

PIGS AND PLAQUES: CONSIDERING RM. 714 IN LIGHT OF COMPARATIVE ARTISTIC AND TEXTUAL SOURCES¹

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Rm. 714, a first millennium B.C.E. tablet in the collections of the British Museum, is remarkable for the fine carving of a striding pig in high relief on its obverse. Purchased by Hormuzd Rassam in Baghdad in 1877, it lacks archaeological context and must be considered in light of other textual and artistic references to pigs, the closest parallel being a sow and her piglets seen in the reliefs of Court VI from Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh. Unlike depictions of pigs on later cylinder seals, where they are often shown as a dangerous quarry in hunting scenes, Rm. 714's pig appears in a more neutral, non-aggressive posture, similar to the sow in the Assyrian reliefs. Although Rm. 714's highly curved reverse would inhibit its use as a mounted or otherwise easily displayed object, the tablet may still have served as an apotropaic object or sculptor's model, among other potential functions.

Rm. 714: Introduction

This article centers on the analysis of a single tablet, Rm. 714, and the fine carving of a pig found on its obverse. Mesopotamian tablets could serve as the medium for more than cuneiform, and drawings are found on tablets as early as the third millennium B.C.E. Many of these early tablets are otherwise uninscribed, but later examples feature both drawing and cuneiform writing on a single tablet.² Rm. 714, dated to the first millennium B.C.E., also pairs writing and carving, with a single line of cuneiform on the opposite side to its impressive relief. Although the inscription provides us with some information, Rm. 714 must be analyzed primarily through a consideration of its relief and by comparing the tablet to other carved or sculpted objects. The wide range of textual and artistic references to pigs provides critical context for how the animal was both used and depicted in Mesopotamia. When this is considered alongside the additional context provided by comparisons to similar carved objects, several possible functions for Rm. 714, as well as additional significance for the pig in its relief, may be proposed.

The relief is the most notable aspect of Rm. 714. The tablet is small and rectangular, with dimensions of 6.8 centimetres by 4.3 centimetres, and made of dark-colored, fine clay; it is notably plano-convex in cross-section and uninscribed save for one line of cuneiform script along the upper edge of the tablet's reverse.³ Its obverse displays its very fine, high relief carving of a striding pig (Fig. 1). Although there is some damage to the tablet's lower right edge, with the left hind leg of the pig broken away, the tablet is otherwise completely preserved. The relief of the pig in particular is in good condition, showing clearly the fine detail and artistic skill of its carving (Fig. 2). The pig is carved directly onto the tablet, its outline emphasized by a line of vertical hatching running along and above the line of its back and curving around the outline of its tail.

Previous analysis of Rm. 714, notably by Reade (2001/2002: 154–56), has considered it in the context of other sculpted objects held in the collections of the British Museum. Many of these objects had been previously explored as potential sculptor's models, with other common proposals

¹ I would like to thank the Trustees of the British Museum for permission to publish a handcopy of this tablet. It has previously appeared in print (in photograph) as discussed by Reade (2001/2002: 147–64) and Van Buren (1930). I am grateful for comments on earlier drafts of this article by members of the ancient Near Eastern art department of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, particularly Sarah Graff, Michael Seymour, and Elizabeth Knott; as well as Nancy

Highcock, Jonathan Valk, and the article's anonymous reviewers.

² For an overview of tablets with drawings, see Finkel (2011).

³ Reade (2017: 184–85) attributes the dark color of this tablet to the hot ash process by which it was fired: "(Rm. 714) has on one side the image of a pig in relief, darkened and well preserved except where an attempt to clean the stomach has exposed some high-quality unfired clay."

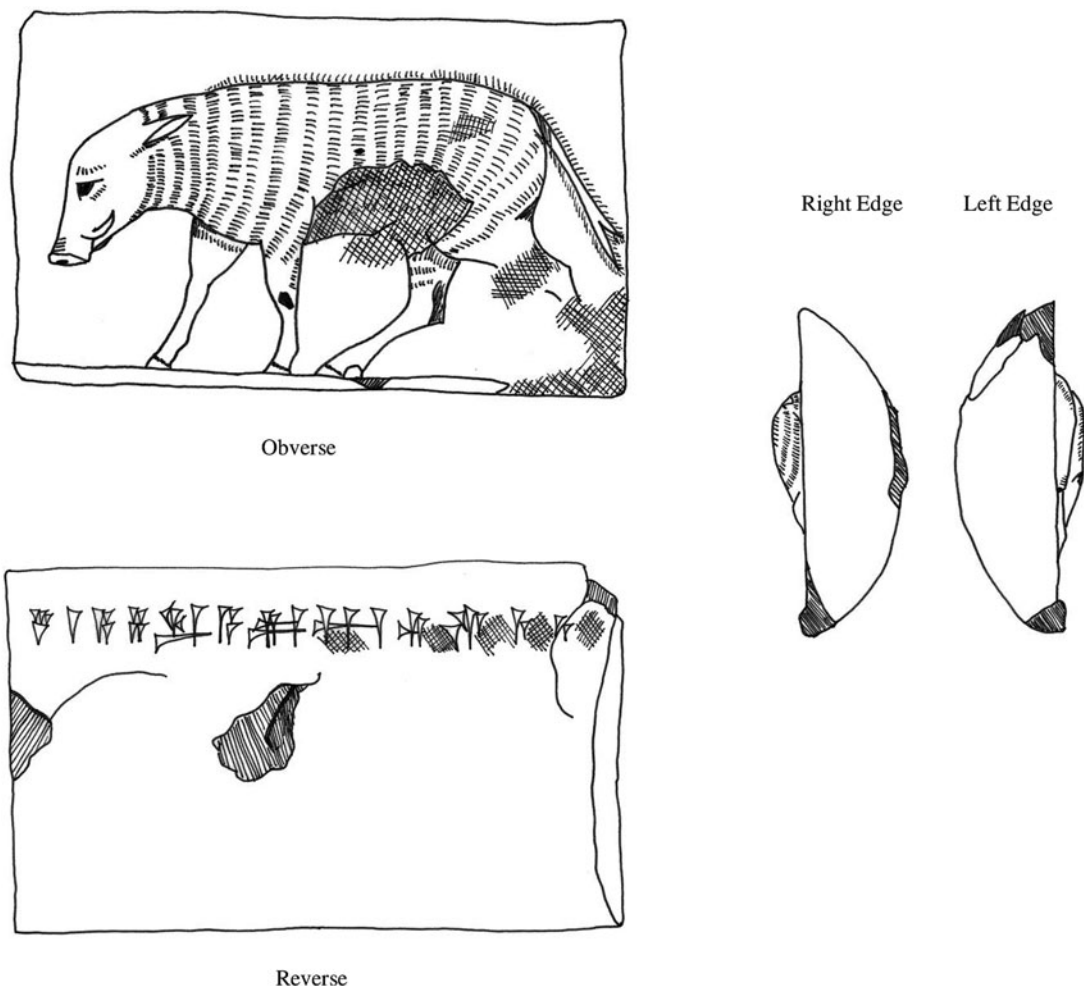


Fig. 1 Tablet with Relief of Striding Pig, Rm. 714, 6.8 × 4.3 cm. Handcopy by author

for function being apotropaic or personal dedicatory objects.⁴ This article aims to evaluate the possible functions of Rm. 714 in light of both similar objects as well as the wider range of artistic representations and textual references to pigs in the Neo-Assyrian and earlier periods. Although Rm. 714's convex reverse is at odds with the flat backs of other sculptors models or apotropaic plaques, the relief itself still falls within a larger context of porcine representations in Mesopotamia.

The information provided by comparative artistic and textual sources is critical, as the tablet lacks archaeological context. Although it is recorded in Carl Bezold's catalogue of objects in the British Museum from Kouyunjik (the main mound at Nineveh), it appears in a final listing of many different large categories of tablet groups, included under the sub-heading of "inscribed fragments and tablets which were not found at Kouyunjik" (Bezold 1896). The Rassam collections (listed as RRm. within the catalogue) include allotments of many tablets grouped together as follows: 622–40, 642–853, and 856–901, to be followed by individually numbered tablets.⁵ Rm. 714 falls within

⁴ Reade evaluates the previous arguments for the use of these objects as sculptors' models and argues that for many of the objects, use as a sculptor's model would have been unlikely. Instead, many other uses were possible, although it is difficult to assign any one specific function: "So 'sculptors' models' of unfired clay could have been made for educational, experimental, ritual or reference purposes,

as well as for the guidance of artisans who had to create a finished product in some other medium such as terracotta, metal or stone" (2001/2002: 151).

⁵ These groups include un-inscribed tablets excavated at Kouyunjik but also purchased objects that were accessioned at the same time. Many of the objects thus lack detailed context. Rm. 714 is baked, but it is uncertain at what point



Fig. 2 Tablet with Relief of Striding Pig, Rm. 714, obverse. © The Trustees of the British Museum

the largest of these three tablet groupings, purchased by Hormuzd Rassam in Baghdad in 1877. At this time, as Reade (2001/2002: 154) notes, the only southern sites that were potential sources for purchased tablets were Babylon and Borsippa, which is all that may be said about the original location of Rm. 714.

The options for contextual analysis exhausted, we are left with the object itself. Although the relief is indisputably its most prominent feature, its inscription also merits consideration. The single line of cuneiform found on the reverse is worn at points in its latter half but still clearly identifies the tablet's owner: “šá^{dis} a-za-ru a-pil(A) é-sag-íl a⁷-[a],” which may be translated, with some caveats, as “Belonging to Azaru, son of Esagil(a).”⁶ The inscription marks the tablet's owner, and the object, in turn, was personally connected to Azaru.⁷ Its potential function in this regard is more obscure, as the most notable element of the tablet remains the detailed carving on the obverse. This relief, and the pig it depicts, also provide the most viable route for dating the tablet. Although neighbouring tablets in its grouping of Rm. 642–853 are overwhelmingly from the first millennium B.C.E., they do not otherwise help establish a more specific or concrete date. Over a quarter of the tablets with accession numbers within the Rm. 700 range are late Babylonian or Hellenistic astronomical texts and are thus distinct in both genre and time from Rm. 714.⁸ The tablet's relief does closely match other artistic depictions of pigs from the Neo-Assyrian period, making this the object's most likely original date. Overall, the depiction of the pig of Rm. 714, from its artistic

this was done, whether in the past or in the museum, and a comparative study of other Rm objects in the Rm. 642–853 lot is inconclusive.

⁶ The final signs of this line of cuneiform are poorly preserved, and I can neither confirm nor deny the reading of the final two as [a-a], as proposed by Reade. I thank Enrique Jimenez and Piotr Michalowski for looking at the object. The name Azaru finds parallels in the much earlier figure of Aziru, ruler of Amurru in the fourteenth century B.C.E., though the distance between the two provides little help beyond confirming Azaru as a West Semitic name. Although best known for being the temple of Marduk in Babylon, Esagil also appears as an element in personal names, most famously that of Esagil-kin-apli and Esagil-kin-ubba, the two final *ummânû* who appear in the Uruk list of kings and sages (Lenzi 2008: 142). Zadok (2003) also presents the possibility that Azaru may instead be interpreted as *azarru*, an “Akkadian word denoting an animal whose habitat is the marshes of the Babylonian alluvium,” most likely an animal similar to a lynx. There are several variables at play in the reading of this line. The certain elements of the line are “šá^{dis} a-za-ru,” similarly, the final two legible signs “sag-il” are reasonably clear. The

question is then the two middle signs: “a” is certain in reading though not necessarily in meaning, and the sign “é” may be interpreted either as above or as a slightly irregular “pil” sign. If the latter, the line could instead be interpreted: “šá^{dis} a-za-ru a-pil sag-íl”, or “Belonging to Azaru, heir of Sagil.” While *sagil* could be the beginning of a personal name, it is less easily reconciled than the proposed reading. Although *aplu* is most often rendered logographically as DUMU.ÚŠ, later personal names can replace that more common set of signs with “a” particularly in the Neo-Assyrian period and later. We see, for example, the writing *Sin-aplu(A)-iddina(SUM)* in personal names. See: *CAD A12: aplu*, 3^r.

⁷ The use of inscriptions to indicate ownership is hardly limited to tablets; for example, it can also be seen within the collection of Luristan bronze daggers, dated from between the twelfth and eighth centuries B.C.E. and inscribed with the names of kings or their owners in a single line of cuneiform running down the center of the flat of the dagger's blade. See Brinkman (1968: 8–12).

⁸ These texts are primarily published in Pinches and Sachs (1955) and Neugebauer (1955).

style to the posture of the animal itself, provides the single most important source of evidence for further conclusions about the tablet and its potential functions.

Pigs in Mesopotamia

As our focus is thus squarely on how the pig on Rm. 714 is depicted, it is necessary to first survey the broader context of textual and artistic representations of pigs within Mesopotamia. Within textual sources in particular, the pig (*Sus scrofa*) fulfills a variety of roles.⁹ There are two words for pigs in Akkadian; the far more commonly used term, *šahû*, derives from the Sumerian word for the animal (*šah₂*).¹⁰ A rarer Akkadian word, *huzîru*, also appears. The majority of references to the animals appear in the context of their use as livestock, where they occupy the curious position of being primarily, if not exclusively, valuable for their meat.¹¹ Although other livestock animals, such as cows, sheep, goats, and various fowl, are also slaughtered for meat, they all produce both edible (milk and eggs) and useful (hair, wool, or feathers) secondary products without harm to the animal's own life. For a pig to be useful, on the other hand, it must be slaughtered.¹²

Analysis of animal remains in Mesopotamia corroborates the widespread presence of the pig as a livestock animal, though textual references to the practice of pig farming are less common.¹³ The lack of secondary products thus did little to harm the overall popularity and usefulness of the animal. Pigs appear to occupy a slightly different position in comparison to other livestock, a situation compounded by the dual existence in the region of both domesticated and wild pigs, the latter hunted for their meat.¹⁴ With pig domestication in the Near East dating to the Pottery Neolithic, there was more than sufficient time for the development and subsequent presence of the distinct physical traits of domestic versus feral pigs that can be observed in artistic representations of the animals.¹⁵ Wild pigs remained larger than their domestic counterparts, with a size and strength that made hunting them a hazardous, if not potentially fatal, endeavor. Despite the danger, such practices were widespread, with depictions of hunting pigs found across the ancient world.¹⁶

⁹ The role of the pig in the ancient Near East was broadly considered in an edited volume (Lion and Michel 2006). In particular, we see that the animal is not always grouped alongside other livestock – in the earliest lexical lists, pigs (as well as dogs) were placed with wild animals instead of grouped with domestic animals (Cavigneaux 2006).

¹⁰ The Akkadian word *šahîtu* is also used, albeit less frequently, specifically for a female pig or sow, while *šahîturru* (*šAH₂.TUR.RA*) refers specifically to a piglet. There are a number of other terms connected to *šahû* that may be used to refer to pigs within more specific contexts; one example of such is *šahapu* (*šAH₂.GIŠ.GI*), a contraction from *šah api* that refers specifically to a marsh boar.

¹¹ Despite their lack of secondary products, pigs have high meat yields and their meat is highest in calories and fat value amongst the commonly domesticated animals of Mesopotamia (sheep, goats, cattle, and a variety of fowl). They also bear more young in a single litter and reach maturation faster than nearly any other domesticated animal (Zeder 1991: 30).

¹² This distinction is discussed by Foster (2002: 273). Pigs may perform some useful functions: they may be fed food waste and serve as a means of waste disposal, and their manure can be utilized as fertilizer. As opportunistic omnivores, the animals will eat a wide variety of foodstuffs (D'Eath and Turner 2009: 20–21). Modern dairy experiments into milking pigs have been successful enough to produce a pig's milk cheese, though the price of £1,500 per kilo reflects the labor and time intensive, as well as potentially dangerous, nature of the practice (McElwain 2018).

¹³ See Zeder (1991:31). Frans van Koppen (2006) posits that, at least in the Old Babylonian period, pigs were predominantly kept by private individuals, thus explaining the relative paucity of textual references to pig-keeping in comparison to the archaeological evidence.

¹⁴ The various sub-species of the modern pig can range in size considerably but most are easily capable of reaching weights of 200 pounds at a minimum. Recent studies on archaeological remains have shown that the wild pigs of the ancient Near East share a distinctive DNA signature that identifies them as separate from European wild pigs of that same period. Pigs with European genetic profiles begin to dominate the animal stocks found in the Levant from the start of the first millennium B.C.E. onwards, when European pigs migrated or were imported to the region (Meiri *et al.* 2013).

¹⁵ There appears to have been minimal interbreeding between domestic and wild populations of pigs in this period, suggesting very close management of the domestic sounders (Rowley-Conwy *et al.* 2012: 8–14). This matter is complicated by the difficulty of identifying and defining domestication in its initial stages for the pig (Albarella *et al.* 2006).

¹⁶ A drawing on a sandstone slab from Egypt c. 3000 BC depicts a wild boar pursued by two *tesem* hunting dogs (Manlius 2005), in one of earliest portrayals of such a hunt in ancient Egypt. Although this depiction is not detailed enough to feature the characteristic crest of the wild pig, a figurine from the same period in the collection of the Fitzwilliam Museum does show this physical feature (Object Number: E.90.1898). Similarly, there is clear evidence for the hunting of wild boar among Iron Age Celts in Europe (Rowlett 1994) and widespread textual and artistic evidence for the hunting of the animal in the Graeco-Roman world. Hunting is also used in Roman imperial imagery, with both lions and boars as quarry, and the ability to kill the latter animal, particularly alone, is lauded (Green 1996; Tuck 2005). As Edwards (2008: 42–47) notes, Hadrian was known for his prowess in hunting, described as able to fell a boar in one blow.

The pig had connotations and uses beyond its role as either quarry or livestock. In Anatolia and the Levant, it was at times regarded as an unclean animal, with taboos associated with its presence. Within the Mesopotamian ritual sphere, pigs as well as piglets (or models of either) were employed as scapegoats, the targets for redirected impurity.¹⁷ One ritual text to counter disease, for example, contains instructions for first embodying the disease in a clay figurine, to then marry it off to a piglet “as a wife” (*kīma aššati*).¹⁸ Through these actions, the disease would be forced to leave the patient and was bound instead through symbolic marriage to the scapegoat animal. This notion of impurity or, at the least, a connection to demonic antagonists, repeats with the demoness Lamaštu, who is often depicted as suckling a piglet and dog at her breast, in lieu of human infants. The pairing of pig and dog is repeated in another text, a ritual incantation intended to counter witchcraft. This incantation reverses the scapegoat dynamic by detailing how the witch has created a figurine of the afflicted individual, and fed it to a variety of animals, including a dog, pig, “bird of the sky,” and “fish of the underground water,” as well as inflicting a wide range of other evils upon the figurine of the afflicted patient.¹⁹ Thus, while the pig may be invoked as a scapegoat or even potentially a protection against evil, it can also serve as a vector by which witchcraft or other malevolent acts can be worked against an individual.

Artistic Representations

Artistic representations of the pig are as chronologically widespread as their textual counterparts. Though the pig is most often seen in the first millennium B.C.E. in Mesopotamian art, representations from earlier periods are also found. One of the earliest artistic representations is from an administrative tablet from the Jemdet Nasr period (c. 3000 B.C.E.), which documents grain distribution for a large temple and is impressed repeatedly with a cylinder seal depicting a pig alongside several other animals (MMA 1988.433.1, Fig. 3). When reconstructed in full, the sealing presents a hunting scene: a figure holds the leashes of two dogs and approaches a marshy landscape comprised of two registers of pigs and lions hiding in canebrake.²⁰ Unlike much later depictions of hunting scenes, which depict the high drama of a hunt in action, here the hunt in question has yet to begin.

Hunting scenes form a common backdrop for artistic representations of pigs. Another such scene can be found on a plaque (BM 128891), which can be dated to roughly 1900 B.C.E. and was found during excavations at the site of Ishchali in the Diyala region (Fig. 4).²¹ The plaque, which has a flat reverse well suited for mounted display, depicts an archer aiming at a monkey that hangs from the branch of a tree, with a servant crouched at his side. A pig sniffs about at the roots of the other side of the tree, possibly foraging. Although the pig seen on the sealing in MMA 1988.433.1 holds its head higher than this animal, both share a spiky-bristled back common to male pigs (boars) in particular. Otherwise, the position of the pig on this plaque is very similar to that of the animal as seen on the obverse of Rm. 714.²² Thanks to the presence of a duplicate plaque, more poorly preserved than this example but still identical, it is clear that this plaque was produced in a mould. The second copy, however, was sold at the auction of a private collection in 2003 and unfortunately lacks any archaeological context.²³ Even if these are the only two examples

¹⁷ In particular, the pig is described as unable to enter the grounds of a temple, thanks to its unclean nature (Lambert 1996: 215). Regarding the pig in Anatolia, see Collins (2002a: 322–324) and Collins (2002b), while van Wijk (2014: 111–34) discusses the animal in the Levant.

¹⁸ Stol 1993: 99–101; the ritual, found in KAR 66, is designed to combat AN.TA.ŠUB.BA, or epilepsy. This text came to my attention through a conference presentation on the use of divorce language and ritual in incantations (Scurlock 2017). In another ritual, the pig is used to expel the *asakku* disease from an afflicted patient (Scurlock 2002: 392–94).

¹⁹ See Abusch and Schwemer (2010: no. 8.3) for an edition of this text, entitled “Burning the Witches’ Figurines before Šamaš and Purifying the Patient.” The incantation is found

in a number of first millennium B.C.E. copies, primarily dated to the Neo-Assyrian period; note that one exemplar only describes the figurine of the afflicted being fed to a dog.

²⁰ Aruz 2003: no. 11. Another early seal (Morgan Library No. 112) to feature a pig, this time dated to the Early Dynastic III period, renders the animal in less refined detail but with a recognizably similar stance.

²¹ This identification is based upon its connection to another, more concretely dated, plaque (Smith 1937: 120–21).

²² This behavior, known as rooting, is an essential aspect of the exploratory nature of pig behavior, tied to their foraging for food and seen in wild as well as domesticated pigs (Studnitz *et al.* 2007: 183–97).

²³ The plaque appeared as part of the objects belonging to the collection of Henriette and Jacques Schumann, sold at



Fig. 3 Jemdet Nasr Tablet, MMA 1988.433.1, 5.5 × 6 cm, © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Purchase, Raymond and Beverly Sackler Gift, 1988. www.metmuseum.org

currently known, the presence of multiple copies indicates a larger scale of both production and potential distribution, as well as the popularity of the composition and its subject.

The most famous artistic representation of a pig is found on the Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs; it is also the closest match to Rm. 714's pig. This pig, seen among the reliefs on the north and east walls of Court VI of Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh, is the only complete appearance of the animal within the Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs (Fig. 5).²⁴ While most of the room is devoted to scenes depicting the quarrying of the stone and transport of the half-carved colossal *lamassu* statue intended for the palace, another section of the relief is concerned with irrigation and related works.²⁵ This relief section depicts a canal and the swamp it runs into, a marshland richly thicketed with reeds that contains several animals, including a sow with her seven piglets around her. The close similarity between the two images is curious given their different geographic origins: Rm. 714 is most probably from a site in northern Babylonia, as discussed, and thus far to the south of the Assyrian palace relief.

When these images are considered alongside each other, the pigs seen in the earliest two examples (BM 128891 and MMA 1988.433.1) appear in contrast to the later, first millennium B.C.E. representations seen in Rm. 714 and the Nineveh relief. The pigs in both earlier examples, particularly on the plaque (BM 128891), display a bristly mane running along the back, a trait seen most prominently in males due to the clear patterns of sexual dimorphism demonstrated across various pig subspecies.²⁶ This bristly mane is also seen in a partially preserved pig on a relief from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh (Fig. 6), which appears to be the only other pig found within the Assyrian palace reliefs. Although the pig's head is not preserved, depriving us of the chance to examine the tusks, the bristly mane running along its back is clearly depicted. The pigs of Rm. 714 and the relief in Sennacherib's palace, in contrast, lack this bristly mane; incised hatchmarks mark the tablet above the pig's back and around its tail, but these

auction in Paris at Christie's on the 30th of September 2003. The information provided in the auction catalogue is scant, but the photograph is sufficiently detailed to connect it to the one in the collection of the British Museum (Christie's 2003: 56, lot 76).

²⁴ Court VI, Slab 60 (Barnett *et al.* 1998: plate 108). The clear parallel between the two images has been noted by Reade (2001/2002). Ataç (2010: 75) also noted the singular nature of this pig within the Assyrian reliefs. We do, however, see a partially preserved boar in the reliefs of the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh (Fig. 6).

²⁵ This program is discussed by Russell (1987: 536). For the reliefs themselves, see the volume by Barnett, *et al.* (1998).

²⁶ This same characteristic mane can be seen in a later wall panel, dated to the Sasanian period c. 6th c. C.E., which depicts a boar with a bristling mane charging through a thicket (MMA 32.150.22; Harper 2006: no. 12). Even in non-aggressive depictions, such as a cylinder seal from the Achaemenid period with four registers of striding boars, bristling manes may be seen on each, presumably male, animal (Morgan Library Seal No. 836).

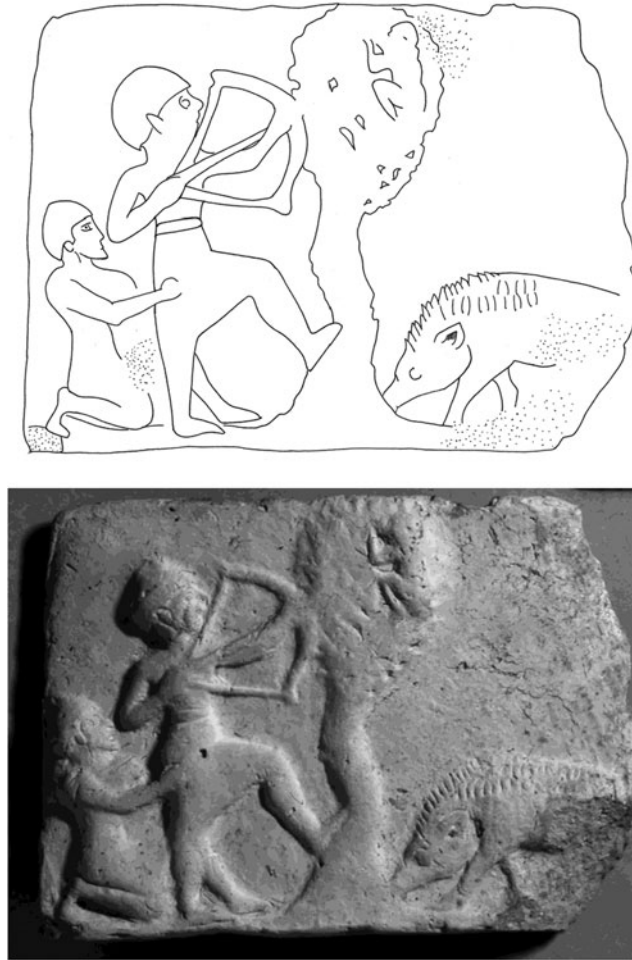


Fig. 4 Plaque of Archer, BM 128891, 12.1 × 9 cm. Drawing and photograph by author

markings emphasize the outline of the pig, and are not a part of its figure. The lines are too short and fine, and continue past the point where the bristles of a mane would end. Overall, Rm. 714's pig presents a less aggressive image than the similarly bristly-maned figures seen in later seals, where the pig charges forward, head and tusks raised, against the hunter. Though the pig in Rm. 714 has no accompanying piglets, the similarity between it and the sow on Sennacherib's palace relief, coupled with the disconnect between it and the depictions of other, clearly male, pigs, helps to identify it as a sow rather than a boar. The two are not exact copies of each other: the sow in the Assyrian palace relief has visibly pronounced udders, to match her accompanying young, and while her tusks are also visible, they are not as prominent as those seen in Rm. 714.²⁷ The similarities between the two, however, far outweigh these differences, and the presence of a distinctive bristly mane on the pig in Ashurbanipal's palace makes it clear that these hallmarks of sexual dimorphism were important in all depictions of the animal.

We see other, even later, pigs within the artistic record, representations that revisit the more aggressive posture seen in wild boars. The motif of a boar hunt is increasingly represented in cylinder seals from the fifth century B.C.E. onwards. In these seals, the hunt is the central and predominant motif, with the boar serving as a dangerous quarry. The staging – as can be seen in a

²⁷ Although the tusks of male pigs are more pronounced than those seen in females, they are present in both sexes.

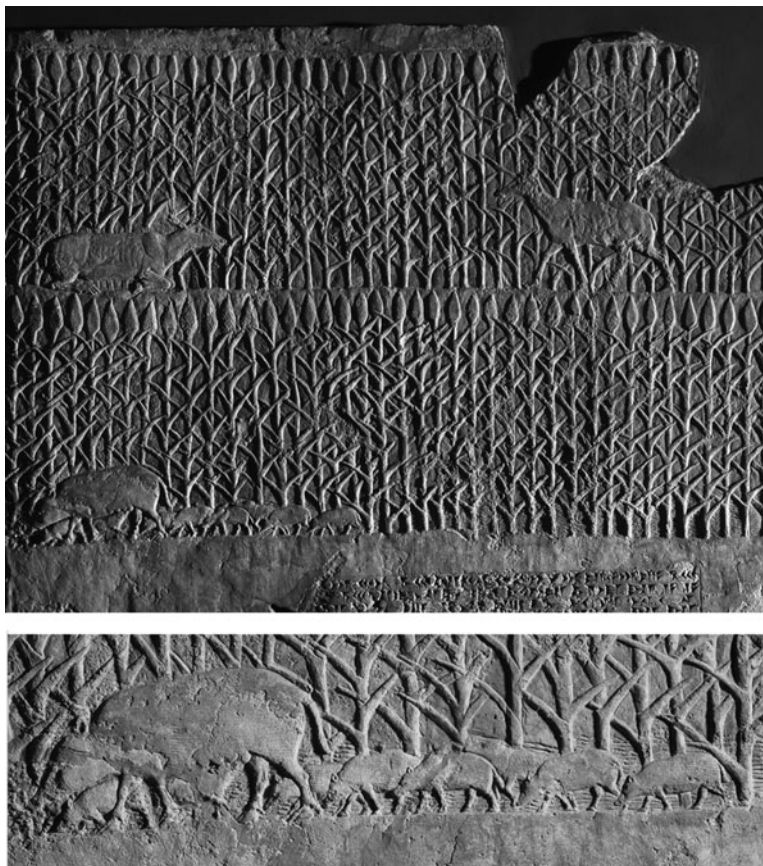


Fig. 5 Top: BM 124824, full panel 203.2 × 199.39 cm, South-West Palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh, Court VI; bottom: panel detail of marsh; detail of sow and piglets, © Trustees of the British Museum

characteristic seal (MMA 1984.383.25; Fig. 7) – most often features a single hunter set against a charging boar. In this particular seal, the archer faces both charging boar and lion, but the boar may also appear as the sole quarry. The use of the bow in this example is seen in other seals of this type, though other weapons are also used. In another seal (BM 120325; Fig. 8), the hunter is on horseback and attacks the charging boar with a spear.²⁸ In this example, as with the much earlier British Museum plaque (BM 128891), the bristly-maned back of the boar is clearly depicted.²⁹ Each of these representations is marked by the dangerous and aggressive posture of the animal, with most mid-charge, attacking the hunter. These stances are at odds with the non-aggressive stance seen on Rm. 714's pig.

Comparative Plaques and the Role of Pigs

Even considered in isolation, artistic parallels between the Assyrian relief and Rm. 714 are clear; however, the relief is only one feature of the tablet. The most anomalous aspect of Rm. 714 remains its highly curved reverse, which prohibits it from fulfilling the same wall-mounted functions as other plaques, which would otherwise be the closest comparisons to Rm. 714. The unexpected disjunction allows us to treat Rm. 714 as a distinct object, albeit one with stylistic

²⁸ We see a similar composition in BM 89144, also from the Achaemenid period; in this seal, the hunter has dismounted and confronts a charging, rampant boar with his spear.

²⁹ This motif moves east, to be represented in the Persepolis Fortification Seals. PFS 0395 features an archer shooting at a

boar, while the sealing image PFS 2323 depicts a standing archer shooting at a boar, with a very clear bristle-maned back, which bears the wounds from several arrows; see Garrison (2011: 17–20).



Fig. 6 Left: BM 124922, full panel 170.18 × 53.34 cm, North Palace at Nineveh, Room S; right: detail of boar in marsh; © Trustees of the British Museum



Fig. 7 Boar Hunt seal, MMA 1984.383.25, 3.2 cm. © Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of Sarah and Martin Cherkasky, 1984. www.metmuseum.org



Fig. 8 Boar Hunt seal, BM 120325, 2.7 × 2.1 cm. © Trustees of the British Museum

parallels to other plaques. The flat back of other plaques facilitates their wall-mounted display, a trait that is also seen in sculptors models. In contrast to the rough edges of mould-produced plaques, however, the reliefs carved on sculptor's models were more finely detailed.³⁰ Of course, moulds produced plaques in numbers that could excuse their roughness and lack of finer details. The moulds for these objects survive far less frequently than the copies produced, thanks to the disparity in the numbers and circulation, although they are occasionally preserved (Spycket 1992).

The functions of these two types of object are fundamentally distinct. Moulds produced objects *en masse* that were used by private households, often functioning apotropaically, as in the case of a first millennium B.C.E. mould-produced *mušhuššu* from Babylon (BM 103381; Fig. 9).³¹ At 9.2 centimetres by 10.2 centimetres, this plaque was too large to have been kept easily on one's person and was instead designed for household protection and was possibly displayed. Not all plaques were necessarily protective. One mould-produced plaque, from Neo-Babylonian period Nippur, features a lion striding to the left, with a single line of cuneiform identifying it as the property of Iddina-ahu, the son of Ninurta-balat-X.³² Although Rm. 714 is not mould-produced, the two objects otherwise much resemble each other, and may have performed similar functions. Differing somewhat in content, there are also a number of mass-produced plaques from the Old Babylonian period that feature scenes of sexual intercourse. These terracotta plaques generally depict a man and woman in the midst of intercourse, though single nude female figures, often portrayed as straddling or squatting over an erect phallus, also appear. While these objects could potentially appeal to the goddess Inana, they presumably had a less directly apotropaic function (Bahrani 2011: 51; Spycket 1992).³³

The finely-crafted details seen in Rm. 714 and objects like it stand in contrast to the rough-edged mould-produced plaques. These so-called "sculptors models" may not have even served that purpose; some were clearly displayed publicly. A model of the king killing a lion, though in a style very similar to the Neo-Assyrian royal reliefs, has several key differences. The relief in the model is much higher than that of the wall reliefs, and although the object is broken the face of the king seems to have

³⁰ See, for example, the clay model of a king killing a lion (Curtis and Reade 1995: no. 41), and another model of a striding deer in fine relief (Marzahn 2008: 239).

³¹ These apotropaic figures – primarily supernatural human or bestial figures – are, like this example, well represented in the first millennium B.C.E., though less commonly seen in earlier periods (Assante 2002: 7).

³² McMahon 2006: 133, pl. 180: 3.

³³ These plaques have their own interesting history and trajectory of use. The industry that produced these plaques begins at the end of the Ur III period and continues until around 1700 B.C.E. As Assante points out, the plaque industry was inventive in regard to the artistic motifs seen: "out of more than seventy plaque motifs, thirty-three are solely creations of the plaque industry...nearly half then do not draw their sources from preexistent art and are, in effect, multiples without originals" (2002: 3).



Fig. 9 *mušhuššu* plaque, BM 103381, 9.2 × 10.2 cm. © Trustees of the British Museum

suffered targeted and deliberate damage more characteristic of purposeful defacement (Reade 2001/2002: 152). Such defacement suggests the object was on public display, as a focal point for worship and reverence of the king; when such reverence failed, the object was targeted and defaced. Public display would have been at odds with the functions required of a sculptor's model.

The closest match to Rm. 714 may be found in a group of plaques excavated at Babylon. These objects, all broken, were described as plano-convex, with a similarly curved reverse to cuneiform tablets.³⁴ All finely carved in low relief, the group includes depictions such as a striding lion, with only the hindquarters preserved, and the upper half of a bearded male figure holding a flask. Koldewey (1901) presented their potential function as either that of sculptors models or objects of personal religious dedication, in light of their location near the temple of Ninurta, although he noted neither explanation could entirely and conclusively be supported.

We can consider the merits of either of these functions as applied to Rm. 714. If it were a personal object of religious or ritual significance, Rm. 714 would then be grouped alongside other figurines and plaques that fulfilled apotropaic roles, designed to protect a private dwelling. Here, the convex nature of Rm. 714's reverse is less problematic: though the previously discussed *mušhuššu*-plaque may have been easily displayed, such objects, particularly figurines, did not need to be actively visible in order to offer protection. An apotropaic function is not often a role assigned to pigs, however. While monstrous figurines could be buried at critical points in private dwellings to create a protected space, they were individual demonic or *mischwesen* figures, and certainly not pigs, though dog figurines could fulfill this role.³⁵ If we consider Rm. 714 as a possible sculptor's model, we may simply posit that it belonged to an individual, one Azaru, son of Esagil, according to the inscription on the reverse. From the fine quality of the relief, its creator (who may or may not have been the same person) had a high degree of technical and artistic skill, and the relief itself finds stylistic echoes in the depiction of a pig in Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh, with further echoes seen in the clearly male pig found in Ashurbanipal's Nineveh palace. Despite Rm. 714's southern origin, there is no discernable stylistic difference between these two roughly

³⁴ Koldewey 1901: 6–7; also discussed in Reade (2001/2002: 154–155). Small objects carved in the round were also found, including the head of a bearded male, worked in fine detail (Koldewey 1911: Abb. 55–56).

³⁵ On these figurines, see Klengel-Brandt (1968: 53–69) and Nakamura (2004: 11–25). The textual and ritual aspect that accompanied the use of such figurines is discussed in the

editions found in Wiggermann (1992). The apotropaic use of small figurines of dogs, often made of bronze, may be linked to the association with the healing goddess Gula (Braun-Holzinger 1984: 86–88). In the Old Babylonian period, plaques, whether apotropaic or not, were most often found in non-elite or institutional contexts, located overwhelmingly in residential areas (Assante 2002: 14–16).

contemporary examples, and we do not see an overall division of Assyrian and Babylonian styles in regards to these depictions. As Reade points out, however, there is little reason to connect Rm. 714, which existed outside of the court sphere, with the depictions seen on Assyrian palace reliefs (2001/2002: 154–55). In the end, this leaves us in a similar position to Koldewey: either explanation is possible, but neither can be conclusively (or exclusively) supported with the available evidence.

The connection between Rm. 714's pig and the mother sow found on the Assyrian reliefs, however, provides another possible contextual grounding for this plaque. The marshy scene of the reliefs in Court VI, with its lush vegetation and abundant game animals, is further detailed in an inscription at the entrance to the room, which describes Sennacherib's actions to create the marsh depicted on the reliefs:³⁶

To calm the rush of the waters for the orchards, I (Sennacherib) created a swamp and planted a canebrake therein. Herons, wild pigs, and deer I turned those...the canebrakes flourished well, the high-flying heron built his nest, and the wild pigs and deer multiplied abundantly (Russell 1991: 259).

Sennacherib here recounts his own engineering feat of building the Kisiri canal, in order to provide consistent irrigation for the orchards (Russell 1987: 536). These are standard actions for a ruler, as the ability to provide a consistent water source and to maintain the complicated system of canals was a hallmark of kingship.³⁷

Beyond the associations with kingship, the marshy scene of Court VI ties into a larger context involving displays of abundance. Repetition – of animals, of vegetation – was a visual marker of both abundance and fertility, arguably one seen as early as the mid-third millennium B.C.E.³⁸ Pigs fit this trope well. When compared to the other animals, domestic or wild, in Mesopotamia, which at most and only rarely would bear two offspring at once, the potential half-dozen or more piglets that could be born in a single litter was a clear and direct sign of fertility and abundance. The created marshland of this relief is a lush hunting ground, and the sow appears as one of the game animals to populate it. The other animals, three deer, are placed singly and are fully mature. They represent animals that may be hunted as they are, while the sow and her piglets are a promise of greater future abundance and prosperity. The inscription may claim that both wild pigs and deer “multiplied abundantly,” but the relief itself focuses on the former of the two animals. Sennacherib has restored the marshland to fullness, if not created it entirely anew, and in doing so has also created a landscape that displays the abundance that would be emblematic of this rule overall. The pig functions within this narrative and, as a consequence, reinforces its positive qualities.

Not all qualities from the Assyrian relief may be grafted onto the pig in Rm. 714, however. Indeed, though the pig in Rm. 714 appears in a similar posture and attitude to the mother sow, it lacks the more explicitly stated context of abundance provided by the larger setting and landscape of the relief. Despite this, we may still say with some certainty that Rm. 714's pig appears to be a sow and not a boar, and that her overall posture, similar to the sow of the Sennacherib relief, is a non-threatening one, particularly when compared to the visibly bristly-maned depictions or more notably aggressive posture of pigs seen on the cylinder seals previously discussed. It is less clear what the role of such a non-aggressive posture would be, as Rm. 714's pig lacks the entourage of piglets that would more easily position her as a marker of abundance and fertility. While this does not discount such connections, it does require we consider them as one more alternative and potentially possible function, or even aspect, of the tablet and its relief. Aside from the information gleaned directly from Rm. 714's relief and its inscription, all other conclusions must be drawn through comparative context, and considered with those caveats.

³⁶ The inscription on the section of Court VI that is closest to the sow and her piglets does not describe the marsh, but rather the transport of stone for the human-headed bull, or *lamassu*, statues: “great bull colossi, which were made in the district of Balatai, to his lordly palace, which is in Nineveh, joyfully [Sennacherib] had them dragged.” (Russell 1999: 286).

³⁷ Laurito and Pers 2002: 275–6. On the features of marshes and rivers in the area over time, see Eger (2011: 55–56).

³⁸ On representations of abundance in art, see Winter (2010: 205–08). Miller (2013) posits that the repeated patterns seen in the twisted wire pendants found in the royal tombs of Ur may have been stylized representations of either twisted rope or the patterns of sheep, roped together to be milked.

So far, this article has focused more upon the questions posed by Rm. 714 than any possible answers. As we have seen, definitive conclusions about Rm. 714 are, in large part, difficult to reach. From its inscription, we may say with some certainty that Rm. 714 was a personal object that either belonged to or was made by one Azaru, son of Esagil. Its creator was certainly skilled, as is evident in the high quality of the relief's carving, and similar sculpted or carved objects have been analyzed as either sculptors' models or apotropaic objects. Though Rm. 714 finds close stylistic connections to two pigs seen in Assyrian palace reliefs, there is little reason to connect a privately owned object from Babylonia to art produced within the elite, court sphere of Assyria. This does not decide the case in favor of its apotropaic use; however, as Rm. 714's highly curved back restricted its ability to be hung or mounted directly on a wall, which may have limited its more visible use and display. Given these caveats, it may be best to understand Rm. 714 first and foremost as a personal object, potentially one with dedicatory significance, though other possible uses are not beyond the realm of speculation.³⁹ Small in size and thus highly portable, Rm. 714 would easily have traveled with its owner as part of his personal belongings, with the high quality and fine detail of the relief helping it merit its place as a valued and treasured personal object.

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³⁹ Given the high relief and fine detail of Rm. 714, one such possible function may have been as the initial positive master for a negative relief mould, though similar objects fulfilling such a function have not typically survived. A relief in negative, or intaglio, is required to create the positive images seen in raised-relief plaques, and the modeling of a negative relief to produce a correct positive image is difficult. The creation of an initial positive mould, carved in high relief, would allow its creator to use more familiar and

intuitive techniques in producing a final, positive image in raised relief. This image could then serve as the master pattern object from which a mould was made, as in the technique of lost-wax or investment casting, already seen in Mesopotamia well before the first millennium B.C.E. (Hunt 1980). This possible function for Rm. 714 would reconcile the skill seen in its carving, the highly curved back that precluded its easy display, and its otherwise unincised nature.

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خنازير ولوحات جدارية: دراسة الرقيم 714 على ضوء مقارنة المصادر الفنية والنصوص المكتوبة
بقلم: جينا كونستانتوبولس

نبذة مختصرة

اللوحة 714 هي رقيم من الألف الأول ق.م. من ضمن المجموعة الموجودة لدى المتحف البريطاني، ويمتاز بصورة منحوتة نحتاً فاخراً على ظهر الرقيم لخنزير وهو يسير قدماً. وقد تم شراء هذا الرقيم من هرمزد رسام في بغداد عام 1877، ويخلو اللوح من أي إشارة إلى سياقه أو أصله الأثري وعليه وجب تقييمه استناداً إلى مراجع نصية وفنية أخرى عن الخنازير. أقرب موازي هي خنزيرة وصغارها ظهرت في منحوتات البلاط السادس من قصر سنحاريب في نينوى. خلافاً لصور الخنازير التي تظهر على الأختام الأسطوانية حيث تبدو الخنازير وكأنها طراند خطيرة في مشهد الصيد، نرى الخنزير في الرقيم 714 في موقف محايد غير عدواني كما هي صورة الخنزيرة في المنحوتات الآشورية. ورغم أن ظهر الرقيم 714 الشديد الاستدارة يمنع من استخدامه كنتاج فني مؤطر يمكن عرضه بسهولة، فمن المحتمل أن يكون اللوح قد استخدم فيما استخدم كتميمة تبعد الشر أو كنموذج لنحت.