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Assyrian Music as Represented
and
Representations of Assyrian Music

A thesis presented

by

Jack Cheng

to

The Department of the History of Art and Architecture

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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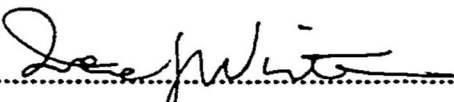
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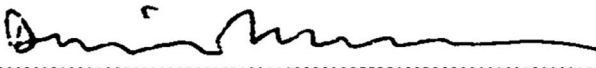
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Assyrian Representations of Music and Representations of Assyrian Music

This thesis describes the social practice of music as it is represented in images from the late Neo-Assyrian period (883-648 BC), and then considers how images of music may contribute new understanding to the study of ancient art. Musical instruments of the period include chordophones (horizontal forearm harp, vertical harp, various lyres, lute, and possibly a zither), aerophones (pipes, flutes, whistles, trumpets), membranophones (kettle drums, frame drums, and others), idiophones (cymbals, sistra) and vocal music. A variety of musicians are distinctively portrayed: male and female; Assyrian, Elamite, Judean, Syrian, Arab and others; human and animal. The events in which these musicians play these instruments are classified as Military, Religious, Banquets, Work, and Mythical. Once these categories of instruments, musicians, and events are defined, patterns emerge. For example, the horizontal forearm harp is played only by male Assyrians in Religious and Military scenes. Another pattern: female musicians tend to play for female audiences.

Using the definitions and classification systems developed in the first half of the thesis, the second half focuses on the semantic value of a half dozen themes that recur in these representations of music. An argument is made for the horizontal forearm harp being a national instrument, closely associated with the king and his duties, regal, martial and cultic. Images of foreign musicians are re-examined with an eye to how visual details show them becoming assimilated, or assyrianized—a visual analogue to the royal boast about prisoners of war: “I made of them Assyrians.” The inherent temporal aspect of



music is shown to have embellished the narrative structure of the palace reliefs. A typology of lyres is established and may help in identifying the musicians who wear feathered headdresses. The placement of images of female musicians is considered as a clue to the function of palace rooms. The ancient vocabulary used to describe music is considered as a means of accessing the aesthetic appreciation of music. Some of the meanings expressed in these images of music are explicit, others implicit. All of them add to a richer understanding of Assyrian life and art.



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