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Robin Baker
Winchester, UK

TEXT-IMAGE ICONICITY IN ASSURNASIRPAL II'S NORTHWEST PALACE[1]

Abstract: Among the most celebrated archaeological discoveries and the most debated expressions of Assyrian art is the bas-relief that stood behind the throne in Assurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace in Nimrud. Most attempts to interpret the panel have focused on specific elements of its iconography, particularly the tree and the figure in the winged disk above it. Many scholars have sought to decipher the image by comparing it with series of panels from elsewhere in the palace. Some studies have also explored the relief's relationship to its inscription. Despite the extensive literature on the artifact, its meaning has remained elusive. This study approaches the conundrum from a different angle. It considers the relief's text-image iconicity through the lens of Assurnasirpal's theology, since both express theological conceptions. It investigates the theological relationship between the image and the placement of the cuneiform signs carved on it, thereby shedding light on the meaning of the imagery.

Keywords: Assyrian art, Assyrian religion, *apkallu*, the god Aššur, Nimrud/Kalhu, name as destiny, maces, Shalmaneser I

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Introduction

In his discussion of the 'Standard Inscription' of the Assyrian king Assurnasirpal II (883-859 BC), the text that was incised on every relief panel and many other orthostats in the king's Northwest Palace (NWP) in Kalhu/Nimrud (Pl. 1: 1), Jonathan Taylor observed: "Assurnasirpal had no qualms about having his Standard Inscription carved across the figures on the reliefs decorating his palace walls. The gods and the king himself would have text written across their visual representation. In the cuneiform world, this meant the words being carved into the bodies of the figures. It was a deliberately chosen technique intended to wed text and image. The figures were all designed to perform a function, and to communicate a message. Likewise, the king's carefully composed text does the same. And the two are physically united." (Taylor 2019)

One of the reasons Taylor's remarks are significant is the change they reveal in the understanding of the relationship between the Standard Inscription (SI) and the images into which it was carved. Writing 45 years earlier, one of Taylor's predecessors at the British Museum, R. D. Barnett, asserted that the SI represented "the defacement of [the] sculptures by the text being written straight across them, like a surcharged postage stamp…with complete indifference to the subject" (1970, 23, 15). Barnett's statement reflected the prevailing view at the time.

This difference in the appreciation of the "Verschriftlichung" of Assurnasirpal's architectural creations (Radner 2005, 149) raises two questions that this study aims to address: what caused the change from a wholesale rejection of a text-image relationship to the conviction that they are "wedded", suggesting that in such "inscribed artworks things may be said to happen because of the semiotic relationship between word and image" (Winter 2007, 61)? Additionally, what concrete evidence supports that conviction? Unlike many studies on this topic, mine adopts a theological reading of the text-image ensemble – because the subject invites it. Both the SI and the vast majority of the images displayed on the NWP panels are overtly concerned with the numinous realm (Bahrani 2014, 118-127, 140-141; Bahrani 2017, 232-236). After all, Assurnasirpal called the NWP, "the palace of all wisdom" (A.0.101.30 103;[2] Parpola 2022, 197) and, in his apprehension, "divine Ea, king of the *Apsû*", was wisdom's source (A.0.101.2 23). Accordingly, the king adorned his palace with images of *apkallu*s, creatures of the *Apsû*, in their human-headed and bird-headed forms (Ataç

[2] All A.0.101 references are found in Grayson 1991.

2010, 150; Bahrani 2008, 205-206). For the throne room (Room B) alone, Janusz Meuszyński (1974, Tafeln 1-3) posited fifteen *apkallu* figures of both types.

It was the publication of two articles by Irene Winter (1981; 1983) that spurred a re-evaluation of the text-image relationship presented in Assurnasirpal's NWP reliefs. In these articles, Winter analyzed the correlation between the images in Room B and Assurnasirpal's inscriptions. She sought to match the annalistic record of military campaigns with specific episodes depicted in the reliefs. She proposed potential matches and concluded that text and image represented "separate but parallel systems, particularly as we are here concerned with an essentially nonliterate population" (Winter 1981, 18).

Winter's exploration of the text-image dialectic in Room B generated interest in both the dialectic and the SI itself. Her work was quickly followed by Julian Reade conducting a similar analysis. Although the results were disappointing[3], from then on Assyriologists increasingly viewed the SI not as an unsightly distraction from the beauty and power of the reliefs (Bahrani 2003, 165), but as purposeful. Few would now adopt Barnett's position. That said, few would go as far as Taylor in rejecting the parallel system postulation in favor of the metaphysical integration of the SI and the images (Bahrani 2003, 165-166; Bahrani 2014, 116-117; Crawford 2014). Yet, research on the use of color on the NWP reliefs concludes that their creators treated text, sculpture, and color as an integrated whole. Shiyanthi Thavapalan (2020, 414) asserts: "[Color] served to enliven sculptured depictions and also the written statements of the king. Polychromy…is not a complementary but rather an additional form of expression on the Assyrian reliefs." She argues that, for the Assyrians, colors—like varieties of stone and, supremely, words—were magically potent.

Explorations in the 'Palace of All Wisdom'

Turning to the second of our questions, when we look for published evidence to support Taylor's contention that the SI is wedded to the reliefs into which it is incised, the results are underwhelming. Taylor himself offered nothing concrete to substantiate his claim. Zainab Bahrani (2003, 107, 169), taking Assurnasirpal's Kalhu creations as her starting point, insisted that "a continuous influential relationship" between text and image must exist: "perhaps the application of

[3] In almost every case, Reade (1985, 213) disagreed with Winter's identifications. Michael Roaf (2008, 210) has discussed the weaknesses in her approach. See also Liverani 2017, 100.

a Middle Eastern concept of script, rather than a Western one, would be more fruitful in the study of inscriptions on images in the Near East. This entails reading texts closely, even hermeneutically, as part of the image, and considering the power of writing, which is not necessarily only the power of rhetoric but what has often been seen in the Middle East as a mystical or magical quality in script and the process of writing." However, she likewise offered no examples from the NWP material of how the relationship concretely manifests itself or what a hermeneutically close reading of the text-image yields.

To my knowledge, there has yet to be a systematic study of SI-image iconicity published, even one focusing on a single panel (Foster 2022, 144). However, there have been some isolated investigations into the topic. Seth Richardson (1999-2001, 166) argued for a "confluence of text and image" in Room I of the NWP. He noted that, in the arrangement of the SI, Assurnasirpal's epithet šid *aš-šur* ("viceroy" or "priest" [sanga] of Aššur) often appears directly beneath the Assyrian Sacred Trees (AST) depicted in the upper register of the panels. Additionally, he observed that an informal survey suggests the only other signs directly beneath the trunk of the tree are "DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ" ("great gods"). From this, he inferred: "The deliberate vertical proximity suggests *šangûtu* [priesthood] as a repeated efflorescence of divine power above the ground, on the earth."

Adducing the SI's citation of Assurnasirpal's father (Tukulti-Ninurta II) and grandfather (Adad-Nerari II), Burchard Brentjes (1994, 51-54) argued that the two opposed king figures on B-23, the bas-relief that stood behind Assurnasirpal's throne (Pl. 1: 2), which is my primary focus in this essay, do not represent Assurnasirpal's right and left profiles, as commonly thought, but rather these two men. This, he claimed, accounts for differences in the portrayal of the two figures—specifically, the variation in their regalia and in the way they hold their maces or scepters. Brentjes, therefore, understood the B-23 relief image to be an illustration of the SI.

Building on Brentjes's work, Brian Brown (2010, 25-26) pointed out that the only sign on the AST in B-23 is giš, the logogram for 'tree'. Given that the SI on B-23 comprises eighteen lines, all of which are interrupted by the AST, he is surely correct that the carving of the sign in this position was deliberate. Brown perceived the logogram's unique appearance on the B-23 AST as "a symbol of a symbol" (2010, 33), and specifically as a symbol of Gilgameš, whom the giš sign could signify (Borger 2010, 337). Gilgameš, in turn, epitomized for the Assyrians the ideal of kingship. Nathan Morello (2016, 40-41) is unpersuaded by

Brown's claim, finding its reasoning overcomplicated. He contends that giš was carved on the AST as labeling to underscore the latter's significance for the scene depicted in B-23. I am unconvinced by Brown's thesis for an additional reason: in the substantial corpus of Assurnasirpal inscriptions, nowhere does the king display an especial interest in or affinity with Gilgameš.

There are three other signs on B-23 carved in analogous spaces: the maces of the opposed king figures. They too appear to perform a labeling/naming role. Spanning the first and second lines, two signs, an and kib, are carefully inscribed on the pommel of the left mace (Pl. 2: 1). In the SI, they respectively convey the divine determinative for 'Dagan' and the syllable *kib* of *kib-rāt* 'quarters'. They are the only wedges on the mace. Logographically, they read ^{d}*kibbu* "divine object" (cf. Radner 2005, 143), highlighting its divine agency. An inscribed lapis mace head "almost certainly" from Assurnasirpal's reign, employed in religious rites, attests to his belief in the numinous power of ritually charged maces to protect him against hostile actors (Mace; Grayson 1975, 69; A.0.101.100).[4] That an *apkallu* image bearing a mace guarded the entry/exit in Room B that stood closest to the throne/B-23, the point of greatest vulnerability for the king, corroborates this conclusion (Portuese 2021, 53-56; Pongratz-Leisten 2022, 228).

Although the right mace spans all but the final three lines of text, only one sign (kal) is found on it, carved on the shaft. Actually, the narrow shaft could only accommodate half of its wedges, those that render the sign a (a logogram for 'son' in the SI; Pl. 2: 2). While it is possible that the sculptor misjudged the space available for kal, obliging him to inscribe the mace, the configuration of the line in question makes this unlikely. The syllabic reading of this sign here is *dan-* (in *dan-nu*, meaning 'strong'). Conceivably, though, its highlighting on the shaft was intended to convey an additional value of kal, namely, the logogram guruš, a signifier of *eṭlu* 'young man'. The SI uses *eṭlu* as a descriptor of Assurnasirpal (see below). The term evokes the archetypal divine heroes who subdued the cosmic forces of chaos, Marduk and especially Ninurta, the patron deity of Assurnasirpal and Kalhu (Chicago Assyrian Dictionary E, 409-410; Seux 1967, 92-93; Maul 2017, 350; Alstola *et al*. 2019, 175; Baker 2022b).[5] And in Mesopo-

[4] The incantation series *Evil Demons* contains the following ritual: "the king bearing radiance (*šalummatu* [– see below]) on his head like the new moon…Organize the mighty *e'ru*-wood mace and noises at his head, cast the Eridu-spell, …purify him with pure waters of the ritual laver, purify and cleanse the king" (Geller 2016, 23, 522, 83, 88'-92'). On the magical agency of the *e'ru*-wood mace, see Wiggermann 1992, 67-68.

[5] On the Assyrian king as Ninurta's "earthly image," see Maul 2017, 350; Pongratz-Leisten 2019, 290-293; Parpola 2022, 195, 201-208.

tamian myth, Ninurta is commonly associated with the mace (Ataç 2018, 91; Dick 2006, 245 n. 11, 254; Hallo and Moran 1979, 79).

Turning elsewhere in the NWP, Brown (2010, 11-12, 49, fig. 7) observed that the king's left hand shown on the H-4 panel bears the signs used in the SI to denote the name 'Assurnasirpal': ^{m}*aš-šur*-pab-*a* (see also Paley 1976, Pls 4, 27b). On the unproven assumption that the king was an old man when the NWP was dedicated, Brown (2010, 37-38) explained this datum as "perhaps signifying both his eponymous predecessor and himself after death, when he would have joined the ancestors and begun receiving offerings to placate his soul in the afterlife".

We owe to Morello (2016, 43-47) the discovery on G-3 of the phrase $^{[m]d}$*šùl-ma-na*-sag man kur *aš-šur* 'Shalmaneser king of Assyria' carved as the only signs on the horizontal strip that undergirds the seat and cushion of the image of a throne, on which a seated king is portrayed. Undoubtedly, the signs that form this phrase were deliberately isolated from their neighbors to accentuate them. As to what or whom this signifies, Morello (2016, 46) avers, "This king is not Shalmaneser (I or III [Assurnasirpal's son and crown prince]), nor can we have any certainty that the one on H-4 is or is not Aššurnasirpal".

Pace Morello and Brown, I suggest that the names Assurnasirpal and Shalmaneser, which H-4 and G-3 foreground in this way, have clear referents and, furthermore, demonstrate the iconicity of the SI and the images on which they are carved. Leaving aside Assurnasirpal's genealogical references in his inscriptions to his father, grandfather, and, on occasion, great-grandfather, which serve to distinguish him from other kings of the same name and to buttress his legitimacy as ruler, he is concerned in the SI with only two kings' names. They are his own as restorer and embellisher of Kalhu and Shalmaneser I's, whom he considered Kalhu's founder. Shalmaneser (1274-1245 BC) occupied the Assyrian throne approximately four centuries before Assurnasirpal's reign. The highlighting of the two regnal names derives from Assurnasirpal's wish to underscore Kalhu's importance and to perpetuate his predecessor's name and his own name, which was a matter of intense concern for him. This concern was expressed through his desire that his successors add their names to his on the monuments rather than erase his name. Doing the former will bring them divine blessing; doing the latter will incur divine retribution against the perpetrator's name and progeny (Bahrani 2003, 128). Thus, "The ancient city Calah, which Shalmaneser [I], king of Assyria, a prince who preceded me, had built—this city had become dilapidated. … I inscribed this monument inscription (and) deposited

(it) in its wall. May a later prince restore its weakened (portions). May he restore my inscribed name to its place. (Then) the god Aššur, the great lord, (and) the goddess Ištar, mistress of battle and conflict, will listen to his prayers. As for the one who removes my name: may Aššur and the god Ninurta glare at him angrily, overthrow his sovereignty, take away from him his throne, make him sit in bonds before his enemies, (and) destroy his name (and) his seed from the land" (A.0.101.26 46b-47, 67b-72).

We read in another Assurnasirpal inscription from Kalhu: "O later prince among the kings my sons whom Aššur will name: (When) you see the foundation, restore its weakened (portions). … Do not erase my inscription (but) *write your name with mine* (emphasis added) (and) return (it) to its place" (A.0.101.38 28b-33a). Honoring the name perpetuated the bearer's life after death (Radner 2005, 19-21; Portuese 2023, 73-77). The conviction that naming possessed performative agency to create and preserve informed the SI and the NWP artistic design (Radner 2005, 198-199), as the labeling of the tree and mace on B-23 subtly implies.[6] True to this belief, Assurnasirpal made a point of writing Shalmaneser's name with his in the SI, and to underscore the point, he highlighted each name in (at least) one place in the palace. The location of Shalmaneser's name is particularly significant. It was engraved on the throne's lower frame. This literally supported Assurnasirpal, the incumbent king, just as the original foundations of Kalhu, which he believed were constructed by Shalmaneser, lay beneath and, in a sense, supported the city that Assurnasirpal was building.

Evidently, Assurnasirpal discovered a clay cone in Nineveh produced by Shalmaneser I (Boda and Novotny 2010, 460). On it, Shalmaneser (Grayson 1987, A.0.77.17 9b-13) wrote of how he restored Assur-uballiṭ's inscriptions and returned them to their place. He urged the kings who followed him to extend the same kindness to him. He too invoked Aššur to punish any ruler who 'removes my inscription and my name' with the overthrow of his rule and the destruction of his name and seed. In his inscription on bricks in the Aššur temple in Assur, Assurnasirpal possibly borrowed wording from Shalmaneser (A.0.101.138). He, therefore, had firsthand evidence that his distant predecessor left building in-

[6] B-16 furnishes an analogous case of naming/labeling. There, the signs nun a are the only wedges carved on the purification bucket held by an *apkallu*. They derive from the SI phrase nun *a-lik* 'the prince [who] went'. As logograms, the two signs denote *nunni mê* 'metal object of water'. I am indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing this out. In the NWP, such labeling is exclusively cryptic but on gate-bands (Balawat) and obelisks Assurnasirpal used overt labeling. In the next century labels were undisguised (and larger-scale) in Assyrian palace text imagery too (Gerardi 1988, 3-4; Russell 1999, 216; Jia 2014, 120-139; Crawford 2014, 253).

scriptions and that he subscribed to the same theological premise that maintaining someone's name in writing preserved its deceased bearer from oblivion. He must have sought similar artifacts in Kalhu from Shalmaneser's reign, apparently without success. In their stead, Assurnasirpal honored Shalmaneser by entering his name on every orthostat in his NWP containing the unabridged SI (Howard 2023, 33-41), including on the image of Assurnasirpal's throne in G-3, where it is explicitly highlighted.

On *Apkallu*s' Wings

The foregoing raises three issues. The first is the immense importance that Assyro-Babylonian culture ascribed to naming. It was a predictive-performative act, intrinsically linked with the determination of the recipient's destiny (Bottéro 1977, 15-26). The connection is explicit in the parallelism of *Enūma eliš* I.8: *šuma lā zukkurū šīmatu lā šīmū* "none [of the gods] had been named and destinies had not been decreed". "The name is the person", insisted W. G. Lambert (2013, 456), "and to give a name to another is to grant him the attributes of which the name speaks".

Assurnasirpal's name signifies "The god Aššur is the protector of the son/the one who watches over the son". In the SI, Assurnasirpal stressed that it was Aššur, the chief deity in the Assyrian pantheon (Maul 2017, 337), who bestowed this name— *aš-šur* en *na-bu-ú* mu-*ia* 'the lord Aššur named my name' (A.0.101.23 6; Zaia 2018, 210). Thus, the god's protection, support, and presence were vouchsafed to the king in the destiny decreed in his name. In the SI, the juncture at which the king recounts the bestowal of his name is the point at which the account pivots from third-person to first-person narrative. Rhetorically, this is highly significant.[7] It was Aššur's "naming my name", and—therefore—bringing Assurnasirpal into existence and determining his destiny (Paley 1976, 137; Van De Mieroop 1999, 329; Sigrist 2010, 411-412), that enabled the king to speak as himself. The act of divine naming induced, as it were, Assurnasirpal's *pīt pî* 'mouth-opening'.[8] And the destiny contained in his name estab-

[7] We encounter the same rhetorical device in the Sumerian praise poem *Šulgi B*. The shift occurs in line 11 when King Šulgi (2094-2047 BC) recounts his divine birth and the determining of his destiny (A Praise Poem of Šulgi; Radner 2005, 160). In his inscriptions, Assurnasirpal frequently employs enallage between first- and third-person forms (Cathcart 2021, 219-220 n. 5).

[8] On *pīt pî*, see Walker and Dick 2001, 8-15.

lished two precepts: Aššur will watch over/protect the son; and Assurnasirpal, by acquiring the name, became that son.

The second issue relates to the process of inscribing the SI. A peculiarity of its production is that it was not always completed on the reliefs. The SI ends mid-section or even mid-sentence if insufficient space was available (Russell 1999, 39; Taylor 2019; Howard 2023, 29-33; Morello 2023, 65). This idiosyncrasy gave the scribes and sculptors some flexibility in choosing where to place signs, since they were not invariably compelled to fit the entire SI into a given space. One infers that a factor in this choice was legibility and visibility. The examples of 'Assurnasirpal' on H-4, 'Shalmaneser' on G-3, and giš, an, kib, and kal on B-23 appear to bear out this assumption. In each, the signs/logograms were afforded conspicuous positions. It seems that the scribes/sculptors' default mode was to avoid those in which legibility would be impaired (Howard 2023, 43-48). Although Egyptian blue paint illuminated the SI on the reliefs, thereby significantly aiding legibility (Thavapalan *et al*. 2016, 207-208; Thavapalan 2020, 410-411)[9], some environments were inherently reader-unfriendly. Thus, in B-23, they did not incise signs in the patterning of the fringes and tassels of garments, in the latticework of the AST's palmettes and tendrils, or in the hands of the king and *apkallu*s, even though this creates breaks in the run of the text, some of which are substantial (Howard 2023, 26-28).

In certain cases, however, they were evidently willing to sacrifice legibility. An example is the inscription's incision into the intricate filigree-like composition of the *apkallu*s' feathers in B-23, which marked the left and right margins of the panel (Roaf 2008, 211). It contrasts with the strategy used on G-6, for example, which depicts an *apkallu* on the left half of the panel purifying the king who occupies the right half. Here, no inscription was carved into the *apkallu*'s wing. Consequently, in G-6, the SI's left margin follows the wing's right contour and not the panel edge. In H-4, the text stopped at the *apkallu*'s wing, but there it was carved on the king's hand. To understand why text was inscribed in the *apkallu*s' wings in B-23, despite its negative impact on legibility, we must consider this panel's context and content.[10]

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[9] The extent to which Egyptian blue was used to highlight the SI (including on B-23) is unknown (Thavapalan 2019, 196-198). Other colors may also have been used (Thavapalan *et al*. 2016, 208-210).

[10] Other panels in Room B, such as 16, 24, and 30, have text inscribed on *apkallu* wings. Probing the specifics of their text-image relationship would deflect our attention from B-23. I simply note that on these three reliefs the wings did not form the original left and right margins. Carving the SI on the wings therefore avoided unacceptably long interruptions in the line of text.

Before doing so, however, we should attend to the third issue raised by the foregoing, namely, how to identify "a visual interaction between text and image" (Morello 2016, 34). Put differently, how do we ascertain where the designers/executants of the NWP reliefs engineered the confluence of specific text and specific space to produce text-image iconicity? Morello (2016, 34) has advanced two criteria: "the sign or group of signs have to be isolated or partly separated from the rest of the inscription by leaving empty space before and/or after it (but also above and/or below it); and the image element that interplays with the sign or group of signs has to encircle (and so isolate) it/them."

While helpful in prompting the debate, the proposition's apprehension of script and scribal art does not give due weight to Assyria's theologically driven value system, whose essential role Morello affirms (2016, 56, 58, 63). The notion that profound meaning must be obvious was alien to its scribes (Maul 2017, 339; Noegel 2021, 143-144). One of them, the seventh-century Ašaredu the Younger, put it well: "Scribal art is not a subject for the marketplace" (Hunger 1992, 194 338). Theirs was a culture that could reconcile the seemingly contradictory practices of, on the one hand, meticulously isolating certain signs on an image to enhance their visibility and, on the other, investing vast resources to carve lengthy inscriptions praising Assurnasirpal on the backs of hundreds of orthostats, where only the gods could read them (Russell 1999, 19, 23; Oates and Oates 2001, 107; Reade 2002, 186-188; Bahrani 2008, 205; Morello 2023, 62-63). Even the giš on the AST would have been all but invisible behind the throne (Morello 2023, 67). In fact, the purpose of isolating labels may not have been to improve visibility but rather primarily to emphasize the significance of naming within the design (cf. Radner 2005, 20). Beate Pongratz-Leisten (2022, 246) compellingly argues that the 'non-readable writing' on B-23, due to its concealment, held performative agency. The palace of all wisdom continually reminds us of the Assyrian enjoyment in "experimenting" with and obscuring meaning (Crawford 2014, 253; Parpola 2014, 470-471; Morello 2023, 71). Its SI and reliefs both reflected and projected these values (Portuese 2021, 56). The two 'conditions' are insufficiently sensitive to this context. Furthermore, the reasoning behind them appears circular. They are constructed to align with the cases that Morello considers text-image visual interactions and they then define what constitutes an interaction. We are beginning to recognize instances of "imagetexts" (Crawford 2014, 242) where the signs are not isolated and, in some cases, the co-presentational relationship is not immediately apparent. I offer further examples of imagetexts below.

Turning now to B-23, the panel stood behind (and, therefore, framed) Assurnasirpal's throne on the eastern wall of his immense throne room. It served as the focal point of the throne room and, consequently, of the Assyrian Empire, representing the nexus of power and the epicenter of Assurnasirpal's rule (Bahrani 2014, 116-117). In this sense, it was the most symbolically charged panel in the palace (Kertai 2020, 385). Scholars agree that its visual content, though enigmatic—as befitting the hub of the palace of all wisdom (Bahrani 2017, 233-234)—served as commentary on the king's place in the cosmos and his relationship with the divine (Ataç 2018, 95-98; Brown 2010, 24; Pongratz-Leisten 2022, 239-240). Consequently, both the carving of its relief image and the incision of the SI into it were accomplished with particular care and refinement (Morello 2016, 36-37; Morello 2023, 66; Pongratz-Leisten 2022, 244). The iconography of B-23 depicts the god in a winged disk watching over the king, whether he is physically present on his throne or represented solely through his image on the relief. This visual representation effectively conveys the meaning of Assurnasirpal's name. Accordingly, the flanking *apkallu*s purify him with cone-shaped *mullilu*s "purifiers" to protect him from harm (Bahrani 2014, 122-123; Oates and Oates 2001, 253; Magen 1986, 35, 78; Portuese 2023, 78-82). Texts refer to *apkallu*s as "guardians" (Russell 2008, 185; Wiggermann 1992, 65-85).

When we consider where the B-23 text recounts Aššur's naming of Assurnasirpal, we find it meticulously woven precisely into the *apkallu*s' wings. It runs from the end of line 4 into the beginning of line 5. The signs incised into the wing of the right-hand *apkallu* are *aš-šur* en *na-bu-ú* 'the lord Aššur named'. This concludes line 4 (Pl. 3: 1; Howard 2017, 560). The text continues in line 5 where it is carved into the other *apkallu*'s wing. The wing contains only four signs of the string 'my name [and] magnified my kingship', namely, mu-*ia mu-šar-*(*bu-ú* man-*ti-ia*) (Pl. 3: 2). This was deliberate since mu.sar (= *musarû*/*mušarû*) means 'inscription, an object bearing a royal inscription'.[11] The aim was to underscore mu.sar by separating it from the remainder of *mu-šar-bu-ú*. This maneuver highlights the key phrase "the lord Aššur named my name", allowing it to stand out as a self-contained and explicitly stated label regarding the king's naming: "The lord Aššur named my name: an inscription." Following Pongratz-Leisten, I suggest that this artistic choice was determined by the need for this sequence of signs to operate performatively to protect Assurnasirpal

[11] Chicago Assyrian Dictionary M/2, 232, for example, '*ša* MU.SAR-*u šiṭir šumija unakkaru* [anyone] who destroys the inscription, the writing of my name'. Objects bearing a royal inscription received anointing and offerings (see, for instance, Leichty 2001, 135 21).

from evil, consistent with the overall imagery of B-23. The relief depicts the king being watched over by the overshadowing deity and attended by the semi-divine *apkallu*s, whose images, along with those of other mythological beings, guarded the entrances to the palace and throne room. Indeed, this highlighted sentence is literally embodied in the *apkallu*s, whose roles included "ensuring the correct functioning of the plans of heaven and earth" (Reiner 1961, 2, 4 1'-9', 6). Their wings, which frame the horizontal space the king occupies on earth, mirror those that frame the horizontal space the deity occupies in heaven. Thus, the mystical significance of the *apkallu*s' wings overrides the more mundane concern with legibility.

This prompts the question whether similar iconicity occurs elsewhere in the assignment of text to the *apkallu*s' wings on B-23. In fact, the positioning of the SI evinces other tenable instances though the patterns of assignment differ from case to case. Thus, when enallage occurs again in the SI, it also seems to be reflected in the placement of the relevant signs. In the section spanning lines 12b-14a of the A.0.101.23 edition, the SI reverts to third-person forms to describe the king. On B-23, the final first-person form before this shift—*al-ta-kan* 'I appointed'—is incised in the right *apkallu*'s wing (l. 9; Pl. 3: 1). The third-person section begins on line 10. Its initial word 'Assurnasirpal' ^{m}*aš-šur*-pab-a is incised in the left *apkallu*'s cloak (a surface which incidentally offers much greater legibility; Pl. 3: 2), not his wing. When the narrative returns to the first-person voice, its initial expression is the prepositional pronoun *pa-ni-a* 'before me' (l. 12). The first-person marker [*ni*]-*a* is carved into the right *apkallu*'s wing (Pl. 3: 1). Shifts in narrative voice are graphically mirrored by transitions to the first-person forms incorporated in the *apkallu*s' wings and the transition to the third person engraved in the *apkallu*'s cloak, the area beneath the wing. The theological coherence of this configuration suggests intentionality: the king, embodying heroic qualities yet mortal, is protected under the *apkallu*s' wings, just as he is the subject of their purifying ministrations.[12] The aspect of the king whose mouth has been opened, however, is more deeply integrated into the divine sphere, woven into the *apkallu*s' wings. Such duality of representation reflects the managed ambiguity of Assyrian ideology: the king is overtly a mortal hero dependent on the gods, yet his divine identity is implied in multiple ways

[12] A prophecy delivered to the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (680-669 BC) indicates that divine wings were held to be a place of protection and blessing: "I raised you/I made you great between my wings... Have no fear!" (Parpola 1997, 18 2.5.27'-29').

(Maul 2017, 348-349; Ornan 2007; Winter 2012, 86, 92; Cooper 2012, 263; Baker 2022a, 146-148; Parpola 2022, 207).

On B-23, Assurnasirpal's epithet 'crowned with awesome radiance' *a-pi-ir šá-lum-ma-te* is engraved on the *apkallu*s' wings, with the right *apkallu*'s wing bearing *apir* 'crowned' (l. 10; Pl. 3: 1) and its nomen rectum *šalummate* 'awesome radiance' carved on the left *apkallu*'s wing (line 11; Pl. 3: 2). *Šalummatu* is a divine property that the gods bestow on the king (Chicago Assyrian Dictionary Š/1, 283-285; Pongratz-Leisten 2022, 227). This arrangement points to the transcendent quality of the *apkallu*s' wings and the king's participation in the numinous realm.

In the second line, the text inscribed in the two wings comprises a concise, discrete statement of Assurnasirpal's divinely determined character, beginning with the theologically loaded *eṭ-lu*: *eṭ-lu qar-du šá* (left *apkallu*; Pl. 3: 2) + *maḫ-ra la-a* tuk (right *apkallu*; Pl. 3: 1), 'the heroic youth who + has no rival'.[13]

In the rhetorically and visually important first line, the approach is different again. Naturally, no flexibility existed as to which signs stood at its beginning, and the panel's schema dictated that they be carved into the left *apkallu*'s wing. They are é.gal ^{m}*aš-šur*-pab-a 'Palace of Assurnasirpal', followed by the initial wedges of the logogram šid. These words, however, reference Aššur and intimate his relationship with the king expressed in Assurnasirpal's name (Pl. 3: 2); where the scribe/sculptor had latitude was in deciding how the line ended. The final word on the right *apkallu*'s wing is *aš-šur*. This could be achieved only because here uniquely two signs were omitted from Adad-Nerari's SI titulary, namely, man šú 'king of the world'[14], and because the enclitic particle *-ma* that follows *aš-šur* was carved beyond the wing's outer line (Pl. 3: 1). References to Aššur, the "all-encompassing divinity" (Maul 2017, 339), therefore, bracket the line. I suggest that this was intended to symbolize both the god's totality as beginning and end (Parpola 2000, 206) and his protective envelopment of the king. If correct, it is a further articulation of their "exclusive relationship" that the god in the winged disk expresses by holding the ring toward the king (Wiggermann 2006-2008, 417).

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[13] The phonetic complement *–ú* stands beyond the wing's outer line.

[14] In his technical study of the SI on the NWP slabs, Caleb Howard (2017, 236, 374, 446) considers this omission parablepsis. It seems unlikely that on the initial line of this key and focal panel, in which special care was taken in carving image and text, the sculptor would be so careless as to truncate Assurnasirpal's grandfather's titulary inadvertently; and, even if this happened, it would be permitted to go uncorrected.

In the foregoing, I imply that the deity in question is Aššur, Assyria's principal god. Scholars are divided, though, on whether B-23 portrays Aššur, the sun-god Šamaš, or Ninurta (Albenda 1972, 176; Magen 1986, 78; Parpola 1997, LXXX-LXXXI; Reade 2002, 200; Roaf 2008, 213; Collon 2010, 161; Bahrani 2014, 119-120; Russell 2017, 472; Pongratz-Leisten 2019, 294; Kertai 2020). While detailed discussion of the question is beyond my scope, some remarks are necessary to justify my position. The B-23 imagetext evinces compelling arguments for identifying the figure as Aššur. The SI enumerates seven deities. The first named and foremost is Aššur (Alstola *et al.* 2019, 162, 170-171). Moreover, it cites Šamaš and Ninurta only once, as against its threefold evocation of Aššur. The scene the relief depicts of the god proffering recognition, support, and empowerment exclusively to the king illustrates the SI's three references to Aššur: Assurnasirpal is 'Aššur's viceroy' (l. 1), that is, his representative on earth (Maul 2017, 341-342; Parpola 2022, 196; Pongratz-Leisten 2022, 236); he is "heroic *eṭlu* who acts with Aššur's support" (l. 2; Zaia 2018, 211); and he affirms that "…Aššur…made my sovereignty supreme" (ll. 5-6) (Pongratz-Leisten 2019).[15] B-23 portrays a deity watching over and protecting Assurnasirpal. According to the destiny heralded in the king's name, this role belonged to Aššur, the name's bestower. Thus, B-23's composite imagery elucidates not only the meaning of the name of its commissioner, whom it prominently portrays, but also the central theological message of the inscription it bears.

B-23 visually and textually narrates the balanced juxtaposition of the king of heaven with the man šú, 'king of the world', and betokens their harmony. By its all-pervasive symmetry, the relief's grand design projects this cosmic concord. On the horizontal plane, *apkallu* is balanced with *apkallu*, inscribed wing with inscribed wing, king with king, tendrils with tendrils, all flanking the central axis of the vertical symmetry of god with tree, heaven with earth, or, when the king was seated on his throne, of heavenly king with earthly king. The symmetry of *apkallu* wings with the wings of the disk above likewise bespeaks celestial-terrestrial harmony. Chaos, signified by asymmetry (Portuese 2023, 89-91), is banished. In the SI's words, "all lands" and "ferocious, merciless kings from east to west" have been subdued by the power that flows upon the earth through the king of Assur's bond with Aššur the king. Cosmic equilibrium is established. No wonder Assurnasirpal called the NWP "the palace of joy" (A.0.101.30 102). Text and image evince further consonance: the heptad of gods named in the SI's

[15] Shana Zaia (2018, 214) remarks, "Ashurnaṣirpal II's inscriptions made it clear that the gods, especially Aššur, played a central role in the transformation of Calah into the king's new capital".

initial section (ll. 1-6) is balanced by a heptad of tree varieties listed in its final section (ll. 15-18). In each set, the most prestigious member is cited first (Foster 2022, 146). The vertical symmetry of god and tree illustrates the symmetry of the text.[16]

Other instances we have examined of text-image iconicity were localized, concerned with specific assignments of text to image. These cases, however, exhibit a 'whole-picture' approach that aligns the entire relief with the essential theology of its inscribed narrative.

Conclusion

This study provides evidence of image-text iconicity in Assurnasirpal's NWP reliefs, which operates in two registers: the whole picture and the localized. The latter includes the isolation of selected signs, which may or may not bear the values they denote in the SI narrative. The insertion of Shalmaneser's name and royal epithet into the base of Assurnasirpal's throne in G-3 at the point in the SI that describes Shalmaneser's founding of Kalhu demonstrates text-image iconicity, in which the SI's meaning is conveyed and illustrated by the isolated text. The same obtains for the incorporation of certain key phrases of the SI in the *apkallu*s' wings in B-23, though here the signs are not notably isolated. On that panel, signs on the tree and the left mace exemplify the variant approach: the artful manipulation of cuneiform polyvalence to *name* the inscribed images. All the B-23 cases reflect aspects of a theology that asserts the divine selection, naming, protection, and 'making supreme' of Assurnasirpal the NWP's creator. Text co-communicates with imagery the relief's core message that the numinous realm is actuating his destiny, the destiny promised by Aššur precisely by his *naming*. Viewed in this light, the image portrayed on B-23 illustrates the meaning and fulfillment of Assurnasirpal's name, of the god Aššur watching over and protecting his son, Assyria's king (Maul 2017, 338).

[16] Like the trees that Assurnasirpal introduced into the NWP to strengthen and beautify it, so he invited "Aššur the great lord and the gods of the entire land into the palace of all wisdom" (A.0.101.30 25-29, 103-104; Hurowitz 2014, 95) to protect and adorn it.

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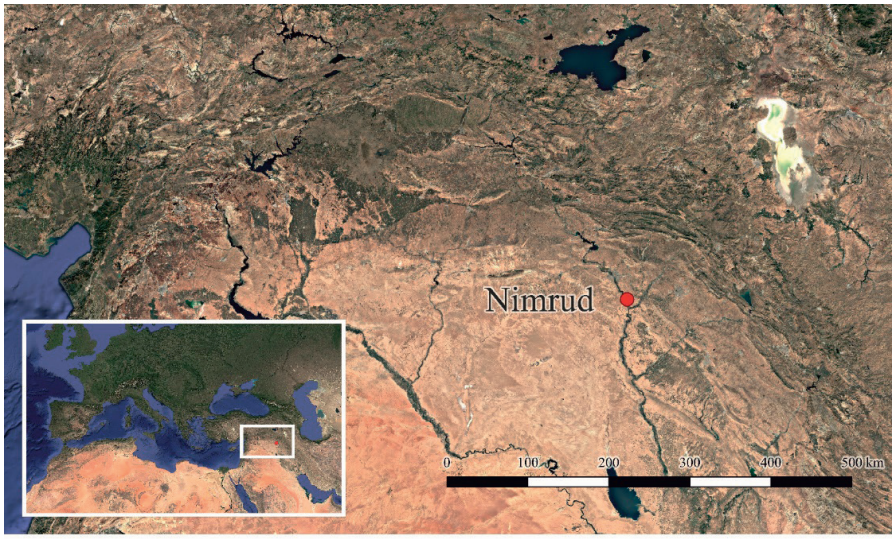
Robin Baker
University of Winchester
robin.baker@winchester.ac.uk

PLATE 1



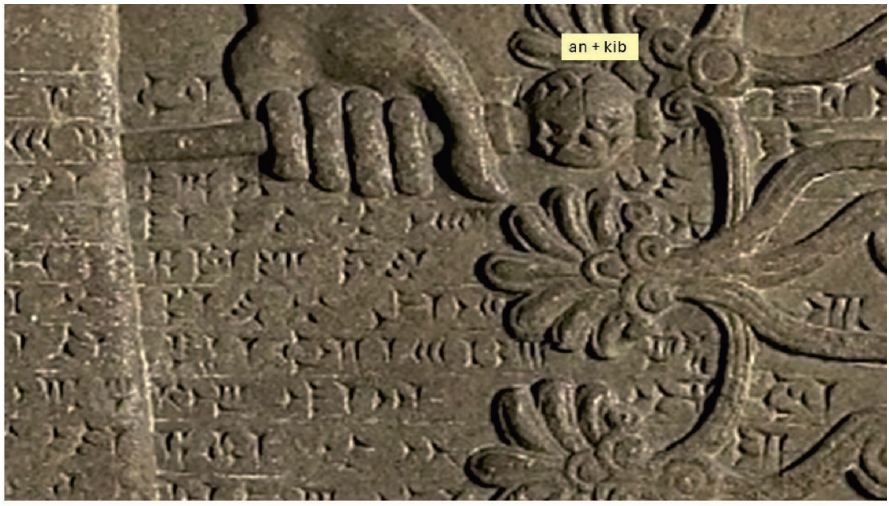
1

2

Pl. 1: 1 – Map showing the location of Nimrud (Author: Kamila Niziołek)

Pl. 2: 1 – Panel B-23 (BM 124531), Northwest Palace, Kalhu/ Nimrud. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum

PLATE 2



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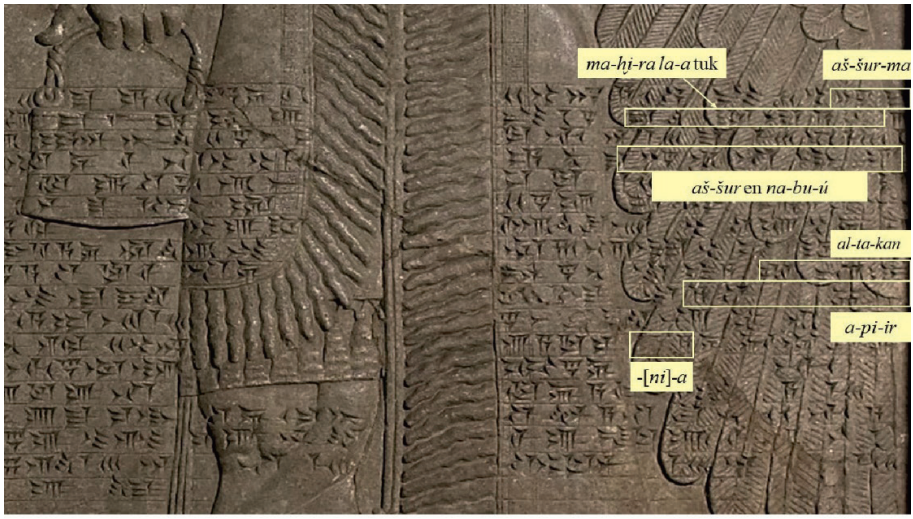
2

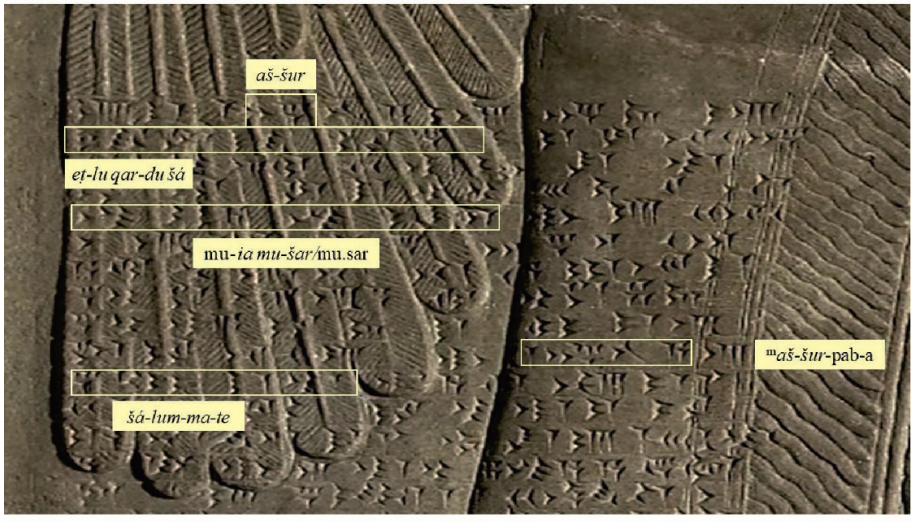
Pl. 2: 1 – Panel B-23 detail. Mace (left). Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum

Pl. 2: 2 – Panel B-23 detail. Mace (right). Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum

PLATE 3



1



2

Pl. 3: 1 – Panel B-23 detail right side. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum

Pl. 3: 2 – Panel B-23 detail left side. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum