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Near Eastern Sources for the Palace of Alkinoos

ERWIN COOK

Abstract

The last quarter century of archaeological discoveries have significantly enriched and nuanced our understanding of interactions between the Greek world and the Levant during the Greek Archaic period (conventionally defined as 776–479 B.C.E.). They have also allowed us to construct an increasingly detailed model explaining the diffusion of knowledge from Mesopotamia to Greece at this time. In addition, advances in our understanding of oral cultures, and the role of oral narrative traditions within them have cast valuable new light on the ways in which the Homeric epics appropriate, adapt, and preserve cultural knowledge. The palace of Alkinoos, described in Book 7 of the *Odyssey*, poses an interesting problem for archaeologists and Homerists alike, in that it departs significantly from the generalized, or “formulaic,” image of a Homeric palace and, moreover, departs equally from Bronze and Iron Age Greek architecture. In order to account for anomalous features such as these, one must always take into account the narrative function and context of the description, which in this case suggests a possible Near Eastern origin. Archaeological evidence not only confirms the possibility, but allows us to take the comparison further: although some of its features doubtless belonged to a stereotypical Greek image of Near Eastern palaces, the description is sufficiently detailed and coherent that we can identify Assyrian palatial architecture as the chief prototype of the palace of Alkinoos.*

It has become something of a cliché in modern Odyssean scholarship that the Phaiakes inhabit a border realm located between the fabulous world of witches and monsters in which Odysseus has been wandering and the real world of Archaic Greece.¹ Their narrative function thus becomes that of pro-

viding escort home for hapless wanderers who reach their shores. On this basis, I argued in an earlier study that the narrative function of the Phaiakes assimilates them to the mythological pattern of otherworldly ferrymen who provide live bodily transport of kings from this world to the next.² The Phaiakes thus provide Odysseus with the converse service of escort to the Greek world, just as they had earlier escorted the otherworldly judge Rhadamanthus, whom Homer explicitly locates in Elysium, to view the criminal Tityos on Euboea. I thereby provided further support for the argument that the *Phaiakias* is informed by the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, in particular the voyage of Gilgamesh with the ferryman Urshanabi to Dilmun. Here I argue that knowledge of Near Eastern palatial architecture reached the Greek world along with the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and that it likewise exerted a formative influence on the *Phaiakias*, specifically on the palace of Alkinoos.³ Such features, I suggest, were meant to lend the palace an exotic appearance appropriate to the status of Skherie as a border realm and of the Phaiakes as otherworldly ferrymen. The Near Eastern pedigree of the narrative also may have been a motive, at least early on while the connection was still recognized. Although some of the features I examine can be considered generic to the Near East, and belonged to any stereotypical image of Near Eastern palaces the Greeks may have had, others point more specifically to Mesopotamia and in particular to the Assyrian palaces of Ashurnasirpal II and his successors.⁴

*I owe a debt of gratitude to Kirk Grayson and John Russell, who read and commented on an earlier draft of this paper. I am also glad for the opportunity to thank Tanya Feinleib for her help with the illustrations; Dimitri Nakassis, Paula Perlman, and Donna Wilson and the anonymous reviewers of *AJA* for commenting on the final draft; and Egbert Bakker, Jonathan Burgess, Jim Marks, and Greg Nagy for their comments on the Homeric material. Earlier versions were presented at the conference, *New Contributions to Bronze Age and Classical Archaeology: The Minnesota Pylos Project*, 16 March 2001, and at Princeton University, 10 October 2002. I would like to thank the audiences for the helpful discussions that followed, in particular Andrew Feldherr, Andrew Ford, Joseph and Maria Shaw, and Froma Zeitlin.

¹ See esp. Segal 1962.

² Cook 1992.

³ Other scholars have suggested Near Eastern influence on the narrative. Discussion by Lorimer (1950, 97, 429), who fa-

vors Egypt; S. Morris (1997, 621) compares it with the temples of Solomon and of Baal; see also Oppenheim 1965; Stanford 1959, ad *Od.* 7.122 ff. I leave out of consideration another form of mediation, namely the provincial Assyrian palaces at sites such as Arslan Tash and Tell Ahmar, though this is highly plausible, especially for such features as bronze cladding of doors.

⁴ Following are the dates of the Assyrian kings under discussion: Assur-uballit I (ca. 1363–1328), Adad-narari I (1307–1275), Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244–1208), Tiglath-Pileser I (1115–1076), Ashur-bel-kala (1073–1056), Ashurnasirpal II (883–859), Shalmaneser III (858–824), Adadnerari III (809–782), Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727), Sargon II (721–705), Sennacherib (704–681), Esarhaddon (680–669), Ashurbanipal (668–631).

For ease of reference, I cite both of Grayson's editions of the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions for passages quoted in the text (1972, 1976, 1987, 1991a, 1996), and to save space I only refer to the earlier edition for simple citations (Grayson provides a concordance at the back of his later editions).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A direct path of communication leads from the palaces of the Assyrian kings to the emerging city-states of mainland Greece, whether by way of Phoenician intermediaries or the Greeks themselves.⁵ Phoenicia was uniquely positioned to play the role of cultural mediator: during much of the Greek Bronze Age, the cities that would eventually become the centers of Phoenician culture had already risen to prominence, and, consequently, found themselves caught in the crossfire between Egypt and the Hittite empire in their struggle for control of Syria-Palestine. Byblos enjoyed close relations with Egypt throughout this period, and was a principal supplier of timber from the Lebanon mountains. By the 18th Dynasty, shipwrights from the Levant were living in Memphis, and over half a millennium later Herodotos refers to Tyrians living there.⁶ After the collapse of Mycenaean civilization and the Hittite empire at the end of the 13th century, Egypt and Assyria both entered a period of gradual decline from which Egypt never fully recovered: despite attempts to reassert herself in the region during the reigns of the 22nd dynasty rulers Sheshonq I (945–924) and Osorkon I (924–889) and II (874–850), Egypt was unable to check the rise of Assyrian power and influence, which by the ninth century extended over the Levant, and which in the seventh century would culminate in successful campaigns against the Egyptian homeland itself under Esarhaddon (680–669) and Ashurbanipal (668–631).⁷

Already in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser I (1115–1076) the principal cities of the Levant acknowledged Assyrian dominance, but it was not until Ashurnasirpal II (883–859) came to power that the Assyrians became a regular presence in the region. Ashurnasirpal reached the Levantine coast around

875; he mentions receiving tribute from Hatti, Sidon, and Tyre and visiting the island kingdom of Arvad.⁸ Ashurnasirpal also reinstated Tiglath-Pileser I's earlier policy of forced resettlement of conquered peoples to Assyria, and in this practice, Shalmaneser III (858–824), Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727), Sargon II (721–705), and Sennacherib (704–681) followed his lead.⁹ Ashurnasirpal himself claims to have resettled 47,000 people, including men of Hatti, in his imperial city of Calah (modern Nimrud), where many took part in the construction of his palace. Shalmaneser III mentions the hardly less modest sum of 44,000 from a single campaign to the west in 858, and he again includes men from Hatti among those he resettled.¹⁰ To judge from the annals, the number of those resettled is far higher than this. Tiglath-Pileser III boasts of resettling over 200,000 men, as did Sennacherib, who mentions Tyrian, Sidonian, and Ionian prisoners.¹¹ Sargon, Sennacherib, and Esarhaddon all report using resettled foreigners in construction on their imperial cities and palaces.¹² Esarhaddon adds that he enlisted the kings of Syria, Phoenicia, and Cyprus to help in the restoration of his palace.¹³

Ashurnasirpal's successor, Shalmaneser III, records campaigning "to the western sea" in his first regnal year, and receiving tribute from cities along the littoral in his 18th and 21st regnal years.¹⁴ Although Adadnerari III (809–782) received tribute from Sidon and Tyre in 802, Assyrian influence in the region soon underwent a period of decline before being restored and greatly increased by the usurper Tiglath-Pileser III.¹⁵ By around 738, Tiglath-Pileser had annexed the cities on the coast north of Byblos as an Assyrian province, and made Byblos, Tyre, and Sidon tributary states with Assyrian governors.¹⁶ The first mention of the Greeks,

⁵ For relationships between Assyrians, Phoenicians, and Greeks, see Riis 1982, 255; Röllig 1982; Culican 1991, 467–70, 486; Burkert 1992, 11–4; Aubet 1993, 41–9; Winter 1995; Haider 1996; Markoe 2000, 39–49; Raaflaub 2000, in press; Rollinger 2001a, 2001b.

⁶ Hdt. 3.112; see also Culican 1991, 471.

⁷ All ancient references are B.C.E.

⁸ Grayson 1976, 141 § 584, 143 § 586, 149 § 597; see also 184 § 716, 187 § 729, 191 § 746. On Assyria generally, see Grayson 1982 and 1991b, 1991c, 1991d.

⁹ Grayson 1976, 141 § 582, 145 § 587, 147 § 591, 162–63 § 641, 166 § 653, 171 § 671, 173 § 677. Discussion in Oded 1979.

¹⁰ Grayson 1996, 28–9.

¹¹ E.g., Tadmor 1994, 45, 63, 67, 77, 83, 161–7, Luckenbill 1924, 73 §§ 57–6; in addition to Oded 1979, see Kearsley 1999, 122; Rollinger 2001a, 242–3; 2001b, 332. For relief illustrations from Sennacherib's palace depicting "western" laborers cap-

tured during his third campaign, see Russell 1991, 166–7, 239, 275. Esarhaddon (Borger 1956, 80) also speaks of forced resettlement but does not specify numbers.

¹² Fuchs 1994, 306–7, 309, 311, 339, 353; Luckenbill 1924, 95 § 71, 104 §§ 52–56; Borger 1956, 34, 59.

¹³ Borger 1956, 60.

¹⁴ Grayson 1996, 34, 44, 48, 60, 78–9, 141, 147.

¹⁵ Grayson 1982, 273; Röllig 1982, 24.

¹⁶ Culican 1991, 469: "The Assyrians do not appear to have set up the southern Phoenician cities into a province at this point. Sidon is not mentioned at all, probably because it was incorporated into the Tyrian kingdom; but towards both Tyre and Sidon the Assyrians conducted themselves with leniency, though they placed Assyrian officials in both cities, imposed a tax on the felling of cedar trees in Lebanon, and placed restrictions on their overseas timber trade."

referred to as “Ionians,” appears in a letter from his reign reporting a pirate raid on the Syrian coast.¹⁷ Sargon II would later boast of having caught the Ionians “like fish from the sea” and that he had put a stop to their piracy.¹⁸ These Ionians are commonly located on Cyprus or Asia Minor. Burkert and Rollinger, however, have advanced important arguments against this assumption and instead locate them further west, perhaps in regions such as Euboia and Attica, which enjoyed strong contemporary Near Eastern contacts.¹⁹ A western origin of these Ionian pirates would be of no small significance for the present argument if, as has been recently argued, this is also where the *Odyssey* came to be written down (see below).²⁰

Be that as it may, Cyprus acknowledged Assyrian preeminence in the Near East through the reign of Esarhaddon; Sargon boasts of having received tribute from the kings of Cyprus in 708, including those of the Greek cities of Salamis and Paphos. There is also evidence that Greeks from Paphos belonged to Sargon’s court.²¹ Ionian sailors captured by Sennacherib and resettled in Nineveh took part in his expedition to the Persian Gulf.²² It is fairly certain that a letter by two Assyrian officials to Esarhaddon refers to a Greek living in eastern Mesopotamia, while an administrative document from Nineveh mentions one or more Ionians in the capital itself. The individual mentioned in the letter to Esarhaddon may have been a Cypriot by the name of Antikritos. In any event, he is the first Greek to be mentioned by name in a historical document since the fall of Mycenaean civilization.²³

Relations between Assyria and the Phoenician states were sometimes tumultuous and required regular Assyrian intervention in the Levant. Tyre’s initial response to the rise of Assyrian influence in the region seems to have been a policy of strength-

ening relations with Egypt and Israel initiated by Ashurnasirpal’s contemporary, king Ithobaal (887–856). After Tyre’s reduction to tributary status by Tiglath-Pileser III, the Tyrian king Hiram II sought to align himself in an anti-Assyrian coalition with Aram-Damascus and Israel. When Tiglath-Pileser arrived with his army at the Tyrian city of Mahalab around 732, Hiram submitted and Tiglath-Pileser spared the city, presumably on account of its economic importance. Yet Tyre remained restive. Shalmaneser IV again invaded Tyrian territory in 724 and laid siege to the city. His successor, Sargon II, apparently lifted the siege, but in 701 Sennacherib again invaded Tyre, whose king, Luli, fled to Cyprus, whereupon he placed the territory of Tyre under Sidonian control and installed Tubalu (Ithobaal) on the throne of Sidon. Esarhaddon reorganized the southern Levantine coast as an Assyrian province, destroying Sidon in 677 and subjugating Tyre in 671. In 662 Ashurbanipal again laid siege to Tyre, which once again submitted, but Ashurbanipal would be forced to return to the area in about 644 when he attacked and destroyed her mainland suburb of Ushu.

In part as a result of Assyrian domination of the Near East, including her control of trade routes leading through Syria-Palestine and Damascus, Phoenicia turned increasingly to the west.²⁴ Her western expansion was not simply a result of Assyrian pressure, however, but was stimulated by Assyria’s own hunger for metal, in particular gold, silver, and tin. The period after Ashurnasirpal reached the Levant and before Tiglath-Pileser consolidated Assyrian control over it encompasses Tyre’s foundation of Kition on Cyprus, and the traditional foundation of Carthage, although at present the archaeological evidence only supports an eighth-century date.²⁵

¹⁷ Braun 1982a, 14–5, who finds an echo with the pirate raid on Egypt in the *Odyssey* (14.266–84, 17.435–44); see also Kearsley 1999, 120–1; Rollinger, 2001b, 237–9.

¹⁸ Fuchs 1994, 290, 304, 308, 319–20, 359.

¹⁹ Burkert 1992, 12–13; Rollinger 2001a; see also Kearsley 1999, 120–6.

²⁰ It is interesting to note that the Homeric Phaiakes may be described as engaging in piratical activity themselves, when the narrator remarks that Alkinoos acquired the nurse Eurumedusa in a general division following a sea voyage (*Od.* 7.8–9). In that case, Alkinoos’s remark that Euboia is the most distant land they have visited can be seen as a metapoetic joke: the Phaiakes are Euboian colonists (*Od.* 7.321; cf. West 1988, 172; Burkert 1992, n. 10).

²¹ Fuchs 1994, e.g., 304, 309, 337 with n. 387, 343, 352; Borger 60; see Grayson 1991b, 90; on the Cyprus stele, see also

Yon and Malbran-Labat 1995. Note, however, king Luli’s escape from Tyre to Cyprus in the intervening reign of Sennacherib. Elsewhere (Fuchs 1994, 308, 326, 348), Sargon records that the Hittites deposed Ahmitu, whom Sargon had set up as ruler of Ashdod, and installed Iamani, or the “Ionian.” See, however, Braun 1982a, 16–17; Burkert 1992, 13; Rollinger 2001a.

²² See supra, n. 11.

²³ Rollinger, 2001a 243, 252; 2001b.

²⁴ Röllig (1982, 24) denies that Assyrian “pressure” accounts for Phoenicia’s western expansion. Much depends on the date of Phoenician colonization; if the traditional dates are accepted then the colonizing movement was well under way before the Assyrians would have been a significant factor.

²⁵ Culican 1991, 490–5; Aubet 1993, 190–6; Markoe 2000, 181.

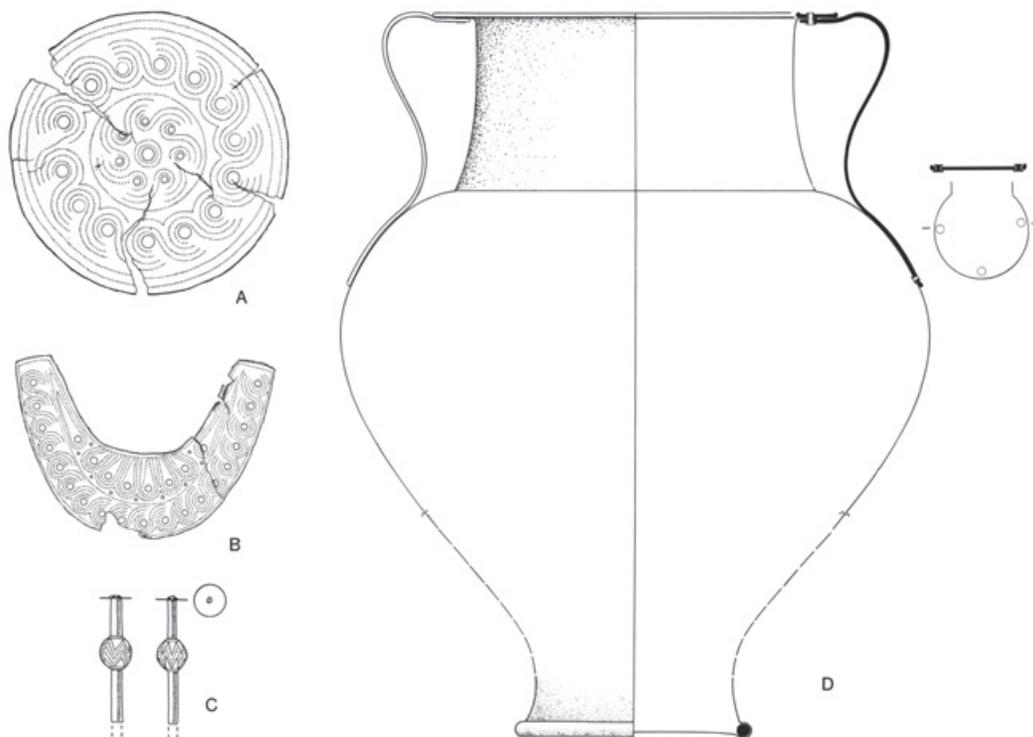


Fig. 1. Lefkandi bronze amphora and other items from a female burial. (From Popham et al. 1993, pl. 18; reproduced with permission of the British School at Athens)

By the time Tiglath-Pileser III arrives on the Levantine coast, Phoenician traders had been sailing in Aegean waters for perhaps a century; evidence suggests that Phoenician craftsmen were living and working in Euboa, Athens, and Crete.²⁶ Conversely, 10th-century protogeometric ceramics have been found at Tyre.²⁷ An early predominance of Euboian artifacts in the Levant is matched by the finds at Lefkandi, where Near Eastern artifacts arrive earlier and in greater quantities than in any other region of the Greek world, though Athens and Crete are also important. A bronze amphora from Cyprus is among the more spectacular finds from the protogeometric ruler's residence at Lefkandi (figs. 1–2); the building was initially identified as a heroon on the basis of the burials within its walls, but the practice would be unexceptional in a Near Eastern context. By the late eighth century, the Phoenicians thus formed a commercial network extending to the Greek world and beyond, and her principal cities on the coast were under Assyrian administration. To judge from

the archaeological record, Phoenicia's own colonizing movement does not begin in earnest until after the arrival of Tiglath-Pileser III in the Levant.

At the time of Tiglath-Pileser's arrival, Euboians, Cypriots, and Phoenicians could be found living together in the trading post of Al Mina, at the western end of the shortest caravan route to the imperial cities of Assyria and on the coastline immediately facing the eastern tip of Cyprus. Immediately to the north lie the spurs to the Amanus Mountains, long prized by the Assyrians as a source of timber and fruit bearing trees. It was also the first region of the Levant to fall under direct Assyrian rule, when Tiglath-Pileser made it an Assyrian province in 738. By this time, Greek enclaves could be found in Phoenician cities in the area, most notably Tel Sukas, and they were an increasing presence on Cyprus itself. A century later, Greek soldiers had established a mercenary settlement at Mesad Hashavyahu in the south; it is certain that Greeks served under Psamtik and in the war between

²⁶For Phoenician activity in Greece, see Kübler 1953; Smithson 1968; Boardman 1980, 54–84, 113; Braun 1982a, 5–7; Coldstream 1982; Hurwit 1985, 37–42; Bisi 1987; J. Shaw 1989; Burkert 1992, 14–25; Negbi 1992; Popham 1994, 22; Ridgway 1994, esp. 36; Bikai 2000; Markoe 2000, 170–4.

²⁷For Greek contact with the Levant, see Bikai 1978, pls. XXII A.1 and XXX.3; Boardman 1980, 35–54; 1999; Braun 1982a; Coldstream 1982, esp. 262; Riis 1982, esp. 244–6; Elayi 1987; Burkert 1992, 12–4; Snodgrass 1994; Popham 1994; Haider 1996; Kearsely 1999; Rollinger 2001a, 2001b.

Necho and Nebuchadrezzar.²⁸ The name of Perian-der's nephew, Psammetichos, points to the increasing involvement of other regions of Greek civilization in the Near East. In 665, Gyges brought the Greek cities of Asia Minor into regular contact with Mesopotamia when he created the "Royal Road" leading east from Sardis.²⁹

Thus, when Tiglath-Pileser and Sargon consolidated Assyrian hegemony over Phoenicia, Syria, and Cilicia in the second half of the eighth century, they created a clear and direct path along which information could travel to the Greek-speaking world.³⁰ Along this path traveled Mesopotamian mythology and literature, including the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Atrahasis*, and *Enuma Elish*, each of which has been shown to have left its imprint on Archaic Greek epic.³¹ It is, I suggest, no coincidence that the library of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh housed copies of all three works.

THE HOMERIC EVIDENCE

Thus far, I have sought to demonstrate how knowledge of Mesopotamian, and in particular Assyrian,

palatial architecture could have reached the Greek world. I have also suggested that by this same path Near Eastern mythological narrative did in fact find its way into Greek epic. We shall presently see that Assyrian kings, beginning with the reign of Ashurnasirpal, employed a common and distinctive architectural vocabulary in the construction of their palaces.³² Moreover, not only did these rulers employ a similar architectural vocabulary, but the rhetoric with which they described the palaces in their commemorative inscriptions is remarkably similar. In other words, one may speak of a common narrative tradition, by which I mean a formulaic way of describing the palaces and their embellishments, that could have reached the Greek world along with Near Eastern mythology. It is thus at least possible that the Homeric *Phaiakis* could be simultaneously informed by accounts of Assyrian palaces and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. And to repeat a point made earlier: a straightforward narrative motivation for doing so can be supplied in the desire to give Skherie an exotic patina appropriate to its status as a "border realm."



Fig. 2. Lefkandi bronze amphora: the decorated rim and handles of the bronze amphora. (From Popham et al. 1993, pl. 19; reproduced with permission of the British School at Athens)

²⁸ Alcaeus B. 10; Cook 1962, 823; Boardman 1980, 112–7; Braun 1982b, 35–7; Riis 1982, 251; Wiseman 1985, 14–7, 24; Redford 1992, 338–64, 430–47; Cook 1995, 169; Kearsley 1999, 122–5; Burgess 2001, 159 with n. 95.

²⁹ Hdt. 5.49–53; see Burkert 1992, 14 with n. 26.

³⁰ The traditional date of Assyrian domination of Cyprus is 709 B.C.E.

³¹ See esp. West 1966, 18–31; 1997; Burkert 1983; 1992,

88–106, 114–20; Morris 1997.

³² I am not here attempting to provide a history of Assyrian architecture, and I consciously elide significant developments between the reigns of Ashurnasirpal II and Ashurbanipal: my interest lies solely in documenting characteristic and distinctive features of Assyrian palatial design that could have become part of a general image of the palaces transmitted to the Greek world in the Archaic period.

Homer and Archaeology

Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to address the issue of method: in its broadest terms the question becomes one of how the historically minded archaeologist can use Homer to illuminate the material evidence. The status of the epics as “oral poetry” is now generally recognized.³³ Progress in comparative linguistics has confirmed that the antecedents of Homeric epic extend at least as far back as Proto-Indo-European: that the Homeric formula *kleos aphthiton* has a metrical, cognate-formula in Vedic Sanskrit suggests that heroes who win “unwithering fame” by their exploits were celebrated in song before the emergence of the Indo-Iranian and Hellenic language families.³⁴ That the Cyclops episode from *Odyssey* Book 9 also has significant parallels in Vedic myth suggests that not only the genre of praise poetry but at least some of its themes are likewise an Indo-European inheritance.³⁵ Archaeological and linguistic evidence suggest that in the Mycenaean period heroic poetry was sung in meters cognate with the Homeric hexameter, featured a divine apparatus—including Zeus and Here—and celebrated heroes—among them Aias and Odysseus—who win *kleos* in battle using Homeric weaponry such as the tower shield and *phasganon arguolon*.³⁶

Homeric epic thus could and did preserve cultural information extending to the BA and even

beyond it by virtue of the inherent conservatism of its formulas and themes, including the actual plots of the epics (viewed here as themes).³⁷ This is, however, far from saying that epic is either interested in or capable of reproducing the Mycenaean world. As has often been observed, the collective memory of preliterate societies is relatively shallow: a common rule of thumb being that such memory extends three generations.³⁸ Apparent violations of the rule can often be explained by assuming the object or practice itself survived into the IA, or that memory of it continued to play a role in contemporary ideology.³⁹ Finley was thus right, in a restricted sense, to argue that “the Homeric world was altogether post-Mycenaean, and the so-called reminiscences and survivals are rare, isolated, and garbled. Hence Homer is not only not a reliable guide to the Mycenaean tablets; he is no guide at all.”⁴⁰ The clear implication of this for the archaeologist is that the historical memory of the epics is largely constrained by the continued relevance of that memory in the present. Moreover, what the epics do preserve they also adapt: the Cyclops story may preserve an Indo-European theme, but in the *Odyssey* it has been transformed into a vehicle of cultural self-definition through construction of the antithetical other.⁴¹ Finally, a distinction should be drawn between material artifacts and the social world in which they

³³The seminal works are Parry 1971; Lord 2000. Subsequent literature is vast. The following are especially important for the discussion that follows: Goody 1968, 1977a, 1977b; Finnegan 1977; Jensen 1980, 1999; Havelock 1982; Ong 1982; Morris 1986; Thomas 1989; 1992; Svenbro, 1993; Dickson 1995; de Vet 1996; Nagy 1996.

³⁴E.g., Nagy 1981; 1990, 122–6; 2003, 45–8; M. West 1988; see also Schmitt 1967, 1968.

³⁵Frame 1978, 44–6; Cook 1995, 80–1, 85; Watkins (1995, esp. 297–303, 398–407) argues that the punishments of the Cyclops and suitors in the *Odyssey* constitute a pair of reciprocal formulas that developed out of the IE theme “hero slay serpent.” Burkert (1983, 130–4), moreover, has argued that the *Cyclopeia* preserves ritualized patterns of behavior extending into the upper Paleolithic. Renfrew’s (1987, 250–2) skeptical assessment of Indo-European mythology succeeds chiefly as a critique of an unreconstructed Dumézilian trifunctionality, which is of course its principal target.

³⁶Ruijgh (1967, 53; 1995, 73–8) has been able to resolve metrical anomalies in various Homeric formulae by reconstituting their Mycenaean forms: for example, *potnia Here*, without prosodic hiatus in Mycenaean Greek, and *Dii mêtin atalantos*, which requires restoration of both the digamma in Zeus’s name and a fully consonantal *h-* prefixed to *atalantos* (*ha-talantos* < *sm-Gk. (s)mia, Lat. semel); see also M. West 1988; Janko 1992, 10–1.

³⁷On tradition itself as a type of intention, a “speech act,” see the subtle discussion by Bakker 1997; and on the reten-

tion of older linguistic categories and forms in the face of constant diachronic pressure on the Homeric *Kunstsprache* see Bakker 1999.

³⁸See, e.g., Goody 1977a, 1977b; Morris 1986; Raaflaub 1998.

³⁹To pick two notorious examples, a BA plaque depicting a boar’s tusk helmet was visible on Delos in the eighth century, while IA elites competing in chariot races at funeral games and festivals had every motivation to preserve the memory of their use in BA warfare. That the Mycenaean wanax owned perfume factories and his palace was a bureaucratic and redistributive center administered by professional scribes writing in syllabic script would have been of little interest. I single out perfume factories because of Shelmerdine’s (1995) persuasive argument that some memory of this is indeed preserved in the epics. If she is right, then this may be a case where, with the benefit of modern archaeology, we understand the historical information preserved in the epics better than the contemporary audience. For the BA plaque, see Coldstream 2003, 215; for the remains of a SM helmet from Crete, see Catling 1983, 53; 1995, 124–8; see also Raaflaub 1998, 175 with n. 30.

⁴⁰Finley 1957, 159. Cited and affirmed by I. Morris 1986, 94–5; Bennet 1996, 533; Raaflaub 1998, 172. See also Dickinson 1986; Micknat 1986. An important exception to this scholarly consensus is Shear 2000, who dates Homer’s world to the BA, but the manuscript tradition to sixth-century Athens.

⁴¹Cook 1995, 93–110.

circulate: a silver studded sword is inherently more interesting than a palace bureaucracy and the formulaic system of epic better suited to preserve its memory.

But this is not to say that the epics simply reproduce contemporary culture: they must provide a plausible account of life in the distant past they claim to be describing. The epics thus employ various distancing effects, such as deliberate archaizing through the suppression of known anachronisms and inclusion of elements that would be generally recognized by the audience itself as belonging to the past.⁴² The “Bronze Age” is thus largely the world as it was 90 years or so before the poems were composed, and it colors but does not significantly alter the Homeric world with an exotic patina. Scholars who have argued that Homeric society is a historical amalgamation have then chosen to foreground the BA and early IA survivals, together with archaizing features taken from the more recent past.⁴³ And again, in a restricted sense, they are justified in doing so, with the important caveat that the amalgamation is not simply temporal but also geographic.⁴⁴

Another reason why the epics cannot be treated as a historical transcript is that there is no such thing as a monolithic IA Greek society to which they can be compared.⁴⁵ The issue becomes acute once it is recognized that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were composed for a Panhellenic audience: their vision of the heroic age must therefore be recognizable—and culturally relevant—throughout the Greek world.⁴⁶ Nor do the poems simply reproduce the abstraction of

Panhellenic culture; rather they are themselves ideological constructs designed to shape the realities they describe.⁴⁷ Homeric society is thus a refraction of an abstraction, which is, I suggest, a principle reason why proposed dates for the epics range so widely. In short, the geographic scope that defines Homeric epic gives it comparable temporal scope: the epics have identified tensions and contradictions so basic that their cultural relevance encompasses the entire IA; and the result is an image of society so fundamental as to appear rudimentary.

If a general consensus has emerged in recent years that the Homeric world is contemporary, then Homer’s own dates have become increasingly controversial. The pursuit of a precise time and place in which to locate Homer, however, is in certain respects misguided. Indeed, Foley has recently argued, based on analogies with South Slavic oral traditions, that “Homer” is a personification of the epic tradition.⁴⁸ Yet, even if an individual poet, whom for want of another name we choose to call Homer, is responsible for the manuscripts that have come down to us, a single author model does not account for the origins or “genius” of the epics, whose temporal and geographic scope extends to Proto-Indo-European and throughout the Greek world, and beyond them both.

Modern attempts to date Homer were substantially framed in the 19th century by the “Homeric Question,” in which debate over the artistic unity of the poems led to very different conclusions as to when, where, and by whom they were written down.⁴⁹ The findings of Parry and Lord, however, required

⁴²Redfield 1975, esp. 36–7; Morris 1986; Raaflaub 1998; van Wees 2002.

⁴³See esp. Long 1970; Snodgrass 1974; Sherratt 1990.

⁴⁴One could use similar strategies to argue that historical Greek society is an “amalgam”: the cult of Athene in fifth-century Athens, for example, combines contemporary and BA features in a manner no less striking than what one finds in Homer.

⁴⁵The various regions of the Greek-speaking world developed at different rates and along different lines. Even in the Classical period Greeks could travel back and forth in time simply by visiting their neighbors, and the differences would have been far more striking in the IA. In this context, see Whitley 1991; Morgan 1993; see also van Wees 2002, 112.

⁴⁶Nagy 1980, 1996, 1999; see also I. Morris 1986, 123; Patzek 1992, 98–101; Raaflaub 1998, esp. 177, 186; Wilson 2002, 11–2, 37–8; for the archaeology of the Panhellenic sanctuaries, see Morgan 1990, 1993. It is, I think, largely the streamlining effects of the Panhellenizing process, combined with “ideological distortion,” that caused Finley to date Homeric society to within the 10th century.

⁴⁷Redfield 1975, 23; Finnegan 1977, esp. 242–3, 263; Mor-

ris 1986, esp. 83, 115, 120; Seaford 1994, 5–6; Raaflaub 1998, 182; Wilson 2002, 11–2. This is above all observable in the poems’ elite oiko-centrism, though it would be wrong in more than one respect to reduce this to a binary opposition between elites and the *dēmos*.

⁴⁸Foley 1998, 1999, esp. 45, 50 and 56–61. Others have reached similar conclusions by different means. See in particular Nagy (1996, 21) who calls attention to the Greek tendency to retroject any great cultural achievement, such as the development of a law code, onto a single person; see also M. West 1999; van Wees 2002. For a recent survey, see Graziosi 2002.

⁴⁹Unitarian scholars, who defended the integrity of the poems, tended to argue that Homer wrote down the epics in Asia Minor during the eighth century, while Analysts, who held that the poems showed signs of extensive revision, usually favored a much later date for the text, often sixth-century Athens. The debate fed into historical models in which Homer belonged to an earlier period than seventh-century lyric poetry, in which the individual voice first emerged, while the Cyclical epics were seen as later because they were inferior and therefore derivative.

not only a reframing of the discussion, but a fundamental reevaluation of the very concepts of authorship, composition, poem, and text. Their research led many scholars to conclude that Homer dictated the epics to an amanuensis in Asia Minor during the eighth century; if this date is to be accepted, it is also the most likely explanation.⁵⁰ For other scholars, however, a date so soon after the introduction of writing seems implausibly early for the creation of the written texts, and not only in terms of their production, preservation, and diffusion, but in cultural terms as well. In their view, the anthropology of oral cultures does not provide ready explanations of why an oral poet or his audience would have wanted a written text, or would see one as authoritative, or consequently how such a text, once it existed, could have stabilized poetic traditions that continued to be orally composed and transmitted. Nagy has thus proposed an evolutionary model for the development of the texts, and for their increasingly authoritative form, as *the poem*. According to this model, the poems gradually crystallized between the eighth and sixth centuries before being written down in Peisistratid Athens, where poetic competitions at the Panathenaia required a standardized text.⁵¹

A consequence of these changing perspectives, above all on the nature of Homeric poetry, its relationship to the material culture, and the material culture itself, has been that a number of scholars working across a variety of disciplines have proposed a general down-dating of the manuscript tra-

dition of Homer. Some scholars have adopted Nagy's crystallization model, or something like it, while others affirm the single dictation model but situate the epics in a seventh-century historical context. Adherents of both models, and even some who date epics to the eighth century or earlier, have also sought to relocate the origins of the manuscript tradition to west Ionia, specifically Euboea and Attica.⁵²

To sum up, the inherited traditions of Homeric epic most likely did not preserve a detailed memory of BA palatial architecture. It is a plausible inference that the primary sources for the Homeric palace are their visible ruins and contemporary rulers' dwellings. Ashlar masonry thus gets combined with pitched roofs in a formulaic description that seems vivid, but is impossible to visualize, without "a series of arbitrary assumptions" by the audience.⁵³ Indeed, such lacunae in the description can be understood in terms of the Panhellenizing process in that they allow the audience to project their own cultural assumptions onto the narrative. But if Panhellenism and composition by theme have conspired to produce a formulaic description of the palaces, then significant departures from the formula invite explanation, and may even be said to demand it. My suggestion, then, is that in a move conflating temporal and geographic topography, the *Odyssey* drew on Near Eastern palatial architecture in order to achieve an epic distancing effect in its description of Alkinoos's palace. As noted above, an impulse to look

⁵⁰ Argued vigorously by Janko 1998.

⁵¹ Nagy 1980; 1996, 29–61; 1999; 2002; 2003, esp. 2–7, 68–71; further on Homer and the Panathenaia in Jensen 1980; Cook 1995, 128–70; van Wees 2002. Scholars have long noted that the great Panhellenic festivals are perhaps the only setting in which performance of works on the scale of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* would have been feasible: conversely the emergence of these festivals can also account for the monumentalization of the epics, and for a broadening of their audience in geographic terms and along class lines, so that they became the common possession of the larger community and the entire Greek world. In other words, the Panhellenism that defines Homeric poetry can be understood as the direct and immediate result of tailoring its performance to the demands of an audience assembled from throughout the Greek world. Nevertheless, as Morgan has shown (1990, 1993), the festivals do not achieve true Panhellenic status before the seventh century, at earliest. On the other hand, institution of competitive performances of Homer at the Panathenaia may suggest that such performances were seen as an integral part of any festival with Panhellenic aspirations by the second half of the sixth century.

⁵² On proposed down-dating of the epics, see Sealey 1957; 1990, 129–31; Kullmann 1960, 381; 1981, 30; 1992, 264; 1995;

1999; Burkert 1976; 1985, 121; 1987, 44; 1992, 204 n. 32; Jensen 1980; 1999; Nagy 1980; 1992, 51–2; 1996, 65–112; 2002; M. West 1988; 1992; 1995; S. West 1988, 33–5, 192, 198; Gentili 1988, 15–23; Ballabriga 1990; Lowenstam 1992; Taplin 1992; van Wees 1992, 54–8; 1994, 138–46; 1996, 689–93; 1999; 2002; Stanley 1993, 279–96; Seaford 1994, 144–54; E. Cook 1995, 3–5, 168–70; Crielaard 1995; Dickie 1995; Winter 1995; Osborne 1996, 156–60, 244; Papadopoulos 1996; Raaflaub 1998, 170, 177, 188; Larson 2000, 219–22; Perlman 2000, 69; Shear 2000 (see, however, *supra*, n. 40); Burgess 2001, 49–53; Wilson 2002, 11 n. 49, 143–4; Patzek 2003, 29–40.

Of the above scholars, the following suggest varying types of affinity between Homer and West Ionia: Sealey 1957, 1990; Jensen 1980, 1999; M. West esp. 1988; S. West 1988; Seaford 1994; Cook 1995; Winter 1995; Larson 2000; Shear 2000; Burgess 2001; Nagy esp. 2002; van Wees 2002.

Scholars who locate Homer in the eighth or even ninth centuries but still find a West Ionian connection plausible include Whitman 1958; Powell 1991; Antonaccio 1995; Bennet 1996; Ruijgh 1997.

⁵³ Stanford 1959, xli–xlii, criticizing the detailed house plan of Merry. The attempt of Wace (1962) to relate the palace of Odysseus to the House of Columns at Mycenae confirms Stanford's caution.

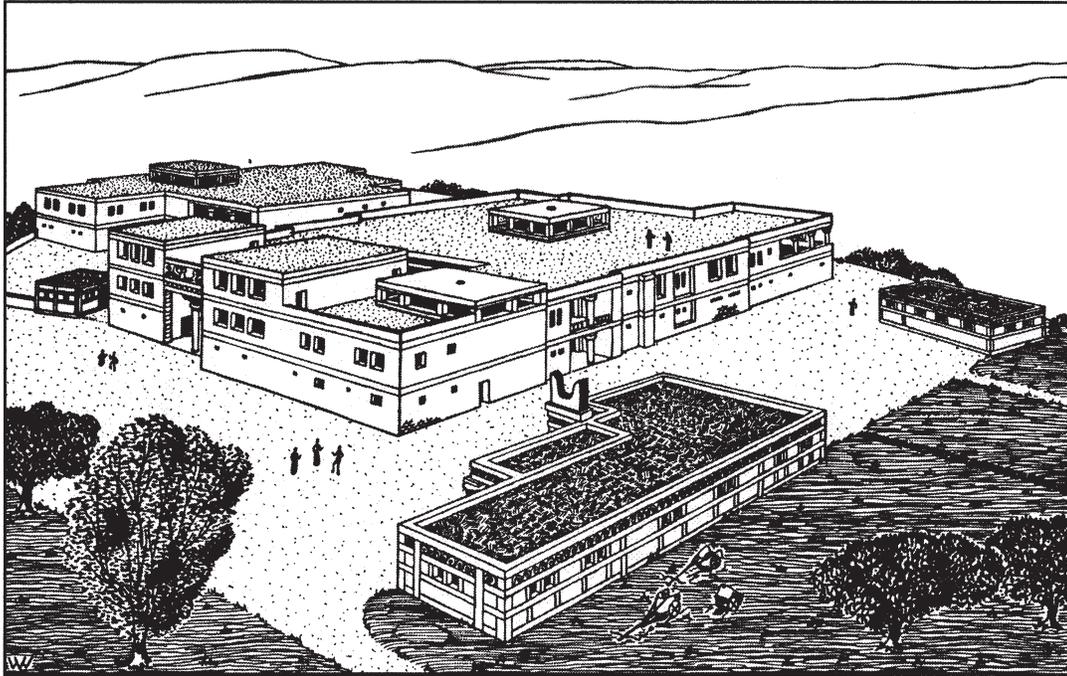


Fig. 3. Reconstruction of the Palace of Nestor. (From McDonald and Thomas 1990, 333, fig. 93; courtesy of Indiana University Press)

to the east for inspiration is provided by the narrative context, though an equation of geographic with temporal remoteness is also a recurrent feature of the poem.⁵⁴ To the extent that the poem is aiming for a narrative effect beyond simple epic distance, and that it risks losing authority if it departs significantly from the shared experience of the audience, the *Odyssey* would seem to model an audience familiar with stereotypical accounts of Near Eastern palaces (though not necessarily Assyrian). Conversely, recognition of the Near Eastern basis of the palace could further enhance the prestige of the objects described, beyond their purely material value: this would be especially significant if Homer's implied audience was itself "orientalizing." Finally, historically minded archaeologists and archaeologically minded Homerists cannot safely exclude seventh-century material evidence from the discussion. In the present case, the historical time frame for the Assyrian palaces and the transmission of knowledge about them covers the entire range of currently maintained dates for the textualization of the epics. This last point is of no small importance given the shallowness of historical memory in oral cultures.

The Palace of Alkinoos in the Odyssey

With these considerations in mind, let us now turn to the Homeric comparanda. The palace of Alkinoos is located in the main settlement or *astu*. The palace is of the *megaron* type: Nausikaa instructs Odysseus to enter it through the courtyard, *aule* (*Od.* 6.303), and he later sleeps in the portico, *aithousa* (*Od.* 7.345). There is an outer gate, *prothura*, to the courtyard, and a doorway, *thurai*, from the courtyard into the main building (*Od.* 7.4, 88). From the courtyard, Odysseus is to proceed to the main room, *megaron* (*Od.* 6.304), where he will find Nausikaa's mother seated by the central hearth, *eskhare* (*Od.* 6.305), and leaning against a column as she weaves by the light of the fire. The throne of Alkinoos leans against the same column, while the handmaids, *dmoai*, sit behind the queen. The column is thus imagined as located near the fire and at some distance from the interior walls. It may belong to an assemblage of four columns supporting a clerestory above the hearth to evacuate smoke and provide light—in which case a Mycenaean palace may be imagined (e.g., fig. 3).⁵⁵ Homer never describes such a group, however, nor even a plurality of columns around the *eskhare*. Homer instead may be

⁵⁴ Cook 1995, esp. 49–92; Nakassis in press.

⁵⁵ For a floor plan of the Palace of Nestor, see Blegen and

Rawson 1973, 3:fig. 303.

imagining a column located along the room's central axis (which would yield a more plausible seating arrangement). In that case, the palace begins to look less like a Mycenaean palace and more like the ruler's residence at Lefkandi (fig. 4). Since Nausikaa is describing her mother in a "typical" pose, the megaron seems to be imagined as rather dark despite its "high roof," *hupserephes* (*Od.* 7.85). It is apparently large enough to hold over 65 adults, including the royal family, the other rulers and counselors of Skherie, maidservants, and unexpected guests (*Od.* 7.103–6, 8.387–90; cf. 8.57–58 and below). Nausikaa has her own private apartment, in which her nurse lights a fire and prepares her supper (*Od.* 7.7–13). Presumably the sons of Alkinoos have similar chambers (*Od.* 7.170; cf. 1.425 and *Il.* 6.242–50, 316–7). Parallels to all of these architectural features are seen in the palaces of Odysseus, Nestor, and Menelaos. Hainsworth is thus at least partially justified in calling the account "generic."⁵⁶

Still, a number of features set the palace of Alkinoos apart from its Homeric counterparts, or indeed from those of the Greek world at any period. When Nausikaa boasts that her father's house is not like the homes of the other Phaiakes (*Od.* 6.301–2), her statement may point to a difference that is not only qualitative but of kind. When Odysseus reaches the threshold of the main building, he pauses in concerned anticipation, and in amazement. Homer then focalizes the description of Alkinoos's palace through the eyes of someone standing at the palace doorway (though he also reports more than Odysseus could possibly see):

... Meanwhile Odysseus
was walking towards the renowned home of Alkinoos;
and his heart
was greatly stirred, as he stood there, before he came
to the brazen threshold.
For it was like the radiance of the sun and moon
throughout the lofty house of great-hearted Alkinoos.
For brazen walls stretched on either side

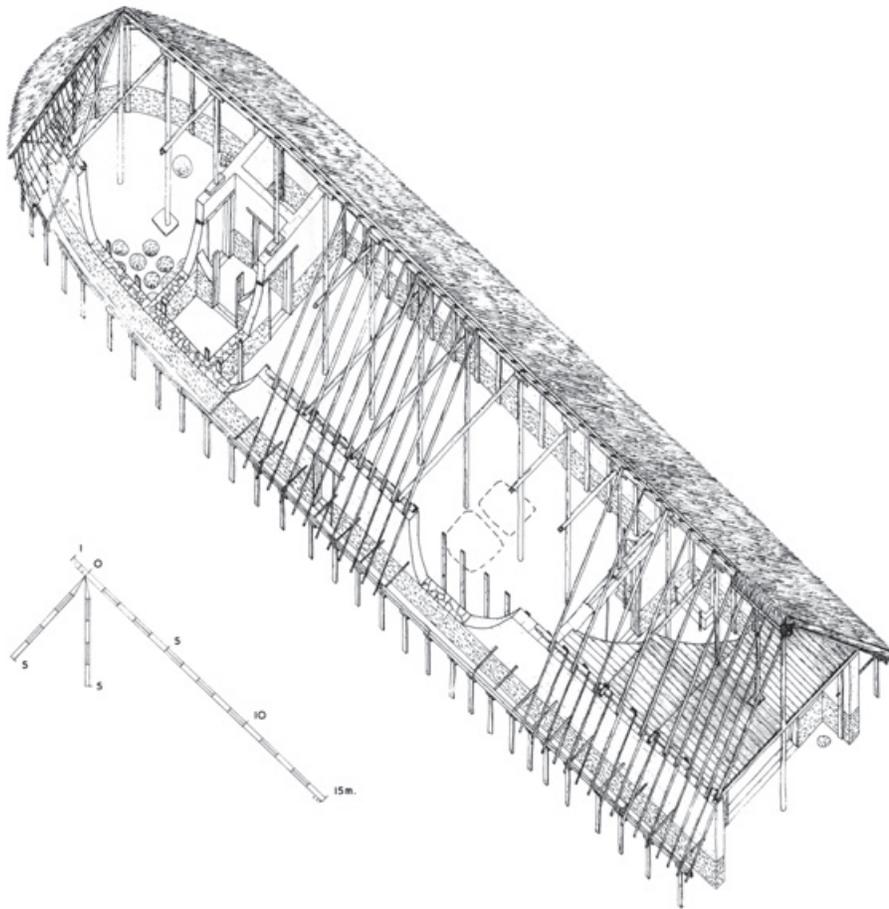


Fig. 4. Axonometric drawing of ruler's residence, Lefkandi. (From Popham et al. 1993, pl. 28; reproduced with permission of the British School at Athens)

⁵⁶ Hainsworth 1988, ad *Od.* 6.303.

from the threshold to its innermost recess, and around them was a band of blue.

And golden doors closed off the well built house and silver columns stood upon the brazen threshold with silver lintel upon them, while the handle was of gold.

On either side were gold and silver dogs, which Hephaistos made with knowing skill to guard the home of great hearted Alkinoos, being deathless and ageless for all time. And inside were thrones leaning against the wall, everywhere

from threshold to its innermost recess continuously, on which cloth,

fine and well sewn was placed, the work of women. On them, the Phaiakian leaders were accustomed to sit

as they ate and drank, for they feasted continuously. And golden youths stood on well built plinths, holding blazing torches in both hands providing light for the banqueters throughout the house by night.

(*Od.* 7.81–102)

The house is not simply brilliant, but effulgent. Comparison of its light to that of the sun and moon (*Od.* 7.84–85) draws immediate attention to the wealth of white and yellow metals. These are not confined to precious artifacts, but the walls themselves are described as brazen from the threshold of the house to its innermost recesses (*Od.* 7.87: *mukhon*). We are probably to imagine bronze cladding of some sort.⁵⁷ This is certainly the case for the golden doors and silver doorposts and lintel. The dark blue band, *thringkos kuanoio* (*Od.* 7.87) that runs around these walls is generally interpreted as referring to glass paste rendered blue with the addition of copper, although glazed brick could also be meant.⁵⁸ Elsewhere in Homer, *thringkos* implies the uppermost course of an external wall and has a defensive function.⁵⁹ It thus seems natural to suppose that the band runs around the top of the palace walls, as a kind of ceiling entablature. Ameis and Hentze thus rightly call the *thringkos* a “Mauerkranz, ein oben an der Wand herumlaufender Streifen.”⁶⁰ We could draw the images still closer if we assume that *thringkos* refers to a crenellated pattern, which had protective and decorative functions on the walls of the courtyard and inside the palace respectively. The description clearly implies that Homer is attempting to describe an architectural feature for which he does not have native vocabulary.

That the dogs made by Hephaistos are immortal and guard the house is to be taken quite literally: although statues, they are thought of as animate, like the automaton helpers of Hephaistos described in the 18th book of the *Iliad* (18.417–18).⁶¹ In describing the statues as gold and silver, Homer may be referring to pairs of statues in each metal, or else to metal inlay, a technique popular in Bronze Age Greece, and in the Near East from the Bronze Age onward. The golden youths in the *megaron* are to be imagined as fairly substantial in size and weight in order to hold the torches. Like the dogs, the description implies that they are animate and are thus literally “life-size”; this would explain why they are standing on *bomoi*, which I have rendered as “plinth,” since they are presumably imagined as stepped. These *bomoi* are probably to be located against the walls and among the chairs, though nothing forbids us from imagining them as niches cut into the walls.

The Palace Garden

Perhaps the most striking single feature of the palace compound is its walled garden, *orkhatos/kepos* (*Od.* 7.112/129), to which Homer devotes an *ekphrasis* of some 19 verses. Reference to the garden as an *orkhatos* implies a formal layout with plants regimented in rows. The garden is enclosed by a *herkos*, as is the space adjacent to the palace of Odysseus into which he built his marriage chamber. There, no mention is made of a garden, though Odysseus does construct his bed upon the trunk of a mature olive tree. Homer says that the garden of Alkinoos is “large,” *meegas*, which he then glosses with *tetraguos*, the meaning of which is uncertain. The Scholia indicate that *gue* designates a square with sides of two stades, estimated by Hainsworth at 365 m each.⁶² Hainsworth considers “more realistic” the equation of *gue* with *plethron* by Hesychius, which yields an orchard of 930 m², or a bit over 30 m on a side. A garden with such dimensions, however, would seem far too small to hold the contents Homer gives it:

Outside the courtyard is a large orchard near the doors,

four measures in size, and about it a wall runs its length and width.

And there grow trees, tall and flourishing pears, and pomegranates, and apple trees with glistening fruit

⁵⁷ Stanford 1959, ad *Od.* 7.86.

⁵⁸ Ameis-Hentze 1908; Hainsworth 1988, both ad *Od.* 7.87.

⁵⁹ Eumaios is said to *thringkoo* his *aule* with some sort of thorn bush to protect his pigs (*Od.* 14.10); and the *aule* of Odysseus likewise has a *thringkos*, presumably of more durable materials (*Od.* 17.267)

⁶⁰ Ameis-Hentze 1908, ad *Od.* 7.87.

⁶¹ Faraone 1987, esp. 257–8; Ameis-Hentze 1908, ad *Od.* 7.93; Stanford 1959, ad *Od.* 7.100–3; contra Hainsworth 1988, ad *Od.* 7.100.

⁶² Hainsworth 1988, ad *Od.* 7.113.

and sweet figs, and flourishing olives:
of these the fruit does not perish, nor gives out,
in winter or summer, but lasts year round; and
Zephyrian
breaths are forever causing some fruit to emerge,
while they ripen others;
Pear upon pear ripens, apple upon apple,
and cluster on cluster of grapes, fig upon fig.
And there his fruitful vineyard is well rooted,
its warmest part is drying out in the sun, in a level
space,
while others they harvest, and others tread, while
before them
unripe grapes are shedding their bloom, and others
beginning to darken.
And there, the ordered leek beds, by the last row of
vines
produce vegetables of all kinds, gleaming fresh the
whole year through,
And therein two springs scatter their water, the one
up through the garden,
while from the other side the other flows beneath the
garden threshold,
to the lofty house, from whence the citizens draw
their water.
Such are the shining gifts of the gods in the home of
Alkinoos
And much enduring, brilliant Odysseus marveled as
he stood there.
(*Od.* 7.112–33)

The garden of Alkinoos is thus a working farm, divided among rows of fruit trees and vines together with a vegetable garden. The vineyard, in turn, is articulated into separate areas by the ripeness of the grapes. Furthest back in the vineyard is the warmest part of the garden, where grapes are apparently being preserved as raisins. Next is an area in which some grapes are being harvested, while others are already being tread. The front bed is likewise divided among grapes that are just now losing their blooms and those that are beginning to darken. A further spatial division between the two beds may therefore be implied, perhaps left and right along a central axis. A wine press is assumed, although the lack of reference to vinification facilities may reflect a presumption that the must would be raised in the palace storerooms.

The trees are likewise described as bearing fruit at different stages of ripeness. An arrangement similar to that of the vines can thus be inferred for each of the five species named. The vegetable beds are presumably “ordered” solely by plant species since they are said to be productive year round. The resulting arrangement is as balanced as a Geometric

vase.⁶³ Our overall image is thus of a garden that is walled, square, symmetrically arranged, irrigated, and functional. Of the trees mentioned, only the olive and grape vine are typically Greek, and all would be at home in a Mesopotamian garden. Pears, apples, pomegranates, and figs are nowhere mentioned in the *Iliad*, and in the *Odyssey* the first three are confined to gardens belonging to Hades and Odysseus. Whatever other associations they may have carried, these trees are clearly felt to be rare and exotic (it should also be observed that the word for apple, *melon*, can also be used to designate fruit trees generally).

PALACES OF THE NEO-ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

Above, I discussed the possibility that the palace of Alkinoos could be based on Near Eastern, and in particular Assyrian, palatial architecture, and the plausibility that the *Odyssey* would draw on contemporary Near Eastern traditions in describing it. Having established the basis of comparison in Homer, I now review the Assyrian material.

The kings of the Neo-Assyrian empire built their imperial palaces in Calah, Khorsabad, and Nineveh, all situated in a V-shaped region created by the confluence of the Upper Zab, flowing southwest into the Tigris River, flowing southeast. We owe our knowledge of their palatial architecture to excavations that laid bare the ruins of the palaces themselves and, as importantly, to the royal inscriptions in which the kings boasted of their accomplishments. Both the Assyrian and Babylonian royal inscriptions follow traditions established by the earlier kings of Sumer: the Assyrian inscriptions differ, however, in their increasingly secular emphases on the king’s military and hunting exploits and on the construction of his palace, which was treated as one of his chief legacies. In this, as in much else, Tiglath-Pileser I created a template for Assyrian royal inscriptions that would be followed and expanded upon by his successors: an invocation to the gods is followed by a chronicle of military campaigns, hunting expeditions, and construction projects, including cult centers, fortifications, irrigation projects, and the imperial palace and its embellishments.

The Palace of Ashurnasirpal II

Ashurnasirpal II, in turn, established new standards of palatial architecture that would be followed for centuries to come.⁶⁴ Shortly after com-

⁶³ See Stanford 1959, ad *Od.* 7.122ff.

⁶⁴ On the organization and decorative program of the central palace, see Mallowan 1966; Russell 1998; for Sargon’s pal-

ace, see Loud 1936, 1938; Albenda 1996; for Sennacherib’s palace, see Russell 1991.

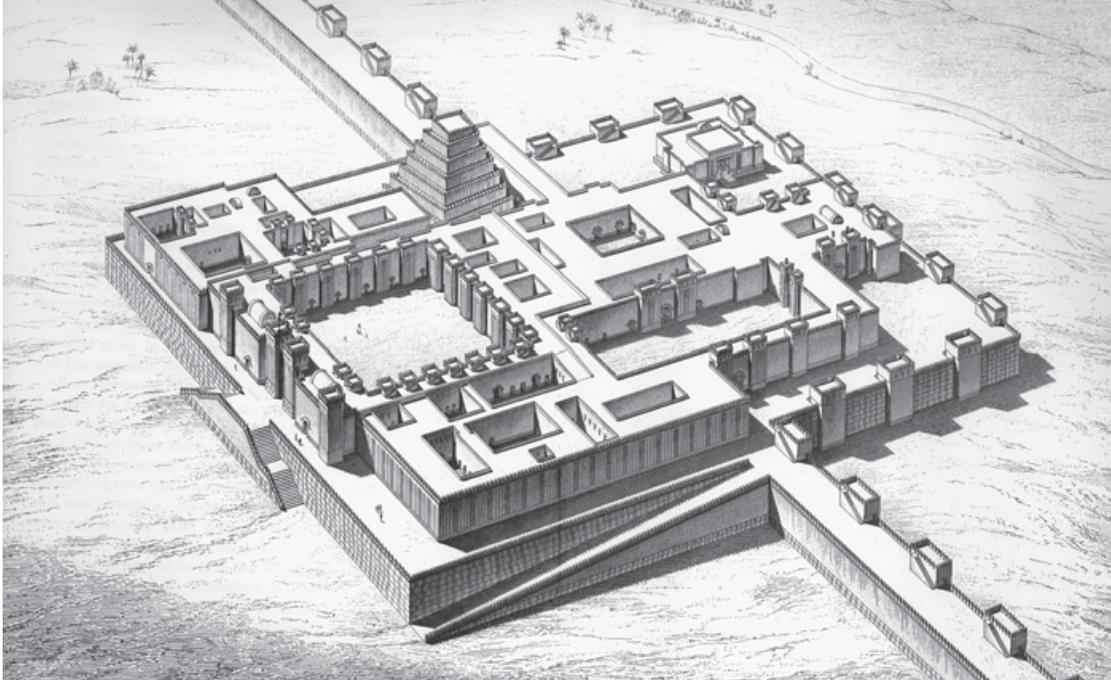


Fig. 5. Reconstruction of Khorsabad. (From Perrot and Chipiez 1970; courtesy of Adeva)

ing to power, Ashurnasirpal made Calah the imperial capital, enclosing it in a new city wall 7.5 km in length and constructing nine new temples to the gods. He also began work on a palace to which Shalmaneser apparently added the administrative complex. Ashurnasirpal consecrated the palace, however, in his fifth regnal year (879 B.C.E.), and boasts of having entertained 69,574 guests for 10 days of festivities, including 5,000 dignitaries from neighboring lands, among them Hatti, Tyre, and Sidon.⁶⁵ These numbers are not as incredible as they might first appear; as Mallowan observes, such a banquet could have provided a *de facto* census, useful in estimating the available manpower for *corvée*.⁶⁶

The palace remained the seat of government well into the eighth century. Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II both administered the empire from the chancery at various points in their reigns; Sargon conducted restorations on the palace and used room U as a treasury; the harem apparently continued to serve as a royal domestic quarters through his reign or later; and other sections of the palace remained in use until the destruction of Nineveh in 612

B.C.E.⁶⁷ Ashurnasirpal's palace would have been legendary from the day it was consecrated to the fall of the Assyrian empire. It is thus interesting to note that letters from western governors addressed to Tiglath-Pileser were found there, as were prisms from the reign of Sargon, which record his receiving tribute from the kings of Cyprus.

By the time Tiglath-Pileser seized the throne, Ashurnasirpal's palace was over a century old, but when he built anew at Calah he still followed Ashurnasirpal's example in its decorative program and presumably in its general layout.⁶⁸ Sargon relocated the capital to Khorsabad and again followed Ashurnasirpal's lead, including the invitation of foreign dignitaries "of all lands" to the consecration.⁶⁹ The relocation may have something to do with the manner in which he came to power, though he continued to live in Calah during the construction of his palace at Khorsabad (fig. 5). On Sargon's death in battle, Sennacherib again relocated the capital, to Nineveh, which he rebuilt and greatly embellished, including city walls, paved roads and enlarged public squares, a network of canals

⁶⁵ Grayson 1976, 175–6 § 682.

⁶⁶ Mallowan 1966, 72.

⁶⁷ Mallowan 1966, 112–3, 172–6.

⁶⁸ A similar layout is inferred from similarities in the decorative program and the inscriptional evidence, and the degree

of conservatism evident in the design of Sargon's palace. For changes in the layout of Sargon's palace, see Russell 1998, 102–8, and for the entranceway and garden, see below.

⁶⁹ Fuchs 1994, 312, 341, 355.

and aqueducts that brought water from mountains 70 km distant, and finally a royal palace and palace garden (fig. 6).⁷⁰ Had Ashurnasirpal been able to tour the palaces of Sargon and Sennacherib, he might well have been impressed by their opulence, but would have understood his surroundings, both in terms of architectural vocabulary and materials. A century later, Nebuchadrezzar built his own palace and gardens at Babylon on models that were then over three centuries old.

There are, then, good reasons to compare Homer's account of Alkinoos's palace to Ashurnasirpal II's own description of his palace at Calah:

I founded therein [Calah] a palace as my royal residence (and) for my lordly leisure for eternity. I decorated (it) in a splendid fashion. I surrounded it with knobbed nails of bronze. I made high doors of fir, fastened (them) with bronze bands, (and) hung (them) in its doorway. I took and put therein thrones of ebony (and) box-wood, dishes decorated with ivory, silver, gold, tin, bronze, iron, booty from the lands over which I gained dominion.⁷¹

Elsewhere he mentions monumental statues situated at the palace doorways:

[The city Calah] I took in hand for renovation. I founded therein my lordly palace. I built that palace for the *gaze* of rulers and princes forever (and) decorated it in a splendid fashion. I made (replicas of) all beasts of mountains and seas in white limestone and *parutu*-alabaster (and) stationed (them) at its doors.⁷²

And glazed brick:

I depicted in greenish glaze on their walls my heroic praises, in that I had gone right across highlands, lands, (and) seas, (and) the conquest of all lands. I glazed bricks with lapis lazuli (and) laid (them) above their doorways.⁷³

⁷⁰ The site of Nineveh, the largest in Mesopotamia, was approximately 720 ha in size with a population of perhaps 175,000 (Jonah 4.11 gives 120,000 in 612 B.C.E.) compared with perhaps 100,000 at Calah during the reign of Ashurnasirpal (Thompson and Hutchinson 1929, 125; Mallowan 1996, 71–2).

⁷¹ Grayson 1976, 154 § 619 = 1991, 252; see 1976, 173 § 677.

⁷² Grayson 1976, 182 § 705 = 1991, 302; see 1976, 166–7 § 653.

⁷³ Grayson 1976, 173 § 677 = 1991, 289.

Even more opulent were the temples that Ashurnasirpal II built near his palace. It is worth noting in this context that Assyrian temples are based on domestic architecture: no attempt is made to distinguish temple, palace, and residence through architectural vocabulary, and frequently identical language is used to describe them in the inscriptions (Loud 1936, 67; 1938, 10–1):

I decorated them [the temples near the palace] in a splendid fashion. I installed over them cedar beams (and) made high cedar doors. I fastened (them) with bronze bands (and) hung (them) in their doorways. I stationed holy bronze images in

Near the palace, Ashurnasirpal installed an irrigated garden for his personal use:

I dug out a canal from the Upper Zab, cutting through a mountain at its peak, (and) called it Patti-hegalli [canal of abundance]. I irrigated the meadows of the Tigris (and) planted orchards with all (kinds of) fruit trees in its environs. I pressed wine (and) gave the best to Ashur my lord and the temples of my land. I dedicated that city to the god Ashur my lord. In the lands through which I marched and the highlands which I traversed, trees (and) seeds which I saw, cedar, cypress, *simsalu*, *burasu*-juniper, . . . *dapranu*-juniper, almond, date, ebony, *meshannu*, olive, *susunu*, oak, tamarisk, *dukdu*, terebinth and ash, *mehru*, . . . *tiatu*, Kanish oak, *haluppu*, *sadanu*, pomegranate, *sal-luru*, fir, *ingirasu*, pear, quince, fig, grapevines, *angasu*-pear, *sumlalu*, *titip*, *siputu*, *zanzaliqqu*, "swamp-apple," *hambuququ*, *nuhurtu*, *urzinu*, and *kanaku*. The canal crashes from above into the gardens. Fragrance pervades the walkways. Streams of water (as numerous) as the stars of heaven flow in the pleasure garden. Pomegranates which like grape vines . . . in the garden . . . [I], Ashur-nasir-apli, in the delightful garden pick fruit like a mouse [. . . .].⁷⁴

For the vast majority of visitors and residents of the imperial city, knowledge of the palace would have extended no further than its exterior walls, with their monumental entrance doorways and colossal guardian statues (e.g., figs. 7–8). Russell notes that the statues in particular would have created a "very high level of imagined expectation for the grandeur" of the palace interior, which "could only be known second hand, through reports and rumor, and these would inevitably be exaggerated."⁷⁵ Indeed, it is precisely in order to create exaggerated expectations that the palace entrance was constructed in such an opulent manner. The

their doorways. I made (the images of) their great divinity resplendent with red gold and sparkling stones. I gave to them gold jewelry, many possessions which I had captured. I adorned the room of the shrine of the god Ninurta, my lord, with gold (and) lapis lazuli, I stationed bronze *tablets* on his right and left, (and) installed wild ferocious dragons of gold at his throne. . . . I created my royal monument with a likeness of my countenance of red gold (and) sparkling stones (and) stationed (it) before the god Ninurta my lord. (Grayson 1976, 174–5 § 679)

Elsewhere we learn that he stationed guardian statues at temple doorways, as he had done in his own home:

I installed over *them* cedar beams (and) made cedar doors. I fastened (them) with bronze [*bands*] (and) hung (them) in their doorways. I made (replicas of) beasts in shining bronze (and) stationed (them) in their tower gates. I made (replicas of) lions in white limestone (and) [*parutu*-alabaster] (and) stationed (them) at their doors. (Grayson 1976, 170 § 665)

⁷⁴ Grayson 1976, 173–4 § 678 = 1991, 290; see also Wiseman 1983, 142; 1985, 59–60; Stronach 1989, 477; Glassner 1991, 13.

⁷⁵ Russell 1998, 663.

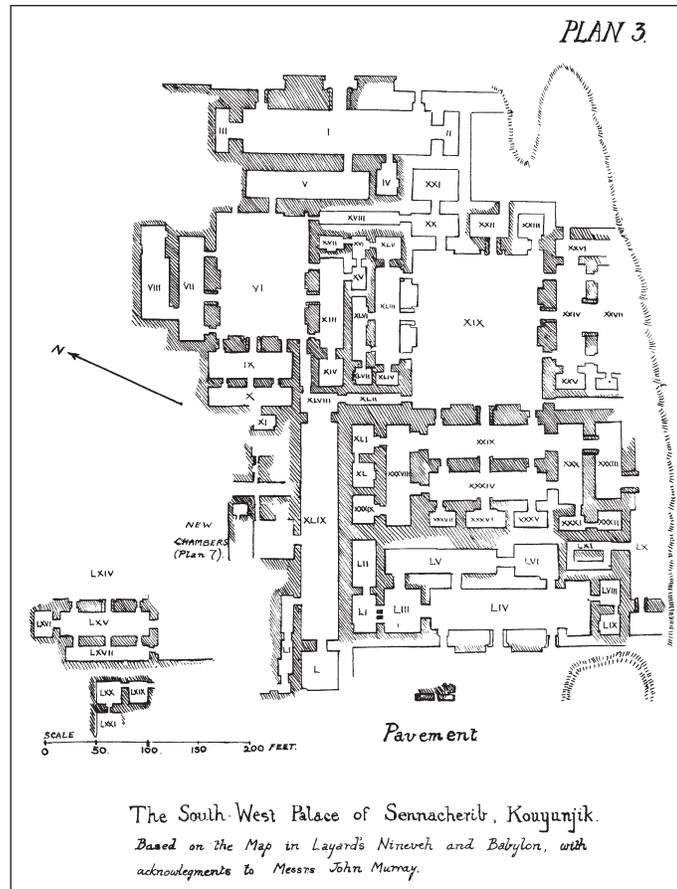


Fig. 6. The South-West Palace of Sennacherib, Kouyunjik. (From Thompson and Hutchinson 1929, plan 3; courtesy of Luzac & Co.)

rhetoric of the royal inscriptions thus reproduces the intended impact of the palace's architectural program.

Ashurnasirpal's Successors

Two centuries later, Sennacherib built his "Palace Without Rival" at Nineveh, in an effort to outdo his father Sargon II's palace of the same name at Khorsabad. Construction on the palace began around 700 and was completed eight years later. The palace also remained in use through the reign of Ashurbanipal, who did restoration work on it. Ashurnasirpal would have recognized not only the general layout of Sennacherib's palace, but also the imagery and language used to describe it:

Thereon [on the terrace] I had them build a palace of ivory, ebony (?), boxwood (?), *musukannu*-wood, cedar, cypress and spruce, the "Palace without a Rival," for my royal abode. / Beams of cedar, the product of Mt. Amanus, which they dragged with difficulty out of (those) distant mountains, I stretched across their ceilings (?). / Great door-leaves of cypress, whose odour is pleasant as they are opened and closed, I bound with a band of shining copper and set up in their doors.⁷⁶ / A portico, patterned after a Hittite⁷⁷ palace, which they call in the Amorite tongue a *bīt-hilāni*, I constructed inside them (the doors),⁷⁸ for my lordly pleasure. / Eight lions, open at the knee, advancing, constructed out of 11,400 talents of shining bronze, the workmanship of the god Nin-a-gal, and exceedingly glorious, / together with 2 colossal pillars whose copper work came to 6,000 talents, and two great cedar pillars,⁷⁹ (which) I placed upon the

⁷⁶Elsewhere (Luckenbill 1924, 119 § 24) the band is said to be of silver and copper.

⁷⁷Luckenbill (1924) remarks ad loc: "That is, a 'western,' Syrian, palace, as the next phrase clearly shows. For the kind of structure that is meant we must turn to the seventh chapter of I Kings." Unsurprisingly, Tiglath-Pileser III seems to have introduced this innovation into the vocabulary of Assyrian

palatial design (Tadmor 1994, 172–3 with note ad 18), and in this, Sargon II followed.

⁷⁸Luckenbill (1924) remarks ad loc: "The portico opened on the inner court."

⁷⁹Elsewhere (Luckenbill 1924, 123 § 32) the columns are said to be cased in bronze and lead.

lions (colossi), I set up as posts to support their doors. / Four mountain-sheep, as protecting deities, of silver and copper, together with mountain-sheep, as protecting deities, of great blocks of mountain stone, I fashioned cunningly, and setting them toward the four winds, (directions) I adorned their entrances. / Great slabs of limestone, the enemy tribes, whom my hands had conquered, dragged through them (the doors), and I had them set up around their walls,—I made them objects of astonishment. / A great part, like unto Mt. Amanus, wherein were set out all kinds of herbs and fruit trees,—trees, such as grow on the mountains and in Chaldea, I planted by its (the palace's) side. / To increase the vegetation, from the border of the city of Kisiri to the plain about Nineveh, through mountain and lowland, with iron pick-axes I cut and directed a canal. / For (a distance) of 1 1/2 *bêru*⁸⁰ (double-hours) of land, the waters of the Khosr, which from of old sought too low a level (lit. place), I made to flow through those orchards in irrigation-ditches. / After I had brought to an end the work on my royal palace, had widened the squares, made bright the avenues and streets and caused them to shine like the day, / I invited Assur, the great lord, the gods and goddesses who dwell in Assyria, into its midst.⁸¹

The only features of this account that would have likely raised Ashurnasirpal's eyebrows are the references to a portico patterned after a *bît-hilâni* and to a palatial garden resembling Mount Amanus to the north of Al Mina. These were innovations Sennacherib adopted from his father, Sargon, who took his inspiration for the *bît-hilâni* from Tiglath-Pileser III; in turn, Sennacherib's son and successor Esarhaddon adopted them.⁸² But Ashurnasirpal would have certainly understood the point and been pleased by it: "my descendants rule Syria!"

The evidence thus justifies the claim that from the ninth through the seventh centuries, Assyrian kings employed a somewhat formulaic way of describing the construction of their palaces and palace gardens. Elements of the formula include the use of exotic woods in the structures; monumental doorways, including columns, lintels, thresholds, and door-leaves clad in a variety of metals; monumental guardian animals in metal or stone guarding the principal doorways of the palace; the use of glazed brick; and walled, irrigated gardens with a variety of exotic plant specimens. Other common motifs in the inscriptions include praise of the city

walls and their gates; reference to the radiance of buildings—palaces and temples—clad in gold and other metals, and of roads built with baked bricks; and the construction of irrigation canals and the parks and orchards they fed.

Nebuchadnezzar as Heir to the Assyrian Empire

One century after Sennacherib, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar presented himself as heir to the Assyrian empire through his manipulation of architectural conventions in the construction of his palace:

The finished palace [Nebuchadnezzar] describes as a "palace as the seat of my royal authority, a building for the admiration of my people, a place of union for the land" . . . The construction was magnificent, the upper walls were decorated all round with a band of blue enamelled bricks and the doors made of cedar, Magan, sissou or ebony-wood encased in bronze or inlaid with silver, gold and ivory. The doorway ceilings coated with lapis lazuli and the threshold, lintel and architraves . . . cast in bronze. The rooms themselves were roofed with huge cedar beams from Lebanon, or with selected pine and cypress logs, some covered in gold.⁸³

As Nebuchadnezzar himself would have hoped, Odysseus pauses to admire the magnificence of Alkinoos's palace before entering. The doorway to both palaces is covered in white and yellow metals; the walls of both were decorated with a blue band; and the interior walls were further brightened by metal cladding. Even the thresholds are bronze.⁸⁴ One could aptly say of Nebuchadnezzar's palace that it is "like the radiance of the sun and moon." I do not wish to argue that Homer based his description on the palace of Nebuchadnezzar, which many scholars would find too late to have influenced the *Odyssey*. My point is rather that Nebuchadnezzar's palace represents an image to which Mesopotamian rulers had aspired for centuries and those of Assyria regularly attained. In fact, each of these features of Nebuchadnezzar's palace can be directly paralleled in the palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Calah, and the Sargonid palaces at Khorsabad and Nineveh.

Next to the palace, Nebuchadnezzar is said to have built his Hanging Gardens, the most famous gardens of the ancient world.⁸⁵ Whatever their appear-

⁸⁰ Luckenbill (1924) remarks ad loc: "The Assyrian *bêru*, like the neo-Babylonian, was equivalent to about 3.8 miles."

⁸¹ Luckenbill 1924, 96–8 §§ 79–92.

⁸² Fuchs 1994, 304–5, 309–10, 340, 353; Borger 1956, 61–2.

⁸³ Wiseman 1985, 55.

⁸⁴ Note the roughly contemporary, 600–560 B.C.E. bronze

threshold from the Nabu temple at Borsippa, now in the British Museum (WA 90851).

⁸⁵ For the state of our ancient sources, see Wiseman 1983, 138–41; 1985, 55–60; see also Oppenheim 1965, 332; Stronach 1989, 480. Dalley (1993, 1994, 2002), however, argues that the "Hanging Gardens" were actually built by Sennacherib in

ance, the royal gardens were probably located between the “Western Outwork” and the Northern palace. Stronach observes that if this location, first proposed by Wiseman, is correct, then the gardens were in the immediate vicinity of the king’s own quarters.⁸⁶ Wall mosaics of monumental date palms against a cobalt blue background brought the gardens themselves indoors as a central element of the interior decoration.⁸⁷ There is some evidence to suggest that the gardens were planted with a wide variety of exotic trees and shrubs.⁸⁸ More striking is a report by the third-century historian Berossos that Nebuchadrezzar built the gardens with stone terraces so that it looked like a mountain planted with trees.⁸⁹ We can dismiss his claim that Nebuchadrezzar did so because his wife was homesick for the mountains of her homeland, and assume instead that, if the description of the garden is itself correct, Nebuchadrezzar once again took his inspiration from the palaces of Khorsabad and Nineveh.⁹⁰

Precedents and Legacies: Statues at the Palace Doors

Ashurnasirpal is generally credited with creating Assyrian sculpture as we know it, being the first to use carved gypsum orthostats to decorate the main rooms of the palace. The paired antithetical groupings of colossal statues guarding the entrance doorways to the palace and throne room are another legacy. An early precedent can be found in the glazed ceramic bulls and griffins dating to the 13th century B.C.E., which guarded the North East entrance to the Ziggurat in Choga Zambil and the Middle Elamite temple of Inshushinak.⁹¹ But it is the monumental stone statues characteristic of Hittite architecture from the Bronze Age empire to the contemporary kingdoms of Cilicia and northern Syria that likely supplied an immediate source

of inspiration for the use of statuary as an integral feature of palatial design.⁹² Ashurnasirpal would have seen such statues in the course of his campaigns in Syria, as did Tiglath-Pileser I over two centuries before him.⁹³

It may be no coincidence that Tiglath-Pileser I is the first Assyrian ruler known to have installed stone guardian statues at the entrance to his palace:

I made replicas in *basalt* of a *nahiru*, which is called a sea-horse (and) which by the command of the gods Ninurta and Palil the great gods my lords I had killed with a *harpoon* of my own making in the [Great] Sea [of the land] Amurru, (and) of a live yak (*burhis*) which was brought from the mountain/land Lumash [...] on the other side of the land Habhu. I stationed (them) on the right and left of my [royal entrance].⁹⁴

These inscriptions are also noteworthy as being the first examples of the use of palatial architecture by Assyrian kings to advertise, not only imperial wealth and power, but the geographic scope of their activities. His example was soon followed: there is no particular reason to suppose that Ashurbel-kala (1073–56) himself rode and killed a Mediterranean sea-horse, for example.⁹⁵ His motives in erecting their statues are in part to compete with his predecessor and perhaps equally to exploit their iconographic significance:

I built the palace of cedar, box-wood, terebinth, (and) tamarisk in my city of Ashur. I made (replicas of) two *nahiru*, four yaks (*burhis*), (and) four lions in *basalt*, two genii in *parutu*-alabaster, (and) two *yaks* (*burhis*) in white limestone and stationed (them) at their doors.⁹⁶

Ashurnasirpal is thus operating within an established Assyrian tradition in erecting monumental stone statues to guard the doorways of his palace. He can also be seen as adopting Tiglath-Pileser I’s

Nineveh. Even if they were not the legendary “Hanging Gardens,” Wiseman’s location for royal gardens attached to the palace of Nebuchadrezzar is plausible. Dalley’s own proposed location of Sennacherib’s gardens beside the palace would make the parallel with Alkinoos’s palace all the more striking. The location would cannibalize a great deal of space on the tell, but Kuyunjik is also the largest site in the Near East.

⁸⁶ Stronach 1989, 480; Wiseman (1985, 56) finds a general tendency, observable at Nineveh, Khorsabad, Babylon, and Jerusalem, to locate the royal gardens near the palace and the city walls, which offered privacy and separated it from the game preserves. On the Gardens of Yahweh in Jerusalem, see Stager 1999.

⁸⁷ In the palace of Ashurnasirpal, at least 190 stylized palms were depicted on the relief sculptures: see, e.g., Russell (1998, 687–96), who argues that they had apotropaic functions.

⁸⁸ Wiseman 1983, 141–2; and note the possible Assyrian inspiration for the garden’s design (though see *supra*, n. 85).

⁸⁹ Wiseman 1983, 139.

⁹⁰ Stronach 1989, 480.

⁹¹ Amiet 1966, 352; Kawami 1986, 260; Harper 1992, 125.

⁹² See Collon, 128–30. The relationship is admittedly controversial: Assyria is not a constant presence in the region until the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III. Moortgat (1969, esp. 126–31) argues for Aramaic mediation; survey of the Syrian material by Hawkins (1982, esp. 380–7).

⁹³ The practice was followed by the general Samsi-ilu in the reign of Adad-nirari III (810–83), who placed a pair of monumental stone lions measuring 2 m in height at a gate to Kar Shalmaneser (Grayson 1996, 231–3).

⁹⁴ Grayson 1976, 28–9 § 103 = 1991, 44; see also 1976, 28 § 103, 30 § 111; 34 § 132.

⁹⁵ He does, however, claim to have ventured to Arvad, where he rode and killed a *nahiru*, to have dispatched merchants who *acquired* yaks, and to have received tribute from the Pharaoh (Grayson 1976, 55 § 248).

⁹⁶ Grayson 1976, 56 § 250 = 1991, 105.



Fig. 7. Lamassu from palace of Sargon at Khorsabad: Louvre, Paris. (Photos by Tanya Feinleib)

use of such statues to advertise the geographic scope of Assyrian power. His boast of having made statues of “all beasts from mountains and seas” thus makes a far more sweeping claim about the extent of his influence than did the yak and sea-horse of Tiglath-Pileser.

Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II, and Sennacherib followed Ashurnasirpal’s practice of arranging guardian statues at the doors to his palace. Sargon’s own sculptural program in fact offers a closer parallel to the *Odyssey* than Ashurnasirpal’s, as Sargon boasts of installing pairs of bronze lions around his

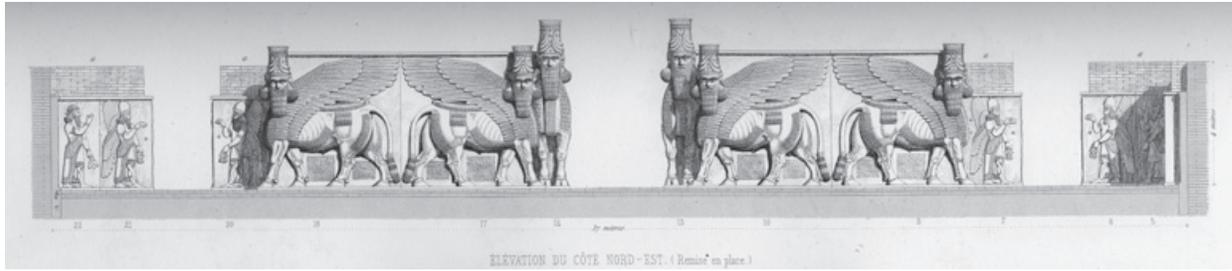


Fig. 8. Palace of Sargon at Khorsabad: Lamassu positioned in doorway. (Botta and Flandin 1894; courtesy of Imprimerie nationale)

doorways.⁹⁷ Whereas Sargon mentions eight lions weighing 4,610 talents, Sennacherib declares that he installed eight bronze lions weighing 11,400 talents. A still closer parallel to Alkinoos's gold and silver dogs are the four mountain sheep of silver and copper that Sennacherib installs in the entranceway as protective deities. Elsewhere he mentions 12 lion, 12 bull, and 22 cow colossi in bronze, and others in alabaster and limestone.⁹⁸ Esarhaddon in turn refers to bronze and silver palace doors with bronze clad columns and bronze and stone colossi; and elsewhere he boasts of erecting silver and bronze colossi by the gates to an Ishtar temple.⁹⁹

Doors and Walls: Metal Plating and Glazed Bricks

The first inscriptional evidence for the use of bronze horizontal banding on monumental doors comes from the reign of Adad-narari I (1307–1275), who records their use on the Gate of Anu and Adad at Ashur.¹⁰⁰ His lead is followed by Tiglath-Pileser I, who placed bronze bands on the gate to his palace.¹⁰¹ Such banding is, in fact, a common and distinctive feature of Assyrian monumental architecture.¹⁰² The most famous example of bronze decorative bands is from the “Balawat Gates,” now in the British Museum, which Shalmaneser III set up in his palace in Balawat. Although material evidence is lacking, Sargon also mentions covering the doors of his palace with bronze, and official correspondence indicates that

silver was also used.¹⁰³ The royal inscriptions of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal indicate they continued the practice.¹⁰⁴

The columns of the Assyrian palaces were generally wooden, but they were sometimes, as for example in the case of important doorways, clad in lead, bronze, silver, or even gold—bronze being the most common metal employed. Ceiling beams of important rooms may also have been clad in precious metals, as in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar. In other cases, they were painted. Sennacherib declares that he brightened the roof timbers of his palace so they “shine like the day.” His words could refer either to paint or to metal cladding.¹⁰⁵ In any event, Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II and Sennacherib all boast of the brilliance of the metals decorating their palaces, especially those used in constructing the doors and statues of the main entrance; and Esarhaddon repeatedly makes the same boast of the temples whose walls he clad in silver and gold.¹⁰⁶

The use of paint is well attested archaeologically. Painted plaster was found throughout Sargon's palace at Khorsabad, where it was used to decorate the walls and ceilings: blue was by far the most common color employed.¹⁰⁷ Horizontal decorative bands were painted on the wall plaster at Calah and possibly at Nineveh, and similar banding was found in Residence J at Khorsabad.¹⁰⁸

Another distinctive feature of Assyrian palatial design is the use of glazed bricks. Tiglath-Pileser I had already employed glazed bricks in the

⁹⁷ See *infra*, n. 105.

⁹⁸ Luckenbill 1924, 108–10, 122–3.

⁹⁹ See *infra*, n. 106.

¹⁰⁰ Grayson 1972, 70 § 456.

¹⁰¹ Grayson 1976, 33 § 125; see *infra* on gardens.

¹⁰² Grayson 1976, 180 n. 818, catalogues other references to bronze door banding through the reign of Ashurnasirpal.

¹⁰³ Fuchs 1994, 305, 310, 340; Loud 1936, 9, 15; 1938, 25–6, 44, 59–62. The excavators believe the use of banding was confined to temples, throne room, and doors to the terrace.

¹⁰⁴ Luckenbill 1927, 322 § 837; Borger 1956, 33, 61–3, 95;

see Russell 1999, and the description of Sennacherib's palace, *supra*, with notes *ad loc.*

¹⁰⁵ Luckenbill 1924, 120 §§ 27–8. Note in particular the boast of Sargon (Fuchs 1994, 298–9): “Tiere des Gebirges und des Meeres aus massivem Berggestein ließ ich vermittels der Kunst des Nin[zadim] fertigen, brachte (sie) ihn ihnen [i.e. in the palace] fest an wie einen [Berg] und ließ so ihren Zugang hell wie den Mond erstrahlen” (my emphasis).

¹⁰⁶ Borger 1956, 5, 22, 33, 59, 94.

¹⁰⁷ Loud 1936, 56–71; 1938, 17, 48–9.

¹⁰⁸ Loud 1938, 65; Russell 1991, 40–1.

decoration of his palace.¹⁰⁹ In using glazed brick, Ashurnasirpal is both working within a well established tradition of Near Eastern palatial design and emulating and surpassing the achievements of his illustrious predecessor Tiglath-Pileser I. Glazed bricks were also found at Khorsabad, and may have been used in the decoration of the palace.¹¹⁰ Sennacherib likewise boasted about Nineveh: “With burnt-brick, KA-stone, and lapis-lazuli, I adorned the walls, cornices and all of their copings.”¹¹¹ Esarhaddon followed his father’s example both architecturally in his use of glazed brick and in his description of it:

I lightened the darkness created by the roofing over the corridors and made them as bright as day (as follows): I covered them (the doors) with silver and bronze knobbed nails (and) I decorated the arches, friezes and all the cornices with bricks glazed the colour of obsidian (and) lapis lazuli.¹¹²

Assyrian Royal Gardens

The earliest inscriptional evidence for Assyrian gardens was recorded by Assur-uballit I (ca. 1363–28),¹¹³ who wrote that he built a “canal of abundance” leading into the royal city because a well previously in use “was not suitable for the requirements of an orchard.” In that the well was “(the source) of the pond behind the terrace,” it may be right to infer that the orchard was located in the immediate vicinity of the palace.¹¹⁴ Adad-narari I (1307–1275) also refers to gardens.¹¹⁵ In the second half of the 13th century Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244–1208) would boast: “I transformed the plains of my city into irrigated fields.”¹¹⁶ He also records directing a large canal into the principal cult center of the city: “I made the Pattu-meshari flow as a wide (stream) to its site. . . . Within that cult center . . . I constructed Egalmesharra, ‘House of the Universe,’ my royal dwelling.”¹¹⁷ Again, it is natural to suppose garden facilities located within the complex so that the palace is located near to or even within them.

Tiglath-Pileser I thus continues a centuries old tradition when he boasts of having planted orchards. And again he seems to be responsible for introducing an important innovation that was subsequently adopted by Ashurnasirpal II and his successors:

I took cedar, box-tree, Kanish oak from the lands over which I had gained dominion—such trees which none among previous kings, my forefathers, had ever planted—and I planted (them) in the orchards of my land. I took rare orchard fruit which is not found in my land (and therewith) filled the orchards of Assyria.¹¹⁸

The utilitarian nature of Tiglath-Pileser’s orchards is obvious and should not be minimized:¹¹⁹ cedar and box-wood were prized building materials used in the construction of palaces, temples and their furnishings, and were doubtless singled out for mention on just these grounds. At the same time, such gardens, located throughout his kingdom, can be understood as serving the same purpose as the statues guarding the entrance to the palace—they bear witness to the ruler’s power and influence, which reaches as far west as the mountains of Lebanon.

That one of Tiglath-Pileser’s gardens was in close proximity to the main palace and was reserved for royal use can be inferred from the following, somewhat garbled and lacunose, account:

[The palace] which Ahur-resha-ishi (I), my father, vice regent of the god Ashur, had built (but) [not] completed—that palace I constructed (and) completed. I raised its walls and tower-gates and made (them), fast, like a . . . , with bricks glazed (the colour of) obsidian, lapis lazuli, *pappardilu*-stone, (and) *parutu*-alabaster. I installed on its towers replicas in obsidian of date palms (and) surrounded (them) with knobbed nails of bronze. I made high doors of fir, made (them) fast with bronze bands, (and) hung (them) in its gateways. Beside that terrace I planted a garden for my lordly leisure. I excavated a [canal] from the River Husir (and) [*directed it*] into that garden. I brought up the remainder of that water to the city plain for irrigation. Within that garden I built a palace, my [*lordly*] . . . I portrayed therein the victory and *might* which the gods Ashur and Ninurta, the gods

¹⁰⁹ Grayson 1976, 33 § 125; see *infra* on gardens.

¹¹⁰ Loud 1938, 49 (see also Loud 1936, 3): “in some manner . . . in panel, frieze or narrow band, enameled bricks decorated or inscribed may have been used to brighten the interiors of certain rooms.” See also Reade 1995.

¹¹¹ Luckenbill 1924, 107 §§ 42–4.

¹¹² Translation courtesy of Grayson. Borger (1956, 62) renders with: “um jenen Palast herum liess ich einen Fries und ein Pechnasengesims aus Hämatit und Lapislazuli machen und ihn wie eine Bekrönung umgeben.”

¹¹³ The earliest attested Mesopotamian gardens are those in the Sumerian city of Uruk, referred to in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (XI.306). The earliest reference to palace gardens are

from the reign of the Babylonian kings Adad-shuma-usur (1218–1189 B.C.E.), and Nabu-apla-iddina (Wiseman 1983, 137–8; Stronach 1989, 476). Wiseman (1983) suggests there may be references to gardens in texts from the Old Babylonian period.

¹¹⁴ Grayson 1972, 42 § 271.

¹¹⁵ Grayson 1972, 65 § 427 and 71–2 § 464.

¹¹⁶ Grayson 1972, 120 § 777; 122 § 785.

¹¹⁷ Grayson 1972, 117 § 767; see also 120 § 778.

¹¹⁸ Grayson 1976, 17 § 47 = 1991, 27. He also created game parks (Grayson 1976, 16–7 § 46), which could have served similar functions.

¹¹⁹ Oppenheim 1965, 331 with n. 6.

who love my priesthood, had granted me. [. . . .] the palace which is upon the terrace, which is beside [the temple of the goddess] Ishtar, my mistress—which a prince who preceded me had built [(and when) it became dilapidated M]utakkil-Nusku, my father, vice-regent of the god Ashur, [rebuilt it . . .]—had become dilapidated. That palace,¹²⁰ the . . . and the terrace [I] entirely [*rebuilt*]. Opposite the temple which had become dilapidated [*I piled up that entire area with bricks*] like an oven. [. . .] I restored. The house of the Step Gate [. . .] I constructed. The palace, my royal dwelling, [. . .] . . . I built. I constructed it from top to bottom (and) decorated (it) in a fashion more splendid than ever.¹²¹

Ashur-bel-kala also installed irrigated orchards, though he does not mention collecting rare and exotic plant specimens: “The canal which Ashur-dan (I), king of Assyria, excavated—the source of that canal had fallen in and for thirty years water had not flowed therein. I again excavated the source of that canal, directed water therein (and) planted gardens.”¹²²

Ashurnasirpal II, by contrast, not only adopts Tiglath-Pileser I’s innovation of collecting plant specimens during his campaigns, but in what may be seen in part as a game of one-upmanship he boasts of planting no less than 39 different species, the majority of them exotic, in his “pleasure garden.” The competition did not simply consist of introducing the most plant species, however: the economic benefits of doing so would have been significant, but the sheer variety of plants introduced directly attests to the number of Ashurnasirpal’s military conquests. Many of these exotic plants doubtless also contributed to the aesthetic pleasure of the garden, and one can also imagine added amenities such as artificial waterfalls and vine covered pergolas. Although the orchard garden that Tiglath-Pileser created for his “lordly leisure,” and Ashurnasirpal’s “pleasure garden” remained working farms, even at this early date the functions of Assyrian royal gardens are not purely utilitarian.¹²³

The first clear evidence for palatial gardens comes from the reign of Sargon II, who is credited with introducing a number of important changes in the design and function of Assyrian royal gar-

dens (fig. 9). As we have seen, these were formal botanical preserves whose function was primarily if not exclusively utilitarian, whereas Sargon installed a landscaped garden with an artificial “mountain.”¹²⁴ A foreign loan-word, *kirimahu*, first appears in Sargon’s inscriptions, where it is used to designate this new garden type. With the construction of Sargon’s palace, Assyrian rulers become the “undisputed masters of monumental garden construction in the Near East.”¹²⁵

A relief from room 7 of Sargon’s palace may depict his garden. On it one sees a wooded hill with an altar and nearby garden pavilion. The pavilion is decorated with western inspired columns and capitals; and the annals of Sargon, Sennacherib, and Esarhaddon suggest that these garden kiosks were referred to as *bitanu*.¹²⁶ Stronach believes that the assemblage was meant to reproduce the foothills of the Taurus Mountains.¹²⁷ Beneath the pavilion is a body of water with two boats at anchor. If a lake were depicted, it would be almost unparalleled in Mesopotamian or western garden design, although Ashur-uballit’s reference to a pond near his palace is a clear exception.¹²⁸ Sargon’s decision to build his capital on virgin soil facilitated another innovation, for he was able to locate the garden immediately adjacent to the palace, presumably to the northwest where the terrace punctures the city walls:

Damals errichtete ich . . . eine Stadt und gab ihr den Namen Dur-Surru-ukin. Einen Park, eine genaue Nachbildung des Amanus-Gebirges, in dem alle aromatischen Bäume des Hatti-Landes (und) sämtliche Obstbaumsorten des Gebirges angepflanzt sind, legte ich um sie herum an.¹²⁹

Evidence indicates that Tiglath-Pileser I and Ashurnasirpal II both installed gardens near their palaces, perhaps just outside the city walls and in direct communication with them so that they would be readily available for use as a royal retreat. Locating them directly adjacent to the palace on the terrace platform would have posed practical difficulties, however, on account of space and also because after centuries of rebuilding, the city and palace terrace stood many meters above the river bed.¹³⁰

¹²⁰ Supplemented in Grayson 1991a, ad loc, with: “which is beside the temple of the goddess Isht[ar].”

¹²¹ Grayson 1976, 33 §§ 125–6 = 1991, 54–5.

¹²² Grayson 1976, 56 § 251 = 1991, 105.

¹²³ Glassner 1991, 14; Stronach 1989, 476–7.

¹²⁴ Discussion of the garden type and nomenclature by Oppenheim 1965, 331–2; Wiseman 1985, 137–9; Stronach 1989, 477–8; Glassner 1991, 10–2.

¹²⁵ Stronach 1989, 477.

¹²⁶ Oppenheim 1965, 328–30; Weisman 1983, 137–8; Stronach 1989, 477–8.

¹²⁷ Stronach 1989, 477–8.

¹²⁸ Ponds, however, are an essential and defining feature of Egyptian gardens belonging to the wealthy.

¹²⁹ Fuchs 1994, 304; see also 309, 340, 353.

¹³⁰ Margueron 1992, 52; see, however, Dalley’s (1994) reconstruction of the garden of Sennacherib.

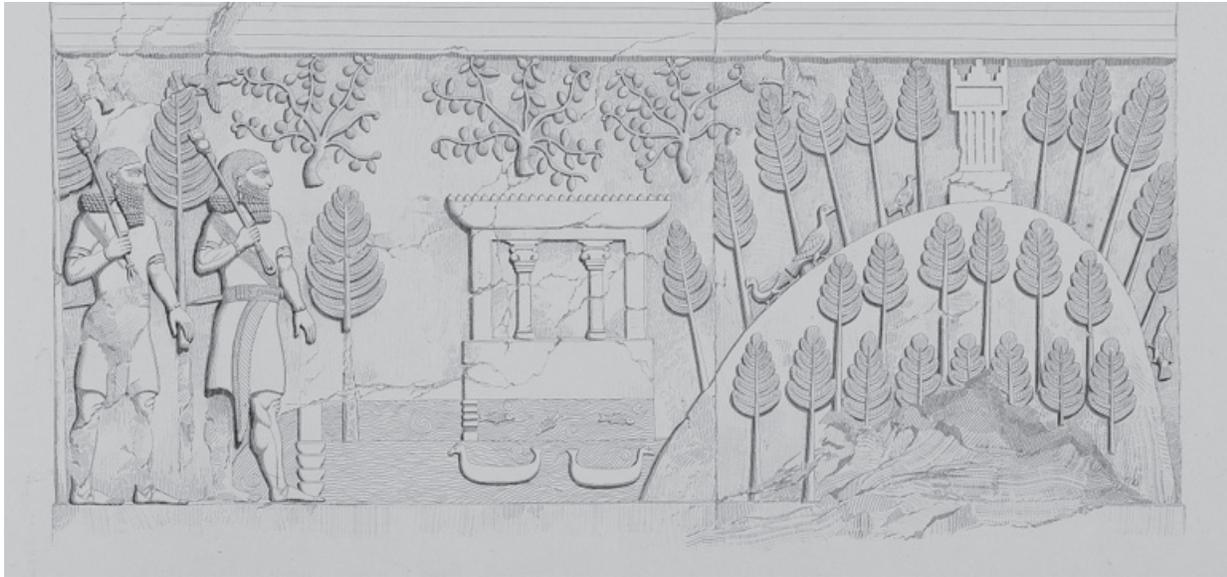


Fig. 9. Garden of Sargon II at his new capital Dur-Sharrukin. (Botta and Flandin 1894; courtesy of Imprimerie nationale)

The threshold leading to the throne room of the northwest palace of Ashurnasirpal, for example, is situated nearly 17 m above the Tigris riverbed, which the palace overlooked.¹³¹ Nevertheless, it should be observed that if the reference to a park “like Mount Amanus” indicates construction of an artificial hill, then Sargon reintroduced a problem that his relocation of the capital to virgin soil might have avoided.

The inspiration and motives behind Sargon’s innovations is the matter of some dispute. Oppenheim sees the adoption of a foreign term for Sargon’s garden as evidence that the garden type itself was imported directly from the west. Wiseman considers this both unnecessary and unlikely. It is certainly true, as Wiseman notes, that Sargon had the opportunity to observe royal gardens first hand on his campaigns throughout the Near East: Sargon mentions, for example, that the gardens of the

Uartian capital Ulhu to the north were the “adornments of that city.”¹³² Indeed, any Assyrian king who engaged in extensive military campaigns would have seen a variety of Mesopotamian and other gardens from which he could have drawn inspiration.¹³³

Nevertheless, the western inspiration for Sargon’s garden seems indisputable. Stronach affirms the “western” and specifically Syrian character of the garden, but observes that no Syrian ruler would have felt the need to reproduce such a landscape; thus a direct borrowing from an established garden type is implausible. Stronach’s explanation is that these gardens were designed to make a political statement: “a park with this specific ‘Syrian’ character was not meant to be only a choice amenity: it was assuredly also intended to underscore—in striking visual terms—the now firm extension of Assyrian power to the west of the homeland.”¹³⁴ A pleasure garden could serve not only for the king’s per-

¹³¹ Mallowan 1966, 79.

¹³² Luckenbill 1927, 87 § 161; see also 90–2 §§ 164–6; Wiseman 1983, 137; Stronach 1989, 477.

¹³³ Sargon’s predecessor, Shalmaneser IV, for example, remarks of the Uartian city, Turupsa: “The trees [which were] the attraction of his royal city, I burned” (Grayson 1996, 87; note that he also boasts of having cut down the gardens of Ahunu, ruler of Bit-Adini, and of Hazael, king of Damascus [Grayson 1996, 21, 29, 48–9, 54, 77–8, 118]). Reliefs from rooms 3 and 60 of the palace of Sennacherib show the Assyrian army cutting down date palms as part of the sack of a city (Russell 1991, 65, 69–72, 75–6, 153–4). A relief dating to ca. 660–650 from the palace of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh depicts

the Elamite city of Madaktu with a series of regularly ordered palm and fig trees that Kawami (1992, 86–7) identifies as a suburban garden. In the same relief series Kawami identifies a building located in a terraced grove of palms and other trees as the Ziggurat of Susa plundered by Ashurbanipal around 646 B.C.E. The importance of sacred groves in Elamite religion may explain Ashurbanipal’s boast of having desecrated “the secret groves into which no stranger (ever) penetrates” (Luckenbill 1927, 310 § 809; see Harper 1992, 139, 270–1 with illustration 189; Kawami 1992, Abb. 30; Margueron 1992, Abb. 16 (= Louvre Museum # AO19939)).

¹³⁴ Stronach 1989, 478; see Glassner 1991, 14.

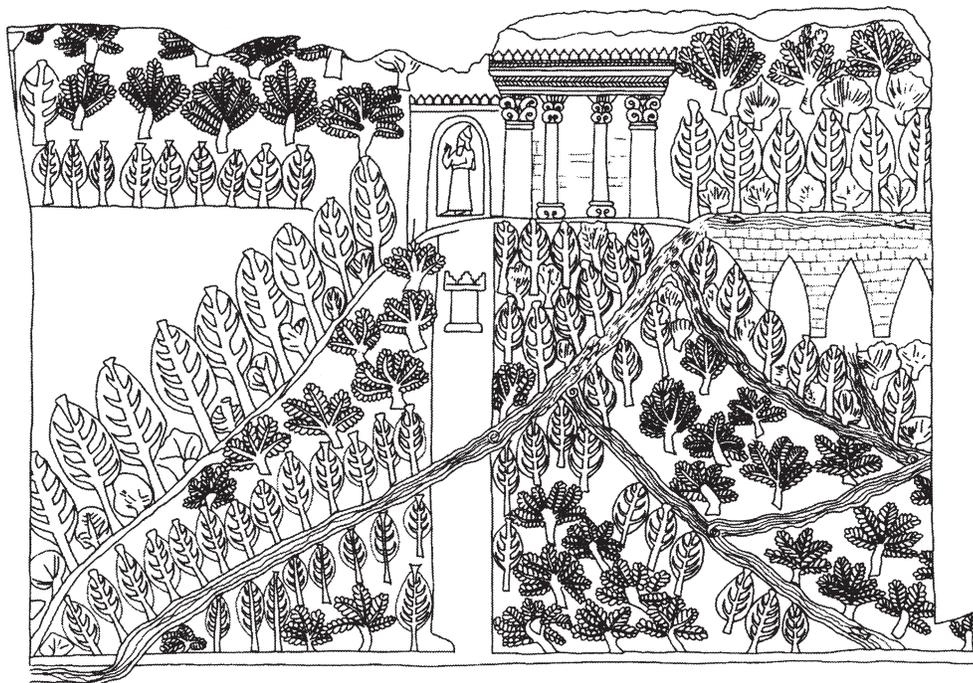


Fig. 10. Line drawing of relief depicting Sennacherib's garden. (From Dalley 1994; reproduced with permission of the author)

sonal enjoyment, but also as an instrument of imperial propaganda.¹³⁵ Public banqueting ceremonies were held there. Gardens that had once served as a living record of the number and extent of Ashurnasirpal's military conquests—a sort of botanical equivalent of his annals—now takes on additional prominence as a direct assertion of imperial rule. It thus becomes no less integral to the overall conception of the palace than the animals located at the palace doors, the portico itself, modeled after a Syrian *bît-hilâni*, and the reliefs and inscriptions lining its walls.

Sargon's precedent was soon followed. His son and successor, Sennacherib, boasts of planting luxurious gardens at Nineveh and at Assur with a wide variety of aromatic and fruit trees, including the olive (fig. 10).¹³⁶ As we have seen, Sennacherib also describes his palace garden as "a great park like unto Mt. Amanus."¹³⁷ A relief from the palace of

Ashurbanipal (BM 124939; see also 124920) may depict this very garden: a porticoed pavilion is shown atop a hill crisscrossed by irregular earth lined water courses and planted with alternating trees and vines.¹³⁸ These water courses are fed by an arched structure resembling an aqueduct and surmounted by rows of trees in an arrangement that has been seen as a possible precursor to the Hanging Gardens. In fact, Dalley has recently argued that these *are* the Hanging Gardens, which were at a much later date falsely attributed to Nebuchadnezzar (figs. 10–11).¹³⁹ In another relief (BM 124920), Ashurbanipal is seen dining on a couch in an orchard pavilion as his wife sits facing him. The head of the Elamite king Teumman, which hangs from a ring attached to a nearby tree, suggests that he just returned home from a campaign: the garden is depicted as an ideal place to relax and enjoy an intimate dinner afterward.

¹³⁵ Oppenheim 1965, 331: "with the Sargonids, the royal interest in gardens definitely shifts from utilitarian to display purposes."

¹³⁶ In addition to the palace description, *supra*, see Wiseman 1983, 138; Margueron 1992, 71.

¹³⁷ See Sennacherib's description of his palace, quoted *supra*; Esarhaddon (Borger 62) repeats the boast.

¹³⁸ Illustrations in Parrot 1961, 51–2; Moortgat 1969, pl. 287;

Barnett 1976, pl. XXXIIIa (see pls. XVI–XIX); Wiseman 1985, pl. 1a; Stronach 1989, pl. 1a; Margueron 1992, Abb. 14–15; Curtis and Reade 1995, 122. Discussion in Oppenheim 1965, 332; see also Wiseman 1983, 137; 1985, 56. On Sennacherib's garden as a precursor of the Hanging Gardens, see Stronach 1989, 478–9; rejected by Margueron 1992, 77.

¹³⁹ Dalley 1993, 1994, 2002.

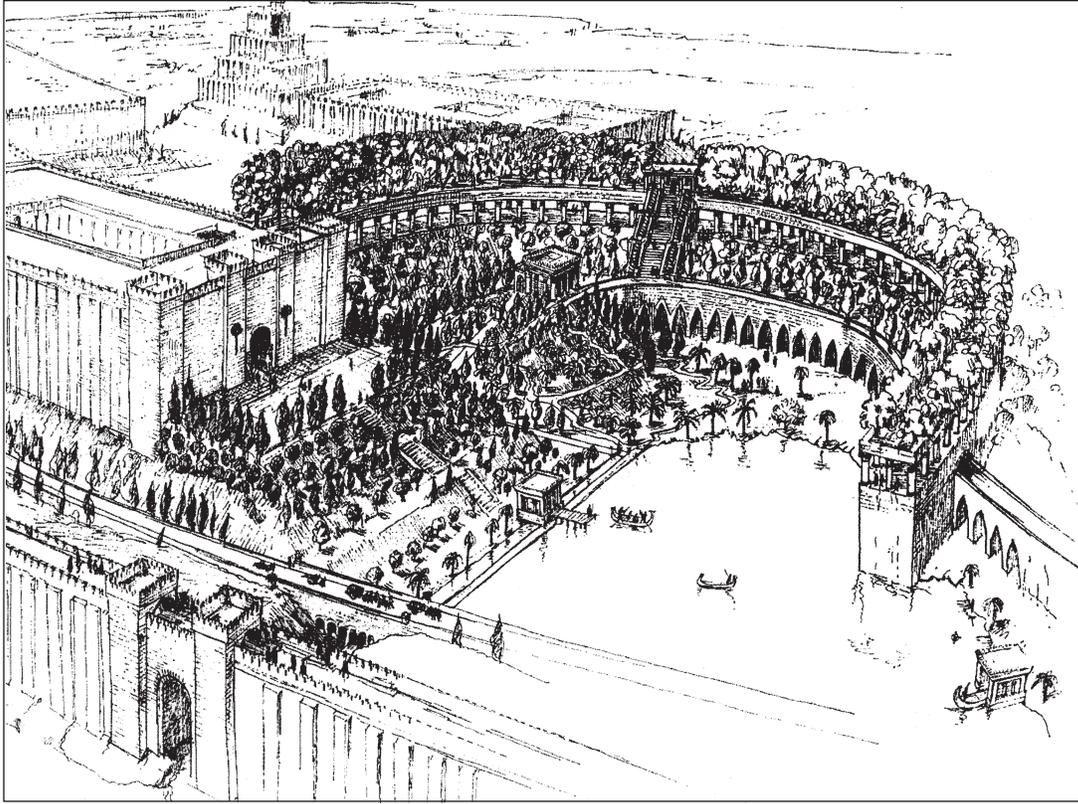


Fig. 11. Reconstruction of the Hanging Gardens. (From Dalley 2002; reproduced with permission of the author)

CONNECTING THE DOTS

The foregoing historical survey allows us to pose some concrete questions, while the archaeological survey permits us to suggest some answers. It should be conceded in advance that we will never know exactly how knowledge of Mesopotamian literature and palatial architecture could have reached the Greek world and left their imprint on Homer. I am therefore only interested in offering some plausible scenarios for how this might have happened.

The historical time frame in which knowledge of the Assyrian palaces would have most plausibly found its way into epic tradition begins with the arrival of Tiglath-Pileser III in the Levant (738), and ends approximately one century later with the death of Ashurbanipal (631). It seems legitimate to assume that the memory of the palaces and their gardens could have endured for some time afterward, since they presumably would have been famous as the finest contemporary palaces of the Near East. In fact, the palaces would have been a more inviting target of epic appropriation

after the fall of Assyria (612), as they now belonged to the past and could help create a temporal as well as “exotic” distancing effect. In any event, application of the three generation rule to their memory brings us well into the sixth century and Peisistratid Athens.

The geographic framework is similarly circumscribed: by the time that Tiglath-Pileser III arrives in the Levant, the Euboians were an established presence in the region. Euboians then living at the emporion of Al Mina would be in a position to learn about the Assyrian palaces from the local governor and his administration, and from Assyrian soldiers and merchants. Euboea’s neighbor, Athens, was also active in the Levant, and may have also played an important role in the transmission of eastern culture to Greece. It may be assumed that the Phoenicians and Greeks possessed some independent knowledge of the imperial city, brought back by merchants who traveled along the same caravan route as the Assyrians, and by officials offering tribute or invited to the consecration of the palaces.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Interest in the Levant is clearly reflected in the *Odyssey*, but attitudes toward trade are somewhat enigmatic, and the historical realities that stand behind them are difficult to pinpoint: Odysseus, in his disguise as a beggar, indicates that he lived for a time in Phoenicia as the guest of a disreputable

Phoenician merchant; and Euryalos insults Odysseus on Skherie by claiming he is a merchant captain “snatching after profits” (*Od.* 8.164), an occupation that implicitly excludes him from elite athletic competition (*Od.* 14.288ff.); but Athene, disguised as a Taphian prince, casually mentions that she is sail-

Visitors to Cyprus could have met with merchants in regular contact with the Levant, and in some cases in direct contact with the Assyrian court. Phoenician commercial activities strengthened these same lines of communication, and added important new ones, above all on Crete, though other islands of the Aegean, such as Aegina, could have also played a role.

What, then, could the merchants, mercenaries, and pirates who sailed along these routes have learned about the Assyrian palaces? Access to the palace interior and the gardens was highly restricted, and only the Assyrian governor and invited dignitaries can be assumed to have seen them. It is thus important to observe that the *Odyssey* focalizes the description of Alkinoos's palace through the eyes of someone standing before its entrance. No less noteworthy is that once the narrative takes us inside it reverts to a "generic" Homeric palace with a few exotic touches such as the golden youths. Such exotica, moreover, can be said to reflect the "exaggerated expectations" about the interior spaces that the Assyrian rulers hoped to raise through the opulence of the palace entrance.

The most distinctive features of Alkinoos's palace thus belong to the palace exterior and have clear parallels in Assyrian palatial architecture: the entranceway, with its golden doors and door handle, silver columns, and brazen threshold, and the magical guardian animals of gold and silver that stand to either side of it; and the walled and irrigated garden directly adjacent. The interior features, on the other hand, are less detailed or distinctive, and more fanciful: golden statues of youths holding torches, and bronze walls with a horizontal blue band near the ceiling. The account thus reflects the knowledge and suppositions that would have been common among merchants who traveled along the caravan routes between Assyria and the Levant. The detail lavished on the garden of Alkinoos could suggest a somewhat higher level of familiarity. That the Assyrian gardens were walled and fed by irrigation canals would, however, have been obvious to the casual observer; that they were botanical preserves may have been well known if they were in fact meant for display purposes. Con-

ing to "men of foreign speech" in Temese in order to trade iron for bronze, a place probably to be identified as Tamassos in Cyprus (see S. West 1988, ad *Od.* 1.184). These comments can be reconciled by assuming an elite rhetoric of hostility toward traders—thus acknowledging them as a nonelite element of society, and perhaps as a threat to the elite ideal that wealth follows rank—and also by assuming that the elites themselves distinguished between traders and trade, thereby allowing for occasional necessary trade to dispose of surpluses and obtain needed supplies. In any case, the frequency of trade

between the Levant and the Greek world should not be exaggerated, and language barriers would have certainly been a factor under the scenario I have outlined. For a detailed review of the Homeric material, which reaches different conclusions, see Tandy 1997.

Monumental Statues

A detailed consideration of some of the individual elements of the Homeric material, beginning with the statues in Alkinoos's palace, yields further insight. The dogs guarding the palace and the torchbearing youths are the only statues mentioned in Homer except for the seated statue of Athene in her temple at Troy: the goddess may be Greek, and the passage would seem to reflect her cult at Athens, but Troy itself is ostensibly a Near Eastern city. From this one may infer that the Homeric audience was familiar with statues, and associated them with Near Eastern monumental architecture, but would have found any mention of Greek statuary anachronistic.

Heraldic flanking is a popular motif in Greek art from the Bronze Age into the Archaic period. Alkinoos's gold and silver guard dogs thus have clear antecedents in Greece, though there is no evidence for their use at the entrances to palaces, or to important dwellings of any kind, in the Homeric period or before. Moreover, the description of the dogs as animate gives them magical properties as talismans that are alien to monumental Greek statuary. Our closest Bronze Age parallels are probably the griffins located in the throne rooms at Pylos (although one has been restored) and at Knossos, and the Lion Gate at Mycenae.

Faraone is thus surely right to seek the antecedents for Alkinoos's dogs in the statues and figurines used to protect the doorways of Near Eastern palaces, and in particular those of the Neo-Assyrian kings.¹⁴¹ Faraone shows that the *Odyssean* account is one of five examples of a Greek mythological tradition in which Hephaistos makes and animates guardian animals, and that the extra-Homeric traditions seem to involve locations with easy and regular access to Anatolia and northern Syria. Among the

between the Levant and the Greek world should not be exaggerated, and language barriers would have certainly been a factor under the scenario I have outlined. For a detailed review of the Homeric material, which reaches different conclusions, see Tandy 1997.

¹⁴¹ Faraone (1987) dates the epics to the eighth century—leaving only Ashurnasirpal's palace as a likely influence—though his other Greek evidence dates to the sixth century or later.

Greek accounts that Faraone cites, however, only Homer describes pairs of animals, or the animals as guarding a palace. During the ninth through seventh centuries, the most famous Near Eastern examples of paired animal statues in metal stationed at palace doorways as talismans would have been those erected by Ashurnasirpal and his successors.

The choice of monumental dog effigies to guard the palace of Alkinoos is a Greek touch. Virtually all of the early Near Eastern examples of dogs used as guardian animals are figurines.¹⁴² Bronze dog figurines were deposited in a well belonging to the palace of Ashurnasirpal II; and clay dog figurines were deposited in groups of five in niches on either side of the palace door of Ashurbanipal.¹⁴³ About a century later, another group of five was deposited beneath the floor of a palace located in the city of Ur.¹⁴⁴ Some evidence exists for life-size dog statues in Egypt in the eighth and seventh centuries. Kawami, however, thinks it possible that the Achaemenid rulers of Egypt were essentially responsible for introducing the motif into Egyptian art.¹⁴⁵ At any event, monumental dog statues do not seem to have become popular there until the Hellenistic period.¹⁴⁶ A pair of seated dogs, dated on stylistic grounds to the late sixth or early fifth century, apparently guarded the vestibule of the Apadana erected by Darius at Persepolis. These statues are unique in Iranian art, however, and both the sculptor and his sculptural language are Greek.¹⁴⁷ A roughly contemporary pair of dog statues has been found on the Athenian Acropolis (late sixth century) and a single dog originally belonging to a pair was found in the Kerameikos.¹⁴⁸

Archaeological parallels for Alkinoos's dogs are thus rare, late, and generally unconvincing. At the same time, it is not hard to supply a motive for the innovation, assuming it is that: dogs would have been the obvious choice of anyone who wished to translate the protective functions of the Assyrian statues into the Greek cultural vocabulary, or the developed imagery of the epics. Moreover, as a display of conspicuous consumption, gold and silver dogs surpass even their Assyrian counterparts. Thus,

¹⁴² Curtis and Read 1995, 116–7 with further bibliography; Kawami 1986, 261; Faraone 1987, esp. 266–9; Postgate 1994. For dogs on shields and keys to a temple, see Luckenbill 1927, 96 § 173. Faraone (1987, 266–7) uses a single inscription from the reign of Sennacherib (Luckenbill 1927, 190 § 454) to generalize dogs in the vocabulary of Assyrian apotropaic art, but Kawami (1986, 261 n. 18) observes that the text is uncertain. If dog(s) are even mentioned they are not freestanding.

¹⁴³ Green 1983; Faraone 1987, 270–1; Curtis and Reade 1995, 116.

¹⁴⁴ Curtis and Reade 1995, 116.

¹⁴⁵ Kawami 1986, 262.

¹⁴⁶ Fisher 1980; Kawami 1986, 262–3; for a later example,

by changing the identity of the animals, the *Odyssey* has preserved both of the primary functions of the statues stationed in the doorways of the Assyrian palaces: protection and display.

Equally unparalleled in a Greek context are the golden youths illuminating the megaron with torches. Freestanding male statues of this scale are essentially unattested on mainland Greece before the second half of the seventh century, and they were not used as household decorations before the Hellenistic period. Torchbearing statues are to my knowledge unattested in the Near East during this time, although household furniture is sometimes modeled on the human form, in Assyria and elsewhere (figs. 12–13).¹⁴⁹ Moreover, Tiglath-Pileser III boasts of having set up a golden statue of himself in the palace at Gaza, an Assyrian emporion.¹⁵⁰ Perhaps it is not entirely far-fetched to imagine reports of this statue combining with “exaggerated expectations” about the riches inside the Assyrian palaces to produce the golden youths of Alkinoos. In any event, such statues would have clearly been perceived as exotic to an Archaic Greek audience, including in the context of the “Homeric” world.

The Palace Garden

In a seminal article on Assyrian palace gardens, Oppenheim writes: “For a garden comparable in purpose and perhaps also in time with the [pre-Sargonid] *kiru*-gardens of the Assyrian kings before the west exercised its influence, see the description in the *Odyssey* (VII 112ff) of the garden of Alcinoos.”¹⁵¹ His intuition is sound, but the inference that historical Greek rulers incorporated walled and irrigated gardens into their “palaces” has no archaeological support whatever. In fact, gardens of any kind or size are unattested in pre-Classical Greek architecture as part of a domestic building complex.¹⁵² Indeed, the rise of the polis, and with it settlement nucleation and a clear division between *astu* and *chora*, meant that gardens were located outside the settlement proper.¹⁵³ Carroll-Spillecke thus seeks to identify Alkinoos's entire palace com-

see Curtis and Reade 1995, 116.

¹⁴⁷ Kawami 1986, 260–2.

¹⁴⁸ B. Ridgway 1977, 142; Kawami 1986, 262.

¹⁴⁹ On the diffusion of furniture types and the messages that imported types could convey, see Paspalas 2000.

¹⁵⁰ Tadmor 1994, 177–9 with n. ad 16', 189, 224. Ashurnasirpal II boasts of having erected a similar statue of himself in the Ninurta temple at Calah (Grayson 1976, 174–5 § 679).

¹⁵¹ Oppenheim 1965, 331 n. 6.

¹⁵² Earliest reference to a private garden: Thyc. 2.62. Further ancient references gathered in Carroll-Spillecke 1989, Tabelle A.

¹⁵³ Carroll-Spillecke 1992, 156.



Fig. 12. Relief from palace of Sargon at Khorsabad: eunuchs carrying a throne. (From Botta and Flandin 1849, pl. 18; courtesy of Imprimerie nationale)

plex as a farm, but there is no archaeological parallel for this theory either, and the identification is rendered implausible both by the Near Eastern elements of the palace architecture, and by the layout of the garden itself. There is no archaeological parallel for a walled farm from the Archaic Greek world, whether or not it is irrigated and whether or not it is attached to its owner's house.¹⁵⁴ Its location within the central township (*astu*), which is also situated on a peninsula, is proof, if proof were needed, that the palace complex is an intrusive element that has no part in the characterization of Skherie as a colonial settlement. Stanford is thus at least partially correct to argue that the garden "is hardly paralleled in classical Greek literature. Oriental or Minoan influence is likely."¹⁵⁵ Again, the lack of parallel is not just literary, but also archaeological.

¹⁵⁴ Caroll-Spillecke 1992, 154.

¹⁵⁵ Stanford 1959, ad *Od.* 7.122ff.

¹⁵⁶ Schäfer 1992a; 1992b, 112–26; M. Shaw 1993, 666–8.

¹⁵⁷ M. Shaw 1993, 680–5.

¹⁵⁸ Graham 1987, 87–91; see also 95, 123, 241.

¹⁵⁹ No location is explicitly mentioned for the temenos belonging to the Pylian wanax on tablet Er 312 (or the temenos of the lawagetas listed on the same tablet), but it was probably located in *sa-ra-pe-da* based on connections the tablet shares with Un 718 and Er 880. *Sa-ra-pe-da* is known to be the loca-

tion of the orchard of e-ke-ra2-wo, whom Palaima (1995) has recently argued should be identified with the Pylian *wanax*. Elsewhere (2002), Palaima notes that Er 312, Er 880, and Un 718 are all written by hand 24, and argues that the scribe is a specialist in the area called *sa-ra-pe-da*. The land holdings of e-ke-ra2-wo are of particular interest as they seem to include plots of 1000+ fig trees and 1100+ vines. We do not know where *sa-ra-pe-da* is located, but given the amount of land in agricultural use it cannot have been contiguous with the palace.



Fig. 13. Relief from palace of Sargon at Khorsabad: eunuchs carrying a table. (From Botta and Flandin 1849, pl. 19; courtesy of Imprimerie nationale)

tion of the orchard of e-ke-ra2-wo, whom Palaima (1995) has recently argued should be identified with the Pylian *wanax*. Elsewhere (2002), Palaima notes that Er 312, Er 880, and Un 718 are all written by hand 24, and argues that the scribe is a specialist in the area called *sa-ra-pe-da*. The land holdings of e-ke-ra2-wo are of particular interest as they seem to include plots of 1000+ fig trees and 1100+ vines. We do not know where *sa-ra-pe-da* is located, but given the amount of land in agricultural use it cannot have been contiguous with the palace.

The garden of Alkinoos is described as a seasonless paradise, with pears, pomegranates, apples, figs, olives, and grapes at all stages of maturity so as to yield a continuous harvest of fruit. Its closest analogy in Homer is the climate on Mount Olympus and Elysium, the earthly paradise to which the fortunate few are transported at the end of their lives. Possibly its only archaeological parallel from the Greek world before the Hellenistic period is again the fresco series at Pylos, which can be understood as portraying the megaron itself as a kind of earthly paradise designed to assimilate the enthroned wanax into the land of the blessed (thereby underscoring his relationship with divinity).¹⁶⁰ Here it is important to note the likelihood of Near Eastern influence on such beliefs. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh* the ageless ruler Utnapishtim resides in an earthly paradise on the island of Dilmun; the epic seems to have exerted a formative influence on the *Phaenikis*. A parallel can also be drawn to the Biblical Garden of Eden, in which every tree is said to grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food (Gen. 2:9). Yahweh strolls in Eden like Ashurnasirpal in his “pleasure garden,” and when he drives out Adam and Eve he stations sphinx-like cherubim to guard its eastern entrance.¹⁶¹

In contrast to Bronze Age Greece, walled monumental gardens are an essential and distinguishing characteristic of elite residences throughout the Near East from the Bronze Age to the present. Gardens thus would have naturally been included in any generalized image that the Greeks had of the cities and palaces of Near Eastern monarchs. Nevertheless, there are significant and distinctive differences both between cultures and over time in the size, organization, and uses to which these gardens were put. I suggest that the best typological fit for the garden of Alkinoos are the royal gardens of Mesopotamia in the first millennium B.C.E., the most famous examples of which were Assyrian (assuming that “Hanging Gardens” existed in Babylon, they

seem to have been based on Sargonid models and are in this sense at least “Assyrian” as well).

We do not know whether Phoenician kings had palace gardens, though owing to site limitations these are apt to have been fairly modest affairs, “pleasure gardens” in the restricted sense of the term. The garden located within an open courtyard in the palace of Ugarit may be representative: again, it has little in common with the garden of Alkinoos.¹⁶²

The most obvious alternative source of inspiration for palatial gardens is of course Egypt, but here too the differences are striking.¹⁶³ It is true that Egyptian gardens are walled and irrigated, as in any hot and arid land. In Egypt, however, the wall typically encloses both house and garden, so that the house is situated within the garden environment, though gardens are also sometimes located within the forecourt or another open courtyard within the building complex. As important, the central defining feature of the Egyptian garden is a rectangular or T shaped pond(s) that is the source of irrigation. Already in the New Kingdom one also observes an important shift in garden design to what has been termed “luxury gardens”: the difference with Alkinoos’s garden becomes greater still. Schäfer thus rightly denies any typological affinity between the garden of Alkinoos and the palatial gardens of Egypt or of Minoan Crete:

Es ist jedoch von entscheidender Wichtigkeit, daß die Bewunderung des Odysseus einer Schönheit gilt, die untrennbar mit der Anerkennung sachgerechter Bearbeitung und landwirtschaftlichen Reichtums verknüpft ist. Gleich weit entfernt scheint diese Form des Gartens vom ägyptischen Tempel- und Palastgarten wie von den sakralen Landschaften und den sakralen Gärten der minoischen Kunst. Wohl kaum ist der Garten des Alkinoos eine Vorstufe des Gartens der Aphrodite, in dem die Rosen erblühen, wie er fast 200 Jahre nach Homer von Sappho beschrieben wird.¹⁶⁴

The garden of Alkinoos and of Ashurnasirpal II have the following points in common, which serve

¹⁶⁰ Cook 1992.

¹⁶¹ Margueron 1992, 45–7.

¹⁶² The palace complex has a footprint of approximately 10,000 m², 7,000 of which were taken up by the palace itself. It was constructed in numerous phases from the 15th to the 13th centuries. The Late Bronze Age palace was walled, as was the city, although it is unclear whether the city was still protected by fortifications in its final years (Yon 1997, 41). The garden, in the center of court 3, measures approximately 12–15 × 21 m, is enclosed by a stone wall, and contains a pavilion (Yon 1997, 51–3; Margueron 1992, 72–4). Irrigation would have been provided by the system of canals that supplied the domestic needs of the palace (Yon 1997, 59). House B, 120 m² in size, also appears to have had a garden (Yon 1997, 88–92). The house of Agipshari may have had an enclosed garden, but like

others it would have been small (Yon 1997, 110).

More generally, Oppenheim (1965, 332) remarks that “the peristyle garden . . . is characteristic of the civilizations on the shores of the Mediterranean wherever an atrium type house is found.” Glassner (1991, 14) draws a pointed contrast with the Assyrian gardens: “à l’opposé des jardins ouest-sémitiques où la nature était domestiquée et contrainte à l’extrême, chaque arbre étant émondé et la moindre haie ou plante taillée . . . les jardins royaux assyriens et babyloniens se voulaient, au contraire, des imitations de la nature, l’homme laissant les arbres et les fleurs coïte à leur guise.”

¹⁶³ For the garden types, see Badaway 1968, esp. 488–99; Gallery 1978; Hugonot 1989; 1992; Wilkinson 1998.

¹⁶⁴ Schäfer 1992b, 136.

to distinguish them from those of Egypt. They are not integrated into the palace as courtyard gardens, nor is the house integrated into them through its enclosure within the garden's own perimeter wall, but rather attached to the palace or located nearby. They are also irrigated, Ashurnasirpal's by a canal, Alkinoos's by a spring, which also supplied water to the city. Most important is their function: although they are also a source of pleasure, the gardens of Alkinoos and of Ashurnasirpal are working farms whose owners collected a number of exotic plant specimens. Ashurnasirpal's catalogue of plants in his *Annals* far outstrips, but is functionally comparable to, the Homeric catalogue in the *Odyssey*. In fact, each of the plants named in the *Odyssey* recurs in Ashurnasirpal's own list; the delights of his well irrigated garden, which must have seemed almost miraculous in the harsh climate of Calah, can be directly compared to the Odyssean description of Alkinoos's garden as a seasonless paradise.

As we have already seen, the *Annals* of Sargon provide our first clear evidence for locating the royal garden contiguous with the palace. In this respect, the gardens of the Sargonids may resemble the garden of Alkinoos more closely than those of Ashurnasirpal and his predecessors. In other respects, our picture of Assyrian royal gardens changes with Sargon in ways that may distance them from what we find in Homer. Most important, the Assyrian reliefs seem to depict the Sargonid gardens as reproducing an idealized natural environment with hill, paths, and streams.¹⁶⁵ One must take into account pictorial convention, which may reproduce ideology more faithfully than appearance: whether or not we imagine these, or some of these, gardens as terraced, the fairly regular arrangement of the trees and the alternating vines shown on the reliefs do not suggest a wholly "natural" environment. Sargon and his successors continued the venerable tradition of collecting trees and other plants from throughout the empire and even beyond. Although under the Sargonid rulers they were increasingly used for display purposes, and as pleasure gardens for the king's personal entertainment, Assyrian gardens continued to have utilitarian functions throughout their history. It thus seems entirely plausible that news of the magnificent and exotic palatial gardens designed to advertise the wealth and power of the Sargonid rulers of Assyria reached the Greek world by the end of the eighth century and throughout the seventh. Yet, as Oppenheim recognized, the closest match for Alkinoos's garden in the Near East may be the earlier garden of Ashurnasirpal II.

CONCLUSION

In sum, the conditions necessary for the diffusion of knowledge from Mesopotamia to the Greek-speaking world obtained throughout the century-long period from the arrival of Tiglath-Pileser III in the Levant to the death of Ashurbanipal. A century and a half before Tiglath-Pileser arrived, Ashurnasirpal II had built his palace and royal gardens at Calah. Parts of the palace remained in use throughout this period, and both it and the garden doubtless shared in the legendary status of their builder. Tiglath-Pileser began work on a new palace, but never completed it; Sargon, Sennacherib, and Ashurbanipal built other palaces, using resources and personnel imported from Syria and the Levant. Before the seventh century, the most direct route by which knowledge of these palaces could have reached mainland Greece was from Cyprus and the Levant to Euboea and Athens. Crete was also important from an early date, and the Cycladic islands must have also played a role in the early diffusion of eastern knowledge.

It bears emphasizing again that the palace of Alkinoos can be understood as reflecting contemporary Greek stereotypes of Near Eastern palatial architecture. Nevertheless, the *Odyssey* describes an architectural ensemble that corresponds most closely to Assyrian palaces built from the ninth through seventh centuries: this timeline is crucial because the *Odyssey* almost certainly drew on contemporary palaces in its description, and knowledge of the Assyrian palaces would have been available at any time currently maintained for the origins of the manuscript traditions of Homeric epic. The architectural ensemble includes a monumental entrance doorway, clad in white and yellow metals, and guarded by talismanic animal statues, which from the reign of Sargon were also in metal. A second distinctive feature of the ensemble is the contiguous, walled and irrigated garden containing exotic plant specimens. Parallels for other features, such as the blue banding on the walls, and the golden statues of youths, are found in Assyrian architecture, but these embellishments are best understood as part of a general image of Near Eastern opulence.

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¹⁶⁵ Oppenheim 1965, 332.

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