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Gesture and Alterity in the Art of Ashurnasirpal II of Assyria

Megan Cifarelli

Long considered the hallmark of the art of the Assyrian Empire, the massive stone relief sculptures that decorated the interiors of ancient Assyrian palaces in northern Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) appear to have been introduced to Assyria during the reign of a remarkable ruler, Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.E., Fig. 1).¹ By the time he ascended to the throne in the ninth century B.C.E., the history of Assyria already spanned a millennium, from its mercantile roots in the early second millennium, to its rise to political and cultural prominence in the “international age” of the middle centuries of the second millennium, to its “dark age” at the turn of the millennium.² The artistic florescence that characterizes the reign of Ashurnasirpal II accompanied the quickening of an era of military aggressiveness, territorial acquisitiveness, and a marked increase in the grandeur of the Assyrian capitals. In the course of his yearly military campaigns into neighboring territory, Ashurnasirpal forcibly collected enormous quantities of luxury goods, furniture, agricultural produce, raw materials for building, and perhaps most important, captive labor. A particularly grandiose gesture on the part of this Assyrian king was the removal of the primary center of the Assyrian government from the city of Ashur, where it had rested since Assyria’s inception a thousand years earlier as a political and cultural entity. He founded a new capital further north on the Tigris River at the ancient city of Kalhu, which became known as Nimrud.³

The art that decorated the palaces created for Ashurnasirpal’s new capital and provincial centers includes both narrative reliefs that lined the palace interior, particularly the Throne Room of the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal at Nimrud (Figs. 2, 3),⁴ as well as miniature scenes embossed on bronze bands decorating the gates of a royal palace and the Mamu Temple at the site of Balawat (Fig. 6).⁵ A variety of subjects are depicted in these expensive, labor-intensive media. Many feature mythical scenes of the king in the company of supernatural creatures, and others depict the king engaged in royal rituals. Of those representations that were historical narratives, however, the vast majority feature depictions of the Assyrian army on campaign in foreign lands, accumulating foreign prisoners and booty, and the Assyrian king receiving the tributaries and tribute of foreign lands.⁶ In other words, the narrative decorative programs in Assyrian palaces focus for the most part on the interaction between Assyrians and non-Assyrians, and they portray this interaction in terms of hostility and the ultimate subjugation of foreign lands and people.

The postures and gestures of non-Assyrians in these scenes, ranging from their crouching posture to hand gestures and the disposition of their weapons, made them appear—especially to the eyes of the Assyrians viewing this art—strange, contemptible, and out of step with Assyrian values.

Through the language of gesture, these images communicate the identification of intercultural difference with intracultural transgression and the subversion of Assyrian social codes. Moreover, within the context of the stories told in Assyrian narrative art, many of these strange non-Assyrian figures are shown meeting dreadful fates, ranging from capture (Fig. 2) to horrific mutilation (Fig. 3). The internal logic of these visual stories, then, often portrays a violent death as the natural consequence of the violation of Assyrian values that these strange gestures embody. The notion of the merciless punishment of transgressions and the wisdom of conformity serves as a powerful message for the foreign visitors to Assyrian palaces, as well as the members of the Assyrian court itself.

The central assumptions brought to bear on the interpretation of the representations of non-Assyrians in this article are first, that palatial decorative schemes were carefully designed to function as a form of visual propaganda, and second, that the content and appearance of this art contributes to, promulgates, and is determined by a specifically Assyrian cultural ideology.⁷ The word *ideology* is used here to indicate a belief system that informs and is expressed by all facets of cultural production. It is a means of understanding the mechanism by which power structures based on unequal distribution of power and resources are able to maintain the status quo.⁸ The cultural production of the central power, in this case the royal inscriptions and palace decoration, are thereby considered to be ideologically weighted. That is to say, they communicate ideologically charged messages to a particular audience.

Even the choice of stone relief as the medium for palace decoration in this period has ideological implications. The application of this elaborately carved stone “wallpaper” to the mud-brick palace walls involved the adaptation of an essentially foreign, in this case north Syrian, medium of architectural decoration to an already ancient Assyrian tradition in style and subject matter.⁹ The use of stone reliefs rather than more traditional decorative media such as painted plaster or brick represents a greater expenditure of time, as well as human and natural resources. Enormous blocks of stone had to be quarried and transported (Fig. 4), then carefully carved and inscribed. The selection of this costly and labor-intensive medium for the decoration of Ashurnasirpal’s palaces and temples illustrates the inextricable causal and ideological links that existed in this era of intensive empire building among the conquest of neighboring territory, the use of prisoners of war as captive labor, the creation of a lavish new capital, and the development of propagandistic decorative programs.¹⁰ It appears that royal construction projects and their elaborate decorative programs were built quite



1 Northwest Palace, Nimrud, ca. 865 B.C.E., Room G, slab 8. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., 1932

literally on the backs of prisoners of war who had been acquired during Ashurnasirpal's military campaigns.

These images, then, communicated highly organized and specific messages about the nature and goals of Assyrian power. One of the tenets of the ideology expressed and formulated through the art of Ashurnasirpal—created at a time when Assyria was engaged intensively in building an empire at the expense (literally and figuratively) of its neighbors—was a negative conception of alterity, of the *otherness* or cultural difference ascribed to foreigners. In this system, the features that distinguish non-Assyrians from Assyrians were understood to be inherently sinister and abnormal.

Their dropped weapons (Fig. 25) and curved backs (Figs. 8, 9) were, in effect, calling out for the retributive action of the Assyrians.¹¹

In light of the ideological and propagandistic nature of these images, any notion of their objectivity as historical documents must be relinquished. Their subjectivity is illustrated by the fact that, according to Assyrian royal inscriptions and palace reliefs, the Assyrian army was continually victorious, and every Assyrian soldier unfailingly valorous. Each image is the end product of a complex series of representational choices, choices that governed all aspects of its appearance, from such general issues as the point in the narrative



2 Northwest Palace,
Nimrud, Room B (Throne
Room), slab 17 lower.
London, British Museum



3 Northwest Palace,
Nimrud, Room B (Throne
Room), slab 4 upper.
London, Brit. Mus.

that is portrayed to specific features of individual figures in the scene. Freed, then, from pursuing empirical questions regarding the historical “truth” of Assyrian narrative art (what “really” happened), one can focus more productively on the manner in which the stories are told. Of particular interest is the interpretation of the representational choices that contribute to the appearance of individual figures and scenes and the reception of these features by a contemporary audience.

Early in the Neo-Assyrian period, one of the most important components of the audience for these narrative images was the Assyrian royal court itself, an elite, male body whose power appears on occasion to equal and even surpass that of the Assyrian king.¹² Like any royal court, the Assyrian court was riddled with intrigue, with frequent coups d'état and assassination attempts. Indeed, two Assyrian kings, Tukulti-Ninurta I and Sennacherib, were reported to have been murdered by their own sons.¹³ Clearly, it was in the king's interest to promote conformity, solidarity, and obedience within the ranks of courtiers.

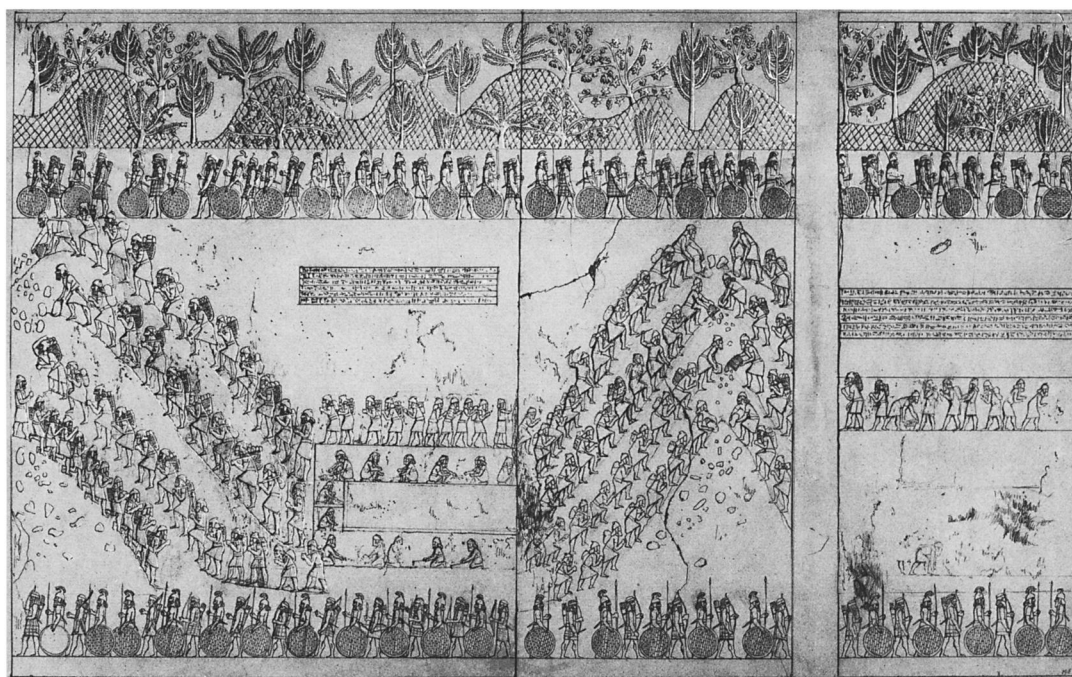
As time went on and the Assyrian capital became increasingly cosmopolitan and international, more and more foreigners—ambassadors, tributaries, merchants, captives—were incorporated into the audience for these images. By the late eighth century B.C.E. a large proportion of the urban population was foreign,¹⁴ and Aramaic—the West Semitic language and alphabet native to the regions near the Mediterranean

coast—became an important second language and writing system in Assyria. The assimilation of Aramaic speakers in Assyria led to their rise to power in the Assyrian army and court.¹⁵ In the face of this foreign influence and influx, the powers that be in Assyria strove to retain Assyrian cultural traditions and values. Sargon II, ruling Assyria at the end of the eighth century, was asked by an official if royal correspondence could be conducted in Aramaic rather than in Assyrian cuneiform signs. The king soundly rejected his plea, stating “your letters had better be written in [cuneiform] signs just like these.”¹⁶ This letter shows us that the Assyrian king privileged local traditions over foreign ones. The distinction between Us and Them, Assyrian and non-Assyrian, and ultimately Right and Wrong that this privileging illustrates is also evident in Assyrian art of the ninth century B.C.E.

Foreigners most often appear in scenes from the military campaigns of Assyrian kings in foreign territory. They are engaged in battle with the Assyrian army (Fig. 6), bear tribute to the Assyrian king (Figs. 7, 8), or are shown as captives (Fig. 2). Later in the Assyrian Empire foreigners appear in the direct service of the Assyrian king, whether as workmen on construction projects (Fig. 4) or incorporated into the Assyrian army.

It is not difficult to detect the non-Assyrians in Assyrian art. Because these narrative images tell tales from the Assyrian point of view, Assyrians and non-Assyrians always differ in their narrative roles. Simply put, in every kind of interaction,

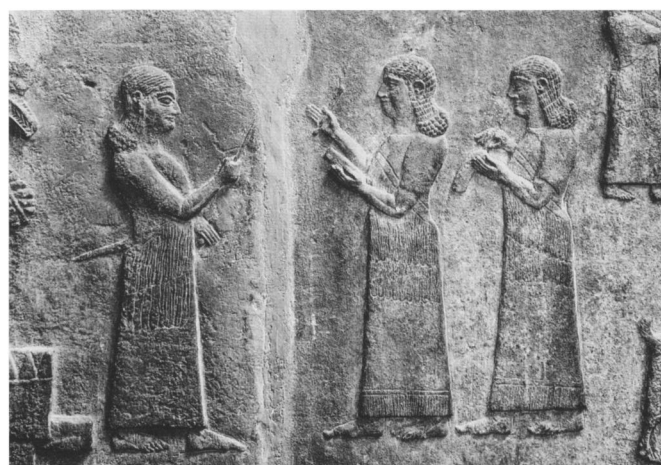
4 Southwest Palace, Nineveh, reign of Sennacherib, Court VI, slabs 66–68. London, Brit. Mus.



Assyrians are dominant, and the foreigners are subjugated, or in the throes of subjugation. Assyrians also used a number of techniques to distinguish among the depictions of various groups of non-Assyrians. Sometimes they used cuneiform captions to identify lands, cities, people, and their rulers, although the reliefs from the palace of Ashurnasirpal lack captions of any kind.¹⁷ Assyrian artists also used details of dress, headgear, facial hair, and hairstyle, as well as types of military equipment as markers of the ethnic or geographic origin of a foreign figure. Non-Assyrians from the Phoenician coast, for example, are generally depicted wearing soft caps, long garments, and shoes with turned-up toes (Figs. 7, 8).¹⁸

As the non-Assyrians who had been brought into Assyria were actually assimilated into Assyrian culture, however, they disappeared from the visual record, for they became virtually indistinguishable from Assyrians. For instance, in a scene from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (Fig. 5), two scribes make records of the spoils obtained in a military campaign. The scribe at the left holds a clay tablet, and is therefore writing in the cuneiform signs used to render the Assyrian (Akkadian) language. The scribe at the right, on the other hand, appears to hold a brush and a scroll, a medium associated with the Aramaic language and the West Semitic alphabetic script. The latter scribe probably hails from the western reaches of the Assyrian Empire, but as an Assyrian official he is visually indistinguishable from his cuneiform-writing colleague.

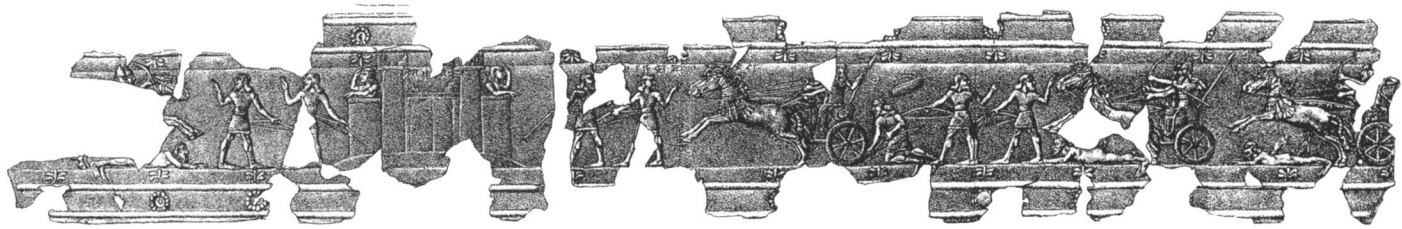
With the exception, then, of fully assimilated, high-ranking foreigners, it is not difficult to recognize and even identify the non-Assyrians who appear in Assyrian art. However, in comparing these visual renderings of foreign armies and leaders with the written accounts found in the royal inscriptions of the Assyrian kings, a puzzling contrast emerges. The documentary record from the early Neo-Assyrian period, consisting primarily of royal inscriptions and official correspondence, is rich and highly biased. We see in it negative characterizations of non-Assyrians in terms of their appearance, behavior, and manners. In the royal inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal and later



5 Central Palace, Nimrud, reign of Tiglath-pileser III. London, Brit. Mus.

Assyrian kings, particularly Sargon, foreigners are often described as being objectively strange and subhuman. They are compared to animals, their armies described as foolish, barbarous, or cowardly. Their leaders are generally groveling or ill-advisedly rebellious.¹⁹ Moreover, the royal inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal describe encounters with foreigners on the field of battle in metaphorical terms that equate the defeated enemies with punished criminals.²⁰ The otherness, or alterity, of non-Assyrians in these texts exceeds notions of enmity, in characterizations that approach dehumanization and the violation of Assyrian social and legal codes.

At a glance the visual record appears more equivocal in its characterization of the opposition of Assyrians and non-Assyrians. To modern eyes the figures of non-Assyrians in Assyrian art do not appear to be so different from those of their Assyrian adversaries and overlords (Fig. 6). Can we detect visually the same elision of cultural difference with



6 Palace gates of Ashurnasirpal II, Balawat, ca. 867 B.C.E., band L6, detail. London, Brit. Mus.

social transgression that is couched in metaphorical language in the royal inscriptions? In fact, we can. Through a careful comparison of the figures of non-Assyrians with those of Assyrians we can recognize consistent and significant distinctions between representational conventions for Assyrian and non-Assyrian figures. Cultural difference is encoded in a subtle visual idiom—in fact, embodied in the figures themselves. The most powerful element in this code was the representation of postures and gestures that would have been immediately recognizable to an Assyrian audience. We can approach an understanding of the intellectual effect of this idiom through the detection of correspondences between the observed visual distinctions between portrayals of Assyrians and non-Assyrians and certain features of the royal inscriptions, contemporary literary works, legal text, and the Assyrian language itself. In the remainder of this article I will isolate and attempt to interpret a number of the gestures that are consistently and exclusively associated with foreigners in Assyrian art.

The term *gesture* is used here in its broadest possible sense, encompassing all physical aspects of nonverbal communication: formalized ceremonial, emblematic, and ritual acts as well as a more general notion of demeanor, the physical characterization of behavior. Scholarship of recent years in a broad range of disciplines has recognized that gesture not only serves as an essential nonverbal complement of spoken and written language but also plays an essential role in cultural and gender differentiation.²¹

Most modern research supports the notion that gestures are culturally, rather than biologically, determined, a position first systematically explored by David Efron in his comparison of the gestural styles of two immigrant populations in New York: Yiddish-speaking, Eastern European Jews and Southern Italians.²² This type of research demonstrates that there are few universal or “natural” gestures, and that the meaning of postures, gestures, and even facial expressions is specific within a given culture. There are countless instances of identical gestures that have radically differing meanings within different cultural groups. The gesture wherein the thumb and index finger form a circle, for example, widely understood in the United States and northern Europe to mean “OK,” denotes “zero” in southern France, and in Greece and Turkey signifies an obscenity with homosexual overtones.

Although the notion of the cultural specificity of gestures is at the core of my interpretation, it is the representations of the gestures rather than the gestures themselves that are the subject of this interpretive endeavor. It is impossible, given the incomplete and highly biased nature of the Assyrian

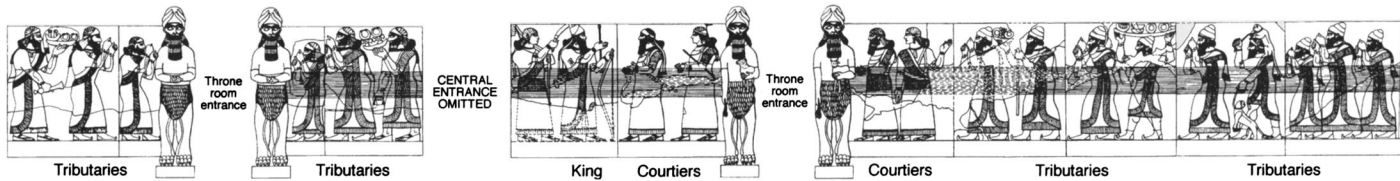
historical record, to determine whether the reliefs accurately portray the gestures of foreigners. Moreover, this study is not concerned with determining the “accuracy” of these historical narratives, for an ideological approach presumes that representations are conventional in nature. The gestures associated with foreigners in the art of Ashurnasirpal are artistic conventions that were selected for the purpose of constructing and communicating the role of foreigners in Assyrian ideology. Our task then, is to attempt to understand the significance of these choices and to interpret the meanings of these conventions for their intended audience.

Close observation of and comparison between the representations of Assyrians and non-Assyrians in the reliefs and bronze gate bands reveal a number of consistently appearing differences in posture, gesture, and general deportment. Having identified these differences, the interpretive task is a challenging one. Assyrian texts, which are primarily concerned with military and administrative matters, do not explicitly discuss the significance of various gestures. To date, modern examinations of Mesopotamian nonverbal communication have focused exclusively on textual references to symbolic acts in legal, royal, and religious contexts, as well as evidence for the physical characterization of emotional states.²³

My interpretation of the manner in which images of these postural and gestural attributes function in the discourse of alterity rests on the positive and negative connotations of Assyrian verbal idioms involving the human body, on contemporary texts describing various gestures in narrative contexts that illustrate their relative status, and to a lesser degree on comparison with similar gestures in other cultures in the region, such as Israel and Egypt. As this discussion develops, it becomes clear that the study of gesture does not provide a monolithic distinction between representations of Assyrians and non-Assyrians, but in fact reveals that representations of non-Assyrians display a range of otherness within which some are nearly indistinguishable from Assyrians, and others are very *other* indeed.

Non-Assyrians as Tributaries

Let us begin with the representations of non-Assyrians as tributaries, the foreigners carrying gifts and taxes to the Assyrian king.²⁴ A figure type that I call the “crouching tributary” is the most common convention for the representation of tributaries. This figure was always shown—and is perhaps best analyzed—juxtaposed with representations of the Assyrian king and his royal attendants (Figs. 7, 8). The Assyrian king and his attendants are without exception depicted with an erect posture and a measured gait. Their backs, waists, and legs are perfectly straight—even rigid—and



7 Reconstruction drawing of a tributary frieze from the Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Main Courtyard, Throne Room facade (after Paley and Sobolewski, 1992, pl. 4, courtesy Samuel Paley)

their heads are held high. Their feet are evenly spaced and firmly planted on the ground. In sharp visual contrast, the heads of the non-Assyrian tributaries who approach the king from the right are pitched forward, their necks bent. Their overall posture is somewhat crouched, and the pronounced bend at their hips, waists, and knees gives a loose S shape to their bodies that is virtually unparalleled in representations of Assyrians. In purely visual terms, the curves and bends of the non-Assyrian body create lines of force that vary from the strict horizontal and vertical axes that dominate the figures of the Assyrians. These diagonals intersect and veer off, creating the general visual impression of disorder.

How would these postural differences have been viewed by Assyrian eyes and minds? Throughout the Neo-Assyrian period, Assyria was a highly militarized society firmly grounded in rigorous military discipline.²⁵ I suggest that the rigidity apparent in representations of Assyrian posture is the demeanor appropriate to this discipline. Perhaps erect carriage, in addition to embodying Assyrian military ideals, could also represent some codified military tradition (the Assyrians are standing “at attention”), although the type of evidence that would corroborate such an assertion is lacking. The wide sashes encircling the waists of the king and his court emphasize their straight backs and are perhaps analogous to the corsets worn by military men in early modern Europe to augment the appearance of an erect and strong physique.²⁶

Assyrian texts and the language confirm that an upright bearing was associated with dignity and correctness. In a literary work narrating a conversation between the later Assyrian king Ashurbanipal and the god Nabu, the king prays that Nabu not abandon him to his adversaries. Nabu responds to him, “Until the end of time your feet shall not grow slack, your hands not tremble . . . *I will lift your head and straighten your body* [emphasis added].”²⁷ Assyrian idioms involving the human body also suggest the positive connotations of the erect Assyrian posture. As in our language, the Akkadian phrase “to hold the head high” (*rēšu šaqû*) can indicate pride.²⁸ In addition, the word for pace or gait, *alaktu*, sometimes also signifies “correct behavior,” or behavior that is pleasing to the gods.²⁹ Within Assyrian culture, then, it was considered desirable to stand upright, with head held high, and to walk in a particular manner.

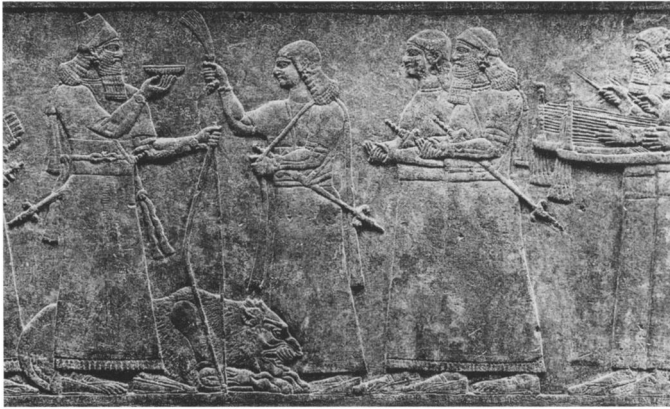
The representation of non-Assyrians as “crouching tributaries” signifies more than simply the antithesis of the “goodness” that is associated with correct demeanor, for stooped posture was associated with moral and physical wretchedness, perhaps with the added connotation of religious transgression. In an early Mesopotamian literary composition known as *Ishtar, Queen of Heaven*, a man who has failed to worship the goddess is described as follows: “. . . his lofty stature he bent to



8 Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Court D, slab 7. London, Brit. Mus.

a crook. . . . He was always walking, hunched over, in the outskirts of the city.”³⁰ A verb expressing supplication, *ka-māsu*, is translated literally as “to stoop.”³¹ The Assyrian phrase for “to lower the head” is used figuratively to express low status and humility.³² “To bend the neck,” or *kanāšu kišada*, is used idiomatically as “to submit,” and transitively “to force (someone else) to submit.”³³ The moral implications of a bent neck are also suggested by a phrase in a Babylonian composition: “You make the neck of the proud bow down like an evildoer.”³⁴ These examples illustrate the specific associations in this society between morality, status, and posture, and they help us to understand the way that a contemporary audience would have read the stooped postures in this visual language.

Stooping and bowing gestures are not, however, exclusively associated with non-Assyrians, for mythological and literary texts occasionally refer to the bowing of messengers when they approach the assembly of the gods. Within these compositions, however, this bow takes place in the context of an elaborate greeting formula that requires the gods to return the bow and then stand, and the courier to straighten up again before addressing the gods.³⁵ Clearly, the reciprocation of such a greeting formula is not seen in depictions of the



9 Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Room B (Throne Room), slab 19 lower, detail. London, Brit. Mus.

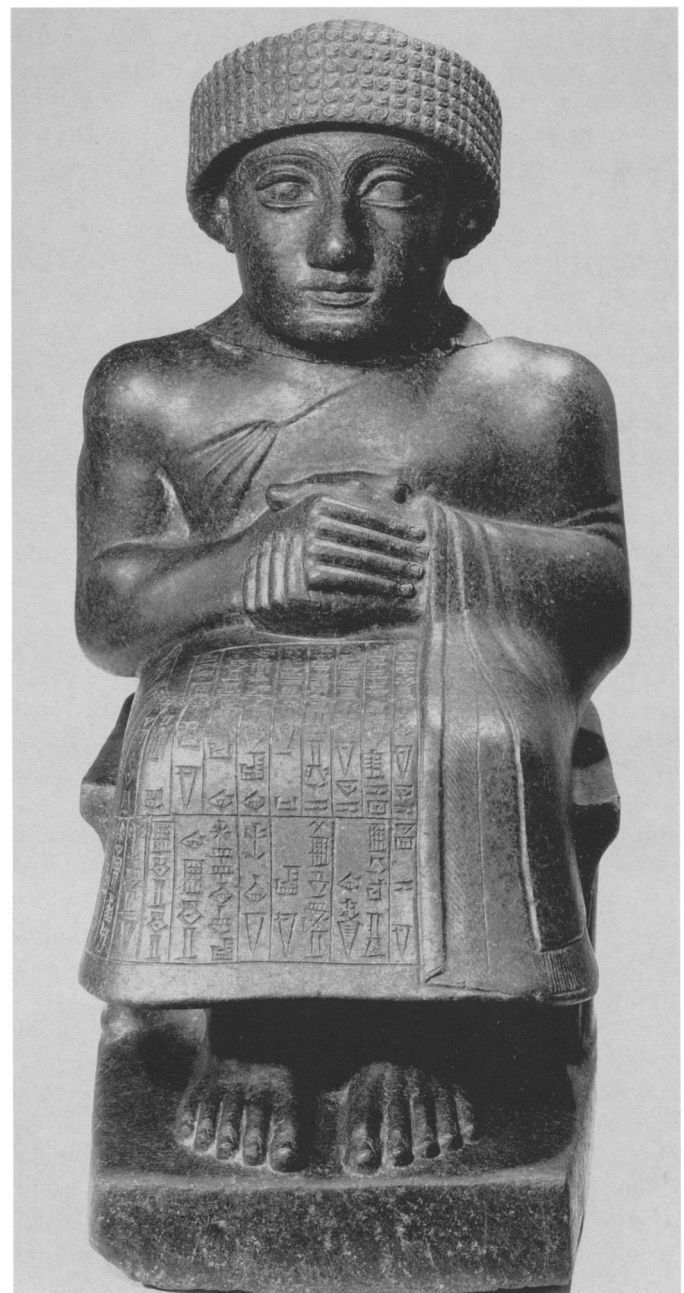
receipt of foreign tribute by the king. The otherness of the non-Assyrian tributaries in these scenes is signified through the *difference* between the posture of Assyrian and non-Assyrian. The “crouching tributary,” when juxtaposed with the erect Assyrian, is in effect shown violating Assyrian behavioral codes that place a high value on standing up straight. As a visual motif, it expresses the foreignness of the foreigners and communicates more specific messages of humiliation and subjection.

While the equation of physical abasement with low status may seem obvious, it is important to point out that the crouched posture of the non-Assyrian tributaries is not simply a natural or universal means of signifying submission or obeisance. The “crouching tributary” figure is the product of a series of representational choices and was intended to carry a more specific meaning. Assyrians made different choices when representing the humility and obedience of Assyrian courtiers before the Assyrian king. Assyrian courtiers, who are beyond a doubt intended to appear submissive to their king, are always rendered in a perfectly upright position (Figs. 7, 9). Their obeisance to the king is usually encoded in their carefully folded hands, an ancient Mesopotamian gesture indicating prayerfulness and respect that is often employed in depictions—particularly in the round—of the king before the gods (Fig. 10). This humble gesture, a motif that expresses obedience without abasement, places Assyrian royal officials in an appropriately respectful attitude before their king.³⁶

An entirely different hand gesture is associated with a number of high-ranking tributaries in the “crouching tributary” pose (Figs. 7, 8, 11). In representations on Ashurnasirpal’s palace reliefs and his gates from Balawat, the files of tributaries are often led by figures, more elaborately dressed than their comrades, who raise one or two fists before their faces.³⁷ Captive foreigners are never shown making this gesture, only non-Assyrian tributaries who bring goods, ostensibly willingly, before the Assyrian king. Assyrian officials are occasionally shown raising a fist in this manner, but only when standing fully erect.

In American culture, we associate a raised fist with power, aggression, and the potential for violence. Consider, for example, the powerful gesture adopted by the Black Panthers. However, the gesture of the tributaries is not aggressive,

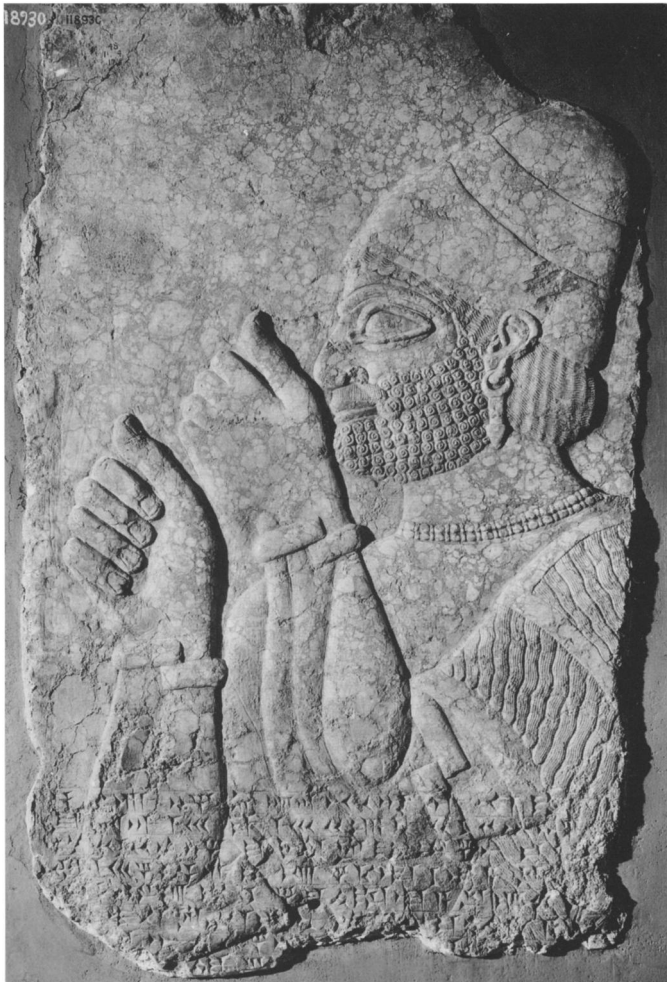
and is similar, although perhaps not identical, to a gesture that involves raising the fist with the thumb fully extended that the Assyrian king often makes before the symbols of the gods (Fig. 12). This royal gesture is described in Assyrian texts as *laban appi*—literally, “to touch the nose,” a ceremonial act that expresses humility and intensified begging for mercy in the presence of divinity.³⁸ The royal inscriptions of a later Assyrian king, Sargon II, suggests that prisoners of war approached the king in the *laban appu* attitude.³⁹ The consistency with which tributaries—particularly their higher-ranking leaders—are represented with their fists raised in this gesture, and its marked resemblance to *laban appi*, strongly suggest that the raising of fists, in conjunction with the crouched posture, was in fact a ceremonial stance or ritual act



10 Figure of Gudea, southern Mesopotamia, Neo-Sumerian period, ca. 2100 B.C.E. New York, Metropolitan Museum, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1959

by which these peoples formally submitted and perhaps pledged fealty to the Assyrian king. The relationship between the Assyrians and non-Assyrians expressed through the use of this gesture—the very act by which the king would beseech the gods—affirms the nearly divine powers of the king over the life and death of those who submit to him.⁴⁰ In doing so it provides the visual equivalent of the following passage in the royal inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal, in which foreign noblemen approach the Assyrian king, pleading, “If it pleases you kill, if it pleases you spare, if it pleases you do what you will.”⁴¹

The figure of the crouching tributary with fists raised in a ceremonial act of obeisance appears hundreds of times throughout the history of Neo-Assyrian art, occurring as early as the White Obelisk, an undated monument created perhaps as early as the eleventh century B.C.E.⁴² Assyria in the eleventh century, when this visual trope may have emerged, existed in a geographic and political context in which Assyrian hegemony was seriously threatened by the encroachment of another ethnic group—the Aramaeans. A fragmentary historical text from this period alludes to the fact that Nineveh, the capital of northern Assyria, where the White Obelisk was discovered, briefly fell into enemy hands.⁴³ Such conditions stimulated the visual and verbal expression of an ideology based in part on cultural differentiation. The florescence in the reign of Ashurnasirpal II of this motif, with its sharply drawn contrast



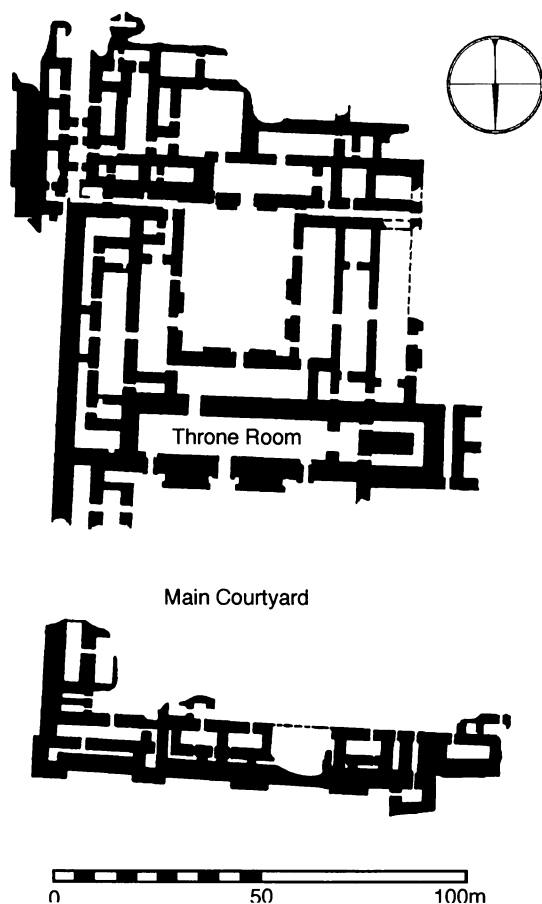
11 Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Room D? London, Brit. Mus.



12 “Grosses Relief,” detail, Bavian, reign of Sennacherib (from Walter Bachmann, *Felsreliefs in Assyrien, Bavian, Maltai, Gundük* [Leipzig, 1969], pl. 11)

between the posture and gesture of Assyrians and non-Assyrians, suggests that this period of empire building, or the conscious enforcement of the hegemony of Us over Them, likewise created an environment that fostered cultural differentiation.

The function of these images of crouching, non-Assyrian tributaries was didactic in part. The accounts of the campaigns presented in the annals of Ashurnasirpal II place submission and the delivery of goods in a narrative context that emphasizes the relative desirability of these actions.⁴⁴ Although these tributaries are unquestionably construed as the Other, their otherness is represented in a more positive light, as being entirely at the service of the Assyrian king. Large-scale versions of these stooping tributary figures appear consistently on the walls of the courtyards outside the main throne rooms of Assyrian palaces, as they do in the courtyard outside the Throne Room of the Northwest Palace.⁴⁵ In such locations, in what was the most public and accessible area of the Assyrian palace (Fig. 13), they provide in effect concrete exempla of appropriate conduct for non-Assyrians. Samuel Paley and Richard Sobolewski have recently suggested that the courtyard of Ashurnasirpal’s Northwest Palace at Nimrud, with its representations of files of richly dressed tributaries bearing sumptuous gifts—all crouching and many with their



13 Plan of the Northwest Palace, Nimrud (after Paley and Sobolewski, 1992, courtesy Samuel Paley)

fists raised—functioned as an arena for the instruction of foreign visitors in conduct appropriate within the Assyrian court.⁴⁶ Their evocative suggestion resonates with the “education” of tributaries as practiced in early imperial China. In China’s Sung dynasty, most international contact took place through a formal tributary system, wherein tributaries from foreign lands would be met at the imperial borders, escorted to the capital, and scrupulously instructed in appropriate etiquette—including the kowtow—before they were permitted to approach the emperor.⁴⁷ Our crouching tributaries, then, not only expressed the power of the Assyrian king over lands, peoples, and goods and characterized non-Assyrians in terms of humiliation and subjugation, they also served as visual etiquette guides for visiting dignitaries.

Another gesture or posture associated exclusively with tributaries in Assyrian art is full or partial prostration (Fig. 14). Prostrate tributaries are uncommon in the art of Ashurnasirpal II—in fact, only one example is known—but they appear frequently in the art of his successors.⁴⁸ The precise posture of these figures is somewhat varied, but in general they kneel with the palms of their hands and their foreheads touching the ground, often in close proximity to the foot of the king.

This prostrate posture is related to an Assyrian phrase used frequently in the inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal to describe the submission of non-Assyrian rulers: “all the kings of the land came down before me and seized my feet.”⁴⁹ I have argued

elsewhere that “foot seizing” is not simply a metaphorical phrase that means submission, but actually describes a codified gesture by which foreign rulers surrendered militarily and politically to the Assyrian king. During the reign of Ashurnasirpal, this ritual seems to appear most often in accounts of either the initial contact between the Assyrian king and non-Assyrian leaders or contact following the suppression of a non-Assyrian rebellion, usually in lands far from the Assyrian centers.⁵⁰

In the above discussion of “crouching tributaries,” I presented the textual evidence for the equation of lowered posture with humiliation and the violation of Assyrian cultural values. Certainly, on these grounds alone the prostrate tributary—virtually flattened on the ground—would have been seen in a negative light by Assyrian eyes. But above and beyond this general negativity, I believe that these representations of tributaries prostrating themselves illustrate the formal gesture of submission that appears in the texts as foot seizing. As was true for the written accounts of foot seizing, these figures appear most frequently in scenes of distant lands, rather than in scenes of tribute brought to the empire’s center, and they sometimes appear in a setting that suggests the tributaries are offering their rich goods to forestall an attack by the Assyrian military.

To Assyrian eyes the gestural distinctions between the prostrate tributary and the crouching tributary were probably significant. The posture and gesture of the prostrate tributary, corresponding to the foot seizing gesture described in texts, communicates a more intense submission, with a sense of urgency or even fear. If, in fact, it can be identified as a formal ritual of surrender to the Assyrian king, it may therefore represent the formulation or repairing of a relationship with Assyria. The crouching tributary with hand raised in the *laban appi* gesture, on the other hand, appears to be reinforcing an existing ceremonial relationship between the king and the foreign delegation.

Male Non-Assyrians as Captives

Compared with tributaries, the representations of non-Assyrian captives exhibit a much greater variety in Assyrian art, particularly in light of the fact that women are portrayed



14 Gates of Shalmaneser III, Balawat, band X, detail. London, Brit. Mus.



15 Palace gates, Balawat, band L1. London, Brit. Mus. (drawing : Marjorie Howard)

among the prisoners. Captives appear most frequently in three types of scenes: scenes of deportation, often in family groups and with their possessions; in files being reviewed by the Assyrian king (Fig. 15); and in the midst of the triumphal procession of the Assyrian army into Assyria (Figs. 20, 21).⁵¹

Many of the gestural attributes of tributaries described above appear in the representations of captives, including the stooped posture, the bend to the waist and knees, and the general visual impression of disorder. There are, however, fundamental distinctions between the image of the non-Assyrian as tributary and the image of the non-Assyrian as captive. The male captives represented in the two scenes from Ashurnasirpal's Throne Room are under guard and bound, with their arms drawn sharply behind their backs and tied with rope. The non-Assyrian who appears to be the highest ranking of the captives in the first scene—for he is positioned first and wears a long garment—is attended closely by the Assyrian foot soldier, who grasps him securely by the hair (Fig. 2).

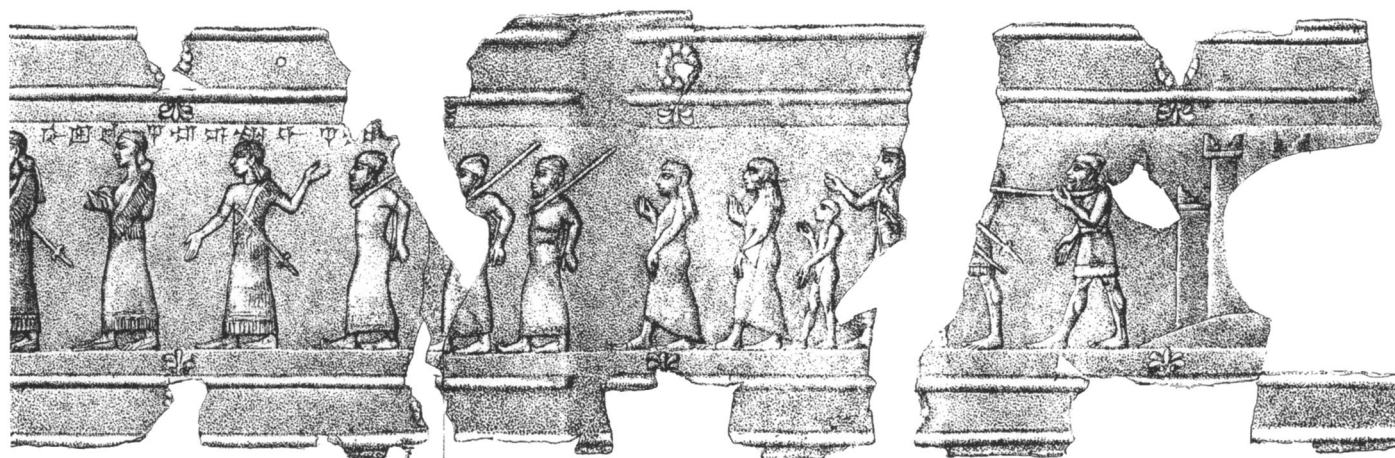
The choice to represent the captive leader held by the hair is ideologically charged, for male hair was considered an important attribute of virility in ancient Near Eastern society. The best-known example of male hair signifying masculinity and strength is that of Samson, whose vigor failed him after Delilah had him shorn while he slept.⁵² While no such illustrative anecdote has survived in Mesopotamian literature, there is ample evidence from Mesopotamia for hair as a conspicuous status marker, and even as a repository for identity. Some omen texts, for instance, indicate that hair from a petitioner's head and the hem of the garment can stand in for the individual in divination rituals.⁵³ Moreover, distinctive patterns of haircutting and shaving appear to have been used to communicate a man's status or occupation, from the degrading haircuts ordained for prisoners, criminals, and slaves to the ritual shaving used in the consecration of priests.⁵⁴ Thus, the representation of a high-ranking captive with his hair in the grasp of an Assyrian soldier was probably intended to communicate the emasculation of this Other, and perhaps to portend greater humiliation to come.

Although all of the prisoners represented in the larger-scale images from the palace of Ashurnasirpal are fully dressed, nudity is an attribute of many of the smaller-scale representations of male non-Assyrian prisoners on the Balawat palace



16 Stele fragment, Susa, southwestern Iran, ca. 2350 B.C.E. Paris, Musée du Louvre (photo: © Louvre)

gates (Fig. 15).⁵⁵ The nudity of prisoners of war is a long-standing tradition in Mesopotamian art, appearing as early as the art of Sumer and Akkad in the mid-third millennium B.C.E. (Fig. 16).⁵⁶ In Mesopotamian society, which esteemed urban life and its associated urbanity, clothing was considered to be a necessary attribute of a sophisticated person. Lack of clothing was associated with the antithesis of urbanity: rusticity, which carried connotations of wildness, stupidity, and amorality. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, one of the first stages in the transition of the hero Enkidu from a wild creature into a civilized human being was the wearing of clothing, given to him by a prostitute; he "became human. He put on clothing."⁵⁷ The association between nudity and degradation for



17 Palace gates, Balawat, band R1. London, Brit. Mus. (drawing: Marjorie Howard)

women in particular is suggested by legal texts that prescribe the stripping and public display of women who have broken marital regulations.⁵⁸ Even sacred nudity—for we know that temple personnel are frequently depicted nude—could be a form of ritual abasement before the gods, perhaps with additional connotations of ritual purity.⁵⁹ Nudity may be related to death and mourning, as Gilgamesh appears to have removed his clothing in his mourning for Enkidu.⁶⁰ In addition to the shame and humiliation of being stripped of their clothing, however, I believe that the nudity of these prisoners communicates that they have been stripped of all of their possessions, including their weapons, for the Assyrian term for naked, *erû*, is also used idiomatically to indicate destitution.⁶¹

The bondage of these figures is also significant in terms of the way these images would have been interpreted by a contemporary audience. In addition to being represented with arms bound behind their backs and tied into a long file, foreign prisoners frequently appear wearing yokes (Fig. 17). The yoke imposed by the Assyrian king is by this period an ancient metaphor for his complete domination and control over non-Assyrians, one that connotes the dehumanization of the non-Assyrian captives by the analogy of their status with that of animals.⁶² When looking at these nude captives in bondage and thinking about the way they would have been seen through Assyrian eyes, we have to bear in mind that this was a highly militarized society. In their own biased literature and visual record, the Assyrians never lost a battle and rarely lost a man. Captivity alone would have been considered a grievous humiliation. Bondage and nudity would have raised this humiliation to the highest order.

Female Non-Assyrian Prisoners

Female prisoners are often featured in the same files of prisoners that were led before the Assyrian king (Figs. 17, 18, 21). Representations of non-Assyrian women raise different interpretive issues than do those of non-Assyrian men.⁶³ With very few exceptions, Assyrian women are conspicuously missing from the historical scenes that decorated Assyrian palaces, for curiously, almost every representation of a woman in Neo-Assyrian art is of a foreign woman.⁶⁴ This dearth of representations of Assyrian women raises two important

questions. The first is why: Why aren't there more images of Assyrian women in Assyrian art?⁶⁵ The second is how: How can we isolate salient features of the visual rhetoric of difference without the visual data that tell us what the Assyrians thought was normative (that is, Assyrian) for the appearance and behavior of women?

The former question is the most perplexing. The simplest response to this query is that there are no Assyrian women in Assyrian art because these narrative scenes are military in nature, and their settings, such as foreign towns, reviews of prisoners, and tribute, are those in which Assyrian women had no role. In other words, Assyrian narrative art focuses on a purely masculine domain, and the lack of images of Assyrian women is purely anecdotal. Such a facile explanation, however, fails to account for the presence in these images of non-Assyrian women, who, like their Assyrian counterparts, have no military function whatsoever. Moreover, it fails to consider the fact that these images are the end products of countless representational choices, not simply visual recordings of events as they unfolded. The inclusion of women among non-Assyrian prisoners (and on the walls of foreign towns under siege [Fig. 6]) is not anecdotal or arbitrary; it is an ideologically motivated choice, the significance of which will be addressed shortly.

The latter question is more easily resolved. The textual record does shed some light on the role of women in Assyrian society and in contemporary Near Eastern cultures. Gathering clues from a variety of textual and literary sources, I will attempt to interpret a few of the gestural attributes of the female, non-Assyrian prisoners of war in the art of Ashurnasirpal II. Because most of the foreign women mentioned as captives in the inscriptions of this reign are royal—wives and daughters of foreign rulers taken as prisoners—it is likely that the female prisoners in these images are royal as well. Unlike their male counterparts in Assyrian art, female prisoners are never bound, and they are never shown completely nude, although I will argue that their representations often involve exposure.

In an important scene from the Throne Room of Ashurnasirpal's Northwest Palace, the female captives wear long garments, and their heads are not covered (Fig. 18). They each raise one or two hands to their heads. The torso of the

woman at extreme left is represented frontally, and one of her breasts has been carefully articulated in relief.⁶⁶ In the virtual absence of comparative representations of Assyrian women, it is difficult to discern the meaning in the posture and gestures of these captive women. With the exception of similar representations of female prisoners of war and women on the walls of besieged cities, I know of no illuminating visual or literary correlates for these gestures in Mesopotamian art or language. The gesture of hands raised to the head has been variously described as “hair tearing” and mourning, based in part on evidence from other ancient Mediterranean cultures. In the second book of Samuel, for instance, Tamar, having been raped by her brother Amnon, places her hand on her head in what is understood as a display of mourning and shame.⁶⁷ In addition, the Egyptian hieroglyph and representational convention for mourning is a woman with her hand raised to her head—sometimes even placing ashes on the head—in precisely the same gesture associated with the foreign women represented in the art of Assyria (Fig. 19).⁶⁸

A number of the female prisoners shown on the Balawat palace gates make a more enigmatic gesture (Fig. 21). These women have their skirts lifted in the front to reveal their legs, some as high as the knee. The images are not always entirely clear in their rendering of the hands of these figures, and it is difficult to determine whether these women are represented actually holding up their skirts with their hands or wearing skirts that are somehow shortened or bound up in the front. For the purposes of this ideological argument, however, such a distinction is not important. The significant feature of these women is their *exposure*.

From a purely pragmatic perspective, gathering the skirt in one hand and holding it high in the front allows greater ease of movement, particularly in the context of what was probably a forced march. If purely utilitarian concerns accounted for the raised garments, however, every woman represented as a prisoner of war would display this gesture, rather than those from selected groups. I believe, then, that this skirt-raising gesture is more significant. I will argue that these non-Assyrian, presumably royal, women are deliberately represented in an aspect that would have appeared immodest to Assyrian eyes.

At our great remove, and with such a reticent cultural record, it is difficult for us to determine what would have looked immodest to Assyrians. Our twentieth-century eyes are rather accustomed to the revelation of women's flesh; in terms of exposure there are few taboos. To us, a glimpse of an ankle or calf scarcely signifies anything at all. But we do not have to delve very far into our cultural past to find an age in which the mysteries of the female body were more closely guarded. In Victorian England and nineteenth-century France, for instance, representations of a woman exposing an ankle or leg were highly significant. Fashionably dressed women showing their boot tops in Parisian cafés or the streets of London were without question being represented as women of easy virtue (Fig. 22).⁶⁹ Respectable women, women who were represented as dutiful wives, mothers, and daughters, appeared in the art of the period wearing flowing skirts that came to the floor (Fig. 23).⁷⁰

In such images as those of female non-Assyrian prisoners

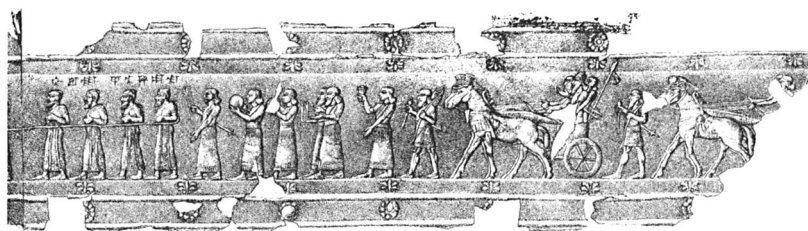


18 Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Room B (Throne Room), slab 5 lower, detail. London, Brit. Mus.

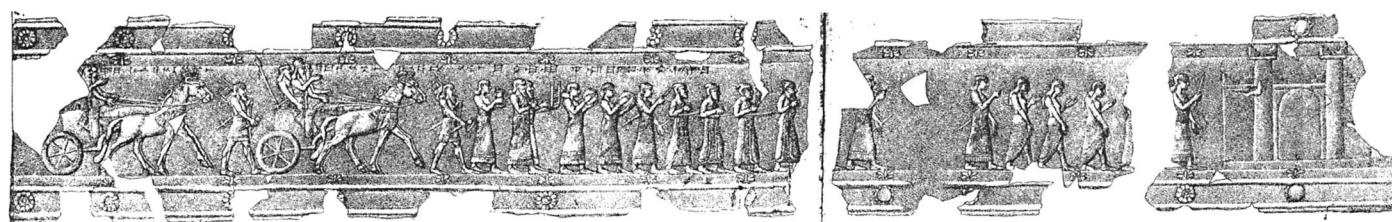


19 Egyptian grieving gesture, Coffin of Ahmose, Thebes, Dynasty 18. New York, Metropolitan Museum, Gift of the Earl of Carnarvon

and nineteenth-century urban streetwalkers, the tiny stretch of exposed leg becomes highly charged, an important component of a visual language that communicates the sexual availability of the whole of the female body. This comparison is in no way intended to suggest that attitudes toward the female body or sexuality in Assyria mirrored those of Western Europe in the nineteenth century. Rather, the analogy is a response to those who would look at the skirt-raising gesture of the foreign women in Assyrian art and discount its significance as sexual revelation because no explicitly sexualized anatomy—that is, indisputably naked breasts and genitalia—is depicted. In the art of Assyria, as in that of Victorian England, I believe that the exposure of female flesh, even limited exposure of “innocent” legs and ankles, participates in the signification of sexual availability and immodesty. The eroticization of the female body in many of these images is



20 Palace gates, Balawat, band L4, fragment. London, Brit. Mus. (drawing: Marjorie Howard)



21 Palace gates, Balawat, band R4. London, Brit. Mus. (drawing: Marjorie Howard)



22 *The Haymarket—Midnight*, wood engraving, from Henry Mayhew, ed., *London Labour and the London Poor*, 1862

augmented by the exaggerated rendering of the breasts of a number of the captives.⁷¹

The suggestion that the raised skirts of these foreign women in Assyrian art signify their exposure and, as such, their humiliation and debasement, is well supported by Assyrian texts. A series of fragmentary law texts from the Middle Assyrian period indicate that clothing and its lack were important cultural signifiers in slightly earlier Assyrian society. One law in particular stated that married women were to have their heads covered when they appeared in public, whereas prostitutes were not permitted to cover their heads.⁷² We can imagine that similar guidelines, now lost, could have applied to other features of women's dress and behavior. In this context, the depiction of women with their legs exposed renders both the transgression of the Other and their humiliation.

Perhaps more telling for the status of the female prisoners is a passage in a fragmentary ninth-century composition that describes a campaign of the Assyrian king in Urartu, north of



23 George Elgar Hicks, *Woman's Mission: Companion of Manhood*, 1863. London, The Tate Gallery

Assyria. Following the account of the battle, the king boasts: "I paraded the women of his land before my troops."⁷³ The remainder of the text details the massacre of enemy soldiers and the destruction of enemy property. In light of the fact that women are singled out for display in this account, it seems likely that such a display would have been understood in sexual terms. This text, with its description of a procession of female prisoners, corresponds to a type of scene frequently found on the bronze gate bands of Ashurnasirpal: the

triumphal procession of the Assyrian army into Assyrian towns, with prisoners of war driven before the royal chariots (Figs. 20, 21).

The inappropriateness and humiliation of such a sexual display by patrician women of the first millennium B.C.E. is also reflected in the invective against Babylon in the book of Isaiah (47:1–3), which is cast in terms of a diatribe against its idle noblewomen:

Down with you! Sit in the dust, virgin, daughter of Babylon. Sit on the ground, dethroned, daughter of the Chaldeans. Never again will you be called tender and delicate. Take the millstones, grind the meal. *Remove the veil, tie up your skirts, uncover your legs.* Wade through rivers. *Let your nakedness be seen, and your shame exposed* [emphasis added].

This text refers specifically to the raising of skirts and exposure of legs, and indicates clearly that in the ancient Near East this act was associated with the diminution of social status, the loss of modesty, and the engendering of shame.

The exposure of women plays a role in a judicial context in Mesopotamia. One method of enacting a divorce entailed the husband cutting off the “hem”—a term that is often synonymous with lap—of the wife/divorcée’s garment, and a substantial portion of the garment with it.⁷⁴ Moreover, additional texts stipulate that if a wife commits an offense such as rejecting her husband and taking another man, she is to be stripped naked, driven from her home, and in one case displayed on the roof of the palace.⁷⁵ In these cases, revealing women’s flesh was a symbolic act that operated multivalently. It was a means of degradation, a conspicuous display of their change in status, and an indication of the forfeiture of their property.

The representations of non-Assyrian female captives with raised skirts, therefore, communicate more than simply the facilitation of walking. While these women are not revealing themselves in a sexually explicit manner—that is, they are not actually “showing anything”—we must remember that these representations were, after all, created for display in a public, official setting. This gesture appears to be one of sexually implicit exposure, a revelation of a small part of the female body that stood for the eroticized whole. As such, exposure was associated in contemporary texts with impropriety, humiliation, and destitution; in the visual record it apparently signified the sexual availability of these women to the Assyrian male viewer.⁷⁶

Non-Assyrians in Combat

The most common and lurid of all representations of non-Assyrians in Assyrian art are those featured in battle scenes. While these depictions of military engagements appear to be somewhat chaotic, they are in fact carefully structured and choreographed representations of the chaos of battle. The royal inscriptions indicate that within the Assyrian belief system, anyone who refused to surrender and actually engaged the Assyrian army fell into one of the following categories: outrageously rebellious and therefore in need of punishment; insane; or subhuman. The presence, then, of non-Assyrians within the context of a battle scene, the very



24 Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Room B (Throne Room), slab 11 upper. London, Brit. Mus.

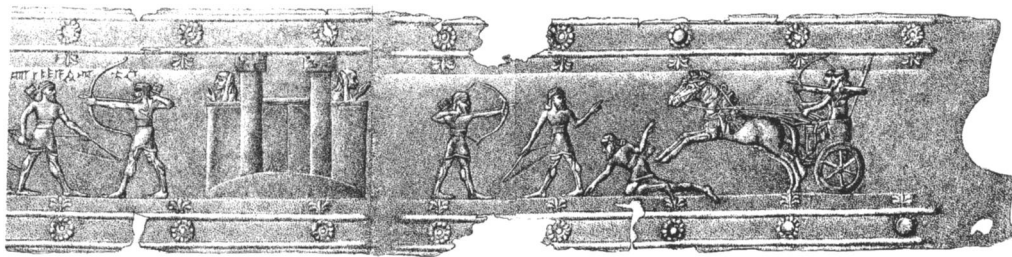
fact that they have resisted sensible Assyrian attempts at conquest (deliverance, advancement), already characterizes foreigners in a negative manner.⁷⁷

Assyrian depictions of their battles with non-Assyrians are extremely biased. The outcome of these struggles is never in question, for the Assyrians are depicted as masterful warriors who easily vanquish their ineffective, and sometimes even cowardly opponents. While some of the foreign soldiers from the walls of the Throne Room of the Northwest Palace and the Balawat palace gates defend their towns and fortresses valiantly, many others stand defenseless, plead for mercy, or even try to run away (Figs. 24, 25).⁷⁸ In the eyes of the Assyrians, whose society was steeped in military discipline, the passive, cowardly behavior of these non-Assyrians would have appeared inexcusably craven.

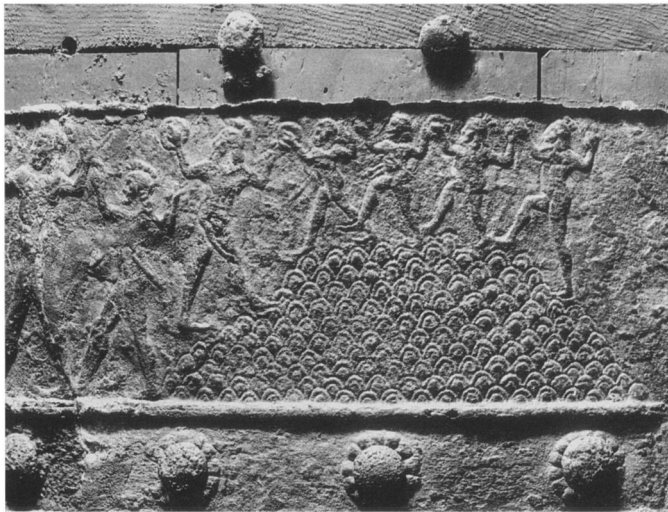
Is the denigration of the enemy’s military skills a necessary, or even a natural way to propagandize? Other cultures use more positive visual and verbal language when describing the military powers of their enemies, in an effort to aggrandize their defeat of such a worthy opponent. For instance, in Homer’s description of the Trojan War, which is clearly a product of a different context and created for a different purpose and audience, Paris is characterized as having a godlike and fearsome appearance that inspired even greater bellicosity in Menelaus.⁷⁹ Assyrian ideology, however, did not in this period allow for the ascription of positive qualities to military and political adversaries. If the purpose of these images is to instruct viewers and forestall rebellion, then there can never be the slightest doubt about the outcome of the conflict. In such a context, the notion of a worthy opponent is oxymoronic.

Many of the foreigners who do not appear to be fighting strenuously are shown with the same hand gesture. These figures raise their arm, with their hand, palm outward, before them. The soldiers who make this gesture are also frequently shown holding their bows in a lowered position with the string on top, a position from which they could not be used readily (Figs. 24, 25).⁸⁰ The consistency with which this identical posture and gesture are represented suggests that this type of figure may have signified something specific.

My analysis of the posture and gesture associated with representations of the captives and tributaries has suggested certain analogies between postures assumed during prayer to the gods and those assumed by non-Assyrians in the presence of the dominant Assyrians. Perhaps it is relevant to the



25 Palace gates, Balawat, band R7, detail. London, Brit. Mus. (drawing: Marjorie Howard)



26 Gates of Shalmaneser III, Balawat, band II, detail. London, Brit. Mus. (from King, pl. xii)

attempt to interpret the palm-outward gesture that an Assyrian phrase used for supplication, *upni petû*, translates literally as “to open the fist.”⁸¹ As the textual attestations of this phrase nearly all date at least a century after the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, the gesture shown in the reliefs may not be literally the visual rendering of *upni petû*. It is possible, however, that the phrase and the gesture stem from similar cultural stimuli. I suggest that the raised, open palms of these foreigners reflect the intensified, urgent begging that is associated in the texts with the *upni petû* gesture. We do not know if this raised hand represents a formal gesture of surrender or if it is a representational choice that indicates that the foreigners were militarily incompetent, outmatched, and forced to beg for mercy. We do know that to the eyes of the Assyrians, these begging, pleading soldiers could have been a clear indication of foreign military ineffectiveness and of Assyrian military superiority. Death is imminent and unavoidable for these figures. It appears as the natural consequence of their ineffectiveness as well as of their cowardly pose.

The lowered and sometimes even dropped bow of many of these foreigners is a gesture that communicates not only their lack of discipline but also their proximity to death. Assyrian archers are in every instance depicted holding their bows firmly—either in immediate use with an arrow to the string or carried slung over the shoulder, with the string to the back in a position that would allow it to be used quickly. While I know of no Akkadian expression or idiom that correlates to this

observation, the consistency with which non-Assyrians are represented with their bows lowered or lost—in nearly every depiction of combat—suggests that the loss of essential military equipment by these non-Assyrian soldiers or the lowering of the bow to a position that detracts from its potential usefulness represent more than simply a narrative anecdote. The trope of the soldier with useless or dropped equipment is employed most commonly as part of the visual shorthand in the scenes on the Balawat palace gates.⁸² Many epithets of Ashurnasirpal II and other Assyrian kings refer to the rulers as weapons, and one of the instruments of awe wielded by Ashurnasirpal II in his annals was his “lordly weapons.”⁸³ In Ashurnasirpal’s sculptures, the bow appears frequently in the hands of the king as an emblem of his military supremacy and political power. Moreover, in other ancient western Asian cultures, the bow appears in literature as a metaphor for potency—political, military, even sexual.⁸⁴ To Assyrian eyes, then, the dropping of the bow may have sent messages about the lack of virility of the enemies as well.

As was the case for tributaries and captives, Assyrian art did not treat all representations of foreigners in battle equally. The gestures and postures of non-Assyrians from the land of Urartu on the bronze bands from the palace gates of Balawat created in the reigns of Ashurnasirpal and his son Shalmaneser stand out in the art of the ninth century B.C.E. (Fig. 26).⁸⁵ Unlike every other battle depicted on the bronze bands of Ashurnasirpal II, the Urartean scene on a band from the Mamu Temple refers not to the battle for a fortified town but a battle for a mountain. While, on the one hand, the inclusion of topographical detail (mountains) in these scenes was a means of referring to a specific, exotic, foreign context,⁸⁶ I believe that the lack of association with cities in the portrayal of these non-Assyrians was certainly intended to signify their lack of “civilization.” In addition, their behavior, posture, gesture, and costume identify them as the most emphatically outlandish, different, and non-Assyrian of all non-Assyrians represented in this reign. All wear crested helmets, but some of the figures dating from the reign of Ashurnasirpal appear to be nude—certainly unusual and, one would think, impractical for an army engaged in combat. Instead of the militarily superior bow and arrow, they wield spears, which defines them as being technologically inferior to the Assyrians. They run pell-mell down the slopes of their mountain toward the Assyrians, with their knees lifted and waving their arms high in the air. The antithesis of the Assyrian army in action, they are the strangest of all the non-Assyrian Others appearing in this reign. Although they appear to be easily defeated by the more composed and disciplined Assyrian army, they ulti-

mately would prove one of the most powerful of all the enemies of Assyria.

A few conclusions can be drawn from this examination of the gestural and postural differences between representations of Assyrians and non-Assyrians in the art of the early Assyrian Empire. I have shown that gestures that are consistently and exclusively associated with representations of non-Assyrians can be interpreted through the use of literary references to gestures in contexts that convey their significance, and by comparison to idiomatic expressions involving the human body. This type of textual comparison is intended to suggest not that these representations of postures or gestures are direct illustrations of the phrases in question but that the visual and verbal idioms were generated within the same cultural milieu. These texts, in other words, help us to interpret the manner in which the images of gestures would have been understood by a contemporary audience.

Gesture is clearly a powerful visual means of reinforcing cultural values regarding identity and difference, and in particular of expressing the alterity, or otherness, of non-Assyrians. In contrast to the skillful and dominating Assyrian army, the cowardly foreign soldiers raise their hands to plead for their lives while their weapons lie useless. In contrast to the discipline and dignity communicated through the upright posture and restrained demeanor of the Assyrian king and his court, foreign captives are stripped, bound like animals, and often bent over, while tributaries crouch in subjugation, with their fists raised in a gesture of abject humility. Foreign women tear their hair in mourning, and their alterity and transgression are expressed through the shame incumbent on their exposed flesh. Through the representation of foreign men and women in inappropriate and even immoral postures and gestures, the Assyrians could in effect justify their violent conquest and annexation of these lands. These foreigners don't know how to act properly; they are crying out for the "civilizing" intervention of Assyrian might.

The gestures that express the cultural difference of non-Assyrians are placed in a narrative context that illustrates the negative consequences of the violation of Assyrian social and moral codes—humiliation, defeat, and mutilation. The representations of the punishment and humiliation of those who—through their gestures—have been highlighted as being out of step with Assyrian values served to reinforce positively Assyrian identity, to encourage conformity in the Assyrian centers, and to advocate the maintenance of existing power structures.

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Notes

1. This is not to say that narrative art was introduced to Assyria in this period, for there is considerable evidence for a continuous narrative tradition in Assyria in both paintings that decorated palaces and small-scale relief sculptures. See, for example, the narrative scene in relief on a "symbol stand" from the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I, 1243–1207 B.C.E., excavated in the Assyrian cult center of Ashur, in Walter Andrae, *Die jüngeren Ishtar-Tempel in Assur*, *Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft*, vol. 58 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1935), pl. 29. Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 B.C.E.) in particular claims to have decorated his palace with his "royal deeds," very likely an allusion to a painted program of historical scenes; A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennium BC (to 1115 BC)*, *Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods*, vol. 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), A.O.87.10, lines 75–78.
2. For the history of Assyria see Horst Klengel, "The History of Ashur in the Third and Second Millennium B.C.E.," in *Assyrian Origins*, ed. P. O. Harper et al. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995); *Cambridge Ancient History*, 3d ed., vol. 2, pt. 2 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 443–81, and vol. 3, pt. 1, 1982, 238–440; William A. Ward and Martha Sharp Joukowsky, eds., *The Crisis Years: The 12th Century B.C.E.* (Dubuque, Ia.: Kendall/Hunt, 1992).
3. The modern reading of the reign of Ashurnasirpal II as marking the inception of "empire" in Assyria is flawed on a number of counts. Ashurnasirpal ascended to the throne of Assyria at a time when Assyria itself was militarily and culturally ascendant, and in many respects his reign is a continuation of patterns established by his predecessors. Moreover, we are at the mercy of the chance nature of archaeological discovery: we simply have a much larger body of evidence at our disposal from the reign of Ashurnasirpal than from any of his immediate predecessors. There is, however, little doubt as to the role of Ashurnasirpal as founder of a new, grandiose capital at Nimrud, and few would dispute that his reign witnessed the introduction of the medium of stone relief orthostats for the decoration of monumental Assyrian buildings.
4. The literature on the reliefs from the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal is extensive. The reliefs are catalogued in Janusz Meuszynski, *Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen und ihrer Anordnung im Nordwestpalast von Kalhu (Nimrud)*, vol. 1, *Baghdader Forschungen*, vol. 2 (Mainz: P. v. Zabern, 1981); and in Paley and Sobolewski, 1987, 1992. For interpretive essays, see Samuel Paley, *King of the World: Ashur-nasir-pal II of Assyria, 883–859 B.C.E.* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1976); Julian Edgeworth Reade, "Texts and Sculptures from the Northwest Palace, Nimrud," *Iraq* 47 (1985): 206; and for the Throne Room program, see Irene Winter, "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs," *Studies in Visual Communication* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 2–38.
5. The huge wooden gates erected at major entrances to Assyrian palaces and temples were often decorated with strips of bronze that had been embossed with narrative scenes and inscribed. The two extant sets of gate bands from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II discovered at the provincial center of Balawat, northeast of Nimrud, provide a corpus of representations of foreigners that is very important because, unlike the palace reliefs, they bear cuneiform captions identifying their subject matter. Those associated with Ashurnasirpal's palace at Balawat are in the collection of the British Museum, while those associated with the Mamu Temple at Balawat are in the Mosul Museum in Iraq. Only a small number of these bands are published; for full

descriptions of them, see Cifarelli, app. B. These gates will be published in their entirety in a forthcoming volume, R. D. Barnett et al., *The Bronze Gates of Ashurnasirpal II*.

6. I am using the word *narrative* in the sense outlined by Whitney Davis, *Masking the Blow: The Scene of Representation in Late Prehistoric Egyptian Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 234–55, that is, as “the discursive ‘relating’—of a transition from one state of affairs to another” (237). Defined as such, this term applies equally to the depiction of a single event as to that of a series of linked events, and equally to mythological or “imagined” events as to “real” or historical events. This understanding of narrative is at odds with that proposed by other scholars of ancient art, such as G. A. Gaballa, *Narrative in Egyptian Art* (Mainz: P. v. Zabern, 1977), who stipulates that narratives be historically accurate. Following Davis’s definition, single scenes depicting files of tributaries bearing goods to the Assyrian king—which relate the transfer of property from one polity to another—are as legitimately considered to be “narrative” as are sequential scenes of the Assyrian king riding forth into battle, laying siege to a foreign town, and executing prisoners of war.

7. For enlightening discussions of decorative programs in Assyrian palaces and monuments, see Winter (as in n. 4); John Malcolm Russell, “Bulls for the Palace and Order in the Empire: The Sculptural Program of Sennacherib’s Court VI at Nineveh,” *Art Bulletin* 69, no. 4 (1987): 520–39; Michelle Marcus, “Geography as an Organizing Principle in the Imperial Art of Shalmaneser III,” *Iraq* 49 (1987): 77–90; and Julian Edgeworth Reade, “Ideology and Propaganda in Assyrian Art,” in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires, Mesopotamia*, vol. 7, ed. Mogens Trolle Larsen (Copenhagen: Akademisk, 1979), 329–43; and idem, “Neo-Assyrian Monuments in Their Historical Context,” in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons in Literary, Ideological and Historical Analysis*, *Oriens Antiqui Collectio*, vol. 17, ed. Frederick Mario Fales (Rome: Istituto per l’Oriente, Centro per la antichità e la storia dell’arte del vicino Oriente, 1981), 143–68.

8. A more thorough examination of the use of ideology as a critical tool can be found in Michelle Marcus, “Art and Ideology in Ancient Western Asia,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 4, ed. Jack M. Sasson (New York: Scribner, 1995), 2487–505; and Cifarelli, 9–13. The literature dealing with ideology and the ideological interpretation of art and literature is enormous. Most useful for my purposes were Louis Althusser, “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus (Notes towards an Investigation),” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: New Left Books, 1971), 121–73; Mario Liverani, “Memorandum on the Approach to Historiographic Texts,” *Orientalia*, n.s., 42 (1973): 178–94; Liverani, 1979; Winter (as in n. 4); and idem, “After the Battle Is Over: The Stele of the Vultures and the Beginning of Historical Narrative in the Art of the Ancient Near East,” in *Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Herbert Kessler and Marianna Shreve Simpson, *Studies in the History of Art*, vol. 16 (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1985), 11–32.

9. Irene Winter, “Art as Evidence for Interaction: Relations between the Assyrian Empire and North Syria,” in *Mesopotamien und Seine Nachbarn*, ed. Hans Nissen and Johannes Renger (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1982), 356–57.

10. Although Ashurnasirpal did not explicitly state that he used prisoners of war in the construction of his new capital, it is suggested by a range of evidence. Ashurnasirpal records the capture of tens of thousands of prisoners of war in the course of his annual campaigns, and in several instances the inscriptions state that the prisoners were brought to Nimrud. The imposition of corvée labor on a defeated population is also mentioned frequently in the campaign accounts. See Cifarelli, 138–228, for a comprehensive analysis of this evidence. The use of a captive work force is amply documented in the visual and verbal records of subsequent Assyrian kings; see, for example, Russell (as in n. 7).

11. Liverani, 305, characterizes this system as a “theory of diversity as justification of unbalance and of exploitation [emphasis added].” He has developed a framework based on the distinction between the *static* and *dynamic* aspects of the expression of ideology, the former being the representation of the world (e.g., the strangeness of non-Assyrian lands and people), and the latter being the representation of interaction between the parties (e.g., the massacre of foreign peoples).

12. There is no evidence from the reign of Ashurnasirpal for the codification of the power of the Assyrian court, because no official correspondence has survived. The relative frequency of uprisings and coups d’état within the court in the reigns of his successors suggests the considerable power wielded by this group, as does the decay of Shalmaneser III’s power near the end of his reign; see Julian Edgeworth Reade, “The History of Assyria,” in Harper et al. (as in n. 2), 25. I have argued that one of the reasons that the audience in this period was limited to the Assyrian court is that Assyria does not appear to have yet established the extensive diplomatic network that would characterize the Assyrian Empire a century later. If the content of the royal inscriptions can be taken as a reliable indication of the official priorities and interests of the reign, then it is significant that in the early Neo-Assyrian period the royal inscriptions describe Assyrian interaction with foreigners in primarily military terms. The inscriptions record that, with remarkably few exceptions, the tribute and tax demanded by the Assyrian king were not brought to the palace and presented to the king by envoys but collected by the king en route during the annual military campaigns. Moreover, the official Assyrian records show that Ashurnasirpal would “conquer” a region, demand tribute and taxes, and

appoint a governor, only to return in a subsequent year to “conquer” the region again. Even in the absence of Ashurnasirpal’s administrative archives, these features of his text suggest a preoccupation with military matters that eclipsed diplomacy and provincial administration. During the course of the Assyrian Empire that emerged in the 8th and 7th centuries B.C.E., the royal inscriptions would change to include descriptions of contact through diplomacy and provincial administration. See Cifarelli, 43–46.

13. Russell (as in n. 7); Simo Parpola, “The Murderer of Sennacherib,” in *Death in Mesopotamia*, *Mesopotamia*, no. 8, ed. B. Alster (Copenhagen: Akademisk, 1979), 171–82; D. J. Wiseman, “Murder in Mesopotamia,” *Iraq* 36 (1974): 249–52; A. Leo Oppenheim, “Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Empires,” in *Propaganda and Communication in World History*, vol. 1, *The Symbolic Instrument in Early Times*, ed. H. Lasswell (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1979), 111–44; Wilfred Lambert, “The Reigns of Shalmaneser III and Ashurnasirpal II: An Interpretation,” *Iraq* 36 (1974): 104–5.

14. Ashurnasirpal had revived the Middle Assyrian practice of mass deportation, that is, the removal of defeated populations from their homelands and their subsequent relocation within the Assyrian domain. His followers would execute this plan on an enormous scale, and by the end of the 8th century B.C.E., deportation policy had resulted in a major demographic shift in the Assyrian capitals, with peoples from the western reaches of the empire constituting a majority. For deportations, see Bustany Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo Assyrian Empire* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1979).

15. For the phenomenon of the Aramaization of Assyria, see Hayim Tadmor, “The Aramaization of Assyria: Aspects of Western Impact,” 449–70, and Paul Garelli, “Importance et rôle des Araméens dans l’administration de l’empire assyrien,” 437–48, in Nissen and Renger (as in n. 9).

16. The letter is quoted in the introduction of Simo Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part One, Letters from Assyria and the West*, *State Archives of Assyria*, vol. 1 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1987), xvi.

17. Captions range from single lines identifying foreign towns and peoples, such as those appearing on the bronze gates of Ashurnasirpal and Shalmaneser III (Fig. 6), to the fragments of narrative and dialogue provided in the battle scenes from the reign of Ashurbanipal, particularly the Battle of Til Tuba. See Pamela Gerardi, “Epigraphs and Assyrian Palace Reliefs: The Development of Epigraphic Texts,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 40, no. 1 (1988): 1–35.

18. For the most comprehensive analysis of the ethnographic information presented in Assyrian reliefs see Markus Wäfler, *Nicht-Assyrischer neuassyrischer Darstellungen*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*, vol. 26 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975).

19. On this topic see Liverani, 309–11; also Carlo Zaccagnini, “The Enemy in Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: The Ethnographic Description,” 409–24, and Frederick Mario Fales, “The Enemy in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: The Moral Judgment,” 425–35, in Nissen and Renger (as in n. 9); for the reign of Ashurnasirpal in particular, see Cifarelli, 171–227.

20. In particular, the descriptions of the atrocities that the Assyrians visited on their conquered foes, such as impalings and beheadings, were couched in language that evokes punishments within the Assyrian judicial system. See Cifarelli, 215–27.

21. The study of gesture appears in the literature of anthropology, linguistics, psychology, and, more recently, cultural and intellectual history. The most useful synopses of the issues surrounding the study of gesture can be found in Keith Thomas, introduction to *A Cultural History of Gesture*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 1–14; and Adam Kendon, “Some Reasons for Studying Gesture,” *Semiotica* 62 (1986): 3–28.

22. David Efron, *Gesture, Race and Culture* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972).

23. Gruber; and Meir Malul, *Studies in Mesopotamian Legal Symbolism*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*, vol. 221 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1988). I am grateful to Jack Sasson for the second reference. Also, for the elucidation of a number of idioms and symbolic acts involving parts of the body, see A. Leo Oppenheim, “Idiomatic Accadian,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 61 (1941): 251–71; and Ann Kilmer Draffkorn, “Symbolic Gestures in Akkadian Contracts from Alalakh and Ugarit,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94 (1974): 177–83.

24. Representations of tributaries appear on the decoration of the relatively public courtyard E-D outside Throne Room B, and in the western wing in the Northwest Palace; see Paley and Sobolewski, 1992, pl. 4; and idem, 1987, pl. 5. Tributaries also appear on a number of the bands from Balawat: bands L2 (Cifarelli, fig. 36), R2, and R5 (both unpublished; for descriptions, see Cifarelli, app. B) of the palace gates, and L1 (Joan Oates, “Balawat: Recent Excavations and a New Gate,” in *Essays on Near Eastern Art and Archaeology in Honor of Charles Kyrle Wilkinson*, ed. Prudence O. Harper and Holly Pittman [New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983], fig. 5), R1 and R2 (John Curtis, “Balawat,” in *Fifty Years of Mesopotamian Discovery* [London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1982], fig. 86), and L2, R2, L3, R3, L4, R4, L5, R5, L8, and R8 (all unpublished; for descriptions, see Cifarelli, app. B) of the Mamu Temple.

25. The militarism of this society is evidenced by the almost obsessive attention to military detail in royal texts and art. The degree of social control that dominated Assyrian palace society is illustrated by a series of documents from the Middle Assyrian period known as the palace edicts. These inscriptions stipulate heinous penalties, such as death and mutilation, for seemingly

minor breaches of court etiquette. For example, a man who accepted a gift from a palace woman stood to lose his nose and ears, in A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1972), 683. For these edicts, see Ernst Weidner, "Hof- und Harems-Erlasses assyrische Königes aus dem 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 17 (1954–56): 257–93. I have argued elsewhere that these texts, although somewhat earlier, are relevant to the discussion of the reign of Ashurnasirpal because of the many archaic features of his reign. See Cifarelli, 43, 102.

26. See David Kunzle, *Fashion and Fetishism: The Social History of the Corset, Tight-Lacing, and Other Forms of Body-Sculpture in the West* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982), 115–18. Michelle Marcus, in "Adornment and Conceptions of the Male Body in Western Iran" (I am grateful to Michelle Marcus for providing me with a copy of this forthcoming article), considers the role of personal adornment for Assyrian men and men from Hasanlu in northwestern Iran, specifically the wearing of wide belts, in achieving the posture depicted in Assyrian reliefs. According to Marcus, the attainment of this posture is part of the construction of masculinity in the Assyrian Empire and was emulated by the elite males of Hasanlu.

27. Benjamin Foster, "Dialogue between Aššurbanipal and Nabû," in *Before the Muses*, vol. 2 (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 1993), 727–28; the translation is from Alisdair Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, State Archives of Assyria, vol. 3 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989), 33–35, lines 7–8, 12, *a-di ša-at UD-me GİR.2.MEŠ-ka la is-sa-nam-ma-a . . . a-mat-ta SAG-ka ú-šat-taš la-an-ke*.

28. Oppenheim (as in n. 23), 252.

29. CAD, A, pt. 1, s.v. *alaktu*, 297. Meaning (1) is "gait"; e.g., in a Babylonian text it appears, "if he walks with the gait of a god . . . the gait of a duck . . ." Meaning (2) is "correct behavior, customary way"; e.g., the epithet of Shalmaneser I, "whose ways (*al-ka-ka-tu-šu*) are exceedingly pleasing to Aššur," in Grayson (as in n. 1), A.O. 77.1, lines 8–9). The plural form "heroic ways" appears within Ashurnasirpal II's own inscription as *il-ka-kāt*, in Grayson, 1991, A.O. 101.1, ii, line 6, in the description of a stele. See CAD, I, s.v. *ilkakāti*, 73.

30. Foster (as in n. 27), 500, lines 12–15.

31. According to Gruber, 171, rather than "to kneel," as in CAD, K, s.v. *kanāšu*, 118b, to suplicate, beseech, submit.

32. *Šapālu rešu*, see CAD, Š, s.v. *šapālu* (1)d.

33. For *kanāšu kišada*, see CAD, K, s.v. *kanāšu* (1), (5), (7), 144–47; *kišada*, 447. Gruber, 178, also observes that *kanāšu*, literally, to bow down and figuratively, to submit, originates in a royal context—that is, it conveys submission to the king, and its use later migrates into the sacral sphere, where it refers to a prostration before the gods.

34. *GÜ elā tušaknaš raggiš*, from a text from Sippar, cited in CAD, K, *kanāšu* (1), 144.

35. Gruber, 313–20.

36. Ursula Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen: Aspekte der Herrschaft*, Baghdader Forschungen, vol. 9 (Mainz: P. v. Zabern, 1986), type IIIa, "König mit verschränkten Händen," 40–45, pls. 6, 2–8. For an example of earlier royal representations—from the late 3rd and early 2nd millennium B.C.E.—with precisely the same posture and gesture, see Winfried Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (Berlin: Propyläon, 1975), figs. 53–57, 172.

37. This gesture is associated with the representations of tributaries from courtyard E-D (Paley and Sobolewski, 1992, pl. 4), as well as panel WFL 21b of the Northwest Palace (Paley and Sobolewski, 1987, pl. 5). On Ashurnasirpal's palace gates from Balawat, the last tributary from Sarug-x on band L2 (Cifarelli, fig. 36) and the first two from x-g-x on band R2 are represented making this gesture. On the Mamu Temple bands, the leader of the tributaries from Azamu, whose higher rank is suggested by his longer, more elaborate costume, and many of the tributaries from Suḫu are depicted with raised fists as well; see Oates (as in n. 24), fig. 5; and Curtis (as in n. 24), fig. 86.

38. See Julian Edgeworth Reade, "Shikaf-i Gulgul: Its Date and Significance," *Iranica Antiqua* 12 (1977): 34. CAD, L, s.v. *labānu* B, (1)a, defines this verb as "to humiliate, or humble," with the connotation of the object begging the gods for mercy, 11. It occurs always in conjunction with the word *appu*, or nose. Magen (as in n. 36), 45–54, 96–100, restricts the use of the term *laban appi* to the description of a royal gesture and to a group of later Assyrian monuments that clearly depict the king holding up his fist with the thumb emphatically raised. Another metaphor for humiliation involving the nose appears in the reign of the Middle Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I, who claims to have attached nose ropes to captive kings, *ina ap-pi-šu-nu ki-ma GU₄ š[er-r]e-ta at-ta-di* (Grayson, 1991, A.O. 87.2, lines 26–27).

39. For the inscriptions, see CAD, L, s.v. *labānu* B, (1)b.

40. Irene Winter has pointed out to me in conversation that there is a Sumerian expression for greeting that involves bringing the hand to the nose. While the Assyrian expression might ultimately derive from this Sumerian precedent, I would argue that the nature of the *relationship* of the supplicant to the deity that is associated with *laban appi* in an Assyrian context implies not simply greeting but ritual humiliation.

41. Grayson, 1991, A.O. 101.1, i, line 81, *ma-a ḥa-da-at du-ku ma-a ḥa-da-at bal-lit ma-a ḥa-da-at šá ŠA-ka-ni e-pu-uš*.

42. The dating and significance of the White Obelisk are topics too complex and controversial to be addressed in this article. While it is often dated as early as the reign of the 11th-century B.C.E. Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I, there are a number of convincing arguments that place the monument in the very earliest years of Ashurnasirpal II's reign. For discussion of this debate, see

Julian Edgeworth Reade, "Ashurnasirpal I and the White Obelisk," *Iraq* 37 (1975): 129–50; and Holly Pittman, "The White Obelisk and the Problem of Historical Narrative in the Art of Assyria," *Art Bulletin* 78, no. 2 (June 1996).

43. All of Assyria was under the threat of Aramaean incursions in this period, but the text in question mentions the "fortress of Nineveh" in the context of a list of areas ravaged by the Aramaeans, suggesting that Nineveh or its environs briefly fell to the Aramaeans; see A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, N.Y.: J. J. Augustin, 1975), Assyrian Chronicle Fragment 4, 189.

44. Cifarelli, 184–89.

45. Such is the case not only in the reign of Ashurnasirpal, whose courtyard E-D was the most public area of his palace (Paley and Sobolewski, 1992, pl. 4), but of the later kings as well. In the late 8th century B.C.E., Facade n of the Palace of Sargon at Khorsabad was decorated with large-scale processions of tributaries bringing goods to Sargon; see Pauline Albenda, *The Palace of Sargon, King of Assyria* (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1986), pls. 16–25.

46. Paley and Sobolewski, unpublished paper. I am grateful to Samuel Paley for providing me with a copy of this manuscript, an abstract of which is available in the proceedings of the 39th Rencontre Assyriologique, *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten: XXXIX Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale Heidelberg*, 6–10. Juli 1992 (Heidelberg: Heidelberger Orientverlag, 1997).

47. For a discussion of the Chinese tributary system, see Morris Rossabi, ed., *China among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors, 10th–14th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 3.

48. One of the tributaries from Phoenicia on an unpublished bronze band from the gate of Ashurnasirpal's Mamu Temple at Balawat is partially prostrated. Many prostrate figures appear on monuments of Shalmaneser III, including tributaries from Gilzanu and Israel in panels A1 and A2 of the Black Obelisk (Marcus [as in n. 7], pl. xxii) and band X of Shalmaneser III's Balawat gates (King, pl. LVII); for prostrate tributaries from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, see Richard D. Barnett and Margaret Falkner, *The Sculptures of Ashurnasirpal II, Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 B.C.E.) and Esarhaddon (681–669) from the Central and Southwest Palaces of Nimrud* (London: British Museum, 1962), pls. lxxxiv, lxxxv.

49. This phrase is rendered in Akkadian *GİR.II (šēpu) sabātu*; for example, see Grayson, 1991, A.O. 101.1, iii, line 69.

50. Cifarelli, 209–12.

51. Review of captives: Room B, Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II, panels B1817b, and B85b (E. A. Wallis Budge, *Assyrian Sculptures in the British Museum: Reign of Ashur-nasir-pal: 885–860 BC* [London, 1914], pl. XX; Meuszynski [as in n. 4], pl. 2), palace gates, bands L1 (Richard Barnett, "More Balawat Gates: A Preliminary Report," in *Symbolae Biblicae et Mesopotamicae Francisco Mario Theodoro de Liagre Böhl Dedicatae*, ed. M. A. Beck et al. [Leiden: Brill, 1973], 19–22), R1 (King, pl. lxxviii), L4 (unpublished), and R4 (Cifarelli, fig. 39).

52. Judg. 16:1–22.

53. Ulla Jeyes, *Old Babylonian Extispicy Texts* (Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut de Istanbul, 1989), 16, 40.

54. For example, Middle Assyrian law stipulated that the hair and beard be cut from a man who could not prove an accusation of adultery against his wife. The verb for this punishment is *gadāmu*; see CAD, G, 8. Another verb, *gullubu*, has as its first meaning "to shave" all or part of the hair as a punishment or as a slave (CAD, G, s.v. *gullubu* (1), 129–30, and as its second meaning "to consecrate a priest by shaving" (CAD, G, s.v. *gullubu* (1), 130). See also CAD, Š, pt. 2, s.v. *sārtu* (1), (2), (hair), 125–29.

55. See, for example, palace gate, band L1, Barnett (as in n. 51), unnumbered plate.

56. Zainab Bahrani, "Iconography of the Nude in Mesopotamia," *Source* 12, no. 2 (1993): 12–19.

57. James Pritchard, "The Epic of Gilgamesh," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), Tablet II, iii, lines 25–26.

58. For legal texts from the 2nd millennium, see Malul (as in n. 23), 122–38; and CAD, E, *erū* (1), "naked," 320.

59. Contra Bahrani (as in n. 56), who discusses the nude representations of temple personnel from the 3rd millennium B.C.E. in southern Mesopotamia.

60. Pritchard (as in n. 57), Tablet IX, ii, lines 23.

61. CAD, E, s.v. *erū* (1), "naked"; (2), "empty"; (3), "destitute," 320.

62. The reference to defeated non-Assyrians with yokes appears first in the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207 B.C.E.), Grayson, 1991, A.O. 78.1, lines 4–5, *ni-ir be-lu-ti-ia [kabta?] UGU-šu-nu*. Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 B.C.E.) also uses this construction frequently in his inscriptions.

63. I have addressed the various interpretive issues engendered by representations of women in a paper entitled "The Female Body in Assyrian Art: Gesture, Exposure, and Violation," delivered at the Annual Meetings of the Archaeological Institute of America in San Diego, December 1995. This material is currently being prepared for publication.

64. The best-known representation of an Assyrian woman is that of King Ashurnasirpal's wife, Ashur-sharrat, in the "victory garden" relief from Room S of the North Palace at Nineveh, in Orthmann (as in n. 36), fig. 247.

65. For a discussion of the paucity of representations of women in the art of Mesopotamia, see, for example, Irene J. Winter, "Women in Public: The Disk of Enheduanna, the Beginning of the Office of the EN-priestess, and the

Weight of Visual Evidence," in *La femme dans le proche-orient antique*, ed. Jean-Marie Durand (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1987).

66. It is not entirely clear whether she is intended to appear nude from the waist up or if the breast is simply being emphasized. Similarly, female prisoners on one of the bronze bands from the reign of Shalmaneser III (band XIII, in King, pl. LXXV) from the Syrian kingdom of Hamath appear to be bare-breasted and are making the same "hair-tearing" gesture. I discuss the significance of this feature in Cifarelli (as in n. 63).

67. 2 Sam. 13:19.

68. Richard Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 35, B8, figs. 1–3.

69. A short skirt that reveals the ankles and lower legs is only one element of the physical stereotype of the prostitute in Victorian England; see Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality* (New York: B. Blackwell, 1988), 176–95. For images of prostitutes with raised or shortened skirts in 19th-century London, see, for example, Nead, figs. 26, 30, 31, 40, 41, 42, 44; in French Impressionist art, see Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love, Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), figs. 55, 58, 63, 70, 92. The shortened skirt associated with urban prostitution appears to be related to the garments of working rural women, who were considered by the contemporary bourgeoisie to be paradoxically healthy, "natural," closer to the earth, morally degraded, and sexually suspect. See Nead, 31. This observation is limited to representations of women in contemporary "public" settings and excludes the genre of the nude.

70. See, for example, the women painted by George Elgar Hicks for his series *Woman's Mission*, in Nead (as in n. 69), pls. 1–3.

71. In a few cases, the breasts of captive women appear to be carefully rendered and emphasized, as in the woman at left in Fig. 18. This topic will be addressed in Cifarelli (as in n. 63).

72. Godfrey R. Driver and J. C. Miles, *The Assyrian Laws* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), 126–34.

73. Foster (as in n. 27), 701, line 52. The precise reading of this phrase is open to question. Livingstone (as in n. 27), 46, translates it as "the women of his land I drove before my troops."

74. Malul (as in n. 23), 151, 184, 198–202. The divorce documents describing this symbolic act date to the Old Babylonian and Nuzi period.

75. *Ibid.*, 122–38. Again, the documents in question are from Nuzi and the kingdom of Hana.

76. Marcus (as in n. 8), 202, has suggested that Assyrian visual and verbal descriptions of territorial conquest are often cast in terms and metaphorical constructs that are sexually charged, which characterize Assyrian imperial activity as the masculine sexual conquest of feminized space: the rape of a foreign land, in effect. Within this eroticized discourse, these women revealing themselves are visual metaphors for the land that is to be "penetrated" and vanquished.

77. Liverani argues convincingly that the descriptions, in the Assyrian royal inscriptions, of intervention in neighboring lands are couched in terms connoting the transformation of chaos into order. The descriptions of non-Assyrian behavior in battle in the royal inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal range from cowardly flight and submission to rebellion. My examination of these texts has demonstrated that the narrative context surrounding such

descriptions, that is, the characterization of the level of brutality employed by the Assyrians against the enemy, indicates the ideological implications of the behavior. For example, submission is repaid with mercy (positive); flight with massacre (negative); and rebellion with defeat in battle and extramilitary atrocities (most negative). Simply engaging the Assyrian army in battle was considered an act of rebellion. See Cifarelli, 209–15.

78. This observation is plainly at variance with Henrietta Groenewegen-Frankfort's comment in *Arrest and Movement* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), 172, that "the enemy never shows abject terror: the fight is fierce and virile . . . not a single battle scene contains a clue as to its outcome, the spectator is held in suspense. . . ." Her description overlooks the obvious implications of the appearance of many of these fleeing figures and of the piles of mutilated enemy corpses and severed enemy heads in the majority of these scenes.

79. *Iliad* 3.16–31.

80. This figure type appears in the Throne Room of the Northwest Palace in panels B11a and B8a, and with the lowered bow in B10a, B9a, and on the palace gates in bands L6, L7, R6, and R7.

81. Wolfram von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1965–81), 1424. This term appears in both the Neo-Assyrian and the Standard Babylonian dialects of Akkadian; in both prayers and the royal inscriptions of Ashurbanipal; Gruber, 50–58.

82. See, for example, palace bands L6 (Cifarelli, fig. 39), as well as R6, L7, and Mamu Temple gate band L6, all unpublished (for descriptions, see Cifarelli, app. A).

83. See Grayson, 1991, A.O. 101.1, i, lines 34.

84. For the equation of the bow with virility in western Semitic cultures, see Seth Parker, "Death and Devotion: The Composition and Theme of AQHT*," in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East, Essays in Honor of Marvin Pope*, ed. John H. Marks and Robert M. Good (Guildford, Conn.: Four Quarters, 1987), 71–83, esp. n. 47. In Egypt, this correlation is explicit, as the verb meaning "to shoot" is the same verb used to express "to ejaculate"; Richard Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic in Egyptian Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 182. The evidence from Mesopotamia is more equivocal. The verbs commonly associated with archery range from the generic (see CAD, N, pt. 2, s.v. *nadû*, which refers to emissions of all kinds, from throwing to spitting, 68; CAD, S, pt. 1, s.v. *šalû* (1), "to spit," (2), "to shoot an arrow," 272–73) to the more specific (*nasāku*, CAD, N, pt. 2, "to shoot an arrow," 15). According to Ann Guinan (personal communication), ejaculation, however, is expressed by *galātu* in Akkadian, a verb whose primary meaning is "to tremble."

85. For the reign of Shalmaneser, see esp. King, pl. xii. The Shalmaneser bands bear captions that identify the location of the action as the land of Urartu, a polity centered in the mountainous region northeast of Assyria. The Ashurnasirpal band bears a fragmentary caption that features an unidentified geographical term, "Mt. Urinu." Similarities in terrain and in headgear suggest that the figures on the Mamu Temple gate of Ashurnasirpal are Urartean as well. The Mamu Temple gates, in the collections of the Iraqi Antiquities Authority, will be published together with the palace gate bands in a volume forthcoming from the British Museum.

86. For the notion of the use of topographical elements as a means of creating a more accurate, verifiable representation, see, for example, Russell (as in n. 7); and Winter (as in n. 9).