

The central character of the Assyrian wall reliefs remains the king, whose presence can be felt even in those scenes which depict incidents and events not requiring his participation or attendance. All the activities illustrated on the reliefs are intended to exhibit the might of the king, either actually or symbolically. With regard to the figure of the Assyrian king himself, the manner in which he is represented manifests several separate aspects of kingship which he embodies. One of these, his royal status, is the subject of this article.

Figure of the King

The image of the Assyrian ruler in which he is portrayed as a personage attired in the full regalia of kingship is seen particularly on the carved stelae. Such monuments are discernible in several scenes of the reliefs. The earliest representations occur in the bronze bands from Balawat. In one register is displayed the royal stele with the figure of the king, Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.), located on the summit of a rocky terrain, in front of which is seen an altar.¹ Elsewhere among the bronze reliefs, the royal stele is illustrated as being carved upon the hillside (fig. 1). In one relief of Sargon II (721-705 B.C.), a stele with the figure of the king is shown located in the niche of the outer wall of a city which is under attack by

¹ L. W. King, Bronze Reliefs from the Gates of Shalmaneser, King of Assyria (London, 1915), pls. I-II.



Fig. 1 Detail: Bronze band relief from Balawat. From L. W. King, Bronze Reliefs from the Gates of Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, pl. LIX.

the Assyrian cavalry.² The stele may represent a predecessor of Sargon II, probably Tiglathpileser III (744-727 B.C.),³ and therefore the identification of the city with Gaza⁴ seems a likely assumption. The illustration of a stele standing upright against the side of a building, with an altar placed before it a short distance away, occurs in the

² P. E. Botta & E. Flandin, Monument de Ninevé (Paris, 1849-50), pl. 64.

³ After the conquest of the town of Gaza, Tiglathpileser III boasted that he placed his royal image in the palace of Hanno, who had fled to Egypt, cf. A. L. Oppenheim in ANET, p. 283. A stele with the image of this king was likewise set up in Raphia, cf. D. J. Wiseman, "Two Historical Inscriptions from Nimrud," Iraq 13 (1951), pp. 22-23.

⁴ In the second year of his rule, Sargon II defeated Hanno, king of Gaza, and brought the captured leader in fetters to the city Assur, while the city Raphia (Rapihu) was destroyed and burned. Since the city depicted in the relief is under attack but not in flames, the writer identifies the city here shown with Gaza. Cf. A. L. Oppenheim in ANET, p. 285. For comments on Gaza and Raphia, see A. H. Gardiner, Ancient Egyptian Onomastica I (London, 1947), p. 87.

time of Ashurbanipal (668-627 B.C.).⁵ There, the many trees that fill the surrounding landscape provide a tranquil setting for the carved image of the king.

The particular location where the figure of the king was placed indicates that these stelae served a major function for displaying the image of the king in a prominent setting.⁶ Texts of the Assyrian rulers illuminate the intent behind the making and setting up of these stone monuments, a tradition that can be traced back to the Old Assyrian period. Shamshi-Adad (ca. 1813-1791 B.C.) boasts of erecting a stele with his name inscribed upon it in "the country Lab'an...on the shore of the Great Sea."⁷ In the course of an expedition to the Amanus mountains to obtain the several types of woods needed to build a religious structure, Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.) caused a sculptured stele to be erected there.⁸ The following king, Shalmaneser III, seems to have taken delight in having royal stelae erected wherever he went during his military campaigns. During his expedition to the West, in the first year of his reign, this king set up no less than four stelae carved with his royal image, that is described variously as "the king and warrior," "overlord," and "king." One stele was fashioned near the source of the Salura River at the foot of the Amanus mountains,⁹ another was erected on the seacoast

⁵ R. D. Barnett, Assyrian Palace Reliefs and their Influence on the Sculptures of Babylonia and Persia (London, n.d.), pl. 134. It may be noted here that the round-topped stele of Ashurnasirpal II confronted by an altar was found outside the north entrance of the temple of Ninurta. For recent comments regarding this, see M. E. L. Mallowan, Nimrud and its Remains (London, 1966), p. 87.

⁶ Stelae may have been occasionally set up in locations that afforded less access to public view. One stele of Ashurnasirpal II was placed in a recess of the courtyard that led to the north corner of the palace at Nimrud. Cf. M. E. L. Mallowan, "The Excavations at Nimrud (Kalhu), 1951," Iraq 14 (1952), p. 7. It may be relevant to mention here the curious find of two rows of stelae at Assur that were erected during a period that extends over seven hundred years, the earliest of which dates to the reign of Eriba-Adad I (ca. 1389 B.C.) and the latest belongs to Ashur-Sharrat, wife of Ashurbanipal. The purpose for which these royal and official stelae were set up remains enigmatic, since no burials, roadway, or edifice were found associated with them. Cf. W. Andrae, Das Wiedererstandene Assur (Leipzig, 1938), pp. 103ff.

⁷ ANET, p. 274. J. R. Kupper comments that the purpose for the expedition to the Mediterranean coast, in the Lebanon, by Shamshi-Adad I, may have been more economic than military, Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. II, Chap. 1, rev. ed. (1963), p. 5.

⁸ ANET, p. 276.

⁹ The "Annalistic Reports" in ANET, p. 277.

of the Mediterranean Sea,¹⁰ a third was carved beside the statue of the god Hirbe in the mountain Atalur,¹¹ and the fourth was set up on the mountain Lallar.¹² In his third year, several times during his campaign to the northern regions, against the lands of Enzite and Urartu, Shalmaneser III set up royal stelae in such places as a city, on a mountain, along the sea, and within a temple.¹³ This same ruler relates, too, of his march in the seventh year of his reign as far as the source of the Tigris, where he had his royal image erected.¹⁴ He records that after marching as far as the mountain of Bali-ra'si, in the eighteenth year of his reign, a stele carved with his image was erected in this region.¹⁵ Sennacherib (704-681 B.C.) likewise had stelae inscribed with texts of his victories set up in such places as defeated cities.¹⁶ Elsewhere, in his *Annals*,¹⁷ he notes that he had a memorial stele made, to be placed in the foundation platform of his palace.

The carving of the king's figure upon these stelae displayed the majesty of the Assyrian ruler and served as the means for placing on view the official royal portrait. Among the earliest surviving examples of a figure of an Assyrian king is that of Tiglathpileser I (ca. 1115-1077 B.C.), chiseled in the living rock at the source of the Tigris.¹⁸ This king had his figure carved on the occasion of his trip to this region. He is represented standing and facing to the left, with his right hand raised and one finger pointing.¹⁹

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² KAH, II, in *ANET*, p. 278.

¹³ W. G. Lambert, "The Sultantepe Tablets VIII. Shalmaneser in Ararat," *Anatolian Studies* 11 (1961), pp. 147-49. The setting up of his royal image in the temple of the defeated city of Laruba (?) is noted elsewhere in the texts of Shalmaneser III. Cf. J. Laessoe, "A Statue of Shalmaneser III, from Nimrud," *Iraq* 21 (1959), p. 155.

¹⁴ J. Laessoe, *ibid.*, p. 152. This event is illustrated on the Balawat gate, see fig. 3.

¹⁵ *ANET*, p. 281.

¹⁶ D. D. Luckenbill, *Annals of Sennacherib*, OIP II (Chicago, 1924), pp. 26-28.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹⁸ E. Unger, *Assyrische und babylonische Kunst* (Breslau, 1926), Abb. 33, p. 23.

¹⁹ It is interesting to compare this representation with the royal portrait figures of the Hittite kings, dated to the second half of the second millennium B.C., which are similar in general posture but different in details. There, the standing personage has his right arm bent upright with clenched hand and, in his left hand, the lituus is held at

In his left hand he grasps a mace which is held vertically. He is dressed in a simple long garment that is decorated with a series of spiral borders. He wears a conical headdress edged with a tasselled band that falls behind his head. This pose continued to be used for the representation of the later Assyrian kings. A series of eleven images of an Assyrian ruler carved in a niche is found along the hillside at Bawian. Three of them bear the inscriptions of Sennacherib,²⁰ and the others are likewise considered as belonging to his reign. The representation of this king, attired in a garment with spiral borders and holding a mace in the left hand, is generally similar to that of Tiglathpileser I, except that he faces to the right. Other examples of images of Assyrian kings carved into the living rock are found at Nahr el-Kelb, near Beirut.²¹ One of the better preserved reliefs shows the carved form of Esarhaddon (680-669 B.C.) in the center of a round-topped niche,²² set beside the inscribed relief of an earlier Egyptian pharaoh, Ramses II.²³ The Assyrian ruler, facing to the left, is posed in the prescribed manner.

Several well preserved stelae of Assyrian kings provide us with an opportunity to study them in greater detail. The stone slab is often of large proportions and elongated in shape; it is rounded at the top. The figure of the king is carved in relief and occasionally carefully modelled. The background around the figure is cut away, leaving a narrow frame along the front edges of the stone. Inscriptions were placed on the front and back of the upright stone, according to the predilection of the scribe. A stele of Ashurnasirpal

his side. Good photographs are found in E. Akurgal, The Art of the Hittites (New York, n.d.). For the rock relief portrait of the king Muwattali (1315-1282 B.C.), see pl. XX, 98; for the king Tudhalyia IV (1250-1220 B.C.), see pls. XIX, 78, 84-85. The carving of rock reliefs portraying Assyrian and Hittite kings may reflect a common tradition in the ancient Near East.

²⁰ W. Bachmann, Felsreliefs in Assyrien, Bawian, Maltai und Gündük, WVDÖG, Nr. 52, Tafel 21, p. 7.

²¹ E. Unger, "Das Bild des Gottes Hirbe auf dem Atalur (am Nahr-el-Kelb)," MAOG, Bd. IV (1928-29), Tafel VIII.

²² A. T. Olmstead, History of Assyria (New York, 1923), Fig. 146.

²³ Three stelae were set up by Ramses II (ca. 1301-1234 B.C.) at the mouth of the Dog River, between Beirut and Byblos. Extracts of his campaigns into Palestine and Syria are given by J. A. Wilson in ANET, pp. 255-56.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Figs.2&3. Stele of Ashurnasirpal II from H.W.F. Saggs, The Greatness That Was Babylon, pl. 29.

Fig.4. Stele of Shamshi-Adad V from B. Hrouda, Die Kulturgeschichte des assyrische Flachbildes, pl. 43, 2.

Fig.5. Stele of Adad-nirari III from Iraq 30 (1968), pl. XXXVIII. Drawings & photograph by author.

II (figs. 2-3) shows that king in the standard pose of the Assyrian rulers on these stelae. Here the king, larger than life size, stands upon the lower frame of the stone, a little off-center, and faces to the left. His right hand is half-clenched, three fingers are closed, with the thumb resting above them, and the forefinger is extended in a pointing motion but remains slightly bent. In his left hand Ashurnasirpal II grips a mace and holds it to his side.²⁴ This interesting combination of pointing one finger of the raised

²⁴ For the symmetrically composed limestone relief showing this king on either side of a sacred tree, with the gesture of pointing finger and holding the mace, see H. W. F. Saggs, The Greatness That Was Babylon (New York, 1966), pl. 32; also discussed by Mallowan, Nimrud and Its Remains, pp. 96-97. A similar twofold rendering of an Assyrian king with the same gesture and attribute is to be seen in a glazed panel of Shalmaneser III, see J. E. Reade, "A Glazed Panel from Nimrud," Iraq 25 (1963), pp. 43ff.



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

right hand and grasping the mace in the left hand is repeated on the stelae of Shalmaneser III,²⁵ Shamshi-Adad V (823-811 B.C.) (fig. 4), and Adad-nirari III (810-783 B.C.) (fig. 5). A recent chance find of a stele of Sargon II adds to the list of known monuments of this type.²⁶

A series of symbols representing deities²⁷ are included in the space above the right hand of the figure

²⁵ B.M. 118884.

²⁶ It was found in the Asadabad valley near Godin Tepe, southeast of Hamadan. The inscribed text gives an account of an Assyrian military campaign into the Central Zagros region. Cf. T. Cuyler Young, Jr., "Survey of Excavations in Iran During 1965-66," *Iran* 5 (1967), pp. 139-40, pl. I.

²⁷ For a summary analysis of the deities and their symbols, see E. Douglas van Buren, *Symbols of the Gods*, *An. Or.* 23 (1945), also D. O. Edzard, "Mesopotamien. Die Mythologie der Sumerer und Akkader," in H. W. Haussig (ed.), *Wörterbuch der Mythologie I, Vorderer Orient* (Stuttgart, 1962).

of the king. They are clearly discernible in the stele of Ashurnasirpal II and, from bottom to top, are arranged in the following order: encircled star (Ishtar), double prong or thunderbolt (Adad), crescent (Sin), winged sun-disk (Shamash), and the horned miter (Marduk).²⁸ Identical emblems are carved on the stele of Shamshi-Adad V, and one emblem is missing on the stele of Shalmaneser III.²⁹ An increase in the number of divine emblems does occur, together with the figure of the king, on the stele of Adad-nirari III, where eight symbols are placed in front of and behind the head of the ruler.³⁰ On the upper part of a round-topped stele of Sennacherib,³¹ on which the inscriptions record the rebuilding of Nineveh and the construction of a "royal road," a double row of nine divine emblems is placed before the figure of the Assyrian king. The symbols are (1) the snake dragon of Marduk, (2) the crescent of Sin, (3) the three-horned caps of Anu, Enlil, and Ea, (4) the winged sun-disk of Shamash, (5) the lamp with flames of Nusku, (6) the star of Ishtar, (7) the seven balls of Sibitti, the god of "Seven." There exists a second similarly decorated stele of Sennacherib.³² A filling of emblematic motifs is also found in the field above the raised hand of another Assyrian king, Esarhaddon, who is pictured in the stone relief at Nahr el-Kelb.³³

²⁸ E. Unger identified these symbols on the broken obelisk of Tiglathpileser I (now identified as belonging to Ashurbelkala, see D. J. Wiseman, Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. II, Chap. 31, rev. ed. (1965), p. 27), and on the stele of Shamshi-Adad V. See his Assyrische und babylonische Kunst, pp. 23, 33.

²⁹ The emblem of Marduk is missing. It should be noted here that S. Smith interpreted the horned miter as the emblem of Anu, see his Assyrian Sculptures in the British Museum from Shalmaneser III to Sennacherib (London, 1938), p. 3.

³⁰ For the identification of symbols, see David Oates, "The Excavations at Tell Al Rimah, 1967," Iraq 30 (1968), pp. 126-27, and Stephanie Page, "A Stela of Adad-nirari III and Nergal-Ereš from Tell Al Rimah," ibid., pp. 140-41.

³¹ S. Smith, Assyrian Sculptures..., Pl. XXXIV, p. 15.

³² E. Unger, op. cit., Abb. 66, p. 38. It is interesting to observe that, in the reign of Sennacherib, a procession of seven gods and goddesses on animals was carved at Maltai in northern Assyria. See W. Bachmann, op. cit., Tafeln 27-28. It may be relevant to mention, too, the basalt stele found at Asaḡe Yarimca, possibly dedicated by Sennacherib, which is decorated with a disc and crescent mounted upon a post. The emblem has been identified with the Moon-God of Harran. Cf. C. J. Gadd in S. Lloyd and W. Brice, "Harran," Anatolian Studies I (1951), pp. 108-110, pl. X, 3.

³³ E. Unger, op. cit., Abb. 193, p. 68.

On the rock reliefs at Bawian, a total of twelve symbols is used.³⁴

The representation of the king with the gesture of the pointing finger is generally interpreted as showing the ruler in a gesture of adoration before the gods.³⁵ Other meanings have been suggested for this gesture, such as the end of the action of throwing a kiss as an act of worship, or as a ritual act resulting from cracking the fingers with the thumb. Still another suggestion is that it is simply a gesture of authority, suitable to the king.³⁶ The suggestion that it is related to a ritual activity requiring momentary action seems untenable, since the gesture is associated with the king when he frequently appears isolated from any specific setting, as on the stelae. The presence of divine emblems in the field above the king on the royal stelae implies another meaning behind the gesture. It may symbolize the transmission of divine sanction of leadership given by the deities - as shown by their emblems - to the Assyrian ruler. This meaning is strongly conveyed by the manner in which the divine symbols are arranged, which are aligned between the upraised hand and the head of the king.³⁷ Such an interpretation would clarify the purpose of the standard representation of the kings on the stelae in which three elements are always included: the symbols of the gods, the pointing finger, the attitude of the king. Moreover, as discussed above, since the stelae were often located in prominent places and visible to the general spectator, they provided an important means to communicate visually the image of Assyrian kingship.

Attributes of Kingship

Texts mention the divine sanction of kingship and reveal interesting aspects concerning those deities who are invoked. The major god Assur is recorded as establishing legitimate rulership and as the bestower of sceptre, sword,

³⁴ W. Bachmann, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

³⁵ E. Strommenger, 5000 Years of the Art of Mesopotamia (New York, 1965), p. 439.

³⁶ S. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

³⁷ Commenting on the scene depicting the double image of Ashurnasirpal II, Mallowan presents a similar interpretation for the scene, which he considers as illustrating the receiving of authority of kingship from the god Assur in the winged disk, see his Nimrud and Its Remains, p. 97.

and crown to the king.³⁸ In the Annals of Adad-nirari II (911-891 B.C.), the sceptre is called the "ruler of peoples."³⁹ Ashurnasirpal II states that the god Shamash gave to him the sceptre, which rules the people.⁴⁰ Mention is made of Nusku as the god who renders divine sanction and "bears a shining staff."⁴¹ Desirable qualities affecting the person of the king were also extended by the deities, as noted in a text of Esarhaddon.⁴² Such disclosures in the royal texts are probably attempts by the Assyrian kings to establish their sovereignty. At the same time these texts provide us with an opportunity to comprehend the significance of those attributes associated with the status of kingship. These attributes are almost always seen in conjunction with the royal portrait of the king and they include the conical headdress surmounted with a small projection, the sword, the mace, and the staff. The last object is occasionally used as a substitute for the mace, as exemplified by a stele of Ashurnasirpal II, found at Nimrud.⁴³

The elaborate headdress, worn only by the Assyrian king, remains the essential piece of apparel that enables us to recognize the ruler. From the time of Ashurnasirpal II on, the shape of this conical cap gradually became taller until, by the time of Ashurbanipal, its height had doubled. In the time of Ashurnasirpal II the decoration consisted of a large rosette centered on the wide band of the cap.⁴⁴ The single rosette motif was subsequently increased by rows of smaller rosettes on the headdresses of the later Assyrian kings. It is possible that the conical cap was of a red material,⁴⁵ and the rosettes were objects of gold attached to the headdress.⁴⁶ Associated with the royal head-

³⁸ D. D. Luckenbill, op. cit., p. 39.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 109.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 104.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 109.

⁴² This king asserts that Sin appointed him with the strength, manliness, and shaggy chest hair (!) and Nergal bestowed upon him the wrath, splendour, and glory associated with kingship. Cf. R. Borger, AfO, Beiheft 9 (1956), p. 46.

⁴³ D. J. Wiseman, "A New Stele of Assur-Nasir-Pal II," Iraq 14 (1952), Pls. II-III.

⁴⁴ On an ivory plaque depicting Ashurnasirpal II, see ibid., pl. I, and on a relief displaying the same ruler, see F. Sarre and E. Herzfeld, Iranische Felsreliefs (Berlin, 1910), Abb. 89.

⁴⁵ This the color shown on a glazed brick fragment of Sargon II, see Botta and Flandin, op. cit., pl. 155, 2.

⁴⁶ A. L. Oppenheim, "Golden Garments of the Gods," JNES 8, (1949), pp. 174-75, 181.

gear was the costume of the king, which consisted of a long fringed robe, covered by a shawl with long tassels worn diagonally around the body, and enveloping the left arm.⁴⁷ A narrow belt was tied at the waist.⁴⁸

The finely wrought sword which is oddly omitted on the stelae but which is visible on other occasions is the royal weapon probably reflecting the power of kingship. It is interesting to note that the shape of this presumably ceremonial weapon changed from Ashurnasirpal II to Ashurbanipal.⁴⁹ Although the sword is missing, on the stelae the king is not without weapons. The hilts of two daggers⁵⁰ and a whetstone⁵¹ are occasionally visible above the belt of the garment. The mace (or sceptre) is a symbol of the Assyrian king's rule.⁵² When seen in the hand of the king, the mace is simply designed; the spherical top is attached to an exceptionally long shaft and this, in turn, is terminated by

⁴⁷ D. Oates points out that the details of dress shown on the sculptures confirm that the king's garment varied for different occasions. See his "Excavations at Nimrud (Kalhu), 1962," Iraq 25 (1963), pp. 12-14.

⁴⁸ A notable exception is the garment worn by Shamshi-Adad V and Adad-nirari III on their stelae. Here, each king is attired in a long straight tunic with tasselled fringe at the bottom, and a tight-fitting shirt bound at the waist with a wide belt. A strap extends from each shoulder and crosses diagonally on the chest, terminating at the belt. This costume can be paralleled with that worn by Babylonian kings, cf. Strommenger, op. cit., pl. 274. On the stele of Esarhaddon, found at Sinjirli, the two sons of the Assyrian king decorate the sides of the stone monument. The representation of each of them, Ashurbanipal, designated heir to the throne of Assyria, and Shamashumukin, heir-apparent to the throne of Babylonia, shows them dressed in the characteristic costume of the respective country. See F. Thureau-Dangin & M. Dussaud, Til Barsib (Paris, 1936), pp. 151-52, pl. XII.

⁴⁹ Compare the changes in the form of the sword, in the reigns of Ashurnasirpal II, Sargon II, and Ashurbanipal respectively. See Strommenger, op. cit., pl. 191; H. R. Hall, Babylonian and Assyrian Sculptures in the British Museum (Paris, 1928), pl. XXVII; R. D. Barnett, op. cit., pl. 84.

⁵⁰ One of these weapons, carried by Ashurnasirpal II, has been identified as a short sword ("dagger sword") by the shape of its pommel. See W. Nagel, "Die Königsdolche der zweiten Dynastie von Isin," AfO 19 (1959-60), pp. 103-04.

⁵¹ For some actual finds mentioned, see E. Herzfeld, Iran in the Ancient East (London, 1941), pp. 139-140, fig. 153.

⁵² For the suggestion that the mace was a "symbol of sanctioned use of power," see R. Harris, "The Journey of the Divine Weapon," AS 16 (1965), p. 217, n. 1.

a smaller orb from which a short wavy tassel is suspended.⁵³ The last object associated with the regalia of kingship is the staff, and it is the object used on the occasion of making royal decisions.⁵⁴

The image of the king on the stelae, then, is partially of an abstract nature, as it is intended to display the official status of kingship, by a standardized rendering of the Assyrian ruler who has received the divine sanction of rule symbolized by the attributes associated with that office. The importance of these portrait reliefs may have rested in the fact that they could transmit the majesty of the Assyrian ruler to the peoples who viewed them, as well as inspire a sense of royal might and power. One may conjecture that the setting up of altars for purposes of prayer before the image of the king, as noted earlier, may reflect the concept of a divine power that lay behind the status of kingship, rather than imply homage to the human aspect of the king.⁵⁵

⁵³ The wielding of this weapon in battle is attested as late as the time of Ashurbanipal, at which time Assyrian soldiers employ a shorter variant of the mace against their unfortunate victims, cf. R. D. Barnett, *op. cit.*, pl. 130. In one scene an Assyrian soldier grips the mace with both hands as it is swung to hit the head of a foe, see pl. 124.

⁵⁴ Discussed at length by the writer in her dissertation.

⁵⁵ A ritual ceremony before an altar that has been set up a short distance from the royal stele, in which the king himself participates, occurs in a register of the bronze reliefs of Shalmaneser III, see above, n. 1.