

Figure in nimbus

I. Introduction. *Mesopotamian deity.*

The f.i.n. is a deity whose upper body is shown standing against a circle or lozenge from which rays or spikes emerge; the rays generally terminate in circular devices. Various identifications have been proposed.

The f.i.n. first appears in the Neo-Assyrian period; it is often beardless, making it difficult to determine whether the deity is male or female. COLLON (2001: 127, 130, 138), who surveys the Neo-Assyrian glyptic evidence, as well as most commentators, assume that the figure is female. The f.i.n. is generally identified as Ishtar of Arbela (note the partial inventory of WATANABE 1999: 327–330, 334–337 and HERBORDT 1992: 112, both of whom suggest that the deity is Ishtar). However, COLLON (2001: 138) suggests that in some contexts the deity may possibly be the consort of →Ninurta, →Assur, or →Nabu, or even potentially a young beardless male god. COLLON (2001: 138) identifies the nimbus as the “divine aura or *melammu*,” which some researchers have suggested may have originated from the decorated shield of →Ishtar of Arbela.

Until recently the f.i.n. was only rarely documented in the Achaemenid Persian period, the most famous and often illustrated example being the seal, probably dating to the 4th cent., found in the Nereid coffin from Gorgippa (22*). The deity represented on that seal has repeatedly been identified as →Anahita, but the evidence for the identification is not unambiguous (see § II.1.1.4).

II. Typology

II.1. Phenotypes

1. RING OR BEADED RING WITH GLOBE-/STAR-TOPPED RAYS (1–15) 2. LOZENGE-SHAPED RING (16–19) 3. NOTCHED RING (20–21) 4. DOUBLE RING (22) 5. TRIPLE RING (23) 6. SERIES OF DRILL HOLES (24–27)

1. RING OR BEADED RING WITH GLOBE-/STAR-TOPPED RAYS. In many examples the nimbus consists of a ring or beaded ring (made of drill holes) from which globe- or star-topped rays emerge (1*–15; note also HERBORDT 1992: pl. 1:5, 7, 14:24). The deity appears to grasp the beaded ring with one hand and holds up the other arm in the greeting/blessing gesture. In these examples the nimbus is very similar to the convention of showing weapons, especially what appear to be bow cases on the backs of warrior deities (both male and female; e.g., COLLON 2001: nos. 244–246, 248–251; note especially 1*–3, which COLLON interprets as having both crossed star-tipped bow cases and a nimbus). The

examples are more often executed in a rich modeled/drilled style of carving, with the deities wearing elaborately patterned, fringed garments, multiple belts, polos headdresses (often horned, tasseled, and/or with a star or globe) and jewelry.

2. LOZENGE-SHAPED RING. Another type depicts the ring from which the rays emerge as lozenge-shaped (16*–19; HERBORDT 1992: pl. 1: 9). Again, the deity appears to grasp the ring. These examples with a lozenge-shaped ring are executed in the abstracted cut-and-drilled style of carving and tend to show less-detailed compositions, but the lozenge-shaped ring can also occur on modeled style seals (WATANABE 1999: no. 2.2.7).

3. NOTCHED RING. A rarer version of the nimbus is a notched ring (20*; male figure) which gives the appearance of a ring of fire. An example from the Achaemenid period is preserved on PFS 68 (21⁺), which depicts a male figure surrounded by a notched ring. On either side of the figure stands a winged male figure who holds a bucket and, apparently, dabs at the nimbus (or raises a hand in adoration). Both the rendering of the nimbus and the overall scene vividly recall the Assyrian example mentioned above, but the style is very clearly Persepolitan (see GARRISON 2000: 129–134).

4. DOUBLE RING. The spikes of the nimbus on the seal found in the Nereid coffin are arranged in a manner suggesting a double ring (22*). The f.i.n., standing on the back of a →lion, has often been identified as →Anahita (for a recent discussion of the seal and previous bibliography see BRIANT 2002: 253f, 917; MOOREY 1979: 223–225; →Anahita).

5. TRIPLE RING. On 23⁺ a f.i.n. floats over an elaborate floral element in the upper part of the terminal field of a heroic encounter scene. The figure (apparently beardless?) emerges from a triple ring from which rays that terminate in stars radiate. Details of dress and headgear are only very faintly preserved; the figure appears to wear a conical headdress with a knob at its top. If beardless, as it seems, the figure is probably female and perhaps to be associated with →Ishtar and/or →Anahita. Given the wealth of astral symbolism in the PFS corpus and at Behistun, the linkage to Ishtar seems highly likely.

6. SERIES OF DRILL HOLES.

On a few Assyrian examples (24–25) the ring may be rendered simply as a series of drill holes surrounding the body of the deity or two sets of drill holes (26*–27) surrounding the body of the deity, one rep-

resenting the ring, the other representing the globe-tops of the rays.

II.2. Associations

A. ASSOCIATED WITH DEITIES AND DEMONS 1. NABU, MARDUK (1–3, 6, 8, 26) 2. NINURTA (5) 3. OTHER (8, 21–22, 23) B. ASSOCIATED WITH ANIMALS 1. LION, LION–DRAGON (5, 7, 9–10, 22, 26) 2. OTHER (1, 9–11, 19, 27) C. ASSOCIATED WITH HUMANS: WORSHIPPER (2, 4, 6–14, 16–19, 22, 26)

General remarks. The f.i.n. usually appears in association with other beings. Only rarely is it found as a single figure, as on stamp seals from the Assyrian period (14–15, 24–25).

A. ASSOCIATED WITH DEITIES AND DEMONS

1. **NABU, MARDUK.** PORADA (1948: 84) identifies the deity standing on a →lion–dragon in front of the f.i.n. and holding a →stylus/wedge as →Nabu (26*). In worship scenes Nabu's and →Marduk's symbols, the stylus and →spade, can directly (3) or indirectly (1*–2, 6, 8) be associated with the f.i.n. Possibly the warrior deity on 6, behind which appear a stylus and spade, may represent Marduk (see COLLON 2001: 130)

2. **NINURTA.** On cylinder seal 5* in the Louvre Museum the f.i.n., standing on a lion–dragon, follows a deity that is probably →Ninurta standing on a scorpion–tailed winged lion–dragon.

3. **OTHER.** The f.i.n. can be flanked by human-headed (21⁺) or fish–cloak (20*) →Apkallus. In one hand they hold a bucket; they raise the other to touch the nimbus. The scorpion–man behind the f.i.n. on 8 holds a cone in his raised hand and in the other a bucket, typical of an Apkallu. On 23⁺, where the f.i.n. is in the terminal field of the design, the main scene depicts a hero in the posture of a →master–of–animals, controlling two rampant winged human-faced bull creatures.

B. ASSOCIATED WITH ANIMALS

1. **LION, LION–DRAGON.** The f.i.n. can be depicted as standing either on a lion (7, 9–11, 22*) or a lion–dragon (5, 26*).

2. **OTHER.** Occasionally birds (1*, 19) or fish (27) can be depicted in scenes in which the f.i.n. occurs. Three very interesting seals preserved as impressions on bullae from Nineveh (9–11) show the Assyrian king and a female (probably the queen) worshipping the f.i.n., who stands on a lion; in the upper field there is a scorpion, the symbol of the Assyrian queen (RADNER 2008: 494–501 reviews the identification of the scorpion with the queen and provides an inventory).

C. ASSOCIATED WITH HUMANS: WORSHIPPER. The f.i.n. is often associated with a worshipper who stands with raised

arm before (2, 4, 6–14, 16*–19, 26*) the deity. As mentioned above, the impressions of three different seals from Nineveh (9–10) show the Assyrian king and a female (probably the queen) worshipping the f. i. n. Similarly, the seal from the Nereid coffin (22*) shows a crowned figure worshipping a female figure in a nimbus, who stands on a lion.

III. Sources. Representations of the f.i.n. from the Neo-Assyrian period date to the 8th/early 7th cent. (1*–8, 17–20, 27) with the exception of 26*, which has been assigned to the early 9th cent. HERBORDT (1992: 112) notes that all examples of the f.i.n. preserved as impressions are found on tablets dating to the 7th cent. (but note MITCHELL/SEARIGHT 2008: 103, who date 9–11 to the late 8th–7th cent.). Unfortunately much of the Assyrian evidence is unprovenanced (but see 6 from Bogazköy). A handful of impressions preserving the f.i.n. are found on tablets from Nineveh, Nimrud, Assur, Tell Halaf, and Khorsabad (HERBORDT 1992: 112, with a partial inventory; add 9–13, all from Nineveh). In the Persian period, 21⁺ and 23⁺ date to the early years of the reign of Darius I and come from Persepolis. Most probably 22* dates to sometime in the 4th cent. and comes from Gorgippa. The f.i.n. is typically found on cylinder seals, but a few examples of the figure on stamp seals are known (e.g., 14–15, 24, from Tell Halaf and Nimrud).

IV. Conclusion. While the f.i.n. may indeed represent Ishtar of Arbela in some of the Assyrian examples, the evidence is ambiguous enough to leave open the possibility that the figure could represent different deities in different contexts. The Achaemenid evidence clearly includes both male and female deities who stand within the nimbus.

It may be noteworthy that many of the seals which include a f.i.n. bear inscriptions that name Neo-Assyrian governmental officials (e.g., 7* names Nabu–usalla, a governor in the administration of Sargon II; see WATANABE 1999: 316, 324) and three or four Assyrian scenes show the king and queen (?) worshipping the f.i.n. (9–11; possibly also MITCHELL/SEARIGHT 2008: no. 224). In this sense it may be more than coincidental that in the Achaemenid period 23⁺ belonged to Irtashduna, a wife of Darius I, and 22* shows a crowned figure worshipping the f.i.n.

Given the rarity of the f.i.n. in both the Neo-Assyrian and the Achaemenid periods, however, one is reluctant to draw any sweeping conclusions either of the identity

of the deity or the significance of the use of the image.

V. Catalogue

1* Cylinder seal, chalcedony, 40 x 19 mm, 800–750. London, British Museum, WA 89164. COLLON 2001: no. 252 **2** Cylinder seal, agate, 725–700. COLLON 2001: no. 253 **3** Cylinder seal, chalcedony, 725–700. COLLON 2001: no. 254 **4** Cylinder seal, chalcedony, 725–675. COLLON 2001: no. 271 **5*** Cylinder seal, chalcedony, 42 x 18 mm, 725–675. Paris, Louvre Museum, AO 1510. DELAPORTE 1923: pl. 88:5 **6** Cylinder seal, agate, Bogazköy, 800–750. WATANABE 1999: fig. 26 **7** Cylinder seal, agate, 721–705 (reign of Sargon II). WATANABE 1999: fig. 20 **8** Cylinder seal, agate, 800–750. WATANABE 1999: fig. 40 **9** Bulla, clay, Nineveh, 720–600. MITCHELL/SEARIGHT 2008: no. 222 **10** Bulla, clay, Nineveh, 720–600. MITCHELL/SEARIGHT 2008: no. 223a **11** Bulla, clay, Nineveh, 720–600. MITCHELL/SEARIGHT 2008: no. 223b **12** Bulla, clay, Nineveh, 800–600. MITCHELL/SEARIGHT 2008: no. 270 (50771) **13** Bulla, clay, Nineveh, 800–600. MITCHELL/SEARIGHT 2008: no. 270 (50796) **14** Stamp seal impression (on tablet), clay, Tell Halaf, 700–600. HERBORDT 1992: pl. 15:9 **15** Stamp seal impression (on tablet), clay, Nimrud, 700–600. HERBORDT 1992: pl. 15:11 **16*** Cylinder seal, chalcedony, 26 x 13.5 mm, 725–675. London, British Museum, WA 89164. COLLON 2001: no. 272 **17** Cylinder seal, chalcedony, 725–675. COLLON 2001: no. 273 **18** Cylinder seal, chalcedony, 725–675. COLLON 2001: no. 274 **19** Cylinder seal, chalcedony, 725–675. COLLON 2001: no. 275 **20*** Cylinder seal, chalcedony, 20 x 10 mm, acquired at Membij, 800–775. London, British Museum, WA 102663. COLLON 2001: no. 269 **21*** Cylinder seal impression, clay, Persepolis, 509–493. Chicago, Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, PFS 68. GARRISON 2000 fig. 21; *GARRISON 2009: fig. 50 **22*** Cylinder seal, chalcedony, 29 x 10.2 mm, Gorgippa, 400–300. St. Petersburg, Eremitage, inv.no. COLLON 1987: no. 432 **23*** Cylinder seal impression, clay, Persepolis, 509–493. Chicago, Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, PFS 38. GARRISON/ROOT 2001: cat. no. 16; *GARRISON 2009: fig. 47 **24** Stamp seal impression (on tablet), clay, Nimrud, 700–600. HERBORDT 1992: pl. 15:10 **25** Stamp seal, material, 800–600. DELAPORTE 1923: pl. 91: 22 **26*** Cylinder seal, haematite, 39 x 18 mm, 900–875. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Morgan Seal 691. PORADA 1948: no. 691 **27** Cylinder seal, chalcedony, 725–675. COLLON 2001: no. 270

VI. Selected bibliography

COLLON 2001: 127, 130, 138 • HERBORDT 1992: 112 • WATANABE 1999: 323, 327f

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