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### **Assyrian (Winged Genius)**

The sculpture (relief), the Relief with Winged Genius, was created by an unknown artist in the Assyrian Empire, between 883-859 BC. During the Neo-Assyrian time period, this was created out of alabaster. The Relief with Winged Genius is arguably one of the most important sculptures that existed in the Assyrian Empire. It was said to have guarded the king, and therefore has a great deal of symbolic importance.

The style is neither completely naturalist nor abstract, because the elements of abstraction exist in this overall naturalistic piece. It is a human-like representation of a figure. The details of the muscular arms, horns headdress, and wings are key examples of how this figure is portrayed in a naturalistic way. Overall, the figure is depicted with great attention to detail, although the figure is very two-dimensional considering it is also shown in a geometric perspective similar to other wall reliefs and paintings during this time period.

The texture is very intricate, with many of the details shown with great clarity. For example, the wings have three dimensional qualities like other aspects of the relief, but not nearly as much of this quality compared to the arms and legs. In this sense, the relief begins to take upon depth. The figure also makes good usage of diagonal lines, as

they guide the eye through the composition. Symmetry exists between the wings and the arms, and this creates an x-shape that provides a balance. The head and the legs of the relief are clearly the only two shapes that show direction in to the right side of the composition.

The sculpture is a stone relief, which is divided into four equal parts. While keeping in mind the obvious damage to the piece, each part was most likely carved individually, and then later placed into its final holding container with the entire piece. These four stone slabs would easily be able to slide in and out if it were not for the incredible weight that each of them carries. At first glance, this piece looks to be holding itself together based on its construction.

The object's original purpose was to be a symbol of protection. A superstition is associated with the Relief with Winged Genius. It served as a protectorate to the Assyrian Kings, and was most likely arranged near a doorway like a guard. Specifically, the Relief with Winged Genius is said to be a protectorate of King Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud. Located in what is now present-day Iraq, the Winged Genius would have a spiritual role to play, as a significant icon of the Assyrian culture.

First of all, the Assyrian holds a basket in his left hand and sprinkles a potion from a cone in his right hand. This would have either been for a tree or an Assyrian King. This spiritual aspect is very important to the ancient Assyrian culture. Second, the wings that the figure has may indicate speed or power. The strength of this warrior would be

important for a protectorate. Third, the horned headdress, and possibly the wings, could be a symbol of the fact that this is a divine figure.

The Wing Genius is in a solid, upright pose. It has bulging muscles of the arms and the legs. An overall projection of strength is shown by the visual representation of a protectorate. Other than the large and apparent details, small often overlooked details are also shown. A horse figure, perhaps the handle of a knife, is next to two other knife-like objects that are on the figure's belt. Finally, a manuscript is written all along the second from the bottom slab. This manuscript is said to detail the story behind this relief sculpture.

As said before, the original purpose of this piece was to serve as a protectorate to royalty in Ancient Assyria. It was believed to have the spiritual ability to defend the ancient kings from evil or danger. Visually, the Relief with Winged Genius is easily showing the traditions of the Assyrian culture. For example, just by simply glancing, the viewer is able to understand a basic representation of the traditional clothing of the fallen civilization.

This piece of ancient artwork shows what a different light, and possibly one of the first easily understandable representations of the Assyrian cultures. The Relief with Winged Genius succeeds at the showing what typical Assyrian philosophies were like, and therefore adequately has shown an ancient civilization, like the Assyrians.

## **Work Cited**

- <http://art.thewalters.org/viewwoa.aspx?id=32526>
- Art History: Volume 1, by: Marilyn Stokstad.

