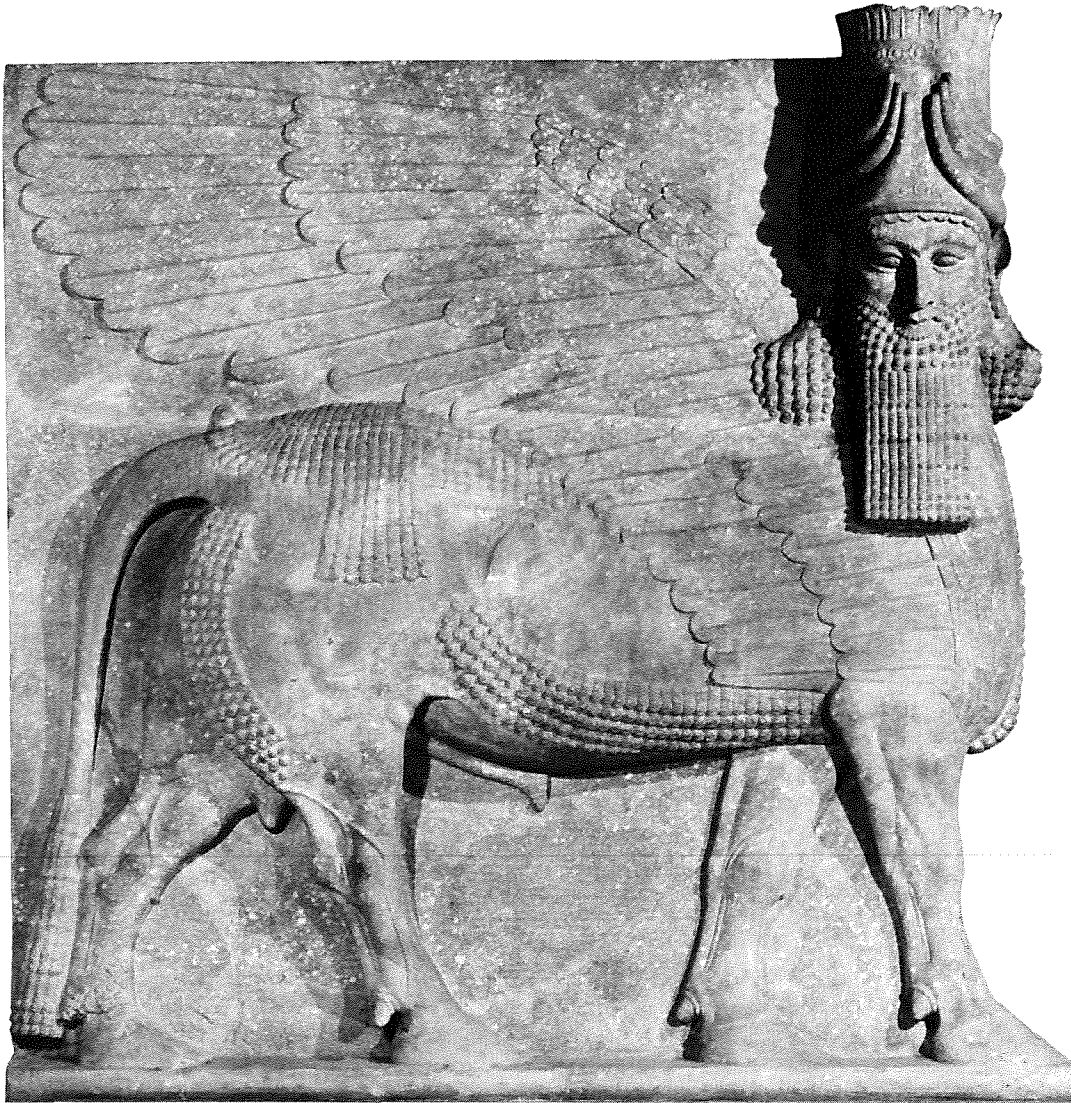


ORIENTAL INSTITUTE MUSEUM
Featured Object Number 8, May 1990
HUMAN-HEADED WINGED BULL FROM KHORSABAD
(OIM A7369)



Human-headed winged bulls and heroic figures adorned the entrances to the throne room of the Assyrian King Sargon II (721-705 B.C.) in his capital city of Dur-Sharrukin, known today as Khorsabad. Oriental Institute archaeologists excavating the ruins of that city discovered this colossal sculpture in 1929. The more than a dozen pieces into which the bull had broken in antiquity were generously given to the Oriental Institute by the Department of Antiquities of Iraq and were, with great difficulty, transported to Chicago. The fragments were then reassembled and restored in place. It is estimated that the sculpture, which stands over sixteen feet tall, weighs approximately forty tons.

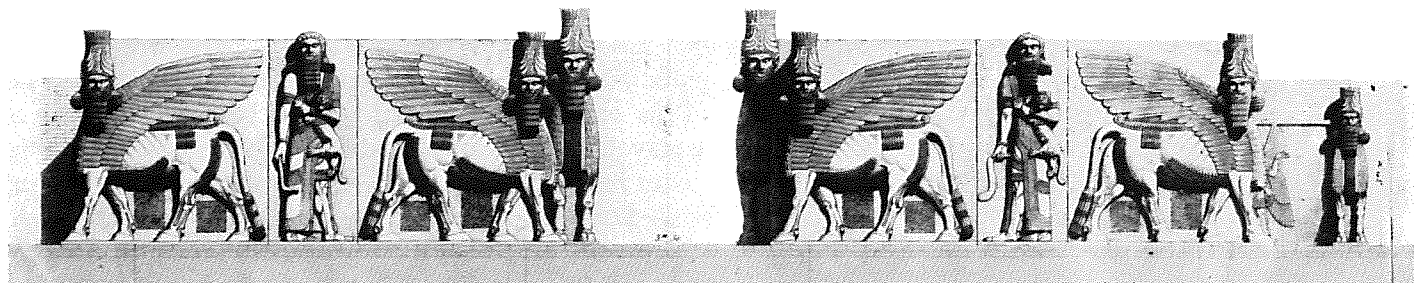
The awesome guardian figure is composed of parts of several different animals—including man—and probably was thought thus to embody the most desirable qualities of each. The lower parts of the sculpture, as well as its ears, are those of a mighty bull, with massive hooves, heavily veined and muscled legs, and an elaborately curly hide. When viewed from the side, the bull strides purposefully forward, but when seen from the front, it appears to be standing still. Thus it is actually represented with five, rather than four, legs. From the bull's shoulders rise the sweeping wings of a bird. These are evocative of the grace and power of a bird of prey—such as the eagle, which is often pictured at Khorsabad in close association with the bull. The head of the guardian figure, turned at right angles to regard those who approached the throne room, is that of a man. The moustache, beard, hair, and earrings are identical to those of King Sargon and his courtiers as depicted on the stone reliefs that decorated the palace walls at Dur-Sharrukin. The expression on the face is benevolent, with the corners of the mouth drawn upward in a slight smile. Atop the human head is a cylindrical crown covered with rosettes, surmounted by a vertical band of feathers, and encircled by three pairs of horns. In ancient Mesopotamia, horned crowns were worn only by gods, so this human-headed winged bull is marked by its headdress as divine.

The inscriptions of many Assyrian kings, including Sargon himself, refer to guardian figures like this one as *lamassus* and speak of placing them at the gates of their cities and palaces. *Lamassus* are described by a successor of Sargon as ones who “because of their appearance, turn back an evil person, guard the steps, and secure the path of the king who fashioned them.” In the inscriptions on this human-headed winged bull, however, Sargon uses only the most general terms for animals when mentioning the stone sculptures that he erected at Dur-Sharrukin. All of Sargon's guardian figures that are preserved have the bodies of bulls, but other Assyrian kings also carved *lamassus* in the form of winged human-headed lions. It has been suggested that these sculptures might have been the source of the Hebrew prophet Ezekiel's vision of composite creatures having the fourfold aspects of a man, a lion, an eagle, and a bull, which “each went straight forward” (Ezek. 1:5-12).

History of the Site

Dur-Sharrukin, “Fort Sargon,” was a new capital city founded by Sargon shortly after he came to the throne of Assyria in 721 B.C. Although formally dedicated in 706 B.C., the city had not been completed before Sargon died the following year. His son and successor, Sennacherib, moved the Assyrian capital to the old established city of Nineveh to the south. Dur-Sharrukin gradually fell into ruins and its stone sculptures were buried in the debris of the buildings' collapsing roofs and walls.

In 1842, the French consul at Mosul heard of the presence of stone sculptures at the site of Khorsabad and began excavations there. He explored and recorded part of the palace and made a few scattered soundings in the town. From 1851-55, another French team traced the entire palace and partially excavated the city wall with its seven gates. One of these gates was still standing with its original decorated arch in place (fig. 3), indicating the monumental scale of Assyrian architecture



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Figure 2. Reconstruction of the southwest wall of Court VIII in Sargon's palace at Dur-Sharrukin. P. E. Botta and E. Flandin, *Monument de Ninive I* (Paris, 1849), plate 30.

above the colossal human-headed winged bulls. The French draftsmen produced exquisitely detailed drawings reconstructing the original placement of Sargon's stone reliefs and sculptures, including one that shows the original appearance of the entrances to the throne room, as they would have looked with the Oriental Institute's human-headed winged bull in place (fig. 2).

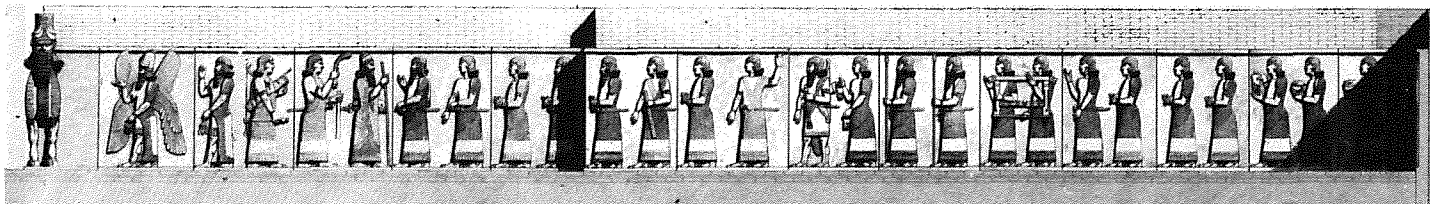
Archaeologists from the Oriental Institute worked at Khorsabad from 1929 to 1935, concentrating on excavating the temples and residences of important state officials that were situated near the palace. Because the city had been abandoned, the excavations yielded few objects, but they did provide a large body of valuable information about Assyrian architecture and architectural decoration. With the permission of the Department of Antiquities of Iraq, this expedition was able to bring to Chicago not only the human-headed winged bull, but also the numerous relief slabs from Sargon's palace that are now on view in the Oriental Institute Museum's Assyrian Gallery.



Figure 3. Khorsabad City Gate No. 3, showing the archway decorated with glazed bricks still standing on the backs of two human-headed winged bulls. Calotype taken by M. Tranchand between 1851 and 1855. M. Pillet, *Un pionnier de l'assyriologie. Victor Place* (Cahiers de la Société Asiatique; Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1962), plate VIII, figure 9.

Transporting the Colossi

Each of the many colossal figures that guarded the entrances to Assyrian cities and palaces was carved from a single block of stone that had to be transported a considerable distance to the capital. In letters written to Sargon by some of his officials there are numerous references to the royal demand for these colossi, as well as descriptions of the difficulties that were encountered in transporting them. For example, one tablet reads: "To the king, my lord: your servant Aššur-bani. Good health to the king, my lord! Aššur-šumu-ke'in called me to help and loaded the bull colossi on the boats, but the boats could not carry the load (and sank). Now, although it cost me a great trouble, I have now hauled them up again" [Simo Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I. Letters from Assyria and the West* (State Archives of Assyria Volume 1; Helsinki University Press, 1987), p. 96].



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The stone relief slabs decorating the walls of the palace of Sargon's son and successor, Sennacherib, include scenes that vividly portray the stages in the laborious process of producing the colossi—the initial hewing out of the monolith from bedrock, its removal from the quarry (fig. 4), and its transport through the Assyrian countryside to the city. On these reliefs, the king personally watches the process from his chariot, indicating the importance attached to these sculptures and their safe arrival at the capital.

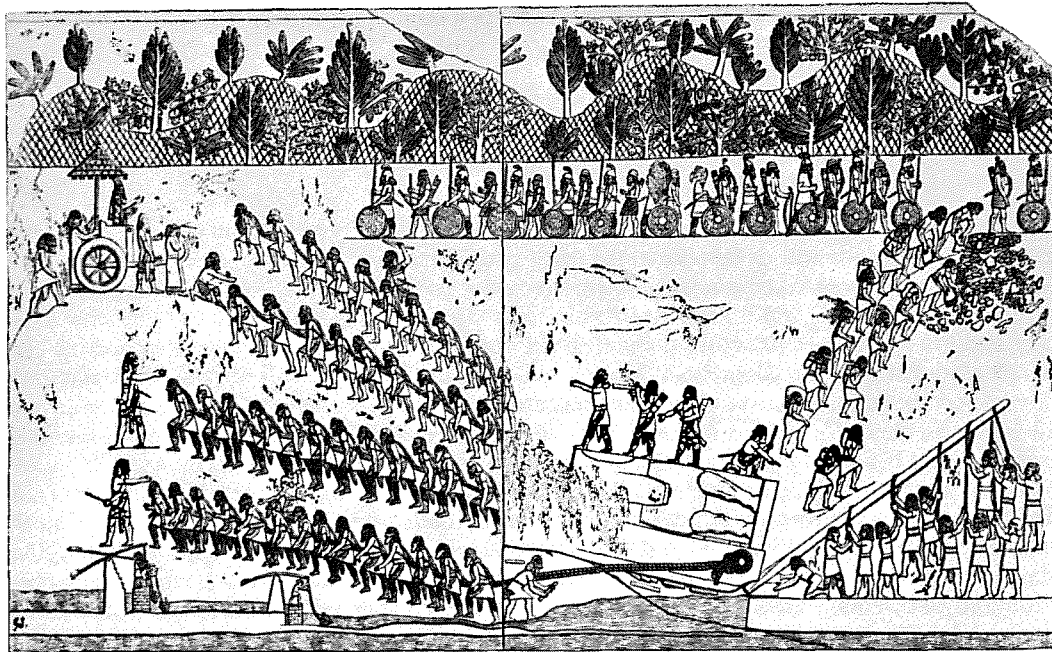


Figure 4. Foreign slaves hauling a winged bull on a sledge out of the quarry and across a stream. Some slaves are clearing rocks from the track while others insert a long lever underneath the sledge. The operation is controlled by a man with a horn who stands on the colossus itself and is watched over by the king from his chariot on the upper left. A. H. Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon* (London, 1853), p. 111.

The many difficulties recorded by the Assyrians in moving these colossi found a modern parallel in the problems encountered in transporting the Oriental Institute's sculpture to Chicago—even though the modern task should have been simpler, as the colossus had been broken into many pieces. The largest fragments, weighing approximately twenty, seven, and five tons each, had to be lifted from their resting places by means of locally made hoists, and wooden cases, reinforced with iron beams, had to be constructed around them. Then the encased fragments were lifted to the modern surface of the mound and transported to the Tigris River some twelve miles away. The Tigris is navigable only when in flood in the late spring and, as the bull was discovered in April, time was of the essence. However, it took fifteen days to travel the twelve miles to the river with the largest fragments as the only vehicle available was woefully inadequate for the task and broke down repeatedly. In the end, the truck collapsed about three hundred meters from the river, which was falling at such a rapid rate that no time could be spent on repairs, so the disabled vehicle was dragged by steel cables the remaining distance to the waiting boat. Three days were spent maneuvering the crate onto the deck, another in pulling the boat (which was now partially aground due to the added weight and the rapidly falling water-level) back into the river, and the bull was at last on its way. After the fragments had reached the United States, the railroad company that was to transport them had to reroute the train so as to avoid all tunnels, which were too narrow to accommodate the largest piece. Three years after its discovery, when the bull had been reconstructed and safely installed in the brand-new Oriental Institute building, a local newspaper columnist wrote: "The forty-ton bull of King Sargon II, after three years of travel, finally has been tethered permanently. 'And thank goodness for that. . . .'"

Translation of the Inscriptions

There are two separate inscriptions on the bull, each describing Sargon's building of his new capital city. On the rear side is a completely preserved 22-line text summarizing the major accomplishments of Sargon's reign and his building of Dur-Sharrukin. On the front are about 50 lines of an incomplete text written in two panels, the first running between the bull's hind legs and the second between the foremost hind leg and the rear foreleg. This inscription may have begun on another slab, since the standard version of this text found elsewhere at Khorsabad would have had approximately 35 to 40 lines of introduction that are not found on this example.

In the following translation, square brackets setting off minor restorations have for the most part been omitted.

Rear Inscription

Palace of Sargon, ruler appointed by Enlil, priest of Ashur, mighty king, king of the world, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters of the world, favorite of the great gods; who established the exempt status of Sippar, Nippur, and Babylon, and protects them in their weakness; who provides food for the destitute, who makes restitution for their wrongful losses; who reestablished for the city Assur its privileged status which had lapsed; who abolished forced labor for Der and brought rest to its weary people; most powerful of all princes, who stretched his protection over Harran and recorded that city's freedom from taxation in accordance with the will of Anu and Dagan; the king, who since the day he became ruler, has had no equal and has encountered no one superior to him in war or battle; who has smashed all lands like clay pots and has imposed reins on the four quarters of the world, who has set his officials over them as governors, and has imposed tax and tribute upon them comparable to those paid by Assyria.

With my broad knowledge and wide intelligence, which the gods Ea and Belet-ili made greater than that of my royal forefathers, and in accordance with my personal wishes, I built a city at the foot of Mt. Musri in the vicinity of Nineveh and named it Dur-Sharrukin. In it I had substantial shrines artistically constructed for Ea, Sin, Shamash, Adad, and Ninurta. I built palaces using ivory, boxwood, *musukkannu*-wood, cedar, cypress, juniper, *burashu*-juniper, and terebinth for my royal dwelling. At their gates, I constructed a portico patterned after a Syrian palace and roofed it with cedar and cypress beams. At their entrances, I erected animals made of white stone resembling beasts of the mountain and sea. In their gates, I hung doors of cypress and *musukkannu*-wood. I made its wall as firm as the mountains, and I brought there as settlers peoples of lands I had conquered—as wide an area as Shamash (the sun god) shepherds. The great gods who inhabit heaven and earth and the gods who dwell in this city have granted me the lasting gift of building this city and growing old here.

Front Inscription

[At that time I constructed a city above the water holes at the foot of Mt. Musri north of Nineveh, and I named it Dur-Sharrukin. Around it I laid out a great park resembling Mt. Amanus, planted with every Syrian aromatic tree and mountain fruit tree. Not one of the 350 ancient princes who reigned over Assyria before me and ruled the subjects of Enlil had thought of this location; not one had known how to settle it or dig its canal or to set out its orchards.] I planned day and night how to settle that city and how to raise its great shrines, the dwellings of the great gods, and my royal residential palaces. I spoke and commanded it to be built. In an auspicious month, on a favorable day, the month Simanu (May/June), on a festival day, I made my workers take up the hoe and mold bricks.

In the month Abu (July/August), the month when foundation platforms of cities or houses are laid and when all black-headed men construct shade for their dwellings, I set out its limestone (masonry) upon (foundation deposits of) gold, silver, precious stones, and aromatic plants of Mt. Amanus; I laid its foundations and firmly set its bricks. There I built awesome shrines, firm as the mass of a mountain, for Ea, Sin, Ningal, Shamash, Nabu, Adad, and Ninurta. At the exalted command of these gods, I constructed palaces of ivory, ebony, boxwood, *musukkannu*-wood, cedar, cypress, juniper, *burashu*-juniper, and pistachio-wood for my royal dwelling. I roofed them with large cedar beams. I bound doors made of cypress and *musukkannu*-wood with bands of shining copper and made them fast in their entrances. In front of the palace gates, I built a portico resembling that of a Hittite palace, which they call a Bit-Hilani in the language of Syria. Eight lions, in pairs, each weighing 4,610 talents (ca. 14 tons) full measure of shining copper, cast according to the workmanship of Ninagal and of dazzling brightness—on top of these lion figures I placed four equally tall cedar columns, each one *ninda* (ca. 20 ft.) in diameter, products of Mt. Amanus, and there supported the boards forming the cornice of the palace gates.

I skillfully made mountain sheep and great protective deities out of massive mountain stone and set them facing the four directions. I depicted on large limestone slabs the regions which I had personally captured and set these slabs around the walls for display.

I made the length of the wall 16,261 $\frac{1}{2}$ *ninda* and 2 cubits (ca. 60 miles) and laid its foundation platform upon a high mountain. In front and in back, on both sides, and facing the four winds I opened eight gates. I called the gates of Shamash and Adad on the east side of the city: "Shamash Gains Victories for Me" and "Adad Establishes My Abundance." I named the gates of Enlil and Ninlil on the north side: "Enlil Makes the Foundation of My City Firm" and "Ninlil Creates Abundance." I named the gates of Anu and Ishtar on the west side: "Anu Makes the Work of My Hands Flourish" and "Ishtar Enriches Its People." I named the gates of Ea and Belet-ili on the south side: "Ea Makes Its Springs Flow Prosperously" and "Belet-ili Increases His Offspring." Its inner wall was called "Ashur Allows the Reign of the King, Its Builder, to Last for Many Years and Guards His Troops"; its outer wall was called "Ninurta Establishes the Foundation Platform of His City So That It Will Last until the Distant Future."

There under a single administration I settled peoples from the four quarters of the world, of alien tongues and different speech, mountain dwellers and lowlanders, as many as the Light of the Gods (Shamash), Lord of All, has shepherded; these peoples I had captured at the command of the god Ashur by the power of my scepter. I commissioned native Assyrians, masters of every craft, as overseers and officials to instruct them (the settlers) in their duties as tenants and in their obligations toward god and king.

When I had finished building the city and my palaces, in the month Tashritu (September/October) I invited the great gods who dwell in Assyria to come here. I held a feast to dedicate the city and palaces. I received rich gifts from the princes of the East and West: gold, silver, and all kinds of costly objects fitting for these palaces. May the gods who dwell in this city deem all my works acceptable. May they decree that they will dwell in their temples here and that my reign may remain firm for ever and ever. Whoever destroys the work of my hands, alters the features of my statue, obliterates the representations which I have had depicted, or erases my insignia—may Sin, Shamash, Adad, and all the great gods who live here pluck out his name and his seed from the land; and may they make him live as a captive under his enemies.

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