EGYPTIAN AND ASSYRIAN RELIEFS

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The scholar to whom we pay homage in this volume has emphasized, in *De Kunst der Oudheid*, the greatness and originality of both Egyptian and Assyrian reliefs. Each constitutes a perfect vehicle for pictorial narrative capable of rendering complex situations without ambiguity. Byvanck did not consider whether or not these two schools of sculpture influenced one another, or perhaps we must interpret his silence as a negative answer to this question. But two other scholars have asserted that a connection existed, although they disagree as to who gave and who received in the exchange.

In 1932 Breasted drew attention to some details in a hunting scene of Ramses III (1198–1165 B.C.) which the epigraphic expedition of the Oriental Institute of Chicago had just discovered (fig. 1). The relief shows the king in his chariot pursuing a fleeing lion which had been wounded by his arrows. But Ramses has turned round and drives a spear into an aggressor attacking him from the rear. The wall surface is largely destroyed at this point, but the expedition traced a lion’s paw pierced by an arrow near the back of the chariot. Breasted recalled a similar incident (fig. 2) depicted by Assurbanipal (668–626 B.C.) and after having stressed the common features in the reliefs he remarks: „In both the charging lion has been sorely wounded while at a distance... and charges his foe... To conclude that an elaborate composition of this kind would be developed in these two different countries with such extraordinary identity of detail both in temporal and local relations, while the artists were working in complete independence of each other, is hardly a possibility.” Since the relief of Ramses III is older than that of Assurbanipal by 500 years he concluded that “the art of Nineveh was influenced by the relief sculpture of Egypt”.

Meissner ꞌ accepted the resemblance as a valid proof of influence but claimed an Asiatic source for the Egyptian scene. He quoted renderings of

1 Meissner, 3–14.
lion hunts in the reliefs of Tell Halaf and Malatya, but these belong to the 9th and 8th centuries respectively and have, therefore, no bearing on our problem. As a further argument he adduced the fact that the Egyptians learned to use horse and chariot from Asiatics. "Bei dieser Lage der Dinge ist es wohl mehr als wahrscheinlich, daß die Aegypter neben der Sache und dem Namen auch die Darstellung des Wagens, der Pferde, und ich möchte hinzufügen, teilweise auch der Jagdtiere (speziell der Löwen und Wildstiere) von den Vorderasiaten übernommen haben werden". Three separate issues are here confused:

1. The Egyptians took the horse and chariot over from the Asiatics;
2. The Egyptian king imitated the Asiatics in using the chariot not only in war but also in sport, namely in hunting big game;
3. The Egyptians imitated Asiatic renderings of such hunts in art.

If the first contention is certain to be correct and the second probably so, the third is a *non sequitur*. For once actual objects become known, their rendering in art can, of course, proceed without foreign examples. It was sufficient that Portuguese soldiers reached Benin, Dutch merchants Nagasaki, and Englishmen the Moghul Court for their effigies to appear occasionally in native art. Meissner moreover, loses sight of the fact that Breasted based his conclusion on one specific and truly striking similarity. Generalities about the use of the horse and chariot cannot explain that Ramses III and Assurbanipal are both depicted hunting lions with bow and arrow and being charged at close range by a lion which is despatched with a spear.

If it were proved that a connection between Egyptian and Assyrian reliefs existed, it might possibly, as Breasted maintains, be difficult to claim that the scene was invented twice independently. In the absence of such proof the twofold occurrence of the scene cannot establish the connection, for the charge of a wounded lion must have been a common hazard of this type of sport. It is true that the setting of the hunt in Egypt differs from that in Assyria, but the conditions were closely similar. Ramses III is shown driving his chariot through the reeds, but we must imagine a narrowing circle of beaters surrounding the huntsman and his game; for without them there would be no sport. It is possible that the companies of soldiers which

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2 Most of the monuments mentioned in the following pages are conveniently illustrated by Wreszinski. The views propounded by him seem to me untenable.