



## *Under His Majesty's Protection: Orientational Metaphors in Neo-Assyrian Texts and Images*

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**Abstract.** In Orientational Conceptual Metaphor, a system of ideas is organized in the relation and interaction in space like up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central-peripheral. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) called this group of metaphors "Orientational," because they give a concept a spatial orientation: in the example, "happy is up," the concept happy is oriented up leading to English expressions like "I'm feeling up today." Such metaphorical orientations have a basis in our physical and cultural experience, thus they vary from culture to culture. Drawing on this theoretical and methodological framework, this paper argues for the existence of Orientational Metaphors in Neo-Assyrian sources, which are largely attested in textual and visual references concerning the relationships between king and subjects.

**Keywords:** Assyrian Empire; Submission; Conceptual Metaphor; Orientational Metaphors.

### [es] Bajo la protección de Su Majestad: 'Orientational Metaphors' en textos e imágenes neasirias

**Resumen.** En la Metáfora Conceptual y Orientacional, un sistema de ideas se organiza en la relación y interacción en el espacio como arriba-abajo, dentro-fuera, delante-atrás, profundo-superficial, central-periférico. Lakoff y Johnson (1980) llamaron a este grupo "Orientational Metaphor," porque dan a un concepto una orientación espacial: en el ejemplo, "happy is up," el concepto de felicidad "happy" está orientado hacia arriba llevando a la expresión inglesa como "I'm feeling up today." Tales orientaciones metafóricas tienen una base en nuestra experiencia física y cultural, por lo que varían de una cultura a otra. Basándose en este marco teórico y metodológico, el presente artículo defiende la existencia de 'Orientational Metaphors' en las fuentes neasirias, que están ampliamente atestiguadas en las referencias textuales y visuales relativas a las relaciones entre el rey y los súbditos.

**Palabras clave:** Imperio Asirio; sumisión; metáfora conceptual; metáforas orientativas.

**Summary.** 1. Methodological Premises. 2. Orientational Metaphors in Texts. 2.1 "Under Your Feet" 2.2 "Turning the Face". 2.3 "Before the King" and "Bowing Down". 3. Orientational Metaphors in Images. 3.1 Bowing Down to the Ground. 3.2 Under the Feet. 3.3 Kneeling. 3.4 Hanging Down. 4. Orientational Metaphors as Harbinger of Political Messages. 5. Conclusions and Further Reflections. 7. Written Sources and Bibliographical References.

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## 1. Methodological Premises

In 1980, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory upset the traditional view on metaphor: a simple linguistic phenomenon used for literary and rhetorical purposes to embellish speech or to make it more incisive was turned into a question of thinking and consequently of behaving<sup>2</sup>. In detail, the Conceptual Metaphor Theory involves understanding one domain of experience, which is generally more abstract, in terms of a very different domain of experience, which is more concrete and readily comprehensible. In more practical terms, a much-cited example is "defending an argument." In this case the conceptual metaphor is "argument is war," where argument (target domain) is partially structured, understood, performed and talked about in terms of war (source domain). The concept is metaphorically structured, and, consequently, the language is metaphorically structured.

To the structural metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson add another kind of metaphorical concept that organizes a whole system of concepts with respect to one another, and this is called Orientational Metaphor because it deals with spatial orientation. As argued by the authors, this kind of metaphors arises "from the fact that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment"<sup>3</sup>. Thus, this category of metaphors is related to basic human spatial orientations such as up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central-peripheral. These are largely simple patterns which have been called Image Schemas, that is to say mental images, or cognitive structures that fit many scenes that one can see through the bodily experience that a person acquires in the process of interaction with the world around them<sup>4</sup>. In practical terms, for instance, in the sentence "I'm feeling up today," the concept "happy" is oriented "up" so that "happy is up." By contrast, in the sentence "I'm feeling down today," the concept "sad" is oriented "down" so that "sad is down" (fig. 1). These sentences may have their basis on the image schema of the upright position for the one who is happy and the bowed or crouched posture for the one who is sad. Alternatively, cultural reasons may also lay behind these common expressions: heaven is high above us so that up stands for happiness; conversely, hell is below us so that down stands for misery<sup>5</sup>. These relationships are therefore normally based on our experiences of the physical space we have but also, and especially, they are rooted in the cultural experience and can be fully appreciated and understood – as any other metaphor – within the culture that has produced them.

The outcome of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and its applications is that metaphors should not be seen just as a prerogative of literary or rhetoric works but as pervading and structuring everyday language and thoughts and, as noted in previous studies, they are very often conventionally fixed within the lexicon of languages<sup>6</sup>. Thus, metaphors can be found in any form of communication in any

<sup>2</sup> Lakoff George and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 253; Lakoff George, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 276-277.

<sup>5</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, 14-21.

<sup>6</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, 55.

time and language. As a consequence, this theory can also be applied to past cultures<sup>7</sup>. Additionally, by regarding metaphors as an essential process and a product of the mind, metaphor is not only essential to verbal language but also to visual expression. Thus, if many words are recognised as metaphorical expressions, the source of which is perceptual experience, it may be true that structures like image schemas actually give form to visual expressions, and that metaphors apply to image schemas in images, to give meaning to the image<sup>8</sup>.

Having set out these theoretical premises, with this paper I intend to apply for the first time the notion of orientational metaphors to a selection of texts and images dating from the Neo-Assyrian period, the aim being to investigate the way textual and visual expressions throw light on the relationships between the king and his subjects.



Figure 1. Example of Orientational Metaphor up/down. Source: Maria Pia M. Portuese.

<sup>7</sup> With special reference to languages of the ancient Near East, see Pallavidini Marta, “On Some Expressions Describing the Relation Between the Hittite King and his Vassals in the Hittite Subjugation Treaties: A Cognitive Approach,” *News from the Land of the Hittites* 1 (2017); Pallavidini Marta, “On the Diplomatic Function of Some Metaphorical Expressions Related to the Semantic Field of Sight in the Hittite International Treaties,” *Res Antiquae* 15 (2018); Pallavidini Marta, “How Did They Think? Towards Use of Metaphor Theories to Research the Hittite Conceptual World,” in *Researching Metaphor in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Marta Pallavidini and Ludovico Portuese (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2020); Portuese Ludovico, “Metaphorical Allusions to Life-Giving Plants in Neo-Assyrian Texts and Images,” *Antiguo Oriente* 16 (2018); Salin Silvia, “‘Stinging pain’ in Assyro-Babylonian Medical Texts: Some Considerations,” *Le Journal des Médecines Cunéiformes* 29 (2017); Salin Silvia, “Words for Loss of Sensation and Paralysis in Assyro-Babylonian Medical Texts: Some Considerations,” *Le Journal des Médecines Cunéiformes* 31 (2018); Salin Silvia, “Conceptual Metaphors and Networks of Metaphors in the Assyro-Babylonian Medical Texts,” *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 24 (2018).

<sup>8</sup> Arnehim Rudolf, *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 231-233; Lakoff George, “The Neuroscience of Form in Art,” in *The Artful Mind: Cognitive Science and the Riddle of Human Creativity*, ed. Mark Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Limont Wieslawa, “Conceptual Metaphor in Visual Art,” in *Ragionamenti Percettivi: Saggi in onore di Alberto Argenton*, ed. Carlo M. Fossaluzza and Ian Vertegen (Milano: Mimesis Edizioni, 2014); Portuese Ludovico, “Live and Let Live Images: Metaphors and Interpictoriality in Neo-Assyrian Art,” in *Researching Metaphor in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Marta Pallavidini and Ludovico Portuese (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2020).

## 2. Orientational Metaphors in Texts

The rendering of specific expressions from an ancient language, such as the Akkadian, into our modern western languages, the English language for instance, certainly poses some problems of meaning. Statements that may appear similar reveal hidden significances that may change the perception of the content. Inscriptions, letters addressed to the king, treaties, and oracles abound with what we may refer to as orientational metaphors and illustrate an array of expressions that structures the relationships between king and subjects as vertical, the king stands above his subjects, and horizontal, the king stands before and looks at his subjects. The polysemy of some orientational particles not only mirrors the Assyrian physical experience of space but also the cultural backdrops that underlie the perception the king had towards the other.

### 2.1. “Under Your Feet”

The expression ‘*ina šapal šēpēka*’ “under your feet” occurs in a number of texts and unequivocally indicates an act of submission, thus having a negative value. A few example may suffice. In a letter, Sargon II (721-705 BC) writes to Ashur-sharru-usur, governor of Que, responding to his request for instructions concerning the unexpected peace sought by a Phrygian delegation. Taking advantages from the new situation, the king orders his governor to do whatever necessary to secure results: “Thanks to my gods Aššur, Šamaš, Bel and Nabû, this land has now been trodden under your feet!”<sup>9</sup>. The expression is found also in a letter sent by Hunni, perhaps a temple official from Nineveh, to the king Sargon II, in reference to blessings and rituals<sup>10</sup>. The text does not make specific references to military actions, but a general statement must be conceived in a very similar vein to the previous letter:

O king, my lord, may you be the temple of kings! Each and everyone who lays down his life under [your feet] and keeps your treaty, will be pardoned in your presence by your gods, and you will dress him (in purple) and bl[ess him] as today; but whoever does not keep your [treaty] will fall into Aššur’s noose and trap and [...] the ja[mb]s of your gates<sup>11</sup>.

Another letter of excuse sent by Urzana, ruler of Musasir, about his difficulties in bringing gifts to the king, concludes with wishes addressed to the king: “May Aššur, B[el, Nabû], and Ištar, the Lady [of Battle and Fight], vanquish your enemies and fo[es], put [your ...] under [your f]eet, and make [your] ru[le]

<sup>9</sup> Parpola Simo, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I: Letters from Assyria and the West*, State Archives of Assyria 1 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1987), text no. 1, lines r 51-52. For a detailed analysis of the letter and its historical implications, see Lanfranchi B. Giovanni, “Sargon’s Letter to Aššur-Šarru-ušur: an Interpretation,” *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 2 (1988), and Melville C. Sarah, *The Campaigns of Sargon II, King of Assyria, 721-705 B.C.* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2016), 172-174.

<sup>10</sup> Baker D. Heather, *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, Volume 2, Part I: H-K* (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2000), 480.

<sup>11</sup> Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I*, text no. 134 lines 10-15.

bene[facial] for a[ll] the countries”<sup>12</sup>. Being physically and politically under someone’s authority was also condition of the king himself in relation to the divine world, as Ishtar of Arbela addresses to Esarhaddon: “I am your great midwife, I am your excellent wet nurse. For long days and everlasting years I have established your throne under the great heavens”<sup>13</sup>. Thus, a subject can be under the king’s feet as much as the king is under heaven, namely the gods. Where the subject is in a less subordinate position, these expressions do not occur and more positive statements are employed by the writer, for example:

My [...], my people, my wives, [my] son[s], my daughters, whatever property of mine there was [that I had acquired with] my work under the protection of the king, my lord, were [plund]ered, ruined and sold to El[am and] Bit-Yakin. I myself did [flee] alone to [Assyria] and grabbed the feet of the king, my lord; and having been ready to die wi[th the men] of the king, my lord, under the protec[tion of] the gods of the king, I have fulfilled the mission that [the king] gave me, and the king, my lord, has put the plant [of life] in my mouth<sup>14</sup>.

Interestingly, being ‘*ina šilli*’ “under the protection” of the king does not imply an act of submission, since it lacks the verb ‘*šapālu*.’ The verb, in fact, expresses both physical posture of someone going down or falling, and emotional, that is to say that someone becomes humbled or depressed<sup>15</sup>.

## 2.2. “Turning the Face”

Physical movement is implied also in the statement ‘*pānu ana šakānu*’ “turning the face towards,” which in a number of instances is a clear metaphor for addressing benevolence to someone or something<sup>16</sup>. In a treaty of the king Ashurbanipal (668-631 BC), there is reference to the following sentence: [and that Assur]banipal, king of Assyria, your lord, put oil on you and turned his friendly face towards you”<sup>17</sup>. Putting oil on or anointing someone was a common stance of a king towards his

<sup>12</sup> Lanfranchi B. Giovanni and Simo Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part II: Letters from the Northern and Northeastern Provinces*, State Archives of Assyria 5 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1990), text no. 146, lines r 6-13; Baker D. Heather, *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, Volume 3, Part II: Š-Z* (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2011), 1420-1421. For a similar instance, see Parpola Simo, *Assyrian Prophecies*, State Archives of Assyria 9 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997), text no. 3, lines i 28-i 34; Parpola Simo, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*, State Archives of Assyria 10 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993), text no. 181; Luukko Mikko and Greta Van Buylaere, *The Political Correspondence of Esarhaddon*, State Archives of Assyria 16 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2002), text no. 126, lines 10-18; text no. 127, lines 10-12; text no. 128, lines 9-13; text no. 132; Parpola Simo, *The Correspondence of Assurbanipal, Part I: Letters from Assyria, Babylonia, and Vassal States*, State Archives of Assyria 21 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyria Text Corpus Project, 2018), text no. 109, lines r 11-14.

<sup>13</sup> Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, text no. 1, lines iii 15-iii 22.

<sup>14</sup> Dietrich Manfred, *The Babylonian Correspondence of Sargon and Sennacherib*, State Archives of Assyria 17 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2003), text no. 112, lines r 8-16. See also Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I*, text no. 1, line r 40 and Luukko and Van Buylaere, *Esarhaddon*, text no. 29, line 11.

<sup>15</sup> Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago Š, *šapālu*.

<sup>16</sup> Assyrian Dictionary Š, *šakānu*, 138-139.

<sup>17</sup> Parpola Simo and Kazuko Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, State Archives of Assyria 2 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988), text no. 10, lines 8-11.

subordinates, which implied benevolence and peaceful treatment<sup>18</sup>. Accordingly, “turning the face towards someone” can be simply seen in a positive light. The expression is made even more explicit in the case of a needy person imploring the king’s support: “[May] the king [rescue] me! May I be a citizen of Der! May the king not abandon me [to] a single oppressor! [I] have no [...]. Turn *your* beautiful face [...] towards me!”<sup>19</sup>. Who therefore gazes back at the king, is on the king’s side: “[The w]hole country has turned its face [towards the ki]ng, my lord, [saying]: “We are the king’s [servant]s”<sup>20</sup>. As a consequence, anyone turning the face towards the king, enjoys his merciful and benevolent treatment, receiving his encouraging and affectionate words:

The king’s word to the Gambulians, young and old: I am well, you can be glad. God himself opened your ears for your life and you heard him; you sought the servitude of the house of your lords (and) grasped my feet. From this day on I shall listen to everything that you say and do, and shall give you what you request. As to Remutu of whom you spoke, let him come and see my face; I will dress him up, honour him, encourage him and appoint him over you<sup>21</sup>.

In a similar vein, in his royal inscriptions, Ashurbanipal states that Natnu, king of the Nabaiaitians, “was constantly beseeching my lordly majesty to conclude a treaty (and) peace agreement, (and) to do obeisance to me.” The king, accordingly, “looked with pleasure upon him and turned” his “benevolent face towards him”<sup>22</sup>. By contrast, those who do not accept the Assyrian king’s authority “turn away their face from the king” (*‘pānu sahāru’*), which signifies the loss of grace and benevolence, and implies disdain and abandonment:

[I]f he has become troublesome, may that gracious face [of the king], my lord, tur[n] away from him! And inasmuch as Ištar of N[ineveh] and Ištar of Arbela

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, the concluding phrases of the Banquet Stele text of Ashurnasirpal II (Grayson A. Kirk, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (1114-859 BC)*, The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods 2 [Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1991], text no. 30, lines 150-154). See also Leichty Erle, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680-669 BC)*, The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 4 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), text no. 1, lines vi 49-vi 53. Along with garments and other precious gifts, anointing with oil is attested in a number of documents dating to the late Assyrian period (e.g. Lanfranchi and Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part II*, text no. 108, line 20; Parpola, *Babylonian Scholars*, text no. 198, line 5; text no. 226, line r 2).

<sup>19</sup> Dietrich, *The Babylonian Correspondence*, text no. 135, lines r 7-11. For a similar instance, see Reynolds Frances, *The Babylonian Correspondence of Esarhaddon and Letters to Assurbanipal and Sin-šarru-iškun from Northern and Central Babylonia*, State Archives of Assyria 18 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2003), text no. 55.

<sup>20</sup> Fuchs Andreas and Simo Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part III: Letters from Babylonia and the Eastern Provinces*, State Archives of Assyria 15 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2001), text no. 150, lines b.e. 8-r 2. For similar examples, see Fuchs and Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part III*, text no. 157, lines 11-12; text no. 245; Reynolds, *Letters to Assurbanipal*, text no. 163, lines r 13-17; Parpola, *The Correspondence of Assurbanipal*, text no. 18, lines 8-9.

<sup>21</sup> Parpola, text no. 51.

<sup>22</sup> Novotny Jamie and Joshua Jeffers, *The Royal Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal (668-631 BC)*, *Assur-etal-ilani (630-627 BC)*, and *Sin-sarra-iskun (626-612 BC)*, *Kings of Assyria, Part I*, The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 5 (University Park, Pennsylvania: Eisenbrauns, 2018), text no. 4, lines viii 47-viii 57.

have said: “We shall root out from Assyria those who are not loyal to the king, our lord!” he should really be banished from Assyria!<sup>23</sup>.

### 2.3. “Before the King” and “Bowling Down”

The relationship between king and subjects is also framed in the expression ‘*ina pān šarri šakānu*,’ translated with the particle “before/in front of the king,” which manifestly denotes orientation. In many cases, the expression envisages an actual stance prescribed by the etiquette or royal protocol and dictates that anyone allowed to meet the king must “kiss the ground” (*‘qaqqaru našāqu’*) or “the feet” (*‘šepu našāqu’*) or “grasp the feet” (*‘šēpu šabātu’*) of the king<sup>24</sup>. However, the individual’s experience of his/her immediate spatial, physical, and emotional orientation may predetermine the individual’s experience of concepts, which are accordingly understood in terms of perceptions, although the basis still lies in the original physical, spatial and emotional orientation<sup>25</sup>. Thus, due to their basic logic and their common experiential basis, the orientational metaphor like “[Princes and governors kne]el before you and praise the valour of your lordship”<sup>26</sup> is purely conceptual in order to manifest submission of someone to the king. This action takes place also when the king stands before his gods, in order to declare his dependence on the divine world: “Assurbanipal is on his knees, praying incessantly to Nabû, his lord: Please, Nabû, do not abandon me! My life is written before you, my soul is deposited in the lap of Mullissu”<sup>27</sup>. As a consequence, the expressions referring to the king standing before gods and subjects standing before the king are equivalent verbal means to express the strict relationship between the two parties. They do not imply actual physical movement and must be interpreted as conceptual metaphors for submission, which mostly rely on the up/down image schema.

To the expression “standing before someone” may follow the physical movement of *‘kanāšu’* “to bend down, to bow down” sometimes accompanied by the humiliating prostration of “kissing the ground,” which exacerbates the asymmetrical relationship between the two parties: “All the kings seated on thrones bow down [before] you and kiss your feet”<sup>28</sup>. It may be also a wish addressed to

<sup>23</sup> Parpola, *Babylonian Scholars*, text no. 284, lines r 1-9.

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part I*, text no. 131, lines r 9-12; Reynolds, *Letters to Assurbanipal*, text no. 88, lines r 11-12. This kind of homage towards a superior authority falls within what has been called as the Mesopotamian “audience-concept,” an expression which lies behind the meeting between someone who was in need of asking for something and a higher authority, such as in the Mesopotamian text *The Poor Man of Nippur*. In this respect, see Zgoll Annette, “Audienz; Ein Modell zum Verständnis mesopotamischer Harderhebungsrituale. Mit einer Deutung der Novelle vom Armen Mann von Nippur,” *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 34 (2003).

<sup>25</sup> Finlayson Rosalie, Marné Pienaar and Sarah Slabbert, “Metaphors of transformation: The New language of education in South Africa,” in *Metaphors for Learning*, ed. Erich A. Berendt (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Johns Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008), 228-229.

<sup>26</sup> Livingstone Alasdair, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, State Archives of Assyria 3 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989), text no. 45, line 5.

<sup>27</sup> Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, text no. 13, lines 19-21.

<sup>28</sup> Livingstone, text no. 44, line r 4. See also, as examples, Livingstone, text no 3, lines r 17-18; Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, text no. 1, lines i 6-i 17; Dietrich, *The Babylonian Correspondence*, text no. 111, lines 7-13; Grayson A. Kirk and Jamie Novotny, *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, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012),

the king: “may Aššur, Bel and Nabû give the king, my lord, long days and happiness; [may] they [bring] your enemies to [submission] before [your feet]!”<sup>29</sup>. However, although the orientational metaphor of standing before the king and bowing down at his feet implies inevitably “Dominanz und Unterwerfung” (dominance and submission)<sup>30</sup>, the expressions also possess and convey positive values because being dominated by and submitted to the king brings light to the subject. This is vividly attested in a letter sent to the king in which the writer discusses political affairs and debts of a governor:

I am his servant and his dog, who fears him; may I see light under his protection!” Bel, Nabû and Šamaš heard (this) prayer for you, and they gave the king, my lord, an everlasting kingship (and) a long reign. And like sunshine, all the countries are illuminated by your light. But I have been left in darkness; no one brings me before the king<sup>31</sup>.

The writer seems to have been ignored, and both conceptual and orientational metaphors are used to express such a condition: ignorance is associated with darkness as well as other conditions which preclude sight. In fact, thanks to the general mapping between visual perception, light, and king, nearly any concept related to the experience of vision is likely to have a clear counterpart in the realm of sufferance and difficulty. Being led and standing before the king brings light and life to the needy.

In sum, all these instances show a basic tenet in the relationship king-subjects which mirrors the god-king relationship: the king stands *up*, while his subject stands *before* him and goes *down*, be it the ground or the king’s feet<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, more/happy/having control, thus dominance (target domain), is up (source domain); by contrast, less/sad/being controlled, thus submission (target domain), is down (source domain). In short, the contrastive pair *up* and *down* articulates and describes any vertical relationship between an authority and a subject.

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text no. 22, line i 15; Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon*, text no. 77, line 14; Novotny and Jeffers, *The Royal Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal*, text no. 5, line iv 1.

<sup>29</sup> Parpola, *Babylonian Scholars*, text no. 69, lines r 12-16.

<sup>30</sup> Most of the audience scenes in the ancient Near East preserves enduring basic elements, where the theme of “dominance and submission” (“Dominanz und Unterwerfung”) is formulated in specific visual elements such as the sitting or standing figure receiving someone, specific bodily postures of the subordinate, and the presence of intermediaries. In this respect, see Gabelmann Hanns, *Antike Audienz- und Tribunalszenen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984), 2-3, 32-34; Hartenstein Friedhelm, *Das Angesicht JHWHs: Studien zum seinen höfischen und kultischen Bedeutungshintergrund in den Psalmen und in Exodus 32-34* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 54-56.

<sup>31</sup> Luukko and Van Buylaere, *Esarhaddon*, text no. 29, lines 11-15.

<sup>32</sup> That the king stands up is not made clear in textual evidence, although a passage of the Royal Coronation Ritual, which describes an actual meeting between king and subjects, states that the second “prostrate themselves [before] the king and kiss the king’s feet,” while the king “remains seated on the throne” (Parpola Simo, *Assyrian Royal Rituals and Cultic Texts*, State Archives of Assyria 20 [Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2017], text no. 7, lines r iii 2-iii 4). Thus, even though the king is seated on the throne, he maintains an upright position.



### 3. Orientational Metaphors in Images

The Assyrian realm offers an important array of visual evidence that may be scrutinised from a pure metaphorical perspective. The practical expression of this metaphor is demonstrated by some bas-reliefs and steles where the image schema involving up and down relations is particularly distinctive. The subjects of illustrations often relate to concrete facts and deals with “real” events, supporting the historicity of the event precisely through the display of its formal coherence-as-story<sup>33</sup>. Nonetheless, images may also represent something that did not happen in reality and that was reinvented or reinterpreted, or even turned into metaphor, for many reasons<sup>34</sup>. Either way, verticality becomes the visual benchmark to convey both actual and metaphorical messages, and this may be already seen in the so-called Broken Obelisk of the king Ashur-bel-kala (1073-1056 BC), where the king stands before and under the divine symbols, while captives stand before and under the king<sup>35</sup>. Although the face of the king appears badly worn, it seems clear that he stands in his upright position and does not turn his face towards the subjects but towards the divine symbols. Following what texts state, when the king does not reciprocate his gaze or turns his face away, the subjects remain metaphorically in the dark, that is to say they do not receive his benevolence and protection. In short, this visual incident can be read in a highly asymmetrical relationship, which may shed light on the political background of captives. This example establishes a basic cultural premise which lies behind the image schema up/down in Assyrian thought: the divine world is above the king, and the king is above any human, thus up is positive and down is negative.

#### 3.1. Bowing Down to the Ground

In the narrative scenes of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC) from the Northwest Palace at Kalhu, all the enemies depicted stand before the king and, even if they are being killed, they turn their face towards the king who may even be not involved in the episode<sup>36</sup>. Nonetheless, the king does not reciprocate with his gaze and, where captives are led in procession before the king, these slightly bend down or are depicted in shorter stature than Assyrian officials and soldiers, so that they cannot

<sup>33</sup> Winter J. Irene, “Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs,” *Studies in Visual Communication* 7, no. 2 (1981): 2-3.

<sup>34</sup> Nadali Davide, “Assyrian Stories of War: The Reinvention of Battles Through Visual Narratives,” *State Archives of Assyria Bulletin* 25 (2019); Nadali Davide, “Images of Assyrian Sieges: What They Show, What We Know, What Can We Say,” in *Brill’s Companion to Sieges in the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Armstrong Jeremy and Matthew Trundle (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019).

<sup>35</sup> For detailed images, see Börker-Klähn Jutta, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen und vergleichbare Felsreliefs*, II: Tafeln (Mainz Am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1982), fig. 131, and Curtis John, “The Broken Obelisk,” *Iraq* LXIX (2007).

<sup>36</sup> For an overview of the reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II, see Budge E. A. Wallis, *Assyrian Sculpture in the British Museum: Reign of Ashur-nasir-pal, 885-869 B.C.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1914), and Meuszyński Janusz, *Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen und ihrer Anordnung im Nordwestpalast von Kalḫu (Nimrūd). Räume: B.C.D.E.F.H.L.N.P.* (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1981), pls. 1-3.

cross the king's gaze<sup>37</sup>. But even more interestingly, orientational metaphors are vividly manifested in the hunting scenes from the throne room (B) of the same palace, where the hunted bull and lion are trampled by and fall under the horses of the royal chariot with the king standing on it and turning his face in opposite direction: an image of subjugation where the image schema up/down is clearly expressed (fig. 2). In the aftermath, during the ritual performed over the hunted animals, bull and lion are shown at the feet of the king, who stands up and the slain animals bow before the king with their face on the ground. This scene is virtually repeated on the adjacent slab (B-18), which shows a human figure bowing down before the king and apparently kissing the ground or his feet. The three subjects, the bull, the lion and the human figure, are apparently associated. However, on a close inspection and reading through the lens of the orientational metaphor, an important detail should be noticed: the captive bows down to the ground before the king, while the wild animals are laid down on the ground before the officials and attendants who partake in the event. The human figure is in a position of total submission to the king; by contrast, the wild animals are under the king and do not prostrate before the king but face in the same direction of the king, thus they are certainly submitted to the king but appear as "under" his protection. In short, the slain animals belong to the king and are presented by the king to the participants of the ritual; on the contrary, the prostrating man is presented to the king. The orientational metaphor frames, in other words, the relationship between the human figure and the king within an actual submission governed by an up/down image schema, where the two parties face each other in a clear asymmetrical relation. The relationship between the king and hunted animals, instead, is governed by the same orientational metaphor, but there seems to be a coincidence between the one having control and the ones being controlled, thus the subjugation expressed by the visual metaphor is muted. This certainly complies with all the ideological and mythological implications associated with the hunt in ancient Assyria, where the hunted animals are not only visual metaphor for the king's qualities, but the hunt itself belongs to the divine sphere<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> Meuszyński, *Die Rekonstruktion*, pl. 2, B-7-6, B-18-17, lower registers.

<sup>38</sup> On the hunt and its meanings in ancient Assyria, see Watanabe E. Chikako, "Symbolism of the Royal Hunt in Assyria," in *Intellectual Life in the Ancient Near East: Papers Presented at the Forty-Third Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Prague, July 1-5, 1996. Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale 43*, ed. Jiří Prosecký (Praha: Oriental Institute, 1998); Watanabe E. Chikako, "The Lion Metaphor in the Mesopotamian Royal Context," *Topoi Suppl.* 2 (2000); Watanabe E. Chikako, *Animal Symbolism in Mesopotamia: A Contextual Approach*, Wiener offene Orientalistik 1 (Wien: Ferdinand Berger&Söhne, 2002).

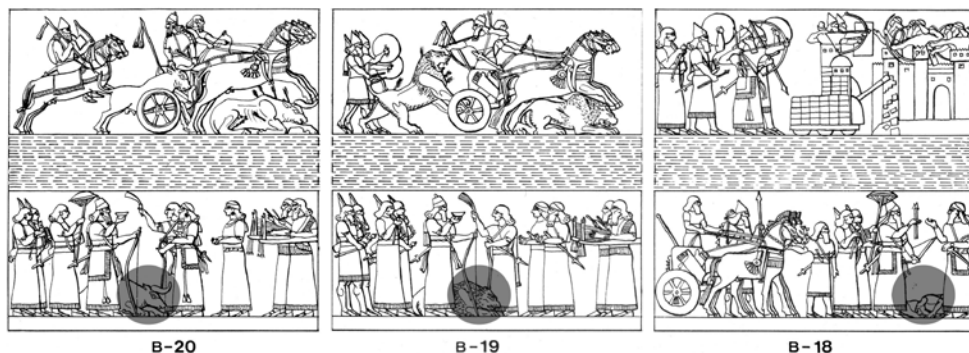


Figure 2. Kalhu, Northwest Palace, throne room B: slabs B-18/20. Source: © CDLI - <http://cdli.ucla.edu>

### 3.2. Under the Feet

That more/happy/dominance is up is well suited for evaluating actions depicted on the bas-reliefs from the Central Palace of Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC) at Kalhu. The king standing upright and his subjects bowing down are signs referring to spatial relations being active in making the visual meaning. Intriguingly, the up/down image schemas give order to four types of submission's scenes. 1) The king stands upright on his throne, while receiving Assyrian officials who face the king and the king reciprocates his gaze. Divine symbols are above all the people depicted (fig. 3). The position in the space connotes a reciprocal relationship favourable to both parties, a relationship governed by mutual obligations and benefits. The concept lying behind the scene thus flattens the up/down orientational metaphor, and horizontality partially replaces verticality. 2) Verticality becomes an appropriate source domain for understanding submission in the image showing the king holding a spear turned downwards to touch a foreigner who bows down and prostrates on the ground before the king's throne (fig. 4)<sup>39</sup>. Submission is here clearly expressed by the raised throne, the upright posture of the king, who faces only his officials, and the foreigner who lies on the ground before the king, who does not gaze his face, and his horizontal position is further emphasised by the oblique position of the spear on his head. 3) The subject bows down before the king's feet, the up/down image schema is emphasised by the verticality of the king and his officials, but also by the bow held by the king, which rests on the ground next to the captive's head<sup>40</sup>. The verticality, expressed by the perfect right angle formed by the encounter between king and subject is again source domain for understanding submission. 4) The case for up-down, where up has a positive value, while down tends to have a negative value, is finally shown in the clearest example of total control and submission, where the subject bows down under king's feet and spear<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> See discussion and other examples from Til-Barsip wall paintings in Portuese Ludovico, "Concealed Paternalism of the Assyrian King: Which Audience," *Mesopotamia* LII (2017): 116-117, fig. 8.

<sup>40</sup> Barnett and Falkner, *Sculptures*, pl. LXXXV.

<sup>41</sup> Barnett and Falkner, pls. LXXXIX, XCV, XCVI.

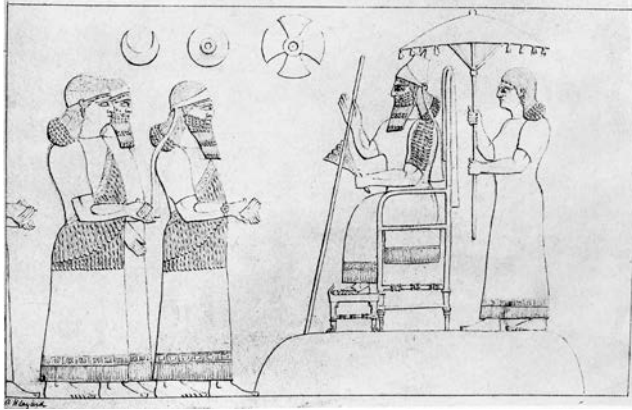


Figure 3. Kalhu, Central Palace: Tiglath-pileser III, drawing. Source: © Barnett D. Richard and Margarete Falkner, *The Sculptures of Aššur-našir-apli II (883-859 B.C.), Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 B.C.), Esarhaddon (681-669 B.C.) from the Central and South-West Palaces at Nimrud* (London: British Museum Publications, 1962), pl. VIII.

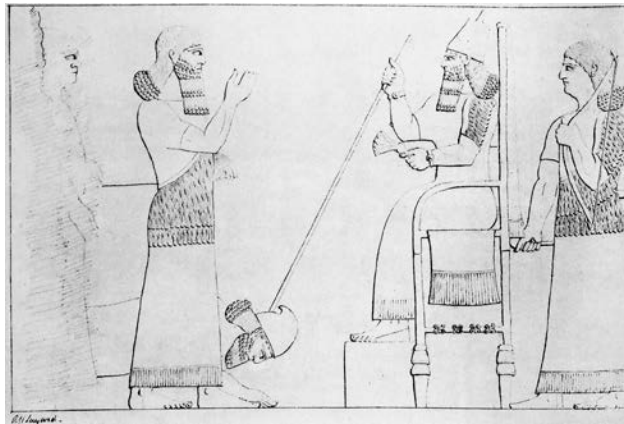


Figure 4. Kalhu, Central Palace: Tiglath-pileser III, drawing. Source: © Barnett and Falkner, *Sculptures*, pl. XVIII.

### 3.3. Kneeling

The above-mentioned Broken Obelisk of Ashur-bel-kala was likely source of inspiration for the figurative programs of Sargon II from his palace at Dur-Sharrukin, and the stela of Esarhaddon (680-669 BC) from Sam'al<sup>42</sup>. On a relief from the secondary throne room 8 of the palace, Sargon II faces crown prince and holds a spear in his right hand and a rope in his left hand (fig. 5). Three captives slightly lower in stature stand before him, one of whom kneels on the ground while two stand upright and look at the king. The spear is turned upside down as to pierce the kneeling captive; the rope or leash, instead, are tied to all captives' lips. All

<sup>42</sup> Ornan Tallay, "Who is Holding the Lead Rope? The Relief of the Broken Obelisk," *Iraq* 69 (2007): 62-63.

three captives look at the king and raise their hands in supplication. On the stela from Sam'al, Esarhaddon faces the divine symbols and holds ropes which end in rings fastened to the captives' lips<sup>43</sup>. The latter, greatly smaller in stature, are differently rendered: one captive kneels on the ground before the king, while the other stands in upright position. Both, however, raise their hands and heads towards the king. In both visual incidents, there seems to be a basic orientational tenet: the short stature and the upward orientation of the captives' face denotes the superiority of the king. Submission is, however, further emphasised in the kneeling captive, who bows down before the upright king.



Figure 5. Dur-Sharrukin Palace, room 8: drawing of reliefs 11-13. Source: © Botta P. Emile and Eugène M. Flandin, *Monument de Ninive II. Architecture et sculpture* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1849), pls. 117-119.

### 3.4 Hanging Down

The contrastive pair up/down is a source domain that offers structure to another target domain, which is the bipolar nature of the human existence, namely life and death. This is well illustrated in the famous “garden scene” of Ashurbanipal from his North Palace at Nineveh (fig. 6).

The visual incident shows Ashurbanipal reclining on a couch opposite the queen, with a laden table between them, and holds a lotus blossom in one hand and a bowl in the other, under a grapevine canopy. Ashurbanipal's eyes focus on a decapitated head, almost certainly that of Teumman, which hangs from a fir tree. It was already demonstrated that everything in the scene has connotations not only of fertility but also of regeneration and paradise<sup>44</sup>. In addition, the king holding the lotus flower stands for the king as life-giving ruler, with the consequence that the whole scene is an actual exaltation of life<sup>45</sup>. This is further emphasised by the position of the king who is opposite the head of Teumman, that is to say that the life-giving ruler is the antithesis of the head of Teumman that symbolizes the death.

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed image, see Börker-Klähn, *Alt Vorderasiatische Bildstelen*, fig. 219, and Porter N. Barbara, “For the Astonishment of All Enemies: Assyrian Propaganda and Its Audience in the Reign of Ashurnasirpal II and Esarhaddon,” *Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 35 (2000): fig. 4.

<sup>44</sup> Ataç Mehmet-Ali, *Art and Immortality in the Ancient Near East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 151-163.

<sup>45</sup> Portuese, “Metaphorical Allusions”; “Metaphor and Interpictoriality”, 119-123.

But what is more interesting in this environment is that while the king stands upright and looks at the head of Teumann, the latter keeps looking at the king but it is turned upside-down so as to indicate that it is lifeless. Thus, the orientation metaphor establishes a clear visual message: happiness, health, life, and control, the things that principally characterize what is good for a person, are all up, while submission, defeat, and death, the things that characterize what is bad for a person, are all down. Such an orientational metaphor basically tends to be bipolar and bivalent, where up has a positive value, while down tends to have a negative value.



Figure 6. Nineveh, North Palace, room S1: relief of Ashurbanipal, the “garden scene”.  
Source: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

#### 4. Orientational Metaphors as Harbinger of Political Messages

The foregoing discussion shows that orientational metaphors were both textually and visually manifested in a variety of ways, and that the basic tenet lying behind the evidence examined relies on the up/down mental image within which the relationship between gods and king, king and subjects was framed and expressed (fig. 7). In short, the orientational metaphor frames and organizes a whole system of ideas and thinking.

More interestingly, one may rightly wonder whether visual orientational metaphors in particular were adopted by artists with discretion for the subject depicted or randomly, namely without specific rules. In other words, can the type of visual submission expressed through orientational metaphors be synonym of the political status of the subject submitted? To answer such a question, the identity of the subjects depicted should be known, and in only few instances we are informed or can speculate on the personalities depicted. In the figurative program of Ashurnasirpal II, the subject-matter of the bas-relief B-18 (fig. 2) most likely represents military events related to the land of Suhu, a region on the middle Euphrates, and the kneeling figure was accordingly identified with the Kassite Zabdanu, brother of the Babylonian king mentioned in the Ashurnasirpal II's

inscriptions as Suhu's supporter and then prisoner<sup>46</sup>. Such a capture was certainly ideologically important and the Assyrian artists sought to represent a fictional submission of Babylonia through the physical submission of the captive. The visual association with the captured and slain bull and lion is thus consistent: the capture of wild bulls and lions, along with the capture of the Babylonian king's brother, was the gratifying result of divine support.

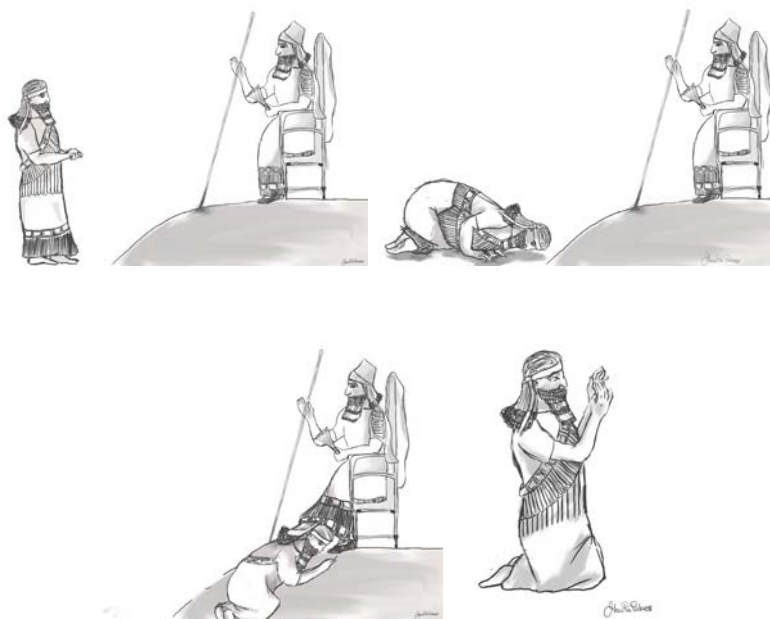


Figure 7. Degrees of visual submission in Assyrian art, on clockwise direction: parity; bowing down, under the feet, kneeling. Source: Maria Pia M. Portuese.

On Tiglath-pileser III's bas-reliefs, the identity of subjects is not made explicit, although it seems that a hierarchy of visual submissions existed, from prostrating persons to trampled captives<sup>47</sup>. On Sargon II's relief, the three captives were identified by an epigraph, which is unfortunately illegible (fig. 5)<sup>48</sup>. Nonetheless, texts inform that Hanunu, king of Gaza, who supported the western coalition led by Hamath, was taken to Assyria in chains and it was suggested that he might be a candidate for this gruesome scene<sup>49</sup>. Although this identification remains hypothetical, I speculate that while the king of Hamath is being punished, the two behind him and standing in upright position might be plausibly kings as well, who

<sup>46</sup> Portuese Ludovico, "'Merciful' Messages in the Reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II: the Land of Suḫu," *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* XXXIX (2016).

<sup>47</sup> In one instance, a general western provenance, perhaps Syrian, is plausible (fig. 4). Reade E. Julian, "Narrative Composition in Assyrian Sculpture," *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 10 (1979): 75.

<sup>48</sup> Russell M. John, *The Writing on the Wall. Studies in the Architectural Context of Late Assyrian Palace Inscriptions* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 117.

<sup>49</sup> Melville, *The Campaigns*, 74, 240 fn. 80. See, however, Elayi Josette, *Sargon II, King of Assyria* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature press, 2017), 55-56.

are however treated differently: they do not crouch or bend down, but stand upright as much as Assyrian officials. Accordingly, I suspect that those behind were less important rulers. Such a notion can be extended to the stela of Esarhaddon. The two captives are identified with the king of Sidon Abdi-Milkutti, the one standing, and with a son of the Egyptian pharaoh, the one kneeling. The former had revolted against Esarhaddon in 677 and was then captured and beheaded; the second, was captured after the campaign in Egypt<sup>50</sup>. In this instance, although the standing prisoner was actually killed and the kneeling one was spared, only the latter appears visually submissive. This suggests that showing the Egyptian pharaoh's son as submissive was the actual gratifying result.

Finally, the identification of the hanging head with that of Teumann, the king of Elam, seems very plausible (fig. 6)<sup>51</sup>. In the relief of Ashurbanipal, the orientational metaphor connotes submission and death, but also the symmetrical – perhaps used sarcastically – relationship between two persons essentially of the same rank: the king of Elam and the king of Assyria can look each other. The consequence is that verticality is adopted here as source domain for death, while horizontality is source domain for parity.

Summing up, from a swift look at the political status of the subjects depicted and their relationships with the Assyrian king emerges a well-thought-out use of orientational metaphors in visual messages: those figures that bowed down on the ground before the king in an act of submission were the most gratifying and important prisoners from a political point of view. Thus, the up/down orientational metaphor was adopted consciously by artists and reflected the identity of the subject. As a consequence, in Assyrian art when verticality is particularly emphasised and becomes source domain for understanding submission, it may indicate that the prostrating figure represented is an important foreign king, selected to represent the most important military and political achievement. Orientational metaphors are accordingly used to conceptually manifest the dominion of the Assyrian king towards other important kings.

## 5. Conclusions and Further Reflections

In this article, cognitive metaphor theory has provided the main theoretical component in an analysis of the structure of meaning in texts and images from the Assyrian realm. Conceptual and orientational metaphors are both pivotal in the textual and visual formulation of the act of submission and, especially in images, present a concrete realisation of order. Order is conceptualised here in the up/down orientation and as a natural premise in the relationship gods/king, king/subjects. In bas-reliefs, this order is manifest and it activates the viewer's bodily experience. It also helps that orientation in space, such as standing up and going down, which is then turned into a concept where standing up correlates to the status of the one having control and standing before and bowing down correlates to the one being

<sup>50</sup> Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon*, text no. 1, lines ii 65-ii 82; text no. 98, lines r 43b-44; Porter, "For the Astonishment," 9-13.

<sup>51</sup> The identification remains a conjecture in the absence of an epigraph on the relief. See, in this respect, Bonatz Dominik, "Ashurbanipal's Headhunt: An Anthropological Perspective," *Iraq* 66 (2004), and Ataç, *Art*, 155.



controlled. Such spatial “logic” is built in and structures one of the so-called image schemas, the up/down schema. This image schema is an abstract thought model incorporating a source position and a status position as target. As a model, it is activated continuously in Assyrians’ speech and thought. They impose it on verbal expressions as well as on the reading of images. The aim of the article is therefore realised especially in the discussion of devices used in the visual formulations of the subject “submission.”

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