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Author(s): John Malcolm Russell

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The Program of the Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud: Issues in the Research and Presentation of Assyrian Art

JOHN MALCOLM RUSSELL

Abstract

In this study I propose two hypotheses about the palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud: first, that the relief decoration of Assurnasirpal's palace expresses a four-fold Assyrian ideology of military success, service to the gods, divine protection, and Assyrian prosperity; and second, that the subject of the decoration in each suite of rooms was influenced by the function of that suite. In order to test these hypotheses, I draw on two theoretical approaches to understanding the meaning of architecture: Trigger's principle of monumental architecture as conspicuous consumption, and Rapoport's phenomenon of the redundancy of cues in the architecture of complex societies. I conclude that the subjects of the reliefs may be identified with considerable confidence, that the architectural evidence and relief subjects reinforce one another in suggesting specific functions for each suite of rooms, and that relief carving served as an expression of conspicuous consumption by being carved in conspicuous locations.*

INTRODUCTION

Assurnasirpal II (reigned 883–859 B.C.), one of the most powerful kings of the ninth century, pursued a successful policy of territorial expansion and also carried out substantial building projects in the traditional capital cities of Assur and Nineveh. His primary architectural and artistic activity, however, was lavished on a new capital city, the former Middle Assyrian provincial capital of Kalhu (modern Nimrud, biblical Calah, Xenophon's "Larissa"), on

the east bank of an ancient bed of the Tigris River, some 35 km south of Mosul. Around his fifth year, Assurnasirpal moved the chief royal residence and administrative center of the realm from Assur to Kalhu and began rebuilding it on a massive scale, constructing a new city wall some 7.5 km in circumference, a palace, and nine temples. The most elaborate of these structures was the palace—called the Northwest Palace in the modern literature—which filled most of the northwest quarter of the citadel mound.

With the fall of Assyria in 612 B.C., the palace fell into ruins and became completely covered with earth and overgrown. It lay forgotten for 2,500 years, until it was rediscovered by a young British adventurer, Austen Henry Layard, in 1845. Layard excavated the state apartments, four large suites of rooms decorated with human-headed bull and lion colossi in the major doorways and slabs sculptured in low relief covering the walls. Some of these reliefs were sent to the British Museum. Many others found their way to collections in Europe and North America, and the remainder stayed in the palace, where they were eventually reburied. The palace was reexcavated by M.E.L. Mallowan (1949–1957) and the Iraq Department of Antiquities and Heritage (1956–present).

The known area of the palace measures 200 m north–south and 120 m east–west, and it may originally have extended further to the south and east

* Versions of this study were delivered at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bryn Mawr College, the University of Minnesota, the Society of Mesopotamian Studies in Toronto, Harvard University, Dartmouth College, and in my classes at Columbia University and Massachusetts College of Art—my research benefited greatly from the discussion generated on each of these occasions. Partial funding for the foldout illustrations was provided by Columbia University. I am grateful to Molly Fulghum and Seth Richardson for sharing their unpublished research with me; to Michelle Marcus, Elizabeth Hendrix, and the two anonymous *AJA* reviewers for countless suggestions that improved the manuscript, and to Fred Kleiner and Tracey Cullen for their patience and enthusiasm throughout the publication process.

The following abbreviations are used below:

Meuszynski	J. Meuszynski, <i>Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen und ihrer Anordnung in Nordwestpalast von Kalhu (Nimrud) (Baghdader Forschungen 2, Mainz 1981)</i> .
Paley and Sobolewski 1987	S.M. Paley and R.P. Sobolewski, <i>The Reconstruction of the Relief Representations and Their Positions in the Northwest-Palace at Kalhu (Nimrud) II (Baghdader Forschungen 10, Mainz 1987)</i> .
Paley and Sobolewski 1992	S.M. Paley and R.P. Sobolewski, <i>The Reconstruction of the Relief Representations and Their Positions in the Northwest-Palace at Kalhu (Nimrud) III (Baghdader Forschungen 14, Mainz 1992)</i> .

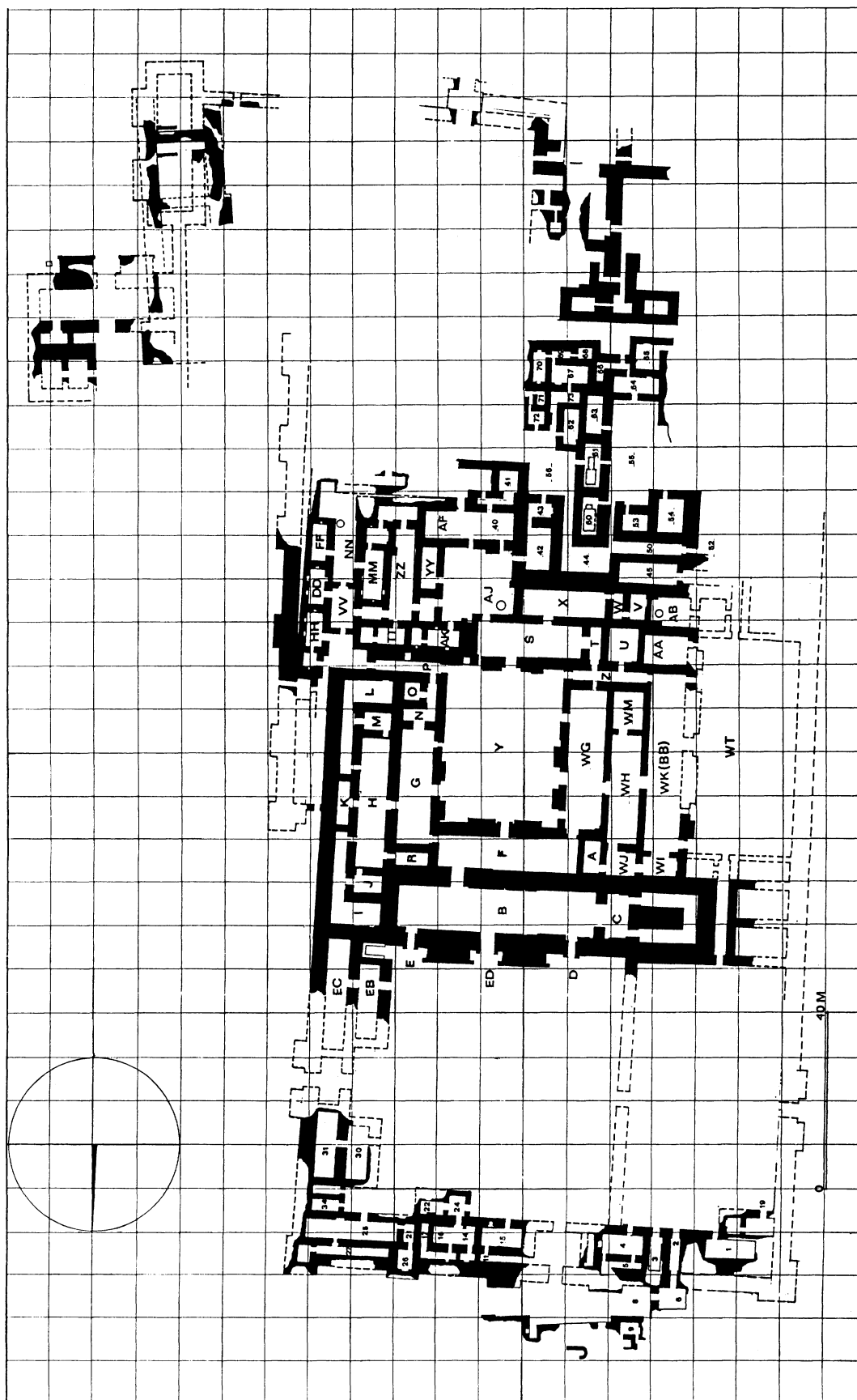


Fig. 1. Kalhu, palace of Assurnasirpal II, overall plan, drawn by R.P. Sobolewski. (Courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

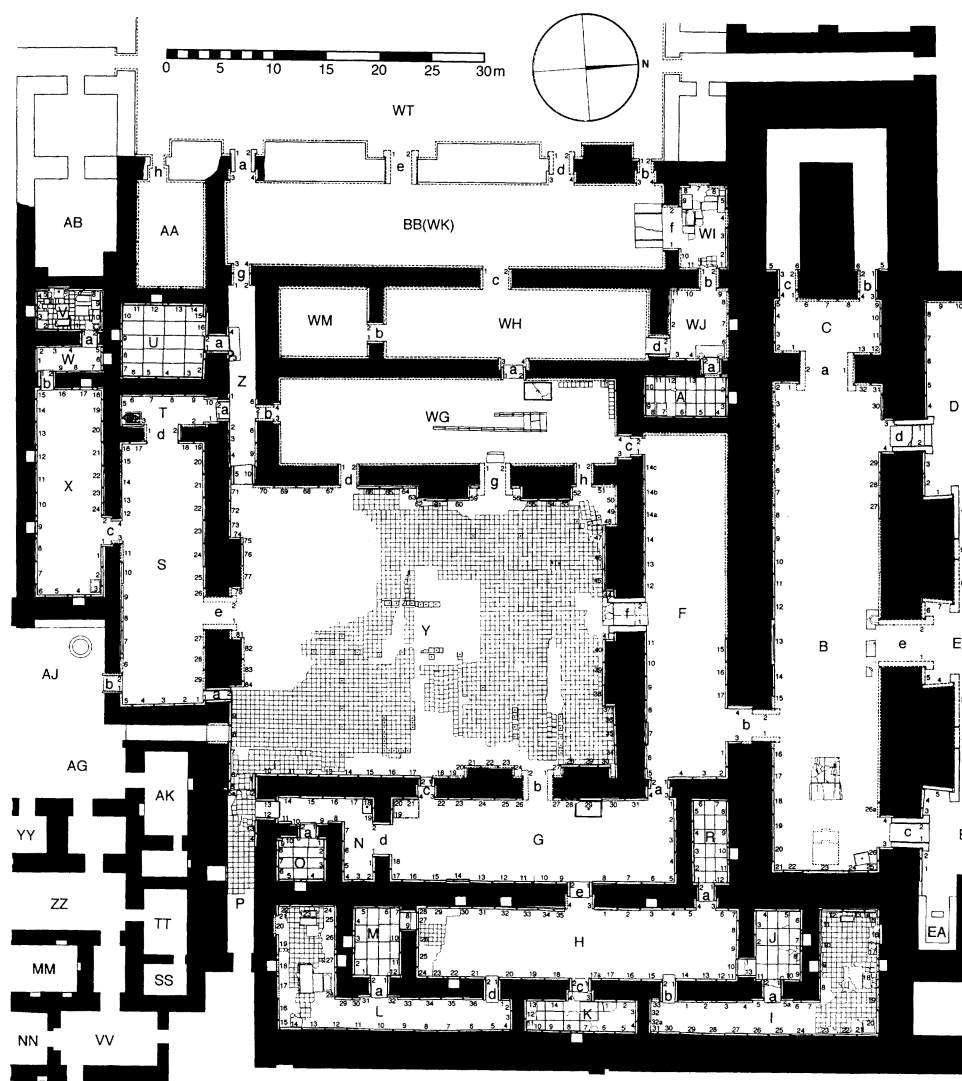


Fig. 2. Plan of the state apartments, drawn by R.P. Sobolewski. (After Paley and Sobolewski 1987, plan 2; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

(fig. 1). Its northern third was a large outer courtyard, the south side of which was the throne-room facade (marked D, ED, and E on the plan). This facade, along with several other major entrances to the palace, was decorated with human-headed bull and lion colossi. The walls to either side of the two preserved entrances in the throne-room facade were lined with stone slabs carved in relief with foreigners bringing tribute before the king. Also carved on each slab, and on every other wall slab in the palace, was a text that we call the "Standard Inscription," which gave the name, titles, and epithets of the king, recorded his relationship with the gods, summarized his military achievements, and described the founding of Kalhu and the appearance of the palace.

Beyond this was the throne-room suite, rooms B and F, which opened onto a smaller inner courtyard,

Y (fig. 2). This courtyard was lined on its other three sides with suites of large state apartments, each entered through a large doorway flanked by human-headed bull or lion colossi: G and H to the east, S and X to the south, and WG, WH, and WK to the west. The walls of all the rooms in this part of the palace were lined with stone slabs, most of which were carved with relief images.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In the practice of scholarship, the conclusions we reach are strongly affected, if not largely predetermined, by the organization and form of presentation of the data, and the questions/hypotheses it occurs to us to formulate. Each of these factors is heavily influenced by the other. In the case of the Assyrian palaces, the ways scholars have organized the source

data have created perceptual hurdles that in turn have led to conceptual hurdles. In most university slide cataloguing systems, for example, the reliefs from the Northwest Palace are organized typologically. This system is well suited to the user who desires images of “winged genii” or “king performing ritual,” but provides no clue for someone who wants a relief from room S or room G. Likewise, until fairly recently the only publications of the Northwest Palace reliefs were picture books and surveys that emphasized specific slabs and details out of context. Apart from the historical reliefs in the throne room, the palace was not sufficiently well published as a whole to permit known reliefs to be grouped together by rooms. These existing categories both defined and restricted the available parameters for investigation. Specifically, this system was not suited to questions of meaning in context and precluded such investigation. As context was not available, scholars were limited primarily to iconographic and typological investigations. Important early studies of pictorial sequence in Assurnasirpal’s palace focused exclusively on the historical narrative reliefs in the throne room, as these were the only complete sequences that had been published.¹

This situation began to change with the pioneering work of Gadd and Weidner, who undertook the monumental task of tracking down Assurnasirpal reliefs all over the world, and ascertaining the original position of each of these reliefs in the palace. The primary source for such identifications was the appendix in Layard’s *Nineveh and Its Remains*, which included a brief description of every relief Layard excavated.² This task was continued by Stearns, Reade, Paley, and Meuszynski.³ Stearns published numerous additional reliefs and used rough drawings to reconstruct the decoration of entire walls in several rooms. Reade also published new reliefs and refined the previous reconstructions through the im-

portant observation that all the slabs in a given room have the same number of lines of inscription, and that the number of lines varies from room to room. Paley contributed further observations on the arrangement of the reliefs and studied the textual variants in the Standard Inscription. Meuszynski further augmented and refined this work, in part by drawing on data from new excavations in the palace, which uncovered many reliefs still in situ, as well as the bases of slabs that had been sawn off and removed, and which could then be matched up with known reliefs on the basis of their dimensions. He also published accurate reconstruction drawings of the sculptures in entire rooms.

The culmination of this work was the three-volume publication of Assurnasirpal’s sculptured rooms by Meuszynski, and Paley and Sobolewski, which allows us to look at the palace as a whole in a way not possible since Layard began to dismantle it in the mid-19th century.⁴ Here, every sculptured slab known from the palace is presented in catalogue fashion, with excellent reconstruction drawings that show the sequence of the reliefs in every room (e.g., fig. 3). There are also new plans of the entire palace, as well as detailed plans of each room (figs. 1–2). For all their indispensable utility, however, these volumes constrain the data in certain ways as well. Their presentation is ordered by Layard’s system of alphabetical designation, which was determined by the sequence of his excavation, so that rooms are arranged in alphabetical order as in the appendix to *Nineveh and Its Remains*, with slabs ordered according to Layard’s similarly arbitrary numbering sequence. Furthermore, the publication format of Meuszynski’s volume (but not those of Paley and Sobolewski) divided the reliefs from long walls into short sections to fit the width of the page. These subdivisions are usually independent of architectural or compositional breaks in the images, and can seem quite disruptive,

¹ A. Moortgat, “Die Bildgliederung des jungassyrischen Wandreliefs,” *JPKS* 51 (1930) 141–58; H.G. Güterbock, “Narration in Anatolian, Syrian, and Assyrian Art,” *AJA* 61 (1957) 66–67; J.E. Reade, *The Design and Decoration of Neo-Assyrian Public Buildings* (Diss. Univ. of Cambridge 1970) 265–78.

² C.J. Gadd, *The Stones of Assyria* (London 1936); E.F. Weidner and G. Furlani, *Die Reliefs der assyrischen Könige* (Afo Beiheft 4, Berlin 1939); A.H. Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains* 1 (London 1849) 381–90.

³ J.B. Stearns, *Reliefs from the Palace of Assurnasirpal II* (Afo Beiheft 15, Graz 1961); J.E. Reade, “Twelve Ashurnasirpal Reliefs,” *Iraq* 27 (1965) 119–34; S.M. Paley, *King of the World: Ashur-nasir-pal II of Assyria 883–859 B.C.* (Brooklyn 1976); J. Meuszynski, “Contribution to the Reconstruction of the Northwest Palace in Kalhu,” *EtTrav* 5 (1971) 31–51; Meuszynski, “The Representations of the Four-Winged Genies

on the Bas-Reliefs from Assur-nasir-apli Times,” *EtTrav* 6 (1972) 27–70; Meuszynski, “The Assur-nasir-apli II Reliefs in the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin,” *EtTrav* 8 (1975) 33–72; Meuszynski, “The Throne-Room of Assur-nasir-apli II. (Room B in the North-West Palace at Nimrud),” *ZA* 64 (1975) 51–73; Meuszynski, “Corpus des Reliefs von Assur-nasir-apli II,” *AA* 1976, 424–79; Meuszynski, “Some Reliefs from the North-West Palace at Kalhu,” *EtTrav* 9 (1976) 29–45; Meuszynski, “Original Drawings of Assur-nasir-apli II Reliefs,” *EtTrav* 10 (1977) 33–72; Meuszynski, “La façade de la salle du trône au Palais Nord-Ouest à Nimrud,” *EtTrav* 11 (1979) 5–13; Meuszynski and H. Abdul-Hamid, “Ekal Assur-Nasir-Apli. First Report on Relief: Rooms ‘B’ and ‘L,’” *Sumer* 30 (1974) 111–19, figs. 1–9.

⁴ Meuszynski; Paley and Sobolewski 1987; Paley and Sobolewski 1992.

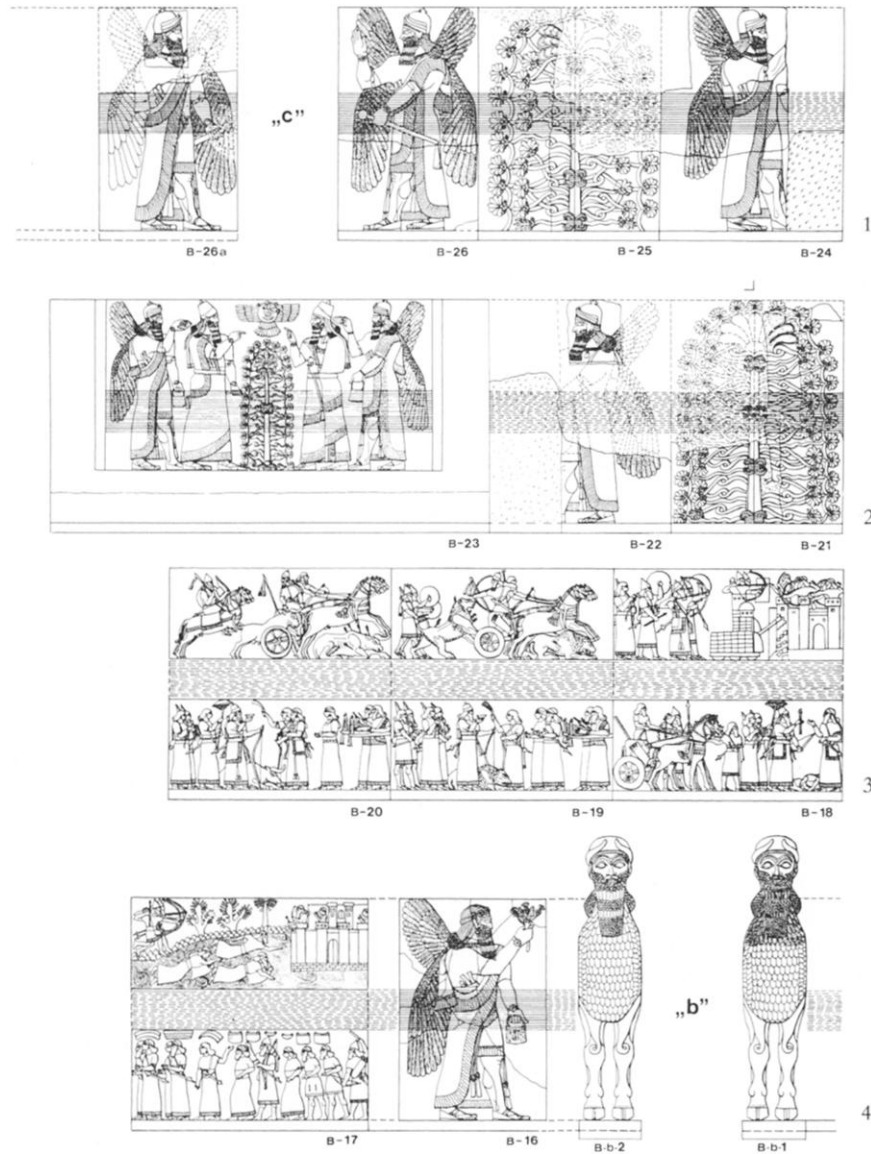


Fig. 3. Room B (throne room), reconstruction of part of the relief decoration, as published by J. Meuszynski. (After Meuszynski, pl. 1; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

as extended horizontal friezes are broken up and arranged vertically, often on more than one page. The reliefs are thereby presented in segmented sequences, room by room, in an order that reflects the sequence of Layard's excavations and the state of Meuszynski's manuscript at his untimely death, but not the experience of a visitor to the palace.

Similarly, the excellent new ground plans of the palace, while giving a good sense of its overall planning scheme, conceal the impact and limits of individual suites. Information that would have been readily available to a visitor moving from room to room is obscured by formal relationships that are visible only in the plan, such as wall thickness and the alignment of unconnected rooms. A notable

example is the thick wall between rooms B and F (fig. 2). In plan, this wall has the visual effect of isolating B from F, and seems to associate F with rooms A, WJ, WI, and courtyard Y. In fact, a closer look shows that B and F form a single suite that is a considerable walking distance from rooms A, WJ, and WI, spatial relationships that are immediately clear to someone walking through the building. Similarly, a glance at the plan (fig. 1) suggests that the palace was organized around a central courtyard, with two long parallel rooms on each side. This pattern of similarity obscures differences among the individual suites, differences that become immediately clear when the palace is disassembled and each suite is viewed in isolation (fig. 4). Again, a representational

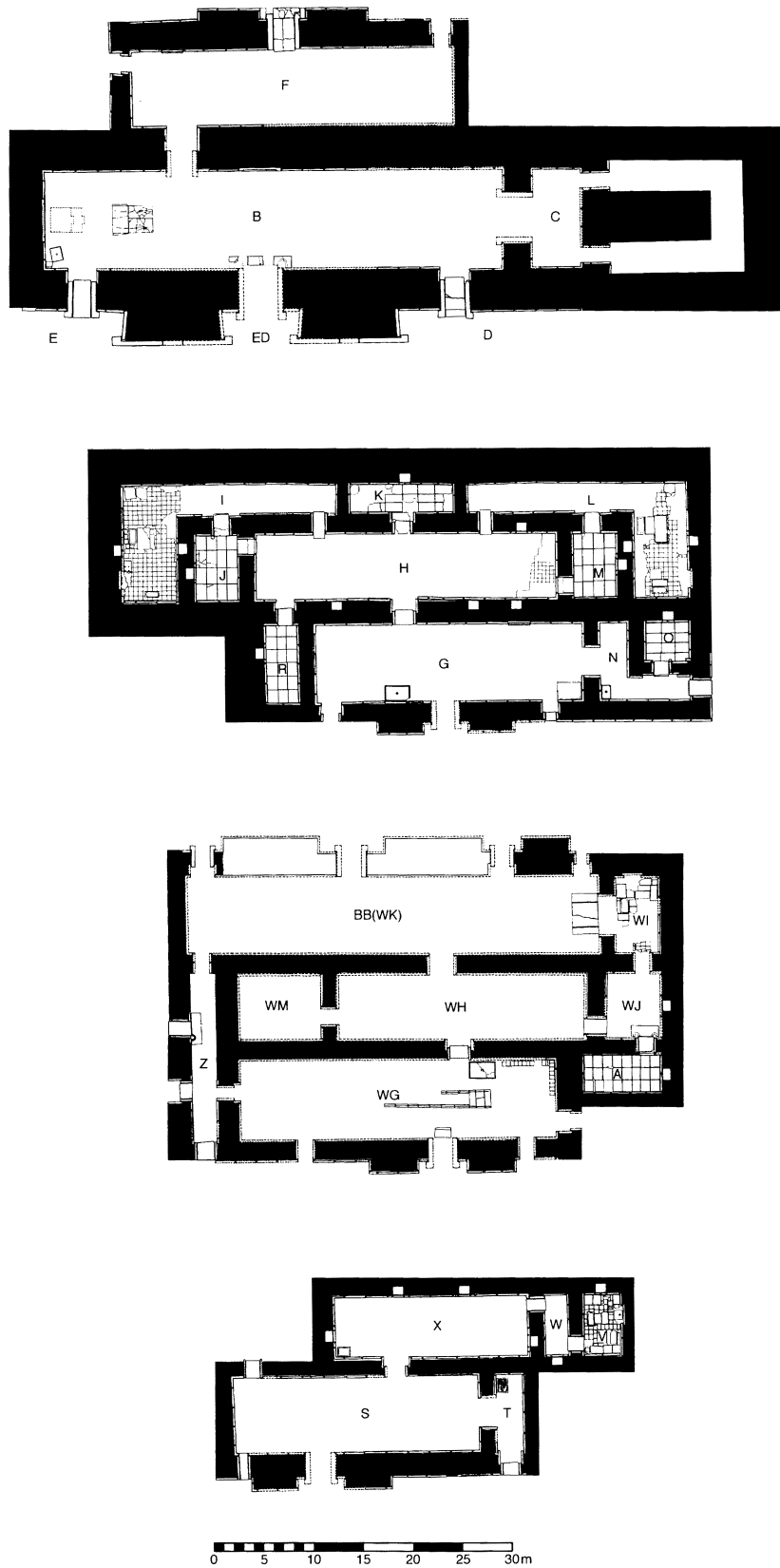


Fig. 4. Individual plans of the throne-room, east, west, and south suites, separated by the author. (After Paley and Sobolewski 1987, plan 2; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

convention — the plan — encourages the formulation of certain questions, while hindering the formation of others.

Finally, the convention of presenting reliefs separate from their architectural context discourages the formation of intuitions concerning the relationship between relief subject and architectural placement. An example of the response one may have to these perceptual hurdles is in Irene Winter's exemplary article on the throne room (room B) of Assurnasirpal II, when she describes the decoration of the other rooms in the palace: "The same repetitive approach was used in the decoration of most reliefs, as whole rooms were devoted to alternations of griffin- or human-headed 'genii' shown individually or flanking the 'sacred tree'. Occasionally standing or seated figures of the king were included, often flanked by attendants, as in rooms G and H of the palace."⁵ I had a similar perception of these rooms when I wrote: "A different subject was depicted in rooms G and H, on the east side of the inner court, where the king accompanied by attendants was shown sitting or standing holding a bowl, engaged in an activity that may most plausibly be identified as pouring libations. The remaining sculptured rooms were all decorated with variations of a single subject: the 'sacred tree' flanked by winged deities, some with human heads and others with heads of birds."⁶ Both of us seem to have been working from an impression derived from the repetitive effect of the reliefs *as they are published*, with the varied "narrative" reliefs from room B presented (alphabetically) first, followed by page after page of genii and kings. We did not consider these latter reliefs in their architectural context.

Such perceptual hurdles were overcome in two important articles, each of which focused on a single room of the palace. In Brandes's 1970 study of room G, his juxtaposition of plan with sculptures suggested an interpretation of the specific function of the room, namely as a venue for ceremonial ablutions.⁷ In 1981, Winter presented room B as a unified ensemble of architecture, sculpture, and inscriptions, addressing issues of program for the first

time in the literature on Assyrian art.⁸ In addition to overcoming limitations imposed by the state of the source material, Brandes and Winter also faced a series of difficult practical problems in making a visual case for their arguments. In simplest terms, the problem can be stated as follows: what visual conventions are adequate for the representation of sculptures in three-dimensional architectural spaces, that is, how can we allow our reader to *see* what we are talking about, given the constraints imposed by the two-dimensional, relatively small format of the printed page? This problem exists at several levels. First is the difficulty of conveying a view of an entire three-dimensional room on a flat page. Second is the difficulty of reconciling the convention of showing ground plans at relatively small scale, in order to emphasize overall planning, with the convention of showing drawings of reliefs at a much larger scale, in order to convey adequate pictorial detail. Presenting sculptures in the context of plan requires a common scale, which results either in a clumsily large plan or vanishingly small detail in the reliefs. Add to this the relatively small size of a standard printed page, and the constraints are serious.

Brandes and Winter made their visual points with different conventions. Brandes used a complex schematic diagram⁹ consisting of an outline plan of room G with the positions and orientation of the relief subjects indicated by letters and arrows:

- R King facing right (a backward "R" shows the king facing left!)
- G Genie facing right ("G" also shown backward for a figure facing left)
- H Courtier facing right (it is not clear if the "H" is reversed for a figure facing left)

This sort of scheme is very useful for conveying the general arrangement of subjects, but in reducing every figure to one of three general symbols, it provides no information about the variations in figure types or their attributes. Brandes's diagram is suitable for making his own points, but the information it presents is so limited that it is useful only for that purpose. It does not lend itself to further contem-

⁵ I.J. Winter, "The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II," in P.O. Harper and H. Pittman eds., *Essays on Near Eastern Archaeology in Honor of Charles Kyrle Wilkinson* (New York 1983) 15.

⁶ J.M. Russell, *The Writing on the Wall: Studies in the Architectural Context of Late Assyrian Palace Inscriptions* (Winona Lake, in press).

⁷ M.A. Brandes, "La salle dit 'G' du palais d'Assurnasirpal II à Kalakh, lieu de cérémonie rituelle," in A. Finet ed., *Actes de la XVII^e Rencontre assyriologique internationale* (Ham-

sur-Heure 1970) 147–54.

⁸ I.J. Winter, "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs," *Studies in Visual Communication* 7:2 (1981) 2–38. For a close critique of Winter's method and a different interpretation of the throne room, see L. Bachelot, "La fonction politique des reliefs néo-assyriens," in D. Charpin and F. Joannès eds., *Marchands, diplomates et empereurs: Études sur la civilisation mésopotamienne offertes à Paul Garelli* (Paris 1991) 109–28.

⁹ Brandes (supra n. 7) fig. 1.

plation, nor can one stare at it and feel that one really understands the effect of the original decoration in its architectural context.

Winter's solution to this problem was both more direct and more evocative of the original effect of the sculptures in context. Starting, like Brandes, from an outline plan of the room, Winter placed scale reproductions of Meuszynski's excellent drawings of the reliefs in their appropriate positions along each wall, as if a bomb had gone off in the center of the room, tipping every slab outward. It is very easy with this diagram to place oneself either outside or inside the room, and from that vantage point see the relief subjects in considerable detail. This form of reconstruction has two significant limitations: First, it is not able to diagram convex corners, as in doorways, and so is not well suited to showing the transitions between rooms. Second, when a scale diagram of a room the size of the throne room is reduced to the size of a printed page, the detail, and even subject, of individual relief slabs becomes difficult to distinguish. This was not a problem when the diagram was reproduced across two pages in Winter's first publication of this material, but when reduced to a single page in her second publication, the two-register reliefs are at the margin of legibility.¹⁰

If one wishes to go beyond a single room to present the decoration of an entire suite of rooms, the difficulties become increasingly severe, as one must deal both with the challenge of showing the transitions between rooms, and with the necessity of either further increasing the page size or decreasing the scale of the illustrations. One possible solution is to construct a model, either physical or virtual, and use images of this as the basis for analysis, as was done very effectively by Bergmann with the House of the Tragic Poet at Pompeii.¹¹ This can be a very compelling tool for approximating the original effect of a structure on the viewer. The problem with a model is that it is difficult to translate its three-dimensional form into the two-dimensional format of a traditional publication. One is reduced to

presenting the model as a series of snapshots, which gives the reader only a very selective portion of the total information contained in the model. In order for a model to convey the amount of information available in a schematic plan such as Winter's, a considerable number of discrete snapshots are required, and the relationship between one view and the next is not necessarily intuitively obvious.

It will soon be possible to create and publish detailed computer models that users will be able to explore freely in virtual space, thereby duplicating the paths and vistas available to viewers in antiquity, and Assurnasirpal's palace would be an ideal subject for such a project.¹² For the moment, though, a more immediate solution to the problem of presentation is required. My solution in this study is to juxtapose the full plan of the palace with plans of the four individual suites and with full reconstructions of the decoration of each room, following the convention used by Winter. These latter were assembled with a computer, using the overall plan of the palace published by Paley and Sobolewski as the basis for the plan of each room, and using Adobe Photoshop to paste the relief slabs into position. In this way, wall slabs are juxtaposed with related features on the floors, and the reconstructions may easily be reduced, combined, and otherwise manipulated without loss of detail. This seems to me to be the best available way to present the maximum amount of information within a format that encourages the formation of independent hypotheses by the reader.

My aim in employing this approach is to offer an interpretation of the relationship between the decoration and the function of various parts of the palace, based on my reading of the layout of the relief decoration and a variety of other clues present in the architecture. I considered only the ground floor level, which is all that is preserved. It should be remembered, however, that some activities may have been carried out in an upper story, if one was present, and may therefore not be reflected in the preserved architecture.¹³ I arrived at my interpretations

¹⁰ Winter (supra n. 8) fig. 2; Winter (supra n. 5) fig. 2. F.A. Cooper, *The Temple of Apollo Bassitas IV* (Princeton 1992) pl. 58, solved the problem of scale when he used a similar convention in his reconstruction of the layout of the sculptures on the interior frieze of the Temple of Apollo at Bassae, but the 61 × 51 cm triple folio format of his publication (with 100-cm foldouts!) is not a widely available publication option. I am grateful to Elizabeth Hendrix, a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Fine Arts, for this reference.

¹¹ B. Bergmann, "The Roman House as Memory Theater: The House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii," *ArtB* 76 (1994) 225–56.

¹² At the time of writing, a virtual model of Assurnasirpal's palace was under development by Learning Sites in collaboration with S.M. Paley, R.B. Sobolewski, and A.B. Snyder (www.learningsites.com/NWPalace/NWPalhome.html). A more finished virtual model of an ancient site, the Forum of Trajan, is exhibited at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles (J.E. Packer, "A Virtual Forum: Computer Models Complement New Excavations," *Archaeology* 51:1 [January/February 1998] 40).

¹³ I.J. Winter, "'Seat of Kingship'/'A Wonder to Behold': The Palace as Construct in the Ancient Near East," *Ars orientalis* 23 (1993) 31.

after scattered intuitions and bits of disconnected information—pictorial, architectural, and textual—led me to formulate a hypothesis that could be tested only through a concerted effort at overcoming the limitations posed by previous publication formats. Following Brandes, Paley, and Winter, but expanding my investigation to all of the state apartments, I hypothesized that the relief decoration of the entire palace is a visual expression of Assurnasirpal's royal ideology.¹⁴ The palace reliefs suggest that the main points of such an ideology might be military success, service to the gods, divine protection, and Assyrian prosperity. Within this overall scheme, the subjects vary from suite to suite. This may perhaps be explained in part by proposing different primary functions for each suite. In testing this hypothesis, my approach is essentially art historical, based on close analysis of the imagery, heavy reliance on texts, and comparisons with other Assyrian palaces. I also utilize two theoretical approaches to understanding the meaning of architecture: Trigger's principle of monumental architecture as conspicuous consumption, and Rapoport's observation of the redundancy of cues in the architecture of complex societies.

Clearly, Assurnasirpal's palace at Kalhu exemplifies what Trigger calls the principle of "conspicuous consumption," that is, the excessive expenditure of energy (natural resources and other people's labor) as an expression of royal power. Palaces such as this one "become symbols of power because they are seen as embodiments of large amounts of human energy and hence symbolize the ability of those for whom they were made to control such energy to an unusual degree."¹⁵ While the palace building itself was perhaps the single most conspicuous public embodiment of this excessive consumption, its massive walls and elevation on the citadel simultaneously served to exclude the great mass of common Assyrians from participating in the royal activities that took place therein.¹⁶ These activities—royal audiences, entertainment, rituals, ceremonies, record-keeping—were often also characterized by conspicuous consumption of labor and resources, but in the private setting of the palace, the message was directed largely

at the elite who participated in these activities with the king.

Outsiders, by contrast, would readily have perceived the message of power and exclusion embodied in the architecture. Although we do not know what Assurnasirpal's palace looked like from the outside, in the later palaces of Sargon II and Sennacherib, the largest sculptures, including human-headed bull colossi and colossal human figures grasping lions, were placed on the exterior facade overlooking the city or landscape, and were probably easily visible from a distance.¹⁷ These extreme examples of conspicuous consumption are the only palace sculptures that most people would have seen, thereby establishing a very high level of imagined expectation for the grandeur within. Indeed, it is exactly this aspect of Sennacherib's palace—viewed from afar with the city wall rising above the river, the citadel wall above that, and the colossus-lined facade of the palace at the top—that is depicted in a view of Nineveh carved on a wall relief in Assurbanipal's palace.¹⁸ Sennacherib described the intended effect of his palace: "for the astonishment of all people I raised aloft its head," and Winter has argued that the effect of the palace on subjects and foreigners was therefore a crucial part of its function.¹⁹ For most people, however, as Bachelot observed, the inner workings of the palace could only be known secondhand, through reports and rumor, and these would inevitably be exaggerated, so that the message of the highly conspicuous exterior is reinforced by the imagined conspicuous consumption within.²⁰

On the one hand, therefore, the king participated in a system of royal activities, at least some of which were characterized by conspicuous consumption, and on the other, the setting for at least some of these royal activities—the palace—is preserved in part in the archaeological record. But how are we today to recover these activities from the archaeological record, that is to say, how are we to locate royal actions in their architectural context? This question is the focus of an article by Rapoport, in which he summarizes some 20 years of his research on the relationship between activities and settings. Rapo-

¹⁴ Brandes (supra n. 7); Paley (supra n. 3) 20–28; Winter (supra n. 8); Winter (supra n. 5).

¹⁵ B.G. Trigger, "Monumental Architecture: A Thermodynamic Explanation of Symbolic Behaviour," *WorldArch* 22 (1990) 124.

¹⁶ Except on such rare occasions as the dedication of the palace itself, when Assurnasirpal entertained 69,574 guests for 10 days with an extravagant feast; see A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I: (1114–859 BC) (The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods*

2, Toronto 1991) 288–93.

¹⁷ J.E. Reade, "Ideology and Propaganda in Assyrian Art," in M.T. Larsen ed., *Power and Propaganda (Mesopotamia 7, Copenhagen 1979)* 335–36.

¹⁸ R.D. Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh* (London 1976) pl. 23.

¹⁹ D.D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia II: Historical Records of Assyria from Sargon to the End* (Chicago 1927) sec. 394; Winter (supra n. 13) 37.

²⁰ Bachelot (supra n. 8) 117–18.

port defines a "setting" as a locus for activity, "a milieu which defines a situation, reminds occupants of the appropriate rules and hence of the ongoing behaviors appropriate to the situation defined by the setting, thereby making co-action possible. . . . The situation, the rules, and the ongoing and appropriate behavior are communicated by cues in the setting . . . [which], if they are noticed and understood, act as mnemonics—they remind those entering the setting of the situation it defines, of which rules apply and hence of how to act."²¹

Rapoport observes that the study of individual activities and settings provides only part of the picture—activities and settings are parts of larger systems. Only some royal activities will take place in the palace. Royal authority is exercised through a system of activities, which may include activities such as processions, worship, and military command, and these are carried out in a system of settings. The palace is only a part of this system of settings, which may also include a range of public, sacred, and remote settings, some outside the palace, some outside the capital. In general, activities appropriate to the palace might be expected to be those that involve a considerable degree of exclusion or seclusion. In analyzing a system of settings such as that exemplified by a series of rooms in a palace, we need to consider such factors as who is included or excluded, which groups may enter which rooms, "the nature of the boundaries (e.g. closed, semi-permeable, permeable, open)," the arrangement and sequence of spaces, the reasons for or meaning of such sequences, and the linkages and barriers between settings.²²

According to Rapoport, the activity environment consists of "fixed-feature elements (buildings, floors, walls, etc.), semi-fixed-feature elements ('furnishings', interior and exterior, of all sorts), and non-fixed-feature elements (people and their activities and behaviors). Settings guide behavior (i.e. the non-fixed-feature elements) not only, or even principally, through the fixed-feature elements of architecture but through semi-fixed-feature elements which provide essential cues; other people present and *their* activities and behaviors are also most important cues."²³ Nonfixed features (people and their behavior) are, of course, not preserved in the archaeological record. Semifixed features may or may not be preserved.

In Rapoport's terminology, architecture contains activities only loosely. In theory, a great range of activities may take place within a single setting, even so formal a setting as a room in a palace. The use of a given space may be influenced by factors such as its location within the palace, the time of day or season of year, the nature and requirements of the audience being accommodated, and the number and availability of spaces required by the system of activities (i.e., if there are more activities than discrete spaces for their performance, then some spaces will serve multiple purposes). The function of the room under these different conditions may be altered by the placement of movable furnishings or may simply be determined by the consensus of those present. In interpreting the archaeological record, the possibility of multiple uses combined with the absence of the living actors "makes analysis of semi-fixed cues critical."²⁴

But what if original semifixed cues are not preserved? What if, as was the case with Assurnasirpal's palace, the building stood for centuries, outlived its original function, and was eventually used as a storehouse? How then can we recover the original function of palace rooms? For that matter, what about the loss even of fixed cues, such as the paintings that originally covered the walls above the reliefs in many of the rooms, but of which only a few fragments have survived?²⁵ Fortunately, a ray of hope is provided here by the phenomenon of redundancy of cues. Rapoport observes that "as scale, size, complexity, and heterogeneity (cultural pluralism) of a society go up, *more* cues as well as *stronger* cues are needed to communicate effectively."²⁶ This in turn leads to an increase in the number of specialized settings intended for specific activities, and these are clearly differentiated from one another. The Assyrian state was a complex, heterogenous society indeed, and we may suspect that the activity settings in its royal palace would therefore exhibit a high degree of differentiation among settings and redundancy of cues. Given the degree of conspicuous consumption evident in the palace, we may also hope that some of these cues were expressed in a conspicuously permanent form in the architecture itself.

My goal in this study is to look beyond the edge of the individual relief slab to try to identify sculptural and architectural cues in Assurnasirpal's palace

²¹ A. Rapoport, "Systems of Activities and Systems of Settings," in S. Kent ed., *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space* (Cambridge 1990) 12.

²² Rapoport (supra n. 21) 14.

²³ Rapoport (supra n. 21) 13.

²⁴ Rapoport (supra n. 21) 13.

²⁵ Y. Tomabechi, "Wall Paintings from the Northwest Palace at Nimrud," *AJO* 33 (1986) 43–54.

²⁶ Rapoport (supra n. 21) 17.

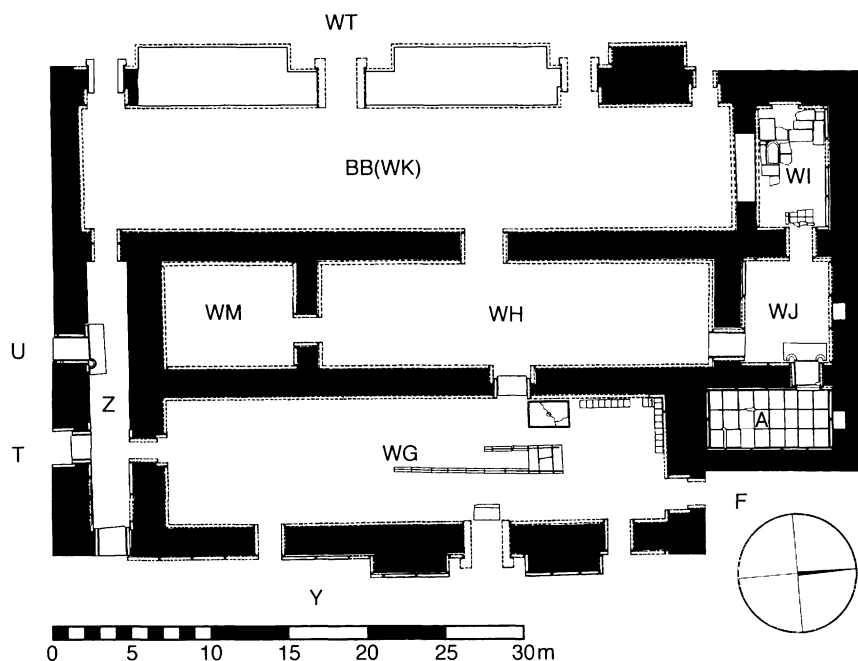


Fig. 5. Plan, detail of the west suite. (After Paley and Sobolewski 1987, plan 2; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

that are clues to the nature of the activities that took place therein, and by extension, to determine the primary function of the rooms. I believe that even though the palace furnishings are missing, there are still enough permanent cues present to generate hypotheses about function. The analysis that follows commences with the suites of rooms around the inner court of the palace, moving from west to east to south, from relief subjects that would have been readily understandable to a general audience, to more esoteric subjects that would probably only have been fully understood by the king and his court. It concludes with the throne-room suite, where all of these subjects come together, and the throne-room facade, which introduces another relief subject that would have been meaningful to a broad audience.

WEST SUITE

The relief decoration in the principal rooms of the west suite (rooms WG and WK/BB, figs. 2, 5) was poorly preserved, largely because many of its wall slabs had been removed in the seventh century B.C. for use in the nearby palace of Esarhaddon. If the evidence of its successor palaces is a valid guide, then this suite of rooms was second in importance only to the throne-room suite (fig. 6). Similar suites—three parallel long rooms, opening onto a terrace or

courtyard at both sides, and projecting perpendicularly from and connected directly to the throne-room suite—occurred in each of the next three Assyrian royal palaces.²⁷ In the arsenal (“Fort Shalmaneser”) at Nimrud, built by Assurnasirpal’s successor, Shalmaneser III, this suite was copied almost exactly (rooms T22–27), augmented by the addition of three rooms in between (T10, 20–21; fig. 7). Here, however, the suite projects onto an open terrace with no further rooms beyond. It is not certain how Shalmaneser used this building, which his texts call simply a “palace,” but his successors used it as an arsenal—a place to muster troops and to store and maintain military equipment. Nevertheless, the presence of a monumental throne-room suite suggests the palace’s use as a venue for royal audiences, and it is probably significant that this and the projecting wing were the *only* parts copied directly from Assurnasirpal’s palace. In other words, these two suites were the only ones *necessary* for this building to function as a royal palace.

The next new palace for which the plan is preserved is that of Sargon II at Dur Sharrukin (Khorabad), where this suite of three parallel rooms occurred twice: rooms IV, 19, and 20, which directly copy the plan and location of the west suite of Assurnasirpal’s palace, and rooms 1–9, 11, and 12,

²⁷ G. Turner, “The State Apartments of Late Assyrian Palaces,” *Iraq* 32 (1970) 204–209, pl. 39, “Reception Suite Type F”

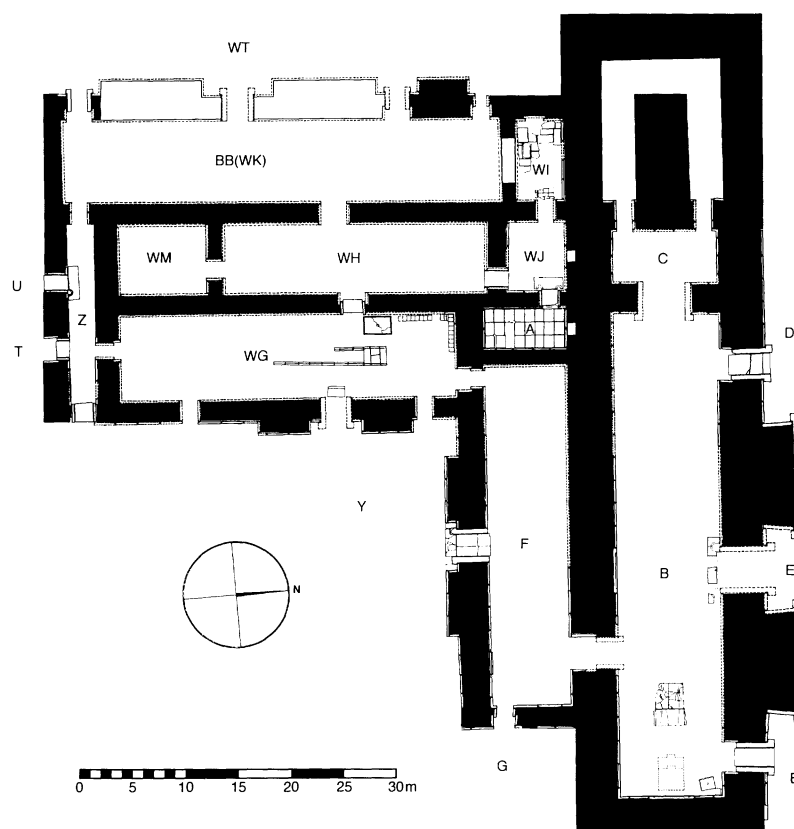


Fig. 6. Plan, detail of the throne-room and west suites. (After Paley and Sobolewski 1987, plan 2; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

a wing that projected northward from the main body of the palace onto an open terrace in the manner of the comparable suite at Fort Shalmaneser (fig. 8). One room in this latter suite, room 8, was fitted with a throne base and was clearly a subsidiary throne room, while the wall reliefs in another large room, room 2, included scenes of banqueting, suggesting one possible use for this room. Also in the arsenal at Dur Sharrukin (Palace F), the plan of the two principal reception suites follows that of Fort Shalmaneser, with the suite of three parallel rooms projecting out from the throne-room suite onto a terrace (fig. 9). Again, these two distinctive suites were the only ones that seemed to be considered essential.

In addition to their physical proximity to one another, the throne-room suite and west suite in Assurnasirpal's palace were directly connected by a doorway in room F. These two suites were also directly connected in Fort Shalmaneser (by room T21)

and Sargon's palace (by room V) (figs. 7–8). In all three cases, communication between these two suites was convenient and private. By contrast, there was apparently no interior connection between the throne-room suite and the projecting wing in Palace F or Sargon's palace, which suggests a greater degree of functional independence.

The Assyrian designation of this distinctive group of three parallel rooms in Assurnasirpal's palace may be preserved in a set of threshold slabs labeled as "from the Second House," published by Paley.²⁸ They were found in a secondary context and their original placement is unknown. On the basis of the combined width of the three slabs, Paley suggested that the ensemble was the right size for one of the major doorways in the west suite, and in their latest publication, Paley and Sobolewski opt for room WK, door e.²⁹ If these slabs are indeed from the west suite, then the name they preserve supports the impres-

²⁸ S.M. Paley, "The Entranceway Inscriptions of the 'Second House' in the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II

at Nimrūd (Kalhu)," *JANES* 19 (1989) 135–47.

²⁹ Paley and Sobolewski 1992, 47.

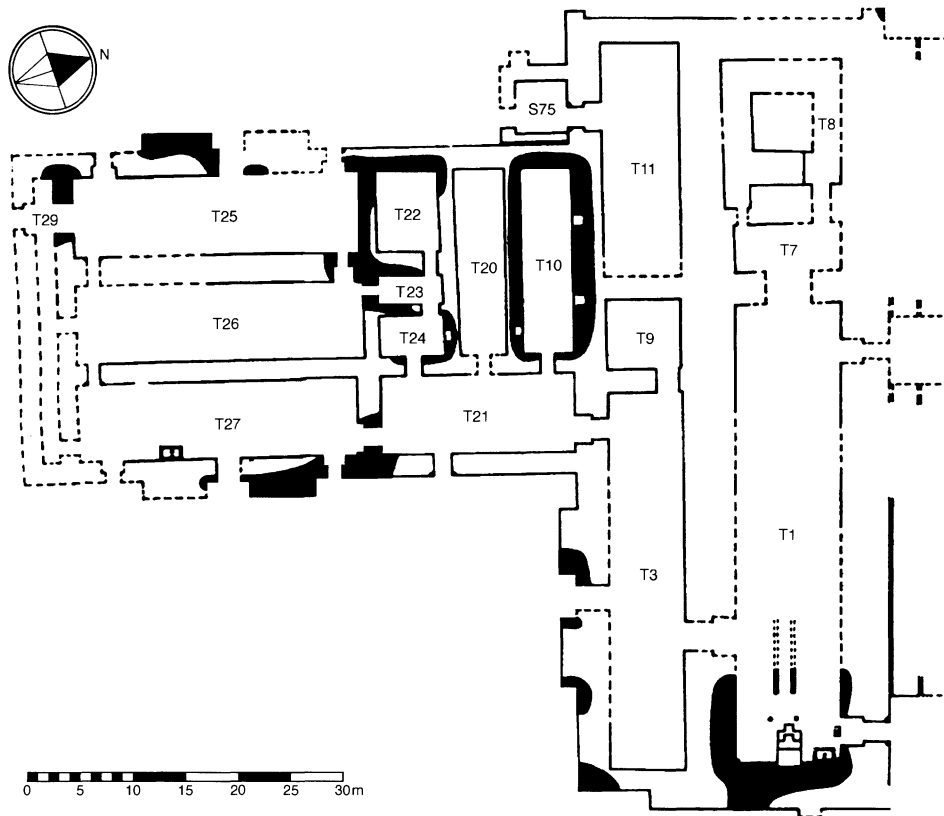


Fig. 7. Kalhu, arsenal of Shalmaneser III ("Fort Shalmaneser"), plan, detail of the throne-room suite and projecting wing. (After M.E.L. Mallowan, *Nimrud and Its Remains* [London 1966] plan 8)

sion given by the architecture that this was the second most important suite in the palace—the "First House" would presumably be the throne-room suite, though no such designation survives.

There may be textual evidence for one function of the "Second House," whatever it might have been. A group of court officials called the *ša bīti šanî*, "men of the Second House," served the king and his high officials at feasts in the palace. It is not clear from the texts, however, whether their title derived from where they worked, in which case "Second House" might mean "banquet hall," or from where they lived, in which case it might mean simply "servant quarters," which would presumably have nothing to do with the west suite.³⁰ That the first translation may be correct is suggested by the banqueting scenes on the upper register of the reliefs in room 2 of the projecting wing of Sargon's palace, which is archi-

tecturally similar to Assurnasirpal's west suite. I will return to this similarity shortly.

The west suite is the only part of the palace besides the throne room in which two-register reliefs with military and hunting subjects were found (fig. 10). Because of its proximity to the edge of the mound, the wall slabs from this suite could easily be removed for use in the construction of Esarhad-don's palace, and a number of reliefs that were apparently from this area were found in that palace. Several others were found either still in place or on the ground in the west suite, and most of these seem to have originated at the north and south ends of the suite. In 1852, Hormuzd Rassam found a number of fragmentary slabs that show bull and lion hunts in the area west of room A. In this area, the unsculptured bases of five slabs still survive in room WI, a small paved bathroom or ablution room, and it is

³⁰ K.F. Müller, "Das assyrische Ritual. Teil 1. Texte zum assyrischen Königsritual," *MVAG* 41:3 (1937) 62, 75; F.A.M. Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts*

(*Cuneiform Monographs* 1, Groningen 1992) 48; *CAD*, B (1965) 297; S. Dalley and J.N. Postgate, *The Tablets from Fort Shalmaneser* (*Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud* 3, London 1984) 165.

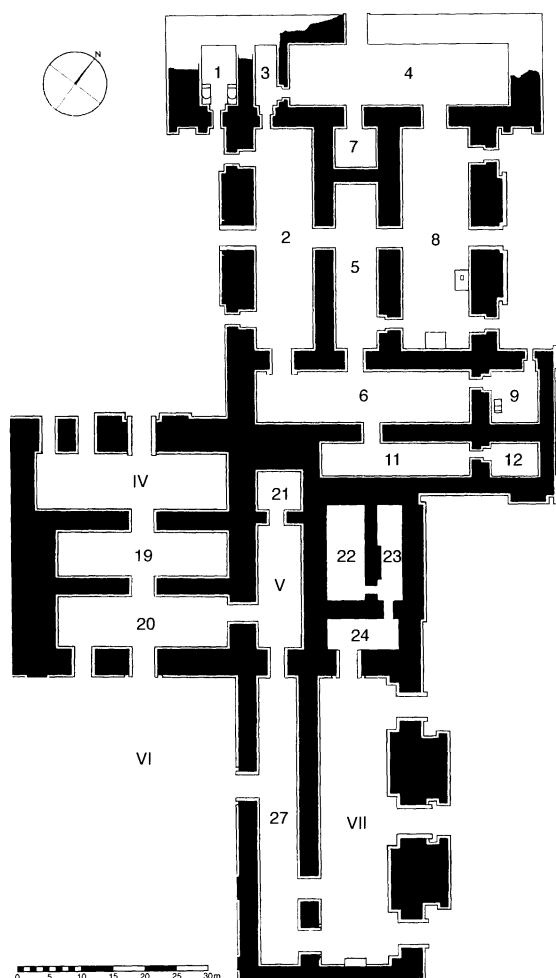


Fig. 8. Dur Sharrukin, palace of Sargon II, plan, detail of throne-room suite, north suite, and projecting wing. (After V. Place and F. Thomas, *Ninive et l'Assyrie III* [Paris 1867–1870] pl. 3)

possible that Rassam's hunts came from there. Alternatively, some or all of these hunts may derive from the north end of room WK, a large reception room.³¹ Rassam found a different subject, a military campaign in the mountains, on a slab in the north-

³¹ WFL-10, 11, 13, 16, 28, 29. Gadd (*supra* n. 2) 212–13, 243; J.E. Reade, "Texts and Sculptures from the North-West Palace, Nimrud," *Iraq* 47 (1985) 210–11; Paley and Sobolewski 1987, 72. Reade (208, fig. 1) observed that room WI, an ablution room, was probably originally separated from room WK by a wall, like the arrangement in room T22 of Fort Shalmaneser (my fig. 7), and that door f connecting the two was a later alteration. This wall is not shown in the full plan of the palace by Paley and Sobolewski (my fig. 2), but is restored in their latest plan of room WK (Paley and Sobolewski 1992, plan 3). It is restored in outline in my individual plan of the west suite (fig. 5). Reade

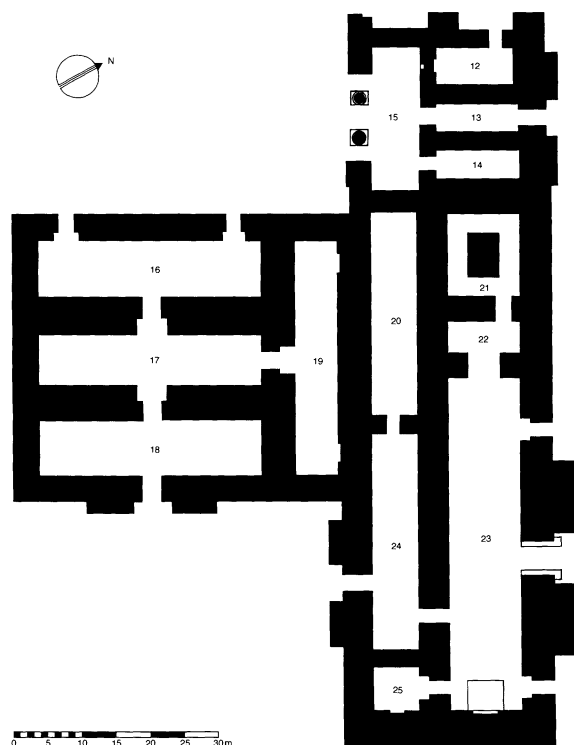


Fig. 9. Dur Sharrukin, arsenal of Sargon II ("Palace F"), plan, detail of throne-room suite and projecting wing. (After G. Loud and C.B. Altman, *Khorsabad, Pt. II* [Chicago 1938] pl. 75)

west corner of room WG, and two more slabs with a similar subject were found by Iraqi excavators on or near the east wall of the same room.³² The walls of room A were lined with unsculptured slabs inscribed with the Standard Inscription, and its floor was also paved with large inscribed stone slabs. A number of similarly appointed rooms occurred in the east suite (J, K, M, O, R) and another one (U) was adjacent to the south suite. Their function is unknown, but as I suggest below, their lack of sculptural decoration suggests limited access; they may have been storerooms for portable furnishings.³³

(207–208, fig. 1) and Paley and Sobolewski (my fig. 2) also propose different reconstructions of the south end of the west wing.

³² WFL-19, 23, 24. Reade (*supra* n. 31) 209; Paley and Sobolewski 1987, 71.

³³ Layard (*supra* n. 2) 27–30. Layard found fragments of carved ivory, presumably originally furniture decoration, near the floor of this room, suggesting that it had been used for storage, but it is not possible now to tell if this fill was of ninth-century date, or from the time of Sargon II or later.

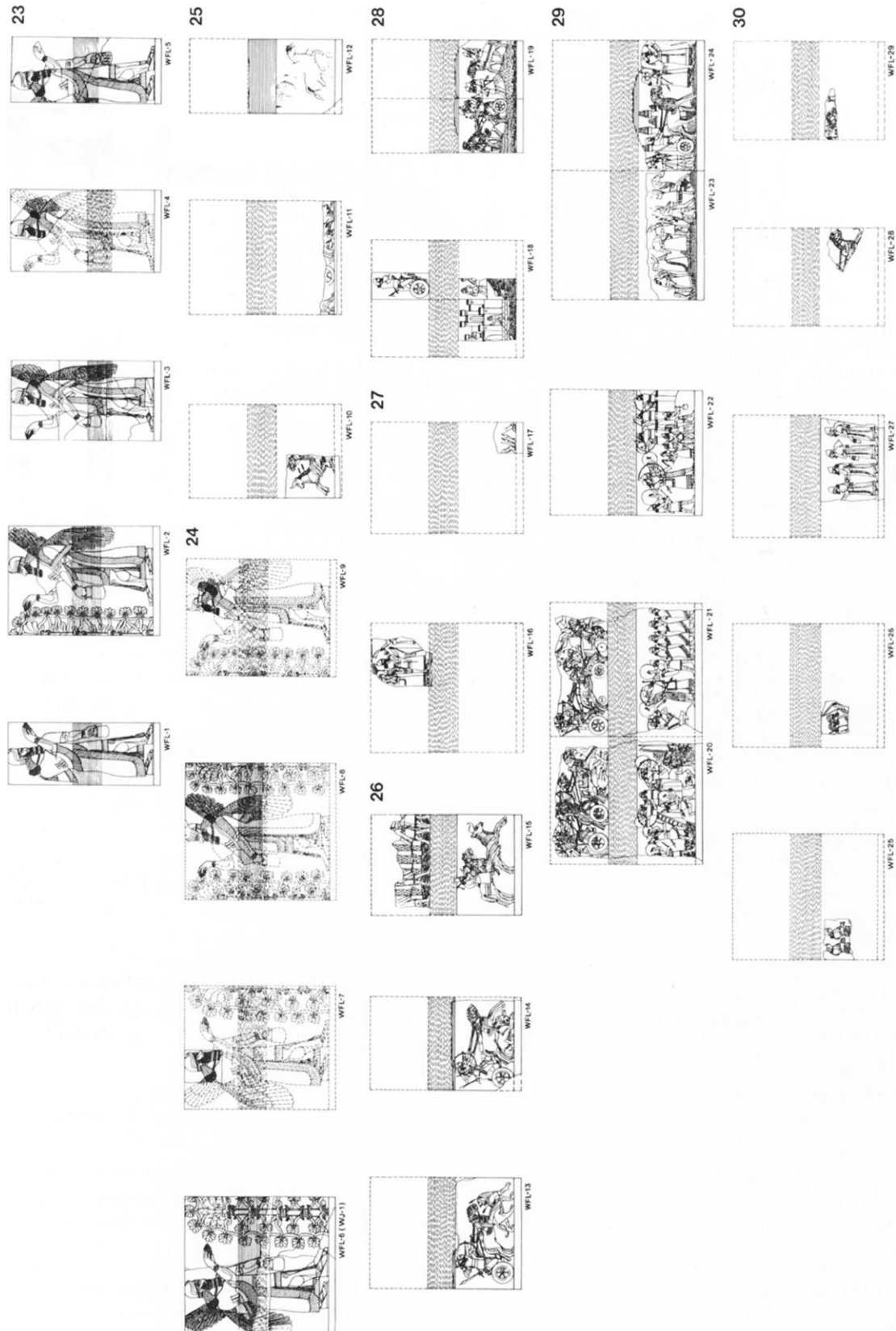


Fig. 10. Kalhu, palace of Assurnasirpal II, west suite, drawings of surviving slabs. (After Paley and Sobolewski 1987, pl. 5; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

Turning to the south end of the west suite, a very worn relief that apparently showed a bull hunt was excavated by the Iraqis on the floor near the eastern wall in room WM, but it could originally have stood in a neighboring room.³⁴ A beautiful slab showing a lion hunt was also found by Layard on the floor in this vicinity—probably in room WG, but possibly in room WM or WK—while excavating the trench for the removal of the bull and lion colossi from courtyard Y.³⁵ Layard described the area west of court Y as consisting of mudbrick walls, the sculptured slabs for which had been either destroyed or carried away. Indeed, one Assurnasirpal relief that shows a bull hunt and several that show military subjects were found reused in Esarhaddon's palace, and these must have originated in the west suite.³⁶ By contrast, only two examples of single-register reliefs are known from the west suite: a slab showing a winged deity from the south wall of room WJ, and the lower part of a deity on a slab that originally stood by a doorway in room WK.³⁷ In addition, Paley and Sobolewski restored a winged deity on the west jamb of door b in room WG.³⁸ Rassam also reported a (two-register?) slab with small figures of bird-headed and anthropomorphic deities, perhaps in or near the niche in the west wall of room WI.³⁹

The picture of the relief decoration of the west suite that emerges from this is certainly not as detailed as one would wish, but the general organization seems fairly clear. Of the three small rooms at the north end of the suite, room A was lined with unsculptured slabs carved with the Standard Inscription, room WJ was decorated with winged deities in one register, and room WI may have been decorated with hunts in two registers. Of the three large rooms, room WG, the reception room that opened from court Y, was decorated with military narrative reliefs and perhaps also hunting scenes, while room WK, the large reception room that opened onto the west terrace, may have displayed hunting scenes, with protective deities at the doors. Of the two center rooms, WM may have contained hunting scenes and there is no record for the decoration of WH. The most interesting conclusion to be drawn from this is that though there may be some doubt concerning the precise original location of the reliefs from this suite, there is no doubt that the great majority of the known reliefs that originated in this suite dis-

played narrative subjects of a type that occurred otherwise only in the throne room.

If this sample is representative of the decoration of the entire suite, then the theme in these rooms was evidently royal power: the king's ability to control Assyria's expanding territory and subdue the enemies of Assyrian order. In the case of human adversaries, these images show the king, in the words of the Standard Inscription, as "the one who by his lordly conflict has brought under one authority ferocious [and] merciless kings from east to west."⁴⁰ The theme of the hunts is arguably similar—by "conquering" wild lions, which kill livestock, and wild bulls, which trample and eat crops, he subdues territory for Assyrian economic development by destroying the enemies of husbandry and agriculture. Tribute from the periphery and the control of agricultural resources both insure Assyrian prosperity.

Since this was the only suite in the palace that overlooked the Tigris, and was therefore well ventilated and scenically sited, these may have been the rooms of choice for court activities that did not require the formal setting of the main throne room, possibly being used as a secondary throne room and for such occasions as state banquets. This suggestion is supported by a comparison with the apparent functions of rooms 8 and 2, the two principal reception rooms in the architecturally similar, scenically located projecting wing of Sargon's palace at Khorsabad. Room 8 was fitted with a throne dais, a strong architectural cue that it served as a secondary throne room. No fixed fittings were reported in room 2, but the imagery on the two-register wall reliefs combined scenes of banqueting in part of the upper register, with military campaigns in the lower and the remainder of the upper. If the reliefs are read as fixed cues, then we may hypothesize that room 2 served in part as a banquet hall, and that military imagery was also considered appropriate decoration for such a setting.

The plans of Assurnasirpal's rooms WK and WG are very similar to the plans of rooms 8 and 2 at Khorsabad, and since the Khorsabad suite ultimately derives from the one at Nimrud, the functions of these rooms in the two palaces may well have been similar. If the west suite at Nimrud should prove to be the "Second House," as suggested above, this would provide further support for the idea that its functions included royal entertaining. The absence of fixed-

³⁴ WFL-12. Paley and Sobolewski 1987, 71, 76.

³⁵ WFL-14. Layard (*supra* n. 2) vol. 2, 77–78; Reade (*supra* n. 31) 211.

³⁶ WFL-15, 18, 20, 21, 22, 27. Paley and Sobolewski 1987, pl. 5.

³⁷ WFL-6, 30. Paley and Sobolewski 1987, 71–72, 74–75.

³⁸ Z-b-2. Paley and Sobolewski 1987, 60, 64.

³⁹ Gadd (*supra* n. 2) 213; Reade (*supra* n. 31) 210.

⁴⁰ Grayson (*supra* n. 16) 276.

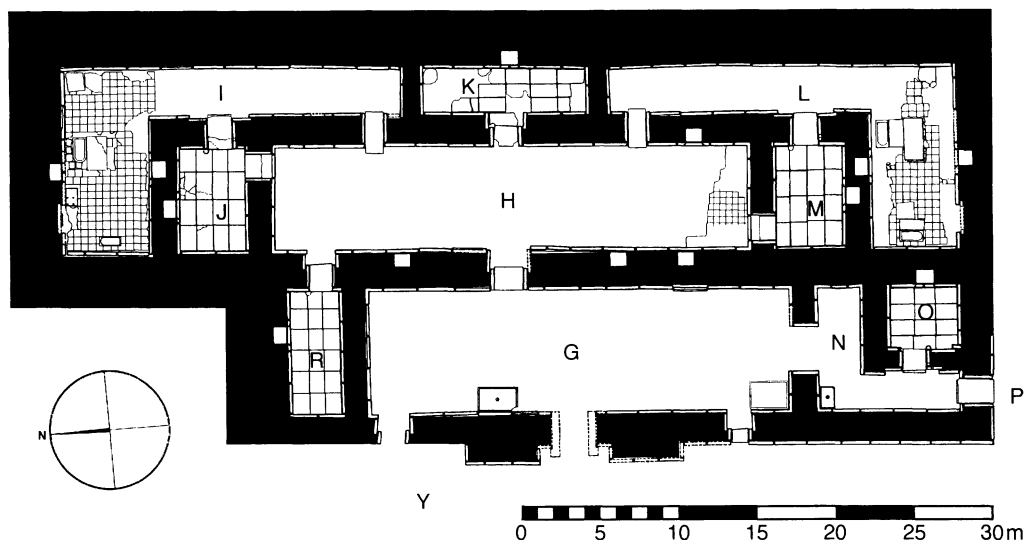


Fig. 11. Kalhu, palace of Assurnasirpal II, plan, detail of the east suite. (After Paley and Sobolewski 1987, plan 2; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

feature elements that can clearly be identified with banqueting is not in itself surprising; a text that describes the protocol for a royal banquet specifies that all of the banquet furnishings were brought into the room at the beginning of the meal, and were removed after it was over, confirming Rapoport's observation on the possibility of multiple uses for a space.⁴¹ Whatever the function of the rooms, the narrative relief images on the walls of the west suite would have served their occupants both as reminders of the effectiveness of the power at the disposal of the king and as statements of the king's tireless activity as protector of Assyria from its enemies. The subjects of these reliefs would also have been much more readily understandable to visitors than the subjects of the east and south suites, which would seem to make this the suite of choice, along with the throne room, for entertaining and impressing visiting foreign dignitaries.

EAST SUITE

The east suite (rooms G–O, R) was apparently a ceremonial complex devoted to liquid offerings, and may even have housed the palace shrines. Mallowan, Paley, and Reade suggested that the decoration of

room G, where some images show the king holding a cup, may depict royal banqueting, and Stronach also identified this subject as wine drinking.⁴² The cup is never shown held to the king's mouth, however, and as I show below, a closer examination of the details of these images makes banqueting an unlikely interpretation. By contrast, also on the basis of the relief decoration, Brandes suggested that room G was a space for ceremonial libation or lustration in which the king's weapons were either consecrated or purified of the blood of slain foes.⁴³ This seems to me to be closer to the meaning of the images, but for a clearer understanding it is necessary to go beyond room G and consider the decoration and architecture of the entire suite.

The plan of this suite is distinctive (figs. 2, 11). Instead of being open to the outside on both sides, as were the throne-room suite and the west suite, only the outer reception room, G, and its southern extension, N, were accessible from the rest of the palace. The interior location of the remaining rooms is emphasized in the plan by the presence of one or more ventilation shafts in the walls of each of them.⁴⁴ Such shafts, which occur only in rooms that lack an outside entrance, served to ventilate otherwise enclosed spaces and may also have admitted a limited

⁴¹ Müller (supra n. 30).

⁴² M.E.L. Mallowan, *Nimrud and Its Remains* 1 (London 1966) 102; Paley (supra n. 3) 21; J.E. Reade, "The Architectural Context of Assyrian Sculpture," *BaM* 11 (1980) 85; D. Stronach, "The Imagery of the Wine Bowl: Wine in Assyria in the Early First Millennium B.C.," in P.E. McGovern,

S.J. Fleming, and S.H. Katz eds., *The Origins and Ancient History of Wine* (Luxembourg 1995) 175–79.

⁴³ Brandes (supra n. 7).

⁴⁴ For the identification of these as ventilation shafts, see S.M. Paley, "Reconstruction of an Assyrian Palace," *Bulletin of the Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 10 (Oct. 1985) 19–20.

amount of natural light, which could have been directed into the room with the aid of a mirror.⁴⁵

The basic plan of the outer part of the east suite is comparable to those of the throne-room and south suites, comprising two large parallel rooms. The outer room (G) is comparable in plan and location to rooms B, WG, WK, and S, large rooms that open onto a courtyard or terrace, of a type that Turner refers to as "reception rooms." The second room (H) is comparable in location to rooms F, X, and WH, large inner rooms that Turner calls "retiring rooms," though in the case of room F there is access also to the outside. The west, south, and throne-room suites are each planned around one or more reception rooms, a retiring room, and perhaps a few small side rooms, and none of the large rooms are far removed from an outside door. The east suite, by contrast, adds a third row of rooms (I–M) deep inside the palace, far from the air and light of the courtyard. Two of these rooms, I and L, are relatively large and, like G, H, and N, are decorated with wall reliefs. What could be the purpose of these deeply recessed rooms?

The archaeological remains from room I were plentiful but unhelpful. This was one of the few rooms for which Layard reported the contents: considerable quantities of pieces of armor in iron and copper, including several helmets, a number of stone vases, some of which were inscribed, and an inscribed vase of glass.⁴⁶ Unfortunately for our purposes, all of the inscribed vases bore the name of Sargon II, who restored the palace and used parts of it as store-rooms. The excavated contents of room I, therefore, relate to its evident function as a storeroom in the late eighth century, and probably provide no indication of its use at the time of its construction in the early ninth century.

The architecture itself may be more helpful. One suggestive indicator is the floors in this suite—seven of the nine rooms here are paved either with stone slabs (J, K, M, O, R) or baked bricks and stone slabs (I, L), a much larger concentration of paved rooms than in any other suite in the palace. Since pavement is apparently reserved for rooms that are exposed to flowing liquids, and as there was no evidence that these rooms were open to the sky, the implication here is that there was intensive use of liquids in this suite.⁴⁷ In addition, four of the five back rooms (I, J, L, M) are furnished with a niche in the wall. In room L and probably I, there was a drain in the floor in front of this niche, while in J and M there was not.⁴⁸ I and L also each had a large stone slab carved with a shallow U-shaped basin on the floor against both their north and west walls.

The plans of rooms I and L are unusual—"L"-shaped, with a narrow unpaved corridor giving access to a separate stone-paved room with a niche (J and M) and then opening into a broader stone- and brick-paved space equipped with a niche and drain. To my knowledge, there is no parallel for the plan of these rooms or for such a concentration of paved rooms in any other Assyrian palace. In the throne-room suites of later Assyrian palaces, however, a doorway next to the throne base opens into a paved room with niche and drain, for example, room 25 in Palace F at Khorsabad. This innovation may be a simplification of the arrangement in the Northwest Palace, where an entire suite of paved rooms is located adjacent to the throne base, directly accessible from the throne room via doors b and a in room F (fig. 12). The direct internal access between the east end of the throne room and the east suite, which is isolated from the other suites, suggests that the activ-

⁴⁵ For mirrors, including large mirrors, in ancient Mesopotamia, see CAD, N/1 (1980) 219–20. Any evidence for the use of reflective surfaces as a means of directing sunlight into interior rooms has disappeared, as any object with a large polished surface would have been carried off or corroded away. The principle is simple and easily put into practice, however. Our perception of windowless Assyrian reception rooms as dimly lighted may be incorrect if a few strategically placed servants with large mirrors, or even polished shields, could have directed bright sunlight into their remotest corners. With mirrors, the supposedly dimly lighted palace reliefs could have been illuminated for visitors in the same manner as Egyptian tomb reliefs are today, and the gilded and brightly painted architectural fittings in the upper part of the rooms could have been made to shine, as Sennacherib says, "as bright as the daylight" (CAD, N/1 [1980] 218).

⁴⁶ Layard (supra n. 2) 341–43.

⁴⁷ It is possible that all of the rooms were originally paved, and that the pavements in the large reception rooms were completely robbed away, while those in the inner rooms were untouched. In that case, however, we would expect the pavement bricks from the central court Y to have been robbed as well, but most of them are still in place, suggesting that the pavements in the palace are preserved much as they were in antiquity.

⁴⁸ Room L: Layard (supra n. 2) vol. 2, 5–6. Layard did not report a drain in the niche in room I, but that does not mean one was not there. The deep niches in the south wall of room J and the north wall of room M appear to be doorways into room H that were blocked off when slabs 10 and 27 were erected in room H. I do not know if this represents the original plan or an alteration at the time the wall slabs were erected, but the relief sculpture on slabs 10 and 27 is evidently contemporary with that on the neighboring slabs.

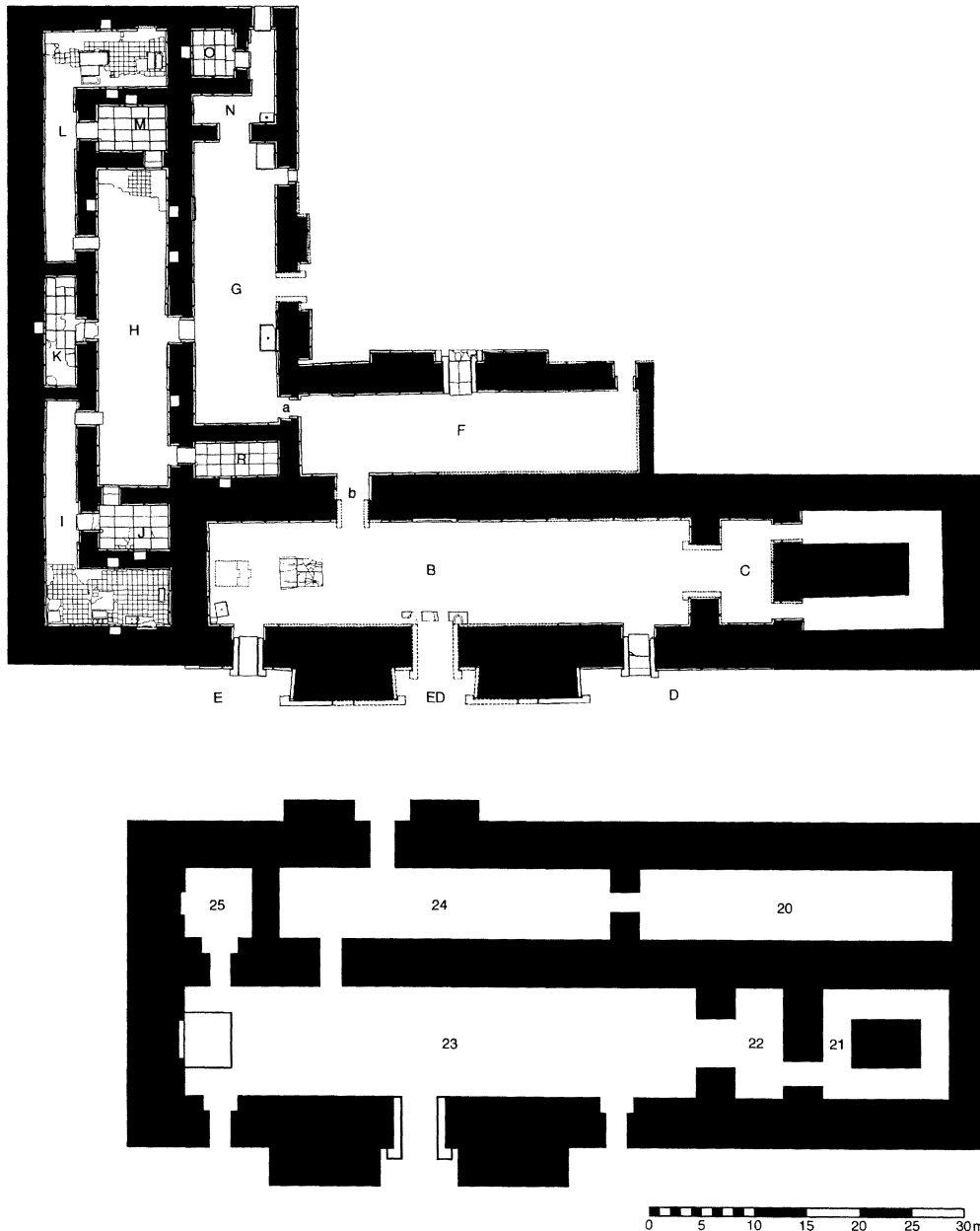


Fig. 12. Comparison of the layout of the throne room and east suite of Assurnasirpal's palace with that of the throne room and ablution room (25) of Sargon's arsenal. (After Paley and Sobolewski 1987, plan 2, and G. Loud and C.B. Altman, *Khorsabad*, Pt. II [Chicago 1938] pl. 75)

ities in the east suite may have been closely connected to those carried out in the throne room.

One final fixed feature may provide a clue to the importance of this suite. The wall reliefs in room I differ in two respects from those elsewhere in the palace. First, room I is the only room known to have been decorated entirely with reliefs of apotropaic figures in two registers. Everywhere else, such figures occupy a single register the full height of the slab.

Second, room I is the only sculptured room in the palace in which the wall reliefs are inscribed with a variety of texts. In the remainder of the palace, wall slabs in unsculptured rooms carry a text called "Standard Inscription Type A," in combination with a shorter text originally composed for burial in the palace walls. Wall slabs in sculptured rooms all carry a later text called "Standard Inscription Type B." In room I, however, all three of these texts were used

interchangeably.⁴⁹ The implication here is that this was the first sculptured room to be completed, before the standard text and relief format for the other sculptured rooms had been finalized. If this is true, then this suggests that, as it is the closest room with a niche and drain to the throne room, the function of room I was so important that it had to be finished first.

To summarize the fixed architectural features, the east suite displays a unique arrangement and concentration of paved rooms, one or two of which were equipped with drains. It is adjacent to and connected with the end of the throne room with the throne, and one of its rooms seems to have been the first decorated room in the palace to be finished. All of this suggests that this suite served a critical and specialized function that involved liquids. These architectural cues are reinforced by the arrangement and subjects of the relief decoration in the east suite.⁵⁰

Doorway Figures

Before describing the doorways of the east suite, it will be helpful to have some idea of the repertoire of supernatural figure types that are used.⁵¹ Apart from the bull and lion colossi in major doorways, there are three general types of apotropaic figures in Assurnasirpal's palace: a winged anthropomorphic figure wearing the horned crown of divinity, a winged anthropomorphic figure wearing a headband decorated with rosettes, and a winged human figure with the head of a bird. Occasionally the wings are omitted from anthropomorphic figures carved in narrow spaces, but as the attributes of these wingless figures are identical to those of their winged counterparts, this omission is probably solely a function of available space, and is not meant to designate a different type of figure. Occasionally the figure with

the horned crown is depicted with four wings, instead of the usual two. I suggest below that this extra pair of wings may designate an especially powerful figure. Bird-headed figures are never shown wingless or with four wings.

In order to identify these apotropaic figure types, we must turn to texts that describe the uses of such figures to protect houses and their occupants. Wiggermann has collected and edited a series of texts that prescribe the rituals for the production and placement of protective figurines "to block the entry of the enemy in someone's house." Though the dated examples were written in 750 B.C. and later, well after the construction of Assurnasirpal's palace, they describe figure types that apparently occur in the palace reliefs, and it seems reasonable to suppose that such figures served the same function a century earlier. Although the best-preserved texts deal with protective statuettes that were buried under the floors, there are references in other texts to similar figures "drawn in the corners" or "drawn in the gate," which indicates that the figure could exercise its apotropaic function whether it was executed in two dimensions or three.⁵²

Unfortunately, the various anthropomorphic figures, both with and without the horned crown of divinity, in the palace reliefs cannot be identified specifically with the numerous anthropomorphic figures listed in the figurine texts. The texts do, however, list an *apkallu* ("sage"), described as a "guardian" with the face and wings of a bird, holding in its right hand a *mullilu*, or "purifier," and in its left a *banduddû*, or "bucket." This must be the bird-headed guardian figure in the doorways of Assurnasirpal's palace, which always holds a bucket in his left hand and a pinecone-shaped object, evidently the purifier, in his right. Wiggermann has plausibly identified the ac-

⁴⁹ Paley (supra n. 3) 145–47 was the first to note that Types A and B both occur in room I, and to suggest that room I was the first of the decorated rooms to be completed. I was able to refine this chronology based on study of Layard's hand copies of the Standard Inscription from most of the slabs in this room (Russell, supra n. 6).

⁵⁰ In addition, two types of fixed-feature cues associated with doorways are preserved archaeologically in Assurnasirpal's palace: the wear patterns on the threshold slabs, and the number of door leaves and the direction they open in each door. I did not consider these here, as it was not clear to me how they might be relevant, but others may be able to do so. The wear patterns we see today are the result of the usage of the building over its entire history, and it is not possible to distinguish those created when it was a palace from those created when it was a storehouse. Doors may be fastened from either side, so the direction they open does not necessarily allow us to distinguish which

side was less or more secure.

⁵¹ My analysis of the apotropaic figures in the doorways was inspired by the excellent work of Mary M. Fulghum, a graduate student in the Department of Fine Arts at Harvard University, whom I acknowledge with gratitude and thanks ("The Double Duty of Doorway Figures in the Northwest Palace of Assurnasirpal at Nimrud," unpublished seminar paper, Neo-Assyrian Seminar, Harvard University, spring 1996). Although we focus largely on different aspects of these figures, several of her observations are cited here.

⁵² Drawn figures: Wiggermann (supra n. 30) 90, 110, 121. One apotropaic wall relief figure in a door of Assurbanipal's palace, a lion-centaur, was even inscribed with the same magical incantation prescribed for statuettes of the same figure, further proof that it was an active presence and not mere decoration (Barnett [supra n. 18] 40, pl. XX).

tion depicted here as sprinkling—the purifier is dipped in the bucket, which contains holy water, and then held aloft and flipped forward with a sharp snap of the arm and wrist, throwing a shower of droplets outward onto whatever is to be purified.⁵³

In Assurnasirpal's palace, the bird-headed figure always holds the bucket and purifier. The anthropomorphic figure with horned crown may be represented in a variety of ways: holding the bucket and purifier, making a gesture of greeting or blessing (*karābu*) with the upraised right hand and holding a stalk of flowers or a mace in the lowered left hand,⁵⁴ holding a stalk of pomegranates (?) in the upraised right hand and a mace in the lowered left hand, or touching a stylized tree with both hands. He never holds an animal. The anthropomorphic figure with headband is usually shown making the gesture of blessing with his raised right hand while holding a stalk of flowers, a mace, or a bucket in his lowered left. A few examples hold a goat or deer in one hand and a stalk of palmettes or a palm frond (?) in the other. This figure never holds the purifier. Although the attributes he holds all have apotropaic powers, the manner in which this figure deploys those powers is generally passive, allowing the mere presence of the bucket, mace, or flower to block evil from the door, rather than actively projecting its power forward, as do the figures with sprinklers.

Turning now to the doorway reliefs of the east suite, the principal entrance to the suite from courtyard Y was through door b, which was lined with a pair of colossal human-headed winged lions whose function was evidently both to guard the door and to draw attention to it (pl. I and fig. 13). The other exterior entrance to room G, door c, displayed two pairs of apotropaic figures—a pair of wingless deities holding purifiers and buckets facing out into the courtyard, and a pair of wingless figures with headbands facing into the room, holding maces in their left hands and making a gesture of blessing with their right. This door was further guarded by a pair of bird-headed winged human figures carrying the purifier and bucket on the wall slabs (21 and 22) inside the room adjacent to the door. It appears that such figures were originally planned for the two wall slabs (26 and 27) flanking the center door as well, but only one was carved, perhaps due to lack of space.

From the architectural placement of these various figure types, it seems clear that the figures with the purifier and bucket were purely apotropaic, as they were positioned in doorways oriented so that they provided active protection from threats outside the room, purifying whatever passed through. The figures that make the gesture of blessing, by contrast, seem not to have been primarily apotropaic, but rather served to greet or bless the legitimate occupants of the room, primarily the king, as they passed through these doorways to other parts of the palace. Nevertheless, this figure has apotropaic potential as well, as the mace held in his left hand is one of the tools used by the exorcist to drive away evil.⁵⁵

The other exterior entrance to the east suite was from passage P into room N (figs. 2, 14–15). The outside wall adjacent to this door was carved with a pair of deities holding the purifier and bucket, protecting room N from outside intruders. The example east of the door is winged, and that to the west wingless, evidently due to lack of space on the narrow slab. There is a second figure at the east side, a winged deity facing away from the door, holding a mace and making the gesture of blessing. The doorjambs here were also carved with a pair of winged deities making the gesture of blessing and holding the mace, oriented to greet the king as he passed out of room N into passage P.

The three other entrances to room G were from other rooms. Door a from room F in the throne-room suite was protected only by a pair of wingless human figures with headbands, holding a stalk of flowers and making the gesture of blessing, carved on the slabs of the outer jamb facing outward into room F. There was room for a second pair of figures on the inner jamb slabs, but these were left uncarved except for the Standard Inscription. The absence of figures with purifiers in this door suggests that those entering from room F did not require purification. Rather, this door's architectural proximity to the throne-room suite and its relief subject are redundant cues that these figures greeted the king, who would presumably have used this door in passing between these two suites. The identity and function of the plant in this figure's left hand are uncertain.⁵⁶ The only textual mention of a flower held by apotropaic figures is later, in a text of Sennacherib,

⁵³ Anthropomorphic: Wiggermann (supra n. 30) 73–79. Bird-headed: Wiggermann, I, 15, 48, 67, 75; *CAD*, M/2 (1977) 189, s.v. mullilu; *CAD*, B (1965) 79–80. I am grateful to Jeremy Rutter for demonstrating the vigorous action that is implied by the position of the purifier in these images (personal communication, 13 Nov. 1997).

⁵⁴ Wiggermann (supra n. 30) 61; *CAD*, K (1971) 197, sub. 4a.

⁵⁵ Wiggermann (supra n. 30) 60, 68, 78–85.

⁵⁶ E.A.W. Budge, *Assyrian Sculptures in the British Museum: Reign of Ashur-nasir-pal, 885–860 B.C.* (London 1914) pl. 39.1.

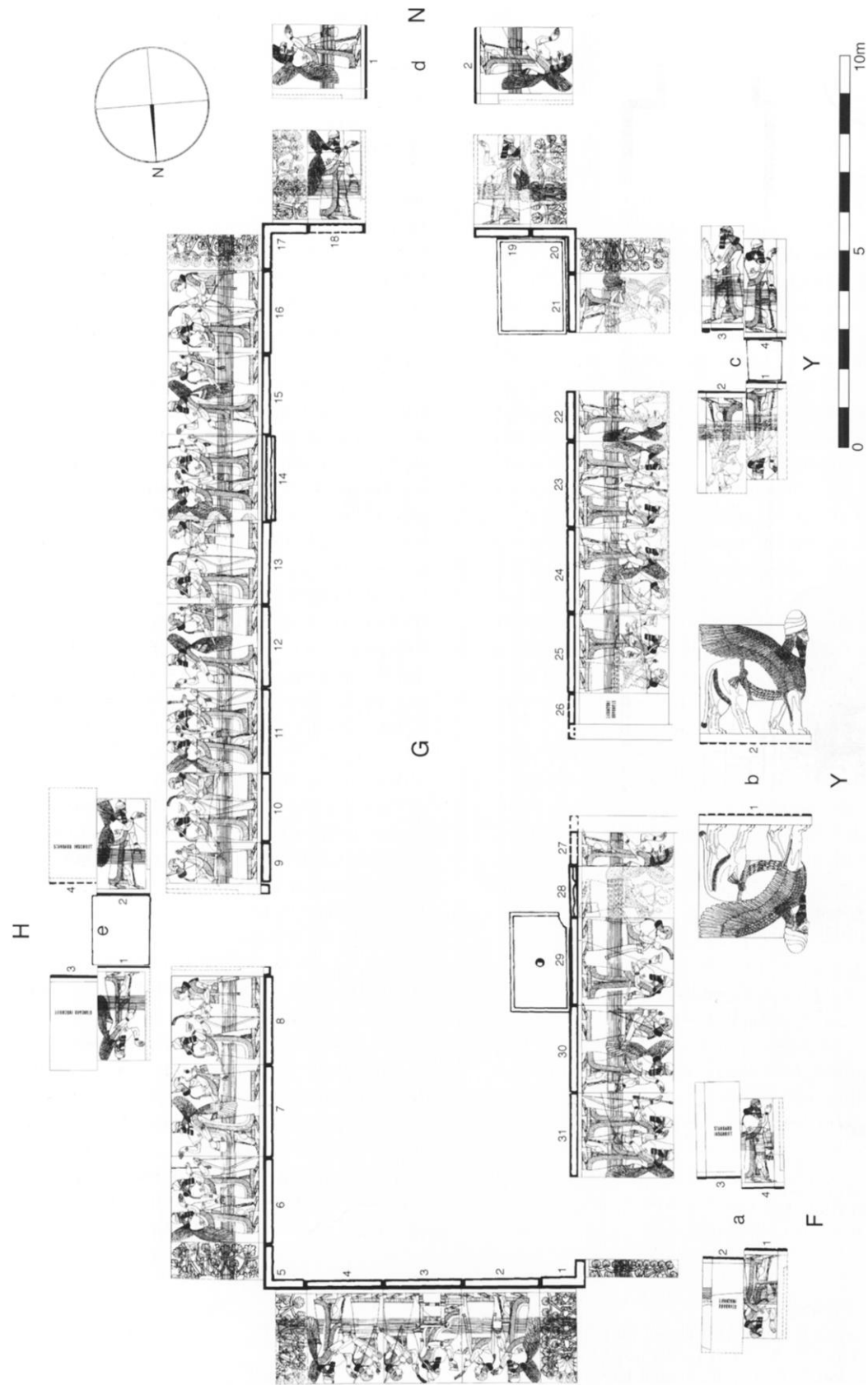


Fig. 13. Room G, layout of the decoration, assembled by the author. (After Meuszynski, pls. 8-10; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

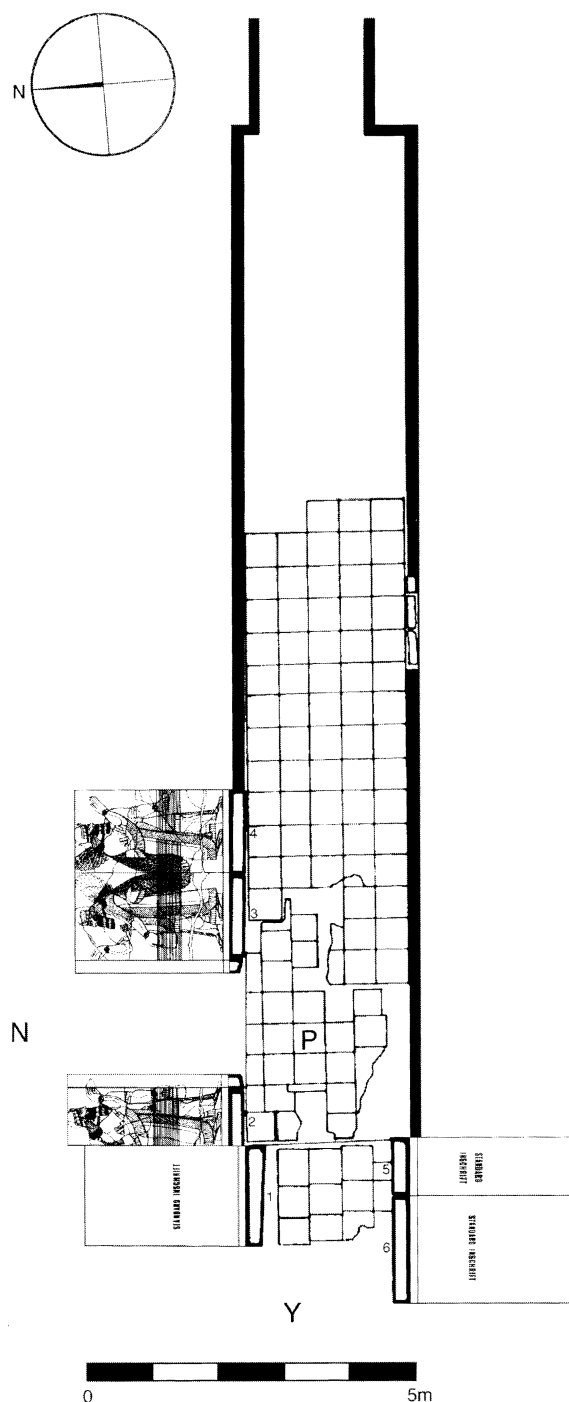


Fig. 14. Room P, layout of the decoration, assembled by the author. (After Meuszynski, pl. 17; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

⁵⁷ CAD, I–J (1960) 88.

⁵⁸ I am grateful to Leigh-Ann Bedal, a graduate student in anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, for drawing my attention to these four-winged figures.

which describes palace doorway guardian figures that hold the *illuru* flower.⁵⁷ Whatever the identity of the flower held by Assurnasirpal's figures, its function was most likely to have been apotropaic, as seems to have been the case with all of the other attributes held by these figures.

Door d from room N was well protected, with a pair of bird-headed winged figures with purifier and bucket on the jamb, and a pair of winged deities with purifier and bucket on the wall adjacent to the door both in room N and G. The last door, e, connects room G with room H in the interior of the suite (fig. 16). The jambs on the room G side of this door were carved with a pair of winged deities with purifier and bucket facing toward room G. The jambs nearest room H, by contrast, were plain except for the Standard Inscription, though again they could easily have accommodated a second pair of figures.

There were three more sculptured doorways in the east suite, all on the east wall of room H, which gave access to the innermost group of rooms (I, K, L; figs. 17–18). The jambs in each of these doors (b, c, d) were carved with a winged deity with purifier and bucket, but all of these figures have four wings, unlike all but one of the other winged figures in the suite, which have only two.⁵⁸ Likewise, though dozens of two-winged figures occur throughout the rest of the palace, four-winged figures are found in only a few other locations—on the wall of the niche in room L of the east suite (L-20), on the throne-room facade (E-5, D-1), and beside door c of the throne room next to the throne base (B-26, 26a)—and in each case the location seems to be particularly strategic.

Four-winged figures seem to be fairly common, by contrast, in temples, at least as far as can be determined from the limited evidence. In the Ninurta temple at Nimrud, a pair of slabs that showed a thunderbolt-wielding four-winged deity driving out a demon was found in door 2, and two more pairs of four-winged figures may have been in door 3.⁵⁹ In the Assurnasirpal II building in the center of the Nimrud citadel, evidently also a temple, a four-winged human figure carrying a fawn and plant was found between a colossal bull and lion on the entrance facade, and a pair of four-winged scorpionmen flanked door b, probably the door to the sanctuary, while a four-winged figure between two rampant

⁵⁹ A.H. Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon* (London 1853) 348, plan 2; Meuszynski 1972 (supra n. 3) 51–52.

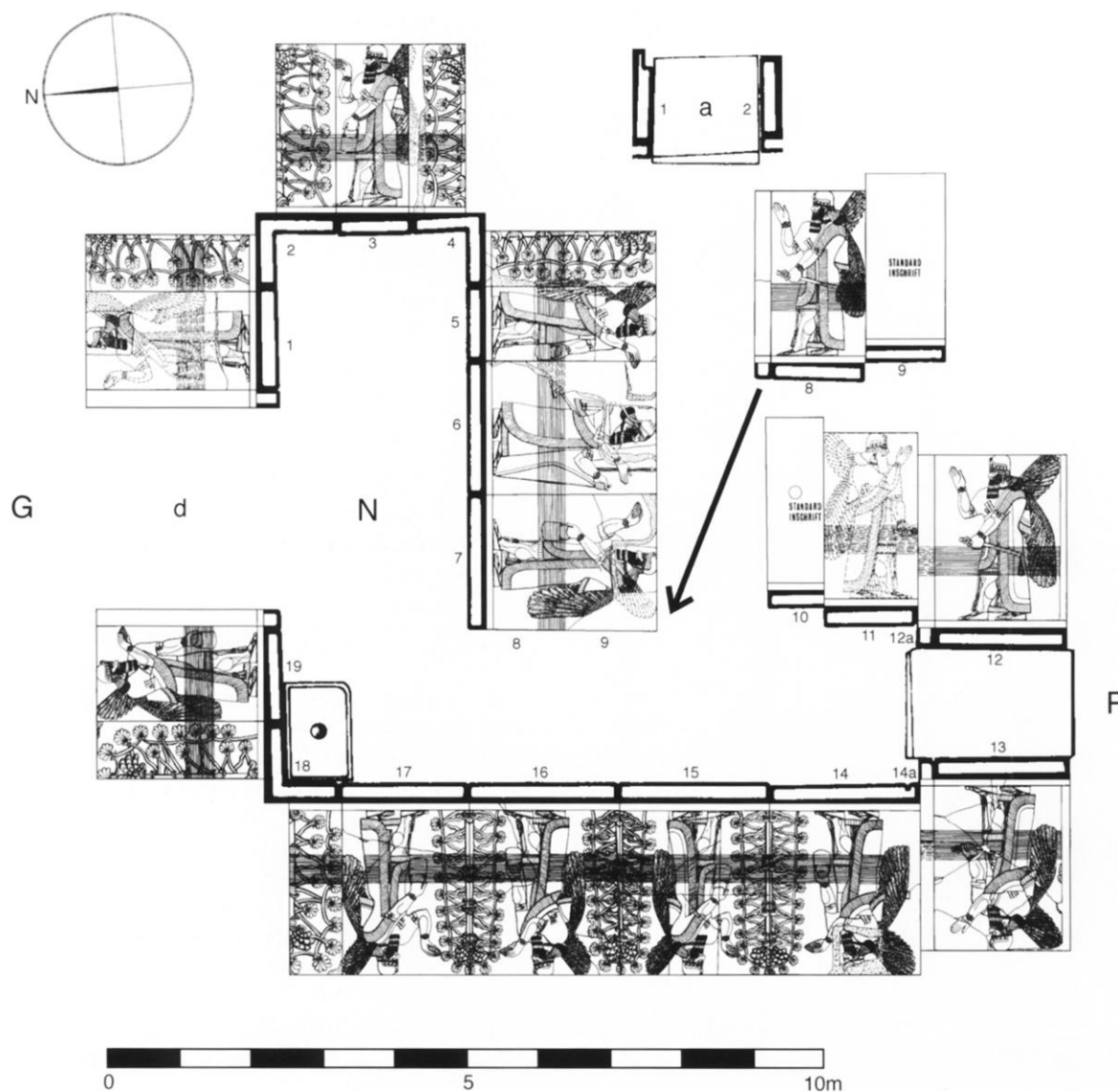


Fig. 15. Room N, layout of the decoration, assembled by the author. (After Meuszynski, pls. 16–17; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

lions was on its jamb.⁶⁰ It appears, therefore, that four-winged figures may have been considered particularly powerful and were favored for cult areas.

To summarize the evidence of the doors, the outer doors to the east suite were protected by a combination of wingless and two-winged figures, the doors between room G and rooms H and N were guarded only by two-winged figures, and the doors between room H and the back rooms were guarded only by four-winged figures. The pattern here seems to be an increase in the number of wings the further into

the suite one moves. A figure with purifier and bucket stands in every door, except the one from room F. When they are on a jamb, these figures always face outward, while figures with a mace face inward. This distribution of figures gives the strong impression that every door except the one communicating with the throne-room suite was felt to need whatever sort of protection the purifier afforded. Furthermore, the frequency with which four-winged figures occur in Assurnasirpal's temples, in contrast to their scarcity in his palace, may be cues that the inner rooms

⁶⁰ R.D. Barnett and M. Falkner, *The Sculptures of Assurnasir-apli II (883–859 B.C.), Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 B.C.), Esarhaddon (681–669 B.C.) from the Central and South-west*

Palaces at Nimrud (London 1962) pls. 126–27; J. Meuszynski, "Neo-Assyrian Reliefs from the Central Area of Nimrud Citadel," *Iraq* 38 (1976) 37–43.

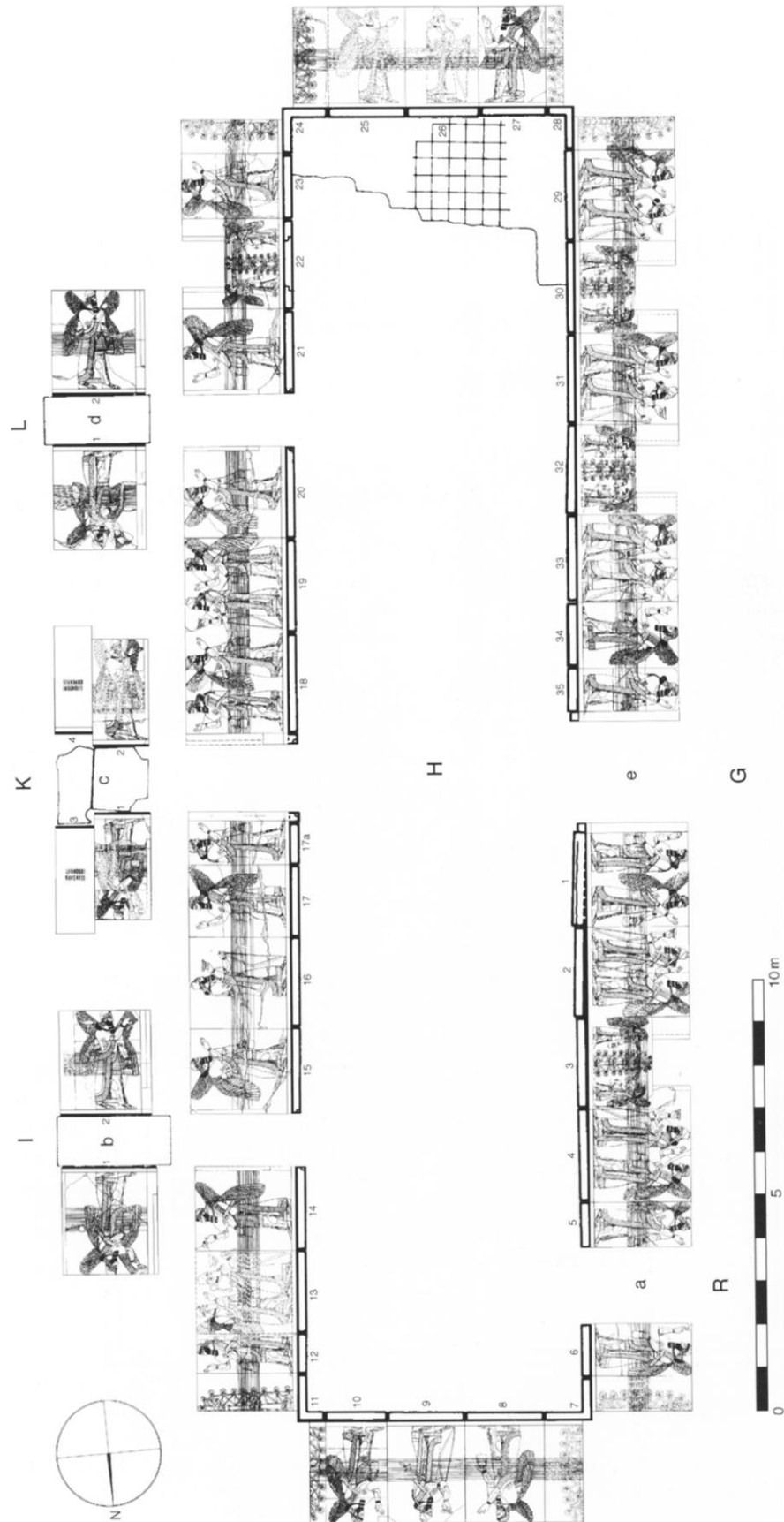


Fig. 16. Room H, layout of the decoration, assembled by the author. (After Meuszynski, pls. 11–13; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

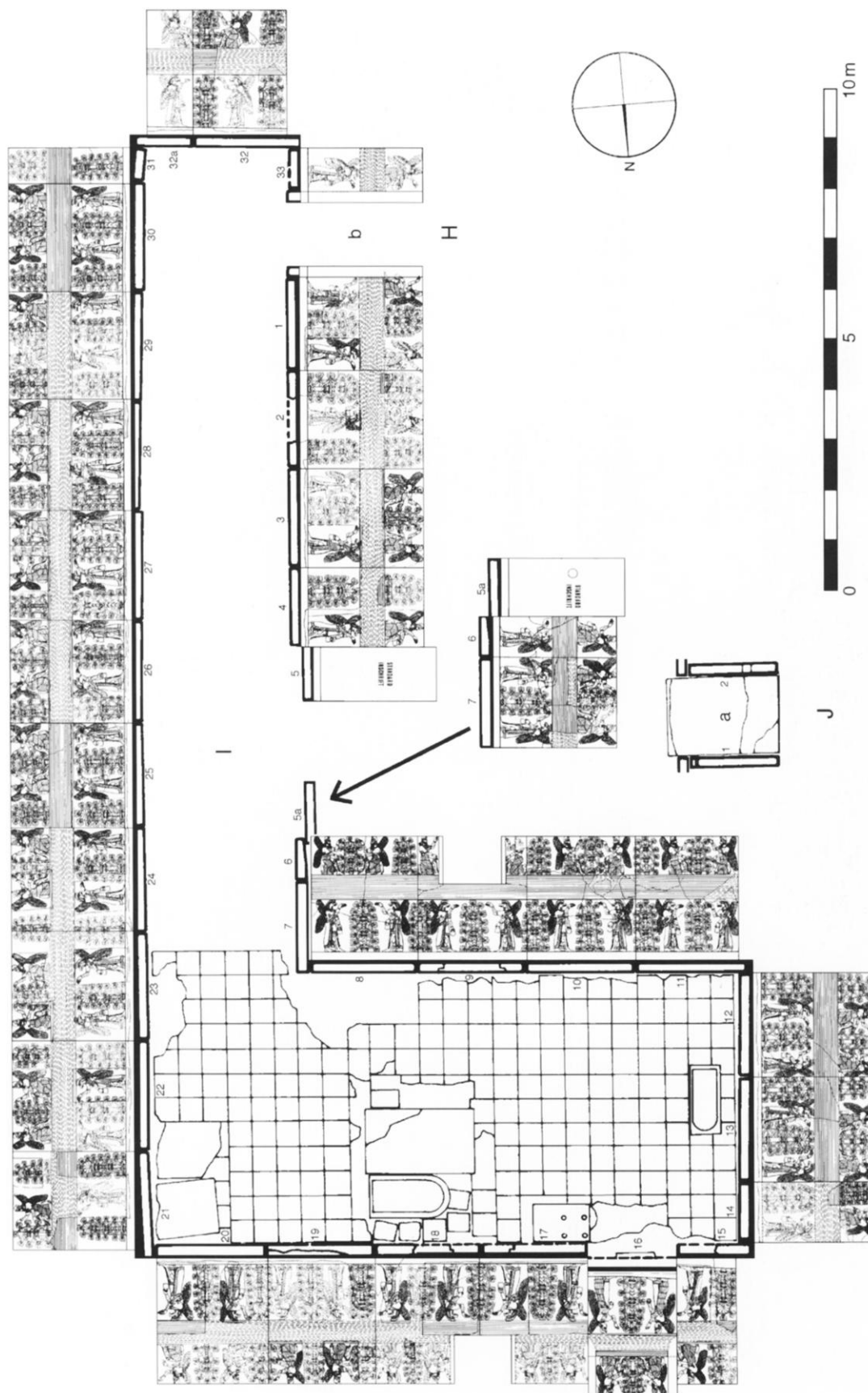


Fig. 17. Room I, layout of the decoration, assembled by the author. (After Paley and Sobolewski 1987, pls. 1-2; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

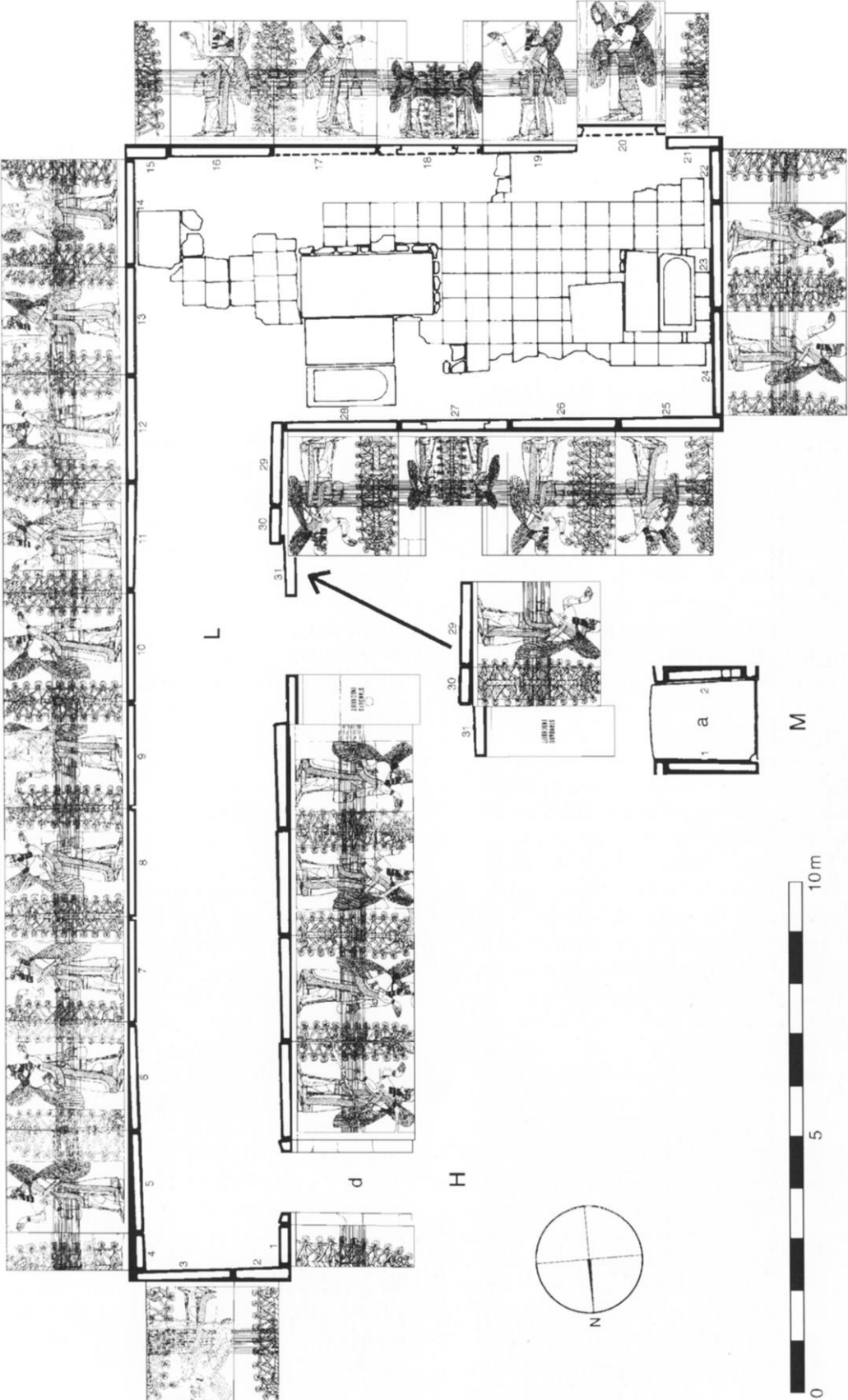


Fig. 18. Room L, layout of the decoration, assembled by the author. (After Meuszynski, pls. 14–16; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

in the east suite had a cultic function, and this impression is reinforced by the occurrence of an unusual beardless four-winged figure in the niche in room L.

King Holding a Bowl

The decoration on the interior walls of the rooms in the east suite is more varied than one might suppose from a glance. The first images one would see upon entering room G through its central door are the pair of subjects on the east wall directly opposite, on slabs 9–12 (fig. 13). At left, on slabs 9–10, is the standing king facing right, holding a bowl in his upraised right hand and a bow in his left. Before him is a courtier with flywhisk and towel, while a courtier with mace, sword, bow, and quiver stands behind. At right, on slabs 11–12, is the king facing right, holding a pair of arrows in his upraised right hand and again a bow in his left. He is flanked by a pair of winged deities who hold the purifier and bucket. The same pair of subjects is repeated, with minor variations, along the entire length of the east wall. The group of the king with bowl occurs three more times here, and in all three cases the courtier who faces him carries a ladle in addition to the towel and flywhisk. On the southern part of this wall, from slabs 12–16, the subjects alternate, so that there are two more images of the king with bowl and one more of the king with arrows. At the northern end of the east wall, on slabs 6–8, the same pair of subjects is shown, but their order is reversed. This distribution of these two subjects has three results, any or none of which may have been deliberate. First, images of the king with bowl flank door e, which leads to the interior of the suite. Second, the other two “outer” doors to room G, doors a and c, each afford a different initial view, the king with arrows opposite a and the king with bowl opposite c. And third, the east wall gives a slight emphasis to the king with bowl, which occurs four times, over the king with arrows, which occurs only three. I will return to these points shortly.

The other long wall of room G, the west wall, is decorated with nearly the same subjects, but with at least one significant difference. This may be seen on slabs 29–30, which are directly opposite door e, and therefore the scene visible to someone entering from room H. Here we see the standing king, now facing left, again with a bowl in his right hand, but now with his left hand resting on the hilt of his sword (he does not wear a sword on the east wall). He is flanked by the same two courtiers, but the one in

front lacks the ladle. It is probably no accident that on the floor directly in front of this image of the king is a large rectangular stone ablution or libation slab. The viewer from door e, therefore, sees an image of the king holding up a bowl directly above a furnishing designed to receive liquids. A similar slab, but apparently without the central depression, is in the southwest corner of room G, and another is in the northwest corner of room N.

The same group of the king with bowl and sword is repeated on the wall to the south of door b, so that this door too is flanked by a pair of images of the king with bowl. The remainder of the west wall is occupied by two images of the king with bow and arrows flanked by winged deities, similar to the examples on the east wall, but with the king facing left. Both long walls, therefore, feature alternating groups of the king with bowl and a weapon, and the king with bow and arrows. The arrangement of these groups emphasizes the king with bowl, which is placed directly opposite three of the four doors in the long walls (the exception being the door from the throne-room suite, possibly the king's personal entrance), flanking both sides of the two main doors in the long walls (b and e), and directly above the ablution/libation slab opposite door e. This image, therefore, is the first thing one sees upon entering and the last thing one sees on exiting through these main doors.

A similar situation exists with the view from door d, which connects rooms N and G. Again the reliefs opposite the door, slabs 2–4 at the far end of the room on the north wall, show the king with a bowl, but in this case a single unique composition occupies the entire wall. Here the king sits on a decorated chair and footstool, weaponless, a bowl in his raised right hand, the courtier with towel, ladle, and flywhisk in front, two courtiers behind—one with a flywhisk and the other with a mace—both with bow, quiver, and sword, all bracketed by a pair of winged deities with purifier and bucket, one at either end. This dominant image confirms the emphasis in this room on the king with bowl. The equivalent wall in the throne room is where the throne base is located. In room G, therefore, this image of the enthroned king marks his place in this room, and when the king was present, the image would have reinforced the impact of his enthroned person. This also explains why all of the images of the king on the east and west walls face south, the same direction as the enthroned king himself.

At this point, we should consider the question of

what the king is doing in these images in which he holds a bowl.⁶¹ Certainly it is possible to suggest that the king is about to drink from the bowl, but the prominence of weapons in these scenes would seem to argue against this being a banquet scene, as does their alternation with scenes of the armed king with deities. Less decisive, but still noteworthy, the bowl is never held near the lips of the king and no other banqueters are shown. In fact, there is considerable textual and visual evidence that the king is shown here pouring a wine libation, a suggestion made tentatively by Brandes, but dropped in favor of purification through lustration.⁶² I have already noted the juxtaposition of one such scene with an actual ablution/libation slab in room G. In a text that describes the building of Nimrud, Assurnasirpal states: "I pressed wine and gave the best to Assur my lord, and the temples of my land."⁶³ This statement finds support in the Nimrud Wine Lists, a series of wine ration texts found in Fort Shalmaneser, the Nimrud arsenal. Though the earliest of these lists dates to 784, nearly a century after the beginning of Assurnasirpal's reign, the types of rations remain consistent for the 50-year span covered by the dated lists, and it seems likely that the same types of rations would apply in Assurnasirpal's reign as well. The first entry on all the lists is a substantial wine ration for *ginû*, "the regular offering" for the gods and for ceremonial purposes.⁶⁴ The lists include additional rations for ceremonial purposes as well: *šurāri*, "libation offering," for specific deities, *ša qaqqiri*, "for libations" (lit. "for the ground"), and *ina nubatti*, "for the evening ceremonies"; perhaps the rations *ša širti*, "for the morning ceremonies" (?), and *ša kāsāte* (GIŠ.GÚ.ZI.MEŠ), "for cups," are for ceremonial purposes too.⁶⁵

⁶¹ The images are unlikely to show oil divination, as there is no evidence for this practice in the Neo-Assyrian period (*CAD*, Sh/I [1989] 326–27).

⁶² Brandes (*supra* n. 7) 153–54.

⁶³ Nimrud Monolith, Grayson (*supra* n. 16) 252, lines v.9–10.

⁶⁴ J.V.K. Wilson, *The Nimrud Wine Lists (Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud 1*, London 1972) 112–13; *CAD*, G (1956) 80–81.

⁶⁵ Wilson (*supra* n. 64) 113–14; Dalley and Postgate (*supra* n. 30) 247; *CAD*, Q (1982) 115; *CAD*, N/2 (1980) 308; *CAD*, Š/2 (1992) 322. The *kāsu* entries generally stand on their own, but Postgate's collation of one of them may give a clue to their meaning (in S. Parpola, review of Wilson [*supra* n. 64] in *JSS* 21 [1976] 167, no. 8:4–5):

5! *qa a- [na] GÚ!.[ZI].MEŠ! ina! šil-ir!-ti*
3 *qa a- [na] G[Ú]!.Z[I]!.MEŠ! ina! nu!-bat!-ti!*

Unmistakable visual evidence for the king pouring wine libations is found on the so-called White Obelisk, probably dating either to the reign of Assurnasirpal I (1049–1031 B.C.) or to the second year of Assurnasirpal II, which includes an image of the king standing before a cauldron, incense stand, and offering table in front of a temple. His pose is identical to that of the king with bowl in room G, with the bowl in his raised right hand, except that there is no bow in his left hand and the bowl is tipped slightly outward. The image is accompanied by an epigraph: "The Bit-nathi of the city Nineveh: I perform the wine libations (and) sacrifices of the temple of the exalted goddess."⁶⁶

In the throne room, two relief images of the king with bowl leave little doubt that he is shown in the act of pouring libations (B-19, 20). Both images show the aftermath of a hunt, with the slain bull and lion at the king's feet. He stands in exactly the pose of the room G reliefs, with the upright bow in his left hand and the upraised bowl in his right. While he is neither shown drinking nor pouring, a comparable image found fallen into room S of the palace of the seventh-century king Assurbanipal at Nineveh actually shows the libation being poured over the dead lions. To erase any doubt, the Assurbanipal relief includes a caption: "I, Assurbanipal, king of the world, king of Assyria, whom Assur and Mullissu have granted exalted strength. The lions that I killed: I held the fierce bow of Ishtar, lady of battle, over them, I set up an offering over them, [and] I made a libation over them."⁶⁷ Admittedly Assurbanipal is a later king, but the identical subjects and the very similar mode of depiction strongly suggest that both kings are performing the same action in these hunting scenes. Because the pose of the king in the hunt

This is probably to be translated: "5 qû for cups for the morning ceremonies; 3 qû for cups for the evening ceremonies." If I have understood this correctly, then the *kāsu* rations were evidently for ceremonial offerings (but see Wilson no. 11:r.14' and 22', where there are separate *kāsu* and *nubattu* entries, according to Parpola, 168, no. 11).

⁶⁶ Text: Grayson (*supra* n. 16) 256. Photograph: H. Pittman, "The White Obelisk and the Problem of Historical Narrative in the Art of Assyria," *ArtB* 78 (1996) 337.

⁶⁷ Text: Russell (*supra* n. 6). Photograph: Barnett (*supra* n. 18) pl. 59. This image and others depicting wine libation are discussed in C. Watanabe, "A Problem in the Libation Scene of Ashurbanipal," in T. Mikasa ed., *Cult and Ritual in the Ancient Near East (Bulletin of the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan 6*, Wiesbaden 1992) 91–104.

scenes is identical to that in every other image that shows him holding a bowl, it seems plausible to argue that the same action — pouring libations — is depicted in all of these images.⁶⁸

Images that may with some confidence be identified as drinking, by contrast, are scarcer. Examples include the White Obelisk, directly adjacent to the temple libation scene, band N of the bronze doors of Shalmaneser III, a ninth-century ivory panel from Nimrud, the upper registers of the reliefs in rooms 2 and 7 from the palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad, and the garden banquet relief found fallen into room S of Assurbanipal's palace at Nineveh.⁶⁹ In all of these examples the drinkers are seated, and in all but one (Shalmaneser III), the king is accompanied by other drinkers. Based on this comparison, only the relief of the seated king on the north wall of room G could represent the king drinking, and surrounded by so many apparent images of libation, even that seems uncertain.

King Holding Arrows

As Assurnasirpal sat enthroned at the north end of room G, the image facing him at the other end of the room was that on slabs 5–7 in room N, which shows the king with a bow and a pair of arrows (fig. 15). As we have seen, the same image is placed opposite the door into room G from the throne-room suite, shared space with the king and bowl opposite the central door, and was also placed to either side of the king, on slabs 6–7 and 30–31, as he sat enthroned. The placement of these images gives the impression that while the motif of the king with bowl is emphasized for anyone entering or standing anywhere except at the throne end, from the king's perspective the image of the king with bow and arrows is paramount. The king's personal identification with this image is even stressed in the decoration on the tunic of the enthroned king in room G, which includes two images of the king with bow and arrows flanked by a pair of winged deities — the same image that is on the walls.⁷⁰ Similarly, in at least one image of the king with bow and arrows on the long walls, his garment decoration includes this motif (G-11),

and it is likely that it occurred on royal garments throughout the room.⁷¹

Once again, the meaning of this representation is not self-evident, but there is ample comparative material from which to propose suggestions. The motif of the king with a bow and a pair of arrows is popular in Neo-Assyrian art, but does not seem to be attested much earlier. The earliest example I know is on a stele of the Babylonian king Marduk-nadin-ahhe (1099–1082 B.C.), where the king is shown alone with the bow in his upraised left hand and the pair of arrows in his lowered right hand.⁷² The major difference between this figure and the ones of Assurnasirpal II in room G is that the Babylonian king's pose would allow him to fire the bow easily, whereas the reversed bow resting on the ground in the Assurnasirpal images presents no immediate threat.

In Assurnasirpal's own reliefs outside of room G, the king with bow and two arrows occurs in three general contexts. The first is the lion hunt, for which there are two reliefs that show the king hunting lions from his chariot, with bow drawn and arrows at the ready in his right fist (B-19-a, WFL-13). An Assyrian eunuch archer is shown in the same pose in a battle scene (WFL-21), but the king himself is not shown this way in battle — the closest comparable images show the king shooting the bow from his chariot with a single arrow in reserve in his hand (WFL-21), and the king with drawn bow and an attendant holding the two arrows ready for him (B-18-a), a pose that is also used for an Assyrian eunuch archer (WFL-22). In the same relief, an Assyrian eunuch with his bow at rest and a pair of arrows held up in his right hand leads a procession of prisoners out of a defeated city. There are also two instances of enemy archers shown holding the bow and two arrows, but not shooting, in one case because he is mortally wounded, and in the other perhaps due to fear (B-4-b, B-17-a). In most of these cases, the intent seems primarily to show the reality of archers in action, with the first and second rounds in hand ready for quick firing, even if, in the case of the enemy, they will never have the chance to shoot.

The second context in which the king with bow

⁶⁸ Magen also identified the action in these images as pouring libations: U. Magen, *Assyrische Königsdarstellungen — Aspekte der Herrschaft* (Baghdader Forschungen 9, Mainz 1986) 65–69, pls. 12–13.

⁶⁹ J. Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs* 2 (Baghdader Forschungen 4, Mainz 1982) no. 132; E. Unger, "Die Wiederherstellung des Bronzetores von Balawat," *AM* 45 (1920) pl. 1; M.E.L. Mallowan and L.G. Davies, *Ivories in Assyrian Style (Ivories from Nimrud 2)*, London 1970) pl. V.7; P. Albenda, *The Palace of Sargon, King of Assyria: Monumental Wall Reliefs at Dur-Sharrukin, from Original Draw-*

ings Made at the Time of Their Discovery in 1843–1844 by Botta and Flandin (Synthèse 22, Paris 1986) pls. 85–90, 110–23; Barnett (supra n. 18) pl. 65.

⁷⁰ A.H. Layard, *Monuments of Nineveh* (London 1849) pl. 6.

⁷¹ J.V. Canby, "Decorated Garments in Ashurnasirpal's Sculpture," *Iraq* 33 (1971) 31–53, pl. 16b; Magen (supra n. 68) 81–84, pls. 16–17.

⁷² E. Strommenger, *Fünf Jahrtausende Mesopotamien* (Munich 1962) pl. 271.

and two arrows occurs is in reliefs that show the king underway in his chariot. There are three such images. In one, the triumphant king is shown returning to his fortified camp after a battle. His bow is held lowered horizontally in his left hand, with its string down, and a pair of arrows is held up in his right hand (B-5-a). Above him, a deity in a winged disk assumes the same pose, with a bow in the same position but no arrows in the raised right hand. A second relief shows the king traversing mountainous country in his chariot (WFL-19). He holds his bow and arrows in the same position as in the previous relief, except that the bow string is up, so that the weapon is ready for use. In a third relief, the king crosses a river standing in his chariot, which is on a boat (B-9-b). His bow and arrows are held in the same position as in the mountainous image. In reference to the second image, Reade interpreted the position of the bow and arrows as symbolizing victory.⁷³ This could certainly be the case with the first image, but in the other two, the moment depicted seems to be the approach of the king and his army, not the aftermath of battle. It may be preferable therefore to interpret this image in all three cases as a reference to royal might, and specifically the might of the king. The pair of arrows upraised, then, would be both an attribute of kingship and a symbol of power.

The third context for images of the king with bow and two arrows is in booty and tribute processions. Examples occur on both the single- and double-register wall reliefs, and in garment decoration. Two examples of booty processions were found in the throne room (B-7-b, B-18-b). In both cases, the king holds the bow and arrows the same way as he does in his chariot, with the bow gripped in his hand as if ready for action. In one of these he is accompanied by the god in the winged disk, who again mimics his pose, but holds a ring instead of a bow and has no arrows. In a relief from room WG (WFL-24) that shows the king reviewing either booty or tribute (the procession itself is lost), the king's left hand holds the top of the bow, which rests vertically on the ground, the string facing outward, with a pair of arrows in the upraised right hand, in the same pose as in the reliefs in room G. The king is in this same pose in the large-scale tribute procession on the throne-room facade (D-2), and in an apparent trib-

ute procession on the garment decoration of an apotropaic figure on a relief beside the outer door to room N (P-2).⁷⁴ As in room G, the bow in these representations is not readily usable, which gives the sense that its role here is mainly symbolic. Once again, in the case of the booty reviews the bow and arrows could symbolize victory, but for the tribute processions the more general interpretation of royal might seems preferable.

In the art of Assurnasirpal's successors, the recurrence of the motif of the king with his bow resting on the ground and a pair of arrows held high lends support to the idea that it is an emblem of royal might. In the reliefs of Shalmaneser III, this is the standard pose for the king receiving tribute and booty on the bronze doors from Balawat, in the tribute processions on the sides of his throne base, and in the tribute processions on the Black Obelisk.⁷⁵ Only a few of these images represent military victory; the great majority depict acknowledgment of the king's power through delivery of tribute. On the Black Obelisk, which dates to the end of the king's reign, five tribute processions from far-flung regions are depicted converging on the king, who only appears twice, once in each of the top two registers. Interestingly, he is depicted in two different ways: holding the bow and two arrows in the top register, and holding a bowl and resting his hand on his sword hilt in the second. In both images, a winged disk and star are in the field before his face, evidence of divine sanction. This pair of images, the same two that are shown in room G, evidently suffices to express the essential aspects of kingship, which here seem to be military might and divine service.

The motif is much less common in reliefs of the eighth and seventh centuries. It recurs in the reliefs of Tiglath-pileser III in the context of a booty procession, in which the king holds the bow up as if ready for use, serving as a threat as well as an emblem of power, and in an image of the king standing before an apotropaic figure, where the bow and arrows are held in the same position as in room G.⁷⁶ In the relief series that depicts Sennacherib's victory at Lachish, the king reviews the booty while enthroned, holding the bow and arrows in the same position as in Assurnasirpal's room G.⁷⁷ And in a lion hunt relief fallen into room S of the North Pal-

⁷³ J.E. Curtis et al., *Art and Empire: Treasures from Assyria in the British Museum* (London 1995) 44.

⁷⁴ Canby (supra n. 71) pl. 13a.

⁷⁵ L.W. King, *The Bronze Reliefs from the Gates of Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, B.C. 860-825* (London 1915) pls. 15, 28, 34, 41, 52, 57, 62, and 73; Unger (supra n. 69) pl. 2; M.I. Marcus, "Geography as an Organizing Principle in the Im-

perial Art of Shalmaneser III," *Iraq* 49 (1987) pl. 20; Börker-Klähn (supra n. 69) no. 152.

⁷⁶ Barnett and Falkner (supra n. 60) pl. 59; R.P. Sobolewski, "Die Ausgrabungen in Kalhu (Nimrud) 1974-1976," *AJO* 25 (1974-1977) 237.

⁷⁷ J.B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*² (Princeton 1969) no. 371.

ace, Assurbanipal holds both bow and arrows in his left hand, while pouring a libation from a bowl with his right.⁷⁸ In all of these later examples, the motif of the king with bow and arrows is associated with triumph in battle or the hunt, and so could symbolize both victory and might. In addition, in the Assurbanipal relief, the bow and arrows are combined with the bowl, juxtaposing the physical and divine aspects of kingship even more closely than in the Black Obelisk.

Returning now to room G, we find the king displaying the bow and two arrows in the same pose as in tribute processions, but here he is flanked by winged deities with the purifier and bucket. The formal similarity between the figures of the king and the deities is noteworthy—the king's pose is very similar to that of the deity who stands behind him, they both wear crowns and similar garments, and their faces and jewelry are identical.⁷⁹ Although not shown as a god, he is in their likeness. By contrast, in the neighboring images where he holds a bowl, the king's visage is clearly distinguished from those of his beardless courtiers. This recalls a claim by Assurnasirpal's grandfather, Adad-nirari II, that when the gods created him, "they altered my stature to lordly stature, they rightly made perfect my features, and filled my lordly body with wisdom."⁸⁰

In these images the king and his weapons, the supreme manifestation of terrestrial royal might, are purified by protective deities. This serves as a reminder that the king's weapons are very special. In the Standard Inscription carved on every wall slab and in the text carved on the colossi and throne base, Assurnasirpal gives the source of his weapons: "Assur, the lord who called me by name (and) made my sovereignty supreme, placed his merciless weapon in my lordly arms."⁸¹ The weapon of Assur is not specifically identified here, but in the palace reliefs the weapon used by the king in battle is always the bow. Furthermore, the bow is also the weapon used by the gods who accompany the king in battle: it is held by the god in the winged disk, probably Assur or Shamash, who hovers above the king in battle (B-3-a, B-5-a, B-11-a), and also by the god Adad, who is represented on royal standards as charging into battle standing on the back of his bull with bow drawn

(B-4-a, B-6-a, B-8-b, B-10-a).⁸² The bow is also one of the martial attributes of Ishtar, as in a late eighth-century British Museum cylinder seal where she holds a bow and pair of arrows vertically in her left hand in a pose that recalls that of the king in room G.⁸³ Finally, in the Middle Assyrian "Broken Obelisk," probably dating to the reign of Assur-bel-kala (1073–1056 B.C.), the Assyrian king holds tethered foreign captives while a god in the form of a winged disk offers him a bow, evidently a literal representation of the descent of the divine weapon from god to king.⁸⁴

What are we to make of the alternation of images of the king with bowl and king with bow in the reliefs in room G? Brandes noted that the king here appears in the roles of priest and military leader, and that in both roles the focus of activity seems to be on his weapons. He suggested that the ceremonies represented here may have recorded ceremonies actually held in room G, ceremonies that involved invocations for divine favor and purifying lustration. The reliefs, therefore, would be highly visible fixed-feature cues to the function of the room. Furthermore, he noted the curious fact that the king as priest is shown in human company, while the military leader is accompanied by divinities.⁸⁵ Both of these groupings stress the king's role as a link between humans and gods—the human high priest who transcends his fellows by reaching out to the gods, and the human commander-in-chief whom the gods have singled out from his fellows to receive their favor. These two aspects of kingship are explicitly linked in the text on the Nimrud Monolith, a large stone stele that commemorates the foundation of the Northwest Palace: "[Assurnasirpal], provider of offerings for the great gods, legitimate prince, to whom is perpetually entrusted the proper administration of the rites of the temples of his land, whose deeds and offerings the great gods of heaven and underworld love so that they (therefore) established forever his priesthood in the temples, granted to his dominion their fierce weapons, (and) made him more marvellous than (any of) the kings of the four quarters with respect to the splendour of his weapons (and) the radiance of his dominion."⁸⁶

This text establishes service to the gods as the pre-

⁷⁸ Barnett (supra n. 18) pl. 59.

⁷⁹ Budge (supra n. 56) pl. 33.

⁸⁰ Grayson (supra n. 16) 147; cited in I.J. Winter, "Aesthetics in Ancient Mesopotamian Art," in J.M. Sasson ed., *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East IV* (New York 1995) 2572.

⁸¹ Grayson (supra n. 16) 224, 275.

⁸² For a similar image from the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta II, see W. Andrae, *Farbige Keramik aus Assur und ihre Vorstufen*

in altassyrischen Wandmalereien (Berlin 1923) pl. 8.

⁸³ D. Collon, *First Impressions: Cylinder Seals in the Ancient Near East* (London 1987) no. 773. The date was suggested by Collon in a seminar on Neo-Assyrian seals, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, 16 May 1996.

⁸⁴ Pritchard (supra n. 77) no. 440.

⁸⁵ Brandes (supra n. 7) 151–54.

⁸⁶ Grayson (supra n. 16) 239.

condition for their support. The king's reliance on this divine support is stressed repeatedly in the language of the Standard Inscription, carved on each of these relief slabs. This text begins not with the usual royal titles and genealogy, but rather by invoking the gods of Assyria: "Palace of Ashurnasirpal, vice-regent of Assur, chosen of the gods Enlil and Dagan, destructive weapon of the great gods." The same theme recurs at the beginning of each new section of the text: "valiant man who acts with the support of Assur, his lord, . . . the king who acts with the support of the great gods, his lords. . . . Assur, the lord who called me by name (and) made my sovereignty supreme, placed his merciless weapon in my lordly arms. . . . With the help of the gods Shamash and Adad, the gods my supporters, I thundered like the god Adad, the devastator, against [enemy] troops. . . . Pious prince, worshipper of the great gods."⁸⁷

Seen in this light, the numerically and publicly predominant images of the king with bowl establish the fact of the king's service to the gods. He holds his bow or sword in these images to draw attention to the desired reward, which is then granted in the reliefs that show the king in the presence of deities who purify these god-given weapons. The importance of the libation ritual for the power of the weapons is made explicit on slab 8, an image of the king with bowl, where the scabbard of the king's sword is decorated with a miniature image of this very scene, suggesting that the power of the sword derives from the offerings to the gods.⁸⁸ What we see in room G, therefore, are not so much vignettes of royalty, "the king as priest" or "the king as military leader," but rather images of divine service and divine sanction as the legitimation of royal might. The king as priest *and* military leader makes offerings to the gods, who reward his service by granting their power to the weapons in his hands. The more publicly positioned images of the king libating account for the images of divinely sanctioned royal might that are directly juxtaposed and identified with the person of the king himself.

Stylized Tree

There is one further subject on the walls of room G, a subject that, like the apotropaic figures, occurs in nearly every sculptured room in the palace. This

is a stylized palm tree, carved on each of the four monolithic corner slabs in the room. There are apparently no references to such a tree in Assyrian texts, but in the modern literature the motif is referred to either as the "tree of life," or by the ostensibly more neutral designation "sacred tree." Clearly, a considerable amount of interpretation, if not preconception, is embedded in either designation. "Tree of life" evokes biblical associations, while "sacred tree" presupposes that the tree is an emblem that is either associated with a deity or is itself an object of veneration. Both terms promote certain interpretations at the expense of others. In fact, there is no consensus either on the meaning of the motif for the Assyrians, nor on its function in the decorative programs of Assyrian palaces.

In a recent volume of the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Parpola advanced the controversial hypothesis that the Assyrian "tree of life" is a complex esoteric emblem of the Assyrian pantheon and religion, and that its full meaning would have been transmitted only orally to a "few select initiates." Parpola assumed that in the reliefs of Assurnasirpal II the tree represents the "divine world order." He observed that in Assurnasirpal's reliefs apotropaic figures "usually flank the tree" and sprinkle it with holy water. He also noted that "in some reliefs the king takes the place of the Tree" between these apotropaic figures, which he felt is evidence that the king here is the human personification of the "Tree."⁸⁹

In the same volume, Porter argued that the "sacred tree" of Assurnasirpal II was a symbol of "agricultural abundance." She identified a "tree scene," which consists of two winged figures, each of which holds a bucket and extends "an oval object toward a stylized tree-like object between them." The elements of this tree scene may also occur separately—the tree by itself may serve as a "spacer" between tree scenes, and the winged figures with their "characteristic apparatus and gesture" may also stand on their own. The implication here seems to be that the "tree scene" is the fullest statement of an idea that may also be evoked by the representation of any of its constituent elements, that is to say, the part may stand for the whole. Porter persuasively demonstrated that the oval object in the hand of the winged figure resembles the male flower cluster of the date palm, and that what is depicted is the process of date palm pol-

⁸⁷ Grayson (supra n. 16) 275–76. The translation "pious" is based on CAD, N/1 (1980) 66.

⁸⁸ S. Hare and E. Porada, *The Great King, King of Assyria* (New York 1946) 34; Layard (supra n. 70) pl. 52.3. A close look at the other unpublished scabbards might reveal the

same image.

⁸⁹ S. Parpola, "The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy," *JNES* 52 (1993) 165–69.

lination. She countered the objection that date palms will not bear fruit and are prone to die from frost in Assyria by making that the very basis of the tree's appeal. The Assyrians chose to represent the date palm, she argued, "precisely because it was not part of their daily agricultural life, but was already at one remove from it and was thus readily transformed in their art into an emblem of agricultural abundance as a divine gift."⁹⁰

Furthermore, Porter suggested, the palm image may have been popular in Assyria because of its occasional association with Ishtar, the "goddess of sexual fertility," and Albenda arrived at a similar conclusion in her discussion of "sacred trees" on Assurnasirpal reliefs in the Brooklyn Museum. Albenda then argued that if the "sacred tree" is a divine symbol of Ishtar, "the so-called pollination scene must then portray the Assyrian king and genies as receiving energy and power *from* the tree, rather than fertilizing it." Because of their highly stylized appearance, Albenda assumed that "the model for the sacred tree on the stone reliefs was an object of concrete form," that is, an artificial tree that was used as a piece of cult furniture.⁹¹ The trees in the reliefs appear stylized, therefore, not because they themselves are idealizations, but rather because they are literal copies of concrete pieces of furniture. This is not a new idea. Some years ago Paley observed that the notion that "sacred trees" are images of actual cult furniture was based on a misunderstanding of texts that refer to the decoration of doorposts. In fact, there is neither textual nor archaeological evidence to support the existence of "sacred trees" as cult furniture.⁹²

These and most other interpretations of the tree fall into three general categories, roughly corresponding to Peirce's semiotic classification of sign types: icon, index, and symbol.⁹³ The most common reading of the tree, exemplified by Parpola, is as a *symbol*, variously equated with the Assyrian pantheon, agricultural abundance, fertility, or Assyrian prosperity.

The minor deities that often flank the tree contribute to its symbolism, either by fertilizing it with a male pollen cluster or by cleansing it with a purifier. Alternatively, Porter saw the tree essentially as an *index* for what she designated the "tree scene," consisting of the tree together with its attending deities. Wherever the tree occurs alone, it refers to this "complete" image, which she interpreted as literal fertilization, and by extension, symbolic fertility of the land. The isolated tree, therefore, is an index for the tree scene, which in turn is a symbol of fertility. Finally, Albenda suggested that the stylized palm tree was to be read as an *icon*—a visual replica of an actual cult object having this form.

While it is not possible to disprove any of these interesting hypotheses, it should be noted that there is no compelling evidence in their favor either. Indeed, on the basis of the available visual, textual, and contextual evidence, the stylized palm tree in Assurnasirpal's palace serves a basic function that is quite different from the interpretations offered by Parpola, Porter, and Albenda. Part of the problem with their hypotheses, and with most current interpretations of the stylized tree, is that they focus on only a selection of the total number of such images in the palace. For purposes of interpretation, these studies consider only the group that consists of the stylized tree flanked by a pair of winged figures with oval object and bucket. Parpola considered this to be the standard arrangement, which permitted him to observe that when the image of the king appears between winged figures, then the king must be identified with the tree. Porter characterized this group as her "tree scene" and consigned trees without figures, and figures without trees, to the category of tree scene elements, which refer to the tree scene without actually participating in it.

This state of affairs does not seem entirely satisfactory. Porter's argument for the virtue of unfamiliarity notwithstanding, why would the Assyrians use a tree that cannot survive in Assyria as their emblem

⁹⁰ B.N. Porter, "Sacred Trees, Date Palms, and the Royal Persona of Ashurnasirpal II," *JNES* 52 (1993) 129–39. For the range of the date palm in Iraq, see V.H.W. Dowson, *Dates and Date Cultivation of the Iraq* 1 (Cambridge 1921–1923) 4–5; and Dowson, *Date Production and Protection, with Special Reference to North Africa and the Near East (FAO Plant Production and Protection Papers* 35, Rome 1982) xv, 7. The purifier was first identified as a date spathe by E.B. Tylor, "The Winged Figures of the Assyrian and Other Ancient Monuments," *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 12 (1890) 383–93, pls. 1–4. Tylor's identification was rejected by C.J. Gadd, *The Assyrian Sculptures in the British Museum*

(London 1934) 51–52. For further bibliography on the identification of the purifier and the action depicted, see Stearns (supra n. 3) 24–25.

⁹¹ Porter (supra n. 90) 138; P. Albenda, "Assyrian Sacred Trees in the Brooklyn Museum," *Iraq* 56 (1994) 124, 132–33. Gadd (supra n. 90) 52–53 seems to have been the first to suggest that the tree dispenses power to those who touch it.

⁹² Paley (supra n. 3) 23.

⁹³ C.S. Peirce (J. Hoopes ed.), *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic* by Charles Sanders Peirce (Chapel Hill 1991) 239–40, 251.

of agricultural abundance? Why would their winged deities be shown carrying out an agricultural procedure that would have no meaning for Assyrians? If the tree scene is meant to function as a unit, then why is it not represented complete every time? How can some trees be the emblem of divine maintenance of agricultural abundance, while others are mere spacers? What purpose can be served by the pollination of the king, or of Ishtar, by winged divinities? If the tree symbolizes fertility, then how does it relate to Ishtar, the goddess of sex, who has little to do with agricultural fertility? If the tree symbolizes Ishtar, then what is her role in this context? While these reservations do not necessarily disqualify the interpretations of Porter, Parpola, and Albenda, they do suggest that the question of the meaning of the tree deserves yet another look.

Part of the problem here seems to be too narrow a concentration on certain relief scenes, without taking into account their surroundings. Both Parpola and Porter follow the usual practice of reproducing images of the tree flanked by winged figures, without looking at these scenes in context. Neither considers the context of images of the tree shown without winged figures. In fact, my survey of all 190 large-scale images of the stylized tree published in Meuszynski's and Paley and Sobolewski's volumes showed that the majority of trees (54%) were depicted without attendant winged figures, and only 41% belonged to the supposedly typical group with two winged figures (table 1).

The most obvious implication of this numerical survey is that the stylized tree does not require winged attendants in order to perform its function, a point made already by Stearns some time ago.⁹⁴ The illusion to the contrary is fostered by the publishing practice of showing primarily images of trees flanked by deities. Similarly, winged figures holding the purifier do not require the stylized tree in order to perform their function; as we have seen, they are frequently depicted separately from the stylized tree, whether in doorways or in compositions that include the king. In these contexts, the role of the winged figures is clearly apotropaic, and this function is confirmed by the inclusion of apparently identical figures in texts that prescribe the rituals for the protection of a house.

Table 1. Numbers of Trees with and without Winged Figures, by Room, in the Palace of Assurnasirpal II

Room	Number of Trees	Trees with Two Figures	Trees with One Figure	Trees with No Figures
B	6	0	1 (17%)	5 (83%)
C	6	2 (33%)	0	4 (67%)
F	16	5 (31%)	2 (13%)	9 (56%)
G	4	0	0	4 (100%)
H	8	4 (50%)	0	4 (50%)
I	96	46 (48%)	2 (2%)	48 (50%)
L	24	12 (50%)	1 (4%)	11 (46%)
N	6	2 (33%)	1 (17%)	3 (50%)
S	18	5 (28%)	2 (11%)	11 (61%)
T	6	2 (33%)	1 (17%)	3 (50%)
Total	190	78 (41%)	10 (5%)	102 (54%)

The same separation of tree and winged figures is maintained in the succeeding Assyrian palaces of Shalmaneser III, Tiglath-pileser III, and Sargon II, all of which were evidently modeled on Assurnasirpal's palace. In Shalmaneser's palace at Nimrud, "Fort Shalmaneser," there was a 4-m-high decorated arched panel of glazed bricks above the rear entrance to the throne-room suite. The central element of this composition was a stylized tree, consisting of a central trunk surmounted by a palmette, surrounded by tendrils tipped with alternating palmettes, pomegranates, and pinecones. No winged figures were present—instead the tree was flanked by a pair of rampant bulls.⁹⁵

The only place stylized trees are known to have occurred in Tiglath-pileser's palace is in corners. One example is similar to those in Assurnasirpal's reliefs, with a palmette-topped trunk framed by a continuous row of palmettes, while one or two other examples had the same central trunk, but framed by a row of alternating cones and pomegranates.⁹⁶ The images adjacent to the tree are preserved in two of these examples, and in both cases they show not winged figures facing the tree, but rather the end of battle scenes in two registers. Layard reported finding winged figures on two different slabs in Tiglath-pileser's palace. Only one of these slabs has been illustrated, in a rough sketch that shows only the inscribed part, from which it appears that it preceded a figure in a fringed robe. Layard did not say

⁹⁴ Stearns (supra n. 3) 70–71.

⁹⁵ J.E. Reade, "A Glazed-Brick Panel from Nimrud," *Iraq* 25 (1963) 38–47.

⁹⁶ E. Bleibtreu, *Die Flora der neuassyrischen Reliefs: Eine Untersuchung zu den Orthostatenreliefs des 9.–7. Jahrhunderts*

u. Chr. (WZKM, Sonderband 1, Vienna 1980) pls. 5b, 6a–b, 7; R.P. Sobolewski, "The Polish Work at Nimrud: Ten Years of Excavation and Study," *ZA* 71 (1982) fig. 15. By 1998, the palmette example had been broken up for the antiquities market by looters, destroying the tree in the process.

whether either of these figures carried the purifier and bucket, nor whether they were associated with trees.⁹⁷

The evidence for the use of stylized trees and winged figures with the purifier and bucket in Sargon's palace is much more plentiful. Here, stylized trees occurred without attendant figures in the corners of three rooms that were decorated with single-register reliefs (rooms 4, 8, and 14). A group consisting of the stylized tree flanked by two wingless figures holding pomegranate stalks was found on the jambs of door I in room 13 and on the wall near a corner in monument X. Botta observed that this group was not found elsewhere in the palace.⁹⁸ Winged human and bird-headed figures with the purifier and bucket, by contrast, always occur in or flanking doorways in Sargon's palace: colossal examples on doorjambs and on the buttresses and facades to either side of doorways, and small examples stacked two or three high—sometimes all human, sometimes with a bird-headed figure at the top and human figures below—on the wall beside gateway bull colossi.⁹⁹ These figures never occur together with the stylized tree, so it is clear that they are meant to function independently of one another.

Similarly, colossal human figures with the purifier and bucket were placed behind the bull colossi in the gates of the city and citadel.¹⁰⁰ In City Gate 3, the facade of the arched gateway was faced with glazed bricks decorated also with the same type of figure, either pointing his purifier toward the door or toward rosettes, which alternate with the winged figures in the same position that the stylized trees occupy in Assurnasirpal's reliefs.¹⁰¹ A similar arrangement was found in the wall painting in the principal reception room of Residence K at Khorsabad, where winged figures above point their purifiers toward the image of the king, while those below point

theirs toward rosettes.¹⁰² To my knowledge, no one has suggested that the winged figures in these images are pollinating the rosettes.

This repertoire of winged figures, stylized palms, and rosettes, so well established in imperial Assyrian architectural decoration of the ninth and eighth centuries, is even reflected in the "figures of cherubim, palm-trees, and open flowers" reportedly carved on the walls of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:29). The date of composition of this passage is uncertain, and therefore it is not known whether this description was influenced by knowledge of Assyrian buildings or whether it represents a separate occurrence of these types in Israel. It is nevertheless suggestive that "cherub" is evidently an Akkadian loan word. Its root, *krb*, is otherwise unattested in Hebrew, but we have already encountered it in the Akkadian verb (*karābu*), which Wiggermann identified with the gesture of greeting or blessing made by many of the apotropaic figures in Assurnasirpal's palace. "Cherub" may also be related to protective figures of uncertain form called *kāribu* and *kurību*, evidently general terms for "blessing figure."¹⁰³

In addition, in the Assyrian-style ivories from Nimrud, there are numerous panels decorated with winged human and bird-headed figures holding the purifier and bucket. Sometimes these are associated with the figure of the king, but never with a stylized tree. By contrast, there are very few examples of a stylized tree on Assyrian-style ivories.¹⁰⁴ The evidence of Assurnasirpal II, therefore, suggests that the stylized tree and winged figures with purifier and bucket could function independently of one another, and in the examples of Shalmaneser III, Tiglath-pileser III, and Sargon II, as well as in the ivories, the two were always separate.

In reconsidering the function of the stylized tree, therefore, I propose to ignore previous interpreta-

⁹⁷ A.H. Layard, *Inscriptions in the Cuneiform Character from Assyrian Monuments, Discovered by A. H. Layard* (London 1851) 65, 71–72; H. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, King of Assyria* (Jerusalem 1994) 257, pls. 15–16.

⁹⁸ Albenda (supra n. 69) pls. 62, 73, 76, 80, 131, 135, and fig. 20; P.E. Botta and E.N. Flandin, *Monument de Ninive* 5 (Paris 1849–1850) 161. An engraving from a photograph of an unidentified corner slab is in V. Place and F. Thomas, *Ninive et l'Assyrie* III (Paris 1867–1870) pl. 49.2.

⁹⁹ Human-headed: Albenda (supra n. 69) pls. 16, 19, 35–39, 43, 52, 56, 71, 92, and fig. 14. Bird-headed: Albenda, pls. 36, 39, 43, 53, 54, 56, 110, and fig. 15.

¹⁰⁰ Albenda (supra n. 69) figs. 3, 4, 9, and 10; Place and Thomas (supra n. 98) pl. 12.

¹⁰¹ Place and Thomas (supra n. 98) pl. 14.

¹⁰² G. Loud and C.B. Altman, *Khorsabad, Pt. II: The Cit-*

adel and the Town (OIP 40, Chicago 1938) pl. 89.

¹⁰³ Wiggermann (supra n. 30) 61; CAD, K (1971) 197 sub. 4a, 216–17, 559. By contrast, W.F. Albright, "What Were the Cherubim?" *BiblArch* 1 (1938) 1–3 identified the cherub with the winged human-headed lion on the basis of Levantine archaeological parallels, but ignored the Assyrian philological evidence. In the same vein, R.D. Barnett, *A Catalogue of the Nimrud Ivories* (London 1957) 86 equated the Assyrian human-headed lion with "cherub" and *kāribu*. Reade (supra n. 42) 41 instead suggested that *kāribu* is the lion with human head and torso. For a full discussion of the terminology and literature, see D.N. Freedman and P. O'Connor, "Kerûb," *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* 4 (Stuttgart 1984) 322–34.

¹⁰⁴ Mallowan and Davies (supra n. 69) pls. 41–46; Barnett (supra n. 103) pls. 113–14, nos. I.2.a, d, i.

tions and to start over, looking first at decorative context, then at textual evidence, and only then attempting an interpretation of their function and, perhaps, meaning. In so doing, I follow Barbara Parker Mallowan, whose brief essays on the apotropaic figures in Assurnasirpal's palace are the best studies of this subject to date.¹⁰⁵ Her fundamental contributions to the understanding of these figures may now be augmented by the wealth of textual material assembled by Wiggermann in his study of protective figures. On the basis of this evidence, I concur with her suggestion that the stylized tree should not be seen as the recipient of beneficial attention, but rather as a powerful apotropaic agency in its own right.

In room G, and in most of the other sculptured rooms in the palace, the stylized tree is carved on the slabs in the corners of the room. Trees in this location may be accompanied by winged figures with purifier and bucket, but usually they are not. Compositionally, this is an ideal location for the tree—as the only Assyrian motif that displays perfect axial symmetry, it fits the awkward angle of the corner perfectly. But that does not seem to be a sufficient explanation for its presence in the corners of a room such as G, where each corner slab could just as easily have been carved with a pair of figures back to back, more in keeping with the subject of the rest of the reliefs there. The selection of the tree for this particular location suggests that it served a specific purpose.

The eighth-century figurine texts indicate where each type of figure is to be placed in the building in order to provide the desired protection, and the locations specified in this way are presumably those that are vulnerable to demonic penetration. One such location is corners, both in the courtyard and in rooms adjacent to courtyards.¹⁰⁶ If this holds true for Assurnasirpal's palace as well, then the stylized palm trees in the corners of the rooms must be performing an apotropaic function. Indeed, with the exception of the king, courtiers, and historical subjects, every figure type represented in the palace is apotropaic. As Rapoport's theory predicts, the placement of different figure types is context-specific, suggesting that the selection was determined by the characteristics both of the location and the figure. As we will see, images of the tree and deity with purifier

are concentrated in particularly sensitive rooms in the palace—in what are probably bathing rooms and the king's private apartment—suggesting an apotropaic rather than symbolic function.

The most radical interpretation of the tree has been offered by Parker Mallowan, who suggested that the image of the stylized palm tree was to be read as a stylized palm tree.¹⁰⁷ Parker Mallowan has been the only scholar to introduce external evidence for her interpretation. She questioned the tree's value as a symbol of agricultural abundance or fertility, observing that the date palm is of no agricultural value in Assyria, as it will not bear fruit and tends to die in the cold climate. Instead, she observed that palm fronds and offshoots occur in Assyrian texts as apotropaic instruments for exorcism, and that the stylized tree was carved in the corners of rooms, a liminal zone vulnerable to demonic entry. The function of the stylized tree therefore, she argued, should be apotropaic. Parker Mallowan's interpretation has generally been ignored, apparently because it contradicts the evidence of our eyes: the long ancient Near Eastern visual tradition for figures flanking a tree (though not these figures or this tree), and the apparently clear interaction between this stylized tree and the figures who flank it. My own analysis, however, strongly supports Parker Mallowan's interpretation.

In Babylonian texts, palms occur in a variety of contexts, primarily agricultural, reflecting the fact that the date palm is of major economic importance in Babylonia. By contrast, in Assyrian texts, virtually all of the references to palms are in apotropaic contexts or relate to exorcism. For these purposes, both the palm frond and the palm offshoot are prescribed, either held by protective figures, or placed on the sick person by the exorcist.¹⁰⁸ In both of these contexts, the function of the palm frond is to repel evil, and thereby to purify or protect whatever is in its vicinity. The Babylonian origin of these exorcism texts is clear from their liberal utilization of the palm frond and offshoot, which are common waste products of date culture and easily available there. In Assyria, by contrast, palm by-products would either have to be imported or harvested from the limited stock of immature local trees, which may have made them less generally accessible and hence more desirable. Interestingly, Wiggermann observes that the pine-

¹⁰⁵ B. Parker Mallowan, "Magic and Ritual in the Northwest Palace Reliefs," in Harper and Pittman (supra n. 5) 32–39; Parker Mallowan, "The Assyrian Tree," *Sumer* 42 (1986) 141–45.

¹⁰⁶ Wiggermann (supra n. 30) 49, 52, 109.

¹⁰⁷ Parker Mallowan 1983 and 1986 (supra n. 105).

¹⁰⁸ Wiggermann (supra n. 30) 68–69, 84–85.

cone (*terinnu*), a plentiful by-product of pine trees that was readily available in Assyria, can have the same function in exorcism texts. This suggests that the object that looks like a pinecone in the hands of apotropaic figures probably is in fact a pinecone.¹⁰⁹ The male pollen cluster of the palm, by contrast, is never mentioned in Assyrian texts. Therefore, the activity depicted here is purification rather than pollination.

Based on these textually attested uses of the date palm and pinecone, it would appear that Assurnasirpal's "sacred tree" is to be identified with the palm offshoot or frond, and that the primary function of both the tree and cone is apotropaic, defending vulnerable spots such as doors and corners from evil intrusions, protecting the image and person of the king, and through multiple repetition, creating highly secure spaces within the palace. Indeed, in Assurnasirpal's palace, the stylized tree looks very much like a palm tree surmounted by its characteristic plume of fronds forming the central axis, surrounded by an arc of smaller offshoots (the palm-ettes), called "suckers" by growers, which sprout near the base of real trees.¹¹⁰ Since both the fronds and offshoots are apotropaic, this combination should provide powerful protection indeed.

To return briefly to Peirce's typology of signs, it appears that Parker Mallowan also conceives of the tree as an icon—not a literal likeness, but a representation of a palm tree nonetheless. In fact, however, what she is describing here is not primarily a sign at all, but rather an object—a potent apotropaic object that itself has the power to banish evil. As with the figurines, the tree as object empowers the Assyrians by giving them a permanent way to control the security of their environment. The representation of the tree, therefore, would be analogous to the Assyrian sciences of divination and exorcism, placing them in control of, rather than being prey to, the forces of chaos.

This hypothesis receives further support in the relief decoration of room H. Here the sole occurrences of the stylized tree are in the corners and beneath the four air shaft openings, where they are depicted together with a pair of bird-headed *apkallu* holding the purifier and bucket. Though this is Porter's archetypical "tree scene," it now appears that the relationship between the figures and the tree

is not one of mutual dependence, but rather functional similarity. The tree and *apkallu* are actually both performing the same function, namely warding off evil. The primary difference between the two, it seems, is directional. The power of the *apkallu* is focused in the direction the figure faces, and protects against threats from that quarter. This makes it ideal for direction-sensitive locations such as doorways, where the image frequently occurs. The power of the symmetrical stylized palm, by contrast, should emanate in all directions, making it suitable for centralized locations such as corners and under the center of air shafts. The actual explanation for the "tree scene" group beneath the air shafts in room H, therefore, is not that this potential entrance for demonic intruders was decorated with an emblem of agricultural abundance, but rather that the tree protects the center of this vulnerable space, while the two *apkallu* face inward toward the opening from either side, performing the same function. The apparent interaction between the figures and the tree, as Parker Mallowan observed, is due only to the artistic decision to crowd these independent apotropaic elements together in order to fill the available space.¹¹¹

Elsewhere in room H, a single subject predominates: the king, with or without his sword, holding the bow in his left hand and a cup in his upraised right hand. He is flanked by a pair of winged anthropomorphic figures with headbands, each of which holds the bucket in his left hand and makes the gesture of blessing toward the king with his right. As when the king is paired with deities in room G, here too his pose and aspect are almost identical to theirs, a ruler divinely endowed in aspect as in power.¹¹² The images of the king on the long walls in the north half of the room face south, and those in the south half face north, that is, they all face toward the central doors, e and c. In this inner room, therefore, the emphasis in the reliefs is entirely on libations, and these offerings are now made before divine or semidivine figures. The emphasis on the king as a priest acting on behalf of humans, as shown in room G, is replaced here by images that apparently show divine sanction for his offerings.

Room N seems to function architecturally both as a niche at the south end of room G and as a passageway to room O and corridor P. We have

¹⁰⁹ Wiggermann (supra n. 30) 67, 84; Parker Mallowan 1986 (supra n. 105) 144–45; Bleibtreu (supra n. 96) 61; CAD, Sh/2 (1992) 354. The purifier was already identified as a pinecone by Layard (supra n. 2) vol. 2, 471.

¹¹⁰ Dowson 1921–1923 (supra n. 90) 37–40; Dowson 1982

(supra n. 90) 79–91; B. Landsberger, *The Date Palm and Its By-products according to the Cuneiform Sources* (AfO Beiheft 17, Graz 1967) 22.

¹¹¹ Parker Mallowan 1986 (supra n. 105) 145.

¹¹² Paley (supra n. 3) fig. 4.

already considered the part of its relief decoration that is visible from room G, an image of the king with bow and arrows flanked by a pair of winged deities holding the purifier and bucket. The relief slabs to either side of the door to room O are carved with blessing figures facing away from the door, as if to welcome or bless visitors approaching from either direction. The opposite wall, by contrast, is carved with alternating images of the stylized palm and winged figures with the purifier and bucket. Again, the winged figures appear to be tending the tree, but it seems much more likely that they are shown alternately facing left and right so that their protective power may be most effectively distributed in both directions along the wall. The stylized trees presumably direct their protective power outward into the room. They also mask the joints between slabs, and perhaps help to insure that nothing unwelcome will slip into the room through these cracks. The effect of the west wall of room N, therefore, is of a space charged with protective power in every direction: left, right, in front, and behind.

That said, it is undeniable that the pair of winged figures with purifier and bucket flanking the stylized tree forms a distinct compositional group, and we may wonder if this arrangement of figures and tree was viewed as a distinct motif with a meaning beyond, or in addition to, the purely apotropaic. Both the stylized tree and winged figures have a long tradition in ancient Near Eastern representation. Although the distinctive combination that interests us here—Porter's "tree scene"—apparently first appeared in Assurnasirpal's palace, it is likely that previous representational conventions influenced the composition of Assurnasirpal's images, while at the same time serving as a set of tradition-based expectations with which to view and interpret, perhaps erroneously, these new images. Indeed, examination of earlier representations suggests that Mitannian and Middle Assyrian conventions served as the source for the elements and composition of Assurnasirpal's apotropaic images, but not for their meaning.

Stylized trees are a common motif on Syrian cylinder seals as early as the 18th century B.C., as well as on Kassite, Mitannian, Middle Assyrian, and Cypriot cylinder seals of the second half of the second

millennium.¹¹³ When the tree is flanked by figures, these are usually animals, heroes, or a king facing a god. Mitannian seals that probably date to the 14th century occasionally show a wingless human or bird-headed man holding a palm frond and bucket near a Mitannian stylized tree or standard, which is very unlike the Assyrian stylized palm (fig. 19a).¹¹⁴ In this context, the palm frond presumably serves as a sprinkler, perhaps an earlier form of the purifier. This type of figure does not seem to occur in Assyrian representations, however, until the palace of Assurnasirpal II. Other Mitannian sealings show a pair of winged humans or bird-men kneeling and touching a standard surmounted by a winged disk, in a composition that is very similar to the upper register of the reliefs in Assurnasirpal's room I, where, however, the kneeling figures touch a stylized palm tree (fig. 19b).¹¹⁵ Already in the 14th century, therefore, the compositional type of a pair of winged figures flanking an emblem was well established in northern Mesopotamia.

Middle Assyrian seals of the 14th century show heavy Mitannian influence, a reflection of increasing Assyrian dominance in a previously Mitannian region. Ancient seal impressions (sealings) on tablets from Assur, probably from the time of Eriba-Adad I and Assur-uballit I, show the earliest Assyrian examples of a pair of bird-headed men, usually winged but in one case wingless, flanking a stylized tree (fig. 19c). The figures hold no attributes, and either make the blessing gesture or touch the tree with one hand. The tree itself is still Mitannian in appearance and the compositions all include other figures that do not interact with the tree. In another sealing from Assur of this period, however, the tree is represented in a way that anticipates the Assurnasirpal examples, with a central trunk surrounded by flowers on tendrils, but it is flanked by a gazelle, who nibbles at it, and a fox (fig. 19d).¹¹⁶

The same motifs continue in Assyrian seals and wall painting from the time of Tukulti-Ninurta I in the 13th century. An ancient sealing from Assur shows a pair of winged bird-men, apparently empty-handed and with one arm lowered and the other raised, flanking a naturalistic palm tree (fig. 19e). Two other Assur sealings of the same date again anticipate the

¹¹³ Collon (supra n. 83) 54–74. For a general survey, see H. York, "Heiliger Baum," *RLA* 4 (Berlin 1975) 269–82.

¹¹⁴ See also Collon (supra n. 83) fig. 275 (unprovenanced). Parker Mallowan 1986 (supra n. 105) 144, fig. 17 observed that the figure with sprinkler and bucket appears earlier in Old Babylonian cylinder seals (see also Collon [supra n. 83] figs. 169, 814, and 832).

¹¹⁵ See also T. Beran, "Assyrische Glyptik des 14. Jahrhunderts," *ZA* 52 (1957) figs. 109, 113 (both from Nuzi).

¹¹⁶ See also Beran (supra n. 115) figs. 3 (wingless), 10, and 54 (all from Assur). For a full bibliography of Middle Assyrian seals, see D. Stein, "Mittelassyrische Kunstperiode," *RLA* 8 (Berlin 1997) 306–307.

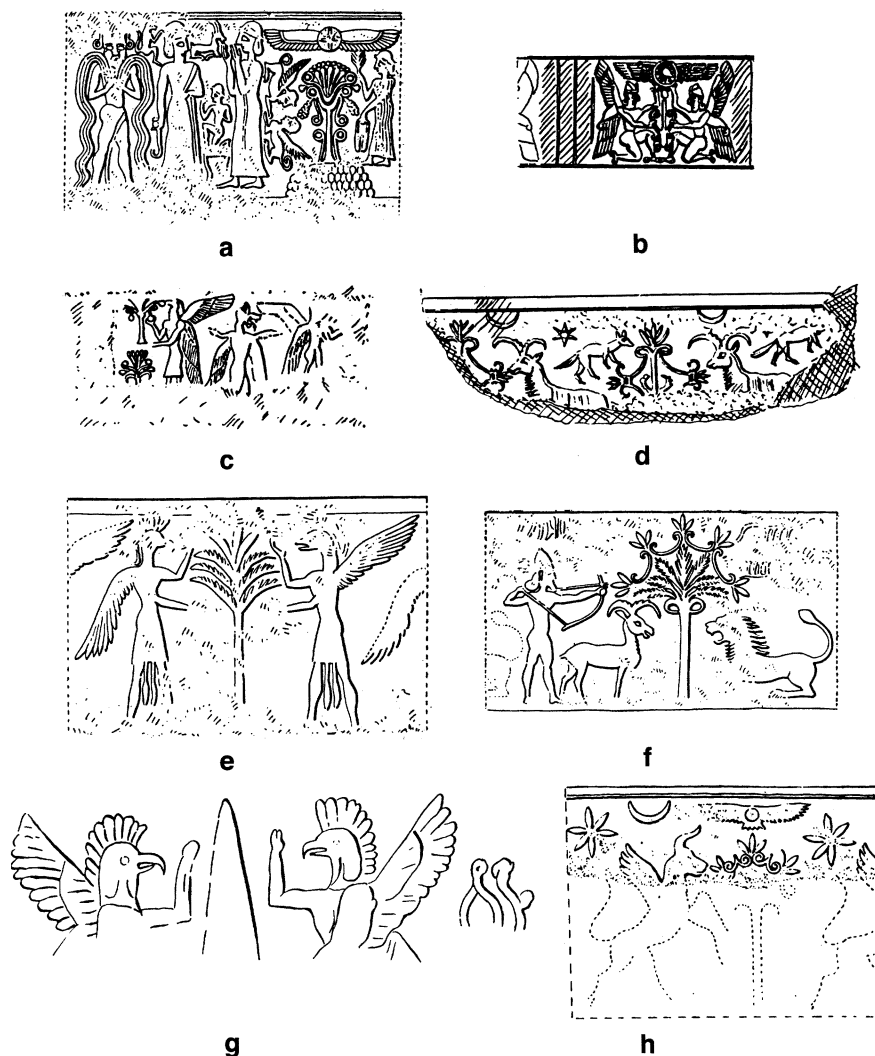


Fig. 19. Mitannian and Middle Assyrian seal impressions on tablets from Nuzi (top right) and Assur (all others). Top row (a, b): Mitannian, probably 14th century B.C. Second row (c, d): Middle Assyrian, 14th century B.C. Third row (e, f): Middle Assyrian, 13th century B.C. Bottom row (g, h): Middle Assyrian, 12th century B.C. (After A. Moortgat, *ZA* 47 [1942] figs. 11, 55, 76; Moortgat, *ZA* 48 [1944] fig. 32; T. Beran, *ZA* 52 [1957] figs. 29, 71, 108; D. Opitz, *A/O* 10 [1935–1936] fig. 5)

form of Assurnasirpal's tree, but in the context of a hunt or flanked by kneeling gazelles (fig. 19f).¹¹⁷ Wall paintings found fallen at the south side of the palace terrace in Tukulti-Ninurta's new capital, Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta, included in one area a small frieze (5 cm high) of winged bird-men, similar to those in the Assur sealing just described, touching stylized trees that anticipate the form of Assurnasirpal II's tree. These figures do not seem to hold the purifier and bucket, however, and this together with their

very small scale and juxtaposition with other motifs familiar from the seals (kneeling and rearing animals) suggests that they may not play the same sort of crucial apotropaic role here as do their large-scale counterparts in the Neo-Assyrian palaces. The larger-scale motifs in these wall paintings are mostly floral, including rosettes, lotus blossoms, and a stylized palm tree consisting of a central trunk surrounded by palmettes connected by tendrils, again anticipating the form of Assurnasirpal's tree.¹¹⁸ The increasing

¹¹⁷ See also A. Moortgat, "Assyrische Glyptik des 13. Jahrhunderts," *ZA* 47 (1942) fig. 54 (Assur).

¹¹⁸ Andrae (supra n. 82) pls. 1–4.

frequency of representations of palms and palmettes at this time may reflect Tukulti-Ninurta's military activities in Babylonia.

Similar forms and compositions were found on seals from Assur from the 12th century, mainly from the time of Tiglath-pileser I. One ancient sealing shows a pair of winged bird-men with one empty hand raised and the other lowered (fig. 19g). Behind them is some tendrilly object, perhaps a floral motif. They presumably both face a central object, probably a tree, but the seal was rolled so that the central element was omitted and the two figures face outward back to back. The figures are complete, giving the impression that the sealing was rolled this way deliberately; perhaps it was felt that the figures would provide more protection for the tablet if they faced outward rather than inward. Two other sealings of this time from Assur show a pair of figures flanking a tree. Only one figure of each pair is a winged bird-man, while the others are a griffin and a man. One of these seals was rolled in the manner of the previous one, with the figures facing outward and the tree omitted. On the other one, and on another example of the same date (fig. 19h), the form of the tree prefigures that of Assurnasirpal II, though it is not clear if the tree is actually a palm.¹¹⁹

In the late Middle Assyrian period, therefore, prior to the historical lacunae of the 11th and 10th centuries, the form of the stylized tree and the motif of bird-headed men flanking a tree were well established in Assyrian glyptic and painting. There is no evidence for the meaning of such a composition in the Middle Assyrian period, however, and the prevalence of numerous other types of mythic, human, and animal figures in tree scenes suggests that the image of the tree flanked by two bird-men was no more desirable than any of the other possible combinations. Certainly, there is nothing in the Middle Assyrian examples to suggest the prominence that this particular combination of figures attained in Assurnasirpal's palace. Nor is the figure with purifier and bucket known to occur in northern Mesopota-

mian representations prior to Assurnasirpal, apart from the Mitannian examples of uncertain relevance.¹²⁰ In Middle Assyrian imagery, the figures that flank the tree interact with it either by touching it or by raising one arm in front of it in a gesture similar to the blessing gesture of doorway figures in Assurnasirpal's palace.

On the one hand, then, there is a clear Middle Assyrian visual tradition for figures flanking a tree, and on the other, in the palaces of Shalmaneser III, Tiglath-pileser III, and Sargon II, the tree almost always stands on its own. In between is the palace of Assurnasirpal II, in which trees and figures with a purifier and bucket may be either grouped together or stand alone, and where there seems to be no evidence for an iconographic relationship between winged figures and trees. The image of two figures flanking the stylized tree occurs frequently as part of a continuous frieze of such figures, but only rarely as a discrete, self-contained composition, as they do beneath the air shafts in room H.

The motif does occur frequently, however, in the small-scale images engraved on the garments in Assurnasirpal's wall reliefs, evidently representing embroidery or incised metal appliques. Here we find a stylized tree flanked by images of the king, by human and bird-headed figures with the purifier and bucket, as well as by a variety of other mythical and animal types. But although the imagery of the garment decorations includes a number of motifs and subjects seen also in the large-scale reliefs, it nevertheless appears to belong to a different decorative system. In the tree represented in the garment decorations, for example, the outer border of palmettes is always replaced with a border of pinecones, as in the garment decorations on the stele of the earlier Babylonian king Marduk-nadin-ahhe (1099–1082 B.C.).¹²¹ Similarly, the range of mythical and animal figures and the variety of poses shown in the garment decorations are much greater than those of the large-scale reliefs, recalling the variety of interactions and figures seen in Middle Assyrian glyptic.

¹¹⁹ See also D. Opitz, "Die Siegel Ninurta-tukul-Assurs und seiner Frau Rimeni," *AfO* 10 (1935–1936) figs. 5–6; A. Moortgat, "Assyrische Glyptik des 12. Jahrhunderts," *ZA* 48 (1944) figs. 29–31.

¹²⁰ Also of uncertain relevance is an ancient cylinder seal impression from Hasanlu that shows a pair of winged bird-legged scorpion-tailed anthropomorphic deities holding a round object and bucket, flanking a naturalistic tree on a mountain with a winged disk above: M.I. Marcus, *Emblems of Identity and Prestige: The Seals and Sealings from Hasanlu, Iran. Commentary and Catalog* (University Museum Mono-

graphs 84, *Hasanlu Special Studies* III, Philadelphia 1996) 55–56, no. 81. Because the seal combines Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian features, Marcus dates it to the stylistically undocumented transitional period of the 11th–10th centuries. The closest parallel for the figures is a garment decoration on the reliefs of Assurnasirpal II (Layard [supra n. 70] pl. 44.2), however, so in the absence of dated comparanda from the preceding period, it seems safer to place it provisionally in the ninth century, and to ascribe the earlier features to archaizing or experimentation.

¹²¹ Strommenger (supra n. 72) pl. 271.

What we seem to have in the Assurnasirpal garment decorations is an existing system of decorative forms, into which has been integrated a new group of stock images taken directly from the large-scale relief images on which the small-scale ones are engraved. This process of integration apparently did not involve merely the appropriation of new motifs, but rather the synthesis of new motifs with existing forms and conventions. An example is the image of the king shown twice flanking the tree, with the winged disk above, which was incised on the tunic of the seated king on slab 3 in room G. While it is possible that this composition was copied from actual garments, and therefore records a potential lost source for the large-scale reliefs, it seems more likely that the small-scale image is based on the central part of the similar large-scale scene carved on slabs 13 and 23 in the throne room, B. In the version on the garment, the overall composition, as well as the pose and dress of the king, is drawn from the large-scale prototype, but the tree is surrounded by pinecones, the winged disk lacks the human figure in its center, and the group stands on a pattern that evidently represents a mountainous landscape, features that are all foreign to the large-scale images.

In the garment decorations, therefore, groups including the king, winged deities, and the tree were evidently lifted from the large-scale reliefs and integrated into a world that, as Stearns observed, is “radically different from that in which the reliefs exist”—a world where winged figures not only stand or kneel stiffly to either side of the tree, but also demonstrate their powers by actively subduing wild mythical creatures, while neighboring scenes show the king similarly engaged hunting wild beasts.¹²² This difference from the large-scale reliefs may be because Assurnasirpal's garment decorations actually looked this way, but this is unverifiable. Or the garment decorations may have been carved by artists drawing on several different traditions of small-scale engraving, including the Middle Assyrian glyptic tradition and foreign traditions such as engraved works from contemporary northwest Iran and ivory carving from Late Bronze Age Phoenicia.¹²³

Whatever the explanation, in the garment decorations, the stylized tree flanked by winged figures with the purifier and bucket so closely fits the exist-

ing Middle Assyrian template of two figures flanking a tree that the group apparently became just another stock motif, with the result that the original meaning of these figures as powerful independent apotropaic entities was subordinated to an older Middle Assyrian compositional ideal of an eternal struggle between monsters and deities in a mythic realm. In the large-scale reliefs, by contrast, the relationship between the stylized tree and winged figures with purifier and bucket is apparently a purely formal arrangement that, like the garment decorations, may have been heavily influenced by Middle Assyrian compositional formulas.

Inner Rooms

The two inner rooms of the east suite, I and L, are similarly decorated and, presumably, similarly charged with protective power. Every slab except one in each of these rooms is decorated with the stylized tree alternating with winged figures. Whether these rooms served for ablutions or offerings or both, their occupants would have been mightily protected against evil and impurity. In room L, the winged figures are anthropomorphic and all but one carry the purifier and bucket. As already noted, the atypical figure was depicted on slab 20, in the niche beside the drain: a beardless human, possibly female, with four wings, wearing a flounced garment, the horned crown of divinity, a pectoral composed of disks decorated with stars and rosettes, a string of beads in the lowered left hand, and the right hand held up in the gesture of greeting or blessing.¹²⁴ Elsewhere in the palace, the flounced garment occurs only in room I, on a pair of beardless figures similar to these, and on kneeling deities who touch the stylized tree. Meuszynski observed that a similar garment was depicted on divine figures in Assurnasirpal's Ninurta temple and his Central Building at Nimrud, and suggested that it characterized temple or cult locations.¹²⁵ Rosettes, stars, and a string of beads all can be attributes of Ishtar, and as I have already suggested, the four wings may denote an especially powerful figure. This may, therefore, be an image of Ishtar, in which case, the niche and drain could be for cult offerings. Ishtar's most distinctive attributes, weapons and a lion, are absent from this image, however, so this is more likely to

¹²² Stearns (supra n. 3) 69.

¹²³ For parallels with Iran, see Canby (supra n. 71). For a parallel from Late Bronze Age Kamid el-Löz, see D. Rittig, “Bermerkungen zur Gewandverzierung des Königs Assurnasirpal II,” in B. Hrouda, S. Kroll, and P. Spanos eds.,

Von Uruk nach Tuttul, eine Festschrift für Eva Strommenger (Münchener vorderasiatische Studien 12, Munich 1992) 181–83.

¹²⁴ Budge (supra n. 56) pl. 41.

¹²⁵ Meuszynski (supra n. 60) 43.

be a special type of apotropaic figure whose specific function is to guard against demonic intruders entering through the drain.

The reliefs in room I are also devoted wholly to apotropaic imagery, but with several differences. As already noted, the reliefs in this room are divided into two registers. The stylized palm alternates with the bird-headed *apkallu* with purifier and bucket in the lower register, and with kneeling anthropomorphic deities wearing the flounced garment in the upper. In the upper register, however, only those figures who flank doorways hold the purifier and bucket. The remaining anthropomorphic figures touch or hold the tree itself with both hands. These figures do, therefore, appear to be interacting directly with the tree in some fashion—their kneeling pose and special dress suggest that they may be engaged in a ritual that utilizes the power of the palm. Perhaps the palm is their attribute, as it is for some of the apotropaic figures described in the ritual texts, and the kneeling figures effect the release of its protective power.¹²⁶ If so, then the palm held in the hands of the upper figures might be the equivalent of the purifier and bucket held by the figures directly below, in both cases dispensing apotropaic power throughout the room.

Slab 16, in the niche beside the presumed drain in room I, is decorated with the usual kneeling figures touching the stylized tree in the upper register, and with a pair of female deities—identical to the one in room L, but with two wings instead of four—flanking a stylized tree in the lower register.¹²⁷ The doubling of this figure here and the placement of the tree in the center suggest that these are not cult images of Ishtar herself, but rather female apotropaic deities charged with guarding the drain and protecting those who use it.

Overall, the theme of the relief decoration in the east suite seems to be divine legitimation of Assurnasirpal's royal authority. In the outer room, G, the king is shown making offerings to the gods and receiving divine purification of his person and his weapons. In the middle room, H, the two previous subjects are conflated, as the offerings of the king are rewarded with divine blessing. The inner rooms, I and L, are entirely lined with apotropaic figures, which insure that the occupants and activities therein will be immune from evil influences. This would be a very secure location, for example, for rituals such

as those depicted in the two outer rooms. It would also be an ideal venue for bathing, ritual or otherwise, during which time the king, possibly weaponless and disrobed, would be particularly vulnerable to both demonic and physical threats. Turner suggested that such a room may have been associated with the bathing rituals described in a series of texts concerning the *bit rimki*, a house for ritual purification through bathing. Although a true *bit rimki* should be outdoors away from the city, so that any demons washed away will be unable to find refuge indoors in the palace, the texts also describe ablutions that take place in the palace, and rooms I and L seem well fitted for this purpose.¹²⁸ If this is indeed the case, then both the architecture and sculpture in these rooms provide redundant cues to function.

In sum, then, the architectural and sculptural fixed features of the entire east wing seem to be cues for an overall function of purification, both of the implements of royal power and of the person of the king himself. Perhaps it is not too farfetched to imagine the king and members of his court making a ceremonial procession through this wing, beginning in room G with relatively public offerings to the gods and the presentation of his arms in the presence of his courtiers, proceeding with a selected company into room H for the blessing of his weapons, and culminating with the purification of his person in rooms I and L, attended by only his most trusted retainers.

SOUTH SUITE

The south suite has the smallest rooms of the four suites grouped around court Y (figs. 2, 4, and 20). Its plan is also simpler than those of the west and east suites, and is comparable to that of the throne-room suite, though on a much smaller scale: a large outer room (S) opening from court Y, with an alcove (T) at its west end, and a large inner room (X), with a pair of small rooms also at its west end, V and W, the latter a paved room with niche and drain. Turner has shown that this plan, which consists of a large outer “reception room,” a smaller inner “retiring room,” and small subsidiary chambers, is the most frequently occurring type of suite in Assyrian palaces.¹²⁹ This plan should therefore exemplify the standard Assyrian residential suite, and more complex suites presumably represent modifications of the standard plan for specialized functions. Reade

¹²⁶ Wiggermann (supra n. 30) 68–69.

¹²⁷ Budge (supra n. 56) pl. 42b.

¹²⁸ Turner (supra n. 27) 193; J. Laessøe, *Studies on the As-*

syrian Ritual and Series bit rimki (Copenhagen 1955) 17, 83–89.

¹²⁹ Turner (supra n. 27) 194–99.

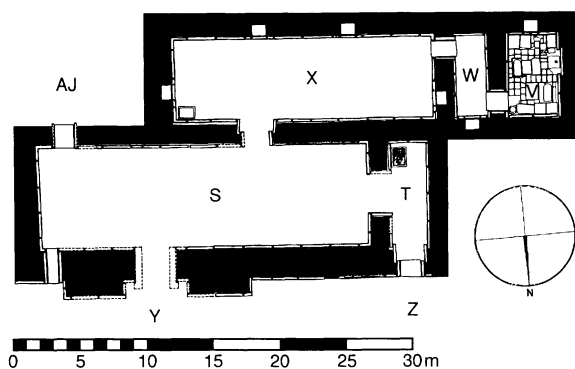


Fig. 20. Kalhu, palace of Assurnasirpal II, plan, detail of the south suite. (After Paley and Sobolewski 1987, plan 2; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

identified the south suite as the king's "residential suite," though without enumerating his reasons, and I believe that the architectural and decorative cues support this identification.¹³⁰

As with the east suite, the finds excavated in the south suite provide no assistance in identifying its function. In this area Layard reported "copper vessels of peculiar shape," all of which disintegrated during excavation. He also found a considerable number of carved ivories near door a in room V, and Malloyan found further examples, apparently at the west end of room X.¹³¹ The ivories presumably originally served as decoration on pieces of furniture, but they cannot be dated with certainty. Even if some of them date to the ninth century, this would not tell us when the furniture they adorned was placed in these rooms. The doorjambs of room U in this same area carry inscriptions of Sargon II, which report that he restored this room or suite of rooms and used it as a storehouse for booty from Carchemish.¹³² Therefore, it seems probable that, as with the east suite, the finds in these rooms date to the time of Sargon or later.

Architecturally, the south suite displays several suggestive features. As with the throne room (B), the principal outside entrances to room S face north, so that in the summer it would have been cooler than the large reception rooms in the east and west suites. It is the innermost of the decorated reception suites, furthest from the throne room and outer courtyard. Unlike rooms G and WG, each of which is directly accessible from room F via a single doorway, room S is separated from the other decorated suites by corridor Z. The only inside access to the south suite is from room WG, probably the secondary throne room, by crossing corridor Z via doors a and b. This suite is therefore isolated from, rather than connected with, the remaining reception suites.

This is also the only suite with direct access to the private wing of the palace, through door b into court AJ (fig. 2). The function of these small undecorated inner rooms is unknown, but this would be a good location for the palace domestic services, as suggested by the presence of wells. In addition, vaulted tombs, at least two of which contained rich grave goods, were found beneath the floors of several rooms in the area directly south of room X. According to the inscriptions found in the tombs in rooms 60 and 61, one of them belonged to a queen of Assurnasirpal, and the other to queens of Tiglath-pileser III, Shalmaneser V, and Sargon II.¹³³ At Assur, Neo-Assyrian kings were buried in tombs adjacent to the residential suites, so it may well be that the area around the tombs in the palace at Nimrud was the residence of Assurnasirpal's queen and palace women.¹³⁴

All of this architectural evidence suggests that the south suite was the most private and comfortable of the decorated suites, and it is tempting to speculate that this was the king's private suite, which would also be consistent with its direct access to the proposed women's quarters. In keeping with Rapoport's observation on the redundancy of cues, this hypothe-

¹³⁰ Reade (supra n. 42) 84. Richard Ellis first suggested this identification to me during a seminar on the palace (13 April 1996), and I later discovered that Reade had reached the same conclusion.

¹³¹ Layard (supra n. 2) vol. 2, 8–11, 204–11; Barnett (supra n. 103) 111.

¹³² Text: Layard (supra n. 97) 33–34. Translation: Luckenbill (supra n. 19) sec. 136–38. Study: Russell (supra n. 6).

¹³³ A. Fadhil, "Die Grabinschrift der Mulissu-mukanniš-Ninua aus Nimrud/Kalhu und andere in ihrem Grab gefundene Schriftträger," *BaM* 21 (1990) 471–82; and A. Fadhil, "Die in Nimrud/Kalhu aufgefundene Grabinschrift der Jabā," *BaM* 21 (1990) 461–70.

¹³⁴ Only one residence of an Assyrian royal woman has been securely identified: in Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh,

the residential suite of one of his queens, at the back of the palace, was identified by an inscription on a colossus at its door: H.D. Galter, L.D. Levine, and J.E. Reade, "The Colossi of Sennacherib's Palace and Their Inscriptions," *Annual Review of the Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Project* 4 (1986) 27–32. There is no synthetic study of Neo-Assyrian palace women. For discussions of texts and terminology concerning these women, see CAD, S (1984) 215–17, s.v. *sekretu*; Dalley and Postgate (supra n. 30) 11–14 and passim; and T. Kwasman and S. Parpola, *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh*, Pt. I: *Tiglath-Pileser III through Esarhaddon* (*State Archives of Assyria* 6, Helsinki 1991) 70–87. J.G. Westenholz, "Towards a New Conceptualization of the Female Role in Mesopotamian Society," *JAOS* 110 (1990) 513–16 cautions against the use of the anachronistic term "harem."

sis seems to be supported by the relief decoration in the south suite, which consists almost entirely of apotropaic imagery (fig. 21). The only image of the king in the entire suite is on the east wall of room S, in the same location as the enthroned king in room G (figs. 13, 22). The composition is less complex in room S, however, consisting of the king standing in the center of the wall, a staff in his right hand and his sword hilt in his left, flanked by two courtiers, each holding a bow, quiver, and mace. The group is framed by a pair of stylized palm trees, placed not in the corners, as would be expected, but directly behind the courtiers, as close as possible to the figures whom their apotropaic powers protect. As in room G, the placement of the image of the king in this particular location on the reliefs strongly suggests that this is the spot the king himself would have occupied when he was in this room. The two outside doorways, a and b, would have ensured a good source of natural light for this end of the room, highlighting the king's person, while much of the rest of the room would have been in comparative shadow.

The remainder of the reliefs in room S, as well as those in the adjoining alcove T, show only apotropaic subjects. On the walls, the stylized palm tree alternates with the winged deity with purifier and bucket. The same subjects are depicted even on slabs 7 and 8 in room T, which are visible from room S and which, by analogy with room N in the east suite and room C in the throne-room suite, might be expected to show royal subjects (figs. 21, 23). This overwhelming emphasis on the apotropaic, as in rooms I and L, suggests that this was meant to be a very secure room.

The doorways receive a different treatment, but again the emphasis is on the apotropaic, as is true for all of the palace doorways. The main entrance to room S, door e, is guarded by human-headed bull colossi in the jambs, and small figures of a deity with purifier and bucket and a blessing figure with plant, placed vertically above one another on the slabs to either side of the door inside the room. Each jamb of door a, which also opens from courtyard Y, is carved with a large-scale pair of the same figures, with the deity with purifier and bucket facing outward and the blessing figure facing inward, as in door c to room G.

The reliefs in the other outer door, b, which connects with the back part of the palace, are somewhat surprising, as there are no figures with purifiers at this door, but rather four blessing figures with plants in their left hands. Interestingly, the pair of these figures on the doorjambs here face into room S, not outward into AJ, so that only the figures on the interior slabs that flank the door confront any threat from outside. If I am correct in attributing less apotropaic power to this type of figure than to those with the purifier and bucket, then this doorway was not considered as vulnerable to unwanted intruders as were the other outer doors in this suite.

Door c, by contrast, the only entrance to the large inner room, X, is protected both by blessing figures and by bird-headed figures with the purifier and bucket. The selection of bird-headed figures here instead of the anthropomorphic figures that line the remainder of the walls in room S, suggests that there may be some qualitative or quantitative difference in the type or amount of apotropaic power that these two figure types afford. There is some slight evidence in the miniature representations of the garment decorations on the palace reliefs that the bird-headed figure is more aggressive than the anthropomorphic one.¹³⁵ If this is true for the large-scale reliefs as well, then the door to room X may have been thought to need a measure of extra protection.

The other interior doorway, d, which connects rooms S and T, is flanked by a pair of winged deities with purifier and bucket on the walls in both S and T, while each jamb is carved with a winged anthropomorphic figure facing into room S, with a mace in his lowered left hand and a stalk of pomegranates (?) in his raised right. As with all of the other objects carried by such figures, the pomegranate, which this form most likely represents, is attributed apotropaic power in exorcism texts.¹³⁶

Finally, door a, through which one enters the suite from corridor Z, is carved with a pair of unusual figures, as well as some familiar ones (fig. 24). On the wall of corridor Z to either side of this door are two pairs of small figures: a deity with purifier and bucket and a blessing figure with plant, arranged vertically one above the other as in door e of room S. Large-scale figures with the purifier and bucket are also placed on the walls of room T facing the

¹³⁵ A point made by Fulghum (supra n. 51); for examples, see Canby (supra n. 71) 37; and Layard (supra n. 70) pls. 45.1, 48.3, and 49.4.

¹³⁶ Parker Mallowan 1983 (supra n. 105) 38; CAD, N/2 (1980) 346, s.v. *nurmû*, 2b. Bleibtreu has suggested that this plant may sometimes be the lotus pod (RLA 7 [Berlin 1987]

103–106, s.v. *Lotos* [E. Bleibtreu]). Although this plant also looks like an opium pod, it is unlikely to be one, as there is no evidence for opium in either texts or images from pre-Islamic Mesopotamia (RLA 8 [Berlin 1997] 344–48, s.v. Mohn [W. Farber and E. Bleibtreu]).

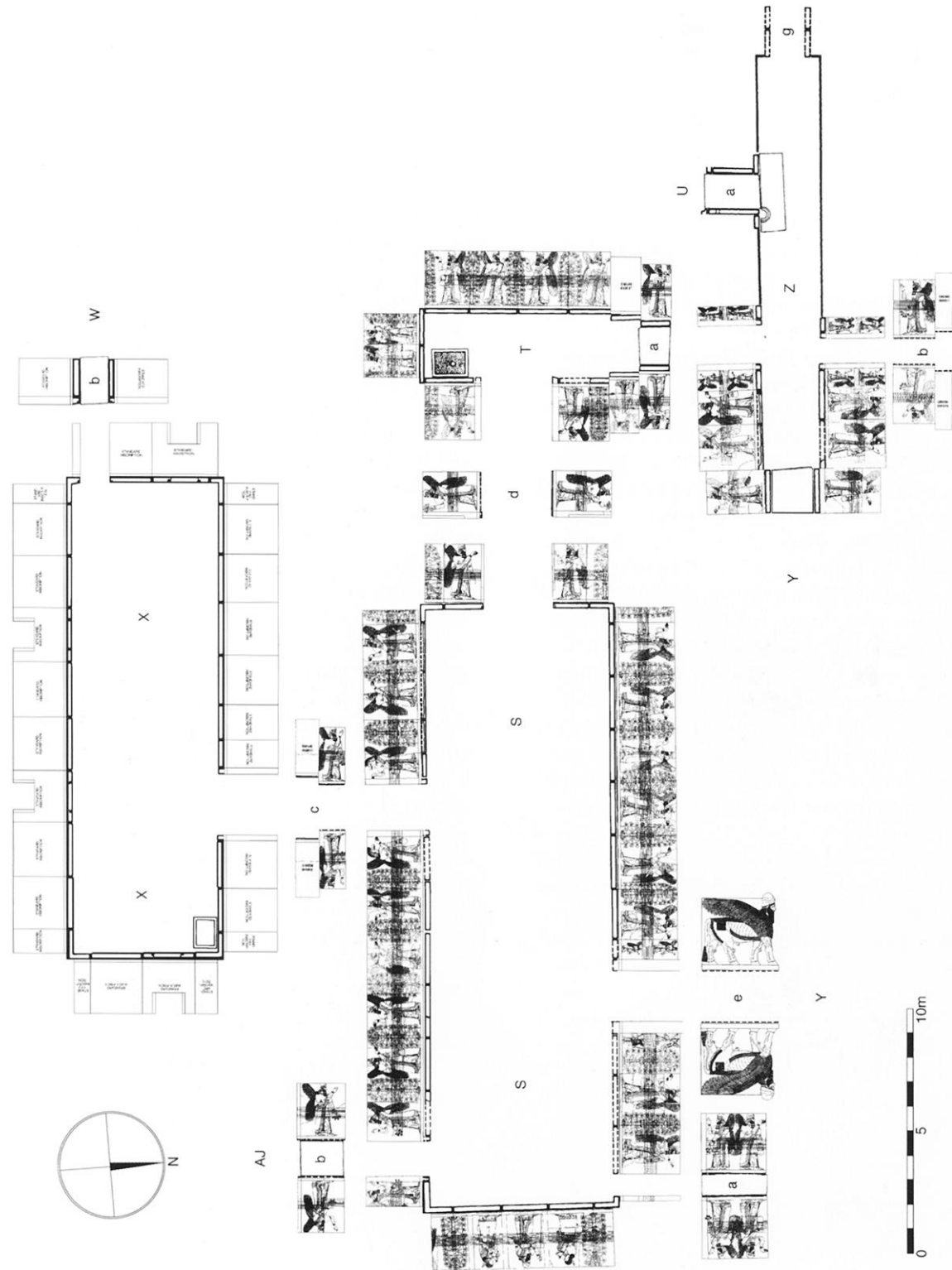


Fig 21. South suite, layout of the decoration, assembled by the author. (Courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

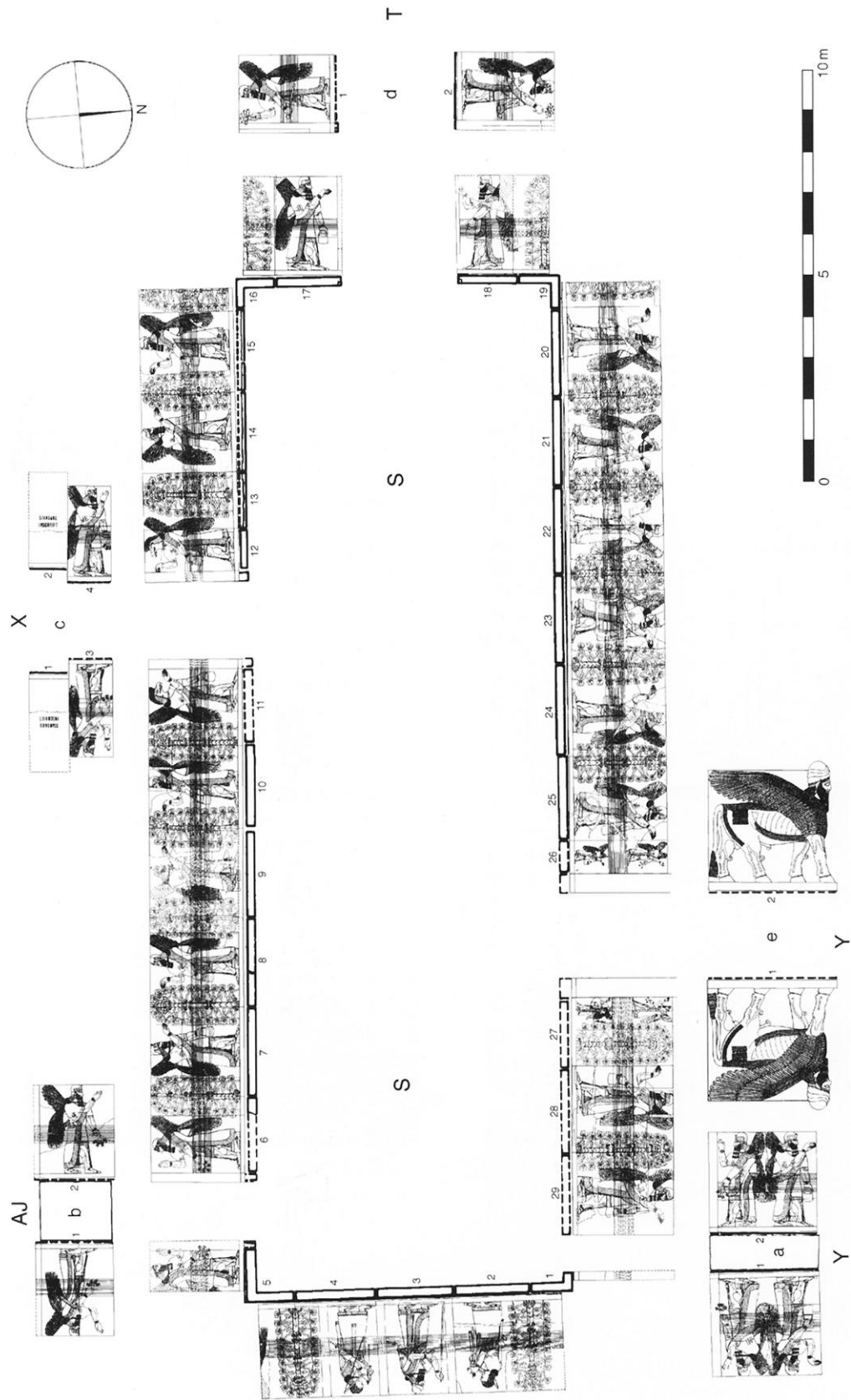


Fig. 22. Room S, layout of the decoration, assembled by the author. (After Paley and Sobolewski 1987, pls. 2-3; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

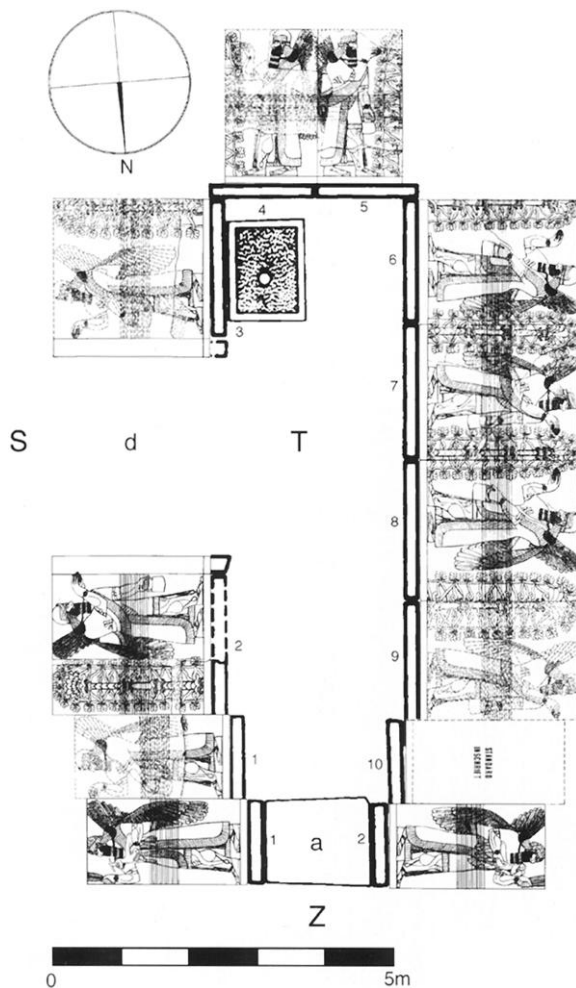


Fig. 23. Room T, layout of the decoration, assembled by the author. (After Meuszynski, pl. 4; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

door. The unusual figures here are on the doorjamb, each of which is carved with a single anthropomorphic winged figure with a headband, facing outward toward the corridor.¹³⁷ Unlike the other pairs of apotropaic figures in the palace, for whom one type of attribute is held consistently in the right hand and another type consistently in the left, this figure holds his attributes in different hands, depending on which side of the door he is on. With the near hand he holds a small goat against his side, and in

the upraised far hand he holds what appears to be a palm frond.

Following Barnett, Parker Mallowan identified the goat here as a *mašhultuppû*, or scapegoat, used in Assyrian rituals to avert evil, presumably by serving as a host for wandering demons that might otherwise possess the human inhabitants of the palace.¹³⁸ The deer in the arms of the figures in the comparable location beside throne-room door a probably served a similar purpose, though there is no known textual reference to deer in this role.¹³⁹ Mallowan found the skeleton of a similar small quadruped, tentatively identified as a gazelle, under the pavement of the floor in corridor P; this animal may also have served as a scapegoat.¹⁴⁰ The plant in the upraised hand of these figures has generally been identified as an ear of grain ever since Layard's initial description of the slabs, but Parker Mallowan identified it instead as a palm frond, and this would be much more consistent with this figure's apparent apotropaic function.¹⁴¹ Indeed, the comparable figures beside throne-room door a carry stalks of palmettes, which I have already suggested are stylized representations of palm offshoots. Both offshoots and fronds of the palm possess great apotropaic power, while there is no evidence that this is the case for an ear of grain. The goat-bearing figures that stand facing outward in this entrance to the south suite, therefore, are almost certainly apotropaic in function, and their occurrence elsewhere only in an entrance to the throne room suggests that they may be a particularly powerful type.

The walls of room X were paneled with unsculptured stone slabs, each of which was carved with the Standard Inscription, as were the walls of rooms V and W (fig. 25). Room X was by far the largest room in the palace to be treated this way, and the absence of sculptures here seems particularly surprising since it is clearly one of the two major rooms in the south suite. Furthermore, the absence even of apotropaic imagery seems surprising in view of the overwhelming apotropaic emphasis in the adjacent room S. It may be that room X was not considered to be particularly vulnerable to evil infiltration, as its only outside entrance was from the well-protected room S, but there would still be the potential for super-

¹³⁷ Budge (supra n. 56) pl. 27.

¹³⁸ R.D. Barnett, *Assyrian Palace Reliefs in the British Museum* (London 1970) 12; Parker Mallowan 1983 (supra n. 105) 37; Wiggermann (supra n. 30) 77; *CAD*, M/1 (1977) 365–66. Similar figures were found in or beside doorways of Sargon's palace at Khorsabad, and the colossal figures clutching a small lion on the facades of the palace and

throne room may be variants of the type (Albenda [supra n. 69] pls. 15–17, 59, 63, and fig. 24).

¹³⁹ Budge (supra n. 56) pl. 26.

¹⁴⁰ Mallowan (supra n. 42) 120; thanks to Mary Fulghum (supra n. 51) for reminding me of this reference.

¹⁴¹ Layard (supra n. 2) 389; Parker Mallowan 1983 (supra n. 105) 38.

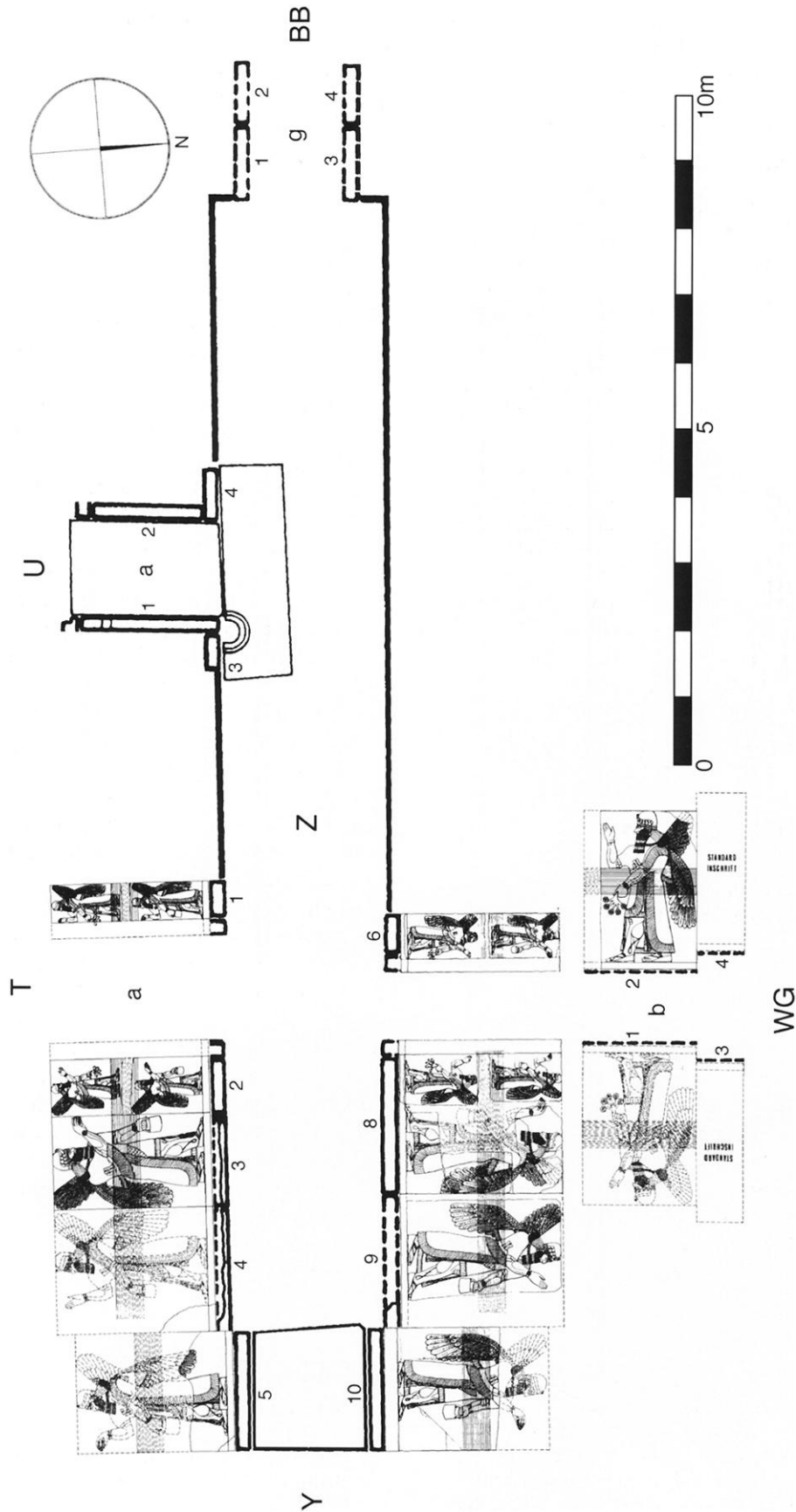


Fig. 24. Corridor Z, layout of the decoration, assembled by the author. (After Paley and Sobolewski 1987, pl. 4; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

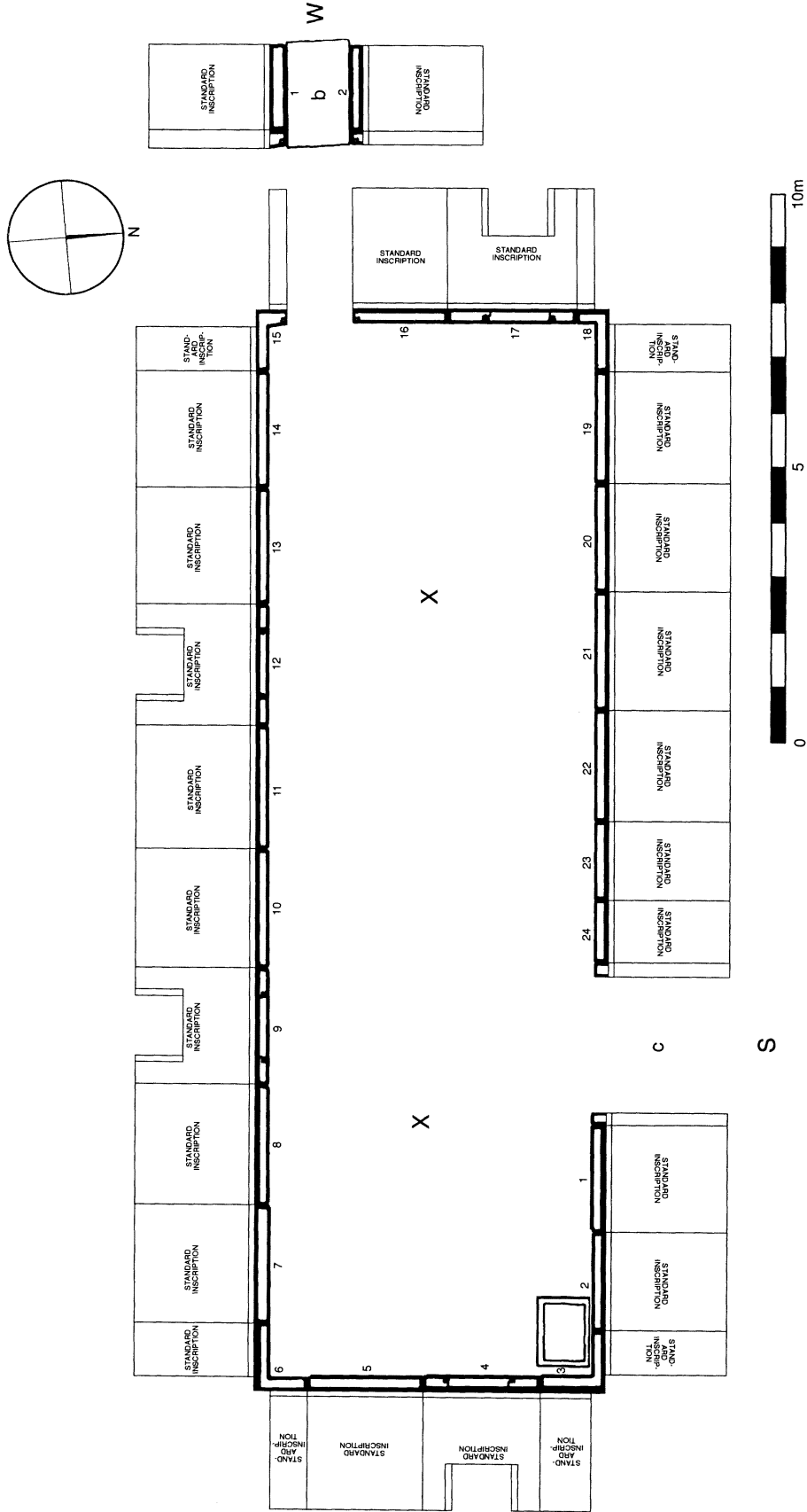


Fig. 25. Room X, layout of the decoration, assembled by the author. (Courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

natural entry via corners, air shafts, and the drain in room V. Alternatively, it may be that in this relatively safe interior location, the gods invoked by name in every copy of the Standard Inscription—Assur, Enlil, Ninurta, Anu, Dagan, Shamash, and Adad—would have provided sufficient protection. Or possibly room X was originally decorated with painted images on the slabs, on the wall above, or both, or perhaps its walls were covered with hangings that could also have carried images.¹⁴² However that may be, it appears that room X was considered to be a private room with only limited access, as it lacks the relief sculptures that are one of the hallmarks of conspicuous consumption in the other large rooms.

All of the features enumerated above seem to support Reade's identification of the south suite as Assurnasirpal's private residential suite. The overall emphasis on apotropaic imagery in rooms S and T and the particularly potent protective figures in the outer doors are readily understandable if this suite was the location in which the king conducted his private affairs: receiving high court officials, entertaining palace women, eating, bathing, and, especially, sleeping. While the king was engaged in these pursuits, the protective images carved all around the walls of the outer rooms would have provided a measure of magical protection, and at the same time would have reminded those closest to the king (and therefore potentially the most dangerous to him) that the king rules by the will of the gods and enjoys their protection.

The absence of sculptures in room X becomes less anomalous if that room was in fact the king's private retiring room, as it would then presumably have been inaccessible to all but his most trusted servants. A message of conspicuous consumption in that context would have been largely wasted, and magical protection could have been afforded through less costly means. In this respect, room X is like the other small interior rooms in the palace—A, J, K, M, O, R, U, V, and W—all of which were lined with slabs carved only with the Standard Inscription, which may have been felt to provide adequate magical protection. Whatever else the function of carved figures may have been, they seem to have been considered necessary only where there was the potential for a more general human audience, emphasizing fore-

most their role as emblems of consumption. Thus by focusing attention on the audience, Trigger's observations on the role of conspicuous consumption in monumental architecture help to account not only for the presence but also for the absence of sculptural decoration—rooms with limited access are unsculptured because conspicuous consumption is wasted if it is not conspicuous.

THRONE-ROOM SUITE

In the three suites that face court Y the decoration seems to emphasize three different aspects of Assurnasirpal's rule: military success in the west suite, service to the gods in the east suite, and divine protection of the king in the south suite. In the relief decoration of the throne-room suite, all three of these themes were brought together. The suite comprises three rooms (fig. 26). The throne room itself, room B, which is by far the largest enclosed space in the palace, opens via three monumental entrances onto the great outer court, ED. At the west end of the throne room is an alcove, room C, which gives access through door b to a ramp or stairway to the roof. The third room, F, is the inner "retiring room," and connects the throne room with the east and west suites and the central court. Unlike the other rooms in the palace, there is no uncertainty about the function of room B. Its identification as the principal throne room is confirmed by its size, by its location between the outer and inner courtyards, by its similarity in plan to the throne rooms of later Assyrian palaces, and by the presence of a large inscribed throne base at its east end.¹⁴³

As the principal audience hall of the king and the room through which access was gained to the interior of the palace, the doors of room B were very well guarded by apotropaic figures (pl. II). Of the three outer doors, door c, directly beside the throne base, was protected by a pair of winged lion-centaurs with folded hands, which form the doorjambs, and by a pair of four-winged deities, making the gesture of blessing with their right hands and holding maces in their left hands, on the wall just inside the door (pls. III–IV). Door d, at the far end of the room, was again protected by a pair of winged lion-centaurs as doorjambs, but each of these figures holds a small hooved quadruped clasped to his chest with his left hand, and a stalk with three tufted rosettes in his

¹⁴² Although no paintings have been reported in room X, extensive remains of wall paintings were found on the floor of the neighboring room S during the Iraqi restoration work in the room. Due to their fragmentary state

and extreme fragility, they were reburied pending the development of adequate conservation techniques for their preservation. See Tomabechi (*supra* n. 25) 54.

¹⁴³ Turner (*supra* n. 27) 183–94.

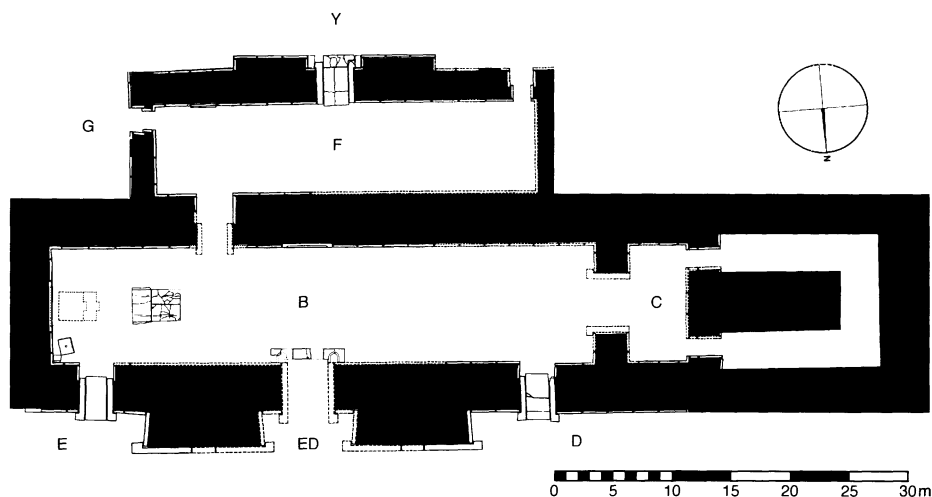


Fig. 26. Plan, detail of the throne-room suite. (After Paley and Sobolewski 1987, plan 2; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

lowered right hand. On the wall just inside the door was a pair of winged figures with headbands, each of whom holds a deer to his chest with the near hand and a stalk of palmettes in his upraised far hand. The fact that the three-dimensional doorjamb figures both hold the animal in the left hand suggests that their two-dimensional counterparts just inside this door, and in door a of room T, hold the animal in different arms on either side of the door only because of the compositional difficulty of satisfactorily representing an animal in the left arm of a two-dimensional figure shown from the right. The inside jamb slabs in doors c and d were all carved with the Standard Inscription. Since these slabs would have been obscured when the double doors were open, it may have been thought unnecessary to decorate these inconspicuous slabs with sculptures.

Doors c and d were each also protected by an additional pair of figures on the adjacent buttress: a human-headed winged bull with fish-head crown facing toward the door on the front of the buttress, and a four-winged deity with purifier and bucket facing outward on the side of the buttress. Except for the foot of a lion colossus, the center sculptures on the buttresses and those in door e are lost. Inspired by the pairing of bull with lion colossi on Assurnasirpal's temple facade in the center of the Nimrud citadel, Paley and Sobolewski have proposed a very plausible reconstruction starting from the lion fragment, from which they deduced a pair of human-

headed lion colossi facing the central door on the front of the buttresses. The four-winged figure carrying a kid and stalk of tufted rosettes, which they restore between each pair of facade colossi, is hypothetical but was actually found in this location on Assurnasirpal's central building facade, so the presence of some such figure here seems very likely.¹⁴⁴ The second pair of four-winged deities with purifier and bucket on the door e sides of the facade buttresses seems self-evident, as does the pair of human-headed bull or lion colossi in the door itself.¹⁴⁵ The three stacked figures, consisting of bird-headed figure with purifier and bucket, blessing figure with sprig, and deity with purifier and bucket, were taken directly from the main entrance to Assurnasirpal's Ninurta temple at Nimrud, where they occupied this same position.

Whatever the details of the center door, it is clear that all three outer doors of the throne room were amply provided with apotropaic figures. The different selection of figures in the east and west doors is interesting. Perhaps it is not too farfetched to speculate that the emphasis of the figures in the east door is to guard the door by fending off evil, while the emphasis of those in the west door is to intercept and disable it. In the east door, the lion colossi and the four-winged deities both convey an impression of vigilance. Indeed, the pains that the designer took to fit four-winged deities on the relatively narrow slabs 26 and 26a, where two-winged figures would

¹⁴⁴ Barnett and Falkner (supra n. 60) pls. 126–27; Meuszynski (supra n. 60).

¹⁴⁵ A slightly different reconstruction was proposed by Albenda, who suggested switching the positions of the lost

bull and lion colossi, with bulls only on the buttresses and lions only in the doors: P. Albenda, review of Paley and Sobolewski 1992, in *JNES* 55 (1996) 314.

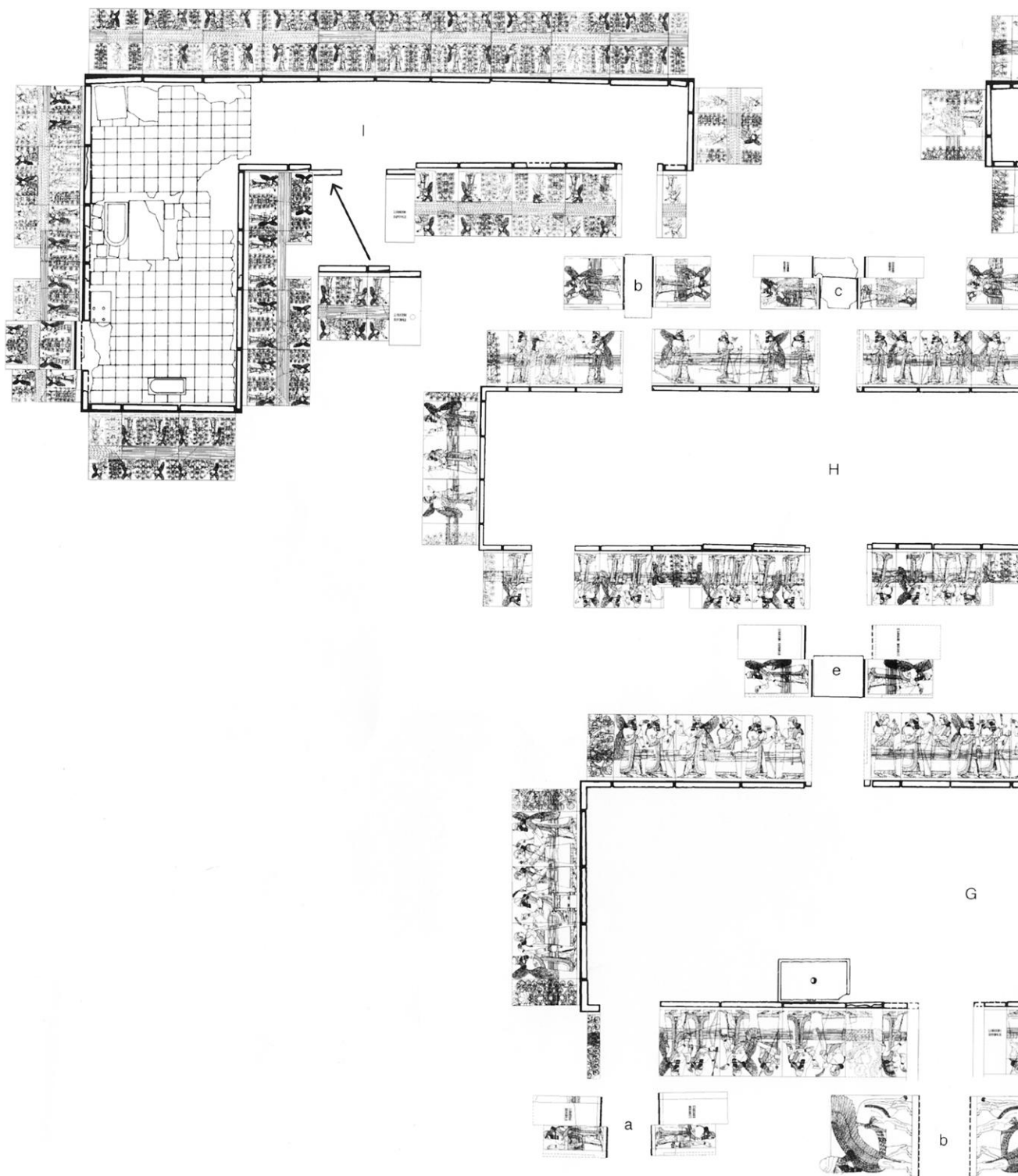
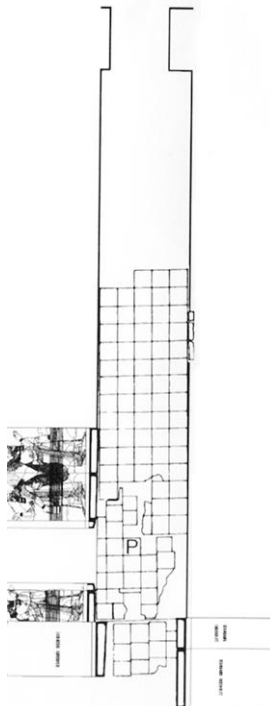
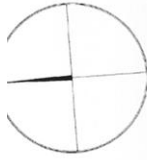
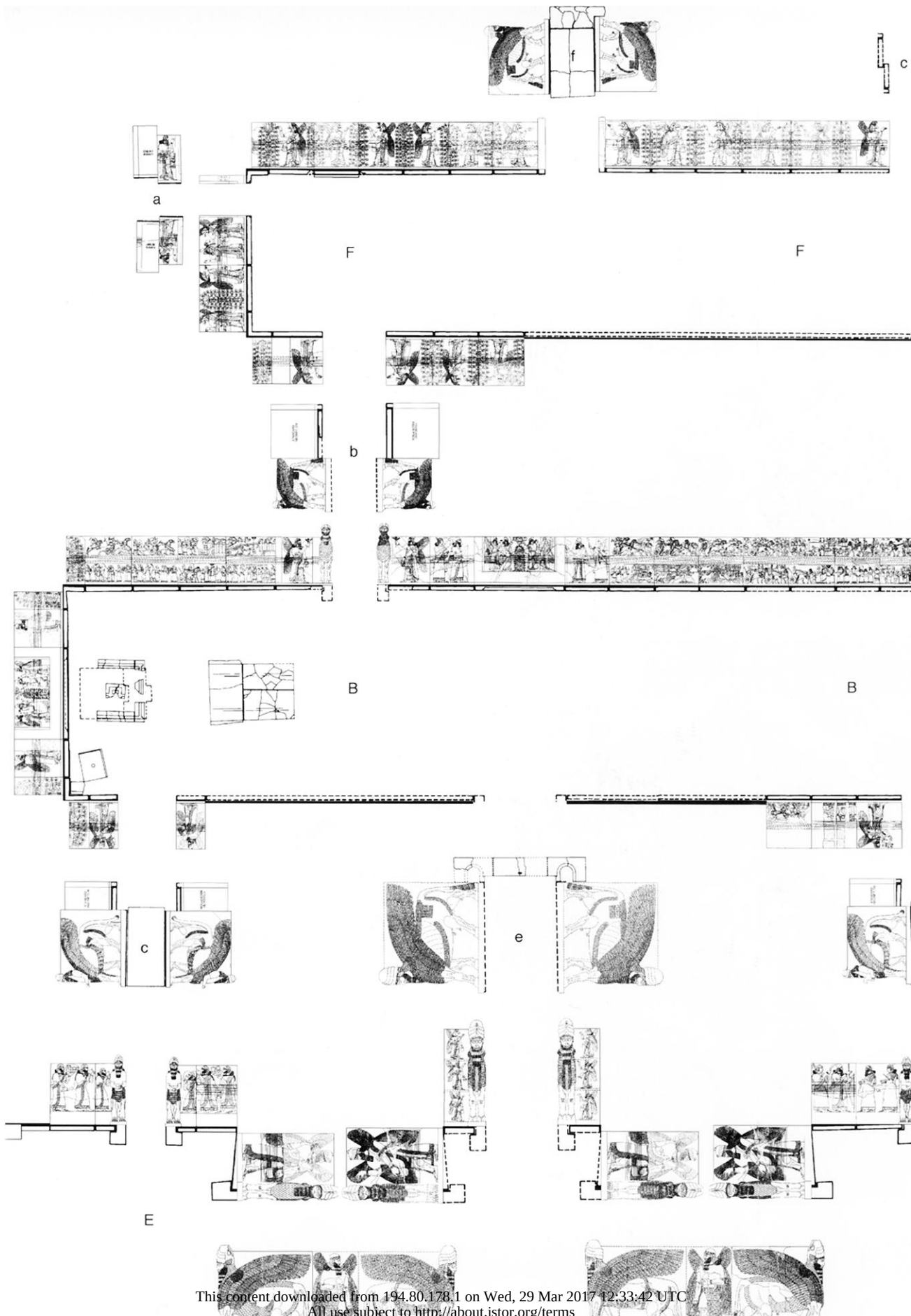


Plate I. Kalhu, palace of Assurnasirpal II, east suite, layout





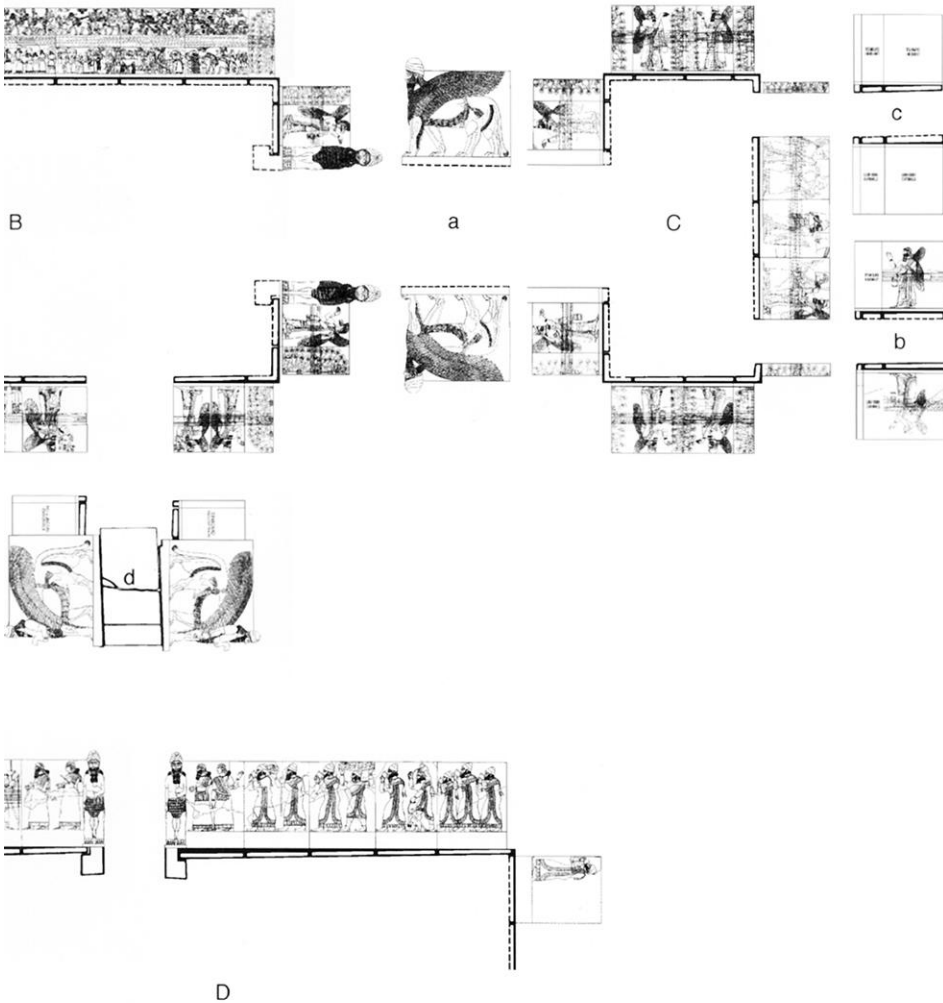
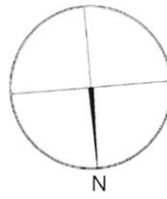




Plate II. Kalhu, palace of Assurnasirpal II, throne-room suite, layout of the decoration, assem



on, assembled by the author. (Courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

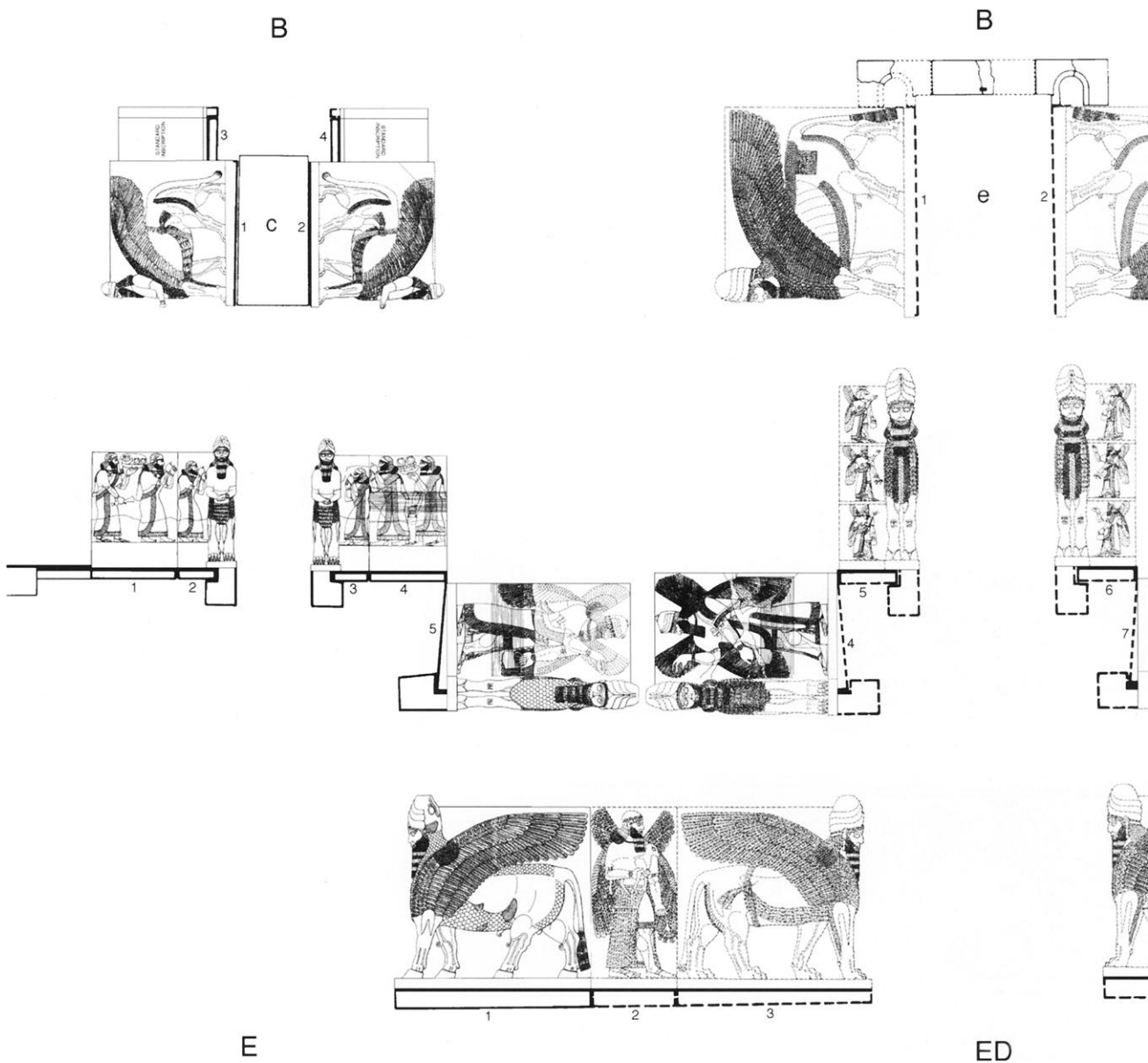
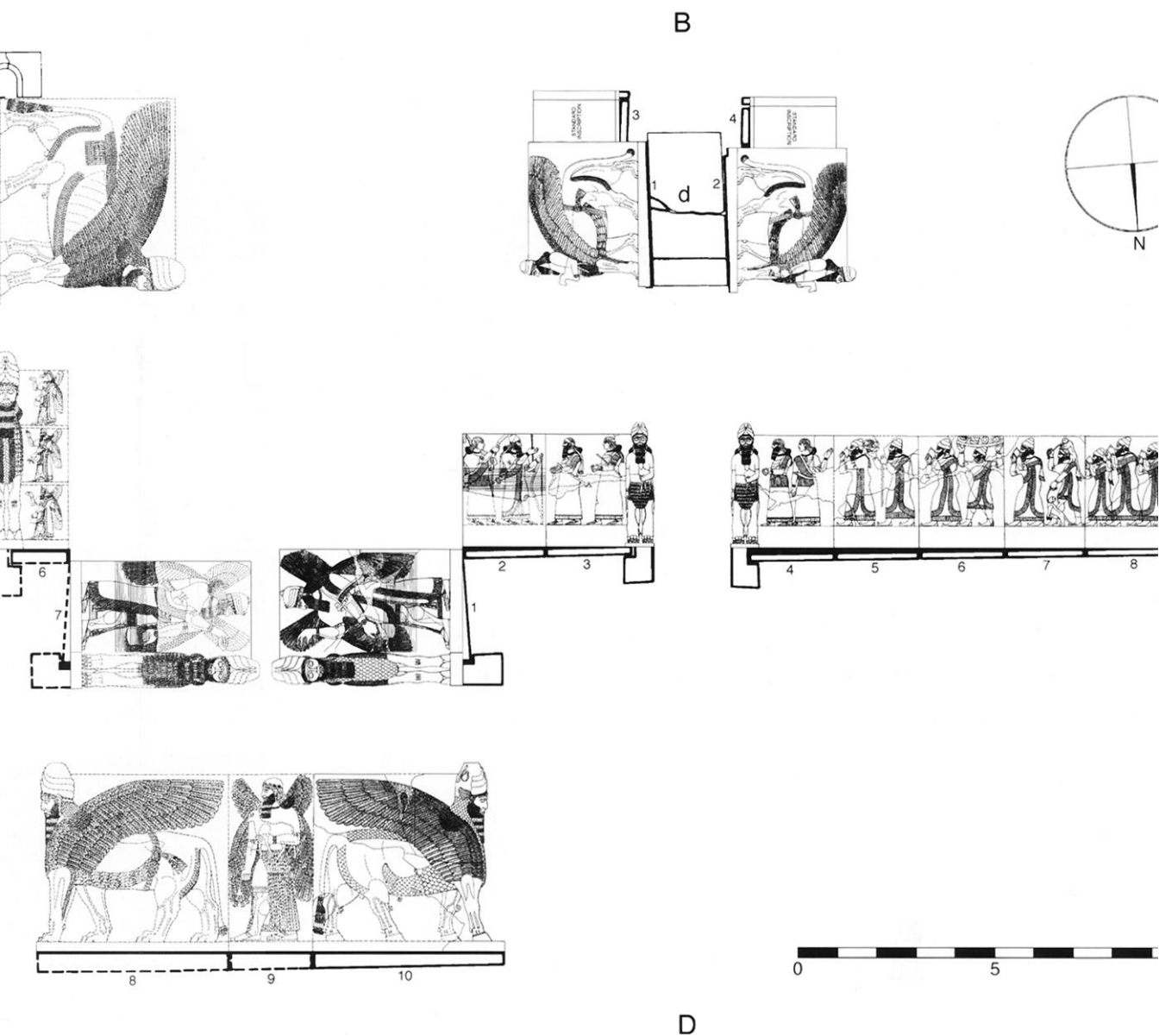
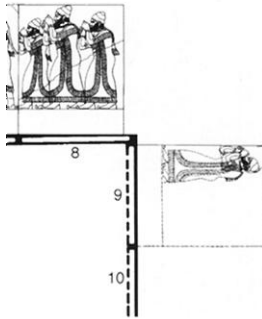
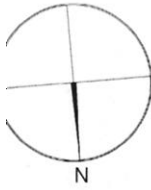


Plate III. Kalhu, palace of Assurnasirpal II, facade D/E, layout of the decoration



he decoration, assembled by the author. (After Meuszynski, pls. 5-6; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)



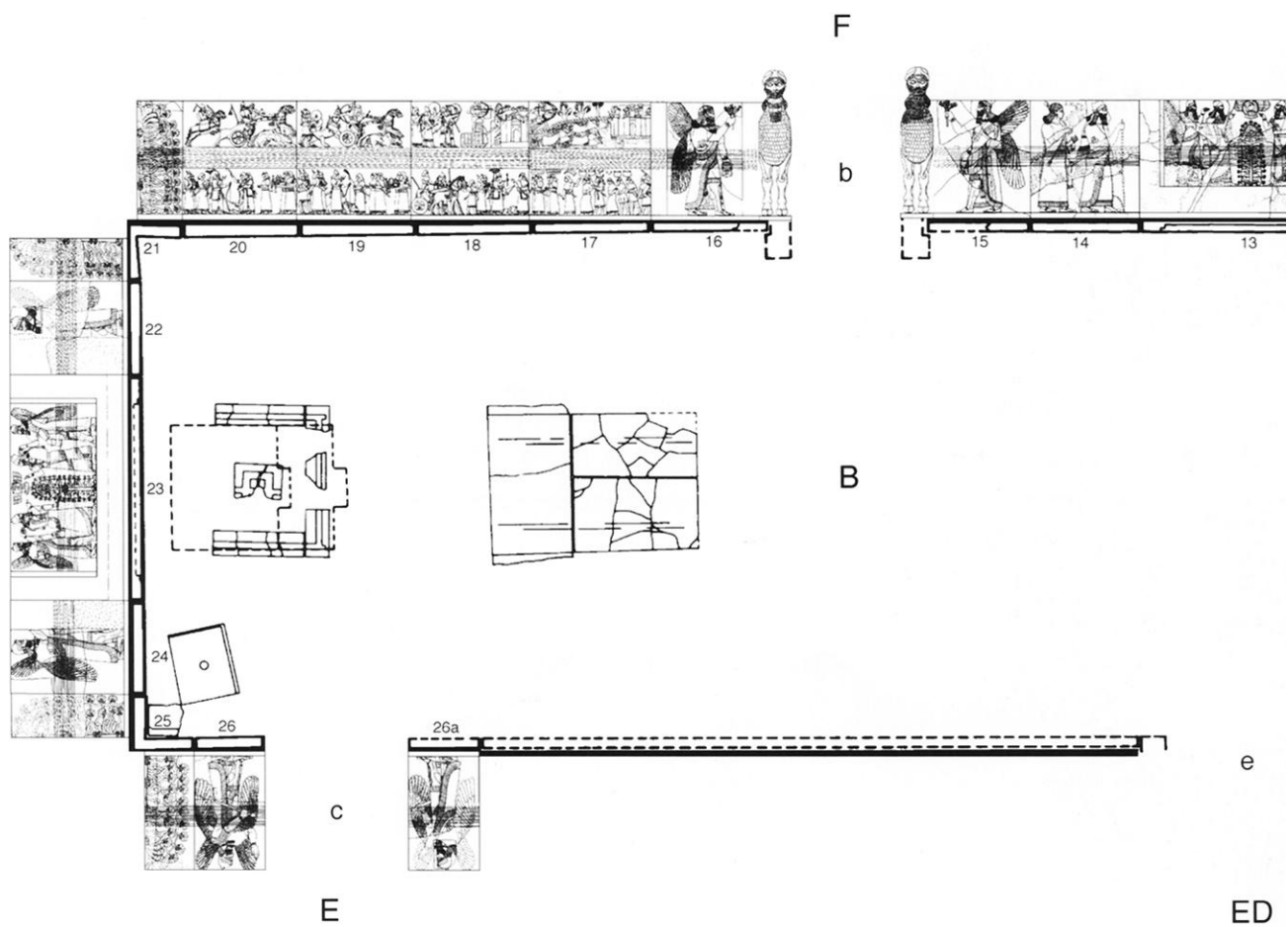
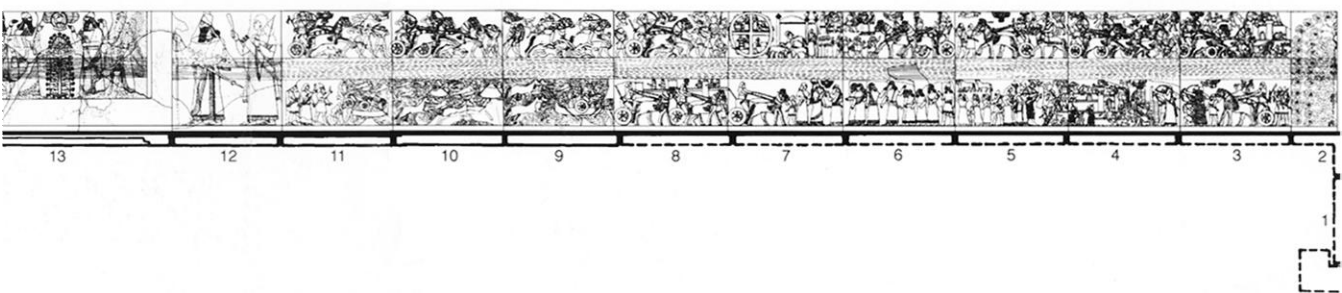


Plate IV. Kalhu, palace of Assurnasirpal II, room B (throne room), layout of the

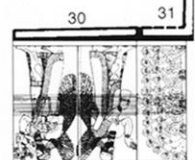


B

e



d

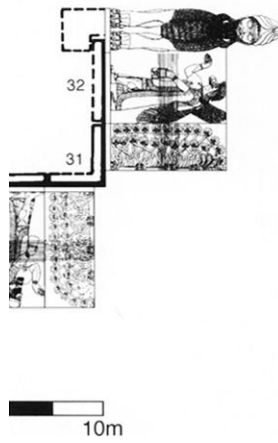
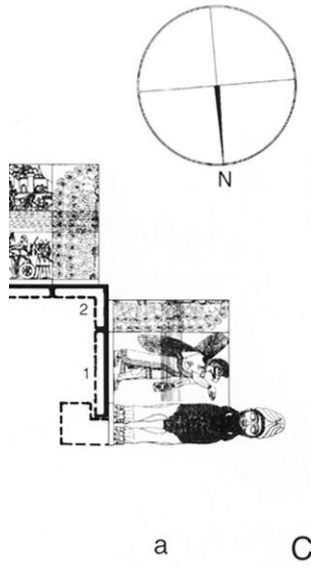


ED

D



out of the decoration, assembled by the author. (After Meuszynski, pls. 1-3; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)



fit more comfortably, supports the hypothesis that four-winged figures were thought to be more powerful, or at least more effective, than their two-winged counterparts.¹⁴⁶ As I have already suggested, this vigilance would seem appropriate in the doorway that was closest to the enthroned king, a doorway that was very unlikely to have been used as an entrance by visitors while the king was present. This door is much more likely to have provided illumination on the king rather than physical access to his person, and to have served as an exit for those who had concluded their audience with the king. The apotropaic figures in the west door, by contrast, all hold scapegoats, which would have served to intercept evil forces as they passed through a door that, by virtue of its distance from the enthroned king, may well have been the customary entrance for visitors.¹⁴⁷

The throne room is the only room in the palace in which colossal statues were placed in the interior doorways, a and b. Presumably these giant figures provided an additional measure of protection to the doors in which they were located, which would be appropriate given the relatively public nature and outer location of this room. They also draw attention to the doors and look very impressive, which would likewise be appropriate for this vast and relatively public space, a perfect venue for conspicuous consumption. In addition to colossal human-headed lions in the jambs, door a to room C was flanked by bird-headed figures with the purifier and bucket on the outer wall and winged deities with purifier and bucket on the wall inside (pl. II, fig. 27). The placement of figures with purifiers both inside and outside this door, including the only pair of bird-headed figures in the throne room, suggests that this may have been reckoned a vulnerable entrance, perhaps because of the stairway to the roof just beyond. The presence of a pair of winged blessing figures with buckets in door b of room C suggests that this was the door that led to the stairway. The stairs would have wrapped around the central pier until they reached roof level in the area of the adjacent door c, which presumably opened into a storage space under the stairs.

Finally, door b, which connected the throne room with the "retiring room," F, also had bull colossi as

doorjambs (pl. II, fig. 28). In addition, the slabs to either side of the door on the room B side were carved with a pair of winged figures with headbands, each of whom holds a bucket in his lowered left hand and a stalk of alternating tufted rosettes and pinecones in his upraised right. This curious plant apparently combines the apotropaic powers of the rosette, often associated with Ishtar, and the pinecone, and the resulting hybrid may have been considered to possess particularly potent protective powers. The slabs to either side of door b on the room F side display bird-headed figures with the purifier and bucket, which is also the subject on most of the other reliefs in that room. The jamb slabs behind the colossi are again carved only with the Standard Inscription, which would have been partially obscured when the double doors were open.

Of the other doors in room F, the blessing figures in door a, which leads to the east suite, have already been discussed, and whatever figures might have been in door c to the west suite are lost. The remaining door, f, opened from courtyard Y and was also lined with a pair of winged human-headed bull colossi, with bird-headed figures on the walls inside the door. The slabs to either side of the door in the courtyard were carved only with the Standard Inscription, as were all of the wall slabs in courtyard Y. For whatever reason, the courtyard was apparently not an appropriate location for relief images of any sort.

All of the corner slabs in the throne room and room C were carved with the stylized palm tree. In one case, the northwest corner of the throne room, a winged deity with purifier and bucket faces the tree; the remainder stand alone. In the two surviving corners in room F, by contrast, the stylized tree is placed next to the corner, as in room I, but not centered on the corner itself. The reason for this variation from the apparent norm is not clear.

Building on the observations of Reade, Winter argued that the relief decoration on the walls of the throne room has two powerful visual foci.¹⁴⁸ Slab 13, directly opposite the central entrance, and slab 23, directly behind the throne base, were both treated in a unique fashion. Each slab was twice the width of the standard wall slabs, and the upper two-thirds of each slab were cut back to form a shallow niche.

¹⁴⁶ As suggested by Fulghum (*supra* n. 51).

¹⁴⁷ This traffic pattern was first suggested by Mallowan (*supra* n. 42) 103, although his interpretation was based on the assumption that there were only two exterior doors, and was developed further by S.M. Paley and R.P. Sobolewski, "The Outer Façade of the Throne Room of the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrūd (Kalhu)," in H.

Waetzoldt and H. Hauptmann eds., *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten. XXXIX^e Rencontre assyriologique internationale, Heidelberg, 6.-10. Juli 1992* (Heidelberger Studien zum Alten Orient 6, Heidelberg 1997) 334.

¹⁴⁸ Reade (*supra* n. 3) 123; Winter (*supra* n. 5) 16-17. See also Paley (*supra* n. 44) 14.

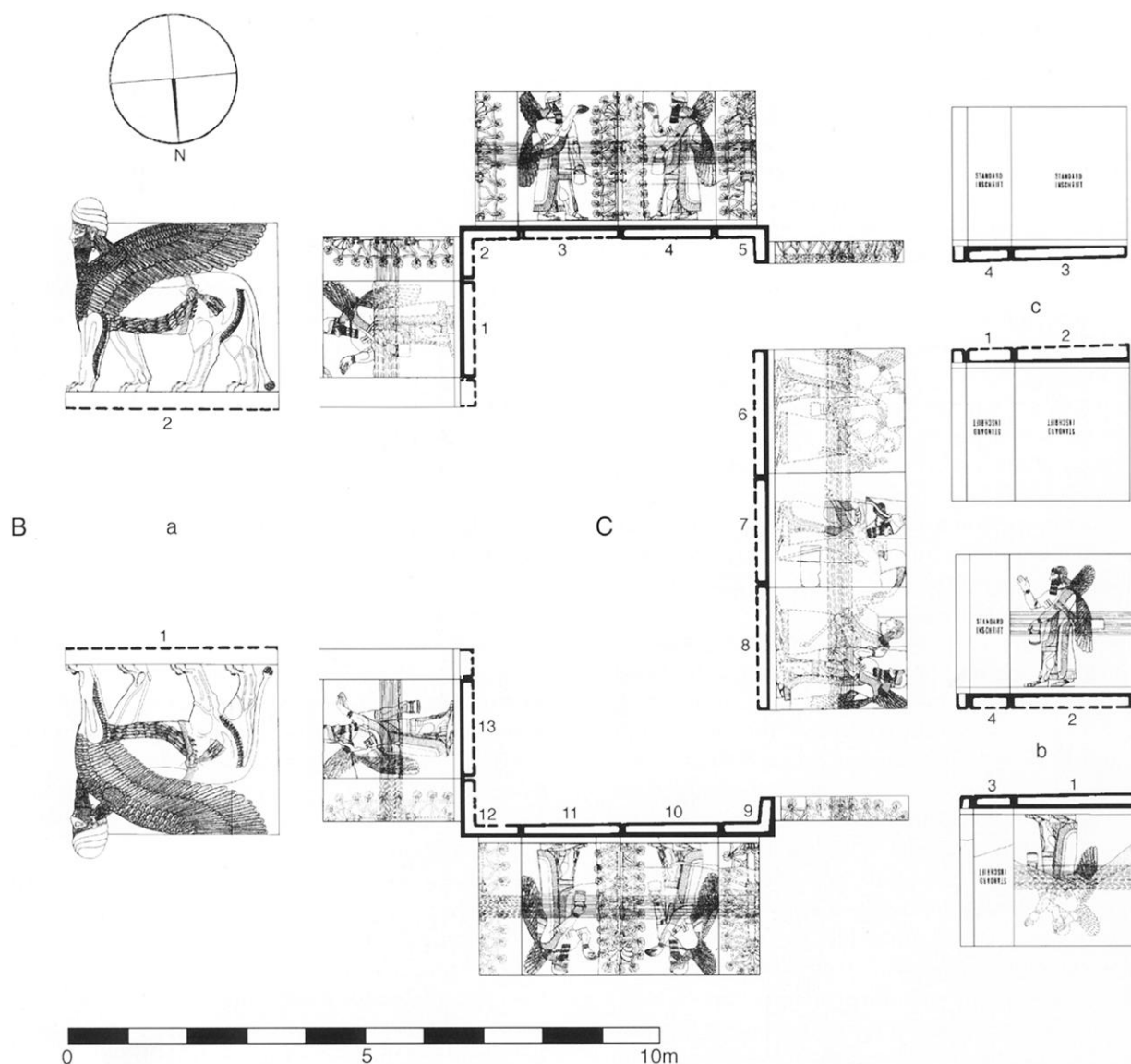


Fig. 27. Room C, layout of the decoration, assembled by the author. (After Meuszynski, pl. 4; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

The same subject was carved in both niches: a stylized palm tree in the center with a deity in a winged disk above it, flanked by two images of the king holding a mace in his lowered left hand and making a pointing gesture toward the center with his upraised right, all of which is flanked by a pair of winged deities with purifier and bucket. The slab opposite the main door is framed by a pair of slabs, each carved to its full height with an image of the king holding a staff, behind whom is a courtier with bow,

quiver, and fly whisk, all of whom face the image in the niche. The slab behind the throne base, by contrast, is framed by a pair of winged deities who probably held the purifier and bucket; their attributes were chiseled away during a subsequent remodeling, but enough remains of the left figure to show that he did not carry a mace. For both of these distinctive slabs, the framing figures focus attention on the image in the niche.¹⁴⁹

The meaning of the images in the niches has been

¹⁴⁹ Stearns (supra n. 3) pl. 23; S.M. Paley, "The Assyrian *Winged Genius* in the Middlebury College Museum of Art,"

The Middlebury College Museum of Art 1992 Annual Report (Middlebury 1992) 21.

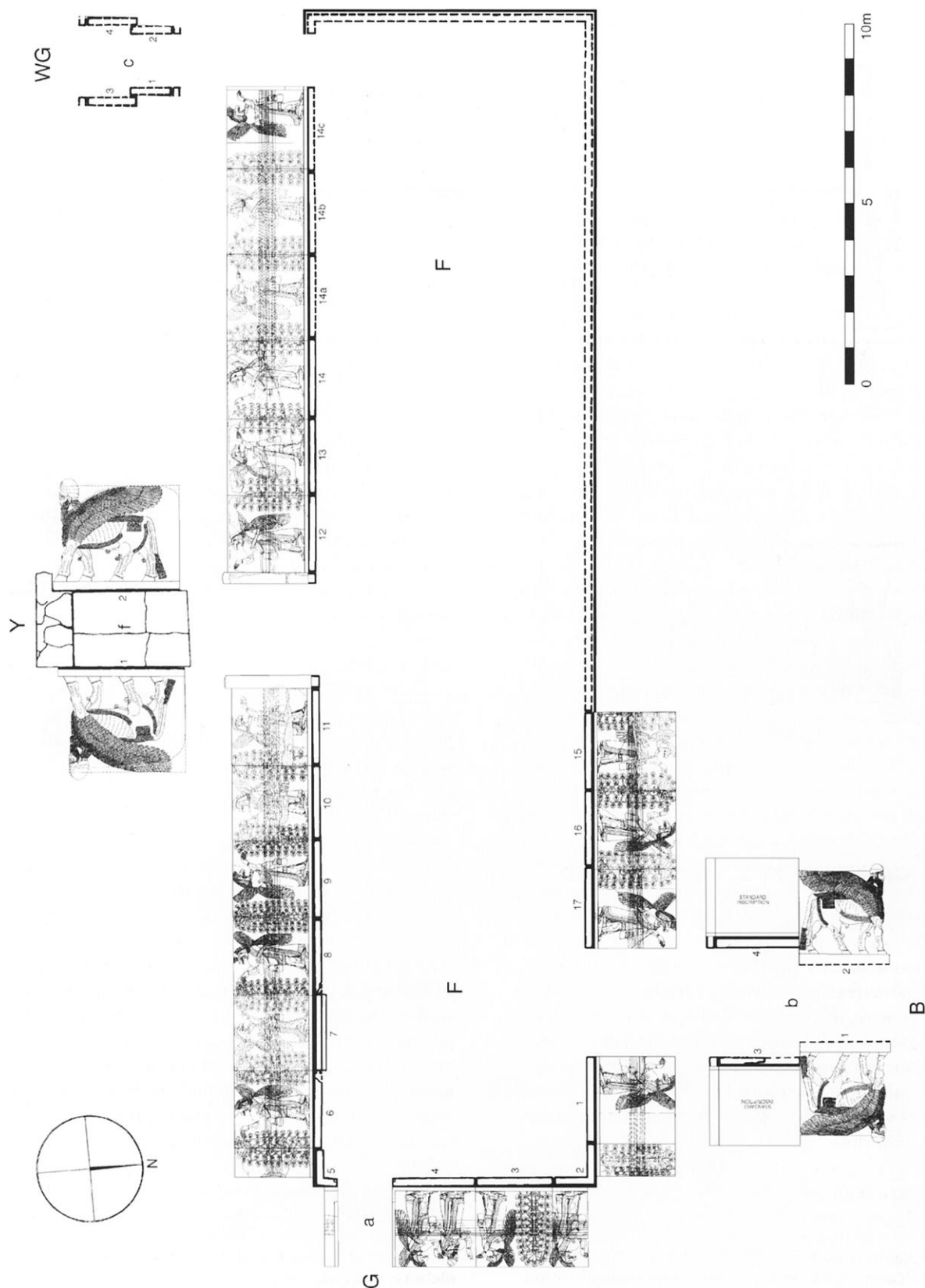


Fig. 28. Room F, layout of the decoration, assembled by the author. (After Meuszynski, pls. 6-7; courtesy R.P. Sobolewski)

the object of much speculation, but no agreement. Winter considered it "a statement of the king's role in maintaining ritual fertility, and thus the balance of the state in relationship to divine principles."¹⁵⁰ Porter linked the king with the standing deities, observing that here it is "the gods who reach out to fertilize the tree, but the king is now represented as the link between them. The scene becomes a visual metaphor for the king's role as the gods' regent on earth, the conduit through whose actions their gift of abundance could reach Assyria and her empire."¹⁵¹ Parpola instead linked the king with the god in the winged disk, arguing that "clearly, the Tree here represents the divine world order maintained by the king as the representative of the god Assur, embodied in the winged disk hovering over the Tree."¹⁵² Though these three interpretations differ significantly in detail, they all see the stylized tree as the key to the meaning of the composition. Based on the functional interpretations I have proposed for the stylized tree and winged deities with purifier and bucket, a very different interpretation of this scene may be offered.

It would seem that the best place to start is with the architectural context of these two distinctive slabs. The only apparent reason for placing the niche above the floor at the east end of the room is to raise it above the throne base, which would otherwise block the lower part of the image. Similarly, the only apparent reason for cutting a niche in this location is to provide a clear architectural setting for the throne base. The same reasoning probably holds true as well for the similar niched slab opposite the central door. Though no throne base was found here, this is the traditional and logical location for the king to sit in order to observe, and be observed from, the outer courtyard. On such occasions, it seems probable that a portable throne dais was used. Furthermore, Winter has observed that when the king was enthroned on the permanent throne base at the east end of the room, the niche in slab 13 opposite the central door would serve to draw the visitor's attention to the nearly identical niche on the end wall, before which sat the king himself.¹⁵³ It also directs the movement of a visitor who enters the room

through the central door, serving as a visual cue that defines the path to the king. What we must imagine, therefore, is a meaning for the image that complements the actual person of the king seated in front of it.

If we suppose that the function of the tree and standing deities here is the same as has been proposed for these figures in other contexts in the palace, i.e., purely apotropaic, then their sole function here too should be to safeguard the king, as represented by his two images as well as by his actual person, seated directly in front of the tree. The tree and standing deities, then, are not themselves the focus of the scene, but rather protect its principal subject, the king. The primary meaning of the image is expressed by the relationship depicted between the two figures of the king and the deity in the winged disk above. Indeed, what is shown here is a variation of the standard subject of Assurnasirpal's royal stelae, which depict the king paying homage to his gods. This is evident from the position of the king's clenched right hand, which is raised toward the god in the winged disk in a distinctive gesture in which the thumb is placed below the pointing forefinger, the same gesture that is used by the king in the presence of his gods on the stelae.¹⁵⁴

The god in the disk, most probably Assur or Shamash, extends a ring toward the king. The ring, elsewhere often shown with a rod reflecting its original form as a measuring rod and line, is a common attribute of godhood in Assyrian art. When offered to a king, it represents the bestowal of authority by the god. In the compositions in the throne room, the king is shown twice so that the person of the king does not obstruct the image of the king, depicted in the act of receiving the authority that he exercises by dispensing decisions from his throne. As in rooms G and H, the face and figure of the images of the king here are virtually identical to those of the deities, physical proof of his divine favor, while in turn these two inward-facing royal likenesses focus our gaze on the physical king in between, their perfect form ennobling and reinforcing the royal aspects of his person. While this is the central message of the scene in the niche, the presence of apo-

¹⁵⁰ Winter (supra n. 5) 16.

¹⁵¹ Porter (supra n. 90) 138–39.

¹⁵² Parpola (supra n. 89) 167.

¹⁵³ Winter (supra n. 5) 17.

¹⁵⁴ Budge (supra n. 56) pl. 2. Strabo described a similar gesture on an Assyrian stele in Anatolia, which he identified as the tomb of Sardanapallus: "a stone figure which represents the fingers of the right hand as snapping to-

gether, and the following inscription in Assyrian letters: 'Sardanapallus, the son of Anacyndaraxes, built Anchialê and Tarsus in one day. Eat, drink, be merry, because all things else are not worth this,' meaning the snapping of the fingers" (*The Geography of Strabo* 6, H.L. Jones ed. [Cambridge, Mass. 1924] 14.5.9, cited from hydra.perseus.tufts.edu).

tropaic divinities and the tree affirm that the king enjoys divine protection, as well as divine authority, and at the same time, these apotropaic elements purify the space in front of the slab that is occupied by the physical king himself.

In essence, therefore, this composition combines the axially focused apotropaic group that is deployed in centralized locations such as air shafts with the imagery of the royal stelae, inserting figures of the pious king into the protected spaces between the winged deity and stylized palm tree, which simultaneously extend their protection outward to encompass the throne itself. Brentjes has plausibly argued that the two kings on each of these slabs are Assurnasirpal's predecessors, Tukulti-Ninurta II and Adad-nirari II, who also comprise the genealogy at the beginning of the Standard Inscription.¹⁵⁵ If so, then these royal forebears placed to either side of the throne emphasize Assurnasirpal's legitimacy through recognition of his royal lineage. The relief behind the throne, therefore, would be a visual equivalent to the introduction of the Standard Inscription, identifying Assurnasirpal as chosen of the gods and the son of great kings, and like the Standard Inscription, conferring authority, legitimacy, and protection on the throne's occupant.

The remainder of the preserved reliefs in the throne room depict scenes of battle and the hunt in two registers separated by the Standard Inscription. The two slabs closest to the throne base (19 and 20) are decorated with scenes of the royal hunt. Winter has suggested that this subject therefore had special significance for the king. This view receives support from the subjects of the garment decorations on the reliefs; the robes of the king as well as the figures that accompany him are often decorated with scenes of royal hunts, but never with battle scenes.¹⁵⁶ As already noted, in the garment decorations these hunt scenes appear together with images of deities and winged mythic figures subduing monsters and demons, and it may be that images of the hunt had a similar significance, as the king emulates the action of the deities by subduing the wild forces of nature in his realm.

The other historical reliefs represent royal military campaigns. In the short span afforded by slabs

17–18, the sequence of a single battle is divided between the upper and lower registers, with the assault above and the booty procession below. On the longer stretch of slabs 3–11, by contrast, each sequence is worked out fully in a single register, and several such sequences are depicted. One interesting feature of the location of the hunt and battle scenes is that each of the three outside doorways affords a view of a different subject: as already noted, the central door opens onto the scene of the king receiving divine recognition, the east door presents images of royal hunts, and the west door presents royal military campaigns.¹⁵⁷ This observation supports the idea that door d might have been the principal entrance for visitors, as this would have afforded the fullest view of the battle scenes, images that were probably intended to bolster the loyalty of both friend and potential foe. A considerable part of the north wall of the throne room was evidently paneled with historical reliefs also, as evidenced by the subjects of the surviving slabs 27–28 at the west end, but these reliefs are lost.

The reliefs on the west wall of room C, a shallow alcove at the west end of the throne room, introduce a subject that is already familiar to us from the east suite: the standing king with bowl and bow, flanked by a pair of courtiers and a pair of winged figures with purifier and bucket.¹⁵⁸ Clearly visible from the throne room through the wide door a, this image is effectively part of the decorative scheme of the throne room. The subject of this relief is the same as those in room G, the king making offerings to the gods, but here he is accompanied by both human and divine attendants. As with the images opposite one another on the long axis of rooms G and N, the images at the east end of the throne room and the west end of room C complement one another. From the king's perspective on the throne, the image visible at the farthest end of the room depicts his service to the gods, while on the wall directly behind him, that service is rewarded with the divine gift of royal authority. From the perspective of anyone else in the room, these two images justify the king's presence on the throne in that room. The large-scale static representations of the king at the centers of the south, east, and west walls also serve to

¹⁵⁵ B. Brentjes, "Selbstverherrlichung oder Legitimitätsanspruch? Gedanken zu dem Thronrelief von Nimrud-Kalah," *Altorientalische Forschungen* 21 (1994) 50–64.

¹⁵⁶ Winter (supra n. 5) 18–19; Layard (supra n. 70) pls. 8, 48–50.

¹⁵⁷ The different views from each door were drawn to my attention by Ellen Belcher, a graduate student in the

Department of Art History at Columbia University (personal communication, 16 April 1996).

¹⁵⁸ Recently, I rediscovered the upper part of one of these reliefs, slab 6, at Canford School in Dorsetshire; see J.M. Russell, *From Nineveh to New York: The Strange Story of the Assyrian Reliefs in the Metropolitan Museum and the Hidden Masterpiece at Canford School* (London 1997).

fix his image in the eye of the viewer, allowing that image to be readily identified in the smaller-scale dynamic battle and hunting scenes.

The reliefs on the side walls of room C depict the stylized tree and deities with purifier and bucket, as was the case also in the comparable rooms N and T. As each of these rooms contains a back door to the suite, they may have been thought to require special protection. Apotropaic figures are also the primary relief subject in room F, the "retiring room" behind the throne room. The only nonapotropaic image in the preserved part of the room is the king himself, depicted standing between a pair of bird-headed figures with purifier and bucket at the east end of the room. His left hand rests on his sword hilt while his right hand is raised in the gesture of blessing that is elsewhere only used by the apotropaic figures with headband.¹⁵⁹ I do not know if the king's image in this familiar location on an end wall marks a spot from which he presided over activities in the room, as seems to have been the case in the throne room and rooms G and S, or whether it instead or in addition marks the route he followed between the throne room and room G.

The remaining slabs in room F are carved exclusively with the stylized palm tree alternating with the bird-headed figure with purifier and bucket. As with rooms I, L, and S, this suggests an intent to create a very well protected space. I can suggest three reasons for the choice of apotropaic subjects for this room. First, the king might desire to have a secure retiring room close to the more vulnerable outer space of the throne room. Passing into this room after leaving the throne room might serve to purify the king of any unwanted pollution that he had accidentally picked up. Second, this room served as both the antechamber to the throne room and the gate chamber to the rest of the palace. Since one must pass through room F to reach any part of the palace interior, the apotropaic imagery on its walls would have served as a sort of filter, protecting the inside of the palace from undesirable intruders, while at the same time protecting the inner door to the throne room from intrusions from the interior.¹⁶⁰

Finally, of the three types of decorative subjects that were featured in the reception rooms of the inner suites in Assurnasirpal's palace, the reliefs in room F exemplify the apotropaic imagery that was the principal subject in the south suite. The other two primary subjects, of course, were historical nar-

ratives and ritual offerings, featured respectively in the west and east suites, and also in rooms B and C of the throne-room suite. The decoration of the throne-room suite, therefore, expresses the same ideology of power, piety, and protection that was developed individually in each of the three inner suites of rooms.

To this mixture, the throne-room facade (D and E) adds the further ideal of prosperity, in the form of the peaceful delivery of tribute from subject peoples at the extremity of the empire. At the western door, a procession of western tributaries bearing jewelry and monkeys approaches the image of the king from the right (fig. 29). Paley and Sobolewski have observed that these are powerful visual cues for the emissaries and tributaries who presumably actually congregated in the outer court while awaiting a royal audience; these reliefs simultaneously direct them toward the entrance door and illustrate correct deportment in the presence of the king.¹⁶¹ At the eastern door, tribute processions approach from both sides, converging not on the image, but rather on the person of the king, enthroned just inside. The message of these tribute processions in the outer court seems to be that the maintenance of order, as shown inside the throne room and in the inner suites of the palace, will assure prosperity in the form of the flow of wealth from the outer reaches of the empire into its capital.

CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of this study I ventured two hypotheses: first, that the relief decoration of Assurnasirpal's palace expresses a fourfold Assyrian ideology comprising military success, service to the gods, divine protection, and Assyrian prosperity; and second, that the subject and placement of the decoration in each suite of rooms was influenced by the function of that suite. In order to test these hypotheses, I drew on two theoretical approaches to understanding the meaning of architecture: Trigger's principle of monumental architecture as conspicuous consumption, and Rapoport's phenomenon of the redundancy of cues in the architecture of complex societies. My source material was the architecture and sculpture of the palace itself, as well as comparative architectural, visual, and textual sources from the general Assyrian milieu. While I cannot claim to have proven these hypotheses—others looking at the same data have drawn, and will doubtless continue to draw, different conclusions—I believe

¹⁵⁹ Budge (*supra* n. 56) pl. 46.

¹⁶⁰ This excellent point was made by Fulghum (*supra*

n. 51).

¹⁶¹ Paley and Sobolewski (*supra* n. 147) 334.

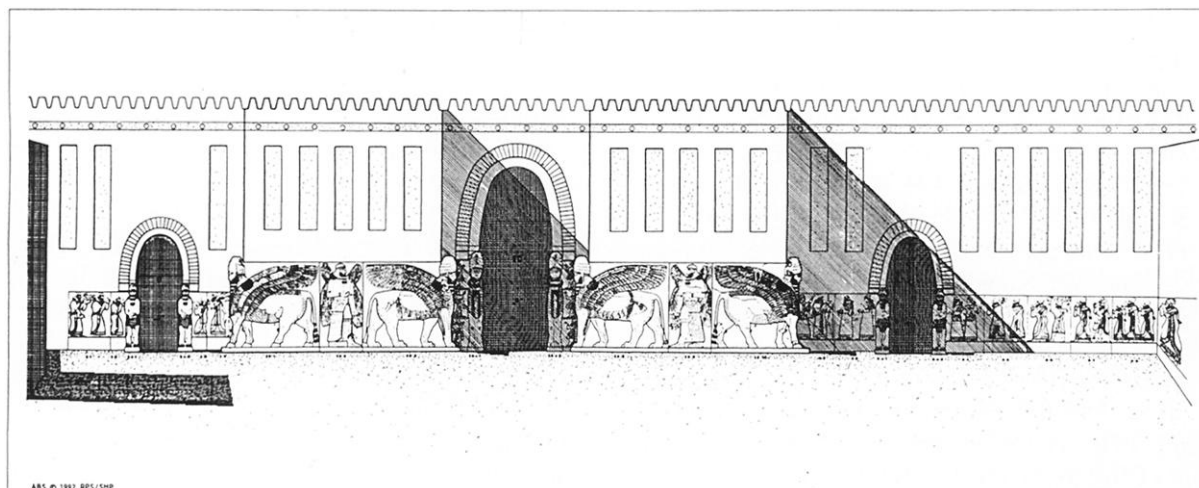


Fig. 29. Facade D/E, reconstruction of the elevation, prepared by R.P. Sobolewski, S.M. Paley, and A.B. Snyder. (Courtesy R.P. Sobolewski, S.M. Paley, and A.B. Snyder)

that I have shown them to be a viable way of considering the architectural layout and decoration of the palace. On the basis of my analysis, I determined that the subjects of the reliefs may be identified with considerable confidence, that the architectural cues suggest a specific primary function for each suite of rooms and the relief subjects in those rooms reinforce the likelihood of that function, and that relief carving served as an expression of conspicuous consumption by being carved in conspicuous locations.

To conclude, let us take a quick tour through the palace, moving this time from outside to inside, viewing it in light of the cues that have been considered in this study. For these purposes, it is useful to think of the palace in terms of outer and inner areas, with the throne room as the interface between the two. A visitor to the palace who had been ushered into the outer court, ED, would have stood before the monumental throne-room facade, the most public part of the state apartments and the most dramatic example of conspicuous consumption in the palace. Confronted by this concentration of colossal divinities and subservient tributaries, the visitor is invited to contemplate the resources at the disposal of the king and to conjure up mental images of comparable splendors hidden within.

This highly conspicuous facade framed three entrances, each of which offered a different visual experience. The great central door was apparently flanked by every type of figure in the Assyrian apotropaic arsenal—bull and lion colossi, four-winged deities with the purifier and bucket, figures with a scapegoat and plant, and two-winged anthropomorphic and bird-headed figures with purifier and bucket or plants. This formidable concentration of mon-

umental figures framed an image of kings, deities, and a tree, enclosed within its own frame on the opposite wall inside the room. This image was a virtual duplicate of the one behind the throne base, which suggests that on occasion the king could sit here as well, as was the case in the throne rooms of the earlier palace at Mari and the later palace at Babylon. I suspect that this door was not used as an entrance when the king was enthroned at the end of the room, but rather only when the king positioned himself opposite it. This might have happened on occasions when the king wished to receive visitors directly from the courtyard, or to review activities in the courtyard or be viewed from the courtyard.

The reliefs flanking the west door, d, by contrast, present the spectacle of foreigners bringing tribute before the image of the king. The door itself is lined with colossi with scapegoats, beyond which is a vista of royal battles on the opposite wall inside. The sequence of images here, therefore, moves from instruction in proper behavior outside, to instruction in the perils of noncompliance inside, with cleansing apotropaic images in between. The apparent message of these reliefs, combined with the distance of this door from the throne base, would seem to make this an ideal entrance for outsiders seeking an audience with the king. The reliefs flanking the east door, c, again depict tribute processions, but now converging from both sides toward the door itself, just beyond which sat the person of the king. It is difficult to imagine visitors approaching the king from his side—if this door was used at all when the king was present, it probably served as the exit for those who had finished their audience.

The splendor exhibited by the throne-room facade is carried to the inside of the throne room as well,

the only room in the palace in which every door contains a pair of bull or lion-headed colossi. For visitors whose business carried them only as far as the throne room, presumably the great majority, the occurrence of such figures in every door would have fostered the impression that every other doorway in the palace also contained such figures, another example of conspicuous consumption in a relatively public location serving to increase the imagined magnificence of the private areas. The opulence of the room is further enhanced by the wall reliefs, which include examples of nearly every relief subject in the remainder of the palace. A look around the throne room would have given a visitor a full sense of the range of subjects within.

The throne room evidently represents both the innermost zone of the Assyrian empire—the place where Assyrian subjects come before the “king of the world”—and the outermost zone of the royal apartments. The king and court entered this room from within, the rest of the world from without. We do not know how large a public was granted admittance to the throne room, but on the evidence of the foreigners depicted on the facade reliefs, it was very likely a larger and more diverse public than would usually have been admitted to the rooms beyond. The interior of the palace was accessible only through the “back” door of the throne room, door b, which led to room F. While the triple portal of the facade invites admittance, the single back door bespeaks exclusion.

To move beyond the throne room and gain access to the inner suites of the state apartments, one must pass through room F, the walls of which were lined entirely with apotropaic figures. This space served as the retiring room and antechamber of the throne room, and as the gate chamber to the inner court and east and west suites. Door f, the principal exterior door of this room, provided indirect access to the three inner reception suites via the inner courtyard, Y, from which one could approach the monumental exterior portals of the other three suites. The scale of the four monumental doorways in court Y suggests that they were intended as the primary entrances, but this may be misleading. Rather, as suggested also for the central door of the throne room, they may have been used mainly when the king sat opposite them. Room F also provided direct access to the east and west suites through two interior doors, a and c. These doors, however, have

the appearance of small private entrances tucked away in a corner directly adjacent to the short wall where the king would have customarily been enthroned. Their scale and location suggest that these were the king's personal entrances to the east and west suites.

Each of the three inner suites was decorated with a different subject, and each of them seems to have had a different function. The east suite was the one closest to the throne end of the throne room, roughly in the same position as the ablution room in the throne-room suites of later Assyrian palaces. The wall reliefs in the large outer and middle rooms of this suite show the king as a priest pouring libations and as a ruler having his weapons blessed. The presence of stone ablution slabs on the floor of the outer room, and stone and brick pavements in the inner rooms, suggests that this suite may have been used for libations, as shown in the images. In addition, the wall reliefs of the innermost rooms, I and L, depicted only apotropaic figures, suggesting that these paved rooms with niche, drain, and ample magical protection may also have been used for ablutions, ritual or personal. The west suite, by contrast, has large outer rooms on both sides. Each of these rooms is fitted with at least three exterior doors and wall reliefs that depict royal conquests and hunts. These features are also characteristic of the throne room, and it is likely that the west suite was likewise used for royal reception and perhaps also for banqueting. The south suite is isolated from the others. Unlike the other suites, which were decorated with wall reliefs throughout, only the outer room of the south suite had wall reliefs, and these showed only apotropaic figures. The emphasis on protection in the outer room, the lack of emphasis on conspicuous consumption in the inner rooms, and the direct access from this suite to the back part of the palace all suggest that this was the king's private residential suite, with access restricted only to the outer room.

We now see that Assurnasirpal stood on the brink of the greatest empire the world had ever seen, but Assurnasirpal himself could see only the past, not the future. What he could see was how precarious Assyria's position had been during the previous two centuries, which had been characterized by Aramaean incursions and Assyrian contractions and retrenchments.¹⁶² From Assurnasirpal's perspective, Assyria's claim to greatness may have been a given, but the implementation of that greatness lay solely

¹⁶² An observation made by Seth Richardson (“É.GAL Ashurnasirpal: Palace of the ‘fraidy-cat,’” unpublished seminar paper, Neo-Assyrian Seminar, Columbia University,

fall 1996), a graduate student in the Middle East Languages program at Columbia University.

in his hands. The relief program of Assurnasirpal's palace lays out a recipe for Assyrian security and prosperity, displaying each of the ingredients in the location where it would have the greatest effect on the groups who could assure his success. This program communicated with its audiences at two levels: the overt level of meaning expressed through relief images in architectural context, and the more covert message of conspicuous consumption embodied in the profusion of sculpture within a monumental architectural setting. The fact that relief sculptures were apparently confined to the most accessible

rooms suggests that, whatever magical power the images may have been thought to possess, the choice to depict such images through the medium of sculpture in public rooms reflects an intention to influence human, as well as divine and demonic, occupants of the palace.

CRITICAL STUDIES DEPARTMENT
MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGE OF ART
621 HUNTINGTON AVENUE
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02115