



Lamassu, British Museum

An analysis of the object's life and sudden 'death'



Object in the Modern Era

Currently held in British Museum rooms 6a and 6b, Collection Number 118802

Displayed in a pair, and stands at 350 centimeters in height, and 371 centimeters in length

Assyrian Descent, during reign of King Ashurnasirpal II

Excellent Condition



Description of the Object

Made using Gypsum, a soft lightweight mineral

Winged lion with head of a human-
which will be later discussed

Interestingly statue has 5 legs, so can
be viewed from multiple angles
without being distorted



Background to Assyrian Civilisation

Stretched from early Bronze Age to Iron Age

Was a dependency of Mesopotamia until 14th century BC (Augustyn et al, 2020)

Rocky history through until 9th century, where it peaked until 7th century BC, when it eventually fell



9th-7th Century BC Assyria

During this time, Assyria was not only a civilisation but an empire

Period in which Assyria's most notable rulers were in charge, including Sargon II, Ashurbanipal and Ashurnasirpal II

“One of the most important eras in Mesopotamian history, a fact reflected in the large number of royal inscriptions for this king and the wealth of detail which they contain” (Grayson, 1991)

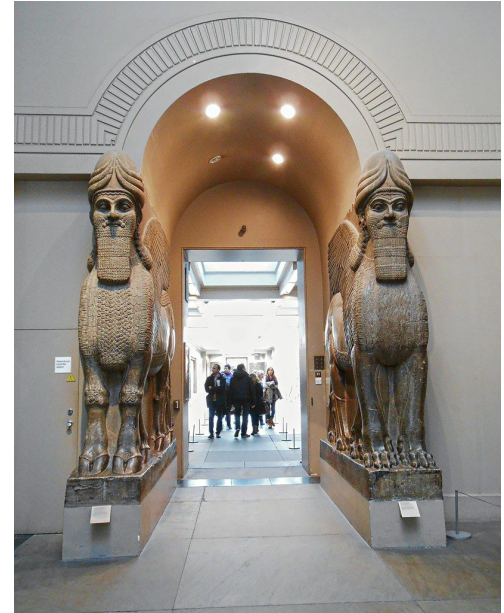


The Context of Which the Statue was Found

Found at entrance to Throne Room in Royal Palace of Ashurnasirpal at Nimrud, modern-day Iraq

Both statues flanked entrance, clearly exhuming the power and prestige seated within

Nimrud was made capital of Assyria during reign of Ashurnasirpal II (Met Museum, 2022)



Who is being Depicted?

Assyrian god *Lamassu*, a 'servant' god who is depicted introducing guests to another, more superior god (Lendering, 2004)

Gender of deity is disputed- generally female but my statue has a beard

Beards are a sign of superiority across Assyrian culture- beard may be used on statue to emphasise the power held by the ruler within

Adornments on statue (crown and belt) further support this theory

Why is the Lamassu Statue Present?

“The horned cap attests to its divinity, and the belt signifies its power”

(Metropolitan Museum, 2021)

Statue is Apotropaic- meaning to ward off evil. Protects the ruling king from opposition he may face

Five legs potentially support this- frontal view shows Lamassu being strong in the face of danger, and peripheral view shows Lamassu moving forward possibly ‘against evil’ (Amin, 2014)

Possible Link to Ishtar

Ishtar is the Mesopotamian goddess of love and war

Also the “first known deity for which we have written evidence” (Pryke, 2019)

Often depicted alongside a lion, which may suggest statue has body of a lion to combine the power of both goddesses together



Other Lamassu Depictions in Assyria - Persepolis

Persepolis, the 'Gate of All Nations' is accompanied with 2 similar Lammasu statues. Interestingly, these statues have clearly faced the elements

Supports theory that my statue was kept inside/under a cover in original location



Other Lamassu Depictions in Assyria - Dur-Sharrukin

150 years later than Nimrud statues (during reign of Sargon II)

Clear difference that can be observed is the presence of two heads, as opposed to one

Most likely due to cultural artistic advancements



Previous Lamassu Appearances

Motif seems to appear during the first half of the second millennium BC (Danrey, 2004)

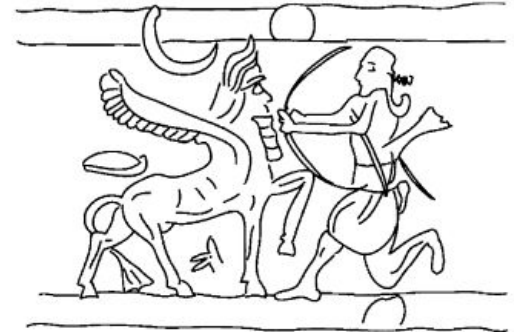
Defeating Barbarians and Protecting Kings



14th Century BC



8th Century BC



9-8th Century BC

Sudden Disappearance of Lamassu

No other figure came to substitute the winged human-headed bull at the gates of the last Neo-Assyrian buildings (Danrey, 2004)

Although sudden drop-off could be due to cultural changes, some historians argue that the representations of the Lamassu would have continued if material was available

Sculpted using a large stone, so a sudden lack of availability would lead no more statues being constructed

Supported by point that Lamassu statues rapidly 'fell off' as opposed to a small decline

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