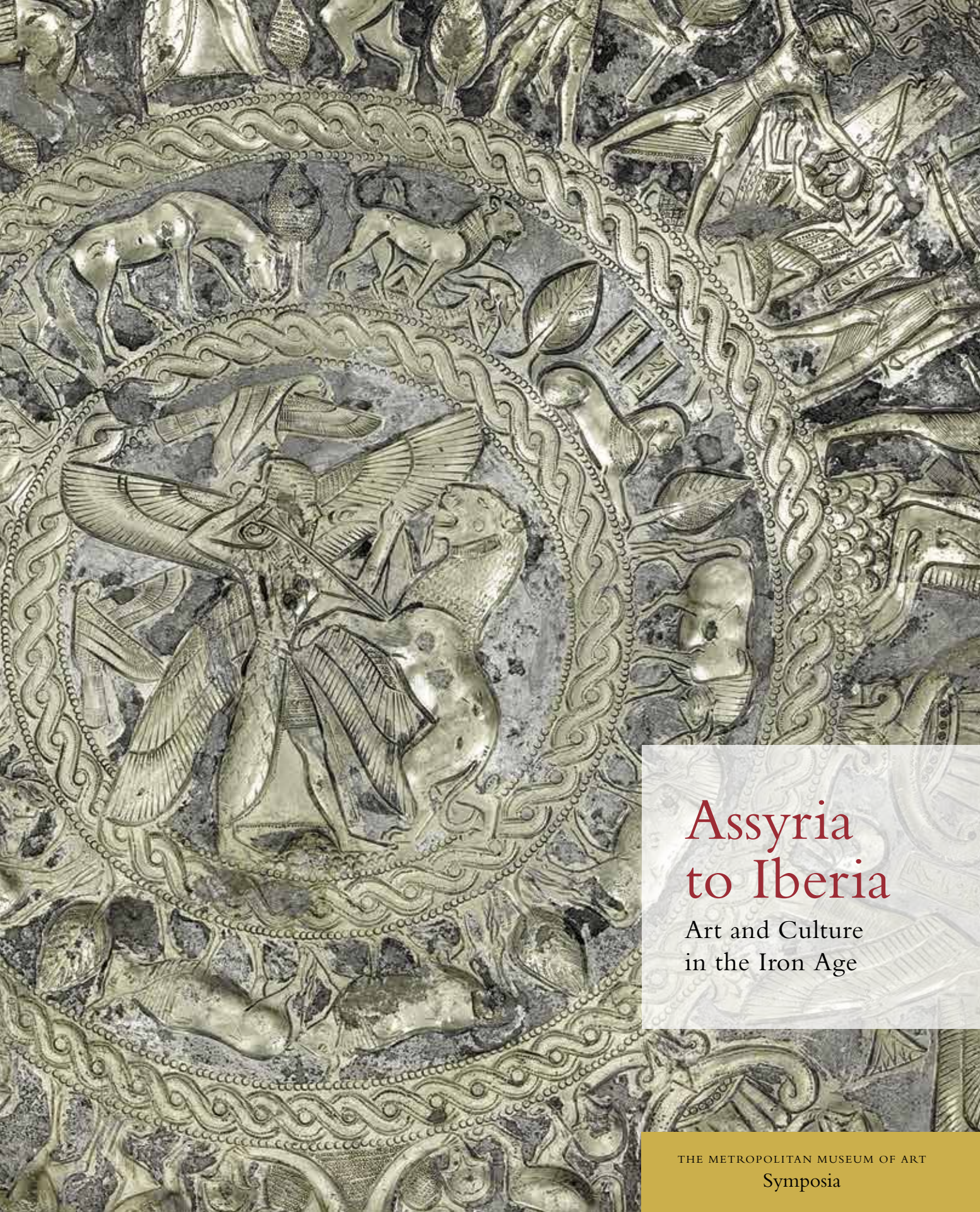


# Assyria to Iberia

## Art and Culture in the Iron Age

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
Symposia

The Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia

# Assyria to Iberia



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## Art and Culture in the Iron Age

Edited by
Joan Aruz and Michael Seymour

THE MET

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK

DISTRIBUTED BY YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS, NEW HAVEN AND LONDON

The essays in this volume are based on papers and lectures presented in conjunction with the exhibition "Assyria to Iberia at the Dawn of the Classical Age" on view at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from September 27, 2014, though January 4, 2015.

This publication is made possible by The Adelaide Milton de Groot Fund, in memory of the de Groot and Hawley families.

**Published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York**
Mark Polizzotti, Publisher and Editor in Chief
Gwen Roginsky, Associate Publisher and General Manager of Publications
Peter Antony, Chief Production Manager
Michael Sittenfeld, Senior Managing Editor

Edited by Elizabeth Franzen
Designed implemented by Duke & Company, Inc., Devon, Pennsylvania, based on a format established by Tsang Seymour Design Inc.
Production by Christopher Zichello
Bibliography edited by Philomena Mariani
Image acquisitions and permissions by Blair Fowlkes-Childs and Jane Tai
Maps on pp.x-xvi, 34, 89, 102, 196, and 209 by Anandaroop Roy

Photographs of works in the Metropolitan Museum's collection are by the Imaging Department, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, unless otherwise noted.

Additional photography credits appear on page 349.

Typeset in Monotype Bembo
Printed on 128 gsm Neo Star
Separations by Embassy Graphics, Winnipeg, Canada
Printed and bound by SICP, Guangzhou, China
Jacket illustration: Gilded silver bowl with Egyptianizing motifs. Said to be from Kourion (the Kourion Treasure). Cypro-Phoenician, late 8th–early 7th century B.C. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Cesnola Collection, Purchased by subscription, 1874–76 (74.51.4554)

Frontispiece: Phoenician-style ivory plaque with gold leaf and inlaid semiprecious stones and vitreous material depicting a lioness attacking a youth. Nimrud, Northwest Palace, well in Room MM. Neo-Assyrian period, 9th–8th century B.C. The Trustees of the British Museum, London (ME 127412)

Page 2: Detail of gypsum alabaster relief showing ships transporting cedar logs from Tyre. Khorsabad, palace of Sargon II, facade n. Neo-Assyrian, reign of Sargon II. Musée du Louvre, Paris (AO 19889)

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Page 322: Bronze cauldron and iron stand. Salamis, dromos of Tomb 79. Cypro-Archaic, ca. 8th–7th century B.C. Cyprus Museum, Nicosia (T.79/202, 202[b])

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First printing

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The Metropolitan Museum of Art
1000 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10028
metmuseum.org

Distributed by
Yale University Press, New Haven and London
yalebooks.com/art
yalebooks.co.uk

Cataloguing-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.
ISBN 978-1-58839-606-8

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# Acknowledgments

The exhibition "Assyria to Iberia at the Dawn of the Classical Age," on view in 2014–15, and its extensive catalogue, focused attention on the varieties of interaction across western Asia and the Mediterranean during the early centuries of the first millennium B.C. The success of the project relied to a great extent on the ability to secure extraordinary loans from museums across the vast span of the Mediterranean region and on contributions by many colleagues from these institutions, thanks to the generosity of our major donors: The Hagop Kevorkian Fund, spearheaded by the commitment of Ralph D. Minasian; the Stavros Niarchos Foundation; Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman; and an Anonymous Foundation, as well as to catalogue supporters The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, The Hagop Kevorkian Fund, and the A. G. Leventis Foundation. For the rich programming that accompanied this show, we would first like to thank the Director of The Met, Thomas P. Campbell, for his support. The major event was a two-day symposium, which was preceded by the Charles K. Wilkinson lectures, both made possible by the many friends of Charles K. Wilkinson and of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The keynote address for the symposium was part of the Armand Brunswick Distinguished Lectures in Archaeology of The Raymond and Beverly Sackler Foundation, Inc. Our loyal Friends of Inanna, who also contributed to the exhibition funding, supported a Scholar's Day Workshop. The publication of papers presented during these events and a series of lectures dedicated to topics related to the show—including the work of Ronny Reich, funded by the Friends of the Israel Antiquities Authority—are collected in this volume and published with the support of The Adelaide Milton de Groot Fund, in memory of the de Groot and Hawley families. Our colleagues in the Education Department and Concerts and Lectures at The Met helped ensure the success of the various programs, and special thanks go to Joseph Loh and Jennifer Mock.

We are very pleased that, with these essays, we are able to make another contribution to the Museum's symposium series, three years after the publication of *Cultures in Contact: From Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean in the Second Millennium B.C.* We would like to thank Mark Polizzotti and Michael Sittenfeld of the Publications and Editorial Department for their assistance in bringing this volume to completion. As with the *Assyria to Iberia* catalogue, Christopher Zichello has done masterful work in production and contributed his expertise with images and layout. Elizabeth Franzen devoted much time, energy, and skill to the careful editing of this volume, with the assistance of Anne Rebecca Blood, Elizabeth Gordon, Frances Malcolm, and Amelia Kutschbach. Anandaroop Roy created the exhibition catalogue maps and has kindly adapted them for the purposes of this volume, Philomena Mariani prepared the bibliography and endnotes, and Jane Tai handled image rights. Special thanks to Anne Rebecca Blood who, as project manager, ensured that the volume moved forward.

In the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art, we are extremely grateful for the careful work and dedication of Blair Fowlkes-Childs, who provided expert assistance and support on many aspects of this volume, particularly image and bibliographic research, and Elizabeth Knott, Hagop Kevorkian Research Associate, who diligently researched the maps for both the exhibition catalogue and the present volume, while providing other essential research

assistance. Anne Elizabeth Dunn-Vaturi, Hagop Kevorkian Research Associate, helped with French to English accurate translation. Tim Healing and Cristina Velásquez Murrieta provided critical support throughout the project, and their work on numerous phases of the programing is greatly appreciated.

Finally, we would like to thank all the contributors to *Assyria to Iberia: Art and Culture in the Iron Age*, who worked closely with us, always responding to our queries with expedience and good cheer. Their contributions enriched the presentation of the exhibition and reflect the complexities of an era of ancient civilization that is best understood when its various aspects are considered from a "global" perspective, as we endeavored to do in our journey from Assyria to Iberia.

Joan Aruz and Michael Seymour


15°W
0°
15°E
45°N
30°N
15°N
Marseilles
ETRURIA
Vetulonia
Corsica
Alalia
Pyrgi
Caere
Rome
Praeneste
Adriatic Sea
Atlantic Ocean
IBERIA
Madrid
Sardinia
Pontecagnano
Tharros
Balearic islands
Ibiza
GR
Lisbon
Guadalquivir
Bajo de la Campana
Huelva (Tartessos?)
El Carambolo
Gadir/Cádiz
Algiers
Motya
Sicily
Carthage
Tunis
Strait of Gibraltar
Lixus
Rabat
Tripoli
Taucheira
LIBYA
Sahara Desert
The Ancient Near East and the Mediterranean in the First Millennium B.C.
With Select Second-Millennium B.C. Sites
Map showing place-names cited in the essays.
Archaeological site
Modern city
Shipwreck
0
500 mi
0
500
1,000 km
Robinson projection centered on 20°E


30°E
45°E
Black Sea
Caucasus Mountains
Caspian Sea
Istanbul
Troy
Ankara
Hattusa
Gordion
Karmir Blur
Yerevan
EECE
Aegean Sea
ANATOLIA
Lefkandi
Delphi
Eretria
Sardis
Lake Van
Van
Corinth
Athens
Samos
Ephesos
Mycenae
Olympia
Miletos
Marash
ASSYRIA
Hasanlu
Sparta
Cyclades
Taurus Mtns
Carchemish
Arslan Tash
Musasir
Amanus Mtns
Tell Halaf
Mosul
Nineveh
Rhodes
Aleppo
Tell al Rimah
Nimrud
Uluburun
Crete
Ugarit
SYRIA
Tehran
Eleutherna
Knossos
Cyprus
Salamis
Ashur
Kirkuk
Mount Ida
Prinias
Nicosia
Kition
MESOPOTAMIA
Byblos
Beirut
Euphrates
Tell Asmar
Mediterranean Sea
Sidon
Baghdad
Damascus
LEVANT
Tigris
Zagros Mountains
Cyrene
Tyre
Babylon
Megiddo
Dilbat
Tobruk
Samaria
Susa
Amman
BABYLONIA
Jerusalem
Uruk
Lachish
Naukratis
Tanis
Ur
Cairo
Memphis
Herakleopolis
EGYPT
Tell el-Amarna
Persian Gulf
Nile
Deir el-Medina
Thebes
Medinet Habu
Tôd
ARABIA
Riyadh
Red Sea
Dakka
Abu Simbel
NUBIA
Kerma
Jebel Barkal
Nuri
el-Kurru
KUSH
Meroë
Khartoum
Sana'a
Arabian Sea




*Iberia*




*Greece and Western Anatolia*




*Central Mediterranean*



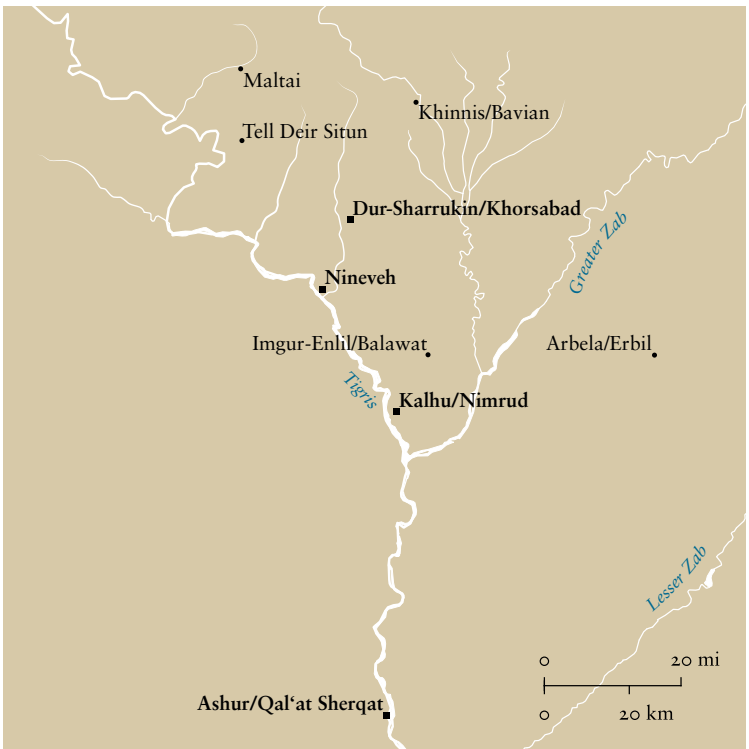

*Urartu and the Syro-Hittite States*




*Levant, Cyprus, and the Nile Valley*




*Assyrian World*




*Assyrian Heartland*

# CHRONOLOGY, 1200–400 B.C. (all dates are approximate)

| | Mesopotamia | Iran | Syria and the Levant | Anatolia/North Syria |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1200 | BABYLONIA<br>Nebuchadnezzar I (1125–1104)<br><br>ASSYRIA<br>Tiglath-Pileser I (1114–1076) | Iron Age II, 1250–800 | Iron Age I, 1200–900<br>Sea Peoples incursions | Syro-Hittite and Aramaean kingdoms, 1200–800<br><br>Traditional date of Trojan War, 1184 |
| 1100 | | | | |
| 1000 | Neo-Babylonian period, 1000–539<br><br>Neo-Assyrian empire, 911–612<br>Adad-nirari II (911–891) | Neo-Elamite period, 1000–539 | Philistine city-states founded in 10th century | |
| 900 | ASSYRIA<br>Ashurnasirpal II (883–859)<br>Assyrian capital moved to Nimrud/Kalhu, 878<br><br>Shalmaneser III (858–824) | | Iron Age II, 900–700<br><br>Battle of Qarqar, 853<br><br>Hazael of Aram-Damascus (843–806) | Sarduri I (840–830) founds royal dynasty of Urartu |
| 800 | Assyrian rule in Babylonia, 729–625<br><br>ASSYRIA<br>Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727)<br><br>Sargon II (721–705)<br>Assyrian capital moved to Khorsabad/Dur-Sharrukin, 717<br><br>BABYLONIA<br>Marduk-apla-iddina II, 721–711<br><br>ASSYRIA<br>Sennacherib (704–681)<br>Assyrian capital moved to Nineveh/Kuyunjik, 704 | Iron Age III, 800–550 | Assyria conquers Samaria, 722<br><br>Assyria conquers Philistine city-states, 714–712<br><br>Assyrian sieges of Lachish and Jerusalem, 701 | URARTU<br>Argishti I (785/780–756)<br>Sarduri II (756–730)<br>Rusa I (730–714/713)<br><br>PHRYGIA<br>Midas (contemporary with Sargon II of Assyria)<br><br>Assyrian sack of Haldi Temple, Musasir, 714 |
| 700 | Sennacherib destroys Babylon, 689<br><br>ASSYRIA<br>Esarhaddon (680–669)<br>Ashurbanipal (668–627)<br>War between Ashurbanipal and Shamash-shuma-ukin, 652–649<br><br>Fall of Nineveh, 612<br><br>BABYLONIA<br>Nabopolassar (626–605)<br><br>Neo-Babylonian kingdom, 626–612<br><br>Neo-Babylonian empire, 612–539<br><br>Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562) | Battle of Til Tuba, 653<br><br>Assyrian sack of Susa, 646<br><br>Median empire, 625–550 | Iron Age III, 700–550<br><br>Babylonian rule, 605–539 | URARTU<br>Rusa II (first half of 7th century)<br><br>LYDIA<br>Mermnad dynasty, 680–546<br><br>Battle of Carchemish, 605 |
| 600 | Nabonidus (555–539)<br><br>Persian conquest of Babylon, 539<br><br>Achaemenid rule, 539–330 | Achaemenid dynasty, 559–330<br><br>Bisutun relief of Darius I, 521 | Babylonian sack of Jerusalem and destruction of Temple, 587<br><br>Achaemenid rule, 550–330 | LYDIA<br>Croesus (560–546)<br><br>Achaemenid rule, 546–330 |
| 500 | | | | Ionian Revolt, 499–498 |

| Egypt | Cyprus | Greece | Western Mediterranean |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ramesses III (1184–1153) | Late Bronze Age, 1600–1050 | Late Helladic (LH) IIIC period on mainland / Late Minoan (LM) IIIC period on Crete, 1200–1125 | Spain<br>Middle and Later Bronze Age, 1500–700 |
| Third Intermediate Period, 1070–712 (or 664)*<br><br>Dynasty 21, 1070–945 | Phoenician colonies on Cyprus, ca. 1100<br><br>Cypro-Geometric period, 1050–750 | Sub-Mycenaean period on mainland / Sub-Minoan period on Crete | |
| Libyan period / Dynasty 22, 945–712<br><br>Sheshonq I (945–924)<br><br>Osorkon I (924–889) | | Protogeometric period, 1000–900<br><br>Lefkandi "heroon," 950<br><br>Tekke bowl, late 10th–early 9th century | Italy<br>Iron Age, 1000–750 |
| Osorkon II (874–850) | Phoenician colony at Kition founded, mid-9th century | Geometric period, 900–700 | Italy<br>Villanovan culture, 900–500<br><br>Sardinia<br>Earliest possible date for Nora stele (see cat. 98)<br><br>North Africa<br>Traditional date of foundation of Carthage, 814 |
| Kushite period / Dynasty 25, 712–664<br><br>Late period, 712–332 | Salamis "royal" tombs, 8th–7th century<br><br>Cypro-Archaic I period, 750–600<br><br>Cypriot kings pay tribute to Sargon II, 707 | *Iliad* and *Odyssey* composed, 8th–7th century<br><br>Olympic games established, 776<br><br>Orientalizing period, 750–600 | Spain<br>Tartessian rule, 800–540<br><br>Italy<br>Etruscan culture, 750–90<br>Orientalizing period, 750–575<br>Nestor's cup inscription, 750–725 |
| Taharqo (690–664)<br><br>Assyria invades Egypt, 671–663<br><br>Saite period / Dynasty 26, 664–525<br><br>Greek settlement at Naukratis, second half of 7th century<br><br>Necho II (610–595) | | | Spain<br>Iron Age, 700–200<br><br>Mazarrón shipwrecks, second half of 7th century<br><br>Bajo de la Campana shipwreck, late 7th–early 6th century |
| Amasis (Ahmose II) (570–526)<br><br>Achaemenid rule, 525–404 | Cypro-Archaic II period, 600–480<br><br>Egyptian rule, 570–526<br><br>Achaemenid rule, 526–333 | Archaic period, 600–480<br><br>Polykrates of Samos (538–522) | Italy<br>Archaic period, 575–490 |
| | Cypro-Classical period, 480–310 | Classical period, 480–323 | Italy<br>Classical period, 490–300 |

*See Hill in Aruz et al. 2014, pp. 198–201.



*Paul Collins*

# The Face of the Assyrian Empire: Mythology and the Heroic King

The image of an ever-victorious and courageous king lies at the heart of Assyrian court art. Assyrian rulers presented themselves as the heroic kings they aspired to be and, in so doing, deliberately tied themselves to a mytho-historical past. The depictions of their superhuman achievements take the most impressive forms as narratives carved across stone panels lining the lower walls of significant rooms and courtyards in royal palaces, but they also occur as wall paintings, repoussé metal bands decorating palace and temple gates, and carved ivory panels on furniture. These depictions were intended to glorify the gods as well as the divinely directed achievements of the king.[1] This essay explores the ways in which the heroic royal image was transformed during the period from the thirteenth to the seventh century B.C. as the Assyrian kingdom expanded to establish an empire across the Near East. The heroic aspect of the ideal king was part of the unifying body of values, traditions, and knowledge shared within the Assyrian courtly community, but over time it became increasingly situated within a mythological framework that overlapped with social networks beyond the empire's borders, where it was readily received.

The heroism of an Assyrian king was believed to be dependent on his intimate relationship with the gods. This notion was rooted in a millennia-old understanding within Mesopotamia of a mutual obligation in which humans served the gods in return for abundance, security, and justice.[2] As early as the later fourth millennium B.C., such relationships were established through ritual acts and imagery. Jan Assmann has explored how these human obligations to the gods had a legal character, established as agreements whereby transgressions would be subject to divine retribution.[3] In Mesopotamia, "everything in the universe, material or immaterial, human or divine, was laid down by decree. Man's duty was to conform to these regulations."[4] Those who broke the rules faced divine justice, which was carried out on behalf of the gods by their appointed human king. The king restored the world to the order established by the gods at the beginning of time through heroic exploits that were essentially ritual acts.[5] Royal inscriptions narrating how the guilty were punished demonstrated the imposition of divine justice. While written narrative texts served to establish the actions and logical basis for the resolution of the event, related visual images depicted the divinely inspired action and thereby transformed linear history into cyclical ritual, ensuring that the present led to the divinely ordered world of the past.[6] Such images were the medium through which the symbiotic relationship between the king and the gods was established and maintained.

Just as there was a contractual relationship between humans and the gods, the relations between Mesopotamian city-states and kingdoms were also regulated by oaths and contracts held in place by divine authority. During the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C., much of the Near East came to be linked by such contractual relationships established through diplomacy. In Egypt during this period historical narratives began to be recorded by both ordinary people and by kings as evidence of this divine intervention in their lives.[7] Royal inscriptions transformed these events into reports, while the most striking visual records are the royal battle reliefs of Dynasties 18 and 19 (ca. 1550–1180 B.C.), especially the narrative monu-

ments of Seti I and Ramesses II.[8] It is within this Late Bronze Age setting that we should consider the origin of Assyrian narrative art.

An emphasis on the mythological and ritual nature of the Assyrian king's heroic activities is apparent in a fragment of a small, round, black stone lid, perhaps of a pyxis, from the New Palace at Ashur (fig. 1). The lid is carved in relief with one of the earliest known versions of an Assyrian royal hero, and it combines scenes of battle and ritual that derive from both contemporary Assyrian and third-millennium B.C. Babylonian imagery.[9] Divided into two registers, much of the scene in the top half is missing but can be reconstructed as a triumphant king pressing his foot on the body of a defeated enemy who is about to be killed. In the lower half of the relief, a royal figure raises a bowl, while to his rear two horses may be pulling a chariot (which does not survive) and rider. The direction of the characters in both registers is significant: action moves from left to right in the top scene and, in the lower register, victory celebrations move from right to left in a formula well known from later Assyrian palace reliefs.[10] The arrangement of the imagery as a simple narrative within a circular frame emphasizes the connection between punishment and celebration (conflict and victory), as well as the circularity of the past and future.

The relationship between the action of the divinely inspired king and the rituals associated with his restoration of order are also apparent on the so-called White Obelisk from Nineveh that probably dates to the reign of Ashurnasirpal I (1049–1031 B.C.).[11] Here again, the arrangement of the carved scenes, organized into registers, is meaningful. There is an expansion in the length of individual narrative scenes within each register, moving from a single image on each of the four sides at the top and bottom of the monument toward the two middle registers, where single scenes wrap around the entire pillar. Significantly, the longest registers, whose position at the center of the obelisk underlines their importance, depict victory



Fig. 1. Black stone lid. Ashur, New Palace. Middle Assyrian, reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207 B.C.). Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (VA 7989)

processions and a wine libation and sacrifice; a cuneiform caption describes the latter scene. These scenes are flanked by vignettes of the king engaged in battle and, at the very top and bottom, the hunting of wild animals. A cuneiform inscription on two sides of the monument, above the carved scenes, narrates a series of military campaigns "at the command of [the god] Ashur."

An emphasis on the mythological and ritual nature of the king's activities is represented unambiguously by the throne-room reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.) from the Northwest Palace at Nimrud. Here not only is the king accompanied by a god in a winged disk but the deity and ruler adopt an identical pose so that Ashurnasirpal is a mirror of the divine (fig. 2).[12] Narrative elements are distributed over parallel registers running the length of the throne room: Assyrian chariots advance to battle; a city is besieged; and the victorious king returns to his encampment, where the omens are taken and the defeated enemy is paraded and humiliated. However, these events do not occur in a linear sequence. The order



Fig. 2. Gypsum alabaster relief showing Ashurnasirpal II returning from a victorious campaign accompanied by a god in a winged disk. Nimrud, Northwest Palace. Neo-Assyrian, ca. 865–860 B.C. The British Museum, London (ME 124551)

established by the king on behalf of the gods, represented by the ritual celebrations and punishment of the guilty, is placed, like the processions and scene of sacrifice on the White Obelisk, at the center of the scheme rather than at the end.[13]

Ashurnasirpal states how he depicted on the palace walls his "heroic praises, in that I had gone right across highlands, lands, (and) seas, (and) the conquest of all lands."[14] It was his duty to reestablish divine order beyond the borders of Assyria, and these military campaigns were the perfect vehicle to illustrate age-old heroic qualities that could be demonstrated visually in a number of ways. The approach to battle took the army over long distances through varied landscapes that were used by the Assyrian artists to express territorial expansion and, with it, the incorporation of a potentially bountiful world.[15] This was a world where heroes of the past had reached the Mediterranean Sea and washed their weapons or had ventured into mountains to discover resources and sacred places.[16] The overcoming of physical obstacles on these military campaigns was especially important for the heroic image. Mountains presented no challenge to the king, who is shown leading his army over the traditional scale patterns; similarly, a major river, probably the Euphrates, is traversed effortlessly (fig. 3).

The parallel registers running the length of the throne room that depict narrative episodes are separated by a central band carved with the so-called "Standard Inscription," recording the king's military achievements and the founding of his new capital and palace at Kalhu (Nimrud). Guy Bunnens has proposed that Assyrian court scholars established a deliberate analogy between the content of these inscriptions and *Enūma Eliš*, the so-called "Epic of Creation."[17] Thus Ashurnasirpal had the ruins of the already ancient city of Kalhu rebuilt just as in myth the god Marduk created Babylon as his cult center following his defeat of the forces of chaos. Cosmic order was reflected in the building and layout of the Northwest Palace. This was where the rituals of state could take place and the intimate relationship between the king and the gods was maintained: for example, a route from the throne room, with its carved scenes of successful battles and animal hunts, led through a series of chambers, with images of supernatural spirits and stylized trees, to a space for ritual libations in the east wing of the palace.[18]

The Assyrian king's imposition of divine justice on those who had opposed both him and the gods is depicted in extraordinary detail in the reliefs. While this was necessary so as to preserve the memory of the royal achievements, it came with the danger of introducing into the palace, albeit in pictorial form, wicked outsiders who would disturb the perfect order of the Assyrian world.[19] Marian Feldman has argued that the sculptors and painters countered this threat by depicting the foreign people, animals, and lands in an Assyrian style as "an effective means of co-opting and neutralizing that which is threatening about alterity."[20] Thus, as she makes clear, disorder was turned into order by the incorporation of non-Assyrian elements into Assyria. At the same time, a consistently coherent Assyrian style contributed to a sense of community within the royal court. It meant the chaotic world beyond the edges of the kingdom as well as its exotic resources, such as the unusual animals depicted on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (858–824 B.C.), were Assyrianized and presented not as frightening but with the potential to submit to the authority of the Assyrian king (fig. 4).

Beyond the Assyrian heartland, kings had images of themselves carved in Assyrian style on cliff faces in remote places.[21] These depictions were intended to establish the ruler's actual presence in these foreign lands and thereby transform them into Assyrian territory. They focused not on battles or the hunt but showed the king as the unwavering center of the world as established by the gods. He is depicted in profile, standing and performing the so-called *ubāna tarāṣū*—"stretching the finger"—gesture of devotion with the raising of the right hand. From the ninth century B.C., freestanding stelae were erected on which the king gestures to his gods, who appear as symbols above him. The commemorative inscriptions that accompany the images narrate the historical context for the making of the monument, providing details of the royal heroism. As the texts would have been understandable only to the literate elite, these carvings, especially when set up in foreign lands, were intended presumably to be read by the gods and future Assyrian kings; local populations were limited to viewing only the portrait of the perfect ruler.

From the mid-eighth century B.C. onward, conquered territories were increasingly incorporated into a formal provincial system. The reliefs lining the walls of the palace at

Fig. 3. Gypsum alabaster relief showing Ashurnasirpal II crossing a river, probably the Euphrates, while on campaign. Nimrud, Northwest Palace. Neo-Assyrian, ca. 865–860 B.C. The British Museum, London (ME 124545)





Fig. 4. Two faces of inscribed limestone obelisk (Black Obelisk) showing submission of foreign rulers and tribute, including exotic animals presented to Shalmaneser III. Nimrud, Northwest Palace. Neo-Assyrian, ca. 825 B.C. The British Museum, London (ME 118885)

Khorsabad, established by Sargon II (721–705 B.C.), now focus on an ordered world with processions of tribute bearers approaching the king, as well as celebratory banquets and scenes of historically specific battles and sieges.[22] Under Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.), entire rooms in the Southwest Palace at Nineveh are devoted to individual military campaigns, with an emphasis on particular moments or a number of episodes that are juxtaposed to express movement in space and time. These detailed pictorial narratives replace the written narratives previously carved across the panels. Action and resolution, ritual and myth, are all carried through the visual image (longer annalistic texts are restricted to gateway figures or foundation documents). Indeed, these scenes can be understood in mythological terms. For example, some of Sennacherib's building projects are highlighted in a series of carved panels that decorated the walls of a courtyard at the heart of his palace at Nineveh.[23] Enormous numbers of prisoners of war and deportees from defeated regions are depicted quarrying and shaping a huge stone block and then using ropes to haul the colossal sculpture across a changing landscape. This represents a creative act at the center of the state, using resources acquired through the king's defeat of his enemies. As with the inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal noted above, there are clear parallels with *Enūma Eliš*, in which the forces of disorder are defeated by the god Ashur (in the Assyrian version of the epic), who then creates humans from the body of his enemy to become the workers who will construct his temple and work the land.[24] In this case, however, the carved images carry the message. Indeed, Sennacherib is shown directing the work, and, as noted by scholars such as Irene Winter and Tallay Ornan, he increasingly assumes properties associated with divinity in monumental art.[25] In fact, the king is no longer depicted in the reliefs engaged in battle, but he is situated at the end of narratives and presented as the ultimate source of power and justice,

overseeing life and death and bringing the narrative to a conclusion.

With a permanent Assyrian presence established from Iran to southeast Anatolia and the southern Levant through a system of provinces, the concept of a heroic divine-like king was disseminated through the empire's administrative structures to local elites. The palaces of provincial governors were decorated with carved reliefs or wall paintings and, judging from surviving examples, focus on many of the same themes as in the Assyrian capitals: triumphal processions, royal hunts, and occasionally scenes of battle, often presented in an Assyrian style.[26] This "Assyrian" identity and associated material culture was shared by an increasingly multiethnic ruling class that emerged from the mixed populations that resulted from the empire's policy of mass deportations. In addition, an "Assyrianization" of outsiders was encouraged through the presentation of portable gifts to mercenaries, messengers, hostages, and envoys.[27] Among the most portable of objects were cylinder seals, and increasingly stamp seals, carved with representations of worshipers standing before gods, as well as supernatural contests.[28] The Assyrian world was thus authorized and protected (as expressed in the act of sealing) by the divine world. But there were other, more intangible, methods of Assyrianization. It is usually presumed that certain texts, such as the so-called Letter to the God Ashur, which records the heroic achievements of Sargon II, and treaties establishing the successors to Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.), were read aloud as elements of public ceremonies.[29] Barbara N. Porter has suggested the same for the texts inscribed on Esarhaddon's stelae from Til Barsip and Sam'al (fig. 5).[30] The message of the texts would thus have reached almost everyone in the two cities. Indeed, the carved images on the stelae are no longer simply depictions of a generic Assyrian king gesturing in supplication to his gods; instead, each monument is crafted with distinct political agendas—reward for a faithful city and a warning to one of doubtful loyalties. The



Fig. 5. Basalt stele of Esarhaddon. Sam'al (Zincirli). Neo-Assyrian, ca. 670 B.C. Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (VA 2708)

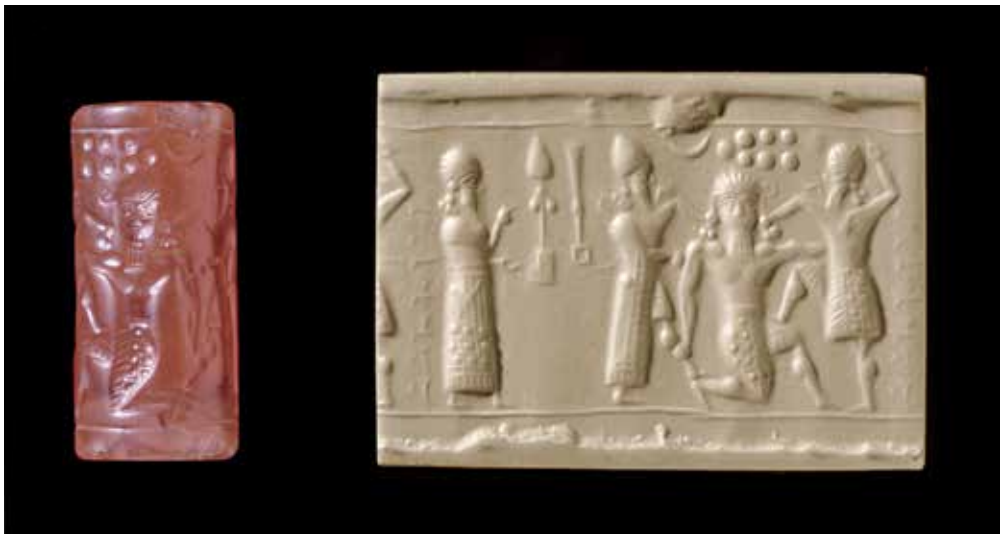


Fig. 6. Carnelian cylinder seal and modern impression with Gilgamesh and Enkidu flanking Humbaba, 8th century B.C. The British Museum, London (ME 89763)

inscription on the Sam'al stele makes a clear association between the heroic god and the triumphant king:

> I had a stele made (with) my written name and I had inscribed upon it the renown (and) heroism of the god Aššur, my lord, the mighty deeds which I had done with the help of the god Aššur, my lord, and the victory (and) booty. I set it up for all time to astonish all the enemies.[31]

Among the greatest of heroes from Mesopotamia's mythological past to which a divine-like Assyrian king could aspire was Gilgamesh. From the Late Bronze Age, the Epic of Gilgamesh became one of the best-known literary works throughout the Near East, and its popularity at the Assyrian court is suggested by the thirty-five manuscripts of the standard version that have survived from the libraries at Nineveh.[32] Although only rarely can Mesopotamian myths be equated with artistic representations, it is significant that the subjects of Tablets V and VI of the standard version, the combat with Humbaba, and Ishtar and the Bull of Heaven, are known from a number of cylinder seals and clay plaques (fig. 6).[33] By the reign of Ashurbanipal (668–627 B.C.), the epic had come to play a central role in the definition of Assyrian kingship. No longer was it only in literary texts that historical battles were portrayed as if between a supernatural hero and monstrous rivals, but the parallels between myth and reality were made explicit in reliefs from the Southwest and North Palaces at Nineveh depicting a major battle between the Assyrian and Elamite armies at Til Tuba (in about 653 B.C.).[34] The death and treatment of the Elamite king Teumman in the reliefs closely matches those of Humbaba in the epic: both individuals are killed and decapitated in a woodland setting using a mace and an ax (fig. 7), and their severed heads are carried over long distances from a mountainous foreign land to Mesopotamia, where they are displayed at gateways and consecrated to the gods.[35] The two Assyrian soldiers responsible for dispatching Teumman and his son in the reliefs presumably stand in for Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu. While it might have been expected that Ashurbanipal should play the role of the hero, by the seventh century B.C., as noted above, the Assyrian king is no

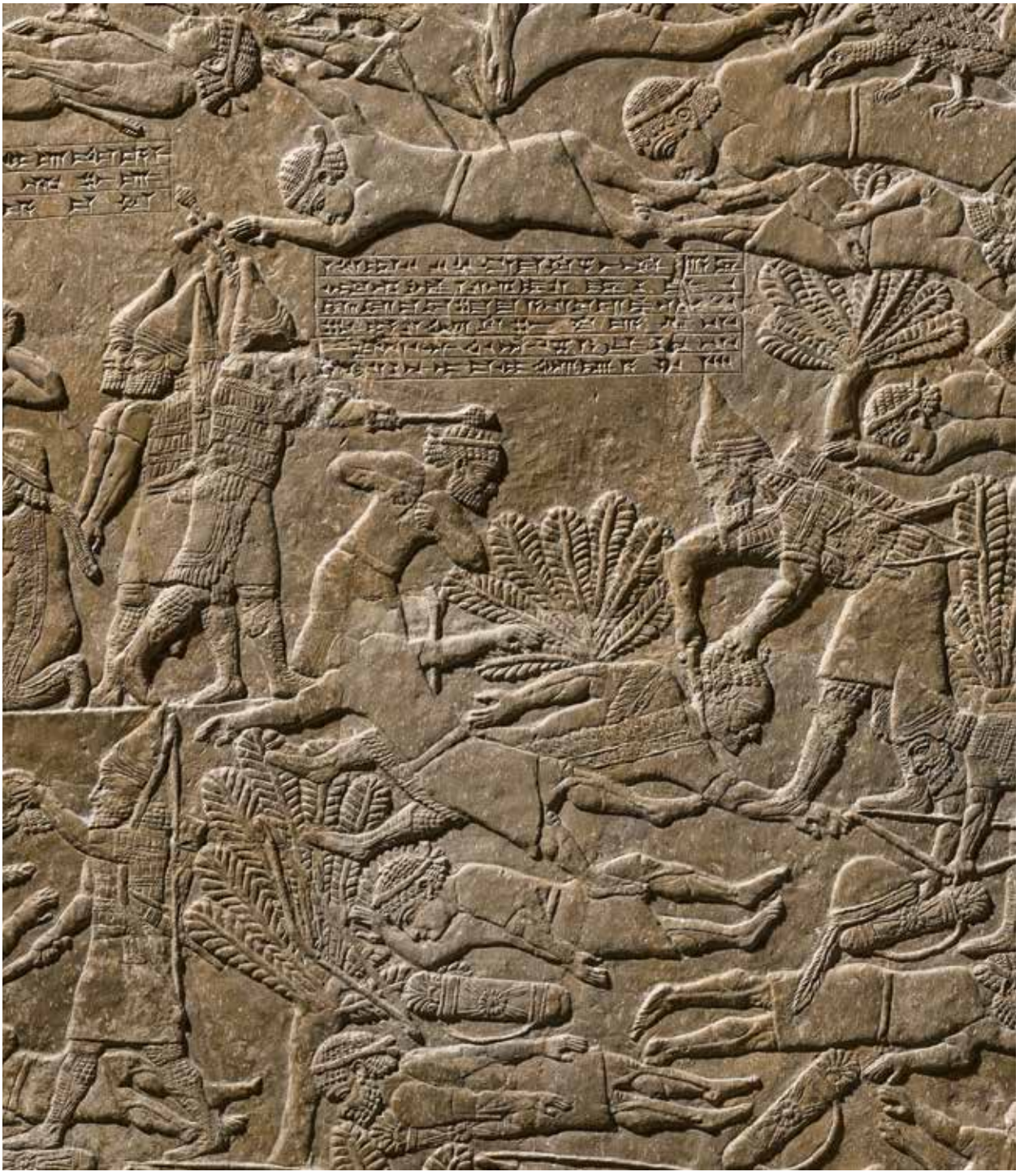


Fig. 7. Detail of limestone relief showing an Assyrian soldier cutting off the head of the Elamite king Teumman, while another kills the king's son with a mace during the battle of Til Tuba. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room XXXIII. Neo-Assyrian, ca. 650 B.C. The British Museum, London (ME 124801c)



Fig. 8. Gypsum alabaster relief showing a victory celebration with a figure wearing a lion skin. Nimrud, Central Palace. Neo-Assyrian, ca. 730–727 B.C. The British Museum, London (ME 136773)

longer portrayed in battle with humans. Nevertheless, Ashurbanipal makes the claim in the epigraph accompanying the scene of decapitation that it was he who cut off the head of the Elamite king, thus tying himself to a mythological past and its greatest hero.[36]

Ashurbanipal's reliefs and inscriptions also make a relationship clear between the ritual killing and display of Teumman and the ritual killing and presentation of lions.[37] The Assyrian king's association with the powerful lion was already established in the ninth century B.C., when the animals may have been hunted as ritual acts relating to military triumphs; figures wearing the skins of lions appear as part of the victory celebrations of both Ashurnasirpal II and Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 B.C.) (fig. 8).[38] Lions were closely connected with notions of kingship, sometimes on a mythological level.[39] Under Sargon II a striding lion was used as a pictogram, standing for LUGAL = *šarru*, king, engraved in front of the king's name on vessels of stone and glass.[40] Although the image of the king killing a lion was circulated among state administrators through the official government seal from the ninth century B.C. onward (see Seymour essay, p. 70, fig. 5), it is only with Ashurbanipal that the royal lion hunts figure significantly in both carved reliefs and wall paintings.[41] Elnathan Weissert has interpreted the famous lion-hunt reliefs from the North Palace at Nineveh as the depiction of a ritual act, a magical way of protecting the city.[42] The reliefs show a wooded hill adjacent to the hunting arena that is populated with Assyrians apparently fleeing from the scenes of slaughter. The



Fig. 9. Detail of gypsum alabaster relief showing Ashurbanipal pouring a libation, which the inscription states is wine, over the bodies of four lions he has killed. Nineveh, North Palace. Neo-Assyrian, ca. 645–640 B.C. The British Museum, London (ME 124886)

inclusion of these people, who may be overwhelmed by the king's terrifying *melammu* (radiance), suggests that an element of public performance and diplomatic encounter was intended by the event. In another series of reliefs, the royal hunt culminates with Ashurbanipal dedicating the dead animals to the warrior goddess Ishtar by pouring a libation of wine over their bodies just as he poured wine over the head of Teumman (fig. 9).[43]

Throughout the eighth and seventh centuries B.C., such notions of Assyrian kingship overlapped and interacted with other social networks across political and cultural boundaries in all geographic directions.[44] This is most evident in the contact between the Gilgamesh epic and analogous "epic traditions" of Greek-speaking poetic craftsmen. Martin West has shown how certain Gilgamesh themes made their way into the Homeric *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.[45] Recently he has proposed a hypothetical Herakles poem separate from that of Gilgamesh but drawing on Gilgamesh motifs and phrases.[46] We therefore have two cultures with a body of shared identities in which the hero moved—an Assyrian



Fig. 10. Bronze votive breastplate. Samos, Heraion, ca. 625 B.C. Archaeological Museum, Vathy, Greece (B2518)

imperial identity centered on the heroic image of the divine-like king and an identity based on the traveling heroes of the Mediterranean—and indications that these two heroic identities interacted and fused. While the Assyrian court style was aimed at controlling foreign influences, the politically fragmented Greek world was able to embrace Assyrian imagery and symbols of royal authority and power to depict local mythological figures. One extraordinary example is a bronze tympanum, found in the Ida Cave on Crete, showing an Assyrianizing lion wrestler flanked by supernatural spirits; the other is a bronze relief, dating to within a few years of the death of Ashurbanipal (627 B.C.). Dedicated at the sanctuary of Hera at Samos, this relief features the earliest representation of Herakles wearing a lion's head over his own (fig. 10).[47]

1. For general surveys of Assyrian art with extensive bibliographies, see J. Curtis and Reade 1995 and J. Curtis 2014.
2. Cohen 2005, p. 119.
3. Assmann 2011.
4. Lambert 1972, p. 67.
5. For battle as ritual, see Reade 2005b. For the concept of bringing order to the chaos of the non-Assyrian world, see Machinist 1993.
6. For Mesopotamian images as embedded in mythology, see Ataç 2010a, Selz 2014, and Collins forthcoming.
7. Assmann 2011, p. 222.
8. Heinz 2001.
9. Moortgat 1969, pp. 117–18; Collins 2008, pp. 21–22. For comparative imagery on contemporary cylinder seals, see Matthews 1990.
10. I. Winter (1981, p. 14) notes the same use of direction in the ninth-century B.C. throne-room reliefs from the Northwest Palace at Nimrud. On the Til Tuba reliefs from Nineveh, the Elamite king flees to the right, but his severed head is carried in triumph across the field to the left; see Watanabe 2004 and Collins 2008, p. 97.

11. For the dating of the obelisk, see Reade 1975. Pittman (1996) suggests that the scenes derive from wall decoration in an Assyrian throne room.
12. The deity in the winged disk may be identified as the Assyrian national god Ashur, although Shamash, the sun god of justice, is another possibility; see Collon 2001a, pp. 79–81.
13. Lumsden 2004.
14. Grayson 1991, pp. 289–90.
15. Marcus 1987, 1995; Thomason 2001.
16. Harmanşah 2007; Shafer 2007.
17. Bunnens 2006.
18. Russell 1998b; Collins 2010, pp. 187–88.
19. In Mesopotamia, images could be thought of as a form of essential presence of the thing represented. Thus the *ṣalmu* ("image") of the king acted as his double; see Bahrani 2003, p. 123.
20. Feldman 2014a, pp. 92–93.
21. Harmanşah 2007.
22. Albenda 1986.
23. Barnett et al. 1998, pls. 91, 96–126, 414–23.
24. Noegel 2007. For literary allusions to *Enūma Eliš* in Sennacherib's account of the battle of Halule, see Weissert 1997a.
25. Ornan 2007; I. Winter 2008.
26. Stone reliefs are known from Arslan Tash (see Albenda 1988) and wall paintings from Tell Ahmar (see Parrot 1961, pls. 109–20, pp. 332–47).
27. Gunter 2009, pp. 124–54.
28. Collon 2001a.
29. A. Oppenheim (1960, p. 143) first suggested that the letter was read aloud as an element of a public victory ceremony. Such a scenario seems likely but remains hypothetical. For the Letter to Ashur, see ibid., Fales 1991, and Kravitz 2003. For the succession treaties, see Wiseman 1958 and Fales 2012.
30. Porter 2000.
31. Leichty 2011, p. 186.
32. George 1999.
33. Lambert 1987.
34. For the Southwest Palace reliefs, see Barnett et al. 1998, pls. 286–319; for the North Palace, see Barnett 1976, pp. 42–43, pls. XXIII–XV.
35. Bonatz 2004a.
36. Barnett et al. 1998, p. 95.
37. For the inscriptions, see Russell 1999, p. 161: text A, section 14, and note b. The treatment of Teumman has been recognized as analogous in Assyrian art to the royal hunt; see Pongratz-Leisten 2007.
38. Reade 2005b, p. 20, figs. 18, 19. The lion-garbed figures may be related to the god La-tarāk; see Black and Green 1992, pp. 33, 116.
39. Watanabe 1998; Ataç 2010a, p. 93.
40. Finkel and Reade 1996, p. 249. For examples of inscribed objects, see J. Curtis and Reade 1995, pp. 146, 148.
41. For the government seal, see Millard 1965 and 1978, Nadali 2011, and Radner 2008. For the Nineveh lion-hunt reliefs, see Barnett 1976, pls. VI–XIII, XLIX, LI, LVI, LVII. There is debate over the dating of the lion-hunt paintings from the Assyrian palace at Til Barsip; see Albenda 2005, pp. 71–73; Reade 2005b, p. 24; and I. Winter 2007, p. 379.
42. Weissert 1997b.
43. Reade 2005b, p. 21, fig. 20; note 37 above.
44. For an example of the emulation of Assyrian court models at Hasanlu, Iran, see Gunter 2009, pp. 40–49.
45. West 1997.
46. Martin L. West, "Gilgamesh and Homer: The Missing Link," paper delivered at "Wandering Myths: Transcultural Uses of Myth in the Ancient World," Somerville College, University of Oxford, April 14–16, 2014.
47. For the bronze tympanum, see J. Curtis 1994b, pp. 1–2, and Aruz et al. 2014, pp. 118–19, fig. 3.5; for the Samos bronze, see Knapp and van Dommelen 2014, p. 292, fig. 16.7.