

Sennacherib's Sieges and Deportations Reliefs: How to Increase Emotions

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Abstract

Since their discovery, the iconological value of the Neo-Assyrian bas-reliefs has made most researchers forget their connection with architecture. Looking at the two aspects is necessary because the reliefs are not only a “pure décor”: stabilizing the walls of the palace, their materiality helps the architecture. Their context, moreover, gives more meaning to understanding the reliefs. The arrangement of the bas-reliefs was not chosen at random: there is a fundamental interconnection between architecture and iconological choice of reliefs. The location of the reliefs was carefully chosen to arouse the most emotional and psychological effects: it has already been demonstrated that the attention of an observer entering an Assyrian palace is captured by certain reliefs because they demarcate immediately themselves because of light, colour, place, proximity to the king's podium.

Keywords: Assyrian; reliefs; Sennacherib; Annals; sieges

Introduction

Between 1960 and 1990, many volumes presented discussions concerning the interior palatial placement of Assyrian reliefs. Seven publications revolutionized our understanding of these architectural features.² Up to that time, apart from Reade,³ most scholars were mainly interested in the iconographic aspects of the bas-reliefs.⁴ This

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² Barnett and Falkner 1962, Barnett 1976, Barnett Bleibtreu and Turner 1998, Albenda 1986, Meuszinsky 1981, Paley and Sobolewski 1987 and 1992.

³ 1980b: 75-87; 1981.

⁴ It would take up so many pages if one wanted to indicate the entire bibliography on Assyrian reliefs. Nor would it be useful because it is easy to find (for ex., see for full references Matthiae 1996 and 1998, Barnett, Bleibtreu and Turner 1998).



was followed⁵ by contextualized studies,⁶ studies on relations between texts and images,⁷ studies on warfare and military tactics,⁸ neurological comprehension of images,⁹ and recently studies dealing with emotions.¹⁰ But the important link between the location and the choice of subject material for these bas-reliefs has not yet been explored.¹¹ This is the main subject of this article. Reliefs are not only “pure décor,” but also stabilize the walls of the palace. Put differently, their materiality augments architecture.¹² Their arrangement was not chosen at random. Rather, there is a fundamental interconnection between architecture and iconological choice.¹³

The intimate connection between reliefs and architecture needs to be investigated with a thorough knowledge of both disciplines.¹⁴ Mesopotamian architecture is a “truncated” architecture¹⁵ that has come down to us only partially preserved. To understand the Assyrian reliefs, we need to restore the three-dimensional space that has been lost over the centuries. The eminent Italian scholar, Bruno Zevi,¹⁶ insists on the need to render architecture in three-dimensions.

⁵ For the changing approaches on Assyrian reliefs see also Ataç 2013: 596-607.

⁶ Brandes 1970, Winter 1983, Matthiae 1998, Lumdsen 2004.

⁷ Winter 1981; Villard 1988; Thomason 2016b; Bachelot 2017; Morello 2017; Matthiae 2018; Pongratz-Leisten 2018.

⁸ Nadali 2019, Micale and Nadali 2004.

⁹ Nadali 2012: 587–595; Battini 2019a: 80-87; Portuese 2016, 2019, 2020.

¹⁰ Cifarelli 1998; Thomason 2016a; Rendu-Loisel 2016a; Kipfer (ed.) 2017; Bonnaz 2017; Wagner-Durand 2017, 2018, 2020; Battini 2019b; Hawthorn and Rendu-Loisel eds 2019.

¹¹ Few exceptions are Battini 2019a, Nadali and Portuese 2020.

The topic is still barely recognised and vaguely touched (Reade 1979b: 78-80, 1980a: 82; Matthiae 1996: 117; Matthiae 1998: 89-91; Nadali 2006:15 and 2007: 63 ; Battini 2013: 41-42; Nadali and Portuese 2020: 134-135) and has never been studied in depth (apart Reade 1980b: 75-87).

¹² In archaeology, the materiality of the object has seldom been given importance. Thanks to the studies of Tilley 2004; DeMarras, Gosden and Renfrew (eds) 2004; Meskell 2005; Ingold 2007 and 2012 and Malafouris 2013 and other researchers (for the field of the Near East see e.g. Thomason 2016b, Di Paolo 2018, Battini 2019b), each object analyzed in its materiality as well as in all its aspects regains an 'augmented' meaning. This is what I am trying to do in this article with Sennacherib's reliefs.

¹³ Paley and Sobolewski (1988: 45; 1992: 30-31) have already noted - for the planning of Assurnasirpal palace - the existence of principles in choosing reliefs for a particular location: for example, avoid repeating the same subject in the vicinity. In an article published in the RAI of Barcelona, I show some relations between choice of room and choice of reliefs (Battini 2013: 37-43).

¹⁴ I follow Zevi (1948, 1950 and 1997) in considering architecture as the most complete art form.

¹⁵ Margueron 1986.

¹⁶ Zevi, 1948, 1997.



I am certainly aware that archaeologists are often reluctant to recognize this necessity as essential.¹⁷ Three-dimensional restoration is a possibility but it is never completely certain. Restoration of ancient architecture requires a solid understanding of traditional architecture.¹⁸ It is difficult because the three-dimensionality of architecture comes from the height of the walls, which were not preserved in Mesopotamia. But there are definite clues to the unseen dimensions, including archaeological, architectural and planimetric clues, as well as textual ones. So I use here, as well as in all my writings on architecture, the method of architectural analysis of Jean Margueron, Olivier Callot, and Bruno Zevi.¹⁹

When studying images,²⁰ it is important to understand who the images reached, the emotional affect they were intended to generate and the means of delivery. Audience, emotions, and the staging of images are inextricably linked to Panowsian iconology.²¹ I will investigate these issues within the article, but before advancing it is necessary to clarify what I mean by emotions and how one can identify them in images. Emotions can be defined as a more or less momentary state of the body which reacts to perceptions or

¹⁷ The German school, which has always been of great finesse in architectural understanding and analysis, has unfortunately taken this direction for the past few decades (Miglus 1994, 1999; Pflanzner 1996 and; Kertai 2015a et 2015b). It is not only archaeologists but also anthropologists and Assyriologists who often oppose the idea of volumetric restitution of ancient buildings including a foreground (Stone 1987, Castel 1992, Brusasco 1999-2000). Though, other eminent Assyriologists (Stol 2004, Charpin, Villard 2006 et à paraître) have advanced the reconstruction of the second floor and advanced the understanding of the second floor as described by the texts.

¹⁸ That is architecture made by traditional materials (cf. CRATerre 2006). cf. Meirion-Jones, G.I. and M.-C. Vázquez 1979; Aurenche, Bazin, Sadler 1997.

¹⁹ I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Jean Margueron, who has been my teacher since I came to France. He taught me how to look at and better understand architecture, which has always been a passion of mine. For those who need knowledge quickly, I would point to the following articles, apart from his book derived from his habilitation (1982): 1986, 1996, 2005, 2012... And if you are not under pressure, you can also read all the other articles of Jean Margueron, especially 1991, 1997, 2013, 2019. For Callot see 1983, 1985 and 1994. For Zevi see at least: 1948 and 1997. But all his books are interesting and easy to read, as 1973, 1950 and especially 1971.

²⁰ When I speak of images for the Assyrian reliefs I use a simplification, a shortening: the reliefs are not just images, and it is their materiality that contributes to reinforcing the architecture of the Assyrian palaces. When I speak of images, I want to emphasize not so much the iconographic value of the reliefs as their iconological value (Panowsky 1992, 2009 for Italian translation).

²¹ But I go beyond Panowski, integrating his iconological point of view with other new directions: neurological studies, emotions, gestures (Bachelot 2017, Barry 1997, Cacioppo and Gardener 1999, Campe and Weber 2014, Cifarelli 1998, LeDoux 1996, Portuese 2020).

representations that alter its equilibrium.²² They are physical, instinctive, and irrational. Determined by the genes, they are managed by the limbic system (amygdala, hypothalamus, and hippocampus), the human emotional processing centre which is separate from the part of the brain responsible for conscious thoughts (neocortex) (Pezawas, Santos and Meyer-Lindenberg 2013). Emotions are not feelings; feelings have conscious and unconscious roots, there are mental associations and reactions to an emotion are personal and differ from one person to another because they are shaped by temperament and individual experience. Emotions can be measured, feelings cannot.²³ Today, emotions can be gauged by blood flow, brain activity, facial expressions, and gestures. For emotions expressed in images, one can only gauge facial mimicry and gestures.

An interesting case study is the representation of siege and deportations²⁴ in Sennacherib's palace, which has preserved one of the two most comprehensive sets of reliefs. It's a highly emotional topic, with the representation of women and children in the background of war. It is also a topic described in the royal inscriptions. The narrative of Sennacherib's campaigns can be compared with the figurative representations.²⁵ Comparing textual and iconological data is the best step to analyse the topic from new points of view. More so than his father, Sennacherib preferred to represent battles, conquests, booty, and deportations.²⁶ His reliefs are intended to provoke the strongest emotions because the brain retains images that arouse more intense emotion for longer than usual.²⁷ Moving from these studies on materiality, emotion, the psychological

²² Campe and Weber 2014.

²³ Cacioppo and Gardener 1999.

²⁴ The term 'deportation' is partly misleading (Radner 2018: 102), but it is convenient, since it makes immediately clear which reliefs are analyzed here. This is why it is commonly used in publications.

²⁵ One of the most interesting articles on this topic is seldom cited (Villard 1988), but gives considerable material for reflection and understanding.

²⁶ Since Assyriologists (in the broad sense) were involved with the study of Sennacherib's palace, this specialization of Sennacherib's reliefs in war narrative had already been recognized (for ex. Reade 1979c: 339, Matthiae 1996: 158-159).

²⁷ LeDoux 1989, 1996, 2012; LeDoux and Hirst 1986; Barry 1997.



value of images and light,²⁸ I intend here to deepen the comprehension of Sennacherib's bas-reliefs,²⁹ specifically those connected with deportations.

1. Contextualizing the Reliefs

The Palace without Rival of Sennacherib is partially known.³⁰ Walls have been excavated in an area of 3 hectares, but the palace is incomplete (**Figure 1**). There are no clear limits in all the four directions and no clear comprehension of the general organization.³¹ Even the three excavated hectares are not very well known: once the reconstructions are removed (**Figure 2**), it is clear that even the excavated part is poorly preserved. According to the royal inscriptions, the palace is 914 cubits by 440 cubits, that is 503 m by 242m; the total surface is equal to 12 hectares. Since Sargon's palace is 9 hectares large, it is possible that the inscriptions of Sennacherib are not so far from the truth. In this case we would miss almost 9 hectares or 3/4 of the palace.³²

²⁸ For a new interpretation of light in increasing the power of images see Potts 1995, McMahon 2013, Battini 2019a. Few scholars are concerned with this important issue, despite the ICANE congress dedicated to this topic (Matthew and Curtis, eds. 2012). Shepperson 2017 is disappointing, even though she was the first to publish a book on this issue. Also, the connection between architecture and images is limited to short observations (See footnote 1), without a systematic study.

²⁹ In their historical and political context (Reade 1981: 143-167, Cornelius 1989: 41-60, Bachelot 1991: 109-128, Pittman 1996; Cifarelli 1998; Ataç 2006 and 2010. cf. Liverani 1979, Oded 1998, Porter 2003, Machinist 2006, Fales 2010, Parker 2011, Frahm 2013, Pongratz 2015).

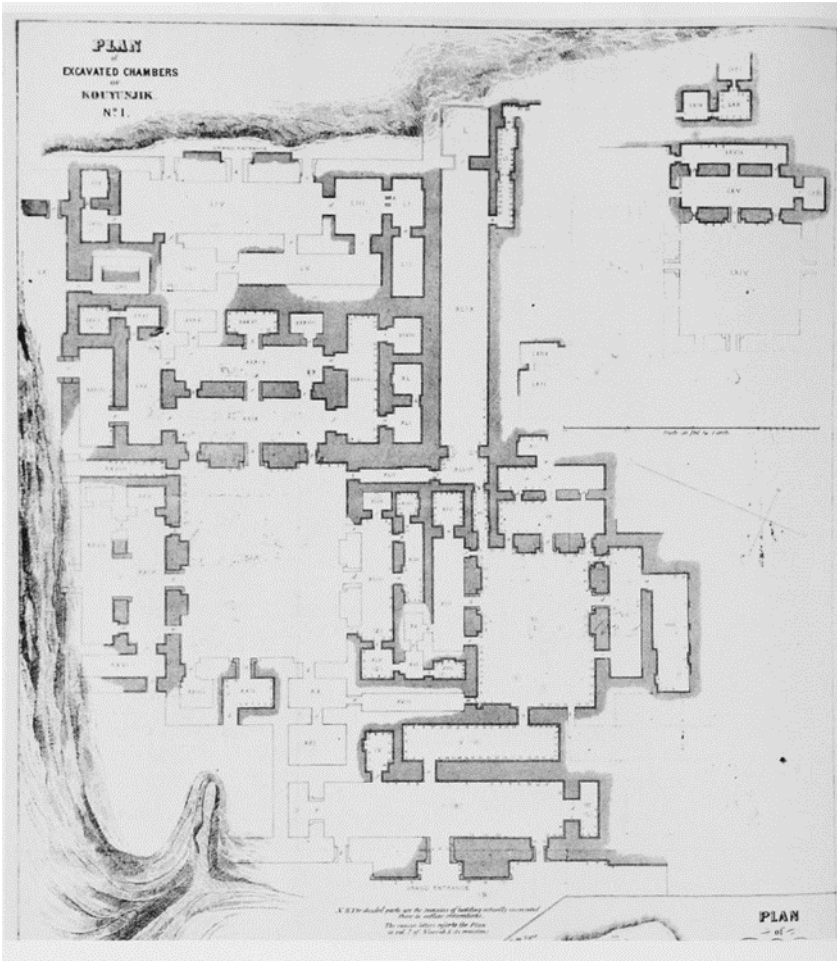
³⁰ cf. Russell 1991: 79-88; Matthiae 1996: 142-144; Kertai 2015: 121-154.

³¹ Matthiae 1996: 157.

³² It is the same result as Matthiae (1996: 143-144) who wrote that 1/4 of the palace is known.

It must be seen, however, how the palace fitted into a multi-millennial urban fabric, especially in relation to the temple of Ishtar (Russell 1991: 85-88).

Figure 1. Sennacherib Palace (from Layard 1853, fig. opp. p.67).



3rd in thirteen. Only one room (XLIII) and one courtyard (LXIV) represent two campaigns, the second and the third for room XLIII and the first and the third in courtyard LXIV.

Figure 3. Sennacherib Palace with the distribution of the reliefs' subjects (after Russell 1991: fig. 92 p. 172).

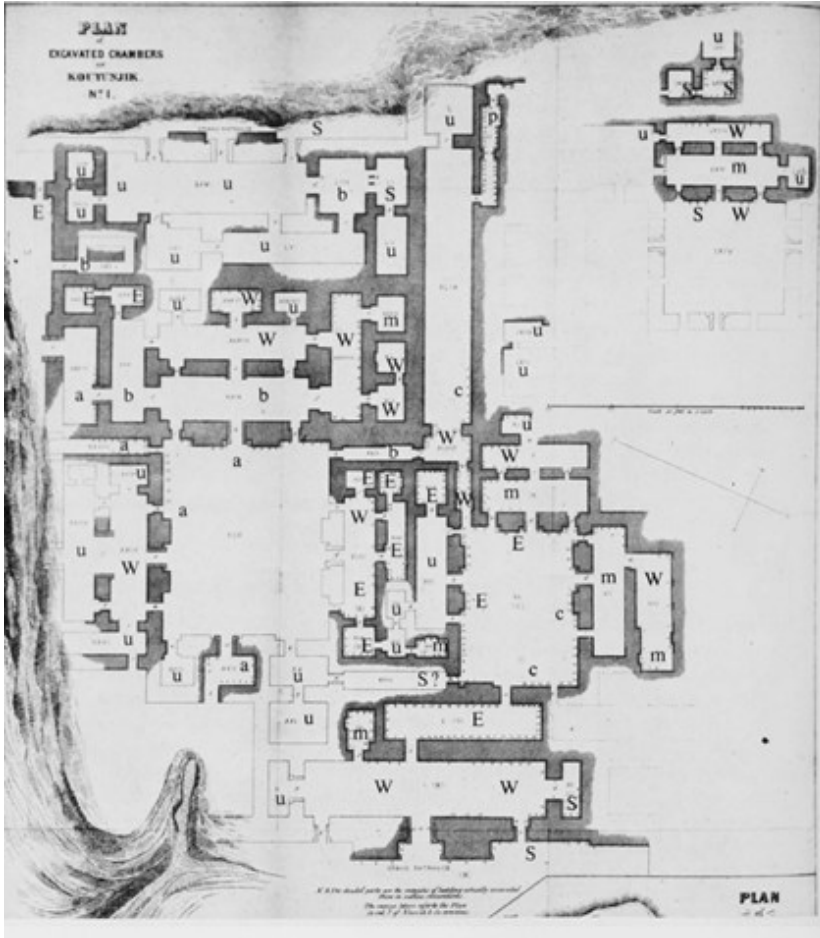


Table I.³⁵ Sieges and deportees per campaign

Campaign	Rooms	Number of sieges	Number of deportees
1st	10= SOUTHERN EXTERIOR FACADE, III, XVIII, NORTHERN EXTERIOR FACADE, corridor LI, ROOM LI, LXIV, LXIX, LXX	1 (III, room LI, LXIX, LXX)= 4 in 4 rooms	1 (room LI, LXIV, LXIX, LXX)= 4 in 4 rooms
2nd	11= V, VI, XIV, XXXI, XXXII, XLIII, XLIV, XLV, XLVI, XLVII, LX	4 (V), 1 (VI, XIV, XXXII, XLIII, XLV, XLVII)= 10 in 7 rooms	4 (V), 3 (VI), 1 (XIV, XXXII, XLIII, XLV, XLVII), more than 1 (XLVI)= at least 13 in 8 rooms
3rd	13=I, VIII, X, XII, XXXIV, XXXVI, XXXVIII, XL, XLI, XLIII, XLVIII, LXIV, LXVII	3 (I), 1 (XII, XXXVI, XXXVIII, XLIII, XLVIII, LXVII)= 9 in 7 rooms	1 (I, X, XII, XXXVI, XXXVIII, XLIII, LXIV)= 7 in 7 rooms
Tot	33 rooms	23	24

The 3rd campaign seems a little more represented in comparison with the other two. Why? Sennacherib waged a single campaign against the Levant but more against Babylon and Elam. If the third campaign is so widely represented, it is also the less often identifiable by captions. In the Palace without Rival twenty-six captions were found with twenty assigned to Sennacherib and six to Assurbanipal. The 3rd campaign is identified in two rooms: the throne room (four captions) and the so called ‘Lachish room.’ On the contrary, the 2nd campaign is the most richly supplied of captions: they are six in five rooms (rooms n.V, XIV, XLV, XLVII and LX), and the first campaign has three captions in three rooms (rooms III, LXX and front H).

³⁵ I am resuming here Russell's (1991) identification of the subjects of the reliefs.

1.2 The first three campaigns in the texts

Although the incomplete state of the palace—that is of the reliefs—leaves us cautious, the sieges conserved are 23, a figure very different from that claimed in the royal inscriptions. According to his *Annals*, in eight campaigns Sennacherib sieged more than 270 cities, and deported more than 463,150 people (**Table II**). The king boasts of having besieged during his first campaign against Babylonia, 88 cities, 820 smaller settlements and deported 208,000 people.

“In the course of my campaign, I surrounded, conquered, (and) plundered the cities Amatu, Ḥauae, Supapu, Nuqabu, Bīt-Sannabi, Qudayyin, Kidrina, Dūr-Ladini, Bitāti, (and) Bānītu, the land Guzummanu, the cities Dūr-Yanšuri, Dūr-Abī-Yata’, Dūr-Rudumme, Bīt-Raḥê, Ḥapiša, Sadian, Ḥurudu, Šaḥrina, Iltuk, Allallu, Marad, Yaqimuna, Kupruna, Bīt-Kudurri, Sūqa-Marusi, altogether 33 fortified cities, fortresses of the land of the Bīt-Dakkūri, together with 250 small(er) settlements in their environs; the cities Dūr-Appê, Dūr-Tanê, Dūr-Sama’, Sarrabātu, Šalaḥatu, Dūr-Abdāya, Sappi-ḥimari, Šibtu-ša-Makkamê, altogether 8 fortified cities, fortresses of the land of the Bīt-Sa’alli, together with 120 small(er) settlements in their environs; the cities Sapīya (Šapīya), Sarrabānu, Larak, Parak-Marri, Bīt-Ilu-bāni, Aḥudu, Ša-iššur-Adad, Šaḥarratu, Manahḥu, Šamêlê, Dūr-Aqqīya, Nagītu, Nūr-abīnu, Ḥar-Šuarra, Dūr-Rukbi, Danda-Ḥulla, Dūr-Bir-Dada, Bīt-Re’ê, Dūr-Ugurri, Ḥindaina, Dūr-Uayyit, Bīt-Taurâ, Saphuna, Bu-ḥarru, Ḥarbat Iddina, Ḥarbat-Kalbi, Ša-barê, Bīt-Bāni-ilūya, Sulādu, Bīt-Iltama-sama’a, Bīt-Dīni-ili, Daqala, Ḥameza, Bêlâ, Tairu, Kiprānu, Iltaratu, Aqqar-ša-kīna, Sagabatu-ša-Mardukīya, altogether 39 fortified cities of the land of the Bīt-Amukāni, together with 350 small(er) settlements in their environs; (and) the cities Bīt-Zabidīya, Larsa, Kulaba, Eridu, Kissik, Nēmed-Laguda, (and) Dūr-Yakīn, including the city Kār-Nabû, which is on the shore of the Bitter Sea, altogether 8 fortified cities, fortresses of the



land of the Bīt-Yakīn, together with 100 small(er) settlements in their environs; he (grand) total is 88 fortified cities, fortresses of Chaldea, together with 820 small(er) settlement[s] in their environs.

(...)

I returned safely to Assyria with 208,000 substantial captives, 7,200 horses (and) mules, 11,073 donkeys, 5,230 camels, 80,050 oxen, (and) 800,100 sheep and goats. This is apart from the people, donkeys, camels, oxen, and sheep and goats that all of my troops had carried away and appropriated for themselves” (RINAP 3/1 1: 36-50 and 60-61).³⁶

The data concerning the second campaign, against Elam, is less precise (**Table II**); he besieged at least 42 cities and a unspecified number of smaller settlements and deported an indeterminate number of people.

“On my second campaign, the god Aššur, my lord, encouraged me and] I marched [to the land of the Kassites and the land of the Yasubigallians, a dangerous enemy who since time immemorial] had not submitted [to the kings], my [ancestor]s. [In the high mountains, difficult terrain, I rode on horseback and had my personal chariot carried on (men’s) necks. In very rugged terrain] I roamed about [on foot] like a wild bull. [I surrounded (and) conquered the city Bīt-Kilamzah], their fortified city. I] brought out of it [people, young (and) old, horses, mules, donkeys, oxen, and sheep and goats], and I counted (them) as booty. [I destroyed,

³⁶ There are other variants, as for ex. RINAP 3/1 2: 1.11-12 and 16, where the conquered cities are not 88 (as in RINAP 3 col i) but 89: “[With the strength of the god Aššur, my lord, I surrounded, conquered, (and) plundered 89 fortified cities, fortresses] of Chal[dea, and 820 small(er) settlements in their environs. I brought out the auxiliary forces of the Arameans and Chaldeans who were in] Uruk, Nip[ur, Kish, Ḫursagkalama, (and) Cutha, together with the guilty citizens, and] I counted (them) [as booty].(...) I carried off into Assyria [a sub]stantial [booty](consisting of) 208,000 people, male and female, 7,200 horses (and) mules, 11,073 donkeys, 5,230 camels, 80,100 oxen, (and) 800,600 sheep and goats” (RINAP 3/1 2: 1.11-12 and 16)

Also RINAP 3/1 15 col. i, 12'-35' is another version, where the cities conquered are 75. (Idem RINAP 3/1 16 and 17)

devastated, (and) turned into ruins their small(er) settlements, which were without number. I burned with fire the pavilions (and) tents that they relied upon, and] reduced (them) to [as]hes.

(...)

I destroyed, devastated, (and) burned with fire the cities Mar'ubištu (and) Akkuddu, cities of his royal house, together with thirty-four fortified cities and small(er) settlements [in] their [en]vions, which were without number.

(...)

I detached [fr]om his land [the cities Ši(š)širtu (and) Kummaḥlum, fortified cities, together with the small(er) settlements in their environs (and) the district of the land Bīt-Barrû in its entirety], and I added (this area) to the territory of Assyria. [I took the city Elenzaš as a royal city]" (RINAP 3/1 2: 20-23, 28, 31-32)

In the third campaign, against the Levant, he besieged 61 cities and an indeterminate number of smaller settlements, and he deported 200,150 people (**Table II**).

“(ii 37-46) On my third campaign, I marched to the land Ḫatti. Fear of my lordly brilliance overwhelmed Luī, the king of the city of Sidon, and he fled afar into the midst of the sea and disappeared. The awesome terror of the weapon of the god Aššur, my lord, overwhelmed the cities Great Sidon, Lesser Sidon, Bīt-Zitti, Šarepta, Maḥalliba, Ušû, Akzibu, (and) Acco, his fortified cities (and) fortresses, an area of pasture(s) and water-place(s), resources upon which he relied, and they bowed down at my feet.

(...)

(ii 68b-72) In the course of my campaign, I surrounded, conquered, (and) plundered the cities Bīt-Daganna, Joppa,



Banayabarqa, (and) Azuru, the cities of Šidqâ that had not submitted to me quickly.

(...)

(iii 6b-14a) I surrounded, conquered, (and) plundered the cities Eltekeh (and) Tamnâ. I approached the city Ekron and I killed the governors (and) nobles who had committed crime(s) and hung their corpses on towers around the city; I counted the citizens who had committed the criminal acts as booty; (and) I commanded that the rest of them, (those) who were not guilty of crimes or wrongdoing, (to) whom no penalty was due, be allowed to go free.

(...)

(iii 18-27a) Moreover, (as for) Hezekiah of the land Judah, who had not submitted to my yoke, I surrounded (and) conquered forty-six of his fortified cities, fortresses and small(er) settlements in their environs, which were without number, by having ramps trodden down and battering rams brought up, the assault of foot soldiers, sapping, breaching, and siege engines. I brought out of them 200,150 people, young (and) old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, oxen, and sheep and goats, which were without number, and I counted (them) as booty.” (RINAP 3/1 22: ii 37-46, 68b-72, iii 6b-14a, 18-27a)

The royal inscriptions tend to become more and more elusive in the description of the other campaigns (**Table II**).³⁷

³⁷ For the fifth and seventh campaigns they report a few figures (at least 41 cities conquered in the fifth campaign and 37 in the seventh campaign), but they do not give the exact number of deportees, nor of small settlements conquered. On the contrary for the fourth, sixth and eighth campaigns they are intriguingly silent on all figures: no one is given neither of cities, nor of small sites and no more of people deported (Table II). The narrative of the campaigns changes a little over time: in the last campaigns it is more generic, and Sennacherib even admits here not participating in the battle but having sent his soldiers to fight. The last years of his reign, Sennacherib suffered several defeats (Frahm 1997: 16-18) and probably this is the main reason for the change in the tone of his annals.

Table II. Cities, settlements, and deportees of each campaign in descending order of accuracy

Campaign	Year ³⁸	Cities conquered	Settlements	People deported
First (South)	703	89 or 88 or 75	820 or 420	208,000
Third (West)	701	61	Not quantified	200,150+ 20,000 soldiers
Fifth (East? Mt. Nipur)	697	41	Not quantified	35,000 specialized soldiers Not quantified=other people
Second (East)	702	42	Not quantified	Not quantified
Seventh (East)	693	37	Not quantified	Not quantified
Fourth (South)	700	Not quantified	Not quantified	Not quantified
Sixth (South)	693	Not quantified	Not quantified	Not quantified
Eighth (South)	691	Not quantified	Not quantified	Not quantified
TOTAL	13 years	More than 270 cities	More than 820 settlements	More than 463,150 people

The exact number of conquered cities and people deported for each campaign—and consequently the total of all campaigns—is missing because of the contradictions of the sources.³⁹ For example, the most accurately recorded campaign is the first. But the total number of cities conquered in this campaign fluctuates in the different passages of Sennacherib's annals: 88, 89 or 75 cities.⁴⁰ The number of small

³⁸ The dates approximate, since there are still uncertainties: e.g., it is not known whether the first campaign starts at the end of 704 or the beginning of 703 (Frahm 1997: 9. cf. Rusell 1998: 152-155). The fifth campaign started in the middle of 697 or in 696 (Frahm 1997: 13). 6th and 7th campaigns both occupy the year 693 (Frahm 1997: tab. 2). I follow here Frahm's dates (1997: 9-16).

³⁹ cf. Frahm 1997: 9-16.

⁴⁰ See footnote 34.

For the second campaign, the situation is the same: no inscription gives a total number, and only 6 cities are mentioned with their name, 34 other are claimed conquered but their name remains unknown (Taylor Prism or RINAP 3/1 22: i 72-ii 19a; 'Cylinder D' or RINAP 3/1 16: ii 6-59).



settlements conquered during the first campaign also swings between 820 and 420, a big difference!⁴¹ Even if one assumes the figures are real,⁴² there is still the difference of 270 cities recorded as besieged by the king in his inscriptions but only 23 in the royal palace reliefs.

1.3 The sieges

In Sennacherib's palace, 23 sieges are represented (**Table I, Figure 4**): ten concern the East campaign (2nd campaign)⁴³, nine the West campaign (3rd campaign)⁴⁴, and four the South campaign (1st campaign)⁴⁵. Thus, the second and the third campaigns have the most numerous sieges (respectively ten and nine), while the first campaign has only four sieges. The reluctance to represent sieges in Babylonia is part of the Babylonian problem that Sennacherib's inscriptions suggest.

Linked to depiction of sieges are also representations of deportees (thirteen times in the 2nd campaign,⁴⁶ seven in the 3rd,⁴⁷ and four in

⁴¹ Even if the figures were more accurate, it would not be useful as the figures are exaggerated (see next footnote).

⁴² After an initial phase of acceptance of the figures mentioned in the royal scriptures (from Oded 1978 and 1979: 19-22 to for ex. Radner 2018: 101-102 with some reluctance), with limited exceptions (Ungnad 1942- 1943, who pointed out the exaggeration of the Assyrian figures), a more skeptical phase followed (de Odorico 1995; Faust 2015: 776-778), especially after the estimation of Judean population (Na'aman 1989: 43-62, Broshi and Finkelstein 1992: 53-57, Faust 2008: 168-194. See also Faust 2011 for the VI s. BCE). In a recent article (Battini 2022b), I demonstrated that the number of deportees declared in the inscriptions is impossible. Knowing the distance and the days necessary to walk from the original country to that of deportation and knowing the number of deportees, you can deduce how many tons of food per day were necessary. Another proof is indirectly provided by the royal inscriptions themselves, as well as the demography of the region during the 8th century BC (Broshi and Finkelstein 1992: 53-57). There are about 88 towns conquered in the first campaign and 820 small settlements, i.e., 908 large and small settlements in total. Assuming that the soldiers were fighting 365 days a year, they would have had to conquer 2.4 settlements a day, or to be more precise, two small settlements a day and one city every four days. Assuming then they didn't fight in winter, i.e., assuming that they fought for 8 months, they should have conquered a city every 3 days and 3 small sites a day. And if they had fought only 6 months, they would have had to conquer a city every 2 days and 5 villages a day. The number of cities and villages conquered per day means that there are no rest days for Assyrian soldiers, and this undermines morale, which is as important as the weapons (von Clausewitz 19592: ch. V; Dary 2007: 173-175).

⁴³ Rooms V with four sieges, VI, XIV, XXXII, XLIII, XLV, XLVII.

⁴⁴ Rooms I with three sieges, XII, XXXVI, XXXVIII, XLIII, XLVIII, LXVII.

⁴⁵ Rooms III, LI, LXIX and LXX.

⁴⁶ Rooms V with four scenes of deportees, VI, XIV, XXXII, XLIII, XLV, XLVII and Room XLVI which has four or five groups of deportees.

⁴⁷ Rooms I, X, XII, XXXVI, XXXVIII, XLIII, LXIV.

the first).⁴⁸ The deportees generally appear with the siege, but sometimes alone (at least in the remaining reliefs). For example, in the courtyard LXIV there are only deportees, but few reliefs are preserved in this space. In room XLVII which preserves more sculptures than the courtyard LXIV, there are only deportees without a siege in the remaining reliefs.⁴⁹

Figure 4. Localization of reliefs representing sieges, deportees, and severed heads (© L. Battini).



⁴⁸ Rooms LI, LXIV, LXIX and LXX.

⁴⁹ The same happens in the corridor XXVIII, attributed to Assurbanipal.



Table III. Sieges and captions per campaign

Campaign	Rooms with siege	Number of captions	Total of rooms with captions	Ratio
2nd	10 rooms= 4 (V), 1 (VI, XIV, XXXII, XLIII, XLV, XLVII)= 10 rooms	6 (V x 2, XIV, XLV, XLVII, LX)	5	1.8 (50%)
1st	4 rooms= 3, 51, 69 and 70	3 (III, LXX, front H)	3	1.3 (75%)
3rd	7 rooms= I, XII, XXXVI, XXXVIII, XLIII, XLVIII, LXVII	5 (I (x4), XXXVI)	2	3.5 (28.6%)

Five western cities were identified with a caption (**Table III**), but unfortunately four of the names have been lost. The only western name preserved is Lachish. Three southern cities had a caption, but one has been lost: only Sahrina and Dilbat remain. Six eastern cities were identified with a caption but only three are readable: Alammu, Kisusi and Bit-Kubatti. Are these cities quoted in the texts? The answer is negative for four out of these six cities: Lachish, Saharina, Alammu and Kisusi are never quoted in the Annals of Sennacherib, unlike Dilbat⁵⁰ and Bit-Kubatti⁵¹. One could conclude that there was not much connection between the writings and the reliefs. In fact, one is surprised by the limited number of captions in Sennacherib's palace. The extremely reduced number of inscriptions for all the sieges represented suggests then that the exact identification of the conquered city was not essential. Proportionally, that is looking at the proportion between the number of rooms decorated with a siege and the number of captions, the first campaign is the most widely identified by inscriptions. Probably, the exact identification of a siege with a particular city was not evident in all levels of the population.

⁵⁰ "I surrounded, conquered, (and) plundered (the city) Dilbat" (Senn 057).

⁵¹ "I made (them) dwell in the cities Ḥardišpu] (and) Bit-Kubatti" (Rinap 02, 22).

Is it the mirror of geographic knowledge of the 1st millennium BC Assyria and of the cultural Babylonian supremacy?

2. How to Inspire Emotion

Sennacherib's palace is full of images of wars, sieges, and deportations. Out of about fifty rooms decorated with war, only three (corridors XLIX and LI, courtyard VI) are decorated with a subject other than the military (processions of servants and of the king with his attendants and bodyguard,⁵² quarrying and transportation of *lamassu*). In relation to his predecessors and his grandson, Sennacherib is therefore more 'sensationalist' in the subject of his bas-reliefs, but also in the way that war is depicted and located.⁵³

2.1 Choice of subjects

2.1.1 The sieges

The sieges follow a similar scheme, sometimes dilated, sometimes reduced, but basically composed by the same elements (**Figure 5**).⁵⁴ First (stage I), the movement of the Assyrian army, infantrymen or infantrymen and chivalry and special units. Second (stage II), the beginning of the siege: the besieged city has not yet fallen, the scene is filled with battles on both sides. But the construction of the scene, with the enemies entrenched inside the city, lets the massive Assyrian army occupy most of the visual space and outnumber the enemies. Third (stage III), the beginning of the conquest:⁵⁵ the Assyrians begin to burn the city or to undermine its defensive wall, enemy women appear on the defensive wall sometimes with very emotive gestures.

⁵² Matthiae (1996: 168) rightly notes that these processions are well suited to the length of the corridor. I would say the same for corridor XXVIII, attributed to Ashurbanipal, and probably composed only of long lines of deportees. Once again, Assurbanipal follows certain choices of his grandfather in locating the reliefs.

⁵³ This is the official image (cf. Villard 2015, Verderame 2008) that the king himself wanted to disseminate and transmit. Another more tormented aspect was his inner personality (Frahm's words on Sennacherib's personality are very fair: Id. 1997: 19–20 and 2014: 163–222).

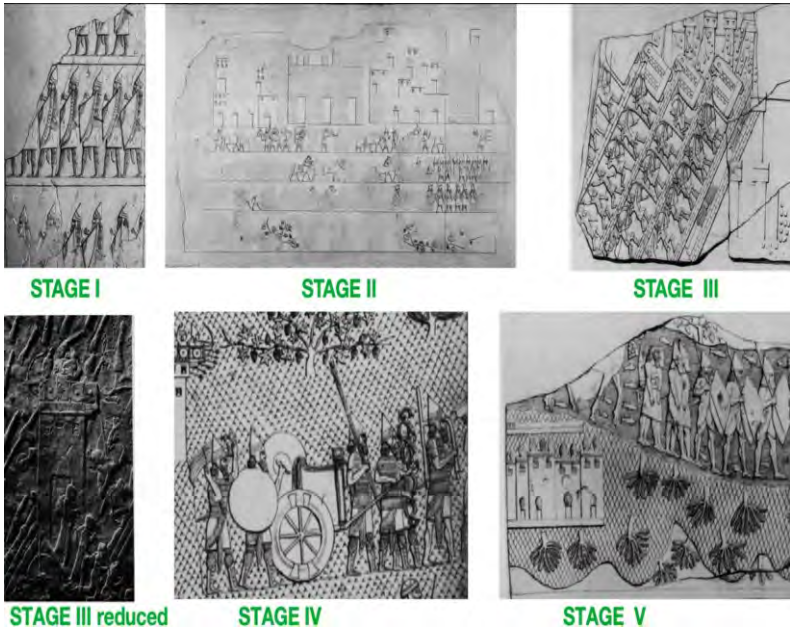
⁵⁴ The stages of siege have already been analyzed from the military point of view by Battini 2008, Eph'al 2009, Fagan 2010 and Nadali 2019.

⁵⁵ This stage is often represented with stage II in the same slab. The differentiation between stages II and III in different slabs is less frequent.



When the siege is of a reduced type, this is the phase in which the enemies became deportees and begin to leave. This means that the city has already been captured (e.g., Lachish). In reality it is unthinkable that women could have left the city during the battle as described in the reliefs, but the reduced and contracted form of the siege representation gives an indication of the impending Assyrian victory and it gives more *pathos* to the scene: more emotion is aroused if the women leave the city with their bundles in the middle of the battle (Room XXXVI, Lachish reliefs) than when the battle is over. Fourth (stage IV), the time of the conquest: there are no more fights, no burning flames, and the Assyrian army is busy taking loot or directing deportees or counting heads of dead enemies. And lastly, the time of the ‘enemy cities’ (stage V): in a natural landscape which seems peaceful there is a city without people living inside. The presence of only a few Assyrian soldiers allows one to understand the scene; it is not the representation of a foreign city, but the conclusion of the siege, the desertification of the city, abandoned after the loss and the more or less great destruction.

Figure 5. Stages of the siege (© L. Battini).



2.1.2 Deportees

Deportees appear as long series of walking men, women and children accompanied by Assyrian soldiers.⁵⁶ Their dress changes according to the countries who have submitted. Women are veiled only in the West but wear a more adorned dress with double vertical and horizontal fringes in the South.⁵⁷ Those from the East wear a dress with vertical fringes,⁵⁸ while those in the west don a uniform dress without fringes.⁵⁹ Men wear a long dress in the West, a skirt below the knees and a little slanted in the East, and a short skirt over the knees in the South (**Figure 6**). Hairstyles also change. It is not known who could understand these differences in clothing and could therefore attribute them more to one country or another, but it is clear that the deportees are shown as belonging to ‘other’ and different cultures rather than that of Assyria. The geographic origin of deportees does not, however, influence the custom that male children (Battini 2022a) and adults are often depicted naked,⁶⁰ nor the gestures and attitudes which are identical. We will deal with these details in a later section.

Deportation is a result of the siege. Deportees can appear when the city is under attack (Room XXXVI for example) and in this case the artists avoid representing children (Battini 2022a). More generally they appear after the battle is over and city is won. It is the result of the incomplete state of the reliefs that the deportees appear alone, and without any representation of a coinciding seige, as e.g. in rooms VII, X, XXVIII, XLVI, LXIV. They occupy most of the rooms, from the comparatively smaller Lachish relief to the largest in the

⁵⁶ I do not consider here the few rows of single men for whom one cannot really speak of deportations, but rather of slaves or prisoners of war. In the Assyrian sources, people displaced from their country to a new one are presented as captives. In Akkadian *ḫubtānu* (“captives” or “deportees”) and *šalālu* (“prisoners of war” from the passive form of *šalālu*, “to be carried off as booty”) originate from the same concept: people who being loot can be transported anywhere (see Battini 2022b). For an analysis of the Akkadian term for ‘booty’, ‘tribute’ and ‘deportees’ see Feldman 2011: 137-139.

⁵⁷ For ex. See Barnett, Bleibtreu and Turner 1998: pl. 464.

⁵⁸ For ex. See Barnett, Bleibtreu and Turner 1998: pl. 390.

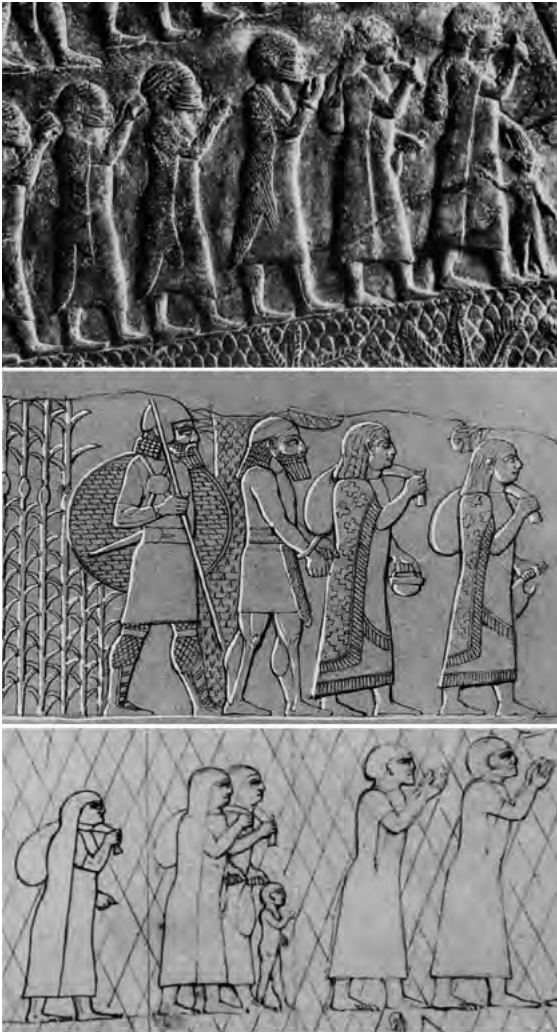
⁵⁹ For ex. See Barnett, Bleibtreu and Turner 1998: pl. 338.

⁶⁰ I do not go back over what I have already analyzed in 2022b, but only over a few crucial points.



throne room. However, deportees can appear in courtyards and in corridors.

Figure 6. Changing of deportees' dress according to the countries that have submitted. (© L. Battini).



The most frequently represented deportees are from the East (9 representations),⁶¹ then from the West (7 representations),⁶² and then the South (6 representations).⁶³ Counting the booty and showing the deportees were manners to prove the economic results of the war. But it was a strong way to increase the emotional experience of the reliefs. This explains why so many sieges were represented in Sennacherib's palace.

2.2 Unity of representation

In the about fifty rooms discovered, almost half (25 spaces) have a siege or deportees or both. They can be corridors, as XII,⁶⁴ courtyards (VI, LXIV)⁶⁵ or rooms, the larger ones such as Room I (the throne room) or the smaller ones such as Lachish's room which is comparatively 'small' at 50m².⁶⁶

Although uncertainty remains due to the absence of some reliefs, what remains shows a unity of architectural and geographical space (Matthiae 1996: 143-174). Each campaign is depicted in a room that contains no other campaigns. The only exceptions are room XLIII, which contains part of the western and part of the eastern campaigns, and court LXIV, which contains the southern and western campaigns.

In general, a room represents several phases of the siege: rooms I and XXXVIII represent all the stages of the siege from I to V. In rooms XIV (eastern campaign) (**Figure 7**) and XXXVI (Lachish room) are represented stages from I to IV. Room XLVIII, which has half of its reliefs, represents only stages III and IV. Sometimes a single room represents only one moment of the siege: room X (**Figure 8**) for example only represents stage IV; the fight is over, the loot is transported far away, the enemies have become deportees (see

⁶¹ Rooms V, VI, XIV, XVII, XXXII, XLVI, XLVII, XLIII, XLV.

⁶² Rooms I, X, XII, XXII, XXXVI, XXXVIII, LXIV.

⁶³ Rooms XIX, XXVIII, LI, LXIV, LXIX and LXX.

⁶⁴ And corridor XXVIII, attributed to Assurbanipal (Russel 1998: 171-174 and fig.92).

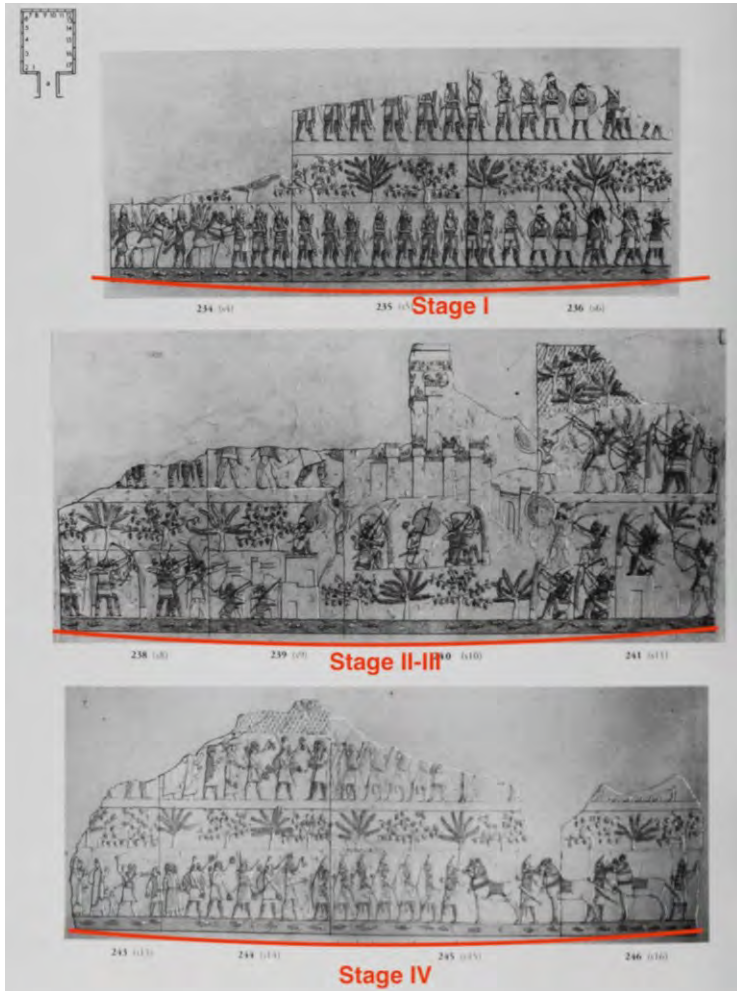
⁶⁵ And courtyard XIX, attributed to Assurbanipal (Russel 1998: 171-174 and fig.92).

⁶⁶ It is (5 m x 11.3 m, that is 56.5 m²) the third smallest room of the palace.



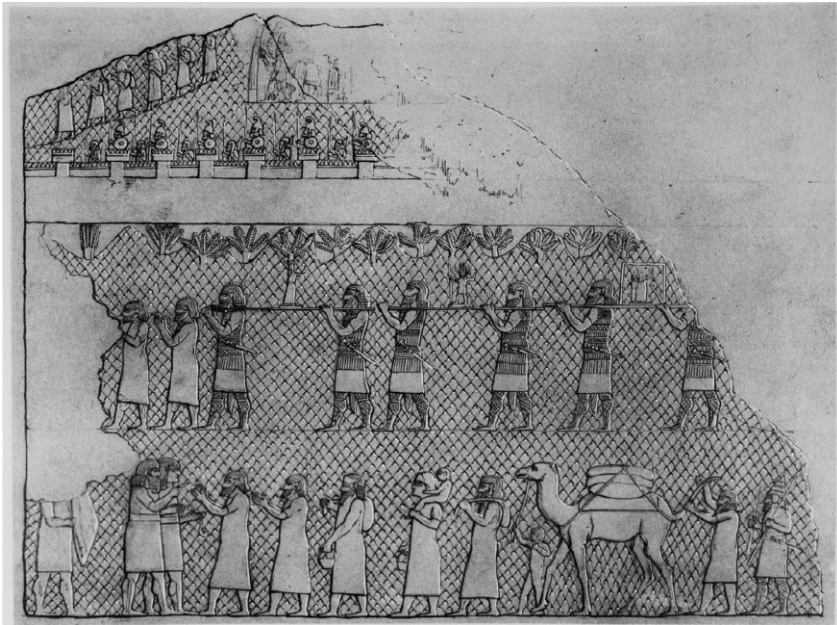
their backpacks) and even the gods are deported.⁶⁷ But given the incomplete state of the room, it is not certain whether originally showed more phases of the siege. *Idem* for other rooms which have partially conserved their reliefs, such as Room LXVIII.

Figure 7. Room XIV, analysis of the siege stages (© L. Battini, reprocessed from Barnett and Bleibtreu 1998 pl.158).



⁶⁷ On the cases of divine deportation, their significance and all the preceding bibliography, see the clever article from Zaia 2015.

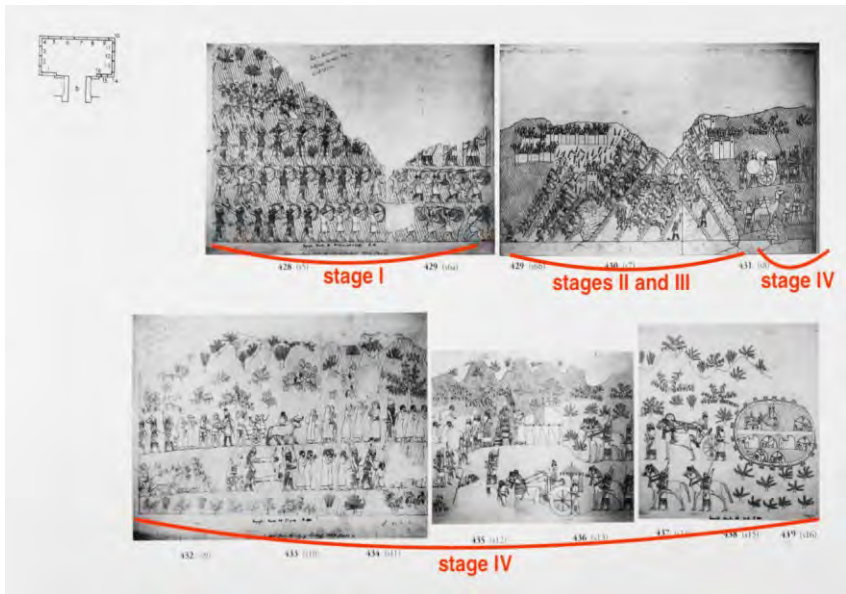
Figure 8. Room X, S 11 (from Barnett and Bleibtreu 1998: pl.143).



Room XXXVI shows a unity of narrative space and of geographical conquest (**Figure 9**), and the arrangement of the reliefs follows the chronological order of a siege, as in room 38 where to the left of the entrance, is stage I showing the moving of the Assyrian army in order to prepare the attack of the city. In front of the entrance are stages II (soldiers are still fighting) and III (deportees begin to leave the city). On the right is stage IV (deportees and booty presented to the king). Room XXXVI misses stage V. Is the latter a coincidence or is intentional? Could this absence indicate that the city was not abandoned or deserted, that Lachish survived?



Figure 9. Room XXXVI, analysis of the siege stages (© L. Battini, reprocessed from Barnett and Bleibtreu 1998 pl.322).



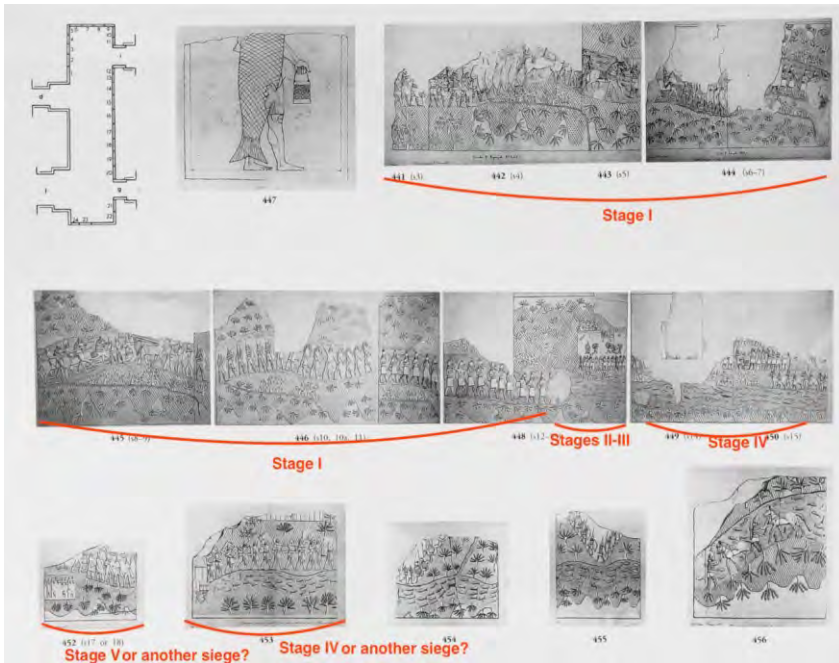
2.3 Ambiguity of representation

The rooms representing more than one siege are the exception. Rooms I, V and probably also Room XXXVIII show different conquered cities and thus present a multiplicity of geographic sieges in the unity of the room. In Room I, probably⁶⁸ the throne room, the representations of cities and their geographical location (by the sea, in the mountains) are so different that they must represent different sieges. In room XXXVIII (**Figure 10**) five stages of the siege are sculpted, but the 3 cities represented are so different that it is obvious that they are 3 different sieges. Or, perhaps, this a kinetic representation of different moments of the same siege? In fact, a visitor can read the reliefs as a progressive development. Especially since their arrangement follows the chronological order of a siege:

⁶⁸ Until one finds either the entrance to the palace, and thus the circulation system beginning with the main gate or the podium, one cannot be sure of the identification of Room I with the throne room. Indeed, in terms of grandeur and monumentality, Room LIV is no less and what is more, it is practically identical in plan.

stage I (S 4-12) then II and III (S 13), then IV (S 14-15 + n.453) and V (S 17 or 18). This is all the charm of the images, their ambiguity, and the different levels of reading.

Figure 10. Room XXXVIII, analysis of the five siege stages (© L. Battini, reprocessed from Barnett and Bleibtreu 1998 pl.353).



2.3 Axial placement of the reliefs

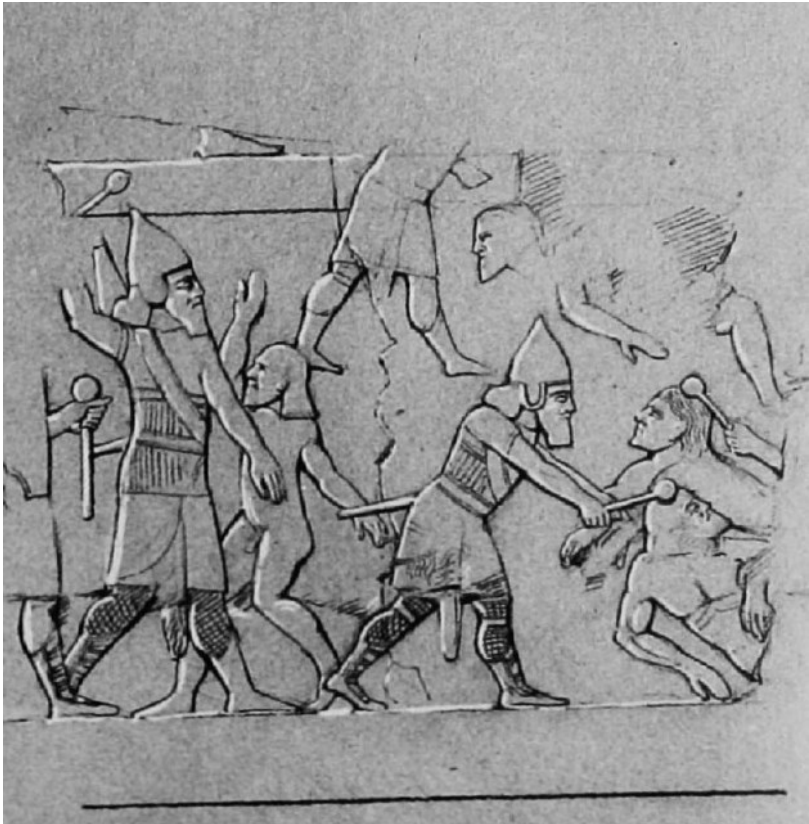
A simple way to accentuate the reliefs is to put them in a particular position. Reliefs that are on axis with the door through which visitors enter are in a prominent position because the gaze is attracted to what is in front of you. This is also the position illuminated by light, as we will see in the penultimate paragraph. Nine siege reliefs out of 23 (43 %) are in this position.⁶⁹ In the famous Lachish scene, the city under siege (S 6-7) is just in front of the entrance door. In room XVII, slabs 7-10, representing a siege, are in front of the room entrance. In room XLV, the two slabs which are in axis with the

⁶⁹ Rooms III, XIV, XVII, XXII, XXXVI, XLV, XLVIII, LXVII, LXX.



entrance represent a siege with rows of deportees and the enemy's severed heads.⁷⁰ And just in axis with the door to Room XLVI, slab 2 represents a massacre of the naked enemy soldiers who, being defenseless, are hit (**Figure 11**).

Figure 11. Room XLVI, massacre of the defenseless enemy (from Barnett and Bleibtreu 1998: pl.388).



⁷⁰ Note that this is also the case in room XXII, attributed to Assurbanipal, who therefore took his grandfather as a model to give more emotional force to the reliefs.

2.4 Spatial placement of the reliefs

The reliefs to the right and left of the doorway to a room are also in a prominent position, and they are doubly so: on the one hand, because being obliged to pass through the door, the visitor cannot fail to see the reliefs immediately to his right and left. And on the other, because the door is a dangerous point, a liminal space that acts as a bridge between two different realities,⁷¹ and was always particularly protected. The reliefs of the deportees, which are for the most part placed near the doors, perhaps served to magically protect the door by drawing the evil inherent in the access onto the figures of the deportees and, at the same time, freeing the visitor from the same evil. This becomes even clearer when one realizes that even the reliefs representing severed heads are practically always near a door (9 out of 11 reliefs, i.e. 82%).⁷² 9 of the 23 siege reliefs and 6 of the at least 33 deportee reliefs are in this position. For example, in room I (**Figure 12**) all three sieges (S1-2, S15 and S23) are near different doors, and the reliefs showing the heads cut off of the enemies (S 13) and the deportees (S 1-2) are also near a door.⁷³ In room X (S 11), deportees are near the door with room XI. In room XLVI, deportees from the west and east are near the entrances. And in courtyard VI the two reliefs representing rows of deportees (S12-13, S38) are one (S 12-13) near the door that gives access to courtyard XIX and the set of rooms that depend on it, and the other is next to the door that gives access to the western part of the palace.

Finally, another prominent position for a relief to occupy is the center of a wall. Although present, this position is attested only twice: once in the great hall V where the short south-east wall has a relief in the center with the representation of stage II and III of the siege,

⁷¹ On the liminal value of doors see: Pongratz-Leisten 1994: 13-36; Battini 1996b: 223-224 and 2016: 233; Radner 2010: 271; Ragavan 2013: 209; Rendu-Loisel 2016b: 296; Tudeau 2019: 90-104 and 147-148.

⁷² It is possible that, when open, doors' shutters can cover the reliefs but the existence of the heads in any case gave protection to the difficult passages. (In the same way, the foundation deposits were not visible but provided protection to the passageway.)

⁷³ The Assurbanipal reliefs in the courtyard XIX, whether siege or deportees, are also near the entrance.



and another in room VII which has lost many of its reliefs. In the middle of its northwest wall two contiguous slabs (S 12-13) (**Figure 13**) report the defeat of the enemy through the massacre of the soldiers at the top, the deportation of the women at the bottom and the pile of severed heads in the middle.

Figure 12. Room I, near the doors (© L. Battini, reprocessed from Barnett and Bleibtreu 1998: pl.30).

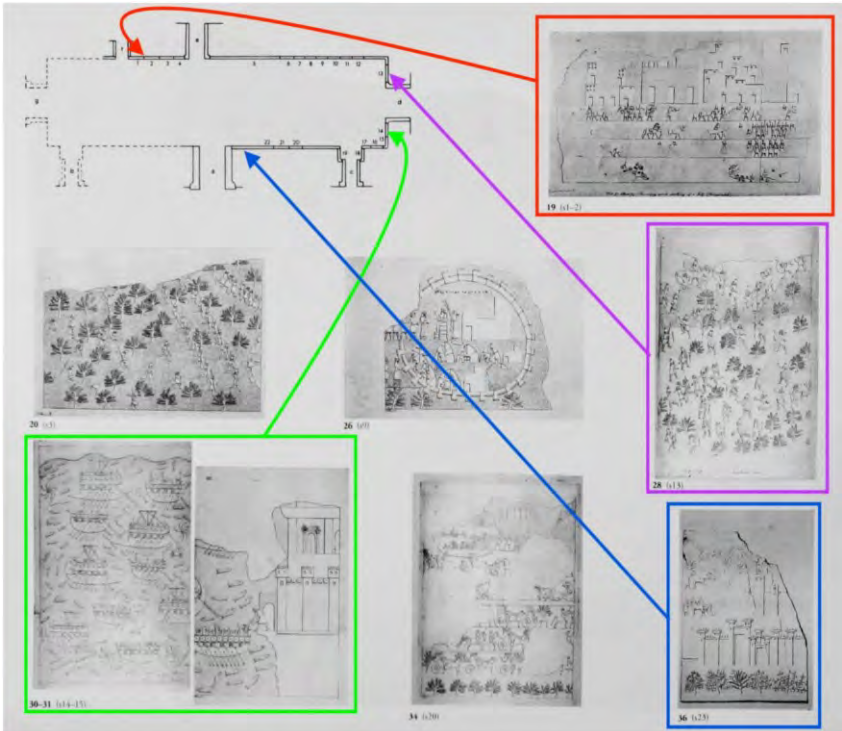
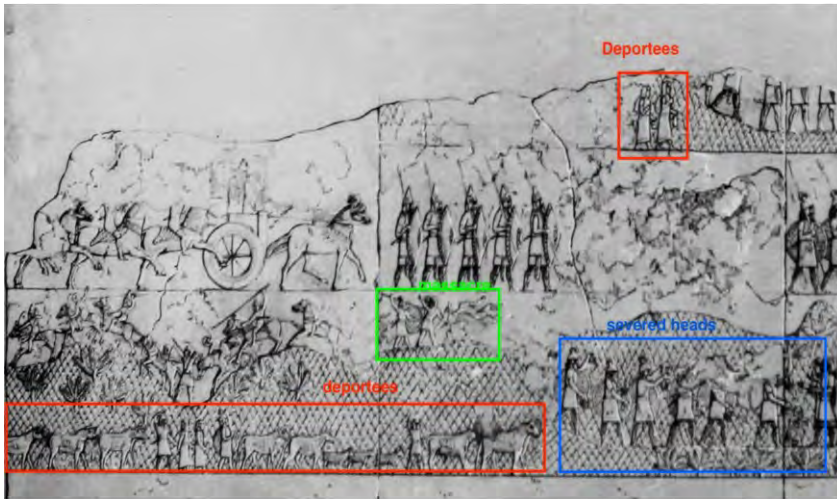


Figure 13. Room VII, Slabs 12-13, representing in the middle of the short south-eastern wall the massacre of the soldiers at the top, the deportation of the women at the bottom and the pile of severed heads in the middle (from Barnett and Bleibtreu 1998: pl.54-55).



2.5 Visual enhancement by light

The perception of light in an architectural space is a complex matter.⁷⁴ One needs to consider natural (that is solar) light entering in a closed space, as well as artificial light. The natural light entering an Assyrian palace was ever-changing. In the open courtyard it directly hits the reliefs making them brighter. In the rooms, the light is softer and subtle. Natural light changes during the day, is much bluer at the beginning of the day and much redder at the end, but this is difficult to appreciate on the Assyrian reliefs.⁷⁵

Moreover, if the object directly hit by the sun presents a multi-levelled surface the light plays with its planes, with the highest and

⁷⁴ Ginthner's (2004: 1-5) main focus is on how light changes interior spaces, while Renoué (2001) also studies external light on buildings. For the Near East, Margueron studied the architectural use of light (1982, 1996, 2005 for ex.).

⁷⁵ The reconstructions of Sennacherib's reliefs made by the British Museum (<http://lachish.org/lachish-battle-reliefs/>) are absurd from the point of view of light. Kertai's (2015a) proposals are hardly acceptable because he did not take into account the existence of a second floor, which, on the other hand, is proven by the existence of stairs and objects found in the stairwell (Battini 1996a).



lowest, creating a set of lights and shadows that stand in contrast with oppositions between the bright of the high reliefs and the shadows of the lower reliefs (background and holes). The result is to enhance the dramatic character of what is seen. On the contrary, inside the palace the natural light loses some of his strength and contrasts: it does not dazzle the surface of the bas-reliefs, it is not as intense and contrastive as when it strikes a surface directly. This attenuated light illuminates the object in a less brilliant and less dramatic way. The result is less dramatic, projecting somewhat softer surfaces.⁷⁶

Reliefs are particularly emphasized when they are in axis with the entrance doors where the light goes through the doorway. These are particularly highlighted since the visitor entering the room has his gaze in front of him and therefore the first relief he sees is the one in the axis, the one in front of him. The reliefs are in a remarkable position even when they are located to the right and left of the door leading to other rooms. Both cases represent 17 out of 23 sieges reliefs (74%) (**Figure 14**). This means that Sennacherib wanted to strongly emphasise the sieges and especially the sight of the enemy city being attacked by weapons in stages II-III. In fact, in room XXXVI, the reliefs that are right in axis with the door are only those showing stage II-III, the attacked city and women leaving the city during the battle. In room XIV, it is always the reliefs of the besieged city that first appear to those entering the room: 4 slabs (S 8-11) representing the city attacked in the front, on the right and on the left.⁷⁷

Having the palace corners oriented with the four wings in courtyards VI, XIX⁷⁸ and LXIV, the east and west corners are those where the light changed the most, probably the most expressive. Let us now consider courtyard VI, the only one of the three courtyards that retains a large part of the reliefs. In the east corner are reliefs 1-9: the

⁷⁶ Renoué 2001: 161-163.

⁷⁷ In room XXII, attributed to Assurbanipal, the king places the most intense reliefs in axis with the entrance, as did his grandfather Sennacherib.

⁷⁸ The courtyard is attributed to Assurbanipal, but probably his grandfather had already decorated it.

2.6 Gestures

It is difficult to analyze the gestures, but essential because they constitute the most powerful form of human communication.⁷⁹ And in the art of the ancient Near East, where emotions are not yet expressed by facial expressions or by bodily disorder,⁸⁰ gesture is essential to understand them. Few reliefs show the emotions felt by the deportees. Within the strict framework of the migration, enemy men are either walking or transporting items and women are walking or caring for children. But in certain reliefs emotions appear clearly. Men express their desperation when they are fighting high up on the walls of the city which is already defeated because the enemies have entered it and are also fighting on the walls. This is the case in relief S 13 of room XXXVIII: a few men are depicted in the last fight, the Assyrians with many weapons, the enemies undefended, and sometimes their arms stretched towards the sky (**Figure 15**). And when they are presented as prisoners and deported to the Assyrian authority, the men often raise their two hands tied by rope, as if to beg.⁸¹ Women, on the other hand, are too busy with children to show emotion in Sennacherib's reliefs.⁸² But sometimes they seem to challenge the Assyrian soldiers, as in the relief n.555 (without precise place) of the room LI (Barnett and Bleibtreu 1998: pl.431) (**Figure 16**).

The symbolism of gesture demonstrates that the emotions of deportees have been felt, understood, and transmitted by the artists. Despite the reality that the audience of the palace reliefs is essentially

⁷⁹ On the importance of gesture in the ancient world, also demonstrated by the fact that it is regarded as the first step towards articulate language (cf. Kendon 2017: 163-170, who disagrees with this hypothesis), see, from an historical point of view Bertelli et Centanni (eds) 1995, from a philosophical point of view Marienberg (ed. 2017, especially 31-46), from a theoretical and ethnographic point of view (Romberg 2017). For the Near East attempts to understand it are very few (Gruber 1980, Botha 1996, Cifarelli 1998), so Ludovico Portuese's Marie Skłodowska-Curie new project is welcome.

⁸⁰ Bonatz 2017: 55-74; Wagner-Durand 2017, 2018 and 2020.

⁸¹ The same gesture can be found in Room XLVIII (S 20), when the deportees approach Sennacherib who is on the throne (Barnett, Bleibtreu and Turner 1998: pl.412).

⁸² The case is different in Assurnasirpal (Battini 2022b). See also Bahrani 2001:125-127. According to her, the women's gestures of despair is an act of mourning after the end of the battle.

the winners,⁸³ the artists did not avoid transmitting the emotions of the vanquished. Why? To accentuate the *pathos* of the scene? To conform to the Assyrian propaganda? To express sympathy? None of these reasons excludes the others, and the Assyrian reliefs are so polysemous that the reading always remains polyvalent and ambiguous.

Figure 15. Room XXXVIII, detail of the slab 13 with gesture of vanquished men (from Barnett and Bleibtreu 1998: pl.362).



⁸³ On the question of the audience for which the reliefs were intended, after several clever articles (Reade 1979a: 335-339; Morandi 1988: 147-149; Russel 1998: 705-714; Cooper 1990: 48; Porter 2000: 7-18, Ead. 2003a: 180-191 and Ead. 2012: 669-676; Liverani 2005: 232-233 and 2014: 374-385; Bagg 2016: 57-82) it seems reasonable to think that the reliefs were above all a form of "internal indoctrination," seen daily by the Assyrian notables and the court, and also a form of justification addressed to the gods. The palace reliefs could occasionally be seen by diplomats and citizens.



Figure 16. Room LI, detail of the slab n.555 with gesture of deported women (from Barnett and Bleibtreu 1998: pl.431).



3. Conclusions

Through the choice of subjects and gestures, as well as the location of the reliefs in the palace and the arrangement of light, the reliefs of Sennacherib's palace were intentionally chosen with the aim of

arousing as many emotions as possible. The preferred subjects were war, siege, and deportees - all strongly emotive themes. The presence of women and children in the depiction of war is already a motif of contention. Through gestures, the emotions of different people can be expressed. However, it must be recognized that the emotions expressed in the reliefs are those that Sennacherib's sculptors had an interest in showing or hiding in order to serve the king's political message. The point of view is Assyrian, although certain emotions of the deportees seem to have been inspired by their observation (men's pleading gestures, gestures of affliction, tenderness towards children...).

The spatial placement of the reliefs and the arrangement of light serve to reinforce the *pathos* of the scenes depicted. The siege and deportee reliefs are either on axis with the door through which visitors enter (39% of the siege reliefs; 18% of the deportee reliefs), or close to the doors (39% of the siege reliefs, 61% of the deportee reliefs). Sometimes they occupy the center of the wall.⁸⁴ The axial position is the most striking because the gaze is drawn to what is in front and because it is enhanced by the light entering the room through the door. The position next to the door is equally charged with intensity because of the liminal value of the door. Most of the deportee reliefs (61%) are, in fact, in this position and they assume a magical value. It is extraordinary to think that the deportees end up being not only the image of the king's success but also his magical protection.

But for whom were these reliefs intended? Various authors have already suggested that the audience of the palace was very limited, comprising mainly the court and high officials, plus a few foreign delegations.⁸⁵ At the time, these images of deportations and sieges probably had different levels of interpretation; from the king's demonstration of strength to the pacification of the empire, to the economic wealth derived from warfare to the magical protection the

⁸⁴ Unfortunately, the rest of the reliefs has lost its original location.

⁸⁵ Morandi 1988, Cooper 1990, Liverani 2014, Bagg 2016, Battini 2019a and 2019b.



king was able to guarantee. The king's message was complex in the reliefs as well as in the royal inscriptions. It is worth noting the concordance in broad strokes between the annals and the representations of the sieges and deportees.⁸⁶ The accuracy of the first three campaigns, reflected in the accuracy of indicating the figures of conquered cities and deportees, finds comparisons in the palace's reliefs, which extensively portray these three early campaigns. The vague allusion to the other campaigns is echoed in their virtual absence from the palace's figurative program.⁸⁷ On the other hand, if the reliefs pause to show scenes of brutality, decapitations and other atrocious scenes, the king's inscriptions also delight in talking about them. This violence is not only a manifestation of strength, as is often believed, but it is also a form of magical protection for the entire empire. Made fragile by wars, destructions, deportations, and deaths, the empire needs a positive message. With the inscriptions and the reliefs, the king shows that everything is under control, that the *pax assyriaca* achieves the cohesion of the empire humanely and magically. Writing and artistic representation are the expression of the same royal and ambiguous message.

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⁸⁶ This element has been studied by P. Villard (1988) with acuteness: despite their different aims and audience, the narration of assyrian reliefs closely matches the composition of the royal annals.

⁸⁷ Why this absence? Did the king want to blur the memory of his last campaigns, tainted by the destruction of Babylon? The Babylonian campaign with the final destruction of Babylon represents Sennacherib's most controversial (Brinkman 1973: 89-95, Machinist 1985: 353-364; Frahm 2017: 286-298) and 'something 'taboo' operation (Cogan 2009: 165-171). That the destruction is total is hard to believe and the topography, which from the end of the II Mill. to the I Mill. BC remains practically unchanged (Battini 2007: 281-297), seems to exclude it.

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