

Assyrian Royal Hunts: Antlered and Horned Animals from Distant Lands

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Assyrian royal texts disclose the rich variety of wildlife encountered in distant landscapes during military campaigns. The royal hunts of wild animals are illustrated in the visual arts of Assyria, which include species of Cervidae and Bovidae. Singled out are the deer (fallow deer, red deer), wild mountain goat (ibex, Kuban tur), and gazelle. These non-aggressive herbivores, represented in different contexts and media of ancient Near Eastern art and especially Assyria, are studied individually. Neo-Assyrian art provides evidence that species of deer, mountain goat, and gazelle were hunted in the wild; kept in herds for royal sporting events; and subjected to cultic practices. On occasion their images had political meaning as symbols of distant lands.

INTRODUCTION

The hunting exploits of Assyrian kings that are mentioned briefly in royal texts disclose the rich variety of wildlife encountered in distant landscapes. In this royal sport, the specific species that Assyrian kings could pursue depended upon the particular terrain traversed in the course of their military campaigns, ranging from the desert, to the forest, to the high hills and mountains.

One text of the 12th-century king Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 B.C.E.) states that he killed wild bulls and cows in the land Hatti; he felled elephants with his bow in the land Harran and the region of the Habur River; he rode in boats of Arvad, and in the “Great Sea” he killed a *nāhiru*, which is called a sea-horse (Grayson 1991: 37; 1976: §46; Luckenbill 1926–1927: §§248, 253). In addition, the Assyrian king hunted lions and formed herds of *najālu*-deer, *ajalu*-deer, ibex, and gazelle.¹ Ashurbelkala (1073–1056 B.C.E.) mentions that he killed a variety of wild animals which are identified, and in winter he hunted gazelle, ibex, and deer in the high mountains (Grayson 1991: 103; 1976: §248). Adad-nirari II (911–891 B.C.E.) boasts of his killing of lions, wild bulls,

and elephants. In the city of Ashur he formed herds of animals that included lions, bulls, elephants, *ajalu*-deer, and ibex (Grayson 1991: 154; Luckenbill 1926–1927: §§375, 392, 436). Tukulti-ninurta II (890–884 B.C.E.) hunted wild beasts and killed *ajalu*-deer and ostriches on the banks of the Euphrates and captured their young (Grayson 1991: 168, 175; 1976: §472). During the reign of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.E.), *ajalu*-deer and deer were included among the captured beasts of the mountains and plains that were bred and displayed in the city of Nimrud (Kalhu). Moreover, deer are mentioned among the list of animals and birds obviously killed for their meat, which were offered for a spectacular public feast.² Centuries later, King Ashurbanipal (669–627 B.C.E.) records

¹ Grayson 1991: 26; 1976: §81. We follow the spellings in CAD for the deer species. Variant spellings cited by Grayson (1991; 1976), AHw, and Black, George, and Postgate (1999) are *aialu*, *ajjalu*, *ayalu*, *ayyalu*, and *naialu*, *najjalu*, *nayalu*.

² Grayson 1991: 215–16, 226, 292; 1976: §§597–98. Mention of the elephant in the Assyrian texts deserves comment. Ashurnasirpal II received five live elephants as tribute from the governor of Suhu, which he took on his campaign. Shalmaneser III (858–825 B.C.E.) is the last Assyrian king to remark on the capture or kills of elephants; see Grayson 1996: 41. On the Black Obelisk dated to this king's reign, one carved panel shows a live elephant brought as tribute from the land of Mušri; see Moortgat 1969: pl. 271; Luckenbill 1926–1927: §591. Annals of the Assyrian kings also describe tribute of ivory objects that were given by rulers residing in western territories; see Mallowan and Herrmann 1974: 34–35. Collon proposes that the live elephants known to exist in Syria were imported from India, during various times in the course of centuries. The Syrian elephant became extinct by the end of the ninth century B.C.E.; see Collon 1977: 220.

the devastation of Elam during his military campaign to that region and refers to its wild animals, citing the wild ass, gazelle, and all kinds of beasts of the plains.³

The visual arts of Assyria contain depictions of the royal hunt of wild animals. The most ferocious and challenging adversary for the Assyrian king was the lion. The chase of the lion—from the chariot, on horseback, or on foot—and its ultimate dispatch with bow, spear, or dagger demonstrated the royal individual's exceptional bravery and skill.⁴ Other animals depicted as the object of the hunt include the wild bull and the ostrich. The bull hunt occurs in one panel on the White Obelisk, here attributed to the 11th-century king Ashurnasirpal I (1049–1031 B.C.E.), and also on the wall reliefs of the 9th-century king Ashurnasirpal II.⁵ The chase of the ostrich is known mainly from cylinder seal designs (Collon 1999; for a study of the ostrich in Assyrian art, see Albenda 2005: 97–101). Additional species of wildlife cited in the hunting accounts of Assyrian kings and which also appear in the pictorial record are the antlered and horned animals of the fields, hills, and high mountains. The royal hunts of these herbivores seem to have been mainly for recreational activity. Little or no religious significance was apparently attached to their images in the hunting scenes. However, royal texts do mention that their “pure” young were offered to the gods for sacrifice. Moreover, the visual arts of Assyria provide examples of these animals held in the arms of winged and wingless genies (see below).

Over 68 years ago, E. D. van Buren assembled and published the main categories of animals identified in Near Eastern art, which include antlered (Cervidae) and horned (Bovidae) types.⁶ Since the appearance of her publication, not much attention has been given to the extent to which representations of ant-

lered and horned fauna—namely, deer, ibex, and gazelle—occur in different contexts and media of the visual arts of the Near East and especially Assyria. These herbivores deserve further discussion with an aim to determining whether their representations may add meaning or significance to particular art works. Images of the above-named fauna do occur in settings that may have ritual or symbolic intent. Starting with the antlered animals and followed by the horned ones, this paper surveys their imagery in the art of the ancient Near East and Assyria. A primary focus is on their depictions as the hunted by Assyrian kings.

CERVIDAE

Deer

The species of deer known to have inhabited regions of the Near East from antiquity to modern times are the red deer/stag (*Cervus elaphus*), fallow deer/buck (*Dama Mesopotamica*), and roe deer/roe buck (*Capreolus capreolus*).⁷ In Akkadian texts, deer have been identified as *ajalu*, *najālu*, and *lulimu*. It is not entirely certain to which species of deer the Akkadian terms belong. Their paired antlers, whose growth patterns differ among the species, distinguish the males. Thus, in the visual arts of the ancient Near East, the rendering of this anatomical feature is a useful guide for indicating which species of deer is illustrated. Generally, in two-dimensional representations the profile view of the antler is depicted; sometimes one is shown and at other times both. Another indicator for identifying the deer species, particularly in the art of the Neo-Assyrian period, comes from the textual information that records the regions where the Assyrian kings undertook military campaigns and hunting expeditions.

³ Luckenbill 1926–1927: §811. Ancient Near Eastern textual sources on the tribute, capture, and place of origin of “exotic” animal species are dealt with in Lion 1992.

⁴ Consideration of the lion as image and symbol in the arts has been studied; for example, see Albenda 1974; Weissert 1997: 351–56; Watanabe 2002: 69–72, 76–82, 87–88. Additional references on the subject are cited in Matthiae 1996: 230–31.

⁵ Albenda 1972: fig. 4; Meyer 1962: Abb. 66; Barnett and Falkner 1962: pl. 115. The date of the White Obelisk is debated. Grayson (1976: 156–57, §625), following Sollberger (1974), accepts a date in the reign of Ashurnasirpal II. Reade (1975: 144–47), who supports a date to the reign of Ashurnasirpal I, gives a comparative analysis of details shown on the reliefs that is convincing. Thus the latter date is followed in the present article.

⁶ Van Buren 1939: 37–57.

⁷ For photographs of the three deer species, see Kawami 2005, figs. 3 (red deer stag), 4 (fallow deer stag), 5 (roe deer stag). For the zooarchaeological evidence and distribution of deer, wild goats, and gazelles in Neolithic and later periods, see Cavallo 2000: 29, 63–66; Vila 1998: 36–45; Gilbert 2002: 13, 22–26. Third-millennium cylinder seal designs illustrate deer, mountain goats, and gazelles, and several fine examples are reproduced in Kantor 1966, figs. 2–4. Early second-millennium Syrian seal designs depict a stag, gazelle, and wild goats tied by their feet to long poles that are transported by men on foot. These scenes probably reflect the aftermath of successful animal hunts; see Collon 1981: fig. 3 f, g. Rowton (1967), who utilizes tree-toponyms that are mentioned in cuneiform sources, studies the various landscapes—mountains, mountain ranges, forests, and woodlands—of ancient Western Asia.

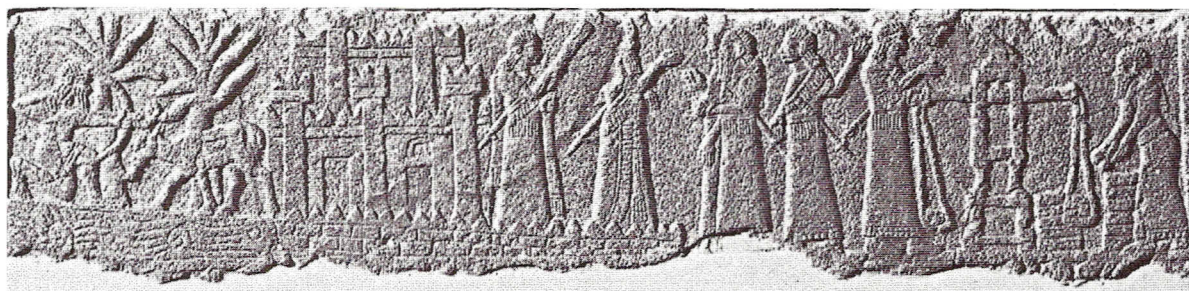


Fig. 1. The "Rassam Obelisk" of King Ashurnasirpal II: Panel A 3. BMWA 118800. After Reade 1980: pl. 4. © Copyright the Trustees of The British Museum.



Fig. 2. Deer hunt at water's edge. Line drawing of detail on Panel A 3, the "Rassam Obelisk" of King Ashurnasirpal II. After Reade 1980: pl. 4 (drawn by Albenda).

As noted above, one inscription of Tukulti-ninurta II states that he killed *ajalu*-deer on his hunting forays on the banks of the Euphrates in the land of Hindanu, and that he captured the young of the *ajalu*-deer (CAD/A: 225). The landscape alongside the banks of the Euphrates, which at that time may have consisted of grassy terrain and woodlands, would be suitable habitat for the fallow deer. A similar terrain forms the backdrop for a modest scene carved at one end of a panel of a fragmentary basalt monument of Ashurnasirpal II, the so-called Rassam Obelisk (figs. 1, 2).⁸ Against a line of two

trees alongside a river, a deer nibbles on a plant, unaware that it is the target of an Assyrian archer. The rendering of its broad antlers suggests that the deer is of the fallow species. The adjacent scene depicts the Assyrian king standing on the crenellated wall of a fortified city, followed by a row of advancing officials and two attendants with a large balance. If one agrees with the conclusion that the locale shown in the panel is along the Euphrates River, then the grazing deer on the obelisk is probably identifiable with the *ajalu*-deer mentioned in the text of Tukulti-ninurta II.⁹ The *najālu*-deer (CAD/N: 152) is therefore probably to be identified with the roe deer, since the red deer species, which is identified with *lulimu* (CAD/L: 241; Black, George, and Postgate 1999: 185), generally inhabits heavily forested regions that include the mountain ranges of the Taurus, Zagros, and Elburz. The roe is a small species of deer whose shoulder height ranges from 63 to 67 cm. Its short antlers with a total of six tines distinguish the male roe or buck. The roe does not seem to be represented in Assyrian art; possibly it is identifiable in several Syrian seal designs of the 15th and 14th centuries.¹⁰ Therefore, the two species of deer that are recognized in the art of the ancient Near East are the fallow deer and the red deer.

⁹ Reade (1980: 11) proposes that the city is a stylized view of Kalhu (Nimrud). He states that the structure depicted on the obelisk recalls the structure of Ashurnasirpal's wall base beside the river at Kalhu. However, on a wall relief originally located in the same king's palace, the depiction of a foreign city beside a river also shows a similar wall base structure, but it lacks crenellations atop the outer walls. See Moortgat 1969: pl. 261.

¹⁰ Several seal designs from the Syrian site of Ras Shamra show deer with just one tine on the antler; see Schaeffer-Forrer 1983: 89, 98, 195 (drawings 3, 7, 8), nos. R.S.6.128, R.S.6.372, R.S.8.302. For other seals showing a deer with two tines, see Colton 1987: 62, nos. 249, 250, 253.

⁸ Reade 1980: 11–12, pls. 1, 4. Thomason (2001: 67, 69–72) gives a brief geographical description of Syria and discusses north Syrian landscapes represented in Assyrian art of the ninth century B.C.E.



Fig. 3. Wild animals in forested landscape. Panel from the Black Obelisk of King Shalmaneser III. BMWA 118885. © Copyright the Trustees of The British Museum.

Fallow Deer

Smaller in size than the red deer is the fallow deer. The male is notable for the flat palm on the upper part of its antlers and the white spots on its back and body. This deer species is carved on several large stone slabs that were discovered at the north Syrian site of Carchemish, located at the western side of the middle Euphrates River, which the excavators date to the Middle Hittite period. On one basalt stone, the carved relief depicts a half-kneeling hero grasping the hind leg of a bull and lion in his respective right and left hands, and a fallow deer appears in the field above the scene (Hogarth 1914: 164, pl. B.10a). The theme of the deer hunt is the subject of two adjoining stone blocks that originated from the northwest wall of the inner court at the site. One slab depicts a fallow deer or buck, and the other a hunter on foot with bow and arrow attacking a buck in flight (Woolley and Barnett 1952: 201, 247, pls. B.57a, B.58b, B.59a, b). The three slabs from Carchemish with their carved images of fallow deer provide evidence of a viable population of the species in the vicinity of the Euphrates; the Rassam Obelisk (see fig. 1) suggests a similar population in later centuries.

The fallow deer also appears in cylinder seal designs of the Middle Assyrian period. In several examples, the animal is depicted within a natural habitat indicated by a single leafy tree or a tree set atop a hill; in one instance the fallow deer, nearly overtaken by a lion, flees up the hillside (Moortgat 1969: pl. J, nos. 7, 8; Collon 1987: nos. 277, 915, 962). The buck is represented showing the palm of the visible antler and the spots on its body, suggesting the craftsman's familiarity with the appearance of the fallow species, which probably roamed the nearby grassy woodlands. A later occurrence of the fallow deer within a woodland setting is presented in one rectangular panel of the ninth-century B.C.E. stone monument known as the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (Moortgat 1969: pl. 270). The scene illustrates three wild animals running through a tree-lined hilly landscape (fig. 3). A lion strides to the left, followed by a fallow deer, which in turn is overtaken from behind by a roaring lion. The narrative of a deer attacked by a pride of lions is an Assyrian artist's version of wildlife in its natural setting.

An incised linear representation of the fallow deer is shown on a ninth-century ivory carved in the

Assyrian style.¹¹ The ease of the drawing technique in this work may indicate knowledge of the living animal. The most refined portrayal of the fallow deer occurs on a wall relief from the doorway in the throne room (B) of the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II, where a small buck is carried by a winged male genie (Akkadian *apkallu*) (Paley 1976: pl. 21d). The deer's palmate antler and spotted hide are prominently displayed. The genie also holds a flowering five-branch plant in his upraised right hand. Each branch terminates in a palmette flower, perhaps alluding to the palm tree generally associated with regions to the south and southwest of Assyria (Babylonia and Middle Euphrates region).¹² In this instance it is plausible to assume a connection between the fallow deer and the extent of its geographical habitat. A likely assumption is the land bordering the Euphrates River and farther west, since the ninth-century Assyrian kings frequently campaigned in those distant territories. Perhaps the image of a small buck clutched by an Assyrian-type genie may be intended to have political meaning. But on the other hand, the winged genie holding the small buck does have associations with ritual activity.¹³ A similar wall relief also dated to the reign of Ashurnasirpal II was discovered near the Central Building ("Centre Palace") at Nimrud. The carving on the slab depicts a four-winged genie that grasps a small fawn to the level of its chest and holds a floral plant in his lowered hand. The head of the fawn suggests a budding antler, and its body was possibly spotted. The stone slab originally stood between two carved stones showing a lion and a bull, respectively, standing and facing outward, back to back.¹⁴ In this instance, the three-part figural grouping may be regarded as "heraldic"; therefore the fawn in the arm of the genie may in a symbolic way allude to the control of As-

syria over distant territories, particularly those to the west of the heartland. The only known illustration of an Assyrian archer aiming at a browsing fallow deer in the woodlands, probably along the Euphrates River, occurs on the fragmentary Rassam Obelisk of Ashurnasirpal II, mentioned above. After the ninth century B.C.E. the fallow deer is no longer illustrated in the art of Assyria.

Red Deer

The male red deer or stag has large antlers with multiple tines, and it appears early in the art of Mesopotamia and Anatolia. The stag is depicted on clay plaques from the sites of Kish and Mari, which have been dated to the third and second millennia, respectively (Parrot 1961: pls. 161, 361). The antlered animal is also represented among a group of metal standards discovered at the Anatolian site of Alaca Hüyük, which are dated to an early period preceding the Hittite Empire (Akurgal 1962: 25, pls. 1–3, I, III–IV [color]; Vieyra 1955: 59–60, pl. 4). Pictorial images in the relief art of the Hittite Empire show an armed male deity standing upon a stag, indicating a symbolic association between the two figures (Akurgal 1962: pls. 47, 109). However, the connection of the deer symbol with a Hittite deity seems to have lost its significance by the early first millennium. A transitional phase in the later occurrence is shown by the unusual depiction of a stag in the tenth/ninth-century Kapara temple (*hilani*) at Tell Halaf.¹⁵ Carved beneath the body of a stone lion base in the columned temple (one of three large sculptured animals on which stood statues of deities in human form) is a large fallen stag turned upside down. Although superseded by the lion base, the image of the stag recalls its linkage with a male deity, albeit indirectly.

During the general period between the second and early first millennia, the motif of the hunted stag was represented on carved stone slabs discovered at several ancient sites in Anatolia and northern Syria. The stag with its huge antlers fleeing from a kneeling archer is represented on a slab uncovered at

¹¹ Mallowan and Davies 1970: 43, no. 140. The fallow deer is shown in "velvet," that is, at the start of the growth of the antlers. Also note that the stag represented on ivory no. 142 has spots on its body, but the antlers are of the red deer species.

¹² On the geographical limits of growing date palms in Iraq and Syria, see Porter 1993, n. 21.

¹³ The anthropomorphic winged figure holding a deer or goat is identified as an *apkallū*; see Wiggermann 1992: 77. Also, see Kolbe 1981: 30–42, and B. P. Mallowan 1983: 37–38, for general discussion of animal-carrying genies in art and religious contexts.

¹⁴ Barnett and Falkner 1962: 4, n. 9, pls. 126–27; Meyer 1962: Abb. 71. Rassam discovered the slab in 1853 and described the animal as a "gazelle." For the excavation of the Central Building and views of the wall containing the stone reliefs, see Meuszyński 1976: 41, pls. 7, 9b, 10.

¹⁵ Langenegger, Müller, and Naumann 1950: 64, Abb. 22, 27, 28. On the haunch of the stag is a flame motif, a detail that occurs in other representations of animals in Near Eastern art. Herrmann (1989) has studied the flame and frond motif which, in her view, belongs to a style originating from Bit-Bahiani/Guzana (Tell Halaf). She also discusses the probable date of its occurrence.



Fig. 4. Middle Assyrian seal design. BMWA 89806. After Matthews 1991: fig. d. © Copyright the Trustees of The British Museum.

Alaca Hüyük (Akurgal 1962: pls. 94–96), and a similar motif occurs along one wall of the Kapara temple at Tell Halaf (Langenegger, Müller, and Naumann 1950: pl. 10, 1). Of later date is a stone block from Malatya, on which is carved the chase of a stag from the chariot (Akurgal 1962: pl. 104, third row). The Anatolian and north Syrian representations of the stag, both as symbol and as the hunted, disclose a plentiful red deer population in the forested territories near to the above-mentioned sites.

In Mesopotamia, examples of stag images occur in seal designs of the second millennium and include those of the Kassite/Middle Babylonian period.¹⁶ One seal design depicts the chase of wild animals from a chariot, and above is a row of recumbent stags and below a row of striding stags (Moortgat 1940: 136, no. 562). A presentation scene on a 14th-century seal from Nineveh is unusual for the inclusion of a large antlered deer head, perhaps a trophy, placed on a table set before a seated figure (fig. 4).¹⁷ Antlered deer heads also occur in two seal designs of the Middle Assyrian-Mitanni period (Moortgat 1940: 138, Taf. D 3, no. 579). In one example, the frontal head of a stag is repeated and combined with the guilloche into an overall decorative pattern. The second example is composed of a guilloche pattern that separates and frames two rows of motifs; above,

a bull and stag head alternate; below, a demon mask and stag head alternate.

Turning to the Neo-Assyrian period, images of the browsing stag occur on carved ivories that were excavated in several rooms at Fort Shalmaneser.¹⁸ The artistic style-groups of these ivories belong to different craft traditions, and their dates of manufacture range from the ninth to the eighth century. All the ivory examples that depict the stag are considered imports to Assyria. In the monumental wall relief art of Assyria, the red deer makes no known appearance before the seventh century. However, an unusual reference to the stag occurs in the drawing of a battle scene that was carved on a now-lost late eighth-century wall relief from Khorsabad. Three huge deer antlers rise from the battlements of Kishesim, a city set atop a high hill and under siege by the advancing Assyrian army of Sargon II (721–705 B.C.E.).¹⁹ Their inclusion in the depiction of the foreign city located in the mountains of the Zagros east of Assyria must have significance connected with that place. From the Assyrian viewpoint, the addition of the antlers is a marker that points to an unusual characteristic feature adopted by the inhabitants of Kishesim; possibly deer antlers were hung on walls and thus visible in select areas of the fortified city. The eighth-century city is tentatively located in the western part of the central Zagros, at that time adjacent to or in Median territory (Pärpola and Porter 2001: map 11; Levine 1972: map facing p. 9). Moreover, the depiction of antlers in the Assyrian rendering of Kishesim does provide evidence for red deer populations in the surrounding mountainous terrain. On a related matter, we may consider the discovery of red deer skulls complete with antlers that were excavated at Hasanlu, a citadel located southwest of

¹⁶ Several seal designs from Ras Shamra show deer with three tines, which represent stags (red deer): Schaeffer-Forrer 1983: 138, 152, 154–55, 195 (drawings 2, 4, 5, 9, 10), nos. R.S.24.140, R.S.25.379, R.S.26.230. See also Moortgat 1940: 61, nos. 569, 570; Collon 1987: 62, no. 251.

¹⁷ Matthews 1991: 23, fig. d. Several texts of the Old Babylonian period mention that stags and gazelles belonged to the “Diviner’s House”; thus the animals may have been used for divination or cultic purposes. See Gadd 1940: 32.

¹⁸ Herrmann 1992: 30, 39, nos. 137, 332, 368–80, 391. Two schools of carving styles are recognized for these ivories: North Syrian and Intermediate. For discussion of the respective dates of manufacture in the ninth and eighth centuries, see pp. 27–28.

¹⁹ Albenda 1986: 109, 147, pls. 125–26. In the same volume, p. 109, Walker discusses the cuneiform epigraph “Kishesim” that identifies the city shown in the original drawing. Kishesim is also mentioned in the text carved on a stela of Sargon II, discovered at Najafabad in Iran, which describes his sixth campaign to the east in 716 B.C.E. For the translation of the text, illustrations of the stela, and discussion, see Levine 1972: 25–50, pls. 7–8. Levine also remarks that Kishesim is near the Elamite border; see Levine 1974: 110. Reade (1976: 102) in his discussion of the captions written on the sculptures of Sargon II, confirms that Kishesim was captured in 716 B.C.E.

Lake Urmia in the Gadar River valley.²⁰ Among the many different objects discovered at this site in a destruction level dated to the end of the ninth century B.C.E. are a carved ivory fragment showing the head of an antlered stag, a decorated iron quiver that includes the motif of an archer hunting a stag, and a similar theme of the hunt on several seal designs (Muscarella 1980: 76, no. 156; Pigott 1989: 75, fig. 14; Marcus 1989: 57, 59, figs. 7, 16). A survey of red deer or stag figurines and motifs at several late second–early first millennium B.C.E. burial sites that were excavated on the western side of the Caspian watershed, as well as the Caucasus, has led to the conclusion that their presence signified a participation in a regional belief system that equally engaged men and women (Kawami 2005: 127). Kishesim may be included in that system, if one accepts the meaning behind the large deer antlers emerging from the walls of that embattled city.

During Sargon II's military incursions into the dense, forested regions of the Zagros mountain range, the Assyrians must have encountered the wildlife inhabiting that part of the vast terrain, among which was the red deer. At about the same period, the stag motif first occurs in Neo-Assyrian glyptic. Two seal designs dated to the end of the eighth century or slightly later contain stag images that may symbolize Assyria's control over regions of the Zagros. In one design, a hero clothed in Assyrian-style costume stands with one leg resting upon a goatfish (Collon 2001: 163–64, no. 321, pl. 26). He holds a scimitar in his lowered right hand, a weapon that is also held by heroes and deities represented in Assyrian and Babylonian art, and grasps the hind leg of a stag in his other hand. The struggling stag hangs downward above the ground, and at the same time turns its head back and upward toward the hero. The animal is depicted with a degree of naturalism, although still stylized, that suggests direct observation on the part of the seal designer. The date of manufacture for this seal is attributed to the seventh century B.C.E.

The second seal design consists of two separate compositions: a ritual scene composed of human, demon, divine, and architectural elements, and the figure of a "Gilgamesh" hero. The hero, identified

as a mythological *apkallū* type or "Tiertragender Genius," is distinguished by the three curled strands of hair at each side of his head.²¹ He clutches to each side of his body a stag held upright and a gazelle held downward (fig. 5). The hero stands in frontal pose and is attired in a patterned knee-length dress. At the waist is a broad belt, below which extends a long fringed cloth. A parallel for the hero with curls is known from Khorsabad, and a version showing an Assyrian-costumed hero occurs at Khorsabad and Nineveh. The monumental wall reliefs were set up at the entranceway to the respective palace complexes of Sargon II and Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.E.) (Albenda 1986: 52–53, pls. 14, 15, 17, figs. 7, 8; Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998: 47–48, pl. 20 [no. 8]). In these art works, the larger-than-life-size hero is displayed grasping a struggling lion, and the subject matter probably signifies the power of Assyria over its foes. In the seal design, the hapless stags and the gazelles, in this instance substituting for the lion on the wall reliefs, may be viewed as symbolic of the respective mountains and plains of the Zagros region to the east of Assyria. Thus the animals may be markers pointing to the sixth and later military campaigns of Sargon II.²² Moreover, since the curled hair hero-type occurs only at Khorsabad, a date in the reign of that king is a plausible assumption for the manufacture of the cylinder seal.

²¹ Collon 2001: 113, no. 211, pls. 16, 39; Kolbe 1981:30–31.

The Assyrian hero with curls is likely a later version of a much earlier naked hero type, known as a *lahmu*; see Wiggermann 1992: 164–65. An interesting parallel for the hero motif on the seal occurs among the carved scenes on the outer wall of the great hall at Karnak. Represented is the huge figure of the pharaoh Seti I who clutches captive chieftains to each side of his body. The small-size hapless foes are held by their waists, their arms and feet thrust outward; see Pritchard 1969: 287, pls. 323, 325. Assyrian contacts with Egypt were established by the middle of the eighth century. Sargon II fought a military battle against an Egyptian army near the Egyptian border, and subsequently Assyrian contacts with Egypt were strengthened. For discussion of the western/Egyptian campaigns depicted on the reliefs of Sargon II, see Reade 1976: 99–102. On one occasion the Egyptian king presented Sargon II with five white horses; see Tadmor 1958: 77–78, 93. We may surmise that entry into Egypt by Assyrian individuals (merchants and officials) included journeys to Karnak, where the wall reliefs were readily visible. Thus the Karnak wall relief may have been a source for the symbolic version in the Assyrian seal design.

²² Luckenbill 1926–1927: §§10–25. The geographical reconstruction of the account of Sargon II's eighth campaign into eastern territories has been debated. For a summary of earlier proposals and more recent discussion, see Zimansky 1990.

²⁰ Muscarella 1989: fig. 20. The plan of Burned Building II indicates that two pairs of antlers were discovered on the first floor of the columned hall (5). See Dyson 1989: 129, fig. 18a. For recent discussion regarding the Hasanlu excavations, see Muscarella 2006.



Fig. 5. Neo-Assyrian seal design showing a hero grasping wild animals. BMWA 102966. © Copyright the Trustees of The British Museum.

Sennacherib records in his building activities at Nineveh that he changed the course of the Khosr River and channels leading into the city. He adds that he made a swamp with canebrakes (reeds) and set loose therein birds, wild swine, and beasts of the forest, which brought forth young in abundance.²³ A pictorial version of this last statement appears on a now-fragmentary wall relief from Court VI of the king's Southwest Palace (Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998: 66–67, pls. 107–9 [no. 148 a, b]). Amid the rows of reeds appear a sow with her eight piglets, a stag, and two hinds. A similar scene recurs on a now-lost wall relief from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal (Barnett 1976: 56–57, pls. 63–65). This wall relief is divided into three registers and, from top to bottom, depicts the royal banquet in the queen's garden, a long row of trees intermingled with pomegranate and floral shrubs, and a continuous row of tall reeds. At the time that the relief was discovered,

only a wild boar and the antlers of a stag were still visible amid the reeds in the bottom register. The pictorial evidence on the respective Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal wall reliefs shows that the seventh-century Assyrian kings favored the red deer among the “beasts of the forest” that were kept in the royal preserves located in or near the city of Nineveh.

Ashurbanipal not only kept deer in his royal park-land, but also undertook the chase, capture, and kill of red deer in the forested mountains, as amply illustrated on the stone reliefs in Room S (“The Western Portal”) of his North Palace (Barnett 1976: 49–50, pl. 49). The episodic scenes related to the hunt of these animals were represented on the northwest wall of the chamber, probably on both sides of the columned entrance that led to the lower level of the palace complex. On the northern side of the wall, two connecting panels of relief, numbered Slabs 17–18 (fig. 6), display the unfolding narrative of the deer hunt in a left-to-right direction. Unfortunately, the slabs that once lined the wall on the southern side of the columned entrance were destroyed at the time of discovery. The drawing of a now-lost relief, numbered Slab 21 (fig. 7), and three small fragments

²³ Luckenbill 1926–1927 §§401–2, 414–15; Frahm 1997: 83, 95. An epithet of Sennacherib states that he is “the one favored by the gods, the wise stag.” See *CAD/L*: 241, 1b.

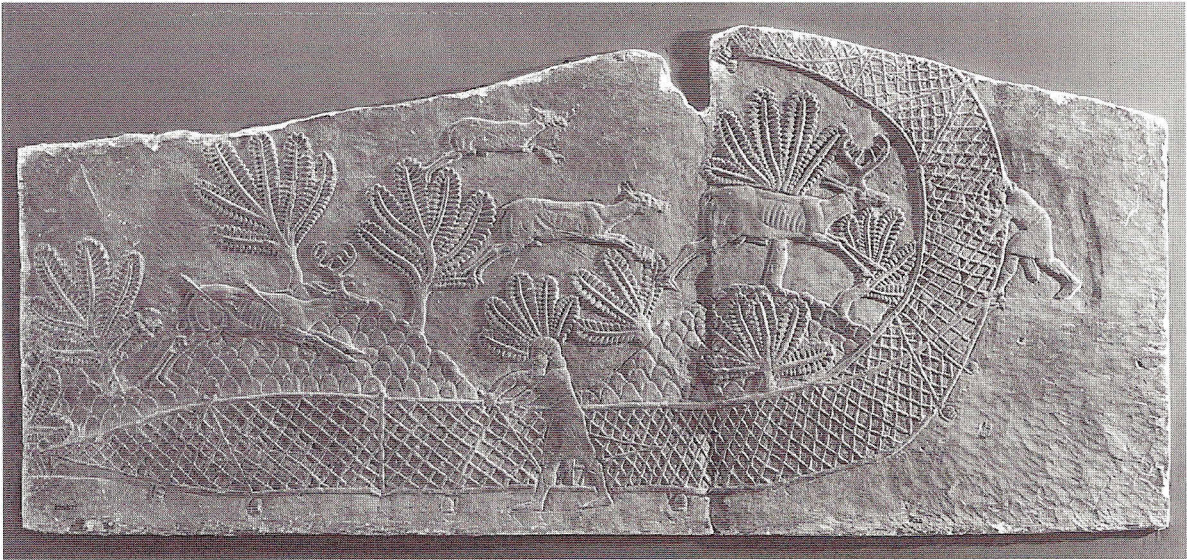


Fig. 6. Deer hunt in the mountains. Slabs 17–18 from Room S in the North Palace at Nineveh. BMWA 124871. © Copyright the Trustees of The British Museum.

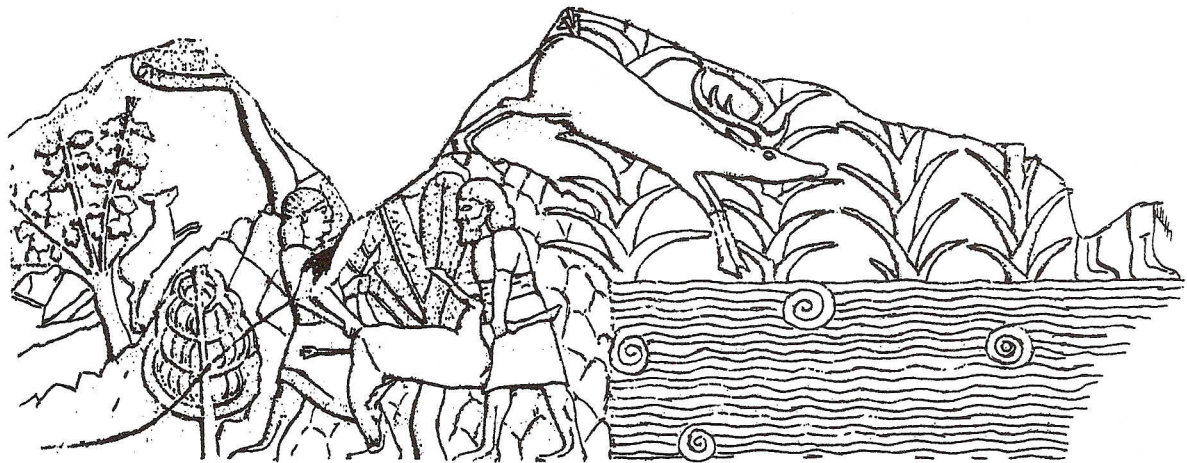


Fig. 7. Chase and kill of red deer in landscape. Line drawing of Slab 21 from Room S in the North Palace at Nineveh. After Barnett 1976: pl. 44 (redrawn by Albenda).

that do exist may have belonged to the relief decoration on that wall (Slab 22), since they are carved with one or more stags and human figures advancing in a right-to-left direction. The fragments suggest a separate but closely related theme of the stag hunt on the southern side of the northwest wall. A linkage between the narrative compositions is suggested by the representations of two huntsmen on Slab 21 and two huntsmen on one of the existing fragments. On

Slab 21 the men are depicted in the act of tying a dead deer to a pole, and on the fragment they carry off a dead deer attached to a pole. We may surmise that the two narrative compositions of the stag hunt originally extended across the lowermost register of the northwest wall of Room S, and probably included the upper registers as well.

The hunting exploits of red deer in the hill country were significant enough to be documented in visual

art form, since the three-register reliefs on the opposite, southeast wall of Room S also depict episodes of the royal hunt of wild animals. On those reliefs, the animals include gazelles, wild horses, and lions.²⁴ However, in the chase and kill of red deer, the available pictorial material gives no visible indication that the figure of King Ashurbanipal was depicted elsewhere in the now-lost sections of the long narrative. One small existing fragment shows the front hooves of a horse overtaking deer. It provides evidence that horsemen took part in the chase. Possibly on the lost portion of the wall reliefs from Room S the Assyrian king, armed with spear, was represented on horseback hunting deer. A similar theme is depicted on a seal design from Nineveh.²⁵ Nonetheless, the only detail that hints at a royal presence is the inclusion of a hound chasing a fawn or hind, which is visible in the upper left section of the drawing of Slab 21. Dogs of the same mastiff type were kept in the royal residence, as demonstrated by the relief in Room E where they are shown tied to leashes held by palace attendants who stroll in the royal garden. Elsewhere on the wall reliefs in the North Palace, the dogs are led by attendants in preparation for the animal hunt with the use of nets (Passage R), are used as guard dogs during the royal hunt of lions (Room C), and take part in the chase and capture of wild horses (Room S).²⁶

Of interest in Ashurbanipal's deer hunt reliefs are the details of the forested landscape used as backdrop scenery and the hunting methods in the chase, capture, and kill of red deer. The drawing of Slab 21 (see fig. 7) depicts the activities of men and animals within a specific locale, consisting of a hilly tree- and vine-lined terrain and nearby lake or stream bordered by tall reeds. A large antlered deer leaping downward toward the right connects the two distinct topographical features. A nonspecific forested mountain

range is shown on Slabs 17–18 (see fig. 6), from which place stags and hinds flee to the right. The scene culminates with a long net that huntsmen spread in order to surround and contain the fleeing deer. The net is also used as a device for the entanglement of stags and hinds. Almost overlooked are the renderings of three fallen deer caught beneath the open net at the lower left, right, and upper right sides, respectively. The depiction of deer entangled beneath the open net reveals a technique of “see-through” overlapping that is unusual in Neo-Assyrian art. Another detail of interest is the rendering of the antlers on the stags shown in Slabs 17–18 and those on the stags carved on the fragments. In the first example, the antlers are drawn as a curved V-shape with three tines on each inner side, while on the fragments the antlers curve both back and forward.²⁷ It may be that several artisans were responsible for the drawing and carving of deer on the wall reliefs in Room S, and perhaps also for the designing of the compositions.

BOVIDAE

The species of horned animals represented in the visual arts of the ancient Near East and which are discussed below include the wild goat (species *Capra*) and the gazelle (species *Gazella*). Like the deer, these herbivores roamed the woodlands and hills in regions surrounding Assyria. They are identifiable in the glyptic of Mesopotamia as early as the third millennium. Over time, representations of the wild goat and gazelle are less common in the visual arts. During the Neo-Assyrian period, wild mountain goats, as well as the domestic variety, appear sporadically in the various media, while gazelles are rarely portrayed.

Wild Goat

The use of the terms *enzu* and *turāhu* in Akkadian texts differentiate the respective domestic and wild mountain goats, and another Akkadian word, *sappāru*, is identified with the wild goat or ram (AHw 3: 1372; Black, George, and Postgate 1999: 74, 317). The domestic goat is represented in Mesopotamian

²⁴ For views of these animals on the Room S reliefs, see Barnett 1976: pls. 48–59. Barnett identifies the equids as onagers. For their identification as wild horses, ancestors to the modern-day Asiatic wild horse, see Albenda 2004: 325–26, figs. 5, 6, 8.

²⁵ See Herbordt 1992: 119, Taf. 31, 1. For a second example on a Neo-Elamite-style seal design, see Collon 1987: 86, no. 411.

²⁶ Barnett 1976: 37, 39, 48–49, pls. 7, 14, 39–41; Barnett and Lorenzini 1975: pls. 91, 99, 102. Five apotropaic clay dog figurines of the mastiff type, each in a different color and with a name inscribed on the body, were placed in a recess under a slab in Room S of the North Palace; see Barnett 1976: 36, pl. 1. For the role of the clay dogs in rituals and their colors, see Wiggermann 1992: 53–55, 98.

²⁷ Barnett 1976: pl. 49. Stags with similar style V-shaped antlers also occur on several seal designs; see Herbordt 1992: 119, 220, Taf. 17, 1; 20, 1a–1b.

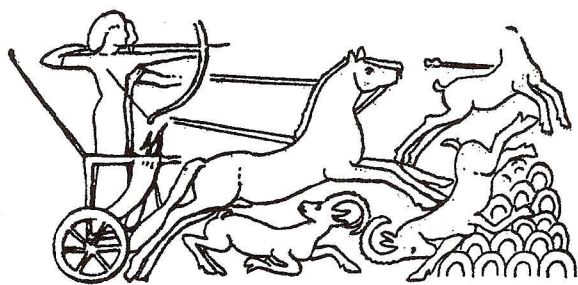


Fig. 8. Ibex hunt from the chariot. Reconstructed seal design of Ninurta-Tukul-Ashur. Redrawn, after Opitz 1935–1936: fig. 4.

art as early as the third millennium and occasionally on the wall reliefs discovered in Neo-Assyrian royal residences. In the latter examples, they are depicted as part of a flock with sheep (Barnett and Falkner 1962: 8, 11, pls. 5–6, 29–30). The wild mountain goat is represented in the art of the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods, generally within a hilly landscape but also associated with a tree or plant in a symmetrical arrangement. Examples of the latter composition occur on carved ivories of the ninth century, where half-kneeling goats in mirror image frame a low-lying plant.²⁸ Representations of the mountain goat show the animal either with one long horn curving back over the body, or two horns, one curving forward, the other back. The different manner of representing the horns makes it likely that two species of wild goat population are specified, rather than two views of the horns belonging to the same species. The former pictorial version is identifiable with the Asiatic ibex (*Capra ibex*), known to inhabit the broad landscape of the Zagros Mountains in modern-day Iran. The horns of the ibex have a blunt edge with prominent transverse ridges marking successive growth periods. The latter pictorial version is identifiable with the western or Kuban tur (*Capra caucasica*), a species presently known to inhabit the western Caucasus Mountains. Viewed frontally, the horns of the western tur are bent outward like a scimitar in a horizontal plane and diverge in a wide V. The two species of wild goat appear early on, notably in second-millennium Mesopotamian glyptic; thus it

may be that at one time both the Asiatic ibex and the western tur occupied the same mountainous regions of Western Asia. (For the two wild goat species shown on a seal design, see Collon 1987: no. 265.)

An early occurrence of the royal hunt of the ibex appears on a Middle Assyrian seal of Ninurta-Tukul-Ashur (ca. 1133 B.C.E.), impressed on a clay fragment discovered at Ashur (fig. 8) (Opitz 1935–1936: 48–52, Abb. 1–4). The reconstructed line drawing of the scene depicts a beardless archer and charioteer standing in an open light chariot drawn by a pair of horses advancing toward a rocky mountain. Before them are three fleeing ibexes, one startled by an arrow in its back, a second tumbling down the side of the mountain, and a third overtaken beneath the bodies of the horses. The 12th-century Ashur seal, with its inclusion of ibexes and imbricate mountain, typify the Assyrian style. Anton Moortgat described the seal as “an echo of the great Middle Assyrian stone-carving” (Moortgat 1969: 122). Another early Assyrian-style motif of the royal chase and attack of wild animals from the chariot is displayed in three of four panels carved on the White Obelisk, which is attributed to Ashurnasirpal I (Moortgat 1969: 123–25, pl. 251; Reade 1975: pl. 31 a). Of the four panels, one is completely ruined, the second depicts the hunt of bulls, the third the hunt of onagers or wild horses, and the fourth the chase of three horned animals (fig. 9). The latter are here identified as ibexes, although extensive damage to the stone surface makes it difficult to detect with certainty the outline of their horns. Overrun by the king’s chariot horses is the fallen body of one ibex, while two others flee in the open field. It may be noted that since ibex jump from rock to rock, the animal is quite difficult to follow in a chariot, unless the landscape is relatively level. In the Neo-Assyrian period, the chase of the ibex from the chariot is unknown, although a seal design with a similar theme is thought to have an origin in the borderlands of Iran (Collon 2001: 59, 61–62, no. 98). On the other hand, the motif of an archer on foot attacking an ibex is known (Moortgat 1940: 151, no. 747).

The depiction of the ibex in a nonviolent setting occurs on other carved seals of the Middle Assyrian period. In one example, the animal leaps over an imbricate mountain and alongside is a tall tree (Collon 1987: 107, no. 463; Moortgat 1940: 139, no. 590). Another seal design includes two leaping ibexes that

²⁸ Herrmann 1992: 53–54, 109–10, nos. 30–31, 351–55. The author identifies the animals as “sheep or goats.” On the discussion of goats in Assyrian art, see Albenda 2005: 118–20.



Fig. 9. Assyrian king in chariot pursuing ibex. The White Obelisk of King Ashurnasirpal I: Panel D-8. BMWA 118807. © Copyright the Trustees of The British Museum.

cross one another, and behind this group is a date palm tree (Moortgat 1940: 138, no. 587). Below the bodies of the animals is a small ibex, and in the field above are a rosette and the isolated head of an ibex. Of interest, the motif of crossed ibexes reappears in a much later seal design dated to the late eighth century.²⁹ There, the animals share the scene with a date palm tree and a worshipper facing the goddess Ishtar who stands upon the back of a recumbent lion.

A wingless-genie-and-goat motif occurs on a wall relief of Sargon II, which was located on Façade m of a courtyard in the royal palace at Khorsabad. The wingless genie, facing to the viewer's left, grasps an ibex to the level of his chest, and in his lowered right hand is a lotus plant (fig. 10) (see Albenda 1986: 159, pl. 59, fig. 24). The ibex is relatively small in scale and drawn with remarkable care and delicacy, although the rendering of its profile accords with the standard Assyrian style. Quite different is the representation of the ibex within a natural setting that is illustrated on a relief of the

seventh-century King Ashurbanipal (Barnett and Lorenzini 1975: pl. 166). The narrative scene on the slab describes the transport of captive Elamites through a hilly, tree-filled landscape, while in the lower left corner a lioness stalks an ibex. This detail may identify Elam both as the setting for the narrative and the habitat of both wild animal species.

Less frequently illustrated in ancient Near Eastern art is the wild goat identified with the western or Kuban tur. In seal designs, the schematic rendering of the slightly curved horns extending outward is an indicator of this species—as, for example, on two seals, one dated to the second and the other to the first millennium (Collon 1987: 190, no. 916; 2001: 101–2, nos. 184, 186). A rare scene depicting the chase and capture of the Kuban tur occurs in a Middle Assyrian seal design; there, a hero grips the wild goat by one hind leg, as it attempts to flee (Moortgat 1940: no. 582; Collon 1987: 66, no. 287). First-millennium seal designs illustrate a wild goat that is attacked by an archer on foot and by a lion-griffon (Collon 2001: 43, no. 22; Moortgat 1940: 144, no. 652). The last example depicts an animated goat in mid-air as it takes flight from the monster. The most outstanding representation of the Kuban tur occurs on a wall relief of Ashurnasirpal II discovered in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud (Barnett and Loren-

²⁹ Collon 2001: 127–28, no. 240. The motif of crossed animals of the same species positioned upright seems to have had a long history in Mesopotamian glyptic. For example, see Collon 1987: nos. 158 (lion), 692 (gazelle or antelope), 917 (antelope).



Fig. 10. Detail: genie with ibex. Wall relief from the Palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad. Louvre AO19872 (photo by Albenda).

zini 1975: pl. 4; B. P. Mallowan 1983: 38, fig. 11). The goat is relatively prominent in size and carved with a fine degree of delicacy and precision. The animal is carried to the level of the chest of a protective winged genie, which also holds a sprig in the other hand. The goat's distinctive paired horns are rendered forward and back, respectively, thereby illustrating their lateral directions within a two-dimensional scheme. Moreover, the forward horn is to some extent drawn obliquely, which emphasizes its outward direction. The motif of a winged genie holding a Kuban tur to the level of its chest recurs in a seal design of later date; there, each of two genies holds a recumbent goat (Collon. 2001: 100, no. 180).

The wild goat species do not seem to have been a main quarry of the royal sport in the Neo-Assyrian period, although one may assume that herds were assembled for their meat and body parts, as well as for cultic purposes. As mentioned in several texts of Assyrian kings, it was the "pure" young goats and other animals that were used in cultic rituals. (Akka-

dian incantation texts mention "yellow goats" [*enzānu arqātu*]; see Wiggermann 1992: 117.) However, it should be noted that in the visual arts, wild mountain goats were shown horned, a feature of adult males, as a means to distinguish the specific species. As mentioned above, the goat was also a favored motif in decorative designs, particularly in symmetrical arrangements.

Gazelle

There are over 90 species of antelope, and among this large group of animals is the gazelle (Akkadian *ṣabītu*; Black, George, and Postgate 1999: 331). The ringed horns of the gazelle curve back and up, in an elongated S-curve. This feature distinguishes the gazelle from other antelope species depicted in ancient Near Eastern art. Several species of gazelle are found in Western Asia (Vila 1998: 36–38). One is the mountain gazelle (*Gazella gazella*). Another species of gazelle, which has a pronounced curve of its horns and is best equipped for dry areas, is *Gazella dorcas*, a small animal known to inhabit parts of the Sahara and Sinai in the Near East. In antiquity its habitation may have extended farther into the deserts of Western Asia. A third species of gazelle is *Gazella guttorosa*, also with strongly curved horns. One or more of these gazelle species were represented in ancient Near Eastern art. However, it is not possible to distinguish the representations of individual species of gazelle, which are otherwise identifiable by the S-curve horns. It is noteworthy that the skeleton of an animal, which Max Mallowan excavated and tentatively identified as a gazelle, was discovered beneath the floor of a corridor leading to the domestic quarters in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud (M. Mallowan 1966: 121, fig. 62). Although the archaeologist was not entirely certain that the skeleton is that of a gazelle, the evidence does indicate that the animal was deposited as a ritual act of purification, which took place during the reign of Sargon II.

Second-millennium seal designs from several sites, including Ras Shamra, Beth Shan, and Tell Abu Hawam, furnish images of gazelles (Schaeffer-Forrer 1983: 14–15; Collon 1987: 62, nos. 252, 253). Treated as decorative elements, these animals are identifiable by their horns which are generally rendered in front view, showing each horn turned up and in at the upper end. One interesting example illustrates the presentation of a gazelle to an enthroned deity, presumably after the hunt, since two attendants carry off

a second gazelle tied to a long pole (Collon 1987: 52, no. 209). In contrast to the animal images on the seals, a more naturalistic version of a gazelle striding to the viewer's left is depicted on a large stone relief from Carchemish, dated to the Middle Hittite period (Woolley and Barnett 1952: 164, 247, 283, pl. B.61b). In this example, the gazelle's profile view clearly shows the S-curve of the horns. A similar rendering of a striding gazelle, but with lowered head, occurs on several small ivory fragments from Nimrud, dated to the ninth century (Herrmann 1992: 52–53, nos. 22–24). The animals are delineated in simple outline, a feature characteristic of the Assyrian style of ivory work. In Assyrian art after the ninth century, representations of the gazelle outside of the hunt are lacking, with a few exceptions as noted below.

The narrative scene on a Middle Babylonian seal provides an early example of the chase of gazelles (Moortgat 1940: 135, no. 563). The horse-drawn chariot occupied by a standing archer moves forward rapidly to overcome two gazelles. One animal has fallen beneath the bodies of the horses, and a second gazelle falls immediately in front of the chariot horses. This recalls the royal hunts found on the White Obelisk attributed to Ashurnasirpal I, although in those examples different animals are hunted. Perhaps gazelles were the objects of the royal chase on the fourth, destroyed panel on the White Obelisk. Probably dated to the reign of Tiglath-pileser III is another seal design that shows an Assyrian soldier on horseback who overtakes a gazelle leaping away on its hind legs, its head turned back to face its adversary (Collon 2001: 114–15, no. 265). The gazelle is readily identifiable by the visible S-curve horn. Similar horns identify the two gazelles depicted on another seal dated to the end of the eighth century, discussed above (see fig. 5), which are clutched to the body of a hero-type figure. These animals hang helplessly in mid-air, beneath the bodies of the stags in the hero's grip. A much different method of grasping the gazelle is represented on a large stone relief discovered at Khorsabad. Among a group of Assyrian soldiers in a forested landscape, one carries a large gazelle over both shoulders and at the same time clutches the animal's fore- and hind legs with one hand (fig. 11).³⁰ The gazelle's wide eye stares forward, as if frozen in death. The soldier's other hand dangles a hare by its hind legs. Both presumably dead animals point to a successful hunt. Moreover, the soldier's casual method of clutching the two animals increases the notion that the forest forms the

backdrop for displaying the skillfulness of Assyrian soldiers in the ultimate kill of wild, non-aggressive animals.

Gazelle hunting as an Assyrian royal sport is vividly depicted in an episodic scene in one register of a wall relief of Ashurbanipal (Barnett 1976: 50–51, pls. 49–50, 52). Carefully positioned within the plain background, each of 14 gazelles in the herd—male, female, and young—is rendered in a different phase of movement, so that the viewer is witness to the several stages of the hunt. At the viewer's right, a soldier stands in front of his horse and, with a whip in his hand, urges the herd forward. At the far left side, the Assyrian king kneels behind a blind and aims his arrow at the unsuspecting gazelles. Before him are three gazelles, two already pierced by arrows. The animals are rendered in different postures: one frozen in place, the second fleeing in retreat, and the third falling backward toward the ground. The pictorial narrative was most likely intended to record the king's mastery in archery, but it also reveals that herds of mild-mannered animals, such as gazelle, were targeted for the king's sporting pleasure.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Species of Cervidae and Bovidae inhabited various regions of the Near East throughout the millennia into modern times. Ancient texts attest to their occurrence, particularly as objects of Assyrian hunting expeditions. They appear in the visual arts as decorative motifs and in narrative scenes of the hunt. Three species are singled out: the deer, ibex, and gazelle. These animals do not pose a physical threat to humans. Thus the challenge for the huntsmen in the chase and kill of the herbivores lies in one's adeptness and the other's speed—that is, between the skill of the archer and the swiftness of the ani-

³⁰ Albenda 1986: 69, fig. 76; Barnett and Lorenzini 1975: pl. 77. An identical method of holding an animal over one's shoulders occurs among a group of carved open-work ivories discovered at Fort Shalmaneser; see M. Mallowan 1966: 528–38, nos. 443–48. In one example (no. 445) the foreigner carries a goat (?) over his shoulders, using his right hand to clutch one fore- and hind leg. At the same time, his left hand restrains an ostrich by its neck. A similar but not identical method of transporting an animal occurs among a wall of stone reliefs discovered along the Processional Entry at Carchemish, dated to the early ninth century. A procession of ten male attendants lines four slabs, and each person balances a gazelle over his shoulders by using both hands to grasp the animal's visible legs. See Woolley 1921: pls. B.17, B. 22b–B. 24a; Woolley and Barnett 1952: 243–25.



Fig. 11. Hunters in a forested landscape. Wall relief from the Palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad. BMWA 118829. © Copyright the Trustees of The British Museum.

mal in its natural environment. In the art of the Neo-Assyrian period, evidence suggests that Assyrian kings sometimes hunted specific animal species during military expeditions beyond the heartland. Among the herbivores that were the subjects of the hunt, generally fallow deer were in the west, wild goats and red deer were in the mountainous and forested northern and northeastern territories, and gazelles were in the southeastern regions. Neo-Assyrian art also provides evidence that different species were captured and kept in small herds, probably in the royal parks located near the royal residences at Nimrud, Khorsabad, and Nineveh.

Several Assyrian wall reliefs demonstrate that species of “pure” wild animals—fallow deer, Asiatic ibex, Kuban tur—held by winged and wingless genies were subjected to cultic or religious practices. The animals may have been portrayed on the reliefs to represent, in a permanent way, the ritual offerings that were set up in select areas of the royal resi-

dences. Since the wild animals were not native to the heartland of Assyria, beyond their roles in royal sporting events and cultic matters they also had a political meaning. The animals were symbols representing the distant territories associated with the Assyrian king’s successful military campaigns. Ninth-century Assyrian kings undertook military expeditions to northern and western territories inhabited by specific species of animals that include the wild goats in the mountainous terrains and the fallow deer in the woodland areas. In the late eighth and seventh centuries, the Assyrian kings campaigned in the territories located to the east and southeast of the heartland. The two animals that symbolized the respective lands of those regions, the mountainous Zagros and Elam, are the red deer and the gazelle. The cylinder seal discussed above, showing a hero of the curled-hair type clutching a pair of each of these struggling animals, can also be read as a political statement reiterating the power of Assyria.

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