IMAGES OF POWER:
ANCIENT NEAR EAST: FOCUS
( Assyrian and Persian)
TITLE or DESIGNATION:
Citadel of Sargon II

CULTURE or ART
HISTORICAL PERIOD:
Assyrian

DATE: c. 720-705 B.C.E.

LOCATION:
Dur Sharrukin (modern-day Khorsabad, Iraq)
ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ancient-art-civilizations/ancient-near-east1/assyrian/v/lamassu

TITLE or DESIGNATION: Lamassu from the Citadel of Sargon II

CULTURE or ART HISTORICAL PERIOD: Assyrian

DATE: 720-705 B.C.E.

MEDIUM: limestone
TITLE or DESIGNATION: Assyrian archers pursuing enemies, relief from the northwest palace of Ashurnasirpal II, Kalhu (modern Nimrud), Iraq

CULTURE or ART HISTORICAL PERIOD: Assyrian

DATE: c. 875-860 B.C.E.

MEDIUM: gypsum
TITLE or DESIGNATION: Ashurbanipal hunting lions, relief from the north palace of Ashurbanipal, Ninevah (modern Kuyunjik), Iraq

CULTURE or ART HISTORICAL PERIOD: Assyrian

DATE: c. 645-640 B.C.E.

MEDIUM: gypsum
ONLINE ASSIGNMENT: https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ancient-art-civilizations/ancient-near-east1/persian/a/persian-art-an-introduction

TITLE or DESIGNATION: Audience Hall (Apadana) of Darius and Xerxes

CULTURE or ART

HISTORICAL PERIOD: Persian

DATE: c. 520-465 B.C.E.

LOCATION: Persepolis, Iran
ART of the ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Online Links:

Assyria - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Ashurbanipal - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Lamassu - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Persepolis - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Youtube - Persepolis Documentary

Youtube - Reconstructed Views of Persepolis

Persian Bull Capital - Smarthistory
Assyria was a Semitic Akkadian kingdom, existing as a nation state from the late 25th to early 24th century BCE until 605 BCE. Assyria was centered on the Upper Tigris river in northern Mesopotamia. The Assyrians came to rule powerful empires several times. Beginning with the campaigns of Adad-nirari II from 911 BCE, it again became a great power over the next three centuries, overthrowing and conquering the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Persians, and others.
Ashurnasirpal (883-859 BCE) was a fierce and ruthless king who advanced without opposition through Canaan (modern-day Syria) and Asia Minor as far as the Mediterranean.

Here he is shown in a relief from his palace at Nimrud greeting a high official during a review of soldiers and war prisoners. He holds a bow and a pair of raised arrows, symbolizing victory in battle. He is accompanied by a parasol-bearer and is watched over by a winged deity.
This relief decorated the interior wall of the palace of King Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud. With his right hand, the genius (or benevolent spirit) uses a cone-shaped object to sprinkle from his bucket some magic potion upon either a sacred tree or the king depicted on the adjacent relief.

The genius wears the horned crown of a deity and the elegant jewelry and fringed cloak of contemporary courtiers.
Royal hunting scenes are some of the most well known of the Nimrud reliefs particularly those showing Assurnasirpal II hunting lions. There is also a distinct interest in the relationship between man and animal in many of the scenes. In several depictions the king is shown with supernatural creatures of animal and human combination.
In 1847 after discovering more than half a dozen winged pairs of colossal statues of lions and bulls at Nimrud, Henry Layard brought two of the colossi (one lion and one bull) to London. After 18 months, and several near disasters he succeeded in bringing them to the British Museum.

A lamassu is a protective deity, often depicted with a bull or lion's body, eagle's wings, and human's head.

These composite creatures combined the strength of the lion or the bull, the swiftness of birds indicated by the wings, and the intelligence of the human head. The helmet with horns indicates the creature's divinity.
The Assyrians were always shown in moments of glory while the non-Assyrians are in sprawled or contorted positions and most often naked. These illustrations represented violent death as punishment for violating Assyrian values, as well as merciless punishment for transgressions. Not only would this have served as a clear message for visiting dignitaries from other cultures but also the same message was innately obvious as a warning to the Assyrian elites as to what could happen if they decided to defy the king.
This relief probably depicts an episode that occurred when Ashurnasirpal drove his enemy’s forces into the Euphrates River. Two Assyrian archers shoot arrows at the fleeing foe. Three enemy soldiers are in the water. One swims with an arrow in his back. The other two attempt to float to safety by inflating animal skins.
The Assyrian kings also commissioned extensive series of mural paintings. Unfortunately, few Assyrian paintings exist today.

This notable exception depicts Ashurnasirpal II and his retinue paying homage to the gods. It comes from the palace at Kalhu (modern Nimrud).

The painting medium is glazed brick, a much more durable format than direct painting on plastered mud-brick walls.
Sargon II (reigned 722-705 BCE) chose Ninevah rather than the traditional capital at Assur. In 713 BCE, he ordered the construction of a new palace and town called Dur-Sharrukin (“House of Sargon”). The court moved to Dur-Sharrukin in 706 BCE, although it was not completely finished yet.
Within the citadel, Sargon’s palace complex (the group of buildings where the ruler governed and resided) stood on a raised, fortified platform about 40 feet high—demonstrating the use of art as political propaganda. Guarded by two towers, the palace complex was accessible only by a wide ramp leading up from an open square, around which the residences of important government and religious officials were clustered. Beyond the ramp was the main courtyard, with service buildings on the right and temples on the left. The heart of the palace, protected by a reinforced wall with only two small, off-center doors, lay past the main courtyard.
Within the inner compound was a second courtyard lined with narrative relief panels showing tribute bearers. Visitors would have waited to see the king in this courtyard that functioned as an open-air audience hall; once granted access to the royal throne room, they would have passed through a stone flanked, like the other gates of citadel and palace, by awesome guardian figures. These colossal beings, known as lamassus, combined the bearded head of a man, the powerful body of a lion or bull, the wings of an eagle, and the horned headdress of a god.
These large monsters served to ward off the king’s enemies and were often placed in pairs to guard palace entrances. Hence they were *apotropaic*, or *tutelary*, figures.

The Assyrian lamassu sculptures are partly in the round, but the sculptor nonetheless conceived of them as high reliefs on adjacent sides of a corner. Hence the lamassu, from a three-quarters view, appears to have five legs.

Bearing the facial features of the monarch, these colossi united the physical attributes of the bull (virility), the lions (physical strength), and the eagle (predatory agility). The winged, human-headed bulls from the citadel at Khorsabad were power-symbols designed to inspire awe and fear among those who passed beneath their impassive gaze.
Ashurbanipal (685-627 BCE) was the last strong king of the Neo-Assyrian empire, famous for amassing a significant collection of cuneiform documents for his royal palace at Ninevah. This collection, known as the Library of Ashurbanipal, is now housed at the British Museum.

Left: Ashurbanipal as a high priest
The Greeks called Ashurbanipal Sardanapalus, and the French painter Eugene Delacroix immortalized the Assyrian king in the 19th century in one of the most dramatic canvases of the Romantic era in Europe.
In Assyria, the lion hunt was seen as a royal sport; the depictions on his palace walls at Ninevah were seen as a symbol of the king’s ability to guard the nation. While the figure here of Ashurbanipal is heavily stylized, the lion, his nemesis, is surprisingly naturalistic.
Assyrian reliefs from the palace of Ashurbanipal (Ninevah, Iraq) c. 650 BCE
**LION**

(*Panthera leo*)

**LENGTH** 54 in. to 86 in. (excluding tail)

**MAXIMUM WEIGHT** Males, 496 lbs.; females, 370 lbs.

**EST. POP.** 23,000

**STATUS** Vulnerable

**THREATS** Killed by livestock owners to protect herds

**HABITAT** Grassy plains, dry forests, scrub, semideserts

**MAN EATER?** Yes

- Roar measures up to 114 db (a jackhammer is just 100 db)
- The only big cat to live and hunt in family groups (prides); lions sleep as much as 19 hr. per day
- Once found in Europe, Asia and the Americas; the only wild lions outside Africa now are 300 in the Gir Forest sanctuary in India

*Indicates the species’ probable historical range, which did not change much until the past 200 years*

Sources: Justina Ray, Wildlife Conservation Society; IUCN, Cat Specialist Group

Historical and current range of the Lion *(Time 8/23/04)*
Ashurbanipal Statue in San Francisco by Fred Parhad
The Assyrians, like many other societies before and after, regarded prowess in hunting as a manly virtue on a par with success in warfare. The royal hunt did not take place in the wild, however, but in a controlled environment, ensuring the king’s safety and success.
Portraying Ashurbanipal’s beastly foes as possessing courage and nobility as well as the power to kill made the king’s accomplishments that much grander.
Persepolis was the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire, located northeast of the modern city of Shiraz in modern Iran. The earliest remains date from around 515 BCE.

The Persian king Darius I ordered the construction of the Apadana Palace and its surroundings. These were completed during the reign of his son, Xerxes the Great.
Broad ceremonial stairways provided access to the platform and the immense royal audience hall, or apadana, in which at least 10,000 guests could stand at one time.

The reliefs on the royal stairways depict processions of royal guards, Persian nobles and dignitaries bringing tribute to the king.
Persians and Medes, detail of the processional frieze on the east side of the terrace of the apadana of the palace, Persepolis, Iran, c. 521-465 BCE, limestone
It is possible that the Apadana was the site of a single great annual ceremony, when the peoples of the empire brought their tribute to the king. In addition, there were also treasuries and store-rooms on the Persepolis terrace, and quarters for guards. Other large columned halls may equally have been used only on special formal occasions.

One of the reliefs carved on the wall of the eastern staircase depicts the representatives of 23 subject nations accompanied by Persian noblemen who lead them hand by hand to the grand ceremony.
There is no force or pressure. When the viewer sees this, he recognizes that the Achaemenids certainly encompassed a kind of political free thinking where they respected people and nations.

The first are the Medes, wearing horsemen dress and cloaks, they bring a pitcher, a bowl, a sword, and other gifts as tributes to the king. Next come the Elamites, wearing long cloaks, offering a lion cub, which was the symbol of loyalty.
The Armenians present a beautifully decorated vase with griffin handles. Behind them the Parthians wear clothing similar to the Elamites but with a special turban to protect their faces against the desert winds. They offer a bowl and a Bactrian two-humped camel.

Unlike ancient Egyptian, Roman, and Assyrian reliefs, which depict their subject nations as slaves, the representatives and gift bearers in the reliefs at Persepolis hold hands with their host as they walk towards the ceremony, indicating that they were treated with kindness and respect.
Persepolis was a cosmopolitan city made up of citizens from many different backgrounds, none above the other. Thus, in these reliefs, no one is riding a horse or portrayed as being superior. Nobody is angry. No slaves are depicted and no nationality is humiliated or disrespected. The lotus flower seen here held by kings or noble dignitaries is the Achaemenid symbol of peace and friendship.
The Achaemenids had four capitals. They still carried the nomadic spirit and tribal traditions of their ancestors on their minds and in their governments. And like the nomads who migrated in the winter went to Babylonia, in the summer to Ekbatana. In the spring they came to Persepolis and celebrated the New Year Festival.

Here we see the lion, a symbol for the sun, devouring the bull, or Taurus, which is also the last month of the year. This signals the renewal of the earth, the beginning of spring, and the advent of a new year. Iranians call the new year Nowruz and this day has been held sacred and celebrated by Persians since centuries before the Achaemenids.
Like Egyptian and Greek cities, Persepolis was laid out on a rectangular grid. Darius lived to see the completion only of a treasury, the apadana, and a very small palace for himself. The apadana, set above the rest of the complex on a second terrace, had open porches on three sides and a square hall large enough to hold several thousand people.

Many reliefs throughout the city depict displays of allegiance or economic prosperity. In one example, once the centerpiece, Darius holds an audience while his son and heir, Xerxes, listens from behind the throne.
The palace had a grand hall in the shape of a square, each side with seventy-two columns, thirteen of which still stand on the enormous platform.

The columns carried the weight of the vast and heavy ceiling. The tops of the columns were made from animal sculptures such as two headed bulls, lions and eagles.
The animals on the columns vary from capital to capital. The Persepolis architect must have wanted to suggest that the Persian king had captured the fiercest animals and monsters to hold up the roof of his palace.

The paired protomes (decorative elements based on the head of an animal or bust of a person) form a u-shaped socket that held massive cedar beams (imported from Lebanon), which in turn supported a timber roof sealed with mud plaster.
The Gate of all Nations, referring to subjects of the empire, consisted of a grand hall that was a square of approximately 25 meters (82 feet) in length, with four columns and its entrance on the Western Wall.

A pair of lamassu, bulls with the heads of bearded men, stand by the western threshold. Another pair, with wings and a Persian head, stands by the eastern entrance, to reflect the Empire's power.
The Hall of 100 Columns or the Throne Room of Xerxes was Persepolis' second largest building. Construction was started by Xerxes and completed by his son Artaxerxes I by the end of the fifth century BCE.

Its eight stone doorways are decorated on the south and north with reliefs of throne scenes and on the east and west with scenes depicting the king in combat with monsters. Two colossal stone bulls flank the northern portico. In the beginning of Xerxes's reign the Throne Hall was used mainly for receptions for military commanders and representatives of all the subject nations of the empire. Later the Throne Hall served as an imperial museum.
After invading Persia, Alexander the Great marched over mountains in the depth of winter to seize the Persian capital of Persepolis; and so rapidly did he move that he was in Darius’ palace before the Persians could conceal the royal treasury.

Here again his good judgment left him, and he burned the magnificent city to the ground. His soldiers looted the houses, ravaged the women, and killed the men.
About eight miles northeast of Persepolis, on the opposite side of the Pulvar River, rises a cliff-face in a place called Naqsh-e Rostam. Four tombs are carved out of the cliff-face, the first and oldest is the tomb of Darius I, which is identified by inscriptions. The other three tombs have no inscriptions to identify them, but are believed to be the tombs of Achaemenian kings Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I, and Darius II.
The facade of Darius' tomb is divided into three registers: the bottom register is blank, the middle is sculptured to imitate the front of a palace, and the top shows the monarch at worship on the top of a piece of furniture that is supported by representatives of the nations in his realm.

This top register is adorned with a framed relief panel showing a dais supported by thirty representatives of the nations of the empire. These representatives are identified by cuneiform captions. They are arranged in two tiers of fourteen people with raised arms between the legs, and two people on the outside supporting the feet of the dais (or throne).
IMAGES OF POWER:
ANCIENT NEAR EAST: ACTIVITIES and REVIEW
(Assyrian and Persian)
On the left is a miniature from the Mughal Empire (in present-day India). It depicts the emperor Jahangir on a lion hunt and dates to approximately 1615. Compare and contrast this work with the Assyrian relief seen above, analyzing how each work conveys notions of power. Discuss stylistic characteristics as well as visual content.
Guardian figures were common in the ancient world. Using your textbook, identify each of these works and the culture that created them. Using specific visual evidence, clearly state how each of these works conveys notions of power.
The design of this outlet mall in Los Angeles was inspired by Assyrian architecture. Why do you think the architects were interested in Assyrian art, especially the lamassu? (You do not have to write an answer)
VIDEO: Lamassu from the Citadel of Sargon II on Smarthistory
VIDEO: Capital from the Palace of Darius I on Smarthistory