Enlil/Mulhil

I. Introduction. Mesopotamian god. E./M. was one of the principal gods of the Mesopotamian pantheon (HERLES 2006: 219) and considered to be the father of →Sin, Ningirsu, →Ninurta, →Nergal, →Nusku, →Shamash, and other deities (BLACK/GREEN 1992: 76; GRONEBERG 2004: 61). His main sanctuary was the E.KUR at Nippur (GEORGE 1992: 148f.; GRONEBERG 2004: 60–62). Although he played a dominant role in myths (GRONEBERG 2004: 62–67), anthropomorphic E./M. cannot be identified in visual sources with certainty in any period of Mesopotamian history (BRAUN–HOLZINGER 1996: 332; HERLES 2006: 219–220). There is no clear etymology of the god’s name (FELIU 2006: 229f.), and no description of attributes. The wide range of his responsibilities, indicated by his many epithets (GEORGE 1992: 148f.; FELIU 2006: 242–246), does not provide an indication for an iconographic profile. However, inscribed Neo-Assyrian reliefs (see § II.2.A.3) and Babylonian kudurrus (see § II.1.A) suggest that E./M. was represented emblematically by a horned →crown, a symbol that was also used for →Assur and Anu (SEIDL 1989: 116f; see also §§ II.2.A.1, 3). The depiction of three horned caps on a kudurru (SEIDL 1989: pl. 32b) is unique. No satisfactory explanation has presently been brought forward for the third horned cap (the other two representing E./M. and Anu) in this representation (for an attempt see SEIDL 1989: 84).

II. Typology

II.1. Phenotypes


B. Anthropomorphic: Unlikely. The fifth figure of the Malaii relief has been interpreted as either Anu or E./M. The deity is depicted in the same fashion as the god →Sin standing before him, but seems to be of lower rank since he does not hold a scepter (BOEHMER 1975: 51f). However, considering the high status of E./M. it would be inappropriate to identify the deity with a god apparently lower in rank than the other high gods of the pantheon.

II.2. Associations

A. Associated with Deities/Divinities: The association of E./M.’s symbol with other symbols on kudurrus is problematic since it is difficult to distinguish deliberate associations with other symbols of deities from a mere listing of symbols. The following associations seem to be valid.


2. Ea/Enki. In addition to the pedestals with the horned crowns of E./M. and Anu, Ea/Enki can be represented by a turtle (→Weapons 16*; SEIDL 1989: 152–154) placed on a pedestal or →goat–fish (SEIDL 1989: no. 106) at the pedestal.

3. Assur. On Neo-Assyrian rock reliefs three horned crowns are rarely depicted next to each other, with each on a pedestal (17, 19) or on a common pedestal (18*). The accompanying inscription identifies them with →Assur, Anu, or E./M. (SEIDL 1989: 117).

B. Associated with Humans: King. On Neo-Assyrian rock reliefs and stelae (17–19) the horned crown of E./M. appears with other divine symbols next to the image of the king, demonstrating its relevance to the representation of royal power.

III. Sources.

E./M.’s symbol is found on Babylonian kudurrus from the 11th to the 8th cent. with provenanced items from Susa (1–7), Abu Hadba (→Gula 3*), Aziziyyah (8), Warka (9, 15), Babylon (10), Ctesiphon (11), Ur (12), Assur (13), Nimrud (14), and Cyprus (16). Neo-Assyrian depictions on rock reliefs and stelae (17–19) date to the time of Sennacherib (704–681).

IV. Conclusion. The visual representations of E./M. as horned crown relate to the legitimacy of the king and his dominion. This is evidenced in Babylonia until the 8th cent. on kudurrus, and in Assyria in the rock reliefs of Sennacherib (704–681). The attestation of E./M.’s symbol ceased after this period. However, this missing visual evidence does not necessarily imply a loss of E./M.’s significance.

V. Catalogue

VI. Selected bibliography

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