

Pinecone or date palm male inflorescence – metaphorical pollination in Assyrian art

Irit Ziffer

MUSA Eretz Israel Museum Tel Aviv, 2 Haim Levanon St., Tel Aviv 6987501, Israel

ABSTRACT

The following contribution focuses on Assyrian stone reliefs depicting winged figures holding a bucket and reaching a cone-shaped object toward a stylized tree. Ever since the discovery of the reliefs, the cone-shaped object was considered as either a conifer cone or a date palm male inflorescence used in the symbolic pollination of the stylized tree, derived from the date palm. Utilizing the visual material combined with textual evidence and based on the importance of the date palm as economic resource that gave rise to a plethora of meanings, religious, royal and popular, I shall argue that the scene refers to the artificial pollination of the tree.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 18 July 2018

Accepted 2 December 2018

KEYWORDS

Pinecone; date palm; male inflorescence; stylized tree; pollination; Sumerian; Assyrian

CONTACT Irit Ziffer [\[Email\] irit.ziffer@gmail.com](mailto:irit.ziffer@gmail.com)

Supplementary material



Figure S1. Stone relief slab: genius carrying cone and bucket, Nimrud, 883–859 BCE, 229.2 × 138.4 cm. MMA 17.190.2082 (CC Public Domain).



Figure S2. Stone relief slab: winged griffin carrying cone and bucket, Nimrud, 883–859 BCE, 236.2X177.8 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art 32.143.7 (CC Public Domain).

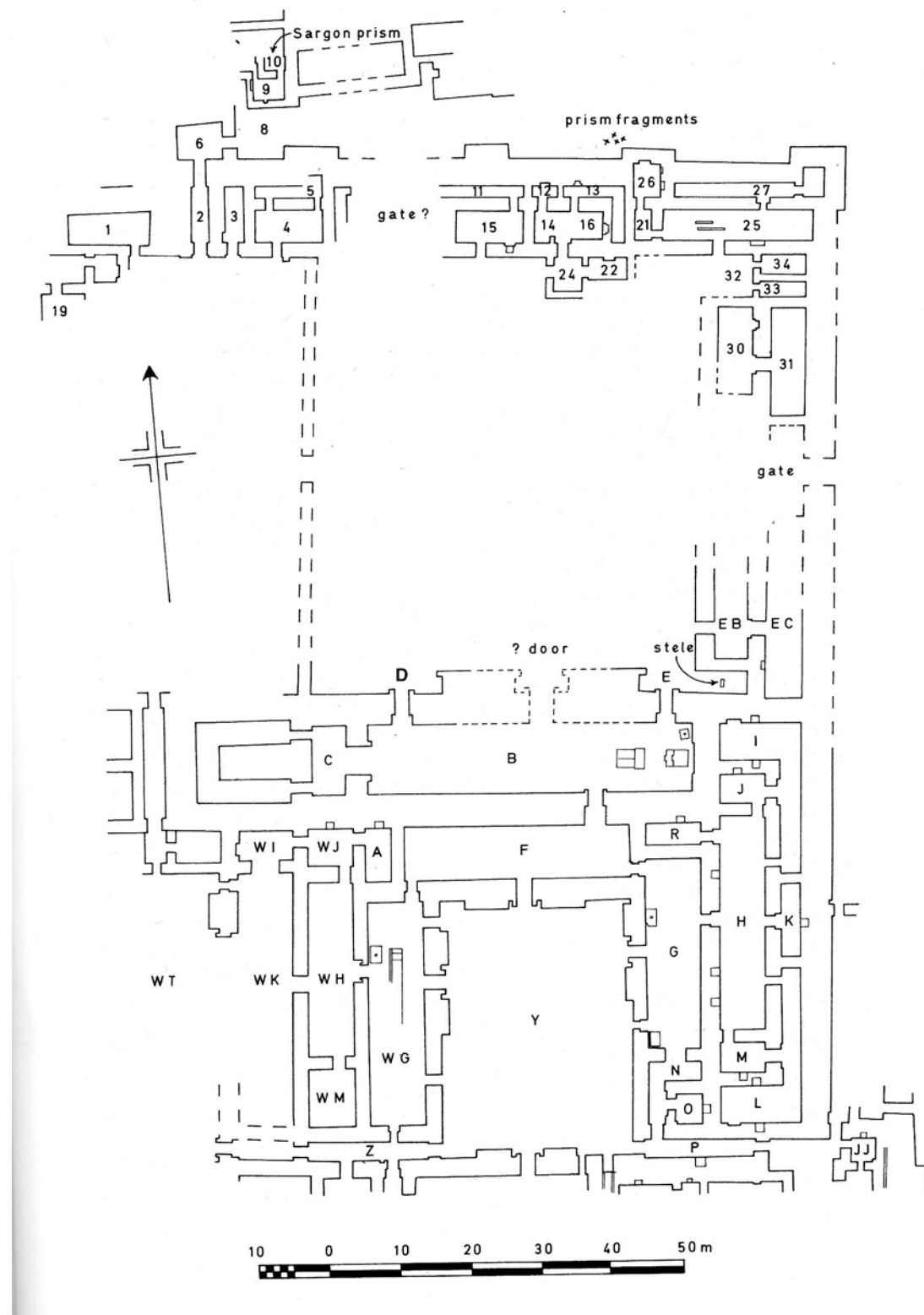


Figure S3a. Plan of the North-West Palace, Nimrud, 883–859 BCE
(Mallowan 1966: plan 3).

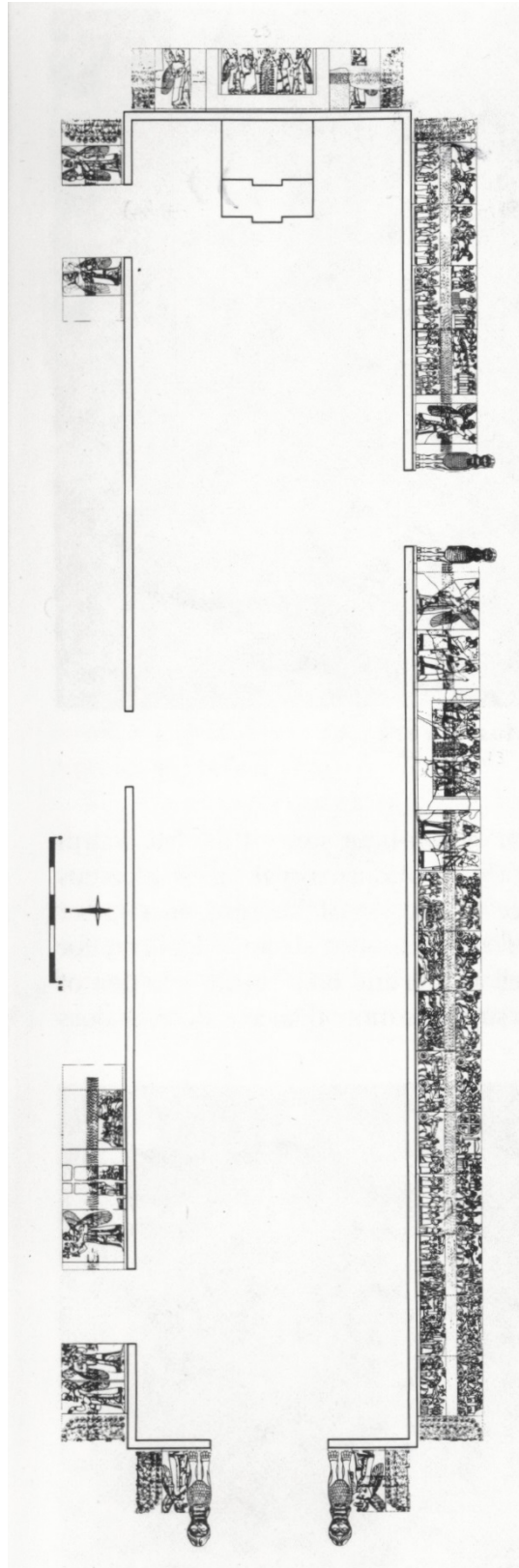


Figure S3b. Throneroom, North-West Palace, Nimrud. Drawing: Elizabeth Simpson, published by permission.



Figure S4. King enthroned, surrounded by royal entourage and winged genii holding cone and bucket. Layard, 1849: pl. 5 <http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/layard1849/0033>

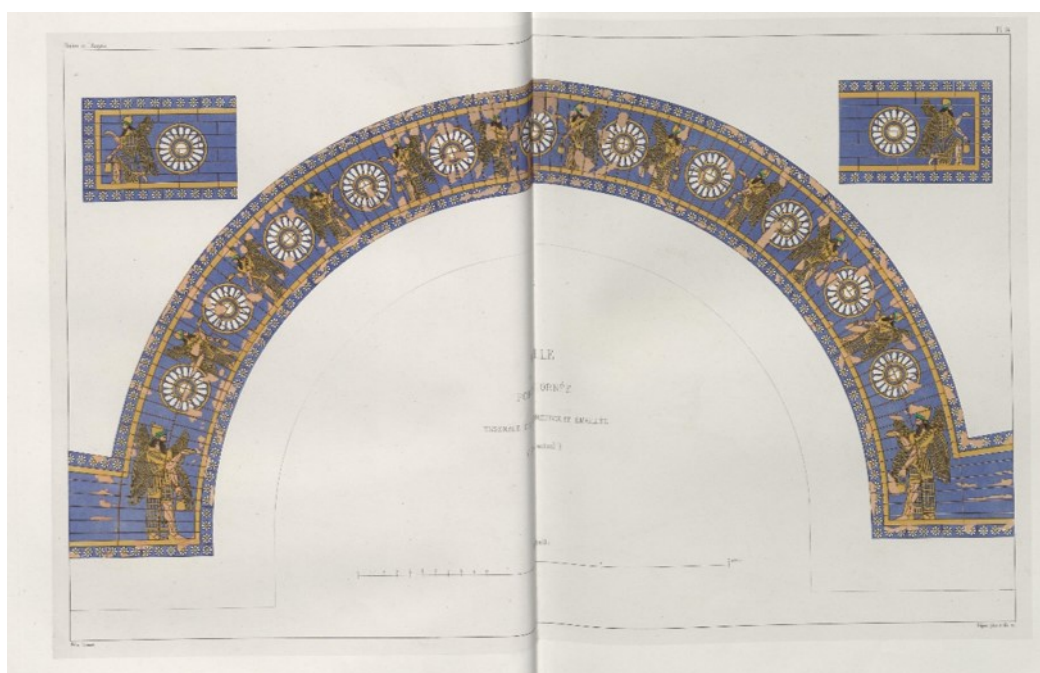


Figure S5. Gate arch decorated with winged genii carrying cone and bucket flanking rosettes (Place 1867: pl. 14) (<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/place1867bd3/0024>).



Figure S6. Stone slab from the central section of a threshold, with square quatrefoil of alternating cones and lotus blossom radiating from a rosette. Probably Niniveh, period of Ashurbanipal 668-627 BCE, 83.8 × 73.7 cm. MMA X.153, CC Public Domain.

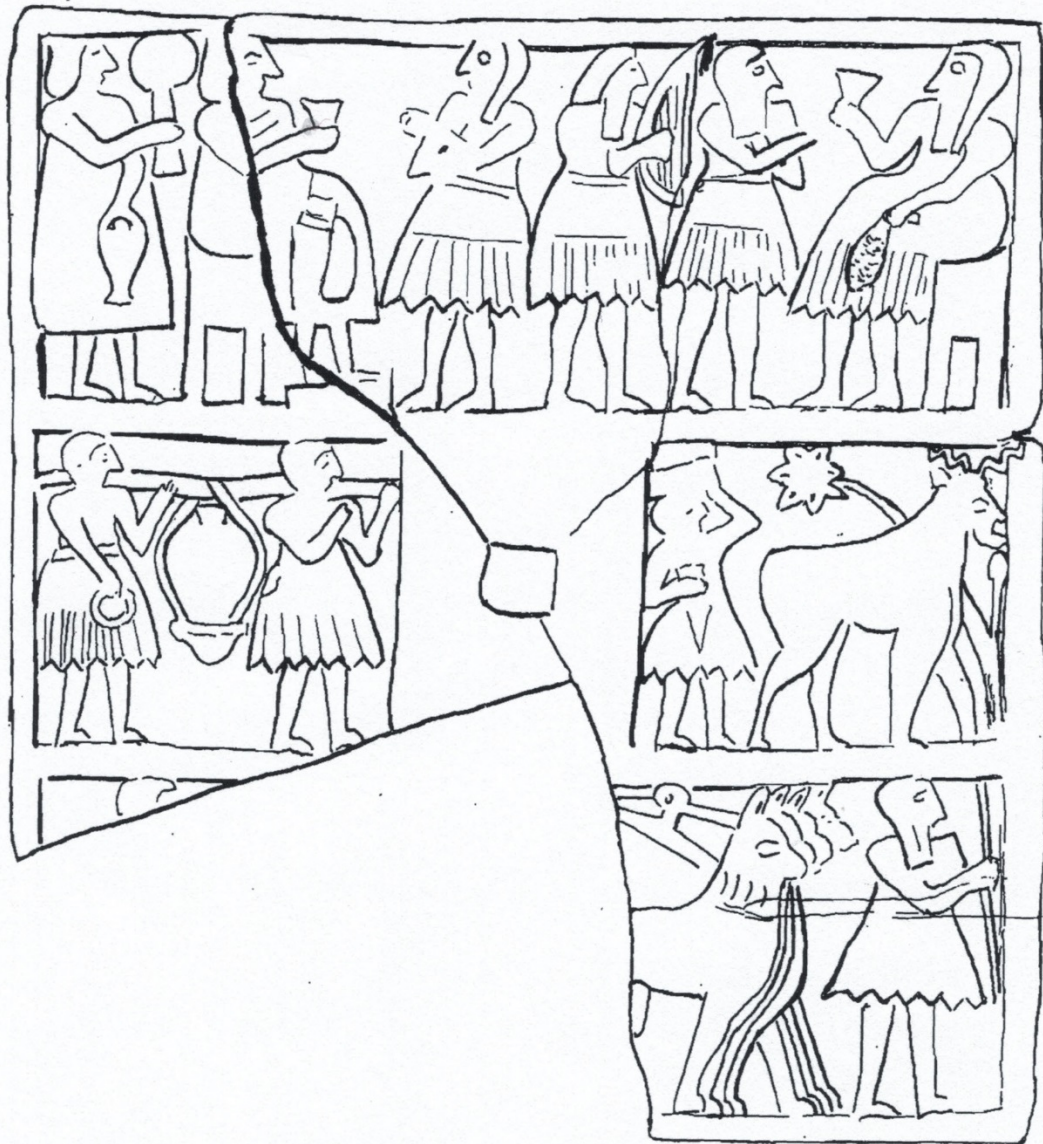


Figure S7. Stone plaque depicting royal celebrants grasping date cluster at banquet, Khafajah (Diyala), c.2700 or 2600 BCE (Danthine 1937: pl. 140: 881).



Figure S8. Cylinder seal depicting a figure in fish-skin with cone and bucket (Matthews 1990: fig. 196).

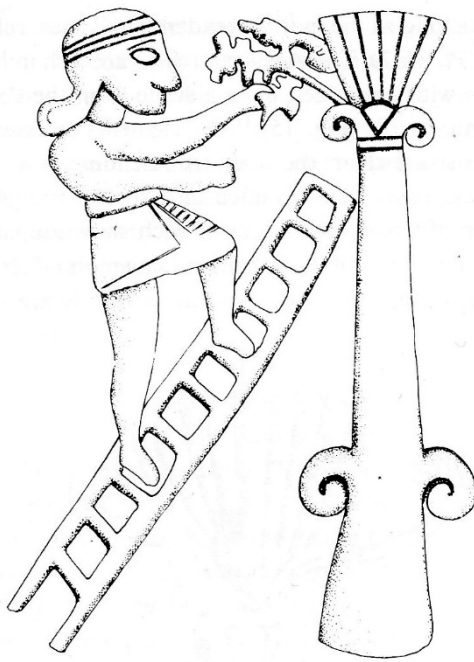


Figure S9. Artificial pollination of a stylized date palm, Tell Halaf, 9th century BCE (Shilo 1979: fig. 16).



Figure S10. Goddess grasping date cluster. Basalt vessel, 25th century BCE
(Danthine 1937: pl. 137: 874).



17 a

Figure S11. Goddess enthroned next to a date harvest scene (Metzger 1983: fig. 17a).



Figure S12. Goddess receiving cone from a male figure (Matthews 1990: no. 518).

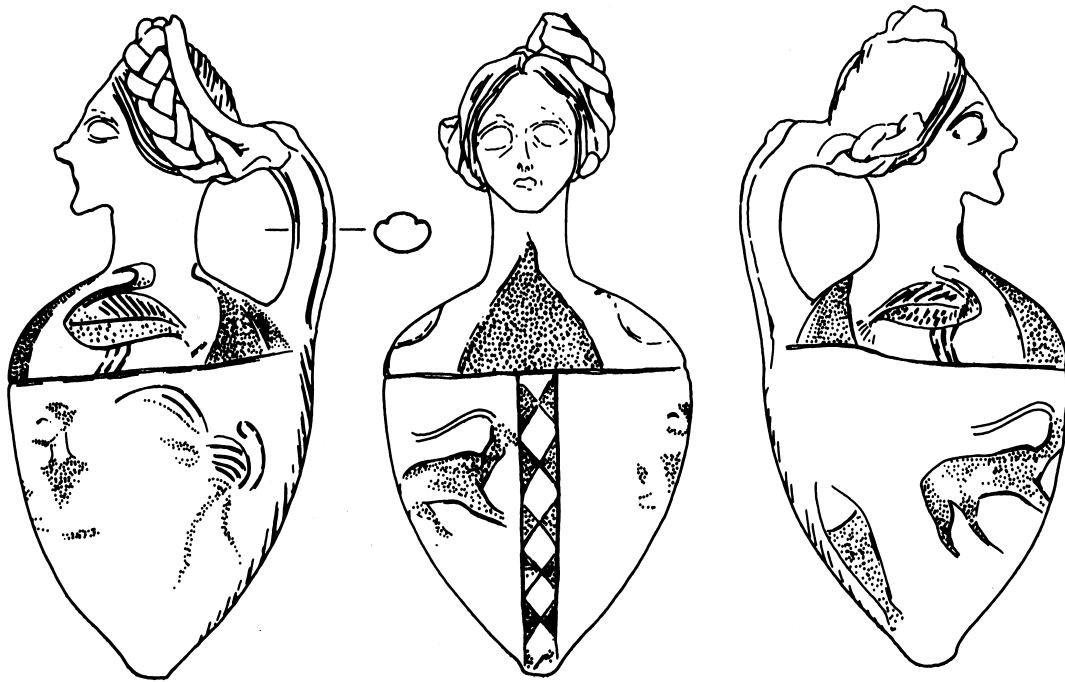


Figure S13. Female-headed juglet from Jericho (Balensi 1986: 75).



Figure S14. The Lachish ewer (Ziffer 2010: fig. 5).

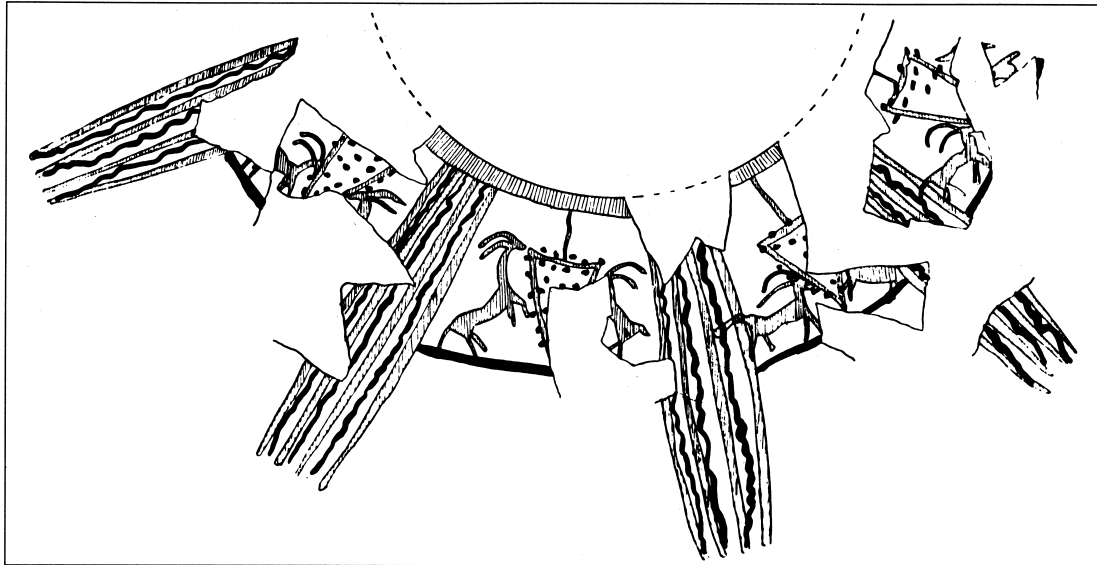


Figure S15. Lachish goblet depicting the pubic triangles flanked by caprids (Ziffer 2010: fig. 6).

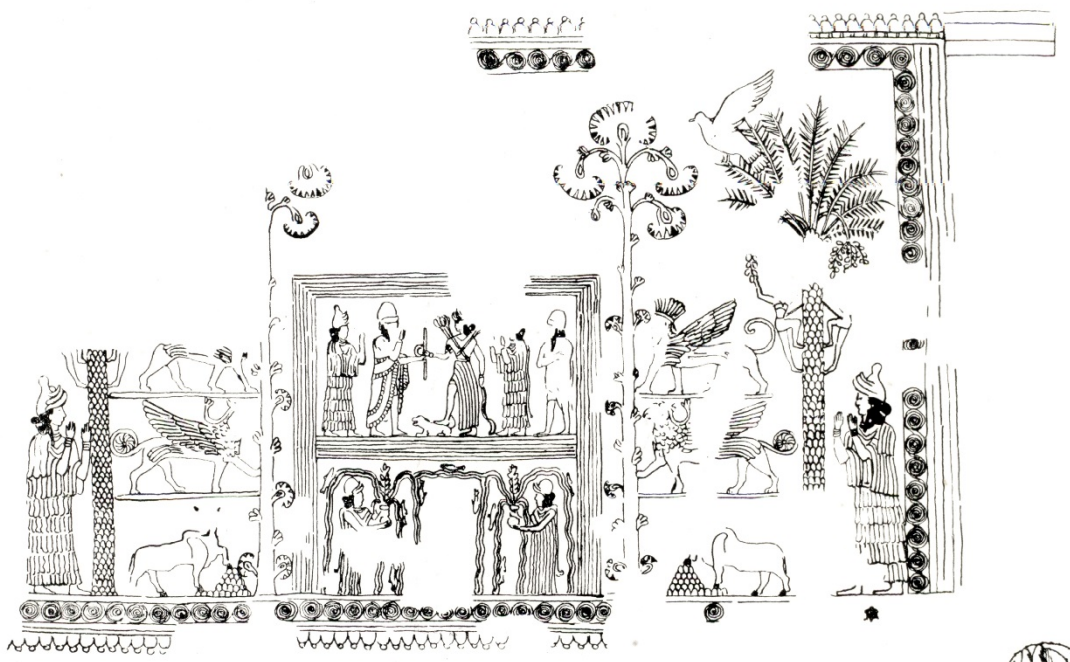
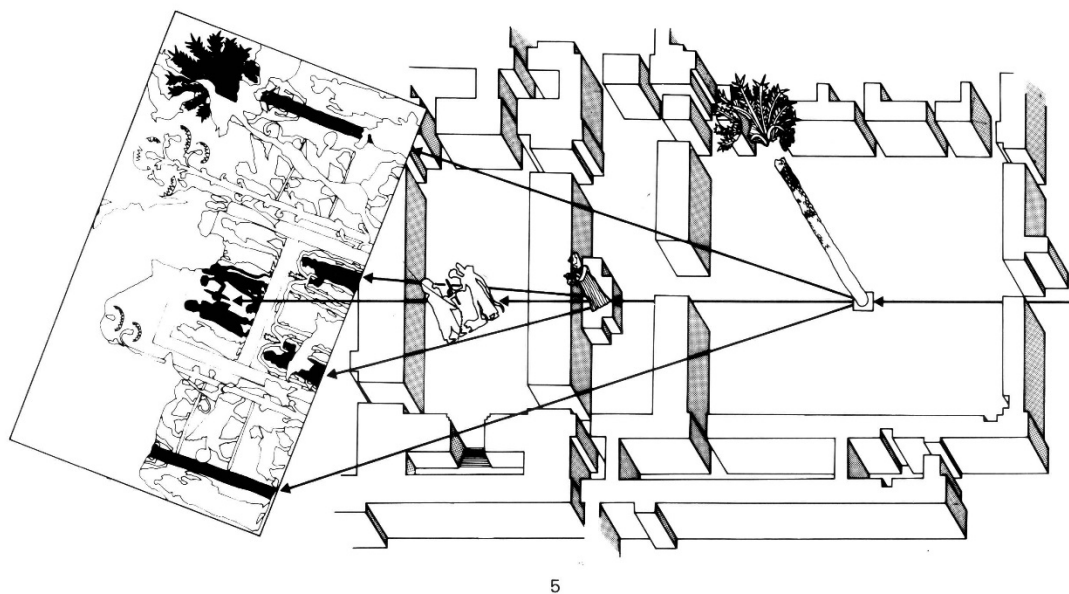


Figure S16. The "Investiture" mural, Palace of Mari (Barrelet 1950).



5

Figure S17. Program of the "Investiture" scene, a true reflection of the Palace of Mari (Margueron 1992: pl. 46).



Figure S18. Storage piece made of clay mixed with straw, with palm fronds decoration in a dwelling cave near Amazyia, the Shephela. Photo: MUSA, Eretz Israel Musuem, Tel Aviv. Leonid Padrul-Kwitkowski.