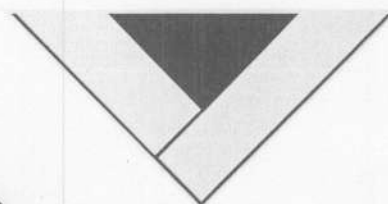


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M. FORTIN (éd.)

TELL 'ACHARNEH 1998-2004

RAPPORTS PRÉLIMINAIRES SUR LES CAMPAGNES DE FOUILLES ET SAISON D'ÉTUDES
PRELIMINARY REPORTS ON EXCAVATION CAMPAIGNS AND STUDY SEASON

Subartu

XVIII

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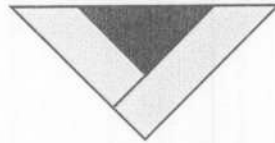
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The Tell Acharneh Stela of Sargon II of Assyria

Grant Frame, University of Toronto

Introduction

Tell Acharneh was undoubtedly a city of some significance in ancient Syria. The site is an extremely large one and this suggests that a substantial number of people lived there. The height of the main mound and the dates of the ceramics found on the surface of the site indicate that it was occupied over a long period of time (3000-720 BC). Moreover, its location at a crossing of the Orontes river would have given it strategic importance. We should not be surprised if a large number of cuneiform texts are eventually found during excavations at Tell Acharneh.

The Tell Acharneh stela fragment

One cuneiform text has already been found at Tell Acharneh. In 1924, a French officer by the name of Maignan who was in command of a Senegalize regiment found a fragment of a stone monument with a cuneiform inscription on it near the bridge across the Orontes at Tell Acharneh. Exactly what commander Maignan was doing at Tell Acharneh is unknown to me and no details about the exact findspot of the piece have ever been published¹. The fragment was initially deposited in a museum in Beirut but was later transferred to the Aleppo Museum in Syria (M 10890). I am informed that it has been moved to the new museum in Hama, thus closer to Tell Acharneh. The inscription was originally published by the esteemed French Assyriologist François Thureau-Dangin about seventy years ago² and a new edition of this inscription will be presented in my forthcoming volume of the inscriptions of Sargon II for the Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia project. The text was kindly collated for me by Dr. Karen Radner when she was in Syria in 1999.

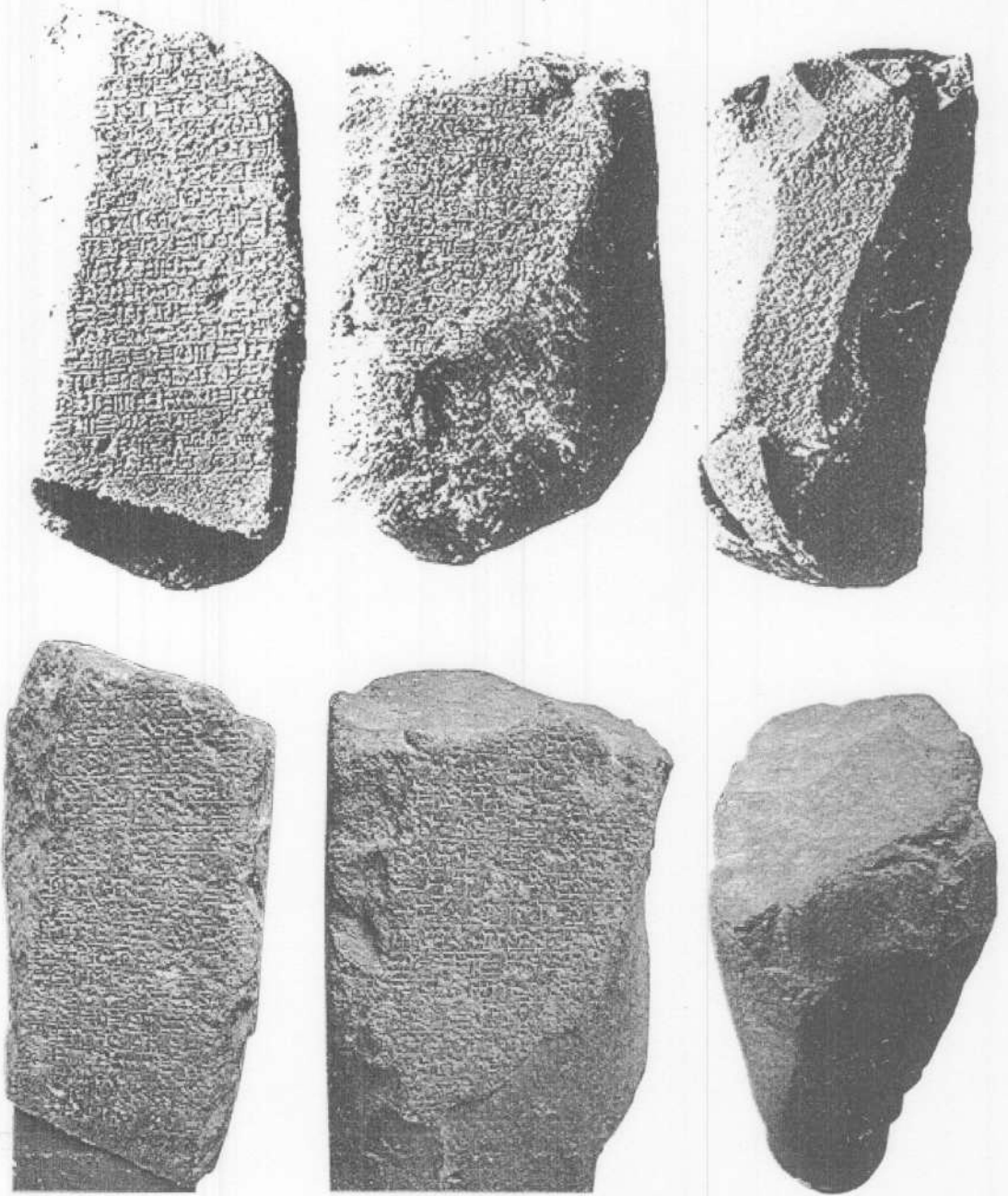
Only a tiny fraction of the original stone monument is preserved (fig. 1). Nevertheless, the piece is actually quite interesting, particularly when one considers the whole question of what a fragment of an Assyrian stone monument was doing at a site on the Orontes river, about 600 km west of the Assyrian heartland.

The fragment is reported to be basalt and to measure 77 cm in height, 43 cm in width, and 36 cm in depth, although both the height and likely the depth would originally have been greater. It is inscribed on three sides (fig. 2 for an edition of the inscription), with the fourth side being totally damaged. In what Thureau-Dangin designated side B, we find references to Hamath, an Assyrian victory, someone (likely the ruler of Hamath) being taken away to Assyria, and apparently the imposition of taxes upon the defeated area. (It should be noted that Hamath, modern Hama, is located only about 35 km to the southeast of Tell Acharneh.) Side C appears to mention the making of several commemorative monuments to record the king's victory and their erection in at least five locations, including Hamath and Hatar[ikka]. (Hatarikka is thought to be Tell Afis, located about 80 km northeast of Tell Acharneh.) These were likely all situated within the region or land which had just been conquered. Following this, the text blesses the one who would treat this monument (NA₄.NA.RÚ.[A], *narû*, "stela, commemorative monument") well and begins a curse against one who would treat it poorly. Only a handful of signs are legible on side D, too few to enable us to determine what matter was being recorded. Thus, the text appears to refer to the erection of several stelae in various important centres within the land of Hamath following its conquest by an Assyrian king. While it is possible that this fragment was brought to Tell Acharneh from another location in either ancient or modern times, it is more

This is a slightly modified version of a paper presented to the members of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies at a symposium on Tell Acharneh held on September 18, 1999 and it keeps the informal style used in that presentation. The paper makes a great deal of use of J. Börker-Klähn's catalogue and study *Altvorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs* (Baghdader Forschungen, vol. 4) (Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 1982) and for the convenience of the user, I will cite Börker-Klähn's catalogue numbers when an item treated by her is mentioned. Figs. 3, 5, and 11-15 were kindly prepared by A. Barron and figs. 7, 8, and 10 by L.M. James.

¹ Michel Fortin has informed me that a great deal of work was carried out in the area of Tell Acharneh in the 1920s constructions and that stones may have been collected to be used in the foundation for the bridge being built across the Orontes. Possibly someone noticed that this fragment had something engraved upon it and brought it to the attention of Maignan. Fortin speculates that additional pieces of the stela may be in the foundation of the bridge.

² F. Thureau-Dangin, "La stèle d'Asharné," *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 30 (1933): 53-56, pl. I, and p. 104 n. 1. Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. 177.



- Fig. 1: Tell Acharneh Stela fragment (Aleppo Museum, M 108790).
 (Left to right: side B, side C, and side D.) Top row: photographs published with the permission
 of the editors of *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*; bottom row:
 modern photographs taken by the Canadian Archaeological Mission to Tell 'Acharneh.

likely that it was part of a stela originally set up in or near Tell Acharneh. This site, under its ancient name, may well have been one of the locations mentioned in the text as a place in which a stela was erected.

The name of the king whose actions are recorded in the inscription is not preserved, so why is it thought to be Sargon II, ruler of Assyria 721–705 BCE? The inscription mentions Hamath twice and the texts of only a few Assyrian kings refer to that city, mainly those of Shalmaneser III, Tiglath-Pileser III, and particularly Sargon II. Moreover, Sargon is known to have conquered Hamath in 720 BCE and many of his inscriptions mention this conquest. Hamath is written slightly differently in the two places it appears: [KUR] *a-ma-at-te* in side B line 10' and KUR *ha-am-ma-te* in side C line 6'. The only other documents in

which both writings appear – that is, with an initial H and without it – are clearly assignable to Sargon II: the 'Beirut' Stela fragment and the Cyprus Stela (see below). Fragments of stone monuments of Sargon have been found at several other sites in Syria-Palestine and, according to the esteemed scholar Hayim Tadmor, the palaeography of the Tell Acharneh inscription is identical with that of two other stelae which clearly date to the reign of Sargon – the stela from Cyprus which has Sargon's name preserved on it and stela fragments from Ashdod which clearly duplicate passages in other texts of Sargon.³ For these and a few other more detailed reasons, the Tell Acharneh text has always been assigned to Sargon II.

The remainder of this presentation will attempt to provide the reader with some idea of what the complete stela may have looked like and what may have been included in the inscription on it. We will do this by putting it within the context of other Neo-Assyrian royal monuments, in particular of those of Sargon II from the periphery of his empire. This presentation makes no pretense of dealing with all relevant Assyrian monuments or of providing a comprehensive and detailed study of them as a genre, but is simply intended to present briefly and informally some matters to hold in mind when considering the stone fragment of Sargon II found at Tell Acharneh.⁴

What do the other stone commemorative monuments of Sargon II found outside of the Assyrian heartland look like and what do the inscriptions on them say? I will begin with fragmentary ones and then move on to better preserved ones.

Ashdod stela fragments

In 1963, three small basalt fragments of a commemorative monument were unearthed at Ashdod in Philistia and these are now preserved in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem (IAA 63-931, 63-962, and 63-1053). At least two of them come from secondary contexts (a Byzantine dump and a Hellenistic wall) and thus we do not know where the stela was originally set up in the city. As with the Tell Acharneh fragment, no trace of a sculpture relief is found on any of the Ashdod pieces. Only a few tiny sections of the inscription are preserved, but happily parts of these duplicate some information (e.g., the name of the Elamite king Humbani[gaš]) found on texts clearly assignable to Sargon II. Sargon II is known to have conquered Ashdod in 712/711 BCE and Tadmor has suggested that the fragments were part of a stela which had been set up after the king's capture of that city and had possibly been destroyed during Hezekiah's rebellion in 705.⁵

"Beirut" stela fragment

A fragment measuring 58 x 35.6 cm and now in the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem (BLMJ 1115) preserves portions of two adjoining sides of an inscribed stone monument. No trace of an image is preserved, but the inscription describes events of 720 BCE, namely Sargon's settlement of Assyrians at Hamath following his conquest of that city. It may also have been part of a monument set up to commemorate Sargon's conquest of that land; however, since the fragment mentions several events later in the king's reign on its damaged left side (in particular the submission of the seven kings of Iā' which took place in 709/708), it can have been created only towards the end of the king's reign and may have been erected to commemorate some other action. The fragment appeared on the antiquities market in Beirut and thus its original provenance is not known; however, David Hawkins has suggested that it may originally have come from Sheizar, located on the Orontes river about halfway between Tell Acharneh and Hama.⁶

³ H. Tadmor, "Fragments of an Assyrian Stele of Sargon II," *Antiqot*, English Series 9–10 (1971): 195.

⁴ Works by J. Börker-Klähn (*Bildstelen*), D. Morandi ("Stele e statue reali assire: localizzazione, diffusione e implicazioni ideologiche," *Mesopotamia* 23 [1988]: 105–55), and A.T. Shafer (*The Carving of an Empire: Neo-Assyrian Monuments on the Periphery* [doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1998]) provide detailed studies of Assyrian royal stelae and rock reliefs and should be consulted by anyone interested in knowing more about these monuments. This presentation will not consider the stelae of Assyrian eponyms found at Assur since they are basically different in purpose, form, and content from other stelae.

⁵ See in particular Tadmor, *Antiqot*, English Series 9–10 (1971): 192–97 and pl. XCVI-XCVII. Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. 174.

⁶ See in particular W.G. Lambert in *Ladders to Heaven*, ed. O.W. Muscarella (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1981), 125 no. 83 and J.D. Hawkins, "The Neo-Hittite States in Syria and Anatolia," in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd. ed., vol. 3 part 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 417. [J.D. Hawkins has recently published an edition and study of this text in *From the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea: Studies on the History of Assyria and Babylonia in Honour of A.K. Grayson*, edited by G. Frame, with the assistance of L.S. Wilding (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2004), 151–64. He argues that the stela originally came from the territory of Hamath and that it and the Cyprus stela were erected in 708 or 705 BCE.]

Side A = Col. i

Not preserved

Side B = Col. ii

Lacuna

- 1') [...] x x x [...]
 2') [...] a-na A.ME[Š x (x)]
 3') [...] -šú ú-qí-ru-m[a]
 4') [...] ᵀi¹-te-e URU-šú
 5') [...] a-n)a šit-mur ANŠE.KUR.RA.M[E]
 6') [...] -ti LÚ e-qa-x
 7') [...] di-ik-ta(?) -šú-nu ma-at-t[u]
 8') [...] is]-Iki¹-ru ÍD
 9') [...] di(?) -tal(?) -l]-i-iš iq-mu-ú-m[a]
 10') [x x (x) i-na KUR] a-ma-at-te iš-ku-nu-m[a(?)]
 11') [...] x šá-a-šú ga-du kim-ti-[šú]
 12') [a-na qé-re]b URU-ia aš-šur.KI ᵀub-lu¹-[ni]
 13') [...] i-da-a-a i-ta[p-p]a-l[u]
 14') [...] ᵀir¹-nit-ti ak-šú-du x [(x)]
 15') [...] am-šu(?)]-ᵀú¹ ma-la lib-bi-i[a]
 16') [a-na ᵀaš-šur] ᵀEN¹-ia ak-ru-ub-m[a]
 17') [...] x ši-bit GU₄.MEŠ u še-(x)-e-[ni]
 18') [...] x ú-kin sat-tuk-ku-u[š-šú]
 19') [...] -šú-n]u ú-nak-ki-ir-[ma]
 20') [(...)] šap-tuš-šú-u[n(?)]

Side C = Col. iii

Lacuna

- 1') [...] x [...]
 2') [...] -ni-ia [...]
 3') [šá ina tukul]-ti ᵀaš-šur E[N-ia ...]
 4') [at-ta]-la-ku ù mim-mu-ú [ina(?) KUR(?)
 ᵀa(?) -am(?) -ma(?) -te(?)]
 5') [e-tep]-pu-šú áš-ᵀu-ra š[er-ru-uš-šú-(un)]
 6') [1-en i]na KUR ᵀa-am-ma-te 1-en ina [...]
 7') [1-en] ᵀi¹-na ᵀURU¹ ᵀa-ta-r[i-ka (...)]
 8') [1-en i]na URU KUR'-a 1-en ina [...]
 9') [...] a-lik ar-ki ru-ri-x [...]
 10') [NUN] EGIR-ú NA₄.NA.RÚ.[A-a li-mur-ma]
 11') [šī-ᵀ]ir MU-ia lil-ta-s[i zik-ri(?) ᵀaš-šur(?)]
 12') [lit-t]a'-id-ma Ī.[GIŠ lip-šú-uš]
 13') [SISKU]R liq-qí ᵀaš¹-šur [...]
 14') [mu]-nak-k[ir ...]
 15') [mu-pa]-šit ᵀi¹-ᵀ[ir MU-ia (...)]
 16') [...] x [...]

Side D = Col. iv

Lacuna

- 1') [...] x [...]
 2') [...] BU IZ [...]
 3') [...] KID E [...]
 4') [...] e-peš [...]
 5') [...] x x DU x [...]
 (Remainder not inscribed)

Lacuna

- ii 1') [...]
 ii 2') [...] for water [...]
 ii 3') [...] they made his/fits [...] scarce
 ii 4') [...] the neighbourhood of his city
 ii 5') [...] for] horses to show their mettle
 ii 6') [...] ...
 ii 7') [...] a] major [military defeat of th]em
 ii 8') [(...) they blo]cked up the river [with their corpses].
 ii 9'-12') They burned [...], (turning them) [into ash]es; they established [devastation in the land] of Hamath a[nd ...]. They brought that (individual), together with [his] family, [into] my city Aššur.
 ii 13'-18') [Because the god Aššur who goes] at my side answered [...] I obtained victory [...] I was able to do] whatever I wanted. I praised [the god Aššur], my lord. [I imposed upon him (the payment of) ...] šibtu-tax on oxen and she[ep]. I established regular offerings [for him].
 ii 19') [(...) I altered [the]ir [...] and]
 ii 20') [(...) on their lips.

Lacuna

- iii 1') [...]
 iii 2') [...] my [...]
 iii 3'-5') [that I (had carried out while)] acting [with the suppo]rt of the god Aššur, [my] lo[rd, ...], and everything [that I had] done [in the land of Hamath], I inscribed u[pon it/them].
 iii 6') [One] in the land of Hamath, one in [...]
 iii 7') [one] in the city of ᵀatar[ikka (...)],
 iii 8') [one] in the city of KUR'a, one in [...]
 iii 9') [...] coming after ... [...]
 iii 10'-13') May a future [prince look at my] stel[a and] read my [inscr]iption! [May he (then) pr]aise [the name of the god Aššur, anoint (the stela) with] oi[I], (and) offer [a sac]rifice! The god Aššur [will (then) listen to his prayers].
 iii 14'-16') [(But) as for the one who] discar[ds my stela, (or) er]ases [my] inscr[iption ...]

Lacuna

- iv 1'-5') Too poorly preserved to allow translation.

- Fig. 2: Edition of the inscription on the Tell Acharneh Stela fragment.

Til Barsip fragment

In the 1930s, a stone fragment measuring 40 x 97 x 15 cm and preserving part of an inscription of Sargon II was found in a late wall at Til Barsip (modern Tell Ahmar), located in Syria on the upper Euphrates river near the Turkish border. The present whereabouts of the piece is not known. Thureau-Dangin who saw the piece stated that it was part of a bull colossus. Since the preserved part of the text refers to favours granted by Sargon to various Babylonian cities, it must date from after his conquest of Babylonia in 710-709 BCE.⁷ If the fragment does come from a bull colossus, it would be totally different in type than the other monuments discussed in this presentation; however, it does show that the king left at least one monumental inscription at this site, a provincial capital of the Assyrian empire.

Samaria stela fragment

A limestone fragment measuring 20 x 9 cm was found in a modern field wall at Samaria and is now preserved in the Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem (D.1430). No trace of a relief is found on the fragment, only a few cuneiform signs whose forms suggest that they were written during the Neo-Assyrian period.⁸ Since Sargon claims to have conquered Samaria and to have had many of its inhabitants transported, we might expect that he left some record of his actions at the site. There is, however, no other particular reason to associate this inscription with him as opposed to any other Neo-Assyrian ruler.

Carchemish stela fragment

A fragment of the corner of a basalt monument was found at Carchemish (located on the Euphrates just north of the Syrian-Turkish border) in the early part of this century by a British Museum expedition, but neither its exact provenance nor its current location are known. No trace of a relief was preserved on the fragment, only a few words in Neo-Assyrian script. The text refers to silver, tribute, horses, and the destruction of something ("I demolished").⁹ Its assignment to Sargon is quite uncertain since nothing in the text suggests any particular Neo-Assyrian king. However, Sargon II is known to have conquered Carchemish in 717 BCE and an inscribed brick clearly assignable to him has been found there. Moreover, Tadmor has stated that the palaeography of the Carchemish and Samaria fragments is "very similar" to that of the Tell Acharneh, Ashdod and Cyprus stelae of Sargon.¹⁰

Cyprus stela

Moving on to better preserved stone monuments of Sargon II, we come first to a large stela reportedly found in the mid-1840s in the vicinity of Larnaca on Cyprus and now on display in the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin (VA 968). The exact findspot of the stela is disputed, but it may have been found in the ruins of the ancient city of Kition. It has a rounded top and is 209 cm in height and 68 cm across the front. The side of the monument is currently 32-33 cm in length, but a section from the back of the monument has been cut away; it has been suggested that the stela had originally been ca. 45 cm wide. Carved upon the front of the stela is a large image of the king, standing in a formal pose, facing right, raising his right hand, and holding a mace in his left hand (fig. 3). Symbols of various important gods are found in front of the head of the king. References in the lengthy inscription on the stela indicate that it was composed towards the end of Sargon's reign (708 BCE or later).

Outline of the inscription:

- a) invocation of various deities
- b) royal name, titles, and epithets
- c) major accomplishments of the king's reign (generous actions to certain Babylonian and Assyrian cities; summary of his military victories, including Hamath; triumphal entry into Babylon; the presentation of gifts to Babylonian gods; reception of tribute from rulers of Dilmun [Bahrain] and the land of Iā')

⁷ See in particular F. Thureau-Dangin and M. Dunand, *Til Barsib* (Paris: Geuthner, 1936), 159 no. 10 and pl. XV no. 3 and W. Farber and K. Kessler, "Eine Inschrift Sargons II. aus Til Barsib," *RA* 67 (1973), 163-64.

⁸ See in particular C.J. Gadd in *Samaria-Sebaste*, Volume III: *Objects from Samaria*, by J.W. Crowfoot, G.M. Crowfoot, and K.M. Kenyon (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1957), 35 and pl. IV nos. 2-3. Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. 179.

⁹ See in particular R.D. Barnett in *Carchemish, Report on the Excavations at Jerablus*, Part III, by L. Woolley and R.D. Barnett (London: British Museum Publications, 1952), 265 and 279-80 and pl. A.33 m-m*. Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. 178.

¹⁰ Tadmor, *Antiqot*, English Series 9-10 (1971): 195.



- Fig. 3: Drawing of the front of the Cyprus Stela of Sargon II (Berlin, VA 968).
After Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, fig. 175a.

- d) creation of the stela (*narû*), with images (*šalmu*) of the great gods and the king engraved upon it, and with a record of “[the names of the peoples] whom, from East [to We]st, I had subjected [to] my royal [yoke] with the support of the gods Aššur, [Nabû], (and) Marduk, my divine helpers”; erection of the stela in the land of Adnana
- e) curse

This and some other inscriptions of Sargon mention the receipt of tribute from “seven kings of the land of Iā’, a region of the land of Adnana, located far away, a distance seven days (journey) in the middle of the Western Sea,” and his prisms from Calah (modern Nimrud) explicitly state that he left an inscribed monument in that land. This certainly refers to the Mediterranean island of Cyprus. There is, however, no evidence of any Assyrian presence on Cyprus and no clear statement anywhere in Sargon’s inscriptions that the Assyrians conquered that island. The rulers of at least some of the Cypriot cities had likely desired friendly relations with the king of the empire controlling the eastern Mediterranean coast and had gone to Babylonia in order to congratulate him on his conquest of that land. In particular, the Phoenician cities on Cyprus would have wanted to be on good terms with the overlord of their kindred and major trading partners in Phoenicia. Rather than commemorating a conquest of Cyprus by Sargon, the stela was more probably intended to mark a formal ‘alliance’ or ‘friendship’ which had been concluded between a Cypriot ruler and Sargon when the former went to Babylon. Its exact provenance is not known and it is unclear from the inscription exactly where it was to have been erected on the island. S. Dalley thinks that the text refers to its placement near mines (presumably copper mines for which Cyprus was well-known), while Tadmor thinks that it refers to being set it up on a mountain headland. There is no evidence that it ever reached its intended resting place. It would be interesting to know if the stela had been made on Cyprus or been carved on the mainland and then sent to the island. It is to be hoped that analysis of the stone may one day allow us to settle that matter.¹¹

In any case, we can see from the Cyprus Stela what at least one stone monument of Sargon’s from the periphery of Sargon’s empire (or actually just outside it) resembled and what it recorded.

¹¹ Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. 175 and see T 63.175. See in particular E. Schrader, *Die Sargonsstele des Berliner Museum* (Berlin: Königliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1882); L. Messerschmidt and A. Ungnad, *Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler des Königlichen Museen zu Berlin*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: 1907), no. 71; C.J. Gadd, “Inscribed Prisms of Sargon II from Nimrud,” *Iraq* 16 (1954): 191–92 and pl. XLIX vii 24–44; A.T. Reyes, *Archaic Cyprus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press,



- Fig. 4: Najafehabad Stela of Sargon II (National Museum of Iran, Teheran). L.D. Levine, *Two Neo-Assyrian Stelae from Iran* (Royal Ontario Museum, Art and Archaeology, Occasional Paper 23) (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1972), pl. VII. Published with the permission of L.D. Levine and the Royal Ontario Museum.



- Fig. 5: Drawing of the relief on the Najafehabad Stela of Sargon II (National Museum of Iran, Teheran). After Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, fig. 173.

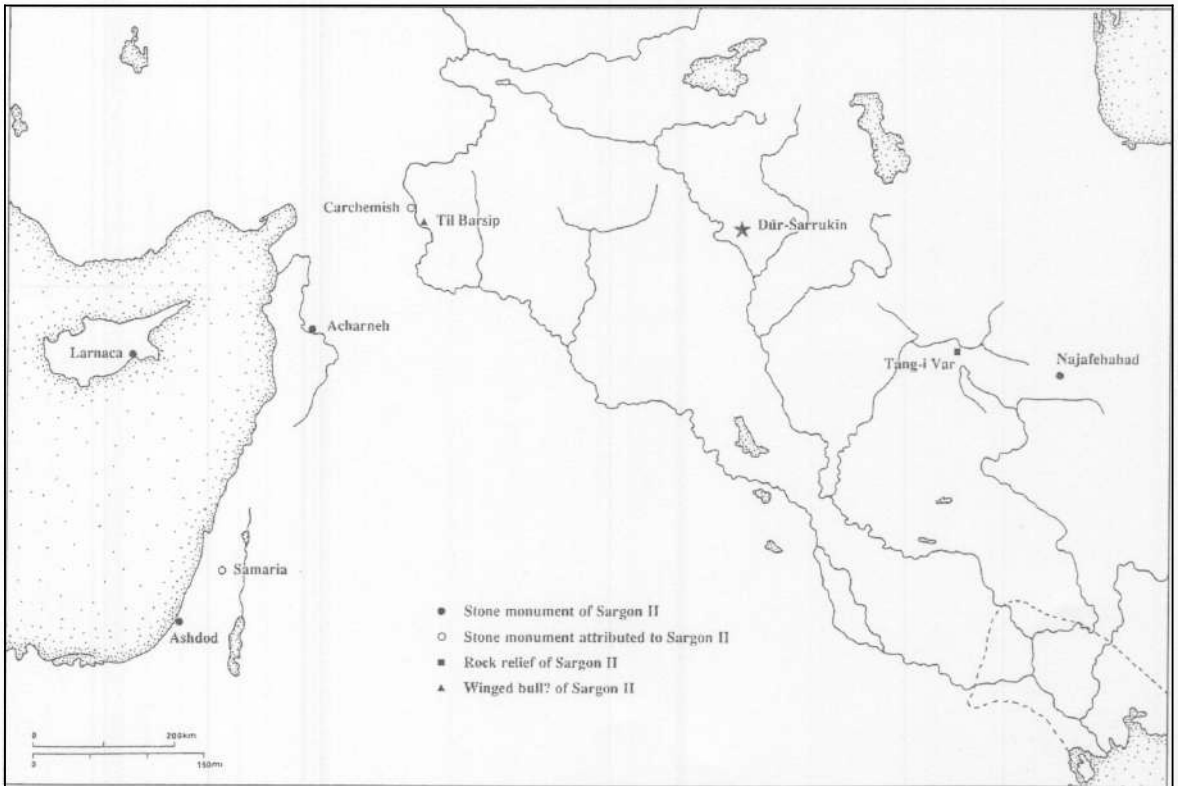
Najafehabad stela

In 1965, a large fragment of a stone stela of Sargon II (figs. 4 and 5) was located in the village of Najafehabad, in the Assadabad valley of western Iran. The piece was supposedly found by a villager while excavating the foundation for an addition to his house, but Dr. L.D. Levine has suggested that it actually

1994), 50–56 (with Dalley's translation of the passage); and H. Tadmor, "Notes on a Stele of Sargon II Found at Cyprus," *Eretz-Israel* 25 (1996): 286–89 [in Hebrew]. N. Na'aman has argued that passages in Sargon's Display Inscription and Annals refer to the Assyrians having sent an officer and the royal guard to Cyprus to help the ruler of Tyre put down a rebellion by some of his vassals on Cyprus ("Sargon II and the Rebellion of the Cypriote Kings against Shiṭṭa of Tyre," *Orientalia* 67 [1998]: 239–47). The passages in question, however, are damaged and his interpretation is open to dispute. If the Cyprus Stela was intended to mark a diplomatic connection between Assyria and a Cypriot state, this might explain why the stela, as far as it is preserved, does not seem to record any military victory at length. Stelae similar to this one were usually created in order to describe and commemorate a victory over the area in which they were erected (see below). The back of the stela is no longer preserved and it is possible that it had had an extensive account of some military action. Since one episode (Sargon's conquest of Hamath) concludes neatly at the end of the right side of the stela and another episode (Sargon's entry into Babylon) begins neatly at the very start of the left side of stela, it might be thought that the intervening back of the stela had not been inscribed. One might, however, suppose that the back had had a description of (at least) Sargon's defeat of Merodach-Baladan and conquest of Babylonia. Such a description would then have led naturally to what appears on the final (left) side (i.e., Sargon's entry in Babylon, presentation of gifts to its gods, and reception of tribute from Dilmun and rulers of the land of Iā'). The inclusion of a detailed account Sargon's conquest of Babylonia would not preclude the stela having been sent to Cyprus to mark a formal treaty or friendship agreement since such an account would have been unlikely to offend Cypriot feelings.



- Fig. 6: Rock relief of Sargon II at Tang-i Var, Iran. *Photograph courtesy P. Vallat.*



- Fig. 7: Map of the places at which monuments of Sargon II have been found outside the Assyrian heartland. The 'Beirut' Stela fragment has not been marked on the map since its original provenance is not known.

came from one of the ancient mounds in the area and was moved to Najafehabad at some time in the past. The piece is now in the National Museum of Iran in Teheran. Although damaged the piece is still 165 cm high and measures 65 cm across the front and 70 cm on the side. A relief basically similar to the one on the Cyprus Stela is found on the front of the Najafehabad Stela, except that the figure faces left, rather than right. The inscription is less well preserved than that on the Cyprus Stela, but clearly records a campaign against the Medes conducted by Sargon II in 716 BCE.

Outline of the inscription:

- a) invocation of various deities
- b) royal name, titles and epithets (including reference to generous actions to certain Babylonian and Assyrian cities)
- c) major military accomplishments of the king's reign described in chronological order, with the account of events in the last year recorded (the king's sixth regnal year) being by far the longest and most detailed
- d) creation of the stela (*narû*), with images (*šalmu*) of the great gods [and the king(?) engraved upon it], and with a record of "the victorious deeds of Aššur, the conquests which I had made over the four quarters (of the world), (and) everything I had done in the city of Ki-..."; [erection of the stela] in the city of *Kisasi*
- e) curse¹²

The inscription states that it was set up in the city of *Kisasi*, which is presumably to be equated with *Kišesim*, where the Annals of Sargon state that a royal image (*šalam šarrūtiia*) was erected.¹³ The stela was undoubtedly set up during the course of Sargon's campaign against the Medes in order to commemorate that campaign. The inscription is very badly written, which might suggest that it was prepared on site by an inexperienced or poorly trained scribe and/or stone carver.

Tang-i Var rock relief

It is also useful for us to look at a rock relief (i.e., a relief carved into the side of a mountain or a rocky outcropping) from the reign of Sargon II found about 40 m above ground level in the Tang-i Var pass in Iranian Kurdistan, about 85 km NW of Kermanshah (fig. 6). A recent article on this relief and its inscription was published in the journal *Orientalia*. Although this is not a stela, the imagery and inscription on it are similar to what we find on commemorative stelae from the periphery of the Assyrian empire. The relief and inscription are set in a niche with an arched top. The relief depicts an Assyrian king in a standing position, facing right, raising his right hand, and holding something in his left hand. Symbols of various gods were probably placed in front of the king's head, although this is not absolutely clear from the available photographs of the relief. The inscription is poorly preserved, but clearly records a military campaign into the Zagros mountains against the land of *Karalla*, a campaign that took place in 706 and that was led not by the king, but by some of his officials.

Outline of the inscription:

- a) invocation of various deities
- b) royal name, titles and epithets
- c) major accomplishment of the king's reign (generous actions to certain Babylonian and Assyrian cities; summary of numerous military victories)
- d) description of a victorious campaign to the land of *Karalla*

¹² L.D. Levine, *Two Neo-Assyrian Stelae from Iran* (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1972), 25–50, 60–62, 66–75 figs. 3–12, and 82–86 pls. VII–XI; Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. 173. A new edition of this text has been prepared by myself and A. Fuchs for the Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia project. The Royal Ontario Museum kindly allowed me to examine its squeezes and unpublished photographs of the stela, and S. Razmjou and A.M. Arfaee of the National Museum of Iran kindly provided me with additional photos. These have permitted numerous improvements to our understanding of the inscription.

¹³ The text has ... *mim-mu-u ina URU ki-x-x 'e-pu-uš(?)* UGU-šú á[š]-[tur ina] URU ki-[sa(?)-si] ša ŠU.II [ikl-š[u-d]a a-na mu-x [... ul-ziz(?) (...)], "... everything I had done in the city of Ki-... I inscribed upon it. [I erected (it)] in the city of *Kisasi* which (my) hands had cap[tured] for ... [...]" ii 71 (collated from unpublished photographs and squeezes). Sargon's Annals state that he erected a royal image of himself at *Kišesim* during his sixth campaign (see below). A writing *ki-sa-si* for *Kišesim* would, however, be unique. The reading of the two signs following the first URU *ki-* in the line remains obscure from the available photographs and squeezes, although we would expect it also to be *Kisasi*/*Kišesim*. Previously, it has been thought that the Najafehabad Stela stated that it had been erected in a place whose name began with HÛ (*ina KUR hu-...*, ii 70) (e.g., Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. T 59.173), but that spot actually reads *mu(AŠ-KUR)-ša[k]-[šī(?)]-du ir-nit-ti-ia*.

- e) creation of the monument (*narû*) with images (*šalmu*) of the great gods and the king engraved upon it; placement of an inscription upon it recording "the victories of the god Aššur, father of the gods, lord ... [...] all [...]" (remainder damaged)

Interestingly, this inscription mentions the name of the Kushite ruler of Egypt, Shebitku, an individual whom Egyptologists had thought did not ascend the throne until after the reign of Sargon II of Assyria. In as far as it is legible, the inscription does not state where it was placed. Nevertheless, the pass in which the rock relief is situated was probably somewhere along the Assyrian line of march in Karalla.¹⁴

One will have noticed that in addition to having similar reliefs, the last three items have inscriptions on them which follow basically the same pattern. Indeed stelae and rock reliefs of other Neo-Assyrian monarchs from the outlying provinces and periphery of the Assyrian empire often have similar images and their inscriptions often follow similar patterns. The fragment from Tell Achareh bears parts of the sections describing the military accomplishments of the king (side B), the creation and erection of the monument (side C) and the blessing and curse (side C). Too little of the inscription of side D is preserved to allow us to make any real determination about its contents. Since the lower part of that side of the fragment appears to be uninscribed, it should be the very end of the text. This would mean, however, that the concluding curse formula which begins in side C line 14¹ was unusually long (particularly in relation to the short blessing formula) or that some additional and unexpected section actually concluded the inscription. Since the one clear word in column iv (*e-peš*, side D line 4¹) appears on the front of the Cyprus Stela (i 27) and probably towards the beginning of the Tang-i Var Rock Relief (line 10, partially restored), one might be tempted to suggest that what Thureau-Dangin called side D was actually the beginning of the inscription. The mere duplication of one word, however, means very little. If that side of the fragment had the beginning of the inscription we would expect (1) to see some traces of a relief since one regularly appears on the front of this type of commemorative stela and (2) to have the inscription cover the whole surface of the column and not end part way down that side of the fragment. We would expect the beginning of the inscription to begin on one of the wider sides of the stela, but we could note that since the fragment is damaged the original length of sides B and D is not certain and that the relief on the Najafehabad Stela is on one of the shorter sides. Nevertheless, for the most part, the inscription on the Tell Achareh fragment appears to follow the basic pattern found on the Cyprus and Najafehabad stelae and the Tang-i Var rock relief.

Other commemorative monuments of Sargon II

I have now described all the extant monumental inscriptions clearly or possibly assignable to Sargon II found outside the Assyrian heartland.¹⁵ Some are stelae or stela fragments, one is a rock relief, and one is stated to be a fragment of a bull colossus. The map (fig. 7) indicates the places at which these were found. In addition to the extant monuments, we know that Sargon erected several others on the periphery of his realm from statements in his royal inscriptions. These refer to the placement of royal images of Sargon (*šalam šarrūtiya*) or commemorative monuments (*narû*) in three cities to the east and northeast of Assyria: Kišesim, Ḥarḥar (likely located not far from Kermanshah), and Izirtu (possibly Tapeh Qalâychi, near Bukân, SE of Lake Urmiah).¹⁶ The Tell Achareh fragment appears to refer to at least five monuments being erected, one in the land of Hamath, one the city of Hatarikka, one in the city of KUR-³a (possibly Mad'a), and two in places whose names are not preserved (side C 6'-8').¹⁷ (One of these may well have been the Tell Achareh Stela itself.) A wall relief from Sargon's palace at Khorsabad depicts a stela standing at the gate to the Median city of Tikraki (fig. 11), but it is likely that the stela had been set up in the time of Tiglath-Pileser III, who claimed to have erected one at that city.¹⁸ In sum, it is clear that Sargon had numerous commemorative monuments set up outside the Assyrian heartland – in outlying provinces and on the borders of his realm where he had conducted military actions – and that only a few of these have been found.

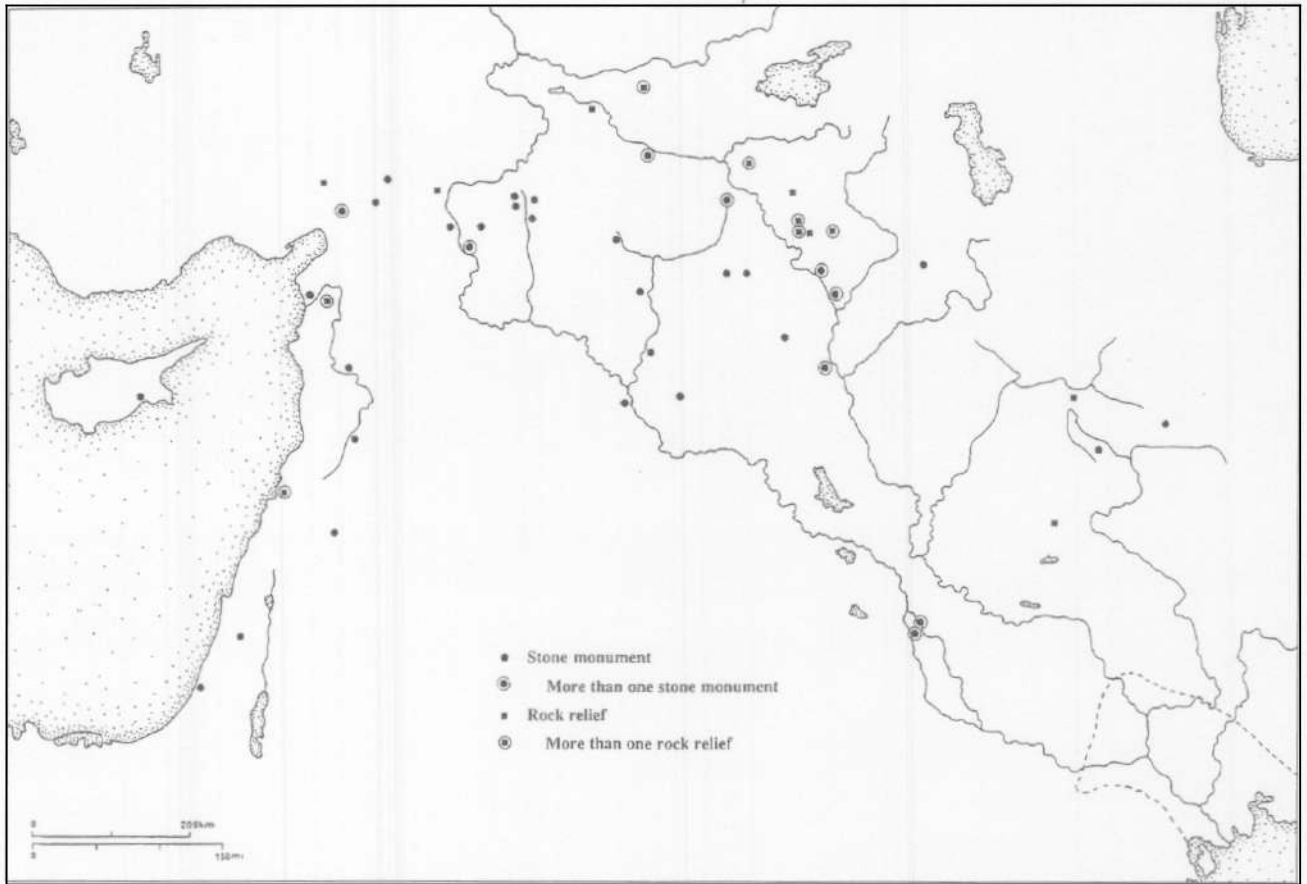
¹⁴ See G. Frame, "The Inscription of Sargon II at Tang-i Var," *Orientalia* 68 (1999): 31–57 and pls. I–XVIII; D.B. Redford, "A Note on the Chronology of Dynasty 25 and the Inscription of Sargon II at Tang-i Var," *Orientalia* 68 (1999): 58–60; and Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. 248.

¹⁵ A rock relief located in Turkey at Eğin in the upper Tigris valley has sometimes been ascribed to either Shalmaneser III or Sargon II. On the left side of a broad inset panel is a standing figure – possibly a deity – who is facing right, holding an axe in his left hand, and raising his right hand. In front of the figure's head are symbols of five deities. The relief appears to have originally had two further figures, but these were later erased. Nothing is now legible of the inscription the relief originally had. See Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. 154 and J.M. Russell in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, Band 9, Lieferung 3/4, ed. D.O. Edzard (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1999), 256.

¹⁶ See Fuchs, *Khorsabad*, no. 2.3 lines 93–95, 99–100, and 108–109, and no. 2.4 lines 53 and 59–63; A. Fuchs, *Die Annalen des Jahres 711 v. Chr.* (State Archives of Assyria Studies 8) (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1998), 26 III.b 17–21. Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, nos. T 60–62.173.

¹⁷ Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, nos. T 64–68.179.

¹⁸ Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, nos. 172 and T 51.171.



- Fig. 8: Map of the places at which Assyrian monuments have been found (ca. 1150 BCE to 625 BCE).



- Fig. 9: The stela of Adad-nārārī III in the cella of late Assyrian temple at Tell al-Rimah. Photograph courtesy of D. Oates.

Why was the stela created?

The practice of erecting stone monuments and carving rock reliefs is well-attested for Assyrian kings, but is also known for other Near Eastern rulers (e.g., Babylonian, Egyptian, Hittite, Urartian, and Persian monarchs), as well as for rulers of other areas. The most famous Near Eastern rock relief, for example, is the one at Behistun, where the Persian ruler Darius I recorded his quashing of several rebellions against his authority in three different languages. Neo-Assyrian monarchs erected numerous commemorative monuments throughout their empire and many or most of them come from outside the Assyrian heartland. They have been found from deep in the Zagros mountains in the East to the Mediterranean island of Cyprus in the west, and from near the Egyptian border in the southwest to deep into Anatolia in the north (fig. 8)¹⁹.

Why did the Assyrian kings erect so many monuments? Stone monuments and rock reliefs were mediums by which the Assyrian authorities disseminated Assyrian propaganda. The inscriptions on them record the event or events which led up to the creation of the monument or rock relief, generally a successful military action conducted by the king. Victorious campaigns into areas not previously controlled by Assyria or areas which had rebelled from Assyrian authority were often commemorated by the erection of a stone monument or rock relief in the area affected (e.g., the Najafehabad Stela which commemorates Sargon's campaign into the Zagros mountains in 716 BCE and the Tang-i Var rock relief which commemorates a military victory over the land of Karalla in 706 BCE). The inscriptions on them sometimes state specifically that they recorded the king's actions in a particular place (e.g., "I inscribed ... everything that I had done in ..."). Victory stelae could also be erected in provincial capitals; for example, a stela commemorating Esarhaddon's campaign into Egypt in 671 was erected at Zenjirli, in southern Turkey.²⁰ Stone monuments commemorating major building construction – especially temples, palaces, and cities, but also including such public works as canals – by Assyrian kings are also well-attested. These generally come, however, from the Assyrian heartland or from Babylonia (e.g., the so-called Banquet Stela of Ashurnasirpal II from the Assyrian capital of Calah commemorating the construction of that city, and a stela of Ashurbanipal from Borsippa commemorating work on the Ezida temple there)²¹ and are thus distinct in nature from the monuments set up in the periphery to record military conquests. In sum, large numbers of commemorative monuments (stelae, rock reliefs, obelisks, etc.) are known archaeologically, textually, or pictorially for the reigns of certain Neo-Assyrian kings, kings who were vigorous and successful campaigners and/or builders.

In addition to commemorating specific actions, the monuments from the Assyrian periphery were intended to be both a reminder of Assyrian military power, might and authority and a warning of what happened to those who opposed Assyria for the people of the conquered areas and for foreigners visiting those areas, as well as for Assyrian officials, soldiers, and merchants stationed or now settled in those areas. They were intended to serve as a lasting, poignant reminder of the king's and his gods' achievements for people in the king's own time and for people in the future and to inspire those people to respect and obey the Assyrian king and his gods. For example, the inscription on the Zenjirli Stela of Esarhaddon states:

I had a stela (*narû*) made with my inscription (literally: the inscription of my name) (on it). I had inscribed upon it praise of the valour of the god Aššur, my lord, the mighty deeds which I (had carried out while) acting with the support of the god Aššur, my lord, and the victory which I had achieved. I erected (it) to be a wonderment for all the enemy for (all) future time.²²

As just one other example, the Najafehabad Stela of Sargon says:

At that time, I had a stela (*narû*) made and [*I engraved upon it*] image(s) (*šalmu*) of the great gods, my lords, who make me triumph ... [...] I inscribed upon it [...] the victorious deeds of Aššur, the conquests which I had made over the four quarters (of the world), (and) everything I had done in the city of Ki-... [*I erected (it)*] in the city of *Kisasi* which (my) hands had cap[tured], for ... [...]. In the future, may a future prince – (one) whom Aššur, king of all the Igīgū gods, shall summon and name to be ruler of Assyria – read this commemorative monument, ano[int (it)] with o[il, (...)] (and) offer a sacrifice! May he praise the kind deeds of Aššur and have future generations taught to revere him (i.e., Aššur)! (ii 70–73)

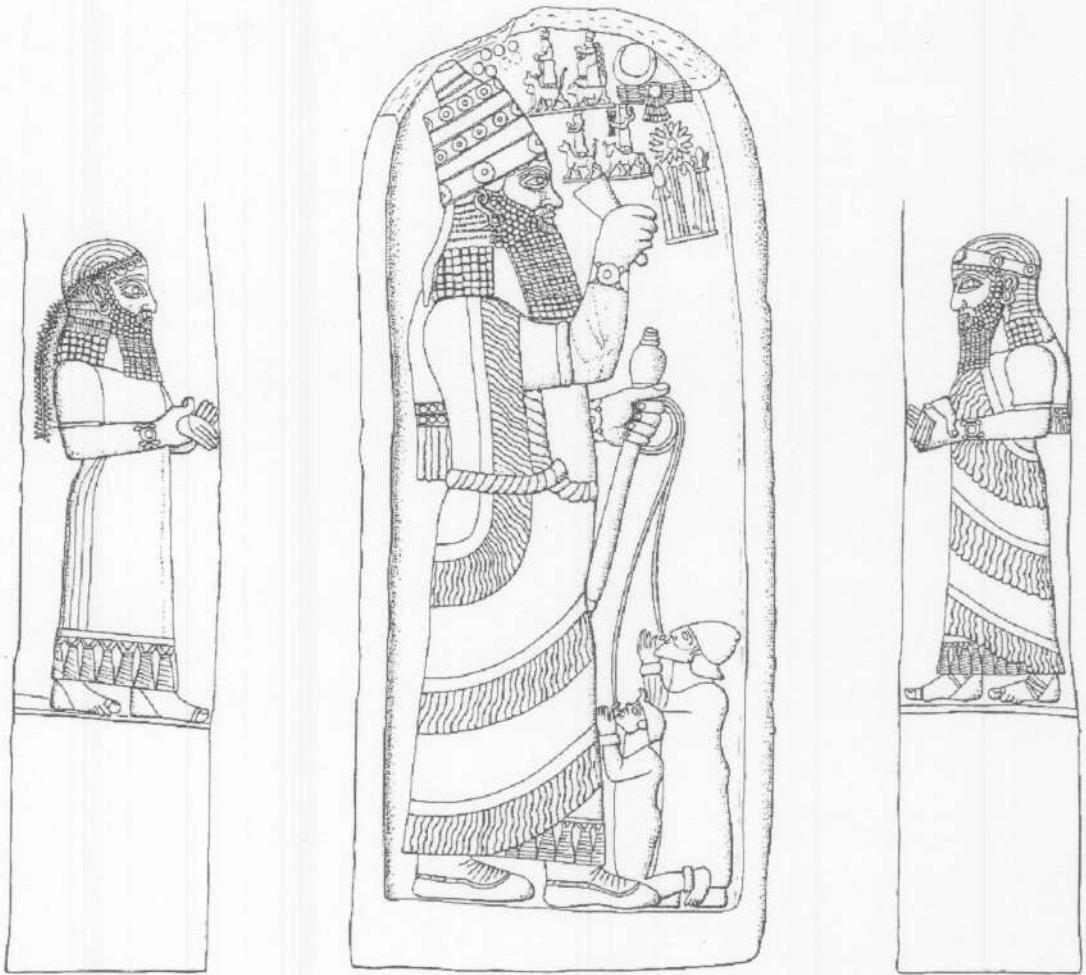
These monuments were thus intended to disseminate Assyrian propaganda and were mediums by which the Assyrians sought to maintain control over the areas in which the monuments were erected. (As men-

¹⁹ The map is based upon information found in Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, supplemented by information from various other sources. Only actual monuments are indicated on the map. There are textual references to numerous other monuments having been erected.

²⁰ Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. 219.

²¹ Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, nos. 137 and 225; for the provenance of the latter piece, see J.E. Reade, "Rassam's Excavations at Borsippa and Kutha, 1879–82," *Iraq* 48 (1986): 109.

²² R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons, Königs von Assyrien* (Archiv für Orientforschung, Beiheft 9) (Graz: E.F. Weidner, 1956), 99 §65 rev. 50–53.



- Fig. 10: Drawing of the relief on the Zenjirli Stela of Esarhaddon (Berlin, VA 2708).

tioned earlier, the Cyprus Stela of Sargon II is likely to have been intended to mark an alliance or formal friendship between Sargon and a Cypriot city rather than a major military victory in Cyprus.) Thus, in addition to having been erected to commemorate Sargon's victory over the state of Hamath, the Tell Acharneh Stela was undoubtedly also erected for purposes of propaganda.

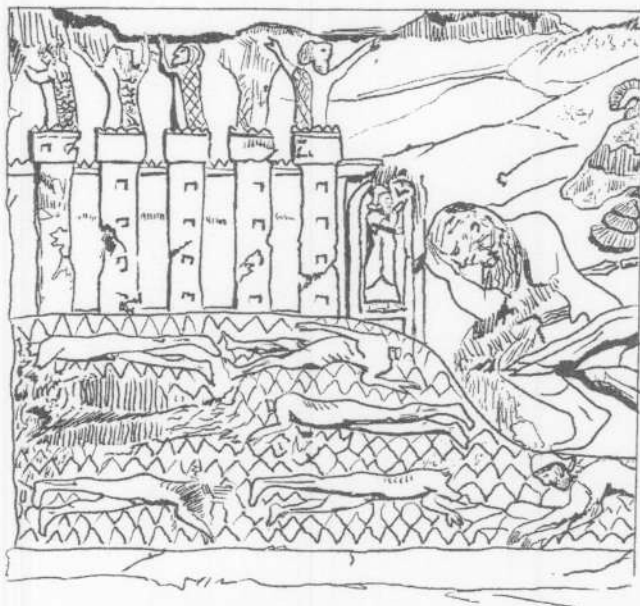
Where might the stela have been set up?

Since Neo-Assyrian royal monuments and rock reliefs were often created to commemorate a military victory or successful campaign, they were often placed in the conquered cities, at the site of a significant military engagement, or at an important location along a campaign route. But where in particular would they have been erected? Some Assyrian commemorative monuments have been found in or near temples and palaces. For example, a stela from the time of Adad-nārāri III was found next to the podium in a shrine at Tell al-Rimah (a site located near the Jebel Sinjar) (fig. 9) and a huge stone stela of Ashurnasirpal II was discovered at the entrance to the Ninurta temple at Calah.²³

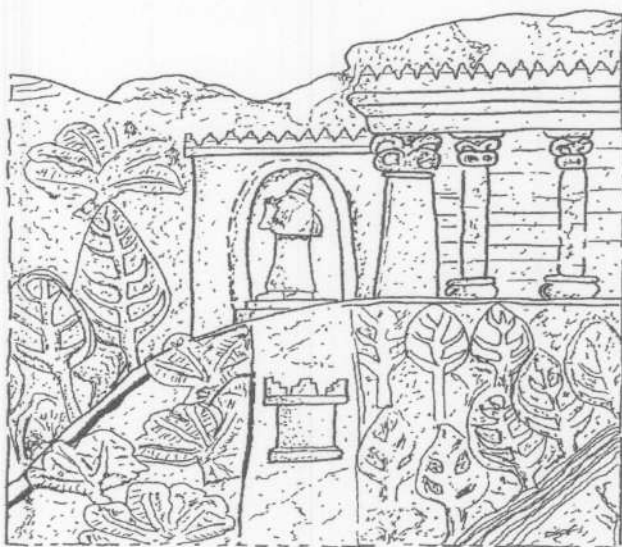
Although the relevant passage is somewhat damaged, the Nineveh Prism of Sargon II appears to indicate that after defeating the Median city of Kišesim he set up in a temple there an image of himself with an inscription describing what he had accomplished.²⁴ Some monumental stelae are known to have been erected in city gates, where they would have been seen by numerous passers-by. A large stela of Esarhaddon which commemorates his victory over Egypt in 671 BCE (fig. 10) was found on a pedestal inside a gate-house at

²³ Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, nos. 164 and 136 respectively.

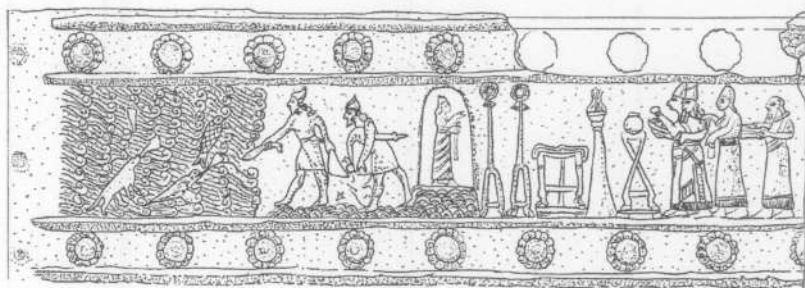
²⁴ Fuchs, *Annalen des Jahres 711*, 26 III.b 17–21. Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. T 60.173.



- Fig. 11: Drawing of a wall relief from the Palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad depicting a stela situated at the gate of the Median city of Tikrakkī (British Museum, BM 124939). After Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, fig. 172.



- Fig. 12: Drawing of a wall relief from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh depicting a stela situated on top of a wooded hill (British Museum, BM 124939). After Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, fig. 228.



- Fig. 13: Drawing of a part of a bronze band from the Balawat Gates depicting a stela or rock relief situated by the shore of the Nairi Sea (British Museum). After Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, fig. 146.

Zenjirli in southern Turkey; and a relief from Sargon's palace at Khorsabad depicts a stela next to a gate of the Median city of Tikraki (fig. 11).²⁵ It is interesting to note that a relief from Ashurbanipal's North Palace at Nineveh depicts a royal monument erected in or near a small structure on top of a wooded hill (fig. 12).²⁶ Some royal inscriptions refer to monuments having been erected on mountains; for example, Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III both claim to have erected royal monuments/images on Mount Amanus.²⁷ One section of the Bronze Gates of Balawat depicts a monument on the shore of the Nairi Sea (likely Lake Urmiah) (fig. 13), but it is not clear if the artist was intending to depict a stela or a rock relief.²⁸ Certainly we know that the Assyrians carved rock reliefs along sea coasts (e.g., at Nahr el-Kelb) and at other prominent topographic locations (e.g., in mountain passes or gorges, at the source of springs or rivers, and along newly constructed or improved water channels). Sometimes monuments were erected next to monuments of other kings; for example, a rock relief of Esarhaddon commemorating a campaign into Egypt was carved right next to one of Ramesses II of Egypt at Nahr el-Kelb in Lebanon. Esarhaddon clearly wished to indicate that he had done as much as, and indeed more than, the Egyptian ruler. In any case, it is likely that the Tell Acharneh Stela had been set up originally in some prominent place in the city, possibly at a city gate, or in or near a temple or palace.

What might the stela have looked like?

Many Neo-Assyrian royal stelae, and in particular those from the periphery of the Assyrian empire, have several distinct features:

- (1) a rounded top;
- (2) an image of the king, wearing his royal headdress and in formal attire, standing erect and facing either right or left, with his right hand raised in a gesture of supplication and/or adoration and with his left hand grasping some object (usually a mace, a symbol of authority); and
- (3) symbols of several (generally 5-10) important deities placed near the head of the king.²⁹

The Cyprus Stela of Sargon II and, as far as we can tell, his Najafehabad Stela fit this pattern, as does his rock relief at Tang-i Var, although the latter was not of course a free-standing monument. Numerous other Neo-Assyrian stelae and rock reliefs fit this basic pattern, for example ones of Ashurnasirpal II and Šamši-Adad V from Calah and one of Adad-nārārī III from Tell al-Rimah (fig. 14).³⁰ Most of the stelae and rock reliefs depicted by Assyrian artists on palace wall reliefs and on the bronze gates from Balawat also fit this description except for the fact that since these are depicted in miniature the symbols of the gods are often omitted, as is occasionally the item held in the king's left hand (see figs. 11-13). Stelae fitting this pattern have been described by L.D. Levine and other scholars as being monuments of a "standard type." Two stelae of Esarhaddon from Til Barsip and one from Zinjirli (fig. 10) are noteworthy in that they add (1) in front of the king smaller representations of two defeated enemies in postures of submission and (2) on either side of the stela a representation of a son of the king.³¹ Stelae tend to be decidedly rectangular in section, with the front of the stela (the side having both the relief and the beginning of the inscription) being one of the two longer sides. The Najafehabad Stela, however, is actually thicker than it is wide, and the Cyprus Stela and the Tell Acharneh Stela may originally have been more squarish in section than rectangular.

²⁵ Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, nos. 219 and 172 respectively.

²⁶ Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. 228.

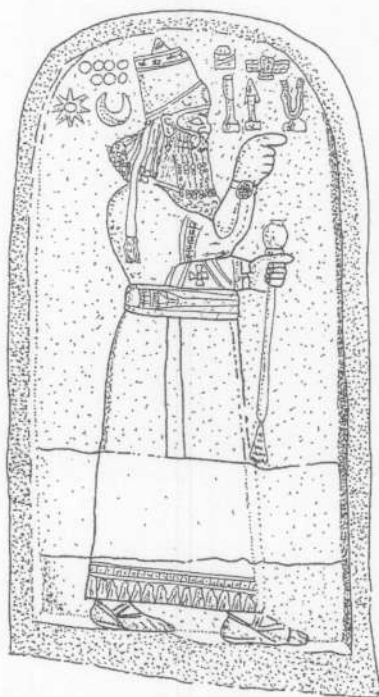
²⁷ A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (1114-859 BC)* (Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods 2) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 219 A.O.101.1 iii 89 (*asumettu ša qurdiya*) and 298 A.O.101.33 lines 6'-7' (*[ša]lam šarrūtiya*); Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. T 32.138. A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC II (858-745 BC)* (Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods 3) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 103 A.O.102.28 line 22 (*šalam šarrūtiya*).

²⁸ Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. 146.

²⁹ The images are, of course, far more complex and subtle than this standardization implies. For example, there are numerous stylistic differences in the manner in which the images are depicted on the numerous stelae and rock reliefs and these have been discussed by A.T. Shafer in *The Carving of an Empire: Neo-Assyrian Monuments on the Periphery* (doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1998).

³⁰ Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, nos. 136, 161, and 164 respectively.

³¹ Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, nos. 217-219. For a study of these three monuments which points out that their reliefs and inscriptions were tailored for their particular audiences, see the paper presented by Dr. B.N. Porter to the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies in January 2000 ("'For the Astonishment of All Enemies': Assyrian Propaganda and Its Audiences in the Reigns of Ashurnasirpal II and Esarhaddon," *BCSMS* 35 [2000]: 7-18). While in Berlin in 1999, I noted that the figures on the sides of the Zinjirli Stela had a considerably higher ground-line than the figures on the front (i.e., contrary to the positioning on the Til Barsip stelae and against drawings of the Zinjirli Stela in Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen* and elsewhere). The figures on the right and left sides are respectively c. 60 and 62 cm higher than the ground line of the figures on the front (measurements courtesy of P. Miglus). Fig. 10 shows their approximate position, but may indicate them as being slightly larger in size in relation to the figures on the front than is actually the case.



- Fig. 14: Drawing of the relief on the stela of Adad-nārārī III from Tell al-Rimah (Iraq Museum).

Of course, not all free-standing stone monuments from the Neo-Assyrian period follow the above pattern. For example, the so-called Banquet Stela of Ashurnasirpal II from Calah is a large rectangular block (128 x 105 x 57 cm) with a small rectangular panel inset into the centre of the top of one face. In the panel is an image similar to those described above, except for the fact that the king grasps a staff with his right hand (fig. 15).³² Other types of stela include the so-called obelisks, such as the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III from Calah. (fig. 16 is a drawing indicating the general shape of the Black Obelisk.) This monument measures 198 x 61 x 43 cm and tapers toward the top, which resembles a ziggurat in form. Inset into each of the four sides of this stela are five panels with reliefs depicting the king receiving tribute and the submission of foreign rulers.³³ Another example of this type of commemorative monument is the White Obelisk from Nineveh which has 8 bands of relief on each side, depicting military matters and hunting, as well as the king's reception of tribute and submission.³⁴ No Assyrian obelisk, however, has been found outside the Assyrian heartland and no clear example of one is known to date later than the reign of Shalmaneser III (858-824 BCE).

Two stelae of Adad-nārārī III (810-783 BCE) from southeast Turkey also present a quite different appearance with respect to their images.³⁵ A stela from the Pazarcik area has on its front a simple image of the crescent moon on top of a pole (fig. 17) and a damaged stela found close to the Orontes river near Antakya has at the top of its front a relief representing two individuals standing on either side of what appears to be a pole or standard which would likely have had a symbol of a god on its top (fig. 18). The inscriptions on both stelae deal with the establishment of borders and indicate that they were boundary stones (*taḥūmu*). Thus, they are quite unlike the Cyprus and Najafehabad stelae of Sargon and his rock relief at Tang-i Var in both purpose and imagery.

As just one further example of a different type of stela erected outside the Assyrian heartland, we might note the inscribed monument of Ashurbanipal (*šalam šarrūtiya*) found at Babylon and commemorating his

³² Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. 137.

³³ Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. 152.

³⁴ Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. 132.

³⁵ V. Donbaz, "Two Neo-Assyrian Stelae in the Antakya and Kahramanmaraş Museums," *Annual Review of the Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Project* 8 (1990): 5-24. Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, nos. 166-67.

³⁶ Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. 224.



- Fig. 15: Drawing of the relief (inset panel) on the Banquet Stela of Ashurnasirpal II from Calah (Iraq Museum, ND 1104) After Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, fig. 137b.

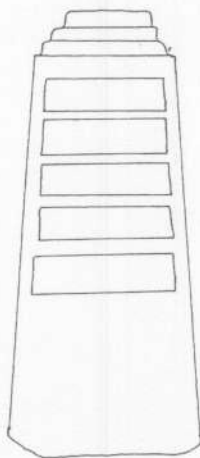
reconstruction of the shrine of the god Ea within the Esagila temple at that city (fig. 19).³⁶ It is much smaller than the other stelae mentioned (36 x 22 x 6 cm) and has on its front an image of the ruler facing forward and carrying a work basket on his head. The motif of a ruler carrying a work basket on his head was an old one in southern Mesopotamia, one going back to the third millennium BCE, and was intended to represent the ruler personally taking part in the rebuilding of the structure (temple) mentioned in the inscription. This relief was clearly intended to show Ashurbanipal acting in the traditional manner of a Babylonian ruler. As far as I am aware, this motif is not depicted on any Neo-Assyrian reliefs or monuments outside of Babylonia and thus the stela from Tell Acharneh is most unlikely to have had a similar image upon it.

Only a few of the commemorative monuments of the Neo-Assyrian kings have been described. It would be fair to say that the reliefs on the stelae of Sargon from Cyprus and Najafehabad – as well as on the rock relief of that king from Tang-i Var – reflect what was found on most Assyrian stelae from outside the Assyrian heartland, and in particular on those erected during the latter half of the eighth century and the seventh century BCE. If the Tell Acharneh Stela had originally a relief carved on it, it is quite possible that the relief would have fit the pattern found on these monuments.

Who could have seen and read the stela?

A great deal of effort was expended to create these monumental stelae and rock reliefs and many of them were placed in prominent locations where people could easily see them (e.g., at a city gate or outside a temple). It is not clear, however, how many people would have had access to those placed inside temples and palaces, even if they were erected in the outer courtyards of those structures. Moreover, the rooms of most buildings would have been reasonably dark and thus any monuments erected indoors could have been somewhat difficult to read. Some rock reliefs were placed in rather hidden locations and/or high up on rock faces with no easy access. No one would have been able to read the inscription on the rock relief of Sargon II at Tang-i Var to determine even to which king it should be attributed. Of course, the fact that these rock reliefs were almost totally inaccessible meant that it would be much harder for anyone to destroy or deface them. The creators of these reliefs were well aware that this could happen to Assyrian monuments and included curses on them to try and prevent it.

The inscriptions on some of these monuments indicate that it was expected that future rulers would be able to read them. (See for example the passage from the Najafehabad Stela quoted above and the Tell Acharneh Stela side C 10'–11'.) However, only a few rulers of ancient Mesopotamia ever claimed to be able to read. They would undoubtedly have had to rely on their scribes to tell them what a stela



- Fig. 16: Drawing depicting the general shape of the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III from Calah (British Museum, BM 118885).

said.³⁷ The rate of literacy in the heartlands of Assyria and Babylonia themselves is thought to have been very low and thus it is unlikely that many Assyrians or Babylonians would have been able to read the monuments even if they could get close to them. Not many individuals in distant Assyrian provinces, vassal kingdoms, or border areas would have been able to read cuneiform script and understand the Akkadian language. Possibly no more than a handful of scribes employed by local merchants trading with Assyria and a few Assyrian officials stationed at Tell Acharneh would have been able to read the stela erected there. Many scholars believe that at least some Assyrian royal inscriptions were read aloud to the public in Assyria (e.g., the inscription recording Sargon's campaign into Urartu). Thus, it is not impossible that the inscription on the Tell Acharneh Stela was read aloud during some ceremony at the time the stela was erected. Even if the inscription had been read aloud to the local inhabitants and/or local dignitaries, how many of them would have been able to understand it unless it had been simultaneously translated from Akkadian into Aramaic? In sum, the inscriptions on the commemorative monuments found on the periphery of the Assyrian empire would have been inaccessible to the vast majority of people in the locations in which they were erected.

This does not mean, however, that the local inhabitants would not have understood the basic meaning of an Assyrian monument erected in their midst. The inscriptions engraved on these monuments and the images depicted upon them complemented one another. The images on the stelae and rock reliefs would have been readily understandable by local and foreign viewers and they gave the same basic idea/view of the Assyrian king as the inscriptions: a majestic, strong, confident, and pious monarch exercising his authority with the approval and support of the gods. In other words, the king is depicted as an ideal ruler, one whom it would be wise to obey. The mere presence of the stela would have served as a constant reminder to the local population of Assyrian might and of the dire consequences opposition to Assyria might bring. In addition to being directed toward the people of their own time and later times, the inscriptions and images had another audience: the gods. They were intended to acknowledge the help the gods had given to the Assyrian king in conquering the area in which they were placed, to praise them, and to demonstrate the king's piety towards them. They would have been accessible to the gods whether placed in a temple sanctuary in Syria or carved high up on an inaccessible mountain face in Iran.

Ceremony and ritual

A ceremony may have taken place at the time of the erection or dedication of the Tell Acharneh Stela and such a ceremony may well have included religious rituals and sacrifices. Sculptural representations of gods and (on at least some occasions) of kings are known to have undergone rituals when they were consecrated and installed in Assyria and Babylonia, and these commemorative stelae regularly have on them representations of the king and symbols of gods, as well as inscriptions which often begin by invoking several deities. One of the bronze bands of the Balawat Gates depicts a stela or rock relief at a seashore and associates it

³⁷ Note that the inscription on the Zenjirli Stela of Esarhaddon asks that it be read to the future ruler (Borger, *Esar.* 99–100 §65 rev. 56–57 NUN-u EGIR-u NA₄.NA.RÚ.A *ši-ṭir* MU-ia li-<mur>-ma ma-ḥar-šú lil-ta-su-ma).



- Fig. 17: Stela of Adad-nārārī III from the area of Pazarcik (Maraş Museum).



- Fig. 18: Stela of Adad-nārārī III from the area of Antakya (Antakya Museum, Inv. nr. 11832).

with some rituals, including the playing of musical instruments, the offering of libations, and the sacrifice of animals. The sacrificed animal parts were then thrown into the sea (fig. 13).³⁸ In front of the stela depicted in the wooded garden or park on one of Ashurbanipal's wall reliefs (fig. 12) is placed an altar, suggesting that some ritual actions might have taken place in front of that stela.³⁹ The fact that the garment the king wears on these representations is often thought to be the one worn by him when he was acting in his position as chief priest of the god Aššur might also indicate the ceremonial nature of the object or at least be connected with the idea behind the image depicted on it. Some offerings may have been directed to the monuments themselves and not just to the gods mentioned on them or the kings who commissioned their creation and were also depicted on them. The idea that these monuments were objects of some veneration could be indicated by the request on many of them that future rulers anoint them with oil and offer sacrifices. (See for example the Tell Acharneh Stela side C 12'-13' and the passage from the Najafehabad Stela quoted earlier.)⁴⁰

Conclusion

In conclusion, although the stone fragment found at Tell Acharneh may look small and unimpressive, it is actually quite interesting when considered in the proper context. It is a fragment of an Assyrian royal monument undoubtedly dated to the reign of Sargon II of Assyria and intended to record and commemorate that monarch's victory in 720 BCE over the Aramean state of Hamath, a state of which Tell Acharneh was a part. This ruler is known to have set up several commemorative monuments throughout his empire as he conducted military campaigns to consolidate his control of it and to expand it. In erecting monuments in conquered areas, Sargon was acting in accordance with a common practice of Neo-Assyrian monarchs. The stela had probably been erected at a prominent location at Tell Acharneh and been intended to commemorate Sargon's military victory, to mark Assyrian suzerainty over that city and area, to honour the gods who had helped him conquer it, and to serve as a reminder and warning to the local population of the Assyrian king's power and might. Some ceremonies and rituals were probably carried out at the time the monument was set up. The original stela may well have had a relief of some type on it, possibly one similar to those found on the stelae of Sargon from Cyprus and Najafehabad and on his rock relief at Tang-i Var (as well as on several monuments of other Neo-Assyrian kings), but this remains pure speculation. The inscription and any images on the stela would have complemented one another and been mediums by which Assyrian propaganda was communicated.

³⁸ Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. 146.

³⁹ Börker-Klähn, *Bildstelen*, no. 228.

⁴⁰ A stela of Tiglath-Pileser III from Iran also mentions washing that monument with water; see H. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III, King of Assyria* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994), 110 III B 7'.



- Fig. 19: Stela of Ashurbanipal from Babylon (British Museum, BM 90864).
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Many Assyrian monuments set up in subjugated areas may have been intentionally knocked down, effaced, and/or destroyed during times of rebellion against Assyrian overlordship or when the Assyrian grip over those areas had slipped. The reason we have only a fragment of Sargon's stela from Tell Acharnah may be because it had been destroyed in ancient times by the local populace, just as at the fall of communism numerous statues of Stalin were destroyed by mobs in eastern European cities. Certainly, the creators of most of the Assyrian monuments recognized that their works might be purposefully defaced or destroyed and included curses in the inscriptions on them to try and prevent this. For example, the inscription on the Najafehabad Stela of Sargon II curses anyone who would hide it or throw it into a river or destroy it with fire (iv 74-75), and the Tell Acharnah Stela probably curses anyone who would discard or erase it (side C 14'ff.). It is to be hoped that forthcoming archaeological work at Tell Acharnah will result in the discovery of the missing parts of the monument and that we will one day have a better idea of exactly what was on it.