



University of Malta

Faculty of Arts

Omar Simon N'Shea

**The Construct of Royal Masculinity in the
Textual and Visual Sources of the
Neo-Assyrian Empire**

Supervisor: **Prof. Anthony J. Frendo**

Co-Supervisor: **Prof. Saana Svärd**

*A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
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Student's I.D. /Code 05027969

Student's Name & Surname OMAR SIMON N'SHEA

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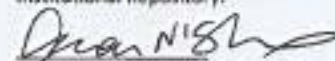
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ABSTRACT

The Construct of Royal Masculinity in the Textual and Visual Sources of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.

In this study, I engage with the state arts and texts of the ancient Neo-Assyrian (911–612 B.C.E.) to examine the extent to which Neo-Assyrian kings relied on the proper construction and performance of hegemonic masculinity to negotiate and legitimate their exercise of rule. Methodologically, this multimodal study in the different media employed by Neo-Assyrian statecraft will employ the critical tools of Assyriology along with feminist theories and masculinities studies, archaeological, art historical and psychoanalytic critical paradigms, to analyse both visual and textual representations in order to trace the construction of masculinities not only of individual kings but also of the ‘monarchy’ and the ‘state hierarchy’ as expressions of shifting hegemonic masculinities. It will be shown that masculinities were central to the discourse and legitimation of rule, that the state and the ruler were entirely dependent on notions of masculinity expressed as virile military prowess in battle and in diplomatic encounters, domination over men and animals, as well as the management of the reproductive abilities of persons born with male genitals. This study will then focus on the late Sargonid reigns of Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.E.), Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.E.) to discuss not only the *longue durée* of gender construction and performance but also to trace internal developments and reconfigurations which indicate that within the time frame of empire, masculinities were not monolithic but were, rather, constructed and performed differently depending not only on the socio-political circumstances of the time but also on the media at issue. References will also be made to other Neo-

Assyrian sovereigns in general, and to Assurbanipal (668–630 B.C.E.) in particular. This study will also investigate the way royal masculinities were constructed through the contradictory discourse of symbiosis with and dominance over the Other, namely animals and castrated males. It is hoped that this study will not only elucidate the importance of masculinities as ideological state apparatuses and as tools for hegemonic ideology within the Neo-Assyrian Empire, but that it will initiate a dialogue on the role played by gender in general, and masculinities in particular, in the establishment and maintenance of political formations and imperial projects in past societies as well as today through the lens of the ancient Near East.

DEDICATION

To my mother, Josephine

PREFACE

This dissertation is a study of the way masculinities were constructed, performed and brought to the fold of imperial discourse in an ancient empire, specifically the Neo-Assyrian empire in ancient Iraq. After a period of almost twenty years of near-total silence from field archaeologists working in the region, new expeditions by both local and foreign teams are starting to take place. It may be that within a few years from now, studies on gender in general, and masculinities in particular, will not only have more data sets to analyse, but will also have a broader social context to look at than what is currently available.

As things stand, the only data that we can access must necessarily come from elite contexts, because it is precisely these that gave rise to an interest in the material culture of the region in the nineteenth century with the British and French expeditions. As a result, I could only investigate the topic as it relates to these contexts. It may be that as new data emerge, we may have to rethink the way we presently study gender in this specific context, and to rephrase our questions as well as reshape our theoretical frameworks.

Be that as it may, I feel that our currently available data require elucidation through research into this topic. However, the present work in no way pretends to be a complete and comprehensive volume. Far from it. What I merely sought to achieve here was to initiate a debate on masculinities, and to attempt to contribute to a more comprehensive and more holistic approach to gender studies and the construction of identities in the ancient world. On the suggestion of ancient Near Eastern art historian Megan Cifarelli, I have also sought to include references to scholars who are outside

the Western and heteronormative domains of knowledge production. It is now clear to me that a dissertation which seeks to discern the ways masculinities were constructed in the context of my study also needs to engage with scholars who are not only outside the gender binary, but also with those whose work is under-represented in academia in general, and our field in particular.

From the outset of this project, I have been fortunate to meet a group of people whose generosity and collaborative spirit have made this work possible. Saana Svärd and Agnès Garcia-Ventura were kind enough to invite me to talk at the first Gender, Methodology, and the Ancient Near East (GeMANE 1) workshop in Helsinki on October 27–28, 2014. It was at that workshop that my sense of intellectual isolation shifted, and that I was introduced to a group of researchers working in the field to which this study hopes to make a contribution. With the second GeMANE 2 workshop in Barcelona in 2017, it became clear that the interest in gender had grown exponentially, and that now it has become a legitimate area of inquiry within Assyriology. And it is to this area that I would like to contribute my initial foray into masculinities.

Since research is never carried out in isolation, I would like to thank my supervisor Anthony J. Frendo, Professor in Near Eastern Archaeology and the Hebrew Bible at the University of Malta, for believing in me and in this topic from the start. His wise guidance as my teacher throughout my undergraduate and postgraduate studies will hopefully be passed on to my students in my teaching.

The inspiration to work through easy and difficult times came from my co-supervisor Professor Saana Svärd of the University of Helsinki. Her belief in my

theoretical conundrums, her patience with my writing, and her close mentoring are truly commendable. This would not have been at all possible without her insistence on my overcoming the fears of academic contributions. This work was completed thanks to the effort she made to be available for our monthly meetings, to read my work closely, to instruct me graciously but firmly, and to host me in Helsinki when my productivity needed a change of scene. Without my supervisors, this dissertation would never have happened.

I also wish to thank my doctoral committee, Professor Martin Zammit, Professor Megan Cifarelli, Dr. Agnès Garcia-Ventura and Dr. Dennis Mizzi. Their graciousness in my oral examination as well as their insightful comments on this manuscript will undoubtedly make of this work a sturdier contribution to the field. It was Professor Martin Zammit who first introduced me to East Semitic, and it was he who planted the seed that was to become this dissertation. I wish to thank him here for all the times he has instructed me in all things academic and otherwise. Finally, I would also like to thank Professor Nicholas C. Vella, Professor Isabel Stabile, and Professor Pierluigi Mollicone for their constant support throughout the research and writing of this dissertation. Their sound advice on method and execution has been immensely helpful. Among my colleagues and friends in Assyriology, I wish to thank Professor Lorenzo Verderame of the University of La Sapienza in Rome, Sophus Helle of Aarhus University, and Ann K. Guinan of the University of Pennsylvania, for believing in this topic, for reading and commenting on parts of this work, and for always being helpful and sending me relevant literature to read.

As a hazard of any dissertation is that it seeps into the lived reality of the researcher, my close friends have had to put up with a lot of theorizing about masculinities. To James Bugeja, Robert Zammit, Giuseppe Fanara, Joe Gatt, Edward George Wilkinson, and Aaron Aquilina I owe my immense gratitude for their love and friendship, for sharing their insights, and for always being there. It is now my turn to listen to you.

Numerous other friends and colleagues have supported me and my project. Among those I wish to thank here, for various contributions to my preparation for the doctoral oral examination and for their support, are Dr. Lucienne Vassallo Gatt, Dr. Alessandra Theuma, Robert Labrosse, Christopher Micallef, Sandra Agius Darmanin, Jessica Alamango, Agnetha Agius, Carl Caruana, Therese Camilleri, Stafania Calleja, and my student Essa Qasem. Lastly, I wish to express my special gratitude to Annabelle Attard for enthusiastically listening to stories from Assyria for all these years and for sending me pictures of the Assyrian reliefs from London.

Finally, I would like to point out that if any errors of form and content have made their way into this manuscript, they remain entirely of my own making.

Malta, September 2018

Omar N'Shea

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ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

Bibliographical Abbreviations

BM	British Museum
CAD	Chicago Assyrian Dictionary
LAS II	Parpola 1971
PNA	Radner 1998, 1999; Baker 2000, 2001, 2002, 2011
RIMA 2	Grayson 1991
RIMA 3	Grayson 1996
RINAP 1	Tadmor and Yamada 2011
RINAP 3/1	Grayson and Novotny 2012
RINAP 3/2	Grayson and Novotny 2014
RINAP 4	Leichty 2011
SAA 1	Parpola 1987
SAA 2	Parpola and Watanabe 1988
SAA 3	Livingstone 1989
SAA 4	Starr 1990
SAA 6	Kwasman and Parpola 1991
SAA 7	Fales and Postgate 1992
SAA 8	Hunger 1992
SAA 9	Parpola 1997
SAA 10	Parpola 1993
SAA 11	Fales and Postgate 1995
SAA 12	Kataja and Whiting 1995
SAA 13	Cole and Machinist 1998
SAA 14	Mattila 2002
SAA 16	Luukko and Van Buylaere 2002
SAA 18	Reynolds 2003

Other Abbreviations and Symbols

?	uncertain reading
X	broken or undeciphered sign
()	supplied word or sign
(...)	uncertain number of signs
⸗	partially preserved word or sign

PART 1: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

CHAPTER 0. INTRODUCTION

0.0. Introductory Remarks

In this dissertation, I analyse theories of masculinities in order to investigate the extent to which the late Neo-Assyrian Empire (934–612 B.C.E.) foregrounded the royal construction and performance of hegemonic masculinity, to negotiate, re-negotiate, and legitimate its hegemonic status as a socio-political entity in the ancient Near East. I employ the sociological understanding of masculinities as social constructs that disrupt the claims made by essentialists that there are natural, biologically determined correlations between male bodies and the production and performance of different ways of being a man.¹ The ideological nature of masculinities proposes to naturalise the relationship between male bodies and masculinities, leaving men not only unmarked in the historical and prehistorical records, but also allowing men to generally stand in for the whole of humankind.²

With the emergence of gender as a legitimate category of intellectual inquiry, and on Joan Wallach Scott's insistence that we study both women and men in the gender record, marking men as categories of analysis has brought into view the constructed nature of different configurations of masculinities as they change not only over space and time but even within the lifespan of an individual.³

¹ Creangă 2010, 85.

² Hearne 2004, 59. I wish to point out that I also understand femininities to be ideological and coercive; indeed, this study seeks to analyse the way that masculinities operated in the first millennium BC in northern Iraq as a way to make Neo-Assyrian sovereignty *seem* natural and divinely gifted.

³ Scott 1986, 1053–1075. See also Tosh 2004, 48.

Masculinities, as I understand them in this work, are discursive practices usually, but not necessarily, aligned with the bodily and behavioural practices of persons identified as male at birth. I shall argue that in the period under study, masculinity was not a monolithic and stable discursive trait but rather one that was configured in various ways often depending on the needs of a socio-political state with imperial ambitions. Indeed, that is why I find it more useful here to follow—although with caution and some revision—Raewyn Connell’s theoretical framework of masculinities rather than use the singular category masculinity.⁴ Connell’s framework indicates a theoretical distancing from an essentialist (a genetic or psychological component which produces masculinity, positivist (a catalogue of attributes that feature in all men), normative (an ideal masculinity that all men try to imitate), and semiotic perspective (masculinity as all that which is not feminine).⁵ According to Connell’s social constructionist framework, masculinity is the practice of positioning the subject along a gender order as well as the maintenance of that site through bodily and cultural experience.⁶ According to this understanding of masculinity, therefore, there are different ways of being a man and each does not exclude other discursive modalities from the domain of masculinities.

The sources studied for this dissertation reveal that in the emic context, gender was already understood as a performance in the ancient Near East, and that texts—including written and oral traditions—as well as visual media helped construct and

⁴ Connell 1995. See also Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 829–59. My gratitude to Agnès Garcia-Ventura for suggestions on the use of the term ‘masculinities’ in this dissertation.

⁵ Connell 1995, 68–71. See also Creangă 2010, 85.

⁶ Connell 1995, 71.

disseminate multiple constructs of masculinities.⁷ Indeed, as I shall argue, the Neo-Assyrian imperial project also considered and acknowledged different productions and performances of masculinities to bolster its hegemonic image through the state arts. Masculinities, as presented in this study, are therefore gender and gendered discursive practices that permeate the social and cultural arenas, and are not tied down to any particular ideology of manliness.⁸ As construed in the state arts of the Neo-Assyrian empire, royal masculinities are based on the king's hypervirility both in the portrayal of his body as well as beyond.⁹ This, however, is not to suggest that the sole trait of the Neo-Assyrian sovereign is hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, other persons, even court eunuchs, are portrayed through hypervirile bodies as well as other traits that were correlated with elite masculine privilege. To a large degree, royal masculinities in the Neo-Assyrian context are based on the notion of dominance of the Other, be it socio-political entity, person, animal, or land(scape) and they are scripted outside the body, originating, as they do, in the needs of an expansionist regime. They are then inscribed onto the body of males as a form of bodily fiction resulting in (what some may call) patriarchy as well as on the bodies of non-normative males and women if the political ecosystem so demands.

This is not to ignore or underestimate the agency of individual persons. Indeed, I shall pay special attention to the interstices where the political fictions of masculinities intersect with the lived reality of the sovereigns discussed here. Since the

⁷ On the multiple and changing constructions of masculinities in the ancient world, see most recently Zsolnay 2017, esp. 2–3.

⁸ Tosh 2004, 41.

⁹ One important feature of Connell's framework for masculinities is the insistence that although masculinities are not biologically determined, the body plays a central role in the construction of masculinities with its potentials and limitations. See Connell 1995, 52–56.

largest part of this study is based on representations of the Neo-Assyrian king and court eunuchs in textual and visual documentation, there is little wiggle room for a comprehensive investigation of the agency of individual actors. However, where the lived experience becomes partially visible through other documents in the archive, I shall attempt to make comparisons between the state-sanctioned image of royal masculinity (that is, the masculinity of the office of kingship) and the personal life of the king as he tries to live up to the hegemonic heights of state-sanctioned gender.

For this work, I have studied the official textual documents of the Neo-Assyrian administration in the form of royal inscriptions as well the palace decorative programmes usually in the form of reliefs on orthostats lining some of the walls of Neo-Assyrian palaces. In addition, I have also consulted the Neo-Assyrian archive of letters, queries, prophecy, and literature available in the standard text editions of the State Archives of Assyria (SAA). My focus in this study is limited to the reigns of the late Sargonid kings Sennacherib (704–681), Esarhaddon (680–669), and Assurbanipal (668–630). This narrow focus on the late Sargonid kings was borne out of the methodological and theoretical needs since these are the best-documented reigns of Neo-Assyrian kings, providing substantial evidence of continuity and change to attempt to answer my research question.

I did not wish for this study to provide a catalogue of instances in the Neo-Assyrian textual and visual records that attest to what one may suppose are expressions of masculinity. Although such a catalogue has not been written for this period, I was not theoretically and methodologically inclined to do so here since such a study would necessarily be based on a set of *a priori* assumptions of what masculinities

may have been. Such a method would also necessarily involve looking at the archive and finding evidence of those traits.¹⁰ For example, to say that masculinity is the performance of a man in the ambits of procreation, provision, and protection would involve looking for evidence of men who do so in the archive. Likewise, to say that masculinity is the expression of violence involving male bodies over racial male others or women would tantamount to the same thing, and all findings would be tautological.

What I have attempted to do here is to identify what the state *itself* consciously construed as masculine constructs and to understand the significance of this strategy for the construction, maintenance, and expansion of the territorial project. In this way, I hope to address a lacuna in Assyriology and Neo-Assyrian studies, namely the dearth of studies that foreground gender as a significant aspect of imperialism. In doing so, I aim to provide not only some instances in which the state arts of Assyria construct royal masculinities, but also to provide a theoretical framework through which to interpret these practices. It is hoped that this framework may be useful also outside the field of Assyriology proper, especially in order to reveal the mechanisms by which masculinities achieved their stealth and invisibility in the historical record as well as beyond.

The socio-political entity that is the focus of this study is the Neo-Assyrian Empire, specifically the late kings from the Sargonid dynasty who ruled between 704 and 630 B.C.E. The choice of this period was determined by methodological imperatives, namely the need for a significant quantity of documentation that allow

¹⁰ Bederman 2011, 15. Suffice it to say here that although the lexicographic account of masculinities and third gender identities carried out by Peled (2016) was much needed, the under-theorised approach reifies such attributes in most of the cases discussed therein.

the research question to be answered, as well as significant evidence of continuity and change in order to critique the notion of a stable masculinity that is monolithic and unchanging. The evidence from this period allows us to see, within a relatively short chronology, the effects of a political and imperial ecosystem making demands on the bodies of its subjects, from the king to the enemies, which are effected through a coded gendered system of power and signification. All of the textual evidence from the Neo-Assyrian period was searched and taken into consideration for this study, and duly noted where relevant; however, my emphasis has been on the late period because of the possibility of comparison between the state-sanctioned textual and visual media and the administrative and private archive of correspondence between the king and the imperial apparatus.

It is important to note here that this is not a philological study of the way Akkadian in general, or the Neo-Assyrian dialect in particular, work to construct masculinities in language, nor is it a lexicographic study of masculinities in the period.¹¹ Rather, it is an investigation of what the Assyrian state and the palace socio-political apparatus came to signify as royal masculinity and the extent to which the hegemonizing performed it appropriately. I will therefore not discuss the grammatical fine points of Akkadian but rather read the texts linguistically for content-driven analysis. Indeed, the translation of cuneiform sources used here are based on standard text editions (the RIMA and RINAP series) and variations employed by the State Archives of Assyria (SAA). In some instances, I have felt that some passages required a new translation and where this was the case, I have duly noted it.

¹¹ For a recent lexicographic study of masculinities and third gender persons in ancient Mesopotamia, see Peled, 2016.

All the quotations I use in this study are taken from Neo-Assyrian cuneiform sources available in RIMA/RINAP or the SAA text editions and online database. When images are used to aid or make reference to the text, I have supplied museum numbers. For names, I follow the *Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (PNA) but when the name is commonly established, I use the common form (Sennacherib rather than Sīn-aḥḥē-erība). In accordance with SAA style, Assur refers to the city whereas Aššur refers to the deity.

For this dissertation, I have studied the royal inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian period in order to identify where in the texts the authors make both explicit and indirect reference to masculinity as a feature of the approved and sanctioned image of kingship. I have also looked at the reliefs separately. In conclusion, I have brought together the data sets gleaned from both streams of evidence to attempt to identify whether masculinity was constructed coherently across all media or where different media, and their purpose and audience, differ. I have also searched the letters from the period under study in order to examine the construct of masculinities therein. In doing so, I have sought to figure out whether the masculine image of the king differed in the personal correspondence, and if so, to determine the extent to which it did.

0.1. Situating the Study

This study discusses the socio-cultural construct of royal masculinity and the value attached to this construct in the Neo-Assyrian imperial court. It is therefore important to discuss what I mean by the terms ‘socio-cultural construct’ and ‘masculinity’ at this point.

I follow the definition of social constructionism which stipulates that there are processes by which discourse produces subjectivity and that one's identity is not constituted by one's innate or essential qualities.¹² Judith Butler employed the term performativity to refer to the way culturally prescribed scripts are reiterated in one's life to result in the socially-legitimated ways of being a man or woman, thus producing gender as a binary in which discursive traits constitute the sanctioned configurations of masculinity and femininity.¹³ Like West and Zimmerman before her, Butler argues that there is no pre-discursive gender; gender itself arises in the processes by which discourse constitutes masculinity and femininity.¹⁴

As Chris Beasley argues, social constructionism remains very central to the study of masculinities as it maintains that identities do not rest on fixed and stable content.¹⁵ This implies a distancing from the positivist notion that woman or man are tantamount to a scientifically-accumulated list of attributes. Furthermore, Weeks notes that social constructionism rejects the reduction of gender to a core truth, usually based in biology and uncontaminated by culture.¹⁶ At the same time, however, social constructivists disagree with the way postmodernists oppose identity; indeed, as Beasley stresses, gender is not merely a matter of identity, but also one of hierarchical divisions.¹⁷

Social constructivists continue to argue (*contra* postmodern writers who reject completely any foundational base to identity) that "sexuality may have varying social

¹² Brickell 2006, 87.

¹³ Butler 1999, esp. 9–12.

¹⁴ Butler 1999, 5. See also West and Zimmerman 1987 and more recently 2009.

¹⁵ Beasley 2005, 135.

¹⁶ Weeks is quoted in Beasley 2005, 136.

¹⁷ Beasley 2005, 135.

significance in different cultural and historical periods.”¹⁸ The stress of social constructivists is on specific social variation and complexity rather than unlimited mutability. The rejection of reductionism in favour of specific socio-historical and cultural variation gives rise to the claim that ‘acts’ do not have universal social meaning.¹⁹ Therefore, sodomy between males, for example, may not always mean homosexuality or social marginalisation.²⁰

Early sexologists like Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, and Freud, see sex as a force of nature that can either be dangerously repressed or healthily given free reign.²¹ These essentialist projects used medicalisation to free sexuality from the social constraints, turned homosexuality into something natural, and even made their way into later studies like Kinsey’s and modern genetic determinism. Social constructivism, on the other hand, is rooted in the works of Foucault who saw sexual identity as a cultural historical character and not a biological drive.²² Social constructivists, however, do not totally represent the body as a passive surface on which society writes its script (as in the case of Butler). Indeed, Diane Richardson and Connell for instance note that the body does propose possibilities and limitations.²³ It is at this juncture that the nature of social constructivism comes across as being rooted still within Modernism: that although there is a place for Modernism, the bodily trajectories are never entirely reduced to constructionism.

¹⁸ Beasley 2005, 137.

¹⁹ Vance 1992, 133–4.

²⁰ Guinan and Morris 2017, 150–169.

²¹ See Beasley 2005, 138–9.

²² See in Beasley 2005, 141.

²³ Richardson 1993, 78; Connell 1995, 52–56.

Masculinity, on the other hand, and as defined by Connell, is the configuration of practices that order social practice in relation to somatic features.²⁴ Connell understands masculinities as configurations that are either hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, or marginal. Hegemonic masculinity is culturally celebrated at an ideal level and prized by socio-cultural institutions such as the family.²⁵ At an ideological level, hegemonic masculinity operates in stealth and appears monolithic and stable yet when made visible in research and examined closely, reveals itself to be subject to destabilisation and change. Complicit masculinity, on the other hand, is the performance of masculinity which is not enacted on the plane of the ideal but which sustains the hegemonic performance. Such persons who perform complicit masculinities are rewarded with that Connell calls the 'patriarchal dividend', that is, they are situated within the matrix of social privilege as men, despite being parasitic rather than the heroes of patriarchy.²⁶

Since Connell understands masculinities to be relational, they argue that hegemonic and complicit masculinities could only attain their status and privilege through the exclusion of subordinate masculinities, that is, those masculinities which are aberrant, namely homosexual masculinity and effeminacy.²⁷ Such subordination practices usually involve abuse, economic unfairness, socio-cultural exclusion, and negative representation at law and within juridical discourse. Finally, marginal masculinities are gender positionalities that lack what Connell calls 'authorisation'.²⁸

²⁴ Connell 1995, 71–72.

²⁵ Connell 1995, 77–78.

²⁶ Connell 1995, 79–80.

²⁷ Connell 1995, 78–79.

²⁸ Connell 1995, 80–81.

Although connected to hegemonic masculinity, marginal masculinities do not receive legitimation usually due to issues of class, race, ethnicity, and physical disability.²⁹

My focus on these two nodes is rooted in the importance that the Neo-Assyrian period attaches to the way power relations between the state of Assyria and the others, as well as those between men and other men, women, and animals, were shaped through a rigid and institutionally-defined and sanctioned construction of masculinity and the emphasis on the proper performance of the gender script. Theoretically, therefore, I subscribe to the idea that masculinities are relational, and that they should be studied explicitly and not left unmarked. The extent to which masculinity brings to bear on the expression of empire I hope will become a little evident.

Furthermore, the emphasis on theory and theoretical approaches in this dissertation will also become evident. As a study on gender in general, and masculinities in particular, it would be unpardonable to not include my stance as a researcher. Indeed, it is my firm belief that to either remain blind to the theoretical stance that helps the researcher construct knowledge, or to leave it undiscussed, would constitute a grave error of method. By explaining my theoretical method, I hope to also reveal (if only slightly) the way in which men were able to stand in for humankind.³⁰ In this sense, I construct a different image of the Assyrian king than that in most standard accounts, one that is based on the data sets as well as my own position as a researcher.

²⁹ Creangă 2010, 86.

³⁰ See also Svärd 2015, 2–3.

Since I also maintain that the use of modern theories of investigation cannot be employed to ancient archives without recalibration to accurately reflect the data sets, I have carefully looked at the sources and built a theoretical framework which could accommodate and help me make sense of my data. The framework acts as a lens to look at and analyse the data. In this sense, I have used the framework and the collection of data in tandem and constantly revised the. I hope this framework may be useful to other researchers in Assyriology and beyond in their own studies.

In addition, the way masculinity is viewed in the cuneiform sources is necessarily tied to how we define masculinity. If it is seen as anything that is performed by a male body, then it is easy to exclude anything that is not male, such as the state itself, or women, or animals, or even re-engineered males. This is perhaps why so far, all men in the period were grouped as performing or possessing masculinity while eunuchs, women, and animals as lacking it. My aim, therefore, is to investigate how the construct of royal masculinity was socially and somatically engineered, and in turn how it stood in relation to other masculinities.³¹

0.2. Scope and Aims

This study discusses the construct of royal masculinity in the textual and visual sources of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, a socio-political entity centred around ancient Northern Iraq. The focus is on the late Neo-Assyrian Sargonid rulers, primarily on the reigns of Sennacherib and Esarhaddon. References to the reign of Assurbanipal will be made in

³¹ This is not to imply that the study of femininities in these records is not possible or not important. I merely wish to note that such a study is beyond the scope of the present one, and if readers wish to consult what is presently available in this field to see, especially, Gansell, 2013, and Svärd, 2015.

the third part of the study. The primary aim of this thesis is to employ theoretical perspectives from gender studies to analyse the ways in which royal masculinities were constructed and performed in this period as well as to assess the extent to which the state of Assyria relied on the discourse of masculinities in the textual and visual evidence from the period in order to legitimate its political hegemony both 'domestically' and 'internationally'. The term 'masculinity' used in the title is a nod to the scholarly construct so far employed in references to the gender of Neo-Assyrian kings. I subscribe to the more accurate term 'masculinities' throughout the study, as one of the aims is to show that in the period under discussion, more than one construct was performed at any given time. The secondary, and to a certain extent much lesser, aim is to critique the notion of essential masculinity in the secondary Assyriological literature by showing that masculinities were culturally constructed and inextricably tied to power and its expressions. The final aim is to analyse the discursive modes employed by the state of Assyria to construct royal masculinity and other masculinities complicit in its making and to demonstrate that far from being a monolithic configuration situated in the male body, Neo-Assyrian royal masculinity was fluid and configured along the lines of both continuity and change.

0.3. Historical Setting

For our ancient Near Eastern context, perhaps the ideal site for the study of masculinity is the construct of royal masculinity in the Neo-Assyrian Empire since the evidence is more readily available. We are fortunate to have a visual and textual corpus from this period which in terms of breadth and volume far surpasses any other ancient Near

Eastern record. This is due to the fact that the evidence—mostly written on clay tablets or engraved on walls of alabaster survived both the conflagrations of war as well as the passage of time. Other cultures who wrote on perishable materials such as papyrus have not been as fortunate with their archival records.

The Neo-Assyrian Empire was the most important military power in the Near East from the beginning of the first millennium to the end of the seventh century, presiding over the political and economic spheres of the areas comprising Western Iran to the Mediterranean and from Anatolia to Egypt (fig. 1). Behind this power lay a succession of kings who set out on campaign with their army annually. In theory, the king was the head of a socio-military hierarchy and led his army, in person, on campaign every year in the name of the god Aššur.³²

The entire Neo-Assyrian phase of Near Eastern history is usually divided into two distinct phases, the first in the ninth century, and the second starting in the mid-eighth century (see Table 1 at the end of this section for the succession of kings and the date of their reign). The latter phase is commonly presented as the period of expansion during which the imperial project was more consciously concerned with the formation of a unified empire.

Underneath the king stood a pyramidal hierarchy of officers all in the employ of the state, headed by governors who were responsible for the provinces in the interior of Assyria. These officers all hailed from important Assyrian families.³³ The pattern of employing officers from socially privileged families was re-engineered in the mid-eighth

³² Radner 2010, 25.

³³ Reade 1972, 87–112.

century, when more frequently eunuchs were given these powerful positions, presumably on the premise that it would stop these local leaders from passing on authority to their sons.³⁴

Initially, the king and his army set out on campaign in the summer, when agricultural work was limited. This pattern changed when a standing army was created, one which could theoretically go to war at any given time.³⁵ There is no agreement on how many soldiers the Assyrian state fielded at any given campaign, but the numbers are sometimes estimated at several hundreds of thousands for the mid-seventh century based on accounts which related that the number of fallen enemy soldiers surpassed 100,000.³⁶ Since Assyria itself could not meet these quantitative needs, men from conquered territories had to be recruited into the army, as in the case of Phoenician sailors for battles in the Mediterranean and chariot teams for the battle in Samaria, Israel.³⁷ This means that the army was composed of men from diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds. Despite its centrality to the structure and organisation of the Neo-Assyrian army to the imperial apparatus, we still have a gaping lacuna in our knowledge. What we can be certain about, however, is that contrary to royal rhetoric and annalistic hyperbole, the army did not always engage in open field battles but relied, rather, on terror tactics and ‘calculated frightfulness’ to subdue the enemy. Sieges were resorted to only when terrorising tactics proved ineffectual.³⁸

³⁴ Van De Mierop 2007, 230.

³⁵ Radner 2015, 96–97.

³⁶ Van De Mierop 2007, 230.

³⁷ Van De Mierop 2007, 230.

³⁸ Van De Mierop 2007, 231.

One of the desired results of these incursions on other states was the influx of wealth that was brought to the heartland. Most of Assyria's enemies were wealthy states and the royal inscriptions list the abundance of resources and luxury goods, from camels and cattle to artefacts and weaponry. Phoenicia, for instance, supplied purple cloth and cedar wood while the Zagros people provided horses. At times, the booty would be so large that luxury goods became available to members of the lower classes. After the mid-eighth century, the practice of re-settling the vanquished people became important to build and populate the newly constructed cities.³⁹

Military leaders who were valiant and victorious on the battlefield were also great builders, and spoils from war financed their building projects. In this period, a succession of Assyrian kings built a number of new capital cities. The traditional city of Assur proved rather small for the ever-growing state, and Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.E.) relocated the entire state apparatus to Nimrud (Kalḫu), a Middle Assyrian city which he rebuilt in its entirety over a period of fifteen years.⁴⁰ He had a palace, a ziggurat and several temples built on top of a large citadel. The palace was a structure of some 200 metres long and 120 metres wide built around a central courtyard and whose monumental architecture included colossal figures guarding thresholds as well as reliefs whose themes included cult and ritual, royal hunting as well as warfare.

³⁹ Van De Mierop 2007, 233. Initially only specialist craftsmen were relocated, but this practice later included the majority of the population from areas that were particularly defiant. The rationale behind deportation practice was that rebellion in these areas would be quashed and the deportees would have to rely on protection against local hostility. The numbers of people deported during the three centuries of Assyrian rule are estimated at 4.5 million. Areas were either resettled (if they were important to trade) or left depopulated (as in the case of the northern part of ancient Israel). Those who were deported had to walk to the end destination, with men often bound in chains. Such relocation programmes must have required a high degree of planning and organisation.

⁴⁰ Van De Mierop 2007, 233.

Shalmaneser III, Ashurnasirpal II's immediate successor, had an arsenal built in the south-east corner of Kalḫu.⁴¹

Kalḫu was to remain the capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire for 150 years, until Sargon II (721–705 B.C.E.) moved the city to yet another location, one which had not been previously occupied. He called the city Dur-Sharrukin (Sargon's Fortress), another massive site of some 300 hectares housed in by a wall of some 7 kilometres. Once again, the architecture is monumental, displaying alabaster walls with low relief and colossal liminal statues.

Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.E.), Sargon II's son, chose to abandon his father's city when the latter's corpse was not retrieved from Tabal in Central Anatolia where had had been fighting the Kullummean enemy troops.⁴² It seems that the loss of the ruler's body at war was inauspicious to Assyrian politics.⁴³ Sennacherib moved the state apparatus to the old city of Nineveh, which he refurbished entirely to enclose its 750 hectares within a 12-kilometre wall. He called his palace the 'Palace Without Rival'.⁴⁴

Throughout this time, Assyrian hegemony was displayed in Assyrianized regions under the yoke of Aššur through the construction of public buildings and private residences. In addition, in 856 B.C.E. Shalmaneser III renamed Til-Barsip, in western Syria—now Kar Shalmaneser. Although the archaeological record is usually silent on

⁴¹ Kertai 2011, 71–85.

⁴² Frahm 2005, 4.

⁴³ According to Frahm 2005, 4–5, the scribe who lived in Kalḫu, copied the XIIth tablet of Gilgamesh in order to frame the inauspicious event of leaving the royal body unburied in foreign territory and to throw light on the unhappy conditions of unburied kings in their afterlife. A. George (cited in Frahm 2005, 4–5) offers a different reading of Nabû-zupup-kenu's activity, and suggests that the entire twelve tablets may have been recited in memory of the dead royal.

⁴⁴ Russell 1991.

luxury movable items such as carpets and jewellery, some material remains do point to the abundance of wealth available to the Assyrians in this period. Of special note are the ivory furniture attachments found in great abundance in Kalḫu.⁴⁵ The most notable find, however, has been the undisturbed queens' tomb in Kalḫu, where the bodies of ninth and eighth century queens were discovered⁴⁶ amid some 35 kilograms of elaborately and intricately carved gold items revealing the abilities of contemporary craftsmen.⁴⁷

King	Reign	City / Palace
Ashurnasirpal II	883–859	Kalḫu, Northwest Palace
Shalmaneser III	858–824	Kalḫu, Fort Shalmaneser
Shamshi-adad V	823–811	
Adad-nerari III	810–783	
Shalmaneser IV	782–773	
Aššur-dan III	772–755	
Aššur-nirari V	754–745	

⁴⁵ Winter 1976, 25–54. In this study, Winter differentiated the styles of carving of these ivory attachments and classified them as originating in different regions of the western empire, namely Phoenicia and North Syria.

⁴⁶ Dalley 2008, 171–177.

⁴⁷ Galil 2007. Since most of the archaeological work has focussed on monumental architecture, we are not yet in a position to discuss the status of lower-stratum families. Some work has been done on the structure of these families but not enough to glean any information regarding their material status and possessions.

Tiglath-pileser III	744–727	
Shalmaneser V	726–722	
Sargon II	721–705	Khorsabad, Dur-Sharrukin
Sennacherib	704–681	Nineveh, Southwest Palace
Esarhaddon	680–669	
Assurbanipal	668–627	Nineveh, North Palace
Aššur-etel-ilani	627–623	
Sin-shar-ishkun	622–612	
Aššur-uballit	611–?	

Table 1 List of Neo-Assyrian Kings

0.3.1. The Neo-Assyrian Empire in the Ninth Century

The territory annexed to the heartland in the Middle Assyrian period was relinquished piecemeal during the upsetting period of the twelfth to the tenth century. The current state of knowledge does not indicate to what extent local rulers remained faithful to Assyrian rule but it seems that most scholars are more inclined to think that little or no influence was exerted during this period.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Van De Mieroop 2007, 238.

In the last part of the tenth century, however, Assyrian kings re-engineered their policies and embarked on campaigning regularly. Initially, Assyrian foreign policy focussed on repossessing the western territory which had been taken from them by the Aramaeans. Aššur-dan II (934–912 B.C.E.) is explicit in his annalistic statements that he reconquered and resettled the land to the west. In addition to taking back lost territory, Assyrian foreign policy also focussed on the erection of public buildings and palaces from which the whole area could be ruled. Canals were dug along the Khabur river and the Middle Assyrian roads were restored in order to have an unimpeded link to the heartland of Assyria.⁴⁹

Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.E.) and Shalmaneser III (858–824 B.C.E.) initiated the policy of hemming in the entire region from the Zagros in the east to the Euphrates in the west, and from the Taurus Mountains in the north to the Babylonian border in the south, thus creating an area that served as a launching pad to territories beyond these confines. Ashurnasirpal II campaigned heavily within these borders in his reconquista of second millennium Assyrian territory, erecting Assyrian centres at axial locations such as river crossings.⁵⁰ His son and immediate successor, Shalmaneser III, campaigned aggressively in his thirty-five-year reign but did not expand the territory significantly. Shalmaneser III exploited the political fragmentation in the west to gain access to the luxury booty from the Mediterranean Sea, a military move which was encountered with the set-up of a coalition between the states of Damascus, Hamath, Israel, and Phoenician cities with the support of the Arabs and the Egyptians. At Qarqar, the Assyrians were pushed back but returned at the death of the Damascene

⁴⁹ Liverani 2014, 475.

⁵⁰ Van De Mieroop 2007, 240.

ruler Hadad-ezer to take advantage of the power vacuum and establish hegemony.⁵¹ In the north, Anatolian mines were possessed through the subordination of Neo-Hittite states which remained independent but were subject to tribute. It was also at this time that Shalmaneser III campaigned in five successive times to the north to quell the military influence of Urartu and to obtain its spoils.⁵² It was also during this period that the Assyrian troops encountered the Medes and the Mannans, who were later to become significant opponents to Assyrian hegemony. Shalmaneser's policies towards Babylonia remained inconsequential, intervening only twice to stifle civil uprisings involving the king and his brother.

At this time, provinces were governed by the king's direct representatives and while not as ambitious as the royal palaces, their administrative buildings, were constructed in the Assyrian style and displayed wall paintings with themes that paralleled those at Kalḫu. Provinces had to furnish food for the god Aššur, whose temple remained in the traditional city of Assur; many see this as an ideological expression of the diverse economies all feeding into a central state bureaucracy.⁵³ Dynasties passed provincial power from father to son; as long as they worked in tandem with the regime, their structures were allowed to stay in place.

Beyond these boundaries, vassals existing under the yoke of Aššur paid annual tribute in the form of luxury goods. Vassals were not subject to the imposition of the cult of Aššur, and their tribute was not paid to the deity but to the king. This is evidence

⁵¹ Van De Mieroop 2007, 241.

⁵² Van De Mieroop 2007, 242. In this period, Shalmaneser III stopped leading the army in person and entrusted this pivotal role to his *turtanu* (commander-in-chief) Dayyan Aššur.

⁵³ Van De Mieroop 2007, 243.

that during the ninth century, Assyrian policies were concerned with the reconquista of Middle Assyrian territory but not with expansion. Beyond the heartland stood territories which had to pay tribute but not necessarily become part of Assyria itself.⁵⁴

It is also during this period that the power of the Assyrian king was challenged on many fronts: powerful officials tried to gain hegemony in their areas and erected monuments in their own honour, whereas at home, queen Sammu-ramat (the woman who inspired the legend of Semiramis in later traditions) was politically influential during the reign of both her husband Shamsi-adad V as well as her son's Adad-nerari III (810–783 B.C.E.).⁵⁵ The traditional masculine hegemony seems to have been compromised in this period, and without a strong leader at the centre of the empire, the administrative apparatus became weakened. The dynasty stayed in place, but it came to rely significantly on the favour of privileged officials.

0.3.2. The Neo-Assyrian Empire in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries

During the eighth and seventh centuries, Assyria embarked on the project of imperial expansion and came to dominate the entire Near East, including Egypt for a short period. Assyria created an imperial unit extending from the Zagros Mountains in western Iran to the Mediterranean and from Anatolia to Egypt. The Assyrian king re-established himself as the main protagonist of this phase of empire building, and his hegemonic masculinity was to prove crucial to the imperial project. As we shall see

⁵⁴ Late in the reign of Shalmaneser III privileged military personnel gained more independence and their power became significantly bigger. Dayyan-aššur led military campaigns for which he gained status and threatened the princes' right of succession. This scenario lasted for seven years, including the first three years of the reign of Shamsi-Adad V (823–811 BC). During this period, local governors and officials such as the all-powerful Shamshi-ilu portrayed themselves as kings on monuments they erected in their own honour, sometimes with bilingual inscriptions in Assyrian and Aramaic.

⁵⁵ Siddall 2013, 57.

later on, however, the continuous reengineering of the hegemony of masculinity, along with internal disputes over succession and policy-weakness, undermined the project and following the reign of Assurbanipal, Assyrian kings lost their hold on the imperial project, leading to the collapse of Assyria.

The trend of the first half of the eighth century was reversed with the accession of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 B.C.E.). During his reign and that of Sargon II (721–705 B.C.E.), annual campaigns reached beyond the traditional borders and local officials were stripped off the power they gleaned for themselves in the preceding period. Age-old provinces were broken down into smaller ones while privileged positions within the official hierarchy had to be shared. The position of *turtanu* (commander-in-chief) was now given to two men, and to further curb the power of the officials and heighten that of the king's, eunuchs were appointed on the premise that roles within the hierarchy were not passed on from father to son.⁵⁶ Tiglath-pileser III created a professional standing army comprising foreigners for the infantry and Assyrians for the cavalry and chariots. Unlike his predecessors, when Tiglath-pileser III crossed the Euphrates, he incorporated the territories into the empire and not merely subjected them to tribute.

Van De Mieroop argues that this may not have been the original intention of the project, but was rather the result of local resistance.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Van De Mieroop 2007, 248.

⁵⁷ Van De Mieroop 2007, 248; Van De Mieroop points out that the political configuration at this period was three-tiered. The first was vassalage with annual tribute, the second was the enthroning of a puppet king at the service of Assyria and the third to turn the territory into a province with a governor loyal only to Assyria. Disobedience led from one tier in the relationship to another. This is best seen with Tiglath-pileser III's treatment of the state of Israel. Menahem, who paid tribute, was left to reign but when his son Pekahiah was assassinated by the anti-Assyrian Pekah in 735 (with the aid of Damascus), Tiglath-pileser III turned cities on the Syrian coast into provinces and then incorporated Damascus. After that, the northern parts of Israel were incorporated. Pekah was overthrown by the Israelites and the pro-Assyrian Hoshea was put on the throne (an act triggered by the threat of the advancing Assyrian army). When Hosea rebelled against Assyria, Shalmaneser V and later Sargon II

The Assyrian policy towards its southern neighbour, Babylonia, never followed any hard and fast rules. Assyrian empire-building kings seem to have been disinclined to openly dominate Babylonia, a policy often contributed to the fact that Assyrian cult and culture were inherited from Babylonia.⁵⁸ This may have been the case indeed, however we ought not to underestimate the difficulty the Assyrians may have had with an imperial project to take over the south. Babylonia was a distinctly heterogeneous area and its southern tip consisted of marshes where Assyrian military practices would have been severely compromised. In fact, the countless changes that Babylonia underwent during the reign of these six Assyrian kings is evidence of the latter's difficulty with finding a long-term solution to its relationship with the south.⁵⁹

Assyria's relationship to Babylonia is well attested in the reign of Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.E.). On ascending to the throne of Assyria, Sennacherib, like his three predecessors, crowned himself king of Babylonia as well. Two years into his reign, a native Babylonian, Marduk-zakir-shumi III, usurped the throne.⁶⁰ The latter was overthrown after a couple of weeks by the aggressively anti-Assyrian Marduk-apla-iddina II. Sennacherib's first campaign centred on Babylonia and having driven Marduk-apla-iddina II to the marshes, he placed an Assyrian puppet ruler, Bel-ibni, in his stead. Sennacherib later replaced Bel-ibni with his own son Aššur-nadin-shumi. The latter was captured by the Babylonians six years later and handed over to the Elamite king. A native Babylonian was put on the throne but was soon replaced by a Chaldean,

annexed the region to the province of Samaria. Judah was a different matter altogether, and it seems that a puppet king would suffice.

⁵⁸ Radner 2015, 3–6.

⁵⁹ Van De Mieroop 2007, 252.

⁶⁰ Tadmor *et al.* 1989, 3–50.

Mushezib-Marduk, who used the treasury of the temple to form an alliance with the Chaldeans, Arameans, Babylonians and Elamites.⁶¹ In 691 B.C.E. this alliance engaged in battle with Sennacherib at Halule and a year later, in a fifteen-month incursion, Sennacherib razed Babylonia.⁶²

Esarhaddon, Sennacherib's successor, recognised the importance of Babylonia and set about reconstructing it while presenting himself as the king who unified the two kingdoms. Esarhaddon, however, discontinued this tradition and before his death he passed on the kingdom of Babylonia to his older son Shamas-shuma-ukin while Assyria went to the younger Assurbanipal. The older brother treated Assurbanipal as a vassal and later joined forces with the Chaldeans, Arameans and Elamites. Assurbanipal waged a four-year war against Babylonia and his brother, a face-off that dried up the resources of both kingdoms. Despite this uneven relationship with its southern neighbour, Assyria never fully integrated Babylonia into its empire and at times gave it the special treatment Assyria felt it deserved.⁶³ The same cannot, however, be said of Urartu and Elam; Sargon II sacked Urartu in 714 B.C.E.. and Assurbanipal dealt with Elam by raiding Susa in 647 B.C.E.

Egypt too was a significant opponent of Assyria. In the ninth century, the prospect of conquering Egypt was impossible for Assyrian foreign policy, but with the later Sargonid kings and Esarhaddon's dominance over Egypt's neighbouring territories, the prospect seemed more realistic. In his old age, Esarhaddon vanquished the Nubian

⁶¹ Van De Mieroop 2007, 255.

⁶² Van De Mieroop 2007, 255.

⁶³ Van De Mieroop 2007, 255.

Taharqa and went on to conquer Memphis, the northern capital of Egypt. The spoils were siphoned into the reconstruction of Babylon.⁶⁴

The Nubian Taharqa took advantage of the death of Esarhaddon to reassert himself as ruler over Egypt but the latter's successor, Assurbanipal, quelled the rebellions with the assistance of a Syro-Palestinian alliance and placed Necho on the throne. Assurbanipal returned to quell the rebellion of Tantamani, this time reaching as far as Thebes and its abundant booty. This curbed Nubian influence and ushered in the rule of Necho's son, Psamtik, an Assyrian-educated ruler who proclaimed full independence for Egypt. Egypt came to aid Assyria against the threat from the east in the latter's last days.⁶⁵

Scholars are uncertain about the reasons behind the collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Evidence from Assyria itself is scant and most have to turn to the Babylonian sources, or, indeed, to the structure of the Assyrian empire itself. What is certain, however, is that by the end of the long reign of Assurbanipal, the areas in the periphery of the empire were starting to slip away.⁶⁶ The power vacuum grew significantly with the death of Assurbanipal, whose two sons, Aššur-etel-ilani and Sin-shar-ishkun, fell out over issues of succession.⁶⁷

In 626 B.C.E., Nabopolassar, a former Assyrian official, gained popularity and by about a decade later had gleaned enough support to attempt to invade Assyria. In the east the Medes, who had served the Assyrian as mercenaries, fortified their army and

⁶⁴ Van De Mierop 2007, 256.

⁶⁵ Van De Mierop 2007, 256.

⁶⁶ Van De Mierop 2007, 267.

⁶⁷ Problems of succession were not new, especially in the Neo-Assyrian Empire; at this time, however, they seemed to have caused irreversible damage.

in 615 B.C.E. raided the Assyrian heartland. In 612 B.C.E. the alliance, with the help of the Scythians, sacked Nineveh. By 610 B.C.E., Assyria had been razed to the ground. Babylonia took control of the Assyrian territories, while the Eastern people and the Anatolians took back their independence.

Van De Mieroop argues that perhaps the single, biggest problem of the Assyrian empire was that power was ultimately held by one man; it seems that, at times, the demands of the imperial project exceeded the abilities of one person. In addition, issues of succession and the unrelenting aggression with which the imperial project treated its opponents (creating a multitude of opportunities for rebellion) were also significant causes in the downfall of the Assyrian empire.⁶⁸ We have no Assyrian document to report to us the conditions of the empire at its downfall, but later traditions, such as that of the fourth century Greek doctor and historian Ctesias, attribute the decline not only to the opposition between the Greeks and the people of the east, but also to the effeminate vagaries of the last great Assyrian king, Assurbanipal.⁶⁹ It seems that, to the ancient mind-set, gender always came to bear on the political arenas of the ancient Near East.

0.4. The Study of Gender and Masculinity in the Ancient Near East

Until fairly recently, in the field of Assyriology, more often than not, gender studies implied the study of women and the search for women or femininity in the material, visual or textual record. This is also the case with other disciplines, such as Biblical

⁶⁸ Van De Mieroop 2007, 268.

⁶⁹ Frahm 2003, 39.

Studies and Classical Studies. Feminism, in its various methodological forms, or ‘waves’, has been adopted by historians of the ancient world in order to throw light on women and their various forms of power in the distant past. In Assyriology, gender discourse started in 1985 when Julia Asher-Greve published *Frauen in altersumerische Zeit*, followed immediately by the dedication of an entire *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* to the issue of ‘women’.⁷⁰ In her review of the proceedings of this 33rd *Rencontre*, Joan Westenholz pointed out the perils, the pitfalls and the way forward for the study of women in the ancient Near East.⁷¹ Since then, many scholars have engaged with the primary sources in order to reinstate women in their public roles, and a new generation of Assyriologists like Bahrani, Gansell, Svärd and Garcia-Ventura, Macgregor, Melville have engaged with contemporary gender theories to establish the study of gender as a legitimate category of analysis along with more traditional approaches in Assyriology.⁷²

This, however, is not the case for the study of masculinity and the ancient Near East. This gloomy situation has recently led Martti Nissinen to lament the dearth of studies on masculinity in ancient Near Eastern scholarship.⁷³ Among his musings, we find the acute observation that New Testament scholarship has fared better in this field as it has been able to draw on classical sources and studies, yet Hebrew Bible scholarship has not been able to turn to ancient Near Eastern studies to find frameworks on which to rely. Indeed, very little has been done by way of masculinity

⁷⁰ Asher-Greve 1985.

⁷¹ Westenholz 1990, 510–521.

⁷² See Bahrani 2001; Gansell 2013; Macgregor 2012; Melville 2004; Svärd 2015; Svärd and Garcia-Ventura 2017.

⁷³ Nissinen 2014, 271–285.

studies in Assyriology, and if we focus on the Neo-Assyrian period, we find that even less has been accomplished. Equally disconcerting is the near total absence of the study of masculinities in recent general surveys of gender and the body in antiquity. It is the aim of this study to reverse this trend by engaging with the visual and textual representations of Neo-Assyrian kings in order to determine the extent to which the proper construction and performance of ideal, hegemonic masculinity was relied on for the legitimation of rule.

0.4.1. Masculinities in Biblical Studies

Although the Hebrew Bible is outside the scope of this thesis, I have chosen to include this section to briefly outline the work that has been carried out by biblical scholars in the field of masculinity. It has often been lamented that work on masculinities in the Hebrew Bible has been stalled by the dearth of studies on masculinity addressing the Mesopotamian record. The need to address the ways men could be marked in the Hebrew Bible has exposed the lack of any referential models to refer to from the wider socio-cultural region. Despite the paucity of studies with regard to masculinity in the ancient Near East, there has been a recent impetus to change this situation.⁷⁴ I will here present a brief survey of the current literature on masculinity studies that has informed the present thesis.

⁷⁴ See most recently Ciffarelli 2016; N'Shea 2016; Zsolnay 2017. The study of masculinities studies in the ancient Near East has been given more attention in the work on gender carried out by Assyriologists and presented at the 'Second Gender, Methodology, and the Ancient Near East, Barcelona, February 1–3, 2017. See especially Ann Guinan's study of Assurbanipal in the later traditions and Sophus Helle's study of methodology with regards to non-binary gender constructs in their contributions to the forthcoming conference proceedings volume. Ilan Peled 2016 on masculinities and third gender constructs in the emic context has also tried to address the lacuna in gender studies in Assyriology. Here, Peled a significant contribution to the study of masculinities from a lexicographic point of view.

Interest in men and religion among Biblical scholars took off in the 1980s yet it took longer for biblical scholars to unite under this particular scholarly regime.⁷⁵ In fact, it was only in the 1990s that a monograph engaging specifically with masculinity and the Bible—Howard Eilberg-Schwartz’s *God’s Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism*—was published. In this volume, Eilberg-Schwartz argued that notwithstanding the taboo on homoeroticism, the relationship between God and ancient Israelite men, ancient Jewish men and Jewish men of any age was described in terms of a marriage and expressed in the semantics of eroticism and sexual intimacy.⁷⁶ Therefore, men could only define themselves in this binary through identification with the female polarity. Furthermore, Eilberg-Schwartz argued that the concealment of God’s corporeal aspect was essential for a culture that requested human males to be included in a formula of male love while at the same time champion procreation, giving rise to what Eilberg-Schwartz calls an ideology of fracture and contradiction.⁷⁷

David Clines followed suit with an essay in which he attempted to highlight not the contradiction but the coherence of biblical masculinity. In a study on the construction of masculinity in the David story (1 Sam 2; 1 Kgs 2), Clines outlined a typology of masculinity based on six masculine traits which were culturally constructed norms for ancient Israelite men. These traits were martial violence against other males, verbal eloquence, beauty and comeliness, intense social bonding with other males,

⁷⁵ Krondorfer 2009.

⁷⁶ See in Moore 2014.

⁷⁷ Eilberg-Schwartz 1994, 2.

independence from women and skillfulness in music.⁷⁸ These traits, as we shall see, were common cultural norms in the entire ancient Near East.

More recently, the twin volumes edited by Ovidiu Creangă entitled *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond* and *Biblical Masculinities Foregrounded* bring together Biblical scholars to discuss gendered aspects of Old Testament narratives through the critical lens of the construction and performance of gender, more particularly, masculinity. These contributions certainly reversed the trend for biblical scholars, whose work, until then, focused almost solely on classifying Biblical subjectivities according to Connell's schema in the theory of hegemonic masculinity, namely the classification of men into taxonomic brackets of hegemonic, complicit, subordinate or marginal.⁷⁹ Clines, the original proponent of this practice, has retrospectively lamented this methodology, and advocated for a more rigorous approach to men in the Bible in order to methodologically align masculinity studies with the most recent wave of feminist inquiry.⁸⁰ It is undeniable that feminism has more sophisticated methodological tools, a situation made possible by the fact that feminists have a longer chronology in their favour, but this points to the fact that masculinity studies should neither work against, nor under the strain of feminist methodologies. In fact, masculinity studies would certainly benefit from cross-pollination with feminist modes of inquiry.

⁷⁸ Clines 1995, 212–243.

⁷⁹ See Creangă 2010 and 2014.

⁸⁰ Clines 2010, 238.

0.4.2. Masculinities in Assyriology

In lieu of a literature review, I shall here present a brief survey of the current state of research with regards to the study of masculinities in ancient Iraq. References to work carried out on the topic will be made in the text and comments in the relevant chapters.

Closer to my area of inquiry, the work of art historian Irene J. Winter on the statuery of Gudea and the victory stele of Naram-Sîn stands out as paradigm-shifting. In a 1986 article called *Body of the Able Ruler: Towards an Understanding of the statues of Gudea*, Winter investigated the affinity between the iconographic portrayal of Gudea and Sumerian expressions for masculinity and ability to rule. In this study, Winter was able to tease out the height, broadness of chest, the rounded and bulbous biceps, the broad face and the wide ears as well as the large eyes expressed figuratively in the statuery as expressions of masculinity and ability to rule by turning to the Sumerian lexicon in order to find attestations of related expressions in Sumerian (fig. 2). In this seminal study, Winter concludes that these artistic forms did, indeed, find a parallel in the Sumerian lexicon of value.⁸¹ Assyriologist and gender specialist Julia Asher-Greve also discusses the statuery of Gudea and argues for the fusion of masculine and feminine attributes in the art of this period. According to Asher-Greve, Ur III (2112–2004 B.C.E.) artists constructed the figure of the ‘perfect king’ by expressing an androgynous royal persona fusing the masculine qualities of the builder-king with the feminine aspects of piety portrayed in art through a beardless face and softer, more pronounced breasts.⁸² Heroic kings, on the other hand, did away with the

⁸¹ Winter 1989, 573-583.

⁸² Asher-Greve 2002, 11.

soft facial features and the pronounced breasts in favour of the hypervirile beards, long hair, lion-like features and manly musculature.⁸³ In this study, Asher-Greve concludes that the 'perfect king' construct could carry feminine features because he represented the primordial, universal man (*lullu*) who stood in for the rest of mankind.⁸⁴

Winter developed her investigation into the politics of masculinity in Mesopotamian visual culture in a seminal 1996 article called *Sex, Rhetoric and the Public Monument: The Alluring Body of Naram Sin of Agade*. Here, Winter looks at the way masculinity as gender performance and as sexuality come to bear on the politics of state formation and legitimation of rule. Winter argued that the display of royal corporal allure and sexuality are tied up in a single discourse to state formation, early imperial ambitions and the explicit attribution of the status of divinity to the ruler.⁸⁵ Winter approached this study by first examining the semantic field of Akkadian lexemes in order to establish a correlation between the visual and the lexical domains of value. Winter argues that such terms as well formed (*banû*), auspicious (*damqu*), vigorous and vital (*baštu*) and sexually alluring (*kuzbu*) were translated into iconographic motifs by state-sponsored artists (fig. 3). She cites further evidence, like the later Assyrian use of epithets in their royal inscriptions, to signify the importance of masculinity for the ruler. Pair bonds like *zikaru qardu* (heroic male) and *eṭlu kardu* (heroic young man) show the importance of manliness and virility for the royal persona, with a focus on the male *potestas* foregrounded.⁸⁶ According to Winter, the

⁸³ Asher-Greve 2002, 11.

⁸⁴ Asher-Greve 2002, 12. In this study, however, Asher-Greve seems to essentialise masculinities and femininities by claiming that rounded breasts on a person with male genitals are feminine traits.

⁸⁵ Winter 1996, 11-26.

⁸⁶ Winter 1996, 17.

victory stele does more than elicit aesthetic admiration; the display of the sexually alluring body of the ruler calls forth what she calls “an act of social approbation” and induces in the viewer a state of specularity both of which subordinate the female audience and create in the male counterpart a fusion with authority and a subjugation to it at the same time.⁸⁷

Although Winter’s argument is buttressed by evidence from much later periods than that in which the stele of Naram-Sîn was produced and displayed, her original contribution to the study of masculinity in the art of the ancient Near East remains highly influential.⁸⁸ Indeed, the study of masculinity in the art of early Mesopotamia by Claudia Suter continues to build on the arguments expounded by Winter. Suter focuses on the physical attributes of Sumerian and early Akkadian rulers, engaging with the visual and textual repertoire of early Mesopotamia to argue that physical strength and the beard were the foremost traits of ideal masculinity in ancient southern Iraq, and that the physical exposure of male corporeality was iconographically expressed when kings made claims to divinity.⁸⁹

In this dissertation, I continue to build on the preliminary investigations of the construction and performance of masculinity in the Neo-Assyrian period carried out by Michelle Marcus, Cynthia Chapman, Ilona Zsolnay, and Julia Assante. Chapman’s textual and visual analysis of Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions and palace relief programmes discusses the feminisation of the Other in the Royal Inscriptions of

⁸⁷ Winter 1996, 21.

⁸⁸ Winter 1996, 13 describes the cutting off of beards as a trope of emasculation in the reign of Sennacherib. At issue is whether this trope can be applied to an earlier Mesopotamian sequence in the reign of Naram-Sîn (c. 2254–2218 BC). See also Winter 1996, 17 for the trope of divinely-shaped royal bodies in the royal inscriptions of Adad-nerari II for a similar methodological issue.

⁸⁹ Suter 2012, 433–458.

Assyrian kings and concludes that the ideal masculinity of the Assyrian king competed for ideal masculinity in the arena of warfare, and that both the royal inscriptions and the visual reliefs portray enemy kings as emasculated for failing to protect the many women taken into Assyrian captivity.⁹⁰ For Chapman, failed masculinity in the Neo-Assyrian period was expressed through gendered language such as ‘to become a woman’ or ‘to become a whore’ and that this emasculation was inextricably tied to the loss of land, military prowess, and progeny.

Ilona Zsolnay joined the fold by studying the role of Ishtar in the granting or taking away of masculinity in the battle.⁹¹ Michelle Marcus broached the topic in an art historical analysis, arguing that the sublimation of masculine desire and the feminisation of the landscape contributed to the Neo-Assyrian masculine reading of invasion as penetration of the feminine and virginal territory.⁹² Radner, however, disagrees with this claim, arguing that in her study of Assyrian geography she finds no evidence in the sources for the equation of the invasion of foreign territory with the act of sexual penetration and states that this reading is imbued with preconceived ideas of Assyrian imperialism and with the expectations of Marcus’ theoretical framework.⁹³ Indeed, Marcus’ interpretation is not buttressed with strong evidence from the textual or visual corpus and there is no evidence to suggest that Assyrian kings directly perceived foreign territory in the same way that sixteenth century Italian and seventeenth century Flemish landscape artists did.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Chapman 2004.

⁹¹ Zsolnay 2010, 389–402.

⁹² Marcus 1995, 200–202.

⁹³ Radner 2000, 234–235.

⁹⁴ Note, however, that in the reign of Assurbanipal, a relief from Room L adjacent to throneroom M of the North Palace in Nineveh portrays the unprecedented Assyrian violence on a group of Arab women

Theoretically and methodologically, however, this thesis stands closer to the recent study carried out by Julia Assante on the construction of masculinity in Neo-Assyrian art. Assante takes her cue from the earlier work of Megan Cifarelli on the early Neo-Assyrian visual culture of Ashurnasirpal II.⁹⁵ Cifarelli cogently argues that the trope of discursive opposition is expressed in the art of Ashurnasirpal II by depicting the Assyrian victor as erect and the vanquished enemy as non-erect. Cifarelli buttresses her conclusions with textual and visual evidence to demonstrate that the Assyrian erect postures stood in for order, dignity, and militarism while the lowered, prostrate, and groveling postures of the vanquished signalled passivity, cowardice, and emasculation.⁹⁶

Assante's argument rests on the idea that the creation of a new class, the military, in the Neo-Assyrian period demanded the re-engineering of the construct of hegemonic masculinity seen in the previous Middle Assyrian period. For the Middle Assyrian period, *awīlu*⁹⁷ men (that is, free-born male citizens) had the highest access to the patriarchal privilege (what Connell calls the patriarchal dividend), gained through social standing, ethnicity, and inheritance.⁹⁸ The increasing militarization of the Neo-Assyrian polity, however, was differently organised; the presence of deportees reconfigured the intersection of ethnicity and hegemonic masculinity in the new military class, now engineered around the logic of phallic aggression, homosocial

during the Assyrian campaigns against the Arabs. The extent to which the Assyrian themselves equated the conquest with gendered or sexual violence deserves a full-length study. See Dubovsky 2009, 394–419.

⁹⁵ Cifarelli 1998.

⁹⁶ Cifarelli 1998, 218.

⁹⁷ CAD 2/A-3B, 55–56.

⁹⁸ Assante 2017, 42.

bonding, and hierarchisation.⁹⁹ Assante implies, therefore, that with growing populations, internationalism, and the rise of the military, the *awīlu* male claim to hegemonic masculinity became threatened as more people had access to this patriarchal privilege. The resultant crisis in masculinity ensued in a martial masculinity that was complemented by the foregrounding of eunuchism to complement it.¹⁰⁰ As we shall see in more detail in **Chapter 6**, eunuchism as a form of elite masculinity has so far been undertheorized in studies on ancient Mesopotamia in general and in Neo-Assyrian studies in particular.

Assante's work rests on the assumption that Neo-Assyrian visual culture was essentially homosocial, that is, made by men for men. Assante's interest in the role state art plays in the construction and performance of gendered subjectivities is axial to the departure point of this thesis, yet theoretically and methodologically, this work departs from many of the conclusions reached by Assante's analysis. While agreeing that the introduction of eunuchs in the state art of the Neo-Assyrian empire broadened the spectrum of masculinities in the imperial culture of the period, as we shall see in **Chapter 6**, it would be erroneous to claim, as Assante does, that Neo-Assyrian state art constructs the feminine eunuch in the proximity of the king as a way of deflecting the homoerotic male gaze away from the body of the ruler (figs. 4–6). Indeed, the conclusions reached by Assante find no bases in the textual or visual evidence, but rather seem to be imported wholesale from the later Byzantine and Islamic narratives of eunuchs in the royal palace.

⁹⁹ Assante 2017, 42.

¹⁰⁰ Assante 2017, 42–43.

These studies are certainly important contributions to the understanding of gender, more particularly masculinity, in the ancient Near East but apart from Chapman's and Assante's work, none of them addresses the issue of the construction and the performance of masculinity in the Assyrian segment of Mesopotamian history. Furthermore, we could not uncritically apply Winter's study of Gudea and Naram-Sîn to Assyrian or Neo-Assyrian representations of male rulers because the stylistic features that mark them are temporally embedded and some of their iconographic trends were discontinued. The divine status of kingship, as expressed by Naram-Sîn, was not encouraged in later expressions of the body politic, nor the explicit sexuality of the king's body in the stele's *Glutenerotik*. Nor can we apply Asher-Greve's conclusions on the androgyny of the ruler as there is no evidence in the entire Neo-Assyrian corpus that the king would exhibit non-masculine traits to represent himself as metonymic of all mankind.

Although highly innovative, Chapman's study takes the Neo-Assyrian construction of masculinity as fossilised and temporally unmarked by differences, an approach which this study hopes to reverse. In fact, the Neo-Assyrian construction, performance and representation of masculinity in the visual and textual media reveal that masculinity in Mesopotamia was not monolithic, and that Neo-Assyrian gender has to be understood primarily in the Neo-Assyrian context and only then pitted against the backdrop of the larger Mesopotamian sequence.

0.5. The Sources of the Study

As this study is based on both textual and visual sources, I shall here present a brief survey of the documentary evidence that I read and analysed for this dissertation.

0.5.1. The Textual Sources

Assyrian royal ideology was mainly disseminated in the royal inscriptions, a genre of writing that dates back to the third millennium B.C.E. Tiglath-pileser I (1115–1076 B.C.E.) was responsible for altering the genre into what is now referred to as ‘annals’.¹⁰¹ These official royal inscriptions, found on tablets, prisms, clay cylinders, slabs, objects left on display or otherwise in a number of Assyrian locations and stelae and rock faces in distant sites, are the most detailed written sources from the Neo-Assyrian period.¹⁰² They are year-by-year autobiographical narratives of the king’s military campaigns outside the homeland as well as projects carried out at home.¹⁰³ For each year, these texts either offer a list of the king’s enemies, or go into great detail of Assyrian military might. The ‘real’ authors of these texts are not known to us, nor is the intended audience. Sargon’s *Letter to Aššur* explicitly attributes its composition to a chief scribe and scholar (*ummanu*) by the name of Nabu-šallimšumu, but other inscriptions remain unsigned. What we could be certain about, however, is that state letters from the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal indicate that the king exercised control over

¹⁰¹ See, the RIM and RINAP series.

¹⁰² Fales 1999–2001, 115–44.

¹⁰³ Frahm 2017, 245 cautions against the use of the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions as factual historical sources. Although they do not ‘invent’ any of the events they mention, the order in which the events are recounted does not always follow the actual chronology. In addition, there is sometimes the tendency to conflate two or more events into one. Furthermore, the outcome of events always puts the Assyrians in a positive light, with most of the accomplishments attributed to the solitary actions of the hero-king. Fales 1981, 169–202 notes that the royal inscriptions also carry coded language. For instance, the trapping of the enemy king like a ‘bird in a cage’ suggests that the outcome of the encounter was not totally successful for the Assyrian army.

their content. SAA XVI: 143(6–12) is explicit in the role the king played over the content of the royal inscriptions:

NA₄.*pu-u-lu ša ina ŠÀ uš-še- ša BÀD*
ša URU.tar-bi-ši ni-ik-ru-ru-u-ni
šu-mu ša LUGAL be-lí-ia ina UGU-ḫi ni-iš-ṭur
ki-i ša ni-šaṭ-ṭaru-u-ni
LUGAL be-lí liš-pu-ra
LUGAL be-lí liš-pu-ra
i-na pi-it-te ni-iš-ṭur
ù ša LUGAL be-lí

We shall write the name of the king, my lord, on the foundation stone which we laid in the foundations of the city walls of Tarbišu. Let the king my lord write me what we should write (on it) and we shall write accordingly.

At issue is whether the anonymity of the authors was an attempt to keep the narrative voice of the king credible.

The Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions are an important genre for the study of the construction of masculinity in representation and its significance to the imperial project. In these texts, the king presents himself as both a solitary warrior and a hero, moulding his subjectivity on that of the divine Ninurta, and attributing his actions to divine command and favour. In this textual genre, kings therefore made known their model of Ur-masculinity, justified their masculine attributes of martial action and legitimated their rule.

The royal inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian period (RINAP) were written in the Standard Babylonian dialect of Akkadian and this text corpus has finally been brought together in five print volumes (from the reign of Tiglath-pileser III to Esarhaddon) and

online, with transcriptions and English translations, under the auspices of Grant Frame of the University of Pennsylvania. This project largely takes off where Grayson's Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia (RIMA) left off.

The Neo-Assyrian text corpus is a vast textual resource, and the royal inscriptions are merely a small section of what was written on clay tablets, monuments, cylinders, and prisms. Other textual remains which are vital to the writing of Neo-Assyrian history in its broadest scope include foundation documents (whose limited intended audience does not detract from their importance to this study, especially in light of the stress they put on the king's self-representation) as well as the palace archives from Nineveh published as the State Archives of Assyria (SAA). Among these archives, we find such genres as letters to and from the king, queries to gods, astrological reports, oaths and treaties and legal as well as literary texts.¹⁰⁴ In addition to this, archives from Nimrud (ancient Kalḫu) have been preserved and are now published in the open access monographs Cuneiform from Nimrud Series. Specialist secondary literature and monographs have also been consulted and duly noted in this study.

0.5.2. The Visual Sources

The following is a brief outline of the state-sanctioned art of Assyria during the Neo-Assyrian period.

Ashurnasirpal II's Assyrian palace in Nimrud (Kalḫu) was decorated with a visual programme in low relief on alabaster slabs across which ran a concise version of the

¹⁰⁴ Frahm 2017, 244–5.

king's annals called the Standard Inscription (fig. 7). Ashurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace is one of the best preserved, having escaped the extensive destruction at the hands of the Medes and Elamites in their destruction of Nineveh. Originally an influence reaching Assyria from the West, these reliefs contained either historical narratives or mythological scenes. The latter trend discontinued as the empire became more heterogeneous.

Much preliminary work on the development of historical narrative within the Neo-Assyrian period has been carried out by Julian E. Reade and Irene J. Winter.¹⁰⁵ In his discussions of the development of narrative composition in Assyrian palace visual displays, Reade notes that the art of Shalmaneser III (858–824 B.C.E.) differs little from that of his father Ashurnasirpal II.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, a close look at Shalmaneser's Black Obelisk indicates that conceptually, the monument borrows its visual structure from the throneroom and from court D of his father's Northwest palace (fig. 8). King attributed an innovation to Shalmaneser III when his two sets of bronze door bands were found, but the discovery of Ashurnasirpal II's sets of bronze bands from Balawat / Imgur Enlil reversed this attribution of innovation.¹⁰⁷ For Winter, however, Shalmaneser III's bronze bands reveal a trend of elaboration of the historical narratives, with the inclusion of more detail such as landscape elements to indicate the location of the king's campaigns (fig. 9).

Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 B.C.E.) built his Central Palace in Nimrud but the structure has deteriorated and the reliefs are in a dire state of preservation. In

¹⁰⁵ Reade 1979; Winter 1981, 2–38. See also Winter 1997, 359–381.

¹⁰⁶ Reade 1979, 70–72.

¹⁰⁷ See Winter 1981, 23–24.

addition, it is believed that a later Assyrian king, Esarhaddon, removed and reutilised some of the reliefs in his Southwest Palace. From the remains, however, Groenewegen-Frankfort has noted that the trend towards using diagonal rows implied a depth of space beyond the picture plane.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, Tiglath-pileser III, unlike Ashurnasirpal II, uses the *complete* version of his annals.

Sargon II (721–705 B.C.E.) moved his capital to Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Sharrukin) 15 kilometres northeast of Nineveh. The decorative scheme in this new capital broke away with past trends and aimed at the inclusion of more historical narratives. In this period, the relief programme of each room was dedicated to a single campaign, a trend which begins in the reign of Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.E.) and reaches its zenith in the very well preserved Lachish relief cycle from his palace in Nineveh. Sennacherib's visual innovations are extensive, ranging from the attempt at representing three-dimensional space and a sense of 'perspective' to broadening his conceptual and thematic fields to include tributes to the king's building activities, previously mentioned in the inscriptions but not shown in the reliefs (fig. 10).

Winter has argued, with regards to the king's interest in suppressing mythological and ceremonial visual structures, that Sennacherib attempted to portray 'true' space in the interest of making his relief programme historically verifiable.¹⁰⁹ Certainly, the fact that Sennacherib's sculptors, most likely on orders from the king himself, shrank the inscriptions to epigraphs released more space on the visual plane,

¹⁰⁸Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951, 177–78.

¹⁰⁹ Winter 1997, 362–363.

that is, the surface on which the image could be represented (fig. 11). This innovation will be taken up in Chapter 2 of this study.

Assurbanipal, the last Assyrian king for whom we have a palatial decorative programme, worked with both field and register. In his North Palace at Nineveh, narrative sequences are not only read from one side to the other across the register, but also across registers from top to bottom, with the viewer taking in the narrative sequence in a fashion not dissimilar from that of film (fig. 12).

Some themes from the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II are revived, such as the lion hunt and the king pouring libations over the dead animals; stylistically, however, the sculptors of the North Palace decreased the proportions of their representations in order to include more people and animals in the pictorial field (fig. 13). Winter argues that this is sometimes to the detriment of focus in the reading of the narrative¹¹⁰, but Bersani and Dutoit claim that that the profusion of bodies and figures in narrative schemes such as the Assyrian battle against Elam is a conscious trope of representation (fig. 14).¹¹¹ Assurbanipal's enigmatic garden party relief, a segment of a larger visual programme found in a remote section of the North Palace labelled S¹ by the excavators, will be treated at length further on.

Other Neo-Assyrian state-sponsored art will be referred to in the study. These other visual media will include stelae erected by various kings, representing the king usually in a gesture of prayer underneath astral symbols, rock carvings in peripheral

¹¹⁰ Winter 1981, 26.

¹¹¹ Bersani and Dutoit 1985, 15–25.

areas of the empire (fig. 15), figurines and other 'small art' like bureaucratic seals, sealings and ivory carved figures and wall paintings from the palace of Til-Barsip.

Together, these media will be employed in this study to show how Neo-Assyrian kings relied on visual language in order to promote their imperial rhetoric and ideology through the construction and performance of the ideal masculinity of kingship.

0.6. Structure of the Dissertation

The structural organisation of this dissertation is determined by the research questions outlined earlier in this section. **Chapter 1** presents and discusses the key sociological and critical terminology employed throughout the study as well as the theoretical framework upon which this dissertation is built. In order to investigate the construct of masculinity, it is necessary to define both the terms 'construct' and 'masculinity' and to explain their use as research tools to aid in the investigation of what masculinity meant to the Assyrian elite and how it was portrayed in the extant sources.

Chapters 2 and 3 present the textual and visual sources of the late Neo-Assyrian rulers Sennacherib and Esarhaddon in order to examine the way royal masculinity was constructed in different media. These case studies will allow me to compare both data sets in order to conclude whether the different media under examination expressed the same configuration of masculinity or otherwise. **Chapter 2** focusses on king Sennacherib, and places emphasis on the relief programme of the Battle of Lachish excavated from the king's so-called Palace Without Rival as well as the Oriental Institute Prism Inscription documenting Sennacherib's campaign to the West in 701 B.C.E. **Chapter 3** discusses the media from the reign of Esarhaddon, especially the royal inscriptions, the extant letters published in the SAA, and the state

art depicting the ruler. The extant letters of Esarhaddon are useful in building a case study to discuss the extent to which official state textual and visual documents differ from the glimpse we glean of the Neo-Assyrian king's lived experience. In this chapter, the construct of female masculinity will be introduced to discuss female agency operating from within discursive practices that are always already loci of hegemonic masculinities.

The third part of the dissertation mainly investigates leonine metaphors and the lion hunt in **Chapters 4 and 5**, and eunuchism in **Chapter 6**, to examine how these discursive and social practices bolstered royal gender ideology. In **Chapter 4** I have methodologically chosen to discuss the role that animality played in the construction of the king's gendered subjectivity. Due to the scope of this dissertation, my focus has mainly been on leonine metaphors. Other animal metaphors would benefit from a monograph dedicated solely to the topic as the documentary sources abound with related data. **Chapter 5** is an investigation into the role that hunting played in the construction and performance of masculinity in the Neo-Assyrian period, especially in the state-sanctioned identity of Assurbanipal. The hunting texts and reliefs were chosen because they constitute one of the main arenas in which Mesopotamian rulers displayed their manly prowess. Indeed, Neo-Assyrian rulers went to great length to represent the hunting scenes in their official inscriptions and art. **Chapter 6** re-reads the extant textual and visual evidence regarding eunuchism and discusses the socio-political function of castration as part of the Neo-Assyrian king's necropolitical gender regime.

The conclusions of this study are presented in **Chapter 7** along with prospects for further studies.

CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.0. Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the theoretical framework of this thesis. Throughout this thesis, I make reference to theoretical works that I employ in tandem with the data in order to bring fresh questions to the ancient material. I do not employ a single, overarching theory but resort to a flexible framework that is adaptable to the source material.

To begin with, I subscribe to the notions raised by Gail Bederman that masculinity is not a self-evident thing, like a tree or a car. Rather, masculinity is best employed to the service of research as a heuristic device. Bederman places emphasis on the resources available for the study of masculinity and insists that the place of the researcher within the different discursive fields on masculinity is best made apparent at the outset.¹¹² In order to clarify this point, I will first describe the different scholarly perspectives on masculinity studies, and later outline which of the contributions made by these camps best relates to the material at hand. In this way, I aim to justify my position *via-a-vis* the source material and the research question.

1.1. Masculinity as a Heuristic Category

Masculinity, Bederman claims, can only really work if we employ the term as a heuristic category and not as a self-evident thing.¹¹³ The answers we find depend

¹¹² Bederman 2011, 14–16.

¹¹³ Bederman 2011, 14–16, especially 15.

largely on the questions we ask. If we use the term masculinity as an analytical tool, then we need to carefully and precisely define what we mean by this term for the readers to understand what is being analysed and why.

To begin with, it is worth pointing out that the term 'masculinity' may not have existed throughout time, possibly coming into use with its modern meaning at the turn of the twentieth century. In light of this, therefore, any attempt to study masculinity in the ancient source material is always already retrogressive. Using the category 'masculinity' as a heuristic research device allows us to ask questions about men, or about persons whose gender performance throws off the balance the assumption that there is a 'natural' equilibrium between the male body and masculinity. Masculinity can, on the one hand, allow us to ask questions about men's behaviour or their psychological framework and, on the other hand, allow us to ask questions about the *kind of* power that men have or do not have. It can also allow us to ask questions concerning how gender signifies power, and how masculinity can help us better understand imperialism, state histories, and political theory across space and time.¹¹⁴

Masculinity is important and relevant to scholars only as it allows us to ask "particular questions about gender."¹¹⁵ The problem with treating masculinity as a self-evident thing is that it will inevitably lead to the reification of the unstated assumptions of what masculinity is: that is, if we assume that masculinity is violence, we will find men who are violent. Bederman concedes that the researcher may indeed wish to write about masculinity in terms of, for example, violence, but that will only be meaningful if we theorise and explain our approach, and not simply re-inforce

¹¹⁴ Scott 1986, especially 1073.

¹¹⁵ Bederman 2011, 15.

common assumptions.¹¹⁶ In other words, rather than finding every occurrence in which the male subject of the study engages in acts of violence and compiling a catalogue of these occurrences, one should attempt to unpack the possible reasons for the use of the term violence as an attribute of masculinity. Thus, in order to make our writing relevant, we need to use masculinity as a conceptual placeholder, to define precisely what we want to know, and what we mean when we use the term 'masculinity'.

Bederman discusses two approaches to the study of masculinity and whether their premises are compatible or not. The first approach considered the early feminist assumption of male power but did not explain it. In this sense, therefore, this early concern with the invisibility of masculinity was not very useful for scholars of masculinity; it is not useful to discover that many men had power in the past because we know that already, and the conclusions of any research carried out along those lines would be entirely tautological.

The second approach, and the one adopted by Bederman in her work, proposes to study the interstices of masculinity and power by using a framework related to the turn to the hermeneutics of Geertz, Althusser, and Gramsci. In this way, Bederman attempts to decode embedded cultural meanings in texts, daily practices, and political and social movements. In addition to decoding the meaning of manhood in a particular cultural context, Bederman also seeks to understand the resilience of male power.¹¹⁷

One of the aims of the present work, therefore, is to move away from the compilation of a catalogue to demonstrate the power of royal masculinity and instead

¹¹⁶ Bederman 2011, 15.

¹¹⁷ Bederman 2011, 18.

to unravel the kind of power, or rather, the patriarchal dividend, that some persons gleaned from their placement along the gender spectrum.

Joan Wallach Scott's article on gender and historiography is also axial to the theoretical framework of this thesis. Here Scott established that gender is a primary way of signifying power relations, and as such, it becomes a tool of ideology implicated in the way that power is defined and shared among members of society.¹¹⁸ Specifically, for the context of historical discourse, gender becomes a recurrent reference by means of which power is legitimated on one side and denied by the other. Scott argues that in order to abet political power, gender must seem stable, outside of human construction, and part of the natural or divine order.¹¹⁹ Indeed, a look at the Neo-Assyrian sources employed in this thesis will initially reveal that gender was (at least superficially) portrayed as a monolithic category of the divine order, with ideal hypermasculinity granted to the ruling males in order to legitimise their authority apparently fixed along a longitudinal axis (or what could be called the *longue durée* of masculinity).

Since Scott's seminal article, masculinity as a category of analysis has been understood in two ways: as an object open to empirical analysis or as a configuration of practices. Studies of past cultures must necessarily imply an understanding of what masculinity is, even though it has been notoriously difficult to define this category, with most attempts being either imprecise or not done at all, leaving the understanding of the term to assumed meanings. As Benjamin Alberti states, the difficulty is in trying to

¹¹⁸ Scott 1986, 1069.

¹¹⁹ Scott 1988, 49.

decide whether to use the term descriptively or analytically.¹²⁰ Most often, the two attempts are conflated.

The descriptive approach is essentialising in its attempt to describe the qualities that epitomise men in all places and at all times. It immediately becomes obvious that lists of masculine attributes are not only culture-bound or time-bound, but they also seem to describe the gender configuration of individuals in their context. This may be the reason why it is more practicable to study masculinity as an analytical category.

The analytical approach to the study of masculinity stresses the cultural and the historical contexts in which these configurations of practice are engineered. As Alberti posits, masculinity consists of traits, behaviours, beliefs, expectations and so on that are commonly associated with males in specific cultures and, when internalized, are a constitutive part of their identities.¹²¹

Recent theories of masculinity pose a practice-based definition. Connell, for instance, understands masculinity as a configuration of practice within gender relations.¹²² In this approach, the term masculinity is no longer a category predefined by culture but is, rather, a relative category. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant form of being a man, maintained by social, economic and political privilege. It does not comprise fixed traits but is made up of tendencies and possibilities that individuals have access to at different points in time. This implies that there are many different 'masculinities', often contradictory and in tension with one another.

¹²⁰ Alberti 2006, 404–405.

¹²¹ Alberti 2006, 405.

¹²² Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 836.

In the field of Assyriology, most interpretations of masculinity have been essentialist, despite the advent of gender studies in other fields of inquiry. This framework is best seen in the monolithic understanding of masculinity despite the clear cultural and historical variations of being a man. Assyriologists, like other historians and archaeologists, have written about ancient Mesopotamian masculinity as “firmly rooted in an undifferentiated male body.”¹²³ It may be argued that this essentialist approach towards the understanding of being a man coincided with the nascence of archaeology and Assyriology and explains masculinity through the tropes of determinism, rooted in turn in post-Enlightenment thought and inextricable from nineteenth century conceptions of ideal masculinity. More recently, essentialism has returned to the fold of discourse in the form of evolutionary perspectives that root behaviour in genes or DNA. Commonly, these involve the genetic reasons for such male practices as fighting and hunting.¹²⁴

The understanding of gender as a social construction offers a far more flexible framework of interpretation. According to this perspective, gendered identities are not scripted by and wired into nature but are culturally constructed. Therefore, variations in socio-cultural configurations will affect the roles of men and women. Since West and Zimmermann’s argument that gender is achieved through cultural performance¹²⁵, many scholars have followed suit and the best proponent of this school of thought is Judith Butler. For Butler, gender is an identity “tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts” whose main objective is the

¹²³ Alberti 2006, 407. See Asher-Greve 2002, 12.

¹²⁴ Bates 2013, 7–9.

¹²⁵ West and Zimmermann 1987 and 2009.

survival of culture.¹²⁶ For Butler, strategies need to be adopted for one to perform one's gender appropriately and effectively. To be a culturally coherent woman means to "have to become a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of 'woman,' to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility."¹²⁷ This process, Butler argues, involves the reiteration of the performance. Those who participate successfully in this reiterative cultural performance of gender become fools of their own fictions.

Two academic movements were set up at this time to study masculinity: post-structural gender analysis and masculinity studies. Both movements wrote about invisibility, power, and performance, and both endorsed the social construction of gender theory. Yet, the way they both defined masculinity differed, and the approaches often appeared incompatible.

Adherents of the field of masculinity studies did not need affirmative action policies—after all, men already help top positions; nor did they need a movement to inspire younger generations. The proponents of this movement were divided into two streams: one that demanded a men's study programme that would be subsumed under the rubric of gender studies, the other not.

Post-structuralists approached gender analysis differently. They were interested in how gender works in culture, history, language to construct what falsely appear to be trans-historical truths about men, women, and sexuality. Furthermore, they argued that ideas, institutions, and practices enacted in history, and through

¹²⁶ Butler 1988, 462.

¹²⁷ Butler 1988, 522.

language and culture, affect the very categories through which people understand their own experiences and identities.

Understanding the differences between the two is essential if we are to write relevant studies in the twenty-first century. Bederman in fact contrasts the ways the two movements study invisible privilege. For adherents of masculinity studies like Kimmel, the invisibility of masculinity—its stealth—is an illusion experienced only by men.¹²⁸ For those doing gender analysis, however, the invisibility was part of a much deeper invisible sex/gender difference. For the latter, contingent and historically variable notions of male dominance appeared natural but were actually constructed. The second difference lies in the interest in analysing types of naturalised dualisms. For Bederman, for instance, Kimmel's notion of invisibility occurs only in and stops with the context of dualistic opposites, for example, invisible vis-à-vis the visibility of women.¹²⁹ For gender analysts however, the constructedness of these binaries, and how these binaries brought about notions of masculinity vis-à-vis the others, needed to be analysed.¹³⁰

Masculinity studies seemed more interested in studying men as individuals, or in relation to other men, itself a masculine programme of analysis. For, among others, Butler, how the binaries worked and what they left out was key to analysing gender; indeed, it is these oppositional categories that rendered masculinity compulsory, natural, and invisible.¹³¹ This therefore highlights the need to study masculinity in relation to its others.

¹²⁸ Kimmel 1993, 26.

¹²⁹ Bederman 2011, 21.

¹³⁰ Bederman 2011, 21.

¹³¹ Butler 1999, 31.

In sum, therefore, masculinity studies are primarily concerned with the invisibility of masculinity, while post-structuralist gender analysis is driven by the need to explain the coerciveness and naturalness of gender and normativity.

Epistemologically, gender analysts went beyond the materialist and common-sense understanding of culture and power to unpack the naturalness of gender. The men's movement, on the other hand, remained almost solely interested in creating a movement in which self-abjection could be avoided. We can see this clearly in Connell's misunderstanding of Butler's notion of performativity, which Connell claims to be merely a bodiless metaphor.¹³² Butler took pains, over several publications, to explain what she meant by performative: upon ending the performance, the actor cannot revert to an underlying real self. Performance, for Butler, is neither inauthentic nor a role.

For gender theorists, therefore, performativity was used to denaturalise masculinity in order to show how it worked in ways that were coercive, violent, yet natural and invisible. In ways, therefore, that had *material effects* and that created important power relations upon embodied humans of various genders and sexualities. It seems, therefore, that the project, ultimately, was interested in exposing and perhaps undoing gender's asymmetric power relations.

In men's studies, the focus remains on how men relate to one another; for gender theorists, the impetus is focussed on unmasking the coercive system of 'natural' sex gender; how gender coerces performance (repeatedly marginalising the other differently in various times and places). It is interesting to note that the two

¹³² See in Bederman 2011, 22.

movements are in themselves gendered: the former predominantly male social scientists, the latter predominantly female gender theorists with a penchant for French theory. In this sense, therefore, the reader needs to keep in mind that this study does not situate itself within the rubric of men's studies but rather seeks to make a contribution to gender studies in general and masculinities studies in particular, and methodologically seeks to address what it is that the study of masculinity can contribute which is unavailable without using this term.

Classical and Biblical historians focussing on gender make the same methodological observations as Butler with regards to the reiterative performativity of gender. Working on Greek physiognomic tests, Maud Gleason argues that masculinity is an "achieved state, radically underdetermined by anatomical sex."¹³³ Masculinity was, therefore, a system of signs, a language that the body had to learn to articulate through the process of acculturation. Similarly, for biblical scholars like David Clines, "different societies write different scripts for their men."¹³⁴ This epistemological base, however, is rooted in the sex/gender divide and could bring serious methodological problems to a study of women or men in ancient cultures; to say that sex is natural and that gender is a cultural construct is to undermine the extent to which discourse constructs 'sex' and to leave sex under-theorised.¹³⁵ This argument would be especially problematic for Assyriologists as we always have to construct 'sex' before we can identify 'gender' in the archaeological or visual record.

¹³³ Gleason 1995, 59.

¹³⁴ Clines 1995, 215.

¹³⁵ By assuming that in the emic context sex existed *a priori* of gender, we risk not only misrepresenting the data available to us and retrogressively imposing our own dichotomies onto the past. Future scholarly work on the *Epic of Gilgamesh* would certainly benefit from an investigation into the sole of socialisation as process through which both sex and gender are constructed in the character of Enkidu.

It is certain that most of what is written in Assyriological scholarship concerns the deeds of great kings as public figures, whose representations were recorded in a number of media ranging from the visual to the textual to the archival. Thus far, however, we have been looking at men in ancient Mesopotamia as ungendered subjects, unmarked to the extent that we take their masculinity to be the product of biology and not a construct based on the demands of imperial ideology, historical circumstances and royal agency. It is time we turned this attitude on its head and started looking at the men in our field of study as gendered subjects whose gender was constructed and whose masculinity was performed. As Benjamin Alberti states, “making past men’s gender explicit reveals them as gendered subjects – rather than representing the whole of humanity, they can stand only for themselves.”¹³⁶

As noted earlier, that gender was indeed seen as a social construct in the ancient Near East has already been established in the field of Assyriology.¹³⁷ The ‘notion’ of the construct, as elaborated by feminist scholars, implies that gender is not naturally conferred upon the subject by biology but is rather the iterative process of cultural production and masquerade which involves not only introjection but also cross-censorship, the failure of which goes severely punished. What is at issue in the present case, however, is not only whether gender was viewed as a construct but also how the Assyrians went about constructing gender, and how gender was performed. We need not look far to find that to the ancient Mesopotamians masculinity came with socialisation. Enkidu, in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, takes up his masculinity with the sexual socialisation process. In this transition, dress and sexuality become components of

¹³⁶ Alberti 2006, 403.

¹³⁷ Zsolnay 2017, 2.

gender construction and performance in the Mesopotamian lexicon of value; in fact, it is only when Enkidu is clothed and engages in the performance of heterosexual sex that he *becomes* a man. Prior to learning how to construct and perform his gender, Enkidu is not civilised. What should be noted here, however, is not only the role of women in the process of attaining ‘civilised’ masculinity, but also the idea that in the epic, masculinity does not exist prior to socialisation, but rather that it comes with it – the Mesopotamian parallel of discourse and gender arising out of the same matrix.

Of course it is a rather thorny issue to commit to the gender-as-construct idea since we have no treatise on gender and sexuality from the ancient Near East, but if masculinity could somehow be taken away, then masculinity may not have been viewed in essentialist terms.¹³⁸ If masculinity could be granted or stripped by a deity for the subject’s failure to adhere to the demands of gender or imperial ideology, then it was a factor which was firstly of extreme importance to being a man, secondly of extreme importance to the ruler as the supreme man in the hierarchy, and finally perhaps most importantly, to the expansion or maintenance of empire.

Since we have little data to tell us anything about the private lives of Neo-Assyrian kings, or men for that matter, our discussion is restricted to the documentary evidence and to the construction of royal masculinity in textual and visual representation, enmeshed as it is within the rhetoric and ideology of the imperial project. The royal and bureaucratic documentary evidence from Assyria is one of the most plentiful for ancient Mesopotamia; this is so because historians have established

¹³⁸ See Assante 2017, 45 for a discussion of Tukulti-Ninurta I’s call on Ishtar to change the enemy males into women in his royal inscriptions.

a direct correlation between the breadth of the sources and the extent of the imperial project. Since most of the documentary evidence comes from the palace, it obviously concerns the king and his exploits. Furthermore, the nature of the sources is responsible for the almost exclusive military picture that we have of Assyria. Military concerns also make up most of the palace pictorial relief programmes, from Ashurnasirpal II's Kalḫu to Assurbanipal's North palace in Nineveh.

1.2. The Theory of Hegemonic Masculinity

Connell and Connell and Messerschmidt elaborated a theory which states that hegemonic masculinity 'represented the culturally idealized form of manhood that was socially and hierarchically exclusive' and which was sustained by complicit, subordinated forms of masculinity.¹³⁹ Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity is not a static attribute but rather one that changes over time, as we see for instance from the changing types of ideal masculinity from religious pietism to dandy types. As historian John Tosh notes in *Masculinities in Politics and War*, the word hegemonic implies that there are structures of coercion and control allowing us "to place masculinity into some kind of pecking order."¹⁴⁰ Tosh defines hegemonic masculinity as a theory that concerns "the structure of gender relations which seeks to explain how the political and social order is created in the image of men and expressed in specific forms of masculinity."¹⁴¹ He adds that the structure of asymmetric power relations between men and women and men and men is held in place by both force and cultural means, especially media,

¹³⁹ Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 829–59.

¹⁴⁰ Tosh 2004, 42.

¹⁴¹ Tosh 2004, 42.

that place the assumptions of hegemonic masculinity in the 'realm of common sense' This is why they are so difficult to shift. Hegemonic masculinity is typified by instability and change and it is always in an unstable relationship with other masculinities. Furthermore, Tosh adds that although Connell first elaborated the theory in the context of contemporary capitalist society, the historical associations are clear.¹⁴²

According to Tosh, Gramsci's use of the term hegemony refers to the 'domination which goes beyond the exercise of brute force and legal power because it has become embedded in culture'.¹⁴³ When this term is used in the context of gender, it refers to the asymmetrical social bonds which place men in certain positions of power and to the structure of masculinity which, albeit unconscious, justifies and legitimizes these bonds, making it appear to the rest of men that it is the only legitimate way of being a man. In order for hegemonic masculinity to be successful, it requires the ability to "impose a definition of the situation, to set the terms in which events are understood and issues discussed, to formulate ideals and define morality."¹⁴⁴ Thus, the role of mass media is clearly central to it.

Tosh argues that there are two meanings of hegemonic masculinity. The first refers to "those masculine attributes which are most widely subscribed to and least questioned."¹⁴⁵ Attributes of this type of hegemonic masculinity are physical strength, practical competence, performance in sex, and the protection and support of women. These qualities tend to be enduring, therefore seemingly above or anterior to other

¹⁴² Tosh 2004, 43.

¹⁴³ Tosh 2004, 43.

¹⁴⁴ Tosh 2004, 44.

¹⁴⁵ Tosh 2004, 47.

social categories, and they follow independent trajectories or hardly change at all (like Braudel's *long durée*). It is important for this study to keep in mind that one of the characteristic features of a national crisis is that it may bring about drastic change in the socially acceptable ways of being of man (for example, Tosh notes that following WWI, a quieter, more domestic and anti-heroic style emerged, implying that hegemonic masculinity is contingent and volatile).¹⁴⁶ This is the minimalist interpretation of hegemonic masculinity, seeing it as defined according to the gender norms which most men subscribe to, whether or not they fully enact them.

The second usage has a sharper political edge and is more useful to the Neo-Assyrian context. In this second definition, hegemonic masculinity refers to those masculine norms and practices which are most valued by the politically dominant class and which help to maintain its authority. The success of this is dependent on the number of men who subscribe to it. Thus, the hegemonic codes of manhood served to strengthen the power and security of the governing class.

The theory of hegemonic masculinity is especially useful for this study because it enables us to make sense of the role royal masculinity played in its own legitimation and its reliance on other forms of masculinity (complicit, subordinate, and marginal) in order to stratify the power structures of the Neo-Assyrian period. It is therefore not only useful for identifying the hegemon and other masculinities but also to trace fluctuations within the construction and performance of gender configurations. In order to allow our sources to speak in multiple voices, however, this study will also make use the theory of the male gaze as elaborated by film critic Laura Mulvey and

¹⁴⁶ Tosh 2004, 48.

cross-cut with the work of art historian Norman Bryson. Mulvey claims, in the films she cites, that man is the bearer of the look while the female is the object of that looking. Bryson modifies this theory by elaborating a discourse on the gaze of men upon men, saying that identification with the bearer of the look is not sufficient to account for the aforementioned cross-censorship, which always already involves the male as also object of the looking.¹⁴⁷

1.3. Prosthetic Masculinity

In this study, I have also made use of Jack Halberstam's theoretical framework in their seminal study of female masculinity. For Halberstam, masculinity is the social, cultural, and political expression of maleness. What Halberstam suggests is that masculinity is not located in the male body or its effects.¹⁴⁸ For Halberstam, masculinity may be difficult to define but easy to identify, and that what we call 'heroic masculinity' has been produced by and across male and female bodies.

In fact, as I will argue in my case study of Naqī'a and the court eunuchs in the Neo-Assyrian period, the able and intact male body is not the single and singular locus where masculinity is inscribed or from which it emanates or to which it can be reduced; rather, masculinity is not tied to a single biological body but can be produced in and by other bodies, even those shorn of the iconic indices of masculinity.

For Halberstam, male masculinity is a hermeneutic, because what they seek is the iconicity of masculinity not in white males or white bodies, but in other bodies in

¹⁴⁷ See Bryson 1994, 228–259.

¹⁴⁸ Halberstam 1998, 1.

which its operations are not in stealth but are highly visible. This point has already been raised within the discipline of Assyriology, where an attempt has been made at looking for masculinity in other than the male body, but often this is termed third gender.¹⁴⁹ This initial attempt carried out by Peled seems to conflate third gender with a form of failed masculinity rather than as a separate gender configuration on its own. The trap for the researcher, here, is that he continues to employ the dominant male-oriented gaze and finds different configurations of gender as either a successful or a failed attempt at producing and performing a form of hegemonic masculinity. What I suggest in this study is a rather different approach, and basing my arguments on data gleaned from the sources, I argue that rather than failed masculinity, the emic context constructed different masculinities with a spectrum of access or denial to the privileges and dividends of hegemonic masculinity, that is, always in relation to the masculinity of the hegemon king (and, by extension, the masculinity of the state). However, as we shall see, the intact male body was not always a requirement for the conferring of elite masculinity in the court domain of the Neo-Assyrian ruler.

In addition, no one has truly marked the forms and expressions of male dominance, even if it seems that we know our male subjects and male subjectivities almost intimately. In light of this, this study is concerned not only with how royal masculinity was scripted and performed in the period under investigation, but also the extent to which masculinity could become an agent of social change in our sources. For the Sargonid kings of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, from Sargon II to Assurbanipal, the cuneiform and figurative evidence suggest that their masculinities were both

¹⁴⁹ Peled 2016.

expressions of a deep-seated traditional masculinity *in* representation while at the same time innovative and generative of difference on a socio-political level.

Because of restrictions imposed both by the research question itself, as well as the scope of the study, I will not engage at great length with identifying and problematizing other configurations of masculinities in the Neo-Assyrian period. The literature on the topic is ever-growing, and it would constitute a valuable research area/study on its own.¹⁵⁰ My focus here remains on the construction and performance of the Neo-Assyrian king's masculinity, both as a shadow of what Halberstam calls a 'much more powerful and convincing alternative masculinity', that of the gods especially Ishtar, Aššur, and Ninurta, as well as that of the hegemon who embodies the masculinity of the state of Assyria itself.¹⁵¹

It has become more and more evident in the sources that this royal masculinity is never stable and fixed; rather it is relational and contested. To the audience of the royal inscriptions and the visual relief programmes, the king is the ultimate masculine hegemon par excellence, who appears as the one performing it at the level which is hegemonic in an ideology of masculinity defined in terms of the ability to dominate the other. The hubris of this, however, seems to have been kept in check by the Neo-Assyrian ideological apparatus. Like the James Bond discussed by Halberstam, Assyrian kings battle the usual array of bad guys: the seditious Phoenicians, the unruly and insolent Elamites and so on, and they have their usual supply of gadgetry to aid them – the bow, the arrow, and the chariot. But the credible masculine power that is

¹⁵⁰ See Peled 2016 and relevant bibliography.

¹⁵¹ Halberstam 1998, 3.

painfully constructed through these tropes is destabilised because of the female masculinity of Ishtar who, in a sense, enables the king and takes away *his* masculinity.

What this suggests, therefore, is that Neo-Assyrian royal masculinity is a prosthetic scripted onto the body of the king, who is always *in representation*. This masculinity is not inherent in the body of king himself, but is a requirement of the state, an ideological script that is effectively tied to the imperative of an expansionist imperialist agenda. If it is agreed that James Bond, the fictional character of British espionage masculinity, performs his suave masculinity with the help of prosthetics because it is entirely reliant on the gadgetry, clothing, and heterosexual sex, then the evidence in the cuneiform evidence of prosthesis for masculinisation also points to the same framework.¹⁵² There is explicit acknowledgement of the reliance on prosthesis to construct the image of the valiant masculine warrior king; however, as the repeated epithets demonstrate, and from which the theoretical perspective here is built up, is that masculinity itself is the prosthetic, pinned onto bodies that perform the state ideology. The cases of Ishtar and Naqi'a also unsettles the relationship between masculinity and the male body – if Ishtar can be more masculine than the king and Naqi'a can occupy the position of hegemonic masculinity.

Another interesting feature is that sexism and misogyny have become historically difficult to untangle from masculinity, yet this is not the case with the way Assyrian royal masculinity is represented in the official media. The royal inscriptions, for instance, never mention women in the context of oppression – at least not

¹⁵² See Halberstam 1998, especially page 3 for a discussion on the construct of prosthetic masculinity in the films of James Bond.

directly.¹⁵³ This suggests that the media defined royal masculinity more in terms of homosociality than in a binary gender relationality through the oppression of women. Of course, silencing women may be viewed as the ultimate form of oppression; indeed, the independence of men from women in the documentary sources may prompt scholars to define the Neo-Assyrian period as one of toxic patriarchy in which women were segregated and silenced, with very little to no representation. This picture has been overturned almost completely in the recent work of Saana Svärd, who identified the faults with the theoretical frameworks that defined power as hierarchical. Svärd proposed to look at the distribution of power in heterarchical terms, and the cuneiform sources revealed a different picture, one in which women had access to many different forms of power and representation and that the picture needs a wholesale revision.¹⁵⁴

Masculinities that rely on prosthetics, Halberstam notes, undermine the hero's heterosexuality while extending his masculinity.¹⁵⁵ At the same time, the lower ranking masculinities of the adversaries provide a script for the determination of the absolute dependence of heroic masculinity on other masculinities. For instance, the royal inscriptions rely heavily on the immediately recognisable 'bad guy'. The 'bad guys' are a standard trope of epic masculine narratives.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ The only exception to this is the instance in the iconography of the reign of Assurbanipal. See Dubovsky 2009.

¹⁵⁴ Svärd 2015.

¹⁵⁵ Halberstam 1998, 4.

¹⁵⁶ See Halberstam 1998, 4 with reference to the text of *Paradise Lost*. For Halberstam, the bad guys do reap the patriarchal dividend but they just die quicker. In this sense, therefore, the attempt of the Neo-Assyrian king to emasculate the enemy other does not necessarily imply that the attempt was effective. In order for the masculinity of the Neo-Assyrian king to be hegemonic, his enemy other had to also perform a hypervirile masculinity worthy of the king's opposition. The success is in turning this hypervirility to a form of emasculation.

Furthermore, the Neo-Assyrian sources seem to suggest that the strength associated with the warrior code operates somewhat independently of actual men. This undoing of the continuum between the male body and masculinity is evident, for instance, in the masculinity attributed to the royal weaponry, especially the bow as the recipient of an independently acting masculinity.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, for the Neo-Assyrian sources, the same logic seems to apply to all the prosthetics that engender masculinity. At issue, however, remains the challenge of undoing gender from individual, bodily, and subjective experience and seeking to find its construction in the broader ideological representational fabric of society.

1.4. Necropolitical Masculinity

Basing his work on Foucault's and Agamben's ideas of the necropolitical sovereignty before the advent of biopower regimes, gender theoretician Paul Beatriz Preciado argues that gender is a somatic fiction that is scripted outside the body, and that before the advent of medical regimes that seek to control the body through biopower, masculinity was performed through a necropolitical regime of power, that is, rather than the traditional understanding of the masculine hegemon as giving life, masculinity is rooted in the ideology of the taking away of life.¹⁵⁸

For Preciado, patriarchal and heterocentric societies define masculinity as the lawful access to and use of techniques of violence, generally against women, children,

¹⁵⁷ Assante 2017, 61–64.

¹⁵⁸ Preciado 2013, 45.

ethnic others, and non-human persons.¹⁵⁹ Short-circuiting Max Weber with Judith Butler, Preciado argues that “masculinity is to society what the State is to the nation: the holder and legitimate user of violence.”¹⁶⁰ These techniques of violence take different forms; physically, they may manifest as domination over the other, financially they could ensue in placing the other at an economic disadvantage, and sexually they may manifest as aggressive behaviour and unwarranted sexual acts.

Necropolitical masculinity is a useful analytical tool to make sense of the state-sanctioned coercive practices in the Neo-Assyrian sources, and this category of analysis will be used in this study to help illustrate one of the means by which royal masculinities were constructed.

1.5. Hegemonic Masculinity and the Neo-Assyrian Sources: Sexuality versus Gender

It is, perhaps, best to keep in mind that by gender we do not *only* mean a sexualized representation of manhood, or images of overt virility and force such as evident in the victory stele of Naram-Sîn as argued convincingly by Winter,¹⁶¹ but rather that any representation or visual narrative could be engendered so that we could read gender from any representation. In fact, Michelle Marcus has argued that Assyrian reliefs may be read as masculine discourses in which what was explicitly portrayed as sexuality in the Akkadian period becomes sublimated in the Assyrian period; the reliefs, although stripped of their overt and explicit sexuality so evident in the victory stele of Naram-

¹⁵⁹ Preciado 2018 <https://bullybloggers.wordpress.com/2018/01/26/ladies-and-gentlemen-and-everybody-else-by-paul-preciado/> [last accessed 25.09.08]

¹⁶⁰ Preciado 2018 <https://bullybloggers.wordpress.com/2018/01/26/ladies-and-gentlemen-and-everybody-else-by-paul-preciado/> [last accessed 25.09.08]

¹⁶¹ Winter 1996.

Sîn, nonetheless encode an engendered message of masculinity which promotes the male-centred message of hegemonic royal masculine rule.¹⁶² However, in spite of the rarity of sexualised images of ithyphallic males in the Neo-Assyrian period, when we do find them, the males often represent male ethnic others – and not the Assyrians themselves.¹⁶³ This in itself is valuable information to the study of Assyrian notions of masculinity since erotic representation for the consumption of hegemonic types stresses the gaze as masculine and imperialistic at the same time.

1.6. Problems with the Study of Masculinities in Historical Contexts

In this section, I present a brief outline of some of the challenges encountered when attempting to investigate gender in the ancient sources. I begin with some reflections on the perils of writing masculinity into history as well as investigating the historical material to assess the construction of this discursive trait in the past. I will then proceed to discuss the challenges presented by the sources employed in this dissertation, followed by the theoretical and methodological pitfalls of writing about the masculinity in representation as opposed to attempting to write about the lived reality of men in the past.

1.6.1. Writing a History of Masculinities

One of the challenges presented to scholars of masculinity, especially those working with ancient sources, is the way we write about the history of masculinity. In an

¹⁶² Marcus 1995, 200–202.

¹⁶³ Assante 2007, 369–407.

attempt to address this challenge, Pierre Bourdieu insists that the “deep-rooted character of patriarchy” produces and reproduces itself via social relations, cultural media, embodied habits, and the practices of everyday experiences. Masculine domination has been hard to challenge because it has been a regime turned into a natural necessity, history turned into nature.¹⁶⁴ Really, therefore, gender in general, and masculinity in particular, are ideological practices turned into an inescapable necessity. Thus, if we want to write about the regimes of power relations and politics, we need to analyse gender. Viewed across time, the seemingly structural similarities that emerge in Bourdieu’s study give way to nuances of what we choose to term masculinity.¹⁶⁵

The challenges of writing about masculinity from ancient sources are manifold. Suffice it here to say that, to begin with, masculinity is a modern concept that the ancient Assyrians may not have been aware of to the same extent that we are today, especially within academic institutions or gender action groups. Care must therefore be taken not to retrogressively impose the present understanding of masculinity into the Assyrian emic context. This is especially challenging as we have no instruction manual from the period that teaches a person how to be or become a man. Writing about masculinity in the Neo-Assyrian period, therefore, has led me to look closely to instances where the textual and the visual expressions turn to the notion of the successful or failed performance of manhood to explain a privileged position in power relations or otherwise.

¹⁶⁴ Bourdieu 2001, 1.

¹⁶⁵ Bourdieu 2001, 2–4.

1.6.2. The Nature of the Sources

We need to bear in mind the nature of the extant sources when writing the history of masculinity. Archival variation raises the question of comparability: are we looking at the same thing across different media or across time? One of the challenges presented in this study has been the difficulty to ascertain whether the absence of a certain aspect or attribute points to a real difference over time or merely a difference in how the sources were tailored to speak to their audience.

Changes in the sources may not, after all, be a result of random distribution of data but the result of changing configurations of power/knowledge and, therefore, changes in ideological frameworks which result in changes of gender configurations and expressions. We need to bear in mind, therefore, that there is no such thing as an archive that is neutral about gender relations. Indeed, the archive itself is complicit in the construction of gender, either as a means to enforce the gender binary or to upset it.

1.6.3. The Relational Nature of Masculinity

Like male-female relations, the relations between men themselves also demonstrate a degree of change over time. Insight into the social practices and institutions through which men came into contact with other men, for example the military or the institution of eunuchs, gives us a clear indication of the way socio-political structures rearrange power relations. Such hierarchies are a good place to investigate the construction of different masculinities and their access to patriarchal privilege or otherwise.

A particular feature of Neo-Assyrian ideology is the notion that social hierarchy was God-given. Social differences and social tensions, which are inscribed onto local (space/time) notions of masculinity, are therefore positioned within wider ideologies.

1.6.4. Masculinities and intersectionality

Gender rarely, if ever, stands alone in the formation of an individual's subjectivity.

Gender is one set of cultural codes which meets up with other important aspects such as race, class, and time.¹⁶⁶ For some historians, gender has always been the source from which all other inequalities follow; for some others, different times have different notions, and, for example, race could be the more determining factor, even if notions of masculinity and femininity still abound.

1.6.5. The Relationship Between Representation and Experience

A nagging concern in such a study as this is the difficulty of reconstructing the lived experience from the emic context. To a certain degree, therefore, we only really ever construct knowledge based on analyses of the media of the period, with very rare glimpses in the lived realities of historical subjectivities. Such experience is not accessible in some transparent, *a priori* state; indeed, a "pristine subjectivity" is not only unavailable to the historian, but it is not experienced by historical subjects themselves.¹⁶⁷ In a sense, therefore, there is no discord between discourse and reality. In post-structuralist fashion, dominant regimes shape/inform our experience of the world. This culturally-mediated reality, therefore, needs to be explored in the primary

¹⁶⁶ Connell 1995, 75. See, earlier, the work of bell hooks, especially hooks 1984 on intersectionality. See most recently, McCall, 2005, 1771–1800.

¹⁶⁷ Arnold and Brady, 2011 41.

sources under investigation. Suffice it to say, at this point, that the epistolographic sources yield a greater sense of the complex texture of everyday life. The prescriptive voice of the royal inscriptions, on the other hand, is a vehicle for the dominant ideology of the period. Bearing this in mind, an analysis of the construction of gender in this genre would need to be balanced out with analyses of reception and interpretation for a more complete investigation.

It is for this reason that I have sought to look at the expressions of masculinity and the legitimation of male power for the period as well as the metaphoric language of animality and bestiality as tropes through which the sources construct masculinities.

It is also important to exercise caution when thinking about the circulation, readership, and audience of a text or visual sources. One important assumption I do not adhere to in this study is that which proposes that the date of production is also the date of maximum audience.¹⁶⁸ As this may not necessarily be the case, I leave that assumption out of this present work. Also outside the scope of the present dissertation are such points of investigation as the reception of royal and elite masculinities outside the domain of the Neo-Assyrian elite social structures, and whether their reception was that of wholesale acceptance or counter-reaction.

¹⁶⁸ For a thorough investigation and discussion of audience for the Neo-Assyrian reliefs, see Russell 1991, 223–240.

1.7. Conclusions

In this section, a summary of the discussion of the theoretical perspectives in this chapter will be provided, followed by a brief discussion of its relevance to the rest of the dissertation.

This study subscribes to the notion that gender is a social construct and not a biological aspect of a person. Indeed, it is only by understanding gender in this way that we can study it. Assuming that gender is a biological given would mean that gender in general, and its myriad configurations in particular, would be configured in the same way across space and time. Since the sources under investigation reveal that gender is constructed along the lines of power relations, and is subject to the flux in socio-political and human relations, it would only be fruitful to employ the understanding of gender as a discursive and performative trait of power relations.

Within gender, masculinity was, until fairly recently, unmarked. For scholarship, this meant that the discursive aspects of masculinity were left unexamined and left under the assumption of behaviours, bodies, and psychological states that were rooted in the hormonal compositions of male bodies. With the advent of third wave feminism, however, masculinity also became marked as a configuration of gender practice, exposing to the discerning scholar the ideologically driven understanding of man as stand-in for universal human beings.

Connell understands gender as a configuration of practice within gender relations.¹⁶⁹ This understanding of masculinity is relevant for this study because this

¹⁶⁹ Connell 1995, 84.

view allows for the building of a theoretical framework that employs masculinity as a research tool, or as Bederman prefers to refer to it, as a heuristic category. Connell views masculinities as construed in different discursive formations. Hegemonic masculinity is the cultural ideal which remains unattainable for most living persons. It is best seen in representation, often constructed beyond the male body with the aid of prosthetics.¹⁷⁰ For example, Halberstam points out that masculinity folds in on itself when the prosthetic scaffold is dismantled. He uses the example of the hypermasculine James Bond to point out that his masculinity is constructed in terms of material extensions and gadgetry such as the suit, the car, and the iconic half-smile which convey a construct of masculinity as one of self-assurance in the midst of a geo-political crisis.¹⁷¹ The theoretical notion of prosthetic masculinity is very useful in examining my research question, as the sources reveal that Neo-Assyrian kingship was, in its textual and visual expression, also reliant to a great extent on the use of bodily prosthetics to convey the hypervirile image of its ruling hegemon.

In addition to masculinity as a configuration of practice within gender relations that iterates its cultural script with the aid of prostheticisation, masculinity is also expressed in the sources under examination as a necropolitical discursive practice. Basing his theory on the work of Foucault, philosopher Paul Beatriz Preciado argues that before the advent of biopower, masculinity—especially that iterated by the sovereign—was construed along the lines of the ability to take life away from the other.¹⁷² Sovereign hegemonic masculinity was based on a thanatologic, that is, the

¹⁷⁰ Halberstam 1998, 3.

¹⁷¹ Halberstam 1998, 4.

¹⁷² Preciado 2018. <https://bullybloggers.wordpress.com/2018/01/26/ladies-and-gentlemen-and-everybody-else-by-paul-preciado/> [last accessed: 25.09.18]

logic of inflicting death through the legitimate use of techniques of violence. These theoretical techniques for the production of a hegemonic, necropolitical masculine subjectivity are analysed in light of the Neo-Assyrian textual and visual evidence, as is the extent to which these played a role in promoting the militaristic and necropolitical ideology of a state based on territorial expansion and dominance over the other.

**PART 2: THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITIES IN THE TEXTUAL AND
VISUAL SOURCES OF SENNACHERIB AND ESARHADDON**

CHAPTER 2. ROYAL MASCULINITY IN THE REIGN OF SENNACHERIB (705–681 B.C.E.)

2.0 Introduction

In his afterword to a volume on biblical masculinities edited by Ovidiu Creangă and Peter-Ben Smit, Martti Nissinen has recently reflected on the rather late addition of masculinity studies to the methodological toolkit of ancient Near Eastern and Biblical scholars.¹⁷³ In these musings, Nissinen underscored the need for more research on masculinities from ancient Near Eastern sources, stating that while New Testament scholars have been able to draw on research carried out on Classical Antiquity, Hebrew Bible scholars find a dire situation when they turn to the ancient Near East for theoretical frameworks relating to men and masculinities.¹⁷⁴ As things stand, we have very little data to begin to theorise masculinities in the ancient Near East, and consequently, we have to rely on theoretical and methodological frameworks from the study of Classical, medieval, and contemporary masculinities to question the construction of various masculinities and the androcentric discourse of our primary sources.

That Assyriology has taken rather longer than other disciplines to study masculinities may perhaps be explained by the reluctance of some to engage with interpretative methodologies which throw light on a subject that seems to be everywhere, yet invisible, in the primary sources: men. Another factor which may add to the reluctance to study the construction of masculinities is what Nissinen calls the

¹⁷³ Nissinen 2014, 271–85.

¹⁷⁴ Nissinen 2014, 271.

‘distancing effect’ of the entire project: researchers may feel that while feminist studies and women’s studies refer to a cause or a person, masculinity studies refers only to a conceptual or theoretical framework.¹⁷⁵ Be that as it may, if the study of ancient texts and iconography is a key practice to the understanding of past and present gender performance, identity construction, and political processes, then the project of studying the construct of masculinities in the ancient world may not be so objectionable after all.

In this initial attempt to address this situation with regards to the study of masculinities in the Neo-Assyrian period, I will discuss the way masculinities were constructed in the official textual and visual sources from the reign of king Sennacherib (705–681 B.C.E.). It will draw on R.W. Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity to trace the construction of royal masculinity in the annals and the iconographic programme of king Sennacherib. I aim to show that the primary sources for this period reveal that ideal masculinity is not only not innate, natural and monolithic across time and space, but that different media reveal that within the same reign, different configurations of gender practice emerge, perhaps dependent not only on the nature of medium and representation, but also on the audience to whom the ideological messages were addressed. This implies that—for the Neo-Assyrian period—ideal, hegemonic masculinity is not only inextricable from different socio-political processes, but its construction and display are also determined by the context and medium of artistic production and reception.

¹⁷⁵ Nissinen 2014, 281.

Connell's work on social inequality in Australian schools created the need for a theory to explain gender relations among boys. This gave rise to the theory of hegemonic masculinity, a framework in which hegemonic masculinities and emphasised femininities are understood as dynamic configurations of gender practices which are constructed and played out not only in the social milieu but also in literary and visual spaces.¹⁷⁶ As the ideal expression of being a man within a given cultural and social milieu, hegemonic masculinity is in constant negotiation with all other non-hegemonic forms to maintain its power and prestige. If hegemonic masculinity sits at the top of the gender-expression hierarchy of masculinity, it only does so through the mutual negotiation with complicit masculinity, which actively participates in propagating its hegemony while receiving the rewards (the patriarchal dividend) for doing so, as well as with non-hegemonic forms, which are either subordinated or marginalised.¹⁷⁷

In an article that traces and assesses the criticism of the theory, R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt continued to emphasise not only the non-essentialising nature of hegemonic masculinity and the dynamic processes involved in the configurations of practice, but also the relationality between its hegemonic and non-hegemonic forms.¹⁷⁸ Non-hegemonic masculinities may be subordinated or marginalised; nevertheless, all expressions of masculinity are interwoven with the gender matrix and as we shall see in this contribution, hegemonic masculinity not only accomplishes its mission by constructing and subordinating the Other, but it may also

¹⁷⁶ Connell 1995, 72.

¹⁷⁷ Nissinen 2014, 274.

¹⁷⁸ Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 848.

incorporate into its sphere of power and privilege non-hegemonic forms like men whose bodies are made biologically imperfect.

Much has been written about the meaning of Neo-Assyrian kingship to the Assyrians themselves, yet scholarship has, as yet, not attempted to ascertain the degree to which Neo-Assyrian kingship relied on the construction and performance of ideal, hegemonic masculinity for its exercise of rule.¹⁷⁹ That the Neo-Assyrian king would wish to portray an ideal form of masculinity is indisputable, given that 1) the king occupied the highest position in the male hierarchy, and 2) in ancient Mesopotamia, like the rest of the ancient Near East and Egypt, rule was always the domain of males.¹⁸⁰ As Winter has argued for Naram-Sîn from the Akkadian period, the king's body was the body politic and it was essential for him to represent what David Gilmore calls the three pillars of maleness: impregnation, protection and provision.¹⁸¹

Furthermore, in their annalistic inscriptions, Neo-Assyrian royals always made reference to their masculinity as being *a*, or rather *the*, source of their strength. Winter has convincingly argued that by using epithets like 'strong male' and 'mighty warrior' in the titular section of the royal annals, Neo-Assyrian imperial propaganda employed gender in order to legitimise royal valiancy as divine favour.¹⁸² The Mesopotamian sources present enemy men as emasculated, as having failed, therefore, in their

¹⁷⁹ Frankfort 1948; Machinist 2006, 152–188; Winter 2008, 75–101; Radner 2010, 15–24.

¹⁸⁰ In Ancient Egypt, Hatshepsut was indeed sexed female but the gender expression of her royalty was indisputably masculine, confirming, indeed, the fact that kingship was always already an exclusively masculine affair. For a critique of the queer approach to Hatshepsut, see most recently Matic 2016, 810–831.

¹⁸¹ Winter 1996, 22. Drawing parallels between the Akkadian and the Neo-Assyrian period may be methodologically unsound; however, we do know that in the Sargonid period, the so-called Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sîn was well known (as can be seen from the style and structure of the Sin of Sargon document) and that Sargon II actively sought to emulate his Akkadian namesake. See Parpola in Tadmor, Landsberger and Parpola 1989, 46.

¹⁸² Winter 1996, 17–18.

performance of ideal masculinity. For Winter, an example of the emasculation of enemy other is clearly portrayed in the stele of Naram-Sîn, where the enemy soldiers on the right part of the victory monument are portrayed as emasculated, that is totally subordinated to the hegemonic male's penetrative combat into their territory, followed by his army of complicit males who aid the deified sovereign in attaining his hegemonic status.¹⁸³ Closer to the context of this study, Cynthia Chapman has identified the representation of emasculated enemy soldiers in the annalistic inscriptions and visual program of the Neo-Assyrian period; Chapman argues that according to the Neo-Assyrian lexicon of cultural values and symbols, the enemy soldiers, with their beards cut off, or prostrating in front of the Assyrian king, signified the loss of vitality and virility, and therefore ideal masculinity.¹⁸⁴

The ideal construction and performance of masculinity was embedded into the matrix of the ideology of kingship and Neo-Assyrian rule. But how was this masculinity exhibited? Winter has argued that although the explicit exhibition of male sexual allure of the Naram-Sîn period was discontinued, the concepts of masculinity and sexuality remained closely connected to power and leadership for two millennia. We may venture to argue that although masculinity is not a monolithic and essential attribute of any person sexed male, across time and space, certain elements may indeed be said to have continued from Naram-Sîn to Gudea to the Neo-Assyrian kings.¹⁸⁵ Hence, it is not surprising to find that the locus of vitality and masculinity was in the body. In the Neo-Assyrian period, masculinity is very much embodied, as can be seen in visual and

¹⁸³ Winter 1996. See also Cifarelli 1994 and 1998, *passim* for the treatment of enemy males in the reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II.

¹⁸⁴ Chapman 2004, 20–59.

¹⁸⁵ Winter 1996, especially 22.

textual references to the luxuriant beard, which Winter suggests was equated with mature manhood, as well as in visual clues such as the accentuated shoulders, the rounded biceps, the direct gaze, the upright stance and the hyper-masculine calves.¹⁸⁶ Yet embodiment, I argue, was not the only way masculinity was expressed in the Neo-Assyrian period: royal masculinity, as I shall argue in this paper, also meant giving the sovereign grammatical and visual centrality in both the textual and visual syntax of the period.

In the following subsections, I will first discuss very briefly the early Assyrian tradition of masculine representation and then focus this study on the reign of king Sennacherib, discussing the ways in which this king reinforced traditional masculinity in one medium but broke away with convention and tradition, ushering in new values and new configurations of what it meant to be the ideal male, in another. On close examination, we will note that the way gender emerges from the matrix of representation differs depending on the media that we have as primary sources.

2.1. Masculinity in the Early Neo-Assyrian Period

Gender is not monolithic and stable but volatile; it is for this reason that gender theorists talk about femininities and masculinities in the plural. John Tosh argues that one characteristic feature of a national crisis is that it may bring about radical change in the socially acceptable ways of constructing and performing gender.¹⁸⁷ As we shall see, masculinity was not always constructed, performed and expressed in the same way in

¹⁸⁶ Winter 1996.

¹⁸⁷ Tosh 2004, 48.

the Neo-Assyrian period. A close examination of the Assyrian context will indicate that within the time frame of empire, ideal masculinities were inextricable from political processes and changing ideological practices.

Thus, ancient Assyrian constructions of masculinities may not only reflect the shifting demands of the socio-political climate but also constitute them. In the Old Assyrian period (2000–1740 B.C.E.), merchants from Assur established trading colonies in Kaneš (ancient Kültepe) where they exchanged textiles and tin for gold and silver. Sources reveal that in this market-driven economy set in a frontier society, the Assyrian males who operated from the trading centre (*kārum*) constructed their hegemonic masculinity not only through their entrepreneurial negotiations with other merchants, but also with their wives and relatives back in Assur.¹⁸⁸ The picture that emerges from the cuneiform sources is one in which in order to attain an ideal masculinity, the Old Assyrian ‘patriarch’ had to provide not only financial stability for the family back in Assur, but also a fatherly role in the religious upbringing of the children, a firm stance in disputes with other males as well as a supportive attitude towards the wives and daughters back in Assur who may have taken it into their own hands to see to the family’s financial matters.¹⁸⁹ Thus, the picture that emerges of the Old Assyrian hegemonic male working in Kaneš is one in which ideal masculinity was attained through decent socio-economic negotiations with the female working in the homeland.

With the Middle Assyrian period, however, hegemonic norms were reconfigured with the emergence of the Assyrian heartland as a territorial centre. By

¹⁸⁸ Thomason 2013, 93.

¹⁸⁹ Thomason 2013, 93–94.

the seventh century, however, the Assyrian king was perceived as ideologically different, and above, ordinary Assyrian men. According to a creation account attested in Neo-Babylonian but well known in the Neo-Assyrian period and most likely of earlier origin, the gods first made mankind (*lullû amēlu*) and then, in a separate act, made the king as intermediary between the gods and mankind (*šarru māliku amēlu*).¹⁹⁰ The account tells us that the king was a divine construct, with the makers responsible for giving him the attributes of kingship and valour, that is, the war, the crown, the throne, as well as comeliness and physical perfection.¹⁹¹ This divine construct, while shaped by the deities in perfect somatic form and mental balance, was, however, always already subordinate to them while superior in manliness to other human beings.

This feature of royal hegemonic masculinity as embodied and perfected by the hands of the gods through the materiality of kingship is well attested in the late Neo-Assyrian textual corpus of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and in Assurbanipal's Coronation Hymn.¹⁹² In the inscriptions, the royal subordination to the divine will last until the fall of empire as may be seen clearly by the numerous references to the kings' subordination to the gods in the opening lines of their annalistic inscriptions¹⁹³, but in the visual record Tallay Ornan has noted the gradual removal of astral symbols and references to deities, marking, perhaps, the change of the status of the king from high priest of Aššur to political leader.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ Jiménez 2013, 236.

¹⁹¹ Jiménez 2013, 240.

¹⁹² Radner 2010, 27. For the Coronation Hymn attested from the reign of Assurbanipal, see SAA III, 26–27.

¹⁹³ See Assurbanipal's Prism D inscription, especially lines i12i37 and passim. RINAP 5 <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/rinap/rinap5/corpus/> [last accessed 15.09.2018]

¹⁹⁴ Ornan 2007, 161.

In the art of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.E.), the king embodies the ideal warrior while at the same time keeps a hegemonic religious identity by maintaining close bonds with his ancestral spirits. The Assyrian king's pious and martial masculinity is dissimilar from that of early southern Mesopotamian representations of kings like Gudea (2144–2124 B.C.E.), whose construct presents a pious attentiveness as well as a lack of secondary sexual characteristics like the fully mature beard and the slightly marked breasts which may in fact point to the absence of monolithic masculinity in the ancient Near East.¹⁹⁵ In the low-reliefs of the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II, the king's hyper-masculinity is brought out in relief with the frequent visual juxtaposition of eunuchs whose eunuchoid forms and beardlessness render more prominent the king's secondary sexual characteristics, namely his elaborate beard and hypermusculature (fig. 16). Furthermore, in the visual narrative, action becomes symbolic of valour and vitality, therefore masculinity, as the king places himself under foreign citadels, in the line of fire. The Neo-Assyrian sovereign is the image of physical strength; his body is displayed in its frontality and his taut forearms become the locus of his virility. In addition, the king's direct gaze at the target remind the viewer that the royal is in complete command of one of his kingly attributes (martial action) while at the same time framing the enemy male soldiers as failed Other in total subordination

¹⁹⁵ Asher-Greve 2002, 11 has argued that the representations of Gudea combine both feminine and masculine forms. The beardless face and the slightly protruded breasts in the statuary of Gudea may, however, suggest that in the ancient Near East, in that social milieu and in the context of production of votive statuary, these traits may point to the attributes of the ideal, pious male and not any expression of femininity. Hence the singling out of feminine traits in the statuary of Gudea should be approached with caution, as it may reinforce the concept of essentialising masculinity (and femininity) in the ancient Near Eastern artistic production. I am indebted to Agn s Garcia-Ventura for raising the question of essential gender.

(fig. 17). The sovereign gaze, therefore, dictates the way the viewer reads the visual narrative through the eyes of the ideal male in the Assyrian hierarchy.

Neo-Assyrian kings of the early first millennium claim hegemonic masculinity not only through elaborate systems of representation such as primary placement in the syntactical field of the visual or textual composition but also through the subordination of other masculinities. The courtroom facade of the Northwest Palace in Nimrud depicts subordinate males bearing tributes for their Assyrian masters (fig. 18), and elsewhere, in Shalmaneser III's Black Obelisk, subordinates prostrate themselves and the hegemon's feet (fig. 19).¹⁹⁶

It is evident that there is no discrepancy between the construct in the royal inscriptions and that in the low-reliefs embellishing the palaces. Neo-Assyrian ideology constructs its hegemonic form of masculinity both verbally (through the first-person narrative of the royal annals) and visually (through dominance of the picture field and vitality expressed therein).

2.2. Sennacherib and Women

In this section I will discuss the ways in which king Sennacherib's representation of masculinity reinforced tradition and the *longue durée* of Assyrian hegemonic masculinity in one medium but broke away with conventional Assyrian royal masculinity and ushered in new values and new configurations of what it meant to be the ideal male in another. On close examination, this multimodal study will reveal that

¹⁹⁶ Cifarelli 1994, 166–170.

the way in which gender emerges from the matrix of representation differs depending on the media that we have as primary sources. Thus, in the reign of Sennacherib, different media had different gender ramifications.

It has already been noted that royal women's power in the reign of Sennacherib was re-positioned. In fact, Julian Reade has famously asked whether Sennacherib was a proto-feminist of sorts, given the unprecedented dedication of a palace quarter to his queen Tašmētu-šarrat in an inscription on a lion gateway colossus in the South West Palace.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, Ornan has shown that in the reign of Sennacherib, the visual repertoire of women in representation increases dramatically when compared with preceding reigns.¹⁹⁸ In addition, Karen Radner cites evidence from the SAA to show that from the reign of Sennacherib onwards, the queen commanded her own army.¹⁹⁹

Sennacherib also made reforms not only in the religious but also in the artistic realms of expression. Thus, in the reign of Sennacherib, a stone inscription from the *Akitu* house introduced Aššur with two consorts, Mullissu and Šerū'a, an unprecedented theological configuration which Eckart Frahm suggests may mirror the king's personal household arrangement with Tašmētu-šarrat and Naqī'a, who may have been Sennacherib's wives simultaneously for some time. In addition, Sennacherib

¹⁹⁷ Reade 1987, 139–145; Radner 2012, 692 advises that it would be wrong to read this dedication as a revelation of Sennacherib's feelings towards his wife, suggesting instead that it is more revealing of the new power women attained in the seventh century BC during the reign of Sennacherib due, in part, to the decommissioning of powerful magnates by the king in favour of maintaining power within his immediate circle. I concur with this view, especially since an inscription on a doorway colossus is too public a context for the expression of private emotions.

¹⁹⁸ Ornan 2002, 461–477.

¹⁹⁹ Radner 2012, 687–698 with reference to SAA VI, 164 lines r4–r5 which mentions two witnesses referred to as cohort commanders of the queen (MÍ.É.GAL).

introduced female sphinxes into the repertoire of male bulls and lions in his gateway colossi imported from the West. Thus, there is certainly some evidence to suggest that Sennacherib was not unwilling to change the gender ideology inherited from Sargon II (721–705 B.C.E.) in the realms of both the palace and the temple. These shifts point to changes brought about by Sennacherib not only in the ideology of rule and but also in the hegemonic masculine configuration that had governed Assyrian gender ideology thus far.²⁰⁰

2.3. Sennacherib in the Textual Sources

I shall start by looking at the textual evidence for the construction of Sennacherib’s masculinity. For the purposes of this chapter, I have selected a section of text from the well-known Rassam cylinder documenting Sennacherib’s campaign to the West in 701 B.C.E. Here, Sennacherib tells us that he personally took alive in the midst of the battle the Egyptian charioteers and princes, together with the charioteers of the king of the land of Meluḥḥa:

LÚ.EN GIŠ.GIGIR.MEŠ ù DUMU.MEŠ LUGAL.MEŠ

KUR.*mu-ṣu-ra-a-a a-di* LÚ.EN GIŠ.GIGIR.MEŠ *ša*

LUGAL.KUR.*me-luḥ-ḥa bal-ṭu-su-un i-na*

MURUB₄ *tam-ḥa-ri ik-šu-da* ŠU.II-*a-a*

In the thick of battle, I captured alive the Egyptian charioteers,

The princes, together with the charioteers of the King of Meluhha.²⁰¹

Here, as in the rest of the document, Sennacherib claims that he himself was in the line of fire, stressing that he was neither averse to engaging corporally in the

²⁰⁰ May and Svärd 2015.

²⁰¹ Grayson and Novotny 2012, 65.

battle, nor averse to being thus represented. Indeed, in this action-packed sequence of homosocial macho bravura and rhetoric, Sennacherib boasts about his solitary participation in war and his having taken what were very worthy opponents. As Mario Fales has recently observed, the victory was ‘claimed thanks to Sennacherib’s own personal heroic, intervention on the battlefield.’²⁰²

The prism inscription shows Sennacherib within the same gender matrix as previous Neo-Assyrian kings when the verses tell us that the kings of Amurru ‘brought extensive gifts’ and ‘kissed my feet’, indeed confirming his masculine honour and the subordination of equally hegemonic subjects.²⁰³ Earlier in the inscription, Lulû the king of Sidon, flees from the overwhelming radiance of Sennacherib and disappears in the midst of the sea.²⁰⁴ This trope, repeated many times in the Assyrian inscriptions, shows the othering of enemy kings through subordination and emasculation, since according to the Assyrian royal imperative, the protection of the people is an attribute of ideal masculinity.²⁰⁵ These instances show Sennacherib represented within the same ideological paradigm as his predecessors and that his masculinity was constructed not only through the invincible, sacral bond with Aššur, but also through terrorizing the enemy kings who flee from their cities, through making failed rulers pay tribute and donate gifts and stripping them of their hegemonic masculinity by subordinating them into bowing and kissing the feet of their oppressor or fleeing his martial radiance.

²⁰² Fales 2014, 239.

²⁰³ Grayson and Novotny 2012, 64.

²⁰⁴ Grayson and Novotny 2012, 63.

²⁰⁵ For the purposes of this dissertation, suffice it to say that what is still at issue is whether the retreat was seen as a retreat of masculinity itself. Was masculinity still there but forced below the surface, or did the emasculated male lose his masculinity completely? The same could be said of the Assyrian penchant for flaying and beheading enemy males, where the head may have indeed represented the very locus of masculinity.

In the prism inscription, the king is always the principal actor and subject, with all the action emanating from him. The king claims: “I surround,” “I conquer,” “I fight,” “I besiege” and “I inflict defeat upon my enemies.” He deports people, orders the release of innocent ones and protects the weak. This is an echo of the visual programme of the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II, where, as Winter describes it, the programme shows the essential formulation always in the transitive, that is, “Ashurnasirpal II did X.”²⁰⁶ In this particular inscription, as in many others, Sennacherib’s construct of masculinity is faithful to an age-old Assyrian tradition of action emanating from the royal body as body politic, with the terrorizing king himself participating in the thick of battle. The king’s person stands in for himself, but also metonymically for the army and for Assyria. Similarly, in the visual program of the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II, we can see the king himself attacking the enemy, always at the forefront, ready for action or already in the thick of it—a visual tradition that goes on uninterrupted until the reign of Sennacherib.

In the textual medium, the king is a leader-soldier, the commander-in-chief of the army – and he almost always fulfils the divine martial prerogative on his own. He inflicts death upon the enemy, a violence which is divinely sanctioned. Violence, in Assyrian martial rhetorics, is a masculine affair – a homosocial arena in which men get to perform their gender and gain their hegemony, complicity or subordination.²⁰⁷ Thus, as Chapman calls it, a masculine contest. Shame and humiliation of defeat meant

²⁰⁶ Winter 1981, 12.

²⁰⁷ In the entire visual and textual corpora of the Neo-Assyrian period, violence towards women is only attested once, on slab 9 of Assurbanipal’s Room L in the North Palace. This anomalous treatment of the so-called pregnant Arab women has been dealt with at some length by Nadali 2004, 72–75 and Dubovsky 2009, 412-418. Suffice it to say here that this visual *hapax* requires further study.

emasculatation since Assyrian royal masculinity is primarily associated with valour, strength, heroism and, I should add, victory.²⁰⁸

In this text, the mechanism of the male gaze is androcentric; the master of the male gaze is the king himself, presented as the performer of the action, the embodiment of activity itself. The audience either identify with him and mould their view of the world and historical reality through his version of hegemonic masculinity, or become othered by him through exclusion to Assyrian royal power and privilege. Thus, there is identification with, or subordination to, the masculine position - a complicit relationship with the visual and textual narratives of previous kings.

2.4. Sennacherib in the Visual Sources

Neo-Assyrian royal masculinity in the textual sources is, however, at odds with the way the masculinity of Sennacherib is constructed and represented in the visual program of his “Palace Without Rival,” especially the program of Room XXXVI which has, since the time of its discovery, been known to represent the Battle of Lachish (figs. 20–22).²⁰⁹

What I propose here is that by looking at the Lachish relief cycle, in the context of the visual arts in the reign of Sennacherib and Assyrian art in general, we can see an innovation in the representation of hegemonic royal masculinity, one which is in line with what Michelle Marcus presented in her argument on the expansion of the spatial dimensions and the embedding of the king as being significant to masculine

²⁰⁸ Chapman 2004, 23.

²⁰⁹ Ussishkin 1980, 174.

discourse.²¹⁰ Methodologically, however, the sexual politics of the male gaze need to be reconsidered. Here we have to elaborate a framework which takes into consideration what Norman Bryson calls the dynamics of the male gaze in relation to male bodies.²¹¹ Why, we could ask, did the Assyrians represent disempowered males for male spectators?

In the current state of preservation and exhibition, the Lachish relief cycle presents, from slab 5 to slab 16, the Assyrian invasion of the Judean city of Lachish which Ussishkin has firmly established as Lachish stratum III.²¹² This particular relief is relevant because of its efficacy at showing how Sennacherib continued to engage with the constructed image of ideal, hegemonic, Assyrian masculinity while at the same time introducing a re-engineered construct that broke away from the age old tradition of his predecessors of presenting themselves in the thick of the action.

Our chief interest lies in the section of the relief (slab 12) where king Sennacherib occupies what Russell has called a 'visually privileged space' (fig. 22).²¹³ The image of masculine hegemony is constructed through a number of iconographical tropes many of which are borrowed from previous codes of Assyrian royal representation. To borrow the Braudelian classification schema as employed by Henry French and Mark Rothery, I would call these the *longue durée* of gender performance in the Neo-Assyrian period.²¹⁴ Sennacherib is wearing the ceremonial royal robe, and the pointed royal fez. The imago of the triumphant, Neo-Assyrian autocrat-warrior is

²¹⁰ Marcus 1995, 193–202.

²¹¹ Bryson 1994, 231.

²¹² Ussishkin 1980, 174–195.

²¹³ Russell 1993, 63.

²¹⁴ French and Rothery 2013, 139 – 166.

displayed with the weapons carried by Sennacherib, two arrows in his raised right hand and a bow in his left resting on the side of the throne. In addition, the king's long, luxuriant beard continues to remind the viewer that the sovereign has reached full, mature manhood.²¹⁵

Sennacherib's hegemonic masculinity is constructed through visual display and adornment on the male body. Connell states that pageantry and display are wired into the mechanisms of masculinity and these become key to what Judith Butler calls gender performance.²¹⁶ The king is shrouded in extravagance, both sartorial as well as in the throne and footstool. Just as the beard and the hair styles were luxuriant in previous expressions of royal masculinity, so for Sennacherib. In fact, Winter has noted that the visual evidence reveals a more elaborate representation of sartorial finery and hair curls here.²¹⁷ Added to this is the fact that, as Hoffner argued, the king's bow and arrow are the ultimate symbols of masculinity, which in the martial discourse of the ancient Near East carried the double signification of territorial as well as sexual penetration.²¹⁸ The weapons are divine blessings, but also clear indicators that the king is indeed the ideal warrior in the masculine contest of war. I would also argue that the weapons are a continuity of homologous royal representation, and a visual clue through which the victorious king is identified. It has been suggested that the arrows are pointing at the epigraph.²¹⁹ An alternative reading would point to this action as

²¹⁵ Winter 1996, 13.

²¹⁶ Connell 1995, 843; Butler 1999, 179.

²¹⁷ Winter 2010a, 547.

²¹⁸ Hoffner 1966, 327.

²¹⁹ Uehlinger 2003, 238.

signifying vigour, power and triumph - the image of strength emanating from the supreme political phallus.

The battlefield in the visual programme of room XXXVI repeats the masculine image of martial machismo and is continuous with that of previous kings, only this time the single narrative is played out on all the walls of the room. Sennacherib's masculine military might is not to be questioned, as evidenced in the gesture of triumph. And despite the replacement of the text bands with the concise epigraphs, Sennacherib still continues the tradition of the logocentric reign of the phallus.

2.5. Discussion

Why is Sennacherib not on slab 5 or 6 or 7 (fig. 23) terrorizing and overwhelming the city of Lachish like his predecessors would have done? In the relief cycle, Sennacherib is sitting on his throne, calmly observing the unfolding of what Seth Richardson has recently called 'the first world event'²²⁰. To begin with, the clearly inauspicious death and loss of the body of Sargon II (Sennacherib's father) at war with the Kulummu of the Tabal coalition in the Anti-Taurus region not only meant that the royal corpse could not be taken through the necessary funerary rites and receive a proper burial according to tradition, but it also led to the investigation of the king's death commissioned by his heir. In this investigation, the chief scribe Nabû-zupup-kēnu studied the twelfth tablet of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* in which the unburied dead are discussed; the latter were destined to wander restlessly and to rely on the advances of

²²⁰ Richardson 2014, 433–503.

others for food.²²¹ This ensuing sense of apprehension and unease may have indeed triggered the sudden relocation of the entire palatial network from Dur-Šarrukin to Nineveh, reducing the former to nothing more than a military garrison.²²² Fales suggests that although the early political policies of Sargon II, especially those that treated international relations, remained rather faithful to those of the preceding reign, the archaeological evidence from the relocation of the entire palace set-up and the omission of Sargon II's name from the titular and self-descriptions of Sennacherib point a "certain sense of cosmically-determined unease lying behind Sennacherib's policies, especially in his earlier years".²²³ If, as Tosh points out, "one of the characteristic features of a national crisis is that it may bring about drastic change in the socially acceptable ways of being a man", then this may suggest that the loss of the royal corpse, and the subsequent fear that the same fate would befall the new king, affected the performance not only of Assyrian kingship in the battlefield, but also the configuration of gender practice with which royal hegemony was intertwined.²²⁴ Thus, the calamitous end to Sargon II may have had significant ramifications on the construction and performance of both kingship and its masculine hegemony.

In the entire visual program of the Palace without Rival, as in the Lachish cycle, Sennacherib is not in the line of fire but rather out of it, at a remove from the site of violent action, observing the unfurling of his plan. He is sitting on a throne embellished with apotropaic figures, possibly of ivory, that appear to be holding up the heavy weight of kingship and further elevating the royal persona to a height that commands

²²¹ Frahm 1999, 75.

²²² Fales 2014, 229.

²²³ Fales 2014, 232.

²²⁴ Tosh 2004, 48.

a bird's eye view on Lachish (fig. 24).²²⁵ The king is in surveillance, supervising and patrolling Assyria as it establishes its hegemony in the West just as he supervised the quarrying of the bull colossi from a distant and elevated point of view, from the royal carriage. As Winter has noted Sennacherib gives us the impression of having observed everything and this—one could argue—is a glimpse into the inner workings of this greatly enterprising king.²²⁶ Sennacherib surveys the outcome of his successful siege on Lachish, shaping himself into, not a front-liner, but a political leader. In this relief cycle, the innovation is attested not only in the way Sennacherib is represented sitting on his luxurious throne in supreme command, the genius organiser, but also in the removal of visual references to deities on the side of the Assyrians under the auspices of whom war was waged in previous reigns and as Sennacherib mentions in his annals. One could argue that Sennacherib represented himself as the ideal nominal warrior cum spiritual leader, if not as a replacement for the deity in question, then at least as one who is not subordinate to it.

Winter has argued cogently that the direct gaze is one of the salient features of royal *šalmu* (image): I concur with this reading but I also see the direct, royal gaze as also expressing the hegemonic masculine gaze of the king.²²⁷ In the Lachish reliefs, in fact, the gaze is so central to the message of ideology of Assyrian imperial surveillance of its subjects that enemy soldiers made a deep gash into and mutilated it (fig. 25).²²⁸

²²⁵ Ornan 2005, 85.

²²⁶ Winter 2010a, 546.

²²⁷ Winter 2010a, 85.

²²⁸ The centrality of the gaze in Assyrian surveillance art can be seen in the eyes of the doorway colossi guarding every axial room of the palace complex: this gaze has often been studied in terms of protection from evil forces. Its meaning in the construction of the ideology of surveillance has not been emphasised at all. What is interesting for room XXXVI is that it was three doorways removed from the main court, with a depth of perspective achieved through shrinking doorway colossi at which end stood the relief cycle. This must have enhanced the idea of surveillance.

Such mutilations could not only have been intended to remove the sovereign persona from collective memory, but also to empty the person represented from all that is performative of his identity. This mutilation is indeed not far removed from the Assyrian penchant of decapitating enemy soldiers, as evidenced in the Lachish relief cycle and elsewhere in the Assyrian repertoire of narrative monuments.²²⁹

At Lachish, Sennacherib is seated. No other previous Assyrian king consistently sat through a battle.²³⁰ As both Paolo Matthiae and Reade have argued, previous kings were front archers under the enemy cities.²³¹ At first, it is tempting to argue that the visual programme in the Lachish relief cycle is evidence of a masculinity in crisis during the reign of Sennacherib, that the removal of the king from the battle-ground points to a decay in the Assyrian masculine construction of ruler as primary actor in the battle, now expressed solely in the passive act of sitting and reviewing prisoners and booty. It may even be tempting to argue that the inauspiciousness of the loss of Sargon II's body diminished the significance of personal military prowess and masculine valour on the battleground. However, a closer look at the visual evidence reveals that royal masculinity in the reign of Sennacherib was not in crisis but rather in the process of reconfiguration, a re-engineering which may have affected the *longue durée* of the Assyrian construction and performance of masculinity.

²²⁹ See Nylander 1980, 329–333 for a discussion on the mutilation of the figures on the reliefs. On theories relating to the practice of decapitation and its gender ramifications, see Cixous 1981, Kristeva 2011, and Watkin 2000.

²³⁰ Karlsson 2016, 107. Except for the representation of Tiglath-pileser II (967–935 BC) at Til-Barsip and Shalmaneser III (858–824 BC) on the Balawat Bronze band gazing intently at his army engaged in battle, Sennacherib is the first king to be thus represented. Karlsson in his PhD on Early Neo-Assyrian State Ideology finds error in Oates' conclusion (1963: 6-37) that Shalmaneser III took himself out of the thick of battle and presented himself as an 'organising genius' instead. Indeed, Shalmaneser III did portray himself in the royal chariot shooting arrows at enemy citadels and forces.

²³¹ Matthiae 1995, 124–126; Reade 1972, 87–112.

Sennacherib is sitting on his *ne-me-du* throne with his feet resting on a footstool. Firstly, Ornan has established through iconographic evidence that the image of a royal sitting on a throne was a signal of importance and reverence, and secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Saana Svärd notes that *kussiu* (throne) is not just a physical object 'but a physical manifestation of the highest authority'.²³² Finally, *wašābu* ('to dwell, sit') is inextricably linked with the politics of hegemonic masculinity as it indicates that enthronement during a battle is not a passive state but an action of engagement, and it is exactly this novel style of presiding over a battle like a strategist which points to a possible redefinition of masculinity of kingship. Prior to the reign of Sennacherib, the royal male was martially active on the battleground. At this time, however, sitting in surveillance is integrated into the domain of masculinity. Furthermore, the act of sitting (while everything else is in action) centres the body of the ruler, identifies his royalty, differentiates him from everybody else and earns him his hegemonic masculinity. This representation of the ideal king is not too distant from the representations of deities in the Neo-Assyrian visual tradition.

In the visual medium, Sennacherib does not need to validate his hegemonic construction by participating in the battle itself, because his masculinity is constructed, rather, through the intellectual endeavour of strategy and surveillance. Recent work on the intelligence services and espionage networks in the Neo-Assyrian Empire has yielded ample evidence that during his stint as crown prince Sennacherib was indeed very well trained in the essential statecraft of surveillance.²³³ In the Lachish relief,

²³² Ornan 2002, 473; Svärd 2015, 81.

²³³ Dubovsky 2014, 283–287.

Sennacherib is chief information official, the king who was trained at Kalḫu to keep political affairs right under his eyes.

The all-encompassing male gaze of imperial surveillance is then expressed in what Groenewegen-Frankfort noted as the major visual innovation in this reign, the wider view of the landscape, the broader, almost bird's eye view of the setting and the vertical reckoning of perspective.²³⁴ What Sennacherib achieved in the Lachish relief is the representation of the male hegemon as owner of the surveilling gaze, turning the image of the king into the supreme political phallus. Vision, in the reign of Sennacherib, becomes gendered through the all-encompassing king's gaze, thus affirming the power hierarchies at play.

R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt stress the relationality of hegemonic masculinity; indeed, hegemonic masculinity cannot attain the illusion of being natural and essential without negotiating with other, non-hegemonic forms.²³⁵ Indeed, in this visual program there is ample evidence to suggest that the hegemonic masculinity of Sennacherib is aided by complicit forms of masculinity.

The Neo-Assyrian king has two types of complicit males in his court and administration: bearded men and eunuchs. If we do indeed accept the hypothesis that the beardless men in the Neo-Assyrian visual programmes were castrates, then at issue is the nature of the masculinity of these men.²³⁶ It is indisputable that in the visual traditions of the Neo-Assyrian period, when eunuchs are represented in close proximity to the king, the luxuriance of the sovereign's full beard, and therefore

²³⁴ Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951, 177.

²³⁵ Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 848.

²³⁶ See Reade 1971, 87–112; Grayson 1995; and Tadmor 2002, 603–611.

mature masculinity and valour, becomes highly accentuated. It should be noted, however, that despite the physical deformation and the subsequent biological changes that may have happened with androgen deprivation, beardless men in the Neo-Assyrian court were still gendered masculine. This may be seen not only in the favour of close physical proximity to the king, but also through the offices held by some eunuchs. Through this it becomes clear that despite the deformation of their reproductive apparatus, court eunuchs in the Neo-Assyrian reveal that in the gender ideology of this period, non-hegemonic forms of masculinity participated in the power politics of the period as well. In light of this, it may be argued that in spite of their physical deformity, or perhaps because of it, eunuchs reaped power from the patriarchal dividend through their protection of the royal bloodline. Indeed, the complicit status and access to power and privilege given to these non-hegemonic forms of masculinity is made clear in the use of epithets like “wise,” “expert in battle,” and “man of authority” by chief eunuchs like Mutaris-Ašur, titles which were otherwise reserved for the sovereign.²³⁷

Reade has suggested that in the reign of Sennacherib court eunuchs were stripped of their privilege and access; the relief cycles of the Place Without Rival show them relegated to performing menial tasks.²³⁸ The Neo-Assyrian text corpus, however, reveals a different state of affairs. Indeed, the royal inscriptions of Sargonid kings make frequent reference to the *ša rēšis* in positions of military leadership or as governors appointed to administrate newly annexed territories.²³⁹ In the Lachish relief cycle

²³⁷ Tadmor 2001, 603–611.

²³⁸ Reade 1983, 52.

²³⁹ Groß and Pirngruber 2014, 161–175.

under discussion, the beardless courtiers continue to participate in the construction of sovereign masculine hegemony; their close proximity to the king and the royal throne is an indication that in the reign of Sennacherib the military and palace apparatus constructed multiple and dynamic forms of masculinity (fig.26). It may be even argued that the beardless courtiers do not fall under the direct, controlling gaze of the sovereign but they indeed participate in the surveillance of the conquest.

The relational aspect of hegemonic masculinity is further evidenced in the negotiation with the agency of non-hegemonic types by the ideal male within the given visual space. In front of the king are the other complicit males of the Assyrian empire – both in their hierarchy and in the expression of their masculinity. The crown prince stands in front of the father/leader while an army of bearded men attend to the sovereign or behead and flay captives. To begin with, the twin representation of the sovereign and the crown prince on the same visual plane points to a key feature of Assyrian royal masculinity – that it is not enough for the ruler to be the supreme political phallus, but he also had to have a potent biological penis that procreates and continues the dynastic bloodline. Fatherhood is a feature of masculinity in most ancient Near Eastern cultures, and the Neo-Assyrian sources make this abundantly clear.²⁴⁰ Fertility and sexual potency were indeed the foremost requisites of the Assyrian royal conception of hegemonic masculinity, and the frequent representation of the king with the crown prince in Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs is a well-crafted trope that confirms the potent, impregnating power and sexual prowess of the most powerful man in the hierarchy. In a geopolitical setting where the empire was not only

²⁴⁰ Hoffner 1966, 327; Nissinen 2014, 274. See also fig. 27 for a relief from Dur-Sharrukin with Sargon II and crown prince Sennacherib.

ruled by the sovereign but was also the possession of that ruling man, the question of continuity of the bloodline becomes even more salient; it is not only the dynastic set-up which masculinity helped construct, but it was also the continuity of the imperial project itself.²⁴¹

Homosociality is deeply embedded into the matrix of masculinity in Assyrian social, literary and artistic spaces. In the case of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (Standard Babylonian version), the homosocial dimension is represented by the strong emotional bond between Gilgamesh and his friend Enkidu. Nissinen has suggested that this bond may have even unsettled the 'normal' gender conceptions of an ancient audience with its liminal and queer themes that transgress conventional ancient categories.²⁴² On the Assyrian visual plane in the relief programmes of late Neo-Assyrian palaces, such queer categories may not have been desirable tropes. Nevertheless, the theme of homosociality is played out very clearly in the military relief cycles. Ancient Assyrian texts and reliefs are unequivocal about the gendered nature of political violence: war and military valour were solely and exclusively the domain of men, and the martial action itself inherently masculine. The homosocial gaze falls onto the bodies of Assyrian soldiers, bodies which in turn are undifferentiated, armoured and impenetrable. In successfully carrying out the military strategy of the hegemon, they benefit from the outcome of the battle, reap the patriarchal dividend and attain a place in the politics of masculinity.

²⁴¹ Kertai 2009, 27.

²⁴² Nissinen 2010, 74.

Assyrian soldiers on the Lachish relief cycle are depicted in action – this negates attempts to objectify them because they are shown powerfully in the relief. Even when the Assyrians are stationary, their hyper-muscled bodies connote action, thus giving more power to the subject. The signs of masculinity are multiplied to cover the entire body and to code the body so that from the male body itself will be projected an image of strength that is not just personal, but Assyrian, the army collectively orchestrating the production of a masculine image. Subordinates do not wear uniforms and their gesture of supplication is evidence of their failed masculinity; in Assyrian visual code, this is male vulnerability.

The male ruler extending or maintaining the expanse of territory under the yoke of Aššur through his virility and manliness becomes part of the Assyrian gender matrix, and the expression of ideal masculinity was an integral part of Neo-Assyrian ideology. In light of this, subordination means emasculation. Subordinate manliness is the absence of the ideology of Assyrian rule, and here we see the enemy impaled, beheaded, flayed (figs. 28–29), evicted, deported, on the move, leaving the city of Lachish. In Assyrian terms, they fail in their performance of masculinity. The sculptors of room XXXVI create masculinities through figurative differentiation: the king and his men are intricately represented and the detail is very elaborate while the Judahites are either represented in the plainest terms possible or dead and naked. In Assyrian art nakedness plays a double role. When it is the Assyrians themselves who are represented naked, the action in which they participate denotes manly valour, such as crossing rivers to wage war (fig. 30). When it is the enemy that is represented naked,

then it is often a state of shame and loss of life, such as the naked bodies thrown off the citadels and the impaled or flayed bodies on the Lachish relief cycle.

This spectacle of male violence is homomartial; that is to say that the exclusion of women and children as receptors of male violence was very much an Assyrian prerogative. The women depicted in the Lachish reliefs in fact reinforce the shame and humiliation of the Judahite men for having failed in their performance of masculinity, that of protecting the women and children especially. By failing to protect the women and the children, they fail in the performance of their hegemonic standard of masculinity.

2.6. Conclusion

Tosh argues that crises may bring about changes in the configurations of ideal masculinity.²⁴³ If, however, we accept that, as recently suggested by French and Rothery, changes in gender configurations do not occur at the deep-seated, *longue durée* levels, then what are we witnessing here?²⁴⁴ I have argued that the presentation of Neo-Assyrian ideal hegemonic masculinity for the royal persona in text relied on the conventional patterns of gender and identity construction, but that the visual, although borrowing from traditional hegemonic tropes to anchor the representation in the real, started a process of reconfiguration which would continue into the reign of Assurbanipal and culminate in the unprecedented 'garden scene' relief, where the sovereign reclines on a day couch and feasts with the ladies of the palace in post-

²⁴³ Tosh 2004, 48.

²⁴⁴ French and Rothery 2013, 139–166.

martial languor. The visual construction and performance of masculinity in the reign of Sennacherib permeates into the *longue durée* levels and re-engineers them. What remains at issue, however, is whether this new configuration of doing gender had any repercussions on the collapse of the empire itself.

CHAPTER 3. ROYAL MASCULINITY IN THE REIGN OF ESARHADDON (680–669 B.C.E.)

3.0. Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the construct of royal masculinity in the reign of king Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.E.). Esarhaddon's reign is one of the best attested in the Neo-Assyrian period. The sources for this reign are royal inscriptions, letters, chronicles, treaties, literary compositions, queries to the sun-god, legal and administrative texts, astrological reports, prophecies, and a land grant, as well as some visual sources. I will argue that the inscriptions from this reign shed light on the construct of necropolitical masculinity as evinced by the ideology of the state (which continues the *longue durée* of Neo-Assyrian masculinity) while the administrative and epistolographic sources reveal how the construct is at loggerheads with the lived experience of the man on whom heroic masculinity was inferred as a function of the state. I will first discuss the reign of Esarhaddon, and the construct available in the official sources of the state, and then compare these with the more personal and intimate archive extant in the administrative and state correspondence.

Among Assyriologists, the Neo-Assyrian king Esarhaddon remains a conundrum and his reign, as described by Sarah Melville, has been improperly understood. Traditionally described as weak and vacillating, Assyriologists have, over the past decades, started to reconsider the reign of Esarhaddon in light of the epistolary evidence and the emerging picture is one of an 'intelligent and able' ruler as well as an 'astute statesman' in whose sphere of influence his close advisors wanted to be.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ Melville 1999, 32.

There have been four lines of reasoning feeding into a picture of Esarhaddon's rule as marked by a series of emasculating tropes. Firstly, Assyriologists have traditionally levelled accusations of cowardice and paranoia against Esarhaddon, basing their arguments on the dramatic rise in data related to ominous and auspicious signs sent to Esarhaddon's court by scholars and diviners.²⁴⁶

Secondly, Esarhaddon seems to have resorted more frequently than any other Assyrian ruler to the substitute king ritual (*šar pūḫi*), a rite meant to protect the king in the instance that an eclipse announced an inauspicious omen threatening his life. Evidence points to the possibility that in a period of two years Esarhaddon seems to have carried out the ritual at least three times; since each time the ritual took place the king was required to go into hiding for one-hundred days, it would be logical to assume that the seat of kingship was "incapacitated" for a significant portion of that time.²⁴⁷ In this ritual, the king was replaced by a substitute chosen from the population (usually a person of dim intellect) who would wear the king's royal garments, eat the royal meals, and sleep in the king's bed. Meanwhile, the king himself would leave the public domain and be referred to as "the farmer". In this way, fate was tricked and the evil redirected to the scapegoat, who was killed at the end of the ritual.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ See, for example, the letter sent to crown prince Assurbanipal in 667 BC in SAA X 76, obv. 11–rev. 9. In this letter, the author notes that Esarhaddon had set in place a daily routine to process the large amount of information sent to the palace. Note, however, that Radner 2003 168-173 claims that Assyrian kings did, yes, seek the sun god's advice since royal decision making was entwined with divine council, and that it is only the vagaries of archaeology that the ones we have left in the original are from the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. However, Radner notes that it is only for Esarhaddon that we have queries about possible betrayals.

²⁴⁷ On the substitute king ritual (*šar pūḫi*) see Parpola 1971, 54–56; Parpola 1983, xxii–xxxii; Radner 2003, 171–172.

²⁴⁸ Radner 2003, 172.

The third argument constructed to emasculate the rule of Esarhaddon concerns the role of his mother Naqi'a (Akkadian: *Zakutu*) in the matrix of power and palace affairs during his reign. Among Assyriologists there seems to have emerged two groups of thinking, what I will call the minimalists and the maximalists. Adherents to the minimalist camp argue that Naqi'a's role in the selection of Esarhaddon for crown prince and his rise to the throne has been overemphasised, while the maximalists promote the contrary view, that Naqi'a was instrumental to the enthronement and success of Esarhaddon's reign.²⁴⁹ Melville, for instance, constructs a case against the maximalist line of argumentation, suggesting that Naqi'a did not 'start her son's reign from an established position of great authority' and if she 'wielded any real power during the reign of her son, it can only be because Esarhaddon sanctioned it'.²⁵⁰ More recently, Svärd has presented a more balanced picture, basing her argument on the understanding that power is more hetrarchical and diffuse in many directions rather than merely static, unidirectional, and hierarchical.²⁵¹ The picture of Naqi'a as a scheming elite in the apparatus of the royal court using her position of privilege to lobby for the ascent of her son to the throne and masterminding a position of privilege for herself through her son's rule is one that has for many years emasculated the role of Esarhaddon in the literature, making of the king a subordinate hegemon to a female's voracious greed for power. At issue is whether this picture needs to be thoroughly redrawn in light of more recent evidence.

²⁴⁹ See Meville, 1999 for a complete analysis of the role of Naqi'a as argued by both sides. Melville herself adheres to the minimalist line of reasoning but presents the counter arguments in great detail. Frahm 2017, 245 suggests that Sennacherib appointed Esarhaddon crown prince possibly under the influence of Naqi'a.

²⁵⁰ Melville 1999, 32.

²⁵¹ Svärd 2015, 23.

The final argument raised against Esarhaddon's performance of royal masculinity has been based on the evidence in the epistolary remains of the period concerning his physical well-being. Incontrovertible evidence found in letters, reports, haruspex queries, and chronicles makes clear that Esarhaddon's health suffered greatly during his reign.²⁵² Since whatever ailed Esarhaddon became outwardly visible in the form of a skin condition which numerous medical experts could neither identify and name nor resolve, the resultant deformity and disability ran at loggerheads with the age-old Mesopotamian requirement for a fit ruler: that of well-formation and somatic auspiciousness.²⁵³ In addition, as Radner notes, candidature for kingship required not only a blood relation to the king, but also maleness by birth as well as perfect physical and mental health.²⁵⁴ In a society in which disease was construed as a form of divine punishment, the case of Esarhaddon's illness and disability may have been met by his subjects as evidence of a lack of goodwill from the gods to the king, or even as a form of punishment for committing an offensive act towards them.²⁵⁵ Be that as it may, Esarhaddon had to be mostly kept away from public receptions, and the practice of veiling and kneeling during audience with the king may have lessened the anxiety of making visible the king's lack of masculine physical perfection.²⁵⁶ This intersection of royal masculinity and disability has continued to suggest that Esarhaddon may have needed a person to promote the idea of strength at the core of the empire. This may have been the reason why Esarhaddon, given the policy of vigilance (*maṣṣartu*) that resulted from a political ecosystem of suspicion and

²⁵² See LAS II, 229–238.

²⁵³ See Winter 1996, 12.

²⁵⁴ Radner 2003, 166.

²⁵⁵ Radner 2003, 169.

²⁵⁶ See Radner 2003, 170. See also Parpola 1980, 172.

denunciation, chose to hasten the succession process and reconfigure the distribution of power along gender lines since most male elite had fallen out of palace favour or became untrustworthy.

The arguments presented above have been instrumental in constructing an emasculated construct of sovereignty in the reign of Esarhaddon. However, a closer look at the sources from the period, as well as a thorough evaluation of the lines of reasoning among Assyriologists, might suggest that the emasculation is imposed on the evidence retrospectively, and that modern meanings construed along the expectations of masculinity may have coloured the readings of the evidence from the period. Indeed, far from being a model of a failed male, Esarhaddon seems to have championed the heroic masculinity of Assyrian kingship, managing to impose a *pax Assyriaca* on most of the Assyrian territory (which during his reign had reached its widest expanse with the conquest of Egypt), promoting a positive policy towards Babylonia, putting into place a succession treaty to ensure continuity, and reconfiguring the distribution of power along gender lines to safeguard the notion of trust within the palace and the realm.²⁵⁷ In this chapter, I will deal with each of these issues in order to present an argument that claims that Esarhaddon in fact succeeded to continue the *longue durée* construct of royal Assyrian masculinity despite the climate of fear, doubt, political tension, and personal difficulties.

²⁵⁷ Melville 1999, 31–32.

3.1. Esarhaddon's Reign

Esarhaddon's reign marked the greatest territorial expanse of the empire as yet.

During his military campaigns, Esarhaddon defeated the insurgents in Cilicia, drove the Cimmerians westwards, devastated Sidon and renamed it Kar-Aššur-ahu-iddina, took the cities of Kundu and Sissû in the Cilician plains, battled with the Medes and reached the salt-deserts of Darht-e-Kavir, invaded eastern Arabia taking Diḥranu and other cities, and spearheaded the first conquest of Egypt.²⁵⁸ This latter invasion may have been prompted by the interest among Nubian leaders to interfere in the Levant.²⁵⁹

Esarhaddon's first attempt to take Egypt happened in 674, an event which the Babylonian Chronical suggests was in vain.²⁶⁰ Three years later he succeeded, possibly because instead of attempting to approach Egypt via the *via maris* along the Mediterranean littoral, Esarhaddon crossed the Sinai abetted by the Arab tribes.²⁶¹ The Nubian Taharqa fled to Upper Egypt and Esarhaddon took Memphis, leaving local rulers in place but deploying Assyrian officials.²⁶² Esarhaddon returned to Assyria having subdued Egypt, then wealthy and culturally brimming with craftsmen and religious experts now taken along with other booty to Assyria. Esarhaddon should have been celebrated in the homeland for his imperial drive; instead, however, insurgencies erupted in his absence. In Nineveh, a Babylonian divined that Esarhaddon's throne would be usurped by the Chief Eunuch,²⁶³ while in Ḥarran, a woman prophesied that the god Nusku would obliterate the progeny of Sennacherib.²⁶⁴ It seems that the

²⁵⁸ See Frahm 2017.

²⁵⁹ Onasch 1994, 16–59.

²⁶⁰ Frahm 2017.

²⁶¹ Radner 2008.

²⁶² Radner 2008.

²⁶³ SAA X, 179.

²⁶⁴ SAA XVI, 59.

overseer of the city of Assur also attempted to plot against a king, this time following a dream in which a child rose from the dead and passed on the staff to him. When these plots were foiled, Esarhaddon ordered the killing of many officials, leaving his political and personal wellbeing in a precarious situation. As the letters in SAA XVI reveal, the survival of Esarhaddon was almost entirely dependent on the existence of a network of spies, finks, and professional *agent provocateurs*. Furthermore, Esarhaddon's sense of insecurity is possibly the reason why he had the palaces of Nineveh and Kalḫu redesigned into impenetrable fortresses.²⁶⁵

In the reign of Esarhaddon, the eastern frontier was not a stable zone. Tensions between the Assyrians and the Elamites remained acute, despite the bilateral treaty of 674 signed by Esarhaddon and Urtaku, king of Elam. In light of the fact that Esarhaddon may have wished to refrain from inflaming the situation, he did not punish the probably known Babylonian captors of his brother Aššur-nadin-šumi who delivered the latter to the Elamites.²⁶⁶ The situation on the eastern frontier was one of escalating tension, since deserters from Mannea, Media, and Hubuškia were received by the crown prince.²⁶⁷ The rising tensions in the East were worsened with the migration of the Scythians and the Cimmerians into the region from the north, confirmed in the letters of the crown prince who reports of the presence of these migrants and the ensuing lack of security in the region.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ Radner 2015, 50.

²⁶⁶ SAA XVI, xxii. Esarhaddon, in a letter from Šamaš-šumu-ukin (21), was told that possibly an astrologer concluded a treaty with the captors.

²⁶⁷ SAA XVI, xxii.

²⁶⁸ SAA XVI, xxii.

The extent of the loyalty of the Babylonians in the south is put into question in Šamaš-šumu-ukin's letter cited above. The Babylonians denounce three Assyrian scholars but it is not clear whether they do so out of loyalty to the treaty or for self-interest, acting thus out of anti-Assyrian sentiment.²⁶⁹

The letter corpus, especially, seems to indicate that Esarhaddon wanted to protect the lucrative trade between Assyrian and the Western states, to the point that he even put up with behaviour by local kings that went against his own interests.²⁷⁰

The north seems to have been an area of much unrest according to the royal inscriptions and the queries. Cilicians and Scythians were a constant threat, and one of Esarhaddon's main military campaigns was directed against Šubria in 673. The letter corpus, however, presents this area as one of exceptional peace. This may be seen in the relative silence on Urartu, which, perhaps due to the Cimmerian erasure of the state, posed hardly any difficulties to the Assyrians at this point.²⁷¹

The general impression of the domestic scene has been presented, of course, as a rather different matter altogether. Following the murder of Sennacherib, it is stated that the domestic scenario must have been one of paranoia and restlessness.²⁷² Perhaps, as already suggested in SAA XVI, Esarhaddon's rational administration and ensuing stability is very much the result of the preceding political turmoil.²⁷³ It is,

²⁶⁹ SAA XVI, xxiii.

²⁷⁰ SAA XVI, xxiv. See, for instance, the reports on the anti-Assyrian actions of Ikkilû, the king of Arwad, who seems to have actively hindered business-carrying vessels from entering the Assyrian ports in order to siphon the business to himself. SAA XVI: xxiv–xxv.

²⁷¹ SAA XVI, xxvi.

²⁷² SAA XVI, letter no. 95. 88–90.

²⁷³ SAA XVI, xxvii.

indeed, in this light that we need to understand the image that the imperial machine presented of Esarhaddon, and how his royal masculinity was constructed.

What do we know about Esarhaddon's policies? Shortly after being named crown prince, Esarhaddon engaged with issues of domestic policy. From his letters to the crown prince Assurbanipal, we know that Esarhaddon was keen on delegating some matters to him. The letters also tell us that he was the person who granted permission even for minor technicalities such as the repair of a chariot wheel and the administration of cures to an ailing woman in the palace.²⁷⁴

Very revealing are the number of denunciations made in the reign of Esarhaddon. Although it has been claimed that this stems from the actual provisions listed in the treaties, it may also point to the fact that Esarhaddon's policy was one of strict and utter control of surveillance.²⁷⁵ As a result of the institution of a petition and denunciation system, Esarhaddon became a more 'accessible' king, as testified by the amount of correspondence regarding matters of intelligence.

The nature of this body of correspondence seems to lean towards writers trying to better their social standing vis-à-vis the palace, or to intercede on behalf of trusted ones. Other letters, especially those by Nabû-rehtu-usur, reveal conspiracies against the king.²⁷⁶

One interesting thing that occurs in the letters is the correspondence from what has been called the enigmatic anonymous informer. A trope of his letters is the lack of a salutary greeting formula to the king, as is normally found in the letters from

²⁷⁴ SAA XVI, xxviii.

²⁷⁵ SAA XVI, xxix.

²⁷⁶ For a discussion of these letters, see Nissinen 1998, 109–150.

officials.²⁷⁷ How come this man remained totally anonymous, and how come he was allowed to leave the formula out?

Esarhaddon's ascent to the throne of Assyria had also been riddled with political and personal difficulties. Esarhaddon was not the first son of Sennacherib to be nominated crown prince. His brother Urdu-Mulissi had been in training for years to ascend to the throne of Assyria. However, in 683, Sennacherib changed his mind and nominated Esarhaddon. Frahm claims that this may have possibly occurred under the influence of Naqi'a²⁷⁸, however Svärd more recently has summed up the evidence and finds it lacking, thus concluding that there is not enough evidence either way for Naqi'a's meddling in Sennacherib's choice of crown prince.²⁷⁹ Urdu-Mulissi and his supporting faction did not support Sennacherib's new power configuration and lobbied for change. Sennacherib did not change his mind, and exiled Esarhaddon to the West for safety. Urdu-Mulissi and his supporters started a coup, and king Sennacherib was killed in a temple in Nineveh in 681.²⁸⁰ Prompted by signs that were auspicious, Esarhaddon returned to the Assyrian capital and was enthroned two months later. Esarhaddon proved immediately that he could lead a successful military campaign when he defeated his brothers following Sennacherib's murder. In this campaign, the superior force going against Esarhaddon submitted *en masse*. He did this from a position of moral superiority: he was the rightful heir to the throne. Nonetheless, the circumstance of his kingship was precarious.

²⁷⁷ See SAA XVI, especially letters 59–76, seven of which were written by an individual who never identifies himself and who does not use the usual salutary greeting.

²⁷⁸ Frahm 2017, 245

²⁷⁹ Svärd 2015, 54.

²⁸⁰ Frahm 2017, 245. See also Parpola 1980.

According to Esarhaddon, both his grandfather Sargon II and his father Sennacherib incited the wrath of the gods and their ends were rooted in divine punishment. Sargon II worshiped the Babylonian gods excessively, while his father did not put any emphasis on worship at all. Indeed, Esarhaddon's remedial action to avert the wrath of the gods was to strike a balance of power between the gods of Assyria and Babylonia, Aššur and Marduk. His policies in fact reflect this attempt at striking a balance of power: he rebuilt Babylon,²⁸¹ promoted the end of the neglect of the cult of Aššur,²⁸² and even possibly inscribed a stone-slab with the sins of his forefathers for the floor of the cella of the Aššur temple.²⁸³

Upon ascending to the throne, Esarhaddon had to demonstrate unprecedented military and intellectual prowess. To begin with, he had to keep in check an element of sedition among members of the court who had plotted against him during the civil war. We know of at least two officials involved in the conspiracy who had gone undetected for a few years. When factored in, this fear of sedition construed the trope of doubt running through the reign of Esarhaddon. Furthermore, in Babylonia, there remained pockets of resistance and if not checked, would threaten the influx of manpower, goods, and taxes, and could even weaken or disrupt trade. The rebellion of Nabû-zer-kitti-lišir (one of the sons of Marduk-apla-iddina II) is one case of the element of resistance to the reign of Esarhaddon from the south. This fear of rebellion was strengthened by the fact that Esarhaddon's brothers were still at large. This promoted a perceived weakness at the centre, and one which vassal regions in the

²⁸¹ Porter 1993.

²⁸² Novotny 2014.

²⁸³ Frahm 1999, 85–6.

Mediterranean and Asia Minor used in order to glean power for themselves; Esarhaddon had to intervene in these regions at very great costs.

There was also the issue of internecine strife. Since the last seven of Esarhaddon's children were male, there may have been external attempts at stripping them of their legitimacy, or perhaps an internal attempt to conspire against each other. That is why, in the Vassal Treaties enacted in 672 to settle the succession, Esarhaddon included a provision which stipulated that oath-takers support his young in case of his demise before they reached a suitable age to govern.²⁸⁴ The provision, Esarhaddon knew from his own experience, would not be enough. Esarhaddon therefore needed a person of trust.

Finally, there was the concern with Esarhaddon's own demise. Esarhaddon settled the succession eight years after his enthronement. Parpola notes that this may have been due to his awareness that he was unwell and that his time was running out.²⁸⁵

After 672, he became increasingly more and more ill, and Assurbanipal acted in 'joint-rule' LAS 247 r.13. quoted in LAS 2: 235-6 and which at times seems to have been the rule of the crown prince alone. It may be because of this need for a show of strength that Naqi'a position within the matrix of power was reengineered.

But how does the imperial machine, construed as it was on the very node of necropolitical, hegemonic masculinity, devise a way for a female body to be placed in such prominence? Would not placing Naqi'a in a position of power weaken the

²⁸⁴ SAA II, 6, 115–16. See Lauinger 2012 for copies that were found in Kalhu, Assur, and Tell Tayinat.

²⁸⁵ LAS II, 235 n. 399.

masculine image of the king? I argue here that the state devised a new construct, that of female masculinity, in order to legitimise the prominence given to Naqi'a.

3.2. Esarhaddon in the Textual Sources

In this section, I analyse aspects of the textual evidence for the construction of masculinity during the reign of Esarhaddon. The reign of Esarhaddon is attested very well both in the royal inscriptions as well as in the correspondence to and from the king. To begin with, an analysis of the royal inscriptions will be presented followed by a close reading of some of the letters relevant for this study.

3.2.1 Esarhaddon in the Royal Inscriptions

The authors of the royal inscriptions present Esarhaddon in a novel light from those who composed the inscriptions of Sennacherib. Liverani suggests that it may be erroneous to argue that Sennacherib is construed as a more 'lay' king than any other, but he does concede that Esarhaddon's inscriptions engineer a more heightened emphasis on the gods. Indeed, what Esarhaddon's inscriptions seem to suggest is a lessened emphasis on the agency of the king and an increased re-attribution of all the belligerent acts to the gods, namely Aššur in the case of Esarhaddon. Whether this re-attribution of necropolitical agency indicates a subordinate masculinity in the king remains to be seen. However, the formulaic theology of belligerent attribution to the gods does not remove Esarhaddon from the role of protagonist in his inscriptions, and he comes across as a very traditional king—a solitary hero who goes at it alone.

3.2.1.1. The Aesthetics of Necropolitical Masculinity in the Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon

If, as stated earlier, Neo-Assyrian kingship was primarily constructed and performed along the lines of necropolitical masculinity in its *longue durée*, then the royal inscriptions of King Esarhaddon continue this tradition without interruption. Perhaps the sole area of concern is the increased frequency with which every action needs to be legitimated and justified by the gods, and ultimately re-attributed to them, that points to a ripple of change in the inscriptions of Esarhaddon. Otherwise, in concurrence with the traditional royal image, Esarhaddon's inscriptions proceed with the Assyrian necropolitical masculinity centred on the aesthetics of aggression, primacy, domination, subjugation, and punishment of the enemy males in a contest for divine favour, land expansion, the fulfilment of the promise of the coronation ritual, and hegemony.

3.2.1.2. Tropes in the Aesthetics of Necropolitical Masculinity

Royal masculinity in the Neo-Assyrian period is constructed on the legitimation of violence through the logic of necropolitics. As in the earlier reign of Sennacherib, the royal inscriptions legitimate the use of the technologies of violence through divine appeal. The inscriptions follow a well-defined sequence: firstly, appeal to the gods is made through benedictions, supplications, and expressions of humility to legitimate the use of violence.

After that, the authors of the ideology of violence state the reasons to the (divine and mortal) audience that the male Other was worth dominating, namely, for

forsaking the gods and the Neo-Assyrian ruler's will, for spreading falsities, performing arrogant deeds, losing their minds out of greed for power, sedition or disrespect against the Assyrian ruler, not heeding to the king, and not fearing his lordship.

Having established that the life of the enemy is to be taken away, the inscriptions proceed to construct the aesthetics of necropolitics with the aid of the textual tropes discussed below in the analysis of sections of the royal inscriptions from the reign of Esarhaddon I.²⁸⁶

The following is an excerpt from the royal inscriptions of Esarhaddon found on numerous hexagonal clay prisms from Nineveh, Assur, and Susa. Esarhaddon 1: I 53-62 reads as follows:

*a-na-ku^{md} aš-šur-PAP-AŠ ša ina tu-kul-ti DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ EN.MEŠ-šú
ina qé-reb ta-ḥa-zi la i-né-e'-ú i-rat-su
ep-še-ti-šú-nu lem-né-e-ti ur-ru-ḥi-iš áš-me-e-ma
u₈-a aq-bi-ma šu-bat ru-bu-ti-ia ú-šar-riṭ-ma
ú-šá-aš-ri-ḥa si-pit-tu lab-biš an-na-dir-ma iṣ-ša-ri-iḥ ka-bat-ti
áš-šú e-peš LUGAL-u-ti É AD-ia ar-pi-sa rit-ti-ia
a-na^d aš-
šur^d 30^d UTU^d EN^d AG^d u^d U.GUR^d 15^d šá NINA.KI^d 15^d šá URU.LÍMMU-DINGIR
qa-ti áš-ši-ma im-gu-ru qí-bi-ti ina an-ni-šú-nu ke-nim
UZU ta-kil-ti iṣ-tap-pa-ru-nim-ma a-lik la ka-la-a-ta
i-da-a-ka ni-it-tal-lak-ma ni-na-a-ra ga-re-e-ka*

I, Esarhaddon, who with the help of the great gods, his lords, does not turn back in the heat of battle, quickly heard of their evil deeds. I said 'Woe!' and rent my princely garment. I cried out in mourning, I raged like a lion, and my mood became furious. In order to exercise kingship (over) the house of my father I beat my hands together. I prayed to the gods Aššur, Sîn,

²⁸⁶ RINAP 4, 11–26.

Šamaš, Bēl, Nabû, and Nergal, Ištar of Nineveh, (and) Ištar of Arbela, and they accepted my word(s). with their firm ‘yes,’ they were sending me reliable omen(s), (saying): ‘Go! Do not hold back! We will go and kill your enemies.’²⁸⁷

In Esarhaddon 1: I 53–62, Esarhaddon brings into focus the use of royal dress as a prosthetic of masculine heroic courage. Upon hearing of his brothers’ attempt at usurping the throne following the murder of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon starts for Nineveh to confront them in battle. The powerful image created in Esarhaddon 1: i 53–62 continues the performative construction of masculinity through a symbiotic relationship with lions; Esarhaddon emits a loud mourning cry and rages like a lion, and finally charges with fury while beating his hands together. Yet this heroic masculinity is always already undermined by its subordination to a higher order. Indeed, Esarhaddon charges against his brothers only when the omens become favourable.

The inscription then continues to construct the trope in Esarhaddon I: i 63–73, presenting the sovereign as a necropolitical and hegemonic male whose martial virility undoes the valour of the enemy and makes them scream like women.

*1-en u₄-me 2 u₄-me ul uq-qí pa-an ERIM.ḪI.A-ia ul ad-gul
ar-ka-a ul a-mur pi-qit-ti ANŠE.KUR.RA.MEŠ ši-mit-ti GIŠ.ŠUDUN
ù ú-nu-ut MÈ-ia ul a-šu-ur ši-di-it ger-ri-ia ul áš-pu-uk
šal-gu ku-uš-šu ITI.ZÍZ dan-na-at EN.TE.NA ul a-dur
ki-ma u₅-rí-in-ni mu-up-pa-ar-ši
a-na sa-kap za-’i-ri-ia ap-ta-a i-da-a-a
ḫar-ra-an NINA.KI pa-áš-qí-iš u ur-ru-ḫiš ar-de-e-ma*

²⁸⁷ RINAP 4, 12.

*el-la-mu-u-a ina KI-tim KUR.ḫal-ni-gal-bat gi-mir qu-ra-di-šú-un MAḪ.MEŠ
pa-an ger-ri-ia šab-tu-ma ú-šá-'a-lu GIŠ.TUKUL.MEŠ-šú-un
pu-luḫ-ti DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ EN.MEŠ-ia is-ḫup-šú-nu-ti-ma
ti-ib MÈ-ia dan-ni e-mu-ru-ma e-mu-ú maḫ-ḫu-tiš*

I did not hesitate one day (or) two days. I did not wait for my army. I did not look for my rear guard. I did not check the assignment of horses harnessed to The yoke nor that of my battle equipment. I did not stock up travel provisions for my campaign. I was not afraid of the snow (and) cold of Šābaṭu, the severest cold season. Like a flying eagle I spread my wings to drive back my enemies. With difficulty and haste, I followed the road to Nineveh and before my (arrival) in the territory of the land of Ḫanigalbat all of their crack troops blocked my advance; they were sharpening their weapons. Fear of the great gods, my lords, overwhelmed them, (and when) they saw my mighty battle array, they became like crazed women.²⁸⁸

Here is the solitary hero, not in a homosocial military contest, but rather one who is impatient to get to the objective. He leaves for Nineveh without his troops, his horses, his provisions, and his weapons and endures the harshest of winter cold and snow with the charge to fight. His charge is described as difficult, and the animal metaphor so frequent in the Assyrian royal inscriptions here draws a parallel between the king and a flying eagle. Like the leonine metaphor discussed in Chapter 4, the metaphor of the eagle is another means through which the construct of masculinity is achieved. Finally, before entering Ḫanigalbat, the brothers' crack troops attempted to

²⁸⁸ RINAP 4, 13.

stop Esarhaddon's advance but his masculine prosthetics (the battle array)

emasculated the enemy other and 'became like crazed women':

tīb tāhāziya danni ēmurūma emû mahhūtiš

when they saw my strong battle attack, they became like female ecstasies
(my translation).

The king also imposes punishment on enemy males.²⁸⁹ He seeks out the guilty parties and kills their offspring, thus interrupting one of the prerogatives of masculinity in the ancient Near East, that is to leave traces of continuity through fathering children. (Esarhaddon 1: ii 5–11).

Nabû-zēr-kitti-līšir (son of Marduk-apla-iddina II) demonstrated sedition towards Esarhaddon and lack of respect for his rule. The Assyrian king becomes inflamed and advances his army towards him. Nabû-zēr-kitti-līšir's cowardice becomes a trope of failed masculinity that employs a contrasting animal metaphor to the king's eagle with spread wings. He is likened to a fox fleeing to Elam for refuge but was chased and killed with the sword. Abdi-Milkūti of Sidon too fails to please Esarhaddon; the former flees but is caught like a fish from the midst of the sea.

A vigorous Assyrian punishment towards enemy males is beheading.²⁹⁰ This is the extreme end of the Assyrian punishment of the Other and the aesthetics of necropolitical masculinity. Esarhaddon 1 sees the Neo-Assyrian monarch eliminating the enemy males in their totality with the removal of the locus of their identity—the head—or rather, that which represents the very focus of personhood and singularity,

²⁸⁹ Indeed, for Neo-Assyrian royal masculinity to be performed effectively, women are never the recipients of the necropolitical techniques of violence.

²⁹⁰ See, most recently, Dolce 2018 for an in-depth study of decapitation in the ancient Near East.

and that which becomes proof of the overcoming of the Other. In defining royal masculinity as the aesthetics of violence over other men, Esarhaddon boasts about the event in iii 32–iii 38:

ina ITU.DU₆ SAG.DU ^m*ab-di-mil-ku-ut-ti*
ina ITI.ŠE SAG.DU ^m*sa-an-du-ar-ri*
ina 1-et MU.AN.NA *ú-nak-ki-is-ma*
maḥ-ru-ú la ú-ḫi-ir-ma ú-šaḫ-mì-ša EGIR-ú
áš-šú da-na-an ^d*aš-šur* EN-ia UN.MEŠ *kul-lu-mì-im-ma*
ina ki-šá-di LÚ.GAL.MEŠ-*šu-un a-lul-ma it-ti* LÚ.NAR
ù GIŠ.ZÀ.MÍ ina re-bet NINA.KI *e-te-et-ti-iq.*²⁹¹

In Tašrītu, I beheaded Abdi-Milkūti.
In Addaru I beheaded Sandauarri!”
I beheaded both of them in the same year.
With the former I did not take long, with the latter
I was also quick. To show the people the might of the god Aššur, my lord,
I hung the heads around the necks of their nobles and
I paraded in the squares of Nineveh with singer(s) and lyre(s). (my translation)

The royal inscriptions here place emphasis on the speed with which the beheadings are carried out, but also on the element of display of triumph so important to the performance of violent, necropolitical masculinity. It is not just the giving of death (here by beheading) but it is also by displaying the object of desire in public. The heads of the failed males are hung around the heads of their nobles and paraded in the public squares of Nineveh to musical accompaniment in a celebration of hypermasculine shaming of the enemy.

²⁹¹ RINAP 4, 17.

Another trope of the failed masculinity of the enemy male king is performed on Asuḫīli of Arzâ (a district in the brook of Egypt). Esarhaddon claims to have chained, bound, and displayed him near the citadel gate along with bears, dogs, and pigs.²⁹²

Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions do not construct necropolitical masculinity solely on the basis of the taking away of life; the authors of the inscriptions also emphasise the sovereign's pity on the failed males who of their own volition regret their disloyalty to him and make amends. Esarhaddon 1: iii 78–79 mentions a Gambulian named Bēl-iqīša who prostrated himself in front of Esarhaddon, kissed his feet, and presented a tribute and payment.²⁹³ When subordinate men embrace their subordination of their own will, the Assyrian king extends pity and encouragement towards them, and strengthens their position vis-à-vis their enemies.

A similar case pertains to king Hazael of the Arabs who subordinates himself to Esarhaddon for the return of his gods. Esarhaddon, pitying Hazael, did indeed return the gods, however, with an Assyrian inscription mentioning Assur and Esarhaddon himself as a reminder of the Assyria's, and the king's own, supremacy.²⁹⁴

3.2.2. Esarhaddon and Women in the State Archives of Assyria

In the correspondence, Esarhaddon emerges in an altogether different light; despite the political and military achievements, Esarhaddon was deeply unhappy. The image of Esarhaddon that emerges from the rest of the archive is that of a man who was

²⁹² RINAP 4, 18–19 = Prism Nineveh A iii 39–42.

²⁹³ RINAP 4, 18–19.

²⁹⁴ Esarhaddon 1, iv 5–14 = RINAP 4, 19.

weighed down by issues of distrust. It is in light of this that we see the emergence of a nexus of female power in this reign, unprecedented in the Neo-Assyrian period.

Esarhaddon's rise to power unfolded in a climate of doom. The patricide of his father Sennacherib by two of his sons resulted in a climate of distrust within the nexus of Assyrian male power elites. In order to safeguard the state against any coup d'état, Esarhaddon replaced most of the officials in the country and may have ordered the killing of his security staff as well as the court eunuchs.²⁹⁵

This climate of distrust may have urged Esarhaddon to resort to an increase in oracular queries to establish if any of his male relatives wished him harm.²⁹⁶ It is in this context that power becomes reconfigured along gendered lines in the reign of Esarhaddon. Radner concludes that it is because of this climate of suspicion that Esarhaddon shifts the focus of elite power from the domain of male-based homosociality to the female realm.²⁹⁷ In fact, this period sees the unprecedented rise of a triad of women who are "able to wield an amount of influence that has few parallels in ancient Near Eastern history".²⁹⁸

In *Female Masculinity*, Jack Halberstam notes that what "we understand as heroic masculinity has been produced by and across both male and female bodies" arguing that the naturalised and inextricable tie between masculinity and maleness is part of the covert ideology of masculinity to divert attention from alternative masculinities emerging from less power-and-domination-based subjectivities.²⁹⁹ For

²⁹⁵ Radner, 2003, 167.

²⁹⁶ Radner 2003, 167.

²⁹⁷ Radner 2003, 168.

²⁹⁸ Radner 2003, 168.

²⁹⁹ Halberstam 1998, 2.

Halberstam, therefore, male masculinity works merely as a hermeneutic, present only in so far as it informs the construction of masculinity vis-à-vis other bodies. It is only by looking at the other nodes where masculinity becomes marked that we can see the work of gender instigating social change. For the present case, the masculinity that is ideologically driven by the state to become an expression of power and dominance as well as an expression of legitimate rule finds its expression in the emergence of a masculine position of power, privilege, and representation occupied by a body that is non-male. Like Sammu-ramat before her, Naqi'a role in the functions of the state emerge from a position of masculinity. However, rather than emerging from a position of masculine agency tied to the naturalised bond between masculinity and maleness, it is the needs of the state and of sovereignty that allow the dynamic shift in the movement of masculinity across different bodies.³⁰⁰ For the reign of Esarhaddon, therefore, the ecosystem of vigilance shifted the position of male-centred masculine homosociality to a masculine sociality that occupies different somatic positions. In addition, rather than calling Esarhaddon a feminist king (as Reade did for Sennacherib), I argue that Esarhaddon's precarious political ecosystem drove the shift towards a re-engineering of gendered power and representation. It is in light of this that I make sense of the emergence of female-bodies in newly formed positions of power.

³⁰⁰ See, especially, Svärd 2015, 81–85 for an argument on the ideological reconfiguration of Naqi'a role in power and politics with evidence from the textual sources. Note, especially, Svärd's treatment of the term *bēlu* (lord!) to refer to high-ranking women.

3.2.2.1. Naqi'a

Naqi'a's importance to her son Esarhaddon emerges unequivocally.³⁰¹ Svärd presents the data sets very clearly, pointing to the centrality given to her by the king, citing the role of queen after the death of Ešarra-hammat in 673.³⁰² Svärd argues that the numerous references to her are suggestive of relative hierarchical power within the realm.³⁰³ Finally, a remarkable bronze plaque portrays Naqi'a's participation in a religious ritual with her son Esarhaddon (fig. 31).³⁰⁴ In light of the evidence compiled by Svärd, she concludes that the role played by Naqi'a in the reign of Esarhaddon was that of a 'proxy' to her son, and the range of activities she was involved in are those usually within the purview of the king himself.³⁰⁵ According to Svärd, however, the most incontrovertible evidence of the influence attained by Naqi'a in the reign of her son Esarhaddon occurs in SAA XVI, 2. This is the only extant piece of direct correspondence between the Assyrian king and his mother, and one in which the king has acted out on the advice of the mother.³⁰⁶ Although Melville sees this letter as evidence of the inability of female elite personnel to exhibit direct power over the subjects, Svärd

³⁰¹ Svärd 2015, 52–54 rightly refrains from speculating on the role Naqi'a played in the accession of Esarhaddon to the throne in light of absence of evidence; she prefers to highlight, instead, Naqi'a proxy relationship to her son. Radner, however, cites the prophecy to Naqi'a bearing the encouraging words of Ishtar of Arbela during the exile of Esarhaddon. See Radner 2003, 168. Like Svärd, I agree this remains purely speculative.

³⁰² Svärd 2015, 54.

³⁰³ See Svärd 2015, especially 52 where she cites evidence to numerous references to her declining health, her security detail, her role in cultic duties, and newly attested oracular and prophetic messages. Svärd also argues that the image of the queen in an abundance of jewellery at Nineveh and Harran as well as the correspondence with exorcists who express humility towards her may point to her relative hegemonic status within the imperial apparatus.

³⁰⁴ Svärd 2015, 54–55.

³⁰⁵ Svärd 2015, 23, 55.

³⁰⁶ Svärd 2015, 56.

counters this by arguing that power is not only hierarchical but also heterarchical, and that Naqi'a is an active agent in power relations.³⁰⁷

Another aspect which feeds into the construction of masculinity wielded by a female in the elite structures of the state is the building inscription of Naqi'a (RINAP 4, 2003, 2004). Building is a theme of masculinity, and the image of the king as builder is a very old and traditional one. Melville argues that the inscription reveals a woman in the shadow of her male son, and that in a sense, it throws shade on the notion of power wielded by woman in the top ranks of the state. She supports her argument by stating that the image of the queen is always present in conjunction with that of the king. Svärd however disagrees with this facile reading, and sees that joint-venture of king and queen in a building project as an empowerment of Naqi'a and her access to the remits of kingship.³⁰⁸ Indeed, the project brings the mother of the king into the domain of masculine power, otherwise normally the remit and prerogative of males. I argue that the very occurrence of a stele whose authorship is assigned to a female and whose content recounts activities otherwise carried out only by males *strictu sensu*, and that it occurs on a stele that publicly exhibits the name of Naqi'a, is in itself a reconfiguration of the role of Naqi'a in this period, and that Esarhaddon had totally broken with the seclusion of the female name from the domain of public access. However, it is in order to keep in mind that the gendered performance of the text is itself masculine, and therefore the image of the mother of the king wielding a masculine power and performing masculinity through active (direct or indirect) policy-

³⁰⁷ Svärd 2015, 56.

³⁰⁸ Svärd 2015, 57.

making may not have been a total taboo in the period. Whether the wife of the king could have done the same remains at issue.

Furthermore, Naqi'a's role in Babylon continues to reveal the extent to which she occupied a position usually reserved to the hegemonic male at the height of power in state affairs. Letters SAA XVIII, 10 and SAA XVIII, 85, cited most recently by Svärd, attest to the direct military involvement of Naqi'a. Contra Melville, Svärd agrees with Dietrich and concludes that SAA XVI, 85 indeed refers to the request sent to Naqi'a to send troops to Babylon.³⁰⁹ Naqi'a is again actively engaged in activities that are exclusive to kingship.

In the Zakutu treaty SAA II, 8, discussed at length by Melville³¹⁰ and more recently by Svärd,³¹¹ the queen aims to secure the loyalty of the subjects towards Assurbanipal. Naqi'a quite literally occupies the position of the king and this is the only loyalty pact issued by anyone other than the king.³¹²

In sum, Naqi'a's role in the state affairs has been seen by Melville as that of a puppet in the strategic hands of Esarhaddon whose distrust in the male elite of the palace isolated him from their sphere and shifted his alliance to a female whose support he rallied for. Melville sees Naqi'a also as a devoted mother and grandmother, whose family loyalties ensured that she would actively and publicly seek to lobby for their legitimacy. On the other hand, Naqi'a has also been reconstructed as a manipulative and power-grabbing queen who stepped in to attain her own hegemonic position in the running of the state where her husband and her son showed signs of

³⁰⁹ Svärd 2015, 58.

³¹⁰ Melville 1999, 79–90.

³¹¹ Svärd 2015, 58.

³¹² Svärd 2015, 58 argues that this position of power had already been attained by Sammu-ramat.

weakness. A third, more balanced view has been recently presented by Svärd, whose theoretical underpinnings problematise the one-dimensional view of power. I argue that both views perpetuate the construct of the binary womanhood as either a puppet victim or a vixen right into the scholarship within Assyriology. As a way out of this binary construction of women in the domain of power and influence, Svärd seeks to construct Naqi'a from a balanced view of the sources which results in the image of a female actively engaged in heterarchical networks of power and as an 'active party in a mutually beneficial negotiated power relationship'.³¹³

But what of the legitimacy of this female masculinity in the Neo-Assyrian reign of Esarhaddon? Melville and Ben-Barak that Naqi'a could not have any legitimate expression of power on her own if she so required. The former argues that Naqi'a power was a construct of Esarhaddon who sought to attain loyalty (this making sense in light of the climate of suspicion, paranoia, and distrust). The latter, on the other hand, sees Esarhaddon as a weakling who became a puppet to a scheming mother.³¹⁴ Svärd, however, argues that it seems too idealistic to portray power as emanating from the sole node of the king since other sources of power and its legitimacy could be evidenced, namely financial or ideological power.³¹⁵ In addition, Naqi'a may have been performing the expected role of the queen in the Neo-Assyrian period as her actions do not differ to any great extent from that of other females in this position.³¹⁶ Svärd takes issue with Melville's understanding of Naqi'a role as one of symbolic power, and uses the data arsenal to argue that Naqi'a power was real and to theoretically

³¹³ Svärd 2015, 59.

³¹⁴ See in Svärd 2015, 59.

³¹⁵ Svärd 2015, 59.

³¹⁶ Svärd 2015, 59.

conclude that power is not merely the purview of an “autonomous individual who is part of a hierarchical administration system”.³¹⁷ In arguing for a more balanced view of power, namely that which governs a more interdependent network around the figure of the sovereign, Svärd concludes that Naqi’a role was much more similar to that of the king than has otherwise been admitted.³¹⁸ In light of the evidence amassed by Melville and Svärd, and in view of the image of Naqi’a as the result of the gendered nature of Assyriology itself, that of the mother manipulated by a son who embodies the hypermasculinity of the Assyrian state into fulfilling state functions which materialise the long-term political objectives of imperial expansionism, or the manipulative mother whose role in statecraft was devised in order to place her at the top tier of the power hierarchy. This way of constructing the image of a female in ancient history seems perhaps too driven by the binary constructs that govern the way women have been historically construed as either weak and subordinate to the male prerogatives of power or as power-crazed opportunists who mimic the voracity of masculinity. Svärd’s theoretical framework, however, seeks to be more data-driven, and opens up the possibility that power was more suffused than previously thought, rather than a one-dimensional and top-down vertical chain of command and influence. Be that as it may, the power matrix that Naqi’a occupied was one otherwise reserved for the male hegemon of the state par excellence, and that whether created by the needs of the king whose distrust of his state apparatus required a re-engineering of the gendered-nature of power in Assyria, or whether it was devised by Naqi’a herself to redefine the womanhood at the intersection of masculine power, or even whether

³¹⁷ Svärd 2015, 59.

³¹⁸ Svärd 2015, 59.

it is the traditional role of the king's mother and the nature of power itself that placed Naqi'a in a position otherwise exclusively performed by the male body of the sovereign, what can be said for certain is that the place of sovereignty itself is not impervious to bodies other than those that are male-born. In the traditional understanding of the remit of rule with Assyriology, royal women were understood in terms of harem and segregation and it is refreshing to see that recent scholarship is throwing light on their real (or symbolic) roles within state administrative systems. However, we need to bear in mind that the position of power occupied by the Naqi'a is always already a phallogocentric one, that is, one always already masculine. Rather than female power, I would call her positionality and performance one of female masculinity, that is, a female body occupying the masculinist position of power and privilege. It is perhaps that fact that Naqi'a was the mother of Esarhaddon that could make the occupation of this masculine position a possibility, and I wonder if the extent of her kingly activities would have been possible if she had been the wife and not the mother of the king.

3.2.2.2. Ešarra-ḫammat

The second female in the nexus of power during the reign of Esarhaddon is Ešarra-ḫammat. Radner's claim that Ešarra-ḫammat's power was evident even outside the life of the palace is quite striking. All references to her are posthumous.³¹⁹ In fact, Radner cites two contemporary Babylonian chronicle texts (85: Chronicle 1: iv 22, and 127:

³¹⁹ See RINAP 4 2001, an eye-stone with her name inscribed.

Chronicle 14: 23) which mention the queen's death in 673.³²⁰ Esarhaddon may have had a mausoleum built for Ešarra-ḫammat, and to have issued funerary rituals in her honour. Her funerary rites in SAA XX 34 consist of two sections: the former part explains the day of the vigil while the latter the day the pyre was to take place.³²¹ Svärd³²² agrees that the rarity of textual occurrences referring to MÍ.É.GAL after the passing away of Ešarra-ḫammat strongly suggest that Esarhaddon did not remarry, again a controversial aspect of the masculinity of this king in light of his predecessors (perhaps also indicating the strongly emotional ties of the king). Indeed, as Svärd concludes, it was Naqi'a who took over the title of MÍ.É.GAL after the death of Ešarra-ḫammat.³²³

That Esarhaddon had a mausoleum erected in her honor, however, remains entirely circumstantial; as does the evidence to show that Ešarra-ḫammat was Assurbanipal's mother. Elnathan Weissert argues that the reference to the mausoleum of Assurbanipal can only have referred to the mausoleum of Ešarra-ḫammat since it seems unlikely that he was set to tend his own.³²⁴ Svärd, on the other hand, most recently brought together all the references to the mother of Assurbanipal and evaluated them in light of the hypothesis that Ešarra-ḫammat may have been indeed his mother. Her conclusions favour this hypothesis, with the further claim that the

³²⁰ Radner 2003, 168. Chronicle 1: iv 22 states that she died on the fifth day of Adar while 14, 23 states it was the sixth day of the same month.

³²¹ See Svärd 2015, 45 and references.

³²² Svärd 2015, 46.

³²³ Svärd 2015, 46.

³²⁴ See Weissert in PNA 1/I, 160-161. Weissert works from the obverse of a tablet published from an excavation photograph in Weidner [1939-41] 213-216, pl. xiv (see especially pp. 325).

mother of the king in question in the letters is Naqi'a in her role as protector of the crown prince in the absence of his mother.³²⁵

3.2.2.3. Šeru'a-eṭirat

Šeru'a-eṭirat was the daughter of Esarhaddon, and her prominent role in palace affairs is stunningly highlighted in this period. Firstly, in SAA XVI 28, Šeru'a-eṭirat writes to the wife of the crown prince Assurbanipal, Libbali-šarrat, encouraging her to further learning by practicing her tablet writing. Šeru'a-eṭirat stresses her relatively higher rank by adding the full name of her father and his chain of titularies whereas for Libbali-šarrat the short version.³²⁶ The pomp and power play in the letter makes it a covert command rather than a friendly advice, and seems to hint at the manner in which Šeru'a-eṭirat regarded the perhaps novel attribute of value at court: scholarly abilities.³²⁷

Furthermore, SAA VII 154 and SAA XIII 56 reveal that Šeru'a-eṭirat may have even outranked some of her brothers at court. The minimalist view taken by Melville suggests that rather than rank, the lists present the members in order of birth.³²⁸ Svärd, however, rejects this minimalist interpretation and argues that lists often present hierarchical power chains rather than order of birth, implying, therefore, that

³²⁵ The letters referring to the mother of Assurbanipal are as follows: SAA XX 188; SAA VI 325; SAA XIII 89, 101, and 108. For the most recent evaluation of these letters in the discussion on the mother of Assurbanipal, see Svärd 2015, 46-47.

³²⁶ See Svärd 2015, 88. See further, Brinkman in PNA 1/I, 184.

³²⁷ Livingstone seems to think that there was no hostility between the two women in this piece of correspondence. See Livingstone 2007, 103-105. It may not be a question of hostility. However, the outranking is evident.

³²⁸ Melville 2004, 42.

in terms of relative social standing, Šeru'a-eṭirat ranked immediately behind the crown princes but higher than the other male progeny of the king.³²⁹

The far-reaching influence of Šeru'a-eṭirat becomes evident in the civil war between her brothers, the kings of Assyria and Babylonia as evidenced in the Aramaic *Papyrus Amherst* 63 xvii 5- xxii 9 but totally outside the scope of this work.

Svärd takes issue with Melville's idea that women were complicit in the construction of masculinity. She states that it is not incorrect, but it is a narrow understanding of their role.

Be that as it may, we need to bear in mind that what we have here are representations of both masculinity and the role of women. These official monuments as well as the letters of statecraft may throw some light on the functions of male and female bodies in the state apparatus, but kingship remains a masculine affair, irrespective of who or what buttresses the power at that node. In this sense, Melville's viewpoint is agreeable. However, with Svärd, we need to see how in certain reigns, these viewpoints were challenged and how previously unattested roles become prominent. In the case of Esarhaddon, for example, we see the emergence of the need to broaden the diffusion of the image of the women in the state apparatus (they may not be doing anything outside the traditional remit of their role) but there are on the receiving end of bigger diffusion policy. The fact that there is the emergence of a tension between the the all-male image of the state, and the newly configured state

³²⁹ Svärd 2013, 89. Weidner 1939–1941, 213–216 seems to be at odds with these lists in that it presents the daughter of the king as foremost of the female born but after all the male progeny. The nature of this text needs further investigation. For the continuity of name of Šeru'a-eṭirat, see Svärd 2015, 89-90 as it appears in a third century text written in Aramaic (Demotic script). The text concerns the civil war involving her two brothers.

with women on the side of public representation, diffusion, and centrality would certainly have been seen as a change in the tradition of kingship. For starters, agents of the state would have had to reconsider their strategies of approach and communication with the mother of king the having a more central role.

3.2.3. Esarhaddon: Disability and Grief in the State Archives of Assyria

In 673, Esarhaddon suffered the loss of his wife Ešarra-hammat, and shortly thereafter their son. Adad-šumu-usur's letter to Esarhaddon is a reply to the expression of grief that the king had written to the royal exorcist who was especially responsible for the well-being of the royal family and the ritual of the substitute king.³³⁰ The king's suffering is evident in the following lines:

𐎶 𐎶𐎵𐎶 LUGAL be-lí iš-pur-an-𐎶 ni𐎶
 𐎶 ma𐎶 -a ŠÀ-bi ma-ri-iš a—dan-niš
 ša ina še-ḫe-ri-ia an-ni-𐎶 e𐎶
 ŠÀ-bi iš-pil-u-ni a-𐎶 ke-e𐎶
 né-pu-uš lu-ú ša pa-ṭa-a-𐎶 ri𐎶
 ši-i mi-šil ma-ti-i-ka
 lu-ú ta-din lu tap-ṭu-ra-áš-ši
 mi-i-nu né-pu-uš LUGAL be-lí
 dul-lu ša a-na e-pa-a-še

As to what the king, my lord, wrote to
 Me: “I am feeling very sad; how did we act
 that I have become so depressed for this little
 one of mine?” – had it been curable, you
 would have given away half of your kingdom
 to have it cured. But what can we do? O king
 my lord, it is something that cannot be done.³³¹

³³⁰ Adad-šumu-usur was the royal exorcist for Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal and by far the most prolific of letter writers from Nineveh and hailing from an important family of scribes as can be seen from the colophon of a tablet of the *šumma alu* series. In the reign of Assurbanipal, his career waned as can be seen by the appeals to the king to keep him in business. See PNA/A 38–40.

³³¹ SAA X 187, 6–15.

Other letters by the same author are equally important at throwing light on the general well-being of Esarhaddon. Adad-šumu-usur instructs the king that staying in the dark longer than is necessary, restlessness, not eating, and not drinking “disturbs the mind and *adds to illness*.”³³² Esarhaddon is advised to eat bread and drink wine.³³³

But Esarhaddon’s physical ailments were so severe that he had to retreat to his quarters for days on end: “he vomited a *lump*, (with) the bile *settling* downward; this sort of it does not portend good.”³³⁴ In light of the novel trope in royal correspondence insisting that the king is the very image and likeness of god, such reports from the chief physician may have been very disconcerting among palace officials, scholars, and the subject population.³³⁵ Surely, news of the king’s illness and disfiguring disability was a ‘dangerous propaganda tool’ in the hands of his enemies.³³⁶

Parpola was the first Assyriologist to systematically present the numerous texts that make reference to Esarhaddon’s ‘bodily and mental troubles’.³³⁷ Parpola identifies the following symptoms in the Esarhaddon archive: imbalance, fever, feebleness, loss of appetite, aticular stiffness, vision troubles, cutaneous eruption (blisters), chills, and earache. The evidence suggests that the disease was chronic, with acute fits at regular intervals, latent between acute periods (Esarhaddon was on military campaign in 671

³³² SAA X 196, 14–9.

³³³ SAA X 196, 10–13.

³³⁴ SAA X 217, 12–15.

³³⁵ SAA X 207.

³³⁶ Melville 1999, 35.

³³⁷ LAS II, 229–238. **Letters:** LAS 51 (Balasî and Nabû-ahhê-erîba); 130, 133, 143, 159 (Adad-šumu-usur); 180–183 (Marduk-šākin-šumi); 246–248, 253–257 (Urad-Nanâ); 258 (Ikkāru) **Reports:** LAS 322; RMA 257 (Ištar-šumu-ēreš). **Haruspex Queries:** AGS 99–100 **Chronicles:** Grayson TCS 5, 87, entry for Esarhaddon’s 11th year (669 BC).

and 669).³³⁸ Finally, Esarhaddon succumbed to the disease in Arahsamna in 669 in the course of his campaign to Egypt. Excessive heat, drafts, and physical strain worsened the condition. Esarhaddon had been treated with lotions and poultices to relieve the fever and salves to protect the skin. He had also been told to rest and to follow a dietary regime. Other remedies were of a magical nature.

Parpola was aware of working under the assumptions that the symptoms were being treated as originating of the same disease, and that the sources revealed all the symptoms and that no significant symptoms remained in the dark, with the peripheral symptoms becoming central. The resultant retrospective diagnosis points systemic 'lupus erythematosus' (*lupus erythematosus disseminatus*). Interestingly, Parpola suggests that lupus may have been the trigger for 'certain disrupted features in his personality and life'.³³⁹

Esarhaddon's attitude towards astrology and magic may indeed point to a high degree of superstition in the monarch; indeed, as Radner notes, there are more letters and reports dealing with astrology and magic dating to his period than to the other reigns put together.³⁴⁰

Finally, and in order to highlight the singularity of Esarhaddon's disability as ruler, Parpola draws parallels between Esarhaddon's and Sargon II's archive. Sargon II, whose extensive epistolographic evidence remains until today silent on matters related to his health, seems to have enjoyed good health to the point of hubris. Based

³³⁸ RMA 257 r7 reveals the chronic nature of the disease. 672 BC, a year before the campaign, he was *im-da-na-ra-as*. Also, LAS II: 246 the king **keeps** saying, LAS II, 258:15ff fever of the eyes and ears harassing the king in his last years, and LAS 180, 183, 246 had already troubled him before. The affliction exacerbated as the years advanced.

³³⁹ LAS II, 232–235.

³⁴⁰ Radner 2003, 169.

on this dearth of evidence concerning any ailment afflicting Sargon II, Parpola concludes that 'there is nothing in the life of that man (Sargon II) suggesting any particular interest in transcendental matters, leaving aside, that is, the tradition-bound pious formulae met in his inscriptions.³⁴¹ Indeed, Sargon II emerges from the evidence as ruler who came to the throne in his fifties and whose concern with military and administrative matters point to a ruler whose health must have been paramount.³⁴²

The Assyrians saw disease as divine punishment, as gods lacking goodwill towards the king. Radner suggests that this affliction had to be hidden from the people, and given the difficult access to the king (Adad-šumu-ušur writes often about auspicious days when the crown princes could go and see the king), this must have been fairly easy to arrange.³⁴³ Radner suggests that the ritual of the substitute king was enacted with frequency in order to alleviate the burdens of kingship from Esarhaddon.³⁴⁴ Esarhaddon performed this ritual at least four times, a frequency which was unprecedented. Evidence suggests that in 671, eleven days after the victory of the Egyptian campaign, the Chief Eunuch Aššur-Nasir continued the campaign, and the king went into hiding. He seems to have done so twice more in the following two years. The choice of a political opponent may have been a practical solution to a nagging problem.

Esarhaddon's sense of insecurity was further heightened when in 670 when, according to the *Babylonian Chronicles* for 670, in Harran, North Syria, a woman prophesied that the words of the light god Nusku claims that kingship belongs to Sasi

³⁴¹ LAS II, 235.

³⁴² LAS II, 235.

³⁴³ Radner 2003, 169–170.

³⁴⁴ Radner 2015, 51.

and that the seed of Sennacherib would be destroyed. Radner makes the connection between Esarhaddon's favouring of the moon god Sin and his skin condition based on the belief that Sin's vengeance was a curse on the skin which rendered the victim a social outcast.³⁴⁵

Disability is not a purely medical phenomenon; it is also a social, cultural and political construction. When physical traits become non-normative from a 'medical' perspective and there is structural 'discrimination' against the person with the disability, illness and disability no longer remain static in medical discourse only, but they are woven into the social fabric.³⁴⁶

Recently, a spate of methodological approaches, perspectives and theories have informed many investigations of the social construction of 'bodily differences' and their meaning in religious, political, cultural, and social contexts.³⁴⁷ For instance, the medical model, emerging as it did before the rise of disability studies in the 1980s, maps deviations from the norm, listing impairments or making retrospective diagnoses. This approach has been employed by Assyriologists for the case of Esarhaddon since the early years of the twentieth Century. Among the earliest scholarship of Esarhaddon's illness, Meissner's *Babylonien und Assyrien II* (1925) retrospectively ascribes Esarhaddon's ailments to rheumatism. Later in the century, Thorwald's *Macht und Geheimnis* (1967) links the symptoms to chronic rheumatism.³⁴⁸ Thorwald's credibility on the matter came from his medical background. More recently, however, Parpola has objected to Meissner's diagnosis, claiming that the

³⁴⁵ Radner 2003, 171.

³⁴⁶ Peckruhn 2014, 102.

³⁴⁷ Peckruhn 2014, 102.

³⁴⁸ See in LAS II, 230.

latter was working on the erroneous translation of *sakikkû* (symptom) to mean rheumatism.³⁴⁹ The assumption here is that it is possible to ‘identify conditions described in ancient texts with modern medical categories’. What this stance ignores, however, is the notion that different cultural values attached to certain conditions.

The moral and religious model frequently deployed by Assyriologists above is rooted in the understanding of disability as divine punishment or reward, curse or blessing, showing that disability is never perceived or engaged in an impartial manner or as a neutral category. The social and cultural model, on the other hand, sees non-normative bodies as categories to be understood through the distinction between physical impairment and social discrimination. At issue here are the cultural processes that take the ‘normal’ body as ideal and stigmatises what is not ideal embodiment.

Lennard J. Davis argues that the construction of normalcy (that is, a normative body) is what constructs disability.³⁵⁰ It is in this sense that we can understand Foucault’s proposed concept of the anatomico-clinical gaze (the medical gaze, or that which constructs the non-normative body through the extraneous discourse of biomedical regimes that create a norm), already possible to notice in the correspondence between the chief physician and the Neo-Assyrian king.³⁵¹ The medical gaze may be defined as the process by which illness is mapped out, defined, measured, named, classified, anatomised, as well as the circumstances in which the disease is constructed as something ‘other’ than, but ‘part of’ the normative. The healthy and

³⁴⁹ LAS II, 230.

³⁵⁰ Davis 1995, 15

³⁵¹ Foucault 1998, especially 107–131.

the normative are then included in the construction of normative identity, and healthy norms become implicit in the ideological narrative of kingship.

What emerges from this, therefore, is that in cases of disability, the person is first seen as disabled and not as a man, thus losing the culturally valued norms of masculinity. As Connell stresses, disability is always placed at the opposite end of agency, and places emphasis on the experiences and perceptions of the physical male body rather than the intersection of cognitive disability and masculinity.³⁵²

Yet the situation may be more nuanced than the monolithic binary between able and disabled male bodies. Creangă argues that hegemonic masculinity is the exultation of intellectual and physical characteristics to an ideal and hardly attainable level.³⁵³ This, however, does not always exclude disabled men from the schema and cast them along women, homosexuals, and children; disabled men may continue to occupy a hegemonic or complicit standard which continues to reinforce, and glean dividend from, the hegemonic standard. It may even be the case that a marginal position may still yield power over others. In fact, the retention of real power by disabled men can be seen in the way disabled men are described.³⁵⁴

3.3. Esarhaddon in the Visual Sources

The visual sources relevant for the study of the construction of royal masculinity during his reign are very limited. It seems from the excavations carried out by Layard

³⁵² Connell 1995, 54–55; 2006, 58

³⁵³ Strimple and Creangă 2010, 112.

³⁵⁴ Strimple and Creangă 2010, 113.

at Esarhaddon's Southwest palace at Kalḫu that Esarhaddon had planned to reutilise wall slabs from the Northwest and Central palaces but the project never reached completion.³⁵⁵ The only extant reliefs from the palace are four-legged, human-headed bull and lion colossi at Doors a, b, c, and f. Carved in course limestone rather than the usual alabaster, these colossi reveal the novel feature of apotropaic figures carved between the head and the wing at the top, and near the tail. It is uncertain whether the wall paintings from the arsenal at Kalḫu and the Governor's palace, the Burnt palace, and the "1950s building" date to the reign of Esarhaddon.³⁵⁶

Excavations on mound Nebi Yunus by the Iraqi State Organization for Antiquities and Heritage exposed a decorated wall façade in a courtyard of the arsenal. A pair of bull colossi adorsed by a composition of a lion-carrying human. Between the bulls, the excavations revealed winged deities with a text from the reign of Esarhaddon inscribed on the back.³⁵⁷

In addition, one badly fragmented rock carving (one in series of ancient representations of kings carved on cliffs at the mouth of Nahr il-Kelb in Lebanon, 12 kilometres north of Beirut), shows the king in relief, depicted in a traditional manner but carrying an unidentified object in his left hand and oriented towards the nose (figs. 32–33).³⁵⁸

More secure is the attribution to the reign of Esarhaddon of three nearly identical stelae found in the conquered cities West of the Assyrian heartland. Two basalt steles from Til-Barsip and one from Zinçirli made of dolerite reveal a break from

³⁵⁵ Winter 2010a, 7.

³⁵⁶ Russell 2017, 687–8.

³⁵⁷ Russell 2017, 678.

³⁵⁸ Börker-Klähn 1982, Nr. 211–16.

the traditional depiction of an Assyrian king. Esarhaddon breaks with the Assyrian tradition of representing the king as the same size as other humans. Indeed, his visual culture portrays him as much larger (fig. 34).³⁵⁹ The stela carry an inscription of the king's policy.³⁶⁰ The king appears at the front, and on the sides are his sons whose princely garments reflect Esarhaddon's choice of governance for his heirs—Šamaš-šumu-ukin on the left panel in Babylonian princely dress, and Assurbanipal on the right panel in Assyrian royal style (fig. 35). Not since the Middle Assyrian period had the king been represented/portrayed as so much larger than his own sons, or his enemies. Reade suggests that Esarhaddon may have borrowed this trope from the Egyptian depiction of social difference.

In Esarhaddon's stela, the king's own masculinity is achieved through scale but also through the action depicted. Standing erect in masculine authority and prowess, Esarhaddon's necropolitical management of the lives of failed males is made explicit with the Assyrian sovereign holding in his left hand a rope that is attached to lip rings of a significantly smaller pair of captives kneeling at his feet (fig. 36).³⁶¹

3.4. Discussion

In traditional studies on Esarhaddon carried out by Assyriologists, the image of the king was one of an emasculated sovereign who was subordinate to the scholars and whose masculine, and therefore sovereign, agency was assailed by astrologers and

³⁵⁹ Reade 1979, 331.

³⁶⁰ Reade 1979, 342.

³⁶¹ Russell 2017, 688.

haruspices.³⁶² This recent construct of the emasculated ruler promoted an image of Esarhaddon as one who was “weak and vacillating”, and whose failed masculinity resulted in disastrous policy-making.³⁶³

The analysis above, however, presents a rather different construct of Esarhaddon. Following the regicide of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon ordered the mass execution of many of the state’s magnates, causing great harm to the state.³⁶⁴ The state’s administration had been strong enough to largely put up with the king’s disability and insistence on absence, but this second mass culling of officials weakened the state from within. At that point, it is worth bearing in mind that the Neo-Assyria polity had reached its zenith and the frequent recourse to the royal diviners, especially after the prophecy from Harran threatened to kill the seed of Sennacherib, points to an increased internal destabilisation.

It is, therefore, in light of the political upheavals of the period that we may understand the contradictory forces emerging from the sources regarding the gendered subjectivity of Esarhaddon. Indeed, his complex amalgam of disability and masculinity, seem to have brought to bear on both foreign and domestic policy, as they reflect an emerging Assyrian ideology of a ruler who wanted to secure the dynasty in the face of personal adversity.

Furthermore, the state-sanctioned texts continue to manipulate the royal image in order to present a normative Neo-Assyrian masculinity, whereas the

³⁶² See Porter 1993, 26 on how Assyriologists have traditionally constructed the image of Esarhaddon.

³⁶³ Porter 1993, 26.

³⁶⁴ Radner 2003, 174.

correspondence reveals the difficulties that the imperial machine had to deal with when the two variables are not in a straightforward relationship.

3.5. Conclusion

Among Assyriologists, Esarhaddon presents a bit of a conundrum. Traditionally described as weak and vacillating, the more recent reconstruction of the king is that of a clever and astute statesman. The royal inscriptions portray him slightly differently from Sennacherib. Rather than the solitary hero who goes it alone, the royal inscriptions portray him as subordinate to the gods, namely Aššur, and he comes across as having little agency of his own. Every single expression of necropolitical masculinity is never claimed to be his own but reattributed to the divine Aššur. There may be a precise context for this – matters in Babylonia being one, and matters of paranoia surrounding succession may be another. There is, however, an internal weakness behind the manifestation of so much necropolitical masculinity – the symptoms on the body of the duress of the performance of masculinity caved in and presented in the subject a degree of malaise that seems to have been psychic as well as physiological. That he fulfilled the *longue durée* requirements of Neo-Assyrian royal masculinity is certain; what is at issue is the degree of trauma brought about by the pressures of state ideology, and consequently that of the gendered subjectivity of the ruler.

**PART 3: NEO-ASSYRIAN MASCULINITIES AND THE MANAGEMENT OF
THE LIFE OF THE OTHER**

CHAPTER 4. IMPERIAL MASCULINITIES AND ANIMALITY IN THE NEO-ASSYRIAN TEXTUAL AND VISUAL SOURCES

4.0. Introduction

At the beginning of the second in a series of seminars called *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Jacques Derrida weaves two strands of thought, political sovereignty and animality, to iterate the place of animals in the imaginary in general, and in political discourse in particular. Here Derrida poses a double question. The first question articulates the need to address why specific animals and not others lend themselves to political figuration: is it that fauna are tied to the land from which this ‘fabulous discourse on the political’ emerges? The second question posits the degree to which the nature, form, and psychology ‘supposed’ in anthropomorphic advance by the discourse itself, e.g. the tranquil strength of the lion, or, the cunning of the fox, bring to bear on the proposition.³⁶⁵ In doing so, Derrida exposes and explores the contradictory logic of the sovereign in his use of animals: at times, the sovereign and the sovereign state appear in the form of an animal, and at other times the animal is subordinate and the sovereign its master. It is to this contradictory logic that I will return in *my* attempt to cross-cut the constructs of animality and sovereignty in the gender and political discourse of Neo-Assyrian kingship.

Like many kings before and after them, Assyrian kings turned to the notion of masculinity to justify the martial homosocial hierarchy of their state. The construct of masculinity as a regime of discourse within the imperialistic ideology of Assyria on the one hand turned to the explicitly martial discourse of warfare to construct, perform,

³⁶⁵ Derrida 2011, 60–64.

and legitimate the sovereignty of the Assyrian king and his legitimacy at the top of the hierarchy of elite masculinity, and on the other hand this very ideology permeated into other discourses which the state constructed and employed in order to validate the imperialistic drive of Assyria. The royal inscriptions and the bas-relief visual programs in Neo-Assyrian palaces reveal that Assyrian scribes and craftsmen resorted to the image-making of the king as not only the hegemonic male par excellence among rival kings and enemies, but they also employed an oscillating discourse and contradictory logic of ontological symmetry with beasts and ‘natural’ phenomena through linguistic and visual tropes, as well as an asymmetrical discourse of the sovereign’s dominance and blood sport over animals and landscape built around the triangulated erotics of humans, beasts, and landscape in the hunting narratives. Indeed, in his study on the image of the late Neo-Assyrian king Assurbanipal as hunter, Elnathan Weissert observes that by the time Assurbanipal sat on the throne, the theme of king-as-hunter had long been part of the ethos and cultural fabric of the palace to the point that it “served as the central motif of the official Neo-Assyrian imperial seal, depicting the king in face-to-face combat with a rampant lion” (fig. 37).³⁶⁶ This chapter will address the sovereign’s relations to animals not only as an isolated ideological trope of imperialism but also as a central gendered discourse which may have been employed by the scribes and artists to bolster Assyrian ideology into effect.

The overlapping domains of sovereignty and animality have interested Assyriologists for a very long time, and more recently, an attempt at discerning the

³⁶⁶ Weissert 1997, 339. Note, however, that the sovereign-lion combat scene is not to be conflated with another genre in the imperial iconography, that is, the hunting narratives. Winter 2010a, 113–114 notes that the absence of the sovereign-lion combat scene from the reliefs on palace orthostats is not a trivial matter but rather one that requires further investigation.

philosophical and ontological understanding of animals in the royal inscriptions and the visual programs of Neo-Assyrian kings has been foregrounded.³⁶⁷ Outside the field of Assyriology proper, the comparative work on the topos of the royal hunt by Thomas T. Allsen has made an important contribution to the understanding of the notion of animality in the political configuration of imperialism.³⁶⁸ However, most work to date focuses on animals and the landscape as a type of binary discourse centred around the inner ordered core of civilized urbanity and Assyrian identity, and an outside territory of chaos which the Assyrian kings attempted to tame and Assyrianize.³⁶⁹ Despite the more novel approach taken by Pauline Albenda³⁷⁰, Chikako Watanabe³⁷¹, and Elnathan Weissert³⁷² to construct the royal hunt as part of the cultic duty of the king, not to be separated from his religious duties as high priest of Aššur and the king's self-image modelled on Ninurta, the binary construct of a civilized order at the centre and a chaotic otherness outside remains insidious. While this study does not argue against such an understanding of the royal hunt, I would like to approach the royal animal metaphors and the royal hunt from a different prism, namely that of the theory of metaphor, the theories of human-animal studies, hunter-gatherer theory, and their intersection with gender theory and theories of imperialism. In doing so, it is hoped

³⁶⁷ See Marcus 1977 for an early comprehensive study of the references to animals in the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. See further Ataç 2010 for a study of the ontological symmetry between animals and men in the Neo-Assyrian bas-reliefs. More recently Karlsson 2016 has attempted to understand the early Neo-Assyrian kings' involvement in hunting practices as a manly endeavour but this study remains theoretically underdeveloped.

³⁶⁸ Allsen 2006.

³⁶⁹ Originally proposed by Mario Liverani 1979 and then further elaborated by Peter Machinist 1993 in his influential article *Assyrians on Assyria*, the notion of an inner core of order and an outside domain of chaos remains influential even in very recent scholarship. See Feldman 2014, 100 for a recent perspective on this construct.

³⁷⁰ Albenda 1972.

³⁷¹ Watanabe 1998; 2000; 2015.

³⁷² Weissert 1997.

that these perspectives would help make some sense of the centrality that these regimes of discourse were given in the royal inscriptions and the bas-relief programs and explore the role they played in the construction of masculinities in the period under study. The second, and lesser, aim of this chapter is to attempt to unpack the Orientalist undertones insidious in most scholarship and literature concerning Neo-Assyrian kings as cruel Eastern despots who kill their prey out of sheer hyper-masculine compulsion and vainglory. Such discourses were abundant in the extra-Assyrian texts such as the Hebrew Bible, and have come down through antagonistic sources all the way to the nineteenth century portrayal in the visual arts and the literature and to the more recent portrayal of the Assyrian king as a template of cruel masculinity in the discourse on Middle Eastern political leaders today. Consequently, and perhaps even in stealth, these Orientalist constructs made their way into the dominant discourse and may at times have crept into the study of Assyriology itself.

In this chapter I will first look at the way the Assyrian king constructed a virile masculinity through cross-species identification using figurative language and after that, I will look at the construct of animality as an antagonistic discourse through which the king's necropolitical and imperial masculinity are brought into effect. Then, I will attempt to engage with the conceptual, theoretical and paradoxical tension that emerges from the overlap of this contradictory logic. Finally, I will address the Orientalism inherent in some of the writings concerning the royal persona of the Assyrian king within and outside the discipline of Assyriology.

4.1. Masculinity and Animality Through Metaphor in the Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions ³⁷³

In this section I will first discuss the theories of metaphor that are applicable to the primary sources used in this study, and I will follow this with a quantitative catalogue of attestations of the leonine metaphor in the royal inscriptions. I will start with a brief survey of early Mesopotamian textual attestations, and then explore the use of this and related tropes from the reign of the Middle Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 B.C.E.) to the last of the great Neo-Assyrian kings Assurbanipal (668–627 B.C.E.). In doing so, I will attempt to chronicle the quantitative occurrence of this trope and address issues of continuity and change over time. I will also seek to engage with an interpretive model for the attestations in the hope of making some sense of the use of the leonine metaphor for the study of the Neo-Assyrian rhetoric of sovereignty and gender.³⁷⁴

4.1.1. Metaphor in the Study of Animality and Masculinity in the Ancient Near East

The first comprehensive analysis of metaphor and metaphor-like devices used in the Assyrian annals was carried out by David Marcus.³⁷⁵ Already in the 1970s, Marcus makes known two salient features in the animal imagery which are useful for this

³⁷³ On the Asiatic lion (*Panthera leo goojratensis* or *Pantheraleo persica*) in the Near East, see Dick 2006, 245, f. 10. Dick notes that the link of the lion with kingship is very old; already the famed mace head of Mesilim, king of Kiš (26th Century BC), found at a possible Ningirsu shrine in Girsu, shows six intertwined lions crowned with an anzû lion-eagle on top. See AO 2340. Dick 2006, 245 situates the lion hunt in the process of evolution from the Assyrian *rubā'um* (prince) to *šar kiššati* and it “plays a role in effecting and visualising that evolution.”

³⁷⁴ The Neo-Assyrian scribes also refer to the parallel construct of the king as wild bull as an animal-concept through which the king attains his masculinity. Future research would continue to build on this initial attempt at seeking to outline the identity of the Neo-Assyrian king in representation. Here I will only be analysing the leonine metaphors and hunts as they are quantitatively the most frequently attested in the sources and most likely to yield a more complete picture.

³⁷⁵ Marcus 1977.

study in particular: firstly, that the annals of Sargon II and Sennacherib make the most quantitative use of animal similes, and secondly, that the semantic domain implied in the annals does not always correspond that what may have been the culturally dominant attribute of the animal employed in the tropes.³⁷⁶ Marcus' work, however, was broadly one of catalogue.

A more detailed study of the relationship between the king and all-things leonine was pioneered by Elena Cassin less than a decade after Marcus' contribution.³⁷⁷ Here, Cassin treated the theme of the leonine imagery in the expressions of kingship for the first time, and she established the association between the two domains.³⁷⁸ A more theoretically-grounded study of the linguistic device of metaphor in relation to the domain of animals has been carried out by Chikako Watanabe in her exploration of the term 'lion' as attested in the extant written sources from ancient Mesopotamia.³⁷⁹ Specifically, Watanabe has used the theory of metaphor as elaborated by Max Black to glean the emic meanings of the term lion employed in linguistic tropes. Black posits that metaphor as a linguistic device works by having a primary subject (the pronoun or noun), a secondary subject (the domain that predicates upon the subject), and the commonplace meanings attached to the secondary subject which shift to the primary subject through the alignment of the former with the latter.³⁸⁰ According to this model, therefore, the utterance "I am a lion" is said to be made up of a primary subject (in this

³⁷⁶ Marcus 1977, 86 notes that for some animals, a "less common characteristic is attributed."

³⁷⁷ Cassin 1981, 353–401.

³⁷⁸ However, Watanabe 2000, 400, while acknowledging Cassin's contribution, puts forward the criticism that the author imposes an external interpretation of association between royal and beast based on the latter's optimal hierarchical rank in the animal kingdom, a judgement commonly expressed in more modern contexts but not attested in the primary sources of the period under study.

³⁷⁹ See Watanabe 2000, 399–409. In this study, Watanabe explores the leonine metaphor in both Sumerian and Akkadian textual evidence.

³⁸⁰ Watanabe 2000, 401–404.

case the pronoun 'I' as used by the person who articulates the utterance), a secondary subject (in this case 'the lion') and a movement of the commonplace meanings culturally attached to the secondary subject which transmit to the identity of the subject through the means of metaphor. According to Black, the function of the metaphor is to glean 'commonplace' or 'ad hoc' meanings and to shift them to the primary subject.³⁸¹ Using this model, Watanabe explores leonine metaphors and gleans a semantic domain for 'lion'. The result is a chain of leonine attributes which are culturally agreed upon and which are meaningful to the audience of the texts.

In discussing the use of the leonine metaphor in the Neo-Assyrian texts, Watanabe notes that Assyrian kings frequently employed this trope in the epithet section of their annals, traditionally embedded in a series of self-proclaimed positive attributes. Thus, in the epithet section of his annals, Ashurnasirpal II places the leonine metaphor in what Black calls a "frame" of attributes which emphasise the king's own lordliness, praiseworthiness, power, magnificence, primacy, virility, heroism, and martial might. Since Watanabe follows Black in arguing that the frame is to be taken literally, she concludes that the metaphor attains focus and "absorbs" the semantic domains of the frame. Thus, the lion stands for all the attributes in the frame in which it is embedded.³⁸² Indeed, Watanabe reveals a set of attributes in the cultural lexicon of ancient Mesopotamia that point to an 'awe-inspiring fear' (the lion in the Šulgi texts variously described as with a 'wide-open mouth', or 'roaring', or 'with a raised paw'), and a more abstract feeling of 'awe'. These are expressed through the descriptors **pirig.igi.huš** (lion with awe-inspiring eyes) inducing, therefore, awe in the person upon

³⁸¹ Quoted in Watanabe 2000, 401.

³⁸² Watanabe 2000, 405.

whom the gaze falls) and power expressed in notions of vigour through **à.pirìg.ug** (vigour of a raging lion) and **pirig.nam.šul.bi.tanu.kūš.ù nè.ba gub.ba.me.en** (lion never failing in his vigour, standing firm in his strength).³⁸³ Watanabe further argues that the Assyrian lion metaphors are context-bound, and the attributes of the lion worthy of predicating unto the king are gleaned from the frame of the epithet chain in which they are embedded, a frame which extols the military prowess of the king.³⁸⁴ The fierceness, mercilessness, and bravery in battle evoked by the metaphor is contextualized both in the military might of the ruler as well as in the harsh treatment towards Assyria's antagonists.

Yet metaphors do not only shift commonplace meanings. Black posits that commonplace meanings may give way to ad hoc signification in the use of metaphor. To illustrate this point, Watanabe turns to the annals of Esarhaddon and notes that 'lion' takes on not only the commonplace meanings of 'mercilessness' and 'bravery' but also that of 'avenger for the death of the father'.³⁸⁵ This would be, in Black's framework, an ad hoc—not a commonplace—meaning for lion, that is, a meaning created for the sole use of the cultural and political circumstances of the context of the text, and not the meaning as widely understood in the culture at large. Watanabe convincingly interprets that this ad hoc signification may be linked to the historical circumstance of Sennacherib's, Esarhaddon's father, assassination with the ad hoc meaning of avenger of his father's death here adding a semantic layer not in common usage in association with the term lion.³⁸⁶ In Watanabe's model of building leonine

³⁸³ Watanabe 2000, 403.

³⁸⁴ Watanabe 2000, 405.

³⁸⁵ Watanabe 2000, 405.

³⁸⁶ Watanabe 2000, 405.

semantic domains, the framing chain becomes the organizing principle around the primary subject, here the king. Watanabe further argues that the metaphor was not only used in textual traditions but also in visual ones; indeed, the trope extended to the two types of royal seals used by Neo-Assyrian officials, one showing the king in single combat with a lion and the other a lion with an extended paw as a metonym for the sovereign.³⁸⁷

Watanabe also notes that the slain animals in the bas-reliefs of the period are never given the same treatment as the human enemies; the latter are otherwise impaled, stripped, flayed, and beheaded while animals are represented with dignity.³⁸⁸ I argue that this may have been a transference of the royal body as body politic onto the lion in the associative link between the two domains, implying that the metaphor operated in both and not in a single direction.³⁸⁹ As I shall argue, in the royal inscriptions we not only see the king using the lion as a source for his virility and masculinity through cross-species identification, but we also see the king predicating onto the lion anthropomorphic claims such as ‘avenger-of-the-father’s-death’, therefore an anthropomorphic ‘fierceness with hatred’ otherwise perhaps not a culturally-agreed upon meaning but one that is determined by the textual occurrence of this trope. In this sense, therefore, the metaphor operates to transmit or construct meaning in both directions (and hence, the lion becomes the symbol of royalty).

³⁸⁷ Watanabe 2000, 406–407.

³⁸⁸ Watanabe 2000, 407.

³⁸⁹ For the symbolic role of animals in Babylonia, see Watanabe 2015. Ataç 2010, 3 and 12 argues that metaphor may not have existed in the emic culture and in fact proceeds to build a case for humans and animals being ontologically cognate. In this sense, therefore, when the king utters *labbaku* this would not be a metaphoric statement as no movement of meaning is transmitting from secondary to primary subject, but the two always already share an ontological essence. Contra Ataç, I take the linguistic construct of first person suffix attachment *-ku* to always point in the direction of metaphor.

Watanabe's approach has been very fruitful in analysing the tropes of language to understand the meaning of vehicles in metaphorical configurations. However, the gendered dimensions that are constructed in and through metaphors have not been adequately addressed within Assyriology.

A more fruitful exercise in the study of metaphor and gender has been carried out by Susan E. Haddox for her attempt to explore the construction of masculinity in the Book of Hosea.³⁹⁰ Haddox takes an anthropological approach to masculinity and the language through which it is constructed; this provides a fruitful avenue of investigation because anthropologists have long been interested in the ways cultures use language as classificatory and symbolic systems through which identity is formed. What is particularly interesting for this analysis is the way cultures create a sense of identity and reconfigurations of social relations through non-human images.³⁹¹ Haddox opts for an anthropological perspective as the most fruitful one because other approaches to understanding metaphor, although diversely labelled, remain focused primarily on language itself.³⁹² Anthropological perspectives on metaphor, on the other hand, aim to identify social dynamics, especially what the associative links between people and entities (e.g. gender) resulting in meaningful configurations.

³⁹⁰ Haddox 2011.

³⁹¹ See Lévi-Strauss, quoted in Haddox 2011, 39 for a discussion on totemism and the frequency through which persons or groups take on the identity of animals and plants. The Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions are replete with references to the king taking on the identity of animals and natural phenomena. Lévi-Strauss stresses, however, that it is not merely the taking on of the identity of the animal but rather a modality "arbitrarily isolated from a formal system, the function of which is to guarantee the convertibility of ideas between different levels of social reality."

³⁹² For a brief analysis of the differences between philosophical, cognitive, and rhetorical, approaches to metaphors, see Haddox 2011, 39. Suffice it to say here that Watanabe's approach, using the model constructed by Max Black is a philosophical approach to metaphor in which the framework proposes to unpack the way the metaphor brings to bear on the meaning of words, sentences, and the relationship between the different parts of the metaphoric construction. It remains, therefore, concerned with language rather than identity construction.

Linguistic and cognitive definitions of metaphor, such as those outlined by Janet Soskice and Lakoff and Johnson focus on the former stressing the figure of speech whereby one term is referred to in terms of another,³⁹³ and the latter as the mental process of ‘understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.’³⁹⁴ Anthropological definitions of metaphor, such as that propounded by James W. Fernandez, seek to determine other functions of metaphors, namely the role they play in the social construction of identity.³⁹⁵ For Fernandez, metaphors are a ‘strategic predication upon an inchoate noun (an I, a you, a we, a they) which makes a movement and leads to performance.’³⁹⁶ Further, the inchoate noun is a human subject in search of an identity, with the ‘other thing’ or ‘terms suggestive of another’ being predicated upon the human subject forming a social identity. For example, when the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I claims to be a ‘splendid flame which covers the hostile land like a rain storm’, the inchoate subject is the king, and the other thing, predicating upon the subject, is the splendid flame that is used by the scribes to construct the self-image of the king.³⁹⁷

Fernandez’s inchoate nature of the pronoun implies that there is always already a lack in the subject: to be human, for Fernandez, is to have a sense of uncertainty which the metaphor attempts to amend through predications upon the subject.³⁹⁸ One would, of course, be tempted to ask whether this applies to the identity of the sovereign. Is the sovereign not the ultimate identity, the most always already

³⁹³ Soskice 1985, 15.

³⁹⁴ Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 5.

³⁹⁵ Fernandez 1986.

³⁹⁶ Fernandez 1986, 8.

³⁹⁷ RIMA 2: A.O.87.1 43-45.

³⁹⁸ Fernandez 1986, ix-x.

formed one, what Winter calls a royal masculinity rooted in the lack of a lack?³⁹⁹ According to Fernandez, predication upon the persona of the pronoun (here the king) already implies a lack in the core identity (here, of the sovereign). Again, one would be tempted to ask whether there is any room for social movement in the persona of the king. As I shall argue, it may have been for this reason that the scribes predicated upon the persona of the king attributes of masculinity which were sourced from cross-species identification rather than other male subjects.

Fernandez acknowledges the many uses of metaphor but he focusses on its social use. For Fernandez, metaphor is the chief means by which a pronoun takes its place along various continua the sum of which comprises what he calls a cultural 'quality space'.⁴⁰⁰ By continua, Fernandez means a set of parameters regulated and governed by emic values and factors which create social differentiation.⁴⁰¹ These continua, or parameters, inform the way a society places or takes away value. In contemporary discourse, for instance, some examples of continua may be powerful versus dispossessed. In the emic context, the axes that represent continua may be 'castrated male' versus 'intact male'. This spatial model, therefore, points to the relative placement of people along social axes, with society being defined by this model as a movement of pronouns "about within quality space."⁴⁰² A person may be in an optimal position, or a disenfranchised position. A person may also occupy more than one space along the continua of quality space. The sovereign, for example, always already occupies the optimal position in society, so the use of metaphor to allocate an

³⁹⁹ Winter 1996,13.

⁴⁰⁰ Fernandez 1986, 14.

⁴⁰¹ Quoted in Haddox 2011, 41.

⁴⁰² Haddox 2011, 41.

optimal position for the king points to the intended purpose of the epithet section of the royal inscriptions, pointing their message outside the core of Assyria, where the king would already have held the position of prestige. For the local audience, however, it may have had the effect of confirming rather than moving the king around in quality space.

For Fernandez, metaphors either set the cultural space by placing the various continua in relation to one another, or they move the pronoun along axes of optimization or otherwise. He defines the uses of two different kinds of metaphors: performative and persuasive in order to outline their operation in quality space.

Performative metaphors are organizing metaphors which underlie a society's cultural understanding of itself and their function is to place the subject within a cultural quality space rather than to move the subject along the axes of optimization or otherwise. A group's reception and interpretation of a metaphor, however, also plays a role in establishing the subject in quality space. This, in turn, gives rise to ways of acting within the framework established by the metaphor, otherwise referred to as performance. Often, societies use multiple metaphors to establish the frame of social value, leading to different performances at different times. Metaphors are not only linguistic phenomena. They may also be acts. Indeed, Judith Butler's notion of the difference between the speech act and the bodily act comes down to "there is what is said, and then there is a kind of saying that the 'bodily instrument' of the utterance performs" thus pointing to bodily acts as performative metaphors which constitute that which they represent.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰³ Butler 1999, 11.

Persuasive metaphors, on the other hand, bring about a change along the continua of quality space. Inasmuch as metaphors fuse two images from different domains, any predication is likely to reconfigure the understanding of the pronoun as well as the predication. Fernandez is careful to point out that predication is always strategic, meaning that it is never free of social value. Indeed, predication promotes a reconfiguration of the perception of self and other, leading to a relocation of the pronoun's position in quality space. What Fernandez calls the 'mission' of the metaphor, refers to the movement of the pronoun from a state of being inchoate to one of optimization or vice-versa.⁴⁰⁴ When Sennacherib refers to king Hezekiah of Judah as a 'bird in a cage', the socially-agreed upon understanding of the image of a caged bird moves the Judean king from a position of optimization (a worthy royal opponent) to one of disenfranchisement (he failed). Here, the caged bird as vehicle of predication upon Hezekiah is used because the image has cultural-bound value among the scribal culture of Assyria, and it was used to effectively shape the identity of the speaker (thus optimising the position of the Assyrian king in a contest of martial masculinity), in disabling the rival (the image of a king as a caged bird moves the king to a relatively lower position than Sennacherib), and then changes the configuration of the relationship between the two: Sennacherib governs the movements of the rival male royal by confining him to his own city, prisoner within his own city walls.

How the pronoun responds to the predication is termed by Haddox as performance.⁴⁰⁵ The pronoun may wholly accept the predication, it may accept the predication but alter its meaning, or it may flatly reject the predication and proceed

⁴⁰⁴ See Haddox 2011, 62.

⁴⁰⁵ Haddox 2011, 45.

with acting on that rejection.⁴⁰⁶ Haddox, however, is careful to remind us that reconstructing or gauging the original audience's response to predication is difficult since we have no direct access to the past.⁴⁰⁷ We may identify or reconstruct the movement in cultural quality space, but we may never truly gauge its reception.

It is also useful to follow Haddox in using Ferndandez's model (based on the work of Charles Osgood) in gauging the movement of the pronoun along quality space.⁴⁰⁸ These three continua are evaluation (goodness), potency, and activity, and as Haddox claims, through these continua we may in fact be able to correlate linguistic space with social quality space.⁴⁰⁹ These continua, Haddox states, are 'common judgements applied to people, especially in the social sphere' and constitute the axes along which most people are likely to perform social movement.⁴¹⁰ As in the case of the book of Hosea, the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, whose audience was composed elite and powerful males, issues of movement in quality space are rife, giving rise to power contests, the discourse of the value of action and the understanding of goodness between elite males.

Since the corpus also yields a large number of similes, these tropes will be treated as metaphor-like devices. Indeed, as Haddox notes, "when the rhetorical and the social effect, rather than the cognitive effect, is what is important, differences between metaphor and simile matter little."⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁶ Haddox 2011, 45.

⁴⁰⁷ Haddox 2011, 46.

⁴⁰⁸ Haddox 2011, 46–47. Osgood, a computational linguist, identified three continua which together account for more than 70% of variance in the establishing of the meaning of words. See Osgood et al, 1967, 38

⁴⁰⁹ Haddox 2011, 46–47.

⁴¹⁰ Haddox 2011, 46–47.

⁴¹¹ Haddox 2011, 49.

Through the use of metaphor, societies acknowledge the inchoate nature of humans, that underlying (psychophysiological) and overlying (sociocultural) sense of entity (entirely of being or wholeness) which we reach for to express and act out (by performance) but can never grasp.⁴¹² Metaphors, therefore, accomplish what literal or analytical language does not: namely, they address the polyvalence and unstable nature of the inchoate. Since the core of the pronoun cannot be girded by a singular, monolithic image, a series of images are needed to begin to grasp the polyvalent subject of the pronoun (in our case, the sovereign). In addition, the images that predicate upon the inchoate pronoun are bound by spatial and temporal value. Finally, it is worth remembering that no means of girding the inchoate by definition may be absolute but is always already relational.⁴¹³

The unfixed nature of the Assyrian king may, therefore, be determined by the number of tropes used in the royal inscriptions to attempt to girdle the identity of the king. In this section, I will focus on the leonine tropes that attempt to throw light on the subject, bearing in mind that the royal inscriptions use multiple images to define the identity of the sovereign. A further pitfall is the fact that what the leonine metaphor is attempting to predicate is masculinity, in itself a domain that, as Cornwall and Lindisfarne note for gender identities in general, are “constantly created and transformed in everyday situations” and in themselves are “fluid and they are often subversive of dominant forms.”⁴¹⁴

⁴¹² Fernandez 1986, 235.

⁴¹³ Haddox 2011, 53.

⁴¹⁴ Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994, 10.

Since the purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the ways in which masculinities were constructed in the Neo-Assyrian period, it is necessarily a study of linguistic and visual and artefactual devices. Therefore, what we are seeing is not gender in the lived experience of the subject, but the ways in which gender informed the textual and visual repertoire and the way the repertoire itself configured gender. One of the literary devices used in the royal inscriptions to construct the gendered identity of the Neo-Assyrian king are metaphors and metaphor-like tropes (similes). These devices, in turn, employ the domains of 'beast' and 'sovereign and beast' in order to conceptualize a masculinity that is outside the norms achieved by 'ordinary' men. Indeed, the association between 'sovereign' and 'beast' in the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions is so frequent, that it pertains to Derrida's notion of the political bestiary, one that is "rich in animal figures that are figures of the political."⁴¹⁵ Indeed, this may even be a gender bestiary, full of rich animal figures that are figures of successful or failed masculinity.⁴¹⁶ Nevertheless, the animal figures belong to the Pascalian and Derridian space that fuses the apparently contradictory forces of being: as animals, they cross national, institutional, and sovereign borders, but they belong to "cultures, nations, languages, myths, fables, fantasies, histories."⁴¹⁷ Thus, the beast is a cultural and political figure onto whom a meaning is inscribed. The cultural and political attributes ascribed to the lion-beast in the royal inscriptions are implicated in gender and are therefore useful for this study.

⁴¹⁵ Derrida 2011, 22.

⁴¹⁶ Contra Liverani 1979, animal tropes are not only used for failed manhood. The sovereign very frequently constructs cross-species identification. I disagree with Liverani here, who insists that animals were conceived of as sub-human. Similarly, animals were positioned along continua of value.

⁴¹⁷ Derrida 2011, 24.

I shall, therefore, be asking the following question as a preamble to the investigation: what were the cultural values ascribed to the beast *a priori* of the event of the metaphor as a search for identity and subjectivity? And why is it the lion and not any other beast that becomes implicated in the contradictory logic of the gendered identity of the sovereign and the sovereign state?

4.1.2. Leonine Metaphors in the Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions.⁴¹⁸

Animal metaphors are a salient feature of the Assyrian royal inscriptions. The authors of these texts used references to animals either in a very literal meaning, for example when cataloguing war booty, or in a metaphoric use when making reference to other men. Generally speaking, linguistic devices that make use of the bestiary fall either into performative or persuasive metaphors; either way, they are always used to either place the subject in a position along continua of value, or to move the subject along these axes. For example, in Sargon II's Display Inscription from Khorsabad, animal metaphors are used to create a distinction between the successful and culturally sanctioned performance of Assyrian masculinity as well as to signal the failure to subscribe and perform the standard by those who oppose the command of Aššur (or that of Assyrian policy). In this text, Marduk-apla-iddina II (the Biblical Merodach-Baladach), upon hearing of the arrival of Sargon II, goes into a state of panic and flees to Iqbi-bel from Babylon. In fleeing, he is compared to a bat.⁴¹⁹ The metaphor here functions at a context level – we know from the context that the bat was culturally construed as frightened but also as a selfish animal that does not care for its

⁴¹⁸ The inscriptions mostly make use of the poetic *labbu* and not the prosaic *nēšu* for 'lion'.

⁴¹⁹ Melville 2006, 341.

community of others: Marduk-apla-iddina II's in fact *panics for himself* and flees *like a bat*. In the same text, the fleeing king of Babylon who leaves behind the material vestments of kingship like the throne, the tent, the sceptre, the chariot, and the necklace, is compared to a skulking cat and his people to helpless sheep.⁴²⁰ Thus, fleeing bats and skulking cats become emblematic of cowardice and failed masculinity. Assyrians are also portrayed through animal metaphors; however, they are construed in positive value. In the same Display Inscription, while Marduk-apla-iddina and his allies and people are compared to pelicans for pitching their tents around canals that were dug to keep the Assyrians from having easy access, the Assyrian troops are compared to eagles to fly over the ditches and accomplish the defeat.⁴²¹ Another example is Sargon II's *Letter to Aššur* in which the Assyrian troops are compared to soaring eagles commanded by Sargon II himself. The martial male bond created by the simile here is a powerful one, with Sargon II quite literally saying that "he caused his chariots, cavalry, battle troops, and the ones who accompany me" to soar like eagles over the steep and hostile mountain of Simirru, "which lunges up like the point of a spear" with difficult ascents on all sides, and "whose side gullies and mountain ravines are deeply cut and the act of looking at it is shrouded in terror."⁴²²

It is, however, beyond the scope of this study to catalogue every instance of animal metaphor in the construction of culturally prized and culturally rejected masculinities. Rather, I would like to look at one particular animal metaphor, the leonine, because of its frequent use in the construction of royal positive value and

⁴²⁰ Melville 2006, 341.

⁴²¹ Melville 2006, 341.

⁴²² Melville 2006, 337.

subjectivity. Leonine metaphors are an old motif in the world of ancient Mesopotamia, and one that is put to use as a way of constructing a divine and a mortal masculinity.⁴²³ In order to construct a lexicon of value for the leonine trope, I have resolved to use a diachronic approach to identify the traditions that were already in place when the Neo-Assyrian kings were employing this device. As the royal texts of Šulgi clearly show, the Neo-Assyrian authors were reviving an old configuration of masculinity, or rather, placing themselves on a continuum. I have therefore explored the corpus of Sumerian literature to gauge the semantic traditions in place before the Neo-Assyrian period under study.

4.1.2.1 Leonine Metaphors in the Early Mesopotamian Record.

Early Mesopotamian texts already point to the emergence of a contradictory logic in the realm of the political bestiary in the textual record. These texts establish at one and the same time both an ontological symmetry between the sovereign and the lion as well as a discourse of asymmetry and antagonism between the two domains. In this chapter, I will first focus on the ontological symmetry between the king and the beast.

The Sumerian corpus of extant texts may be a good place to start exploring the semantic domains of the leonine. I will do this in order not only to demonstrate that later cultures of royal identity *in representation* were expressing a concern with tradition, but also to explore the subtle ripples of change that took place over time. The following attestations might be useful in attempting to construct a semantic

⁴²³ See Zsolnay 2009 for a study of the extent to which mortal and divine genders mirrored each other.

domain for the leonine. I will first explore the leonine imagery with reference to the divine realm, and then investigate the same imagery in the royal traditions.

In Enki and Ninġursaġa, a Sumerian ‘paradise myth’ which Keith Dickson calls the “acts and tribulations of Enki’s body traversing, modifying, and being modified in turn by female bodily space”, lions inhabit the pure, virginal, and pristine land of Dilmun in a state of prolepsis.⁴²⁴ In this problematic paradise, however, lions do not slay;⁴²⁵ rather, they make their appearance but they do not yet perform their lion-ness. Lambert and Tourney, in fact, draw attention to this state of prolepsis, stating: “Le lion ne tuait pas . . . [signifie] qui’il n’avait pas encore commencé à tuer, à faire son métier de lion.”⁴²⁶ The lion’s state of prolepsis in this rhetorical, or perhaps virtual dimension,⁴²⁷ however, foreshadows what will later become the culturally subscribed ontology of the animal, that is, as a slayer. It is this aspect of the leonine which is singled out.

In Inana and Ebih, (Inana and Ebih c.1.3.2), a myth describing the goddess Inana’s fight with the eponymous mountain, the opening hymnic sequence praises the martial aspect of her persona. After a series of epithet-like opening phrases highlighting the almost-capricious belligerence of the goddess, lines 7–9 compare the goddess to a lion,⁴²⁸ extolling her leonine roar and her devastating qualities.⁴²⁹ In the following line, the Inana’s fearsomeness is that of a lion who subordinates the

⁴²⁴ Dickson 2007, 32.

⁴²⁵ ETCSL 1.1.1 [last accessed 12.03.2018].

⁴²⁶ Lambert and Tourney 1949, 123.

⁴²⁷ Dickson 2007, 5 argues that the Dilmun of the opening sequence of the myth is just a *topos* and not a lush and “tangible” Garden of Eden, despite attempts by many scholars to draw parallels between Dilmun and Eden.

⁴²⁸ Karashi 2004, 118.

⁴²⁹ Delnero 2011, 135. The same attributes of the goddess occur in other texts as well. See, for example, *The Exaltation of Inana* 1. 10 in which she “roars like Iškur.” Cf. also *Inana Hymn C* 1. 52

unsubmissive.⁴³⁰ Indeed, in the iconography of ancient Mesopotamia, the lion becomes the attribute animal of Inanna, on which she is often depicted standing with one or both legs, signalling the masculine aspect of the goddess. It is worth noting here again that Inanna embodies both masculine and feminine gender configurations and is sometimes depicted bearded in the iconography.⁴³¹ By embedding the leonine tropes in a context of martial excess, the scribes of the myth point to the already existing cultural understanding that lions had a powerful associative link to warfare.⁴³²

The god Ninurta, discussed here as a paragon of masculinity which the Assyrian kings frequently modelled their mortal gender on,⁴³³ is referred to as **pirig** (lion) in the Sumerian temple hymns that originate in the Sargonic period (2600–2350).⁴³⁴ It may also be, as argued by Lambert, that *Pirigbanda* as well as the variant *Ninpirigbanda* in the Fara god-list and the Hymn to the Queen of Nippur refer to Ninurta as well.⁴³⁵ In Ninurta’s Return to Nibru, a Sumerian epic poem known by its incipit as Angim describing Ninurta’s return from the campaigns of conquest in the rebel lands, a symbiosis between the battle itself and the lion is established. The scribes pay particular attention to the corporality of the lion to describe Ninurta’s battle itself. Other gods are emasculated: they “flee like a flock of small birds” and “stand hiding in

⁴³⁰ ETCSL 1.3.2 [last accessed 12.03.2018].

⁴³¹ Heffron 2016.

⁴³² For Wilcke’s view that the text of Inana and Ebih carries a subtext of the expansionist policies of the Akkadian period, especially those of Sargon and Naram-Suen with their aggressive military campaigns in the late third Millennium BC, as well as for Cooper’s critique of this view, see Delnero 2011, 136–139.

⁴³³ On the symbiosis of Ninurta and the Assyrian king, see in general, Annus 2002 and specifically, Dick 2006, 252–255.

⁴³⁴ Ninurta bears the epithet “the foremost, the lion, whom the Great Mountain engendered” in the Collection Sumerian Temple Hymns. See Annus 2002, 11.

⁴³⁵ Ištar of Nippur is called the daughter-in-law of *Pirigbanda*, and mistress of Eridu. Lambert 1982, 216 ff quoted in Annus 2002, 102. Ninurta appears in leonine clothing in the Barton cylinder seal VI, 11f. and takes on leonine qualities to resolve a problem of food shortage in Nippur. See Annus 2002, 13.

the grass like wild bulls,” but Ninurta’s battle “with a lion’s body and lion’s muscles, it rose up in the rebellious land.”⁴³⁶

The associative link between the lion and strength is also evidenced in an epithet to Ninurta in *Ninurta’s Exploits* (c.1.6.2), one of the longest Sumerian compositions.⁴³⁷ The text focuses on the strength of the lion and its militant advance upon the enemy with savage teeth. The lion is also described as mighty, and confident in its strength. Once more, the semantic domain of the leonine is linked to martial strength, its fearsome advance, and self-assurance in its own might. The symbiosis between the lion and the battle is made evident in *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, a legendary Neo-Sumerian text from the twenty-first century B.C.E. In this account, the hero is dressed in a garment of lion skins, thus establishing the association between the lion and the victor in battle.⁴³⁸ In the building of the Ningirsu temple, the lion is not only fierce, but it also keeps an eye on the land.⁴³⁹ This places emphasis on the watchful and attentive nature of the lion over its dominion, a heroic quality which the shepherd-kings of the ancient Near East would find useful in their expression of royal identity.

In these instances, therefore, the semantic domains of the term lion incorporate aspects of the leonine that construct a military persona centred on notions of belligerence, fearsomeness, and dominance, while at the same time singling out the roar and the very corporality of this mighty beast. Despite the aggressive

⁴³⁶ ETCSL 1.6.1 [last accessed 12.03.2018]. See especially verses 119-24 in Black *et al* (eds.) 2004, 184.

⁴³⁷ ETCSL 1.6.2 [last accessed 13.03.2018].

⁴³⁸ ETCSL 1.8.2.3 [last accessed 13.03.2018].

⁴³⁹ ETCSL 2.1.7 [last accessed 13.03.2018] referring to the Gudea cylinders A and B. In the Neo-Assyrian period, Sennacherib declares himself to be the attentive prince of the steppe in a clear cross-species identification with the lion.

hypermasculinity attributed to the lion, however, a focus on the confident, attentive and steppe-surveilling nature of this animal is also highlighted in the early texts. That the ancient Mesopotamian lexicon of value placed emphasis on the corporal aesthetics of aggression and might is evident in the references made to the teeth, the paws, the muscles, and the sinews of the lion, zooming in on these aspects of the animal's physicality to map the loci of its strength and power. In attributing these values to the lion, it is not surprising that protagonists who signal strength and supremacy are portrayed wearing lion skins.

The motif of cross-species, leonine identification is put to use in the mortal domain as well, although (and perhaps, despite of) the fragmentary evidence is restricted to elite contexts. Already in the Fara period (Early Dynastic IIIa), an epithet **PN Lugal.pirig** (the king is a lion) presents a cross-species, leonine metaphor in which the subject (here, the king) is identified as a lion.⁴⁴⁰ Later, in the Ur III period, the epithet **Lugal.pirig.bànda** identifies the king not only with the domain of the leonine, but it qualifies which category of identity within the animality of the lion had to be predicated upon the subject: the animal's fierceness.⁴⁴¹

Within the domain of the mortal sovereign, the Šulgi texts reveal a frequent attempt to shape the identity of the king in terms of an ontological symmetry with the beast. Šulgi A, a praise poem of Šulgi (c.2.4.2.01) states: "I am a fierce-looking lion, begotten by a dragon. I am the growling lion of Utu. I, the lion, never failing in vigor, standing firm in its strength. Like a lion spreading fearsomeness from (?) the royal offering place. I rushed forth like a fierce lion."

⁴⁴⁰ Watanabe 1998, 446; Annus 2002, 102.

⁴⁴¹ Watanabe 1998, 446.

Another Šulgi text known as Šulgi C extends the semantic domain of the leonine with its frequent leonine phraseology. Segment A of the text lines 1–17 is a polyphony of cross-species references to shape the identity of the king as warrior. The text states:

“I am the king, a wild bull of acknowledged strength, a lion with wide-open jaws! I am Šulgi, a wild bull of acknowledged strength, a lion with wide-open jaws! I am a great storm let loose from heaven, sending its splendor far and wide! I am good stock, with brindled body, engendered by a breed-bull! I am a king born from a cow, resting amid butter and milk! I am the calf of a thick-necked white cow, reared in the cow-pen! Dressed in a royal robe and holding out a scepter, I am perfect for I am also the good shepherd who takes joy in justice, the scourge and stick of all evil! Strength of lions, hero of battle -- I have no rivals! Handsome of limb, ferocious lion, I am perfection in warfare! Grasping a lapis-lazuli mace and a battle-axe, with long fingers I sharpen a tin knife to untie knots. In the turbulent affray of battle, in the conflict, I shoot out my tongue, a *mušhuš* darting out its tongue at the foreign lands, a dragon raging (?) at men.”⁴⁴²

A further (fragmentary) part of the text continues in segment B:1–16:

[5 lines of fragmentary text] May its glory cover the cities, and its battle-cry smother the foreign lands! May the people be terrified at its roaring, as at a storm in the heavens! I am Šulgi, the good shepherd of Sumer! May he bring me the muscles of a lion, the sinews of a lion! May he receive (?) my spear!⁴⁴³

Šulgi D, another praise poem of Šulgi, makes the claim that the king was born to a great wild bull, like a lion standing firm in his strength.⁴⁴⁴ Furthermore, in a praise poem of Šulgi known as Šulgi X, the king is “eloquent and good-looking, mighty hero,

⁴⁴² ETCSL 2.4.2.03 [last accessed 13.03.2018].

⁴⁴³ ETCSL 2.4.2.03 [last accessed 14.03.2018].

⁴⁴⁴ ETCSL 2.4.2.04 [last accessed 13.03.2018].

born to be a lion, young bull standing firm in its vigor, valiant one, unrestrained in his strength, who tramples great mountains underfoot.⁴⁴⁵

In these praise poems, the frequent references to the lion are a scribal attempt to create an overlap between the domains of sovereignty and bestiality through the use of metaphoric language. The tropes channel the lion's (and therefore, the king's) fearful appearance, the roar, the hostile and aggressive advance upon the enemy into a semantic domain of positive value which places the king's martial masculinity on a continuum of optimal value. I would argue that these streams of positive leonine attributes, construed in a culture whose internal logic is one of martial aggression and territorial conquest, form an aesthetics of political and border violence which bolstered Šulgi's expansion and consolidation the Neo-Sumerian empire.⁴⁴⁶

In the Gilgamesh narratives, the lion is charged with highly symbolic value. Since this is not explicitly a study of the leonine tropes in the epic, suffice it to comment on a few isolated cases which may help make sense of the intersections of kingship, animality, and gender. In Gilgameš and Huwawa (Version B), a warrior's face is a lion's grimace, with the leonine reference again used in a martial context.⁴⁴⁷ In this

⁴⁴⁵ ETCSL 2.4.2.24 [last accessed 13.03.2018].

⁴⁴⁶ Klein 1981, 7. Other textual occurrences that refer to lions in the associative link between king and lion include a Lipit-Eštar praise poem (Lipit-Eštar A) ETCSL.2.5.5.1 [last accessed 13.03.2018] in which the king states that he is a lion, and a text of Išme-Dagan (A+V) ETCSL 2.5.4.01 [last accessed 13.03.2018] which again refers to the somatic features of the lion: He has the muscles, sinews and body of a lion. Ur-Ninurta in Ur-Ninurta A ETCSL 2.5.6.1 [last accessed 13.03.2018] and B ETCSL 2.5.6.2 [last accessed 13.03.2018] is also referred to as the "lion of kingship". In the balbale to Ningišzida (Ningišzida A) ETCSL 4.19.1 [last accessed 13.03.2018] Ningišzida is said to have been suckled on lion's spittle and in a hymn to Ninurta C ETCSL 4.27.03 [last accessed 13.03.2018] Ninurta is compared to a lion; Finally, in a hymn to Ninurta C, Ninurta is a wild raging lion overpowering the enemy. The collection of proverbs may also be interesting site for the investigation of the leonine trope. Collection 1 ETCSL 6.1.01 [last accessed 13.03.2018] states: the lion is to the desert what the raven is to the sky what the mongoose is to the earth. And where would a wife go? Collection 2 ETCSL 6.1.02 [last accessed 13.03.2018] reads as follows: The palace is a forest, and the king is a lion.

⁴⁴⁷ ETCSL 1.8.1.5.1 [last accessed 13.03.2018].

version, the lion's tongue is never dry of blood and the lion's paws are a cause to fear the eldest brother of the seven warrior brothers. Sophus Helle argues that just as Enkidu had shed his 'animality' to enter the fold of urbanity and civilisation, so Gilgamesh had to shed his humanity and enter the stage of animality to enter the world of the steppe (a suspension of all this is urban and royal).⁴⁴⁸ This shedding of humanity and becoming animal is textually achieved through the device of imagery: Gilgamesh strips off his royal garment and wears garments made of lion skins. It is this fusion with the leonine, this *becoming lion* which creates the possibility for Gilgamesh to mourn Enkidu to an extent which is 'excessive'.⁴⁴⁹

In this section I have attempted to show that the leonine metaphor used in the Mesopotamian texts predating the Assyrian period already had a well-established tradition. The metaphor has a clear, associative link with notions of kingship, and only the sovereign is ever symbiotically related to the lion. However, the lexicon of positive value signals the aggressive as well as the calm, confident, and attentive attributes of the lion as pertinent to the royal male. The emphasis is on a shared virility that extols an aesthetics of violence, oscillating between a martial violence that is strategic and corporal and a confidence in one's strength and one's prowess.

⁴⁴⁸ See, especially, Helle 2016, 70–72 on the grieving 'animalisation' of Gilgamesh.

⁴⁴⁹ One senses that these comments, however, unfold in the imaginary of essentialist dualisms, human-animal, city-steppe, life-death, king-beast. Of key interest in this section of the epic is the reverse-gendering taking place while Gilgamesh mourns: the leonine metaphor becomes a feminine one. Mourning seems to have been rooted in feminine affect, and Gilgamesh is described as a lioness that has lost her cubs.

4.1.2.2. The Early Neo-Assyrian Period

The leonine metaphor in the royal inscriptions of Assyrian kings is first attested in the reign of Adad-nerari II (911–891). Following a long hiatus in the appearance of the leonine metaphor, the trope resurfaces in the annals of Adad-nerari II, specifically in A.O.99.2, the longest and best-preserved of the king’s annals inscribed on a clay tablet from Assur.⁴⁵⁰ Lines 13–15 present a series of royal epithets which carry a gender marker in a context of positive value; indeed, the epithets place emphasis on the masculinity of the king as manly, heroic and strong.⁴⁵¹ At issue, however, is the ill-defined term ‘manly’ as used in these contexts.

The lion metaphor in the early Neo-Assyrian period is presented in an epithet chain operating as a frame from which the metaphor gleans its meaning. As argued by Watanabe, the ‘focus’ (or metaphor) in a frame chain constructs its meaning from the terms in the frame in which it is embedded; thus, the lion—here the focus because it is the anomalous sign in the chain of signs otherwise literal and realistic—gleans its semantic domain from the values that surround it. In this sense, therefore, and according to Watanabe’s theoretical framework, a lion carries the culturally-ascribed meaning of power, importance, praiseworthiness, magnificence, strength, might, fierceness, radiance, and rage. Through the trope of metaphor, and metaphor-like tropes, the king as subject of the epithet to whom the chain refers is predicated upon by the frame whose centrality is the leonine metaphor. As we shall see, in this specific

⁴⁵⁰ RIMA 2, 145.

⁴⁵¹ See Winter 2010b, 92 who notes that royal epithets like *zikaru qardu* and *etlu qardu* in the Assyrian annals “carry with them both a gender marker and also a sense of associative potency.” See also Chapman 2004, 22–25. Chapman links the royal titles not to a claim of biological maleness, which would have been tautological, but rather sees the epithets as a metaphor for a successful iteration of superlative masculinity. See also Ataç 2010, 59 whose argument furthers Winter’s and Chapman’s, claiming that the titles are a clear indication of a philosophical conception of hypervirility.

context, the lion is not just a lion, but it is a virile lion. It is the virility of the lion which is singled out for identification. The royal inscriptions build the leonine construct as a paragon of masculinity, and it is this which the authors of the royal inscriptions wished to single out for the king. Indeed, the pair bond is explicit: *lābāku u zikarāku*. The following is a chronological presentation of the epithet chains in which the leonine metaphor is framed.

In Adad-nerari II's inscriptions (Adad-nerari II 2, 14) the metaphor is presented in an explicit way: I am a virile lion. This is attested in the two instances embedded within an epithet chain. A.O.99.2, written on a clay tablet and found in Assur and dating to 893 (the 19th regnal year of the king) is a near-complete text of Adad-nerari II's annals.⁴⁵² Given the near-duplication of A.O.99.4 and its references to Adad-nerari II's seventh campaign in Hanigalbat, this version of the annals was probably composed in the same year.⁴⁵³

The following is a transliteration and a literal translation of the epithet section of A.O.99.2:

šar-ra-ku be-la-ku geš-^ˀra-ku kab-ta-ku na-da-ku šur-ru-ḥa-ku^ˀ dan-na-ku dan-dan-na-ku áš-^ˀta-ku

na-mur-ra-ku ù šur-ba-ku ^ˀur-ša^ˀ-na^ˀ-ku qar-ra-da-ku lab-ba^ˀ-ku ù zi-ka-ra-kua-šá-re-da-ku ši-ra^ˀ-ku^ˀ šit-mu-ra-ku⁴⁵⁴

Literal translation: king, lord, very strong, heavy, praised, very proud, very strong, all-powerful, stiff one;

Awe-inspiring and very great, warrior and warlike, lion and man, first and foremost, exalted, and very wild. The same is restored for Adad-nerari II 4, 1'.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵² RIMA 2, 145.

⁴⁵³ RIMA 2, 156.

⁴⁵⁴ RIMA 2, 147

⁴⁵⁵ RIMA 2, 157.

For Ashurnasirpal II (Ashurnasirpal 001, i 32–33) the formulaic epithet-chain is repeated here in A.O.101.1, lines 32 and 33 from Adad-nerari II as it is in A.O.101.20 line 43 (restored).⁴⁵⁶

MAN-ku *be-la-ku na-a-da-ku* MAḪ-ku DUGUD-ku *šur-ru-ḥa-ku* SAG.KAL-ku *ur-šá-na-ku qar-ra-da-ku*

lab-ba-ku u zi-ka-ra-ku ^maš-šur-PAP-A MAN *dan-nu* MAN KUR *aš-šur ni-bit* ^d30 *mi-gir* ^da-nim *na-mad* ^d10 *kaš-kaš* DINGIR.MEŠ⁴⁵⁷

Literal translation: king, lord, praised, exalted, important, very proud, first and foremost, warrior, and warlike;

lion and man, Ashurnasirpal II, strong king, land of Aššur nominated by Sin, favored by Anu, darling of Adad, all mighty among gods.

The same trope with identical wording is repeated in the annals of Ashurnasirpal II in Ashurnasirpal II 0.101.17: i36.⁴⁵⁸

4.1.2.3. The Later Neo-Assyrian Period

This marks the end of the use of the explicit leonine metaphor in the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. What follows are the Sargonid kings' use of the leonine metaphor and metaphor-like tropes. It is important to note that references to the symbiotic relationship between the royal and the leonine do not occur in the royal epithets. Rather than explicit, *-ku* particle constructs, the scribes made use of *kima* or *iš* constructs indicating the use of a simile structure. The use of similes here point to a

⁴⁵⁶ RIMA 2, 264.

⁴⁵⁷ RIMA 2, 195-6.

⁴⁵⁸ RIMA 2, 239.

different form of identification. The trope is contextualized in a militaristic context, and not in a section (like the epithets) which is reserved for the positioning of the king's self-proclaimed successful performance of masculinity.

What follows is a catalogue of the attestations of the leonine-tropes in the Sargonid kings' inscriptions. Sargon II states that he set in motion the mighty Assyrian army and raged like a lion.

*Kīma lab-bi nadir ša puluḫtu
ramû etelliš attallakma.*⁴⁵⁹

I marched (through Urartu) proudly
like a terror-laden lion

Sennacherib 1 is the earliest known annalistic account of the king's reign (probably dating to 703, his 3rd regnal year); it is also known as the First Campaign Cylinder⁴⁶⁰ and was inscribed on cylinders found in Assur, Nineveh and Tarbisu.⁴⁶¹ Sennacherib first declares that he is a *zikar sēri na'du* (attentive man of the open country/steppe) who *labbiš annadirma* (became restless like a lion).⁴⁶² This is followed by a comparison of the object of antagonism (Marduk-apla-iddina, the biblical Merodach Baladan) to a *gallû*-demon.⁴⁶³ The leonine metaphor is brought up once again in the same text in line 25, with the collocation *allabib (lābabu)* to denote that

⁴⁵⁹ CAD 9/L: 24. See also TCL 3:420.

⁴⁶⁰ RINAP 3/1, 29.

⁴⁶¹ Frahm has suggested that this text was written by the talented scholar Nabû-zupup-kēnu. Frahm 2003, 157–160. See also Baker and Pearce PNA 2/2, 912–913 for a biography.

⁴⁶² RINAP 3/1, 33.

⁴⁶³ RINAP 3/1, 33.

not only is the king restless, but he is also furious and enraged.⁴⁶⁴ This prepares the reader for another onslaught in which Sennacherib and his army take on Marduk-apla-iddina in Kish. The leonine rage and restlessness, constructing a warrior-masculinity that is to dominate the enemy, is negatively paralleled by the failed masculinity of the enemy who sees the oncoming troops and is filled with fear, abandons his own troops, and flees to the land of Guzummānu.⁴⁶⁵

Sennacherib 18: v11b comes from an octagonal clay prism from Nineveh dating to the king's 14th regnal year.⁴⁶⁶ This trope introduces a sequence of events which are performative in that they engender the necessary rage for military action. Sennacherib rages like a lion, and the leonine transference is followed by a prostheticisation of the body: he wears armor, combat-helmet, rides in the chariot, and takes the mighty bow and arrow in hand. The rage is here not gratuitous; indeed, it comes from the agreement of the gods who accede to his request, that is, for the gods to command his victory. The exact same wording is duplicated in Sennacherib 22: v 67b,⁴⁶⁷ Sennacherib 23: v 57⁴⁶⁸ and Sennacherib 148: 9'b.⁴⁶⁹

The leonine metaphor is expressed in two different configurations in the annals of Sennacherib. In the first configuration, Sennacherib goes after Marduk-apla-iddina and his allies, and this elicits the rage of a lion in the Assyrian king. The metaphor-like comparative structure predicates a masculine animality and a masculinized natural

⁴⁶⁴ RINAP 3/1, 34. The text also extends the metaphor beyond animality to the domain of natural phenomena, claiming that like a he become fearful like a flood (*abūbāniš, abūbiš*). This will be discussed elsewhere in this study.

⁴⁶⁵ See also RINAP 3/2, 295 = Sennacherib 213:25.

⁴⁶⁶ RINAP3/1, 154.

⁴⁶⁷ RINAP 3/1, 182–3.

⁴⁶⁸ RINAP 3/1, 200.

⁴⁶⁹ RINAP 3/2, 202.

phenomenon (the flood) onto the royal persona. The second configuration highlights the king's relation to the gods: Sennacherib turning to the gods to concede victory in the battlefield and when given the command, the leonine transference is brought about through a technologized subjectivity.

Esarhaddon's inscriptions follow those of Sennacherib but they also introduce a new motif to the leonine imagery that the scribal culture adopted for the *res gestae* of the king. In Esarhaddon 01: i 57, the king reports that *ušasriha sipittu labbiš annadirma issarih kabattī* (I cried out the mourning rites, and like a lion I became restless and my mind/liver flared up, ie. I became furious).⁴⁷⁰ This introduces for the first time in the Assyrian royal inscriptions the *sipittu* (mourning) in the context of lions. Suffice it to say here that Esarhaddon's introduction of the notion of mourning, an activity otherwise associated with femininity in ancient Near Eastern texts, points to the instability of masculinity as a gender performance. The occurrence of the transference of leonine masculinity compensates for the transient loss of masculinity in this passage. Once again, sovereign masculinity turns to the bestial metaphor to rescue the king's gender performance from going awry. This is also repeated in the octagonal prism fragment Esarhaddon 6: i1.⁴⁷¹ Esarhaddon 8: ii6', however, continues the image of Sennacherib's ritual preparation for battle: first the raging like a lion, and then the preparation for battle.⁴⁷²

Esarhaddon 98 is a stele discovered at Ziņçirli and commonly known as Esarhaddon Monument A (fig. 34). The leonine metaphor occurs on both the obverse

⁴⁷⁰ RINAP 4, 13.

⁴⁷¹ RINAP 4, 47.

⁴⁷² RINAP 4, 53.

and the reverse of the stele. In Esarhaddon 98: rev13 the leonine trope is contextualized in a section of the text where the intended message is to portray the king as one who subdues the enemy and razes cities to tells. This time, however, the leonine rage is not predicated upon the king's persona, but rather upon his deeds.⁴⁷³ The obverse of the stele constructs an image of royal hypervirility by portraying the merciless and inexorably belligerent king as carrying the enemy rulers with nose ropes while raging like a lion. This is followed by the novel phraseology for the leonine, that of avenger of the death of the father who engendered him (*lābu nadru mutēr gimil abī ālidišu*).⁴⁷⁴ The political context that required the use of this *ad hoc addendum* will be discussed below. Finally, Esarhaddon 99:1, a text copied from a protective bull colossus placed at one of the palace doorways and a near-verbatim version of the text on the Ziņirli stele., duplicates the image of the king, raging like a lion and carrying unsubmitive rulers by a nose-rope and raging like a lion.⁴⁷⁵

The motif discontinues after Esarhaddon and is not attested in the *res gestae* of Assurbanipal and his successors. I will argue that this is not a hazard of the fragmentary remains of the evidence, but rather (due to the extent to which this reign is well documented) a matter of scribal, and perhaps royal, prerogative.

Table 2 (below) lists the attestations of leonine metaphors and metaphor-like tropes in the royal inscriptions:

⁴⁷³ RINAP 4, 184.

⁴⁷⁴ Esarhaddon 98:24 = RINAP 4, 184. See also CAD 9/L, 25 *labbu*.

⁴⁷⁵ RINAP 4, 186–7.

Reign	Source	Trope
Adad-nerari II	Adad-nerari II 2, 14	metaphor
Adad-nerari II	Adad-nerari II 4, 1'	metaphor
Ashurnasirpal II	Ashurnasirpal II 001, i 3b	metaphor
Ashurnasirpal II	Ashurnasirpal II 017, i 35	metaphor
Ashurnasirpal II	Ashurnasirpal II 020, 40b	metaphor
Shalmaneser V	Shalmaneser V	-
Sargon II	Sargon II	simile
Sennacherib	Sennacherib 1, 16	simile
Sennacherib	Sennacherib 1, 25	simile
Sennacherib	Sennacherib 18, v 11'b	simile
Sennacherib	Sennacherib 22, v 67b	simile
Sennacherib	Sennacherib 39, 51b	simile
Sennacherib	Sennacherib 148, 9'b	simile
Sennacherib	Sennacherib 213, 16	simile
Sennacherib	Sennacherib 213, 25	simile
Esarhaddon	Esarhaddon 1, i 53	simile
Esarhaddon	Esarhaddon 6, i 1	simile
Esarhaddon	Esarhaddon 8, ii' 6'	simile
Esarhaddon	Esarhaddon 98, 13	simile
Esarhaddon	Esarhaddon 98, r 7b	simile
Esarhaddon	Esarhaddon 99, 1	simile

Table 2 Attestations of Leonine Metaphors and Metaphor-Like Tropes in the Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions

Table 3 (below) is a bar chart that shows the distribution of the literary devices that are used in the royal inscriptions to refer to the king as a lion based on the number of attestations in all the royal inscriptions.

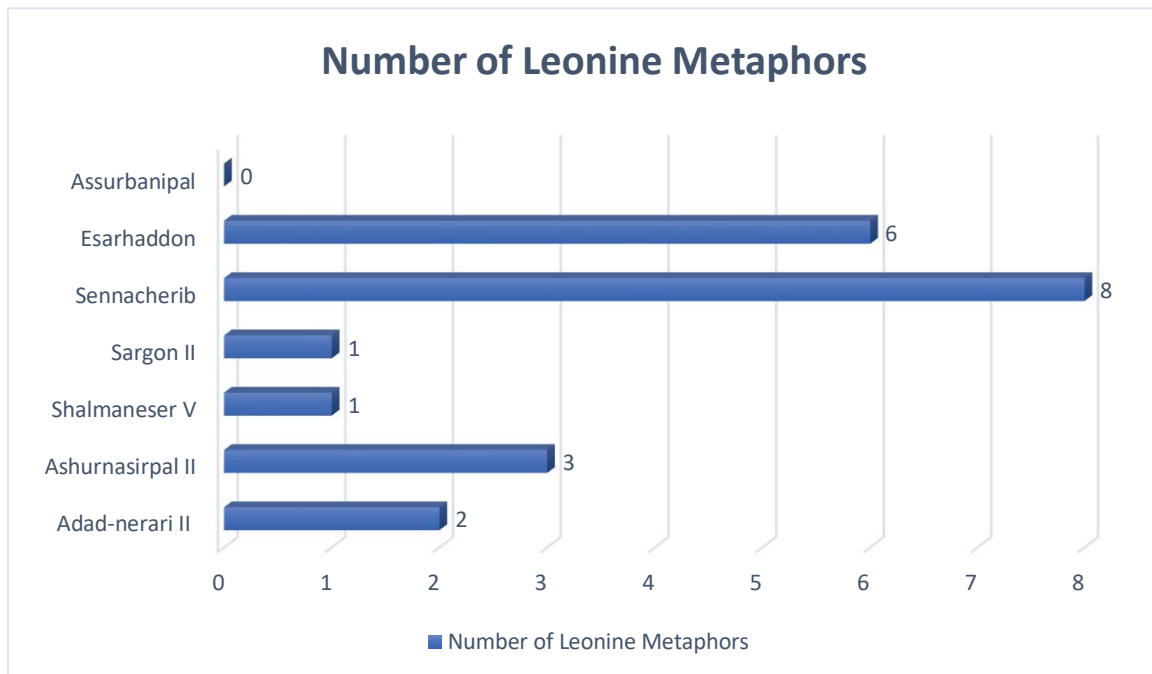


Table 3 Distribution of Leonine References to the Neo-Assyrian King

4.2. Discussion on the Use of the Leonine Metaphor in the Neo-Assyrian Period

We have seen how Elena Cassin had long established the symmetrical association of value between the king and the lion, and more recently in the work of Watanabe, we explored the semantic domains, namely the attributes of awe-inspiring fear and power, that governed this association. What the work of both Cassin and Watanabe does not focus on, however, is not only the changing phraseology of the leonine references in the *res gestae* of the Neo-Assyrian period, but also their persistent gender value over time. In this light, what these studies leave out is the narcissistic transference that occurs in the domains of the sovereign's potency, primacy, and

power when the ‘tenor’ and the ‘vehicle’ meet in the trope of the metaphor. Both ‘values’ of tenor and vehicle undergo a process of transformation in the device of the metaphor, and we may argue that the change is one that revolves around the axis of gender. Indeed, in the listed semantic range, Watanabe’s attributes leave out the masculinity-marker that is conjured by the pair bond *labāku u zikaraku*.⁴⁷⁶ Indeed, the frequent translation of the pair bond as “I am a virile lion” in most of the Assyriological literature does not accurately reflect the meaning of the epithet chain and Winter’s translation makes for a better rendition of the pair bond as “I am a lion, and I am a (potent) male.”⁴⁷⁷

Furthermore, in his seminal and highly instrumental study of the ideology of the Neo-Assyrian empire, Liverani argues that one of the strategies of dominant Assyrian masculinity was to predicate the domain of animality upon subordinate masculinities, that is, by referring to them as animals: “the doubt arises that they are sub-human beings, belonging rather to the animal world, and as a matter of fact, frequently compared to animals.”⁴⁷⁸ Although Liverani’s reading correctly identifies one of the Assyrian tropes of constructing and signalling failed masculinity through bestial references, the author ignores the gender-political discourse that is abundant in the *res gestae* referring to the Assyrian king and his armies using cross-species identification. Animality was not a strategy or device used for the sole purpose of othering; indeed, as Derrida notes, only *some* animals become other.⁴⁷⁹ Therefore, we

⁴⁷⁶ Winter 2010b, 92–93.

⁴⁷⁷ Winter 2010b, 92–93. Indeed, in the RIMA translations, the conjunction *u* is left untranslated and the male potency is, paradoxically, transferred to the lion to render the couplet “I am a virile lion.” Furthermore, supporting the ‘king-lion-potent male’ triad is also Adad-nerari II’s claim that the body is divinely shaped into one that carries lordly stature. For this view, see Winter 2010b, 93.

⁴⁷⁸ Liverani 1979, 310.

⁴⁷⁹ See, Derrida 2011 *passim*.

may posit that the ideology of the Neo-Assyrian empire structures animality into a hierarchy reflecting the relations with the human social order. As Colin Jerolmack notes in his study on pigeon fanciers, animals and the human relations to them cross-cut with the structuring of the social order.⁴⁸⁰

As the diachronic catalogue above indicates, the scribal tradition in the early phase of the Neo-Assyrian empire turned to an already existing tradition of constructing the sovereign's gender identity along the lines of what Ataç calls "a masculinity that exists on an ideal plane, rather than an ordinary conception of masculinity defined exclusively in relation to social norms."⁴⁸¹ In effecting a search for a royal masculine subjectivity, the scribes and the king employed a tradition of cross-species transference through, among others, the leonine metaphor to create what I shall call a leonine masculinity for the ruler. As the early Neo-Assyrian tradition reveals, it is the attributes most useful for an ideology and aesthetics of militarism essential for an expansionist imperialism as the central discourse of the Neo-Assyrian rulers that seemed to be the most relevant among the attributes of the lion.

The trope of symbiotically attaining a leonine masculinity that is achieved through a "copula" relationship across species rather than through hegemonic or complicit or even antagonistic homosocial relations with other men plays into Ferandez's tension of the inchoate subject in search for an identity through metaphor. In fact, the tension of the lack within the subjectivity of the sovereign is resolved by the scribal tradition through a series of performative and persuasive metaphors which in themselves go through a series of reconfigurations over time. Indeed, the use of the

⁴⁸⁰ Jerolmack 2013, 14–16.

⁴⁸¹ Ataç 2010, 59.

leonine metaphor seems to mirror the political developments of the period, which placed high value on the performance of masculinity within the arena of militarism.⁴⁸²

4.3 Conclusion

Adad-nerari II is the first king to introduce the metaphor in the epithet section of his annals. This signals a long hiatus in the use of the trope, especially in the context of royal literature. With their individualistic tone and focus on the personal valour and might of the king, the epithets Adad-nerari II mark an Assyrian renaissance of territorial re-conquest which is no coincidence.⁴⁸³ It is no coincidence, therefore, that Adad-nerari II, whose reign ushered in a new era of politico-military superiority by conquering the lands previously occupied by the Arameans, was concerned with promoting a self-image of a man that was unrivalled.⁴⁸⁴ By turning to the age-old tradition of leonine masculinity already in place at the time of Šulgi, Adad-nerari II's annalistic compositions constructed a masculinity outside the realms of men to attain higher hegemonic value. With the next expansionist phase, that of Ashurnasirpal II, the metaphor is used in the royal inscriptions once again. One may argue that, like other titles and epithets, the writers of the annals only used specific phraseology that reflected the political realities of the reign.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸² See Chapman 2007 who sees the battlefield as the primary arena for the performance of successful masculinity as expressed in the royal inscriptions and the bas-reliefs of the period.

⁴⁸³ Cifola 1995, 83–84.

⁴⁸⁴ Cifola 1995, 82.

⁴⁸⁵ See Liverani 2017, 102–112 for an updated survey of the use of royal titles and epithets in the Assyrian inscriptions.

The Sargonid period, however, marks a change not only at the level of frequency and phraseology, but also at the level of semantics. At the level of frequency, Sennacherib and Esarhaddon mark a substantial increase in the leonine tropes, as seen in the distribution table (Table 3). The two together account for more than the whole corpus of occurrences dating to other reigns. The other significant change is the way the trope was employed, with Sennacherib choosing the simile-structure over the explicit metaphor, while employing it to specifically declare the type of rage required to charge the agent into military action. In fact, the trope as used by Sennacherib seems to frame a ritual of war which begins with the king feeling enraged and restless like a lion, and then embarking on the preparations for war – that is, the prosthetic decoration with technologized martial apparatuses. The linguistic and conceptual device here operates as a performative utterance to arouse the troops for war. Furthermore, in Sennacherib we also witness a broadening of the semantic domain for the term lion. As a *zikar šēri na'du*, that is, attentive man of the steppe, Sennacherib reconfigures the semantic domain of lion and shifts its focus from the outright bellicose to the statesman who commands Assyria through a network of surveillance and intelligence. Indeed, this trope feeds into a phraseology that builds Sennacherib's surveilling male gaze (see Chapter 3).

In the reign of Esarhaddon, the metaphor is embedded between the image of the king as a majestically-clad, fearless and merciless warrior-king who subdues the enemy other and parades them like menial animals by a nose-rope through the Assyrian city and the loyal son who reckons the male-kinship with his mortal father and maker. The image of the king carrying the enemy with a nose or mouth ring brings into visual synonymy the king's total management and control of the bridled animals;

thus, the king is seen as managing the lives of others.⁴⁸⁶ This was a strategy reminiscent of the belligerent Sargon II, and using it may have been an attempt by Esarhaddon to align himself with Sargon in light of the murder of his father. Furthermore, William R. Gallagher notes that no Assyrian king used the hyper-dominant and hyper-masculine epithet of ‘king who places the nose-rope on the rebels of the four (quarters of the earth).’⁴⁸⁷ Indeed, only Assurbanipal uses the image of the *serretu* rope on an enemy (Uaite’, king of the Arabs). The Zinçirli stele of Esarhaddon has a near-identical *visual* rendition of this trope of masculine dominance (it would be circular to say that dominance is masculine were it not for the fact that the Assyrian sources single out the virility as a necessary attribute *for* dominance) with the king holding the Nubian and the Phoenician captives by a lip-ring: on the stele, the king states “*mukil serret maliki*” (holder of the nose-rope of rulers).

A novel semantic range for the lion in the reign of Esarhaddon emerges from the political realities of the period. Esarhaddon, whose reign was plagued by the shadow of his father’s assassination and whose depression, disability, and personal ill-fortune may have been attributed to his alleged grandfather’s sin and doom of lineage, a novel semantic domain emerges for the lion, one that pits masculinity against the need to obtain restitution for past injustice. In the case of Esarhaddon 98:24, a point to bear in mind is that the metaphor is precisely located in the middle of an account of

⁴⁸⁶ On this, cf. 2Ki 19:28. Isaiah talks of the king of Assyria who will be forced to leave Judah with a ‘hook through the nose’ and a ‘bit in your mouth’. “Because they rage against me, and thy tumult, is come up into mine ears, therefore will I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way which thou camest.” Is 37:29. See also Ezekiel 38:1–4.

⁴⁸⁷ Gallagher 1999, 234. On the possibility that Esarhaddon may have killed Sennacherib himself, see Radner 2003.

the king's domination of his enemies and the king's emphasis on avenging the murder of the father.

With Assurbanipal and his reign, as we shall see in the analysis of his hunting bas-reliefs, the increasing secularity and the redefinition of masculinity as one that places value on intellectual matters rather than extolling explicit military might prefigures the absence of the trope. It is worth noting, however, that the only reference to the royal leonine masculinity in this reign comes from a petition to Assurbanipal.⁴⁸⁸ This is perhaps part of a letter written to Assurbanipal by his son who, in extolling the power of the king, begs him the question: 'are you not a lion?'⁴⁸⁹

What we see is a construct of masculinity at the intersection of power, potency, and sovereignty. The use of literary devices such as metaphor which constitute figurative language brings together Fernandez's account of the inchoate's subject search for identity and Derrida's tension between the 'conjunction' and the 'copula'.⁴⁹⁰ Read through this prism, the early Neo-Assyrian project to construct the masculinity of the king used the literary device of metaphor to turn the subject, 'inchoate' in Fernandez's terms because neither man nor god, and turns away from either to structure and build a masculine identity. In this sense, therefore, it is a Derridian 'copula' (the sovereign *is* the beast) and not a 'conjunction' (the sovereign *and* the beast). The effect of the device, therefore, is a "sort of ontologico-sexual attraction, a mutual fascination, a communitarian attachment, or even a narcissistic resemblance, the one recognizing in the other a sort of double, the one becoming the

⁴⁸⁸ SAA III, 59 = K 4793 = ABL 1455, line r.5.

⁴⁸⁹ SAA III, 59 = K 4793 = ABL 1455, line r.5.

⁴⁹⁰ See Derrida 2011, 60.

other, being the other.”⁴⁹¹ In this sense, therefore, the inchoate subject, in recognizing its identity in the beast, is not so inchoate, or rather, less inchoate than Fernandez or Haddox claim. It is inchoate until the identification is established. The Neo-Assyrian king, in these royal inscriptions, configures a masculinity that is suitable for the militaristic requirements of the nation, already in itself a masculine enterprise. This process of ‘*being the other*’ is perhaps best seen in the metonymic substitute (or *supplement*) of the lion/king in the royal seal.

That this construct of leonine masculinity was culturally contingent, and native to Assyrian militaristic ideology but not necessarily so to other emic contexts, is a point that is made clear in the text of the Hebrew Bible. While in Mesopotamia the “image of the wild animal is employed as a model of combat for the king to emulate,”⁴⁹² the same construct of masculinity through symbiosis is not placed in a position of optimal cultural value. Jer 50:17, for instance, does not view the belligerent and aggressive attributes of the lion in positive terms: indeed, power and fierceness belong to a construct of masculinity which is not culturally approved. As Foreman notes, “this is consistent with the biblical tradition which *never* maps the violent ferocity or strength of the lion for the king’s strength or militaristic capabilities in a positive light.”⁴⁹³ In the Hebrew Bible, cross-species symbiosis of the Israelite king and the lion is a prohibition unless those rulers are foreign, and by extension, other to the Israelite king. Ezek 32:2–3 depicts pharaoh as a lion but the intended message is one of negative value; the same negative image is transmitted for Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 7:4 as a lion with

⁴⁹¹ Derrida 2011, 60.

⁴⁹² Brown quoted in Foreman 2011, 88.

⁴⁹³ Foreman 2011, 173. See 162–173 for a treatment of leonine metaphors.

clipped wings. Since only the foreign king is a lion, and since the foreign king is the enemy, the lion is logically the enemy too. In this sense, therefore, we see in the Hebrew Bible a critique of the aesthetics of fear and violence that lies at the heart of the masculinity of the Assyrian king.⁴⁹⁴

In conclusion, therefore, the hyper-masculinity of the Neo-Assyrian king is constructed through a set of identificatory tropes which carry the “value of a process, a becoming, an identity metamorphosis”⁴⁹⁵ through which the sovereign attains the necropolitical masculinity demanded by imperial ideology.

⁴⁹⁴ See Strawn 2005, 347. According to Strawn, the Hebrew Bible reserves the image of the lion for Yahweh alone. The fact that Shalmaneser V or Sargon II took the northern kingdom of Israel in (722?) may lie behind such a reception for the leonine image. On this view see Foreman 2011, 86. What is interesting is that the combo sovereign-lion was an international trope of foreign policy, one which entered the fold of political and theological discourse. This critique of the aesthetics of masculine violence and rage will be discussed below where I will argue that the Orientalist images of Near Eastern rulers borrowed from this critique of Assyrian masculinity.

⁴⁹⁵ Derrida 2011, 60. Derrida argues that both the sovereign and the beast are outside the law, with the beast not knowing it, and the king being the one who creates it. This implies that the king is the agent of necropolitical power, taking the life of the other. As I have argued earlier, this is the real construct of masculinity defined as hypermasculine in the Assyrian repertoire, and it is this configuration of masculinity which the Hebrew Bible writers were at loggerheads with.

CHAPTER 5. MASCULINITIES, HUNTING, AND EMPIRE

5.0. Introduction

In this chapter, I will be analysing the extant textual and visual sources related to the self-image of the Neo-Assyrian king as hunter. I will first engage with the current state of knowledge in the field of Assyriology related to the theme of the royal hunt, which focuses mainly on the performance of the cultic duties of the king and the age-old interplay between the constructs of order and chaos, and then present a chronological survey of the attestations. In order to make sense of these data, I will turn to the work of hunter-gatherer studies, especially as used by Catherine Bates in her literary work on lyric poetry, to elaborate a theoretical framework in order to cross-cut the reading of the royal hunt with the ideological demands on the king's performance in the hunting expeditions to legitimate his claim of hegemonic masculinity within a hierarchy of different masculinities. At issue in this section are the chronological changes in the configurations, expressions, performances and representations of the royal hunt as they intersect with notions of gender, class, and imperial agency.

5.1. The Royal Hunts in Assyriological Literature

The image of the Assyrian king as hunter was actively propagated in the palaces of the Assyrian kings as well as outside; indeed, it remains until today one of the central images of kingship for that period.⁴⁹⁶ The meaning of the king-as-hunter encoded in the textual and visual programmes in their emic contexts differ greatly however from that projected onto this image by external sources such as the Hebrew Bible. Even today,

⁴⁹⁶ The royal hunt reliefs are the most popular Western Asiatic exhibits at the British Museum.

Collins argues that the Orientalising image of the Assyrian king in the nineteenth century reception of Assyria was built on an image of Eastern despotism.⁴⁹⁷ Indeed, Frederick Arthur Bridgman's nineteenth-century painting of the Assyrian king in the arena with lions strips the royal hunt from the fabric within which it was embedded in the emic context and appears more intent on representing the king in the guise of a Roman gladiator entertaining the cheering crowds (fig. 38). The overt homoerotic and libidinal male gaze elicited by the audience of Bridgman's painting is directed onto the figure of the king and his alluring physique. This is not a contest of masculinity in fact, and the manliness of the Assyrian king is almost redundant in the painting, for the lions do not represent worthy opponents. The presentation of the king seems unnecessarily cruel, and the pathos is driven towards the lion.

The Assyrian hunting reliefs, however, reveal a rather different picture. As noted by Karlsson, the primary sources make clear that the blood sport of the Assyrian king were not the product of a bored and cruel Oriental despot seeking gratuitous cruelty through sport, but rather a religious duty to which the king had to subscribe.⁴⁹⁸

That the Neo-Assyrian kings had an imperial interest in animals is well known in the Assyriological literature. Reade gives a comprehensive overview of the collection of exotic animals by the king, arguing that most of the material goods that the kings collected were by-products of their military campaigns but the policy of animal collecting appear to have been for its own sake.⁴⁹⁹ Since the focus of this chapter is on

⁴⁹⁷ Collins 2008, 16 talks about inclusion of Assyrian details to confirm a biblical or oriental imaginary.

⁴⁹⁸ Karlsson 2016, 225.

⁴⁹⁹ Reade 2004, 260.

the lion hunt in particular, I shall restrict the analysis to this animal only, with only passing comments on the rest of the bestiary when necessary.⁵⁰⁰

Lions, for example, may have been collected for royal prestige; Shalmaneser I may have collected the animal but does not specify the species in his inscriptions.⁵⁰¹ It is certain that Ashurnasirpal II kept lions in cages in his palaces in town and elsewhere. Further, an unidentified eighth century Assyrian king is shown with a lion under his throne and we know that Assurbanipal kept lions in his palace.⁵⁰² In addition, the king-lion combat was the theme of the royal seal at least since Shalmaneser III. The hunting of lions is also shown on the White Obelisk probably from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, and wall paintings probably dating to the reigns Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal were excavated in Nimrud and at Til-Barsip.⁵⁰³ Furthermore, Reade shows that despite the lack of textual evidence from Sargon's period related to hunting, the reliefs show that Sargon and Sennacherib did hunt small game like birds and gazelle. Assurbanipal hunted lion, gazelle, deer, wild asses.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰⁰ Winter 2010a, 22 notes that although the Neo-Assyrian kings mentioned numerous species of animals in the hunting sequence of their royal inscriptions, they only chose to represent the lions and the bulls as their worthy opponents in their visual narrative.

⁵⁰¹ RIMA 2, 183–4.

⁵⁰² Reade 2004, 260.

⁵⁰³ On the zoological collection of Assyrian kings, see Reade 2004, 260. Reade notes that Ashurbelkala brought home live elephants and wild cattle (cf. also Grayson 1991, 103–104), collected herds of deer and camels, and birds and displayed them to his people; Adad-nerari II collected animals at Assur, Ashurnasirpal II made a new collection at Kalah (cf. also Grayson 1991, 216, 226, 291–92, 344). Shalmaneser III was 'a very keen hunter' (cf. also Grayson 1996, 54, 84) but despite the abundance of texts, he only mentions collecting wild animals twice. Reade interprets this as either pointing to an existence of an inherited collection, or to a dwindling in the number of game available to hunt and collect due to deforestation and agricultural expansion (perhaps the reason why the wild pig becomes a collectable animal).

⁵⁰⁴ Reade 2004, 260.

The hunt is an early theme in the royal textual and visual self-imaging of Mesopotamian kings, dating back to the early kings of prehistoric Uruk.⁵⁰⁵ Maul argues that the philosophical understanding of the royal hunt in its indigenous context is tied to the structured binary of order and chaos.⁵⁰⁶ Karlsson too supports this idea. Indeed, Karlsson posits that in embodying the structure of Chaos and ‘mythological danger’, the lions threaten the social order that is the king’s prerogative to maintain.⁵⁰⁷ The argument here risks becoming circular; as argued by Derrida, the beast is not so much outside ‘the law’ as within a legal structure that allows the possibility of being outside it. The neat binary of order and chaos is too facile to be useful for the analysis at hand; it does not resolve the ideological tension of the Derridean *being-with* and *being* that is so evident in the sources.

A better interpretation of the evidence situates the royal hunt in a broader discourse of imperialism; for Russell, followed by Karlsson, the hunt extends the land for the benefit of economic progress in terms of husbandry and agriculture.⁵⁰⁸ Albenda and Cassin, on the other hand, the hunt is an expression of divine power which prefigures military activity and warfare. They have both looked closely at the theme of the Assyrian royal hunt and argue for the religious dimension can be explained the libation scene attested as a consequence of the hunt.⁵⁰⁹ This ritual of divine

⁵⁰⁵ Karlsson 2016, 133 and Reade 1983, 72; Winter 1981, 11 argues that the royal hunt was not a casual theme but rather one that portrayed the king as vigorous and victorious master-of-the-animals. See also Ziegler 2011, 68–69 and Herbort 1998–2001, 269 who argue that hunting was tied to kingship even in the Neo-Assyrian period.

⁵⁰⁶ Maul 1995, 395; 399,

⁵⁰⁷ Karlsson 2016, 133.

⁵⁰⁸ Russell 2008, 182; Karlsson 2016, 133.

⁵⁰⁹ Winter 2010a, 15 also notes that the royal hunts of Ashurnasirpal II and Assurbanipal are visually represented in a pair, with the action showing the hunting activities of the sovereign and the consequence showing the ritual libation following a successful hunt.

glorification for the gift of the successful hunt implies that this princely activity is carried out under the auspices of the gods who seek to extend the imperial territory into the open country (*ersetu*) and thereby taking over the lion's top position in the hierarchy in its domain.⁵¹⁰ They both argue that the hunt was indeed part of the religious remit of the king, and that it was buttressed by a divine command and fulfilled a theological ideology.

Watanabe's contribution to the discussion on the sovereign hunting activities in the Neo-Assyrian period engages with an interdisciplinary strategy to analyse the deeper meaning of symbolism of this activity. She seeks to understand the "attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion" by she analysing the entire corpus, from the royal inscriptions, the ritual texts, the correspondence, and the visual program of the palaces.⁵¹¹ At this point, however, it is worth engaging with Watanabe's study at some length; the justification for this lies in the fact that her study provides a foundation for the analysis that will be presented here.

Watanabe notes that in the libation scene following the hunt, the king occupies the place of the object of worship yet the textual and visual sources do not make clear who or what the specific someone is. Watanabe believes that identifying the 'someone' could resolve the riddle of the true meaning of the royal hunt. Rather than taking the facile solution of the hunt as a practical solution to the elimination of animals regarded as natural enemies threatening human and cattle, Watanabe prefers to read in the cult-drama the nature of the surrogate victim of the beast embedded

⁵¹⁰ See Albenda 1972, 167–178, and Cassin 1981, 355–401.

⁵¹¹ See Watanabe 1998, 440.

within ritual, especially since the inhabitants of Nineveh shared in the emotional tension, and, I would add, collective effervescence.

For Watanabe the libation ritual frames the hunt, making clear its sacrificial element. Thus, the hunt restores the animal to its divine owner to appease the ‘anxiety of bloodshed’.⁵¹² Here, she extends the argument to claim that the king was the owner of the lions—although not in a domestic sense. Further, Watanabe adds that there is a clear intersection between the royal hunt and the myths of Ninurta. She cites echoes in the terminology used to describe what I shall call the ‘prosthetic technologies of the hunt’; the *nar’amtū* weapon and the chariot described as ^{giš}GIGIR *ru-kub* LUGAL-*ti-ia* or simply the open chariot (^{giš}GIGIR *pattūte*).⁵¹³ Based on these parallels, Watanabe argues that the king is performing the role of Ninurta. I have already argued earlier that Ninurta was indeed a paragon for Assyrian kingship, a standard of masculinity against which the Assyrian king measured his gender performance. In light of my earlier argument, I concur with Watanabe that a blurring of identity through performance is at the heart of the royal hunt. Watanabe further parallels the establishment of Ninurta’s divine kingship attained through the killing of monsters with the Assyrian king’s kingship attained through the killing of lions. She demonstrates cogently that lions were the beastly domain reserved for the sole privilege of the king.⁵¹⁴

Watanabe cites the Šulgi hymn B (trans. Castellino) to note that “to finish the lion with the weapon was *my own* privilege” (my emphasis). In addition, two Old

⁵¹² Watanabe 1992, 441.

⁵¹³ Watanabe 1992, 442–3.

⁵¹⁴ Watanabe 1992, 443.

Babylonian letters from Mari written by a Yaqqim-Addu to the king reveal that the former had a lioness on his estate but could not kill it. He had to feed it until the king arrived, but the lioness would not eat and the king's reply did not arrive in a timely fashion and fearing that the beast might get sick, Yaqqim-Addu caged it and sent it to the king. The lion died en route. Upon examination of the body of the lioness, Yaqqim-Addu concluded that the beast was old and poorly, and its death was due to natural causes. There is emphasis in the letter that the king might suspect wrongdoing and would accuse Yaqqim-Addu of killing the beast, thus breaking what he calls the 'taboo of my lord' (*a-sa-ak be-li-ia*). This idea points, therefore, to what Watanabe calls a 'hunting prohibition' concerning lions.⁵¹⁵ The prohibition seems to have been reserved for the act of killing the lion; in fact, no qualms were made for Yaqqim-Addu skinning the dead carcass for fur and flesh. She concludes that lions had a special place in the spiritual culture of ancient Mesopotamia.

The prohibition on the act of killing lions points to the copula nature of the king as lion, discussed above. They are a mirror image of each other. The king *is* the lion, and anyone but the king killing the lion would have been an attempt to displace the king from the position of hegemonic masculinity; indeed, the epithets clearly state that the king is the sole possessor of extraordinary vigour and virility. In engaging with Watanabe's text, it is interesting to note that she writes the following: "such association of the king with the lion or with the wild bull provides an insight into the perception that kingship belonged in the wild domain" through the common

⁵¹⁵ Watanabe 1991, 446.

hegemony over the domain of fierceness.⁵¹⁶ Watanabe almost seems to echo the iteration by Derrida of the sovereign and the beast as both situated outside of the law.

It is evident that there is a diachronic change in the ideology of kingship from the Sumerian to the Assyrian period: for the Sumerians, kingship was both a wild animal (Sum. **bàn-da**; Akk. *ekdu*) and a domestic one (Sum. **gud**; Akk. *Alpu*). The Assyrian king never identifies with the domesticated bull. Indeed, there are ideological imperatives explicitly stated in the coronation hymns that the king was required to align his persons with the needs of the state and the body is thus fashioned in such a way as to require the strength and vigour to helm the Assyrian imperial war machine.

Watanabe also suggests that there is a binary order and chaos involved in the lion hunt. The king would have been seen as lord of both domains. I add that this has strong echoes in the Epic of Gilgamesh, in the dual nature of Enkidu as originally a 'creature of nature' who is then brought into the rule of law through sexual contact with a woman who is at the margins of the rule of law. Drawing parallels from the model of kingship in Swazi culture as a structuring theoretical framework, Watanabe concludes that upon killing the lion, the Assyrian king releases the forces of chaos from the beast, establishes his supremacy, and restores social order.⁵¹⁷

It is thus clear that studies of the Assyrian royal hunt focus on the divine command behind the hunting expeditions of the king, the sacrificial nature of the victim which propitiates the anxiety of the blood shed through the rite of libation, and the establishment of the king's supremacy through the ordering of the domains of

⁵¹⁶ Watanabe 1991, 446.

⁵¹⁷ Watanabe 1992, 448.

order and chaos (therefore, the rule of law). At issue remains the question of how the royal hunt became a means through which royal masculinity was constructed, and why the king-as-hunter was a chosen theme to construct an imperial masculinity.

The contributions presented above rest on the notions of hunting as the attempt to bring the civilised world to the steppe and the fulfilment of the cultic duties of the king as priest (*sangu*) of Aššur; it seems, however, that these discussions emerge with the orthodox understanding of the evolution of *Homo Sapiens* from hunter-gatherer configurations, with Man-the-Hunter as the paragon of this very orthodoxy. As discussed above, such readings of the Mesopotamian hunting texts and reliefs in general, and the Neo-Assyrian exemplars in particular, need to be understood in light of the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology of the nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century which often reveal a classic back-formation of the manly heroism of hunting activities and, consequently, a tautological and circular argument.⁵¹⁸

5.2. Masculinity and The Hunt: A Theoretical Preamble

Notions of heroic masculinity and hunting have been bedfellows since the dawn of Western literature.⁵¹⁹ Indeed, as Catherine Bates states apropos boar hunting, it “represented the ultimate test of a man’s fighting ability; its encounter with a single, wild, male animal – that does not flee, that stands its ground, that is armed (literally) to the teeth, that is extraordinarily strong and many times the hunter’s body weight,

⁵¹⁸ In this we see more the post-bourgeois culture of the West, with its insistence on the provisioning of high-protein, meat based nutrition for the nuclear family, than we see the emic context.

⁵¹⁹ For an analysis of Odysseus, the hunter, see, among others: Bates 2013, 1–3. See also Cartmill 1996, especially pp. 30.

that must be attacked at close range with a single spear – making it the closest thing to heroic human combat, at least as it was practiced in the ancient world.”⁵²⁰

That the heroic masculinity achieved through hunting prowess is more than just a show of strength may be seen, however, in the constituent attributes of master hunters in the ancient world. Bates notes that Odysseus is no “archaic human type inhabiting the wild, dressed in skins, armed with a primitive club, famous for his archery, and slaughtering mythically impossible beasts.”⁵²¹ The same could be said of the Assyrian kings—they are no Enkidu, nor are they Ninurta slaying Anzû, despite the many literary allusions to the god in the textual sources. Indeed, for Odysseus as well as for his Mesopotamian literary ancestors like Enkidu, achieving a culturally approved configuration of masculinity meant “staging a transition from the space designed as ‘outside’ back in again: from the forest back to plough-land, as it were.”⁵²² Hunting, therefore, scripts the steppe as a discourse of hostility, danger, and unpredictability which needs to be overcome. Once the power has been attributed to the hunter, however, it needs to be put to good use: in the case of Odysseus to serve the *oikos*, while in the case of the Assyrian king, as we shall see, to bolster the very core of the civilized world.⁵²³

That some forms of hunting were also seen as war training for youths to uphold the city’s governance is evidenced in Plato’s *Laws* (822 D–824). Homer uses the topos of hunting to juxtapose the ideal of masculinity with the failure to perform the culturally-accepted ideal by abusing of another topos – that of hospitality; indeed,

⁵²⁰ Bates 2013, 1.

⁵²¹ Bates 2013, 3.

⁵²² Bates 2013, 3.

⁵²³ Bates 2013, 3.

Odysseus hunts not wild animals or foreign enmity (the Other) but the men who had “fallen foul of the ideal.”⁵²⁴

Nevertheless, the natural correlation between masculinity and the activity of chasing and killing or capturing large-prey needs to be dissolved if we are to avoid the self-evident, tautological and circular reasoning in finding every hunting activity to be inherently manly and heroic. In order to make sense of this correlation, we need to bear in mind that there is a strong classic back-formation in the understanding of the hunt as a heroic and manly act. Indeed, recent contributions by hunter-gatherer studies have shown that nineteenth- and twentieth-century archaeologists and anthropologists, more often than not, found evidence of what they set out to look for in the first place, namely the self-evident heroism-in-the-hunt that the orthodoxy of their various disciplines was classically trained to uphold (that is, the hunter-gatherer configuration as site of the emergence of *Homo Sapiens* and the technologized subjectivity of Man-the-Hunter whose heroic manliness tamed the wild). Indeed, scholars within the framework of hunter-gatherer studies have revealed the concerns of nineteenth- and twentieth-century post-bourgeois Western values of man as provider of a high-protein meat-based nutrition to the nuclear family. Indeed, Linda Owens has made clear that by reassessing the evidence from the European Upper Palaeolithic, the role of women in hunting has been grossly misrepresented in scholarship, and that biological explanations regarding the role of women as gatherers, child bearers, and minders is at loggerheads with the data available.⁵²⁵

⁵²⁴ Bates 2013, 3. This is an indication that the object of the hunt is not always the Other; in fact, the hunt could be directed to same-gendered social equals.

⁵²⁵ See Owens 2005. Owen stresses the importance of activities carried out by females in supplying clothing, containers, and tools. In light of the evidence from the period in her study, she recommends

In order to make sense of the evidence, anthropologists sought to understand the activity of hunting as a symbolic rather than utilitarian domain in men's work.⁵²⁶ That is, rather than making sense of the hunt within the context of the provision of food, they sought to understand it in terms of a strategy which is object-oriented. In the context of a system of diversified subsistence and a differential economy operating between foraging (efficient, safe, and predominantly a female task) and hunting (dangerous, unsafe, and predominantly a male task), the yield of the latter will be more highly rated.⁵²⁷ It is argued that it is this very inefficiency, low-yield, and danger involved in the activity of large-prey hunting that signals its continuity and its prestige (what hunter-gatherer scholars call its *structuring principle*). In turn, it is these structuring principles that get translated into the attributes of the agent carrying out the hunt, that is, courage, fearlessness, strength, and resourcefulness. As Bates notes, "hunting is about status, not subsistence," that is, it constructs *differences* between individuals and, just like the battlefield, becomes an arena for male competition and competing masculinities.⁵²⁸

In so far as it is a reliable signal of male ability, therefore, hunting becomes a signal of masculinity, and a topos which is antagonistic to the essentialist discourses on

we reassess our scholarly assumptions as it seems that, more often than not, the relegation of women to the private realm is more a reflection of our own biased accounts than that of the emic contexts we study.

⁵²⁶ They showed that hunting of large prey was less effective than the gathering of foodstuffs, and that understood in terms of calories expended in relation to calories gained, gathering is more high yield and less high risk. See Bates 2013, 6 for comment and relevant bibliography.

⁵²⁷ Owens 2005 *passim* argues that, with careful consideration, the need has come to undo the firm link between males and big game hunting. Although her study brings to bear on the way we understand big game and trophy hunting in prehistoric societies, we also need to bear in mind that so far we have no evidence from Neo-Assyrian sources of the activities of blood sport and big game hunting in connection with females, royal or otherwise. Interestingly, however, females do take part in the royal hunt at Nineveh during the reign of Assurbanipal, but only as spectators from the hillside. See fig.

⁵²⁸ See Bates 2013, 6; See also Chapman 2004 *passim* on the battlefield as an area for male competition.

sexual division as a result of innate attributes.⁵²⁹ The costly nature of the hunt is, in fact, a result of relational, differential economies and its heroism the result of that very cost rather than innate gendered behaviour.⁵³⁰ The masculinity-in-display in the context of the hunt is a nod to the high-risk low-yield nature of the activity. Hunting, is, therefore, a signifier of value; indeed, the more useless the activity of hunting, the more its prestige aggregates.⁵³¹

In this study, I analyse the hunt as a symbolic activity rather than a functional one. If the latter were merely the case, hunting would have very likely disappeared with the emergence of agro-pastoral societies, a period which marked the inefficiency of large-game hunting as a means of provisioning for a protein-based diet in terms of calories spent versus calories gained. Indeed, as hunter-gatherer theories show, wherever there is a differentiated economy, hunting is generally marked by a degree of inefficiency and physical peril for the actors involved, while foraging for foodstuffs like nuts proves to be much more efficient. In light of this, therefore, it would be more theoretically and methodologically sound to attempt to understand the hunt as a symbolic activity. It is only as such, in fact, that the continuity of the practice can be explained in agro-pastoralist cultures like that of ancient Assyria all the way down to modern times.

⁵²⁹ Indeed, it is argued that as a signal of maleness, hunting proffers to women the ability to make informed decisions about their mating partners. The meat becomes a bonanza by-product, as it were.

⁵³⁰ It has been argued that for Middle Palaeolithic Neanderthal societies, 250,000–30,000 years ago, the absence of a differential economy meant zero cost-signalling for bodies that required huge amounts of protein sources; conversely, for Upper Palaeolithic Eurasian human populations (45,000–12,000 years ago) which yielded evidence of both gathering and hunting tools like bows and arrows, hunting increasingly served a symbolic function. See Bates for comment and bibliography.

⁵³¹ The uselessness of the hunt in the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions is evidenced in the fact that the animals hunted (lions and elephants among others) in this princely sport did not provide protein for the diet. See RIMA 2, 681.

In so far as the practice of large game hunting poses not only a marked peril to the actor but also a high degree of inefficacy, the despatch is said to carry a higher value that is other than the provision of meat. It therefore becomes an indicator of the qualities of the hunter, and a signal to his heroic masculinity. It is this very inefficacy that gives hunting its structuring principle and as such, it becomes a representation of the abilities of the actor, that is, the fearlessness in the face of adversity as well as the ability to use tactics that allow the actor to catch the beast.⁵³² As long as hunting marks difference of masculinity among men, it becomes an arena in which male competition is played out effectively. As a symbolic means of performing and negotiating masculinity through the display of physical and tactical prowess, hunting is said to constitute the first economy, and the resulting communal banquet after the hunt, as I shall discuss with regards to Sargon's elite hunts on the bas reliefs in room 7 of Dur-Sharrukin's Room 7, becomes an occasion to foster sociality and reciprocity.⁵³³

5.3. The Neo-Assyrian Hunting Texts

Already in the time of Šulgi, the hunting texts were an integral part of royal identity and representation. In Šulgi B (c.2.4.2.02), a praise poem, Šulgi turns the lion metaphor into a hunt narrative. We can see here that the ideological tension and seeming contradiction is already established. Also, the first time the nobility of the lion is downgraded to the domain of garden weeds. In the hunt, the lion becomes the embodiment of enmity. Here the link between sovereignty, animality, and martiality is established.

⁵³² Bates 2013, 6.

⁵³³ Bates 2013, 7.

I put an end to the heroic roaring in the plains of the different lions, the dragons of the plains. I do not go after them with a net, nor do I lie in wait for them in a hide; it comes to a confrontation of strength and weapons. I do not hurl a weapon; when I plunge a bitter-pointed lance in their throats, I do not flinch at their roar. I am not one to retreat to my hiding-place but, as when one warrior kills another warrior, I do everything swiftly on the open plain. In the desert where the paths peter out, I reduce the roar at the lair to silence. In the sheepfold and the cattle-pen, where heads are laid to rest (?), I put the shepherd tribesmen at ease. Let no one ever at any time say about me, "Could he really subdue them all on his own?" The number of lions that I have dispatched with my weapons is limitless; their total is unknown. (hand to paw like Assyrian kings). The high point of my great deeds is the culling of lions before the lance as if they were garden weeds.

Šulgi (like Assyrian kings) becomes technologized through a lapis-lazuli mace and a battle-axe, and a somatic transformation into a mythological dragon with long fingers that sharpen tin and a tongue that curls out in battle.⁵³⁴

There is no inscription from the Old Assyrian period that suggests that the leonine trope was an important one for the gendered identity or the gender imaginary of the king. The first attestations in Assyrian culture come from the Middle Assyrian period. In many of these we find an echo of the praise poem of Šulgi. As we have already seen, the royal inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 B.C.E.) establish the tradition of royal inscriptions for successive Neo-Assyrian kings.⁵³⁵ Indeed, this is the period which marked important cultural transformations in both the political domain as well as in scribal activity.⁵³⁶

A.O.87.1, a royal narrative on an octagonal prism found in Assur (the first real Assyrian annalistic narrative with a chronological account of military events and a clear

⁵³⁴ On technologized subjectivities and necropolitics, see Mbembe 2003, 11-40, and Preciado 2013, 45.

⁵³⁵ RIMA 2, 7.

⁵³⁶ RIMA 2, 5.

division between the campaigns even if not dated) inserts the hunting theme between the sequences of military campaigns and the reconstruction of important edifices and the establishment of prosperity in the land. Thus, the placement of the motif in the royal inscriptions marks the importance of this theme to kingship, and puts into a form of (possibly a queer) hierarchy the hunting activities of the king.

Segment vi 55–vi 84 of the prism is what concerns us here.⁵³⁷ The motif is introduced with a juxtaposition of a gender-epithet that marks the king's masculinity constructed here through the possession of courage, strength, and valiancy with the construction of a technologized hunting identity followed by a praise for his expertise in the hunt.

*^mGIŠ.tukul-ti-IBLA-é-šár-ra et-lu qar-du
ta-me-eh GIŠ-BAN la-a sá-na-an
mu-gam-me-ru bu-ú-ur se-ri
(A.O.87.1 vi 55-57)*

Tiglath-pileser, valiant man, armed with
the unrivalled bow, expert in the hunt⁵³⁸

The Assyrian hunt narrative unfolds thus: first the king's royal bodily self is equipped with the accessories of the hunt (the prosthetics of the hunter identity which extend the body to a technologized one). The text mentions the gift of fierce weapons and a strong, exalted bow passed on from Ninurta and Nergal to the king. The hunter's prosthetic aesthetics are further technologized with iron arrowheads and sharp arrows. In this contest of supreme and sovereign virility, the king slays four virile wild

⁵³⁷ RIMA 2, 25-27.

⁵³⁸ RIMA 2, 25.

bulls in the desert, in the land Mittani, and in the city Araziqu (just outside Hatti). He flays them and takes their hides and horns to the city of Assur. The carrying of the hunting trophies back home is a display spectacle staged and choreographed for having accomplished the blood sport, and it may be inferred that the king needed to boast about the victory in this contest for masculinity. Equally important is the reference to the hunt taking place in the desert, and not in an arena set up especially for the king to display his hunting prowess. Nevertheless, the fact that the king returned with animal-part booty hints at a level of masculine pomp and circumstance upon re-entering Assur. Masculinity is always already a performance in need of an audience.

The text then proceeds to mention the elephant hunts. Tiglath-pileser hunts fourteen (ten killed, and four captured alive) in Harran and in the region of the River Habur. The live elephants and the hides and husks of the dead ones are taken as hunting trophy. After that, the narrative turns to the lions. The hunting of lions is not carried out at the whim of a savage and despotic masculinity (as often implied in Orientalist narratives of masculinity) of the Assyrian king, but it is carried out within the rule of divine law. The king's "wildly outstanding assault" (A.O.87.1; *ina qitrub mitlūtiya* vi 78—perhaps more literally translated as 'in close approach of manhood') is commanded by Ninurta, and not a gratuitous act of vainglory. The hunt is carried out *ina šēpīya* (on foot; vi 79), implying that it is done in close and fierce bodily contact. This presents the fusion of the sovereign's and the beast's bodies, a static image which was so iconic of the king's hypermasculinity that it was used as an index/metonym of kingship itself in the official bureau seal of the Assyrian palace. A further 800 lions are said to have been killed from his 'light chariot'. The text then proceeds to emphasize

the king's ability at shooting arrows by claiming that he killed the livestock of the god Sumuqan and wild birds. The annals then move on to the description of the king's reconstruction work and livestock management.

What is at issue is whether the hunting narrative is an intermezzo within the text placed between the military campaigns and the reconstruction work. A clue might reside in vi 85; "After I had gained complete dominion over the enemies of the god Aššur" (*ištu nakrūt Aššur pāt gimrišunu apēlu*; A.O.87.1 vi 85). If the hunting narrative is an intermezzo in the annals, then the animals are not part of the 'nakru' domain; if, this is not an intermezzo, then the animals and the enemies are both classified as 'nakru'. If the latter hypothesis holds, then the animals in the hunting narrative are seen as ideologically antagonistic to Aššur and therefore the masculine relationality between the sovereign and the beast is one of dominion. Further, if this is the case, what remains at issue is the ideological gap, within Assyrian ideology, between the beast as a source of both identity and enmity.

The royal inscriptions of the Middle Assyrian king Aššur-bel-kala (1073–1056) establish the formulaic narrative move from the military expeditions to the royal hunt in the Assyrian royal inscriptions. This transition formula, further elaborated in the annals of Tiglath-pileser I, juxtaposes different configurations of royal identity, namely those of the priest and the hunter. In this juxtaposition, the apparent tension is resolved in the declaration that Ninurta and Nergal do not gratuitously give the beast for the king to hunt, but they do so only because the king has successfully performed his priestly duties. A.O.89.2 iii 29 reads:

*Ninurta u Nergal ša šangûti irammū bu''ur sēra ušatlimūnima epēš
bu''uri iqbûnimma*

Lit: Ninurta and Nergal my priesthood they love, hunting in the open country they granted, a performance of the hunt they granted.

There is less emphasis here on the prosthetics and technologies of the hunt but more emphasis on *ina mēziz qardūtiya* (in wrath and heroism, or in heroic wrath, verse iii 30).

Although bearing resemblance to earlier hunting texts, Aššur-bel-kala's hunting text in the 'Broken Obelisk' dating probably to the fifth or sixth regnal year—found at Nineveh but probably originally located in Assur and celebrating the king's dominance over the body of the other—is the longest hunting narrative from the period.⁵³⁹ The gaps left by the author of the stele before the number of animals that were hunted are not trivial; it may be that the authors of the text may not have been able to reach consensus over the exact, ideal, or perhaps even ideological number.⁵⁴⁰ Again, the sequence of hunted animals follows the tradition of Tiglath-pileser I: wild bulls, elephants, and then lions. The hostile landscape and the lions are both overcome in the same vigorous assault. The inscriptions also mention of felling the lions with a mace (*ina pašhi* iv 11), an image which is also evidenced in the hunting revival of Assurbanipal.⁵⁴¹ Further, in the hunting narratives, animals are put on display for the people (*ušebri* – to make see; iv 28).

⁵³⁹ See Curtis, 2007, 53–57 for details of excavation and transportation; Ornan, 2007, 59–72 for an analysis of the topos of the king holding his prisoners of war by nose and mouth rings. For the entire text, see Grayson 1991, 99–105.

⁵⁴⁰ RIMA 2, 99. Note that Rassam reports finding this stele (BM 118898 56-9-9, 59) measuring 65.4+ cm high and 40.6 cm square at Nineveh in a ditch about halfway between the palaces of Sennacherib and of Aššurbanipal together with the female torso A.O.89.10 of Aššur-bel-kala that speaks of arousing the troops. The different pronouns used in this text points to the collation of different sources.

⁵⁴¹ Note that, like Tiglath-pileser I, Aššur-bel-kala puts animals figure in doorways. Does this not hint at the protective/prophylactic ontology of animality? Mentions 4 lions in basalt 07 v 17: *nēšē ša adbari*

The textual evidence suggests that in the Middle Assyrian period there was a quantitative increase over time in the length of hunting passages, and a more intense interest in the king's prosthetic technology at the beginning of the narrative sequence. The texts all refer to hunting and to the prophylactic ontology of the animals as well as to their aesthetic and decorative function within architectonic details. The construct set up in this period is that of masculine contest, control, dominance, and death of the animal – showing the king's masculinity to be tied to a necropolitical identity. Further, in this period the royal construction of masculine identity is never underscored by terms referring to animality.

Early attestations of the hunt in the Assyrian phase of Mesopotamian history come from a number of sources, including different textual and visual media.⁵⁴² A Middle Assyrian text called "*The king as the hunter of enemies*" popularly known in Assyriological circles as *The Hunter* portrays the king, aided and abetted by the gods Aššur, Adad, and Ninurta, hunting and clearing the steppe from a variety of animals. The hunt, in this text, is equated with the battle. The literary nature of the text allows the author to voice the concerns of the hunted, who claim their right to live in the mountains and wish for the wind to send the hunter's nets flying. They curse the prowess of the hunter, and wish for him to shoot awry. The animals wish for the hunter's manly prowess to fail. The poem also throws light on the perception of manhood in the period: gifted in speech or in physical build, men are born the way they are. The king, with his troops, then performs an extispicy and heads to the

⁵⁴² Winter shows that the lion hunts were more central motifs in the throne room programme of Ashurnasirpal II than in the annals. See Winter 2010a, 17–19. The hunts begin towards the end of the reign of Shalmaneser I (1274–1245) when Assyria conquered Ḫanigalbat. By Tiglath-pileser I it had become part of ritual.

mountains to massacre the people. The hunt here is evidently a preamble to war, with the birds uttering the fears of the people about to be invaded.⁵⁴³

The rest of the textual attestations come from the royal inscriptions. The statistical analysis of the distribution of references to hunting expeditions in the royal inscriptions starting in the Middle Assyrian and ending with the collapse of the Neo-Assyrian period reveals that following a great concern with royal hunting in the inscriptions of Middle and Early Neo-Assyrian kings, a hiatus follows in the Sargonid period reflecting an absence of concern with the representation of royal hunting expeditions in the inscriptions and which is then revived, yet in idiosyncratic ways, in the reign of Assurbanipal. The following table presents the attestations and commentaries of the references to hunting in the royal inscriptions. It will be followed with a discussion of these attestations and distributions.

⁵⁴³ See, Foster 2003, 248–249.

Text

LKA62:

[Who curbs] foes, trampler of his enemies, [who hunts] mountain donkeys, flushes the creatures of the steppe. [The Hunter:] Aššur is his ally, is his help, Ninurta, vanguard of the gods, [go]es before him. The Hunter plans battle against the donkeys; he sharpens his dagger to cut short their lives. The donkeys listened, they gamboled alert, the Hunter's terror had not come down upon them. They were bewildered: "Who is it that stalks us? Who is it, not having seen who we are, who tries to frighten us all? Our ... will cut off the high mountains, our dwelling place lies in the ... of the mountain. Let the wind send flying the Hunter's snare! May the shootings of his bow not rise high enough to reach (us) assembled!" The Hunter heard the chatter of the mountain beasts - their speech was anxious, their words troubled: "Mouth or muscles, men are what they are born!" To the warriors who will make the breaches over the mountains he says: "Let us go and bring massacre upon the mountain beasts, with our sharpened weapons we will shed their blood." He performed an extispicy for his appointed time, he raged like a thunderstorm, (like the) sun he was hitching up his chariotry. A journey of three days he marched [in one]. Even without sunshine a fiery heat was among them, he slashed the wombs of the pregnant, blinded the babies, he cut the throats of the strong ones among them, their troops saw the smoke of the (burning) land. Whatever land is disloyal to Aššur will turn into a ruin. Let me sing of the victory of Aššur, the mighty, who goes out to c[ombat], who triumphs over the cohorts of the earth! Let the first one hear and te[ll it] to the later ones!

Period - Reign	Sources	Hunting Event
MA: Tiglath-pileser I	01, vi 55	<p>A.0.87.1 – vi 55-84: Tiglath-pileser I is described as a paragon of masculinity and an expert hunter. He receives the weapons and bow of Ninurta and Nergal from them and Ninurta commands him to the hunt. The king is equipped with a bow, iron arrow-heads, and sharp arrows. Hunts 4 bulls in the desert, in Mittani, and at Araziqum just outside ḫatti. Takes trophy hides and horns to Assur.</p> <p>At ḫarrān and the River ḫabur, the king hunts 10 bull elephants and captures 4 live ones. Takes live elephants and the horns and hides of the slain ones to Assur.</p> <p>Ninurta then commands him to assault and slay 120 lions in single combat and 800 from the chariot. The king then proceeds to hunt wild beasts and birds.</p>
MA: Aššur-bēl-kala	02 iii 29' 07, iv 1	<p>A.0.89.2 – iii 29-35: Aššur-bēl-kala receives the gifts of the hunt and wild beasts from Ninurta and Nergal for his priesthood. In his 2nd regnal year, the king slays 300 lions and 6 horned bulls with sharp arrows both from the chariot and in single combat. He then goes on to hunt wild beasts and birds.</p> <p>A.0.89.7 – vi 1-34a: Aššur-bēl-kala receives the gift of the hunt and wild beasts from Ninurta and Nergal for his priesthood. He recounts hunting from a boat in Arvad, killing a <i>nāḫiru</i> in the Great Sea (Mediterranean). At Araziqum and the foot of Mount Lebanon, he slays wild bulls and cows, captures and herds the calves of wild bulls, and captures elephants which he takes to Aššur. He hunts 120 lions from the chariot and in single combat with a spear and mace. The king relates that the hunting took place in the high mountains (as commanded by the gods Ninurta and Nergal) and mentions that he herded gazelle, ibex, and deer in deep winter when Sirius is on the ascendant and “red like molten copper”. The text proceeds with the hunting of panthers, tigers, bears, 2 wild boars of the marshes, ostriches, wild asses, deer, wolves, and <i>simkurrū</i>. He also sent out traders to buy <i>burḫiš</i>, dromedaries, and <i>tešēnū</i>. He put on display for his people herds of dromedaries and the animal gifts from the king of Egypt: a large female monkey, a crocodile, and a river-man of the Mediterranean. The hunting text concludes with a mention of the numerous hunted beasts and birds not mentioned or numbered in the text.</p>

ENA: Aššur-dan II	1, 68	<p>A.0.98.1 – 68-72: Aššur-dan II receives the gift of the hunt and wild beasts from Ninurta and Nergal for his priesthood. The king recounts slaying 120 lions from the chariot and in single combat with a spear, 1,600 wild bulls and 2 live ones in ambush, and killing 56 elephants.</p>
ENA: Adad-nerari II	2, 122	<p>A.0.99.2 – 122-127: Adad-nerari II receives the gift of the hunt and wild beasts from Ninurta and Nergal for his priesthood. He hunts 360 lions from the chariot and in single combat. He slays 240 wild bulls and captures 9 live ones. He also slays 6 elephants and captures 4 live ones in ambush. The king captures 5 elephants with snares. At Aššur he herds lions, wild bulls, elephants, deer, ibex, and ostrich.</p>
ENA: Tukulti-Ninurta II	03, r 5' 05, 73b 05, 134	<p>A.0.100.3 – rev. 5-6: Tukulti-Ninurta II receives the gift of the hunt and wild beasts from Ninurta and Nergal for his priesthood. He slays 60 lions from the chariot and in single combat with a spear.</p> <p>A.0.100.5 – 81-85a and 134-135.: Tukulti-Ninurta II hunts in the desert and on the banks of the Euphrates and kills ostriches and deer, capturing their young ones. He receives the gift of the hunt and wild beasts from Ninurta and Nergal for his priesthood, and slays 60 lions from the chariot and in single combat.</p>
ENA: Ashurnasirpal II	002, 40 030, 84b Balawat bronze bands ASH II L4-5	<p>A.0.101.2 – 4-42: Ashurnasirpal II receives the gift of the hunt and wild beasts from Ninurta and Nergal for his priesthood. He hunts and slays 30 elephants from an ambush pit, 257 wild bulls from his chariot and in single combat, and kills 370 lions with a spear. He refers to the lions as “caged birds”.</p> <p>A.0.101.30 – 84b-101: Ashurnasirpal II receives the gift of the hunt and wild beasts from Ninurta and Nergal for his priesthood. He kills 450 lions and 390 wild bulls from his chariot and in single combat. He kills 200 ostriches and drives 30 elephants into ambush. He also captures alive 50 wild bulls, 140 ostriches, and 20 lions from mountains and forests. The governors of Suḫu and Lubdu give him at tribute of 5 elephants which he takes with him on his campaign. He herds lions, wild bulls, and ostriches. He breeds and herds male and female monkeys.</p> <p>Ashurnasirpal slays bulls on the River Euphrates and lions on the River Balih.</p>

	ASH II R4–5	
LNA: Assurbanipal	Frag 13, 1' 9, i 24 052, 3b and 6 053, 1 054, 1 055, 1 056, 1 073, 24 073, 28	<p>13, 1: For the viewing pleasure of the people, Assurbanipal with one team pierces the throats of a ferocious mountain breed of lion that attacked the cattle pens with a single arrow each in 40 min.</p> <p>9, i 24: Assurbanipal equates kings with lions and claims that both are his subordinates.</p> <p>052, 3b and 6: Assurbanipal scatters a pack of lions that approach his chariot; Assurbanipal protects Ummanappa of Elam from an attacking lion.</p> <p>053, 1: While Assurbanipal is carrying out his princely sport (of hunting), he is attacked by a lion of the steppe; Assurbanipal attempts to kill the lion with three arrows but the lion does not perish. Assurbanipal engages with the lion in single combat and kills him with an iron belt-dagger. There is a reference to the aid of virility in killing the lion.</p> <p>054, 1: Assurbanipal takes a lion by the ears and pierces the beast with a lance</p> <p>055, 1: Assurbanipal takes a lion by the tail and shatters its skull with his mace</p> <p>056, 1: Assurbanipal pours a libation offering on the slain lions</p> <p>073, 24: Assurbanipal hunts in the reed-thickets; he attacks lions which are devouring oxen, sheep, goats, and people.</p> <p>073, 28: Assurbanipal hears of lions that are disrupting the estate of shepherds and herdsmen; he goes to the reeds and forests to scatter the beasts.</p>

Table 4 References to Hunting in the Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions

The royal inscriptions establish that the hunt was not a gratuitous display of hunting prowess, but an activity that has theological and symbolic ramifications.⁵⁴⁴

That it required the manly physique, prowess, and valour is a feature which is explicitly

⁵⁴⁴ There is clearly a strong link between the priesthood of the king and his hunting prowess in the early period. Note the formulaic frame of the hunting text.

stated in the inscriptions, but one that required theological law within which it was legitimated. Already in the Middle Assyrian period the formulaic opening of the hunting narratives within the annals state this explicitly. They intersect the divine command with a theological law in which the king is placed as a worthy priest who performs his religious duty to the desire of the deities. The opening formula shows that for the Assyrian king, the law is not a gratuitous *event* of the sovereign, but a divine *event* which subordinates the sovereign. Thus, the king is not at once inside and outside the law, but always already within it. In the Neo-Assyrian mind-set, the king cannot be in the realm of order *and* chaos, because he is always already within the law. As we shall see, it is from the theologically subordinate position that the sovereign becomes the law and the law becomes necropolitical. In order to support this idea, I will make reference to the formulaic openings of the hunting texts.

The annals of Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076) A.O.87.1 place the hunting narrative between the military campaigns of the king, and his claim to the reconstruction and prosperity of the land. The hunting narrative, like the succeeding part of the annals, is a textual innovation which was taken up by later monarchs as well.⁵⁴⁵ The inclusion of the hunting texts in the royal annals suggests that the activity was deemed as important as the military and building affairs of the king, therefore a central activity and not merely one of princely sport or leisure. Considering the audience of the annals of the kings, the decision of the authors to include this hunting narrative in the text would have been one to display and impress the viewers (as we have seen in the previous chapter) and therefore to create differences between men. The same could

⁵⁴⁵ See RIMA 2, 6.

be said about the bas-reliefs which show the king on his hunting expeditions. It would be facile to argue that the hunting narrative is an intermezzo between the royal activities of military incursions and restoration works on temples.⁵⁴⁶ Indeed, the importance of the hunting narrative is established through the enumeration of the animal trophies and the attempt at establishing a level of veracity through the reference to land and landscape.

The hunting narratives also reveal a concern with the construction of a technologised self-identity through which masculinity is attained. We have already seen how Halberstam considers the prosthetics of masculinity, a construction which I argue was achieved through the *kulūlu* turban,⁵⁴⁷ gadgets, weapons, tools, chariots, ships, accessories, and the *hutpalû* mace.⁵⁴⁸ This is useful to help make sense of the opening lines in the text at hand.⁵⁴⁹ The annals of Tiglath-pileser I present the king in the following manner:

...et-lu qar-du
Ta-me-eh GIŠ.BAN la-a-ša-na-an
mu-gam-me-ru bu-‘u-ur-se-ri

...etlu qardu
tāmeḥ qašti lā šanān
mugammeru bu’ur sēri

⁵⁴⁶ See Weissert 1997, 350 for an explanation of the identical treatment of enemies and lions in the evidence; he argues that the military and hunting expeditions and victories were organised, displayed, and celebrated in the same way. See also Watanabe 1992.

⁵⁴⁷ For the tiara see Dick, 2006 250 f. 41.

⁵⁴⁸ See Dick 2006, 249 f 34; in 25% of the hunting reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II and Assurbanipal, the king wears the *kulūlu* tiara without the fez; this tiara was part of the Middle Assyrian coronation prop. Aššurbanipal wears this in Room S and S¹.

⁵⁴⁹ See Halberstam, 1998, 199.

(Tiglath-pileser) the manly one, the valiant one
He who grasps the unequalled bow
He who is totally in control of the hunt in the open country.

This opening segment of the hunting text weaves together three motifs: the masculinity of the king, his technologized identity, and his mastery over the domains of animality and landscape. The first focus is emphasised in the expression *etlu qardu* (Tiglath-pileser I 01: vi 55), a gendered-epithet which accentuates the “king’s maleness and valiance,”⁵⁵⁰ carrying with it what Winter calls “a sense of associative potency.” The second focus is on the weapon as hunting technology. The third focus is on the dominance of the king over animals and landscape, a relation of dominance which Tim Ingold roots in the patriarchal paradigm of sociality in the Near East.⁵⁵¹

The first focus has already been discussed in relation to the martial masculinity of the Assyrian king whose body was fashioned according to normative elite values of extreme hypermasculinity that embody notions of a war machine. It is the second focus which will be further developed here.

The second focus is on the fashioning of the king as hunter. The masculinity presented here is primarily a “prosthetic” one, what Halberstam notes “has little if anything to do with biological maleness and signifies more often as a technological special effect.”⁵⁵² Prosthetics construct a technologized masculinity which in the context of the hunt relies on bows, chariots, iron arrowheads, sharp arrows, spears, and snares. This emphasis on what Halberstam calls “prosthetic extension” creates an

⁵⁵⁰ See Winter 2010b, 92.

⁵⁵¹ Ingold 2015, 26–27.

⁵⁵² Halberstam, 1998 3.

“unnatural form of masculine embodiment” which risks undermining the very masculinity it attempts to construct.⁵⁵³ What keeps this prosthetic masculinity from entering into the space of the queer is the notion that the opponent is a worthy one; indeed, the lion and the sovereign morph into a singular identification in the royal epithets (discussed above). Indeed, the worthiness of the animals is noted in Ashurnasirpal II’s reminder to future kings, later people, vice-chancellors, nobles, and eunuchs: *la tatappil ina pān Aššur napišti šī balāt* (do not slander them for they live before Aššur).⁵⁵⁴

5.4. The Neo-Assyrian Hunting Reliefs

Like the hunting texts, the visual sources for the self-image of king as hunter has an early history in ancient Mesopotamia. Already in the Uruk period, the link between ruler and hunter is well-established in the visual domain. The famous lion-hunt stele from Uruk (fig. 39) shows the ruler in (at least) two different events in the hunt on the same visual plane. The hunting stele from Uruk is in an early attempt at creating a form of continuous narration: the top ‘register’ shows the king slaying a lion in single combat with a spear, while the lower ‘register’ also shows the king in single combat with a pair of lions but in the lower part of the composition he is shooting arrows at the lions from his bow while a third lion is attacking from behind.⁵⁵⁵ In the repeated image of the ruler, the king is wearing a net-like skirt, a belt (possibly to hold the dagger) and a trimmed cap. He appears to be bare chested.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵³ Halberstam 1998, 4.

⁵⁵⁴ RIMA 2 002: 38b.

⁵⁵⁵ Register is a tentative label to the composition. Aruz says it is rather free-form. See Aruz 2003, 23.

⁵⁵⁶ On the Uruk lion hunt stele, see Aruz 2003.

Even glyptic art displayed the topos of the royal hunt from the very early periods onwards. A Late Uruk cylinder seal now in the British Museum shows the ruler hunting four dexterously-carved bulls in a state of dynamic representation with bow and arrow while an attendant (possibly a eunuch) carries his quiver and supplies (fig. 40). In this cylinder seal, the king also wears a net-skirt and a trimmed cap, and here too he is bare-chested. A further clue to the religious domain within which the hunt was constructed comes from the small gatepost with a streamer between the king and his attendant. Other attestations of this prop, as seen in the Uruk vase among others, indicated that this is the symbol of Inanna.⁵⁵⁷ The prosthetics of hunting are already clearly marked in the Halaf period. Indeed, the archery scene on the Halaf pot from Arapachiyah dating to the middle of the 5th Millennium shows a hunter equipped with a bow, arrows, and a quiver, hunting a bull and a felid. The topos is thus a very old one, and the configurations of its practices, representations, and meanings will be attempted in the sections that follow.

The earliest hunting scenes we have in the Assyrian period appear on the White Obelisk (fig. 41) of Ashurnasirpal (1047–1029 B.C.E.). The Assyrian king may be seen hunting on three of the four lowest registers of the obelisk. The king is seen hunting a bull, an ibex, and an onager. It may be that the fourth register, now badly damaged, was a scene depicting the king hunting a lion. In each of these instances, the king is seen facing right, with bow drawn and ready for the hunt while the king's horses gallop over the prey.⁵⁵⁸ The nearest prototypes for the visual compositions seen in this period are a Kassite cylinder seal from Babylon and a brick-relief from Assur (Ninurta-Tukulti-

⁵⁵⁷ See Aruz 2003, 23.

⁵⁵⁸ For a discussion of the hunting scenes on the White Obelisk see Albenda 1972, 169.

Aššur, 1133) (fig. 42). Both show the schematic image as attested in the late second millennium.⁵⁵⁹

5.4.1. The Self-Image of Ashurnasirpal II as Hunter

The first representations of a Neo-Assyrian sovereign as hunter on the orthostats lining the palace walls date to the reign of Ashurnasirpal II. On the eastern side of the south wall of the throneroom in the Northwest palace of Nimrud, slabs 19 (figs. 43–44) and 20 (figs. 45–46)— that is, those closest to the throne dais—portrayed Ashurnasirpal II hunting lions and bulls (the top registers = the slabs labelled A) as well as leading the ritual libation following the hunt (the bottom registers = the slabs labelled B). Two more hunting slabs depicted the sovereign during a hunting expedition, one possibly found in the West Wing of the Northwest palace, Room WM (fig. 47), and the other of uncertain findspot and now in Berlin (fig. 48). Furthermore, among the slabs removed by Esarhaddon from the fabric of Ashurnasirpal II's palace to decorate his parts of the Southwest palace in Nineveh were two hunting slabs that showed the early Neo-Assyrian sovereign also engaged in lion hunts.⁵⁶⁰ Finally, the eight pairs of double-register bronze bands on the gates of Balawat dating to the reign of Ashurnasirpal II also depict lion and bull hunts (figs 49–52).⁵⁶¹

The art historical analysis of the hunt reliefs in the Northwest palace of Ashurnasirpal II points to a generic composition rather than a historical narrative. In fact, Winter considers these compositions to be closer to the generic of 'master-of-

⁵⁵⁹ For these and another Kassite hunting seal, see Albenda 1972, 169 with notes on Moortgat. Note that the archer on the Assur relief may be a eunuch.

⁵⁶⁰ See Winter 2010a, 7. See also Albenda 1972, 167–178.

⁵⁶¹ See Curtis and Tallis 2008. Shalmaneser III's bronze bands, however, do not depict hunting scenes.

animals' so conventionally depicted in most of the Mesopotamian sequence since the hunting stele of Uruk.⁵⁶² Yet, since the walls of the Throneroom are more conducive to narrative compositions than a stela, Winter is able to argue that the self-contained culminating scenes represented on one slab may be read as narrative also.⁵⁶³ Be that as it may, Ashurnasirpal's reliefs related to the hunting exploits of the sovereign certainly show the action and consequence dyad of narration across registers; indeed, the top registers of slabs (19a and 20a) show the king during the action of the hunt, while the bottom registers of the slabs (19b and 20b) show him enacting a ritual libation over the sacrificial carcasses of the beasts.

Winter further argues that the landscape elements of the bas reliefs in the Throneroom of the Northwest palace point to historical realism among the intended purposes of the compositions. However, I find this to be methodologically problematic given the absence of any topographical elements in the hunting scenes in particular. I argue, rather, that the explicit references to the setting of the hunting scenes on the Balawat bronze bands would make for an interesting study on the attempt at representing 'real locations' in the reliefs. Indeed, the epigraphs and the landscape elements could provide a good model for looking at the parallels or otherwise on the palace orthostats. Suffice it here to say that the epigraphs place the hunting of bulls on the River Euphrates⁵⁶⁴ while that of lions on the River Balih.⁵⁶⁵ Only then could we gauge whether the landscape elements correspond to those on the narrative compositions of the Throneroom in the Northwest palace.

⁵⁶² Winter 2010, 11.

⁵⁶³ Winter 2010a, 14.

⁵⁶⁴ Curtis and Tallis 2008, 33–34.

⁵⁶⁵ Curtis and Tallis 2008, 41–42.

However, I do concur with Winter that the royal hunting activities provide an iconographic representation of the king-as-fierce-predator topos in the royal inscriptions.⁵⁶⁶ This is especially salient to the understanding of the construct of masculinity through cross-species symbiosis with the lion and the bull since the adjective ‘fierce’ (*ekdu*) used for the sovereign in the royal inscriptions is otherwise only used to refer to lions and bulls.⁵⁶⁷

5.4.2. The Self-Image of Sargon II as Hunter

To begin with, it is worth noting that hunting scenes are entirely absent from the palace of Sennacherib, even though the rooms that should, by analogy with other palaces, have had them were excavated by Layard.⁵⁶⁸ Although the Neo-Assyrian king-as-hunter theme on display in the royal throne room had already been in use during the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, Reade suggests that the hunting scenes were omitted from the visual program of Sennacherib because traditional scenes did not lend themselves well to the new compositions and rich visual syntax which depicted the king’s elaborate achievements. It may be, however, more tied to the personality of king Sennacherib rather than to the iconographic motives of the visual narrative in his throneroom. Indeed, Russell emphasises that with Sennacherib, the building inscriptions give detailed accounts of his personal involvement in construction work, and it seems, therefore, that this activity was meant more to him than hunting.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁶ Winter 2010 a, 75.

⁵⁶⁷ RIMA 2, ANP II in the Ninurta temple annalistic inscription A.0.101.1 line 126; RIMA 2, ANP II in the Ninurta temple stele A.0.101.17 lines 12–13; RIMA 2, ANP II in the standard inscription A.0.101.23 line 12

⁵⁶⁸ Russell 1991, 187.

⁵⁶⁹ Russell 1991, 188–189 for a tentative explanation for Sennacherib’s disinterest in hunting as a clue to his personality.

Hunting, on the other hand, does feature in the previous reign of Sargon II's Palace at Khorsabad, but this time, rather than wild beasts, Sargon shows the recreational hunting of small game. At Khorsabad's Room 7 (possibly a bathroom in the private rear quarters of the palace), a variety of bearded men and eunuchs participate in Sargon's hunt, which seems to take place among conifer trees in the *ambassu* with the *bīt-ḫilāni* portico in the distance (figs. 54–59).⁵⁷⁰ Russell notes that the hunt in the park or estate takes place in three stages: the approach, the hunt, and the return to the palace.⁵⁷¹

Room 7 of Sargon's Palace in Khorsabad remains severely understudied. According to Matthiae, the palace of Khorsabad was a conscious move away from the ideology of ninth century sovereignty and a shift from the ideological construct of the martial and belligerent heroic sovereign to the general who does not situate himself in the line of fire but commands from the elevation of his royal chariot.⁵⁷² Matthiae further reads the visual program of Sargon's palace as an expression of an integration of the noble class within palace culture. Room 7, in fact, rather than portraying the king in the highly symbolic arena of the hunt *qua* hunt/theological duty/sovereign spectacle, represents an idyllic scene of elite recreational hunting and commensality

⁵⁷⁰ Russell 1991, 187, and Albenda, 1986, plates 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90. These are extant reliefs BM 118831, Oriental Institute Museum A 11254, A 11255, A 11256; Iraq Museum 60971/1, 60971/2, 6097/3. See Albenda 1986, 77–81. However, slabs 3, part of 4, 7 and 9 are not extant, nor at the time of Flandin's drawings. The blocks were divided into top and bottom registers separated by a horizontal band of inscriptions. The visual narrative scenes depict different but interrelated events. Originally discovered by Botta but the room was re-cleared by the Oriental Institute expedition. The backs of the slabs have a long inscription inscribed on their surface. In the extant reliefs, the king is portrayed once re-entering the palace towards the *bīt-ḫilāni* with his elite corps.

⁵⁷¹ See Russell 1991, 218–219. Albenda 1986, 80. For the most informative work on the reliefs in this room, see Matthiae 1996, 103–105. See also, Albenda 1986, Figures 76 (BM 11829), 77 (Archives Nationales, F²¹546, pl.13, Calotype), 78 (Musée du Louvre AO 19886) showing small game hunting on black limestone. See most recently, Winter 2016, 35–52.

⁵⁷² Matthiae 2012, 486–7.

following a successful expedition.⁵⁷³ Indeed, the manly collegiality and homosociality that is class marked is clear; rather than surrounded by troops, the king is surrounded by noblemen and elite males close to the palace apparatus. It is an altogether different hunt—in fact, it may be more accurate to describe the ongoing of these scenes as *hunting* rather than *the hunt*.

The two-registered sequence of Khorsabad's Room 7 is carved with a degree of naturalism that attempts to represent difference through placement and foregrounding.⁵⁷⁴ Indeed, the collegiality and homosociality is further highlighted in the narrative of the top register, where the dignitaries are seen banqueting. Rather than two separate themes, Room 7 reveals that the topos of small game hunting and banqueting cross-cut. This is a spectacle to non-martial homosociality in an Assyrian palace, one which reveals the flip side of the ideological representations of the Assyrian war of terror. Indeed, the reliefs in Room 7 offer a glimpse into the domestic culture of Assyria, or what may be read as a view into the construct of public and homosocial that coded messages of not only internal political and class policy, but also of gender performance. These were the values of a class performing a culturally-sanctioned script of masculinity.⁵⁷⁵

Furthermore, Room 7 of Sargon II's Dur Sharrukin points to the link between the elite homosociality of the hunt and the commensality following the hunt. These

⁵⁷³ Winter 2016 *passim*.

⁵⁷⁴ Matthiae 2012, 487.

⁵⁷⁵ Ataç, 2010, 51 argues against the notion of perspective on the grounds that they are represented on the same ground line and not a different one, as was habitual in the art of Tiglath-pileser III. See especially Ataç 2010, 51. This figural piece is similar to the ones from Neo-Hittite Carchemish and Kartepe (Ataç 2010, 52) and earlier Ugarit from the 2nd M BC. Matthiae 2012 is not entirely convinced by this.

two events brought elite men together. In the context of the scene of commensality, the material display focusses on a drinking vessel, the lion-beaker, whose salience to the discussion at hand needs highlighting. Álvarez-Mon identified three male-types holding the lion drinking vessels in the reliefs from Khorsabad: eunuchs who fill the vessels and bring them to the bearded males (possibly dignitaries), the standing males wearing a knee-length garment and carrying swords and insignia, and males sitting in pairs wearing knee-length official garments at table.⁵⁷⁶ Álvarez-Mon adds that “it is thus possible, one is tempted to say, that a subtext of the reliefs—something that would have been well known to an Assyrian audience—was in part to advertise the members of Sargon’s male progeny, i.e. the singular strength of the royal blood line.”⁵⁷⁷ Consequently, for Álvarez-Mon, the use of the lion beakers in events that celebrated military and hunting activities represented the strength and indomitable force of the king. The vessel is therefore metonymic of the king himself.

Further, Álvarez-Mon also points to the ritual element linking the banquet and drinking with the spilling of the blood of the enemy/prey, or what he terms a relation of “conspicuous symbolism.”⁵⁷⁸ He also adds that the beakers were manufactured to participate and perform in the context of wine drinking and its inherent intoxicating properties, and, by extension, a lapse from the formal outward behaviour of Assyrian elite males construed along the lines of self-control and dignified behaviour. In this sense, Álvarez-Mon concludes, the lion-headed vessel as an emblem cross-cuts elements of masculine domains such as ritual, hunting, warfare, and formal behaviour.

⁵⁷⁶ Álvarez-Mon 2008, 139; Alvarez Mon suggests that there may be unequal rank between the males: the seating ones may be the king’s son, the standing ones may be emirs.

⁵⁷⁷ Álvarez-Mon 2008, 135–138.

⁵⁷⁸ Álvarez-Mon 2008, 140.

Finally, Matthiae notes that there is no relation between the hunts of Ashurnasirpal II and Assurbanipal with those of Sargon II: in the former, the king and lions or bulls are the protagonists; in the latter, the aristocratic male elites are the subjects and agents of the hunt, with the king passing by in a chariot procession under the parasol and in salutation towards the palace.⁵⁷⁹

Unlike Ashurnasirpal II's hunting scenes, which are set in a zone that transcends the real, Sargon's hunting scenes are set in the woodlands. This points to the idea that Ashurnasirpal II's homosocial relations are with his troops and not the male elite of the city. Indeed, Ashurnasirpal II's hunting scenes are no idyll. Rather, their representation bears a striking resemblance to the battle scenes in the same throneroom.

Ashurnasirpal II's emphasis is on the heroic masculinity of the king-as-hunter, and not on the homosociality of the hunt and its ensuing male relations. We may conclude, therefore, that Ashurnasirpal II's hunting scenes establish a hierarchical vision of masculinity, with the king as the most virile warrior among the troops. Sargon II's idyll, and the commensality that follows as represented in the upper register of Room 7 at Khorsabad, constructs a masculinity which is more linear, and definitely in line with the new policies of his state, namely the reintroduction of the local elite into the fold of the palace.

5.4.3. The Self-Image of Assurbanipal as Hunter

No images related to the hunting activities of Sennacherib and Esarhaddon were found in the nineteenth century or excavated since. However, the construct of king-as-hunter

⁵⁷⁹ Matthiae 2012, 487.

emerges once again, and perhaps even more forcefully than in the previous rules, during the reign of Assurbanipal. In fact, Weissert argues that the artists and scribes broadened and ‘vigorously propagated’ the theme of the hunter king in the reign of Assurbanipal; indeed, they heightened the drama of the “relentless quarrel between man and beast....in the hunting reliefs of the North Palace of Nineveh” and produced an account of the hunt whose literary qualities had been unprecedented.⁵⁸⁰

None of the annals refer to the hunt save for prism fragment 82-5-22,2 which Weissert suggests may be a “hymnic and intermezzo-like passage.”⁵⁸¹ Weissert equates the king going to hunt in the plains with the gods Aššur and Ishtar going to tame the mythological creatures of chaos.⁵⁸² The lions, according to his interpretation, are the incarnate hosts of chaos. Yet, in light of Ashurnasirpal II’s declaration that animals are not to be slandered, this interpretation may be at odds with the evidence.

Weissert notes the following: “... by confronting the lions a hair’s breadth away, not only was it possible for Assurbanipal to exhibit his manifold skills in handling various weapons, but he could also – and this is of utmost importance – publicly realize the image of the brave hunter, which for more than two hundred years had been represented on the imperial seal (fig. 37).”⁵⁸³

⁵⁸⁰ Weissert 1997, 339.

⁵⁸¹ Weissert 1997, 340.

⁵⁸² Weissert 1997, 349.

⁵⁸³ Weissert 1997, 356. Also, the combat scene became the official seal in the reign of Shalmaneser III till the end. See S. Herboldt *Neuassyrische glyptik des 8.-7. Jh.v.Chr.* (SAA I) pp. 123–45. There are 104 exemplars, each with different configurations of dress, hairstyle, royal head accessories, and leonine stance.

Perhaps the seal portrays the **pirig š zi-ga** (lion with raised paw) or the **pirig ka duh-ha** (lion with open mouth) of the Šulgi hymns (Dick 2006, 246 f 15). Possibly Barnett Room S¹ Plate LVII.

That the royal hunt reached unprecedented heights in the imaginary of the late Neo-Assyrian period is perhaps best evidenced in the dedication of an entire sector of the North palace to the iconography of royal hunting in the arena of Nineveh and elsewhere. The whole of the southwest wing of the North Palace of Assurbanipal, that is, the best-known part of this palace, is dedicated to the royal hunt.⁵⁸⁴ No Assyrian royal before Assurbanipal gave the royal hunting activities the centrality that they are given in this sector of the palace; indeed, rooms A, C, E, passage R, S, and S¹ are predominantly concerned with the encounter between the sovereign and the lion.⁵⁸⁵ It is not the objective of this study to reconstruct a possible narrative sequence from one room to the next but a tentative sequence for passages A and R will be attempted.

Room R in Assurbanipal's North Palace, commonly referred to as 'ascending passage R', has the southwest and the northwest walls covered with orthostats which show the journey to the hunting arena. The southwest wall depicts the journey to the encounter of the king with the lion, and the northwest wall presents the return from the hunt.⁵⁸⁶ This passage led to a back gate leading out of the palace.⁵⁸⁷

The southwest wall bas-reliefs show the court eunuchs moving towards a postern gate, carrying hunting nets and stake-bundles to set up the hunting arena (fig. 61). The eunuch mastiff-handlers sport a different, shorter hairstyle than the ones carrying the stakes, with an end-row of shorter and simpler plaits rather than the more

⁵⁸⁴ See Barnett 1976, 12-14; 19; 37-39; 48-54. See for a recent reconsideration of the North Palace, especially of the fallen slabs from the upper storeys, see Kertai 2015, 180.

⁵⁸⁵ Barnett 1976, 12. Room B may also have had the lion hunt as its subject matter, but the state of the slabs was too deteriorated to allow any clear understanding.

⁵⁸⁶ Barnett 1976, 48.

⁵⁸⁷ Curtis and Reade 1995, 84.

elaborate five-row curls of the net-and-stake carriers (figs. 62–65).⁵⁸⁸ The younger eunuch assistants leading the donkeys, just like the mastiff-handlers, are discalced. The older eunuchs either support the mule-loads or they are seen carrying the heavy hunting accessories. They are followed by eunuch leaders on horseback. The northwest wall bas reliefs show the return from the hunt, with mature court eunuchs carrying the trophy of the game leading the file (fig. 66), followed by eunuchs carrying small game or spears and shields.

Room A is an ascending passage from which sixteen slabs were recovered. The northeast wall contained slabs 1–11, and the south wall carried slabs 12–16.⁵⁸⁹ The remaining orthostats, as well as the drawings of W. Boutcher and C. Hodder, show a single file of fourteen eunuchs, eight of which are archers preceding the king's chariot returning from the hunting arena (figs. 67–8). Passage A may be a continuation of Passage R. Four eunuchs are shown carrying the chariot, and one follows the first two archers carrying an unidentified object in the left hand. All the eunuch archers wear a toxophile's breastplate. The archers are shown carrying the bow in their left hand and quivers with arrows on their backs. The eighth archer, unlike the rest who are all shown looking ahead, has his head turned backwards to the four eunuchs carrying the chariot. If indeed the south wall continues the return of the Northwest wall in ascending passage R, then it might be that the North-East wall showed the march of the toxophiles and the king's chariot to the hunting arena. This would mean that the

⁵⁸⁸ Reade, in Curtis and Reade 1985, 84 notes that the same hairstyle is sported by the donkey-handlers in the same composition. He points to the possibility that the hairstyle signalled a lower social status than the net and stake carriers, presumably because of the simpler style. *Contra* Reade, the mastiff-handlers have the same hairstyle as the younger eunuchs assisting in the set-up of the hunting grounds.

⁵⁸⁹ Barnett 1976, 36. Slabs 1–11 are lost. Slab 13 is only known from a drawing by Boutcher, slabs 14–16 are in the Louvre, Paris (AO 19901). Rassam wrote that all but slabs 12–16 were destroyed. Slabs 12 and 13 are now lost.

parade leading out of the royal palace was headed by the eunuchs carrying nets and stakes, followed by the archers, and the king's chariot. On the return, the archers ushered the king's chariot into the palace followed by the eunuchs carrying the slain lions and small game.

The iconographic culmination of the hunting topos in the visual expression of the reign of Assurbanipal was placed in Room C, which Matthiae calls the “ideological centre” of the North Palace.⁵⁹⁰ Room C visualises the imperial hunting spectacle staged by the palace apparatus in order to entertain the king himself as well as the Assyrian folk. As Weissert notes, the *kī multa'uti* (for my pleasure) phrase used in Assurbanipal's hunting text differs from the Hunting Epigraph B's *ina mēlulti rubûtiya* (while I was carrying out my princely sport) in that the phrase *kī multa'uti* signals a detachment from the notion of personal pleasure, whereas the final temporal expression *ina mēlulti rubûtiya* carries with it a sense of enjoyment and recreation.⁵⁹¹ Further, the use of the former phrase is restricted to the context of the king's hunt in the plain to confront a possible problem, while the latter is exclusively used for the hunting games in the city. Logically, therefore, the iconographic topos of Room C, with its emphasis on the topography of Nineveh, is a recreational event staged for the multisensorial pleasure of the king and the subjects of Assyria, who are seen rushing to the hills to establish a good view of the unfolding of the spectacle (fig. 69).

⁵⁹⁰ Matthiae 1996, 201.

⁵⁹¹ Weissert 1997, 342. The author notes that Prism fragment 82-5-22,2 (which he ascribes to Prism E, Assurbanipal's earliest prism dating to c. 666 BC) is part of the topos of the king-as-hunter-in-the-plain. Since the plain was construed as the natural habitat of the lion, the expedition was theologically charged, and this is evident with the use of the phrase *kī multa'uti*. For Weissert, therefore, this framework parallels the construct of king-as-shepherd and restorer of order over chaos (see fn. 16).

Much scholarly emphasis has been placed on Assurbanipal's construct of imperial hegemon in the hunting reliefs of Room C, with Weissert arguing that the royal hunting spectacle, celebrated after the *akītu* festival, not only bolstered the self-image of the sovereign as a brave and impatient warrior, but also gave him the opportunity to show off his technical expertise learned at the House of Succession while still the heir prince of Assyria.⁵⁹² Further, Weissert notes that the number of lions slain in the reliefs of Room C correspond to the number of city gates in Nineveh, thus concluding that the hunt was a symbolic ritual of protection for the city.⁵⁹³

But was this spectacle a commonplace occurrence in Nineveh, or was it choreographed by Assurbanipal as a means of bolstering the political upheavals caused by his brother, the king of Babylon? I will venture to argue that the construct of prosthetic masculinity might open a fruitful stream of interpretation in this regard.

Assurbanipal's prosthetic materiality in the lion hunts of Room C comprise a hunting gear which signals an oscillation between two opposing constructs of masculinity that could not have been unintended to the emic audience. While the choreography of the event stages Assurbanipal as an Assyrian sovereign fulfilling his political and theological prerogative of restoring real and symbolic order by killing the ultimate symbol of chaos (that is, the king-as-hunter), at the same time the reliefs also show that Assurbanipal placed importance on a different construct of masculinity, that of king-as-scholar. In the rest of this section I will argue that the reliefs from Room C as

⁵⁹² Weissert 1997, 343. The *akītu* festival was celebrated to commemorate extraordinary military achievements as well as Ishtar's re-entry and presentation of captives and booty with a cheering public watching. The processional itinerary went from Nineveh to Milqiya on to Arbela and then Assur.

⁵⁹³ Weissert 1997, 355.

well as the lion hunt reliefs from Room S work together to promote a sovereign care-of-the-self through the materiality of dress.

If dress is a prosthetic extension of the body, and a means by which identities are constituted⁵⁹⁴, then the hunting gear of Assurbanipal plays no small part in the masculinity of the sovereign and the state. In Room C and Room S, Assurbanipal revives the courtly fashion of Assurnasirpal II, with the pectoral section of his hunting garment showing geometric, floral, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic patterns reminiscent of the royal robe in Room G of the palace of Nimrud (figs. 70–71). Yet two features of the prosthetic of dress stand out even more saliently: the first is the rosette patterned fabric of the hunting gear, and the second is the writing stylus wedged into the fastening band (fig. 72).

The former, with its symbolism of Ishtar, stands out in the otherwise minimalist fashion of the court of Assurbanipal and points to the role of Ishtar in both the hunting events as well as in the theological politics of the period. Crouch has cogently shown, in fact, that in the cosmological tradition of Assurbanipal, allusions to the Babylonian epic of creation *Enuma Elish* were foregrounded in the king's Cylinder B inscriptions as well as in the Ishtar Temple Inscription.⁵⁹⁵ However, in the Assyrian allusions Ishtar replaces the Babylonian divine hero of creation Marduk, a politically subversive move given the unstable relations between north and south.

The stylus, on the other hand, points to the scholarly masculinity emphasised by Assurbanipal in, among others, his Prism F inscription:

⁵⁹⁴ Eicher and Roach Higgins 1992, 15–17. For material engagement as bodily extension, see also Lambros Malafouris 2008, 125.

⁵⁹⁵ Crouch 2013, 132–140.

Furthermore, I, Assurbanipal, learned inside it [the House of Succession] the wisdom of the god Nabû, all of the scribal arts. I investigated the precepts of every type of scholar there is, learned how to shoot with a bow, ride a horse [and] chariot, [and] take hold of their reins. Kings among the people [and] lions among the animals could not grow more powerful before my bow. I know how to wage war [and] battle; I am experienced forming a battle line [and] fighting. Heroic male, beloved of [the god] Aššur and the goddess Ishtar, descendant of kingship (Prism F. L. 24–33).

Ursula Seidl has already noted the correspondence between the stylus in the hunting reliefs and the king's claim to scholarly knowledge⁵⁹⁶; however, the presence of this prosthetic material needs to be understood in terms of the king's care-of-the-self. Given the inauspicious death of Sargon II, Sennacherib, and Esarhaddon (all of Assurbanipal's predecessors), the king's claim to knowledge needs to be re-evaluated in the framework of his own safety. Although this would require a book-length study, suffice it to say here that his claim to scholarly masculinity is not a trivial matter, and is inexplicably tied to the masculine construct of the management and control of the scholarly circles on whose trust the king could no longer count.

5.4.3. Assurbanipal's Garden Banquet Relief

The image of the hunter is also indirectly featured in the Garden Banquet relief from Room S¹ of Assurbanipal's North Palace (fig. 73). In this section, I will discuss not only some of the enigmatic features of the relief, but also attempt to discern its importance to the construction of Assurbanipal's masculinity. In light of the fact that Assurbanipal seems not to have engaged in direct warfare, the ways in which the state artisans resolved the question of the hegemonic dividend may be gleaned from this relief in its

⁵⁹⁶ Seidl 2007, 119–124.

ensemble, location, and programme. Further, the middle relief may indicate a continuity with Sargon's elite recreational hunting in Room 7 at Khorsabad.

This relief was one of a number of slabs discovered by William Loftus in August 1854 in a distinctive wing of Assurbanipal's North Palace in Nineveh, namely a portico which opened into the NW terrace of the citadel, conceivably affording lush panoramic views of the town below. The term *bīt ḥīlanī* has often been used to describe this part of the palace.

The slabs were originally divided into three horizontal friezes, with the central piece of the composition on the uppermost tier, showing king Assurbanipal semi-reclined on a day bed, feasting with his queen and served by an entourage of female servants. The little known middle frieze shows rows of pine and pomegranate, shrubs, birds, servants, and the figure of a bearded hunter. The almost totally lost lower frieze shows a marsh landscape and a solitary boar.⁵⁹⁷ It is important to remember here that there is no clear consensus among scholars with regards to its meaning, not least because this relief has no clear parallels in the Assyrian repertoire. It truly is a visual hapax.

Noteworthy is the fact that this relief has always attracted scholars from the field of gender studies.⁵⁹⁸ To date, however, it has always been the female figure enthroned opposite the reclining king that has been subjected to intensive and extensive analyses (fig. 74). We have even had a hypothesis claiming that the figure is actually not female but eunuch.⁵⁹⁹ Pauline Albenda, a leading expert on this particular

⁵⁹⁷ Albenda 1976, 50–51.

⁵⁹⁸ Collins 2004, 1–6; Gansell 2013, 391–420.

⁵⁹⁹ Schmidt-Colinet 1997, 289–308.

relief programme, was quick to dismiss this hypothesis by drawing parallels with the portrayal of other queens in Assyrian visual culture.⁶⁰⁰

In order to balance out our perspective on this famous but enigmatic work of Assyrian art, I propose to shift our attention to the central figure of this relief cycle, the king, and to read it in light of the development of masculinity studies to see how the Assyrians treated the invisible but pervasive masculine construct.

Marian Feldman, among many scholars, has recently questioned the reasons why king Assurbanipal would wish to portray himself so 'passively' (fig. 75).⁶⁰¹ This statement only makes sense when read in light of the portrayal of previous Assyrian kings: boasting about hardness, upright, gazing directly and in the line of fire, their bodies always almost entirely covered to protect the homosocial male gaze from sexualising or eroticising it. I suspect that the attribution of passivity in the reclining body of the king is far from how the Assyrians themselves perceived it. Indeed, in the visual vocabulary of this relief cycle, the king is in fact, the central figure, the being from whom everything emanates (palace, contained space and wilderness). We ought not underestimate this distribution in Assyrian art; in fact, as Albenda has noted, even the queen is lower than the king in this visual vertical hierarchy.⁶⁰²

Assurbanipal maintained the masculine centrality, even in a slab which depicts only females. He is not just a king, but he is an Assyrian king; he is the logical centre of the universe, in the same way his grandfather Sennacherib maintained his centrality in the Lachish relief cycle.

⁶⁰⁰ Albenda 1998, 88–89.

⁶⁰¹ Feldman 2014, 104.

⁶⁰² Albenda 1976, 63.

I further suspect that the attribution of passivity to the masculine construction of Assurbanipal is rooted in the later traditions. In fact, it was the Greek medic and historian Ctesias, writing at the Persian court, who first othered the masculinity of Assurbanipal by portraying him as a cross-dressing, bisexual hedonist who preferred the company of women and eunuchs.⁶⁰³ It was also Ctesias who put the blame of the disintegration of the great empire to Assurbanipal's failed masculine performance. For Assurbanipal, this reputation stayed with him until the discoveries were made in northern Iraq and we could see a different picture from the cuneiform sources. What emerged from the inscriptions and the art of Assurbanipal is completely at odds with the Ctesian picture.

The visual evidence of this relief cycle suggests that Assurbanipal is feasting with his queen after the battle is over. Albenda has discussed this extensively in two magisterial articles published in the 1970s.⁶⁰⁴ Yet Albenda makes the erroneous claim that Assurbanipal is on his day bed as he was afflicted by an illness which often made him tired. This, I argue, is far from what the evidence suggests, and far from the ideology of Assyrian art. All the evidence in this relief cycle in fact points to the king as hegemon who has returned from the battle victorious and is celebrating the patriarchal dividend of his successful ultra-masculine masquerade, or what I shall call post-martial languor.

To begin with, day beds of the type on which Assurbanipal reclines could be seen among the loot of the city of Lachish in the art of king Sennacherib. The bed we have here is not specifically made for Assurbanipal because of his alleged affliction, but

⁶⁰³ Frahm 2003, 39.

⁶⁰⁴ Albenda 1976, 49–72; Albenda 1977, 29–48.

rather because it represented a much sought after luxurious international style. That Assurbanipal should lie on one points to his successful performance as male hegemon; the Assyrian equivalent of driving a Ferrari as a statement of machismo. Furthermore, the head of arch-enemy Te-umman on the tree at the king's eye level and the military paraphernalia laid on the side table are further indication that the martial hero has just returned from the war a successful man (fig. 76). Hoffner argued that the bow was the quintessential symbol of masculinity in the ancient Near East and in Assyrian art, the bow is almost metonymic of the king.

Here Assurbanipal lies in post-martial languor. Pauline Albenda and Alvarez Mon both agree that the space in which this narrative unfolds is the queen's garden.⁶⁰⁵ And I believe the symbolism to be quite explicit as well. Hegemonic males fight battles to receive the patriarchal dividend. In Assyrian terms, this dividend is paid by the queen and the ladies of the house in sexual delight in their paradisiacal garden. Paul Collins has noted that the alternating conifer and fruiting date palm along with male and female humans recall the 7th century love lyrics of Nabu and Tashmetu where shade is provided by the trees for the sexually heightened drama, while the twittering of the birds provides the soundtrack.⁶⁰⁶ Furthermore, I would add that in the erotic lyrics of Nabu and Tashmetu, the scene unfolds in a fashion not too dissimilar from what we see in this relief, with Tashmetu adorned (including the mural crown) and seeking the pleasures of the body in the shaded garden to the singing of the birds.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁵ Alvarez-Mon 2009, 131–180.

⁶⁰⁶ Collins 2006, 99–107.

⁶⁰⁷ Livingstone 1989, 35–37.

This is exactly what we see in the Garden relief of Assurbanipal; the hegemonic male, victorious in his performance of ultra-masculinity, is rewarded with the fruits of love while confirming his sway over his most terrible enemies.

Of further importance here is that the relief depicts gendered space. The arbour is a space for women (and young boys, as seen from the far right remains of the relief), and it is the privilege of the hegemon to have access to it. From what we see here, the hegemon had to prove his valiancy to gain the right of access. The ideological representation here is that Assurbanipal is reaping the patriarchal dividend for having struggled to the end of the masculine contest par excellence, the battlefield.

Albenda and Alvarez Mon agree that all visual evidence suggests that this relief cycle may have been located in the women's quarters of the palace or a recreational area. I join them in stating that the enigmatic nature of this work arises from the fact that despite the usual martial references, the king's masculinity is seen in a private moment, when the king is raising his goblet of wine and eating lotus flower – an intoxicating cocktail right to this day. In this relief, the king is the object of the female gaze, while his gaze is martial and homosocial. And it is because the king is the object of this female gaze that we may venture to suggest that the work was indeed a reminder to the ladies of the house that they were responsible of delivering the hegemon with his patriarchal dividend, in this case, love making and food aplenty.

We have seen how Sennacherib started the re-engineering of the Assyrian notion of hegemonic masculinity but it is in the reign of Assurbanipal that we see the biggest break from the norm of representation. Esarhaddon (Sennacherib's son and Assurbanipal's father) made himself gigantic in relation to his subordinates in order to

emphasise his masculinity through what art historians term 'status perspective', but really Assurbanipal depicts himself in a scene which no other Assyrian ruler would have allowed. Assurbanipal in the garden scene shows a facet of Assyrian masculinity as yet unencountered and unrepresented. In the garden scene, Assurbanipal is divested of the proximity of complicit masculinity. Apart from the king's, there is not a single secondary feature of masculinity in sight. The scene is divested of beards, forearms, masculine traits. Ctesias, reporting from the Persian Achaemenid courts, tells us that Assurbanipal was a cross dressing sexual deviant who preferred the company of eunuchs and Elamite princes to that of women. It is difficult to gauge the veracity of this slander but if the garden scene is anything to go by, it seems to indicate that the king was not averse to having the image of his kingship expressing a post-martial languor. We know from the inscriptions, and from the Sennacherib precedent, that kings no longer engaged in battle. The weapons left forlornly on the table point to the fact that Assurbanipal did not have the weapon at hand. In this garden idyll, Assurbanipal is elevated from the rest of the palace human apparatus, but he is not sitting like a god or a sovereign. Rather, he presents himself in a languishing masculinity. It has been suggested that he is sitting with an Elamite eunuch commander – this, however, is at odds with what the relief depicts. The mural crown of queen Libbali-šarrat is very evident, and a close reading of all Neo-Assyrian attestations of palace women shows them wearing the crown. Suggesting that the person opposite Assurbanipal is a eunuch dragging it up as an Assyrian queen is taking the reconfiguration of Assyrian masculine representation two steps too far. Gardens have been associated with palace women and this is what we believe this scene is portraying. Assyrian kings self-congratulated their martial prowess by languishing in

the female quarters of the palace. The fact that the head of Te-umman is hanging from the tree is indicative that for the Neo-Assyrians the head was the locus of identity, subjectivity, and probably, therefore, the centre for masculinity and gender.

In this brief preliminary study of the construct of masculinity in the state arts of the Neo-Assyrian Empire I have attempted to show how gender played an axial part in the ideological state apparatus for the expansion and maintenance of the Assyrian imperial holdings. We have seen that the early Neo-Assyrian kings constructed and performed their masculinity within the matrix of martial discourse, as commanders in the hosts of Aššur. Their hegemonic masculinity was a reward not only from their patron deities under the auspices of whom they set off on their campaigns, but also from the fact that they put their bodies to the limit of distress. By dismembering enemy bodies, or risking to be dismembered themselves, they attained the ideal of martial, fearless males at the top of their hierarchy. With the inauspicious loss of the body of Sargon II, the later Neo-Assyrian kings re-engineered their construction and performance of manhood, strategically opting to perform masculinity not on the battlefield but through strategic surveillance and statesmanship in the less conservative medium of visual representation. Finally, with the reign of Assurbanipal, we have seen that the king allowed his ladies of the house, as well as posterity, a glimpse into a private moment of what it meant to be not an Assyrian male, but the Assyrian hegemonic male par excellence.

5.5. Discussion

It has recently been argued that the North palace of Nineveh may not have been the central seat of royal power, but rather a palace dedicated to the hunt itself.⁶⁰⁸ Kertai argues against the explanation that the large number of hunting scenes merely reflects the large number of corridors.⁶⁰⁹ For Kertai, in fact, the choice of the topos for the corridors is not at all coincidental but may reflect the actual function of the North palace.

Earlier, in fact, Dick had suggested that the hermeneutical key to the Neo-Assyrian royal hunt is in the arrangement of the reliefs in the palace.⁶¹⁰ S¹ is the most significant in that it displays two series: a. the lion hunt, and b. the Elamite wars with the banquet scene. This structuring, Dick argues, may point to the motif of the king as a shepherd protecting his flock from lions (K2867 + 1904- 10- 9, 11 [BM98982]).⁶¹¹ Lions may have been a consequence of the abundance of the land resulting from the water sent by Adad and Ea. They also feed on domesticated livestock and humans, and villagers and shepherds may have lamented for this reason, thus asking the king to resort order. The banquet scene is the “culmination of the lion hunt.”⁶¹²

In the reign of Assurbanipal, the hunt and its related motifs seem to undergo a revival from the earlier periods. Indeed, it is not only the themes of hunting and the *royal hunt* that re-appear with unprecedented frequency of representation in the visual and textual sources, but even other motifs for example that of the sacred tree

⁶⁰⁸ See Kertai 2016, 184.

⁶⁰⁹ Kertai 2016, 184.

⁶¹⁰ Dick 2006, 246-7.

⁶¹¹ Dick 2006, 246.

⁶¹² Dick 2006, 256.

motif, which is now displaced from the centrality in the reliefs to a feature on the king's hunting garment.⁶¹³ Furthermore, Assurbanipal wears the *kulūlu* tiara in the hunting scenes, pointing to his status as priest (*šangu*) of Aššur. The tiara is indeed a prop of the coronation rite. Indeed, his fashion technology may also point to a fruitful area of investigation. Every item of clothing and accessorisation is theme-orientated to heighten the feeling of display and performance. From the lion-motifs on the body accessories and the hunt prosthetics to the embroidery on the hunting gear that he wears, the concern with display is evident.

Assurbanipal's royal hunt seems to have taken place in the *ambassu* which is likely to have led out of the low-elevation room S. Yet despite the seeming veracity of the locale, as well as the reminder that the temperament of the lions in the arena is not to be underestimated in the epigraph notes, this composition exudes a high degree of royal pomp, with the king's body perfectly protected from the allegedly threatening lions by an impenetrable security detail.⁶¹⁴

Furthermore, the fact that Assurbanipal is never compared to an animal represents an advance in the construction of ideal heroism in the late Assyrian phase – earlier similes which compare the king to a lion and a bull to note his physical strength are abandoned in the royal inscriptions of Assurbanipal in favour of a construction of the self-image of the king as master huntsman. His achieved masculinity turns him not so much into a hero as a “culture hero” who puts the prowess to the use of more intellectual matters, as the stylus signifies in the lion hunt. The stylus is a good

⁶¹³ See R.D. Barnett and A. Lorenzini, *Assyrian Sculptures in the British Museum*, Toronto 1975, plates 105, 116, and 127.

⁶¹⁴ For the epigraph see Dick 2006, 255-6. Despite being controlled in cages (^{giš} *nabārti*) the lion is still UR.MAḪ *ez-zu šà EDIN-šú* (a raging wild lion of the wilderness).

indicator of the king's real concern – that power and prowess were there to maintain order in the civilized world.⁶¹⁵

It seems to me that the visual culture in the palace of king Assurbanipal is one of dissent. What we see here, and what the audience may have perceived upon seeing the Assurbanipal palace reliefs, is an aesthetic of dissent from traditional norms and values. The lion hunts may perhaps point to this new code and culture. In light of the fact that Assurbanipal was not at all an active agent in the line of battle, and to the extent that the battle was a symbolic performance of the war, it seems strange that he is displaying all this prowess. As if to subvert the inherited construct of traditional Assyrian royal masculinity, Assurbanipal strategically places visual cues in the visual field which undo this configuration. One such clue is the stylus in the place of the dagger, an indicator that his masculinity was conflicting with the event. As if to say: "I'd rather be writing than hunting." Or even, "In the hunt, I am still a scholar above all else." Indeed, the conflicting masculinities of scholar and soldier in the reign of Assurbanipal become noteworthy in this emphasis on his intellectual masculinity.

Finally, on the symbolic level of code, it might be worth pointing out that image of the eunuchs returning from the royal hunt carrying the dead body of the slain lion away from the arena and into the royal palace could signal a moment of gender comedy. If the lion is the paragon of hypermasculinity, then the eunuchs carrying its carcass may indeed have appeared rather touching. Therefore, it seems to me that what we have in the period of Assurbanipal is not too far from the rumours circulating about him in foreign courts. As Frahm writes:

⁶¹⁵ A similar trajectory takes place from the Iliadic heroes who are routinely compared to animal predators to Odysseus presented exclusively as master huntsman and nothing else. Bates 2013, 4.

“An even better study object would be the Assyrian king Assurbanipal who is however, not the central character of the present volume. Assurbanipal left a particularly copious body of royal inscriptions, which includes an “autobiographical” sketch about his youth and long descriptions of how he tortured his enemies. He avoided going to war, had himself depicted, on a palace relief, slouching on a couch in a garden in the presence of his wife and several musicians, and hobnobbed with Elamite princes who stayed at the Nineveh court. Later sources, especially Ctesias, describe Assurbanipal, now called Sardanapallus, as an effeminate character with bisexual inclinations, a characterization that may have been more than an orientalist fantasy.”⁶¹⁶

If, as argued earlier, the lion was culturally-construed as an epitome and source of the sovereign’s masculinity, then it may have been poignant for the viewing audience to see the slain lion carried away from the arena by eunuchs, themselves stripped of their essential manhood through castration. The thematic parallel of the lack/death of masculinity in the ascending passage might have even signalled the king’s control of the masculinity of the other: in the case of eunuchs, the management of the corporal masculinity through the crushing of the testicles, and in the case of the lion, the slaying of the ultimate masculine opponent in a circus-like display in town.

5.6. Conclusion

Hunting is about status, not subsistence. It is in light of the cost-signalling symbolic meaning of hunting that we can better understand the ideological decision of the scholars of the Neo-Assyrian court to include the hunting activities of the king in the royal inscriptions, the bas-reliefs, the frescos, and the glyptic art. The display of symbolic capital and the attributes of masculinity that are required to attain the signalling capital become the pageantry of political masculinity.

⁶¹⁶ Frahm 2014, 169.

As was argued in the preamble to this section, the “more antiquated, archaic, and unnecessary hunting became, the better able it was to signify prestige: to the point, arguably, were it developed into a ‘pure’ signifier.”⁶¹⁷ It is this that we see in the hunting reliefs of Assurbanipal – an expensive and spectacular staging of a hunting display in which the king represents himself displaying dominion over animals, and, by extension, other men. That these were representations of a symbolic regime of power play and blood sport was evident in the “staginess, script, and self-conscious theatricality” of the event: indeed, the bas-reliefs show a self-referential image to the stand-alone permanent monument of the king-as-hunter in the hills of Nineveh (*Figure 17*). Equally evident of the symbolic function is the customised toolkit used for the event. The arm bands and bracelets as well as a bow tips show miniature leonine motifs which heighten the theatricality and the scripted and staged dimension of this circus-in-town. We may argue, in fact, that Assurbanipal staged these displays (there may have been more than one since a precedent event may have been recorded in the stand-alone monument on the hill), in order to validate his valour and prowess in light of the fact that he lived his reign in isolation from the battlefield (ideologically and theologically presented as a divine command of Ishtar to protect the body of the king from damage and death but ridiculed in successive kingdoms as an effeminate and cowardly gesture of a king who preferred the company of palace eunuchs to that of his troops).⁶¹⁸ The hunting cycles are perhaps best seen as propagandistic adverts for Assurbanipal’s worth and value as a man (and precisely the reason why his inscriptions do not employ the topos of symbiosis between sovereign and beast).

⁶¹⁷ Bates 2013, 9.

⁶¹⁸ See Frahm 2003, 37–48.

It has been argued that the sovereign and beast relations operate on a level of symbiosis the axis of which is grounded in a construct of masculinity. For the king, as for the lion (and the bull), a construct of vigour, vitality, virility, potency, mercilessness, and impatience in military and heroic action as well as an embodiment of muscularity was necessary to fulfil the politico-aesthetics of Neo-Assyrian ideology. That the sovereign is at one and the same time *a lion* and *a lion slayer* may be read as a logical fallacy yet if we address the Western logic behind the construct of essentialist and determinist discourse, and look directly at our primary sources concerning Near Eastern mythology, we see what Dick proposes as a solution: namely, the ancient Mesopotamian logic of symbiosis. Dick cites the evidence that Ninurta himself is both ontologically leonine, yet a slayer of the Anzû the leonine being.⁶¹⁹ He further notes that the beastly victim is “never mutilated, but is treated with respect.”⁶²⁰ Indeed, Ninurta, Nabû, Nergal (Erra), and Ištar are all leonine and lion slayers. Perhaps the solution to this problem could be further resolved through the claim of Erra in the Epic of Erra: *In the heavens, I am a wild bull; in the open country, I am a lion; in the homeland, I am king...*⁶²¹

This disjuncture, this irony, paradox, this dialectic is expressed in Elena Cassin: it is “dialectique du chaser et du chassé que le rapport entre le roi et le lion nous apparaît sous un jour différent.”⁶²² Besides, hunting and fishing had their place in the nutritional life of ancient Assyria; indeed, notions of masculinity and hospitality

⁶¹⁹ Dick 2006, 245.

⁶²⁰ Dick 2006, 245.

⁶²¹ See Dick 2006, 244.

⁶²² Cassin 1981, 388.

intersect frequently in the extant remains. As Ashurnasirpal II's Banquet Stele clearly shows, the serving of stag and gazelle was part of royal masculine hospitality.⁶²³

In conclusion, therefore, hunting operated along the lines of homosociality in which the hunting grounds delineated/defined as a homosocial space with physical and symbolic boundaries in which men displayed their hunting prowess to each other and enjoyed the camaraderie. The king delineates the homosocial hunting space in the reliefs. The staged hunts, on the other hand, point to the theatricality of manhood making, and the audience may subject the protagonist to a gender shaming if the skills and prowess are not displayed as they are dictated by cultural norms, and the shot is awry. The gear is a stage prop that helps the actor construct the dramaturgy and aiding the actor to display his masculinity. Acts of display work to fashion masculinity while at the same time threatening to undermine it: the trophy is the measure of the success in the construction of manhood.

⁶²³ Allsen 2006, 5.

CHAPTER 6. IMPERIAL EUNUCHS AND ELITE MASCULINITY IN THE NEO-ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

6.0. Introduction

This chapter will look at the gender identity of eunuchs in the Neo-Assyrian empire by investigating the occurrence and function of persons referred to as *ša rēši* in the royal inscriptions and the administrative texts of the state as well as the extant visual sources from the palace relief programmes and glyptic. This reading of the sources will employ gender theories, mainly the theory of masculinities as well as queer and trans-theory, first to investigate whether these methodological approaches could help us better understand the practice of castration and the institution of eunuchism in the imperial project, and after that to argue that 1) far from being effeminate or socially liminal, eunuchs occupied positions of power and privilege in the royal court of ancient Assyria that validated their claim to elite masculinity, and 2) the social-engineering of a new configuration of masculinity in the royal agenda of the state of Assur proved to be a very effective political tool for the expansion and stability of the imperial project. To begin with a brief overview of the attestations and debate concerning eunuchism in Mesopotamia before the rise of Assyria is in order. After that, I will map the lexicographic studies to date with regards to the terms that refer to persons who underwent body modification in order to be referred to as castrates, to be followed by a thorough critical assessment of the current state of scholarship. This will lead to a presentation and discussion of the different functions of castration in both the Middle and the Neo-Assyrian periods in order to set the scene for the discussion of the gender expression of eunuchs throughout the imperial timeline. Attention will be paid to the

institution of eunuchism as a hegemonic state apparatus, as well as to individual eunuchs within the institution about whom we have enough information to discuss at some length.

Castration is the social practice of androgen deprivation in the male body with the removal or the destruction of the testicles, and is generally referred to as eunuchism.⁶²⁴ Eunuchism appears in many different cultures, yet the effects of this practice on the socio-political and gendered lives of the persons who undergo such a biological change remain inadequately grasped.⁶²⁵ This re-engineering of the male body results in an outwardly different physiognomic appearance which thwarts some aspects of what, in most cultures, are considered to be essential attributes of normative masculinity, and may hence be understood as a re-gendering of the body.

Recent study of castrate osteometric and anthropometric data has confirmed that prepubescent castration results in changes which affect the long bones, the pelvis, and the development of the skull and dentition, as well as arresting the development of body and facial hair.⁶²⁶ More specifically, the differences resulting from the deprivation of endogenous sex hormones were clearly marked in the abnormal lengthening of the long bones due to a delay in epiphyseal fusion and the development of the ossa coxae and the craniofacial area. Such outwardly visible changes contribute to what has often been termed the gender liminality of eunuchs within the social milieu among historians and gender theorists. Others argue that these physiognomic differences must have classed these men differently within the gender matrix of the

⁶²⁴ The removal of the penis is usually termed penectomy. See Taylor 2000.

⁶²⁵ Eunuchism has been the subject of a number of recent studies. For the ones relevant to the gender of eunuchs in cultures other than Mesopotamia see Ringrose 2003.

⁶²⁶ Reusch 2013, 107–112.

societies where the practice was performed, often with the resultant classification of eunuchs as third gender.⁶²⁷

It may be that the origins of human castration emerged in the ancient Near East alongside the agrarian practice of animal castration in societies that were organised around rigid hierarchical models; the gelding of male animals minimises the competition for the alpha male and hence more docile specimen are engineered. Historically, eunuchism is attested in regions where proto-bureaucracy and rigid patrimonial ties were very strong, and thus became a tool through which rulers could reduce bureaucratic interference through total allegiance and loyalty by the castrated subjects.⁶²⁸ Our sources reveal that this region became the nexus of this practice in at least the second and first millennia. In light of this, the social, cultural, and political histories of the region cannot leave unaddressed the topic of human castration and its impact on the gender identification and configuration of the castrated subject as well as the repercussions of this physical re-engineering of the male reproductive system on socio-political organisation at large. The recent impetus in Assyriology from gender studies and theories of masculinities has now made it possible for scholars to pose legitimate questions about the role(s) of eunuchs not only in the political domains of ancient Mesopotamia, but also within the discourse of gender in these societies. This chapter will look at how these men, whose male bodies were biologically reconfigured, were perceived within the ideological practices of imperial expansion and then offer a

⁶²⁷ Reusch 2013, 69; See also Peled 2016 who argues, somewhat contradictorily, throughout the entire monograph that eunuchs were unhegemonic males and third gender.

⁶²⁸ Coser 1964, 881.

re-interpretation of the gendered status of eunuchs in order to discuss their role in the construction of masculinities at the royal courts of ancient Assyria.

6.1. Brief Overview of Eunuchs Before the Assyrian Period

In order to better understand the gender continuities and innovations of the Neo-Assyrian period, a brief look at the practice of male castration in the earlier records is in order. This section will discuss possible early attestation of castrated males in the Mesopotamian sequence.

6.1.1. *Girseqû*

The *girseqûs*, mostly known to us from Old Babylonian corpora, were a distinct type of palace attendant closely associated with the lack of biological children. In the earlier Ur III period, *girseqûs* are understood to have referred broadly to any person in the employ of the palace; however, the title underwent radical semantic drift in the Old Babylonian period. Three laws (§§ 187, 192, and 193) of the Old Babylonian law collection of Hammurabi as well as the *šumma ālu* omen series mention a male who, due to his nature, cannot have biological children and needs to resort to adoption.⁶²⁹

The *girseqûs* are functionally and contextually associated with the singers of the Mari letters and the *ša rēšis*; due to this association, the parallel has been drawn between the term and the practice of either castration or male sexual passivity in anal intercourse or femininity. This has been understood in this way since at least Meier's

⁶²⁹ For a thorough lexicographic study of this figure, see most recently Peled 2016, 239–252, and bibliography.

entry 'eunuchs' in the Reallexikon in 1936. Most recently, Peled has argued that the strong association hints at the possibility of these persons being eunuchs.⁶³⁰

6.1.2. Sumerian Proverb

Mario Liverani, in a very early attempt at discussing eunuchs from the perspective of the contemporary reception of gender other, discusses at some length the possible meaning of the Old Sumerian proverb, dating to around 1900 B.C.E., *dab-sar an-ta-me-en lú ki-ta-nu-me-en* (translated by its editor E.I. Gordon as 'you may be a scribe [when viewed] from above; but you are not even a man [when viewed] from below.'⁶³¹ Here Liverani argues that this orally passed-down text throws light at the way eunuchs and state officials were perceived by common people. Liverani argues that there is a double function in this text: one figurative and the other literal. The figurative speaks of the above as the gaze-of-the-administration which brings the eunuch into the fold for his scribal prowess, while the below is the gaze-of-the-outsiders who admonish the eunuch for his lack of masculinity. Liverani then argues that there is another function to the text; the above is the head, and therefore the eunuch is prized for his knowledge and skills, while viewed from the anatomical below, the eunuch is a failed man.⁶³² In this piece, and if we accept Liverani's argument that the man in citation is indeed a eunuch and that the proverb is a riddle pointing to the paradoxical nature of the eunuch, we have a double-sided social gaze upon the figure of the eunuch: the state-gaze, which sees the utilitarian dimension of the castrated

⁶³⁰ Peled 2016, 203.

⁶³¹ Liverani 1978, 398–9.

⁶³² Liverani 1978, 398–9.

male body and its functionality for the efficacy of administration, and the public-gaze, which ridicules the eunuch for the physical incompleteness and its partial manhood.

6.1.3. Gudea and Eunuchs

In Gudea's account of the building of the Eninnu temple, the statue B inscription (B 4:5 f) mentions the directive that women were not to carry the baskets but the eunuchs had to do the building for them.⁶³³

6.1.4. Discussion

What seems to be happening in most of the scholarly attempts here is that various titles are being subsumed under the taxonomic class 'eunuch' with a hefty amount of retrojection, working from *ša rēši* backwards.

In addition, every occurrence that mentions men not being able to produce biological offspring are also suspected of body modification, leaving out the possibility of the natural inability to produce semen and therefore procreate. In the case of the codex Hammurabi, the indication is not clear. What the state does do, however, is lend a lot of support to those people who adopt children, and clearly promotes a harsh proscription against returning to the biological parents thus placing emphasis and value not so much on the biological tie of kinship but on the cultural and social construction of kinship through adoption. The ramifications for manhood are clear here: harsh punishment for rendering fatherless those men who adopt children and are then abandoned.

⁶³³ Suter 2000, 140.

Furthermore, the classification of all the persons who do not sire children as gender ambiguous is not only a complete retrojection unsupported by contemporary evidence, but also a total misconstruction of what was normative gender expression in ancient Mesopotamia, indicating, very erroneously, that there was only one way of being a man, and that is to be biologically functional. This error is then what creates the false impression that eunuchs were the creation (or invention) of Assyrian imperial ideology when the data may show that the practice had been around for a long time.⁶³⁴

What the pre-Assyrian evidence indicates is not entirely clear, however one may argue that if indeed these men were castrated, then there is already a very well established practice of eunuchism before the rise of the first great empire.

6.2. Ša Rēši in Assyriological Studies

In this section I will be looking at the terms by which eunuchs were referred to in the Middle and the Neo-Assyrian period and then present the most recent contribution by Assyriologists to the debate of whether or not the Assyrian court employed eunuchs.

6.2.1. Assyriological Studies of Eunuchism

A variety of sources make reference to the term *ša rēši*. The logographic designation *lú-sag*, Akkadian *ša rēši*, is considered by many scholars to mean eunuch. Peled is rather inaccurate in stating the logogram and the term refer to court eunuch⁶³⁵; as we

⁶³⁴ See Assante 2017, 64–66.

⁶³⁵ Peled 2016, 203

shall see, there is ample evidence to indicate that it was not a term restricted to the domain of the palace.

In the Short Recension of the *igi-tuḫ* list (ll. 232–234)⁶³⁶ the *lú-sag / ša rēši* are associated with the *girseqû* and the *tīru*, and it is this association which is generally used to make claims about the non-normative masculinity of the *lú-sag / ša rēši* group. Since Peled’s framework of hegemonic masculinity sees procreation as a necessary attribute, the author concludes that eunuchs, and other men who are unable to procreate, should be brought into the fold of male gender ambiguity.⁶³⁷ To begin with, I find the term rather unsatisfactory due to the inherent contradiction – in gender terms, one is either male, or gender ambiguous. Being both seems to be a gender conundrum.

The first attempt to equate the term *lú-sag / ša rēši* with eunuchs was made by Zimmern in 1889; Zimmern equated *ša rēši* with the biblical *sārîs* and the Akkadian term *rab ša rēši* with the biblical *rab sārîs*. Since then, the debate of whether or not these terms designate the category eunuchs is still ongoing, with Hawkins, most recently, stating that the Akkadian dictionaries are still rather sceptical to adopt the term eunuchs.⁶³⁸

The field can be broadly divided into two camps: the maximalists, that is those scholars who agree that the term refers to eunuchs, and the minimalists, those who claim that the evidence is either not clear enough or too unsubstantial. For the latter category, Dalley argues that the term *ša rēši* should be read in the dual form (man with

⁶³⁶ Landsberger and Gurney 1957–58, 83

⁶³⁷ Peled 2016, 203.

⁶³⁸ Hawkins 2002, 220. For a thorough discussion of the scholarship to date, see Peled 2016, 207–8 and relevant bibliography.

two heads) and that rather than referring to eunuchs, it harked to what Dalley suggests may have been the aristocratic tendency in the Assyrian court to separate themselves from the commoners.⁶³⁹ This explanation remains, however, rather tendentious: Peled rightly notes that Dalley consistently used the dual form in her argument, even where the attestation showed otherwise.⁶⁴⁰ Furthermore, the dual is a rare occurrence which is so exceptional that it almost never appears in the texts save, as Deller has noted, in the Middle Assyrian laws.⁶⁴¹

Most recently, Luis Siddall, taking his cue from the work of Dalley, has pointed out some of the problems with establishing a one-to-one correspondence between the term *ša rēši* and the social practice of castration.⁶⁴² Siddall attempted to define this term as an ungendered designation referring exclusively to an office within the Assyrian court linked to the goddess Ishtar while leaving open the possibility that some of the holders of the office may have been castrates.⁶⁴³ This reading is, however, rather tenuous since the professional roles of the men carrying the title within palace administration were so varied and unrelated that it would be a fruitless enterprise to insist on defining the term as a rank or an office within palace administration.

In the maximal camp, on the other hand, are a group of Assyriologists who define the term as always designating eunuchs.⁶⁴⁴ The most solid evidence of the one-to-one correspondence between the term and the designator has been presented by

⁶³⁹ Dalley 2002, 121-122.

⁶⁴⁰ Peled 2016, 208.

⁶⁴¹ Deller 1999, 304.

⁶⁴² Siddall 2007.

⁶⁴³ Siddall 2007, 237.

⁶⁴⁴ Barjamovic 2011; Deller 1999; Grayson 1995; Groß 2014; Mattila 2000; Parpola 1995; Radner 2014; Reade 1972; Watanabe 1998.

Watanabe’s study of official seals from the Neo-Assyrian empire.⁶⁴⁵ Watanabe has shown that the image and the legend correspond; in most cases save a few exceptions, every single occurrence of the term in a seal legend when accompanied by an image, the image will show a beardless official. Most recently, Barjamovic has stated that the reluctance to accept that the Assyrian court employed eunuchs is indefensible in light of the evidence presented in the work of the maximal camp.⁶⁴⁶ Barjamovic highlights the fact that intact men were often mentioned in contexts of their lineage and offspring, whereas *ša rēši*’s never mention progeny but rather successors, using, in fact, the Aramaic loan word *ḫalputu*.⁶⁴⁷ Finally, CT 10:14, a text studied by Parpola and discussed in LAS, notes that *ša rēši* were *la ālidi*, a clear indication that they were “not able to beget.”⁶⁴⁸

6.2.2. Attestations in the Data Sets

The term *ša rēši* appears as early as the ED IIIa period (2600–2500 B.C.E.) in the *lú* list of professions (Early Dynastic List E)⁶⁴⁹ as well as in the list of names and professions.⁶⁵⁰ Administrative texts from this and from the Ur III period as well as an Old Akkadian text and a list of professions from Ebla also mention this figure.⁶⁵¹ Despite these mentions, however, no further information is given in these data sets and certainly nothing about the social nexus of this figure can be surmised from the texts.

⁶⁴⁵ Watanabe 1998.

⁶⁴⁶ Barjamovic 2011, 58.

⁶⁴⁷ See LAS II, 129 (8 and 15).

⁶⁴⁸ See LAS II, 15.

⁶⁴⁹ *Lú-sag-[k]al* in OIP 99.54 obv. Vii 13 (=1.139).

⁶⁵⁰ *igi-LAM-LAM lú-sag* in OIP 99.61 obv. Vi 20a-b (= ll. 148–149).

⁶⁵¹ Peled 2016, 209 and references.

In Neo-Assyrian copies of the Old Babylonian *šumma izbu* omen series as well as in extispicy texts, the designation *ša rēši* refers to a courtier as well as to a person who threatens the king and the prince.⁶⁵² The Mari texts tell us that the *ša rēši* were also courtiers engaged in different palace tasks.⁶⁵³

The largest number of textual attestations for *ša rēši* comes from the Assyrian palace archive, where we see the designated person very close to the ruler and engaged in a variety of tasks in the management of the palace.⁶⁵⁴ These attestations indicate that the palace eunuchs were under the nominal supervision of the chief eunuch (*rab ša rēši*) who, apart from heading the institution of eunuchs in the palace, also acted as the king's special envoy and as military commander.⁶⁵⁵ Sîn-šumu-lēšir, the *rab ša rēši* of Assurbanipal and his successor Aššur-etel-ilāni, even became king.⁶⁵⁶ The remit of the *ša rēši* courtiers included treasurer (*masennu*), chief cup bearer (*rab šāqê*), palace herald (*nagir ekalli*), and commander-in-chief (*tūrtanu*).⁶⁵⁷ The designation *ša rēši* continued to be used in the Neo- and Late Babylonian periods also.⁶⁵⁸

In the Neo-Assyrian data set, the title *ša rēši* is usually written in the following ways:

1. (LÚ/LÚ*.) SAG
2. (LÚ.) ša-SAG⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵² Peled 2016, 209 and references.

⁶⁵³ Peled 2016 210.

⁶⁵⁴ Groß 2014.

⁶⁵⁵ Mattila 2000, 70–76.

⁶⁵⁶ Tadmor 2002, 610.

⁶⁵⁷ Mattila 2000, 161.

⁶⁵⁸ See Peled 2016, 210, including previous literature.

⁶⁵⁹ RIMA 2 A.O.101.1 i 92; A.O.101.2:92; Watanabe 1993,112–3, no.5.2:2 (on seal GPA 66); SAA 4 142:4; SAA 12 6 r.2.

3. *ša*-SAG (ND 2329 r.12)⁶⁶⁰

4. *ša*-LÚ.SAG⁶⁶¹

The fully syllabic writing *ša-re-ši* and the plural *ša-rēšāni*⁶⁶² can be found in a Babylonian letter, and can be transcribed as *ša-rēšāni*. Another variant is LÚ*.SAG.MEŠ-*te*⁶⁶³ read as *ša-rēšūti* (which is also the abstract term encountered in a land grant from the reign of Adad-nerari III⁶⁶⁴ and in a query to Šamaš⁶⁶⁵). The Standard Babylonian sources of the Neo-Assyrian period yield the writings (LÚ.) *šu/šú-ut*-SAG and the hapax *šu-ut-re-še-e*.MEŠ.⁶⁶⁶

For the Neo-Assyrian period, the minimalist group argue for the meaning of ‘a courtier’, while the maximalist group agree that it always designates ‘a eunuch’. The literal meaning is “he (servant) of the head”⁶⁶⁷ and Deller has attempted a possible etymology for the term.⁶⁶⁸ The maximal group turn to the Middle Assyrian Laws to show that there is a very strong correlation, indeed a one-to-one correspondence, between the term and the practice of castration.

6.2.3. *Ša-Rēši* in the Middle Assyrian Period

Important evidence in attempting to demonstrate the strong correlation between the designation *ša rēši* and the practice of castration can be found in the Middle Assyrian

⁶⁶⁰ ND 2392 r.12.

⁶⁶¹ SAA 3 20 r.10.

⁶⁶² SAA 17 139 r.19, 20.

⁶⁶³ ND 2386+ r ii 4

⁶⁶⁴ SAA 12 1:4: LÚ.SAG-*ti-šú*

⁶⁶⁵ Lambert 2007, 106–9, no. 18: 4, 5, 11, 12: *ša*-LÚ.SAG-*ti*.

⁶⁶⁶ K 8862:9; Lambert 1988, 171, 174.

⁶⁶⁷ CAD R 277–89 and AHW 973–6 reject the meaning ‘eunuch’ while HAD 94, 107 only gives the translation “eunuch, castrate” for the term.

⁶⁶⁸ Deller 1999. 304 argues that two heads may be a euphemism for testicles.

Laws, specifically clauses §§ 15 and 20. The Middle Assyrian Laws, dating to the fourteenth century and consisting of fourteen tablets designated Tablets “A” to “O”, are mostly known to us from later editions compiled in Assur in the eleventh century.

6.2.3.1. The Middle Assyrian Laws

Clause § 15 addresses a case of adultery and the punitive measure for both the adulterating woman and her lover:

MAL § 15, 51-57

51 *šum-ma mu-ut sinnilte (munus) aššassu (dam-su) i-du-ak*

52 *ù a-i-la i-du-ak-ma*

53 *šum-ma ap-pa ša aššitišu (dam-šu) i-na-ki-is*

54 *a 'ila(lú) a-na ša re-še-en ú-tar*

55 *ù pa-ni-šu gab-ba i-na-qu-ru*

56 *ù šum-ma aššass[u(dam-su) ú-uš-šar]*

57 *a 'ila(lu) ú[-uš-šar]*

51 If the husband of a woman kills his wife,
52 he shall also kill the man (=the adulterer);
53 If he cuts off the nose of his wife,
54 he shall turn the man into a *ša rēšēn*,
55 and they will completely mutilate his face;
56 And if [he releases] his wife,
57 [he shall] also re[lease] the man.

Clause § 20 deals with a case of man-on-man anal sex, in which the two males are equal at law:

MAL § 20, 93-97

93 *šum-ma a'ilu(lú) tap-pa-a-šu i-ni-ik*

94 *ub-ta-e-ru-ú-uš*

95 *uk-ta-i-nu-ú-uš*

96 *i-ni-ik-ku-ú-uš*

97 *a-na ša re-še-en ú-tar-ru-uš*

93 If a man sodomises his fellow man,

94 (and) they indict him,

95 (and) they prove him (=his guilt):

96: they shall sodomise him;

97 they shall turn him into a *ša rēšēn*.

In her work on MAL § 15, Dalley rejects the notion of ‘turning someone into something’ implied by the term *utâr*, suggesting instead the alternative of “to turn someone over to someone else”.⁶⁶⁹ This would mean that the adulterer’s punishment would equal that of the adulterating woman and that the punishment would be executed by a *ša rēšēn* official. The logic behind Dalley’s argument is that the punitive measure would be too harsh and the criminal would certainly die. Peled, following Siddall’s cue, argues against Dalley’s reading of the apodosis and her reasoning, maintaining that the verb *inaddin* would have been more likely in this context and that the harsh punishment could indeed have been adequate penalty for the man breaking the proscription.⁶⁷⁰ For MAL § 20, Dalley does not exclude the possibility of castration.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁶⁹ Dalley 2001, 200.

⁶⁷⁰ Peled 2016, 213; Peled quotes Siddall 2007, 228.

⁶⁷¹ Dalley 2001, 201.

6.2.3.2. The Middle Assyrian Palace Decrees

The Middle Assyrian Palace Decrees, a group of instruction texts from Assur addressing the twenty-three rules regulating the women's quarters in Assyrian royal palaces, were compiled in the reign of Tiglath-pileser I (ca. 1114–1076 B.C.E.). The collection comprises decrees by eight previous kings and four of his own, spanning a period of roughly three hundred years. These texts were known by the name *Harem Edicts* until recent scholarship pointed out the inadequacy of the term in light of recent criticism for orientalist writing.

Palace Decree no. 8,50-51

50 *ki-i ma-zi-iz pa-ni^{meš} i-hi-ru-ú-ni lu-ú šá rēš(sag) šarri(lugal) lu-ú ma-zi-iz pa-ni ša la-a mar-ru-ru-ni i-qa-bi-ú ša ša-nu-ut-[te-š]u*
51 *a-na ma-zi-iz pa-nu-ut-te id-du-nu-uš*

50 When they inspect the courtiers, they shall declare whether a *ša rēši* of the king or a courtier is not *marrur[u]*. For a second time, 51 they shall give him for “courtier-ship”.

Similarly, Palace Decree no. 20, 98 addresses the same issue:

Palace Decree no. 20, 98

šúm-ma la-a mar-ru-ur ša ša-nu-ut-te-šu a-na ma-zi-iz pa-nu-ut-te ú-ta[r-r]u-šu

If he is not *marrur*, for a second time they shall *tu[r]*n him for courtier-ship.

The key word in these data sets is *marrur(u)* in the context of an official entering the women's quarters. It has been suggested that the term *marrur(u)* was a euphemism for castrated⁶⁷² It is important to note, however, that the idea of *ša rēši* as regulators of etiquette in the women's quarters is perhaps tied to the fact that the edicts were understood to be harem edicts. The notion that Assyrian palaces did in fact have a harem has been recently questioned in the work of Svärd, who maintains that there is a lot of Ottoman retrojection in the argument that Assyrian kings kept their women in a secluded area of the palace.⁶⁷³ In fact, Svärd's argument could be applied also to the role of eunuchs as guards of the king's women. In the absence of Neo-Assyrian evidence, the practice may have been limited to the Middle Assyrian period.⁶⁷⁴ There is ample evidence to demonstrate that the king's women (mother and wife at least) had their own personal eunuchs, but whether these women were restricted to private quarters under the guardianship of castrates is not attested at all. Perhaps the evidence merely points to *ša rēši*s acting as personal attendants of the elite, which, as argued by Svärd, would make an elegant solution especially in light of the fact that eunuchs had no other loyalties or family ties.⁶⁷⁵ However, one has to be careful not to bring Neo-Assyrian practices back in time to discuss earlier data sets; there remains, indeed, the possibility that eunuchs did control entrance to the female quarters and that this was perhaps an early remit of palace eunuchs that was

⁶⁷² Oppenheim 1973, 330 no.17; AHw: 609 and CAS M/2:223; Roth 1997, 200 all translate the term as castrated. See also, LAS II 9, 15, and 32.

⁶⁷³ Svärd 2015, 91-92.

⁶⁷⁴ Svärd 2015. 108 discusses the possibility of using the MAPD to understand the role of Neo-Assyrian *sekretu* women and whether the latter did in fact correspond to the MAPD MI.ša É.GAL "women of the palace".

⁶⁷⁵ Svärd 2015, 73.

discontinued. As Coser notes, the origins of a practice do not necessarily always explain the factors that led to its later development.⁶⁷⁶

There has been much debate over the translation and meaning of the verb *marrur(u)* in these decrees. It is usually translated as ‘checked for castration’ but as Siddall argues, since it does not refer to *ša rēšis* but to all officials approaching the quarters, and since the verb points to an action that can be carried out twice, it would hardly make sense to point to castration as a possible meaning.⁶⁷⁷ Earlier, Dalley also contested the claim that *marrur[u]* designated a castrate, and suggested instead the semantic field of “strengthen or confirm”, suggesting that the officials required qualification to enter the designated area.⁶⁷⁸ Furthermore, cognate languages do not help in throwing any light at all on the term as it seems that the semantic field is rather stretched to fit the hypothesis⁶⁷⁹. Indeed, from a close contextual reading, the term could mean to check for the necessary requirements, as advocated by Siddall.⁶⁸⁰ As stated earlier, the impetus to interpret this verb as to check for castration may have been driven by the fact that the decrees were called “harem edicts” and that in retrojection, harems are expected to have eunuchs who regulate the behaviour of the women and the personnel and officials who approach them.

Furthermore, the argument is usually put forward that the mention of eunuchs in the Middle Assyrian palace decrees gives evidence of the need of the king, and the

⁶⁷⁶ Coser 1964, 880.

⁶⁷⁷ Siddall 2007, 229.

⁶⁷⁸ Dalley 2001, 202. For parallels from the Hittite administration, see Peled 2016: 216-220. Of particular interest, with no parallel from either the Middle Assyrian or the Neo-Assyrian period is RS 17.144 10-19 which highlights the fact that the boy being sent for eunuchship is “very good looking”. This aesthetic value may have been a requirement for eunuchism in the ancient Near East.

⁶⁷⁹ See Peled 2016, 216 and earlier literature.

⁶⁸⁰ Peled 2016, 216.

Assyrian bloodline, to have legitimate children.⁶⁸¹ This assumption does not usually encounter any critical evaluation and is accepted as a necessity of the Assyrian king. In light of the complex pattern of princely selection, this however may not have been the case.

6.2.3.3. Ša Rēši and the White Obelisk

I will now turn to the visual evidence of eunuchs in the Middle Assyrian period. In the visual communication of the monumental reliefs and glyptic iconography, beardless men form part of the predominantly male world that populates the images. Images of women are rare in Assyrian art, decidedly rarer than the textual attestations. The images of beardless men are usually brought into the discussion of eunuchs as an addendum to discussions of the textual occurrences, and as a concluding remark used as further evidence to buttress the argument that eunuchs were indeed in the employ of the Assyrian palace. Layard already equated these beardless men with eunuchs, and Reade endorses this designation.⁶⁸² Reade, and Winter more recently, have tried to rescue the visual dimension from a marginal data set to a primary one, therefore not as a data set to support the textual evidence, but as a data set of its own right. In fact, Winter has cogently argued that “the visual domain contains within it primary information, as well as unique structures of knowledge – oftentimes in parallel or complimentary with, occasionally even distinct from, the textual record.”⁶⁸³

⁶⁸¹ See Peled 2016, 214–216.

⁶⁸² Reade 1972, 91-92 and 96-96.

⁶⁸³ Winter 2010a, 71-72.

Consequently, the visual record needs to be studied with the same full toolkit as other data sets.

In order to obtain some data relevant to the issue at hand, I now turn to the White Obelisk (fig. 41). The White Obelisk is a free-standing monument which was erected outside important entrances. The rectangular, tapering pillar with stepped apex measures about 2.90 m high and its 0.35 m base seems to have originally been inserted into a podium. It was excavated by Rassam between Sennacherib's outer court and the entrance to the Ishtar temple. Each of the four sides has eight registers of sculpture representing scenes of warfare, hunting, tribute and ritual with inscriptions written partly on the apex and partly between the panels.⁶⁸⁴ The dating of the White Obelisk is a site of contention, but Reade and Pittman both agree that the monument dates to the late Middle Assyrian period. If we accept this dating of the monument, then we have the first visual attestations of eunuchs in the Middle Assyrian period. What Reade highlights as a distinctive feature of this monument, and this period, is the remit of eunuchs. In terms of sheer number, there are fewer eunuchs on the White Obelisk than on the later visual expression of Ashurnasirpal I or Shalmaneser III. In addition, Reade notes that there is less status distinction between the king, still *primus inter pares* and not yet *numen*, and his courtiers and nobles: indeed, the fez is worn by most of the courtiers in the iconography.⁶⁸⁵ Finally, the carrying of the fly whisk (Panel D7) and the introduction of tributaries (panels A4 and

⁶⁸⁴ Reade 1975, 143 with discussion on the problems of dating the monument. For a more recent recension and dating attempt, see Pittman 1996, 334–355.

⁶⁸⁵ Reade 2009, 248–249.

B5), later to be the exclusive remit of beardless men in the Neo-Assyrian relief cycles, is still the domain and the task of bearded, and therefore presumably intact, males.⁶⁸⁶

6.2.4. Discussion

The Middle Assyrian evidence presents us with two strands of data: the first sees castration as a harsh punitive measure while the second sees castration as a feature of some men in the employ of the state. This evidence seems to be at loggerheads, but as we shall see later in the discussion on Middle and Neo-Assyrian castration, there seems to have been an internal logic to the way castration was an integral part of Assyrian society. Assante has recently argued that the White Monument ushers in a new understanding of masculinity in Ancient Mesopotamia, and that for the first time, grounded in the needs of the growing territorial empire, the need for diverse, perhaps queer masculinities became expedient.⁶⁸⁷ If the evidence from earlier periods points to the existence of the practice prior to the rise of Assyria, then castration had already been practiced in the region for a while and by the time the Assyrians entered the world stage, eunuchism had already existed for a while. It was up to the Assyrian state ideology to negotiate a place for eunuchs in the gender matrix and in society.

6.3. Ša Rēši in the Neo-Assyrian Period

The largest data set on eunuchs in ancient Mesopotamia comes to us from the Neo-Assyrian period. The sources for the designation are the royal inscriptions, the

⁶⁸⁶ See Reade 1975, 145 and, more recently, Assante 2016, 66–67.

⁶⁸⁷ Assante 2017, 58–59.

administrative texts, the correspondence between the kings and their advisors, the visual communication of the empire, and the cylinder seals. In this section, I will first look at the occurrence in the context of the royal inscriptions, then at the context in which *ša rēši* occur in the state archives of Assyria. Following that, I will assess how eunuchs feature in the visual communication and the state arts, and then turn to the glyptic evidence. In bringing together these sources, we will be able to see the historical transformations that took place in the institution of eunuchism at the heart of the empire, as well as the function and social mechanism that regulated the use of eunuchs in the state civil service. The sources have been thoroughly looked at in order to ensure that a representative variety of occurrences are written about, yet will refrain from listing every occurrence of the designation, especially since Groß (2014) has already gathered most known occurrences.⁶⁸⁸ What remains to be done, at this point, is to elaborate a theory in order to better understand the practice in Assyrian society, and how eunuchs fared in the gender system and the vocabulary of value of the time.

6.3.1. Ša Rēši: Background and Origins

There is a dearth of information regarding the background and family origin of *ša rēši* in the Neo-Assyrian period. One reason for this, as already argued by Groß, may be due to the nature of the sources; however, Groß is willing to admit that the dearth of background information for *ša rēši* is rather remarkable.⁶⁸⁹ This has led many scholars

⁶⁸⁸ See Groß 2014, 245–299.

⁶⁸⁹ Groß 2014, 249; note, however, that Groß mentions two slim references to the background of two eunuchs: SAA 11 196:2 is a broken administrative document which mentions the unnamed mother of a eunuch, while Lambert 2007, 106–9, no. 18: 11 is yet another anonymous reference to a father of another eunuch.

to argue that one salient feature of *ša rēši* in the Neo-Assyrian period is their complete re-engineering of kinship through the dissociation with their biological families, their renaming, and the ‘adoption’ by the king. Indeed, this may be the reason why the designation *ša rēši* was employed: as many argue, the term refers to ‘he of the head’, that is servant and/or adoptive son of the king. One may be tempted to argue that court eunuchs may not have been ethnically Assyrian, especially since the sources make ample references to eunuchs that were brought into Assyria as prisoners of war. In his inscriptions, Tiglath-pileser III, for instance, mentions that Hiram, the ruler of Tyre, handed over his eunuchs,⁶⁹⁰ Esarhaddon took eunuchs from Šubria,⁶⁹¹ and Assurbanipal from Elam and Babylonia.⁶⁹² Indeed, one cannot discredit that possibility that at least some of the eunuchs in the Assyrian court had their ethnic origins elsewhere and were brought into the Assyrian fold, having been trained in the courts of foreign rulers.⁶⁹³ However, the Neo-Assyrian sources never make mention of their ethnic origins, and this in itself is a very salient point as it points to the possibility that foreign eunuchs were completely Assyrianised. Nor, however, can one discredit the possibility that eunuchs were engendered from the local population: since the sources clearly indicate that eunuchism was associated with courtly prestige, it is not unfathomable that local families who wished to secure careers for their sons and

⁶⁹⁰ RINAP 1 49 r.8.

⁶⁹¹ RINAP 4 33 r.iii 17’.

⁶⁹² Borger 1996, 56, 105, Prisms A vi 89 // F v 62 + B vi 31 // C vii 27 and Pp. 153; Prism C ix 34.

⁶⁹³ Note the mention of the following foreign eunuchs: the Urartian eunuch in CTN 3 136:1; the Ru’uean eunuch in SAA 15 1:4, and the Kushite eunuch in SAA 7 47 I 1, ii 3–4.

possibly a channel into the spheres of the royal house would donate their sons to the state.⁶⁹⁴

What we do know, however, is that part of the regendering process of eunuchs involved the renaming of the subject. Parpola has argued that the adoption of the subject by the state is the reason why so many eunuch names carry the designation – *šarru*;⁶⁹⁵ more recently, however, Baker has carried out a thorough analytical study of names in Akkadian and pointed out that the lemma –*šarru* occurs more often in intact males than it does in eunuchs.⁶⁹⁶ Be that as it may, what we can state with certainty is that eunuchs took on masculine normative names.

6.3.2. *Ša Rēši* and ‘Fictive Kinship’

With many modern scholars agreeing that there is something remarkable and significant in the almost total absence of father-son associations in the record, it is reasonable to argue that the kinship patterns of eunuchs were therefore in most instances not biological or affinal. Indeed, recent scholarship on khajasarai eunuchs early modern India could help throw some light on the formation of non-biological and non-affinal kinship, or what historians and anthropologists term fictive kinship, patterns among eunuchs elsewhere. For instance, Hinchy argues that fictive kinship undermines the social and political kinship ties of a community; biological/affinal kinship made the core of the family while kinship through adoption and dependency

⁶⁹⁴ Parallel scenarios in later periods are amply attested. One may even argue that on a more symbolic level, this is what priesthood is. Similar arguments of sons-as-gift-to-the-state may be said of the military.

⁶⁹⁵ Parpola 1987, XXXIV fn. 9.

⁶⁹⁶ Baker 2002, 4–5.

peripheral.⁶⁹⁷ The same argument could be made for Assyria in the Neo-Assyrian period: indeed, as will be seen below, categories of kin could be blurred in the royal household.

Furthermore, eunuchs forged a community and an identity which were not only central to the politics of the empire but that could also ease the possible distancing effect brought about by affinal kinship. These expedient kinship relations for men who were genealogically heirless could also consolidate political favour and alliances. So how did Assyrian fictive kinship reveal itself? It has been argued that brotherhood could be one way of constructing kinship for eunuchs⁶⁹⁸: Bēl-tarsi-ilumma, the *ša rēši* of the governor of Kalḫu, and his brother the *ša rēši* Sīn-ētir, may be a newly forged kinship based on the fact that they were both eunuchs. But perhaps the most important indicator of fictive kinship comes from the closeness between eunuchs as evidenced through the donation of a cylinder seal by Bīrtāiu, the *ša rēši* of Adad-nerari III, to his protector Issār-dūrī, the *ša rēši* of the commander-in-chief Nergal-ilāṭ.⁶⁹⁹ With seals being a stand-in for the identity of the person, seal-gifting may be argued to be the passing on of one's identity onto to another person. Winter, citing evidence from Assyrian omens, argues that there could be a direct link between seals and progeny: this direct link could become problematic for the class of seals belonging to eunuchs.⁷⁰⁰ Since, as in Isa 56:5, we glean that eunuchs had a queasy relationship with issues of succession and continuity, the seal could become an extension of the self,

⁶⁹⁷ Hinchy 2014, 418. See also references to earlier literature in fn. 36.

⁶⁹⁸ Groß 2014, 249.

⁶⁹⁹ RIMA 3 A.O.104.2009, cf. Grayson 1995, 96.

⁷⁰⁰ Winter 2010a, 147.

with the inscription acting as a signifier of one's self, their issue being through the domain of their activity and featured on the seal.⁷⁰¹

6.3.3. Ša Rēšis in the State and the Palace of the Assyrian King

In the following section I will be looking at the role that eunuchs played in the Neo-Assyrian state and the palace of the king. The entire corpus has been searched for these attestations, and the most salient ones will be mentioned and discussed below. After that, a comparison with the eunuchs of the visual programme will be made to figure out what both streams of data could tell us about the construction and institution of eunuchs in the Neo-Assyrian period. I maintain that it is through these professional channels that eunuchs tried to negotiate their way inside the ideology of gender, and where they competed with other masculinities for hegemony.

6.3.3.1. Ša Rēši in Legal Texts

In this section I will discuss the presentation of eunuchs in the legal texts as a way of discussing not only the status that some eunuchs could attain through landed property, land grants and tax exemption but also to outline their masculine performance as a struggle for hegemony. In these texts, eunuchs appear at the nexus between genealogical heirlessness and the need to establish a normative performance of masculinity through the adoption of strategies, supported by a juridical framework, which mimicked the performance of intact males and their non-fictive social ties.

Single transactions in legal texts:

⁷⁰¹ Winter 2010a, 416–7.

1. Witnesses in legal transactions from records in Nineveh, Kalḫu, Assur, Dur-Katlimmu, and Guzana starting with the reign of Adad-nerāri III until the 7th Century.⁷⁰²
2. Active Parties in legal transactions as creditors of silver, sellers of houses and land, and as sellers of slaves.⁷⁰³
3. Releasers of debt-slavery as in the case of the judicial document of Assur which informs us that a certain *ša rēši-šarri* took the woman Arbailhammat and her son Nabû-erība.⁷⁰⁴
4. Buyers of land and sometimes estates of quite a substantial size scattered throughout the empire.⁷⁰⁵

Dossiers of Legal Transactions:

Collection of business records of Šamaš-šarru-usur. The archive was found in one of the Town Wall houses in the NE part of the citadel mound of Kalḫu. We can see a business career spanning over four decades (660-618*). He had credits of silver, barley, of silver and barley together, doves and geese. Creditor of wages, buyer of slaves, cooks, and women and their children. He took a daughter in adoption, Gallussu. The wife of Sa'altī-il was at his house as security against payment. Bought a house in 641 and received land for cultivation. Carried out business with bird fatteners and fowlers. Other

⁷⁰² See Groß 2014: 250 for the relevant attestations.

⁷⁰³ Groß 2014: 250

⁷⁰⁴ Groß 2014: 250

⁷⁰⁵ Groß 2014: 250

business dossiers include those of the king's eunuch Nīnuāiu and the eunuch of the queen Milki-nūrī as well as Sīn-ētir and Bēl-issē'a.⁷⁰⁶

As Beneficiaries of Land grants:

During the reign of Tiglath-pileser III and earlier, Neo-Assyrian kings made use of land grants in benefice of services rendered and as a retainer for future services. These agreements changed somewhat in the later period, with Assurbanipal's revision of land grants to tax exemption on the purchase of property for those favoured by the king. Among those who were in benefice of these schemes are a number of *ša rēšis*.

For the earlier period, Adad-nērari III grants land (fields and orchards) as well as personnel to manage the estate to eunuchs on a number of occasions. SAA 12 6, 7, 8, and 18 all attest to the agreement that the king has given the land to a eunuch. Assurbanipal, or an earlier king, on the other hand, may have revised this grant and instead of giving the land, allowed the eunuch to buy the property out of his own pocket but exempted him from paying taxes on the transaction. SAA 12 27, 29, and 36 give ample evidence of this novel practice. Nowhere, however, is this more salient than in SAA 12 036, in which Assurbanipal seals his grant to chief eunuch Nabu-šarru-usur. We could interpret this revision in light of SAA 1 233 r.10, where Sargon is criticised for giving away too much land in benefice, with the sender arguing that this practice was the reason for such limited land available. It is important to note,

⁷⁰⁶ Groß 2014: 251

however, that Assurbanipal does not grant land but he grants tax exemption of property that already belonged to eunuchs. The property of eunuchs must have reverted back to the crown or transferred to their successors, or handed over to the temples as in the grant from reign of Adad-Nērari III in SAA 12 1:3-4.

We are witness here to the juridical and political dimensions of masculinity: as argued by Kimmel, the process of conferring privilege onto one group instead of another is often invisible to those on the receiving end of this privilege.⁷⁰⁷ As these legal texts show, eunuchs in the Neo-Assyrian empire laid their claim to elite masculinity by receiving the ‘patriarchal dividends’ described accurately in these documents. The result of these privileges produce a material and ideological gender inequality. Through access to land ownership, grants, and wealth, eunuchs entered the fold of elite masculinity and reproduced it in order to maintain its hegemonic configuration. Thus, eunuchs not only served to highlight the hypermasculinity of the king, but they also constituted the formation process of that masculinity.

Case Study: The Dossier of Šamaš-šarru-ušur

Šamaš-šarru-ušur (O Šamaš, protect the king!) was a eunuch from the reign of Assurbanipal and later whose archive of forty clay tablets was found in the eastern citadel wall at Kalḫu. The tablets were accidentally fired and discovered in excavation.

⁷⁰⁷ See Kimmel 1993, 28–35.

He is attested in the dossier as a buyer of slaves, a creditor, and, unusually, as a bird dealer, and the dossier covers a period of about forty years of business activity from 660-618*.

Šamaš-šarru-ušur (^{md}šá-maš-MAN-PAB LÚ.SAG) activities included the purchasing of human property and the legal texts document the transaction and the property rights of the master. Between circa 649 and 622, Šamaš-šarru-ušur made at least seven transactions involving the purchase of human property (men, women, and children). In 649, ^{md}šá-maš-MAN-PAB purchased Ahati-le'i, a woman from Nur-Šamaš, and her son, Se'-hari (son of Pušhi) who was 3 spans tall, together with Nabû-šumu-iddina, son of Sukkaia, for two minas one shekel of silver. Later on, in 644, ^{md}šá-maš-MAN-PAB adopted a daughter, Gallussu, from her biological father Mati'-il-īla'I, for sixteen shekels from the fowler of the city of Rapâ and about two years later bought the female slave Banitu-tašmanni for fifty shekels of silver. Around 635, ^{md}šá-maš-MAN-PAB bought an older female slave, Urkittu-hammat, from the queen's fowler for seventeen shekels of silver and about ten years after that he bought a male slave Ahi-ahu-idi, son of Naqami, for 1.5 minas of silver. Of unknown date are the two contracts which reveal that ^{md}šá-maš-MAN-PAB also purchased the chief baker, Mannu-ki-Šamaš, and the slave Banî. He latter cost him 41 shekels of silver.⁷⁰⁸

These legal documents give clear evidence of the master's property rights as well as his ownership of human bodies. Slaves come across as cultural and social capital, and the eunuch-master asserts his power of ownership over their capitals through his purchasing power. In light of this, property ownership becomes one way

⁷⁰⁸ PNA Shin-Z, 1212.

for Neo-Assyrian eunuchs to negotiate and express their masculinity; in this sense, therefore, sterility had to be amended through the legal purchase of human capital through which the eunuch could perform normative gender expression, that is, as a father to Gallussu, and a male provider to the women who now formed part of his household. Through his capital, ^{md}šá-maš-MAN-PAB could re-enter the fold of masculinity and conform to the Neo-Assyrian beliefs about reproductive and gender normativity.

^{md}šá-maš-MAN-PAB also appears in the record as a creditor. Tables 5–7 (below) show his business activity as creditor between the years 660 and 618*.

DATE	AMOUNT OWED	DEBTOR	PLEDGE
652	1.5 minas of silver	Il-iadini	
650	10 shekels of silver	Qurdi-Nergal and Limraš-libbi-ili	Usufruct of four hectares of tax- exempt land for six years
650	16 shekels of silver	Mannu-ki-Nabû	
637*	16 shekels of silver	Urdu	
633*	8 shekels of silver	Mannu-ki-Arbail (as wages to Našir-edi)	

632*	3 shekels of silver	Bisusu	
631*	12 shekels of silver	Nabû-remanni	
623*	3 shekels of silver	Nabû-remanni	
Eponymy of Ša-īli-tadammaq	12 shekels of silver	Nur-Šamaš	
DATE	AMOUNT LOANED	DEBTOR	
650	0.5 mina of silver	Barikî	
646	5 shekels of silver	Arbailaiu	
643*	7 shekels of silver	Kuššudu and Ahu-eriba	
640*	4 shekels of silver	Pan-Marduk	
636* or 625*	10 shekels of (refined) silver	La-hitaiu	Wife: Basasu
629	8 shekels of silver	Nabû-eriba	Daughter: Put-upnišu
627*	5 shekels of silver	Adad-malki-ušur	
623*	3 shekels of silver	Šamaš-ahu-iddina	

Table 5 Šamaš-šarru-ušur as creditor for sums of silver

DATE	AMOUNT GIVEN	DEBTOR	CONCERN
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640*	5 homers 3 <i>sūtu</i> of barley	Qurdi-Nergal	Corn Loan
639*	3 homers of barley	Inurta-nadin-ahi	Corn Loan
637*	1 homer of barley	Gutuzu	Corn Loan
	3 homers of barley	Našir-edi and Adad-malki-ereš	Corn Loan
622*	1 homer of barley	Adad-malki-ušur	Corn Loan

Table 6 Šamaš-šarru-ušur as creditor of homers of barley

DATE	AMOUNT GIVEN	DEBTOR	CONCERN
618*	5 1/3 shekles of silver and 3 homers and 4(?) <i>sūtu</i> of barley	Urdu-Issar	Silver and grain
618*	5 shekels of silver and one homer five <i>sūtu</i> of barley	Nabû-Remanni	Silver and grain
660	230 turtledoves	Zar-Issar	Birds
637*	2 geese / cranes (pays 120)	Ahu-eriba	Birds

	turtledoves if loan is not foreclosed at stipulated time)		
631*	36 doves	Ilu-Ibni	Birds
621*	1 goose / crane	Adallal	Birds
625*	35 chains and 1 <i>hutungu</i> -implement	Urkittu-uşur	Other commodities

Table 7 Šamaš-šarru-uşur as creditor of silver and grain together, birds, and other commodities

Some light on the status of the creditor comes to us from the earlier Middle Assyrian period. Middle Assyrian Laws MAL A § 44, C §§2–3, and G+C §7 deal with the framework within which creditors could treat the human pledges either acquired after the foreclosure of the loan, or living with the creditor as pledges. Human pledges are frequently attested in loan contracts in the ancient Near East, and in these loan contracts, the creditor takes a pledge in lieu of a payment or as loan security. Pledges would usually perform antichretic services as interest on capital, and subsequently released upon payment of capital. Although in most cases there was no time stipulation for repayment, there are some instances in which if the capital was not repaid within the stipulated time frame, the creditor could take possession of the pledge unless a redemption clause was included. However, as MAL C §2-3 do envisage,

an absolute transfer of the pledge was agreed upon. In this way, Middle Assyrian laws did attempt to limit the rights of the creditor after the loan was foreclosed.⁷⁰⁹

Although these stipulations cannot be applied directly to the Neo-Assyrian period (as stated earlier, no Neo-Assyrian body of law has yet been unearthed), a possible conceptual similarity, or even continuity, may be imagined. In light of this, eunuchs who participated in credit transactions and took human or land pledges until foreclosure must have commanded a very axial role within the community, with the masculine hegemonic legal discourse in favour of them (masculine because the pledges were often women or children). The pledges betray the importance paid to the organic tie between man and woman and the importance of biological kinship. That the pledge would go and dwell with the creditor must have been a form of emasculation to the debtor, and therefore the eunuch could negotiate a configuration of hegemonic masculinity within this domain.

Šamaš-šarru-ušur's dossier also informs us about his real estate activity. Table 8 (below) indicates that he was certainly involved in the buying of a house adjoining another already owned by him, as well as the acquisition of land.

DATE	ACQUISITION	SELLER	AMOUNT PAID
641*	House in the centre of Kalḫu	Nabû-pi-ahi-ušur	?

⁷⁰⁹ For a thorough discussion of Middle Assyrian debt laws together with previous literature on the topic, see Chirichigno 1993, 73–85.

623*	3 homers of tax-exempt fallow land for cultivation	Šulmu-beli	3 shekles of silver
?	3 homers of fallow land for cultivation	Šulmu-beli	?

Table 8 Šamaš-šarru-ušur as buyer of real estate

The quest for material ownership and the power over the land as an expression of masculinity is evident throughout the ancient Near East.⁷¹⁰ Once again, in his attempt to negotiate a place for himself in society, the eunuch Šamaš-šarru-ušur amassed property and land in order to gain more control of the economic domain. This must have brought with it a lot of social prestige, status, and community credibility, which intersects with notions of how one is perceived as a man. This clearly indicated that the gender of eunuchs did not preclude them from the legal right to buy property and land; quite conversely, rather. If we agree with the argument that gender and identity are performed, among other things, through space, and that the formation of a (national) identity is, in part, “a meditation on the meanings and significance of land as property”⁷¹¹, then when a man buys or cultivates land, he negotiates a place within society. This is precisely what we see in the case of Šamaš-šarru-ušur; by imposing a

⁷¹⁰ For the Neo-Assyrian period specifically, evidence of property and land ownership by females is scarce. This does not necessarily imply that females had little to no economic agency, yet until other data emerge to throw light on this matter, we must necessarily hypothesise that practices of ownership and selling of land and property remained predominantly a means of placing males on the discursive matrices of masculinity. For the few attestations of female economic agency in the Neo-Assyrian period, see Svärd 2008, 103–104.

⁷¹¹ Blomley, 122

masculine sense of ownership on the landscape around his property and through cultivation, he reshaped the physical as well as the social (and therefore gendered) landscape. To impact the geographical, social and cultural landscape through the regime of property ownership and land cultivation was to carry the weight of masculine privilege.

In these legal texts, eunuchs are constituted within legal discourse as masculine subjects. As the dossier of Šamaš-šarru-ušur shows, eunuchs even attempted to normalise their masculine identity by assuming normative roles not through biological channels but through other regimes, namely as creditors, property owners, land cultivators, and witnesses to legal transactions. Neo-Assyrian legal discourse constructs masculinity through legal regulation and the process of naturalisation is institutionalised to override biological facts of bodily difference.⁷¹² Perhaps the ultimate aim of Neo-Assyrian kings was to disempower the patriarchal system with its moral tie between 'land' and 'possessor', and making less problematic the legal framework of land tenure through hereditary practices. In allocating land to state functionaries, the king re-inscribes power over the landscape, which as we have already seen, is a requirement for his claim to hegemonic masculinity, through the use of surveillance by eunuchs who embody the masculine gaze of the state.

⁷¹² For a parallel but contemporary discussion, see Collier 2002, 89.

6.3.3.2. *Ša Rēši*: Provincial Governors and Governors for the State of Assyria

In this section I will outline the various careers that eunuchs could have in the state or the palace and discuss the nexus of gender and profession. Recently, Mattila⁷¹³ and Groß⁷¹⁴ have listed the occurrences of *rab ša rēši* and *ša rēši*-professions and the repetition of the task would be redundant here. Therefore, a discussion of these career paths is more in order here. Table 9 (below) lists the attestations of eunuchs in positions of governor and provincial governor.

According to the sources, the institution of eunuchs was headed by the chief eunuch, the *rab ša rēši*. The sources inform us that the chief eunuch's role within the standing army was very central, with him heading the equestrian units in the Sargonid army and commanding troops during the reign of Esarhaddon.⁷¹⁵

TASK	REIGN	ATTESTATION	NAME
Governor	Adad-nerari III	Seal inscription Adad-nerari III 2003, 1.	Bēl-tarši- illumma
Governor	Adad-nerari III	Seal inscription Adad-nerari III 2005, 1.	Remmanni-ilu
Governor	Adad-nerari III	Inscribed bead	Nergal-ēriš

⁷¹³ Mattila 2000, 61–76.

⁷¹⁴ See Groß 2014.

⁷¹⁵ See Mattila 2000, 70–76 for the complete list of attestations, and 153–154 for discussion.

Governor	Adad-nerari III	Seal inscription	[Aš]šur-bēla- ušur
Governor	Šamši-Adad V	Inscribed amulet Šamši-Adad V 2001, 1.	Ili-ittīya
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Wall slab (wth reliefs) Tiglath-pileser III 5, 5b.	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Wall slab (with reliefs) Tiglath-pileser III 7, 3b.	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Wall slab (with reliefs) Tiglath-pileser III 8, 4b.	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Wall slab (with reliefs) Tiglath-pileser III	?

		12, 11'b.	
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Wall slab (with relief) Tiglath-pileser III 13, 11b. Also in Wall slab (with relief) Tiglath-pileser III 31, 1.	Two anonymous eunuchs
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Wall slab (with relief) Tiglath-pileser III 13, 18b.	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Wall slab (with relief) Tiglath-pileser III 13, 20b.	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Wall slab (with relief)	?

		Tiglath-pileser III 17, 7b.	
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Stele Tiglath-pileser III 35, i 1'	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Stele Tiglath-pileser III 35, i 5'	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Stele Tiglath- pileser III 35, i 5'	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Rock cliff Tiglath-pileser III 37, 43b.	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Slab Tiglath-pileser III 39, 17 and 28b.	Three anonymous eunuchs
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Slab	?

		Tiglath-pileser III 40, 3b.	
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Slab Tiglath-pileser III 41, 11', and 27'	11': Number of anonymous eunuchs lost 27': ?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Slab Tiglath-pileser III 42, 1'.	Six anonymous eunuchs
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Slab Tiglath-pileser III 42, 5'b.	Unknown number of anonymous eunuchs
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Slab Tiglath-pileser III 45, 1'.	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	Slab Tiglath-pileser III 46, 5b.	?

Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	RI Tiglath-pileser III 46, 12.	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	RI Tiglath-pileser III 46, 17.	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	RI Tiglath-pileser III 46, 20.	2 anonymous eunuchs
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	RI Tiglath-pileser III 46, 22.	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	RI Tiglath-pileser III 47, 5.	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	RI Tiglath-pileser III 47, 13b.	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	RI	Unknown number of

		Tiglath-pileser III 47, 36b.	anonymous eunuchs
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	RI Tiglath-pileser III 48, 1'.	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	RI Tiglath-pileser III 49, 6'.	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	RI Tiglath-pileser III 49, 24'.	?
Provincial Governor	iglath- pileser III	RI Tiglath-pileser III 49, 26'.	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	RI Tiglath-pileser III 49, r 1'.	2 anonymous eunuchs
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	RI Tiglath-pileser III 49, r 3'.	?

Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	RI Tiglath-pileser III 50, 1'.	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	RI Tiglath-pileser III 50, r 1.	2 snonymous eunuchs
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	RI Tiglath-pileser III 50, r 3'.	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	RI Tiglath-pileser III 51, 17.	?
Provincial Governor	Tiglath-pileser III	RI Tiglath-pileser III 52, 5.	?

Table 9 Eunuch Governors in the Neo-Assyrian Period

What is highly noticeable from the table above is that eunuchs were only identified by their name in personal objects such as seals and amulets; on the other media, namely public media which were visible for public display, eunuchs remained anonymous and reference was only made to them in terms of their identification

through body modification, and hence as a monolithic group. It may be that seals were seen as identity markers, or perhaps even as substitutes for the persons themselves.

Things change in the reign of Sennacherib. The king's royal inscriptions mention the eunuch governor of the city of Arrapha (Sennacherib 2 24; 3 24; 4 22; 16 ii 24; 17 ii 6; 22 i 80b; 23 i 74; 140 5'; 165, ii 15b) and the eunuch governor of the city of Harhar (Sennacherib 4 29; 15 ii 24''b; 16 ii 60; 17 ii 42; 18 ii 19'; 22 ii 27b; 23 ii 25b; 24 ii 1'; 32 i' 1'; 140 12'). It seems that during his reign, these two eunuchs were the only ones who remained in the circle of royal privilege. Compared with previous reigns, this removal of royal favour towards the members of the institution of eunuchs is highly significant and points to the fact, otherwise also attested in the royal palace reliefs, of this group falling out of favour.

The royal inscriptions of Esarhaddon, Assurbanipal, and his successors make no reference to the placement of eunuchs in the post of governors; indeed, there is no mention of eunuchs at all in Esarhaddon's royal inscriptions, but they are referred to in ample instances in the royal inscriptions of Assurbanipal and his successors, however not in the remit of governorships.

In what function are these governors, or provincial governors, mentioned in the primary sources? Tiglath-pileser III 14, 1 informs us that provincial governors, like the eunuch governor of the land of Na'iri, were indeed very martial and active on the battlefield, and competed with normative masculinity for a place within the structures and configurations of hegemony. The said eunuch is praised (yet remains unnamed) in highly public media for capturing and plundering enemy cities, and bring booty to the king. This complicity with the dictates of the ruler, and his hegemonic masculinity as

displayed on these media, brings eunuchs into the fold of elite masculinity. What remains at issue, however, is whether such complicity could, at least as a theoretical underpinning, participate in the production of the hegemonic masculinity of the ruler, or whether as a configuration it existed independently. The royal inscriptions present a king whose hegemonic masculinity is absolute, and herein lies the ideological turn, for as Connell states, hegemonic masculinity is an ideal that guides male aspirations, and does not reside in any particular body and every individual deviates from it to some extent. What provincial governors reveal, though, is that patriarchal dividends, such as promotions within the ranks of the Assyrian imperial structure, could also go to men who were gelded

6.4. *Ša Rēši* in the Visual Sources of the Neo-Assyrian Empire

A comprehensive study of eunuchs in the visual arts of the Neo-Assyrian empire remains until today a desideratum. Among Assyriologists who specialize in the visual arts of the Neo-Assyrian period, Reade has been at the forefront of the study of eunuchs in the reliefs, and he has worked almost single-handedly on this topic. Reade has not written a specific work on the figures who appear to be eunuchs in the reliefs, but he has certainly made ample references to visual attestations of individuals who appear to have undergone body modification and whose appearance is significantly different from that of intact males, as well as to their possible roles and functions within the Assyrian system of power and organization.⁷¹⁶ More recently, Paul Collins

⁷¹⁶ For the most informative studies on eunuchs by Reade, see Reade 1972, 87–112, especially pages 95–96, and 99–100; and Reade 1981, 143–189.

has also looked at the visual representation of courtiers in the Neo-Assyrian visual repertoire, with an attempt at unpacking the significant roles of eunuchs in the visual ideology of rule in the first millennium B.C.E., especially the historical transformations that took place in the visual attestations of eunuchs throughout the imperial period.⁷¹⁷ In the visual domain of Neo-Assyrian arts, eunuchs are commonly referred to as beardless men. This has been one way of hedging the dispute in the field of whether these figures represent eunuchs or other officials. Already in the 1970s Reade, following Layard and Olmstead, committed to making the distinction between beardless and bearded men by equating the beardless figures with the textual *ša rēši* and therefore eunuchs, and the bearded figures with the textual *ša ziqni*, and therefore intact males.⁷¹⁸

Reade divides eunuchs in Neo-Assyrian monumental representations into officials and attendants based on distinctive features such as headgear, attire, and position within the composition vis-à-vis other participants. The distinctive features of officials in the art of empire, based on Reade's observations, can be summarized as follows.

6.4.1. Officials

Reade defines officials as those individuals who are often placed with the crown prince in procession towards the king in the compositions.⁷¹⁹ This thematic scene is attested in all periods, but its frequency is reduced in the 7th century visual repertoire and it

⁷¹⁷ See Collins 2010, 181–197.

⁷¹⁸ Reade 1972, 91–92.

⁷¹⁹ Reade 1972, 93.

seems to have been removed from the review-scene on the battlefield sometime after Tiglath-pileser III. The garments worn by these officials comprise ankle-length tunics and sometimes a shawl. Their prosthetic material accessories consist of swords, but not maces. Reade also considers eunuch soldiers as officials. The latter usually wear long coats of mail; however, they may also be seen wearing court dress when engaged as standing archers on the battlefield in 9th and 8th century compositions. Eunuch officials also fought in chariots and wore the long tunics, however, on the reliefs from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, the length of their garment is hidden by their shield-bearers.⁷²⁰

A distinctive feature of eunuchs is their frequent proximity to the crown prince before the throne. The social standing of these eunuch officials is determined by their headgear; in the ninth and eighth centuries, and even at Til-Barsip, they wear a headband which is wider at the back than at the front. During the reign of Sargon II, however, only one occurrence of this accessory is attested, and in this latter instance, the width is even throughout.⁷²¹ In the 9th century these eunuchs sometimes wear a tasselled apron, and the latter is of a simpler variety when worn by a eunuch on the battlefield in a relief from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II. Another eunuch from the same visual repertoire wears the apron and also a tasselled sheath attachment. Reade suggests that this distinctive dress code was an external coded signifier of status, and only the *turtānu* and the *rab ša rēši* were dressed in this fashion.⁷²²

⁷²⁰ Reade 1972, 94. Reade also discusses the methodological difficulties of identifying these individuals in the reliefs but already notes their important social standing within the Assyrian administrative structure. Despite these difficulties, however, we do have at least two portraits of eunuch officials: Bēl-Harrān-bel-u-ūsur, the *nāgir ekalli*, and Mušezib-Šamaš, the *bēl pāhiti* of Dūru.

⁷²¹ Reade 1972, 95, and note 38. All other eunuch headbands from the reign of Sargon II were erased.

⁷²² Reade 1972, 95. Reade notes that both intact males and eunuchs wear a headband which is slightly wider at the back on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III and on one of the side of his throne base.

In the theme of the 'procession before the king', the last person is usually a eunuch. The latter's hand gesture indicates that the individual's role in the procession is the introduction of people into the king's presence. At times, this figure may be seen carrying a staff, possibly the Middle Assyrian *hattu* stick which were indicators of the office of the *sukkallē*. This figure could well represent the *ša pān ekalli*, the individual who vetted individuals who were to hold audience with the king.⁷²³ Neo-Assyrian eunuchs of the 9th and 8th centuries may also be represented away from the immediate proximity of the royal persona; the remit of these eunuchs falls in the domain of the military, either as commanders of soldiers or as organisers of staff-work. Reade classifies these eunuchs into three categories: they organize labour, take charge of the camp, and count booty.⁷²⁴ Reade argues that these roles and functions appear to have discontinued in the reign of Sennacherib, only to resurface in a different form in the reign of his successors. For instance, Reade correctly notes that eunuchs do not oversee the massive project of the quarrying and transportation of Sennacherib's winged bulls⁷²⁵; indeed, the eunuchs in these reliefs may be seen carrying out more menial tasks of carrying ropes and equipment for captive labourers under the orders of intact men.

6.4.2. Attendants

Attendants are those individuals generally referred to as *manzaz pāni*. The most common type in the earlier phase is the arms-bearer who follows the king. The former

However, Reade concludes that this is either an anomaly typical of the unreliability in the execution of the monument. This conclusion, however, does not explain why the same pattern is seen on the throne base; indeed, it may be that during this reign, two types of headband were in use and the artists did not distinguish between them on the monumental art.

⁷²³ Reade 1972, 92–95.

⁷²⁴ Reade 1972, 95. Note also the unusual occurrence of a eunuch on the ninth- or eighth-century ivory who conducts an entire review-scene on his own.

⁷²⁵ Reade 1972, 95.

may be seen carrying a mace and a bow. For the reign of Shalmaneser III eunuchs may sometimes be seen carrying shields.

In the eighth century, eunuch attendants continue to carry arms (. In the reliefs of Sargon II, the king is seen followed by a eunuch attendant carrying a spear (figs. 77–78). Sennacherib has no armed eunuchs in his relief programmes. However, eunuch attendants re-appear in Assurbanipal but they are not armed. They are very common in domestic and hunt scenes. For the late group, there are only small groups of eunuchs with one attestation where two are seen carrying spears and one with a bow behind the campaigning king.

Throughout the entire Neo-Assyrian period, eunuchs are represented on foot carrying sunshades, fans, towels. Some carry cups. In the ninth century, they are armed and may carry maces. One is seen in Shalmaneser's chariot. His successors in the eighth and seventh centuries carry sunshades.

Reade suggests that a distinction may have developed between the eunuch attendants who carried arms, and those who looked after the king's body. During the reign of Sennacherib, only the latter appear.⁷²⁶ The place of eunuchs in the army was well-established. Eunuch army officers are attested at all times. In the ninth century, their uniforms are identical to those worn by the eunuch royal attendants. These uniforms change to shorter tunics in the eighth century. Seniority is suggested by their appearance in the chariots.

Eunuchs also appear carrying furniture, waiting at table, playing music, performing domestic and other tasks (figs. 79–81). Possibly of foreign origin are the

⁷²⁶ Reade 2009, 248.

long-haired eunuchs from the reign of Assurbanipal who are seen with dogs at the hunting scene (fig. 63).

An interesting contrast can be seen when we compare the corridors with reliefs representing figures in procession to and from the hunt of Sennacherib with those of Assurbanipal; The figures in Sennacherib's corridor L1, on the Western slope some 150m from the southern corner, are all intact men, whereas those in Assurbanipal's corridors A and R are all eunuchs. What is the significance of this change, of this re-integration in the reign of Assurbanipal? The answer to this would clearly place the court eunuchs in the network of power, privilege and masculinities in the imperial ideology and imaginary of the Neo-Assyrian period.

6.5. Discussion

As stated earlier, the most theoretically and methodologically complex analysis of eunuchs in the state art of Assyria has only recently been carried out. In this analysis, Assante argues that the introduction of eunuchs in the visual art of the Assyrian state broadened the spectrum of masculinities and, consequently, the media carried a more complex message.⁷²⁷ Her attempt to theorise the function of castration in the Neo-Assyrian period reverses the silence on matters of interpretation of eunuchism for this particular historical context.

Assante traces this development by exploring the shifts in the representation of males in the Neo-Assyrian period and points out that between the reigns of Tukulti-Ninurti I and that of Ashurnasirpal II, hierarchies of men were re-engineered with the

⁷²⁷ Assante 2017, 43.

increasingly conspicuous presence of eunuchs in the visual compositions.⁷²⁸ This development is interpreted as resulting in a shift along the male gender order, with a privileged visual centrality becoming more occupied by eunuchs from the ninth century onwards. Assante also notes that in the White Obelisk (uncertain date), eunuchs make their first appearance but the transitional style of the monument continues to show a predomination of bearded men in domestic scenes; this is not so in the later palace art where they predominate as attendants in domestic scenes.⁷²⁹ From Ashurnasirpal II onwards, the eunuch attends to the king's body, fly-whisking, with a towel, carrying a sunshade, fanning him to keep him cool. They also attend to his needs, keep his body safe, carry his furniture and his trophy animals. Assante attributes this to either the sudden surge in the availability of eunuchs, or to the sudden understanding that these tasks were too feminine to be carried out by real men.⁷³⁰

The close reading of the visual compositions lead Assante to make some broad claims, some of which are convincing but others less so. That the shaven face of the eunuch placed in a dyadic relationship to the king enhances the latter's hypermasculinity may indeed have appeared so to the intended audience of the reliefs.⁷³¹ Assante even argues that the king's dyadic visual relationship with a eunuch may have revealed a cultural aversion to the representation of the ruler in close proximity to an intact male whose potency and sexual ability competed with that of the hegemon, or even aroused his homoerotic desire.⁷³²

⁷²⁸ Assante 2017, 43.

⁷²⁹ Assante 2017, 66.

⁷³⁰ Assante 2017, 67.

⁷³¹ Assante 2017, 64–65.

⁷³² Assante 2017, 68.

Less straightforward and convincing, however, is Assante's conclusion that eunuchism is a feminized male sexual identity which elicits in the male viewer a new form of erotic gaze through the manipulation of the latter's sexual identity.⁷³³ Assante also hints at the emic perception of eunuchs as incapable of sexual activity.⁷³⁴ A close analysis of the extant sources, as seen above, shows no indication of the feminsation of the eunuch body, nor can one find any indication of their sexuality. Indeed, the generalisations brought into the interpretive stance in her work seem to be retrogressively borrowed from later Byzantine and Islamic secondary literature, in itself rather questionable.

It may be that a more fruitful attempt at analysing the function of eunuchs in the Neo-Assyrian empire lies in the perspective of necropolitical masculinity. The technologies of violence employed by the statecraft to bolster the hegemonic masculinity of the king include the control of the body of other males, mainly the control of their procreative abilities. To control the sexuality of other men, as Assante rightly claims, is itself "an emblem of the king's dominion over men and their sexuality" and the presence of such vast numbers of eunuchs in the palace was an effective means of displaying the wealth of the dynasty.⁷³⁵

6.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that the evidence from the Neo-Assyrian period not only incontrovertibly informs us that castration was indeed a socio-cultural practice, but also that the persons whose reproductive function had been arrested

⁷³³ Assante 2017, 74.

⁷³⁴ Assante 2017, 68.

⁷³⁵ Assante 2017, 69–70.

were not necessarily viewed or placed within a matrix too far different from normative elite masculinity. The close proximity to the royal body, as well as the patriarchal dividend that elite eunuchs received certainly placed them within the matrix of masculinity either through their work within the state apparatus, or as citizens of Assyria who could negotiate their subjectivities from position of power.

Furthermore, I have attempted to show that there is a complete silence on the imported assumptions into discussions on the gendered subjectivities of eunuchs and that the vast amount of evidence for the practice could more fruitfully be employed for a broader approach than that which concerns their sexual practices. It is indeed hoped that I could undertake a more extended and systematic study of eunuchism in the ancient Near East in future, and that this initial foray into the subject may indeed foster further interest.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

In this thesis, I have investigated the textual and visual documentary sources from the Neo-Assyrian Empire in order to assess the extent to which the emic culture relied on the production and performance of hegemonic masculinity as an ideological expression of legitimate rule. The data reveal that not only was masculinity a central discursive trait across the sources examined, but they also show a number of gender features that are context-specific.

To begin with, masculinity as expressed in the media under investigation in this thesis is not a monolithic construct. Although the ideology of masculinity attempts to present this gender configuration as stable over space and time in order to appear natural, the data sets reveal that masculinity in the Neo-Assyrian period is constructed along the lines of 'continuity' and 'change'. As shown in the cases of the late Assyrian kings Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Assurbanipal, all three reigns were typified by imperial needs which demanded that masculinity in representation be portrayed with elements of traditional masculinity as well as innovations within the discursive domain of gender expression. Elements of deep-seated gender expressions may be seen in the emphasis on secondary sexual characteristics, battle prosthetics, and centrality in the field of composition for the visual sources, and the centrality of the ruler as fearless warrior in the textual compositions of the royal inscriptions. Change, on the other hand, marks the masculine construct as a move away from the discourse of violence in favour of a masculinity that is more concerned with the expression of knowledge, statesmanship, and surveillance.

Further investigation, however, shows that the construct of hegemonic masculinity for the Neo-Assyrian ruler was careful not to portray the king as a victim of hubris. Indeed, royal Neo-Assyrian masculinity always remained subordinate to the will of the gods. This is at loggerheads with earlier Mesopotamian constructs of masculinity, such as that discussed by Winter in the stele of Naram-Sin/Naram-Sîn. The textual and visual sources are careful to distance the king from the claim to divinity and divine gender expression. Rather, the late Neo-Assyrian ruler claims to be divinely shaped in order to fulfil the imperial demand of territorial expansion through dominance. It is precisely along this discursive trait that the Neo-Assyrian sources place the construct of masculinity. The traditional construct of masculinity, however, also gives way to internal innovations in the way gender in general, and masculinity in particular, were constructed in the period under investigation. Although a deep-seated construct is seen throughout the material under investigation, closer examination has revealed that all three kings revealed that unstable mechanism of gender construction in their state-sponsored media and internal epistolographic correspondence. The decision for Sennacherib to distance himself from the battle front line, despite the opposite claim made in the royal inscriptions, shows that different media were concerned with different performances of masculinity. In the reign of Sennacherib, the construct of royal masculinity in terms of belligerence is re-engineered; instead of the Neo-Assyrian king performing his masculinity in the arena of battle, Sennacherib distances himself and develops the masculine gaze of surveillance. Informed by an intelligence network that becomes complicit in the setting up and maintenance of a masculinity expressed through the notion of intelligent control of the army and the stream of intelligence gathering that finds its visual expression in the relief cycle of the

battle of Lachish. Sennacherib's son Esarhaddon is also portrayed as a traditional male ruler in the royal inscriptions. However, what becomes evident from an analysis of the extant correspondence published in the State Archives of Assyria is the extreme fear and paranoia of the ruler. The image we glean of Esarhaddon from the epistolography of the period is that of a male struggling under the weight of the demands of hegemonic masculinity at its intersection with deep-seated psychological fears and physical disability. As the correspondence shows, the threat to the seat of kingship ensued in decisions that may indeed have brought about the very beginning of the corrosion of unity within the empire itself, namely the choice to divide the kingdom of Assyria and Babylonia and to place two brothers at loggerheads with each other. Furthermore, Esarhaddon's solution to bring his mother Naqi'a into the fold of power seems to have opened up a new discursive trait, that is, the configuration of female masculinity. Since the seat of kingship was always already masculine, the representation of Naqi'a as central to the logic of rule could only have been achieved through the female masculinity of the king's mother. In **Chapter 4**, I argued that the re-emergence of the leonine metaphor in the royal inscriptions was not accidental; indeed, the use of this trope by Adad-nerari II and Ashurnasirpal II, like the rest of their titles and epithets, constructed a cross-species identification through metaphor to reflect the political ideology of their reign. I have also argued that the quantitative increase in phrases that mark cross-species identification with the lion in the reigns of Sennacherib and Esarhaddon not only point to the need of the state to bolster the image of the sovereign, but the trope also expands the semantic range of the term 'lion'. For Sennacherib, the symbiotic identity of the sovereign and the beast frames a ritual of war, whereas for Esarhaddon, the trope shifts its meaning to that of a

sovereign who controls the lives of the Other. Finally, I have outlined the cultural contingency of metaphors in their use for the construction of masculinities and also suggested that the absence of such correlations between leonine strength and military might from the biblical traditions may be the result of anti-Assyrian policy by the authors of the biblical texts.

With Assurbanipal, the configuration of masculinity continues to be represented in the traditional manner in the textual evidence, yet the pictorial data sets reveal a concern with yet another configuration and performance of masculinity. Hunting gains centrality in the visual culture at the palace of Assurbanipal, and as I argued in Chapter 5, it is expressed in two different practices. The hunting activities point to the element of homosocial bonding among the Assyrian elite and the foreign dignitaries at the palace. In this sense, the visual compositions reveal a traditional concern with masculine activities that had a long-standing tradition in ancient Iraq. However, a subtler expression of masculinity is revealed in the spectacular royal hunt which make their first appearance in the kingdom with Assurbanipal. Here, the element of display and performance seem to undermine the masculinity that the hunting excursions promote through homosocial bonding. One remaining question which requires further investigation concerning the case of Assurbanipal is the extent to which the subtle subversion of traditional Assyrian masculinity through the ostentatious display of wealth and power may be an attempt to compensate for the possibility that the empire was showing signs of weakening. Furthermore, rumours were developing away from the homeland accusing Assurbanipal of failing to live up to the expectations of hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, it is in light of this possible subversion to the normative construct of masculinity that I have attempted to read the

garden banquet relief with its triangular erotics of the queen, the king, and the enemy head forming a complex system of gazes, the heteronormative and the homoerotic.

As has been shown in Chapter 6, Neo-Assyrian royal masculinity earned its hegemonic status through its intersection with other masculinities. Despite the scarcity of material regarding the construction of eunuch identity in the Neo-Assyrian period, some fruitful results could be gleaned. Since the theory of masculinity employed in this thesis allows for alternative configurations of being a man, eunuchs have been examined not as third gendered persons or as feminine men in the court of the Assyrian king. Indeed, I take issue with Assante's argument that the presence of the eunuch entourage with their feminine bodies further bolstered the hypervirility of the ruler. The textual and visual sources examined point to a construction of identity for the eunuchs that was based on the notion of masculinity; the difference I present here is that the lack, described by Winter as a form of emasculation, becomes an index of an alternative form of elite masculinity, and one which earned the male with the gelded body the patriarchal dividend of royal privilege.

To summarise, assuming that masculinity in the ancient sources cannot be examined fruitfully as it would constitute a retrogressive interpretation of ancient documentary sources restricts the type of questions we could ask of our data sets. Indeed, as has been shown, masculinity constitutes one of the central discursive traits of imperial ideology, and one which bolstered the legitimisation of the ruler in the seat of power. That masculinity is not an essential and stable factor, but is rather a construct that is subject to expressions of continuity and change has been shown through the way different rulers configured their gender expression in their various

media. This offers new perspectives of looking at the expressions of power and empire; rather than an essential attribute of male bodies, masculinity is a discourse that is tied to the way power is negotiated and renegotiated.

Finally, I would like to suggest that there are other periods which might benefit from an investigation of the construct of masculinity. The Old and the Middle Assyrian periods are well-documented to allow for a thorough investigation of the way different socio-political configurations attempted to use gender in their expressions of power. Indeed, broadening the scope might make the use of gender theories more widely applicable in studies of both imperial contexts and the lower strata in the ancient world.

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FIGURES



Figure 1. Map of Assyria.

After Hammond, C. S. 1959.



Figure 2. Statue of Gudea.

c. 2090 B.C.E. AN59.2. Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 3. Victory Stele of Naram-Sin.

c. 2230 B.C.E. Musée du Louvre. After Moortgat-Correns, 1989. P. 126.



Figure 4. Ashurnasirpal II and eunuch attendant. Nimrud.
BM 124565. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 5. Ashurnasirpal II and eunuch attendant. Nimrud.

BM 124564. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 6. Ashurnasirpal II and eunuch attendant. Nimrud.

BM 124566. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 7. Protective Spirit and Standard Inscription. Nimrud, Room B.

BM 124560. The Trustees of the British Museum.

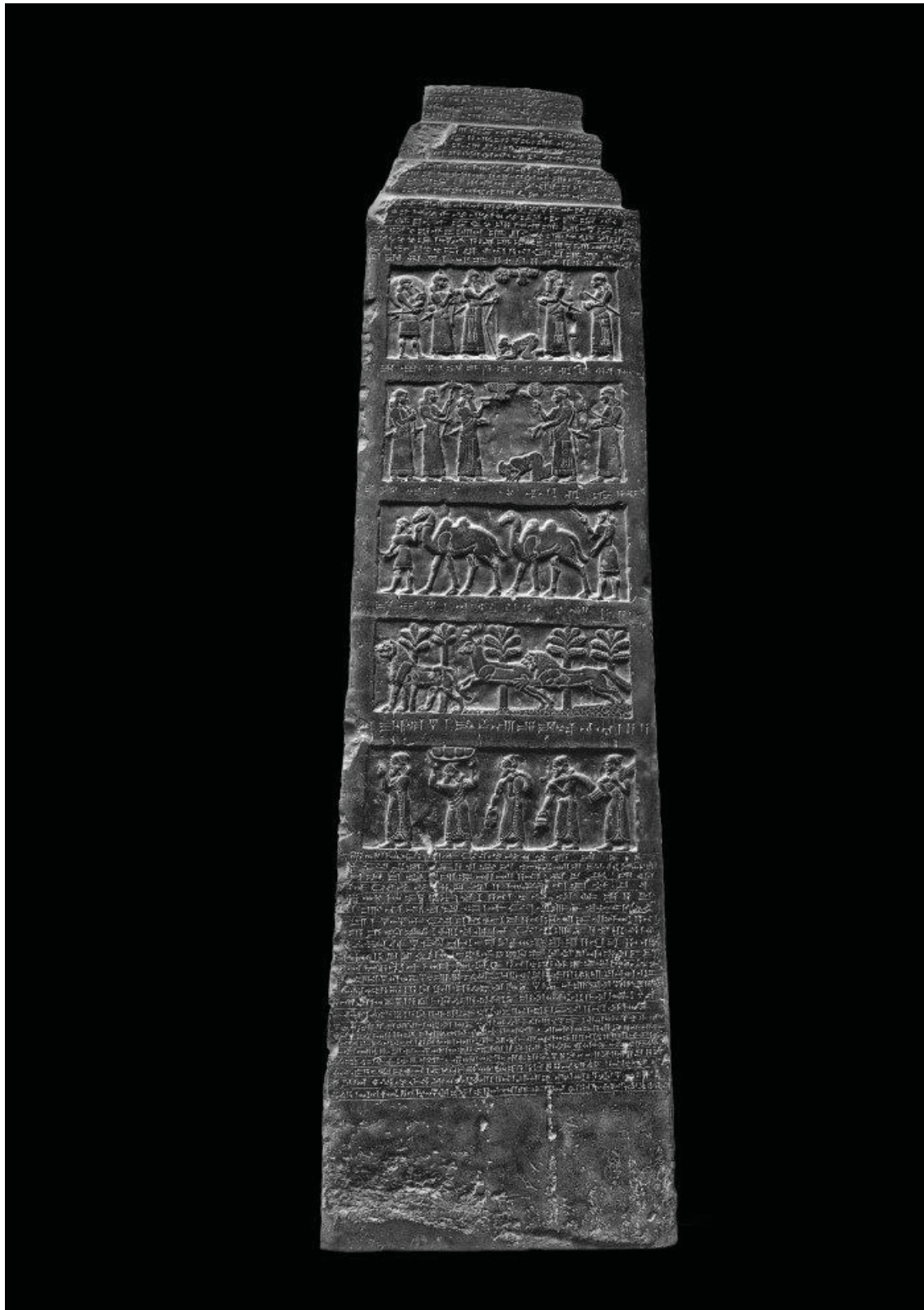


Figure 8. Black Obelisk. Reign of Shalmaneser III.
BM 118885. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 9. Shalmaneser III expedition to the Tigris.

Bronze Band. BM 124656. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 10. Sennacherib's building project.

Detail. BM 2007-6024-58. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 11. Epigraph on Bas Relief from Sennacherib's South-West Palace. Nineveh.
BM 124911. The Trustees of the British Museum.

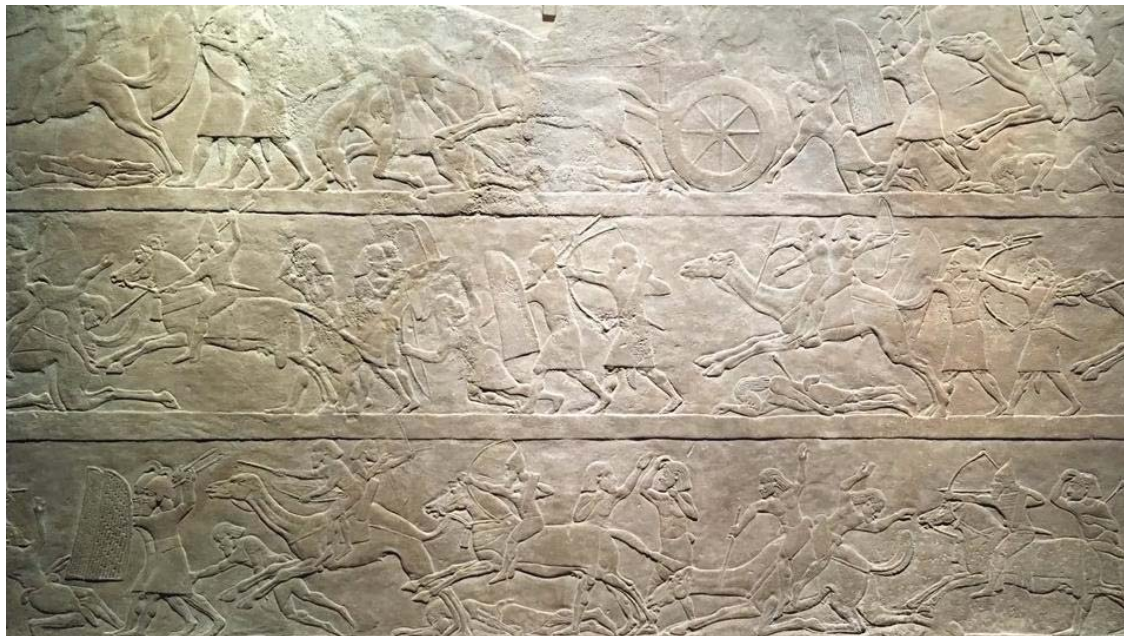


Figure 12. Camels moving across registers in bas relief from Palace of Assurbanipal.
BM 124926. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 13. Figures in bas relief from reign of Assurbanipal.

BM 124801a. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 14. Scene from the battle of Til Tuba. Reign of Assurbanipal.

BM 124801. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 15. Stele of Ashurnasirpal II under astral symbols.

BM 118805. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 16. Ashurnasirpal II and eunuch attendants. Nimrud.

New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Figure 17. Ashurnasirpal II attacks enemy city.

BM 124536. The Trustees of the British Museum.

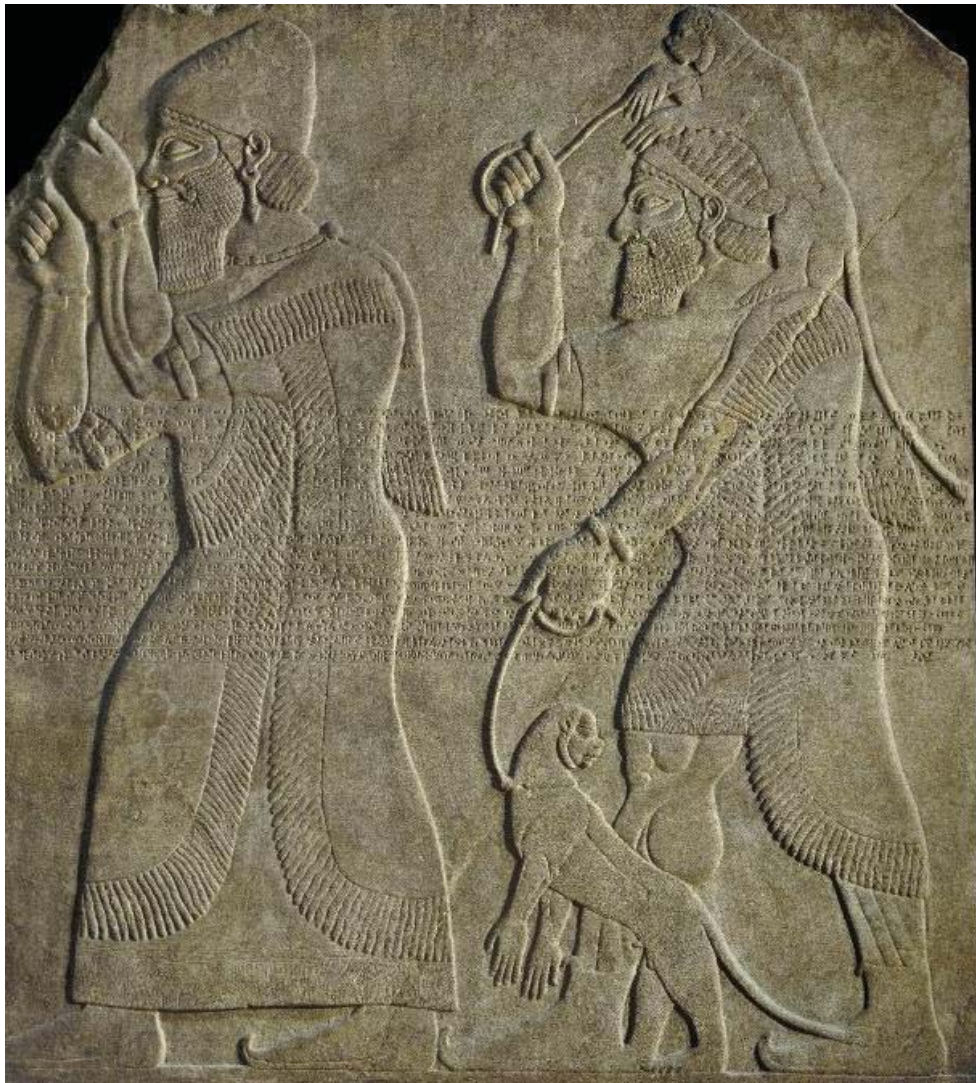


Figure 18. Tribute bearers. Reign of Ashurnasirpal II.
BM 124562. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 19. Prostrating rulers. Black Obelisk, reign of Shalmaneser III.

BM 118885. The Trustees of the British Museum.

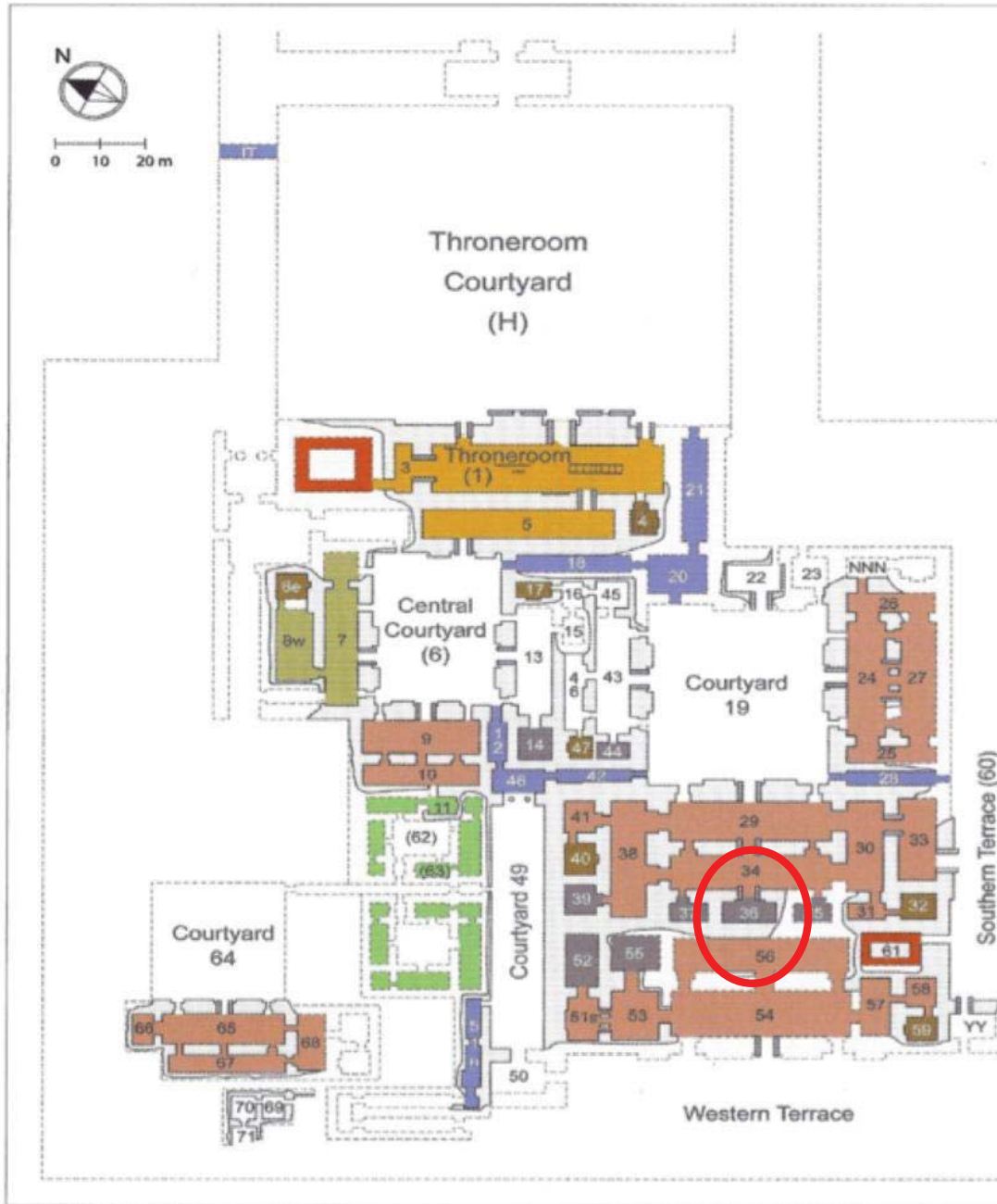


Figure 20. Plan of the Southwest Palace.

After Kertai, D. 2015. Plate 17.

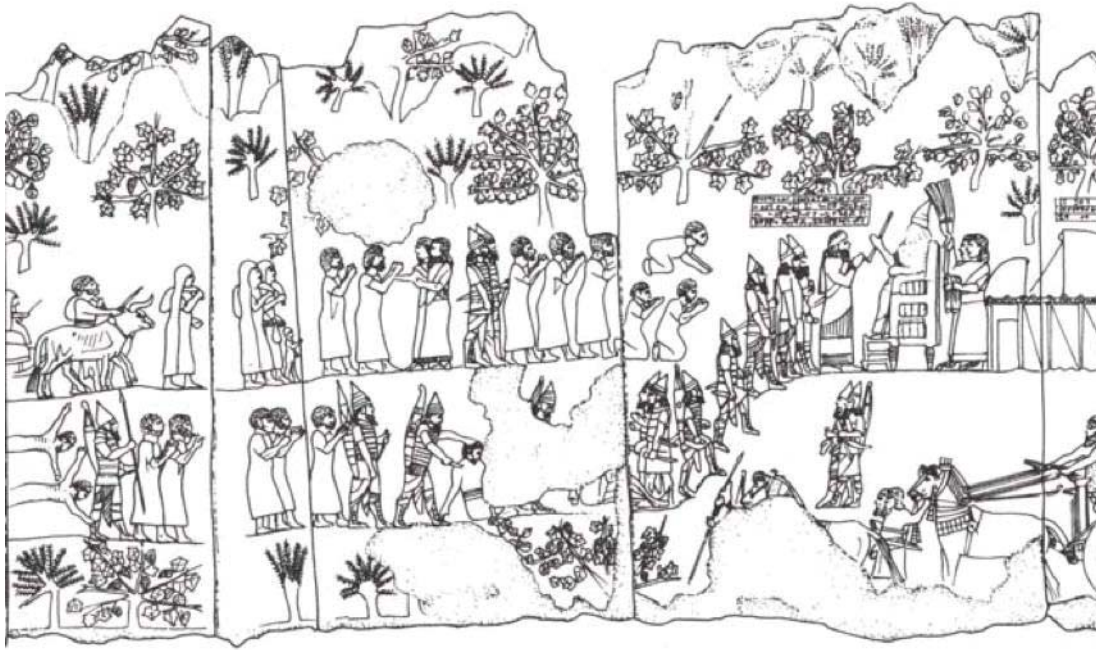


Figure 21. Line drawing of the siege of Lachish.

After Pearlman, M. 1980. p. 25.



Figure 22. Assyrian siege of Lachish. South-west Palace.
Room XXXVI. BM 124906. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 23. Siege of Lachish. South-West Palace
Room XXXVI. BM 124911. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 24. Central image of Room XXXVI. Sennacherib on throne.

BM 124911. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 25. Defacing of the image of Sennacherib.
Detail. BM 124911. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 26. Eunuchs from the reign of Sennacherib.
Detail. BM 124911. The Trustees of The British Museum.



Figure 27. Sargon II and crown prince Sennacherib. Dur-Sharrukin.
Detail. Musée Louvre.



Figure 28. Assyrian soldier beheading a man from Lachish.
Detail. BM 124910. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 29. Assyrians impaling men of Lachish.
Detail. BM 124911. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 30. Assyrian divers.

BM 124543. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 31. Naqi'a and Esarhaddon. Bronze plaque.

Musée du Louvre.

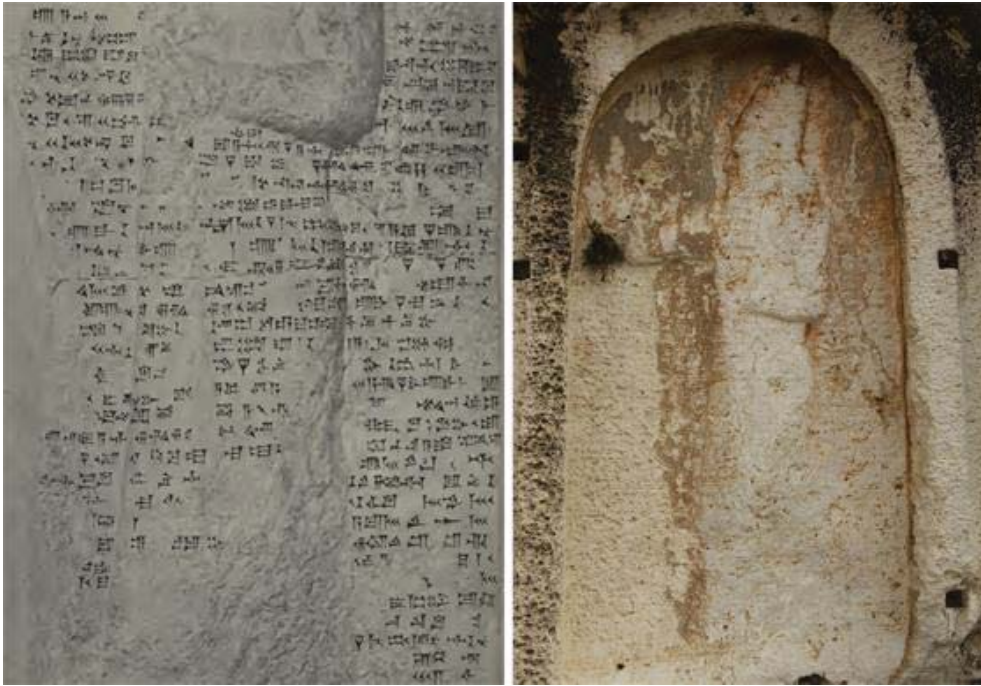


Figure 32. Stele of Esarhaddon. Nahr el Kalb. Lebanon.
Courtesy Factum Foundation.



Figure 33. 3D rendering of the stele of Esarhaddon.
Courtesy Alex Peck. Factum Foundation.



Figure 34. Stele of Esarhaddon. Zincirli.
Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin.



Figure 35. Drawing of the stele of Esarhaddon.

After Börker-Klähn 1982, 219.



Figure 36. Stele of Esarhaddon.
Detail. Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin.



Figure 37. Assyrian royal seal.
SM 2276. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 38. Frederick Arthur Brigman. *The Diversion of an Assyrian King*. 1878.
The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 39. *Hunting stele from Uruk*.
c. 3500–3100 B.C.E.



Figure 40. Uruk hunting seal.

c. 3300–3000.

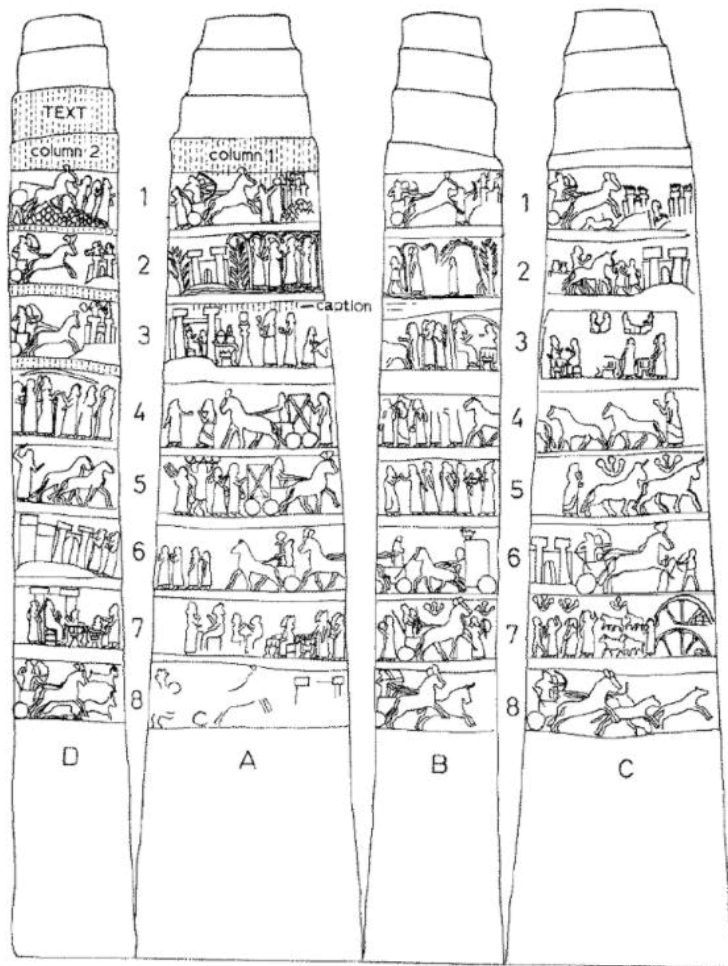


Figure 41. Drawing of The White Obelisk.

After Reade 1975.

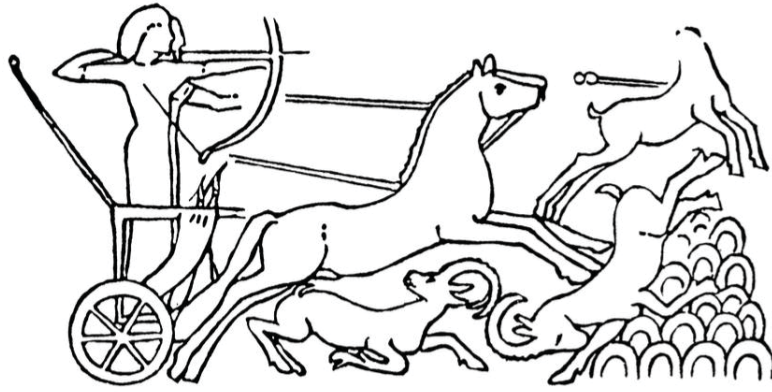


Figure 42. Seal impression from Assur.

After Smith, W.S. 1965, fig. 147a.



Figure 43. Ashurnasirpal II's lion hunt.

Slab 19a=BM 124534. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 44. Ashurnasirpal II's ritual libation.

Slab 19b=BM 124535. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 45. Ashurnasirpal II's bull hunt.

Slab 20a=BM 124532. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 46. Ashurnasirpal II's ritual libation.

Slab 20b=BM 124533. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 47. Ashurnasirpal II's lion hunt. West wing of the NW Palace.

BM 124579. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 48. Ashurnasirpal II's lion hunt.

Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin.

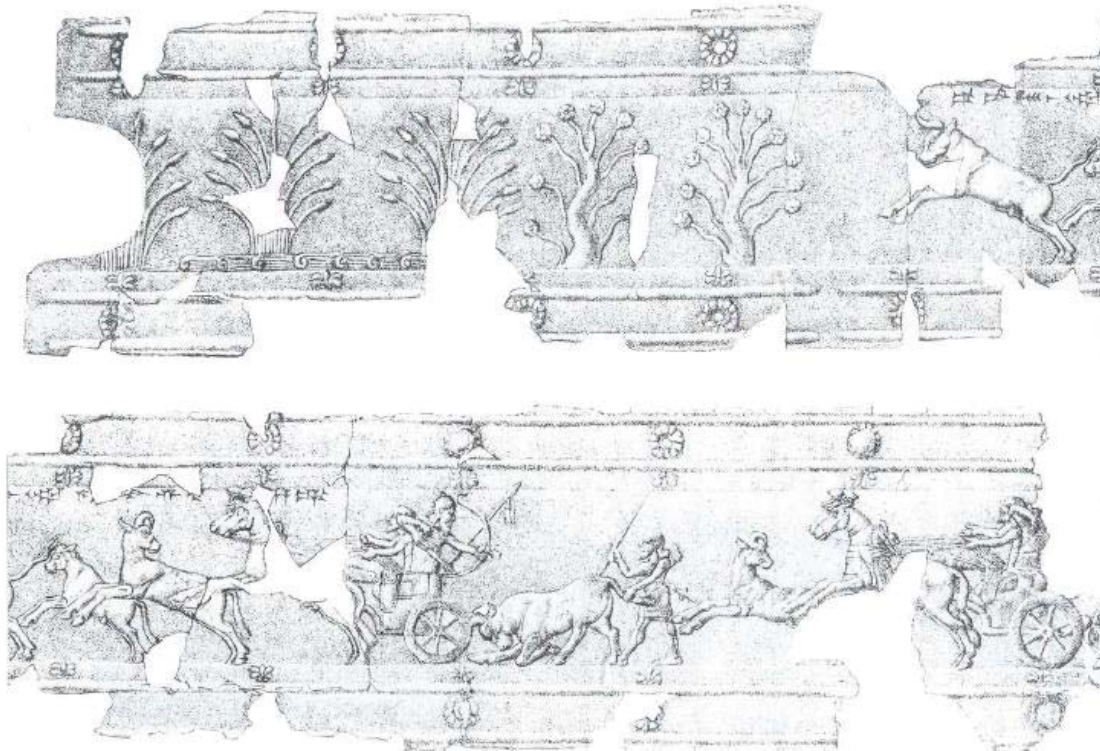


Figure 49. Bull hunt on the Balawat bronze bands.

After Curtis and Tallis 2008, plate 14.

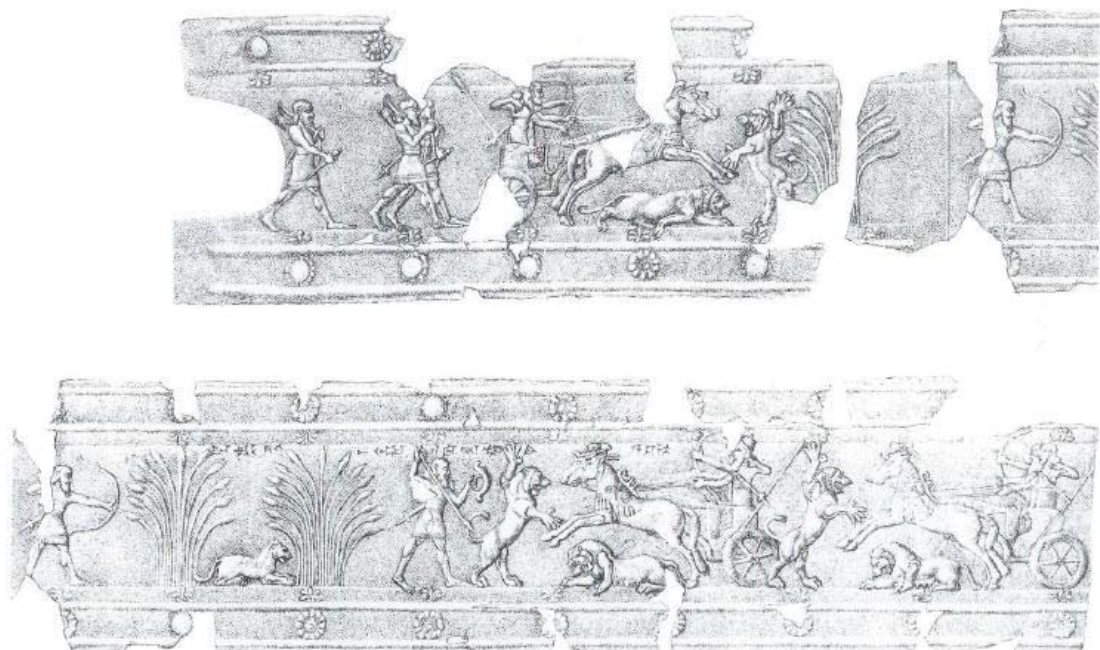


Figure 50. Lion hunt on the Balawat bronze bands.

After Curtis and Tallis 2008, plate 16.

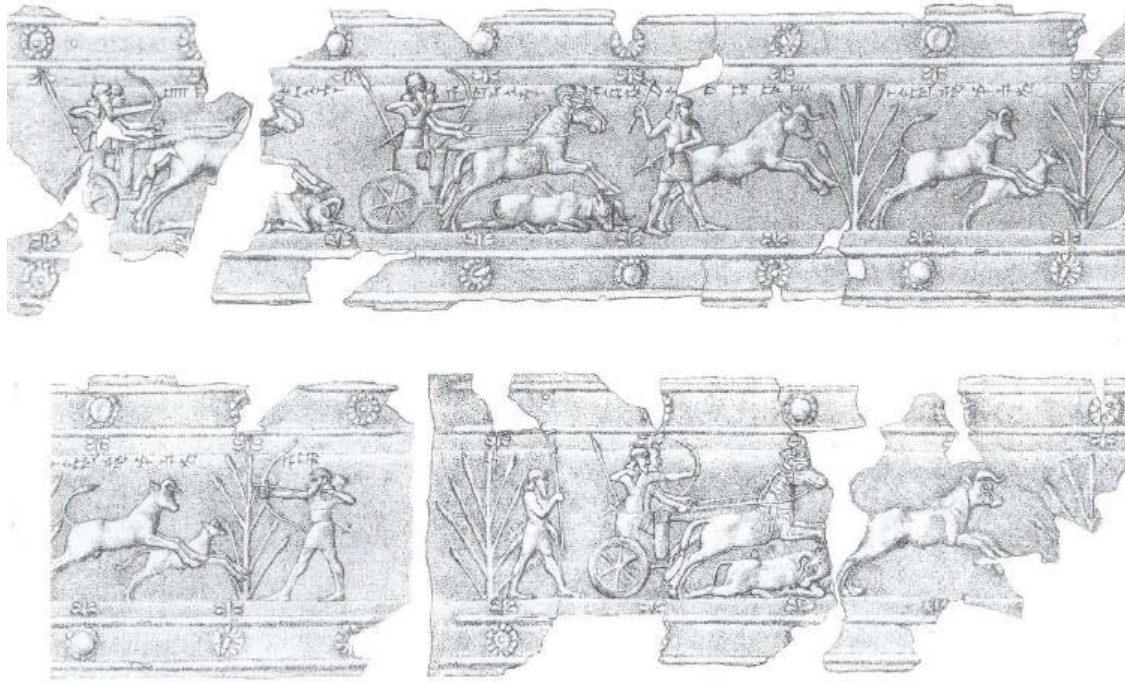


Figure 51. Bull hunt on the Balawat bronze bands.
After Curtis and Tallis 2008, Plate 30.

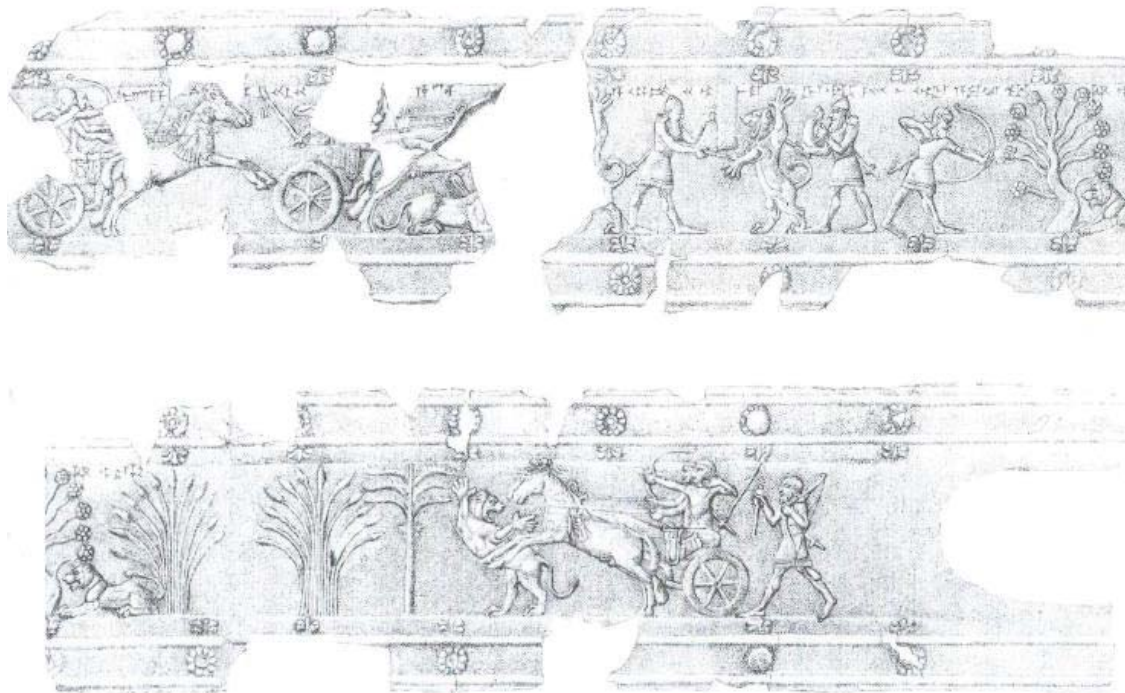


Figure 52. Lion hunt on the Balawat bronze bands.
After Curtis and Tallis 2008, plate 32.

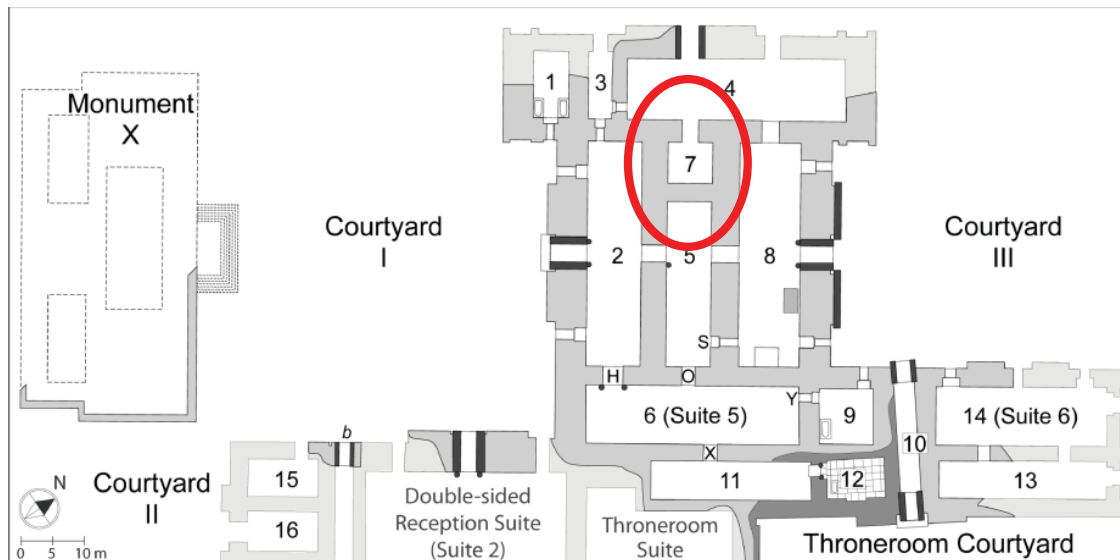


Figure 53. Sargon's palace at Khorsabad.

After Kertai, D. 2015, plate 5.7.



Figure 54. Sargon II's hunt: the approach. Room 7, Khorsabad.

The Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago. Photo courtesy of Daderot.



Figure 55. Sargon II in his chariot. Room 7, Khorsabad.
The Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago. Photo courtesy of Daderot.



Figure 56. The bit-ḫilāni. Room 7, Khorsabad.
The Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago. Photo courtesy of Daderot.



Figure 57. Scene of commensality. Room 7, Khorsabad.
The Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago. Photo courtesy of Daderot.



Figure 58. Scene of commensality. Room 7, Khorsabad.
The Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago. Photo courtesy of Daderot.

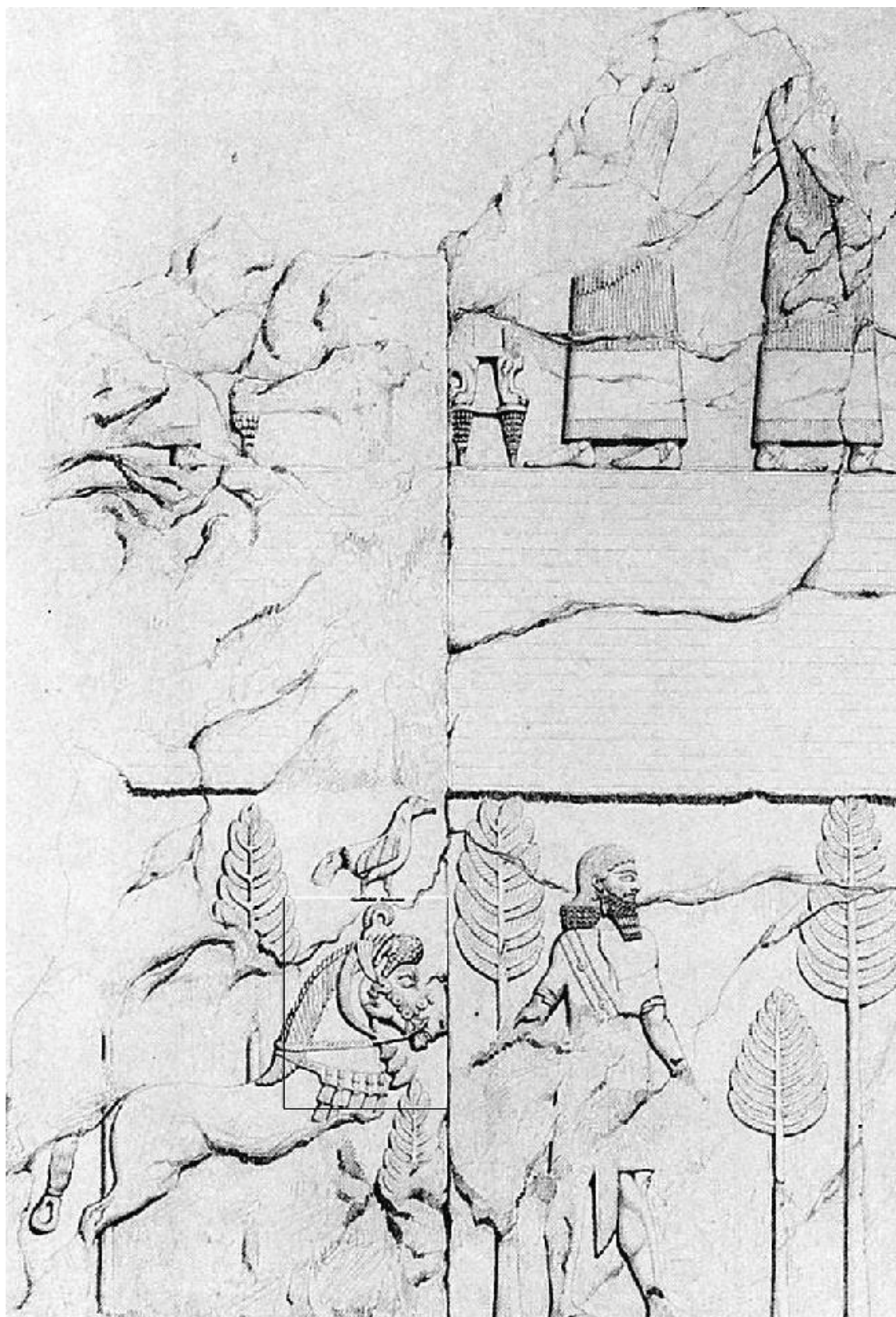


Figure 59. Recreational hunting from Room 7, Khorsabad.

Albenda 1986 (after Flandin).



Figure 60. Plan of Nineveh.
After Kertai, D. 2015, plate 16B.

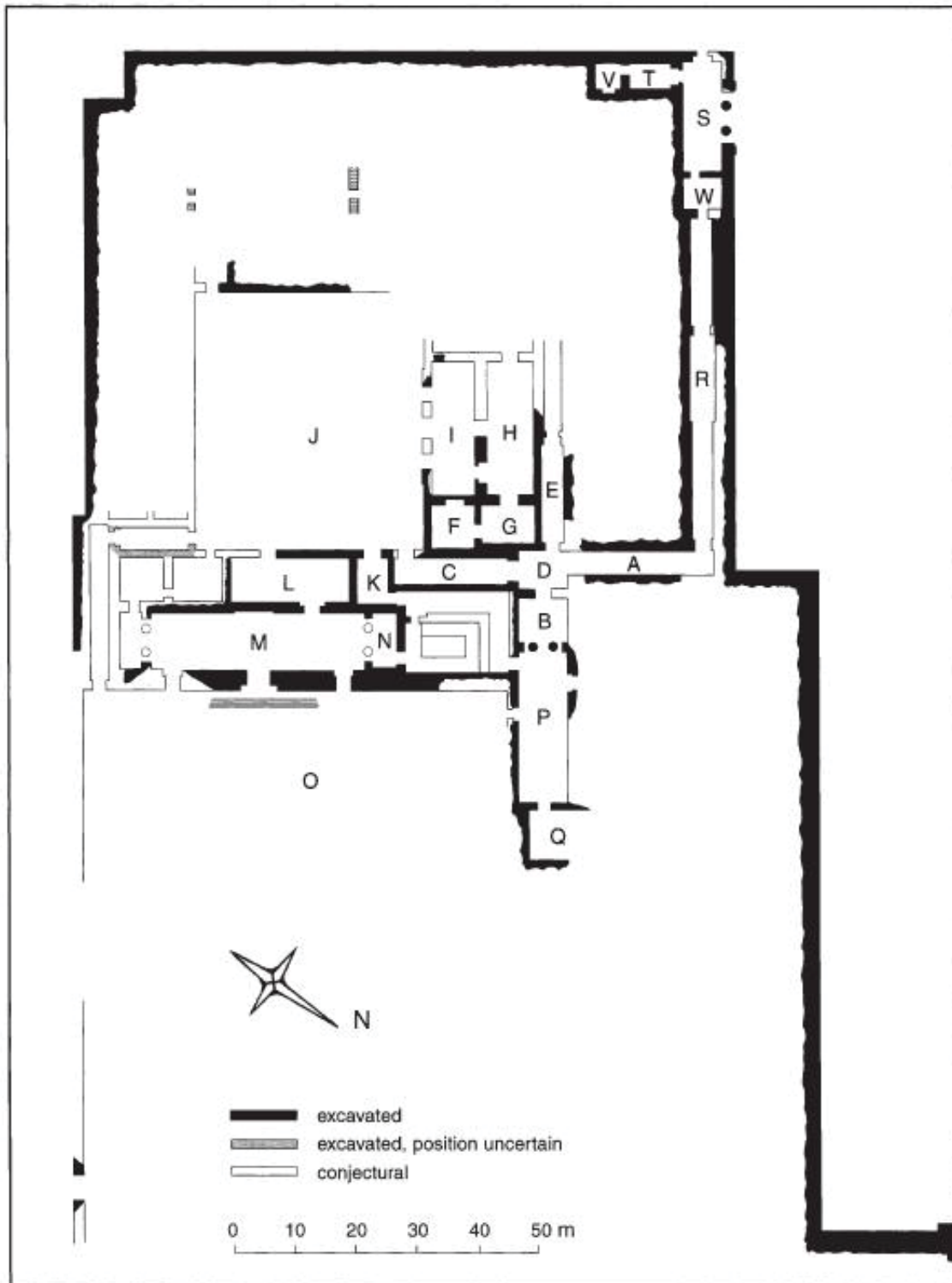


Figure 61. Plan of the North Palace, Nineveh.

After Reade, J. 2001, fig. 2.



Figure 62. Southwest wall, Passage R. North Palace.
The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 63. Detail. Passage R, North Palace.
Slab 7=BM 124893. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 64. Detail. Passage R, North Palace.

Slabs 4, 3, and 2=BM 124893. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 65. Detail. Passage R, North Palace.

Slab 1=BM 124893. the Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 66. Detail. Northwest wall, Passage R. North Palace.
Slab 22=BM 124890. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 67. Room A, south wall. North Palace.
Slabs 14–16=AO 19901. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Figure 68. Detail. Room A, south wall. North Palace.
Slab 16=AO 19901. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Figure 69. Audience of the royal hunt in Nineveh.
BM 124862. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 70. Assurbanipal's Lion Hunt. Room C, North Palace.

BM 124867. The Trustees of the British Museum.

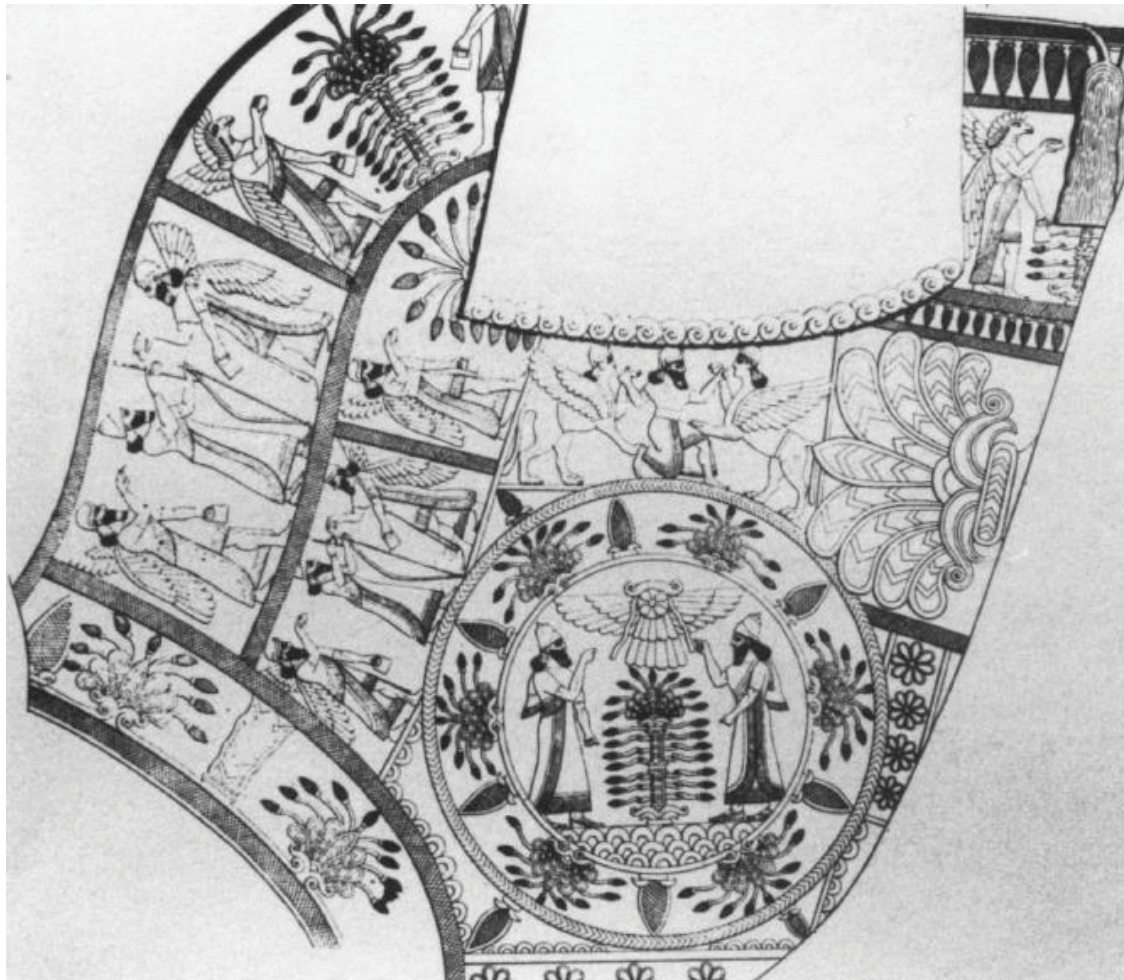


Figure 71. Ashurnasirpal II's patterned fabric.

Gurlanick 2004, fig. 1 (after Layard 1849).



Figure 72. Room S, North Palace.
BM 124876. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 73. Garden banquet relief. North Palace.
BM 124920. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 74. Detail. Queen Libbali-šarrat wearing mural crown.

BM 124920. The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 75. Detail. Assurbanipal in the garden.
BM 124920. the Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 76. Te-umman's head.

BM 124920. The Trustees of the British Museum.

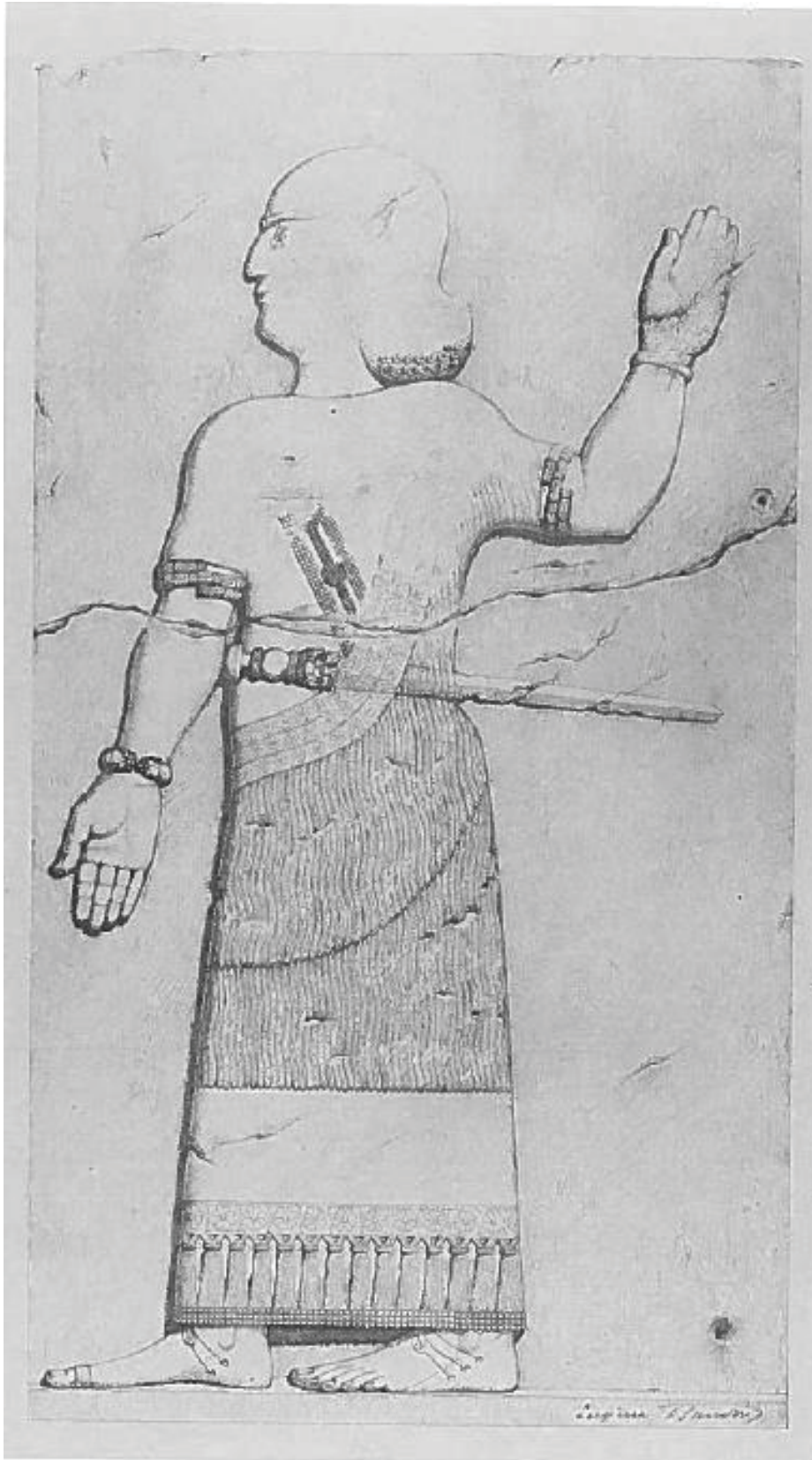


Figure 77. Armed eunuch attendant from Dur-Sharrukin. Facade L, slab 25.

Albenda 1986, pl. 46 (after FLandin).

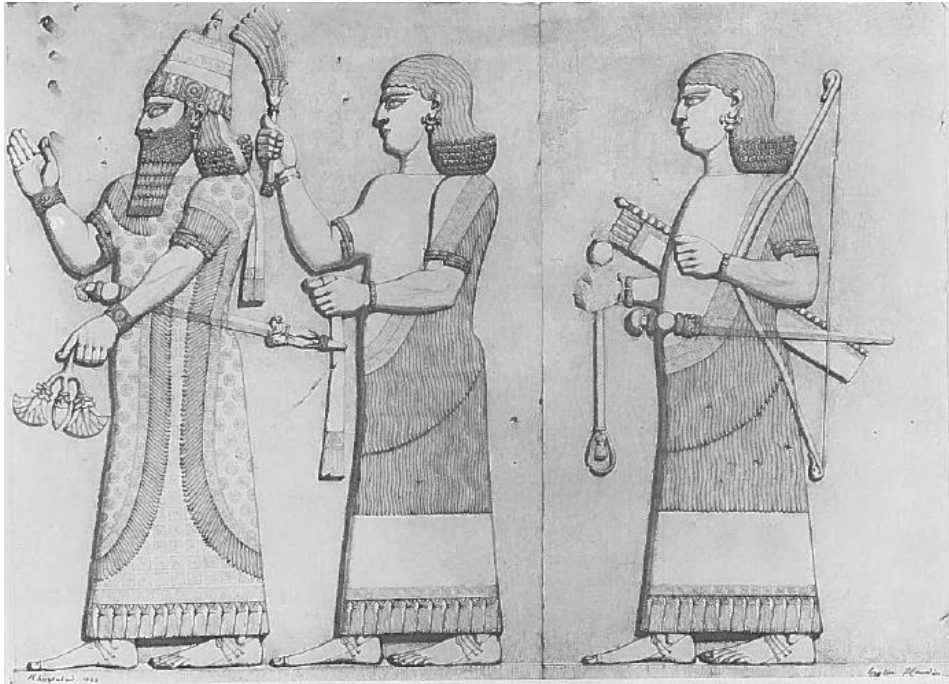


Figure 78. Armed eunuch attendant from Dur-Sharrukin. Room 6, slabs 11–12.

Albenda 1986, pl. 46 (after Flandin).

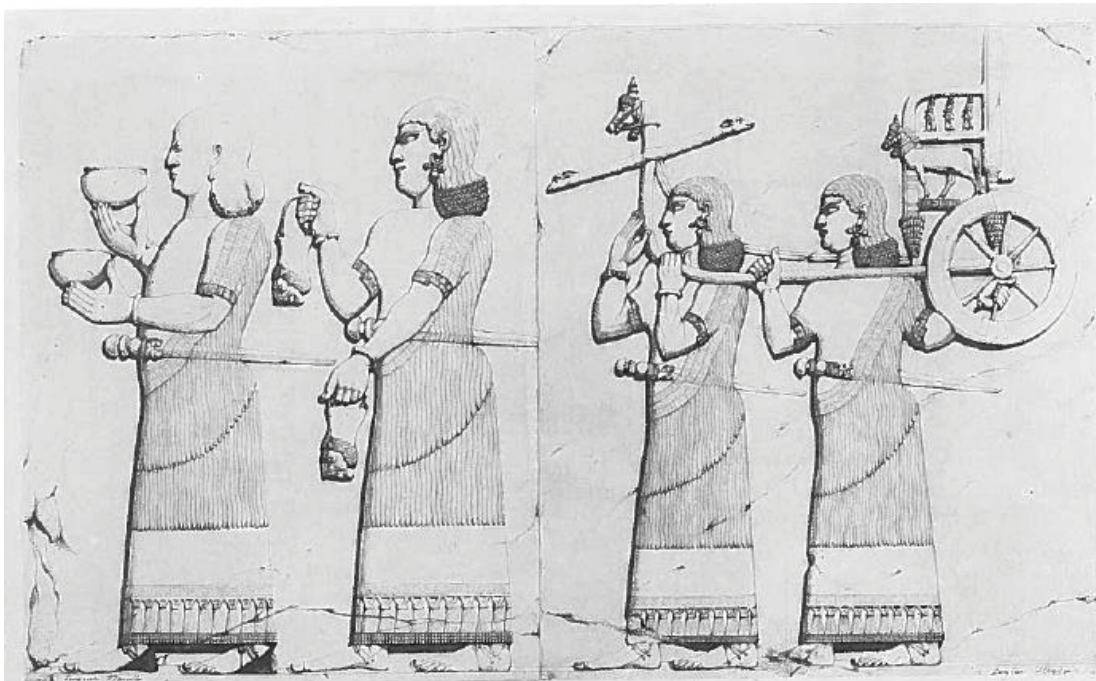


Figure 79. Eunuchs carrying drinking vessels and furniture. Dur Sharrukin. Facade L, slabs 26–27.

Albenda 1986, pl. 47 (after Flandin).

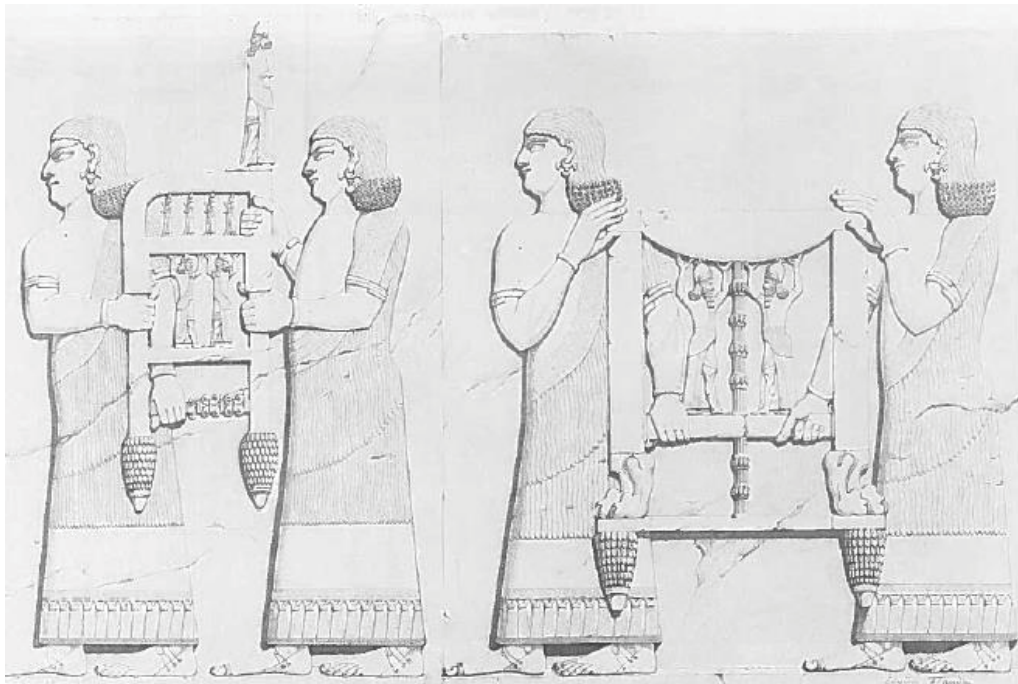


Figure 80. Eunuchs carrying furniture. Dur Sharrukin. Facade L, slabs 28–29.

Albenda 1986, pl. 48 (after Flandin).

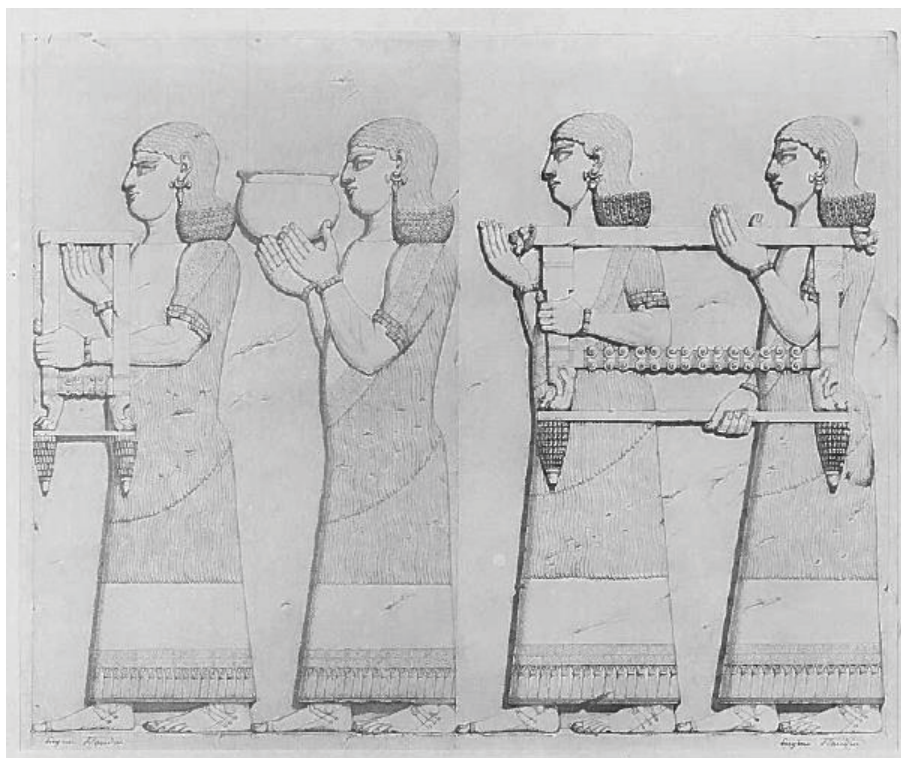


Figure 81. Eunuchs carrying vessels and furniture. Dur Sharrukin. Facade L, slabs 34–35.

Albenda 1986, pl. 50 (after Flandin).