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Assyrian Imperial Elites and Textile Culture of the 1st Millennium BC: Shaping Power Visions Through Textiles

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Abstract: As a crucial component of the materiality of the first world empire, textile culture documented in archival cuneiform documents, visual art, and archaeological materials from 1st-millennium BC Assyria enables historians to reconstruct the social identities, power visions, and economic systems of the people who ruled the "Land of Aššur". Through the analysis of royal clothes, it is possible to form an idea of the clothing ensemble, the aesthetic, and power visions that shaped the presence of the king and his queen in public ceremonies and in visual art narratives, and to see how royal textile art played a role in political communication. Royal garments, combined with power accessories such as royal insignia and other objects, represented a powerful means to visualize royal personhood and what the institution of Assyrian kingship meant in the imperial phase of Assyrian history. Representations of royal scenes in visual art integrate the documentary picture from texts and archaeological materials and show how the royal costume developed over the Neo-Assyrian period and how the centrality and superior status of the royal person were emphasised by visual interaction between the king's clothes and other textiles in the scene. Queenly garments represent another channel for the communication of the success of the Assyrian imperial project. Less represented in textual sources and material evidence are other upper-class sectors of Assyrian imperial society, in which textiles equally played an important role as markers of social identity and status. Non-royal textiles were an integral part of power narratives in the Neo-Assyrian age, contributing to create the sense of a common Assyrian identity, of elite's unity and cohesion, and full adherence to the imperial project.

Keywords: Assyria; clothes; king; queen; elite; power

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1 Introduction

As a crucial although partially invisible component of the materiality of the first world empire, textile culture of 1st-millennium BC Assyria – documented in archival cuneiform documents, visual art, and archaeological materials – enables historians to reconstruct not only the economic system and the elite goods circulating within the social elite who ruled the "Land of (the god) Aššur" (*māt* ^{d}*Aššur*) in the imperial age (9th to 7th century BC), but also the vision of power that informed their lives and activities and that manifested the success of the imperial project.

Research on the textile culture of the ancient world corroborates this interpretation and offers another perspective for understanding the Assyrian imperial project and the ruling elite's culture. Textiles, especially clothes, are important not only for their intrinsic material, technical and workmanship characteristics, but also for their symbolic significance within social and political contexts.[1] The use of clothing to convey social messages such as status and affiliation to a group appears to have been a primary function almost since the beginning of history.[2] Seen in their function as a form of non-verbal social communication,[3] clothes convey the shared values of a social group, defining the individual identity of the wearer and the collective identity of the group to which he or she belongs, and constructing complex systems of signification that are projected onto the world.[4] Dress has a relational function, as it helps the individual to explicitly present his or her identity, values and attitudes to another, and to socially construct the basis for his or her interactions.[5] An individual's dress signals to the external viewer the type of social relationship to be entertained with the wearer (equal or hierarchically subordinate) and the information it conveys is crucial in regulating the wearer's interactions with the outside world. Clothes concur with bodies and gestures to express political norms and practices in a variety of forms, even theatricalized, of manifestation of power and play a significant role in the definition of ideological systems and as powerful carriers of political messages.[6]

1 Gillis and Nosch 2007: vii, ix.

2 Barber 2007: 177–78.

3 The communicative function of clothing in self-expression and definition of social standing intertwines multiple dimensions, from the individual's aesthetic experience to the affirmation of social and economic value in relation to the group and the rest of society, to the use of clothing as a political symbol. These aspects have been treated in anthropological research. See, *e.g.* Roach and Bubolz Eicher 1979: 10–16. On dress and dressing as a form of non-verbal communication, see also Bender Jørgensen 2007: 7–8 and Graybill 2021: 39–40 with further literature.

4 Botta 2009: 8.

5 Kaiser 1997, cited in Marzel 2015: 9.

6 Gherchanoc and Huet 2019: 9–10.

Political and religious ideologies play a major role in dress. In the field of political ideologies, the dress – of the king or the political leader – expresses and consolidates power.[7] The clothed body thus becomes a fundamental vehicle of the system of values and policies to which the ruling class adheres. The body is also the privileged space of the religious identity. The religious dress concretises the values of the religious system to which the individual belongs and materialises the hierarchical position within a religious group.[8] Not only the dress itself, but also its representation in visual art plays a crucial role in political and religious communication. This aspect is of particular relevance to the way the Assyrian imperial elite constructed their cultural identity. It also plays an important role in our modern reconstruction and understanding of what Assyrian elite dress looked like. Although idealisation and symbolism play a crucial role in royal depictions and the depiction of dress was not the main focus of Assyrian artists,[9] these depictions nevertheless offer important information on how kings, queens, court dignitaries and service personnel dressed and were expected to dress. Moreover, considered in the context of the social image of an individual and, in particular, of a political leader, clothes and other personal accessories are not separate elements from the wearer's body. Anthropological research shows that every dress can be considered from the point of view of its visible and invisible signs, the former relating to the outward features exposed to the viewer's sight and the latter hidden from view. The information that these different signs contain makes it possible to identify the individual and the society to which he or she belongs.[10] According to the perspective of the sociological study of dress, the non-verbal communication that clothing establishes contributes to constructing the individual body as a social actor and conveys the social, political and cultural meanings that the wearer represents in a given community. Dress is also an indicator of gendered identity.[11] This leads one to see the Assyrian king's (the queen's and other court figures') clothes also in the role they play in the construction of gender identity and its properties, dictated by developments in Assyrian elite's culture. The construction of the king's masculinity, his emphasisation or de-eroticisation, is an integral part of this process of constructing the public image of the Assyrian ruler that is visible in imperial art.[12] The study of the queen's clothing and her clothed body

7 Marzel 2015: 10.

8 Marzel 2015: 6; Graybill 2021: 47.

9 For analogous observations concerning representations of clothes in Graeco-Roman world and the use of visual representations as a source for understanding ancient dress, see Larsson Lovén 2021: 135–54.

10 Hume 2021: 34.

11 Graybill 2021: 46–47.

12 On the construction of the masculinity of the royal person in the evidence of Neo-Assyrian art, see Assante 2017: esp. 52–64.

represents another important field of investigation, for example to understand how the socially constructed category of femininity in Assyrian elite's culture is expressed in relation to power and high rank.

Not unlike other civilizations of the ancient world, Assyrian society can be defined as a "clothing-society" to use Marzel's terminology, *i.e.* one in which conservatism and adherence to tradition are valued as signs of social stability and order.[13] When applied to specific cases of the cultures of the ancient world, for example the dress culture of the Assyrian king and the ruling elite of the imperial age, Marzel's definition of "clothing-society" appears too rigid in any case, as innovations in dress are certainly recognisable even in this type of society. Changes in clothing may have been determined by the variables of time and place, by the aesthetic tastes of new power groups within the imperial elite, the elite's increased economic resources and new cultural trends that affected the court and the ruling class.[14]

In the light of these preliminary considerations, in this study I will consider three aspects that are relevant to understanding the role played by textiles in the construction of the identity of the elites that ruled Assyria, benefitting from the expansionistic project: 1) the king's dress and its significance in the Assyrian political discourse; 2) the queenly dress as representative of the "other side of Assyrian imperialism"; and what can be termed as 3) "the textile landscape" of the empire. The analysis of these aspects reveals how clothing (and other types of textile products linked to the royal figure and the palace) constituted a powerful channel of expression of Assyrian imperialism and its success. To do this, the investigation must necessarily rely on different types of sources, written, visual and archaeological. These sources differ in context and purpose and their peculiarities will be discussed in this study. However, each of them adds an important piece in the understanding of what dress and dress practices were in the Assyrian imperial elite. As shown by other disciplinary fields of textile research on the ancient world where the corpus of organic textile finds is limited,[15] the interplay between textual, iconographic and archaeological sources appears vital for the reconstruction of what textiles were like in terms of workmanship and as vehicles of social messages.

If the items of clothing of the king and the members of the government elite of Assyria shared the common characteristic of being the product of the large-scale mobilization and centralized control of fibres, materials for textile processing,

13 Marzel 2015: 3.

14 For the notion of fashion and its applicability, see the discussion in Marzel 2015: 1–3. On the possibility of recognising changes in clothing over time in dress cultures of Antiquity, see for the Graeco-Roman civilization Harlow 2021: 5–6.

15 Harlow 2021: 1–3.

craftspeople, techniques, and artistic styles from all the near-eastern regions politically and militarily subjugated by the Assyrians – all witnesses to the success of the Assyrian expansionist project – the clothes that covered the king of Assyria were of paramount importance. The royal *ensemble vestimentaire* was not only central in asserting Assyria's military and political superiority but also in communicating the specific power system that ruled Assyria, the political-religious construct that informed the office of kingship (*šarrūtu*) and its objectives to the internal and external recipients of this message of dominion. As vectors of social meaning, the items that made up the royal dress played a role in the construction of identity both at the level of the single individual king and the social group to which he belonged. They also played a role at the level of the ideological discourse that shaped the communication strategy underlying the Assyrian elite's imperialistic project. In a few generations of kings, the imperialistic project led Assyria to expand enormously its political boundaries, unifying a vast area of the Near East from southern Anatolia to the Persian Gulf and from Western Iran to the Levantine area and Egypt, bringing to reality the millennia-old royal claim of universal dominion and predating the later programmes of imperial unification of the Near Eastern scenario that were launched by the Chaldean kings, the Achaemenid Persians, Alexander the Great and the Seleucid kings, the Romans, the Parthians, the Sasanians and the Arab-Islamic rulers. In Assyria, it was not only the royal insignia, namely the *ḫaṭṭu*, "sceptre", the *ušpāru*, "ruler's staff" or *šibirru*, "pastoral staff", and the *kakku*, "weapon", represented by the sword or by the bow and arrows, that materialised the royal office[16] but also all those objects that covered the royal body and that were considered befitting the king's functions: these were the jewels (*šakuttu*), the ornaments (*tiqnu*), and the dress (*lubussu*).[17]

The king's clothes embodied a full range of meanings to be conveyed visually during public ceremonies, from court meetings limited to palatine members (members of the royal family and high-ranking civil and military officials) to larger ceremonial events open to visiting foreign delegates from vassal kingdoms, as well as parades in the presence of military officials and royal troops, triumphal processions after military victories, *akītu*-processions and other yearly cultic festivals in the Aššur Temple of the Holy Citadel of Assur (Qal'at Šerqāṭ) or in other shrines of the country, and oath-taking ceremonies for the stipulation of succession treaties or related to the imposition of vassalage treaties on submitted foreign rulers. The common people of Assyria would have had the opportunity to see at a remote distance the royal person during public official ceremonies, presumably without any

16 On the royal insignia and their sacralization in the Neo-Assyrian period, see Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 441–47.

17 On these terms, see CAD L: 232b s.v. *lubuštu*; Š/III: 237a s.v. *šukuttu* A; T: 422a s.v. *tiqnu*.

chance to appreciate the specific details of the luxury and finely crafted items that covered his body (and that constituted the professional pride of the royal tailors and dress decorators who created them). However, the same clothes, although in simplified form and bearing no details about decoration, were also visually accessible to commoners in various regions of the empire's territory through the media that conveyed the king's message of dominion in the central cities of the Assyrian heartland, provincial centres, and vassal states, as the sovereign was depicted in countless royal stelae, rock carvings, and other public monuments located in different parts of Assyria to celebrate his achievements.

2 The King's Dress and Its Significance in the Assyrian Political Discourse

Everything we know about the royal costume of 1st-millennium BC Assyria can be reconstructed on the basis of the textile terminology documented in written cuneiform sources and from representations of the Assyrian king in visual art, especially large-scale artefacts such as palace bas-reliefs, stelae, obelisks, and statuary. Both material culture terminology and visual evidence are sources that document objects in use. But both sources present a limited selection of the artefacts they refer to. Types and details of textiles mentioned in the textual evidence are subject to the purpose of the message the text was meant to convey, the interest of those who commissioned the scribes to record textiles in writing, the context of production of the message and the scribe's ability to describe the textiles (in terms of appearance and workmanship) he had to record on texts. Representational evidence of textiles is also subject to certain constraints that are peculiar to the specific artefact, above all the type of message to be conveyed, the artist's skills, the artistic style, the king's personal tastes and the public it was intended for. Firstly, representations of textiles show a limited selection of products, some of which can be compared with items mentioned in contemporary texts, but many others cannot. This selection in visual art is clearly determined by the specific choices made by the kings who commissioned these artefacts. In addition, textiles represented in visual art are inserted in specific royal scenes and narratives and as such they are imbued with the notions that informed Assyrian imperial ideology. This means that these textiles (as many other categories of material culture objects) also work at symbolic or ideal level of communication, reflecting the ideological (political, religious and in general cultural) vision of the commissioner and the social and cultural group to which he belonged. Since this high-ranking social group participated in the imperial project and enjoyed its fruits in terms of possession of high-quality objects and social visibility within the

court and the ruling elite, it shared the same values, ideals and visions of power of the king. These different and opposite readings of the objects represented in royal visual art – as real objects or symbols – is especially evident in the case of Neo-Assyrian bas-reliefs, a monumental medium primarily aimed at reinforcing the imperial elite's self-image and instil fear and awe in external visitors,[18] prompting them to recognise the inevitability of the Assyrian empire and the need to submit unconditionally to it. Gods and posterity were probably other potential viewers of the images in the bas-reliefs.[19] The former would have rejoiced to see that their human *protégé* had fully realised the divine mission in the world, the latter, primarily future successors to the throne, would have found in this visual memory the model of perfect kingship and civilization at its highest degree of realisation. In any case, there is no explicit information as to whom the reliefs were addressed, nor is it clear whether there was a specific message that the reliefs were intended to convey.[20]

In the carved wall panels different levels of communication interpenetrate, leading to different positions regarding the degree of reliability that these monumental representations have as historical source.[21] The textiles and other royal objects represented in these artefacts certainly refer to real objects. The assumption is supported by the fact that many Assyrian royal objects match items of the archaeological evidence. Textual information, albeit scarce, incomplete, originating from specific communicative contexts and produced for specific informational purposes and target audiences, can offer a contribution to a deeper understanding of the objects depicted in visual art and found at archaeological level. The interpretation of the items depicted in the reliefs must in any case go beyond the use of the reliefs as a mere illustration of reality and of what is documented in textual documentation[22] and take into consideration other important factors, such as the artefact-specific factors that affect the representation, from the

18 Reade 2005: 7. The communication strategies expressed by the palace reliefs must be considered on the basis of their target audiences. Persuasion strategy was preferred for an inner audience that already had a positive attitude towards the king's political projects and that only needed to be persuaded or reinforced in its beliefs, while a deliberate strategy to shape perceptions and forcefully orient behaviour was addressed to an outer audience. For a discussion on these aspects, see Portuese 2020: 261–67.

19 Reade 2005: 7. See also Portuese 2020: 253, 255, 258.

20 Portuese 2020: 15.

21 Nadali 2019: 329–36.

22 Although as observed in Matthiae 2014: 388 this approach is not an illegitimate one. For the deep-rooted use of Neo-Assyrian bas-reliefs to document material culture items in Assyriological literature, see above all the illustrations published in the volumes of the series *State Archives of Assyria* (Helsinki 1987–2018).

artistic and architectural programmes to which the medium belongs to the ideological message[23] and the degree of idealisation of the images depicted, not to speak of the royal culture of the specific reign period in which the medium was created. Although inspired by the reality of everyday life, the iconography selected textiles and other royal artefacts that were recognisable to viewers and reflected the perceptions, expectations and ideological systems shared by specific social groups.[24] Clothing and other textiles have a significant place in the definition of the Assyrian royal figure as transmitted through the carved wall panels and other monumental sculptures. What these visual media convey of the royal figure is an idealised image, where the material accessories that connote it contribute to constructing the values and functions of Assyrian kingship as it was conceived at that precise historical moment, rather than the peculiarities of the individual person of the sovereign. These material items associated to the royal person also act as signature elements to make the scenes depicted in the reliefs real and situated in specific events.[25] The degree of adherence to reality in the representation of textiles, *i.e.* the resemblance to textiles actually in use, evidently varied according to the skill of the artist, the style and the message to be conveyed. Through a visual representation apparently characterised by cultural continuity, loyalty to tradition and immutability of content, the culture of kingship, the political-religious message and the royal imagery underwent changes during the Neo-Assyrian era,[26] changes that are partly witnessed through the textiles documented in visual art.

The analysis of the royal imagery shows that underlying the construction of the person of the king in visual art was a conceptualisation not only of the king's clothing but also of his body. As royal iconography of bas-reliefs shows, the Assyrian royal figure communicated his leadership qualities through physical and postural characteristics, such as a well-formed and muscular body, an upright and proud posture and a direct gaze. Clothing and accessories, which are elements external to the person, played a key role in highlighting these physical and postural characteristics of the sovereign (or, in the case of less physically gifted rulers, presumably compensated for their absence) and communicating notions of the royalty he embodied.[27] If we compare this posture and its relation to royal dress with that of enemy rulers kneeling at the feet of the Assyrian sovereign or tearing off elements of

23 Matthiae 2014: 389.

24 For analogous observations regarding ancient Mediterranean iconography of textiles and how to interpret it, see Brøns and Harris 2022: 3.

25 Portuese 2020: 14.

26 Matthiae 2014: 389–400.

27 Portuese 2020: 130.

their royal dress through convulsive acts of the body,[28] it is clear how these examples in visual art and ideologically-charged texts serve to depict the unsuitability for kingship of enemies. The enemies' royal robes do not manifest what kingship should be and their destruction by the enemy kings themselves signals the inconsistency of their power.

In the case of the Assyrian royal dress, the main components of the outfit – the headdress; the long, short-sleeved fringed tunic; and the fringed overgarment – were not only markers of the ruler's social identity[29] and position in the eyes of the elite and all the Assyrian subjects; they also conveyed values and meanings of crucial importance in the imperial ideology and religion of 1st-millennium BC Assyria. The royal dress contributed together with other accessories of the royal person not only to making the historical figure of each king a perfect and superhuman figure, thus demonstrating the rightness of the divine choice on that particular sovereign, but also helped to construct through the king's clothed and accessorized body the very image of kingship (*ṣalam šarrūti*), *i.e.* the embodiment of Assyrian royalty itself. From this perspective, the royal dress represented a material vector of the ideas that in the written political communication of royal inscriptions were conveyed by the titulary and the narratives of the king's military, ritual, and building activities. The same ideas conveyed by the royal discourse of inscriptions were also channelled by royal ritual texts and court literature, all written media that bore witness to a restricted and literate circle of recipients of the royal discourse within the ruling elite, and by oral channels to different levels of recipients within the government elite and the Assyrian urban society in the context of public ceremonial events. We can argue that the visual and material medium of the royal dress functioned as a *manifesto* or a political programme of Assyrian kingship, enabling the construction of Assyrian royal identity and the communication of the Assyrian king's message of power to his subjects. Depending on social position and official circumstances, the Assyrians could have experienced in different ways the vision of the royal person in its full majesty, through direct encounter in private or official occasions, at a remote distance, or through indirect channels. Along with other material vectors of both monumental and minor arts of the Assyrian imperial age, textile art – a sector of

28 According to Sargon II's description in RINAP 2: 65: 411–12, the Urartian king Ursâ threw himself on the ground, ripped his royal coat (*naḫlaptu*) to such an extent that he bared his arms and tore off his royal headdress (*kubšu*), before pulling out his hair, beating his chest and lying on the ground, face downwards. Another case is that of the Šubrian king, who tore off his royal garment (*lubulti šarrūti*), replacing it with a sackcloth (*bašāmu*) as a sign of humiliation and repentance to obtain mercy from Esarhaddon. See RINAP 4: 33 i 3.

29 The association of clothing with the body and the personal identity concurs to the definition of what a person is. On how this worked in the field of 1st-millennium BC rituals in Assyria, see Verderame 2019: 177–86.

Assyrian art and craftsmanship long neglected in studies of Neo-Assyrian art history because of the poor archaeological evidence regarding textiles, limited to representations in visual art and a few fibre remains from burial contexts – was consciously developed in the imperial period as a powerful means to spread the message of unrivalled dominion achieved by the Assyrians with their expansionist project.

Although it is possible that the Neo-Assyrian royal wardrobe included a variety of ceremonial and non-ceremonial clothes to be used on different occasions, private and public, in which the presence of the king was required, this alleged variety of the royal clothing is not documented in Assyrian art and details on the characteristics of the king's dress, for instance in regard to colour, are very scarce. From Til Barsip wall paintings, it seems that the royal outfit was polychromatic, as shown by the red-coloured motifs and the blue background of both the shawl and the long tunic worn by the king[30] or by the representation of the monarch wearing a green tunic adorned with rosettes and a white tiara with ribbons on a 9th century BC glazed wall tile from the North-West Palace in Kalḫu (Nimrud), possibly representing a ritual scene connected to a victorious military campaign.[31] In this glazed tile, it is also interesting to note the chromatic alternance of green and yellow in the petals of the rosettes adorning the royal tunic and in the frontal rosette of the headband, in the tassels, and in the discs of the knee-high band, as well as in the round-shaped locks of the shawl's fringes and in the ending tassels of the tiara's ribbons. The linear borders of the tunic, included the collar, are yellow-coloured. A white tunic bordered with red and blue fringes is attested in the decoration of Residence K at Dūr-Šarrukēn (Khorsabad).[32] In the Neo-Assyrian period, tiaras could be of different chromatic combinations, due to the colour of the truncated headgear and to those characterizing the decorative horizontal bands and the ribbons.[33] The royal headdress on the above-mentioned glazed tile is characterized by a white main part with a black pointed top with a black horizontal band; the headband was white, with a frontal yellow rosette and ribbons.[34] Another example from the early Neo-Assyrian period is given by a Til Barsip wall painting in which the king's headdress, which has no decorative bands, is completely red and equipped with blue and red ribbons on its back.[35] As far as the late Neo-Assyrian evidence is concerned, Sargon II's headgear that we see in a Khorsabad relief shows a white background with red bands adorned with white rosettes, but other

30 Matthiae 1998: 183.

31 Reade 1983: 44; Neumann 2017: 10 fig. 7.

32 Portuese 2020: 134.

33 Reade 2009: 250, 255–56; Gaspa 2018: 311–12; Portuese 2020: 133.

34 Reade 1983: 44.

35 Reade 2009: 256.

attestations of royal tiaras in imperial art show the preference for red colour and white bands with yellow rosettes or blue disc-shaped motifs.[36] The general impression is that a wide variety of chromatic combinations characterized these items of the royal dress, presumably dictated by the specific ceremonial occasion in which the monarch was involved as well as by aesthetic preferences that were specific to individual kings and historical periods. From letters of the royal correspondence we learn that Neo-Assyrian sovereigns were consulted about the quality and workmanship of royal images,[37] and it is plausible that their opinion on the shape, colours, colour combinations and decoration of the clothes depicted on statues, bas-reliefs, and other art objects was decisive to accord the materiality of the royal representation with the aesthetic vision and the political message that the kings intended to convey. In the field of textile art and royal dressmaking, given the importance that royal costume had in the presentation of the Assyrian king's person on various ceremonial and ritual occasions, it is just as reasonable to assume that sovereigns were consulted in the choice of materials, shapes, colours, decorative themes and accessories when making a new dress. This leads one to think that every ceremonial dress worn by the king was the result of an active interaction between patron, aesthetic and dress advisors, tailors and dress decorators. Every ceremonial royal dress was therefore the material synthesis of an ideological, aesthetic, and technical project.[38]

2.1 Identifying the Royal Clothes: the Contribution of Textile Terminology

Descriptions of textiles and textile terminology that we derive from written sources can be useful for a better understanding of textile products and, in the most fortunate cases, for their identification in the light of the comparison of textual data with iconographical evidence. They can therefore complement the information provided by archaeological evidence and visual art. Indeed, the study of textiles cannot be limited to the separate study of these different sources, but must consider them

36 Reade 2009: 256.

37 See SAA 13: 34, a Nabû-ašarēd's missive to the king regarding the request to examine two royal images, especially with regard to hands, chin, and hair, and SAA 13: 52, which refers to a request for information from the sovereign on the precious stones to be used to fashion parts of the faces of statues, evidently representing the king himself.

38 The interactive relationship between sovereign and craftsmen has been studied in the case of the creation of the carved panels of the Neo-Assyrian royal palaces (for which see Portuese 2020: 161), but the principle can be extended to other areas of artistic and craft work in the service of the Assyrian king.

together in a unified approach. However, the use of textual information is not without its problems. Its characteristics and limitations must therefore be taken into account. Neo-Assyrian textile terminology mainly concerns luxury products (of Assyrian and foreign origin) consumed by the imperial elite and personnel of the state sector. Some terms enable scholars to form an idea of the royal dress and its main components. However, the way in which textile products are qualified by the scribes diverges in the sources, clearly due to the purpose of the text in question (informative detail in the case of administrative and everyday documents, in contrast to general absence of interest in peculiarities of the textiles listed in booty and tribute enumerations of royal inscriptions). While a wide lexical variety can be found in archival and everyday documents, a generic, repetitive and rather standard terminology characterises the references to textile products acquired as tribute or booty from conquered countries in royal inscriptions' war narratives. Formulaic expressions used by the authors of royal inscriptions usually concern garments with polychromatic trim and linen clothes, with rare exceptions, such as the *šaddīnu*-dress found in Taharqa's palace, as we shall see below. Behind these generic definitions there probably was a wide variety of products of which the scribes accompanying the troops may have taken note during the military campaign. In all likelihood, these foreign products were identified by the scribes with terms in the languages currently used in the imperial administration, namely with Assyrian or Aramaic names, less likely with Assyrianised forms of the indigenous names.

Terminology can also help in understanding the dress culture of the Assyrian elite and its changes. For instance, the frequency with which certain high-class textiles (*e.g.*, *gammīdu*, *gulēnu*, *maqaṭṭu*, *šaddīnu* and *urnutu*) and materials (*kitû* and *būṣu*) appear in everyday texts issued by the central state administration is probably indicative of dress preferences and new aesthetic tastes emerging in the ruling class, as well as changes in upper class fashion of the imperial age. The relationship between written sources and iconography is also not without problems. In the field of dress, a comparison between the clothes mentioned in the texts and those depicted in visual art shows a fundamental difference: while the terminology testifies to the use among the Assyrian elite of a great variety of dress elements, the iconography of dress is instead limited to a reduced and highly standardised set of dress types, with the inevitable risk of assuming that the dress types depicted were the only ones in use.[39]

From a terminological point of view, when Neo-Assyrian texts refer to the royal dress, the word *kuzippu* is used. This is a versatile textile designation that also occurs

39 The problematic relationship between textiles in written sources and those attested in visual evidence is addressed with regard to the ancient Mediterranean world in Brøns and Harris 2022: 11–13.

for both elite and ordinary clothes in general and for female clothes as well as for military uniforms.[40] Given the main articles that composed the king's dress and the use of more specific items of clothing, it is possible that the long, fringed tunic, made of wool or linen, was called by the term *kusītu*. The possibility that the king also wore an *urnutu* is suggested by the fact that such an item, according to an administrative record, could be decorated with figural decorations, for example bulls and goats,[41] the visual counterpart of which is provided by Assurnaṣirpal II's tunic and shawl in the drinking scene of Reliefs 2–3 of Room G in the North-West Palace in Kalḫu,[42] which shows decorative motifs in the form of wild goats, winged bulls, lions, and supernatural beings (*i.e.*, purifying *apkallu*s or winged genii with the so-called "Assyrian sacred tree" or "tree of life", a stylized palmette-type tree, and analogous beings wrestling with winged animals or lions). The tunic worn by Assurbanipal represents the 7th century version, characterized by a finely-decorated chest part as the visual focus of the whole decoration, encapsulated by rows of lotuses and buds and rows of palmettes, alternating with various rows of concentric discs and rosettes, and of crenellated structures, as we will discuss below.[43] Candidate terms for the fringed overgarment are *elītu*, *ḫullānu*, *maklulu*, and *qirmu*.[44] This piece of the royal clothing was a sort of shawl or stole that could be worn to cover the body below the waist or just the tunic's fringed edge. The statue in the round of Assurnaṣirpal II from the sanctuary of Šarrat-niphi in Kalḫu, a stele, and a ritual scene on a wall-carved slab from the North-West Palace[45] show that this shawl was fastened on the top of the tunic to cover the left arm and, passing over the right shoulder, was secured to the waist-belt. The *ḫullānu* could be decorated with vegetal motifs, as shown by a Middle Assyrian text from Assur, perhaps similar to the vegetal decorations (*i.e.*, rows of palmettes and buds or cone-shaped vegetal items in alternation, rows of only cone-shaped items and rows of stylized lotuses, palmettes and buds) that adorn Assurnaṣirpal II's dress.[46] This king also used a stole decorated with large crenellated structures bordering its fringed edges.[47] A shorter version of this stole (or a simple covering for the hips) appears in a war scene, and it is decorated with concentric hexagonal motifs.[48]

40 Gaspa 2018: 251–53.

41 SAA 7: 109 obv. ii 3', 5', rev. iv 4'.

42 Layard 1849–53, I: pl. 5. For a discussion on Assurnaṣirpal II's dress decorations erroneously reproduced in Layard's drawings, see Bartl 2005: 20–26.

43 Barnett 1976: pl. 8. See Collins 2008: 119 and Fales and Postgate 1992: 116 fig. 27 for a detailed view.

44 Gaspa 2018: 245–47, 254–55, 268–69.

45 Matthiae 1998: 39; Reade 1983: 20, 37.

46 Layard 1849–53, I: pls. 6–9.

47 Bartl 2014: pl. 1.a.

48 Bartl 2014: pl. 6.a-b.

Sashes or belts constituted another important article of the royal clothing, although representations of the king's dress in visual art do not always include this item; these items were possibly called *nēbettu*, *nēbuḫu*, or *ṣipirtu* in Neo-Assyrian.[49] The terminology concerning parts of garments may be applied to both the royal and the queenly dress. The word *aḫāte* probably indicated the sleeves,[50] which in the king's outfit are generally short while in the queenly clothes they are long. The term *libānu* referred to the collar of garments, which could be finely decorated.[51] Moreover, the king's dress as well as those of the queen, crown prince and high-ranking dignitaries were also characterized by fringed borders, possibly described by the words *appu*, *qannu*, or *sissiqtu*.[52] The fringed edge could be made of simple loose threads or arranged in series of tassels. This was a peculiarity of Assyrian vestimentary tradition. Individuals of different social classes also wore fringed clothing, as evidenced by the reliefs,[53] but the quality, polychromy and quantity of fringes must certainly have been a characteristic element in the clothing of the Assyrian elite. The fringe communicated the social and economic status of a person and the quantity of fringes and tassels signalled the wearer's high rank and power. Both tunics and overgarments could be edged by fringes or tassels. For instance, the feet-length overgarment could be edged both with fringes and tassels, as may be seen from the standing figure of Assurnaṣirpal II on a palace wall panel.[54] In the same scene, the king wears a tunic bordered by various decorated bands and a series of tassels. Polychromatic and decorated bands with figural decorations that adorned the edge of tunics and overgarments were called *birmu*.[55] These parts were woven separately and then sewn onto the item of royal clothing. With the term *uṣurtu*, the decorative design on clothes was indicated.[56] Within the category of *uṣurtu* both figural and geometrical elements were possibly included. Decorations on the garments could have been made in different ways by the royal tailors, presumably by using threads of different colours or by embroidering. Bands of previously prepared woven fabric bearing the design were then stitched onto a specific part of the garment.[57] These bands were of variable size, depending on the part of the garment

49 Gaspa 2018: 259, 267, 288–90.

50 Gaspa 2018: 291–92.

51 Gaspa 2018: 297.

52 Gaspa 2018: 292, 299–300, 301–302.

53 In all likelihood, in the case of fringed clothes worn by individuals of lower social classes, the fringes were not additional parts stitched or inlaid onto a woven garment, but simply the cut warp ends. On fringes, see Barber 1991: 151–54, 274.

54 Layard 1849–53, I: pl. 34.

55 Gaspa 2018: 293–95.

56 Gaspa 2018: 304–305.

57 Albenda 2005: 56, 66, 67.

to be enriched by decoration. Another method consisted of attaching metal items onto the woven cloth.[58] It is not excluded that in the middle part of small geometrical elements on these border bands, especially in concentric squares, circles, or floral motifs, the central element was a coloured stone stitched onto the cloth.

Neo-Assyrian texts show that decorative attachments were associated with certain items of clothing. *Kuzippu*s and *maklulu*s could be decorated by attaching beads (*abnāte*), presumably of different colours,[59] while *urnutu*s were enriched by stitching eye-shaped or concentric disc-shaped elements (*ēnāte*).[60] Decorations in the form of rosettes and stars, both made of fabric or metal, were called *aiarē* (*aierē*, with vowel harmony) and *kakkabāte*.[61] Other motifs were called *uznē*, literally "ears", possibly referring to ear-shaped or half-circle (or concentric half-circle) motifs adorning the borders of garments.[62] Concerning the royal headdress, the tall and truncated cone-shaped variety of tiara, which in the 8th and 7th centuries BC became the standard royal headgear, was adorned with three horizontal bands (two of which are part of the tiara while the third one is a headband or diadem with ribbons wrapped around the tiara's base)[63] and was called by the word *kubšu*.[64] This item could be decorated with rosette-shaped motifs and other items as well, while with the word *kulūlu* both the royal headband and the crown were indicated.[65] Presumably, the design and the colours of the decoration differentiated the royal from the princely headband, but common elements could characterise both the royal and the crown prince's headband. Another term for headband or diadem was *pitūtu*, which, however, referred to the headgear worn by crown princes.[66] The official outfit of princes at the Assyrian royal court consisted of a tasselled tunic around which a fringed stole or shawl was wrapped tightly in a spiral. This may be seen in the relief from Sargon II's palace in Dūr-Šarrukēn (Khorsabad) in which the crown prince and his father are portrayed,[67] in the scene carved on a slab of the South-West Palace in Nineveh (Quyunjiq) in which Sennacherib is depicted on his throne while inspecting the booty from the captured city of Lachish and receiving the crown prince,[68] and in

58 Albenda 2005: 56.
59 Gaspa 2018: 251, 254.
60 Gaspa 2018: 296.
61 Gaspa 2018: 168, 309.
62 Gaspa 2018: 305.
63 Reade 2009: 254, 261.
64 Gaspa 2018: 308–12.
65 Gaspa 2018: 312.
66 Gaspa 2018: 316.
67 Relief 19, Court III, Façade L, see Matthiae 1996: fig. 5.1.
68 Relief 11, Room 36. See Collins 2008: 95.

Esarhaddon's stele from Sam'al (Zincirli).[69] In Esarhaddon's stele, for example, the princes Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukīn wear feet-length, short-sleeved tunics and headbands that were typical of the vestimentary traditions of Assyria and Babylonia, respectively.[70] This representation had the aim of emphasising through textile language the equal dignity of the two states in the unity of the empire, but also to clearly indicate the dynastic continuity of royal power in Assyria. The headbands worn by the two princes are in fact entirely different: that worn by Assurbanipal ends with a fringe and bears decorative elements that are similar to those adorning his father's royal tiara (concentric discs),[71] while the one that encircles Šamaš-šumu-ukīn's head is of a variety that is alien to the Assyrian dress tradition and consists of a thin band with small protruding elements along the entire edge.[72] It is also possible that the latter variety of headband may have been deliberately created by the royal tailors specifically for Assurbanipal's brother,[73] presumably as a sign of distinction of his status to be displayed at public ceremonies involving his and Assurbanipal's presence. It is also worth noting that the decoration of the ribbons dangling from Assurbanipal's headband explicitly recalls that of Esarhaddon's ribbons, while also signalling Assurbanipal's different status (a single decorative band with discs instead of two bands, showing that he was hierarchically inferior to the king). With regard to the princes' robes, in addition to the tasselled tunic, Assurbanipal also wears a fringed shawl that spirals around his body, covering almost the entire tunic and leaving the left shoulder uncovered. In contrast, his brother wears only a tunic. The only difference between Assurbanipal's shawl and Esarhaddon's is that the royal shawl also covers the shoulders. Thus, several elements in Assurbanipal's costume signalled to the spectator the close dynastic link between him and the king of Assyria, and his royal destiny. Through this differentiated and regionally based "dress code", the different royal destinies of Esarhaddon's heirs are communicated in this stele. This differentiation, however, could have been an entirely iconographic creation of the royal artists, whereas in the reality of court life in Nineveh Assurbanipal's brother must in all likelihood have been wearing a princely dress in line with the Assyrian tradition. It is hard to believe that, when he was young and living in Nineveh, he would appear at the royal palace or attend public ceremonies dressed as a Babylonian.

69 Matthiae 1998: 129.

70 Matthiae 1998: 129.

71 Similarities in the decoration of the headbands of crown princes and of royal tiaras, and the presence of fringes also concern other pictorial representations of kings and crown princes, as the aforementioned Khorsabad and Lachish reliefs show.

72 Described in May 2018: 272 as a "special zigzagged tasseled headband".

73 May 2018: 272.

The designation for the princely dress is attested in another text from the reign of Esarhaddon. In the royal inscription that describes his ascent to power, Esarhaddon mentions his princely garment (*ṣubāt rubûti*, literally "garment of rulership").[74] Another possible representation of princely clothes can be seen in the hunting scenes from the North Palace in Nineveh, where Assurbanipal is represented in clothes that appear more suitable to horse-riding, chariot-driving, and hunting, since he generally uses a headband and a horseman's short-sleeved asymmetrical tunic or, as shown in the chariot-driving scenes, only a tiara and a long tunic, with no shawl.[75] If these scenes represent Assurbanipal in the period when he was crown prince, the clothes depicted were probably those used during his youth.[76] However, representations of the king without tiara or shawl, although limited, demonstrate that the presence of these items was not necessary on all the public occasions in which the monarch took part and, probably, was only required for specific events. It is clear that the tiara and the shawl were dismissed when the king was not involved in certain ceremonial events, as may be seen in the case of war-making, hunting, and private court banqueting.

2.2 Significance of the Royal Clothing in Assyrian Imperial Ideology

The use of the royal clothing in Assyria is informative as regards the significance attributed to them in royal ideology. To judge from Neo-Assyrian royal iconography, the basic elements of the royal attire remain essentially the same throughout the reigns, although important innovations emerge in certain periods. The adoption of the predecessors' dress must have been an integral part of the new ruler's legitimization strategy.[77] The unaltered continuity of Assyrian kingship through the royal generations found expression through the full adherence to the dress code of the royal tradition of the past, thus meeting the expectations of the more conservative elements of the Assyrian elite. The introduction of innovative features that expressed the cultural identity of new groups within the elite did not substantially alter the ruler's overall attire, but enriched it with new meanings. That the king's clothes embodied the royal office and its functions is evident from the ritual use of them as substitutes of the royal person in the execution of processions

74 RINAP 4: 1 i 56.

75 Barnett 1976: pls. 46, 47, 49–53, 56, 57, but see pl. 59 for the use of the royal tiara in lion-killing instead of the headband.

76 Gaspa 2018: 312.

77 On the adoption of the predecessors' dress to legitimize the new ruler's political power in ethnographical evidence, see Roach and Bubolz Eicher 1979: 15.

of gods' statues,[78] in rites that implied interaction between the royal clothes and ritual tools,[79] and in which penitential chants aimed at obtaining the gods' blessings in favour of the monarch were performed by the cultic singer on the king's dress.[80] This ritual use is coherent with the Mesopotamian notion that garments were an extension of a person and its social role; as such, they were perceived as entities with an agentive role.[81] The agency of the king's clothes is witnessed by activation rites that were performed on royal vestments and insignia with the aim of animating each royal object and, through them, enabling the wearer to acquire the dignity and functions of the royal office.[82] As an extension of personhood, possessing royal clothes belonging to the wardrobes of submitted rulers must have been of great significance for the Assyrian king's claim of universalistic power. This substitutive and agentic use of royal clothes was also well established in Babylonia. Under Seleucid rule, the presentation of Nebuchadnezzar II's robe to Antiochus III during his visit to Babylon in 187 BC is illustrative of how royal clothes were still seen by Babylonians as embodying the office of kingship and how, in the refiguration of Mesopotamian royal tradition by the Seleucids, possessing them may have helped the Graeco-Macedonian royal elite to legitimize their rule in Babylonia, presenting themselves as heirs of the Neo-Babylonian kings.[83]

As we read in royal inscriptions, high-class clothes with multicoloured trim and linen garments were among the wealthy booty regularly acquired by Assyrian troops during the plunder of the royal palaces of conquered kingdoms. Once carried to Assyria, these were redistributed among members of the royal family and high-ranking officials of the palace and the government sector, while others probably entered the treasuries of temples. One can suppose that these plundered foreign textiles and the textile craftsmen that were transferred from the enemy's palace to Assyria represented precious sources of information in terms of materials, weaving and decorative techniques, and dress styles for the Assyrian artisans in charge of fabricating clothes for the king, the royal family and the palace elite. In all likelihood, these plundered elite clothes also included the dress items worn by the local ruler, as well as members of his family and court. Obtaining these high-quality products must have been another objective of the looting of enemy palaces. The royal clothes of foreign rulers symbolized the wealth, authority, and power of the defeated enemies and, as such, their appropriation by the victorious king of Assyria materialised the acquisition of the foreign king's power into the Assyrian king's

78 SAA 10: 287 obv. 3–6; 339 obv. 12–13; 340 obv. 9–12.
79 SAA 10: 340 obv. 9–12.
80 SAA 10: 338 obv. 9–15; 339 rev. 3–4.
81 Gaspa 2018: 146–47.
82 Gaspa 2018: 148–49.
83 Madreiter 2016: 126–27.

universalistic power, thus implementing the extension of the divinely sanctioned ordered world. Once hoarded in Assyrian royal and elite residences in the major cities of central Assyria, these foreign artefacts continued to perpetuate the memory of the king's triumph over the forces of chaos, fuelling new aesthetic tastes within the royal court and ruling class, and feeding competition for the possession of further textile products and other objects from those same enemy countries.

Two examples can be cited here of the appropriation of enemy royal clothing. In the inscriptions concerning Esarhaddon's second campaign in Egypt (671 BC), mention is made of a garment of byssus which the Assyrian scribe, exceptionally, qualifies with the term *šaddīnu*, a specific designation that also occurs in administrative texts and that referred to an item of clothing of a fine quality of linen. This *šaddīnu* was found in Taharqa's palace treasury in Memphis.[84] Other textiles looted by the Assyrians were innumerable choice linen robes (*gadamāḫī lā nībi*) and garments befitting the Kushite pharaoh's dignity (*ṣubāt bālti*).[85] Further precious Kushite textiles were collected during Assurbanipal's campaigns (667/66 and 664/63 BC) that led to the conquest and looting of Memphis and Thebes. As for the textiles from the Theban palace of Tanwetamani (Tanutamani), only two generic categories of textiles are mentioned in his inscriptions, without any specification: garments with polychromatic trims and linen clothes.[86]

In the wardrobe of the Nubian palatine elite, the Assyrians must have found a wide variety of high-quality linen clothes used by the pharaoh, members of his family, courtiers, and other high-ranking members of the Kushite royal elite. Kushite clothing of the 25th Dynasty was heavily characterized by adherence to Egyptian costumes, clearly due to assimilation to the Egyptian culture but also to the Kushite kings' political agenda to present themselves as the legitimate heirs and proud defenders of that ancient and prestigious civilization. Consequently, representations of Kushite pharaohs as well as of high-ranking individuals of the Kushite elite show a new idiom in royal and elite dressing, marked by a revivalism of Egyptian costumes from the Old to New Kingdoms and by the addition of some

84 RINAP 4: 103:21. On the fibre called *būṣu* in Assyrian, see Gaspa 2018: 47–48. The occurrence of this material, presumably imported, along with fine-quality, dyed wool quantities in a Neo-Assyrian note from Nimrud related to (the fabrication of) *niksu*-textiles and the *kusītu* for Tašmētu, the spouse of Nabû (CTN 6: 56 obv. 5), confirms the use of this precious fibre in the manufacture of clothes for gods' statues also in Assyria. Specialists in the manufacture of byssus and wool textiles were trained in 1st-millennium BC textile workshops, as evidenced by an apprenticeship contract from Hellenistic Babylon (Quillien 2022: 184, 358 table 32, 359). For the use of *būṣu* for divine garments in Neo-Babylonian texts, see Gaspa 2018: 48, 213 Quillien 2022: 182–84 (also for non-clothing items).

85 RINAP 4: 1019 rev. 34, simply translated by Leichty as "festive garments".

86 RINAP 5/1: 3 ii 28; 6 iii 45'; 9 i 51; 11 ii 40; 12 ii 9'; RINAP 5/2: 197 obv. 22''; 207 rev. 8.

ethnic features and innovations.[87] Among the items of clothing plundered by the Assyrian troops there were probably items peculiar to pharaonic clothing – revised according to the Kushite new style – and as such culturally distant from the conquerors' dressing traditions and aesthetic sensibilities, such as the skirt with a frontal trapezoidal part (the *shendjut*), a royal prerogative throughout Egyptian history[88] and frequently represented in the statuary and other artworks portraying Taharqa,[89] the long kilt with a tasselled cord,[90] the short kilt decorated with rosettes,[91] the clasp straps,[92] the crossed-falcon shirt,[93] and the tightly fitting cap-crown,[94] as well as cloaks that were fastened with a knot at the right shoulder, such as the one worn by Tanwetamani in the painted decoration of the burial chamber at el-Kurru.[95] The trimmings mentioned in Assurbanipal's texts probably refer to bands sewn onto the edges of Kushite elite tunics and garnished with tassels, cords with tassels,[96] or embroidered scenes with geometric or figurative motifs.[97]

The end of the civil war between Assyria and Babylonia (648 BC) and the defeat of the unfaithful brother and king of Babylonia Šamaš-šumu-ukīn represent another context in which textiles act as representative of royal personhood and power. These events were ceremonially sanctioned by Assurbanipal in a triumphal procession before the Assyrian king through the parade of all the royal appurtenances of the hostile brother that were carried off to Assyria. The precious objects, emblems of the Babylonian kingship that were plundered from his royal palace, included Šamaš-šumu-ukīn's royal clothing, jewellery, and other regalia.[98]

The parade of the defeated brother's regalia, sculpted in Room M of the North Palace, opens with a royal tiara, apparently Babylonian in style.[99] The message that these insignia of kingship communicate is clear: no longer integral parts of a unity (the Babylonian king's clothed body, the "image of kingship"), but separate individual

87 Ebied and Fahim 2018: 61–67; Fahim and Bassir 2018: 70–78.

88 Pedrini 2016: 73.

89 Fahim and Bassir 2018: 70, 88 fig. 2.

90 Fahim and Bassir 2018: 71, 90 fig. 8.

91 Fahim and Bassir 2018: 75, 93 fig. 25.

92 Fahim and Bassir 2018: 73, 91 figs. 14, 15.

93 Fahim and Bassir 2018: 74, 92 fig. 21.

94 Lacovara 2015: 449–50 and fig. 23.2.

95 Ebied and Fahim 2018: 65, 67. See also Lacovara 2015: 448–49 and pl. 10.

96 Fahim and Bassir 2018: 72.

97 The use of bands with figurative scenes is documented already in earlier periods. See Pedrini 2016: 29 and fig. 9 on hunting scenes, sphinxes, and griffins embroidered on the lower edge of a linen tunic of Tutankhamun (18th Dynasty).

98 RINAP 5/1: 7 viii 65', see also nos. 8 viii 24''''; 9 v 10; 11 vi 16; RINAP 5/2: 89 v 15'' A; 175 ii 16'–17'; 176 obv. 2; 181 rev.[?] 4'.

99 Slab 12, Room M. See Barnett 1976: pl. 35. For details, see Collins 2008: 110.

objects, they are now devoid of all power and become trophies glorifying the Assyrian king's victory. Šamaš-šumu-ukīn's royal clothing was presumably fashioned according to Babylonian clothing tradition and in line with the less richly ornamented costumes of Neo-Babylonian kings.[100] The spectacularization of victory thus found its decisive moment in the display of the enemy king's regalia and clothes to the Assyrian public.[101]

In Assyria, royal dress materialises notions that we see at work in texts of political-religious communication and helped the ruling elite constructing the Assyrian king's public appearance as the synthesis of the imperialistic project and the roles that he had to fulfil as the holder of Assyrian *šarrūtu*. Analogously to the standard titles that described the royal person and his functions in titulary sections of royal inscriptions, the components of the Assyrian king's dress were aimed at illustrating the unrivalled qualities of the ruling king and responded to the imperatives of the divine mandate to rule the "Land of Aššur". The royal titulary that the king "wore" on the occasion of public ceremonies highlighted his superior strength, vigour, and military capacity, his privileged status of appointee and chosen by the gods, and the god-inspired mission that informed his human rulership, the universality of his dominion. In few words, the royal dress with all its related accessories materialised the institution of Assyrian kingship and all its values, meanings, prerogatives, and functions, as well as the Assyrian elite's expectations regarding the success of the imperialistic project in which they were involved. These functions of *šarrūtu* represented what the Assyrian imperial elite who lived in the major cities of central Assyria expected in terms of wealth, prestige, and power from the military expansion of the state. By covering the king's body, these titles in the form of items of finely executed clothing enhanced the cosmic relevance of his earthly rulership, which re-enacted the gods' combats against the chaos at the origin of the world and manifested how the king's actions in war and peace continued the work of civilization inaugurated by his celestial counterparts in the mythical time. The way the royal items of clothing materialised the central ideas of Assyrian royal ideology and state religion probably varied according to the clothing ensemble worn by the king on the different occasions in which he took part, as well as to specific characteristics

100 Apart from the "Assyrian-like" clothes worn by Nabonidus in his stele from Babylon, in general the Neo-Babylonian royal costume is simpler in comparison with the Neo-Assyrian one, although greater sophistication occurs in late Neo-Babylonian royal clothes in contrast to the clothing of the early Neo-Babylonian kings. See Quillien 2022: 555–57. It can be assumed that this development in the late Neo-Babylonian costume, although entirely in line with the Babylonian tradition, was probably determined at least in part by the cultural impact of the Assyrian imperial dress and the use of royal dressing as a vehicle of political discourse in Assyrian imperial culture.

101 On public display and spectacularization, an integral part of the Neo-Assyrian communication strategy, see Liverani 2017: 75–86.

inherent to the textiles worn, such as colour combinations and decorative elements, not to mention the combination of items of clothing and accessories that expressed the royal dignity and power of the bearer.

The distinctive functions of the Assyrian king as vice-regent of the god Aššur, the true king of the country, and as chief priest of the supreme deity – two functions that were strictly intertwined with kingship in the Assyrian royal culture – were materially expressed through the characteristic truncated tiara with ribbons and the fringed overgarment or shawl. The tiara of the 9th century typology was a low, squat, fez-like cap with a pointed top adorned by only a frontal headband, while the 8th–7th centuries' variety was taller and adorned with a headband and other decorative bands on both the headdress' main part and the pointed top.[102] The later elongated variety probably resulted from combining the traditional squat, fez-like hat with the tall, conical headgear of priests as a reference to the king's priestly office (*sangûtu*) and to the horned tiara of gods' statues (*agû*), generally represented as a tall, cylindrical head covering with a pointed or rounded top. Among its meanings, the royal tiara evidently concretised the king's role as high priest of Aššur, materialising his hierarchical position with respect to the god's clergy. The ribbons occur as the characteristic ending part of headbands and tiaras. While the main part is plain, the ending is fringed. In some cases, the ribbon's end is decorated by a border band bearing decorative motifs, possibly woven, and a fringe. As an alternative to fringes, ribbons can end in tassels. The tiara is a central element in the identification of the Assyrian ruler in his representations in imperial art and its visual elaboration is crucial to the message to be conveyed. In sculpted scenes, Assyrian artists evidently elongate this element of dress to make the figure of the sovereign appear taller, as well as more easily identifiable.[103] The shawl is another fundamental component of the king's dress and of his official and public image: the monarch in his full majesty generally wears the shawl. This was a heavy overgarment that was worn differently from the stole or shawl used by princes and high dignitaries of the court. Visual depictions show that this item required a large quantity of fabric: evidently, the greater amount of fabric was itself an element that conveyed the higher status and power of the royal figure. It is unclear what determined its absence in some representations of palace reliefs, including those relating to rituals.[104] The covering of the sovereign's shoulders perhaps also met ritual requirements[105] as well as royal protocol, but the available data do not allow any firm conclusions to be drawn on this.

102 Reade 2009: 249–502, 254–56.

103 Assante 2017: 58.

104 See, *e.g.*, the libation scene in Slab D of Room S' of the North Palace in Nineveh in Collins 2008: 135. On the absence of shawl and tiara in royal representations, see Gaspa 2018: 150–51.

105 Possibly related to his priestly duties. On the covering the king's shoulders in the framework of the Šabāṭu-Addāru cultic rites, see Gaspa 2016: 93–94; 2019: 210–12.

The clothing ensemble consisting of tunic and shawl, both equipped with fringes, combined with the royal jewellery, the sceptre or the staff, and the ceremonial weapons, was fundamental in manifesting the king's position *vis-à-vis* the closest palace entourage, the ruling elite and all his subjects. Moreover, his attire was intended to show himself as the one who, as a descendent of an ancient royal lineage and entrusted by the "great gods" (*ilāni rabûti*) of Assyria to expand the *māt Aššur*'s borders, was legitimized to rule the country. This project entailed the political mission of territorially enlarging Assyria and merged with the ideal of making the political borders of the state coincide with the extreme boundaries of the cosmos established by the gods. If the fringed and tasselled bands at the edges of the foot-length tunics were peculiar to the high-ranking members of the court, the robe worn by the king stood out from the others for the border bands, finely decorated with figural scenes, or by the interplay between a myriad of motifs scattered over the entire surface of the royal robe and those decorating the border bands and the tiara. The figural programme visible on Assurnaṣirpal II's dress, elaborated by the expert royal tailors and decorators, shows how the king's clothes were consciously understood as a medium of political communication. It is clear that analogously to iconography on jewels and other small-scale royal belongings,[106] figural scenes on the royal garments were only visible at a close distance. This suggests that their identity-building functions were directed to the wearer and to his closest entourage. In contrast, people who could only visually access the royal person at a remote distance would have had a more limited perception of his outfit, appreciating other traits of the royal *lubussu*, presumably shapes and colour combinations or the presence of elements that easily identify the wearer as a king, for example the tiara. This probably also affected the meanings that were conveyed to observers outside the king's close entourage.

2.3 Dress Decorations as Materialisation of Key Concepts of Assyrian Royal Ideology

2.3.1 Assurnaṣirpal II's Royal Dress

Royal robes play a leading role in the monumental art of the reliefs in the North-West Palace of Assurnaṣirpal II in Kalḫu, as shown by the numerous royal images characterised by extreme attention to garments' details. However, it is difficult to believe that neither before nor after this king did the royal tailors not make richly ornamented robes for the rulers of Assyria. Much more likely is that only with

106 Gansell 2018: 89.

Assurnaṣirpal II did the king's dress become a central element in the construction and communication of the Assyrian state's message of power, along with and in close relation to other media of imperial visual communication. The finely depicted decorations on Assurnaṣirpal II's garments are preserved in some of the bas-reliefs from his royal residence.[107] Accurately incised on the stone of the carvings by the most talented artists, the finely embroidered scenes that decorated the king's sumptuous garments were probably enhanced by the use of painting. This probably served as a means to give more visibility to these miniaturised motifs and to show the unrivalled richness of the royal outfit.[108] As much as Assurnaṣirpal II's robes depicted in the reliefs contribute to the construction of an idealised image of the royal figure and the robes themselves may have been rendered by the artists in an idealised manner, they remain an important source of information on the royal attire of this period. In fact, the absence of organic remains of Neo-Assyrian decorated royal robes makes it impossible to know how realistic the depictions of dress decorations in the palace reliefs are or how much they diverge from reality, either for reasons of practical difficulty in depicting them on stone or because of stylistic choices and the message to be conveyed to the viewer. Whatever was the reality of the decorations on the royal dress, these decorations are not only revelatory of the textile art and aesthetic taste of this king (and perhaps also of other kings of Assyria who did not leave us detailed visual information on their dress). They also tell us how the king of Assyria was expected to dress and appear, and constitute important vehicles of meanings relating to the king's image and the ideology that it embodied.

These decorations could consist of isolated motifs freely spread over the garment's cloth and of patterned bands with continuous sequences of motifs, generally of figural, geometrical, or floral type. These bands were presumably woven separately and stitched onto the main cloth of the garment, principally onto the edges (the collar, sleeves, and edge of the tunic; the tiara; and the ribbons). In the case of the edges of the overgarment and the tunic, the band with the decorative motifs was attached to that bearing the fringes or the tassels. Alternatively, a single band with both decorations and fringes or tassels could be sewn to the dress. Also the ending part of the ribbons was adorned by stitching a decorative band. In this connection, it is worth noting that the figural scenes of winged heroes wrestling with wild or supernatural beasts, of the double royal person facing the "sacred tree", of Aššur's winged symbol, of protective genii with *lamassu*s, and vegetal motifs of palmettes,

107 For an in-depth analysis of the motifs incised on this king's clothes in the reliefs of Nimrud, see Bartl 2014.

108 See Matthiae 1996: 67–68.

Figure 1: A beardless *lamassu* grasped by a winged protective genius on the royal garment's border band, Room G, North-West Palace, Nimrud (BM 124567, © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved).

flowers, and buds are abundant in the textile art evidenced by Assurnaṣirpal II's outfit (Figure 1).[109]

Hunting and wrestling scenes symbolized masculine vigour and strength and were prerequisites for a successful king, as they recalled the royal obligation to defeat disruptive forces and expand the cosmic and civilizing order of the gods over the world as the human counterpart of Ninurta.[110] Royal hunts constituted the arena where the king's function as protector of the "Land of Aššur" and the divinely sanctioned cosmic order was expressed and spectacularized.[111] These themes concur with the iconographical programme carved in the palace rooms to exalt the unrivalled heroism, strength, and military abilities of Assurnaṣirpal II. As for the vegetal motifs, these elements do not speak the language of war and the king's unrivalled martial skills, but that of peacetime and construction. They probably referred to the prosperity of the country and the generative capacity of the Assyrian sovereign in the service of the state: the Land benefitted from the territorial expansion and agricultural exploitation of previously unproductive foreign lands resulting from the

109 Layard 1849–53, I: pls. 5, 6, 8, 9. These and other motifs on the king's garment are described in detail in Bartl 2014: 29–48.

110 The role played by the warlike figure of Ninurta and the combat myth in royal rhetoric is discussed in Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 232–62.

111 On the king's protective role, see Thomason 2016a: 142–43.

king's warlike endeavours. The creational and generative abilities of the king were especially manifested through the construction of capital cities,[112] royal residences, and temples as centres of wealth hoarding and seats of unrivalled power, as well as of hydraulic infrastructures for the enhancement of palace gardens and the agricultural productivity of Assyria's heartland.

Among the vegetal motifs, that of the "Assyrian sacred tree" is central, since it is represented both as an individual motif among various motifs in sequence on decorative bands and as the main decoration of the chest part of the tunic. The sacred tree motif may occur on the chest area of Assurnaṣirpal II's costume in a stylized form in horizontal position[113] or in a more complex design. In the case of Assurnaṣirpal II's sitting figure of Reliefs 2–3 of Room G (Figure 2), the scene portraying the double royal figure facing the "sacred tree" under Aššur's emblem and holding the streamers of the disc-shaped emblem on the chest part is encircled within a band formed by a row of buds and palmettes (Figure 3).[114]

It cannot be ruled out that the artist deliberately enlarged and accentuated the chest decoration compared to how it must have appeared in reality on the king's dress, in order to make the iconographic motif and the message it embodied more visible to the viewer.[115] The centrality of the "sacred tree" motif in the artistic and architectural programme of the North-West Palace explains its presence also in the royal dress. In the bas-reliefs of the North-West Palace the "sacred tree" is represented in isolation or in scenes in which the king is depicted twice on either side of the tree.[116] The latter motif may have been inspired by a royal ritual that was performed near a real object resembling a palm tree,[117] but in Assurnaṣirpal II's artistic programme it becomes a component of an idealised representation of the royal figure that combines the mythical and historical, the divine and human dimensions.[118] In the Throne Room's decoration, the scene with the doubling of the

112 Thomason 2016a: 139.

113 Bartl 2014: pls. 35, 41.b.

114 Layard 1849–53, I: pls. 5–6. As observed by Bartl (2005: 22, 25 figs. 6a and b), Layard's drawing of the chest decoration (pl. 6) is erroneous as regards the number of vegetal motifs in the circle and the position of the double royal figure's left hands. On the motifs of Room G, see Bartl 2014: 60–64 and Lion 2019: 27–28.

115 Emphasisation of dress features in visual art can be due to various reasons and is recognisable in the rare cases in which archaeological textiles can be compared with iconographical evidence, as shown, for instance, by the depictions of clothes in Roman Palmyra studied in Żuchowska 2022: 166–74.

116 In the decoration of the Throne Room. See Matthiae 1996: figs. 2.5–6.

117 Reade (2005: 10) suggests that the sacred tree could not have been "an exclusively intellectual or spiritual concept, but sometimes had physical reality."

118 See Reade 2005: 9–10 on this motif as an ideal representation.

Figure 2: Assurnaṣirpal II sitting with a bowl of wine among attendants, Room G, North-West Palace, Nimrud (BM 124565, © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved).

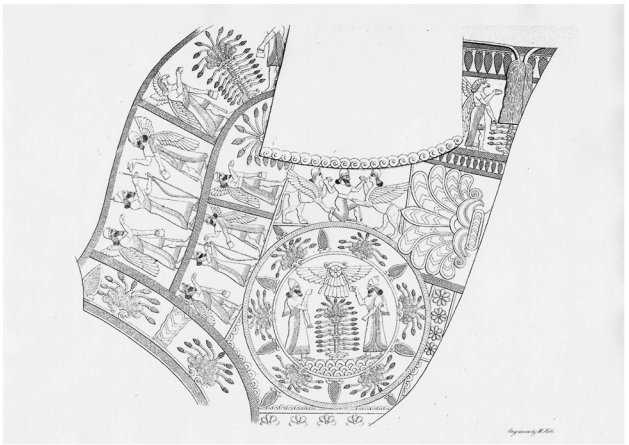

Figure 3: Decoration of the chest area of Assurnaṣirpal II's dress from Layard 1849–53, I: pl. 6.

king's body flanking the "sacred tree"[119] attracted the visitor's attention as the main focal point of the sequence of the sculpted images of this space. The two figures are not perfectly symmetrical, as shown by the different way in which the shawl is worn. The same can be observed in the scene reproduced in the chest decoration of the royal tunic of Room G.[120] However, whereas in the Throne Room the shawl spirally wraps around the body of the royal figure on the right more than once and entirely covers the left arm,[121] in the decoration of the tunic the shawl worn by the king on the right side leaves the left arm uncovered and covers the tunic at length with the two flaps almost entirely. In the scene, the different way of wearing the royal shawl is determined by the king's different position (in physical/ritual and ideal/religious terms) in relation to the tree and the divine symbol. The different representation of the shawl seems to have been instrumental in highlighting the meaning of the "sacred tree" scene, certainly consistent with the message that the decoration of the Throne Room expressed.[122]

This motif as a decoration of the tunic's chest area will not disappear in the textile art of the late Neo-Assyrian period, as we shall see below. In addition, the chest area of Assurnaṣirpal II's costume is predominantly enriched by repeated series of figural scenes, with a minor role played by garlands of palmettes, pinecones, and stylized flowers. Narrow bands of small rosettes also occur on the chest, while in the end part of the ribbons the band with rosettes occurs between a band with a rectangular motif and the tassels. It is also worth noting how in Assurnaṣirpal II's reliefs the artists intend to greatly emphasise the chest area of the king's body. By rotating the torso towards the viewer, the profile of the shoulders and chest are shown in all their mass and vigour, resulting in accentuating the masculine features, but also highlighting the decoration of the dress and, presumably, its meanings. In terms of gender construction of the royal body, it is clear that this way of representing the king's body masculinises his otherwise completely covered and uniformly compact figure.[123] But this artistic solution also shows how the textile language plays a crucial role in the re-definition of the corporal vocabulary of the Assyrian kings in imperial art. If the represented body is shown completely covered, powerful in its solid mass and impenetrable in its physicality,[124] it is on the details of the dress, the decoration

119 Matthiae 1996: figs. 2.5–6, 3.6.

120 Bartl 2014: pl. 13.

121 Contrary to what Portuese (2020: 192) claims, the item depicted does not appear to be "a double shawl with multiple fringes", but a single shawl.

122 Portuese (2020: 192) suggests that the doubling of the royal figure may have embodied and condensed the king's mercilessness and benevolence, two aspects of the king's policy that are displayed in the reliefs of the west and east side of the Throne Room.

123 Assante 2017: 56–57.

124 Assante 2017: 53–55.

and the accessories that the royal image invites the spectator's gaze. The viewer's gaze is invited to read the visual narrative unfolding along the sovereign's robes and to identify the web of interconnections with the message conveyed by the sculpted panels in the palatine rooms.

The basic decoration on Neo-Assyrian royal ribbons is given by a band with a rosette (or a square-shaped element with an internal rosette), accompanied by a fringed ending, as can be seen in the stele of Šamšī-Adad V[125] and in the Khorsabad reliefs depicting Sargon II and the crown prince.[126] Rows of small-shaped elements occur in two bands that adorn the middle part and the fringed ending of ribbons of Sennacherib's tiara in the scene regarding the booty from Lachish.[127] The same decoration also occurs in the ribbons of the crown prince's headband depicted in the same scene. In the stele from Sam'al, both Esarhaddon and Crown Prince Assurbanipal show fringed ribbons with an ending part adorned with small discs.[128] The number of these decorative bands probably constituted another marker of status. In fact, it is interesting to observe that on the ribbons of the king's headdress there are two bands with discs, while on those of Assurbanipal's headband there is only one.

To come back to Assurnaṣirpal II's dress, the figural scenes that occur as decoration in ceremonial garments related to specific occasions of the royal presence at court and in ritual contexts[129] were inserted within bands that adorned the fringed borders of the tunic and the shawl and the upper part of the tunic, that is to say the chest area and the shoulders. The most complex figural motifs only occur in specific reliefs of the iconographical programme of the North-West Palace. This suggests a connection between the high degree of realism in the representation of the royal clothes and the ceremonial functions of certain rooms, as in the case of Room G, where the carved royal clothes are extensively decorated with such scenes and the royal drinking seems to be ritually connoted.[130] The limitation of highly decorated garments to specific reliefs in the figurative programme seems to suggest that these representations played the role of focal points of the narrative cycle in relation to other scenes and were aimed at presenting to the spectator the king in his full majesty. Hence the greater emphasis on the depiction of decorative details in the garments. However, it is surprising that no such complex figural decorations appear on the royal clothes represented in Throne Room B, where the preference of the artists (and of the king that commissioned the work) was oriented to

125 Reade 1983: 45.
126 Botta and Flandin 1849–50: pls. 12, 14.
127 Collins 2008: 95.
128 Matthiae 1998: 126–127, 129.
129 Lion 2019: 30–31.
130 Lion 2019: 19, 30–31. On Room G, see Russell 2017: 474.

geometrical decorations.[131] In recalling analogous motifs on the garments worn by genii and in other representations carved on the stone wall panels of the North-West Palace in Nimrud, the royal dress shows how the king's political message of unrivalled dominion was spread through different visual media that worked as single but complementary components of an integrated visual communication system. By reiterating motifs that were disseminated through different communication media of visual art, on ceremonial occasions the narratives of power "worn" by the king helped to establish a continuous dialogue between the decorated robes and the sculpted halls of the palace. These narratives on the royal dress also shifted the message of power from the static dimension of monumental art to the movable, dynamic, and living dimension of the royal person and his gestures in everyday situations. However, the repertoire of the above-described figural motifs was not systematically applied to all the garments worn by the king. Specific occasions must have dictated the use of clothes on which figural scenes were reduced to a minimum, while a central position was given to certain motifs; for instance, the "Assyrian sacred tree". This motif, possibly on account of its meaning in the Assyrian royal ideology, occurs both on the chest part and on the shoulders. The standing royal figure carved in Relief 3 of Room S in Assurnaṣirpal II's palace[132] represents another piece of evidence regarding the most complex figural motifs of the royal dress and, as in the case of Room G, raises the question about the specific function of this place in the palace, possibly a reception room functioning as part of the king's residential suite.[133] Room S must have been a protected environment, as the overabundant figures of genii and "sacred trees" and the unique portrait of the sovereign at the end of the room would prove.[134] For those entering this space, the royal image at the end of the room certainly constituted the focal point.[135] This relief shows an extremely refined decoration on the tunic in which rows of rosettes, lotuses, pinecones or buds, and palmettes are central, while rows of rosettes and a garland formed by palmettes, pinecones (or buds), and what appear to be lilies[136] feature on the overgarment (Figure 4).

The ending part of the tiara's ribbons show a narrow, chequered band and tassels. The centrality of the stylized "sacred tree" is evident from its large size and the position in the royal dress: it is represented in horizontal position on the chest part and as a vertical motif on the left sleeve. The figural motifs occur on the sleeves

131 Lion 2019: 31.

132 Layard 1849–53, I: pl. 34. For a photograph of Slab 3, Room S, see Bartl 2014: pl. 33.

133 Russell 2017: 474.

134 Bartl 2014: 69; Portuese 2020: 194.

135 Portuese 2020: 194.

136 On the motifs forming this type of garland in the wall painting of the North-West Palace, see Albenda 2005: 107–13.

Figure 4: Assurnaṣirpal II's royal dress from Layard 1849–53, I: pl. 34.

and on the overgarment; a procession of human figures is portrayed on the lower part of the overgarment between a series of opposing half-circles and a chequered band, while a sequence of wild goats adorn the border band of the left short sleeve, surmounted by a narrow band with rosettes. Bartl's reconstruction of the figural decoration on the overgarment's lower part shows that it represented the king in a standing position with bow and arrows and accompanied by an attendant, in the act of receiving a procession of high-ranking figures paying homage to him and presumably introducing submitted enemies and tribute-bearers from conquered countries.[137] An analogous audience scene is displayed on the western side of the

137 Bartl 2014: pls. 34.b, 36.b.

Throne Room façade[138] and it cannot be excluded that the reference to the same motif of the Throne Room is an indication of the function for which Room S was intended,[139] namely to host receptions of selected groups of high-ranking personalities. The motif frequently occurs in war narratives of royal inscriptions and in monumental art and pertains to the king's ability to channel goods in the form of gifts, tribute, or booty, but certainly also via trade, from conquered countries.[140] In addition, the wide, fringed border of the overgarment is embellished by a double sequence of rosettes or other vegetal motifs within square-shaped elements, delimited by narrow, grid-shaped bands.[141] Partially covered by the overgarment, the tunic exhibits two main decorative bands: one is a knee-high band while the other characterizes the edge. In Layard's drawing, the former is constituted by five narrow bands with, from top to bottom, sequences of lilies and palmettes, rosettes, two opposing rows of half-circles, and palmettes and rosettes again, while the latter shows, from top to bottom, a double series of rosettes, a grid-shaped band, a row of lilies, and a large garland of palmettes and pinecones (or buds), closed by the tassels. However, from Bartl's reconstruction, the bands adorning the tunic's lower part seem to contain rows of concentric half-circles and rhomboidal elements, opposing palmettes, a separating grid band, opposing buds and lilies, and a bull-hunting scene with mounted soldiers, infantrymen, and the king on his war chariot, closed by various vegetal motifs and surmounted by astralized divine symbols.[142]

To return to the possible function of the rooms in which the most detailed depictions of Assurnaṣirpal II's decorated clothes occur, it is reasonable to think that the spatial context in which these royal images were inserted had to meet the aesthetic and ideological expectations of the king and the royal elite, and those pertaining to the performance of specific ceremonial or ritual events aimed at constructing and making explicit the role of the sovereign. When the king is portrayed in mythical-symbolic scenes, he is represented as encountering the divine world but not being completely absorbed by it.[143] His physical features, emphasised by sumptuous and richly ornamented robes, accessories, weapons and royalty insignia, show him as perfect, imbued with divine attributes, and irradiating an awe-inspiring and powerful aura. His close association with the purifying genii in the scenes also establishes a relationship between his clothing and those worn by the

138 Bartl 2014: 69; Portuese 2020: 194.

139 Portuese 2020: 194.

140 Liverani 2017: 70.

141 Bartl 2014: pls. 33, 34.a-b. Some squares contain representations of animals, mythical beings in isolation or in hunting scenes, or combinations of more decorative elements (*i.e.*, geometrical and vegetal motifs, geometrical and figural motifs, vegetal and figural motifs).

142 Bartl 2014: pl. 36.a.

143 Portuese 2020: 163.

*apkallu*s, both richly ornamented to signal the king's special closeness to the divine world. If rites were performed in these rooms, they were probably aimed at purifying his body, insignia and clothes.[144] To this aim, the royal images were probably intended to illustrate the necessary ritual steps to achieve perfection and enable the monarch to fully exercise his functions of power.[145] In this regard, one wonders whether the different way of depicting the royal shawl may have played a role in instructing the sovereign on how to wear it at different stages of the ritual. In all likelihood, a restricted number of viewers were admitted in these rooms as participants in the royal rites; they represented a privileged and internal audience.[146] In the eyes of these internal spectators, some of which were presumably ritual operators, the images of the king among *apkallu*s would have confirmed the crucial role of the ritual experts in the imperial project and specifically in guiding, purifying and protecting the royal figure.[147] The attention of those who were admitted to the Throne Room would have been directed towards the portraits of the king in the scenes between genii and "sacred trees", focal moments of the decorative cycle of the sculpted wall panels and probably capable of inspiring an effect of calm and equilibrium in visitors.[148] Other portraits of the sovereign occur in limited points of the palace and show him in his benevolent and reassuring role of shepherd with the royal staff, aimed at blessing the visitors on their way to other parts of the palace[149] or acting as focal point in otherwise homogeneously decorated spaces, access to which was probably limited to a few visitors of higher rank, as assumed in the case of Room S.[150] The intended addressees of these portraits of the king in his pastoral duties are unknown, but they could have been members of the administrative and political staff, thus an internal audience.[151] Moreover, the sensorial experience of these royal images and details of the king's robes in viewers may have been intentionally conditioned depending on the ceremonial occasion and the visitors admitted. It cannot be ruled out that the amount of light inside the palace rooms was intentionally manipulated to highlight the images of the king at focal points in the decorative cycle of the reliefs and to emphasise decorative details,[152] such as those with figural scenes on the royal robes.

144 Portuese 2020: 163.
145 Portuese 2020: 91–93, 163.
146 Portuese 2020: 193, 206.
147 Portuese 2020: 93–94, 163.
148 Portuese 2020: 190.
149 Portuese 2020: 190.
150 Portuese 2020: 194.
151 Portuese 2020: 206.
152 Portuese 2020: 188–89.

2.3.2 The Sargonid Royal Dress

As far as the late imperial period is concerned, innovations regarding the royal imagery reflect the new programme of presentation of the king's figure inaugurated by Tiglath-pileser III's imperial politics and the developments that occurred from Sargon II's reign onwards. In general, the sovereign is now depicted as creator of the empire, the holder of the power insignia and the one who dominates as an absolute autocrat his enemies and vassals. However, ideology and political message change during the Sargonid period. Innovations of Sargon II's reign concern the unprecedented role of the aristocracy that accompanies the king in his deeds and takes part to festive banquets in the court. This is evident in the case of the Khorsabad reliefs, that witness to the central role played by the social group who helped Sargon's ascent to the throne and the solidarity and common interests that linked the king and the aristocracy as a crucial factor in making the empire an efficient system of government.[153] In the art of Sargon II's successors, evidenced by the wall panels of the royal palaces of Sennacherib (South-West Palace) and Assurbanipal (North Palace) in Nineveh, the king's power becomes more personalistic and the nobles loose the former centrality and protagonism. The presence of the aristocracy in the scene is now confined to a merely ceremonial role in proximity to the royal figure, depicted as distant and inaccessible. The traditional motif of the king's heroism and the direct involvement of the sovereign in combat action also lose value in this era, while the emperor's unrivalled capacities of control over the world are now exalted in the carved scenes.[154]

On the royal dress of the Sargonids the preference of decorative elements is oriented towards a more limited presence – if not a complete absence – of figural motifs and a much more consistent presence of geometrical and floral motifs in the form of concentric circles, square-shaped elements, rosettes or encircled rosettes, and star-shaped items.[155] Geometric motifs are not absent in the royal garments of Assurnaṣirpal II's reign period, but they are limited to border bands of garments or other items of clothing worn in non-palatine and outdoor contexts, namely in hunting or war activities.[156] An interesting case is the above-mentioned short stole covering Assurnaṣirpal II's hips, decorated with concentric hexagons.[157] Other very elaborate concentric elements in royal dress borders of the 9th century are the rectangles bordered with palmettes and resembling small-scale carpets at the ends of

153 Matthiae 2014: 393–94.
154 Matthiae 2014: 395–97.
155 Guralnick 2004: 226–31.
156 Lion 2019: 31.
157 Bartl 2014: pl. 6.a-b.

Assurnaṣirpal II's sash[158] or the hexagons embedded in concentric rectangles on the shawl's border of the same sovereign.[159] Concentric figures represent another category of geometric figures. Probably, the different levels of the concentric element's structure made it possible to create woven patterns of alternating colours using different coloured threads.

The repertoire of decorative motifs of the late imperial period shows a great variety of combined geometrical shapes and floral elements. Especially in the reign of Assurbanipal, concentric circles with central dots, encircled rosettes, and stars (or star-like rosettes) were the favourite motifs in the decoration of royal garments,[160] as shown in the carved wall panels of the North Palace in Nineveh. Some of these elements were probably intended to represent the Assyrian deities, namely the great gods of the imperial pantheon, in astralized form. The "sacred tree" motif does not disappear in the textile art of the reign period of Assurbanipal. In contrast, the tailors and dress decorators of Assurbanipal's reign revived this 9th century motif[161] through a renewed language and style of royal dress. On the chest part of Assurbanipal's dress in the hunting scenes, the scene with the double image of the king confronting the "sacred tree" under the supreme god's symbol is represented as a highly simplified and miniaturised image compactly inserted between two large floral discs within a rectangular frame formed by narrow bands decorated by rows of various items (Figure 5).

It is important to observe that also the dress worn by the royal figures flanking the tree is depicted in a highly simplified manner. Moreover, differences are recognisable in the way the shawl is worn by the two kings. The sculptor's artistic solutions are probably due to the difficulty in rendering complex figural motifs on stone. The narrative cycle of royal hunts in the North Palace[162] certainly constituted the privileged context for displaying the sovereign's virtues and abilities. It also constituted the ideal context to display the symbolism of the "sacred tree" scene and communicate to the viewer the message that Assurbanipal's kingship was in full continuity with the old tradition of heroic rulers of the first imperial phase. Assurbanipal takes up and reworks the motif of the lion hunt – a royal prerogative and a ritual signifying the king's control over the forces of nature – already present in the art of Assurnaṣirpal II.[163] In line with royal culture of Assurbanipal's reign,

158 Bartl 2014: pl. 14.b. The design of these rectangular elements is formed by a series of concentric rectangles, some of which are decorated (with petal-shaped elements, grids, pointed motifs, and large protruding flowers).

159 Bartl 2014: pl. 25.a.

160 Guralnick 2004: 228–31.

161 Guralnick 2004: 229; see also N'Shea 2019: 180.

162 Matthiae 1998: 171–79.

163 Matthiae 2014: 397.

Figure 5: Decoration on the chest part of Assurbanipal's dress, Room C, North Palace, Quyunjiq (BM 124866, © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved).

the royal hunt now takes the form of a public spectacle,[164] becoming a further stage on which to display, with voyeuristic taste and extreme attention to detail, the royal person and his unrivalled abilities. The rectangular element and the scene are clearly visible in chariot hunting representations[165] and in that regarding horse-riding.[166] This decorative element also occurs in the scenes depicting him in the act of shooting arrows[167] and killing on foot a lion with a spear.[168] The rectangle and one floral disc are partially visible when the king directly confronts and kills a wounded lion at the end of the hunt[169] and when, clad in the ceremonial outfit with tiara and shawl, he makes a libation on the dead lions.[170] The large floral items in the rectangle are actually concentric floral discs in the chariot hunting scene, namely with two rows of petals,[171] and concentric flowers with a central concentric dot in the horse-riding, lion-killing on foot, and libation scenes.[172] The element

164 Reade 2005: 24.

165 Reliefs 14, 24, Room C. See Collins 2008: 114, 119.

166 Reliefs 12, 13, Room S. See Collins 2008: 132.

167 Relief 12, Room S. See Barnett 1976: pl. 51.

168 Relief 9', Room S. See Barnett 1976: pl. 53. Clay models were produced to guide Assyrian sculptors in the realisation of wall reliefs. From fragments of one of these models we learn that variations in the depiction of the king also included the rectangular motif being partially covered by a decorated, diagonal strap across the chest area. See Matthiae 1998: 209 and Fales and Postgate 1992: 118 fig. 28 for a detailed view.

169 Relief 13, Room S. See Reade 1983: 79 fig. 94 and, for details Collins 2008: 133.

170 Relief D, Room S'. See Collins 2008: 135.

171 Collins 2008: 114, 119.

172 Collins 2008: 132, 133, 136.

characterises the royal dress both in scenes in which the sovereign wears the tiara and in those in which he wears the diadem. The 9th century precursor of this rectangular frame in Assurbanipal's chest decoration is visible on the sculpted garment of Assurnaṣirpal II. In that case, the element consisted of a large concentric rectangle in horizontal position, crowned on both sides by palmettes.[173] If the iconography of the rectangle-shaped element realistically reproduces in the proportions the chest decoration of the ceremonial robe that Assurbanipal usually worn, the scene must not have been so easily recognisable in the context of a dress richly decorated with various geometric and floral multicoloured motifs. It is therefore possible that the colours of the double figure of the king and the tree accentuated the visibility of the image and its message, to make the motif stand out from the rest of the polychromatic decoration of the robe. In Assurbanipal's dress, it is also important to note that the "sacred tree" scene with the double royal figures is also reproduced within small squares against a background of alternating concentric discs and rosettes in a decorative band on the belly part of the royal costume in one of the chariot hunting scenes.[174] Apparently, it seems that the display of the "sacred tree" emblem on the royal costume's chest part is only shown in public situations that were much more politically charged and, as such, relevant for the Assyrian royal construct and the political-religious discourse. In fact, in the garden scene on Relief BC of Room S', a space that was located in the inner residential quarter of the North Palace in Nineveh, the motif is absent from the chest part of Assurbanipal's tunic.[175] The event carved in the scene seems to refer to a private situation – however strongly idealised and charged with symbolism – whose access was precluded to outsiders, except for the royal couple's domestic staff.

What we see may be called a "geometrical revolution" in Assyrian textile art, which found expression not only in elements of clothing but also in draperies and carpets. This can be seen in the finely carved stone replicas of carpets that decorated the entrances to the palaces of Kalḫu, Dūr-Šarrukēn and Nineveh, clearly imitating real carpets that embellished the gateways of these places. With their combination of geometrical and vegetal decorations, carpets and drapery endlessly replicated the ideal microcosm that capitals and botanical gardens materialised on a large-scale and in three-dimensional terms, thus visualizing the Assyrian king's capacity to manipulate the world into an ordered, civilized, and prosperous system. Some of these carpets permanently adorned the palace rooms (as was probably the case of

173 Bartl 2014: pls. 1.b, 40.a-b. The same motif is reproduced in the chest area of a genius' dress, see *ibid*.: pl. 41.a.

174 Collins 2008: 119, 120.

175 See Collins 2008: 137.

carpets in the personal suites of the king's palace) but others were probably used only at ceremonial events open to high-ranking visitors (presumably in ceremonial reception rooms). This "geometrical revolution" in the artistic language and style of the late textile art of Assyria cannot be ascribed to the autonomous creation of the royal textile artisans with no relation to the elites' aesthetic tastes and power vision and the orientation the ruling elite gave to imperial culture. It certainly reflects the development of the royal ideological notion of the king's role and mandate during the late Neo-Assyrian period. While in the first phase of the Assyrian expansionist project the royal elite felt the need to express the king's power and above all the functions of kingship in terms of re-enactment of divine and mythical deeds, the ability to wage war and convey foreign, luxury goods as tribute or booty to his land, and to generate prosperity for the country, in the phase that saw the greatest extension of Assyria's territorial dominion in the Near East and the full realization of the king's autocratic power, reached through difficult dynastic successions and in open contrast with components of the Assyrian aristocracy, the focus was no longer on the functions of kingship and the military capabilities of the sovereign but on the special nature of the royal person. This change in textile language and style probably reflects the cultural impact due to the abandonment of the paradigm of the king's heroism after the tragic death of Sargon II, a change that in the royal representations in official texts and monumental art led to the drastic reduction of the heroic-martial qualities of the king, with the dismissal of the royal prominence in warfare and the development of new forms of physical, moral, and intellectual superiority of the sovereign, with a marked increase of the symbolic dimension.[176] The king's figure is now seen as an entity elevated and protected by the gods, embodying universal power and superhuman perfection, and no more as an active counterpart of the gods who tests his skills on the battlefield. In monumental visual art, when the monarch is portrayed in close position to the god Aššur, as in the Bavian rock relief, the size of the royal figure and the similarities linking the figures of Aššur and the king – notwithstanding the different types of tiaras and shawls – underline the proximity of the monarch to the supreme god of the Assyrian pantheon. In the case of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, the king is no more the one who goes to the battlefield in person as a warrior armed by the gods but the one who is generated, raised, and protected by the gods. According to this ideological vision, it is the gods who are expected to go to war for him and defeat his opponents. In Assurbanipal's war narratives are the great gods of Assyria who place enemy lands into the kings' hands.[177] They protect the king's majesty, marching at his side, standing at the front of the royal troops, and

176 See Galter 2022: 116–17.

177 RINAP 5/1: 3 i 12–13.

personally striking down the king's foes.[178] For the period of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, it is Ištar, the warrior goddess related to prophetism, who acquires an unprecedented central role in the divine protection of the Assyrian king.[179] It is the heroic goddess who goes into battle against Teumman, the king of Elam, accomplishing what by rule was a royal task and letting Assurbanipal achieve his heart's desire.[180] The libation on Teumman's head in front of the shrine of Ištar at Arbela, carved on a panel of Room I of the North Palace,[181] confirms the decisive role attributed to the goddess in the victory over the Elamite king. It is not by chance that in late war narratives of palace reliefs the king is no longer represented as a combatant engaged in battle and his centrality is now situated at the end of the pictorial war narratives.[182] The sovereign becomes a detached spectator who merely follows the success of the Assyrian military machine and celebrates it with grandiose and triumphant public events.[183] In the framework of this redefinition of Assyrian *šarrūtu* of the late period, if war capabilities are expressed in visual communication, they are in the sign of theatricalization, as clearly evidenced by representations of Assurbanipal in hunting activities that are performed in public – although physically closed and protected – spaces that facilitate the visual focusing on the king's figure and gestures. In this context, his hunting and sporting dress plays a central role in emphasising his protagonism as a virile and skilled hunter in spectacular terms.[184]

That the model for the star-covered dress of the king was inspired by the divine garments is evident from the traditional representation of the god Marduk and other deities of the Assyro-Babylonian pantheon, based on the notion that the divine beings, in addition to their anthropomorphic appearance, could also manifest their presence through their symbols or in astralized form.[185] This aesthetic change, achieved through the adoption of the star-quilted divine clothes as the model for the Assyrian king's attire, responded to developments in the notion of the king's status and role in the imperial age. The diffuse presence of geometrical motifs in the form of astral symbols on the Assyrian royal outfit could indicate that the king's power was conceptualized as pervasively spread over the whole world, similarly

178 RINAP 5/1: 11 ix 75–102.

179 See Parpola 1997: XXXIX–XL and N'Shea 2019: 180–81.

180 RINAP 5/1: 3 v 64–65.

181 Slab 9, Room I. See Barnett 1976: pls. 25–26 and Reade 2005: 21 and pl. 20.

182 Collins 2019: 275.

183 See Matthiae 1996: 192.

184 On highlighting Assurbanipal's virile and martial traits through his clothing and accessories in hunting scenes, see N'Shea 2019: 177–79.

185 On 1st-millennium BC representations of star-covered divine clothes, see, *e.g.*, the encircled stars and other astral motifs adorning the long robes worn by Adad and Marduk on 9th-century BC seals from Babylonia in Matthiae 1998: 52, 63.

to that of the gods that extended over the entire cosmos. It showed that the empire had a cosmic dimension. This idea resulted from the Assyrian notion that saw the imperial control of the world as inextricably tied to the concept of divine universality, since the king's action to extend the state's borders meant extending the divine order to all the previously chaotic and unordered territories (people, material resources, etc.) of the universe.[186]

The presence of astralized motifs suggests the special proximity with the great gods that the Assyrian king enjoyed in the exercise of his power. This proximity with the divine dimension could be further emphasised by using gold appliqués: as the numerous golden rosettes, stars, discs, and other items discovered in the Nimrud queenly tombs show,[187] Assyrian elite garments could be adorned by stitching onto the cloth a variable number of such items. The use of metal decorations added luminosity to the king's dress. Brightness was a peculiar characteristic of the divine manifestation and found expression through the idea of *melammu* or *namurratu*, the awesome radiance of the divine entity that from Tukultī-Ninurta I onwards became an attribute of the royal person in the Assyrian political discourse.[188] In one of his inscriptions, Esarhaddon states to have restored the statues of the previously plundered Babylonian gods and to have returned them to their proper cultic places, and to have taken care of clothing them daily "in silver and gold",[189] an expression used to indicate garments fully covered with precious metal appliqués. In the same text, the monarch also states to have restored the supreme Assyrian god's crown. He describes the object using words that underline the luminosity as the fundamental attribute of the object and of the sensorial experience related to it.[190] Ištar of Arbela, who is mentioned in an inscription of Assurbanipal as the deity who defeated the king's enemies by raining down fire upon the land of the Arabs, is also described in terms of luminosity: "(the goddess) who is clothed in fire (and) cloaked in awe-inspiring radiance".[191] Analogous words are used in a hymn in which Assurbanipal describes Ištar of Nineveh.[192] The same can be seen in the case of Aššur-etel-ilāni, Assurbanipal's son and successor, who in a Babylonian inscription

186 See Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 146–47.

187 Hussein 2016; Gaspa 2018: 168–70, 296.

188 Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 220, 262.

189 RINAP 4: 48 obv. 38.

190 RINAP 4: 48 rev. 84–86: "I had an artfully (designed) crown, which is befitting the lordship of the god Aššur, king of the gods, my lord, made of red gold and precious stones, and I restored it. Aššur, the great lord, accepted magnanimously that crown, (which is) clothed in splendorous radiance, full of dignity, radiating a glow, (and) wrapped in brilliance, and his spirit was pleased (and) his countenance shone."

191 RINAP 5/1: 11 ix 80.

192 SAA 3: 7 obv. 6–8.

concerning the fashioning of a gold sceptre for Marduk, qualifies this god as the "lord of lords, exalted, wh(ose) figure is splendid (and who) is vastly superior to all of the (other) gods, bearer of the awe-inspiring, terrible radiance, clothed in splendour".[193]

In comparison with the colour effect that could be generated by astral motifs woven in fabric on the Assyrian royal garment, the use of decorative appliqués made more manifest the notion that the king's dress was the earthly counterpart of the gold-covered clothes that adorned the gods' statues in the temples, suggesting commonalities between the king and the gods. The metal luminosity of the appliqués was instrumental to show the superior attributes of the Assyrian king. In his annals, Sargon II is referred to as the one who "is clad in awesome splendour (*ḫālip namurrāti*) and whose weapons are raised to strike down (his) enemies".[194] With analogous tenor, Esarhaddon describes himself as a "[valiant] warrior, [clothed] with numinous splendour; whom the god Aššur, king of the gods, made take up his weapons to overthrow the enemies of Assyria; light of the (four) quar[ters]"[195] and as the one "who is clothed in splen[dour]".[196] The "luminous splendour" (*šalummatu*) is one of the gifts that the great gods gave to Assurbanipal at the coronation ceremony, as shown by the hymn related to this event.[197] This radiance of divine origin is one of the attributes of the Assyrian royal person, who, according to the aforesaid hymn, was expected to rule the "Land of Aššur" with "command, attention, truth and justice".[198] The radiance-wearing of the king is a direct consequence of the divine gifts and of the identification of his role with that of the god Ninurta, as implied in a theological commentary in which the sovereign, who is crowned inside the Aššur Temple and carried to the palace, is equated with Ninurta and who, as the avenger of his father, receives the royal insignia and is adorned with the splendour of kingship (*melam šarrūti*).[199] The brilliance that the royal body radiates comes from having been adorned (*za'ānu*) by the gods, his fathers.[200]

However, different interpretations may be suggested concerning the idea of this special proximity with the divine sphere that could be emphasised by dress decorations. The multitude of these decorative astral symbols on the king's covered body could indicate that Aššur's vice-regent benefitted from a special and direct protection by the great gods of the country (a condition justified by the unrivalled

193 RIMB 2: 2 obv. 2–4.
194 RINAP 2: 1:5; see also nos. 9:11, 43:7, 73:3, 129:7.
195 RINAP 4: 48 obv. 44–45.
196 RINAP 4: 98 obv. 21, see also no. 99 obv. 3.
197 SAA 3: 11 rev. 7.
198 SAA 3: 11 obv. 8.
199 SAA 3: 39 rev. 20–24.
200 SAA 3: 39 rev. 24.

hegemony reached by Assyria in the international scenario, as well as by the increasing internal instability due to succession problems and power conflicts within the Assyrian elite). In this perspective, the gods' presence physically covered the royal body, ensuring that his rulership was under the control of the celestial sphere and that all his actions were divinely authorized and, as such, destined for success. The increase in abstract symbolism in textile decorations of the royal dress could also bear witness to the increasing isolation of the king's person within the Assyrian state establishment in the late Neo-Assyrian period and the forms of control regulating access to his presence due to the need to preserve him, both physically and ritually, from external threats. This aspect reflects the importance of *maṣṣartu* in Neo-Assyrian royal culture. This term referred to the protecting watch regularly performed by court scholars towards the royal person to preserve him from any danger and to keep him ritually pure and his conduct in line with the gods' decrees.[201] The need for divine protection could explain the possible apotropaic function of these decorative motifs. The motifs' apotropaic value has been suggested by Bartl and Lion.[202] Following this interpretation, the decorative elements scattered on the royal dress and tiara would thus represent entities intended to protect the royal person and his sphere of action from external threats. In the case of early Neo-Assyrian royal dress, evidenced by the magnificent robe of Assurnaṣirpal II on the wall panels of his palace, the figural scenes were inserted within bands that adorned the fringed edges of the tunic and shawl, and the upper part of the tunic, that is to say the chest area and shoulders. Like magical formulas uttered by the *āšipu*s, the repeated decorations reiterated the idea of the royal person as a being perpetually purified and protected by the divine world, replicating at the level of the royal body the protection guaranteed to the palace by the numerous *apkallu*s carved on the wall stone panels. At the same time, these decorations showed the king's privileged access to the divine world, whose cosmic deeds he re-enacted through the everyday rule of the Land. The emblem of the "sacred tree", whose exact meaning still escapes us,[203] perhaps reminded in a symbolic and synthetic way, by referencing the vegetal prosperity of the king's divine mandate, the cosmic significance of the office of the

201 Parpola 1993: XXI–XXIV.

202 Bartl 2007: 35; Lion 2019: 35. See, also Thomason 2016a: 137.

203 Reade (1983: 37) sees this stylized palm tree as a possible representation of the fertility of the life-giving earth, to be identified with Assyria. Long debated is the idea that this was an esoteric emblem encapsulating the basics of Assyrian religion and salvation theory, for which see Parpola 1993; 2022: 209. For the possibility that this symbol refers to Ištar as the goddess of fecundity and vegetation, see Albenda 2005: 111. See Pongratz-Leisten 2019: 294 for the interpretation of this emblem as a "central visual token referencing to fertility and abundance". See Pongratz-Leisten 2022: 239–40 for a review of previous interpretations of this symbol.

Assyrian *šarrūtu* and the prosperity of the "Land of Aššur".[204] As such, this emblem delimited the different nature of the royal person in relation to the outside world, showing that his agency participated both at the mythical and the historical levels. In other words, it worked as an icon epitomizing the imperial project and the system of values on which the imperial elite's political-religious identity was based.

Apart from the "sacred tree" motif, still used in the royal dress of the later period, a different situation characterizes the late phase of Neo-Assyrian history, when geometrical motifs were spread across the entire surface of the king's robes, possibly to convey the idea of a more pervasive presence of the divine beings in the protection and guidance of the king in the everyday rule of the country. The legions of encircled stars (or encircled star-like rosettes), usually provided with an internal concentric circle or dot, constituted an innovation in the textile art of royal clothes of the late imperial period.[205] These motifs, which are depicted as extensively covering the main surface of Assurbanipal's tunic in the hunting scenes and the lower part of the robe worn in the garden scene, could refer, through astral symbolism, to the special protective role exerted by Ištar in favour of her royal *protégé*.[206] Rosettes and star-shaped elements are traditionally linked to Ištar and to her manifestations and possibly refer to different attributes of the goddess: the fecundity, attractiveness, and fullness of life (the rosette) and the planet Venus (the star), with which Ištar was associated.[207] The proliferation of all these star- or flower-shaped elements was a fashion innovation that also responded to the new aesthetic imagery of the king's presence, skilfully constructed through the mixture of revival and new motifs[208] to appear a perfect synthesis of all royal virtues and functions and at the same time a smug and aestheticizing spectacularization of an unlimited autocratic power.

As showed by the attestations of the Neo-Assyrian royal costume from the 9th to the 7th century BC, the upper part was usually much more thickly decorated that the lower part, which was generally left plain and decorated only on the border bands. In the case of Assurbanipal's costume, the tunic could be adorned by isolated large items in both the upper and the lower part or only in the lower part. In the case of tunics that were fully adorned by such large decorative items, the borders of the sleeves show a series of narrow bands with rows of small adorning elements, and the

204 As discussed in Pongratz-Leisten 2022: 261, the ideologically charged association of Assyrian kingship with the palm tree in Neo-Assyrian royal iconography from Assurnaṣirpal II to Assurbanipal evidenced the mediating function of kingship between the heavenly and earthly realms. It was thanks to his connection with the gods that the Assyrian sovereign was seen as the one who transferred fertility and prosperity from the celestial world to earth.

205 Guralnick 2004: 231; N'Shea 2019: 180.

206 Collins 2008: 119, 120, 132, 137.

207 Albenda 2005: 90–91.

208 N'Shea 2019: 180.

chest part is characterized by the above-described rectangle, connected to the collar of the costume by border bands forming a V-shaped design.[209] In some tunics, the upper part, including the sleeves, is thickly decorated by a series of alternating narrow bands that exhibit the whole repertoire of Assyrian textile motifs that we have seen in the central decorative rectangle. These elements are both geometrical and floral, namely concentric discs, encircled rosettes, rosettes within square-shaped frames and stepped triangles. It is tempting to think that these triangles are simplified representations of *siqqurrutu*s, "ziggurats", and as such symbols of Ištar and of her fall and rising from the dead.[210] Other elements on this king's tunics are small squares, garlands of lotuses and buds, and garlands of palmettes, and include bands with different alternating motifs (concentric discs and encircled rosettes).[211] It is interesting to observe that the earliest appearance of the lotus in Assyria's ornamental repertoire dates to the Middle Assyrian period, but it is in Neo-Assyrian art that it became widely attested.[212] This motif was probably inspired by the Egyptian lotus, a flower appreciated for its colours but primarily for its scent.[213] In the Sargonid period, presumably thanks to direct contacts with Egypt, it became a peculiar element in the official representation of the royal figure.[214]

The proliferation of stars on Assurbanipal's dress reminds us of Ištar's words regarding her protective role; she is the deity who takes the king into her sweet embrace and protects Assurbanipal's entire body (*gimir lāni*).[215] This idea is also attested in one of the oracles in favour of his father Esarhaddon, in which the deity reminds the king that 60 great gods stood around him and girded his loins.[216] That the star-shaped ornaments were related to the goddess is also evident from a fragmentary report on a prophecy in favour of Assurbanipal, in which golden *kakkabāte*, possibly of the deity's garment, are mentioned.[217] Other astral symbols visible on the hunting dress, possibly made of fabric or metal studs, are depicted on the waist-belt and refer to other deities of the imperial pantheon: the astral symbols of the "great gods" Ištar, Aššur, and Sîn are visible on the relief.[218] The protective presence of the *ilāni rabûti*, reproduced in the form of their symbols, is a peculiar

209 Collins 2008: 119, 132, 133.
210 On the temple tower as a symbol of the cult of this deity, see Parpola 1997: XCII fn. 114; 2022: 197.
211 See, *e.g.* Collins 2008: 119, 120, 123, 133, 135, 137.
212 Ataç 2015: 436.
213 Albenda 2005: 115–17.
214 Albenda 2005: 117.
215 RINAP 5/1: 3 v 68 and *passim*.
216 SAA 9: 1 ii 25'–26'.
217 SAA 9: 11 rev. 7, 11. See also *ibid*., rev. 13.
218 See Collins 2008: 132.

trait of the royal imagery and was also expressed through the jewellery, as may be seen in the case of the pendants of a necklace worn by Assurnaṣirpal II in his stele from the temple of Ninurta at Nimrud and in the "sacred tree" scene carved in the Throne Room of the North-West Palace.[219] Encircled rosettes or other flower-like items and encircled stars with concentric dots characterize the three decorative bands of the tiara worn by Assurbanipal during the hunt on the royal chariot.[220] The evolution of the circle, a common geometric element among the decorative shapes of Neo-Assyrian art, is the concentric disc formed by two or three rings with a central dot.[221] Concentric discs alternating with encircled stars are peculiar to the lower part of the foot-length, fringed tunic that Assurbanipal wears to perform libations after the successful hunt, while the tall tiara required by the ritual act is decorated by encircled rosettes with central dots within square-shaped elements on the lower band and small concentric discs in the other bands of the headdress and the pointed top.[222] It is in the headband worn in the garden scene that we see a decoration constituted by large concentric discs; this headband is different from the ones that Assurbanipal exhibits in the representations of horse-riding and lion-killing on foot, where the design is composed by encircled rosettes with central concentric dots inserted within square-shaped frames.[223] Regarding the ribbons, we can observe that the ones that characterize the headband worn in the horse-riding scenes show a decorative band with an encircled star or rosette, accompanied by a fringe,[224] while in the scenes where Assurbanipal confronts the lion on foot, three decorative bands with series of concentric discs and rosettes are depicted on the end parts of the fringed ribbons.[225] A different typology of ribbon is represented in the scenes showing the libation on the killed lions, the garden party with the queen and attendants, the hunt on the chariot, and the lion-killing on foot

219 Reade 1983: 20, 37.

220 Variants can be recognised on the reliefs in the decoration of the tiara, testifying to the wide variety of headdresses in the royal wardrobe and the king's desire to display these precious items of clothing, inviting the spectator's gaze to catch these details. For large, encircled sunflowers(?) on the headband of the tiara's base and alternating encircled rosettes and stars on the other bands of the tiara and the pointed top, see Collins 2008: 119 (Relief 14, Room C, Northeastern Wall). The bands adorning the royal headdress could also be decorated with the same motif, albeit in different sizes (larger at the base of the tiara and smaller at its pointed top), as shown in another scene of hunting on the royal chariot, in which only encircled sunflowers(?) with less elaborate central dots are depicted on the tiara's bands, see *ibid*., 123 (Relief 20, Room C, Southwestern Wall).

221 Albenda 2005: 92, 97.

222 Relief D, Room S'. See Collins 2008: 135.

223 Collins 2008: 132, 133.

224 Collins 2008: 132.

225 Collins 2008: 133.

with the spear.[226] In all these cases, more than one decorative band adorns the ribbons. For instance, in the scene of the chariot, the tiara's ribbons show three parts adorned by bands, all of which consisting of three narrow bands (the central band with stars or star-like rosettes and the others with small concentric discs).[227]

Concerning the numerous concentric discs on the king's dress, they are not a novelty, as they are reminiscent of the royal robe fully covered by these items worn by Sennacherib during the capture of Lachish.[228] This shows that the dress culture of Assurbanipal's reign was also heir to that of Sennacherib, despite the fact that Assurbanipal's pro-Babylonian policy was the negation of his grandfather's. In terms of apotropaic functions, one wonders whether they were meant to act as powerful and supernatural "eyes" aimed at protecting the bearer. This function, possibly shared with those eyestones that, in the form of pendants and inlays, constituted an integral part of the queen's adornment, as the Nimrud evidence shows, presumably served to repel malevolence and any other threat.[229] Another possibility is to interpret these concentric discs as a symbolic rendering of an astral body emanating its radiance or surrounded by its halo, perhaps to be identified with the sun (Šamaš) or the moon (Sîn).[230] This latter interpretation would lead to seeing these concentric discs disseminated on the king's dress as the visible manifestation (and the textile rendering) of the awesome radiance emanating from the royal body. It is also interesting to note that the disc was also a symbol of Ištar. This deified symbol is one of the deities that are present in the temple of Gula in Assur according to a cultic text related to the *tākultu*-ceremony for Assurbanipal.[231] However, much more attested in Neo-Assyrian cultic texts is the goddess *Kippat māti*, "the Circle of the Earth".[232] This deity resided in the holy of holies of the Aššur Temple.[233] During the

226 Collins 2008: 119, 122–23, 135, 137. Another type of ribbon, worn by Assurbanipal in Slab $9^{?}$ of Room S, shows two outer bands with small, square-shaped elements and a middle band with concentric discs in the main part, while in the ending fringed part there are two middle bands with concentric discs; see Barnett 1976: pl. 53 and Matthiae 1998: 128.

227 See Collins 2008: 119 for details.

228 Relief 11, Room 36, of the South-West Palace in Nineveh. See Collins 2008: 95. Although damaged, the relief shows that Sennacherib worn a fringed shawl and a tunic fully decorated by concentric circles, with a pectoral band adorned with a large, encircled star.

229 Gansell 2018: 88. According to Albenda (2005: 93), the way the disc-shaped decorations are rendered recalls the eyestones used for jewellery.

230 Albenda 2005: 97.

231 SAA 20: 40 obv. iii 11. This deity probably occurred also in no. 38 obv. iii 28, related to the *tākultu* for Sennacherib.

232 Translated by Parpola as "Orbis Terrarum" in SAA 20: 201.

233 SAA 20: 49 obv. 3. See Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 397. *Tākultu*-texts show that both *Kippat māti* and *Kippat māti ṣalmu*, "the Circle of the Earth image", resided in the Aššur Temple. See SAA 20: 38 obv. i 14 and 40 obv. i 13.

Šabāṭu-Addāru festivities she was one of the gods who went in procession to specific cultic places: "the House of Dagan",[234] "the Labbunu House",[235] "the House of Anu"[236] and "the House of Adad".[237] The group of female goddesses to which *Kippat māti* belongs is headed by Šērū'a and also includes Tašmētu.[238] If the concentric circles on the royal robe recalled this goddess, they were intended to underline the universality of the Assyrian king's power, which extended to the whole earth. In addition, *Kippat māti*'s power of intercession on the Assyrian king's behalf[239] leads one to think that her symbol on the king's clothed body constituted not only a form of protection, but also the materialisation of her continuous intercession in the divine assembly.

What we see at work in the use of astral symbols is the result of different processes that affected the royal culture of Assyria: on the one hand, the attribution of divine splendour to the king paved the way to a further strengthening of the notion of proximity of the royal person to the divine world; on the other hand, the growing significance of astrology among the predictive sciences in Assyria and the rise of astronomy in the 1st millennium BC consolidated the ideal of royal dominion of the cosmos through the king's control of wisdom, the divine knowledge.[240] It is no coincidence that the Sargonid rulers portray themselves in their royal inscriptions as wise, expert, learned, and capable of broad understanding,[241] all attributes stemming from the king's mastery of both theoretical and technical knowledge of ultimate divine origin; these were perceived as crucial skills for ruling the "Land of Aššur" in the late imperial period.

The idea that the king's person interacted directly with the divine sphere thanks to the superhuman qualities of wisdom and perfection that the gods granted to him could explain the proliferation of such astral symbols on his robes. The presence of the gods on his body – reduced to geometrical symbols – is indicative of a new paradigm of kingship that implied the full monopoly of divine knowledge, now epitomized in the perfect and wise person of the king. The monarch was thus seen as the one who knew the gods' will. His privileged access to communication with the divine sphere and his ability to correctly interpret the celestial will gave him the full control over the divine designs and cosmic order, thanks to the intellectual qualities

234 SAA 20: 1 rev. 22; 9 obv. i 6.
235 SAA 20: 5 obv. 4'.
236 SAA 20: 9 rev. iii 5'.
237 SAA 20: 11 rev. 6.
238 SAA 20: 5 obv. 4'; 9 obv. i 6, iii 5'; 11 rev. 6. The three goddesses are mentioned together also in SAA 20: 49 obv. 3–4: "Šērū'a, *Kippat māti*, the Window of Tašmētu".
239 For this role of the goddess, see Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 413.
240 Fales and Lanfranchi 1997: 100–11; Fales 2001: 39–46.
241 Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 273.

bestowed by the gods and his mastery of the divinatory sciences – an aspect suggested by the marked interest in the predictive sciences by Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal and by the regular interaction they had with experts in these disciplines in the everyday ruling of the empire.[242] In recalling the value of the king's scribal knowledge and education, the writing stylus tucked under the belt of Assurbanipal's hunting dress in depictions of royal hunts becomes a central element in the construction of the new image of kingship, interacting with the royal dress in a similar way to jewellery and other royal insignia.[243] The redefinition of the Assyrian royal person affected the visual communication media of the late imperial period, including royal textiles. These, in combination with jewellery and all the regalia, became another means to convey the reassuring message that the newly established autocratic control of the world rested on the full knowledge of divine decisions.

One of the appropriate contexts in which the royal person was publicized was represented by the state rituals. Participation in these rites is the context in which a focus on the king's robes emerges in the texts. In a hymn of Assurbanipal, the king in the ritual scene appears as clothed in garments that are qualified by the scribe as *ebbu*, physically and ritually clean, pure, and, therefore, also shining.[244] The visual appearance of his whole outfit is significant in the performance of cultic rites and aims at showing that the wearer is appropriate to the role of ritual actor and to interaction with the gods: his dress is qualified as *rabbû*, "magnificent".[245] It is reasonable to think that all the semantics attached to the items of clothing, the royal regalia, and relevant decorations that characterized the king's presence in the scene were enhanced during the performance of cultic rites in the context of large public celebrations, such as the *tākultu* ceremonies and the rites related to the months of Šabāṭu, Addāru, and Nisannu (the eleventh, the twelfth, and the first month of the Assyrian calendar, respectively). In fact, in the dynamics of the ritual action, the textiles worn by the king cooperated with other ritual actors and objects involved in the cultic scene to construct and re-affirm the cosmic function of the Assyrian *šarrūtu*, the king's status, and his centrality for the well-being of the Land. For instance, the wearing of the tiara (*agû*) belonging to the god Aššur's statue represented a crucial moment during the Šabāṭu celebrations[246] and symbolized the universality of the king's dominion. From what is known about the tiara of the gods' *simulacra*, called *agû*, it was generally made of precious stones and metal, not of

242 See Pongratz-Leisten 2015: esp. 373–78 on divination and the appropriation of omen practice by Assurbanipal.

243 Zamazalová 2011: 326–27; N'Shea 2019: 181.

244 SAA 3: 7 obv. 13.

245 SAA 3: 7 obv. 13.

246 Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 411–12.

fabric.[247] In all likelihood, this head covering was only worn in special cultic contexts, while in ordinary situations the king used a cloth headgear (*kubšu*) or a headband (*kulūlu*). The wearing of the divine crown on different days of the Šabāṭu-Addāru festive cycle[248] implied a transformative change in the status of the king, making the royal person and the exercise of his power an extension of Aššur's agency. This act also showed the complete merging of the divine and human intentionality.[249] All these aspects were emphasised by the king's appropriation of the god's tiara and its divine radiance.[250]

Presumably, all the ritual acts and gestures that the king performed as the central actor in these cultic events represented multisensorial experiences for the ones who could take part in them, accentuated in the public space by the chromatic and luminescent interaction of all his clothing components (*i.e.*, the fringed shawl, the tunic, and the metallic dress decorations) and accessories (jewellery and the royal regalia). The movement of the fringes and tassels of the shawl and tunic followed every gesture of the king and amplified the spectator's visual perception of the ritual event. Probably, another factor in the sensory amplification of the king's presence and action in ritual space was the jingling of the metal appliqués that accompanied gestures and movements in the ritual space, an aspect that also characterized the queenly clothes, as we will see below. Palace ceremonies constituted another context of multisensorial experiences concerning the royal dress. The chromaticism of the robes, combined with the decoration and insignia of royalty, must evidently have communicated to anyone received in audience by the king a sense of superhuman terror and splendour, sensations that the king's isolated position (sitting on the throne, or in a standing or seated position elsewhere) and the distance from his audience, rigidly regulated by royal etiquette, certainly increased.[251] It is possible that occasions like this and other public events, such as palace banquets and receptions of guests, processions of tribute-bearers, and reviews of troops, required lengthy and complex preparation by the court tailors and craftsmen, both for the preparation of new clothes and the mending of old ones. Metallic appliqués on the headgear and the clothes, and the jewellery apparatus, were presumably polished for the occasion to increase the lustre and aura surrounding the royal figure. New fringed, embroidered border bands and ribbons, enlivened by polychromatic decorations, replaced the old ones, in all likelihood also innovating the colour scheme according to the wearer's taste and hence the general

247 Gaspa 2018: 313–14.

248 Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 411–15.

249 Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 414.

250 See Pongratz-Leisten 2015: 415.

251 On etiquette regarding entering the king's presence and the distance between the royal person and his audience, see Portuese 2020: 110–21, 141.

aesthetic perception of the royal dress and the type of message to convey to the observer. We ignore how much in everyday reality the royal tailors' creative flair could dare in terms of innovation, but it is plausible that this happened. In any case, the solutions that the royal tailors proposed were part of stylistic choices that were negotiated with the king and in compliance with what the Assyrian court protocol and tradition required for the solemnity of the event.

3 The Queenly Dress: The Other Side of Assyrian Imperialism

The clothes that constituted the wardrobe of the Assyrian queens were another product of the exceptional mobilization of textile materials, skilled professionals, and textile techniques brought about by the Assyrian expansionist project. Evidence on the clothing and dress ornaments of the Assyrian queens and upper-class women in written and iconographical sources is scarce compared to the clothing of kings, but fortunately includes the materials found in the 8th century burials at Kalḫu, the former capital of the Assyrian state. These finds allow us to reconstruct a more balanced and less king-oriented discourse on clothing and adornment in the Assyrian royal context. Among the various valuable grave goods interred together with the bodies of the queens – identified as the consorts of Tiglath-pileser III and Shalmaneser V or of Sargon II – were also remnants of linen and cotton fabric, two high-class and expensive textile materials from which the queenly garments were made. The latter fibre was evidently a rare product,[252] perhaps acquired in the Babylonian textile market and originating from the Elamite area in whose trade network this luxury material circulated.[253] The clothes of these queens were accompanied by a huge number of dress ornaments in the form of gold rosettes, star-shaped ornaments, circles, triangles, and discs, to name but a few of these precious objects.[254] Unfortunately, no mention is made in the funerary inscriptions of royal women from Kalḫu about the garments with which they were buried. Yabâ's alabaster tablet mentions only the jewellery (*šukuttu*),[255]evidently as *pars pro toto* of the grave goods, consisting of clothing, jewellery and other accessories. The only exception where explicit reference is made to a textile of funerary use is in Mullissu-mukannišat-Nīnua's inscription, written on a marble tablet. However, since

252 The first known example of cotton was found in Iran and consists of folded cotton fragments of an elite covering from a ca. 600 BC tomb discovered at Arjān. See Kawami 2018: 689. Other cotton remains were discovered in the contemporary burials of elite women at Jūbajī, see Daems 2018: 769.
253 Henkelman 2018: 805–806.
254 Hussein 2016; Gaspa 2018: 164–82; Gansell 2018: 65–95.
255 Al-Rawi 2008: 119, text no. 1 obv. 10.

the reference occurs in a section of injunctions against future visitors of the tomb and addresses to anyone who would care for it, the "cover" (*tapšû*) in question[256] may have served as a shroud to cover any mortal remains found in the opening of the tomb or perhaps to wrap around the tablet of the inscription itself.[257]

The burial materials testify to the aesthetic and power vision of the women belonging to the Assyrian royal family in the 8th century BC. Analogous objects probably also characterized the attire of palace women of the 7th century BC. As the carved images of the Assyrian queens in palace stone reliefs and other works of visual art show, the richness of the clothing, ornaments, and jewels worn by the Assyrian queens represented powerful vectors for communicating the imperial message of dominion through the social position, wealth, dignity, and power reached at the Assyrian court by powerful women. The new imperial image promoted by the ruling elite also found its way through the prominence of the female queen and female court culture. There is no doubt that the female component of the Assyrian elite – the most important figures of which were the king's consort and the king's mother,[258] who had their own female entourages – played a significant role as a catalyst for resources, precious artefacts, and luxury textiles that came from both Assyria's internal production and the economic exploitation of subjugated foreign countries. The presence of a deputy of the chief of trade in the administrative staff in the service of Naqī'a, Esarhaddon's mother,[259] indicates that, like kings, the queens were able to receive revenue directly from abroad,[260] presumably including luxury textiles, both raw and finished.

In the royal political discourse, the display of costly clothes and precious ornaments in visual art became a means to materialise the queens' membership of the court milieu and their fundamental contribution to the Assyrian state by sustaining the royal male lineage and preserving the legitimate royal authority.[261] The increasing economic, social, and especially political role of queens,[262] the latter being evident in the case of irregular successions to the throne of Assyria and when ensuring dynastic continuity and legitimation became crucial,[263] explains the visibility of queens in the visual art of the late imperial period. The privileged

256 Al-Rawi 2008: 124, text no. 2 rev. 22.

257 In Al-Rawi's translation (2008: 124), the *tapšû* is interpreted as a shroud to cover the body, while in CAD T: 194a s.v. *tapsû* b as a cover for the "funerary stela".

258 Melville 2004: 43–53.

259 SAA 7: 9 rev. i 27–28.

260 Svärd 2015a: 64.

261 See Gansell 2018: 92.

262 Svärd 2015a: 39–85. In addition, during the Sargonid period, Assyrian queens had their own military staff, as observed in Svärd 2015b: 163–66.

263 See Svärd 2015b: 168.

position of the king's consort enabled her to fully enjoy the imperialism's fruit, receiving a share of tribute and audience gifts.[264] Due to their wealth and authority, these palace women played an active role in the political and economic life of Assyria. In the royal residences, queens lived in a domestic wing reserved for women, where they had their own court and dependent personnel, presumably including their own expert weavers, tailors, dress decorators, and clothes menders.[265] Also in the case of Assyrian queens, information from contemporary written sources helps to shed light on the textiles used by the sovereigns' wives and to supplement what we know from archaeological evidence and representational art. The wardrobe of queens and other high-ranking palace women probably included items of clothing that often occur both in administrative records from state archives and in dowry-related private legal documents. From what we know of the Neo-Assyrian textile terminology about female clothing, the designation *kuzippu* was by no means confined to royal clothing,[266] and one may assume that it was also applied to items of the queenly wardrobe. In addition, it is possible that queens worn long tunics (*gulēnu*, *urnutu*),[267] overgarments (*ḫullānu*, *naḫlaptu*, *qirmu*),[268] veils (*raddīdu*, *ša-kaqqidi*),[269] and headbands or crenellated crowns (*kulūlu*),[270] to quote the main items attested in the written sources.

It is beyond the scope of this study to review all the evidence for the visibility of queens in imperial art[271] and I will only cite a few examples. When queens are privileged to be present in royal representations, they occupy a central position in the scene, as can be seen in the case of Naqī'a, Esarhaddon's powerful mother, who played a crucial role in the succession of both his son and the grandson Assurbanipal. On a fragmentary bronze plaque from Babylonia, possibly part of a temple's furnishings (an altar or a deity's throne dais?), she is portrayed together with her son Esarhaddon, carrying a mirror and wearing a headband with striped ribbons, a long tunic, and an overcoat[272] – all of which bear witness to her majesty

264 See Melville 2004: 48–49.

265 Other textile artisans in the queen's service operated outside Nineveh, as in the case of a tailor from Kalḫu, who was in the service of Libbāli-šarrat. See Svärd 2015a: 65.

266 Gaspa 2018: 250–51.

267 Gaspa 2018: 274–75, 278.

268 Gaspa 2018: 247, 257, 268.

269 Gaspa 2018: 316–18.

270 Gaspa 2018: 312–15.

271 Their visibility in both written and visual sources has been recently treated in May 2018: 249–81.

272 Leichty 2011: 324 fig. 19. The queen's headgear is poorly preserved on the plaque and cannot be identified with certainty. Svärd (2015a: 77–79) tentatively suggests that it could have been a mural crown, while May (2018: 272) describes the queen's headgear as consisting of a headband and a mural crown.

Figure 6: The royal couple at the banquet in the royal palace's garden, Room S', North Palace, Quyunjiq (BM 124920, © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved).

and power in the royal court.[273] In addition, the size of her figure as well as the pose and the gesture are similar to those of Esarhaddon,[274] showing that what had been the exclusive prerogatives of kings in the Assyrian official imagery became the terrain in which elite femininity was affirmed. The fact that the queen mother is accompanying the sovereign, his son, in what probably was a procession or another cultic rite, is illustrative of the queen mother's role in state rituals and his authority.[275] Another example is provided by the banquet scene on Relief BC of Room S' in the North Palace in Nineveh, where the royal couple – Assurbanipal and his wife Libbāli-šarrat – is portrayed under a vine-covered pergola in the palace garden (Figure 6).[276]

This garden party is a private event for the royal couple but is also part of the celebrations that followed the Assyrian victory over Elam. This representation for an elite woman is exceptional in light of the predominantly king- and male-gendered discourse that informs Assyrian imperial art, including that of palace carved slabs and other monumental artefacts.[277] This pictorial representation of Libbāli-šarrat in her attire, certainly inspired by a real event, crystallizes her figure in a timeless reality, making her appearance and celebrating gesture another way of materialising the positive effects of the imperial project, considered not from a king-centered perspective but as shared by the queenly component of the king's family. As this relief shows, the Assyrian queen's dress consisted of a long, fringed tunic and an overgarment or shawl, both decorated with large, disc-shaped ornaments (Figure 7).

273 May 2018: 259–60.
274 Green 2019: 189.
275 See Svärd 2015a: 79.
276 Barnett 1976: pl. 65. See Reade 1983: 89 for details.
277 Green 2019: 188.

Figure 7: Libbāli-šarrat in her festive dress attending the king's banquet in the royal garden, Room S', North Palace, Quyunjiq (BM 124920, © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved).

In this scene, she is clad in elements that identify her high-ranking social position and power at court: seated on a throne in the foreground of the scene, she wears a mural crown and an overgarment finely adorned by small decorative items, possibly woven on the cloth or metal sequins stitched onto it, as the Nimrud burial finds suggest. If the decorative items of Libbāli-šarrat's depicted clothes were metal appliqués similar to those that decorated the garments of the Kalḫu queens, it means that the use of richly ornamented clothes was the prerogative of Assyrian queens even before the age of Assurbanipal. All these elements – the headdress, the shawl, and the throne, combined with her prominent position in the scene and the gesture

of raising the wine bowl in celebration – are usually associated with royal imagery and certainly speak of the central role attained by queens in imperial Assyria.[278] Even the cloth hanging from the back of the throne seems to signal her position of prominence. In Neo-Assyrian bas-reliefs, this element usually adorns thrones of kings, but whereas in the case of royal thrones it appears fringed and richly decorated,[279] that of Assurbanipal's consort appears undecorated. The fact that Libbāli-šarrat also raises the wine cup in a blatant gesture to celebrate the victory is illustrative not only of her status, but also of her active participation in the imperial project, the fruits of which she now enjoys with her king. It is worth noting that in this scene Assurbanipal, who is depicted as reclining on a couch in secondary position although at a greater height, holding with the left hand a lotus flower and with the right one a wine bowl, does not wear the typical royal tiara, the shawl, and the waist-belt, but only a headband and a tunic, confirming the protagonism of the queenly figure in the scene. It is the figure of the queen that is primarily offered to the observer's gaze. It has been suggested that this unexpected centrality of the queen in the scene could have been charged with symbolism referring to fertility, attractiveness, and eroticism,[280] as such reflecting the imperial (and male-oriented) ideal of control, possession, and display of valuable resources for the king's exclusive benefit. However, it is plausible that this novelty in visual art was due to the unprecedented social and political standing reached in the late imperial period, when elite women started to play a significant role in the phase of irregular successions to the throne of Assyria. Consequently, it is equally valid to believe that more than feminine charm and sexuality, pictorial representations of queens intended to communicate dignity and power.[281] In accordance with the female dress culture of the Assyrian court, clothes covered from neck to toe the royal female's body, protecting it from unwanted glances. Assyrian women's dress conceals the body, rather than accentuating its physical characteristics. This is also true in the case of Libbāli-šarrat in the garden scene, in which her dress obscures the contours of the physique, emphasising, albeit slightly, a certain roundness of the breasts. How tight or loose the queen's clothing was in reality and how much her robes highlighted her physical characteristics is impossible to say. Just as it is impossible to know what ordinary clothes the queen wore on private occasions in the wing of the palace reserved for her, although it is

278 May 2018: 260.

279 In the wall paintings at Till Barsip, the throne cloth is fringed and decorated with a chequered pattern; see Albenda 2005: 50 pl. 21, 63 pl. 23, 66 pl. 25. In the case of Sennacherib's throne depicted in the Lachish relief this cloth appears fringed and richly decorated with linear motifs, small discs and concentric circles. See Collins 2008: 95.

280 Gansell 2013: 393–98; Green 2019: 188.

281 For the interpretation that images of Neo-Assyrian royal women completely lack signifiers of femininity and sexuality, see May 2018: 276.

plausible to imagine that they were less elaborate and allowed for ease of movement. In any case, the Assyrian queen's attractiveness did not lie solely in her clothed body, idealised in the visual art, but also in the combination of clothes with regalia and accessories.[282] At the same time, or perhaps more than physical attractiveness, clothes and regalia embodied the queen's dignity and power and materialised through a royal female's fully dressed and richly adorned body the ideals of Assyrian imperialism and the political and cultural networks that the empire's expansionism generated and sustained.[283]

The prominence of queens and the use of dress as a signal of status and power are also evident in another field of monumental royal art. The installation of stelae was a royal prerogative in Assyria, but at least three Neo-Assyrian queens installed stelae in Assur, presumably as a result of the pro-queen policy implemented by the Sargonid kings and also of the active role that the kings' consorts, as part of the royal establishment, played in state affairs.[284] On a limestone stele from the *Stelenreihen* of Assur, which is another example of how the monumentality of political communication in the public space also became the prerogative of queens, Libbāli-šarrat, still portrayed as seated on a throne, wears a tall mural crown and a fringed overcoat with rosette decorations.[285] The fragmentary condition of the stele makes it impossible to know any further details about her dress. The presence in the stele of the throne cloth – in this case apparently decorated with a pattern of horizontal lines – confirms that this was the official iconography of the queen, also followed in carved and inscribed stelae.

In the light of these images of Assyrian queens, it appears that geometrical and floral elements are the only items that occurred as decoration in queenly clothing. The analysis of patterns on a mass of detached linen threads from embroidery found in the queens' tombs at Nimrud reveals that petal-shaped decorations (rosettes?) and leaves (buds?),[286] which recall recurring motifs of the Assyrian ornamental repertoire of the time, met the aesthetic taste of palace women. Moreover, two tassels of finely woven linen from the same tomb contexts, probably originally sewn onto the edges of what originally was a luxury female shawl or tunic, show stepped, rhomboid

282 On regalia as markers of beauty, see Gansell 2013: 406–407.

283 In the case of royal women of foreign origin, their dress and adornment also materialised political and diplomatic relationships that were crucial for the stability of the empire. See Gansell 2016: 62.

284 May 2018: 253–254, 258–59, 263–65.

285 Andrae 1913: 6–8. See Svärd 2015a: 75–77 and Gaspa 2018: 178. Interestingly, the stele of Assurbanipal's queen is the only one among the stelae of the *Stelenreihen* that bears a visual depiction. See May 2018: 260; 2020: 221.

286 Crowfoot 1995: 114 and fig. 3, 117.

decorations in series[287] that remind us of similar motifs in representations of foreign and Assyrian clothes in the visual art of the time.[288] These examples of decoration from Nimrud textile remains are in line with the textile art of the late Neo-Assyrian period. It is clear that figural representations, which in Assurbanipal's reign were limited to "sacred trees" and royal figures, were only prerogatives of the king's dress. The queen's tunic depicted in the royal garden scene ends in a broad and high collar with a bordered row of circles. The edge of the shawl is characterized by two border bands, one with a row of stepped triangles and the second with a row of discs, while on the lower part of the tunic the border bands of stepped triangles and discs are alternated by rows of small, square-shaped items. That the sleeves were woven and decorated by tailors as separate parts is evident from the patterned cloth of the right arm sleeve: this part is finely decorated with alternating rows of small discs, crenellated structures, and small, square-shaped elements.[289]

We are unable to say if the garden scene realistically depicts a normal high-class and comfortable dress worn regularly by the Assyrian queen at banquets. Given the high degree of symbolism of the royal depictions, we cannot exclude that the artist portrayed the queen in one of her most luxurious dresses, more suitable to ceremonial events than a private garden party. The crown, the jewellery, and the finely decorated robes suggest a fully public and ceremonial dimension of the Assyrian queen's presence, thus seemingly contrasting with an event of domestic life. All these elements are given full visibility in the scene and appear in line with the new centrality accorded to queens at court and in politics that characterized the new image of the empire. The representations depicting the king in his ceremonial and more majestic robes during warlike actions of unparalleled heroism – robes that appear more appropriate for receiving high-ranking persons in palace audiences or simple ritual gestures like pouring libations – suggest similar considerations about the degree of symbolism and idealisation of these scenes and the semantic charge that certain garments had in political communication and as icons in which the imperial elite's ethos was materialised. It is hard to believe that the sovereign wore his bulky tiara, his heavy mantle quilted with legions of metallic appliqués, and the numerous pieces of his jewellery in the theatres of war of his campaigns, and that in such an outfit he engaged in acts of war among his soldiers. If the queen's attire depicted in the scene was equally heavily decorated with hundreds of golden sequins, we can assume that its use was limited to ceremonial occasions, not private

287 Crowfoot 1995: 114 and fig. 4, 117.

288 See Collins 2008: 40, 48–49, 50–51 on stepped decorations on feet-length tunics of female captives and on the kilts worn by Assyrian infantry officers and soldiers. For a discussion on the Nimrud tassels and the stepped decoration, see Gaspa 2018: 180, 300–301.

289 See for details Reade 1983: 89.

events. It is therefore much more reasonable to assume that the wearing of such clothes also required appropriate posture and gestures, which were certainly codified by the ceremonial rules of court, above all keeping the body upright and without movement for the entire duration of the event except to express limited and slow gestures, but always in accordance with the ceremonial circumstances and the royal protocol.[290]

3.1 The Queen's Dress and Its Significance in the Assyrian Political Discourse

From the perspective of what the queenly clothes could mean in the imperial ideology, we may suggest that an ideological construct comparable to that concerning the king was developed regarding the significance of the queenly attire, thanks to the strengthening of the social, economic and also political position of the queens. The new image of the queens in the political and socio-economic dimension of the late imperial period is also visible in their participation in state rituals, as shown by the active role of the queen, the daughter, and the sister of the king and other unspecified (royal?) women in some cultic practices at Assur that resulted from Sennacherib's religious reforms.[291] Cultic rituals related to female deities were the field where this role of queens emerged, although no official position in the temple staff was held by them.[292] Pictorial and textual evidence shows that queens participated in the state cult of Mullissu, a goddess usually equated to Ištar of Nineveh.[293]

The realm of religious reflection, an integral part of the broader Assyrian ideological system, is an important arena in which the new image of the Assyrian queen and her participation in the imperial project is constructed. At public events, her robes were probably meant to convey the idea that they were the earthly counterpart of the luminescent clothes worn by the Assyrian goddesses in their sanctuaries, especially Ištar and her manifestations, or Mullissu, the spouse of

290 On posture and gestures as non-verbal communication techniques at the Assyrian court and their significance in terms of asymmetrical power relationship, see Portuese 2020: 111, 139–41.

291 SAA 20: 52 rev. ii 49'–50', iv 52'–56', v 53'–56'. See May 2022: 145 for comments.

292 May 2022: 145.

293 May 2018: 266–67. The rituals of Šabāṭu included the queen's participation in the presentation of food offerings to Mullissu during the *quršu*-feast in Assur; see SAA 20: 2 obv. i 1', ii 8', although the lines are broken. The administrative records SAA 7: 183 and 184 list alcoholic beverages provided by the queen for the *quršu*-offerings to the goddess. SAA 7: 175 records various animal offerings provided by the queen, among which those destined to a goddess called *Šarrat samme* (a variant for *Šarrat šamê*, "Queen of Heaven?"). On queen's provisions of meat for temple offerings, see also SAA 7: 181 e.7.

Aššur.[294] The iconography of the enthroned queen is in fact modelled on that of Aššur's consort and it is possible that it was an innovation of the time of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal,[295] certainly favoured by the elevation of Mullissu's status in Sargonid religious politics.[296] Not only Mullissu's role as patroness of the king's consort, but also the bond of couple and power that united Mullissu and the head of the pantheon were decisive factors in the construction of the Assyrian queen's public image. As Reade observes, the turreted headgear that was worn by Assyrian queens was a reworking of a horned headdress worn by goddesses.[297] Even before the Sargonid era the turreted crown appears in the iconography of Assyrian queens,[298] but it may have been an adaptation of a headdress originally used by kings.[299] In any case, it is in the Sargonid age that this item was definitively adopted as the standard headgear for queens, although headbands were also used.[300] In recalling the similar headdress worn by the goddess, the queen's turreted headgear was a powerful means of emphasising the position of power held by the ruler's wife. Another field in which both tailoring creativity and royal ideology found expression was the dress decoration of both goddesses and queens. Indeed, disc-shaped decorations were peculiar to the garments that covered the statues of the goddesses in Assyrian temples. In order to enhance the splendour of the *simulacrum* and convey the idea of the divine radiance, the deity's attire was extensively adorned with gold sequins. In his hymn, Assurbanipal describes the luminescent appearance of Ištar of Nineveh, "clad of brilliance" (*namrirri ḫalpat*), crowned with a tiara gleaming like stars (*aki kakkabi nabat*) and wearing a dress whose chest part was decorated with disc-shaped appliqués (*šanšānāti*) shining like the sun (*ša kî Šamaš napḫa*).[301] It is clear that these

294 Gaspa 2018: 179.

295 May 2018: 261–63.

296 May 2018: 281. Sennacherib qualifies Mullissu as "the queen of Ešarra" (RINAP 3/2: 162 rev. iii 11') and she is invoked in the curse section of this king's seal as a deity endowed with weapons (RINAP 3/2: 212:8-10). The lifting of Aššur's tiara and Mullissu's weapons were among the ritual acts to be performed at the royal coronation ceremony (SAA 20: 7 ii 15). She is described by Assurbanipal as "the supreme goddess, the most impetuous one among goddesses, who(se) position is equal in rank with (that of) the gods Anu (and) Enlil" (RINAP 5/1: 11 ix 75–77). Along with Šērū'a, she is envisaged as "the queen of goddesses, the lady of ladies" (RINAP 5/2: 220 i 32').

297 Reade 2009: 246, 262.

298 May's conclusions (2018: 262 and fn. 90) that the mural crown would only be attested in the Sargonid era and that it would have been transformed into the queen's headdress from Naqī'a onwards are therefore incorrect. See Reade 2009: 253 fig. 14 for the representation of a queen with a turreted headgear on a Nimrud cylinder seal possibly belonging to the *turtānu* Šamšī-ilu.

299 For a representation of this headgear as a royal item on a glazed tile, possibly to be attributed to the reign of Assurnaṣirpal II, see Matthiae 1996: fig. 1.2 and May 2018: 262 fn. 90.

300 For headbands used by queens, see the evidence discussed in May 2018: 272.

301 SAA 3: 7 obv. 6–8.

disc-shaped decorative items were not a prerogative of divine clothes in Assyria. Possibly, the gold-covered clothes were worn by the queens only on special occasions of court life and at public ceremonial events, but their appearance, thanks to the referencing to the golden radiance-covered clothes with which the goddesses' statues were dressed in Assyrian temples,[302] must have been crucial in highlighting the Assyrian queens' high status and power. One wonders whether the stylistic choices that the tailors followed in creating the queen's dresses, including the imitation of the divine clothes, also took into account the aesthetic tastes of the queens. The dress code of official ceremonies may have been heavily influenced by royal protocol and the sovereign's decision, but for other events it is possible that the interaction between the queen and the tailors in her employ was crucial in the creation of her and other women's dresses in the royal family. The imitation of the divine clothes used for cultic statues probably extended to other details of the vestments, such as the material, shape, polychromy and patterns of cloth, since we can presume that the expert textile artisans in charge of producing the wardrobes of kings and queens were probably the same who manufactured the finely decorated vestments for the deities' statues. In the Neo-Assyrian period, polychromy was not only determined by fabrics entirely dyed in different colours and enriched by the varied colouring of fringes, tassels and embroidered decorations. The natural shades of the fibres were also prized, as proven by the linen remains found in the burials at Nimrud.[303] The wardrobe of Assyrian queens must therefore have included both dyed robes and robes characterised by the natural colour of the fibres used. Moreover, the appearance of the queenly outfit was probably chromatically enriched by the presence of beads of different colours and jewels, as suggested, for instance, by the carnelian beads associated with mineralized textile remains from Nimrud and by textual references in Neo-Assyrian documents to *kuzippu*s and *maklulu*s studded with precious stones.[304] The original polychromy of the carved wall panels in all likelihood amplified the sense of unparalleled *grandeur* that the sumptuous, multi-coloured robes communicated. In addition to accentuating the queen's personal qualities,[305] the combined radiance of jewels and metal appliqués in the queen's dress, accompanied by the precious stones and the multicoloured embroidery of her garment's edges, materialised the queen's figure in terms of divine luminosity,[306] another attribute usually exclusive to kings and gods.

302 See Gaspa 2018: 179.
303 Crowfoot 1995: 113.
304 Gaspa 2018: 251, 254.
305 Gansell 2013: 408.
306 Gansell 2018: 92.

Given the multi-materiality and the brilliance of the queen's precious outfit, the meanings attached to her presence were probably conveyed and experienced through a multi-sensorial dimension. Although limited to public and official occasions that queens and other palace women could access, these garments – in the case of the king's wife presumably weighted by metal appliqués, pearls, and metal jewels – must have contributed to the specific sensory dimension that could be perceived in daily life within Assyrian palaces, with the presence of the queens announced by the glitter of gold sequins and the polychromatic combination of cloth and jewels, and the clink produced by metal attachments and jewellery during the queens' movements within the palace rooms, for instance on the occasion of receptions and other ceremonial events, as Thomason suggests in her study of the "sense-scapes" that could be experienced in the Assyrian capital cities.[307] How much these heavy ceremonial clothes from the royal and queenly wardrobes were perceived by the wearers as not only valuable and pleasing to the touch but also comfortable is difficult to say. While these robes certainly restricted the wearer's movement,[308] it is also true that this type of dress responded to the solemnity of the event and the need to give visibility and centrality to the wearer in the scene, aspects that required the wearer to have a posture that was more static than mobile and with slower, more cadenced and solemn gestures.

Analogously to the values and meanings attached to the royal dress, in the late Neo-Assyrian period, materials, clothes' shapes and decorations, and accessories that formed the queenly vestimentary ensemble were instrumental in establishing the personal, social, and institutional identity of the king's wife within the court and ruling establishment and the values and functions attached to the office of queenship.[309] Further and more specific meanings were probably conveyed by the visual interaction between decorative elements of the queenly dress and similar ornaments on her accessories, such as the crown and jewellery, insignia whose semantic load combined the magical-apotropaic dimension with the message of proud affirmation of the success of the imperial project. For instance, the crenellated structures of both the mural crown and the dress borders were probably instrumental to symbolically protect the queen's individual body from head to feet and at the same time recall the image of the fortified city,[310] emblem of the empire's undisputed economic prosperity and unrivalled military power. In this perspective, the queen's appearance in the public sphere made her an icon of the empire in its functions of centralization of resources, powerful defence against evil external forces, life-giving, and civilizing

307 Thomason 2016b: 251.

308 Thomason 2016b: 251. See also Thomason 2016c: 226 on wearing Neo-Assyrian royal jewellery.

309 Gaspa 2018: 347; Gansell 2018: 87–91.

310 Gansell 2013: 411.

capacity. With the promise of continued enjoyment of the fruits of imperial expansionism, the political message conveyed by the queenly dress was certainly meant to help keep the Assyrian elite cohesive and resolute in their support for the king and the project he embodied.

Similarly to the official imagery made of items of clothing, royal insignia, poses, and gestures that had been traditionally connoted as peculiar to kings, the attire (constituted by the *lubussu*, the *tiqnu*, and the *šakuttu*) also became the arena in which the new elite femininity of Assyria was negotiated and affirmed in the late imperial period, albeit in limited contexts determined by political-dynastic developments and always in relation to their role regarding the king.[311] This probably made the queen's dress complementary to the political programme "worn" by her husband and acted as another important vector to communicating the success of the imperial project along with the queens' personal ascent to power in the court milieu and in imperial politics.

4 The Imperial Project and Its Success in Terms of "Textile Landscape": The Uniformity of Dressing and the Autocratic Vision of Power

Less represented in Neo-Assyrian textual sources and material evidence are other upper-class sectors of Assyrian imperial society, in which textiles played an equally important role as markers of social identity and status. Even less represented are the middle-lower social classes of the Assyrian population, apart from scenes of daily life in the contexts of deportees and prisoners of war, of work activities carried out by palace-dependent personnel, and of servile manpower in military camps and construction sites in the capital.

However, some observations can be made on non-royal clothing in relation to royal power. The contexts of visual art in which the king and the queen were given a central position also show how the protagonism of the ruler or his consort was visually enhanced by the presence in the scene of courtiers, high-ranking civil and military officers, attendants, and common palace servants. The careful depiction of the clothing of members affiliated with the royal court in the depictions of the palace reliefs suggests that the content of these scenes also addressed these courtiers and high-ranking officials in order to emphasise the role of these royal associates in the construction and management of the empire. It is reasonable to think that the presence of figures from the aristocracy in the royal scenes and the detail in the

311 Melville 2004: 52–57.

depiction of their dress responded to a programmatic vision intended to materialise the king's autocratic power and the might of the empire through scenes of broad collective participation.

In the case of the queen, her highly decorated clothes stressed the social position she had in the court not only in relation to her powerful husband but also in relation to other women of the court milieu who held lower positions in the royal family and palace hierarchy. We do not know how the dress varied within the queenly wardrobe according to the type of event (public, private, profane, or ritual) in which the queen participated. We also ignore if differences existed in terms of attire and decoration among the queens, for instance, between the queen mother and the king's wife or between the queen and the wife of the crown prince. To judge from a comparison between the above-discussed representations, Naqī'a's status as Esarhaddon's queen mother was probably underlined by her headband, adorned with ribbons, while the crown shaped as a towered wall was appropriate to Libbāli-šarrat in her role of Assurbanipal's consort. Beyond these cases, however, it is difficult to make generalizations. The king's primary consort and mother of the crown prince probably marked her status compared to the sovereign's other wives through dress and accoutrements, but no evidence confirms this.[312] Perhaps, rank differences also played a role as markers of status and privilege among other high-ranking palace women. Within the court and palace milieu, the king's sisters and daughters certainly had a higher status than other palace women due to their family ties with the king, but their specific position and authority in the palace hierarchy escapes us. A different privileged standing was certainly acquired by royal sisters and daughters through marriages to foreign kings and high-ranking Assyrian state officials, namely when they lost their connection to the palace and the royal family and became consorts of powerful men.[313] If status differences among Assyrian palace women did play a role in the palace hierarchy and everyday life and were expressed through attire and decoration, we can assume that any innovation in the queenly outfit as well as in the dress of other royal women had to be in line with the tradition of Assyrian court clothing and harmonized with the appearance of the sovereign's dress, especially in the case of ceremonial clothes to be shown in public during events that entailed the presence of both the king and these women.

Along with other costly materials collected by the Assyrian kings and displayed in the court milieu, highly elaborate clothes of local and exotic provenance that excelled in elegance and wealth represented another powerful means to confirm the success of the imperialistic project and probably served to consolidate the inner elite's consensus to the ruling king and the expansionist project. Assyrian

312 Melville 2004: 50, 52.

313 On kings' sisters and daughters, see Melville 2004: 42–43 and Svärd 2015a: 87–91.

aristocracy's support for and participation in the project certainly benefitted from the regular redistribution of war booty and tribute, and the acquisition of exotic and fine textiles through international trade, since this possession consolidated the elite members' status, wealth, and power. Royal collecting of *exotica* has been considered as regards various foreign objects, such as ivory and wooden furniture, metal, glass, and stone vessels,[314] but it is clear that luxury textiles, especially the ones coming from the royal wardrobe of submitted foreign rulers, were among the most sought after *exotica* that entered the collections of the Assyrian kings and queens, as well as other members of the royal family, although they are not documented in the extant visual art and archaeological evidence. In the case of the goods looted from Kushite royal residences in Memphis and Thebes, a large number of high-class linen clothes for which Egypt was renowned in the ancient world entered the Assyrian king's and the queen's wardrobe in Nineveh. Their presence inside the palace environment certainly expressed Assyria's deep admiration for Egypt's millennia-old civilization, and their possession among other high-class foreign objects consolidated the idea of the Assyrian kings as unrivalled conquerors as well as high-class collectors.[315] The exoticism of the foreign material, style, and craftsmanship of the goods carried out to the royal residences must have been highly prized by the Assyrian elite, who saw in these finished products not only a source of wealth and social prestige but also the tangible positive effects of the imperialistic project promoted by the king. The circulation and possession of these items of foreign origin consolidated interest for the acquisition of analogous textiles, thus implementing the exploitation of foreign resources through war, tribute, and commerce. Concerning the exotic textile products that entered the king's wardrobe, presumably a number just became collection items and enriched the royal collection of exotic products accumulated in palace and temple treasuries of the Assyrian capitals (Kalḫu, Dūr-Šarrukēn, and Nineveh). In the case of other foreign textiles to be used as dress by the royal person, we can suppose that they were probably reworked by the royal tailors in order to adapt them to the vestimentary tradition of the Assyrian royal court and especially of the royal dress. It is possible that not only different materials, but also different styles coexisted in royal and queenly dress, not unlike the items that formed the mortuary ensembles of the queens of Nimrud, although these traits do not emerge from the idealised representations of kings and queens in Neo-Assyrian visual art. The queenly dress and adornment that are documented in the Nimrud tombs, for example, show a combination of styles and the incorporation of foreign components in the Assyrian artistic language of certain objects. This combination was crucial to express the new identity and status acquired by royal women

314 Thomason 2005: 120–52.

315 Thomason 2005: 162–63.

at the Assyrian royal court and, in case of foreign origin, at the same time to affirm their ethnic background through styles that best reflected the broad geographical and cultural composition of the Assyrian empire and were evidently already known in their regions of origin.[316] Their foreign background could also have found expression through styles that incorporated heterogeneous cultural elements and that as such reflected the empire's composite culture.[317] Indeed, the figurative repertoire of dress decorations on royal and queenly clothes may have been much richer than the palatine reliefs and visual art in general suggest and may have included decorative styles that combined foreign iconographic elements with indigenous Assyrian ones.

That foreign textiles entered the queens' wardrobe is evident from textual information about redistribution of tribute and audience gifts within the Assyrian imperial court. The much-quoted letter by Crown Prince Sennacherib to his father shows that the Assyrian queen was one of the recipients of *šaddīnu*-garments and linen clothes as audience gifts and tribute from the Levant along with the royal palace, the crown prince and high-ranking officials of the state apparatus.[318] These and other elite commodities most likely came from the trading cities on the southern Palestinian coast, where goods of Egyptian origin passed through. Unfortunately, no administrative or epistolary text from the state archives clarifies how these textiles, evidently manufactured with materials foreign to Assyria, and woven and adorned according to dress styles and traditions alien to the "Land of Aššur", were used by the royal women and in which contexts of public and private life. These textiles of foreign origin could have been transformed and "Assyrianised" by palace tailors by adding bands decorated with typically Assyrian iconographical motifs (in the collar, the end borders of the robe and the sleeves) or by stitching geometric and floral motifs of fabric or metal over a part or the whole surface of the dress. If not used as clothes, it is reasonable to assume that luxury textiles from abroad were reworked by royal tailors for a different use. Once suitably adapted, they could become curtains and draperies for the king's and queen's palace rooms, tablecloths and other upholstery for both residential and ceremonial areas of the palace.

Presumably, the display of luxury items made of fine foreign materials by the royal couple on palace gatherings acted as a powerful means to strengthen the competition within the Assyrian aristocracy. These exotic textiles must have been seen by the members of the elite outside the royal family as embodying the success of the imperial project and, consequently, as a means for the king's servants to reinforce

316 On the "Royal Assyrian", "Near Eastern" and "intercultural" styles, see Gansell 2016: 56–58.

317 See Gansell 2016: 60 on the "composite style".

318 SAA 1: 34 obv. 14–16, rev. 8'–9'. The textile products in question are listed among quantities of silver and fish.

social position and increase authority and prestige within the court and the government sector. This probably also increased the Assyrian elite's interest in possessing luxury textiles similar to those of the royal family and acted as a powerful factor in promoting and keeping active individual participation in the imperialistic project.

The strengthening of positive attitudes towards the imperial project also acted on other social and professional groups linked to the palace. These groups too became a target audience for the royal communication conveyed by the palace reliefs. The king's domestic personnel participated in the organisation of the official events at the royal residences and were presumably exposed to the interior decorations of the palace rooms during their everyday service activities.[319] In the eyes of the palace servants, the depictions of the domestic staff embodied the values of loyalty to the king and adhesion to his every will and plan. These images also showed the palatine staff what the ethos of service and care towards the royal person should be. In the construction and communication of the ethos of domestic servants, the display of these professionals' clothes in visual art must have played an important role. In the aforementioned royal garden scene,[320] one is struck by the vivid contrast between the queen's highly adorned clothes and the plain garments worn by the women of her retinue. The display of these domestic garments must be considered an integral part of the Assyrian empire's visual communication strategy. The message of dominion and success achieved by Assyria thanks to the expansionist project was also expressed in monumental art through the tendency towards uniformity of the clothing worn by the groups of attendants, soldiers, and officials, as evident especially for the late Neo-Assyrian period. For example, the apex of the standardization of military uniforms was reached under Assurbanipal's reign,[321] and it can be assumed that similar processes also affected the clothing of the palace sector, as evidenced by the scenes of male and female servants depicted in the palace reliefs of Nineveh. We are not in a position to say if this process of coercive standardization of clothing was systematically applied to all professional groups serving the palace sector, but the examples provided by the terminology of standard items of clothing circulating within the state milieu for military personnel and the pictorial evidence of palatine sculpted wall panels seem to point in this direction. On the one hand, the power vision of the last Assyrian emperors found expression through the autocratic and semi-divine figure of Aššur's vice-regent, and this implied distinction and enhancement of the royal figure from the rest of the population. On the other hand, however, this unrivalled power seems to have also been conceived as spread over the

319 On palace domestic staff and other servants and the possibility that they had access to palace spaces and their decoration, see Portuese 2020: 254, 257.

320 Barnett 1976: pl. 65.

321 Dezső 2012a: 92–93, 117; 2012b: 161.

whole country of Assyria, manifested visually through the individual dress of the king's servants. The various socio-professional components of the country, called upon to contribute to the success of the imperial project with their individual daily work service, manifested their adhesion through their standard dress (uniforms or work clothes). If this hypothesis is valid, the display of the clothes of the king's servants was instrumental to the political discourse conveyed by visual art in order to show the universally diffuse nature of this imperial power – embodied in every single social actor of the "Land of Aššur" – and the cosmic and social unity of the world that resulted from the success of the Assyrian king's actions. The Assyrian royal custom of donating high-quality clothes, generally of red-dyed (purple?) wool, to the king's high-ranking servants, as well as foreign rulers and visiting delegates, as a sign of favour[322] confirms the political will to unify the king's subjects and to shape or consolidate their spirit of service to the imperial cause. Other beneficiaries of this royal practice of donating high-quality clothes were professionals and workmen, as the cases of canal diggers and architects show.[323] The gift of finely crafted clothes could also be the reward to state officials on account of their faithful service to the Assyrian crown. For all beneficiaries, including those of lower social status, the gift of the robes functioned as an incentive to continue to work and be loyal to the Assyrian king, each supporting the imperial project in his own role and capacity. Through the act of dressing the king's servants, the unbalanced and subordinated relationships that linked the subjects to the Assyrian king were constructed or consolidated. This act was felt as a sign of royal favour and a privilege for the recipient, who could benefit from the direct connection with the king and the royal court, consolidating his social standing and power. Wearing clothes donated by the king established the wearer's membership to the imperial organization and conformity within the hierarchical system; it also entailed duties on the part of the recipient and full adhesion to the Assyrian imperial project and to the values that inspired it. This practice also shows how Assyrian kingship constructed itself through the act of royal gift-giving and how it helped to mould the mass of the king's subjects as a single, submissive, uniform, and controllable social body.

A few examples may be cited here of how Assyrian royal power was materially diffused over the king's subjects via textiles. The motifs of the figural decorations seen on Assurnaṣirpal II's dress in the relief of Room G in the North-West Palace are also diffusely spread on the border bands adorning the outfits of the king's attendants in the same drinking scene, as shown by the bands with wild goats, winged bulls, and "sacred trees"; the row of alternating buds and palmettes on the

322 On this royal custom as a sign of the court hospitality and the king's magnanimity, see Portuese 2020: 149–50.

323 RINAP 3/2: 223:33; RINAP 4: 54 obv. 32'–35'.

cupbearer's waist-belt; and the purifying winged genii, "sacred trees", wild bulls, concentric "carpet-like" rectangles, and scenes with human hunters and wild goats on the fringed border band of the same individual's long tunic.[324] The decorated edge of the cupbearer's short sleeve shows a double band of rows of rosettes within squares, separated by stripes with half-circles, and large palmettes and buds in alternation,[325] while the pectoral decoration is characterized by a double series of buds, palmettes, and lilies.[326] The first of the two individuals bearing fly-whisks and bows behind the monarch wears a waist-belt decorated with scenes of winged genii, who purify the king, and the "sacred tree" and an alternation of palmettes and buds, while the fringed border band of his tunic shows wild goats and "sacred trees" and the same band of vegetal motifs as the waist-belt. His short sleeves end in a double band with the same alternating vegetal items and a row of rosettes. The waist-belt and the tunic's border of the second attendant show the same motifs, although accompanied by ostriches, namely two rectangular bands with buds, ostriches, and palmettes inserted within a frame of rows of small rosettes.[327] All these decorative items are also present on their quivers. An analogous case of the presence of royal motifs on the clothes of the entourage occurs in the above-described 9th century BC glazed tile from the North-West Palace in Nimrud,[328] in which one can identify some similarities between the royal dress and the outfits of two attendants, characterized not only by the same large-sized rosettes, locks of fringes, and linear border bands but also by the same alternance of colours.

As already pointed out, the centrality of courtiers and officials is indicative of how Sargon II's policy was to enhance the role of the Assyrian aristocracy in the running of the empire. The scenes of processions, hunts and banquets in the Khorsabad reliefs offer interesting examples in this regard. The detail in the rendering of clothing and ornamental motifs suggests that the figures depicted were members of the aristocracy. The Assyrian dignitary's costume in procession scenes, therefore reflecting ceremonial events at the palace in the presence of the king, consisted of an ankle-length tunic ending in tassels, wrapped in a fringed stole or shawl made of woollen locks and bordered at the top with a wide band decorated with multiple series of rosettes set in squares or concentric squares.[329] The fact that the former motif is also present in the decoration of the Sargon II's tunic and in the stole worn by

324 Layard 1849–53, I: pl. 5. See Bartl 2014: pls. 12.a-b.

325 Bartl 2014: pl. 9.b.

326 Bartl 2014: pl. 11.a.

327 Bartl 2014: pl. 17. Ostriches and palmettes are also recognisable on the border of the short sleeves of the tunic.

328 Reade 1983: 44; Neumann 2017: 10 fig. 7.

329 See, *e.g.* Botta and Flandin 1849–50: pls. 15, 40. See also Matthiae 1996: figs. 5.5 (concentric squares) and 5.6 (squares with internal rosettes and concentric squares in alternation).

the crown prince, while the latter in other representations of Sargon II's tunic[330] underlines the special bond between king and aristocracy. Analogous decorations may be recognised in the clothes worn by the attendants in hunting scenes of Khorsabad reliefs. The king's hunting staff includes courtiers, cavalrymen and archers worn in long robes, and soldiers in knee-length uniforms. A bearded archer wears a short tunic without fringes and entirely decorated with concentric squares (Figure 8).

He is depicted between another archer, dressed in a long, tasselled robe, and a hunter who wears a knee-length tasselled tunic with a border band adorned with concentric squares.[331] These hunters were dignitaries that accompanied the sovereign in the hunt in the royal park, experienced in the time of Sargon II as an entertainment for the king and his retinue.[332] The central figure in the scene is a high-ranking member, perhaps belonging to the royal family, as suggested by the rich decoration of his dress. The above-mentioned ankle-length, tasselled tunics with fringed stoles made of woollen locks and the knee-length tunics are also shown when the members of the Assyrian aristocracy are depicted as protagonists of symposia in banquet scenes,[333] those of highest rank sitting on stools while taking part in the banquet, as shown by the beakers raised for the toast, and those of lower rank in standing position, dressed in long and short robes, while assisting the banqueters or toasting among equals.[334] Since these scenes were confined to the less accessible areas of Sargon II's royal palace, they were probably addressed to an inner audience,[335] the only one that could have appreciated the protagonism of the aristocracy in the management of the empire, finding in it a further incentive to continue supporting the king's activities.

The resulting impression from these scenes is that of a royal power materialised through a homogeneous environment in the form of a "textile landscape". The reality of ceremonial occasions may have been less homogeneous in terms of elite clothing than the idealised vision of the palace reliefs, but it is likely that rules dictated by aristocratic and court etiquette, as well as the aesthetic taste of each sovereign played

330 Botta and Flandin 1849–50: pls. 12, 14, 105. Note that this motif also appears to have been used during the reign of Sennacherib for the decoration of the crown prince's dress. The decorative band edging the crown prince's stole in the Lachish relief shows four sets of concentric squares. See Collins 2008: 95.

331 Layard 1849–53, II: pl. 32; Matthiae 1996: fig. 5.23. See Collins 2008: 70 for details.

332 Portuese 2020: 175.

333 Matthiae 1996: figs. 6.14–15.

334 Portuese 2020: 176.

335 Portuese 2020: 208–209.

Figure 8: An archer from the king's hunting staff dressed in a short tunic decorated with concentric squares, Royal Palace, Khorsabad (BM 118829, © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved).

a role in determining standard trends in ceremonial clothing. The "textile landscape" of the royal power, constructed in palace reliefs through the strategy of emphasising details of non-royal clothes and their decoration, as well as through the interplay between the king's clothes and those worn by his closest attendants, is also visible in Assurbanipal's palace reliefs. The multitude of rows of rosettes and buds on the upper part of the robes worn by the charioteers who assisted Assurbanipal during his hunt[336] and the bands of discs and small squares decorating the sleeves' edges of the female attendants holding fly-whisks behind the seated queen in the scene of the

336 Relief 14, Room C. See Collins 2008: 119, 120.

Figure 9: Assurbanipal and attendants with spears on the royal chariot during the lion hunt, Room C, North Palace, Quyunjiq (BM 124867, © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved).

royal pergola[337] are also part of the visual programme aimed at asserting Assyria's dominion through the sense of a pervasive royal power that also affects the closest entourage of the royal and the queenly figures. Interestingly, in Slab 14 of Room C the rectangle-shaped decoration with the "sacred tree" scene and one of the large floral elements on the chest part of the garment of the young beardless spear-bearer behind Assurbanipal are partially visible (Figures 9 and 10).[338] Perhaps, this suggests that the wearer, a hunting assistant who had the privilege of being part of the royal chariot staff, was a member of the royal family.[339] No other members of the royal chariot team wear a costume with such a decoration on the chest.[340] The only person besides the sovereign who could have worn a dress with such an ideologically-charged decorative motif was the heir to the throne. If this interpretation is valid, the depiction of this costume would confirm the Sargonid communicative strategy of making the figure of the heir to the throne more visible, as evidenced by the reliefs depicting Sargon II and the crown prince at Khorsabad, the scene with Sennacherib and the crown prince at Lachish and the Zincirli stele with Esarhaddon and his sons Assurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukīn.

Regarding the royal garden party, decorative border bands are certainly an indicator of the different role within the palace service staff. We can see that the women who bring culinary products to the banquet wear simpler clothes than the

337 Reade 1983: 89.

338 Collins 2008: 120.

339 A young beardless hunting assistant, armed with a bow, occurs on the royal chariot in Slab 24 (see Barnett 1976: pl. 12), but his costume is not visible as it is hidden by the figure of the king.

340 Consider, for instance, the charioteer's uniform in Slab 24 in Barnett 1976: pl. 12 and Collins 2008: 8 for detail.

Figure 10: Detail on the young spearman's dress (BM 124867, © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved).

female attendants who stand behind the queen's throne. However, all of them wear long robes that, not unlike the queen, conceal the features of the body, reflecting the Assyrian view of female decency and composure in public, the court dress code and perfect adherence to royal protocol in serving the royal couple. On the contrary, the two attendants at the side of the reclining monarch wear clothes whose border bands are far more elaborate than those of the pair of women in proximity to the queen's throne (Figures 11 and 12).

In addition, the queen's attendants all wear a headband, not unlike the king's servants. In this regard, one wonders on what occasions the "veils" mentioned in

Figure 11: Detail on the queen's female attendants, some with fans, others with dishes to serve at the garden banquet, Room S', North Palace, Quyunjiq (BM 124920, © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved).

Neo-Assyrian texts[341] in relation to the female wardrobe were used. Royal palaces as well as private homes were protected environments. The case of public space was different, however. Middle Assyrian laws place great importance on the female veil as head covering as a sign of dignity and decorum in public space,[342] but there is no trace of this element of dress in Neo-Assyrian art, if we exclude depictions of foreign women taken as captives.[343] Concerning the king's male attendants, they are

341 Gaspa 2018: 316–18.

342 Roth 2014: 165–66, Middle Assyrian Laws tablet A § 40.

343 See Layard 1849–53, I: pls. 58, 61, 68; II: 18, 22, 30. In the case of the clothing of captured and deported foreign women, Assyrian artists usually depicted this item as a broad veil or mantle that covered not only the head but also the shoulders down to the base of the tunic underneath. It may have been an everyday piece of women's clothing for use outdoors, for both the upper and lower social classes.

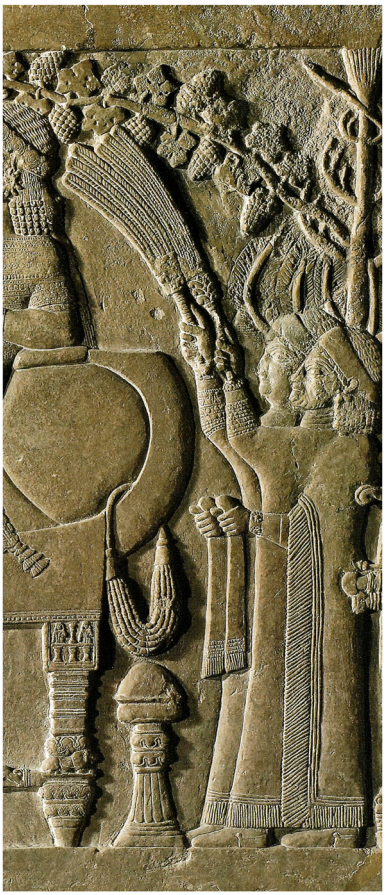

Figure 12: Detail on the male attendants with fans next to the king's couch, Room S', North Palace, Quyunjiq (BM 124920, © The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved).

probably eunuchs, whose domestic duties required caring for the king's person and protecting him from any discomfort in daily life.[344] Moreover, the king's bearded servant in the foreground of the scene also wears a long, fringed overcoat, perhaps a sign of higher rank.[345] In addition, we are unable to say whether the colour of the clothes, now not visible in the reliefs,[346] could have played a role in identifying the

344 Assante 2017: 67.

345 Unless it is a bearded Elamite; see Assante 2017: 68.

346 Traces of paint survives in North Palace sculptures, as the red paint on the head of the great lion protective demon in Room B shows. See Collins 2008: 107.

king's and queen's attendants, highlighting their common membership to the class of personal attendants of the royal couple (uniform clothes of the same colour?) or their specific position in the attendant hierarchy (different colours according to role and domestic duties, and perhaps also as a visible sign of the king's personal favouritism?). It is also possible that, apart from reasons pertaining to the individual position of the attendant within the palace service staff, the wearing of certain clothes and decorations was part of the dress code required of those standing in the immediate vicinity of the royal couple for reasons of court etiquette and aesthetics of the royal couple's public image. Presumably, court etiquette also required that the servants' clothes were clean, decorous and tidy both on the occasion of official ceremonies and private events. In royal representations, details of the servants' clothes and accessories concur to building the image of power of the Assyrian kingship and the empire. This visually pervasive royal power consolidated the idea of a world under the full control of the king and an empire animated and guided by the same power vision. The same applies to the jewellery worn by the kings and queens but also by their close attendants. In the case of palace servants, the presence of earrings and bracelets is not necessarily accompanied by decoratively elaborated clothing. Nevertheless, their widespread presence in royal and queenly scenes communicates the unity and cohesion of the Assyrian palace people, its adherence to the imperial project, and, in essence, the common identity in which this elite recognised itself.[347]

The depiction of elite dress in visual art did not only concern the figures of the king and queen, but extended, albeit in varying degrees of detail, to those of other high-ranking individuals. In this regard, it is possible that the focus on finely decorated details on the clothes of the king and the court members, government personnel, and military officers in the monumental art was also intended to show the unrivalled level of technical development of the textile art itself under the auspices of the Assyrian king and the superior wisdom that informed the Assyrian *šarrūtu*, a conclusion also suggested by Sennacherib's well-known statement about the innovative cultivation of cotton trees in his royal botanical garden and the processing of this fibre into textiles by the Assyrians.[348] This is also evident in the display in Neo-Assyrian visual art of palace reliefs of other textile products of high quality and fine decoration, equally functional in materialising the absolute power of the Assyrian king, isolating and distinguishing in the public scene his superhuman person and embodying the empire's *grandeur*, such as the richly ornamented parasols that accompanied the king's person in public parades and ceremonies or the

347 Gansell 2013: 407.

348 RINAP 3/1: 16 vii 20–21, viii 50–51; 17 vii 56–57, viii 64. On Sennacherib's statements and the use of cotton, see the discussion in Gaspa 2018: 49.

sumptuous carpets that adorned entrances and halls of royal residences.[349] The decorations of both these objects recalled the floral and geometric motifs of the king's robes and palaces and contributed on the one hand to physically and symbolically mark the space occupied by the royal person, and on the other hand to further multiply the figurative and symbolic repertoire that characterised the ordered and perfect cosmos under the king's leadership. One can assume that if the carpets were made by craftsmen originating from regions where carpet-making and its techniques were more widespread than in Assyria, the display of these textile products (also through stone replicas) further magnified the power of the king, capable of transferring the decorative and symbolic repertoire of imperial art onto fabric thanks to the control of new carpet techniques. In all likelihood, the finely sculpted depictions of royal parasols and carpets expressed the imperial elite's self-satisfaction for the unprecedented development that textile art in the service of imperial power had achieved under royal patronage. In light of these observations, we can state that the intergenerational competitiveness that led each Assyrian king to launch ambitious projects never attempted by his forefathers – as we read in royal inscriptions – was the rationale not only for explorative and military missions to remote lands or for construction works in the capital cities[350] but probably also for textile art, which under the wise and expert king's patronage became another powerful means of asserting Assyria's superior power in the world. The heroic superiority that the Assyrian king boasted over the past also found expression through the concentration of textile craftsmen of different origins and experiences in the workshops of the capital cities, the import of an unprecedented number of exotic textiles from abroad, and the adoption of innovative craftsmanship techniques that were in the exclusive service of the sovereign and the imperial elite.[351]

5 Conclusions

The successful accomplishments of the Assyrian kings were presented in the official texts – and superbly represented in monumental art – as the result of a divine mandate that was entrusted to the vice-regent of Aššur and of the monarch's personal desire. The Assyrian king's intentionality and desires (*bibil libbi*) were considered to be in line with the divine will (*ṭēm ili*) and, accordingly, the king's deeds were seen as protecting and consolidating the cosmic order through the

349 On these items see Gaspa 2018: 72–76, 112, 151, 337–39.

350 On this aspect, see Radner 2011: 40.

351 For the Assyrian king's "heroic priority" in terms of technical innovation, see Liverani 2017: 218–19.

success of the imperial project. The clothes worn by the Assyrian king manifested this success.

As finely crafted products and vectors of social meaning, royal and queenly clothing and their related adornment objects were central in imperial identity construction and in contributing to the ideological discourse that informed Assyria's expansionistic project from the 9th to the 7th century BC. The ensemble formed by the royal insignia and the royal dress with all its decorative attachments materialised the splendour of kingship and all its functions, acting as a visual manifestation of the political programme entrusted to the king as a divine mandate. The potential of textile language was consciously and deeply explored in the Neo-Assyrian period. This was due to the new availability of textile materials and craftspeople, a new sensibility regarding royal and court fashion, the culture of ostentation and spectacularization, and the coherent integration of textile language into the apparatus of visual communication in the service of imperial power. Variations in royal dress over the course of the reigns are indications not only of the individual kings' personal tastes but also of how the imperial elite represented themselves and their ambitions, expectations, and plans through the public figure of the sovereign.

The development of royal textile art in the late imperial period probably also reflects a change in the paradigm of kingship. Possibly, a change of paradigm also affected the public role of the Assyrian queens, who were now allowed to access the public arena of royal monumental art with their finely crafted outfits and related decorative items – personal belongings that epitomized at the same time the success of the imperial project and their individual success in terms of socio-political ascent. In the case of the queens, the assemblages of ornamental items are illustrative of how dress and adornment were crucial to establishing the royal women's identities in the personal, courtly, and queenly spheres[352] and the success they had achieved in these areas. In addition to the value of queens as central figures in determining the dynastic succession of the Assyrian throne, the queenly polychromatic dress and the relevant brilliant attachments and jewels seem to have been also functional to visually stress that the Assyrian queens represented the earthly embodiment of the divine qualities of the goddesses in charge of protecting the king, the royal lineage, the empire, and the "Land of Aššur". In this perspective, the display of the queenly dress would have balanced the predominantly male, warlike, and king-oriented imagery and political discourse of the time, at least in those specific social contexts and public occasions to which the queens had access. It is also worth noting that both the king's and the queen's multicoloured clothes replicated decorative motifs (circles, rosettes, stars, stepped triangles, etc.) that

352 Gansell 2018: 87–93.

were diffusely spread in their closest entourage as well as in the interiors of palace rooms (*e.g.*, in wall painting decorations, on carpets and drapery, portable objects, and furniture). In all likelihood, this contributed to creating the royal space as a visual synthesis of the wealthy, luxuriant, and powerful cosmos ordered by the combined action of the king and his divine protectors.

The world unified under the yoke of Aššur abruptly came to an end with the Chaldean and Median attack to Nineveh in 612 BC and the plunder of the precious goods belonging to the royal treasury. The sacking of the capital would have had in store for the Assyrian elite the same destiny Aššur's vice-regents had assigned for centuries to foreign rulers who experienced Assyria's territorial expansion, with high-quality polychromatic and linen clothes plundered by enemy soldiers from the royal family's wardrobe along with jewels, objects of gold, silver, and ivory, and all the palace elite's appurtenances. In the corridors and rooms of the royal residences, the superb and finely carved bas-reliefs reminded the invading soldiers of the unrivalled wealth and power reached by the Assyrian elite thanks to the warmongering of their kings. As a small revenge, the faces of Assurbanipal and of his queen in the banquet under the garden's pergola[353] were meticulously chiselled away by the invaders of Nineveh.[354] It is interesting to observe that while they had no mercy on the protagonists of Assyria's success, they apparently refrained from chiselling away their sumptuous fringed and richly adorned garments, stone replicas of the ones that the invaders evidently plundered from the palace treasury of Nineveh. Clearly, those untouched sculpted clothes, which epitomized the level of unequalled wealth, power, and prestige reached by the Assyrians, appeared so precious, of such exquisite and unparalleled craftsmanship, and so full of dignity as to uniquely deserve the conquerors' respect and curious gaze.

Abbreviations

CAD — *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, Chicago, Illinois: Oriental Institute 1956–2010.

CTN 6 — Herbordt, Suzanne, Mattila, Raja, Parker, Barbara(†), Postgate, J. Nicholas and Donald J. Wiseman(†). 2019. *Documents from the Nabu Temple and from Private Houses on the Citadel.* Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud 6. London: The British Institute for the Study of Iraq.

RIMB 2 — Frame, Grant. 1995. *Rulers of Babylonia*: *From the Second Dynasty of Isin to the End of Assyrian Domination (1157-612 BC)*. The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Babylonian Periods 2. Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press.

353 Barnett 1976: pl. 65.

354 Porter 2009: 206–207.

RINAP 2	Frame, Grant. 2021. *The Royal Inscriptions of Sargon II, King of Assyria (721-705 BC)*. The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 2. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns.
RINAP 3/1	Grayson, A. Kirk and Jamie Novotny. 2012. *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704-681 BC), Part 1*. The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 3/1. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns.
RINAP 3/2	Grayson, A. Kirk and Jamie Novotny. 2014. *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704-681 BC), Part 2*. The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 3/2. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns.
RINAP 4	Leichty, Erle. 2011. *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680-669 BC)*. The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 4. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns.
RINAP 5/1	Novotny, Jamie and Joshua Jeffers. 2018. *The Royal Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal (668-631 BC), Aššur-etel-ilāni (630-627 BC) and Sîn-šarra-iškun (626-612 BC), Kings of Assyria, Part 1*. The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 5/1. University Park, Pennsylvania: Eisenbrauns.
RINAP 5/2	Jeffers, Joshua and Jamie Novotny. 2023. *The Royal Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal (668-631 BC), Aššur-etel-ilāni (630-627 BC) and Sîn-šarra-iškun (626-612 BC), Kings of Assyria, Part 2*. The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 5/2. University Park, Pennsylvania: Eisenbrauns.
SAA 3	Livingstone, Alasdair. 1989. *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*. State Archives of Assyria 3. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
SAA 7	Fales, F. Mario and J. Nicholas Postgate. 1992. *Imperial Administrative Records, Part I: Palace and Temple Administration*. State Archives of Assyria 7. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
SAA 9	Parpola, Simo. 1997. *Assyrian Prophecies*. State Archives of Assyria 9. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
SAA 10	Parpola, Simo. 1993. *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*. State Archives of Assyria 10. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
SAA 13	Cole, Steven W. and Peter Machinist. 1998. *Letters from Priests to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal.* State Archives of Assyria 13. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
SAA 20	Parpola, Simo. 2017. *Assyrian Royal Rituals and Cultic Texts*. State Archives of Assyria 20. Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project.

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