

Leggo!

Studies Presented to Frederick Mario Fales
on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday

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Visual Evidence for the Status and Activities of Assyrian Scribes

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Mario Fales has taught us much about Assyrian scribes. He is almost one himself, and it is a privilege to offer in his honour some observations on this theme.

Background

The many Assyrian annalistic narratives and other historical accounts depended on some form of recording system. Thirty years ago, when Mario brought some of us together in the beautiful town of Cetona to talk about such things, I was beginning to develop my own view of the procedures, summarised below, that were most probably involved in the evolution and maintenance of such a system (Reade 1981: 155f.; 2004: 470). I refer not to the overlying interpretative options, on which Mario has continued to enlighten us (e.g. Fales 2001), but to the fundamental elements at the very base of the structure.

From an early date the Assyrian king was obliged to make a report on his activities to the god Ashur at least annually and probably at the close of any campaign or special event. The text on the eleventh-century Broken Obelisk (Grayson 1991: 101–103) shows that campaigns were by then being recorded in diaries, probably written in Akkadian on clay tablets. Later, at the latest from the beginning of the reign of Shalmaneser III, the system was organised more methodically. The form of a final campaign report developed into an elaborate letter, of which the one recounting Sargon's eighth campaign is celebrated. The information in the letters and in the drawings which presumably accompanied them when appropriate, in conjunction with summary eponym records and associated data, underlie the annalistic and visual narratives and other accounts. As the empire grew more complicated, of course, more and more data were collected and were necessary for administrative purposes and so on.

Scribes had an essential role throughout this process, beginning with their work as primary collectors of information, recording what happened during military campaigns. The present paper covers the representations of these scribes, and of their main writing materials, as they appear in narrative art in some Assyrian official buildings. A catalogue of the representations is given at the end of this paper, and the catalogue numbers assigned to the images there (Cat. 1–Cat. 35) are employed in this discussion. Personal and technical details about scribes and scribal practices can be found through entries such as “Schreiber” in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, or indeed in plenty of Mario's papers (e.g. Fales 2000). I myself am beholden too to two

excellent friends, Tariq Madhloom and Hayim Tadmor, now sadly both departed, for helping clarify my thoughts on this matter, and to a third, Irving Finkel, for insisting that I discuss it in print.

General information

No scribes are represented in the narrative art of Ashurnasirpal II, made about 860 BC, though there are scenes where they could have belonged (e.g. Budge 1914: Pl. XVI.1: BM 124548). Thereafter there are representations of scribes, nearly always in pairs, or of writing materials, from all the palaces and buildings that have produced large quantities of narrative art. The available images date from periods within the reigns of Shalmaneser III (Cat. 1: c. 852–845 BC), Tiglathpileser III (Cat. 2: c. 730–727), Shalmaneser V (Cat. 3: i.e. a Til-Barsip painting of the premier style, c. 726–722), Sargon II (Cat. 4–7: c. 710–705), Sennacherib (Cat. 8–21: c. 700–692), Ashurbanipal (both early, Cat. 22–23: c. 660–650; and late, Cat. 24–28: c. 645–640), and Sinsharrishkun (Cat. 29–35: i.e. many of the late panels in the South-West Palace at Nineveh, c. 625–620). There are questions over the dating of some of the images (Cat. 3, 22–23 and 29–35), and I have simply followed Reade (1972: 88–90; 1979: 76f., 96, 109f.), without considering the time elapsed between event and illustration; others could adjust the chronology if they wished, which would slightly modify the general picture.

A notable feature of the narrative representations of scribes is that they were designed by individuals who belonged to the same class as those being represented, i.e. they were all scribes. They were exercising an unusual opportunity. This was hardly individual self-portraiture, but it was a portrayal of themselves, their associates and their contribution to the Assyrian state, with some degree of latitude in how they chose to appear. For instance, one scribe is shown throwing his stylus at a poor foreigner whose best gift for the Assyrian king is probably a large basket of food (Cat. 18; Fig. 1); this could well be a genuine incident, remembered with laughter.

Scribes in context

The Shalmaneser III scene (Cat. 1; Fig. 2) is unusual, because the scribes are not recording but giving instructions. In an upper register, on the far right, a man in court dress faces left. He holds a stylus in his raised right fist, and points down with it towards something oblong in his left hand; it may be a tablet, but a line along the side suggests the spine of a board-book. He is clearly giving directions to a man who is working with hammer and chisel at a cliff face, and who must be cutting a royal inscription, the text of which is written on the tablet or board-book and presumably scratched on to the stone or painted in ink. The scribe is giving advice and checking the work as it proceeds. A third man, waving towards the scene, may be a supervisor. In a lower register, to the left, another man in court dress faces right. His right hand is raised and open, and his left fist is clenched and empty, as can be confirmed by comparison with the left hand of a soldier behind him; he is clearly giving directions

to another man, who is working with hammer and chisel on a royal stela cut on to the cliff face. Presumably the man with empty hands is a scribe, ensuring that there are no mistakes in the iconography of the stela, which will also have been outlined on the stone beforehand. He is less likely to be controlling the cutting of an inscription, as he is not carrying a text in his hand.

Nearly all the later representations of scribes show them on campaign and after victory, at the front of a group of Assyrians, recording the submission of foreigners and the receipt of booty such as heads, prisoners, women, children, livestock and furniture, usually as these move forward to be reviewed by the Assyrian king, e.g. Fig. 3. In two of the eighth-century representations (Cat. 2, 4; Figs. 4, 6) the scribes are towards the back of the procession, facing back, but have supervisors who face forward towards the king. In two more (Cat. 3, 5; Fig. 5) the scribes are at the head of the procession, themselves facing towards the king. In another (Cat. 6; Fig. 7) the two scribes overlap, facing back towards the procession, and thereafter this scheme becomes standard. Whenever enough of a seventh-century composition featuring a pair of scribes has been adequately preserved and recorded, it shows the king in a landscape, inspecting a procession of victorious soldiers who are escorting the booty, usually coming from a battle or captured town in the distance. The king himself is surrounded by his bodyguard, with the scribes at or very near the front. This type of seventh-century composition is never complete and often fragmentary, but can be restored with confidence. It comes in two versions, however, the more literal and the less literal.

Sennacherib himself is often obviously represented as personally present on campaign (Cat. 8–21). So is the king on some at least (Cat. 29–31) of the panels ascribed to Sinsharrishkun, as in another composition from the same series showing Babylonia he is preparing to cross a river (Barnett *et Al.* 1998: Pls. 190–191). The other panels ascribed to Sinsharrishkun (Cat. 32–35) are in an adjoining corridor, are carved in much the same style, and also show Babylonia, where we know that this king campaigned. So the scribes who appear in the Sennacherib and Sinsharrishkun scenes are probably equipped much as they were in reality.

One Ashurbanipal scene (Cat. 23; Fig. 8) shows a specific event during a campaign, but the presence of a scribe is uncertain. Later Ashurbanipal scenes that incorporate scribes seem to be less literal (Cat. 24–27; Figs. 3, 12, 17), further removed from reality, because it is unlikely that the king participated personally in these campaigns. The compositions must be viewed as iconic: they do show the fighting, the booty and the king and his bodyguard together in one sequence, but the royal party has arrived on a magic carpet. As in Fig. 3, they are met by an important Assyrian, presumably the military commander, who is introduced by an official waving an arm, and they duly review the prisoners, a display that may have been repeated afterwards as a triumph at Nineveh; but they are present on campaign in principle rather than reality. Ashurbanipal's scribes, in Fig. 3, are at the front of the royal party in the lower row. They may have arrived with him on the magic carpet, and they may be equipped in the same way that they were at court, unlike scribes in the field.



Fig. 1. Sennacherib scribes (Cat. 18).

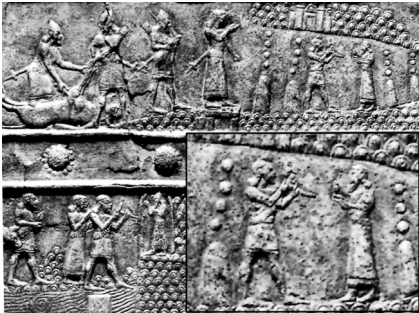


Fig. 2. Shalmaneser III scribes (Cat. 1).



Fig. 3. Ashurbanipal victory review (Cat. 26).



Fig. 4. Tiglathpileser III scribes (Cat. 2).

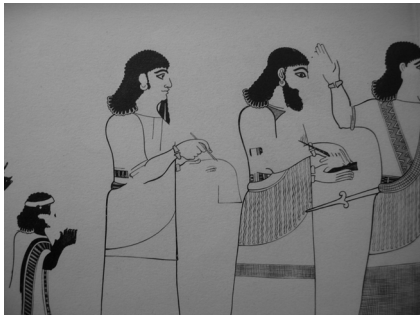


Fig. 5. Scribes ascribed to Shalmaneser V, repainted (Cat. 3).

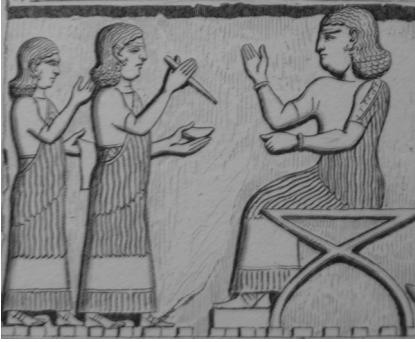


Fig. 6. Sargon scribes, poorly drawn (Cat. 4).



Fig. 7. Sargon scribes (Cat. 6).

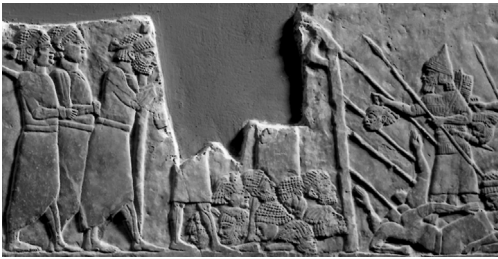


Fig. 8. Ashurbanipal tent scene (Cat. 23).



Fig. 9. Sennacherib scribes (Cat. 8).

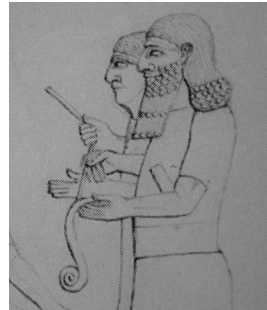


Fig. 10. Sennacherib scribes (Cat. 12).

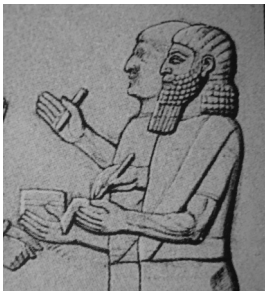


Fig. 11. Sennacherib scribes (Cat. 20).



Fig. 12. Ashurbanipal scribes (Cat. 24).

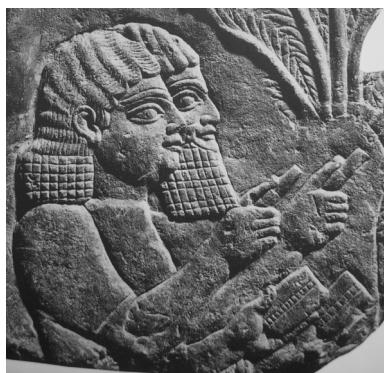


Fig. 13. Scribes ascribed to Ashurbanipal (Cat. 28).



Fig. 14. Scribes ascribed to Sinsharrishkun (Cat. 31).



Fig. 15. Scribes ascribed to Sinsharrishkun (Cat. 34).



Fig. 16. Scribes ascribed to Sinsharrishkun (Cat. 35).



Fig. 17. Ashurbanipal scribes (Cat. 25).

Writing materials: general

Scribes can nearly always be recognised because of what they are holding. In the right hand there is a marker of some kind, either pen or stylus, and in the left hand the object to be marked, which is a scroll, a board-book (consisting of two or more “writing-boards” bound together), or a clay tablet.

Scrolls are obvious, because they flop down from the left hand and usually curve (Cat. 2–12, 15–21, 29, 31–35; Figs. 1, 3–7, 9–11, 14–16); on one occasion a man is shown reading from a scroll (Cat. 7). One Sennacherib scroll looks as if it may have a string attached (Cat. 8; Fig. 9). A few Sennacherib scribes with scrolls also carry under the left arm an oblong object (Cat. 10, 12, 18; Figs. 1, 10), which must be another scroll or a writing case of some kind; they should have possessed pen-and-ink cases, like those known from Egypt and represented as held by the scribe on the Bar-Rakib stela from Sam'al, although that particular man seems to have a board-book rather than a scroll under his arm (Meyer 1965: 80). Scrolls will have been made of leather or papyrus (e.g. Wiseman 1955: 12).

Board-books are rectangular, and can easily be recognised when the binding is represented by internal lines (Cat. 20, 22, 24, 26, 28–29, 31–35; Figs. 11–16). Scribes are regularly shown holding them upright, which enables us to identify oblong objects held upright (Cat. 25; Fig. 17) almost certainly as board-books, even though they themselves are plain or unfinished, with no internal lines. Board-books will have had raised edges around one side of each board, with a layer of soft wax inside; wooden and ivory examples from Sargon's reign were found at Nimrud (Howard 1955).

One of the Til-Barsip scribes holds what must be a clay tablet, because it has a solid red-brown colour (Cat. 3; Fig. 5). It lies flat in his hand. Other tablets are surely represented by solid objects which seem to rest flat on a scribe's hand, which lack any indication of binding, and which sometimes have outlines that are less plainly rectangular than those of the board-books (Cat. 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 16, 17; Figs. 4, 6–7, 9). When detail is not visible, it can be difficult to determine whether the object is intended to be a board-book or a clay tablet, and Wiseman (1955: 12) even proposed that all such objects held by scribes in Assyrian art were board-books rather than clay tablets.

An incidental advantage of scrolls and board-books is that both could easily be sealed shut; the sealing, besides aiding confidentiality as with the notorious board-book intended to dispose of Bellerophon (Hom., *Il.*, vi 169), would have helped protect the written contents when in transit. We even have one representation of an Elamite royal letter inscribed on a board-book (Cat. 22). Clay tablets, although simpler to make and surviving today in much greater numbers, will have been heavier and more difficult to secure than board-books, requiring an additional layer of clay for envelopes, and will have needed greater protection from casual damage.

Writing materials: chronology

Under Tiglathpileser III (Cat. 2), Shalmaneser V (Cat. 3) and Sargon (Cat. 4–6), one of each pair of scribes holds a scroll. The other eighth-century scribes whose left hands are visible have tablets (Cat. 2–4, 6). Under Sennacherib (Cat. 8–21), when details are adequately preserved, one scribe always has a scroll, while the other scribe has either a tablet or a board-book. Under Ashurbanipal, where details are adequately preserved (Cat. 24–26), and on another fragment ascribed to Ashurbanipal (Cat. 28), both scribes do or probably do hold board-books. On well-preserved panels ascribed to Sinsharrishkun (Cat. 29, 31–35) one of the pair holds a board-book and the other a scroll. So, at least according to the evidence in these illustrations, during the seventh century tablets fell out of use for recording campaigns in the field, replaced by board-books.

Scrolls, in contrast, are used throughout the eighth and seventh centuries except in the reign of Ashurbanipal. A possible conclusion from their absence then would be that this king, who is known to have been fond of traditional Akkadian literature that was written on board-books or tablets (Livingstone 2007), and was indeed accustomed to wear his own stylus in his belt (Seidl 2007), disliked or at least refused to allow the representation of scrolls in narrative art. However, as these compositions are iconic, it remains possible that Ashurbanipal's scribes did in practice still use scrolls in the field, although the king preferred to see them represented with board-books. It is correspondingly possible that scribes present on formal occasions at court, during the reigns of other seventh-century kings, also held board-books rather than scrolls.

Writing materials: precedence

When two scribes stand beside one another, one always appears to have precedence. Either both are represented in full, so that one is clearly standing in front of the other, or they overlap. When they overlap, the scribe with apparent precedence is the more prominent figure, being closer to the viewer and shown in full profile; he is necessarily, however, a step or two behind his companion. The body of the other is largely obscured, but he is obliged to be stepping forward so that his face and front profile may remain visible.

A consistent mark of status in the eighth century is that the scribe with the scroll is always the one standing behind or in the background (Cat. 2–6), but the contrast is much less marked in the seventh century. The scribe with the scroll stands in the background on seven out of twelve Sennacherib examples (Cat. 8–9, 15–17, 19, 21). He does not appear at all in Ashurbanipal's North Palace (Cat. 24–26). He is again the background scribe on two examples ascribed to Sinsharrishkun (Cat. 29, 31); in four more examples (Cat. 32–35), however, in two compositions, the scribes with scrolls and board-books alternate in positions of prominence.

Bearded or unbearded (eunuch): precedence

Under Shalmaneser III (Cat. 1), both scribes are bearded; a eunuch is present, and may be supervising the operation. An unbearded man in court dress is also supervising the two Tiglathpileser scribes, who are unbearded (Cat. 2); so here all three are eunuchs. There is an unbearded supervisor in one Sargon scene (Cat. 4), and we may well suppose that scribes were always subordinate to some such official, one of the senior eunuchs at court. In the other illustrations, however, they operate without visible supervision.

At Til-Barsip (Cat. 3) the scribe in front is bearded, and the one behind is not. On the latter, however, there are traces of black paint under the chin, which can only have been a beard in origin. It is theoretically possible that the scribe was originally a eunuch, on to whom a beard was later painted (subsequently flaking away from his face), but it seems far more likely that an originally bearded face was later over-painted and changed to an unbearded one. So the painting (which will have remained visible through the seventh century) was changed to conform with what was to become the standard convention, in every other well-preserved example of a pair of scribes from Sargon onwards, that one of them was bearded and the other was not. It looks as if the modern artist at the excavation, confronted with two layers of flaky paint, interpreted the remains of the beard as a sidelock.

The Til-Barsip scribe who has perhaps been rendered beardless stands behind the other, as if he is of slightly lower status. The evidence from Sargon's reign (Cat. 4–6) is ambivalent. Under Sennacherib the scribe with the beard is the one in the foreground in all but one (Cat. 15) of the nine adequately preserved examples; this is consistent with the broad impression, given by other Sennacherib illustrations, that in his reign the status of unbearded courtiers or eunuchs was lower than it had been under Sargon. In contrast, on the three examples from Ashurbanipal's North Palace (Cat. 24–26), and on another ascribed to it (Cat. 28), the beardless scribe is the one in the foreground; many other carvings indeed suggest that Ashurbanipal's court was dominated by eunuchs. On panels ascribed to Sinsharrishkun bearded and beardless scribes share this position equally.

One might have expected a degree of consistency, such as bearded scribes always holding tablets in the foreground, with unbearded scribes always holding scrolls behind them. As noted by Nougayrol (1960: 203f.), this is not the case. At Til-Barsip (Cat. 3) the scribe who has retained his beard is the one carrying the tablet. Under Sargon he is as likely to be carrying the scroll (Cat. 6) as the tablet (Cat. 4). Under Sennacherib too he is as likely to be carrying the scroll (Cat. 10, 12, 15, 18, 20) as the tablet or possibly board-book (Cat. 9, 16–17, 19, 21). In Ashurbanipal's North Palace he of course carries a board-book. He holds the board-book in five of the six well-preserved examples ascribed to Sinsharrishkun (Cat. 29, 31–34), but does once hold the scroll (Cat. 35).

Scribal dress: status

The scribes of the ninth and eighth centuries probably all wear “court dress”, consisting of an ankle-length robe with a shawl; this seems to have been standard wear for anyone dressing respectably. The “court dress” shawl normally crosses the left shoulder (Cat. 3–6), but both Tiglathpileser scribes though not their supervisor wear it over the right shoulder instead (Cat. 2). Under Sennacherib, whose scribes are all shown on campaign, four pairs of them wear robes, without the court shawl, but they all have or could have had a belt or baldric instead (Cat. 9, 13, 18, 20). Scribes on Ashurbanipal’s wall-panels from the North Palace (Cat. 24–27) may all wear court dress, though not those on the fragment ascribed to this king (Cat. 28).

Nine pairs of Sennacherib scribes wear shorter tunics (Cat. 8, 10, 12, 14–17, 19, 21). The tunic would have been more convenient in the field; it differs from an ordinary Assyrian soldier’s kilt as it does not have an end hanging down between the legs. The convenient tunics, often with scale-armour above the waist, are worn on campaign by all the scribes shown on wall-panels ascribed to Sinsharrishkun (Cat. 29–35).

The prominence of the Til-Barsip scribes in their procession (Cat. 3), and their wristlets, superficially suggest that they are individuals of relatively high status, even if not as high as that of the unbearded official who introduces them and their prisoners into the king’s presence. The prominence, however, is largely due to the exigencies of the painted composition, which is on a larger scale than others in which scribes appear; at least one relatively large-scale Sargon scribe does have an armband (Cat. 6). Broadly the clothes worn by scribes are similar to those worn by other Assyrian officials. The main distinction is that, in the ninth and eighth centuries and under Ashurbanipal the scribes tend to look more like courtiers, whereas under Sennacherib and Sinsharrishkun they seem better integrated into the army.

Scribal activities

What these scribes are plainly shown to be doing in the narrative art, as noted above, is recording details of heads, prisoners and booty collected by the Assyrian army, either on the field of battle or on arrival at an Assyrian base, when there must often have been an official review over which the commander or king presided. Most narrative compositions show a single pair of scribes, but presumably there were often other scribes at work with them, since the compositions carved on the wall-panels generally form a typical rather than a comprehensive narrative record. There are in fact two compositions each of which includes four scribes (Cat. 32–33, 34–35), in two pairs among different rows of people; both compositions could have accommodated a third pair of scribes in a missing top row. Doubtless groups of scribes were assigned in the field to whatever duties were necessary.

Messerschmidt (1906: 187) explained the presence of pairs of scribes by proposing that the information on the tablets and scrolls was virtually identical, in duplicate

versions, Akkadian and Aramaic. Alternatively, since Akkadian was the prime official Assyrian language, and Sargon once firmly refused a request from the governor of Ur that he should write to the king in Aramaic rather than Akkadian (Dietrich 2003: 5), it has been suggested that the scribe with the tablet, who sometimes has precedence over the scribe with the scroll, could have been noting the more important details and totals in Akkadian while his colleague made other records in Aramaic. The introduction of board-books instead of tablets would not have changed the situation, nor would the use of board-books instead of scrolls as shown under Ashurbanipal, because board-books were used for writing both Akkadian and Aramaic. In any case the two scribes invite identification as the scribal pair, an Assyrian and an Aramaic scribe, who were standard members of the Assyrian court establishment in the seventh century, and who were much better known than other sorts of scribe such as the Egyptian (Kinnier Wilson 1972: 62, 138).

It is obvious that, whatever any of these pairs of scribes in the narrative images are regarded as doing, and whatever type of writing equipment they carry, they are recording closely related kinds of information which must have been later collected together. Presumably it was then copied or filed for the imperial administration, was presented in some way to the god Ashur, and contributed a significant part of the historical record of a campaign.

Two forms of these campaign records are still preserved, the verbal and the visual versions, the writings and the illustrations. The writings are abundant and familiar, and they are understood to some extent by every Assyriologist. Excerpts from the illustrations, which are less widely understood, accompany this paper. Such illustrations were to be found in stone, paint or bronze in major Assyrian public buildings. The scenes, combined in narrative compositions that follow generalized schemes, repeatedly incorporate stereotyped groups, especially of Assyrian soldiers. There could have been copybooks containing standard items to assist the designers. The absence of satisfactory sketches would account for anomalies such as impossible animals represented on the ninth-century Black Obelisk (e.g. Börker-Klähn 1982: Abb. 152). The two versions of the “Death of Ituni” scene, in which a single executioner is represented by two kinds of Assyrian officer (Barnett 1976: Pl. XXIV, left; Barnett *et al.* 1998: Pl. 295, top right), and probably the two versions of Ashurbanipal’s lion-hunt, when the king does the same thing in two different types of dress (Barnett 1976: Pls. LI–LII, LVII), represent seventh-century examples of inconsistent illustration.

Far more impressive, however, are the innumerable consistent circumstantial details including foreign hair-styles, clothes, artefacts, architecture and landscapes encountered on campaign, which are shown on the ninth-century embossed bronzes of Shalmaneser III, and on wall-panels of the later eighth and seventh centuries. A proper discussion of such details would occupy several pages: the list would include the gods captured by Tiglathpileser III (Barnett & Falkner 1962: Pls. XC–XCII), the architecture and booty of Musasir captured by Sargon (Albenda 1986: Pls. 132–133), Sennacherib’s landscapes in general, and the architecture and booty of Lachish

and another city captured by him (Barnett *et Al.* 1998: Pls. 330–337, 410–411), Ashurbanipal's prisoners and booty from Babylon, Elam and Egypt (e.g. Barnett 1976: Pls. XXXV–XXXVI), and the heaps of booty captured in Babylonia by Sinsharrishkun (Barnett *et Al.* 1998: Pls. 213, 255). It would seem tolerably obvious that the designers of these illustrations had access, directly or indirectly, to original drawings made by war-artists in the field. Such images would not of course have been naturalistic, they would have conformed to the conventions of the time, and they would have been liable to interpretation and distortion during the transition from field-drawing to finished object. The vagaries of this process would override the objection expressed by Uehlinger (2003: 266), who claimed specifically that the architecture of Lachish, as shown in Sennacherib's panels, is more likely to have been based on verbal descriptions than on eye-witness records. The obvious people to have kept both the written and the graphic sets of narrative records, as war-historians and war-artists, were the scribes such as we see represented in the records themselves.

Interested scholars, with Seidl (2007: 119) as one distinguished exception, often seem to have difficulty with this concept. Russell (1991: 292), for instance, states that the only field sketches the scribes with scrolls could be making, when actually visible in the sculptures of Sennacherib, are of "enemy heads, prisoners, cattle and other booty. Since most of these items are hardly distinctive, and since many of them would have been brought back to Assyria as spoil anyway, it is difficult to demonstrate convincingly the need for an artist here". Furthermore (Russell 1991: 207f.), "the only evidence for such drawings is the apparent accuracy of the finished reliefs in details such as costume, topographical details, and architecture... The details that do exist in the reliefs could, I believe, have been drawn wholly from written campaign accounts and interviews with participants from both sides". No doubt people who had been involved in campaigns did take a direct interest in such representations, and some will have been available for consultation. Yet, rather than organising *post mortem* discussions involving survivors from both sides years later, it would have been far easier, more economical and more efficient, for the Assyrians to include sketches of interesting details among their field records; they would not have had to wait until they returned home, and sometimes until they heard that the king was building or redecorating a palace, before the first illustrations were drawn. Although the scribes in the wall-panels are only shown recording booty, which includes repetitive items like sheep in addition to distinctive artefacts like clothes and sets of furniture, they will at the same time have had ample opportunities to record architecture and landscape too.

Cooper (*apud* Russell 1999: 141) thought that it would have been difficult to draw on a hand-held scroll. Yet Egyptian scribes could apparently write while resting papyrus scrolls open on their crossed legs (e.g. Parkinson *et Al.* 1999: 129). The scribes in the wall-panels seem to have rested their scrolls on the palm of the hand, and this or something held in the hand clearly provided a surface good enough to work on, whether they were writing or drawing. There is even a letter to Sargon the author

of which accompanied his message, written in Akkadian on clay, with a drawing of a fortress on leather (Fuchs & Parpola 2001: 95); he must have regarded this as a convenient and acceptable procedure.

Even Tadmor (1982; 1985), ordinarily a very fine scholar, claimed to have disproved the thesis that the scribe with the scroll was engaged in drawing. “I believe however that conclusive evidence against this thesis may be furnished by a fresco from Til Barsip [here, in part, Fig. 3] ... It portrays two scribes ... standing behind three courtiers who are facing the king ... Since this fresco is concerned not with a military campaign in a foreign land, but with a ceremony at the royal court, it stands to reason that the person holding the sheet of papyrus, standing beside the scribe with the tablet, is, not an artist but likewise a scribe, recording the royal instructions in Aramaic”. The “ceremony at the royal court” in fact has the king receiving dark-skinned foreigners who are brought forward under escort, and introduced together with the scribes by a courtier waving his arm; two of the foreigners stand immediately behind the man with the scroll. It is more likely that the men with tablet and scroll are doing what they are plainly doing in nearly all the other representations, i.e. recording what is happening, rather than that they are taking bilingual instructions from the king.

If we look closely, however, at all these objections to the idea of an Assyrian war-artist (a negative thesis which could never be proved even if it deserved consideration), we find that they are not really directed against the war-artist at all. They are actually directed against an ingenious suggestion by Madhloom (1970: 121f.). He was possibly the first scholar to address the question of war-artists seriously, and proposed that the people holding scrolls were engaged in drawing rather than writing Aramaic. It might seem, then, that we have to choose between two propositions: either the man with the scroll is the Aramaic scribe and not the war-artist, or he is the war-artist and not the Aramaic scribe. Scholars have been understandably reluctant to abandon the parallel between, on the one hand, the Akkadian and Aramaic scribes mentioned in the texts, and on the other hand the scribes who are illustrated holding tablets or writing-boards and scrolls. In fact, however, we do not have to choose. This is not a yes-no, either-or question. The dilemma is illusory.

A basic element of scribal training was learning how to deal with clay. A glance at the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* entry for *eṣeru* makes it plain that every competent scribe accustomed to writing cuneiform on clay, or indeed on wax, must also have learnt how to draw on these materials. Drawings are not common on surviving clay tablets, but they do exist (e.g. Finkel & Seymour 2008: 163, fig. 149; 196, figs. 183–184). One clay tablet of the mid-seventh century, which was inscribed, modelled and incised, is a veritable masterpiece (Reade 2002: 149f., Figs. 4–5). So scribes with tablets or with board-books in the field could have recorded what was happening both in words, using Akkadian, and in sketches which would anyway have needed explanatory captions. Sometimes an abundance of text may have been accompanied by occasional drawings or by no drawings at all; the use of drawings might have been one of Shalmaneser III’s innovations.

Much the same applies to the scribes with scrolls. The speculation that the Assyrians were really in the habit of making duplicate records in Akkadian and Aramaic can be left to one side. The scribes with scrolls could have been making records both in words, using Aramaic, and in sketches. It could well be that scrolls were found by experience to be more suitable for field drawings, and that one of the standard duties of the Aramaic scribe was to draw. If so, there is no reason to reject Madhlom's hypothesis. It does not contradict or eliminate the parallel between Akkadian and Aramaic scribes in the verbal and in the visual records, it simply provides an additional option to help explain how the narrative art was created.

So whether any particular scribe with a tablet or a board-book or scroll, as shown on one of the wall-panels, was himself engaged in writing or in drawing or in both activities at once is a red herring. Two characteristics repeatedly displayed by the Assyrian administration were flexibility and common sense. It is probable that all sorts of writing materials, whatever was available, were used in the real world for whatever types of improvised recording were needed. When two scribes were represented standing beside one another, recording a single consignment of prisoners or booty, and when such consignments were at some stage recorded by both description and drawing, it is most likely that the representations were envisaged as embracing both processes.

Catalogue of illustrations of Neo-Assyrian scribes

The following catalogue, arranged by approximate date of manufacture, includes all the illustrations known to me that show scribes or writing materials in Assyrian narrative sequences, except the carvings of Ashurbanipal wearing a stylus in his belt (Seidl 2007). Cat. 1 is an embossed bronze; Cat. 3 is a copy of a wall-painting; the remainder are stone wall-panels or illustrations based on wall-panels. Much of this evidence is well preserved, but some originals are damaged or badly and confusingly restored with plaster. Sometimes we are dependent on drawings of variable quality, made on site in the nineteenth century, showing illustrations the originals of which are now reburied or lost. There are inconsistencies in the evidence, which may partly be due to real inconsistencies and changes in ancient practice, to the differing skills and preferences of the individuals responsible for designing the palace illustrations, and to the nature of the contexts and compositions within which the scribes are represented. References given below are to standard publications, none of which are satisfactory; a piecemeal analysis of relevant stylistic and compositional features and problems would occupy many more pages. So this catalogue, on the whole, only presents the main information.

The catalogue entries refer to wall-panels, or drawings or photographs of wall-panels, unless stated otherwise. The entries include, besides technical details, references and occasional other data, an indication of the direction in which the scribes face, and what they wear (ankle-length robe, with or without shawl, or knee-length tunic). Scribe A, in an entry, is either the one first in line (Cat. 2–6) or the one nearer

the viewer out of two overlapping figures (Cat. 8–21, 24–35); Scribe B is second in line, or further from the viewer. C is or may be a supervisor (Cat. 1, 2, 4). Most of the illustrations used here are taken with gratitude from originals in the British Museum or from British Museum publications; Sargon illustrations are taken from the French publications.

1. Fig. 2. Embossed bronze. Shalmaneser III. BM 124656. Condition good, but scale very small. King 1915: Pl. LIX. All with robes and shawls. Above: A: left-facing, bearded, tablet or board-book. Below: B: right-facing, bearded, empty-handed. Above: C: right-facing supervisor(?), eunuch, sword.

2. Fig. 4. Wall-panel. Tiglathpileser III. BM 118882. Condition good. Barnett & Falkner 1962: 11, Pl. VI. All with robes and shawls. A: left-facing, eunuch, tablet. B: left-facing, eunuch, scroll. C: right-facing supervisor, eunuch, stick, sword.

3. Fig. 5. Field copy of painting. Til-Barsip, ascribed to Shalmaneser V. Condition variable. Thureau-Dangin & Dunand 1936: 54–56, Pl. L; Parrot 1961: 278, fig. 348 (colour). Both scribes right-facing, in robes, shawls and armlets. A: bearded, tablet. B: eunuch (but with traces of black paint below the chin, suggesting that at one stage he was bearded), scroll.

4. Fig. 6. Wall-panel and drawing. Sargon. Louvre, AO 19892. Condition variable. Botta & Flandin 1849–50: II, Pl. 141. Nougayrol 1960 (photograph). Albenda 1986: 110f., 163, Fig. 90, Pl. 133. All with robes and shawls. A: right-facing, bearded (wrongly drawn as unbearded), tablet. B: right-facing, eunuch, scroll. C: left-facing supervisor, eunuch, armlets.

5. Drawing. Sargon. Condition poor. Botta & Flandin 1849–50: I, Pl. 54. Albenda 1986: 144, Pl. 111. Scribes both left-facing, with robes and shawls. A: details damaged. B: eunuch, fingers hold pen as if there was a scroll in the missing left hand.

6. Fig. 7. Drawing. Sargon. Condition variable. Botta & Flandin 1849–50: II, Pl. 146. Albenda 1986: 111, Pl. 137. Scribes both right-facing, with robes (and lost shawls?). A: eunuch, tablet, armlet. B: bearded, scroll.

7. Drawing. Sargon. Condition good. Botta & Flandin 1849–50: II, Pl. 145. Albenda 1986: 111, Pl. 136. A helmeted soldier in the upper storey of a siege-engine holds what appears to be a scroll in his hands, as if reading terms of surrender to the enemy, as identified by Yadin (1963: 320, 425).

8. Fig. 9. Wall-panel and drawings. Sennacherib. BM 124903. Condition good, but scribes only preserved from neck down. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: 93, Pls 278f., 281, No. 370. Scribes both left-facing, with tunics. A: tablet, also wearing baldric, but without armour as shown in one drawing. B: scroll, with possible string.

9. Wall-panel and drawings. Sennacherib. BM 124910. Condition: worn, and very confused by plaster. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: Pls 338f., 341. Scribes both left-facing, with robes and baldrics. A: bearded, tablet or board-book. B: eunuch, scroll.

10. Wall-panel and drawings. Sennacherib. BM 124786b. Damaged, and very confused by plaster. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: Pls 173–176, No. 244b. Scribes both left-facing, with tunics. A: bearded, scroll, oblong under left arm. B: eunuch (probably), tablet.

11. Photograph. Sennacherib(?). BM 102079 (lost). Condition good, but only small fragment of waist area survives. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: 141, Pl. 514, No. 751, with the suggestion that Cat. 11 might be a fragment from Cat. 20, but details such as the belts are different. A: left-facing, scroll. B: traces.

12. Fig. 10. Photograph and drawing. Sennacherib. Condition good. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: 56, Pl. 56, No. 5a. Russell 1998: Figs 116f. Scribes both left-facing, with tunics. A: bearded, scroll, oblong under left arm. B: eunuch, tablet or board-book.

13. Photograph. Sennacherib. Russell 1998: Fig. 89. Condition good, but scribes only preserved from waist down. Scribes both left-facing, with robes. Identified as scribes through their place in the composition.

14. Photograph. Sennacherib. Russell 1998: Fig. 100. Condition good, but scribes only preserved from the knees down. Scribes both left-facing, with tunics. Identified as scribes through their place in the composition.

15. Drawing. Sennacherib. Condition obscure; very small scale. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: 62, Pl. 83, No. 102a. Scribes both right-facing, with tunics. A: eunuch, tablet or board-book. B: bearded, scroll.

16. Drawing. Sennacherib. Condition good. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: 71, Pl. 132, No. 193a. Scribes both left-facing, with tunics. A: bearded, tablet. B: eunuch, scroll.

17. Drawing. Sennacherib. Condition good. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: 107, Pl. 363, No. 450a. Scribes both left-facing, with tunics. A: bearded, tablet. B: eunuch, scroll.

18. Fig. 1. Drawing. Sennacherib. Condition good. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: 122, Pl. 426, No. 550a. Scribes both left-facing, with robes and belts. A: bearded, scroll, oblong under left arm. B: eunuch, no left hand drawn(!), but his stylus is in mid-air in front of him, thrown at approaching foreigners.

19. Drawing. Sennacherib. Condition poor. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: Pl. 453, No. 608a. Scribes both left-facing, with tunics. A: bearded, tablet or writing-board, as his right hand holds a stylus. B: eunuch, presumably scroll.

20. Fig. 11. Drawing. Sennacherib. Condition good. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: 79, Pl. 186, No. 263. Scribes both left-facing, with robes and baldrics. A: bearded, scroll. B: eunuch, board-book.

21. Drawing. Sennacherib. Condition good. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: 74, Pl. 143, No. 214a. Scribes both right-facing, with tunics. A: bearded, tablet(?). B: eunuch, scroll.

22. Wall-panel. Ashurbanipal, before 650 BC. BM 124802c. Condition: confused by plaster. Barnett *et al.* 1998: Pl. 312, No. 386c. An ambassador facing left holds a document containing a letter to Ashurbanipal from the king of Elam. It is oblong with lines across it, and a caption defines it as a wooden board-book (Streck 1916: II, 318).

23. Fig. 7. Wall-panel. Ashurbanipal, before 650 BC. BM 124801b. Condition good, but the Assyrians are missing from the waist up. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: Pl. 291, No. 381b. Figure 7. The Assyrians face each other in a tent across a pile of heads, at the moment that the enemy king's head is identified. The Assyrian facing right, wearing a tunic, may be a scribe, but if so he is exceptional in not having a pair.

24. Fig. 12. Wall-panel. Ashurbanipal. BM 124935. Condition fair. Barnett 1976: Pl. XXXV. Scribes both left-facing, with robes and shawls. A: eunuch, board-book. B: bearded, board-book.

25. Fig. 17. Wall-panel. Ashurbanipal. BM 124931. Condition good. Barnett 1976: Pl. XVII. Scribes both right-facing, with robes and shawls. A: eunuch, board-book(?). B: bearded, board-book(?). The board-books(?) are lifted like those in Figures 12–16, not held flat like tablets, but no bindings are represented.

26. Fig. 3. Drawing. Ashurbanipal. Condition fair. Barnett 1976: 59, Pl. LXVII. Scribes both right-facing, with robes and shawls. A: eunuch, board-book. B: bearded, board-book(?).

27. Drawing. Ashurbanipal. Condition very poor. Barnett 1976: Pl. LX. Scribes both right-facing, with robes. Identified as scribes through their place in the composition.

28. Fig. 13. Wall-panel ascribed to Ashurbanipal, North Palace. Glasgow, Burrell Collection, 28.33. Good condition, but scribes are secondary, carved on to a Babylonian narrative scene, and are missing below the waist. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: 84, Pl. 222, No. 303. Scribes both right-facing. A: eunuch, board-book. B: bearded, board-book. The presence of two board-books is a strong reason for the ascription; the style also fits, and there are several examples of recarving on North Palace wall-panels.

29. Wall-panel. Ascribed to Sinsharrishkun. BM 124782a. Condition good. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: Pls 193, 195, No. 277a-b. Cat. 29–31 were contemporary, all belonging to a single series of compositions. Scribes both right-facing, with tunics. Right. A: bearded, board-book. B: eunuch, scroll.

30. Drawing. Ascribed to Sinsharrishkun. Condition fair, but scribes only recorded from waist down. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: 82, Pl. 198, No. 278a. See Cat. 29. Scribes both left-facing, with tunics. Identified as scribes through their place in the composition.

31. Fig. 14. Wall-panel. Ascribed to Sinsharrishkun. BM 124825b. Condition good. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: 82, Pls 208f., 213, No. 283a-b. See Cat. 29. Scribes both right-facing, with tunics. A: bearded, board-book. B: eunuch, scroll.

32. Drawing and fragmentary wall-panel. Ascribed to Sinsharrishkun. BM 124774e. Condition unclear. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: 89, Pls 244f., No. 342a. Cat. 32–35 are contemporary, Cat 32 and 33 being in different rows of one composition on one side of a corridor, and Cat. 34 and 35 in different rows of a similar composition on the opposite wall. Scribes both left-facing, with tunics and armour. A: eunuch, presumably scroll. B: bearded, board-book.

33. Wall-panel. Ascribed to Sinsharrishkun. BM 124774e. Condition good. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: 89, Pls 244f., No. 342a-b. See Cat. 32. Scribes both left-facing, with tunics and armour. A: bearded, board-book. B: eunuch, scroll.

34. Fig. 15. Wall-panel. Ascribed to Sinsharrishkun. BM 124955. Condition good. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: 89, Pls 252–254, 256, No. 346a-c. See Cat. 32. Scribes both left-facing, with tunics and armour. A: eunuch, scroll. B: bearded, board-book.

35. Fig. 16. Wall-panel. Ascribed to Sinsharrishkun. BM 124956. Condition good. Barnett *et Al.* 1998: 90, Pls 252–255, No. 347a-c. See Cat. 32. Scribes both left-facing, with tunics and armour. A: eunuch, board-book. B: bearded, scroll.

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