

## What a Relief: The Greek Reception of City-Siege & Palace-Construction Scenes in Neo-Assyrian Relief Art

Famous for scenes which depict torture and destruction, the art of the Assyrians was certainly powerful and unapologetic, and the way the Assyrian kings employed it in their palaces was purposeful. These striking scenes of conquest and destruction were used to not only remind subjected peoples of the consequence of rebellion, but also to promote the strength and might of Assyria to its own citizens. Balancing these scenes of destruction, however, were scenes of palace construction which promoted the wealth and prosperity of the Assyrian empire. In this paper, I will first argue that the scenes of city-sieges and those of palace construction are complementary and inherently tied to one another, playing an equal role in the performance of imperial ideology in the Assyrian empire. Second, expanding on Childs' theory that the Assyrian city-siege scenes spread to Greek Anatolia through portable artforms, I will argue that this phenomenon is also the best explanation as to why we see a lack of reception of palace-construction scenes in Greek art.

The relationship of Assyrian palace relief art to the general imperial ideology has been a much-discussed topic over the years, but the reception, or lack thereof, of certain type-scenes has gone largely unobserved. Reade (1979) discuss the personal self-fashioning of Assyrian kings through their palace art and Liverani (1979) the more general promotion of imperial ideology achieved by the same art. Russel (1998) has placed an emphasis on the importance of studying the palace relief art in its original context in order to arrive at an understanding of the overall decorative scheme (see also Russel 1991 & 1993). Barjamovic (2012) focuses on the relationship of the imperial ideology displayed in the art of the capital to the reality of day-to-day governance

of the vast empire, arguing that the imperial capitals ultimately served as the distribution center for this ideology. Most scholars agree that while the Assyrians have more of a reputation for the destructive scenes of city sieges, the scenes of palace construction are equally important for their imperial ideology and equally prominent in the palaces.

While the reception of the Assyrian city-siege motif can be traced in Greek art, the palace-construction motif seems to have enjoyed no such afterlife. Childs (1978) theorizes that city-siege scenes were brought to Greek art through portable art forms, such as silver bowls. This argument explains both the geographical and chronological gap between the fall of Nineveh in 614 BC and the subsequent appearance of this motif in 4<sup>th</sup> century Greek art. His argument is convincing, but does not explain why the city siege motif is adapted throughout the Mediterranean, whereas the scenes of palace construction remain a uniquely Assyrian phenomenon. I propose that the reason for this has to do with the medium through which Childs argues the city siege reliefs made it to Anatolia. The palace construction reliefs, I argue, do not make it onto portable art forms because they are inherently tied to the architecture that they are a part of in a way that the city siege motif is not. When removed from the surrounding environment (of which they depict the creation) they lose their narrative quality and thus their overall significance. Since the city siege scenes are already removed from their original environment, they have already been adapted to be significant in a different environment. These scenes, then, ultimately lend themselves to be further adapted onto portable art forms like vases, whereas the construction narratives do not.

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