

MALE NUDITY IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIAN ART

A Master's Thesis

by
AYŞEN GİRİT

Department of Archaeology
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University
Ankara

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To my family

MALE NUDITY IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIAN ART

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

AYŞEN GİRİT

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of
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ANKARA

April 2012

I certify that I have read this thesis and that it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Archaeology.

Dr. Marie-Henriette Gates
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this thesis and that it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Archaeology.

Dr. İlknur Özgen
Examining Committee Member

I certify that I have read this thesis and that it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Archaeology.

Dr. Ann E. Killebrew
Examining Committee Member

Approval of the Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences

Dr. Erdal Erel
Director

ABSTRACT

MALE NUDITY IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIAN ART

Girit, Ayşen
M.A., Department of Archaeology

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marie-Henriette Gates

April 2012

This thesis attempts to study nude male representations in Mesopotamian art. It analyzes examples of male nudity in art and textual material from the Protoliterate to the Neo-Assyrian period in Northern and Southern Iraq. It aims to investigate the implications that the male nudity in Mesopotamian art carries and both the social and conceptual aspects that are attributed to male nudity in Mesopotamian society. It argues how nude male representations are embedded within cultural, religious and political aspects of the society. The thesis also shows the context dependent state of male nudity and how it is used as a marker in ancient Mesopotamian art pointing to various identities, physicalities, and political and religious configurations.

Keywords: Mesopotamia, Nudity, Body, Art, Iconography, Identity.

ÖZET

ANTİK MEZOPOTAMYA SANATINDA ERKEK ÇIPLAKLIĞI

Girit, Ayşen
Yüksek Lisans, Arkeoloji Bölümü

Tez Yöneticisi: Doç. Dr. Marie-Henriette Gates

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Bu tez Mezopotamya sanatında çıplak erkek temsillerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma Kuzey ve Güney Mezopotamya'da, Uruk döneminden Yeni Asur Dönemine kadar sanatta ve metinlerde görülen erkek çıplaklık temsillerinden örnekleri incelemektedir. Tez Mezopotamya sanatında erkek çıplaklığının çıkarımlarını ve Mezopotamya toplumunda erkek çıplaklığına atfedilen hem sosyal hem de kavramsal taraflarını araştırmaktadır. Çıplak erkek temsillerinin toplumun kültürel, dini, ve politik yönleriyle ilişkili olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Ayrıca bu çalışma erkek çıplaklığının bağlam-bağımlı yapısını ve antik Mezopotamya sanatında çeşitli kimliklere, fiziksel durumlara, politik ve dini düzenlemelere işaret eden bir gösterge olarak kullanıldığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Mezopotamya, Çıplaklık, Beden, Sanat, İkonografi, Kimlik.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Clothes are the cause of nudity”¹.

Wearing clothes is a characteristic of human beings, and nudity is a special state of wearing no clothing that bears various overtones according to different societies. Since nudity is a constructed term and physical state of human body exclusively, its connotations and attributions are embedded within the norms, ideals, and attitudes of each particular society. Nudity is always a peculiar subject of investigation for people who most of the times live in societies where clothes play an important role in life and being clothed is an accepted norm. Its representations in art are also as stimulating and worth investigating as the term itself. Since nudity is a “costume” that evokes reactions within a society, its employment in art, the ways in which it is seen and depicted is the basic interest of this study.

Previous studies on nudity and the naked body in ancient Near Eastern art mainly focus on female nudity and its interpretations. Among the female nude representations surviving from the Neolithic period onwards, one figure was highly

¹ Quoted by Osborne (1998) after Adam Phillips (1996) “Women: What are they for?” *London Review of Books*, 18: 6-8.

debated among scholars: the nude female with exaggerated breasts and hips, often impulsively identified as “the mother goddess” and thus attracting many critiques (Gimbutas, 1991; Meskell, 1995). Furthermore, nude depictions of the goddess Ishtar drew considerable attention from the ancient Near Eastern scholars as well as terracotta relief and plaques that depict nursing mothers, frontal nude women and erotic scenes (Bahrani, 1993; 1996; 2001; Pinnock, 1995; Wiggerman 1998). However little attention has been paid to representations of male nudity exclusively in ancient Near Eastern art. Even in the case of studies on representations of masculinity, they remain outnumbered when compared to the ones on femininity. In contrast to the ancient Near East, however male nudity has been an important aspect of studies on Classical Art. Depiction of men totally or partially naked is the most noticeable characteristic of Greek art (Stewart, 1997: 24).

Although male nudity has not been neglected in the Near Eastern scholarship, there is a lack of an extensive study on the male nude and its contexts. There are some insightful attempts by scholars on male nudity but they nonetheless remain either cursory or regarded as a subcategory within discussions of gender and female nudity. Zainab Bahrani (1993) had contributed to Source issue on nudity; she has written on nudity in ancient Mesopotamian iconography in general and made comments on male nudity and its different contexts. Further she extended her study in her book *Women of Babylon* in which she devoted a chapter on male nudity (2001). Although her studies did not entirely deal with male nude, Irene Winter has made insightful and influential contributions to the understanding of body, male body and masculinity in ancient Mesopotamian art. Especially her article on Naram-Sin reflected on rhetorical and

ideological aspects of the male body (1996). Furthermore Julia Asher-Greve wrote extensively on gender and gendered body in ancient Mesopotamian art, her article *The Essential Body* (1997) explored how sex, gender, and social status were marked on the body while commenting on the male nudity and male body. In 1998 Biggs wrote an entry on nudity for *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, it was a short and precise commentary on both female and male nudity. Similarly in the same volume Ursula Seidl differentiated her own categories of nudity for both male and female. More recently Sarah Costello (2010) published an article on the Mesopotamian nude hero figure and its interpretations and origins.

It is also noteworthy how art historical discourses regard the representations of male nudity in both civilizations. Art history as a discipline, since its foundation, based its premises on colonial discourses. The formation of art history as an academic discipline coincided with the phenomenon of European colonialist expansion, and its aesthetic perspective reflects Eurocentric presumptions created by eighteenth and nineteenth century Western European discourse (Bahrani, 2003: 16). Art historical and aesthetic evaluations made by scholars remain very much embedded within the colonial discourse and carry the overtones of a constructed alterity between Western and non-Western arts. As Edward Said states in his work *Orientalism*, “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the orient” and “the occident” (Said, 1985: 3). East and West are constructed terms; they reflect and support each other (Said, 1985: 5). Binary oppositions and sets of dichotomies also define the relationship between them. Thus, art historical discourses place Western arts at the center and anything non-Western stands out as a

comparison to judge, to criticize, to correct, etc. Art history considers Greek antiquity as superior to non-Greek cultures since it accomplished “the victory of the autonomy of the humanist and aesthetic realm” (Bahrani, 2003: 26). Since Western aesthetics’ development is a product of Greek antiquity, pre-Greek arts such as ancient Near Eastern art has been regarded as lacking the sufficient understanding and appreciation of aesthetics, or being less developed (Bahrani, 2001: 70). In the case of representation of nudity in art, again, Greeks are often credited as the inventors of such an art form. As Kenneth Clark states, the nude is seen as “an art form invented by the Greeks in the 5th century BC” (Clark, 1960: 4). In contrast, the nude or male nude in ancient Near Eastern art is considered to have failed in achieving the ideal established by Greek sculpture from the Western perspective. Many scholars agree that Greek art brought about the exaltation of the nude male body and its beauty as a means of marking superiority over women, slaves, and Barbarians in Greek antiquity (Arieti, 1975: 432; Bonfante, 1989; Stewart, 1997: 8-12; Osborne, 1998: 81). Similar to Clark’s argument, Larissa Bonfante notes that it was the Greeks who for the first time saw the beauty and pride in the nude male body instead of shame and fear; and “It was the Greeks who brought into our culture the ideal of male nudity as the highest kind of beauty” (Bonfante, 1989: 544, 546). While it is true that the beauty of the ideal male body reached an apex in Greek antiquity and fundamentally influenced the Western arts, it is not proper to ignore the fact that some Near Eastern art that also exalted the beauty of the male body. Although it is true to some extent that there are contexts in which nudity is used as a sign of degradation and deprivation in the ancient Near East², nudity

² These contexts will be discussed in the following chapters.

is not necessarily considered something to be ashamed of within the society. Compared to the Greek culture where genitals are referred euphemistically to as *aidoia*, “shameful things” (Bonfante, 1989: 545), a great number of terms were used for both male and female genitals and they do not imply any negative connotations. Instead in Sumerian poetry the female organ is often regarded as something beautiful and compared to sweet foods³ (Bahrani, 2001: 45). Similarly male organ is mentioned directly in texts without euphemism: *išaru(m)* in Akkadian language and *GIŠ* in Sumerian directly means penis; *išaru(m)* also is associated with positive meanings such as being upright, righteous, righteous ways or words of deity and handsome looks (Black, 2000: 132-133).

The implications of male nudity in ancient Near Eastern art, as it will be shown in the following chapters, are context dependent. While it is fallacious to dismiss the capability of this culture’s appreciation and celebration of the nude male body or body in general, it is true that ancient Mesopotamian society must have had the fairly universal taboo of nakedness in public and shame attached to it. Clearly, the lustful and strong body of the Akkadian king Naram-Sin represented on his victory stele, and the nude hero figures epitomize an achievement of depicting and exalting masculine beauty comparable to the Greek nude sculptures. In other cases, nudity was illustrated as an iconographic indication to convey the deprivation, degradation, defeat and helplessness. As Stewart and Bonfante argue, being naked is a special “costume” in a clothed society charging “the wearer” with various meanings (Bonfante, 1989: 544; Stewart, 1997: 26). Thus, its polysemic character allows for various applications within

³ For an example of a royal love song of Shu-Suen from Ur III, see Jacobsen (1987: 96).

the ancient Near Eastern art, indicating sexual allure and purity along with degradation and despair.

This thesis attempts to investigate the nude male representations in Mesopotamian art that fall into specific categories. The geographical and temporal scope of this thesis is confined to a specific region and periods in order to interpret data more coherently and in relation to each other. Thus, the geographical scope of this thesis is limited to Mesopotamia, more specifically northern and southern Iraq; its temporal scope includes a time span starting from the Protoliterate period to the end of Neo-Assyrian period. In this time span, some periods belonging to Mesopotamian chronology are omitted or disregarded due to the lack of the data, i.e. nude male representations.

While investigating nude male representations, the thesis will not simply be a descriptive survey of nude male representations, but it will relate these representations to concepts and contexts by and in which they are made, perceived and understood. This thesis aims to investigate the implications that the nude male in Mesopotamian art carries and both the social and conceptual aspects that are attributed to male nudity in Mesopotamian society.

The following chapters are an attempt to understand the male nudity and its representations in ancient Mesopotamian art. The second chapter introduces a general overview of the nude male representations that can be observed in Mesopotamian art starting with the earliest Sumerian (Protoliterate) period until the end of the Neo-Assyrian period. It investigates male nudity in art through three separate categories: nudity as a defeat, ritual nudity and heroic nudity. The third chapter discusses briefly

the remarks regarding nudity and male nudity in Sumerian and Akkadian literature, by referring to ancient textual evidence such as myths, poems, hymns, songs and the like. The discussion and interpretation chapter evaluates the visual and textual data for each category in order to understand male nudity in art and in society by following an interdisciplinary approach.

CHAPTER 2

CATEGORIES OF MALE NUDITY

In this chapter I will give an overview of male nudity examples in Mesopotamian art starting with the 4th millennium BC. I will mention three distinct categories by which nude male representations can be classified.

2.1 Prisoners and Dead Enemies

It is a long lasting convention in ancient Near Eastern art to depict captives and dead enemies in visual representations, ranging from free-standing steles, to cylinder seals, to large palace wall reliefs. Despite some changes visible in the art of some periods over time, like Neo-Assyrian, the tradition of depicting captives and dead or defeated enemies has a characteristic iconography within Mesopotamian art. They are represented stripped of their clothes when depicted in a procession or deportation, and when depicted dead or about to be executed. From the 4th millennium BC onwards, we see the depiction of both live captives and dead enemies naked in ancient Mesopotamian Art.

As it will be illustrated with examples and discussed below, we can talk of a clear difference between generic scenes and historical ones. Although iconographically they depict captured or dead enemies, some examples from earlier periods offer more conventional representations opposed to the realism clearly adopted by later periods. They can be seen as clichés, sometimes with unidentifiable characters, designed to communicate a message, that is victory or military power in this case, rather than projecting a historical event.

2.1.1 Protoliterate and Early Dynastic period examples

The first representations appear in Protoliterate Period cylinder seals. Many examples of cylinder seals from the Uruk period depict the naked prisoners with their hands tied at the back (Figure 1). In the Sumerian Early Dynastic Period of the 3rd millennium BC, representation of captives and dead enemies becomes common in other forms of art (Bahrani, 2001: 60). One of the most famous examples from the Sumerian or Early Dynastic III period is the inlaid wooden box, the Royal Standard of Ur, a tomb gift excavated in the Royal Cemetery of Ur by Woolley (2600-2500BC) (Figure 2). The Standard is made of mosaic panels each representing a series of scenes in three separate registers: One side represents a military campaign and the other represents a celebration and banquet scene after victory. On the “war” side of the standard, the lowest register depicts a battle scene, where the victory is apparent, since under the horse chariots lie the naked and fallen enemies (Figure 3). In the middle register, the portrayal of the procession of undressed prisoners among Sumerian soldiers can be seen as an event occurring after the battle, when some enemies are

taken prisoner (Figure 4). These captured soldiers walk with great shame covering their bodies and some of them are injured with large bleeding scars on their chests and thighs (Frankfort, 1970: 74). This can be observed as an evidence for defeat and subjugation.

However the characters and the king presented on the inlaid panels are not distinguished or identified, they are stock characters depicted within a standard battle scene followed by a victory and a banquet. Thus, speaking of Standard of Ur as displaying a victory scene is not possible, because what is depicted here is non-contextualized. It does not refer to a specific victory that we can contextualize. This is the convention of depicting such battle scenes in earlier periods, which will give way to a more realistic artistic tradition in which scenes can be associated with historical events.

Another Early Dynastic monument, from ED III, which bears a similar iconography of depicting the fallen enemy naked as a narrative device for the outcome of the battle, is the so-called Stele of Vultures found at Telloh/Girsu and dating c. 2440 BC. King Eannatum commissioned the stele, depicting the victory of Lagash over Umma and many other events. It again has two sides: divine and historical. The divine side of the stele shows the god Ningirsu (the city god of Lagash) holding a divine battle-net full of naked bodies of the enemies and smashing the head of one enemy peeping out of the net (Figure 5). The existence of battle-nets is also attested in the inscription carved to fill the empty space of the stele. The text talks about Eannatum giving the great battle nets of deities (Ningirsu, Ninhursağa, Enki, etc) to the leader of

Umma and making him swear by it (Cooper, 1986: 35). Inside the net, the enemies may be already dead or not but they are definitely naked.

The historical side of the stele was divided into 4 registers. Many scholars argue that these registers depict historically accurate events, a battle scene, as implied in the cuneiform inscription which fills the background of the stele; the battle against Umma (Figure 6). The uppermost part of the stele depicts vultures carrying severed head of enemies in a battlefield strewn with dead soldiers, implying the obvious victory of the battle depicted in the register below it. In the first register a group of Lagash soldiers are depicted as charging an attack with their pointed spears, and the king wearing a typical dress for the period leads them. What is important here for my subject is that while charging an attack the soldiers walk over the naked bodies of the enemies, as a declaration of their defeat. And further in the register the naked bodies of the Ummaites are piled up.

In the second register, again, naked bodies of the enemy can be seen under the feet of the marching soldiers behind the king on his chariot. The third register, unlike the first two, depicts a religious scene where the god, is identified as Ningirsu who is also the personal god of Eannatum, is seated; in front of him a naked servant or a cultic staff (as it is also a convention of many religious scenes from earlier and contemporary periods) pours libation. Furthermore, to the left we again see the pile of naked bodies about to be buried in a burial mound by people carrying earth in their baskets. It was common at the period to sacrifice the captured enemies to the gods (Nemet-Nejat, 1998: 237).

When the registers of the historical side are read from bottom to up, as Winter argues, the first lowest two registers depict events preceding the actual battle with Umma. In relation with the divine side of the stele and the inscription, these two registers may depict a ritual event where the king receives divine instruction or agency to defeat the enemies (Winter, 2010: 16). So the upper parts of the stele depict the actual battle and the outcome of it as predicted and enacted by Ningirsu on the divine side of the stele. However it can also be argued that the stele depicts various events and battles against the land of Umma, as the inscription suggests a long lasting dispute between Umma and Lagash over a land loan, and mentions multiple campaigns (Cooper, 1986: 35).

Here on the Vultures Stele, as in the case of Standard of Ur, male nudity is used as a device to anticipate the narrative of the scenes depicted, where the enemies are meant to be seen defeated. Despite the fact that this stele, unlike the Standard is clearly attributed to Eannatum and depicts historically attested events, still the ways in which the dead enemy soldiers are depicted recall the generic and conventional representation of earlier periods. The way that the Lagash soldiers trample upon the dead naked enemies, the piled up bodies and severed heads at the beaks of vultures seem like a *mise-en-scène* symbolizing the affairs between Lagash and Umma rather than an historical record as specified by its accompanying inscription. Finally, the libation scene on the stele offers another prevalent category of male nudity, which is a ritual one to be discussed below.

2.1.2 Akkadian period

By the Akkadian period, representations of battle scenes become visually more powerful due to changes in artistic style and theme. In dramatic contrast to the previous periods, Akkadian representations accentuated individuality. The representations are far more sophisticated and full of details and unique characteristics of individuals are underlined. To elaborate, unlike artwork from the Protoliterate or the Early Dynastic periods, the emphasis is more on isolated figures; they are more plasticized in the sense that details of their bodily features are depicted clearly. And unlike the previous examples in both freestanding stone monuments and seals, the background is less crowded giving room to emphasize the individuals and their actions.

In terms of nude representations of dead/defeated enemies or captured prisoners, the same differences and developments of Akkadian art can be applied; examples from this period depict enemies in a more detailed way, in terms of their individual/ethnic characteristics and bodies. Similarly nude representations of enemies or captured prisoners become more powerful in conveying narrative of battle. As another development in Akkadian art, because the images tell stories that we can easily read and understand, nudity becomes a tool for the audience or reader to foresee the aftermath and the outcome of the battle (Bahrani, 2001: 63). The Akkadian period offers many examples of such scenes. Here I will mention five of them.

The first is a fragment of a conical diorite stele found at Susa where it was taken as booty from Babylonia by a 12th century BC Elamite king (Figure 7). Its attribution is secured by the inscription “Sharrukin, the king” beside the representation of Sargon, the founder of the Akkadian Dynasty, on the lower frieze who leads a

procession of soldiers to the left. On the upper damaged frieze, above the king, a procession of naked prisoners is depicted with their hands tied at the back, probably accompanied by an Akkadian soldier (Strommenger, 1964: 404). This somewhat conical stele also presents a scene similar to the previous example the Vultures Stele; again it depicts a divine battle-net filled with naked enemies this time held by the goddess Ishtar who was also Sargon's personal deity (Figure 8).

In a similar vein another diorite stele fragment found at Susa again depicts the procession of handcuffed captives in front of an Akkadian soldier (Figure 9). Above that scene in the upper frieze, which is highly damaged, a battle scene is depicted. The stele is not inscribed but dated probably to the time of the same king Sargon, due to its similarity to the inscribed ones found at Susa. A later important example of naked prisoners and enemies found at Girsu/Telloh may be attributed to the reign of Sargon's son Rimush (2415-2290 BC). Although it is not dated with any inscriptions, due to its emphasis on individual figures and details, and also to the composition characteristics that are similar to the period's artistic conventions, the stele is dated accordingly (Orthmann, 1975: 196). This fragment again contains a battle scene.

On one side of the limestone fragment, in the middle register an Akkadian soldier is about to decapitate a naked enemy by holding up his beard to bare his neck (Figure 10). Since it seems to take place during the battle, the enemy has already been stripped of his possessions in anticipation of being killed. Similarly, next to him is another enemy with a similar hair and beard style, this time already fallen on the ground. To his left, an Akkadian archer is depicted with great details given to his clothing and movement. On the reverse side of the same stele fragment the battle scene

continues (Figure 11). In the middle register also a naked enemy/prisoner is led by a soldier, probably taken captive at the end of the battle, while another is shown on the ground before an Akkadian soldier pointing a weapon to his head. The enemy is depicted lifting his hands in a gesture of begging for his life (Strommenger, 1964: 404).

The examples from the Akkadian period that depict undressed enemies dead or alive do not end here. Another striking set of fragments of an alabaster stele come from Nasiriyya, although this one, clearly belonging to Akkadian period c. 2415-2290 BC, cannot be dated to a reign of any rulers. It is generally attributed to Naram-Sin. In terms of stylistic qualities the Nasiriyya stele is a good example of Akkadian Period art with its highly realistic and plasticized rendition of figures that are emphasized and adorned with great details (Figure 12). The depiction of at least six captives can be seen on the upper register. The naked prisoners walk in a procession, their hands cuffed as normal, but strikingly also bound to each other with an animal yoke. Tremendous effort is given to details of the captives' bodily and individual features, including their different hairstyles. In the lower frieze, two soldiers are shown carrying tribute, including daggers with long straps and two-handed vessels taken as booty from the enemy (Figure 13) (Strommenger, 1964: 405).

The most celebrated example among the Akkadian period steles is the Stele of Naram-Sin, which commemorates the victory of the king of Agade against the Lullubi people from the Zagros Mountains (2389-2353 BC) (Figure 14). The damaged inscription of the stele, found at Susa, identifies this campaign of the king. The stele bears the most developed version of Akkadian stylistic innovations, with its detailed

rendition of the body of the ruler Naram-Sin, and the centrality of the figures to the general composition of the scene. The main action takes place in topography with mountains and trees. The Akkadian soldiers are seen marching up the mountain while king Naram-Sin is shown twice the size of other figures as he reaches to the top. The king Naram-Sin, who is deified by a horned cap, steps on two dead, undressed Lullubi people, as if symbolizing his victory over them (Figure 15). Furthermore, another already dead and naked enemy is seen falling down the cliff. While the dead enemies are clearly naked, the others, either beseeching or severely injured, wear animal skins. Completely opposite to the Lullubi depicted with their long braided pony tail-like hairstyles, the Akkadian soldiers are dressed fully for the battle, with their weapons ready in their hands.

It can also be argued that, at the right hand side of the stele, a cycle of events is depicted. The chief of the Lullubi people is first shown at the lower right of the stele in a bullying manner, and then on the upper figure he is shown with his spear broken. It is a known convention in ancient Near Eastern art to show a broken weapon as a sign of defeat. The next upper figure shows the chief pleading for his life with his hands lifted up, while in the next one he is shown severely wounded with the spear or an arrow thrown by Naram-Sin, but he is not yet dead. And consequently the chief is shown first lying dead and naked, and then falling down the hill. If the stele of Naram-Sin is read that way it reveals the connection of nudity and death, on which I will discuss more below.

The 2nd millennium BC offers fewer examples of narrative scenes. A few Middle Assyrian examples are thus exceptional in returning to this theme. One is a

pyxis fragment discovered at Assur from the reign of the Middle Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (1224-1208 BC). It is damaged and preserves only portions of two registers of scenes separated by a line (Figure 16). At the top is a scene resembling a battle: an Assyrian soldier, represented only by his weapon, grabs a naked enemy by the hair while stepping on his leg or crotch. The scene resembles the scene on the Rimush stele where an Akkadian soldier grabs the enemy by his beard to behead him. Next to that fighting scene two other dead enemies with the same hairstyles, lie naked. Interestingly, the hairstyles of these enemies are identical with the ones depicted on the Rimush stele. Below the battle scene, we see the Assyrian ruler with his typical conical hat, depicted twice: once holding a cup in front of the horses, and second, riding on a chariot (Orthmann, 1975: 331).

2.1.3 Neo-Assyrian period

The convention of depicting live captives and dead enemies naked in the art lasted for more than 2000 years, but not without discontinuations or alterations. During the Neo-Assyrian period (1000-612 BC), the depiction and usage of such nudity were partly abandoned. Instead, enemies are shown naked in scenes with narratives such as procession of captives, torture or execution (Bahrani, 2001: 63). This may be due to the increased realism to which the palace reliefs aspired to tell the specific military victories and important events from the reigns of the rulers instead of abstract or conventional depictions of victory in war. A major category of Neo-Assyrian art consisted of narrative reliefs, on palace walls, intended to display realistic accounts of battles for ideological purposes. Similarly the usage of nudity is probably limited to the

occasions that reflect real life practices. The enemies are not shown naked in unrealistic occasions but they are shown naked where they require being naked: after or even before they were executed since they were probably stripped of their clothes and possessions as booty.

In striking contrast with the previous eras, many reliefs from the palace walls of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC) depict captives and dead enemies fully dressed. For instance, on a relief that depicts the conquest of a city during the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, from the Northwest Palace at Nimrud, the decapitated and fully dressed enemies, regardless of the perspective, are placed above the storming soldiers on chariots (Figure 17). It is a clear break from previous artistic conventions. Many other examples from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II also show captives or dead enemies still wearing clothing. Although live captives are always depicted naked in procession scenes in Uruk, Early Dynastic and the Akkadian periods, the Northwest Palace reliefs did not follow this convention. Another scene from a large relief series from the palace of Ashurnasirpal II displays the aftermath of the battle, where one captive enemy in the procession is held by the hair by an Assyrian soldier (Figure 18). In contrast to the convention of the previous periods, the scene depicts both the captive held by the hair and the other soldiers in the procession dressed.

However, later Neo-Assyrian rulers readopted the tradition of depicting the captured or dead enemies naked, although with some alterations. At this period not necessarily dead soldiers are shown undressed during the battle scenes. Unlike previous periods, the fallen or defeated enemies are not seen lying naked on the

battlefield, under chariots, but still they are shown naked in processions or execution scenes, or about to be executed either by impalement or by beheading.

The decorative bronze bands that were set on the doors of the temple at Imgur-Enlil (Balawat) from the reign of Ashurnasirpal II's son and successor Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC) are an example of this convention of depicting enemies executed or about to be executed (Figure 19). The decorated doors of the temple, which consist of several bands of friezes, relate Shalmaneser's military expeditions and victories over various foreign lands. Scenes depicting the military expeditions of the king to Northern Syria, the captured soldiers are displayed on stakes in front of the gates of the Syrian city Dabigu, stripped off, to frighten the city under siege (Figure 20).

Impalement of enemy soldiers in front of city gates is a well-known war practice that can be attested from textual records that Assyrian kings impaled their enemies on stakes in front of the city gates (Luckenbill, 1989: 147). Thus the Balawat gates depict this famous practice by showing executed enemies naked, probably stripped before impalement. In another Syrian war between Shalmaneser III and the kingdom of Hamath, naked captives are depicted with their hands and necks tied to each other as an indication of the aftermath of the battle (Figure 21). In contrast, where the actual battle takes place, the dead enemies under the Assyrian chariots and horses are presented as fully dressed, unlike the conventions of previous periods (Figure 22).

The convention of depicting the enemy executed or prepared for an execution can also be attested on the palace reliefs during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 BC). A relief from his Central palace at Nimrud, narrating the siege of a city depicts the similar impalement practice representing the executed soldiers naked (Figure 23).

At the lower part of the relief, presumably in the vicinity of the actual siege scene, an Assyrian soldier decapitates a captured and stripped enemy while grasping his hair, and around lie the other naked enemies either already beheaded or waiting to be. A later relief from Khorsabad (Dur-Sharukkin) during the reign of Sargon II (721-705) depicts the arrival of the king on chariot to the captured city Tikrakkā and supports this Neo-Assyrian convention showing the disposed and mostly decapitated bodies of the enemies under the chariots, as if they are buried (Figure 24). In contrast, the king on his chariot accompanied by soldiers, calmly moves towards the enemy fortress, as he enjoys the shade of his little parasol. An enemy, shown quite small, at the top of the fortress lifts his hands up. This can be a scene after the battle is over and the king is shown approaching the city of to confirm or celebrate the extent of victory.

Another example of the impalement practice during Neo-Assyrian period comes from the reign of Sennacherib (701-681 BC). An orthostat slab from Southwest Palace at Nineveh represents the siege of the city Lachish in Palestine, showing the dramatic charge of Assyrian troops (Figure 25). In terms of artistic conventions it is a quite different relief, unlike the rigid registered images, it gets rid of borders and present the narrative as a whole series of events taking at one time and one place, while figures are scattered on the orthostat surface. In terms of the iconographic rendition, fallen enemies again are not necessarily shown naked, however the enemies on stakes are depicted naked.

Along with the impalement scenes where dead enemy is represented naked, other relief fragments showing the expedition against Lachish depict torture scenes where naked male enemies are tied by their arms and legs, while other captives

including women and children are being deported with their possessions (Figure 26). The deportation and appropriating of both people and their possessions as booty were common practices attested in textual records of wars (Luckenbill, 1989: v2. 122). Another striking relief from the same palace at Nineveh showing Sennacherib's campaign in the Arab marshes is a battle scene that takes place on boats (Figure 27). The relief shows the geography accurately, displaying the difficulty of penetrating these high reeds in the marshes and how they serve as hiding places for the fugitives. While the fighting takes place between the enemy and the Assyrian soldiers, captive men and women are being taken away by boats (Strommenger, 1964: 451). In a similar vein as the relief depicting the siege of Tikrakkā, the disposed naked body of a beheaded enemy floats on the water. This detail again offers a realistic example for the practice of stripping the enemy soldiers before a potential execution.

The palace reliefs from the reign of Ashurbahipal (668-627 BC) provide more examples of this war practice of stripping the enemies before execution. A relief from his Northwest Palace at Nineveh depicting the capture of Madaktu in Elam presents the deportation of women and children along some musicians leaving the city, while the slain enemies and their horses and equipment were shown floating down the river (Figure 28). Particularly interesting, in the river only the decapitated bodies of the enemy are shown naked, whereas the other dead ones remain fully dressed, indicating that they were killed during the battle and are thrown down the river. It is apparent that the decapitated ones were stripped of their clothing before execution. Furthermore, another relief from the same palace stands as an evidence for the aim of achieving realism in war scenes. The relief depicts Ashurbanipal's war against Arabs in three

registers (Figure 29). Assyrian and Arab soldiers are shown fighting with each other; the Assyrian superiority is apparent from the way two groups of soldiers are rendered. The detail pertinent to the subject is the fallen enemies under the storming chariots and horses are shown dressed as a requirement of a realistic battle scene, since they cannot be immediately stripped off their clothes as soon as they fall.

2.1.4 Conclusion

As illustrated with examples above male nudity is used in ancient Mesopotamian Art to depict prisoners and dead enemy soldiers starting with the Protoliterate period until the end of Neo-Assyrian period. Since it is a long lasting convention in art there had been alterations and shifts in time across the political entities. I argued above that depiction of captives and dead enemies follow a more or less chronological pattern where the artistic iconography and rendition becomes less conventional.

The fact that the executed enemies are shown naked instead of the ones killed during battle is a clear sign of this artistic shift, from conventional to more realist representations. In contrast to previous examples, such as Standard of Ur or the Vultures Stele, importance is given to the accuracy of the events during the actual battles, instead of symbolic and stock renditions. Although in both cases the ultimate aim was to depict victory and military power through nudity of enemies, it is apparent that artistic practices transformed in time; but the nudity of the dead, captured, subjugated or executed enemy soldiers, as a powerful tool remained constant. While early periods depended their iconography on more symbolic renditions in order to

convey more dramatic and conventional depictions of their military power, by the time of Neo-Assyrian period a historically more accurate approach has been favored. The palace reliefs depict scenes that are more faithful to real events that might have occurred; this can be seen as an artistic choice made by Neo-Assyrian artists or patrons to create a more cogent account of victories achieved. Realism, thus, is an important aspect of this period's art that was used to create what Bahrani borrows from Barthes, the "reality effect" (Bahrani, 2008: 53). As a result, in contrast to the Early Sumerian or Akkadian periods, the male nudity in art was employed for occasions that can be regarded as real life practices.

2.2 Ritual Nudity

As a second category of male nude representations, ritual nudity in ancient Mesopotamian art can be attested from the 4th millennium BC until the end of Early Dynastic period. Ritual nudity refers to visual representations of nude male figures engaged in ritual activities, either as an actual or symbolic observance. This type of male nudity appears in a variety of representations on steles and seals, or as freestanding statuary mostly from temple or burial contexts. Thus, within this category we can identify two different groups of examples where male nudity is used: narrative scenes and isolated figures.

Narrative scenes mostly depict naked male figures whose identity is not emphasized. They are performing various activities in a religious ritual/ceremony, such as pouring libations, carrying offerings or playing an instrument. In contrast, isolated figures are shown in prayer, or with offerings. They were dedicated as votive objects or

temple furniture (Frankfort, 1970: 53; Strommenger, 1964: 394). However, we see the abandonment of this convention after the Early Dynastic period. This may relate to the shift in the political and religious system of Mesopotamia after the end of Sumerian period starting with the Akkadian period. This political shift led to fundamental changes in the religion and the ideologies, centralized political system introduced after the city-state structure necessitated a more standardized state religion, thus this had effects on the iconography and the art.

2.2.1 Narrative Scenes

Male nudity in cultic narrative scenes can be observed as early as in the Protoliterate Period art. One important example from the period is the so-called Uruk Vase (Figure 30). It is an alabaster vase found in the Eanna temple precinct at the sanctuary of Inanna at Uruk within a temple treasury hoard at level III. The level in which the vase found is dated to 3000 BC, however it is suggested that the vase must be made earlier due to the repairs on the upper part, as argued many scholars these repairs must have been done in the antiquity. The vase is divided into four clear registers where scenes are carved (Figure 31). Below the lowest register two continuous wavy lines depict water. In the above register, two alternating plants variously identified as barley and date palm, or wheat and flax (Crawford, 1985: 73-4; Frankfort, 1970: 25; Winter, 2010: 206). Above the flora, another register similar in width depicts a procession of ewes and rams, again in an alternating fashion (Winter, 2010: 206). The register above the one bearing the pairs of sheep exhibits, this time, the procession of offering bearers, who move towards in the opposite direction of the

animals. Male figures in the procession are naked walking one behind the other, towards something while each of them carries a bowl or a basket filled with products. The motion of the figures in opposite directions indicates that the scenes move in a circular fashion and continuous procession from bottom to top, reaching the uppermost register of the vase, where a scene is depicted (Figure 32).

The scene shows a prominent female figure in the middle standing in front of two poles, identified as temple posts, which are symbols of the goddess Inanna also used in the earliest texts to indicate her (Black and Green, 1992: 148; Green, 1995). As a Mesopotamian artistic convention, representing a temple by its doorways begins in the Protoliterate period with symbols such as these reed gateposts with streamers (Lloyd, 1984: 57). Although her headdress is not visible to identify her as a goddess, it is stated that these poles are used as signs to represent Inanna, thus they represent her shrine and herself and making this scene linked with a ritual act involving her (Bahrani, 2002: 18; Goff, 1963: 85). Before the goddess figure, we see another naked servant carrying one of those baskets, and it is clear that they are offerings carried to the female figure, since her shrine is also filled with similar baskets, vessels and other livestock. Behind this naked servant figure a male figure is depicted, although it is damaged, a small fragment of his dress is preserved. Many scholars argue that the figure wears a net-skirt⁴ and another servant wearing a knee length skirt and carrying a belt follows him.

The presence of priest-king in the scene led many scholars to interpret the scene as the Sacred Marriage ritual where an enactment of the marriage between Inanna and

⁴ This is a typical dress for the priest-king, *en* (Schmandt-Besserat, 1993: 209; Postgate, 1992: 261).

Dumuzi by priest-king and the priestess. An alternative interpretation of the scene is that a king, whose identity cannot be attested, performs a ritual before the goddess in front of her shrine, making offerings to her. It is one of the duties of the king to give offerings to gods on behalf of his people in order to secure prosperity on land (Postgate, 1992: 263). Winter argues that the vessel depicts abundance in production coming from the goddess Inanna and offering back to her what has been produced in Mesopotamia, which is shown in the lower registers (Winter, 2010: 209).

What is important here in terms of the subject of ritual nudity is the fact that we see one of the earliest representations of offering bearing naked servants or temple attendants, a lasting convention in Mesopotamian art until the end of Early Dynastic period. It is likely that these male figures are depicted nude as a requirement of the rituals or to indicate their position and duties. After the Sumerian period, we see the abandonment of this iconography and it transforms into the depiction of priests with shaved heads starting with the Akkadian period (Postgate, 1992: 128).

The convention of depicting temple staff involving in ritual acts as naked continues in other forms of representation during the Protoliterate period. A cylinder seal from Tell Billa is carved with a scene related to the uppermost register of the Warka Vase (Figure 33). The seal depicts a scene of the procession of three male figures towards the shrine of the goddess bearing some items. The architectural structure with “ring pillars” is identified as the shrine of Inanna (Strommenger, 1964: 384). What is striking here is the fact that the third man in the procession, probably a temple staff, is naked and carries an accessory resembling the girdle or belt carried in the Uruk vase, in addition to that the second naked priest or a temple attendant carries a

necklace made of beads. Furthermore another group of three naked male figures approaches the same shrine from the opposite side with a boat decorated with flowers (Frankfort, 1970: 37). These naked men are definitely involved in a ritual act and their physical characteristics (shaved head, muscular nude bodies and striding pose) as well as their actions (carrying offerings and gifts) closely resemble those on the Uruk vase.

In the following Early Dynastic period, Sumerian Mesopotamia witnesses the reemergence of this iconographic tradition in ritual scenes. Early Dynastic period can be seen as a period where the established aspects of Sumerian identity in the Protoliterate period are revived (Lloyd, 1984: 111-124; Frankfort, 1970: 39). This can be considered as the antiquarian interest in the previous periods rather than an unbroken tradition. Thus, the appearances of male nude priests or servants, resembling the previous representations, continue in steles, plaques or reliefs after ED I, which is marked with non-representational artworks.

The stele of Eannatum, the king of Lagash, depicts a similar ritual scene (Figure 6). On the third register of the reverse side of the Stele of Vultures, a ritual involving the god Ningirsu is presented. The god, larger than the other figures, is seated before a “sacred plant” and a tied up bull, while a naked priest or a temple personnel, standing upon the sacrifice animals, pours libation from a spouted vessel. Here the naked priest/temple staff imagery is in line with the previous examples, indicating a common practice or sign for temple staff involving such cultic rituals like presenting an offering or pouring libations.

Such libation scenes performed by a naked priest or a temple staff, continue to be seen in the Early Dynastic II period as votive plaques. Votive plaques are usually

square in shape and carved with various religious scenes and they are pierced in the middle. It is probable that they are attached to temple walls with a peg put through their holes. These plaques start appearing in ancient Mesopotamian art from the ED II to the end of ED III (Frankfort, 1970: 69-70). One such example is found in the shrine of Gikiparku, at the sanctuary of moon god Nanna in Ur below levels IX and X (Figure 34). The square votive plaque consists of two registers. On the lower register, before a temple building marked by “gate posts” a naked priest is shown and he is followed by three female figures (Moortgat, 1988: 42; Postgate, 1992: 128). They stand before the entrance of the temple: the naked figure pours libation from a spouted vessel while the other figures carry offerings including livestock. The upper register is divided by a thick line and depicts the same group of people before a seated god while the nude figure pours libation from the same vessel (Postgate, 1992: 128). In a similar vein another libation scene by a nude male figure in front of a deity can be observed on a votive plaque from Girsu/Telloh dating ca. 2400 BC during the Early Dynastic period (Figure 35). This time almost the same naked figure pours libation in front of an enthroned goddess identified as Nin-hursag, the goddess of mountain and vegetation (Dalley, 2000: 326).

It is clear from the above examples that such ritual scenes of pouring libation and presenting offerings in art necessitated the employment of male nudity from Protoliterate to Early Dynastic period, whether as an actual requirement of the ritual or as a symbolic convention. However this iconographic tradition was abandoned after the Early Dynastic period, transforming into the depiction of temple personnel and priests with shaved heads.

2.2.2 Isolated Figures

As mentioned above, male nudity is not only observed in ritual scenes, depiction of nude male figures can be attested as free-standing figures made of clay, terracotta or metal as early as Ubaid period. However they do not offer a narrative scene since they are only isolated figures, but they come from religious contexts or are associated with rituals.

One of the earliest examples from the end of fourth millennium BC, Protoliterate period is a standing male figure found probably at Uruk (Figure 36). The figure is bearded, wears a round cap and holds his hands up in front of his chest, in a gesture of prayer. The figure is completely naked and does not wear any belts or girdles, which at later periods will be a common artistic convention of depicting male nude as an isolated figure in ritual context.

Examples of nude male figures continue to be seen after the 4th millennium BC, during the Early Dynastic period, especially among the sculptures found in Diyala river region. These sculptures are regarded as votive objects put in temple contexts. One example from the region is a damaged standing nude male figure that was found in the Nintu Temple phase VI at Khafajeh (Figure 37). The figure shows a man in a typical praying gesture in ancient Near Eastern art, clasping his hands in front of his chest. The eyes of the figure are large and wide-open while his long hair is carefully trimmed. The figure is shown naked while other statuettes found at the same temple context depict male figures with a similar headdress and facial features but wearing a tiered skirt⁵.

⁵ The tiered skirt can also be observed in many Early Dynastic representations as a standard Sumerian dress for males.

Diyala region offers more examples of nude male figures. The Shara Temple at Tell Agrab beneath the pavement level provided many examples of such statues depicting male figures with similar features, yet they are represented wearing girdles or belts. One such example from the temple context represents a kneeling male figure that wears nothing but a belt and carries a large pot on his head (Figure 38). It was found in a temple context and thought to be a votive object put inside the temple by a worshipper along with other similar statues. Other examples from the same Shara temple at Tell Agrab are three bronze standing male figures (Figure 39). Again they are depicted nude only wearing a belt, with their hands clasped at the front. Hair and beard treatments of the figures resemble previous mentioned examples and their inlaid eyes indicate that they are wide open as the eyes of other votive figures found there and at Tell Asmar (Feldman, 2007: 312).

Nude male figures from Tell Asmar continue with another example from Square Temple of Abu (Figure 40). In contrast to other examples of nude male figures, this presents a kneeling nude bearded man wearing a three-tiered belt and a different headdress similar to a turban or a toque (Lloyd, 1984: 112), as if a cloth is wrapped around the head. Since his hands are in gesture of reverence or praying, it can be assumed that this figure also serves as a votive object. Similar figures were designed as temple furniture, such as metal supports or offering stands in rituals. One of them is a copper support from Tell Asmar in the shape of a nude male figure with a beard (Figure 41). The figure strides with its left leg forward and his hands clasped in front of his chest resembling other examples. What makes it possible temple furniture is the additional metal stand at the top and bottom of the figure as if suggesting a place to put

something on or it is placed in a niche. Another set of examples comes from Khafaje, from the Temple Oval (Figures 42-43). They are provided with a “four-armed claw” on their head, on which offerings or ritual vessels may be placed (Frankfort, 1970: 53). They are again standing nude male figures with the same beard and hair treatment wearing nothing but a belt, and they resemble other figures mentioned earlier. Frankfort states that the figures designed for the usage as temple furniture depict naked males with a belt, thus these male figures may fall into a different category than the worshippers’ votive statues. It is further argued that these nude male figures with a belt and long beard may represent another version of the hero figure depicted on sculptural cups in the Protoliterate period and seal carvings of the later periods (Frankfort, 1970: figs. 17, 94)⁶.

2.2.3 Other Examples

Another possible example for ritual nudity is the scenes depicting musicians and entertainment. Although it is rare compared to nude representations of women playing an instrument, nude male musicians are also being attested in the art of Mesopotamia (Bahrani, 2001: 58). One such example is from the Early Babylonian period (1930-1700 BC): it is a terracotta plaque, which depicts a male musician playing a string instrument (Figure 44). The male figure is naked but interestingly only wears a triple belt similar to the ones mentioned and his hair is carefully treated with braids. It is clear that music played an important role in the religious life of the Ancient Mesopotamian civilizations, many art works depict the representations of musicians

⁶ Examples of this nude hero motif and more will be given in the following section.

involving in a religious occasion like festival or ceremonies (Figure 45). It can also be attested from the textual evidence explaining rituals from various periods and ceremonies (Reisman, 1973: 188-199; Pritchard, 1969: 331).

2.2.4 Conclusion

As mentioned and illustrated by various examples from different periods and areas, ritual nudity can be regarded as another category in ancient Mesopotamian Art regarding the male nudity that is employed until the end of Early Dynastic period. We see that certain male figures are represented naked according to specific iconographic purposes for some occasions. Above I argued that the representations of male nudity mentioned are related to religious and ritual context, thus it is probable that they present a state of being undressed as a requirement of a religious act or a symbolic convention valid for the earlier periods.

When examples are reviewed, it can be seen that there are two primary categories for such works employing male nudity in religious and ritual context: narrative ritual scenes and isolated figures. Narrative scenes, as stated above, consist of scenes where a temple attendant or attendants involve in rituals such as pouring libation, carrying and presenting offerings before gods or goddesses, or scenes of various activities such as playing an instrument which can be attributed as a ritual. Isolated figures are freestanding representations of nude males who can be recognized with their specific hand gestures implying a reverence or an act of praying. Also these figures are bearded with long trimmed hair, and some of them wear a type of belt, which the contemporary hero figure wears on cylinder seals. Thus, this compels us to

differentiate two different types of nude males in this category: the ones with a belt and without a belt. The nude male figures with the belt can also be associated with the hero motif as mentioned above, as another possible version of representation of this mythological character within a religious context. This issue will be discussed further below.

2.3 Heroic Nudity

An examination of the types of nude male figures in the ancient Mesopotamian Art calls for a third category: heroic nudity, which can be observed from the Protoliterate period onwards coming to an end with Middle Assyrian period. It is a recurring theme in the art of ancient Mesopotamia that nude, strong male figures, also associated with mythological beings as will be discussed below, were depicted in contest scenes generally subduing or controlling wild animals, and other mythological figures. Although these representations can be commonly attested on glyptic art of the Early Dynastic and Akkadian periods, in the earlier periods these male figures can also be represented as sculptured figures on cups in the 4th millennium BC. The most common motif of these nude, strong male figures is the so-called nude hero figure. What distinguish the nude heroic figure are his common physical attributes, which become generic properties to depict those certain characters. Accordingly, the nude male figure, which can be observed in the art as a regular subject, is portrayed generally with six individual curls of hair, three of them on each side of his head, and with a long beard. He is completely nude except for a triple belt. He does not wear any headdress to identify his character as a god or a divine being. He is portrayed as a

convention in two different types of scenes. One is the combat scene and the other is the ritual scene involving an association with the water god Enki/Ea. Regarding the most common convention, he is portrayed in combat scenes on cylinder seals as well as an isolated figure, and most of the time in the company of the bull-man⁷. In these combat scenes lions attack bulls and other game animals such as stags, and the nude male figure and his companion, the bull-man, attack the lions and control the bulls, or human headed bulls. Furthermore, either they both fight with wild animals such as lions or control bulls, or they fight with each other. Another less attested set of representations of the same nude male figure with beard and curly hair is the scenes with flowing vase or fertility vase and gateposts. On some cylinder seals from the Akkadian period the nude hero is shown kneeling and holding the flowing vase with streams, which is often held by gods as a sign of fertility and abundance (Black and Green, 1992: 184) or holding temple gateposts in the presence of divine beings.

However, heroic male nudity was not only used in the case of the nude hero with curls; additional nude male figures that can be attested from Early Dynastic period onwards. Furthermore, male deities who battle against each other can also be included within the heroic nudity. Although it is not the case to depict a male god naked in ritual or reverence scenes, the divine battle theme was the only context in which male deities are depicted undressed fighting with each other.

⁷ Green argues that the bull-man figure should be identified as an iconography derived from bison and called bison-man, since Akkadian word *kusarikku* (*gud-alim* in Sumerian) used for this figure means bison and the physical characteristics of the bull-man matches with those of a bison rather than a bull (1992, 49-51). However, the term bull-man will be used henceforth in this essay for the sake of convenience and conformity with other scholars.

2.3.1 Introduction of Nude Hero Motif

The earliest representations of the nude male figure with curly hair with a belt were attested on a group of cups found at Diyala sites dating to the Protoliterate period, ca. 3000 BC. One of them is a limestone base of a cup from the Shara Temple at Tell Agrab (Figure 46). In this representation, the nude figure is shown frontally wearing only a belt and boots, and two lions flank him. He holds the tails of two wild lions as if controlling them. He is bearded and his long curly hair falls on both sides of his shoulders. There are other examples of these sculptured cups with the nude hero motif controlling wild beasts, probably dating to the same period (Frankfort, 1970: figs. 17-18).

The nude hero motif becomes more common in the Early Dynastic period. In spite of the fact that its depiction can be attested as combat scenes frequently on cylinder seals of the 3rd millennium BC, the nude hero continues to be observed on different media. One such example comes from the grave PG 789 at Royal Cemetery of Ur (Figure 47). The burial PG 789 is considered as belonging to a king, and it contains artifacts including a lyre, which has a decorated sound box with inlays and a magnificent bull's head made of precious materials. The front panel of the sound box is decorated with four registers of mythological and animal scenes (Figure 49). The uppermost register represents the nude male figure with six identifiable curls and a belt, calmly holding two human-headed bulls at both sides. He is shown frontally, resembling the earlier examples from Tell Agrab. The other registers depict the preparation of a banquet scene. They show various animals performing human activities such as serving food and drink and playing musical instruments. Frankfort

believes that such works of art like the inlaid sound box displays how Sumerian art transforms “the world of fairy-tale into reality” (Frankfort, 1970: 77). Thus, it can be suggested that the nude hero controlling the human-headed bulls belongs to the realm of myths. Moreover, starting with the ED II period, for the first time we can see the equivalent of this fantastic world including the nude hero figure in glyptic art.

Early Dynastic seals provide many examples of the contests scenes of the nude male figure. One example from ED II depicts the naked hero frontally flanked by two bulls that he holds by their chins or beards, while another smaller version of the same scene is placed underneath the inscription. (Figure 49) Next to him the bull man is shown fighting two lions, the nude hero shares all the physical attributes of the bull man except having a bull’s tail, horns and feet. Almost the same composition can be observed on another cylinder seal from the period found at Tell Fara ca. 2700 BC: here again the nude hero with belt is shown between two bulls, holding their chins while the bull man is depicted between two lions (Figure 50). Artistically what is important here is the stylized rendition of the figures compared to later periods. Although the nude hero figure is characterized by six distinct curls as mentioned earlier, on these cylinder seals his hair is shown as upright sticks ending with a circle.

There are further examples of such a rendition of the nude hero’s hair (Figure 51). Although Collon (1995) and Costello (2010) identify this hairstyle as a high spiky headdress, it can also be viewed as an earlier convention of depicting the hair of the nude hero in this period that still indicates six distinct curls of the nude hero. Since, starting with the ED III period, this portrayal ceases and gives way to the depiction of conventional hairstyle, we can see the variant hairstyles as a particularity of the earlier

period. This may be due to increased realism of the later period compared to ED II where figures are depicted in a more stylized manner. In the following Early Dynastic III period, the figures on glyptic art become more plasticized, in contrast to the flat rendering of ED II (Frankfort, 1970: 77). The figures are depicted with more physical details and more realistically. For the contest scenes from this period, it can be observed that they depart from the earliest period in terms of the realism applied in representation. While the composition of the cylinder seals is similar, the figures gain more volume as a consequence of plasticity (Frankfort, 1970: 81).

One such example depicts three groups of scenes that include the nude hero, bull-man, and other wild fantastic creatures including a human-headed bull (Figure 52). Compared to previous examples, the representation on the seal is modeled more realistically and physical features are more detailed. Thus, instead of the previous hairstyle for the nude hero, we see the naturalistic depiction of his curly hair with three curls on each side along with more detailed facial and bodily features. In other words, by the ED III period a canonical version for the nude heroic figure has been chosen.

2.3.2 Additional Nude Male Figures

In the Early Dynastic period, another nude combatant in these contest scenes is introduced along the bull-man and the nude hero with six curls. An ED III cylinder seal found in the Royal Cemetery at Ur shows a contest scene with lions attacking a bull and a human-headed bull; furthermore a leopard attacks the same bull (Figure 53). At the right side of the contest a nude figure with a beard and a spiky headdress or spiky hair makes move with daggers in his hands to attack the leopard. This nude figure is

completely nude and he does not wear any belts. In contrast to the nude hero with curls and the bull-man, he is shown in profile.

The spiky haired nude male figure with a dagger continues to make his appearance in this period on other cylinder seals. One cylinder seal from Ur ca. 2550/2475 BC shows two crossed lions attacking a deer and a goat, while the armed nude figure with a spiky hair comes to rescue them (Figure 54)⁸. Another seal found in the Royal Cemetery at UR, from Tomb 743, depicts the spiky haired hero with more detail and plasticity but in almost the same composition as the previous examples (Figure 55). In the middle of the combat scene three lions are depicted attacking a goat or a ram and a cow, the goat is shown upside down probably for the sake of making the image more active. This time the armed nude hero with a dagger approaches from the right as a help, stabbing one of the lions in the head while holding its tail⁹.

Additionally, the spiky-haired nude figure does not appear always alone in contest scenes; he is also portrayed along the nude hero and bull-man in similar composition. One example from Ur depicts the nude hero with six curls and beard attacked by two lions while from both sides, the spiky-haired hero and the bull-man approach to help, the spiky-haired figure is again depicted holding the tail of the lion and stabbing the lion with a dagger (Figure 56).

The spiky-haired figure thus appears in specific positions and different roles from the bull-man or the nude hero with curls. Either alone with other combating

⁸ The inscription next to the combat scene gives the name of the owner, Lugalsapada, while a scorpion is depicted under the inscription space.

⁹ Next to the hero figure the inscription mentions the occupation of owner of the seal, saying “scribe of the mistress”, under the inscription a smaller version of the fight between a lion and a deer is repeated.

animals or in the company of the nude hero and bull-man, he is depicted performing the same action. Unlike his companions he is always depicted armed with one or two daggers, and he appears to help rather than as the combatant. Furthermore, in contrast to other figures (bull-man and the nude hero), his head and body are always shown in profile. Costello identifies this spiky-haired hero as forerunner of the Akkadian “royal hero” (Figure 57-58), distinguished from the others by his specific flat headgear as seen on this specific example (Figure 59)¹⁰. It has been suggested that, as a result of a proliferation in the types of hero figures in the later periods, we observe various hero figures with specific roles and features in such scenes (Costello, 2010: 30).

2.3.3. Changes in the Akkadian Period

In the Akkadian period, many alterations in the heroic nudity iconography took place in terms of both artistic renditions and the character of the nude hero. We see departures from the Early Dynastic themes, although combat scenes with animals and heroes remain as a preferred theme in glyptic art. Yet changes in the rendition occur: no longer are the animals combating shown crossed, overlapping each other like in the ED III period, but they are modeled separately and in the clearer forms of the earlier ED II period. The figures are isolated, giving more space to place forms that are emphasized more in terms of plasticity revealing muscles, bone structures and detailed hairstyles (Collon, 1995: 77; Frankfort, 1970: 89).

The depiction of the nude hero in this period becomes more established and standardized: the hero’s face is shown frontally while his torso and lower body is

¹⁰ An inscription panel giving the name of the seal owner Adda, the state supervisor of Enheduanna, Sargon’s daughter, frames the contest scene.

depicted in profile, his hair is modeled revealing six distinct curls and he wears a long beard. In terms of composition, most of the cylinder seal examples from the period portray two pairs of contestants and an inscription panel, instead of continuous friezes. The combat scenes are more balanced. One example from the British Museum depicts two kneeling, nude heroes in a mirror-like composition fighting two lions as if wrestling; the scenes are separated from each other by tall plants and framed by an inscription panel revealing the owner of the seal, a priest called Puzur-Shullat (Figure 60). Collon argues that the seals representing identical pairs of combatants are products of a single royal workshop that specialized in such scenes (1995: 79).

Another example supposedly from the same workshop or in the same artistic manner this time depicts mirror images of a bull-man and the nude hero each subduing a lion and a water buffalo respectively (Figure 61). A space next to the scenes is left for inscription; it is a convention, which can also be observed on other examples, for example on a cylinder seal from Tell Asmar now in the Iraq Museum (Figure 61). Here again the nude-hero and bull-man are depicted controlling a bull and a lion respectively, while an Oryx is placed under the clear space left for a potential inscription to be added later.

2.3.4 The Nude Hero's Relation with Enki and *abzu*

Another development during the Akkadian period is the increasing identification and association of the nude hero figure with the god Enki/Ea and the watery realm, *abzu*. The appearances of the nude hero in relation with the realm of subterranean freshwaters and its ruler can be seen mostly in glyptic art of the period.

One such example depicts two nude heroes kneeling in a mirror image; they offer water to two water buffaloes from vases out of which streams of water flow (Figure 63). Framed by the intricately detailed horns of the buffaloes, an inscription panel gives the name of the owner who was a scribe of the last Akkadian king Shar-kali-sharri (r. 2217-2193) (Collon, 1995: 79; Boehmer, 1965: 163). The vase with streams or the flowing vase is a symbol in ancient Mesopotamian iconography representing fertility and abundance and it is associated with the god Enki (among others). In art mostly deities in scenes relating to Enki hold it (Black and Green, 1992: 184).

It is clear that in the Akkadian period, the role of nude hero expands and he becomes associated with deities such as Enki. Other examples of the nude hero clearly support this connection, as he is shown in the presence of Enki or holding the gateposts of his temple. One such example from the Akkadian period is a cylinder seal today missing, dating ca. 2260-2160 BC (Figure 64). The seal depicts Ea/Enki stepping on a temple-like structure while holding the flowing vase with streams of water and fish. Next to him, two identical nude heroes wrestle with daggers in their hands, but the scene suggests maybe a mock-wrestle. A third nude hero approaches from right; he holds two fish in his hand and a crab (or turtle) on a fishing stick. The empty space of the composition is further filled with a bird of prey, a goat and above it an inscription panel giving the name of the owner and his father.

A further example comes from Girsu, now at Louvre Museum (Figure 65). The seal depicts Enki seated on a square-like structure with grids as he holds the vase with streams. Three other figures, one the two-faced deity Isimud, minister to Enki, and a female deity, followed by another bearded figure with a long skirt make reverence

gestures before him, while a nude hero whose face is only shown frontally holds the gatepost of Enki behind the seated god. A seal from the Metropolitan Museum portrays four representations of the nude hero each kneeling with their right leg (Figure 66). Their upper body is shown frontally while lower body remains in profile. All of them hold gateposts with a ring and above them four symbols are placed: a lunar crescent, a fish, a flowing vase and a sun disk.

Examples for such scenes where the nude hero holds the gateposts of Enki signifying his temple are numerous from the Akkadian period (Figure 67). There is one important seal from the Akkadian Period found in the later levels of the Royal Cemetery at Ur, in Tomb 699 (Figure 68). On the seal Enki is portrayed seated surrounded by flowing streams of water in his shrine, while two other deities with sunrays pay homage to him within his temple, which is marked by two gateposts held by a squatting nude hero.

The squatting nude hero figure with the gatepost of Enki underlines a clear connection between various forms of art of the period, since it offers an association with the arsenical copper Bassetki statue found at Northern Iraq c. 2250 (Figure 69). The severed statue with an Akkadian inscription giving the name of Akkadian King Naram-Sin preserves the lower body of a nude male figure with a triple belt. He is shown sitting while a cylindrical object is placed between his legs. Although the upper part of the statue is missing, the nude figure with belt suggests a clear connection with the nude hero portrayed on other forms of art mentioned above. Further it can be argued that the object he holds between his legs might be the gatepost with which the nude hero is frequently shown during the Akkadian period (Al-Fouadi, 1976: 69), due

to its similarity to the cylinder seal from the Royal Cemetery of Ur above (Figure 68) and others (Figures 66 and 70). From the symbols it is clear that the iconography of the seal is connected with god Ea, since the nude hero is associated with him and often holds the gateposts that symbolizes the god (Porada, 1960: 117).

The connection of the nude hero with water led to his identification as *lahmu* who is one of the eleven creatures to which Tiamat gives birth in order to defeat the cosmic pantheon in the Babylonian Creation Epic (Black and Green, 1992: 75, 115; Dalley, 2000: 237). Black and Green further identified the figure with the protective and beneficent deity Lahmu, the hairy one, that can be attested on a plaque-figurine found in the foundation deposit of a building at Assur from the 7th century BC (Figure 71). *Lahmu* as a word means hairy and shaggy. It also refers to a monster as a general term; in texts *lahmu* is used to indicate a monster in general and beings associated with *abzu* to be more specific. Also it is noted that this creature belongs to Ea/Enki (CAD, 1973: 41-2)¹¹. The word's meaning and its usage in ancient texts favor the identification of the nude hero with *lahmu* due to his physical features (being hairy and whiskery) and appearances in art in the company of Ea/Enki. During the Akkadian period we see the incorporation of the nude hero in scenes that are directly related to deities and in which the nude hero is shown in the company of these deities. Costello argues for a shift in the meaning of these combat scenes and in the role of the nude hero as he is now appropriated within the divine iconography (Costello, 2010: 31). Instead of battle scenes with mythological or wild beasts, the nude hero with curls

¹¹ Lahmu and Lahamu (Ea and Damkina in the Assyrian version) is also a mythological pair, who bears another theogonic couple Anshar and Kishar mentioned in the Babylonian Epic of Creation (Dalley, 2000: 233, 274).

accompanies gods and goddesses. Besides the examples with Enki/Ea, the nude hero is also shown in the company of the goddess Ishtar (Figure 72).

2.3.5 Later Periods

The employment of heroic male nudity in contest scenes with animals and in divine scenes with symbols associated with certain deities continues in later periods. The UR III period seals (c. 2190-2000) mainly depict scenes of reverence to seated gods; the scenes with nude figures fighting or subduing animals are found in small numbers. The general composition of the combat scenes from the period consists of one victim between two combatants. One such example comes from Fara; it represents the nude hero and the bull-man in the conventional fashion, yet it lacks the plasticity and realism of the Akkadian examples (Figure 73). Like the previous examples, they are depicted facing each other with a rising lion in-between them. Between the lion and the bull-man a small representation of bird of prey is placed and the damaged inscription gives the name of “AN. SÜ. DU, the son of Ur- (...)”.

More examples of contest scenes can be found in UR III period, however not all of them necessarily include nude combatants. A cylinder seal from the collection of J. Pierpont Morgan Collection depicts a similar composition of three figures and it is clearly dated to UR III period due to its inscription (Figure 74). A bull-man is shown fighting a lion-griffin while the nude hero holds the beast from its back. An inscription panel frames the scene and as it is a typical convention of the period, the background is filled with some symbolic designs such as: a crescent, an offering table and a small bird. There are other cylinder seals, which depict scenes with three combating figures

including heroes and wild creatures, as it is a common motif, but they are not clear enough to identify the physical characteristics of the figures. One example does depict clearly two nude male figures fighting a lion-griffin, but these figures have completely different hairstyles from the previous nude hero, the hero with spiky hair or the bull-man (Figure 75).

In the Old Babylonian period, the contest scenes in which the male nudity is used frequently continue to appear. An example from the first half of the 18th century BC found at Tell Taya Level III represents two nude heroes with six curls and beard- one standing up, one sitting on the floor- holding vases with streams (Figure 76). Next to them another hero is depicted fighting a lion; he is wearing a knee length kilt and headgear similar to the additional hero figure seen in the Akkadian period. Reade suggests that the headgear is a combination of the Akkadian flat cap and the Old Babylonian horned crown, and the style is Akkadian. Thus it is argued that it is an Old Babylonian copy of an Akkadian work (Reade, 1973: 171). Another seal recalling the Akkadian style of seal production comes from Assur (Figure 77). The seal depicts two separate battle scenes. In the left one a kneeling nude hero is shown with his face in profile. He is not the nude hero with six curls; he wears a flat cap and wrestles a lion-griffin. The second battle scene depicts two nude heroes with six curls, each holding a lion pressed against their knees in a mirror-like image. The lions at the same time attack a bull in between. The nude hero with the flat cap can also be attested in other seals from the same period (Figures 78-79).

The battle scene was not the only theme involving male heroic nudity adopted from the Akkadian period regarding the depiction of male heroic nudity. The nude hero

in the company of the god Ea and his symbols can be attested on many examples from the Old Babylonian period. For instance, one cylinder seal, a product of a workshop at Sippar dating to the reign of Samsuiluna, the successor of Hammurabi, represents the nude hero with curls next to the water god Ea who holds a vase with streams of water (Figure 80). There are also other examples of the nude hero in different contexts in the presence of the bull-man and other deities in ritual scenes (Figures 81-83).

During the Old Babylonian period another motif was also introduced: the kneeling nude hero with six curls carrying a wild animal above his head. One example from J. Pierpont Morgan Collection represents three pairs of fighters: Bull-man fights a lion, a nude male shown in profile kneels down and fights a lion-griffin, and the third, the nude hero with six curls kneels on the back of a lion while holding another lion above his head (Figure 84). It is a common motif of the period that can be attested on many examples (Figures 85-86).

2.3.6 Changes in the Nude Hero Motif

In the following Middle Assyrian period seals also adopted this new motif of the kneeling nude hero carrying a lion above his head, but with some alterations. An example dated to the period, now in the British Museum, depicts only a kneeling hero raising a defeated lion in the air (Figure 87). An inscription mentioning that a brewer called Nabu-sharhi-ilani dedicated this seal to Marduk frames the single scene. What is important in this example is the fact that the kneeling hero wears a knee length skirt in a striking contrast to the earlier periods. The dedication suggests that the hero is now associated with the god Marduk. By the Middle Assyrian period, the long lasting

convention of depicting the hero with six curls naked has been abandoned. Another example from the same period also depicts the hero with six curls dressed in a short skirt with two tassels falling down (Figure 88). He swings his sword in one hand while raising his left leg and grabbing the ear of a horse with the other. Other examples also show different versions of the “new” hero figure, always dressed. He is shown as in composition reminding the master of animal motif (Figure 89), or fighting beasts like lion-griffins (Figure 90). In both cases his head is shown frontally and lower body in profile as it is the convention of his depiction, but with one exception, that is he wears a skirt with two tassels hanging down. It appears that, in the Middle Assyrian period, male heroic nudity is transferred to different contexts and motifs. One cylinder seal depicts a hunting scene where the hunter is shown naked (Figure 91). In contrast to the frontal representation and the hairstyle of the conventional hero figure, he is shown in profile and with a high hairstyle or a headdress while bearing no triple belts. Finally, by the Neo-Assyrian period, we see the continuation of frontal hero with six curls especially on the wall reliefs from the Sargon’s palace at Khorsabad. Here found two relief slabs that depict heroes dressed in short tunic with some variations in hairstyles (Figure 92). Both figures are depicted holding a small lion in their left hand while holding a sickle like sword in the other. On these reliefs the altered attribution and appropriation of the nude hero; the nude hero motif was adopted on these reliefs, which also bear royal emblems, suggesting in a way that the now-clothed hero is associated with royalty and reinforces the power of the Assyrian kingship (Albenda, 1986: 102).

Moreover, on the cylinder seals of the Neo-Assyrian period, we see the abandonment of this typical frontal hero motif with curls. Instead, the new hero figures

on seals fighting with animals and most of the time appearing as an archer bears a hairstyle resembling a cap on the top and a pony tail at the back (Figure 93-94). That is typical of the hairstyle used by the Neo-Assyrian kings and other divine beings that can be observed on many seals and palace reliefs.

2.3.7 Nude Deities

The nude hero or his companions were not the only motifs that served as an example of male heroic nudity. Although it is not a common convention to represent male deities naked in Mesopotamian art, the scenes of battles among gods were exceptional examples in which they are often depicted nude.

Boehmer lists many examples of seals depicting such a scene. One clear example from Akkadian period represents five figures (Figure 95). All of them are armed except the one that is seated on pyramidal mountain figure (maybe indicating the setting of the fight) being threatened by another god from whose shoulders rays are coming out. To the left of them stand three other male figures, two of them are clearly deities with their horned caps but the third one differs from them in terms of his clothing and physical features. The third male figure wears a knee length kilt whereas the two deities wear long tiered skirts, which can be attested as the old-fashioned clothing for gods. Thus the man with the short skirt recalls the royal hero or the king himself; next to a deity he witnesses the battle between other two deities. What is striking here is that the deities that are clearly fighting are depicted naked, however the ones that stand behind the short kilted man are dressed, as if only watching the fight or waiting their turn.

Another Akkadian example represents six deities paired with each other in a combat scene (Figure 96). All of the deities are recognizable with their horned headdresses and depicted naked except their belts. One deity with rays coming out of his shoulders holds a mace and subdues another deity kneeling down with his left leg by grasping him by his horns and aiming his weapon. A third deity does the same thing to his rival deity whose broken mace shows his defeat. Lastly, a fifth deity again holding a mace and the horns of his rival, grasps his rival deity sitting on a pyramidal structure resembling a mountain as it is in the case of previous examples. The god with rays emanating from his shoulders is identified commonly as the Sun-god that be attested further on various cylinder seals (Frankfort 1934, 23, Pl. IV; Goff 1963, 255; Green and Black 1992, 183) (Figure 97). He is sometimes portrayed as victor defeating the birdman, Zu, along with his nude servant (Frankfort, 1955: 43) (Figure 98). The battle among deities is a common mythological motif used in both the Epic of Creation and the “flood myth”, Atrahasis. It is the only context in which the male deities are depicted naked. Asher-Greve, by associating the naked deities with the nude hero figure, argues that the fact that these deities are nude accentuates the deeds achieved by “pure physical prowess and superiority” instead of bearing protection or any arms. Thus the nudity of these gods and the hero points to a celebration of male and divine physical power (Asher-Greve, 1997: 443).

2.3.8 Conclusion

Clear from the examples above, heroic nudity can be considered as another important category in which male nude representations can be attested. In ancient Mesopotamian art heroic nudity is a recurring theme where various nude male figures with strong bodies are depicted often within contest scenes. The most common motif of this heroic nudity is the so-called nude hero figure with unique physical characteristics. As illustrated above, heroic nudity as an iconographic convention appears starting as early as the Protoliterate period and becomes more common starting with the Early Dynastic period especially on cylinder seals. During the Akkadian period the representation of the nude hero and other heroic figures as well as nude deities becomes a defining artistic feature of the period. After some continuations in the Old Babylonian period, the hero figure underwent some major changes in the Middle Assyrian and later periods: the figure started to be depicted with clothes. There is immediate explanation for such a modification of the figure that lasted for centuries, but it might have to do with an increasing conservatism during the Iron Age art. Other than the hero figure, Neo-Assyrian representations also depict kings dressed compared to the exposed upper body and arm of the Sumerian kings and half-naked alluring body of Naram-Sin.

CHAPTER 3

NUDITY IN MESOPOTAMIAN TEXTUAL RECORD

Art was not the only means by which nudity was documented. Along with visual representations of nudity, more specifically male nudity, written material from Sumerian and Akkadian literature is also a source of knowledge to understand male nudity in ancient Mesopotamian society. Also the ancient texts ranging from myths to proverbs unveil the concepts through which nudity or male nudity is perceived and understood. The texts do not directly reflect the connection between visual representations of nudity and meaning behind them. However they offer insights in order to comprehend basic Mesopotamian conceptions about nudity and being nude.

First of all, Mesopotamian literature is rife with stories, myths, or poems on the subject of sexuality. There is plentiful written evidence that deals with sexual encounters, sex, and sexual intercourse between deities or royal persona. Sexuality is seen as the source of diversity. The myth of *Enlil and Ninlil* written in the mid- to late 3rd millennium BC is mainly concerned with fertility and conceiving (Jacobsen, 1987: 167-180). In the myth, Enlil is banished to the Netherworld from Nippur after seducing the city's maiden Ninlil. However Ninlil follows her beloved Enlil and the god

deceives her into mating again in order to bear Netherworld substitutes for him. Ninlil follows the god through four gates where at each she is deluded by the gatekeeper and Enlil. As a result of their successive unions four gods are engendered: Nanna/Sin, Nergal, Ninazu and Enbilulu. The myth explicitly mentions the intercourse between Enlil and Ninlil, referring to genitalia and the act of conceiving (Jacobsen, 1987: 174).

Similarly the myths and stories of the water god Enki are full of phallic representations and symbolic references to both male and female genitalia. The texts related to him bear explicit phallic characteristics and sexual connotations that are in line with the procreative aspects of the deity. For example the text with the modern title *Enki and the World Order* (Kramer and Maier, 1989: 38-56) praises the generative powers of the deity whose actions, words and even presence are efficacious in terms of reproduction of the earth. He is commissioned by Enlil, provides the earth with animals, houses, grain, or trees and he appears as a great organizer and administrator who accomplishes deeds that are crucial for the maintenance of civilization (Kramer and Maier, 1989: 38). In terms of sexuality and nudity, the text mentions Enki lifting his penis and filling the empty Tigris River with his fertile semen. Although it is clearly a symbolic action, there is an explicit description of the god's reproductive organ.

The myth of *Enki and Ninhursagâ* deals with sexuality and fertility, thus refers more to explicit descriptions of nudity than *The World Order* (Jacobsen, 1987: 181-204). Here Enki's lust and sexuality are the main theme of the myth and his sexual encounters with female deities are mentioned. Opening with a description of the city Dilmun where everything is pure and at peace, the text mentions the city's tutelary

deity Ninsikilla's request from Enki to bring sweet waters and crop-bearing fields (Jacobsen, 1987: 187). Then the text continues with the sexual adventures of Enki, first with the goddess Ninhursag a who bears various names in the text such as Nintu and Damgalnunna. From this union Ninmu is begotten and then she is also impregnated by Enki to bear the goddess Ninkurra. After Ninkurra gives birth to the goddess Uttu, Enki impregnates her as well. Advised by her mother and grandmother to stay away from Enki unless he brings her a gift of vegetables, Uttu nevertheless is seduced by Enki and his gift. However Ninhursag a removes the semen of the god and plants it in the soil where eight kinds of plants sprout. Enraged by a fate he did not decree, Enki eats the eight plants and is cursed to death by Ninhursag a, however he is brought back to life after a fox goes before Enlil to promise to bring Ninhursag a back to the Annuna and convince her to change her decree (Kramer and Maier, 1989: 29). The text refers to the lustful nature of the god Enki by explicitly giving account of the sexual encounters between him and the goddesses. The male organ and vulva are repeatedly mentioned in the text as well as the act of copulation and conceiving.

Although Mesopotamian literature is full of accounts on sexuality and eroticism there is no word in Sumerian or Akkadian language that corresponds to the term nude or naked. The texts do repeatedly mention removal of clothes, but there is no specific term referring to the state of a person without clothing (Bahrani, 2001: 44). However there are many used for body parts especially for sexual organs; Bahrani suggests there are five different words for female genitals known in the Akkadian language (2001: 45). Furthermore both in Akkadian and Sumerian languages, the terms for sexual organs were not euphemisms but rather direct equivalents of vulva and penis. In

Sumerian pictographic script, in fact, man and woman, *nita and munus*, are represented by a penis and a pubic triangle (Asher-Greve, 2002: 434). There is one term in Akkadian, which can be associated with the term “naked”: *erû*, which corresponds to the Sumerian word *SUG4*. These terms literally mean empty, empty-handed, or destitute and are often used in contexts referring to poverty and lack. Bahrani argues that the absence of a term for the state of nakedness is due to the fact that there is no such a concept of nudity or nakedness; Mesopotamians rather “thought more in terms of dress and undress” (2001: 44).

Thus, the removal of clothes or references to being without clothes occurs regularly in Mesopotamian literature. For instance, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is a legend revolving around the hero-king of Uruk Gilgamesh, and Enkidu who is created by the gods as a rival to him (Dalley, 2000: 39-153). The lengthy text mentions various adventures and exploits of Gilgamesh and Enkidu as well as the relationship and brotherly love between the two. Walls even argues for the homoerotic nature of the relationship between Enkidu and Gilgamesh, referring to their implicit sexual desire (Walls, 2001: 12). The story then transforms into Gilgamesh’s quest for immortal life after the death of his companion, Enkidu. The theme of the text is not sexuality or fertility as in the case of Enlil and Enki’s myths, however it has a few references to being nude or rather being undressed, and is helpful in that sense to understand how nudity of a mortal Mesopotamian man was perceived.

First of all, Enkidu is created by the mother goddess Aruru out of a pinch of clay and put in the open fields where he lived like a cattle rather than a civilized man. Even though the text does not directly refer to Enkidu as naked, it is said that he was

“shaggy with hair” and “dressed as a cattle”. We infer from these lines that he was wandering around naked in the wilderness. Furthermore his encounter with the prostitute Shamhat who was sent to seduce him mentions the act of removing clothes. Shamhat is given the advice to take off her clothes, bare her bosom and open her legs for Enkidu so that he can take in her attractions. However the original Akkadian text does not use a specific term for being naked; rather, it mentions the act of getting undressed.

As argued above, the Akkadian word *erû* is often translated as naked according to the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary (CAD). For instance an Old Babylonian letter uses the adverbial version of the word *erû*, translated as: “my clothes are with you, and I go about naked, send me (at least) one old garment” (CAD, 1958: 320). However *erû* appearing in such contexts implies a lack of clothing due to being destitute instead of being naked. One can argue that the term is not an equivalent of the English term nude or naked. Another example from an Old Babylonian proverb is translated as: “if a wife says to her husband ‘You are not my husband,’ she shall go out (from his house) naked, and they shall take her up to the floor of the palace (to expose her)”. *Erû* is used for ‘naked’ in this sentence and it can be read also as if a wife wants to leave her husband, she should leave all her possessions, she should go empty-handed. The presence of such examples supports the idea that there is a lack in terms of a concept being naked or nude in the language.

The state of being unclothed or taking off the clothes does not necessarily have sexual connotations in Mesopotamian literature and textual record. If we go back to the

act of removing clothes in literature, the connection of getting undressed with contexts that are not related to sexuality and eroticism can be further observed.

The myth called *Descent of Inanna/Ishtar to the Netherworld* narrates the story of the goddess' journey to the underworld to take over the rule of Hades (Jacobsen, 1987: 205-232). This attempt of Inanna or Ishtar, however, fails and she is punished to death for her act. Confined to the realm of the dead, Inanna/Ishtar makes her release possible by handing over her lover Dumuzi as her substitute as a result of a rage caused by jealousy. What is pertinent here in terms of removal of clothes in the written record is that Inanna removes all of her clothing at each seven gates of the Netherworld. Before her planned coup, she dresses up in her full attire and weapons, thus her powers, but when entering through the gates of underworld she is stripped off by the guardians. In a similar vein, in a story called *In the Desert by the Early Grass*, which is about Inanna's husband Dumuzi, removal of clothes is mentioned in connection with death (Jacobsen, 1987: 56-84). The text opens with a wailing for Dumuzi's death by Inanna for her dead husband and continues with various laments for Dumuzi and gives an account of his death. According to the other texts on Dumuzi and *Descent of Inanna*, his death may be because of Inanna herself when she offered him to the Netherworld as her substitute, as mentioned above. What is important in this text is how Dumuzi is treated when faced with death. It can be understood that the guardians of the Netherworld search for him on the road, in the desert to take him to the realm of dead, and when they seized him they stripped him off his clothes: "...they cried out, they seized him, his girdle they untied...the lad's thighs they bared..." (Jacobsen, 1987: 63). Both the story of Inanna and Dumuzi support the literary evidence of

removal of clothes with motivations other than sexuality or eroticism. They suggest a link between removing clothes and death, which will be further developed in the next chapter.

Although Mesopotamian art from the Protoliterate period onwards until the end of Early Dynastic period, offers many examples of nude male representations in religious and ritualistic contexts, textual records from the period are silent about it. The earliest texts that mention how certain rituals should be conducted by priests and various temple personnel come from Akkadian period when nude male figures engaging in cultic rituals cease to be depicted in art.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION: INTERPRETATIONS AND IDENTIFICATIONS

Starting with the 4th millennium BC, nude male figures start appearing in Mesopotamian art in various contexts. The examples of male nudity can be observed in three categories: death and defeat of enemy soldiers, ritual nudity and heroic nudity. Examples discussed and described in detail above imply many possible readings and explanations of male nudity in ancient Near Eastern Art. In this section I will discuss the ways in which these examples can be understood and explained in the light of various aspects of nudity.

4.1 Captives and Dead Enemies

A close examination of the representations of war and violence scenes that can be attested from the 4th millennium BC onwards reflects the Mesopotamian conceptions that are perceived and embraced regarding the nudity is employed in such scenes.

4.1.1 Nudity as Subjugation and Defeat

In the case of captives and dead enemies, the usage of nudity first signals the concept of subjugation and degradation of the enemy: the other. It can be observed that clothing and getting dressed are regarded as the requirements of being civilized for a man in the Mesopotamian concept. The Epic of Gilgamesh clearly exemplifies the attributions assumed for being naked. In the story, when the physical attributes of Gilgamesh's friend Enkidu were first described, it is told that his whole body was "*shaggy with hair*" and "*he was dressed as cattle are*" (Dalley, 2000: 53) in other words he was naked. Furthermore he was seen as a primitive man, with no knowledge of any aspects of being civilized. Then he transforms from being a wild creature of the mountains into a civilized human with the help of the prostitute Shamhat who clothes him with one piece of garment. Putting on clothes is what makes Enkidu a human being that can be accepted as urban and civilized, and thus being nude bears the negative connotations that are linked to being savage, barbarous and uncivilized (Bahrani, 2001:). Another example of the perception of nudity as a sign of lacking civilized behavior can be attested in a Sumerian poem called "The Disputation Between Sheep and Grain" which reads; "*And there was no cloth to wear... The people of those days did not know about eating bread. They did not know about wearing clothes; they went about with naked limbs in the Land.*" (See ETCSL¹² c.5.3.2)

It is argued by many scholars, who are interested in these battle scenes depicting prisoners and dead enemy soldiers naked, that nudity is used as a humiliating

¹² Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature: <http://www-etcs1.orient.ox.ac.uk>

tool in order to represent the subjugated and vanquished other. Cifarelli (1998) states that the nudity is used as a marker of alterity towards foreigners. The subject defines itself in relation to the other, in the presence of other. Lacan (1977) explains the formation of the self of subject by his idea of mirror stage that takes place in the early years of an individual. According to this, when a subject is confronted with the other, he or she constructs himself or herself accordingly, in relation to the other. The identity of the subject is created through the presence of the other. The psychoanalytic premise of Lacan can be applied in order to understand why such an iconography of depicting defeated enemy is used in ancient Mesopotamian Art. It is clear that nudity or being undressed bears negative attributes, at least for the mortal man. Although a civilized Mesopotamian mortal man is generally depicted dressed, the nudity is reserved for mortal men only in the case of battle scenes, only to represent foreigners. Accordingly, the Mesopotamians set themselves apart from foreigners, by showing themselves dressed in contrast. In Mesopotamia the behavior was the significative of the alterity concept (Bahrani, 2006: 51). The primary differentiation was along the axis of barbarian and civilized, and it can be attested in ancient record that groups of people other than the Mesopotamians were regarded as uncivilized (Bahrani, 2006: 54; Cooper, 1983: 31; Schwartz, 1995: s250). They create an identity full of positive attributes, by positioning themselves against their enemies. Thus nudity is reserved for the inferior and defeated; in this case it is the conquered enemy. With the usage of nudity the enemy soldiers, which represent the other, is degraded and regarded as inferior. The superiority and the victory of Mesopotamians are underlined.

4.1.2 Stripping of the Enemy

However stripping the enemy as an actual war practice should be equally true. Given the lack of textual evidence we cannot eliminate the possibility of a metaphorical usage of nudity or that of an actual practice, which leaves enemy soldiers naked in the battlefield. It is likely that Mesopotamians stripped their enemies in order to acquire their possessions as booty and also before execution. The spoils were an important aspect of the battles, either as goods, furniture, and weaponry or as human spoils (Nemet-Nejat, 1998: 236). This interest in booty can be attested clearly in ancient records and visual imagery as well.

The actual practice of stripping enemies before execution can be observed in palace reliefs from Neo-Assyrian period more clearly. There is an obvious difference between the depiction of enemies who died during the battle, and the ones about to be executed or paraded in processions, are faced with a special treatment: torture or execution. In examples of Protoliterate, Early Dynastic and Akkadian periods the distinction and the emphasis on the accuracy of such a possible practice is not that clear. The battle scenes are more conventional compared to the possible historical accuracy and realism of Neo-Assyrian period. There is no clear emphasis regarding the usage of nudity as a consequence of an actual practice of stripping. In earlier periods the dead bodies lying under chariots are shown naked in battle scenes. Since these enemies did not take off their clothes before the battle, it is apparent that they are stripped after being vanquished. However the naked vanquished soldiers can also be read as a metaphorical use of nudity in order to indicate the defeated, as a tool of subjugation. Yet, this kind of a representation should have derived from an actual

practice and then transformed into an iconographic convention to depict the defeated enemy. The scenes then overlap the aftermath and the actual battle together to create a more symbolic effect on the monuments that apparently celebrate the victory of the rulers.

The representations of war and violence scenes, which incorporate the nudity of the defeated, are mostly public monuments, placed in public spaces for human and/or divine viewers to see. They commemorate and celebrate the victory of the rulers. The choice of representing such execution, procession or battle scenes establish the rulers as the sovereign power and a new formulation of this sovereign power, which takes the form of biopolitics (Bahrani 2008). That is to say, life and death become relevant in the economy of the power. According to Michel Foucault, sovereign power possesses the right “to kill and let live” (Foucault, 1978: 136). Royal authority functions over the life of the others. The power of the ruler is also pertinent to the function and the cause of the wars. Foucault argues “the right to punish is an aspect of the sovereign’s right to make war on his enemies” (Foucault, 1979: 48). As Bahrani (2008) also argues the body of the enemy becomes the reified image through which the power is exerted. Especially on the Stele of Naram-Sin the implication of the ruler as the sovereign power becomes clearer, since he is depicted as the power over the bare life of his enemy. He literally steps on the dead naked bodies as the victor of the battle while the Lulubu warrior is shown pleading for his life. In the Foucauldian sense, it is an indication of the ruler’s right to decide to kill or let live, his absolute power over the bare life. Bahrani asserts that it is the first usage of an iconography where a ruler directly exerts his absolute power literally over a body. Yet the convention of stepping

on the dead bodies of the enemy soldiers can be attested also during the Early Dynastic monument, the Vultures Stele, however, it is not the ruler who actually performed the act of stepping like Naram-Sin. Whereas Eannatum is shown on the fourth register of the “historical” side of the stele as pointing his spear to the head of the enemy leader suggesting another manner through which the ruler’s power over the body of the enemy and right to kill is revealed. In both cases it can be observed that the ruler’s manifest power over life and death can take on different forms.

The nudity of these bodies in these scenes reveals the bareness of life of the enemy soldiers more obvious, leaving them vulnerable bodies. Giorgio Agamben (1998) argues for the distinction between *zoe*, or bare life and *bios*, politically or morally qualified life. He notes that sovereign power has the right to decide whom to incorporate or exclude within the politically defined *bios*, reducing the excluded ones to bare life, or simply biological bodies. Annals from the Neo-Assyrian period describe vividly how the bodies of the other are treated, claiming the sovereign’s right over these merely biological entities (Grayson, 1991). Visually this is manifest in these victory scenes over the bodies of enemy soldiers; they are excluded from a politically and morally defined identity and regarded as biological entities that can be stepped upon, killed and discarded. An application of Foucault’s premises on execution and sovereign power is also valid for the Neo-Assyrian period. The palace reliefs represent scenes of violent torture, execution and death more than any other examples from the earlier periods. Torture and execution scenes proclaim the victory and signal the defeat of the enemy through their usage of the bodies of the enemy. Execution in this sense is

not only a judicial act but also a political ceremony through which power is revealed (Foucault, 1979: 47).

4.1.3 Nudity, death and deprivation

Nudity of the prisoners, or the dead, or the about-to-be executed enemy soldiers can also be seen as a condition of the execution practices, and related to the connection between nudity and death embraced by Mesopotamians. Many ancient texts relate nudity with death, in a more strict sense as a requirement of death. For instance, in the story of Dumuzi, the dying god, he is captured and stripped by the deputies of the netherworld (Jacobsen, 1987: 63). Similarly, “The Descent of Inanna to the Netherworld” which narrates the visit of Inanna to the netherworld and back describes how the goddess is forced to take off her clothes by the guardians at each gate. She gets undressed as a requirement of going to the netherworld. Furthermore a Standard Babylonian omen referring to a dead person as “a naked ghost” is translated as follows: *“if in a man’s house the owner sees a naked ghost”* (CAD, 1958: 320).

Also visually it’s apparent on the Naram-Sin stele; the enemy is shown at different stages of being live, wounded and dead. The live enemy begging for mercy is clearly dressed while the one under the foot of the ruler and the ones falling down the mountain are clearly dead and totally naked. On the Assyrian reliefs, the connection between death and nudity is also visible. The visual difference made between the enemy prepared to be executed and the ones died during the fighting indicates a special effort is given to the ones that will face the “ritual” of dying. Since execution can be seen a ceremony where power is exerted, it requires certain rites, such as undressing. In

the art of previous periods, the connection is extended to the one existing between nudity and dead or fallen to indicate the vanquished in general. As mentioned above, the actual requirement of being death might have transformed into a more conventional and metaphorical usage of nudity, which becomes the sign of the defeated.

However Dina Katz disavows the prevalent view of associating nudity with death, presenting textual evidence for the treatment of the dead body and the statue of the dead. According to that the bodies were washed carefully, anointed with oil and covered with clean garments before interment (Cohen, 2005: 75; Katz, 2007: 170). The following is a description of a healing ritual that is similar to a funerary ritual (after Katz, 2007): *“as a substitute of man for Ereskigal, you slaughter a lamb that knew no copulation, and fill its intestines with perfume. Treat her like a corpse, dress her in a garment, anoint her hands with sweet oil. You display a taklimtu and offer kispu.”* She argues that in the Descent of Inanna, the goddess is not stripped as a requirement of the Netherworld but because the guardians took her attire, which she carefully dressed before her departure for the takeover of the rule of Netherworld, in order to disable her powers and immunity (Katz, 2007: 170). Usages of Akkadian word for naked/nude, *erû*, and the Sumerian *sa-su-(g)* also mean empty-handed and destitute. Often the terms are used in contexts where a lack or poverty is mentioned. If a wife says to her husband “You are not my husband”, she will leave his house naked. Naked in this context means “empty-handed” (CAD, 1958: 320). Furthermore there is textual evidence that connects being clothed or lacking clothed to having no powers or means. The Sumerian text “Lugalbanda in a Mountain Cave” mentions sun god Utu’s power over the poor and the scoundrel: *“Utu... your sunshine clothes the poor man and the scoundrel as*

well as him who has no clothes; as a garment of white wool it covers the bodies even of debt slaves” (Black, 2006: 17). Another example clearly linking being poor to lacking clothes or enough clothes comes from the Descent of Inanna: *“Like (he has no man) a pauper, she clothed herself in a single garment”* (Jacobsen 1987, 216). Furthermore having clothes also means possessing powers or importance according to this passage from “A *balbale* to Inanna”: *“For him I straightened my clothes as the garments of power, I reinforced for him the noble vestments”* (see ETCSL 4.07.1).

However the rituals surrounding the corpse of the dead person in Mesopotamia, noted by Katz and Cohen, often mention the rituals and practices followed for royal or elite personae. Similarly, it is clear that most of the ED III graves excavated at the Royal Cemetery of Ur contained bodies dressed (Zettler, 1998: 22) or wrapped in a reed (Pollock, 1999: 211). It is likely that burials of royal and elite people were treated differently than the common burials. Besides the ritual of washing the body and wrapping it with garment or grave clothing is a still ongoing practice in the region and its surroundings. For instance in Modern Egypt the bodies of the poor are wrapped in one sheet of “kefen” whereas those of the rich are wrapped in many layers of silk, cotton and Cashmere (Lane, 2010 (1860): 506). I believe it is a practice done and still being done in the region not for the sake of “dressing” the body but for covering the body for interment; which still requires, first, the removal of the worldly clothes of the deceased before entering into the realm of the dead as in the case of Inanna who is told that her clothes and attire belong to the realm of Earth goddess?????. Thus disregarding a ritual of undressing the body, as a preparation for death in Mesopotamia is not plausible, since Jacobsen opts for such a ritual of burying bodies undressed and

crouched down, as the way Inanna enters the Netherworld (Jacobsen, 1976: 57). At the same time, in the case of Inanna's Descent, stripping off as a means of deprivation of powers in relation to the literal meaning of the word, *erû*, is equally likely when the captives and enemy soldiers are considered. Stripping off their clothes may also mean, besides a preparation for their "death ceremony", depriving them of their powers, leaving them empty-handed and vulnerable, and thus signaling an obvious defeat.

4.2 Ritual Nudity

Ritual nudity in the case of examples from the 4th millennium BC until the end of Early Dynastic period is an ambiguous context in which nude male figures are represented in various ritual scenes. Its purpose remains open to argument, as does the question whether nudity was an actual practice. Although no textual evidence supports it, it is not sufficient to dismiss the possibility of such an actual practice that can be observed for a long time in art. As Bonfante argues, since nudity can be seen as a costume in a clothed society, thus ritual nudity denotes "a special mode of dressing" required by such cultic activities (Bonfante, 1989: 546).

We come across nude male figures either in narrative scenes where a ritual ceremony takes place, or as isolated figures engaged in an act of reverence. It can be suggested that nudity is a requirement of certain religious and ritual practices. Many representations on votive plaques, stelae or seals depict completely nude and especially bald men in procession, carrying offerings or pouring libations before deities. The most famous example among them, the Uruk Vase, displays this type of male figures engaging in ritual activities before a female figure that may be the goddess Inanna.

These men are considered to be the temple personnel, or priests who take part naked in such ceremonies as an obligation. It is clear that the staff of the temple, around this period, distinguished by certain physical characteristics as well as dress, and being nude was probably one of these characteristics of the earlier periods (Postgate, 1992: 128). Similarly the nude musicians may temple personnel who play instruments in some cultic rituals; thus being nude was a characteristic of some temple staff. Asher-Greve suggests that they should be identified as *guruš*, young unmarried men who were the young cultic personnel of the temple often described as bald and beardless (1997: 441). *Guruš* in Sumerian and *etlu* in Akkadian mean “man, young man,” and the terms are often used to designate a male individual at a stage between a full-grown man and an adolescent (CAD, 1956: 407-411). Asher-Greve argues that these young male figures were also virginal and their nudity might represent purity required for these cultic rituals.

Although there is no Mesopotamian text that mentions a requirement of nudity in rituals, a cross-cultural comparison offers a parallel case among the Hittites where the word for nudity *nekumant-* appears in religious texts that mention religious rituals. In these texts being nude is sometimes a transitory stage, where the king, for instance, takes his clothes off and then takes a bath in order to wear a clean robe for the ritual (De Martino, 1985: 258). Here, nudity is required for the ritual in order the king to purify himself. However there is no text suggesting a ritual where participants should be naked, yet a fragmentary text about a ritual before a divinity mentions nudity (after De Martino, 1985: 261) “*ma quando la divinità della città di Hatenzuwa ... allora nudi vanno*”. Asher-Greve further states that being nude enables the worshipper more

receptive to divine influence (1997: 442). However identification of these beardless, nude men as *guruš* or *etlu* cannot offer an explanation for the examples of nude male figure with beards. Those men are clearly fully grown adults and their hand gesture of reverence or prayer suggests a ritual or religious context. However nudity and reverence gesture of these isolated figures that are put within temples before deities as votive figures, also imply a requirement comparable to the nude and shaved cultic personnel representations. Furthermore, due to the belt that some figures wear and their beard and hairstyles, these isolated nude figures are also associated with the nude hero figure found in Mesopotamian art since the Protoliterate period. This interpretation of these figures as mythological heroes due to their physical similarity to the hero figures depicted on seals is argued by also Bahrani; she noted that nudity used here is a sign of “masculine strength and heroism, *kuzbu*, rather than simply being the requirement of religious ritual” (Bahrani, 2001: 57)¹³.

In contrast to Hittite texts that mention being nude or nudity for religious circumstances, ancient texts from Mesopotamia only confirm the existence of these group of young people represented on the Uruk Vase. “The Hymn to the Goddess Inanna”, composed under the reign of Idin-Daggan, the third king of the Early Babylonian period ca. 20th century BC, mentions specific rituals that take place before Inanna. The text talks about the dark-headed people, Sumerians, who get up in the morning to bring her offerings and pour libations (Jacobsen, 1987: 120). Yet whether these people are naked or not is not specified. On the contrary texts necessitate cultic officiants to wear clothing (Biggs, 1998: 64). One Akkadian text about a ritual for the

¹³ The relation between male nudity and heroism will be discussed further below.

repair of a temple makes clear that the director of the reconstruction should put on clean clothes. Furthermore another text about a ritual to be performed at Uruk mentions the *mahhū*-priest (high priest) wearing a sash (Sachs, 1950: 338). This may suggest that, even if being nude was an actual requirement of cultic rituals, it was reserved for specific personnel, probably according to rank. Thus, low-rank young staff of the temple might have been required to be naked instead of high-rank priests. Pollock also notes the depiction of hierarchy between individuals depending on clothing in the case of Uruk vase (Pollock, 1999: 191). She argues for a connection between the natural order of things depicted on the vase as plants and animals, and the individuals.

However the textual indication of such a practice is still ambiguous, the texts mentioned are Akkadian or composed as copies of older versions, thus it is unclear whether they reflect the ritual nudity in art that can only be attested until the end of Early Dynastic period or not. Since there are no examples of nude male figures in cult or ritual scenes after the Early Dynastic period, and this iconographic convention was transformed into the depiction of temple personnel and priests whose only expressed nudity was in the shaving of their heads, these texts may signal later practices.

Still, the lack of contemporary textual evidence that correlates with visual representations supports the idea of the possible symbolic usage of nudity in art. Asher-Greve differentiates between the words nude and naked. According to her and Sweeney, naked refers to undressed bodies in contexts where taking clothes off is an actual practice, whereas nude refers to a symbolic usage of undressed bodies as “transcendent forms” (2006: 133). In this sense, as mentioned above, whether undressed male figures in ritual scenes and contexts do reflect an actual practice or a

symbolic usage, is not clear. However, the fact that later texts from a period when the nudity was transformed into the practice of shaving heads do not mention such a practice anymore and the fact that it is depicted on works of art from the Early Sumerian period point to the likely existence of such an actual practice. It is probable that ritual nudity was a practice but was not described in texts, and then it was abandoned. Since there is cultural break and shift with the Akkadian period, such a change in the ritual practices is likely. Besides, as a result of reverse logic, if we consider the later Akkadian and Neo-Sumerian practice of priests shaving heads actual then existence of a different way in which cultic rituals are performed should not be disregarded as well given the lack of Sumerian texts.

4.3 Heroic Nudity

Male nudity in the heroic context in ancient Near Eastern Art offers various interpretations and identifications of the figures depicted. As mentioned above, the most frequent usages of heroic nudity manifest itself in the combat scenes where a nude hero is represented wrestling and subduing wild beasts and humanoid creatures. Along with the nude hero figure and his various companions, male deities are depicted naked in divine battle scenes, a common motif commonly attested in Mesopotamian literature. Here I will discuss the ways in which male heroic nudity can be understood and interpreted.

4.3.1 Nude Hero as a Royal Image

Heroic nudity in the case of nude hero figure becomes a common motif during the Early Dynastic period. There are numerous identifications of this figure and Costello, in her article on his origins and interpretations associates the nude hero with the earlier shaman and master of animals figure of the sixth millennium Neolithic period. She argues that the master of animals and priest-king in net skirt are the precursors of the nude hero, linking his appearance with the political shift to powerful city-states starting with the fourth millennium BC (Costello, 2010: 25). She makes this association largely due to both figures' relationships with animals and argues that both figures connect with the idea of kingship, which is also argued by Asher-Greve. It is suggested that the frequent appearance of the nude hero figure in the Early Dynastic period marks the changes in the idea of kingship during the time, when the kings became "godlike and more secular" (Asher-Greve, 1997: 443; Costello, 2010: 32). According to her, the representation of the nude heroic figure is a royal allegory through which the king's superiority, strength and godlike appearance are underscored. The Neo-Sumerian king Šulgi of the Ur III dynasty, declares himself in his praise poem, the text called "Šulgi A", as "*provided with lofty royal power*" and "*given heroism*" (Klein, 1981: 201). Furthermore, she notes for a connection with another motif where nudity is employed: the divine battle scenes. In the divine battle scenes, as argued above, gods are shown naked fighting with each other displaying their physical strength. Thus, by adopting the nude hero figure as a royal image of his valor the king assumes the powers of the divine (Asher-Greve, 1997: 444). It is also argued that the heroes in combat scenes exemplify the struggle to maintain order in Mesopotamia.

Starting with the Early Dynastic period this evoked the importance of the hero-like kings who assume heroic powers; it can also be observed that the kings incorporated the word “hero”, *mes* with their names as in Meskalamdug or Mesanepada (Cohen, 2005: 140; Costello, 2010: 33).

4.3.2 Icons of Masculinity and Sexual Allure

It is also true that, in the case of heroes and divine beings, male nudity evokes the celebration of ideal male body, virility and physical power. Mesopotamian literature and society often praise masculine power and strong male body. There are many literary texts, such as hymns, poems, epics, etc. that expresses admiration for the heroic bodies of important semi-divine heroes, deities and kings. Their bodies, according to literary descriptions, shine with brilliance and their strength is unrivaled. Often, the kings are told as heroes in praise poems. One such example from various praise poems of Šulgi informs us the king was a hero already before he was born and described as warrior and strong hero (Klein, 1981: 189). Furthermore, the semi-divine hero-king Gilgamesh is described as a hero with great splendor and power that is unrivaled (Dalley, 2000: 15). Similarly, the warrior god Ninurta, son of Enlil, is often lauded for possessing superior strength and powerful body parts such as arms that can reap the necks of the disobedient like barley (Jacobsen, 1987: 235). Furthermore, the kings and male gods are often compared to a wild bull or bison underscoring their untamed masculinity and strength (Leick, 1994: 23). In a society where men, divine or mortal, are glorified through their powerful and formidable bodies, it would not be inappropriate to state that the representation of heroes in combat scenes convey an

idealized, heroic (maybe divine) male body. Thus, the nude hero with curls transforms into “an icon of masculinity” (Asher-Greve, 1997: 444). However this ideal male body is not eroticized as the nude female figures are. The nude bodies of heroes or deities are though not to induce sexual overtones since often their genitalia are downplayed or even completely omitted (Asher-Greve and Sweeney, 2006: 146). But I believe it is not plausible to completely eliminate the fact that these nude male bodies bore erotic connotations.

However, in contrast, Bahrani (2001) and Winter (1996) note that although not as much as female nude does, the nude male also bears notions of desire, due to *kuzbu* (sexual allure) of his representation. Akkadian word *kuzbu* (Sumerian *hi-li*) means luxuriance, abundance, attractiveness, charm and sexual vigor depending on the context it is used (CAD, 1971: 614-615). Given the large numbers of contexts it can be used, *kuzbu* can refer to inanimate objects such as architecture, gardens, water canals as well as human beings and deities both for male and female. Euphemistically it also refers to virility and sexual parts. In Gilgamesh Epic, *kuzbu* is further revealed when the clothes are taken off; Shamhat is given the advice to take off her clothes to reveal her *kuzbu* for Enkidu, further Shamhat declares that Gilgamesh’s “entire body is adorned with seductive allure” (*zu’ una kuzba kalu zumrišu*), seductive allure. In the praise poem for Šulgi, the king declares that the goddess Inanna chose him for his “attractiveness”, *hi-li* (Klein, 1981: 189). Winter describes it not as a passive attribute but also like “pheromone”, spreading from the possessor to the beholder, produces a reaction (Walls, 2001: 17; Winter, 1996: 14). It is clear that with his powerful body and unprotected fight with wild beasts, the nude hero figure epitomizes the ideal masculine

body full of *kuzbu*, a body that also induces desire for the beholder. The nude body of the hero serves as a place for the gaze of the beholder as well as an example of an ideal strong heroic body assumed by deities and kings.

4.3.3 Identification of the Nude Hero and Connection with Enki/Ea

Besides possible explanations for the state of nudity of the hero figure with curls, his identification is also another important debate among scholars. There have been various attempts to identify him as a certain persona, such as Dumuzi and Gilgamesh. The most sound identification among them is Black and Green's association of the nude figure with six curls with the god Lahmu, as mentioned above, by comparing it to the clay figures found at the Neo-Assyrian foundation deposits, one of which is inscribed with the name of the deity Lahmu as the protector of the building from evil and sickness (1992: 17, 115). Furthermore, since *lahmu*, in a general context refers to the creatures belonging to the watery realm of *abzu*, the nude hero's later association with water in the third millennium BC supports such identification and his association with the water god Enki or more likely his Akkadian counterpart Ea. Given the variations in the meaning of the word in time, it is fair to assume that the hero is first associated with the general term *lahmu* of the watery realm as a confederate of the god Ea, then in later periods he acquired an identity in connection with the protective god Lahmu.

The visual link between the god Enki/ Ea and the nude hero figure can be understood better when the god's characteristics are examined. Enki, the wise and crafty one, is among the most important gods of the Mesopotamian pantheon, regarded

as the King of Abzu, the watery realm (Kramer and Maier, 1989: 2-5). The gods An and Enlil were responsible for the creation of the cosmic order while Enki crafted the world in order to make it a suitable place for human beings to live (Leick, 1994: 22). He had creative and reproductive powers, which are related to the element water, as it is the essential basis for existence. When the Sumerian word for “water” and literary texts are looked at, the correlation between generative and reproductive aspect of Enki and the element water becomes more visible. Sumerian term for fluid “a” also stands for water, urine and sperm. As it can be observed in the Epic of Creation, the water, or the muddy water, is thought to be fertile, like semen. Water gives life, as Enki influences fertility and reproduction with his semen or even with his mere presence in the text “Enki and the World Order” (Leick, 1994: 22). *“Father Enki, come close to the seeded land: let it bear healthy seed. Nudimmud, come close to the pregnant ewe: let it give birth to a healthy lamb.”* (lines 52-3 Kramer and Maier, 1989: 40). His generative power is also emphasized in the text through his masculine fertility and phallic actions: *“...once Father Enki had raised it over the Euphrates, he stood up full of lust like an attacking bull, lifted his penis, ejaculates- he filled the Tigris with flowing water.”* (lines 251-4 Kramer and Maier, 1989: 47). It is clear from this passage that Enki controls the water realm in a masculine manner, given the equation of “a/water = sperm/urine = fertility = Phallus” (Leick, 1994: 26). There are also other instances where Enki’s reproductive and fertile masculinity is manifest, such as in “Enki and Ninhursagâ”¹⁴ which narrates Enki’s relationship with female deities and attributes of his sexual and fertile powers.

¹⁴ See Jacobsen (1987: 181-204).

As mentioned above, the nude hero with six curls, especially starting with the Akkadian period is visually represented with iconography closely related to the water realm, *apsu*, or Enki. The fact that Enki is a Mesopotamian god mostly associated with phallic representations in literature (Leick, 1994: 21) and his associate, the nude hero, is commonly known for his nudity poses possible connections. It can be suggested that the adoption of the nude hero motif within the context of Enki and his cult may manifested the god's untamed and generative masculinity through the nude hero.

Yet Enki is not the only god whose untamed masculinity is revealed in art. The examples of divine battle scene where male deities engage in combat with each other is a common mythological motif used in both the Epic of Creation and the "flood myth", Atrahasis. It is the only context in which the male deities are depicted naked in Mesopotamian art. Although the texts mentioning the dispute among deities do not present them as naked, Asher-Greve argues that the fact that these deities are nude accentuates the deeds achieved by "pure physical prowess and superiority" instead of bearing protection or any arms by associating the naked deities with the nude hero figure. Thus the nudity of these gods and the hero points to a celebration of male and divine physical power (Asher-Greve, 1997: 443).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I investigated the nude male representations in ancient Mesopotamian art and the implications and attributions they carry within Mesopotamian society. In the previous chapters I attempted to understand the ways in which these representations are produced and how male nudity is perceived.

I started with a survey of the nude male representations in ancient Mesopotamia, beginning with the Protoliterate period until the end of Neo-Assyrian period. By constructing a typology with three distinct categories of male nudity I gave an overview of cases where male nudity and the kinds of changes in the artistic conventions over time can be observed. Then, I examined evidence of nudity or male nudity in Mesopotamian textual records, since art was not the only means through which nudity was described and depicted. After investigating visual and textual evidence for male nudity, I evaluated the data for each male nudity category and came up with various explanations for the understanding of the nude male representations.

As can be seen, the use of art in ancient Mesopotamia supersedes its decorative aspect. The art in ancient Mesopotamia functions as a tool to record historical and

mythological events and promote religion and ideologies. It is not an art solely for decorating palace walls, temples or private homes, or it is not an art for the sake of art. Rather its functionality and intentionality permit various interpretations and conclusions that are bound up with cultural, religious and political aspects of the society.

When looked at three categories established separately, some conclusions can be drawn. First of all, male nudity is used as a marker in ancient Mesopotamian art pointing to various identities. As argued above, male nudity is context dependent; and it signifies different groups of people, states of being, physicalities, and political and religious configurations. Nudity denotes a special meaning and condition within a clothed society. Thus, also in ancient Mesopotamian society it comes to signify particular identities and roles.

In this thesis it can be concluded that male nudity bears both positive and negative attributions depending on the context in which it is used. In the case of representations of captives and dead enemies, male nudity becomes the marker of subjugation, deprivation, defeat and death of the enemy; it serves as a visual signifier for “the other”, i.e. the enemy. In a society where public monuments play an important political and ideological role, images of defeated naked enemies become a powerful and impressive apparatus heralding both the victory of the sovereign power and the humiliation and defeat of the enemy. While nudity can be regarded as a visual adaptation of an actual battle practice, the connection between nudity and death attributes to it a more symbolic meaning.

Stylistically, we see a certain development in this category in the use of male nudity to favor more narrative realism. The usage of male nudity and iconography becomes less conventional. The symbolic and stock representations of dead enemy and captives give way to the visual accuracy of events, resulting in a more realistic usage of nudity. It is possible that the depiction of enemies stripped of their clothes derived from an actual practice; it was then adopted as an iconographic convention in earlier periods in order to help the audience foresee the aftermath of the battle. Starting with the Neo-Assyrian period, battles scenes became more realistic; this can be due to an artistic choice made by Neo-Assyrian artists or patrons in order to provide a more cogent account of victories achieved.

In the category of ritual nudity, the extent and meaning of male nudity are less clear and straightforward. It can be noted that since nudity signifies a special state of being in a clothed society, ritual nudity should have denoted a distinctive costume or a symbolic bodily configuration required by such ritual practices. Although there is no textual evidence to support such an argument, it can be inferred that rituals required a state of being pure, virginal and young, thus naked. The young low-rank temple staff might have engaged in such rituals naked compared to the high priests, thus the nudity may have been a marker for both their purity and hierarchy. I have determined that visual evidence for such a practice ceases after the Early Dynastic period, and in agreement with Postgate, from the Akkadian period onwards it gave way to the practice of head shaving. Furthermore, regarding the textual evidence in relation to ritual nudity, it needs to be stated that, first, there are no texts from Early Dynastic period to support the actual existence of such a practice. Second, only texts that do

mention cultic rituals appear from Akkadian period onwards, and they do not mention ritual nudity.

I believe that it is problematic to dismiss the existence of a ritual practice involving nudity just because there is no text mentioning it. It can be concluded that ritual nudity was an actual practice, but was not described in texts, and then it was abandoned in the Akkadian period due to the cultural and political break. Besides if the later Akkadian and Neo-Sumerian ritual practices are considered actual, then existence of a different way in which cultic rituals are performed should not be disregarded. However, the purpose of such an iconography still remains open to argument given the lack of Sumerian texts.

The third category is less ambiguous but it is worth mentioning the changing nature of heroic nudity and its long-lasting appropriations and modifications in different periods. When the nude hero figure first appeared in the Protoliterate period, it was associated with nature, wild animals and other mythological companions such as the bull-man. In the Early Dynastic period the figure became a motif for the justification of a strong king at a time when there is struggle to secure the kingship. However, starting with the Akkadian period when an absolute rule is established, the figure was associated within the divine iconography. First his role was transformed into being the gatekeeper and water bearer of deities, mainly the water god, Enki/Ea. This connection, I believe, is intriguing given the fact that Enki/Ea is a deity whose sexual encounters; fertility and numerous phallic representations are present in Mesopotamian literature. By the Middle Assyrian and the Neo-Assyrian periods it can be seen that the nude hero was re-adopted within the royal iconography except with some alterations

and associated with Marduk probably with a purpose of claiming the past and equating the might of the king with a powerful hero. In such a long span of time it is plausible that an iconographic convention changes and acquires new meanings and identities according to the functional needs of that particular period.

Yet what is more evident is that heroic nudity denotes the strength and allure of masculine body. Combat scenes with the “nude hero” subduing wild beasts and nude and muscular deities reinforce the ideal image of male body, virility and physical power possessed by the privileged segment of the ancient Mesopotamian society, its men. It can be suggested that the sexual allure of the ideal male body is underlined through the representations of naked and muscular bodies of the heroes and male deities. In a society where kings and deities are praised for their strong and formidable bodies, it is plausible to assume the nude heroes in combat scenes convey an idealized, heroic male body that is admired by the society. Thus, these bodily qualifications are also assumed by kings in order to celebrate the strength of their kingship by associating themselves with strong, powerful heroes. The rise of the “nude hero” figure coincides with changes in the idea of kingship, at a time when kings supposedly acquired more godlike heroic powers. Thus the “nude hero” becomes a royal allegory pointing to the unrivaled and heroic nature of the king.

In this thesis I have briefly touched upon the understanding of nude male representations in ancient Mesopotamian art. These conclusions should be further developed, and affirmed/rebutted by future studies. In the light of the new studies especially done on textual records, how male nudity in art connects with the Mesopotamian society and the kinds of associations can be further understood.

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APPENDIX

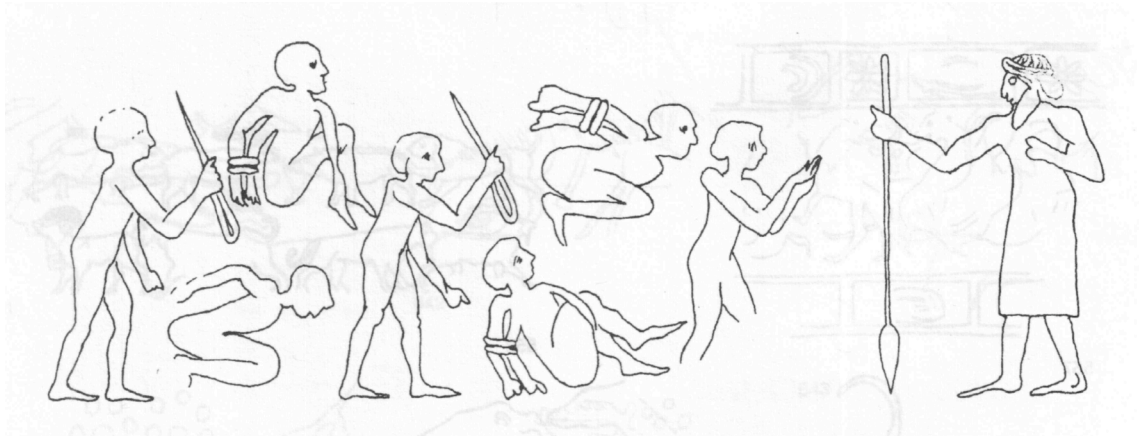


Fig. 1: Seal impression from Uruk

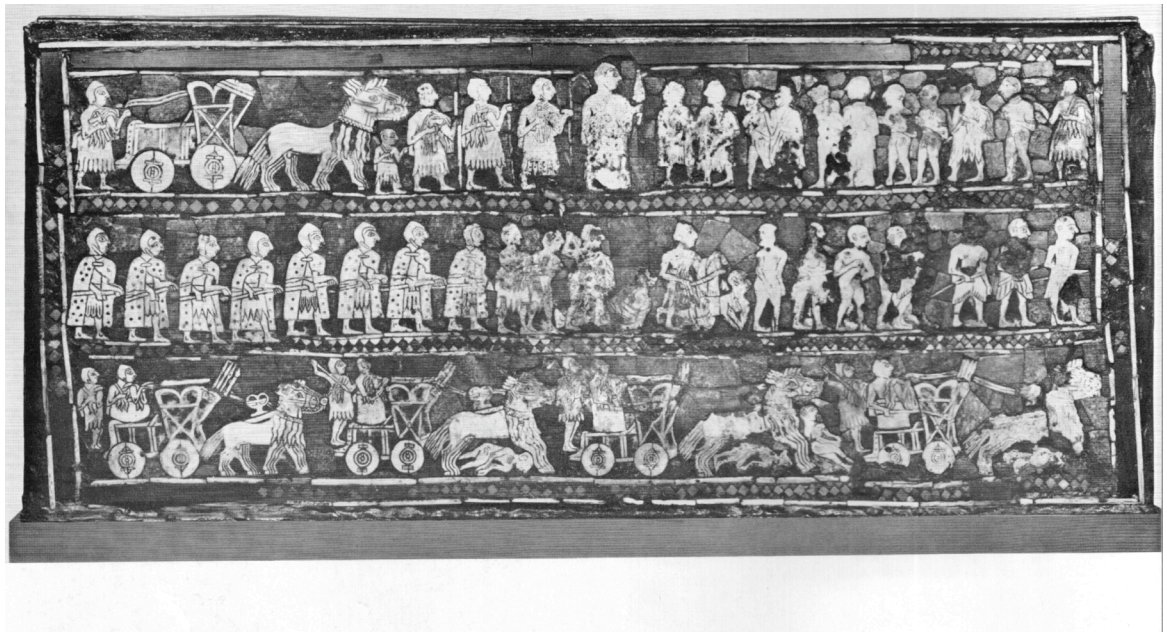


Fig. 2: Royal Standard of Ur



Fig. 3 Detail from Royal Standard of Ur



Fig. 4 Detail from Royal Standard of Ur



Fig. 5: Obverse of Stele of Vultures

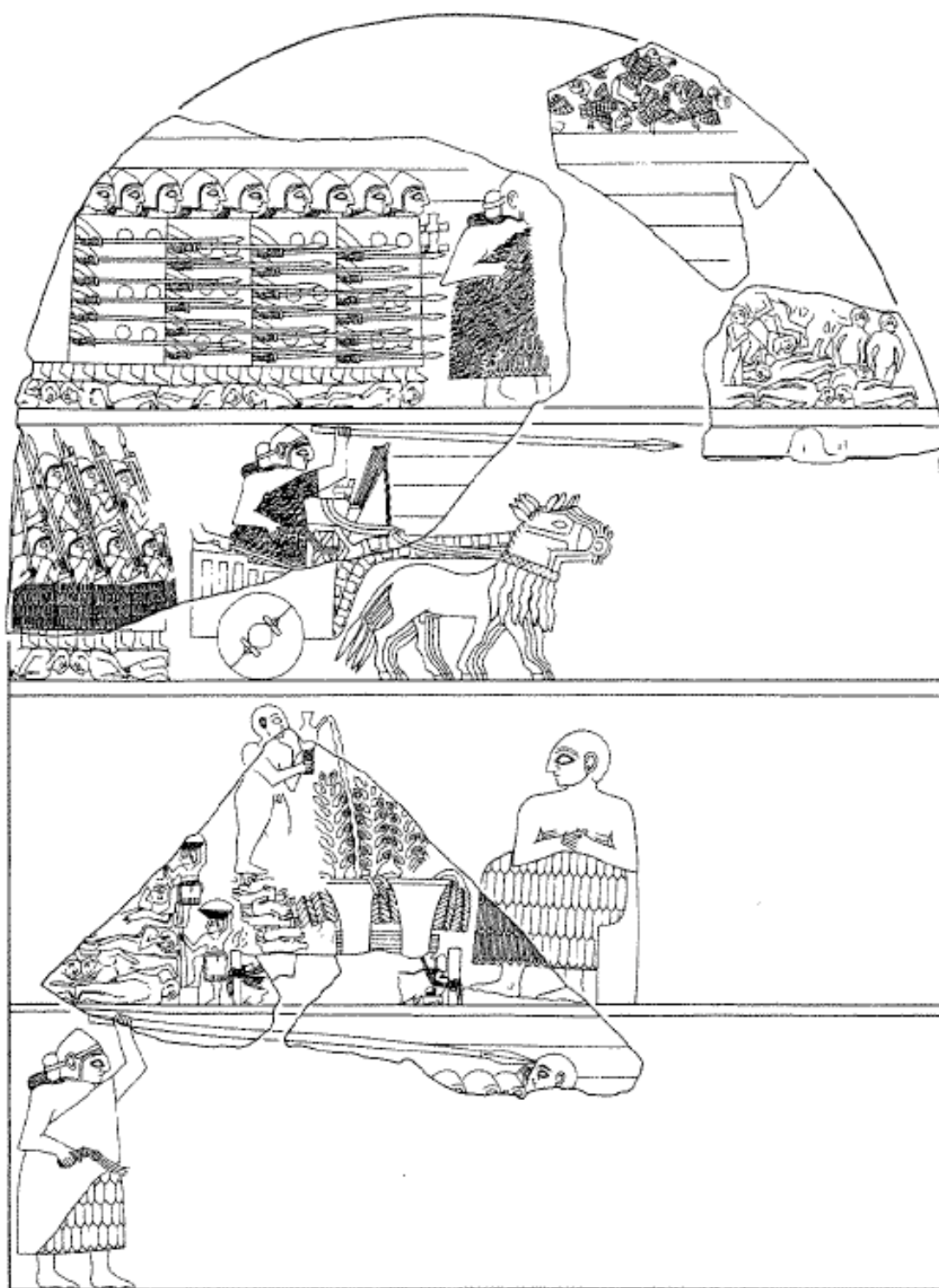


Fig. 6: Reverse of Stele of Vultures



Fig. 7: Stele of Sargon from Susa



Fig. 8: Stele of Sargon from Susa (reverse)



Fig. 9: A diorite stele fragment from Susa

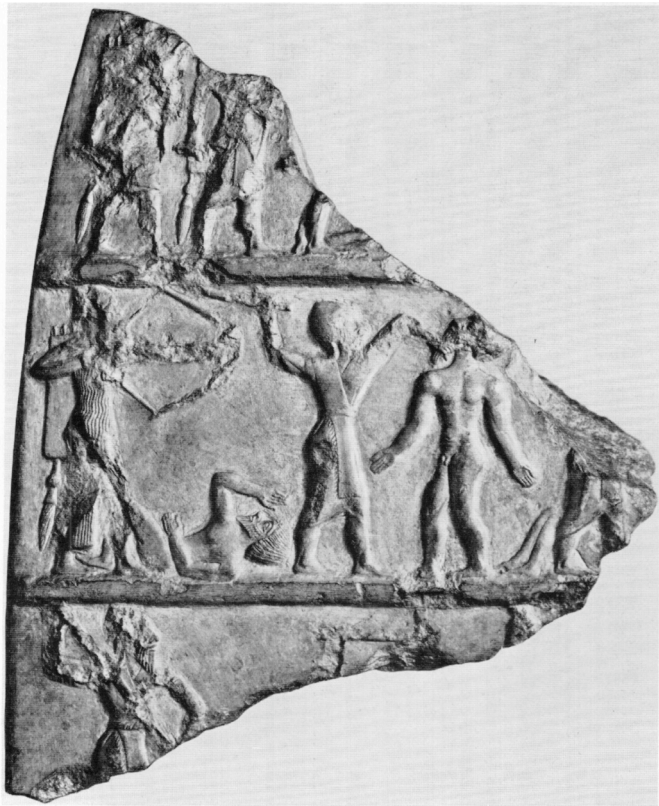


Fig. 10: Stele of Rimush from Girsu/Telloh

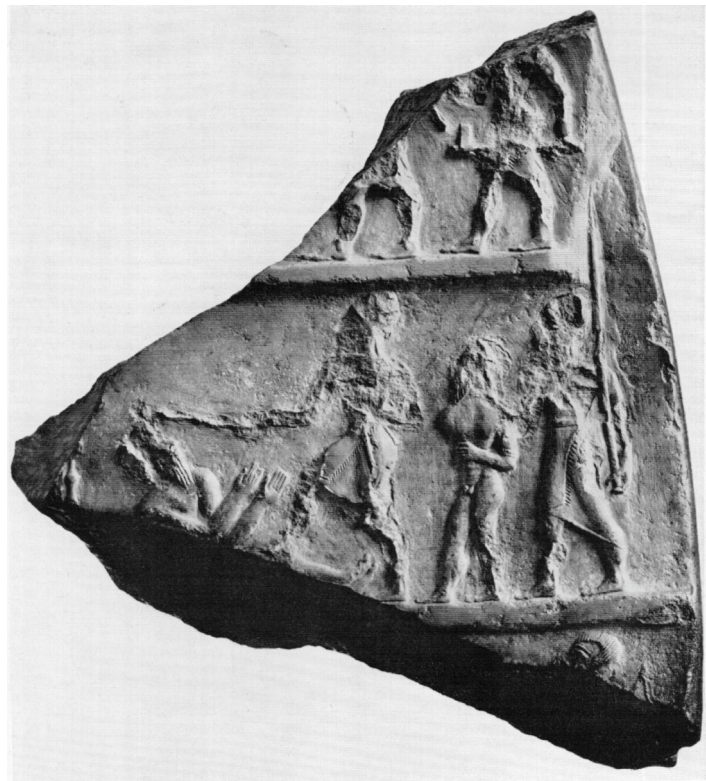


Fig. 11: Stele of Rimush from Girsu/Telloh (reverse)

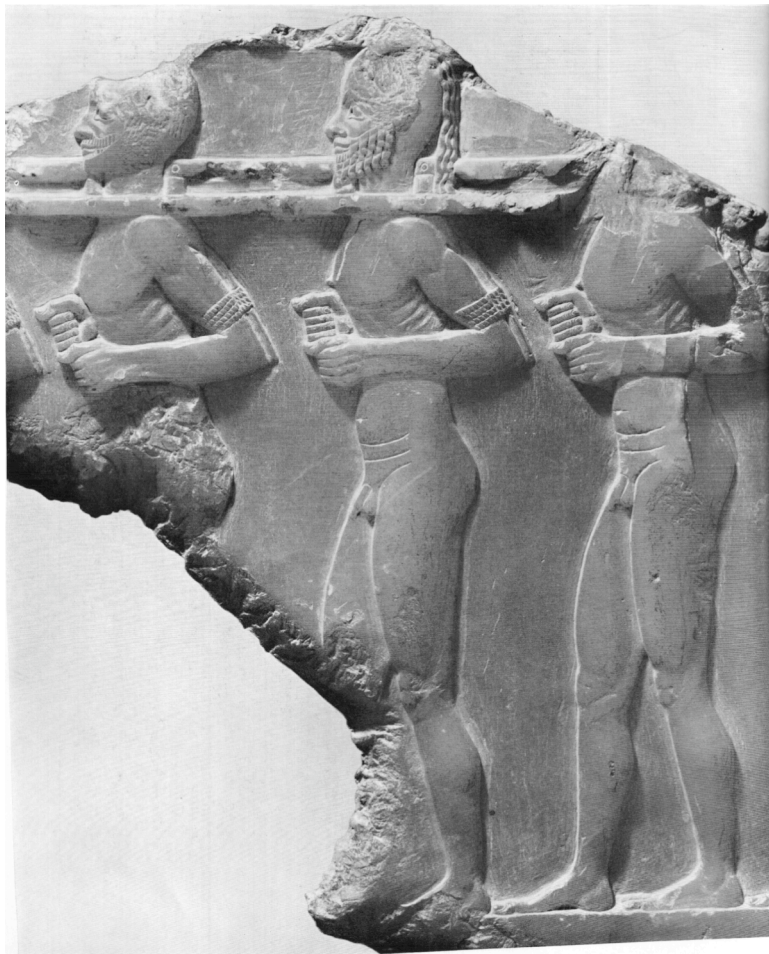


Fig. 12: Fragment of a Stele from Nasiriyya



Fig. 13: Fragment of a Stele from Nasiriyya



Fig. 14: Victory Stele of Naram-Sin

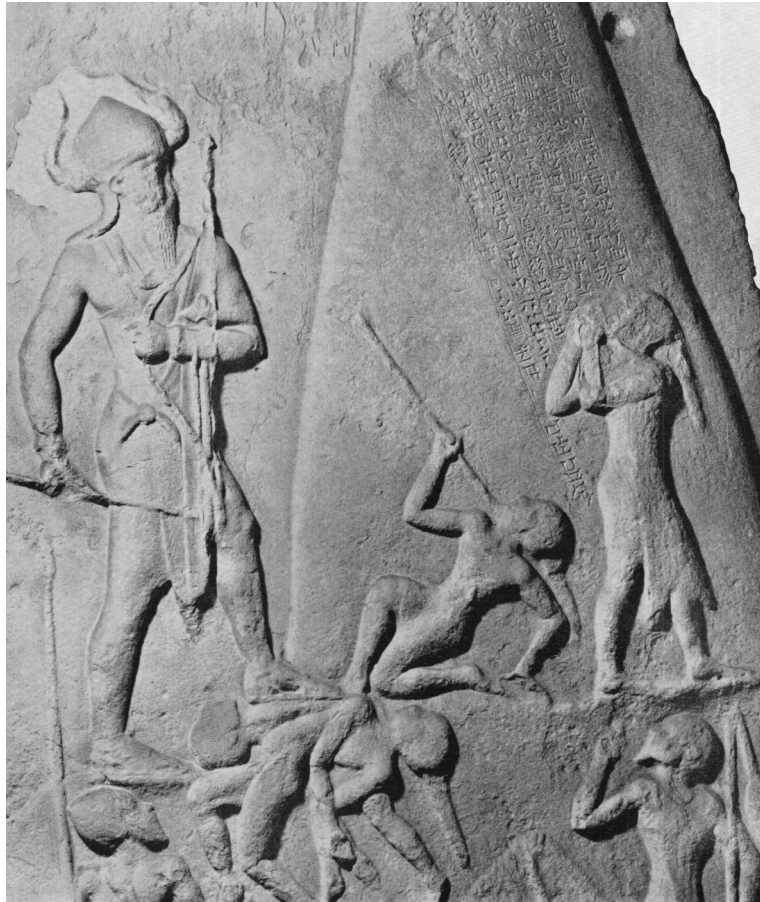


Fig. 15: Victory Stele of Naram-Sin (upper-right detail)



Fig. 16: Fragment from a Middle Assyrian Pyxis



Fig. 17: Wall relief from Northwest Palace at Nimrud



Fig. 18: Detail of a relief from Northwest Palace at Nimrud

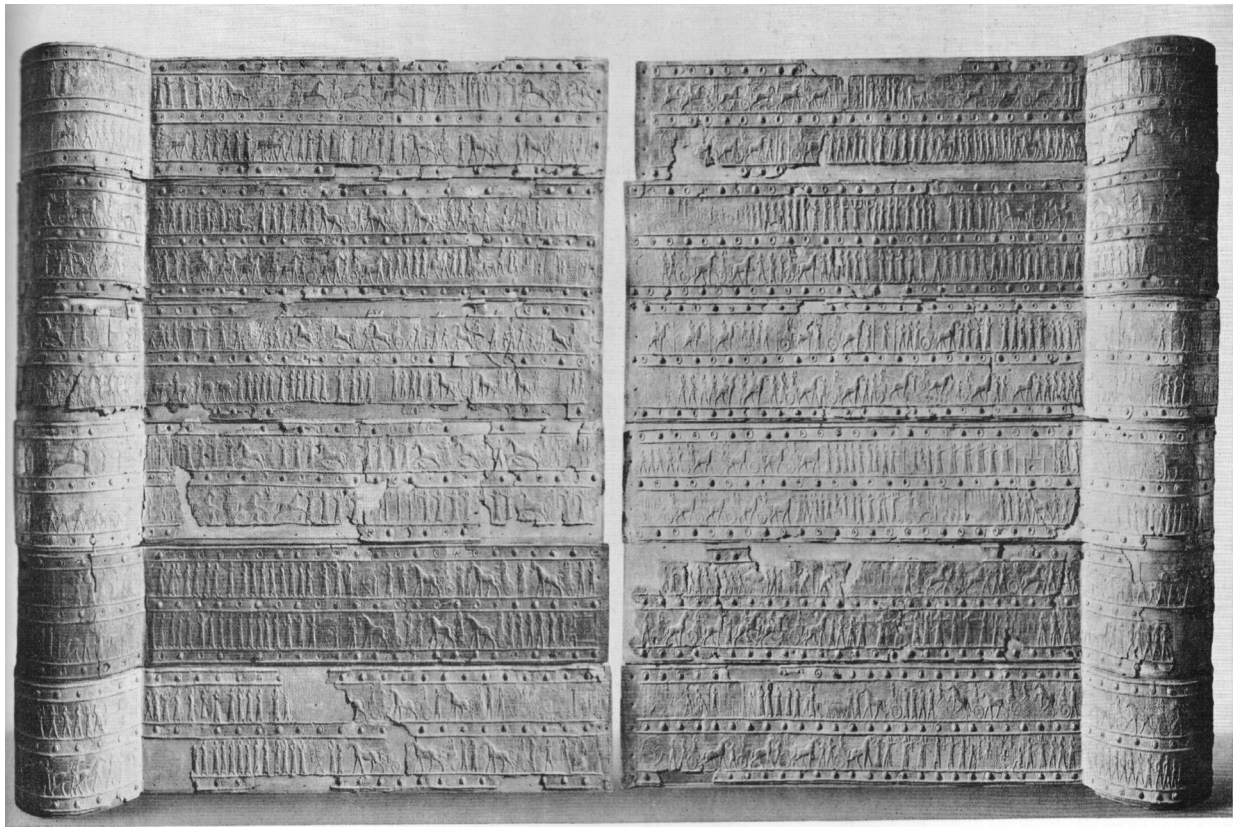


Fig. 19: Decorated Bronze Gates from Balawat



Fig. 20: Detail from Bronze Gates, impalement of the enemy

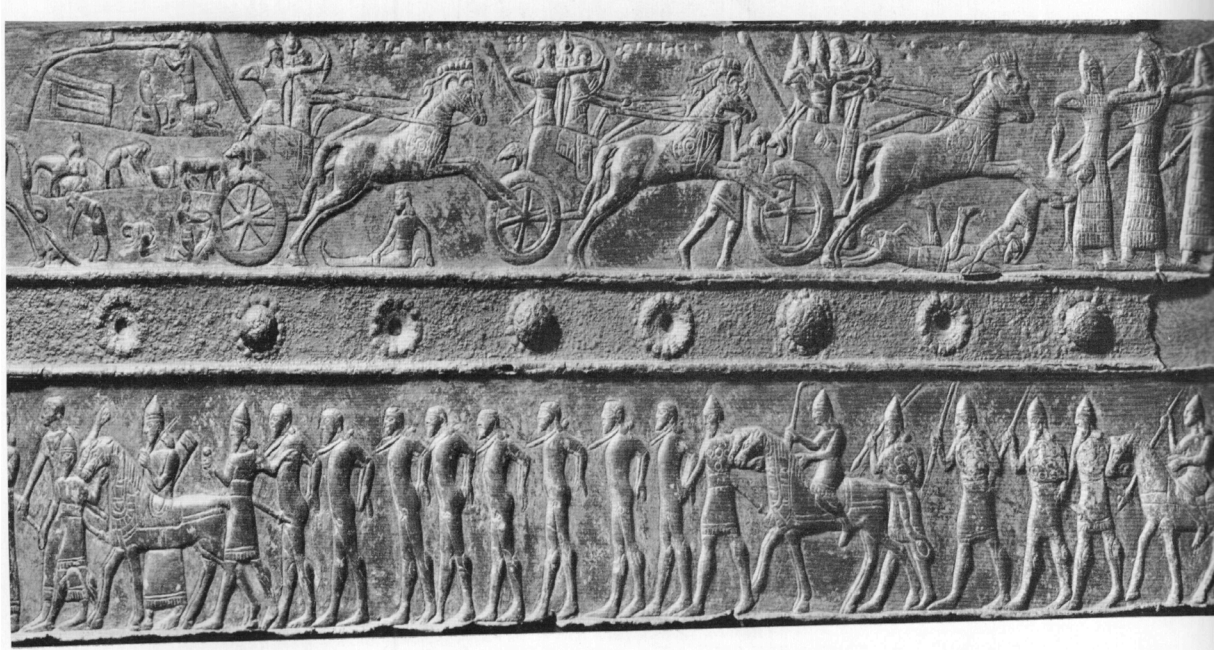


Fig. 21: Detail from Bronze Gates, procession of prisoners



Fig. 22: Detail from Bronze Gates

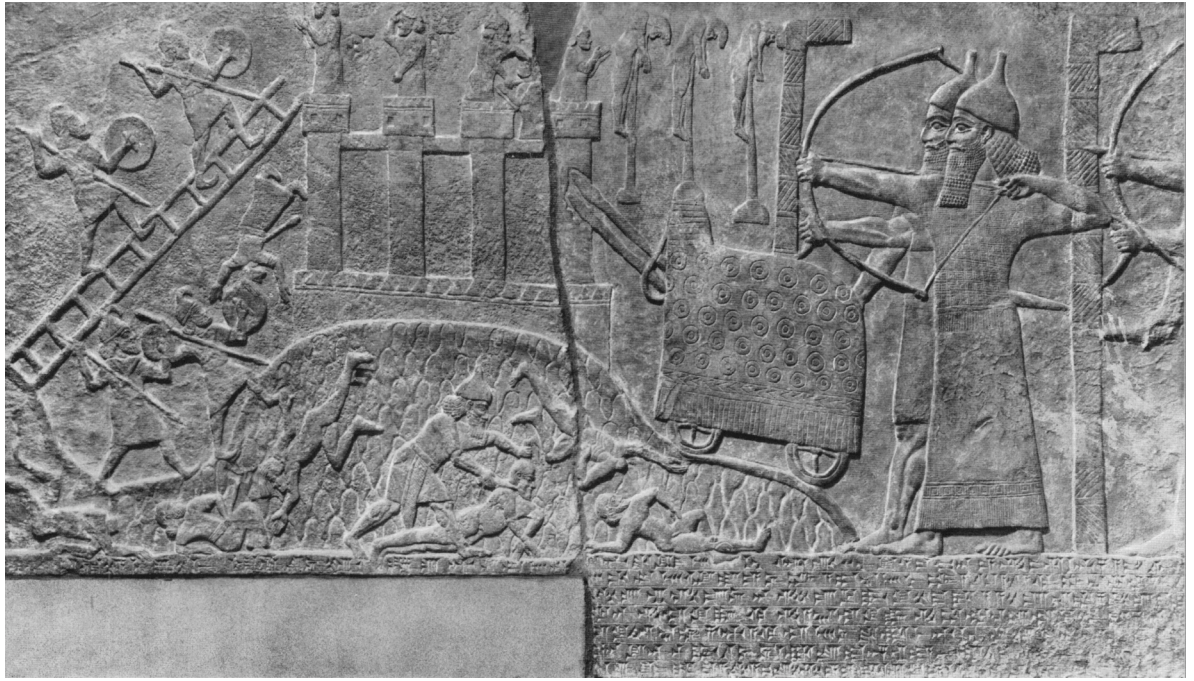


Fig. 23: Wall relief from the Central Palace at Nimrud

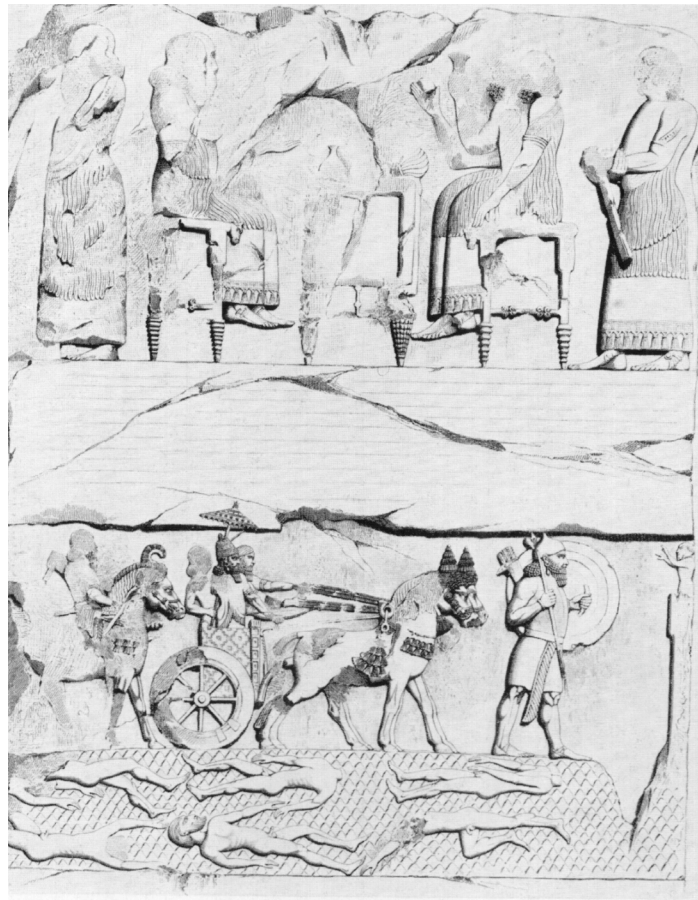


Fig. 24: Wall relief from Khorsabad

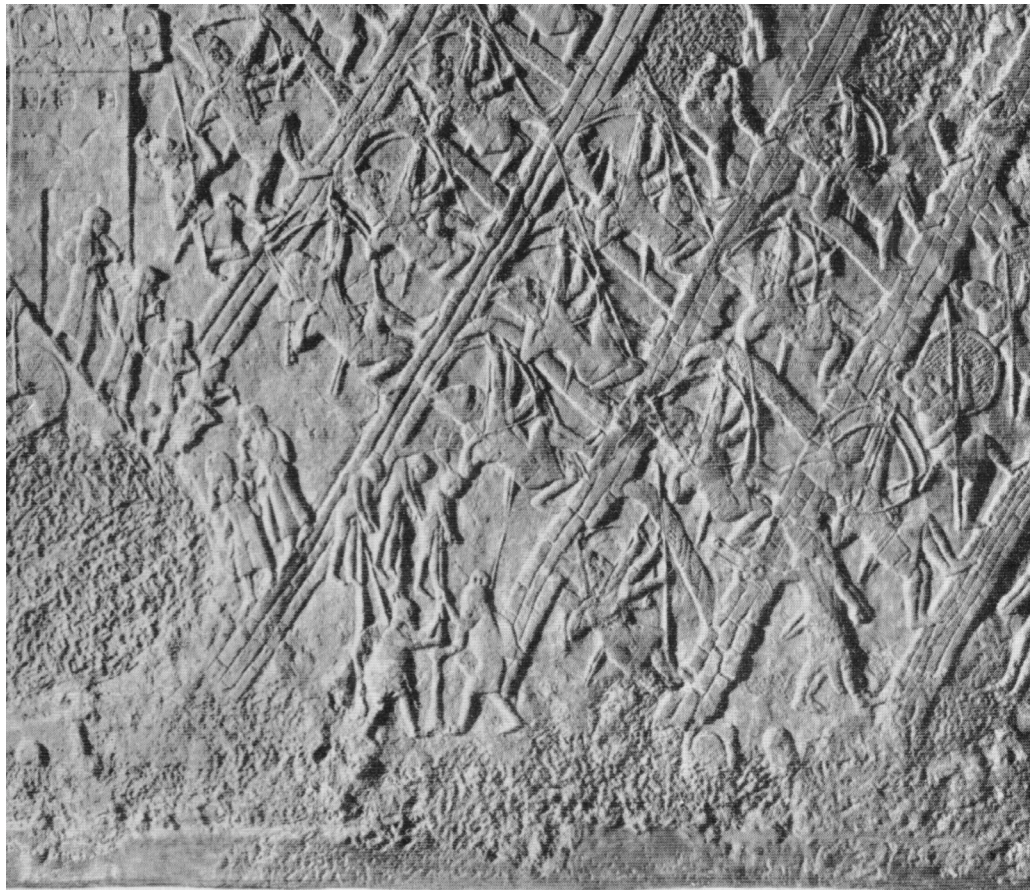


Fig. 25: Detail of a wall relief from Southwest Palace at Nineveh



Fig. 26: Wall relief from Southwest Palace at Nineveh

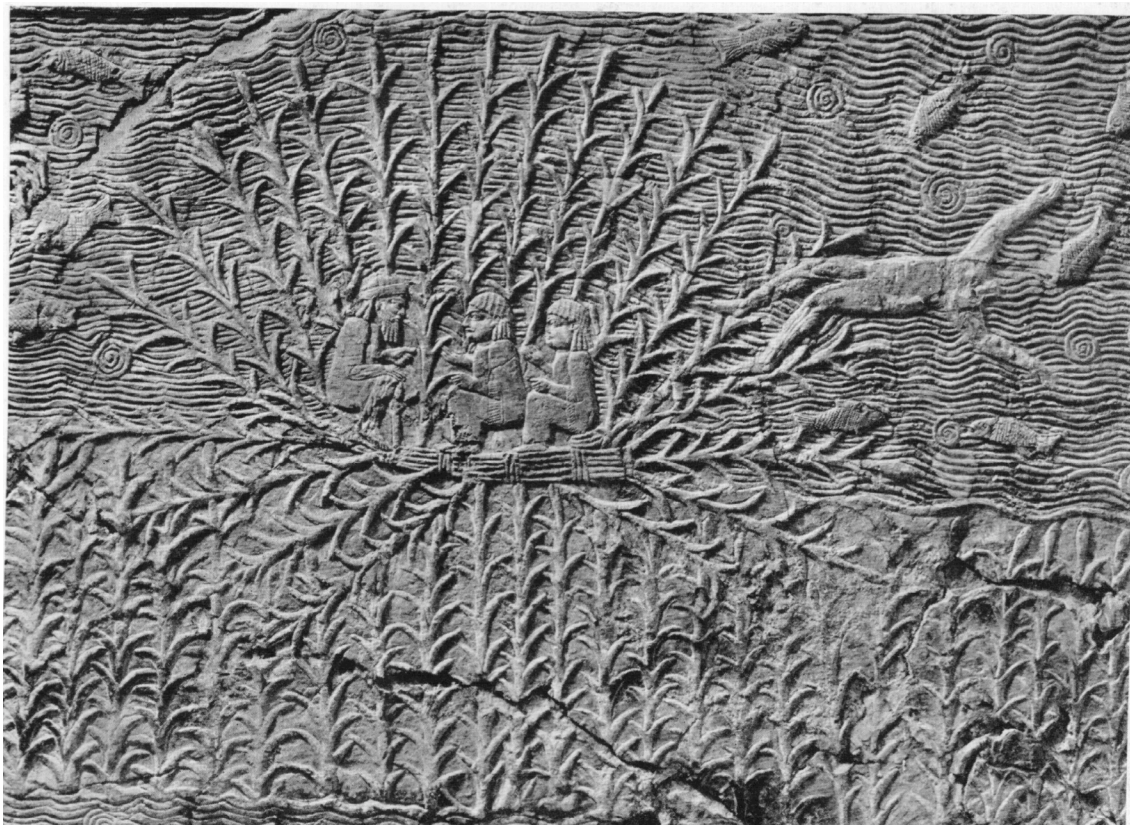


Fig. 27: Detail of a wall relief from Southwest Palace at Nineveh

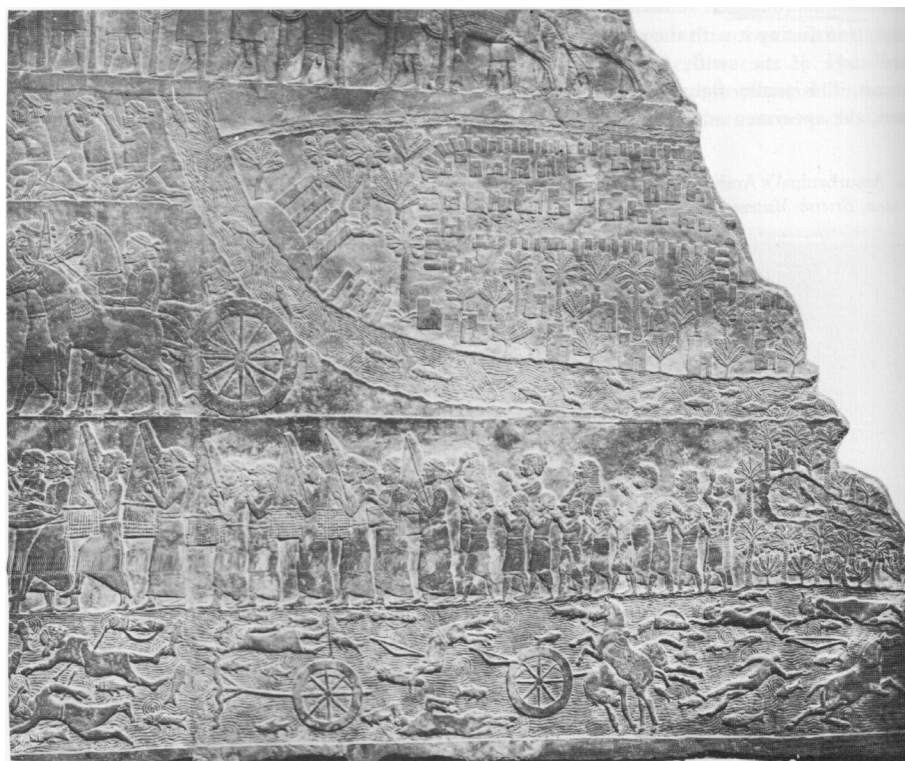


Fig. 28: Wall relief from Northwest Palace at Nineveh



Fig. 29: Wall relief from Northwest Palace at Nineveh



Fig. 30: Uruk Vase

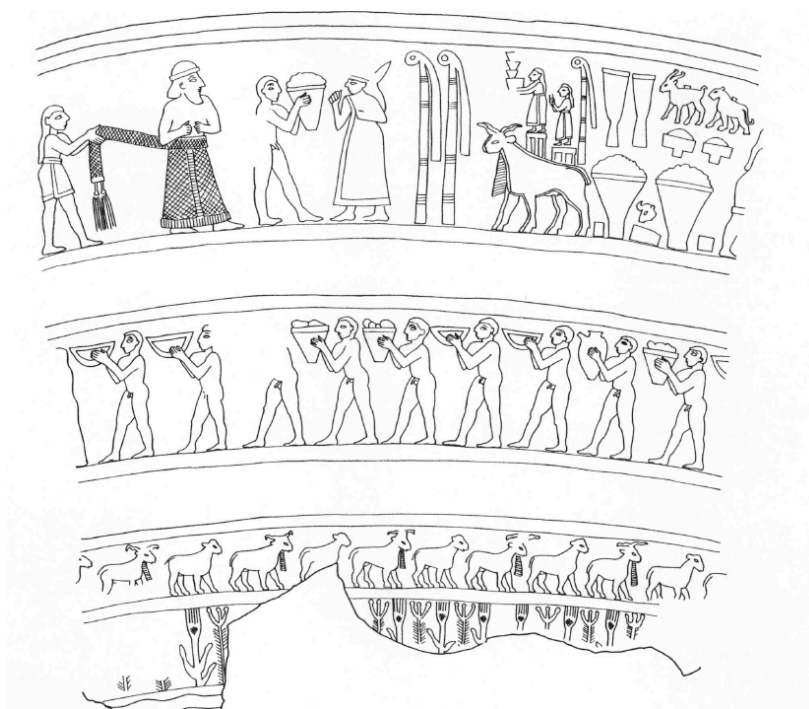


Fig. 31: Drawing of Uruk Vase by Jo Wood



Fig. 32: Uruk Vase (uppermost register detail)



Fig. 33: Seal from Tell Billa



Fig. 34: Votive plaque found in the shrine of Gigparku at Ur



Fig. 35: Votive plaque from Girsu/Telloh



Fig. 36: Standing male figure from Uruk



Fig. 37: Standing male figure from Khafajeh

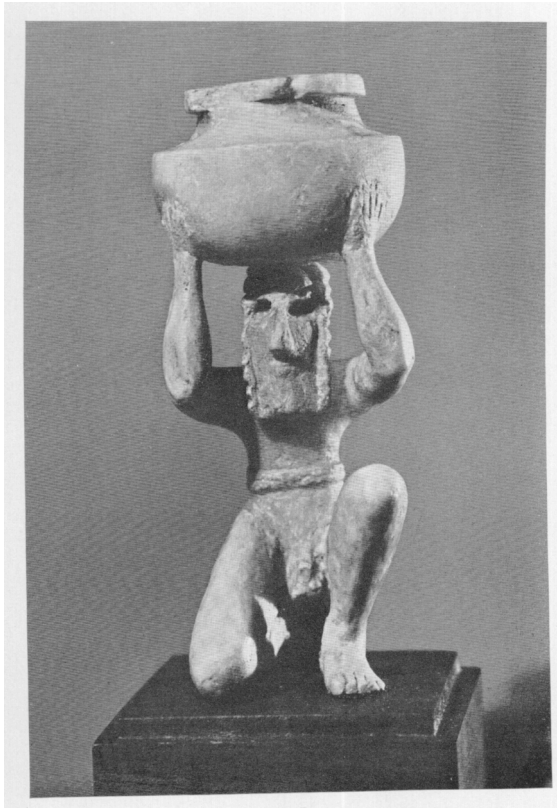


Fig. 38: Kneeling nude male figure from the Shara Temple at Tell Agrab



Fig. 39: Bronze standing male figures from the Shara Temple at Tell Agrab

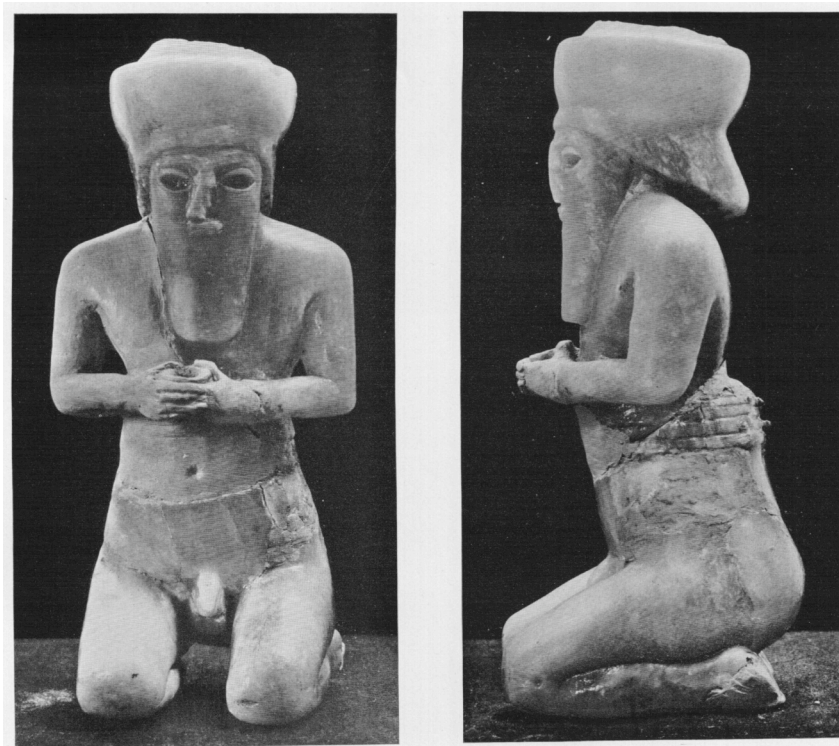


Fig. 40: Kneeling nude male figure from Square Temple of Abu at Tell Asmar



Fig. 41: Copper stand from Tell Asmar

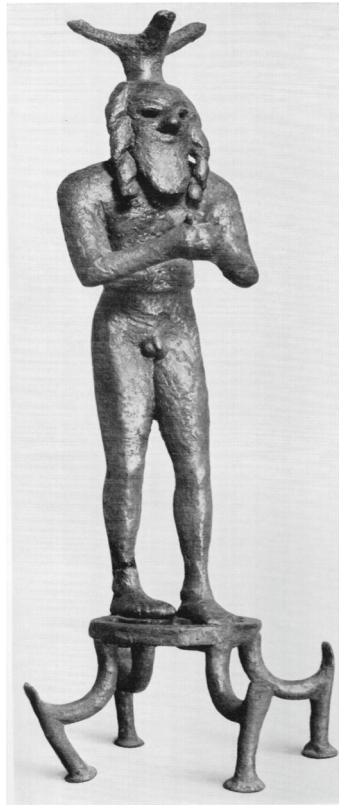


Fig. 42: Copper stand from the Temple Oval at Khafaje



Fig. 43: Copper stand from the Temple Oval Khafaje

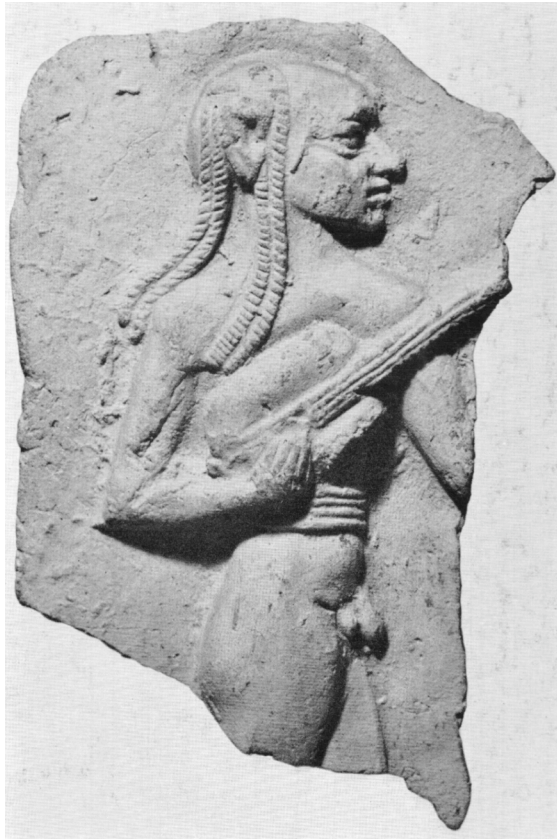


Fig. 44: Terracotta plaque from Early Babylonian period



Fig. 45: Fragment of carved stone bowl from Lagas



Fig. 46: Limestone base of a cup from the Shara Temple at Tell Agrab

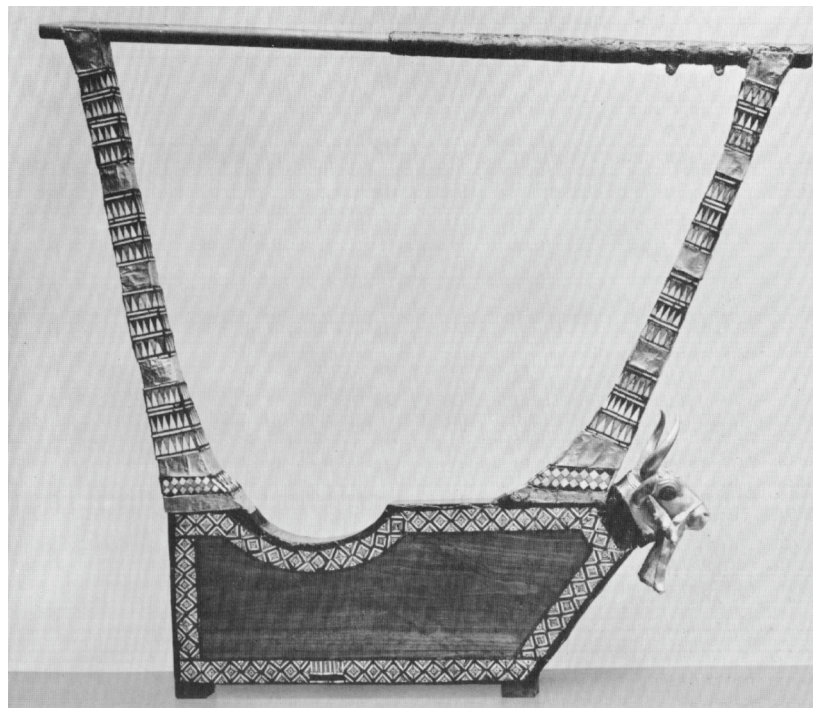


Fig. 47: Great lyre from the grave PG 789 at Royal Cemetery of Ur

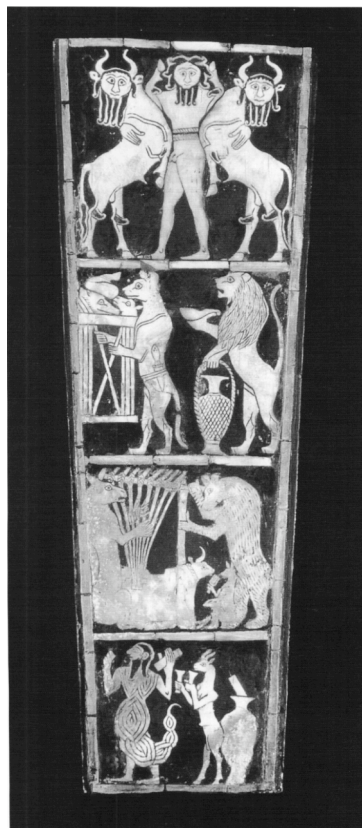


Fig. 48: Front panel of the sound box of the lyre from PG 789



Fig. 49: A cylinder seal from ED II period



Fig. 50: A cylinder seal from ED II found at Tell Fara



Fig. 51: A cylinder seal from ED II period



Fig. 52: A cylinder seal from ED III period

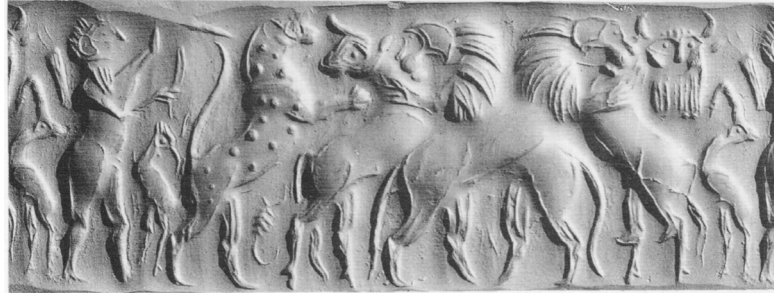


Fig. 53: An ED III cylinder seal found in the Royal Cemetery at Ur

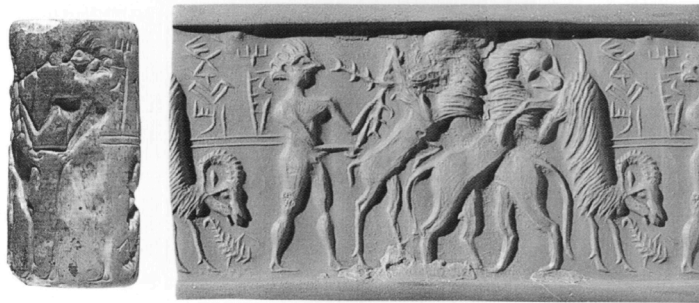


Fig. 54: An ED III cylinder seal from Ur

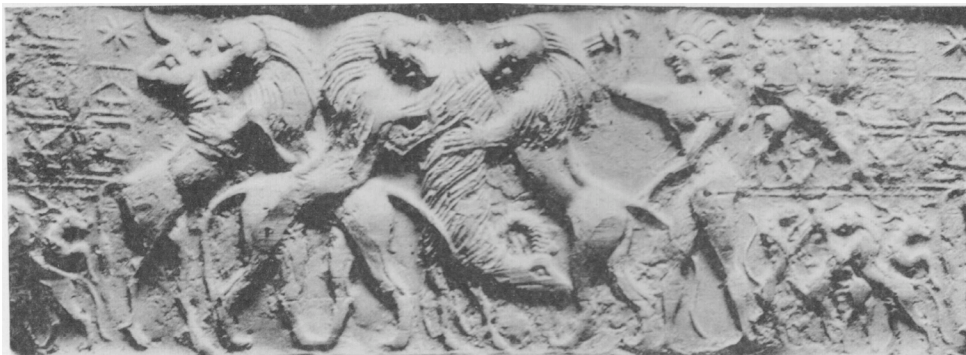


Fig. 55: A cylinder seal from the grave PG 743 at the Royal Cemetery of Ur

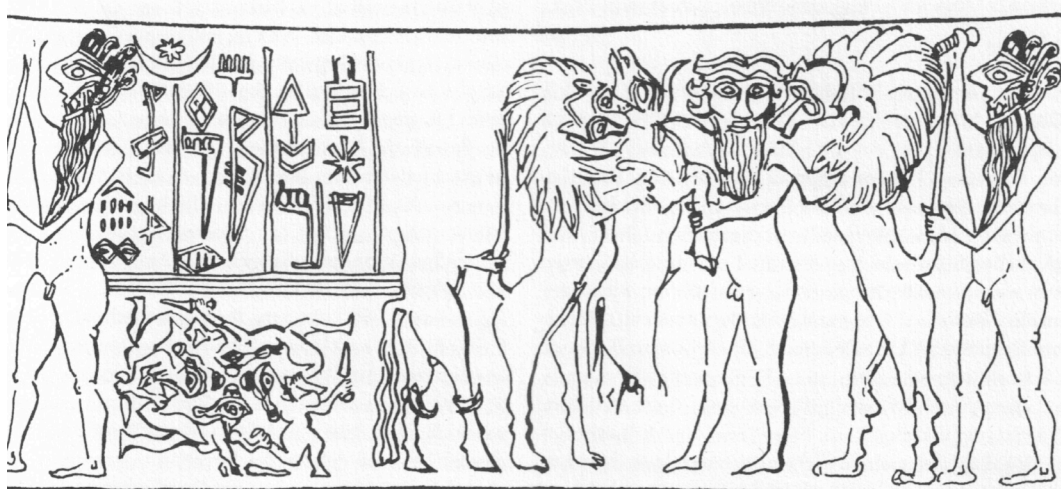


Fig. 56: A cylinder seal from Ur

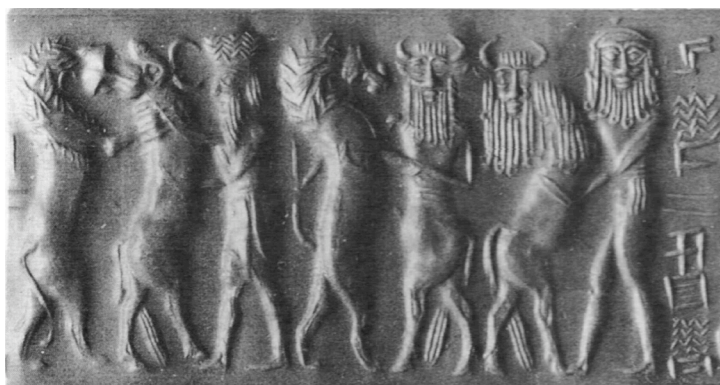


Fig. 57: An Akkadian cylinder seal

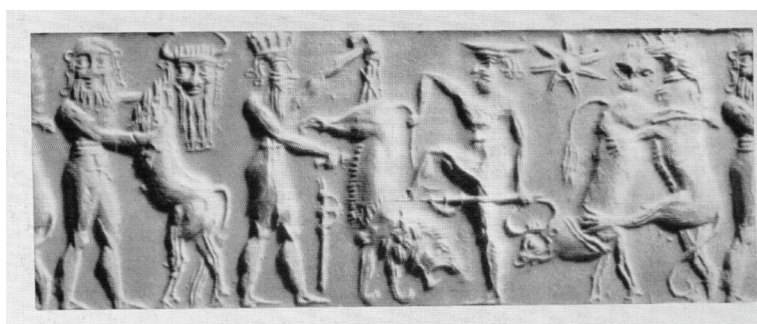


Fig. 58: An Akkadian cylinder seal



Fig. 59: An Akkadian cylinder seal owned by Adda



Fig. 60: An Akkadian cylinder seal owned by a Priest called Puzur-Shullat



Fig. 61: An Akkadian cylinder seal

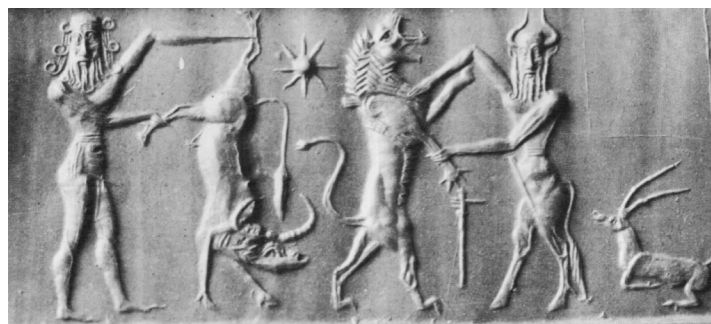


Fig. 62: An Akkadian cylinder seal from Tell Asmar



Fig. 63: An Akkadian cylinder seal owned by a scribe of Shar-kali-sharri

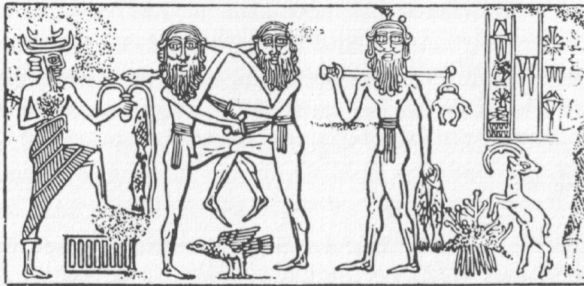


Fig. 64: An Akkadian cylinder seal

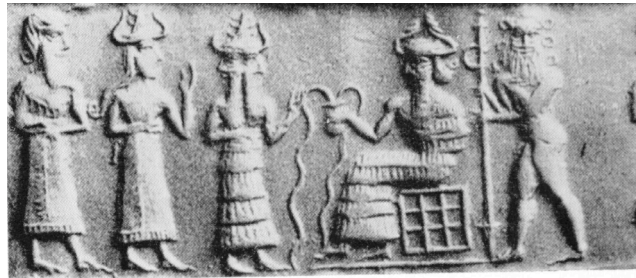


Fig. 65: An Akkadian cylinder seal from Girsu/Telloh

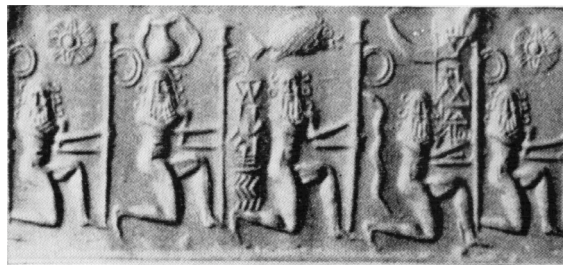


Fig. 66: An Akkadian cylinder seal



Fig. 67: An Akkadian cylinder seal



Fig. 68: An Akkadian seal found in the grave PG 699 at the Royal Cemetery of Ur



Fig. 69: Arsenical copper Bassetki statue found at Northern Iraq



Fig. 70: An Akkadian cylinder seal



Fig. 71: A plaque-figurine found in the foundation deposit of a building at Assur

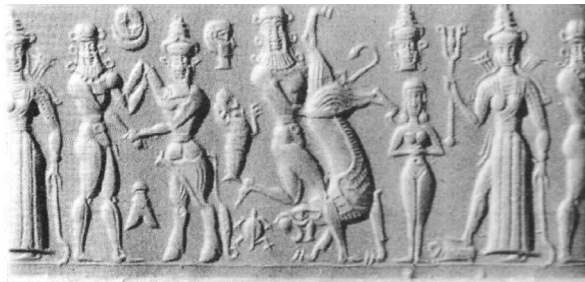


Fig. 72: An Akkadian cylinder seal with Ishtar



Fig. 73: A cylinder seal from UR III period found at Fara



Fig. 74: A cylinder seal from UR III period



Fig. 75: A cylinder seal from UR III period



Fig. 76: An Old Babylonian cylinder seal from Tell Taya



Fig. 77: An Old Babylonian seal from Assur



Fig. 78: An Old Babylonian cylinder seal



Fig. 79: An Old Babylonian cylinder seal

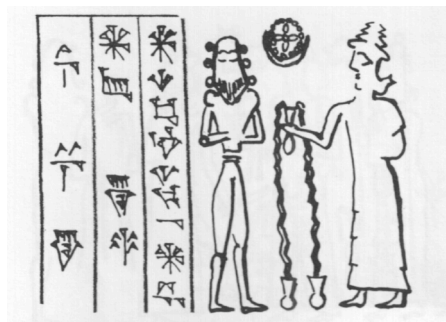


Fig. 80: An Old Babylonian seal from a workshop at Sippar



Fig. 81: An Old Babylonian cylinder seal

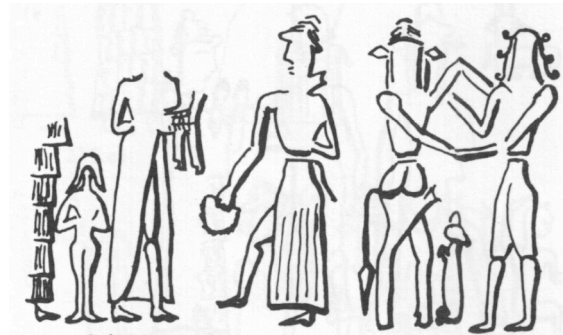


Fig. 82: An Old Babylonian cylinder seal



Fig. 83: An Old Babylonian cylinder seal



Fig. 84: An Old Babylonian cylinder seal

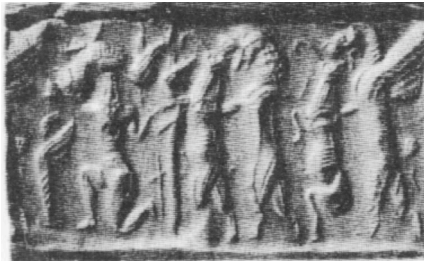


Fig. 85: An Old Babylonian cylinder seal



Fig. 86: An Old Babylonian cylinder seal



Fig. 87: A Middle Assyrian cylinder seal



Fig. 88: A Middle Assyrian cylinder seal



Fig. 89: A Middle Assyrian cylinder seal



Fig. 90: A Middle Assyrian cylinder seal



Fig. 91: A Middle Assyrian cylinder seal



Figure 92: A wall relief from the Palace of Sargon at Khorsabad



Fig. 93: A Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal



Fig. 94: A Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal



Fig. 95: An Akkadian cylinder seal



Fig. 96: An Akkadian cylinder seal



Fig. 97: A cylinder seal with Sun-God



Fig. 98: A cylinder seal depicting Sun-God and Zu