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The Role of Rituals in Warfare during the Neo-Assyrian Period

Sarah C. Melville*
Clarkson University, New York, USA

Abstract

In imperial Assyria during the first millennium BCE, ritual pervaded every aspect of life. As the link between the divine realm and the earthly one, the king's primary duty was to discover the gods' will and enact it. To this end, an array of ritual experts in the art of reading and reacting to divine signs aided the king. Due to the risk involved, warfare required particular attention from the experts during every phase of operations. Based on evidence from cuneiform sources (ritual texts, royal inscriptions, and letters) and monumental art (narrative sculptured reliefs), this article focuses on how ritual activity at each campaign stage affected different audiences, including the enemy, the king's officials, and the Assyrian army.

Introduction: Warfare as a Ritual Activity

Like many other cultures, those of the ancient Near East turned to myth and religion to come to terms with the violent contradictions inherent in war, which brought benefit to some and disaster to others, according to the will of the gods. On the positive side, the creation myth, *Enuma Elish*, taught that the god, Marduk, established order over chaos by killing the primordial monster, Tiamat, in combat (Foster 2005, pp. 436–86; Noegel 2007). By contrast, *Erra and Ishum*, the story of an angry god run amuck, warned against waging war without restraint or a just cause (Foster 2005, pp. 880–913; George 2013). Despite the ambivalent attitude to war, no one seriously questioned its necessity. Rather, the ancients reasoned that when a mortal king waged war correctly and for legitimate reasons, he did so on behalf of his gods in order to defend cosmic order. Nor did people distinguish between the sacred and profane as we do. They believed in a single reality in which political action and religious action coalesced. Hence, the prevailing understanding of the cosmos, coupled with associated royal ideology, justified and gave meaning to all the king's political activities, especially warfare.

At the height of their power from the 9th to the 7th centuries BCE, the Assyrians held similarly that a divinely appointed king, the 'viceroy of Ashur', acted as the intermediary between the cosmic realm and the earthly one, which encompassed both civilized lands under Assyrian sovereignty and dangerous enemy regions that awaited pacification. The king's duty was to enact the gods' will on earth through conquest and just administration. The gods communicated their bidding to him through celestial omina and all kinds of physical signs, whose meaning was revealed to trained professionals through ritual observation and interpretation of the appropriate scholarly compendia (Rochberg 2004, pp. 44–97). For his part, the king fulfilled the divine instructions obtained through divination by maintaining cults and temples, performing rituals, and by waging war. According to this system of thought, victory signaled the gods' approval; setbacks withdrawal of support. Thus imbued with cosmic significance, war became – in the broadest sense – a ritualized activity, an 'ordalic procedure' through which

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the king and his army served the gods (Liverani 1990, 2002; Sallaberger 2005; Noegel 2007; Rivaroli 2015). Indeed, by this way of thinking, royal inscriptions and narrative art that highlighted the king's accomplishments also served a mantic purpose (Liverani 2014; Levtow 2014, pp. 27–34). While acknowledging the validity of these views in general, this article defines military ritual more narrowly as an activity whose meaning and outcome depend upon the enactment of traditional scripted utterances and prescribed actions at particular times and places (Watts 2009; Noegel 2010).[1] Though certainly symbolic, actions carried out in the heat of battle, such as soldiers' looting of temples, destruction of statues, or killings, did not normally constitute ritual as defined here. Likewise, common soldiers' personal rituals, of which there is little evidence, do not fall within the scope of this paper, which concentrates on official rites involving the king.

That is not to suggest that the king's ritual activities did not affect the army. On the contrary, royal rituals played an important social role and had the power to transform the violence of war into something meaningful and positive. On one level, war rituals served as rites of passage that marked the various stages of soldiers' experience and so mitigated the threat to social order created when they took up arms, left orderly civilized life, went to war, and eventually returned (for rites of passage, see van Gennep 1961; Ambos 2013, pp. 40–41). Apart from the politico-religious implications of war rituals (e.g., Talon 1993; Fales & Lanfranchi 1997; Pongratz-Leisten 1997; Holloway 2002; Porter 2005; Fales 2010; Lenzi & Stökl 2014), this article explores their impact on the Assyrian military, demonstrating that ritual gave meaning to soldiers' actions, justified their behavior, and subdued fears, while concurrently reinforcing the army's relationship with civilians and the state.

In order to ensure success and his soldiers' support, the Assyrian king consulted diviners and performed rituals during every stage of a campaign, from planning and muster to public punishment of the vanquished and celebration of victory. A large number of experts, including the celestial diviner (*ṭupšar Enūma Anu Enlil*), extispicy priest (*barû*), exorcist (*āšipu*), lamentation priest (*kalû*), or, less frequently, prophet/prophetess (*maḫḫu/maḫḫūtu*, *raggimu/ragintu*), contributed their services (Rochberg 2004, pp. 44–97). Of these, the ecstatic prophet, who did not belong to the palace hierarchy, had least to do with military matters. Celestial observation and extispicy remained the most common forms of divination during the period in question; the former because it could reveal signs pertaining to any part of the vast empire, and the latter because it could be performed at will and did not depend on the observation of periodic natural phenomena (Starr 1990, pp. xxx–xxxv; Leichty 1997). In this way, extispicy often served to confirm the findings of other types of divination. Incantation and lamentation priests, by contrast, performed rituals in response to the diviners' interpretation of ominous signs, or to other problems, such as the king's illness (Koch 2011, pp. 456–66; Schwemer 2011).

Despite the Assyrians' dependence on war-rituals, few exemplars have come down to us (Elat 1982; van Dijk 1973; Mayer 1988; Mayer 2001; Schwemer 2007; Schwemer 2012), possibly because they were considered secret, written on perishable material such as leather to facilitate transportation on campaign, or committed to memory for the same reasons (Jean 2013). Some peacetime rituals could be adapted to wartime (or vice-versa), as in the case of a tablet from Nineveh that recorded a ritual in two sections; one to protect the king on campaign and another, with slightly different wording, to protect the general traveler (Schwemer 2012). References in royal inscriptions and letters, as well as depictions on sculptured narrative reliefs, further enhance our knowledge of war-related rituals. In general, they fit into several categories: divinatory; apotropaic; purification; thanksgiving, and celebratory. These categories do not correspond temporally to the different stages of the campaign; rather, rituals were performed whenever circumstances called for intervention. Each type required the expertise of different practitioners, although there appears to have been considerable overlap, since experts often

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worked together (Scurlock 1999). The following gives a brief but by no means comprehensive overview of the types of war-related rituals that the Assyrians performed.

Divination

Before undertaking any important activity, especially one as dangerous as warfare, the king took care to confirm the gods' support and receive their instructions about how to proceed. In the royal inscriptions, when a king claimed to campaign 'at the command of Ashur' or by the gods' 'firm consent', he alluded to this practice (e.g., Grayson and Novotny 2012–2014, p. 223.3; Leichty 2011, p. 1.i.53; see also, Oded 1992). The bulk of war-related divinatory texts involve extispicy, although celestial observation could also have an impact on military operations (Nadali & Verderame 2014, p. 556). A large number of queries to the sun god, Shamash, have survived from the reigns of Esarhaddon (680–670 BCE) and Ashurbanipal (669–627 BCE) (Starr 1990). Those relating to war reveal royal concerns over enemy machinations as well as the potential for Assyrian success. Following the standard format, a typical military query began as follows:

> Shamash, great lord, [give me] a firm positive answer to what I am asking you!
> Should Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, strive and plan? Should he [send] Nab[u-sharru-uṣur, chief eunuch, with] men, horses and [troops], as he [wishes], to the district of Gam[bulu? Should they go] to kill, lo[ot, and plunder]? If he, having planned, sends (them) [and they kill what there is to kill, loo]t what there is to loot, and [plunder] what there is to plunder [in] the district of [Gambulu], will the men, hor[ses] (and) ar[my of Gambulu do] battle [with the Nabu-sharru-uṣur, chief eunuch, and] the arm[y of] Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, that went with him? [Or] will the men and large army [of the Elamites…with] Nabu-sharru-uṣur, chief eunuch, to […]? (trans., Starr 1990, #271)

Similar queries addressed enemy military plans, the probability of attack, or the best way to capture an enemy city (Starr 1990; Eph'al 1997). To ensure a correct result, extispicy could be repeated up to three times on a single occasion. If the omens remained negative, then the client had to wait for a more propitious time before asking again. The divine mandate to campaign provided the justification needed to assure soldiers that the risk and killing involved were necessary. However, securing the gods' approbation was just the beginning.

Rituals performed at the army's muster and before it crossed into enemy territory also helped soldiers transition mentally from the constraints of peacetime living, with its prohibition against killing, to the physical demands and moral license of wartime (Mayer 2001; Kelle 2014). The administration of loyalty oaths and the king's formal review of the troops helped to give soldiers a sense of purpose that, in turn, created some sense of corporate identity. That rituals involved 'secret knowledge' probably heightened their effect (Fuchs 2011, p. 386). Moreover, pre-campaign rituals involving the army often signaled opponents' intentions and thus fulfilled the (unwritten) 'rules' of warfare that proscribed surprise attack. For these reasons, Assyrian officials on the empire's periphery regularly reported enemy troop-gathering, movement, and religious behavior. One such brief informs the Assyrian king, Sargon II (721–505): 'The Mannean (king) has attacked the Urartian towns in the territory by the lake shore but has shifted (position). Abaliuqunu, the governor of Muṣaṣir, and Tunbaun, the governor of Kar-Sipar[ri] have gone to the border of Mannea to keep watch. The Urartian (king) is in Turushpa making his sacrifices. All the governors are in his presence' (Lanfranchi & Parpola 1990, #84). Just as the Assyrians understood their enemy's ritual actions in political terms, so others would have interpreted those of the Assyrians. In this way, ritual preparation for war played an important strategic role for both sides. Once an army crossed into enemy territory, it fell to the king and

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the experts, who accompanied him on campaign, to maintain the gods' support and the army's fighting effectiveness throughout operations.

A famous example of on-the-go prognostication appears in Sargon II's *Letter to Ashur*, a literary account of his war with the Urarṭian king, Rusa, in 714 (Thureau-Dangin 1912). After defeating Rusa in battle at Mt. Uaush, Sargon invaded Urarṭu, which he proceeded to loot. Instead of going straight back to Assyria afterward, however, Sargon opted to send his main force home, while he and 1000 volunteers made a diversion to punish his recalcitrant client, Urzana of Muṣaṣir. In order to justify the change in plan, which not only put the king in danger but also involved plundering an important cult center and seizing divine statues, Sargon called upon his experts. According to the rather enigmatic description in the *Letter to Ashur*, a timely lunar eclipse, extispicy, and an unspecified affirmative sign (*tukultu*) from the god Ashur offered unequivocal support for the king's proposal:

> …from of old the Enlil of the gods, Marduk, bestowed the gods of heaven and the netherworld and the four corners of the earth, that they ever, without ceasing, honor him (Ashur) above all others, and that he (Ashur) bring them into Ehursaggalkurkurra (his temple) with their accumulated treasures, and at the sublime command of Nabu and Marduk, who had taken the course in the constellations favorable to my attack, and, furthermore, at a favorable sign for conquest – the moon, lord of the tiara, prolonged (an eclipse) for (more than one?) watch – auguring the fall of Gutium (the enemy), and at the precious assent of Shamash, the warrior who caused an unambiguous omen to be inscribed for me on the liver (of a sacrificial animal), portending that he would go at my side. I took the difficult road to Muṣaṣir. (Thureau–Dangin 1912, ln. 314–321; trans. Foster 2005, p. 807)

A mark of the questionable wisdom of Sargon's abrupt change in plan is that he called upon three different experts to secure the support of four of the highest-ranking gods: Ashur, Marduk, Nabu, and Shamash. After a long, grueling campaign and with winter coming on (the eclipse occurred in late October), the army may not have greeted the king's new course with enthusiasm (Oppenheim 1960). What better way to boost morale and encourage acquiescence than to demonstrate decisively that the gods approved? Beyond its obvious political utility, divination helped the king and his officers maintain control over the troops and keep up morale. When the signs were unambiguously negative or danger imminent, however, it fell to other practitioners to secure safety and success.

Protecting the King and his Army

Any type of evil portent or unpropitious event required a ritual response to mitigate its effects. Even when nothing bad threatened, it was necessary to placate the gods through rituals. Usually, this involved an incantation priest (*āšipu*) (Jean 2006, pp. 111–138) or a lamentation priest (*kalû*) (Löhnert 2011). These officials mastered a large variety of multi-tablet ritual series, most of which are known to us only by title. Nevertheless, relatively few purification rituals appear to have involved military matters (Schwemer 2011, p. 422). A fragmentary letter from Ashurbanipal to a Babylonian official lists some of the war rituals that existed. In the letter, the king asks specifically for Babylonian ritual texts, including 'Mustering, (those) series to do with war, as many as there are, as well as their additional tablets, as many as there are, (and the ritual) So that in Battle Arrows do not Come Near a Man' (Frame & George 2005, p. 281). Prophylactic rituals not only protected the king, but also the instrument of his will, the army. As their leader, the Assyrian king was responsible for supporting his troops throughout the campaign, which he did through material means (food, water, and equipment), leadership, and ritual performance

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that kept the gods on the Assyrian side. It stands to reason, therefore, that rituals played a key role in helping the army achieve battle readiness, good morale, and cohesion.

The different divisions of the army marched under the auspices of the most important gods, including Adad, Nergal, and Ishtar. Each god was depicted on a standard (*urigallu*) affixed to a chariot that would lead the men into battle (Pongratz-Leisten *et al.* 1992). Tradition associated particular regiments with certain gods, as in the case of the royal cavalry guard and the Arbela city unit, whose patron was Ishtar of Arbela (Dalley & Postgate 1983, p. 40). In royal inscriptions, when the king made statements such as 'I prepared the yoke of Nergal and Adad, whose standards march ahead of me' (Thureau-Dangin 1912, ln. 14), he not only referred literally to divine standards, but thereby imbued the men who marched behind those emblems with the gods' power. Several sculpted reliefs from Neo-Assyrian palaces show rituals being enacted in military camps in front of standards or the king's chariot, although it is not always clear whether they were performed before or after contact with the enemy (Reade 2005). Nor is it possible to determine to what extent common soldiers participated in the rituals involving the divine standard. Even if most rites were conducted in private outside the soldiers' view, ritual enactment emphasized the rightness of the venture, which in turn would have had a salutary effect on morale.

Before going into a battle, kings 'activated the divine weapon' ritually (Capomacchia & Rivaroli 2014, pp. 176–77). But such were the vicissitudes of war that sometimes circumstances curtailed proper preparation. Since to enter battle ritually unprepared put the army in extreme danger, kings took the risk only in an emergency. On the rare occasions that royal inscriptions allude to such events, they do so obliquely by omitting normal references to divine support and emphasizing heroic haste instead: 'I did not allow the troops of Assyria to rest, did not give (them) water to drink, (and) did not pitch camp nor bivouac my soldiers (allowing them to recover from) their weariness' (Tadmor & Yamada 2011, 35. i.27'b. For similar examples, see Thureau-Dangin 1912, ln. 127–128; Grayson and Novotny 2012–2014, 1.19–20). With no camp or proper ritual venue and limited time, the diviners could only have performed a quick pre-battle extispicy, if any at all. Whether condoned by the gods or not, the blood-taint that combat imposed on the king and his army required ritual purification followed by thanksgiving.

Purification and Thanksgiving

Although the Assyrians did not shy away from violence, which they regarded as both necessary and justified, they did recognize that it had to be controlled. Like most ancient societies, the Assyrians believed that those who committed violent acts had to cleanse themselves in order to reintegrate into peacetime society (Oded 1992, p. 15; Kelle 2014, p. 223). Cleansing rituals not only helped soldiers refocus after the adrenalin rush and chaos of combat but also facilitated their leaders' efforts to reestablish authority over them. Alhough battle could push soldiers to extremes, sieges often had an even worse effect. A combination of horrible field conditions (bad food and water, outbreaks of disease, and unburied bodies,) and the nature of combat (frontal assaults on fortifications) often resulted in excessive violence. In order to re-impose order after such events, military leaders sometimes shifted focus to acts of piety. Immediately after recounting how he impaled enemy soldiers at the siege of Harhar, for example, Sargon II's Najafehabad inscription details how he rebuilt the city's temples and refurbished its gods' statues (Levine 1972, ln 43–44; Albenda 1986, pl. 112). The group impalement may have required a redemptive religious response, although the need to pacify the survivors no doubt also motivated the decision.

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Most of the time, however, post-battle purification appears to have been subsumed in wider victory and thanksgiving celebrations (as opposed to apotropaic purification rites such as *bīt rimki*, for which see, Ambos 2012, 2013). Despite the fact that neither surviving war-ritual texts nor royal inscriptions allude to post-battle purification rites *per se*, they certainly occurred over the course of a campaign (Van Dijk 1973; Mayer 2001). In his Annals, Ashurnasirpal II mentions washing his weapons in the Mediterranean after conquering coastal Phoenician cities (Grayson 1991, part 1: 298, ln. 16–17). Shalmaneser III performed a similar weapon-washing rite in Lake Urmia during a campaign (Grayson 1991, part 2: 9, ln. 34; for additional examples, see Kelle 2014, p. 223, n. 55). Thanksgiving rituals could also be held in camp, as in the case of Sargon's return from the battle of Mt. Uaush:

> I entered into my camp with joy and exultation, with players on lyres and flutes. To Nergal, Adad, Ishtar, lords of battle, to the gods who dwell in heaven and the netherworld, and to the gods who dwell in Assyria, I offered splendid sacred sacrifices. I stood before them in prayer and supplication and praised their divinity (Thureau-Dangin 1912, ln. 156–163).

This passage from the *Letter to Ashur* probably refers to the same ceremony described in a cultic commentary text (Deller 1992). The commentary gives instructions for a ritual in which the king symbolically defeats his enemy with the aid of the very gods Sargon mentions: Nergal, Adad, and Belet-dunani, the warrior aspect of Ishtar. Natalie May has argued convincingly that the same post-battle ritual is depicted in the palace reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III. During the course of this elaborate multi-part rite, officials make sacrifices and ride the sacred chariot, the king does pseudo-combat with his bow and arrows while driving his own chariot, and officials perform a 'ritual voodoo-like shooting of an enemy or his image' as onlookers and participants shout, sing, and chant the appropriate incantations. After that, the king symbolically captures his enemy, the group raises shields, and priests make additional sacrifices (Gaspa 2012). Finally, the entire party enjoys a celebratory meal in a temporary sanctuary (May 2010; May 2012, pp. 462–63). Reliefs from the palace of Tiglath-pileser III (745–727) depict priests dressed in lion skins and enacting what was probably a similar victory ritual (Reade 2005, Figs. 18–19).

Celebration in the Field

Celebratory war rituals often involved vaunting over battle trophies, including the severed heads of enemies (Bahrani 2005; Dolce 2014). They may sometimes have entailed execution, as in the case of Sargon's flaying of Bagdatti, ruler of Uishdish, in retaliation for the latter's earlier murder of an Assyrian client (Fuchs 1994, An. 83, Prunk. 49). The flaying may also have represented Marduk's triumph over Tiamat, and thus the king's symbolic restoration of cosmic order (Noegel 2007). Similar rites performed in the field could include the subjugation and humiliation of prisoners, the parading of divine statues removed from enemy temples, and the counting of spoils and trophies, such as heads or hands (May 2010, p. 448). The erection of a royal stele at the new boundary of the empire not only marked the successful conclusion of a campaign, but the king's success in extending the limits of the ordered world (Capomacchia & Rivaroli, 2014, p. 179). All of these activities and their associated rites placed recent events in their proper ideological context, thereby reinforcing military identity and soldiers' confidence in the righteousness of their cause. Once back within the ordered confines of the civilized world (the Assyrian heartland), rituals entered a new, more elaborate phase.

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Triumphant Return

The final phase of a campaign, and one of the most important, was the army's return to Assyria. Just as ritual marked the king's entry into camp after battle, it informed his homecoming. A sacrally charged liminal period, the journey also marked the reintegration of the combatants into everyday life. The long march home transporting booty and prisoners through Assyrian territory gave the soldiers time to reorient themselves from the horrors of war to the normality of peace. In Assyria, the victory procession or triumph (*erāb āli*) was celebrated as part of the annual New Year (*akītu*) festival. Starting in Nineveh, the king, his scholars, the army, and their prisoners marched to Milqia and Arbela. The gods and people of those cities welcomed the king, who performed rituals at each stop. At the final destination in the sacred city, Ashur, the celebrants paraded the spoils before the eponymous god (Pongratz-Leisten 1997; Weissert 1997; May 2012; Nadali 2013). After particularly momentous campaigns, celebrations may have entailed the composition of a letter addressed to a god or gods, such as Sargon's *Letter to Ashur* written to commemorate his victory over Urartu in 714. Fragmentary letters of Shalmaneser IV and Esarhaddon have also been found. Some scholars argue that such texts were read or recited aloud in public before being dedicated at the appropriate temple, although this theory remains controversial (Oppenheim 1960, p. 145; Pongratz-Leisten 2013, pp. 293–301).

The celebration of military accomplishments as part of the *akītu*, arguably the most important festival of the year, reveals how completely integrated war, politics, royal ideology, and religion were in Assyria. By making the triumph a prolonged, multi-event process, parts of which took place in public, the king proved his legitimacy and battle prowess to the gods. In this way, he also invited his subjects to appreciate divine support of their king and army. Victory songs chanted en mass to accompanying music not only proved cathartic but also confirmed the rightness of what had occurred (Tadmor 2004; Smith 2014). During this phase, the king ritually punished high-ranking prisoners. The execution or debasement of defeated leaders primarily emphasized the might of the Assyrian king and gods by demonstrating the consequences of resistance (Noegel 2007; Bahrani 2008; Niditch 2014). For soldiers, such acts had a secondary effect and served as public redress for their own suffering. After one campaign, for example, Esarhaddon beheaded the rulers he had captured and then 'in order to show the people the power of the god Ashur, my lord, hung (the heads) around the necks of their nobles and, with musician and lyre, paraded (them) through the streets of Nineveh' (Leichty 2011, 1.iii.36–39). Likewise, Ashurbanipal displayed the severed head of the Elamite king, Teuman, at Nineveh, where it became the ritual symbol of triumph, and eventually an ornamental trophy in the king's garden (Bahrani 2005; Dolce 2005: Capomacchia & Rivaroli 2014). As with victory rituals that took place in the field, those in Assyria culminated in a banquet at which the king and his highest officials dined in high style (Reade 2005, pp. 25–27, Ermidoro 2015). Rewards for success and compensation for loss promoted a good relationship between the gods, the king, elites, soldiers, and civilians.

As another part of the post-campaign activities, the king distributed the spoils among the temples, the magnates, and members of the royal family. Under certain circumstances, perhaps to reward outstanding bravery or compensate the relatives of the dead, regular soldiers and citizens received a share (e.g., Tadmor & Yamada 2011, 12.6'b; Leichty 2011, 33.iii.14'). One letter from the time of Sargon II instructs an official to 'send to me [the names] of the [sol]diers killed and their [sons and d]aughters' and find 'all the widows, record them and decide (their status) and send them to me' (Parpola 1987, #21). The Assyrians also had to deal with the problem of unburied war dead. All Near Eastern societies took special care over proper burial of the dead, believing that, if neglected, the spirit of the dead person would wander, desolate,

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thirsty, and hungry forever. Inevitably, however, not all campaign casualties could receive the required obsequies. In order to effect a symbolic burial, the Assyrians performed rituals possibly related to tablet 12 of the Epic of Gilgamesh (George 2003, pp. 52–4; Frahm 2005; Ambos 2005; Radner, 2011, pp. 43–44). Exactly when this occurred in relation to the triumph remains uncertain.

Conclusion

As one of the most important of royal activities – one whose outcome affected not only the citizens of Assyria but also the balance of cosmic order itself – warfare required the attention of experts during every stage. There remains much uncertainty about specific war-rituals, who participated in them, their frequency, and how regimented they were. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Assyrian king played the focal role, and that the same pattern of ritual activity involving prognostication, protection, purification, thanksgiving, punishment, and celebration stayed fairly constant throughout the Neo-Assyrian period. In order to respond effectively to circumstances, the enactment of war-rituals, like military strategy itself, required flexibility. War-rituals resonated on several different planes, among numerous participants, and with various audiences, all of which interacted. On a cosmic level, they facilitated communication between men and gods, while from the king's point of view they legitimized his political actions and proved his competence to rule. Finally, war rituals benefited soldiers by giving meaning to their actions and aiding their transitions to and from the battleground. Despite the ambiguity and scarcity of the evidence, it seems that war rituals fit seamlessly into the standard ritual canon. In other words, the only thing that marks them as different from other divinatory, apotropaic, or celebratory rites is the specialized context – war – in which they were enacted. Necessary to cosmic and earthly order, war had greater significance than almost any other human activity.

Short Biography

Sarah Melville is an Associate Professor of History at Clarkson University. She received her Ph. D. in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Yale University and has published articles on Neo-Assyrian military history, imperialism and royal women. Her books include The Campaigns of Sargon II, King of Assyria, 721-705 B.C. (Oklahoma, 2016), and The Role of Naqi'a/Zakutu in Sargonid Politics (Helsinki, 1999).

Notes

* Correspondence address: Sarah C. Melville, Box 5750, Clarkson University, Potsdam NY 13699. E-mail: Melville@clarkson.edu

[1] In the vast scholarly literature on ritual, definitions remain as hotly contested as theoretical approaches are numerous. See, for example, Smith (1987), Bell (1992), Snoek (2008) and Seligman *et al.* (2008).

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