

THE MELAMMU PROJECT

<http://www.aakkl.helsinki.fi/melammu/>



“The King, the Emperor, and the Empire. Continuity and Discontinuity of Royal Representation in Text and Image”

JOAN WESTENHOLZ

Published in Melammu Symposia 1:

Sanno Aro and R. M. Whiting (eds.),

The Heirs of Assyria.

Proceedings of the Opening Symposium of the Assyrian and Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project. Held in Tvärminne, Finland, October 8-11, 1998 (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project 2000), pp. 99-125.

Publisher: <http://www.helsinki.fi/science/saa/>

This article was downloaded from the website of the Melammu Project:

<http://www.aakkl.helsinki.fi/melammu/>

The Melammu Project investigates the continuity, transformation and diffusion of Mesopotamian culture throughout the ancient world. A central objective of the project is to create an electronic database collecting the relevant textual, art-historical, archaeological, ethnographic and linguistic evidence, which is available on the website, alongside bibliographies of relevant themes. In addition, the project organizes symposia focusing on different aspects of cultural continuity and evolution in the ancient world.

The Digital Library available at the website of the Melammu Project contains articles from the *Melammu Symposia* volumes, as well as related essays. All downloads at this website are freely available for personal, non-commercial use. Commercial use is strictly prohibited. For inquiries, please contact melammu-db@helsinki.fi.

JOAN WESTENHOLZ Jerusalem

The King, the Emperor, and the Empire: Continuity and Discontinuity of Royal Representation in Text and Image*

Empires in the Ancient World

The concept of empire relates to a period when disparate geographical territories are united under one regime, but this was the exception rather than the norm during the first 1,500 years of Mesopotamian history. Nevertheless, a paradigmatic ideal of empire was established in Mesopotamia by the dynasty of Akkade (2334-2154) in the third millennium.¹ For the duration of Mesopotamian history, not only did the Akkadian kings represent the ideal monarchy, but their memory also served as a source of authoritarian legitimation for later rulers. Their statues stood in the sanctuaries of the great urban centers and sacrifices were offered before them. Pilgrimimages to Akkade were

made by kings as diverse as Šamši-Adad I of Assyria (1813-1781) and Nabonidus, the last Babylonian king (555-539). The titulary of the Assyrian kings, two of whom bore the name of Sargon, imitated the Sargonic titulary, expressing conscious Assyrian emulation of the world dominion of the Sargonic empire. Echoes of the impact of the Akkadian empire can be heard in Roman times. An omen-text concerning Sargon of Akkade has been traced down to Roman poets.² Notwithstanding some dissent,³ it has been maintained that Sargon created a new type of charismatic kingship, with a new emphasis on the royal person in the public plastic arts and public display ceremonies, and an “empire” of a type unknown

* This paper was written in response to a call for papers on the theme: “The Heirs of Assyria: several empires or one supranational Empire with changing leadership?” Since I am not a political historian, I have attempted to focus on the image of the emperor and to begin at the beginning, with the conception of “emperor” and “empire.” It is with great humility and trepidation that I speak of this subject, which many scholars have already treated. All abbreviations are those of *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956-) and *The Sumerian Dictionary of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: The University Museum, 1984-), with the following exceptions and additions: *Bildstelen* = J. Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs* (BaF 4, Mainz, 1982); *Legends* = J. Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade* (Winona Lake, 1997); Wilcke ZA 87 = C. Wilcke,

“Amar-girids Revolte gegen Narām-Su’ēn,” *ZA* 87 (1997), 11-32.

¹ For a possible justification of the application of the term “empire” to the “empire of Akkad,” see D. Charpin, “The History of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Overview,” in J. Sasson *et al.* (eds.), *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (New York, 1995), 810-11; M. T. Larsen, “The Tradition of Empire in Mesopotamia,” in M. T. Larsen (ed.), *Power and Propaganda* (Copenhagen, 1979), 75-103. All dates in this paper are BCE unless otherwise noted.

² W. G. Schileico, “Eine Omentext Sargons von Akkad und sein Nachklang bei römischen Dichtern,” *AJO* 5 (1928-1929), 214-18.

³ P. Michalowski, “Memory and Deed: The Historiography of the Political Expansion of the Akkad State,” in M. Liverani (ed.), *Akkad, The First World Empire* (Padua, 1993), 86f.

before him, based on the novel conception of world domination, *šar kiššatim*.⁴ The ensuing empires – the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Alexandrine, Roman, Sassanian and Byzantine – all followed the Akkadian paradigm, a process that was later called *translatio imperii*.

At the heart of an empire stood the emperor. Much has been written concerning the visual and textual traditions surrounding him. Manifold studies have focused on royal life-cycle events – the birth, divine election, coronation, and death of the king. Special attention has been paid to the birth of the pre-ordained monarch, of the king-redeemer, of the god-like child, of the hero, and of the bringer of universal cosmic peace. In addition to life-cycle events, scholars have concentrated on various aspects of the image of the king, such as the king's relationship with the divine and with his people. Other themes that have been investigated include kingship from heaven, and the king as pontifex, as bridgemaker between heaven, the gods and the people, as

shepherd of his people, as wise judge and legislator, and as protector of his people. Treatises have been written concerning the attributes of leadership, the exercise of power, and the construction of royal authority. Visual evidence glorifying that power and authority has also been investigated. Asymmetry has also already been noted between image and text.⁵

Despite this wealth of analysis, I would like to offer some possible insights into the royal representation of kings. Among the various types of kings, I have selected the emperor – the consolidator who brings the empire to its greatest heights, who wields unlimited power and authority over his subjects. In order to illustrate the techniques employed in his symbolic discourse with his subjects, I have chosen a few specific elements of the images and texts used by the emperor to convey his message of power and dominion, searching out similarities and channels of transmission between representations from different times and places.

Evidence and its consideration

When examining royal images and texts, one should remember that these representations can have complex multi-layered interpretations, which I have labeled the literal, metaphorical/figurative, and symbolic/mythic, in an earlier publication.⁶ Furthermore, these representations should be understood as referring to several simultaneous levels of perception. However, we are still viewing the royal image from one

direction; let us not forget the two directions from which the king expected to be viewed – from heaven and from earth.

The royal image appears in various media, ranging from display monuments to glyptics and coins. Art was commissioned in the service of the empire and conceived by court planners as an artistic program, presenting the king or emperor as the master of the world by using royal images of

⁴ H. Limet, "Aspect mythique de la royauté en Mésopotamie, Sargon l'Ancien et Cyrus le Grand," in F. Jouan and A. Motte (eds.), *Mythe et Politique* (Paris, 1990), 167-79; Michalowski, "Memory and Deed," 87.

⁵ J. S. Cooper, "Mesopotamian Historical Consciousness and the Production of Monumental Art in the Third Millennium B.C.," in A.C. Gunter (ed.), *Investigating Artis-*

tic Environments in the Ancient Near East (Washington, D.C., 1990), 39-51

⁶ J. Westenholz, "Symbolic Language in Akkadian Narrative Poetry: The Metaphorical Relationship between Poetical Images and the Real World," in M. E. Vogelzang and H. L. J. Vanstiphout (eds.), *Mesopotamian Poetic Language* (Groningen, 1996), 193.

power. The royal inscription is another case of self-presentation, and is often couched in the first person. This fact has given definition to literary categories (such as autobiography and pseudo-autobiography), so it is essential to note that the royal inscriptions from the Sargonic period are mostly expressed in the third person, whereas those from the second millennium are in the first person. While the majority of Assyrian royal inscriptions are written in the first person, segments written in the third person were also re-introduced.⁷ Beyond art and text, there were celebrations of kingship in ritual, public displays of worship and loyalty, royal journeys through the kingdom, and victory celebrations.⁸

In comparative studies such as this, there are many factors to take into account. The first is the nature of the subject to be studied, which in this case consists of a mass of data with manifold interpretations. The second factor is the type of evidence, of the various visual and textual genres which are being equated. Like should be compared to

like. On the other hand, there is a need to use both image and text, which together provide information about the iconography of rule and the ideology of empire. The third factor is the need to differentiate between general correspondences and specific particulars. The fourth factor consists of tabulating the mechanisms of transmission,⁹ the evaluation of significant connections across cultural boundaries in terms of established correspondences, whether of single or multiple traits. For this reason, in the following, single isolated elements attested in later material with similarities to earlier components will be mentioned together with their precursors, while multiple traits belonging to an inherited complex will be described in their chronological context.

Because of the limits of space and time, topics such as theoretical perspectives on power and representation, or paradigms of power in literature, authority and the construction of power, could not be discussed in this paper.¹⁰

Naram-Sin

Narām-Sîn, fourth king of the Akkadian dynasty (2254-2218), not only had a long and brilliant reign which typified an age and a way of life, like Louis XIV or Queen Victoria, but also transformed the realm he inherited, creating a true empire.¹¹ For the

first time in Mesopotamian history, the king differentiated himself from his subjects and assimilated himself to the divine rulers of destiny. This deification of the ruler was symbolized by the iconographic representation of the king wearing the horned tiara,

⁷ A. K. Grayson, "Assyria and Babylonia," *Or.* 49 (1980), 165-167; A. F. Conradie, "The Standard Inscription of Ashurnasirpal II: Historical Document or Decoration," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 16 (1990), 17f.

⁸ Michalowski, "Memory and Deed," 90.

⁹ For example, note the use of the continuities within the craft tradition between pre-Achaemenid and Achaemenid Persian art; see Margaret C. Root, "Lifting the veil: artistic transmission beyond the boundaries of historical periodisation," in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, A. Kuhrt, and M. Cool Root (eds.), *Achaemenid History VIII: Con-*

tinuity and Change (Leiden, 1994), 22-33.

¹⁰ On the power of representation and the representation of power, see a discussion of the representation of Louis XIV; Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King*, translated from the French (1981) by M. H. Houle (Dexter, MN, 1988). On the paradigms of power in Renaissance literature, see Alan Liu, "The Power of Formalism: The New Historicism," *ELH* 56 (1989), 721-71. On the general construction of authority and power, see Bruce Lincoln, *Authority, Construction and Corrosion* (Chicago, 1994).

¹¹ Charpin, "History," 810.

previously an exclusive attribute of the gods.

Monumental public works consisting of standardized monumental artwork gave expression to this symbolic identification and transmitted the signs encoded in the discourse of divine monarchy. It has often been remarked that one of the most spectacular achievements of the Akkadian empire was its artwork. Large sculptures in the round, stelae with reliefs, and rock sculptures communicated information about nature, society, and a particular world view to an overwhelmingly illiterate population. These public monuments contained both historical narratives of military conquests and iconic depictions of royal might. Naram-Sin tells us in his own words that “he made a gold statue for the admiration of his power and the battles that he won.”¹² Furthermore, only rarely has it been acknowledged that the Sargonic scribes created new kinds of narrative.¹³ New ideas were expressed in writing, changing the very notions of kingship and empire.

Iconic expression of deification can be seen in the statues of the monarch placed in the temples of the gods, the sacred space. For example, Naram-Sin tells us that “when he defeated HARsamat and personally felled a wild bull at Mount Tibar, he fashioned an image of himself and dedicated it to the god Enlil, his father.”¹⁴ As Winter proposes, these royal statues represented “the introduction of the ruler into, and the

appropriation of, ritual space hitherto belonging to the god. Presence in the god’s shrine constitutes power; it permits direct access to superhuman authority.”¹⁵

Statues were also placed in accessible public venues. As today, large images of the ruler remind the people of their fealty to him, among other things. Thus, statues were erected in the foreign dominions conquered by the Akkadian kings – the Elamite king Hita agreed in his treaty with Naram-Sin to erect a statue of his overlord in Susa.¹⁶ It is said that at the ratification of the treaty, Naram-Sin came to Susa in person and his minister and the oracle priest dedicated the statue on that occasion.¹⁷

The most famous monument pertaining to Naram-Sin is the Victory Stela (200 cm high × 105 cm wide), taken from Sippar by Šutruk-Nahhunte I, the Elamite king (ca. 1165) and found by J. de Morgan on the acropolis of Susa (see fig. 1).¹⁸ As recognized by Pierre Amiet, “This grandiose scene thus unites all the episodes expressing the mythological and historical conceptions of kingship – usually elaborated in a series of registers – into a single comprehensive vision.”¹⁹ Moreover, while a literal interpretation of this stela would view it as depicting Naram-Sin’s victory over the Lulubi mountain tribes (cf. Frayne, RIME 2 143-44, 2.1.4.31), on a mythic scale it records the spiritual victory of order over chaos. The following four elements in this image will now be isolated and examined:

¹² Frayne, RIME 2 160, 2.1.4.1001:4'-12'.

¹³ Michalowski, “Memory and Deed,” 75, 87.

¹⁴ Frayne, RIME 2 127, 2.1.4.23:5-19.

¹⁵ I. J. Winter, “‘Idols of the King’: Royal Images as Recipients of Ritual Action in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 6 (1992), 32.

¹⁶ W. Hinz, “Elams Vertrag mit Nārām-Sîn von Akkade,” *ZA* 58 (1967), 80-81.

¹⁷ W. Hinz, *The Lost World of Elam* (London, 1972), 76f.

¹⁸ Recent discussions of this stela are: P. Amiet, “Victory Stele of Naram-Sin,” in P. O. Harper, J. Aruz, and F. Tallon (eds.), *The Royal City of Susa, Ancient Near*

Eastern Treasures in the Louvre (New York, 1992), 166-68; D. Bänder, *Die Siegesstele des Naramsîn und ihre Stellung in Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte* (Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte 103, Idstein, 1995); I. J. Winter, “Sex, Rhetoric and the Public Monument: The Alluring Body of Naram-Sin of Agade,” in N. B. Kampen (ed.), *Sexuality in Ancient Art* (Cambridge, 1996), 11-26. For its recent conservation, see A. Caubet, B. Bourgeois, and J.-F. de Lapérouse, “Technical Appendix,” in P. O. Harper, J. Aruz, and F. Tallon (eds.), *op. cit.*, 285-87.

¹⁹ Amiet, “Victory Stele,” 166.

A. Body language, B. Depiction of enemies, C. The bow as royal weapon, and D. Astral symbols.

A. Body Language

Naram-Sin is shown with a heroic body and a triumphal stance. Winter has studied the careful rendering of Naram-Sin's body on this stela, and has related his male vigor to authority and dominance. She has also suggested that the abundant full beard worn by Naram-Sin presents him as manly, mature, noble, and powerful, like the dominant male in a pride of lions.²⁰ This emphasis on the royal body was an innovation in the artwork of Naram-Sin. It has also been argued that this is not a picture of an individual but of a ruler. Since Naram-Sin is king and representative of his people, his body is related to the body politic; as he is also the protective deity of his city, his body unites both the body politic and the body divine.

The triumphal stance shows the king with his foot placed on the bodies of his prostrate enemies. Naram-Sin not only triumphs over the enemies but also over chaos, since behind the king order reigns, while before him is despair, confusion, and wild disorder.²¹ Thus, his victory is one of order over chaos.

By placing the image of the king above all the other figures, larger than them, and at the center of the composition, it becomes an image of the glorification and deification of kingship.

B. Depiction of Enemies

The enemies are represented both clothed



Fig. 1: Drawing of a possible restoration of the Victory Stela of Naram-Sin (after J. Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs*, no. 26k).

and naked. Those enemies still upright seem to be wearing cloaks of animal hide, while their fallen companions are shown naked. The hide cloaks are similar to those

²⁰ I. J. Winter, "Art in Empire: The Royal Image and the Visual Dimensions of Assyrian Ideology," in S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting (eds.), *Assyria, 1995* (Helsinki, 1997), 370f.

²¹ Aa. Westenholz, "The Old Akkadian Period: History and Culture," in P. Attinger and M. Wäfler (eds.), *Mesopotamien, Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit* (Freiburg, Schweiz, 1999), 88.

worn much later in the same region by the Medes, who are represented in this garb on a relief from the period of Sargon II of Assyria. Such ethnographic details were as interesting to the audience back home as they were in Assyria some 1,500 years later.²² Beyond literal ethnographic detail, the animal hides are also a metaphor for the animal-like nature of the enemy, the alien, the other. The message is that the enemies are not human and that therefore no consideration should inhibit their slaughter. The king is trampling the prostrate enemies as if he were trampling animals.

One enemy warrior holds a broken spear, its point hanging down – an eloquent image of shattered resistance. The whole drama of order's victory over chaos is condensed in the point right before the king's toe.²³

C. Bow as Royal Weapon

The king carries a bow for the first time in iconic representation. Naram-Sin is holding a bow in his left hand. However, a bow is never listed among the insignia of royalty (the crown, the throne, the lead-rope, the sceptre, the crook, and the mace).²⁴ There is archaeological evidence of a particular

stone arrowhead found as a type fossil in Akkadian assemblages.²⁵ Despite the evidence that they were used in warfare, the large-scale use of bows and arrows does seem to have been a shocking innovation to the Sumerians.²⁶ The invention and function of the Akkadian composite bow may have changed military tactics, as did the English longbow many centuries later. The armory text from Susa (MDP XIV 86) shows that these weapons were status symbols as much as practical instruments of war – silver was used to decorate the bows and even the arrows.

The question arises as to whether there is any symbolic significance to the bow in this representation or whether it takes on such significance after the reign of Naram-Sin. The answer to this question lies in the positioning of the bow. When the bow is shown carried, ready for use, by various monarchs, it is represented as being grasped naturally, with the bowstave held outward and the bowstring toward the king. However, in the Stela of Naram-Sin, the king and one leader of his troops hold their bows in crooked arms, with the bowstring toward the enemy. This pose may merely reflect artistic convention, but the fact that all the bows are held in this position might indicate that

²² Julian Reade, "Ideology and Propaganda in Assyrian Art," in M. T. Larsen (ed.), *Power and Propaganda* (Copenhagen, 1979), 334f.

²³ Aa. Westenholz, "The Old Akkadian Period," 88.

²⁴ Examples are: the lead-rope and the scimitar-crook, the sceptre and the throne (Šulgi G 25-27); the crown, the throne, the sceptre, the scimitar-crook, the robes, Inanna and Enki, pls. II v 4-8 and cf. refs. cited, G. Farber-Flügge, *Der Mythos "Inanna und Enki" unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Liste der me* (Rome, 1973), 103; the crown, the throne and the sceptre (Innīšagura 142); the sceptre, the throne, and the crown (Agušaya I iv 1-2); the crown, the sceptre, the throne, the crook (Etana I 6-11). For a discussion and a listing of royal insignia through the millennia, see Ursula Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen – Aspekte der Herrschaft, Eine Typologie* (BaF 9, Mainz, 1986), 19-28. Note that *qaštu* appears only once, in one instance in *mis pi*: Gerhard Meier, "Die Ritualtafel der Serie 'Mundwaschung,'" *AfO* XII (1937-39), 43 K 9729+rev. ii 7; see Magen, *Assyri-*

sche Königsdarstellungen, 25, 27 who believes that the bow as royal insignia belongs to the Assyrian tradition.

²⁵ e.g. Gawra I XXXVIIIa:18, reference courtesy of McGuire Gibson.

²⁶ M. Korfmann, *Schleuder und Bogen in Südwestasien, von den frühesten Belegen bis zum Beginn der historischen Stadtstaaten* (Antiquitas, Reihe 3, Band 13, Bonn, 1972), 218-222; For Sumerian textual references, see W. H. Ph. Römer, "Beiträge zum Lexikon des Sumerischen (6), Zu Pfeilen, Köchern und Bogen," in S. Maul (ed.), *Festschrift für Rykle Borger zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 24. Mai 1994* (Groningen, 1998), 303-312, who lists only one reference for the pre-Sargonic period (Steible ABW 1, 126 Ean. 1). A unique small incised inlay from Mari bears the earliest impression of a siege scene in which one of the two soldiers holds a double curved bow (A. Parrot, "Les fouilles de Mari, dix-neuvième campagne (printemps 1971)," *Syria* 48 [1975], pl. xiv, 4).

some meaning was inherent in the stance. Wilkinson suggests that this pose may signify that there is no further threat of resistance.²⁷ He sees it as a specific gesture of dominance symbolism. In the following sections of this paper, the “outward bow” will refer to the bow held outward with the bowstring toward the king, while the “turned bow” will refer to the bow held turned in towards the body of the king, with the bowstring toward the enemy. The military connotations of the bow are difficult to assess; it does not seem to have symbolized the king’s function as commander-in-chief of the army, since it is also borne by one of his soldiers.

D. Astral Symbols.

Above the *melée* at the apex of the stela shine at least three eight-pointed and rayed stars. Because the top of the stela is only partially preserved, it can be reconstructed in different ways. Börker-Klähn restores seven stars, which seems most likely.²⁸ The seven stars are usually equated with the Pleiades²⁹ or with the seven planets (the moon, sun, and the five planets). The latter, however, would be expected to be shown with separate symbols for the moon and the sun. Consequently, it is suggested here that the Sebetti, the heroic Heptad, are manifesting themselves in the battle *melée*.³⁰ In Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, the seven heroic gods are said to help defeat enemies and are invoked in treaties. According to Esar-



Fig. 2: Drawing of the rock relief of Naram-Sin at Pir Hüseyin (after J. Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs*, no. 25).

haddon (Borger Esarh. 79:12), their weapons are the bow and the arrow.

The astral symbols can embody many meanings. They can indicate the divine assistance given to the king, and are evidence of a divinely sanctioned victory. Similarly, Achilles’ shield, fashioned by Hephaistos, bore astral symbols including the Pleiades (*Iliad* 18.483-89). The mythic involvement of gods in the human sphere as shown by the astral symbols is reminiscent of the Sargon legend, in which the stars came out against his enemies, indicating that the ostensible account of his victory is in reality

²⁷ Richard H. Wilkinson, “The Representation of the Bow in the Art of Egypt and the Ancient Near East,” *JANES* 20 (1991), 83-99.

²⁸ J. Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen und Vergleichbare Felsreliefs* (BaF 4, Mainz, 1982), 134-36, no. 26. Note Bänder, *Die Siegesstele des Naramsin*, 172, 185f, explains these stars as symbols of Šamaš and depicts five stars in her reconstruction.

²⁹ On the Pleiades, see Erica Reiner, *Astral Magic in Babylonia* (Philadelphia, 1995), 86 and note 355; D.

Pingree, “Legacies in Astronomy and Celestial Omens,” in S. Dalley, *The Legacy of Mesopotamia* (Oxford, 1998), 127-29. Note: “the stars (MUL.MUL = Pleiades), the seven gods, the great gods” MUL.APIN I i 44, H. Hunger and D. Pingree, *MUL.APIN, An Astronomical Compendium in Cuneiform* (AfO Beiheft 24, Horn, Austria, 1989), 30.

³⁰ For a recent discussion of the various sets of seven gods, see A. R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 40, Leuven, 1992), 365f.

a divine triumph. The stars also give divine protection to the stela itself, like the divine symbols on kudurrus of the Middle and Neo-Babylonian periods, as well as on the stelae of Neo-Assyrian kings (see below).

Whether or not the Victory Stela of Naram-Sin was visible to the greater population in Sippar, it or other monuments of Naram-Sin with similar imagery were surely seen by the Gutian monarchs and their cohorts during their short period of hegemony over the south. Another victory stela was set up by Naram-Sin on the northern borders of the Akkadian empire and was visible to those who lived in the northern provinces. This relief was found at Pir Hüseyin, a village about 25 km north-east of Diyarbakır (see fig. 2),³¹ and commemorates a military victory over settlements in the Tigris basin. Naram-Sin is the only figure on the stela. Except for the similarity in hair and beard styles, his depiction on this stela differs from that of the Victory Stela. He wears a beehive-shaped hat with crossed lines which has been related to headdresses from Ebla. Paolo Matthiae has suggested that this headdress may be a royal military tiara worn by the kings of Ebla, and adopted by Naram-Sin on his stela for reasons of prestige after his Syrian conquests.³² Naram-Sin is clothed in a flounced robe which probably reached down to his ankles, like that worn by Sargon on his stela. On the broken stela, Naram-Sin is apparently not holding a bow but a crook and mace. According to his inscriptions, Naram-Sin carries the mace of the gods Ilaba and Aštar to the foreign lands. This stela is the earliest evidence of the marking of boundaries in a period of military expansion.

Since the inscription on the victory stela

and the Pir Hüseyin relief are poorly preserved and mostly effaced by time, we must supply the text that originally accompanied the images from other original inscriptions and scribal copies of inscriptions of Naram-Sin. These correspond to or supplement the symbolism of the imagery of the iconic presentation. In general, Naram-Sin the mighty records his fights against enemies, devotion to the gods, military achievements, adventurous exploits, and only rarely his construction of temples.

I will now isolate and examine three narrative elements: E. Rebellion theme, F. Battling the beasts, and G. Adventurous exploits.

E. Rebellion Theme

“Naram-Sin, the mighty, king of Akkade, when the four quarters together revolted against him, through the love which the goddess Aštar showed him, he was victorious in nine battles in one year.”³³ The term “four quarters” encompasses the known world and turns these events into a universal catastrophe. For this reason, Naram-Sin designates the rebellion as a unique epoch-making event: “Whereas for all time since the creation of humankind, no king among kings had experienced the revolt of the people of the four quarters together” (Wilcke ZA 87 24 J ix 9-20). This royal rhetoric has changed the conception of the monarchy and the sociopolitical system. There is no such concept as opposition to the ruler of the universe, but only rebellion, which later develops into sacrilege after the apotheosis of Naram-Sin. This symbolic discourse indicates that although these royal inscriptions have been read as docu-

³¹ *Bildstelen*, 133-34, no. 25; Bänder, *Die Siegesstela des Naramsin*, 156-159. The fragmentary text of the inscription is given in Frayne, RIME 2 128-9, 2.1.4.24.

³² P. Matthiae, “Appunti di iconografia eblaita, II,” *Studi Eblaiti* II/2-3 41 (1980), 41-47.

³³ Frayne, RIME 2 113-4, 2.1.4.10: 1-15.

menting a general insurrection against Naram-Sin, the facts of the crises may be entirely different: what originally began as a local rebellion was turned on its head when extended to the four quarters of the world. It is said that the deification of the king occurred shortly after this crisis in his reign.³⁴

While the phrase “when the four quarters together revolted against him” refers explicitly to rebellion,³⁵ the phrase “nine battles in one year” became a leitmotiv of all Naram-Sin’s royal inscriptions.³⁶ In texts written after the reign of Naram-Sin, the number nine became paradigmatic, especially for the last and final battle.³⁷ Historical texts speak of Sargon’s nine regiments (Frayne, RIME 2 16, 2.1.1.3:6-8) and legends concerning Sargon refer to his nine battles – “for the ninth time he took captive men, oxen, cattle, sheep and goats” (Legends 7 iii 14f “Sargon in Foreign Lands”). The conquests of “Sargon, the Conquering Hero,” are nine in number. Šulgi also smote Simurru and Lullubum nine times.

F. Battling the Beasts

An inscription of Naram-Sin known from two Old Babylonian tablet copies deals with the king’s slaying of a wild bull at Mount Tibar and the dedication of an image to the god Enlil at Nippur (Frayne, RIME 2 126-7,

2.1.4.23). This topos, which appears here for the first time in the written tradition, is related to the later lion-slaying by the monarch.³⁸ Although only described in words in Naram-Sin inscriptions, the king’s combat with beasts became a traditional Mesopotamian theme.³⁹ In later traditions surrounding the figure of Naram-Sin, lion omens relating to Naram-Sin who governed the universe span the millennia of Mesopotamian history.⁴⁰ The theme of the royal hero vanquishing beasts represents the king as the maintainer of order against the forces of chaos.

G. Extraordinary Feats and Adventurous Exploits

Naram-Sin set out to conquer the universe, and to extend the known boundaries of the Akkadian empire. He made a point of going where no king had gone before (“where no king among kings had ever gone before, Naram-Sin, king of Akkade, went there,” Frayne, RIME 2 131, 2.1.4.25:22-29; “Whereas for all time since the creation of humankind, no king among kings had destroyed Armānum and Ebla,” Frayne, RIME 2 132f, 2.1.4.26 i 1-9). His expeditions were thus twofold, concerned both with the exploration of the four quarters of the world and with the imposition of the king’s will on them. Physical evidence of the explora-

³⁴ On the dating of the deification, see Aa. Westenholz, *FS Oelsner*, forthcoming.

³⁵ The phrase “when the four quarters rebelled against him” is also found in: Frayne, RIME 2 96, 2.1.4.3 iii 15-18 = Wilcke ZA 87 24 J ix 13-17; Frayne, RIME 2 96-7, 2.1.4.3 iii 27-32 = Wilcke ZA 87 25 J ix 26-30; Frayne, RIME 2 110, 2.1.4.8 ii 1’-5’; p. 138, E2.11.4.28:9-13; p. 140, E2.11.4.29:5-7. See discussion in Aa. Westenholz, *FS Oelsner*, forthcoming, and idem, “The Old Akkadian Period,” pp. 51ff.

³⁶ For the royal epithet “victor of nine battles in one year,” see Frayne, RIME 2 112, 2.1.4.9:6-8; p. 115, 2.1.4.11:6-8; p. 116, 2.1.4.12:6-7; p. 117, 2.1.4.13 i 6-8. Walter Sommerfeld discusses the location of the nine

battles in “Narām-Sin, die ‘Große Revolte’ und MAR.TU^{ki},” *FS Oelsner*, forthcoming.

³⁷ Cf. Michalowski, “Memory and Deed,” 79.

³⁸ See E. Cassin, “Le roi et le lion,” *Le semblable et le différent* (Paris, 1987), 167-213.

³⁹ The general theme of the king’s triumph over the lion dates back to the Uruk period, see F. Basmachi, “The Lion-Hunt Stela from Warka,” *Sumer* 5 (1949), 88. In this old formulation, the king is represented shooting an arrow, as well as spearing the lion while the lion throws himself at the king. Many seals from the Uruk and Early Dynastic periods contain this scene. However, in all these portrayals, the “outward bow” is shown.

⁴⁰ Cassin, “Le roi et le lion,” 210.

tion is seen in the description and exhibition of the royal procurement of prestige materials and goods, through the extraordinary personal enterprise of the monarch.

Furthermore, he emphasized that his statements were truthful. This emphasis on truth (*[umma' la surrātum] lu kīniš*, Wilcke ZA 87 J vii 30 - viii 1) and revelation (*Enlil ukallim* Wilcke ZA 87 J vii 13) are leit-motivs of the royal inscriptions of Naram-Sin.

Second millennium imitations in image and text

On the mountainous periphery of the Mesopotamian lowlands in the centuries directly after the Sargonic period, especially in those areas inhabited by the defeated enemies of Naram-Sin, the following rock reliefs appeared, imitating the pose and figures of the Naram-Sin Victory Stela:

1. Darband-i Gaur (*Bildstelen* no. 29, p. 137): King depicted in triumphal pose, foot raised over fallen enemies and holding “turned” bow. Date uncertain, no inscription.
2. Sar-i Pul-i Zohab (located directly west of Behistun near the Iraqi border on the route leading from Babylon to Ecbatana) #1 (*Bildstelen* no. 31, p. 138f, **see fig. 3**): Scene divided into two registers. Top register contains sun symbol, king in triumphal pose over prostrate naked enemies, holding “turned” bow and facing Ištar, who is giving him the ring of kingship and holding enemies by a nose-rope. The bottom register presents a row of naked captives. Inscription begins: “Annubanini, the mighty king, king of Lullubum, erected a *šalam* of himself and a *šalam* of

Ištar in the Mountains of Batir.”⁴¹ This relief shows the use made by the defeated Lullubean enemy shown on the Victory Stela of Naram-Sin of this very stela. A total of nine enemies is represented.

3. Sarpol-i Zohab #2 (*Bildstelen* no. 30, p. 138): Scene shows sun and crescent symbols hovering over king in triumphal pose, with foot on prostrate enemy. Inscription: titulary broken and attribution of this piece is uncertain. Most recent attribution to Iddin-Sin of Simurru.⁴²
4. Bitwāta:⁴³ fragmentary relief of top half of royal figure holding “turned” bow. No inscription. Attribution to Iddin-Sin of Simurru.
5. Sarpol-i Zohab #3 (*Bildstelen* no. 32, p. 139): scene depicts sun or star(?) hovering over king in triumphal pose holding “turned” bow, with foot on prostrate enemy, facing Ištar who is presenting him with ring and rod (which looks like nose-rope holding enemies). No inscription.
6. Darband-i Seh Han (*Bildstelen* no. 33, p. 139f): scene depicts king with “outward” bow held in reverse position towards enemies and quiver, and with foot on prostrate figures. Inscription: PN.
7. Darband-i Ramqan #1 (*Bildstelen* no. 34, p. 140f): Damaged scene showing sun and crescent hovering over king in triumphal pose, holding “turned” bow and facing Ištar, who is presenting him with ring and rod. No inscription.
8. Darband-i Ramqan #2 (*Bildstelen* no. N34, p. 140f): Little remains of scene, though sun and crescent are visible.

From the northern periphery come other relief fragments which have partly similar scenes, such as those from Mardin (*Bildstelen* no. 111, p. 165f), and depictions in other media, such as the Old Assyrian seal

⁴¹ D. O. Edzard, “Zwei Inschriften am Felsen von Sar-i-Pul-i-Zohab: Anubanini 1 und 2,” *AfO* 24 (1974), 73 = Frayne, RIME 4 704ff, 4.18.1.1.

⁴² Frayne, RIME 4 712.

⁴³ A.-H. Al-Fouadi, “Inscriptions and Reliefs from Bitwāta,” *Sumer* 34 (1978), 127.

of Šilulu king of Assyria from Kültepe.⁴⁴ The imitated elements are: A. Body language, B. Depiction of enemies, C. Bow as royal weapon, and D. Astral symbols.

As for the written textual tradition, the epithets of Naram-Sin (*šarrum dannum*, *šar kiššatim* “mighty king, king of the universe”) are used by his namesake Naram-Sin of Ešnunna (Frayne, RIME 4 553ff, 4.5.15, ca. 1950) and Assyria, as well as by Šamši-Adad I of Assyria. In the peripheral states, the Gutian kings,⁴⁵ the Lullubean kings,⁴⁶ and the Hurrian kings of Simurum⁴⁷ also use similar epithets.⁴⁸

As to the three narrative elements in the royal inscriptions described above (E. Rebellion theme, F. Battling the beasts, G. Adventurous exploits), we find only the first given prominence in the texts of the post-Sargonic kings. The first kings to use this language were those of the Ur III dynasty: Šulgi depicts the manner in which he will attack and defeat the rebellious land in these words:

I will fill my quiver,
My bow will distend, ready to shoot like a
raging serpent,
The barbed arrows will flash before me like
lightning,
The barbar-arrows like flying bats,
Will fly into the ‘mouth of its battle,’
The crushed(?) people of the rebellious land

(Šulgi D 179-87,
J. Klein Šulgi, 78f)

Glassner sees Samsuiluna’s inscription celebrating his defeat of a revolt as imitating Naram-Sin’s “Great Rebellion” Inscription.⁴⁹ (“At that time I defeated with wea-



Fig. 3: Drawing of the rock relief of Annubanini at Sar-i Pul-i Zohab (after J. Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs*, no. 31).

pons, eight times in the course of one year, the totality of the land of Sumer and Akkad which had rebelled against me,” Frayne, RIME 4 376f, 4.3.7.3:39-46).⁵⁰

The iconic image of the king’s supremacy over his enemies conveyed by showing him treading on the necks of his enemies is now mentioned in the literature: e.g. Gudea of Lagash (Gudea B xviii 11, Jacobsen, *Harps*, 440). However, one of the iconic images, the bow, becomes the quintessential divine weapon, a marvelous weapon used by the gods to defeat their many enemies. For instance, in historical texts and royal inscriptions, Gudea bestows weapons as gifts on

⁴⁴ W. Nagel, “Ein altassyrisches Königssiegel,” *AfO* 18 (1957/58), 97-103, Grayson, *RIMA* 1 12f, 0.27.1; Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen*, Taf. 19/2, p. 9f, nn. 6-7. For references to other similar depictions, see Bänder, *Die Siegesstele des Naramsin*, 169 and nn. 697, 698.

⁴⁵ Frayne, RIME 2 219ff, 2.2. Note that Erridu-pizir is a slavish imitator of the exact language of Naram-Sin.

⁴⁶ Frayne, RIME 4 703ff, 4.18.

⁴⁷ Frayne, RIME 4 707ff, 4.19.

⁴⁸ See the discussion by W. W. Hallo, “Royal Titles from the Mesopotamian Periphery,” *AnSt* 30 (1980), 189-195.

⁴⁹ Jean-Jacques Glassner, *La Chute d’Akkadé, L’événement et sa mémoire* (BBVO 5, Berlin, 1986), 58f.

⁵⁰ The statement of Samsuiluna “when Enlil gave to him the four quarters to rule and entrusted their nose-rope in his hands,” Frayne, RIME 4 373, 4.3.7.2:5-11, might be compared to that of Naram-Sin.

the Eninnu among which are “his (Ningirsu’s?) bow, twanging like (the swish of) a *mēsu*-tree forest, his angry arrows all set to flash like lightning in the battle, and his quiver on which wrath lions have stuck the tongue out at fierce serpents, weapons of battle for outfitting kingship” (Gudea Cyl. B xiv 4-8, Jacobsen, *Harps*, 437) while Šulgi brandishes it as his weapon (see quotation above). In the later Akkadian literary texts, Ninurta’s deadly weapon against Anzu is the bow and arrow (Anzu SB II) and Marduk kills Tiamat with an arrow (IV 101, cf. *ibšimma qašta kakkašu uaddi mulmullu uštarkiba ukīnši matnu* “He fashioned a bow, designated it as his weapon, he nocked an arrow (on it), fixed a bowstring on it” En.el. IV 35-36). Marduk’s bow becomes a constellation: “The Lord took the bow, his weapon, and set it before them.... They saw how artfully the bow was fashioned.... Anu ...kissed the bow and declared ‘Let it be my daughter,’ he gave the bow names as (follows), ‘Longwood’ shall be the first, ‘Conqueror’ shall be the second, the third name

is ‘Bow star,’ he made it appear in the heavens” En.el. VI 82-90. Thus is created the heavenly bow, a star or constellation (but *not* a rainbow).

The gods lend their divine weapon to the chosen kings:⁵¹ *Ninurta u Nergal kakkēšunu ezzūte u qašassunu širta ana idi bēlūtija išrukū* “Ninurta and Nergal gave (me) their fierce weapons and their exalted bow for my lordly arms” (Grayson RIMA 2 25, A.0.87.1 line 59, Tiglath-Pileser I). In the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic, the king kills a man with his first arrow (“He let fly an arrow, the fierce, overwhelming, crushing weapon of Assur, he felled one slain” v 42’). The connection between the bow and military power becomes frequent: *šumma tīrānu kīma tilpānu mīli irti amūt* LUGAL.IM.GI “if the intestinal convolutions look like a bow, pride, omen of a rebel king” BRM 4 13:4.⁵² Outside the military context, a bow of bronze functioned as an instrument of judgement of the kings of Harmal.⁵³ Bow and arrows are found in cult inventories belonging to various gods.⁵⁴

Assyria and its King

The Assyrian empire has been described as “a heterogeneous multi-national power directed by a superhuman, autocratic king, who was conceived of as the representative

of God on earth.”⁵⁵ Unlike Naram-Sin, who was a god in his own right, the Assyrian king was the counterpart of the divine, and his semblance is found on hill and vale,⁵⁶ in

⁵¹ For a discussion of the topos of a king wielding the god’s weapon, see M. West, *The East Face of Helicon, West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford, 1997), 570.

⁵² Brigitte Groneberg, “TILPĀNU = BOGEN,” *RA* 81 (1987), 115-24: The paper proves that the word GIŠ.RU = *tilpānu* in most profane texts from OB on means a bow and not a javelin or a lance. In certain literary texts with mythological content, it may stand for a magic staff which has connections to death and the underworld. See further B. Groneberg, “GIŠ.RU = eblaitisch *ma-du-um*,” *RA* 82 (1988), 71-73.

⁵³ Brigitte Groneberg, “TILPĀNU = BOGEN,” *RA* 81 (1987), 117 and n. 21.

⁵⁴ See J. Westenholz, *Cuneiform Inscriptions in the Col-*

lection of the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem, The Emar Texts (Groningen, forthcoming), no. 28:5 (54 arrows belonging to Erra of Newtown), no. 29:11-12 (2 bows and 15 arrows belonging to Nergal, lord of Šagma).

⁵⁵ Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies* (SAA 9, Helsinki, 1997), xxi. See also p. lxxxii, n. 25: “This analogy is not accidental, for the empire was conceived of as the counterpart (*tamšilu*) of the divine world, referred to as the ‘kingdom of heaven’ in oracle 2.5.”

⁵⁶ For a discussion of the location of statues of the king as the culminative act of triumph in foreign lands, see E. Badali, M. G. Biga, O. Carena, G. Di Bernardo, S. Di Rienzo, M. Liverani and P. Vitali, “Studies on the Annals of Aššurnasirpal II. 1. Morphological Analysis,” *Vicino Oriente* 5 (1982), 40.

temples⁵⁷ and palaces.⁵⁸ The word used to convey the concept “semblance” is *tamšīlu*; this word is not used in Akkadian sources between the inscriptions of Naram-Sin of Akkad and those of Assurnasirpal II of Assyria (*šalam* (NU) *šarrūtija* (MAN-ti-ja) *tamšīl bunnannija* (Iraq 14 34:76 = Grayson, RIMA 2 291, A.0.101.30 line 76). Assurnasirpal began a new artistic tradition of prolific stone bas-relief decoration on each and every wall, as well as the classic form of the stela, which employed not only words but also iconic representations.⁵⁹ More de-

pictions of the king survive from his reign than from any other (113).⁶⁰ Moreover, Assurnasirpal seems to refer to the Akkadian ideological tradition of imperialism in his words: *šarrāni ša kibrāt arba’i ušarrihūšu* “(the gods) made him more marvelous than (any of) the kings of the four quarters” (Grayson, RIMA 2 195, A.0.101.1 i 26-27). Consequently, I have chosen to compare Assurnasirpal II to Naram-Sin in order to study continuity and change in the selected elements of our analysis.

Assurnasirpal

Of the many images of Aššur-nāšir-apli II (883-859), I have selected two examples analogous to the Naram-Sin stela and rock relief in regard to type of monument. Comparable to the Victory Stela of Naram-Sin is the Rassam Obelisk, BM 118800+,⁶¹ so called after its discover, Hormuzd Rassam, who found several pieces of black stone with remains of relief and inscriptions at Nimrud (ancient Kalḫu). The pieces were reassembled by Julian Reade, and turned out to have formed parts of an obelisk. In contrast to the various rock reliefs above, the Rassam Obelisk probably stood in the piazza in front of the “Central Building” in Nimrud.⁶² It was a public venue; the street leading from the great eastern gate of the citadel converged on this piazza. Rather

than depicting one narrative scene glorifying a military victory, the Rassam Obelisk originally had a series of narrative scenes, presented in a set of registers, representing the bringing of tribute by numerous subject peoples to Assurnasirpal. The inscriptions consisted of a version of the Standard Inscription,⁶³ traces of which (lines 7-8) remain, followed by a sequence of captions. As to the date of the obelisk, enough of the version of the Standard Inscription is preserved to show that it mentioned Mount Lebanon, thus dating it to the latter part of Assurnasirpal’s reign.

In the Rassam obelisk, on Face A, the Assyrian king appears in two scenes. In the first, on the top register, he stands to the left with two other Assyrians, facing a group of

⁵⁷ Winter, “Art in Empire,” 376.

⁵⁸ S. M. Paley, *King of the World: Ashur-nasir-pal II of Assyria, 883-859 B.C.* (Brooklyn, 1976).

⁵⁹ For a discussion of Assurnasirpal’s programmatic design, see Irene J. Winter, “Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs,” *Studies in Visual Communication* 7,2 (Spring, 1981), 2-38; idem, “The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II,” in P. O. Harper and H. Pittman (eds.), *Essays on Near Eastern Art and Archaeology in Honor of Charles Kyrle Wilkinson* (New York, 1983), 15-31.

⁶⁰ Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen*, p. 120, table II.

⁶¹ Rassam Obelisk, BM 118800+ = *Bildstelen* no. 138, p. 183f = J. E. Reade, “The Rassam Obelisk,” *Iraq* 42 (1980), 1-22, abb. 1-3; 5th year(?) of Assurnasirpal II 879; Inscription: Grayson, RIMA 2 277f, A.0.101.24, captions: Grayson, RIMA 2 342-344, A.0.101.71-78.

⁶² Reade, “The Rassam Obelisk,” 2-3.

⁶³ The Standard Inscription is to be found in Grayson, RIMA 2 268-276, A.0.101.23. The line numbers refer to Grayson’s composite edition, which is in turn based on earlier editions.

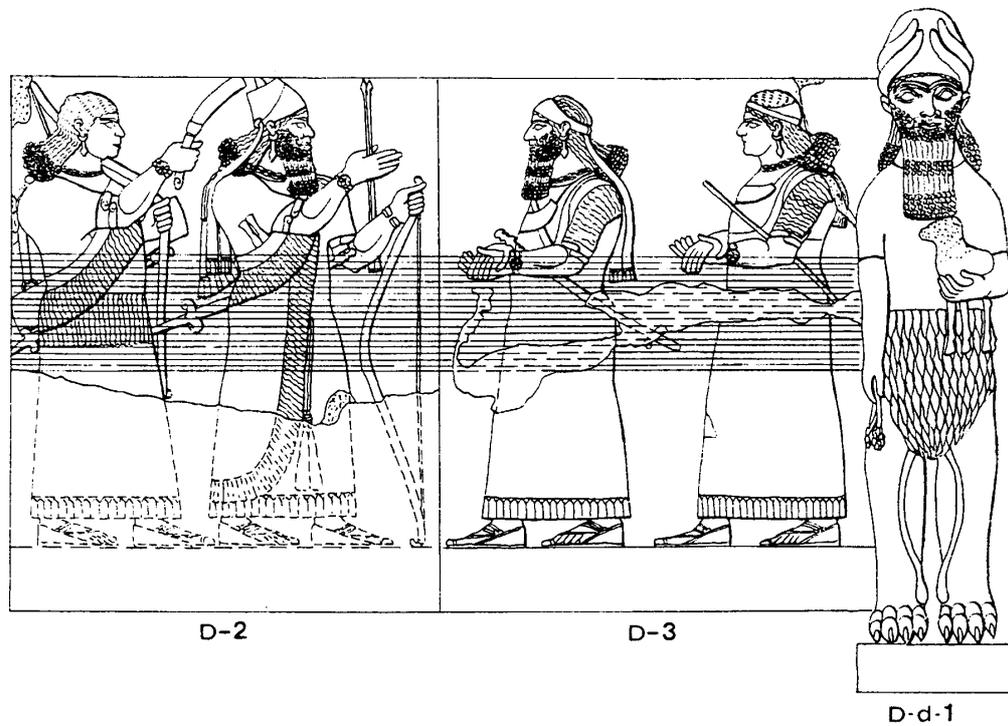


Fig. 4: Drawing of the outer façade of the throne room of the Northwest Palace of Assurnasirpal II (after J. Meuszynski, *Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen und ihrer Anordnung im Nordwestpalast von Kalḫu (Nimrūd)* I, pl. 5).

representatives of peoples bearing tribute.⁶⁴ He is attired in an ankle-length tasseled tunic and arrayed with the standard pointed fez and diadem on his head. He is shown with long hair and a beard. A sword hangs at his waist, and he holds a “turned” bow in his left hand. His right hand is empty, holding neither the arrows nor the libation cup which might be expected on the basis of comparison with the series of wall reliefs from his Northwest palace at Kalḫu. This image of the king was an extremely popular

one and is partly duplicated in the throne room (lower registers, B-7, B-18),⁶⁵ on the outer façade of the throne room (D-2, see fig. 4),⁶⁶ and in rooms G (see fig. 5), H and side room N-6.⁶⁷ The second scene in which the king appears is set in a landscape; the king is shown at the center of the illustration, alongside what may be a representation of his palace at Kalḫu, overseeing the weighing of the tribute. The Rassam Obelisk exhibits three of the four elements singled out above (A. Body language, B. De-

⁶⁴ Classified by Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen*, 140, as “Typ IX b König Tribut empfangend.”

⁶⁵ Janusz Meuszynski, *Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen und ihrer Anordnung im Nordwestpalast von Kalḫu (Nimrūd)* I (BaF 2, Mainz, 1981), 21, 23. All designations to wall reliefs in this article will be in accordance with his system. Magen (*Assyrische Königsdarstellungen*, 141), however, classifies B-7 and B-18 as “Typ X a König Beute/Gefangene zählend.”

⁶⁶ Samuel M. Paley and Richard P. Soblewski, *The*

Reconstruction of the Relief Representations and Their Positions in the Northwest-Palace at Kalḫu (Nimrūd) III (BaF 14, Mainz, 1992), 16; Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen*, 140, “Typ IX b König Tribut empfangend.”

⁶⁷ Meuszynski, *Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen*, 44-49, 56-61, 74f. Magen (*Assyrische Königsdarstellungen*, 142ff) classifies these reliefs as different sub-types of “Type IV, König als *mušaklil parši*.”

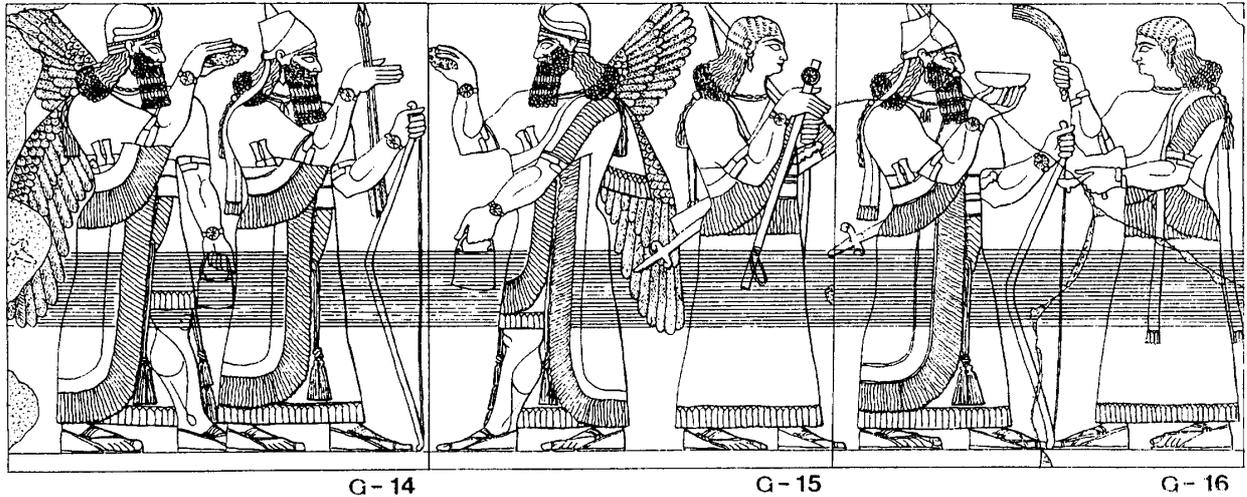


Fig. 5: Drawing of reliefs from Room G of the Northwest Palace of Assurnasirpal II (after J. Meuszynski, *Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen und ihrer Anordnung im Nordwestpalast von Kalhu (Nimrud) I*, pl. 8).

piction of enemies, C. Bow as royal weapon, and D. Astral symbols).

A. Body Language

The king's body is now fully clothed and the text describing it has replaced the image. In textual sources, the body of the Assyrian king is idealized and praised as the perfect likeness of the god.⁶⁸ A literal interpretation of body language was attempted by Winter, who searched for specific physiognomic "signature elements" and ideas of representation of physical resemblance.⁶⁹ As quoted above, Assurnasirpal states *šalam šarrūtija tamšil bunnanni* ...

abni "I constructed my royal statue with a likeness of my countenance" (*Iraq* 14, 34:76 = Grayson, RIMA 2 291, A.0.101.30 line 76). However, with his powerful musculature and generous mane of hair, Assurnasirpal also projects an exceptional portrait of a potent vigorous ruler, like Naram-Sin. He informs his subjects concerning his self-image: "At that time, at the command of the great gods, my sovereignty (*šarrūti*), my dominion (*bēlūti*) and my power (*kiššūti*) came forth; I am king ... I am magnificent, I am foremost, I am a hero, I am a warrior, I am a lion and I am virile." (Grayson, RIMA 2 195f, A.0.101.1 i 31b-33a). This self-conception is said to have been transferred from written to artistic rep-

⁶⁸ For Assurnasirpal, see Grayson, RIMA 2 308, A.0.101.40 line 6 *nabntu ellūtu* "holy form"; see further Simo Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life," *JNES* 52 (1993), 168, nn. 33-34. Actually, it is interesting to note that Assurnasirpal does not claim to have been divinely shaped, or to be the very likeness of a god, in contrast to his predecessors and successors. Considering how many images Assurnasirpal made of himself, we cannot but wonder why he does not use the terminology of divine creation. Note also the view of Badali *et al.*, "Studies on

the Annals of Aššurnasirpal II. 1. Morphological Analysis," *Vicino Oriente* 5 (1982), 73, that "increasing security leads Assurnasirpal to figure more and more exclusively as first protagonist and to neglect recognizing divine and human assistance." On the other hand, his image in room G is presented with a celestial entourage alternating with a human entourage, indicating his presence both in the divine and the human realms (see fig. 5).

⁶⁹ Winter, "Art in Empire," 369.

resentation by the command of the king.⁷⁰ The image of the king is placed at the top register of the Obelisk, like the figure of Naram-Sin at the top of the Victory Stela, but here it is placed not at the center of the composition but to its left, as the final goal of all the action depicted on the Obelisk. Conversely, the centrality of the king in the third register's second scene makes Assurnasirpal the pivot of all the action.

There are no representations of Assurnasirpal maintaining the triumphal stance with his foot upon his enemies, unless one reads this into his location in the top register of the Obelisk. This stance is seen only rarely with other Neo-Assyrian kings.⁷¹

B. Depiction of Enemies

Opposite the king in the top register of Face A is the leading tributary, with his hands raised, fists clenched and thumbs uppermost – a gesture of submission frequently made by leading figures in scenes of this kind.⁷² He is followed by three other tributaries, who appear to be bearing valuables. The Rassam Obelisk is also decorated with processions of tributaries in the lower registers. According to Julian Reade's interpretation, these are representatives of states acknowledging Assyrian supremacy. Unlike the figures on the Victory Stela of Naram-Sin, the tributaries are well-dressed, attired in fringed tunics and shawls or belts and fringed kilts; none bear animal skins nor are any shown naked, as were the enemies of

Naram-Sin. The message is the peaceful co-existence of peoples under beneficial Assyrian rule.

The depiction of trampled enemies under the hooves of the cavalry and the chariot wheels can be seen on the walls of the throne room (e.g., B-9, B-10, B-11), while the outer façade of the throne room shows a procession of tributaries (D 2-9, E 1-4). Nevertheless, in his royal inscriptions, Assurnasirpal describes himself as *eṭlu dannu mukabbis kišād ajjābīšu dā'iš kullat nakrī* "strong male who treads upon the necks of his foes, trampler of all enemies" (Grayson, RIMA 2 194, 0.101.1 i 14-15 and *passim*).

On the other hand, the text of the king slaying the beast is even more popular in image than in text. Assurnasirpal is also unusual in subjugating a bull in the manner of Naram-Sin, rather than a lion like his successors. It is interesting to note the juxtaposition of three scenes in the throne room (room B) in the corner closest to the royal dais: the siege of the town and submission of the enemies before the king (B 18), the lion hunt (B 19), and the bull hunt (B 20). There seems to be a pictorial equation between the enemies and the animals.⁷³ This parallel in the Assurbanipal texts and images has been analyzed as depicting the royal savior of his people, who protects them from the lions who harass both humans and animals, and symbolizes civilized urban society as against the chaotic and disordered plain, where the sins of enemies :: sins of lions.⁷⁴ The king is thus shown as the restorer of order. A more literal inter-

⁷⁰ Many scholars have pointed out that the king may be said to have exercised control over his own images (Paley, *King of the World*, 8-19; Winter, "Art in Empire," 367f).

⁷¹ See Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen*, Taf. 22/1 Wandrelief from Nimrud, SWP, Tiglath-Pileser III holds a spear directed at the cowering enemy and grasps an "outward" bow horizontally, by center of the bowstave = Type XIa "König als Triumphator mit Fuß Besiegten niedertretend," p. 125.

⁷² Reade, "The Rassam Obelisk," 9.

⁷³ On the sub-human character of the other, the stranger, the enemy, and their comparison to animals, see Mario Liverani, "The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire," in M. T. Larsen (ed.), *Power and Propaganda* (Copenhagen, 1979), 310.

⁷⁴ Elnathan Weissert, "Royal Hunt and Royal Triumph in a Prism Fragment of Ashurbanipal (82-5-22,2)," in S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting (eds.), *Assyria, 1995* (Helsinki, 1997), 343.

pretation of the juxtaposition was also offered by Weissert in his discussion of whether lion hunts formed part of the military triumphal processions, where captives and booty were presented before Ashur in Assur as part of akitu celebrations in Arbela and Assur.⁷⁵

C. Bow as Divinely Given Royal Weapon

In the top register of the Rassam Obelisk, the king grasps a “turned” bow by its tip. This position has been called “parade rest” by Samuel Paley.⁷⁶ He has been followed by Magen: “Der Gestus des Königs mit den erhobenen Pfeilen und dem nicht kampfbereiten Bogen ist typisch für Tribut- und Beuteszenen und wurde dort von Paley sehr treffend als ‘Siegesgestus’ (‘triumphal gesture’ oder ‘parade rest’) bezeichnet.”⁷⁷ In the context of the ritual set in room G, Brandes emphasizes the sacral aspect of the “turned” bow, and explains its position as one of offering arms towards the gesture of benediction of the genii (see fig. 5).⁷⁸

Similarly, whereas Assurnasirpal grasps a “turned” bow by its tip in the ritual scene after the hunts (B-19, B-20),⁷⁹ he holds the bow “outward” and downward in the militaristic scene of submission (B-18).⁸⁰ In the former scenes, he is performing a ritual libation, while in the latter he is holding up the arrows of triumph in his right hand. Paley comments on this fact that “there is perhaps no cease fire yet?”⁸¹ Notwithstand-

ing the varied throne room scenes, there are only three other permutations of the scene of the Rassam Obelisk in rooms G, N and H: (1) Assurnasirpal grasps a “turned” bow by its tip in his left hand and holds up two arrows in his right hand, while he and his weapons are being purified/sanctified by winged genii, adorned with horned helmets and holding ritual buckets and fir cones (G-6, 11, 14, 23, 31, N-6);⁸² (2) Assurnasirpal grasps a “turned” bow by its tip in his left hand and holds up a cup in his right hand, in the presence of priests/eunuchs/courtiers (G 8, 10, 13, 16); (3) Assurnasirpal grasps a “turned” bow by its tip in his left hand and holds up a cup in his right hand, in the presence of winged genii adorned with fillets rather than horned helmets, and holding ritual buckets but no fir cones (all wall reliefs in room H).⁸³ While there is an alternation between types 1 and 2 in room G (see fig. 5), type 3 only appears in room H.

The character of the reliefs give meaning to the rooms, and the whole context of the room gives meaning to the individual elements of the relief. According to Mark Brandes, the alternation in room G of the themes of the king with bow and arrows flanked by genii with pails and cones, and of the king with bow and bowl flanked by “courtiers,” who may hold his weapons, ritual spoon, and fly whisk, may have represented the king in his celestial and earthly spheres of activity.⁸⁴ Thus, in the divine world the king enacts his immanent human role and offers

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 348.

⁷⁶ Paley, *King of the World*, 24, n. 1; Paley and Sobolewski, *Northwest-Palace at Kalhu (Nimrud) III*, 16.

⁷⁷ Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen*, 82.

⁷⁸ Mark A. Brandes, “La salle dite «G» du palais d’Assurnasirpal II à Kalakh, lieu de cérémonie rituelle,” *Actes de la XVII^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (Brussels, 1970), 151.

⁷⁹ Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen*, 140, “Type IVa-3, König als šangû, epēš niqê, pagulu ugdamir.”

⁸⁰ Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen*, 140, “Type

Xa, König Beute/Gefangene zählend.”

⁸¹ Paley and Sobolewski, *Northwest-Palace at Kalhu (Nimrud) III*, 16.

⁸² Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen*, 143f “Type IVd, König als Kultaktant, reinigt Waffen, mušaklil parši,” pp. 8ff.

⁸³ Both types 2 and 3 are designated by Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen*, 143ff, as “Type IVa-3, König als šangû, epēš niqê, pagulu ugdamir.”

⁸⁴ Mark A. Brandes, “La salle dite «G»,” 147-54.

the arrows, and in the human world he enacts his transcendent divine role and pours out a libation to the earth.⁸⁵ Paley queries whether in this scene the divinities have simply entered the human world, or whether the king has moved out of his own world into theirs, and states that “an apotheosis of Assyrian kingship, symbolic or otherwise, would be very difficult to document.”⁸⁶ The culmination of the series of reliefs appears on the northern wall of room G, where the king is depicted seated on a lordly throne, bedecked with a magnificent robe, and surrounded by both his human and divine attendants. Consequently, the beginning of the series must be presented on the southern wall of Room N. These reliefs with such potent significance must have been the backdrop of an important religious ceremony. Brandes suggests that room G was a “salle de lustration” in which the ritual purification of the bloodied weapons was performed by the highest military and supreme priest of the empire – the king. In another context, Assurnasirpal does relate (Grayson, RIMA 2 218, A.0.101.1 iii 85b) his performance of a purification of arms in the Mediterranean, a millennia-old custom handed down from the Akkadians.⁸⁷ The purifying ritual must be undergone in both realms, since they are reflections of each other. Magen agrees that room G was probably devoted to the purification of arms, but suggests that both rooms G and H could have been used for the mouth-

washing of the king.⁸⁸ The mouth-washing ritual involved various actions performed with the king’s regalia, followed by the preparation of the *agubbû* -vessels in the *bīt Kusu*.⁸⁹ As he is presented with his regalia, the king pronounces an incantation over each item. The incantation over the bow begins with the words: *giš-illuru á-gíd-da* “the bow, the spear.”⁹⁰

Perhaps comparison with the positions of the bow in war scenes might shed some light on the symbolism of the bow in the reign of Assurnasirpal. The “outward” bow is held by Assurnasirpal when he is shooting arrows against his enemies (B-3, 11).⁹¹ In these two scenes not only does Assurnasirpal hold the “outward” bow, but also Aššur his god and the god of Assyria holds the bow in an identical position.⁹² Moreover, on slab B-5, after his return from the battlefield, both king and god grasp their bows in the “turned” position from the middle.⁹³ Thus, the bow is the divine weapon used both by god and king, given to the latter by the former. The presentation of the bow to the king from heaven is depicted on a broken obelisk of Aššur-bēl-kala (BM 118898, see **fig. 6**).⁹⁴ It seems to denote the divine approval and legitimacy of the Assyrian king. As he proclaims from every wall, *enūma Aššur bēlu nābū šumīja mušarbū šarrūtija kakkēšu la padā ana idāt bēlūtija lu itmuḥ* “when Assur, the lord who called my name (and) who makes my sovereignty supreme,

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁸⁶ Paley, *King of the World*, 25, n. 9.

⁸⁷ Abraham Malamat, “Campaigns to the Mediterranean by Iahdunlim and other Early Mesopotamian Rulers,” *Studies Landsberger*, 365-373. On such rituals, see J. van Dijk, “Un rituel de purification des armes et de l’armée,” *Symbolae Böhl*, 107-17, though he opts for the sacred time of this purification as being before the battle (p. 115).

⁸⁸ Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen*, 82.

⁸⁹ Meier, “Die Rituallafel der Serie ‘Mundwaschung,’” *AfO* XII (1937-39), 43 K 9729+rev. ii 7, see C. B. F. Walker, *Material for a Reconstruction of the mis pi Ritual* (BA thesis, Oxford, 1966), 153.

⁹⁰ Possibly related to 4R2 18* no. 3 iii 7-8 + 4R2 Additions 3 Rm.2, 133:8-9; see PSD A/2 65.

⁹¹ Classified by Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen*, 141: “Type VIIb, König als Kämpfer.”

⁹² Where Assurnasirpal can only be related to the bow of Aššur, note that Assurbanipal holds the bow of Ištar of Arbela over the lions in the lion hunt; see Weissert, “Royal Hunt and Royal Triumph,” 352.

⁹³ Meuszynski, *Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen*, 20. Classified by Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen*, 141: “Type XII, König beim triumphalen Einzug.”

⁹⁴ Julian Reade, “Shikaf-i Gulgul: Its Date and Symbolism,” *Iranica Antiqua* 12 (1977), pl. iv.

placed his merciless weapon in my lordly hands” (Grayson, RIMA 2 280, A.0.101.23: 14b-16). Assurnasirpal also claims that *kak-kēšunu ezzūte ana širikte bē-lūtīšu išrukū* “(the gods) granted to him their (own) fierce weapons as a gift of his dominion” (Grayson, RIMA 2 195, A.0.101.1 i 26). A unique scene is shown in B-7, where the king only holds the bow in an “outward” position from the middle, while the god (without any bow) presides over the cease-fire or truce. In all other scenes – those of submission, tribute, purification and ritual – the king appears alone, grasping the divine weapon in “turned position.” I would suggest that this image of the king alone with the “turned” bow directly reflects that of the tradition originating with Naram-Sin, and

that it conveys the same meanings of triumph, a specific gesture of dominance and, above all else, order over chaos.

The bow is also used in other figures of speech related to military actions: “to break the bow” = “to defeat.” It is found in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, treaties, and curses.

D. Astral Symbols

Although the Rassam Obelisk and the wall reliefs do not exhibit symbols of the gods, such as those at the summit of the Victory Stela of Naram-Sin, stelae and rock carvings were employed by the Neo-Assyrian kings in the same way as Naram-Sin used the Pir Hüseyin stela.⁹⁵ One relief which

⁹⁵ This type is classified by Magen (*Assyrische Königsdarstellungen*, 45ff) as “Type IIIb, König vor Gott, *ubāna tarāšu*”; see discussion of the possible locations of these rock carvings and stelae, pp. 49f. See also the

discussion of the location of these stelae with images of standing king and divine and astral symbols in *Bildstelen*, no. 134-37, pp. 181-83, and descriptions of setting up statues T26-T31.

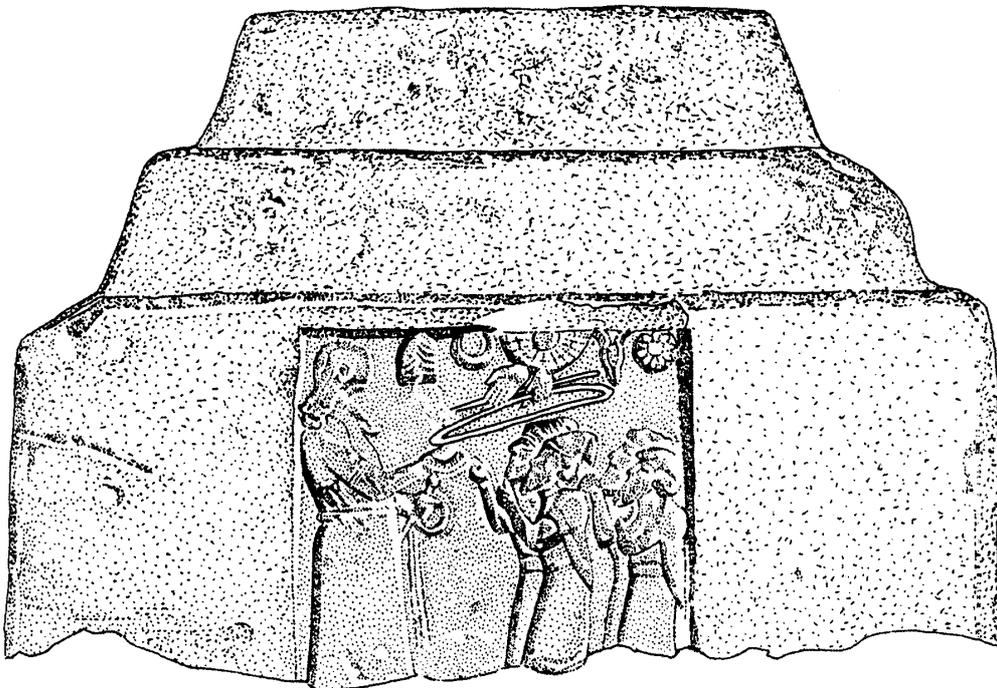


Fig. 6: Drawing of the broken obelisk of Aššur-bēl-kala (after J. Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs*, no. 131).

Assurnasirpal set up at the borders of his kingdom is the “Kurkh Monolith” (BM 118883 = *Bildstelen* no. 135, p. 181f = Grayson, RIMA 2 256ff, A.0.101.19), found in 1861 at Kurḫ, on the Tigris south of Diyarbakır, bearing the text of his second campaign against Nairi, in the fifth year of Assurnasirpal II (879). It depicts the symbols of five gods: the horned crown of Aššur, the winged disk of Šamaš, the moon sickle of Sin, the lightning rod of Adad, and the eight-pointed star of Ištar. The inscription invokes the same five gods as the “great gods who go at the head of my troops” (1-4). The text describes the fashioning of the stela: “I made an image of myself (and) wrote thereon an account of my powerful victories. I erected it in Matiatu” (Grayson RIMA 2 258, A.0.101.19: 51-52). Another text which may be related to this very image is: “I made an image of myself (*šalam bunnannija*) in white limestone and wrote thereon praise of my extraordinary power (*tanatti kiššūtija šūturte*) and my heroic deeds (*ilkaḫāt qurdiḫa*) which I had been accomplishing in the lands Nairi” (Grayson, RIMA 2 243, A.0.101.17 ii 15-18).

Since the inscription on the victory stela and the Pir Hüseyin inscription of Naram-Sin are both poorly preserved, I supplied the text to the images from other original inscriptions and scribal copies of inscriptions of Naram-Sin (see above). Assurnasirpal’s texts, however, are found carved across the wall reliefs of the Northwest Palace at Kalḫu, the same text being repeated on each of the known 406 slabs with some variation.⁹⁶ His innovative unification of text and image is clear; the text was incorporated physically onto the palace reliefs.

The text begins with the king’s name and titles: “(Property of) the palace of Assurna-

sirpal, vice-regent of Aššur, chosen of the gods Enlil and Ninurta, beloved of the gods Anu and Dagan, destructive weapon of the great gods, strong king, king of the universe, king of Assyria... marvelous shepherd, fearless in battle, mighty flood-tide which has no opponent, the king who subdues those in subordinate to him, he who rules all peoples, strong male who treads upon the neck of his foes, trampler of all enemies, he who breaks up the forces of the rebellious, the king who acts with the support of the great gods, his lords, and has conquered all lands, gained dominion over all the highlands and received their tribute, capturer of hostages, he who is victorious over all countries” (Grayson RIMA 2 275, 101.23.1-5a). This is followed by a general description of the king’s conquests. Assurnasirpal then lauds himself again and concludes with his building of Kalḫu and its palace.

The text bears some of the meaning of the image of Naram-Sin – constructing the institution of kingship by giving a concrete form to underlying concepts of the divinely sanctioned rule and the ideal qualities of the ruler. Let us look at the three narrative elements (E. Rebellion theme, F. Battling the beasts, G. Adventurous exploits), chosen above in relation to Naram-Sin, and compare them with Assurnasirpal’s standard inscription. Certain themes are similar to those of Naram-Sin, but others differ because the Assyrian ideology of rule differed from Akkadian ideology.⁹⁷

E. Rebellion Theme

In the standard inscription, the epithet *muparriru kišri multarḫi* “he who breaks up the forces of the boastful,” ‘boastful’ is

⁹⁶ Grayson, RIMA 2, pp. 268-274.

⁹⁷ Liverani, “The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire,” 297-317. For a discussion of a literary code embedded in

the inscriptions, see Badali *et al.*, “Studies on the Annals of AššurnasirpalII,” 13-73.

translated by Grayson as “rebellious” (Grayson RIMA 2 275 A.0.101.23 line 4).⁹⁸ He does so deliberately, because the Assyrian conception of the enemy is that he is unnatural, wicked, and in a state of rebellion against the king of the world.⁹⁹ The normal verb expressing the concept “to rebel” is *nabalkutu*, which is used by Assurnasirpal of his enemies. Liverani relates the rebellion theme to an emphasis on “disorder”: A state of disorder causes the king to act, and every action of the Assyrian king was aimed at the establishment of order.¹⁰⁰ As regards the substance of the disorder, the typical verb is *nabalkutu* “to rebel,” the “overthrow of the established order.” The opponent of Assurnasirpal is a *bēl hīti* “a sinner.”¹⁰¹ This sinner must be coerced into the right way, a process in which the surrounding disorder of the Assyrian periphery is reduced to order and correct functioning from its initial state of disorder.

F. Battling the Beasts

Almost as a minor incident on his campaign, similar to Naram-Sin’s killing of a single bull at Mount Tibar on his return from a campaign, Assurnasirpal recounts in his annals: “... at that time I killed 40 strong wild bulls on the other bank of the Euphrates ...” (Grayson, RIMA 2 215, A.0.101.1 iii 48). He also speaks of killing lions (e.g. Grayson RIMA 2 258,

A.0.101.19: 33-34). Pictorially, the theme was epitomized by the stamp-seal used by royal officials, which shows the king killing a lion.¹⁰² On the periphery of the Assyrian world reside the sub-human foreigners and the dangerous animals, representatives of the chaotic world who threaten the security of the realm – all of whom must submit to the rule of order provided by the Assyrian monarch. Since the kingship is the reference point for the order of the cosmos,¹⁰³ it must be acted out not only on the human scene but also among the creatures of the wild.

G. Extraordinary Feats and Adventurous Exploits

Naram-Sin made a point of going where no king had gone before; Assurnasirpal traveled through mountainous regions unknown to anyone.¹⁰⁴ For instance, Assurnasirpal recounts in his annals: *ētattiq šadē dannūte ātammar durug šapšāqi ša kalīšina kibrāti* “I have traversed mighty mountains; I have seen remote (and) rugged regions throughout all the (four) quarters” (Grayson, RIMA 2 225, A.0.101.2: 21-22) and *ina qereb šadē dannassunu iškunū ša ina šarrāni abbīja mamma ina qerebšunu la iṭehhū ina 3 ūmē qarrādu šadū ihīta* “They had placed their fortress ... within the mountain which none of the kings my fathers had ever approached. For three days the hero

⁹⁸ Other references are: RIMA 2, 194 A.0.101.1 i 15, 244 A.0.101.17 ii 79 and *passim*; cf. H. Tadmor, “Autobiographical Apology in the Royal Assyrian Literature,” in H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld (eds.), *History, Historiography and Interpretation* (Jerusalem, 1989), 36-57, who also discusses the introductory section of the annals of Shamshi-Adad V (824-811) “when Ashur-da’in-apli, in the time of Shalmaneser, his father, acted evilly, fomented rebellion and sedition, caused the country to rebel ...” (Grayson, RIMA 3 183, A.0.103.1 i 39ff).

⁹⁹ Liverani, “The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire,” 311.

¹⁰⁰ Badali *et al.*, “Studies on the Annals of Aššurnasirpal II,” 22f, 69ff.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁰² S. M. Maul, “Das ‘dreifache Königtum’ – Überlegungen zu einer Sonderform des neuassyrischen Königsiegels,” in U. Finkbeiner *et al.* (eds.), *Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte Vorderasiens. Festschrift für Rainer Michael Boehmer* (Mainz 1995), 395-402 and pl. 33 a-c.

¹⁰³ Liverani, “The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire,” 311.

¹⁰⁴ Badali *et al.*, “Studies on the Annals of Aššurnasirpal II,” 28.

explored the mountain” (Grayson, RIMA 2 197, A.0.101.1 i 50-51).¹⁰⁵ He also reports cutting roads out of mountains (Grayson, RIMA 2 209, A.0.101.1 ii 95-97 and *passim*), the crossing of rivers (Grayson, RIMA 2 210, A.0.101.1 ii 103-4 and *passim*), and the climbing of steep mountains where not even birds nest (Grayson, RIMA 2 197, A.0.101.1 i 49-51 and *passim*).¹⁰⁶

In a similar vein to that of Naram-Sin, Assurnasirpal speaks of his personal acquisition of prestige materials and exotic goods. It has been said that Assurnasirpal’s campaigns had the primary aim of obtaining goods from the surrounding countries.¹⁰⁷ In so doing, he can be said to have transformed the raw material of peripheral chaos into order.¹⁰⁸

At the chaotic periphery, Assurnasirpal

defines the dominion of the four quarters of the world as Assyrian by leaving “the stela at the world boundaries.”¹⁰⁹ The stelae and rock carvings were directed at every possible audience: the gods, the king’s contemporaries, and universal posterity.¹¹⁰

At the cosmic center, the king is the reference point for the order of the cosmos, the bulwark against the chaotic periphery.¹¹¹ Assurnasirpal entitles a statue of himself: *Aššur-nāšir-apli šarru ša tanattašu dannanu kajjāmanuma ana ħuribte tarrušu panūšu ana šitaprušu ħutennišu iṣaḥḥa libbašu* “Assurnasirpal, the king whose strength is constantly praiseworthy, whose face is turned towards the desert, who delights in loosing his javelin” (Grayson, RIMA 2 214, A.0.101.1 iii 25-26).

Persia and its King

Persian Achaemenid Dynasty (ca. 559-330)

It has often been said that Achaemenid art is the art of kings, and that imperial art embodied the Persians’ world view and political aspirations and served as a vehicle for Persian propaganda.¹¹² Achaemenid art encapsulates the king’s exploits in war, hunting, and ritual, through which the king identified himself to his audience in static non-narrative scenes. The portrait of the king enabled him to become the icon of the

absolute monarch he desired to be, so that even when the subject of the icon was himself absent, the viewer could recognize and identify through and in the icon. Yet, the syncretic character of Achaemenid art has often been remarked upon.¹¹³ One of the sources of Persian inspiration is assumed to be Mesopotamia, although the quantity and quality of the Mesopotamian contribution is disputed.

¹⁰⁵ Note the change of register in the text, the change from king to “hero,” from the straight narrative of Assyrian royal style to the literary style of literary compositions, which also reflects Old Akkadian third person usage.

¹⁰⁶ On the difficulties of the campaign routes, see Badali *et al.*, “Studies on the Annals of Aššurnasirpal II,” 28.

¹⁰⁷ Mario Liverani, *Studies on the Annals of Ashurnasirpal II*, 2. *Topographical Analysis* (Rome, 1992), 155.

¹⁰⁸ Liverani, “The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire,” 313.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 307.

¹¹⁰ Reade, “Ideology and Propaganda,” 340.

¹¹¹ Liverani, “The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire,” 306, 311.

¹¹² Margaret Cool Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art* (Acta Iranica 19, Leiden, 1979).

¹¹³ Peter Calmeyer, “Babylonische und assyrische Elemente in der achaimenidischen Kunst,” in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, A. Kuhrt, and M. Cool Root (eds.), *Achaemenid History VIII: Continuity and Change* (Leiden, 1994), 131-147.

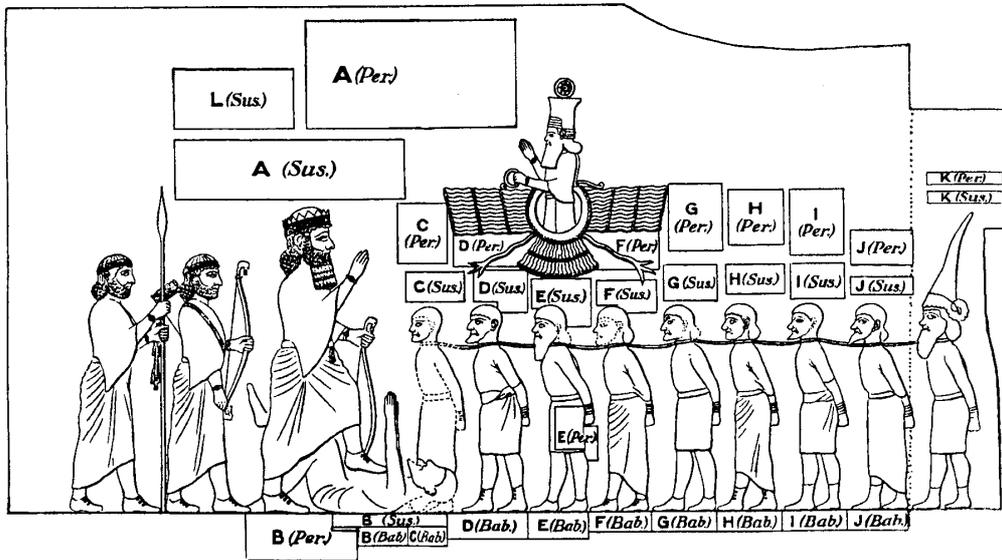


Fig. 7: Drawing of the relief of Darius II at Behistun (after R. Schmitt, *The Bisitun Inscriptions of Darius the Great: Old Persian Text* (*Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum*, I/I, London, 1991) pl. 5).

One reason for adopting the art tradition of their Mesopotamian predecessors in power was to legitimize both Achaemenid rule over the world and the kings themselves as its rulers. It is interesting to follow the continuity of Mesopotamian imagery –

how and which images were received, re-invented and re-incorporated in the creation of the new iconographic repertoire. It has been said that the “integral part of that creativity lay in its mining of earlier traditions.”¹¹⁴

Darius I (522-486)

Darius’ autobiographical inscription at the mountain of Behistun (bagastāna “place of the gods”), on the highway from Babylon to Ecbatana (modern Hamadan), includes a verbal as well as a visual representation of his rise to power and the consolidation of his empire (see fig. 7). The relief has been described as “emblematic,” compact, self-contained, non-episodic, compressing the long narrative to the point of distorting facts.¹¹⁵ The narrative composition of this relief is exceptional among Achaemenid re-

liefs in emphasizing the motifs of victory, triumph, and humiliating subjection, which differs from the peaceful Achaemenid vision of empire. All scholars have pointed out that this composition is a reworking of ancient visual formulae of authority: the questions usually posed concern the model, the alteration of the model, and the message to be conveyed through the means of this type of narrative relief. Several scholars seem to be at a loss to explain the source of Darius’ inspiration. Since they cannot find

¹¹⁴ Margaret C. Root, “Lifting the veil: artistic transmission beyond the boundaries of historical periodisation,” in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, A. Kuhrt, and M. Cool

Root (eds.), *Achaemenid History VIII: Continuity and Change* (Leiden, 1994), 22.

¹¹⁵ Root, *The King and Kingship*, 187.

any prototype in Babylonia and Elam for an image of a victorious king,¹¹⁶ they have chosen the obvious prototype, which is the nearest rock relief (see fig. 3), about 100 kilometers further east on the same road, at Sar-i Pul; indeed, Calmeyer has spoken of “Darius’ adaptive emulation of the late third millennium rock relief at Sar-i Pul for his own rock relief at Behistun.”¹¹⁷ The Behistun relief is said to be reworked in a style close to that of late-Assyrian reliefs, especially those of the ninth century.¹¹⁸

Although the Sar-i Pul relief resembles that at Behistun in certain traits, such as the king being offered the ring of kingship by a deity, its roots are in the Old Akkadian artistic tradition which culminated in the Victory Stela of Naram-Sin.¹¹⁹ Moreover, not only was the Victory Stela known to the ancients, as is shown by its being plundered and taken to Susa, but it was probably still standing in the Elamite capital among other Old Akkadian stelae. Darius made Susa his capital before work began on Persepolis, and he could have seen the ancient stela with his own eyes during building excavations. Among the neighboring stelae was *Bildstelen* no. 20, showing a row of naked captives with hands tied behind their backs. It seems that the only image showing neck stocks, despite literary references, is *Bildstelen* no. 22, the Nasiriya stela, which was found in southern Mesopotamia. Of the many elements in this well-studied relief, let us look again at the same four elements as above: A. Body language, B. Depiction of enemies, C. Bow as royal weapon, and D. Astral symbols.

A. Body Language

The figure of Darius is represented as standing, facing right, adorned with a crown, bedecked in royal robes, and with curled hair and full beard. With his left foot Darius steps on the chest of the figure prostrate before him. The image of the king rises above all other persons and is thus accorded the status differential due the Great King. This type of portrait of the king, with heroic body and triumphal stance, is extremely rare among representations of Persian monarchs. It shows a continuity with the southern Mesopotamian image of the monarch rather than the Assyrian version, as we have seen above.

B. Depiction of Enemies

In addition to the imploring prostrate figure labeled Gaumata, there are nine rebel prisoners in neck stocks, labeled and differentiated by their dress and hair style as leaders of those parts of the empire which rebelled against Darius during his first regnal year. The number nine also appears frequently in the organization of events and locations in the text, and its importance is clearly derived from its magical significance.¹²⁰ Since the number is traditional in the textual sources, it will be treated below.

Although the vanquished enemies are shown in neck stocks, they are not stripped of their humanity as in the Old Akkadian tradition. These enemies, as well as the representatives of foreign provinces, are depicted

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 194f.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 30; Calmeyer, “Babylonische und assyrische Elemente,” 137f; also Carl Nylander, “Achaemenid Imperial Art,” in M. T. Larsen (ed.), *Power and Propaganda* (Copenhagen, 1979), 354.

¹¹⁸ Root, *The King and Kingship*, 202ff; Nylander, “Achaemenid Imperial Art,” 354.

¹¹⁹ A. Farkas, *Achaemenid Sculpture* (Leiden 1974), 31

stresses the dependence of the Sar-i Pul relief upon the stela of Naram-Sin.

¹²⁰ Root, *The King and Kingship*, 201, n. 55; G. L. Windfuhr, “Saith Darius. Dialectic, Numbers, Time and Space at Behistun,” in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, A. Kuhrt, and M. Cool Root (eds.), *Achaemenid History VIII: Continuity and Change* (Leiden, 1994), 270-72.

as dignified persons, reflecting the portraiture of the tributaries of Assurnasirpal II.¹²¹

C. Bow as Royal Weapon

In his left hand, Darius grasps an “outward”-facing bow. His right hand is raised, with palm turned outward. Although he has changed the traditional “turned” direction, the bow that he is holding is similar to the Assyrian one grasped by Assurnasirpal. Root suggests that Darius’ adoption of the Assyrian bow as his own symbolizes his appropriation of Assyrian military might.¹²² This symbol refers to military might but not necessarily to military victory or triumph.

The image of the Persian king holding this type of bow is known from coins and seals; like seals, coins constitute a circulating, condensed articulation of propaganda. Achaemenid imperial coinage was developed during the reign of Darius I with the sole theme of the “archer” motif – a royal archer wearing the Persian court robes, facing right and carrying a bow.¹²³ Presumably, Darius was depicted as the archetypal archer because this was an abstract symbol of the king’s power and prowess. He was known as “the first Bowman of his people” (Aeschylus, *Persians* l. 536) and set an example for them. Herodotus stated that the Persians taught their sons “three things only from their fifth to their twentieth year: horsemanship, bowmanship and to tell the truth” (Herodotus, *Histories* I 136) – this was the code of behavior and hence rules that were meant to constitute the qualities of sovereigns.

D. Astral Symbols

Hovering over the scene is the figure Ahura-Mazda, within the winged solar disc, who faces left towards Darius. In his left hand he extends the ring of kingship to his rightful protégé, Darius, while his right hand is extended with its palm facing out, like that of Darius himself. The legitimacy of Darius’ territorial claims is thus graphically confirmed by the hovering symbol of the god Ahura-Mazda. He occupies the same position as Ištar in the Sar-i Pul #1 relief, and the anthropomorphized god Aššur in the winged disc hovering over Assurnasirpal in scenes of battle and submission. The Behistun Ahura-Mazda can thus be derived from ninth-century tradition.¹²⁴

On his head, Ahura-Mazda bears the *polos* crown topped with the astral symbol – the star. Whether it should be related to the stars atop the Naram-Sin Victory Stela, or to its successor – Ištar’s seven-pointed star on the rock relief of Anubanini at Sar-i Pul #1 – is impossible to determine. It is interesting to note that the Behistun relief is the only known Achaemenid monument where Ahura-Mazda wears this *polos* crown.

The trilingual inscription in Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian, copies of which were sent throughout the empire and versions of which were incorporated in Herodotus’ *Histories* III, 61-79 and in Ctesias’ *Persika* XII, 41-44, describes Darius’ role as moral and military regenerator of the empire.¹²⁵ It sets forth Darius’ lineage and titles, then describes his defeat of Gaumata, the pretender to the throne, Darius’ subsequent rise to

¹²¹ Calmeyer, “Babylonische und assyrische Elemente,” 136f and further references.

¹²² Root, *The King and Kingship*, 166-67.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 164-69.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹²⁵ Rüdiger Schmitt, *The Bisitun Inscriptions of Darius the Great: Old Persian Text* (Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum, I/I, London, 1991); Elizabeth von Voigtlander,

The Bisitun Inscription of Darius the Great: Babylonian Version (Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum, II/I, London, 1978); Jonas C. Greenfield and Bezalel Porten, *The Bisitun Inscription of Darius the Great: Aramaic Version* (Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum, V/I, London, 1982). See also the recent re-edition of the Akkadian version: Florence Malbran-Labat, *La Version Akkadienne de l’Inscription trilingue de Darius à Behistun* (Rome, 1994).

the throne, and the suppression of the rebellions that broke out in the first year of his reign. Of the three selected narrative elements (E. Rebellion theme, F. Battling the beasts, G. Adventurous exploits) only the first is found in Darius' inscription.

E. Rebellion Theme

The whole text of the Behistun inscription is devoted to the rebellion theme and contains identical formulas known from Naram-Sin's royal inscriptions. The first formula, "within one year," is repeated five times in the Behistun inscription.¹²⁶ In wording this claim, Darius echoes Naram-Sin's and his successors' descriptions of their victorious fights against the rebel lands. This imitation of Mesopotamian examples has been claimed to be necessary because there was no Persian scribal tradition.¹²⁷ The literary motif proceeds with the leitmotiv of the number nine (as mentioned above). While Naram-Sin was victorious in nine battles within a single year, Darius claims to have won 19 battles (DB IV 5 § 52 Old Persian = 41 Akkadian), but they appear to be organized into nine sets if only decisive wins are counted.¹²⁸ Moreover, Darius not only faces nine rebels in nine rebellious provinces, but also claims to be the ninth king of his lineage (DB I 10 § 4 Old Persian = § 4 Akkadian).

The Rebellion theme is also associated

with the truth factor, which was invoked by Naram-Sin in relation to his extraordinary exploits. Rebels are characterized by untruth – "the people became disloyal and falsehood grew greatly in the land" (DB I 33-4 § 10 Old Persian = § 10 Akkadian); "Falsehood made them rebellious" (DB IV 34 § 54 Old Persian = § 43 Akkadian). Truth will triumph inevitably over untruth, Darius over Lie-followers.

F. Battling the Beasts

While not appearing in written sources, the theme of the royal hero vanquishing beasts is known from the doorjambes of several palaces at Persepolis and from Achaemenid seals. As in previous examples, this theme represents the king as the maintainer of order against the forces of chaos.

G. Extraordinary Feats and Adventurous Exploits

Like Naram-Sin and Assurnasirpal, Darius compares himself to his predecessors, claiming that the king who preceded him had never achieved as much as he had (DB IV 50-52 § 59 Old Persian = § 48 Akkadian). Darius also emphasizes the truth of the inscription and the truth of his deeds ("I did this truly, not falsely" [DB IV 44-45 § 57 Old Persian = § 46 Akkadian]).

¹²⁶ The five times are: (1) DB IV 4f § 52 Old Persian = § 41 Akkadian; (2) DB IV 41 § 56 OP = § 45 Akk.; (3) DB IV 45 § 57 OP = § 46 Akk., (4) DB IV 52 § 59 OP = § 48 Akk., (5) DB IV 60 § 62 OP = § 50 Akk. Scholars have pondered over the chronological problems entailed in

this statement of fitting all the events into one calendrical year of any sort, see e.g. Windfuhr, "Saith Darius."

¹²⁷ E. J. Bickerman and H. Tadmor, "Darius I, Pseudo-Smerdis, and the Magi," *Athenaeum* LVI (1978), 240f.

¹²⁸ Windfuhr, "Saith Darius," 271.

Conclusion

This summary investigation into iconic and aniconic images of the emperor, through which all inhabitants of the world are brought to understand the message of the absolute king and his empire, has only been able to trace a few elements. It would have needed many volumes to begin to fathom the continuities of many aspects of royal representation through time. As can be seen from this summary of seven elements, the Sargonic era provided the legitimation or foundation myths of subsequent states, giving them an ideological grammar of universals as well as specifics. Despite this continuity, there are other threads that make up the fabric of royal imagery. Matthiae has pointed towards a western tradition.¹²⁹ Beyond the periods and areas covered in the present investigation, this tradition is known to have continued down the corridors of time. The rock reliefs of ancient kings were an integral part of the visible environment seen by Alexander and his successors, who were sometimes portrayed on

coins and statues as having horns upon their heads, a traditional Mesopotamian way of claiming divine nature. The theme of battling the beasts was incorporated into biblical imagery, in particular in the illustration of Psalm 91.

Universal similarities to these seven elements also exist. An example of the theme of body perfect is the following quote portraying the Finnish hero Lemminkäinen, “Thus became a mighty hero, In his veins the blood of ages, Head erect and form commanding, Growth of mind and body perfect” (*Kalevala*, Rune XI).¹³⁰ The symbolism of the number nine might be seen in the nine days in which the magic balm was finished in Rune IX. There is even a reference to a bow placed in the heavens in Rune III: “Still the minstrel sings enchantment, sings his sword with golden handle, sings it into gleam of lightning, hangs it in the sky above him; sings his cross-bow, gaily painted, to a rainbow o’er the ocean.”¹³¹

¹²⁹ “Old Syrian Ancestors of Some Neo-Assyrian Figurative Symbols of Kingship,” in L. De Meyer and E. Haerinck (eds.), *Archaeologia Iranica et Orientalis, Miscellanea in Honorem Louis Vanden Berghe* (Gent, 1989),

368-91.

¹³⁰ John Martin Crawford, *The Kalevala, The Epic Poem of Finland* (Cincinnati, 1904), 143.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 38.