A Foucaultian View on the Modes of Governance in the Neo-Assyrian Empire: The Good Shepherd

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Introduction

The religious and imperial ideas of the nineteenth century, the racial views of the first half of the twentieth, the democratic and globalist perspectives of the period that followed World War II, all influenced or distorted scholarly perceptions of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.[1] Greek historians, such as Ctesias, Herodotus, Xenophon and Pseudo-Aristotle, as well as the Bible already offered and imposed an essentially distorted vision of Assyria, on which westerners built the main cliché of the Oriental court governed by despotic kings.[2] It is an example the influence exerted on artists and poets, like Lord Byron, who draws on the Bible his 1815 poem "The Destruction of Sennacherib" whose *incipit* presents a negative and dark image of Assyria: "The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold."[3] The poetic license to freely project onto the Assyrians one's own desires can be seen in writers that used Assyria as model of brutality to describe contemporary events. Suffice it to mention the short story by Lev Tolstòi, "Assirijskij car' Asarchadon" (1903; "Esarhaddon, King of Assyria"), written to defend and support the Jews victims of the Kishinev pogrom: "The Assyrian King, Esarhaddon, had conquered the kingdom of King Lailie, had destroyed and burnt the towns, taken all the inhabitants captive to his own country, slaughtered the warriors, beheaded some chieftains and impaled or flayed others, and had confined King Lailie himself in a cage."[4] A prominent independence and autonomy of Assyria from classical sources and the Bible begun with the German Assyriologist Friedrich Delitzsch (1902) whose racist approach to history, however, largely conditioned his historical perception and continued to find resonances in Germany: he downplayed the Semitic character of the Assyrians claiming that they received Indo-European influences.[5] Racist views were dismissed after World War II, but the bellicosity of the Assyrians was highlighted by later scholars. For instance, in his study of Mesopotamian religion, Jacobsen banished the religions of the first millennium stating

1 For a review of past western works and scholarship, see Bohrer 1998; 2003; Holloway 2002: 1–12, 427–444; Frahm 2003a, 2003b; 2006; Rollinger 2017.
2 Lanfranchi 2010; 2011.
3 Byron 1903: 222.
4 English translation of Tolstòj 1991: 784; see also De Giorgi 2020.
5 Arnold/Weisberg 2002; Frahm 2006: 83–85.

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that this period was characterized by decline and brutalization.[6] Later scholars maintained substantially this view up to the '80's. Most recently, instead, trends of the contemporary world, such as the globalized economy, lead scholars to investigate other aspects of Assyrian society, such as culture and religion,[7] and contributions in this respect are revising terms and ideas that mostly have a Eurocentric or Western-centric origin to give full value to the originality of the Assyrian Empire.[8]

A certain degree of scepticism on some popular characterizations might be therefore warranted. In particular, the distorted views in the West that Assyria was a brutal empire of unrelenting violence, governed by autocratic and despotic kings, is a rather widespread commonplace to the detriment of other modes of governance, often neglected in academic studies.[9] The image or, as commonly categorized, a metaphor of the good shepherd, in this respect, is scarcely taken into account as a concept for an examination of Assyrian governance, especially because paternalistic ideas are applied with difficulty to the Neo-Assyrian king.[10] However, Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs as well as textual evidence often present the king in some non-warlike contexts that highlight his pastoral roles. This may include the iconography of the king holding the long staff or the lotus flower during his reception of tributes, or banqueting scenes.[11] In this connection, Michel Foucault asserts that the sovereign power, which is based on coercion and repression, contrasts with pastoral power, which instead relies on a reciprocal – and non-hierarchical – power structure. The pastoral power builds upon the willingness of those who are guided to

6 Jacobsen 1976.

7 Pongratz-Leisten 2015; Portuese 2020a.

8 Bernbeck 2010; Siddal 2013: 149; Collins 2014: 621; Bagg 2016; Nadali 2017: 3–4; 2019. In this respect, the DFG Kolleg-Forschungsgruppe 2615 "Rethinking–Governance in the Ancient Near East" carried out at the Freie Universität Berlin aims at "rethinking" a number of modern terms, such as despotism, theocracy and bureaucracy, that have been overused in attempts to understand and define the governance and character of the ancient Near Eastern societies to be replaced by more subtle, dynamic and sensitive concepts. This paper presents some of the results of the project ("Despotic Kings or Dystopian Views? Representations of the Good Shepherd and Modes of Governance in the Reigns of Assurnasirpal II, Sargon II and Assurbanipal") currently carried out within the German research group.

9 The so-called "oriental despotism" is an expression used by Karl August Wittfogel (1962) to understand and describe a despotic system of government in which the ruler claims total power and a strong state bureaucracy completely rules the country. A society where there is no civil freedom, with damaging effects on the dignity of the individual. See also Selz 2001: 8.

10 For the image of the good shepherd in Mesopotamia, see Cancik-Kirschbaum 1995; Selz 1998; 2001; Sallaberger 2002; Karlsson 2016: 181–189; Novák 2017. It is clear that the image of the good shepherd changes through time and, particularly in the Neo-Assyrian period, it becomes even more complex to identify.

11 Portuese 2014; 2017; 2018.

allow themselves to be guided. This willingness is a consequence of the trust placed in the good shepherd to look after the wellbeing and the interest of the people, and to care for the individual and society, in order to save them or to exercise a redemptive role in their lives.[12] Closely connected with the image of the good shepherd is another non-warlike activity in which the Assyrian king is often involved, namely the royal hunt. This appears to be a counter-image to the pastoral power, since the king's status as dominant over animals may allude to authoritarian ambitions on the part of the governing ruler. Nevertheless, confronting and hunting wild animals in Assyria also symbolizes the king's manly strength and courage against wild forces, as well as his ability to defend and liberate humans – as a good shepherd – from the wild animals that threaten his herd, in a ritual battle between Order and Chaos.[13] As a consequence, the image of the king as hunter may complement that of the shepherd, so that both become the two sides of the same coin.[14] In short, they may represent an alternative mode of governance which does not imply violence and repression.

This paper delves into this alternative mode of governance and proposes an investigation of a sample of reliefs, with support from textual evidence, which portrays the Assyrian king in his pastoral roles. The enquiry focuses on the iconographic repertoires of Assurnasirpal II (883–859 BC), Sargon II (721–705 BC) and Assurbanipal (668–631 BC) which originate from their royal palaces. The choice of these sources depends on the strong affinities between the reliefs of these kings, which invites one to suspect that Sargon II and Assurbanipal drew inspiration from their predecessor's figurative program. Unlike previous works, which usually offered only a description and occasional interpretation of the king's pastoral roles in these images, this work relies on the notion of intericonicity. This notion refers to the process of an image by reference to another image, sparking a kind of "déjà-vu" in the viewer, or a feeling of familiarity of having already seen that image. In addition to the questions "from where?" and "what?", intericonicity asks "why?" and "how?" the image of the good shepherd was reused or readapted through time.[15]

Focusing on this aspect of the *Herrscherdarstellungen* in Assyria, the paper investigates "how" the Assyrian king presented himself as good shepherd, "where" the image of the good shepherd was used to communicate with his ruled

[12] Foucault 2007: 169.
[13] Weissert 1997; Oded 1992: 113–116; Watanabe 1998; 2000a, 2000b. For a reappraisal of the hunt motif in the Assyrian realm and related bibliography, see Karlsson 2016: 133–140.
[14] In this respect, see Oded 1992: 113–117; Strawn 2005; Karlsson 2016: 133–140; Selz 2001; Wagner-Durand 2020.
[15] Chéroux 2010: 56–89; Heydemann 2015; Laboury 2017; Portuese 2020b: 111–112.

people, as well as "when" pastoral power came to represent an alternative mode of governance to the sovereign power.[16]

Sovereign Power *vs* Pastoral Power

Foucault argues in favour of a number of considerations around power and offers definitions that are directly opposed to more traditional liberal and Marxist theories of power. In his view, power is not a thing owned by the State or a king, but a relation between different individuals and groups which exists only if it is exercised over free subjects. By freedom, Foucault refers the possibility of the individual or group to react against power, or the choice of subjects to refuse or modify the actions of the holder/s of power; otherwise, it is no longer a question of the relationship of power but of its limits. With this in mind, Foucault proceeds further by proposing a series of different historical configurations of power, among which is "sovereign power" and "disciplinary power." The former implies that sovereignty manifests itself as a right to kill when the sovereign's existence is in danger. Quoting Foucault: "The sovereign exercised his right of life only by exercising his right to kill, or by refraining from killing; he evidenced his power over life only through the death he was capable of requiring. The right which was formulated as the "power of life and death" was in reality the right to *take* life or *let* live."[17] The second form of power replaces the former, it is a "modest, suspicious power," and involves obedience to the law of the king and aims at keeping someone under surveillance and diagnosis, so as to control her or his conduct, behaviour, and attitudes. It works through the binary opposition of the permitted and the forbidden and the division of condemnation, with the aim of a possible transformation of individuals.[18] Against sovereign power and disciplinary power, Foucault markedly juxtaposes "pastoral power," which does not imply a hierarchical but a reciprocal power-relation, because the essential objective of the king who acts as the shepherd of his flock is the salvation of the flock, meaning that the food is preserved, and the pasture made ripe. The obvious consequence is that pastoral power is beneficent in nature, leading the holder of power to manifest his power "in [the form of] a duty, a task to be undertaken, so that […] the form it takes is not first of all the striking display of strength and superiority. […] The shepherd is someone who keeps watch."[19]

16 On the various Assyrian king's representations, see Magen 1986.
17 Fouacult 1978: 136.
18 Foucault 1995: 170; 2007: 20; O'Farrell 2005: 98–102.
19 Foucault 2007: 172.

By analysing religions (especially Judaism and Christianity), Foucault asserts that the basic notion of pastoral power, which is rooted in the idea of God as a shepherd of men, is a pre-Christian concept found throughout the Mediterranean East, above all in Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia. Although for Jews and Christians the good shepherd is one who leads his flock towards "salvation," in more ancient times salvation is first of all essentially subsistence: "The shepherd is someone who feeds and who feeds directly, or at any rate, he is someone who feeds the flock first by leading it to good pastures, and then by making sure that the animals eat and are properly fed. Pastoral power is a power of care. It looks after the flock, it looks after the individuals of the flock, it sees to it that the sheep do not suffer, it goes in search of those that have strayed of course, and it treats those that are injured."[20] This means that any power-holder who acts to protect, defend and save his flock is performing a pastoral power. Additionally, Foucault points out that pastoral power is an individualizing power, insofar as, although the shepherd looks after the whole flock as a single unity, he also counts and knows each sheep individually, to such an extent that "the shepherd owes everything to his flock to the extent of agreeing to sacrifice himself for its salvation."[21] Thus, when compared to sovereign power, pastoral power is not exercised on a territory but rather on a multiplicity, and guides those on whom it is exercised towards a benevolent end.

In the Assyrian realm, it seems that both forms of power – or modes of governance – were adopted and, in the case of some rulerships, we can actually encounter a model that sets pastoral practice as a governance at its centre. This is especially shown in certain visual contexts in which the Assyrian king is not involved in military actions (battles and reviews of prisoners), but rather in non-bellicose activities. Here pastoral power is expressed by the surrounding visual and architectural context as well as by specific symbols or insignia relating to the king. Specifically, pastoral roles are manifested in the king's holding of the long staff or the lotus flower, and in hunting scenes. Although previous scholars have pointed out that the king's holding of the long staff stands for the good shepherd, the lotus flower indicates the life-giving ruler, and the hunting scenes highlight the king as a hunter and destroyer of wild forces, an examination of the evidence and their context shows that all these visual manifestations essentially aim at conveying the pastoral power of the Assyrian king.[22] In other words, these apparently various and diversified royal images interact with one another to forge a unified symbolic picture.

[20] *ibid*.
[21] Foucault 2007: 173.
[22] Portuese 2014; 2017; 2018; Karlsson 2016: 181–189; Anthonioz 2020.

Assurnasirpal II

In the Northwest Palace of Assurnasirpal II at Kalhu, the images of the king as hunter and the king as shepherd were shown in the area of the Throne Room (B), respectively on slabs B–19 and B–20 and on the so-called Banquet Stele, located in the recess EA. Although physically not in proximity with one another, these images were both shown in the east side of the room, close to the throne and the door that was most likely used as an exit.[23]

Much has been written on the meaning and ideas associated with the hunting motif in Assurnasirpal II's reign, especially with reference to its metaphorical and mythological significance. In particular, Watanabe suggests that the bull hunt has parallels with the heroic episode in which the legendary Gilgamesh slays the Bull of Heaven, while the lion hunt recalls the myths and rites of the god Ninurta who achieves his divine kingship by slaying monsters.[24] However, what we should additionally be aware of is that hunting scenes are located close to visual incidents whose natures are essentially "peaceful." In the Throne Room (B), the adjacent slabs B–17–18 narrate episodes related to the land of Suhu near the middle Euphrates, a land which stood in an essentially amicable relation with Assyria.[25] In fact, no enemy appears to be killed and the warlike aspects of the battle are muted or diluted in some way. Thus, the threat of violence, although present, is filtered and balanced by the non-violent atmosphere of the narrative and the non-bellicose image of the king as hunter. Conversely, the image of the hunting king is accompanied by episodes which, compared to the daunting and cruel scenes of the west side of the room, mute the bellicose roles of the king (fig. 1).[26] Finally, the whole sequence of slabs seems complemented by the pastoral portrait of the king's depiction as a

[23] For the entrance and exit of the room, see bibliography in Portuese 2019: 70 footnote 8. On the semantics of the Throne Room (B), see Winter 1981; 1983.

[24] Watanabe 1998; 2000a; 2000b; 2002: 69–82.

[25] Portuese 2016.

[26] Hunting scenes probably also decorated the walls of the West Suite, although the allocation of these reliefs to specific rooms is complex (Reade 1985: 209–211; Paley/Sobolewski 1987: 75–76, pl. 5; Russell 1998: 665–671). There is in fact no portrait of Assurnasirpal II as shepherd in the West Suite, but the hunting scenes adhere to the general peaceful aspects of the pastoral roles of the king. Scholars have also pointed out that the surviving visual incidents from the suite may be related to the Mediterranean campaign (ninth campaign) and the series of forays against neighbouring communities, which represented the only action of force during the entire campaign (Albenda 1972; Liverani 1992: 95; Cifarelli 1995: 285; Thomason 2001: 70). If so, the ninth campaign that led Assurnasirpal II to the far west was essentially distinguished by its ideological aspects and was quite different from all the others, both for its peaceful development and for its geographical dimension, since it took place outside of the traditional borders of the empire, opening up long-distance trade relations (Liverani 1992: 96).

shepherd on the Banquet Stele: the king faces two symbols (Shamash and Sin) that represent justice and wisdom, but turns his back on four (Ishtar, Assur, Adad, Sebittu) which mainly represent war and conquest (fig. 2).[27]

The inscription engraved on the throne base is integrated into these visual manifestations and thereby enhances the different pastoral roles of the king in the east side of the room. At the east end of the Throne Room (B), the large throne base was inscribed with a single text. This diverges from the most widespread Standard Inscription – the text inscribed on all the slabs of the palace – by adding two "peaceful" aspects of kingship: the king in his peaceful role of a collector of tribute, and the king as a hunter and pacifier of foreign animals.[28] The first aspect enhances the king's ability to exact tribute, and this is expressed without mention of violent actions: "At that time I received tribute from the kings of the sea-coast, from the lands of the people of Tyre, Sidon, Amurru, Byblos, Maḫallatu, Kaizu, Maizu, and the city Arvad."[29] The non-violent approach as well as the voluntary submission of the enemy is evidenced with equal prominence in a military campaign: "He took fright in the face of my raging weapons (and) fierce battle and submitted to me to save his life. I received as his tribute 20 talents of silver, one talent of gold, 100 talents of tin, (50) 100 talents of iron, 1,000 oxen, 10,000 sheep, 1,000 linen garments with multi-coloured trim, decorated couches of boxwood with inlay, beds of boxwood, decorated ivory beds with inlay, many ornaments from his palace the weight of which could not be determined."[30] The second aspect expresses the king's victory over wild beasts, highlighting thereby his manly strength and courage: "I killed 30 elephants from an ambush pit. I slew 257 strong wild bulls from my...chariots with my lordly assault with swords. I killed 370 strong lions like caged birds with the spear."[31] The wild beasts are also caught and collected to turn the royal zoological gardens into an artificial paradise: "I captured 15 strong lions from the mountains and forests. I took away 50 lion cubs. I herded them into Calah and the palaces of my land into cages."[32] Although these depictions appear different in nature, the material goods collected from conquered lands as tribute and the animals gathered from foreign lands for pleasure are both metonyms for the same phenomenon, namely the ruler's pastoral power. Therefore, the king is here celebrated in his benevolent image of a good shepherd towards conquered lands, which accept

27 Portuese 2014.
28 For the content and discussion on this text, see RIMA 2 A.0.101.2; Russell 1999: 41–44; Dewar 2017.
29 RIMA 2 A.0.101.2: 26–29.
30 RIMA 2 A.0.101.2: 48–51.
31 RIMA 2 A.0.101.2: 41–42.
32 RIMA 2 A.0.101.2: 33–34.

his sovereignty and authority without resistance and deliver their own goods to him, as well as towards hunted animals, which are collected and brought into the capital.[33]

In sum, this examination emphasises and strengthens the view that the Throne Room (B) can be divided into two antithetical halves to convey the opposing political attitudes of the Assyrian king, which comprises both benevolence and paternalism (east side), mercilessness and cruelty (west side).[34] Following Foucault's terminology, this reading can also be represented in terms of modes of governance: pastoral power (east side), sovereign power (west side).

Sargon II

Before moving to his new royal residence at Dur-Sharrukin, Sargon II lived in the palace of Assurnasirpal II and probably had frequent occasion to visit the palace of Tiglath-pileser III. It seems clear that the interior decoration of these palaces became a source of inspiration for his new figurative program.[35] In particular, the image of the king as shepherd, by his holding of the long staff, was adopted into a widespread motif within the palace of Dur-Sharrukin, which suggests that the paternalistic and pastoral aspects of Sargon II were keenly emphasised during his reign.[36] To complement the image of the good shepherd, Sargon II also introduced the image of the life-giving ruler by the king's holding of the lotus flower, which was most likely patterned after the examples of Tiglath-pileser III's reliefs.[37] Although the distinction between these two roles seems visually clear, nevertheless there seems to be an exception to this general rule: in one instance, the image of the life-giving ruler seems to underlie the king in his pastoral role, yet the images of the shepherd king and the life-giving ruler overlap and combine with one another. This occurs in the hunting scenes that decorate Room 7.[38]

The royal hunt is framed within a generally peaceful atmosphere: the lower register shows hunting in the royal park and a procession of the elite military

[33] Liverani 1979: 313–314; Dewar 2017: 79–80.
[34] Portuese 2019: 80–86.
[35] Restorations and interventions in the Northwest Palace may be attributed to Sargon II during his stay. For instance, a 22–line text was inscribed by Sargon II above Assurnasirpal II's Standard Inscription (ARAB 2.138).
[36] Portuese 2017: 123.
[37] Portuese 2018: 101–105.
[38] Slabs showing similar hunt scenes also come from the so-called Monument X (Albenda 1986: figs. 76–77)

troops, while the upper displays a banquet scene (fig. 3).[39] The hunt in Sargon II's palace clearly diverges from the rituality of Assurnasirpal II's hunt in appearing more as a pastime than an event full of mythological implications. Neither lions nor bulls are hunted, nor is the king the main hunter. Rather, birds and hares become the subject of the hunt, and the hunters are bearded and beardless attendants. The king does not actively participate in the hunt and is shown on his chariot making a gesture of salutation or blessing with the right hand (*karābu*), and holding a large open lotus between two closed buds in his lowered left hand.[40] As Matthiae pointed out, "Sargon II on the chariot moves the right hand as if greeting someone, and therefore is not the active protagonist of the hunt, but a pleased onlooker, and participant in the hunt, which certainly is an aristocratic pastime, probably of the highest officials of the court whom the king benevolently and courteously joins, without taking any active part in the action."[41] Although this is true and represents a clear innovation in Assyrian art, nevertheless a close reading of the portrait of the king allows for further analysis.

The ruler is shown in his blessing attitude expressed by the *karābu* gesture and the lotus flower: two elements that embody his "life-giving" role. Such a distinctive aspect, as the texts confirm, implies that the king is viewed as able to endow life to his subjects, analogous to the way that the shepherd gives his life to his flock.[42] Hence, in this royal portrait there is a salvific message at play too. However, salvation is here not conceived in Judaic or Christian terms, but, as Foucault asserts, as "essentially subsistence." This subsistence is manifested both in the hunt and in the banquet depicted in the upper register. Birds, hares, and the other objects hunted within the royal park or garden all implicitly belong to the king, and thus it is basically the king who offers the hunt and the banquet that follows it. The raw materials for food, in other words, are assured. In this respect, Winter is correct to state that there must be a chronological narrative relationship between the lower and the upper register, with the dining activity taking place either before or after the hunt.[43] It is however likely that both registers were conceived as a single unity and functioned in tandem to show the Assyrian king as a provider of life in the form of his provision of food, extending from its procurement to its consumption. Therefore, the image of the king as hunter is here melded with the image of the life-giving

[39] Botta / Flandin 1849: pls. 107–114.

[40] See Wiggermann 1992: 61, 78 and Frechette 2012: 35–38 for the identification and description of the *karābu* gesture.

[41] Matthiae 2012: 486.

[42] That the plant held by the king bestowed the role of the provider of life on the king is shown in a number of pieces of textual evidence; see further Portuese 2018.

[43] Winter 2016: 45–46.

king, and both flow into the pastoral image of the king "who feeds his flock."[44] This is confirmed by another subtext that emerges from a well-thought-out intericonical/intertextual transference which artists and scribes probably made. The hunt and banquet scenes in Room 7 seem subtly influenced by the famous Banquet Stele of Assurnasirpal II.[45] The text inscribed on the stele does not mention the prepared dishes offered to guests, but rather lists the various raw ingredients and beverages that were then turned into meals to be proffered on dining occasions. Here, the king is celebrated in his pastoral role and the entire text becomes the conspicuous example of his pastoral power: the king cultivates and hunts – even risking his life – to feed his flock. Combined with the image of the shepherd king portrayed on a small frame on the top of the stele (fig. 2), it seems plausible that a combination of the visual and textual message highlighting the pastoral duties of the king may have represented a source of inspiration for Sargon II's artists to decorate Room 7.

Assurbanipal

The image of the shepherd king, which features him holding the long staff, disappears after the time of Sargon II, but Assurbanipal's artists elaborate new ways to express the king as shepherd and retain the image of the life-giving ruler. Under his reign, the royal lion hunt also becomes an important and dominant theme in the North Palace's figurative program at Nineveh. Specifically, the king in his life-giving role was shown in the so-called "garden scene" from Room S^1, while the hunting scenes covered the walls of a number of rooms (C, S, corridor R, S^1). It is precisely in the "garden scene" and in the hunting episodes from Room C that the pastoral power of the king was made explicit, although both contexts do not greatly diverge from the foregoing examples.

In the famous "garden scene" on the top register, the central scene is dominated by Assurbanipal reclining on a couch opposite the queen, with a laden table between them, and holding a lotus flower in one hand and a bowl in the other, under a grapevine canopy. The king is surrounded by war trophies as he is served by a number of attendants, being cheered by musicians with flute, harp and percussion ensemble. The severed head of his archenemy Teʾumman, the king of Elam, hangs opposite from a nearby tree (fig. 4).[46] To the left side is a line of Assyrian attendants, Elamite nobles, and musicians, and food is brought in for the royal banquet. To the right are other musicians and attendants. The

[44] Foucault 2007: 172.
[45] RIMA 2 A.0.101.30.
[46] On the identification of the head, see Bonatz 2004.

landscape or setting in which the episode takes place is most likely the private gardens of Assurbanipal's queen, which is populated by alternating conifer and date-palm trees.[47] The middle register contains a row of conifer trees that are spread across the full length of the register, birds, and a number of attendants bringing furniture and food. Very little is known of the bottom register, although its reconstruction includes a dense millet or reed thicket and wild animals (stag, boar) (fig. 5).[48]

This visual incident, its ideological implications and its hidden messages have elicited much attention from scholars. In a seminal study, Albenda pointed out the main references in the relief to military and political affairs, and, in highlighting the peaceful aspect of the entire composition, states that peace is here conceived "as a state of security" conveyed "by the particular location in which the king resides, a place that bars the external, mundane world."[49] More recent works have conversely called attention to multiple and deeper levels of meaning, accessible only to a limited audience.[50] For example, Ataç highlighted the vegetal symbolism and regenerative imagery of the whole composition, and considered all the activities performed in the scene as life-giving activities.[51] Although the "garden scene" is likely to remain an enigma, other alternative and complementary readings may also be pointed out.

From an intericonical perspective, the three registers encapsulate the landscape and peaceful atmosphere of the hunting scene in Sargon II's Room 7 at Dur-Sharrukin. The wooded environment filled with coniferous trees, the small wild animals and numerous birds, the king holding the lotus flower, and the banquet in the upper register all recall Sargon II's reliefs and sparks a kind of "déjà-vu" in the viewer.[52] It is thus not unlikely that Assurbanipal's artists drew inspiration from Sargon II's figurative program. Interestingly, the resultant visual message seems in no way altered: just like Sargon II, Assurbanipal also offers the raw ingredients – grapevine, stag and boar – to a generous banquet shared with his guests. Thus, the king here appears again in his pastoral role: he is the provider of food, the one who feeds his flock.[53]

47 Barnett 1976: 56; Albenda 1976: 61, 67; 1977: 44–45; Collins 2004.
48 This description relies on the reconstruction of Albenda 1976.
49 Albenda 1977: 44.
50 Collins 2004; Feldman 2014: 100–104; Karlsson 2016: 121; Gilibert 2018.
51 Ataç 2018: 158–163.
52 Albenda 1976: 69.
53 In addition, the presence of locusts may also be indicative of the role of the king as shepherd, as Salvatore Gaspa (2012: 191) points out: "Non si esclude, poi, che il consumo di questi insetti presso la corte rappresentasse agli occhi del re e dei suoi illustri commensali una sorta di *redde rationem* per gli odiati devastatori di raccolti: un trionfo tutto gastronomico

Nevertheless, the message of the scene also appears to have been ironically manipulated for political reasons. Gilibert explored the textual sources for Assurbanipal's "garden scene" and notes that the visual message actually represents an encoded reference to literary motifs. In particular, the severed head of Teʾumman hanging from a tree, which accompanies the lavish banquet of Assurbanipal, mirrors what texts refer to as a sentence inflicted on the vestiges of enemies carried away to Nineveh: "I condemned their ghosts never to sleep, I deprived them of the food and drink for the dead."[54] This humorous message is further enhanced by the epigraph that describes the Elamite kings approaching Assurbanipal on the left side of the top register: "kings of the land Elam whom [I] had defeat[ed] with the support of (the god) Aššur and the goddess Mullissu, [...] they [sto]od [...] and (then) they prepared their royal meal with their own hands and had (it) brought [before me]."[55] This textual reference implies that the king relieves himself, on occasion, of his pastoral duties, which involves feeding his flock. Therefore, what the "garden scene" shows is the pastoral power of the king, although this power is selective and exercised over select guests. Assurbanipal also holds the lotus flower to show himself as provider of life, in the form of food, by the way that he cultivates, hunts, and gathers animals for his flock, but the act of cooking and serving is the punishment reserved to subjected enemies; they are led to a good pasture, but must provide food for their shepherd, in a clearly humiliating act.

The pastoral power is further emphasised by an "inner" and "outer" intericonical relationship, the former referring to a mechanism of intericonical transference between motifs from the same palace and epoch, the second to a visual transformative process of a textual motif from a past example. Slabs decorating Room E in the North Palace show servants leading hunting-dogs and musicians with stringed instruments, and a lion and lioness relaxing in a garden. The whole composition is populated by a row of alternating date-palms and coniferous trees with vines, blossoming flowers and shrubs.[56] By focusing on these reliefs, one may notably observe that the "visual grammar" – using the expression of Leborg –[57] used in the idyllic and peaceful composition of the relaxing lion and

e conviviale del re assiro, ancora una volta in grado di dimostrare la sua abilità nel proteggere il paese e nell'eliminare le minacce esterne di qualsiasi natura."

54 Gilibert 2018: 293.

55 RINAP 5 50.

56 Barnett 1976: pls. XIV–XV. See Albenda 1974 for a detailed analysis on the grapevines in Assurbanipal's garden.

57 "The reason for writing a grammar of visual language is the same as for any language: to define its basic elements, describe its patterns and processes, and to understand the re1ations between the individual elements in the system. Visual language has no formal syntax or semantics, but the visual objects themselves can be classified" (Leborg 2006; see also Kress/van Leeuwen 2006).

lioness reminds the one adopted by artists in the "garden scene" of Room S[1] (fig. 6): both face each other; the standing lion (reclining and raised king) dominates over the recumbent lioness (seated queen); on both sides are flowering lotus flowers (lotus held by the king); a coniferous tree together with grapevines and a date-palm tree fill the backdrop (the same landscape). The symbolic subtexts remind also the protagonists of the "garden scene": the lion stands for the king and the lioness may represent Ishtar, whose association with the Assyrian queen, and with women in general, is evidenced by textual and archaeological evidence.[58] These messages are complemented by a further significance. As outlined above, Assurnasirpal II in his throne-base inscription declares that wild beasts were also caught and collected in royal zoological gardens which were then turned into an artificial paradise. We do not have depictions of such an artificial paradise populated by wild animals from Assurnasirpal II's figurative program, but it is tempting to postulate that the throne-base text may have been a source of inspiration for Assurbanipal's artists to turn this textual reference into a visual one, along with its symbolic pastoral messages. In fact, taken altogether, the "inner" and "outer" intericonical mechanisms suggest that the "garden scene" may have represented the good, or even, the ideal pasture where the good shepherd led his flock, taking himself fully part in enjoying the idyllic pasture. The king in the artificial paradise, be he a lion or human, participates and lives with his flock in the good pasture, with the consequence that – quoting Foucault – he "serves the flock" and acts as an "intermediary between the flock and pasture, food, and salvation."[59]

Finally, to turn to the hunt scene in Room C, a close reading of the role of the king as hunter brings out the pastoral power of Assurbanipal here too (fig. 7). The hunt begins on the left of the northeast wall, where the king is portrayed preparing for his hunting activities (slabs 5–9). To the right of the hill is depicted the actual action, where wounded lions are positioned facing to the left. They are struck by the arrows of the king, who shoots from his chariot with his bow (slabs 11–15). The southwest wall shows two royal chariots facing each other, with the figure of a rampant lion between the two vehicles. The king on the chariot on the left thrusts a sword into the throat of the lion, and the king on the right holds a spear to pierce the lion, which has sprung onto the wheel of the chariot (slabs 20–25) (fig. 8). The episode in Room C is arranged in a continuous narrative, with figures repeated over and over to express both the story's movement and its time. Commenting on this aspect, Watanabe believes that two different lion hunts are being integrated into a

[58] Watanabe 2000a; 2002: 42–56; Collins 2006; Gansell 2012: 17, 23; 2018a: 159–160; 2018b.
[59] Foucault 2007: 173.

single scene, which were carried out at different times and possibly in different places.[60] Nadali also distinguishes two different events in Room C, but asserts that there is no precise or preferred itinerary to follow the story; any viewer can experience a "work in movement" without visual restrictions of time and place.[61] Although it seems reasonable to allow that two separate lion hunts are amalgamated here, it may also be the case that the two different roles of the king and two different metaphors of the lion hunt may be deliberately shown in the same room.[62]

Scholars have pointed out that, since there are no lion hunts recorded on palace reliefs between the reigns of Assurnasirpal II and Assurbanipal, the hunting scenes of these two kings seem intericonically related, which is to say that the hunt involving Assurbanipal relied on Assurnasirpal II's figurative program to decorate Room C.[63] The meaning of the lion hunt in both instances seems continuous across both contexts: in both scenes the lion is used as a metaphor to elucidate the nature and aspects of the king in terms of specific animal features, with the killing of the lions symbolizing the prowess and power of the king to repel and ward off any evil force against the cultural order and civilization that he establishes.[64] However, it is likely that between Assurnasirpal II and Assurbanipal the underlying ideological aspects may have changed. In the textual corpus, the straightforward statement "I am a lion" occurs in Assurnasirpal II's texts but is absent in Assurbanipal's texts.[65] In this statement, the king is not stronger than a lion nor is he like a lion, but rather the king is a lion. This is reflected in the reliefs from the Northwest Palace, where the lion attacks the chariot and possesses a similar-looking posture to the king (fig. 1, B–19, upper register). In Assurbanipal's texts, by contrast, there is no metaphorical description of the king in terms of a lion. In fact, the sentence referring to the relationship between the king and the lion – "kings among mankind (and) lions among the animals could not *grow powerful* before my bow" – rather associates the lions with the enemies (and *vice versa*), rather than with the king.[66] This is also visually expressed in the reliefs from Room C. On the northeast wall, the king is surrounded by a large number of lions, which may represent a large number of enemy kings; the lions before the king and the chariot do not attack but escape, and thus they cede power and cannot grow powerful. By contrast, on the southwest wall the king attacks the lion but

60 Watanabe 2008: 326–331; 2014: 355.
61 Nadali 2018.
62 Portuese 2020b: 123–129.
63 Reade 2005: 24; Portuese 2020b: 127–128.
64 Cassin 1981; Watanabe 1998; 2000a.
65 RIMA 2 A.0.101.1: i33.
66 RINAP 5 9: i29.

is also attacked by him. Accordingly, as in Assurnasirpal II's relief, there is a physical similarity between the attacking lion and the attacking king, whereby the features of the king are identified with those of the lion. On the southwest wall, the king is identified with the lion, while on the northeast wall the lion is identified with the enemy. The resultant visual message can be understood as follows: the northeast wall displays the king as an exemplary shepherd, who appears stronger than any wild force, capable of hunting the enemy, warding off any evil threat, and protecting his flock. In brief, the northeast wall manifests the pastoral power of the king. By contrast, but complementary with the image of the king as shepherd, the southwest wall showed the king and the lion as equals, given the association of their features and qualities, and thus the king was exalted on this wall as an excellent hunter.[67] The two images, however, combine to stress a single common aspect: the pastoral role, or shepherd-status, of the king.

The Good Shepherd and His Flock: Concluding Remarks

Each example examined so far allows us to reject distorted attitudes towards Assyrian kings, who have been historically characterised as cruel and heinous rulers. It seems indeed that views that have been applied to the Assyrian Empire have been distorting by their emphasis on the most garish aspects of its rulers, such as their military prowess, violence, and coercion, to the detriment of other neglected roles each king may have adopted. Ruling such a vast empire required, in fact, a chameleon-like attitude to confront or cope with a variety of people and cultures, and war was only the ultimate choice. The Assyrian king, both before and after engaging in a military confrontation and showing his sovereign power, presented himself in his beneficent role and exhibited his pastoral power; those who looked for protection under the Assyrian king were carefully grazed, fed, led and protected into one single "corral," the empire.

However, it goes without saying that such pastoral power must not be confused with Judaic and Christian notions of shepherding and salvation: in the Assyrian cultural imagination, there seems to be no universal claim in the exhibition of the king's pastoral power. Rather, the pastoral power of the Assyrian king is an individualizing power, as Foucault points out, but in the strictest sense: the king knows his flock, which is to say that he individually knows who deserves his pastoral and benevolent treatment. Assuming pastoral attitudes was not a basic choice in political terms, like sovereign power was, but a power exercised according to specific dynamics. In other words, only those who accepted the

[67] Portuese 2020b: 129.

sovereignty of the king were favoured by the king and, in turn, received his paternalistic and pastoral treatment. This is well demonstrated by the reliefs we have previously examined. As a general rule, the image of the king as a shepherd and hunter, as well as a provider of life, was displayed in less accessible spaces of the palace, as though the pastoral power was somehow "concealed" to the majority. Moreover, the foregoing examples show that the visual depictions of pastoral power corresponded to the political circumstances of each reigning king. Assurnasirpal II showed himself to be a hunter and shepherd in the east side of the Throne Room (B), the remotest point of the room from the main entrance, but in what was still the most accessible room of the palace. Accordingly, the message of pastoral power in this case was addressed to the selected persons who were allowed to meet the king in the Throne Room (B) and occupied a position close to his throne. Assurnasirpal II's successors in a sense followed this principle, but in a new light. In fact, during the reigns of Sargon II and Assurbanipal, the ways artists used images from their predecessors, and the ways they translated them in order to subvert, understand or reinforce their message, developed to a remarkable extent. Intericonicity, in this respect, shows the presence of a past image within another image, and highlights the mobility, plasticity and historicity of images. Although a relationship of influence and emulation among artists and scribes is indisputable, the resultant visual manifestation of the king's pastoral power shows a high degree of originality, authenticity and uniqueness. Sargon II, for instance, who acts as a provider of food for his flock, was manifested in the secluded Room 7, where only a few selected persons could have access. Here, the fusion of words and images, and whose decoration was probably shaped on the Banquet Stele of Assurnasirpal II, is clear and attests to the coordination that existed between scribes and artists. This example shows, in fact, that there is actually no intersemiotic translation that is not iconic and linguistic at the same time. Finally, in Assurbanipal's reign, artists relied both on Assurnasirpal II and Sargon II's figurative programs to present a new idea of pastoral power, which is both well-structured and individualizing. In the "garden scene," the pastoral role of the king as a provider of life in the form of food and the setting of the scene as the ideal pasture for his flock are made explicit, as in Sargon II's Room 7 and the throne-base text of Assurnasirpal II respectively. However, the message is ironically individualized and tailored to the participants of the royal banquet: the king feeds only a selected range of guests; any other "diner" who goes against the king must cook by himself as well as for the king. Selected must have been also the audience of Room S[1], since the whole composition of the "garden scene" required a restricted learned audience to grasp the multiple levels of the message conveyed. Conceived differently, the image of the shepherd king in Room C is detached from that of the hunter king, but still

both images are shown in the same room and work in conjunction with one another to outline the pastoral profile of Assurbanipal.

In conclusion, by expanding and elaborating further on Foucault's ideas of pastoral power, we are able to uncover another mode of governance, or an alternative manner in which ruled people can be and have been integrated, in the history of the Assyrian Empire. Despotic Assyrian kings may also be seen through the lens of less distorted views. Of course, the salvific action of the Assyrian king as shepherd is apparent and certainly looks after his own interests. Yet, it also goes without saying that the shepherd "always tries to persuade the sheep that their interests and his own are the same" (Stendhal).

Abbreviations

ARAB 2: see Luckenbill 1927

RIMA 2: see Grayson 1991

RINAP 5: see Novotny and Jeffers 2018

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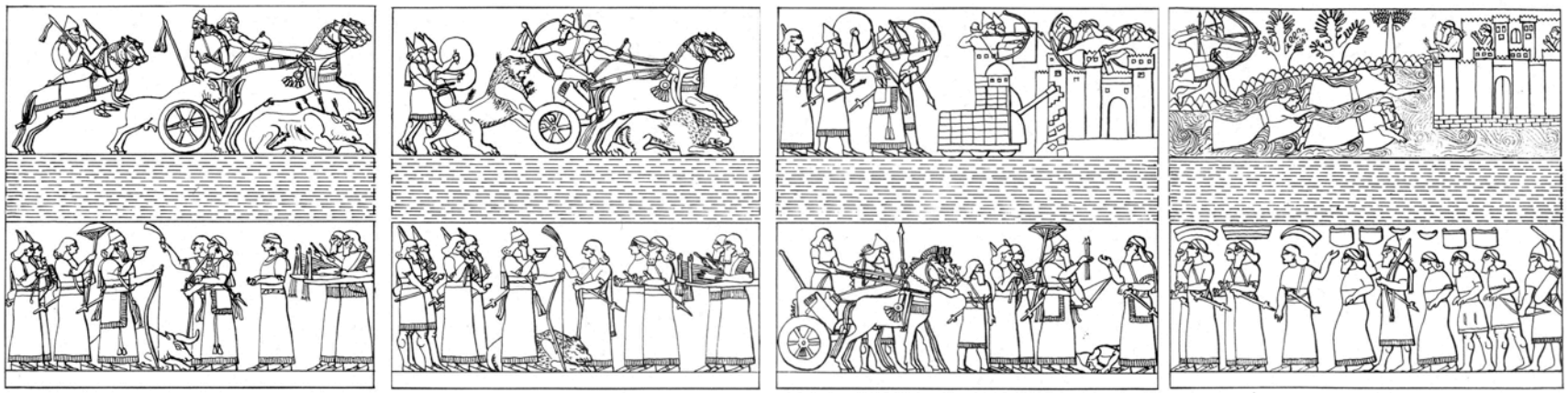

B-20 B-19 B-18 B-17

Figure 2 Kalhu, Northwest Palace, Throne Room (B): Banquet Stele (plan adapted from Kertai 2014: fig. 3; Wiseman 1952: pl. II)

Figure 3 Dur-Sharrukin Palace, Room 7: banquet scene (upper register), hunt scene (lower register) (relief 11) (Botta/Flandin 1849: pl. 113)

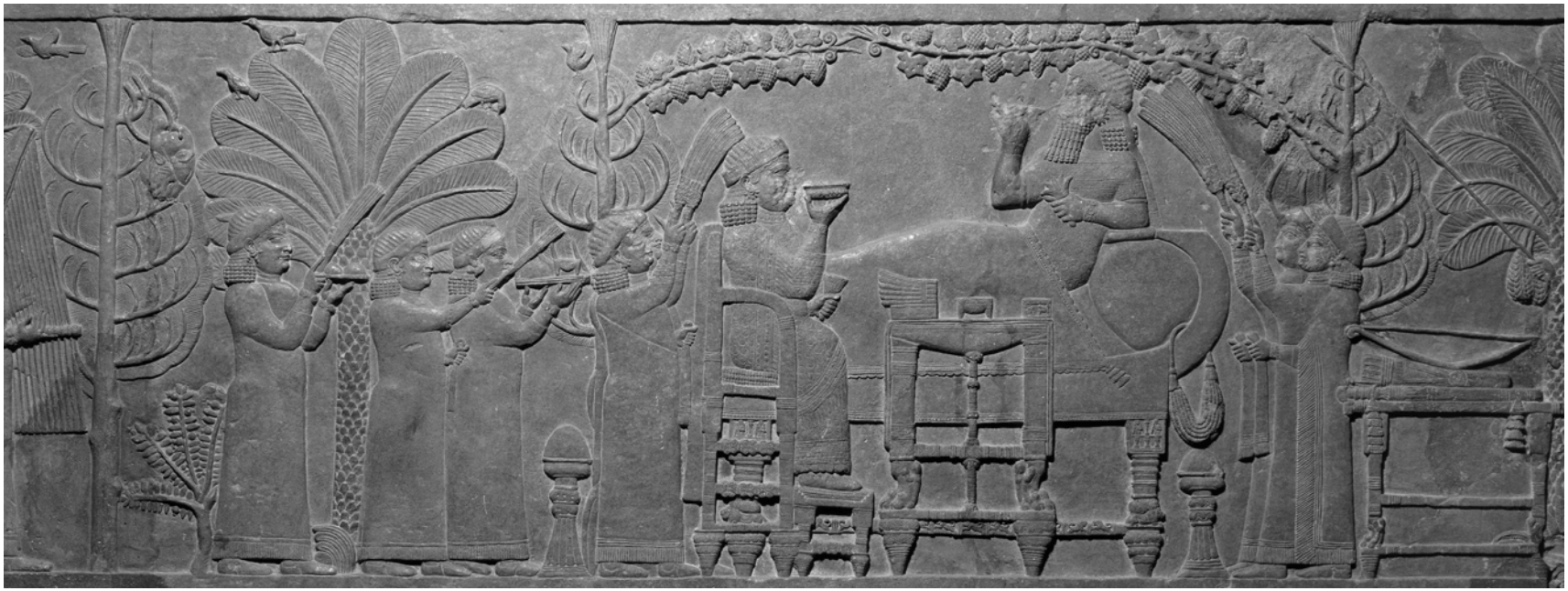

Figure 4 Nineveh, North Palace, Room S[1]: "garden scene" (British Museum, 124920; © The Trustees of the British Museum)

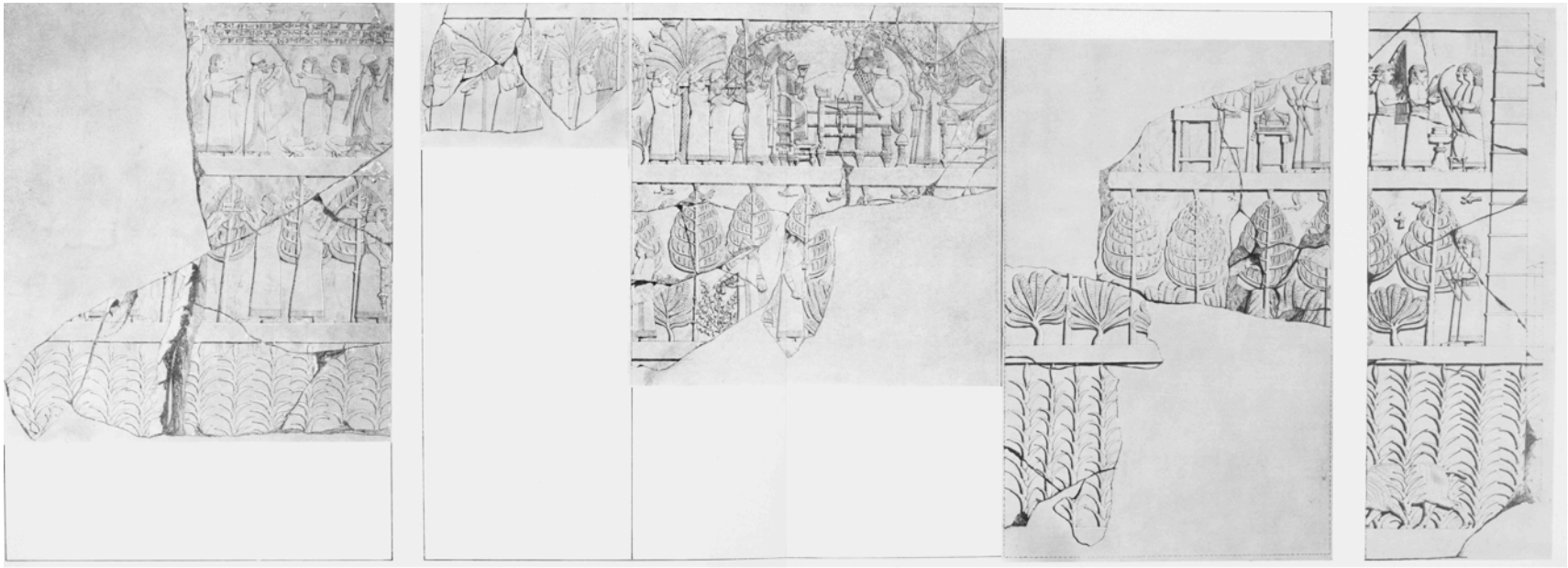

Figure 5 Nineveh, North Palace, Room S[1]: "garden scene", reconstruction (Barnett 1976: pl. LXIII)

Figure 6 Nineveh, North Palace, Room E: relief of Assurbanipal, slabs 7–8 (British Museum, 118914,a; © The Trustees of the British Museum)

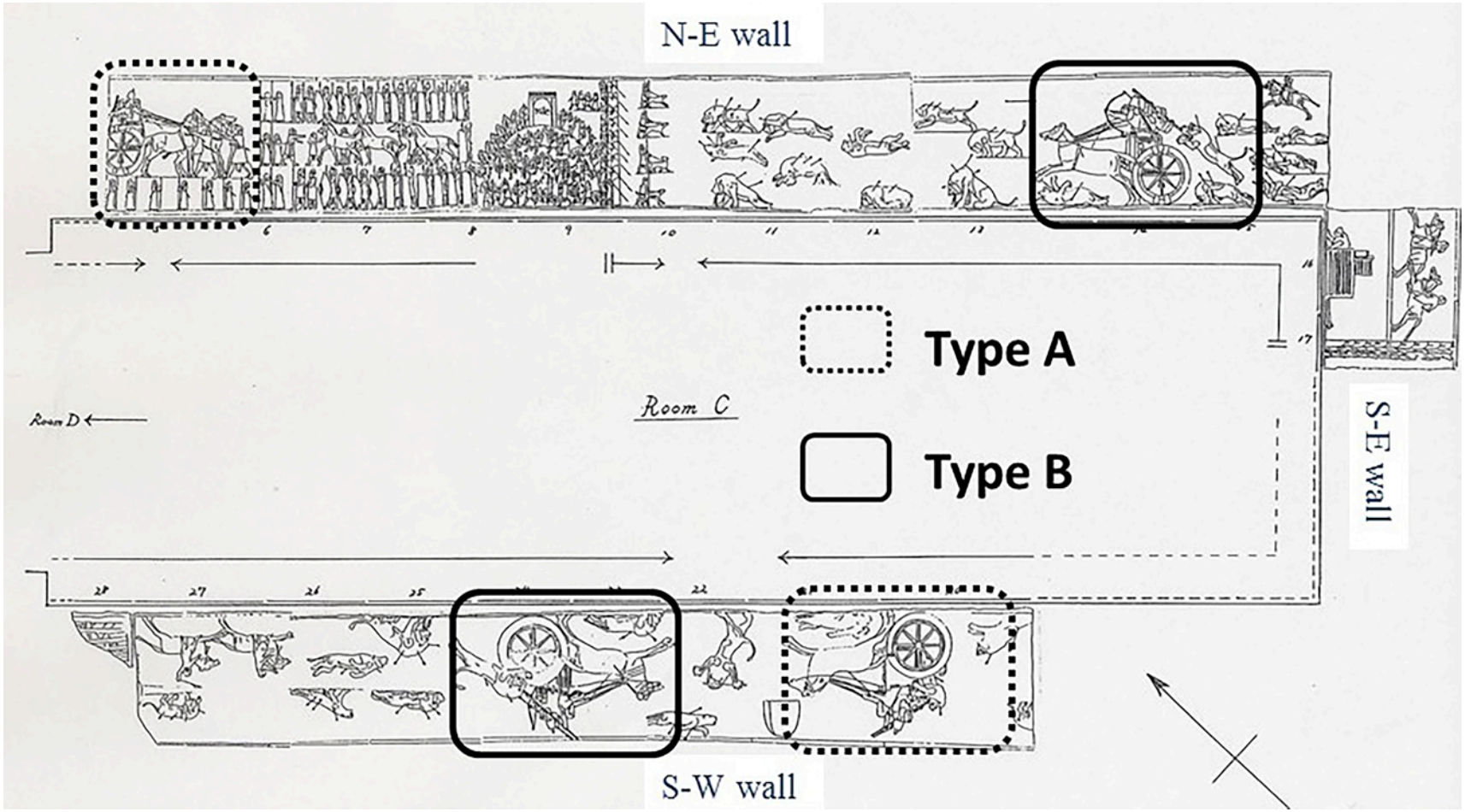

Figure 7 Nineveh, North Palace, plan of Room C (Watanabe 2014: fig. 4; by courtesy of Prof. Dr. C. E. Watanabe)

Figure 8 Nineveh, North Palace, Room C: relief of Assurbanipal, slabs 20–25 (British Museum, 124850–1, 124852–5; © The Trustees of the British Museum)