Eagle-headed Apkallu
Assyrian

Assyrian, Neo-Assyrian period, 883-859 BC
Gypsum, relief: 42 1/8 x 26 x 1 1/2 in. (107 x 66 x 3.8 cm)
width of stone and backing material: 2 5/8 in (6.7 cm)

Museum purchase funded by Agnes Cullen Arnold Endowment Fund

The Annals of Assyrian Kings relate "Protecting colossal figures of stone which by their appearance ward off evil, guarding the footfall, protecting the path of the king their maker, I place to the right and left of the thresholds." Such protective spirits carrying a cone and bucket often appeared as guardians of gateways, royal bedrooms, throne rooms, and other areas of palaces.

These winged figures can have human or eagle heads and are called apkallu, ancient mythical creatures of wisdom. They are often engaged in the act of fertilizing the sacred tree, which symbolizes the king, the chief god Ashur, and the fertility of the land.

The inscription at the top of this panel is one which occurs repeatedly on the panels of the palace of Assurnasirpal II, proclaiming him as the Great King, ruler of the World: "I placed doors of cedar, cypress, dapranu and meskannu in its doorways. I took in great quantities of put therein silver, gold, tin, bronze, iron and booty from the countries over which I gained dominion." (translation by Andre F. Conradie)

Online Resources:
Hirsch Library Online Catalog
The Metropolitan Museum of Art Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Articles: (full-text access available on-site; off-site access available through your school library or Houston Public Library)

Print Resources:
The Assyrians and the Babylonians
The Ancient Near East
Cultures in Contact
Assyrian Palace Sculptures
Civilizations of Ancient Iraq
Bibliography

General Surveys of Near Eastern Art


Near Eastern Art


Assyrian Art


Mesopotamia


This reference guide is just the tip of the iceberg on helpful resources in the library’s holdings. Many of the suggested resources above have their own bibliographies. Each of these may lead you to another resource that would also be helpful in your research here in the museum or in another library. To find additional resources, use keywords such as “Near East” and “Assyrian” in the online catalog and in periodical indexes. Once you find a few relevant titles, pay attention to the subject headings to identify similar materials. Examples of useful subject headings are:

Middle East--Antiquities
Middle East--Religion
Mythology, Oriental
Art, Ancient--Middle East

For guidelines about writing it may be helpful to look at Sylvan Barnet’s *A Short Guide to Writing about Art*, which includes tips for looking, reading, and writing about art. Ask for it at the reference desk. At every stage of your work, please allow the library staff to help you. Contact us at 713-639-7325 or hirsch@mfah.org