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IDEOLOGY AND PROPAGANDA IN ASSYRIAN ART

This paper has two main themes: how the Assyrians viewed themselves and their relationship with the outside world, and how they wished the outside world to view them. In considering what the official art of Assyria, which means above all the Assyrian sculptures, has to tell us about these matters, I occasionally refer also to written documents. They and the sculptures are inseparable, like the print and pictures in an illustrated book, but other contributors deal with the written evidence in greater detail.¹

The historical background should first be summarized. Assyria was an ancient kingdom based in what is now northern Iraq. In the first half of the ninth century B.C. it expanded west and east by military conquest to cover an area stretching from the Euphrates, in Syria and Turkey, to the central Zagros, roughly the present frontier between Iraq and Iran. The bulk of this empire was a homogeneous area to much of which Assyria had traditional claims inherited from a comparable period of expansion in the past; it had a common economic basis of rain-fed agriculture, and was readily absorbed into Assyria proper so that, for instance, when the empire disintegrated, its last stronghold was in the far west at the city of Har-ran. The eastern extension into the Zagros may have been due to the strategic necessity of controlling routes across to states on the Iranian plateau from which the horses vital for military operations were obtained. Other military supplies needed by Assyria — iron, copper, and tin — may all have been imported from the west where the Assyrians were constantly trying to establish colonies or client-kingdoms, though copper might have been obtained from the north-western corner of the ninth-century empire and iron was not necessarily a problem. Apart from horses and metals, imports were essentially luxury items, since Assyria was well provided with goods such as food and stone.

A century later, beginning in the 740s, there was another phase of successful expansion during which Assyria conquered or otherwise came to control virtually all the lands from the eastern coast of the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. The empire was separated by natural boundaries or buffer states from other great powers — Egypt, Phrygia, Urartu, and Elam. During the seventh century Assyrian kings attempted, with varying

competence and consistency, to consolidate their rule over this much more heterogeneous territory. The attempt eventually failed, so far as the Assyrians were concerned, with Nineveh falling in 612 B.C., but the greater part of the empire was inherited entire by the Chaldaean kings of Babylon.

Many of the historical events of these three centuries were recorded in sculptures: stone slabs, carved in low relief, which decorated the walls of the royal palaces. Modern displays of these sculptures are unavoidably misleading as they always consist of fragments — several slabs long, perhaps, but nonetheless fragments — of what were very complicated schemes of decoration including paintings also and embracing entire palaces. Each of these was essentially the creation of one Assyrian king, built in his capital-city.

In the early ninth century Ashurnasirpal, an important king of the first phase of expansion, turned the small provincial town of Kalhu into a new capital-city for himself. Over a century later Tiglath-pileser III, who inaugurated the second phase of expansion, built himself a new palace, also at Kalhu. Shortly afterwards Sargon built a new capital-city on a fresh site in the neighbourhood, which he named after himself, Dur-Sharrukin. His son Sennacherib, late in the eighth century at the start of his reign, shifted the capital to another nearby city, Nineveh. His son Esarhaddon made arrangements to move back to Kalhu, and his son Ashurbanipal returned to Nineveh. We therefore have a magnificent succession of palaces, each the memorial of one man.

This memorial status is plain from inscriptions commemorating the building projects. They hardly mention the administrative convenience or political motives that may sometimes have been involved. They concentrate instead on the personal achievement of the king responsible. Ashurnasirpal states it clearly:²

“I founded therein a palace as my royal residence and for my lordly pleasure for eternity. I decorated it in a splendid fashion. . . May a later prince restore its weakened portions and restore my inscribed name to its place. Then Ashur will listen to his prayers. He must not forsake my mighty palace, my royal residence, of Kalach, nor abandon it in the face of enemies. He must not remove the doors, beams, or knobbed nails of bronze from it and put them in another city in another palace . . . He must not block up its door. He must neither appropriate it for a warehouse nor turn it into a prison . . . He must not allow it to disintegrate through neglect, desertion, or lack of renovation. He must not move into another palace, either within or without the city, instead of my palace.”

And so on: a list of all the dreadful things that eventually did happen to Ashurnasirpal's palace at the hands of his practically minded successors, and to their palaces in their turn.

Each palace, of which the sculptures were an integral part, had its individual character. They have features in common, so that we can see a logical sequence of development and sometimes imitation, but they were designed for different kings each of whom was anxious to prove his own superiority. The king's names, titles, and achievements were written repeatedly in both conspicuous and concealed places, and frequently assert that he had done what his predecessors had failed to do. The palace was a massive corpus of personal propaganda.

The sculptures and paintings, apart from those which had a magical or ornamental function, concentrate in accordance with Mesopotamian tradition on the achievements of the king. We see him worshipping, standing to receive his courtiers or processions of tributaries, administering justice, and winning or celebrating victories which may be over men, wild animals, or natural obstacles. Assyrian art employs various traditional Mesopotamian conventions: an example is the treatment of the human face, where types may be distinguished but we can seldom recognize individual portraiture. No significance need be attached to such stylistic conventions except in so far as they demonstrate continuity with the past. There are of course stylistic and other developments within Assyrian art over the centuries; the most important, from our point of view, is that the scenes become more complicated so that the latest ones are the most informative. There is, however, no great change in their ideological content, in the assumptions and attitudes illustrated by them.

The king is invincible, but not superhuman. In each composition, or in each unit of a strip-cartoon composition, he normally appears once and once only, like anyone else. He is the most important figure, but he is normally the same size as other people until Esarhaddon's conquest of Egypt, after which he tends to be slightly bigger. He may seem to be no more than one in a crowd; there are exceptions in certain kinds of composition, but they merely reflect stylistic difficulties which can equally result in the king being smaller than other people (Fig. 1): once, for instance, he appears as a dwarf riding a pony. The opposition which the king overcomes sometimes seems unworthy of him, but at other times he faces dangerous problems which enhance his ultimate victory. The sculptures seem reliable in what they include: thus Sargon and earlier kings take a more active part in battle than later kings; there are also pictures of campaigns in which, as we happen to know, the king did not participate, and he is not shown as participating. On the other hand the sculptures exclude undesirable subjects such as Assyrian casualties: some of these were in-

advertently included, through uncritical use of the stylistic convention of chariots running over a dead enemy, on one embossed door fitting,³ but instead of being scrapped it was relegated in the practical Assyrian way to the most inconspicuous position available. Mass-production, coupled with poor supervision, as well as provincial arrogance or ignorance, also led to various breaches of etiquette, but they were generally tolerated so long as they did not infringe the prerogatives of royalty.

The king, besides being invincible, has god on his side. In normal circumstances he needs no justification for what he does. He is high priest of the god Ashur, whose glory he proclaims throughout the world. Early ninth-century kings are accompanied by a god in mid-air; divine insignia go with the army; the gods of defeated nations acquiesce. It was the king's duty to protect his realm, the realm of the god Ashur, from the powers of chaos which the enemy represented. Sennacherib was even shown, according to one ancient description of a picture which does not survive, helping the gods in their own struggle against primeval Chaos.⁴ The theme was epitomized in the design of the stamp-seal used by royal officials: it shows the king killing a lion, one of the wild animals which threatened the security of the realm such as human enemies did (Fig. 2). A comparable but simpler design, the king drawing a bow, was adopted for the coinage of imperial Persia. The gods naturally rejoiced in the defeat and death of those who opposed the Assyrian king, and artists recorded the events with a triumphant relish for detail.

The king ruled, however, a peaceful and well-ordered state. His noteworthy achievements, within the boundaries of his empire, spoke for themselves and there are relatively few useful illustrations of them. If a tributary state was turned into an imperial province under an Assyrian governor, it became part of the realm of Ashur; it ceased paying tribute and paid tax instead; this payment was a routine affair, and not worth illustrating. There is a strong contrast with the Persepolis sculptures, with their emphasis on the international nature but internal cohesion of the Persian empire. There are some Assyrian pictures that show engineering operations at home, but idyllic scenes, such as the countryside near Nineveh (Fig. 3), tend to be inserted marginally in compositions that really deal with other subjects.

This attitude towards the king — the justice of his cause and the unquestioning loyalty of his people — is one aspect of Assyrian ideology illustrated by the sculptures; there was nothing exceptional about it in the ancient Near East. The Assyrian attitude to the world outside the empire was more complicated, reflecting in a practical fashion the realities of imperial power and responsibility. Foreign states were grouped in categories and treated accordingly; the distinction between the different categories

was flexible, and circumstances naturally varied in ways that the sculptures do not indicate, but the general rules are tolerably clear.

Some foreign kingdoms were recognized as independent equals. In the second millennium B.C. there had been several great powers which recognized each other's independence, and Assyria itself eventually joined this select group. Similarly, in the middle of the ninth century, we find the king of Assyria posing as brother of the king of Babylon: the pair were shown shaking hands (Fig. 4) after the Assyrian had intervened, by invitation according to Assyrian sources, in a Babylonian civil war. Later, when Tiglath-pileser III conquered Babylonia around 730, he continued to recognize Babylonian pretensions to independence, taking the throne himself. This meant accommodating two kingdoms within one empire, and the recalcitrant problem of how best to do this was an important factor in the collapse of Assyria a century or so later.

Another state recognized as independent was Urartu, beyond the mountains on Assyria's northern border. The peaceful albeit nervous relationship established between Assyria and Urartu is illustrated by a mid-seventh-century picture in which two Urartian ambassadors witness an Assyrian triumph (Fig. 5).

Elam, in southern Iran, had similar status. There is a picture of Elamite princes competing unsuccessfully with the Assyrian king in a lion-hunt, which may well have been a specifically royal activity.⁵ There is also a picture of Elamite ambassadors, who have brought an insulting message, being detained not without respect at the Assyrian court.⁶ On one occasion the Assyrians supplied Elamites with food during a famine — one of the few clear examples from Mesopotamia of food affecting international relations.⁷ In the middle of the seventh century war broke out between Assyria and Elam, and the Elamite king, who had sent the insulting message, was killed in battle; maltreatment of the Elamite king's head (Fig. 6) was justified by reference to this message, though even pro-Assyrian Elamites evidently regarded it as a breach of international good manners.⁸ After their victory the Assyrians presented the Elamites with a new king, who had been a political refugee in Assyria; he was shown being introduced to the Elamite people by an Assyrian officer (Fig. 7), and greeted with songs and music while bodies from the battle floated down the river nearby. The Assyrians, then, were representing themselves as friends and liberators. Subsequent troubles, however, altered the Assyrian attitude towards Elam, and it was treated more harshly.

Egypt too was probably accepted as an independent power before the brief seventh-century Assyrian occupation. There is a ninth-century picture of tribute from Egypt,⁹ but this may have been either an idle boast or a reference to the status of Byblos, a possible Egyptian protec-

torate in Lebanon. There is a suggestion in one text that the Assyrians, when they did occupy Egypt, made a point of replacing the foreign Nubian kings with presumably more popular native rulers,¹⁰ and pictures draw a distinction between the two groups of people (Fig. 8), though this may be an accident of preservation.

A second category of foreign state consisted of those which were not equals of Assyria but nonetheless did not owe allegiance to the Assyrian king. Various sculptures show wars with states of this kind. There is a ferocious battle, with the atrocities that have been customary in warfare throughout history. The enemy town may or may not be burnt, and the king then reviews the prisoners, men, women, and children. There is rough justice, but there are no elaborate executions. The people may or may not be transferred, for security or other reasons, to another area of the empire; if so they are replaced, as texts tell us, with other captives from elsewhere.¹¹ Pictures show them under escort, but reasonably well treated.

A third category included people who denied allegiance both to the Assyrian king and to the ideals of urban civilization which the Assyrians and other states upheld. These were the wild tribes and villagers of hill and desert; they were liable to be exterminated.

The next category consisted of tributary states. The king was shown receiving their gifts, sometimes on campaign and sometimes at home, in formal conventionalized compositions. In the seventh century, after the second great phase of imperial expansion, this theme disappeared from Assyrian art. One reason, perhaps, is that the very expansion of the empire had greatly reduced the significance of tribute. Once most of the old tributary states had been incorporated into the empire, with others as well, the new tributary states in distant Iran and Anatolia had nothing remarkable to offer.

Disobedience or rebellion by a tributary state attracted punishment. A famous example is Sennacherib's capture of Lachish. After the fall of the town, the local dignitaries were tortured to death publicly. It was hoped that this would help ensure peaceful conditions in future, and it was a scene of this kind that the Urartian ambassadors were shown. The surviving population of Lachish was moved elsewhere, and we see prisoners from this and other campaigns employed as forced labour on public works in Assyria (Fig. 9). Some nomadic and correspondingly less manageable Arabs were treated far more severely: after the battle, when the Assyrians reached their encampment, even the women were assaulted and killed (Fig. 10).

These, then, are the different categories of foreigner which we can distinguish in the pictures. In one respect, however, they are all treated alike: tremendous care is taken to represent them, their cultural and some-

times physical characteristics, and the landscapes in which they live (Fig. 11). We do occasionally see the Assyrians making fun of foreigners, as when rival claimants to the Elamite throne were forced to act as waiters, but the sculptures remind me far more frequently of Oppenheim's remarks referring to the account of Sargon's eighth campaign:¹²

"The text addresses itself at an audience really interested in learning about foreign peoples, their way of life, their religion and customs. In fact one feels tempted to draw a parallel between the priests and citizens of Ashur of 714 BC and the audience which listened to the logoi of the predecessors of the Ionian logographers only a century or so later in Asia Minor . . . The attitude just described indicates an audience sure of itself, deeply imbued with a conscious tradition of native origin but, at the same time, aware of the existence of other traditions without reacting to them so intensely as to evolve patterns of either aggression or fossilizing self-isolation."

This receptive attitude is implicit in the sculptures. I would mention a further specific example. The palaces were decorated partly with magical figures which kept away disease and bad luck. In the ninth century these figures are traditional Assyrian types (Fig. 12), which subsequently become less frequent. They are joined, and largely replaced, by others borrowed not only from Babylonia, the traditional home of wisdom and magic, but also from the western provinces, which contributed the sphinx. Similarly we find Assyrian kings sitting happily on Phoenician furniture (Fig. 13), and announcing that they have built themselves palaces in the Hittite style of architecture.¹³ We are given the impression that they viewed the world with enormous self-confidence, and were therefore willing to adopt anything which appealed to them, regardless of its origin.

While the narrative sculptures tell us a great deal about the Assyrians, they were not as prominent in the Assyrian palaces as they are now in books about Assyrian civilization. To appreciate the relative significance of different types of sculpture in the palaces, we have to reconstruct in our mind's eye the architectural context. We do not know what any Assyrian building looked like in its entirety, but we can, generalizing with all appropriate reservations, build up a composite picture for palaces of the ninth and eighth centuries.

The exterior walls are largely plain, but for magical decoration at the entrances and along the crenellations. This is all that the common people of Assyria normally saw, a massive but fairly simple structure inside the citadel. The sheer size of some of the magical figures, however, which

weighed up to sixteen tons, must have been intended to impress human as well as supernatural visitors (Fig. 14).

Those with business inside the palace entered through a gate-chamber which was decorated internally, at least in the provincial palace of Til-Barsip, with narrative pictures of a military campaign. The great gate of the city of Ashur, and the entrance to the imperial barracks at Nineveh, also held military trophies. The palace gate-chamber opened into a huge outer courtyard surrounded by offices; these were, so far as we know, undecorated. Beyond lay another courtyard with more offices but also having, on one side, the magnificent facade of the royal throneroom, together with side access to further state apartments.

Above the throneroom doors were brilliantly coloured pictures in glazed brick, showing the king at worship. There is a standard composition: the king in duplicate, on either side of a sacred tree above which floats a winged disk carrying the figure of a god. The scene has been variously interpreted, but seems to show the king in some relationship with powers of the earth and sky, for whose favour he as high priest and shepherd of his people was primarily responsible. In any case, it is a ritual scene, emphasizing the king's religious duties. Anyone looking through the great central door of the throneroom could see the self-same scene on the wall opposite, and it recurred in various contexts elsewhere (Fig. 15).

The throneroom facade was dominated, lower down, by magical figures such as colossal human-headed winged bulls. On either side, however, leading the eye towards the throneroom doors, were smaller slabs showing the king with a few attendants receiving groups of people. Once these were courtiers bringing furniture and other equipment for some court ceremony. More often there were processions of people bringing or preparing to bring tribute. Tribute was again the constant theme of obelisks which were erected, probably in fairly public places, during the ninth century: the tributaries come naturally from the periphery of the Assyrian empire, but it does sometimes seem that they have been selected for their remoteness and for the exotic goods they have with them.

The places decorated by these sculptures were as far as the ordinary subject could hope to penetrate, unless we may imagine an occasional guided tour, into the royal palace. We have, as it happens, one list of the people such a palace was meant to impress, the 70,000 odd guests at Ashurnasirpal's housewarming party:¹⁴ nearly all of these were Assyrian subjects, a few represented states which either were or may have been tributary, and there were none at all from major independent powers. The image these public monuments present is plain: a king, devoted to his religious duties, to whom gifts come from the far ends of the earth for the greater glory of the god Ashur and his servants. Military themes were not



Fig. 1 Sennacherib enthroned at Lachish (BM 124911).

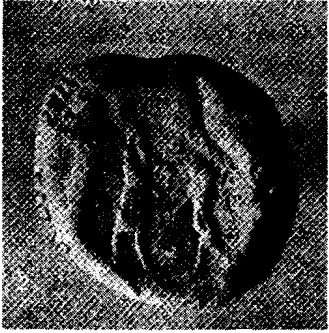


Fig. 2 Assyrian royal seal (BM 50790).

Fig. 3 Deer in Sennacherib's Nature Reserve at Nineveh (BM 124824).

Fig. 4 Meeting between kings of Assyria and Babylon, Reign of Shalmaneser III. (Iraq Museum).



Fig. 5 Urtian ambassadors (the short men in caps) watching the punishment of anti-Assyrian rebels. Reign of Ashurbanipal (BM 124802).



Fig. 6 Recognition of Elamite king's head, held by Assyrian soldier to right of tent. Reign of Ashurbanipal (BM 124801).



Fig. 7 Assyrian officer presenting Elamites with new king. Reign of Ashurbanipal (BM 124802).



Fig. 8 Assyrian campaign in Egypt, with captured Nubian soldiers (left) and Egyptian civilian prisoners (right). Reign of Ashurbanipal (BM 124928).

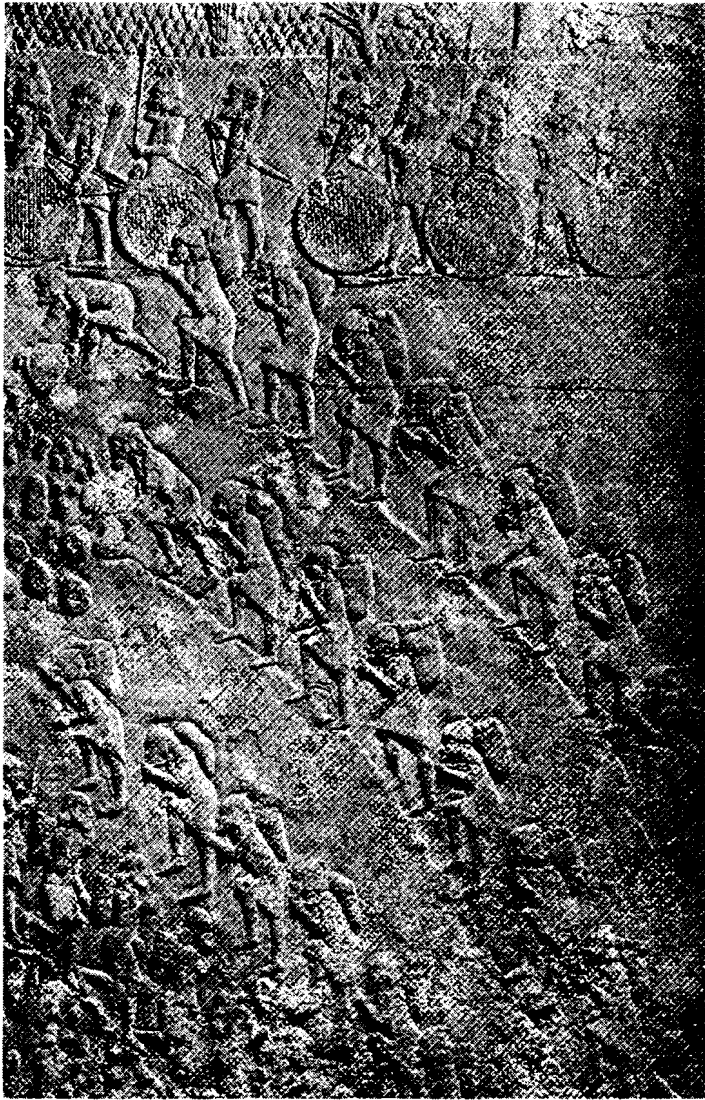


Fig. 9 Western prisoners working in Assyrian quarry. Reign of Sennacherib (BM 124821).



Fig. 10 Assyrians assaulting Arab women. Reign of Ashurbanipal (BM 124927).



Fig. 11 Assyrians recording details of a campaign. Reign of Sin-shar-ishkun? (Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, Burrell Collection 28/33).



Fig. 12 Assyrian protective genie from palace of Ashurnasirpal (BM 98064).



Fig. 13 Ashurbanipal and consort at picnic (BM 124920).



Fig. 14 Facade of Sennacherib's palace (?), Reign of Ashurbanipal (BM 124938).



Fig. 15 Ashurnasirpal portrayed twice, in ritual pose, with protective genies behind and winged disc above (BM 124531).



Fig. 17 Incident from Assyrian-Elamite battle (BM 124801).



Fig. 18 Eunuchs acting as labourers for Sennacherib (BM 93019).



Fig. 19 Stela of Ashurnasirpal II (BM 108805).

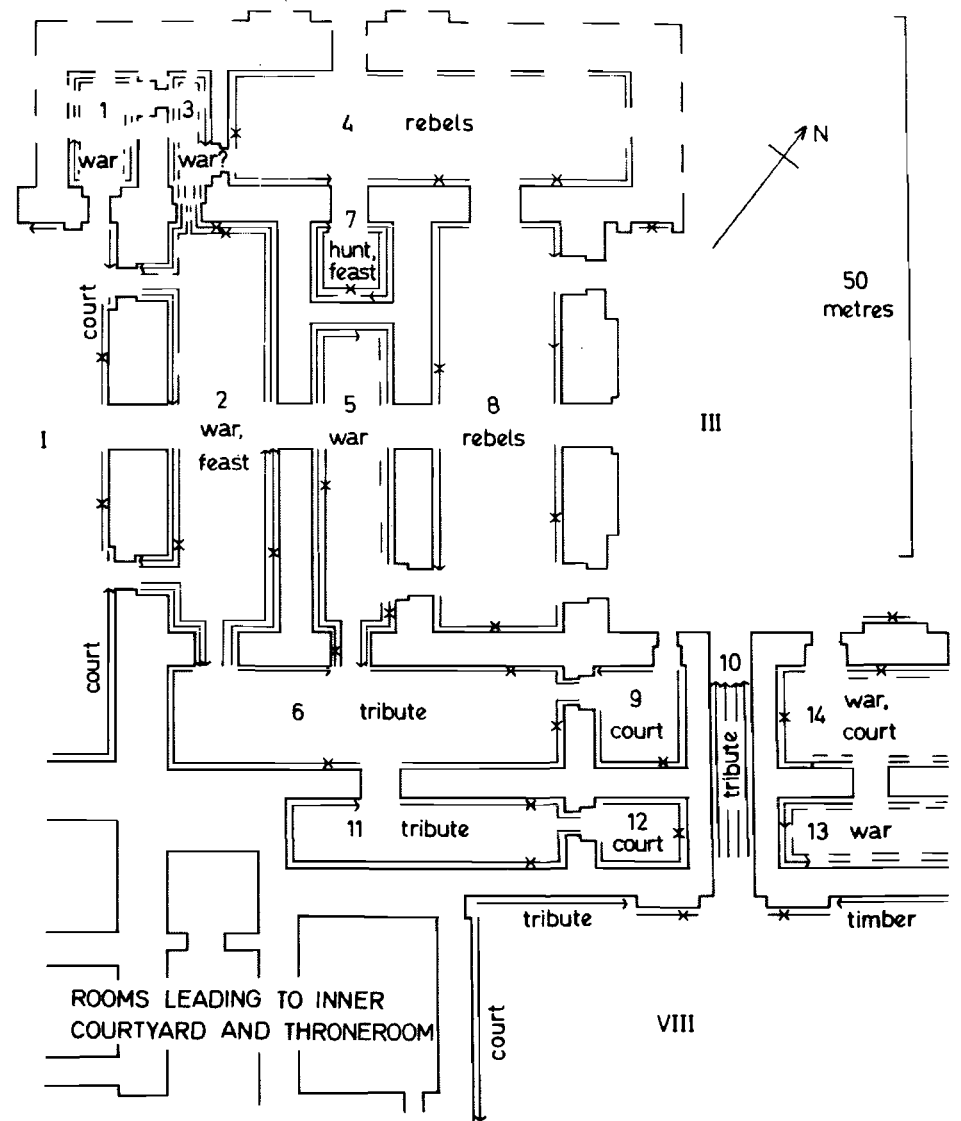


Fig. 16. Reception area of Sargon's palace at Khorsabad.

excluded, and may of course have had a wider circulation on textiles and small objects. The emphasis, however, was on peace, *Pax Assyriaca*, rather than on war.

Inside the throneroom, at least in Ashurhasirpal's palace, there was a greater range of subject-matter. The king, besides appearing in ritual scenes opposite the main entrance and behind his throne, was also shown in formal compositions with his courtiers. There were many magical figures. Over half the sculptures, however, were narrative scenes of military expeditions in different lands or occasionally of hunts. Some kings do specifically mention how magnificent their military narrative sculptures were, and they doubtless impressed some foreigners with the irreversible progress of Assyrian arms, but entry to the throneroom must in practice have been largely restricted to men already connected with the Assyrian court. Propaganda is better exemplified in the reception-wing of the palace of Sargon.

The identification of this area as a reception-wing is largely dependent on the architectural plan (Fig. 16) but the sculptures help to explain it. It was approached from the throneroom court (VIII) by a passage (10) in which were depicted rows of tributaries from east and west; we may suppose that such people, or their leaders, did indeed come this way, and there are other instances in the Assyrian palaces of illustrative decoration of this kind. They emerged into an open space (III) with the reception-wing to one side. Its facade was again decorated with magical figures, and with the king and his attendants. Through the doors they could again see sculptures representing the king, a feature of doorways throughout this building. On entering the room (8), they found that the king was depicted presiding over the torture and execution of important rebels, a clear piece of deterrent propaganda. These salutary scenes led their eyes to a small doorway at the throne end of the room, which communicated with private apartments (6, 11); through this door the king emerged to receive them in person.

An adjoining reception-room (4) was suitable for the entertainment of guests. They will not have been surprised to find here exactly the same pictures of execution. A few guests may have had the privilege of entering a smaller room (7) nearby, surrounded by more congenial scenes of hunting and feasting; the king as usual was represented opposite the door, and this is where he himself probably sat.

Pictures of Assyrian military achievements were restricted, in Sargon's palace, to other anterooms and reception-rooms on the less accessible side of the reception-wing, and elsewhere. They were presumably used to a greater extent by Assyrian courtiers. Similarly, in all Assyrian palaces, the king's achievements in the hunting field were restricted mainly to the

more private state apartments and the approaches to them. Even when hunting scenes appear in a throneroom, as they do in Ashurnasirpal's palace, they are the two narrative sculptures closest to the royal throne. This illustrates an important feature of Assyrian narrative art, its entertainment value: it is full of anecdotes and reminiscences, and it was meant to be enjoyed as much as admired. The king's personal achievements in the hunt were a theme likely to give particular pleasure to him himself, and they were sited accordingly. A courtier could look at a campaign scene, perhaps with an explanatory caption, and remember battles in which he himself had participated (Fig. 17). This was preaching to the converted rather than propaganda.

At this stage I would again emphasize that I have been generalizing, describing tendencies rather than absolute rules, and dealing primarily with palaces of the ninth and eighth centuries. The same tendencies are visible, however, in the late seventh-century palace of Ashurbanipal. On the other hand the palace of Sennacherib, the early seventh-century king who seems to have stood firm against further imperial expansion, appears paradoxically full of scenes of military narrative. Even so, half the walls of the more public courtyards in the open air showed the king's civic achievements, notably the successful transportation of heavy loads across difficult country. This king's sculptures also showed hunting expeditions, though only one group has been partially excavated. To some extent Sennacherib's scenes of military narrative fill the gap left by the disappearance, considered already, of the tribute scenes. There is also a possibility that the military emphasis of Sennacherib's sculptures reflects internal Assyrian politics, with the army gaining power at the expense of the old court establishment of eunuchs; certainly the beardless eunuchs are depicted in extraordinarily menial roles, such as carrying equipment (Fig. 18), and do not appear as high officials as they had done previously. There is also, however, a stylistic consideration: in Sennacherib's reign, for various reasons, military narrative pictures were transformed into sweeping panoramas capable of covering vast stretches of wall without difficulty, far superior in this respect to anything that had gone before. It is to me an open question which if any of these explanations accounts best for the expansion of military narrative in Sennacherib's scheme of palace decoration. In any case, though military decoration on this scale presupposes an imperial scale of military involvement, it certainly does not reflect a growth of militant imperialism.

There are also examples of Assyrian official art in temples. They are mainly concerned with magic or religion, but there were scenes of military narrative displayed in temples, most notably in the courtyards of the great Ashur Temple.¹⁵ They underlined divine interest in Assyrian mili-

tary successes. On the other hand it is notable that wall-decoration in Assyrian private houses is restricted to ornamental, magical, or religious themes. For instance, in Sargon's capital, the largest palace besides that of the king contained, in its main reception-room, equivalent to the royal throneroom, a picture of the king and the master of the house engaged in an act of worship. There are no scenes of warfare.

It is in fact as a worshipper, as high-priest of his god, that the Assyrian king is represented in the sculptures which were most widely viewed. This is how Sennacherib appears in the great rock-carvings with which he commemorated his construction of a permanent water-supply for Nineveh. This was the aspect of the king's personality which was publicized in the Assyrian equivalent of a political poster, the royal stela.¹⁶ It shows the king in the distinctive robes which he probably wore as high priest. He is making a specific gesture of respect and supplication. Above him are symbols representing the major gods of Assyria (Fig. 19).

These stelas, or rock-carvings in stela form, or occasionally statues, were placed inside shrines and in temple courtyards and gateways; in palace courtyards; in city gates and streets; on isolated rocks by battlefields, and on seemingly inaccessible cliffs in the far corners of the known world. They were directed at every possible audience: the gods, the king's contemporaries, universal posterity. Some of those on cliffs were exceedingly difficult to reach, so much so that at least one (Uramanat) still remains unpublished, and others were exceedingly difficult to find, so that it is still uncertain, for instance, how many of Sennacherib's there are on the Judi Dagh. At Nahr el-Kelb in Lebanon, beside the coast road, there are stelas commemorating several different expeditions, and we see again that striving after immortality which the successive palaces embody, the conviction of each individual king that he too had his place in history, and that it was up to him to ensure it. At least two Assyrian stelas were carved directly beside those of other already ancient kings, one of them Egyptian; the older monuments were respected, as the Assyrians hoped their own would be.

Various texts refer to these monuments. A ninth-century king states: "At that time I made an image of my likeness; the glory of Ashur, the great lord, my lord, and the power of my might, I wrote thereon; I set it up by the sea."¹⁷ And, shortly afterwards, "I fashioned an image of my royal self. My deeds of heroism, my acts of bravery, I wrote thereon. At the sources of the river I set it up". The god Ashur is omitted from the second description, but his presence may be understood. This scene of the king worshipping his gods, in conjunction with the seal where he kills his lion, summarizes all the royal achievements.

In the eighth century some Assyrian provincial governors used the stela

form to publicize their own achievements and perpetuate their own memory. Nergal-eresh, the earliest of them, portrayed the king on the stela, but included his own name inconspicuously in the text: in this case his name was later mutilated and almost erased. At least two other governors, Bel-Harran-bel-usur and a ruler of Duru, erected stelas portraying themselves instead of the king, though in both cases the symbol of the god Ashur was perhaps tactfully omitted; the king's name was mentioned in the one text fully preserved. The circumstances in which these officials felt free to act in this way are not clear; the central government may have permitted the practice or have been unable to prevent it. Certainly the monuments of another provincial governor, Shamshi-ilu, whose public sculptures and inscriptions exalted him without reference to the king, were systematically modified at a later date. These provincial sculptures, erased or not, emphasize that officials besides royalty appreciated the memorial function of the stela.

The stela, appropriately, is the medium in which propaganda statements are most easily detected, since alterations in a simple formula are naturally more noticeable than elsewhere.

The gods represented by symbols change. Originally there are five or six traditional Assyrian gods. In the early eighth century, however, the great Babylonian gods, Marduk and Nabu, appear for the first time on a major monument, just when a Nabu temple was being built at Kalhu. Tiglath-pileser III is the only king to employ the relatively obscure god, Amurru, apparently a personal choice, and Sennacherib is the only king to employ Ninurta. Some of the variations cannot now be explained, but the increased popularity of Marduk and Nabu is a further example of open respect for Babylonian traditions.

One development publicized on stelas is represented by the appearance, in the king's hand, of an object of uncertain nature, shaped either like a banana or like an ice-cream cornet. Similar objects were traditionally held by the kings of Babylon, and the custom was adopted by Assyrian kings after Sennacherib's sack of Babylon and his amalgamation of the two state cults. The latter was a reform of outstanding importance, which involved drastic remodelling of the Assyrian national shrine, and it must have caused considerable heart-searching. The change in the stela formula proclaimed Sennacherib's decision to all and sundry.

Another stela shows one king, Shamshi-Adad V, wearing a peculiarly archaic forked form of beard; this is not chance, as the text too is written in archaic characters. A possibility here is that the king, whose accession had been disputed, was claiming a connection with Shamshi-Adad I, an illustrious king (and usurper) of the far distant past. Something similar may have been done by Sargon, whose very throne-name "True King"

exposes the suspect nature of his claim to the Assyrian throne. Some Sargon pictures in a temple courtyard¹⁸ show him paired with an unreal bearded gentleman who could well represent one of his earlier namesakes, the first of whom was a dominant figure in early Mesopotamian history.

A final example concerns Esarhaddon, a seventh-century king. He, in order to fix the succession and avoid civil conflict on his own death, appointed one of his sons crown-prince of Assyria, and another crown-prince of Babylon. The decision was obviously disastrous. There are letters to the king praising it, but we can sense the furious opposition of more far-sighted courtiers some of whom were probably executed not long afterwards. Official policy was firmly expressed in stelas, three of which survive. Esarhaddon appears on the front of these; on the sides are his two sons, each in the appropriate robes of office.

The same group of stelas employs an unusual convention in showing the king, Esarhaddon, on a larger scale than his sons; there are also two small-scale enemies leashed at the king's feet. While there is a parallel in the Middle Assyrian period, four centuries earlier, the appearance of these small-scale enemies at this moment, just after Esarhaddon's conquest of Egypt, suggests that he may have been impressed by the themes and social perspective of Egyptian official art. If this is correct, we have yet another illustration of the receptive and practical approach to other cultures which we find repeatedly expressed in the Assyrian monuments.

These royal stelas are the trademark of the Assyrian empire. Their predominant characteristic, as in the narrative sculptures, is that they show the king as agent and servant of his gods.

We are left then with a picture, a self-portrait, of a traditional Mesopotamian king: this is how the ruler of Assyria saw himself and wished us to see him. There is little explicit recognition of the fundamental nature of the change brought about by Tiglath-pileser's conquests. The emphasis is national rather than imperial, and personal rather than national. The most significant alteration, perhaps, foreshadowing that Achaemenid community of nations that was already beginning to emerge under Assyrian dominion, lies in Sennacherib's incorporation of Babylonian royal symbolism into the Assyrian iconographic tradition. This is one case in which the sculptures, and other archaeological evidence, add substantially to the information derived from written texts. It is to these, however, that we must turn for a deeper understanding of Assyrian ideology.

NOTES

1. This paper is a slightly changed version of that read to the symposium. Footnotes have been kept to a minimum; there is no satisfactory book dealing with Assyrian sculpture in general, but essential sources are included in the list given by me in *Iraq* 34 (1972), 112. Most monuments referred to in this paper are accessible through *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* or J.B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures*. I am indebted to the Trustees of the British Museum for photographs of objects in their care, and to Mr. William Wells of the Burrell Collection, Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, for fig. 11.
2. A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* II, 154-5.
3. E. Unger, *Zum Bronzetur von Balawat*, Taf. III, Platte P.
4. D.D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* II, 186-8. Luckenbill's translations, to which I refer below, are convenient but cannot always be relied on; they will be superseded by forthcoming volumes of Grayson.
5. Reade, *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 9 (1976), Taf. 21, 1.
6. Reade, op. cit., Taf. 22, 2.
7. Luckenbill, op. cit. II, 328-9.
8. Luckenbill, op. cit. II, 303, 330-337.
9. Luckenbill, op. cit. I, 211 (Musri).
10. Luckenbill, op. cit. II, 227.
11. e.g. Luckenbill, op. cit. I, 276.
12. The waiters: Reade, op. cit., Taf. 28, 2. Quotation from A.L. Oppenheim, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 19 (1960), 146.
13. Luckenbill, op. cit. I, 288; II, 65 &c.
14. Grayson, op. cit. II, 197.
15. W. Andrae, *Coloured Ceramics from Ashur*, pl. 6.
16. Stelas and other rock-carvings are listed by L.D. Levine, *Two Neo-Assyrian Stelae from Iran*, 51-58. Supplementary list in Reade, *Iranica Antiqua* 12 (1977), 33-44, with discussion of the symbolism of these monuments.
17. Luckenbill, op. cit. I, 214.
18. G. Loud, *Khorsabad* I, fig. 104.