

## **“The Symbolic Meaning for Divinity concept and Landscape Representation in “Victory Stele of Naram-Sin”**

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### **The Victory Stele of Naram-Sin:**



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Louvre museum, Paris

**The Abstract:**

The current paper presents an artistic analysis based on the visual features for one of the most significant stone memorial Stele of "Naram-Sin". The Victory Stele was created to commemorate Naram-Sin's victory over Satuni king of 'Lullubi', a nomadic tribe. The paper discusses the importance of the Stele as an important historical record in terms of artistic features where the artist deliberately depicts landscape as well as the embodiment of the victorious Akkadian king.

It is known that the representation of the concept of divinity differed from civilization to another, but the paper highlights the way in which Akkadian artist expresses the concept of the power of divinity and its relation to the power of kingship in the memorial Stele of King Naram-Sin.

The current paper investigates the distinctive and fundamental role of the artistic elements of the divinity power collaborating with the royal one, in the victory over the enemies. This is reflected in many artistic manifestations that illustrate the concept of divinity in an important reference from the artist to its importance of this belief in political and military life, which was also associated with the appearance and the body of the king and his performance. All the artistic manifestations reflect the role of the goddess' blessing for the victorious king "Naram Sin".

The paper also analyzes the methodology of the Acadian artist in illustrating the nature. It is clear how the artist portrays the details of the nature and its vocabulary, which replaced any built environments or architectural details that may distinguish the battle location. These landscape details were useful in analyzing the nature of the geographical features of the city. The present paper stresses the importance of analysis of the memorial Stele, as the era of the time was the most important beginnings to portray the landscape in the Akkadian art.

**Keywords:**

Akkadian art – representation the Divinity concept - Victory Stele - Naram-Sin

**المخلص:**

تتناول الورقة البحثية المقدمة تحليل أهم المظاهر الفنية القائمة على التحليل الوصفي للوحة الحجرية التي تسجل انتصار الملك الأكادي "نارام سن" على ملك قبائل بدو "اللؤلوبي". حيث تناقش الورقة أهمية اللوحة كسجل تاريخي هام مميز من حيث الملامح الفنية التي تعتمد المصور ان يصور بها الطبيعة و كذلك تجسيد الملك الأكادي المنتصر.

من المعلوم انه قد اختلف تصوير مبدأ الألوهية من حضارة لأخرى ،الا ان الورقة المقدمة تبرز طريقة تعبير التصوير الأكادي عن مفهوم قوة الألوهية وعلاقتها بقوة الملكية في اللوحة التذكارية للملك " نارام سن " . و تحقق الورقة البحثية في الدور المميز و الأساسي للعناصر الفنية للألوهية الملكية في احلال النصر على الاعداء . و يتجلى ذلك في العديد من المظاهر الفنية التي توضح مبدأ الألوهية التي تعتمد المصور ان يظهرها و يوسم بها الملك المنتصر في اشارة هامة من الفنان لأهمية دور العقيدة في الحياة السياسية و الحربية و التي ارتبطت بمظهر و هيئة الملك و أدأؤه ، حيث تمت الاشارة بأكثر من احياء و مظهر فني لدور و مباركة الالهة للملك المنتصر "نارام سن".

كما تحلل الورقة البحثية منهجية و اسلوب الفنان الأكادي في تصوير الطبيعة . و تتضح كيفية اعتناء المصور بتصوير تفاصيل الطبيعة ومفرداتها و التي حلت محل اية تفاصيل معمارية المعركة مما يساعد على تحليل طبيعة المعالم الجغرافية للمدينة محل الموقعة الحربية. و تؤكد الورقة البحثية على أهمية تحليل اللوحة التذكارية باعتبار ان الحقبة الزمنية المواكبة هي من اهم البدايات لتصوير اللاند سكيب في الفن الأكادي .

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الفن الأكادي – الملك نارام سن – اللوحات التذكارية – تصاوير الالهة

## Visual Description :

The **Victory Stele of Naram-Sin** is dated to around 2250 BC. The stele measures 6 feet 7 inches high. It was carved in pink limestone <sup>1</sup>. The Stele is considered one of the extremely important evidences in the history of ancient Mesopotamia that commemorate the victory of the king Naram Sin over his enemies. Moreover, the importance of the Stele comes from being an important visual evidence for portraying the divinized nature of king Naram-Sin, the 4<sup>th</sup> Akkadian King.

## Historical Information :

Originally, the stele was erected in Sippar city, north to Babylon, yet it was found in 1888 at Susa city in Iran, since it was looted by the Elamite king Shutruk Nahhunte in the 12th century .

The Victory Stele was created to commemorate Naram-Sin's victory over Satuni king of nomadic tribe area known as the Lullubi , located in Zagros Mountains, in western of Iran.

The Akkadian Empire was founded by Sargon, the first to unify Mesopotamia region in the late 24th century BC.and ruled by Naram-Sin, Sargon's grand-son, for thirty six years, between 2254 and 2218 BC) , Naram-Sin was the 4th King of the Semite Dynasty in the Akkadian Empire.

<sup>1</sup>See <https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/victory-stele-naram-sin>

The Akkadian Period witnessed the first territorial state in ancient Near Eastern history, with the entire Mesopotamian plain under the control of one central administration. It also introduced the Akkadian language to bureaucracy and royal inscriptions . (Nissen 1988, p. 165).

### **Visual Analysis :**

Naram-Sin is portrayed as the most important figure at the top-center of the Stele, crossing the steep slopes into enemy territory and defeating them in their homeland. Both his army and Lullub people are looking toward him. It is very clear muddle and weak are apparent in the enemy forces while the organized Akkadian army is defeating and throwing them from the mountain in western of Iran.

Naram-Sin is depicted wearing a bull-horned helmet, symbolizing his divine power, as he was deified during his lifetime. Many kings adopted divinity attributes in many historical cultures. Moreover, he is blessed with the Gods, that are illustrated as Sun\Stars in the top of the Stele.

It can be seen that the original inscription was written in primitive Akkadian cuneiform, however, King Shutruk-Nahhunte added his own inscription celebrating his victory and occupation of the city of Sippar.

### **The Aesthetical Analysis for the Artistic Features in the Stele:**

One trusts that the Stele is a unique depiction that illustrated an important battle in Akkadian History. The unknown artist succeeded in portraying the event with vast of details that helped to perceive the artwork. There are many remarkable points which deserve to be noted here:

First of them is that all the elements of the stele are ascending to the top of the Stele, including the King himself, towards the right top side where the sun/stars Gods are located, in a significant sign to the importance of the Gods' blessing and wellness , as we will discuss the sacredness and kingships later. It can be observed that the direction of their standing, as their chests are in face, while heads toward left side, moreover, Naram-Sin left leg is preceding the right one, which recalls to our minds the Egyptian Narmer Stele ( fig 2).

The second point is the significant symbolic illustration of the trees and landscape , since the scene is lacking of architecture features which are usually help in analyzing the city features and in recognizing the validity of the event. However, in this case the landscape and the nature replaced thiese missing architectural features .

One argues that the Stele design was much elaborated and well prepared , it is very distinctive rather other historical art objects, such as “Stele of Vultures “<sup>2</sup> as seen in details in both (fig 3,4) , where landscape elements are absent.

Helen Kantor in her “ Landscape in Akkadian art” suggested that land scape was a trend in picturing that can be traced starting from Naram Sin’s ruling time, and in his son Sarkalissarri period, that she considered” the greatest achievements” in the Akkadian art. (J.Kantor, 1966)

In Naram sin Stele, as can be seen, the battle took place in a mountain area, where Lullabi people settled, Winter L.J suggested that these specific types of trees, called Oak, is species native to Mesopotamia , due to the British Naval Intelligence Handbook 1944 and the volume on Flora of Iraq that published by the Republic of Iraq 1966, and she stated that the “hilly to mountainous environment of the Kurdish Mts. Were once predominantly open oak forest” (Winter, 2009) .



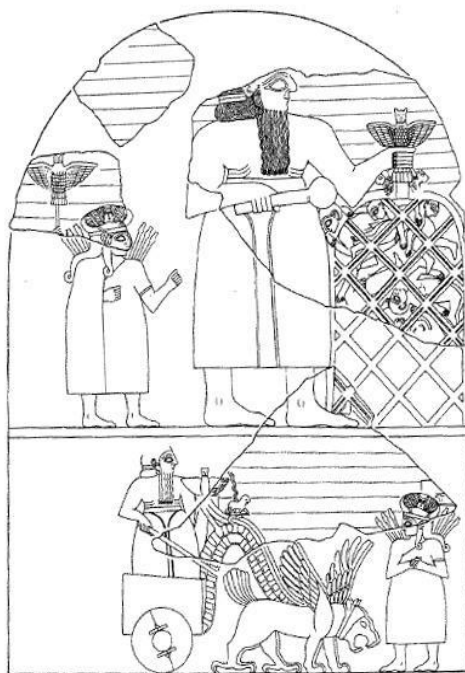
**Fig 2- Palette of King Narmer, from Hierakonpolis, Egypt, Predynastic, c. 3000-2920 B.C.E., slate, 2' 1" high (Egyptian Museum, Cairo)**

<sup>2</sup> Stele of Vultures is considered one of the unique and oldest historical stone document that commemorates the important triumph of king Lagash. It represents the conflict between Lagash and Umma . The Stele portrays vast of details The Stele was discovered in the Sumerian city of Girsu and now is located in department of Near Easter antiquities : Mesopotamia, Louvre Museum, Paris . See <https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/stele-vultures>

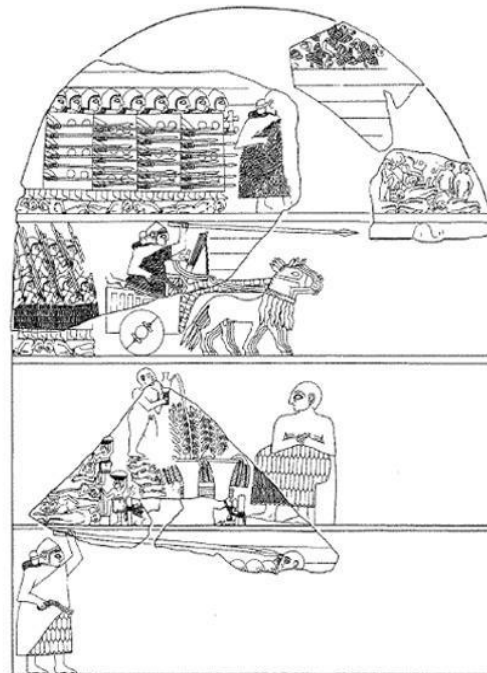




Fig 3 , one from a number of fragments of “Stele of Vultures”, Early Dynastic period , c. 2450 BC<sup>3</sup>



Reconstruction drawing, obverse, Stele of the Vultures (drawing by Elizabeth Simpson)



Reconstruction drawing, reverse, Stele of the Vultures

Fig 4, illustration that reconstructs the two faces for the “Stele of Vultures”, after Elizabeth Simpson (Winter I. , 1985)

<sup>3</sup> , <https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/stele-vultures>



**Fig 5 ,close image for the Oak tree**

Although Naram Sin had the deification but he did not defeat his enemy alone , he was accompanied with the patronage of Gods to attest his divine power and he had the Akkadian strong soldiers and with much closer sight it can be seen, he put a blessed amulet around his neck. The triumph was not accounted as only a military victory, but also a political and divine willing confirmation.

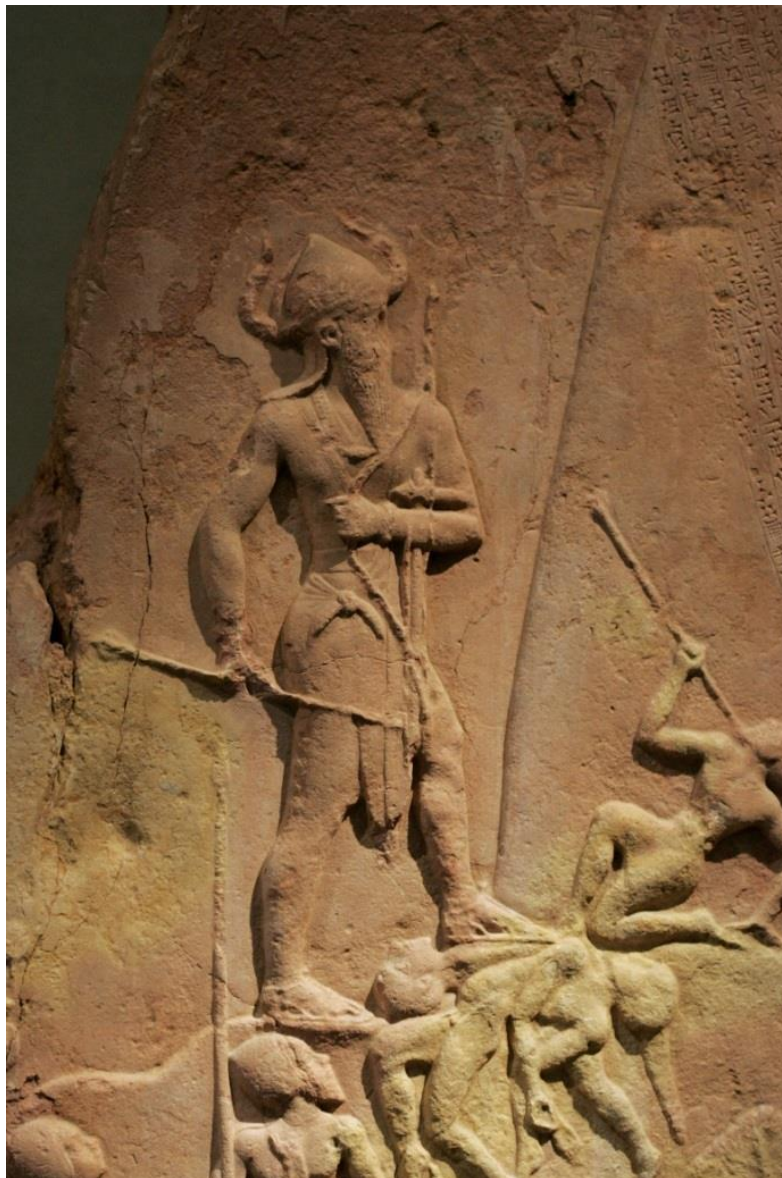
Moreover, it is easy to determine the Akkadian soldiers rather the Lubiols people, however a bearded man can be distinguished , he came after the king, his unique appearance ,uniform , weapon and even accessories refer to his position, as he might be an office , and being followed with soldiers definitely refers to the systemization and hierarchy that characterized the Akkadian army.

On the other hand , the enemy were allocated on the right side in a chaos, dressed in skin tonic, some of them have a different hairstyle with pigtail. It can be argued that the artist exaggerated in depicting their bodies, as can be seen how weakened and feeble they are

comparing the strong Akkadian soldiers , while the other two people in the right side wanted to escape , as can be seen from their legs direction, and begging Naram Sin for forgiveness.

### **Naram Sin :**

Noteworthy , Naram sin was well dressed his battle arsenal, standing with glory on two naked bodies and slayed another one with his javelin (fig 6). In this line of thinking, we should mention that depicting kings in Mesopotamian art had certain characterizes that attested to manifest sexual allure and perfection in body structure, as can be seen in his perfectly limbs, arms and his bear. Further his stands with fully body visible, showing what kings needed to show to public, even perfectly with his right ear. (Winter I. , 1996)



**Fig 6, Details for the Stele , focusing on Naram Sin Body**



## **The Relation Between Divinity Concept and Kingship:**

Divinity concept was known differently from culture to another. Generally it always linked by political necessities and needs and is used to give kings the legitimization. In this regard , kings had applied divine attributes to themselves, that was awarded to kings dead or alive. As Can be seen, Naram-Sin was wearing the horned helmet in a clear indication as visual signifier for the relation with Gods,” as horned headdresses are consistently worn by divine figures in the Mesopotamian visual record” (Winter I. , 1996)

To conclude, the Victory Stele of Naram-Sin is considered one of the most important art work that presented philosophical ideas of a sacral character that characterized the artistic production. The artistic features in visual arts were deeply influenced with the religion philosophy in ancient Mesopotamia. “”As far as the visual expression of this sacred dimension is concerned, our material evidence comes primarily from art objects and artifacts” (Atac, 2008). and it expressed not an individual trend but a community trend .

Moreover, it is a fact that military and policy were always controlled by Gods that led to infer till what extend the art was influenced and was being under the guardianship of rulers, as I can argue the Egyptian and Mesopotamia art as well.

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