

## Ishara

**I. Introduction.** *North-Syrian goddess.* No assured anthropomorphic depiction of I. is known. The only certain iconographic expression of her is in theriomorphic form as →scorpion. First textual evidence of I. comes from the Ebla archives (24th cent.), where she is the most important goddess of the city and functions as tutelary goddess. From there her cult spread to Babylonia, where she is attested in epigraphic sources as a fertility goddess. Both roles may be combined in oath formulas where the oath breaker is said to have no offspring. In a singular Old Babylonian oath formula the bashmu→serpent is mentioned as symbol of I. (CT 2:24 l. 20). During the 2nd mill. she was included in the panthea of various cultures in Syria, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia. In Central Mesopotamia she was assimilated to →Ishtar as the goddess of love and possessed similar characteristics and skills; the Hurrians preserved the North-Syrian tradition (13th cent.); and a Ugaritic ritual text provides the epithet “*hlmz-serpent*” (CAT 1:115 l. 2). From the middle of the 2nd mill. to the late 1st mill. astrological texts that deal with the zodiac often identify I. as a scorpion.

## II. Typology

### II.1. Phenotypes

**A. THERIOMORPHIC: SCORPION.** I. appears as scorpion together with an inscription of her name on the symbol panels of the late Kassite kudurrus of Meli-Shipak/Meli-Shi-HU (1188–1174) (1, →**Spade 1\***) and Marduk-apla-iddina I (1173–1161) (→**Gula 9**). An additional 45 kudurrus depict a scorpion, but with no identifying inscription (SEIDL 1989: 156f; →**Gula 1–4, 6–10, 15–16**). No indication is given that the scorpion appearing together with a female deity on a large number of sealings from the 3rd mill. onward should be associated with I. The same seems to be true for numerous royal and official Neo-Assyrian seal impressions from Nineveh and Nimrud, which depict a scorpion (e.g., HERBORDT 1992: 137f; pls. 20:4–6; 33: 1–7; see also →**Gula 19\***) and are closely related to the Assyrian queen and the palace wing under her responsibility (RADNER 2008: 494–501).

### B. ANTHROPOMORPHIC

**1. Probable.** No. 50 on the reliefs of Yazılıkaya (BITTEL 1975: pl. 34:3) may be a depiction of I., showing her in a row with other goddesses of the Hittite-Hurrian pantheon, but the label has broken away. The representation does not differ from those of

the other goddesses, and a probable identification is thus only based on offering lists from Hattusha, which have some analogies with the circle of deities depicted in Yazılıkaya.

**2. Possible.** The Old Syrian cylinder seal of Indi-ilima, servant of I. (BUCHANAN 1966: no. 872) depicts “the Syrian goddess” (COLLON 1975: 180f). The goddess stands facing left and holds a cup in her right hand. The inscription “Indi-ilima, son of Sherdamu (?), servant of Ishara” may suggest that the goddess is I.

### II.2. Associations

Theriomorphic I. in the form of a scorpion is associated with the goddess →Gula (1, →**Spade 1\***, →**Gula 9**). If I. is indeed depicted in anthropomorphic form (see § II.1.B), she may well be associated with humans.

**III. Sources.** Assured representations of I. as scorpion are identified by inscription date to the 12th cent. (2, →**Spade 1\***, →**Gula 9**). If the early 17th cent. seal of Indi-ilima does indeed depict anthropomorphic I., it would be the earliest depiction of her. Theriomorphic representations of I. are found on kudurrus, which originate in Babylonia. Singular are the depiction of I. on an Old Syrian cylinder seal and the rock reliefs of Yazılıkaya in Anatolia, if these are in fact representations of the goddess.

**IV. Conclusion.** Textual records indicate that there must have been a great number of statues and depictions of I., but iconographic evidence is rare. The broad range of possibilities does not allow a safe iconographic identification of I., with one exception: scorpion representations on Kassite kudurrus with identifying inscriptions.

## V. Catalogue

1 Kudurru, limestone, Susa, 1188–1174. SEIDL 1989: no. 38, pl. 16d

## VI. Selected bibliography

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