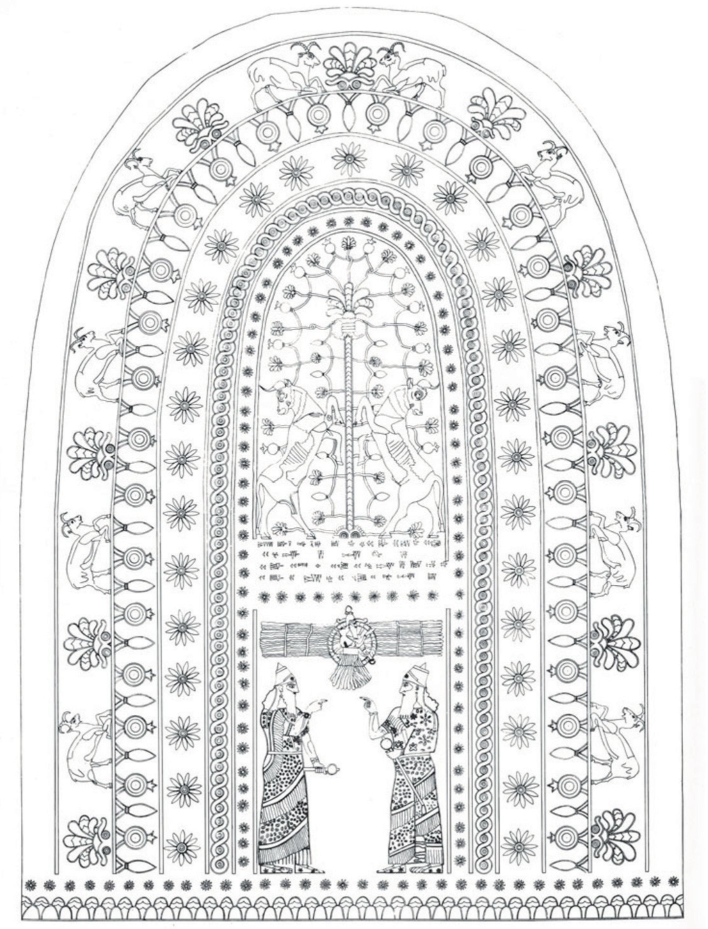

Fig. 6: Brick panel of Shalmaneser III from courtyard T, Fort Shalmaneser, Kalḫu (after Julian E. Reade, "A Glazed-Brick Panel from Nimrud," *Iraq* 25 [1963]: pl. IX).

moment an image was made and shaped up to the reformulation of the same image to match a different place in another time.[88]

Building on these theoretical premises, I return now to the motif of genies flanking the stylized tree to see how the motif migrated through time and space. One example is the glazed-brick panel of Shalmaneser III (Fig. 6), whose bricks were discovered fallen in the outer doorway between Room T3 and Courtyard T of Fort Shalmaneser at Kalḫu. The panel shows the stylized tree on the upper part – consisting of a central trunk surmounted by a palmette, surrounded by tendrils tipped with alternating palmettes, pomegranates, and pinecones – and a winged disk below. The king stands on either side of the disk in a posture of worship.

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[88] Davide Nadali and Ludovico Portuese, "Archaeology of Images: Context and Intericonicity in Neo-Assyrian Art," in *Homo Pictor: Image Studies and Archaeology in Dialogue*, ed. Jacobus Bracker, Freiburger Studien zur Archäologie & Visuellen Kultur 2 (Heidelberg: Propylaeum 2020), 127–157.

By combining different motifs taken from the decorations or embroideries on Ashurnasirpal II's clothing (strategy of combination),[89] Shalmaneser III's artists change the location of the stylized tree that is symmetrically flanked not by genies but by a pair of wingless rampant bulls (strategy of substitution and subtraction).[90] The result, at the formal and stylistic level, is absolutely new. Although similar motifs can be regarded as sources of inspiration, as Julian E. Reade asserts "the composition remains unique and there is no reason to suppose that parallels are going to be found … (t)he unconventional treatment of conventional motifs is in fact the most distinctive feature of this panel."[91]

As for the significance of the glazed-brick panel of Shalmaneser III, Winter observes that the scallops, or lappets, at the base of the entire composition stand for the conventional rendering of earth (*erṣetu*) and land (*mātu*), thus both may indicate the ground for abundance in production and the territory of the state. Surrounding the stylized tree and the representation of the king, the guilloche represents accordingly the water, while the flowers and trees that frame and extend beyond the central field are all cultivars. Therefore, all have symbolic associations with fertility and abundance and reflect ideal Mesopotamian agriculture: in other words, the ornament surrounding the scene is the actual extension and consequence of the relationship between the king and the divine world.[92]

In Tiglath-pileser III's palace the stylized tree is found in corners, and there are no pictures where the tree and otherworldly figures are found adjacent to each other.[93] In the figurative program of Sargon II at Dur-Sharrukin, the artists may have followed the way the source image could have been originally composed, and create new ways of assembling these elements through the strategy of division. The result is that the stylized tree motif mostly functions as decoration or protection for the corners, and the genies, both bird and human-headed,

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[89] Bartl, *Die Ritzverzierungen*, pls. 10a, 12, 14a, 16b.

[90] For a discussion on the glazed-brick panel of Shalmaneser III, see Reade, "A Glazed-Brick Panel," 38–47.

[91] Reade, "A Glazed-Brick Panel," 46. Reade suggests that the principal model for the panel of Shalmaneser III might have been the lost glazed panels of the Northwest Palace.

[92] Winter, "Ornament," 256–257.

[93] Erika Bleibtreu, *Die Flora der neuassyrischen Reliefs: Eine Untersuchung zu den Orthostatenreliefs des 9.–7. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.*, WZKMS 1, Sonderband 1 (Wien: Verlag des Institutes für Orientalistik der Universität Wien, 1990), pls. 5b, 6a–b, 7; Russell, "The Program of the Palace," 689.

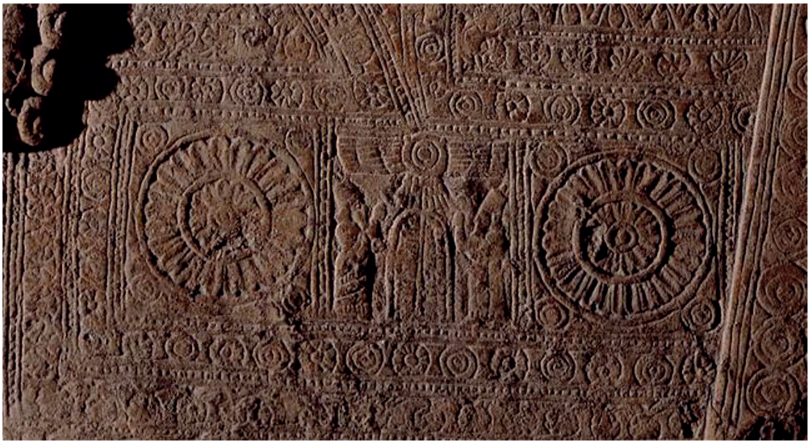

Fig. 7: Detail from a bas-relief from Room C, North Palace, Nineveh (©The Trustees of the British Museum, BM 124867).

are combined and mainly located in proximity of the doorways, with the difference that bird-headed genies are mainly located in the more secluded courtyards, namely courtyards I and VI.[94] The winged genies appear in Sennacherib's palace only as guardians of doorways but without their tree images, which now seem to have disappeared entirely.[95] The motif makes one last palace appearance in the palace of Sennacherib's grandson Ashurbanipal (Fig. 7), but it is shown in miniature, appearing only as a decorative motif lightly etched on the king's clothing, reproducing an almost exact copy of Ashurnasirpal II's engraving, which shows the tree flanked on either side by the king (strategy of substitution).[96] In the example from Ashurbanipal's palace, however, the scene is surrounded only by rosettes rather than genies, trees, and other images of the king: as stated above, rosettes might be a plausible reference to the eternity of the king himself.

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[94] Paul E. Botta, *Monument de Ninive I–II: Architecture et sculpture* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1849), pls. 10, 24–28, 30, 42, 52, 74, 75, 80, 116, 119, 137, 144. Although fragmentary, in one instance, the stylized tree is flanked by wingless genies which seem reproducing the motif from the Northwest Palace (pl. 139); in a further example, instead, two wingless genies holding a three-branched plant or flower flank a stylized tree, which however is not the traditional Assyrian type of stylized tree familiar from the walls of the Northwest Palace (pl. 150). Genies and stylized tree were depicted also on fragmentary glazed bricks (Julian E. Reade, "The Khorsabad Glazed Bricks and Their Symbolism," in *Khorsabad, le palais de Sargon II, roi d'Assyrie: Actes du colloque organisé au musée du Louvre par le Service culturel les 21 et 22 janvier 1994*, ed. Annie Caubet [Paris: La documentation Française, 1995], 228–232).

[95] Russell, *Sennacherib's Palace*, 181; David Kertai, "The Guardians at the Doors: Entering the Southwest Palace in Nineveh," *JNES* 74/2 (2015): 325–349. A fragmented panel showing traces of feet was found in a niche directly opposite the main entrance to the throne room of the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh, analogous to the placement of the tree scene in Ashurnasirpal's throne room. The identification with the tree motif flanked by genies seems however very hypothetical (Porter, "Sacred Trees," 139, fn. 28).

[96] For Ashurnasirpal II's example, see Bartl, *Die Ritzverzierungen*, pl. 13.

By following in time and space the iconic motif of the stylized tree flanked by genies, it would appear that a process of direct or inspired copying has taken place, although one must equally admit that there is a formal and perhaps a significant reinterpretation of the motif at every single step of the process of transmission. After Ashurnasirpal II's death, the motif is modified by Shalmaneser III's artists, the stylized tree is detached from otherworldly figures and combined with wingless rampant bulls. Sargon II's artists increase the transformation and re-adaptation by separating the tree from genies and royal figures and it is mostly used to protect the corners of rooms. The genies, by contrast, flank only doorways and main entrances in the palace, with the peculiarity that bird-headed genies occupy the most private spaces. Finally, Ashurbanipal's artists reproduce and reuse Ashurnasirpal II's work, although there is a clear and indisputable process of reinterpretation and re-composition that makes the new work unique.

Within this interconnection, the variations between this migrating motif allow us to assess not only the different choices made by each artist/patron pair responsible for the making of those reliefs, but also the primary social and ideological function(s) of Ashurnasirpal II's reliefs, which now might appear clearer.[97]

6. GENIES FLANKING THE STYLIZED TREE: CONCLUSIVE (?) AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The re-composition or reinterpretation of the motif of the genies flanking the stylized tree applies distinctly and individually to each king's figurative program. The above-suggested analysis of those variations allows determining the personal iconographic strategies used by the patron/artist network in order to modify the earlier composition and adapt it for the new creation. More than a simple copying process, inspiration appears clearly in this kind of *stemma imaginum*, which becomes an actual eternal image. Nonetheless, the formal reinterpretation bears its primary significance, that is to say it confers on the reinterpreted result the role of productive "borrowing" which assists unveiling the essential meaning of the archetypical image.

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[97] In order to highlight the apotropaic value of genies and stylized tree, Russell, "The Program of the Palace," 689 carried out a similar review of examples coming from Ashurnasirpal II's successors palace reliefs, although different methods and results are used and achieved here.

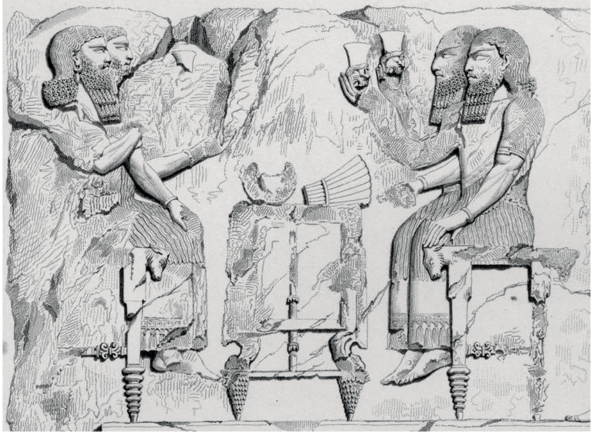

Fig. 8: Detail of bas-relief 17 from Room 2, Royal Palace, Dur-Sharrukin (Botta, *Monument*, pl. 64).

Of the various hidden meanings, the ones which survived through time might have been the most appreciated and understood by later kings, but also those most reliable for a definitive interpretation. The protective role of the stylized tree and of genies is preserved. However, the tree is located only at corners, and genies protect only the doorways. The difference between human and bird-headed genies continues: at least in the time of Sargon II, the bird-headed genies seem to have possessed, as in the palace of Ashurnasirpal II, a different powerful degree of protection, since they were located in the most secluded spaces of the palace. The image of the king flanking the stylized tree outlives the image of the genies flanking the stylized tree, suggesting that the former was conceived through time as an actual royal stemma perhaps of royal legitimacy.[98] Finally, the allure of symmetry as visual "cue" that elicits calm and equilibrium is retained in many cases.

In my view, all these features may have been represented in the basic meanings and functions of the image showing the genies confronting the stylized tree. Since the motif was subsequently diluted in some way, I thus suspect that the motif, and especially its repetition, was more an artistic choice of Ashurnasirpal's artists rather than a purely functional device to protect the palace. Of course, the protection and blessing of the building was one of the main tasks of this composition, as if the image itself had inherent power. However, I believe that protection was an additional value: later examples show that the tree was basically used to protect the corners of a room, and the genies to protect entrances and doorways. The image of the stylized tree flanked by genies is abandoned as palace decoration, perhaps because it was not fully understood by later viewers or not appreciated as decoration, and this is well demonstrated by other symmetrical images that substitute the old motif. In fact, symmetry applied to other scenes seems to have been used selectively and examples can be found in the royal palace of Sargon II: the banqueters displayed in the private rooms 2 and 7 are often depicted in a rotation symmetry, namely the torso turns laterally around a vertical axis centered in the table or in the space between the banqueters (Fig. 8).[99] In much the same way, an almost mirroring image was shown on façade L of the same palace, where the portrait of the king facing the crown prince was duplicated on either side of the central door leading into room 2.[100]

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[98] See Norma Franklin, "The Assyrian Stylized Tree: A Date Palm Plantation and Aššurnaṣirpal II's *Stemma*," *Ash-sharq* 5 (2021): 77–96.

Accordingly, Ashurnasirpal's artists might have decided to combine various images in order to decorate the most private suites of the palace with various symmetrical motifs: the final aim, perhaps at the subconscious level, must have been therefore that of eliciting positive emotions, feelings of equilibrium and states of calmness. In other words, the repetition of the stylized tree flanked by genies mainly worked through the visual effect on viewers, that is to say the aesthetic experience was an important and an essential value of this motif.

Nevertheless, it was shown above that symmetry may carry a number of meanings not only bound to aesthetic but also to cultural values. In fact, having emphasized that symmetrical images are basically motionless and consequently timeless, I believe that symmetry and its repetition was chosen also to metonymically express the notions of eternity, stability, continuity, life, and renewal associated to the genies, which protected the palace from all the risks of time, and to the stylized tree, which was symbol of life and eternity.[101] Accordingly, the image of the genies flanking the stylized tree reified the actual need manifested by Ashurnasirpal II in his inscriptions that his royal palace was a "lordly leisure for eternity" and built "for the eternal admiration of rulers and princes." In this sense, the mechanism of intericonicity allows us to grasp the primary significance of images which survive over time for later rulers, as though some of them were able to live forever.

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[99] Botta, *Monument*, pls. 64–66.

[100] Botta, *Monument*, pls. 10, 12, 14.

[101] On the intentionality and planning of certain motifs and related intended psychological effects of images on the audience, see Portuese, *Life at Court*, 206–207, 209–210.

BETWEEN SCIENCE AND AESTHETICS IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY PUBLIC MUSEUM: THE ELGIN MARBLES, THE CHAIN OF ART, AND THE VICTORIAN ASSIMILATION OF ASSYRIAN SCULPTURE

Karen Sonik and David Kertai[1]

1. Introduction

In the mid-nineteenth century, when the material remains of ancient Assyria were (re-)discovered by Europeans in tells located in the Mosul province of the Ottoman Empire, the framework within which they were integrated, valued, and displayed was, by default, a western one. Britain and France, to which many of the newly excavated Assyrian monuments were shipped, became the defining sites of European encounter and assimilation. Both regions were characterized by the growing prominence of large national museums – especially the British Museum in London (from 1759) and the Louvre in Paris (from 1793), the two institutions at which major Assyrian collections were first publicly accessible.[2] In Britain (Fig. 1), such museums were understood to have the capacity not only to instruct or educate but also to edify the public (i.e., elevate public *morals* and taste). Politicians, intellectuals, and other luminaries thus attended closely to what was collected within them – and how it was displayed.[3]

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[2] It is difficult to overstate the significance of public museums to public life – and the meticulous considerations and negotiations of their proper contributions to public education, morality, and taste – from the later eighteenth through the nineteenth century. Lord Henry G. Lennox ("On the Uses of National Museums to Local Institutions," *Journal of the Society of the Arts* 14 [1866]: 159), in a detailed exposition on Britain's national collections, made clear his belief that "a museum, to be useful and popular, must be educational." He likewise emphasized that the British Museum could and should promote the "moral well-being" of the "artisan" and general public (Lennox, "On the Uses of National Museums," 160), a task in which it failed by closing on evenings and Sundays, when the general public would have the ability to actually access it. Elsewhere, as in a striking line of questioning (further below), members of a parliamentary committee (*Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery: Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index* [Ordered by the House of Commons, to be Printed, 4 August 1853], 639; fn. 22, 28, 66, 85) examined the role of public museum collections in shaping the public mind and taste.

[3] Similar considerations regarding publicly accessible art collections were playing out across Europe; see, for example, the discussion of the *Kaiserliche und königliche Bilder-Gallerie im Oberen Belvedere* (Imperial and Royal Picture Gallery in the Upper Belvedere Palace) in Vienna in Michael Yonan, "Kunsthistorisches Museum / Belvedere, Vienna: Dynasticism and the Function of Art," in *The First Modern Museums of Art: The Birth of an Institution in 18th- and Early-19th-Century Europe*, ed. Carol Paul (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2012), 167–190.

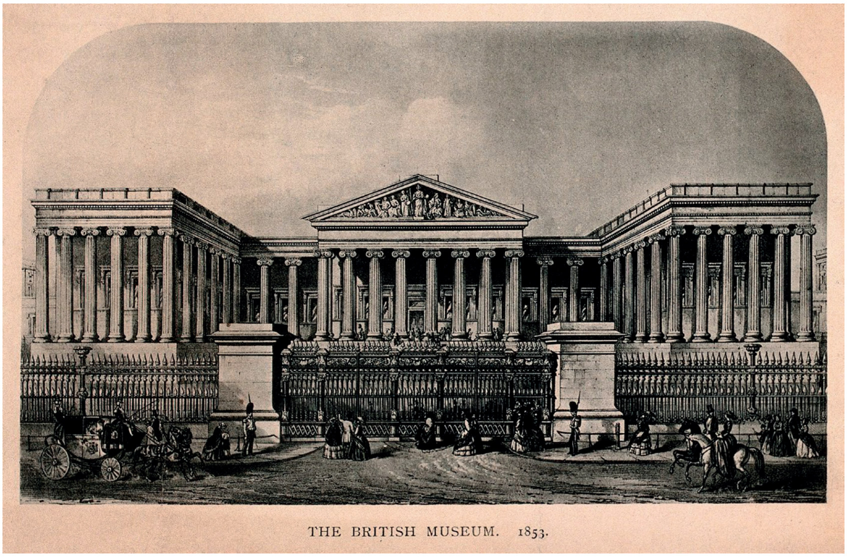
THE BRITISH MUSEUM. 1853.

Fig. 1: Main façade of British Museum (1853), Robert Smirke. Collotype after earlier print; 12 (h) × 20.1 (w) cm. Courtesy Wellcome Collection (Wellcome Library no. 38451i).

Victorian era debates over the constitution of public museum galleries reflected aspects of both the Enlightenment legacy of esteem for scientific ideals and organization (e.g., a concern for chronological arrangement) *and* the contemporary valorization of classical Greek art and aesthetics – with the Elgin Marbles (Fig. 2) understood to represent the pinnacle of artistic development.[4] These two concerns met and merged uneasily in the theory of the great "chain of art," which had various iterations over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The works of the Comte de Caylus (1692–1765) and Johann Winckelmann (1717–1768), which established the study of art on a "scientific" and chronological basis, also contributed to the conceptualization of the ancient

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[4] Inderpal Grewal ("Constructing National Subjects: The British Museum and Its Guidebooks," in *With Other Eyes: Looking at Race and Gender in Visual Culture*, ed. Lisa Bloom [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999], 46), for example, discusses the neoclassicism and valorization of Greek art typical of the first half of the nineteenth century in Britain as contributing to the creation of "an ideal 'English' subject, unquestionably masculine, but one who was receptive to a 'moral' art and who immediately recognized the 'purity' of classical forms." It is interesting to consider the foregrounding of the classical, with all its longstanding connotations of purity, beauty, and foundational Western values, in the contemporary light of the reported draft executive order, "Making Federal Buildings Beautiful Again," described by the *Architectural Record* on February 4, 2020. The draft sought to establish that "the classical architectural style shall be the preferred and default style" (Cathleen McGuigan, "Will the White House Order New Federal Architecture To Be Classical?" *Architectural Record*, February 4, 2020).

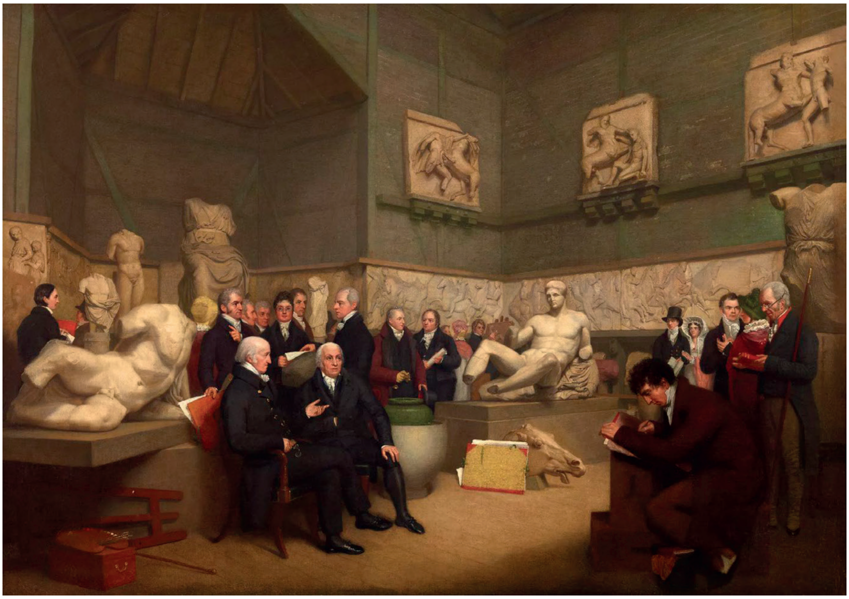

Fig. 2: Archibald Archer, *The Temporary Elgin Room* (1819). The Elgin Room was designed by architect Robert Smirke for the temporary display of the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum. Depicts the Parthenon sculptures, staff, a trustee, visitors (including the artist, Archer, in the right hand corner). Oil painting on canvas. Donated to the British Museum in 1872 by John Edward Gray.

arts as participating in an *evolutionary* development – a chain linking the cultures of the ancient world – that reached its aesthetic apex in the works of classical Greece.[5] These ideas would not only shape the organization of public museums in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, but also significantly influence the collection, display, and reception of Assyria's material remains in ways that reverberate into the present day.[6]

[5] Though Greek art was perceived as declining in the Hellenistic Period, it continued to exert influence through the Romans' appropriation and emulation of Greek works. For further discussion of the respective contributions of Winckelmann and the Comte de Caylus to the conceptualization of the "chain of art," see Ian Jenkins, *Archaeologists & Aesthetes in the Sculpture Galleries of the British Museum, 1800–1939* (London: British Museum Press, 1992); Ian Jenkins, "Ideas of Antiquity: Classical and Other Ancient Civilizations in the Age of Enlightenment," in *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Kim Sloan (London: British Museum Press, 2003), 168–177; main text below.

[6] For issues pertaining to the use of the term art for the material remains of ancient civilizations, see Karen Sonik, "Art/ifacts and Art*Works*: De-Colonizing the Study and Museum Display of Ancient and Non-Western Things," in *Art/ifacts and Art*Works, ed. Karen Sonik (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 1–82; Karen Sonik, "The Ancient Near East: Western | Non-Western," in *Art/ifacts and Art*Works, ed. Karen Sonik (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), xxix–xl.

2. EUROPE (RE-)DISCOVERS ASSYRIA

In 1825, the British Museum purchased its first collection of Near Eastern antiquities from the estate of Claudius James Rich (1787–1821),[7] a British business agent and antiquarian. Rich had been the East India Company's Resident at Baghdad,[8] and his intriguing finds, combined with the posthumous publication of his memoirs in 1836,[9] contributed to European interest in the region. In France, this interest culminated in the appointment, in 1842, of Paul Émile Botta (1802–1870) as the French vice-consul of Mosul.[10] Botta, who had made his name as a scientist, having sailed the world as the naturalist and surgeon on the French ship *Le Héros*, would soon uncover wonderful things in the region of his new posting.

In December of 1842, Botta made his first attempts to excavate at the site of Kuyunjik, the tell located on the opposite bank of the Tigris from Mosul. (Kuyunjik is today known to be the main citadel of ancient Nineveh, but this information was not yet established at the time of Botta's investigations.) No monuments were found in these early investigations, which were further complicated by local opposition and lack of official permission from the Ottoman

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[7] Cyril John Gadd, *The Stones of Assyria; the Surviving Remains of Assyrian Sculpture, Their Recovery, and Their Original positions* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1936), 11; Hannes P. Galter "Am Anfang stand Babylon. Claudius James Rich und die Anfänge altorientalischer Sammlungen," in *Kultur(en). Formen des Alltäglichen in der Antike. Festschrift für Ingomar Weiler zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. Peter Mauritsch and Christoph Ulf (Graz: Grazer Universitätsverlag, 2013), 853–871; Svend Aage Pallis, *The Antiquity of Iraq: A Handbook of Assyriology* (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1956), 66.

[8] Seton Lloyd, *Foundations in the Dust: A Story of Mesopotamian Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), 6–16. Rich holds a respected position in the field of Near Eastern studies as an early and skilled scholar of "Oriental" languages and material culture (Arabic, Persian, Turkish, with familiarity also with Hebrew, Syriac, and Greek and Latin). But if his contributions to the field are indisputable, Rich was not wholly immune to prejudices organized along the familiar race and class lines of his era. This is exemplified by his acrimonious relationship with Samuel Manesty, the Company Resident at Basra: one of the reasons for this acrimony is referenced in a letter Rich wrote to his father-in-law, Sir James Mackintosh, in which he refers in derogatory terms to Manesty's half-Armenian and half-European wife (Constance M. Alexander, *Baghdad in Bygone Days: From the Journals and Correspondence of Claudius Rich, Traveller, Artist, Linguist, Antiquary, and British Resident at Baghdad, 1808–1821* [London: John Murray, 1928], 27), and describes his refusal to allow his English wife, Mary, to associate with her. See, further, on the historical figures and events of this region, J. R. Fawcett Thompson, "The Rich Manuscripts," *The British Museum Quarterly* 27 (1963): 18–23; Denis Wright, "Samuel Manesty and His Unauthorised Embassy to the Court of Fatḥ ʿalī Shāh," *Iran* 24 (1986): 153–160; Terence Clark, "Iraq," in *British Missions around the Gulf, 1575–2005: Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman*, ed. Hugh Arbuthnott, Terence Clark, and Richard Muir (Kent: Global Oriental, 2008), 81–168.

[9] Claudius James Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan, and on the Site of Ancient Nineveh: With a Journal of a Voyage down the Tigris to Bagdad and an Account of a Visit to Shirauz and Persepolis* (London: James Duncan, 1836).

[10] Dina Rizk Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul, 1540–1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

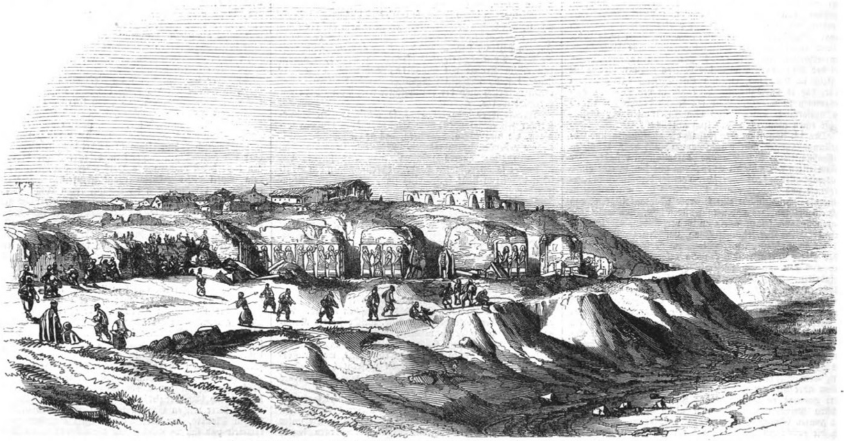
Ausgrabungen zu Khorſabad zur Entdeckung der Trümmer von Ninive.

Fig. 3: Khorsabad during its excavation by Paul Émile Botta (1802–1870), with façade N of the royal palace in the center, Botta's excavation house on the hill above it, and the village of Khorsabad to the left. Drawing by an unidentified artist. *Illustrirte Zeitung*, Saturday, October 3, 1846.

state. After a local farmer reported the finding of sculptured reliefs at the village of Khorsabad, located some 14 km northeast of Mosul, Botta moved his investigations there in March 1843. This new site would yield fabulous results. The excavations uncovered parts of a royal palace belonging to the Assyrian king Sargon II (722–705 BCE), with monumental two- and three-dimensional sculpture amply preserved within (Fig. 3). Botta would continue to excavate at Khorsabad until October 1844,[11] during which period he oversaw the transport of selected sculptures to Paris, where they continue to reside today in the Louvre Museum.[12]

On November 9, 1845, a year after Botta concluded his work, an Englishman named Austen Henry Layard began his own excavations at the site of Nimrud,[13] which was located some 35 km south of Mosul. Like Botta, Layard had also not received a permit for his investigations from the Ottoman state at the time he began them. Unlike Botta, who was the official vice-consul of the French state, Layard was sent to Mosul as an unpaid attaché of the British embassy at Constantinople, funded privately by its ambassador Stratford Canning. One of his main assignments was to retrieve Assyrian remains for the British Empire. In this the young Layard would succeed beyond the wildest hopes of his patron, ultimately uncovering the two most important and best preserved royal palaces of Assyria: the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II (883–858 BCE) at Nimrud and the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib (704–681 BCE) at Nineveh.[14]

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[11] Bülent Genç, "First Steps in the Archaeology of Assyria: Botta's Letters and the 'Excavation House' at Khorsabad," *Iraq* 81 (2019): 145–171.

[12] Frederick N. Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture: Imagining Mesopotamia in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 71.

[13] Gordon Waterfield, *Layard of Nineveh* (London: John Murray, 1963), 121.

Prior to the excavations of Botta and Layard in the 1840s, Assyria was already widely known among educated people in the west through its mentions in biblical and classical sources. But since biblical accounts described how God's wrath had left nothing behind of Assyria's people and their monuments,[15] few people anticipated that traces of that ancient civilization would ever be found. The monumental sculptures that emerged from the Assyrian palaces were thus sensational. And their implications for the understanding of scripture imbued them with a significance for the general public that went far beyond the interest of scholars. After the first finds from Layard's excavations had reached the British Museum in June of 1847,[16] *The Illustrated London News* (a prominent and widely read periodical) observed that they "excited the curiosity not only of the antiquarian but of all scriptural students, from the illustration which they afford of passages of Holy Writ, of which all material traces appeared to be lost"[17] (Fig. 4).

The widespread public interest in the remarkable archaeological discoveries from Assyria is reflected in the extensive coverage allocated to the topic in newspapers and journals in Britain and abroad.[18] This coverage paved the way for the commercial and critical success of Layard's own popular 1849 account of his archaeological explorations, *Nineveh and its Remains: With an Account of a Visit to the Chaldæan Christians of Kurdistan, and the Yezidis, or Devil-Worshippers; and an Inquiry into the Manners and Arts of the Ancient Assyrians*. It also set the stage for close institutional (governmental) and intellectual attention to how the Assyrian monuments were or should be presented to the public within the framework of the British Museum.

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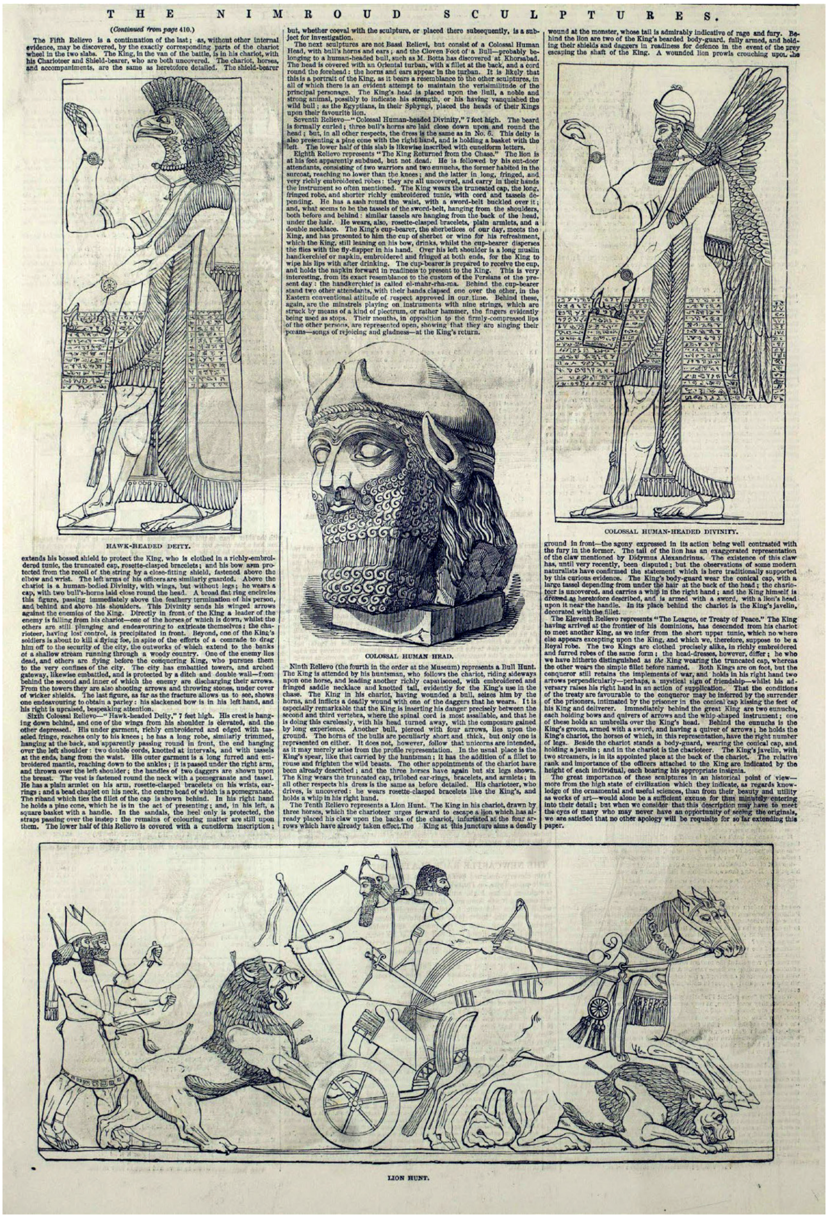
[14] David Kertai, *The Architecture of Late Assyrian Royal Palaces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[15] See, e.g., Isaiah 10:5–34, Nahum 1–3; Austen Henry Layard, *Autobiography and Letters from his Childhood until his Appointment as H.M. Ambassador at Madrid* (London: John Murray, 1903), 1:306.

[16] Waterfield, *Layard of Nineveh*, 178. The British Museum had previously displayed sculptured fragments of two human heads taken from Khorsabad. These had been given by Canning to Sir Robert Peel (1788–1850), the British prime minister and a trustee of the British Museum since 1833. They remained on display in the museum for eight months before returning to Peel (Paul Collins, "From Mesopotamia to the Met: Two Assyrian Reliefs from the Palace of Sargon II," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 47 [2012]: 73–84).

[17] *The Illustrated London News*, June 26, 1847: 409.

[18] For the deliberate manipulation of the news by and for the benefit of the young Layard, see David Kertai, "The News from the East: Assyrian Archaeology, International Politics, and the British Press in the Victorian Age," in *Art/ifacts and Art*Works *in the Ancient World*, ed. Karen Sonik (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 367–413.



THE NIMROUD SCULPTURES.

(*Continued from page* 410.)

The Fifth Relievo is a continuation of the last; as, without other internal evidence, may be discovered, by the exactly corresponding parts of the chariot wheel in the two slabs. The King, in the van of the battle, is in his chariot, with his Charioteer and Shield-bearer, who are both uncovered. The chariot, horses, and accompaniments, are the same as heretofore detailed. The shield-bearer extends his bossed shield to protect the King, who is clothed in a richly-embroidered tunic, the truncated cap, rosette-clasped bracelets; and his bow arm protected from the recoil of the string by a close-fitting shield, fastened above the elbow and wrist. The left arms of his officers are similarly guarded. Above the chariot is a human-bodied Divinity, with wings, but without legs; he wears a cap, with two bull's-horns laid close round the head. A broad flat ring encircles this figure, passing immediately above the feathery termination of his person, and behind and above his shoulders. This Divinity sends his winged arrows against the enemies of the King. Directly in front of the King a leader of the enemy is falling from his chariot—one of the horses of which is down, whilst the others are still plunging and endeavouring to extricate themselves; the charioteer, having lost control, is precipitated in front. Beyond, one of the King's soldiers is about to kill a flying foe, in spite of the efforts of a comrade to drag him off to the security of the city, the outworks of which extend to the banks of a shallow stream running through a woody country. One of the enemy lies dead, and others are flying before the conquering King, who pursues them to the very confines of the city. The city has embattled towers, and arched gateway, likewise embattled, and is protected by a ditch and double wall—from behind the second and inner of which the enemy are discharging their arrows. From the towers they are also shooting arrows and throwing stones, under cover of wicker shields. The last figure, as far as the fracture allows us to see, shows one endeavouring to obtain a parley: his slackened bow is in his left hand, and his right is upraised, bespeaking attention.

HAWK-HEADED DEITY.

Sixth Colossal Relievo—"Hawk-headed Deity," 7 feet high. His crest is hanging down behind, and one of the wings from his shoulder is elevated, and the other depressed. His under garment, richly embroidered and edged with tasseled fringe, reaches only to his knees; he has a long robe, similarly trimmed, hanging at the back, and apparently passing round in front, the end hanging over the left shoulder: two double cords, knotted at intervals, and with tassels at the ends, hang from the waist. His outer garment is a long furred and embroidered mantle, reaching down to the ankles; it is passed under the right arm, and thrown over the left shoulder; the handles of two daggers are shown upon the breast. The vest is fastened round the neck with a pomegranate and tassel. He has a plain armlet on his arm, rosette-clasped bracelets on his wrists, earrings; and a bead chaplet on his neck, the centre bead of which is a pomegranate. The riband which ties the fillet of the cap is shown behind. In his right hand he holds a pine cone, which he is in the act of presenting; and, in his left, a square basket with a handle. In the sandals, the heel only is protected, the straps passing over the instep: the remains of colouring matter are still upon them. The lower half of this Relievo is covered with a cuneiform inscription; but, whether coeval with the sculpture, or placed there subsequently, is a subject for investigation.

The next sculptures are not Bassi Relievi, but consist of a Colossal Human Head, with bull's horns and ears; and the Cloven Foot of a Bull—probably belonging to a human-headed bull, such as M. Botta has discovered at Khorsabad. The head is covered with an Oriental turban, with a fillet at the back, and a cord round the forehead: the horns and ears appear in the turban. It is likely that this is a portrait of the King, as it bears a resemblance to the other sculptures, in all of which there is an evident attempt to maintain the verisimilitude of the principal personage. The King's head is placed upon the Bull, a noble and strong animal, possibly to indicate his strength, or his having vanquished the wild bull; as the Egyptians, in their Sphyngi, placed the heads of their Kings upon their favourite lion.

Seventh Relievo—"Colossal Human-headed Divinity," 7 feet high. The beard is formally curled; three bull's horns are laid close down upon and round the head; but, in all other respects, the dress is the same as in No. 6. This deity is also presenting a pine cone with the right hand, and is holding a basket with the left. The lower half of this slab is likewise inscribed with cuneiform letters.

Eighth Relievo represents "The King Returned from the Chase." The lion is at his feet apparently subdued, but not dead. He is followed by his out-door attendants, consisting of two warriors and two eunuchs, the former habited in the surcoat, reaching no lower than the knees; and the latter in long, fringed, and very richly embroidered robes: they are all uncovered, and carry in their hands the instrument so often mentioned. The King wears the truncated cap, the long, fringed robe, and shorter richly embroidered tunic, with cord and tassels depending. He has a sash round the waist, with a sword-belt buckled over it; and, what seems to be the tassels of the sword-belt, hanging from the shoulders, both before and behind: similar tassels are hanging from the back of the head, under the hair. He wears, also, rosette-clasped bracelets, plain armlets, and a double necklace. The King's cup-bearer, the sherbetices of our day, meets the King, and has presented to him the cup of sherbet or wine for his refreshment, which the King, still leaning on his bow, drinks, whilst the cup-bearer disperses the flies with the fly-flapper in his hand. Over his left shoulder is a long muslin handkerchief or napkin, embroidered and fringed at both ends, for the King to wipe his lips with after drinking. The cup-bearer is prepared to receive the cup, and holds the napkin forward in readiness to present to the King. This is very interesting, from its exact resemblance to the custom of the Persians of the present day: the handkerchief is called el-mahr-rha-ma. Behind the cup-bearer stand two other attendants, with their hands clasped one over the other, in the Eastern conventional attitude of respect approved in our time. Behind these, again, are the minstrels playing on instruments with nine strings, which are struck by means of a kind of plectrum, or rather hammer, the fingers evidently being used as stops. Their mouths, in opposition to the firmly-compressed lips of the other persons, are represented open, showing that they are singing their pœans—songs of rejoicing and gladness—at the King's return.

COLOSSAL HUMAN HEAD.

Ninth Relievo (the fourth in the order at the Museum) represents a Bull Hunt. The King is attended by his huntsman, who follows the chariot, riding sideways upon one horse, and leading another richly caparisoned, with embroidered and fringed saddle necklace and knotted tail, evidently for the King's use in the chase. The King in his chariot, having wounded a bull, seizes him by the horns, and inflicts a deadly wound with one of the daggers that he wears. It is especially remarkable that the King is inserting his danger precisely between the second and third vertebra, where the spinal cord is most assailable, and that he is doing this carelessly, with his head turned away, with the composure gained by long experience. Another bull, pierced with four arrows, lies upon the ground. The horns of the bulls are peculiarly short and thick, but only one is represented on either. It does not, however, follow that unicorns are intended, as it may merely arise from the profile representation. In the usual place is the King's spear, like that carried by the huntsman; it has the addition of a fillet to rouse and frighten the wild beasts. The other appointments of the chariot have been already described; and the three horses have again but six legs shown. The King wears the truncated cap, trilobed ear-rings, bracelets, and armlets; in all other respects his dress is the same as before detailed. His charioteer, who drives, is uncovered: he wears rosette-clasped bracelets like the King's, and holds a whip in his right hand.

The Tenth Relievo represents a Lion Hunt. The King in his chariot, drawn by three horses, which the charioteer urges forward to escape a lion which has already placed his claw upon the backs of the chariot, infuriated at the four arrows which have already taken effect. The King at this juncture aims a deadly wound at the monster, whose tail is admirably indicative of rage and fury. Behind the lion are two of the King's bearded body-guard, fully armed, and holding their shields and daggers in readiness for defence in the event of the prey escaping the shaft of the King. A wounded lion prowls crouching upon the ground in front—the agony expressed in its action being well contrasted with the fury in the former. The tail of the lion has an exaggerated representation of the claw mentioned by Didymus Alexandrinus. The existence of this claw has, until very recently, been disputed; but the observations of some modern naturalists have confirmed the statement which is here traditionally supported by this curious evidence. The King's body-guard wear the conical cap, with a large tassel depending from under the hair at the back of the head; the charioteer is uncovered, and carries a whip in the right hand; and the King himself is dressed as heretofore described, and is armed with a sword, with a lion's head upon it near the handle. In its place behind the chariot is the King's javelin, decorated with the fillet.

COLOSSAL HUMAN-HEADED DIVINITY.

The Eleventh Relievo represents "The League, or Treaty of Peace." The King having arrived at the frontier of his dominions, has descended from his chariot to meet another King, as we infer from the short upper tunic, which no where else appears excepting upon the King, and which we, therefore, suppose to be a Royal robe. The two Kings are clothed precisely alike, in richly embroidered and furred robes of the same form; the head-dresses, however, differ; he who we have hitherto distinguished as *the* King wearing the truncated cap, whereas the other wears the simple fillet before named. Both Kings are on foot, but the conqueror still retains the implements of war, and holds in his right hand two arrows perpendicularly—perhaps, a mystical sign of friendship—whilst his adversary raises his right hand in an action of supplication. That the conditions of the treaty are favourable to the conqueror may be inferred by the surrender of the prisoners, intimated by the prisoner in the conical cap kissing the feet of his King and deliverer. Immediately behind the great King are two eunuchs, each holding bows and quivers of arrows and the whip-shaped instrument; one of these holds an umbrella over the King's head. Behind the eunuchs is the King's groom, armed with a sword, and having a quiver of arrows; he holds the King's chariot, the horses of which, in this representation, have the right number of legs. Beside the chariot stands a body-guard, wearing the conical cap, and holding a javelin; and in the chariot is the charioteer. The King's javelin, with two streamers, is in its appointed place at the back of the chariot. The relative rank and importance of the officers attached to the King are indicated by the height of each individual, each bearing his appropriate insignia.

The great importance of these sculptures in an historical point of view—more from the high state of civilization which they indicate, as regards knowledge of the ornamental and useful sciences, than from their beauty and utility as works of art—would alone be a sufficient excuse for thus minutely entering into their detail; but when we consider that this description may have to meet the eyes of many who may never have an opportunity of seeing the originals, we are satisfied that no other apology will be requisite for so far extending this paper.

LION HUNT.

Fig. 4: "Nimrud Marbles" from the "supposed ruins of Nineveh" showing reliefs from the first batch of reliefs from Layard's excavations that were displayed in the British Museum. *The Illustrated London News* was the first to publish images from Layard's excavations in the British press. *The Illustrated London News*, Saturday, June 26, 1847.

3. SCIENTIFIC VS. AESTHETIC APPROACHES TO COLLECTION & DISPLAY IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY MUSEUM

3.1. *Elite Taste and Public Edification in the British Museum*

In the Department of Antiquities of the mid-nineteenth-century British Museum, an important debate centered on two questions: (1) what to collect; and (2) how to display it. Both questions were predicated on judgements of the value (both aesthetic and edifying)[19] or, perhaps better, the *worth*, of particular objects or monuments. Key decisions were made by the museum's Trustees, a thoroughly elite group,[20] who seem generally to have approved a *picturesque* arrangement, one displaying antiquities according to their perceived aesthetic value and according to their best aesthetic effect. In this the Trustees resisted the type of chronological arrangement, perceived as more *scientific*, which valued antiquities as representative of specific cultures and time periods regardless of their perceived aesthetic qualities[21] – and which had become prominent in public museums and galleries of art across Europe from the late eighteenth century.

The two approaches to the collection and display of art, the scientific and the aesthetic, were (and are) generally understood to diverge in both purpose and in the audience at which they were directed. A chronological or scientific arrangement had the potential to educate (on-the-spot if necessary) its audience, the general public, in the history of art: it thus seemed particularly appropriate for major public collections like the British Museum. A picturesque arrangement, on the other hand, was understood as serving an educated audience (as elite connoisseurs) seeking aesthetic engagement with art. Of course, this is a false dichotomy: chronological display did not, and was not intended to, preclude or diminish aesthetic experience.[22] Moreover, those championing aesthetic interests were not concerned solely with the satisfaction of elite aesthetes; some emphasized the aesthetic as a means of elevating the *public taste*, and promoting thereby not only the intellectual but also the *moral* improvement – the edification – of the public.[23] The contemplation of art, after all, properly undertaken, was understood to have the capacity to improve moral character. But was all (ancient) art equally capable of elevating the public mind and taste?

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[19] On the ways in which eighteenth and nineteenth century theories of aesthetics shaped the reception of ancient and non-Western arts, Karen Sonik, "The Distant Eye and the Ekphrastic Image: Thinking Through Aesthetics and Art for the Senses (Western | Non-Western)," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Senses in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Kiersten Neumann and Allison Karmel Thomason (New York: Routledge, 2022), 530–557.

[20] A description of the Trustees around this time (Nicholas A. Rupke, *Richard Owen: Biology without Darwin*, rev. ed. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009], 34) describes some forty-eight members – of which one was directly appointed by the Crown; twenty-three were *ex officio* representing prominent members of the government, church, and judiciary, as well as presidents of the College of Physicians, Royal Academy, Royal Society, and Society of Antiquaries; nine represented families making major donations to the British Museum (e.g., Sloane, Elgin); and fifteen were elected by the others. Rupke (*Richard Owen*, 34) observes that almost all the family and elected representatives (totaling twenty-four of the forty-eight) were aristocrats and that "museum appointments came under the patronage of three *ex officio* trustees, the archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord High Chancellor, and the Speaker of the House of Commons." This striking group of luminaries indicates the significance of the British Museum to public life in the mid-nineteenth century.

[21] The possession of a complete series of antiquities, whether originals or, where these were unavailable, casts, would be an important goal of archaeologists and antiquarians like Charles Newton; see fn. 40, 51, 52 below.

It is perhaps unsurprising, given that the public museum emerged concomitantly with the valorization of (classical) Greek art in England (and Europe more generally), to find that serious enquiries were made into whether barbaric and aesthetically inferior – e.g., “oriental” or non-Western – objects had the potential to *degrade* and injure the public mind and taste.[24] (This matter is further elucidated below.)

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[22] Carole Paul, “The Emergence of the Professional Curator,” in *A Companion to Curation*, ed. Brad Buckley and John Conomos (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), 80.

[23] For the moral dimensions of taste as they developed from eighteenth through nineteenth century Britain in particular, see e.g., Karl Axelsson, *Political Aesthetics: Addison and Shaftesbury on Taste, Morals and Society* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), esp. 25, 35ff. See also Preben Mortensen, “Shaftesbury and the Morality of Art Appreciation,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55 (1994): 633, who challenged the idea that Shaftesbury “liberate[d] the aesthetic from the moral” and asserted that disinterestedness (as in “art as the object of disinterested contemplation”), rather than removing aesthetic contemplation from the sphere of morality, instead emplaced it firmly within this realm. For the equation of good taste with moral refinement in other nineteenth century contexts such as the novel, see, e.g., Marjorie Garson, *Moral Taste: Aesthetics, Subjectivity and Social Power in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 4.

[24] *Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery* (1853), 639; cf. the impressively forward-looking lecture of the Hungarian antiquarian and politician Ferenc Pulszky (“On the Progress and Decay of Art; and on the Arrangement of a National Museum,” *The Museum of Classical Antiquities* 5 [1852]: 1–15); also the integrative approach to Greek art taken at the Sydenham Crystal Palace. Pulszky (“On the Progress and Decay of Art,” 12) observed the transformation in the status of Egyptian antiquities, which had been “excluded in the last century from the history of art, and considered only as curiosities” but which, by the mid-nineteenth century, were “now everywhere added to the public collections” as legitimate examples of art. He argued that the works of other great civilizations – naming Persia, the Assyrians, India (“the Hindoos”), China, and Japan were worthy of more attention and *better display* in public museums than they currently received at the hands of those who despised them for their nonconformity with the Greek ideal. He regrettably did not extend this same regard to the arts of Africa and Oceania, which would not receive their due until the following century (see, e.g., Arthur Danto, “Artifact and Art,” in *ART/artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections* [New York: Center for African Art and Prestel Verlag, 1988], 18–32). In the Sydenham Crystal Palace, Owen Jones, the architect of the Greek court (in)famously painted the Parthenon frieze, seeking to reintegrate the classical Greek arts “with the art of Egypt and Assyria” (Kate Nichols, *Greece and Rome at the Crystal Palace: Classical Sculpture and Modern Britain, 1854–1936* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015], 215). While this action scandalized some of the public and the press, necessitating Jones’ publication of an equally infamous “Apology for the Colouring of the Greek Court” (1854), it is notable that Jones (*An Apology for the*

3.2. *The Great Chain of Art*

During the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment emphases on reason and the scientific method took firm root. Among the spheres of enquiry shaped by these ideals were those pertaining to art and history, particularly within the frameworks of museums and collections open to the public.

In his enormously influential, if frequently problematic, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764), the German "father of art history" Johann Joachim Winckelmann established a (revolutionary) chronological framework for the study of ancient art. Articulating his goal of demonstrating "the origin, *progress*, change, and downfall of art [emphasis added],"[25] Winckelmann constructed an evolutionary narrative that located the apex of aesthetic development in the works of classical Greece. But even as he valorized the classical Greek arts, Winckelmann also systematically explored other ancient arts, including those of the Egyptians, Phoenicians, Etruscans, and Persians. Given this broad-ranging and meticulous study, he could hardly avoid observing formal similarities in works deriving from different ancient civilizations – as between the works of Egypt and some of the earlier works from Greece. But Winckelmann, unsurprisingly in light of his ideal of Greek exceptionalism, refused to recognize these similarities as evidence for intercultural relationships and influence: "this resemblance does not prove that the Greeks learnt their art from the Egyptians."[26] Instead, he argued that the simple outlines and straight lines that characterized the infancy of art in *any* independently developing culture naturally gave rise to a type of figure "we are accustomed to call Egyptian."[27]

It was the French antiquarian, the Comte de Caylus (Anne-Claude-Philippe de Tubières), who, in his monumental seven volume work, *Recueil d'antiquités*

Colouring of the Greek Court in the Crystal Palace [London: Bradbury & Evans, 1854], 7) definitively stood his ground in arguing the correctness of his conceptualization and asserting that the only stumbling block to the belief that the Greeks (like other ancient peoples) painted their monuments was "the artificial value which white marble has in our eyes."

[25] Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *The History of Ancient Art*, trans. G. Henry Lodge (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1873 [1764]), 1:149–50.

[26] Winckelmann, *The History of Ancient Art*, 1:199. The opening pages of Winckelmann's (*The History of Ancient Art*, 1:191–192) work overflows with false and often ugly ideas as exemplified by his third paragraph, which asserts that "the art of drawing among the Egyptians is to be compared to a tree which, though well cultivated, has been checked and arrested in its growth by a worm, or other casualties ; for it remained unchanged, precisely the same, yet without attaining its perfection, until the period when Greek kings held sway over them ; and the case appears to have been the same with Persian art. Etruscan art, when in its bloom, may be compared to a raging stream, rushing furiously along between crags and over rocks ; for the characteristics of its drawing are hardness and exaggeration. But, among the Greeks, the art of drawing resembles a river whose clear waters flow in numerous windings through a fertile vale, and fill its channel, yet do not overflow." If Winckelmann pioneered a valuable chronological and stylistic approach to art, he also firmly rooted, albeit in part as a reflection of contemporary thought, a deformed discourse of ancient art.

[27] Winckelmann, *The History of Ancient Art*, 1:199.

(1752–1767),[28] advocated for the idea of the arts – and thus also the cultures – of the ancient world as fundamentally *interconnected*.[29] They were linked, according to this view, in a continuous chain originating in Egypt, continuing in Etruria, culminating in the ideal(ized) works of Greece, and then continuing on (though in inferior style and execution to Greek works) among the Romans.[30] Assyria had not yet been excavated and so was not a part of this discourse. In the mid-nineteenth century, when Assyria made its first appearance in the galleries of Europe, some scholars and intellectuals would argue that Assyria should supplant Egyptian art in the latter's traditional role as the "mother of Greek art."[31] But such considerations were yet to come.[32]

Beyond the written discourse on (ancient) art, Europe's public museums and galleries also began to reflect interest in a "scientific" mode of organizing and classifying art and antiquities, often manifested in the form of chronological display. Already in the 1780s, the *Kaiserliche und königliche Bilder-Gallerie im Oberen Belvedere* (Imperial and Royal Picture Gallery in the Upper Belvedere Palace) in Vienna was arranged following chronological and geographical considerations by the art dealer Christian von Mechel, who regarded the collection as a *Lehrmittelsammlung*, possessed of an educational purpose, and termed its arrangement a *sichtbare Geschichte der Kunst*, a "visible history of art."[33] In the 1790s, the Museum of French Monuments, which contained the first "period rooms" in museum history, was arranged by Alexandre Lenoir along stricter chronological lines than any previous collection.[34] And, following the French Revolution, chronological organization was also adopted for the Louvre's Grand Gallery – though not yet for other parts of the museum.[35]

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[28] The seventh supplementary volume of this work was published posthumously.

[29] Caylus is notable also for prioritizing the artwork (the thing) in its own right, rather than looking to texts to inform their understanding: "By examining the precious remains of the ancients, you are able to conceive a sure idea of their taste. The arts carry the character of the nations that cultivated them; you can sort out their beginning, their infancy, their progress, and the point of perfection to which they have been taken by every nation. You do not better distinguish the tastes of these peoples, their customs, their turn of mind, so to speak, in the books that they have left us than in the works of painting and sculpture that have survived up until our time" (Caylus vol. 2:i, translated in Alex Potts, "Introduction," in *History of the Art of Antiquity*, by Johann Joachim Winckelmann, trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave [Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006], 25). This approach leads to its own fallacies (see, further, Sonik, "Art/ifacts and Art*Works*") but goes some way to challenging the primacy of text.

[30] See, e.g., Potts, "Introduction," 25–26.

[31] See, e.g., Sydney Smirke, "Remarks on the Assyrian Sculptures Discovered by Dr. Layard, and on Some Peculiarities of Assyrian Architecture," *The Builder* 8 (April 6, 1850): 160.

[32] See the discussion of ornament – and the argument that Assyria's ornaments, rather than those of Egypt, were the precursors of Greek ornament – in the main text below.

[33] Christian von Mechel, *Verzeichniß der Gemälde der Kaiserlich Königlichen Bilder Gallerie in Wien* (Wien, 1873), xvi. This approach, which saw the pictures separated first by the schools to which each artist belonged and then arranged chronologically within that school, permitted the novice viewer to gain an on-the-spot education in the history of art; see Paul, "The Emergence of the Professional Curator," 79–80. It is notable that Mechel's chronological and historicizing organization was altered by Joseph Rosa, the actual director of the Imperial and Royal Picture Gallery in Vienna, following Mechel's departure in 1783. Rosa sought to create a display more conducive to *aesthetic experience* (one suited to elite connoisseurs), even as he (disingenuously) asserted the

In early nineteenth century Germany, the royal architect Leo von Klenze adopted the chronological approach for the Glyptothek (built 1816–30) of King Ludwig of Bavaria. The collections in the Glyptothek, which housed the ancient sculptures Ludwig had acquired during his Grand Tour of Italy (1804–5), were arranged in "clockwise order from Egypt, to Greece, ancient Rome, the Renaissance, and the modern rebirth under Ludwig."[36] The Glyptothek's arrangement – with its deliberate articulation of a "chronological, stylistic developmental history of art"[37] – was widely admired by archaeologists like Charles Newton, who served as the Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum from 1861–1865.

Newton himself, notably, would play an important role in conceptualizing and seeking to apply to the British Museum's collection and display of antiquities a vision of the great "chain of art." This adapted the eighteenth century concept of the Great Chain of Being, which envisioned a *hierarchical* ordering of

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relevance of his reorganization to a broader public; Paul, "The Emergence of the Professional Curator," 80. See also, for related discussions, Giles Waterfield, "The Origins of the Early Picture Gallery Catalogue in Europe, and Its Manifestations in Victorian Britain," in *Art in Museums*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (London: Athlone Press, 1995), 45; Alexandra Stara, *The Museum of French Monuments 1795–1816: 'Killing Art to Make History'* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 4; Peter Burke, "Context in Context," *Common Knowledge* 8 (2002): 152–177, esp. pp. 159–160.

[34] Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 155; Burke, "Context in Context," 159–160; Stara, *The Museum of French Monuments*. In the sphere of artifacts and archaeology, the chronological model left its mark in the form of the Three Age System (Stone, Bronze, Iron) devised by Christian Thomsen in 1816 for the arrangement of the Danish National Museum's artifact collection; Burke, "Context in Context," 160.

[35] The rest of the museum did not undergo chronological arrangement until the 1930s; see, further, Nichols, *Greece and Rome at the Crystal Palace*, 71. This is despite the calls by French critics, already in the eighteenth century, in favor of chronological arrangement (understood as an "analytic method") in the Louvre; see, further, Stara, *The Museum of French Monuments*, 22 and passim.

[36] David Watkin, "The Transformation of Munich by Maximilian I Joseph and Ludwig I," *The Court Historian* 11 (2006): 5; see also Jenkins, *Archaeologists & Aesthetes*, 56. Other museums of the era, including the Altes Museum in Berlin, were not so strictly arranged along chronological lines: in 1828, Karl Friedrich Schinkel, the architect of the Altes Museum, and the art historian Gustav Friedrich Waagen, director of the *Gemäldegalerie* (occupying the upper storey of the Altes Museum), described their purpose as being "first to delight, then to instruct" – thus prioritizing the aesthetic value of the collection and its display over the educational value; see, further, Carol Paul, "Preface," in *The First Modern Museums of Art: The Birth of an Institution in 18th- and Early-19th-Century Europe*, ed. Carol Paul (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2012), xvi.

[37] Nichols, *Greece and Rome at the Crystal Palace*, 70; see, further, Charles Thomas Newton, *Essays on Art and Archaeology* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1880), 39–72.

life and matter in the universe.[38] The "chain of art," a progressive linking of Egyptian to Assyrian to Etruscan to (and culminating in) Greek art,[39] also drew on chronological and classificatory principles of the natural sciences and applied these to the display and analysis of art.[40] Contemporary works like Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830–33) served as a model for developing disciplines – including the history of art – seeking to organize themselves along scientific lines.[41]

Newton was in good company in the British Museum, which housed not only the nation's foremost collection of antiquities but also, until 1881, its primary natural history collection.[42] The biologist Richard Owen (1804–1892), indeed, declared his vision of the British Museum as functioning primarily to present "a *complete series* of created works [emphasis added]" and only secondarily to serve educational and recreational purposes[43] – though, as Lord Henry Lennox observed, it was difficult to imagine what higher purpose such a complete series (whether of natural history specimens or antiquities or any other thing) could serve "than the development and education of the mind of man."[44] And, in the minutes of the 1853 *Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery* – this discussed, in part, the disposition of particular classes of artifacts in particular collections and their modes of display – the committee chairman proposed that the British Museum should be arranged chronologically as "a regular history as it were of the art: that you should begin with the Egyptian, go to the Assyrian, and come down to the Grecian, Roman, and the lower ages."[45]

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[38] The concept of a great "Chain of Being," rooted in ancient Greek philosophy, was revived during the Middle Ages and gained new prominence from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, when it was both adapted and challenged; see, e.g., Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936); William F. Bynum, "The Great Chain of Being After Forty Years: An Appraisal," *History of Science* 3 (1975): 1–28; David Bindman, *Ape to Apollo: Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the 18th Century* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), 17, passim.

[39] Jenkins, *Archaeologists & Aesthetes*, 73.

[40] Newton (*Essays on Art and Archaeology*, 37) himself held the position that "a museum of antiquities is to the Archaeologist what a botanical garden is to the Botanist; it presents his subject compendiously, synoptically, suggestively, not in the desultory and accidental order in which he would otherwise be brought in contact with its details." A botanical garden, of course, cannot be arranged chronologically; nevertheless, its ordered structure and the comprehensive picture it affords the botanist have something in common with what an antiquities museum arranged along the chronological and evolutionary lines of the "chain of art" might afford the archaeologist.

[41] See, further, Debbie Challis, "Charles Newton and the British Museum: Articulating a Science of Ancient Art in the Nineteenth Century," in *Critical Exchange: Art Criticism of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries in Russia and Western Europe*, ed. Carol Adlam and Julia Simpson (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 154–155.

[42] For the close physical (and other types of) relationship of the antiquities collection with the natural history collection in the nineteenth century British Museum, see Jenkins, *Archaeologists & Aesthetes*, 72–73. The process of removing the natural history collection from the British Museum to the new Natural History Museum was a lengthy process (physically) commencing in 1880, with the arrangement of the botany, geology, and mineralogy (opened to the public on April 18, 1881), and continuing the following year with the installation of the zoology collection (which finally opened to the public in May of 1886); see, further, *A General Guide* 1887: 11.

[43] Owen's view is cited by Lennox, "On the Uses of National Museums," 160.

[44] Lennox, "On the Uses of National Museums," 160.

Newton, then, was far from alone in advocating for "scientific" approaches to and arrangements of art, the latter particularly in service of the edification and education of the public.[46] But the chain of art he conceptualized was not defined exclusively by a concern for chronology. It was underpinned (as were various iterations of the Chain of Being) also by evolutionary ideas with ugly implications: the progression[47] of the chain of ancient art was based "on the intellectual and aesthetic status of the civilization from which ancient art works originated…for [Newton] the chain was evolutionary, with primitive origins culminating in artistic excellence, followed by artistic decay."[48] At the apex of aesthetic progress were the works of classical Greece and, particularly in Britain, the Elgin Marbles.[49] (The Elgin Marbles, which derive from the Parthenon, are named for Thomas Bruce, seventh Earl of Elgin, who procured them while serving as British consul at Constantinople. They have been a centerpiece of the British Museum's exhibits since 1817.[50])

In 1851, Newton published (part of) a report he had drawn up for the British Museum following his 1848 tour of museums in Florence, Rome, and Naples, as well as the Glyptothek in Munich. This illuminated both Newton's own and the British Museum's concerns with respect to collecting. The report suggested it would be convenient to consider art objects chronologically, following their original order of production, even as it emphasized throughout the primacy of Greece. The value of works from other civilizations, including those of the Assyrians and Egyptians, was located in their role as "historical documents" throwing "a new and unlooked-for light on the question which has occupied archaeology for more than a century – the origin of Greek art."[51] Masterworks like the (classical Greek) Elgin Marbles, moreover, could only fully be understood by the viewer in the *material presence* of the rest of the chain of art, whether in the form of originals or casts of objects held in other collections.[52]

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[45] *Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery* (1853), 635.

[46] See, e.g., Pulszky, "On the Progress and Decay of Art."

[47] Jenkins (*Archaeologists & Aesthetes*, 63–65) contrasts Winckelmann's (1717–1768) and Hegel's (1770–1831) conceptions of art within the framework of art history. Winckelmann perceived "the progress of art – and, therefore of civilization – in terms of a rise and fall, with classical Greece representing the paramount, pivotal point…[whereas Hegel] conceived of progress extending beyond the primitive and classical phase of civilization into the medieval and modern age." The development of the modern concept of progress during the Enlightenment has been extensively discussed; see, e.g., John Bagnell Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry Into Its Origin and Growth* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1921); Leslie Sklair, *The Sociology of Progress* (London: Routledge, 1970); Eric Robertson Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress and Other Essays on Greek Literature and Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). The incorporation of the idea and ideal of progress into the British Museum is manifested not only to its commitment to chronological display, though this was "barely realised in practice" (Jenkins, *Archaeologists & Aesthetes*, 62) but also through Westmacott's choice of pedimental composition for the museum: "With its corner figure of primitive man emerging towards the light, and the central group of figures – some based on the Elgin Marbles – representing the intellectual and manufacturing arts, it is both a celebration of nineteenth- century pride in human achievement and an eloquent statement of belief in the idea of progress" (Jenkins, *Archaeologists & Aesthetes*, 61).

[48] Challis, "Charles Newton and the British Museum," 160.

[49] Newton wrote: "Take away the Elgin Marbles, and…it is as if the keystone had fallen out of the arch" (*Essays on Art and Archaeology*, 49).

[50] The term "Elgin Marbles" – rather than "Parthenon Marbles" – is deliberately used here to reflect the prominent new significations the works have acquired over the past 200+ years since they were taken from Athens. It is as the Elgin Marbles that these sculptures acquired their central status in the founding myth of Western civilization.

The benefits (and drawbacks) of the chronological system and other issues pertaining to museum display were thus a subject of significant concern for intellectuals, critics, politicians, and others interested in public education and edification from the late eighteenth and through the nineteenth centuries. Within the framework of the public museum, the chronological system was effectively equated with the "true spirit of the Enlightenment."[53] And yet the aesthetic approach remained a powerful counter to, or, in some cases, inflector of, the chronological, staking its own claim on public edification and public interest. In some cases, this may have been at least partially impelled by concern that the aesthetically – and morally(?) – superior antiquities of classical Greece (in Britain particularly the Elgin Marbles) not be devalued or demeaned by their display alongside *aesthetically inferior* art – whether of more archaic Greek or other "primitive" origin.[54] And, on more practical grounds, efforts to scientifically organize collections along strictly chronological lines was often foiled by a lack of sufficient space: in the mid-nineteenth century, concerns about the availability of space in the British Museum are repeatedly expressed.[55]

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[51] Charles Thomas Newton, "Remarks on the Collections of Ancient Art in the Museums of Italy, the Glyptothek at Munich, and the British Museum," *The Museum of Classical Antiquities* 3 (1851): 206. Egyptian and Assyrian material, for Newton ("Remarks on the Collections of Ancient Art," 206), were significant primarily as the "two distinct sources" from which the "earliest productions of Greek civilization…may have derived."

[52] A number of such casts were, at various times, displayed within the galleries of the British Museum. Jenkins ("Acquisition and Supply of Casts of the Parthenon Sculptures by the British Museum, 1835–1939," *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 85 [1990]: 89–114) discusses those of the Parthenon sculptures especially, noting that it was only with the new minimalist approach to the museum in the 1930s that casts were removed from the combined collection of original sculptures and casts in the Elgin Room.

[53] Stara, *The Museum of French Monuments*, 22. The significance attached to the details of museum display in Britain and with respect to the arrangement of the British Museum is evident in the particulars of the very lengthy and detailed *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Constitution and Government of the British Museum with Minutes of Evidence: Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty* (1850). The commission was composed of such illustrious figures as Francis Earl of Ellesmere; Edward Bishop of Norwich; Henry Lord Langdale; John Lord Wrottesley; Sir Philip de Malpas Grey Egerton; Sir Charles Lemon; Sir Roderick Impey Murchison; Andrew Rutherfurd (Lord Rutherfurd from 1851–1854); Joseph Hume; Samuel Rogers; and Richard Monckton Milnes. Several of these figures stand out for their dedication to and patronage of the arts, among them Joseph Hume (from 1818 a Fellow of the Royal Society), described as a dedicated critic of "the system upon which the national collections were managed" who yet "never grudged the voting of the sums necessary for the maintenance of the British Museum, feeling, as he at the same time pointed out, how, under better management, they might become powerful instruments of good to the people" (Lennox, "On the Uses of National Museums," 157).

In later work, Newton would explicitly address the value of displaying aesthetically inferior art alongside aesthetically superior examples, using the Elgin Marbles as case study: he posed the question of whether the Elgin Marbles *alone*, absent other monuments of art and antiquity arranged in chronological sequence, might actually convey a more instructive lesson "to the people generally…than if they were exhibited in connection with the whole development of Greek art?"[56] The answer, he asserted, was a firm negative: for Newton, "museums should not merely charm and astonish the eye by the exhibition of marvels of art; they should, by the method of their arrangement, suggest to the mind the causes of such phenomena."[57]

3.3. *The Case of the "Lycian Marbles"*

At the British Museum, an early debate on the merits of adopting the chronological approach centered on a collection of art from Lycian Xanthos, which arrived at the museum between 1842 and 1844.[58] The archaeologist Charles Fellows (1799–1860), who had been responsible for procuring the new collection, sought to display the Lycian-style monuments "as historical documents of a new culture, complete with its own language and individual architectural style."[59] According to this plan, the Greek-style monuments recovered from Xanthos, which included the impressive Nereid Tomb (Fig. 5), would be shown separately in one

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[54] See, further, main text below on the perceived place of the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum and the history of art overall; also *Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery* (1853), Minutes 639; John Malcolm Russell, *From Nineveh to New York: The Strange Story of the Assyrian Reliefs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Hidden Masterpiece at Canford School* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 37ff.

[55] See, e.g., *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Constitution and Government of the British Museum with Minutes of Evidence*: *Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1850), 39, 73–74, 95–96, passim; Jenkins, *Archaeologists & Aesthetes*, 158ff.

[56] Newton, *Essays on Art and Archaeology*, 69.

[57] Newton, *Essays on Art and Archaeology*, 69; see also fn. 20 above.

[58] Jenkins, *Archaeologists & Aesthetes*, 142–145.

[59] Jenkins*, Archaeologists & Aesthetes*, 56. On Fellows' interests in a more scientific and structured chronological approach to ancient art, including his call for a gallery of casts to guide students in developing a sense of the key features of successive styles and his advocacy for maintaining the integrity of monuments rather than separating and displaying only their sculpted pieces, see, further, Debbie Challis, "Modern to Ancient: Greece at the Great Exhibition and the Crystal Palace," in *Britain, the Empire, and the World at the Great Exhibition of 1851*, ed. Jeffrey A. Auerbach and Peter H. Hoffenberg (London: Routledge, 2008), 184–185.

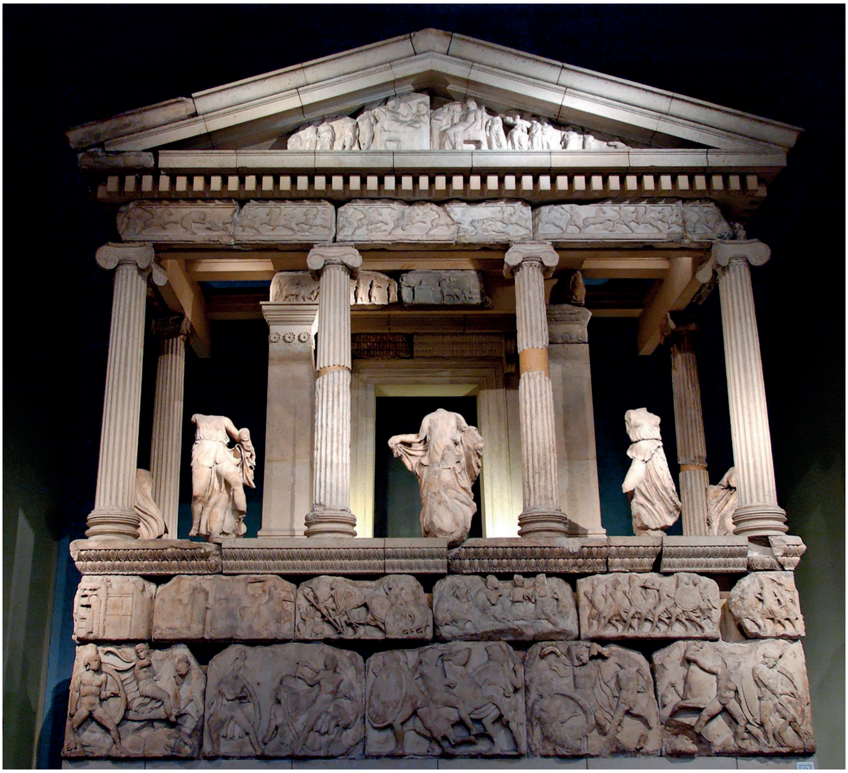

Fig. 5: Marble Nereid Monument (ca. 390–380 BCE), Xanthos, Lycia. Façade resembles Greek Ionic temple. Shipped to British Museum in early 1840s by archaeologist Charles Fellows.

room so as to permit what he regarded as the Lycian-style monuments to be collected and displayed together in their own room.[60] But the museum's Trustees had other ideas. They had hired Sir Richard Westmacott (1775–1856) – a British sculptor and Hellenist, and a noted proponent of *picturesque* organization – to arrange sculptures held by the Department of Antiquities, and it would ultimately be Westmacott's rather than Fellows' plan that they approved. (The Trustees' arrangement with Westmacott was unusual as it bypassed Edward Hawkins, then the Keeper of the Department of Antiquities.)

Westmacott favored an aesthetic approach to display that prioritized the display of the most "sophisticated" works – those in the Greek style, according to the aesthetic judgment of the day – in picturesque settings.[61] It thus gave pride of place to the Greek style Nereid monument (Fig. 5), an early fourth century BCE tomb that resembled an Ionic Greek temple. The monuments deemed to be in the local Lycian-style, which Westmacott regarded as inferior, were shown without the added context Fellows' had suggested (Fig. 6).[62] Fellows' dismay at Westmacott's arrangement and his (justified) ire at being so summarily dismissed by the museum's Trustees led him to write a letter, described in the 1850 *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Constitution and Government of the British Museum; with Minutes of Evidence*, complaining of "inattention to his [Fellows'] representations, of some personal discourtesy on the part of the Trustees, and of serious defects and mistakes in the arrangement [by Westmacott] of the objects in question."[63]

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[60] Jenkins, *Archaeologists & Aesthetes*, 148.

The commissioners who examined the affairs of the British Museum in 1850 evidently took Fellows' complaints seriously: they undertook meticulous enquiries into how Westmacott's vision for the display of the Lycian material came about and elucidated the circumstances of the discourtesy with which Fellows – who had, after all, been responsible for the artifacts' addition to the British Museum collections – was treated both by the museum's Trustees and by Westmacott.[64] The commissioners also enquired, interestingly, into whether Westmacott had been employed on the basis of "artistic eminence" or "archaeological science," indicating a recognition of his potential limitations with respect to a *scientific* approach to the antiquities being displayed.[65] This was of concern, as the commissioners noted, because the Museum Code (statute 3, § 8) assigned the duty to "each officer of a department, of arranging *scientifically* [emphasis added]" any additions to the collection under his care. That this rule was set aside in the Department of Antiquities – so that Westmacott had control over "the arrangement of a large class of objects" prior to their being turned over to Edward Hawkins, the actual Keeper of Antiquities – came in for politely phrased but pointed and conspicuous critique.[66] The British Museum and its collections, after all, were explicitly intended to promote the *education* of the public.[67]

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[61] In the absence of chronological knowledge, sculpture, for example, had traditionally been grouped by style (e.g., idealized vs. naturalized) and/or subject (e.g., gods, heroes, mortals); see, further, Jenkins, *Archaeologists & Aesthetes*, 58.

[62] Jenkins, *Archaeologists & Aesthetes*, 56, 142–153.

[63] *Report of the Commissioners* (1850), 39.

[64] *Report of the Commissioners* (1850), 40, Minutes of Evidence 814ff.

[65] *Report of the Commissioners* (1850), Minutes of Evidence 816.

[66] *Report of the Commissioners* (1850), 40–41, Minutes of Evidence 41, 49, 64–75.

[67] The role of the British Museum in edifying and educating the public – with respect to how it might shape the public mind in matters of art and taste; where women who wish to study might, with delicacy, accommodate themselves; and whether it would be desirable to establish a place where casts might be kept for the purpose of instructing young art students in painting and plastic art – is examined in the very lengthy 1853 *Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery*, esp. Minutes pp. 629–639.

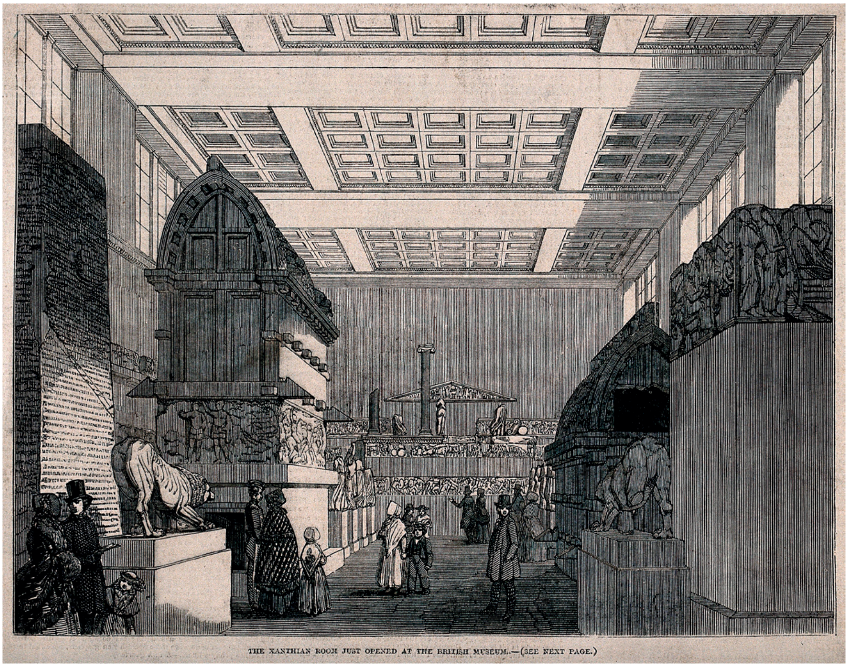
THE XANTHIAN ROOM JUST OPENED AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM.—(SEE NEXT PAGE.)

Fig. 6: The Xanthian Room (1847), with visitors, in the British Museum. Wood engraving; 12.2 (h) × 15.4 (w) cm. Monuments and reliefs from Xanthos in foreground. Courtesy Wellcome Collection (Wellcome Library no. 38446i).

4. The Collection, Valuation, and Display of Assyrian Sculpture in the Victorian Era

4.1. *Degenerate Art? The "Nineveh Marbles"*[68] *vs. the "Elgin Marbles"*

Similar issues to those governing the collection, valuation, and display of the Lycian antiquities would guide the British Museum's response to the so-called

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[68] The Assyrian sculptures, unlike the sculptures from the Elgin (Parthenon) Marbles, were not made of marble. That they, and the Lycian Marbles before them, were termed "marbles" suggests they were named by analogy with the Elgin marbles but it is worth noting this observation from an 1895 edition of the magazine *Stone* (reporting on a paper given at the Royal Institute of British Architects by G. Aitchison, W. Young, and W. Brindley), that, "for the ordinary purposes of life, all stones that are not fine or precious and will take a high polish are called marbles, whatever be their constituents, whether they be of aqueous or igneous origin. Thus, we class porphyry, granite, serpentine, and silicious stones as marble, as well as the hard carbonates of lime" ("The Use and Abuse," *Stone* 11 [June–November, 1895]: 337).

"Nineveh Marbles" (encompassing the sculptures from both Nineveh and Nimrud) it had procured a few years later from the excavations of Layard.

In 1853, a parliamentary committee convened to examine the National Gallery in London and its organization produced a lengthy report (*Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery*) that touched also on issues pertaining to the collections and display practices of the British Museum. The committee's close questioning of the sculptor Richard Westmacott, whose role at the British Museum had been examined in the 1850 *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Constitution and Government of the British Museum*, offers striking insight into how (and why) Assyrian sculptures and other antiquities were valued, displayed, and received in Victorian England.

Among the questions asked of Westmacott by the 1853 committee are a series focused on the status of the Elgin (Parthenon) Marbles in the public esteem. More specifically, the questions examine how this esteem might be affected by the nearby display of inferior works – such as Assyrian sculpture (the Nineveh Marbles). The committee was particularly concerned that the prominent display of pre-Greek and "oriental art" might draw public attention away from beneficial "models of pure beauty" like the Elgin Marbles; that the Assyrian sculptures "may deteriorate the public taste, and less incline them than they otherwise would be to study works of great antiquity and great art"; that the "great interest" excited by works like the Assyrian sculptures – which were denigrated by Westmacott both as "prescriptive art" (i.e., not the product of artistic genius) and as "very bad art," and further deprecated by the committee as "much more objects of curiosity than of art" – might exercise "an injurious effect upon the public mind in matters of art"; and that the "very free introduction of more barbarous specimens" might have "a very injurious effect upon taste in general" as well as upon contemporary artists using the British Museum collections for their training.[69]

Both the committee and Westmacott, then, clearly regarded the Assyrian sculptures as historically significant documents and powerful curiosities – in other words, as valuable artifacts – but not as possessed of aesthetic worth: they were not (*good*) *art*. This situated the Nineveh Marbles as loci of potential danger: their very strangeness had the capacity to draw public attention from the beautiful and sublime works of Classical Greece to sculptures that were aesthetically and morally inferior.

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[69] *Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery* (1853), 638–639. This ill conception of the Assyrian materials was very much in line with Rawlinson's conception (main text below): Rawlinson valued Assyria's remains not as art but as instructive historical artifacts, "invaluable" curiosities "unfolding the history, theology, language, arts, manners, military skill, and political relations 'of one of the most illustrious nations of antiquity'" (Waterfield, *Layard of Nineveh*, 147).

4.2. *Imitation, Copying, and Genius: The Rise of "Fine Art" and the Reception of Assyrian Sculpture*

Alongside the rise of the public museum, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe witnessed the establishment of new interest in and conceptions of "fine art,"[70] concomitant with the entrenchment of the isolated and creative artist-as-genius and the valorization of originality.[71] The reception of the monumental Assyrian sculptures discovered by Botta and Layard both reflected and actively participated in the developing discourses on art, with particular respect to originality and invention, aesthetics, and the nature of the artist (specifically the artist-as-genius) that characterized the time.

Our contemporary views on 'originality' and what constitutes an 'original' work, as well as related ideas regarding the nature of 'genius' and, indeed, of art itself, are inextricably rooted in the developing concerns, socio-economic frameworks, and intellectual and philosophical discourses of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. The concept of genius especially, with particular respect both to fine art and the artist, had various iterations as it developed over time and across different contexts and genres.[72] Already in 1711, the English essayist and playwright Joseph Addison (1891 [1711]) had posited the existence of two distinct but equally significant types of genius: (1) natural geniuses who "were never disciplined and broken by Rules of Art," and who, "by the meer Strength of natural Parts, and without any Assistance of Arts or Learning, have produced Works that were the Delight of their own Times, and the Wonder of Posterity"; and (2) those who "have formed themselves by Rules, and submitted the Greatness of their natural Talents to the Corrections and Restraints of Art." Addison further identified a pernicious threat to those belonging to the second type, namely that they might "cramp their own Abilities too much by Imitation, and form themselves altogether upon Models, without giving the full Play to their own natural Parts. An Imitation of the best Authors is not to compare with a good Original."[73] The relationship of genius with originality, as well as the precise definitions of originals as opposed to imitations and copies, would remain a topic of significant interest and debate over (and beyond) the next two centuries.

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[70] See, e.g., Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics Part I," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951): 496–527; Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics (II)." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13 (1952): 17–46; Meyer Howard Abrams, "Art-as-Such: The Sociology of Modern Aesthetics," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 38 (1985): 8–33; Sonik, "Art/ifacts and Art*Works*"; Sonik, "The Distant Eye."

[71] If the conceptualization of the artist-as-genius may be traced back to the Renaissance (e.g., Erwin Panofsky, "Artist, Scientist, Genius: Notes on the Renaissance Dämmerung," in *The Renaissance: Six Essays*, ed. Wallace K. Ferguson [New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962], 123–182; William E. Wallace, "The Artist as Genius," in *A Companion to Renaissance and Baroque Art*, ed. Babette Bohn and James M. Saslow [Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013], 151–167), the modern idea of genius and the valorization of originality were most fully elucidated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; see, e.g., Joseph Addison, No. 160: Monday, September 3, 1711, *The Spectator*, Vol. 1 (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1891 [1711]); Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, ed. Edith J. Morley (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1918 [1759]); William Duff, *An Essay on Original Genius and Its Various Modes of Exertion in Philosophy and the Fine Arts, Particularly in Poetry* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1767); William Duff, *Critical Observations on the Writings of the Most Celebrated Original Geniuses in Poetry. Being a Sequel to the Essay on Original Genius* (London: T. Becket and P. A. De Hondt, 1770); Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Taste* (London: A. Milla, 1759); Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Genius* (London: W. Strahan, 1774).

[72] Herbert Dieckmann ("Diderot's Conception of Genius," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2 [1941]: 154), discussing the transition from genius to *the* genius, observed that a pre-condition for the eighteenth-century interest in and positive valuation of the genius was the "disintegration of the seventeenth-century theory of art and the seventeenth-century standards of taste…A work of art is no longer judged by the degree of conformity with traditional patterns and rules, but by the degree of delight that it gives, and this delight is caused, not by rational structure and intellectual simplicity, but by the free play of imagination and emotion." See, further, on the developing seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century conceptualizations of genius, Kineret S. Jaffe, "The Concept of Genius: Its Changing Role in Eighteenth-Century French Aesthetics," *Journal of the History of*

It is not surprising, then, that diverse ideas of genius lingered in the mid-nineteenth century – and continued to be deployed in certain circumstances, as we find, indeed, in Layard's assessment of genius in relation to Assyrian sculpture (see further below). By the time of Layard's discoveries and writing, the question of what, precisely, constituted a(n artistic) genius had been a topic of hot debate for over a century, so Layard had many earlier conceptualizations to draw upon.

With respect to Assyrian antiquities, it is important to note that genius could not be located in any specific individual(s): Assyria's artists or makers were and continue to be anonymous and, particularly in the case of monumental works, are likely to have worked collaboratively rather than independently.[74] Layard,

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Ideas 41 (1980): 580ff. Discussing the decline in the status and valuation (aesthetic and economic) of copies, Françoise Benhamou and Victor Ginsburgh ("Copies of Artworks: The Case of Paintings and Prints," in *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture*, ed. Victor A. Ginsburgh and David Throsby [Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2006], 1:261–262) consider the rise of the public museum and the Romantic ideal of the isolated artist as genius, as well as technical progress (e.g., photography) and legal intervention (e.g., property rights law).

[73] The interrogation of the nature and merit of imitation is intertwined with one of the primary intellectual debates of late seventeenth century France, the "quarrel of the ancients and the moderns" (Larry F. Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient: Literature & History in Early Modern France* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011], 11–34; Kristi Simonsuuri, *Homer's Original Genius: Eighteenth Century Notions of the Early Greek Epic (1688–1798)* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979], 19–36). At the heart of this vital literary, artistic, and scientific struggle was the status of antique (Greco-Roman) tradition and authority: on the one side were those who believed that the ancient Greek and Roman writers in particular had achieved a state of perfection that could not be improved upon, so that one could not do better than to imitate (or even copy) the ancients; on the other were those who believed that, as each successive generation of imitators had culled the best of past works to imitate, the merit of modern works surely outstripped those of ancient ones.

[74] Credit for masterworks in Mesopotamia, where assigned, goes to the king or to the gods, not to artisans; see Irene J. Winter, "Aesthetics in Ancient Mesopotamian Art," in *Civilizations of the*

perhaps as a result, discussed art on the level of race and culture, attributing distinct qualities and practices to the Semitic (Hebrew, Arab, and Syrian) and Indo-European (Greek and Roman) races respectively.[75] He attributed genius only to the Greeks and the Assyrians.[76]

The genius of the Assyrians, according to Layard, lay in their ability to *imitate nature*. This notion had been prevalent in the preceding eighteenth century, when many critics regarded original art as a type of imitation whose merit lay in its status as a 'primary copy' or 'invention.' By this it was meant that original art was a *direct imitation* of *nature* (a term often used synonymously with truth or reason) that demonstrated "newness and truth of observation"[77] rather than the trite or slavish copying of another *made thing* (i.e., the work of another artist).

Interestingly, the negative (aesthetic and other) valuation applied to copies or imitations of works by other artists was *not* prevalent in earlier periods. In the fourteenth century, for example, the poet Petrarch collected copies of paintings when he could not purchase the originals.[78] In other contexts, "Italian contracts…at times specified that a work of art was to be, in part or wholly, a copy of another…while fifteenth century workshop practice for the production of paintings frequently involved copying…Indeed, prior to the sixteenth century, it has been plausibly suggested, novelty and invention simply were not seen as indispensable artistic qualities."[79] Even in the seventeenth century, copies – produced not as fakes or forgeries but as explicit reproductions of other artworks – were produced on a significant scale, with such renowned artists as Rubens (1577–1640) copying works by Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael.[80] Such copies served as valuable models for artists.[81] But they were not only functional or instrumental: they also possessed aesthetic and economic value in their own

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Ancient Near East, ed. Jack M. Sasson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995), 4:2569–2582; Karen Sonik, "Pictorial Mythology and Narrative in the Ancient Near East," in *Critical Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Art*, ed. Marian H. Feldman and Brian Brown (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 265–293; Sonik, "The Distant Eye."

[75] Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains: With an Account of a Visit to the Chaldœan Christians of Kurdistan, and the Yezidis, or Devil-Worshippers; and an Inquiry into the Manners and Arts of the Ancient Assyrians* (London: John Murray, 1849), 2:238ff.

[76] Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, 2:155, 238.

[77] Logan Pearsall Smith, *Four Words: Romantic, Originality, Creative, Genius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 18; see also Meyer Howard Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1953), 42 (for "invention" in the sense of "discovery"); Jaffe, "The Concept of Genius," 582.

[78] Benhamou and Ginsburgh, "Copies of Artworks," 260.

[79] Neil De Marchi and Hans J. Van Migroet, "Pricing Invention: 'Originals,' 'Copies,' and Their Relative Value in Seventeenth Century Netherlandish Art Markets," in *Economics of the Arts: Selected Essays*, ed. Victor Ginsburgh and Pierre-Michel Menger (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1996), 29.

[80] Benhamou and Ginsburgh, "Copies of Artworks," 261.

[81] For the ongoing relevance of casts to the contemporary nineteenth-century artist, see *Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery* (1853), 638–639; main text below.

right as works of art, of legitimate interest to the connoisseur and the collector.[82] But the grounds were shifting.

In 1759, the poet Edward Young would assert: "Imitations are of two kinds; one of nature, one of authors: The first we call Originals, and confine the term Imitation to the second."[83] As for the artists who produced what he termed imitations, Young argued that, even supposing "an Imitator to be most excellent (and such there are), yet still he but nobly builds on another's foundation ; his debt is, at least, equal to his glory ; which therefore, on the balance, cannot be very great."[84] The diminution of the copy was rapidly progressing.

It is worth remarking on a significant exception to the developing negative aesthetic valuation of copies: the plaster cast. Through the nineteenth and, in some cases, even into the twentieth century, plaster casts of significant works continued to play important roles – and occupy significant space – within major museum galleries and public spaces, a commingling of original and copy that is striking to contemporary sensibilities.[85] In Britain especially, where casts were collected and displayed in institutions like the British Museum and the South Kensington Museum (officially opened in 1857 and renamed the Victoria & Albert Museum in 1899), casts were used to promote not only the education of artists but also the "public improvement of taste." [86] And, elsewhere in Europe, the ongoing significance of copies into the late nineteenth century (e.g., to serve public education) is indicated by the founding of the Museum of Copies as a study museum of paintings and sculptures in Paris. Though the institution itself was short-lived, closing ignominiously a mere nine months after opening to the public in 1873, it was an endeavor that was decades in the making.[87]

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[82] Benhamou and Ginsburgh, "Copies of Artworks," 261.

[83] Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition*, 7.

[84] Young's (*Conjectures on Original Composition*, 11) instruction to young writers to imitate a genius such as Homer may seem, on initial view, a contradiction of these views but he makes his point clear: "Imitate; but imitate not the *Composition* but the *Man*… The less we copy the renowned antients, we shall remember them the more."

[85] See, e.g., Jenkins, "Acquisition and Supply"; Emma J. Payne, "Casting a New Canon: Collecting and Treating Casts of Greek and Roman Sculpture, 1850–1939," *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 65 (2019): 113–149; Peter Connor, "Cast-Collecting in the Nineteenth Century: Scholarship, Aesthetics, Connoisseurship," in *Rediscovering Hellenism: The Hellenistic Inheritance and the English Imagination*, ed. Graeme W. Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 187–236. In 1867, Henry Cole, Director of the South Kensington Museum, promoted the *International Convention for Promoting Universal Reproductions of Works of Art* to stimulate the exchange of copies across the collections of Europe; see, further, Diane Bilbey and Marjorie Trusted, "'The Question of Casts'-Collecting and Later Reassessment of the Cast Collection at South Kensington," in *Plaster Casts: Making, Collecting, and Displaying from Classical Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Rune Frederiksen and Eckart Marchand (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 466.

[86] Payne, "Casting a New Canon," 115; see also Bilbey and Trusted, "'The Question of Casts'-Collecting." Johannes Siapkas and Lena Sjögren (*Displaying the Ideals of Antiquity: The Petrified Gaze* [London: Routledge, 2014], 97ff.) observe differences in the goal of cast collecting in nineteenth-century Germany as opposed to in Britain. In Germany, cast collection was primarily undertaken by universities as part of the emphasis on *Altertumswissenschaft*; in Britain, cast collection was aimed at the education of artists as well as the elevation of public taste; see, further, Connor, "Cast-Collecting in the Nineteenth Century," 211ff.

In the *absence of originals*, then, casts were regarded as an important means of exposing the public to exemplary works. And in the British Museum particularly, casts fulfilled (with certain restrictions[88]) the additional purpose of completing the "chain of art."

4.3. *Assyrian Art in Chains: The Nineveh Marbles, the Elgin Marbles, and the "Chain of Art"*

Layard's ideas about ancient art, as expressed in his 1849 volume, are perhaps best understood as a series of instrumental rather than theoretical observations. They are based on an undefined framework whose features can mostly be traced to some of the earlier notions of art, imitation, and genius discussed above. Like the majority of his contemporaries, Layard valorized the art of the Greeks – but the grounds on which he did so are worth noting, entangled as they are with then-current ideas pertaining to copying, imitation, and *reason* (another Enlightenment obsession). Layard thus writes, "the Greek sculptor was not a mere imitator, as the Persian had been: adopting that which was most beautiful in the works of others, he made it his own, and by a gradual process of development produced, ere long, those severe and graceful forms, which were the foundation of the most noble monuments of human genius."[89] But if the Greek sculptor was not a *mere* imitator of the arts of other cultures, he was also explicitly *not* an inventor – nor was he a *direct* copyist of nature. Instead, Layard regarded him as an imitator elevated by *reason* to the heights of genius:

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[87] See, e.g., Henri Delaborde, "Le musée des copies," *Revue des deux mondes* 105 (1873): 209–218; Paul Duro, "'Un livre ouvert à l'instruction': Study Museums in Paris in the Nineteenth Century," *Oxford Art Journal* 10 (1987): 44–58; Benhamou and Ginsburgh, "Copies of Artworks," 262.

[88] The Department of Antiquities at the British Museum, during the tenure of Edward Hawkins as Keeper, refused to display casts of any work the original of which was displayed in a public gallery elsewhere in Europe (Jenkins, *Archaeologists & Aesthetes*, 65). Thus the British Museum refused a cast of the Apollo Belvedere in 1840, as the sculpture had been on display in the Vatican from the early sixteenth century. This is despite the status of the sculpture (on par with the Elgin Marbles) during the Enlightenment and subsequent centuries, following its valorization by Winckelmann (e.g., G. Henry Lodge, "Life of Winckelmann," in *The History of Ancient Art*, by Johann Joachim Winckelmann [Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1873], 1:63), as "the ideal body in histories of art and race" (Fae Brauer, "Making Eugenic Bodies Delectable: Art, 'Biopower' and 'Scientia Sexualis,'" in *Art, Sex and Eugenics: Corpus Delecti*, ed. Anthea Callen and Fae Brauer [London: Routledge, 2008], 11). Casts of the Apollo Belvedere were held in the Louvre, the École des Beaux-Arts, and also in medical contexts as in the École de médecine at the Sorbonne in Paris (Anthea Callen, "Man or Machine: Ideals of the Labouring Male Body and the Aesthetics of Industrial Production in Early Twentieth-Century Europe," in *Art, Sex and Eugenics: Corpus Delecti*, ed. Anthea Callen and Fae Brauer [London: Routledge, 2008], 145), and plaster variants of this and other classical icons were widely distributed throughout the colonies of Europe to assert the latter's "ethnic and aesthetic superiority" (Brauer, "Making Eugenic Bodies Delectable,"12; also Fae Brauer, "Eroticizing Lamarckian Eugenics: The Body Stripped Bare During French Sexual Neo-regulation," in *Art, Sex and Eugenics: Corpus Delecti*, ed. Anthea Callen and Fae Brauer [London: Routledge, 2008], 118).

[89] Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, 2:293.

> [The Greek and Romans] will adopt from others the most beautiful forms: it is doubtful whether they have invented any of themselves. But they seek the cause of that beauty; they reduce it to rules by analysis and reasoning; they add or take away – improve that which they have borrowed, or so change it in the process to which it is subjected, that it is no longer recognised as the same thing. That which appeared to be natural to the one, would seem to be the result of profound thought and inquiry in the other.[90]

Assyria's main contribution to the progress of art was described as the careful application, with "taste, and invention, in the choice and arrangement of…ornaments."[91] Layard would concede, perhaps influenced by the (harsh) judgments of some of his contemporaries (discussed further below), that the Assyrian imitation of nature was "rude and unsuccessful."[92] Nevertheless, he claimed a key role for Assyria in the *development of art* based on its invention of ornaments "which the Greeks afterwards, with few additions and improvements, so generally adopted in their most classic monuments."[93] A similar argument was taken up by Sydney Smirke (1797–1877), the eminent architect and designer of the British Museum Reading Room and Weston Hall. Smirke suggested that there was so striking a resemblance between the ornaments of the Assyrians and those of the Greeks "as to force upon us the conclusion that the artists of Greece derived far more of their art from the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates than from the banks of the Nile ; and Egypt must, I think, relinquish a large portion of the honour that has been so long accorded to her of having been the mother of Greek art."[94]

Layard's valuation of Assyrian ornaments as precursors to Greek art seems, from a modern perspective, rather insignificant. But at the time, ornaments were still at the forefront of art historical discourse and had not yet been relegated "to the 'merely decorative,' hence epiphenomenal."[95] Layard's arguments were, significantly, taken up in Owen Jones' 1856 *Grammar of Ornaments* and Alois Riegl's 1893 *Stilfragen*. Moreover, it was not only Assyrian ornament that came in for admiration and attention.

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[90] Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, 2:239–240.

[91] Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, 2:158.

[92] Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, 2:284–285.

[93] Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, 2:295.

[94] Smirke, "Remarks on the Assyrian Sculptures," 160.

[95] Irene J. Winter, "Ornament and the 'Rhetoric of Abundance' in Assyria," *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies* 27 (Hayim and Miriam Tadmor Volume) (2002): 256.

Circulating alongside the argument that the art of Assyria should displace the art of Egypt as the *predecessor* of Greek art were the arguments that Assyrian art was far superior to Egyptian – and that it could even be spoken of (in some respects) in the same breath as the most cultivated of the Greek arts. A brief account of Botta's discoveries in *The Athenaeum* (Feb. 1, 1845), for example, describes the Assyrian sculptures in glowing terms:

> To those who have been accustomed to look upon the Greeks as the true perfecters and masters of the imitative arts, they [the Assyrian sculptures] will furnish new matter for inquiry and reflection. I shall, I think, be hereafter able to show, that, even if they cannot be referred to a period much antecedent to the earlier stages of Greek art, they have nevertheless no connexion with it [i.e., are not influenced by it], and are perfectly original both in design and execution. Whilst probably contemporaneous with many of the most ancient sculptures of Egypt, they are immeasurably superior to the stiff and ill-proportioned figures of the Pharaohs. They discover a knowledge of the anatomy of the human frame, a remarkable perception of character, and wonderful spirit in the outlines and general execution. In fact, the great gulf which separates barbarian from civilized art has been passed…[The figures and objects depicted in the reliefs] are all designed with the most consummate taste, and rival the productions of the most cultivated period of Greek art.

The scholarly and public assessments of Assyrian art were, of course, not so universally positive. Even some of the most prominent of the early scholars of Assyria, including Henry Rawlinson (1810–1895), the so-called "father of Assyriology,"[96] believed that the Assyrian sculptures could not approach the "highest art" – i.e., classical Greek art – and thus could "neither instruct nor enrapture."[97] Rawlinson, indeed, upon being asked by Layard about his standard of beauty, identified the Elgin Marbles. He added, regarding his negative assessment of Assyrian art, "I hope you understand this distinction and when I criticise design and execution, will understand I do so merely because your winged God is not the Apollo Belvedere."[98]

Beyond the place of Assyrian art in the chain of art, and the assessments of its aesthetic value in relation to the Elgin Marbles and other classical Greek art, the mid-nineteenth century also witnessed debates over the aesthetic value of different periods of Assyrian art. Layard, as many of his contemporaries and predecessors (including Winckelmann),[99] believed in art's inevitable decline over time. The impetus for this decline, according to Layard, was that an artist belonging to a later generation, "instead of endeavouring to imitate that which he saw in nature, received as correct delineations the works of his predecessors, and made them his types and his models."[100] In other words, such an artist would copy from his predecessors rather than directly from nature – a failing that Layard recognized also in modern art: "It is to be feared, that this prescriptive love of imitation has exercised no less influence on modern art, than it did upon the arts of the ancients."[101]

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[96] For a summary of the debate over the relative contributions of Rawlinson and the Reverend Edward Hincks (1792–1866) to the decipherment of cuneiform, see, e.g., Mogens Trolle Larsen, *The Conquest of Assyria: Excavations in an Antique Land* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 177ff.

[97] Letter from Rawlinson to Layard, 5 August 1846; apud Waterfield, *Layard of Nineveh*, 148.

[98] Letter from Rawlinson to Layard, 5 August 1846; apud Waterfield, *Layard of Nineveh*, 148.

[99] See, e.g., fn. 25, 46 above on Winckelmann's position.

In keeping with his ideas on art, Layard regarded the earliest of the Assyrian sculptures recovered, those from Ashurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace (ca. 879–865 BCE) at Nimrud, as representing the pinnacle of Assyrian art. While he acknowledged what he perceived as their weaknesses, describing their "want of relative proportions in the figures, and the ignorance of perspective – the full eye in the side face, and the warriors fighting, and the bodies of the dead scattered above, or below the principal figures,"[102] Layard excused these features as typical of all early art. And, though he conceded that *later* sculptors at work in the palaces of subsequent Assyrian kings might have been more *skillful* in certain respects, so that "their work is frequently superior to that of the earlier artist, in delicacy of execution in the details of the features, for instance – and in the boldness of the relief,"[103] he contended that "the slightest acquaintance with Assyrian monuments will show, that the[se later works] were greatly inferior to their ancestors in the higher branches of art – in the treatment of a subject, and in beauty and variety of form."[104]

4.4. *Portraits | Copies | Duplicates? Misapprehending Assyrian Sculpture*

The high value Layard placed on Ashurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace sculptures did not translate into a belief that all the recovered reliefs were of equal value or worth. From the beginning, two different categories of relief were discerned: (1) narrative scenes, which were held in higher esteem; and (2) depictions of (*seemingly* independent) large-scale figures – what might be characterized as "portraits" (representations of specific individuals) – which were less valued.[105] The removal of both types of relief from the Assyrian palace, their

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[100] Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, 2:282.

[101] Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, 2:283.

[102] Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, 2:283.

[103] Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, 2:281.

[104] Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, 2:281.

[105] The first reliefs to arrive in the British Museum from Layard's expedition were those of the second type: the large-scale figures. Their reception by the general public was overwhelmingly positive, leading Layard to state in a letter to his patron Stratford Canning, the British consul at Constantinople, that, "as they are on the whole the least interesting and important of the sculptures from Nimrud, I feel less uneasy as to the reception of the remainder," O.P. [Original Papers]

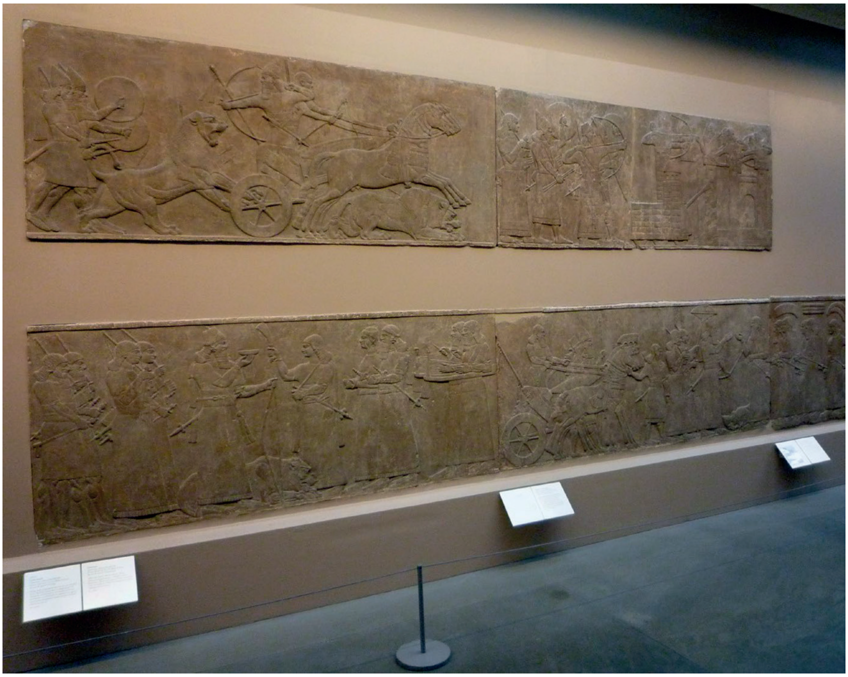

Fig. 7: Narrative reliefs from the Throneroom (B) of the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II in Nimrud as currently displayed in the British Museum (upper and lower bands of reliefs 18–19 and parts of the lower band of relief 17). Photo by D. Kertai.

subsequent transport to Britain, and their re-installation in the British Museum would entail drastic changes to their material composition and modes of display.[106] The nature of these changes, both for the narrative reliefs and for those depicting the large-scale figures, is worth examining in some detail.

Both types of sculptural relief were originally displayed as sequences along the inner walls of the rooms of the Northwest Palace. And yet, Layard (and other European collectors) regarded only the narrative reliefs as forming sequences that needed to be kept intact – and even these only to a degree. The narrative reliefs had mostly been preserved along the southern wall of Throneroom (B). They were organized into three bands: the upper and lowermost bands contained narrative scenes; the central band contained only text. To facilitate the transport

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XXXVIII, 4 August 1847; apud Jenkins, *Archaeologists & Aesthetes*, 157. The more “interesting and important” remainder, of course, encompassed the *narrative* reliefs.

[106] On the material and other changes that things undergo when they are transformed into museum objects, see Sonik, “Art/ifacts and Art*Works*”; Sonik, “The Distant Eye.”

of the reliefs, only the (upper- and lowermost) bands containing pictorial narrative – but *not* the central band of text – were taken to Britain. (All the reliefs were, moreover, reduced in thickness to make them lighter.) The British Museum then reconstructed the pictorial sequence, absent the texts, in its display (Fig. 7).

The large-scale figures depicted in the Northwest Palace reliefs were interpreted and treated rather differently than the narrative scenes. These had formed their *own* sequences within their original palace contexts, forming a continuous band of figures that spanned the walls of the rooms where they appeared. Their efficacy, moreover, was based on the apotropaic landscapes they *created* through these series, enhanced by the interplay of their natures, gestures, and attributes.[107] But the figures were interpreted by Layard (and by the other European viewers) as if they were individual "portraits" of specific figures, each representing one of a number of *duplicates* found throughout the Northwest Palace.[108]

The decision to fragment the original series of figures, and to limit the number of any single *type* of figure collected by the British Museum thus seemed justifiable – even natural. Though it was sufficiently interested in collecting and displaying a complete "chain of art" to acquire casts where originals were unavailable (i.e., not publicly accessible in Europe), the British Museum had no interest in collecting, nor any space to display, extraneous or duplicate pieces – particularly those of questionable aesthetic value.[109] The isolation of the figures when they were moved to their new museum contexts is likewise understandable. Unlike the narrative scenes, there seemed no reason for the British Museum to re-constitute seeming individual portraits in a series: such a display would diminish the *uniqueness* and thus also the *value* of any single figure (Fig. 8).

This conception – or, rather, misconception – of the Assyrian sculptural reliefs is reflected in contemporary correspondence, in which the large-scale figural reliefs that Layard left behind at the Northwest Palace of Nimrud are consistently described as duplicates. Unsurprisingly, the British Museum was content to leave these in situ in Nimrud: other individuals and institutions interested in possessing Assyrian sculptures would eventually take many of these for their

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[107] David Kertai, "The Original Context of a Winged Genie," in *Arte da Mesopotâmia: Atas do colóquio, 24 e 25 de maio de 2013*, ed. António de Freitas (Lisbon: Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, 2015), 44–63; Dieter Kolbe, *Die Reliefprogramme religiös-mythologischen Charakters in neuassyrischen Palästen: Die Figurentypen, ihre Benennung und Bedeutung* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1981).

[108] Describing his Assyrian discoveries in a publication on the Nineveh Court of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, Layard (*The Nineveh Court in the Crystal Palace* [London: Bradbury & Evans, 1854], 24) writes, for example, of the numerous large-scale figures he found at the entrances to Sennacherib's Southwest Palace at Nineveh: "the eagle-headed deity, Dagon or the fish god, a lion-headed man, and various other monstrous forms continually occurred."

[109] For the characterization of Assyrian art as "bad art" or instrumental, see, further, fn. 69 above.

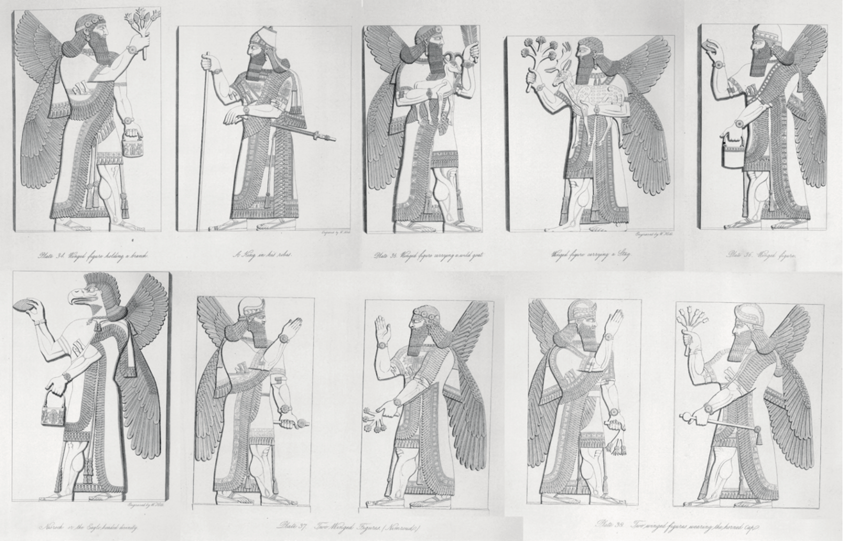

Fig. 8: Assyrian large-scale figures published as individual *types* by Layard (1849b: pls. 34–38). Adapted by D. Kertai.

own collections. The archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam (1826–1910), a member of a prosperous Christian merchant family from Mosul who was Layard's partner in the excavations at Nimrud,[110] wrote in his memoirs that he had selected and sent to Baghdad, for ultimate transport to England and display in the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, "some sculptures from the Nimroud palaces, which were duplicates of those chosen and forwarded to England by Mr. Layard for the British Museum."[111]

Layard also sent to England cases of antiquities for himself, a practice that led to trouble with the Trustees of the British Museum when, in early 1852, the cases were shipped to the museum by mistake. Layard's excuse to the Trustees described two bas-reliefs destined for the University of Oxford as "mere duplicates of others already in the British Museum."[112] The other antiquities in the cases were described as "likewise duplicates or mere fragments of little value which I have selected for myself."[113] The Trustees, while agreeing that Layard could take away the cases containing these “duplicates and fragments of little value,” sought additional clarification for how and why Layard was disposing of Assyrian antiquities. Layard replied as follows, in a statement that self-servingly denigrated both the contemporary local people and the ancient sculptures themselves:

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[110] Hormuzd Rassam, *Asshur and the Land of Nimrod, Being an Account of the Discoveries Made in the Ancient Ruins of Nineveh, Asshur, Sepharvaim, Calah, Babylon, Borsippa, Cuthah, and Van, Including a Narrative of Different Journeys in Mesopotamia, Assyria, Asia Minor, and Koordistan* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1897); Julian Edgeworth Reade, "Hormuzd Rassam and His Discoveries," *Iraq* 55 (1993): 39–62.

[111] Rassam, *Asshur and the Land of Nimrod*, 7–8.

[112] 12.IX.51; Add. MS. 38943: 44v.; apud Russell, *From Nineveh to New York*, 79.

[113] 12.IX.51; Add. MS. 38943: 44v.; apud Russell, *From Nineveh to New York*, 79.

> I believe that I am not incorrect in stating that I was directed in [the Trustees’] instructions not to send down[?] duplicates of sculptures or inscriptions already in the possession of the British Museum. … Had they remained on the spot they would probably have been all destroyed by the Arabs. The expenses were paid out of my own pocket.[114]

Layard was not the only one collecting reliefs on his own account. By November 5, 1852, Rassam could write that “there have been about thirty sculptures taken out of the mound of Nimroud since we left [in April 1851].”[115] By the end of the 1850s, American missionaries had procured 55 Assyrian reliefs.[116] A large majority of these reliefs showed large-scale figures, a circumstance primarily due to the fact that the *narrative* reliefs were either wanted by, or had already been sent to, the British Museum (or the Louvre – or were deemed too fragmentary to be worth taken away) (Fig. 9).

5. CONCLUSION

The European encounter with Assyrian sculpture in the mid-nineteenth century occurred against a backdrop of vigorous intellectual interest in and debate over the role of antiquities and public museums in shaping the public mind and taste; the economic, aesthetic, and educational value of copies and imitations, including casts; the valorization of classical Greece; and the value of scientific as opposed to aesthetic displays and arrangements. It was inflected, further, by the conception of “fine art” that took firm root in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with all its emphasis on the art object’s isolation, autonomy, imposed uselessness, placelessness,[117] and timelessness. The result – unsurprisingly – was a striking misapprehension of Assyrian sculpture, one which severed the palace

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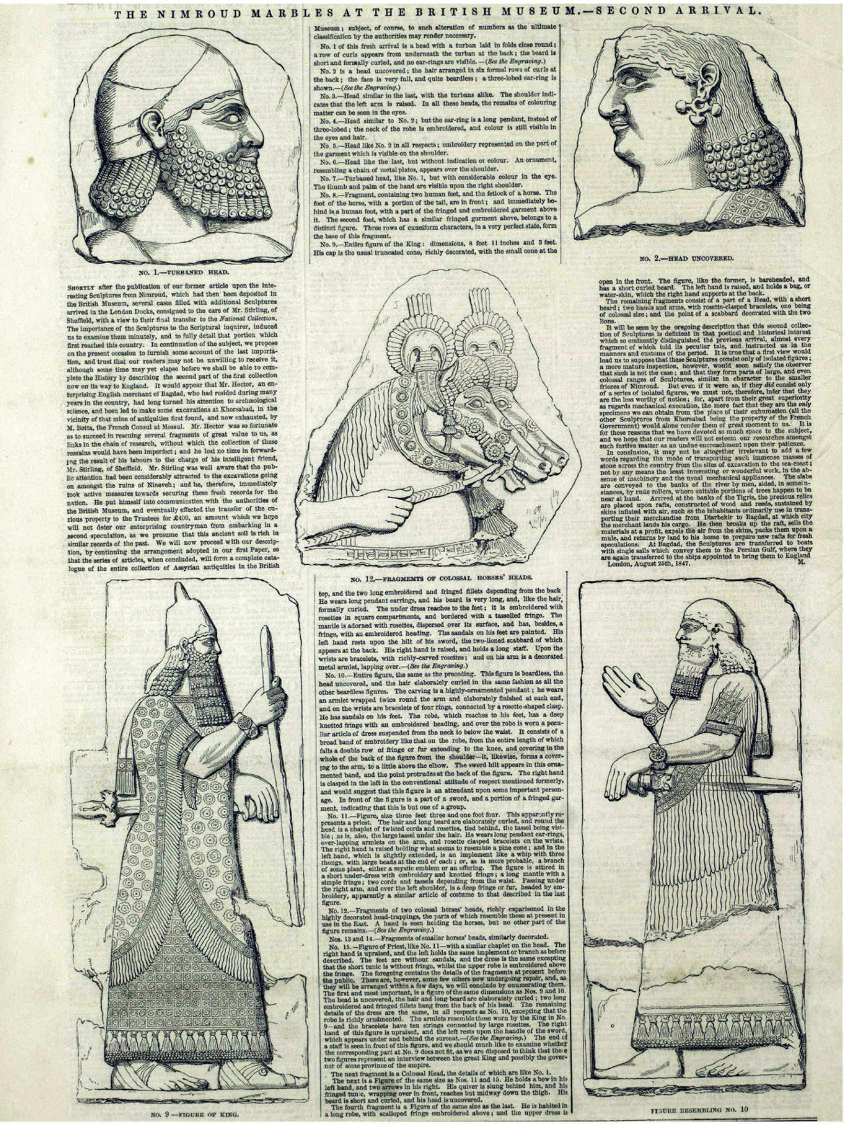
[114] 21.VII.52, Canford, Diary IX:40; apud Russell, *From Nineveh to New York*, 80.

[115] 5.XI.52, Mosul; Add. MS. 38981: 141v; apud Russell, *From Nineveh to New York*, 94.

[116] John B. Stearns, *Reliefs from the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II* (Graz: Archiv für Orientforschung, 1961), 3.

[117] See, e.g., André Malraux, “Museum Without Walls,” in *The Voices of Silence*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (London: Secker & Warburg, 1954), 13–128; Shelly Errington, “What Became Authentic Primitive Art?” *Cultural Anthropology* 9 (1994): 201–226; Shelly Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1998); Sonik, “Art/ifacts and Art*Works*.”



THE NIMROUD MARBLES AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM.—SECOND ARRIVAL.

NO. 1.—TURBANED HEAD.

SHORTLY after the publication of our former article upon the interesting Sculptures from Nimroud, which had then been deposited in the British Museum, several cases filled with additional Sculptures arrived in the London Docks, consigned to the care of Mr. Stirling, of Sheffield, with a view to their final transfer to the *National Collection*. The importance of the Sculptures to the Scriptural inquirer, induced us to examine them minutely, and to fully detail that portion which first reached this country. In continuation of the subject, we propose on the present occasion to furnish some account of the last importation, and trust that our readers may not be unwilling to receive it, although some time may yet elapse before we shall be able to complete the History by describing the second part of the first collection now on its way to England. It would appear that Mr. Hector, an enterprising English merchant of Bagdad, who had resided during many years in the country, had long turned his attention to archæological science, and been led to make some excavations at Khorsabad, in the vicinity of that mine of antiquities first found, and now exhausted, by M. Botta, the French Consul at Mossul. Mr. Hector was so fortunate as to succeed in rescuing several fragments of great value to us, as links in the chain of research, without which the collection of these remains would have been imperfect; and he lost no time in forwarding the result of his labours to the charge of his intelligent friend, Mr. Stirling, of Sheffield. Mr. Stirling was well aware that the public attention had been considerably attracted to the excavations going on amongst the ruins of Nineveh; and he, therefore, immediately took active measures towards securing these fresh records for the nation. He put himself into communication with the authorities of the British Museum, and eventually effected the transfer of the curious property to the Trustees for £400, an amount which we hope will not deter our enterprising countryman from embarking in a second speculation, as we presume that this ancient soil is rich in similar records of the past. We will now proceed with our description, by continuing the arrangement adopted in our first Paper, so that the series of articles, when concluded, will form a complete catalogue of the entire collection of Assyrian antiquities in the British Museum; subject, of course, to such alteration of numbers as the ultimate classification by the authorities may render necessary.

No. 1 of this fresh arrival is a head with a turban laid in folds close round; a row of curls appears from underneath the turban at the back; the beard is short and formally curled, and no ear-rings are visible.—(*See the Engraving.*)

No. 2 is a head uncovered; the hair arranged in six formal rows of curls at the back; the face is very full, and quite beardless; a three-lobed ear-ring is shown.—(*See the Engraving.*)

No. 3.—Head similar to the last, with the turbans alike. The shoulder indicates that the left arm is raised. In all these heads, the remains of colouring matter can be seen in the eyes.

No. 4.—Head similar to No. 2; but the ear-ring is a long pendant, instead of three-lobed; the neck of the robe is embroidered, and colour is still visible in the eyes and hair.

No. 5.—Head like No. 2 in all respects; embroidery represented on the part of the garment which is visible on the shoulder.

No. 6.—Head like the last, but without indication of colour. An ornament, resembling a chain of metal plates, appears over the shoulder.

No. 7.—Turbaned head, like No. 1, but with considerable colour in the eye. The thumb and palm of the hand are visible upon the right shoulder.

No. 8.—Fragment, containing two human feet, and the fetlock of a horse. The foot of the horse, with a portion of the tail, are in front; and immediately behind is a human foot, with a part of the fringed and embroidered garment above it. The second foot, which has a similar fringed garment above, belongs to a distinct figure. Three rows of cuneiform characters, in a very perfect state, form the base of this fragment.

No. 9.—Entire figure of the King: dimensions, 8 feet 11 inches and 3 feet. His cap is the usual truncated cone, richly decorated, with the small cone at the top, and the two long embroidered and fringed fillets depending from the back. He wears long pendant earrings, and his beard is very long, and, like the hair, formally curled. The under dress reaches to the feet; it is embroidered with rosettes in square compartments, and bordered with a tasselled fringe. The mantle is adorned with rosettes, dispersed over its surface, and has, besides, a fringe, with an embroidered heading. The sandals on his feet are painted. His left hand rests upon the hilt of his sword, the two-lioned scabbard of which appesrs at the back. His right hand is raised, and holds a long staff. Upon the wrists are bracelets, with richly-carved rosettes; and on his arm is a decorated metal armlet, lapping over.—(*See the Engraving.*)

No. 10.—Entire figure, the same as the proceding. This figure is beardless, the head uncovered, and the hair elaborately curled in the same fashion as all the other beardless figures. The carving is a highly-ornamented pendant; he wears an armlet wrapped twice round the arm and elaborately finished at each end, and on the wrists are bracelets of four rings, connected by a rosette-shaped clasp. He has sandals on his feet. The robe, which reaches to his feet, has a deep knotted fringe with an embroidered heading, and over the robe is worn a peculiar article of dress suspended from the neck to below the waist. It consists of a broad band of embroidery like that on the robe, from the entire length of which falls a double row of fringe or fur extending to the knee, and covering in the whole of the back of the figure from the shoulder—it, likewise, forms a covering to the arm, to a little above the elbow. The sword hilt appears in this ornamented band, and the point protrudes at the back of the figure. The right hand is clasped in the left in the conventional attitude of respect mentioned formerly, and would suggest that this figure is an attendant upon some important personage. In front of the figure is a part of a sword, and a portion of a fringed garment, indicating that this is but one of a group.

No. 11.—Figure, size three feet three and one foot four. This apparently represents a priest. The hair and long beard are elaborately curled, and round the head is a chaplet of twisted cords and rosettes, tied behind, the tassel being visible; as is, also, the large tassel under the hair. He wears long pendant ear-rings, over-lapping armlets on the arm, and rosette clasped bracelets on the wrists. The right hand is raised holding what seems to resemble a pine cone; and in the left hand, which is slightly extended, is an implement like a whip with three thongs, with large beads at the end of each; or, as is more probable, a branch of some plant, either a mystic emblem or an offering. The figure is attired in a short under-dress with embroidery and knotted fringe; a long mantle with a simple fringe; two cords and tassels depending from the waist. Passing under the right arm, and over the left shoulder, is a deep fringe or fur, headed by embroidery, apparently a similar article of costume to that described in the last figure.

No. 12.—Fragments of two colossal horses' heads, richly caparisoned in the highly decorated head-trappings, the parts of which resemble those at present in use in the East. A hand is seen holding the horses, but no other part of the figure remains.—(*See the Engraving.*)

Nos. 13 and 14.—Fragments of smaller horses' heads, similarly decorated.

No. 15.—Figure of Priest, like No. 11—with a similar chaplet on the head. The right hand is upraised, and the left holds the same implement or branch as before described. The feet are without sandals, and the dress is the same excepting that the short tunic is without fringe, whilst the upper robe is embroidered above the fringe. The foregoing contains the details of the fragments at present before the public. There are, however, some few others now undergoing repair, and, as they will be arranged within a few days, we will conclude by enumerating them. The first and most important, is a figure of the same dimensions as Nos. 9 and 10. The head is uncovered, the hair and long beard are elaborately curled; two long embroidered and fringed fillets hang from the back of his head. The remaining details of the dress are the same, in all respects as No. 10, excepting that the robe is richly ornamented. The armlets resemble those worn by the King in No. 9—and the bracelets have ten strings connected by large rosettes. The right hand of this figure is upraised, and the left rests upon the handle of the sword, which appears under and behind the surcoat.—(*See the Engraving.*) The end of a staff is seen in front of this figure, and we should much like to examine whether the corresponding part at No. 9 does not fit, as we are disposed to think that these two figures represent an interview between the great King and possibly the governor of some province of the empire.

The next fragment is a Colossal Head, the details of which are like No. 1.

The next is a Figure of the same size as Nos. 11 and 15. He holds a bow in his left hand, and two arrows in his right. His quiver is slung behind him, and his fringed tunic, wrapping over in front, reaches but midway down the thigh. His beard is short and curled, and his head is uncovered.

The fourth fragment is a Figure of the same size as the last. He is habited in a long robe, with scalloped fringe embroidered above; and the upper dress is open in the front. The figure, like the former, is bareheaded, and has a short curled beard. The left hand is raised, and holds a bag, or water-skin, which the right hand supports at the back.

The remaining fragments consist of a part of a Head, with a short beard; two hands and arms, with rosette-clasped bracelets, one being of colossal size; and the point of a scabbard decorated with the two lions.

It will be seen by the oregoing description that this second collection of Sculptures is deficient in that poetical and historical interest which so eminently distinguished the previous arrival, almost every fragment of which told its peculiar tale, and instructed us in the manners and customs of the period. It is true that a first view would lead us to suppose that these Sculptures consist only of isolated figures; a more mature inspection, however, would soon satisfy the observer that such is not the case; and that they form parts of large, and even colossal ranges of Sculptures, similar in character to the smaller friezes of Nimroud. But even if it were so, if they *did* consist only of a series of isolated figures, we must not, therefore, infer that they are the less worthy of notice; for, apart from their great superiority as regards mechanical execution, the mere fact that they are the *only* specimens we can obtain from the place of their exhumation (all the other Sculptures from Khorsabad being the property of the French Government) would alone render them of great moment to us. It is for these reasons that we have devoted so much space to the subject, and we hope that our readers will not esteem our researches amongst such furtive matter as an undue encroachment upon their patience.

In conclusion, it may not be altogether irrelevant to add a few words regarding the mode of transporting such immense masses of stone across the country from the sites of excavation to the sea-coast; not by any means the least interesting or wonderful work, in the absence of machinery and the usual mechanical appliances. The slabs are conveyed to the banks of the river by men, aided, in some instances, by rude rollers, where suitable portions of trees happen to be near at hand. Arrived at the banks of the Tigris, the precious relics are placed upon rafts, constructed of wood and reeds, sustained by skins inflated with air, such as the inhabitants ordinarily use in transporting their merchandise from Diarbekir to Bagdad, at which city the merchant lands his cargo. He then breaks up the raft, sells the materials at a profit, expels the air from the skins, packs them upon a mule, and returns by land to his home to prepare new rafts for fresh speculations. At Bagdad, the Sculptures are transferred to boats with single sails which convey them to the Persian Gulf, where they are again transferred to the ships appointed to bring them to England

London, August 25th, 1847. M.

NO. 2.—HEAD UNCOVERED.

NO. 12.—FRAGMEMTS OF COLOSSAL HORSES' HEADS.

NO. 9.—FIGURE OF KING.

FIGURE RESEMBLING NO. 10.

Fig: 9: "Nimrud Marbles" from Alexander Hector's excavations in Khorsabad between 1845 and 1847 and sold to the British Museum in 1847. The Western world's high valuation of portraits, especially faces, is apparent both in the types of reliefs removed from the Assyrian archaeological sites and in the types of images reproduced in publications such as *The Illustrated London News*. The *Illustrated London News*, Saturday, August 28, 1847 (showing BM 118830; 118825; 118828; 118822).

reliefs from their original contexts and functions and transformed them, in a very literal sense, into *our objects*, museum pieces to be displayed, contemplated, and assimilated on *our terms*.[118]

The public display of the Assyrian sculptures in London in the mid-nineteenth century drew them into contemporary debates over the proper role of antiquities in public life and public edification. As the main repository of antiquities in England, the British Museum played an important role in these debates. The museum's Trustees and their appointees in the Department of Antiquities, including Richard Westmacott and Charles Newton, valorised classical Greek art and aesthetics – or what they understood (or, more accurately, misunderstood) of these. Antiquities from other periods and civilizations, while they were valued for filling in gaps in the knowledge of the world and its history (i.e., serving as curiosities and historical documents) and for their potential contribution to or influence on the arts of Greece itself, were often regarded as possessing little aesthetic worth in their own rights. The valorisation of classical Greece, moreover, which reflected the popular opinion of the day, precluded the implementation of a fully *scientific* or chronological approach to the history of art, one in which each period was represented by its own materials. Instead, the scientific and the aesthetic met and merged (uneasily at best) in conceptions like the great chain of art, which permitted the introduction of chronological approaches to antiquities (and their display) without threatening the exalted status of the Elgin Marbles or other classical Greek arts.

It is difficult to overstate the significance of public museums to public life – and the concomitant heated debates over their proper contributions to public edification and education – from the later eighteenth throughout the nineteenth centuries. Museums were, and in many ways remain, an important site for confrontation with the Other, with cultural and other forms of difference. It is vital, consequently, to interrogate the modes and methods of display that they adopt and the particular things that they choose to put on display – points that are being brought to the fore by diverse movements to decolonize the museum as institution.[119]

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[118] On the appropriation and transformations of ancient art, see Sonik, "Art/ifacts and Art*Works*"; Sonik, "The Distant Eye."

[119] See, e.g., Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Annie E. Coombs and Ruth B. Phillips, "Introduction: Museums in Transformation: Dynamics of Democratization and Decolonization," in *Museum Transformations: Decolonization and Democratization*, ed. Annie E. Coombs and Ruth B. Phillips (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), xxv–lv; Bryony Onciul, *Museums, Heritage and Indigenous Voice: Decolonizing Engagement* (London: Routledge, 2015); Sonik, "Art/ifacts and Art*Works*"; cf. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Wang's ("Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1 [2012]: 1–40) objections to decolonization as metaphor.

UT PICTURA POESIS: THE HISTORICAL PSALMS AND THE RELIEFS FROM ASHURNASIRPAL II'S THRONEROOM IN THE NORTHWEST PALACE AT NIMRUD

Brent A. Strawn[1]

> "I want to read you a painting. / I want to… / Ask you to draw me a poem."[2]

> "Past happenings are told [in order] to sing the wonder working power of God."[3]

> "[H]istorical time [in Assurnasirpal's reliefs] (what we have labeled here 'time pulled up') is completely inserted in 'time set off' – that is in 'absolute time'….This…makes it possible to give special significance to the reign of the king and to elevate him for eternity. It is possible that only the inner court was able to understand this and that common people saw only the power and splendor of the king. The principal message had to be understood by everyone, but the special meaning of this reign, of this king appeared only to someone more cultivated."[4]

The study of visual remains has long been a branch of archaeology, but in terms of the Hebrew Bible, its birth should be traced to 1972, when Othmar Keel published his pioneering *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik und das Alte Testament: Am Beispiel der Psalmen*, translated into English in 1978 as *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the*

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[1] D. Moody Smith Distinguished Professor of Old Testament and Professor of Law, Duke University; bstrawn@div.duke.edu. I am thankful to the participants at the Virginia Theological Seminary conference for their feedback and critique, and especially to J. Caleb Howard for his editorial patience and assistance. Earlier forms of this paper were presented at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, the Duke University Hebrew Bible Colloquium, and the Colloquium for Biblical Research. In each instance, I am grateful to all those present who offered helpful comments. I am especially indebted to Ryan Bonfiglio, Richard Purcell, Justin Walker, Collin Cornell, Joel LeMon, Marc Brettler, Stephen Chapman, William P. Brown, John Monson, Klaus-Peter Adam, Jack Sasson, and Aubrey Buster for their assistance, feedback, and critique. None of these are to be held responsible for the opinions expressed here.

[2] Brian J. Tessier, *The Poet and the Painter: A Living Love Story*, cited in Ryan P. Bonfiglio, *Reading Images, Seeing Texts: Towards a Visual Hermeneutics for Biblical Studies*, OBO 280 (Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 17.

[3] Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, 4 vols., HCOT (Kampen: Kok and Leuven: Peeters, 1993–2002), 1:211.

[4] Laura Battini, "Time 'Pulled Up' in Ashurnasirpal's Reliefs," in *Time and History in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 56th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Barcelona, July 26–30, 2010*, ed. L. Felieu et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 35–46 (43).

Book of Psalms.[5] Keel inaugurated a new subfield with *Symbolism* – what some have called "biblical iconography," which may be defined as "the use of visual materials (iconography) in textual analysis" of the Hebrew Bible.[6] Another, perhaps better term is "iconographic exegesis," which is "*an interpretive approach that explains aspects of the Hebrew Bible with the help of ancient Near Eastern visual remains*."[7]

Whatever it is called, Keel's initial work focused extensively on the Bible. After the 1972 volume on the psalms, he published a string of monographs devoted to things like wisdom's playing before God (1974), powerful signs of victory in the Hebrew Bible (1974), visions of Yhwh and seal art (1977), birds as messengers (1977), Yhwh's answer to Job (1978), the boiling of a kid in its mother's milk (1980), the metaphorical language of the Song of Songs (1984), and a full commentary on the Song of Songs (1986), among others.[8] At this early stage of research in this subfield, the intersection of biblical texts and ancient Near Eastern imagery was of paramount concern, with the result that some of Keel's earliest work strikes one as phenomenological (if not impressionistic) compared to what came later.

As Keel proceeded – but already present in no small fashion at the start – he became more and more interested in minor art (seals) and pressed for greater and greater historical specificity.[9] Such aspects are evident in his own publications but are also equally on display in the work of the many students he inspired, sometimes called "the Fribourg School." Proof of Keel and the Fribourg

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[5] Othmar Keel, *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik und das Alte Testament: Am Beispiel der Psalmen* (Zürich: Benzinger and Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972), ET: Othmar Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett (New York: Seabury, 1978; repr. ed. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997). The German edition remains in print in a 5th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996). In addition to the ET, Dutch (1984), Spanish (2007), and Japanese (2010) translations are also available.

[6] See Izaak J. de Hulster et al., "Introduction: Iconographic Exegesis: Method and Practice," in *Iconographic Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: An Introduction to Its Method and Practice*, ed. Izaak J. de Hulster et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 11.

[7] See ibid., 20 (emphasis original).

[8] For a discussion of Keel's work, see Brent A. Strawn, "Introduction: Othmar Keel, Iconography, and the Old Testament," in Othmar Keel, *Jerusalem and the One God: A Religious History*, ed. Brent A. Strawn (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), xxv–xlii (with literature).

[9] See the four stages of Keel's oeuvre outlined in Strawn, "Othmar Keel, Iconography, and the Old Testament": (1) *Symbolism of the Biblical World*, (2) the biblical monographs post-*Symbolism*, (3) his jointly-authored work with Christoph Uehlinger, *Göttinen, Götter und Gottessymbole: Neue Erkenntnisse zur Religionsgeschichte Kanaans und Israels aufgrund bislang unerschlossener ikonographischer Quellen*, QD 134 (Freiburg: Herder, 1992; 7th ed. = Freiburg: BIBEL + ORIENT Museum and Fribourg: Academic Press, 2012; ET: *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* [trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998]; hereafter: *GGG*), and (4) his multivolume *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel: Von den Anfängen bis zur Perserzeit* (Fribourg: Academic Press, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, and Leuven: Peeters, 1995–). Different analyses of various "stages" in Keel's career have been offered by Izaak J. de Hulster and Christoph Uehlinger.

School's potency may be traced in how their influence extended beyond Switzerland, encompassing, eventually, scholars from South Africa and North America. Iconographic work done across the globe in the wake of *Symbolism of the Biblical World* may be characterized by several noteworthy methodological developments. These include the move from a more phenomenological approach to increased historical and archaeological precision; a focus on minor art as a mobile means of message transfer; and explicit attention to matters of theory, method, and practice. At several points these developments overlap or at least interrelate; at other times, however, they have meant that the study of iconography in ancient Israel/Palestine is sometimes conducted independently of any (or much) reference to the biblical texts.[10]

That said, "biblical iconography" has continued apace – not least by Keel himself – accompanied by its own set of specific developments. For example, great attention has been paid to figurative language in the Bible and how metaphors, especially, may be illuminated by ancient Near Eastern iconography.[11] Iconographic exegesis has also benefited from recent developments in the field of visual culture studies.[12] These, in turn, have prompted some to return to aspects of the earlier, more phenomenological kind of approach, but in newer modes, focusing on cognitive matters, including emotion.[13] It is clear that iconographic exegetical research – now almost 50 years old – will continue to proliferate on various fronts, but the study of visual culture and what might be called visual thinking seem especially promising.[14] A further frontier that lays at the intersection of these latter two developments concerns the study of iconography and literary form, specifically the investigation of comparable (if not comparative) poetics in text and art.[15]

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[10] See Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*; as well as Silvia Schroer and Othmar Keel, *Die Ikonographie Palästinas/Israel und der Alte Orient: Eine Religionsgeschichte in Bilder*, Vol. 1: *Vom ausgehenden Mesolithikum bis zur Frühbronzezeit* (Freiburg: Academic Press, 2005); Silvia Schroer, *Die Ikonographie Palästinas/Israels und der Alte Orient: Eine Religionsgeschichte in Bildern*, Vol. 2: *Die Mittelbronzezeit* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2008); eadem, *Die Ikonographie Palästinas/Israels und der Alte Orient: Eine Religionsgeschichte in Bildern*, Vol. 3: *Die Spätbronzezeit* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2011); eadem, *Die Ikonographie Palästinas/Israels und der Alte Orient: Eine Religionsgeschichte in Bildern*, Vol. 4: *Die Eisenzeit bis zum Beginn der achämenidischen Herrschaft* (Freiburg: Academic Press, 2018).

[11] See, e.g., Martin Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting from Heaven: God as Warrior and God as Heaven in the Hebrew Psalter and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography*, OBO 169 (Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999); Brent A. Strawn, *What Is Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, OBO 212 (Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005); Joel M. LeMon, *Yahweh's Winged Form in the Psalms: Exploring Congruent Iconography and Texts*, OBO 242 (Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010); also, more generally, Izaak J. de Hulster, "Illuminating Images: An Iconographic Method of Old Testament Exegesis with Three Case Studies from Third Isaiah" (Ph.D. diss., Utrecht University, 2008).

[12] See esp. Bonfiglio, *Reading Images, Seeing Texts*, *passim*. Cf. also Joel M. LeMon and Brent A. Strawn, "Once More, Yhwh and Company at Kuntillet ʿAjrud," *Maarav* 20 (2013): 83–114.

[13] See, e.g., Brent A. Strawn, "The Iconography of Fear: *Yirʾat YHWH* (יראת יהוה) in Artistic Perspective," in *Image, Text, Exegesis: Iconographic Interpretation and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Izaak J. de Hulster and Joel M. LeMon, LHBOTS 588 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 91–134, and, more extensively, Brett E. Maiden, *Cognitive Science and Ancient Israelite Religion: New Perspectives on Texts, Artifacts, and Culture*, SOTSMS (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), esp. 133–176.

In many ways, the central problematic that runs throughout iconographical study, whether of early or more recent vintage, is the question of the image-text relationship.[16] The use of iconography to elucidate the genre and function of specific *text-forms* (not only or merely textual tropes) represents a genuinely new way to think about the possible relationship(s) between image and text. Bringing figural art and figurative language together for the sake of genre apperception and literary reception is, in my judgment, a new application of iconography to the study of the Hebrew Bible.

The present study probes this application and does so by comparing the textual dynamics at work in the "historical psalms" (so-called given the presence of various elements of Israel's history in these poems) and comparable visual dynamics evident in Ashurnasirpal II's throneroom reliefs in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud. I will first overview the questions (and problems) of history and narrative in the historical psalms (§§1–2). Thereafter, I turn to the place of narrativity in the Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs, focusing on Ashurnasirpal II (§3). Next, I offer four explicit points of comparison between *pictura* and *poesis* (§4) before concluding this study with some thoughts about art and image, genre and theory, and history (§5). In the end, this essay hopes to show that the comparable poetics of art and text can be used to cast important light on the nature and function of the historical psalms.

1. "History," Narrative/Poetry, and the Historical Psalms

Psalms 78, 105, and 106 are the three compositions most frequently designated "historical psalms" by scholars, with Psalms 135 and 136 also often included in the mix.[17] Many other psalms contain historical elements, bits, or pieces that are not unrelated to the general phenomenon of history or history-like aspects (or themes) in the psalms,[18] but these five poems are the ones most typically considered "historical." This literary categorization is not, however, without problems. Hermann Gunkel's groundbreaking *Introduction to Psalms* (completed by Joachim Begrich) categorizes only three psalms (78, 105, and 106) as this type, but actually places them under a different rubric: "legends."[19] The legends in question, which he deems "related to Israel's thanksgiving songs by the material," do not "appear independently" but are rather only "component[s]" that are received into different psalms that belong to "various genres."[20] This is to say that the "historical psalms" designation is not a description of *form* – as are Gunkel's primary categories like lament – but, instead, a matter of *content*.[21] But if content is the primary criterion, then it is difficult to know where to stop: why not also include 135 and 136, if not also 114 and still yet others, as "historical psalms" exactly as scholars have frequently done?[22] Moreover, since the term "historical" can be ambiguous if not misleading, some scholars prefer terminology like "psalms of historical recital"[23] in order to better signal the precise nature of the "history" at work in these several psalms and how that "history" is deployed.[24]

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[14] On "visual thinking," see the classic study by Rudolf Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, 2nd ed., 35th Anniversary Printing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

[15] See Justin Walker, *The Power of Images: The Poetics of Violence in Lamentations 2 and Ancient Near Eastern Art*, OBO 297 (Leuven: Peeters, 2022).

[16] See, inter alia, Mieke Bal, *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Academic Archive, Amsterdam University Press, 2006 [original: 1996]). More extensively, see W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, and Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); idem, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and idem, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). For biblical iconography see de Hulster et al., "Introduction," 22–26; and esp. Bonfiglio, *Reading Images, Seeing Texts*, 64–116.

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[17] For the full set of five, see Bernhard W. Anderson with Steven Bishop, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 42; Judith Gärtner, *Die Geschichtspsalmen: Eine Studie zu den Psalmen 78, 105, 106, 135 und 136 als hermeneutische Schlüsseltexte im Psalter*, FAT 84 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); and Anja Klein, *Geschichte und Gebet: Die Rezeption der biblischen Geschichte in den Psalmen des Alten Testaments*, FAT 94 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), who begins her study with a consideration of Exodus 15 and Psalm 114. S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, repr. ed. (Glocester, MA: Peter Smith, 1972), 369 offers a slightly different set: Psalms 78, 81, 105, 106, and 114 – further proof that categorization by content, not form, complicates the taxonomy. See further below.

[18] See, e.g., Psalms 44, 47, 66, 68, 74, 80, 83, 89, 95, 107, 111, 132, and 137. For discussion, see Anderson/Bishop, *Out of the Depths*, 41; also, and more extensively, Marc Zvi Brettler, "Identifying Torah Sources in the Historical Psalms," in *Subtle Citation, Allusion, and Translation in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Ziony Zevit (Sheffield: Equinox, 2017), 73–90 (76), who would consider "historical" any psalm that refers to a narrative about Israel's past. Elsewhere, Brettler has also noted the inclusion of creation motifs in these so-called "historical" psalms ("Psalm 136 as an Interpretive Text," *HeBAI* 2 [2013]: 373–395).

[19] Hermann Gunkel, completed by Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. James D. Nogalski, Mercer Library of Biblical Studies (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 247–249. Outside the Psalter, Gunkel/Begrich refer to Deuteronomy 32 and Isa 63:7ff. as other examples of "legends" (ibid., 247 fn. 277).

[20] Gunkel/Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms*, 247: Psalm 78 is a "wisdom poem"; Psalm 105 is "a hymn by form" (but a later exemplar); and Psalm 106 is "a communal complaint with a hymnic entry."

[21] Cf. Klaus Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms*, trans. R. Graeme Dunphy (London: T & T Clark, 1990), 118, who states that Psalms 78, 105, and 106 "do not form a type in the strictest sense, unless of course we were to go back to the basic meaning of the proclamation of salvation-history (*Heilsgeschichte*) and its place in worship, which is the context in which these texts are to be set." So also, similarly, John Day, *Psalms* (London: T & T Clark International, 2003), 58. Note Gunkel/Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms*, 248: "One cannot accept that the legend ever formed an *independent psalm genre*. Rather, it is subsumed under known genres everywhere it appears in the psalms" (their emphasis). For Day, *Psalms*, 59–60, those other known genres include lament elements (Psalm 106) and hymns (Psalm 135–136).

Whatever one calls them, these psalms – often viewed as instances of, or related to, narrative poetry[25] – are something of a hybrid. They are, on the one hand, relatively brief poetic compositions that are not the same as, say, an extended, extensive, or fully-developed narrative (*à la* a novel or novella), though they clearly contain narratival or quasi-narratival elements: characters, plot (at least in rudimentary form), development through time and/or space, and so on.[26] On the other hand, the historical psalms are obviously different from the most extreme – the most poetic, as it were – of poetries, namely, the lyric.[27] Lyric poetry, too, can contain a kind of plot, display developments of various kinds, and/or include various characters, but in each instance these elements are typically manifested quite differently than narrative,[28] and they are decidedly *optional*: they can be included or excluded. This last point demonstrates that these elements are neither necessary nor essential elements of the lyric; such a judgment would *not* hold true in the case of narrative proper nor for more extended and extensive narrative (epic) poems.[29] Indeed, some scholars would say that, perhaps above all else, lyric is defined as the decided *absence of*, if not outright *resistance to*, narrative.[30]

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[22] See above. Gunkel/Begrich categorize Psalms 114, 135, and 136 as hymns (*Introduction to Psalms*, 22).

[23] So Walter Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment: Psalms, Modernity, and the Making of History*, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 13.

[24] Anderson/Bishop, *Out of the Depths*, 41 uses "storytelling psalms," which may be an even better option; they also use "salvation history psalms."

[25] Note the definition of C. R. Kinney, "Narrative Poetry," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed., ed. Roland Greene et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 911–915 (911): "Narrative turns the raw material of story – the 'telling' of a concatenation of events unfolding in linear time – into a (more or less) artful organization of those events that may complicate their chronology, suggest their significance, emphasize their affect, or invite their interpretation. Narrative *poetry* heightens this process by framing the act of telling in the rhythmically and sonically constructed lang[uage] of verse." See also the next note.

[26] Cf. Gunkel/Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms*, 247: "They have a common form, the *narrative*," which is "limited to *YHWH's deeds toward Israel* during the wandering from Egypt to the entry into Canaan" (their emphases). On matters of definition, see Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 4th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 5 (her emphases): "*A narrative text* is a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee ('tells' the reader, viewer, or listener) a story in a medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof. *A story* is the content of that text, and produces a particular manifestation, inflection, and 'colouring' of a fabula. A *fabula* is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors." In each case, these are rather capacious definitions, particularly the first, which in my judgment is likely *too* capacious to be useful: how can architecture be a narrative *text*? Elisabeth Wagner-Durand, "Visual Narration in Assyria Versus 'Static Art' in Babylonia – Making a Difference in the 1st Millennium B.C.," in *Proceedings of the 9th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East*, Vol. 1, ed. Oskar Kaelin et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2016), 269–280, depending on the work of Susana Onega and José Angel García Landa ("Introduction," in *Narratology: An Introduction*, ed. Susana Onega and José Angel García Landa [London: Longman, 1996], 2–3), highlights the elements of *temporality* and *causality* as crucial for narrative. Wagner-Durand defines a "true" visual narrative as a visual account "including at least two iconic sign representations denoting different events of one story. The 'true' visual narrative does not simply evoke a known story in the mind of the user by one sign; the image itself narrates the story" (271 with fn. 6 for literature). See also the previous note.

[27] On lyric verse in the Hebrew Bible, see F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), esp. 178–232; Katie M. Heffelfinger, *I Am Large, I Contain Multitudes: Lyric Cohesion and Conflict in Second Isaiah*, BIS 105 (Leiden: Brill, 2011); and, briefly, Brent A. Strawn, "Lyric Poetry," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings*,

If one imagines a hypothetical literary continuum, then, at one end would be the purest narrative – whatever, exactly, that would look like (though it would likely be prose) – and, at the other end, the purest lyric – whatever, precisely that would look like (though almost certainly it would be lineated):[31]

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ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 437–446. See also, and more generally, V. Jackson, "Lyric," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed., ed. Roland Greene et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 826–834 (826). Jackson notes the change in *lyric* from adjective to noun, and its current association with songs or short, occasional poems, and (esp. since the 18th century) with "brevity, subjectivity, passion, and sensuality," such that *lyric* "is used for a kind of poetry that expresses personal feeling…in a concentrated and harmoniously arranged from…and that is indirectly addressed to the private reader." This particular idea of *lyric*, says Jackson, is a modern invention (ibid.). For more on the lyric, including its ancient attestations (or antecedents), see Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

[28] For example, traces of plot (perhaps only traces) would largely be achieved by lyric sequencing – the arrangement of individual lyrics into a larger collection – since, by definition, lyric poems are too brief to contain much, if anything, of a "plot" and certainly not a developed one. For the lyric sequence, see, *inter alia*, M. L. Rosenthal and Sally M. Gall, *The Modern Poetic Sequence: The Genius of Modern Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Robert J. Cirasa, *The Lost Works of William Carlos Williams: The Volumes of Collected Poetry as Lyrical Sequences* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1995); and R. Greene and B. Tate, "Lyric Sequence," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed., ed. Roland Greene et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[29] There is, of course, some overlap between and among poetic types. Cf. Kinney, "Narrative Poetry," 911–912: "the boundaries between narrative and lyric verse are always fungible: poems usually classified as lyric may supply a significant amount of narrative context for an act of reflection unfolding in arrested time." See ibid., 911, for "poetic narrative" as "a capacious category" that can include, *inter alia*, modernist lyric sequences like those of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and William Carlos Williams.

[30] Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*, 184–185: lyric "is *chiefly*…a nonnarrative, nondramatic, nonrepresentational kind of poetry. In fact…what so distinguishes the medium of lyric verse…is the noncentrality, and indeed frequent absence, of features and practices (plot, character, and the like) that are otherwise definitive of more discursive modes of discourse (e.g., narrative, drama)" (his emphasis). Dobbs-Allsopp depends here upon Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 78: "Narrative poems recount an event; lyrics, we might say, strive to be an event." See also idem, "Lyric, History, and Genre," in *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 63–77; and, further and most extensively, idem, *Theory of the Lyric*.

[31] Cf., e.g., Gregory Orr, *A Primer for Poets and Readers of Poetry* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018), 82-117, esp. 83. For the importance of the line in Hebrew poetry, see Dobbs-Allsopp, *On*

narrative ⟵——————————⟶ **lyric**

(prose) (poetry)

Within this hypothetical continuum, the historical psalms would fall somewhere between the two extreme poles, for the reasons expressed above. All things considered, however, these psalms would probably lie at least somewhat nearer the lyric side of the spectrum due to their poetic (lineated) form and the fact that they, too, traffic in the spare language and dense concatenation of figurative language (imagery, metaphor, etc.) that marks all poetry, Hebrew poetry included. Indeed, scholars like S. R. Driver and Luis Alonso Schökel have asserted that basically all biblical Hebrew poetry is of the lyric variety.[32]

Perhaps that is overstated, or wrongheaded in some way,[33] but what is irrefutable is that the narrative elements within the historical psalms are historically tantalizing. These psalms contain details – historical factoids (or so it would seem) – that have often proven irresistible to biblical scholars, especially of earlier generations, many of whom tried to place a specific historical psalm and its "raw data" into the constantly debated, reconstructed, and always-under-(re-)negotiation timeline of ancient Israelite history, religion, and theology.[34] It is appropriate, therefore, to turn now to a consideration of how such endeavors have affected the study of the historical psalms.

Biblical Poetry, 14–94. In recent times there is, of course, the phenomenon known as "prose poetry." See M. A. Caws, "Prose Poem," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed., ed. Roland Greene et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1112–1113. Caws deems the title *prose poem* "oxymoronic" and the form one that is "based on contradiction" (1112). While eschewing lineation, Caws notes that prose poems contain the characteristics that "ensure brevity and poetic quality" – namely, "high patterning, rhythmic and figural repetition, sustained intensity, and compactness" (ibid.). The latter is key: "otherwise, the prose poem merges with the essay" (ibid.). It is noteworthy that Caws thinks that the antecedents of the prose poem "are the poeticized prose verses of the Bible" (ibid.).

[32] See Driver, *An Introduction*, 360, though he also acknowledges the existence of what he calls *gnomic* verse; and L. Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, Subsidia biblica 11 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988), 11: "we can say that biblical literature contains an abundance of lyric poetry and that it contains no epic poems and no drama." Still earlier, see the work of W. M. L. de Wette who asserted, "Die Psalmen sind lyrische Gedichte" and "Man kann der Psalter sehr passend eine lyrische Anthologie nennen" (*Commentar über die Psalmen*, 5th ed. [Heidelberg: J. C. B. Mohr, 1856], 1–2; also cited in Klaus Seybold, "Studies of the Psalms and Other Biblical Poetry," in *Hebrew Bible Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, Vol. III/1: *The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Magne Sæbø [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013], 582–602 [587–588]).

[33] If, that is, these categories are too modern, Western, or otherwise erroneously etic in some fashion. For a fuller discussion of biblical lyric poetry, see Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*, 178–232.

[34] I have commented on some of the difficulties facing the (non)correlation of poetry and history elsewhere. See Brent A. Strawn, "The Poetics of Psalm 82: Three Critical Notes along with a Plea for the Poetic," *RB* 121 (2014): 21–46.

2. PROBLEMS OF "HISTOR(ICIT)Y" AND "NARRATIVE" IN THE HISTORICAL PSALMS

It is well known that the historical psalms refer to events also discussed elsewhere in the Bible, especially in the Pentateuch, but that they often present these events differently: with various details in an alternative organization, for example, or by including additional information, or, conversely, by omitting or lacking certain details.[35] So, to use Psalm 78 as an illustration, this psalm contains only seven of the ten plagues on Egypt known from the Exodus account (absent are plagues 3: gnats; 5: livestock disease; and 9: darkness) and has them in a different sequence:

> Plagues **1**: water into blood (v. 44) → **4**: flies (v. 45a) → **2**: frogs (v. 45b) → **8**: locusts (v. 46) → **7**: thunder and hail (v. 47–48) → **6**: boils (v. 50) → **10**: death of the firstborn (v. 51).[36]

Psalm 78 differs from the Pentateuchal version of the exodus events in other ways as well. Moses and Aaron and even Pharaoh himself are omitted from the psalm – no small details those![37] Psalm 78 also includes *additional details* that are not found in the book of Exodus: the curious statement about Ephraim not helping out in the day of battle (Ps 78:9–11), for example, and the fact that the psalm mentions not just one destroying angel (see Exod 12:23) but a whole "troop" of them (Ps 78:49: *mišlaḥat malʾăkê rāʿîm*; NJPSV: "a band of deadly messengers").

For its part, Psalm 105 mentions eight of the ten plagues known from Exodus (absent are plagues 5 and 6), but, once again, puts them in a different sequence:

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[35] Note, e.g., the bibliography in Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:190–192. In a more general vein, see the discussion of the Psalms and history in James L. Crenshaw, *The Psalms: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 72–79.

[36] Other understandings of the psalm's presentation are possible. E.g., Samuel E. Loewenstamm, *The Evolution of the Exodus Tradition*, trans. Baruch J. Schwartz (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992), 186 fn. 6 and 188 fn. 9 (this study first appeared in *Bib* 52 [1971]: 34–38), also counts seven plagues in Psalm 78, but combines the fourth (v. 45a) and second (v. 45b), while separating the fifth (v. 48a) and sixth (vv. 49–50). My own formulation treats plagues 4 and 2 as independently presented, and views plague 5 as absent (or somehow combined with plague 7; note the use of *rĕšāpîm* in v. 48b).

[37] Perhaps not too much should be made of this. Marc Brettler has reminded me (personal conversation) that Moses only occurs once in the Passover Haggadah. Be that as it may, Psalms 105 and 106 *do* include mention of Moses and Aaron (see below); Psalm 90 is apparently attributed to Moses (*tĕpillāh lĕmōšeh*, "A prayer of Moses"); and Psalms 135 and 136 mention Pharaoh. Such considerations suggest that Psalm 78's omissions may well be by design.

Plagues **9**: darkness (v. 28) → **1**: water into blood (v. 29) → **2**: frogs (v. 30) → **4**: flies (v. 31a) → **3**: gnats (v. 31b) → **7**: thunder and hail (v. 32) → **8**: locusts (v. 34–35) → **10**: death of firstborn (v. 36).[38]

Psalm 105 *does* make mention of Moses and Aaron (v. 26; see also Ps 106:16, 23, 32), and their agency (Ps 105:27),[39] but the origin of the plagues and the wonders, and their ultimate agent, is Yhwh (see vv. 7, 24) – a point underscored in the poetry: Yhwh initiates and envelops Moses and Aaron:

[26] He [Yhwh] sent (*šālaḥ*) Moses, his servant,
Aaron whom he had chosen (*bāḥar*)
[27] They placed (*śāmû*) the matters of his signs among them,[40]
and the portents in the land of Ham.
[28] He sent (*šālaḥ*) darkness…

Like Psalm 78, Psalm 105 adds some new details, or at least some slight nuance, to what is known from Exodus: *God brought Israel out* of Egypt laden with silver and gold (v. 37a),[41] *with no one stumbling* along the way (v. 37b);[42] *the Egyptians rejoiced* when the Israelites left because *they were afraid of them* (v. 38);[43] and the departure was a time of *joy and jubilation* (v. 43).[44]

More differences could be detailed, and from other texts,[45] but the above suffices to show that the historical psalms present the "history" – or perhaps better, tell the "story," or perhaps better still, recount the history-like narrative – in alternative ways, to greater or lesser degrees, than what is presently found in the Pentateuch. In Gunkel/Begrich's pithy formulation: "A certain liberty dominates the handling of the material [in these psalms] and its arrangement."[46] The greatest liberties would seem to be the variant orderings of the events and the distinctive versions of the same, whether such differences are more or less extreme. Whichever the case, the variations found between what the Pentateuch and the Psalms both ostensibly purport to relate raise two major questions that biblical scholars have, in the past and in various ways, attempted to address:

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[38] Loewenstamm, *Evolution of the Exodus Tradition*, 186, counts only seven plagues in Psalm 105, deeming the fourth (flies) and third (gnats) to be one, which he calls "lice" and "swarms."

[39] But see the next note on the text-critical problem in this verse.

[40] This verse is not without text-critical difficulties. The Greek Septuagint and Syriac Peshitta, for instance, read the verbal form here as a singular (so *śām* rather than *śāmû*), which would mean that it is *Yhwh's* agency, not Moses' and Aaron's, that is at work in v. 27.

[41] Silver and gold are mentioned in Exodus (3:22; 11:2; 12:35) but not in connection with God's agency in this fashion.

[42] The verb in question (√*k-š-l*) does not occur in Exodus.

[43] The root √*p-ḥ-d* occurs only in Exod 15:16, with the most likely object of Egyptian fear being God, not the Israelites.

[44] Neither term, *śāśôn* and *rinnāh*, is found in Exodus.

[45] See further Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:199 for examples taken from Psalm 136. Also ibid., 1:201 fn. 425: Psalm 105 "contains a tradition that is not found in the Pentateuch"; and 1:205: "In my judgment it is possible that Ps. 106:32f. embodies a tradition about the incident at Quarrel [Meribah] which in that form does not occur in the Pentateuch." Houtman's use of *tradition* in these passages is important.

[46] Gunkel/Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms*, 247, referring to Gunkel's commentary on Psalm 106, for which see Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 5th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968 [1929]), 461–468.

- First, and mostly on the literary level: which version(s) – psalm(s) or Pentateuchal text(s) – is (are) earlier, foundational, or otherwise primary, and which later, dependent, or secondary, *if* (no small matter) the different presentations can be related in such ways (which of course they may not)?
- Second, and underlying the literary question for some (though not all) biblical scholars: which version(s) is (are) correct – which is to say "accurate" or "historical," if these terms can be used at all (which of course they may not)?

Despite the embedded, parenthetical caveats, these two questions are surely too simply put. If nothing else, the fact that there is "a" Pentateuchal account of these events – which, in truth, is usually filleted into different compositional strata – and also several versions of the same (or similar) events in the Psalms seems to suggest that there were *many* traditions circulating about these matters in ancient Israel at various points in its history.[47] If so, this significantly complicates matters, making it highly unlikely that any one of the versions is the first, pristine original with all others directly dependent upon it. Instead, a model that considers secondary if not tertiary dependence is probably more likely, including dependence on a now lost original or now lost *non*-original, as the case may be, since even an earlier form need not be historically "correct" or "accurate" – at least as we understand those terms now, after the Enlightenment and its notions of historiography.[48]

Whatever the case may be, even a more complex model doesn't answer the two major questions delineated above; it just delays or defers them. And so we might still ask: Is one (or more) of the accounts *we presently have* earlier and/or more accurate than the others? It should be noted, in this regard, that some scholars have posited that the historical psalms represent earlier versions than what is found in the Pentateuch, and so, once again – and no surprise here – the matters of (relative) chronology and literary (inter)dependence are deeply vexed ones, especially because other scholars have posited the exact opposite: it is the Pentateuch that offers the earlier version(s) with the psalms secondary.

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[47] See, e.g., Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:200: "there were various *traditions* with respect to the place of the crossing" of the Reed Sea (emphasis added). Cf. the study by Marc Zvi Brettler, "The Many Faces of God in Exodus 19," in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, ed. Alice Ogden Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 353–367.

[48] Leopold von Ranke's (1795–1886) famous statement *wie es eigentlich gewesen* looms large at this point. Of course, much water has passed under the bridge since then, most notably, perhaps, Hayden White's work, esp. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

A few examples are instructive. Gunkel/Begrich asserted that

> [i]n the psalms, the legend is *thoroughly dependent upon the history of the material in the prose composition*. Its development is completely understandable in this realm. One should thus conclude that the legend developed elsewhere and only entered psalmody rather late.[49]

They go on to say that "[t]he legend type" was "created from Deuteronomic paranesis" and

> developed considerably more broadly in the later period. This later shape of the type is characterized by larger size and a closer connection to the final working of the Pentateuchal tradition. In broad strokes, this is the history of the legend in the realm outside lyrical poetry.[50]

Gunkel/Begrich then add that, "[i]n its late form, dependent upon the written Pentateuch, the legend entered into psalmody via the *hymn* [Psalm 105], the *communal complaint* [Psalm 106], and the *instructional poem* [Psalm 78]."[51]

Samuel Loewenstamm believes otherwise.[52] In a study of Psalm 105, Loewenstamm responded to an earlier essay by B. Margulis,[53] who thought Psalm 105 was dependent on the Pentateuch but took such liberties with that material that "[t]he inevitable conclusion is that the author [of the psalm] was not concerned with a faithful reproduction of his allegedly authoritative source, the account of the plagues in Exodus."[54] Loewenstamm's contrary approach is to establish a range of variations on the details in question as related in Psalm 78, Psalm 105, and the book of Exodus. According to him, that order is in fact the proper logical sequence: Psalm 78 stands first, conceptually, then Psalm 105, and then, finally, the "Pentateuchal account [which] resulted from the amalgamation of all variants of the plague traditions." The Pentateuchal "stage of the plague tradition was preceded by separate variants, each of which included seven plagues, and two of which have been preserved in Psalms 78 and 105."[55] In the end, however, Loewenstamm hedges his bets somewhat by distinguishing, at least theoretically, between *current text form* and *antecedent text tradition*: "We cannot be certain whether Psalm 78 is actually later than the Pentateuch or not, but it certainly represents a poetic tradition which precedes the Pentateuch."[56]

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[49] Gunkel/Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms*, 248 (emphasis added).

[50] Ibid., 248. Gunkel/Begrich associate Ezekiel 20:5ff.; Neh 9:6ff.; Dan 9:6ff.; and Acts 7:1ff.; 13:16ff. with this "later period" (ibid., 248 fn. 292).

[51] Ibid., 248 (emphasis original).

[52] Loewenstamm, *Evolution of the Exodus Tradition*, 184–188.

[53] B. Margulis, "The Plagues Tradition in Psalm 105," *Bib* 50 (1969): 491–496.

[54] Loewenstamm, *Evolution of the Exodus Tradition*, 185.

[55] Ibid., 188.

Writing more recently, this time with reference to Psalm 106, Marc Zvi Brettler takes a different, almost precisely opposite, position:

> [The] authors of the historical psalms may have used sources that now are part of the Torah, and perhaps even the redacted Torah itself, two possibilities that must be distinguished. Psalm 106 likely betrays the influence of the redacted Torah, but this should not be generalized to all of the historical psalms….Careful consideration of the tradition-history work of Loewenstamm highlights how difficult it is to prove – or disprove – allusions. Yet the criteria of Leonard and Carr are very helpful in indicating the likelihood and direction of allusions, and specifically in this case, the likelihood that several historical psalms knew, at the minimum, sources that eventually were woven into the Torah – or documents or traditions that are extremely close to these sources. Scholars who work on these psalms need to consider these observations in greater detail, since one aspect of interpretation is seeing how a psalm interacts with, and reworks, its source(s).[57]

The interactions and reworkings Brettler mentions are sometimes quite large. The biggest "minus," as it were, in the historical psalms is their frequent omission of Mt. Sinai, though that locale is found in Ps 106:19 (where it is called Horeb).[58] According to Cornelis Houtman it is nothing short of remarkable that "Psalms which deal in great detail with the sojourn in the wilderness, such as Ps. 78; 105; 135; 136, do not even allude to the events at the Sinai."[59] More could be said about this matter, of course – surely the texts must be taken up on a case-by-case basis; Psalm 106 does mention Horeb, after all. Also, what constitutes "allusion" for Houtman? It seems that his comment ignores, to some degree at least, Ps 78:1–8, especially v. 5:

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Brettler, "Identifying Torah Sources," 87. In an earlier essay, Brettler argues that Psalm 105 is primarily dependent on the J source with some material taken from the P source, but prior to its combination with J. See Marc Zvi Brettler, "The Poet as Historian: The Plague Tradition in Psalm 105," in *Bringing the Hidden to Light: The Process of Interpretation. Studies in Honor of Stephen A. Geller*, ed. Kathryn F. Kravitz and Diane M. Sharon (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 19–28. The works Brettler refers to in the citation above are, in addition to Loewenstamm, *Evolution of the Exodus Tradition*: Jeffery Leonard, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions: Psalm 78 as a Test Case," *JBL* 127 (2008): 241–265; and David Carr, "Method in Determination of Direction of Dependence: An Empirical Test of Criteria Applied to Exodus 34, 11–26 and its Parallels," in *Gottes Volk am Sinai: Untersuchungen zu Ex 32–34 und Dtn 9–10*, ed. Matthias Köckert and Erhard Blum (Gütersloh: Kaiser, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001), 107–140; idem, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and idem, "The Many Uses of Intertextuality in Biblical Studies: Actual and Potential," in *Congress Volume: Helsinki 2010*, ed. Marti Nissinen, VTSup 148 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 505–535.

[58] See generally Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:207–210, esp. 1:207: "Outside the Pentateuch the momentous happenings at the Sinai (Exod. 19ff.) are barely mentioned," a comment made with reference to Gerhard von Rad, "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," originally published in 1938, reprinted in idem, *From Genesis to Chronicles: Explorations in Old Testament Theology*, ed. K. C. Hanson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 1–58.

[59] Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:207–208. Sinai (סיני) is found only is Ps 68:8 and 17.

> He [Yhwh, see v. 4] established testimony amidst Jacob,
> placed instruction among Israel,
> that he commanded our ancestors,
> to make known to their children.[60]

One suspects Houtman would doubt that these verses are entirely germane, coming, as they do, *out* of chronological order with respect to the other events recounted in the psalm.[61] To Houtman's point is the fact that these verses do not mention Sinai/Horeb by name, though Ps 78:53 mentions God's "holy hill" (*gĕbûl qodšô*) and "the mountain that his right hand had acquired" (*har-zeh qānĕtāh yĕmînô*).[62]

In another study, Brettler has noted that the relationship between the specific texts involved has direct bearing on their form. In his judgment, for example, Psalm 136 had Deut 10:17 (or 10:14 or 10:12)–11:5 as its base-text. This explains why

> there is no mention of Horeb/Sinai in Psalm 136, even though this tradition was well-known by the post-exilic period, *because the base text in Deuteronomy 10–11 did not mention Sinai*. Thus, understanding cases of inner-biblical interpretation is not only important for understanding the history of biblical interpretation or offering some control for Pentateuchal criticism, but also for helping us resolve certain problems in interpretive texts by seeing them in relation to the texts they are interpreting.[63]

Brettler's argument is helpful in explaining how there is more than one possible reason for a "minus." Houtman's summary remark about traces of the exodus in the Hebrew Bible is also instructive, or at least illustrative, on the matter:

> generally speaking the preachers [of Israel] had at their disposal the same traditions we know about from the Tetrateuch. It is not unlikely that in addition they were also familiar with other traditions not referred to in the Tetrateuch….But it is difficult to sift out whether such a tradition was used

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[60] See also Ps 105:45, which mentions "his [God's] statues and laws (*huqqāyw wĕtôrōtāyw*)."

[61] Before, that is, the mention of the exodus from Egypt proper (see Ps 78:12ff.).

[62] One wonders, of course, if this "hill // mountain" might have a double referent, evoking also (if not instead) Mt. Zion. A comparable situation obtains for Exod 15:17. See Justin Walker, "Historical Narrativity in the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:1–18) and the Throneroom Reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II," *HeBAI* (fc); and further below.

[63] Brettler, "Psalm 136," 395 (emphasis added).

> or whether there was a free handling of a tradition known from the Tetrateuch.[64]

Difficult to sift out, indeed – and on several fronts! The problems are made worse by Houtman's further comment, namely, that "a free use of an existing tradition may have been the beginning of a new tradition."[65]

By now it seems patently obvious that certainty on historical and literary questions like the ones discussed here will likely remain elusive due to the nature of the data at hand, not to mention continued scholarly debate on all of the above. It also seems that answering some of these questions may not be as important as is sometimes imagined; indeed, perhaps some of those questions miss the point altogether.[66] To explain this latter sentiment, I turn to an intriguing analogue to the problem posed by the historical psalms when viewed alongside Pentateuchal narrative. The analogue is not an immediately obvious one, not least because it is *artistic* rather than textual: the development and function of historical narrative in Neo-Assyrian royal reliefs, especially as that can be traced in Ashurnasirpal II's Throneroom in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud. Before turning to the iconography, I want to underscore what should be clear from the preceding overview – namely, that, while earlier scholarship was often concerned with matters of histor(icit)y in the historical psalms, especially vis-à-vis the Pentateuch (including, *inter alia*, what *really* happened at the Reed Sea), more recent scholarship has been more interested in inner-biblical exegesis: the (inter)relationship(s) between the Torah and these psalms (and vice versa), usually with some attention paid (even if only implicitly) to questions of relative chronology and/or typology.[67] In the latter, more recent scholarly trend opinions vary widely, just as they did in the earlier scholarly approach.[68] The multi-point impasse provided by different scholarly approaches to the historical psalms, on the one hand, and varying conclusions (even within similar approaches), on the other, provides an opportune moment to turn to another, rather different kind of dataset: ancient Near Eastern art. Perhaps here we will find a way forward.

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[64] Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:212.

[65] Ibid.

[66] One might note, for instance, the existence of studies that attribute the differences between the plague accounts to nothing more (or less) than the different compositions' literary and/or theological agenda. See, e.g., A. C. C. Lee, "Genesis 1 and the Plagues Tradition in Psalm CV," *VT* 40 (1990): 257–263; and W. Dennis Tucker, "Revisiting the Plagues in Psalm CV," *VT* 55 (2005): 401–411.

[67] See more generally on the latter development, Leonard, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions," 241–265 (with much previous literature), especially for the ongoing significance of diachronic inquiry on allusions. But note Leonard's sobering admission that definitive knowledge with regard to textual priority is "rarely possible…especially since demonstrably early texts often contain later, secondary elements" (257). Ultimately, Leonard says that identifying and determining the direction of allusions remains "more art than science" (264). See also Sophie Ramond, *Les leçons et les énigmes du passé: Une exégèse intra-biblique des psaumes historiques*, BZAW 459 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014).

[68] Compare, e.g., Brettler's work, which posits the use of un-redacted Torah sources in some cases (see above), with Gärtner, *Die Geschichtspsalmen*, who thinks that the historical psalms presuppose the Pentateuch in virtually its present form. Note also F.-L. Hossfeld, "Ps 106 und die priestliche Überlieferung des Pentateuch," in *Textarbeit: Studien zu Texten und ihrer Rezeption aus*

3. Narrativity (and Lyric Episodicity?) in Ancient Near Eastern Iconography

Irene Winter's well-known study, "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs,"[69] addresses the place of narrativity in ancient Near Eastern art, its meaning, and its rhetorical function.[70] Despite

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dem AT und der Umwelt Israels, ed. K. Kiesow and T. Meurer, AOAT 294 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2003), 255–266; and Jan-Albert Roetman and Caspar Visser't Hooft, "Le Psaume 106 et le Pentateuque," *ETR* 85 (2010): 233–243. See also Sophie Ramond, "The Growth of the Scriptural Corpus by Successive Rewritings: The Case of the So-called 'Historical Psalms,'" *HeBAI* 4 (2015): 427–449.

[69] Irene J. Winter, "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs," *Studies in Visual Communication* 7 (1981): 2–38, reprinted in eadem, *On Art in the Ancient Near East*, 2 vols., CHANE 34.1–2 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1:3–70; citations come from the latter. In addition to this essay, see also her later, closely-related study, "The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II," in *Essays on Near Eastern Art and Archaeology in Honor of Charles Kyrle Wilkinson*, ed. Prudence O. Harper and Holly Pittman (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983), 15–31. Note also eadem, "After the Battle is Over: The Stele of the Vultures and the Beginning of Historical Narrative in the Art of the Ancient Near East," in *On Art in the Ancient Near East*, 2:3–51. Beyond Winter, see, more generally, the earlier works by Sabatino Moscati, *Historical Art in the Ancient Near East*, Studi Semitici 8 (Rome: Centro di studi semitici, Università, 1963), esp. 88–98, 105–106; and H. A. Groenewegen-Frankfort, *Arrest and Movement: An Essay on Space and Time in the Representational Art of the Ancient Near East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Belknap, 1987), esp. 15–141 (Egyptian art) and 170–181 (Neo-Assyrian art). For Egypt, see also, more recently, Whitney Davis, *Replications: Archaeology, Art History, Psychoanalysis* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 199–231 ("Narrativity and the Narmer Palette"). For the Neo-Assyrian evidence, see also John Malcolm Russell, *Sennacherib's Palace without Rival at Nineveh* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); idem, "The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud: Issues in the Research and Presentation of Assyrian Art," *AJA* 102 (1998): 655–715; idem, *The Writing on the Wall: Studies in the Architectural Context of Late Assyrian Palace Inscriptions*, MC 9 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999). See also, more recently, Mehmet-Ali Ataç, *The Mythology of Kingship in Neo-Assyrian Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. 14–38; David Kertai, *The Architecture of Late Assyrian Royal Palaces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), esp. 17–48; and Ludovico Portuese, *Life at Court: Ideology and Audience in the Late Assyrian Palace*, marru 11 (Münster: Zaphon, 2020).

[70] For more on rhetoric in art, see, *inter alia*, David Castriota, ed., *Artistic Strategy and the Rhetoric of Power: Political Uses of Art from Antiquity to the Present* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), esp. 1–13 (David Castriota, "Introduction: Political Art and the Rhetoric of Power in the Historical Continuum"), and 15–25 (Edith Porada, "The Uses of Art to Convey Political Meanings in the Ancient Near East"). Porada states the point straightforwardly: "In view of the limited application and currency of writing in the ancient Near East, official ideology was often expressed in visual form" (15). Note also, more generally, Charles A. Hill and Marguerite Helmers, ed., *Defining Visual Rhetorics* (Mahway, NJ and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), esp. 1–61, 303–313.

certain precursors,[71] Winter finds the first real evidence for narrative art in the throneroom of Ashurnasirpal II (885–856 BCE), located in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud (Kalḫu), which was completed sometime between 865 and 859 BCE (see Figs. 1–3).[72] Winter's is a careful and lengthy study; many of its details – while fascinating and not unimportant nor entirely unrelated to the matters investigated here – need not detain us. It suffices to raise several of the key points she makes about the program as a whole before examining, in a later section, how these might relate to the historical psalms (§4).[73]

According to Winter, the narrativity of Ashurnasirpal II's throneroom is not "pure" or thoroughgoing. In her judgment, the narrativity found there represents something of a first attempt toward capturing historical narrative in artistic form by means of an intriguing mixture (or juxtaposition) of historical and *a*historical images – an approach that is eventually replaced by what are almost entirely historical representations by the time of Ashurbanipal.[74] Winter means by the term "historical" that the relief scenes in question are more or less readily identifiable with specific locations known from the royal inscriptions. It is not unimportant, in this regard, to recall that in some of the later palace reliefs – especially those of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal – one finds extensive use of epigraphs that accompany the scenes and specify certain matters of detail.[75] Laura Battini refers to historically-specific types of artistic representation as instances of "time pulled up": an event from the past is recalled, remembered, and rendered in the present tableau. This kind of art is largely, if not exclusively, a narrative mode of temporal representation. In Battini's words, these types of images depict "real, present time with action, movement, and real human, mortal figures."[76]

Again, the art found in Ashurnasirpal's throneroom is not uniformly of this variety, though there are still plenty of instances of "time pulled up," which is say the reliefs found here contain a great number of "historical" or narrative elements. These are punctuated, however, with *a*historical or *non*-narratival scenes: episodes, as it were, which cannot be related to real moments known

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[71] Precursors are a special focus of Holly Pittman's study, "The White Obelisk and the Problem of Historical Narrative in the Art of Assyria," *AB* 78 (1996): 334–355. Note also Wagner-Durand, "Visual Narration," 269: "This form of materializing stories by visually producing longer storyboards had been adopted by the Assyrian kings no later than the reign of Ashurnaṣirpal II."

[72] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 6. She describes the change in Ashurnasirpal's reign to be a "quantum leap" (46). It was a new artistic/cultural form that developed alongside the development of the imperial state "that addressed the structure of the new social and political order." Pittman, "White Obelisk," 348 also uses "quantum leap" to describe the Nimrud program.

[73] Winter, "The Program," 29 fn. 7 acknowledges the problems caused by the incomplete state of preservation. Even so, "since the reliefs stood some two meters high, clearly they were intended to provide the principal visual impact in the room, and so I have proceeded as if they constitute a complete program" (ibid.).

[74] See Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 33–38.

[75] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 36–37; more extensively, Russell, *Writing on the Wall*.

[76] Battini, "Time 'Pulled Up,'" 36. Wagner-Durand terms this kind of image *mimetic representation* ("Visual Narration," 270).

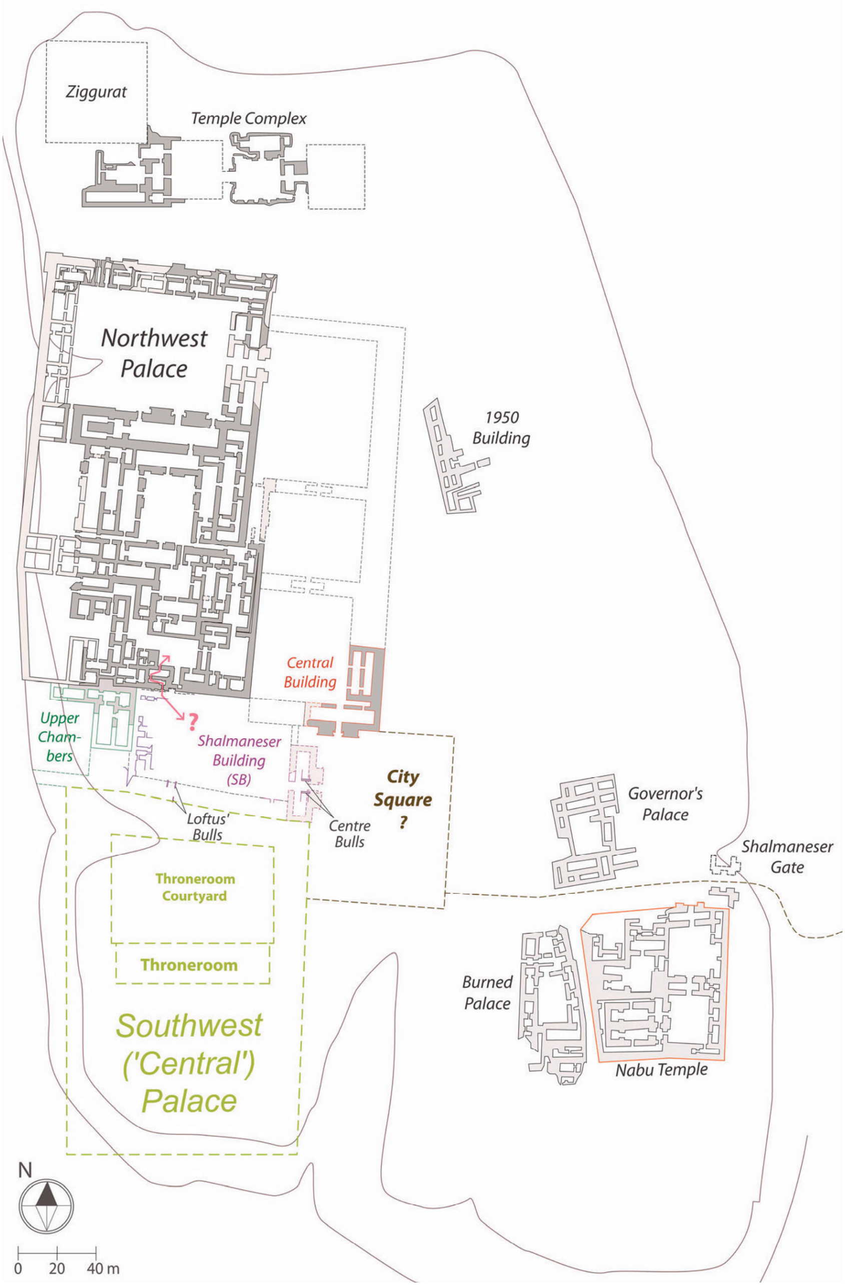
Ziggurat
Temple Complex
Northwest Palace
1950 Building
Central Building
Upper Cham-bers
Shalmaneser Building (SB)
?
City Square ?
Governor's Palace
Shalmaneser Gate
Loftus' Bulls
Centre Bulls
Throneroom Courtyard
Throneroom
Southwest ('Central') Palace
Burned Palace
Nabu Temple
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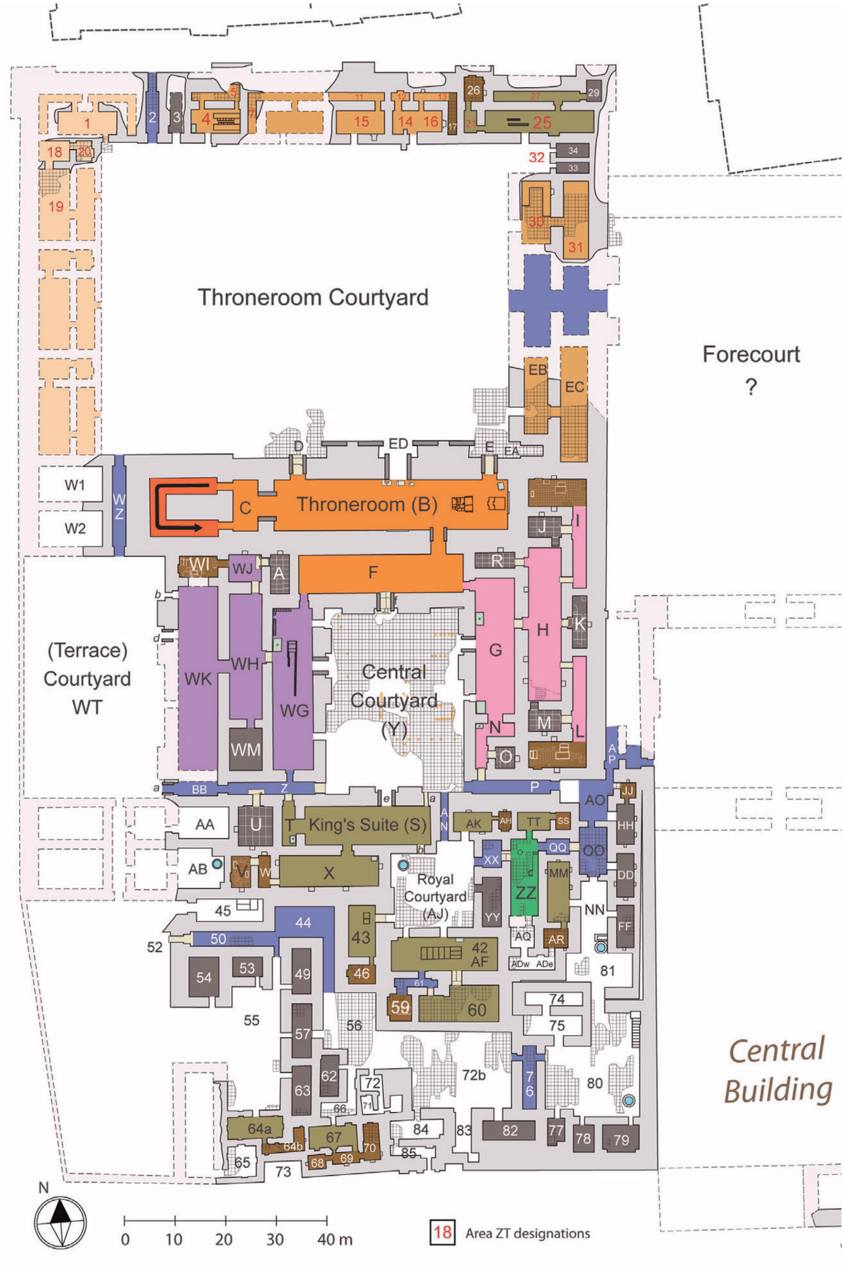
Fig. 1: Kalḫu citadel (Kertai, *Late Assyrian Royal Palaces*, pl. 3).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Throneroom Courtyard
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72
72b
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64b
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69
85
73
Central
Building
N
0
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30
40 m
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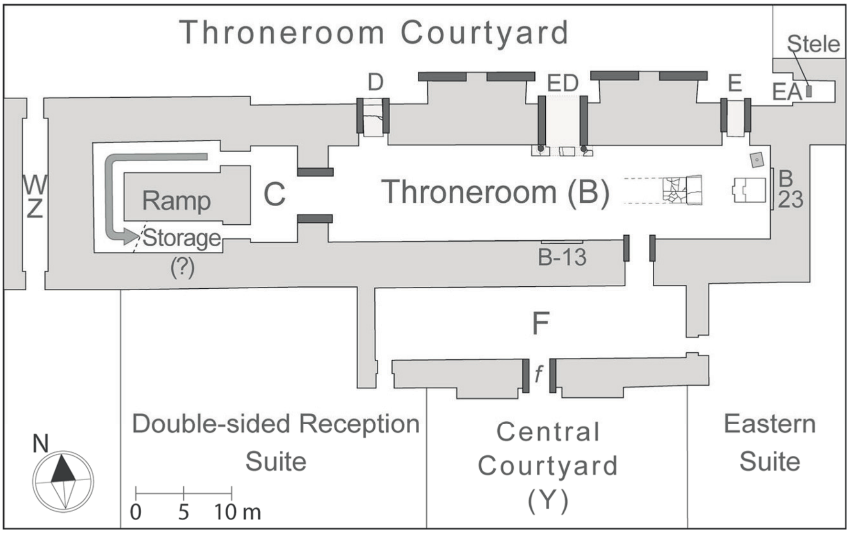
Area ZT designations

Fig. 2: The Northwest Palace floorplan with the Throneroom (Room B) in the upper center (Kertai, *Late Assyrian Royal Palaces*, pl. 4)


Throneroom Courtyard
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Storage
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N
Double-sided Reception
Suite
Central
Courtyard
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Fig. 3: Plan of Throneroom Suite (Kertai, *Late Assyrian Royal Palaces*, 31, fig. 2.4).

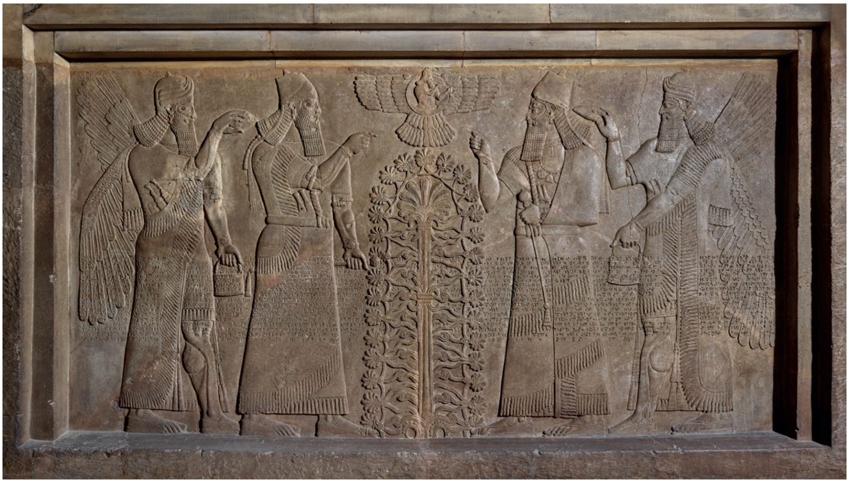

Fig. 4: Slab B-23, Northwest Palace (BM 124531, © Trustees of the British Museum, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

from the inscriptions.[77] Battini refers to this second type of depiction as “time set off,” an iconic mode of temporal representation. According to Battini, in “time set off” images there is “no indication of movement, no action, and no history, but only special figures (genius, sacred tree, king, sometimes courtier)….fixed in a gesture, outside real time, suspended in a dimension without a definite location in space (the background is empty).”[78]

For her part, Winter calls this second, ahistorical or non-narrative type of depiction “conceptual”; whatever they are called, it is clear that these kinds of images occupy prominent places in the throneroom program. So, for example, in slabs 23 and 13 (Fig. 4) the king is “duplicated on either side of…a ‘sacred tree,’ with winged male genii to his left and right and the emblem of the god Assur within a winged disk above.”[79] What is perhaps most important about this doubled slab – though the doubling of the images, too, is quite significant[80] – is that it is found directly behind the king’s throne (slab 23) and again directly opposite what may have been the main (or most important) entrance to the throneroom from Court D (slab 13).[81] This image, therefore, would be the first thing visitors would see upon entry, who would then see it again, directly behind the king's throne, once they had turned left toward him.[82] So, according to Winter, these two slabs are "the organizing pivot-points of the Throneroom."[83] It is worth noting that these two slabs were set slightly higher than the other slabs adjoining them (one-third of the way up), and uniquely so (no others are set thusly), and so they rest on a higher ground line, register, or plane than the others (Fig. 5, left).[84] Also significant is that each corner of the throneroom contains the stylized tree spanning the corner, with half of it appearing on each of the adjoining walls (Fig. 5, right). This "frequent repetition" of the stylized tree "further enhances" the "specialness" of the room, according to Winter, marking it as "a unified and continuous space inside the walls."[85]

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[77] In Battini’s judgment, the majority of the reliefs in Ashurnasirpal’s palace complex concern “time set off”: There are 21 spaces of this type vs. only two of “time pulled up.” The latter two spaces are, notably, the throneroom (B) and the West Wing. “In no other preserved room do we have reliefs of this kind.” But, Battini quickly points out, both of these latter areas “have in common the presence also of ‘time set off’ reliefs. Thus, time pulled up *always appears with time set off in this palace*, which means that it is inserted in timeliness time” (“Time ‘Pulled Up,’” 36; emphasis added). See further below.

[78] Battini, “Time ‘Pulled Up,’” 36. Wagner-Durand calls this a perception of images as *magic presence* (“Visual Narration,” 270).

[79] Winter, “Royal Rhetoric,” 7. The scare quotes around “sacred tree” are important (cf. similarly Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, 125–129), since the meaning and function of this tree is unclear (see, *inter alia*, Julian Reade, *Assyrian Sculpture* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999], 36–37; Barbara Nevling Porter, *Trees, Kings, and Politics: Studies in Assyrian Iconography*, OBO 197 [Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003], 1–37; most extensively: Mariana Giovino, *The Assyrian Sacred Tree: A History of Interpretations*, OBO 230 [Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007]; U. Seidl and W. Sallaberger, “Der ‘Heilige Baum,’” *AfO* 51 [2005/2006]: 54–74). In what follows, I will refer to it more simply as the “stylized tree.”

[80] See Chikako E. Watanabe, “Styles of Pictorial Narratives in Assurbanipal’s Reliefs,” in *Critical Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Art*, ed. Brian A. Brown and Marian H. Feldman (Boston/Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 362–363, for discussions of how the doubled figure may represent two different aspects of the king(ship) (so also Mehmet-Ali Ataç, “Visual Formula and Meaning in Neo-Assyrian Relief Sculpture,” *AB* 88 [2006]: 69–101); two different people (Ashurnasirpal’s father, Tukulti-Ninurta II, and grandfather, Adad-nirari II; see Burchard Brentjes, “Selbstverherrlichung oder Legitimitätsanspruch? Gedanken zu dem Thronrelief von Nimrud-Kalaḫ,” *AoF* 21 [1994]: 50–64); or Ashurnasirpal at two different moments in time (Watanabe, “Styles of Pictorial Narratives,” 364). Kertai, *Late Assyrian Royal Palaces*, 30 fn. 82 refutes Brentjes’ interpretation. For the doubling phenomenon more generally, see Zainab Bahrani, *The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 185–201.

[81] There is some debate on this matter since there are three entrances to the room (see Russell, “The Program of the Palace,” 705–706, 713–714, for discussion). Some scholars think the main entrance was door d at the far western end of the room. See, e.g., ibid., 713; Kertai, *Late Assyrian Royal Palaces*, 30–31; Ludovico Portuese, “The Throne Room of Aššurnaṣirpal II: A Multisensory Experience,” in *Distant Impressions: The Senses in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Ainsley Hawthorn

It is important to note how slabs 23 and 13 – most especially slab 13 – interrupt the narrative sequence found on the other slabs in the throneroom. They comprise what Anton Moortgat called "a heraldic abstraction, divorced from time and space," or what Ekrem Akurgal thought was a purely conceptual representation.[86] They are not, that is, "narratives,"[87] and their inclusion in the

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and Anne-Caroline Rendu Loisel, RAI 61 (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2019), 69–80, esp. 77–78; and idem, *Life at Court*, 50–51. This interpretation would mean that visitors experienced the full span of the reliefs on the northern and southern walls as they approached the king; it may also mean "that the central and most monumental door [e] was usually kept closed" (Portuese, "The Throne Room of Aššurnaṣirpal II," 77). If so, door d may have been reserved for special occasions, with the throne proper moved and set directly in front of slab 13 at such times. Whatever the precise case, the doubled nature of slabs 13 and 23 remains and must be accounted for in some way; it would have made a visual impact regardless. Cf. Battini, "Time 'Pulled Up,'" 42, relying in part on Samuel M. Paley and Richard P. Sobolewski (*The Reconstruction of the Relief Representations and their Positions in the Northwest Palace at Kalḫu [Nimrūd] II*, BaF 10 [Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1987]), who is clear that the design is not "random"; instead, "there are principles at work in the planning of the palace."

[82] See the previous note.

[83] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 9. Similarly eadem, "The Program," 17, where she speaks of the older "bent-axis temple approach" being "incorporated into the Assyrian royal palace," such that the two slabs featuring the king "become the anchors of the entire room."

[84] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 10.

[85] Ibid., 21–22. These presentations likely also emphasize the king in his special function (see further below). Battini, "Time 'Pulled Up,'" 38–39 tallies 18 representations of the king in the throneroom: six in "time set off" and 12 in "time pulled up." See further ibid., 40–41 on the different artistic styles employed for these two types of times: "pulled up" time has a greater variety of postures, the idea of movement, and different backgrounds, while "set off" time is more static with figures often standing. Cf. Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 31: "The symmetrical ['conceptual'] reliefs are played against the asymmetrical historical representations." Note, more generally, Russell, "The Program of the Palace," 689, who catalogues 190 instances of the stylized tree in the palace. 54% of these occur without any accompanying figures; 41% occur with 2 figures; 5% occur with 1 figure (ibid. with Table 1).

[86] See Anton Moortgat, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia* (London: Phaidon, 1969), 134; and Ekrem Akurgal, *The Art of Greece: Its Origins* (New York: Crown, 1968), 16, respectively (both cited in Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 10). Cf. again Battini's terminology for this type of presentation: iconic time or time set off.

[87] Note Wagner-Durand, "Visual Narration," 272–273: "Although ritual scenes might superficially be understood as narratives, they depict standardized and repetitive acts. Their protective and apotropaic [one might add also *symbolic*] function relies on their quality of being perpetual, factual as well as eternal, and therefore not on being narrative. Thus, they might have been perceived as magic presences."

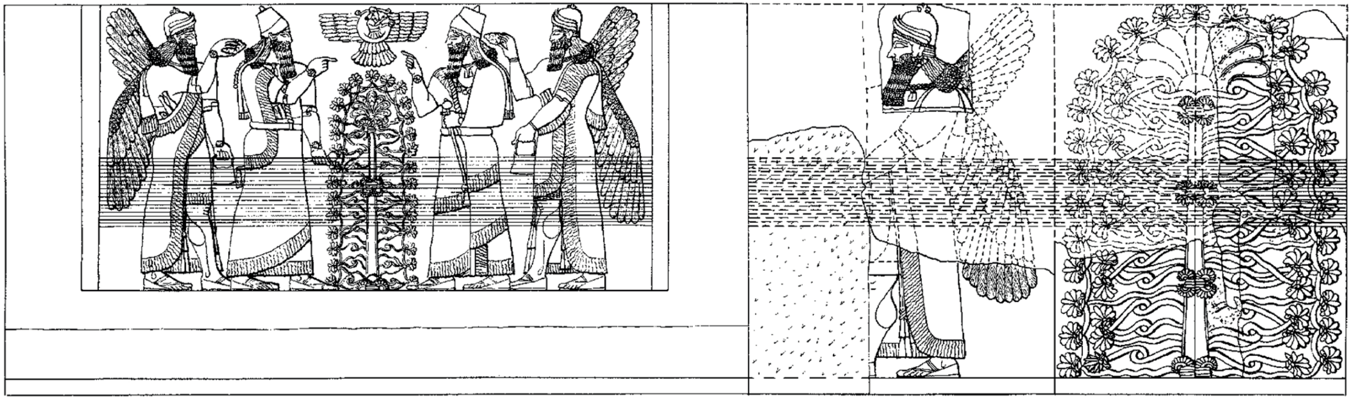

Fig. 5: Slab B-23 (left), set higher in the wall than the other slabs; slab B-21, stylized tree (right) (Janusz Meuszyński, *Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen und ihrer Anordnung im Nordwestpalast von Kalḫu (Nimrūd)* [BagF 2; Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1981], Taf. 1).

throneroom therefore complicates any interpretation of the entire relief program as a kind of coherent, connected, or straightforward narrative. Winter goes so far as to suggest that "the symmetry and particularly the un-'realistic' repetition of the royal figure and genii serve to lift this most important function of the king – the metaphoric maintenance and substance of life through the care of the tree – up to the realm of the 'ideal' world that implies the divine."[88] This happens, she continues, not only at the conceptual or intellectual level of the representational content, but also at

> the physiological/psychological level at which symmetry functions in general, producing an effect of anchoring through the central axis and balance through the flanking figures, which for the ancient Near East pertains to the stability (balance) of the eternal order reflected through the proper exercise of kingship. Precisely what one does not want in this case is directionality and the movement of the eye across (and beyond) the image, but, rather, the absorption of the whole at once, as the perceived order of the universe.[89]

In addition to the non-narrative or ahistorical elements, there are still other apparently generic representations in the throneroom that are also hard to fix in real time and space and thus call "historical," even if they are mentioned in the annals – the animal hunt scenes, for instance.[90] These, too, might be considered *non*-narratival episodes in the relief program since they do not "provide us with sufficient information to suggest the specificity of time or place required for…[what is] *truly* historical narrative."[91] Even so, these non-narrative episodes are nevertheless taken up into a larger articulation: "a unified sequential composition as opposed to…earlier 'serial episodes,'" such as, say, the Warka stele or Royal Standard of Ur.[92] It is the presence of the other, more "historical" depictions alongside and with the less (or non-)historical ones – all within a larger integration "that ultimately…'transcends its contents'"[93] – that allows Winter to offer her judgment that the relief program is "a unified sequential composition."

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[88] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 10. See also the previous note.

[89] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 10.

[90] Ibid., 10–11. While these images are generic, they are nevertheless carefully selected: in contrast to the Annals, e.g., only lions and bulls are represented as hunted on the reliefs (Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 22), perhaps because these are "the most symbolic animals" (Battini, "Time 'Pulled Up,'" 39).

[91] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 11 (emphasis added). Cf. Wagner-Durand, "Visual Narration," 273: "*Potential* narrative character can be found in hunting scenes: these might either refer to specific events recounting and therefore narrating the precise experience…*or* they could also represent the eternal duty of the king as the protector of the *māt aššur*" (emphases added).

[92] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 11.

[93] Ibid., 15, citing Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 115.

One must be clear, however, that even the "historical" representations that are included, while lending a certain "particularity to each sequence….are not sufficient to convey what we from our post-Renaissance perspective would call realism."[94] That important point duly registered, the "historical narratives" in the throneroom include, especially, the battle scenes starting in slab 11 (Fig. 6).[95] The movement of these reliefs "is down the wall from the throne end," flowing away from the king and towards the one seeking audience with him (cf. Figs. 7–8).[96] Winter has described the iconographic "grammar" of these reliefs as essentially "transitive: 'Assurnasirpal did X.'"[97] The focus everywhere and always, that is, is the king – he is both the subject of the message and its sender or composer.[98] The viewer, in contrast, is the one who *receives* this message and *experiences* the mighty acts of the king.[99]

A final, important observation to make is that across these slabs, oftentimes directly over the images themselves, is the Standard Inscription (cf. Figs. 4–5),[100]

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[94] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 16.

[95] Durand-Wagner, "Visual Narration," 274–275, relying on a definition of narrative by M.-L. Ryan ("Toward a Definition of Narrative," in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 22–35 [29]), states that "most of these mainly war related scene-progressions have the following in common: they recount a series of events, contain changes of situation, and lead to closure." She goes on to discuss three features that create "spatial and temporal ligation": "first, by lengthy inscriptions, partly narrating past events; second, by epigraphs, e.g. geographically pinpointing events of the stories by identifying cities and landscapes; third, by the depiction referring to geographic locations or ethnographic groups, linking the scenes to events known from written accounts….[T]hese illustrations of war and victory seem truly narrative, indexing several events bound in time and place, and therefore are not relivable. Consequently, the depictions *re*-present; they do not make present. They were understood as mimetic representations" (her emphasis). See also ibid., 278: "visual narratives with historical, non-mythical content were most likely perceived as mimetic representations visually referring to and mimicking the event in question, but not as the presence of this event. Ergo, visual matters that were anchored in time and place and that were understood as historical accounts could not be perceived as purely magic presences. They might provide some kind of factuality, but not an eternal aura."

[96] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 15–16, 22.

[97] Ibid., 13, but also "I (Assurnasirpal) did X" (23). Winter thinks the visual representation may even follow the word order of Akkadian: subject-object-verb. It is only at the end, therefore, with the verb, that one grasps the action: "the *governing* action is apparent only in the totality" (23).

[98] Ibid., 23, 46. Cf. 28, however, where Winter acknowledges the important role of the god Assur.

[99] See note 81 above on the three entrances to the throneroom and the different effects of each.

[100] See Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 17 and *passim*; also the contribution of J. Caleb Howard in this volume. There is a great deal of text in the Northwest Palace and much of it is closely similar or identical. Note Russell, *Writing on the Wall*, 61–62: "The visitor to the state apartments of this palace would literally have been surrounded by texts, below and on every side. For the nonliterate visitor, this surfeit of inscribed surfaces form[ed] an impressive display, connoting the vast power and authority of the king who ordered its execution. The literate visitor would be likewise impressed, but would soon detect the seemingly endless repetition of the same texts." Note, however, Russell's observation on how the text on the colossi "has been cut to fit the space available, without regard for completeness, a treatment also often accorded the Standard Inscription when it was carved on narrow wall slabs" (62).

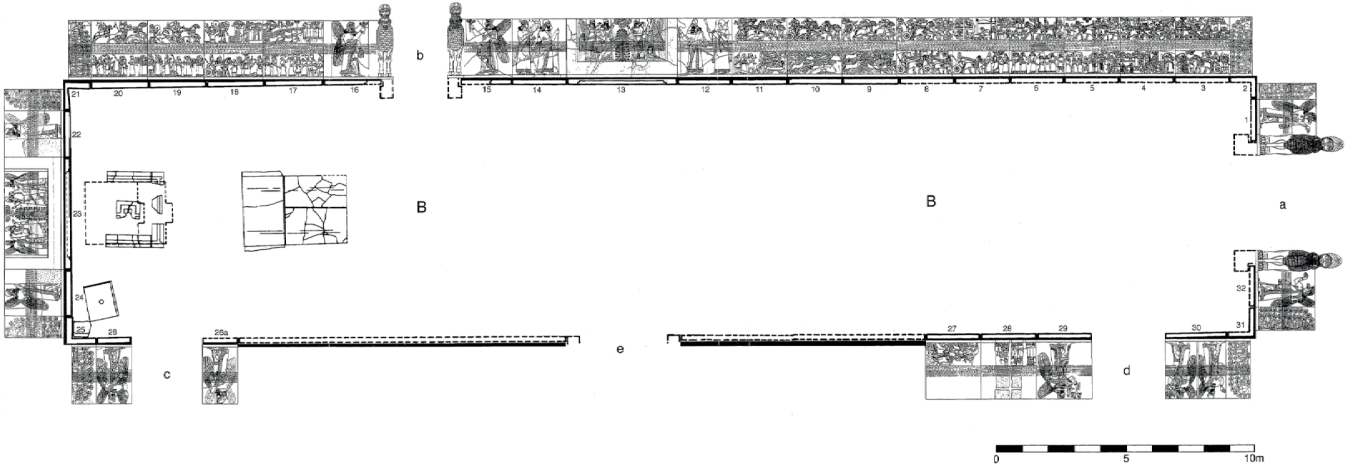
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Fig. 6: Detailed plan of Throneroom (Russell, "The Program of the Palace" pl. IV).

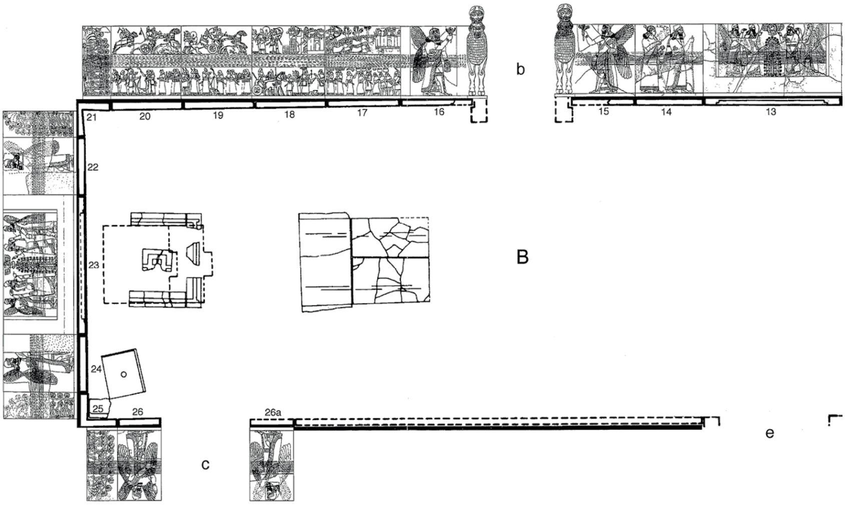
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Fig. 7: Layout of the Throneroom decoration, east end (Russell, “The Program of the Palace,” pl. IV).

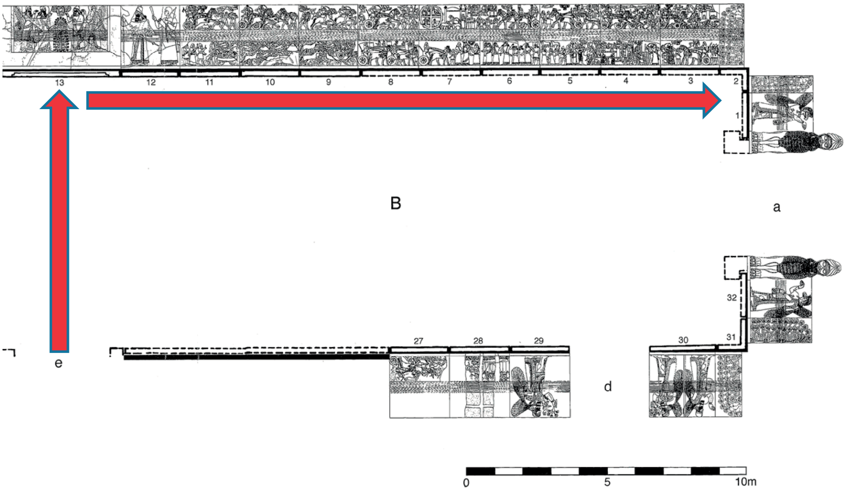
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Fig. 8: Layout of the Throneroom decoration, west end (after Russell, “The Program of the Palace,” pl. IV, arrows added).

and there are some "surprising correspondences" between some of the details found in the wording describing certain military campaigns and what is actually depicted on the reliefs.[101] In some cases, that is, the texts and reliefs are co-interpretive and, so, in Winter's judgment, "there seems to be a close correlation between the wording of the Annals and depictions on the reliefs – a high degree of parallelism therefore between text and image, if not the likelihood of exact correspondences"[102] – but, again, only in the case of *some* of the slabs, particularly those dealing with battles (see Fig. 9).[103] And, even here, the reliefs, no less than the texts, are "carefully selected."[104] Put differently, the "real" world within the reliefs – even the "historical" ones – "has been much manipulated."[105] Among other things that could be mentioned, the Assyrians are invincible in the throneroom program, never suffering harm, let alone defeat. Still further, the repeated representations of the standing or seated king, not to mention repeated representations of human-headed or eagle-headed genii flanking the stylized tree, are best seen, according to Winter, "as the résumé of the essence of the Standard Inscription: the articulation of the right order of the universe."[106] In this combination of the ideal and the real – "a visual parenthesis of the extent of the Empire" that "delineate[ed] the borders" and "mark[ed] the center" – the throneroom

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[101] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 17, esp. in the fuller version found in the Ninurta temple at Nimrud. See A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (1114–859 BC)*, RIMA 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 275–276; but also Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 17 fn. 11 for A. T. Olmstead's failed attempt ("The Calculated Frightfulness of Ashur Nasir Apal," *JAOS* 38 [1918]: 209–263) to try "to squeeze literal readings from the images." Winter herself speaks of text-image "correspondences" and "parallelism" ("Royal Rhetoric," 30–31), and goes on to posit text and image "as essential isomorphisms generated by the identical culture" (46).

[102] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 19; see also 18. Cf. 21: "we seem to have a literal representation of what is also preserved in the Annals"; and 24: "rather than seeing the text – Annals or Standard Inscription – *behind* the images, they should be seen as separate but parallel systems, particularly as we are here concerned with an essentially nonliterate population." Elsewhere Winter writes: "Whether this correspondence reflects a conscious translation of the text into visual terms, or whether instead it reflects an unconscious cultural ordering that underlies text and image equally I cannot answer, but it is the relationship between text and image that counts, and that relationship is manifest both in structural organization and in content" ("The Program," 27). Russell believes that "every one" of the pictures in Ashurbanipal's palace "probably began as a text, a genesis whose fossil remains are visible on the relief surface in the form of the epigraphs" (*Writing on the Wall*, 216).

[103] Note, more generally, the essay by Christoph Uehlinger, "Clio in a World of Pictures – Another Look at the Lachish Reliefs from Sennacherib's Southwest Palace at Nineveh," in *'Like a Bird in a Cage': The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe, JSOTSup 363 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 221–305, esp. vis-à-vis Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 19 fn. 12, which posits some close correspondence between text and art.

[104] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 22. She goes on to specify how selection and representation "allow for easy recognition, with certain distortions and simplifications occurring to focus attention and thereby facilitate recognition." See further 22 and fn. 13.

[105] Ibid., 23.

[106] Ibid., 24.

Throneroom	**Text**
1—King himself on throne	(I am) Assurnasirpal
2—Slab 23: King flanking tree and Assur in winged disc	Vice-regent of Assur, beloved of the gods
3—Hunts and Battles (generic attributes; action: consequence)	Titulary I: attributes (action: consequences)
4—Individual battle sequences	Annalistic account of specific campaigns
5—King seated on throne (Room C reliefs visible)	Titulary II: more attributes (including "praiseworthy king")
6—Throneroom as a whole, plus Court D façade of tribute as center of the palace and of the Empire)	Description of building of palace, plus tribute, as center of the Empire.

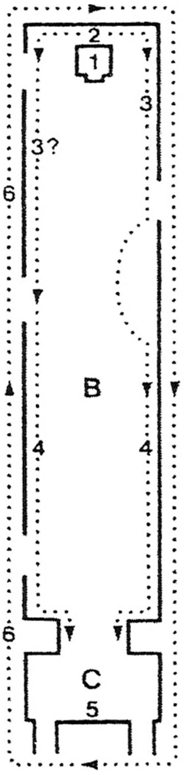

Fig. 9: Winter's diagram of the correspondence between the Standard Inscription and the decorative program of the Throneroom (after Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 31).

"becomes the symbolic, 'true center,' encapsulating the Empire itself, a microcosm of the state."[107]

While more could be said about the throneroom, especially on the basis of work that has been conducted subsequent to Winter's classic study, her larger art-historical argument is that earlier artistic representations are decidedly *non*-narratival, while later kings develop the incipient narrativity of Ashurnasirpal's throneroom much further, incorporating ever-increasing complexity.[108] As an example of the *former*, non-narratival type of image, the stele of Naram-Sin (ca. 2254–2218) might be considered (Fig. 10). While taking place on a "recognizable landscape" with "coniferous trees" and an enemy marked by a certain kind of hairstyle (and identified by name in the accompanying inscription), the king himself, "larger than life, is iconic and timeless in representation."[109] There is just one tableau on this stele, such that one cannot be sure exactly how, or when, the sole upside down figure in the scene is to be located: is he in motion, falling, or just lying dead? In Winter's estimation, the stele of Naram-Sin cannot be "read as a linear progression of action, but rather…[is] a composite, a frozen celebration."[110] This, then, is an instance of time set off (to borrow again from Battini's terminology), with the imagery "emblematic and/or episodic,"[111] making the stele commemorative rather than historical.[112]

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[107] Ibid., 27. Cf. 28: "The whole Throneroom can then be read as a statement of the establishment and maintenance of the exterior state through military conquest and tribute, and the maintenance of the internal state through cultic observances, achieved through the person of the all-powerful king." See 30–31 for a good contrast with the program of temples built by Ashurnasirpal at Nimrud. Note also 32: "In the end, what is before us in the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II is therefore *an integrated architectural, pictorial, and textual representation of the institution of kingship and the ideal of the Neo-Assyrian state*" (emphasis added).

As an example of *later*, more developed presentations, Winter discusses the reliefs of Shalmaneser III (858–824),[113] Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727),[114] and Sargon II (721–705),[115] but especially Sennacherib (704–681)[116] and Ashurbanipal (668–627). The diachronic development evident in the monarchs after

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[108] See ibid., 25, 33–38, 40. Later representations are also, of course, heavily manipulated (see 35).

[109] Zainab Bahrani, *Mesopotamia: Ancient Art and Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2017), 125.

[110] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 14.

[111] Ibid.

[112] See Winter, "The Program," 19. In her earlier essay, Winter uses "narrative" rather than "historical" as the alternative to "commemorative," and believes the same judgment holds true for the stele of Eannatum ("Royal Rhetoric," 14). Cf. Porada's judgment ("The Uses of Art to Convey Political Meanings," 17): "probably intended primarily as a justification or thanksgiving for the divine protection that had made the victory possible; it was only secondarily meant to eternalize that victory." Elsewhere, Winter speaks of the "theological priorities" that are clear on slab 23 in Ashurnasirpal's throneroom ("The Program," 16).

[113] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 34: Ashurnasirpal's lion and bull hunts are "entirely omitted in the bands [on the Balawat Gates] of his son [Shalmaneser III], and only military and campaign activities are included – what we have called the 'historical narratives'….Therefore, just on the basis of this one king, successor to Assurnasirpal, we may tentatively predict *a general trend of elaboration in the genre of historical narrative at the expense of other themes*" (emphasis added).

[114] Ibid., 34: "there is…a general increase in overlapping figures and animals…; more complex special renderings of citadels in their landscape…; and perhaps even a purposeful use of the total field of the register, including diagonal rows of animals to suggest the recession of space beyond the picture plane."

[115] See ibid., 37 on "the *expansion of the concept of historical narrative*…not only in the amount of wall space it occupies…but also in that campaigns of specific years, as known from the Annals, are organized visually as units within individual rooms" (emphasis added). See 36 for how Sargon resided at the Northwest Palace at Nimrud for a long time before building his own city and capital at Khorsabad and how the palace of Ashurnasirpal was thus "an important model for the new building," as, for example, in the key placement of important scenes architecturally, not unlike the special placement of slabs 13 and 23. "In fact, once one accepts this purposeful organization in the reliefs of Sargon, it becomes even more likely that there was a similar intention to refer directly to specific campaigns in the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal" (ibid., 37). Even so, Sargon II's reliefs still differ as described here.

[116] Note Winter "Royal Rhetoric," 35: "We must assume, I feel, that behind this interest in illusory space is the notion that the 'truer' the space, the greater the degree of historicity, as if visual progress across the field of the relief were comparable to the actual progress of the army through

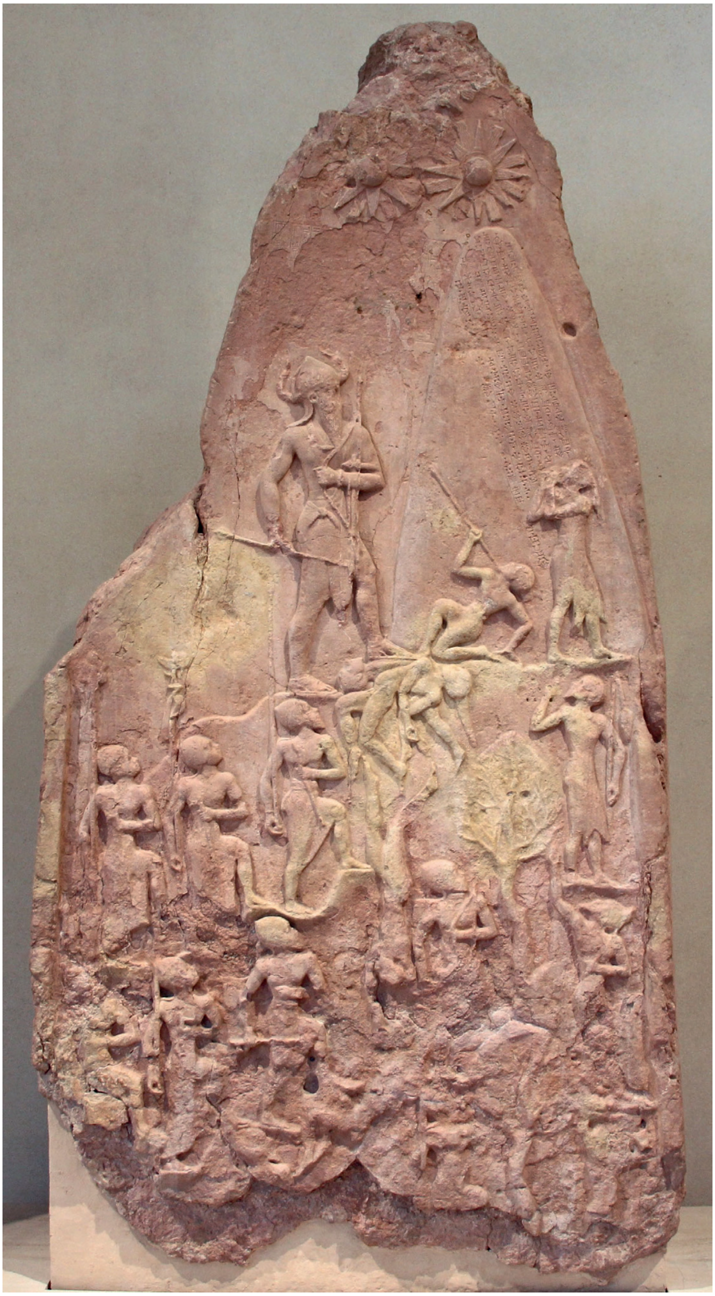

Fig. 10: Victory Stela of Naram-Sin (Musée du Louvre Sb 4, CC BY 2.0, Fred Romero, cropped).

Ashurnasirpal is felt in the movement "away from the cultic and mythological, toward greater historical specificity,"[117] as well as by the proliferation of a great number of potentially distracting details in later reliefs.[118] It is the presence of so many details, in particular, that greatly complicates the reading process: in Winter's opinion, the "price paid is so much distraction that the focus of the action is almost missed."[119] This is to say that the "expansion of the total number of sub-episodes" in these later reliefs "can sometimes work against the narrative, or at least require much more accomplished reading" on the part of viewers.[120] Such a situation has direct bearing on the communicable content of these reliefs since the denser a message is, the higher the cognitive competency of its audience will need to be.[121] And yet, somewhat ironically, it is actually "[t]he cultic and mythological scenes" – the kind that Ashurnasirpal uses more than his successors – that "require a considerably greater degree of symbolic representation."[122] This cultic/mythological type of scene, that is, is the kind "for which

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its field….At the same time, we have no preserved heraldic or ceremonial reliefs of Sennacherib, nor any genii, and this, too, would tend to suggest an interest in the historically verifiable universe." Still – and once again – the representations of Sennacherib are "no less 'manipulated' than those of Assurnasirpal" (ibid.).

[117] Ibid., 38, which also allows for "some continuity with the prototype," however.

[118] Winter speaks of "combining figures in great density" and the "greater peopling of the pictorial field" ("Royal Rhetoric," 37–38). Even so, she also mentions "[v]isual rhythms that aid the reading of the narrative," which "are established not only across a single register, but from register to register" as well as "greater attention…to surface patterning and detail that complements the busyness of the scene." So there is a bit of *both/and* at work here, which is not unrelated to the work of Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, "The Forms of Violence," *October* 8 (1979): 17–29; and eidem, *The Forms of Violence: Narrative in Assyrian Art and Modern Culture* (New York: Schocken, 1985), on which see further below.

[119] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 38; she also mentions how "the nonessential amplifiers of these scenes" occasionally "get in the way of the clear reading of the narrative."

[120] Ibid.; see also 39.

[121] Ibid., 39. Cf. 40: "Implications are that, as the audience learns to discern what is significant, the genre can become more complexly organized. This is not an absolute, evolutionary statement for all cases; but here…the sender of the message must be certain that it will be understood. Continued exposure and familiarity with the conventions would then pave the way for greater complexity and variation, once the main themes were known." Perhaps the density of later programs is to be connected to the increased use of the epigraph, or "written label, inscribed directly on the face of the relief, identifying the scene and the action taking place, not only by content, but also by careful placement" (36). "It is really Sennacherib who begins to fully exploit the epigraph," according to Winter (36), but the "epigraphs of Assurbanipal are even more extensive than those of Sennacherib…as are his narrative sequences" (37). Winter depends here (36) on Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, 25, for how such epigraphs "would tend, like captions to a photograph, to 'quicken' the image…thus avoiding possible misinterpretation – the caption being one of the major sources of information governing correct reading of a picture, along with knowledge of the visual code and an understanding of the context." Captions are different than accompanying text like the Standard Inscription because "the caption tends to focus, getting one closer to the intended meaning – that is, it 'anchors' the image. For a nonliterate or semiliterate audience, as would be the case here, the relationship of word to image exists more on an ideal than a real level, but the increasing explicitness of the visual information is paralleled by the increasing explicitness of the accompanying epigraphs" (36).

[122] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 39; cf. 42.

one must have *prior* knowledge of the story or custom *behind* what is represented."[123] That is patently *not* the case, according to Winter, with the more historical or narrative representations. To be sure, these kinds of representations also

> require a knowledge of context, but not necessarily of the text [or custom] itself, for that can be read from the image. The historical narrative therefore simply does not require a code in the same way as a cultic or mythological scene would; it demands less previous knowledge and/or decoding skill…[and] less competence…from the viewer.[124]

Proof of this point might be found in the fact that scholars are still not quite sure what is taking place with the stylized tree – or even what to call it![125] On the contrary, scholars often have far less trouble with the battle images, even very complex and convoluted ones like Ashurbanipal's Battle of Til-Tuba reliefs in the Southwest and North Palaces at Nineveh, which depict a battle against the Elamites in 653 BCE.[126]

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[123] Ibid., 39 (first emphasis added; second original).

[124] Ibid., 39; also 42: "historical narrative[s] may be read with less prior knowledge than other sorts of imagery….they demanded less degree of shared cultural experience than motifs such as the king and the sacred tree." Cf. 41 on the "heterogeneous ethnic and cultural audience for the palace reliefs" (similarly 44). Hence: "the growth in complexity of the historical narrative…their proliferation at the expense of cultic and mythological images represents *a lowering of the common denominator of what would be intelligible to a heterogeneous audience*…these developments were a direct response to the increased heterogeneity of the Empire as it developed" (ibid., 42; emphasis added; similarly 44, 46). Winter goes on to discuss the importance of military symbols in creating "a common history for the Empire" (43) and also shared needs and shared cultural material (e.g., the rise of Aramaic as the lingua franca, but also shared symbol systems – cf. Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*). See further Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 44, for the audience and ideal target group; more extensively now: Portuese, *Life at Court*, esp. 55–100. Porada, "The Uses of Art to Convey Political Meanings," 15 does not think that many people were directly influenced by the palace reliefs. She is no doubt correct that the proportions would not allow access to every one of the 5,000 high officials who came as delegates. Even so, as many as 1,000 delegates may have fit in the space if current reconstructions are correct (see, e.g., Kertai, *Late Assyrian Royal Palaces*, 30). Battini rightly distinguishes between "occasional visitors" and "regular presences in the palace" ("Time 'Pulled Up,'" 35; see further 43 where she states that "the problem of the actual public getting into specific rooms of the palace has at the moment no clear answer"). Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 45 mentions "the highly visible outer facades, the inner public court facades, the thronerooms and throne bases as the most publicly accessible places within the palaces for the most explicit messages." See also 46 on the relatively permanent nature of the palace relief message once created. The most extensive work on how the reliefs impacted viewers is found in Portuese, *Life at Court*. See also idem, "The Throne Room of Aššurnaṣirpal II," 63–92.

[125] But see Seidl and Sallaberger, "Der 'Heilige Baum,'" for the argument that the so-called "stylized tree" is in fact a ritual object called *urigallu*. See also Giovino, *The Assyrian Sacred Tree*.

[126] See Bahrani, *Mesopotamia*, 245–248 with figs. 10.18–19; Chikako E. Watanabe, "Reading Ashurbanipal's Palace Reliefs: Methods of Presenting Visual Narratives," in *I am Ashurbanipal king of the world, king of Assyria*, ed. Gareth Brereton (London: The British Museum and Thames & Hudson, 2018), 212–233, esp. 212–218; and Davide Nadali, "The Battle of Til-Tuba in the South-West Palace: Context and Iconography," in *I am Ashurbanipal king of the world, king of Assyria*, ed. Gareth Brereton (London: The British Museum and Thames & Hudson, 2018), 234–243.

Of course this is only part of the story since the historical images, too, can be, are, and have been manipulated by their "encoders." So, while the more historical type of relief is, on the surface, more readily readable, "that very readability…[nevertheless] 'masks the constructed meaning under the appearance of the given.'"[127]

Before returning to how the artistic data bears on the problem of history and narrativity in the historical psalms, a few caveats should be entered since Winter's interpretation of Ashurnasirpal's throneroom and her thesis regarding the development of narrative in Assyrian art are not the only options on the table. Holly Pittman, for instance, deems it unlikely that Ashurnasirpal's throneroom was the first attempt at such a program. She finds an antecedent in the White Obelisk, which she argues "carries on its sides a reduced copy of a narrative program that originally lined the walls of a long, narrow room, arguably the throne room of a palace in the Assyrian capital at Nineveh" – one that she would date to sometime between the reigns of Aššur-bel-kala (1074–1057 BCE) or Tiglath-pileser I (1115–1077 BCE) and Tukulti-Ninurta II (890–884 BCE).[128] She thinks this (hypothetical) throneroom program situated its viewers "in the middle of the narrative…forcing simultaneous comprehension of both walls."[129] Pittman continues:

> This was accomplished through mirrored subject matter and compositional format. Because the viewer had to integrate both sides of the room in order to comprehend the Obelisk narrative, the experience was not that of an external observer reviewing a linear sequence, but of someone placed in the middle of a surrounding scene. The viewer was forced to move his eyes back and forth from side to side, taking in only the four or so panels immediately in front of him, while retaining a sense of the ensemble.[130]

Pittman's study is rather speculative with regard to a pre-existing throneroom on which the White Obelisk purportedly depends. Regardless, the strategy Pittman deduces from the latter is different than the one operative in Ashurbanipal's throneroom, which, according to her "would have been understood either as a linear sequence engaging both registers, with action on the top and consequence on the bottom, or as an extended horizontal two-register tableau oriented

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Walker offers an impressively close reading of the Til-Tuba reliefs in *The Power of Images*. See also Oskar Kaelin, *Ein assyrisches Bildexperiment nach ägyptischem Vorbild: Zu Planung und Ausführung der "Schlacht am Ulai"*, AOAT 266 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1999).

[127] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 40, citing Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, 47.

[128] Pittman, "White Obelisk," 334.

[129] Ibid., 347.

[130] Ibid.; she speaks of the viewer becoming a participant in the narrative, "engaged in an active relationship with the unfolding drama."

around a strong central point."[131] Stephen Lumsden, however, has argued for a symmetrical, rather than linear, arrangement of the historical/narrative scenes.[132] For him, the symmetrical presentation he finds in these slabs means there is not such an obvious differentiation between narrative and iconic modes; instead, there is "a *combination* in the large section of the reliefs…of the 'transcendental' significance of symmetrical structure with the 'actuality' of narrative action."[133] In the end, then, the effect of Lumsden's interpretation is to find *a more thorough intermixture* of Winter's two distinct types of scenes or Battini's two different types of time. In Lumsden's synthesizing opinion: "Historical narrative in this main section of reliefs in Aššurnaṣirpal's throneroom is transformed into a 'mythologized epic' accomplished by the heroic protagonist/king, set within a historicizing framework."[134]

Some scholars have challenged Winter's notion that later relief programs evidence a more developed narrativity, or at least have argued that later instances of narrativity are not quite as developed (or pure) as Winter's argument might make it seem. So, for example, two somewhat idiosyncratic studies by Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit attempt to undercut a narrative understanding of Ashurbanipal's lion hunt scenes, mostly by highlighting small-scale "mobilizing strategies" that keep the eye moving, ultimately subverting any one coherent center by "transform[ing] every center into the margin of another (provisional) focus of our attention."[135] Other scholars, like Chikako E. Watanabe, have identified centric structures at work in later reliefs like Ashurbanipal's, not just the linear type known as the *kinematolographische Erzählungsform* or *strip-cartoon effect*.[136]

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[131] Ibid. See 348 for Pittman's opinion that the program in Ashurnasirpal's throneroom could not have been comprehended simultaneously such that the effect was to overwhelm the viewer "with conceptual and compositional intensity," such that "the Nimrud program gained greatly in visual power," even while it lacked "something in terms of intimacy."

[132] Stephen Lumsden, "Narrative Art and Empire: The Throneroom of Aššurnaṣirpal II," in *Assyria and Beyond: Studies Presented to Mogens Trolle Larsen* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2004), 359–385 (366). Lumsden thinks the organization of registers on the throneroom is "a progression of episodes in the following manner: approach – culmination – conflict, or beginning – end – middle" (369). This focuses attention on the central slabs "'with their connective, culminating, and climactic scenes – a narrative contained in symmetrical, or iconic, form" (370). He goes on to describe this symmetry as "a kind of parallelism" (370), a term also used by Winter.

[133] Lumsden, "Narrative Art and Empire," 372. In the end, then, Lumsden deems the narrative sections more complex and "specifically directed at a sophisticated elite Assyrian courtly audience schooled in literary and rhetorical stylizations" (377). His analysis bears resemblance to some interpretations offered by Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*.

[134] Lumsden, "Narrative Art and Empire," 372. Note 375 on what he calls the "poetical" fashion by which the narrative scenes were organized.

[135] Bersani and Dutoit, "The Forms of Violence," 17–29 (19); see more extensively the longer version of their argument in eidem, *The Forms of Violence*. In their opinion, psychic mobility with regard to violence is better than destructive fixation on it ("Forms of Violence," 21–22). Mobility is thus in contrast to arrestedness. In the end, Bersani and Dutoit contrast two modes of attention: a narrative vision and a vision that is "more agitated, erratic" (ibid., 29). For a psychoanalytic analysis of Bersani and Dutoit's work, see Davis, *Replications*, 266–285.

In my judgment, none of these studies finally overturns Winter's insightful analysis; instead, much that is found in these subsequent investigations (and still others that could be added) may be seen as friendly amendment to Winter's study. So, for example, Lumsden largely assumes Winter's points and simply extends them further; Bersani and Dutoit's interpretation of smaller moments do not undercut the overall narrative sense of Ashurbanipal's lion hunt reliefs; and Watanabe doesn't really challenge the presence (or development) of narrativity, she just seeks a better understanding of how that narrativity is present, even in scenes previously deemed to be portrayed in simultaneous mode(s).[137] As one final note on this front – and as further support for Winter's overall understanding – mention might be made of Elisabeth Wagner-Durand's opinion that, in marked contrast to visual narration in Assyria, Babylonia knows almost only of "static art." "The later Babylonian kings…never used truly narrative larger-scale images," she states, despite the fact that "neither Nabonidus nor Nebuchadnezzar shied away from adopting Assyrian imagery if convenient."[138]

In light of the preceding discussion, it seems safe to continue to draw on Winter (among others) with reference to the development of narrativity in Neo-Assyrian art, most especially for present purposes, its beginning – a kind of "fit and start," as it were – in Ashurnasirpal's throneroom with its intriguing combination of the realistic and the iconic, "time pulled up" and "time set off," the historical and the ahistorical, the narratival and what might be seen as the analogical equivalent of lyric. This combination is striking, especially given the "triumph of narrative" that becomes evident in later periods. The inclusion of "lyric episodes" within a larger narrative tableau (or is it actually vice versa?) suggests, among other things – again *especially* in light of later, more straightforward narrative developments – that Ashurnasirpal's throneroom is *not*, at least *not exactly*, "a narrative." At most, the relief program might be viewed as *a kind of* narrative – a kind that includes particularly important lyrical moments. Alternatively, and perhaps better, Ashurnasirpal's throneroom is something *other* than narrative that nevertheless includes a kind of inchoate narrativity within itself: something that deploys narrative moments to be sure but for a non-, a-, or supra-historical purpose.

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[136] See Watanabe, "Styles of Pictorial Narratives," 345–367. She states that "one characteristic of the centric arrangement is the amalgamation of different events" (364). Watanabe supports the symmetrically-arranged interpretation of Ashurnasirpal's throneroom (362–363; see discussion of Lumsden above).

[137] See further Watanabe, "Reading Ashurbanipal's Palace Reliefs," 229: "an innovative technique of continuous narrative was adopted in the reliefs depicting the Battle of Til-Tuba, in which each stage of narrative development was described fully….[W]e can recognize the incorporation of separate incidents in order to create an Assyrian account of 'historical fact' designed to manipulate and promote political propaganda. The artistic technique of visual amalgamation was used…to create a powerful image, in which all essential episodes are included and narrated, yet are all captured in a single unified space."

[138] Wagner-Durand, "Visual Narration," 269; see further *passim*, esp. 276–277. Wagner-Durand's only partial exception is the sun-god tablet from Sippar (Nabu-apla-iddina), which she thinks "vaguely…counted as narrative, yet it primarily belongs to a period before 626" (277). It is unclear, however, if the Sippar tablet is really narratival. See the lengthy study by Christopher E. Woods, "The Sun-God Tablet of Nabû-apla-iddina," *JCS* 56 (2004): 23–103; and the comments by Izaak J. de Hulster, "Picturing Ancient Israel's Cosmic Geography: An Iconographic Perspective on Genesis 1:1–2:4a," in *Iconographic Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: An Introduction to Its Method and Practice*, ed. Izaak J. de Hulster et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 49–50. Wagner-Durand's ultimate conclusion is that "[f]or the Babylonians…narrative images [as were common in Neo-Assyrian art] might have been disturbing, maybe even heretical. Thus, the narrative image could not take root in Babylonia" ("Visual Narration," 278; cf. the similar opinions expressed in Moscati, *Historical Art*, 95). Persian art, too, is dominated by static imagery. See esp. Margaret Cool Root, *King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art: Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire*, Acta Iranica 19 (Leiden: Brill, 1979).

With these considerations in place, we may return to the similar problems posed in the historical psalms in order to reconsider them afresh in the light cast by Ashurnasirpal's throneroom.

4. *UT PICTURA POESIS*: FOUR COMPARISONS

In what follows I will suggest that what Winter and others have identified in the throneroom of Ashurnasirpal is quite similar – an iconographical analogue, as it were – to what one finds in the historical psalms. In light of the discipline of iconographic exegesis described earlier, a text-image correlation should occasion no surprise; this is the bread-and-butter of biblical iconography. This particular interface is somewhat unique, however, since, as noted above, it operates at the level of comparative poetics in art and word. Yet even this fairly novel interfacing of text and image should occasion no objection given the old saying of Horace (65–8 BCE): "as is painting, so is poetry" (*ut pictura poesis*).[139] At least four points of comparison between the relief program of Ashurnasirpal's throneroom and the historical psalms can be entertained. An additional implication is drawn out in the conclusion (§5).

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[139] Horace, Ars Poetica, lines 361–365. Somewhat later, Plutarch (45–120 CE) quoted a much earlier sixth-century BCE poet Simonides (556–468 BCE) as saying that "poetry is vocal painting and painting silent poetry (poema pictura loquens, pictura poema silens)." See Wesley Trimpi, "The Meaning of Horace's Ut Pictura Poesis," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 36 (1973): 1–34; Cory D. Crawford, "Relating Image and Word in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Critical Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Art*, ed. Brian A. Brown and Marian H. Feldman (Boston/Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 241–264, esp. 244; and also S. Chaganti, "Ut pictura poesis," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed., ed. Roland Greene et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1500–1501 for a brief history of the debate, including the critique of ut pictura poesis by Lessing. For the latter, see Gotthold Ephraim Lessling, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984 [orig: 1766]).

4.1. *The Integration of Narrative and Non-Narrative Materials and Its Rhetorical Purpose(s)*

Both media – the historical psalms and Ashurnasirpal's throneroom – integrate narrative *and* non-narrative elements within a broader tableau. Seen in comparative light, the historical psalms would seem to be "historical" in the same way Ashurnasirpal's throneroom is – which is to say, in a *quite mixed* or *decidedly amalgamated* fashion that includes important use of *non*-narratival or ahistorical pieces alongside more narrative/historical ones. This admixture in Nimrud is clearly *not* for purely antiquarian interest(s) but for (a) rhetorical purpose(s): the sending of (a) message(s) about Ashurnasirpal and his empire – its order, extent, power, and so forth. So also the historical psalms – at least according to Judith Gärtner and, before her, Eric Voeglin, who distinguished between *pragmatic* and *paradigmatic* history.[140] The historical psalms, no less than Ashurnasirpal's throneroom, clearly belong to the latter type, which is history with a quite contemporary purpose for the community. Psalm 78, for example, begins with a stanza concerned with teaching the audience with the express purpose of effectively passing along the faith to the next generation:

> Listen, O my people, to my teaching;
> incline your ear to the words of my mouth.
> I will open my mouth with a parable;
> I will utter ancient riddles
> that we have heard and have known,
> that our ancestors recounted to us.
> We will not withhold from their offspring;
> we will recount to the next generation
> the glories of the LORD, with his might,
> and the wondrous things he has done.
> He established testimony amidst Jacob,
> placed instruction among Israel,
> which he commanded our ancestors
> to make known to their offspring,
> so that the next generation might know –
> children yet to be born –
> that they might rise up and recount to their offspring,
> and set their hope on God,
> not forgetting deeds of God,

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[140] Gärtner, *Die Geschichtspsalmen*, 11–15. Eric Voegelin's work is *Order and History*, 5 vols. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), esp. vol. 1: *Israel and Revelation*. Note Bernhard W. Anderson, "Politics and the Transcendent: Voegelin's Philosophical and Theological Exposition of the Old Testament in the Context of the Ancient Near East," in *Eric Voegelin's Search for Order in History*, ed. Stephen A. McKnight (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 62–100.

but keeping his commandments;
and not becoming like their ancestors:
a stubborn and rebellious generation –
a generation whose heart was not firm,
whose spirit was not faithful with God. (Ps 78:1–8; my translation)

There is little interest here in history for history's sake.[141] To be sure, the rhetorical purposes at work in the historical psalms have been noted since Gunkel/Begrich. So it is that, much more recently, Bernhard W. Anderson and Steven Bishop have written pithily about these poems: "they have a strong didactic interest: History is recounted in order to *teach* people the meaning of their history."[142] But this articulation doesn't seem quite right – and on more than one level. In my judgment, especially in light of what is seen in Ashurnasirpal's throneroom, it would be better to say that "*bits of* history *along with other non-historical or non-narratival elements* are recounted in these psalms in order to teach the people the meaning of their *faith*." This is a very different formulation; if accurate, it is further indication that the historical psalms belong to the category of paradigmatic not pragmatic history.[143] They, no less than the throneroom, are rhetorical artifacts.[144]

The non-narrative punctuations of Ashurnasirpal's throneroom are crucial for the present point, as well as for the overall message of the relief program. The latter is under discussion in the third point of comparison below. At the risk of jumping ahead, it is important to observe already here the comparable, even extreme, non-narrative punctuation that takes place in Psalm 136 by means of its repeated refrain *kî lĕʿôlām ḥasdô* ("because his steadfast love is forever") – a line that is repeated 26 times in the poem. This refrain constantly and consistently interrupts the narrativity of the non-refrain portions, which are, as a result, quite paratactic and, furthermore, asyndetic. Indeed, the repetition of the *kî lĕʿôlām ḥasdô* refrain may make these other lines refrain-like themselves, only adding to the paratactic, asyndetic quality of the psalm as a whole.[145] At the very least, this juxtaposition makes the "narrative" lines appear more like symbols for or representations of various events than the events themselves: they are time "pulled up" only to some extent, that is, with the qualification created in no small part by the time "set off" refrains that (re-)present the pulled-up parts as instances of Yhwh's "steadfast love" (*ḥesed*). Any "narrative" that exists in Psalm 136, therefore, is suggested largely if not solely by the simple succession of lines, with the overall effect striking one as a grand instance of stair-case parallelism.[146] Linear succession, however – especially paratactic and asyndetic succession, but even, more generally, poetic dynamism – is hardly the same thing as full-blown narrative,[147] a point driven home by the reliefs in Ashurnasirpal's throneroom when seen in their larger Neo-Assyrian context. Beyond Psalm 136, which is the most extreme example of non-narrative punctuation in the historical psalms, note could also be made of several of the stanzas in Psalm 135 which seem to switch between more iconic and more "narrative" presentations.[148] Whatever the precise mixture of ingredients, the inclusion of non-narrative elements in prominent places, playing important roles, demonstrates that the product as a whole – whether that product is a historical psalm or Ashurnasirpal's throneroom – are decidedly *not* and certainly *not only* "narratives."[149]

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[141] Cf. Psalms 105, 135, and 136 with their initial calls to praise, or Psalm 106's opening in petition. In the case of Psalm 78, the content that is to come is described by the poet in v. 2 as "a proverb" (*māšāl*) and as "ancient riddles" (*ḥîdôt minnî-qedem*). For more on these aspects, see the helpful discussion in Aubrey Buster, "The Historical Psalms," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Psalms*, ed. Joel M. LeMon and Brent A. Strawn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, fc).

[142] Anderson/Bishop, *Out of the Depths*, 41–42 (their emphasis). See earlier Driver, *Introduction*, 369: these psalms are "retrospects of the national history with reference to the lessons deducible from it." Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment*, 13: "They are…rhetorical acts which shape the past in certain ways, and which deny or exclude other shapings of the past."

[143] To be sure, paradigmatic history is also a type of history. Didacticism *in ipse* is not an indication of non- or anti-historicism. Indeed, some definitions of history combine aspects of the paradigmatic and pragmatic. Note, e.g., Johan Huizinga's definition of history: "History is the intellectual form in which a civilization renders account to itself of its past" ("A Definition of the Concept of History," in *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer*, ed. R. Klibansky and H. J. Paton [New York: Oxford University Press, 1936], 9), cited by John Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983], 1).

[144] For rhetoric and the psalms more generally, see Davida H. Charney, *Persuading God: Rhetorical Studies of First-Person Psalms*, HBM 73 (Sheffield: Phoenix, 2017); and Robert L. Foster and David M. Howard, ed., *My Words Are Lovely: Studies in the Rhetoric of the Psalms*, LHBOTS 467 (New York: T&T Clark, 2008). For the historical psalms specifically, see Jeffery M. Leonard, "The Psalmist as Historiographer," in *Inner Biblical Allusion in the Poetry of Wisdom and Psalms*, ed. Mark J. Boda et al., LHBOTS 659 (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 9–23.

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[145] Cf. in terms of Ashurnasirpal's palace, the use of the stylized tree – which, again, occurs 190 times (Russell, "The Program of the Palace," 689). Unfortunately, the epic poetry in praise of the Assyrian kings that has survived is very fragmentary; what is extant does not appear to contain the same literary dynamics as those described here of the historical psalms. See Alasdair Livingstone, ed., *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, SAA 3 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014), esp. 44–53.

[146] For staircase parallelism, see Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques*, 2nd ed., JSOTSup 26 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 150–156. My thanks go to Aubrey Buster for discussing Psalm 136 with me. Several of the comments above depend on her insightful observations.

[147] I find it interesting, and telling, that Robert Alter can, at most, speak only of "incipient" narrativity in biblical poetry and only in some instances. See his *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, rev ed. (New York: Basic, 2011), 27, 32, 43, 76, 123. One is justified in wondering if "incipient narrative" is narrative at all or if the incipience in question is actually prelude to something else, something *non*-narrative, especially in lyric poetry.

[148] Cf. Sue Gillingham, "Psalms 105 and 106 and the Participation in History through Liturgy," *HeBAI* 4 (2015): 450–475 on how liturgical performance can help one apprehend the lessons learned from history.

[149] Cf. Walker's remarks ("Historical Narrativity"), which show how the manipulation of time and reportage of "events" in a poem like Exodus 15 also functions to undercut a simple understanding of the composition as a narrative.

4.2. *Rhetorical Purpose(s) and Selectivity*

The overall rhetorical purpose(s) and message(s) of Ashurnasirpal's throneroom described in §3 above helps to explain the selectivity at work in the narrative elements that are included therein. There is no doubt that these, too, are as carefully manipulated as any other element of the relief program in order to convey a very specific image of the king. So also with the historical psalms.[150] These psalms are not entirely of a piece, of course; each has its respective emphases and foci, all of which are manipulated to achieve certain composition-specific effects. Houtman offers several examples. He states that, in several of these psalms, "a one sided picture is given of the time in the desert *for the sake of adding strength to the proclamation*."[151] Speaking specifically of Psalm 78, he writes: "The memory of those acts [recounted in this poem] *should have kept Israel from rebelling*….In Ps. 78 the emphasis is on the fact that *the plagues were meant to convince Israel* of the greatness and power of YHWH."[152] Or, speaking of the purpose of Psalm 105, he states "those deeds of God on behalf of Israel also *demand a response* from following generations."[153]

"History," as a category, is in some sense just *there*. *Psalmic history* as known in the historical psalms, however, is *selected* history set within an *artistic* and *highly rhetorical* program that can be "pulled up" from *back there* to *here and now*, to borrow once more from Battini's terminology.[154] And yet contemporary effect or effectiveness is not solely and probably not even primarily a function of the history-like or narrative-like aspects included within the historical psalms per se; it is, rather, the direct result of the rhetorical (re)presentation (and reframing) of these aspects that happens in these poems *by means of their combination with non-narrative and non-historical aspects*, the time "set off" pieces. This combination makes a larger complex that, in terms of the artistic analogue, may be seen as an instance of "'mythologized epic'…set within a historicizing framework"[155] but may be yet still more: poetry that operates primarily in "absolute time,"[156] or that is, in fact, "timeless."[157] In the end, *transhistorical*

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[150] A helpful discussion of selectivity in the historical psalms may be found in Buster, "The Historical Psalms."

[151] Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:207 (emphasis added).

[152] Ibid., 1:194 (emphasis added).

[153] Ibid., 1:195 (emphasis added).

[154] Cf. Anderson/Bishop, *Out of the Depths*, 41: "The story/history is not related with detachment but is told as a drama that is true 'for me' or 'for us.'" Cf. 43–44: "in worship the story was retold with a contemporaneous ring, so that it touched the concerns of people in their present situation." Cf. Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:212: "It has become clear that the preachers in Israel [including the psalmists] were very free in their use of the traditions about the past. That free dealing with the traditions was for the purpose of actualizing history." See further below.

[155] Lumsden, "Narrative Art and Empire," 372.

[156] Battini, "Time 'Pulled Up,'" 43.

[157] See, on the latter point, within the artistic materials, Zainab Bahrani, *The Infinite Image: Art, Time and the Aesthetic Dimension in Antiquity* (London: Reaktion, 2014), passim, and, e.g., 9–

psalms or *suprahistorical psalms* might be far better terms to use than “historical psalms.”

4.3. *Rhetorical Purpose(s) and Divine Focus*

The overall rhetorical purpose(s) and message(s) of Ashurnasirpal’s throneroom also helps to explain the focus, in the historical psalms, on the Deity. Yhwh is the main subject of these psalms, just as the Assyrian king was the main subject of the throneroom relief program.[158] To be sure, the emphasis on God in the historical psalms is yet another instance of rhetorical selection and message manipulation. Among other things, the theological focus helps to explain the notable lack of Moses and Aaron in some of the historical psalms. A lengthy citation from Houtman’s work is useful in connecting the ultimate focus on God to the previous two points of comparison – namely, *selectivity* in service to an intention that goes *far beyond the merely antiquarian*:

> It is striking that in the Pentateuch Moses (and Aaron) play a dominant role as YHWH’s representatives, but that outside the Pentateuch they are hardly mentioned as protagonists. Always it is YHWH himself who is [the] subject. The likely reason is not only [that] in later times Moses (and Aaron) were given a leading role in the traditions, but [rather] that psalmists and prophets recounted the history with a (somewhat) different intent than the authors of the so-called historical books. The latter intended to offer a more or less detailed account of the events (to get a certain message across!)….The first reach for the history [was] for the purpose of exhortation and admonition, confession of sin, to reinforce prayer, to praise God, and to demonstrate that history is replete with examples of YHWH’s goodness and mercy, meaning that there is hope for the future, etc. Also the latter are interested in the meaning of the past for the present. They want to show the lessons of history. However, the psalmists and prophets *are more direct in showing the abiding relevance of history*. They easily pass over historical details and instead concentrate on the meaning of history for the permanently relevant theme of the relationship between God and Israel. Giving (overly much) historical detail

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10: “For Mesopotamia…images had a diachronic presence; they were seen as objects that transcend time and that carry or embody traces of time itself. They therefore became foci of rituals of history and collective memory, of reinscriptions, burials and recoveries, in continuous dialogic relationships between past and present and present into the past.” See also Mehmet-Ali Ataç, “‘Time and Eternity’ in the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud,” in *Assyrian Reliefs from the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II: A Cultural Biography*, ed. Ada Cohen and Steven E. Kangas (Hanover, NH: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College and University Press of New England, 2010), 159–180. Cf. more generally Paul Crowther, *The Transhistorical Image: Philosophizing Art and Its History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[158] See Battini, “Time ‘Pulled Up,’” 43, for the Assyrian king; and, inter alia, Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment*, for the centrality of God and miracle/wonder/astonishment in the psalms.

> might detract from the directness of preaching. Mentioning Moses (and Aaron) might divert the attention from the honor due to YHWH for having cared for Israel throughout history. *That in particular is what later generations must know. Hence the emphasis on YHWH as subject!...Past happenings are told [in order] to sing the wonder working power of God*….The passing over of historical details and the use of general terms facilitates the actualization and generalization of historical events. It makes it easier for the hearer of the words to relate them to his [or her] own situation. *So past events can become events that (can) repeat themselves.* One can reach back to them to describe future events….So the permanent relevance of the history is highlighted….[I]t would seem that this is also how we should account for the rare mention of Sinai/Horeb outside the Pentateuch.[159]

There can be no doubt that Israel – the people, its leaders, and its past – plays a large and important role in the historical psalms, but never at the expense of their ultimate focus: God. One very small example from Psalm 78 may prove illustrative. This psalm comes to a climax with the rejection of Joseph and Ephraim and the selection of Judah and Mount Zion, before narrowing in on David (vv. 70–72), whom God "chose…and took from the sheepfolds" (v. 70). God brings David from one kind of shepherding to another: "in order to shepherd his people Jacob, Israel, his inheritance" (v. 71). The last verse is somewhat ambiguous:

> He shepherded them according to the perfection of his heart (*kĕtōm lĕbābô*),
> He led them (*yanḥēm*) with the skill of his hands (*ûbitbûnôt kappāyw*). (v. 72)

Does this describe David or Yhwh? It is David who has most immediately been described as a shepherd but it is Yhwh who was behind David's vocational shift. The "them" in v. 72, furthermore, clearly refers back to "his" (God's) people (*ʿammô*) and inheritance (*naḥălātô*), and, even more importantly, Yhwh has been the subject of all of the prior finite verbs in vv. 70–72. It is not unthinkable, therefore, that it is Yhwh who is at work even here in the last lines. That would suit the divine focus of the historical psalms. At the very least, given that divine focus, it is easy enough to see God – who did all these things with, to, and for David, and who is described elsewhere as perfect (*tāmîm*; Deut 32:4), the source of understanding (*tĕbûnāh*; e.g., Job 12:13; see also Exod 31:3; 1 Kgs 5:9), and the one who leads Israel (√*n-ḥ-h*; Exod 15:13) – as the one active in, with, and under David, the shepherd-king.

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[159] Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:210–212 (emphases added).

4.4. *Locating the Historical Psalms on the Narrative-Lyric Continuum*

Houtman's remarks about the Pentateuch provoke a (re)consideration of the relationship of the historical psalms to the Torah, still with an eye fixed on Ashurnasirpal's throneroom understood within the developmental schema suggested by Winter. So, to return to the continuum outlined earlier (see §1), the historical psalms would (again) live somewhere in between the more pronounced lyricism of Psalm 114 and the more developed, almost exclusively prose narrative now found in the Pentateuch:[160]

narrative ◀——▶	**“Historical Psalms”** ◀——▶	**lyric**
Pentateuch	Psalms 78, 105, 106, 135, 136	Psalm 114
Cf. Sennacherib/ Ashurbanipal	Cf. Ashurnasirpal	Cf. Naram-Sin

It is, of course, obvious that Pentateuchal narrative contains a considerably higher accumulation of detail than any of the historical psalms. But applying Winter's analysis analogically to this continuum suggests still more: that Pentateuchal narrative is more like what one finds with later Neo-Assyrian relief programs such as Sennacherib's or Ashurbanipal's. Like the latter, the greater complexity found in the Torah might actually detract or distract from the central focus,[161] even as, somewhat paradoxically, it presents a final product that is simpler to read than the hybridized forms found in the historical psalms, let alone the extreme lyricism found in Psalm 114.[162] The Pentateuch is (at least comparatively) easier to read than the poetry because the historical psalms also include a fair share of timeless, ritual, and symbolic elements, moments, or episodes – in higher frequency and density per verse – all of which depend upon and require more competency and decoding skill on the part of the receiver.[163] And that is true even if these latter are captured in truly small compass like the repeated refrain *kî lĕʿôlām ḥasdô* in Psalm 136. The Pentateuch, by way of comparison and contrast – in part due to its length – is at least somewhat more transparent. To be sure, the Pentateuch, too, has its "punctuations" of the timeless, the symbolic, the ritualized – not least by its inclusion of poetry (!) – but its overall form, its greater peopling of the field of vision (as it were) and proliferation of details (including distinct sources and conflicting traditions), creates an impression that is, in the main, decidedly narratival; far more narratival, at least, than what one finds in the psalms, historical or otherwise.[164]

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[160] The Pentateuch does contain some bits of poetry here and there. For a treatment of one such poem, along with its ramifications for its literary context, see Brent A. Strawn, “YHWH's Poesie: The *Gnadenformel* (Exodus 34:6b–7), the Book of Exodus, and Beyond,” in *Biblical Poetry and the Art of Close Reading*, ed. J. Blake Couey and Elaine T. James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 237–256. For more extensive treatments of poetry in Exodus and the P source, see, respectively, Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2014); and Jason M. H. Gaines, *The Poetic Priestly Source* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015).

[161] Cf., e.g., Jan Christian Gertz, among others, who has remarked that the Pentateuch can be treated as “the biography of Moses” (“The Overall Context of Genesis–2 Kings,” in Jan Christian Gertz et al., *T&T Clark Handbook of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Literature, Religion and History of the Old Testament* [London: T&T Clark, 2012], 237–271 [241]). Despite the admitted importance of Moses, such a comment drastically misses the theological point(s) of the Pentateuch.

[162] Not all would agree that the Torah is easier to read; in fact, some scholars opine that the Torah is unreadable in its current compiled form (see, e.g., Joel S. Baden, “Why Is the Pentateuch Unreadable? Or, Why Are We Doing This Anyway?” in *The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America*, ed. Jan C. Gertz et al., FAT 111 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016], 243–251). In my judgment, this is to exaggerate or over-interpret the distinct traditions, sources, or literary seams as extensively or exclusively jarring, disjunctive,

Several ramifications might be considered at this point. So, for example, one might perhaps suggest that the narrative construction reflected in the Pentateuch reflects a *later, more developed formulation* than what one finds in the historical psalms, not unlike the way Sennacherib's or Ashurbanipal's reliefs reflect later development from Ashurnasirpal's throneroom. This is basically Loewenstamm's understanding of the plague traditions cited earlier. But, even if one does not want to press the issue *diachronically* – at least not exclusively – it can still be said that the apperception of the historical psalms is likely more difficult than that of the Pentateuch. More skill is required, more "background" knowledge, greater literary competency.[165] If so, moving further back along the continuum, yet still more skill is required for an adequate handling of an even terser, more lyrical poem like Psalm 114: since when do mountains "leap like

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or irreconcilable. Some may well be that – or at the least may be abrupt – but many are not. Moreover, it is quite possible, now but also, evidently, in antiquity, to read the Pentateuch as a whole despite the fact that, in its final form, it is indubitably a complex that unites much originally separate and distinctive material. To be sure, the readability of the Torah as a whole is in no small measure due to the narrative superstructure now present within (if not also secondarily imposed on) the Pentateuch as we now have it.

[163] That is to say that the lyrical aspects of the historical psalms must not be underestimated. Indeed, the rhetorical and didactic elements described above (e.g., in Ps 78:1–8) would seem to locate these psalms nearer the lyric end of the continuum – at least according to the definition of Culler, cited earlier: "Narrative poems *recount* an event; lyrics, we might say, strive *to be* an event" (*Literary Theory*, 78; emphases added).

[164] So, among other things, the Pentateuch *explains* the plagues in considerable detail; the historical psalms, in comparison, do little more than *list* them.

[165] Even if only due to their poetic form. For literary competency more generally, see John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996). Recall Russell's judgment ("The Program of the Palace," 705–706 and 713–714) that the main entrance to Ashurnasirpal's throneroom forces the viewer to start *in media res*. Psalm 78 is comparable at this point, since it begins, after the didactic introduction (vv. 1–8), with an obscure reference to Ephraim (vv. 9ff.). As another example, consider the relative infrequency of *ḥesed* in the Torah (21×), one of which is in a poem (Exod 15:13!), and several of which do not refer to God's *ḥesed* but to someone else's (e.g., Gen 20:13). Psalm 136 by itself has more references to *ḥesed* than the entire Pentateuch combined.

rams, hills like lambs" (*hehārîm rāqĕdû kĕʾêlîm gĕbāʿôt kibnê-ṣōʾn*)? Only in lyric poetry.

Whether or not the relatively easier grasping of what is now found in the Pentateuch is by design is an intriguing if unanswerable question.[166] Whatever the case, the relatively more difficult apperception of the historical psalms may be demonstrated easily enough by how so many scholars have stumbled at precisely this point by offering interpretations of these poems that have treated them only as so much grist for their historical-critical mills in order to confirm or disconfirm what is found elsewhere in the Pentateuch and/or so to somehow verify or falsify "what actually happened." That kind of thin historicism is old-fashioned and passé, flat-footed and a real missing of the poetic point, as it were – and yet this kind of interpretation persists.[167] One suspects it arises mostly from readers too accustomed to or overly enamored with the (relatively) more straightforward presentation in the full-blown narrative texts of the Pentateuch; this kind of interpretation comes, that is, from more "literal-minded" readers – ones who are unfamiliar, if not also uncomfortable, with the different ways of thinking found in poetry, especially lyric poetry.[168]

Regardless of the origin of such interpretation, the historical psalms are manifestly about *much more* than history or historicism thinly conceived.[169] These poems are, after all, "closely related to the hymns, with their main theme being [the] praise of God."[170] The theme of God's praise properly belongs to a poetic text like a biblical psalm;[171] such a theme is *not* typical of history *qua* history –

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[166] Perhaps one might compare Winter's understanding of the diversity of the throneroom audience and the need for a least common denominator that would communicate to all constituents.

[167] For an argument against modernist historiographic interventions in the historical psalms, see Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment*. Cf. Strawn, "The Poetics of Psalm 82." For a collection of recent, more helpful approaches to the historical psalms, which include – among other things – attention to cultural memory studies, see the special issue of *HeBAI* 4.4 (2015) edited by Judith Gärtner and Anja Klein, as well as the monographs by these two scholars: *Die Geschichtspsalmen* and *Geschichte und Gebet*, respectively. See also Buster, "The Historical Psalms."

[168] A similar problem obtains with other narrative-poetic interfaces (or lack thereof) in, say, Judges 4 and 5 or Exodus 14 and 15. For the latter, see again Walker, "Historical Narrativity."

[169] So too, of course, is the full thickness of Pentateuchal narrative.

[170] S. E. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 219. Gunkel/Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms*, are more variegated in their attribution (see above).

[171] Divine praise may also be a proper subject of some of the relief programs. Porada, e.g., thinks that "in the first place" the pictorial narratives "were intended as an accounting to the gods with whose help and in whose honor they were won, and as a means of retaining the impact of these victories in a 'magical' way" ("The Uses of Art to Convey Political Meanings," 17). She does not justify, however, that this is "the only reasonable explanation" of these artistic narratives. She goes on to admit that "[s]econd, the narrative reliefs must have served as a satisfaction for the king's own self-esteem and as a personal reassurance of his power. I believe that only in the third place were they a means of impressing the beholder with the king's military might" (ibid.). She also states that "the immediate impression that the representation was directed toward the viewer…seems to have been less important than the king's relationship with *his* protectors, his gods, and his personal desire for the permanence of victory….Thus…monuments that seem at first sight to have been overt

quite to the contrary, in fact, at least in post-Enlightenment modes. Praise, after all, requires *agents of praise*, those who do the praising: who have breath in their lungs to speak, lips to sing hallelujah, hands to clap in joy. The Psalter is quite clear that you don't have to be *human* to praise,[172] but you need to be some *thing* – an entity, an agent, a subject. History *qua* history is none of those; history *qua* history is just…a topic. And praise not only needs agents, it needs an *object*: the one who is to be praised. The Psalms have such an object aplenty: Yhwh, the Lord God of Israel – who is, in the end, not just an object but also a Subject, one who, yes, is believed to have acted in history, but also before it and beyond it.[173]

5. ART AND IMAGE, GENRE AND POETICS…AND "HISTORY"

By way of conclusion, I return to the question of method in the study of iconography and the Hebrew Bible with which I began. As I said at the start, the approach offered here attempts a new way to relate image and text, at least in terms of biblical iconography up to this point. In some ways, the present investigation might be seen as retrogressive: a return to the earlier, more phenomenological work by Keel, since I have not worried much about chronology or possible genetic relationships between the psalms and the reliefs, nor about possible mechanisms of transference. I have not argued (nor do I intend to) that some ancient Israelites knew or saw the Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs first hand, let alone understood their underlying conceptual and design principles.[174] While not entirely

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visual propagandistic statements probably had a more propitious intent" (20; similarly 22). See Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, for an extensive argument for an internal, elite meaning for the Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs; cf. Winter, "The Program," 16–17.

[172] See, e.g., Pss 96:11–13; 98:7–9; 148:2–10, and, for discussion, Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 249–268. See also Brent A. Strawn and Joel M. LeMon, "'Everything That Has Breath': Animal Praise in Psalm 150:6 in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Iconography," in *Bilder als Quellen/Images as Sources: Studies on Ancient Near Eastern Artefacts and the Bible Inspired by the Work of Othmar Keel*, ed. Susanne Bickel et al., OBO Sonderband (Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 451–485.

[173] See, e.g., Fretheim, *God and World*, for a treatment that is *after* the "God-at-work-in-history" (*magnalia Dei*) studies that marked the mid-20th century. In ancient Israelite conceptions, Yhwh is certainly thought to be a real subject, capable of agency in history (as were many other ancient Near Eastern deities), though Yhwh was also ultimately somehow above history. The historical psalms' focus on the Deity combined with their trans- or supra-historical qualities helps to explain the inclusion of "mythical elements" in, e.g., Pss 78:13a; 106:9a; 136:13a. Cf. Houtman on the combination of things historical and *urzeitlich* in such texts: "The depiction of the making of a way through the sea with imagery from creation spotlights the greatness of the event. The making of a way through the sea is equally as great as the creation event itself!" (*Exodus*, 1:199).

[174] Audiences at furthest remove would presumably be the least likely to know what transpired in the Assyrian heartland. Would Israelites belong to that category, or would they fall in the sweet spot identified by Winter: "socially distant but potentially able to receive…the intended object of the communicative act" ("Royal Rhetoric," 44)?

unthinkable – some scholars have argued this sort of thing[175] – I do not think such scenarios can be known with certainty or demonstrated beyond doubt (or even with much plausibility). In short, chronological, developmental, and interconnectional precision seems difficult to establish in this case: it is elusive, if not impossible. And yet, despite some similarities to the "early Keel,"[176] I think the approach taken here skirts some of the problems that he and others have noted in prior work: namely, artistic fragmentation and literary fragmentation.[177]

The preceding is, admittedly, something of *via negativa apologia* for what I've offered here. More positively, then, what I have attempted to do is create a conversation of sorts or construct a comparison, as Jonathan Z. Smith would put it.[178] My comparison, like every other comparison, traffics in both like and unlike. That is, of course, to recognize the patently obvious: not everything about the historical psalms and the reliefs from Ashurnasirpal's throneroom is similar; much is quite different. Such is the nature of comparison and also analogy: applying one thing to another. Smith himself argues that comparison is most interesting and useful if it is interesting and useful *to us* – particularly if it answers some of our questions.[179] To be transparent, then, the comparison between the art and the psalms I have undertaken here is interesting and useful to me (and perhaps others) in pointing ways forward with regard to several important questions. These questions include: are there new horizons for relating text and image in future research, even at the level of genre?[180] How can art and literature be used to uncover and investigate (common) cognitive processes and meaning-making?[181] In some instances, might text and image reflect the same underlying principles: mechanics, hermeneutics, poetics? These are very different kinds of questions than the ones that have occupied earlier research on the historical psalms, whether that has been focused on histor(icit)y, on the one hand, or inner-biblical interpretation, on the other.[182] The present study demonstrates, I hope, that an iconographical set of questions can also cast (new and different) light on the meaning and significance of the historical psalms.

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[175] See, e.g., Shawn Zelig Aster, "Images of the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Calah in the Throne-Room Vision of Isaiah 6," in *Marbeh Ḥokmah: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East in Loving Memory of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz*, ed. S. Yona et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 13–42.

[176] I deem Keel's early approach still useful at many points. See Brent A. Strawn, "The Iconography of Fear: *Yirʾat YHWH* (יראת יהוה) in Artistic Perspective," in *Image, Text, Exegesis: Iconographic Interpretation and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Izaak J. de Hulster and Joel M. LeMon, LHBOTS 588 (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 91–134.

[177] See Othmar Keel, "Iconography and the Bible," *ABD* 3:357–374, esp. 367–368; and Joel M. LeMon, *Yahweh's Winged Form in the Psalms: Exploring Congruent Iconography and Texts*, OBO 242 (Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 14–22.

[178] See Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), esp. 36–53.

[179] See ibid., 52–53, 115.

[180] See again Walker, "Historical Narrativity," and, more extensively, idem, *The Power of Images* for further interventions on this point.

[181] See Brett E. Maiden, *Cognitive Science and Ancient Israelite Religion: New Perspectives on Texts, Artifacts, and Culture*, SOTSMS (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), esp. 133–176.

What is that meaning and significance? In the final analysis, it has little to do with *bruta facta*. Instead, it has everything to do with the curious but important admixture of “time set off” (non-narrative) and “time pulled up” (narrative) – and equally also with the proper relationship and order(ing) of these two times. According to Battini,

> it seems that “time set off” – that is, cosmic time – *encompasses* “time pulled up” – that is, historical and real time, and *the first becomes the most important time: it constitutes the most important point of view* of historical interpretation. The inclusion of historical time in cosmic time means that at the end *only cosmic time survives and gives sense to historical events*. This is the specific point of view of the king Ashurnasirpal II.[183]

But not only Ashurnasirpal. Also the historical psalms. Because, after all, *ut pictura poesis*.

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[182] In addition to other items already cited, see (though not with reference to the historical psalms), John S. Vassar, *Recalling a Story Once Told: An Intertextual Reading of the Psalter and the Pentateuch* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007).

[183] Battini, “Time ‘Pulled Up,’” 39–40 (emphases added). Cf. 43: “Time represented in Ashurnasirpal’s sculpture is not real time; it is ‘invented and cerebral time.’ It is a construction for justifying royal power and celebrating its magnificence. When on the basis of the annals or of the standard inscription we try to identify single military victories, real hunts, actual occasions for rituals represented, we take a point of view *that ancient people never took*. What was represented is the affirmation of power in its multiplicity of functions: as a destroyer of enemies, as victorious against the wild world, as a pious executor of divine power, and especially as a victor over evil, any kind of evil” (emphasis added). The similarities to Yhwh’s “historical acts” in the Psalms should be obvious. Battini’s later comment evokes yet another similarity to Yhwh in the Psalms: Ashurnasipal “behaves as if he is the divine power that distinguishes what is important [and] what is not, forever” (“Time ‘Pulled Up,’” 43). This focus on the human king (in the Neo-Assyrian art) and the divine king (in the Psalms) indicates that if it isn’t a matter of *real* time, it is nevertheless a matter of *royal* time (cf. *real* in Spanish).

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