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New Aspects of God Teisheba's Iconography

Our knowledge of the Urartian religion and iconography of the Urartian gods is strictly confined to limited ancient literature sources and depictions of gods on various artifacts and art objects. According to pieces of documents, which were preserved until the present times, the god Haldi was the main and the highest god in Urartian Kingdom, as well as the main god of the Urartian pantheon (König 1955, 1957). Our knowledge about his position is mostly supported by monumental historical texts carved on the slopes of the Van citadel. Furthermore, on many votive offerings, which were found on various archaeological sites we could find short inscriptions, most often dedicated to the god Haldi presenting him as the lord of heaven, the god of the land and kingdom of Urartu. It should be noted that his image was often presented as the one of a warlike god. His role based on various evidence we could arrive at a conclusion that Haldi was the only god known by his given name. This however can be easily disproved as we have a comprehensive list of Urartian gods engraved on a rock named Meher Kapisi (König 1955, 56 No. 10). The said inscription quotes another god Teisheba of certain import who held the second highest position after Haldi in the Urartian religion. It could be supposed that some of the depictions that were ascribed to Haldi could have been images of Teisheba. The examination of the above claim was not easy as many elements of Urartian art were eclectic i.e. they were borrowed from Assyrian art and mixed with local tradition. Especially that many elements intermingle and several gods could have the same elements as their personal attributes. The elements being mixed, the deities were presented as having the same features as their personal attributes.

Distinguishing the elements, which depicted Teisheba using the available material, would involve taking a closer look at the depicting manner of Haldi (Taşyürek 1978, Burney 1994). His iconography is usually limited to several schematic symbols. Haldi was shown riding on animals, particularly on bulls, with a bow and arrows, or with lighting. As it was mentioned above, similar feature/qualities in iconography could belong to other gods in Urartu. In his excellent article Taşyürek expressed an opinion that many of the discussed

objects depicted the god Haldi. It should be noted, however, that at the time of writing the said article i.e. 1978 the author could not analyze the Anzaf Kale shield, which would shed a new light on the discussion on the iconography of the Urartian pantheon (Belli 1999).

The last years gave us little possibility of enjoying new spectacular artifacts from the Urartian period. A big fragment of a bronze shield was found at Anzaf Kale which is located in the northeast of the Van city (Belli 1999). On the shield which dates back to the reign of Ishpuini (probably the times of his co-regency with Menua) we can find twelve Urartian gods attacking Assyrian troops. Moreover, two other depictions of the gods, which certainly belonged to that shield were found in the same chamber. That discovery gives us a possibility of examining the Urartian religion more closely, especially the iconography, symbolism and attributes of the gods.

In this paper I will attempt to examine the iconography of one god, Teisheba, who was depicted on the shield from Anzaf Kale as the second highest deity just behind the highest god of the Urartian pantheon, Haldi (Belli 1999, 41-45). God Teisheba was the god of weather, storm and war at the same time. In that aspect he seems to be similar to the Hurric god Teshub. The inscription on the Meher Kapisi monument located 7 km northeast of Van fortresses reads that there were only six cows and twelve sheep offered to him as a sacrifice which proves that fact that he was the god of "a secondary rank". The Meher Kapisi monument was probably one of the most important shrines/sacred places on the whole Urartian territory located in an open area. Unfortunately apart from that inscription we have little evidence on the religion in the Urartu. That is the reason why it is so difficult to estimate how the religious system was constructed in detail.

On the Anzaf Kale shield Teisheba is shown in profile, as a beardless god with long hair up to the shoulders marked with horizontal lines. (Fig. 1) He is wearing a conical helmet with a single pair of horns fixed over his forehead. A belt running underneath his chin is keeping the helmet on the head and covering his cheeks. One arm of Teisheba is in a straight horizontal line behind him, whereas the second arm is bent a bit forward from the face. In both hands he is holding flashes of lighting. The god is wearing a long overcoat or tunic with short sleeves. That part of his wardrobe looks very wealthy and it is decorated with embroideries which are conical or almond in shape, which are divided by horizontal lines. We can see that kind of decoration on the top part of the tunic. These conical elements could be also interpreted as metal elements of an armor-like tunic. On the hips, and the lower part the tunic or overcoat we can find vertical decorations, which could have been tassels. The two sections of the "tassels" are divided by a depiction of what could probably be embroiders. That decoration consists of two bands, the upper, and the lower. On each of them there is a circle. He is wearing a short kilt underneath the overcoat that is also similarly decorated. In the top part of the tunic we can see a belt which is

running aslant from the right shoulder down to the left hip. On that belt fastened is a quiver, which is visible behind Teisheba's back. Furthermore the god is armed with a long sword fixed to his waist.

Teisheba is wearing shoes that go over his ankles and is standing on a lion keeping the left leg on lion's nape and the right one on his back. The lion is presented while jumping, which adds to the dynamics of the whole depiction. The animal has widely open mouth, big eyes and a mane with slightly wavy lines. His front paws are raised and thrown forward. The whole weight of the lion is concentrated on his rear paws. A line engraved from his thigh to the paw emphasizes the tension of the muscles. The hook-like tail is raised up and bent in Teisheba's direction. On the lion's breasts the lines of its ribs were marked. That could be the manner, which was used to emphasize the move and the dynamics.

The symbolism of a lion is strongly developed and the presence of that animal is visible almost in every period in the art and religions of the ancient Middle East. Its figure has always been associated with such attributes such: military power, bravery, strength, pride, wisdom, magnanimity and justice. Here, on the Anzaf Kale shield, for the first time we are offered such a clear comparison of a god with the lion. Undoubtedly the depicted god was Teisheba himself. Of course that depiction is not fully Urartian in style, and here we can find influence of the Assyrian art for example. The illustration of the god is eclectic in manner and leaves room for discussion.

Now that we have evidence of the way of presenting Teisheba, let us take a closer look at some other objects depicting gods accompanied by lions, and analyze the qualities attributed to them.

On a collar from the Munich Prähistorische Staatssammlung collection (Özgen 1984, Pl. 4, 133) a silhouette of a beardless god can be observed, who is standing on a jumping lion. (Fig. 2) The god is wearing a conical helmet. He is shooting using a bow and his quiver with arrows is fixed on his back. He is wearing a robe which similar to that one described above (the Anzaf Kale shield) and consists of a long sleeve tunic and a kilt long up to the knees. It should be noted that there is another god is depicted. The second figure is a god in a similar uniform, also armed with a bow, but he is shown on a bull. Thus, we are provided with an association of gods having strong military attributes, which in itself is not surprising as such elements as collars usually were a part of military chariots.

Another artifact that I would like to draw your attention to is a bronze belt from Karlsruhe (catalog number BLM 77.50 + 89.570) (Kellner 1991 a, 154). (Fig. 3) The belt is richly decorated with rosettes, and stylized representations of floral elements. Among these ornaments engraved were figures of gods. Here also gods' silhouettes were shown on bulls and lions. Intrinsic to this artifact is that both gods i.e. first one who is standing on the bull, and the other one on the lion, are both wearing the same uniforms. The gods are wearing polos-like helmets or caps, decorated with single pairs of horns. Moreover the sleeves of

their overcoats are running up to their elbows and they are wearing short kilts underneath. As weaponry they are holding lightning in a shape of a fork and their swords are strapped to the hips. In both cases the animals i.e. the lion and the bull were depicted in static position.

The same static depiction of a lion can be found on a votive plaque from Adana Regional Museum, which was discussed by Taşyürek (Taşyürek 1975 a). (Fig. 4) On the lion we can see a god's silhouette wearing polos with horns, a tunic and a kilt similar to the ones described above. On the deity's back a quiver and a bow are fixed. The right arm is bent and raised up to the chin; in the left hand he keeps a standard with a rectangular top. The corners of that rectangular element are decorated with rings.

Another votive plaque similar to the one presented above is stored in the Louvre (AO 26086) (Kellner 1991 b). (Fig. 5) On that object a god standing on a lion is depicted. Also here, as on the plaque from Adana collection the god's left foot is resting on the lion's head. The main difference between the plaques is that here the god is holding a bow in his hand, not a standard. A woman with a standard is presented in front of the deity. The standard present is bears resemblance to the one discussed above. On both plaques we can see, what can be construed as an offering scene when the petitioner brings a standard as a gift or as a sacrifice. What should be noted the standards played an important role during various ceremonies such as benedictions.

On another votive plaque discussed by Taşyürek a beardless deity is depicted sitting on a throne, which stands on a lying lion's back (Taşyürek 1975 b, Merhav 1991 a). (Fig. 6) The throne was probably furnished with soft covering/linen, which is visible behind the god's back. The god is wearing a horned cap with three round elements on top. His tunic is decorated with diagonal lines, which seem to be tassels. In his left hand the god holding probably a rope in a grip, which points to the Mesopotamian gods iconography, Shamash and Ashur who had that attribute as a symbol of justice (Black/Green 1992, 94, 161). (Fig. 7, 8)

Only one depiction of a god standing on a lion is known from the wall paintings discovered at Erabuni, (Arin-Berd) (Wartke 1993, PL. 88). (Fig. 9) where we have a silhouette of bearded god in a polos, who is wearing an up-to-ankle-long tunic with an overcoat. All the elements of his clothes are richly decorated. In his right hand the god is holding a stick or a rod, probably in a gesture of benediction. As the painting was found in the Haldi temple it is often interpreted as the depiction of Haldi himself. Since the painting was found at antecella of the temple among other rich painting decorations, we can assume that it was not Haldi but Teisheba, who could be one of the Urartian gods who could be depicted on the walls in a form of a procession of gods coming to the highest deity. In that case Teisheba's picture though found in a very bad condition would be the only preserved fragment of the painting.

As we can see the repertoire of attributes and characteristic features is limited to several above-mentioned elements. In Urartu the depictions of Teisheba is

the effect of intertwining Assyrian and Hurrian influence with elements typical for the local tradition. Based on the influence we could associate Teisheba with gods depicted on bulls. Teshub and Adad, as weather gods were associated with the power of the bull and had the same attributes i.e. lighting. The association with Teshub is fully understandable because Urartians had their predecessors in Hurrian tribes and probably some common elements beside their language were preserved until the times of the Kingdom of Van. A depiction of Adad from a Neo-Assyrian stela found in Arslan Tash should be mentioned as evidence of strong Assyrian influence (Black/Green 1992, Pl. 89, 112). It shows Adad standing on a bull with flashes of lighting in both hands and a bow hanging on his back. On his head he is wearing a polos with a single pair of horns. On the top of the polos depicted in a circle is a star.

In the iconography of the Urartian deities, we can find two of gods that were depicted on a bull. The first one being the most important in the hierarchy of all of the pantheon, Haldi, was the god of heaven and the god of the kingdom. The second god who had the same animal as his attribute is Sihuini. I believe it is fair to say that the god's powers were probably connected with solar elements as presented in the Urartian religion. as his iconography pictures him with a winged solar disc, similar to that, which is particularly ascribed to Ashur. He is carrying; similarly to Ashur, a bow and arrows which also was an element in iconography of the gods Haldi and Teisheba. It should be noted that Sihuini, was the third person in the pantheon, just after Haldi and Teisheba. This may indicate that in the upper part of the Urartian pantheon we can observe permuted attributes, which could have remained unchanged. These elements should articulate the identity and the rank of the gods' hierarchy. Please notice that the three among the main gods in Urartu hold flashes of lighting as their personal weaponry and the attribute of the god's status. Supposedly there were subtle differences between the gods, but now we cannot decipher the sense of them. The main problem with the interpretation is strongly connected with the scantiness of the written sources on the Urartian religion.

We have evidence supporting the fact that the aforementioned elements of iconography, which were attributes to each deity in the pantheon, were brought to Urartu from two main sources i.e. from Assyrians and Hurrians. The golden lighting, which was found in Ashur presents such evidence (Fig. 10) inasmuch as we can find an analogy to the lighting of Teisheba depicted on the Anzaf Kale shield on that object (Andrae 1977, 216). Attributes such as flashes of lighting were usually associated with a storm or weather gods.

It is of interest how the symbol of lion was brought to the Urartian iconography especially that on of Teisheba. Let us take a close look at that issue. In Mesopotamia lions usually were associated with two gods: Innana (Ishtar) or Ninurta. Both deities had strong military qualities. Probably, that is a reason why the Urartians accepted that aspect of the warrior gods from Mesopotamia and transferred that element into their own iconography. Moreover it should be

noted that similar depictions of gods riding on lions were originally Anatolian elements as well. Some examples of such elements can be found in Karum Kanesh level 2 such as seals where gods are depicted as sitting on lions. Such scenes were engraved on seals from Assur-nada archive (Teissier 1994, Fig. 122), Istar-lamassi archive (Teissier 1994, Fig. 125) and archive of Amur-Assur (Teissier 1994, Fig. 145). Gods riding on lions with axes and lightning or two headed snakes were presented on a seal from Subianika S archive (Teissier 1994, Fig. 338), also on a seal from Sisisi archive (Teissier 1994, Fig. 339), and on a seal with no archive provenience (Teissier 1994, Fig. 194). Naturally all those seals were bureaucratic elements of Assyrian traders; therefore we cannot forget that the seals were connected with both Anatolian and Mesopotamian elements. The symbolism of the seals as iconographical elements had to be readable equally for the people from Kültepe, the neighboring areas, as well as for the Assyrians.

Such objects as the gold medallion from the Munich Prähistorische Staatssammlung (Wartke 1993, Pl. 68) (Fig. 11) and the bronze votive plaque with the depiction of the beardless gods standing on lions are strongly connected to Mesopotamian elements. Moreover, the elements of those depictions clearly derive from the iconography of the goddess Ishtar. It is especially visible when we analyze the uniform and weaponry details of the Mesopotamian goddess and compare them with the above-mentioned objects. On the golden medallion we can find a god wearing a horned cap with a star symbol fixed on top. His tunic and kilt are shown in a way typical for the Urartian art. In one hand the god is holding a bow with arrows. On his back we can see a quiver, bow (?) and a sword tied to his hips. An important element, which is clearly connected with the concept of Ishtar, is an eight-armed star located behind the deity. On the second object that element was not included, but the composition is similar. In the Assyrian art we can find similar images of Ishtar on such objects as cylinder seals. As a good example I have chosen one seal from the British Museum from the Neo Assyrian period where the goddess is depicted similarly to the objects from Urartu. (Frankfort 1939, Hrouda 1991, 360) (Fig. 12) It is obvious that Urartians took over Ishtar's attributes and bestowed them onto Teisheba. The gender aside, the remaining elements were identical for both gods. That is probably the main reason why Urartian gods very often were depicted as without a beard. In other regions of the Middle East that kind of depictions of male figures were representations of eunuchs, whereas here, surprisingly enough, we have gods presented in this way. We can assume that Urartians did not fully understand the Mesopotamian iconography and especially the symbolic of Ishtar. However, the process of adoption must have been attractive for them.

Another example of the lack of understanding of the elements from Mesopotamia, we can find, in my opinion, on a relief from Kef Kalesi (Calmeyer 1991, 315). That bas-relief was cut on a square block, which probably was a base of a colon. (Fig. 13) There were two winged geniuses or gods depicted, who adored a symbol of Haldi: a sacred tree or a lance. Often the gods participating in that

scene are interpreted as the god Haldi himself. It is confusing and hard to understand how and why Haldi could adore himself. That is why another possibility should be taken into consideration. Two geniuses that adore a sacred tree are clearly a Mesopotamian motive. Of course, the origin of that scene is Mesopotamian, but winged gods standing on lions are uncommon. In my opinion here we have a depiction of the god Teisheba, who worships Haldi, as a greater god. A similar depiction we can find on a bronze belt, where on the end of it is a figure of a winged god is standing on a lion. Earlier that figure was interpreted as a winged genius, a person who protects from evil. Now it could be construed anew as a depiction of Teisheba (Kellner 1983, Pl. 18,2). As it was mentioned above, some elements came to Urartu from Mesopotamia. Here also we can find star symbols on horned caps of the depicted gods, which are similar to the star symbol from the gold medallion discussed above. In that case also such element could be associated with Ishtar, what was transferred into the Teisheba's iconography. Moreover, wings, so typical for the Mesopotamian geniuses, here were understood and used as such elements as quivers or bows carried on the back. On that bas-relief probably the intention was to show a very dignified worshiped god, and the wings probably were demonstrated to emphasize that. Should my interpretation be correct, we are left with one question, namely why the god Teisheba was depicted twice? Perhaps it was for the better composition of the scene and to emphasize the glory of Haldi. Furthermore, the Mesopotamian scheme enforced the centrally located element adored from both sides by similar persons. Such a solution can be found even on a relief from the throne hall in the Northwestern Palace in Nimrud. There were two images of king Ashurnasirapli II on both sides of a sacred tree (Hrouda 1991, 126). (Fig. 14)

While analyzing the iconography of Teisheba in the Urartian art we can find two objects, which are sometimes described as his pictures. The first one is a bronze figurine from the British Museum collection (Merhav 1991b, 277). The sculpture shows a god with a beard, who is wearing a conical helmet with horns over the forehead. (Fig. 15) The god is wearing a long undecorated tunic up to the ankles. The god has no attributes, which could help us identify him. Probably his interpretation as Teisheba was based on the knowledge of Haldi's iconography. The god on the sculpture had no attributes typical for Haldi, so he could not be Haldi, consequently, he could be the second greatest god i.e. Teisheba. Given the above the reasoning seems to be correct.

The other example is also a bronze sculpture found in Karmir Blur (Merhav 1991b, 275). That object was evidently a part of furniture, probably a chair or a table, or even a throne. (Fig. 16) The sculpture shows a beardless god with a horned cap, who is wearing a long up to the ankles tunic. Unlike the figurine from the British Museum here we have the personal attributes of the god. In both hands he is keeping a grip on axes or mace heads. Earlier we did not know to which Urartian gods such elements were attributed. As Karmir Blur in antiquities had

been called Teishebaine (the city of Teisheba), it seems obvious that most of objects from that city should be associated with religion aspects, especially connected with the god Teisheba. Now, thanks to the excellent iconography from the shield from Anzaf Kale we can assume that the god from the Karmir Blur was not Teisheba but it could be god Turani or other gods who also have mace heads as their attributes i.e.: Arsimela or Anapsha. That interpretation is supported by the Oktay Belli's understanding of the Anzaf Kale Shield (Belli 1999, 58-61).

To conclude, in the Urartian art we have a specific conglomeration of iconographical elements, giving it an exceptional character. Some elements of Teisheba's iconography came from Assyria as discussed above: wings, weaponry etc. Specific representation on lions was also strictly connected with Ishtar, or Teshub. From Carchemish we have a bas-relief with depiction of two gods (Hrouda 1991, 110). (Fig. 17) One of them whom we could probably be connected with a solar deity who also had wings, similar to those ones of Teisheba from Kef Kalesi relief. That indicates that the Neo-Hittite art could strongly influence the imagination of the Urartians and their own gods' iconography. Moreover, we cannot forget several older elements i.e. those depictions of the gods on lions, which were discovered in Kültepe. In that case we could have in the Urartian art a continuity of the iconographical elements from a much earlier period.

Urartians did not completely comprehend some of the aspects. Many of them were, however, directly transferred to the Urartian gods' iconography, especially that the Urartian gods have the same functions and responsibilities for people's fate similarly to the deities in other religious systems in the Middle East. Supposedly original Urartian elements could have been identical with those presented and interpreted as foreign influence. A distinct division of these elements nowadays is, in my opinion, rather difficult, as we have little literature to support our interpretations. Nevertheless, the shield from Anzaf Kale is a new, important tool for the interpretation of the Urartian pantheon. Based on it, in my opinion, we can ascribe all depictions of a god standing on a lion armed with bow or lightings to Teisheba. Moreover, that interpretation should embrace these depictions, which could seem as representations of a female goddess. Those qualities must be rather restricted to the Urartian territories and not mapped on to the other Middle Eastern regions.

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Fig. 1 Teisheba on the lion. According to Belli O., 1991.

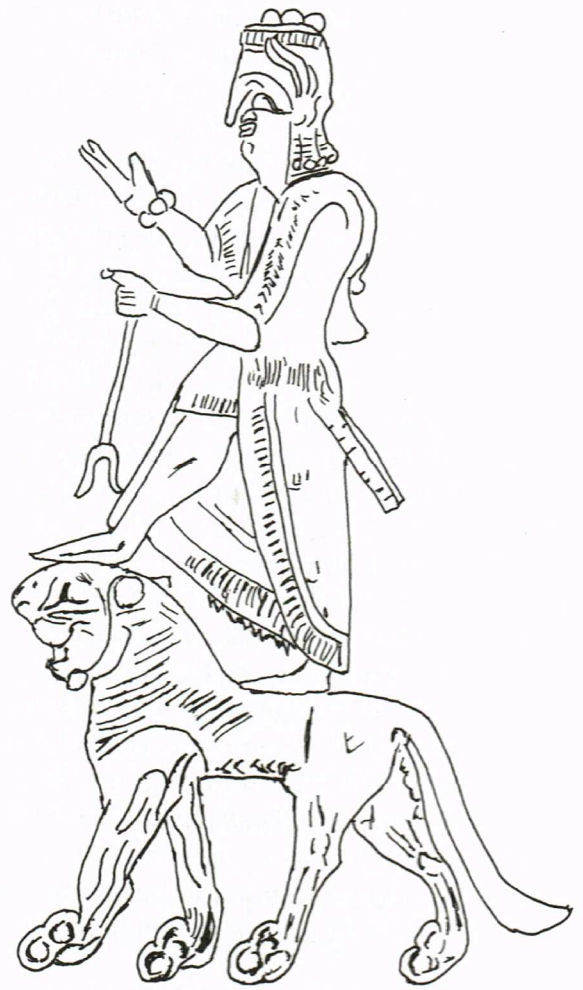


Fig. 3 The god from the Karlsruhe belt. According to Kellner H., 1991 a.



Fig. 2 Collar wit depiction of the god. According to Özgen E., 1994

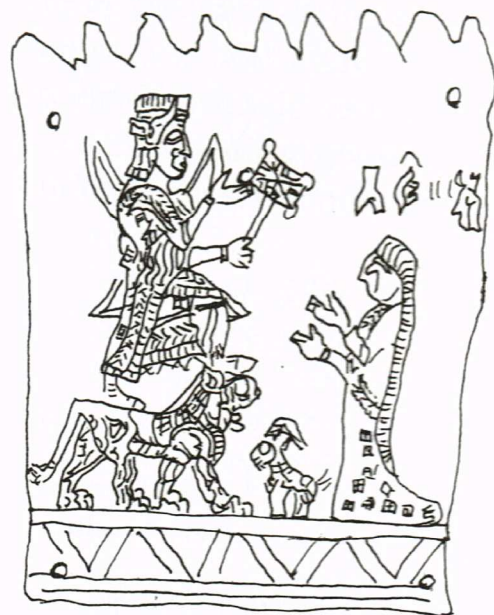


Fig. 4 The god with the standard. According to Taşyürek O., 1975 a.



Fig. 5 The god with the standard. According to Kellner H., 1991b.



Fig. 7 Depiction of Shamash on the Nabu -apla-idinna stone tablet. According to Black J., Green T., 1992.



Fig. 6 The god sitting on the throne. According to Taşyürek O., 1975b.

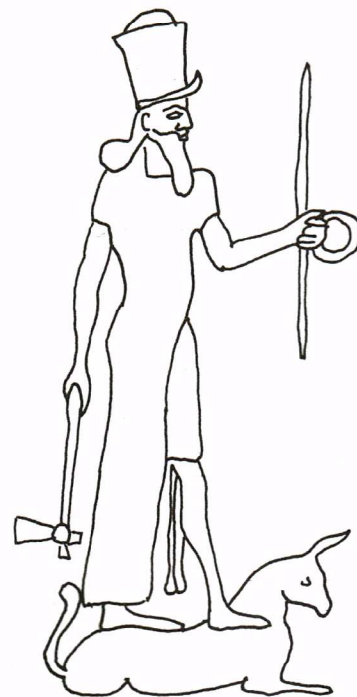


Fig. 8 Ashur from a Neo-Assyrian seal. According to Black J., Green T., 1992.



Fig. 9 Depiction of the god riding on the lion discovered at Erebuni. According to Wartke R., 1993.



Fig. 11 The God depicted on the golden medallion. According to Wartke R., 1993.



Fig. 10 The lightning discovered at Ashur. According to Andrae W., 1977.



Fig. 12 The goddess Ishtar from an Neo-Assyrian seal. According to Hrouda B., 1991.

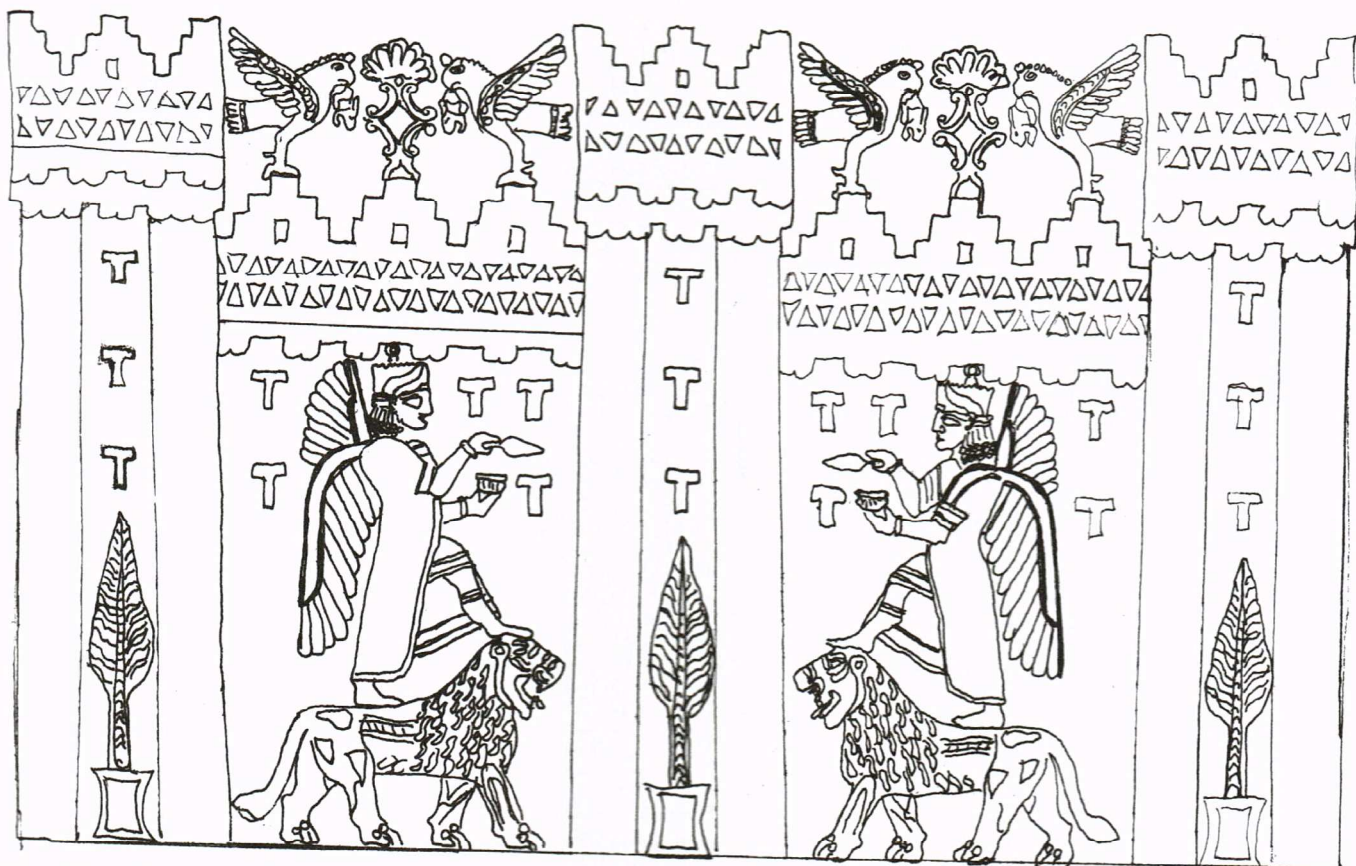


Fig. 13 The bas relief from Kef Kalesi. According to Calmayer P., 1991.

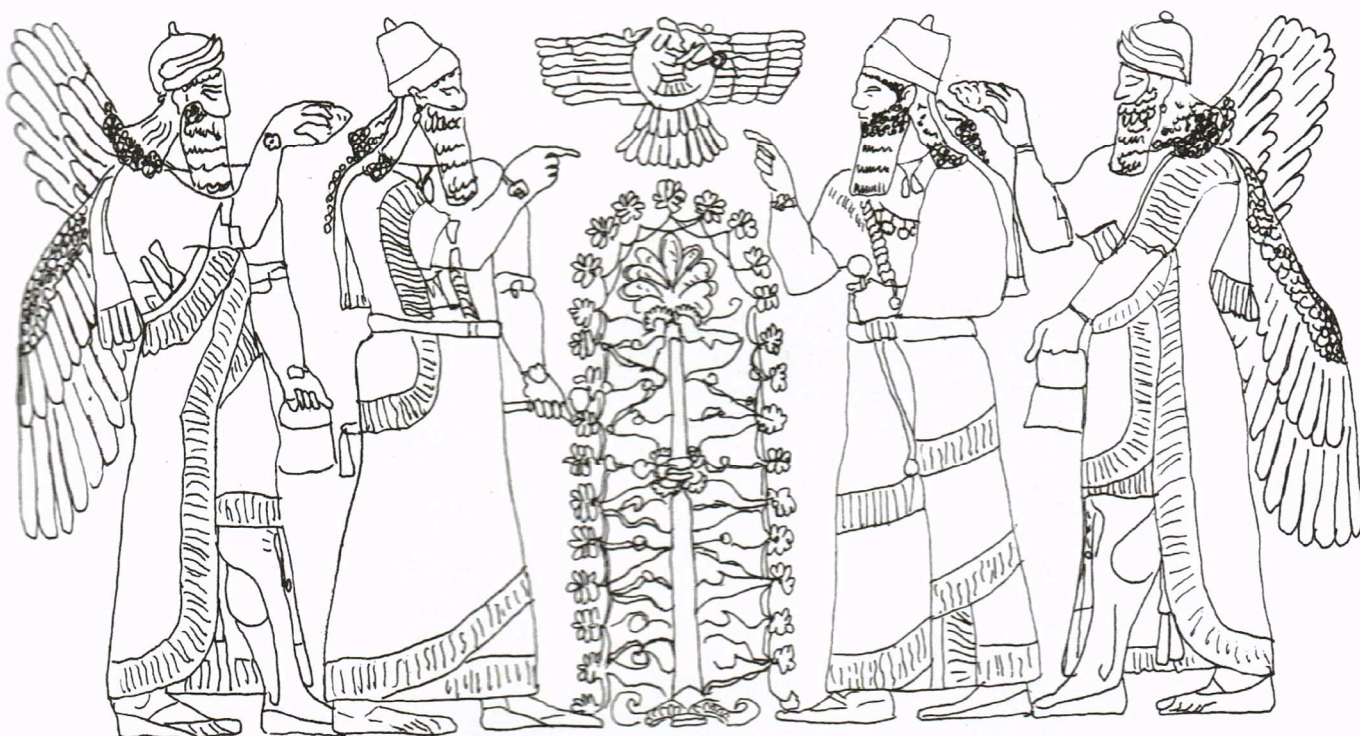


Fig. 14 The adoration of the sacred tree from the Northwestern Palace in Nimrud. According to Hrouda B., 1991.

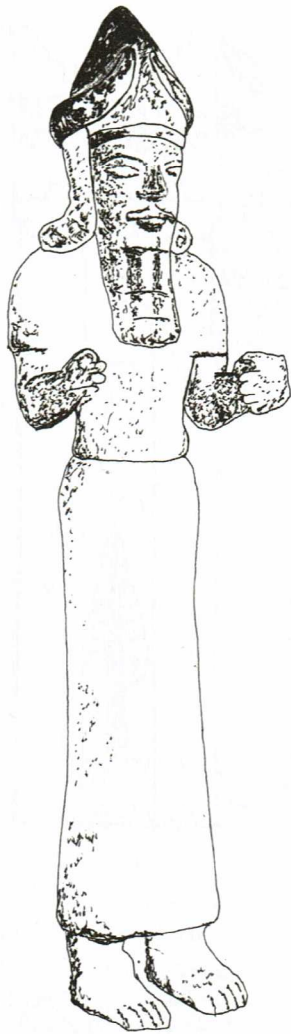


Fig. 15 The bronze figurine from the British Museum. According to Merhav R., 1991 b.



Fig. 16 The figurine from Karmir Blur. According to Merhav R., 1991 b.



Fig. 17 The bas relief from Carchemish. According to Amiet P., 1977.