

A huge winged bull with the head of an ornately bearded man guarded a gate of the great palace built about 710 BC by Assyria's King Sargon II. Almost thirteen feet tall and weighing close to sixteen tons, the stone figure revealed the skill of Assyrian sculptors — who gave it five legs so that it would appear balanced, whether viewed full face or in profile. Such mythical creatures, thought to give magical protection against evil spirits, stood at the main portals of all Assyrian palaces.

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Assyrian. Winged bull. c. 721-705 BC. Louvre.