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How did the Neo-Assyrian King Perceive his Land and its Resources?

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Slightly modifying the topic originally suggested to me by the organisers of this symposium, I will not discuss "how the Assyrian King perceived his land and its resources," but attempt to investigate "how the Neo-Assyrian king perceived his land and its resources" in the present paper. Focusing on the Neo-Assyrian period is, I think, justified by the sources which in that age are more diverse than in the preceding periods. It should be noted, however, that the Neo-Assyrian kings' views on land can be expected to reflect their predecessors' as the attitude towards land tends to be determined by tradition to a large extent.

I am aware of the limited possibilities at our disposal to find answers to the question "how the Neo-Assyrian king perceived his land and its resources" as no king, and indeed nobody else, from that period left a treatise elaborating on his personal views on the matter. However, we are in the fortunate position to command a variety of different sources which at least allow us to attempt an approximation of the king's attitude towards his land and its resources. The royal inscriptions are probably our most informative source. But as they illustrate the way in which the king chose to portray himself and his actions they do not necessarily reflect the way he actually thought and acted.[1] The same is true for our second source, the royal grants and decrees with which privileges were bestowed upon individuals and temples. A more unbiased view may be found in our third source, the correspondence between the king and his officials. However, as authors and addressees were familiar with the overall situation, the letters do not offer much general information, but primarily deal with specific details. Another important source is the visual record left, most prominently the reliefs found in the Neo-Assyrian palaces. On these reliefs close attention is paid to the depiction of landscape.

By combining the information gathered from these sources, we may try to approximate the king's views on land and its resources. For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on two kings, Sargon II (721-705 BC) and Sennacherib (704-681 BC), as texts covering all the aforementioned categories as well as reliefs have survived from the reigns of these kings.[2] Both Sargon and Sennacherib had new residence cities built, the first Dur-Šarrukin and the latter Nineveh; in their inscriptions they explain why they chose to do this. These passages contain the most personal accounts on how these Assyrian kings saw their land and its potential. While Sargon relishes the thought that none of his predecessors, 350 in number, had realised the great promise shown by the

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1 On the difficulties of using royal inscriptions as a source for a characterisation of a king see recently E. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*. AfO Beiheft 26, Vienna 1997, 19.

2 But note that no letters from the reign of Sennacherib have survived.

city of Maganuba which he had chosen as a location for his residence Dur-Šarrukin,[3] Sennacherib takes pride in being the one to raise the ancient city of Nineveh to the eminent position it had so long deserved.[4]

I

As a first step to approximate the Assyrian kings' attitude towards land a reaction to a recent description of this attitude as that of a dominant male penetrating a passive female is called for.

In an attempt to interpret the landscape imagery of the Assyrian reliefs, modelled after interpretative work on sixteenth century Italian and seventeenth century Dutch landscape paintings, M. I. Marcus, claiming that "*it seems worthwhile exploring the radical idea that the Assyrian imperial "landscapes" were likewise expressions of (male) sexual anxieties and ideologies – expressions of (royal) manhood in the face of Nature, seen as female and Other*,"[5] tries to connect Assyrian territorial conquest, characterised as "*penetration followed by possession*," with "*male (hetero)sexual anxieties*."[6] She comes to the conclusion that "*all of this imagery implies a double desire by the king and state: to dominate the land as a man might dominate a woman*."[7] While it is clear that the Assyrian king indeed wished to master the land the sources hardly lend themselves to the equation with a sexual relationship between a dominant male and a passive female. As sexual connotations are entirely missing both in the written and in the visual accounts on the Assyrian conquests,[8] Marcus' approach may be less radical than rather unduly influenced by pre-conceived notions about the nature of Assyrian imperialism as well as her theoretical framework.[9] Especially the idea that the Assyrians

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3 Inschrift auf den Tonzylindern:44-47, see A. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad*, Göttingen 1994, 38f and 293; Inschrift auf den Stierkolossen:43-46, see Fuchs l.c. 67 and 304f; Kleine Prunkinschrift des Saales XIV:29f; see Fuchs l.c. 78 and 309f.

4 D. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*. OIP 2, Chicago 1924, 80: H 3:17f and 94f: A 1:63-70.

5 M. I. Marcus, "Geography as Visual Ideology: Landscape, Knowledge, and Power in Neo-Assyrian Art," *Neo-Assyrian Geography*. QGS 5, ed. M. Liverani, Rome 1995, 200.

6 Marcus l.c. 202.

7 Marcus l.c. 202.

8 Quite on the contrary, it is noteworthy that depiction of sexual violence of Assyrian soldiers against women and children are altogether missing although abuse certainly took place. This is even more remarkable as the Assyrian stonemasons were perfectly able to portray extreme physical violence in all its horror, cf. the detailed depiction of skinning, impaling and decapitation. The reluctance to make sexual violence and sexuality the subject of art and literature is certainly a topic worthy of further study. Note that the scene on an Assurbanipal relief quoted by Marcus (1995:202 with n. 66) as showing a rape scene (cf. also J. Reade's subtitle for the illustration "*rape of Arab woman*" in S. Parpola and K. Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*. SAA 2, Helsinki 1988, 47 fig. 13) shows two Assyrian soldiers brutally manhandling a (fully clothed) captive in a tent; although this may well have led to a rape the scene can hardly be described as depicting one.

9 Cf. also the review of A. Fuchs, AfO 44/45 (1997/98) 408.

equated the land with the female and the female body cannot be supported at all.[10] Note also that the Assyrians called their country Aššur, after their male god.[11]

II

Recently J. Reade and I. J. Finkel[12] have suggested to interpret a sequence of symbols depicted repeatedly on glazed-brick reliefs and bronze appliqués of Sargon's buildings in Dur-Šarrukin and a similar sequence found on Esarhaddon's so-called Black Stone[13] and on some of his prisms as hieroglyphic writings of these kings' names and titles.[14] In Sargon's sequence, the combination of a fig-tree and a seeder-plough is supposed to stand for "the country of Assyria" (fig. 1) while in Esarhaddon's sequence the combination of a seeder-plough and a date-palm stands for "Assyria and Babylonia" (fig. 2).

The symbols chosen to represent the countries stress the importance of agriculture and horticulture. In our study of the king's attitude towards his land, we shall highlight the king's role as farmer and as gardener, a role which is both propagated in those sources promoting the king's self-image but also emphasised in less biased texts.

III

When a bad omen threatening the king's well-being made it necessary that the country was *pro forma* ruled by a substitute king (*šar pūhi*),[15] the king adopted the title of a "farmer"[16] and, bearing this title, carried on his functions. The title cannot be explained

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10 Marcus l.c. 200, using, e.g., "*the European imperialist tradition of naming colonial territories after women*" as a comparison.

11 See W. G. Lambert, "The God Aššur," Iraq 45 (1983) 82-86 on the nature of the god.

12 I. Finkel and J. Reade, "Assyrian Hieroglyphs," ZA 86 (1996) 244-268; see already J. Reade, "The Khorsabad Glazed Bricks and Their Symbolism," *Khorsabad, le palais de Sargon II, roi d'Assyrie*, ed. A. Caubet, Paris 1995, 235 with 248 fig. 12 and 250 fig. 14 and compare the additional remarks of J. A. Scurlock, "Assyrian Hieroglyphs Enhanced," NABU 1997/92.

13 The Black Stone, also known as Lord Aberdeen's Stone, currently kept in the British Museum (BM 91027), has received a lot of attention during the last few years. Aside from adorning the cover of L. Kataja and R. Whiting, *Grants, Decrees and Gifts of the Neo-Assyrian Period.* SAA 12, Helsinki 1995, the stele and its decoration has been studied by B. N. Porter, "Conquest or Kudurru's? A Note on Peaceful Strategies of Assyrian Government," *The Tablet and the Scroll. Fs. W. W. Hallo*, ed. M. Cohen *et al.*, Bethesda 1993, 194-197 and by P. A. Miglus, "«Der Stein des Grafen von Aberdeen»: Interpretation eines assyrischen Flachbildes," *Beiträge zur Altorientalischen Archäologie und Altertumskunde. Fs. B. Hrouda*, ed. P. Calmeyer *et al.*, Wiesbaden 1994, 179-191.

14 Finkel and Reade l.c. 257f rather convincingly interpret the term *lumāšu* as the word for "hieroglyph." They explain the emergence of the Assyrian hieroglyphs as a deliberate imitation of the Egyptian writing system (l.c. 245f).

15 On the substitute king ritual see S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. Part IIA: Introduction and Appendixes*, Kevelaer and Neukirchen-Vluyn 1971, 54-65 and S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal. Part II: Commentary and Appendices.* AOAT 5/II, Kevelaer and Neukirchen-Vluyn 1983, xxii-xxxii.

16 Whether the logogram LÚ.ENGAR is to be read *ikkāru* or possibly rather *qatinnu* in Neo-Assyrian cannot be decided with certainty at present, see K. Radner, *Ein Privatarchiv der neuassyrischen Goldschmiede von Assur.* StAT 1, Saarbrücken 1999, 114f.

by *Rollentausch* between the king and his substitute alone as calling the king "beggar" or "fool" would have served that purpose just the same, if not better.[17] It seems more likely to me that the title of a "farmer" was chosen because it reflected one of the king's supreme duties and primary concerns, the cultivation of land.[18]

Rain was always good news for the king, as witnessed by a letter written by Issar-duri, the governor of Arrapha, to Sargon: "It has rained a lot. The harvest will be good. The king, my lord, can be glad."[19] Another letter[20] which is unfortunately very broken is concerned with more alarming news: the river running past Samaria in Palestine had dried up and the area was facing a period of severe drought. Rain which was so essential but just as impossible to control was therefore considered a divine blessing of the highest level which is best illustrated by Sargon's inscription on the threshold of the temple of the storm-god Adad in Dur-Šarrukin:[21]

"O Adad, canal inspector of heaven and earth who illuminates the sanctuaries, for Sargon, king of the world, king of Assyria, governor of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, the builder of your sanctuary, bring rain from the sky and flood from the springs, amass corn and oil in its (i.e., the city of Dur-Šarrukin's) surroundings, let your subjects graze in the meadows in plenty and abundance, strengthen the foundation of his (i.e., Sargon's) throne (and) let his reign last for long!"

It is usually thought that rainfalls of a minimum of 200 mm *per annum* are needed for rainfed agriculture. A glimpse at a modern map shows that although most of the Assyrian heartland with the cities Nineveh, Kalhu and Dur-Šarrukin is situated within this area, a large part of the empire, including the city of Assur and most of the Jezireh, is outside it. Most of this land is steppe land. In the inscriptions, composed in the Standard Babylonian dialect, the synonyms *namû* and *madbaru* are used to denote steppe land whereas in the texts written in Neo-Assyrian such as letters, legal and administrative documents only the term *mudaburu*[22] is employed. Steppe land could always be used for grazing the herds[23] but cultivated only when the rainfalls were sufficient. For this reason the region has been dubbed the risk or uncertainty zone[24] by modern researchers.[25]

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17 The title has nothing to do with the original profession of the substitute king as he could be anybody whose life could be dispensed with (he was subsequently killed).

18 For a study of the Neo-Assyrian vocabulary on land cultivation as found in the legal documents see F. M. Fales, "The Rural Landscape of the Neo-Assyrian Empire: A Survey," SAAB 4 (1990) 81-142.

19 ABL 157 r. 7-11: A AN.MEŠ *ma-a²-da* (8) *a-dan-niš i-ta-lak* (9) $BURU_{14}$ *de-e-qe* (10) ŠÀ-*bi ša* LUGAL *be-lí-ia* (11) *lu-u* DÙG.GA.

20 CT 53 458 = SAA 1 255.

21 A. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad*, Göttingen 1994, 282 and 370.

22 Neo-Assyrian for *madbaru*.

23 ABL 547 = SAA 1 82 illustrates the tensions between the semi-nomads grazing their herds in the Jezirah and the sedentary population of Assur whose relations with each other were especially fragile at times of hunger.

24 See, e.g., H. Kühne, *Die rezente Umwelt von Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad und Daten zur Umweltrekonstruktion der assyrischen Stadt Dūr-Katlimmu*. BATSH 1, Berlin 1991, 28.

25 The evaluation of the large archive found in 1998 in the so-called Red House in Dur-Katlimmu (mod. Tall Šēḫ Ḥamad) on the river Habur promises for the first time the possibility to gain insights into the economics of a major Neo-Assyrian city situated in the risk zone. Although the city of Assur is today situated outside the 200 mm *per annum* border, the texts from this city offer little information on

The Assyrian kings tried to reduce the risk in the uncertainty zone and to raise the yield of the arable land in general by supplementing rainfed irrigation with artificial irrigation by means of wells and canals. The importance of this task is stressed in the foundation inscription of the New Year festival house in Assur in which Sennacherib calls himself the one "who causes canals to be dug, who opens wells, who causes irrigation-ditches to murmur, who establishes plenty and abundance in the wide regions of Assyria, who puts irrigation water inside of Assyria."[26] Sennacherib bore this title with full right as, other such enterprises aside, he had five major irrigation projects completed for providing the Nineveh area with water in order to guarantee maximum profitability.[27]

Whereas Sennacherib's irrigation projects for the Nineveh area were necessitated by the need to provide an over-sized metropolis[28] with the means to produce enough food to function properly without being overly dependent on imports from the provinces, the situation in the rest of the empire was rather different. Although a number of fairly big cities existed, Assyria was essentially a rural, not an urban country. As various surveys in northern Mesopotamia have shown the country was covered by a multitude of settlements in the Neo-Assyrian period, most of them rather small.[29] The same situation is found in the textual record, most explicitly in the texts of the so-called Harran Census which are possibly to be dated to the reign of Sargon.[30] To quote F. M. Fales, "*No urban sites appear directly in the texts: the listed real estate pertains to the rural world of the village and the hamlet* (kapru), *which may at best be located* (ina) qanni, *'near' a larger town or a city, but on the other hand may be deep* ina madbar, *'in the steppe,' its sole reference being a particular province.*"[31]

Wherever possible, steps to convert steppe lands into arable land were taken. A good illustration of this is provided by a letter written by Nabû-šumu-iddina, the governor of

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artificial irrigation; an exception is the reference to Sennacherib's construction of a canal with the name "The one that purifies the New Year festival" feeding the gardens of the New Year festival house, see VAT 9656 = SAA 12 86:19. Note that in the building inscription of the New Year festival house, KAH 2 122, Sennacherib says that he had two canals dug in order to irrigate the gardens, see D. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*. OIP 2, Chicago 1924, 137: I 2:33-35.

26 KAH 2 122:11-14, see Luckenbill l.c. 135 (I 2) and cf. M. Liverani, "Critique of Variants and the Titulary of Sennacherib," *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons in Literary, Ideological, and Historical Analysis*. Orientis Antiqui Collectio XVII, ed. F. M. Fales, Rome 1981, 248f.

27 See in detail J. E. Reade, "Studies in Assyrian Geography. Part I: Sennacherib and the Waters of Nineveh," RA 72 (1978) 47-72, 157-180 and cf. E. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*. AfO Beiheft 26, Vienna 1997, 13.

28 Nineveh was much larger than any other Assyrian city; thanks to O. Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries in the Ancient Near East, 1500-300 B.C.*, Bethesda 1998, the size of Nineveh (p. 159: Plan 74) can now easily compared with that of various other Neo-Assyrian cities: Assur (p. 133: Plan 62), Kalhu (p. 144: Plan 66), Dur-Šarrukin (p. 156: Plan 72), Imgur-Illil (p. 166: Plan 77), Šibaniba (p. 168: Plan 79), Dur-Katlimmu (p. 170, Plan 80), Guzana (p. 173: Plan 82), Til-Barsip (p. 176: Plan 84), Burmarina (p. 178: Plan 86) and Huzirina (p. 179: Plan 87).

29 T. J. Wilkinson, "Late-Assyrian Settlement Geography in Upper Mesopotamia," *Neo-Assyrian Geography*. QGS 5, ed. M. Liverani, Rome 1995, 139-159.

30 The texts of the Harran Census, originally published by C. H. W. Johns and later edited by F. M. Fales, were recently re-edited as SAA 11 200-219.

31 F. M. Fales and J. N. Postgate, *Imperial Administrative Records, Part II. Provincial and Military Administration*. SAA 11, Helsinki 1995, xxxi.

Lahiru in northern Babylonia, to Sargon:[32] "Concerning what the king, my lord, wrote to me: '[Sur]vey in detail the surroundings [of] the fort in regard to cultivating the ste[ppe]!' I have surveyed it: it is very resourceful." That the cultivation of barren land was one of the king's primary concerns is made abundantly clear in Sargon's prism inscription:[33]

"The well versed king, who constantly considers plans of good things and who directs his attention to the settlement of desolate steppes, to the cultivation of fallow land and to the plantation of fruit groves, contemplated causing steep rocks, from which never before green had sprouted, to produce yield. He had in mind to let furrows arise in waste barren land which had not known the plough under the previous kings, to let the work song resound, to open a spring as a *karattu* in an area without well and have (everything) irrigated in abundance from top to bottom (with) water, like with the masses of the flood (of a river in spring)."

The cultivation of barren land was either achieved with the work power of the local population or of deportees who were settled in the area at the same time. Sargon reports in his inscriptions that he had people from the country of Kummuhi in Anatolia (classical Commagene) brought to Bit-Iakin in Babylonia where they were settled and where they cultivated the barren land.[34] This method is also well documented in the letters from the royal correspondence. Hence we read in a letter written by Bel-liqbi, the governor of Ṣupat in Syria (possibly mod. Homs), to Sargon:[35] "The town of Hêsa, a road station of mine, lacks people; the postmaster and the commander of the recruits are there alone and cannot attend to it. Now, let me get together thirty families and place them there. There are men of the prefect Nabû-uṣalla living in Hêsa, a cohort of craftsmen; let him move them out, settle them in the town of Argite, and give them fields and gardens." Note that it was clearly seen as a priority to have the population of a conquered country return to their fields as quickly as possible. Nabû-hamatu$^{\supset}$a, the deputy governor of Mazamua, reported to Sargon on the orders he gave to the people from the newly conquered country of Allabria:[36] "[I said]: 'Do your work, each in [his house and] field, and be glad; you are now subjects of the king.' They are peaceful and do their work. I have brought them out from six forts, saying: 'Go! Each of you should build (a house) in the field and stay there!'"

IV

The Assyrian kings' keen interest in plants and trees is illustrated by the detailed depiction of plants in their reliefs.[37] So naturalistic is the representation of the flora that it is possible to identify geographic regions with its help. But the kings did not only

32 ABL 685:12-15: *ša* LUGAL *be-lí iš-pur-an-ni* (13) [*ma*]-*a* TA *šid-di ar-ki ina bat-bat-ti* (14) [*ša*] URU.HAL.ṢU *a-na a-ra-si ša* KUR.*mu*-[*da-bir*] (15) [*a-mu*]*r a-ta-mar ma-a*$^{\supset}$*-da a-dan-niš*.

33 Inschrift auf den Tonzylindern:34-37, see A. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad*, Göttingen 1994, 37 and 292.

34 Annalen:378-381, see Fuchs l.c. 169f and 335; Große Prunkinschrift:137-139, see Fuchs l.c. 229f and 351f.

35 ABL 414 = SAA 1 177.

36 ABL 208 = SAA 5 210.

37 See E. Bleibtreu, *Die Flora der neuassyrischen Reliefs*. WZKM/S 1, Vienna 1980.

reconstruct foreign landscapes in their reliefs; they also brought them into Assyria by laying out parks in their residence cities.

The first Assyrian king to bring back trees from the conquered lands to Assyria was Tiglath-pileser I (1114-1067); in any case, he is the first to mention this in his inscriptions and he prides himself in the fact that "I took cedar, box-tree (and) Kanish oak from the lands over which I had gained dominion, such trees which none among the previous kings, my forefathers, had ever planted, and I planted (them) in the orchards of my land; I took rare orchard fruit which is not found in my land (and) filled the orchards of Assyria."[38] When Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC) had exhaustive building work performed in Kalhu in order to make the town his new residence city, he also had numerous kinds of trees which he previously had encountered on his campaigns planted in the new pleasure gardens in the Tigris meadows, giving a detailed list of the 41 varieties of trees in one of his inscriptions, the famous Banquet Stela.[39] The gardens were irrigated with the help of a newly constructed canal dug from the Upper Zab named "Canal of plenty" (*patti hegalli*).

Sargon had extensive gardens built around Dur-Šarrukin of which his inscriptions, a number of letters from the royal correspondence and scenes on his reliefs in the palace of Dur-Šarrukin (fig. 3)[40] bear witness. Sargon states in his inscriptions that the model for the park in Dur-Šarrukin was the Amanus mountain range: "Around it (i.e. the city) I constructed a park, an exact replica of the Amanus mountains, in which all the aromatic plants of the Hatti land and the fruit trees of every mountain are planted."[41] The letters illustrate how several thousands of plants were brought in, especially from the region of the Habur and the Middle Euphrates, but also from Assyria's northern border.[42] An enterprise of such dimensions necessarily needed a great deal of organisation and planning in advance. As a letter from the governor of Kalhu to the king shows, plans were used to construct the gardens.[43]

The most famous among the royal Assyrian horticulturists is, however, Sargon's son and successor Sennacherib who had lavish gardens designed in Nineveh. In his

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38 A. K. Grayson, Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millenium BC I (1114-859 BC). RIMA 2, Toronto 1991, 27: A.0.87.1 vii 17-27.

39 Grayson l.c. 290: RIMA 2 A.0.101.30: 36b-52.

40 See the relief sequence of room 7, especially the slabs 12-13, see P. E. Botta and E. Flandin, *Monument de Ninive II*, Paris 1849, pl. 114 and P. Albenda, *The Palace of Sargon King of Assyria*. Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations. Synthèse 22, Paris 1986, pl. 89-90; cf. also S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I. Letters from Assyria and the West*. SAA 1, Helsinki 1987, 64 fig. 23 and Bleibtreu l.c. 102 Abb. 34 (side-inverted!) and 110 Abb. 40.

41 Inschrift auf den Stierkolossen:41f, see Fuchs l.c. 66f and 304. Kleine Prunkinschrift des Saales XIV:28f, see Fuchs l.c. 78 and 309.

42 ABL 938 = SAA 1 222 (tree saplings from Šadikanni), ABL 813 = SAA 1 226 (tree saplings from Nemed-Issar, Suhu and Laqê), ABL 814 = SAA 1 227 (tree saplings from Nemed-Issar), ABL 510 = SAA 5 27 (tree saplings from the northern border, possibly from Tidu), ABL 544 = SAA 5 105 (tree saplings from Tamnuna), CT 53 836 = SAA 5 268 (tree saplings of unknown provenance), CT 53 36 = SAA 5 281 (tree saplings from Šuru in the Ṭur Abdin region), see also S. Parpola, "The Construction of Dur-Šarrukin in the Assyrian Royal Correspondence," *Khorsabad, le palais de Sargon II, roi d'Assyrie*, ed. A. Caubet, Paris 1995, 58f.

43 NL 16 = SAA 1 110; it is not entirely clear whether this letter refers to the park around Dur-Šarrukin or to another garden project, see Parpola l.c. 74 n. 70.

inscriptions he gives extremely detailed descriptions of them.[44] Whereas Sargon attempted to bring the lush landscape of the northern Syrian mountain regions to Assyria, Sennacherib tried to recreate not only this paradise-like environment, but also the southern Babylonian marsh landscape in Nineveh.[45] As S. Dalley has shown his gardens, which are depicted in an Assurbanipal relief (fig. 4),[46] were supported by an innovative irrigation system using the so-called Archimedes' screw. The story of the Hanging Gardens of the fabled Queen Semiramis of Babylon, praised as one of the wonders of the world in classical antiquity, may well be merely a distorted recollection of Sennacherib's pseudo-Babylonian park.[47] But Sennacherib had other gardens built as well, such as the one surrounding the New Year festival house erected in the steppe outside the city of Assur. In a royal decree dedicating personnel to this temple Sennacherib describes the garden: "I encircled it (i.e. the New Year festival house) with [trees] of the orchard, all kinds of fruit trees and aromatic plants, as with a garland."[48]

The Assyrian kings used their parks as recreational areas. K. Deller[49] was able to show that the Neo-Assyrian term for the bowery of vines depicted in the famous scene on an Assurbanipal relief, dubbed "Assurbanipal in der Gartenlaube" by modern scholars (fig. 5),[50] was *qersu*. The combination of textual and visual sources illustrates how the king and his closest confidants retreated to this bowery to find relaxation and peace.[51] If access to the king's bowery was strictly denied to unwanted visitors, a letter to Sargon shows how officials would speculate to find the king accessible in the surroundings of his parks.[52]

But the gardens were not only meant for the enjoyment of the king. As Sennacherib states in his inscriptions he gave part of the garden land, subdivided in plots of a size of two *pānū* each, to the people of Nineveh so that they could have orchards of their own.[53]

It may seem that the image of the Assyrian kings as patrons of horticulture contrasts sharply with their frequently used war strategy to destroy the enemies' orchards. Both the accounts in the inscriptions as well as the depiction on the reliefs bear witness to the devastation of fruit groves by ruthlessly cutting down trees.[54] But the use of tree

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44 For attestations see E. Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sanherib-Inschriften*. AfO Beiheft 26, Vienna 1997, 269 sub 32) and cf. 277f.

45 J. A. Brinkman, "Reflections on the Geography of Babylonia (1000-600 B.C.)," *Neo-Assyrian Geography*. QGS 5, ed. M. Liverani, Rome 1995, 29.

46 BM 124939, see S. Dalley, "Nineveh, Babylon and the Hanging Gardens: Cuneiform and Classical Sources Reconciled," Iraq 56 (1994) 51 fig. 1.

47 Dalley l.c. 45-58 and see also S. Dalley, "The Hanging Gardens of Babylon at Nineveh," *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten*. HSAO 6 (= CRRA 39), ed. H. Hauptmann and H. Waetzoldt, Heidelberg 1997, 19-24.

48 VAT 9656 = SAA 12 86:20, cf. D. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*. OIP 2, Chicago 1924, 137: KAH 2 122 = I 2:34f.

49 K. Deller, "Assurbanipal in der Gartenlaube," BaM 18 (1987) 229-238.

50 BM 124920, see Deller l.c. pl. 13 for a reproduction of the relief and l.c. 229 n. 3 and n. 7 for the most important earlier literature.

51 Deller l.c. 238.

52 ABL 843 = SAA 1 160:4-9: "[I] stood [alongside] the king's road, [in fron]t of the gardens, but the king did not pay attention to me, speaking as he was with Raṣappaiu."

53 D. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*. OIP 2, Chicago 1924, 97: A 1:88 and 101: B 1:58.

54 See S. W. Cole, "The Destruction of Orchards in Assyrian Warfare," *Assyria 1995*, ed. S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting, Helsinki 1997, 29-40 for a survey of the textual and visual sources; cf. also B.

destruction in war was the other side of the Assyrian kings' love for horticulture. As they deeply appreciated trees and their gifts to mankind they perfectly understood how to use their destruction as an instrument of terror. As S. Cole was able to show, orchards were not destroyed at once but the precious trees which take decades to reach maturity were gradually cut down one by one in order to persuade the inhabitants of a besieged city to surrender.

V

We may conclude that the Assyrian kings, being familiar with regions where agriculture and horticulture were a matter of course, were aware of the possibilities to create a similar environment in less fortunate areas and were eager to optimise the land at their disposal. Big cultivation projects in the steppe and large scale landscape gardening were the direct results of the kings' role as supreme farmer and gardener.

But whereas the kings portrayed themselves as the masters of earth in their inscriptions, stressing how they conquered deserts, mountains and oceans, cultivated barren lands and connected distant parts of the world by constructing cities, canals, bridges and roads, they were at the same time well aware of the fact that it was impossible to fully dominate nature with manpower and advanced engineering. With these means alone, plagues such as epidemics[55] and locust swarms[56] and natural disasters such as flooding,[57] storms[58] and earthquakes[59] were impossible to control.

The king[60] tried to prevent such catastrophes preferably before they even came into existence. Information on them was collected with the help of a diversity of scholars who interpreted astronomical and terrestrial omens gained from watching the skies, analysing sheep livers and generally keeping the eyes open for any kind of unusual event. Once the impending danger was detected, the scholars endeavoured to prevent the catastrophe's

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Oded, "Cutting Down Orchards in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions – The Historiographic Aspect," JAC 12 (1997) 93-98.

55 Such as the one reported in NL 18 = SAA 1 171 to Sargon.

56 Locust swarms are reported in several letters of Sargon's correspondence: ABL 1015 = SAA 1 103, CTN 2 240 = SAA 1 104, ABL 910 = SAA 1 221, cf. also NL 103. Sennacherib compares his enemies who constantly engaged him in battle with the onset of locust swarms in spring, see D. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*. OIP 2, Chicago 1924, 43: H 2 v 56.

57 A report by the crown prince Sennacherib to his father Sargon on flooding in central Assyria is found in the letter ABL 713 = SAA 1 36. Sennacherib quotes the heavy storms and the dangers caused by the swollen mountain rivers as the reason for the termination of his seventh campaign in 693 against Elam, see Luckenbill l.c. 41: H 2 v 7-11. See also F. M. Fales, "Rivers in Neo-Assyrian Geography," *Neo-Assyrian Geography*. QGS 5, ed. M. Liverani, Rome 1995, 205f.

58 A storm which destroyed a camp is reported to Sargon in the letter CT 53 197 = SAA 5 249. The Assyrian kings compared the destructive force of their army frequently with that of a storm, for references in Sargon's and Sennacherib's inscriptions see A. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad*, Göttingen 1994, 150 and 330: Annalen:296, and Luckenbill l.c. 28: H 2 ii 15.

59 For a report on an earthquake at Dur-Šarrukin see ABL 191 = SAA 1 125. The subject has been recently studied by A. Fadhil, "Erdbeben im Alten Orient," BaM 24 (1993) 271-278.

60 Whereas all known letters and reports from scholars to the king date into the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, it is clear that also their predecessors used the service of scholars, see, e.g., the letter ABL 1216 = SAA 10 109 for a reference to the activity of scholars under Sennacherib.

realisation with the help of the appropriate rituals.[61] While modern man may be reluctant to put faith in these measures they certainly succeeded in comforting the Assyrian king and his people. The general awareness of possible catastrophes alone will have contributed its share to restrict the damages once they took place.

VI

As a conclusion to this paper we shall briefly touch upon the role of the Assyrian king as the supreme landlord by summarising how he both administered and held together his land by distributing it among officials, temples and soldiers without ceding the absolute titles to it.

The character of land tenure in the Neo-Assyrian period was the direct result of the developments in the Middle-Assyrian period.[62] Whatever the exact nature of the evolution of land tenure, by the first millennium landed property could not only be owned by the king (i.e., the state), but also by private individuals, individually or jointly. There is no direct evidence for land owned by cities and villages. However, as the organisation of concerted use of agricultural land must have been one of the major responsibilities of the municipal government, the community's importance in respect to landed property should not be underestimated[63] and it seems that the consent of the municipal government was needed for the transfer of ownership within the community's jurisdiction.[64] Unless the king granted tax exemption,[65] the tenure of land was linked to the duty to pay taxes, specifically the *šibšu* tax on corn and the *nusāhē* tax on straw.[66]

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61 See most recently S. M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung: eine Untersuchung altorientalischen Denkens anhand der babylonisch-assyrischen Löserituale (Namburbi)*. BaF 18, Mainz 1994, especially chapters II. and III.

62 J. Pečírková, "On Land Tenure in Assyria," *Fs. L. Matouš* II, ed. B. Hruška and G. Komoróczy, Budapest 1978, 187-200 summarises the different opinions of various scholars, notably Diakonoff, Garelli, Jankowska and Postgate, on Assyrian land tenure and its evolution. See further F. M. Fales, "A Survey of Neo-Assyrian Land Sales," *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East*, ed. T. Khalidi, Beirut 1984, 1-13 and "The Neo-Assyrian Period," *Circulation of Goods in Non-Palatial Context in the Ancient Near East*. Incunabula Graeca 82, ed. A. Archi, Rome 1984, 207-220, J. N. Postgate, "The Economic Structure of the Assyrian Empire," *Power and Propaganda. A Symposium on Ancient Empires*. Mesopotamia 7, ed. M. T. Larsen, Copenhagen 1979, 193-221, "*ilku* and Land Tenure in the Middle Assyrian Kingdom - A Second Attempt," *Societies and Languages of the Ancient Near East. Fs. I. M. Diakonoff*, ed. M. A. Dandamayev *et al.*, Warminster 1982, 304-313 and "The Ownership and Exploitation of Land in Assyria in the 1st Millennium B. C.," *Reflets des Deux Fleuves. Fs. A. Finet*. Akkadica Supplementum 6, ed. M. Lebeau and Ph. Talon, Louvain 1989, 141-152 (= "Grundeigentum und Nutzung von Land in Assyrien," *Grundeigentum in Mesopotamien*. Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte 1987/S, ed. B. Brentjes, Berlin 1988, 89-110).

63 Cf. J. N. Postgate, Akkadica Supplementum 6, 144.

64 This can be shown best in the case of property within the city of Assur: the sale documents not only have to be sealed by the seller, but also by the city officials, see E. Klengel-Brandt and K. Radner, "Die Stadtbeamten von Assur und ihre Siegel," *Assyria 1995*, ed. S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting, Helsinki 1997, 137-143. According to CTN 2 44, a text from Kalhu, a building plot is bought and the mayor (*hazannu*) of the city of [...] seals the text alongside with the seller, see l.c. 138.

65 Postgate l.c. 149f.

66 On *šibšu* and *nusāhē* see J. N. Postgate, *Taxation and Conscription in the Assyrian Empire*. Studia Pohl SM 3, Rome 1974, 174-18 and P. Garelli, "Le système fiscal de l'empire assyrien," *Points de vue sur la fiscalité antique*, ed. H. van Effenterre, Paris 1979, 11f.

Although privately owned land existed and could be freely bought and sold, the majority of the land was owned by the state, especially as newly conquered and newly cultivated land automatically belonged to the king. However, the king chose to cede the possessory rights of large quantities of land to officials, temples and soldiers. By distributing state-owned land to have it worked without giving up the absolute titles to it the central administration was greatly relieved and at the same time the emergence of independent great landowners who would endanger the absolute power of the king was prevented.

State-owned land given as maintainance land, called *ma'uttu*,[67] to the holder of an office such as a provincial governor was the primary means to sustain the administration. Maintainance lands are also attested for such institutions as the royal tombs in Assur.[68] While a fixed share of these estates' yield had to be handed over to the state to support the central administration the remaining share was to sustain the holder's office. This is especially clear from a letter to Sargon,[69] written by a dismayed provincial official who could not see how he should be able to provide the state with the assigned quota of 1000 homers of corn and still maintain his office. He claimed that unlike his colleagues in adjoining provinces who were able to meet their quota and still could feed both humans and horses as well as use the corn as seed he was not able to do so. In addition to the taxes the proprietors of state-owned land had to complete state service, called *ilku*.[70]

By using its crops as temple offerings and as provisions for the temple staff, land was the most important means to support the temples. It was the king's responsibility to see to it that the temples had sufficient land at their disposal. He did so by donating land to the temples,[71] but also by bestowing land onto people who were supposed to use part of their fields' yields as provisions for the temples. This practice is best attested in a grant by Sargon who, when some land in the town of bakers, which Adad-nirari III had earlier exempted from taxes and given to certain families in order to provide the Aššur temple with offerings, became useless due to the expansion of the city of Maganuba into Sargon's new residence Dur-Šarrukin, exchanged this land against fields in the town of clergymen in the district of Nineveh.[72]

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67 For *ma'uttu ša šarri* "maintainance land of the king" see CTN 3 14:4, CTN 3 16:4 and NL 52:5, for *ma'uttu ša ekalli* "maintainance land of the palace" see CTN 3 87 r. 11. It seems that in contrast to privately owned land, maintainance lands were always described as the land of a certain official, without giving his proper name, see Postgate, Akkadica Supplementum 6, 146f. The problem of distinguishing maintainance lands from privately held estates is not restricted to officials, but also arises in the case of the king and his family.

68 TIM 11 33:5': *ma-'u-u-te ša* É LUGAL-*n*[*i*].

69 CT 53 79 = SAA 5 225.

70 On *ilku* see Postgate, Studia Pohl SM 3, 63-79, also in Mesopotamia 7, 203-205, in *Fs. I. M. Diakonoff*, 304-313 and Garelli l.c. 8-11; on the link between *ilku* and land tenure see also J. N. Postgate, *Fifty Neo-Assyrian Legal Documents*, Warminster 1976, 24f and cf. A. K. Grayson, "Assyrian Civilization," *The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C. The Cambridge Ancient History* III/2, ed. J. Boardman *et al.*, Cambridge 1991 (second edition), 213f.

71 The letter ABL 480 = SAA 1 106 concerns land given by Sargon to the Nabû temple in Dur-Šarrukin. In general cf. Postgate, Akkadica Supplementum 6, 145f.

72 NARGD 32 = SAA 12 19:23'-33'.

A reference to "bow land" in a letter to Sargon shows that soldiers received shares of state land as "fiefs" which at least sometimes could be exempted from taxes.[73] This system was adopted by the Chaldean empire[74] that passed it on to the Achaemenid empire.[75] Due to the scarcity of references we do not know whether these fiefs could be inherited by the original recipient's heirs or whether the land was returned to the state after the recipient's death. The latter, however, would seem to be more likely.

Sources of illustrations

Fig. 1 I. Finkel and J. Reade, ZA 86 (1996) 249 (fig-tree) and 250 (seeder-plough).
Fig. 2 I. Finkel and J. Reade, ZA 86 (1996) 260 (seeder-plough and palm-tree).
Fig. 3 Author's drawing based on E. Botta's original drawings of slabs 12-13 of room in Sargon's palace in Dur-Šarrukin (Chorsabad), published in P. Albenda, *The Palace of Sargon King of Assyria*. Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations. Synthèse 22, Paris 1986, pl. 89-90.
Fig. 4 BM 124.939, drawing reproduced from S. Dalley, Iraq 56 (1994) 51 fig. 1.
Fig. 5 BM 124.920

73 Postgate l.c. 148 and in Studia Pohl SM 3, 223 on ABL 201 = SAA 5 16:6: A.ŠÀ GIŠ.BAN-*šu*.

74 See M. Jursa, *Der Tempelzehnt in Babylonien vom siebten bis zum dritten Jahrhundert v. Chr.* AOAT 254, Münster 1998, 14-18 and M. Jursa, "Bogenland schon unter Nebuchadnezar II.," NABU 1998/124 on the attestations for *bīt qašti* in the Chaldean period.

75 Thanks to the evidence presented by Jursa it is unnecessary to hypothesise that the system was transmitted from the Assyrians to the Achaemenids via the Medes, as has been suggested earlier due to the lack of attestations from the Chaldean period (most recently M. Stolper, "Militärkolonisten," RLA 8/3-4 (1994) 206a and M. Dandamayev, "Assyrian Traditions during Achaemenid Times," *Assyria 1995*, ed. S. Parpola and R. M. Whiting, Helsinki 1997, 45f).

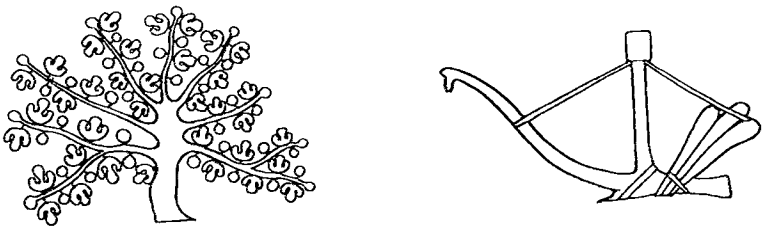

Fig. 1. Sargon's hieroglyphs: a fig tree and a seeder-plough, standing for "the country of Assyria".

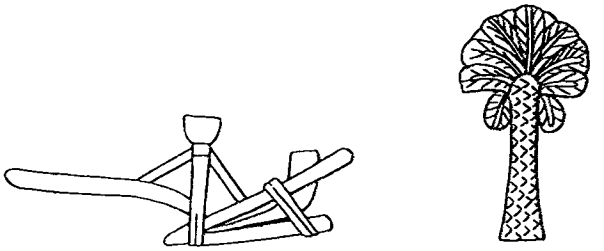

Fig. 2. Esarhaddon's hieroglyphs: a seeder-plough and a palm-tree, standing for "Assyria and Babylonia".

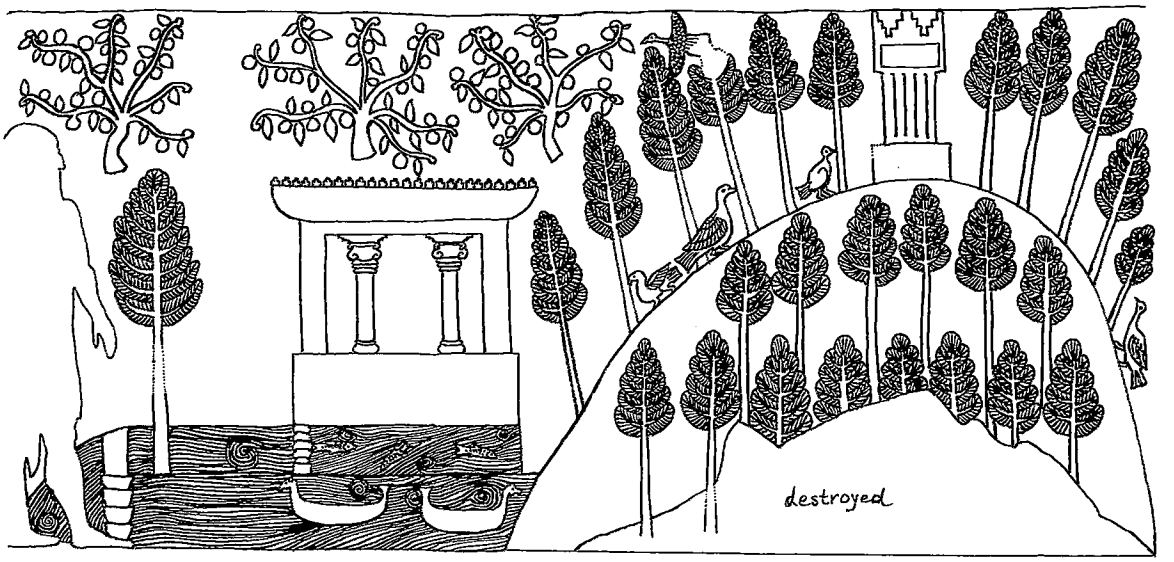

Fig. 3. Sargon's park in Dur-Šarrukin, drawing after reliefs from Dur-Šarrukin.

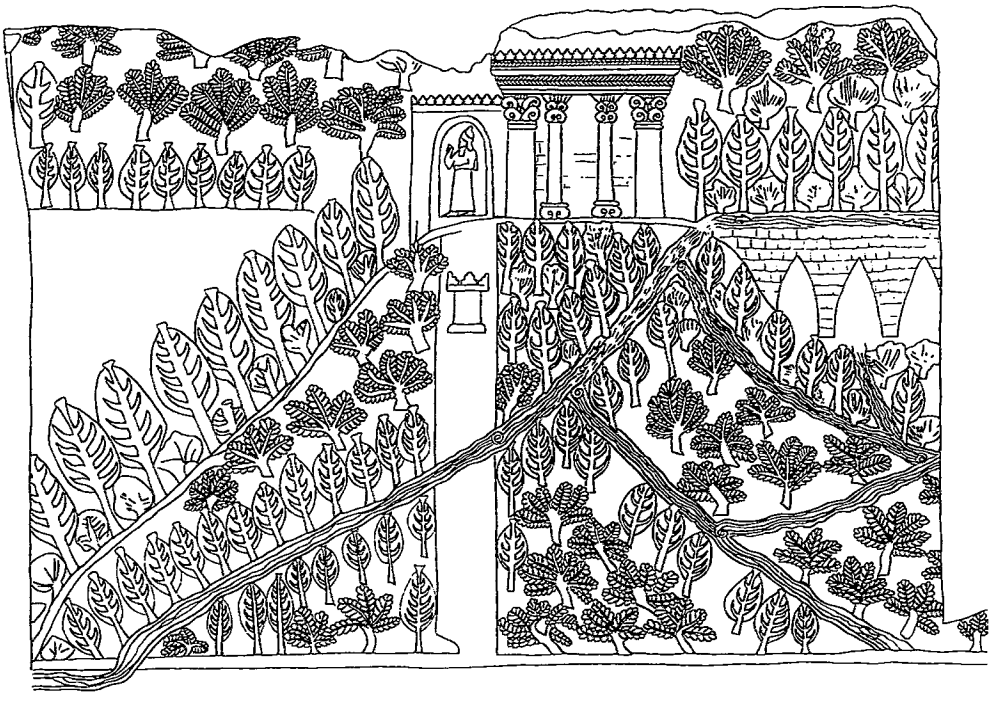

Fig. 4. Sennacherib's park in Nineveh, drawing after an Assurbanipal relief from Nineveh (BM 124.939).

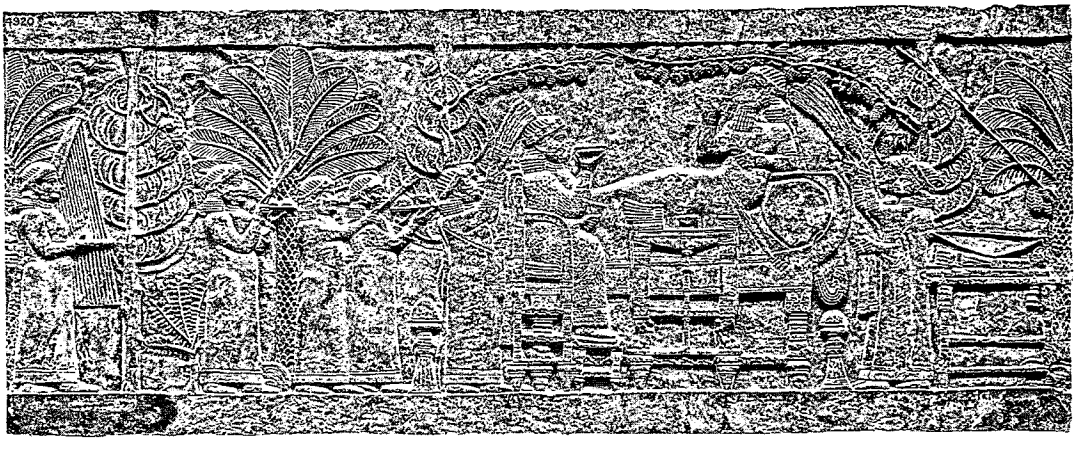

Fig. 5. Assurbanipal's vine bower in Nineveh, scene of an Assurbanipal relief from Nineveh (BM 124.920).