

Assyrian Hieroglyphs

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One conundrum faced by early Assyriologists has proved to be unusually intractable. The document of Esarhaddon (680–669 B. C.) known to nineteenth-century scholars as Lord Aberdeen's Black Stone has symbols carved on one face; there are similar symbols on the ends of several Esarhaddon terracotta prisms. Earlier comparable symbols exist on glazed-brick panels and embossed bronzes of Sargon II (721–705 B. C.). It has been recognised that both sets of monuments incorporate symbolic representations of royalty, but the key to their interpretation has remained elusive. The problems have been studied by Luckenbill, Sidney Smith, Weidner, Gadd, and doubtless many others; most recently Miglus (1994) has provided a useful overview of previous research. No satisfactory explanation has yet been forthcoming.

The present authors now offer a fresh attack on the problem, starting from the premise that the meaning of the symbols does not reside simply in their astral, divine or decorative connotations, but that they are a cryptographic and highly contrived form of writing, and, what is more, a deliberate attempt by the Assyrian authorities to produce a home-grown equivalent to exotic foreign hieroglyphs.

Background

We take it that there will always have been an interest among educated Mesopotamians in the subject of writing, predominantly in its native form, but also, when it happened to abut on the cuneiform world, in the writing of foreigners. A specifically Assyrian interest in the formal nature and development of their own script is evident from the pictographic sign-lists (Hallock 1955: 10; Mallowan 1966: 276 f. fig. 256; Edzard 1976/80: 560; Daniels 1992: 1–4), where ancestors are carefully provided (or invented) for long sequences of cuneiform signs.

Within Mesopotamia, single graphic or symbolic signs are found intermittently across long periods of time, commencing with the earli-

est seal-impressions. In the third millennium B. C., symbols incised on objects from Early Dynastic royal graves at Ur may be rebus writings expressing ownership (Woolley 1934: 317). A Neo-Sumerian votive bowl from the same city is inscribed with the donor's title in two versions, one of which substitutes a crescent for the name of the moon-god (Gadd/Legrain 1928: 14 no. 64, pl. XIV). Middle Assyrian pottery containers sometimes bear impressions that cannot be merely decorative: for example, a rim from Ashur (As. 17941 = WA 1922-8-12, 51), drawn to our attention by Dr St John Simpson, was impressed with a sharp-edged metal stamp representing a goat-fish, possibly indicating that the vessel belonged to a specific temple. A bronze sickle-sword inscribed with the name of Adad-nirari I of Assyria (1305–1274 B. C.) bears a supplementary incised design of an oryx on its blade near the hilt (Unger 1927: 100, Abb. 29; Muscarella 1988: 340–2), while a dagger of the late second or early first millennium B. C. (WA 140683) has a wild goat incised in much the same place, where the owner's name might otherwise have been represented in cuneiform. Some designs on cylinder seals may be interpreted as rebus writings rather than filling motifs; the authors of the present paper have suggested a possible Assyrian example of this practice from the later eighth century B. C. (Reade 1995: 236; see now Collon 1995).

In addition, the Assyrians of the eighth century had long been familiar with Hittite hieroglyphs, they probably knew of Urartian hieroglyphs, and they were certainly aware of the Egyptian or pseudo-Egyptian hieroglyphs which were used on the east coast of the Mediterranean and will have been visible on some of the furniture imported from that region. It was from the 730s, however, during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, and increasingly thereafter, that the Assyrians were in repeated contact with Egypt itself, the civilization which was the home of the major variety of hieroglyphic writing and employed it, as the Neo-Hittites had done, on a monumental scale in architecture. Sargon and probably Sennacherib, during their campaigns in Palestine, encountered soldiers from Africa who were accordingly represented with distinctive features on palace wall-panels (e. g. Unger 1927: 118, Abb. 61). An "Egyptian scribe", with an Assyrian name, bought a house at Nineveh in 692 B. C. (Kwasman/Parpola 1991: 125). The details of Esarhaddon's involvement with Egypt are unclear, but there may have been a campaign to the border in 679, and there were invasions, the second one successful, in 674 and 671 (Onasch 1994: 169; Porter 1993: 156 f.). Thereafter there is ample evidence for the presence of Egyptian culture in the Mesopotamian world, e. g. the number and range of Egyptians resident there (Eph'al 1978: 78; Leahy n. d.;

Onasch 1994: 13–6) and the many Egyptian-style seals or amulets found at Assyrian sites (Herbordt 1992: 120 f.).

Traditionally Assyrian rulers had shown great interest in foreign cultures. This was not only for display: they often adopted ideas that appealed to them. Esarhaddon exhibited Egyptian trophies prominently in the arsenal at Nineveh (Asil 1954: 111). A narrative painting from Nimrud, probably showing one of Esarhaddon's Egyptian campaigns, represents chariot-horses rearing in a characteristically steep Egyptian pose, see *Abb. 6*. Sculptures from Nineveh, both a piece tentatively ascribed to Esarhaddon (Reade 1972: 111 f., pl. XLb) and the slightly later Til-Tuba series of Ashurbanipal (Reade 1979: Taf. 17 f.), display a compositional boldness very likely influenced by monuments seen in Egypt.

Similarly, Assyrian rulers will hardly have ignored, and the more intellectual among them will have relished, the special features of Egyptian hieroglyphic writing. An inventive scribe had much to draw on for inspiration, but it seems improbable that scholars experimenting with Assyrian hieroglyphs would have followed foreign writing practice closely. Rather they would have incorporated a range of tricks, devices and substitutions that elsewhere are to be seen at work in native Mesopotamian cuneiform documents such as learned explanatory commentaries, or in the kinds of text discussed recently by Beau-lieu (1995). Accordingly, the elaborate form of cryptography found in these Assyrian monuments employs a number of distinct devices: direct and indirect pictogram; direct and indirect pun.

Sargon: prisms

Weidner (1941: 48 f.) drew attention to a possible relationship between the Esarhaddon symbols and the decoration on the ends of two terracotta foundation prisms dating from the reign of Sargon II (721–705 B. C.). He noted Luckenbill's observation (1925: 165) that the Esarhaddon symbols should represent Esarhaddon's name, and suggested that Sargon might also have had his name represented in a comparable manner. These do appear to be the earliest prisms with decorated ends. Details are as follows:

Ashur prism (Weidner 1941: 48 f.). A design is cut or impressed on the broken end of a prism in Berlin (VA 8424) found in the Ashur temple forecourt; the text as preserved does not specify the building for which the prism was intended, but it may well have been the Ashur Temple, the one place at Ashur where Sargon certainly worked. The

design shows a stylized plant, with an animal to one side which Weidner defines as a kid (Zicklein), see *Abb. 7*, for which we are indebted to J. Marzahn; the details are unclear, but the animal may have been prancing. There does not seem to have been space for more than a symmetrical composition showing two such animals on either side of the plant.

Nineveh(?) prism (Luckenbill 1927: 111). A design is cut, not impressed, on the broken end of a prism whose British Museum number (K 4818) indicates that it was most probably, but not unquestionably, found at Nineveh. The text refers to work on a ziggurrat, and invokes the gods Šamaš and Adad. The design shows the greater part of two animals striding left, one certainly and the other almost certainly a bull, see *Abb. 8*; there would have been space for several others if the procession was continued.

Apart from their location on the ends of prisms, there is no cogent link between these designs and the hieroglyphs discussed below. It is more probable that the Sargon designs were related to the identities of the gods for whose temples the prisms were made. The goat was an attribute of the god Ashur (Unger 1965: 437–41), and the composition on the Ashur piece might have been appropriate for a prism made for his temple. The bull is well known as an attribute of the weather-god Adad (Seidl 1969: 487). A very general parallel may be drawn with a Kassite terracotta block dedicated to Adad (Sollberger 1968: 195–7); on this piece, on two unscribed faces, pairs of curving lines represent the god's weapon, lightning.

Sargon: glazed bricks and paintings

Five pairs of glazed-brick panels were located in temples at Sargon's city of Dūr-Šarrukīn, Ḥorsābād. They covered the sides and faces of low platforms which projected at the base of internal courtyard facades, on either side of major entrances. The panels were all decorated with variations of a single distinctive design, incorporating either five or seven symbols. The designs were arranged symmetrically, balancing each other, with the figures within them directed towards the doors. Three of the pairs, outside the shrines of Sin, Šamaš, and Nabû, showed the Assyrian king, followed by a lion, a bird, a bull, a fig-tree, a combination seeder-plough, and another human figure (Place/Thomas 1867–70: III, pls 26–31; Loud 1936: 92–7, 102–4; Loud/Altman 1938: 41 f., 61), see *Abb. 1*. A pair of shorter panels, on the inner facade of the Nabû Temple outer court, omitted the bird and the

bull (Loud/Altman 1938: 59). Outside the shrine of Ningal was another pair of shorter panels, similarly restored by the excavator though the lion did not survive (Loud 1936: 110–2). Scraps of paintings showing a fig-tree, a bird, and other poorly preserved subjects were found near a staircase in a smaller Ḫorsābād palace (Loud/Altman 1938: 66, pls 32A, 91); they do not resemble the glazed bricks closely, but this area could well have been the approach to a domestic shrine.

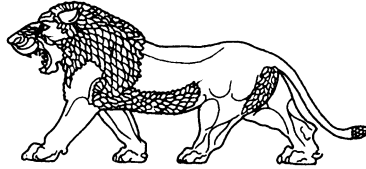
While Loud (1936: 94–6) saw the Sargon symbols as representing empire and fertility, Unger (1938: 252) saw them as symbolizing different gods; Nunn (1988: 177f.) suggested that they were both. Gadd (1948: 93–5), who was perhaps the first to note a resemblance between these Sargon symbols and those of Esarhaddon, suggested that they might represent the king's name. Reade (1979: 45) suggested a principle on which this might have been done, postulating that patterns of stars were thought by Mesopotamian astronomers to correspond not merely to figures, animals and so on, as seen perhaps by preliterate Mesopotamians and in modern pictures of the zodiac, but to the cuneiform signs with which the names of these zodiacal constellations were written (*šīṭir šamē*): this would offer infinite possibilities for puns and esoteric interpretations.

Sargon: decipherment

It is possible to decipher these particular panels more straightforwardly on cryptographic principles, and we have accordingly offered a preliminary interpretation (Reade 1995: 235) which is elaborated here, as follows:



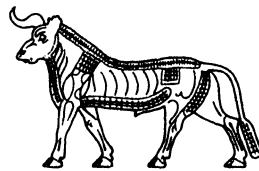
KING: direct pictogram, representing Sargon in person, and to be understood as the name “Sargon”. The king, clearly identified by his royal headdress, is wearing ritual dress and holds a mace in his left hand. The right hand is raised and points towards the door; the published drawing shows it with the palm open, but one may wonder whether it was not in reality clenched, with the forefinger outstretched, in the classic gesture of an Assyrian king as worshipper that is well attested in stela.



LION: indirect pictogram, standing for LUGAL = *šarru*, “king”. The lion was a familiar symbol of strength and royalty. Significantly, it is found engraved in front of Sargon’s name on vessels of stone and glass (Barag 1985: 61); these were excavated at Nimrud, where they must have been left when Sargon moved to Ḫorsābād, perhaps about 710 B. C., and may therefore anticipate the more developed hieroglyphic writing.



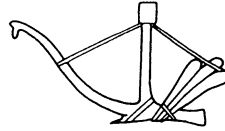
BIRD: direct pun, to represent *rabû*, “great”; we propose for the moment the underlying *āribu*, “crow”, or “raven” (or possibly *arabû*, a water-bird), aware that the bird itself looks rather more like an eagle, if not an Egyptian vulture.



BULL: indirect pictogram, standing for LUGAL₂ = *šarru*, “king”. The bull, like the lion, was a symbol of virile strength and royalty. A bull was occasionally stamped on baked bricks at Ḫorsābād (Loud 1938: 14, pl. 65).



FIG-TREE: indirect pun, reading *mātu*, “land”, following the writing of MA = *tittu*, “fig-tree”, and MA = *mātu*, “land”.



SEEDER-PLOUGH: either a direct pun, standing for *šūrû*, which was some kind of metal implement (even perhaps a seeder) used in agriculture, and reading (*Aš*)*šur*, or an indirect pictogram symbolising the ploughed fields typical of the Assyrian landscape.



HUMAN FIGURE: direct pictogram, standing for *KI* = *eršetu*, meaning “earth”, “ground”, or “Underworld”, since the figure is pointing at the ground in front of himself with the tip of his spear. Here the sign corresponds to *KI* as determinative for place-names.

This inscription can thus be interpreted as follows: “Sargon, Great King, King of the Land of Assyria.”

The shorter version, omitting the bird and the bull, would read simply: “Sargon, King of the Land of Assyria”.

We propose, then, that Sargon ordered the chiefs of the scribal academy in Dūr Šarrukīn to develop a hieroglyphic method of writing the king’s name and titles, for use as architectural decoration in temples. The special choice of iconography may well have been a response to the striking but altogether alien writing system that he had encountered through contact with Egyptians and through description of the use to which hieroglyphs were put on Egyptian monuments and buildings.

It may be observed in this regard that the glazed brick panels were arranged in pairs, each facing in a different direction. This emulates a well-known quality of Egyptian writing: it can proceed from left to right or vice versa, the reading being dictated by diagnostic signs such as birds or human figures (see Gardiner 1950: 25). This facility is entirely denied to cuneiform script of the first millennium B. C.

Sargon: bronzes

Hieroglyphic symbols and comparable designs were not restricted to the glazed-brick panels. There is evidence at Ḥorsābād that some or all of the main temple doors or furniture and the poles at the temple entrances were decorated with embossed bronzework. Sixteen relevant fragments are recorded, in three groups; we have assigned them the letters A–P.

A (*Abb. 10*). This fragment, much the best preserved, derives from a pole outside the shrine of Šamaš, and is now numbered A 12468 in the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. It is mentioned by Loud (1936: 104–5), and has been illustrated in part by Brinkman (1974: 13, fig. 2) and by Karen Wilson (1994: 62, fig. 2), to the latter of whom we are indebted for further information and help. It is in two registers, as follows:

Upper left (*Abb. 9*): a bird flying to left. A bird could symbolize the god Ninurta (Seidl 1969: 487).

Upper centre: Master of Animals (*Abb. 11*), facing left, and grasping by the horns two bulls which stride towards him. The Master of Animals wears a robe, belt and reversed apron (to prevent chafing against the sides of a chariot), which could all be royal. Despite the fine quality of the workmanship, his bracelets are much simpler than those usually worn by Sargon in the Ḥorsābād sculptures. He is marked as a king, however, by his tall hat with attached diadem. The main part of this hat is taller than Sargon's usually is, and its flat top is unusually narrow; there is apparently a cone on top, but it is tiny when compared with the cones on other Assyrian royal hats. The whole gives the impression of headgear which, while clearly royal, had some special significance. The posture of the king as Master of Animals would also be unusual, though the Assyrian royal seal did show the king killing a lion while the royal seal of a seventh-century Assyrian king of Babylon showed him grasping an oryx (Collon 1987: 129, no. 555). The theme of earlier Babylonian royal seals is unknown; a king grasping a bull would have been not inappropriate. It would be relevant that Sargon was king of Babylon during 709–705 B. C., when the Ḥorsābād temples were in the process of completion. The possible connotations of this, and the identity of the Master of Animals, are further considered at the end of this paper.

Upper right, if correctly positioned in the current reconstruction (*Abb. 12*): bearded man, facing left, with right arm raised and left lowered and bent, as if greeting or introducing; he wears a kilt, decorated with incised squares and rosettes, much like those worn by Assyrian soldiers and magic figures.

Lower left: trace of a pattern, just possibly the end of a bull's tail.

Lower centre: fig-tree. The tree was described as barren by Loud, but now the bronze is clean there is a distinctive pattern of fruits and leaves incised along the branches. Clearly this symbol, with those directly to either side of it, could be part of the king's name and titles as on the glazed bricks.

Lower right: seeder-plough (front end of shaft only preserved).

B–H (*Abb. 3*). These fragments from Room 14, the outer shrine of the Nabû Temple, are discussed and illustrated by Loud/Altman (1938: 59, 96, pls 49–50, nos 20–26, reproduced here by kind permission of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago),

and seem likely to have derived from a door or other fitting with bronze overlay. They are as follows:

B. A bull-man (*kusarikku*) followed by a fish-man (*kulīlu*), both facing left. These are well-known semi-divine figures. Each seems to have had his hands folded, in the attitude of a respectful Assyrian courtier.

C. The drawing published by Loud/Altman suggests a dog, but this is probably because the metal was corroded. In reality this seems to have been a dragon (*mušḫuššu*), supporting a stylus and presumably symbolizing the god Nabû. We are again indebted to Karen Wilson for information that this piece, which is in the Iraq Museum, probably faces right; the published photograph (Loud/Altman 1938: pl. 50) shows the reverse.

D. A bull striding left which could be regarded either as a plain hieroglyph, as on the glazed-brick panels, or as symbolizing a god such as Adad.

E. Part of a seeder-plough directed right, which could be regarded either as referring to Aššur as on the glazed-brick panels, or as symbolizing a god (Seidl 1969: 486).

F. A bearded man in Assyrian court dress, facing left and holding a vertical shaft which may have a point resting on the ground in front of him. He is close though not quite identical to the KI figure on the glazed bricks.

G. Facing right, part of a figure in Assyrian court dress, holding a spear pointed at the ground. He is probably like the figure on Fragment F.

H. What appears to be a clump of grass on a hill, with part of another animal or object to its right.

I–P (*Abb. 15, 13, 14, 4, 5, 16–18*). This third group consists of fragments found by Place/Thomas (1867–70: I, 129; III, pl. 72, nos 1–10) in Room 166, the shrine of Adad. They too may have derived from a door or other fitting with bronze overlay. There seems no reason to take as correct the reconstruction given by Place/Thomas (1867: III, pl. 25.5) and reproduced by Miglus (1994: 183, *Abb. 4*). We are indebted to Annie Caubet for photographs of the surviving pieces in the Louvre, now numbered N III 3099, and for permission to publish them. The fragments are as follows:

I (*Abb. 15, 13, 14*, Place/Thomas, nos 5 + 8 + 4, now joined as in *Abb. 4*). Parts of three figures survive, all moving to the left. Left: bull (not clearly identifiable as such in photographs, but broadly similar to bulls on fragments N and O). Centre: goat, with a star in a circle above its back. Right: bearded man, facing left, with right arm raised and left lowered, and wearing a kilt decorated with incised circles. The bull could symbolize Adad. The goat with a star above it might suggest a pun on the name of the god Sin; since *ûz* is the Sumerian and *enzu* the Akkadian for goat, we assume that ^dûz = “^denzu” corresponds to the normal orthography ^dEN.ZU = Sin. The man could be human or magical.

J (*Abb. 5*). Possibly the wings of a bird. Compare fragment A.

K (*Abb. 5*). Just possibly the head of a goat-fish (*suḫurmaššu*) or dragon (*mušḫuššu*).

L (*Abb. 16*). Three figures. Left: an incised tassel, like those attached to ritual poles or royal equipment, and possibly a trace of a hand raised backward, such as that of a magical figure. Centre: bearded man, facing left, with right arm raised and left lowered, and wearing a tunic and kilt decorated with incised circles; his hair has triple ringlets at the back, which indicate his magical status. Right: lion striding left. The lion could be regarded either as a plain hieroglyph, as on the glazed-brick panels, or as symbolizing a deity, e. g. Ištar.

M (*Abb. 5*). Part of a seeder-plough directed left. Compare fragment E.

N (*Abb. 17*). Left: bull striding left. Right: tree, much like the fig-tree on fragment A but with fruit indicated only by small incised circles along the branches. This piece could represent part of a composition similar to those on the glazed bricks.

O (*Abb. 18*). Similar to fragment N, but with both fruit and leaves indicated.

P (*Abb. 5*). On the left is an object slightly resembling a fan or funnel, certainly not a plough though it might perhaps be a seeder. On the right is part of a human figure, facing left and wearing a long dress; a belt is indicated, and this might be Assyrian court dress. He has his right arm raised, and in his left hand holds a vertical staff the lower end of which is lost. He recalls the K1 figures of fragments F and G, but may be differently dressed and is holding the staff with only one hand.

Further progress can be made on the somewhat speculative assumption that the designs on various bronze panels, both on poles and on other fittings, were arranged on the same general principles as one another.

The figures or symbols in the upper register of fragment A all move left, and we may envisage a whole procession of them encircling the pole, possibly but not necessarily headed by the Master of Animals. Among the fragments from other places, the figures on fragments B, C, I and L, could easily belong in comparable processions, and so possibly could those on fragments J and K. In other words we postulate that there was a procession of gods and/or demigods in the upper register of fragment A, and that there were other such processions, varying in length according to the space available, on the other bronze fittings from which fragments B, C, and I–L derive. Given that the Master of Animals wears the royal crown, one might compare the bronze overlay of a door at Ashur, on which Sennacherib had himself represented assisting the god Ashur and others against Tiamat and her brood (Luckenbill 1924: 139–42).

On the lower register of fragment A and on other bronze fittings there would then have been the king's name and titles in Assyrian hieroglyphs, written in the same way as on the glazed brick panels and represented by the surviving fragments E, F, G, M, N, and O.

The bull on fragment D could be either a divine symbol or part of the royal titles. Fragment P might conceivably belong to a version of the royal titles. This leaves fragment H for which no explanation is suggested, beyond the obvious likelihood that it too had a symbolic meaning.

Most of the divine figures preserved face left, but one faces right. The hieroglyphs face both directions. This suggests that bronze bands, representing in an upper register mainly gods or their symbols, and in a lower register the royal name and titles in hieroglyphs, were attached symmetrically to doors or other fittings, with the figures facing inward as on the glazed-brick panels.

Esarhaddon: monuments

Lord Aberdeen's Black Stone, now WA 91027 in the British Museum, is a rectangular block of black limestone, the same material as many Babylonian *kudurru* monuments. It was acquired, probably around the 1820s, by the fourth Earl of Aberdeen who presented it to the British Museum in 1860; it was published by Rawlinson/Norris (1861: 49) as coming from Nineveh, but real evidence for a Nineveh provenance is unavailable, and Babylon seems much likelier since this was the normal source for antiquities at the time that Lord Aberdeen acquired it; they used to be found by people digging for bricks.

Symbols are carved on what we may regard as its top, see *Abb. 19*. The four long sides, see *Abb. 20*, bear an inscription of Esarhaddon (680–669 B. C.) relating to his restoration of Babylon and the Marduk Temple.

The symbols are in two lines, read from left to right, as follows:

upper line: ALTAR/KING/SACRED TREE/BULL;

lower line: MOUNTAIN/SEEDER-PLOUGH/PALM-TREE/RECTANGLE WITH CIRCLES AT ITS CORNERS

Other such symbols were present on a stamp, about 6.6 cm in diameter, which was impressed to a depth of some 0.8 cm in the ends of at least three inscribed terracotta prisms of Esarhaddon: WA 78223 (*Abb. 21–22*) and WA 78247 (*Abb. 23*) in the British Museum, and MMA 86.11.283 (*Abb. 24*) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. We are indebted to Prudence Harper and Joan Aruz of the Metropolitan Museum of Art for permission to illustrate the New York piece and to Ira Spar and Erle Leichty for a transliteration of the text.

Both stamped ends of WA 78223, and one end of MMA 86.11.283, are partly preserved; the prisms were seven-sided. One end of WA 78247, which seems to have been ten-sided, is partly preserved. The same stamp was apparently used for all three prisms, the sharpness of the detail suggesting that it was metal rather than stone. Pinches (1963: pl. IV) and Herbordt (1992: 145, Taf. 20.11) mention and illustrate the design on the British Museum pieces. The British Museum prisms were purchased at Hillah near Babylon in 1887; the New York prism was in the hands of a Mesopotamian dealer's agent in London in 1885, and reached the Metropolitan Museum the following year. Like the Black Stone, all the prisms bear texts relating to the restoration of Babylon and the Marduk Temple.

The sequence on the impression, again from left to right, see *Abb. 2* (though the actual symbols are in a circle without any indica-

tion of which comes first), runs as follows: ALTAR/KING/SACRED TREE/LION/MOUNTAIN/SEEDER-PLOUGH/PALM-TREE/RECTANGLE WITH CIRCLES AT ITS CORNERS

Part of an official Esarhaddon text discussed in the following section refers to foundation documents, made for Babylon, which bore designs and were made of black stone and terracotta among other materials. The natural supposition is that this is a reference to the Black Stone itself and to stamped terracotta prisms such as the ones in London and New York.

It should be noted, however, that the London prisms are not themselves likely to have been buried in the foundations of the temple, even if that was their original intended use. They belong to a group of at least seven prisms (WA 78221 + 2, 78223–5, 78246–8), substantial fragments of which were all purchased for the British Museum at Hillah in 1887, while other fragments of the same prisms went elsewhere on the market (Porter 1993: 186 f.); they represent, if we rely on the standard listing of Esarhaddon's Babylon inscriptions (Borger 1956: 10 f.), editions Bab. A, C, E and F. Though the dating evidence for the various editions is far from clear-cut (Porter 1993: 170–5), the process of reconstructing Babylon certainly continued for years, and the prisms were probably produced over several years, before and after 674 B. C. Now it was normal in antiquity to deposit foundation documents singly in their destined locations, from which they have often been excavated one by one. Because these seven prisms came on to the market together, it seems likely that they had been found close to one another, and that their finders had stumbled, not on a series of foundation deposits, but rather on what had once been a record-office, store, scriptorium, or even the place where superfluous or defective copies were dumped as rubbish. There is an analogy with Campbell Thompson's great find of Neo-Assyrian cylinders and prisms at Nineveh (Reade 1986: 216) and with the collections of Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus duplicate cylinders found by Rassam in the Šamaš Temple at Sippar (Leichty 1986: 138–49, 201). Although there is nothing evidently amiss with the Esarhaddon prisms from Babylon in the British Museum, the photograph of MMA 86.11.283 (*Abb. 24*) does appear to indicate a distortion on the left-hand side.

An important difference between the sequence of symbols on the Black Stone and that on the prisms is that the latter substitute lion for bull. Another variation is in the appearance of the sacred tree: on the Black Stone this is the traditional Assyrian type, with a central pole topped by a palmette and surrounded by trellis-work; on the prisms there is a similar pole but the trellis-work is missing. While the

variation in the design of the tree may be insignificant, the substitution of lion for bull cannot be disregarded. The imbalance is susceptible of three possible interpretations:

1. *Only one version is correct.*
2. *Both versions are correct.*
3. *Both versions are incorrect.*

It does seem improbable that a mistake should appear on such an expensive and highly finished object as the Black Stone, whose production should have been closely supervised. In contrast, confusion between a bull and a lion on a reverse stamp for impressing clay would be less surprising: the two symbols are interchangeable in the Sargon inscription discussed above, and scribal supervision of the process of manufacturing the stamp may have been less exacting. On the other hand both the Black Stone and the stamp are notably specific in representing the king as bare-headed.

It is not obvious which version has chronological precedence. The Black Stone is carved with the text classified as edition Bab. D (= Luckenbill 1927: 242–4). The text on WA 78223 is edition Bab. A (= Luckenbill 1927: 244–9), as apparently was that on the New York piece 86.11.283, while that on WA 78247 is edition Bab. F. Editions Bab. A and Bab. D probably both belong in the period 680–674, and could be virtually contemporary. Bab. F is probably later, in the period 674–669. So the stamp, whether or not its design was faulty, was manifestly used on two kinds of prism, possibly over several years.

We might have hoped for a constructive allusion to this matter preserved among scholarly letters of Esarhaddon's reign emanating from Babylonia. The elaborate archaizing version of Babylonian script in which the Black Stone and some of the prisms are inscribed, besides reinforcing Porter's arguments (1993: 104) about the propagandistic nature of these documents, points to the involvement of highly qualified scholars in the process of production. There is indeed a fragmentary letter to which Parpola (1993: 315) gives the encouraging title "Obscure Inscriptions", but there is no particular reason to suppose that the inscriptions in question are related either to these Babylonian versions or indeed to the associated symbols. Another letter (Parpola 1993: 292) refers to seven foundation stones destined for Babylon or Borsippa, and to the supply of *elallum* stone for a dais in the Marduk Temple. One of the foundation documents with designs on it is described, in the official text discussed below, as having been made of this variety of stone, but we have not identified any cogent link between the scholarly correspondence and the monuments considered in this paper.

Esarhaddon: the *lumāšī* reference

Luckenbill (1925: 165) was perhaps the first to identify a reference to these symbols in one sentence of the section of Esarhaddon's Babylon records defined by Borger (1956: 27–8) as Episode 40: *lumāšī tamšīl šītir šumia ēsiq šeruššun*, "I represented upon them *lumāšī*-symbols, the equivalent of writing my name." Episode 40 is entirely absent from the relatively short text of the Black Stone, but is present in full on WA 78223, and could have been present on WA 78247 and Met. 86–11–283. Paradoxically, Episode 40 is present in full also on at least one other prism from the group, WA 78221 + 2 (edition Bab. C 2), the ends of which are plain rather than stamped, whereas edition Bab. E, to which the plain-ended cylinders, WA 78225, 78246, and 78248, are all assigned, have an abbreviated version of Episode 40, omitting the *lumāšī* sentence (Borger 1956: 28, note in commentary). It would be helpful to have a systematic classification of these and other Esarhaddon prisms which took account of their shape, script and decoration as well as their textual content.

The full text of Episode 40 runs as follows:

ušēpišma narē kaspi hurāši siparri uqnī gišnugalli šallamtu pindū elallu pīlu pešū musarē tiṭṭi šarpūti lumāšī tamšīl šītir šumia ēsiq šeruššun danān qarrādi rabē Marduk epšēt ēteppušu liptāt qātēia qerebšun aštur ina uššē aškun ana šāt ūmē ēzib.

I made foundation documents of silver, gold, copper/bronze, lapis lazuli, alabaster, black stone, variegated(?) stone, *elallum* stone, limestone, (and) inscriptions of terracotta. I represented upon them *lumāšī*-symbols, the equivalent of writing my name. I wrote on them the power of the great hero Marduk, the deeds I have accomplished, the work of my hands; I set (them) in the foundations, and deposited (them there) forever.

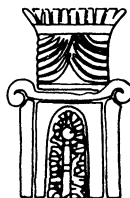
In attempting to correlate text with symbols, Luckenbill (1925: 170) proposed that the latter actually resembled in their physical shape the cuneiform signs representing ^d*Aššur-aḥa-iddin(na) ana-ku*, "I am Esarhaddon", and that some also represented known stars or groups of stars. The resemblance to cuneiform has generally been dismissed as illusory, however, and another fundamental problem is that the symbols include trees while there seem to be no trees known among the recognized stars and constellations. Sidney Smith (1925: 57) thought of the horned crown on an altar as representing the god Anu and the mountain as representing the god Enlil, and drew a parallel with

contrasted Anu and Enlil star groups, but was unable to relate the symbols to Esarhaddon's name. Weidner (1941: 48 f.) and Gadd (1948: 93 f.) considered the matter, but did not propose solutions.

Luckenbill consequently rendered the term *lumāšī* as “constellations”, Borger following with “die *lumāši*-Sterne”, while the CAD recently enough (vol. L: 245) likewise translated “*lumāšu*-stars”. In practice, however, though the common astral connotations of the word could impose an indirect allusion to the *lumāšī* placed in the sky by Marduk, the very god for whose temple the Black Stone and the prisms were created, there is no imperative reason to assume that Esarhaddon's reference to *lumāšī* here is itself a direct reference to stars. We prefer rather to follow the lead of Landsberger and Kinnier Wilson (1961: 170 f.) who proposed for the word *lumāšu*, on etymological grounds, the translation “twin-image” or “replica”. This follows the derivation of *lumāšu*, sometimes written *lú-maš-ši*, from LÚ.MAŠ = *māšu*, “twin”. In the present context we might equally translate it as “counterpart”, or even “hieroglyph”.

Esarhaddon: decipherment

The designs on the Black Stone may now be interpreted as follows:



HORNED CROWN ON ALTAR: indirect pictogram, standing for the cuneiform sign AN/dingir, since the horned crown on an altar is the standard symbol of the highest divinities; here to be read phonetically as “an”.

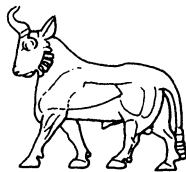


KING: direct pictogram, standing for the cuneiform sign LUGAL = *šarru*, “king”, here to be read phonetically as *šar*. These two signs thus produce the first element of Esarhaddon's name, an.šar = Aššur, as

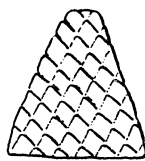
it is written in the archaizing orthography of the main Black Stone text and of course frequently elsewhere.



SACRED TREE: indirect pun, reading šēš = *aḫu*, “brother”. We take the tree to reflect the sign šēš/URI, assuming that URI stands for *urigallu*, a kind of sacred pole and perhaps a likely name for the Sacred Tree. This produces the word *aḫu*, “brother”.



BULL: indirect pun, taking BULL, *totum pro parte*, for HORN, drawing thence on si = *qarnu*, “horn”, and si = *nadānu*, “to give”. This then will stand for the finite form *iddin*.



MOUNTAIN: indirect pun, following KUR = *šadû*, “mountain,” and KUR = *ekallu*, “palace.” Since the context demands the word “king”, we propose interpreting this as a direct calque from Egyptian. The Akkadian word *ekallu* is loaned from Sumerian É.GAL, literally “great house”, and its use here for the Assyrian king reflects the Egyptian title *perʿaa*, “great house”, i.e. “Pharaoh”. Note that in Sargon’s records of 716–5 B. C., “Pir’u, king of Egypt” was taken to be a personal name; by Esarhaddon’s time, both the nature and derivation of the term would have been more familiar.



SEEDER-PLOUGH: either a direct pun, standing for *šūrû*, as above in the Sargon text, or an indirect pictogram symbolising the ploughed fields typical of the Assyrian landscape, i. e. *Aššur* or “Upper Mesopotamia”.



PALM-TREE: indirect pictogram, standing for Sumer and Akkad or Babylonia (Karduniaš), i. e. “Lower Mesopotamia”. It is perhaps noteworthy that in the Egyptian titulary the term “Upper Egypt” is represented by a plant (Gardiner 1950: 482 f., M 23 and variants). By Esarhaddon’s time the Assyrians were aware not only of Lower Egypt, the country they had long known as Mušru, which the Egyptians themselves called *p(š)-tš-mḥw*, but also of Upper Egypt, Paturisu, evidently a rendering of Egyptian *p(š)-tš-rsy* (we are indebted to our colleague Dr. Stephen Quirke for advice on these Egyptian forms). There was an obvious geographical parallel between the upper and lower riverlands of Mesopotamia and Egypt.



SQUARE SYMBOL: this symbol, a square with circles at the corners, is taken as an alternative writing for KI, the determinative for place-names (see above). The symbol, which may be unparalleled, does have some resemblance to the ground-plan of an Assyrian camp, and may perhaps be loosely compared with the Egyptian hieroglyph for a toponym, which consists of a circle enclosing a grid (Gardiner 1950: 498, O 49).

We propose, then, to see in the Black Stone hieroglyphs a calque from Egyptian royal titulary, and interpret them as follows: “Aššur-aḥ-iddin, ‘Great House’ of ‘Upper’ and ‘Lower’ Mesopotamia”.

While the Esarhaddon hieroglyphs are in the same tradition as the Sargon ones, they represent a further development. The complexity and ingenuity of the encoding process is greater. Whereas Sargon's name is merely represented pictographically by the figure of a king, for example, the later text devises a full phonetic cryptographic writing of the royal name. Moreover, by incorporating an Egyptian allusion in the royal title, the scribe responsible was not merely displaying his ingenuity. A letter to Esarhaddon's son (Parpola 1993: 137) claims that the conquest of Egypt was a further step towards universal dominion. The Assyrian hieroglyphs reflect this kind of aspiration, the wholesale integration of Egypt into a Mesopotamian universe.

Esarhaddon: alternative decipherments

The preceding decipherment is based on the Black Stone. If the prisms are correct, however, and the Black Stone is incorrect, a lion has to replace the bull. A similar approach then offers several possibilities.

Either the lion represents the last element of Esarhaddon's name, in a manner yet to be determined, and the cryptogram is otherwise the same.

Or the sequence ALTAR/KING/SACRED TREE represents the name of Esarhaddon, i. e. Aššur-aḥa-⟨iddin⟩. This would generate further alternatives. The lion could be an indirect pictogram representing *šarru*, "king", as in the Sargon cryptogram discussed above, or indeed *šarru rabû*, "great king". We could either regard the mountain as a direct pictogram representing KUR, "land" or "lands"; hence, "Esarhaddon, King of the lands of Ashur and Babylonia"; Esarhaddon, however, did not call himself baldly "King of Assyria and Babylonia". Or we could proceed as we did with the Black Stone, reading "Esarhaddon, Great King, Great House of Upper and Lower Mesopotamia".

If both the Black Stone and the prisms are correct, either the lion and the bull were interchangeable, with one of the meanings suggested above. Or the inscriptions were not effectively duplicates, which seems somewhat unlikely.

It is obviously unsatisfactory to have to assume a double error in the original documents. If both versions are incorrect, however, we might restore the original sequence as follows: ALTAR/KING/SACRED TREE/BULL/LION/MOUNTAIN/SEEDER-PLOUGH/PALM-TREE/SQUARE SYMBOL.

Following the equations itemized above, this could still result in the reading: "Esarhaddon, Great King, 'Great House' of 'Upper' and 'Lower' Mesopotamia".

Sargon of Assyria, Sargon of Agade, Gilgameš

Given that Esarhaddon's hieroglyphs were *lumāšī*, so very likely were Sargon's. The term, however, can apply also to the symbols, representations, counterparts or replicas of divine occupants of the supernatural world, and it is these which are associated on the bronzes with the symbols representing Sargon's name. In view of the more usual astral connotations of the term *lumāšī*, it seems possible that a deliberate parallel was being drawn, through these paired groups of symbols, between the natural and supernatural worlds. Gods could have *lumāšī*: so could Sargon. We are reminded of Parpola's view (1995) that the government of Assyria was theoretically modelled on the government of Heaven, with the king corresponding to the supreme god and his ministers to lesser gods with specific functions, just as originally, of course, Mesopotamians based their ideas of what might be done in Heaven on what was already being done on earth.

The application of the term *lumāšī* to both natural and supernatural worlds would help elucidate the function or meaning of Sargon's glazed-brick panels. They were located, exclusively so far as we know, on approaches to shrines, at the base of facades, the points where natural and supernatural worlds were juxtaposed. The shrines themselves were the abodes of gods, for instance of Nabû, manifest in his cult-image. An Assyrian theologian will perhaps have distinguished between Nabû as one facet of the supreme divinity (Ashur), Nabû as an individual god manifest in cult-images in many cities, the specific Nabû of Ḫorsābād, and Nabû as a personal god, but the shrine embodied a supernatural order in which Nabû was transcendent. The representation of Sargon's name and titles in hieroglyphs bore a comparable relationship to the real Sargon of flesh and blood. The association of god and king, in similar visual terminology, could be seen as an assertion that the two performed comparable functions: the king's authority on earth was not merely derived from supernatural authority, but was at the same time the earthly counterpart of supernatural authority. In this way the glazed-brick panels elaborated and reinforced the assertion of royal legitimacy traditionally presented, in temples, in the form of stelae that showed an act of worship by the king. Sargon was placed squarely within the Mesopotamian tradition of kingship, his status in the divine order of the universe was confirmed.

Moreover Sargon's choice of his own name, for representation through *lumāšī*, was peculiarly appropriate. It is plain, for instance from the words of the Ashur Charter in which he justified his accession

(Saggs 1975), and from other inscriptions, that royal legitimacy was a sensitive issue for Sargon II. His throne-name, however, *šarru kēnu*, “true king”, signified more than its literal meaning. It was indeed the name of an Old Assyrian king, as Sargon II or his advisers will have known from king-lists, but it is by no means clear how well they distinguished between that Sargon I of Assyria and the far more celebrated Sargon of Agade. When Sargon II adopted this throne-name for himself, he was associating himself and claiming comparable status with someone about whom omens were recorded from the most distant past, someone about whom legends survived, someone who had acquired a reputation as a world-emperor. Lewis (1980: 104–7) has pointed to the possibility that the Sargon Legend as it survives, like the geographical treatise on the Akkadian empire, might indeed have been composed under Sargon II.

Sargon II also founded a new capital-city. There may have been practical reasons for this, besides a possible desire to distance himself from his immediate royal predecessors who were identified with Kalḫu, Nimrud. There were distinguished precedents, however, of which he or his advisers will have been aware. The first of them was Gilgameš, building the walls of Uruk at the dawn of history; the second was Sargon as builder of Agade. Sargon II, with his new city, was conforming to the pattern of Mesopotamian rulers set on creating a new world-order, and the name he chose for it, Dūr Šarrukīn, confirmed the nature of his aspirations. They even had physical expression in the city-wall of Ḫorsābād, whose length was described as the mathematical equivalent of the royal name (Luckenbill 1927: 65).

Perhaps this explains the unusual iconography of the bronze Master of Animals. Although the identification of the Master of Animals on much earlier cylinder seals as Gilgameš is unfashionable, Neo-Assyrian textual references (Borger 1988: 8; Parpola 1993: 215) demonstrate that there did then exist a conventional method of representing Gilgameš in art; Calmeyer (1970) and Lambert (1987), among others, are confident that they have recognized him, and Calmeyer comments on his mixture of divine and human iconography. Three of the clearest examples, on Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian cylinder seals (Lambert 1987: pls VII.6, VIII.7–8), show Gilgameš wearing respectively an Assyrian royal hat, a divine horned polos, and what could be a Babylonian royal hat. The first of these hats, tapering with a small cone on top, is very like that worn by Sargon’s Master of Animals, and it seems quite probable that the Master of Animals on the bronze

band is none other than Gilgamesh himself. His presence would constitute yet another endorsement of the divine kingship of his remote successor Sargon II.

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Abb. 1. Sargon: glazed-brick panel (Place/Thomas 1867-70: III, pls 26-31)



Abb. 2 Esarhaddon: symbols on prism impression, drawn by Ann Searight

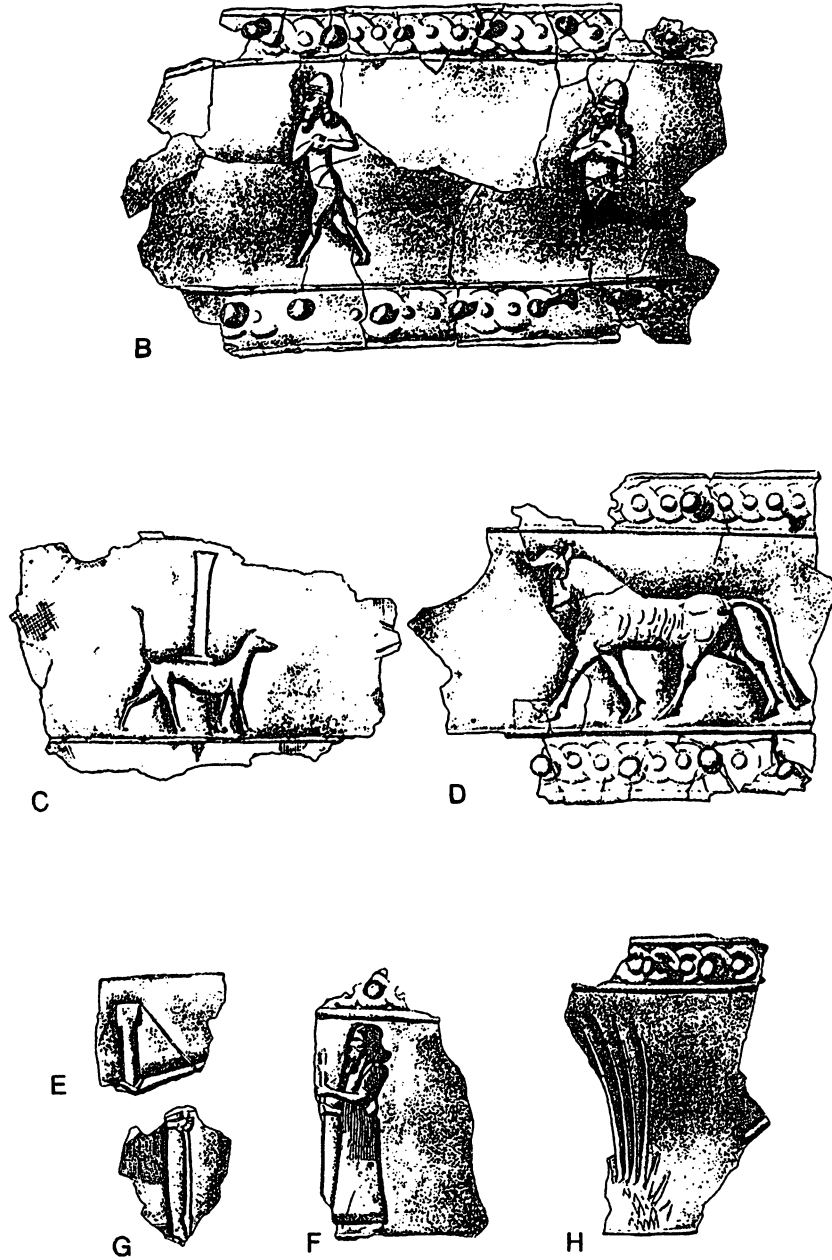


Abb. 3. Sargon: embossed bronzes from the Nabû Temple outer shrine (Loud and Altman 1938: pls 49–50). Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago

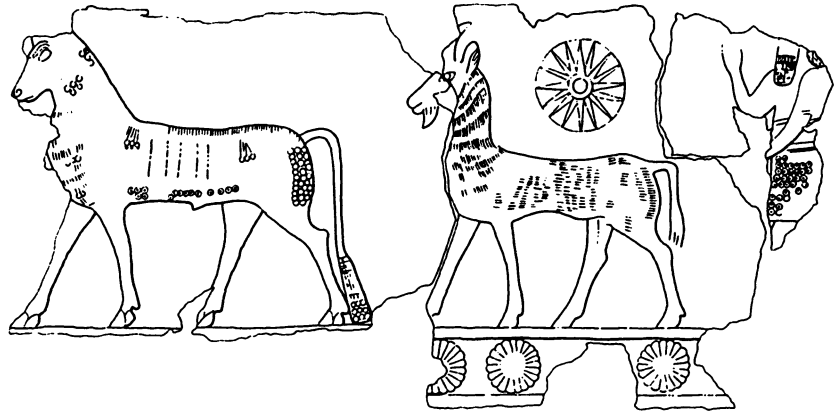


Abb. 4. Sargon: embossed bronze. I, as now joined. Drawing by Ann Searight

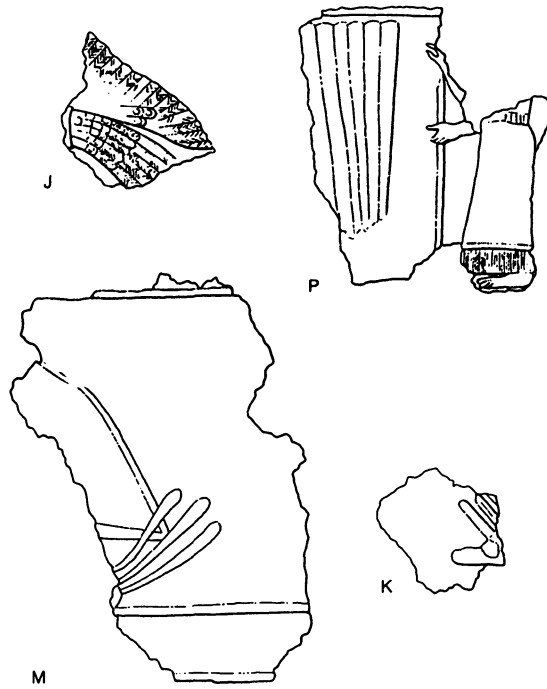


Abb. 5. Sargon: embossed bronzes from Adad Temple.
Drawing by Ann Searight after Place/Thomas
(1867-70: III, pl. 72, nos 3, 6, 7, 10)



Abb. 6. Esarhaddon: glazed tile from Nimrud
(Layard 1853: pl. 53.3)



Abb. 7. Sargon: design of goat and tree on end of prism (VA 8424).
Courtesy of the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin



► Abb. 8. Sargon: design of bulls on end of prism (British Museum, K 4818)



▲ Abb. 9. Sargon: embossed bronze, part of A, from Šamaš Temple pole (Oriental Institute, A 12468). Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago

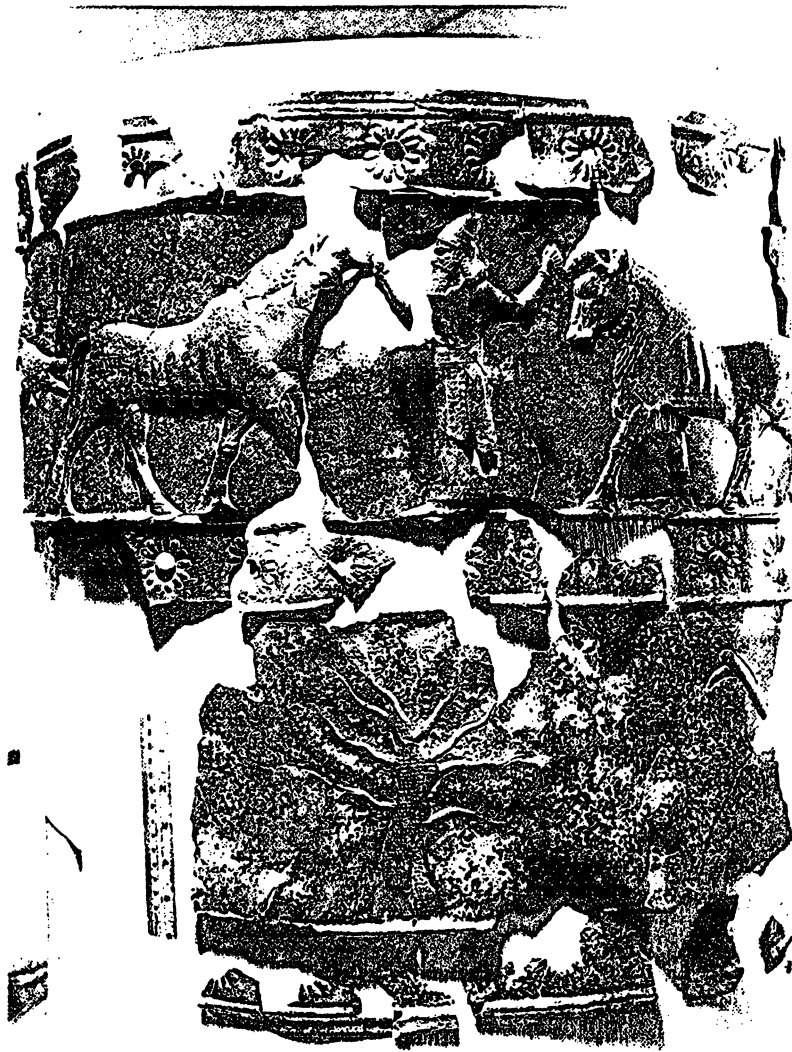


Abb. 10. Sargon: embossed bronze. A, from Šamaš Temple pole (Oriental Institute, A 12468). Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago



Abb. 11. Sargon: embossed bronze, part of A, from Šamaš Temple pole (Oriental Institute, A 12468). Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago



Abb. 12. Sargon: embossed bronze, part of A, from Šamaš Temple pole (Oriental Institute, A 12468). Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago

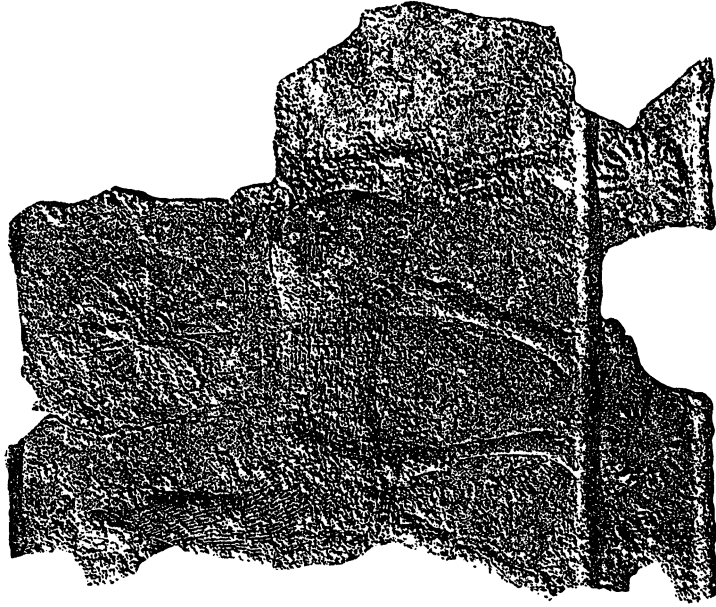


Abb. 13. Sargon: embossed bronze, part of I, from Adad Temple (Louvre, part of N III 3099). Courtesy of the Musée du Louvre

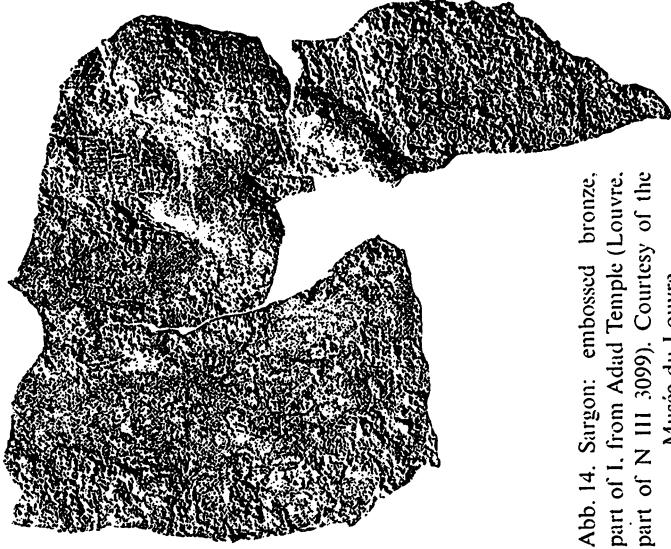
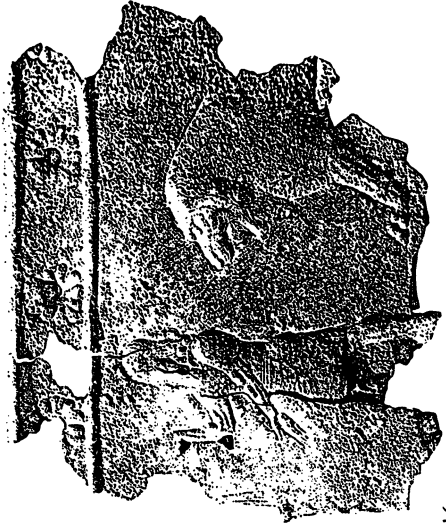


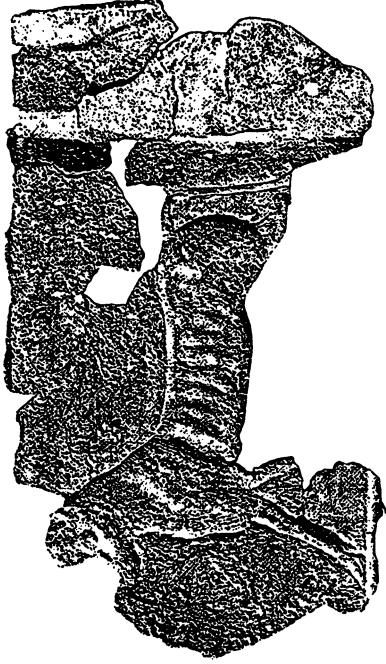
Abb. 14. Sargon: embossed bronze, part of I, from Adad Temple (Louvre, part of N III 3099). Courtesy of the Musée du Louvre



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Abb. 15. Sargon: embossed bronze, part of I, from Adad Temple (Louvre, part of N III 3099). Courtesy of the Musée du Louvre.
Abb. 16. Sargon: embossed bronze, L, from Adad Temple (Louvre, part of N III 3099). Courtesy of the Musée du Louvre.
Abb. 17. Sargon: embossed bronze, N, from Adad Temple (Louvre, part of N III 3099). Courtesy of the Musée du Louvre.
Abb. 18. Sargon: embossed bronze, O, from Adad Temple (Louvre, part of N III 3099). Courtesy of the Musée du Louvre.



▲ Abb. 19. Esarhaddon: top of Lord Aberdeen's Black Stone (British Museum, WA 91027)



Abb. 20. Esarhaddon: one side of Lord Aberdeen's Black Stone (British Museum, WA 91027)



Abb. 21. Esarhaddon: impression on ends of prism (British Museum, WA 78223)

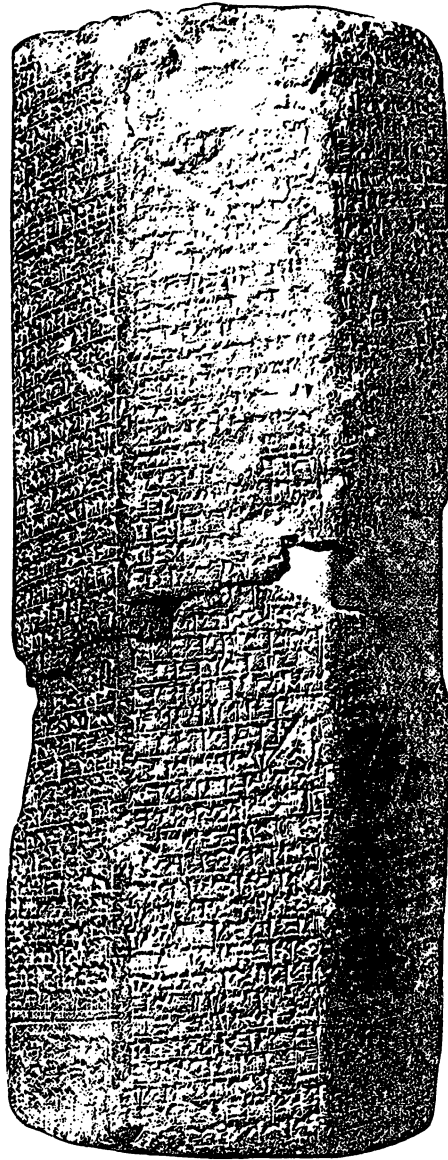


Abb. 22. Esarhaddon: one side of prism
(British Museum, WA 78223)

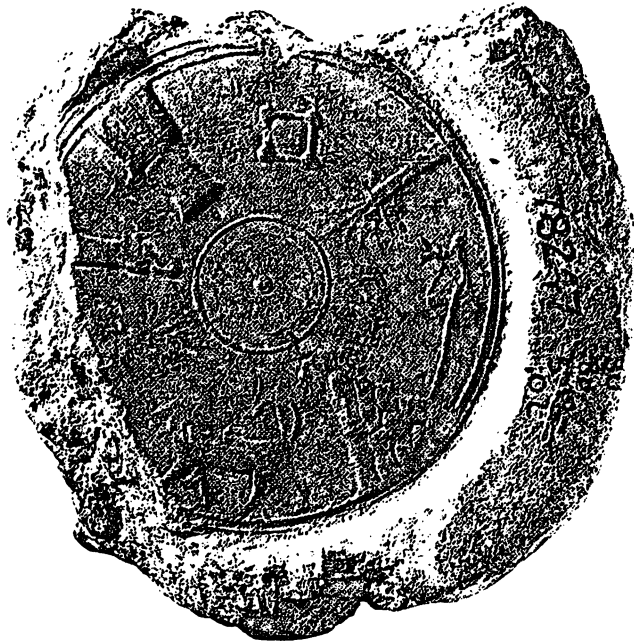


Abb. 23. Esarhaddon: impression on end of prism (British Museum. WA 78247)



Abb. 24. Esarhaddon: impression on end of prism (MMA 86.11.283).
Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art