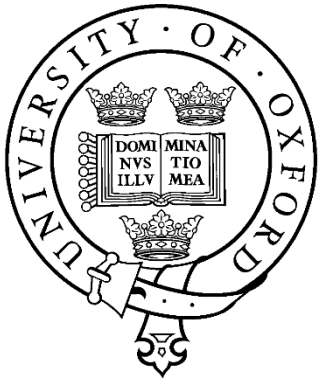
Divine Kinship at the Sargonid Royal Court



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Abstract

This thesis explores the visual and textual formulation of kingship in Assyria in terms of relationships of kinship, including the divine and the royal family, during the reigns of Sargon II (r. 721–705 BC), Sennacherib (r. 704–681 BC), Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 BC) and Aššurbanipal (r. 668–ca. 631 BC). While prior scholarship has considered the relationship of the king, or even of other royal family members, with the divine and questions of royal status, the thesis considers the formulation of royal family and divine relationships in relation to each other. One aim of the thesis is to explore the relative formulation of the relationship of the king and crown prince in the Sargonid period, which is described in the thesis as a 'theologised relationship'. Through four core chapters arranged chronologically and focused mostly on monumental sites and works, the relationship is illuminated by situating it in relation to other divine and royal relationships, demonstrating the value of a relational focus. A second aim is to establish that the form of Sargonid kingship that is revealed is distinct from earlier models. To this end, the introductory chapter explores the prior Mesopotamian context, beginning with the third millennium BC examples that greatly influenced the development of Assyrian kingship as well as modern scholarly definitions. The overarching argument of the thesis is that Sargonid kingship, while building on and transforming earlier kingship models, was formulated on the basis of a broader relational framework of being in kinship with the divine. The concluding chapter returns to questions of status and considers the relationship of Sargonid kingship to earlier kingship models with the acquired perspective, suggesting that, by the end of the period studied, the relationship of the king with the divine is formulated through royal family relationships.

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Notes and Abbreviations

The names of the first four Sargonid kings, who are the focus of this thesis, are rendered, mostly following convention, as Sargon II (Šarru-ukīn), Sennacherib (Sīn-aḫḫē-erība), Esarhaddon (Aššūr-aḫu-iddina) and Aššurbanipal (Aššūr-bāni-apli). Names of other persons and places pertaining to this period are generally rendered in accordance with Radner, K., and H. Baker, eds. 1998–2017. *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*. 4 vols. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project.

Dates for the Neo-Assyrian period follow the chronology outlined in Radner, K., N. Moeller, and D. T. Potts, eds. 2023. *The Oxford History of the Ancient Near East. Volume IV: The Age of Assyria*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Unless otherwise stated, translations from Akkadian to English are my own and photographs included in the Figures are my own.

I have used the following abbreviations for the References:

Bird and Fish	Mittermayer, C. 2019. '*Vogel und Fisch*'. In *Was Sprach der eine Zum Anderen?: Argumentationsformen in Den Sumerischen Rangstreitgesprächen*, edited by C. Mittermayer, 67–108. Untersuchungen Zur Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie 15. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter.
CAD R	Reiner, E., and R. D. Biggs, eds. 1999. *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. Vol. 14, R. Chicago: The Oriental Institute.
Ctesias F 1b	Stronk, J. P. 2010. *Ctesias' Persian History. Part I: Introduction, Text, and Translation*. Reihe Geschichte 2. Düsseldorf: Wellem Verlag.

CUSAS 38	Metcalf, C. 2019. *Sumerian Literary Texts in the Schøyen Collection*. *Volume 1: Literary Sources on Old Babylonian Religion*. Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology 38. University Park: Eisenbrauns.
Justin Book 1	Yardley, J. C., and W. Heckel, eds. 1994. *Justin: Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*. American Philological Association Classical Resources Series 9. Atlanta: Scholars Press.
LBL Enūma eliš	Heinrich, A. C., and S. Helle. 2024. 'Enuma Elish'. In *Enuma Elish: The Babylonian Epic of Creation*, edited by J. Haubold, S. Helle, E. Jiménez, and S. Wisnom, 25–96. The Library of Babylonian Literature 1. London: Bloomsbury.
RIMA 2	Grayson, A. K. 1991. *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (1114–859 BC)*. The Rowyal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Assyrian Periods 2. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
RIME 1	Frayne, D. R. 2008. *Presargonic Period (2700–2350 BC)*. The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Early Periods 1. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
RIME 2	Frayne, D. R. 1993. *Sargonic and Gutian Periods (2234-2113 BC)*. The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Early Periods 2. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
RIME 3/1	Edzard, D. O. 1997. *Gudea and His Dynasty. The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Early Periods* 3/1. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
RIME 4	Frayne, D. R. 1990. *Old Babylonian Period (2003-1595 BC)*. The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Early Periods 4. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
RINAP 1	Tadmor, H., and S. Yamada. 2011. *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC) and Shalmaneser V (726-722 BC), Kings of Assyria*. The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 1. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.

RINAP 2	Frame, G. 2021. *The Royal Inscriptions of Sargon II, King of Assyria (721–705 BC).* The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 2. University Park: Eisenbrauns.
RINAP 3/1	Grayson, A. K., and J. Novotny. 2012. *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC), Part 1.* The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 3/1. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
RINAP 3/2	Grayson, A. K., and J. Novotny. 2014. *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC), Part 2*. The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 3/2. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
RINAP 4	Leichty, E. 2011. *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC).* The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 4. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
RINAP 5/1	Jeffers, J., and J. Novotny. 2018. *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*. The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 5/1. München: Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität.
RINAP 5/2	Jeffers, J., and J. Novotny. 2023. *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 2*. The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 5/2. University Park: Eisenbrauns.
SAA 1	Parpola, S. 1987. *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I: Letters from Assyria and the West*. State Archives of Assyria 1. Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project.
SAA 2	Parpola, S., and K. Watanabe. 1988. *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*. State Archives of Assyria 2. Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project.

SAA 3	Livingstone, A. 1989. *Assyrian Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*. State Archives of Assyria 3. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
SAA 6	Kwasman, T., and S. Parpola. 1991. *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh, Part I: Tiglath-Pileser III through Esarhaddon*. State Archives of Assyria 6. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
SAA 7	Fales, F. M., and J. N. Postgate. 1992. *Imperial Administrative Records, Part I: Palace and Temple Administration*. State Archives of Assyria 7. Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text-Corpus Project.
SAA 9	Parpola, S. 1997. *Assyrian Prophecies*. State Archives of Assyria 9. Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text-Corpus Project.
SAA 10	Parpola, S. 1993b. *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*. State Archives of Assyria 10. Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project.
SAA 11	Fales, F. M., and J. N. Postgate. 1995. *Imperial Administrative Records, Part 2: Provincial and Military Administration.* State Archives of Assyria 11. Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text-Corpus Project.
SAA 12	Kataja, L., and R. M. Whiting. 1995. *Grants, Decrees and Gifts of the Neo-Assyrian Period*. State Archives of Assyria 12. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
SAA 13	Cole, S. W., and P. Machinist. 1998. *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Priests to Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*. State Archives of Assyria 13. Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project.
SAA 20	Parpola, S. 2017. *Assyrian Royal Rituals and Cultic Texts*. State Archives of Assyria 20. Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project.
SB Gilgameš	George, A. 2003. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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At its core, this thesis is about relationships, and it could not have been written without the unwavering support of my cherished circle of family and friends. I dedicate this work to them, and especially to the memory of my sister, Laura, and of my grandmother, Constance, with all my love and gratitude.

Chapter I

Introduction

In the eighth and seventh centuries BC, the kings of Assyria's Sargonid dynasty came to rule over a vast empire reaching out from their royal centres, located in today's northern Iraq, as far as the Zagros Mountains in the east and the Nile Valley in the west. Prior scholarship has established that their kingship was formulated, both visually and textually, in close relationship with divinity, and that individual kings claimed intimate and familial relationships with deities. On these grounds, Sargonid kingship has often been understood in relation to forms of kingship that had emerged in Assyria before the eighth century BC. This thesis reveals a distinct Sargonid form of kingship that builds on and transforms these earlier models, arguing that the relationship between the kingship and divinity came to be formulated on the basis of a broader relational framework.

Through four core chapters arranged chronologically and focused on monumental sites and works dated to the reigns of Sargon II (r. 721–705 BC), Sennacherib (r. 704–681 BC), Esarhaddon (r. 680–669 BC) and Aššurbanipal (r. 668–ca. 631 BC), I will make the case that the connection between the kingship and divinity came to be formulated not only in terms of the monarch's individual relationship with deities, or even other individual royal family member relationships with deities, but by means of a nexus of relationships of kinship, including both royal familial and divine familial relationships. As I will make this case in part by using language that will be familiar generally but that has been defined in various ways in the context of Ancient Near Eastern Studies, it is first necessary to discuss terms, which I will do by providing a relevant overview of the earlier and wider picture.

Kingship and Divinity in Mesopotamia Prior to the Sargonids

Kingship and divinity are profoundly interrelated concepts.[1] As David Graeber and Marshall Sahlins observe in their anthropological study (2017, 3): 'In the course of human history, royal power has been derivative of and dependent on divine power. Indeed, no less in stateless societies than in major kingdoms, the human authorities emulate the ruling cosmic powers—if in a reduced form.' With regards to the early 'major kingdoms', and since Sir James Frazer's foundational study (1911–1915, 3rd ed., 12 vols.), which was based on the premise that the modern era had inherited certain ancient cosmic worldviews, the nature and scope of royal emulation of divine power has been considered in a broad range of scholarly disciplines.[2] Of particular relevance to the present exploration, Frazer's thesis that Mesopotamian kings, among kings of other ancient cultures, celebrated a 'sacred marriage' involving the ritual union of a goddess and a human king, who was sacrificed as a 'god who annually died and rose again' in order to ensure the continued renewal of nature's cycles, has been highly, and immediately, influential for the fields of Assyriology and, more broadly, Ancient Near Eastern Studies.[3]

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[1] While I understand divinity, the main term to contextualise here, more generally as the quality of being divine, I refer to kingship per Moin and Strathern (2022, 1): 'a form of politics in which a venerated leader is set apart from and above the group and imbued with extraordinary power (a power over life and death)'.

[2] In the introduction to the proceedings volume of a conference held in 2022 on the subject of Frazer's popular and scholarly influence, 'religious studies and related disciplines like history, classics, Assyriology and biblical studies' were identified as being of central relevance (Tully and Budin 2024, 2).

[3] Frazer 1911–1915, pt. 1, vol. 2, ch. 12 and pt. 4, vol. 1, ch. 1. In addition to Frazer, see, for instance, the following early studies: Frankfort et al. 1946; Gadd 1948; Moortgat 1949. Frazer's influence on the study of kingship and divinity in Assyriology has been discussed recently in Pongratz-Leisten 2023a.

In another important early contribution, Henri Frankfort (1948) tempered Frazer's universalising understanding of the formulation of the relationship between kingship and divinity in his own comparative study of Egypt and Mesopotamia, forming a paradigmatic contrast. Drawing clear distinctions between these contexts, Frankfort made the case that, while 'the fundamental concept of Egyptian kingship [was] that Pharaoh was of divine essence, a god incarnate', to be king in Mesopotamia meant, aside from a few anomalous cases, only being a 'great man'.[4] Frankfort's influence, like Frazer's, cannot be overstated and is reflected in Jerrold Cooper's (2008, 261) more recent assessment that: 'As several contributors have noted, kingship in Mesopotamia was always sacred, but only rarely divine'. However, as Frankfort (1948, 287) to some extent anticipated by declaring that 'neither Egypt nor Mesopotamia knew "divine kingship" in the Frazerian sense', scholars have defined and applied terms such as 'the divine' and 'the sacred' to Mesopotamian formulations of kingship in different ways, and alongside other terms, as the following exploration of historical examples will show.

Royal monuments, which frequently combine sculpted images with inscribed text in enduring stone and at a massive scale, have traditionally been celebrated as important articulations of the relationship between kingship and divinity.[5] Among the most celebrated

[4] Frankfort 1948, 5-6. This characterisation derives from lugal, a Sumerian term for 'king' that is more directly rendered as 'great man'. Other emic terms used for figures that are identified conventionally today as 'ruler' include Sumerian en and ensi and, for king, Akkadian *šarrum*. The historical relationship between and development of the Sumerian terms as royal and priestly, as well as hierarchised, titles has notably been discussed by Jacobsen (1943 and 1957). For more up to date discussions see Klein and Sefati 2020a and 2020b. In this thesis, I mostly use the terms king and ruler to refer to the representative leader of a society for the sake of simplicity and comparison.

[5] See, for instance, the observation by Groenewegen-Frankfort (1951, 22-23) that monuments 'penetrate the impermanent, to stress the transcendent significance of human action' and the response by Winter (1985, 28). However, this is true for Mesopotamian art across media, material and scale and, indeed, Mesopotamian

of monuments is the limestone Victory Stele of Narām-Sîn of Akkad (r. 2253–2198 BC), now held in the Louvre Museum in Paris (SB 4), which commemorates his defeat of the Lullubi people of the Zagros (fig. 1).[6] The stele was unearthed in 1896 as part of the expedition of J. De Morgan to Susa, where it had been taken from Sippar in the 12th century BC as a war prize by Šutruk-Nahhunte of Elam, who also added his name to the monument's inscription. Strikingly, the writing of Narām-Sîn's name in the account of his victory given in the inscription is preceded by the determinative that is used to mark divinity in Sumerian and Akkadian cuneiform writing systems.[7] Insofar as it is possible to say, Narām-Sîn is the first historical king whose name was written with this determinative ('^{d}Narām-Sîn').[8]

The main iconic indicator of Narām-Sîn's divinity is the crown or cap he wears on the stele and, in this sense, Frankfort (1948, 225) was correct to state that 'no other Mesopotamian monument expresses in formal language the divinity of kingship'.[9] It incorporates one pair of bull horns, which are otherwise worn by deities in Mesopotamian

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kings formulated their rule across diverse media, material and scale (see notably Bahrani 2014). While cognisant of this, my focus here will be on the monumental.

[6] For a brief overview of Narām-Sîn's reign and further references see Schrakamp 2020, 632-634. Dates for the third millennium BC follow the Middle Chronology minus eight years (see Sallaberger and Schrakamp 2015, 301-303).

[7] RIME 2 Narām-Sîn 31, 1. This star-shaped cuneiform sign can either be read as a determinative, i.e., '^{d}' (dingir) or 'sky' (an).

[8] Narām-Sîn's name was written with the divine determinative in many contexts (see also, for example, RIME 2 Narām-Sîn 35, 1).

[9] A statue of Puzur-Ištar of Mari, who ruled at the turn of the second millennium BC, depicts him with horns but these seem to have been added long after his reign (see Blocher 1999), calling into question how they should be understood.

imagery, although they typically wear multiple tiers of horns.[10] Léon Heuzey (1898, 678), who published an early report documenting the monument's discovery at Susa, already questioned whether Narām-Sîn should be understood as a king or a god on account of it.[11] More recently scholars have argued that the stele serves to negotiate Narām-Sîn's divine status, depicting him with a strong and attractive body that reflects his fitness to rule (Winter 1996) and naturalises his control over life and death (Bahrani 2008). This is while he is, at the same time, depicted wearing amuletic jewellery that charges his body with divine protection and looks up to celestial symbols that signal both divine approval and interdependence.[12]

There is written evidence that the divine was conceptualised in celestial form in ancient Mesopotamia from as early as the fourth millennium BC, when administrative texts written in Sumerian from the city of Uruk (modern Warka) began to document offerings to the goddess Inana as the 'morning and evening star' (^{d}inana-húd and ^{d}inana-sig); the bright planet Venus. At the same time, Inana was referred to as 'prince' (^{d}inana-nun) in these texts. In so-called 'god lists' from the cities of Fāra and Abū Ṣalābīkh, the earliest of which are dated to the early part of the third millennium BC, Inana, alongside hundreds of other deities, was similarly referred to with rulership titles and arranged into relationships of

[10] On the attestation, historical development and interpretation of the divine horned crown or cap see, notably, Van Buren 1943, Furlong 1987 and Asher-Greve 1995–1996.

[11] 'Le vainqueur est-il un dieu ou un roi déifié…?'. Heuzey (1898, 677) measured the monument to be 2 m tall and 1.05 m wide.

[12] See also, for example, Winter 1997; Winter 2004; Braun-Holzinger 2007; Cooper 2008; Westenholz 2008; Winter 2008b; Brisch 2013; Bahrani 2014; Ornan 2014; Porter 2014; Bahrani 2017; Eppihimer 2019; Brisch 2022.

kinship.[13] The god lists also incorporate human social structures and divine determinatives are used to introduce these. Included structuring components are divine emblems (e.g., '^{d}the nose-rope'; '^{d}the sceptre'), divine professions (e.g., '^{d}the temple brick-maker'; '^{d}the leader of the land'), and divine properties (e.g., '^{d}the statue'; '^{d}the radiance').[14]

The question as to how these facets of polytheistic divinity, which the Uruk administrative texts and Fāra and Abū Ṣalābīkh god lists serve only to provide an early and limited window into, might be understood to relate to one another has, traditionally, posed methodological challenges. As the view of these textual examples shows, reconstructing a general picture requires synthesising different types of evidence from different cultural contexts, notably leading Leo Oppenheim (1977, rev. ed., ch. 4) to reject the validity of this endeavour altogether. Scholars previously adopted evolutionary approaches, arguing that divinity was recognised first as immanent in nature before being anthropomorphised with the development of urban societies.[15] For the purposes of this discussion, it is useful to foreground Beate Pongratz-Leisten's recent reading of Mesopotamian divinity as an 'integrated system of action', including deities that 'operated according to a human sociomorphic model' in addition to 'multiple materialized forms of presence'.[16]

The example of Narām-Sîn well illustrates this multifaceted concept of divinity. A text inscribed on a copper statue base attributed to Narām-Sîn from the village of Basetki,

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[13] See discussion of the administrative texts and god lists in Selz 2008, 15-17 and Pongratz-Leisten 2024, 834.

[14] See notably Selz 1997.

[15] See notably Jacobsen 1976. For a recent anthropological study of immanentist cultures, see Sahlins 2022.

[16] See notably Pongratz-Leisten 2022b and 2023b. For foundational earlier studies, see, in addition to Selz 1997 cited above, for instance, Porter 2000; Porter 2006; Porter 2009; Rochberg 2009; Vantisphout 2009.

which is now housed in the Iraq Museum in Baghdad, explains how the gods come together to bestow divinity upon Narām-Sîn after he wins nine military victories in a year.[17] All this is made possible because of a relationship; 'the love which the goddess Aštar (i.e., Ištar, the Akkadian version of Inana) showed him'.[18] This relationship may be depicted on a controversial stone mould (fig. 2) that is unprovenanced and depicts a goddess taking the king by the hand and presenting captured enemies connected to her ring via ropes attached to their noses (i.e., the nose-rope), which is a divine action.[19] Both goddess and king sit on a high terrace which, as Donald Hansen (2002, 98) notably suggests, might 'embody the sacred precincts of both Naram-Sin and Ishtar now that he is divine', yet her sole possession of the rope, grander throne, dress and confrontation of the viewer *en face* indicates her relative superiority.[20]

The theme of the goddess' delivery of enemies to the king is also visualised, after the rule of the dynasty of Akkad, on sculptural reliefs carved into the cliffs of the Zagros Mountains that are dated to the turn of the second millennium BC, including the rock relief of Anubanini of Lullubum that depicts Ištar wielding the nose-rope (fig. 3).[21] In the rock

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[17] RIME 2 Narām-Sîn 10.

[18] RIME 2 Narām-Sîn 10, 8-9 (translation Frayne 1993; *in ri-ma-ti* ^{d}INANNA *tar-a-mu-su*$_4$). Narām-Sîn is otherwise described as Ištar's *mut* ('spouse'). See, for example, RIME 2 Narām-Sîn 1, 8.

[19] See notably Hansen 2002 and Hansen 2003. Braun-Holzinger 2007, 93-94 argues that the mould is a forgery whereas Steinkeller 2017, 158-164 takes it as genuine. While it is difficult to decide either way the validity of this object on the basis of iconography alone, it is insightful to contemplate this visualisation of Narām-Sîn's kingship alongside the more definite textual and visual evidence from his reign.

[20] Narām-Sîn elsewhere possesses the rope to support his service to the goddess. See RIME 2 Narām-Sîn 3, iv 33-36, which describes how the rope was bestowed to him by the deity Enlil for this purpose. On the frontal gaze of the goddess also see Colbow 1991, 79-83 and Bahrani 2001, 131-133.

[21] The relief's inscription is published as RIME 4 Anubanini 1. For a recent overview of the reign of Anubanini see De Graef 2022, 439-442

relief of Iddin-Sîn of Simurrum, the goddess is depicted extending a sceptre.[22] While both Anubanini and Iddin-Sîn are depicted treading the enemy's belly before the goddess, their kingships are formulated differently in terms of royal divinity. Only Iddin-Sîn's name is inscribed with the determinative for divinity ('^{d}Iddin-Sîn'), witnessing the gradual cessation of this practice in Mesopotamia during the second millennium BC.[23] Neither king is depicted with a horned cap. However, Iddin-Sîn wears a brimmed hat with lunar symbols. While this hat has not been read as divine, it is thought to 'align' Iddin-Sîn visually with his namesake, the moon deity Sîn (Ornan 2014, 579).

In such instances where Mesopotamian kingship is neither formulated in relation to the divine determinative nor a horned cap, which represent the majority of cases, scholars frequently describe kings as sacred rather than divine.[24] In this sense, distinctions have also been drawn between the institution of kingship, which is said to descend from the heavens in the Sumerian King List, and kings themselves, whom the gods select to inhabit its office.[25] There is no unanimous agreement as to which terms best describe the institution of kingship itself.[26] In terms of the status of the king, Émile Durkheim's (1915) influential sociological definition of the sacred as 'set apart and forbidden' fits with the prevalent view

[22] The inscription is published as RIME 4 Iddin-Sîn 1. The relief is now held in Jerusalem (71.73.248).

[23] See discussion and further references for divine determinatives in the early second millennium BC in Dalley 2021, 73 fn. 99, 100. Also see the relevant discussion in Clancier 2022, 15-18.

[24] For example, Winter 2008b; Brisch 2013; Thomason 2016; Clancier 2022.

[25] The oldest manuscript of the Sumerian King List dates to the turn of the second millennium BC (see Steinkeller 2003). For a concise discussion of transmission history and further references see Gabriel 2023.

[26] Compare, for example, Ornan (2014, 570), who uses the term 'sanctified', and Clancier (2022, 13), who relates the descent of kingship from heaven to 'divine right' of kings.

that Mesopotamian kings, even if not divine, formulate their rule typically in terms of roles and responsibilities that separate them from their subjects.[27] However, as the comparison of the Anubanini and Iddin-Sîn rock reliefs shows, kingship is formulated in close relation to divinity regardless as to whether kings are thought as divine or sacred in the above terms.

Narām-Sîn is the first Mesopotamian king to use the divine determinative and wear the horned cap on his Victory Stele. Yet the articulation of his defeat of the Lullubi is considered to be anticipated by the stele of Eanatum of Lagaš (r. ca. 2400 BC), which commemorates a victory of Lagaš in a border conflict against its neighbour state, Umma.[28] The stele survives in fragments, which are displayed in the Louvre as a partial reconstruction (AO 50).[29] Irene Winter (1985) has argued that the obverse and reverse imagery and inscription convey distinct but interrelated narratives.[30] Hence, a dramatically upscaled figure identified as the warrior deity Ninĝirsu grasps a mace and a net filled with captives on the obverse (fig. 4), and thus, 'The act of controlling death is', ultimately, 'attributed to the god, not the ruler' (Bahrani 2008, 151). Yet, at the same time, text placed

[27] As Mitchell and Melville (2012, 19) explain: 'How a king and his subjects expressed the relationship of ruling, and how they negotiated the boundaries of it, was culturally and temporally determined'. This is often reflected in the different titles adopted by kings, as addressed above in fn. 4. For a useful overview of the difference in conceptualisation of kingship in northern and southern Mesopotamia, see Brisch 2022, 78.

[28] For a useful summary of the events surrounding the Lagaš-Umma-conflict and further references, see Bartash 2020, 552-556.

[29] The fragments were published in Sarzec 1884–1912, pls. 3-4. See Heuzey and Thureau-Dangin 1909 as well as Barrelet 1970 on the early reconstruction of the fragments. The inscription is published as RIME 1 Eanatum 1.

[30] See also, for instance, Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951; Winter 1986; Pongratz-Leisten 2003; Selz 2008; Winter 2008b; Ornan 2014; Bahrani 2017; Van Dijk-Coombes 2017; Collins 2019; Brisch 2022.

on the reverse near to two smaller depictions of Eanatum in military scenarios nuances this clear visual message, claiming that the ruler secures military victories for the deity.[31]

Cooper (2008, 261) casts Eanatum as a paragon of sacred rather than divine rulership even while acknowledging that his stele's inscription describes the involvement of deities in his conception, birth and infancy: Ninĝirsu placed the semen in the womb; Inana midwived the delivery, Ninhursaĝ suckled the baby.[32] This trope is, nevertheless, well attested for Mesopotamian rulers who did not take the divine determinative. Claudia Suter (2015, 522) argues that Gudea of Lagaš, who is represented in some of his many black stone statues at a superhuman scale, 'alluded to hegemonic power and godlikeness in implicit ways' in part because he falls into this latter category.[33] Comparably, Tallay Ornan (2014, 570-571) has described such formulations, alongside 'appropriations of divine attributes and insignia by kings', 'homology of body gestures between gods and kings', 'allusions to legendary accounts of archetypal kings', and the position and direction faced of a royal figure in a composition as 'indirect markers that may hint or allude to divine-like' status.[34]

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[31] RIME 1 Eanatum 1, Cartouche A and Cartouche B.

[32] RIME 1 Eanatum 1, iv, 9-29.

[33] See, for example, RIME 3/1 Gudea Statue D, i 11-19. See the foundational study of Gudea's physical form in Winter 1989.

[34] Ornan (2014, 578) argues that allusions to divine affinity and descent are mostly mentioned textually and not visually in Mesopotamia, although suggesting that the stele of Ur-Namma, founder of the Third Dynasty of Ur (Ur III) might make a very subtle allusion to his divine descent, otherwise mentioned in textual sources, because the king is depicted in the monument's top register before an image of the goddess Ningal sitting on the lap of her consort Nana. The stele is preserved only in highly fragmented form, although it has been reconstructed to some degree and is currently on view in the Penn Museum in Philadelphia (B16676). For a catalogue of the fragments see Canby 2001.

This apparent slipperiness in the formulation of kingship in relation to divinity was historicised by Cooper and others who participated in the first major scholarly meeting on this topic since the publication of Frazer's study (Brisch, ed. 2008).[35] Use of the divine determinative by supposed divine kings was explained as an ideological response to expansionist state policies, while other, supposedly sacred, kings were situated within humbler contexts and with less power.[36] Ornan (2014, 570) attributed use of only 'indirect markers' to situations of 'rigorous limitations on royal deification', contrasting the divine determinative as a bold and 'direct means' of signalling that a king is 'deified'. As such, Ornan presents another binary classification system for theorising the relationship between kingship and divinity, comparable to that of the divine and the sacred. However, it must be observed that even 'direct' as defined in this sense is slippery; signalling either 'a divine **or** (emphasis mine) quasi-divine category'; only the 'lowest tier of the divine hierarchy'.

Contributing to the same proceedings volume for which Cooper wrote the closing response, Selz (2008, 13) provided a salient critique of what he describes as Aristotelian 'rigid categorization' in scholarship; 'the general distinction between a sacred versus a divine kingship' in Assyriology, which can be applied equally to Ornan's later distinction between direct and indirect markers of royal divinity. In addition to his own earlier study of the nature of polytheistic divinity in Mesopotamia cited above (Selz 1997), Selz's critique built on another of his earlier arguments that personhood in Mesopotamia was thought of as

[35] This was in part seen as a corrective to earlier approaches, including Frankfort's (1948), which were more concerned with theological interpretation. Ataç (2008) explores how this earlier focus (also see, for instance, Van Buren 1933; Frankfort 1939; Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951) gave way to socio-political enquiries in the 1970s. Bahrani (2003) has notably critiqued what remains the prevalent tendency in scholarship to interpret Mesopotamian sources solely as political propaganda.

[36] See in particular Cooper 2008; Michalowski 2008; Reichel 2008; Winter 2008b. See also Jones 2020.

a composite entity rather than in terms of Platonic dualism (Selz 2003). As emblems, professions, and properties were divine, Selz argued that formulations of kingship in relation to them might be seen to co-construct royal divinity and establish royal membership in the category of the divine through the notion of 'gradience' as defined in the cognitive sciences within the framework of Eleanor Rosch's (1978) prototype theory.

This more relative system of classification by 'gradience' or, put more simply, in terms of a king's ability to be considered in comparison with the concept of the divine by constructed composition rather than by binary distinction, allows for a more expansive understanding of formulations of kingship in terms of divinity. This is appropriate for the third millennium BC context because, as Selz (2008, 15-17) points out himself, neither the divine determinative nor tiers of horns were always used in the writing of deities' names or for images depicting deities in this period. Furthermore, the determinative is not even used before Narām-Sîn's name in the Basetki monument inscription discussed above, even though this text outlines the gods' bestowal of his divinity. The question posed above as to whether the institution of kingship, which is said to descend from heaven, is to be thought of as divine or sacred might, therefore, be dismissed if one accepts that such debates are not always decided by the presence or absence of certain individual markers of divinity.

Attempting to turn away from the endeavour to fix the precise place of kingship in relation to divinity, whether on a divine-sacred or direct-indirect binary or spectrum, scholars have described formulations of kingship in terms of 'sacralising strategies'. Pongratz-Leisten (2003) identifies the trope of the king as the child of a goddess as a prominent such strategy attested from earliest to late periods, to which the above comparison of Eanatum and Gudea provides an early view, while understanding the

interrelated trope of the king as the lover of a goddess to have peaked in prominence during the reigns of the kings of the Ur III and Isin dynasties.[37] A text referred to today as Šulgi X, for example, describes the intimate encounter of Inana and Šulgi of Ur (r. 2092– 2045 BC), who styled his name with the divine determinative from at least the time of his 21st regnal year until his 48th and last year on earth, while also referring to Šulgi as the son of the goddess Ninsun, who was otherwise the mother of the legendary king of Uruk, Gilgameš.[38]

In part based on newly translated textual sources, Christopher Metcalf (2024, 76) has recently shown through his diachronic study of the relationship of Inana and the herdsman Dumuzi, which he describes as a 'story-pattern' for human kingship, that the trope of the king as the lover of the goddess in fact 'remained productive, and relevant for the conception of Mesopotamian kingship, until well into the first millennium BC.' Metcalf (2024, 76-77), furthermore, also diverges from Pongratz-Leisten in how he describes such relationships, using the term theogamy to define 'a marriage or sexual union that involves at least one divine party'; Pongratz-Leisten, on the other hand, defines the union of deities and kings as 'hierogamy', separating them from 'theogamy', which she defines as a union between deities.[39] Despite the turn to sacralising strategies, then, at the heart of Pongratz-

[37] See Garfinkle 2022 for a useful overview of the Ur III period and Wagensonner 2022 for the kings of Isin. The language of 'sacralising strategies' is also used in Pongratz-Leisten 2015 and 2023a.

[38] For a recent edition of this text, see Attinger 2022. An administrative text dated to Šulgi's forty-eighth regnal year styles his name with this determinative and describes his death as a heavenly ascent (see discussion and references in Steinkeller 2013). The Epic of Gilgameš will be discussed in ch. II of this thesis. For now, note the recent discussion by Peterson (2022), who considers Gilgameš episodes as a possible background to a coronation ritual text written in Sumerian.

[39] See Pongratz-Leisten 2003, 2008 and 2023a.

Leisten's move to distinguish these relationships is still apparently the issue as to whether or not the king participating in the relationship with the deity is a god himself.

Indeed, since the treatment of the sacred marriage topic by Frazer, scholars have long debated the end to which unions between Inana and the king were enacted via ritual in Mesopotamia during the late third and early second millennia BC, if they were enacted, and what these ritual unions meant for the status of the king in terms of divinity.[40] Important sources for this debate examined by Metcalf include Sumerian poems dated to later in the second millennium BC, often referred to in modern scholarship as 'love lyrics'.[41] There is an apparent split in the subject matter of these texts between Inana's relationship with Dumuzi and with historical kings of the Ur III and Isin dynasties that has previously been used to argue against the association of the first group with human kingship, but Metcalf's (2024, 82-83) close reading rather leads to the conclusion 'that this division is artificial, in the sense that some of the most important sources strive to efface the distinction between the divine Dumuzi and the mortal king, in the moment of their union with Inana.'

This active effacing of distinction between historical kings and Dumuzi in the lyrics suggests that the union of king and goddess might be defined as either hierogamy or theogamy. Recognising ambiguity, Alan Strathern (2019) has, like Pongratz-Leisten, adopted the term 'sacralisation' in his study of pre-modern kings, understanding this term as an end achieved in immanentist cultures in part via strategies of 'divinising' kingship; a

[40] See also, for instance, Kramer 1969; Hallo 1987; Cooper 1993; Sweet 1994; Sefati 1998; Steinkeller 1999; Cooper 2003; Lapinkivi 2004; Brisch 2006; Pongratz-Leisten 2008; Steinkeller 2017; Clancier 2022; Metcalf 2024.

[41] In addition to Metcalf 2024, see notably Sefati 1998. See also Ludwig and Metcalf 2017.

revision of the more established notion of 'divine kingship'.[42] Strathern defines 'divinised kingship' as an 'attempt to ambiguate the ontological status of incumbents so that they are in-between things, straddling the worlds of men and metapersons (i.e., forces unaccounted for by a scientific account of the natural world).'[43] Strathern considered claims of intimacy with deities to be a foremost strategy of divinisation, also citing Mesopotamian examples to support his case, and Nicole Brisch (2022) has recently applied these concepts in her own recent revisitation of the topic of relations between Mesopotamian kings and deities.[44]

Strathern's notion of ambiguation can be seen as an intent of even the earliest formulations of Mesopotamian rulership, as demonstrated by Zainab Bahrani's (2002) study of the so-called Uruk Vase (ca. 3200 BC) uncovered at Inana's Eana ('House of Heaven') temple at Uruk, and now in the Iraq Museum (fig. 5). This near-cylindrical stone vessel is carved with registers of relief depicting water, grain, animals and nude male figures in stratified procession beneath a broken scene at top that has been read as an encounter between Uruk's ruler and Inana or her priestess outside of the Eana storehouse at the climax of a historical sacred marriage ritual.[45] The identity of the 'Inana' figure has

[42] Indeed, as put by Moin and Strathern (2022, 14): 'This does not quite adhere to the most straightforward understanding of divine kingship, in which the king is simply understood "to be" a god. Rather, surveying a very broad range of cases, one finds scholars repeatedly grappling with a generic sense of ambiguity.'

[43] Strathern 2019, 155. Definitions of metapersons are given in Strathern 2019, 4 as well as Brisch 2022, 72, and this term is also used throughout Graeber and Sahlins 2017 and, more recently, in Sahlins 2022.

[44] Strathern 2019, 178: 'The first Mesopotamian ruler regarded as "deified" by scholarship, Naram-Sin, may have been presented as the consort of this goddess in her Akkadian form, Ishtar. The next "deified" Mesopotamian ruler, Shulgi, claimed to be the brother of Gilgamesh.' Compare, earlier, Brisch 2008 and 2013.

[45] See the studies of the Uruk Vase by, for instance, Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951; Frankfort 1954; Jacobsen 1970; Porada 1995; Winter 2007b; Ataç 2008; McCaffrey 2013; Bahrani 2014; Suter 2014; Collins 2019.

been debated, in part because an ancient repair to the area where the headdress is depicted makes it difficult to determine whether she wears tiered horns, but Bahrani has reframed this debate by engaging the work of Jacques Derrida (1982) to argue that, through representation, the Vase's imagery 'performs' rather than narrates the ritual.

In particular, Bahrani (2002, 21) argues that the Uruk Vase's 'performative enactment necessitates the blurring of priestess into goddess and god into king. Without this uncertainty of identities the ritual would be useless.' This resonates with Metcalf's argument regarding the effacement of distinction between historical kings with Dumuzi, and encourages a more daring reading than Strathern's, suggesting that image and text may be understood as vehicles that alter rather than only obfuscate royal status through the representation of relationships. Bahrani (2002, 22) concludes her study of the Uruk Vase with the affirmation that 'we need to consider the Mesopotamian work of art as something more than a vehicle for historical documentation'. Bahrani (2003, 134) has since built on this statement, arguing that 'while things and words, people and images are categories that are essential as far as we are concerned today, they were by no means categories in Near Eastern antiquity. The world of appearance and the world of essence are the same'.[46]

Crucial to the present focus, Bahrani (2003) identifies performativity as an enduring quality of Mesopotamian art, exemplified in Assyria millennia later by a decorated stone altar of Tukultī-Ninurta I (r. 1243–1207 BC) found at Ištar's temple in Aššur (modern Qal'at Sherqat), Assyria's ancestral city.[47] The altar (fig. 6) depicts an altar shaped like

[46] See also Bahrani 2008, 2014, 2017 and 2018.

[47] The altar is now held in the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin (VA 08146). The inscription is published as RIMA 2 Tukultī-Ninurta I 27. The inscription identifies the altar as a *nēmed* of the deity Nusku.

itself bearing a tablet and stylus and two sequential images of Tukultī-Ninurta standing and kneeling before it; through the altar, his prayer is performed continuously. As is custom, Tukultī-Ninurta credits his kingship to Aššur, the god-king of Assyria whose name is shared with the land, but also to Ištar, describing himself as her 'darling' (*namad*), in a temple building inscription.[48] As Wiebke Meinhold (2009) traces, Ištar's foundational importance for the Assyrian kingship is evidenced by the goddess' continued worship in the city of Aššur from the mid-third through the first millennium BC, including under the syncretic hypostases Ištar-Aššurītu ('Ištar the Assyrian'), Šarrat-Niphi ('Blazing Queen') and Bēlat-Ekalli ('Lady of the Palace').[49]

Assyria's rulers styled themselves as the 'vice-regent of the god Aššur' (*iššak* ^{d}*Aššur*) and his city-state until the so-called Middle Assyrian period, when an elevation in the status of these rulers occurred and they became 'kings of the land of Aššur' (*šar māt Aššur*).[50] As discussed by Meinhold (2009, 35), Ištar's sanctuary at Aššur was relocated, enlarged and given a traditional Sumerian name: É.me ('House of Divine Powers') during the reign of Tukultī-Ninurta I.[51] This has been interpreted as a conscious reception of Sumero-Babylonian religious tropes in Assyria.[52] In the same vein, Peter Machinist (2011)

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[48] RIMA 1 Tukultī-Ninurta I 11.

[49] On Ištar syncretism see notably Porter 2004a as well as Allen 2015 and Allen 2024.

[50] The title *iššiakum* is equivalent to Sumerian ensi, used, for instance, by Eanatum and Gudea. The differing perspectives on the chronological bounds of the Middle Assyrian period are discussed, and a useful overview of this period is given, in Reculeau 2022. Here, the Middle Assyrian period is taken to mean the period between Aššur-uballiṭ I (r. 1363–1328 BC) and Tiglath-pileser I (r. 1114–1076 BC).

[51] Significantly, Inana's acquisition of these powers is described in the Sumerian mythological text referred to today as Enki and the World Order. See also the relevant discussion in the introduction to Bahrani 2008.

[52] In addition to Meinhold, see the introduction to Pongratz-Leisten 2015.

has, significantly, characterised Tukultī-Ninurta's reign as a juncture for the Assyrian kingship, arguing that it began to resemble the earlier models of kingship I have explored above in terms of divinity. This is in part based on his study of a text known as the Tukultī-Ninurta Epic, which celebrates the Assyrian conquest of Babylon following Tukultī-Ninurta's defeat of its king, Kaštiliaš IV. I quote a relevant passage below:

> *gal-tu me-lam-mu-šu ú-sa-aḫ-ḫa-pu na-gab za-ia-a-ri*
> *ša kip-pat šārē erbette/arba'i šá* IM.TU *i-ta-na-da-ru-uš pu-ḫur kal šarrāne*
> *ki-ma* ^{d}*Ad-di a-na ša-gi-im-me-šu it-tar-ra-ru šadû*
> *ù ki-ma* ^{d}*Nin-urta a-na ni-iš kakkē-šú ul-ta-nap-šá-qa ka-liš kibrātu*
> *ina ši-mat* ^{d}*Nu-dím-mud-ma ma-ni it-ti šēr ilāne mi-na-a-šu*
> *ina purussu bēl mātāte ina ra-a-aṭ šassuru ilāne ši-pi-ik-šu i-te-eš-ra*
> *šú-u-ma ṣalam* ^{d}*Enlil da-ru-u še-e-mu pi-i nišē mi-lik māti*
> *ki-ma šá-a-šú ana pān re-de-e bēl mātāte u-man-du-ú-uš i-ud ina šap-ti*
> *u-šar-bi-šu-ma* ^{d}*Enlil ki-ma a-bi a-li-di ar-ki mār bu-uk-ri-šu*

> Frightful are his effulgences; they overwhelm all the enemies.
> He who controls the entirety of the four winds, the awe-inspiring one (?) –
> the assembly of all the kings fear him continually.
> Like Adad when he thunders, the mountains tremble;
> And like Ninurta when he raises his weapons, the regions (of the world) everywhere are thrown into continual panic.
> By the fate (determined by) Nudimmud (= Ea), his mass is reckoned with the flesh of the gods.
> By the decision of the lord of all the lands (= Enlil), he was successfully engendered through/cast into the channel of the womb of the gods.
> He alone is the eternal image of Enlil, attentive to the voice of the people, to the counsel of the land.
> Just as the lord of all the lands (= Enlil) designated him as head of the soldiers, so he praised (him) with his lips.
> Enlil raised him like a natural father, after his first-born son.[53]

Machinist (2011, 411-412) argues that this formulation of Tukultī-Ninurta's kingship indicates 'a borrowing from the Akkadian and Sumerian traditions of the Babylonian south,

[53] Tukultī-Ninurta Epic Tablet 1 12'-20' (translation Machinist 2011).

traditions beginning already in the later third millennium B.C.' In particular, the Epic provides early witness to three tropes for formulating kingship with respect to the divine that are unattested in Assyria prior to this period. First, the notion of 'effulgence' or 'radiance' (*melammu*) that is otherwise a divine property is appropriated for the king. Second, the king's military prowess is likened to that of the deities Ninurta (the Akkadian equivalent of Ninĝirsu) and Adad. Finally, the king is described as the image and son of the Sumerian ruler deity Enlil (*ṣalam* ^{d}*Enlil*). Machinist further traces the use and development of these tropes in correlation with Assyria's transformation into a world empire during the so-called Neo-Assyrian period.[54] More generally, the endeavour of tracing development in the status of the king before the divine in this period has been pursued by many scholars.[55]

It is understood that the Assyrian kingship came to be formulated, both visually and textually, in its closest connection with divinity during the seventh century BC, in the reigns of Sargon II's first three successors: Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal.[56] As stated at the outset of this chapter, it is properly the task of the subsequent chapters of this thesis to revisit this so-called Sargonid period with the aim of revealing a new aspect of its distinction from earlier forms of kingship. To this end, an area of particular complexity

[54] In referring to the Neo-Assyrian Empire as a 'world empire' I follow the definition by Liverani (2017b, 536); while the territorial remit better fits the designation of a 'regional empire', the Assyrian kings ruled over the world that they knew, and as an 'ideological notion'. The Neo-Assyrian period is understood here to begin with Aššur-dan II (r. 934–912 BC).

[55] For the increasing status of the Neo-Assyrian king in terms of divinity see, for instance, Olmstead 1923 and, more recently, Parpola 1997; Holloway 2002; Ornan 2007; Radner 2010; Machinist 2011; May 2013; Collins 2014; Thomason 2016; Frahm 2019; Brisch 2022; Clancier 2022; Portuese 2023.

[56] In addition to the other scholars cited above, see, for instance, the comment made by May (2013, 199) that 'a conscious and politically engendered revival and modification of the conception of divine royalty took place in the spirit of historical self-reflection and archaization' after Sennacherib.

worth dwelling on here is the status of certain Neo-Assyrian royal images (*ṣalam šarri*) with respect to the divine. Comparable to many examples explored above, Assyrian kings were never depicted with headdresses incorporating horns and did not style their names with the divine determinative, remaining defined as *šangu* ('priest'; 'temple manager') in all periods.[57] Yet, especially in relation to these royal images, and as otherwise seen for earlier contexts, scholars have similarly critiqued attempts to categorise this model of kingship binarily.[58]

Philippe Clancier (2022, 18) has recently examined the topic of Neo-Assyrian royal images, supporting his recognisable argument that 'In the first millennium in Assyria and Babylonia the king was no longer a god, but remained a person of sacred status who took him out from the world of men.' While the present discussion has so far focused on extant images of kings, and mostly in the form of royal steles, textual sources, including royal inscriptions and letters, attested from the third through the first millennium BC, evidence another category of, now perished, images: statues made of wood and precious metals and stones, which were set up by royal design in Mesopotamian cities, including in deities' shrines, and further afield. A textual example recapped by Clancier is an inscription of Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria (r. 745–727), which outlines how the king placed an image of

[57] Indeed, as Fales (2015, 557 fn. 4) quips: 'a clear-cut trespassing of the theological "gender" (man::god) barrier is not substantiated by truly relevant clues'. For definitions of the Assyrian king as decidedly not divine see also, for instance, Frankfort 1948; Cogan 1974; Cooper 2008; Liverani 2017a; Karlsson 2020. On *šangu*, see Magen 1986, 65-91; Machinist 2011, 3; Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 202-217 and Parpola 2022.

[58] See notably Holloway 2002, 179; Bahrani 2003, 142; Machinist 2011, 428; Pongratz-Leisten 2022, 94-95.

himself and his gods, made of gold, in the royal palace of the city of Gaza after defeating its ruler, Ḫanūnu, and established offerings (*sattukku*) before it.[59]

In some instances, statues of Assyrian kings placed in deities' shrines are listed in textual sources prefaced with the divine determinative, being styled, for example, as ^{d}*ṣalam šarri*.[60] That the image of the king could be set up in relation to images of gods, and receive offerings in parallel, has been much discussed in scholarship and in consideration with the Akkadian concept of the *ṣalmu* ('image').[61] On the basis of the diverse textual attestation of *ṣalmu*, Winter (1997) notably understands this term as referring to the image itself rather than any specific medium, which could, nevertheless, take many forms including, but not limited to, a statue, stele, relief, painting or engraving. Winter further interprets the *ṣalam šarri*, and the frequently occurring expression *ṣalam šarrūtīya*, to mean 'image (in my office) of kingship'; a representation of the king in his idealised role as the divinely shaped representative of the gods. As illustrated in the passage from the Tukultī-Ninurta Epic quoted above, the king's corporeal form could also be referred to as the image of a god.

Machinist (2011, 411-412) interpreted the description of Tukultī-Ninurta I as the image of Enlil (*ṣalam* ^{d}*Enlil*) to mean that the king 'shares in the presence of his divine guardian'. Bahrani (2003, 134-137) had already significantly elaborated this concept of the *ṣalmu* as a non-mimetic 'facet of presence', in part building on her earlier work on the

[59] The text is RINAP 1 Tiglath-pileser III 42, 8'–13'.

[60] See, for instance, SAA 20, vi 29 (see also Meinhold 2009, 392). Dalley (1987) has notably interpreted ^{d}*ṣalam-šarri* as ^{d}Ṣalmu-šarri, the name of the god Ṣalmu.

[61] See also, for instance, Van Buren 1941; Winter 1989; Winter 1992; Parpola 1993a; Winter 1997; Bahrani 2003; Shafer 2007; Bahrani 2008; Winter 2009; Machinist 2011; Frahm 2013; Bahrani 2014; Bahrani 2017; Nadali and Verderame 2019.

performativity of Mesopotamian artworks in addition to her own reconstruction of a related ontology of personhood as a 'multifaceted assemblage of parts', which includes the organic body as well as extensions such as names and attire. Thus when Aššurnaṣirpal II of Assyria (r. 883–859 BC) became the first Mesopotamian king since Narām-Sîn to use the term *tamšīlu* ('semblance') to articulate the relationship of his person to his royal image, which was endowed with a 'reddish gold' (*ḫurāṣi ḫūšē*) face made of shining stones and placed before Ninurta in the deity's shrine, it is possible to understand his description as referring to a representation of the parts of himself that were an image of the divine.[62]

Aššurnaṣirpal II further transformed the means by which the kingship could be represented when he adopted the use of stone wall relief sculptures in Assyria for the decoration of his so-called Northwest Palace, which was built to be his residence at Kalḫu (modern Nimrud), an always important Assyrian city that was largely rebuilt during Aššurnaṣirpal's reign and made into Assyria's capital.[63] These reliefs were used to decorate the interiors of Kalḫu's and subsequent Assyrian palace rooms, and it is known that the relief surfaces were once painted in vibrant hues, although very little pigment is visible today.[64] Since Winter (1981, 2) traced the developing representation of historical narrative in this art, scholars have analysed the reliefs with the view that the frequent depictions of

[62] RIMA 2 Aššurnaṣirpal 30, 76-77 (see the discussions in Westenholz 2000; Ornan 2007a; Machinist 2011). Benzel (2015, 90) notably explores how certain precious and luminous metals, including gold and silver, were themselves 'considered sacred or divine in nature' in ancient Mesopotamia.

[63] An argument is made in Pittman 1996 that wall reliefs comparable to those from Nimrud were used to decorate an earlier Assyrian palace, though there is no direct evidence.

[64] Much effort has been made in recent years to study the loss of pigment from the relief surfaces and potential for reconstructing the original palettes. See most usefully Thavapalan 2019 and 2020 for descriptions and further references for the remnants of pigment that were found on the relief surfaces during the early excavations, as well as recent exploration of reasons for pigment loss and attempts at reconstruction.

the king engaged in 'historical events, specifically scenes of battle and tribute, as both author (his palace) and subject (principal actor)' can be 'read', not least because 'the disposition of figures is likely to be in sequence' across a wall and around a room.

In addition to these so-called historical scenes, Aššurnaṣirpal II's reliefs have been celebrated for the anomalously prevalent depiction of an iconic 'sacred tree', which is represented over 200 times on both the monumental and miniature scale in these reliefs and in relation to images of the king, human courtiers, and winged beings wearing headdresses incorporating horns.[65] In a relief that provided a backdrop for the royal throne in the king's throne room, now held in the British Museum (BM 124531), images of the king are represented either side of this tree while a deity encircled within a winged disc, who extends insignia of rulership to the king, manifests above (fig. 7).[66] This scene is taken to reiterate the idea of the investiture of the king by the deity, which was otherwise proclaimed in the coronation ceremony.[67] Relevant for this study, Mehmet-Ali Ataç (2010b, 124) describes this imagery as conveying the 'kingship theology', notably diverging from the notion of 'kingship ideology', which scholars use more prevalently, but the concepts are entwined.[68]

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[65] On the interpretation of Aššurnaṣirpal II's reliefs and inscriptions see, for instance, Porada 1946; Winter 1983; Porter 1993b; Russell 1998; Giovino 2007; Ataç 2010b; Morello 2016; Bahrani 2018; Collins 2022.

[66] Room B, Slab 23. Layard, 1849a, pl. 25. For the reading of the ring in Mesopotamian imagery see notably Van Buren 1949 and Slanski 2007.

[67] The text referred to today as Aššurbanipal's Coronation Hymn is published as SAA 3 11. For discussion see, for instance, Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 210-216; Brisch 2022, 78 and Clancier 2022, 26. The Middle Assyrian coronation ritual is published as SAA 20 7 (see also Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 438-441).

[68] Frankfort (1948, e.g., 44 and 307) notably adopted the term 'kingship theology'. See also the review by Finley (1948, 275), who states that 'What Frankfort analyzes is the theology of kingship'. Ataç (e.g., 2008) otherwise explicitly situates his work in relation to Frankfort's and other scholars who have focused on 'religious art', in the sense that this might be defined by subject matter and production context. On religious

In another relief from the throne room of Aššurnaṣirpal II that Ataç understands to convey a theological message, also held in the British Museum (BM 124549), the deity encircled by the winged disc manifests between the king and a figure who wears a tasselled diadem (fig. 8).[69] Since the analysis by Julian Reade, this figure is identified as the crown prince; the son of the king declared for the kingship, hence the deity extends the ring here too.[70] The image of king facing prince, introduced at Kalḫu by Aššurnaṣirpal II, is depicted frequently in Assyrian art, both with and without deities and whether the king stands or is enthroned before the prince. Foundational to Ataç's interpretation of this scene is the idea that Assyrian art, including historical scenes, contains visual formulas of a 'hieratic or religious character, analogous with the art of Egypt. A representative formula foregrounded by Ataç is the *sema tawy* or 'union' scene, where two rulers face each other wearing the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt (fig. 9) to depict a binding as well as their duality.

Ataç (2006, 69-70) describes the Assyrian scenes depicting the king and crown prince facing each other as 'one of the most salient motifs' of Assyrian relief imagery and,

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rather than political approaches to Mesopotamian sources see, relevantly, fn. 35 above. To be clear, ideology is understood here following Liverani's definition (1979, 301), who states that 'the religious character' of the Assyrian kingship is 'the very form of that ideology'.

[69] Room B, Slab 7. See 11B in Gadd 1936, 135.

[70] See notably Reade 1967, 45-62, 1982, and 2009, 250 as well as Kertai 2017 for the argument in favour of reading the figure in the tasselled diadem as the crown prince, which I follow. Important evidence is dated to Esarhaddon's reign, when a letter from the exorcist Adad-šumu-uṣur describes how the king adorns the crown prince Aššurbanipal with a *pitūtu* or 'diadem' (see SAA 10 185, 9). A figure identical to the 'crown princes' seen in the reliefs from Nimrud, Khorsabad and Nineveh, and comparable to a figure seen in other media (e.g., a seal from the Nimrud Queens' Tombs; Hussein 2016, pl. 133; ND 1989.332, discussed in May 2020) is depicted on Esarhaddon's steles for Sam'al and Til Barsip, which will be examined in ch. III. Even if one is reluctant to identify the crown prince in imagery before the time of Esarhaddon, the continuity of roles and responsibilities performed by this figure in all periods strongly indicates, at the very least, that the earlier depictions are antecedents. On the emic titles for 'crown prince', see the useful discussion in Hussein 2020.

fittingly, names it the 'encounter'.[71] Identifying comparable duality within the Assyrian encounter scenes to the *sema tawy*, Ataç interprets the image of the king as representing a unified 'regnum', while identifying the image of the crown prince as an extracted 'sacerdotium'.[72] In a later formulation of his argument, Ataç (2010b, 132) continues that

> Whereas the king may have been seen primarily as the embodiment of administrative and military power, the crown prince may have been thought of as representing a degree of priestly notions, although, admittedly, there is no direct evidence in contemporary ritual texts or correspondence to that effect.

To my mind, the idea that the encounter of king and prince reveals the latter's theological significance can be supported, but by a reframed reading of the scene and the relationship it represents, informed by the prior Mesopotamian context explored above.

'The Theologised Relationship of the King and Crown Prince'

Ataç cites the third millennium BC precedent of kings appointing heirs in priestly positions to support his reading of the image of the Assyrian crown prince as the sacerdotal aspect of the kingship in the encounter scene, but the above discussion of earlier kingship models prompts consideration of the encounter in relation to imagery where kings are represented in visual relationship with or, even, 'encountering' deities. Winter (1992) has considered

[71] See also notably Ataç 2010b.

[72] Ataç does not primarily refer to the connections he identifies between Egyptian and Assyrian art in terms of influence or intercultural contact, but these topics have notably been considered by Feldman 2004 and Fales 2023 and will be addressed in ch. IV of this thesis.

the above-mentioned comment of Aššurnaṣirpal's, in which he mentions placing an image of himself in Ninurta's shrine, in her study of standing and seated statues of Gudea and his son and successor Ur-Ninĝirsu. As the inscriptions carved onto these statues typically appear on the backs of the standing figures and the fronts of the seated figures, Winter (1992, 26) has argued that 'just as the standing Gudeas were those most likely to have been placed in attendance upon divine images, the seated figures, while equally empowered to speak directly to the gods, would themselves have been the objects of cultic attention'.

Winter's analysis recalls Ornan's (2014) categorisation of depictions of rulers in positions otherwise occupied by deities, such as a seated position, as a means of 'indirect' signification of divine status. At the same time, her consideration of the relative position of Ur-Ninĝirsu to Gudea prompts further consideration of imagery depicting rulers before enthroned deities, as the Assyrian encounter scene also assumes this form.[73] To introduce another relevant example, in her analysis of the basalt stele of Hammurabi of Babylon (r. 1792–1750 BC), which is notably carved with a widely copied legal text as well as a relief depicting the king in an empty space before Šamaš, the deity of solar justice (fig. 10), Bahrani (2008, 118) observes that the king is 'mortal, but he is nevertheless enclosed in the space of the [enthroned] god'.[74] A comparable Assyrian image is depicted on the White Obelisk, now held in the British Museum (BM 118807), in which the king makes offerings before and then stands face to face with the cult image of Ištar enthroned in her shrine.[75]

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[73] See, for instance, fig. 33, which will be discussed in ch. III of this thesis.

[74] See also Bahrani 2006, 2014 and 2017. The Hammurabi stele was taken to Susa in the 12th century BC alongside the Victory Stele of Narām-Sîn and is now held in the Louvre (SB 8). On kingship and divinity in this Old Babylonian period see also the relevant recent discussion in Jones 2020, 342-346.

[75] The White Obelisk was uncovered between Sennacherib's Southwest Palace and the Ištar temple at Nineveh (see Rassam 1897, 8). It has been debated whether the monument should be attributed to

Bahrani's description of the enclosure of Hammurabi with the deity acknowledges that god and king are depicted in visual relationship together and in a setting beyond all other affairs. In the White Obelisk scene, the king and cult image are comparably sectioned off, albeit from what surrounds them as part of a larger relief composition, by the structure of Ištar's shrine. As with the depiction of Hammurabi and Šamaš on his stele, the Assyrian king is depicted in Ištar's space and face to face with her because his role is to uphold the kingship and provide service to the gods. These scenes can each be seen to convey their own kingship theologies, recalling Ataç's description of Aššurnaṣirpal II's throne room relief that depicts kings before the deity atop the tree extending the ring of rule (fig. 7), which is otherwise extended in the king's encounter with the crown prince (fig. 8). Indeed, while the visual relationship established in this encounter scene conveys a different status differential to that of king and deity, the depiction similarly represents a functional bond.

If the king is depicted with the deity because his role requires his access to the gods, the crown prince is depicted encountering the king and the deity because he supports this duty. Whereas Ataç reads the encounter in a manner that assigns the crown prince theological significance through his visual contrast to the king, it is rather through the depiction of his connection with the king, and through him the deity, in the relief that the prince's importance for the kingship theology or what I would like to describe as 'the theologised relationship of the king and crown prince' is revealed. My revised reading of the encounter as depicting a relationship of theological importance between the king and

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Aššurnaṣirpal I or Aššurnaṣirpal II (see Reade 1975), with the former attribution being more prevalent and followed here. Also see discussion and drawings of the monument in Pittman 1996, who argues for a potential connection between the Obelisk and the development to decorate the interior walls of Assyrian palaces with sculptural reliefs.

prince that is an extension of the king's relationship with the divine, moreover, raises intriguing questions about what the formulation of this relationship reveals about the relationship of kingship and divinity, because this encounter is not depicted in the enclosed space of the king, but occurring in the context of the aftermath of a military victory.

The deity with the ring does not feature in the other encounter scenes from Nimrud that are attributed to Aššurnaṣirpal II and Tiglath-pileser III, but these other scenes similarly depict the king and crown prince sharing in the royal duties and in relation to other figures.[76] While Ataç focuses his analysis on the royal dyad, my reading of the encounter as an extension of the relationship of the king and the divine prompts recognition of the fact that the encounter is always formulated in relation to other relationships; in the throne room encounter scene, for example, an attendant holds a parasol over the king during the meeting with the prince and the deity. Taking my revised reading of the encounter as a point of departure, then, in the four core chapters to follow I intend to build on Ataç's foundational work on the encounter in the reliefs from Nimrud by illuminating how the scene is formulated in relation to other royal and divine relationships and through time, beginning with the reliefs of Sargon II, who moved the royal court away from Kalḫu.

Summary of Core Chapters

Situating the relationship of the king and crown prince in a broad relational context, Chapter II takes as its primary case study the material remains of the fortress of Sargon II at Dūr-Šarrukīn (modern Khorsabad). It is often repeated in scholarship that Sargon must

[76] See, for instance, fig. 74, which will be discussed in ch. IV.

have relocated the royal court from the long-established royal capital at Kalḫu in order to build his own city in a place of no apparent significance out of political necessity given his presumed vulnerable position after usurping the throne from Šalmaneser V (r. 727–722 BC), the designated crown prince of Tiglath-pileser III (r. 744–727 BC). Offering a different perspective, I posit that the architectural and decorative configuration of Dūr-Šarrukīn indicates choice engagement with the landscape that surrounded the new city and, exploring relationships between artworks, buildings, people and the landscape, I argue that the relationship of the king and crown prince was represented as a significant point of convergence or nexus between the divine and the royal court in the city.

After Sargon's death on campaign in Anatolia in 705 BC, his son and successor Sennacherib relocated the royal court from Dūr-Šarrukīn to the more traditional Assyrian city of Nineveh (modern Kuyunjik). Chapter III explores the formulation of his kingship in terms of a relationship with the divine couple, Aššur and Mullissu, depicted in rock reliefs carved at the site of the Khinis canal head (near to the village of Bavian), which was built to transform Nineveh's water provisions. It has been argued previously that the Khinis reliefs, which depict the king enclosed with the deities, and inscriptions, which describe the destruction of Babylon in 689 BC, elevate the king's status in relation to the deities. Cognisant of the prominence given to the encounter of the king and crown prince in the reliefs from Sennacherib's new Southwest Palace at Nineveh, I situate the Khinis complex in the context of the artistic and theological developments of the period to explore how the relationship of the king and deities is formulated in terms of divine and royal succession.

Chapter IV explores a nexus of royal and divine relationships relative to textual and visual sources dated to the years surrounding Esarhaddon's designation of his two heirs;

Aššurbanipal, future king of Assyria, and Šamaš-šumu-ukīn, future ruler of Babylonia, in 672 BC. The theologising aspects of the *adê* ('oath') tablets uncovered at Nimrud and Tell Tayinat, which were intended to bind the empire's subjects in loyalty to Aššurbanipal, are well recognised, but I revisit these sources to inform my interpretation of the transposition of the king's encounter with the prince in the presence of the divine to monuments intended to commemorate Esarhaddon's victory over Egypt in 671 BC. While these monuments have been taken as disseminators of propagandistic messages about royal might to imperial provinces, my analysis of the inscribed stele for Sam'al (modern Zincirli), informed by my reading of the rituals that accompanied the swearing of the *adê* at Ezida in Kalḫu, explores how the encounter of king and prince is formulated in terms of divine familial relations.

While many artworks are attributed to the reign of Aššurbanipal, not one of these depicts the encounter of king and prince. Chapter V considers this absence relative to the celebrated so-called Garden Scene relief from Aššurbanipal's own North Palace at Nineveh. Since the earliest iconographic readings, this relief has been understood to depict the king and queen consort. I challenge and nuance these interpretations, arguing that the relief depicts an encounter between the crown prince and the queen mother and, crucially, that this relationship is formulated in relation to a divine relational model. To make this case, I consider the depiction of the relationship of queen and crown prince relative to textual and visual sources pertaining to Ištar's divine role in securing Assyria's victory against Elam. Ultimately, I argue that, in the visual and textual sources examined, the relationship of the king and crown prince is suspended so that Aššurbanipal may inhabit both roles in relation to the goddess, being both king and crown prince forever.

‘Divine Kinship’

In addition to generating the new readings, tracing development in the theologised relationship of the king and crown prince in relation to other royal and divine relationships ultimately reveals a Sargonid form of kingship not witnessed in the earlier examples or the scholarship about them. As indicated in this chapter’s discussion of the Mesopotamian context, the relationship of kingship and divinity has been considered mostly in terms of the formulation of the king’s, or at least individual royal, relations with deities and questions of royal status.[77] Throughout this thesis, I aim to demonstrate the value of a more integrated relational approach and, in so doing, surface future directions.[78] Janet Carsten (2000, 4), introducing the field of new kinship studies, has defined ‘relatedness’ as ‘a broad and imaginative view of what might be included under the rubric of “kinship” … of being related in a specific cultural context’.[79] In the concluding chapter, I will revisit this term

[77] In addition to the role of kings, scholars have increasingly considered the role of queens in terms of divinity, reconstructing the queenship as a discrete aspect of the kingship. See, for instance, Reade 1987; Melville 1999; Ornan 2002; Melville 2004; MacGregor 2012; Kertai 2013; Svärd 2015; Gansell 2018a; May 2018a; Melville 2020). Assyrian royal women were not referred to as *šarrūtu* (‘queen’), as goddesses were, but as, for instance, MUNUS-É.GAL (‘palace woman’); see discussion of titles relative to the use of *šarrūtu* for Ištar in Meinhold 2009, 243-244. Fewer studies have considered the role of the crown prince in terms of divinity. See notably Pongratz-Leisten 1994, Radner 2010 and Robson 2019.

[78] While I know of no art historical study that is primarily focused on the study of relationships of Assyrian royalty and divinity, Radner (2008 and 2010) has considered relations of the households of king, queen and crown prince, and in terms of their bureau sealings and, to a lesser extent, the idea that all three offices were formulated in relation to divinity. Moreover, Parpola (1993a; 1997; 2000) has notably made the case that the Assyrian royal triad served as mirrors for the divine family, on philological grounds as well as in relation to connections identified with later Christian theology. His arguments have been heavily criticised on both accounts (see, for instance, Gruenwald 1997; Cooper 2000; Porter 2000; Frahm 2000-2001; Postgate 2002).

[79] (New) kinship studies are of increasing interest in Assyriology (see notably Verderame 2025) and Egyptology (see notably Olabarria 2020).

and other definitions explored here relative to the revealed nexus to reflect on the extent of 'divine kinship'.[80]

[80] Porter (2014, 603) mentions the 'divine *kin*ship' (italics hers) of Narām-Sîn, referring to the relationship between him and the divine, but I use this term more expansively.

Chapter II

Foundation: Sargon, Creator of a Nexus

> *i-na* u_4*-me-šu-ma i-na* UGU *nam-ba-ʾi šá* GÌR.II
> KUR.*mu-uṣ-ri* KUR-*e e-le-nu ni-na-a.*KI URU *e-pu-uš-ma* URU.BÀD-^{m}MAN-GIN
> *az-ku-ra ni-bit-su*
>
> At that time I built a city above the spring at the foot of Mount Muṣri, a mountain upstream from (the city) Nineveh, and I named it Dūr-Šarrukīn.
>
> *ša* 3 ME 50.ÀM *mal-ki la-bi-ru-ti ša el-la-mu-u-a be-lu-ut*
> KUR *aš-šur*.KI *e-pu-šu-ma il-ta-nap-pa-ru ba-ʾu-lat* ^{d}EN.LÍL
> *a-a-um-ma i-na lìb-bi-šú-nu a-šar-šú ul ú-maš-ši-ma šu-šu-ub-šú*
> *ul il-ma-du*
>
> Not one of the three hundred and fifty previous rulers who had exercised lordship over Assyria before my time and had governed the subjects of the god Enlil had noted its site or come to know how to make it habitable.[81]

The above quoted excerpts of an inscription documenting the construction of Dūr-Šarrukīn ('fortress of Sargon'; modern Khorsabad) make clear that Sargon II of Assyria (r. 721–705 BC) understood the founding of his new royal capital at the bottom of Mount Muṣri, about 45 km northwest of the previous capital at Kalḫu (modern Nimrud), as doing something new.[82] Dūr-Šarrukīn was built close to an existing settlement known as Maganuba and, while this area was not entirely unknown, it was outside of the traditional Assyrian core

[81] RINAP 2 Sargon II 9, 39b-40; 43-49a (translations Frame 2021).

[82] See also RINAP 2 Sargon II 43, 44-46. On the founding of the city see the relevant discussions in McMahon 2013, 164 as well as Kertai 2021, 219-220. Compare the more traditional city founding description in RIMA 2 Tukultī-Ninurta I 23, 94-97.

area bordered by Aššur (modern Qal'at Sherqat) in the south, Nineveh (modern Kuyunjik) in the northeast, and Arbela (modern Erbil) in the west.[83] As discussed in Chapter I, Kalḫu had been rebuilt and turned into a grand royal capital during the reign of Aššurnaṣirpal II (r. 883–859 BC). Moreover, for over a century before Sargon came to the throne, Aššurnaṣirpal's Northwest Palace remained the primary royal residence, even though other palaces had been built in the city.

In breaking with established tradition, Sargon's choosing of an apparent nowhere place to relocate the royal court has been understood as a political manoeuvre given that he is suspected to have usurped Šalmaneser V (r. 727–722 BC), the designated crown prince of Tiglath-pileser III (r. 744–727 BC).[84] Comparably, readings of the material remains of Dūr-Šarrukīn have either not considered them in terms of the city's landscape or have otherwise interpreted the landscape as offering little other benefit.[85] In this chapter, I offer a different perspective, arguing that the architectural and decorative configuration of Dūr-Šarrukīn exhibits choice engagement with the landscape by exploring relationships expressed between artworks, buildings, people and the landscape. Situating the prominent depiction of the encounter of king and crown prince in the reliefs that lined the walls of Sargon's royal palace at Dūr-Šarrukīn within this broad relational context, I illuminate the

[83] On the historical importance of the 'Assyrian triangle' see the useful discussion in Radner 2011.

[84] For useful and recent overviews of the events surrounding Sargon's accession, see the introduction to Frame 2021 and Baker 2023, 296-300. For the reading of the location of Dūr-Šarrukīn as politically motivated see, for instance, Grayson 1992, 81-82; Russell 1999, 240; Radner 2011, 324; May 2015, 110-111; Baker 2023, 300. This line of interpretation is prevalent for the royal deeds of usurper kings; see, for instance, the discussion of Sargon of Akkad in Roberts 2012.

[85] See, for instance, Reade 1979a; Albenda 1986; Battini 2000; Albenda 2003; Barbanes 2003; Reade 2011; Matthiae 2012; McMahon 2013; Frahm 2017; Portuese 2022; Novotny 2023.

formulation of Sargon's kingship in relation to the divine in this chapter by considering the prominent depiction of the encounter of king and prince relative to the royal court.

As in Aššurnaṣirpal's Northwest Palace at Kalḫu, the use of sculptural relief decoration at Dūr-Šarrukīn allowed for the laying out of larger narratives and relationships visually. In her comparison of Aššurnaṣirpal's reliefs with Sargon's, Zainab Bahrani (2017, 232) has observed that 'Rather than stressing the continuous linear narratives laid out in horizontal stretches across the palace, or the symmetrical play of heraldic groupings in Ashurnasirpal II's palace, Sargon II's sculptors stressed royal might as a fact in itself, present in the existence of courtly life'. In taking the relationships that courtly life is made up of in Sargon's reliefs as this chapter's main subject, my ultimate aim is to demonstrate that the royal court is depicted as being in kinship with the divine through the relationship of the king and the crown prince as depicted in the city. Before I begin to make this case, it is first necessary to outline some of the challenges to the investigation that are bound up with Khorsabad's early excavation history.

The uncovering of the reliefs at Khorsabad first commenced in 1843-1844 when Paul Émile Botta, in his capacity as French consul in Mosul, and Eugène Flandin, who would create archaeological drawings of the reliefs, monuments and inscriptions that they found (see Botta and Flandin 1849–1850, 5 vols.), redirected their efforts to Khorsabad after a relatively unsuccessful expedition to Kuyunjik following the lead of a local resident who had previously brought two inscribed bricks from there.[86] The excavations were continued in 1852–1854 by Victor Place (also consul), who unearthed over 100 additional parts of the palace and the temple area (see Place 1867–1870, 3 vols.). While Botta focused

[86] An account of these events is given in Bonomi 1852, 7-26, and summarised in Albenda 1986, 26.

on the throne room spaces of the palace terrace, Place excavated other areas.[87] Most of the sculptures excavated under Place's direction were made ready to sail for Paris and Berlin, but, on 21 May 1855, one of the transport ships sank near to the town of Al-Qurnah in southern Iraq; of 235 cases, only 80 sculptures were saved.[88]

In attempting to reconstruct the original placement of the reliefs, one is mostly dependent on Botta's sketches and Flandin's drawings, which were made at the time that the reliefs were uncovered, in addition to the plans produced by Place and the output of the subsequent Chicago excavations, to understand the relationship between the reliefs and the palace's architectural configuration.[89] Place reconstructed his floorplan by tracing remnants of plaster on the walls at Khorsabad, which he stated was present in many places.[90] Positively, Place's floorplan can be accepted generally. Caution is still necessary, however, when it comes to reviewing the details and, unfortunately, Place's fieldnotes were lost during the disaster of 1855 described above and cannot be used to elaborate on some apparent inconsistencies.[91] The rooms uncovered during Botta and Flandin's missions,

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[87] A useful and more recent history of these early excavations and their scope is given in Kertai 2015a, 87.

[88] A first-person account of this so-called 'Qurna disaster' is given in Clément 1866. Place's own explanation is given in Place 1867–1870, vol. 2, 142-144. See Potts 2020 for recent discussion.

[89] See Loud, Frankfort and Jacobsen 1936; Loud and Altman 1938; Wilson 1995.

[90] See Place 1867–1870, vol. 2, 103.

[91] Place's floorplans are evaluated in Kertai 2015a, 89-91. Of relevance, Place's 'harem' is now understood to have been a temple complex, whereas the area he identifies as courtyard vii has since been shown to be the throne room. The reasons for the inaccuracies are that 1) the doors in Place's plan are generally centred on the walls whereas Assyrian architecture usually had asymmetrical doors, 2) some known walls – e.g., the door for the bathroom behind the throne room – are missing, 3) the excavation photos make it unlikely that Place excavated the entire palace as he claimed to have done, 4) Place reconstructed some rooms from doors that suggests some wall lines were missed, and 5) the contours do not correspond to the later Chicago plan.

which are the focus of the present study, were better preserved comparatively, and their plans are more accurate as a result.

However, there are also errors with their plans, and minor discrepancies in the accompanying illustrations.[92] Even still, the sequencing of the reliefs as they were unearthed *in situ* allows some reconstruction of narrative as well as spatial arrangement of subject matter. This is possible to trace at least generally as, in some of the rooms where the interior walls were bifurcated by a band with cuneiform inscriptions (such as Rooms II and VII), the lower parts of the walls were decorated with military scenes, whereas the upper sections were decorated with banquet scenes.[93] Thus, what emerges from this brief discussion of the early sources for the reconstruction of the architectural and decorative arrangement of the city is that, despite the limitations mentioned above, much can still be ascertained about relationships between reliefs and their subjects, and, crucially, the relationships that are their subjects. With this considered, I now begin the examination of the sculptures.

Legendary, Cosmic, Connected

The most iconic, and certainly the most imposing, extant sculptures from Dūr-Šarrukīn are now held in the Louvre: two visually connected but intriguingly differentiated male figures

[92] The problems with Botta's plans and Flandin's illustrations are discussed in Kertai 2015a, 91-92. Similarly, in terms of the reliefs, the courtiers on the throne room courtyard processions were revealed to hold different objects to Botta's sketches during the Chicago excavations, though the general order of the participants in the processions as sketched by Botta is uncontested.

[93] The interrelated representation of these subjects is explored in Matthiae 2012.

who each restrain a snarling lion in their arms. One of these figures (AO 19861) was stationed on the outer wall of the palace terrace at Dūr-Šarrukīn (fig. 11).[94] The other one (AO 19862) stood on the wall outside of Sargon's throne room (figs. 12-13).[95] The figures are so tall that the lions that they hold, which are life size, appear diminished relative to them. In the following discussion of these figures, I will consider two prevalent lines of interpretation with the aim of establishing, first, how each figure might plausibly be understood to have served the needs of the relief programme for Dūr-Šarrukīn and, ultimately, how they might be understood relative to each other. First, it is necessary to properly introduce each figure.

The figure that was stationed at the entrance to the palace terrace, corresponding to Flandin's Façade A and Place's Gate M, would have been the first of the two to have been seen by visitors to the palace. This figure is carved in such high relief to the effect of making him appear freestanding. His measurement was first given as 4.7 m tall and 1.88 m wide in the Louvre catalogue authored by Edmond Pottier (1924, no. 16). His lower body is in the left profile while his upper body is frontal facing. He wears a short-sleeved tunic that reaches just above his knees, which is also covered with fringing and tassels. His bare feet rest on a protruding platform and the top of his hair protrudes from the blank background. Notably, his shoulder-length hair is arranged into six locks of curls. He has a coiled beard. He wears armbands on both arms and rosette bracelets on each wrist. He wields a sickle in his right hand, while in his left hand he restrains a lion that bites into his arm and has protruding claws.

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[94] Botta and Flandin, 1849–1850, vol. 2, pl. 47.

[95] Botta and Flandin, 1849–1850, vol. 2, pl. 41.

The second surviving colossal figure was stationed at the northeast wall of Façade n (court viii); outside Sargon's throne room. This figure is similar in many respects to the one stationed on the palace terrace but there are important distinctions to be noted. Pottier (1924, no. 17) measured this figure as being significantly taller at 5.45 m in height, although only slightly less wide at 2.08 m. Like the palace terrace figure, the throne room figure's lower body is represented in the left profile, while his upper body is frontal facing. Like the palace terrace figure, the throne room figure also wears a short-sleeved tunic, however his has more fringing and is worn beneath a flounced and decorated shawl or robe with fringing and tassels. This robe is worn over the top of his right shoulder and covers his left leg down to his ankle, though leaving the right leg and the tunic exposed. He also stands atop a platform but wears wedged sandals. The top of his hair protrudes from the background. His hair is differentiated from the palace terrace figure's, being coiffed in the ringlet style that Assyrian persons are more typically represented wearing in the reliefs. In addition to his armbands, he wears dragon bracelets. He also wields a sickle in his right hand and restrains a lion in his left hand. This lion, like the palace terrace lion, has protruding claws but, instead of biting its holder, glares out to the viewer.

These figures have long been associated with Gilgameš, the legendary king of Uruk, who in the eponymous Epic, and spurred by his companion, the wild man Enkidu, defeats the demon Humbaba, kills the Bull of Heaven and, following the death of Enkidu, embarks on a quest for immortality. An image of the slightly shorter figure with six locks of curls stationed on the palace terrace at Dūr-Šarrukīn was used in George Smith's 1876 publication of The Chaldean Account of Genesis that included his translation of the Nineveh version of The Epic of Gilgameš, which he named 'The Izdubar (i.e., an earlier

rendering of the name of Gilgameš) Legends' (fig. 14).[96] Smith captioned the figure: 'Izdubar Strangling a Lion, from Khorsabad Sculpture'. Relatedly, an image of a figure with an identical hairstyle represented in combat with a lion from an Akkadian period cylinder seal impression was used as the cover image of Smith's publication.[97] There is no ancient evidence definitively connecting either hero to The Epic of Gilgameš, but Smith clearly saw both images as fitting illustrations for the heroic deeds Gilgameš accomplishes, resulting in their presentation as one and the same in the context of his publication.[98]

An important difference between the six-locked hero represented in the cylinder seal image that Smith used for his cover and the Khorsabad palace terrace hero, is that the seal image hero is represented nude, albeit wearing a belt. Nude figures with the six-locked hairstyle appear in Akkadian period glyptic imagery regularly, especially in so-called contest scenes where they face off against animals and hybrid beings (fig. 15).[99] Despite this difference, both nude and clothed figures with the six-locked hairstyle have been associated with the name *laḫmu* because of a terracotta plaque from Aššur that represents a

[96] Smith 1876, fig. 19. See also the recent discussion of Smith's choice in Eppihimer 2019, 152.

[97] Smith 1876, fig. 1, which is captioned 'IZDUBAR (NIMROD) IN CONFLICT WITH A LION, FROM AN EARLY BABYLONIAN CYLINDER'.

[98] The many problems with seeking to identify precise episodes from textual sources, and especially the Epic, in visual imagery are now well acknowledged in art historical scholarship. As Ataç (2010a, 262) cautions in his own study of potential Neo-Assyrian depictions of Gilgameš, 'the visual arts in ancient Mesopotamia were not concerned with providing a coherent and comprehensive documentation of the elements of mythological or literary narratives'. Nevertheless, see the consideration of other Mesopotamian artworks as potential representations of scenes from the Epic in Lambert 2010, 98-109 (with, to borrow Lambert's own words, 'a good measure of scepticism'), as well as Ornan 2010.

[99] See the useful discussion of contest scenes in Akkadian period imagery in Rakic 2014.

figure with this hairstyle who has inscriptions on both of his arms.[100] The inscription contains lines from a figurine burial ritual that has significant attestation: The right arm is inscribed 'enter, lurker of peace' (*erba rābiṣ šulme*), while the left arm is inscribed 'exit, lurker of evil' (*ṣī rābiṣ lemuttim*).[101] Frans Wiggermann pointed out that one variant of this text mentions *laḫmu* as the lurker and, gathering lexical evidence in support of the reading of *laḫmu* as 'hairy one', argued that all instances of the six-locked (i.e., 'hairy' or 'shaggy') hero must represent this subject accordingly.[102]

One problem with Wiggermann's argument is that some figurines bearing the same inscription as the six-curled figure represented on the Aššur plaque depict an alternative figure with the generic Assyrian hairstyle that is worn, for example, by the lion-holding figure stationed outside of Sargon's throne room at Dūr-Šarrukīn.[103] Thus, it has been questioned whether the theorised association between the six-locked figure and *laḫmu*, if it existed at all in the first millennium BC, could have been exclusive.[104] Melissa Eppihimer (2019, 142), while not doubting that the six-locked Assyrian figures depict *laḫmu*, has argued against the association between them and the six-locked figures who appear in the Akkadian contest scene imagery, arguing that there is no proof that any Akkadian period

[100] The plaque is published in Ebeling 1928-1929. Six-locked figurines are also attested at Khorsabad, i.e., Louvre N 8283.

[101] The text is KAR 298, and included in Wiggermann 1992, 42-46.

[102] See Wiggermann 1981-1982 for the initial iteration of the argument in favour of this identification. Wiggermann argues against the identification advanced in Ebeling 1928-1929 of this figure as *talīm* ('twin').

[103] See discussion in Ellis 1995, 163.

[104] Doubts have also been raised about the etymological evidence Wiggermann advances in favour of the reading of *laḫmu* as 'hairy one'. See Ellis 1995 and Zartner 2020, 314.

seals survived into the first millennium BC, or were known to any of the Sargonid kings. Eppihimer proposes to the contrary that the visual inspiration for the six-locked hero presented on the palace terrace at Dūr-Šarrukīn would have been clothed intermediary figures who appear in Assyrian glyptic imagery and stood guard in temples (fig. 16).[105]

Eppihimer ultimately aims to lift the Khorsabad lion-holding figures out of the realm of the heroic, but the association with The Epic of Gilgameš endures. The palace terrace lion-holding figure with the Assyrian hairstyle continues to be treated as the representative of the Epic.[106] In defence of the association between the throne room figure and Gilgameš, Amar Annus (2012, 44) has argued that this figure's height (5.45 m) corresponds to the 11 cubits of height given for Gilgameš in the Epic. Annus proposes, correspondingly, that while Enkidu's height is not given in the Epic, it is implied that he is both shorter and more muscular than Gilgameš, and therefore that the shorter and broader six-locked hero stationed on the palace terrace could, in turn, represent Enkidu, especially as Enkidu's hair is described in the Epic as being curly.[107]

To provide further context for Annus' point about the connection between the throne room figure's height and the height given for Gilgameš in the Epic, one might consider how Sargon's concern with measurements was otherwise expressed in relation to

[105] In addition to fig. 16, see discussion and examples in Eppihimer 2019, 172-173.

[106] See the early identification of this figure as Gilgameš in Boscawen 1903, 281 and, more recently, Portuese 2022, 167. This figure is also depicted later at Khinis (to be discussed in ch. III of this thesis) and is identified as 'Gilgameš' (quotation marks included) in Dalley 2025.

[107] Cf. SB Gilgameš I, 107; II, 41.

Dūr-Šarrukīn's built environment. Sargon's cylinder inscription, for example, informs the reader that his own name provided the measure of the city's walls.[108]

> ŠÁR ŠÁR ŠÁR ŠÁR GÉŠ.U GÉŠ.U GÉŠ.U 1 UŠ 3 *qa-ni* 2 KÙŠ *ni-bit* MU-*ia mi-ši-iḫ-ti* BÀD-*šu áš-kun-ma* UGU NA$_4$ KUR-*e zaq-ri ú-šar-ši-da te-me-en-šu*
>
> I made the measurement of the wall 16,280 cubits, the invocation of my name, and I made its foundation secure upon high mountain stone.

While it is not clear how this measurement could possibly relate to a numerical understanding of Sargon's name, the conceptual connection expressed between Sargon and his city in this inscription indicates that the throne room hero's height may well have been carefully selected as part of a broader strategy to represent Sargon's kingship through the architectural and decorative arrangement of the city.[109] After all, if the lion-holding hero stationed by the throne room was intended to in some way represent Gilgameš, he is more directly connected to Sargon on account of his Assyrian hairstyle and being situated outside his throne room; a space closely connected to his kingship.

Remaining with the Gilgameš idea, one might also recall how the eponymous hero, having lost his final chance to achieve immortality in the flesh, is left focusing on the city

[108] Frame 2021 Sargon II 43, 65. See discussion in Van De Mieroop 1999, 337. Frahm (2005, 48) describes this as Mesopotamian gematria.

[109] The impression that arises from the available textual sources from Sargon's reign is that he personally identified with the construction of Dūr-Šarrukīn. More than 100 letters, equating to approximately 10% of the correspondence attested for Sargon overall, concern the construction of the city. See the discussion in Parpola 1995, 50.

walls of Uruk at the end of the Tablet XI of the Epic.[110] Ultimately, the connection between the throne room figure's height and the height given for Gilgameš in the Epic may be no more than a coincidence of both Gilgameš and the lion-holding hero being intended to embody similarly impressive characteristics. It has, however, been shown that various strands of the Epic were engaged by Sargon's scribes as a point of comparison for the king. Perhaps most compellingly, the colophon of the twelfth tablet of the Epic, which is set in the aftermath of Enkidu's death, indicates that it was written in the month of Du'uzu (month IV) 705 BC, shortly after Sargon was killed in battle. As Eckhart Frahm argues, this tablet was likely written as a meditation on Sargon's death.[111] This posthumous representation vis-à-vis the tragic figure of Enkidu, whose premature death is determined by the gods in the Epic, however built upon other connections made between the living king and the figure of Gilgameš.

Turning to consider the annalistic evidence for the Sargon-Gilgameš association, Johannes Bach (2020) has argued recently that the textual account of Sargon's eighth campaign against Urartu, a kingdom centred around Lake Van, and to its neighbour city-state of Muṣaṣir, in 714 BC, makes sustained, albeit indirect, reference to The Epic of Gilgameš.[112] Addressed to the god Aššur, the city Aššur, and the people of Assyria, this campaign is often referred to as the Letter to Aššur and was written by Sargon's scribe

[110] SB Gilgameš XI, 322-328. The walls also play a prominent role in the prologue: SB Gilgameš I, 1-28. See discussion in, for instance, Dickson 2009.

[111] See in particular Frahm 1999 and Frahm 2005.

[112] For an overview of events leading to Sargon's involvement with Urarṭu and Muṣaṣir, and the history of both areas in the first millennium BC, see Grekyan 2023. Bach 2020 refers to texts AO 5372 = TCL 3 + VAT 8634, 8698 and 8749. RINAP 2 Sargon II 65 is the composite.

Nabû-šallim-šunu. Situating the Letter within the broader tradition of royal inscriptions being written in dialogue with diverse genres of text and, therefore, primarily aimed to be read by a knowing, elite audience, Bach interprets its contents within the framework of intertextuality studies.[113] Overall, Bach argues that the Letter exhibits a sustained and innovative scribal strategy equating Sargon with Gilgameš, with each indirect reference or 'intertextual allusion' becoming more convincing when considered all together. To begin recapping these references with the clearest, Sargon describes his victory using the same simile that is used to describe Gilgameš' battle with lions in the ninth tablet of the Epic:[114]

> *ki-i* ^{GIŠ}*šil-ta-ḫi ez-zi i-na lìb-bi-šu-<nu> am-qut-ma* […]
>
> Like a furious arrow I fell amongst their midst […].
>
> *ki-ma šil-t*[*a-ḫi a-na b*]*i-ri-šú-nu im-qut*
>
> Like an ar[row] he fell [amo]ng them.

Considering the above passages, first, from the Letter and, second, from the Epic, it would seem that this allusion serves to equate Sargon's attack against Muṣaṣir with Gilgameš' attack against the lions, suggesting, in turn, that Sargon's victory was a spectacular feat over dangerous beasts, and that this exhibited Gilgameš-like prowess.

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[113] On the integrative nature of Assyrian royal inscriptions see in particular Frahm 2019. See most notably Wisnom 2019 and, earlier, Seri 2014 on intertextual approaches to cuneiform sources and further references.

[114] TCL 3, 133 (translation Bach 2020, 327-328); SB Gilgameš IX, 17; X, 96 (translation George 2003).

The portrayal of the lion as the ultimate enemy finds broad attestation, beginning in Mesopotamia as early 3300 BC with a basalt stele that was found deposited in the goddess Inana's Eana temple at Uruk and is now housed in the Iraq Museum.[115] This so-called Lion Hunt stele shows sequential images of a bearded man hunting lions with arrows and a spear. Based on comparison with other artworks of this period, the male figure is identified as the en ('ruler'). As Bahrani (2017, 52) notes in her discussion of this stele, the 'image of the king as hunter became a theme of Mesopotamian and ancient Near Eastern art [and] is used later to represent the prowess of other ancient rulers, for example the Roman emperors'. In Assyria, the theme of lion hunting is first documented in an inscription of Tiglath-pileser I (r. 1114–1076 BC) and remains important until the late stage of the Sargonid period, as is witnessed by celebrated reliefs of Aššurbanipal depicting him lion hunting, which will be explored in Chapter V of this thesis.[116]

From the time of Aššurnsirpal II's son and successor Šalmaneser III (r. 858–824 BC), the king's bureau seal bore an image of a king engaged in one-to-one active combat with a lion.[117] As with the other earlier examples, this imagery has been understood to convey the notion of the king's ongoing role to maintain order against all challenges; the representation of the lion-holding figures at Dūr-Šarrukīn must be seen as part of this artistic tradition. [118] Informed by this visual context and the above allusion to The Epic of

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[115] Zenzen 2018, 97.

[116] See RIMA 2 Tiglath-pileser I 1, 76-84 and discussion in Zenzen 2018, 373.

[117] See discussion and images in Radner 2008, 487.

[118] See discussion in Zenzen 2018, 192. Aššurnaṣirpal II's palace at Kalḫu featured reliefs depicting the hunting and defeat of lions led by the king in the company of his attendants. See for example, two reliefs in the collection of the British Museum (BM 124535 and BM 124534) discussed in Zenzen 2018, 109-111.

Gilgameš in the Letter to Aššur that is highlighted by Bach, it furthermore becomes clear that the Khorsabad lion-holding figures elevate Sargon's kingship by conveying the idea that his victories are not only being accomplished but have been already easily won, and in the Epic's terms. After all, the lion-holding figures' massive stature means that their subduing of the lions appears effortlessly done.

A second allusion identified by Bach also speaks to this notion of the elevation of Sargon's deeds by establishing a comparison between his and Gilgameš' actions:[119]

> [*u*]*r-ḫa ru-uq-ta il-li-kam-ma a-ni-iḫ u šup-šu-uḫ*
>
> He came a distant road and was weary but granted rest.
>
> *um-ma-na-at da-šur dal-pa-a-te ša ḫar-ra-an ru-uq-ti il-li-ka-nim-ma šu-nu-ḫa ù mu-uq-qa* […] *an-ḫu-us-si-in ul ú-šap-ši-iḫ-ma* […]
>
> The tired troops of Aššur who, having come such a distant (march)road, were exhausted and weary, […] (yet) I gave no respite to their fatigue […]

However, rather than making another allusive connection between Sargon and Gilgameš through direct comparison, as is otherwise seen in the use of the lion combat trope in the Letter to Aššur, the combined reading of these passages from the Letter and the Epic reveals that the latter of these two instances completely inverts the original phrase. In this instance, the description of the lack of rest on the part of Sargon's troops seemingly serves

[119] SB Gilgameš I, 9 (translation George 2003); TCL 3, 127 + 129 (translation Bach 2020).

to emphasise how the heroes are accomplishing an extraordinary task, persevering at a moment in which rest might otherwise be expected of even heroic figures.[120]

A third intertextual allusion identified by Bach between the Letter and Tablet IX of The Epic connects the journeying of Sargon's army with Gilgameš' journey to and eventual encounter with Ūta-napištim, the Epic's Flood hero, in search of immortality:[121]

> *ša ša-di-i še-mu-šúma-š*[*u-*(*um*)*-ma*]
> […]
> *e-lu*<*-ú*>*-šu-nu šu-pu-uk* AN-*e i*[*n-da*?*-a*?]
> *šap-liš a-ra-le-e i-rat-su-nu* ⌊*kaš-da-át*⌋
>
> The mountains name was 'tw[in']
> […]
> Their upper parts are leaning against the base of heaven,
> Below their breast reaches the netherworld.
>
> KUR*si-mir-ri-a* ŠU.SI KUR-*i* GAL-*tu ša ki-ma še-lu-ut šu-kúr-ri zaq-pat-ma* UGU *ḫur-ša-a-ni šú-bat* d*be-let-*DINGIR^{MEŠ} *ša-qa-at re-e-ši ša e-liš re-ša-a-ša ša-ma-mi en-da-ma šap-la-nu šur-šú-ša šuk-šud-du qe-reb a-ra-al-li*
>
> Simirria is a great mountain peak that thrusts up like a spear-blade and raising the (= its) head above the mountain ranges, the seat of Bēlet-ilī, whose two heads are leaning against the skies above, and whose root is reaching the netherworld down below.

While both passages describe the mountains' reach, the sequence 'fundaments of heaven' (*šupuk šamê*) followed by 'netherworld' (*arallû*) in Tablet IX is replaced by the sequence

[120] Or, as Bach (2020, 37) puts it, 'Sargon is portrayed as the leader of a company of heroes'.

[121] SB Gilgameš IX, 37 + 40–41 (translation George 2003); TCL 3, 18–19 (translation Bach 2020).

'heavens' (*šamāmī*) followed by 'middle of the netherworld' (*qereb arallî*) in the Letter. The transformation of the original text reflects the allusion's overall purpose to elevate Sargon's image. As Bach (2020, 326) concludes, this literary strategy 'inscribes Sargon II as well as his army and entourage into a scene of clearly mytho-epic proportions'. Here, one is certainly also called to recall how Dūr-Šarrukīn was established near a mountain, and that Sargon's victory over Urartu that is outlined in the Letter provided the resources required to build his city.

Whether these allusions are understood as subtle references to Gilgameš that appear to be the outcome of a sustained scribal strategy or, more simply, that the account of the eighth campaign engages with themes, motifs and tropes that are in a way comparable to the actions of Gilgameš, it is otherwise established that Sargon's scribes formulated his image in relation to legendary figures. Marc Van De Mieroop (1999) has proposed that Sargon's chief scholar Nabû-zuqup-kēnu attempted to equate the king with Sargon of Akkad, the legendary founder of the dynasty of Akkad and the grandfather of Narām-Sîn, by repeatedly referring to him as *arkû* ('the second'). Presumably on the basis that the Old Assyrian king named Sargon I was ignored or conflated, Van De Mieroop (1999, 329) observes how texts such as the so-called Sargon Geography and the Sargon Legend, which are both understood as engaging with and creating new literary traditions about Sargon of Akkad, were produced during the reign of Sargon II, and argues that: 'By using the name Sargon, the king of Assyria must have attempted to adopt the characteristics of his famous ancient predecessor'.[122]

[122] See also the useful discussion and further references for the potential conflation of Sargon II with the earlier Assyrian Sargon and Sargon of Akkad in Baker 2023, 299.

I have already outlined here how Sargon's name was given as the measurement for his city walls, but the scribal strategy Van De Mieroop proposes of presenting Assyrian Sargon II in terms of Sargon of Akkad suggests further intellectual engagement. While the exact numerical workings of the relationship between Sargon's name and the measure of the wall of Dūr-Šarrukīn remains mysterious, a recent study by Martin Worthington (2024) reveals yet another layer of scholarly 'name play'. Glazed brick decorations from Khorsabad that are associated with several temples but best preserved from a temple dedicated to the lunar deity Sîn represent two symbolic sequences that scholars have identified with Sargon's name. The first tripartite sequence is made up of lion, tree and plough symbols, whereas the second sequence of five symbols also includes a bird and a bull between the lion and tree. Cyril Gadd (1948) first suggested that these symbolic sequences spell out the name Sargon, but Worthington revises their reading and also identifies each symbol with a constellation that was known to the Assyrians and associated by them with the sky deity Anu as well as with the Enlil.[123]

Through his revisitation of this topic, Worthington (2024, 128) argues that the presentation of the symbols in the city was intended for a dual purpose: they 'wrote Sargon's name and placed it in the heavens'. In the following discussion, I will consider how Sargon's kingship was presented in terms of heavenly affiliations by engaging the cosmogonic poem Enūma eliš, which describes how Marduk, the god of Babylon and son of Ea, defeats the chaos monster Tiāmat and her demonic horde and then, being declared supreme among the gods, establishes cosmic order. In particular, and in a comparable way

[123] For history of interpretation and images see Worthington 2024, 110-119 (although he identifies them as being Flandin's work). See also Frahm 2013 on this topic. For Esarhaddon's 'astroglyphs' see Roaf and Zgoll 2010.

to how Sargon's name was connected to the built environment of Dūr-Šarrukīn, I will make the case that the presentation of Sargon's deeds, namely building the city, was presented there in equally expansive terms. As also pointed out by Van De Mieroop (1999, 338), Sargon likens himself to the antediluvian sage Adapa, when describing the inspiration that prompted the building of Dūr-Šarrukīn. Moreover, and crucially, his construction of the city is further formulated in terms of Enūma eliš.[124]

> *iptema abbullāti ina ṣēlē kilallāni*
>
> he (i.e., Marduk) opened gates in both ribcages.
>
> *i-na ṣe-li ki-lal-la-an mé-eḫ-ret* 4 IM.MEŠ 8 KÁ.GAL.MEŠ *ap-te-e-ma*
>
> in both sides in front of the 4 winds I opened 8 gates.

The connection becomes more pronounced with the knowledge that Marduk uses the wind to destroy Tiāmat in the poem. Further interpreting this passage relative to the lion-holding heroes, Eppihimer points out that a figure given the proper name Laḫmu also appears in Enūma eliš. As Marduk stations Laḫmu at the gates of Apsû, the primordial freshwater, as part of his establishment of order in the cosmos, Eppihimer (2019, 188) argues that Sargon's stationing of the six-locked hero on the palace terrace was intended to 'frame the city as a primordial creation'. Having now reviewed some of the prevalent associations, in

[124] Enūma eliš V, 9-11 (translation Heimpel 1986 as quoted in Van De Mieroop 1999, 337); RINAP 2 Sargon II 9, 82. See earlier Parpola 1995, 69. On formulations of Mesopotamian kingship in terms of Enūma eliš also see notably Abusch 2016.

the following section of this chapter, I intend to take this argument further by considering this passage from Sargon's building inscription in its artistic context, i.e., being written on winged, human-headed bull guardians that were stationed around the city.

Sargon's Divine Creations

In this section of this chapter, I will extend the argument that Sargon's construction of Dūr-Šarrukīn is visualised as well as described in cosmological terms. To do this, it is first necessary to return both lion-holding heroes to their intended surrounds: the human-headed, winged bulls wearing headdresses incorporating divine horns, often referred to as *lamassu*, who flanked both figures in their ancient settings and were carved with references to Enūma eliš. Place identified pairs of winged, bull-bodied and human-headed guardians during his excavations at Khorsabad stationed along the ancient city walls and outside of the entrance gates to various courts and the palace terrace.[125] These hybrid beings presented a striking first impression, typically exceeding 4.5 m in height (fig. 17).[126] As at Kalḫu, these hybrid winged guardian figures were initially stationed in pairs as self-sufficient units.[127] It is significant that, at Dūr-Šarrukīn, these winged bulls joined the lion-holding

[125] Place 1867–1870, vol. 2, pls. 11-13 and 19-20.

[126] Albenda gives this as a representative measurement of the winged bull sculptures known today. See catalogue of extant winged bull guardians including earlier references, which publish the individual measurements, in Albenda 1986, ch. 9. Surviving sculptures are currently displayed in the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad, the Louvre Museum in Paris, the British Museum in London and the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures Museum in Chicago. Another bull was unearthed as recently as 2023 as part of the renewed French excavations at Khorsabad. See Butterlin 2022.

[127] See, for example, Mallowan 1966, 103-104 on the Nimrud colossal figures.

heroes discussed above to form individual tripartite formations. Pauline Albenda (1986, 102-103) has notably described these formations as a 'grand royal emblem' introduced by Sargon.[128]

It is my view that the interpretation of the lion-holding heroes' contributions to the Khorsabad relief programme can be greatly enhanced by considering their representation relative to the flanking bulls. The development to show the lion-holding heroes between the winged bulls would seem to build on the diversity in supernatural guardians already seen in the sculptures from Nimrud, where winged, human-headed bulls and lions could be depicted with variations including having hands folded in front of them or holding deer, and with other accessories such as belts or fish-hoods (fig. 19). However, the introduction of the heroes between the hybrid bulls at Dūr-Šarrukīn would seem to introduce a more perceptibly human element, especially in the case of the throne room hero with the recognisably Assyrian hairstyle, despite his massive scale.

Significantly, winged, apotropaic guardians feature less in the Khorsabad reliefs than the reliefs that were displayed in Aššurnaṣirpal's Northwest Palace at Kalḫu. A wide variety of apotropaic guardians and scenes involving them are represented in the reliefs from Nimrud, and to the full height of the relief slabs that they are depicted on.[129] By contrast, the Khorsabad reliefs have been characterised by a 'reduction' (Kertai 2015a, 102-103) of such scenes and the more limited representation of apotropaic guardians on smaller panels positioned near to gates and portals. Replacing the former presence of the

[128] Albenda 1986. This emblem continues to be used by Sargon's successor Sennacherib in his Southwest Palace built at Nineveh as well as at the Khinis canal gorge, as will be discussed in ch. III of this thesis.

[129] For example, a relief in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: MMA 17.190.2082.

full-scale reliefs showing such scenes and featuring the king in the reliefs from Nimrud, the Khorsabad reliefs represent full-scale military conquests or hunting scenes. Moreover, group, rather than individual, banqueting scenes and game hunting scenes set in the woods, are some of the other artistic developments introduced in the relief programme for Dūr-Šarrukīn.[130]

Guy Bunnens (2006) demonstrates that the strategy of framing the royal creation of cities in terms of Enūma eliš was already utilised at Kalḫu through his study of the inscription carved onto Aššurnaṣirpal's so-called Banquet Stele, which is now housed in the Mosul Museum, which describes the construction of the city, the Northwest Palace and a lavish inaugural celebration.[131] In particular, the structure of the inscription follows the structure of Enūma eliš, with both texts being concerned with the defeat and putting to work of subjugated peoples; the organisation of water for subsistence; the introduction of gods into the city; the setting up of the image of the king.

It has been suggested by Ataç that Enūma eliš was used as a reference point for the visualisation of royal action in palatial reliefs only much later, during the reigns of Sennacherib (r. 704–681 BC) and Aššurbanipal (r. 668–ca. 631 BC).[132] However, it is my view that Enūma eliš was already being appealed to visually at Dūr-Šarrukīn. Through the following examination of the relief sequence that originally lined the far-right section of

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[130] See the useful comparison of the Nimrud and Khorsabad reliefs in Matthiae 2012, 481-485.

[131] See Oates and Oates 2001, 40-41 and fig. 18 for the stele. The inscription is published as RIMA 2 Ashurnasirpal II 30.

[132] Ataç (2010b, 182) has proposed that the survival of the *ugallu*, the lion-demon, in the reliefs of Sargon's successor Sennacherib and his great-grandson Aššurbanipal may be situated within an increasing appeal to Enuma eliš given that these demons appear in the poem. See also discussion of *ugallu* in Ornan 2004, 87-88.

the southeast wall of Façade n, near to Sargon's throne room, which shows the continuous transport of timber to Dūr-Šarrukīn in the sea, containing within it an image of a *lamassu*, I will now begin to consider how the carving of the Dūr-Šarrukīn building inscriptions onto the monumental *lamassu* guardians can be seen as a broader strategy.

Five stone relief slabs depicting the transport sequence survive in a near complete state in the Louvre (figs. 20-24), though a possible further two slabs might have existed.[133] One particularly fragmentary slab (AO 19888) shows men on land advancing to the left lugging wood.[134] While this slab's original placement in the sequence is unknown, it is likely that this slab began the sequence because the men are shown to move toward the left of the sequence, which is in line with the general flow of movement across the numbered slabs. Slabs 1-2 (AO 19889) show timber being carried across an unknown body of water by ships.[135] The water is populated with miniature islands, various forms of sea life, and, intriguingly, mythological creatures including a *lamassu*, a winged bull (i.e., without a human head) and a merman (understood to be a *kulullû*).[136] Slab 3 (AO 19890) shows the leftwards progression of the seascape, featuring lizards, serpents, shells and another

[133] Illustrated in Botta and Flandin 1849–1850, vol. 2, pls. 31-33.

[134] The measurement given for this in Pottier's (1924, no. 45) catalogue is 3.02 m x 2 m.

[135] Pottier (1924, no. 43) measures 2.93 m x 4.08 m.

[136] This figure was, in its first publication in Longpérier 1847, described as a 'fish-tailed monster' and a 'triton'. As pointed out by Robson (2019, 70): the cultic association between the *kulullû* and wisdom from before the primordial Flood was expressed by the stationing of monumental variants outside of the Nabû temple, Ezida ('True House') at Kalḫu. The association between the *kulullû* and Sargon is further evidenced by the appearance of one alongside a centaur on a bronze pole band found at the Nabû temple at Khorsabad (Frankfort 1935, fig. 96).

merman.[137] Finally, slab 4 (AO 19891) shows men also facing left lugging wood towards an upward-curving road.[138]

I am chiefly interested here in the visual relationship between the monumental *lamassu* guardians carved in high relief that lined the city and palace walls of Dūr-Šarrukīn and the smaller *lamassu* image carved in low relief in the lower middle area of the sea shown in slabs 1-2 of the transport of timber sequence (fig. 21). These representations of the *lamassu* are connected not only by their shared subject but also by the shared role that each *lamassu* plays in its context, even despite their different scales. I suggest that the *lamassu* in the sea can be seen to assist and guard in the transport of timber in a comparable way to how the *lamassu* gateway guardians served to reinforce palace portals. In support of this view, it may be noticed that, whereas the mythological creatures all face the direction of travel (i.e., right to left) in the transport sequence, the non-mythological fish can be seen to move in all directions, clearly not participating in what must be understood as their co-ordinated, leftwards action. The presence of *kulullû* at both the front (fig. 24) and rear of the transport sequence, who seem to propel themselves forward with their left arms, would suggest that the transport is, furthermore, co-ordinated by the divine figures in the sea, overall forming a protective unit.

Albenda (1983, 24) observed that the inclusion of the supernatural figures in the sea 'is somewhat surprising', and, in line with Winter's (1981) influential study, has otherwise interpreted the scene in terms of historical narrative (2003, 12). Similarly, scholars have sought to positively identify aspects of the scene including the body of water represented

[137] Pottier (1924, no. 44) measures 2.83 m x 2.3 m.

[138] Pottier (1924, no. 46) measures 1.8 m x 2.46 m.

(e.g., in Albenda 1983, the Mediterranean), where the wood is being brought to (e.g., in Reade 2018, Dūr-Šarrukīn), which type of wood is being represented and where it might be from (e.g., in Linder 1986, cedar from Lebanon). These practical concerns have in part been motivated by the volume of correspondence from the reign of Sargon concerning the acquisition of timber and the labour and effort required to transport it.[139] Certainly, Sargon boasts of his acquisition of materials for the construction of the palace in his building inscription, mentioning different types of wood:[140]

> GIŠ.*mu-suk-kan-ni* GIŠ.*ere*-IGI GIŠ.ŠUR.MÌN GIŠ.*dup-ra-ni*
> GIŠ.ŠIM.LI *u* GIŠ.*bu-uṭ-ni i-na qí-bi-ti-šú-nu*
> *ṣir-ti a-na mu-šab šar-ru-ti-ia ab-ni-ma*
>
> at their splendid command I built therein palatial halls with ivory of elephants, ebony, boxwood, rosewood, cedar, cypress, junipers and terebinth for the dwelling of my kingship.

As Ataç (2010a, 273) has observed, Gilgameš and Enkidu's travel to the Cedar Forest, which leads to their encounter with and defeat of its guardian demon, Humbaba, and subsequent acquisition of timber (Tablet V) and killing of the Bull of Heaven (Tablet VI) 'may also have been suggested' by the transport of timber sequence. This is especially given the presence of winged and bovine creatures in the sea, in addition to the presence of the logs. Providing further support for the idea that these particular episodes could be engaged with for Assyrian architectural decoration, it is also of relevance that the head of

[139] See discussion in Parpola 1995, 57-59.

[140] RINAP 2 Sargon II 9, 60-63.

Humbaba was represented upon monumental gateposts outside the Middle Assyrian temple at Tell al-Rimah, where it served, like the Khorsabad bulls, as an apotropaic guardian.[141] As Paul Collins (2019, 49-50) has otherwise concluded, 'narrative art depicted ritual action that transformed [historical events] into cyclical myth in order to ensure a return to a divinely ordered world'. It seems to me, then, that the presence of the mythological beings in the sea in the transport sequence should be seen to transform this terrestrial scenario.

Continuing with the present line of interpretation, I would like to foreground an important point of comparison and distinction between the *lamassu* in the sea and the *lamassu* gate guardian. Whereas the former type accompanies the transport of the wood, the latter type stood either side of the city's doors, which would have been made of wood. It is, therefore, significant in my view that the *lamassu* gate guardians and the *lamassu* in the sea are connected by their representation relative to wood. The *lamassu* in the sea and *lamassu* gate guardians, when considered alongside each other, can be seen to articulate their otherworldly character and functional reason for being in the city (i.e., to provide supernatural protection). At the same time, their visual representation in close proximity to each other and the material of wood also gestures toward the status of both forms of *lamassu* as constructed works of art brought into existence at Sargon's behest to act in his service. As Bahrani (2014, 47) observes, the *lamassu* gate guardians 'are real and not real, they are architecture and sculpture… living and stone', but the blurring is heightened when these beings are understood in relation to the *lamassu* in the sea.[142]

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[141] See Graff 2012, 39 for discussion and, in particular, cat. no. 220 for references. The head of Humbaba was also represented on terracotta plaques, and Graff (2013, 141) has argued that these images, in an apotropaic sense, 'held the enormous power of the demon himself'.

[142] See also Bahrani 2018 on interrelated representation of subject across scale in the reliefs from Nimrud.

As Simo Parpola (1995, 61) has observed, the question as to how to transport the *lamassu* gateway guardians to Dūr-Šarrukīn is the 'only problem that surfaces in the letters' concerning the city's construction. In my view, the representation of the *lamassu* in the sea as part of the transport of timber sequence actually gestures toward this 'problem'. Even though the *lamassu* in the sea is not represented inside the boat, the surpassing skill required to create and transport these guardians becomes more apparent when interpreting the *lamassu* gateway guardians and the *lamassu* in the sea relative to each other.[143] At the same time, the viewer is reminded that the *lamassu* are not just impressive works of art. Their wearing of headdresses incorporating the divine horns, in both the sea and by the palace portals, indicates that they are divine creations; as the transport of timber sequence implies, they swam there themselves.

In the same way that Marduk creates the cosmos out of Tiāmat's remains and stations Laḫmu at the gates of Apsû upon his victory in Enūma eliš, Sargon's control over the universe is expressed in the transportation scene, which delineates a new watershed moment in Assyrian visual imagery via the representation of royal control over non-Assyrian bodies. While the subject of acquiring timber from foreign regions is attested in the art of Aššurnaṣirpal II and Šalmaneser III, as noted by Albenda (1983, 23) the representation of a massive Assyrian workforce composed only of non-Assyrians is previously unseen. This representational development arguably reflects the establishment and consolidation of Assyria as an imperial power in the eighth century BC, during which time the relationship between the Assyrian 'centre' and non-Assyrian 'periphery' also

[143] See discussion of this theme in relation to Sennacherib's reliefs from Nineveh in Winter 2008a.

became a subject of heightened speculation in textual sources.[144] Colonisation and imperial activity, most recently and notably in Muṣaṣir, allowed Sargon to acquire the resources required to build Dūr-Šarrukīn. In keeping with this development, non-Assyrian actors are represented within the relief sequence as serving Assyria, providing labour to facilitate the acquisition of raw materials in an endless coming and going.

In a comparable way to how the representation of the *lamassu* in the sea as part of the transport of timber relief sequence can be illuminated by interpreting the image alongside the *lamassu* gateway guardians, I contend that the representations of the non-Assyrian actors transporting timber can also be interpreted relative to the lion-holding figures who are stationed outside the throne room and on the palace terrace. Moreover, in a comparable way to how the monumental *lamassu* are called upon for various duties in the creation and protection of the palace, perhaps emerging from the Apsû, as did Laḫmu, to stand guard, the foreign tributaries can essentially be seen to emerge from the sea to process on land in slab 4 of the transport sequence to serve Assyria.[145] The only ships shown sailing from Khorsabad (i.e., oriented from right to left rather than left to right) are empty of timber, presumably so as to collect more resources. The labourers' movement continues once arriving to the city, where their transformation or process of

[144] Consider, for example, Van De Mieroop's treatment of the so-called Sargon Geography, a literary text that seems to reflect on the extent of Sargon II's territorial exploits, though it is framed around his third-millennium namesake (1999, 333).

[145] In this sense, the *apkallu* relationship with the colossal, winged gate figures at Nimrud, which could also be represented with fish hoods and bellies, is built on at Khorsabad with the relationship between the colossal, winged gate figures and the king. See, for example, fig. 50 in Mallowan 1966, 103-104. See also Kertai 2015b on the artistic groundwork laid for the development of gateway guardians at Nineveh.

'Assyrianisation' becomes complete.[146] In the following section of this chapter, I will consider how Sargon's creation of the *lamassu* wearing headdresses incorporating divine horns may be further related to the representation of the non-Assyrian figures shown in the procession scenes on the other side of the door marked 'c' on the southeast wall of Botta and Flandin's Façade n (i.e., the other side of the wall to the transport of timber sequence).

The Ordered Royal Court

The exterior walls of Sargon's palace were decorated with larger-than-life procession scenes showing groupings of foreign tributaries and beardless Assyrian attendants moving towards the entrance gates. The procession scenes decorated locations including the outer façades of courts, the courtyard preceding the throne room, and the façades of courts leading to the back terraces. Represented to the full height of the walls, which stood 3 m high upon an already towering citadel, these procession scenes would have been visible to palace visitors as they approached.[147] While there are reliefs showing procession scenes attested from Aššurnaṣirpal's Northwest Palace at Kalḫu, thought to have been originally placed on the throne room façade, they were neither as large nor as frequently represented as at Dūr-Šarrukīn.[148] Moreover, the Dūr-Šarrukīn processions continued over different façades and walls, which would have made them appear endless from any given viewpoint.

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[146] See in particular Feldman 2014, 79-110 and the more recent application of this term in DeGrado 2019.

[147] See also the relevant discussion of scale in McMahon 2013, 164.

[148] See, for example, a relief of Aššurnaṣirpal's, now held in the British Museum (BM 124562), from the throne room façade (see also discussion in Layard 1849b, vol. 2, 118).

The procession scenes involving tributaries visually express Assyrian supremacy over foreign peoples made subject to Sargon's rule. On the southeast wall of Botta and Flandin's Façade n, to the left of the door marked c (i.e., the other side of the wall to the transport of timber sequence), foreign tributaries are shown moving from left to right towards the *lamassu* flanking the palace entrance (fig. 25). The tributaries are uniformly dressed in caps, boots and scalloped garments, wear pointed beards and moustaches and are shown presenting objects including sacks (slab 22) and bowls (slab 21). Different ethnic groups are represented throughout the procession scenes, but each group is represented homogeneously.[149] As with the representation of the labourers transporting wood by sea, the procession scenes articulate Sargon's power to order through the visualisation of the foreigners in their assigned roles as tributaries. In this sense, the representation of the processing tributaries moves them into new states of being.

The clearest contrast represented in the Dūr-Šarrukīn procession scenes was between non-Assyrian and Assyrian persons, differentiated primarily by their clothes and hairstyles but also by the foreigners' bowed postures vs the Assyrians' upright postures.[150] Beardless Assyrian attendants are shown in reliefs from the southeast wall of Botta and Flandin's Façade n (fig. 25), where they can be seen to usher the foreign tributaries forwards towards the entrance of the palace.[151] In other procession scenes depicted on the northeast wall of that façade (fig. 13), beardless Assyrian attendants are shown with their

[149] See the relevant discussions in Bahrani 2006 and Brown 2014.

[150] This representational strategy is already witnessed in reliefs from Nimrud. See the study by Cifarelli 1998.

[151] Botta and Flandin 1849–1850, vol. 1, pl. 29.

hands folded (fig. 26).[152] The beardless attendants have been the subject of much discussion in scholarship. Based on a synthesis of visual and textual evidence, including palace reliefs, cylinder seals, and royal inscriptions, these figures are generally equated with Assyrian elites referred to in inscriptions as *ša rēši* ('one of the head').[153] As this group is understood to contrast the group that is otherwise referred to as *ša ziqni* ('one of the beard'), the beardless attendants depicted in Assyrian imagery have typically been understood as representing eunuchs.[154] Diagnostic analyses based on art have been advanced correspondingly, attributing visual traits including the beardlessness of these figures but also their rounded faces to interventions associated with castration.[155]

The beardless Assyrian attendants are better attested in the reliefs from Khorsabad than anywhere else in the visual record which is, in turn, justified in scholarship by what is understood as the unprecedented political significance of the *šūt rēši* in the reign of Sargon. The *šūt rēši* are not always named in Sargon's inscriptions. Rather, they are described in their capacity to oversee parts of his empire as part of the royal ordering of the universe and distribution of royal authority. It has been argued by Omar N'Shea (2016, 219) that the *šūt rēši*'s 'reconfigured biology and redefined masculinity granted them power and privilege' as they replaced 'reproductively-functional males as governors of provinces',

[152] Botta and Flandin 1849–1850, vol. 1, pl. 30; Loud, Frankfort and Jacobsen 1936, figs. 38-40. The beardless figure carved to the right of the prince in fig. 26 is thought (e.g., Guralnick 2012) to have originally had a beard and royal signifiers including back tassels before being re-carved in antiquity.

[153] To name a few studies see, for example, Reade 1972, Watanabe 1999, N'Shea 2016 and Frazer 2022. See additional references in Frazer 2022, 98 fn. 15.

[154] Complicating this interpretation see, in particular, Siddall 2007.

[155] See recently, for example, Ziffer 2023.

with the view that their inability to produce offspring of their own would make them more loyal to the king or at least insubstantial kings in and of themselves. Irit Ziffer's (2023, 80) recent study of the beardless attendants adopts much the same approach as N'Shea's. Indeed, she concludes that 'the ideal courtier was a eunuch'. In offering my own reading of their role as depicted in the reliefs, I am primarily interested in considering which visual relationships involving the beardless attendants are established in the procession scenes, and how this serves the Dūr-Šarrukīn relief programme.

The beardless attendants are contrasted with the foreign tributaries on the basis of their being Assyrian but also with the bearded Assyrian figures, most notably, the king and the crown prince, in terms of their lack of a beard. They therefore stand between the foreigners and the royal encounter. The most frequently represented bearded Assyrian personas in the exterior procession scenes are the king, recognisable by his distinctive regalia and truncated, conical hat with back-tassels, and the crown prince, recognisable by his distinctive diadem with back-tassels (figs. 27-28).[156] As noted by Kertai (2015a, 103 fn. 102, 126), the absence of heads on some reliefs from Khorsabad means that it is not always easy to identify the figure shown opposite the king. However, when the crown prince is clearly shown in these reliefs, he is always shown meeting the gaze of the king directly. As a result, the crown prince is positioned as the most significant human figure in the relief programme after the king.[157]

[156] Botta and Flandin 1849–1850, vol. 1, pl. 12 and 14.

[157] See the comprehensive discussion of the crown prince's functional roles in Kertai 2017.

The prominent role played by the crown prince Sennacherib at Sargon's court is well evidenced.[158] But the image of the crown prince depicted in the procession scenes is, like the others represented in the Khorsabad relief programme, better interpreted as a 'generic crown prince rather than a specific individual' (Kertai 2017, 127). It was discussed in Chapter I that the royal image was intended to depict the king in his idealised form, and it is also true that, in Assyrian art, representations of most human figures portray stylised personas or types rather than anything resembling contemporary notions of what a portrait is.[159] The figure of the crown prince as shown in this imagery is therefore to be taken as both a representation of the crown prince Sennacherib but also the idea of his office, and any other person who held that office, beyond him.

To begin to conclude this initial analysis of the procession scenes, it may be observed that the presence of so many reliefs from Khorsabad that depict the encounter scene, compared to the smaller number of the reliefs that depict this scene from Nimrud, and the smaller scale that these reliefs are represented at in the Nimrud reliefs, would have had the effect of making the royal dyad much more present, and at a greater scale, at Sargon's court.[160] Ataç (2010a, 276) has already hypothesised that the pairing of king and crown prince may have been presented as 'analogous' to Gilgameš and Enkidu in Neo-

[158] See, for example, the discussion of the crown prince's household and courtly role in Groß and Kertai 2019.

[159] See p. 21. On the Assyrian conception of a 'portrait', see notably Winter 1997 and 2009.

[160] The king's position receiving the processions is further emphasised through scale on the southwest wall. The floor slopes down towards him and makes him seem taller than those approaching as the reliefs become bigger, progressing with the approach. Kertai 2015a, 103.

Assyrian glyptic.[161] Engaging this idea in the context of my own exploration of the reliefs from Khorsabad, I am prompted to recall what would have been the towering presence of the lion-holding figures on the citadel at Dūr-Šarrukīn. Regardless as to whether one accepts the potential association between the lion-holding figures and the Epic, it is significant that they represent another prominent dyad, mirroring the royal pair and further distinguishing them from other figures represented in the reliefs.

My analysis here of the relative visual prominence and proximity of the beardless attendants to the king and crown prince in the reliefs from Khorsabad overall suggests that they are to be understood as playing a supportive role that is emphasised by their visual relationship to this dyad, which is characterised by similarities in dress and hair and differences in facial hair.[162] At this juncture it is pertinent to recall Ziffer's (2023, 80) argument that, typically, 'the [beardless attendant] virtually protects the physical space that surrounds the monarch' and therefore supports the kingship.[163] As the reliefs from Khorsabad often incorporate the crown prince into the king's space, the beardless attendants can also be seen to support the succession. Nuancing the above explored assumption that the *šūt rēši* were empowered because they could not pose a challenge to

[161] For an example seal discussed by Ataç, see Boston Museum of Fine Arts 65.1415.

[162] See, for comparison, the discussion of the relative visual representation of the king and the beardless figures in Assante 2017.

[163] Ziffer (2023, 80) continues: 'very much like the protective genii who flank him along with the sacred tree in the throne room of Ashurnasirpal at Nimrud'. See, for example, a relief showing such a scene held in the collection of the Hood Museum of Dartmouth College: s.856.3.2.

the succession, I would suggest that the reliefs from Khorsabad emphasise how their support for the royal dyad is, rather, dynastically productive.[164]

Kinship and The Gods

What emerges from the study of the scenes showing the king and crown prince relative to the Assyrian courtiers and foreign tributaries who are represented around them in the reliefs from Khorsabad is a picture of their relationship as being the axial centre of Sargon's court. Compared with the later palace reliefs from Nineveh that depict the king at a greater remove from his subjects, at Dūr-Šarrukīn the king was shown as being more present with the people.[165] Moreover, whereas in the Northwest Palace of Aššurnaṣirpal II at Kalḫu the king was shown to imbibe as a solo figure, in Sargon's palace at Dūr-Šarrukīn representations of what Winter (2016) has described as 'commensality' abound in group banqueting scenes. It has been suggested that 'Khorsabad is the one Assyrian capital-city whose location has no obvious practical merit and which was presumably founded as an ideal, ideological statement by a king, Sargon, who had seized the throne for himself and wished to be presented as a unique, universal emperor' (Reade 2011, 118). To my mind, Sargon represented himself as the builder of not only a new city but a new community.

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[164] I intend to further engage with the idea that the *šūt rēši*'s 'gender configuration suspended [them] in an eternal present, without past and without future' (N'Shea 2016, 219), and its applicability to reliefs, in future.

[165] Matthiae 2012, 491. This is even though the organisation of the palace courtyards around big, open spaces, would have made the king's person relatively inaccessible to his courtiers. See also discussions of this aspect of the architectural configuration of the palace in McMahon 2013 and Portuese 2020.

Community ideals would have been engendered from the outset of the construction of Dūr-Šarrukīn, as responsibility was divided between various governors of the empire, including from the kingdoms of Arpad, Samaria and Meggido, who each received a share of 40,000 bricks to make an equal contribution to the construction.[166] Thus, an image of collaboration is also projected by the reliefs that show Assyrians in processions carrying objects that would have been used inside the palace, including furniture.[167] Paolo Matthiae (2012, 492) has described the procession scenes as representing 'a collective accomplishment'. Indeed, the frequent representation of the king greeting Assyrians with a shepherd's staff in his hands, which he is shown to hold more than any earlier Assyrian king, in addition to the flower attribute that is frequently in his hands when he greets tributaries, further contributes to this picture. Ludovico Portuese (2017, 123) has suggested that this benign imagery would have, overall, functioned 'at a psychological level to perform the role of bonding the collective'.[168] This idea can be taken further through consideration of the choice to represent processions at Dūr-Šarrukīn to such an extent and at such a large scale.

Processions were conceptualised as inherently ritualistic activities that marked emphatically the movement of things, people and deities, and were thus performed as important parts of military victories, cultic festivals and the inaugurations of cities, palaces,

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[166] See discussion in Parpola 1995, 65.

[167] See, for example Botta and Flandin 1849–1850, vol. 1, pls. 16-19. Per Albenda (2003, 11): 'One attendant holds in each hand a lion-headed situla. What makes this object especially noteworthy is that an actual bronze example was discovered in a tomb burial at the Phrygian site of Gordion, located in central Turkey'.

[168] This fits in with the broader trend in Sargonid imagery and texts toward incorporating a fuller picture of diversity rather than only showing foreign peoples as subjugated. See notably Brown 2014 and DeGrado 2019 on the palace reliefs and Bach 2022b on the eighth campaign, which distinguishes foreigners positively.

and temples.[169] As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, Dūr-Šarrukīn was established in the wake of Sargon's victory over Muṣaṣir, and the construction of Dūr-Šarrukīn was made possible through Muṣaṣir's plunder. By representing procession scenes on the palace's walls, the processions that would have carried booty from Muṣaṣir back to Assyria were commemorated. Indeed, such scenes serve to perpetuate the victory and communicate Sargon's triumph through the representation of the culmination of the conquest in the imagery.

Overall, the processions contribute to the depiction of a ritualised environment set after the battle, when all including the gods of Assyria were invited inside the new city. This is evidenced in the city's building inscriptions:[170]

> *ba-ʾu-lat ar-ba-ʾi li-šá-nu*
> *a-ḫi-tu at-me-e la mit-ḫur-ti a-ši-bu-ut* KUR-*i ù ma-a-ti ma-la ir-te-ʾu-ú*
> ZÁLAG DINGIR.MEŠ EN *gim-ri ša i-na zi-kir* ^{d}*aš-šur* EN-*ia ina me-tel ši-bir-ri-ia áš-lu-la*
> *pa-a* 1-*en ú-šá-áš-kin-ma ú-šar-ma-a qé-reb-šú* DUMU.MEŠ KUR *aš-šur*.KI *mu-du-ut i-ni*
> *ka-la-ma a-na šu-ḫu-uz ṣi-bit-ti pa-laḫ* DINGIR ù LUGAL LÚ.*ak-li*
> LÚ.*šá-pi-ri ú-ma-ʾe-er-šú-nu-ti ul-tu ši-pìr* URU *ù* É.GAL.MEŠ-*ia*
> *ú-qat-tu-ú* DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ *a-ši-bu-ut* KUR *aš-šur*.KI *i-na qer-bi-ši-na aq-re-e-ma ta-šil-ta-ši-na áš-kun ša mal-ki ṣi-it* ^{d}UTU-*ši ù e-reb* ^{d}UTU-ši
> KÙ.GI KÙ.BABBAR *mim-ma aq-ru si-mat* É.GAL.MEŠ *šá-ti-na ta-mar-ta-šú-nu ka-bit-tú am-ḫur*
>
> People of the four (quarters); foreign tongue(s); diverse speech; those who inhabit mountain and land; as many as the light of the gods (i.e., Šamaš), the lord of totality, continually shepherded; whom I had carried off by the lordship of my

[169] See, for example, the studies of processions in May 2012 and Nadali 2013.

[170] RINAP 2 Sargon II 9, 92b-100.

> shepherd's staff, through the command of Aššur, my lord; I established one mouth and I settled (them) inside it (i.e., the city). I commissioned sons of the land of Assyria, masters of every craft, as overseers (and) leaders for the instruction of correct behaviour, reverence for god and king. After I had finished work on the city and my palatial halls, I invited the great gods, those who dwell in the land of Assyria, inside them and I held a festival for them. From rulers of the east and the west, I received as their heavy audience gifts gold; silver; everything valuable; an appropriate symbol of these palatial halls.

The ritualised inauguration of Dūr-Šarrukīn occurred in the month of Ayyāru (month II) 706 BC, after the gods were inducted into their temples in the month of Tišri (month VII) 707 BC.[171] Sargon describes in the above passage, first, how he resettles a diverse flock within the city, establishes harmony between them, and sets Assyrians over them and, second, the moment that the halls are opened and the gods and diverse peoples are invited inside for a grand inauguration. Attempting to visualise this event, the procession scenes shown in the reliefs would have accompanied the transition visitors would have made moving from the space outside the palace to within it, from the first monumental lion-holding heroes flanked by *lamassu* that would have greeted them as they journeyed closer to the image of the king's encounter with the crown prince.

As well as memorialising the victory processions that would have occurred following the sack over Muṣaṣir, the processions scenes also memorialise and reflect the real-life processions that would have occurred before the reliefs themselves upon the city's inauguration. Both visitors to the palace and the represented court would have processed into the city in tandem, subsuming the human visitors to the palace into Sargon's new world order as articulated on the walls around them. As the procession reliefs towered

[171] See discussion in Parpola 1995, 66.

above them and repeated and mirrored their journeying inwards, one purpose of representing processions on the walls of Sargon's palace may well have been to lead visitors into the palace and set an example.

Sargon was not the first Assyrian king to describe himself as being the king of the four quarters (*šar kibrāt erba'i*), expressing his rule over a world empire, a title first claimed by Narām-Sîn of Akkad.[172] However, I would suggest that this idea was represented at Dūr-Šarrukīn through the structure of his palace.[173] At Kalḫu, the Northwest Palace was laid out in a 'linear' fashion from north to south; organised with the temples at the northmost point, followed by the throne room, reception suites, royal courtyard and then the service area.[174] By contrast, at Dūr-Šarrukīn, the royal palace was arranged into four quadrants, a structure which is neither anticipated nor repeated in Assyria. The palace entrance area was in the southern quad, the throne room was in the northern quad, the service area was in the eastern quad, and the main residential area was in the western quad, while the temples were in a separate, adjoined area to the southwest. A relief from the upper register of panel 7 from Room B of the Northwest Palace at Kalḫu, now in the British Museum (BM 124548), provides some visual precedent for the organisation of space in this balanced manner, albeit not for a palace, as the relief shows a circular fortified Assyrian camp divided into four segments (fig. 29).[175]

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[172] For example, RINAP 2 Sargon II 8, 1. Cf., RINAP 1 Tiglath-pileser III 37, 12; RIME 2 Narām-Sîn 1, 3.

[173] The argument is made in Thomason 2005 that Assyrian palaces were microcosmic centres of empire.

[174] See discussion of the architectural configuration of Kalḫu in Kertai 2015a, 94.

[175] Layard 1849a, pl. 30.

The arrangement of Sargon's palace into quadrants would have facilitated new forms of court interaction at Dūr-Šarrukīn, compared to at Kalḫu. As Jamie Novotny (2023, 406) stated, this structure was based on Babylon, which was also configured as an 'almost perfect square, with access to the city and palace provided by eight city gates'.[176] The case made throughout this chapter that Babylon's chief deity Marduk, and particularly Marduk's creation of the cosmos as outlined in Enūma eliš, informed the representation of Sargon's kingship and construction of Dūr-Šarrukīn reinforces the validity of this argument that this configuration 'may have been attractive [to Sargon]… because Babylon had been created not only as the center of the universe, but also as the eternal link between humans and gods'. Moreover, this argument can be further nuanced by considering the topography of the city further, and particularly its proximity to Mount Muṣri.

Whereas the traditional royal cities at Kalḫu and Nineveh were characterised by their establishment upon the Tigris River, Dūr-Šarrukīn was defined, by contrast, through its proximity to Mount Muṣri (McMahon 2013, 164). The importance of topography is expressed in the material remains from Khorsabad, as for example in the relief carved on the southwest side of Sargon's throne base that depicts Assyrian archers conquering a mountain fortress, while on the northeast side of the base the king is shown reviewing decapitated enemy heads above a river.[177] The mountains were conceptualised in Assyrian royal inscriptions as representing the border between east and west and Sargon's royal inscriptions engage with the idea of mountainous space defining surrounding areas and

[176] See also the earlier interpretation of the perfect square structure in Battini 2000.
[177] See discussion of throne base in Wilson 1995, 114.

peoples depending on their location relative to mountains as well.[178] At the same time, mountains were understood to possess the divine *melammu* and expressed 'overwhelming sublime' qualities (Bahrani 2018, 181). As witnessed by the victory stele of Narām-Sîn, mountains were long conceptualised as natural wonders against which to stage the relationship between kingship and divinity in Mesopotamia before Sargon II.[179]

While it has been suggested that 'the city's (i.e., Dūr-Šarrukīn's) engineers did not engage with [the mountain] setting or local topography' (McMahon 2013, 164), it is, at the same time recognised that the qualities of great scale and height defined Dūr-Šarrukīn's architecture. Indeed, the entire city was enclosed within walls that were approximately 20 m high and also immensely wide, measuring either 24 or 14 m, depending on whether Place or Botta's numbers are accepted.[180] As pointed out by Augusta McMahon (2013, 164), the citadel was pressed up against the city walls, and because of its size, the total plan would not have been viewable at ground-level. The royal palace itself was built upon a raised terrace within the already towering citadel and next to a towering ziggurat and raised temple complex. The royal palace covered a massive area and was nearly twice the size of Aššurnaṣirpal II's Northwest Palace.[181] Overall, the emphasis on scale and height in the architectural configuration of the city would have been harmonious with and, in my view, been in visual coherence with the mountain. One can only imagine how the lavishness of

[178] See discussion and examples in Ponchia 2006, 231-245 (see also Ponchia 2004).

[179] See the useful discussion of the use of the mountain trope to visualise Akkadian kingship in Winter 1999 and Ataç 2008, 904.

[180] Place 1867–1870, vol. 1, 161-166, discussed in Loud and Altman 1938, 18 and McMahon 2013, 165.

[181] In addition to the references given in the fn. above, see the discussion in Reade 2011, 115.

the relief programme in its original display would have further helped to transmit the nearby mountain's awe-inspiring qualities.

The Northwest Palace was made up of vertically sequenced spaces that were intended for specific, often ritualised, uses. In my view, the chosen location, built environment and the relief programme that was presented throughout Dūr-Šarrukīn, were intended to represent Dūr-Šarrukīn as being like a mountain built by Sargon through divine inspiration. Access to a range of 'metapersons', to borrow the earlier discussed term, was achieved for the community by the king, who was represented through the lion-holding heroes as being in direct relationship with them, as well as the crown prince.[182] Through their relative relationship to these figures of central importance, I would suggest that Sargon's court was represented as being in connection with the gods within a divinised realm; what Bahrani (2014, 22) has otherwise described as an 'aesthetic dimension'. Of course, the encounter between the king and crown prince is presented with primary importance in the reliefs from Khorsabad, but the reconstruction of the palatial environment that I have advanced throughout this discussion leads me to posit that the other persons shown were all visualised as having important roles to play within this design, and for collective benefit.

Excursus: The Royal Bridge to Nabû

While Sargon's palace was separated from the temple complex at Dūr-Šarrukīn, which was built upon a platform of its own, the two areas were connected by a stone bridge that

[182] See discussion and references given on p. 15.

provided the king with direct access to the Nabû temple (Loud and Altman 1938, 56-65). Having considered how Sargon's vision for his courtly community was expressed topographically and architecturally as well as through the palatial relief programme for the palace, in the following excursus I will probe how the architectural connection expressed between the palace terrace and the Nabû temple in particular would have further shaped the courtly community's interrelatedness with the divine through the deity Nabû in particular.

Nabû, despite being a Babylonian deity, gained increasing prominence for Assyrian royal ideology throughout the Sargonid period, beginning with the reign of Sargon II.[183] Aššurnaṣirpal II would become the first Assyrian king to mention Nabû in his royal inscriptions, and he built a temple for Nabû as part of his transformation of Kalḫu after he had taken care of the cult places dedicated to the traditionally prominent Assyrian deities. Eleanor Robson (2019, 65-68) points out that Sargon's successful conquest of Muṣaṣir as presented in the same Letter to Aššur discussed above in terms of Gilgameš, for the first time, 'consistently treats Nabu—always paired with his father Marduk—as a key factor in [the conquest's] success'. Indeed, to provide an example passage from the text:[184]

> *i-na e-mu-qi ṣi-ra-a-te ša* ^{d}*a-šur* EN-*ia i-na li-i-te da-na-ni ša* ^{d}EN ^{d}AG DINGIR.MEŠ *tik-le-ia*
>
> By the exalted strength of Aššur, my lord; by the victory and might of Bēl (i.e., Marduk and) Nabû, my divine helpers.

[183] This topic is treated at length in Robson 2019. See also the recent PhD diss., by Rubin (2021), which is a diachronic study of Nabû's developing ideological role in the Neo-Assyrian period.

[184] RINAP 2 Sargon II 65, 415.

Robson's observation that Nabû joins the litany of divine personas accredited for the Assyrian victory through his divine familial connection to Marduk is intriguing for the analysis of the prominent visual representation of the king-crown prince relationship at Dūr-Šarrukīn. This is especially because a connection between the palace terrace and the Nabû temple was expressed architecturally by the building of the bridge between them, and the case that I have otherwise made throughout this chapter that Sargon's establishment of Dūr-Šarrukīn is formulated in terms of Marduk's actions in Enūma eliš.

In addition to Nabû's increasing importance for Sargon's royal ideology, there appears to have been a promotion of scribal scholarship during Sargon's reign: scribes' names become more visible in the colophons of texts, there are many literary tablets dateable to the reign of Sargon, presumably reflecting extensive patronage of scribes, and there is evidence that, had Sargon not died abruptly on the battlefield in 705 BC, he would have established a great library in his new city.[185] As Nabû was a scribal deity, this development probably relates to his promotion as expressed in the built environment at Khorsabad.

It is, moreover, of note that in the vicinity of the Nabû temple there were various residences with reception suites, indicating that the residences belonged to people who are thought to have been relatives of the king or, more generally, important political figures. The residence referred to as 'K', the second largest of these residences, is of chief interest

[185] The evidence for the library includes the finding of sixteen ivory writing boards and sixteen wooden writing boards at Nimrud, as well as an inscription on the accompanying cover of the ivory boards that indicates that they were intended for Dūr-Šarrukīn. One of these is in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art: 54.117.12a, b. See Mallowan 1954, 98 and the relevant discussion in May 2018b, 119.

for the present analysis.[186] Decorated glazed bricks were found at this location in addition to sculptural works and, significantly, the remains of what would have originally been a huge mural. While the southwestern wall that the mural was originally painted on had collapsed, a 2.5 x 3.5 m section of painted plaster was found face down in a connected room, referred to as Room XII, and the painting is projected to have been an impressive 12.8 m tall (fig. 30).[187] Only the deity's pedestal remains, and the worshipping figures are only preserved as outlines (fig. 31), making their identities somewhat unclear.[188] Despite the little that has been preserved of the painting, a restoration was made picturing a deity in anthropomorphic form standing on a pedestal before the king and crown prince, and in vibrant blue and red hues (fig. 32).[189]

There is no accompanying inscription for the painting that might offer further clues but, from the little of the figures' outlines that remain, it has been suggested that this painting depicts the king and the crown prince engaged in a scene of worship and, relatedly, that Residence K would have been a residence for the crown prince at Dūr-Šarrukīn.[190] Given the proximity of the Nabû temple to this residence, it is quite possible that Nabû was the intended anthropomorphic deity originally standing on the pedestal. To provide further support for this notion, it is pertinent to recall how the bricks that were used

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[186] See Loud and Altman 1938, 65-69. Also see, in particular, Wilson 1995, 117.

[187] Measurements as reported in Loud and Altman 1938, 20, 83.

[188] A line drawing of the preserved elements is given in Loud and Altman 1938, fig. 12.

[189] The restoration is given in Loud and Altman 1938, pl. 89. As Green (2012, 132) observes, the frequent reproduction of the restoration in scholarship 'provides a good example of how some speculative elements within restorations can become accepted facts of iconography'.

[190] Reade 2011, 119.

to build Dūr-Šarrukīn were commissioned on the day of a festival for Nabû, and the city was inaugurated on 6 Ayyāru 706 BC, during a festival for Nabû and Tašmētu, further expressing his central significance for the royal envisioning of the city.[191]

While the gods are not represented in anthropomorphic or even symbolic form in the surviving reliefs from Sargon's palace, some additional support for the idea that it is the crown prince who is shown with the king worshipping a deity in the Residence K painting might be found in the positioning of reliefs showing the king and crown prince in the palace's portals. While both figures are depicted in standard royal dress, it has been pointed out previously that their representation in these spaces is 'exceptional' (Albenda 1986, 58) given that these locations were otherwise exclusively used to represent divine figures.

As Sargon remodelled the Nabû temple at Kalḫu around the same time that Dūr-Šarrukīn and its temple to Nabû were built, there seems to have been a concerted effort to augment the connection between this deity and the institution of kingship in this period. Overall, the importance granted to both Marduk and Nabû in the formulation of Sargon's kingship at Dūr-Šarrukīn, a city that seemingly borrowed the square layout of Marduk's city of Babylon, would lead me to query whether a conscious analogy was being established between the king and crown prince and Marduk and Nabû during the reign of Sargon. While the strands of evidence I have considered during this excursus permit only speculation, I think it is highly plausible that, in some way, the formulating of the relationship between the king and crown prince in these terms, like the building of the

[191] See discussion in Robson 2019, 70-75.

stone bridge between the palace terrace and the Nabû temple, was intended to connect the community with the divine.[192]

In commencing the construction of his elevated royal citadel, which echoed the mountainous landscape it was situated within, in addition to his royal palace, which was arranged into four quarters, I have made the case in this chapter that Sargon's intention was to found a new community in relationship with the divine, in part through building Dūr-Šarrukīn in connection with the mountain. I have argued that the so-called 'new royal emblem' of Sargon builds upon the use of monumental gateway guardians at Kalḫu to insert different ideas about royalty into that representational system. The lion-wielding figures express various visual connections to mythological figures. As Albenda has pointed out, the co-occurrence of the two visually distinguished heroes and the stationing of the Assyrian hero outside of the throne room formulates Sargon's image through his interconnectedness with this hero and, through him, the six-locked hero. The reference to Enūma eliš inscribed upon the monumental *lamassu* should be understood as part of a broader programme of formulating Sargon's creative work in relation to divine work given that the analogy between Marduk and Sargon in their provision of order is also expressed visually through the transport of timber relief sequence. The mythological creatures in the sea, especially the *lamassu*, interpreted in relation to the gate guardians, emphasise not only the exceptional nature of the palace's construction but also Sargon himself, who expresses control over objects, space and foreign people for the enterprise of his new city.

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[192] Intriguingly, a mural that unfortunately has not survived, may have made more tangible the idea of kinship with Gilgameš through relationships later at Nineveh, already indicated at Khorsabad by the presence of the colossal, curly-haired hero figures, as it seemed to have represented Sennacherib's princes with Gilgameš, Humbaba and possibly Enkidu. See discussions in Frahm 2002, 1115 and Frahm 2014, 218.

I have also suggested here that the theme of Assyrian control over foreign labourers was visually represented to unprecedented scale at Dūr-Šarrukīn as part of a broader strategy of depicting Sargon's assignment of order, with the procession scenes providing clearest witness to this. Indeed, the visual contrast communicated between the seemingly endless beardless figures and the bearded king and crown prince both reinforces the royal relationship and ties the royal pairing to the beardless figures, who are visualised as providing spatial reinforcement for them. At the same time, the beardedness of the royal pair ties them to the bearded *lamassu* and hero figures, who provide literal architectural as well as mythological structural reinforcement. Overall, the procession scenes are organised around the king's relationship or encounter with the crown prince, who presents the Assyrian courtiers and foreign tributaries to the king. On such a monumental scale in the mountainous context, this configuration expresses one vision for interrelatedness within the new courtly community; where people of the four quarters could live in harmonious kinship with one another and in proximity to the gods. Given the prominent place of the encounter of crown prince and king in the reliefs and the formulation of the kingship in terms of both Marduk and his divine son Nabû at and in relation to Dūr-Šarrukīn, one certainly wonders how the reliefs and other aspects of the built environment might have been brought into relationship with the royal dyad through rituals occurring in the city that would have further impressed divine-royal connection.

Nabû will not feature in the following chapter of this thesis, which will examine the representational consequences of Sennacherib's religious reforms that led to a demotion of Babylonian deities in Assyria. In any case, after Sennacherib, the discussion will resume

the consideration of the formulation of the role of crown prince and the theologising of the relationship of king and crown prince in terms of Nabû.

Chapter III

Elevation: Sennacherib, Aššur and Mullissu's Heir

In the wake of the death of Sargon II (r. 721–705 BC), and the loss of his body in battle in Anatolia in 705 BC, his crown prince and successor Sennacherib (r. 704–681 BC) transferred the royal seat from his father's erstwhile capital at Dūr-Šarrukīn (modern Khorsabad) to Nineveh (modern Kuyunjik).[193] Nineveh had formed part of the Assyrian 'core' area, together with the cities of Aššur (modern Qal'at Sherqat) and Arbela (modern Erbil), since the Middle Assyrian period.[194] Establishing his royal court there, Sennacherib soon embarked on his own grand renovation project to transform the city.[195] Within the years 702–691 BC, the new king constructed a massive royal residence in the southwestern area of Nineveh; his so-called Egalzagdinutukua ('Palace without Rival').[196] He also ordered the expansion of Nineveh's outer walls.[197] Beyond these walls, Sennacherib oversaw the development of a sophisticated irrigation system that culminated in the construction of a canal for Nineveh. The site of the canal head at Khinis (near to the village

[193] For the eponym documenting Sargon's death, see Millard 1994, 60 and the discussion in Baker 2023, 306. Sennacherib ascended the throne on the twelfth day of the month Abu (month V). Frahm (1999) argues that the loss of Sargon's body in battle was seen as an ill omen.

[194] Radner 2011, 322.

[195] Comparatively 'little is known about the details of [Nineveh's] earlier history' archaeologically due to extensive Sargonid rebuilding works but Emašmaš, Ištar's temple, was already being renovated by Middle Assyrian kings including Tukultī-Ninurta I and Aššurnaṣirpal I, following the temple's reconstruction by Šamšī-Adad I in the eighteenth-century BC (Frahm 2008, 13-14). See Reade 2005 on Emašmaš' history.

[196] For textual sources on the construction of the Southwest Palace see RINAP 3/1 Sennacherib 1, 63-86; Sennacherib 2, 34-63; Sennacherib 3, 34-56. For discussion see Paterson 1915 and Russell 1991.

[197] Sennacherib's work on Nineveh's walls is mentioned in texts published in RINAP 3/1 including Sennacherib 8, Sennacherib 15-18 and Sennacherib 38.

of Bavian; ancient Khunusa), approximately 60 km northeast of the city, is marked by monumental cliff reliefs; a text inscribed onto steles carved into the cliffs reveals that this was achieved after Sennacherib destroyed Babylon in 689 BC.[198]

The Assyrian ransacking of Babylon's shrines, including the abduction of the deity Marduk's statue from his shrine, Esagil ('House Whose Top is High'), has long been considered as a transformative moment for the kingship theology.[199] In this chapter, I explore the formulation of Sennacherib's kingship in terms of the divine, the royal and the familial in relation to this juncture through an integrated study of the repeated depiction of the king enclosed in the space of the divine couple; Aššur and his consort Mullissu in the Khinis reliefs (figs. 35-43). While the textual pairing of the deities can be traced to the reign of Tukultī-Ninurta I (r. 1243—1207 BC), they are not depicted together visually as a dyad until the reign of Sennacherib.[200] The encounter of the king and crown prince continues to be depicted in the reliefs from Sennacherib's new Southwest Palace at Nineveh; in a relief from Room XXXVI, which was decorated with scenes depicting the Assyrian siege of Lachish of 701 BC, the crown prince stands before the enthroned king

[198] The composite text is published as RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223. Sennacherib was engaged in military conflict in Babylonia as well as in Elam, its ally state, from 705 BC. He adopted various approaches to managing Assyria's southern neighbour including setting up his own son Aššur-nādin-šumi on the throne at the end of his fourth campaign. It was only Hallušu, the Elamite king's abduction of Aššur-nādin-šumi that triggered Sennacherib's sack of Babylon. See Grayson and Novotny 2012, 12-14 for further sources documenting the conflict. See also the recent overview of Sennacherib's military campaigns in Baker 2023, 308-310. On the 'Babylonian problem' see, traditionally, Brinkman 1973 as well as Levine 1982, 48-55 and Frame 2008, 26-28.

[199] This is most discussed in terms of Sennacherib's renovations of Aššur's Ešarra temple ('House of the Universe'). See the recent discussion of and further bibliography for the Assyrian reception of the Babylonian *akītu* and Enūma eliš before, during and after Sennacherib in Reynolds 2025.

[200] See discussion in Meinhold 2009, 192-193.

and presents the victory (fig. 33).[201] Expanding the understanding of the formulation of kingship in terms of relationships of royalty and divinity, I argue that the relationship of the king and the divine couple at Khinis is depicted in terms of the familial and succession.

Canals, Gods, Kings

> ^{i7}idigna ^{i7}buranuna^{na} da-ga ba-an-la$_2$ kur-kur-ra mi-ni-in-tum$_3$-uš
> i$_7$ tur-[tu]r-ra šu-luḫ ba-an-AK sur$_3$-sur$_3$ mi-ni-ĝar-ĝar
>
> The Tigris and Euphrates stretched along next to each other, in the mountain regions they (i.e., the gods) brought forth (the rivers)
> He (i.e., Enki) cleared the small canals and built irrigation ditches.[202]

The above passage from the cosmological prologue of the Sumerian literary text referred to as Bird and Fish illustrates the longstanding tradition in Mesopotamia that the creation of water sources was a divine work. At the same time, the building of canals was royal work. A hymn addressed to Ur-Namma of Ur (r. ca. 2110–2093 BC), for instance, praises him for digging canals and bringing abundance to the land.[203] The reliefs carved at Khinis, depicting the king with the gods in the context of water, provide an Assyrian visual

[201] Panel 12, Room XXXVI (BM 124911). See Layard 1853b, pls. 23-24 and his description of the relief in Layard 1853a, 150-151. Also see Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998, 103-104. For an overview of the reliefs and gateway sculptures more generally, see Barnett, Bleibtreu, Turner and Collon 1998 as well as Russell 1998a. It has been suggested previously that this relief and comparable scenes convey the 'god-like' status of the king because he sits enthroned before a standing royal figure, as deities often do in Mesopotamian imagery; see, for instance, Winter 1989; Uehlinger 2003; Ornan 2007; Ornan 2014.

[202] Bird and Fish, 7-8 (translation Mittermayer 2019; English rendering mine; German: "Tigris und Euphrat erstreckten sich nahe beieinander, im Bergland führten sie (= die Götter) (die Flüsse) heran / Er reinigte die kleinen Kanäle und errichtete Wassergräben").

[203] See the translated versions and comprehensive discussion of the hymn in Tinney 1999.

formulation of this trope. In this and subsequent sections of the chapter, my aim is to explore coherent but developing engagement with this trope in the reigns of Sargon and Sennacherib. To this end, it is first necessary to situate the Khinis reliefs relative to cliff and bedrock reliefs carved along the stretches of the Maltai and Faida canals that, comparably to the reliefs carved at Khinis, depict the king with deities represented in anthropomorphic form.[204]

Recent archaeological explorations of the Duhok region have led to renewed questioning of earlier attributions of the Maltai and Faida canals and their reliefs to Sennacherib. It has been argued, on stylistic and archaeological grounds, that the Maltai and Faida reliefs were carved before the reign of Sennacherib, most likely during the reign of Sargon. Following the proposal of Julian Reade (1978a and 1978b), it had been established that Sennacherib engaged in four distinct phases of hydraulic innovations in the Duhok region from 703 BC until 689 BC in order to supply Nineveh and its surrounds with water.[205] According to Reade's reconstruction, the Kisiri canal, which diverted water from the River Khosr to Nineveh via the Shallalat dam, was the first canal built in the sequence. The Mount Muṣri canal system, which directed waters into the Khosr, marked the second phase of construction. The Maltai, Faida, Bandawai and Uskof and Tarbisu canals, which were thought to have formed a connected network bringing water to Nineveh; the so-called 'Northern System', marked the third phase of construction. The Khinis canal, which

[204] A complete early description of the Khinis site by a Mr Ross is published in Layard 1849b, vol. 2, 142-144. See Bär 2006 as well as Fales 2017 for recent discussions of the early history of exploration of the site.

[205] See also the relevant discussions of these hypothesised phases of construction in Bagg 2000, 304-317 and Morandi Bonacossin 2018c, 91.

diverted waters from the River Gomel into a tributary of the River Khosr and, from there, into the heart of Nineveh, was hypothesised as the fourth and final phase of construction.

In addition to the sculptural complex carved at the site of the Khinis canal head and the cliff and bedrock reliefs carved along the Maltai and Faida canal lengths, reliefs were carved at the site of the Bandawai canal head at Shiru Maliktha, while inscriptions were carved at the site of the Jerwan aqueduct and likely also other sites associated with the canal at Khinis.[206] As the reliefs carved along the canals at Maltai and Faida are not accompanied by inscriptions as the Khinis reliefs are, the association between these three examples and attribution to Sennacherib has been maintained on stylistic grounds.[207]

The relief complex at Maltai consists of four sculptural panels carved at Jebel Zawiya on the southern bank of the Duhok river, which are to varying degrees weathered as well as vandalised. Each panel depicts a nearly identical row of seven deities, who are represented in anthropomorphic form, facing left and mounted atop quadruped supports (fig. 44). Walter Bachmann (1927) provided measurements for each panel and provided the earliest readings of the iconography based on visual comparison.[208] At the time of Bachmann's visit, relief 4 was the worst preserved and relief 3 the best preserved, hence

[206] The Jerwan inscriptions are published in RINAP 3/2 as Sennacherib 224-228. The Shiru Maliktha relief is very weathered and less well understood. See Reade 2002.

[207] Already Layard (1849b, vol. 1, 230) identified that 'The sculpture is Assyrian, and evidently of the later period, contemporary with the kings of Khorsabad and Kouyunjik'. Bachmann (1927, 27) identified them with Sennacherib because of the Khinis relief inscriptions and their style and representation.

[208] The measurements (width x height) given by Bachmann (1927, 24) are as follows: panel 1: 5.5 m x 2.25 m; panel 2: 6 m x 1.85 m; panel 3: 6.5 m x 2.35 m; panel 4: 5.4 m x 2.3 m.

his reading is based on relief 3.[209] The deities were identified (from left to right) as Aššur and Ištar of Nineveh or Mullissu, otherwise depicted at Khinis; Sîn, because of his lunar crown; Anu or Nabû; Šamaš, because of his solar crown; Adad, because of his lightning bundle; Ištar of Arbela, because she stands on a lion and the goddess who proceeds her was identified with the other major Ištar personas (Bachmann 1927, 26).[210] All deities except Mullissu, who is seated on a throne, are shown standing. There are minor iconographic variations between panels, as recently discussed by Kate Justement (2024, 367-368). For example, the sixth deity identified as Adad stands atop a horned bull in panels 1, 3 and 4, while in panel 2 he stands on a horned bull as well as a lion.

Ten sculptural panels that are like those at Maltai are carved along the Faida canal's eastern bank.[211] The reliefs are severely damaged due to a combination of factors including vandalism, modern irrigation works, and the expansion of a local farm. Panels 4-9 are better preserved than panels 1-3 and 10.[212] As with the Maltai reliefs, the Faida reliefs each depict a line of seven deities with inward-facing images of the king at either end

[209] Simon Rouet, then French consul in Mosul, briefly described the Maltai reliefs in correspondence to Jules Mohl (see Mohl 1846, including an illustration of relief 3). See also the early description of Maltai in Layard 1849b, vol. 1, 229-231 and the drawing in Place 1867–1870, vol. 3, pl. 45).

[210] The deities have been read differently through time. For instance, Reade (1989, 321) read the second deity Bachmann understood as Anu or Nabû to be either Anu or Enlil.

[211]A very early description of the still visible upper areas of the Faida reliefs is written in a travel account from 1906 authored by an anonymous English woman, which is quoted in Reade 1978b, 159. Reade visited the site in 1983 (see Reade 1983, 204) and identified two relief panels. In his subsequent publication (1978b, 162) he mentioned a third panel and surmised from the still visible hats worn by the figures that they 'must be worn by gods in a procession, as at Malthaya'. A description of the reliefs and photographs are published in Boehmer 1997. The LoNAP team identified six additional reliefs during their excavation of 2012 and a tenth relief in 2019. They give the measurements of 'the frames surrounding them [that] vary from 1.25 m to 1.62 m in height and from 4.30 m to 5 m in length' (Morandi Bonacossi and Ahmed Qasim 2022, 61).

[212] Morandi Bonacossi and Ahmed Qasim 2022, 63.

performing the *appa labānu* gesture (fig. 45). The deities all face to the right, and so in the direction of the current flowing into the channel.[213] Daniele Morandi Bonacossi and Hasan Ahmed Qasim (2022, 24-25) identified the same sequence of deities as Bachmann identified at Maltai. In addition to the above-mentioned iconographic variations between relief panels at Maltai, there are also variations between the Maltai and Faida reliefs in terms of the supporting creatures that deities are represented as standing or enthroned upon. Aššur, for example, is always represented atop both a *mušḫuššu* dragon and an *abūbu*-deluge monster in the Maltai reliefs, whereas he is represented atop a *mušḫuššu* dragon and a bull in the Faida reliefs.

It is thought that the theme of the row of seven deities as seen at Maltai and Faida was also depicted at Khinis in the so-called Rider Relief, which was re-carved centuries later, possibly following the victory of Alexander the Great at Gaugamela (Assyrian Arbela), in 331 BC.[214] The present relief shows a horse and rider holding a spear and facing to the right in the central area of its panel, while the rest of the composition is extremely weathered (figs. 46). Bachmann (1927, 16-18) measured the relief and identified the remains of Mullissu, facing left, as the second deity in the composition, albeit standing on her lion support rather than enthroned.[215] Julian Reade and Julie Anderson (2013, 103-105)

[213] Reade 1978, 162; Morandi Bonacossi and Ahmed Qasim 2022, 64.

[214] For a comprehensive discussion of the potential attribution to Alexander in relation to the horse and rider theme see Reade and Anderson 2013, 111-114.

[215] The measurement was provided as 4.2 m x 6.7 m.

provided a full reconstruction (fig. 47).[216] The seven deities are thought to have been represented facing left and standing atop animal and quadruped supports.

The representation of the king in proximity to deities rendered in anthropomorphic form in the canal reliefs has traditionally been considered to be an iconographic innovation in Assyrian imagery, especially in landscape monuments where the king is more usually shown with deities represented in symbolic forms or not at all. There are Middle Assyrian examples of deities being represented in anthropomorphic form on the monumental scale, such as the cult relief from Ešarra, the temple to Aššur in his city of Aššur that is now in the collection of the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin (VA Ass 1358). In the first part of the first millennium BC, it had become more typical for major deities to be represented in, comparatively smaller, symbolic or emblematic form in wall reliefs, such as in the Northwest Palace of Aššurnaṣirpal II at Kalḫu, as discussed in Chapter I.[217] Tallay Ornan (2005) has argued that deities were not depicted in anthropomorphic form on the monumental scale in this period to ensure that they were not confused for royal figures. That is, until the time of Sennacherib, when Ornan, building on an earlier argument made by Irene Winter regarding the influence of North Syrian art on Assyrian artistic development (1982), argues that the artistic tradition is transformed and the king is depicted in visual likeness and exceptional proximity to anthropomorphic deities, notably including in the canal reliefs at Khinis, Maltai and Faida.[218] Recent excavations conducted

[216] Mullissu, who is the best-preserved deity in the sequence, is reconstructed from what remains of her lion support and sceptre, while Aššur is reconstructed from what remains of his sword scabbard and *mušḫuššu.*

[217] See p. 23.

[218] See also Ornan 2007 and, for a different view, the argument in Fales 2015. The recent discovery of a relief from the North Palace of Aššurbanipal at Nineveh by the Toronto team depicting the king between Aššur and Ištar/Mullissu would, however, seem to counter Ornan's argument that, after Sennacherib, deities returned to

as part of the Italian-led Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project (henceforth, LoNAP) however encourage revision of this thesis.

Jason Ur (2005, 328) initially hypothesised that the Maltai and Faida canals were neither connected to each other nor part of the so-called Northern System, but Morandi Bonacossi and Ahmed Qasim (2022, 73) have recently confirmed that this is the case. Their revised suggestion is that the Northern System, which, is now thought to have been constructed as part of the first phase of Sennacherib's irrigation works, was only formed of the linked Bandawai and Uskof canals along with the Tarbisu canal, which directed water into the River Khosr and then into the Kisiri Canal, posing the question as to when and to whom the Maltai and Faida reliefs should be attributed.

Morandi Bonacossi and Ahmed Qasim have established that the Faida relief panels witness successive moments of carving. In addition to witnessing minor iconographic variations between locations as outlined in the previous section, the Faida reliefs exhibit two different types of divine sequence at the same location. The more frequently depicted sequence is found on all Faida relief panels except panel X, which depicts an alternative sequence. The Type B sequence depicted on panel X represents the king on a larger scale than the deities, whereas the Type A sequence shown on the other panels exhibits a less pronounced size difference between the king and the divine group.[219]

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being represented in symbolic form. The publication of this relief is forthcoming, and future iterations of this work will address this finding more directly.

[219] The reduced size of the divine images in the Type B sequence, considered together with the detail that they are represented under a shrine or *qersu*, which does not appear in the Type A sequence, indicates that the Type B deities are explicitly represented as cult statues (Morandi Bonacossi and Ahmed Qasim 2022, 64-70). The order of deities may also have been different in the Type B sequence as the fourth deity (who is not preserved) depicted on panel 10 stands atop an *abūbu* rather than a *mušḫuššu*, as in the other panels.

Panel X's iconography differs from the other Faida reliefs because it was most likely devised earlier. The left edge of panel X appears as if it were cut away to facilitate the sculpting of panel V, which runs perpendicular to panel X (fig. 48). Morandi Bonacossi and Ahmed Qasim suggest that the Type B sequence as surviving on panel X likely precedes the Type A sequence represented on panels I-IX. As the king and deities in panel X wear triple armed earrings that are associated with the reign of Sargon, in addition to wearing a simpler type of rosette bracelet and embodying a different style of musculature than is seen in later imagery, they have argued that the reliefs may pre-date Sennacherib and date to the reign of his father.[220]

Textual evidence may provide support for the attribution of the Maltai and Faida panels to Sargon. A fragmentary letter from Nineveh written by the royal treasurer Ṭab-šar-Aššur and dated to the reign of Sargon relays a complaint about the digging of a *hirītu* ('ditch' or 'canal') involving the governor of Talmusa:[221]

> [^{m}]ᵀ*pa*ˀ-*qa-ḫa* LÚᵛ.TIN
> *ša pa-an ḫi-ri-te*
> *it-tal-ka ina pa-ni-ia*
> *i-ti-ti-zi ma-a* LÚᵛ.ERIM-MEŠ
> *ina* UGU *ḫi-ri-te* LUGAL *ur-ta-di*
> *ma-a* LÚᵛ.*ra-di-a-ni la-áš-šú*
> *ma-a* LÚᵛ.EN.NAM *ša* URU.*tal-mu-sa*
> ᵀ*la*ˀ *e-mu-qa-šú* LÚᵛ.ERIM-MEŠ
> [*la-a*] *i-ra-di*
> [*ki-i an*]-ᵀ*ni*ˀ-*e iq-ṭí-bi-a*

[220] Morandi Bonacossi 2018c, 96.

[221] SAA 1 65, 4-13.

> Paqaha, the master-builder in charge of the ditch came (and) stood before me saying: 'The king has added to the men working on the ditch but there are no leaders. The governor of Talmusa is not able to direct the men, he said to me as follows…'

After the mention of one thousand men followed by a substantial break, the legible part of the text ends with a request for the king to intercede on behalf of Paqaha, the overseer of the ditch digging project. Morandi Bonacossi and Ahmed Qasim suggest, on the basis of a possible identification between Talmusa, which is mentioned in the letter, and Gir-e Pan, which is known to have been an important canal site, that this letter might relate to the construction of the Maltai and Faida canals during Sargon's reign.[222] They admit, however, that this is a speculative conclusion which, moreover, would seem to be contradicted by other iconographic evidence from Maltai and Faida.

The king's performance of the *appa labānu* gesture on all ten of the Faida and Maltai panels, together with the presence of the *mušḫuššu* dragon quadruped that Aššur stands on complicate the picture, as both motifs are Babylonian in origin and are thought to have been incorporated into the visual repertoire of Assyrian kingship following Sennacherib's sack of Babylon in 689 BC.[223] Reckoning with this association, Morandi Bonacossi and Ahmed Qasim raise the alternative possibility that the earliest Type B sequence could have been carved by Sennacherib while the later Type A sequence might

[222] Morandi Bonacossi 2018c, 97.

[223] For the incorporation of the *appa labānu* gesture see Magen 1986, 62. The gesture is mentioned during the reign of Sargon but is thought to receive first visual depiction under Sennacherib, being traditionally associated with images of Babylonian kings; see also discussion in Ornan 2005, 85-86. For the incorporation of the *mušḫuššu* gesture see Wiggermann 1992, 169.

have been carved by either Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon or even Sennacherib's grandson, Aššurbanipal.[224]

Given the inconclusive evidence, it is impossible at this stage to say for certain who was responsible for the Faida and by extension the highly similar Maltai relief panels. In my view, the presence of iconographic features associated with the reign of Sargon at Maltai and Faida does not weaken the argument in favour of an attribution of all reliefs at these sites to Sennacherib even though it has been shown that the Maltai and Faida canals were not part of his Northern System. As Aššur and Mullissu are represented standing atop quadrupeds in the Great Relief as well as in the upper register of the Gate Monolith main panel relief at Khinis, I would suggest that the portrayal of the king in different formations with Aššur and Mullissu in the reliefs at Khinis, which can be securely attributed to the reign of Sennacherib, would appear to be a development from the repeated depiction of the king with the larger group of deities in a row at the other two canal sites.

Crucially, the development of the Maltai and Faida relief theme to portray the king with the group of deities to also show different formations of the king with Aššur and Mullissu at Khinis highlights how the three canal sites were decorated in a developing but coherent tradition. Whether Sargon carved the Type B Faida reliefs or the differences between the Type B and Type A Faida sequences indicate artistic progression within Sennacherib's own reign or after him, it remains to be seen how and why the Khinis reliefs, which can be attributed to Sennacherib securely, witness further transformation from the

[224] Morandi Bonacossi and Ahmed Qasim 2022, 73-74.

latest dated Type A Faida sequence.[225] In the remainder of this chapter, I aim to answer both of these questions.

From Babylon to Assyria

Taking the six Assyrian steles thought to have been carved at Nahr el-Kalb (Dog River) in Lebanon over the span of more than half a millennium between the reigns of Tiglath-pileser I and Aššurbanipal as her case study, Ann Shafer (2015, 491) describes the continuous act of carving at one site 'as an act of inhabitation—of history, site, and identity'.[226] In other words, by returning to the same location to carve rock reliefs over centuries, Shafer argues that successive kings, in addition to using their sculptural carvings to incorporate landscape territories into a coherent framework, also engaged with one another. Beyond this, Shafer proposed that the pattern of returning to this site, where a stele of the thirteenth-century BC Egyptian king Rameses II (r. 1279–1213 BC), among others, was carved, also serves to express competition.

In this section of this chapter, I will begin to account for the development to show the king in not just one but multiple formations with the divine couple in the Khinis reliefs by considering similar forms of interaction through carving. I will first examine the Khinis rock-cut stele reliefs, not only for the inscriptions that three of these steles carry, which

[225] It is also possible, as suggested by Justement (2024, 366 fn. 10), that some or all of the Maltai and Faida reliefs were carved during the reign of Sargon but under the supervision of Sennacherib while he was crown prince.

[226] Bahrani (2014) foregrounds the notion that Mesopotamian monuments were addressed to eternity. See also Shafer 2007 and Amrhein 2020 on the creation of a coherent ritualised landscape through rock relief carving.

have been much discussed in their composite form, which is referred to as the 'Bavian Inscription', but also for their images. This integrated analysis will then be situated in relation to textual sources that witness Sennacherib's transformation of the Ešarra complex at Aššur. Through this, I intend to establish that the royal image was not only described but also shown to have been transformed in relation to the sack of Babylon in 689 BC at both Aššur and Khinis.

Prior to the representation of the king with the divine in anthropomorphic form in the Sargonid canal reliefs making the Babylonian *appa labānu* ('nose rubbing') reverence gesture, Assyrian kings were long engaged in the tradition of carving monuments in the landscape in which they were shown performing the Assyrian *ubāna tarāṣu* ('finger pointing') reverence gesture. There is some precedent for this in the Middle Assyrian period.[227] This practice became more popular from the time of Aššurnaṣirpal II and Šalmaneser III.[228] Rock cut steles from the second millennium BC typically depict the image of the king venerating deities represented in symbolic rather than anthropomorphic form and relate stylistically to freestanding stone steles that were erected in central as well as provincial court contexts (fig. 49). The erection of steles of this type is attested at least into the time of Sennacherib and his successor Esarhaddon.

Twelve rock-cut and niched steles of this type, previously thought to be eleven, are positioned high across the cliffs at Khinis (figs. 50-51).[229] Bachmann (1927, 21) gave their

[227] For example, the reliefs attributed to Tiglath-pileser I at the source of the Tigris and Nahr el-Kalb. See discussion and references in Morandi Bonacossi 2018a, 56 fn. 13.

[228] For a list of examples of earlier Neo-Assyrian steles see Ornan 2005, 134.

[229] See Morandi Bonacossi 2018b for an account of and analysis of the recent discovery of the twelfth stele, which is positioned at the exit of the canal tunnel through the rock and hence parallels the positioning of the

measurements as being up to 2 m in height. The individual steles are compromised to varying degrees, in part due to erosion but possibly also because of vandalism. Each niche depicts, or, in the case of the recently discovered twelfth stele, originally depicted, an identical image of the king in ceremonial attire making *ubāna tarāṣu* to one of four different groupings of divine emblems associated with twelve deities. The presence of these steles at Khinis is curious given the other reliefs there that show anthropomorphic gods and the king making the Babylonian *appa labānu* gesture. Examination of the structure of the steles' inscriptions begins to illuminate how these differing types of rock relief were intended to relate to one another at Khinis.

Partly preserved and near identical inscriptions are carved on the fourth stele (lower panel), which is visible from the bottom of the cliffs, as well as the seventh (central panel) and eleventh (upper panel) steles, though these are higher up and beyond plausible human viewing.[230] What remains of these inscriptions facilitates a comprehensive reconstruction of the reduplicated text.[231] The inscriptions outline the royal perspective on the events surrounding the construction of the canal, which is juxtaposed within the texts with the destruction that the Assyrian army brought on Babylon in 689 BC. Before reviewing the contents of the inscriptions in closer detail, it is useful to establish the overall structure.

Structure of the Bavian Inscription (informed by Frahm 2019, 148-149).		
Section	Content	Lines

first stele at the tunnel entrance. The twelfth stele is so badly worn that it could only be identified by the visible remains of the upper left section of the niche.

[230] See Grayson and Novotny 2014, 311 for exemplars.

[231] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223.

Introduction	Invocation and titulary	1-5a
Building account	Expansion of Nineveh's walls and the construction of the Khinis canal	5a-34a
Military activities	Conflict with Elamites and Babylonians leading to the sack of Babylon	34b-54a
Conclusion	Image carving and malediction	54b-60

Significantly, despite adhering to precedent of showing the king in the pose of *ubāna tarāṣu*, the inscriptions incorporated into these steles diverge from the expected structure. As pointed out by Eckhart Frahm, the stele inscriptions at Khinis are 'exceptional cases' in which 'the building account [precedes] the section on military activities'.[232] The more typical structure of royal inscriptions opens with the royal titulary before moving to outline military affairs and only after this is the building account usually introduced.[233] Given that the building of the canal is prioritised in the stele inscriptions over the recounting Sennacherib's military conquest of Babylon, it is useful to recap the progression of the inscriptions in closer detail to establish how this shift in textual form inflects interpretation of the narrative.

The stele inscriptions establish a direct connection between Sennacherib's destruction of Babylon and the rebuilding of Nineveh by way of the construction of the Khinis canal. This is most clearly expressed in the text's shifting narrative structure that moves from Khinis to Babylon and back again. After the introductory section, which names each of the gods in the service of establishing the king's divine election and

[232] Frahm 2019, 146.

[233] Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 281.

introduces Sennacherib as king of Assyria and of the four quarters of the world,[234] Sennacherib states that the gods commissioned and ensured his successful military conquests against foreign kings, prompting their submission to him.[235] The narrative focus then promptly switches from Sennacherib's military exploits to elaborate Sennacherib's expansive reconstruction of Nineveh:[236]

> *i-na* u_4*-me-šu-ma ša* NINA.KI *šu-bat-su ma-gal uš-rab-bi* BÀD-*šú ù šal-ḫu-šú ša ina maḫ-re-e*
> *la ep-šú eš-šiš ú-še-piš-ma ú-zaq-qir ḫur-šá-niš ta-me-ra-tu-šú ša i-na la ma-mi na-mu-ta šu-lu-ka-ma*
> *šá-ta-a qé-e et-tu-ti ù* UN.MEŠ-*šú* A.MEŠ *ši-qi la i-da-a-ma a-na zu-un-ni ti-ik* AN-*e tur-ru-ṣa* IGI.II.MEŠ-*šun*
>
> At that time, I greatly enlarged the site of Nineveh. I had its (inner) wall and its outer wall, which had never been constructed before, built anew and I raised (them) as high as mountain(s). Its fields, which had been turned into wastelands due to lack of water, were woven over with spider webs. Moreover, its people did not know artificial irrigation, but had their eyes turned for rain (and) showers from the sky.

The following sections of the text explain Sennacherib's building of eighteen canals in considerable depth, emphasising their significance for the wellbeing of the city.[237]

> *ina* A.MEŠ *pat-ta-a-ti ša ú-šaḫ-ru-ú* NINA.KI *a-na li-me-ti-šú* GIŠ.KIRI$_6$.MEŠ GIŠ.GEŠTIN.MEŠ

[234] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223, 1-3.

[235] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223, 3b-5a.

[236] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223, 5b-7 (translation Grayson and Novotny 2014).

[237] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223, 8-18a.

gi-mir ⌜GURUN⌝ [...] *ú*-[...] *x* ŠAB? *x x* ⌜*šu*⌝-*be-lat ḫur-šá-a-ni ka-li-šú-un* GURUN *ad-na-a-ti*
ka-la-⌜*ma*?⌝ ŠIM?⌝.[ḪI.A?] *ù* [GIŠ.*se-er-di? az*]-*qup*

Thanks to the waters of the canals that I caused to be dug, [I could pl]ant around Nineveh gardens, vines, every type of fruit, [...] ..., products of every mountain, fruit trees from all over the world, (including) spi[ces] and [olive trees].[238]

After describing the opening ceremony for the Khinis canal, the text again abruptly refocuses on Sennacherib's military conflicts against the Elamites, Babylonians and their Sealand allies.[239] Sennacherib recounts how he defeated the enemy coalition at Ḫalulê, a site that has not yet been identified archaeologically, capturing members of the Elamite nobility as well as Nabû-šuma-iškun, a Babylonian prince, while the Babylonian and Elamite kings escaped.[240] Whereas the Elamites were cowed by Sennacherib's display of might, the Babylonians remained an enduring threat.

URU *ù* É.MEŠ
ul-tu UŠ$_8$-*šú a-di gaba-dib-bi-šú ap-pul aq-qur i-na* ^{d}GIŠ.BAR *aq-mu* BÀD *ù šal-ḫu-u* É.MEŠ DINGIR.MEŠ *ziq-qur-rat* SIG$_4$ *u* SAḪAR.ḪI.A *ma-la ba-šu-ú*
as-suḫ-ma a-na ÍD.*a-ra-aḫ-ti ad-di i-na qé-reb* URU *šu-a-tu* ⌜*ḫi-ra*⌝-*a-ti aḫ-re-e-ma er-ṣe-es-su-nu ina* A.MEŠ *as-pu-un ši-kin*
uš-še-šú ú-ḫal-liq-ma UGU *ša a-bu-bu na-al-pan-ta-šú ú-šá-tir áš-šu aḫ-rat u$_4$-me qaq-qar* URU *šu-a-tu ù* É.MEŠ DINGIR.MEŠ
la muš-ši-i i-na ma-a-mi uš-ḫar-miṭ-su-ma ag-da-mar ú-šal-liš

I destroyed, devastated, (and) burned with fire the city, and (its) buildings, from its foundations to its crenelations. I removed the brick(s) and earth, as much as there

[238] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223, 19b-21a (translation Grayson and Novotny 2014).

[239] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223, 34b-37a.

[240] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223, 37-42.

> was, from the (inner) wall and outer wall, the temples, (and) the ziggurat, (and) I threw (it) into the Araḫtu river. I dug canals into the centre of that city and (thus) levelled their site with water. I destroyed the outline of its foundations and (thereby) made its destruction surpass that of the Deluge. So that in the future, the site of that city and (its) temples will be unrecognisable, I dissolved it (Babylon) in water and annihilated (it), (making it) like a meadow.[241]

In an extremely evocative passage, Sennacherib recounts how he destroyed Babylon with water, significantly in the form of canals he opened there for this purpose. Certainly, as Marc Van De Mieroop (2003, 8) argues, 'the destruction of Babylon [is] portrayed as a negative parallel to Nineveh's construction' throughout the text, with Sennacherib's expansion of Nineveh's walls and construction of its external water supply contrasting his felling of Babylon's walls and opening of canals within that city to flood it.[242] This brief recap of the inscription's progression extends this argument by foregrounding how this is articulated through the text's shifting narrative focus. Further still, Van De Mieroop's argument can be elaborated by proposing a new rhetorical end to which the parallel between the two cities is established within the inscriptions.

In addition to destroying Babylon by felling its walls and opening canals, the inscription reveals that the Babylonian king and more of his relatives were abducted and that the treasures of the city were handed over to Nineveh. While Babylonian cult statues were destroyed, including the statue of Marduk, statues found there that originally belonged to the northern city Ekallātum were returned.[243] These instances of reclamation

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[241] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223, 50b-54a (translation Grayson and Novotny 2014).

[242] See also Van De Mieroop 2004, 1 and Ornan 2014, 588.

[243] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223, 47-50a.

and redirection of resource in the context of so much destruction are important to note because it not only means that the abundance that the Khinis canal brings to Nineveh is contrasted with the ruin of Babylon but that the appropriation of Babylonian resources during the city's destruction materially contributes to Nineveh's, and more broadly, Assyria's, elevation. After the destruction of Babylon is outlined, the following passage refocuses on Khinis:

> *i-na pi-i* ÍD *ša ú-šaḫ-ru-ú i-na qé-reb* KUR-*i*
> 6 NA$_4$.NA.RÚ-[*e* DÙ$^{?}$]-$^{\lceil}$*uš*$^{?\rceil}$ *ṣa-lam* DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ EN.MEŠ-*ia ab-ta-ni*
> *qé-reb-šú-un ù ṣa-lam* LUGAL-*ti-ia la-bi-in*
> *ap-pi ma-ḫar-šú-un ul-ziz mim-ma lip-ta-at* ŠU.II-*ia ša qé-reb* NINA.KI *i-tep-pu-šú*
> *ṣe-ru-uš-šú-un ú-šá-áš-ṭir-ma*
> *a-na* LUGAL.MEŠ-*ni* DUMU.MEŠ-*ia e-zib ṣa-ti-iš ma-ti-ma*
>
> At the 'mouth' of the canal that I caused to be dug into the mountain, [I ma]de six stele[s] (and) I fashioned image(s) of the great gods, my lords, upon them. Moreover, I had a royal image of myself expressing humility (lit. 'one who strokes the nose') placed before them. I had all of my handiwork that I had undertaken in Nineveh inscribed upon them and I left (them) for ever after for the kings, my descendants.[244]

The relationship between the destruction of Babylon and the appropriation of its resource and the improvement of Nineveh through the building of the Khinis canal is also the context through which to understand the above passage, in which Sennacherib describes monuments erected at the canal where he makes *appa labānu*. The mention of this gesture means that the monuments in question must refer to other reliefs at Khinis because the steles that the inscriptions are carved onto show the king making *ubāna tarāṣu*. In the same

[244] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223, 54b-57a (translation Grayson and Novotny 2014).

way that the contents of the Bavian Inscription, in having the building account precede the military account, transforms the royal inscription form, the text-image relationship on the inscribed steles transforms the royal stele form.

Both transformations in form as witnessed by the interplay of image and text on the Khinis steles inflect how the presentation of the Babylon conflict through the texts may be understood. On the one hand, the shift in the inscriptional structure ensures that Nineveh, as described through the explanation of its expansion, is given precedence in the story over Babylon, as described through the account of its destruction. On the other hand, the carving of the text mentioning *appa labānu* into the rock-cut steles bearing the *ubāna tarāṣu* images in the context of the other resource appropriations and the other steles that do show *appa labānu* at Khinis suggests that the appropriation of the Babylonian gesture has a transformative effect for Assyrian royal self-representation.

With this in mind, it is now useful to examine the textual witnesses to Sennacherib's religious reforms in the city of Aššur after the ransacking of Esagil in 689 BC to establish how the presentation of the Babylon story at Khinis was part of a broader strategy. Textual evidence from Nineveh and Aššur documents Sennacherib's renovation of the Ešarra complex in Aššur and building of an *akītu*-house for the deity Aššur outside the city walls following his sack of Babylon in 689 BC. Sennacherib explicitly references his destruction of Babylon in a text inscribed upon a large stone tablet found at Aššur that outlines his construction of the *akītu*-house and the reinstitution of the *akītu* ritual for the deity Aššur in the month of Nisannu (month I).[245]

[245] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 168, 36.

i-sin-ni qé-re-ti šá LUGAL DINGIR.MEŠ AN.ŠÁR
šá ul-tu u_4*-me* SÙ.MEŠ *ina e-šá-a-ti u saḫ-ma-šá-a-ti* É *a-ki-it*
EDIN *im-ma-šú-u ina qé-reb* URU *in-né-ep-pu-šú pa-ra-aṣ* LUGAL DINGIR.MEŠ AN.ŠÁR
it-ti šip-ri-im-ma šu-a-ti a-na e-peš É *a-kit lìb-bi ub-la-ni-ma*
ṭè-em ^{d}UTU ^{d}IŠKUR *al-mad-ma an-na ke-<e-nu> i-pu-lu-in-ni-ma*
iq-bu-u-ni e-pe-e-šú

> The festival of the feast of the king of the gods, (the god) Aššur, which from distant days, because of chaos and disruption, (and) the *akītu*-house of the steppe had been forgotten; the rites of the king of the gods, (the god) Aššur, had been performed inside the city. With (regard to) that work, I made up my mind to (re)build th(at) *akītu*-house, and (then) I found out the will of the gods Šamaš (and) Adad, and they answered me with a firm 'yes' and commanded me to (re)build (it).[246]

This passage comes after a description of how Sennacherib made images of Aššur (*ištu ṣalam Aššur*) and the great gods and installed them in Ešarra in the same month.[247] The implication arising from this text is that the image of Assyrian religion as expressed through cultic activity has been remade with Sennacherib's remaking of the image of Aššur after the sack of Babylon. A small tablet from Nineveh bearing a text thought to be a draft for what would have been inscribed on the Aššur *akītu*-house gate provides further detail about the impact of Sennacherib's religious reforms on royal self-representation. The *akītu*-house was given the ceremonial name Eabbaugga ('House (where) Tiāmat Is Put to Death)', while its cella was named Edubdubabba ('House that Makes the Host of Tiāmat

[246] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 168, 25-30a (translation Grayson and Novotny 2014).

[247] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 168, 22b. Sennacherib is also described as the maker of the image of Aššur in Sennacherib 160, 166, 169-171, and the maker of the image of Mullissu also in a fragment from a stele housed in the Eski Şark Eserleri Müzesi, Arkeoloji Müzeleri, Istanbul, that is thought to show both deities (Ist EŞEM 07847). The text is published as RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 167.

Tremble’).[248] The same text also describes an image that was most likely depicted on the Aššur *akītu*-house gate.

> *ṣa-lam* [AN.ŠÁR *šá a-na* ŠÀ *ti-amat*] *ṣal-ti* DU-*ku*
> ˹GIŠ.PAN˺ *ki-i šá na-šu-ú ina* GIŠ.GIGIR *šá ra-ak-bu a-bu-˹bu˺* [*šá ṣa*]-˹*an*˺-*du*
> ^{d}MAR.TU *šá a-na mu-kil ap-pa-a-ti it-ti-šú rak-bu a-˹na˺* [UGU] ˹*pi*˺-*i šá* ^{d}UTU *u* ^{d}IŠKUR
> *ina bi-ri ˹iq-bu˺-nim-ma*
>
> Acco[rding to] the command that the gods Šamaš and Adad gave me through divination, I depicted on this gate an image of [(the god) Aššur, who] is going to fight [Tiāmat], (showing) the bow as he carries (it), in the chariot which he rides, (and) the Deluge [which he has h]arnessed, (and) the god Amurru as the driver who rides with him.[249]

Both the naming of the house and cella and the carving of an image depicted on the gate explicitly tie the Aššur *akītu*-house, and the rituals for which it was constructed, to Enūma eliš. Babylonian iterations of the poem, in which Marduk defeats Tiāmat before building Babylon, were widely distributed in Assyria in the seventh century BC but the poem was also rewritten in Assyrian.[250] Two manuscripts of the Assyrian recension are known from Aššur and another is known from Nineveh, and the recension is mentioned in epistolary evidence. It is thought that the manuscripts of the recension date to the time of Sennacherib on account of his transformation of Ešarra. In the Assyrian recension of the text, the god Aššur takes the role of Marduk, who is removed from the text, while the city of Aššur takes

[248] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 160, 2.

[249] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 160, 6-9a (translation Grayson and Novotny 2014).

[250] See the useful recent overview and further references in Reynolds 2025, 138.

the place of Babylon.[251] These changes were implemented through the writing of Aššur's name using the logogram AN.ŠÁR in order to connect him to an older deity that is already mentioned in the Babylonian version of the poem, a practice that dates to the reign of Sargon (and as discussed in the previous chapter).[252] The city of Aššur was referred to by the older name Baltil in the Assyrian recension of the text.

A tablet from Nineveh dated to the reign of Aššurbanipal records inscriptions of Sennacherib in praise of Aššur that were inscribed on a metal throne and bed of Marduk's that was presumably appropriated during the sack of Babylon.[253] Moreover, in the so-called Aššur Temple Inscription, which is known from two octagonal stone prisms from Aššur, Sennacherib outlines how, by the decree of Šamaš and Adad, he rotated Ešarra's cella, Eḫursaggalkurkurra ('House of the Great Mountain of the Lands'), from facing south to facing east.[254] While there is no mention of Sennacherib's military conflicts within this text, it is highly likely, given Sennacherib's other reforms, that the rotation of the cella away from the south was also intended to reject the previous ideological significance of Marduk and Babylon.

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[251] In line with these appropriations, Aššur was also described in the Assyrian recension to possess the Tablet of Destinies possessed by Marduk in the Babylonian version of the poem (see RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 158).

[252] Lambert 2013, 5. Marduk's parents, Ea and Damkina, are replaced in the Assyrian version by Laḫmu and Laḫamu (see also Lambert 1997).

[253] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 161. Another inscription names Mullissu as the queen of Ešarra and beseeches her and Aššur to look favourably on Sennacherib and lengthen his days and reign forever. See Sennacherib 162.

[254] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 166, 8b-13a. The theme of demoting Babylon was also expressed in literary works such as Marduk's Ordeal.

Recalling the Aššur stone tablet text's description of the building of the *akītu*-house, which is described within that text as having been 'forgotten' (*immašû*) before Sennacherib's intervention, it becomes clear that the attempt to represent recent innovations as a return to tradition was a broader strategy that characterised the renovation of Ešarra in addition to the carving of the reliefs at Khinis. The introduction to the *akītu*-house gates text reveals this strategy's defining significance for royal identity, incorporating Sennacherib's designation as 'the completer of the forgotten rites of Ešarra' (*mušaklil paraṣ Ešarra mašûti*) into his list of formal titles.[255]

With this added context in mind, it is possible to reconsider the case of the twelve steles at Khinis that are carved in the traditional Assyrian style but are nevertheless overlaid with inscriptions that mention the king's performance of the Babylonian prayer gesture. The final lines of the text describing Sennacherib's *akītu*-house gates reveal further information about the relationship between the king's reforms and the renovation of the royal image.

> *ṣa-lam* AN.ŠÁR *šá a-na* ŠÀ *ti-amat ṣal-ti* DU-*ku ṣa-lam* ^{md}30-PAP.MEŠ-SU MAN KUR *aš-šur*
> ^{d}*šár-ur*$_4$ ^{d}*šár-gaz* ^{d}*kà-kà* ^{d}*nusku* $^{d\lceil}$DI.KU$_5^{\rceil}$ ^{d}*tišpak* ^{d}MAŠ *šá* BÀD
> ^{d}*kù-sù* ^{d}*ḫa-ìa* ^{d}7.BI *an-nu-ti* DINGIR.MEŠ *šá ina* IGI AN.ŠÁR *il-la-ku*
>
> The image of (the god) Aššur, who goes to fight against Tiāmat. The image of Sennacherib, king of Assyria. The deities Šarur, Šargaz, Kakka, Nusku, Mandānu, Tišpak, Ninurta of the Wall, Kusu, Ḫaya, (and) the Sebetti — these are the gods who go in front of (the god) Aššur. The deities Mullissu, Šērūa, Sîn, Ningal, Šamaš,

[255] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 168, 3-4. There is no evidence for an earlier *akītu*-house or performance of *akītu* rites at Assur.

> Aya, Kippat-māti, Anu, Antu, Adad, Šala, Ea, D[amqina, (...)], Bēlet-ilī, (and) Ninurta — these are the gods who [g]o behind (the god) Aš[šur].[256]

The first line of this text has been translated differently, with Pongratz-Leisten notably suggesting that it is a nominal phrase that describes the image of Aššur as being equivalent to the image of Sennacherib.[257] Pongratz-Leisten's interpretation is not generally favoured but, regardless, it is significant that Sennacherib is included in the litany of deities, and, more so, that the mentions of the image of Aššur and the image of Sennacherib are written on the same line.[258] While the *akītu*-house gates and the surely impressive image that would have been carved on them do not survive, and it is thus not possible to visualise precisely how the image on the gates would have appeared, it is possible still to at least visualise the basic incorporation of the royal image into the divine entourage directly or through symbolism.

Now that the case for the destruction of Babylon being constitutive of the king's entry into the visual realm of the divine at Khinis and Aššur has been reviewed, it is helpful to explore how this same motive was also realised by Sennacherib through the extension and transformation of the visual forms that were introduced by Sargon at Khorsabad.

From Khorsabad to Khinis

[256] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 160, 26-31 (translation Grayson and Novotny 2014).

[257] Pongratz-Leisten 1994, 207-209; Uehlinger 2003, 292.

[258] See alternatively Frahm 1997, 224; Uehlinger 2003, 292; Ornan 2007a, 170.

In this section I will explore how, in addition to adopting Babylonian cultural models at Khinis and Aššur after the sack of Babylon in 689 BC, visual models from Dūr-Šarrukīn were also extended and transformed in the execution of the Khinis relief complex. I aim to show that tracing these developments enables better understanding of the representation of his relationship with the divine couple at this site. I will begin to make this case by examining the Khinis Gate Monolith, starting with its main panel relief.

Sennacherib's Khinis Gate Monolith was formed through the carving of two sculptural reliefs into one side of a projecting cliff overlooking the canal (figs. 38-44); measured by Bachmann (1927, 14) as 6 m x 4 m x 8 m. These reliefs are referred to today as the main panel relief, itself divided horizontally into two registers, and right-side panel relief.[259] The lower register of the main panel relief depicts the frontal-facing lion-holding hero flanked by outwards-facing *lamassu* guardians. As discussed in Chapter II, this formation was introduced at Dūr-Šarrukīn by Sargon (fig. 12).[260] Despite Sennacherib's transferral of the royal seat from Dūr-Šarrukīn to Nineveh, the unit was incorporated into the architectural and decorative arrangement of his Southwest Palace, on the grand façade facing northeast, in addition to the image appearing in the Khinis Gate Monolith.[261] At Khinis, this motif is not only transposed but transformed through the further visual context provided by the canal setting and the main panel relief's interrelated upper register.

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[259] The reliefs are in a poor state of preservation due to the rock's falling in on itself and sitting in the waters beneath for centuries. The main panel is broken through its right side, though the reconstruction by Walter Bachman (1927, 15 and fig. 13) is likely. See further discussion in Fales 2015, 549.

[260] See p. 52; 79.

[261] See Paterson 1915, 2 on the presence of this unit in the Southwest Palace. See also relevantly Ornan 2004 for a discussion of the motif in the context of protective imagery.

The upper register of the main panel relief depicts the king standing between Aššur and Mullissu, whose presence Bachmann reconstructed mostly from the paw of her distinctive lion support. As mentioned earlier, the divine couple is represented in anthropomorphic form, and both deities hold rod and ring emblems of rulership and are mounted upon quadrupeds. In contrast to the depiction of the lion-holding hero and winged, human-headed bulls or *lamassu* on the main panel relief's lower register, the representation of the king in the presence of the divine couple in the upper register is considered to be a new visual formula relative to the relief medium and the monumental scale.[262]

As also mentioned earlier, the representation of the interaction between the king and the divine couple on this scale is considered to be a development from the Maltai and Faida reliefs, and possibly the original Khinis Rider Relief, which represent images of the king with Aššur and Mullissu only as they are part of a line of seven deities.[263] In my view, it is possible to also situate the upper register's representation of this interaction, like the lower register's lion-holding hero with *lamassu* triad, within the visual rhetoric adopted at Dūr-Šarrukīn.

Albeit not in the relief medium, the similarly monumental wall painting from the building identified at Khorsabad as Residence K (figs. 30-32), discussed already in Chapter II, anticipates the depiction of the divine relative to the familial in the Gate Monolith main

[262] The unit of Aššur, Mullissu and the king is also depicted on Sennacherib's so-called Seal of Destinies, which will be discussed as part of ch. IV of this thesis.

[263] Ornan 2005, 85.

panel's upper register.[264] As explored, this painting, which was preserved on the floor of Residence K after the wall it was painted on had collapsed, is not accompanied by an inscription and only outlines of the figure standing on the divine pedestal and its two worshippers have been retained. Based on the presence of what appears to be his divine sceptre, the deity is typically imagined as being Aššur. Based on what remains of their attire and headgear, the figures standing before him are thought to be the king and crown prince, who is otherwise represented prominently in the reliefs from Khorsabad reliefs and was likely the main occupier of Residence K.

I made the case that this painting, albeit in its fragmented state, shows that Sargon's palace was not only replete with reliefs depicting the visual relationship between the king and crown prince, but that this relationship could also be visualised in relation to a representation of a deity and on the monumental scale. Regardless as to whether one is able to accept the identification of the figure standing behind the king in the Residence K painting as the crown prince, the representation of the king's relationships with the deity and with the crown prince, even if separately, in the reliefs from Khorsabad, provides clear visual precedent for the monumental representation of the interaction between the king and the divine couple in the Gate Monolith main panel's upper register.

Further important visual context is provided by examining the compositional connection between the two registers of the main panel, which both depict a central figure flanked by divine as well as zoomorphic elements, even though the flanking figures are not the same across registers and face different directions. The image of the king in profile in the upper register connects to the frontal image of the lion-holding hero in the lower

[264] See pp. 76-78.

register through the former's placement 'almost exactly above the heroic figure', as pointed out by Ornan (2014, 587), in addition to association of this figure with the royal residence.

Contrasting the images of the king and the divine couple all standing in profile and engaged in an exclusive interaction in the upper register of the main panel, the lion-holding hero is the only frontal figure shown, even in his own register, communicating an important distinction between him and the other figures represented. In the royal palace, his function was to stand at gates and portals and directly confront visitors, and this function can be seen to have been maintained in his Khinis representation. As has been established already, the main panel adopts the otherwise attested visual strategy of communicating an architectural referent through horizontal bifurcation. As evidenced by Mario Fales (2015, 551), this visual structure intends to represent a 'tri-dimensional [architectural] reality in only two dimensions'. This is a widely adopted visual strategy in royal art, as notably witnessed by the wall painting, now in the Louvre, from Room 106 of the royal palace at Mari, which incorporates a bi-partite division between the representations of the king's receipt of the rod and ring from Ištar in the upper register and goddesses holding vases overflowing with water in the register beneath.[265]

The upper register of the Gate Monolith main panel has been interpreted as representing a temple cella which is therefore implicitly contrasted to the notion of the palace made visually present by the lion-holding hero below.[266] I would like to suggest that these above highlighted contexts of transposition inform not only how one may understand the form of the individual registers but also their combined meaning. In order to begin to

[265] See the recent, detailed analysis of the Mari painting in Ataç 2018, ch. 1.

[266] See, for instance, Ornan, 2007, 167; Pongratz-Leisten 2022a, 257.

make this case, I now turn to consider the spatial and symbolic strategies used to integrate the king into the divine realm in the Great Relief.

Dominating the landscape at Khinis, the so-called Great Relief (figs. 34-35) was measured by Bachmann to be especially monumental at 9.3 m x 9.2 m.[267] While seriously weathered as well as damaged, the reliefs have long been read as the divine couple. Bachmann (1927, 12) was certain that the bearded deity represents Aššur with Ištar of Nineveh/Mullissu '(Ninlil?)' being the most likely identity of his consort. The representation of the doubled royal image behind both deities, as opposed to one image shown in between them, is one key difference between the Great Relief and Gate Monolith relief representations. Layard (1853a, 215) already identified bullet holes in the reliefs and other damage means that details of the relief are obscured including, for example, parts of the left- and most of the right-hand images of the king as well as the face of the goddess.

From what can be reconstructed of the image of the king from the left-hand representation, he wears ceremonial robes, holds a sceptre and as mentioned in the inscribed steles inscriptions, performs the *appa labānu* supplication gesture. The quadruped supports for the deities elevate their height above the king, who is otherwise represented to the same scale as them.[268] Aššur stands atop a *mušḫuššu* dragon and a lion, and holds the rod and ring symbols of rulership as well as a leash, while Mullissu stands atop a lion only and holds a rod ending in a fruit-bearing palmette in addition to the ring.[269]

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[267] However, the massive scale and damaged condition of the relief meant that Bachmann had issues making these measurements. See discussion in Bachmann 1927, 8.

[268] The depiction of deities atop animal supports may derive from Syrian artistic traditions (see Winter 1982).

[269] The partly preserved cornice at the top of the panel may show additional leonine pedestal supports.

Another key difference between the Great Relief and Gate Monolith representations is that images of the king are shown encircled within both deities' rings (fig. 53). Recent excavations conducted as part of LoNAP have also revealed that the trunk of the rod ending in the palmette held by Mullissu, which was previously only understood in simple detail, is actually another image of the king performing *appa labānu* (fig. 54).[270] The unusually massive scale of the Great Relief enables this representational envelopment. The presence of the king within the rings held by the divine couple and Mullissu's rod means that, while the image focuses on the divine couple's encounter, the image of the king is still featured in the centre of the image. The doubled images of the king represented to the same scale as the deities, albeit without his own quadruped support, however, also positions him at the outermost region of the frame, to the effect that his image also surrounds the deities.

The representation of the king both at either side of the deities and symbolically enveloped by their paraphernalia serves to integrate him into the visual rhetoric of the divine couple. On the one hand, the king's standing directly behind them expresses his reverence to Aššur as well as Mullissu. On the other hand, the appearance of the king within the rings and in the rod-trunk indicates that he is not only in close spatial proximity with the divine couple but also comprises part of the rulership symbols held by the gods. The message is that the king is instrumental in helping the gods rule and that his reverence to them through his kingship is quite literally the deities' instruments of rule. This idea is also expressed in the three inscriptions carved onto the rock-cut and niched steles, making a comparative examination of these texts and the enveloped images of the king in the Great Relief useful.

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[270] Morandi Bonacossi 2018b, 94.

In addition to supporting Sennacherib's military campaigns, the gods are foregrounded throughout the stele relief inscriptions for their involvement in the construction of the canals. Divine involvement is reflected in Sennacherib's sending of ritual specialists including an exorcist (*wāšipu*) and a lamentation singer (*kalû*) to the grand opening of the canal, as well as in the offering of precious metals and sculptures to the deities Ea, Enbilulu and En'e'imdu during these ceremonials, presumably due to their association with water.[271] The canal referred to in the text as Patti-Sennacherib was built at 'the command of Aššur' (*ina qibīt Aššur*), which likely explains how Sennacherib was able to build the Nār-Sennacherib canal with only 'seventy men'.[272] Sennacherib is emphatic in an earlier section of the text that the canal 'gate' was not opened 'through the work of human hands' but through divine wish, though he simultaneously takes credit for making the canal 'gurgle'.[273] Agency appears to shift between Sennacherib and the deities in the same way that the narrative perspective shifts from Nineveh to Babylon and back, and the key overlap between the king and the deities here is, crucially, in their area of collaboration. Whereas in the Gate Monolith main panel's upper register the king is shown in reverence, in the Great Relief the king's reverence becomes the deities' rule. Equipped with these contexts, I now turn to consider the right-side relief panel of the Gate Monolith.

[271] Animal offerings were also made to the gods at the canal's opening ceremony, and the construction workers were adorned with colourful garments and gold adornments for the occasion. RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223, 27-34.

[272] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223, 13-14; 15b, cf. 23b-26.

[273] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223, 30b-31.

Nineveh, a New Babylon

The Gate Monolith right-side panel relief (figs. 42) combines features of the main panel's lower register, i.e., the lion-holding figure's external facing frontality, i.e., the representation of the king's exclusive relationship with the divine couple, to express a distinct but interrelated message about the king's relationship with Aššur.

In a comparable manner to how the Gate Monolith main panel relief's two registers are connected compositionally, the main panel is similarly connected to the right panel. The right-side panel shows a central, frontal-facing image of Aššur holding a mace and flanked by two frontal-facing images of the king, also holding maces. In turn, the images of the king are flanked by frontal facing *lamassu* guardians. Whereas in the upper register of the main panel relief, as in the Great Relief, the to-scale representations of the king show him stood on the ground while the deities are mounted on quadruped supports, the right-side panel relief has the royal image and the image of the deity stood on pedestals of equal height.[274] An examination of the use of profile vs frontal modes of representation in the upper and lower registers of the main panel and right-side panel reliefs illuminates how they should be interpreted relative to each other. First, I will make clear that both the main panel and the right panel reliefs are composed similarly.

Both the Gate Monolith main panel relief's upper and lower registers and the Monolith's right-side panel relief all represent a central figure flanked by anthropomorphic and zoomorphic elements. In the upper register of the Gate Monolith's main panel relief,

[274] This recalls the debate around the equivalence between the image of Aššur and the royal image as represented on the *akītu* house gate.

the king is flanked by the divine couple who stand on quadruped supports, whereas in the lower register the lion-holding hero is flanked by *lamassu* that incorporate both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic elements within their hybrid forms. The right-side panel relief, in comparison, represents the deity in the centre of the composition, while he is flanked by the doubled royal image in addition to *lamassu*. Despite the obvious differences in the elements that comprise the formations represented in the upper and lower registers of the Gate Monolith's main panel relief and the right-side panel relief, the basic visual formula is retained.

Awareness of the basic formula adapted to compose the main panel's upper and lower registers, and the right-side panel clarifies the differences between these images. The clearest contrast is in the instances where frontal representation is used in place of profile representation. The main panel's upper register shows the king and the divine couple in profile whereas the lower register shows the *lamassu* in profile while the lion-holding hero is shown frontally. The right panel, in clearest contrast, shows all subjects in frontal view. This relief is, significantly, the only instance at Khinis where Aššur is represented unaccompanied by other deities, whether by his consort Mullissu only or the larger group. In my view, the contrast expressed between the frontal-facing tripartite unit of king-Aššur-king on the right-side panel is especially notable considering how the unit of Aššur-king-Mullissu is shown in profile in the main panel's upper register.

Whereas the closed encounter between the divine couple and the king is represented in the main panel relief's upper register, the frontal-facing images of Aššur and the king holding identical maces on the right-side panel relief confront the viewer in a manner comparable to the lion-holding figure represented in the main panel relief's lower register.

If the layering of the upper register of the Gate Monolith's main panel relief on top of the lower register imagery situates the royal-divine relationship within the palace, the representation of this in-profile encounter also conveys the exclusivity of its implied architectural setting.

The relationship between Aššur and the king represented in the right-side panel relief is, by contrast, external facing. Pongratz-Leisten (2022a, 259) argues that this configuration of the right-side panel relief is intended to directly engage the viewer, or as she describes them, 'beholder' into 'veneration not only of the god, but also of the king'. This interpretation is very much in line with Ornan's (2007a, 169-170) view that the monumental representation of the image of the king interacting with deities represented in anthropomorphic form was in fact a bold status claim that was too sensitive in its contents to be represented inside of the royal palaces. Considering this and the recent findings from LoNAP, which have led Morandi Bonacossi and Ahmed Qasim (2022, 52) to observe that the Sargonid canals were intended to 'profoundly [modify] the space of the empire's core area, along with the mental and symbolic perception the people had of this newly built imperial landscape', I will now attempt to reframe how the exteriorisation of the divine-royal relationship depicted in the right-side panel relief might be understood.

Sennacherib's irrigation works have traditionally been conceptualised as luxury commodities that were primarily intended to provide water for his renowned royal gardens as opposed to also having a broader socioeconomic impact for the Nineveh region.[275] The site of Khinis has been interpreted as a summer palace, leading to the reading of the reliefs as 'Gartental Reliefs' (Bachmann 1927, 1). More recently however, the archaeological

[275] Compare, for example, Oates 1968, 47-52; Reade 1978b, 174; Bagg 2000.

excavations conducted as part of LoNAP have prompted Morandi Bonacossi to assert the profound importance of Sennacherib's hydraulic innovations for the transformation this area, pointing out that:

> [The construction of the canals] permitted not only the provision of Nineveh, its fields and royal gardens with water, but also the development of intensified irrigation and agricultural production throughout the surrounding countryside. Such a planned shift from dry-farming to irrigation in Assyria is suggested also by the appearance of new crops in the archaeobotanical assemblages of the Neo-Assyrian period, most of them requiring irrigation in areas of irregular and low rainfall.[276]

In the light of these findings, it is possible to begin to reframe how the choice to represent the relationship between the king and Aššur in frontal positions in the Gate Monolith's right-side panel relief may be understood. Integrating my interpretation of the imagery represented in the main panel relief's upper and lower registers, I would posit that, rather than being seen as intended to lead the 'beholder' to perceive the king as a god, the overall message of the Monolith is that the king's relationship with the divine couple inside the palace enables the creativity he needs to build, but crucially also that the king's public service to Aššur through building works is of external benefit.[277] The relationship between the divine and the king extends into the landscape and into Nineveh's infrastructure through the canal, marking the divinely co-acted redirection of water to the heart of Nineveh. As claimed in the Bavian Inscription, the notion of the 'gate' derives from where

[276] Morandi Bonacossi 2018c, 78-81. See also, more recently, Stampoultzidis et al. 2024, who use water modelling techniques to argue similarly that these innovations most likely did have a positive agricultural effect.

[277] This fits with the broader emphasis on the presentation of great skill attributed to divine inspiration during the reign of Sennacherib described in Winter 2008a.

water exits the rock and is redirected toward the city.[278] Hence, site photographs seemingly indicate that the Monolith faces the stream (fig. 55), suggesting that this imagery was represented in this particular area of the site for this reason.[279]

Having now demonstrated that the representation of the king with anthropomorphic deities at Khinis is best understood not only in terms of how this imagery expresses his status in terms of the divine but marks his working with the gods to redirect water to Nineveh, in the remainder of this chapter my aims are twofold. First, I intend to establish a cultic context for interpreting the representation of the king and deities collaborating in the redirection of resources to Nineveh. Second, I intend to build on my earlier analysis of the Bavian Inscription to advance the view that Sennacherib's representation with the deities in this collaborative role is formulated, both visually and textually, in terms of Enūma eliš and, moreover, also in terms of succession.

Given the little attestation to the Assyrian recension of Enūma eliš, it is possible that the poetic account of Aššur's victory over Tiāmat never became more widely known in Assyria than the Babylonian version of the poem in which Marduk is victorious. Regardless, it is well established that the cultic architecture and practice associated with the poem in the city of Aššur extended the recension's theology, not least through the king's public participation in the *akītu* rites for Aššur.[280] One particular aspect of the *akītu* for Aššur is relevant to the present consideration of the impact of the relationship between Aššur and the king as expressed through frontality on the Gate Monolith's side panel: state

[278] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223, 30.

[279] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223, 30.

[280] Debourse 2022, 40-46; Debourse 2024, 118-119.

rituals conducted in the time of Sennacherib have been described as '[endeavouring] to create a relational space in which all cities and their panthea would be tied to the imperial center, thereby fostering social bonds on a large spatial scale and envisioning a unified territory under divine guidance'.[281]

The *tākultu* ritual, on the other hand, may be traced to second millennium BC Babylonia, where it was initially centred on the cultic preparation of a meal (*akālu*, 'to eat') for a deity. In Sargonid Assyria, gaining particular prominence under Sennacherib, the scope of this ritual was greatly expanded, encompassing vast territory and peoples, as each area of the empire was required to offer sacrifices to Aššur in the city of Aššur.[282] Cultic commentary texts reveal information about the types of food offerings that were made in this period as well as the contributions of specific areas. The texts are united in opening with invocations to the gods inviting them to partake in the festive meal. Significantly for the purposes of the present discussion, the ritual 'aimed at legally binding the gods spread throughout the empire into a relationship of mutual obligations with Aššur, Assyria, the Assyrian king, and each other'.[283]

It has been argued that the *tākultu*, significantly unlike the *akītu*, had 'an unambiguous centripetal effect, drawing divine focus to the imperial center and thereby enhancing the ideological value of regular deliveries to the Aššur temple'.[284] In part due to the relationship between cultic topography and poetic text in Babylon as well as Aššur,

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[281] Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 402.

[282] Relevant texts include SAA 20, 33; SAA 7, 148-157; SAA 20, 38-47.

[283] Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 401.

[284] Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 404.

earlier scholarship on the *akītu* posited a direct re-enactment of Enūma eliš, characterising the ritual primarily as a cultic drama, though recent scholarship on the matter is more skeptical.[285] The location of the *akītu*-house outside of Aššur's city walls is nevertheless significant for the interpretation of the ritual because textual evidence describes the procession of divine statues there and indicates Aššur's ultimate return to Ešarra after the proceedings, further communicating Ešarra's importance.[286]

I interpret the representation of royal and divine images at the site of the Khinis canal head marking the outpouring of water from the canal as having, in a way, a comparable 'centripetal' significance. This is possibly why the deities are represented atop quadrupeds in the reliefs, expressing movement. In the same way that precious stones, metals and timber were acquired from the periphery of the empire to benefit technological production and social life in the centre, the redirection of water was another such 'act of inviting and actively transporting benevolent divine aspects of the landscape into the Assyrian centres', in this case Nineveh.[287]

Already in Chapter II it has been recapped how Dūr-Šarrukīn's layout in quadrants was modelled on Babylon. It has, moreover, been suggested previously on the basis of Sennacherib's renovations at Aššur and transformation of the image of Assyrian religion that his aim was to make Aššur a new Babylon. Certainly, insofar as the *akītu* was performed there for Aššur this is the case. Sennacherib likely also built an *akītu*-house for

[285] See literature review in Debourse 2024. See also, in particular, Lambert 1963, 190; Pongratz-Leisten 1994, 74-78.

[286] See discussion of SAA 20 12; 52; 53; 54 and SAA 3 37 in Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 420-422.

[287] Amrhein 2020, 356.

Ištar just outside Nineveh.[288] Given the present exploration of the Khinis reliefs showing Aššur with Mullissu, who was, as mentioned above, connected to Ištar, I would query whether there was an intended ideological connection between the Khinis canal's provision of water for Nineveh and the prominence of the divine couple at Khinis.[289] Interpreted against the cultic context of the *tākultu* and *akītu*, it is moreover possible to establish how this too is represented in relation to the Babylon story.

The examination thus far has pointed out important developments in royal self-representation at Khinis, which it is now pertinent to summarise. As I argued, the carving of twelve steles with imagery of the traditional Assyrian style has laid atop it an inscription that deviates from the expected structure and directs attention toward monuments at the site carved with images showing the king making the Babylonian gesture of *appa labānu*. The inscriptions carved across three of these steles illuminate this dissonance by presenting Nineveh as the beneficiary of Babylon's demise. Extension and development are similarly witnessed in the Gate Monolith main panel relief's upper and lower registers. While the lion-holding figure with *lamassu* formation that was stationed at entranceways in Sargon and Sennacherib's palaces is depicted in the panel's lower register, the unit gains new visual context at Khinis through the representation of the king's encounter with the divine couple in the upper register. The representation of the king's encounter with the divine couple at this scale would appear to be a development for this time and yet, given the

[288] RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 10, 33-42 cf. Debourse 2022, 42 as well as Zaia 2024, 106 fn. 36.

[289] It is known from an inscription carved on an aqueduct intended to redirect water from the Bastura River RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 229 that Sennacherib also intended to provide an external water supply for Arbela, another cult centre of Ištar. It is known from Esarhaddon's reign that there was an akītu-festival held in Arbela too. See RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 54, 25-39 and discussion in Debourse 2022, 43.

architectural context provided by the panel's lower register, this is furthermore clearly situated within the palace.

The especially monumental Great Relief elaborates this image by showing the king as not only spatially proximate but symbolically enveloped by the deities' instruments of power. In this sense, the Great Relief compares positively to the Bavian Inscription, which also attributes the works to the deities as well as the king.

Divine-royal collaboration is also expressed in the Gate Monolith's right-side panel relief, which, although presented in connection to the bifurcated main panel relief, presents an alternative picture of divine-royal relations focused on the king and Aššur. The exclusive relationship between the king and the deities presented in the main panel relief's upper register is externalised through frontality in the right-side panel relief. As claimed by Sennacherib in the Bavian Inscription, and as confirmed by the recent archaeological excavations in the Nineveh region, the construction of the Khinis canal was designed to positively transform Nineveh's infrastructure. By harnessing water resources and representing divinely involvement in its redirection to the centre, this hydraulic innovation echoed the centripetal intentions of state rituals performed at the same time.

Given the above analysis, it is significant that the royal image is enclosed in the space of the divine couple through the king's performance of *appa labānu* and not *ubāna tarāṣu*. Babylon was destroyed, the Khinis canal was constructed, and Nineveh became the beneficiary of Sennacherib's resource appropriations, to the effect of elevating not only the city but also the king. Before Esarhaddon would carve his stele next to the one of Rameses II (r. 1279–1213 BC) at Nahr el-Kalb in line with his new claim to universal kingship following his victory over Egypt, Sennacherib's wielding of walls and water to essentially

recreate Nineveh after he destroyed Babylon is expressed visually, as his performance of working together with the gods; recalling the above discussion of the image of divine conflict presented on the Aššur *akītu*-house gates.

Given the importance of Babylonian appropriation in the context of hydraulic innovation, I do not think it too far to suggest that an implication of the Bavian Inscription is that Nineveh is not only established as being like Babylon but, like the city of Aššur, becomes the new Babylon. This is to say that the inscription, when read in the cultic context that I have attempted to connect, conveys the notion that the abundance bringing waters in the form of the alluvial plain that were in Babylon have now been transported by Sennacherib to Nineveh.

Reflecting on the relationship between the Gate Monolith's main and right-side relief panels in this light, it is useful to recall other arguments previously made in Chapter II of this thesis concerning the relief programme for Dūr-Šarrukīn. In particular, I argued that the depiction of the *lamassu* in the sea during the reliefs visualising the water transport of timber reveals the exceptional nature of Sargon's own creation, given that he creates divine beings, through the proximity of this image to the *lamassu* gateway guardians that were stationed at Khorsabad's entranceways. I argued earlier in the present chapter that the representation of the lion-holding figure with *lamassu* motif, which was introduced at Dūr-Šarrukīn, in the lower register of the Khinis Gate Monolith's main panel relief also alludes to the royal act of creation through building by depicting a representation of an image known not from its widespread reduplication but from its prominent placement in the entranceways of royal palaces. Thus, it appears to me even more likely that the Gate

Monolith's right side panel relief celebrates not only the provision of Nineveh with water but the king's divinely assisted creative prowess in facilitating the water's redirection.

As the elevation of Nineveh and the king occurs in tandem at Khinis through representation in proximity to the divine and to water, it remains to be seen the extent to which Sennacherib is presenting not only Aššur as the replacement of Marduk through the reliefs and inscriptions at Khinis but also the royal image as the replacement of Marduk. This is especially the case given the representation of the royal image in likeness to Aššur and of the relationship with the divine couple as being of reciprocal benefit to the gods and Assyria. In Chapter II, I argued that the relief programme for Dūr-Šarrukīn framed the city as a space at which interrelatedness with the divine was expressed but the representation of the king's intimacy with the divine couple at Khinis further enhances this message. In that chapter intertextual connections between the building inscriptions for Dūr-Šarrukīn and Enūma eliš were also foregrounded as being important to his own logic of the religious and ideological significance of building his new palace. In the following excursus, I will consider the relevance of Enūma eliš to the sculptural complex at Khinis and how this further illuminates development in the formulation of kingship between Sargon and Sennacherib. First, it is essential to establish the basis for which Enūma eliš is able to provide an interpretive framework for the Khinis reliefs and inscriptions.

Excursus: Khinis Interpreted Through Enūma eliš

As it has been seen, Sennacherib's sack of Babylon in 689 BC was witnessed in the renovation of Ešarra and the performance of the *akītu* for Aššur as well as in the

construction of the Khinis canal and its marking with reliefs and inscriptions. The Bavian Inscription, which has been examined above for its detailed account of the Babylon story, has been noted already as exhibiting an unusual structure that gives precedence to Sennacherib's transformation of Nineveh after the conflict rather than the military conflict that led to the acquisition of the necessary resource for this. It has already been suggested that Sennacherib's description of how he destroyed Babylon with water in the inscription is framed, within the broader structural and thematic context of the text, as being akin to a divinely caused deluge. Ornan suggests that this 'echoed mystic events and intensified the divine aspiration of Sennacherib'.[290] Similarly, Stefan Maul:

> Deliberately imitating the flood myth, Sennacherib dispensed the weapon, which was attributed to Assur, and reenacted the annihilation of Babylonia as an obliterating flood. He dammed the Euphrates, cut ditches through the metropolitan area, and destroyed Babylon so forcefully with the floodwater that debris was allegedly washed up even in the vicinity of the Gulf island of Bahrain (Dilmun).[291]

The flood is associated with Marduk visually through his symbol of the spade (*marru*), which is otherwise associated with the divine digging of canals.[292] Marduk is also associated with the flood motif through his wielding of the Deluge weapon against Tiāmat in Enūma eliš.[293]

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[290] Ornan 2007a, 172. See also Ornan 2014, 556-557 fn. 54.

[291] Maul 2017, 336.

[292] Oshima 2006, 79-80.

[293] Compare LBL Enūma eliš IV, 49-50. Cf. IV, 75 and RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 223.

Elnathan Weissert previously made the argument that Sennacherib's earlier account of the Battle of Hallule in his Chicago Prism inscription from Nineveh made five literary allusions to Enūma eliš.[294] To recap these occurrences: 1) the Babylonians are described as *galle lemnūti* ('wicked demons') recalling Tiāmat's horde; 2) the Babylonian king's characterisation as a false king parallels the characterisation of Kingu, Tiāmat's consort; 3) Sennacherib addresses the deities as if they were assembled together, recalling Marduk's receipt of approval from the divine assembly; 4) otherwise uncommon verbs, including *urruhû* ('to trample'), and nouns, including *parī'napšati* ('throat-piercer'), directly parallel their use in the poem; 5) archaisms including *rīšu* ('head') further recall their use in Enūma eliš relative to the notion of Marduk's radiant aura.

Weissert's identification of the above connections between the Chicago Prism account of the Battle of Halule and Enūma eliš led him to argue that Sennacherib's scribes intended to establish a direct comparison between the Babylonians and Tiāmat, and thus that Enūma eliš is referred to in the Chicago Prism account for polemical purposes. Pongratz-Leisten revised and extended Weissert's argument and identified further linguistic, thematic and structural connections between the Chicago Prism account and the Enūma Eliš.[295] Both Weissert and Pongratz-Leisten suggest that the later account of the Battle of Halulue given in the Bavian Inscription does not witness the same sustained engagement with Enūma eliš. However, my analysis of the Khinis complex prompts revisiting this conclusion.

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[294] The prism is referred to as the Chicago Prism because of its current location. The composite text, derived from two complete hexagonal prisms as well as fragments of other prisms found at Nineveh, is published as RINAP 3 as Sennacherib 22. Weissert 1999 refers to v 17– vi 35.

[295] Pongratz-Leisten 2015, 179-181 and 306-321.

Although the Bavian Inscription does not contain as many explicit textual references to Enūma eliš as the Chicago Prism account, I argue that a connection is established throughout the entire Khinis complex between Sennacherib and the victorious god—both Marduk and Aššur, and either—of Enūma eliš, by analogy. As the divine hero overcomes the enemy with water in the poem and then goes on to build his supreme residence, Sennacherib destroys Babylon and constructs the Khinis canal for the elevation of Nineveh.

I will now consider key moments of Enūma eliš that I contend are reflected in the reliefs and inscriptions at Khinis: the fashioning of the sky; the building of a house; the end positions of Tiāmat's horde and the assembly of gods. To be clear, I am not intending to suggest that there are direct textual relationships between the Khinis inscriptions and the poem, which would be beyond the scope of the present enquiry, which is not primarily intended as an intertextual study. Rather, I claim that Sennacherib's kingship is formulated at Khinis in coherence with the poem's overall logic.

> *ubaššim manzāza ana ilī rabûti*
> *kakkabī tamšīlšunu lumāšī ušziz*
> *u'addi šatta miṣrāti umaṣṣir*
> *šinšeret arḫī kakkabī šulu*[*š*]*ā ušziz*
>
> He fashioned stations for the great gods
> and established the constellations, the images of the stars.
> He marked out the year, drawing its outline,
> and established the twelve months, with three stars each.[296]

[296] LBL Enūma eliš V, 1-4 (translation Heinrich and Helle 2024).

The above excerpt can be favourably compared with the twelve steles carved in the traditional style at Khinis. Given the use of emblematic form to represent the deities and the positioning of the steles high upon the cliffs overlooking the canal, the steles appear to have been stationed like stars above. Hence, Sennacherib's account of his recreation of the cosmos through his construction of the Khinis canal is written on them. The connection between the Khinis complex and the logic of the text is further witnessed by the layering of the inscription atop the steles carved into traditional style, reflecting the organisational work done in the poem following the defeat of Tiāmat.

elēnu apsî šubat ḫašmāni
meḫret ešarra ša abnû anāku elkun
šapliš ašrati udannina qaqqarša
lūpuš-ma bīta lū šubat lalêya
qerbuššu māḫāzašu lušaršid-ma
kummī luddâ lukīn šarrūtī
enūma ištu apsî tellâ ana purussê
ašruššu lū nubattakun ana maḫār(i) puḫrīkun
enūma ištu šamāmī turradā ana pur[*ussê*]
ašruššu lū nubattakun ana maḫār(i) puḫrīkun
lubbī-ma šumšu bābi[*li*] *bītāt ilī rabûti*

Above the Apsû, the home of hashmanu,
opposite the Eshara, which I built for you,
beneath the firmament, whose surface I made strong,
I will build a house. Let it be my beautiful home!
Inside it, I will found its temple,
I will appoint my chamber and make firm my kingship.
When you come up from the Apsû to make decisions,
let this be your place of repose before your assembly.
When you come down from the heavens to make decisions,
let this be your place of repose before your assembly.

I will name it ‘Babylon, Houses of the Great Gods.[297]

I would like to revisit my earlier examination of the Khinis Gate Monolith main panel’s bifurcated registers in the light of the above passage. The house Sennacherib builds is localised to Aššur because of its proximity to Ešarra. Yet the three-tiered structure that organises the deities’ proximity, which is made up of Apsû as well as the area beneath the firmament and the high heavens directly maps onto the Gate Monolith main panel relief’s compositional structure. On the one hand, the upper register would appear to correspond to the place beneath the firmament to which the deities descend, as they are represented in what appears to be the upper area of a temple cella. On the other hand, the Monolith’s location above water flowing out of the rock beneath the reliefs and into Nineveh could also cast the canal water as Apsû.

At this point one might recall the ritual opening of the Khinis canal described in the Bavian Inscription and the presence there of water deities including Ea, the deity who presides over Apsû. Viewed through this lens, the lower register can be seen to be like the place beneath the firmament, i.e., the king’s palace as signalled by the lion-holding hero. In turn, this casts the upper register of the main panel as the heavens. The next excerpt from the poem will begin to lead this discussion to the end for which I propose this analogy was established.

[*u*] *ištēn-ešret nabnīssa ša tiāmtu ibnû …*
[*kakk*]*īšun iḫtepâ īsir šēpuššu*
ibnī-ma ṣalmī[*šunu ina bāb*] *apsî uša*[*ṣbit*]
[*aḫ*]*râtaš lā immaššâ* [*š*]*ī lū ittu*

[297] LBL Enūma eliš V, 119-129 (translation Heinrich and Helle 2024).

īmurū-[*ma*] *il*[*ū k*]*arassunu ḫa<dîš> iriššš*[*ū*]
[*la*]*ḫmu u laḫāmu kalîšunu abbūšu*
[*īd*]*iršum-ma anšar šar šulma ušāpīšu*
[*ān*]*u enlil u ea uqa''išūš qīšāti*
ummu damkina ālittašu ušālilšu

and the eleven beings that Tiamat had created [ ]
he broke their weapons, he bound them to his feet.
He created statues of them, installing them at Apsû's gate:
'Let them be a sign, never to be forgotten.'
The gods saw it and their hearts exulted with joy —
Lahmu, Lahamu and all his fathers.
Anshar embraced him and recited greetings for the king,
Anu, Enlil, and Ea gave him gifts.
Mother Damkina, who gave birth to him, cried out with joy over him,[298]

This excerpt from the poem provides further context for interpreting the lower register of the Gate Monolith main panel relief, which represents the curly-haired lion-holding hero previously described as having a connection to Laḫmu.[299] I argued above that the upper register of the panel, providing further visual context for the lower register of the relief, extends and transforms the visual rhetoric of Khorsabad. The presence of Anshar and Damkina in the assembly of the gods at this moment is intriguing given the depiction of Mullissu in the relief.[300] In the logic of the poem, Marduk's victory and construction of Babylon is celebrated by the deities including Anshar and Damkina, his divine mother. At Khinis, Sennacherib's victory and construction is commemorated by his incorporation into

[298] LBL Enūma eliš V, 73-81 (translation Heinrich and Helle 2024).

[299] See pp. 39-42.

[300] See Sonik 2025 for an examination of the presentation of female figures in the poem through characters including Damkina and Tiāmat.

the visual rhetoric of the divine couple, as further seen through my analysis of the Great Relief.

In my analysis of the Gate Monolith main panel relief's upper register, I also argued that the depiction of the king with the divine couple on the monumental scale is an extension of the precedent for showing an anthropomorphic deity in the presence of the royal family dyad in the Residence K wall painting. Thus, according to the logic of the Khinis complex, Sennacherib's victory over Babylon separates him from his father and all the kings before him and is hence represented in a transformed visual form. The end to which the analogy between Sennacherib, Marduk and Aššur is achieved is the integration of the king into the visual rhetoric of divinity through intersecting kinship structures and the idea of the victorious god of the poem's succession. Whereas the Residence K painting represents the king at the forefront worshipping the deity and the crown prince standing behind him, the Gate Monolith main panel relief's upper register shows the king in direct connection with both members of the divine couple, and almost literally standing on the shoulders of Sargon, whose legacy is represented in the form of the lion-holding figure known from Khorsabad.

At the same time, the culmination of Marduk and Aššur's triumph over Tiāmat in Enūma eliš is his acknowledgement by the gods as being supreme and succeeding their generation. In showing Sennacherib standing between Aššur and Mullissu in the upper register of the Gate Monolith main panel and showing the king as being literally part of the deities' instruments of rule in the Great Relief, the inference following the logic of the Bavian Inscription that is essentially written into the stars is that Sennacherib's wielding of water against Babylon has defeated Tiāmat and elevated Nineveh. By analogy with the

poem, Aššur and Mullissu are cast as the elder generation of deities and Sennacherib, because of and despite his representation in the attire of a king rather than the crown prince, is implicitly playing the role of their successor. Whereas at Dūr-Šarrukīn, the main collaboration represented through the palatial reliefs is the king's collaboration with the crown prince, at Khinis this is developed to portray the collaboration between the divine couple and the king. Yet the idea of succession, whether expressed in relation to the royal or the divine, is important in both instances.

Barbara Porter (1997) has notably argued that, after Sennacherib was assassinated at Nineveh in 681 BC, his successor Esarhaddon adopted a more conciliatory Babylonian policy, restoring Marduk to some extent to his previous esteem. In the following chapter, I will trace how the precedent set by Sennacherib of depicting himself enclosed in the visual rhetoric of the divine, formulated in a familial model, and on the monumental scale through his relationship with the divine couple at Khinis is extended to Esarhaddon's own heirs.

Chapter IV

Transposition: Esarhaddon, Binder of the Succession

I argued in the previous chapter that the depiction of Sennacherib (r. 704–681 BC) enclosed in the space of the divine couple at Khinis extended and transformed visual models expressed already in the reliefs from Khorsabad, in which the relationship or encounter between the king and the crown prince served as an organising principle. In this chapter I will examine how the king's close relationship with the divine now reshapes how his relationship with the crown prince is represented.[301]

In the wake of the conspiracy to murder Sennacherib in 681 BC, which is thought to have been enacted by at least one of his sons, his successor Esarhaddon (r. 680−669 BC) came to power in Assyria at a moment of dynastic crisis.[302] Perhaps in part due to these turbulent personal and political circumstances, which can to some extent be seen as brought about by the failure of Sennacherib's succession policy to ensure a smooth transfer of power to one accepted crown prince, Esarhaddon pursued what has been characterised as a unique approach to the issue of the succession. While Esarhaddon chose his younger son Aššurbanipal to become the future king of Assyria, his elder son Šamaš-šumu-ukīn was selected to become the subordinate future king of Babylonia. This succession policy has

[301] An early iteration of some parts of the argument advanced in this chapter is published in Anderson 2025.

[302] For a recent overview of the events surrounding Sennacherib's murder and the accession of Esarhaddon see Baker 2023, 310-312. Scholars debate which of Sennacherib's heirs was responsible. Compare, for instance, Parpola 1980 with the more recent arguments in Knapp 2015; Knapp 2020; Jones 2023.

been much discussed in Assyriology, particularly with respect to the many *adê* ('oath')[303] tablet fragments that have notably been found at Nimrud (ancient Kalḫu) as well as, more recently, at Tell Tayinat (the ancient Assyrian province of Kunalia).[304]

While the theologising aspects of the *adê* documents have been much discussed in scholarship, my aim in this chapter is for these textual sources to inform my interpretation of the reliefs and inscriptions carved onto Esarhaddon's steles uncovered at Zincirli (the ancient Assyrian vassal kingdom of Sam'al) and Tell Ahmar (ancient Til Barsip; Assyrian Kar-Salmanu-ašared), which notably celebrate Esarhaddon's landmark victory over Egypt in 671 BC (figs. 56-67). Through exploring what I describe as the transposition of the encounter scene in the context of the divine during Esarhaddon's reign, also considering the rituals performed at Kalḫu to accompany the *adê* swearing, I aim to advance an integrated reading of Esarhaddon's ideological programme around the succession in the years between the princes' installation in 672 BC and Esarhaddon's death in 669 BC.[305]

As it will be argued, a major aspect of Esarhaddon's succession programme involved formulating the succession in terms of divine support for the princes, and

[303] See Lauinger 2015 for a discussion of the various designations for *adê*, conventionally translated as 'oath' or 'loyalty oath' but better defined as an 'imposed obligation', with a distinctly religious aspect.

[304] Additional variants of the Nimrud *adê* were found at Aššur during the excavations of Walter Andrae. The fragments are VAT 11543 (published in Weidner 1939-1941), VAT 12374 and VAT 9424 (both published in Frahm 2009, 135-36; 255). This discussion will deal only with the Tayinat and Nimrud versions because they are less fragmentary and, crucially, they are not chancellery copies of the *adê* but sealed *adê* tablets (*ṭuppi adê*) intended to be displayed and venerated, like Esarhaddon's steles.

[305] Aiming to secure his southwest borders, Esarhaddon had previously led a failed campaign to Egypt in 674 BC. For a recent overview of Esarhaddon's military campaigns, see Baker 2023, 316-318. It has previously been suggested that Esarhaddon's erection of the steles and the swearing of the *adê* may have functioned as part of the same ideological programme (e.g., Ponchia 2014, 510), though this has not been thoroughly explored.

especially Aššurbanipal, who was to become the superior king of Assyria, in central as well as provincial court contexts. Ultimately, it is my contention that, as part of Esarhaddon's succession programme, the relationship of the Assyrian king and crown prince comes to be formulated in terms of intersecting divine and royal familial relationships. To begin to make this point, it is useful to first revisit the oaths that were sworn around the time of the princes' installation in the month of Ayyāru 672 BC.

Binding the Succession

Esarhaddon's concern for the succession of his heirs has been most discussed in the field of Assyriology in terms of his *adê* tablets from Nimrud. The repeated text inscribed on these tablets has been characterised as a legal and religious obligation that bound Assyrian elites into supporting Aššurbanipal as the future king of Assyria and, secondarily, his older brother Šamaš-šumu-ukīn as the future ruler of Babylonia. In the following discussion, I will consider how the text inscribed onto these tablets and the seals impressed on them conveyed divine support for the succession and intended to bind the swearers of the oath into loyalty to Aššurbanipal's future kingship.[306]

While textual evidence suggests that an *adê* was sworn to support the succession of Esarhaddon during the reign of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon's *adê* for his crown princes is much more substantially documented.[307] Over 350 *adê* tablet fragments, estimated to have

[306] See pp. 13-14.

[307] Both Esarhaddon's Nineveh A inscription (RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 4 i, 13-19) and a fragmentary *adê* from the time of Sennacherib would also seem to affirm that Esarhaddon was ritually installed as crown prince (SAA 6 3).

originally constituted at least nine individual tablets, were found scattered in a suite or 'throne room' connected to Ezida, the Nabû temple at Nimrud, during the British excavations that were led by Max Mallowan in 1955.[308] The reconstructed exemplars are differentiated by scribal errors and slight variations, in particular because each tablet names a different vassal ruler of the Zagros region who is recorded to have entered into an agreement with Esarhaddon between 16 and 18 Ayyāru of the *limmu* ('year eponym') for Nabû-bēlu-uṣur, governor of Dūr-Šarrukku (= 672 BC).[309] Otherwise, the inscriptions are more or less identical. This corpus preserves the most extensive attestation to any known *adê*. The reconstructed text, published as Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty, spans 670 lines regarding an oath of allegiance to the crown prince Aššurbanipal (*ša ina muhhi* ^{m}*aššur-bāni-apli mār šarri rabû ša bēt rēdûti*).[310]

The primary intention of the *adê* was to bind all who swore it to supporting Aššurbanipal's succession in Assyria. This is witnessed by the following extract, which outlines how the contracting parties were to support the transferral of the kingship to Aššurbanipal following Esarhaddon's death.

> *ki-ma* ^{m}*aš-šur*—PAB—AŠ MAN KUR—*aš-šur a-na šim-ti it-ta-lak*
> ^{m}*aš-šur*—DÙ—A DUMU—MAN GAL *šá* É—UŠ-*ti ina* GIŠ.GU.ZA-*e*
> LUGAL-*ti tu-še-šab-ba* LUGAL-*u-tú* EN-*u-tú*
> *šá* KUR—*aš-šur ina* UGU-*ḫi-ku-nu up-pa-áš ina* A.ŠÀ *ina bir-ti* URU

[308] The text is published in Wiseman 1958. See also the relevant discussions in Watanabe 1987 and Lauinger 2015. SAA 2 6 is the composite edition of the text referred to here.

[309] The composite text lists Humbareš, the city ruler of Nahšimarti, who enters the treaty on behalf of all those who he rules over, as well as all of his descendants to come (SAA 2 6, 1-3). Note also the dates provided in the colophon (SAA 2 6, 664-665).

[310] SAA 2 6, 11.

la ta-na-ṣar-šú-u-ni ina UGU-*ḫi-šú la ta-ma-qut-a-ni*
la ta-mut-ta-a-ni ina ket-ti šá ŠÀ-*bi-ku-nu*
is-si-šú la ta-da-bu-ba-a-ni mil-ku SIG$_5$
šá gam-mur-ti ŠÀ-*bi-ku-nu la ta-mal-lik-a-šú-u-ni*
KASKAL SIG$_5$ *ina* GÌR.2.<MEŠ>-*šú la ta-šá-kan-a-ni*
šum-ma at-tu-nu tu-nak-kar-a-šu-ni TA^{v} ŠÀ ŠEŠ-MEŠ-*šú*
GAL-MEŠ TUR-MEŠ *ina ku-mu-šú ina* GIŠ.GU.ZA KUR—*aš-šur*.KI
tu-še-šab-a-ni šum-ma a-bu-tú šá ^{m}*aš-šur*—PAB—AŠ MAN KUR—*aš-šur*.KI
te-na-a-ni tu-šá-an-na-a-ni šum-ma ^{m}*aš-šur*—DÙ—A DUMU—MAN GAL-*u*
šá É—UŠ-*ti šá* ^{m}*aš-šur*—PAB—AŠ MAN KUR—*aš-šur*.KI EN-*ku-nu*
[*ú*]-*kal-lim-ka-nu-ni ḫa-an-nu-um-ma la ta-da-gal-a-ni*
LUGAL-*u-tú* EN-*u-tú šá* KUR—*aš-šur ina* UGU-*ḫi-ku-nu la ú*-[*pa*]-*áš-u-ni*

> When Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, passes away, you will seat Aššurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, upon the royal throne, and he will exercise the kingship and lordship of Assyria over you. You shall protect him in country and in town, fall and die for him. You shall speak with him in the truth of your heart, give him sound advice loyally, and smooth his way in every respect. You shall not depose him nor seat anyone of his brothers, elder or younger, on the throne of Assyria instead of him. You shall neither change nor alter the word of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, but serve this very Aššurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, whom Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, your lord, has presented to you, and he shall exercise the kingship and dominion over you.[311]

In addition to the above passage, which captures the main obligation of the *adê*, it is worth pointing out several other stipulations given later in the text that regulate the behaviour of the oath swearers. The contracting parties were obligated to protect Aššurbanipal and neither revolt nor engage in any conspiracies, explicitly including any conspiracies that may be led by any of his brothers, to replace him.[312] The contracting parties were also obligated to report any word they might hear against the crown prince, including treason

[311] SAA 2 6, 46-61 (translation Leichty 2011).

[312] SAA 2 6, 62-69.

from within the royal family.[313] In the event that a contracting party did become aware of treasonous activity, it was permissible for them to kill the conspirers themselves or, failing that, to deliver the conspirers to Aššurbanipal so that he could deliver their punishment.[314] Even in the event that Esarhaddon died while his heirs were considered to be minors, Aššurbanipal was still to be supported to ascend the throne of Assyria while his elder brother Šamaš-šumu-ukīn was still to ascend the throne of Babylon.[315] If Aššurbanipal was killed by a would-be usurper, it was the duty of the contracting parties to help one of Aššurbanipal's descendants assume the throne, even if that descendent was not yet born.[316]

In summary, through these extensive regulations, the *adê* defined how the contracting parties were to behave toward the royal family and, in turn, to one another in the event of Esarhaddon's death. Aššurbanipal, as his father's sworn successor, was to be supported in assuming the throne of Assyria no matter what scenario should unfold. The contracting parties were forbidden from undoing the *adê*, which, once sworn, became a binding agreement.[317] By entering into this agreement, the contracting parties acknowledged that they were bound to support Aššurbanipal's succession not only because he was chosen by Esarhaddon, but because he was his formally designated heir.

Seal impressions included on the *adê* tablets work express divine involvement in witnessing, supporting, and upholding the obligations sworn. Near the top of the tablets,

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[313] SAA 2 6, 73-82. Cf. SAA 2 6, 92-137.

[314] SAA 2 6, 138-146.

[315] SAA 2 6, 83-87.

[316] SAA 2 6, 247-250.

[317] SAA 2 6, 377-384.

the seal caption introduces the seal of Aššur (*kunuk* ^{d}*aššur*), which is 'not to be altered' (*ša lā šunnê*).[318] The prelude to the text states that the *adê* was sworn in the presence of the heavenly bodies Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Mercury, Mars and the Sirius star, as well as all the gods of the empire broadly conceived (*ilāni mātāti kalīšunu*).[319] Divine participation in the agreement meant that the contracting parties were prohibited from swearing any counter-oath in the presence of deities.[320] Betraying the oath meant offending one's own gods, hence also probably why one variant specifies that a vassal is to swear before 'all of the gods of one's [own] land and one's district' (*nagīšu*). A lengthy series of curses is also included,[321] threatening divine retribution on anyone who would contradict the oath (*ša māmīt ṭuppi annî ennû eggû ihhaṭṭû ipassasu*).[322] A prohibition against damaging the *adê* tablets themselves was also written, which is quoted below:

> *ina* <ŠÀ-*bi*> NA$_4$.KIŠIB *šá* ^{d}*aš-šur* MAN DINGIR-MEŠ-*ni*
> *ka-*⌜*nik**⌝*-u-ni ina* IGI-*ku-nu šá-kín-u-ni*
> *ki-i* DINGIR-*ku-*⌜*nu*⌝ *la ta-na-ṣar-a-ni*
> *šum-ma at-tu-nu tu-na-kar-*[*a*]*-ni a-na* ^{d}GIŠ.BAR
> *ta-pa-qid-a-*[*ni*] *ina* A-MEŠ *ta-na-da-a-ni*
> *ina ep-ri ta-*[*kar-ra-ra-a-ni*] *ina mim-ma ši-pir ni-kil-ti*
> *ta-bat-a-ni tu-ḫal-la-*⌜*qa*⌝*-*[*a-ni*] *ta-sa-pan-a-ni*
> AN.ŠÁR LUGAL DINGIR-MEŠ *mu-šim* [NAM-MEŠ] *ši-mat* MÍ.ḪUL
> *la* DÙG.GA-*ti* ⌜*li*⌝*-*[*šim*]*-*⌜*ku*⌝*-nu*

[318] SAA 2 6, i-ii.

[319] SAA 2 6, 13-24; cf. SAA 2 6, 40 – Variants A/B: 'all the gods of heaven and earth' (*šamê u kaqqiri kalīšunu*); 'all the gods of one's land and one's district' (*nagīšu*).

[320] SAA 2 6, 153-156.

[321] SAA 2 6, 415b-493; 513-662.

[322] SAA 2 6, 397-398.

> You shall guard [this treaty tablet which] is sealed with the seal of Aššur, king of the gods, and set up in your presence, like your own god. If you should remove it, consign it to the fire, throw it into the water, [bury] it in the earth or destroy it by any cunning device, annihilate or deface it, may Aššur, king of the gods, who decrees, decree an evil and unpleasant fate for you.[323]

The binding intent of the *adê*, sworn before all the gods, was enhanced by the monumental scale and layout of the tablets. The above quoted passage outlines how the *adê* tablets were to be set up and revered as divine objects, since the tablets were individually sealed with the seal of.[324] The arrangement of the text on the tablets, which were especially large and thick, was intended to facilitate this purpose. As explored by Kazuko Watanabe (1988), while cuneiform tablets are typically rotated through their horizontal axis from the obverse to the reverse to continue reading, the *adê* tablets would have been rotated through the vertical axis, meaning that its contents could be viewed by walking around the displayed tablet.

Turning to consider the partly preserved seal impressions and their inscriptions, each *adê* tablet was sealed with not one but three seal impressions depicting the age-old dynastic relationship of Assyria's rulers and the deities: an Old Assyrian impression, a Middle Assyrian impression, and an impression from the time of Sennacherib (figs. 71-73); the iconography of all three seals was read by Donald Wiseman (1958, 14-22).[325] Like the

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[323] SAA 2 6, 407-415a (translation Leichty 2011).

[324] As Watanabe (2021, 42) put it: 'The spot where the tablet of ESOD (i.e., Esarhaddon's Succession Oath Documents) would be placed becomes a temple in the sense of a worshipping spot.'.

[325] For a comprehensive recent discussion see Watanabe 2020.

adê inscription, the seal impressions are known from composite reconstructions. These impressions also contributed to the intent of the *adê* to bind its swearers not only to Aššurbanipal's future succession but to the idea that protecting and supporting him was divinely supported.

The central seal impression likely dates to the nineteenth century BC or is at least an archaising scene in the style of that period.[326] As Wiseman describes, the image depicts an intermediary goddess with a worshipful ruler. No higher-ranking deity is pictured as is otherwise typical of such imagery. However, the seal caption identifies it as belonging to 'Aššur of the house of the city' (*ša* ^{d}*aššur ša bīt alim*).

The right-most seal impression is attributed to the thirteenth century BC.[327] The detail of the inscription has not survived, but the image is well preserved. The scene depicts two deities, likely Aššur with Adad, as Wiseman suggested, standing atop animals to the far left and right, while an interceding deity introduces a kneeling man performing the Assyrian *ubāna tarāṣu* worshipping gesture. Due to the similarities between this figure and the figure shown in sequential position on the altar of Tukultī-Ninurta I (r. 1243–1207 BC) discussed already in Chapter I (fig. 6), Wiseman suggested that he may represent that ruler.[328]

The text included in the left-most seal impression identifies the king as Sennacherib and the deities as the divine couple, Aššur and Mullissu, recalling the monumental rock

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[326] Wiseman 1958, 17-19.

[327] Wiseman 1958, 19-22.

[328] See pp. 16-17. Wiseman (1958, 20-22) alternatively suggested that the image may depict Tiglath-pileser I or Tukultī-Ninurta I (see also Watanabe 2020, 76).

reliefs carved at the site of the Khinis canal head which served as the main case study of Chapter III.[329] As at Khinis, the king is depicted performing *appa labānu* in this image.[330]

As Cristina Barcina (2016, 36) has observed, the three seals dated to different periods of Assyrian history represent a 'temporal continuum'. Indeed, the three seals can be seen to depict different phases of the relationship between Assyria's rulers and the deities. This begins with the humbler depiction of the vice-regent (*iššak Aššur*) with the interceding goddess on the Old Assyrian seal impression and continues to the moment where, in Sennacherib's seal impression, the king comes to stand face-to-face, or better, face-to-ring, with Aššur and Mullissu. Given that the *adê* text was directed to the future kingship of Aššurbanipal, the sealing of the tablets with these three seals further projects the picture of the increasingly close relationship of the ruler with the divine into the future.

Sennacherib's seal in particular is, furthermore, formulated in relation to Sumerian and Babylonian traditions. The names of both Aššur and Mullissu are inscribed upon Sennacherib's seal in logographic forms that permit their identification with the more archaic Babylonian deities (AN.ŠÁR MAN DINGIR.MEŠ ^{d}NIN.LÍL).[331] This represents a late Assyrian religious development that may be traced to as early as the innovations of Sargon II's scribes but certainly reflects Sennacherib's more recent religious policies, as discussed throughout Chapter III.[332] As the seal inscription identifies the seal as Aššur's Seal of Destinies (*kunuk šīmāti*), Andrew George (1986) has discussed the relevance of the

[329] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 212, 11.

[330] Wiseman 1958, 14-17.

[331] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 212, 2, 8.

[332] For scribal innovations under Sargon see May 2015, 96.

Tablet of Destinies concept.[333] In the mythological-explanatory poems Anzû and Enūma eliš, the writing on the Tablet of Destinies, and so the Tablet's possessor, determines all future outcomes in the cosmos.[334] Understood within this framework, the use of this seal to seal the *adê* tablets served to transform the oath in support of Aššurbanipal's succession into a cosmic destiny. Thus, through their inscriptions, seal impressions, and fittingness for display, the *adê* tablets served to witness the binding of the contracted parties to the support of Aššurbanipal's succession, at the same time expressing this inheritance as a divinely determined, incontrovertible outcome.

Finally, the substantial replication of the *adê* documents attests to the great extent to which Esarhaddon sought to bind his subjects to Aššurbanipal's succession. While, as mentioned above, the surviving tablets from Nimrud each name a different vassal ruler who entered into the agreement, a claim is made in the text that the *adê* implicated every subject of the empire (*ammar aššur-ahu-idinna šar māt aššur šarrūtu bēlūtu ina muhhīšu uppašūni*).[335] The comparatively more recent discovery of a variant of this *adê* further from the imperial centre at the outpost of Tell Tayinat in south-eastern Turkey during the Canadian excavations directed by Timothy Harrison in 2009 gives further credence to this notion.[336] Like the Nimrud exemplars, the Tell Tayinat tablet fragments record an *adê* supporting the future succession of the crown prince Aššurbanipal, sworn sometime

[333] RINAP 3/2 Sennacherib 212, 1.

[334] Hence the temporary dispossession of the Tablet in both poems is the cause of cosmic disorder from the perspective of the ancient writers.

[335] SAA 2 6, 7-8.

[336] SAA 2 15 is the edition of the Tayinat *adê* referred to here (see also Lauinger 2012). Fales (2020) provides a fuller analysis of the differences between the Tayinat and Nimrud variants (see also Watanabe 2014).

between 16 and 19 Ayyāru 672 BC.[337] However, unlike the Nimrud variants that name foreign vassal rulers who entered into the agreement, a notable feature of the Tayinat variant is that it was sworn between Esarhaddon and the Assyrian governor (*pāhat*) of the region.[338] This means that Assyrian elites were also called to swear allegiance to Aššurbanipal as Esarhaddon's primary designated and divinely supported heir, broadening the scope of obligation.

Overall, I suggest that the unearthing of the Tayinat version is highly instructive in terms of tracing the development of the theologised relationship of the king and crown prince beyond the imperial heartlands. Like the Nimrud *adê*, the Tayinat version was also a religious document found atop a temple dais and sealed with the seal of Aššur, and the physical layout of the text and thickness of the tablet that was found similarly suggest that it was intended to be displayed and venerated.[339] The Tayinat version has previously been taken by Jacob Lauinger (2015) as witness to Esarhaddon's aim to secure broad fealty for his successor in an instance of cuneiform 'mass-production' in antiquity. I would like to suggest here, however, that the Tayinat version, through its similarity to the Nimrud version, evidences the exportation of not only Aššur and the great gods of Assyria into the empire's provinces, as Karen Radner (2017, 81) has previously also described, but, crucially, also the notion of divine support for the ruling dynasty and the crown prince's future succession. The discussion now turns to consider the broader phenomenon of

[337] The date is damaged in the Tayinat version (see the discussion in Lauinger 2015, 291).

[338] SAA 2 15, 3 T i 3.

[339] Lauinger 2011, 12.

Esarhaddon's exportation of this message in the years surrounding the crown princes' formal designation in 672 BC.

Exporting the 'Encounter'

In addition to the *adê*, three steles attributed to Esarhaddon were created for display in the empire's provinces of Sam'al, situated within the foothills of the Amanus mountains, and Til Barsip, located on the Euphrates' east bank. All three monuments are carved with reliefs depicting Esarhaddon's defeat of Assyria's enemies on their obverse faces and his heirs on the left- and right-side panels. In the following discussion, my aim is to argue that the transposition of the encounter scene to the monuments depicts the Assyrian crown prince's co-participation in the king's subjugation of Egypt on the steles and, at the same time, exports the notion that he is supported by and is a key component in the royal relationship with the divine.

The fragments of Esarhaddon's Sam'al stele were unearthed in 1888 by Robert Koldewey and Felix von Luschan during the German excavations at Zincirli Höyük in southern Turkey. According to the excavation reports, the fragments were found just inside the courtyard of the gate that would have led to the Assyrian royal citadel.[340] Shortly after the fragments were excavated, they were transported to Berlin, where they were reconstructed into a near-complete stele that is on display in the Vorderasiatisches Museum

[340] Luschan, Schrader, and Sachau 1893, 12-13 (see also Schloen and Fink 2009 for a more recent overview of the German and American excavations at the site).

(VA 2708). Luschan provided the measurements of the monument as 1.35 m x 3.46 m.[341] The stele is carved in relief on its obverse as well as both side panels, and the lower half of the obverse is covered with an inscription that is mostly complete and comprehensive and continues onto the reverse face. The stele is dated to ca. 671 BC, based on the inscription and particularly the military victory in Egypt of that year that it describes.

Basalt fragments of two highly similar, though comparatively more weathered, steles attributed to Esarhaddon were found during successive excavations at Tell Ahmar on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River in the early twentieth century. The steles are housed in the collection of the Aleppo Museum, Syria, where they were partly reassembled, though neither monument has been reconstructed to the same degree of completion as the Sam'al stele.

The fragments of a first Til Barsip stele were found during the British excavations led by David Hogarth in 1908. These fragments were found near to what would originally have been the eastern or so-called 'lions gate' near to the base of the Tell, hence the stele is often referred to as the 'gateway' stele in modern scholarship. Hogarth provided the measurements for the stele as 1.66 m x 3.5 m, noting that it was found with a base measuring 2 m x 1.25m.[342]

Fragments of a second stele of Esarhaddon's for Til Barsip, which, in turn, is referred to as the 'citadel' stele, were excavated by a French team supervised by François Thureau-Dangin at Tell Ahmar later in 1927. The citadel stele fragments were found at the base of the Tell, corresponding to what would have been the 'foot of the ancient citadel,

[341] Luschan, Schrader, and Sachau 1893, 14.

[342] Hogarth's measurements are published in Thureau-Dangin 1929, 189.

approaching the Assyrian palace'.[343] The stele is significantly bigger than both the gateway stele and the Sam'al stele, measuring 3.8 m x 1.72 m.[344]

Like the Sam'al stele, the Til Barsip gateway and citadel steles are carved in relief on the obverse and both side panels, though there are notable differences between the three monuments that will be mentioned as they become relevant over the course of the following discussion. Crucially for the purposes of dating the gateway stele, the monument is uninscribed. As guidelines were provided for an inscription that was never carved, it is likely unfinished. The monument might therefore date slightly later than the Sam'al stele and, as pointed out by Thureau-Dangin, it is possible that it was still in the process of being carved when Esarhaddon died in 669 BC.[345]

Unlike the gateway stele, the citadel stele is inscribed but damaged. What remains of the inscription is difficult to decipher. Nevertheless, as this stele is inscribed, and because its reliefs closely resemble those carved on the gateway stele, the citadel stele is thought to have been erected at around the same time as, or just before, the gateway stele. This would indicate that the three steles uncovered at Zincirli and Tell Ahmar were created and erected within a two-year window following the swearing of the *adê* at Kalḫu in 672 BC, making them a fitting case study through which to trace the further spread of the notion of divine support for the succession of the crown prince Aššurbanipal.

While the theologising aspects of the *adê* documents are recognised in scholarship, the steles for Sam'al and Til Barsip have most notably been analysed as political

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[343] Thureau-Dangin 1929, 185-190 (see also Thureau-Dangin and Dunand, 1936, 151-156).

[344] Thureau-Dangin 1929, 190.

[345] Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936, 156 (see also the remarks in Borger 1967, 100).

propaganda. Barbara Porter has made significant contributions to this line of interpretation, arguing that the inscriptions and reliefs carved onto the steles, and, in particular, the obverse faces of these monuments, ought to be studied together as inseparable aspects of Esarhaddon's political messaging.[346]

Considering the specific political circumstances that shaped power relations between imperial Assyria and ancient Sam'al and Til Barsip in the seventh century BC, Porter (2003, 78) has argued that the steles communicate contextually relevant messages, encouraging either the total submission or continued fidelity of their localities depending on their past record of good or bad behaviour. Hence, according to Porter the portrayal of the defeated enemies on the Sam'al stele demeans them slightly more because the rulers of Sam'al had historically been less loyal to Assyria than Til Barsip. Indeed, the captives are shown at a more diminutive scale relative to the other steles and wear manacles whereas they do not on the Til Barsip steles.

Departing from Porter's approach, here I examine the steles primarily as monuments that formulate kingship in relationship to divinity and in further connection to the succession. The Sam'al stele, being the most complete and best preserved of the three monuments, provides the clearest witness to this notion. The monument is dominated by the upscaled standing figure of the king, who is almost as tall as the stele itself. Positioned to the left and facing right, he is elaborately dressed in a ceremonial, wrapped and fringed garment with a rope girding his waist, and wears slippers on his feet. He is adorned with an earring on his visible right ear, rosette bracelets on each of his wrists, and tassels that hang behind his back. He wears a stylised, squared, and coiled beard and his shoulder-length hair

[346] See, for example, Porter 1995; 2001; 2003; 2004b.

is covered by the royal crown, which is decorated with concentric spheres divided into horizontal registers.

The divine is represented on the stele in three distinct groups: 1) four anthropomorphic deities, represented across two registers, in the area directly before above the king's eyeline; 2) four deities represented as insignia, seen in one horizontal register before the king's raised hand; 3) four deities represented as celestial bodies, three of which are represented in a near-vertical arrangement above the divine insignia, and the fourth takes the form of six, likely originally seven, spheres represented where there is a visible break in the stele near the peak of the king's crown.

Whereas the twelve rock-cut stele reliefs that are carved high on the cliffs at Khinis depict the gods in emblematic form and the other rock reliefs carved at Khinis, Maltai and Faida depict the divine in anthropomorphic form, the Sam'al stele incorporates both approaches to representing the divine. Luschan provided an early reading of the iconography, based on Neo-Assyrian relief and stele imagery attributed to Esarhaddon and his predecessors and, where relevant, the accompanying inscriptions.[347] Given the combined approach to depicting the divine used on the stele, Luschan read the anthropomorphic deities as Marduk and Ištar (upper register) and Nabû and Ninurta (lower register). The insignia he read as, in order (left to right), Anu, Bēl, Ea, and Adad. For the celestial symbols, he identified the seven spheres as the seven stars of the Sebitti (close to

[347] See discussion in Luschan, Schrader, and Sachau 1893, 17-27. What becomes clear from Luschan's discussion is that the various divine images can be read in different ways depending on context. Thus, the images have been identified differently in subsequent studies. Ornan (2005), for example, reads the anthropomorphic deities as Aššur, Mullissu, Nabû and Adad. For my purposes, it is generally less relevant which deities are represented on the stele than that they are represented. Luschan's identification of the second deity of the group as Ištar is most relevant for my purposes and will be revisited later in this chapter.

the crown) and the crescent moon as Sîn, the winged disc as Aššur and the sun with alternating rays as Šamaš (top to bottom in vertical sequence).

On the Til Barsip citadel stele, the space above Esarhaddon is filled with five extremely weathered anthropomorphic images of the gods shown in a horizontal line, which is in place of the various divine images and emblems seen on the Sam'al stele. On the gateway stele, the gods do not appear to be represented. Porter (2003, 70-71 and fn. 170) suggested that this absence is an intentional concealment motivated by political sensitivity given that this stele was more readily visible than the second stele erected on the citadel at Til Barsip. In my view, the absence of deities is more likely another consequence of this monument being unfinished given that the king is shown to perform a devotional gesture on the obverse anyway. Esarhaddon and his heirs also appear less elaborately dressed on the steles for Til Barsip than they do on the Sam'al stele, which provides further support for this conclusion.

Indeed, the king is represented performing the Babylonian *appa labānu* gesture on the Sam'al stele that, as mentioned in the previous chapter, was incorporated into Assyrian imagery, on all three steles. However, on the Sam'al stele, he is also shown holding a cone in the same hand that he does this. Significantly for the purposes of the present discussion, the picture of Esarhaddon's divine service is given further dimension as the king is shown holding in his free hand a royal sceptre and wields the nose-rope over his defeated enemies on each monument. The nose-rope of course recalls the late third and early second millennium BC kingship models discussed in Chapter I, which will be integrated into the analysis of Esarhaddon's stele in the later part of this chapter.[348] To begin to understand

[348] See discussion of nose-rope on pp. 7-8.

how the Assyrian crown prince is fully integrated into the picture of divine service, it is now useful to turn to the monument's inscription.

Beginning just below Esarhaddon's rope gird, the Sam'al stele inscription opens with a prologue that first names the various gods of Assyria who support Esarhaddon, including Aššur, Anu, Enlil, Ea, Sîn, Šamaš, Adad, Marduk and Ištar, as well as the Sebitti.[349] Esarhaddon is then introduced as the supreme king of Assyria, Babylonia and, significantly, Egypt, and as the agent of the gods, who aided him in his military conquest and subjugation of his rivals.[350] Esarhaddon serves the gods through the maintenance and restoration of their temples and cultic rites, and by protecting and servicing their cult statues.[351] This is implicitly the reason why the gods favour Esarhaddon with vast territorial control, which is a dynastic privilege.[352] Esarhaddon's kingship is presented as his destiny and is achieved through the gods, to reveal their divine power.[353] Thus, Esarhaddon utterly defeats the Egyptian king Taharqa (r. 690–664 BC) and overturns his capital at Memphis.[354] As spoils, Esarhaddon abducts Taharqa's queen, women, and children, including the crown prince Uš-Anaḫuru, and imposes Assyrian rule in Egypt.[355] The Sam'al stele was set up to commemorate this victory, which was ultimately achieved through the

[349] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, obv., 1-12.

[350] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, obv., 13-33.

[351] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, obv., 34-rev., 7a.

[352] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, rev., 7b–18a.

[353] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, rev., 25b-37a.

[354] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, rev., 37b-43a. Taharqa had already been in conflict with Sennacherib since 701 BC. For an overview of the reign of Taharqa see Emberling 2023, 124-130.

[355] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, rev., 43b-50a.

power of Aššur.[356] Curiously, and as will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter, anyone attempting to remove or damage the stele will be changed from a man into a woman by Ištar and made captive at the feet of his enemy. Future kings are advised to revere the stele continually and praise Aššur.[357]

The scope of Esarhaddon's divine service as understood from what remains of the Til Barsip citadel stele inscription is also coherent with the dual actions of the king that are represented visually on this monument's obverse face. The opening six lines of the inscription are incomprehensible due to damage. The first intelligible lines describe how Esarhaddon shows mercy on Hazael, the king of the Arabs, who displayed servitude by kissing Esarhaddon's feet. Esarhaddon revamped the cult statues he plundered from Arabia and sent them back there along with the princess Tabūa after she had presumably been Assyrianised while in captivity.[358] After Hazael died, Esarhaddon oversaw the smooth succession of a new vassal king, Iauta', and supported him against a would-be usurper king, Uabu.[359] Esarhaddon's defeat of foes including the Cilicians and the Manneans is then praised.[360] Beneath the figures, there is a mention of Abdi-milkūti, king of Sidon.[361] The end of the inscription includes a reference to the terrifying appearance of Aššur, which is inscribed on the right edge of the monument, and a remark that Esarhaddon had the stele

[356] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, rev., 50b-53a.

[357] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, rev., 53b-r57.

[358] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 97, obv., 7-14a. See Zaia 2015 on Assyrian refurbishment of cult statues. On Assyrianisation see primarily Feldman 2014, 96-97. See also the discussion in DeGrado 2019, 107.

[359] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 97, obv., 14b-19a.

[360] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 97, obv., 19b-24.

[361] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 97, obv., 25.

made is inscribed on the monument's left edge.[362] Little more detail is legible, but it is clear that cultic maintenance and military prowess are presented here as being linked on this stele like they are on the Sam'al stele. It is likely that the Til Barsip gateway stele, if finished with an inscription, would have conveyed a similar message.

Thus, through their reliefs as well as their inscriptions, Esarhaddon's steles serve to communicate divinely supported royal triumph over Esarhaddon's enemies. By being erected in Sam'al and Til Barsip, these monuments stand in the tradition of the royal stele form by distributing the royal image and the images of Assyria's deities throughout the realm. Diverging from this form, however, Esarhaddon's steles are unique within their context because the images of Esarhaddon's two heirs are incorporated into the compositions. Now that the relationship of Esarhaddon's kingship to divinity as formulated on the steles has been explored, I turn to address this apparent development directly, which, in my view, is presented as an integrated aspect of this picture.

The Sam'al stele's left and right-side panels each depict a bearded man with folded hands who, like Esarhaddon, is elaborately dressed. Luschan, Schrader, and Sachau (1893, 28) read these figures as Syrian vassal kings. However, as discussed in Chapter I, the figure wearing the diadem with back tassels is traditionally read as the crown prince Aššurbanipal following the arguments made by Julian Reade.[363] Reade also identified the prince represented on the Sam'al stele's left panel as Šamaš-šumu-ukīn based on his Babylonian

[362] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 97, l.e., 1.

[363] See comments on p. 24, fn. 70 on the identification of this figure as the Assyrian crown prince.

attire.[364] Both princes are represented on a medium scale when compared with the larger figure of Esarhaddon and the smaller figures of the foreign captives, although the princes' positioning on the steles' side panels means that their relative size can only be apprehended from the left or right diagonal perspectives.

Much of the relief detail on the Til Barsip steles has been weathered, so it is difficult to determine exactly how different from the Sam'al stele the Til Barsip iterations were intended to be. Like the Sam'al stele, both Til Barsip steles depict Esarhaddon and his captives on the obverse and his crown princes on the side panels. One immediately clear difference between the Sam'al and Til Barsip steles, however, is that, whereas Esarhaddon is positioned to the left and facing right on the Sam'al stele, the opposite is true of both steles for Til Barsip. This has the effect of 'flipping' the Sam'al composition, as Aššurbanipal is represented on the left rather than the right panels of both Til Barsip steles, while Šamaš-šumu-ukīn is correspondingly represented on the right panels of the steles.

The inclusion of the images of Esarhaddon's crown princes on the Sam'al and Til Barsip stele side panels has previously been understood as a 'visual parenthetical statement to the [obverse] imagery's main statement of Assyrian dominance' (Porter 1995, 61).[365] In other words, it has been suggested that the representation of Esarhaddon's two princes on the steles conveys a separate message about Esarhaddon's intentions for the royal succession and, by inference, that this does not fundamentally alter the focus of the monuments' obverse faces on the divinely supported king, which is more typical of and

[364] See also Reade 1982. A useful comparison for Šamaš-šumu-ukīn's attire given by Melville (1999, 48-50) is worn by Marduk-apla-iddina II of Babylon on his *kudurru*, now in the Vorderasiatisches Museum (VA 2663).

[365] See also Porter 2003, 79.

characterises the royal stele form. However, if one is to stand before and walk around the stele for Sam'al, for instance (figs. 59-61), it becomes quite clear that the diagonal views of the monument reveal separate relationships of the king to his princes. Therefore, it does not make sense to maintain the view that the message about the princes conveyed by each monument is 'parenthetical'. Rather, the message about the succession is integral to the portrayal of Esarhaddon's kingship.

While the side panels of the steles cannot be seen from any one view, the diagonal views bring both of Esarhaddon's heirs into visual relationship with him and the action he performs. As mentioned previously, even when Esarhaddon is shown to look toward the left side on the Til Barsip steles, rather than to the right side, as on the Sam'al stele, the Assyrian crown prince is represented looking toward him regardless. It is clear to see that the visual model for the representation of the relationship of king and crown prince or their 'encounter' depicted in the palatial reliefs has been transposed to the steles. Ataç (2010b, 78) suggested that the stele conveys greater duality than is expressed between prince and king in the palace reliefs, given 'the duplication of the prince on the two side surfaces' and that two captives are depicted. Here, I will make the case that the king is depicted differently in relation to his two heirs and that these are hierarchised relationships.

As pointed out by Porter (2003, 74), the enemies represented on the obverse faces of all three steles, like the Assyrian and Babylonian crown princes, are differentiated by their attire. On the Sam'al stele, the standing captive wears a conical cap and a pointed, rather than squared, beard, associated with the representation of non-Assyrian enemies.[366]

[366] See in particular Cifarelli 1998, 213. On the representation of ethnicity in Assyrian art see also, for example, Bahrani 2006; Collins 2006a; Brown 2014; Miller 2021.

His beard is squared on the Til Barsip steles. However, this captive wears a similar cap across all three steles and must represent the same figure. Luschan, Schrader, and Sachau (1893, 17) read this figure as Ba'alu of Tyre, who entered into an *adê* with Esarhaddon in 676 BC.[367] However, as mentioned above, the Til Barsip citadel stele inscription actually places the name of Abdi-milkūti of Sidon, who Esarhaddon defeated in 677 BC, below his image, suggesting that this figure is the one represented on all three monuments.[368]

The kneeling captive wears a Kushite cap with an uraeus on all three steles and, unlike the other figures in the composition, is beardless. I understand him to represent the Egyptian crown prince Uš-Anaḫuru, whose capture and removal to Assyria is also mentioned in the stele's inscription. Luschan, Schrader, and Sachau (1893, 16) read this figure as Uš-Anaḫuru's father, Taharqa, and this reading has also been reiterated recently by Mattias Karlsson (2023), but in the following discussion I will show why I uphold the association with Uš-Anaḫuru, first suggested by Edna Russmann (1972) and upheld by Porter (2003). In my view, the stele contrasts the encounter of king and Assyrian crown prince with the depiction with senior and junior captives. This view is otherwise supported by the monument's inscription.

It is through the subjugation of Taharqa's prince that Aššurbanipal's pre-eminent role in Esarhaddon's exported vision of Assyrian kingship is expressed. As briefly described above, the text inscribed upon the Sam'al stele outlines how, after Taharqa's defeat, Esarhaddon abducted his 'woman of the palace, his enclosed women, Uš-Anaḫuru,

[367] The treaty text is published as SAA 2 5.

[368] Also see discussion in Porter 2003, 71, particularly fn. 171. Also see RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 97, 179-180.

his crown prince, and the rest of his sons (and) his daughters'.[369] As explained by Mario Liverani (2004, 175-176), in the context of war, appropriations of divine statues, animals and persons were represented as being conducted for the benefit of Aššur and Assyria. The kidnapping of Taharqa's dynasty as explained in the Sam'al stele inscription fits well with this picture. Taharqa evaded Esarhaddon after the defeat of 671 BC and would need to be defeated again by Aššurbanipal after he became king, but Esarhaddon's abduction of Taharqa's heirs meant Assyrian control over his existing prospects of succession. Thus, Aššurbanipal's representation relative to both Esarhaddon and Uš-Anaḫuru on the Sam'al and Til Barsip steles can be seen to convey this most significant feat.

The in-the-round view of Aššurbanipal's relationship with Uš-Anaḫuru on the steles articulates his dominance and authority over him, and, by extension, over his brother Šamaš-šumu-ukīn. Esarhaddon's holding of the nose-rope underlines Aššurbanipal's superiority in this latter respect, serving to restrain the humbled foreign rulers but also bearing curious similarity in form to the image of the divinely endowed ring of rulership, otherwise discussed with respect to the relief from the Northwest Palace of Aššurnaṣirpal II at Kalḫu that depicts the encounter of king and crown prince while a deity manifests in a winged disc (fig. 8).[370] In my view, the dual interpretation of the leash articulates the overall message that what subdues Taharqa's heir elevates Esarhaddon's heir, whose duty it will be to hold the leash in the near future. This notion is reinforced by Uš-Anaḫuru's rendering on the stele wearing the uraeus crown that contains within it a depiction of the

[369] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, rev., 43-44: MUNUS.É.GAL-*šú* MUNUS.ERIM.É.GAL.MEŠ-*šú mú-šá-na-ḫu-ru* DUMU UŠ-*ti-šú ù re-eḫ-ti* DUMU.MEŠ-*šú* DUMU.MUNUS.MEŠ-*šú*

[370] See discussion on pp. 24; 26. As cited on p. 24, see Van Buren 1949 and Slanski 2007 for the interpretation of the ring symbol.

Egyptian goddess Wadjet, who, through Uš-Anaḫuru's capture, is therefore also relegated to the service of the Assyrian deities.

Perhaps due to Sam'al's closer proximity to Egypt or simply the Sam'al stele's more complete condition, the visual relationship between both captives and the Assyrian royal dyad seems to be further elaborated on this monument. Hence, further diverging from Ataç's (2010b, 78) interpretation of the monument in terms of the 'duplication' of the princes, I would like to point out that only the Assyrian crown prince's eyes are aligned with Esarhaddon's royal sceptre and leash on the Sam'al stele, comparable to how Sennacherib's eyes meet Aššur's ring in the Seal of Destinies, presumably in reference to his position as future king, while his feet are raised up so that he stands at the level of the Egyptian crown prince Uš-Anaḫuru's headdress, a detail that seems to have been overlooked in the frequently referenced drawing (fig. 68).[371] The argument for this foot alignment being an intentional choice may be further supported by the observation, discussed already by Nathan Morello (2016), that Esarhaddon's own feet on the obverse of the monument are situated above the passage of the inscription that refers to him trampling his enemies, creating an interesting image-word interplay.[372]

Indeed, it is significant that the senior-junior pairing of Abdi-milkūti and Uš-Anaḫuru can be seen to mirror that of Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal across the three steles. Comparable to the relief that is attributed to Tiglath-pileser III and shows the crown prince gesturing over the trodden enemy (fig. 74), the Sam'al stele and, in a less elaborated sense, the two Til Barsip steles articulate the concept that the Assyrian king and crown prince are

[371] Börker-Klähn 1982, vol. 2, fig. 219. Cf. Porter 2003, pl. 29 and Pongratz-Leisten 2015, fig. 51.

[372] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, obv., 32-33. See Table 1 ('Esarh.'s Stele of Sam'al') in Morello 2016, 64.

two sides of the same coin.[373] But this is in the sense that the Assyrian crown prince alone is brought into the duties of the kingship and connected to the image of the king through the image of their encounter. Coherent with the view arising from the *adê*, Aššurbanipal's primary role among Esarhaddon's two heirs as the future king of Assyria is depicted through all three steles. The portrayal of Šamaš-šumu-ukīn recalls the images of the beardless attendants who support their kings with flywhisks in the reliefs from Nimrud and Nineveh (figs. 8 and 33). In keeping with the representation of the crown princes in such scenes, Aššurbanipal's role as portrayed on each stele is to face the king and be included in the frame of royal action for the gods and against the enemy. This is why Aššurbanipal does not need to be viewable at the same time that Šamaš-šumu-ukīn is in order to articulate his superiority: Aššurbanipal's role in the obverse action is conveyed through his maintained visual relationship with Esarhaddon.

When the Sam'al and Til Barsip steles are interpreted in-the-round and further situated within the context of the earlier Assyrian palatial imagery, it becomes clear that the visual relationship between Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal as the divinely supported heir designate is stressed visually. Thus, while Natalie May (2020, 72) argues that the two princes 'might be interpreted as… indirectly participating in the adoration of the gods by their father', I argue that the Assyrian crown prince actually participates directly in this action and is depicted to participate in the maintenance of the relationship with the the gods. Understood in this light, the transposition of the visual relationship of the king and crown prince known from the palatial reliefs to steles erected in provincial capitals of the empire further witnesses the exportation of the theologised relationship of the king and

[373] BM 118933. A drawing of the Tiglath-pileser relief is published in Layard 1849a, pl. 82.

crown prince. This development is directly related to the religious message about the princes that was expressed and distributed through Esarhaddon's succession *adê* documents.

Like the *adê*, the steles communicate the idea that Aššurbanipal, through his co-participatory relationship with his father, is in relationship with the gods. Interpreting these distributed sources together reveals that Esarhaddon's ideological strategy around the succession involved the communication of this idea through imagery as well as text across the empire. Further contextualising Esarhaddon's visualisation of Aššurbanipal's proximity to the gods in stone, the discussion now moves to establish how this end was also achieved through carefully choreographed rituals performed at Kalḫu to coincide with the *adê*-swearing in the month of Ayyāru.

Staging Aššurbanipal's Divine Kinship

Thus far in this discussion I have attempted to show that Esarhaddon's *adê* documents and steles for Sam'al and Til Barsip were similarly intended to disseminate and also export the theologised relationship of the king and crown prince beyond the royal centres. The *adê* obligations emphasised divine support for the Assyrian crown prince by extensively involving the divine in validating and enforcing the *adê*. The sealing of these documents with Aššur's seal materialised and visualised Aššurbanipal's divine sanction. By presenting an image of the king encountering the divine couple as the culmination of over a millennium of close relations, the incorporation of Aššur's seal impression into the *adê* also served to anticipate future relations between kingship and divinity under Aššurbanipal.

Hence, the Sam'al and Til Barsip steles, in turn, were set up beyond the imperial heartlands to further disseminate the notion that the Assyrian king and crown prince acted in collaboration to engage the divine in defeat of Assyria's enemies.

Clearly, Esarhaddon adopted a variety of strategies to not only express but also formulate the role of crown prince in relationship to the divine. This prompts further consideration as to how the *adê*-swearing ceremonies were staged and what impressions they might have been intended to create. My exploration in Chapter II of the architectural and decorative features of Dūr-Šarrukīn led me to question whether the relationship between the king and crown prince was formulated in terms of the relationship between Marduk and Nabû during the reign of Sargon. Departing somewhat from this focus, in Chapter III, I explored how Sennacherib's hostile Babylonian policy and sack of Esagil, contributed to the visual focus placed on the representation of the relationship between the king and the Assyrian divine couple in the reliefs carved at Khinis. Under Esarhaddon, however, Esagil was restored and a more conciliatory policy to Babylonia and its deities was adopted.[374] In the following exploration of textual sources that permit reconstruction of Esarhaddon's succession programme, I will consider how Nabû is given prominence relative to the crown prince Aššurbanipal. [375]

[374] See Porter 1993a for a useful overview of Esarhaddon's Babylonian policy. In particular, she argues that 'the centerpiece of Esarhaddon's building program in Babylonia was the rebuilding of its main religious centers, [including] the temple of the god Marduk… which had been heavily damaged in Sennacherib's attack nine years before' (1993, 41).

[375] A number of others have argued similarly that Nabû came to be a model for the Assyrian crown prince in the Sargonid period. See, most notably, Pongratz-Leisten 1994, as well as, for, for instance, Parpola 1997; Lapinkivi 2004; Fales 2012, 150; Barcina 2016; Robson 2019; Rubin 2021.

As explored already in Chapter II, one of the divine remits of Nabû was scribal scholarship. Indeed, to borrow the words of Jeremy Black (1981, 56), Nabû was regarded throughout Assyria and Babylonia as 'a god of arcane, magical wisdom and of the intricate cuneiform writing'. Accordingly, in the the *adê*, Nabû fulfills this role as the 'bearer of the tablet of fates of the gods' (*naši ṭuppi šīmāti ilāni*).[376] Given this remit of Nabû's, the uncovering of the *adê* tablets in a broken state in connection with his cultic residence at Ezida is significant. It has been suggested that the tablets were returned to the place where the *adê* was sworn to be ritually broken as part of the fatal sacking of Assyria by invading Babylonians and Medes at the end of the seventh century BC, thus ending all obligations to their former overlords.[377] Textual evidence including a letter, quoted below, addressed to Esarhaddon from his astrologer Issar-šumu-ereš also suggests that Ezida was the likely site that the *adê* was sworn because of the presence of the cult statues of Bēl and Nabû there:

šum-ma ina IGI ˹LUGAL˺
*be-li-ia ma**-˹*ḫi**˺-*ir**
pa-ni-ú-tim-ma
ša il-lik-˹*ú*˺*-ni-ni*
ina ŠÀ-*bi a-de-e le-e-ru-bu*
bi-is DUMU-MEŠ
URU.NINA.KI
URU.*kal-ḫa-a.a i-ri-qu-ni*
UD 8-KÁM *šap-la* ^{d}EN
^{d}AG *er-ru-bu*

[376] SAA 2 6, 660.

[377] Pongratz-Leisten 1994, 99.

> If it suits the king, my lord, let the [former scribes] who have (already) come, enter the treaty; the citizens of Nineveh and [Nimrud] would be free soon and could enter (the treaty) under (the statues of) Bēl and Nabû on the 8th day.[378]

The colophons of the *adê* tablets indicate that, in the end, the oaths were not sworn on the 8th day but, following the suggestion given by Issar-šumu-ereš given later in the letter, from the 15th onwards.[379] In any case, the indication that, regardless of the date, the oaths were to be sworn beneath the statues of Bēl (i.e., Marduk) and Nabû is important.[380] While various deities are appealed to in the text of the *adê*, the prominent role played by these statues in the proceedings would have given them an especially important role to play.

As explored in Chapter I, the *ṣalmu* ('image') was conceptualised not as a likeness but as a non-mimetic 'facet of presence' (Bahrani 2003, 134-137); in this case, divine presence.[381] Cult and royal images underwent 'rituals of constitution' (Winter 1992) during their fashioning to make them fit for cultic activity.[382] This is evidenced by the Assyrian and Babylonian documents associated with the *mīs pî* rituals that outline the protocols for the manufacture and investiture of cult images, and is also documented visually in one scene presented on the Balawat gates of Šalmaneser III, which depicts ritual events surrounding the creation and initiation of an image of the king.[383] This is also one reason

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[378] SAA 10 6, obv. 15-22 (translation Parpola 1993b).

[379] See SAA 10 6, rev., 11-19.

[380] For a discussion of Marduk as Bēl, see George 1997.

[381] See the discussion and references given on pp. 21-22.

[382] See also recently Nadali and Verderame 2019.

[383] In addition to Winter 1992, see also Shibata 2008, 190 for a summary of the *mīs pî* rituals. See Shafer 2014, 725 for a useful discussion of this procedure and scene.

why statues of the gods, steles and other monuments of kings were repeatedly plundered as part of the spoils of war, including by the Sargonids.[384] To illustrate this point with a vivid example, this is why the goddess Bau is said to die 'as if she were human' (^{d}ba-ú lú-u$_{18}$-lu-gin$_{7}$ u$_{4}$-da-a-ni sá nam-ga-mu-ni-ib-du$_{11}$) when her statue is destroyed in the Lament for Sumer and Ur, an Old Babylonian composition that may have survived into the first millennium BC.[385]

Thus, when the foreign and local authorities swore allegiance to Aššurbanipal as the principal successor of Esarhaddon under the statues of Bēl and Nabû, they crucially did so in what was represented as the deities' real presence. This placed the ritual participants of the ceremony, especially Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal, who represented kingship present and to come and were the key initiators and beneficiaries of the oath, visually, even if only for a moment, in relationship with both deities. If the *adê* was sworn in Ezida, as is most likely, the Nabû temple's built, decorative and ritual functions and features; what Kiersten Neumann (2018, 205) has described as its 'coded sensory landscape' would have only helped to further emphasise these divine personas.

While on the Sam'al and Til Barsip steles the senior-junior pairing of Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal that represents Assyrian kingship is juxtaposed with the senior-junior facets of foreign subservience in the figures of Abdi-Milkūtti and Uš-Anaḫuru, the oath-

[384] Godnapping frequently appears as the subject of literary texts, including the so-called Marduk Prophecy (see Sugie 2011), and various Assyrian kings boast of their own godnappings in the royal inscriptions (Zaia 2015). See also the relief panel of Tiglath-pileser III that shows a procession of cult statues in the British Museum (BM 118931).

[385] The Lament for Sumer and Ur, 174 (translation Michalowski 1989 as quoted in Schaudig 2012, 124). See also the discussion of the lament in Wisnom 2019, 216-217 and of vanishing goddesses in Asher-Greve and Westenholz 2013, 21. See also Buccellati 1982, where a case is made for the equation of the goddess Inana's death in the underworld with the destruction of her cult image in the myth of Inana's Descent.

swearing would have positioned the Assyrian royal dyad in parallel to the divine father-son pairing of Marduk and Nabû. Hence, in summary, as well as binding Assyria's clients and elites with oaths sworn in the presence of the gods and witnessed in clay for eternity, the installation of Aššurbanipal beneath the statues of Bēl and Nabû would have provided a stage to express Aššurbanipal and Esarhaddon's comparable relationship with these materially present deities. At the same time, this staging would have conveyed the significance of the king-crown prince relationship or the kingship theology. Other rituals performed for Nabû earlier in the month of Ayyāru at Kalḫu would have provided an even earlier opportunity to stage these connections in anticipation of the oath-swearing.[386]

Textual and archaeological evidence from the time of Esarhaddon indicates that a nuptial ritual (*quršu*) for Nabû and his divine consort Tašmētu was also probably performed at Ezida prior to the oath-swearing ceremony of Ayyāru 672 BC. According to a letter found at Nineveh addressed to the crown prince Aššurbanipal from Nabû-šumu-iddina, who had responsibilities overseeing Ezida:

> UD 3-KÁM *ša* ITI.GUD URU.*kal-ḫi*
> GIŠ.NÁ *ša* ^{d}AG *tak-kar-ra-ar*
> ^{d}AG *ina* É—GIŠ.NÁ *er-rab*
> UD 4-KÁM *qur-šú ša* ^{d}AG
>
> On the 3rd day of Ayyāru, in [Kalḫu], the bed of Nabû will be set up and Nabû will enter the bed chamber. The 4th is the wedding night of Nabû.[387]

[386] Barcina (2017, 33) suggested that Esarhaddon may have intended a 'concatenation' of ritual proceedings, noting that fuller exploration was 'beyond the scope' of her own study.

[387] SAA 13 78, 7-10 (translation Parpola 1993b).

From this and two other letters addressed to Esarhaddon,[388] also found at Nineveh, Postgate (1974) reconstructed the schedule.

Schedule for the Nabû and Tašmētu *quršu* (adapted from Postgate 1974, 59).	
Day	Ritual Activity
4th day (evening)	Nabû and Tašmetu enter the bed-chamber (*bīt erši*).
5th day	*Quršu* ('chapel') ceremony: Nabû is brought out of his shrine to the *adru* ('threshing floor') of the palace and thence to the garden, where a sacrifice is made. He returns to his temple (presumably to the bed-chamber) and sacrifices are made in the bed-chamber for the life of the king's children. There is a meal consisting of the sacrifices.
6th-10th day	Nabû and Tašmetu, and the *hazannu*-official remain in their rooms.
11th day	Nabû leaves the temple again for the *ambassu* ('park'), where he kills bulls. Then he returns and occupies his (usual) shrine (*šubtīšu*). This probably marks the end of the proceedings.

Postgate (1974) also argued that the Nabû temple at Kalḫu, alongside the temples to this deity at Aššur and Dūr-Šarrukīn, were made up of a series of rooms including a bedchamber that befitted the performance of this schedule; describing this layout as a *bīt akīti* or *akītu*-complex. Given the prominent involvement of the crown prince in both the *quršu* and the *adê*-swearing ceremonies, it is well established that all these proceedings were intentionally coordinated in Ayyāru 672 BC.[389] Indeed, it is not impossible that the letters describing the *quršu* performed at Kalḫu in the month of Ayyāru date to a different year than the *adê*-swearing of 672 BC. Regardless, it remains important that the crown

[388] SAA 13 56 and SAA 13 70. See also the letters from Urdu-Nabû (SAA 13 56) and Nergal-šarrani (SAA 13 70) and the relevant discussion in Matsushima 1987, as well as the summary in Nissinen 1998, 592-593.

[389] See, for instance, Postgate 1974, Pongratz-Leisten 1994, Barcina 2016, 117-119 and Neumann 2018.

prince was involved in the proceedings and planning of both rituals, which ultimately foreground Nabû and his divine family. Therefore, it remains pertinent to continue to see them as conceptually connected. With this connection in mind, I now turn to consider how the alignment of the *adê*-swearing with the earlier *quršu* would have further contributed to the aim of the succession programme to convey divine support for the succession. First, recalling the discussion of the sacred marriage topic, otherwise referred to as unions of theogamy or hierogamy, in Chapter I, it is useful to distinguish what is meant here.[390]

Quršu rituals for Nabû and Tašmētu involving the cult images of the deities are known to have been performed in Assyria during the first millennium BC due to evidence from calendar texts, documenting rituals performed at both Kalḫu and Aššur.[391] In order to understand the relevance of Aššurbanipal's involvement in the *quršu* for Nabû and Tašmētu to the *adê*-swearing, it is useful to attempt to consider the *quršu*'s ritual's function. However, this also involves some engagement with evidence, including literary texts, that cannot be directly connected to the *quršu* ritual. First, however, significant evidence is provided in a letter addressed to Aššurbanipal from Nabû-šumu-iddina explaining that the rites accompanying the *quršu* of Nabû and Tašmētu, like Aššurbanipal's installation, were to be performed 'for the life of the crown prince' (*napšāte ša mār šarri*).[392] Crucially, the blessing of Bēl and Nabû is asked for both at the beginning and end of this letter, and a direct connection between Aššurbanipal and Nabû is implied when

[390] See discussion and references given on p. 14-16.

[391] See Ermidoro 2017, 148.

[392] SAA 13 78, rev., 11–12.

Nabû-šumu-iddina refers to Nabû in writing to Aššurbanipal as ‘your god’.[393] While this form of address would not be that significant by itself, the letter tellingly ends:

> *mi-i-nu ša* DUMU—LUGAL
> *be-lí i-šap-par-an-ni*
> ^{d}EN ^{d}AG *ša ina* ITI.ZÍZ
> *ḫa-šad-da-šá-nu-u-ni*
> *nap-šá-a-te ša* DUMU—LUGAL
> *be-lí-ia li-iṣ-ṣu-ru*
> *šar-ru-ut-ka*
> *a-na ṣa-at* UD-*me lu-šá-li-ku*
>
> What are the written instructions of the crown prince, my lord? May Bēl and Nabû, who are betrothed in the month of Shebat,[394] protect the life of the crown prince, my lord. May they extend your kingship to the end of time.[395]

Clearly, the crown prince was to play a significant role in the proceedings and their planning, and the role Bēl and Nabû were thought to play in ‘protecting [the crown prince’s] life’ as described in this letter warranted the inclusion of the deities in the ritual, and vice versa. It is hard to establish with total certainty what the precise function of these rituals beyond support for the royal family was. A colophon of Aššurbanipal’s, albeit broken, that is attached to a glassmaking text from Nineveh that otherwise does not relate to the *quršu*, for example, would nevertheless seem to further support the interpretation

[393] SAA 13 78, obv., 12–13.

[394] Such rituals were performed in various months; see Ermidoro 2017.

[395] SAA 13 78, rev., 14–r21 (translation Parpola 1993b). The idea that the rituals are to be performed for his life as well as the life of the king and his children is repeated in the other letters. Cf. SAA 13 56, r 11- r 17; SAA 13 70, 4-5; r 6- r 7.

advanced above, connecting Tašmētu's marriage to Nabû with the ensuring of continued divine protection:[396]

> [*Tašmētu bēlet rabītu ḫīrtu narāmtaka ṣābitat abbutti ina maḫrīka ina mayyāl taknê* […] *lā naparkâ līterriška balāṭī* […]-[*x*] *lā ibâš Nabû*
>
> Tašmētu, great lady, your beloved first-rank wife, who intercedes for me before you—may she sleep well in bed and [daily] ask you for my life without stopping. [Whoever trusts in you], Nabû, should never be ashamed.

There was clearly a link envisioned between the performance of the bed ritual and the encouragement of divine support for the crown prince, which is a widely attested outcome of theogamies. A similar view of the positive impact of the union of deities is also expressed in an Old Babylonian period Sumerian text published by Christopher Metcalf as the Hymn to Ninimma:[397]

> e$_2$-šu-me-ša$_4$ ki-tuš ku$_3$ u$_4$-ta-ulu$_3^{lu}$ tab-ba-ni gal-me-en
> e$_2$-ša$_3$-maḫ ki-nu$_2$ ku$_3$ ur-saĝ gal-la a$_2$-ĝal$_2$ maḫ-bi-me-en
> a$_2$-nu$_2$-da ki ni$_2$-tub$_2$-bu-da-ni du$_{10}$ bara$_3$-ga-zu-ne
> ĝešdan-ni-ta gu$_2$ la$_2$-ni u$_3$ du$_{10}$ ku-ku-ni
> enim-ĝar ⌜sa$_6$⌝-ga-ĝu$_{10}$ na-an-ni e-ne-ra du$_{11}$-mu-na-ab
>
> (In) the Ešumeša, the sacred residence of Uta-ulu, you (Ninimma) are his great companion,
> (In) the Ešamaḫ, the sacred resting place of the great hero, you are its great force,
> When you have spread out well his place of relaxation in the bedroom,
> When (Ninurta) embraces his wife and sleeps pleasantly—

[396] K 4273, ii 22-ii 26 (translation Hunger 1968 as quoted in Nissinen 1998, 597). See also Matsushima 1987, 157-158 for interpretation.

[397] CUSAS 38 5, 38-42 (translation Metcalf 2019).

(Ninimma,) tell him the positive decision concerning me, Nanni!

Metcalf interprets the hymn as a 'rather artificial, academic piece of work', in part because the text includes no rubrics to suggest it would have been performed in a cult setting, as well as because the dedication is to a mythical king of the second dynasty of Ur, Nanni, who does not seem to be a historically verifiable person.[398] Comparably, a well-known text referred to today as the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmētu provides further affirmation, although this text similarly cannot be firmly connected to a ritual setting:[399]

man-nu ana šá ta-kil-ú lu ta-˹*kil*˺
a-ni-nu a-na ^{d}AG *tak-la-a-ni*
a-na ^{d}*taš-me-tum šur-bu-ba-ni-ma*
ša at-tu-u-ni at-tu-u-ni ^{d}AG EN-*a-ni*
^{d}*taš-me-tum šad-du-ú ša tuk-la-te-ni** KI.MIN
a-na ša BÀD *a-na ša* BÀD *a-na* ^{d}*taš-me-tum qi-ba-niš-ši*
˹*ma*˺*-a eṭ-*˹*ri*˺ *ši-i-bi i-na* É—*pa-pa-ḫi-e*
i-na pa-rak-ki lil-li-ku ŠEM.LI KUG-MEŠ KI.MIN

May anyone trust in whomever he trusts; as for us, we trust in Nabû, we are devoted to Tašmetu!
What is ours is ours; Nabû is our lord, Tašmetu is the mountain of our trust! Ditto.
Say to her, to her of the wall, to her of the wall, to Tašmetu: 'Save[400] (us), sit down in the cella!'
Let (the scent of) holy juniper fill the sanctuary! Ditto.

[398] See also Metcalf's (2019, 47) discussion on the academic nature of this text.

[399] SAA 3 14, 1-7 (translation Livingstone 1989). It is also worth noting that not all texts understood today as love lyrics incorporate positive sentiment. A group of texts referred to as the 'Divine Love Lyrics', for which there are many exemplars from Aššur and Nineveh, centre on a hostile rivalry between Ištar of Babylon and Zarpānītu, Marduk's consort. See the edition by Da Riva and Wassermann 2025 and Lambert 1959 and 1975.

[400] There is a break in the tablet here. See Nissinen 1998, 587 fn. 14.

The positive connection made in this text between Tašmētu's sitting down in the cella, possibly for the *quršu*, and the chorus, who presumably spoke, sang or, at least, heard these lines or similar during the proceedings, is likely significant. While it is important to point out that the translation of 'save' in this text is speculative given that there is a break in this area of the tablet it was written on, further support for the idea that the union between these deities was intended to be of broader benefit might be suggested by the wider function of theogamies.[401]

While the texts that have been adduced as part of this exploration cannot all be directly connected to the *quršu* for Nabû and Tašmētu, I would suggest that it is highly likely, given the broader context, that Aššurbanipal's participation in performance of the theogamy was intended to formulate his relationship to the deities as having a positive impact. Even cynically, it may at least be concluded that the cultic celebration of the union of Nabû and Tašmētu would have provided a powerful antecedent for Aššurbanipal's installation as crown prince in the presence of Bēl and Nabû later in the month of Ayyāru, whether this ceremony happened in the same year or otherwise, through the performance of their association. Overall, it may be concluded that these rituals would have served as important moments in which Aššurbanipal could be presented to act in close relationship to a nexus of relationships of kinship, involving both the royal family and the gods, also represented as a family. Such ritual scenarios are the type that Lauren Ristvet (2015, 2) interprets as 'the performance of politics – the intersection of ritual and practice'.

[401] See also Lapinkivi 2004, pt. 3 and, more recently, Metcalf 2024, ch. 2 and, in particular, 77 fn. 3 for discussion and further references.

Ištar's Binding Support

In addition to Aššurbanipal's participation in rituals that conveyed his proximity to Nabû and his divine family at Kalḫu in the month of Ayyāru, the king's relationship with Ištar was extended to support the crown prince's succession. By continuing the analysis of the stele for Sam'al began earlier in this chapter, my intention in the following discussion is to show how this monument, more so than either of Esarhaddon's steles for Til Barsip, is formulated in terms of this longstanding relationship.[402] In particular, I propose that the monument's reliefs and inscription combine to convey the notion that Ištar achieves the perpetual binding and delivering of Assyria's enemies to the crown prince through the king. To begin to make this case, it is now pertinent to take up the subject of the leash held by Esarhaddon on the monument, which is described as 'the nose-rope of rulers' (*ṣerret malikī)* in the accompanying inscription and, through analysis of the interplay of image and text on the monument, revisit the earlier examples of kingship formulated in relation to the goddess and the nose-rope discussed in Chapter I.[403]

As noted by Gebhard Selz (1997) in his discussion of the fourth-millennium BC god lists from Fāra and Abū Ṣalābīkh, the nose-rope is a divine motif introduced with the cuneiform determinative for divinity. Moreover, as also discussed in Chapter I, the nose-

[402] While Ištar is not typically conceptualised as being in intimate relationship with Marduk in Mesopotamian sources, they have a sexual encounter in the 'Divine Love Lyrics', set in Babylon, discussed in fn. 399. As kingship is formulated in relation to both Marduk and Ištar under Esarhaddon in support of his succession plan, future research might integrate closer study of these lyrics and, indeed, comparison of Ištar in Assyria and Babylonia.

[403] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, obv., 24a.

rope appears in the Anubanini rock relief (fig. 3) and the controversial stone mould that, despite its lack of provenance, Donald Hansen (2002 and 2003) has attributed to Narām-Sîn (fig. 2), in the possession of Ištar, who wields it over royal enemies in support of the king.[404] As further noted in Chapter I, an inscription of Narām-Sîn describes how he wields the nose-rope to perform service for the goddess, however there is no known surviving image of Narām-Sîn doing this.[405] Tallay Ornan (2007b, 69) has observed that, prior to Esarhaddon's wielding of the nose-rope over the foreign captives depicted on the obverse of the stele for Sam'al, the Assyrian king is first depicted possessing the nose-rope on the relief of the so-called Broken Obelisk of Aššur-bēl-kala (r. 1073–1056 BC), arguing that the relief 'manifests a shift in the pictorial relationship between the king and gods regarding who actually controlled the subdued enemies'. In the following discussion of the Sam'al stele, I aim to establish that the monument witnesses a further shift regarding who actually receives the subdued enemies.

Ištar is not the only deity mentioned in the inscription, nor even the deity most frequently mentioned.[406] However, overall, the inscription seems to prioritise and primarily relate Esarhaddon's martial actions to this deity on account of their 'special relationship', as Wiebke Meinhold (2009, 225) has notably established is an always important trope for the Assyrian kingship. Recapping the references to Ištar throughout the text help to build a

[404] See the discussion on pp. 6-7 of this thesis, and especially fn. 20.

[405] See RIME 2 Narām-Sîn 3, iv 33-36.

[406] Aššur is mentioned a total of 14 times. 1 time he is mentioned alongside Anu, Enlil, Ea, Sîn, Šamaš, Adad, Marduk, Ištar and the Sebitti. 4 of these times, he is mentioned with the reduced grouping of Šamaš, Nabû and Marduk. An additional 1 time, he is mentioned with only Nabû and Marduk. Marduk, Sîn, Anu and Ištar are each mentioned another 1 time independently. Ištar is mentioned a final 1 time independently.

picture of the way the goddess' support for the kingship conceptualised in this specific instance: Ištar is the 'lady of war and battle, the one who goes at [Esarhaddon]s side' (*ištar bēlet qabli u tāhāzi ālikat idīya*).[407] Esarhaddon is the 'beloved' of Ištar, who is 'queen' (*narām šarrati ištar*), 'goddess of all totality' (*ilat kal gimri*) and 'the unforgiving weapon, the one who makes the land of enmity shake (*kakku lā pādû murīb māt nukurti*).[408] She is also 'the lady who loves my priesthood, you caused me to grasp a strong bow, a powerful arrow, the one who causes the unsubmissive to fall; my hand, you caused me to achieve the desires of my heart and you made all the unsubmissive rulers bow down at my feet' (*ištar bēltum rā'imat šangûtīya qaštu dannatu šiltāhu gešru mušamqit lā māgiri tušatmeha rittū'a biblāt libbīya tušakšidannīma naphar malkī lā kanšūti tušakniša šepūya*).[409]

These lines from the inscription indicate that Ištar in particular is understood to be the deity who assures Esarhaddon's victory by working in close proximity to him, arming him, and thus causing him to make the unsubmissive kings bow down, reflecting her own prerogatives.[410] A connection to Ištar is also established temporally, as Esarhaddon declares that his march from Išḫupri to Memphis took 15 days, the number associated with Ištar.[411] In this sense, there is an equation of Esarhaddon's actions with the goddess's overarching control in the inscription. As Hansen (2002, 99) observed in his discussion of the unprovenanced stone mould attributed to Narām-Sîn, the goddess 'channels her forces

[407] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, obv., 9.

[408] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, obv., 21-22.

[409] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, obv., 27-30a.

[410] Cf. RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, obv., 30 (above) with rev., 24: *mušakniš lā kanšūtešu*.

[411] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, rev., 39.

through [Narām-Sîn] as king and lesser god… what happens in the terrestrial sphere is but a reflection of a divine scheme.' Indeed, comparable to the stone mould's relief, the impression arising from the Sam'al stele's inscription is that Ištar is still the deity that secures Esarhaddon's victory leading to his triumph in battle, even though he is depicted wielding the nose-rope. Hence, Ištar is also the deity that will continue to act by Esarhaddon's side through the monument itself after the battle, which was 'set up for distant days' (*ana ṣâtu ūmē ulziz*).[412] Taking all this into account, it is clear that Esarhaddon's victory over Egypt is formulated in relation to Ištar specifically.

Further complexity is expressed in the relationship of goddess and king on the Sam'al stele as Esarhaddon is the one actually pictured with the binding instrument on the obverse of the monument. This is while the goddess is also depicted in the king's eyeline. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Luschan identified the second of the four deities represented in anthropomorphic form in the upper register of the stele, who sits enthroned, as Ištar. As examined in Chapter III of this thesis, Bachmann (1927, 12) identified this same figure as Ištar of Nineveh or Mullissu in the context of the Khinis relief complex. However, Luschan read the image as the more essential persona of the goddess on the Sam'al stele because she is addressed as such in the monument's inscription.[413] As Sennacherib's Seal of Destinies was in use during the reign of Esarhaddon, as witnessed by its impression on the *adê* for Aššurbanipal, it is possible that the enthroned goddess on the Sam'al stele is intended to represent Mullissu as the goddess on the Seal of Destinies. In any case, as pointed out by Meinhold (2009, 204), textual sources from Nineveh dated to

[412] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, rev., 53.

[413] Luschan, Schrader, and Sachau 1893, 19.

this period evidence the syncretism of Ištar of Nineveh and Mullissu, so the goddess is present visually either way.

Ištar imagery is also included on the monument in the form of the rosette bracelets worn on both of Esarhaddon's wrists as well as on the visible wrists of the crown princes, in addition to Aššurbanipal's diadem covered in rosettes. The idea that Assyrian kings and courtiers are represented in attire that expresses Ištar symbolism is well established.[414] The pronounced connection between both the king and the Assyrian crown prince's dress on the stele, in the context of the monument's depiction of the encounter, recalls the earlier relationship of Ištar and the king. In particular, the in-the-round interpretation of Esarhaddon's steles that I have advanced throughout this chapter enables not only a broad iconographic but also a productive compositional comparison with the Anubanini imagery as well as the unprovenanced stone mould treated by Hansen. If in earlier imagery the recipient of the restrained captives is the king, reflecting the notion that: 'By Ishtar's bond, the king is empowered to grasp the ring in his left hand and is able to govern by and through the ropes that extend from the ring' (Hansen 2002, 99), it is striking that here the Assyrian crown prince directly faces the ring, as if he will grasp it soon.

Despite the many similarities between Esarhaddon's three victory steles, it is not possible to advance a similar interpretation of the Til Barsip steles. The leash that the king is shown to hold on these monuments does not appear to be double ended and so attached to the captives like it is on the Sam'al stele. There are also no signs of lip rings attached to the captives on either Til Barsip stele, whereas at least one of these survives on the Sam'al

[414] See the relevant and focused discussion of rosette symbolism and further references in Albenda 2020. The use of rosettes as royal textile decoration is also discussed in Gaspa 2024.

monument. While the weathering of the Til Barsip steles likely provides some explanation for the differentiation of these monuments from the Sam'al stele in terms of the rope, no surviving part of the Til Barsip citadel stele inscription mentions the nose-rope or Ištar. Certainly, as has been explored here, the goddess is mentioned frequently in the Sam'al stele inscription. Overall, the question remains open as to what the rope on the Til Barsip steles was intended to signify.

The representation of the captives at a much more diminutive scale on the Sam'al stele than on the Til Barsip steles may also be considered in relation to earlier kingship models. Whereas on the Til Barsip steles the foreign royal dyad is depicted at a comparatively more realistic scale and almost reach the height of Esarhaddon's waist, they do not reach above the height of Esarhaddon's knee on the Sam'al stele. The king's especially massive stature on the Sam'al stele monument has previously been attributed to Egyptian influence on Assyrian art, particularly representations of Egyptian kings at a larger scale.[415] Marian Feldman (2004) has argued that the Sargonid forays into Egypt exposed them to art of the Ramesside period, and that this was transformative for Assyrian royal self-representation. Certainly, as Mario Fales (2023, 460) has recently discussed, Egyptian scholars were present at Esarhaddon's court, and many Egyptian goods were taken back to Nineveh following the defeat of Taharqa and 'proudly displayed' there. Nevertheless, if one is to accept my interpretation that the depiction of the encounter of king and prince on the stele is formulated in terms of the relationship of Ištar and the king, it is possible to begin to see how Esarhaddon's enlarged stature, which can be traced as far back in Mesopotamian art to the upscaled depiction of Ninĝirsu on the stele of Eanatum of

[415] See notably Reade 1979a, 331.

Lagaš (fig. 4), may reflect the Assyrian king's visual apotheosis within an already elaborated Mesopotamian model of kingship.

As I mentioned when the monument was introduced in this chapter, the Sam'al stele inscription ends with a malediction that reveals the monument's lasting potential to activate Ištar's support against the enemy. While the stele is ultimately dedicated to Aššur, Ištar is the deity that is beseeched to intervene.[416] To ensure the preservation of the stele in case anyone attempts to remove, damage, or hide it, Esarhaddon petitions Ištar specifically: 'may Ištar, lady of war and battle, cause his manliness to become like a woman and may she cause him to sit in a bound state at the feet of his enemy' (*ištar bēlet qabli u tāhāzi zikrūssu sinnišāniš lušālikma ina šapal nakirīšu lušēšibšu kamêš*).[417] Ilona Zsolnay (2010, 394 fn. 17 and 396-397) has notably studied earlier instances of maledictions causing shifts in gender portrayal in Assyrian royal inscriptions, demonstrating that the use of the term *sinnisānu* is only previously attested in this manner under Tukultī-Ninurta I. As seen above in the analysis of the seal impressions used on the *adê* for the succession of Aššurbanipal, Esarhaddon likely engaged with the kingship of Tukultī-Ninurta I to support the succession. Moreover, as discussed by Ornan (2007b), Tukultī-Ninurta I also appears with the nose-rope on the plinth relief of a second stone altar of his from Aššur.

As Peter Machinist (2011) otherwise demonstrated, Tukultī-Ninurta's reign was an important period for the development of the formulation of the relationship of the kingship and divinity in Assyria because of his incorporation of Sumerian and Babylonian traditions in his eponymous Epic. Therefore, with the above discussion taken into account, it is, in

[416] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, rev., 51; 57.

[417] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 98, rev., 55-56.

my view, most likely that the Sam'al stele was, like the *adê* documents, intended to be an integrative monument, and engages with the older model of the goddess wielding the nose-rope for the king in relation to the model of Tukultī-Ninurta. In his discussion of the stele of Eanatum, Selz (2008, 22) suggests that the monument's complex interplay of text describing Eanatum's military victory and visual depiction on the obverse of the upscaled deity in fact represents 'the ruler in a divine role: as triumphator he, the king, is transgressing categorical boundaries'. On the Sam'al stele, there is no visually dominant anthropomorphic image of Ištar to compete with. Thus, it is clear that Esarhaddon is depicted in Ištar's role to subdue the enemies with the rope on the Sam'al stele, but, in the context of the transposition of the encounter, here this is done for the benefit of the Assyrian crown prince, who is a beneficiary of divine support through his relationship with the king.

Excursus: 'To Become Like a Woman'

It is well established that Ištar was conceptualised as existing beyond, and having the power to bring others beyond, the limits of binary gender categories in Mesopotamia.[418] This is not least on the basis of textual evidence, including a text from the second millennium BC that is written on a tablet now held in the Louvre, which outlines how men and women take up paraphernalia associated with the other gender through worshipping

[418] For Ištar's associations with sex and gender see, for instance, Harris 1991; Leick 1994, 157; Bahrani 2001, ch. 8; Asher-Greve and Westenholz 2013; Zsolnay 2013, 83-84; Helle 2018, 41.

her.[419] In part due to this being a topic of scholarly interest, the malediction included in the inscription of Esarhaddon's Sam'al stele uncovered at Zincirli has mostly been read separately from the monument's imagery, whether as part of studies of the goddess' roles supporting the Assyrian king (Zsolnay 2010) or studies of gender including but not limited to Ištar (Konstantopoulos 2020). In returning the malediction to the monument as part of the above discussion, I have intended to establish that Esarhaddon's support for the crown prince Aššurbanipal is formulated in terms of the king's longstanding relationship with Ištar. In this excursus, I intend to consider how the malediction further inflects the picture of Ištar's support for the kingship, and how the formulation of the succession relative to this relationship might be understood. To make this case, I will first consider inscriptions of Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal's that explain how Ištar's support for them in battle leads to the transformation of their enemies for the benefit of the kingship.

Esarhaddon's Nineveh Prism A text, which is reconstructed from exemplars found at Nineveh, Aššur and Susa that are all dated to just before the installation of Esarhaddon's heir designates in 672 BC, is particularly informative for the interpretation of the Sam'al stele inscription. Reflecting on his own accession to the throne following the defeat of his treacherous brothers, who transgressed the *adê* that was imposed by Sennacherib, Esarhaddon describes how 'fear of the great gods, my lords overwhelmed them, (and when) they saw my mighty battle array, they became female ecstatics' (*puluhti ilāni rabûti bēlīya ishupšūnitīma tīb tāhāzīya danni ēmurūma emû mahhūtiš)*.[420] The term *mahhūtiš* has

[419] The text is referred to as Ištar-Louvre (AO 6035). See the recent publication of the text by Streck and Wassermann 2018 and especially i, 8 and ii, 6-9. Also see publication history and references in this edition.

[420] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 1, i 72-73.

previously been translated as 'crazed women' (Leichty 2011).[421] However, support for translating crazed as 'ecstatic', a term otherwise used for divinely caused prophetic speech, can be found in another inscription of Aššurbanipal's once he had become king, where a comparable phrase is used in the context of an encounter with Aššur and Ištar to describe the Elamites in the account of the new king's first campaign to Egypt.

In Aššurbanipal's Nineveh Prism A account, *mahhūtiš* is used to describe the transformation Taharqa, who would be defeated once and for all under Aššurbanipal, immediately undergoes after encountering the divine radiance (*namrīru*) of Aššur and Ištar, suggesting that their new state is not only 'crazed' but divinely instigated.[422] The connection posited in this text between divine radiance and *mahhūtiš* also prompts consideration of how, in Esarhaddon's Nineveh Prism A inscription, the mention of *mahhūtiš* in the context of his brothers' transformation after they encounter Esarhaddon is followed immediately by a mention of 'the goddess Ištar, the lady of war and battle, who loves my priestly duties, stood at my side' (*ištar belet qabli u tāhāzi rā'imat šangûtīya*).[423] Helpfully, explanations are provided in both texts for what happens after the respective transformations of the enemy. In Esarhaddon's Nineveh Prism A text, the brothers' bow

[421] On the use of *mahhû* in prophetic texts see Parpola 1997, xlv-xlvii. The prophecies will be examined in ch. V of this thesis.

[422] RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 11, i 83. See the relevant discussion of divine radiance on pp. 6; 18-19.

[423] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 1, i 73.

before Esarhaddon and declare his kingship (*iqbû umma annû šarrāni*).[424] In Aššurbanipal's Nineveh Prism A text, Taharqa correspondingly flees Memphis.[425]

The use of the term *mahhūtiš* in the context of the enemy's encounter with divine support for the king in battle in these texts offers useful context for the incorporation of the malediction into Esarhaddon's stele. Read apart from the visual imagery, the gender malediction has been understood to have been incorporated into the monument primarily as a means to threaten the stripping away of the enemy's masculine agency.[426] If one accepts the context of the two royal inscriptions explored above, where enemies of the king are transformed after encounters with divine support in the form of radiance, it would seem that Esarhaddon's binding of the enemies on the stele in support of the crown prince is visualised less as an act of subjugation for its sake but as a divinely caused change performed with divine support. This also recalls the binding function of the *adê* for the foreign vassal rulers, for which divine support was enlisted to regulate participants' behaviour in the service of the crown prince.

It is well acknowledged that the relationship of Ištar and the king gained increasing importance for the formulation of the kingship at the end of the seventh century BC.[427] But the above analysis of the Sam'al stele makes clear that this relationship is also formulated visually in relation to the crown prince. This development may be further contextualised within the context of other changes detectable in the formulation of royal familial

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[424] RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 1, i 77.

[425] RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 11, i 87-88.

[426] See, for instance, Karlsson 2016, 228-233 and Konstantopoulos 2020, 366.

[427] See, for example, Parpola 1997; Meinhold 2009; Crouch 2013; Pongratz-Leisten 2015; Zaia 2018.

relationships in this period. Relevantly, Johannes Bach (2022a, 339) has pointed out that, from the time of Esarhaddon, the crown prince is referred to as *māru narāmīya* ('beloved son') of the king, whereas the use of *narāmtu* was previously used only by deities toward humans, as also otherwise explored in Chapter I in the case of Narām-Sîn.[428] Given this development, it would seem that the Sam'al stele presents Esarhaddon in Ištar's role as deliverer of the enemies as well as, crucially, as a parental support for the crown prince in the terms of his relationship with the goddess. As explained in the Sam'al stele inscription, Esarhaddon is the beloved of Ištar as well as her co-participant and instrument. However, the combined reading of imagery and inscription suggests that Esarhaddon prepares the way for Aššurbanipal's future kingship in part through performing Ištar's role as *pater*.

Moreover, while it is Ištar and not royal women who uses the title 'queen' (*šarrati*), in the sense that this title refers to the feminine aspect of the kingship, it is possible to situate the formulation of the relationship of king and crown prince in terms of the relationship of king and goddess on the Sam'al stele to the supportive role of the human queenship.[429] Most significantly, Esarhaddon's mother, Naqīʾa (also referred to as Zakūtu) also invoked the divine when she imposed the only known *adê* attributed to a person other than the king in support of Aššurbanipal, which is known from a surviving chancellery copy.[430] The *adê* was imposed on Šamaš-šumu-ukīn and other members of the Assyrian royal family to re-affirm the agreement of Ayyāru 672 BC following Esarhaddon's death in

[428] See discussion and references in Bach 2022a, 339.

[429] As discussed by Meinhold (2009, 243-244), human queens, referred to in the Neo-Assyrian period as, for example, MUNUS.É.GAL, do not share Ištar's queenly title.

[430] SAA 2 8.

669 BC. Sarah Melville (1999, see notably ch. 3) has suggested that Naqīʾa's public image and depiction in imagery of this period was formulated in relation to the divine in order to empower her in anticipation of her future role as the broker of the succession.[431] As Melville has suggested, the image of Naqī'a holding a mirror, which is otherwise depicted in the hands of goddesses, and standing behind a king on a fragment of a piece of inscribed bronze furniture that is now held in the Louvre (AO 20185) may reflect this aim.[432]

The inscription on the bronze fragment names Naqī'a and mentions a mouth-washing ceremony that the imagery thus likely shows the queen mother to be participating in.[433] It is not clear whether Nergal-šarrani's letters to Naqī'a found at Nineveh regarding her questions about rites conducted for Tašmētu at Kalḫu refer to the same *quršu* for Nabû and Tašmētu performed in the month of Ayyāru.[434] This idea has been refuted in part because Naqī'a is not mentioned in the letters from Nabû-šumu-iddina, Urdu-Nabû, and Nergal-šarrani.[435] However, the prominent role otherwise played by the king, crown prince and the king's children (including daughters) in these rites does, in my view, suggest that Naqī'a could plausibly also have been incorporated in the rituals marking Aššurbanipal's installation as crown prince. Overall, in Esarhaddon's reign, it is possible to detect different

[431] See Melville 1999, in particular ch. 3.

[432] The piece was acquired by the museum from the antiquities market. The acquisition report was published as Parrot and Nougayrol 1956. The measurements published in the report are 33 cm x 31 cm. The mirror has been discussed in relation to images of West Asian and Eastern Mediterranean goddesses with this emblem (see notably Albenda 1985 as well as the comments in Svärd 2015, 77).

[433] The inscription is published as RINAP 4 Esarhaddon 2010.

[434] SAA 13 76 and SAA 13 77.

[435] SAA 13 78; SAA 13 56; SAA 13 70 (see discussion in Menzel 1981, 281 and Melville 1999, 45-46).

royal family relationships being expressed in relation to the divine, which can, in turn, be seen in line with the use of the seal of Sennacherib depicting the king in relationship with the divine couple on the *adê* for Aššurbanipal.

This chapter has advanced an integrated approach to Esarhaddon's programme around the succession with the aim of shedding light on the formulation of the relationship of the king and the crown prince in relation to divinity. The Nimrud copies of the *adê* sworn in the presence of the gods at Ezida in Ayyāru 672 BC functioned to communicate the message that Aššurbanipal, like his father, was also divinely selected and favoured. In doing so, these documents bound the contracting parties not only to the crown prince Aššurbanipal but to the notion that he had been sworn into a position of great significance for the kingship theology. As the tablets were sealed with three historicising seals associated with Aššur, which also incorporated the all-powerful Seal of Destinies, Aššurbanipal's future kingship and intimate relationship with the divine couple, enabled by his father the king, was represented as rooted in the past as well as an unchangeable future outcome. In case anyone attempted to thwart his destiny, the curses included in the *adê* assure the gods' retribution. The monumentality of the tablets further aided the transformation of clay into divinity.

I argued that the excavation of the near-identical Tell Tayinat version of the succession *adê* evidences the exportation of not only Esarhaddon's political control but his theologising message about the crown prince Aššurbanipal beyond the Assyrian heartlands and into the empire's provinces. By examining the transposition of the encounter scene to the steles erected in Sam'al and Til Barsip, I have argued that this message was also expressed visually. Whereas the incorporation of the crown princes has been interpreted in

terms of duality, I have explored the depiction of the encounter of the Assyrian king and crown prince which, furthermore, brings Aššurbanipal into the subjugation of the enemies depicted on the monument. In this sense, the foreign royal dyad of Abdi-milkūti and Uš-Anaḫuru can be seen to mirror that of Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal, rather than the Assyrian and Babylonian heirs on the side panels. In my reading, the Babylonian heir designate is relegated to a subordinate position, which is in line with the hierarchising impression of the princes conveyed by the *adê* itself.

In as much I have considered the relationship of Abdi-milkūti and Uš-Anaḫuru to that of Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal, I have also explored the relationship of the Assyrian royal dyad relative to the relationship of Bēl and Nabû as expressed through the combined presence of their cult images in the *adê*-swearing ceremonies. The presence of the deities' images during the proceedings would have conveyed the relationship of their divine familial connection to the royal succession. As also explored above, this dynamic was underscored by the timing of the *adê*-swearing to coincide with the month in which the *quršu* for Nabû and Tašmētu was performed, in which the king's children participated. In this chapter, then, analysis of the formulation of the relationship of the king and crown prince in terms of the divine as depicted on the monument, which, like the public display of the *adê* tablets, was intended to reach a broad audience across time, has prompted consideration of ritual occasions that would have disseminated a coherent message at a specific time, and may only be textually reconstructed.

Integrating the interpretation of the Sam'al stele inscription with the monument's imagery, I have proposed that the powers and responsibilities of Ištar were similarly appealed to in the Sam'al stele through Esarhaddon's use of the nose-rope, formulating the

relationship of king and crown prince in these terms. Through this, I have also explored how the gender malediction included in the stele may be read in relation to the king's depiction wielding the nose-rope. Given that the malediction was last attested during the reign of Tukultī-Ninurta I, I have argued that the Sam'al stele engages with the Middle Assyrian depictions of the king with the nose-rope but, at the same time, the older model of the goddess wielding the nose-rope on his behalf. In this way, the monument conveys both divine-royal and royal familial relationships, both of which are founded on divine support for the kingship.

However, it is crucial to note that, while the encounter of the king and prince may be seen on the side panels of the three steles of Esarhaddon, the Assyrian crown prince is still depicted on the side panels of the monument and not the obverse. While I have diverged from prior scholarship in incorporating the encounter of king and prince into the overall interpretation of the monument's formulation of the kingship, it is crucial to point out that the relationship of the king with the divine is not disrupted but extended. In other words, Esarhaddon is depicted on all three steles on the obverse, and on the Sam'al stele and Tell Ahmar citadel steles in the presence of divine images. Without the king's relationship to the divine, the crown prince would not be able to encounter him and, in turn, encounter the divine through him. Overall, the monuments depict the crown prince Aššurbanipal entering the arena of the relationship of the king with the deities, but he does not disturb its basic formulation.

Chapter V

Suspension: Aššurbanipal, Ištar's Crown Prince Forever

Esarhaddon's (r. 680–669 BC) ideological programme around the formal designation of Aššurbanipal (r. 668–ca. 631 BC) as crown prince of Assyria in 672 BC involved exporting the encounter of king and prince in the context of the divine beyond the imperial heartlands, through the display of tablets and steles that were intended to be enduring monuments to Aššurbanipal's relationship with the divine around the time of his formal designation as crown prince.

It is curious given this context that a comparable strategy around Aššurbanipal's succession is not witnessed in either textual or visual sources from his reign. Although Aššurbanipal was succeeded by Aššur-etel-ilāni (r. ca. 630–627 BC), there are no texts explicitly describing Aššur-etel-ilāni's designation or tenure as crown prince either from his reign or from Aššurbanipal's. While there are few texts from Aššur-etel-ilāni's reign more generally, the same cannot be said to be true for Aššurbanipal's reign, which is extensively documented. Whereas Esarhaddon's succession *adê* for Aššurbanipal is well attested, there are no comparable sources for Aššurbanipal's succession, and the relationship between the king and crown prince would not seem to be attested by visual sources attributed to Aššurbanipal either. By comparison, only economic texts from Aššurbanipal's reign mention him as having a crown prince.[436]

While the incorporation of Esarhaddon's heirs into his steles from Sam'al and Til Barsip has been understood as an anomaly of his own reign, in Chapter IV I have attempted

[436] See, for example, SAA 6, 325, r 20-21 and SAA 12, 92, r 7, dated to 663 BC and 640 BC respectively.

to contextualise this apparent development by grounding it in the earlier custom of depicting the encounter of the king and the crown prince in palace reliefs. Given this artistic tradition, it is curious that there are no palatial reliefs depicting the relationship between the king and crown prince that can be attributed to Aššurbanipal. Although the relationship between the king and crown prince is represented in the Southwest Palace at Nineveh, which was built by Sennacherib (r. 704–681 BC), the reliefs that Aššurbanipal added there do not show this relationship. As pointed out by David Kertai (2017, 125), the crown prince 'would be expected in settings where the king is shown receiving prisoners while sitting on his throne or standing, but such settings are not known' even in reliefs from Aššurbanipal's own North Palace.

In this chapter, I will make the case that the absence of such scenes that would facilitate representing the crown prince in visual relationship with the king in Aššurbanipal's reliefs gives rise to other formulations of the relationship of kingship and divinity in terms of the royal, the divine and the familial. To make this case, I will advance an integrated analysis of textual and visual sources that, for the most part, describe and depict Aššurbanipal's conflict with Teumman, the king of Elam. Like Babylon and Egypt, Elam was a longstanding foe of Assyria, and tensions surged during the reign of Sennacherib. Peace had been achieved and maintained during the reign of Esarhaddon and in the beginning of the reign of Aššurbanipal. However, the arrival of Teumman, who came to rule Elam by filling the power vacuum created by his predecessor Urtak's involvement in an anti-Assyrian coalition set the stage for the enmity to be brought to a head.[437]

[437] For the history of Elam in the first millennium BC, see Bartelmus 2023. For another useful study of Neo-Assyrian and Elamite relations from the ninth century BC onwards see, most recently, Dubovský 2018 and, under Aššurbanipal specifically, Dubovský 2013.

According to his royal inscriptions, Aššurbanipal was residing in Arbela, an important cult centre of the goddess Ištar, when the conflict broke out. Battle between Aššurbanipal's troops and the Elamites then commenced at Tīl-Tūba upon the Ulaya River (the modern Karkheh River in southwestern Iran), resulting in a decisive Assyrian victory and Teumman's beheading, which Aššurbanipal would later claim was achieved in large part through Ištar's support. Through a case study of the formulation of the victory over Elam in terms of Ištar's support, I will argue that, while the visual relationship between the king and crown prince would appear to drop out during the reign of Aššurbanipal, the king is actually depicted in both the role of king and crown prince, and primarily as an expression of his relationship with Ištar, revealing immense relational complexity.

Ištar's Pacifying Support

Aššurbanipal's seventh military campaign against Elam is described in various inscribed prisms attributed to him, including the prisms known as B, C, D and G found at Nineveh and Prism Kh found at Nimrud, but his Nineveh Prism B incorporates the most extended treatment and is dated earliest.[438] In the Prism B account of the conflict, Ištar's relationship with Aššurbanipal is depicted in particularly intimate terms; the king is portrayed as her child in the text. By further extending the analysis advanced in Chapter IV of the formulation of the relationship of king and crown prince in terms of Ištar's support for the kingship, I will first begin to make the case that Aššurbanipal's representation in the Prism

[438] See the useful discussion of later abridgements in Miller 2019, 140. It should be noted that there are no Elamite accounts documenting this conflict.

B account as the recipient of what I will term Ištar's pacifying support leads to his expression of a princely role even while king.

Significantly, the Prism B account includes a lengthy prayer of Aššurbanipal to Ištar in her localised form as Ištar of Arbela,[439] as well as the goddess' spoken response to him and their subsequent interaction in a reported night vision (*šuttu*) of a dream interpreter (*šabrû*).[440] Given the direct relevance of these events and their presentation as a tripartite sequence in the Prism B account to the present exploration, I quote first the prayer,[441] second the spoken response,[442] and third the reported vision.[443]

> [d]*be-let* URU.LÍMMU-DINGIR.KI *a-na-ku* [m]*aš-šur*-DÙ-A MAN KUR *aš-šur*.KI
> *bi-nu-ut* ŠU.II-*ki šá iḫ-šu-ḫu-šú* AN.ŠÁR AD *ba-nu-ki*
> *a-na ud-du-uš eš-re-e-ti šul-lum par-ṣe-šú-un*
> *na-ṣir pi-riš-te-šú-un šu-ṭu-ub lìb-bi-šú-un*
> *im-bu-u zi-kir-šú a-na-ku áš-re-e-ki áš-te-né-ʾi-i*
> *al-li-ka a-na pa-laḫ* DINGIR-*ti-ki šul-lum par-ṣe-e-ki*
> *ù šu-ú mte-um-man* MAN KUR.ELAM.MA.KI *la mu-šá-qir* DINGIR.MEŠ
> *ku-ṣur ka-li a-na mit-ḫu-ṣi* ERIM.ḪI.A-*ia*
>
> Lady of Arbela! I, Aššurbanipal, king of Assyria; the creation of your hands, whom Aššur, the father who had engendered you, requires; whose name he has called to renovate shrines; fully carry out their rites; guard secret knowledge; please their

[439] On Ištar's localisation to Arbela specifically see notably Porter 2004a and Nissinen and Mattila 2021 and, on syncretism more generally, Allen 2015 and 2024. Meinhold (2009) also discusses worship of Ištar of Arbela at Aššur, although this version of the goddess did not have her own temple there (see also discussion of Ištar in Aššur in ch. 1 of this thesis, p. 17).

[440] On dream interpretation see, classically, Oppenheim 1956, as well as the discussion and further references provided in Fales 2023, 460.

[441] RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 3, v 28-35.

[442] RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 3, v 45b-48a.

[443] RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 3, v 51b-v 72.

hearts: I am assiduous towards your divine places. I have come to revere your divinity; fully carry out your rites. And he, Teumman, the king of Elam who does not respect the gods, is fully prepared to fight my troops.

in-ḫe-ia šu-nu-ḫu-ti ^{d}15 *iš-me-ma*
la ta-pal-laḫ iq-ba-a ú-šar-ḫi-ṣa-an-ni lìb-bu
a-na ni-iš ŠU.II-*ka šá taš-šá-a* IGI.II-*ka im-la-a di-im-tú*
ar-ta-ši re-e-mu

Ištar heard my troubled hardship and said: ‘Be not afraid!’ She gave me courage: ‘For your entreaties, which you directed towards me, (and because) your eyes were filled with tear(s), I came to have mercy’.

^{d}15 *a-ši-bat* URU.LÍMMU-DINGIR
e-ru-ba-am-ma 15 *u* 2.30 *tu-ul-la-ta iš-pa-a-ti*
tam-ḫa-at GIŠ.PAN *ina i-di-šá šal-pat nam-ṣa-*⌜*ru*⌝ *zaq-tú šá e-peš ta-ḫa-zi*
ma-ḫar-šá ta-zi-iz ši-i ki-ma AMA
a-lit-ti i-tam-ma-a it-ti-ka
il-si-ka ^{d}15 *šá-qut* DINGIR.MEŠ *i-šak-kan-ka ṭè-e-mu*
um-ma ta-na-aṭ-ṭa-la a-na e-peš šá-áš-me
a-šar pa-nu-u-a šak-nu te-ba-ku a-na-ku
at-ta ta-qab-bi-šá um-ma a-šar tal-la-ki
it-ti-ki lul-lik ^{d}*be-let* GAŠAN.MEŠ
ši-i tu-šá-an-nak-ka um-ma at-ta a-kan-na lu áš-ba-ta
a-šar maš-kán-i-ka a-kul a-ka-lu ši-ti ku-ru-un-nu
nin-gu-tú šu-kun nu-$^{\prime}$*i-id* DINGIR-*ti*
a-di al-la-ku šip-ru šu-a-tu ep-pu-šú ú-šak-šá-du
ṣu-um-me-rat lìb-bi-ka
pa-nu-u-ka ul ur-raq ul i-nàr-ru-ṭa GÌR.II-*ka*
ul ta-šam-maṭ zu-ut-ka ina MURUB$_4$ *tam-ḫa-ri*
ina ki-rim-mì-šá DÙG.GA *taḫ-ṣi-in-ka-ma taḫ-te-na gi-mir la-ni-ka*
pa-nu-uš-šá ^{d}GIŠ.BAR *in-na-pi-iḫ*
šam-riš ta-at-ta-ṣi a-na a-ḫa-a-ti
e-li ^{m}*te-um-man* MAN KUR.ELAM.MA.KI
ša ug-gu-ga-⌜*ta*⌝ *pa-nu-uš-šá taš-kun*
ina ITI.KIN *ši-pir* ^{d}INANNA.MEŠ *i-sin-ni* AN.ŠÁR *ṣi-i-ru*

> Ištar who dwells in Arbela entered and she had quivers on her right and left. She was holding a bow at her side; she was unsheathing a sharp sword to do battle. You stood before her; she was speaking to you like a birth-mother. Ištar, sublime one of the gods, called out to you, instructing you, saying: 'You are looking forward to waging war; I myself am about to set out towards my destination'. You said to her, saying: 'Let me go with you, wherever you go, Lady of Ladies!' She replied to you, saying: 'You will stay in the place where you are residing. Eat bread, drink beer, establish a joyful song, praise my divinity. Meanwhile, I will go do this work, I will let (you) achieve your heart's desire. Your face will not become pale, your feet will not tremble, you will not wipe off your sweat in the midst of battle.' She took you into her sweet embrace and protected your whole form. Fire flared up before her. She went off furiously outside. She directed her attention towards Teumman, the king of Elam, with whom she was angr[y].

The prayer, spoken response, and vision, taken together as one sequence, establish a clear division of roles and responsibilities between Aššurbanipal and Ištar. In the prayer, Aššurbanipal cries to Ištar while revering her divine power, demonstrating his fealty and seeking her to intervene in his conflict with Elam. In the spoken response, Ištar has mercy on Aššurbanipal because of his demonstrated sincerity and reassures him that she will resolve the conflict. In the reported vision, Aššurbanipal attempts to join Ištar on the battlefield, prompting the goddess' forceful refusal. While Ištar is envisioned armed and ready for the fight, she instructs Aššurbanipal to remain where he is and continue worshipping her.

Ištar is assigned dual responsibility for soothing an overwrought Aššurbanipal and for crushing Teumman and his troops in battle, and she is presented in suitable extremes. Whereas Ištar's furious battle readiness manifests visually in the reported vision as a flame surrounding her form, moments earlier she is described as concerned for Aššurbanipal's bodily wellbeing and takes him into her intimate embrace. Described as Aššurbanipal's creator (*binût qātīki*) in the prayer but likened to his birthmother (*ālitti*) specifically in the

vision, it is implicit that Ištar's directive for Aššurbanipal to refrain from joining her in battle is because he is meant to receive her support as if he were her child. Thus, the goddess expresses *rēmu* ('mercy') for Aššurbanipal, which also denotes 'womb'.[444]

Ištar's expression of parental support for Aššurbanipal leads to his pacification in the Prism B account. This combination of traits aligns with the formulation of the support provided for the crown prince by the goddess through the encounter of prince and king on Esarhaddon's Sam'al stele. To briefly recap Chapter IV's analysis of the stele, I posited that Ištar's support for Esarhaddon is expressed throughout the stele's inscription, which both outlines how the goddess arms Esarhaddon and goes at his side in battle but will also intervene in order to bind and feminise the future enemy who would damage the monument. In interpreting the stele's inscription relative to the monument, I argued that the image of Esarhaddon wielding the nose rope over his enemies while maintaining his visual relationship with the crown prince formulates their encounter in terms of the goddess' support for the king.

More simply put, I proposed that the interplay of image and text on the Sam'al stele conveys the message that Ištar acts for but also through Esarhaddon, who in turn is represented as binding and feminising Assyria's enemies in support of his heir through their encounter on the monument, which was intended to stand for perpetuity. As I will now begin to show through a closer analysis of the Prism B account of the conflict with Elam, even though Aššurbanipal is cast in a similarly protected role in his receiving of

[444] See discussion of *rēmu* in CAD R, 262–265. Scholars disagree as to whether Ištar is properly represented as a mother or a wet nurse for kings in this period. Compare, for example, Parpola 1997, Pongratz-Leisten 2003, Porter 2004a and, more recently, Arbøll 2023. Here I will proceed recognising her support as parental.

Ištar's support in this text as he is on Esarhaddon's monument, he is also described, like Esarhaddon on the monument, to secure the victory.

After the dream vision, the Prism B account continues to explain how in the month of Ulūlu (month VI), 'the work of the goddesses' (*šipir ištarāti*), Aššurbanipal raises his troops against Teumman following the decision of Sîn and Ištar and beheads him at the command of Aššur and Marduk.[445] Hence, whereas Ištar alone is envisioned to pursue Teumman in the vision, his defeat in battle is attributed to Aššurbanipal. After the above passage that describes Aššurbanipal's beheading of Teumman, the subsequent statement given in the Prism B account explains that the radiance of Aššur and Ištar envelops Elam, and, with the support of these deities, the Assyrian victory is assured.[446] This shows that, even when Aššurbanipal is credited, Ištar is still conceptualised as contributing to the cause.[447]

To support the above notion that Ištar is presented as an underlying support for Aššurbanipal throughout the Prism B account, it is necessary to engage directly with the previously suggested idea that the Prism B account might present two different and, possibly originally unrelated but juxtaposed, explanations for the defeat of Teumman. Traditionally, the inspiration for Aššurbanipal's interaction with Ištar as mediated through his prayer, her response and the vision has been attributed to a draft text intended to be inscribed on a bow that was dedicated to Ištar during the cultic presentation of the

[445] RINAP 5/2 Aššurbanipal 3, v 73- v 95a.

[446] RINAP 5/2 Aššurbanipal 3, v 95b.

[447] This ambivalence is mentioned but not explored further in Meinhold 2009, 231.

decapitated head of Teumman to the goddess.[448] Given this direct focus compared to the Prism B account, which records many important episodes of Aššurbanipal's reign, this tablet is dated to sometime during or shortly after the conflict of 653 BC occurred. The translation of this text is published by Daniel Luckenbill, and both sides of the tablet are quoted below for comparison with the above passages from the Prism B account.

> In the month Abu, the month of the appearance of the bow-star, of the feast of [the honored queen], I, Aššurbanipal, king of Assyria, raised my clean hands to [her exalted divinity]. It was on account of this insolence which Teumman, king of Elam, addressed to me, that I approached the exalted Ištar, took my stand in her presence, and bowed down...[449]

> At that time I seized that bow in my hands… Over the beheading of Teumman, king of Elam… The might of Ištar, my lady, I saw and I honored… That bow, which graces, my hands, which… To Ištar, conqueror of my foes… In the shrine, the abode of Ištar, lady… where Ištar, to make… With Ištar, my lady, let… who(?) that bow, the work… Ištar, the exalted among the gods... His bow may she shatter.[450]

Comparable to the Prism B account of the conflict with Elam, the events outlined in the prayer tablet inscription occur during the month of the bow star; Teumman's irreverence to Aššurbanipal is mentioned as an important cause of their conflict; a personal interaction between Aššurbanipal and Ištar is described; the goddess is presented as the supreme conqueror of Aššurbanipal's foes. It has therefore been suggested that, when composing the

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[448] K 2652. See Borger 1996, 101-103, as well as the translation in Luckenbill 1927, 359-360. A composite text that incorporates K2652 along with other draft dedication texts from Ištar's temple at Arbela is published as RINAP 5/2 Aššurbanipal 200.

[449] Luckenbill 1927, 360, No. 929.

[450] Luckenbill 1927, 360, No. 930.

Prism B inscription later in 649 BC, 'the author… had to rather clumsily stitch together' (Goldstein and Weissert 2018, 245-247) the focused bow dedication episode, which attributes the victory to Ištar, with the battle narrative that credits Aššurbanipal.[451] To the contrary, and building on Zainab Bahrani's (2008) interpretation of the sources pertaining to the conflict with Teumman in particular, it rather seems that the portrayal of both Ištar and Aššurbanipal as being responsible for the outcome of the battle in the account is not dissonant at all.

Bahrani interprets the physical changes undergone by Teumman at the start of the conflict with Elam as indicative of the battle's outcome. By engaging with the Babylonian scholar Esagil-kīn-apli's catalogue of the physiognomic omen series *Alamdimmû* and the medical symptom series *Sakikkû*, for which an Assyrian copy from Nimrud is known, Bahrani (2008, 48) makes the case that the physical changes undergone by Teumman during the conflict would have been interpreted in their ancient context as divinely caused 'somatic omens [that] were both portents of his individual destiny and the signs of the Assyrian victory to come'. In the case of the present exploration, it is especially relevant that these omens can be attributed to Ištar's collaboration with Sîn and Aššur, revealing the goddess' co-authorship of Teumman's fate from the outset of the Prism B account: [452]

> *ina* u_4*-me-šú-ma mi-iḫ-ru im-ḫur-šu-ma*
> NUNDUM-*su uk-tam-bil-ma* IGI.II-*šú is-ḫur-ma*

[451] Less cynically, Bach (2025, 184) has also suggested that Ištar's responsibility for the victory in heaven is mirrored by Aššurbanipal's beheading of Teumman on earth but concludes similarly that the attribution of the defeat of Elam to king and deity is a 'puzzling narrative inconsistency' as well as a 'discrepancy' that he cannot 'reconcile'.

[452] RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 3, v 11-15.

ga-ba-ṣu iš-šá-kin ina lìb-bi-šu
it-ti ep-še-e-ti an-na-a-ti šá AN.ŠÁR *u* ^{d}15
e-pu-šú-uš ul i-ba-áš id-ka-a ERIM.ḪI.A-*šú*

> At that time, an unfavourable event befell him: his lip became paralyzed, his eyes turned back, and a seizure had taken place inside him. He was not ashamed by these measures that Aššur and Ištar had taken against him. He mustered his troops.

Similarly to how Teumman's physical marking is enacted by the gods and notably including by Ištar at the outset of the Prism B account of the conflict, it would seem that the text, overall, presents coherent and interrelated interpretations of the conflict's progression. Indeed, the events are all to be understood as in some way being driven by Ištar. After all, it is Ištar's clouding of Teumman's mind at the beginning of the account that causes his initial dispute with Aššurbanipal:[453]

te-um-man
ki-a-am iq-bi šá ^{d}15 *ú-šá-an-nu-u mì-lik ṭè-me-šú*
um-ma ul ú-maš-šar a-di al-la-ku it-ti-šú
ep-pu-šú mit-ḫu-ṣu-tú

> Teumman, whose judgement Ištar had changed, spoke as follows, saying: 'I will not cease until I go (and) do battle with him'.

The temporal and spatial framing of the Prism B account reinforces the connection, as the preliminary events of the campaign are mentioned as coinciding with festivals associated with Ištar, while the narrative also begins and ends in the goddess' city of Arbela. Indeed, the introduction to the account notes that Aššurbanipal trusts in Ištar in the face of

[453] RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 3, v 21b-v 24a.

Teumman's irreverent bids for the return of fugitives.[454] Therefore, Ištar's unsheathing of her sword and pursuit of Teumman in the dream vision is also reflected, rather than challenged, by his execution at the hands of Aššurbanipal in the battle.

It is in the following month, when Aššurbanipal is residing in Arbela for a festival of Ištar associated with the rising of the bow star (*nanmurti qašti*), when he receives news of an Elamite attack.[455] In the context of the present discussion, this prompts recall of how the Sam'al stele inscription claims that Esarhaddon's march to Memphis took 15 days; the number associated with the goddess.[456] What emerges from this comparison is a complex picture of Ištar as well as the picture of the ruler's role relative to her. Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal are represented as being both agents and recipients of Ištar's intervention in the conflict in both case studies, but the key takeaway is that the goddess is always in control.

These case studies are also united in their representation of Aššurbanipal as receiving support from divine and royal parental figures in the context of his enemy's and his own pacification, even though he is incorporated into the Sam'al stele in the attire of the crown prince while in the Prism B account he is ostensibly king. The Prism B account's depiction of Aššurbanipal being comforted by Ištar in the role of parent while she pursues Teumman on his behalf compares favourably with his depiction as crown prince on the Sam'al stele. But, as I have attempted to show, the interrelated presentation of Teumman's

[454] RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 3, iv 80-v 4a.

[455] RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 3, v 16-24b.

[456] See discussion on p. 180.

beheading by Aššurbanipal in the Prism B account as a result of Ištar's sustained support means that he also acts as empowered king as Esarhaddon does on the Sam'al stele.

Perhaps most surprisingly, the comparison of monument and inscription reveals that the goddess' power to nullify action, whether through binding, as on the Sam'al stele, or soothing, as in the Prism B account, is not exclusively expressed in terms of the enemy. Ištar has the prerogative to decide who gets to be active and passive in the Prism B account as she does on Esarhaddon's monument: whether she is represented as instigating or cancelling out the intended military actions of Esarhaddon, Aššurbanipal, Teumman or the foreign and future enemies depicted and described on the stele.

While no crown prince is mentioned in the Prism B account, the description in the text of Aššurbanipal as the child of the goddess who must reside in the palace while she fights on his behalf is certainly coherent with the picture arising from my analysis of the formulation of the encounter of king and prince in terms of the relationship of king and goddess on the Sam'al stele. By the time of the conflict with Teumman of Elam, however, Aššurbanipal was not crown prince, and already the reigning king. I would suggest that the account presents Aššurbanipal as Ištar's child because, in the moment of his pacification by the goddess, he is being depicted as the crown prince. In the next section of this chapter, I intend to argue that Aššurbanipal's receipt of Ištar's support against Elam was visualised in part through his explicit representation as crown prince, and nuanced further, through an extended exploration of his celebrated Garden Scene relief.

Adapting the 'Encounter'

As outlined already in the introduction to this chapter, Aššurbanipal does not encounter his heir in any of his palace reliefs, but it seems to me that the relationship between the crown prince and queen is represented visually in one relief that was found fallen onto the floor in Room S of the North Palace at Nineveh (figs. 75-76), discovered by William Loftus in 1854.[457] The relief shows Aššurbanipal reclining on a couch and wearing a diadem before a crowned and enthroned beardless figure, who is identified as a queen.[458] This relief is referred to as the Banquet Scene or Garden Scene given that, on the one hand, the royal figures elevate bowls in the company of attendants and musicians and, on the other hand, they are represented beneath a grapevine canopy and set against a backdrop of alternating date palm and conifer trees.[459] It was previously thought that the relief represents and was originally displayed in a harem in Aššurbanipal's palace, although this view is outdated.[460] Because of the relief's findspot, important contextual clues are missing.[461] Thus, it is not possible to say how the room that the relief was originally displayed in was used, or by whom.

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[457] Loftus' reports, along with the measurements for this relief (140 cm x 58.5 cm), are published in Barnett 1976, 57. Room S was in the basement of the palace, so the relief did not fall from an 'upper level', as is often repeated in scholarship, but from the ground floor (also see the relevant discussion in Kertai 2015a, 179).

[458] For the earliest readings of the iconography, see Rawlinson 1871, vol. 1, 493 and Rassam 1897, 38-40.

[459] The alternating date palm and conifer tree pattern is discussed in Collins 2006b and will be engaged with later in this chapter. For a relevant recent discussion of the relief in the context of Neo-Assyrian garden imagery see also Amrhein 2015.

[460] See discussions in Barnett 1976, 19 as well as Albenda 1977. This is loosely based on an outdated interpretation of the Hittite Bīt-Ḫilāni concept (see also notably Kertai 2015a, 181).

[461] The position of this relief relative to surrounding reliefs was reconstructed by Gadd (1936, 179; pls. 40-42) based on drawings by William Boutcher. The drawings are also published with helpful notes in Barnett 1976, 56-57. See also the more recent reconstruction of the arrangement of these reliefs in Reade (2022, fig. 46).

Scholars have advanced many compelling and varied interpretations from the time of the relief's uncovering into the present decade.[462] Significantly, the Garden Scene is widely considered to be another witness to the conflict with Elam. Even though the relief bears no epigraph that makes this claim, the severed head of Teumman, which is identified by its similar appearance in reliefs depicting and describing the Battle of Tīl-Tūba from both the North and Southwest Palaces at Nineveh (fig. 78), is depicted hanging from a conifer tree situated to the far left of the scene.[463] Given the interrelated presentation of the head in the context of, to borrow the words of Anton Moortgat (1969, 157), the 'sort of intimacy' that would otherwise appear to be visualised through the royal interaction, the Garden Scene relief is understood as 'one of the most enigmatic' examples of Assyrian and Mesopotamian art more broadly (Barnett 1985, 1).

Unanimously, the diadem-wearer is understood to be a representation of Aššurbanipal. Mehmet-Ali Ataç (2010b, 132-133), despite his analysis of the encounter of king and crown prince, has surmised that it is 'likely that the use of [the diadem] motif in relation to the king was again in accordance with an Assyrian understanding of visual decorum', although he does not consider that the image of the king as crown prince represents him in that role.[464] More explicitly, David Kertai has argued that this figure cannot represent Aššurbanipal in the role of crown prince even though he identifies the

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[462] For example, and to mention only a few, Moortgat 1949 and 1969; Albenda 1977; Deller 1987; Schmidt-Colinet 1997; Collins 2004; Bahrani 2008; Root 2011; Ataç 2012; Feldman 2014, 100-104; Ataç 2018; Portuese 2023.

[463] In favour of the identification of Teumman see, for instance, Albenda 1977; Bahrani 2004 and 2008; Bonatz 2004; Collins 2006a; Álvarez-Mon 2009; Root 2011. For another view see May 2025.

[464] Zamazalová (2011, 326) notably suggested that the imagery might convey royal nostalgia but did not explore further.

diadem as belonging to that office because the crown prince is seen in earlier palatial reliefs wearing 'much more modest clothes' (Kertai 2020, 213) than the rosette-covered garment worn by (King) Aššurbanipal in this relief (e.g., fig. 28). In my view, this apparent dissonance can be illuminated by interpreting the image of the diadem-wearer relative to the rest of the scene, and especially by reconsidering his visual relationship with the crowned and enthroned queen, which I interpret as an adaptation of the king-crown prince encounter formula.

While queens are much better evidenced in Assyrian monumental imagery from the time of Sennacherib onwards, the representation of a queen in palatial relief imagery is currently unparalleled.[465] The queen has traditionally been identified as Aššurbanipal's wife, since the very early discussion of the relief by George Rawlinson (1871, vol. 1, 493), who stated that, because of this relief, 'we are enabled to contemplate at once the domestic life of the monarch and the attire and even the features of his consort'. In particular, the queen is understood to represent Libbāli-šarrat, who is otherwise represented in a similar crown and enthroned on an inscribed stele from Aššur currently held in the Vorderasiatisches Museum (VA 8847) that names her explicitly.[466] In his own later study of the relief, Mehmet-Ali Ataç (2018) similarly read the queen as Libbāli-šarrat, despite his earlier work on the encounter scene. In my view, the queen's representation in the palace relief, which insofar as it is currently possible to say would seem to be an anomaly, should be understood within the context of earlier palatial imagery.

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[465] For a comprehensive survey of Neo-Assyrian images of queens, see Ornan 2002.

[466] The stele's inscription is published as RINAP 5 Aššurbanipal 2001. Libbāli-šarrat's name was previously read by scholars as Aššur-šarrat (see Magen 1986, 39 fn. 33).

In his recent study of the relief, Kertai (2020) has stated that the queen would appear to occupy the most senior position status wise in the composition because she is crowned and enthroned, whereas the royal male is crowned but is laid under covers. To my mind, the relative position of the enthroned queen to the diadem-wearer in the Garden Scene must be directly compared to the relative position of the enthroned king to the crown prince in the Lachish relief depicted in Room XXXVI of the Southwest Palace (fig. 33). As briefly touched upon in Chapter IV, an inscribed fragment of a piece of cultic furniture now in the Louvre that names Naqīʾa (Zakūtu), Aššurbanipal's grandmother, bears a relief depicting the image of the queen behind the king (fig. 77).[467] As the king is depicted in this image wearing the royal fez, its comparison to the Garden Scene, in my view, makes it clear that the king's wearing of the diadem is an intentional choice that expresses his junior status relative to the queen.

As argued recently by Ataç (2018, 172), revisiting an earlier argument made by Reade (1987), the increasing visual prominence of queens in the Sargonid period might relate to the rise of notable individual women, such as Naqīʾa, at the royal court but their monumental visualisation also bears significance for the kingship theology.[468] As also touched upon in Chapter IV, Naqīʾa played a prominent role in ensuring the smooth accession of Aššurbanipal shortly after Esarhaddon's death by overseeing the swearing of a new *adê*.[469] While this is not to say that the image of the Garden Scene must represent

[467] See pp. 189-190.

[468] Images of queens were also regularly represented on seals at this time and may even be represented on Middle Assyrian seals (see Lassen 2020 for a discussion of the possible early evidence).

[469] This is the last clear witness to Naqīʾa in the historical record (see discussion in Melville 1999, 2).

Naqī'a or that the identification of this figure as Libbāli-šarrat does not stand, these contexts provide further support for the notion that the paternalistic relationship or encounter more usually represented between the king and crown prince is adapted here to express maternal queenly support for Aššurbanipal in this relief.

Similar to how the encounter of king and crown prince is formulated in terms of the relationship of the king and Ištar on the stele for Sam'al, I will now begin to make the case that the image of the queen in the Garden Scene also expresses maternal support for Aššurbanipal in the manner of Ištar's support for him as described in the Prism B account of the conflict with Elam. As far as the characterisation of Aššurbanipal as a recipient of Ištar's support in the Prism B account is reflected in the relief, the image recalls the goddess' pacifying support as envisioned in the recounted vision of the *šabru*. Certainly, Aššurbanipal's depiction in a relaxed position while music is made and dishes are brought is coherent with Ištar's reported instructions for him to eat, drink and make music while she secures the victory against Teumman on his behalf, and his representation before a crowned and enthroned matriarch equally recalls the goddess' command for him to worship her.[470]

It has been suggested already that the Garden queen's image is formulated in relation to Ištar imagery.[471] This is not least because of the goddess' associations with the throne and mural crown. Beginning the iconographic examination with the throne, Mullissu, who, as explored already in Chapter III, is interrelated with the Ištar of Nineveh persona, is similarly represented enthroned in the monumental rock reliefs carved at Maltai

[470] Gilibert (2018, 296) questions whether the text and relief are connected but does not explore further.

[471] See notably Moortgat 1949; Barnett 1976; Root 2011; Ataç 2018.

and Faida. The image of Ištar enthroned was also depicted on various seals, in some of which she faces human figures including figures identified as queens.[472] The limestone monument known as the White Obelisk that was discussed in Chapter I depicts the goddess enthroned and wearing a crown that looks somewhat like the crown worn by the queen in the Garden Scene.[473] This is as opposed to Ištar's frequently more shown type of crown that incorporates horns.[474]

Further support for the idea that the crown worn by Ištar on the White Obelisk is possibly connected, either directly or conceptually, to the Garden queen's crown may be found in its crenelation-like form. This so-called 'mural' crown visually expresses the association between wearers and the walls of cities.[475] The translated meaning of Aššurbanipal's wife, Libbāli-šarrat's name is 'the heart of the city is queen', but, even beyond her, queens were long associated with imperial spaces through their designation as, for example, MUNUS.É.GAL ('palace women').[476] This association is further conveyed

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[472] See discussion in Niederreiter 2024, 180-189. For a particular example, see an eighth century BC seal in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (7702).

[473] See pp. 26-27.

[474] Although the crowns worn by Neo-Assyrian queens are typically always identified as 'mural crowns', there are, at the minimum, slight variations between each of the known depictions. The crown worn by Ištar on the White Obelisk is most similar to the crown worn by Hama, Šalmaneser IV's queen. The seal was found in grave III of the queens' tombs at Nimrud (see Hussein 2016, pl. 133; ND 1989.332). Ultimately, it is unclear if the seal and the White Obelisk depict mural crowns. As Gansell (2018b, 65) points out, no wearable crown corresponding to any of the visual representations of queens' crowns has ever been found.

[475] For a useful discussion of this crown see notably Pinnock 2018, 735.

[476] See the relevant discussion of titles in Meinhold 2009, 243-244. As pointed out by Postgate (2001, 44-45), the association between queens and palaces is evidenced even in the Middle Assyrian period; see also, in particular, the Middle Assyrian letter report from Dūr-Katlimmu (modern Tell Sheikh Hamad) discussed by Postgate (2001) and a relevant inscription of Adad-nārārī I in which the king boasts that he captured the 'wife of the palace' of Uasašatta from his city Irridu. The inscription is published as RIMA 2 Adad-nārārī I 3.

through the crenelations that decorate the Garden queen's shawl, sleeve, the part of the dress that covers her knee, its lower fringing, and her footstool (fig. 76).[477] Ištar was, of course, closely associated with the Assyrian cities of Aššur, Nineveh and Arbela, so the visual references to city walls on the Garden queen's ensemble, in the context of the other visual reminders of Ištar's support against Elam, might altogether be seen to suggest firmly that the queen embodies the role of the goddess in the relief to support the crown prince as primary recipient, as Esarhaddon does on his stele for Sam'al.

Taking a more cynical view toward the plausible association between the depiction of the relief's queen and Ištar, however, it is important to point out that Ištar was not the only goddess associated with the mural crown and, in turn, Assyrian cities.[478] Indeed it is certainly tempting to envision, as Reade and Parpola notably have, that the image of the queen, as the wife of the king, would be formulated in relation to the image of this powerful goddess, especially given that, as Mullissu, Ištar was Aššur's spouse. However, as Wiebke Meinhold (2009, 240-244) has pointed out, there is a lack of direct evidence that queenship was formulated in particular relation to Ištar or in the form of Mullissu or her hypostases to Nineveh or Arbela, as opposed to other goddesses, during the Sargonid period. As Meinhold argues, there is a clearer case to be made for the exclusive formulation of the queen's image in relation to the scorpion goddess Išḫara.[479] Taking this

[477] See the discussion of these details in Ornan 2002, 476.

[478] In particular, Tašmētu is described to wear the mural crown (*kilīlu*) in SAA 3 14, 21.

[479] While, admittedly, Išḫara is another goddess that seems to have been interrelated with Ištar in some instances, she is nevertheless clearly distinguished from Mullissu in glyptic imagery by her iconic scorpion attribute and, insofar as it is possible to say, is not represented on the monumental scale as other Ištar personas are. See also Radner 2008 on the connection between queenship and Išḫara as well as Arbøll 2023.

salient point into account, and building on my argument advanced in Chapter IV in relation to the formulation of Esarhaddon's kingship in relation to Ištar on his stele for Sam'al, I will now begin to explore how Ištar imagery is used not only to formulate the image of the queen but, rather, to formulate the relationship between the royal dyad in the Garden Scene.

It seems to me that the case for the formulation of queenship in relation to Ištar in the Garden Scene grows stronger when considered in relation to the representation of the crown prince. Indeed, there are clues that the crown prince's image is also formulated in relation to Ištar in the relief. In particular, the prominent placement of the duck-headed bow on the table to the right of the recumbent prince connects this area of the relief to Ištar. She is styled as the bow breaker of Assyria's enemies in royal inscriptions more broadly, and she of course appears with a bow and quivers in the reported vision of the *šabru* outlined in the Prism B account. Moreover, the bow also appears in relation to Teumman's and, more generally, Elam's defeat in scenes depicting the Battle of Tīl-Tūba from Room I of the North Palace. In my view, these scenes provide relevant context for the Garden Scene.

While little remains of the reliefs and epigraphs that actually depict and describe the Battle of Tīl-Tūba from Room I of the North Palace, the depiction of the bow in these scenes provides important context for the Garden Scene and the notion that the crown prince is also represented to express Ištar's support through the relationship with the queen. The Room I reliefs are only preserved minimally. Reliefs 1-4 which flanked the northwest wall of the entrance to the room are lost besides a fragment of slab 1, which is now held in the British Museum (BM 124941).[480] The reliefs carved into slabs 5-10 that would have

[480] For slab 1 see Streck 1916, vol. 2, 314; Gadd 1936, 197, pl. 27; Barnett 1976, pl. 24.

originally been seen either side of the northwest corner of the room and on the north wall are, besides slab 9 (Louvre AO 19914), mostly lost and documented in drawings.[481] From what is possible to reconstruct, the lower register of the Room I reliefs depicts a battle along a river whereas the upper register depicts Aššurbanipal's triumphant entrance into a city.

The clearest evidence for the association between these reliefs and the Battle of Tīl-Tūba, which of course also took place upon the river Ulaya River, is slab 9. Known from the surviving fragment and the associated drawing, slab 9 shows the king standing between two divine standards on the battlements of a city (fig. 79). He holds a bow and stands before an altar while pouring a libation offering. Crucially, the head of Teumman lies before him.[482] The name of the city of Arbela is mentioned in a text inscribed on the relief, which is otherwise illegible, and a draft epigraph tablet found at Nineveh that describes the entry parade of Aššurbanipal into Arbela following the battle is also of relevance:[483]

> *a-na-ku* ^{m}AN.ŠÁR-DÙ-A MAN KUR ˹*aš-šur*˺.KI *ul-tu* UDU.SISKUR.MEŠ ^{d}*šat-*˹*ri*˺
> *aq-qu-u e-pu-šú i-sin-ni* É *a-ki-ti*
> *at-mu-ḫu* KUŠ.*a-šá-a-ti* ˹^{d}˺*iš-tar*
> *ina* ŠÀ ^{m}*du-na-ni* ^{m}˹*sa-am-gu*˺*-nu* ^{m}IBILA-*ia ù* KUD-*is* SAG.˹DU ^{m}*te-um*˺*-man*
> MAN KUR.ELAM.MA.KI *ša?* ^{d}˹*iš*˺*-tar* GAŠAN *im-nu-u qa-tu-*˹*u-a*˺
> *e-reb* URU.LÍMMU-DINGIR *e-pu-uš ina* ḪÚL.[MEŠ]

[481] For slab 9 see Place 1867–1870, vol. 3, pl. 41; Gadd 1936, 206-207, pl. 28; Barnett 1976, pl. 25. Other possible relief fragments from Room I are Louvre AO 22201 and AO 22199 (see Barnett 1976, 42).

[482] See further images and discussion in Albenda 1980.

[483] See RINAP 5/2 Aššurbanipal 161, iii 18'- iii 23' as well as the discussions in Bonatz 2004, 94-96 and Barnett 1976, 42-43.

> I, Aššurbanipal, king of Assyria, after I made offerings (to) the goddess Šatru (i.e., Ištar of Arbela); performed the *akītu*-festival; seized the chariot reins of Ištar, performed an entering of the city Arbela in joy in the company of Dunānu, Samgunu, Aplāya, and the decapitated head of Teumman, the king of Elam, which Ištar, the Lady, delivered into my hands.

While there is no image preserved of Aššurbanipal in the chariot described in this draft epigraph in the Room I reliefs, this text otherwise closely matches the scene showing the battlements, the head, the king and his offering. I would suggest that the depiction of the bow in the king's hands while he pours out an offering for Ištar in her city of Arbela in the Room I relief, considered in relation to the bow's resting position next to the recumbent prince in the Garden Scene, further reflects the notion that his kingship is formulated in both passive and active roles in the face of Ištar's support. This recognition informs how the depiction of the relationship between queen and prince in the Garden Scene may be understood relative to the rest of the scene. Indeed, this indicates that it is not only the image of the queen that is formulated in relation to Ištar, as Aššurbanipal's reiterated connection to the bow relative to the severed head in the North Palace imagery conveys his own role in securing the victory.

In what survives of slab 1 of the North Palace Room I Tīl-Tūba reliefs, an Assyrian soldier is shown holding an Elamite soldier by the hair and raising a dagger at an erect angle while his restrained foe uses his own dagger to cut his bow (fig. 80). The accompanying epigraph reads: [484]

> ⌜^{m}*i-tu-ni-i* LÚ.*šu-ut* SAG⌝ ^{m}*te-um-man* LUGAL KUR.⌜ELAM.MA.KI⌝

[484] RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 29, 1-4. This epigraph is also included in the above-mentioned draft tablet, see RINAP 5/2 Aššurbanipal 161, ii 8-ii 10.

šá ⌜*er-ḫa-niš iš*⌝*-tap-pa-raš-šú a-di maḫ-ri-*⌜*ia*⌝
⌜*ta-ḫa-zi dan-nu*⌝ *e-mur-*⌜*ma*⌝ *ina* GÍR AN.BAR *šib-*⌜*bi-šú*⌝
⌜GIŠ.PAN *si-mat* Á.II-*šu ik-si*⌝*-ma* ŠU.II *ra-ma-*⌜*ni-šú*⌝

> Itunî, a *šūt rēšī* of Teumman, the king of the land Elam, whom he provocatively sent again and again before me, saw my mighty battle array and, with his iron belt-dagger, cut with his own hand the bow, the appropriate symbol of his strength.

While the epigraph describes the cutting of the bow, the image depicts Itunî, who is introduced as *šūt rēšī* ('one of the head') of the king, doing this before his groin. In addition to Ištar's association with the bow, the Elamite army was widely recognised for its excellent prowess with the bow; in Assyrian sources as well as the Hebrew Bible.[485] Margaret Cool Root (2011, 436) already observed that this scene attests to the idea of 'Elamite weddedness to the bow as an extension of the male persona and its potentials' and suggested that this image 'may make direct allusion to the idea of fertility and prolific maleness'; certainly, Itunî's 'strength' is more directly translated as 'his arm' (*idīšu*).

Building on my earlier analysis of Ištar's feminisation of the enemy through the malediction included in the Sam'al stele inscription and Ištar's pacification of kings in the Prism B account of the conflict of Elam, it seems to me that the bow motif's double association with Ištar as well as Elam provides a useful lens through which to interpret the bow-cutting scene.[486] Even though Ištar is not otherwise represented in the Itunî relief or described in the epigraph accompanying the scene, I would suggest that the image of Itunî

[485] For example, Jeremiah 49:35. See also Álvarez-Mon 2023 and Álvarez-Mon and Wicks 2025.

[486] Dalley (2007, 74-78) has suggested that Ištar is referred to by the localisation Ištar of Elam through the associated image of the Bowstar constellation, which is also the subject of the festival on account of which Aššurbanipal visits Arbela at the same time Teumman launches his attack according to the Prism B account.

cutting his bow in the face of the Assyrian soldier's power over him, given the otherwise visualised outcome of battle, articulates the role of the goddess as an underlying support for Aššurbanipal and, by extension his army. I would therefore agree with Root's conclusion, based on my analysis of Esarhaddon's stele and the Prism B account, that the bow-cutting relief represents Elamite emasculation, but contextualise this within the overall view of Ištar's delivery of the victory.

Equipped with the visual context provided by the Room I imagery, and the knowledge that slab 1 was given important place on the central pilaster of that room despite the fact that little is known about the rest of the relief programme for this area of the North Palace, it becomes apparent that the emasculation of Elam is also represented in the Garden Scene. Significantly, the bow is depicted prominently on a table close to a fruiting date palm in the Garden Scene, so that the fruit hangs down over the bow. Informed by the Itunî relief, it is not hard to see that this hanging fruit resembles dropping testicles (fig. 81). This interpretation is further encouraged by the representation of a hand peeking out over the fruit from behind the tree trunk, which holds a long stick at an erect angle that extends the sexual imagery. It should be noted, however, that the trunk is at this point a modern restoration.

Further support for this interpretation may be found in the depiction of the non-fruiting date palm that is represented on the other side of the relief behind the queen (fig. 82). While the left-side date palm tree does not fruit, it is notable that the attendant standing in front of this tree elevates two ball-shaped objects on a platter in front of it. The representation of these objects in the context of the feasting imagery suggests that they might represent fruit. However, the representation of these objects directly in front of and

below the head of Teumman hanging from the conifer tree positioned to the left of the fruitless palm, in the context of the present analysis, leads me to query whether these objects might also be intended as further visualisations of Ištar's capacity to emasculate the enemy in the service of the Assyrian victory.

The trees themselves further visualise Ištar's reinforcing support in the relief. Like the bow, the date palm is another symbol directly associated with the goddess. In Aššurbanipal's Hymn to Ištar of Nineveh, the goddess is referred to as 'palm tree, daughter of Nineveh, stag of the lands'.[487] Paul Collins (2006b) has demonstrated through his diachronic study of Assyrian tree imagery that the fruiting palm, tied to Ištar, represents sexual productivity, especially when presented interspersed with conifer trees. Taking this argument further in the context of the present study, it is worth considering how, in comparison with the fruiting date palm's productivity, the leftmost conifer tree bears the head of Teumman even though conifer trees do not actually fruit. Recalling Bahrani's (2008) discussion of Teumman's mantic body, the depiction of the severed head with stubble rather than a full beard, which has also been decapitated since the battle scene would seem to suggest that, by divine involvement, Teumman was stripped of the task of being a bearded king, while also providing sufficient contrast with the beardless figures in the scene.

The alternating date palm and conifer tree pattern in the Garden Scene is further complemented by the contrast visualised between bearded and beardless figures in the foreground of the scene. The bow appears to make physical contact with one of the two beardless attendants of the prince who are depicted fanning him, directly connecting them

[487] SAA 3 7: ⌜GIŠ*⌝.GIŠIMMAR *bi-nat* NINA.⌜KI⌝ [*a*].*a-li* KUR.KUR-⌜MEŠ*⌝.

with the interpretation of the bow image. In addition to these two beardless attendants, the garden's queen is fanned by her own pair of beardless attendants who stand to the back of either set of legs of her throne. They are followed by another four beardless attendants, who hold fans, elevate platters, including the platter bearing the two ball shaped objects, and play music.

As noted throughout this chapter, the queen is primarily distinguished within the Garden Scene by her throne, crown and dress. In terms of what is preserved of her facial features, hairstyle and physique, she is, in keeping with the conventions of Assyrian imagery, otherwise not rendered differently to the beardless attendants that surround her and the reclining prince. This has, admittedly, been a matter of dissonance since the earliest analyses of the relief; some identify beardless attendants as always visually distinguished from palace women in Assyrian imagery whereas others recognise greater overlap.[488] I do not find the argument convincing that beardless attendants are always visually differentiated facially, bodily or in dress from representations of women. Indeed, the argument cannot even be made in this instance that the headbands worn by the beardless figures here distinguish them as women necessarily, as bearded figures are shown wearing identical headbands in one relief, now in the British Museum (BM 124788) showing Babylonians in Assyrian captivity from the North Palace.[489]

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[488] Compare, for example, Rawlinson (1871, vol. 1, 493), who identified these figures as eunuchs; Rassam (1897, 37) who withholds his opinion; Gansell (2014, 402), who, in her exploration of beardless figures in Neo-Assyrian palatial art, claims that 'Eunuchs are also characterized by pudgy faces, but this essay focuses on the feminine beauty of biological women'; Ziffer (2023, 77), who identifies these figures as eunuchs and identifies 'striking resemblance to the typical portraiture of the ideal elite woman'.

[489] Barnett 1976, pl. 66e.

It is pertinent at this juncture to briefly recall Constanza Schmidt-Colinet's (1997) outlier argument that the garden's queen is actually a eunuch: in particular, the Assyrian vassal king of Babylonia, Kandalānu.[490] Schmidt-Colinet's specific identification, first, of the queen as Kandalānu and, second, of Kandalānu, as a *šūt rēšī*, specifically a castrated *šūt rēšī*, is based on the well evidenced association between the date palm and the Babylonian landscape, as well as the idea that Kandalānu's name is thought to refer in some way to the idea of physical disability. While I would not necessarily support the argument for the identification of the garden's queen with Kandalānu or even a *šūt rēšī* specifically, the general notion that the garden's queen is visually connected to the beardless attendants seen around her is illuminating in and of itself for the present study.

In Chapter II of this thesis, I argued that the proliferation of images of beardless attendants in the reliefs from Sargon's palace at Dūr-Šarrukīn cannot be separated from the prominent visualisation of the relationship between the king and the crown prince in these reliefs.[491] I put forward the notion that the frequent representation of beardless attendants in these reliefs served to enhance the crown prince's encounter with the king by emphasising his beardedness comparatively. Given that the primary similarity expressed in the Garden Scene imagery is between queen and attendants, I propose that the strategy of representing visual contrast between bearded and beardless figures is adapted in the context of the visual representation of the encounter between queen and prince to draw attention to the idea that the queen, in ruling, and the attendants, in doting, are all depicted supporting the prince.

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[490] Relevantly, Rehm (2005) suggests that the figures represented at the miniature scale decorating Aššurbanipal's couch are eunuchs.

[491] See pp. 63-67.

In other words, whereas the king and crown prince are visually distinguished from the beardless attendants in the Khorsabad reliefs by their beardedness, in the Garden Scene, the prince's sole status as beard wearer distinguishes him from the group and yet, at the same time, emphasises his comparatively passive position to be waited on by them. I maintain that the garden's queen should primarily be understood as a maternal figure, especially in view of the crown prince's passive position. However, his own proximity to the bow in this relief at the same time articulates the notion that this support is not only passively received. While Ištar's military support in the Prism B account leads to Aššurbanipal's pacification, the depiction of the queen also lifting a bowl, and the otherwise tranquil nature of the scene, visualises his task as king to both receive Ištar's support and achieve the military outcome. In other words, Aššurbanipal's military responsibilities are not wholly dispensed of in the relief, as they are not dispensed of in the Prism B account; he is never fully at rest.

In this extended examination of the Garden Scene, informed by my reading of the Prism B account of the conflict with Elam, I have argued that it is primarily the relationship of queen mother and crown prince rather than either of their images that is formulated in relationship to Ištar. As I have also argued, this can be seen as an adaptation of the encounter scene. In the context of the earlier comparison of Esarhaddon's stele and the Prism B account, it may be concluded that the relationship of queen and prince in the relief is also formulated in terms of the royal relationship with Ištar, albeit arguably with more complexity. Ištar's support is primarily offered through both parties here and, crucially, their reciprocal relationship, which anchors the whole scene.

In her study of Esarhaddon's construction of Naqīʾa's image in this period, Sarah Melville (2004, 56) observed that the aim was for 'the son and the mother [to] each gain status from each other'. In the context of the Garden Scene, I would suggest that this continues to be true of the relationship of son and mother, but that Ištar's support is also clearly visualised as existing in the space between them.

The Relationship of the Prince and Queen

My integrated exploration of the Garden Scene in relation to the portrayal of Ištar's support against Elam as presented in the Prism B account has thus far led me to emphasise the goddess' representation as parental protector; the one who empowers Aššurbanipal. I have argued that the relationship depicted between the queen and the crown prince in the relief should be seen as an adaptation of the encounter formula that is seen in earlier Assyrian imagery between the king and the crown prince. As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, the queen has traditionally been identified with Aššurbanipal's wife, Libbāli-šarrat. In this section of my exploration, I aim to begin to reconcile this still prevalent view with the emphasis that I place on the relief's depiction of Aššurbanipal's partaking in a relationship with a maternal queenly figure, rather than only presenting my view as an alternate or divergent reading.

As Rawlinson (1871, vol. 1, 493) made clear in his early description of the relief, in addition to Libbāli-šarrat being otherwise similarly depicted and named in her own stele, as discussed above, she is thought to be the queen depicted in the Garden Scene because the relief has been thought to convey marital intimacy. Moreover, the depiction of

Aššurbanipal laying under covers relative to the depiction of food, drink and musicmaking has been interpreted as conveying a sexual dimension. In part on the basis of the love lyrics for Nabû and Tašmētu (SAA 3 14 21) discussed in Chapter IV of this thesis, which describe the union of these deities in a garden and the goddess' wearing of the mural crown (*kilīlu*), Ludovico Portuese (2023) has recently interpreted the Garden Scene in relation to the theogamy for that divine couple.[492] There does not appear to have been a place in Assyrian cultic calendars for rituals of union for Ištar and the king as there was for theogamies of Nabû and Tašmētu in the first millennium BC. However, scholars have previously interpreted the relief in terms of a sexual union of Ištar and the king given that they have otherwise identified Ištar imagery in the scene.[493]

My reading of the Garden Scene as an encounter between the crown prince and the queen mother in the aftermath of the victory over Elam, while not foregrounding the trope of the king's marital union with the goddess, does not foreclose the possibility that their theogamy may also be represented in the relief. Indeed, as Christopher Metcalf (2024, 120-122) has observed in his discussion of the Sumerian composition Išme-Dagan AB, royal youthfulness is an important quality of Inana's lovers. In terms of relevant Assyrian sources for the interpretation of the Garden Scene, Metcalf discusses a Middle Assyrian text written across two sides of one tablet. The tablet contains, on its obverse, a poem outlining Ištar's search for the lost Dumuzi and their loving reunion and, on its reverse, a mention of Ištar in relation to an Assyrian king's prayers; both sides mostly written in the

[492] See discussion of the love lyrics on pp. 15-16; 174-177 of this thesis.

[493] See notably Moortgat 1949, 139-140, who read the queen to be performing Ištar's role in the 'hieros gamos'. See also, for instance, Root 2011, 448-449 and Ataç 2018, ch. 6.

Babylonian dialect.[494] Although Metcalf gives an important reminder that the notion of the king as being married to Ištar, attested in Babylonia, is never attested in Assyria, the tablet prompts consideration as to whether this literary trope may have survived into later periods and informed the depiction of the relationship of queen and prince in the Garden Scene.

Pongratz-Leisten (2003, 155) has previously made the case that, at the end of the Isin-Larsa period, Ištar 'completely vanishes from the institutions of hierogamy and theogamy in order to assume her role as prophesying deity', in which capacity she maintains an intimate relationship to the kingship albeit not ostensibly in terms of a marital relationship. In his introduction to his publication of the corpus of prophetic texts from Arbela that were held in the royal archive at Nineveh (SAA 9), however, Simo Parpola (1997, XLVI-XLVIII) already suggested that the prophecies 'indicate familiarity with cultic love lyrics', calling into question the extent to which Ištar's role as prophesying deity should be seen as being at odds with her support for the kingship within the framework of theogamy.[495]

The prophecy corpus consists of eleven texts, in which various Ištar goddesses speak through the mouths of prophets (*raggimu*, fem. *raggintu*).[496] Seven of the thirteen

[494] The text is LKA 15 = LAOS 4.9, as discussed in Metcalf 2024, 130-131. The king is either the first Šalmaneser, who reigned in the 13th century BC, or the second Šalmaneser, who reigned at the beginning of the 11th century BC.

[495] Parpola 1997, XLVI-XLVIII.

[496] Some of these prophecy texts are recorded individually on their own tablets, whereas others are recorded as part of collections on larger tablets. Texts 1-6 are directed towards Esarhaddon whereas texts 7-11 are directed to Aššurbanipal. Note the alternate term used for prophecy in Akkadian is *mahhû*, fem. *mahhūtu*, which was discussed in relation to the transformation of royal enemies in ch. IV of this thesis.

named speakers in the corpus claim to be from Ištar's city of Arbela.[497] Of particular relevance to the present study is a text published by Parpola as the Report on a Vision and an Oracle to Aššurbanipal.[498] While the text is hard to date and is heavily fragmented because the entire obverse is destroyed, the message delivered through the prophecy seems to echo the sentiment expressed by Ištar of Arbela in the dream vision of the *šabru* in the Prism B account of the conflict with Elam that Aššurbanipal should reside in the palace while she assures victory on his behalf.

> ⌜LÚ⌝.KÚR *a-kaš-šad šá* ^{m}*aš-šur*—DÙ—A [*x x x x x x*]
> [*ma*]-⌜*a*⌝ *ši-bi* KUR.KUR *ú-taq-qa*-[*an x x x x x*]
> ⌜*ma*⌝-*a ina di-gi-li-ia* ⌜*pa*⌝-[*ni-i x x x x x*]
> [*a*]—*dan-niš kak-kab-tú šá* KUG.GI ⌜*an*$^{?}$⌝-[*x x x x x*]
>
> I will vanquish the enemy of Aššurbanipal [……] Sit down! I will put the lands in orde[r……] In my previous vision [……] very [much]; a golden star ornament [……][499]

Taking the connection between Ištar's instruction for Aššurbanipal to 'sit down' (*šībi*) in this prophecy text and the Prism B account of the conflict of Elam as a point of departure, in the following exploration of the portrayal of the support Ištar provides for the kingship in the prophecy corpus I aim to illuminate the relationship of queen and prince in the Garden Scene. Ultimately, I will consider how my reading of the relationship depicted as

[497] Note exception: one prophet speaks for Aššur.

[498] This text is published as SAA 9 11.

[499] SAA 9 11 r, 4-7 (translation Parpola 1997).

that of queen and crown prince may be further informed by the picture of the relationship of Ištar to the kingship propagated throughout the corpus.

First, the relationships between Esarhaddon, Aššurbanipal and Ištar are depicted as being immensely loving and distinguished from all other relationships. Ištar of Arbela tells Esarhaddon, who she calls 'son of Mullissu' that she is: 'mindful of you, I have loved you greatly'.[500] Moreover, another text addressed to Aššurbanipal begins '[O proté]gé of Mullissu, […] of the Lady of Arbela! [They] are the strongest among the gods; they [lov]e and keep sending their love [to] Aššurbanipal… [They g]ive him heart for the sake of his life'.[501] Essentially, this text reminds Aššurbanipal that he is loved by the goddesses, who are his staunchest advocates. As the text continues, we learn that Ištar has 'ordained life for [Aššurbanipal] in the assembly of all the gods. My arms are strong, they shall not forsake you before the gods'.[502] Another text directed to Esarhaddon concurs: Ištar will 'reconcile the angry gods with Assyria'.[503] In another text, Ištar directly compares her loyalty to Esarhaddon with the lack of loyalty shown to him by his subjects, saying: 'Mankind is deceitful; I am one who says and does'.[504] The message is clear: Ištar, no matter which

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[500] SAA 9 1, iv 20-iv 25 (translation Parpola 1997; [*e-nu*] DUMU ^{d}NIN.[LÍL] *ḫi-is-sa-at*-[*ka*] *ḫa-sa*-[*ku*] *ar-ta-am*-⌜*ka**⌝ *a*—^{d}*an*-[*niš*]).

[501] SAA 9 9, 1-7 (translation Parpola 1997; [*ki-din*]-*nu šá* ^{d}⌜NIN⌝.LÍL [*(x) x x*] *ša* ^{d}GAŠAN—URU.⌜*arba*⌝-*il* [*ši-na*]-⌜ma⌝ *ina* DINGIR.DINGIR *dan-na* [*i-ra*]-⌜ʾ*a**⌝-*a-ma u* ÁG-*ši!-na* [*a-na*] ^{m}*AN.ŠÁR—*ba-an*—A DÙ-*ut* ŠU.2-*ši-na* [*il*]-⌜*ta*⌝-*nap-pa-ra šá* TI.LA-*šú* [*ú-šá*]-⌜*áš*⌝-*ka-na-šu* ŠÀ-*bu*).

[502] SAA 9 9, 16-17 (translation Parpola 1997: *ina* UKKIN* DINGIR-MEŠ *ka-la-me aq-ṭi-bi ba-la-ṭa-ka dan-na rit-ta-a.a la ú-ram-ma-ka ina* IGI DINGIR-MEŠ).

[503] SAA 9 2, iii 19-21 (translation Parpola 1997: ^{m}⌜*aš-šur*—PAB—AŠ⌝ *la ta-pa-làḫ* KUR—*aš-šur ú-ta-qa-an* DINGIR-MEŠ ⌜*ze*-nu*-ti** TA^{v}* KUR*—*aš-šur* ú*-sal*-lam**⌝).

[504] SAA 9 2, ii 17-ii 20 (translation Parpola 1997: *a-me-lu-tu ṭùl-lu-ma-a a-na-ku ši-i qa-bi-tu e-pi-is-su* DUMU.MÍ *ḫu-bur-tu a-na-ku ú-ṣa-a-na ú-*⌜*ba*-ra ad-da*⌝-[*nak*]-*ka**).

manifestation, has a special relationship with the king; she loves him more than the other gods.

Ištar makes statements of great promise to Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal in the prophecy corpus, defining the relationship as one of immense loyalty. The goddess continually assures her faithfulness throughout the corpus. As Parpola points out, at least twelve of the texts contain a 'fear not' clause.[505] In one text, Ištar of Arbela exhorts 'Have no fear, my king! I have spoken to you, I have not lied to you; I have given you faith, I will not let you come to shame. I will take you safely across the river'.[506] In another text, she says to Esarhaddon: 'What words have I spoken to you that you could not rely upon?'.[507] As the goddess has already proven her fidelity to Esarhaddon, she asks him to trust her wholly. The goddess' commitment to Aššurbanipal is to be understood as beyond all limitations. In a particularly visceral passage, she declares: 'I roam the desert desiring your life. I cross over rivers and oceans, I traverse mountains and mountain chains, I cross over all rivers'.[508]

Ištar's relationships with Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal are presented in terms of the goddess' immense desire to be physically close to them, even while not being overtly sexual. To Esarhaddon, Ištar says: 'Like a winged bird ov[er its young] I will twitter over

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[505] Parpola 1997, lxv.

[506] SAA 9 1, iii 30-iv 4 (translation Parpola 1997: *la ta-pa-làḫ* LUGAL *aq-ṭi-ba-ak la as-li-*ˈ*ka*ˈ *ú-ta-ki-*ˈ*il*ˈ-[*ka*] *la ú-ba-áš-*[*ka*] ÍD *ina tu-qu-un-ni ú-še-ba-ar-ka*).

[507] SAA 9 1, i 16-i 17 (translation Parpola 1997: *ša a aq-qa-ba-kan-ni ina* UGU-*ḫi la ta-zi*ˈ*-zu-u-ni*).

[508] SAA 9 9, 8-11 (translation Parpola 1997: [*ba-la*]-*ṭa-ka er-šá-a-ku-ma a-rap-pu-da* EDIN [*e*]-ˈ*ta*ˈ-*nab-bir* ÍD-MEŠ *u tam-tim*-MEŠ ˈ*e-ta*ˈ-*na-at-ti-iq* KUR-MEŠ-*e ḫur-sa-a-ni e-*ˈ*ta*ˈ-*nab-bir* ÍD-MEŠ *ka-li-ši-na*). Halton (2009, 57-59), following Parpola, suggests that this passage alludes to Gilgameš Tablet 10, 251-255.

you and go in circles around you. Like a beautiful cub I will run about in your palace'.[509] In another text, the goddess says: 'Droughts and showers consume me and affect my beautiful figure. I am worn out, my body is exhausted for your sake'.[510] Ištar's desire for physical proximity derives from protective instinct. She intends to 'cover' Esarhaddon's 'figure', offering 'shelter'.[511] Aššurbanipal will be placed 'between [Ištar's] breasts (like) a pomegranate'.[512] Comparable to the picture of the goddess arising from the Prism B account of the conflict of Elam, Ištar is the king's 'midwife' and 'wet nurse'.[513] He is 'her calf in the city'.[514] At the same time, cohering with the picture of the goddess' expansive relation to gender discussed in this thesis with respect to the Sam'al stele of Esarhaddon, Ištar is both the king's 'father and mother', who 'raised' him 'between [her] wings'.[515]

The goddesses' relationships with Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal lead to her bestowal of blessings upon them, as is well established as the main outcome of the goddess' relationship with the king in mode of theogamy. Ištar promises Esarhaddon that

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[509] SAA 9 2, ii 6-ii 10a (translation Parpola 1997: *a-ki iṣ-ṣur a-kap-pi ina* ˹UGU*˺ [AMAR-*šú*] *ina* UGU-*ḫi-ka a-ṣab-bur ina bat-*˹*bat*˺-[*ti*]-˹*ka*˺ *a-la-ab-bi a-sa-ḫu-ur a-ki mu-r*a^{l}-*ni dam*^{l}-*qí ina* É.GAL-*ka a-du-al*). Ištar is compared to various animals in the prophecy corpus (see Bosworth and Tosatto 2022).

[510] SAA 9 9, 12-15 (translation Parpola 1997: *e-*˹*ta*˺-*nak-kal-a-ni ia-a-ši ṣe-*˹*ta*˺-*a-te sa-rab-a-te il-ta-nap-pa-ta ba-nu-ú la-a-ni an-ḫa-*˹*ku**˺-*ma šá-ad-da-lu-pu-ka la-a-ni-ia*).

[511] SAA 9 2, iv 21-iv 22 (translation Parpola 1997: [*(x) x x x x*] *gat*-ta-ka a-ši*-al* [*bir-ti i*]-˹*zi**˺-*ri-ia*).

[512] SAA 9 7, r 9-r 10 (translation Parpola 1997: *šá mu-ši-ia e-rak an-ṣar-ka šá kal*—UD-*me ḫi-il-pa-ka ad-dan šá kal-la-ma-ri un-na-ni-ka ú-ṣur ú-ṣur up-pa-áš-ka*).

[513] SAA 9 1, iii 15-iii 18 (translation Parpola 1997: *sa-ab-su-ub-ta-*˹*ka*˺ *ra-bi-tu a-na-ku mu-še-*˹*niq**˺-*ta-ka de-iq-tú a-na-ku*).

[514] SAA 9 1, v 29-v 30 (translation Parpola 1997: *mu-ri-šá a-na bi-rit* URU).

[515] SAA 9 2, iii 26 (translation Parpola 1997: *a-na-ku* AD-*ka* AMA-*ka*).

his ‘enemies will roll before [his] feet like ripe apples (lit. apple trees of Simanu)’.[516] She also promises to grant him ‘long days and everlasting years in the Inner City’.[517] In another text, Ištar decrees ‘my king! The kingdom is yours, yours is the power!’.[518] Moreover, she promises ‘safe food and… water, [safety in his] palace’.[519] Indeed, as in the mode of theogamy, Ištar’s relationships with Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal serve to secure their kingships. Thus Ištar’s military involvement ‘will abolish the frontiers of all the lands’.[520] Their succession will also be secured as Ištar promises that both ‘son and grandson shall rule as kings on the lap of Ninurta’.[521] Reflecting on the overall picture, although Ištar is not represented in a sexual role in relation to Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal in the prophecy corpus, it is clear that the relationship of the goddess to the kingship continues to be formulated as being wholly generative in terms of dynastic continuity.

Bringing to bear these insights on my reading of the Garden Scene relief, it seems to me that Ištar’s promise to deliver Esarhaddon’s enemies as if they were fruit coming forth from apple trees aligns well with the representation of the head of Teumman hanging from a conifer to the left of the relief. Given the presence of the head in the relief, Ištar’s

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[516] SAA 9 1, i 9 (translation Parpola 1997: *ki-i šá-aḫ-šu-ri ša* ITI.SIG$_4$).

[517] SAA 9 1, iv 14-iv 17 (translation Parpola 1997: ^{m}*aš-šur*—PAB—AŠ *ina* URU.ŠÀ—URU UD-MEŠ ar-ku-u-ti MU-MEŠ *da-ra-a-ti a-da-nak-*⌜*ka*⌝).

[518] SAA 9 1, v 21-v 23 (translation Parpola 1997: LUGAL *la ta-pa-làḫ* LUGAL-*tú ik-ku-u da-na-nu ik-ku-u-ma*).

[519] SAA 9 1, vi 22-v 26 (translation Parpola 1997: *ak-lu taq-nu ta-kal* A-MEŠ *taq-nu-ti ta-šá-at-ti ina* ŠÀ-*bi* É.GAL-*ka ta-taq-qu-un*).

[520] SAA 9 2, ii 15-ii 16 (translation Parpola 1997: *ta-ḫu-ma-a-ni ša* KUR.KUR *ú-ga-am-mar a-da-nak-ka*).

[521] SAA 9 1, vi 27-vi 30 (translation Parpola 1997: DUMU-*ka* DUMU—DUMU-*ka* LUGAL-*u-tú ina bur-ki šá* ^{d}MAŠ *ú-pa-áš*).

delivery of the victory against Elam in the Prism B account as if she were Aššurbanipal's birthmother, and the prior visual context of the encounter scene, I maintain my reading of the Garden Scene as depicting the relationship of queen mother and crown prince and, through their relationship, Ištar's support for the kingship. My analysis of the prophecy corpus however suggests that this image of both divine and royal mother-child relationships may plausibly encompass a wider spectrum of intimacies.

It has been mentioned above already that the relief derives from an inner area of the North Palace for which no definitive use or occupancy is known. Nevertheless, the present reconsideration prompts consideration as to how the imagery may have been interpreted in its ancient setting, and particularly by the royal women at court. The relief may have been encountered by women of all life stages and with varying degrees of connection to the king. On the one hand, as I have argued throughout this chapter, the image of the crowned queen enthroned and providing support for the crown prince might have prompted respect for senior female relatives, reinforcing hierarchy and conveying the aspirational nature of this position. At the same time, the layered image of the relationship of prince and queen arising from the relief may have also reminded viewers of the supportive roles that they might all play in their intimate encounters with the king, regardless as to the exact relational dynamics involved, and how their support might have an active role in maintaining the kingship by offering their relative some respite.

In her analysis of the prophecy corpus, Pongratz-Leisten (2003, 160) has argued that Ištar 'constantly trespasses and effaces the boundaries between the divine and the human world, raising the crown prince to a status which leaves the societal family structure behind, and makes him participate in the concept of the divine order'. In the context of my

reading of the Garden Scene, I rather think that the opposite is true. It seems to me that the relief depicts the goddess entering the societal family structure in this relief, and to expansive representational consequences for the depiction of the relationship between the queen and the crown prince. Recalling Strathern's (2019) language for modes of divinisation, I would also suggest that it is not the status of the king, or even the queen, that is 'ambiguated' here, but rather the roles that they are represented to occupy in relation to each other. In the following section of this chapter, I will take this idea of relational ambiguation further, exploring how this theme may be apprehended in other imagery.

Ambiguation in Relation to Ištar

In my examination of Ištar's provision of support against Elam in both the Prism B account of the conflict and the Garden Scene relief, I have established that Aššurbanipal's kingship is formulated with relational complexity relative to the goddess. Proceeding from this analysis, I intend to examine two further instances where Aššurbanipal's kingship is formulated in terms of complexity in relation to Ištar. While I have considered the remains of the North Palace Room I relief imagery depicting the Battle of Tīl-Tūba as part of my exploration of the Garden Scene, I first turn to examine the more complete depiction of the battle and its aftermath from the Southwest Palace at Nineveh (fig. 83), which was built by Sennacherib but further decorated during Aššurbanipal's reign.[522] Second, I will examine

[522] Aššurbanipal does not mention working on Sennacherib's palace in his own royal inscriptions, however the reliefs and epigraphs make the attribution of the reliefs to his reign certain. As documents traditionally understood to comprise the 'library' of Aššurbanipal were found in this area of the palace, early excavators 'in most instances were only interested in acquiring cuneiform tablets or sculptured slabs. Because they did

reliefs depicting Aššurbanipal hunting lions from his own North Palace. In both cases, it is possible to detect ambiguity in the depiction of Aššurbanipal's kingship; whether he is to be understood, in the Tīl-Tūba reliefs, as participating in the battle and, in the lion hunting reliefs, as the king or crown prince. Engaging Strathern's (2019, 155) perspective that divinising strategies for kingship served to 'ambiguate the ontological status of incumbents so that they are in-between things', I will explore how this notion applies to the depiction of Aššurbanipal as formulated through his relationship with the goddess.

Room XXXIII of the Southwest Palace at Nineveh was located within the residence's second and larger inner courtyard (Court XIX). The lavishly decorated spaces in this area were, in turn, sequenced into three central zones with flanking symmetrical chambers. Room XXXIII was situated on the southeast side, with lion or sphinx colossi facing into it (Layard 1853, 446). The backs of the stone slabs lining the walls of this room were inscribed with the name and titles of Sennacherib, but the fronts were carved with reliefs depicting, and epigraphs describing, the Battle of Tīl-Tūba.[523] The first three slabs of this relief sequence (slabs 1-3), now held in the British Museum (BM 124801a-c), represent the Assyrian pursuit of the Elamites into the Ulaya River and, crucially, the

not appreciate the importance of making accurate records of their discoveries, our knowledge of the plan of the building remains very sketchy and full of problems' (Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998, 37).

[523] Layard 1853a, 459. See the useful catalogue of the known Room XXXIII reliefs, including fragments of uncertain placement within the room, in Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998, 94-100. There are at least eight related epigraphs: see RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 25-28 and RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 5 as well as 33-36. See, notably, Reade 1970, 326-334; Reade 1979b, 96-101; Russell 1999, 166-205 and Nadali 2018 on the relationship between the reliefs and epigraphs. Additional epigraphs are known from a set of tablets that are thought to be in some way related to the wall contents, including the above-described tablet that includes the description of Aššurbanipal's victorious entrance into Arbela and celebration of the *akītu* for Ištar.

execution of Teumman and the capture of his son Tammarītu by Assyrian soldiers.[524] The second three slabs of this sequence (slabs 4-6), also held in the British Museum (BM 124802a-c), depict triumphal celebrations and the appointing of a new king of Elam.[525]

Aššurbanipal is only represented as part of a scene showing the triumph after the battle, where he stands in a chariot (fig. 84), and does not participate in the battle directly.[526] The visual impression of Aššurbanipal's absence during the battle is however complicated by the epigraphs that accompany the scenes depicting the Assyrian troops engaged.[527] One scene depicts an Assyrian soldier in a left-facing chariot brandishing the decapitated head of Teumman (fig. 78) carved into slab 1, and its accompanying epigraph reinforces the visual representation of the soldier's culpability as it reads: [528]

SAG.DU ^{m}*te-um-*[*man* MAN KUR.ELAM.MA.KI]
ša ina MURUB$_4$ *tam-*˹*ḫa*˺-[*ri ik-ki-su*]
a-ḫu-ru-u ERIM.ḪI.A-*ia a-na pu-*˹*us*˺-[*su-rat*]
ḫa-de-e ú-šaḫ-ma-ṭu a-na KUR ˹AN˺.[ŠÁR.KI]

[524] Layard 1853a, 446-450; Layard 1853b, pls. 45-46; Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998, 95.

[525] Layard 1853a, 451-458; Layard 1853b, pls. 47-49; Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998, 97.

[526] It has already been suggested that the choice to visually depict the king at one remove from the conflict, which would appear to have become convention from the time of Sennacherib as is evidenced by the Southwest Palace Room XXXVI reliefs that depict the siege of Lachish, is significant in terms of expressing the god-like status of the king (see, for example, Uehlinger 2003, 288; Nadali 2013, 76).

[527] There are at least eight related epigraphs: see RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 25–28 and RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 5 as well as 33–36. See notably Reade 1970, 326-334; Reade 1979b, 96-101; Russell 1999, 166-205 on the relationship between the reliefs and epigraphs. Additional epigraphs are known from a set of tablets that are thought to be in some way related to the wall contents, including the above-described tablet that includes the description of Aššurbanipal's victorious entrance into Arbela and celebration of the *akītu* for Ištar.

[528] RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 27, 1-4.

> The head of Teum[man, the king of Elam], which a junior in my army [had cut off] in the midst of bat[tle]. They hastened to As[syria] for the mes[sage] of joy.

However, the scene on slab 3 that actually shows the execution of Teumman by an Assyrian soldier (fig. 86) is accompanied by an epigraph that attributes the act to Aššurbanipal, who further attributes the deed to Aššur and Ištar.[529]

> ^{m}*te-um-man* MAN KUR.ELAM.MA.KI *šá ina* MÈ *dan-ni*
> *muḫ-ḫu-ṣu* ^{m}*tam-ri-i-tú* DUMU-*šú* ⌜GAL⌝-*u*
> ŠU.II-*su iṣ-ba-tu-ma a-na šu-zu-ub* ⌜ZI-*tì-šú*⌝
> *in-nab-tú iḫ-lu-pu qé-reb qiš-ti*
> ⌜*ina tukul*⌝-*ti* AN.ŠÁR *u* ^{d}15 *a-nar-šú-nu-ti*
> ⌜SAG⌝.DU-*šú-nu* KUD-*is mé-eḫ-ret a-ḫa-meš*
>
> Teumman, the king of Elam who had been struck in the strong battle; whose hand Tammarītu, his great son, had seized; they fled to save his (i.e., Teumman's) life; slipped into the forest. With the support of Aššur and Ištar, I killed them. I cut off their head(s) in front of one another.

Ištar's support in the conflict is also visualised in the Southwest Palace Tīl-Tūba reliefs. Aššurbanipal's chariot has already been identified as Ištar's chariot based on the draft epigraph explored earlier in this chapter as part of my discussion of the reliefs from Room I of the North Palace that depict the battle. Moreover, while Aššurbanipal's chariot is only partly preserved in the Southwest Palace relief, it is represented on a grandiose scale and the horse that can be seen drawing it wears an elaborate headdress. A horse is shown wearing a similar headdress leading the royal chariot in another relief of Aššurbanipal's from Court XIX of the Southwest Palace (fig. 85). In that relief, now also held in the

[529] RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 26, 1-6.

British Museum (BM 124825), the horse bears a roundel that carries the image of Ištar.[530] Through the following examination of chariot imagery as it pervades the Tīl-Tūba composition more broadly, and building in particular on Zainab Bahrani's (2008) analysis of the repeated depiction of the head of Teumman in the reliefs, I will consider how the image of Aššurbanipal taking the chariot reins is formulated in relationship with Ištar.

> At first glance, the three panels appear to depict a chaotic mass of bodies strewn across the pictorial space with little consideration for composition. The surface is densely covered with a melange of horses, asses, chariots, and human bodies moving in all directions. Perspective is nonexistent or, at best, seems to change arbitrarily from one section to the next. There seems to be no focal point. Everything about the composition seems to be the opposite of what we are trained to see as 'a composition': It is a clutter seemingly born of *horror vacui*.[531]

Bahrani identifies the repeated presence of the head of Teumman in the reliefs, which is made more apparent by his distinguished facial features, as a visual anchor for an otherwise chaotic scene.[532] While the overall composition is given structure through the division of the relief slabs into three horizontal registers, the crammed and disordered portrayal of the battle is otherwise overwhelming. As mentioned above in my own reading of the Prism B account of the conflict with Elam, Bahrani has argued that the depiction of Teumman's facial features reflects his marking by the gods (i.e., Sîn and Ištar) with

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[530] Layard 1853a, 439; Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998, 82.

[531] Bahrani 2008, 25-27.

[532] As argued by Collins (2006a), the depiction of Teumman with a hooked nose, pointed chin, receding hairline and long hair and beard, compared with the images of the other Elamites, reflects stylistic development to depict individualised rather than generic enemies. These features would presumably have been more identifiable still when viewed in their original painted colours. This tendency is, as mentioned in ch. IV, also hinted at in the representation of the Egyptian crown prince in the Sam'al stele.

physiognomic omens of his destiny. In a comparable manner to how the presence of the bow in the Garden Scene and the Room I slab 9 relief recalls Ištar's provision of support in the conflict, I suggest that Ištar's influence is also recalled by the relationship of the repeated head in the Southwest Palace Tīl-Tūba reliefs to the repeated chariot imagery.

The division of the Tīl-Tūba composition into three horizontal registers that are characterised by the interplay of upright Assyrian troops and laid out Elamite troops is broken by the circular forms of the Assyrian and Elamite chariot wheels that appear scattered across the composition. Each wheel contains spokes, though they vary in number, which indicates that they are spinning in motion. Most significantly, the right-most chariot in slab 2 would appear to be represented upside down, as Teumman and his son Tammarītu are depicted during being thrown from the vehicle (fig. 87). In the fallout, Teumman is also shown to lose his royal hat.

While the Prism B account of the conflict does not mention the failing of Teumman's chariot, the image of him being thrown from his chariot in the reliefs contrasted with the image of Aššurbanipal taking the reins of Ištar's chariot in triumph recalls the deity's role as an unseen hand or underlying structural force that moves events on both sides. Indeed, based on the formulation of the relationship of Ištar to the victory in the Prism B account, one wonders whether the wheel spokes of the far-left bottom chariot of slab 1 of the reliefs marking eight points, like an eight-pointed star, might express Ištar's support.[533] Ernst Gombrich (1984, 138) notably discusses such 'radial' imagery, arguing that, 'Most people will tend to see the schematic picture of the sun (i.e., a disc with eight

[533] Of course, chariot wheels also bear slight visual resemblance to the rosette, which is another motif associated with Ištar (see the useful overview of rosette imagery in Albenda 2020).

lines attached to it) with its black lines as rays shooting outwards… But an enclosing line inhibits it'. If one is to accept the association between the depiction of the chariots in the reliefs and Ištar's delivery of the victory, the goddess' presence might in some way be seen as being contained within these wheels, overwhelming the vehicle to the Elamites' demise.

Certainly, the epigraph above the scene showing Assyrian soldiers clubbing Tammarītu and decapitating Teumman, which attributes the execution to Aššurbanipal's collaboration with Ištar and Aššur makes the king and both deities textually present as one unit, even though they are all ostensibly absent, anyway. The depiction of Aššurbanipal at one remove from the battle proper in the reliefs is certainly coherent with the image of the recumbent prince in the Garden Scene, and, ultimately, Ištar's instruction for Aššurbanipal to not participate in battle directly. In each of these case studies, his relationship to the goddess is reflected by his depiction in an ambiguous, or at least a dual, position.

The lion hunting reliefs are, as mentioned during the earlier discussion of the Garden Scene, thought to have been displayed in the centre of the North Palace (Rooms C, D, and E) as well as the rear of the building (corridors A, R, and vestibule S).[534] It has been suggested that Sennacherib and Esarhaddon 'ascended the throne as mature men, and had perhaps little interest in the prestigious and perilous game of hunting lions' (Reade 2018, 54). However, it is otherwise well recognised that the activity these reliefs show are not profane hunts but ritualistic activities that exhibit divine support for the king through the display of his capacity to control even the most dangerous aspects of nature.[535] Lion hunts

[534] See the comprehensive treatment in Barnett 1976.

[535] See, for example, Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951; Frankfort 1954; Albenda 1974; Winter 1981; Winter 1997; Bahrani 2003; Ataç 2010b; Collins 2014; Zenzen 2018; N'Shea 2022; Ornan 2023; Nadali 2024.

are depicted in the wall paintings that were identified among the remains of an Assyrian palace at Til Barsip uncovered at Tell Ahmar.[536] Earlier still, these hunts were represented as an important part of the programmatic arrangement of reliefs in the throne room of Aššurnaṣirpal II at Kalḫu, as briefly touched upon in Chapter II, where libations are also poured in the context of the hunt indicating ritual significance.[537]

The connection between the lion hunting scenes and Ištar is well established.[538] The connection between Ištar and hunting is further witnessed in the White Obelisk, discussed in Chapter I, which is thought to have been displayed close to Emašmaš. As mentioned, the obelisk depicts the worship of Ištar, who is crowned and enthroned, as well as lions being hunted in the context of the hunt of other animals.[539] Lions are one of Ištar's definitive symbols, visualised on the monumental scale in the Sargonid period through Ištar's (and Mullissu's) standing on a lion support in the rock reliefs at Khinis, Maltai and Faida as well as on the eighth century BC stele showing the mounted Ištar of Arbela from Tell Ahmar (fig. 88), now held in the Louvre (AO 11503).[540] Textual evidence indicates that Assyrian cult statues of Ištar, which do not survive antiquity, also depicted her mounted in this manner, and this imagery is, furthermore, attested from Urartian contexts, evidencing its broad spread.[541]

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[536] Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936, pl. LII.

[537] Gadd 1936, 133.

[538] See, for instance, Gerardi 1988, 27-28.

[539] See discussion in Reade 2022, 56-68.

[540] Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936, pl. 156.

[541] See discussion in Zenzen 2018, 193

Ištar's standing on the lion in these contexts represents her mastery over and transformation of the animal into a trophy. Ištar is never depicted hunting lions and Aššurbanipal is, by comparison, never depicted standing on a lion but the representation of him hunting lions is analogous to this prerogative. A fragmentary text from Nineveh contains a dedication of Aššurbanipal's lion hunt to Mullissu.[542] Aššurbanipal is depicted using a duck-head bow in the lion hunt that is thought to be an Elamite style and the same bow that he dedicates to Ištar.[543] As in the Garden Scene, Aššurbanipal is depicted wearing the crown prince's diadem in this particular relief (fig. 90), even though, as mentioned earlier, reliefs that are part of this same series also show the king engaged in the hunting of lions wearing the royal fez and longer robes of the office of kingship (fig. 89).[544] Yet these figures do not encounter each other in this imagery.

As Ataç (2006, 77) observed, 'Rather than a random instance of variety or a sportive headdress suitable for the dynamic activity of the hunt, it is more likely that there was a semiotic behind the use of this motif in relation to the king'. Considered in the context of my readings of the Prism B account of the conflict with Elam, the Garden Scene, the prophecies, and both Tīl-Tūba relief sequences, I suggest that Aššurbanipal's depiction as both king and crown prince in the lion hunting imagery reflects the broader picture of the formulation of his relationship with Ištar in terms of relational flexibility that also expresses ambiguity, and ambiguates him, in his relational role relative to Ištar.

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[542] See RINAP 5/2 Aššurbanipal 187 and discussion in Zenzen 2018, 114.

[543] See Russell 1999, 202 and Razmjou 2018, 354. Ornan (2005, 93) discusses a small image of Ištar that is also depicted on the chariot yoke pole of one relief, now in the British Museum (BM 124867).

[544] Gadd 1936, 184-185; Barnett 1976, pl. LI and Gadd 1936, 187-188; Barnett 1976, LVII.

Excursus: The Crown Prince as Locus

Given that I have read the reliefs depicting Aššurbanipal wearing the diadem of the crown prince from the North Palace as depictions of him in the guise of the prince, it is pertinent to consider how this imagery may relate to the palace's function as a *bīt redûti* ('House of Succession'). Palaces referred to as *bīt redûti* are generally described in royal inscriptions of the period as the place where the heir designate is trained for kingship, however the interpretation of this concept is complicated. Aššurbanipal claims that:[545]

> *ina* ḪÚL.MEŠ *ri-šá-a-te e-ru-ub ina* É UŠ-*u-ti*
> *áš-ru nak-lu mar-kas* LUGAL-*u-ti*
> *ša* ^{md}30-PAP.MEŠ-SU AD AD *a-li-di-ia*
> DUMU LUGAL-*tú ù* LUGAL-*tú e-pu-šú ina lìb-bi-šú*
> *a-šar* ^{m}AN.ŠÁR-PAP-AŠ AD DÙ-*u-a qé-reb-šú iʾ-al-du*
> *ir-bu-u e-pu-šú be-lut* KUR AN.ŠÁR.KI
> *gi-mir ma-al-ki ir-du-u kim-tú ú-rap-pi-šú*
> *ik-ṣu-ru ni-šu-tú u sa-la-tú*
>
> In joy and exaltation, I entered into the House of Succession, a sophisticated place, the bond of kingship, in which Sennacherib, the father of the father, my begetter, exercised crown princeship and kingship, the place in which Esarhaddon, the father, my creator, was born, grew up, exercised rule over the land of Assyria, led all of the princes; expanded the family; bonded with relatives and kin.

However, there is no evidence that Sennacherib built such a residence, either from textual or archaeological evidence. Moreover, the impression of the function of the *bīt redûti* is

[545] RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 11, i 23-i 30.

also complicated in Esarhaddon's inscriptions, which indicate that there was a residence for a crown prince at Tarbisu (modern Sherif Khan) even though this residence was not referred to as a *bīt redûti*. The North Palace of Aššurbanipal at Nineveh, by contrast, is understood to be a *bīt redûti,* but Aššurbanipal made use of it even while reigning as king. Reade (2022, 4) has suggested recently that the North Palace may have served as 'the counterpart to the royal palace (i.e., the Southwest Palace) in much the same way as the crown prince was counterpart to the king'. The picture that arises from my reading of the palatial decoration relative to the other case studies considered as part of this chapter is not that of a relationship of prince and king, however, but rather of a retained connection to the role of crown prince even while king, which aligns with the palace's continued use by Aššurbanipal.

Thus far in this chapter I have aimed to demonstrate that Aššurbanipal's kingship is formulated in relation to the role of crown prince, both visually and textually, despite the ostensible absence of encounter scenes in his reliefs, conveying his relational flexibility in relation to Ištar. It is also the case that the relationship of the king to Ištar is formulated with relational complexity on her side. As has been established by Barbara Porter (2004a), Ištar's hypostases Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela work together to express support for the kingship in the Hymn to Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela, which reads:[546]

> *a-na-ku* ^{m}*aš-šur*—DÙ—A *bi-bil* ŠÀ-*bi-ši-in*
> NUMUN* BAL*.TIL.KI* *ra*-⌜*bu**⌝-[*u i*]-⌜*lit**⌝-*ti* URU.*ni-na-a*
> *bi-nu-ut* É.⌜MAŠ*.MAŠ*⌝ [*ù*] ⌜É*⌝.GAŠAN.KALAM.MA
> *ša ul-tu* ŠÀ É—⌜*re*⌝-[*du-ti ú-šar*]-*ba-a* LUGAL-*u-ti*
> [*ina*] ⌜*pi*⌝-*i-ši-na el-*⌜*li*⌝ [*qa-bu*]-*ú la-bar* GIŠ.GU.ZA-*ia*

[546] SAA 3 3, 8-12; r 14-r 16.

> I am Aššurbanipal, their heart's desire, great seed of Assur, offspring of Nineveh, creation of Emašmaš and Egašankalamma, whose kingship they made great in the House of Succession. In their pure mouths is [comman]ded the endurance of my throne.
>
> ^{d}*be-lit*—URU.*ni-ná-a um-mu a-lit-ti-ia*
> *taš-ru-ka* LUGAL-*u-tu šá la šá-na-a-ni*
> ^{d}*be-lit*—URU.*arba-ìl* ˹*ba**˺-[*ni*]-˹*ti*˺-*ia taq-ba-a* TI.LA *da-ra-a-te*
>
> The Lady of Nineveh, my birth mother, you bestowed kingship that has no rivalry; the Lady of Arbela, my creator, you commanded life of eternity.

As in the Prism B account of the conflict with Elam, Ištar of Nineveh is described as Aššurbanipal's birth mother in this text, but the relational framework for the provision of this support is also expansive. Aššurbanipal claims that both Ištar of Nineveh and Ištar of Arbela supported him before he became king, as he 'knew no father or mother' but 'grew up in the lap of [his] goddess'.[547] Moreover, in a text known as the Dialogue Between Aššurbanipal and Nabû, Nabû is also described to assist the Ištar goddesses in Aššurbanipal's upbringing; directly speaking to Aššurbanipal to say:[548]

> *ṣe-eḫ-ru at-ta* ^{m}AN.ŠÁR—DÙ—A *ša ú-maš-šir-u-ka ina* UGU ^{d}*šar-rat*—NINA.KI
> *la-ku-u at-ta* ^{m}AN.ŠÁR—DÙ—A *ša áš-ba-ka ina bur-ki* ^{d}*šar-rat*—NINA.KI
> *er-bi zi-ze-e-šá ina pi-ka šak-na* 2 *te-en-ni-iq* 2 *ta-ḫal-líp ana pa-ni-ka*

---

[547] SAA 3 3, 13: *ul i-di* AD *u um-me ina** ˹*bur**˺-*ki** ˹^{d}*˺U.DAR-MEŠ*-*ia ár-ba-a ana-ku*. This is anticipated already by Tukultī-Ninurta I, as discussed by Machinist (2011, 415).

[548] SAA 3 13, r 6-r 8.

> You were a child, Aššurbanipal, when I left you with the Queen of Nineveh: you were a baby, Aššurbanipal, when I seated you in the lap of the Queen of Nineveh! Her four teats are placed in your mouth; two you suck, and two you milk to your face.

As Porter has observed, the Ištar goddesses are depicted as coming together for the support of Aššurbanipal. But Aššurbanipal's relationship with Nabû is also formulated textually in relation to Nabû's relationship with the goddesses. The temples for both Ištar and Nabû at Nineveh were refurbished by Aššurbanipal between 643 and 640 BC, around ten years after the defeat of Teumman; Aššurbanipal redecorated both temples and enlarged their courtyards. Inscriptions carved onto paving stones from both temples mention Teumman and so recall the conflict with Elam. The slabs are not dated, but the earliest possible date for the inscriptions is 645 BC, in part due to the mention of the capture of the Elamite king Ummanaldašu (Ḫumban-ḫaltaš III). The support of both Ištar and Nabû in achieving the victory is credited in these otherwise identical inscriptions. Compare:

> *u* ^{m}*um-man-i-gaš* ^{m}*tam-ma-ri-tú*
> ^{m}*pa-ʾe-e* ^{m}*um-man-al-daš šá* EGIR ^{m}*te-um-man*
> DÙ-*šú* MAN-*ut* KUR.ELAM.KI *ina qí-bi-ti-šú* GAL-*ti*
> *qa-ti* KUR-*su-nu-ti-ma ina* GIŠ.*šá šá-da-di*
> *ru-kub* MAN-*ti-ia* LAL-*su-nu-ti*
> *u ina tukul-ti-šú* GAL-*ti ina kul-lat* NIGIN KUR.KUR
> GAR.GAR-*nu si-mat*[549]
>
> and through his great command, I defeated Ummanigaš (Ḫumban-nikaš II); Tammarītu; Paʾê; Ummanaldašu (Ḫumban-ḫaltaš III), who exercised the kingship of Elam after Teumman, and tied them to a rickshaw, the vehicle of my kingship,

[549] RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 59, 6b-12a.

> and through his great support, I continually established appropriate procedures in all of the lands.

> *u* ^{m}*um-man-i-gaš* ^{m}*tam-ma-ri-tú* ^{m}*pa-ʾe-e*
> ^{m}*um-man-al-daš šá* EGIR ^{m}*te-um-man* DÙ-*šú*
> LUGAL-*ut* KUR.ELAM.MA.KI *ina tukul-ti-šá* GAL-*ti*
> ŠU.II KUR-*su-nu-ti-ma ina* GIŠ.*šá šá-da-di*
> *ru-kub* LUGAL-*ti-ia aṣ-mid-su-nu-tiru-kub* LUGAL-*ti-ia aṣ-mid-su-nu-ti*
> *u ina zik-ri-šá* DUGUD *ina kul-lat* KUR.KUR DU.MEŠ-*ma*[550]

> and through her great support, I defeated Ummanigaš (Ḫumban-nikaš II); Tammarītu; Paʾê; Ummanaldašu (Ḫumban-ḫaltaš III), who exercised the kingship of Elam after Teumman, and tied them to a rickshaw, the vehicle of my kingship, and by her heavy utterance, I marched in all of the lands and had no opponent.

Both inscriptions follow the same structure and, after the above passages, go on to imply that the spoils of war contributed to the refurbishment of the shrines as both works were carried out at the same time Elam was defeated. This recognition is relevant for the reading of the victory over Elam as formulated in the Garden Scene relief advanced in this chapter because, as Omar N'Shea (2018, 229) has observed, Aššurbanipal wears not only the rosette imagery associated with Ištar in the lion hunting reliefs but also the double stylus associated with the deity Nabû. The royal relationship with each deity is formulated relative to the other in these instances.

Finally, this study compels comment on the how the formulation of Aššurbanipal's kingship in terms of relationship with Ištar relates to the polemical Greek and Roman view of the Assyrian kings as the archetypes of decadence and degenerate effeminacy, who passively remained in their palaces while the real business of empire and its eventual

[550] RINAP 5/1 Aššurbanipal 60, 6-12a

demise occurred outside its luxurious confines.[551] Once the archaeological expeditions in the mid-nineteenth century CE permitted engagement with Assyrian sources, this perspective began to be rejected in scholarship favouring a hypermasculine image understood to be presented by emic sources.[552] This study however leads me to suggest that the picture might, first, have been much more complex and, second, in some way have been picked up and reshaped in Greek and Roman accounts and carried forward through and beyond the Persian period, becoming progressively distorted. In engaging with the Greek and Roman and later Victorian receptions for this purpose it is, of course, essential not to 'blur the borders'.[553] Yet, in this instance, recognising and acknowledging the potential for misrepresentation where there has previously been rejection may serve as an important aspect of historical reconstruction. This is especially the case as pathologising scholarship on this topic continues to be published.[554]

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[551] See Rollinger 2017 and Guinan 2018 for overviews of the Greek and Roman accounts about the kings of Assyria and their later reception. For example, 'The fact that [Ninus] was seen by no one outside the palace made everyone ignorant of the luxury of his manner of life. Because of their fear of him, as of an unseen god, nobody dared to show disrespect to him even in word.' (Ctesias F 1b, xxi 7 as quoted in Rollinger 2017, 572); '[Arbactus] found Sardanapalus surrounded by troops of whores. He was spinning purple wool with a distaff and, dressed like a woman (though he was more effeminate in his appearance and more wanton in his glances than any woman) … Arbactus was incensed that so many warriors were subject to such a 'woman' and that men who bore swords and armour served someone who worked with wool. He went to his comrades and told them what he had seen, adding that he could not take order from someone who preferred to be a woman rather than a man' (Justin Book 1, 3 as quoted in Guinan 2018, 14). See Hartmann 2020 on the historical pantomime Sardanapal*,* staged in Berlin in 1908.

[552] '[Ctesias'] account, intrinsically suspicious is now directly contradicted by the authentic records we possess of the warlike character and manly pursuits of so many kings' (Rawlinson 1871, vol. 1, 1871, 246). Indeed, as Fink (2024, 8) put it: 'The [excavation of] Assyrian reliefs… seemed to approve of the image of the Assyrians… as bloodthirsty warriors with unlimited power who liked to document their cruel deeds for posterity, in short: they were true oriental despots'. See also, for example, the discussions of royal masculinity in Karlsson 2016, N'Shea 2018 and 2022 and Bennett 2019.

[553] See Asher-Greve 2006 on the ongoing Assyriological attempt to make sense of Semiramis.

[554] See, for example, the recent claim in Annus 2025 that Aššurbanipal was born with an androgen deficiency.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

This thesis has set out to consider the relationship of kingship and divinity in Assyria as formulated in visual and textual sources during the reigns of Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal. Building on and diverging from prior studies of the relationship of kingship and divinity in Mesopotamia that have focused mostly on formulations of kingship in terms of expressions of intimacy between kings and deities and associated questions of relative royal status, I have made the case that the Sargonid model of kingship came to be formulated on the basis of a broader relational framework than is witnessed in forms of kingship that had emerged in Assyria previously.

Advancing a revised reading of the image of the king standing face-to-face with the crown prince introduced in the relief programme for the Northwest Palace of Aššurnaṣirpal II at Kalḫu in Chapter I, which Mehmet-Ali Ataç (2006 and 2010b) has read as the 'encounter', I have situated what I have described as the 'theologised relationship of the king and crown prince' in relation to other royal and divine relationships and in the context of mostly monumental sites and works in the four core chapters. Key case studies for the exploration have included Dūr-Šarrukīn (Chapter II); the Khinis complex (Chapter III); the Sam'al stele (Chapter IV); and the Garden Scene relief (Chapter V).

Through the progression of the sequence, I have repeatedly made the case that the Sargonid model of kingship was formulated on the basis of a nexus of relationships of kinship that was centred on, but not limited to, the royal family as well as the divine. As it has been shown, this nexus or point of convergence is composed slightly differently in each case study, with the kingship being formulated in terms of the divine, the royal, and the

familial to varying degrees depending on the instance. What has been revealed despite the ostensible differences, however, is that the kingship is formulated in relation to the divine, the royal, and the familial significantly in each circumstance.

In their study of ancient and medieval kingship, Lynette Mitchell and Charles Melville (2012, 20) have observed that 'the institution of kingship itself went far beyond the political. It was relational… and resided between the king (irrespective of the king's person) and his subjects'. Aligning somewhat with this perspective, the new readings of the Sargonid sources that I have offered illuminate how the relationship of kingship and divinity was also formulated in terms of its extension through the familial and into the royal courts at Dūr-Šarrukīn and Nineveh (Chapters II and V), Nineveh's water source (Chapter III), and beyond the royal centres to imperial outposts (Chapter IV).

Ultimately, I submit that Sargonid kingship may be characterised by both profoundly relational and relationally profound themes. Reflecting on the overall picture, it seems to me that it is the repeated entwining of multiple forms of relationship that distinguishes the form of Sargonid kingship that I have revealed from earlier Mesopotamian models. With the acquired perspective, I will conclude the present exploration by offering reflections on the relationship of the Sargonid model to the earlier kingship models explored in Chapter I, and in relation to definitions. To this end, it is fitting to begin with the new reading of the Garden Scene advanced in Chapter V.

Ištar and the King Before and After the 'Encounter'

As explored in Chapter V, the kingship is formulated in relation to the divine in terms of Ištar in Aššurbanipal's Garden Scene relief due to her role in securing the Assyrian victory in the conflict with Elam. This is most clearly represented in the relief through the depiction of the decapitated head of Teumman, the Elamite king, which hangs from a conifer tree behind the procession of attendants, who wait on the party's queen (fig. 75). In the textual account of the conflict given in Aššurbanipal's Prism B inscription, Ištar comforts Aššurbanipal as if he is her child and instructs him to remain seated in his palace while she accomplishes the victory. Correspondingly, I have argued that, in the Garden Scene, the image of Aššurbanipal wearing the crown princely diadem and reclining depicts his youth and, given the visual context of the encounter scene, that the ruler's interaction with the crowned and enthroned figure must be read as that of junior and senior; prince and queen mother.

As also explored in Chapter V, the relationship of the royal figures in the Garden Scene has, traditionally and to the contrary, been read as that of king and queen consort, who has, at times, also been read as Ištar given her presiding position in the scene in the presence of the head of Teumman. If one accepts these views, it follows that the Garden Scene witnesses a reversion to an earlier model of formulating kingship visually in terms of the face-to-face encounter of king and goddess and in the context of the vanquished. In particular, such a reading recalls my exploration in Chapter I of the reliefs carved into the cliffs of the Zagros Mountains by Anubanini of Lullubum (fig. 3) and Iddin-Sîn of Simurrum, as well as the controversial and unprovenanced stone mould attributed to Narām-Sîn of Akkad that depicts a comparably intimate scenario of Ištar taking the king's wrist (fig. 2); that is accepting this artwork as at least an authentic representation of the

otherwise textually witnessed reality that Narām-Sîn styled himself as the spouse of the goddess, whose love led to his divinity.

Interpreting the Garden Scene as a return to these older kingship models would be in line with Natalie May's (2013, 209) suggestion that a 'revival of the ancient concept of divine kingship probably started in the times of Esarhaddon and was developed by Ashurbanipal. In their time, the Neo-Assyrian royal theology reaches the climax of its development.' Yet while the king had not come face-to-face with Ištar in the manner exemplified by the rock reliefs and stone mould in Mesopotamia for millennia prior to the Garden Scene's creation, I see the relationship depicted between queen and prince not so much as a 'revival' of the earlier models than a transformation of their relational framework. As observed in Chapter I, Christopher Metcalf (2024, 76-77) has argued that the relationship of goddess and king 'remained productive, and relevant for the conception of Mesopotamian kingship, until well into the first millennium BC'. In my analysis of the Garden Scene, I posit that this relationship is 'productively' reformulated through a royal family relationship.

My focus on relational frameworks in my analysis has revealed that the Garden Scene's queen does not so much embody Ištar in the earlier mode of the encounter of goddess and king as she does perform Ištar's roles in relation to the prince as a matriarch of the family. It is the relationship of rather than the individual images of queen and prince that recalls the encounter of king and goddess. The queen does not wear a headdress that incorporates divine horns, wield the nose-rope or offer the ring of rulership, but the king becomes a child through his depiction as the crown prince in relation to her, who, in relation to him, adopts the authoritative position against Elam. Thus, the relationship of

king and goddess, who also claims the king as her child and rules over him in the Prism B account, is represented in, and may only be seen in, the relationship of prince and queen. This diverges from the earlier models of the king's encounter with Ištar distinctly, depicting this within a royal familial model; transforming it into king-prince encountering goddess-queen (mother).

Indeed, while I did not apprehend the connection during my original analysis of the Garden Scene, taking the long view here makes clear that the relationship of prince and queen depicted in this relief more closely resembles the encounter depicted in the top register of the Uruk Vase (fig. 5), in the sense that this imagery has been interpreted by Zainab Bahrani as 'performative' (2002), as also explored in Chapter I. If the figure that the so-called priest-king encounters outside of Inana's temple storehouse is to be read as priestess turning into goddess through the representation of their relationship, and the ruler, in turn, is to be read as ruler becoming god through either 'hierogamy' or 'theogamy' depending on which stage of coming together these terms are taken to refer to, I think it appropriate to also interpret the relationship of prince and queen depicted in the Garden Scene with capacity to accept ambiguity given that the king assumes the guise of the prince. In this vein, I suggest that the depiction of the king as prince in this relief is, in its way, 'performative'.[555]

The revisitation of the Garden Scene recalls the traditional question as to how to define royal status. Reformulating this question for my study of relationships, it is pertinent

[555] Of course, the Garden Scene is not quite a 'self-referential' image in the same manner that the Uruk Vase imagery is, primarily because the Uruk Vase contains within its relief carvings a depiction of two vases that resemble its own shape, participating in what Bahrani (2002) describes as a 'referential circle'. This notwithstanding, the relationship of the queen and king depicted in the Garden Scene may still be interpreted as a representation of a representation, i.e., of the relationship between Ištar and the prince.

to recall Alan Strathern's (2019) conceptualisation of 'sacralisation' in terms of modes of 'divinising' kingship. My analysis of the Garden Scene, like Bahrani's interpretation of the Uruk Vase, indicates that it is not necessarily through the formulation of the relief in terms of the king's intimate relationship with Ištar that his ontological status is 'ambiguated' between royal and divine, but that the relationship of the royal dyad in this relief is made ambiguous, and to divinising consequences. This is comparable to the effacement of distinction between the human king and the shepherd god Dumuzi in the union with Inana that Metcalf discusses in terms of the love lyrics, implicating both members of the royal dyad depicted in the Garden Scene relief. However, as it has been seen in my analysis of the relief and of the Sargonid model of kingship more generally, it is not only the royal dyad that is implicated.

The turn from considering the status implications of the relationship of kingship and divinity for individuals to the status implications of this relationship for other relationships in the context of the Garden Scene relief prompts recall of Janet Carsten's (2000, 4) definition of 'relatedness' as a more encompassing concept of 'kinship'; of 'being related in a specific cultural context'. Given that the attendants of the royal dyad are depicted in important supporting roles and, as such, are implicated with the enthroned queen in facilitating the reclining prince's rest, it is also possible that the beardless attendants, who support the royal dyad in the Garden Scene, are to be read as implicated in this image of relational ambiguation. Looking closer at the depiction of the attendants in the relief with this perspective, it becomes apparent that the heads of the attendants who stand immediately behind the royal dyad are positioned in front of conifers in a manner that

makes it seem like they almost wear horns, albeit made of branches (fig. 91). If the suggestion is subtly made, it is, in this sense, ‘ambiguating’.

My reading of the Garden Scene as a development of the encounter of king and prince as well as a reformulation of the older models of king encountering goddess motivates me to retrace the chronological steps I have taken in this thesis. While I have moved mostly forwards in my exploration since the broad overview, given in Chapter I, of historical examples from the late fourth through to the first millennium BC, and, subsequently, in the four core chapters, onwards through the reigns of the first four Sargonid kings, it is now pertinent to briefly reverse the direction of travel in order to reflect on what might be said about the process behind the inflection of these models. As I have deduced that the reformulation of the older model of Ištar’s encounter with the king occurs through the development to depict the encounter of queen and prince rather than king and prince in the Garden Scene, I am interested to consider how these visual models came to be entwined.

Most apparent, the reconstitution of the encounter of king and goddess through the depiction of the encounter of prince and queen in the Garden Scene relief can be seen to build on the earlier depiction of the encounter of prince and king on Esarhaddon’s Sam’al stele from Zincirli (fig. 59). I have made the case in Chapter IV that the king performs Ištar’s role to bind the enemy that is otherwise outlined in this monument’s inscription, at the same time holding the rod and ring of rulership, for the support of Aššurbanipal’s future kingship, and that this is underpinned by the older model of the king’s encounter with the goddess, as exemplified by the Anubanini rock relief. However, as the king is still depicted in visual relationship with the divine images that are placed at and above his eye-level on

the stele's obverse, the royal relationship with the divine that the crown prince is depicted to participate in still depends on the encounter with the king to relay the relationship with the goddess; in other words, the visual model cannot function without the king.

As explored in Chapter IV, Esarhaddon's Nimrud and Tell Tayinat *adê* documents were sealed with Sennacherib's Seal of Destinies, which depicts his relationship with the divine couple (fig. 73). The crown prince is not depicted with the king and the divine couple in the seal or in the Khinis cliff reliefs (figs. 36-40), as explored in Chapter III. But as the relationship of the king and divine couple is formulated at Khinis not only in terms of Marduk's (or, rather, Aššur's) role to create his domain with water, as is exemplified in Enūma eliš, but also, as I have argued, in terms of the creator's divine succession, Esarhaddon's later formulation of the succession in terms of a divine-royal relationship may be seen as coherent with Sennacherib's earlier formulation of kingship in terms of succession and the divine couple. Tracing my steps back even further, then, the formulation of the transposed encounter of king and prince through the model of goddess and king on the Sam'al stele would seem to have emerged from a context in which Sennacherib already formulated kingship visually in terms of a divine familial model on the monumental scale.

I also made the case in Chapter III that the depiction of the relationship of king and divine couple at Khinis emerges out of the earlier context of the depiction of the prominent relationship of king and crown prince at Sargon II's fortress at Dūr-Šarrukīn, as evidenced by the material remains uncovered at Khorsabad. As explored earlier in Chapter II, the king and crown prince are likely depicted worshipping a deity stood on a pedestal in the mural known from Residence K (figs. 30-32), and, in the Khorsabad reliefs, the encounter of king and prince is depicted more prominently than in imagery from any other site (e.g., figs 27-

28). I have argued that this depiction of the encounter in relation to the other artworks, buildings, people and the landscape at Dūr-Šarrukīn framed the relationship of king and crown prince as a significant point of convergence between the divine and Sargon's court. With the later developments revealed, I would suggest that the reliefs where the prince presents the court and tributaries to the king may be productively compared with images where the king encounters Ištar and the enemy.

While I am not suggesting here that the encounter of king and prince in the reliefs from Khorsabad should be understood in terms of development from the older model of the king's encounter with Ištar, I note that king and prince are depicted securing the continuity of the empire in the reliefs together and in relation to other bodies, which, in this sense, matches the older model. I have suggested in Chapter IV that the depiction of the encounter of king and prince relative to the captives on the Sam'al stele, which is formulated in terms of the encounter of king and goddess wielding the nose-rope, may be traced to the earlier relief attributed to Tiglath-pileser III that depicts the king trampling and spearing a fallen foe before the prince (fig. 74). Taking the long view of this imagery, it becomes possible to raise the question as to why an older model of the king's face-to-face encounter with the goddess in the context of the vanquished became a useful model for the formulation of the relationship of the king and crown prince, and crown prince and queen, in later periods.

I do not wish to retroject the connection I have identified between the development of the encounter of king and prince in terms of an older model of the encounter of goddess and king during the reigns of Esarhaddon and Aššurbanipal. With this clearly stated, I would like to suggest that the later developments are made possible in part by the inherent potential for comparison between these relationships. As Wiebke Meinhold (2009, 225) has

stated, Ištar and the Assyrian king always maintain a special relationship in textual sources. However, in the reliefs from the Assyrian palaces, the special relationship occurring in the human sphere is typically that of king and prince, unless it is, at least in the Garden Scene, prince and queen. While in the older models, the king's intimate relationship with the goddess in the context of the enemy, otherwise expressed textually, also leads to visual encounters to support rulership, in the Neo-Assyrian period, the king's encounter with his son occupies this purpose. This does not mean that the visual models are linked inextricably. Yet there are areas of relational overlap at the site of the family.

David Graeber and Marshall Sahlins (2017, 7) describe divine kingship, as this is traditionally conceived, as 'the essence of sovereignty: it is the ability to act as if one were a god; to step outside the confines of the human, and return to rain favor, or destruction, with arbitrariness and impunity'. In the context of the case studies that I have explored throughout this thesis in terms of the relationship of the king and the crown prince, or the king and the divine couple, or the crown prince and the queen, and the other relationships that I have shown to intersect with these, it is, despite the varying participants involved in the relationships, always in the context of relationships involving royalty and divinity that such powers are seen to be accessed. At the same time, these formulations of kingship in terms of familial models, whether royal or divine, convey intimate support inherently. All of this is true for the older model of depicting the king and the goddess. Except in the Sargonid imagery, the relationship of the king with the divine is also formulated visually in terms of royal family relationships with broad reach.

If the notion of an empowering relationship that in some sense involves the divine, the royal and the familial remains productive for the formulation of kingship from earliest

to late periods, future work might consider, in line with the historicising approaches often adopted in relation to the topic of the relationship of kingship and divinity, why the distinct form of Sargonid kingship that I have revealed emerges in the Late Assyrian context. As with the period of the rule of the dynasty of Akkad, it is often maintained in scholarship that the requirements of maintaining a far-reaching empire required new forms of kingship. In her diachronic analysis of visual evidence for royal divinity in Mesopotamia, Irene Winter (2008, 87) suggests that 'certain political and authority structures require such elevations', but what has been revealed here is rather a picture of extension. While I have similarly situated my work within a Mesopotamian context, in offering another direction for future research, I would like to follow the example of Ataç in his reading of the encounter scene by seeking a comparison with a relevant ancient Egyptian kingship model.

It seems to me that the Sargonid form of kingship that I have revealed finds particular resonance in the Amarna period. Although the relationship of kingship and divinity was always formulated in relational terms in ancient Egypt, albeit not, as Frankfort has classically made clear, in the same manner as in Mesopotamia, it has traditionally been argued that Amarna art witnesses transformation in the depiction of the royal family in relation to the divine. [556] In his discussion of a house altar that depicts Akhenaten and Nefertiti with their daughters beneath the Aten sun disc (fig. 92), Jan Assmann (2001, 216-217) has stated that 'The king and the queen prayed to the god, and the people prayed to the triad. It was only in this triad that the cosmic life force of the sun manifested itself as a god in act and was accessible to the prayerful devotion of humankind.' Situating the

556 See, for instance, Frankfort 1948; Aldred 1968; Assmann 1995; Arnold 1996; Robins 1998; Hornung 1999; Assmann 2001.

Sargonid model in relation to Assmann's reading suggests that transformation in the familial basis upon which the relationship of kingship and divinity is formulated may also have a transformative effect on the perception of, and capacity to relate to, royal images.

Figures



Figure 1. Stele of Narām-Sîn of Akkad (SB 4)



Figure 2. Mould fragment depicting Ištar and Narām-Sîn (?); mould impression
Hansen 2003, no. 133.



Figure 3. Sar-i Pol-i Zahab, rock relief of Anubanini of Lullubum
Photo by Koorosh Nozad Tehrani, via Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=77395008), Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 (CC BY-SA 2.0) license



Figure 4. Stele of Eanatum of Lagaš (AO 50)
detail: Ninĝirsu determines the victory
© Musée du Louvre, Dist. GrandPalaisRmn / Maurice et Pierre Chuzeville

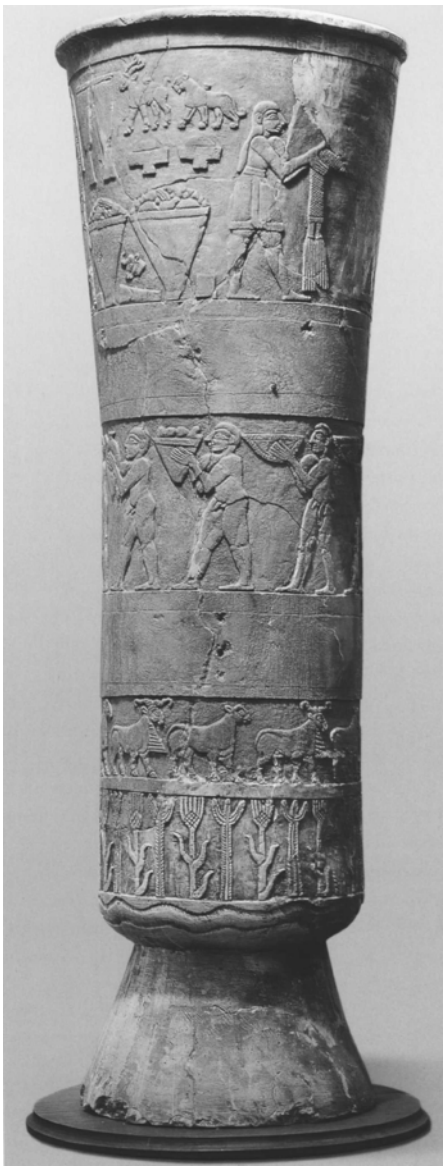




Figure 5. Uruk Vase (IM 19606); drawing of Vase's upper register
Aruz and Wallenfels 2009, figs. 9-10



Figure 6. Qal’at Sherqat, temple of Ištar, altar of Tukultī-Ninurta I (VA 8146)
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum / Olaf M. Teßmer CC BY-SA 4.0.



Figure 7. Nimrud, Northwest Palace, relief of Aššurnaṣirpal II:
the winged disc; sacred tree; royal images; divine figures (BM 124531)
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Figure 8. Nimrud, Northwest Palace, relief of Aššurnaṣirpal II (BM 124549) the ‘encounter’

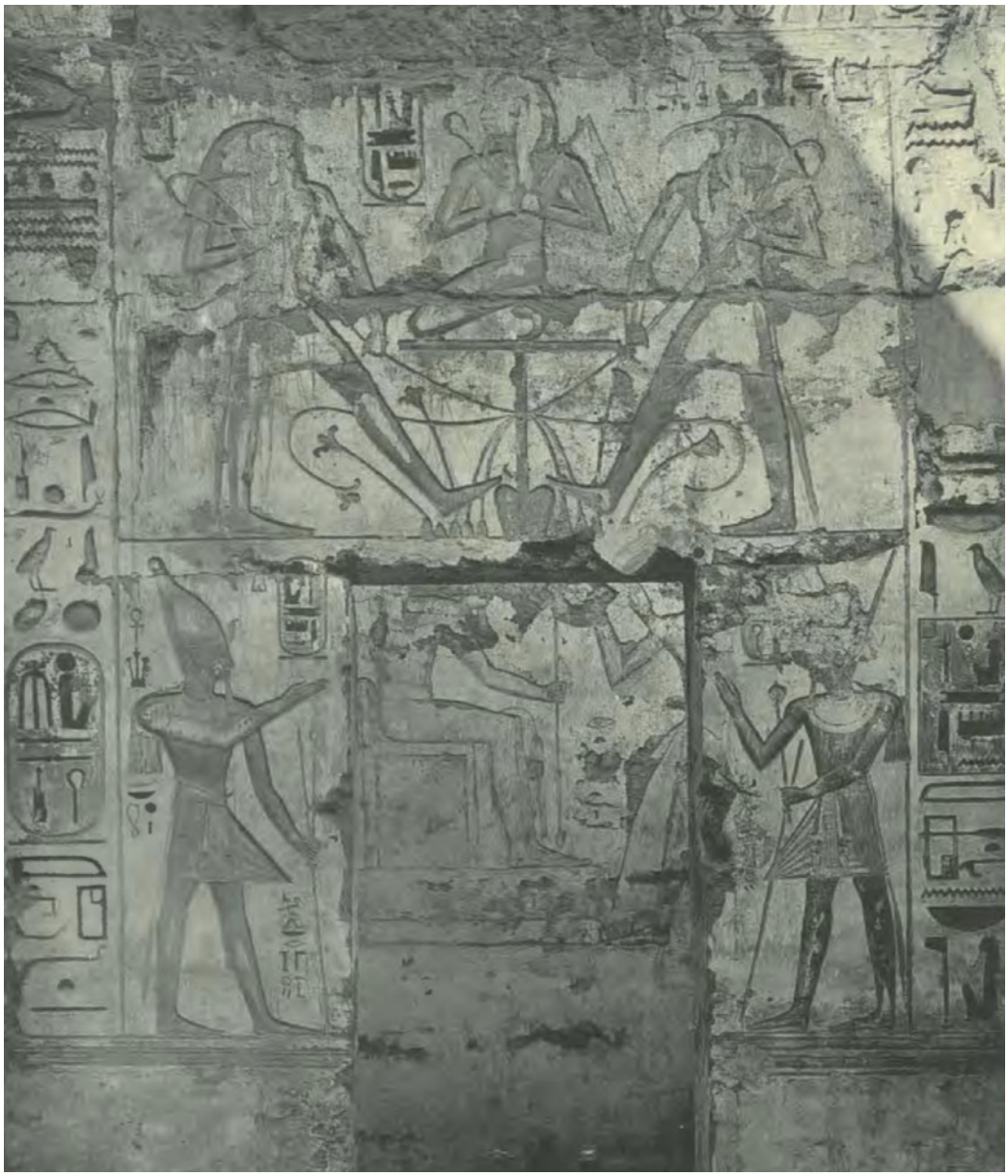


Figure 9. Medinet Habu, Temple of Rameses III
sema tawy
Jéquier 1922, pl. 62



Figure 10. Stele of Hammurabi of Babylon (SB 8)



Figure 11. Khorsabad, Palace of Sargon II, palace terrace hero (AO 19861)
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Figure 12. Khorsabad, Palace of Sargon II, throne room hero (AO 19862)
© 2011 Musée du Louvre, Dist. GrandPalaisRmn / Thierry Ollivier

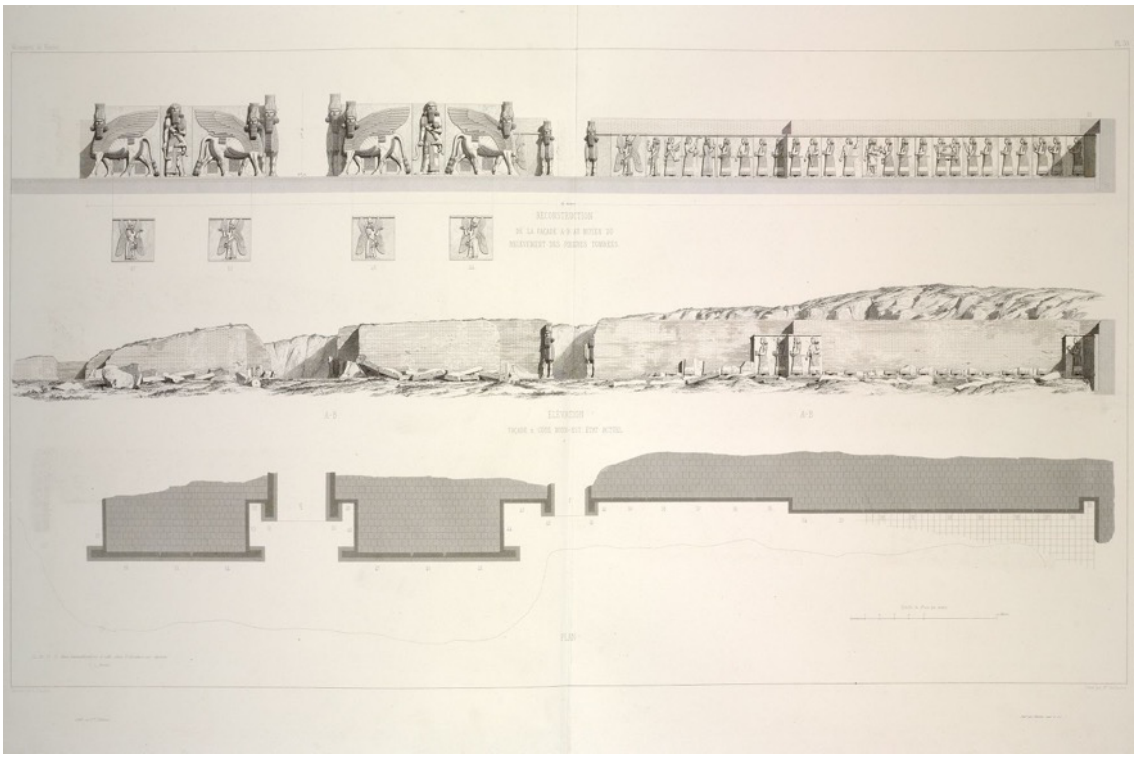


Figure 13. Plan and elevation of Façade n, northeast wall
Botta and Flandin 1849–1850, vol. 1, pl. 30

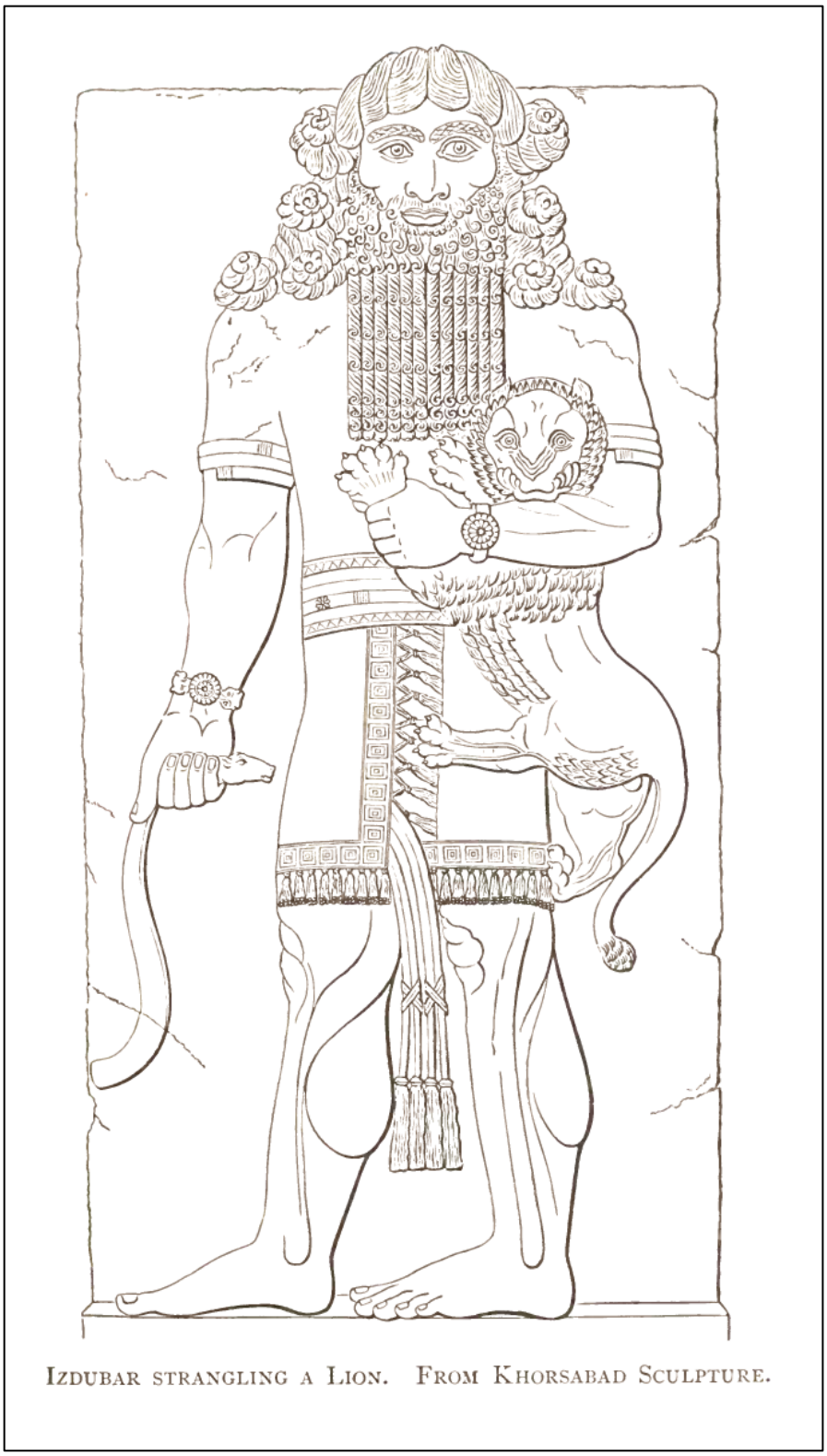


Figure 14. Drawing of the Khorsabad palace terrace hero
Smith 1876, fig. 19



Figure 15. Akkadian cylinder seal impression
The Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA 1984.383.8)



Figure 16. Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal and impression (BM 132257)
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Figure 17. Khorsabad, Palace of Sargon II, winged, human-headed bull (AO 30228)



Figure 18. Khorsabad, Palace of Sargon II, relief:
transport of timber, slab 1 (AO 19889)
detail: *lamassu* in the sea

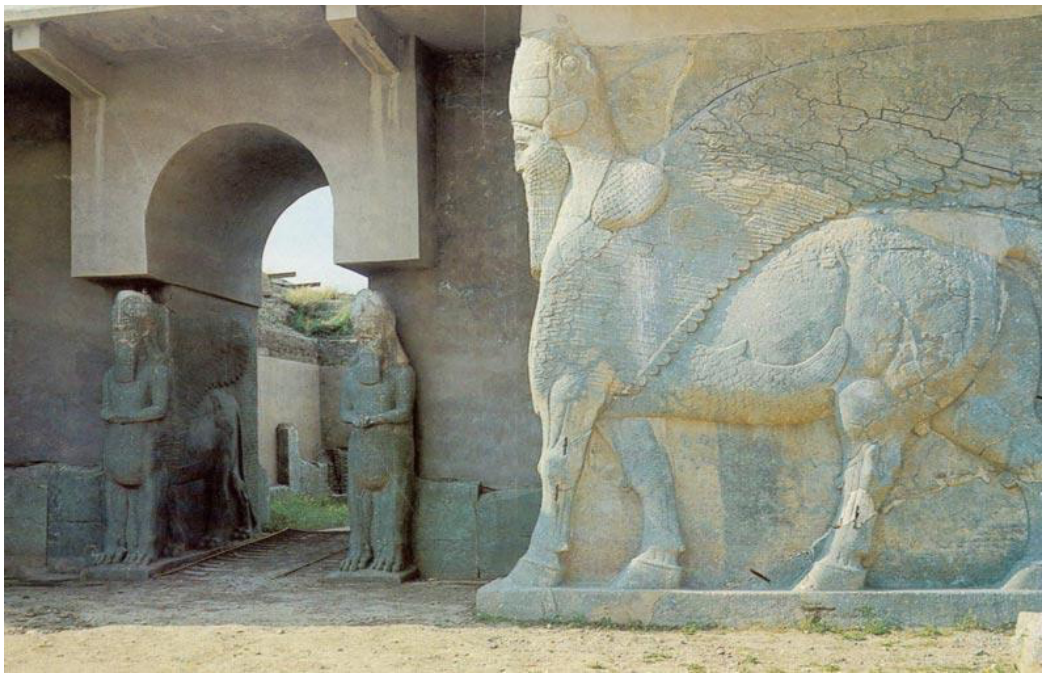


Figure 19. Photograph of the Northwest Palace taken at Nimrud in 2007
Photo in the Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons

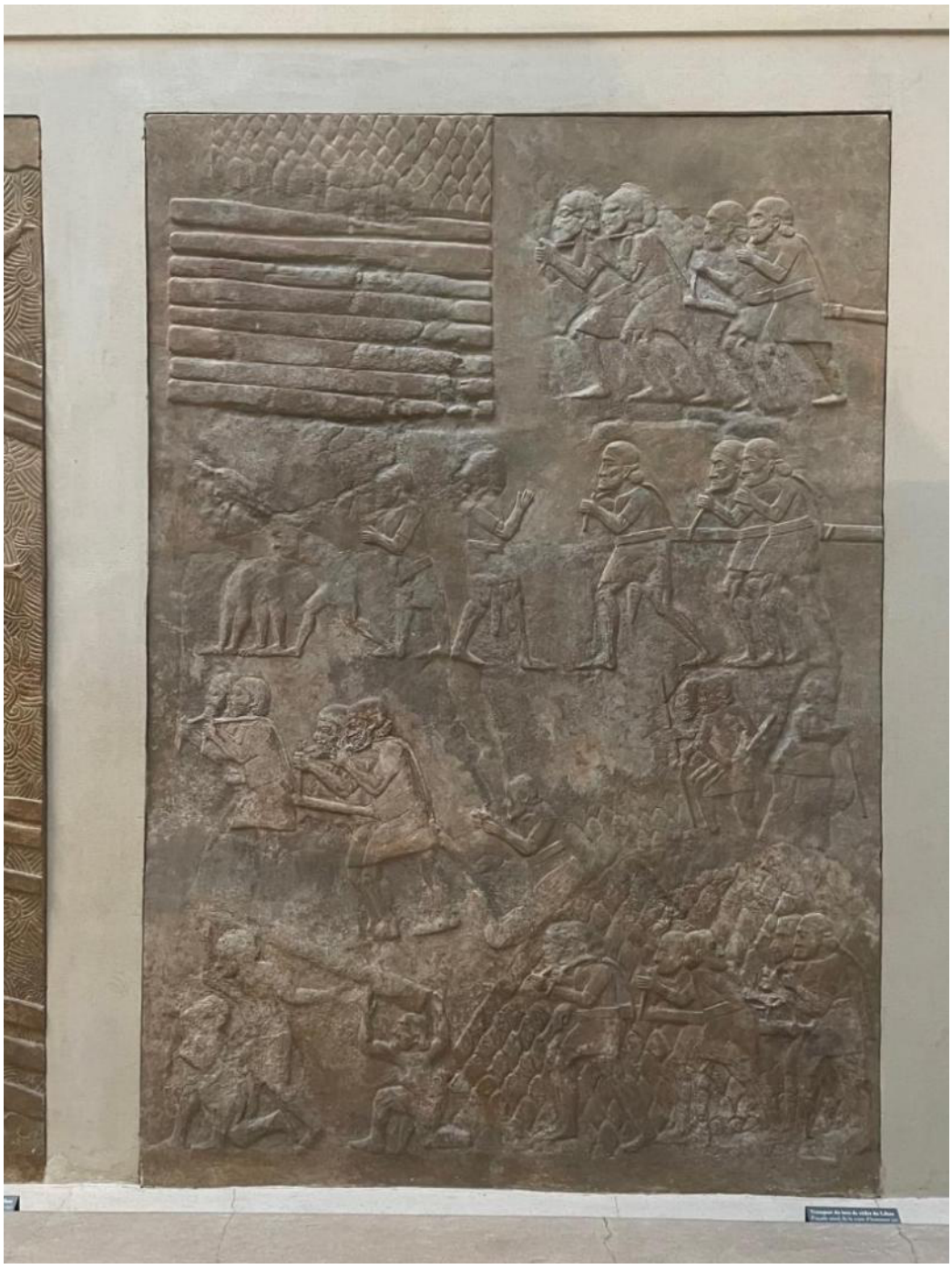


Figure 20. Khorsabad, Palace of Sargon II, relief:
men advancing left (AO 19888)



Figure 21. Khorsabad, Palace of Sargon II, relief:
transport of timber, slabs 1-2 (AO 19889)



Figure 22. Palace of Sargon II, relief:
transport of timber, slab 3 (AO 19890)



Figure 23. Khorsabad, Palace of Sargon II, relief:
transport of timber, slab 4 (AO 19891)

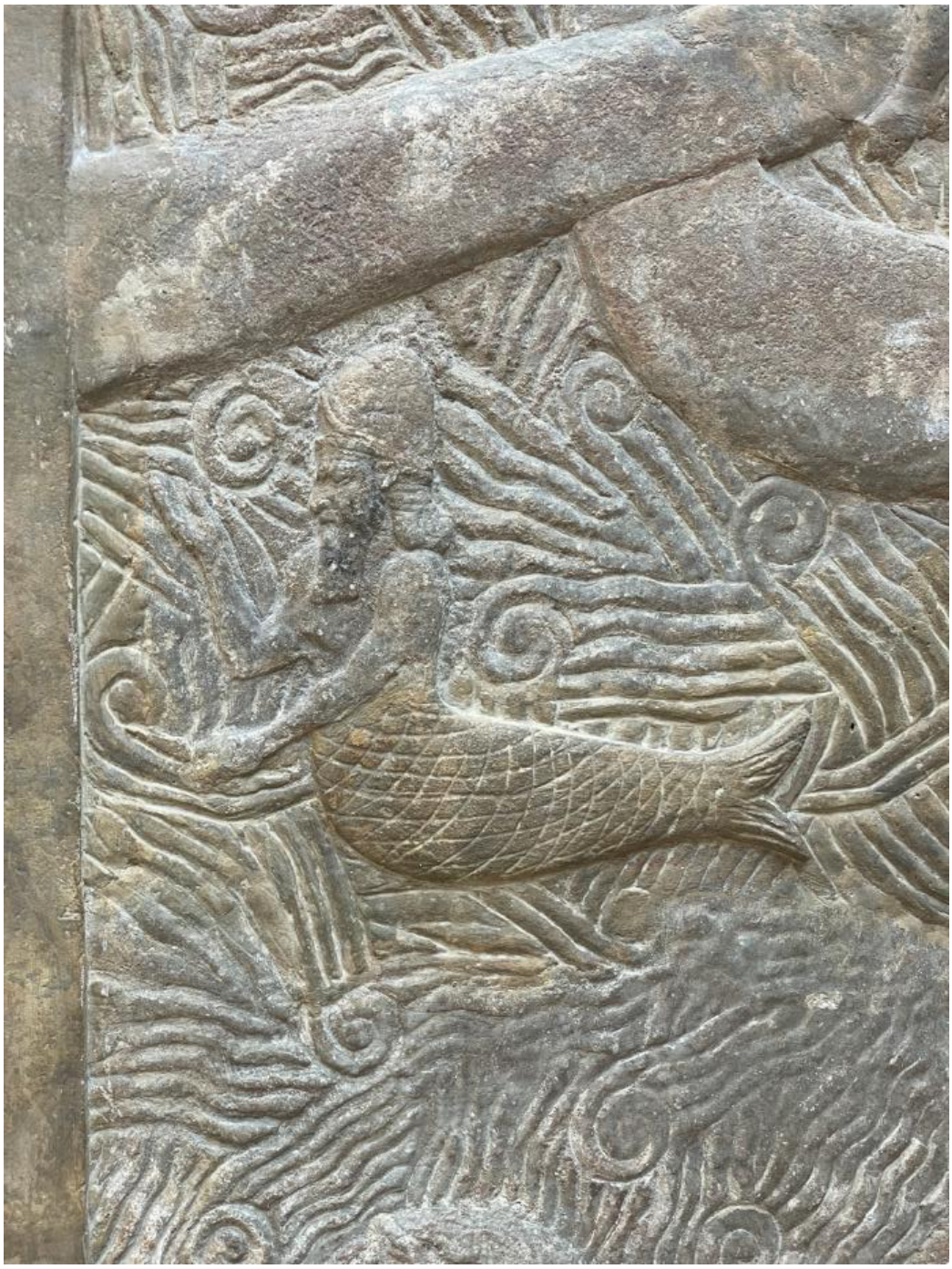


Figure 24. Khorsabad, Palace of Sargon II, relief:
transport of timber, slab 3 (AO 19890)
detail: *kululli*

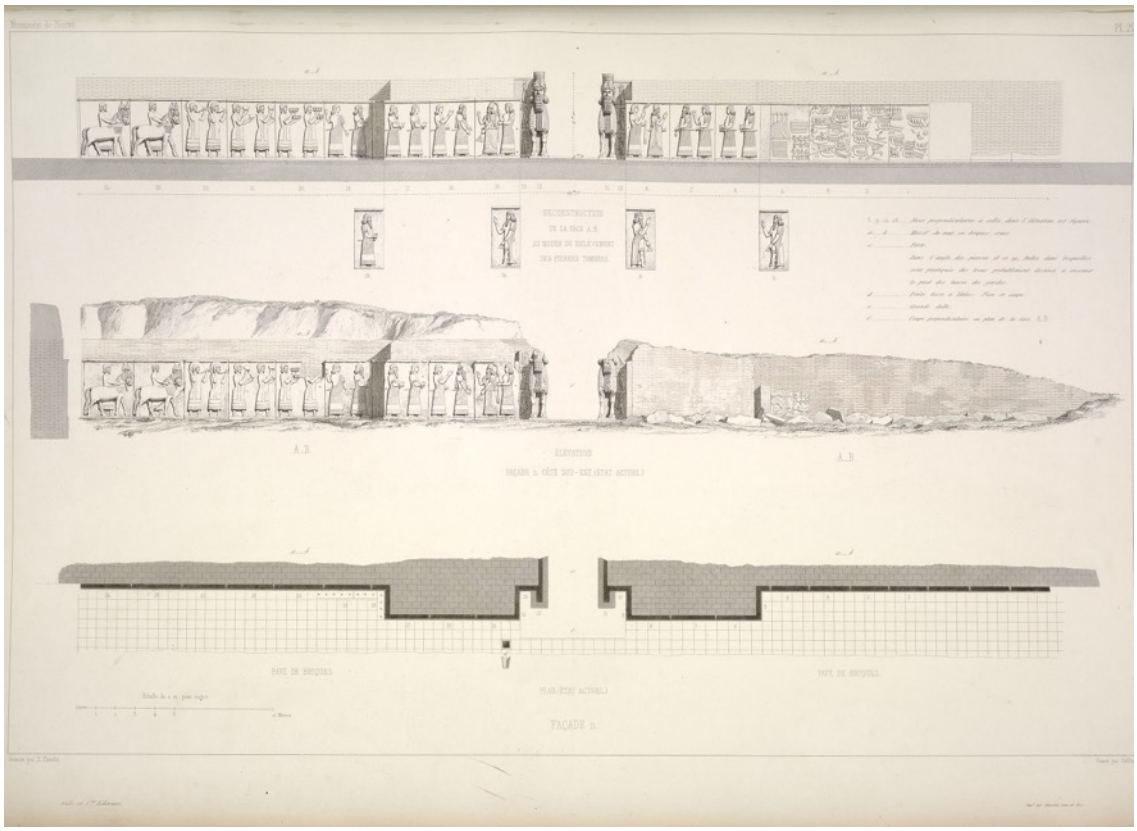


Figure 25. Plan and elevation of Façade n, southeast wall
Botta and Flandin 1849–1850, vol. 1, pl. 29



Figure 26. Khorsabad, Palace of Sargon II, relief:
crown prince and attendants (A7366-A7368)



Figure 27. Khorsabad, Palace of Sargon II, relief:
king and crown prince (BM 118822)



Figure 28. Khorsabad, Palace of Sargon II, relief:
crown prince and king (AO 19873)



Figure 29. Nimrud, Northwest Palace, relief of Aššurnaṣirpal II:
Assyrian camp (BM 124548)

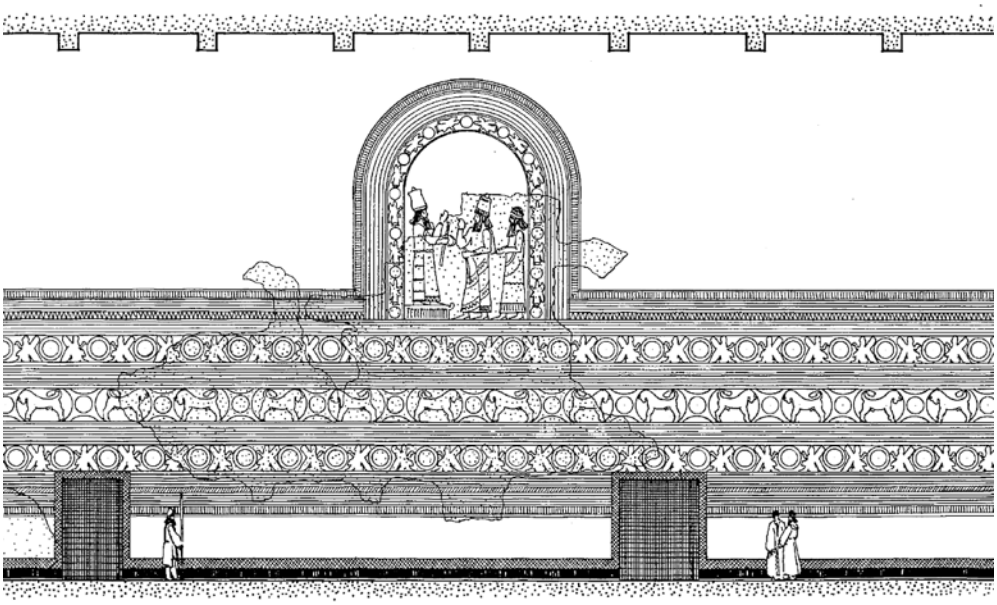


Figure 30. Restoration of southwest wall, Residence K, Room XII
Loud and Altman 1938, pl. 88

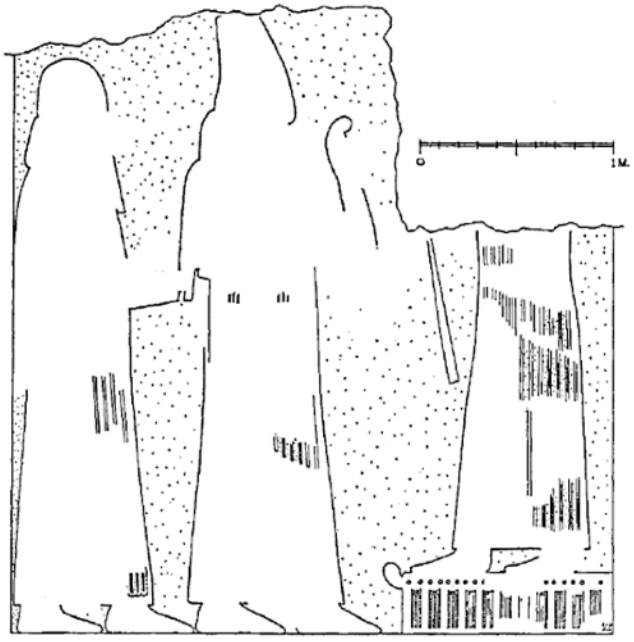


Figure 31. Remains of mural, Residence K, Room XII
Loud and Altman 1938, fig. 12



Figure 32. Restoration of mural, Residence K, Room XII
Loud and Altman 1938, pl. 89

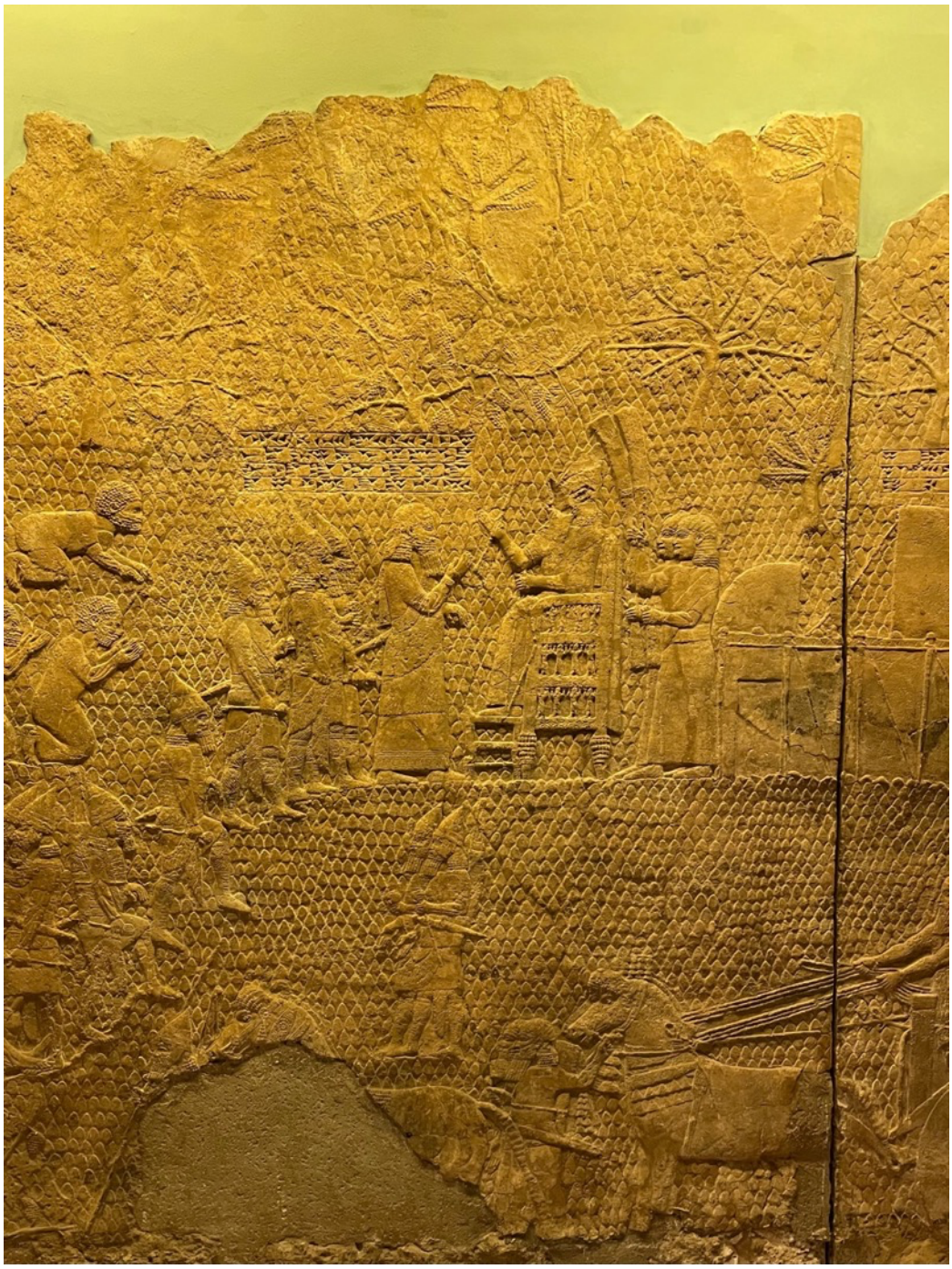


Figure 33. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room XXXIII, relief of Sennacherib: the king enthroned before the crown prince at Lachish (BM 124911)



Figure 34. Khinis, canal head, Great Relief of Sennacherib
Photography by the Media Center for Art History, Department of Art History & Archaeology, Columbia University, produced as a part of the Mapping Mesopotamian Monuments project

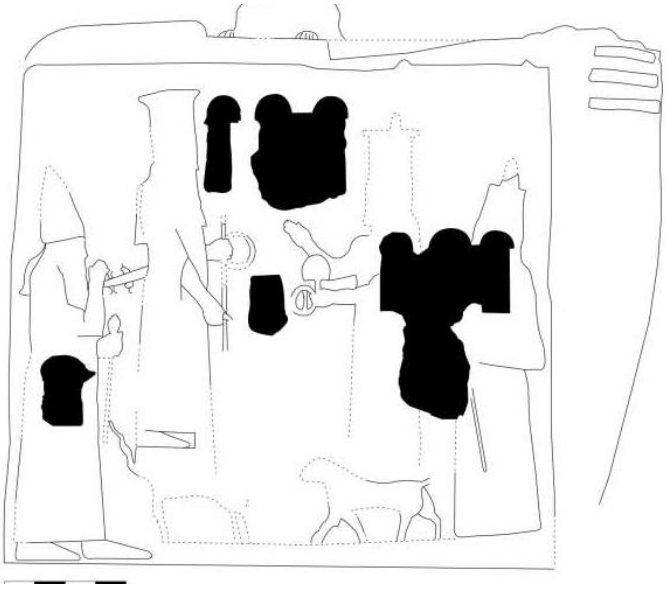


Figure 35. Drawing of Khinis Great Relief
Sennacherib Archaeological Park Project



Figure 36. Reconstruction of Khinis Great Relief
Bachmann 1927, fig. 8



Figure 37. Khinis, canal head, Khinis Gate Monolith of Sennacherib, main panel
Sennacherib Archaeological Park Project

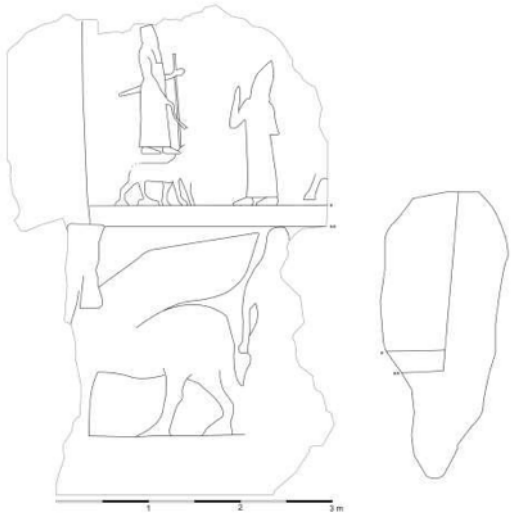


Figure 38. Drawing of Khinis Gate Monolith, main panel
Sennacherib Archaeological Park Project

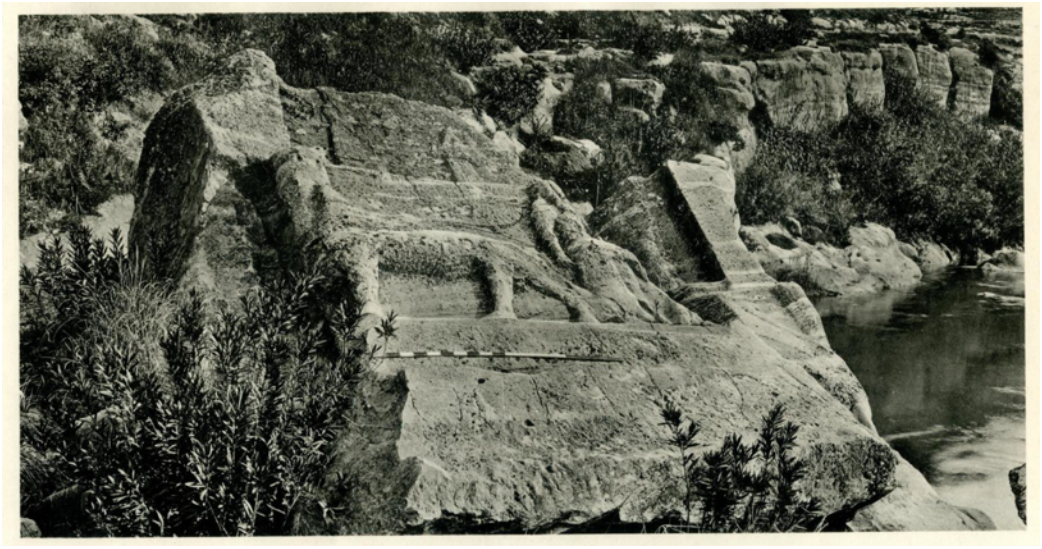


Figure 39. Photograph of Khinis Gate Monolith, main panel
Bachmann 1927, pl. 15

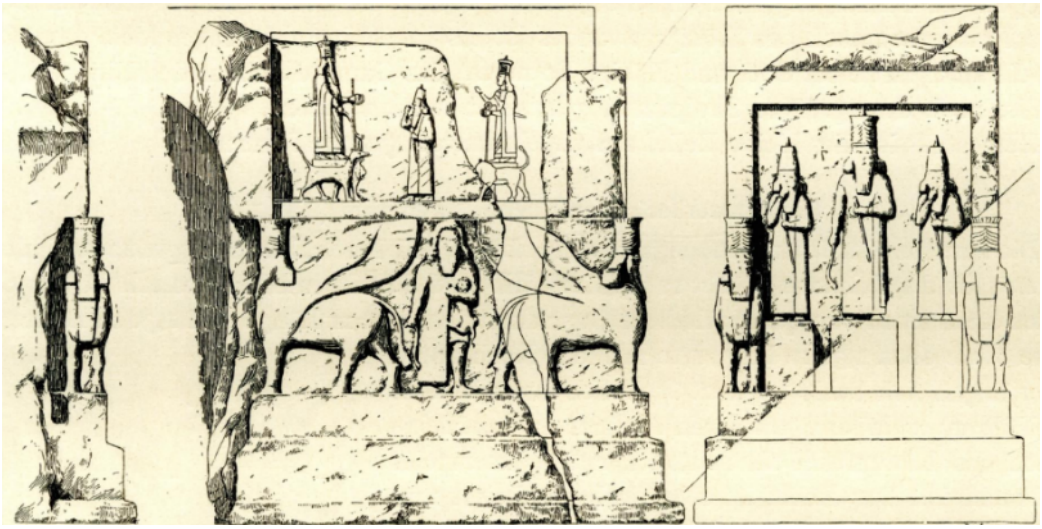


Figure 40. Reconstruction of Khinis Gate Monolith
Bachmann 1927, fig. 13

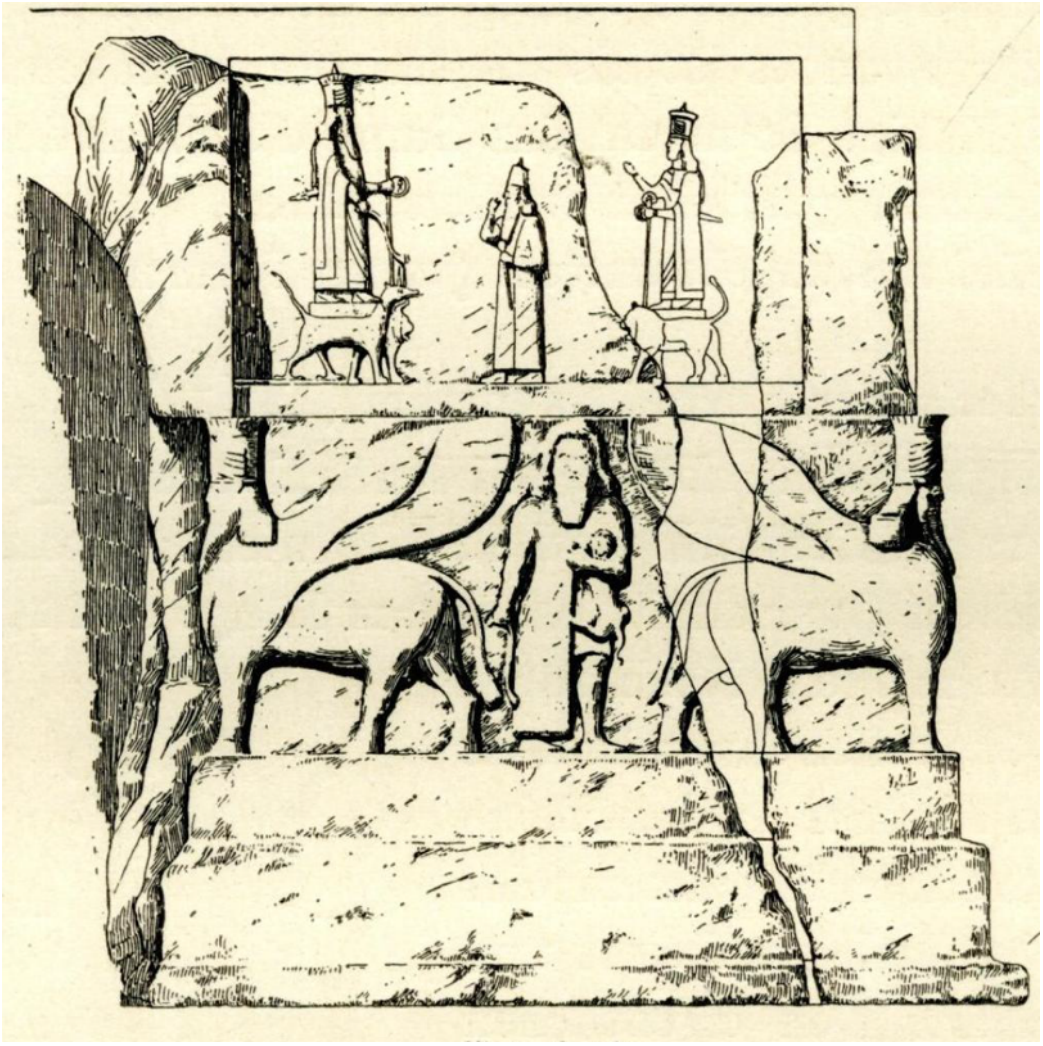


Figure 41. Reconstruction of Khinis Gate Monolith
detail: main panel
Bachmann 1927, fig. 13

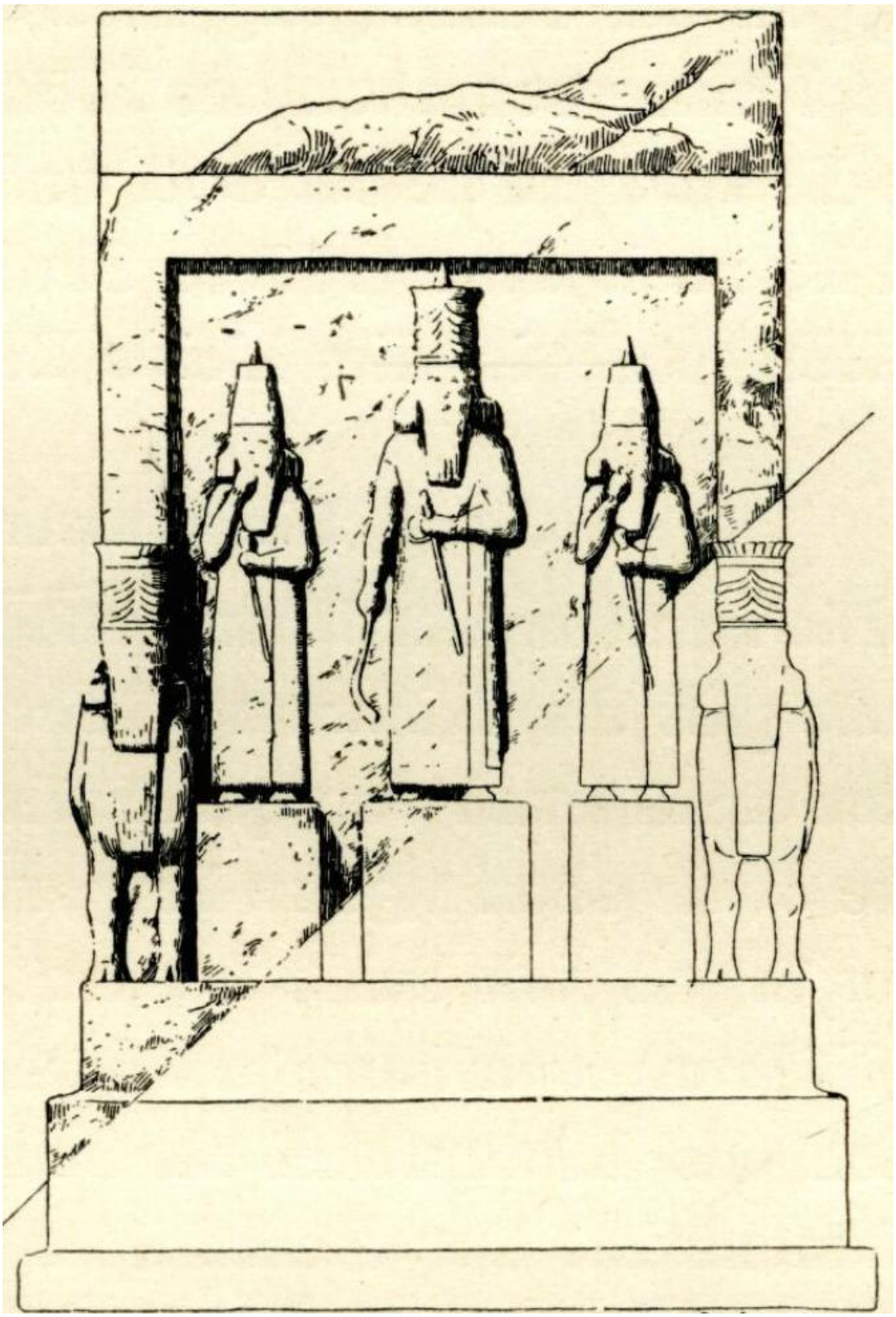


Figure 42. Reconstruction of Khinis Gate Monolith
detail: right panel
Bachmann 1927, fig. 13



Figure 43. Khinis, canal head, Gate Monolith of Sennacherib, right panel
Photography by the Media Center for Art History, Department of Art History & Archaeology, Columbia University, produced as a part of the Mapping Mesopotamian Monuments project



Figure 44. Maltai, canal length, relief, panel 2
Photography by the Media Center for Art History, Department of Art History & Archaeology, Columbia University, produced as a part of the Mapping Mesopotamian Monuments project



Figure 45. Faida, canal length, relief, panel 4
Morandi Bonacossi and Ahmed Qasim 2022, fig. 20b

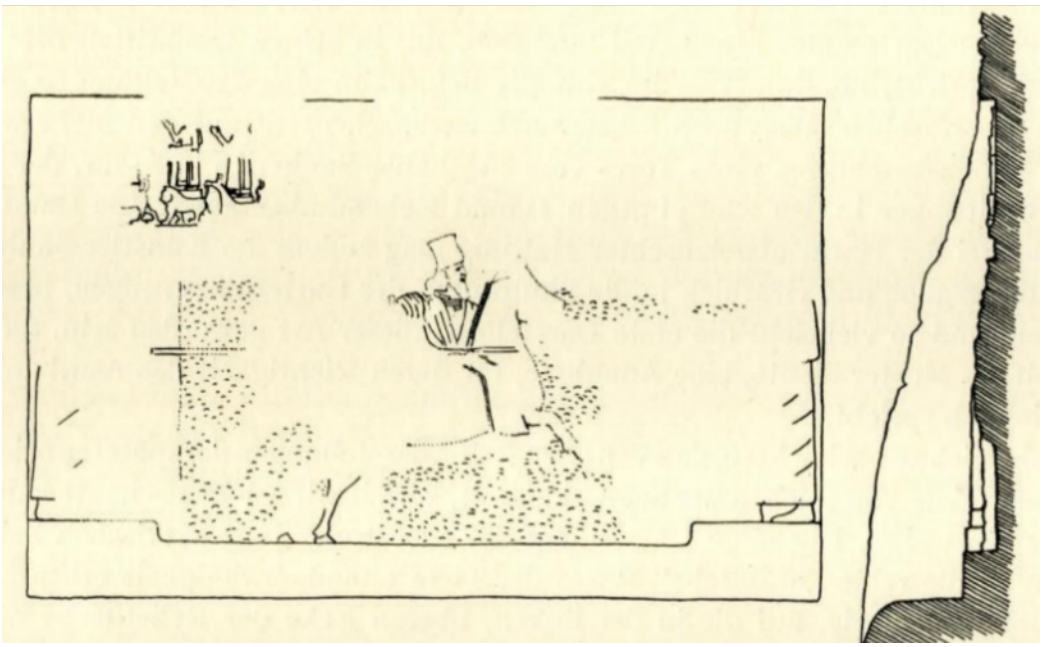


Figure 46. Drawing of Khinis Rider Relief
Bachmann 1927, fig. 14

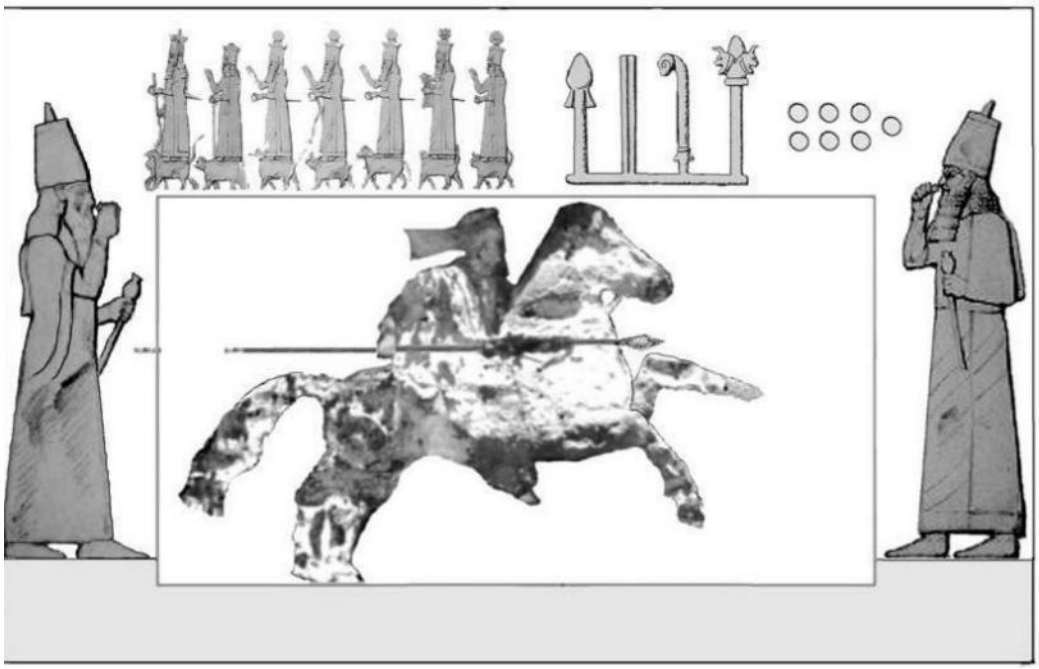


Figure 47. Reconstruction of Khinis Rider Relief
Reade and Anderson 2013, fig. 59

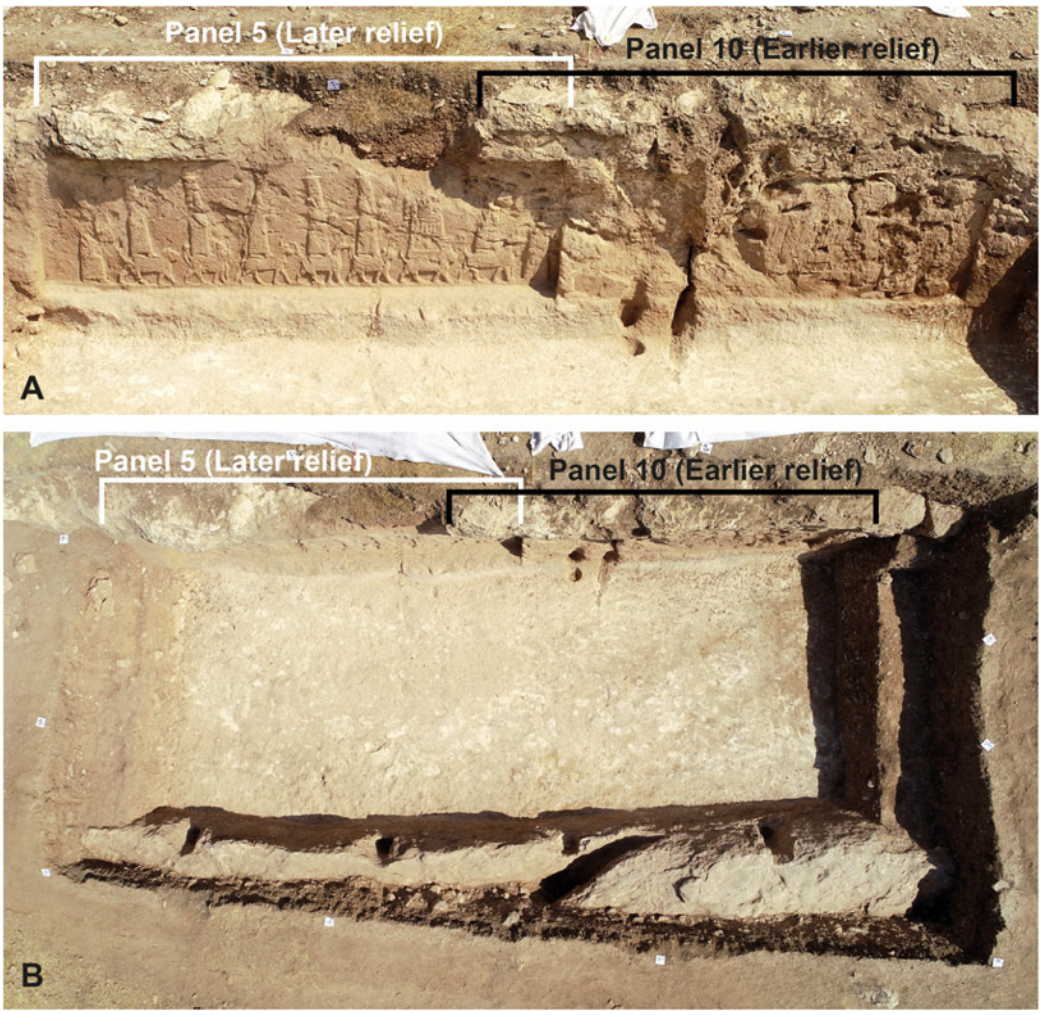


Figure 48. Faida, canal length, relief comparison, panels V and X
Morandi Bonacossi and Ahmed Qasim 2022, fig. 22



Figure 49. Nimrud, temple of Ninurta, stele of Aššurnaṣirpal II (BM 118805)



Figure 50. Khinis, canal head, stele of Sennacherib
Photography by the Media Center for Art History, Department of Art History & Archaeology, Columbia University, produced as a part of the Mapping Mesopotamian Monuments project



Figure 51. Khinis, canal head, inscribed stele of Sennacherib
Photography by the Media Center for Art History, Department of Art History & Archaeology, Columbia University, produced as a part of the Mapping Mesopotamian Monuments project

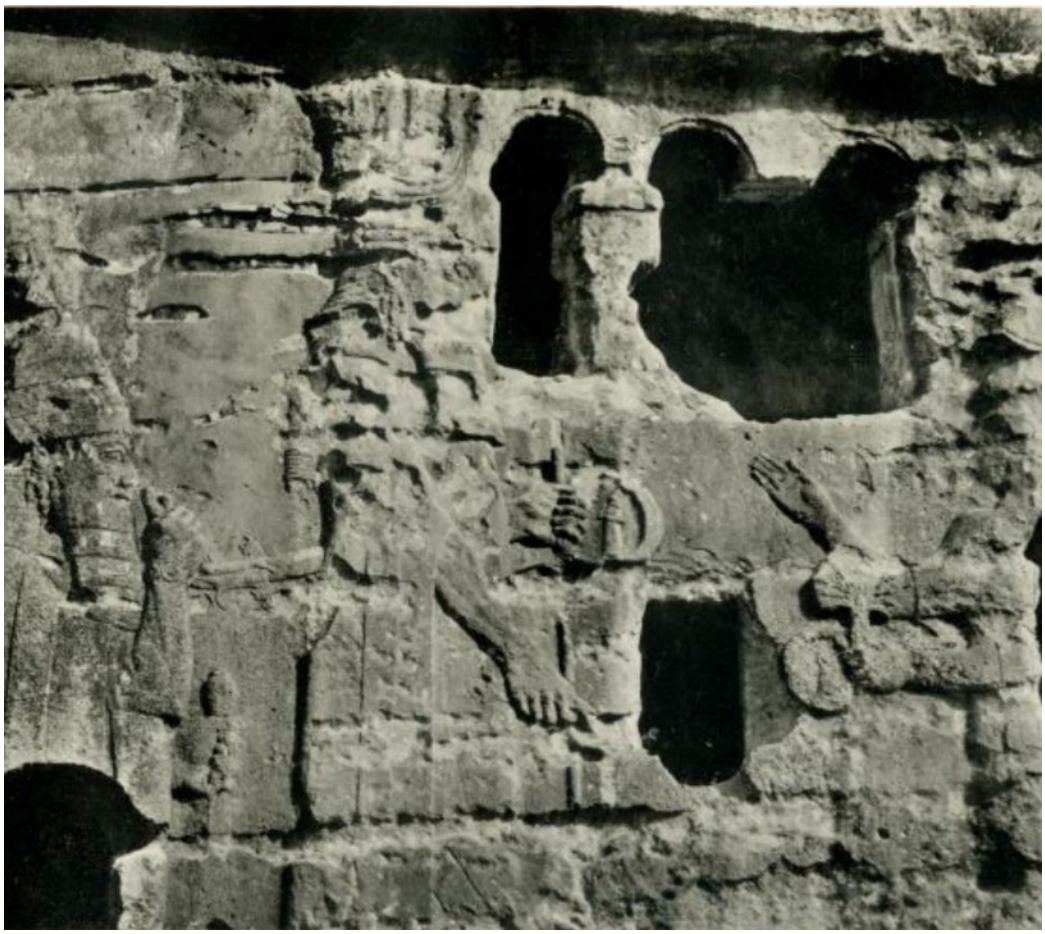


Figure 52. Photograph of Khinis Great Relief
Bachmann 1927, pl. 10

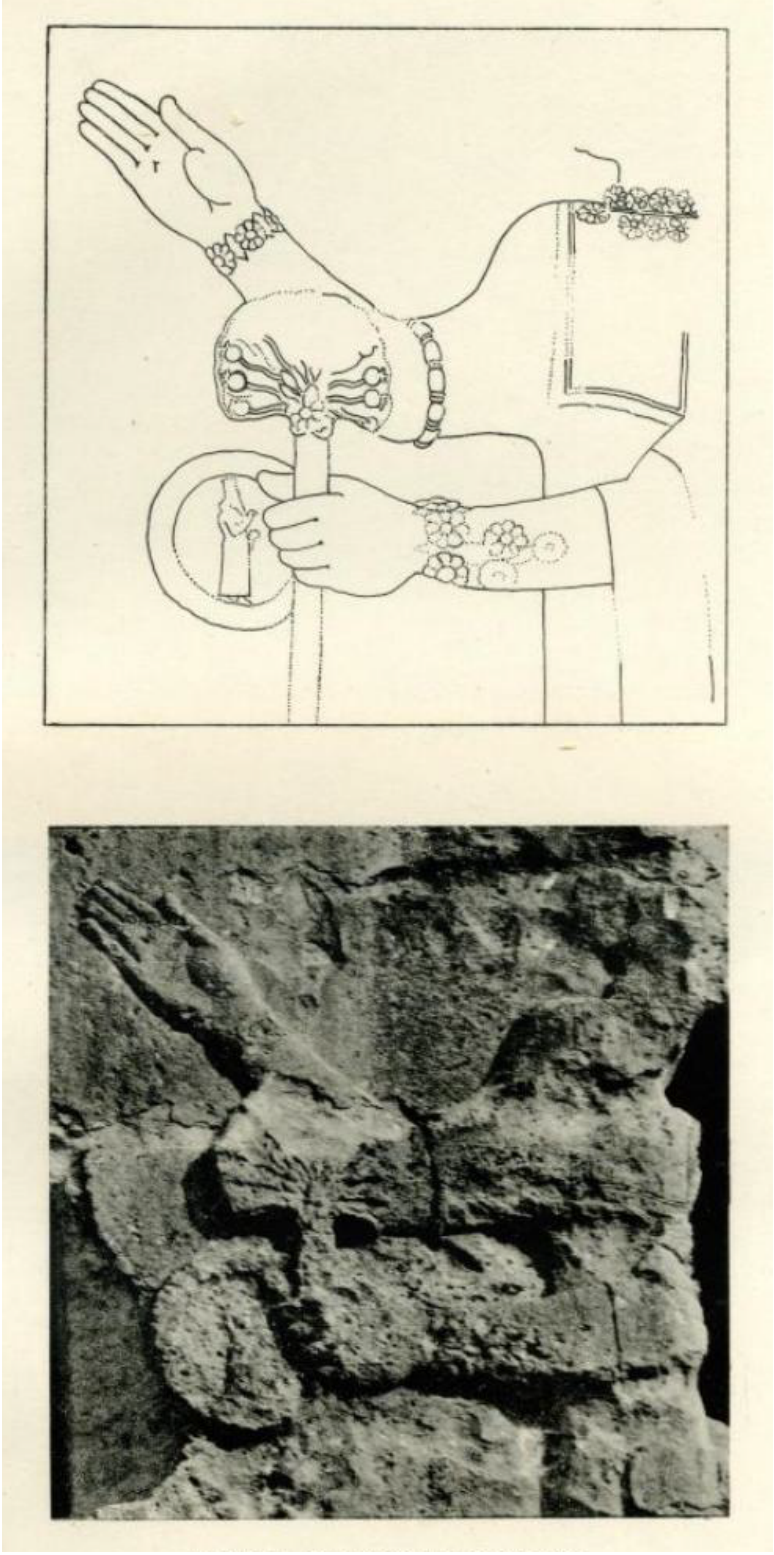


Figure 53. Drawing and photograph of rod and ring, Khinis Great Relief
Bachmann 1927, pl. 12



Figure 54. Khinis, canal head, Great Relief
detail: Mullissu’s rod
Morandi Bonacossi 2018b, fig. 15



Figure 55. View of Khinis Great Relief and Gate Monolith
Photography by the Media Center for Art History, Department of Art History & Archaeology, Columbia University, produced as a part of the Mapping Mesopotamian Monuments project.



Figure 56. Zincirli, stele of Esarhaddon (VA 2708), frontal view

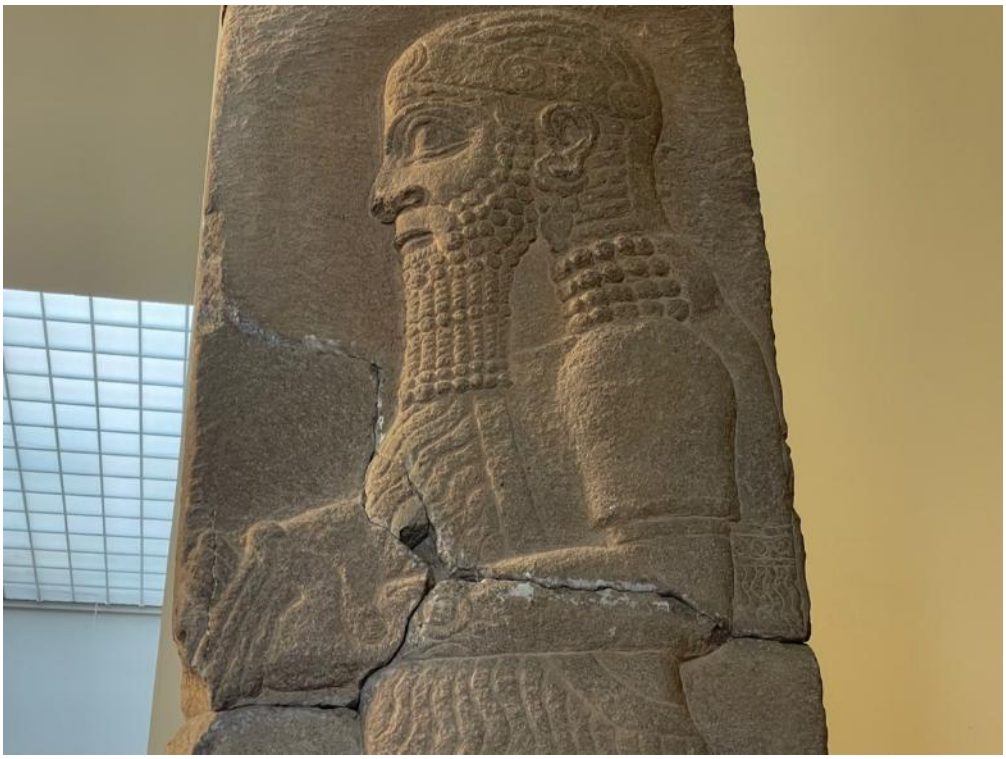


Figure 57. Zincirli, stele of Esarhaddon (VA 2708), right-side view



Figure 58. Zincirli, stele of Esarhaddon (VA 2708), left-side view



Figure 59. Zincirli, stele of Esarhaddon (VA 2708), right-diagonal view



Figure 60. Zincirli, stele of Esarhaddon (VA 2708), left-diagonal view



Figure 61. Zincirli, stele of Esarhaddon (VA 2708), right-diagonal view



Figure 62. Tell Ahmar, gateway, stele of Esarhaddon, frontal view
Porter 2003, pl. 15



Figure 63. Tell Ahmar, gateway, stele of Esarhaddon, left-side view
Porter 2003, pl. 19



Figure 64. Tell Ahmar, citadel, stele of Esarhaddon, frontal view
Porter 2003, pl. 17



Figure 65. Tell Ahmar, citadel, stele of Esarhaddon, left-side view
Porter 2003, pl. 22



Figure 66. Tell Ahmar, citadel, stele of Esarhaddon, upper-right view
Porter 2003, pl. 23



Figure 67. Tell Ahmar, citadel, stele of Esarhaddon, lower-right view
Porter 2003, pl. 24



Figure 68. Drawing of Sam'al stele
Börker-Klähn 1982, vol. 2, fig. 219

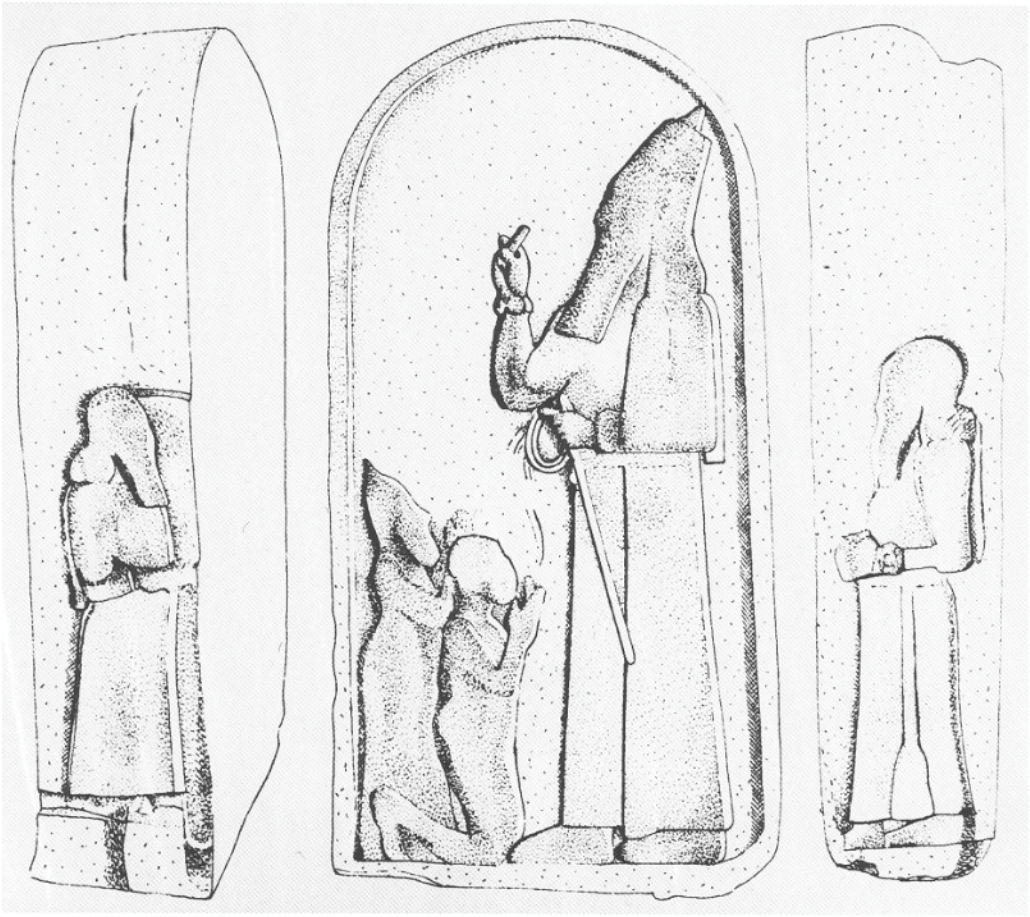


Figure 69. Drawing of Til Barsip gateway stele
Börker-Klähn 1982, vol. 2, fig. 217



Figure 70. Drawing of Til Barsip citadel stele
Börker-Klähn 1982, vol. 2, fig. 218

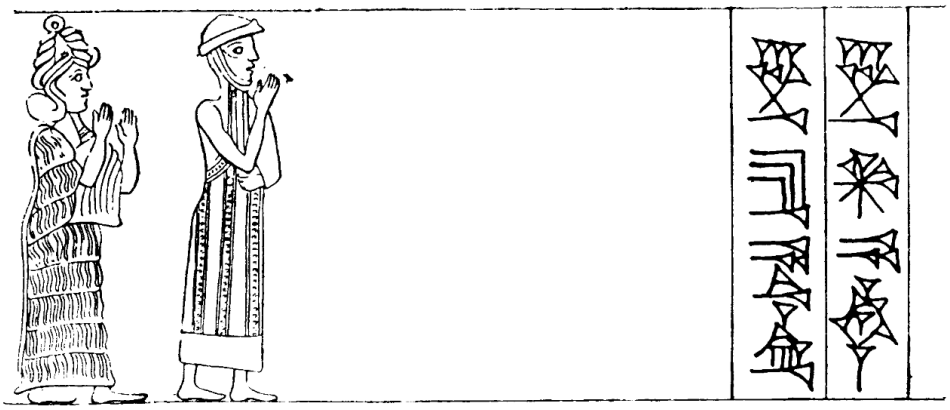


Figure 71. Drawing of Old Assyrian seal impression
Wiseman 1958, fig. 4

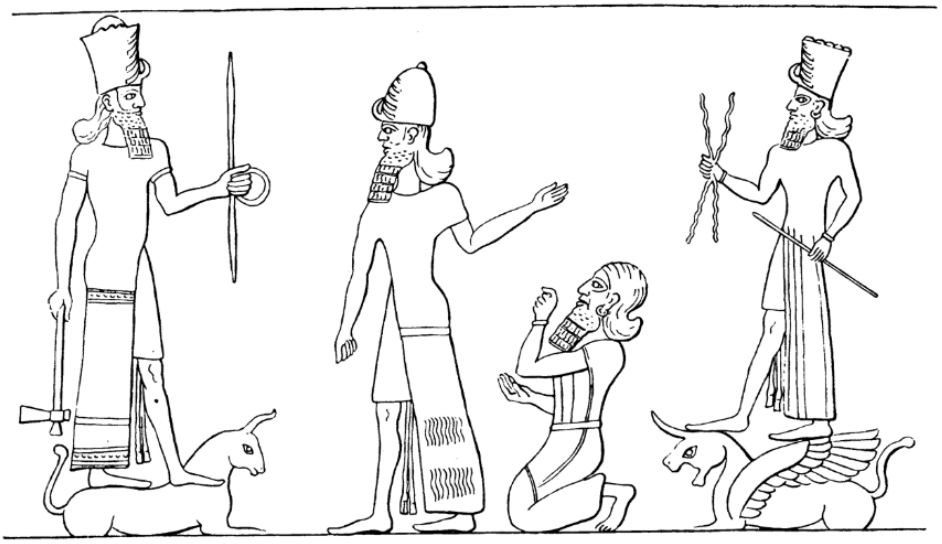


Figure 72. Drawing of Middle Assyrian seal impression.
Wiseman 1958, fig. 6



Figure 73. Drawing of Sennacherib's seal impression
Wiseman 1958, fig. 2



Figure 74. Nimrud, Northwest Palace, relief of Tiglath-pileser III (BM 118933): the king treads on the enemy's neck before the crown prince



Figure 75. Nineveh, North Palace, Room S (fallen into),
Garden Scene of Aššurbanipal (BM 124920)



Figure 76. Nineveh, North Palace, Room S (fallen into),
Garden Scene of Aššurbanipal (BM 124920)
detail: the queen and crown prince



Figure 77. Bronze furniture fragment depicting Naqīʾa (Zakūtu) and a king (AO 20185)



Figure 78. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room XXXIII, relief of Aššurbanipal:
The Battle of Tīl-Tūba (BM 124801)
detail: the brandished head of Teumman
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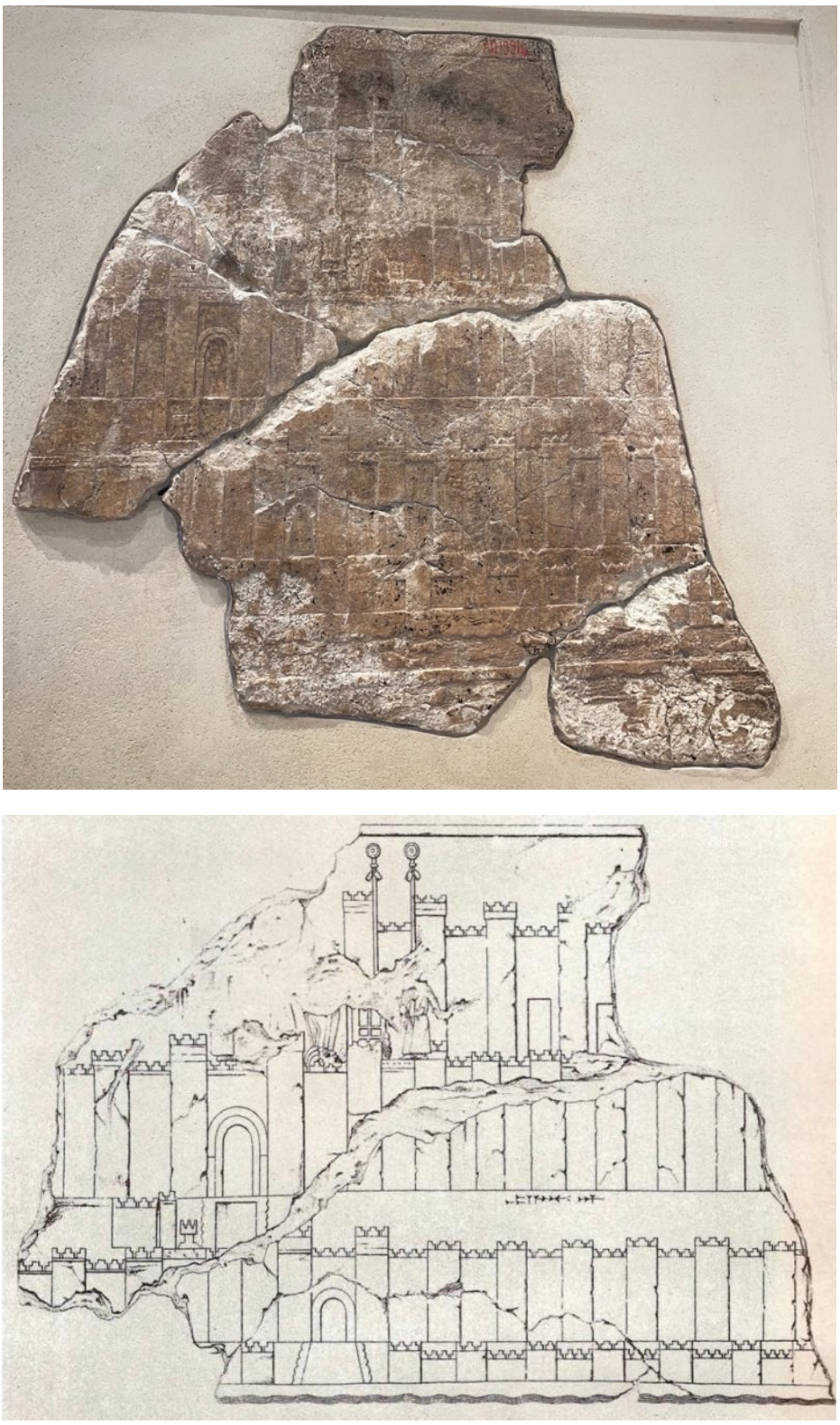


Figure 79. Slab 9 Room I, North Palace, Nineveh
Drawing: Place 1867–1870, vol. 3, pl. 40

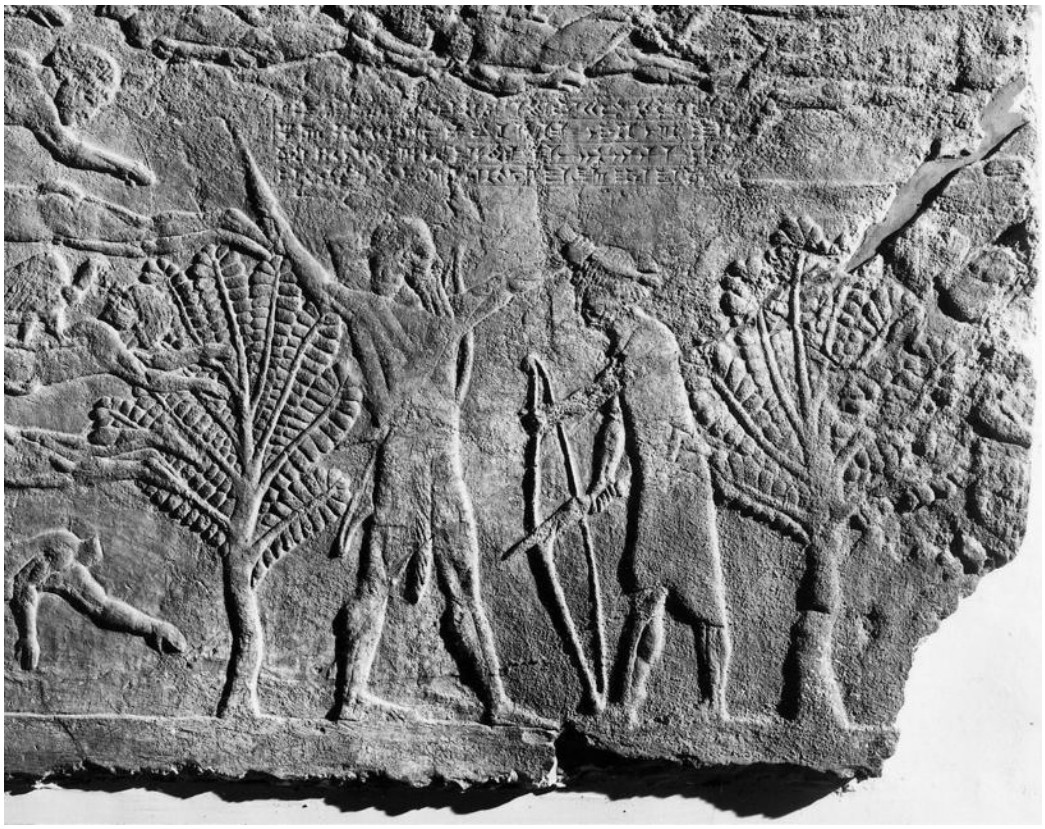


Figure 80. Nineveh, North Palace, Room I, slab 1, relief of Aššurbanipal: Itunî cuts his bow (BM 124941)

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Figure 81. Nineveh, North Palace, Room S (fallen into),
Garden Scene of Aššurbanipal (BM 124920)
detail: the crown prince's sphere



Figure 82. Nineveh, North Palace, Room S (fallen into),
Garden Scene of Aššurbanipal (BM 124920)
detail: conifer tree with head of Teumman; attendant with fruit



Figure 83. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room XXXIII, relief of Aššurbanipal: The Battle of Tīl-Tūba (BM 124801)

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Figure 84. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room XXXIII, relief of Aššurbanipal: the royal entry into Arbela (BM 124802)

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Figure 85. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Court XIX, relief of Aššurbanipal:
the royal chariot and horse with roundel of Ištar (BM 124825)
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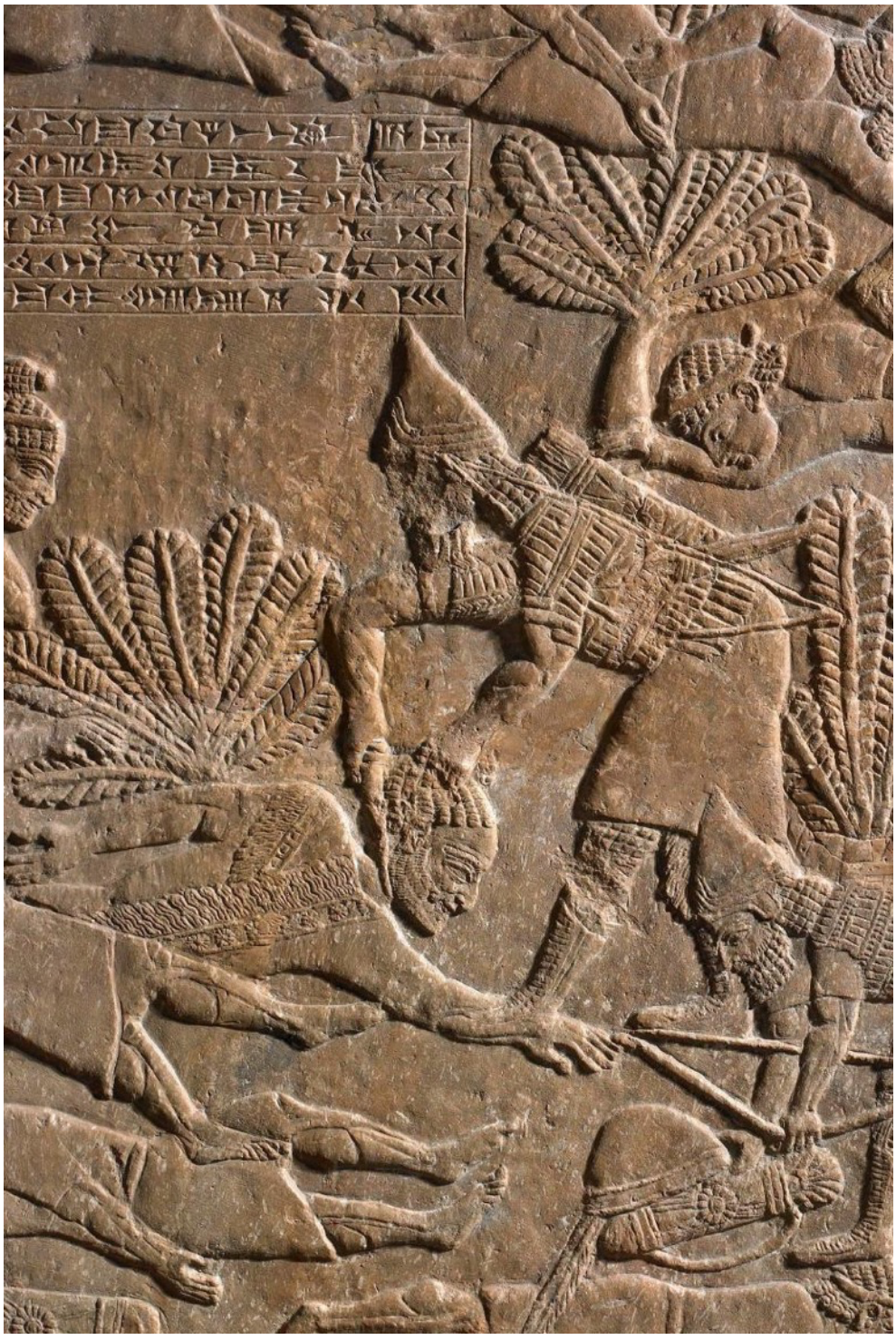


Figure 86. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room XXXIII, relief of Aššurbanipal:
The Battle of Tīl-Tūba (BM 124801)
detail: a soldier severs Teumman's head
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Figure 87. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room XXXIII, relief of Aššurbanipal:
The Battle of Tīl-Tūba (BM 124801)
detail: Teumman and Tammarītu thrown from their chariot
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Figure 88. Tell Ahmar, stele depicting Ištar mounted on a lion (AO 11503)



Figure 89. Nineveh, North Palace, Room S (fallen into), relief of Aššurbanipal: the king pours a libation (BM 124886)

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Figure 90. Nineveh, North Palace, Room S, relief of Aššurbanipal:
the crown prince launches an arrow (BM 124878)
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Figure 91. Nineveh, North Palace, Room S (fallen into),
Garden Scene of Aššurbanipal (BM 124920)
detail: horns?



Figure 92. Amarna, house altar depicting Akhenaten, Nefertiti and their daughters beneath the Aten (ÄM 14145)
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung / Margarete Büsing CC BY-SA 4.0

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