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# An Ivory Fan Handle from Nimrud

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During excavations of the Northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.) at Nimrud by the British School of Archaeology in Iraq in 1951–52, a deep well was investigated at the southern end of a room designated NN.<sup>1</sup> The accumulated debris filling the well contained pottery vessels, fragments of bronze objects, wooden furniture, and pieces of carved shell and ivory. A considerable number of these objects were thrown into the well, perhaps in the hope of later recovery, when Babylonian and Median soldiers sacked Nimrud in 612 B.C., bringing to an end the Assyrian empire that had dominated an area from Egypt to Iran. Many of the ivory pieces display carving of the highest quality; one very fine example is the top of a fan handle (Figure 1), which was partly encased beneath a thick coat of bitumen when found at the bottom of the well.<sup>2</sup> It entered the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1954, when the finds were divided between Iraq and the excavation's funding institutions, in accordance with the practice at that time.<sup>3</sup>

The handle is a very fine and delicately modeled example of an Assyrian-style ivory. Generally dated to the ninth and eighth centuries B.C., Assyrian-style ivories are so named because they are decorated with subjects known to us from the wall reliefs, paintings, and decorated metalwork of the Assyrian palaces. They contrast with so-called Syrian-style ivories, which have designs related to stone carvings of northern Syrian cities, and Phoenician-style ivories, with designs that are influenced by Egyptian art. Examples of Assyrian-style ivories have been found in northern Iraq at Nimrud, Nineveh, and Balawat, and in northwestern Iran at Hasanlu.<sup>4</sup> Carved with an incised line or in low relief with a few examples in the round, their decoration includes scenes of warfare, processions, and figures approaching a stylized tree. Simpler animal and plant designs known in Assyrian glyptic art and ceramics also occur on these objects.

The Metropolitan Museum's fan handle is carved from a single piece of ivory and is preserved virtually complete.<sup>5</sup> Three hollow cylinders on its top were previously thought to have accommodated bristles, but as will be suggested below, they more likely held feathers. Below the cylinders, a rectangular space contains a scene, framed at top and bottom by three bands and repeated on both faces of the object; the bands continue on the narrow sides, which are otherwise undecorated. The carved scene depicts a pair of half-kneeling beardless figures flanking a stylized tree. Plucking rounded fruit with their raised right hands, they hold in their left hands the ends of fillets that emerge from the tree trunk. Each figure's hair is bound with a band and falls in a block of curls to the shoulders. The two wear simple round-necked, ankle-length robes with short sleeves, belted at the waist. The central tree consists of four stems, with moldings at the center and beneath the volute palmette at the top. Fillets or stalks emerging from the central molding end in what may be stylized flowers, perhaps lotuses. The framed scene rests on three pairs of downward-curving, openwork volutes, set on a partially preserved molded column. The handle originally would have been attached to a separate staff by means of the dowel hole drilled in the base of the column and secured with the ivory pin that is still in place on one side.

The fan handle was first published in 1952 in the *Illustrated London News*, where Max Mallowan described it as "an ivory plaque finely carved on either side with a mythological scene depicting two bearded, kneeling figures holding on to bands which are tied to the sacred tree. This may perhaps represent the bedecked Assyrian 'Maypole' which appears to have played an important part in the Assyrian New Year Festival."<sup>6</sup> Nearly three years later, Joan Lines followed Mallowan in describing "two figures kneeling before a 'sacred tree' or 'maypole,' believed to have had ritual significance in the Assyrian New Year's festival."<sup>7</sup> In Mallowan's survey of the British School's excavations at Nimrud, the figures, though no longer described by him as bearded, are still interpreted as taking part in "a ritual

1. Two faces of a fan handle from the Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Iraq. Neo-Assyrian, 7th century B.C. Ivory, 4 x 1 3/8 x 3/8 in. (10.2 x 3.5 x 1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1954 (54.117.3)



performed at the Assyrian spring festival.”<sup>8</sup> Finally, Mallowan and Leri Glynne Davies suggested a possible connection between the scene and the New Year festival in their 1970 catalogue of Assyrian-style ivories from Nimrud.<sup>9</sup>

Mallowan’s interpretation of the scene on the fan handle is based on a suggestion by Sidney Smith, who in 1922 posited the existence of an Assyrian New Year festival “maypole” and related it to the stylized trees found on Assyrian reliefs.<sup>10</sup> Smith formulated this thesis from his reading of a seventh-century B.C. letter from Nineveh (British Museum, K189), which seemed to refer to Akitu temples where tree trunks were decorated with metal bands and fillets. Smith associated the setting up of decorated tree trunks with the New Year festival because these celebrations were thought to have taken place in Akitu temples.<sup>11</sup> James Breasted followed this interpretation: “Assur’s oldest symbol was the

tree of life, which the Assyrians set up and decorated every spring like a Maypole.”<sup>12</sup> Henri Frankfort, too, was convinced of the idea, which was strengthened in his mind by the discovery of trunks of cedars bound with copper bands that had once flanked doorways in the temples of Sin and Shamash at Khorsabad.<sup>13</sup> A more recent translation of tablet K189 indicates, however, that the text in fact concerns a lamentation priest at Nimrud, whom the author accuses of making alterations to temple buildings without royal permission.<sup>14</sup> The letter contains no references to setting up decorated trees in Akitu temples, and the meaning of the fan handle’s scene must therefore be revisited.

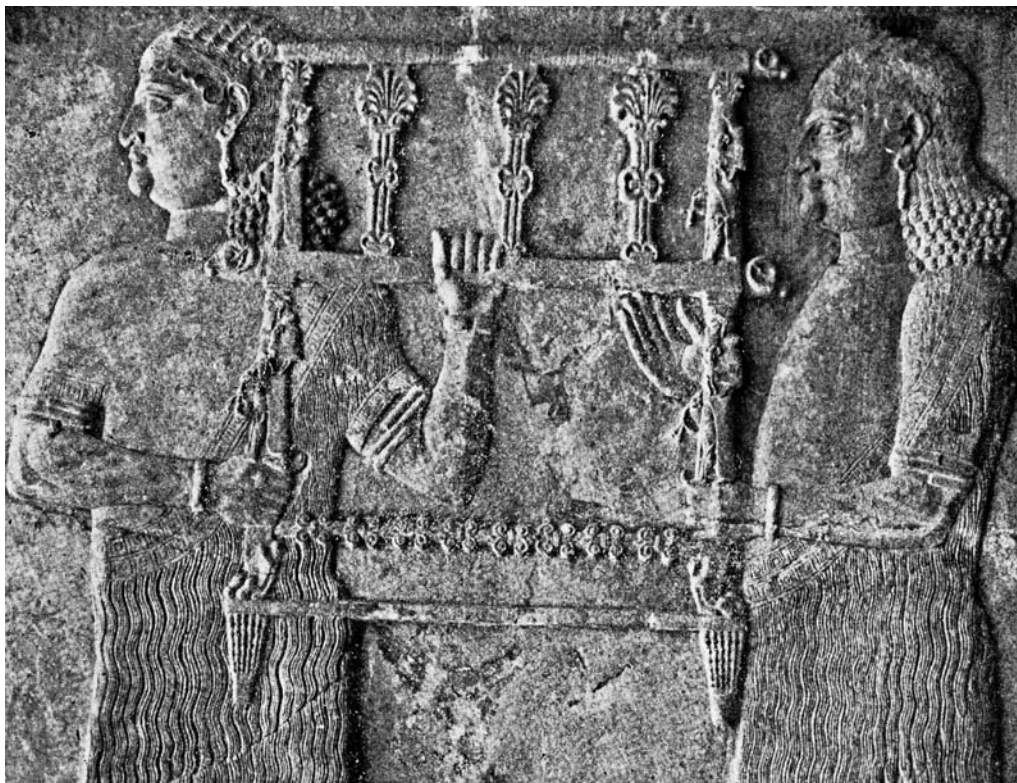
The central element of the two carved scenes on the ivory, the stylized tree, is formed from volutes and tendrils. Such trees are first known from images dating to the fifteenth to the fourteenth century B.C. from northern Syria

and Iraq, a region then dominated by the kingdom of Mitanni.<sup>15</sup> They are the predecessors of images from the Middle Assyrian period toward the end of the fourteenth century B.C., when volute-trees on cylinder seals were elaborated by clusters of volutes placed at intervals along the stem.<sup>16</sup> These stylized trees in turn were the ancestors of well-known examples in Neo-Assyrian wall reliefs, glazed bricks, and glyptic that scholars often call Sacred Trees. The Sacred Tree is commonly formed from multiple palmettes, which are sometimes replaced with either pomegranates or buds.<sup>17</sup> Some of the rooms in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud, for example, have palmette Sacred Trees repeated along all the walls (Figure 2).<sup>18</sup> The tree, which represents abundance, is apotropaic, carved in relief to defend vulnerable parts of the palace such as corners and doorways, and repeated across walls to magically protect the space.<sup>19</sup>

Sacred Trees with multiple palmettes would appear to have a close association with female deities and femininity in general.<sup>20</sup> The type of simplified tree represented on the Metropolitan's ivory, however, with a trunk divided into zones by horizontal "bindings," may be gendered only according to its particular context: a version of this tree that appears on stamped clay prisms of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.), for example, has been interpreted as symbolizing the male god Ashur.<sup>21</sup> As noted by Mallowan, some of the closest parallels to the fan handle's Sacred Tree are those decorating a table on a relief from Khorsabad (Figure 3).<sup>22</sup> Whereas the trees on the Khorsabad

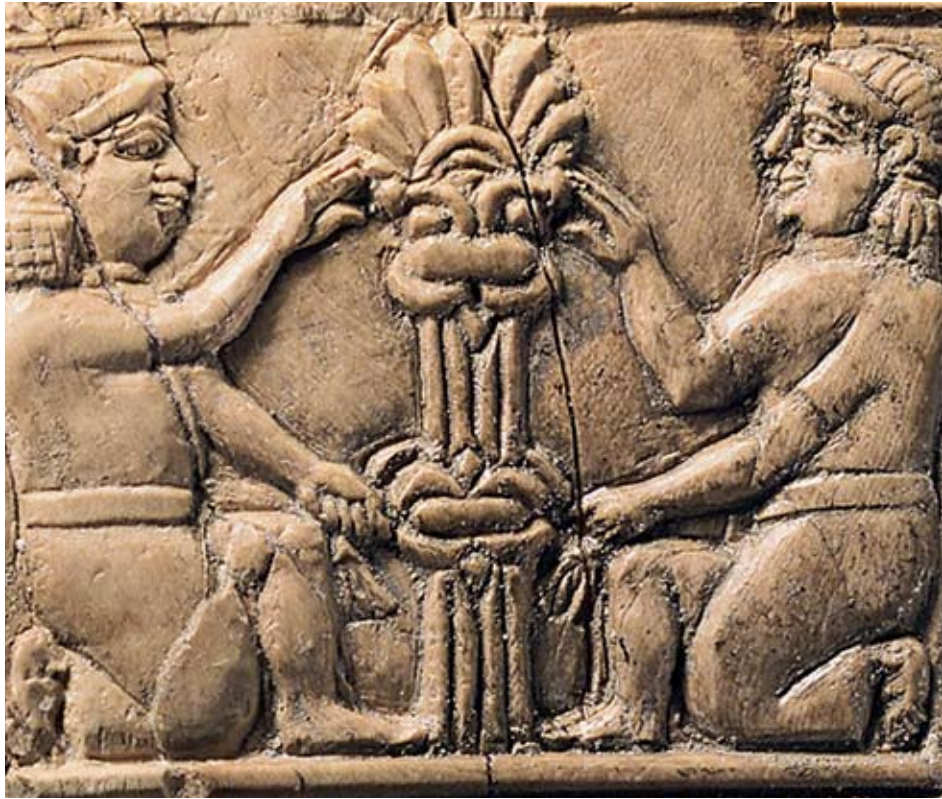


2. Detail of a relief showing a Sacred Tree, from room F, Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Iraq. Neo-Assyrian, ca. 875–860 B.C. Gypsum. British Museum, London (ME 124584). Photograph courtesy of the Trustees of The British Museum



3. Detail of a relief showing a table, from Khorsabad, Iraq. Neo-Assyrian, ca. 710 B.C. Gypsum. Iraq Museum, Baghdad (18629). Photograph: Loud 1936, fig. 41





4. Detail of Figure 1 showing carved fruits

relief do not have fillets and emerge from a volute base, the tree on the ivory includes fillets and emerges from the ground line without the more usual “roots.”<sup>23</sup> The trees on both the relief and the ivory have two small rounded fruits at the ends of stalks that sprout from the top of the trunk where the palmette emerges (Figure 4). The variety of the fruit is not clear, but the rounded shape and the possibility that a calyx may be depicted on one of them suggest that they are intended to be pomegranates, which, like palmette trees, are Assyrian symbols of fertility, abundance, and femininity.<sup>24</sup> One of King Sennacherib’s rock reliefs at Bavian, for example, depicts a goddess, thought to represent a syncretistic union of the goddesses Mullissu and Ishtar, carrying a staff topped with a stylized tree with radiating branches terminating in pomegranates, possibly representing the abundance of the land provided by the goddess through the king.<sup>25</sup>

The pairs of antithetical figures flanking the Sacred Trees on the Museum’s ivory handle may represent either women or eunuchs, who are both depicted beardless and wearing ankle-length robes on Assyrian reliefs, metalwork, and carved ivories.<sup>26</sup> Whereas there is extensive pictorial evidence of eunuchs from the Neo-Assyrian period, representations of Assyrian women are less common.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, distinctions between women and eunuchs in Assyrian art become clearer when their costumes and attributes are compared across media, and the gender of the figures on the fan handle can thus be identified. The robes of eunuchs



5. Female head, probably from Nineveh, Iraq. Neo-Assyrian, 7th century B.C. Limestone, 9 x 8½ in. (22.9 x 21.6 cm). British Museum, London (ME 118897). Photograph courtesy of the Trustees of The British Museum

have short sleeves like those seen here, but women’s tunics also display this feature (although women also wore their sleeves below the elbow).<sup>28</sup> Eunuchs wear their belts over a cummerbund, while women have a simple band around their waist, as seen on the fan handle. The most obvious



6. Relief showing female genies flanking a Sacred Tree, from room I, Northwest Palace, Nimrud, Iraq. Neo-Assyrian, ca. 875–860 B.C. Gypsum, 46 x 68½ in. (117 x 174 cm). British Museum, London (ME 124581). Photograph courtesy of the Trustees of The British Museum

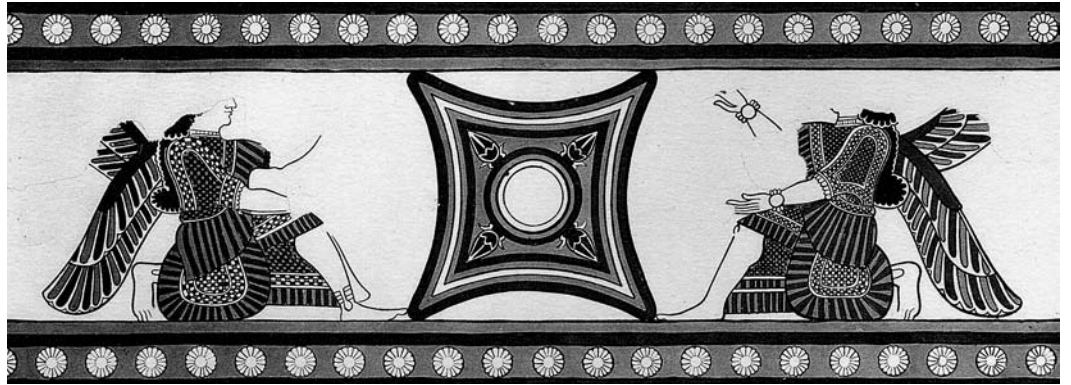
attribute that favors an identification of the individuals on the ivory as female is the headband each wears. The surviving heads of two Assyrian statues, at least one of which was found at Nineveh (Figure 5), depict females with wide headbands of uniform width; similar headgear appears on a statue of a female from Ashur.<sup>29</sup> In Assyrian imagery only women and bearded men wear such headbands; those worn by eunuchs are wider behind than in front, distinguishing these individuals as senior officials.<sup>30</sup> Julian Reade has noted that eunuchs on reliefs of Sargon II (721–705 B.C.) from Khorsabad were originally carved with headbands of standard width but these were later erased or recarved as hair.<sup>31</sup> Since Sargon claims to have deported skilled workers from conquered regions, it is possible that some of these sculptors, unfamiliar with the conventions of Assyrian courtly dress, rendered the images, which were subsequently corrected.<sup>32</sup> A similar explanation may account for inconsistencies in wall paintings of a similar date in the Assyrian residence at Til Barsip (modern Tell ‘Ahmar, Syria). Paintings from room 47 at Til Barsip show eunuchs as well as bearded men wearing ornamented headbands,<sup>33</sup> whereas similar figures in the contemporary wall paintings in room 24 of the same building do not wear headbands.<sup>34</sup>

The headband and belt worn by the figures on the ivory handle, then, indicate that they should be identified as females. Indeed, it has been suggested that the broad headbands they wear might signify a connection with the

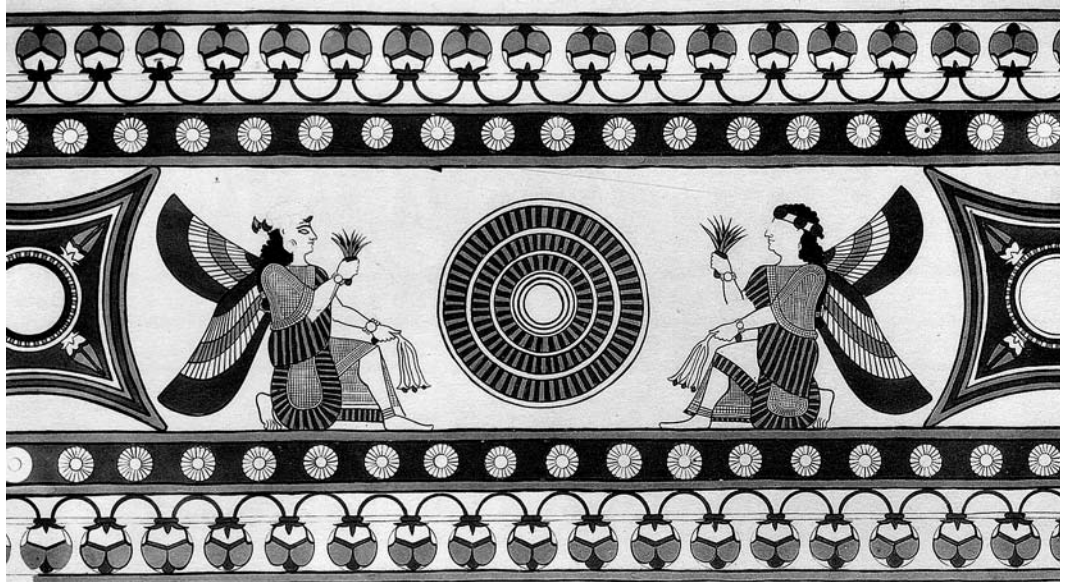
goddess Ishtar.<sup>35</sup> Since either a deity and a worshipper or two deities normally flank Sacred Trees, it is possible that the females on the ivory have a close relationship with the supernatural world.<sup>36</sup> In Assyrian reliefs from the Northwest Palace at Nimrud, for example, the Sacred Tree can be depicted in isolation or, more often, flanked by bearded genies.<sup>37</sup> Usually the genies appear to stride toward the tree, but there are also examples of reliefs where the genies adopt the half-kneeling pose of the figures on the fan handle.<sup>38</sup> A few of the standing genies flanking the Sacred Tree in rooms I and L of the Northwest Palace are beardless and wear short-sleeved, ankle-length robes (Figure 6); they have been identified as female genies, perhaps to be associated with Ishtar.<sup>39</sup> Both the male and the female genies at Nimrud are usually winged and wear the horned helmet of divinity, however, and these features are clearly not present on the fan handle’s figures.<sup>40</sup>

Stronger parallels can be found between the figures on the ivory handle and the half-kneeling female genies painted on walls in the Assyrian royal residence at Til Barsip. A pair of genies flanking a concave-sided square “cushion” was recorded in room 46 (Figure 7). Unlike the figures on the Metropolitan’s fan handle, they are shown in strict mirror image. Elsewhere in the building, a single genie from room 27 wears a broad headband ornamented with rosettes and holds a triple-branch plant in her lowered left hand and a lotuslike flower in her raised right hand. Another pair of beardless genies, but flanking a roundel, decorate a wall in

7. Drawing of a wall painting of female genies from room 46 in the Assyrian royal residence at Til Barsip. Photograph: Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936, pl. 52



8. Drawing of a wall painting of female genies from room 25 in the Assyrian royal residence at Til Barsip. Photograph: Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936, pl. 52



room 25 (Figure 8). These are very similar in pose and attributes to the genie from room 27. The robes of the genies are round-necked, elaborately decorated, and fringed, with sleeves that end at or above the elbows. They also wear arm and ankle bracelets; the latter are generally associated with women.<sup>41</sup> As in the pose of the fan handle's figures, their lower bodies are in mirror image while their upper bodies are in rotational symmetry, and they have bare feet.<sup>42</sup>

Clearly the Til Barsip female genies have a greater elaboration of costume and jewelry than the fan handle's figures. This fact might be explained by varying conventions of representation in different media.<sup>43</sup> The other significant difference from the handle figures is the presence of wings on the Til Barsip female genies. Nonetheless, wingless genies are known from the wall decoration at Nimrud and Til Barsip, as well as from an Assyrian-style ivory from Hasanlu.<sup>44</sup> At Khorsabad wingless genies represent the most widely depicted supernatural figure on exterior walls and inner doorways of the palace, either positioned singly or on either side of a stylized tree.<sup>45</sup> The absence of wings is therefore not sufficient evidence to discount the possibility that the figures on the fan handle are divine, since wingless genies

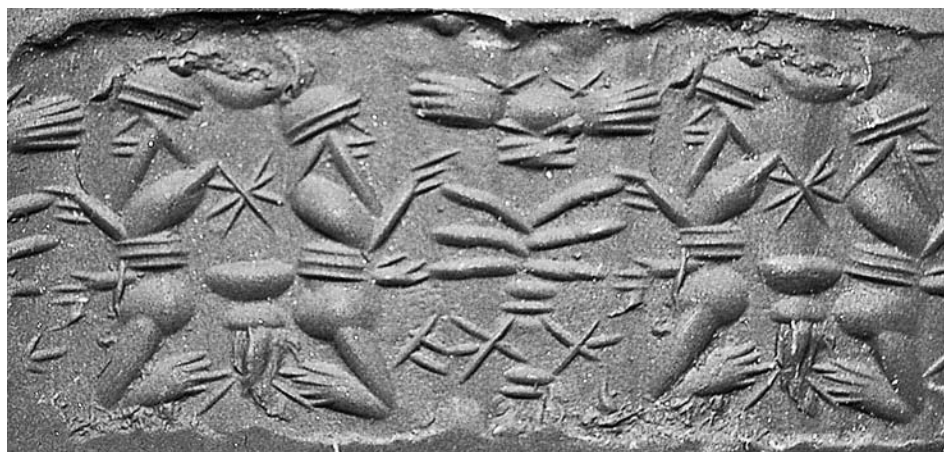
are known in increasing numbers in Assyrian art from the ninth through the eighth century B.C. Because our understanding of the function and ranking of these supernatural beings is limited, some of their forms may reflect a system of representation and placement that we cannot identify. Indeed, some Assyrian cylinder seals of the seventh century B.C. display antithetical, wingless, kneeling figures flanking a tree, each wearing a belt and headband but appearing to be bearded (Figure 9).<sup>46</sup>

To evaluate further the imagery on the fan handle, it is necessary to consider its date. Mallowan places the fan handle in the Sargonid period, possibly to the reign of Sargon II himself.<sup>47</sup> He reaches this conclusion from the appearance of the square of tightly curled hair resting on the shoulders of the carved figures—a hairstyle certainly depicted first on the reliefs of Sargon but also evident on the monuments of all his successors.<sup>48</sup> The parallels, noted above, between the Sacred Trees on the fan handle and those on a relief from Khorsabad, as well as comparisons with the Til Barsip female genies, also might suggest a date in the late eighth century B.C. Nevertheless, a review of the changing form of Neo-Assyrian fan handles in the imagery



of the eighth to the seventh century B.C. points to a somewhat later date. Since I have explored this topic elsewhere, it is only necessary to summarize, as follows, some of the findings that led to this conclusion.<sup>49</sup>

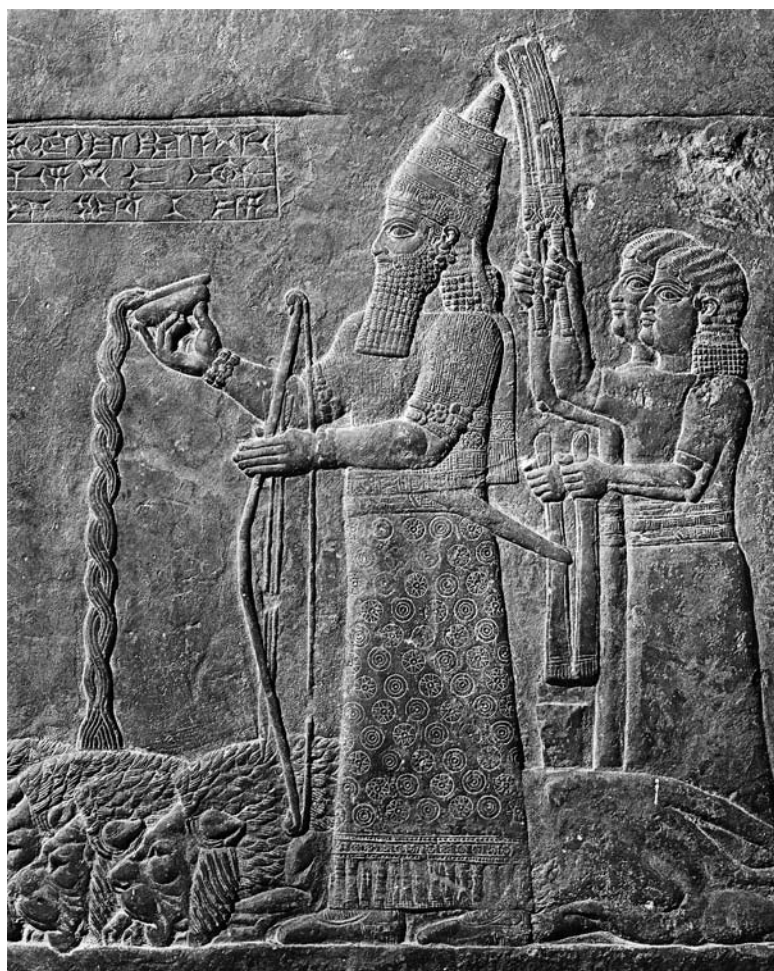
From the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 B.C.), depictions of the king show him attended by a eunuch courtier holding a fan, whose handle terminates in a lotus shape from which feathers emerge.<sup>50</sup> On the Khorsabad reliefs of Sargon II, eunuchs hold similar fans, each with a handle carved in the shape of a lion's head at the lower end. Under Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.), the attendant's feather fan is more elaborate than those depicted at Khorsabad, with the addition of two pairs of volutes supporting the lotus and three parallel moldings at the top, from which four very long feathers emerge. The last representations of Assyrian fans occur in the reliefs from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal (668–631 B.C.) at Nineveh, where volutes form part of the tops of handles as a standard feature. The volutes sometimes support a square section topped with cylinders bearing feathers. In one relief, fallen into room S from an upper floor, the king pours a libation over dead lions while he is attended by two fan bearers, each holding a folded napkin in the left hand and, in the right, a fan decorated with



double volutes, a square ribbed section, and three cylinders (Figure 10).<sup>51</sup> Finally, in the so-called Garden Party relief, a pair of female fan bearers stand behind both the king and the queen. Their fans have ribbed shafts topped with three volutes and feathers issuing from three cylinders (Figure 11).

Although parallels have long been noted between the fan handle that is the focus of this article and those represented on the reliefs of Sennacherib,<sup>52</sup> the strongest correspondence is with the fans just described—those decorated with

9. Modern impression of an Assyrian cylinder seal with kneeling wingless figures. Seal: provenance unknown, 7th century B.C. Chalcedony, 1 1/8 x 3/8 in. (2.75 x 1.1 cm). British Museum, London (1905,1209.10, 102062). Photograph courtesy of the Trustees of The British Museum



10. Detail of a relief showing King Ashurbanipal attended by two fan bearers. Neo-Assyrian, ca. 645–640 B.C., fallen into room S, North Palace, Nineveh, Iraq. Gypsum. British Museum, London (ME 124886). Photograph courtesy of the Trustees of The British Museum



11. Detail of the "Garden Party" relief. Neo-Assyrian, ca. 645–640 B.C., fallen into room S, North Palace, Nineveh, Iraq. British Museum, London (ME 124920). Photograph courtesy of the Trustees of The British Museum

volutes and topped with cylinders to hold feathers that are carried by eunuchs and women on the reliefs of Ashurbanipal.<sup>53</sup> By the seventh century B.C., Assyrian palace reliefs represented some of the most sustained visual narratives of the entire ancient world. Although variations in details can be noted among the reliefs, they all depict events in a world that would have been familiar to a contemporary audience rather than alien or archaic.<sup>54</sup> This is not to imply that the images were meant to be taken literally by the viewer; they are constructs intended to reveal the king as a divinely sanctioned, victorious hunter and warrior. Nonetheless, to make that statement more immediate for the viewer, artists included recognizable details such as topographical information, details of dress and ornament, and even identifiable individuals.<sup>55</sup> The fans represented in the Garden Party relief would therefore very likely have been a type familiar to members of the royal court in the seventh century B.C.

Such a late date for the fan handle is rarely considered, since it has generally been argued that the terminal date for the majority of carved ivories discovered at Nimrud is the reign of Sargon II (721–705 B.C.). This conclusion is based on the evidence that he was the last Assyrian king to use the Northwest Palace as a residence and storehouse. Since Sargon's successor, Sennacherib, focused his building activity on Nineveh and his son Esarhaddon actually removed sculptures from the Northwest Palace for his own building at Nimrud, a late eighth-century date for the latest Nimrud ivories appears very plausible. This dating would also fit with a common assumption that the production of Syrian-style ivories came to an end in the eighth century B.C., at a time when their production centers were absorbed into the Assyrian empire and access to ivory sources diminished with the extinction of Syrian elephants.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, Guy Bunnens has posited that there was a continued production of carved ivories in the Syrian style during the seventh century B.C. on the basis of a collection of ivories from Til Barsip found in a house of that date.<sup>57</sup> This hypothesis might also suggest the possibility of a continued production of Assyrian-style ivories. As Mallowan points out, "there is no reason to suppose that ivories were not being worked in the 7th century B.C."<sup>58</sup> He goes on to suggest, however, that the best examples of such carved ivory would have been destined for the royal palaces in the capital city of Nineveh. (Indeed, objects and decorative elements of Ashurbanipal's bed included in the Garden Party relief may represent such ivories, although it is also possible that they depict works in other materials.)<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, many rooms of the Northwest Palace in Nimrud also continued to be used as royal residences until the destruction of the city in 612 B.C.<sup>60</sup> This included the *bitanu* or private domestic quarters that contained the residences of the royal



12. Handle from Burnt Palace, Nimrud, Iraq. Syrian, 9th–8th century B.C. Ivory, 5 1/4 x 2 in. (13.4 x 5 cm). British Museum, London (ME 118102). Photograph courtesy of the Trustees of The British Museum

women.<sup>61</sup> The excavation of a well in area AJ of the *bitanu* revealed even richer material than the finds from well NN—almost certainly a reflection of the association of this courtyard with the queens' private apartments. The objects hurled down the wells in the final days of Nimrud could have been plundered from different areas of the palace, but considering their location in a functioning area of the building, at least some of the pieces are likely to have been gathered from the domestic quarters of the royal women.

Just as it has been suggested that particular Assyrian images belonged to the male sphere, especially kingship, it is probable that some of the imagery on the objects from the queens' residences had a special significance for women.<sup>62</sup> There are, for example, numerous Syrian-style ivories from Nimrud with representations of females that formed elements of furniture or ivory objects now interpreted as



cosmetic and perfume containers.<sup>63</sup> These include a large number of ivory handles, possibly for bronze mirrors, objects especially associated in Assyria with women (Figure 12).<sup>64</sup> In addition, scenes of females engaged in banquets appear on ivory panels carved in the Syrian style discovered at Fort Shalmaneser in Nimrud. These have been plausibly interpreted as elements of the queens' thrones and may represent protective wingless spirits.<sup>65</sup> Although Assyrian women are largely absent from the palace reliefs and texts, it is notable that some of the most spectacular objects to have survived from Assyria may have belonged to female members of the royal court.<sup>66</sup>

The imagery on the Metropolitan Museum's fan handle might therefore be interpreted in the light of its origins from well NN within the *bitanu* of the Northwest Palace. In the context of the queens' residences, it would be appropriate for a fan handle to be decorated, not with kneeling wingless males flanking a Sacred Tree, as seen in seventh-century B.C. cylinder seals (Figure 9), but, rather, with wingless females. On the fan handle they pluck what may be pomegranates from the stylized tree; both fruit and tree are symbols of femininity, fertility, and abundance. The ivory was carved at a time when Assyrian queens had started to appear on public monuments and the "women of the royal household draw forward from the shadows."<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the same is true for female images of the supernatural world, for after 700 B.C. sculptures of sphinxes with women's heads—imagery derived from the west of the empire—began to appear in palaces.<sup>68</sup> In the more private area of the queens' residence within the Northwest Palace, the importance of these royal women may be signaled by works of art reflecting their connections to fertility, exemplified by the imagery on the Metropolitan's fan handle. This finely carved and delicate object therefore not only demonstrates the continued use of ivory for royal objects during the seventh century B.C. but also affords a small insight into the important but largely hidden world of elite Assyrian women.

## NOTES

1. The well was cleared to a total depth of 83 feet 4 inches (25.4 meters). Between 1949 and 1963 the British School excavated areas already explored by A. H. Layard (1849), such as the throne room, but also investigated some domestic and administrative areas. See M. Mallowan 1966, pp. 93–183, and Oates and Oates 2001, pp. 36–70, 90–100.
2. The use throughout this essay of the term *fan* does not imply a specific function, and such objects may have served the practical purposes of moving air for cooling or as fly whisks, but they could also have had symbolic and/or ritual use.
3. For a list of institutions, see M. Mallowan 1966, pp. 15–16.
4. For references, see Collins 2006a, nn. 6, 8.
5. The diameter of each of the three cylinders at the top is  $\frac{3}{16}$  in. (.5 cm).

6. M. Mallowan 1952, pp. 255–56, fig. 29.
7. Lines 1955, p. 238.
8. M. Mallowan 1966, pp. 144–45.
9. M. Mallowan and Davies 1970, p. 54, no. 203, pl. XLVI.
10. Smith 1922, pp. 43–44. He repeated his interpretation in Smith 1924, p. 84; Smith 1926, p. 72; and Smith 1928, p. 123. M. Mallowan (1966, p. 145n43) refers to doubts having been expressed, by unnamed sources, about Smith's interpretation.
11. Akitu temples are known to have existed in a number of Mesopotamian cities from the third millennium B.C. onward. Dedicated to the local god, the temples were the sites for a specific festival called the Akitu. The Akitu seems to have been celebrated separately from the New Year festival except at Babylon, where the two festivals may have become merged. Indeed, in some Mesopotamian cities more than one Akitu festival took place each year (Klein 1992, pp. 138–40; Bidmead 2002).
12. Breasted 1935, p. 191.
13. Frankfort 1939, p. 205; Frankfort 1954, p. 68. Sargon II (721–705 B.C.) established Khorsabad (ancient Dur-Sharrukin), north of Nimrud, as a new Assyrian capital city. Loud (1936, p. 98) suggests a possible connection between the Khorsabad tree trunks and Smith's ideas relating to the New Year festival, but he also states that the wood may have served as staves to display flags and banners.
14. Cole and Machinist 1998, pp. 102–4, no. 134.
15. Matthews 1990, p. 107. For a review of forms and connections of the stylized tree, see Kepinski 1982.
16. Matthews 1990, pp. 91–92.
17. For the variety of Assyrian Sacred Trees, see Parpola 1993, p. 200, and Collon 2001, pp. 82–85.
18. For the Northwest Palace reliefs, see Paley 1976. Three common variations of the palmette Sacred Trees have been identified at Nimrud; see Albenda 1994a.
19. B. Mallowan 1986; Winter 2003. For a review of the extensive literature, see Giovino 2007.
20. Albenda 1994a. When branches of Sacred Trees end in fir cones, they may be associated with masculinity (Collins 2006c).
21. Roaf and Zgoll 2001, pp. 274–77, fig. 7.
22. M. Mallowan 1966, p. 145n42. Similar tables appear on reliefs as late as Ashurbanipal (668–631 B.C.) and are shown with crossbars decorated with opposed volutes and a central support in the form of a rod with bindings spaced along its length and a small palm or lotus capital mounted on it (Curtis 1996, pp. 176–77).
23. For the variety of stylized tree "roots" that appear on cylinder seals, see Collon 2001, pp. 83–85.
24. Chains or bands of palmettes, cones, and pomegranates appear on Neo-Assyrian sculptured reliefs as well as wall paintings and glazed bricks. They reflect an interest in repetitive patterns that express abundance (Winter 2003; Albenda 2005, pp. 84–118). A Sacred Tree, of the so-called net-tree variety typical of the Sargonid period (for their dating, see Collon 2001, p. 83), with branches ending in alternating pomegranates and palmettes, decorates a headdress element found in a queen's tomb (number II) in the Northwest Palace at Nimrud (Hussein and Suleiman 2000, no. 42).
25. Winter 2003, p. 258.
26. Reade (1972, pp. 91–92) has discussed beardless men in Assyrian reliefs and their likely identity as eunuchs. While there is continuing debate over whether the Assyrian term *ša rēši* should be translated as "eunuch," I use the term here simply as shorthand for "beardless males." For a recent review of the evidence, see Tadmor 2002. For images of eunuchs on metalwork, see King 1915. For

- ivories, see M. Mallowan and Davies 1970, pls. VI–XVII. Eunuchs can sometimes wear a shorter shawl over the ankle-length tunic.
27. Surveys of images of royal women have been undertaken by Albenda (1987), Reade (1987), and Ornan (2002). There are many images of foreign female prisoners of war in Assyrian art, but these are unlikely to provide the source for the distinctly Assyrian image carved on the fan handle (Cifarelli 1998).
  28. As exemplified by the women on the seventh-century-B.C. Garden Party relief from Nineveh (Figure 11) and a figure of a woman from Ashur (Strommenger 1970, pp. 29–30, pl. 20a–c).
  29. Ibid.
  30. Reade 1972, p. 95.
  31. Ibid., p. 90. One eunuch on a Khorsabad relief retains his headband, but this too seems to have been wrongly carved (ibid., n. 21). Reade also notes a beardless palace attendant wearing a braided headband on a relief of Ashurbanipal that may also be a mistake on the part of the ancient sculptor.
  32. Reade 2000, p. 609.
  33. Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936, pl. 52. Til Barsip was conquered in the ninth century B.C. by the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III. French archaeologists excavated the site from 1929 to 1931 and discovered an Assyrian royal residence with some wall paintings in situ. These included narrative, ornamental, and apotropaic scenes. For a discussion of the date of the paintings, see Albenda 2005, pp. 71–72.
  34. Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936, pl. 50.
  35. Reade 2002, p. 559.
  36. Images of standing deities flanking a tree are known from glyptic as early as the eighteenth century B.C.; see Reade 1995, fig. 8 middle, and Collon 1987, no. 220. In Middle Assyrian glyptic, humans and/or bird-headed genies, sometimes holding buckets, flank the tree when it is centered in the scene (Matthews 1990, p. 91). For a Middle Assyrian wall painting showing genies flanking a tree, see Andrae 1925, pl. 3.
  37. The Neo-Assyrian figures flanking the Sacred Tree are usually associated with the term *apkallu* (wise sage), an apotropaic divinity (Wiggermann 1992, pp. 65–67). They are depicted as bearded males or with the heads of birds but wearing the same costume. Images of the king together with genies can also flank the Sacred Tree to represent the monarch as mediator between the gods and humanity (Reade 1995, p. 231).
  38. For example, Paley 1976, p. 92, pl. 8. Similar kneeling genies, though holding a bucket and cone, are known from wall paintings at Khorsabad (Loud and Altman 1938, pl. 89).
  39. Paley 1976, p. 26n20; Kolbe 1981, pp. 55–62; Albenda 1996; Russell 1998, pp. 676–77.
  40. Some bearded male genies wear a headband rather than a horned helmet (Collins 2006a).
  41. Albenda 2005, p. 39.
  42. Assyrians, both male and female, generally wear sandals and, from the time of King Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.), enclosed shoes. Female genies in the Northwest Palace have bare feet (Figure 6). Male genies can also appear without shoes: Nimrud (Meuszyński 1976, pls. 11, 13); Khorsabad (Albenda 1986, pls. 53, 54, 59); Nineveh (Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998, pl. 267, no. 363).
  43. Collon 2001, p. 65.
  44. For a review of the evidence for wingless genies, see Collins 2006a.
  45. Albenda 1986, p. 56, pls. 62, 131.
  46. Collon 2001, pp. 5, 95–96, nos. 165–67; Porada 1948, nos. 727–30.
  47. M. Mallowan and Davies 1970, p. 54.
  48. Madhloom 1970, p. 85.
  49. Collins n.d. (forthcoming).
  50. Barnett and Falkner 1962, pls. LXXXV, XCVI.
  51. Barnett 1976, pl. LIX.
  52. M. Mallowan and Davies 1970, p. 54.
  53. Lines 1955, p. 238.
  54. The audience of the reliefs was likely to be mainly members of the court elite (Winter 1981, p. 35; Lumsden 2004, pp. 376–77).
  55. Collins 2006b.
  56. Barnett 1975, p. 166; Herrmann 1986, p. 7; Herrmann 1992, p. 42; Winter 1976, p. 17.
  57. Bunnens 1997.
  58. M. Mallowan 1966, p. 478.
  59. Albenda 1994b. For the use of stone and metal in Assyrian furniture, see Curtis 1996, pp. 167–80.
  60. Oates and Oates 2001, p. 70.
  61. This is demonstrated most spectacularly by the discovery of a rich tomb beneath room 49 that belonged to queens of Tiglath-pileser III, Shalmaneser V, and Sargon II; other rich tombs discovered in the Northwest Palace were located beneath rooms MM and 57 (the latter belonging to a queen of Ashurnasirpal II; see Hussein and Suleiman 2000 and Oates and Oates 2001, pp. 78–90).
  62. Albenda (1994b) suggests specific markers for the male king, including images of lions, lamassu, and hero figures. I would add the Assyrian fir trees (Collins 2006c).
  63. See, for example, Oates and Oates 2001, figs. 50, 51, 54, 57–59.
  64. Albenda 1985.
  65. M. Mallowan and Herrmann 1974, p. 15.
  66. For a survey of the textual evidence for elite Neo-Assyrian women, see Melville 2004.
  67. Reade 1987.
  68. Reade 2005, p. 9.

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