

# The dying lioness



Nicholas Reese Art History Test #1 Essay Prompt #2 "Dying Lioness" The Dying Lioness a small detail of one of the many Assyrian relief carvings that were found during the Assyrian rule. The Relief itself was titled Ashurbanipal hunting Lions and belonged to the North Palace of Ashurbanipal. It was created in 645 to 640 BCE and like many reliefs; it pictured a hunt taking place. It was average sized at about five and a half feet tall and carved out of Gypsum rock giving itself a red hue.

This falls into place with the description of most reliefs from this time. But what made this Assyrian relief stand out? It was a small detail, a lioness to be exact. The hunt depicted did not take place in the wild but in a controlled environment, ensuring the king would be victorious. The king is in his chariot with his attendants. He is throwing a spear into a lion, which already has several fatal wounds on its body. All around the royal chariot is a pathetic trail of dead and dying animals pierced by far more arrows than needed to kill them.

All around the chariot are the bodies of dead lions littering the ground, most overkilled with far more arrows and spears necessary to kill the beasts. The artist does a fantastic job of showing the rippling muscles and facial wrinkles in all of the lions. But there is one lioness that is different from the other lions. She is pictured holding herself up with her front two legs while dragging the back two on the ground. Her muscles are tense and her face is full of emotion.

Even though the multiple wounds she has sustained will inevitably be the death of her she still holds herself up to let out one last roar. Her roar is a

roar that suggests defiance against the cruel game that is being played against her and her fallen feline comrades. The artist was obviously not re-creating exactly what happened during this “ hunt”, suggesting that he would have had to feel sorrow or sadness for these animals to depict them this way.

Otherwise the artist would have made an illustration more similar to other relief pieces and depicted the beasts as viscous, wild, blood thirsty animals. Even though this piece was supposed to be an illustration of the king’s skill and heroism, the artist clearly had a different underlying focus that is hidden at face value. Its masterful naturalistic detail and ability to portray emotion with an underlying focus makes this Assyrian relief piece nothing short of a masterpiece.