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## THE ICONOGRAPHY OF DEPICTING NAKED ENEMIES IN ANCIENT EGYPT AND MESOPOTAMIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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# THE ICONOGRAPHY OF DEPICTING NAKED ENEMIES IN ANCIENT EGYPT AND MESOPOTAMIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

BY

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## ABSTRACT

[AR] دلالات تصوير الأسرى العراة في مصر القديمة وبلاد العراق القديم [دراسة مقارنة] تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى مناقشة دلالات تصوير الأعداء العراة في كل من مصر القديمة والعراق القديم. وتقتصر على تمثيل الأعداء العراة من الرجال فقط دون الأطفال أو النساء. ويكمن السبب في اختيار هذا الموضوع إلى إلقاء المزيد من الضوء على أوجه الشبه والاختلاف بين تمثيل الأسرى العراة، وكذلك المقارنة بين مفهوم تجريدهم من ملابسهم في مناظر كلتا الحضارتين. وقد ناقشت الدراسة أهم هذه التمثيلات واستعرضتها للإجابة على كثير من الأسئلة التي تدور حول هذا الموضوع، ومنها: ما الحضارة التي ظهر هذا النمط في مناظرها أكثر من الأخرى هل هي مصر القديمة أم العراق القديم؟ وهل العري مرتبط بمفهوم عقوبة الأسرى أو العصاة بشكل عام؟ وإلى أي مدى يرتبط العري بمفهوم العار أو الخزي والمهانة بشكل عام وبخاصة للعدو المهزوم؟ وما مدى ارتباط العري بفكرة الموت؟ وهل اقتصر تمثيل الأسرى وقد جردوا من ملابسهم في مناظر مصر القديمة والعراق القديم على الأعداء الأحياء فقط، أم على الأموات منهم، أم كلاهما الأعداء الأحياء والأموات؟ وقد استنتجت هذه الدراسة أن مناظر الأسرى العراة من الأعداء قد مثلت في العراق القديم أكثر منها في مصر القديمة، كما أن العري قد ارتبط بمفهوم العقاب لتعميق إحساس الخزي والعار وامتهان الأعداء. ولم يقتصر تمثيل الأسرى العراة الأموات دون الأحياء، بل مُثِّل كلاهما عراة، وإن زادت أمثلة مناظر الأسرى الموتى العراة أو المحكوم عليهم بالموت، حيث اقترن تمثيل الأسرى العراة الموتى مع الإعدام بطرق عديدة غاية في القسوة، كالسلخ والوضع على الخازوق، وبخاصة في مناظر العراق القديم في العصر الآشوري الحديث.

[EN] This study focuses on the iconography of depicting naked enemies in the ancient Egyptian and Iraqi civilizations. It is limited to the representation of naked, male enemies only, not women or children. The reason for choosing this topic is to shed more light on the similarities and differences in depicting scenes of naked captives and the concept of stripping prisoners of their clothes in both civilizations. This study also discusses and reviews the most important representations to answer many questions. For instance, which civilization portrays this motif more than ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia? Is nudity associated with the punishment of enemies, captives, prisoners, or the disobedient in general? To what extent is nudity generally related to the concept of shame concerning the defeated one or the enemy? To what extent is nudity related to the notion of death? Is stripping prisoners of their clothes in scenes from ancient Egypt and Iraq restricted to living enemies, the dead among them, or both? The study concludes that scenes of naked enemies in Mesopotamia occur more frequently than in ancient Egypt and that nudity is linked to the concept of punishment to deepen the sense of shame, disgrace, and humiliation of enemies. Moreover, the representation of nakedness includes dead and living enemies in both civilizations. However, depictions of dead, naked captives are also combined with cruel methods of execution, such as skinning and impalement, especially in Neo-Assyrian scenes.

**KEYWORDS:** Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, captives, enemy, nakedness, nudity, prisoners.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In ancient Egypt, nudity is associated with renewal and rebirth. The children are represented naked to distinguish their youthful age. Although it is not uncommon to show men completely naked in ancient Egyptian scenes<sup>1</sup>, it is rare to represent Egyptian women completely naked unless necessary to their profession, such as maids, dancers, or depicting several deities<sup>2</sup>. Nudity differs between the upper and lower classes<sup>3</sup>. Enemies wore clothes more frequently in Egyptian art than those shown naked. However, unclothed, or naked enemies reflect the ideology of Egyptian domination over foreigners<sup>4</sup>.

Since the Ubaid period in Mesopotamia, naked men have been shown as recipients of offerings. In addition, the naked hero is depicted wrestling animals on cylinder seal impressions. This motif is even represented in the Neo-Babylonian period (626-539 BC), in which the naked hero embodies masculine strength and courage<sup>5</sup>. Generally, living prisoners of war are considered part of the spoils of battle, i.e., booty. Sometimes, they are deported from their homelands. Then, as the text of some kings of ancient Mesopotamia, living prisoners were employed according to their skills<sup>6</sup>.

The enemies were depicted naked on the battlefield from the early periods in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. Prisoners of war are shown in painful situations in depictions of royal victory<sup>7</sup>. It can be noted that the meaning of the word «nudity» in ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts connotes poverty and need in general<sup>8</sup>. For example, *ḥ3y* in hieroglyphics means «naked»<sup>9</sup>. Some texts mention that the deceased attributes the idea of good work to himself by giving to the poor man. The deceased states: «*I gave bread to the hungry...clothes to the naked*», meaning nakedness indicates poverty<sup>10</sup>. As in Sumerian, *Bar-šà-*, *sù* (*g*) means «naked one»<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, *Kam-gālḏ* is the Akkadian verb that means «unclothe» or «uncover»<sup>12</sup>. *Erû* in Akkadian is used in connection with poverty, need, or the decline of enemies<sup>13</sup>.

## II. METHODOLOGICAL STUDY

### The Iconography of an Enemy's Nudity in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia

#### A. Punishment with Shame

Both ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia are similar in how they represent the beating and punishment of naked, guilty men from the end of the fourth millennium BC and early third millennium BC. The enemies or guilty ones are stripped of their clothes and restrained. Sometimes, they are beaten in front of an official or governor, who might be the

<sup>1</sup> ASHER-GREVE & SWEENEY 2006: 117.

<sup>2</sup> ASHER-GREVE & SWEENEY 2006: 120; FIGS. E2, E3.

<sup>3</sup> GOELET 1993: 20-31.

<sup>4</sup> SHAHEEN 1992: 35-64; DAVID 2011: 83-100; HSU 2017: 71-87; FIGS.1-4.

<sup>5</sup> ASHER-GREVE & SWEENEY 2006: 121, FIG.M11; ABDULGHANI 2019: 9-45.

<sup>6</sup> GELB 1973: 90; NADALI 2009: 137-149; NADALI 2014: 101-106; ABDULGHANI 2020: 43-57.

<sup>7</sup> ASHER-GREVE & SWEENEY 2006: 124-132; NOWICKI 2021: 11-33,44.

<sup>8</sup> ASHER-GREVE & SWEENEY 2006: 112.

<sup>9</sup> ERMAN & GRAPOW (eds.): *Wb.III*: 14.

<sup>10</sup> GOELET 1993: 120.

<sup>11</sup> ASHER-GREVE & SWEENEY 2006: 117.

<sup>12</sup> ZARA 2020: 48.

<sup>13</sup> ASHER-GREVE & SWEENEY 2006: 117.

king. In addition to beating, it is evident that stripping enemies of their clothes is considered a punishment<sup>14</sup>.

In ancient Egypt, this motif is depicted in the tomb of Mereruka (LS10) at Saqqara, dating to the sixth dynasty of the Old Kingdom period. On the right side of the scene, one of the men is shown completely naked and bound. This punishment may be inflicted for being late in paying the taxes of guilty, or an enemy<sup>15</sup> [FIGURES 1].



[FIGURE 1]: The punishment of naked guilty Tomb of Mereruka, sixth dynasty.

ASHER-GREVE 2006: 113, FIG.E1

It can be noted that no depictions including nudity with punishment are known from the Middle Kingdom. Another scene from the New Kingdom shows the beating of Hittite spies, and one figure is shown naked. The scene occurs in the Battle of Kadesh on the outer wall of the west tower of the first pylon in the Luxor Temple, dating to the nineteenth dynasty of the New Kingdom period<sup>16</sup> [FIGURE 2].



[FIGURE 2]: Beating of Naked Hittite spy. Battle of Kadesh in Luxor Temple, the nineteenth dynasty.

MATIĆ 2019: 180, PL.XXI, a

The same motif is shown in Mesopotamia on a cylinder seal from the Uruk period(4000-3100 BC). The Naked enemies are depicted in front of a ruler or possibly the king, while a nude figure is standing and probably begging the ruler for mercy<sup>17</sup> [FIGURE 3]. The same motif is depicted on another cylinder seal impression that also dates to the Uruk period<sup>18</sup> [FIGURE 4].

<sup>14</sup> This study concludes this similarity between Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia.

<sup>15</sup> DUELL 1938: PL.37; ASHER-GREVE & SWEENEY 2006: 113; FIG.E1.

<sup>16</sup> MATIĆ 2019: 180; PL.XIII a.

<sup>17</sup> NADALI 2007b: 337, FIG.1a; GIRIT 2012: 9, FIG.1.

<sup>18</sup> NADALI 2007b: 339, FIG.2d.



[FIGURE 3]: Cylinder seal impressions showed the beating of naked enemies, Uruk period (4000-3100 BC.)  
GIRIT 2012: 9, FIG.1



[FIGURE 4]: The same motive of Cylinder seal impressions, Uruk period (4000-3100 BC.)  
NADALI 2007 b: 339, FIG.2d

### B. Fear while Escaping from Invaders

The civilizations under study are similar in representing the nakedness of enemies who are shown escaping, whether by land or sea. The defeated enemies appear completely naked and in a panic while escaping from invaders. In ancient Egypt, the motif of the king smiting enemies occurs in all periods. For example, on the *Narmer Palette*, two naked men are depicted running or escaping from the victorious king on the bottom of one side<sup>19</sup> [FIGURE 5].



[FIGURE 5]: Narmer Palette.HSU 2017: 72, FIG.4

It can be noticed that this motif did not spread in Mesopotamia until the beginning of the Neo-Assyrian period. In the reign of Ashurnasirbal II (883-859 BC), the naked, swimming enemies are shown escaping during the conquest of the lands of Laqû and Suhu. The scene is represented in the throne room of the North-West Palace in Nimrud<sup>20</sup> [FIGURE 6].

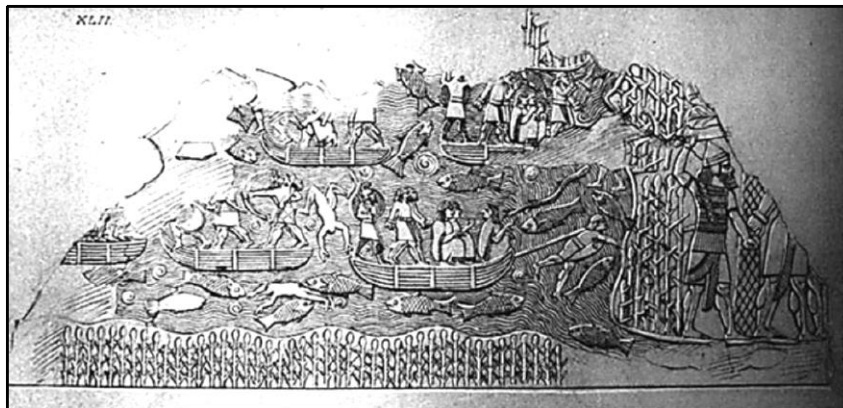
<sup>19</sup> Hsu 2017: 72, FIG.4.

<sup>20</sup> ALBENDA 1970: 148, FIG.3



[FIGURE 6]: Escaping naked enemies, north-west Palace, the reign of Ashurnasirbal II (883-859 BC). ALBENDA 1970: 148, FIG.3

Although there are depictions of ancient swimmers using water bottles to breathe while submerged, it is important to note that certain bodily actions, particularly during the New-Assyrian period, such as outstretched arms, indicate drowning or death, with fish beginning to feed on the body. Furthermore, the movement of the hands of the swimming figures indicates that they are still alive. An example can be found in the southwest palace in Nineveh, specifically on Slab 1 in Room LXX, dated to Sennacherib's campaign between 705-681 BC [FIGURE 7]<sup>21</sup>. This motif also appears in another scene, dating to Ashurbanipal's fourth campaign (669-627 BC) against the Elamite (Hamanu), in the North-West Palace in Nimrud (Room F). It is now displayed in the British Museum<sup>22</sup> [FIGURE 8].



[FIGURE 7]: Sinking some naked enemies while escaping, dated to Sennacherib's campaign (705-681 BC). NADALI 2010: 146, 149, FIG.15

<sup>21</sup> NADALI 2010: 146, 149, FIG.15.

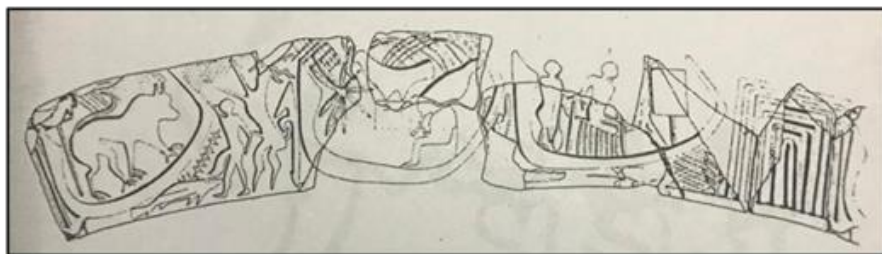
<sup>22</sup> NADALI 2007a: 62-63, PL.4a



[FIGURE 8]: Escaping Elamite while Ashurbanipal's fourth campaign (669-627 BC).  
NADALI 2007 a: 62-63, FIG.4/a

### C. Humiliation after Defeat

It is believed that nudity is often associated with feelings of humiliation and loss. The defeated enemies, especially leaders or governors, are humiliated by being stripped naked by the victors. They are always represented bound and in chains in these depictions. They are sometimes shown walking in processions with their families to deepen their sense of shame and humiliation. For example, in the Protodynastic period of ancient Egypt, the naked and bound enemy was represented before the seated king on his throne<sup>23</sup> [FIGURE 9]. The same motif occurs on the upper part of the *Battlefield Palette*, which dates to the late Predynastic period (Naqada III). The two pieces of the palette are preserved in the British and Ashmolean Museums<sup>24</sup> [FIGURE 10].



[FIGURE 9]: Naked and tied enemy before the seated king(Protodynastic period).  
ABDULLAH 2000: 49 -50, 208, FIG.30

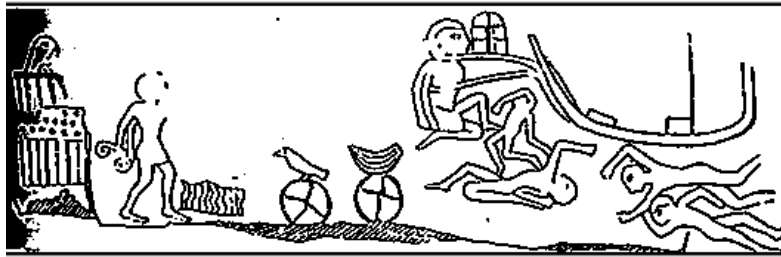


[FIGURE 10]: Upper part of *Battlefield Palette*,(Naqada III).  
ASHER-GREVE & SWEENEY 2006: FIG.E6

<sup>23</sup> ABDULLAH 2000: 49 -50, 208, FIG.30.

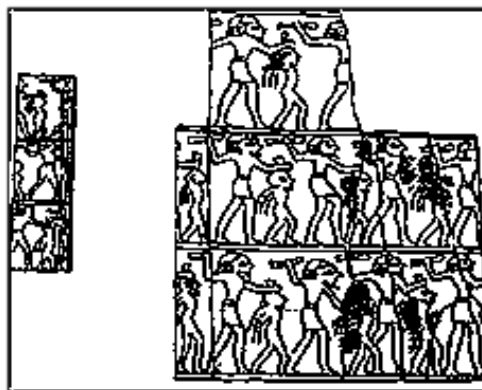
<sup>24</sup> ASHER-GREVE & SWEENEY 2006: FIG.E6.

The first depiction of naked, Nubian captives is recorded on the rock drawing of King Djer, dated to the first dynasty, near Wadi Halfa. Several captives are represented dead, while naked captives are before the name of the king<sup>25</sup> [FIGURE 11].



[FIGURE 11]: Naked alive and dead Nubien enemies, Wadi Halfa, First dynasty. SHAHEEN 1992: 57, FIG.2

A procession of guards leads naked prisoners on an ivory cylinder seal dating to the Archaic period, which comes from Hierakonpolis (3100-2649 BC)<sup>26</sup> [FIGURE 12]. Naked captives are also shown in a procession being brought to Egypt in the tomb of General «Intef» (TT386). The tomb dates to the reign of King «Mentuhotep-NebhepetreII» (2061-2010 BC) of the eleventh dynasty in the Middle Kingdom period<sup>27</sup> [FIGURE 13].



[FIGURE 12]: Ivory cylinder seal, shows a procession of naked enemies, Hierakonpolis, Archaic period.

ABDULLAH 2000: FIG.90



[FIGURE 13]: Procession of naked enemies, Tomb of Intef (TT386), dates to «Mentuhotep-Nebhepetre II».

ABDULLAH 2000: FIG.62

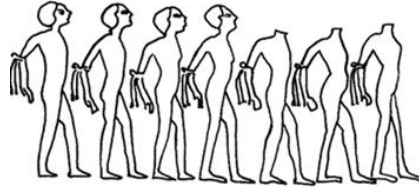
<sup>25</sup> SHAHEEN 1992: 57, FIG.2.

<sup>26</sup> NADALI 2007b: 343, FIG.4b; GIRIT 2012: 10, FIG.4; ABDULLAH 2000: 85, 105, 238, FIG.90.

<sup>27</sup> ABDULLAH 2000: 85, 105, 238, FIG.62.



It is worth mentioning that the enemies of the sun god are represented naked in the procession; some are depicted without their heads as they are cursed<sup>28</sup> [FIGURE 14]. In all these previous examples, it is evident that the naked enemy is depicted in front of the king or his name, or before a figure representing authority, to convey a sense of shame for the enemies.

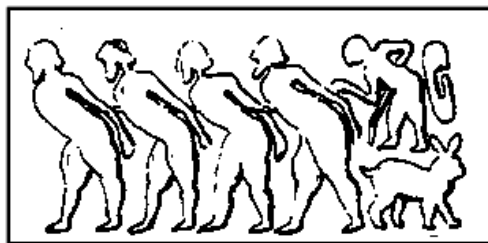


[FIGURE 14]: A procession of naked enemies of the Sun God. ASHER-GREVE & SWEENEY 2006: FIG.E5

In Mesopotamia, seals dating to the Uruk period (4000-3100 BC) show a procession of naked prisoners. They come from Grawa XI and Susa [FIGURES 15-16]. Additionally, the same motif is depicted on the inlaid panels from the Temple of Ishtar and the Palace of Mari, dating to the Early Dynastic period (2900-2350 BC)<sup>29</sup> [FIGURES 17-18]. The city of Ur also recorded its victory on both sides of the panel. The procession of naked enemies on one side, named idiomatically the «peace side», dates to the third millennium BC<sup>30</sup> [FIGURE 19].



[FIGURES 15]: Processions of naked enemies, Uruk period (4000-3100 BC). NADALI 2007b: FIG.2a



[FIGURE 16]: Processions of naked enemies, Uruk period (4000-3100 BC). NADALI 2007b: FIG.2c



[FIGURE 17]: Inlaid panels, Palace of Mari, Temple of Ishtar. NADALI 2007 b: FIG.5

<sup>28</sup> For the place of punishment. ASHER-GREVE & SWEENEY 2006: FIG.E5; EL-NADI 2023: 26-43.

<sup>29</sup> NADALI 2007b: 339, 343, 346, FIGS.2a, c, 5, 6.

<sup>30</sup> NADALI 2007b: 343, FIG.4b; GIRIT 2012: 10, FIG.4 & FIG.20: <https://smarthistory.org/standard-of-ur-2/> accessed on 2/2/2023



[FIGURES 18]: The same motif, inlaid panels, Palace of Mari, Temple of Ishtar. NADALI 2007 b: FIG.6



[FIGURE 19]: Standard of Ur, Third Millennium BC, (Details of peace side). GIRIT 2012: 10, FIG.4

In the Akkadian period (2350-2150 BC), the depiction of processions of naked enemies or captives became more frequent. It reflects the power of the victorious people. The motif occurs on the upper register of a conical, diorite palette found during the Middle Assyrian period (1365-1000 BC) at Susa, as spoils of war from Babylon. It is dated to the twelfth century BC [FIGURE 20]<sup>31</sup>. The same motif is represented on another stele from Susa [[FIGURE 21]<sup>32</sup>. A similar procession showing chains around the necks of the naked enemies is also depicted on a stele fragment from Nasiriya<sup>33</sup> [FIGURE 22]. Those processions of naked enemies, dated to the Middle Assyrian period (1365-1000 BC). [FIGURES 20-22].



[FIGURE 20]: Diorite palette from Susa  
GIRIT 2012: FIG.7

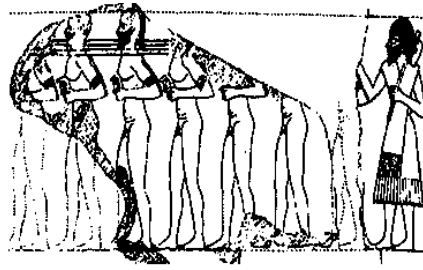


[FIGURE 21]: Palette from Susa.  
GIRIT 2012: FIG.9

<sup>31</sup> GIRIT 2012: 13, FIG.7

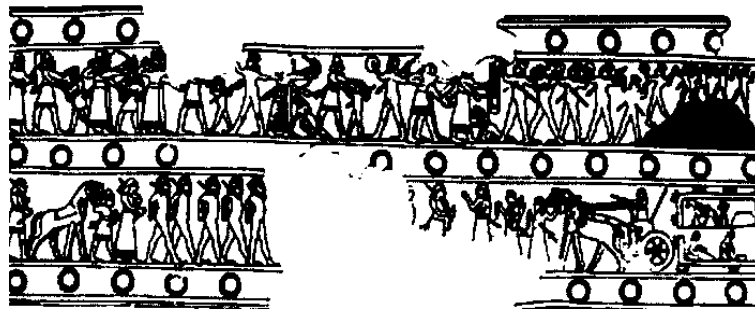
<sup>32</sup> GIRIT 2012: 13, FIG.9.

<sup>33</sup> ASHER-GREVE & SWEENEY 2006: 124, FIG. M4; Girit 2012: 15, FIG.12.

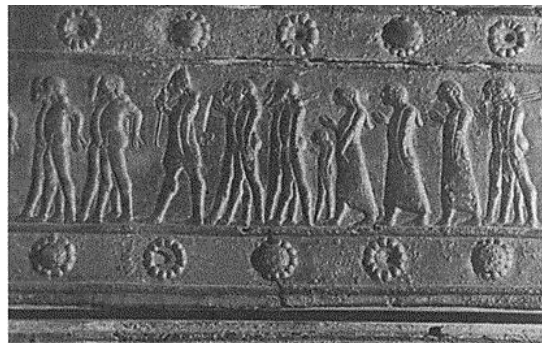


[FIGURE 22]: Procession of naked enemies from Nasiriya. GIRIT 2012: FIG.12

In the Neo-Assyrian period (912-612 BC), there were numerous depictions of processions of naked prisoners. The *Bronze Gate of Balawat* dated to Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC) has numerous processions of naked enemies handcuffed and with chains around their necks<sup>34</sup> [FIGURES 23-25].



[FIGURES 23]: Procession of naked enemies, the gate of Balawat, Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC).  
NADALI 2010: FIG.1



[FIGURE 24]: Details from the gate of Balawat. BAHRANI 2012: 16, FIG.3.



[FIGURE 25]: Details from the gate of Balawat. GIRIT 2012: 19, FIG.21

<sup>34</sup> NADALI 2010: 141- 42, FIGS.1, 3; BAHRANI 2012: 16, FIG.3; GIRIT 2012: 19, FIG.21; ABDULGHANI 2020: 47, FIG.5a.

## D. Execution, Torture, and Death

Representations of nudity are also accompanied by scenes of death or the preparation for death. Male prisoners of war are shown naked when they are executed by impalement and decapitation<sup>35</sup>.

In ancient Egypt, the dead enemy is depicted under the feet of the victorious king. Sometimes, the heads of enemies are shown lying between their legs.<sup>36</sup> According to textual and iconographical evidence, execution by impalement occurred in the ancient Near East before Egypt. In ancient Egypt, it is thought that the goal of this punishment was to destroy the Ba and the shadow of the enemy. According to documents, killing at the stake or burning was rarely carried out in ancient Egypt<sup>37</sup>. Although there is proof of the adoption of other cruel punishments, especially during the New Kingdom, most of these scenes in general do not show naked enemies<sup>38</sup>. Naked, dead enemies are depicted lying under the royal wheels or the feet of the king, or they might be consumed by birds of prey.<sup>39</sup> Their twisted bodies are scattered<sup>40</sup>.

On the contrary, the slaughter of captives on the battlefield in ancient Iraq, especially in the Neo-Assyrian period, was the common method of execution.<sup>41</sup> A particularly cruel method illustrates naked enemies being skinned. Processions of naked men are shown stretched by Assyrian soldiers to skin them. The piles of naked bodies on the battlefield reflect the unrivaled victory.<sup>42</sup> It is worth mentioning that these cruel scenes of naked enemies occur more frequently in ancient Iraq than in Egypt. Both civilizations used their victories as political propaganda to instill fear and intimidation.<sup>43</sup> For example, earlier representations of dead, naked enemies in ancient Egypt occurred from the late Predynastic period (Naqada III)<sup>44</sup> [FIGURE 10]. Sometimes, the victorious king is depicted crushing his enemies or devouring them.<sup>45</sup> He assumes the form of a lion or an ox, as on the *Narmer* and *Battlefield Palettes*<sup>46</sup> [FIGURE 5].

During the beginning of the Uruk period in Mesopotamia, cylinder seal impressions depict naked, dead enemies, while vultures attack them<sup>47</sup> [FIGURE 26]. Additionally, another cylinder seal impression from the Early Dynastic period (2900-2350 BC) shows

<sup>35</sup> GELB 1973: 74; BAHRANI 1993: 15-16; NADALI 2007b: 353.

<sup>36</sup> HSU 2017: 73-74.

<sup>37</sup> MATIĆ 2019: 185-86.

<sup>38</sup> MATIĆ 2019: 73, 91-92, 98, 185- 86.

<sup>39</sup> A text dating to the reign of King Merenptah refers to the place of the performance of the punishment of impalement, which was beside the Temple of Seti II in Memphis. For the scenes of dead enemies wearing their clothes from the battles of the New Kingdom. MATIĆ 2019: PLS.II, III, IX, XII, XIIIa, b, XV, XXI, XXV.

<sup>40</sup> GOELET 1993: 20; ABDULLAH 2000: 148.

<sup>41</sup> GELB 1973: 90.

<sup>42</sup> ASHER-GREVE & SWEENEY 2006: 124; ALMEKHLAFY 2007: 81-124; NADALI 2007b: 357, 58; RADNER 2015: 103-28; MATIĆ 2019: 184.

<sup>43</sup> MATIĆ 2019: 185.

<sup>44</sup> ASHER-GREVE & SWEENEY 2006: FIG.E6; HSU 2017: 72, FIG. 5.

<sup>45</sup> SHAHEEN 1992: 57, FIG.2

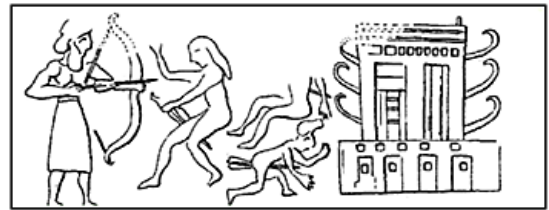
<sup>46</sup> ASHER-GREVE & SWEENEY 2006: FIG.E6; HSU 2017: 72, FIG.4.

<sup>47</sup> NADALI 2007b: FIG.8

naked and dead enemies falling before their fortress, recording the defeat of this city<sup>48</sup> [FIGURE 27].

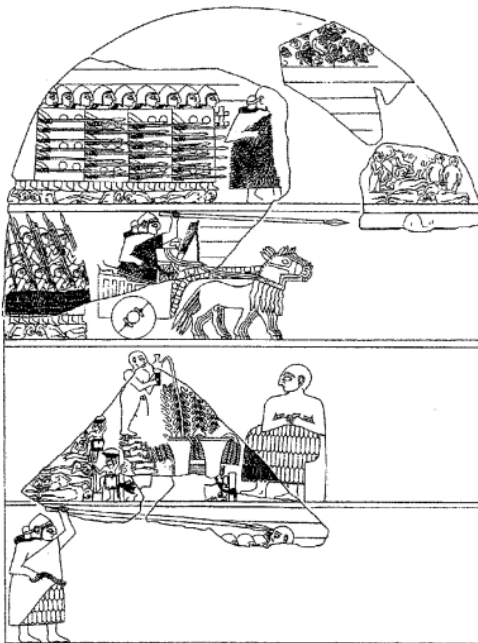


[FIGURE 26]: Vultures attacked naked enemies, Cylinder seal, Uruk period. NADALI 2007b: FIG.8



[FIGURE 27]: Naked and dead enemies, Early Dynastic period(2900-2350 BC). NADALI 2007b: FIG.1/b

In addition, piles of dead, naked prisoners are depicted on the *Stele of Vultures*, which dates to the early Sumerian dynasties (2900-2350 BC). It was discovered in Tello (Girsu) and records the victory of the king of the Lagash dynasty, Iyanatum<sup>49</sup> [FIGURE 28/ a, b]. The same motif is mentioned before in the *Standard of Ur*<sup>50</sup> [FIGURE 19].



[FIGURE 28/ a]: The first side of Stele of Vultures, early Sumerian Dynasties. ASHER-GREVE & SWEENEY 2006: FIG.5



[FIGURE 28/ b]: The Other side of Stele of Vulture ASHER-GREVE & SWEENEY 2006: FIG.6

From the Akkadian period, the *Stele of Rimush* (2278-2270 BC) records the king's victory. It shows the killing of naked enemies and their falling during the battle<sup>51</sup> [FIGURE 29]. The same motif is represented on the victory *Stele of Naram-Sin* (2260-2223 BC) [FIGURE 30]. The crushing of enemies by the king and his army is also a common motif in ancient Egyptian art<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> NADALI 2007b: FIG.1/b.

<sup>49</sup> GIRIT 2012: FIGS.5-6.

<sup>50</sup> NADALI 2007b: 343, FIG.4b; GIRIT 2012: 10, FIG.4.

<sup>51</sup> BAHRANI 1993: 16; GIRIT 2012: FIGS.10-11.

<sup>52</sup> ORTHMANN 1975: 196-7, FIG.104.



[FIGURE 29]: Stele of Rimush (2278-2270 BC)  
GIRIT 2012: FIG.11



[FIGURE 30] Stele of Naram-Sin (2260-2223BC)  
ORTHMANN 1975:96-97, FIG. 104; GIRIT 2012: FIG.15

From the Middle Assyrian period (1365-1000 BC), during the reign of Tikulti-Ninurta I (1224-1208 BC), the same motif is shown, where the Assyrian soldier holds an enemy by the beard to slaughter him<sup>53</sup> [FIGURE 31].



[FIGURE 31]: Killing naked enemies, reign of Tikulti-Ninurta I(1224-1208 BC. GIRIT 2012: 17, FIG.16

In Neo-Assyrian images, cruel execution through impalement, skinning, and decapitation are represented so frequently that they distinguish the scenes of this period.<sup>54</sup> Many forms of cruel execution are depicted during the reign of Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC.), e.g., the *Bronze Gate of Balawat*<sup>55</sup> [FIGURES 32-33].

<sup>53</sup> GIRIT 2012: 17, FIG.16.

<sup>54</sup> NOWICKI 2021: 11-33.

<sup>55</sup> RADNER 2015: 110-112, FIGS.1-3.



[FIGURE 32]: Cruel execution reign of Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC.), the *Bronze Gate of Balawat*.  
RADNER 2015: 110-112, FIG.1



[FIGURE 33]: Impalement, skinning, and decapitation of naked enemies, reign of Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC), the *Bronze Gate of Balawat*. RADNER 2015: 110-112, FIG.2.

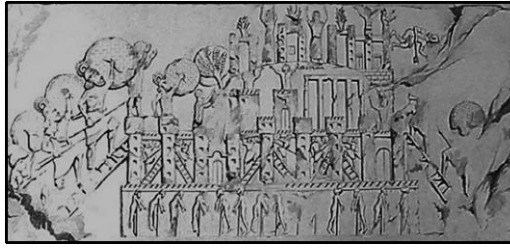
The same motif is depicted on Tiglath-pileser III's wall relief (745-727 BC.) at the Central Palace in Nimrud. Naked enemies are killed by impaling them on sticks or cutting their necks<sup>56</sup> [FIGURES 34 - 35]. The same representation of impalement is depicted after the siege of Harhar on the wall decoration in Sargon II's palace (722-705 BC) in Dur-Šarruken<sup>57</sup> [FIGURE 40].



[FIGURE 34]: Killing naked enemies on sticks, Tiglath-pileser III's (745-727 BC.) Nimrud,  
RADNER 2015: 114, FIG.4; GIRIT 2012: 19, FIG.23

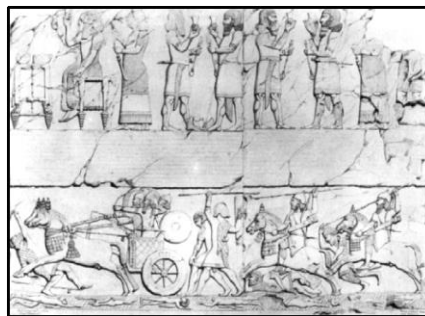
<sup>56</sup> NADALI 2010: FIG.8; GIRIT 2012, 19, FIG.23; RADNER 2015: 114, FIG.4.

<sup>57</sup> RADNER 2015: 124, FIG.5.



[FIGURE 35]: Impalement after the siege of Harhar, Sargon II's palace (722-705 BC), Dur-Šarruken, RADNER 2015: 124, FIG.5

A scene of the royal wheels trampling naked enemies may also occur in the same palace during the reign of Sargon II<sup>58</sup> [FIGURE 36]. Cruel forms of death, like skinning and impaling, are also depicted after the battles of Sennacherib (705-681 BC) and his siege of Lachish (701 BC)<sup>59</sup> [FIGURES 37/a, b, & 38].



[FIGURE 36]: Royal wheels trampling naked enemies, the same reign. NADALI 2010: 145, FIG.11



[FIGURE 37/a]: Skinning naked enemies, the siege of Lachish, the reign of Sennacherib. (705-681 BC) ALBENDA 1970: FIG.2



[FIGURE 37/b]: Skinning naked enemies, siege of Lachish, the reign of Sennacherib, (705-681 BC). ALBENDA 1970: FIG.4



[FIGURE 38]: Hanging and Impaling naked enemies, Siege of Lachish, reign of Sennacherib (705-681BC). RADNER 2015: 116, FIG.7

<sup>58</sup> NADALI 2010: 145, FIG.11.

<sup>59</sup> ALBENDA 1970: FIGS.2, 4; RADNER 2015: 116, FIG.7.



### III. RESULTS

1-This study discusses the iconography of depicting naked enemies of war in both ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. It is limited to four groups as follows: **[TABLE 1]**

ICONOGRAPHY	EXAMPLES IN ANCIENT EGYPT	EXAMPLES IN MESOPOTAMIA
a- Punishment with shame	[FIGURES 1-2]	[FIGURES 3- 4]
b-Fear while escaping from invaders	[FIGURE 5]	[FIGURES 6-8]
c- Humiliation after defeat	[FIGURES 9-14]	[FIGURES 15-25]
d- Execution, torture, and death	[FIGURES 5, 10-11]	[FIGURES 26-38]

2-The purpose of this study is not to count each depiction of naked enemies in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia.

3-The study gives examples of representations in every group to clarify the similarities and differences between both civilizations.

4- Ancient Egypt is like Mesopotamia in most depictions of naked enemies, except for the scenes of execution and torture; this difference is probably related to the ethics of the Egyptian army.

5-According to textual and iconographical evidence, impalement is known in the ancient Near East before Egypt. According to some documents, impalement is rarely carried out in ancient Egypt reflecting the morality of the Egyptian army.

6-Both civilizations used political propaganda by illustrating their victories, which were designed to instill fear and intimidate. The enemy is depicted naked to emphasize their weakness and powerlessness.

7-Ancient Iraq has more examples of images showing naked prisoners of war or enemies during and after the battles than ancient Egypt.

8-It is worth mentioning that the kings in both civilizations utilize similar iconography in representing naked enemies, as the kings are shown crushing the enemies under their feet. This motif continues throughout ancient Egyptian history but began in both civilizations, especially during the Predynastic and early historical periods [for ancient Egypt **[FIGURES 5 & 10]**; and in ancient Iraq **[FIGURES 33/a, b]**].

### IV. DISCUSSION

Most sources dealing with the issue of nudity in ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations focus on it generally and discuss the treatment of enemies, naked or not. Many previous studies dealt with foreign captives or enemies. However, they did not compare the causes and connotations of naked enemies' representation in both ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. Asher-Greve and Sweeney's article refers to some of the concepts of nudity in ancient Egyptian and Iraqi civilizations. However, it does not discuss every aspect of the enemies' nudity. It also does not deal with them comparatively as this study proposes to do. According to the points discussed in this study, the similarities, and differences in the iconography of naked enemies can be summarized below:

**1- Similarities [TABLE 2]**

Similarities	In Ancient Egypt	In Mesopotamia
A. The words that mean nudity in ancient Egyptian and Iraqi texts are intended to connote poverty.	<i>ḥ3y</i> in hieroglyphics means «naked». Some texts mention that the deceased attributes the idea of good work to himself by giving to the poor man. This suggests that nakedness indicates poverty.	<i>Bar-šà-</i> , <i>sù(g)</i> , in Sumerian means «naked one». <i>Erû</i> in Akkadian is used in connection with poverty, need, or the degradation of enemies.
B. The representations of naked enemies are associated with the scenes of beating and punishment from early times.	[FIGURE 1-2]	[FIGURES 3-4]
C. There is a connection between the representation of naked enemies and their attempt to escape by land or sea.	[FIGURE 5]	[FIGURES 6- 8]
D. The defeated enemies, especially their leaders, are humiliated by being stripped naked, sometimes in a procession with their families.	[FIGURES 9-14]	[FIGURES 15-25]
E. The stripping of living, naked prisoners can be linked to their preparation for death. Depictions of male prisoners of war are shown naked when they are executed.	[FIGURES 5 & 11-12]	[FIGURES 20-21 & 25-38]
F. The naked, dead enemies are shown lying under the royal wheels or the feet of the king, or they might be consumed by birds of prey. Their bodies are depicted scattered in violently twisted positions.	[FIGURE 11]	[FIGURES 26-28/a, b, 29- 31& 34]

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**2- Differences [TABLE 3]**

A- According to textual and iconographical evidence, death by impalement was practiced in the ancient Near East before Egypt.
B-It cannot be substantiated that sanctions like impalement, were carried out extensively in ancient Egypt. Although there is proof that the ancient Egyptians adopted other cruel punishments, especially during the New Kingdom, most of these scenes do not show naked enemies.
C-The cruel scenes showing impalement and the skinning of naked enemies are more frequent in ancient Iraq than in Egypt. The tortured enemies are shown naked in ancient Iraq while they are being skinned, impaled, or dismembered. Most of these examples are dated to the Neo-Assyrian period [FIGURES 37-43].
D- Terrorizing the defeated enemies was done in a meaningful and thoughtful manner in ancient Iraq, especially in the Neo-Assyrian period. Targeted victims are the leaders of the defeated enemies, to deter anyone from rebelling against the Assyrians.

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