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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Classification and Iconography of Neo-Assyrian Winged Gods/Angels

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**Abstract:** New Assyria constructed magnificent palaces and temples in its three capital cities, Kalho/Kalah (Nimrud), Dursharokin (Khorsabad), and Nineveh (Koyunjik), which were all adorned with exquisite reliefs. In addition to intimidating and influencing foreign nationals, they engaged in political-religious propaganda. The relief was regarded as one of the most significant works of Assyrian art used to embellish their magnificent government and religious buildings. In these reliefs, they depicted various scenes and subjects while emphasizing the king's and gods'/angels' authoritative presence. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to examine and identify these unique works of art through iconographic analysis of multiple themes. On the other hand, it is beneficial to comprehend the cultural and social conditions of the time by analyzing the scenes and themes in motifs. This study intends to examine scenes taking into account the significance of religion and especially gods/angels in society and the Assyrian court, and after classifying the various scenes of the winged god/angels in the reliefs of the palaces of Kalho, Dursharokin, and Nineveh, providing an archaeological and artistic description of them, and analyzing the icons using the iconography method. How are the scenes in the reliefs of New Assyria classed thematically, and what is the method for iconographically analyzing the depictions of gods and angels? This research is a type of fundamental research based on its nature and approach; it is a type of historical and analytic research, and its method and instrument for information collection are documentary.

**Keywords:** New Assyria; Bas Relief; Gods/Angels; Flying Creatures.

## **Introduction**

During the second millennium and the first half of the first millennium B.C., the Assyrian government was regarded as one of the most influential in the Middle East and "at the time, the government of New Assyria was considered the largest one in the world. As it contained new countries of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, half of Israel, a sizable portion of southeastern Turkey, and a sizable portion of western presence in Iran, it encompassed the aforementioned regions" (Radner, 2003: 165). The central government was situated in the center portion of the Tigris River and its nearby mountains, a rocky and hilly region with good soil. The capital of the Assyrian was first the city of Ashur, followed by the cities of Kalho (Nimrud), Dur Sharukin (Khorsabad), and Nineveh (Koyunjik Hill) during the Neo-Assyrian period.

The Assyrian can be divided into three periods. Old Assyrian (2400-1200 BC), Middle Assyria (1200-900 BC), and New Assyria (612-900 BC). "New Assyria was one of the most powerful empires in Mesopotamia, and its government was considered the most powerful at that period. As they controlled the governments of Babylon, Urartu, Egypt, and Elam, they ruled over the entire Middle East, Asia Minor, Caucasus, North Africa, and the Eastern Mediterranean (Read, 1991: 56).

The art of the bas relief had importance role within the Assyrian culture. One of the reasons for this was that the Assyrians resided in a mountainous terrain in northern Mesopotamia. The location where the stones were covered the most part of area. As, the Assyrian used precious stones in their palaces and nobility decorated the stone sculptures, which were considered court art, with depictions of battle, hunting, and religious rituals. They depicted kings accepting tribute, assembling in public, and hunting various animals with an emphasis on the king's commanding presence. One of the most prominent themes of the New Assyrian reliefs was the depiction of their religion, beliefs, and rituals. Large stone frames were covered the walls of the royal buildings. These remarkable artifacts demonstrate both the king's mythological and actual authority. It depicted according to the desires of the king and his advisors, which were put in these locations to see the current and future people (Reade, 2005: 7).

The Assyrians worshiped numerous gods, as did the Babylonians and Sumerians. However, the Ashur god was worshiped more than any other deity. Ashur was the monarch of the gods and the national god of the Assyrians. He had appointed the king of Assyria as his proxy to reign on his behalf. Above all, Ashur was seen as a warrior god who shared his nation's martial impulses. He accompanied his troops into combat and bolstered weapons.

Some of the sculpted shapes on Assyrian reliefs represent their ritual secrets. As like other Asian peoples and nations, the Assyrians employed symbols to express many notions of life and the Minoan world in particular. As they believed the gods to be celestial creatures, they depicted them in their inscriptions as stars or entities composed of numerous elements. For instance, the great Assyrian god was depicted with a star or a figure with wings. The sole difference between gods and mortals, according to the Assyrians, was their great power and immortality. These people employed symbolic language to communicate their fantasies, and "the objective of constructing legendary and composite animals, or winged jinn, was to keep demons and spirits away from their dwellings" (Mallowan, 1983:33).

### **Classification by Theme of Neo-Assyrian Gods/Winged Angels**

From the Neo-Assyrian period, numerous reliefs have been recovered from the ancient sites of this civilization, particularly its prominent throne halls such as Kalhu, Dursharukin, and Nineveh, as well as from palaces and temples. Julian Reade has divided these motifs into eight groups based on the type of scene: "Idealistic and imaginative scenes, formal ceremonies and religious ceremonies, sacrifice, celebration in the camp, victory -over enemies or wild animals, hunting ceremony, return from victorious hunting and governmental celebrations" (Reade, 2005:8).

The purpose of this research is to investigate the scenes of legendary flying creatures found in collections of idealistic settings and religious rites. It is important to note that the function and number of winged creatures in the palaces of Calhu from the 9th century B.C. varies greatly from those in the palaces of Nineveh from the 7th century B.C. Thus, as we reach the later Neo-Assyrian

periods, the number of god/winged angel motifs decreases. As we observe by comparing the motifs of the northwest palace of Ashurnasir Pal II in Kalhu with the motifs of Ashur Banipal's palace in Nineveh, this shift is evident (Majidzadeh, 2010).

According to the sort of subjects, the Neo-Assyrian reliefs depicting winged creatures can be categorized into three: a- winged humans, b- combined winged animals, and c- winged-disc. Each of these groups includes subcategories that will be described in the following section.

### ***Winged Human***

According to the Assyrians, there are gods at the top of the creation chart, occupying the highest dominion. Since the gods reside in the heavens, they must possess enormous wings like birds in order to fly in the sky. As the means of movement, on land and in water, are feet, and fins, respectively. Since the sky exists on top of the earth and water, its inhabitants are minoy, holy, divine, and immortal. As like as human cultures, the pantheon of gods naturally has a hierarchy, with Assyria at the top as the god of gods. Angels serve as intermediaries between humanity and gods. These celestial creatures who carry the message of the gods to humans or carry out their commands on earth, have wings like the gods so that they can easily drop from the heavens to the earth and roam the boundless coastlines like eagles with sharp-toed feet and from the gods' creation. They are protected against the destruction of demonic and wicked beings. In numerous Neo-Assyrian tablets, the self-care of each of these flying species is described in detail. "Death leave, life enter" is carved on the clothing of one of these winged monsters (Wiggermann, 1992: 61), and "To avoid evil, I sacrificed in front of the gate" is written elsewhere (Mallowan, 1983: 37).

At least four depictions of the winged man can be observed in the reliefs of Assyrian palaces. 1- Only winged man, 2- Man with wings near to a sacred tree, 3-A winged man in religious ceremonies with the king, 4-Winged man battling a mythical beast.

In Assyrian reliefs and seals, there are several depictions of mythological flying creatures or winged humans. According to legend, the goal of their depiction was to guard religious temples or

royal thrones. In other words, these entities served as guards and safeguarded the area from devils and impure spirits; they are also occasionally spotted worshipping around the sacred tree. These beings have the ability to eliminate the court's enemies and defend the king and his family from bad forces. Initially, many of these creatures had a propensity for evil; however, they were conquered by the gods and incorporated in the group of patron gods like the lion-cow and mixed animals that stand in front of palace entrances" (Kertai, 2015: 51). Researchers of Assyrian history and Iranian art have indicated with precision that these winged creatures are not specific representations of the king. Frequently, Assyrian winged jinn bear inscriptions that mention the monarch and describe his valor and military exploits. In actuality, these pictures are intimately linked to the magical and charismatic abilities of Eastern kings (Mallowan, 1972: 2).

Some of these species possess two wings, while others possess four. The tiny wing is positioned over the larger wing. The wing is a sign of liberation and departure from the body and is associated with the Lord and all who approach him, such as angels and human spirits (Shavaliéh, 2000: 57). In fact, they believed that these tales, whether human or animal, had life beyond death because of their wings. The gods with wings were known as apkalu. There are three varieties of opkalu in Assyrian art: human-apkalu, bird-apkalu, and fish-apkalu. The bird-apkalu is iconographically similar to the human-apkalu, with the exception that his head is shaped like a falcon's. Fish-apkalu is a person who wears a fish fin, and this position has never been observed in palaces" (Kertai, 2015: 50). Some of these horned-hatted deities may represent god and Apkalu, including Ea, Marduk, Ninurta, Edad, Nebo, and Gira (Mallowan, 1983: 33).

In the first scene (Figure 1), a winged man (apkalu) is seen carrying a goat while holding a feather in the other hand.



**Fig. 1. Nimrud, Northwest Palace, Assyrian Palace of Nasir Pal II (Curtis and Reade, 1995)**

In a different capacity (Figure 2), this creature is holding a young deer and a branch (Curtis and Reade, 1995: 56). This group of animals is regarded to be sacred and fertile. Alternatively, "carrying this animal constitutes a sacrifice" (Mallowan, 1983: 37). The animal's horn is longer in proportion to its size, suggesting that the larger horn was more significant to the monarch. In actuality, "the horns represent a reminder of the vital power, the annual generation of immortal life and fertility," as stated in the passage. Therefore, the horns are a symbol of royal authority and good acts" (Shavalieh, 2006: 4).



**Fig. 2. A winged man (apkalu) is holding a young deer and a branch (Wilkinson, 1981)**

On the left hand of Figure 2 is a plant with five branches and nine-petal flowers on each branch. "The plant is a sign of abundant solar energy. The plant absorbs the earth's fiery powers and absorbs solar energy, accumulating healing or toxic or magical power" (Shavaliéh, 2006: 797). In this function, the winged man has identical in hair and beard (apkalu) and wears a headgear. On each of their wrists are two bracelets with a huge flower in the center, which is a symbol of divinity.

Several allusions to the sacrifice of numerous animals are found in numerous inscriptions from this culture (Mallowan, 1983: 37). In terms of symbolism, two reproductive animals, the goat and the gazelle, represent an abundance of blessings and a rise in fertility. Consequently, their sacrifices to gods, monarchs, and other holy powers that rule the natural and political order of civilization might be viewed as an increase in their power and resilience against evil forces. In these cultures, the horn represents strength and blessing, and the gazelle's horn, which has more horns than the goat's horn, doubles this strength, abundance, and power and boosts the sacrifice's worth. In all monotheistic and blasphemous religions, the blood sacrifice has a distinct holiness and dignity, and the Assyrian reliefs and other works make this point very clear.

From the same scene (Figure 3), we observe an angel with four wings from Khorsabad during the reign of Sargon II carrying a bucket filled with holy water in his left hand. In his right hand is an object resembling a pine fruit that was dipped into a bucket of holy water and then sprinkled in the desired places. This conical instrument can be used to sprinkle holy water as a sign of rainmaking and purification. "In Akkadian writings, this sacred bucket is referred to as Banduddu, while the pine cone is referred to as Mullilu. The combination of a bucket and a cone is prevalent in the architecture of Assyrian palaces, and both serve the same purpose. By dipping the cone into the bucket, the contents of the cone were strewn over individuals. The water in the bucket is special water derived from the subterranean Abzu Sea; it has the capacity to discourage. Abzu has a connection to the god Ea. Without the cone, the cleansing procedure cannot be carried out" (Wiggermann, 1992: 51-66). The objective of cleansing with this item is to prevent the court from ever entering a human dwelling (Mallowan, 1983: 33). Apparently, they use cones to pollinate female date palms (Curtis and Reade, 1995: 59).



**Fig. 3. A single winged man from the time of Sargon II in Khorsabad (Guralinck, 1996).**

In contrast to the reliefs in the palaces of Ashurnasirpal II, the god/angel depicted is shorter with broader shoulders. On the other hand, artworks from the reign of Sargon II and later depicted angels with four wings. The angel in this relief wears a long robe that covers his back leg to the wrist and his front leg to the knee, along with sandals and a horned cap. "During the Neo-Assyrian period, this hat is never seen on the heads of rulers; it is typically worn by Lamasso and other mythical creatures. Since the beginning of the third millennium B.C., the horned hat has been worn in Mesopotamia as a divine headdress. This emblem appears on the kuduros (monumental stones) of Kasit in the name of the supreme god Anu; but, in the art of New Assyria, it appears to have been transferred to the new national god, Assyria" (Jebraeili, 2016: 48). Numerous specimens of the horned headdress, one of the gods' insignia in ancient Elam, have been discovered in the artifacts of this culture.

In more than twenty-five rooms, the corridor, and the northern palace of the city of Kalhu, dating to the reign of Ashurnasirpal II (859-883 B.C.), three-meter-tall relief designs built of limestone blocks were unearthed. There are more than 200 depictions of winged humans among the numerous religious-mythological and nonreligious patterns cut into the stones. Three divine-mythological figures are known to exist in this big collection, which is uncommon compared to other motifs. These themes, unlike others, lack facial hair (Albenda, 1994: 68). (Figure 4)



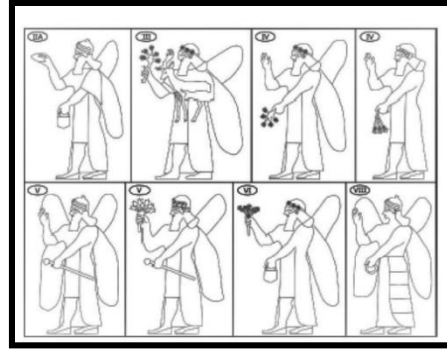


Fig.4 Winged gods wielding a variety of items (Kertai, 2015).

Few of the gods and angels with wings have female face (Fig.5). This ivory artifact was discovered at Nimrud (Herrmann, 1998). In Assyrian reliefs, a woman in this function is depicted placing one of her legs forward farther than usual and carrying snake-like items in both hands. God's/Angel's clothes has a gap like the Assyrian gods/angles; angels however, there are no embellishments and it is very basic. This character wears an Atef hat, which was widespread and customary in Egypt. There are four wings, two pointing above and two pointing downwards. The wings and hat of this god/angel closely resemble those of the wingless angels in Pasargad "The sides of motif were adorned with lotus, rosettes, and blossoms. This motif is reported to have been obtained from the Ashurbanipal II-built Kimuru Temple. This pattern is made in the Phoenician style, the origin of which goes back to ancient Egypt. Phoenicians are the angels with four wings, fire helmets on their forehead and, snakes in their hands" (Herrmann, 1998: 123).

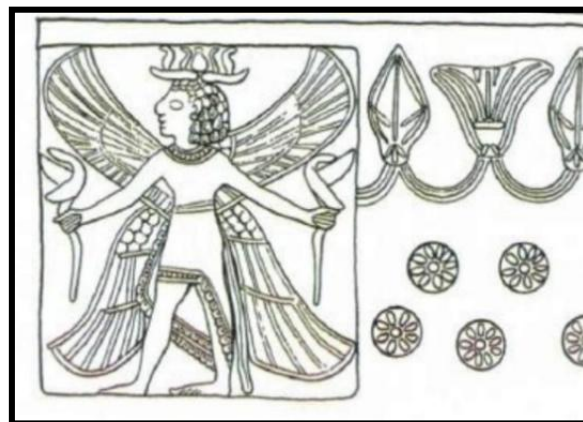


Fig. 5. Four-winged goddess ivory from Calho (Herrmann, 1998)

The second collection of images depicts the winged man beside the sacred trees. In Assyrian reliefs, the sacred tree is carved in an exaggerated manner using abstract and geometric elements. Obviously, a tree carved out to depict the nature or to complete a frame is realistic, whereas the holy tree's abstractness demonstrates its uniqueness and distinction from other trees. Typically, the sacred tree takes symmetrical shape, and around it, either the king or the divine-mythical people are placed symmetrically. Depicting a tree in the center and adding a winged disc on top of it demonstrates its significance and high status in the Mesopotamian philosophy. Probably, the tree was lauded because it was an essential source of nourishment for the inhabitants of the period (Fig. 6). The prevalence of the sacred tree in Assyrian themes reveals its significance in this civilization's culture. This motif is a vegetation symbol or a royal symbol (Albenda, 1994: 123).

A further depiction of this group belongs to the late Neo-Assyrian era (Fig.7). In this artwork, two angels are positioned on each sides of the sacred tree in an identical manner. Each angel holds a ring in his or her left hand. The ring is also a divine symbol. Additionally, the right hand is raised as a symbol of respect to the sacred tree. The hair is styled up to the shoulders. They are wearing long tunics and lack footwear. Additionally, they wear a necklace that conceals the chest ornaments. On both wrists, a bracelet with a lotus blossom in the center is visible. They wear a headdress with horns, which is a symbol of deity. The presence of two ridges on their waist indicates their strength. Behind the angels' heads are two open wings, with the smaller wing facing upwards and the bigger wing facing downwards. The sacred tree is positioned in the center of the artwork, at the same height as the angels, and all of these indications point to the angels' elevated status.

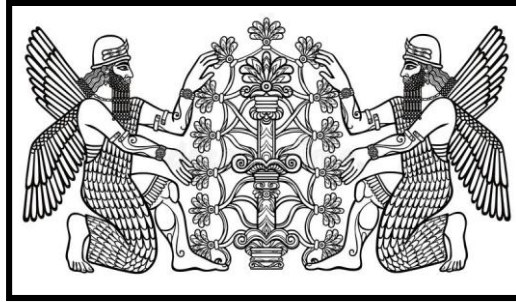


Fig. 6. Two winged gods or angels standing by the holy tree <https://www.dreamstime.com/stock-illustration-silhouette-assyrian-deity>.

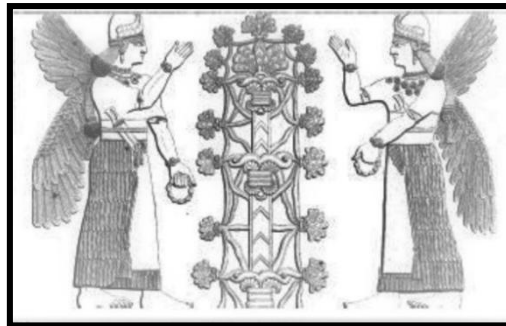


Fig. 7. Two goddess with wings standing by the holy tree (Kertai, 2015)

The third scene from the first group depicts the winged man alongside the king at a religious festival (Fig. 8) (Wilkinson, 1981: 18). In this image, the monarch is seated on a stool with his feet resting on a small stool. He placed a shallow, circular bowl on all five fingers of his right hand and his left hand on his leg. In front and behind the king's head are two women (perhaps eunuchs). The lady standing before the monarch is holding a fly swatter in one hand and a little container with a handle resembling a ladle in the other. The woman standing behind the monarch is also holding a fly swatter and a royal bow in her hands. Due to the fact the king's bow is placed on the ground and he is carrying a cup containing a drink (perhaps holy liquid or wine), this depiction is a symbol of peace, friendship, and the promotion of religious-national understanding. "The cup held by the monarch illustrates his status as a spiritual leader, who was in fact the high priest of Assyria" (Crawford, 1980: 21). In each of these images, the monarch occupies the focal point and plays the most significant role. He wears an expensive suit and has a square beard.

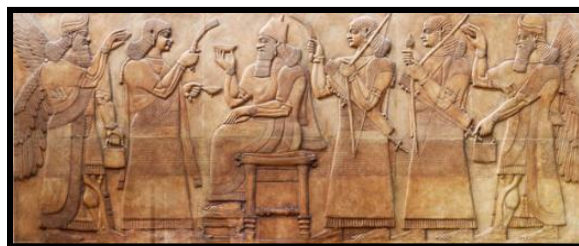


Fig. 8. Winged man with the king at a religious feast, reign of Ashurnasirpal II, Nimrud (Wilkinson, 1981: 18)

Consequently to the knight, "The bow is a royal weapon and a warrior's weapon everywhere... Archery is a proof of the prince's virtuousness and demonstrates his devotion." The arrow is used to combat the enemy and, ritualistically, the symbolic animal. The first action is therefore to eliminate the dark powers, and the second action is to build world order. Therefore, the bow, particularly the wooden bow, is both a weapon of war and a weapon for combating and repelling demons" (Shavaliéh, 2006: 601). The conclusion here, according to the knight, is that the royal bow was probably taken to ward off evil powers.

Behind the women are winged men holding holy water in one hand and a pine cone in the other. In addition to sandals, they wear a long robe that covers the back leg to the ankle and the front leg to the knee. Their facial hair and beards are lengthy and well-kept, and they wear horned hats. According to the iconography of Mesopotamian motifs, gods wear horned hats while angels wear headbands (Kertai, 2015: 48). Since they are wearing horned caps, it is evident that they are gods. It is impossible to discern the identities of these gods or angels based solely on their roles; inscriptions must accompany the roles. Occasionally, paintings are etched with inscriptions.

It appears that Ashur Nasirpal II has featured twice in another motif (Fig. 9) while wearing an ankle-length ritual robe (Majidzadeh, 2010). However, if we examine the image closely, we can see that the man on the right has his left hand in his sleeve and that the ornamentation on his dress is not as elaborate as that of the character on the left. In all depictions, the king and the individual standing before him hold a scepter or staff in their left hand. As previously said, this wand with a dome-shaped head is a sign of divine and terrestrial authority. Possibly a worshipful gesture, the king's right hand is raised and his index finger is pointing to the winged disk or sacred tree.

According to Wiggermann, extending the right hand upwards is a greeting in Akkadian; the term for this gesture is Carābu (Wiggermann, 1992: 61).



**Fig. 9. A winged man with the king at a religious feast, during the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, Nimrod (Wilkinson, 1981: 18)**

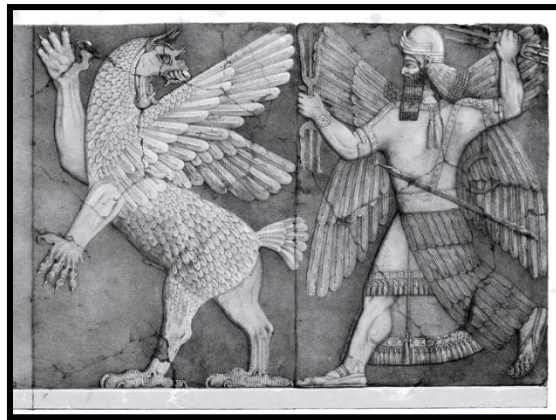
In the center of the scene is a sacred tree that represents life and resembles it. It is the same height as the monarch and angels. A winged disc is carved into the upper portion of the sacred tree, as will be revealed later. Behind each of these individuals are winged guardian angels. In the right hand of each guardian angel, which is raised aloft, a pine cone is visible, while the left hand carries a bucket holding holy water. This religious event, which is supposed to raise the produce of the sacred tree, appears to have been the Assyrians' most significant ceremony.

One of the very magnificent jewels seen on the wrists of both hands of the Assyrian monarch or gods/angels is a bracelet that, depending on the position of the person wearing it, appears to be made of gold. This ornamentation is frequent in Assyrian. The instruments utilized by the inlay industry. In this manner, valuable stones and other materials were incorporated into this jewelry.

In the center of each of these wristbands, which resemble modern wristwatches, is a big flower with several petals. Each of these bracelets contains a different amount of petals. It seems that the flower appears to be a lotus. Lotus is regarded as a sacred flower and a symbol of the beginning of creation in West Asian traditions. On the other hand, this flower is a symbol of sanctity, righteousness, and cleanliness.

The fourth scene of the first group depicts the struggle between a winged man and a legendary beast (Fig.10). The divine-mythical man in this scene has four outstretched wings. He is clad in an

ankle-length robe and sandals. This relief differs from the others in that the god, clutching a spear-like weapon with three heads in each hand, is running and assaulting a hybrid creature with a lion-like body, legs, and wings and the tail is shaped like an eagle, while the body is covered with snake scales. Apkalu wears a horned cap and has a sword at his waist and a sickle-like device dangling from his right arm. The placement of the winged human body behind the hybrid creature demonstrates the superiority of the winged human, while the hybrid creature is also battle-ready with an aggressive face and a ready-to-defend body.



**Fig. 10.** A winged man battling a legendary beast during the time of Ashurnasirpal II; Nimrod (Pittman, 1987).

This evil creature is called Ushumgallu in Sumerian culture. The lion and the dragon/snake are two of the most terrifying creatures to humanity as they pose a risk to human beings. Therefore, a mighty warrior is required to defeat this demon of chaos and destruction, and Ninurta is the only one capable of doing so. This gigantic creature represents strength, power, and destruction (Lewis and Ezekiel, 1996). Alternatively, it is suggested that this lion-dragon demon is likely Tiamat or Enzo (Herrmann, 1998: 125). It is very possible that animals in the Urartian art were the symbol of deities. Therefore, it was essential that they were related to the deities' function. In this case, lion could represent the power and triumph of the king (Dara, 2021: 40).

### ***Hybrid Creatures***

This group of ritual motifs contains depictions of the following creatures: 1- human 2- bird 3- lamasu 4- gryphon 5- sphinxes. In the mythology of many civilizations, there are composite animals that are distinguishable from other natural creatures in appearance, power, and influence over the earth. With these representations, the ancients tried to illustrate the disorder of the system of material creation, the terror, anxiety, and complexity of their notions of good, evil, ugly, and beautiful, and to present accurate and meaningful symbols. It may be a good answer and strategy for combating and representing man's contradictory inner states. In other words, the human mind creates fantastic composite creatures with more complex and expansive meanings that inspire expressive symbols in comparison to single-character or ordinary creatures. "In the history of civilization and in popular belief, there are countless examples of various composite beings, diverse figures in nature whose components have been combined or separated, enhanced or diminished. These creatures are fictitious yet they have deep roots in nature and reality and never lose their link to the real world" (Dadvar and Mobini, 2008: 69). Considering the self-care and the significance it plays in mythology, the united image of man and animal can signify a divine person or a demonic and satanic one.

The first scene of the second group, Man-Winged bird, has been shown next to the Holy Tree (Fig. 11). The Assyrians maintained some religious distinctions despite the expansion of Babylonian influence. The Assyrian god maintained the fundamental characteristics of a mysterious deity. Palace decorations of Ashurnasirpal II (856-883 BC) and his son Shalmaneser III (824-858 BC) in Kalhu were with repeated and extensive decorations of the king with various sacred functions and the sacred tree guarded by a goblin (Beaulieu, 2007: 171). In this bas-relief, the winged divine-mythological guardians of the Tree of Life feature eagle heads instead of human heads "According to self-care and its function in mythology, the human-animal hybrid can signify a divine entity or a demonic and satanic being. In the first instance "The idea of a human-animal hybrid embodies certain old views about god. God, in their view, is both related to and distinct from humanity, and occupies a much higher position. To illustrate their faith, they depicted god or supernatural entities as human-animal hybrids" (Sarfi and Merrikhi, 2008: 98).



**Fig. 11. A winged man with an eagle's head standing close to a sacred tree during the time of Ashurnasirpal II, Nimrod (Crawford, 1980: 23)**

Eagle, the king of birds, is the incarnation, successor, or dandelion of one of the most powerful gods. The sun or celestial fire, and the only creature that can gaze directly at the sun without suffering eye damage. The eagle is not depicted in any culture, nor does it follow the greatest gods and greatest heroes. This is because the eagle is such a powerful and distinct symbol that it has no form of story or imagination, history or myth (Shavaliéh, 2006: 286). In this panel, the sacred tree is shown as a figure in the middle of the artwork, surrounded by two human beings with wings. These creatures wear clothing similar to a robe. The right hand carrying the cone is brought towards the sacred tree, while the left hand with the holy water bucket is brought down. Each of these guardian entities has two open wings visible behind them.

The second scene of the second group depicts a human/bird with wings accompanying the king at a banquet. It demonstrates faith (Fig. 12). A mythological man with an eagle's head and wings, holding a cone in his right hand and a bucket in his left, stands in front of the monarch in this panel. Also facing a mythological figure, the king has extended his right hand in a symbol of reverence.





**Fig. 12. A winged man with an eagle's head. Companion of the king at a religious feast, reign of Ashurnasirpal II, Nimrod (Joshua, 2014)**

In numerous religious images, winged legendary creatures with human or eagle heads hold a cone-shaped object, such as the fruit of a pine tree, and a bucket. These two items are found in numerous ancient cultures, particularly in the New Assyrian palaces. Occasionally, merely a bucket is held in one's hand. Additionally, the conical object is seen more frequently in front of the holy tree. In a rare instance, it is also seen in the hands of winged men performing religious ceremonies behind the king. The bucket is often handled with the left hand whereas the cone is typically grasped with the right. Typically, the cone is identified as the fruit of the pine or fir tree. But it is not apparent if it is genuinely composed of natural pine fruit or if this object has another sort like wool or fabric and just its shape is modeled on pine fruit. Because this object must be able to absorb water so that spraying may be done simply.

The third scene in the second group consists of Lamasu (cow-man) (Fig.13). The history of the winged cow-man dates back to second half of the third millennium BC. It enters Mesopotamia in the second and first millennium B.C. Statues of bulls as guardians of temples and then the palaces of Assyrian kings were located at the entrances of the palaces of Kalhu, Dursharukin and Nineveh. "In Mesopotamia, the cow was considered a symbol of the god, Edad. The ancient Phoenicians

likened him to a bull, and this motif is probably an embodiment of the myth of Gilgamesh and Enkidu, which was popular in Mesopotamia and then transferred to other lands. Cow-man is an embodiment of two elements of human intelligence and animal strength and courage. When these two are combined with each other, an extraordinary creature is created that can fulfill the hopes and dreams of the weak human of that time" (Black and Green, 2004: 87).



Fig. 13. Lamaso. Nineveh (Botta and Flandin, 1849)

The fourth scene from this group belongs to a hybrid creature called gryphon. Gryphon is a Greek word that became popular in Europe in the Middle Ages. The head, wings and front legs of this legendary creature is in the shape of an eagle, and its body and hind legs are in the shape of a lion (Fig. 14). At the end of the mane of this mythical creature, a large wing is drawn, which is a representation of the heavenly power of this imaginary creature. The Gryphon has turned into a male lion from the waist down, and its long and elongated tail extends to the ground. This creature is a mixture of the best earthly and heavenly forces. The front half of this monster looks like an eagle, the king of the skies, and its back half is like a lion, the king of the land. Probably, in the past, this mythical creature was in charge of taking care and guarding temples, humans and animals (Mehrafarin, 2013: 275).

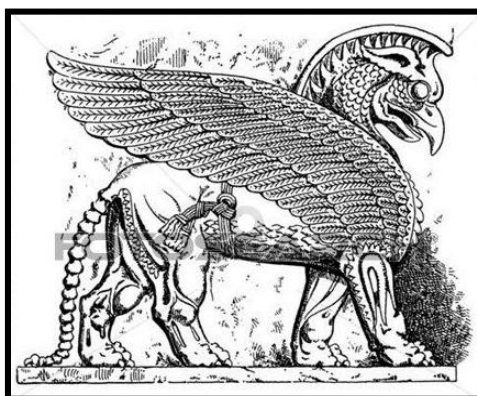


Fig. 14. Gryphon <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/453315518717959495>

"The origin of the gryphon was in Ilam. These people showed a lot of initiative in creating this supernatural creature with their powerful and strong imaginations. According to them, this legendary creature was a sacred monster that could protect temples, palaces, treasures, plants with its supernatural power, and hanging its image on the neck could protect its owner from evil. He protects evil spirits and filth" (Mehrafarin, 2013: 275).

The sphinx is another fictional/mythological creature of the Assyrian civilization that played a similar role as Lamasu. In terms of shape, the sphinx is a hybrid creature with a human head and a lion-shaped body (Fig.15). The famous example of the Sphinx, which is in the form of a very large stone figure, is located near the Great Pyramids of Egypt and is often known as the Sphinx.

Sphinxes, ancient hybrid and winged creatures, were formed to symbolize passage in the higher world. It creates the ascension and flight of spirituality, which is common among all civilizations. Transcending human conditions, which is possible with the help of flight, entails a kind of freedom (Kamrani, 2006: 53).

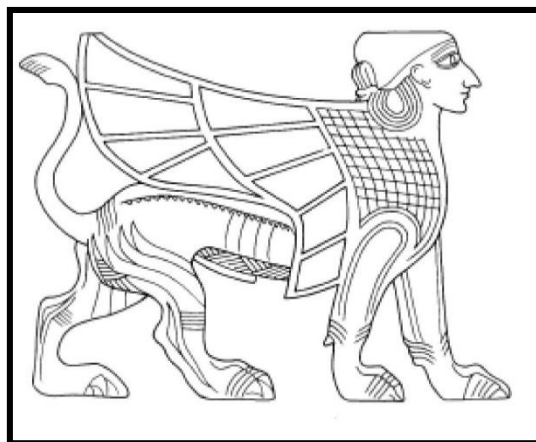


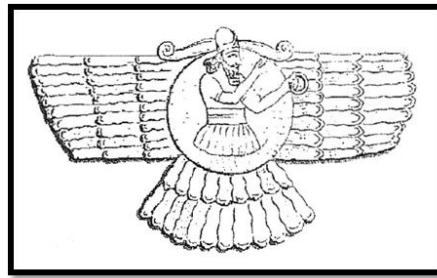
Fig. 15. Sphinx Ivory from Nineveh (Herrmann, 1998)

### *Winged Disc*

One of the important and significant elements in Assyrian ritual art is the winged disc. The origin of the winged disc goes back to the Egyptian civilization and it belongs to the third millennium BC. (Imoto, 2008: 44). After that, winged discs existed in most ancient Near Eastern civilizations such as Syria, Mitanni, Cyprus, Assyria, Babylon, Elam and Achaemenid. From a historical point of view, this ancient image was formed based on the image of a winged circle from a religious idea (Ravasani, 2017: 366-394). The image of the winged disc is in the form of a circle or disc with two wings open on both sides and the wings are open and flying. These wings are similar to the spread wings of a big falcon and the association of flight and high rank and the thought of being heavenly. The circle in the middle of this picture also brings to mind the meaning of the sun. It seems that the idea of the creation of a winged circle in art is an idea -beyond this material world. This pattern can be seen in Assyrian reliefs in two forms: 1- winged disc with human torso 2- simple winged disc without human torso. It should be noted that the winged disc with human torso is depicted in three forms. A- With a ring in his hand B- With a bow in his hand C- Drawing a bow.

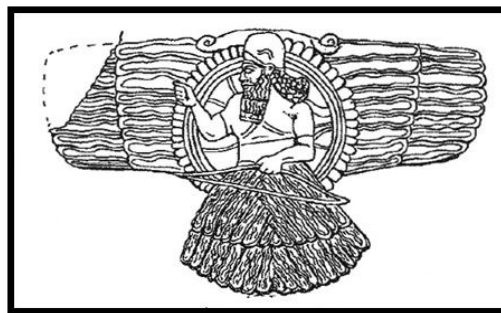
The symbol of Ashur, the god of the Assyrians, was in the form of a bust of a king that came out of the belly of a winged disc, and similar Babylonian symbols were models for Ahura Mazda, which the people of Mesopotamia and Elam were familiar with (Soudavar, 2013: 100). The winged disc symbolizes the Assyrian god or Shamash and is usually seen atop the sacred tree. This symbol is

used in many Assyrian relics. Shamash has various symbols such as cross, circle, four-pointed star, human and winged disc. The -most prominent example of this motif in the Neo-Assyrian period belongs to a relief from the western palace of Ashurnasirpal II, which is carved on top of the sacred tree (Majidzadeh, 2010: 456). The figure of the man in the winged disc is a sign of old age and wisdom. The winged disc here is placed at the top of the image and directly above the sacred tree, around which mythical winged beings are performing religious ceremonies at the door behind the king. The ring in the hand of the Assyrian god is a sign of divinity (Figs. 9, 16).



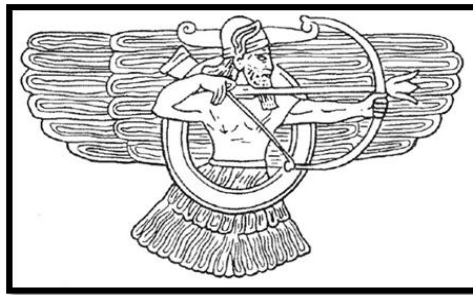
**Fig. 16. Winged disc with human bust holding a ring, Ashurnasirpal's reign, Nimrud (Ornan, 2005: 256)**

In the second example, the human torso inside the winged disc is holding a bow with one hand and raising the other hand in prayer (Fig. 17). This relief is of Ashurnasirpal II returning after capturing a city. The king is standing on a chariot pulled by two horses, and the attendants are leading the horses in front of it. Behind it, soldiers are moving along with prisoners of war. The symbol of the Assyrian god on the top of the king's chariot, which has lowered the bow, can be a symbol of the end of war and victory.



**Fig. 17. Winged disc with a human bust holding a bow, Ashurnasirpal II reign, Nimrud (Ornan, 2005: 256)**

In the third type, a human bust inside a winged disc is drawing a bow (Fig. 18). This relief depicts a battle scene belonging to Ashurnasirpal II from the Northwest Palace at Nimrud. Here the Shamash god is seen in the upper right in front of the king drawing a bow at his enemies. God Shamash is also drawing a bow and is a symbol of helping Ashurnasirpal and his soldiers in the war. "On the Assyrian sun tablet, Ashur is seen shooting against Assyrian enemies with a bow. This image shows the Assyrian god as the god of war, and we clearly see that Ashur has replaced Shamash, the sun god, and Marduk, the god of war. The god of Assyria was shown like this only in times of war, in times of peace. Ashur holds a bow in his hand in a hanging position" (Ravasani, 2017: 367).



**Fig. 18. Winged disk with a human bust drawing a bow, the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, Nimrud (Ornan, 2005: 257)**

## Conclusion

The bas relief is considered one of the most important common arts in the Neo-Assyrian period, which was considered a completely court art. In order to show their power, supremacy and show their national religion, the kings of Assyria ordered stonemason artists to create the scenes they wanted on large stone frames with specific dimensions that often reach three meters, and then these panels were hanged on the walls of the palaces, especially the throne hall or large state temples that were often located in the vicinity of the palaces. Among the various scenes of these reliefs, the winged creatures have been sculpted in a very beautiful and impressive way, and the precision of the artists in drawing them is very remarkable from an artistic and especially visual perspective.

Each of these paintings is an illustrated history of the powerful Assyrian culture and society in the first half of the first millennium BC.

With the investigations that were carried out on the scenes with motifs of winged creatures on the prominent reliefs of New Assyria, the scenes related to god/angels can be divided into three groups in terms of subject matter, which are: winged humans, hybrid animals and winged disc. Each of these scenes has diverse and scattered topics, which is a representation of the breadth of religion and the special complexity of Assyrian court rituals and religion.

The Assyrians showed their gods and angels in the form of various heavenly symbols or human incarnations. In the depiction and personification of Assyrian gods, large and raised wings, horns or heads of birds like eagles on the humanoid bodies of gods and angels show the difference of their divinity and holiness compared to humans. Each of these elements is a symbol of the superiority and immortality of god/angels, who continue their eternal life in the Minoan world, stable and free from pollution. The Assyrian angels, who are the mediators between the gods and earthly humans, are shown as men with long beards and rough bodies. Beside these male-angels, there are female elements that seem to have entered their religious culture little by little, and after some time female-angels completely replace male-angels in later cultures.

Some winged creatures of New Assyria have a combination of human and animal or animal and bird. Among the most important hybrid creatures of this civilization, we can refer to man-bird, Lamasu (a combination of a human head and a cow's body), sphinx (a combination of a human head and a lion's body) and a gryphon (a combination of an eagle's head and wings and a lion's body). These creatures can be referred to as gods/angels who are the creator of the great god, Ashur, and at the same time have a higher status than humans. In fact, they are Minoan gods/angels and are considered to be the link between humans and the great god. The figures of these huge creatures were placed as guards in front of the entrance of palaces, treasuries and temples. The guards who kept the evil spirits away from the palaces of the kings and the temples of the gods and were considered a guarantee for the survival of the lives and property of the owners of these statues and figures. In fact, these beings were considered a taboo against the evil and demonic forces that were

constantly attacking and destroying the good forces and their creations from all sides, especially from underground, whose shelter is the heavens and their mission is to protect the phenomena of The goodness of gods and humans was on earth.

The biggest and most popular national god of the Assyrians was called Ashur. This god was considered the god of gods and had sovereignty and superiority over all other gods. At first, the Assyrians showed this god in the form of a simple winged disc; but soon, a human bust was placed inside this winged disc, which was a perfect symbol and embodiment of Ashur. Ashur, like the kings of this regime, had a warrior character and in many motifs we see him with a bow and arrow rushing towards the enemies of Assyria and encouraging the king of Assyria and his troops to fight and giving orders to kill the enemy. In the sub-circle of Ashur, there are gods/angels who, by the command of the great god, who is Ashur, with each having its own responsibility, and by the command of Ashur, in addition to protecting his creation, they also continuously fight with evil forces. The king of Assyria is the representative of the great god on earth, sometimes we see him in reliefs in front of Ashur, who receives the symbol of power from him, and his image is the same as the great god except for a few minor differences.

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## طبقه‌بندی موضوعی و آیکونوگرافی ایزد/فرشتگان بالدار در نقش برجسته‌های آشور نو

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### چکیده

آشور نو در سه تختگاه کالاه، دورشاروکین و نینوا مبادرت به ساخت کاخ‌ها و معابد بسیار باشکوهی نمود که هر یک از این قصرها و معابد، با نقش برجسته‌های زیبایی تزئین گردیده بود که علاوه بر بیان مفاهیم مذهبی و نقش کارکردی آنها، تبلیغات سیاسی - حکومتی را نیز دنبال می‌کردند. نقوش برجسته از آثار مهم هنری آشوریان در تزئین بناهای باشکوه حکومتی و مذهبی آنان بشمار می‌رفت. آنان در این نقش برجسته‌ها، صحنه‌ها و موضوعات مختلفی را با تأکید بر حضور مقتدرانه شاه و ایزد/فرشتگان به نمایش می‌گذاشتند. از این رو، پژوهش حاضر با هدف مطالعه و شناخت موجودات افسانه‌ای بالدار از طریق شمایل‌نگاری نقشمایه‌ها و از سویی درک صحنه‌ها و مضامین در نقوش، می‌کوشد تا با توجه به اهمیت نقش دین و مخصوصاً ایزدان در جامعه و دربار آشوریان به مطالعه‌ی صحنه‌ها و موضوعات مرتبط با این موضوعات پردازد و پس از طبقه‌بندی صحنه‌های مختلف ایزد/فرشتگان بالدار در نقش برجسته‌های کاخ‌ها و معابد این دوره، توصیفی باستان‌شناختی و هنری از آنها ارائه و در نهایت نمادهای حاضر در این صحنه‌ها را با روش آیکونوگرافی تحلیل نماید. این پژوهش بر اساس ماهیت از نوع پژوهش‌های بنیادی و از نظر رویکرد از نوع پژوهش‌های تاریخی و تحلیلی و روش و ابزار گردآوری اطلاعات به شیوه‌ی اسنادی و شواهد باستان‌شناختی است. نتایج پژوهش نشان داده است که نقش برجسته‌های آشور نو با موضوع موجودات افسانه‌ای بالدار از نظر نوع صحنه به سه دسته؛ از سان بالدار، موجودات ترکیبی بالدار و گوی بالدار تقسیم می‌شوند که از جنبه‌های نمادین و متناسب با صحنه‌های خاص، نقش خود را ایفا می‌کنند و به بیانی دیگر، نقوش موجودات بالدار آشوری یادآور جنبه‌های آیینی و کالبدی از خدایان، فرشتگان و دیوان است که در افکار و اندیشه‌های این قوم نقش چشمگیری داشته و مسیر زندگی و استراتژی مردم و حاکمان را در مقابل نیروهای پیدا و پنهان طبیعی و ماورایی رقم می‌زد.

واژه‌های کلیدی: آشور نو، نقش برجسته، ایزد/فرشتگان، موجودات بالدار