

Fragment Of A Scabbard Terminal

Mesopotamia

9th - 8th Century B.C.

Gypsum

H: 26cm

Taken from a larger gypsum wall carving, this triangular fragment displays the hilt and scabbard of a dagger or 'akinakes'. Decorated with a pair of outward facing rampant lions, each with interlocking forelegs and open claws. It was a motif that was repeated multiple times throughout the extensive wall carvings found in the North West palace at Nimrud. The double lion hilt was thought to be the 'Royal Scabbard' as Darius himself was depicted wearing the most ornamental version, his personal guards, attendants and warriors were also portrayed with very similar hilts. Situated in the 'cradle of civilization', the earliest known human habitation of the site of Nimrud, near modern day Mosul dates from the 6th millennium B.C. However, it is most well-known as the capital of the Assyrian empire in the 8th and 9th century B.C. During this period, the site of Nimrud had a succession of Assyrian palaces and temples built upon it. It is renowned for the sculptures excavated from its Northwest Palace by A.H Layard in the late 19th century. The reliefs and gateway statues found here constitute some of the first modern discoveries of ancient Mesopotamian art and architecture: previously Assyria had been remembered only through biblical and classical texts. The Northwest Palace at Nimrud was built for the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II (r. 883–859 B.C.), he succeeded his father, Tukulti-Ninurta II, in 883 BC. During his reign he embarked on a vast program of expansion, first conquering the peoples to the north in Asia Minor as far as Nairi and exacting tribute from Phrygia, then invading Aram (modern Syria) conquering the Aramaeans and neo Hittites between the Khabur and the Euphrates Rivers. On his return back home, he moved his capital to the city of Kalhu (modern day Nimrud). The palaces, temples and other buildings raised by him bear witness to a considerable development of wealth and art. The interior walls were lined with enormous stone reliefs depicting various court scenes, lion hunts and divine protective

imagery. The section above most likely comes from a larger relief depicting the King and his warriors. A similar full panel is housed in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, where both figures, the King and his attendant are wearing a sword with the Royal Scabbard. The lions with their paws wrapped around each other were supposed to infuse the sword with their strength. The image of the lion was used extensively to represent Kings in Mesopotamian art as a symbol of power and strength. A fragment of a similarly-decorated scabbard given by Layard to the British Ambassador in Constantinople is now in the Kalamazoo Museum, Michigan (acc. No. 60.253). For comparanda, see: P.Collins, Assyrian Palace Sculptures, London 2008, 00. 53-54.

Literature:

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