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Representations of the North Syrian Landscape in Neo-Assyrian Art

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This article explores the way in which landscapes are imagined by imperialist regimes, and in particular by the Neo-Assyrian empire of the early first millennium B.C. The landscape of North Syria, a primary territorial target of the expansionist Neo-Assyrian empire, was mapped out at the heart of the empire in depictions on stone reliefs adorning the palace walls at Nimrud, Khorsabad, and Nineveh. An analysis of these images suggests that the landscape of North Syria was represented by the Neo-Assyrian royal apparatus as a lush and bountiful world, full of exotic animals and natural diversity. Five pictorial topoi, or consistent themes of representation, of the North Syrian landscape are identified within the reliefs throughout the Neo-Assyrian period. These topoi expressed the political ideology that the North Syrian landscape, captured in the distance and recreated in the heartland in the form of royal gardens, was a necessary and beneficial addition provided by the Neo-Assyrian kings for the prosperity of the empire.

INTRODUCTION

The stone bas-reliefs found in the palaces of the Neo-Assyrian kings have long fascinated students of the ancient Near East. These bas-reliefs decorated the mudbrick walls of the Neo-Assyrian palaces in the capitals of Nimrud, Khorsabad, and Nineveh during the ninth through seventh centuries B.C. They are rife with detail that reveals much about both Mesopotamian history and the development of artistic styles in the region. Most importantly, the reliefs escort us through the contemporaneous Near Eastern world through Assyrian eyes, and especially courtly, or elite, Assyrian eyes. They show us how the Assyrians viewed the many different groups of people, cities, and landscapes they encountered during their military campaigns abroad or their celebrations at home.

The reliefs have inspired various studies that attempt to understand how the images on the reliefs both reflected and affected the Neo-Assyrian political and ideological milieu in which they were created (Olmstead 1918; Reade 1979c; Winter 1981;

1983; Marcus 1987; Russell 1987; 1991; Porter 1993; Cifarelli 1998). The reliefs that include details of foreign landscapes in particular have drawn a great deal of attention. Most often scholars have used the landscapes in the reliefs to identify a specific event, in the absence of epigraphs or other visual clues (Reade 1978; 1979b; Russell 1991: 152-53). In other cases, the landscape elements have been used to help interpret the human actions in the reliefs (Albenda 1976; 1977; 1983; 1998; Marcus 1995b).

The goal of this article is to analyze the Neo-Assyrian pictorial representation of one foreign landscape in particular, that of North Syria to the west of Assyria (fig. 1). The intricate detail shown on the reliefs, coupled with the pictorial focus on the conquest of North Syria throughout the Neo-Assyrian period, provide much source material from which we can understand the Neo-Assyrian representation of the North Syrian landscape. An analysis of textual and pictorial references to the floral and faunal landscape of North Syria suggests that the Assyrian royal apparatus depicted the North Syrian natural

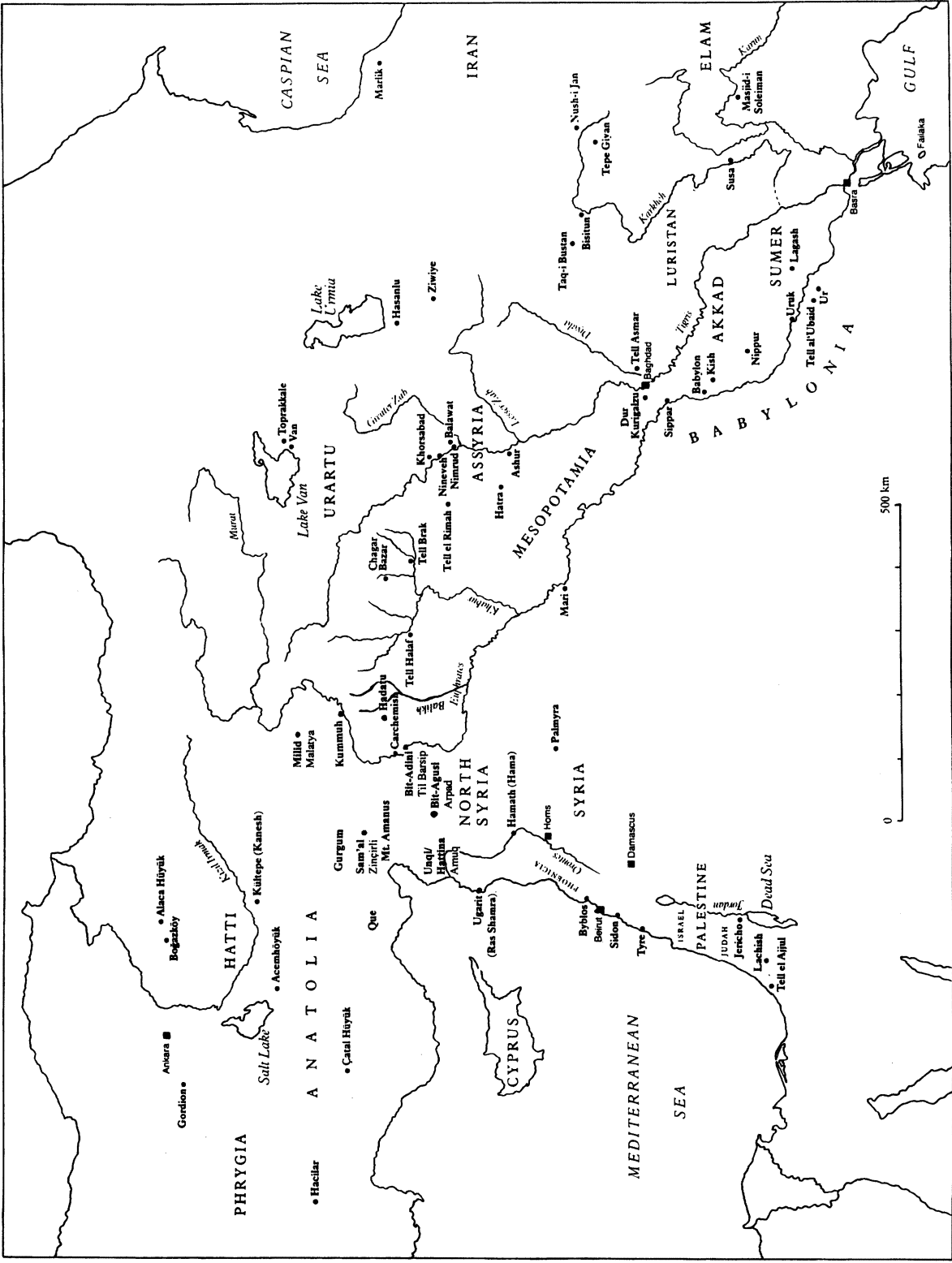


Fig. 1. Map of the ancient Near East showing North Syria (adapted from Collon 1995: 9). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

landscape as wild, abundant, and diverse. This landscape was so desired as to cause the kings to re-create its floral and faunal abundance within the heartland in the guise of royal gardens, zoos, and game parks. Textual and pictorial references also indicate that these garden complexes were constructed as sites of relaxation and pleasure for the Assyrian kings. The representation and re-creation of North Syria, however, was not necessarily an Assyrian urge toward pictorial mimesis of nature. Rather, I will argue that the Assyrian kings commissioned fictive imaginings of the North Syrian landscape in order to assert that such a diverse and fertile land was both contained within the royal realm in the distance and re-created closer to home.

While the North Syrian landscape was a favorite subject for this fictive imagining and tangible recreation, the phenomenon was part of a larger and more complex scheme in which the entire extent of the Assyrian empire—including many different peripheral regions such as Babylonia, Iran, and Urartu—was encapsulated in microcosm.¹ I focus on the landscape of North Syria in particular because I believe that it was the original site chosen for emulation. It was the focus of royal adventure and collection early in Mesopotamian history, as well as in the formative phases of the Neo-Assyrian period at least until the reign of Sargon II (721–705 B.C.).² During the Neo-Assyrian period, a fascination with the landscape, and especially with the mountain ranges of North Syria, intensified. In particular, Mount Amanus in North Syria attracted a lot of attention owing to its majestic height, diverse wild animals, and thickly forested slopes. The interest in the North Syrian natural landscape culminated in the second half of the empire with the construction in the Assyrian heartland of royal gardens (*kirimah[h]u*) that were, according to Sargon II's text, "modeled after Mount Amanus (*tamšil kur-Ḥamanim*)" in North Syria "in which all the aromatic herbs of Hatti and fruit trees of the mountains were planted."³ In the latter half of the Neo-Assyrian period, the fascination with peripheral landscapes broadened, as an interest developed in the landscapes of all of the empire's peripheral regions,

from the slopes of Mount Amanus to the marshes of Babylonia.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The suggestion that the Assyrian re-creation of North Syria was a fictive imagining derives from studies in political geography. There is a vast general literature on landscape, but only recently has the arbitrary nature of landscape been discussed. This discussion has arisen largely as a result of the post-modern critique of rhetoric and representation.⁴ Cosgrove and Daniels (1988: 1) compare landscape and the geographical knowledge that creates landscape to a cultural image or symbol. They argue that the creation of space in word and image is not empirical fact, but a body of representation. The language of geography and landscape, the metaphors used to describe and depict places, are arbitrary constructions defined by and reliant upon the cultural milieu in which they are issued, despite their appearance of being solidly "grounded" in physical fact. Landscape, whether in map, textual, or pictorial form, is an imagining, a construct of the human mind rather than a precise mapping of physical reality.

While Cosgrove, Daniels, and others have been primarily concerned with more modern constructions of landscape, the concept of the construction of place has also been examined with regard to ancient Assyrian civilization, and was a focus of the recent XLIV Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale in Venice, Italy, in 1997.⁵ The rhetorical practice of landscape creation has been described by Michalowski (1986) for the Akkadian period (ca. 2300–2100 B.C.) as the creation of "mental maps" for purposes of political discourse and national identity formation. Furthermore, Marcus (1995b) has related

¹ I would like to thank Samuel Paley for bringing my attention to this important point.

² All dates in this article follow the chronology set by J. Brinkman in Oppenheim (1964: 346).

³ Fuchs 1994: 66–67.

⁴ The literature on deconstruction itself is incredibly vast. Foucault's analysis of the European prison system and the device of the all-seeing and seen panopticon relates the control of space to political and social power and identity (Foucault 1975). Foucault was the first to establish the connection between space and power, and his analysis then became central to later postmodern studies of landscape (Agnew and Duncan 1989; Mitchell 1994).

⁵ The invited papers of this conference have been published in Milano et al. 1999. In particular Huot, Tadmor, and Winter relate the textual and pictorial creation of landscape elements to political ideology in the Mesopotamian world.

the Neo-Assyrian construction of place to the ideology of gender and the creation of masculine identity in relief images and historical texts. These imagined landscapes can be seen as an imperative, within a specific context in Assyria, for purposes of power and control, and deserve examination. However, first we must examine the geographical, topographical, and historical contexts within which the Assyrian imagining of the North Syrian landscape occurred.

GEOGRAPHIC AND TOPOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF NORTH SYRIA

The term “North Syria” refers, obviously, to the northern area of Syria. However, “Syria” is a problematic term for the early first millennium B.C. as it was derived by the Greeks from “Assyria,” and so it necessitates further explanation (Bunnens 2000: 3). Geographically, the region of North Syria can be delimited by the Taurus Mountains on the north, the Amanus (modern Nur) Mountains on the west, the Orontes River valley on the south, and the Euphrates River on the east (Winter 1973: 36A, 77). In the early part of the Neo-Assyrian period, the Assyrians referred to this area and its inhabitants collectively as “Hatti.” “Hatti” is derived from one of the populations encountered by the Assyrians in the region, the Luwian-speaking Hittites, who moved into the region from Anatolia and established urban centers during the second millennium B.C. (*RLA* 4: 152–59, “Hatti”; Winter 1973: 34).⁶ In general, we can equate the Neo-Assyrian “Hatti” with the historically and archaeologically attested cities that flourished in northern Syria in the early first millennium B.C., termed “Neo-Hittite” by modern scholars. However, the region that the Neo-Assyrians called “Hatti” had a mixed population and was not exclusively Luwian/Neo-Hittite in ethnicity. In fact, these small states experienced local power struggles between Aramaean and Luwian-speaking rulers.⁷ The core North Syrian cities of Hatti that are mentioned in the Assyrian texts are Carchemish, Milid (Malatya), Unqi/Hattina/Pattina (Amuq), Gurgum,

Que, and Kummuh. Certain other cities also might have been considered part of the Hatti region by the Assyrians, although they were frequently ruled by Aramaeans. These include Samʿal (Zinçirli), Bit-Agusi (Arpad), Hadatu (Arslan Tash), Bit-Adini (Til Barsip), and Hamath (Hama) (*RLA* 4: 152, “Hatti”; Winter 1973: 35). For the majority of the Neo-Assyrian imperial period, Hatti was distinguished geographically and ethnically from the coastal littoral of Syria and Lebanon populated by Phoenicians, and from the drier and generally less mountainous region south of Damascus and the Orontes River valley, populated almost exclusively by the “Amurru” (Aramaeans) (*RLA* 4: 154, “Hatti”). However, after the reign of Sennacherib, “Hatti” took on a more expansive connotation in Assyrian royal texts and seems to have encompassed any western land, including Phoenicia, Philistia, Samaria, and Judah, and was not restricted to the Neo-Hittite/Aramaean states of North Syria.

While the city-states of North Syria had ethnically and linguistically mixed populations and rulers, they were collectively identified as “Hatti” by the Assyrians because of their geographic proximity and perceived ancestral homeland.⁸ They have also been linked by modern scholars because of their shared political and cultural *koine*.⁹ In the early first millennium B.C., the North Syrian city-states developed palace-based centralized economies, dynastic lines, monumental architecture, and a consistent style of art derived from earlier Hittite models. In sum, the term “North Syria” used here is somewhat anachronistic; however, it is consistently used in the literature referring to the area during the first millennium, and it pinpoints for modern readers the geographic region and loosely unified culture that the Assyrians commonly referred to as “Hatti.”

During the first millennium B.C., North Syria—the region bounded by the Euphrates and Orontes river valleys and the Amanus and Taurus mountain ranges—was topographically diverse. The region in-

⁶ The inhabitants of North Syria did not refer to their homeland as “Hatti,” probably because the region was not politically organized into a single unit.

⁷ For the ethnic composition of the North Syrian elite, see Klengel 2000; Dalley 2000.

⁸ Although the Assyrians conceived of the region as unified, the indigenous inhabitants of North Syria did not have a collective term for themselves in either the Luwian or Aramaic language (Hawkins 1974: 68).

⁹ Bunnens has argued that political and cultural characteristics, including palatial organization, religion, art, and architecture are more useful indices for grouping the North Syrian city-states together and should supercede a purely geographical grouping (2000: 18).

cluded high mountainous areas with dense pine forests on its northern and western fringes, including the Amanus Range (Rowton 1967; Meiggs 1982: 50; Moorey 1994: 348–51). The region also contained wide and fertile open plains peppered with oak trees, such as the plain of Jerablus where the city of Carchemish was located (Winter 1973: 41), in which rain-fed agriculture was practiced. The areas of North Syria closer to the Mediterranean coast were more humid and tropical and thus were able to produce abundant fruit trees. Additionally, parts of North Syria consisted of drier regions of steppe or desert with relatively little vegetation, especially within the southern fringe. Above all, North Syria is today and was in ancient times permeated with rivers and their fertile valleys, including the Euphrates, the northern edge of the Orontes, and a number of other small rivers such as the Sajur and the Kara Su. These rivers were important trade and transportation routes during the first millennium B.C.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Unlike the highly centralized Neo-Assyrian empire based in northern Iraq, North Syria during the early first millennium B.C. consisted of a number of small city-states that held dominion over the fertile plains, lush river valleys, and rugged mountains in which they were located. The governing elite of the cities mustered their own troops, negotiated their own foreign policy, and collected their own taxes. The city-states of North Syria had varying degrees of political and military alliance with Assyria, one another, and their neighbors to the south (Aram-Damascus) and north (Tabal and Urartu). During the ninth through eighth centuries B.C., the city-states of North Syria were slowly brought under the political and military authority of the Neo-Assyrian empire. By the beginning of the seventh century B.C., Sargon II finally defeated Carchemish, and all of North Syria was under the effective control of Assyria (Hawkins 1974; Klengel 1992: 222–30; Kuhrt 1995: Vol. 2: 410–17, 458–61). While this generally describes the outcome of the Neo-Assyrian conquest of North Syria, it should be noted that at various points in this two-hundred-year period, some city-states or coalitions of North Syrians effectively resisted and rebelled against the Assyrians through military force or refusal to deliver tribute. Though never admitted in the Neo-Assyrian texts, the fact that the Assyrians had to return often and repeatedly

to certain cities suggests that the Assyrian army did not always achieve easy victory against its foes in North Syria.¹⁰

NEO-ASSYRIAN TREATMENT OF LANDSCAPE

While it is important to describe and differentiate the entity of North Syria from surrounding regions, it is critical to understand that the empirical description of the North Syrian landscape used here is less at issue than the Assyrian perception of that landscape. The Assyrian imagining and representation of North Syria can be traced in the images that depict the landscape. Irene Winter has pointed out (1983) that this representation, although consistent throughout the Neo-Assyrian period, was not a monolithic, unchanging phenomenon. Rather, it was a complex pictorial activity that manifested itself through several different visual topoi as time progressed. The changing representation of North Syria was partly due to the changing historical situation between Assyria and its imperial periphery. The differences in treatment were also due to the evolving forms of landscape depiction and to experimentation with spatial relationships in the reliefs. Battle narratives within North Syria became less of a focus of the reliefs by the late eighth century B.C., and the references to the North Syrian landscape in the seventh century came in the *ex situ* representation—that is, in the construction within Assyria of actual gardens that were modeled in part on the North Syrian landscape as well as in the images of these royal gardens in the palace decorations.

The central problem scholars face in analyzing the landscapes in the Neo-Assyrian battle narratives and related tribute scenes is identifying where the action took place. From the mid-eighth century B.C. and later, the Assyrian monuments often included short captions, or epigraphs, in the field of the relief or just above it (Gerardi 1988; Russell 1991: 23).¹¹ In the absence of epigraphs that specifically identify

¹⁰ For example, Shalmaneser III initially attacked Ahunu of Bit-Adini in the first year of his reign and then returned to Bit-Adini in regnal years 2, 3, 4 (RIMA 3: A.0.102.6).

¹¹ Epigraphs were not used on the reliefs before the reign of Tiglath-pileser III. They do, however, appear on the Bronze Gates from both Ashurnasirpal II's and Shalmaneser III's reign (RIMA 2 and RIMA 3, *passim*).

the locale, scholars have used the dress and accoutrements of the foreigners depicted to locate the events in the reliefs (Wäfler 1975). In addition, isolated landscape elements, such as pine or palm trees, have been used to identify the location of a particular event (Winter 1981: 15; Russell 1991: 155; Marcus 1995b: 199). Many scholars have commented that the depiction of landscape in the Neo-Assyrian period was minimal in the early periods of the empire and became more detailed and complex toward the end, especially in the reign of Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.) (Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951: 176; Reade 1980: 73; Russell 1991: 192). This relative lack of landscape detail in the earlier reigns may have been due to the composition and size of the narrative reliefs. In the reigns of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.) through Shalmaneser III (858–824 B.C.), the narratives occurred in either double registers separated by inscriptions or in miniature bands on gates. Figures occupied the entire height of the registers or bands, and landscape elements were placed in discrete blocks of space interspersed between, above, or below figures and cities. In order to represent recession into space, or three-dimensional space on the two-dimensional plane of the wall, the figures within the landscape either overlapped or were stacked above one another with the upper figures “floating” or placed above the ground line. Russell has argued (1991: 193–95) that the effect of this figure and landscape placement is to present the audience with a “worm’s eye” view, which gives precedence to the foreground and those elements that rest on the single ground line at the bottom of the relief. In the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 B.C.), the Neo-Assyrian artists began experimenting with different ways of depicting three-dimensional space. Figures were reduced in size, giving the impression of greater distance from the viewer. They were also placed above and below one another, often on top of carved ground lines, so that the figures on the upper ground lines appear farther from the viewer than those on the lower ground lines (Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951: 175; Auerbach 1989: 81–82; Russell 1991: 59; Albenda 1998: 25).

In the reign of Sargon II, three formal elements were emphasized in the reliefs: the use of a single register that spanned the entire height of the stone blocks; the lack of adherence to a single ground line; and the use of an overall pattern of spirals or scales signifying a watery or mountainous setting. This new configuration is best exemplified in Sargon’s “seascape” relief from Court VI of his palace at

Khorsabad (fig. 2).¹² In addition, Sargon’s artists experimented with scale by showing the figures as consistently smaller than their background, which presented a bird’s-eye view to the observer who looked “down” at the scene from on high (Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951: 177). The absence of a single ground line, the inclusion of an overall pattern of background, and a reduction in the scale of the figures created a generous space for the depiction of individual landscape elements such as trees and animals. Therefore, the treatment of space and scale united the figures in one spatial setting and allowed for increased emphasis on geographic specificity. Within Assyrian ideology, this specificity was intended to assert the veracity of the narratives: if the landscape could be precisely shown in a detailed manner, it would lend credence to the victorious events occurring within the landscape (Winter 1981; Marcus 1995a).¹³

In Sennacherib’s reign, with the change in ground line placement and the size differentiation between background and figures, artists created a deeper focus on landscape by experimenting with showing recession into space. They therefore created narratives with a great deal of detail in the representation of landscapes (Russell 1991: 209). Other innovations in the treatment of space and the depiction of detail in the landscapes also occurred in the reign of Sennacherib, and to some extent in that of his grandson Ashurbanipal (668–627 B.C.) (Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951: 174–78; Reade 1979b: 96–109; Russell 1991: 129–35). However, the amount of detail included in the landscapes did not change significantly from Sennacherib’s reign onward. This added level of detail, developed in the latter half of the empire, contributes perhaps the most to an understanding of the image of the North Syrian landscape represented in Neo-Assyrian art.

¹² For a full discussion of this relief, see Albenda 1983; Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951: 175. Parpola (1987: 74) has argued that this scene in fact took place in a wide river and not a sea.

¹³ The inclusion of specific details as a tool for creating veracity in the reliefs was a consistent practice of Neo-Assyrian artists from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II on, and this practice did not begin in the reign of Sargon II. However, the introduction of epigraphs, coupled with the change in landscape depiction that occurred in Sargon II’s reign, allowed Neo-Assyrian artists to emphasize and draw attention to distinct geographic elements.



Fig. 2. Period of Sargon II. Khorsabad, Court VI (Vigneau 1935: II, pl. 4). By permission of the Musée du Louvre.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE NORTH SYRIAN LANDSCAPE

Because the Neo-Assyrian representational formulae changed over time, the discussion presented here takes a diachronic approach. The images of the North Syrian landscape selected for discussion are not meant to be exhaustive, but to exemplify five themes, or *topoi*, of representation that reveal an Assyrian view of North Syria's natural features. The focus is on the representation of the floral and faunal elements of the North Syrian landscape because these elements, as deliberately constructed images, seem to have played a particularly important role

in ideology and royal legitimation. They assert, in pictorial language, that the fertility and natural prosperity of the realm as handed down by the gods was maintained and improved by the Assyrian kings.

Ashurnasirpal II to Tiglath-pileser III

In the reigns of Ashurnasirpal II to Tiglath-pileser III, three *topoi* referring to the natural landscape of North Syria were consistently reiterated.¹⁴ The first *topos*, an imaginative reconstruction of

¹⁴ Ashurnasirpal II's reliefs were innovative but also dependent themselves on earlier Middle Assyrian pictorial

the diversity of the North Syrian floral landscape, depicted a variety of trees and vegetation growing wild in North Syrian environments. In general, the vegetation in these earlier reliefs are subordinate to the action—they bend and are trampled underfoot by the soldiers—yet they are not generic representations of plants. Rather they are purposeful verisimilitudes that may have been used to indicate “specificity of place” (Winter 1999: 72). The practice of using floral elements to “index” a specific topographic or geographic locale was not an Assyrian invention, but had existed in Mesopotamia at least since the Akkadian period (Winter 1999: 69). Perhaps deliberately drawing on an archaizing practice, Ashurnasirpal II’s artists depicted the natural diversity encountered in North Syria by portraying four clearly different types of trees in the reliefs from his Northwest Palace at Nimrud, including Room B, the main throne room, and several rooms in the West Wing, most likely a secondary reception suite.¹⁵ The depicted species include baobobs and date palms from Carchemish (fig. 3);¹⁶ and vines and tall trees with rounded fruits, perhaps from Damdamussa (figs. 4–5).¹⁷ A relief from the West Wing shows another type of vine or shrub (fig. 6).¹⁸ As represented in the Assyrian reliefs,

North Syria was not the *only* region that contained certain plants; for example, date palms are a common feature of Babylonian landscapes. However, date palms may not be used as the single “index” signifying a North Syrian landscape since North Syria is represented in the reliefs by the inclusion of several “index” elements in association with one another.

In Ashurnasirpal II’s bronze gates that adorned both a royal palace and the temple to the god Mamu at Balawat, specific landscape elements are particularly evident in the narrative compositions (Cifarelli 1995: 273). For example, on one band of the Mamu Temple Gates (J. Oates 1983), the king receives tribute before a city with crenellations, identified in the epigraph as Balawat itself (RIMA 2: A.0.101.96–97). Most significantly, four panels from the palace gates depict Ashurnasirpal II’s hunting exploits.¹⁹ These scenes have epigraphs identifying the venue of the hunt as “by the River Euphrates,” presumably the Upper Euphrates where the king’s annals record the hunt,²⁰ and “by the River Balikh” in North Syria.²¹ In the bands, the king pursues wild lions and bulls, both on foot and from his chariot through riverside landscapes. There are three different types of plants depicted here, though the precise species of the plants are not easy to identify. The im-

developments (Cifarelli 1995). The development of these topoi prior to the Neo-Assyrian period is predominantly beyond the scope of this discussion.

¹⁵ The relative positions of these reliefs in the Northwest Palace have been reconstructed for the throne room B by Stearns (1961) and Meuszyński (1975; 1981). The positions of slabs in the West Wing, WFL, have been reconstructed by Paley and Sobolewski (1987). The positions and numbers of the slabs given by the above three authors are used here.

¹⁶ Based on parallel descriptions from Ashurnasirpal II’s annalistic texts, Winter has argued (1981: 15) that panels B17a–b from the throne room represent events occurring near Carchemish. An alternative reading of the dress of similar figures from Ashurnasirpal II’s Balawat gates attributes them to Suhu on the Middle Euphrates (J. Oates 1983: 45; Cifarelli 1995: 277).

¹⁷ The identification of the city in B4a–3a as Damdamussa on the northern Tigris was put forward by Winter (1981: 15; 1983: 22) based on parallels between Ashurnasirpal II’s annalistic texts that describe chopping down orchards near that city.

¹⁸ Owing to the prevalence of mountainous landscapes in the West Wing, Cifarelli has argued that panels WFL 15 and WFL 20–21b represent events occurring in the region to the near or far west of Assyria, perhaps North Syria (1995: 284–85).

¹⁹ A full publication of Ashurnasirpal II’s Balawat gates is being prepared by the staff of the British Museum. Partial drawings of the following gate bands have been published in two different articles: BM 124697 and BM 124698 (Barnett 1973: after p. 22); and BM 124699 and BM 124700 (Barnett 1974: pl. 6). In April 1998, Keepers John Curtis and Christopher Walker of the Department of the Ancient Near East kindly permitted me to view and roughly sketch the complete drawings and photographs of these four bands.

²⁰ “At that time I killed 40 strong wild bulls on the other bank of the Euphrates. I captured eight wild bulls alive” (RIMA 2: A.0.101.1). This was accomplished in the course of Ashurnasirpal II’s seventh campaign, when he established two new Assyrian cities, Nebarti-Ashur, on opposite banks of the Euphrates, south of Bit-Adini (Cifarelli 1995: 157).

²¹ BM 124697, oxen hunt on the Euphrates: the epigraph reads: “I slew wild oxen on the Euphrates” (RIMA 2: A.0.101.982); BM 124699, lion hunt on the River Balikh: the epigraph reads: “. . . I slew lions on the River Balikh” (RIMA 2: A.0.101.94); BM 124698, lion hunt on the River Balikh: the epigraph reads: “I slew lions on the River Balikh” (RIMA 2: A.0.101.93); BM 124700, bull hunt on the River Euphrates: the epigraph reads: “. . . I slew wild oxen on the Euphrates” (RIMA 2: A.0.101.95).



Fig. 3. Period of Ashurnasirpal II. Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Room B-17a (Budge 1914: pl. 13). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 4. Period of Ashurnasirpal II. Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Room B-3a (Budge 1914: pl. 18). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

ages on the hunting bands show a long, arching cat-tail-like plant growing beside the river (fig. 7), a gangly, baobab-like tree (fig. 8), and a tall, straight riverside plant (fig. 9).

This attempt to show specific and diverse plants from North Syria continued into the reign of Shalmaneser III, specifically in his gates from Balawat. Fortunately for our purposes, epigraphs on the gates situated above the narratives allow us to identify the cities in question. As in his father's reign, Shalmaneser III's gates show Assyrian soldiers moving through North Syrian forests populated with local species of vegetation. Next to the city of Carchem-

ish, short, spiked reeds grow beside a river (fig. 10; Bleibtreu 1980: 75).²² The spiked reeds near Carchemish contrast sharply with the vegetation on the way to Qarqar, where fruit trees are depicted (fig. 11). Near Hamath, the Assyrian soldiers trample over a bedraggled, scrubby tree or plant with serpentine branches growing by a river (fig. 12). Finally, near the North Syrian city of Bit-Adini, tall trees with branches that terminate in short spikes or

²² "Tribute of Sangara, the Carchemishite" (RIMA 3: A0.102.70).



Fig. 5. Period of Ashurnasirpal II. Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Room B-4a (Budge 1914: pl. 17). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

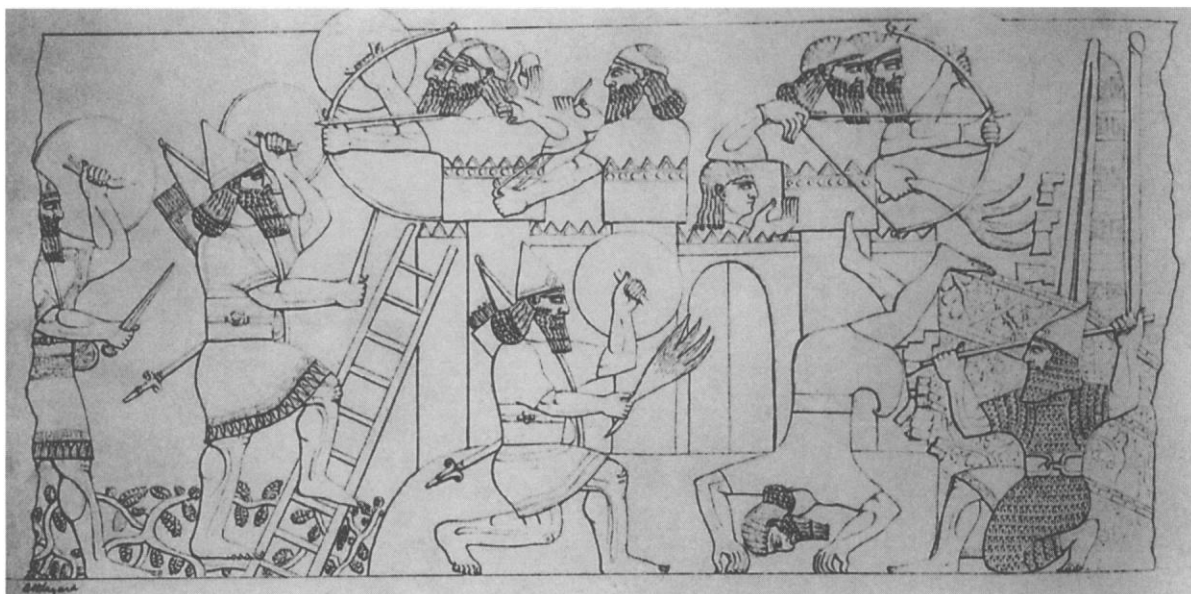


Fig. 6. Period of Ashurnasirpal II. Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Room WFL-20a (Barnett and Falkner 1962: pl. 118). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

leaves are depicted (fig. 13).²³ In sum, four distinct varieties of vegetation were encountered during Shalmaneser III's campaigns in North Syria, as shown on his Balawat gates. This vegetational diversity suggests that the Assyrians envisioned this region as possessing an abundance and variety of plant life. In the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, by contrast, the North Syrian floral landscape is generally absent from the

reliefs. Instead, the landscape of another prominent western foe, Phoenicia, seems to hold the interest of the Assyrian artists.²⁴

A second topos that occurs frequently in the early part of the empire relates to the Neo-Assyrian per-

²³ Unger 1920: tf. 2. There is some dispute as to the location of this scene, which is missing its epigraph. While Reade (1979b: 71) identifies this locale as southern, Marcus has convincingly argued (1987: 79) that this is Bit-Adini based on correspondence with Shalmaneser's annals.

²⁴ In one case, two different types of trees, a palm tree and two specimens of a single species of tree with vertical branches, perhaps pine trees, grow atop the walls of a Phoenician city (Barnett and Falkner 1962: pl. 57). The placement of the city by a sea and the use of distinctive boats allow this city to be identified as Phoenician (Jacoby 1991: 121). Beneath the walls of the city, the waters of the sea are teeming with life, including several



Fig. 7. Period of Ashurnasirpal II. Balawat Gates (Barnett 1973). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

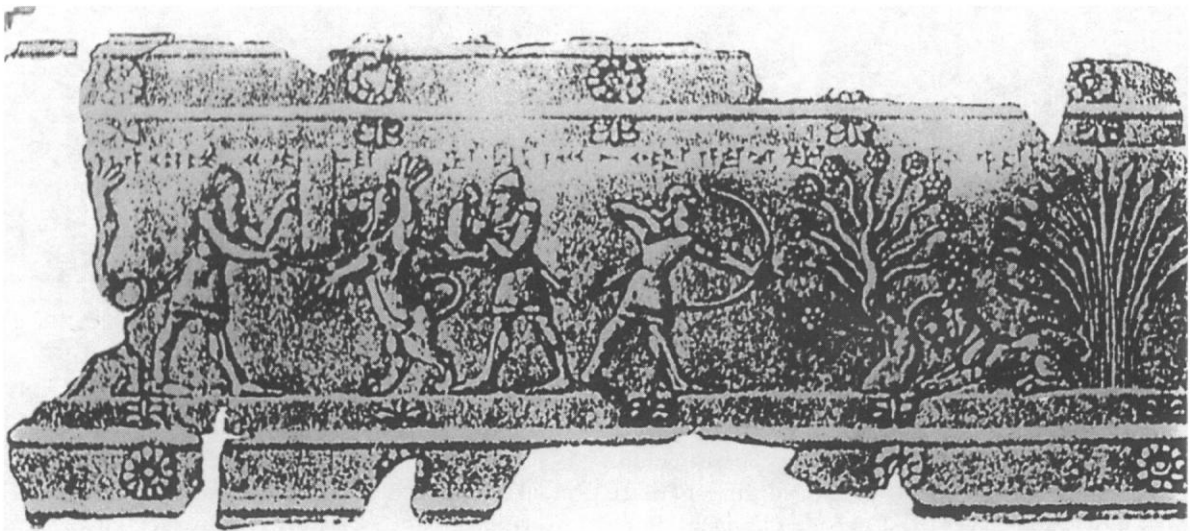


Fig. 8. Period of Ashurnasirpal II. Balawat Gates (Barnett 1974: pl. 6). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

fish, two sea turtles, two creatures with flippers and long tails (whale, shark, or dolphin?), some seabirds, and a long sea snake or eel. The diversity of sea life in this scene demonstrates an interest in the Mediterranean and its varied and abundant species (Albenda 1983).

ception of the diverse and exotic faunal landscape of North Syria. This perception is manifested in the images of exotic yet tamed animals from North Syria that were symbolically incorporated into the empire as tribute. In the reign of Ashurnasirpal II,



Fig. 9. Period of Ashurnasirpal II. Balawat Gates (Barnett 1974: pl. 6). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 10. Period of Shalmaneser III. Balawat Gates (King 1915: fig. 36). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

images show animals from as far away as central Africa offered to the Assyrian king. These include the monkeys from Court D of the Northwest Palace at Nimrud, a courtyard just outside the main throne room B. On the single-register large-scale reliefs, a group of tributaries wearing garments associated (in Ashurnasirpal II's bronze gates) with cities in North Syria advance to the left toward the waiting king (fig. 14).²⁵ A small monkey sits on the shoulders of

one of the western tributaries, while another monkey is tied to a leash held in the tributary's hand. The monkeys in this relief are clearly exotic, as the Assyrian artists awkwardly portray their characteristic features (small hands, large heads, bent posture).

Hatti on the bronze gates from Balawat (Cifarelli 1995: 282). Wäfler (1975: 218–19) identifies them as Carchemishites based on their turbans and short beards. These figures can be distinguished from Phoenicians on Shalmaneser III's gates, who do not wear upturned boots (Wäfler 1974: 84).

²⁵ The figures wear upturned boots, fringed garments, and turbans, specifically identified with the inhabitants of



Fig. 11. Period of Shalmaneser III. Balawat Gates (King 1915: fig. 48). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Their tamed nature is significant because the monkeys, delivered into the hands of the king waiting at the end of the panel, symbolically demonstrate the royal control of a vast realm replete with exotic creatures. It is also significant that while the monkeys were not originally from North Syria, the North Syrian tributaries serve as “middlemen” between Egypt and Assyria. This relief suggests that the region of North Syria was conceived as a convenient and accessible clearinghouse, the supplier of exotic animals and other objects.²⁶

Lions, though not exotic, were also frequently acquired by the Assyrian kings from the vicinity of North Syria. Annalistic texts from the early part of the Assyrian period originally place the lion hunts as occurring between or during campaigns in North Syria.²⁷ The frequent iteration of royal hunting ac-

tivity in the region of North Syria leads to a discussion of the third topos: North Syria was imagined as a site where nature could be both witnessed and controlled. Lions held a particular dual-edged fascination for the Assyrian kings as they symbolized abundance and virility, yet at the same time the uncontrolled chaos of nature. To symbolize their royal power, lions were not only captured and kept as live pets, but hunted with ferocity by the Assyrian kings. In fact, the theme of the royal lion hunt is longstanding in Mesopotamian culture and can be seen on the earliest “official” art: a stele from Uruk dating to the fourth millennium B.C. that depicts a man with a headband and bow and arrow hunting a lion (fig. 15). The earliest reliefs of Neo-Assyrian lion hunts can be found in Throne Room B of Ashurnasirpal II’s Northwest Palace at Nimrud, which show the king hunting from his chariot. While there are no epigraphs or floral elements that can help identify the

²⁶ This suggestion is supported by a reference in Ashurnasirpal II’s annals to the receipt of a *pagutu*, or “large, female monkey” from Lubarna of H/Patina (RIMA 2: A.O.101.1, 76). See also Lion 1992: 359–62.

²⁷ The first extensive texts that mention hunting exploits in “Hatti” occur on the Broken Obelisk inscription

of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 B.C.) (RIMA 2: A.O.89.7) and in the reign of Shalmaneser III (RIMA 3: A.O.102.8, iii37b). For the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, see the epigraphs from the Balawat gates listed in n. 21 above.



Fig. 12. Period of Shalmaneser III. Balawat Gates (King 1915: fig. 75). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

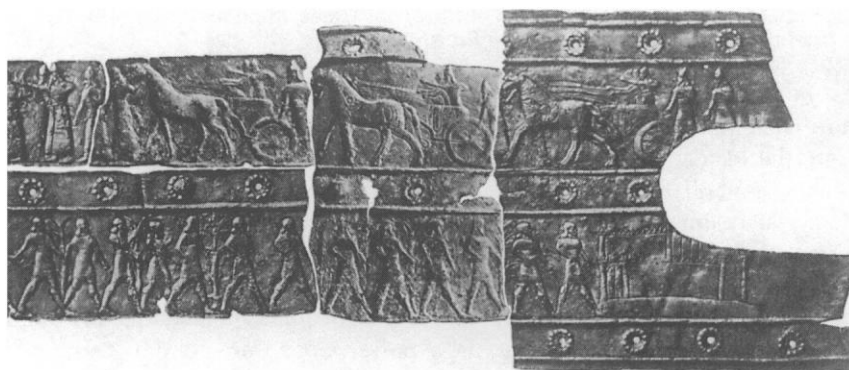


Fig. 13. Period of Shalmaneser III. Balawat Gates (Unger 1920: pl. 4).

location of the hunts, similar hunting scenes from Ashurnasirpal II's Balawat gates strongly suggest, as mentioned above, that his royal lion hunts took place within North Syria.²⁸

In the reign of Shalmaneser III, for which we have no extant monumental stone reliefs, royal lion hunts seem to have dropped out of the visual repertoire. However, a curious scene on the Black Obelisk might be cited as an example of the third topos, which constructs North Syria as a site where nature's power could be witnessed and controlled. On the

fourth band of the monument, there is a scene in which a lion attacks a fleeing gazelle (fig. 16). The scene lacks an epigraph, but its position within the obelisk suggests that the animal chase could have taken place either within the land of North Syria or on the Middle Euphrates upon return from a campaign to North Syria.²⁹ The chase involving the lion and the gazelle occurs in a forested and mountainous

²⁸ See n. 21 above.

²⁹ On another side of this same band, which is located just below the Mušri band, there is a scene showing the receipt of tribute from Suhi on the Middle Euphrates. I would agree with Marcus (1987: 88) that this chase scene,



Fig. 14. Period of Ashurnasirpal II. Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Court D-7 (Budge 1914: pl. 28). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

environment as indicated by the trees and the scales. The lions from Shalmaneser III's Black Obelisk chase scene can be viewed as the pictorial successors of the savage beasts hunted by Ashurnasirpal II in the reliefs from his palace at Nimrud and in his bronze gates from Balawat. This depiction may have symbolized the chaotic unknown of North Syria, an

like all others in the obelisk, was purposefully placed according to principles of geographic order and therefore occurred in the precise geographic order in which it is represented. The chase have been witnessed by the king in any of three actual locales: "within the register," that is, near Suḫi itself on the Middle Euphrates; between Suḫi and the city of tribute on the bottom (fifth) register, which is identified in the epigraph as the city of Unqi in North Syria; or between Suḫi and the city of tribute on the third register, Muṣri, probably Egypt (Tadmor 1961: 146).

unknown that was both wildly natural and at the same time unquestionably controlled by the king.³⁰ If so, it would then assert that the king not only witnessed the novel scene in a wild and distant land, but also managed to bring that chaos between the lines of the register—that is, "under control."

The construct of North Syria as a site for the witnessing and control of nature was reiterated in the reign of Tiglath-pileser III on paintings from the Neo-Assyrian palace at Til Barsip (ancient Bit-Adini). The paintings from Til Barsip most likely record events occurring near the palace itself, which is situated not in the Assyrian heartland but on the Euphrates and within North Syria proper. The

³⁰ Liverani (1979: 306) has argued that the peripheral regions of the Assyrian empire were construed as "wild" and chaotic when compared to the center.



Fig. 15. Uruk period (UVB 1934: pl. 12). Iraq Museum, Baghdad.

paintings from Rooms XXII and XXIV show the king on horseback and chariot hunting lions (Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936: pl. 51, panels XXIIa–f, XXVIIc, e).³¹ There are no texts from Tiglath-pileser III's reign that discuss lion hunts, nor

³¹ Reade (1979b: 95) suggests these lion hunts may date to the reign of Esarhaddon.

are there any elements of the North Syrian floral landscape displayed in the lion hunt paintings at Til Barsip. However, we have seen that both annalistic texts and epigraphs indicate that hunts in previous reigns occurred exactly in this region where the palace is located. We could therefore suggest that the painted hunts might have occurred just outside of the palace doors. In another painting from Til Bar-



Fig. 16. Period of Shalmaneser III. Black Obelisk. Author photo.

sip, a lion can be seen sitting tamely at the feet of the king, who awaits an audience of tributaries (fig. 17). The effect of such elements in these paintings is equivalent to the display of landscape elements and lion hunts in the monuments back at the heartland. The landscape was physically brought inside and symbolically brought under control by the Assyrian king (Barnett 1974: 443).

The most famous lion hunts from the Neo-Assyrian period bear mentioning at this point although they occur in the latter part of the empire—those from Rooms C, S, and S₁ of the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh. As in reliefs from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, there are no floral landscape elements that would definitively place the hunts within North Syria. However, there are indications that the lion hunts were situated in an environment near Nineveh that was artificially constructed by the Assyrian kings and modeled after the North Syrian landscape. In the reliefs from Room C of the North Palace, the action proceeds from left to right along the northeast wall of the room (Barnett 1976: pls. 4–6). Above and below the king's chariot, files of Assyrian soldiers stand guard with shields. The presence of their shields indicates that their duties must have included "beating" the lions, that is, herding them and retaining them in the hunting area for the king. The hunt, therefore, did not take place in the "wild," but rather in an artificially enclosed arena. Other soldiers hold up a royal tent or pavilion that screens the preparation from the hunting arena to the left. The preparation of the royal hunting entourage is further separated from the ac-

tual hunting arena by the image (on Slab 9) of a hillside festooned with conifer trees and covered with Assyrians moving through the trees (fig. 18). The figures' short kilts, hairstyle, and laced boots identify them as native Assyrians, perhaps members of the palace staff (Reade 1972: 107). Clearly, then, we have a pictorial representation of a hunt taking place in a controlled arena and in front of an Assyrian audience (Barnett 1976: 37; Reade 1979b: 107–8). Hence, the hunt depicted in Room C represents an example of the "urban hunt," identified as a theme within the inscriptions of Ashurbanipal (Weissert 1997: 351).

The topographical and floral landscape that surrounded the urban hunt at Nineveh, represented by the hillside covered with conifer trees to the right of the action, suggests that the hunt occurred within a quasi-North Syria, that is, a forested and hilly environment that resembled earlier landscapes and textual descriptions of the land to the west.³² Thus North Syria is depicted right through to the end of the empire as a site where the power and chaos of nature could be witnessed and controlled by the king.

³² The references within the royal inscriptions to the mountainous and forested nature of the North Syrian region are too numerous to cite. The most telling clue that the region was known for both its topography and timber can be found in the phrase, "I ascended Mount Amanus and cut down logs of cedar." For example, see Ashurnasirpal II (RIMA 2 A.O.101.1, 88); and Shalmaneser III (RIMA 3 A.O.102.2, ii9).

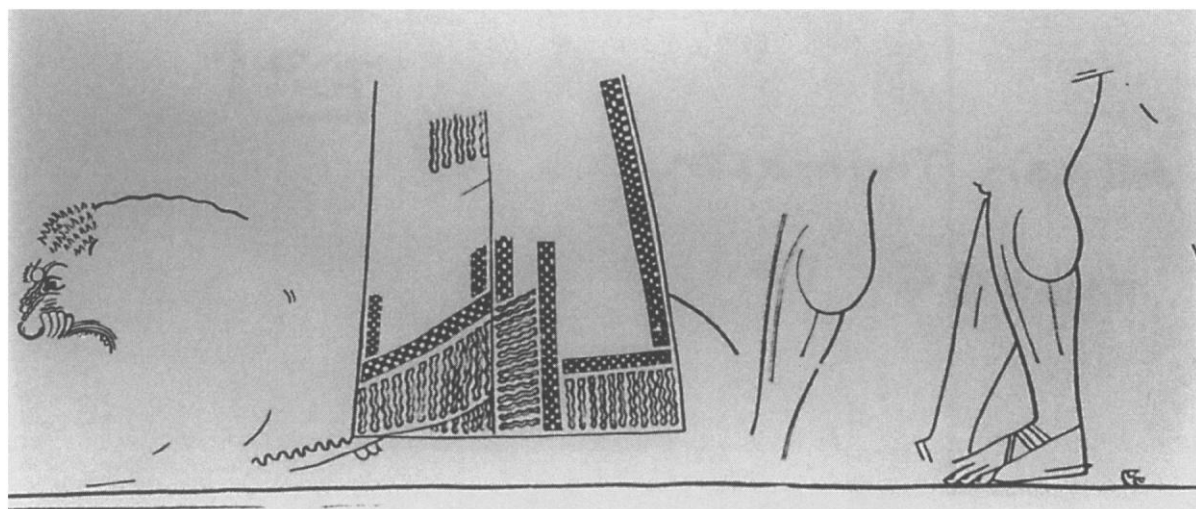


Fig. 17. Period of Tiglath-pileser III. Til Barsip, Room XXIV (Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936: pl. 50).

Sargon II to Ashurbanipal

Until the reign of Sargon II, most of the representations of the floral and faunal landscape of North Syria were experienced *in situ*—that is, they depicted encounters that took place within the actual foreign landscape. With the reign of Sargon II, the situation changed, as we see the first depictions of the North Syrian landscape *ex situ*, that is, as reconstructed within the royal gardens in Assyria. Therefore, we may introduce a fourth topos that is prevalent in Neo-Assyrian reliefs: the representation of a royal garden modeled after the landscape of North Syria, which was imagined as lush, abundant, and diverse. Beginning with Sargon II and continuing to Ashurbanipal, there are numerous detailed references within the royal inscriptions to the construction of a garden (*kirimaḥ[ḥ]u*) that is “modeled after Mount Amanus (*tamšil kur-Hamanim*)” in North Syria “in which all the aromatic herbs of Hatti and fruit trees of the mountains were planted.”³³ This excerpt implies that Sargon’s garden contained both the completeness and the diversity of the natural North Syrian world—he plants all (*gimir*) the

herbs and fruit trees. He was perhaps drawing upon a literary theme of his predecessor Ashurnasirpal II, whose Banquet Stele inscription exhaustively lists dozens of plants seen during the king’s campaigns and presumably brought back for the heartland to enjoy:

I irrigated the meadows of the Tigris and planted orchards with all kinds of fruit trees in its environs. . . . In the lands through which I marched and the highlands which I traversed, the trees and plants (lit. ‘seeds’/[*zēru*]) which I saw (*atammaru*) were: cedar, cypress, *šimiššalû*, *burāsu*-juniper, *daprānu*-juniper, almond, date, ebony, *meskannu*, olive, *šusūnu*, oak, tamarisk, *dukdu*, terebinth, and *murrānu*, *meḥru*, . . . , *tīiatu*, Kanish-oak, *ḫaluppu*, *šadānu*, pomegranate, *šallūru*, fir, *ingirašu*, pear, quince, fig, grapevines, *angašu*-pear, *sumlalu*, *ṭiṭipu*, *šippūtu*, *zanzaliqqu*, ‘swamp-apple’, *hambuququ*, *nuhurtu*, *urzīnu* and *kanaktu*.³⁴

Though Ashurnasirpal II’s inscription does not specifically mention North Syria or Mount Amanus as the site of his botanical excursions, North Syria was the main region into which he campaigned, and it had the topography to produce many of the known species listed. We also know from Ashurnasirpal II’s inscriptions that he cut down cedar, cypress, *burāsu*-juniper, and *daprānu*-juniper upon Mount Amanus.³⁵

³³ Sargon: Fuchs 1994: 66–67; Sennacherib: Luckenbill 1924: 97, and Frahm 1997: 57, 60; Esarhaddon: Borger 1956: 62; Ashurbanipal: Streck 1916: 88 (without specific mention of Amanus). The descriptions of the royal gardens within Assyrian royal inscriptions have received a fair amount of attention due to their similarity with descriptions of royal gardens in the OT (Oppenheim 1965; Wiseman 1983).

³⁴ Wiseman 1952: 290. See also RIMA 2: A.0.101.30.

³⁵ See RIMA 2, A.0.101.1, 88.



Fig. 18. Period of Ashurbanipal. Nineveh, North Palace, Room C (Barnett 1976: pl. 6). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

It is significant that the first specific references to gardens in the Neo-Assyrian period mention a mountain in North Syria, which suggests that this region was the original exotic site to emulate. The identification of North Syria as the authentic site of topographical difference is an ancient theme in Mesopotamia and can be seen in one of the first literary compositions, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. In the story, many trials confront Gilgamesh and Enkidu when they head to the “Cedar Forest” to slay the evil demon Humbaba.³⁶ The forest, however, is also a liminal and luxurious site where Gilgamesh receives a dream from the god Shamash and where “across

the face of the mountain the Cedar brought forth luxurious foliage, its shade was good, extremely pleasant.”³⁷ The cedar of Amanus was also a focus of campaigns by Akkadian kings and by Gudea of Lagash (Moorey 1994: 350).³⁸ Thus the mountainous region to the west of Assyria was a consistent source of mystical intrigue and pleasure in Mesopotamian history, a diverse and tantalizing place worthy of emulation in the heartland. Later the symbolic representation of Babylonia emerges as an equally

³⁷ Kovacs 1989: 41.

³⁸ Mount Amanus in fact became symbolic of all cedar forests in North Syria. Rowton (1967: 267–68) has identified it as the specific site behind the “tree-toponym” the “Cedar Mountain” found in royal inscriptions since the Akkadian period.

³⁶ For identification of the “Cedar Forest” in Gilgamesh and other epics with Mount Amanus, see *RLA* 1: 92, “Amanos”; and Moorey 1994: 250.

important aspect of Assyrian garden construction in the heartland. However, until texts from the reign of Sennacherib mention the concomitant re-creation of the Babylonian marshes, North Syria's landscape alone seems to embody the bounty and diversity deemed worthy of emulation in gardens at the center of the empire.

The description of a "royal garden modeled after Mount Amanus" in Sargon II's text corresponds quite well with many different images in relief from Sargon's palace at Khorsabad, and from both Sennacherib's Southwest Palace and Ashurbanipal's North Palace at Nineveh.³⁹ The lower register of Room 7 at Khorsabad is decorated with images showing a hare and fowl hunt in a forested landscape. The venue of the hunt is not specifically labeled, but the generally peaceful nature of the events and the banquet of native Assyrians appearing in the upper register suggest that the events depicted in Room 7 were situated in the Assyrian heartland.⁴⁰ It has been suggested that for the first time in the Neo-Assyrian reliefs, this forested landscape of Sargon's hunt depicts a geographic space constructed within the Assyrian heartland (Winter 1982: 362). The landscape is full of conifers, most likely cedar or cypress trees, arranged neatly in rows (Bleibtreu 1980: 106), and contains a long-stemmed plant surmounted by a rosette-like flower resembling a sunflower.⁴¹ Although this dense pine landscape was foreign to Assyria (Moorey 1994: 348), we know from Sargon's inscriptions and letters that by this time, live

saplings from the west had been transported intact and regrown in Khorsabad (Fuchs 1994: 66–67; Parpola 1987: 226–27). These texts dated to Sargon's reign strengthen the suggestion that the hunt from Room 7 occurred in Assyria proper and not in North Syria where the conifers grew naturally.

The images on Slabs 12 and 13 from Room 7 reinforce this suggestion. The Assyrian king and his foot soldiers approach, from the left, a small body of water, perhaps a pond or a stream. In the center of the pond sits a building on a platform fronted by two columns with curved capitals and topped with crenellations (fig. 19). Above (that is, behind) the structure, there are three plants with alternating clumps and spade-shaped leaves which have been identified as pear trees because of their S-shaped branches (Bleibtreu 1980: 101). To the right of the structure, a hill is covered neatly with rows of conifer trees. On the slopes of the hill, three different birds walk amid the trees. The slopes of the hill ascend to a pinnacle on which sits another architectural structure, a solid building lacking a portico with a square base and crenellated top.

Winter has suggested (1982: 362) that the porticoed building in the lake represents a *bit-ḫilāni*. This architectural structure was first described in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, which declared that he constructed at Nimrud a "*bit-ḫilāni* modeled after a palace of the land of Hatti" which he built for his "pleasure" (Tadmor 1994: 172–73). Every king from Tiglath-pileser III to Ashurbanipal, with the exception of Esarhaddon, referred in some manner to a *bit-ḫilāni* constructed in his capital (CAD 6:85, *ḫilānu*).⁴² It is possible that the images from Room 7 depict events that occurred in an artificially constructed North Syrian landscape at Khorsabad, namely, the royal park modeled after Mount Amanus. With the inclusion of the building, I suggest that this park contained the entire North Syrian landscape, including the transplanted flora of North Syria as well as restorations of its characteristic architectural pavilions. The fourth topos therefore represents the landscape of the artificially constructed North Syria as a site where the king and his retinue could witness both the diversity and abundance of

³⁹ There are few remaining extant reliefs from the reign of Esarhaddon. Mallowan unearthed some reliefs from Fort Shalmaneser dating to Esarhaddon's reign that would relate to the third topos, showing servants returning from the royal hunt (Mallowan 1966: 467; Reade 1979b: 95). Images illustrating the fourth topos are limited to the remaining three kings for which we do have pictorial evidence of the reconstruction of the North Syrian landscape.

⁴⁰ The upper register depicts a banquet attended by many Assyrians; thus it is possible that the banquet was held in the Assyrian palace, perhaps in that very Room 7, in anticipation or celebration of the hunt depicted below (Reade 1979a: 30; 1979b: 83).

⁴¹ Bleibtreu (1980: 104) has argued that this element represents a shooting target, not a flower. However, I contend that it resembles petaled flowers that grow in a garden on a later relief from Room E of the North Palace of Ashurbanipal that will be discussed below.

⁴² Specific examples include Sargon II: Fuchs 1994: 294 (plus many other references); Sennacherib: Frahm 1997: 75; Ashurbanipal: Streck 1916: 88, 102.

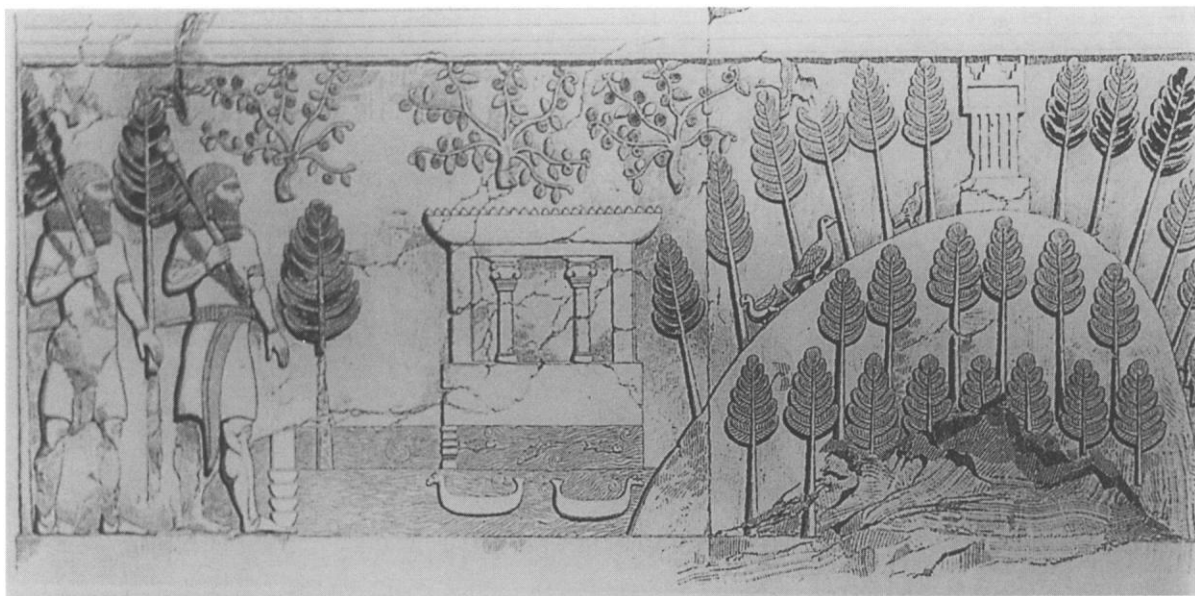


Fig. 19. Period of Sargon II. Khorsabad, Room 7 (Botta and Flandin 1849–1950: Vol. 2, pl. 114).

nature. At the same time it demonstrates that the king could control that natural abundance through the royal hunt.

Both the artificially reconstructed North Syrian-like royal park (topos number 4) and the diverse vegetation of North Syria as witnessed by the Assyrians *in situ* (topos number 1) were also represented in reliefs from Sennacherib's Southwest Palace at Nineveh. In order to discuss these reliefs, a few generalizations about Sennacherib's treatment of the landscape of the west are necessary. In his Southwest Palace at Nineveh, the military narratives can all be related to events that occurred in Sennacherib's first three campaigns as described in his texts. Russell has suggested (1991: 164) that the scenes portraying a wooded landscape "dotted with shrubs and vines" and divided by rivers may be identified with Sennacherib's third and only campaign to the west.⁴³ Scholars tend to view the importance and main goal of Sennacherib's third campaign strictly in relation to the famous siege of the city of Lachish

described in 2 Kings 18 and depicted on the images from Room XXXVI (Ussishkin 1982). Indeed, the main action of this third campaign occurred in areas to the south of North Syria, where the cities of Israel and Judah became the king's chief targets. However, it is important to note that Sennacherib's third campaign, according to his texts, occurred in three distinguishable phases (Na'aman 1979: 64; Russell 1991: 160). Before heading to Judah, Sennacherib first marched up the Euphrates and across North Syria to subdue the kings of Hatti.⁴⁴ It was only after subduing Hatti that Sennacherib went to Phoenicia and then south to Judah. In fact, it has recently been argued that if we did not have the epigraph labeling the city in the Lachish reliefs, we would not be able, from the images of landscape elements and people alone, to definitively identify the site as Lachish (Ash 1995). There are a few lost reliefs, now

⁴³ Russell used details of costume, landscape, and architecture in addition to the epigraphs to identify the locale of these images. These landscapes can be found in the Southwest Palace in Rooms I, VIII(w), X, XII, XXIV, XXXIV, XXXVI, XXXVIII, XLI, XLVIII, and LXVII and in occasional reliefs from XLIII and LXIV.

⁴⁴ The first part of this campaign to Hatti is transliterated: "*ina šalši gerri-ia ana KUR.Hatti lu allik*/On my third campaign I went to the land of Hatti" (Frahm 1997: 53–54). Reade suggests (1979b: 92) that the third campaign "was directed at Greater Syria." He persists in calling the cities "Syrian," and this contrasts with Russell's later suggestion (1991: 162) that most of the reliefs illustrating the third campaign depict events occurring in the more southerly regions of Judah and Phoenicia.

known only from drawings, that possibly illustrate the non-Lachish phase of Sennacherib's third campaign to the west. They show Assyrian soldiers passing through a mountainous country-side with rivers, grapevines, and oak trees. These reliefs originally were found in Rooms XXXVIII and XLVIII of the Southwest Palace at Nineveh (figs. 20–21).

The landscapes that characterize the western campaigns include many different species of trees; thus topos number 1 is reiterated in Sennacherib's reign. All of these species may be seen on the Lachish reliefs, but occur frequently and in the same number on reliefs from other rooms that were not necessarily set in the Lachish phase of the third campaign. This suggests that at least in Sennacherib's reign, the Assyrian artists conflated the landscapes of all of the west, including North and South Syria, and Judah. Therefore, while the reliefs of the Lachish room and the third campaign do not explicitly represent North Syria, they can potentially provide valuable information about the Assyrian representation of the region.

On the reliefs illustrating the third campaign, there are two types of trees with leaves: those with branches that strike out radially; and those with relatively vertical branches (fig. 22). The spiked appendages on the branches suggest that these are deciduous trees (Bleibtreu 1980: 150–57). Sennacherib's western landscapes are also filled with entangling vines that are absolutely bedecked with grapes. The grapevines from western landscape images are exceedingly detailed and lively; their creeping appendages sprawl across the hillside, effectively framing the actors of the scene. The intense attention given by the Assyrian artists may have deliberately highlighted the grapevines, underscoring the political message in the reliefs. The image attested to the king's ability to acquire the grapevines, which were both luxury products and symbols of fertility and abundance in the Mesopotamian world (Albenda 1974: 6; Bleibtreu 1980: 131–39; Stronach 1995: 195). The fertile western floral landscape contrasts sharply with the Babylonian landscapes on reliefs that depict events from Sennacherib's first campaign to the south.⁴⁵ The southern reliefs are rife with palm trees and tall

marsh reeds and lack the ubiquitous windows on the cityscapes. Thus we can see a clear distinction in Sennacherib's reliefs between the landscape of the west and that of the south.

There is also evidence for topos number 4, images of the *ex situ* re-creation of foreign landscapes, in Sennacherib's reliefs. The reliefs in Court VI of the Southwest Palace are useful in attempting to identify images of the royal garden in Sennacherib's reign. They show the transport of stone colossi, roughly shaped into human-headed bulls, by Assyrian soldiers while their king looks on (fig. 23). The quarry where the scene takes place is identified as Balatāi in the epigraphs accompanying the transport scenes; therefore, the images in Court VI are set within Assyria proper. Since there is no river-crossing in the scenes, the quarry was most likely located on the same side of the river as Nineveh, less than 50 km north of the capital city (Russell 1991: 98; *RLA* 1: 39, “*Balaṭa*”).⁴⁶ The action proceeds across the slabs from right to left, and the figures proceed from Slab 68, which depicts the Balatāi quarry head, leftward and “southward” toward Slab 45, which must represent the landscape closer to Nineveh.⁴⁷ The area around the quarry is teeming with landscape elements and contains four distinct varieties of trees: grapevines, conifers, fruit trees with pomegran-

⁴⁶ Reade has argued (1978: 60) for an alternative reading of the images from Court VI, namely, that Balatāi was located on the opposite side of the Tigris from Nineveh. He suggests that Slabs 61–58 show part of the transport party in deep boats crossing a body of water filled with sea life, which can only be the Tigris River. While I would agree that the watercourses depicted at the top of these slabs are more substantial than the watercourses in slabs from earlier in the sequence, i.e. near the quarry, I would not agree that this larger body of water can be identified specifically as the Tigris, rather than a wide canal or the Khosr. Therefore, Slabs 61–58 do not necessarily show a Tigris River crossing, and the Balatāi quarry could have been located on the same side of the Tigris as Nineveh.

⁴⁷ In Slab 62 of the sequence, which “may depict the equipment needed for moving the bulls being brought to the site,” the action proceeds from left to right instead of from right to left (Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998: I: 64). Though the direction of the action in the slab is reversed, the subject of the scenes, the preparation and transport of the bull colossi from rough quarry to Nineveh, is consistent with the theme of this wall of Court VI and therefore contributes to the narrative coherence of the sequence.

⁴⁵ As seen in Rooms V, VI, XIV, XXXI, XXXII, XLIII(e), XLIV, XLV, XLVII, and LX of the North Palace (Bleibtreu 1980: 127; Russell 1991: 160).

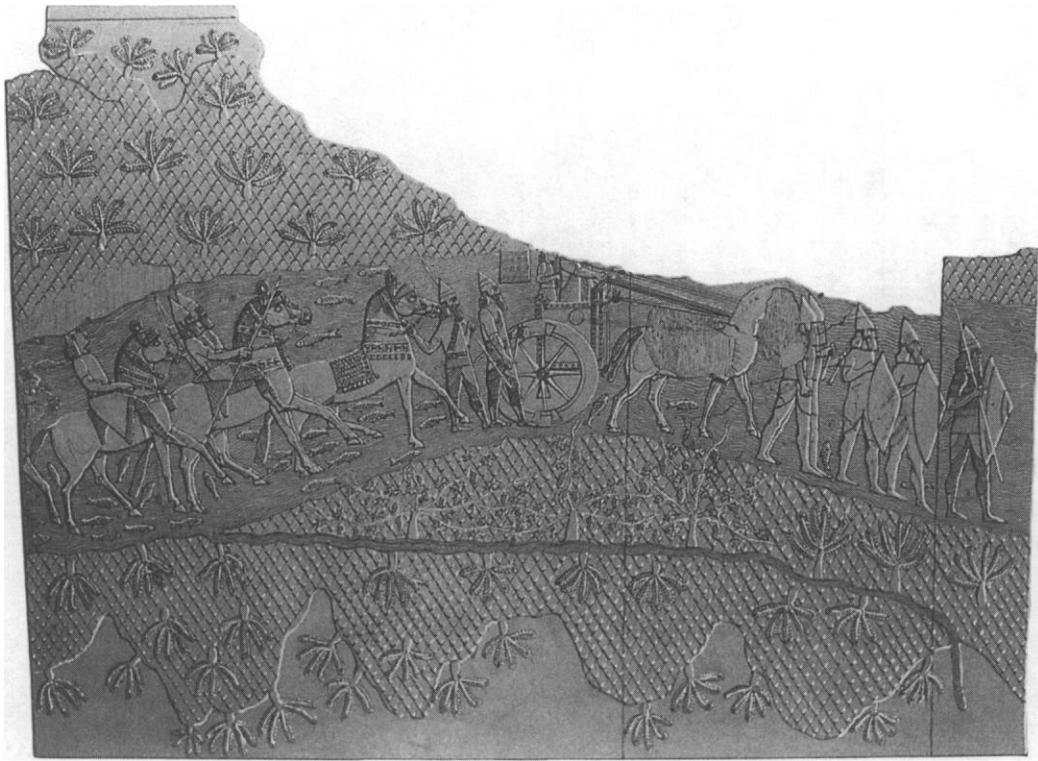


Fig. 20. Period of Sennacherib. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room XXXVIII (Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998: Vol. 2, pl. 357). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

ates, and oak trees with both radially and vertically sprawling branches (fig. 24) (Bleibtreu 1980: 146–59 *passim*). From the quarry, the transport party continues southward along a watercourse. As the party approaches Nineveh at the end of its journey, the landscape changes dramatically. Though the bottom of Slab 60 is not preserved, the top band of landscape depicts not a forest, but a scene with marsh reeds and wild animals. It is possible that this swampy area closest to Nineveh was formed by the construction of a dam on the Khosr River just northeast of the city (D. Oates 1968: 52).

The colossi might have been transported not on the river itself, but along a series of canals running alongside and connecting the Tigris to the Khosr River northeast of Nineveh. The canals were part of a larger irrigation project that drained the entire river basin northeast of Nineveh. Sennacherib's texts claim that he instituted this large public works project in order to "increase the productivity of the low-lying fields" surrounding Nineveh (Luckenbill 1924: 177). The canals also may have supplied water to

the royal gardens and game park which, as shown in the images from Court VI, flanked their banks. If the visual and textual evidence regarding Sennacherib's irrigation and garden system is considered together, the images from Court VI may have represented the "two-tiered" reconstruction of landscapes mentioned in the king's inscriptions, including both the North Syrian forest and the Babylonian marshes within the confines of his royal garden:

A park, the likeness of Mount Amanus, wherein were set out all kinds of aromatic plants and fruits of the orchards and woods, products of the mountains and of Chaldea, I planted by the Palace's side. (Luckenbill 1924: 97; Frahm 1997: 60)

The Babylonian marshes in the periphery became a new site of emulation in Sennacherib's reign. At this late period in the empire, when the conquest of Babylonia became the major focus of Sennacherib's military policy, it perhaps became necessary to re-create (or to pictorially represent the re-creation of) *both* types of peripheral landscapes in order to



Fig. 21. Period of Sennacherib. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room XLVIII (Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998: Vol. 2, pl. 410). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

portray the all-encompassing goals of the imperial center.

Another representation of the well-irrigated royal garden complex modeled in part after the North Syrian landscape dates to the reign of Ashurbanipal. The reliefs in Room H of the North Palace at Nineveh are generally concerned with battles against the Elamites from Iran (Reade 1979b: 104). The lower register depicts the figures moving to the right, whereas in the upper register the Assyrian figures move to the left, perhaps showing a triumphal return of Ashurbanipal's troops into Assyria (Barnett 1976: 41; Reade 1979b: 104). On the upper register of Slabs 8–10, a triple-walled city is depicted sitting on a hillside. The city has crenellated towers and a structure with lion-shaped column bases in its inner sanctums. There is little doubt that this city represents Nineveh itself, and the lion bases adorn either the palace of Ashurbanipal or the palace of his grandfather, Sennacherib, whose texts describe just such decoration (Reade 1979b: 104). To the right of

the city, on Slabs 8 and 9, a hill is depicted with many different species of trees growing between crossing streams (fig. 25). Reade has suggested (1978: 165) that the streams are actually artificially constructed canals, and therefore part of the larger Ninevite irrigation system created by Sennacherib.⁴⁸ A straight path with a wayside crenellated

⁴⁸ Reade has also suggested (1978: 62–64) that the arched built structure in the image represents Sennacherib's aqueduct at Jerwan, which is located farther up Sennacherib's "Kisiri Canal" which ran alongside the Khosr River. If this were the case, then the garden complex would have extended not just up the Tigris, but along the Khosr as well. This fits with Sennacherib's inscriptions, which state, "To increase the vegetation from the border of the city of Kisiri to the plain about Nineveh, through mountain and low land, with iron pickaxes, I cut and directed a canal. For (a distance) of 1–1/2 *beru* (double-hours) of land, the waters of the Khosr, which from of old sought too low a level, I made to flow

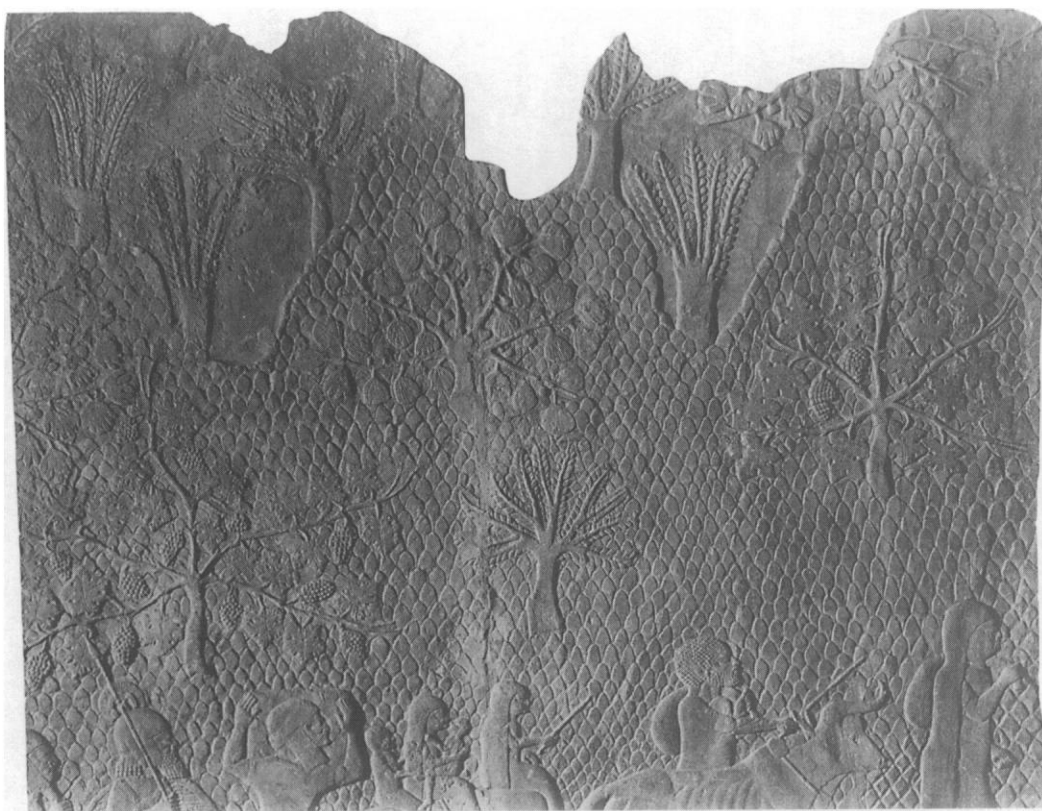


Fig. 22. Period of Sennacherib. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room XXXVI (Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998: Vol. 2, pl. 323). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

monument ascends the hill toward a porticoed building.⁴⁹ The floral species include conifers, deciduous trees with radial branches, and palm trees (Bleibtreu 1980: 219). The trees appear to be arranged in some

through those orchards in irrigation ditches" (Luckenbill 1924: 101; Frahm 1997: 57). This image from Room H has sparked a debate over the location of the famed "Hanging Gardens" of Babylon. Dalley has suggested (1994: 52–55) that the "terraced" garden and aqueduct shown in Room H represent Sennacherib's "Hanging Garden" of Nineveh. She argues that the Classical authors, who described the famed "Hanging Gardens" of Babylon, were confusing the ancient cities of Nineveh and Babylon. However, Reade (2000: 197–99) argues that there are several locations at Babylon that would have been suitable for hanging gardens, and that it is the Babylonian garden complex, and not Nineveh's, that finally appears in the Classical tradition.

⁴⁹ This building consists of a portico with columns supporting a crenellated architrave. Attached to the front of the porticoed building stands a wing containing, or decorated with, a round-topped stele of an Assyrian king.

degree of order, with palm trees alternating with short deciduous trees and conifers on the top of the hill. The trees at the top of the hill are watered by a stone aqueduct located to their right.⁵⁰ Farther down the hill, conifers are planted by the banks of the streams, with some deciduous trees in between, and at the lowest part of the hill, the forest is dominated by deciduous trees. Summarized generally, this relief depicts a porticoed building sitting in a landscape composed of western-style forests with well-planned streams and aqueducts on a hillside. The entire complex sits adjacent or near to a palace at Nineveh. It is not a stretch, then, to infer that this image represents the royal garden of Sennacherib or Ashurbanipal containing "all the aromatic plants of Hatti and products of Chaldaea" (Frahm 1997: 78;

⁵⁰ The aqueduct could have been part of a system that linked the Gomel and Khosr rivers, and thus would be an appropriate subject within an illustration depicting the Khosr River/Kisiri canal system (D. Oates 1968: 51).

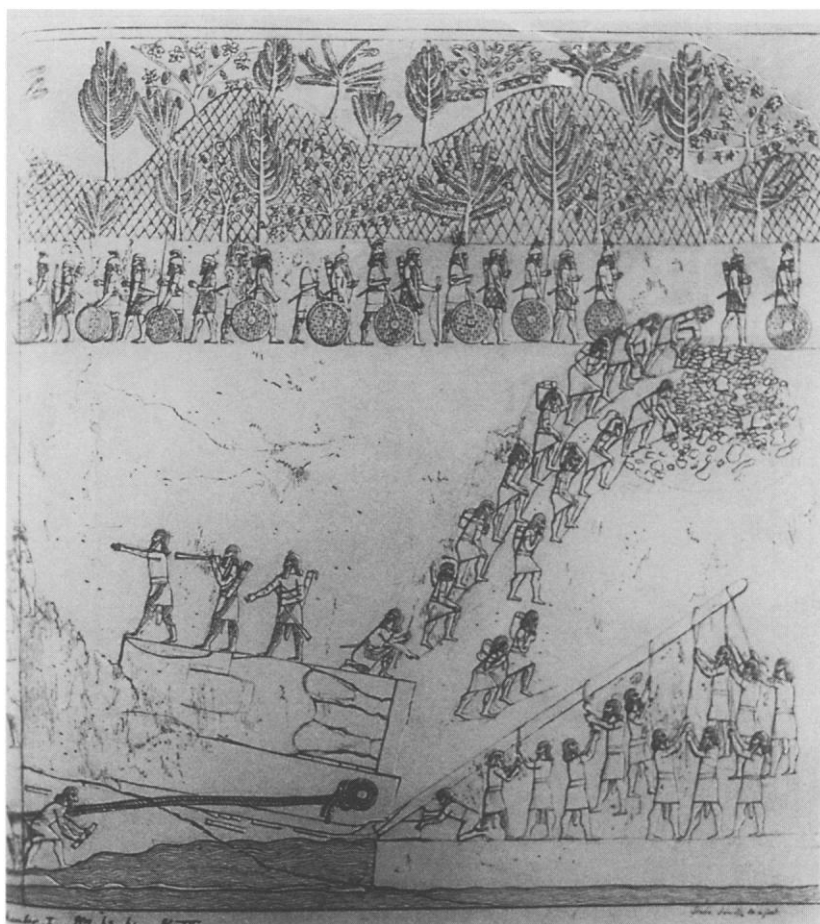


Fig. 23. Period of Sennacherib. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Court VI (Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998: Vol. 2, pl. 113). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Barnett 1974: 41; Reade 1978: 165–67; Stronach 1990: 180). Reade has recently suggested that the scene purposefully conflates a vast area around Nineveh and represents the “entirety of Sennacherib’s landscape achievements . . . compressed like a military campaign into one composition” (Reade 1998: 87–88).

The image of the royal garden from Room H of the Southwest Palace at Nineveh can be compared to a similar image of the reconstructed North Syrian landscape from Ashurbanipal’s North Palace there. In Room E, a lion and lioness rest quietly in a forested landscape (fig. 26). The landscape behind the leonine couple is one of grapevines, conifers, and palm trees—in other words, the elements familiar from the combined western and southern landscapes

of Sennacherib’s and Ashurbanipal’s royal gardens. There is certainly no direct evidence that this scene occurred within Assyria itself. However, a close look at the conifer tree shows that the two lower branches of the tree have been pruned. Therefore, this scene probably occurred in the vast garden complex maintained by the Assyrians near Nineveh from Sennacherib’s reign onward (Albenda 1974: 6).

The scene gives important clues regarding the Assyrian re-creation of this habitat and leads to a discussion of topos number 5, prevalent in images from the later empire: the association of the landscape of North Syria with triumphant victory, pleasure, and fertility. The grapevines that were so detailed in Sennacherib’s reign take on a new look in Ashurbanipal’s relief. In Room E, the vines en-

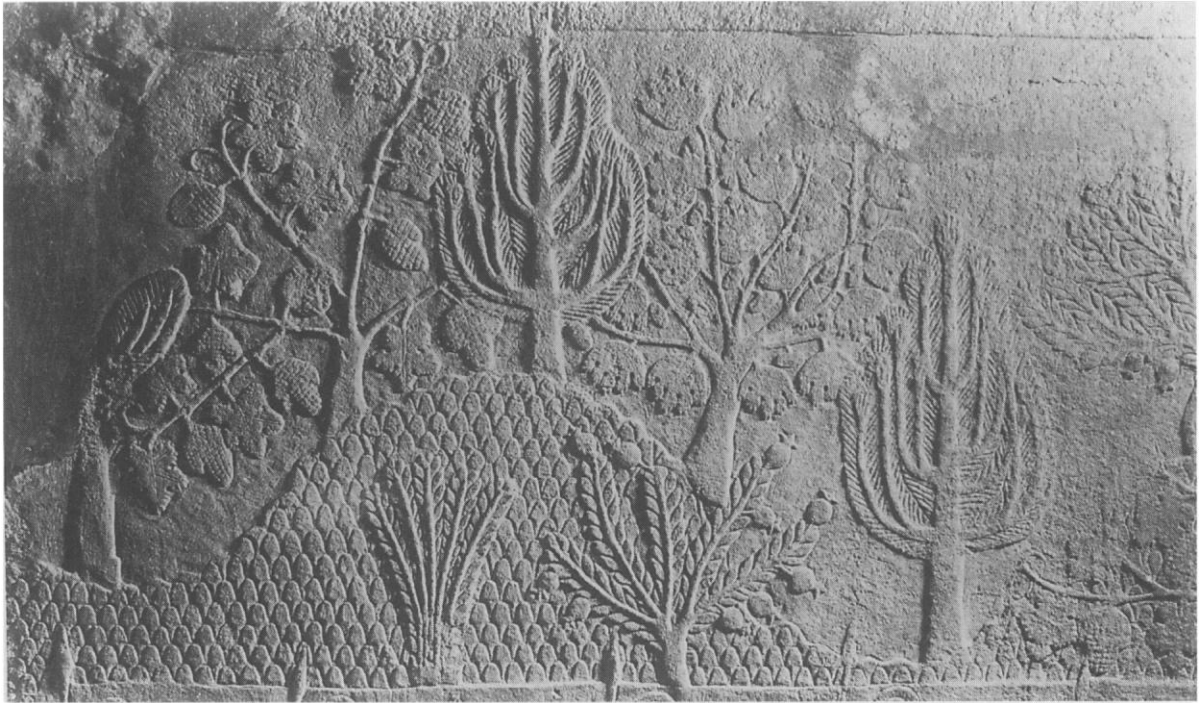


Fig. 24. Period of Sennacherib. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Court VI (Reade 1999: fig. 57). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

tangle themselves around a conifer tree. The grape bunches are exceedingly large, they drip off their vines which terminate in flowers with curly volutes and tall stamens—an added detail not present earlier. The fertility of the vines is emphasized by the the prominence of the stamen, the visible “sex organs” of the grape blossoms, which seem to reach down and “fertilize” the lioness as they nearly touch her back, leaving a trail of potent pollen. The fertility theme is further suggested by the presence of three unique plants. Behind the lioness grows a three-pronged plant with rosette-like blossoms, probably a sunflower (Albenda 1974: 5).⁵¹ Framing the lion and lioness on the far right and left of the image grow two lily plants, their blossoms arching toward the sun. Also behind the lioness there is a short plant laden with broad leaves and round fruits, pos-

sibly a mandrake plant. The mandrake was known in Gen 30:14–16 as an aphrodisiac (Bleibtreu 1980: 239). The peaceful and natural poses of the lion and lioness in Room E contrast sharply with the twisted, excited, and contorted images of lions that are hunted on reliefs from elsewhere in the North Palace of Ashurbanipal. This unique landscape with all of its floral diversity and blossoming fertility represents an idyllic scene (Albenda 1976: 45). But more than a pastoral experiment, this garden and others like it were political statements (Stronach 1990: 180). Its image was deliberately construed and shows the Assyrian imagining of peacefulness and fertility connected with an exotic landscape that was above all supplied by the beneficent king to the Assyrian heartland.

The garden scene from Room S₁ in Ashurbanipal's North Palace is another strong exemplar of topos number 5, which links the North Syrian-like garden with royally supplied fertility and leisure. In this relief, it is the king and queen themselves who relax in a landscape full of wild animals and vegetation familiar from the west and from Babylonia (fig. 27). The garden scene is actually part of a

⁵¹ With its perfectly round shape, this flower is reminiscent of a similar single specimen identified above as a sunflower which appears in the wooded landscape of Sargon's Room 7 reliefs. This view is contra Bleibtreu (1980: 240), who identifies the flowers in Ashurbanipal's relief as asters.

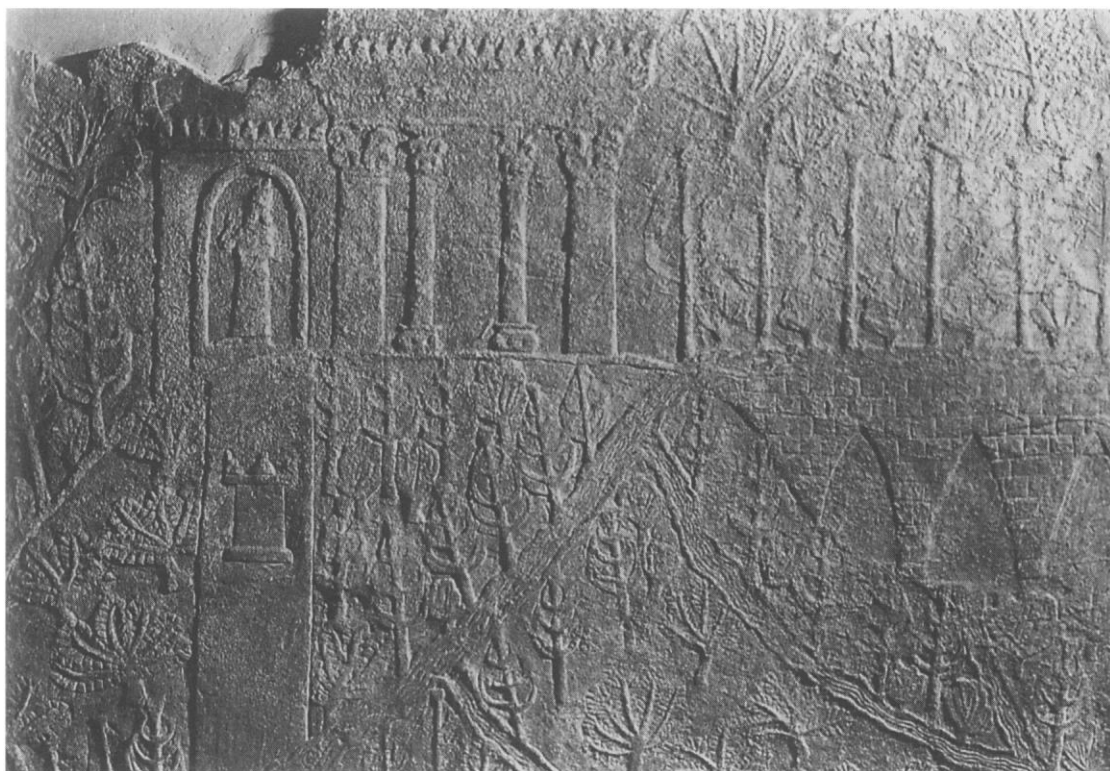


Fig. 25. Period of Ashurbanipal. Nineveh, North Palace, Room H (Reade 1999: fig. 52). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 26. Period of Ashurbanipal. Nineveh, North Palace, Room E (Reade 1999: fig. 80). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 27. Period of Ashurbanipal. Nineveh, North Palace, Room S₁ (Reade 1999: fig. 106). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.

larger composition of slabs originally placed in the walls of an upper chamber which fell into Room S; the upper chambers of Room S have been labeled Room S₁ in the literature (Barnett 1976: 20). In the lower story, the reliefs narrate a royal hunt of lions, onagers, and gazelles. In the upper story, the reliefs include preparations for a banquet and the famous garden scene itself.⁵² The composition with the garden scene consists of three registers, each with a particular set of landscape elements. For example, the top register has alternating conifer trees, palm trees, deciduous trees, and grapevines; the middle register includes conifer trees, lotus plants, deciduous trees, and a small grapevine; and the bottom register includes only tall marsh reeds. The top two registers seem to depict a landscape familiar from areas to the west of Assyria, and the bottom register depicts the landscape of Babylonia to the south.⁵³ These images may indeed portray the same marshes and forests re-created to the north of Nineveh and pictured in Sennacherib's reliefs from Court VI of the Southwest Palace. Hence Ashurbanipal may have reclined in his father's garden complex.

⁵² For a detailed discussion of the organization and program of this wing of the palace, see Meissner and Opitz 1940; Winter 1982; and Albenda 1976: 58.

⁵³ Albenda has suggested (1976: 61–62) that the spatial relationships in the reliefs correspond to actual distances from the king at Nineveh of these two distinct landscapes. She describes an “inner zone” filled with fruit trees and flowers and an “outer zone” with marshes. She implies that the inner zone would have been located directly adjacent to the king's palace, next to the royal harem quarters at Nineveh.

The image of the king and queen reclining on their furniture in Slab C makes a political statement: the relaxing royal figures are accompanied by musicians and attendants who imbue the environment with an air of celebration and pleasure, while to the left of the couple, a decapitated head, identified in an epigraph as belonging to the defeated Elamite king Teumann, hangs in a tree. The scene represents the mood of the royal couple after a major military victory for Assyria, as the epigraph and images just to the left of the relaxing royal couple inform us that the new king of the Elamites, a puppet of Ashurbanipal, was ushered in to greet the king in Slab A. The relaxation of the king and queen is connected in Slab C with the fruitfulness and fertility of the grapevines that hang above their heads. The laden fruit of the grape bunches that frame only the figures of the king and queen are symbols of the latent fertility apparent in the union between the two royal personages. Thus, we have in Room S₁ the human correspondence to the relaxed, peaceful, and fertile leonine couple from Room E. These royal gardens, modeled in part after the North Syrian landscape, were constructed tangibly and in images as sites of symbolic fertility and “royal leisure.”⁵⁴

CONCLUSION AND SIGNIFICANCE

To summarize, the imagined diversity and abundance of the appropriated North Syrian landscape were fully conceived and consistently reiterated

⁵⁴ Ashurbanipal's annals proclaim, “A great park of all kinds of fruit trees I planted for my lordly leisure”

through the use of five pictorial topoi. These include (1) the depiction of numerous species of plants; (2) the receipt of diverse species of tame animals as tribute; (3) the witnessing and control of the chaos of the North Syrian faunal landscape; and (4) the representation of the *ex situ* re-creation of the abundant North Syrian landscape. The fifth topos entails the reasons for collecting the elements of the North Syrian landscape—to invoke a sense of fertility, leisure, and triumphant celebration associated with the king. The North Syrian landscape was reconstructed as a world that was diverse, fertile, and most important, appropriated and supplied by the king. Moreover, it was a central component of a larger world, a microcosm of empire constructed in the Assyrian heartland for the native audience, which contained simulacra of many other captured landscapes, including the marshes of Babylonia. North Syria may not have been the *only* component of the comprehensive empire, but it was possibly the most significant and perhaps the original microcosm requiring re-creation. Most importantly, these microcosms were created not just for royal pleasure but for public display. This can clearly be seen on the relief from Ashurbanipal's palace that shows a hunting arena and Assyrians rushing to watch the royal hunt. The very public nature of the re-creation of North Syria can also be seen in textual phrases that refer to the intentions of the kings to bring these

exotic worlds to their native subjects. For example, a Sennacherib text states, "The wealth of mountains and all lands, all the herbs of the land of Hatti, myrrh plants . . . all kind of mountain vines, all the fruits of the lands, I set out for my subjects" (Luckenbill 1924: 113). Another text claims that the lions that Ashurnasirpal II hunted were put on display in Nimrud:

I took away 50 lion cubs. I herded them into Calah and the palaces of my land into cages. I bred their cubs in great numbers. . . . Beasts of mountain and plain, all of them in my city Calah. I displayed them to all the people of my land. (RIMA 2: A.0.101.1, 34–38)

As public spectacles, the landscapes of North Syria that were imagined in texts and reliefs, and the gardens of Assyria modeled in part on those imagined North Syrian landscapes, were symbolic productions of royal ideology. The created nature of landscape is "tailor-made for the discourse of imperialism" since it demonstrates the royal power to create and, therefore, the royal power *over* the landscape represented (Marcus 1995b: 195). The imagining of North Syria was above all a rhetorical act that helped to cement political aims and substantiate the deeds and claims of the king as the maintainer and restorer of pleasure and prosperity in the empire. By acquiring and creating through images and live displays within the heartland such a wonderfully diverse and lush environment, each Neo-Assyrian king was presented as the legitimate, beneficent, and fit leader. Conversely, as a creative and deliberate imagining, the representations of the North Syrian landscape took part in a fictive narrative, which was conditioned by and filtered through an Assyrian view of an "Other" world.

(ARAB 2: 837; Streck 1916: 88; Borger 1996: 74). It echoes an earlier response to the royal gardens from Ashurnasirpal II's Banquet Stele in which he calls his park a "pleasure garden (GIŠ.KIRI₆.siḫate)" and a "delightful garden (GIŠ.KIRI₆.rišate)" (RIMA 2: A.0.101.30, 51–52).

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