

**BLMJ 2700: A Neo-Babylonian Cylinder Seal with a Mythological Battle:
A Question on the Identity of the Four-Winged God on Neo-Assyrian and Neo-
Babylonian Seals**

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Fig.1: BLMJ 2700 Seal and its Impression

Basic Information

Material: Agate

Size: 1.4 cm × 2.1 cm

Period: Circa 1000–750 BCE

Description of the Iconography of BLMJ 2700

This small but very elegantly engraved cylinder seal is housed at the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem. In 1970s, the late W.G. Lambert studied this seal together with other cylinder seals belonging to the collection, but it has remained unpublished until now.

The barrel-shape seal is made of agate and measures 1.4 cm (diameter) × 2.1 cm (height) at its maximum. There is very minor damage on the upper edge and superficial corrosion on the midsection, but otherwise the seal is well preserved. This beautifully executed cylinder seal depicts a mythological scene, a battle between a hybrid animal and two heroes.

* I would like to thank Mrs Batya Borowski, the founder and chairman of the board of the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem, and Ms Amanda Weiss, the director of the museum, for their kind permission to study the cylinder seals collected by the late Dr Elie Borowski, and to publish BLMJ 2700 here. With their courtesy, other seals from the same collection are also published here, referenced by the prefix BLMJ. I would like to thank them also for providing me with W.G. Lambert's provisional study of the cylinder seals belonging to the collection. The photographs of two objects from the British Museum are published here with generous permission of the Trustees of the British Museum. I would like to thank my colleagues and friends who read my earlier manuscript of the present paper and gave me useful suggestions. All errors, however, are mine alone.

As seen on other Neo-Babylonian cylinder seals,¹ the iconography of this seal is very dynamic. It is very likely that this seal was initially cut around 10th–9th century BCE² and some elements (e.g. palmette, rosette) were added later.

The bare-chested hero on the right side wears a headdress, a kilt belted at his waist and an open short skirt over the kilt. The headdress, kilt and over-skirt are decorated with dot-filled squares³ (otherwise known as *Kassettenmuster*⁴). He grabs the right rear leg of the quadruped and raises his left arm. His left hand is not preserved, but it is most likely that it brandished a weapon when the seal was complete. It is difficult to determine the identity of this figure. There is no inscription identifying the hero, nor does he bear any identifiable iconography. Although his posture, stepping on an ibex (or goat) with his foot, hints at his divine nature, it remains possible that the figure is that of a human king. Rather interestingly the ibexes (or goats) are not proportional: their heads are too large compared to their bodies, and the directions of the legs are also not even. This is unusual for seals made from precious stones like agate.

The damage to the upper edge of the seal hinders identification of the quadruped. Judging from what has survived, it seems that it is a hybrid animal, namely a mixture of a lion and an eagle. It has a leonine body and front legs. Its rear legs have talons. Its tail looks more like that of a bird rather than a leonine tail because it has no dock. It seems that the figure has two wings, but this too is not certain due to the damage to the seal. It is also difficult to determine what its head looks like. Given the traces still visible on the seal, it might have an eagle's head,⁵ but a leonine head is also possible. In sum, it is most probably a griffin like BLMJ 2781 (fig. 2)⁶ or lion-griffin (*Anzû*) as seen on BLMJ 2611 (fig. 3)⁷ Underneath the quadruped, one finds a palmette. Despite its miniscule size (about 5 mm high), the palmette is rendered quite realistically, but its style is unprecedented.⁸ Judging from the fact that the bottom half of each ibex's front leg is overlapped by the palmette, one may speculate that the palmette was added later like the rosette over the spade discussed below.

¹ See D. Collon's observation on the Babylonian contest scene, Collon 2001, pp. 154ff with further references on the subject.

² In his provisional study, Lambert dated BLMJ 2700 to the Late Babylonian period. On the other hand, because VA 254, a seal in the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin, shows a motif and glyptic style similar to BLMJ 2700, I date it to the early first millennium BCE. For these seals, see below.

³ One of the typical 'signatures', i.e. idiosyncrasies, of the Babylonian craftsmanship. See Porada 1947, p. 148; Collon 2001, p. 154.

⁴ Boehmer 1973.

⁵ For the identification of the quadruped, see the discussion on parallel motifs below.

⁶ Previous Publication: Collon 1993, p. 32. See also *idem* 2001, nos. 300–301.

⁷ For the latter, see below.

⁸ For the palmette tree visible below the so-called winged solar disc, cf. Collon 2001, p. 84.

From the left side of the hybrid animal, another hero, also anthropomorphic but with four wings, grabs the right front leg of the quadruped. Just like the first hero from the right, he is bare-chested and dressed with a kilt belted at his waist. The bottom edge of his kilt and the belt are similarly decorated with dot-filled squares. He holds his scimitar behind him,⁹ probably about to deliver a blow to the animal. Because he has four wings, it is evident that it is a god. He may be wearing a headband, but this is uncertain due to the damage on his face area. A crescent, a rosette and a spade (the divine symbol of the god Marduk) appear as filling motifs and together function as a scene divider. The shape of the crescent is very unique and looks like a croissant. The way that the rosette and the divine spade are arranged — the rosette slightly overlapping the divine spade — is rather crude and unfitting for a precious stone like agate. One may speculate that the rosette was added later over another motif probably in order to hide it.¹⁰

Parallel Iconography

Iconography almost identical to that of BLMJ 2700 is attested on three cylinder seals — one in the Pierpont Morgan Library¹¹ and two in the Vorderasiatisches Museum collections, VA 12888¹² and VA 254¹³. B. Wittmann dates these seals to the 11th–10th centuries BCE.¹⁴ On these seals, like BLMJ 2700, one observes two heroes grabbing the legs of a lionine hybrid animal and smiting it from its right and left sides. Like BLMJ 2700, the quadrupeds on the seal in the Morgan Library collections and VA 12888 are lion griffins with an eagle's head, while the animal on VA 254 might be a lion. There are some minor variations as well. Instead of ibexes, each hero on these seals is stepping on a sphinx (VA 12888) and a winged-lion (VA 254) with his foot. The heroes on the Morgan Library seal are stepping on a bull with their feet from its right and left sides.

The iconography of VAT 254 particularly resembles that of BLMJ 2700, although some details are different. Their glyptic techniques also seem to be very similar. Given these points, one may ask whether BLMJ 2700 should be dated to the 11th–10th century BCE as well.

⁹ The way this winged figure holds his scimitar is rather unusual. When a hero holds a scimitar behind him in his lowered hand, its curved blade normally faces away from its victim. That means that, in the case of BLMJ 2700, the scimitar should look like the letter 'd' not 'b'. But note Collon 2001, no. 312, in which the curved blade of a hero's scimitar also faces toward the victim like BLMJ 2700.

¹⁰ The seal was examined using a microscope. The visible tool marks seemed to indicate that a single craftsman cut the seal. However, examination using a microscope with better resolution might yield different results.

¹¹ Wittmann 1992, no. 32.

¹² *Ibid*, no. 31.

¹³ *Ibid*, no. 33.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 193–194.

However, the kilt and over-skirt worn by the hero on the right side suggest an eighth century date. Therefore, I here tentatively date BLMJ 2700 to 1000–750 BCE.

Four-Winged Deity

Because the interpretation of the scene depicted on the seal heavily relies on the identity of the four-winged god on the left, we discuss this first. A god almost identical to the winged hero of BLMJ 2700 is attested on BLMJ 2531 (fig. 4),¹⁵ another Babylonian cylinder seal in the collection of the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem. This seal is made of reddish chalcedony or orange agate. It measures 1.62 cm (diameter) × 3.91 cm (height), considerably larger than BLMJ 2700. This seal is dated to circa 900–750 BCE. On the seal, one observes a winged hero dressed with a belted kilt whose lower edge is decorated with a stripe of dots. The same decoration is also visible on his belt. This god wears a tunic. Yet, he wears neither headdress nor headband. He holds a scimitar behind him in his lowered right hand and grasps the right front paw of the lion in his left hand. Instead of an ibex (or goat), the god's left foot tramples upon a reclining stag. The dressing of this deity and his posture are almost identical to the winged deity on BLMJ 2700. Thus, although the animals at the figure's feet are different on the two seals (an ibex on BLMJ 2700; a stag on BLMJ 2531), they might still depict the same deity.

The same divine image is found on the slab which once decorated the entrance corridor of the Ninurta temple in Calah, now in the British Museum (BM 124572 = fig. 8).¹⁶ On this relief, one sees a hero with four wings brandishing a weapon in the shape of lightning and chasing after a winged lion-demon. Unlike the other two examples, this hero wears a horned headgear, a symbol of divinity. Clearly, this is a scene from the famous *Anzû Myth*.¹⁷ The myth recounts how, despite initial setbacks, the god Ninurta managed to slay Anzû and recover the Tablet of Destiny, which was stolen by Anzû from Enlil. The slab depicts the de-

¹⁵ Previous Publication: Muscarella (ed.) 1981, p. 144, no. 105; Wittmann 1993, p. 288 N 1. Cf. Wiseman 1959, pls. 63, 65, 71–73.

¹⁶ Utulu (lit.: South-Wind) is one of Ninurta's very commonly attested by-names. See, e.g., Annus 2002, p. 57. That is the name which the god list *An-Anum* lists as Ninurta's very first name. See Litke 1998, p. 44, I 205 (Litke offers ^du₄-gišgal-lu. This must be corrected and read ^dutu-u₁₇-lu. Cf. Litke's comment on pp. 44–45 about line 205 where he actually suggests a similar reading), namely Ninurta as the storm god; see also Streck, *RIA* 9, p. 517. Because divine wings commonly symbolize winds, it is very possible that the four-winged deity represents Ninurta as the South Wind. For the divine wings symbolizing wind, c.f., Heeßel 2011; Wiggermann 2007.

¹⁷ The inscription written over the slab is a royal inscription of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859) but is dedicated to Ninurta. Its prologue gives praise to Ninurta. Grayson, *RIMA* 2, pp. 193–194, i 1–8. The iconography of this relief is thoroughly discussed by U. Moortgat-Correns 1988. See also Braun-Holzinger, *RIA* 9, p. 524.

cisive moment when the god Ninurta kills the wicked Anzû. A warrior deity pursuing a winged lion-griffin is a very popular motif of cylinder seals during the Neo-Assyrian period; see, e.g., BLMJ 2611 (fig. 3). However, as already observed by Braun-Holzinger,¹⁸ in Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal glyptic, the warrior god pursuing the winged lion-griffin has no wings. Instead, he typically strides on the back of another lion-griffin.¹⁹

A winged god is attested very often, but with minor variations, in the so-called "contest scene" of Neo-Assyrian/Babylonian glyptic, see, for example, BLMJ 2697 (fig. 5).²⁰ The figure on Collon 2001, no. 329 (BM 129558) is almost identical to our winged hero but has no scimitar. Yet, these seals similarly offer no hint to the figure's identity.

On the seals with a contest scene between a four-winged deity and an animal/hybrid animal, one finds very frequently an inscription, more specifically a prayer addressing the god Nabû. For example, BLMJ 3169 (fig. 7).²¹ This carnelian seal, measuring 1.5 cm × 3.7 cm, depicts a four-winged deity dressed with a short kilt and a long overskirt belted at the waist, holding a vulture in each hand and trampling on another vulture with his left foot. His

¹⁸ *RIA* 9, p. 524.

¹⁹ Black and Green suggests that the lion-griffin lying under Ninurta is Saman-an, one of the slain heroes of Ninurta, Black and Green 1992, pp. 159–160; see also *ibid.*, pp. 35–36; 107–108. U. Seidl, on the other hand, suggests identifying this lion-griffin lying under Ninurta as Abūbu, lit.: 'flood', Seidl 1998. As Seidl notes, although they look almost identical to each other, the lion-griffin lying under the feet of Ninurta has bull-horns and a scorpion tail instead of a bird tail. She pays special attention to this fact and therefore concludes that it cannot be Saman-an, but must be another *Mischwesen*, namely Abūbu, Seidl 1998, pp. 107ff. She also refers to a title of Ninurta (but under his by-name Utulu) *rākib abūbi*, 'the rider of a flood/Abūbu-demon', in an inscription of Šamšī-Adad V (823–811). *Ibid.*, pp. 107–109. For the inscription, see Grayson, *RIMA* 3, p. 182 i 10.

Her conclusion is not, however, free of criticism. First of all, the *Anzû-Myth* does not recount how Ninurta reached the distant mountain where Anzû was located; it simply refers to the seven battles/Evil-Winds, which apparently took him to the battleground. One may compare the episode of Marduk waging a war against Tiamat in *Enūma Eliš*, the Babylonian Creation Epic. In this, Marduk also harnessed four demons to his battle chariot, Tablet IV 51–53 (Lambert 2013, pp. 88–89):

- 51 Four teams he (Marduk) yoked to it (his chariot) and harnessed them to it,
 52 The Destroyer, the Merciless, the Trampler, the Fleet.
 53 Their lips were parted, their teeth bore venom,
 54 They were strangers to weariness, trained to sweep forward.

Moreover, the so-called *Göttertypentext*, an ancient text describing various divine images, states that Ninurta treads on the Anzû, Köcher 1953, p. 66, ii 9. Note also the *Ninurta and Turtle* sec. B 18 which states that Ninurta should stand on Anzû's neck. For the *Ninurta and Turtle*, see ETCSL edition of the poem under <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=c.1.6.3& display=Crit&charenc=gcirc#>. Put differently: if indeed modern scholars' identification of the divine image striding on a lion-griffin as being Ninurta is correct, the hybrid animal lying under his feet must be Anzû as well. That is to say that the bull-horns and the scorpion tail of the Anzû lying under the hero's feet must signify something that thus far escapes our knowledge.

²⁰ The seal is made from chalcedony. It measures 1.3 cm × 2.8 cm. Judging from the style, it was probably cut in Babylonia. We date it tentatively to the Neo-Babylonian period (*circa* 600–450 BCE).

²¹ Previous Publication: Muscarella (ed.) 1981, p. 145, no. 106; Merhav 1987, no. 44; Wittmann 1993, p. 288, N 2; Catalogue 2002, p. 114.

kilt and overskirt have a wavy pattern — probably rendering sheep’s wool. The deity looks almost identical to the four-winged deity on BLMJ 2700 except for the fact that he does not hold a scimitar. This is another fine example of the Babylonian workmanship, but the same deity is also known on Neo-Assyrian seals as well. This seal bears an inscription in Neo-Babylonian script. It reads as follows:

^d PA URU ₃ ZI	<i>nabû nāšir napišti</i>	Nabû, the one who watches over life,
TIN BA	<i>balāta qīša</i>	Grant me (good) <i>health!</i> ²²

Almost identical prayers to Nabû also appear on other cylinder seals with the same four-winged hero. This prayer suggests that the god appearing on BLMJ 3169 is actually Nabû not Ninurta.²³ Nonetheless, because it is very often difficult to see a connection between the iconography of a cylinder seal and the text engraved on it, the four-winged deity’s identity as Nabû is not assured.

The four-winged deity is also commonly attested in a ritual scene showing deities/*Mischwesen* or priests flanking a stylised tree (so-called ‘tree of life’ or ‘*Heiliger Baum*’); see e.g., BLMJ 2511 (fig. 6).²⁴ Very often a winged solar-disc, or a god inside a

²² The exact meanings of the terms *napištu* and *balātu* are somewhat complicated. The former is customarily translated ‘life, living being, breath, throat’. For the meanings of *napištu*, see *CAD N/1*, pp. 296ff. Yet, as observed by various modern scholars (e.g. Steinert 2012, p. 276), *napištu* actually refers to a place or substance which sustains one’s life, like the English words ‘vigour’ or ‘energy source’. That is to say that the plea requesting for *napištu* does not seek ‘life’ as such but more precisely ‘power sustaining one’s life’.

Because *napištu* also signifies ‘person, self, body’, it is often translated ‘soul, spirit’, somewhat similar to the Hebrew word *nefeš*. Yet, unlike Greek philosophers, ancient Mesopotamian thinkers did not see *napištu* to be the seat of one’s mind. More crucially, the ancients did not believe that *napištu* could survive one’s death. When a man died, his spirit was transformed to a wind-like substance but in the same shape as the deceased (Sum: *gidim*; Akk.: *eṭemmu*) — one may even call it a “3D carbon copy”. See Oshima, 2012, p. 421, fn. 94 with further references.

The second term *balātu* has meanings similar to *napištu*. It is commonly translated ‘life, vigour, good health, life’. See, e.g., *CAD B*, p. 46. As these modern translations suggest, *balātu*, which very often appears as a synonym of *napištu* in ancient texts, actually means the very thing that sustains one’s vitality or animation. For example, in the Old-Babylonian *Gilgamesh Epic*, the ale-wife reveals the secret of immortality of the gods by saying that, when the gods created humankind, death was established for humankind as their destiny, whereas gods kept life (*balātu*) for themselves. See George 2003, p. 279, iii 3–5. Modern scholars frequently translate it ‘health’ or ‘good health’, yet these terms present only a limited aspect of *balātu*.

²³ See Parpola 1997, p. XLIII, caption for Fig. 22 (an impression of a Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal, BM 89145 = Collon 2001, no. 381). For the same prayer with the four-winged god, see Collon 2001, nos. 320, 347–8, 381.

²⁴ This seal is also made from chalcedony as BLMJ 2697 above. Given the style, it is most probably another fine example of the Babylonian workmanship. See Muscarella (ed.) 1981, p. 143, no. 104; Wittmann 1993, p. 288, N 3; Goodnick-Westenholz (ed.) 1998, p. 186, no. 184; *idem* (ed.) 2004, p. 14, no. 13.

winged solar disc is shown hovering over the tree.²⁵ The tree is now identified as an *urigallu*, a standard used for various rituals.²⁶ The same scene is also attested on palace-walls.²⁷ Modern scholars routinely call the anthropomorphic four-winged deity in the ritual a ‘genie’ but without offering any specific identification.²⁸ The relationship between the four-winged warrior deity known from the seal here under discussion (BLMJ 2700), or that on BLMJ 2531, and the four-winged deities attested in the contest scenes and ritual scenes elsewhere is likewise not clear.²⁹

Possible Interpretation of the Scene Depicted on BMLJ 2700

It is difficult to determine what BLMJ 2700 exactly depicts. It is evident that it is based on a myth, but what myth? If the second male figure were not winged, one might think of Gilgamesh’s killing the Bull of Heaven with Enkidu. Yet, clearly this is not the case. Gilgamesh and Enkidu are both human heroes, and so should be depicted without wings. Secondly, the hybrid animal attested on BLMJ 2700 is evidently not bovid.³⁰

As discussed above, almost identical iconography with minor variations is known from the two cylinder seals in Berlin which B. Wittmann dated to the 11th–9th centuries BCE.³¹ Like BLMJ 2700, however, they offer no hint that might help us identify the scene depicted on them.

A bare-chested hero wearing a crown and a short kilt with *Kassettenmuster* (but *en face*) is attested on Collon 2001, no. 326 (BM 89520). The motif is a variant of the so-called

²⁵ For the winged solar-disc and the god in a winged solar-disc, see Kurmangaliev, *RIA* 12, pp. 618–619, § 3.

²⁶ For the most recent discussion with further bibliography, see Seidl and Sallaberger 2005/2006.

²⁷ See, e.g., *ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁸ See, e.g., Black and Green 1992, p. 86–88; Reade 1965, p. 122; Herbordt 1992, pp. 79–81; 92–94; and Seidl and Sallaberger 2005/2006, p. 57.

²⁹ On BM 124560, a slab which once decorated the wall of Ashurnasirpal II’s palace (fig. 9), another four-winged deity is attested, but in a very different context. This four-winged deity is bare-chested and dressed with a short kilt belted at the waist and an open over-skirt — very similar to other four-winged deities from the Neo-Assyrian period. Unlike other scenes, however, this four-winged deity is carrying a stag in his right arm while he is holding a branch of a tree in his left hand. Judging from the god’s posture and that of the stag, it seems that the stag is under his protection. That is to say that the four-winged deity might be a protective deity.

A motif of an ibex/goat standing on a “*Heiliger Baum*” which is flanked by a lion-griffin and a leopard is known on a cylinder seal from the late second millennium, but here without a four-winged deity. See Seidl and Sallaberger 2005/2006, p. 57, Abb. 5 (=Matthews 1990, fig. 414). The animal standing on the Tree of Life is, however, not a sacrificial animal, but it seems that he has climbed the tree in order to escape the attack of the lion-griffin and the leopard. In this case, the “*Heiliger Baum*” signifies a safe place, the protection against the chaos represented by the wild animals. Note Seidl’s interpretation of the motif, *ibid.*

³⁰ For the episode Gilgamesh and Enkidu killing the Bull of Heaven, see Collon 2001, nos 857–858.

³¹ Wittmann 1992, 194–195, nos. 31 and 33.

three-figure contest scene: i.e. a hero wrestling with two animals flanking him.³² This hero is kneeling on one knee and holds ibexes or gazelles in both his hands. He is flanked by two winged lion-griffins (Anzû?) which are about to attack him. Another male figure, but much smaller in size, is kneeling on one knee between the backs of the lion-griffins. He apparently grasps the heads of the lion-griffins. This smaller figure is very similar to the winged deity on BLMJ 2700: he has four wings and is dressed with a short kilt belted at his waist, but he wears neither headgear nor headband. Although their details differ from each other, it seems that Collon 2001, no. 326 and BLMJ 2700 depict the same mythological episode.

The motif of a four-winged god fighting against a lion-griffin is suggestive of the Ninurta myths (i.e. *Lugal-e*, *Angin dimma*, and the *Anzû Myth*). In these myths, Ninurta, assisted by two deified weapons, Sharur and Shargaz,³³ wages war against different enemies (Asag in *Lugal-e* and *Angin dimma*; Anzû in the *Anzû Myth*). In *Lugal-e*, Sharur accompanies Ninurta to Kur (the mountain) in order to fight against Asag, whereas, in *Angin dimma*, Sharur and Shargaz stand beside Ninurta in the battle. In the *Anzû Myth*, Ninurta despatches Sharur in order to ask Ea for his advice.³⁴ Therefore, one may speculate that these seals depict a battle between Ninurta assisted by Sharur (or Shargaz), and his foe (either Asag or Anzû). If that be so, the bare-chested hero wearing a short kilt and headdress is Sharur (or Shargaz). There is, however, one problem: we normally expect that the four-winged deity should be larger in size because Ninurta is superior to Sharur. Given the miniscule size of the four-winged deity on Collon 2001, no. 326 (BM 89520), therefore, this interpretation too cannot be assured.

One may speculate that the crowned figure on the right side of BLMJ 2700 depicts a human king. If that be so, the seal might represent the ancient belief that the human king could protect the human world by defeating the chaos which the wild animals (ibexes) and hybrid animals (lion-griffin) symbolize. The ancient thinkers also believed that, in the combat

³² For the term “three-figure contest”, see Collon 2001, pp. 165ff.

³³ Normally their names are written in Sumerian ^dšár-ùr (the one who slays all [lit.: 3600]) and ^dšár-gaz (the one who kills all [lit.: 3600]). A later text explains the former differently: ^dšár-ur₄ = *hāmim kiššat* (the one who collects all). The latter’s name is explained: ^dšár-gaz = *dā’ik kiššat* (the one who kills all). In the first millennium, the two deities, many other attributes of Ninurta (and others from the Enlil-circle), are attributed to Marduk. *VR* 46, line 32 even equates them to ^d*muš-te-šir-hab-lim* (lit.: the one who marches with the maltreated) and ^{d.gis}TUKUL-^dšà-zu (the weapon of Šazu [a byname of Marduk]). See Krebernik, *RIA* 12, pp. 85–86 under Šar-ur und Šar-gaz. Mushteshirhablim is known as the weapon of Marduk, but also deified. He was said to be a lion-demon. See George 1992, p. 293. A mythological text, probably composed in the early first millennium, recounts that, together with Mushteshirhablim and Nēretagmil, a vizier of the god Id (the River), Marduk wages war against the gods of Eshumesha. Very interestingly, in this text, although Eshumesha was the temple of Ninurta in Nippur, this myth refers to Enlil as its occupant. For the myth, see Lambert 2013, pp. 321–325; 497; and Oshima 2010. For Mushteshirhablim, see also Krebernik, *RIA* 11, p. 357.

³⁴ Foster 2005, p. 570.

against chaos, a warrior god (e.g. Ninurta) fought together with/instead of the human king on the mythological level,³⁵ while the human king was fighting against his enemy.³⁶ This belief was exclusively expressed by the Assyrian thinkers who regarded their king to be the earthly manifestation or an avatar of Ninurta.³⁷ Put differently: BLMJ 2700 and Collon 2001, no. 326 may depict the battle at the mythological level between a human king assisted by the divine warrior and chaos represented by the wild animals and *Mischwesen*.³⁸

Thus one may give a different interpretation to the scene depicted on BLMJ 2700. As stated above, the four-winged deity wrestling with animals and *Mischwesen* is a very common motif on cylinder and stamp seals from the second and first millennia. Most of these seals are not inscribed. Yet, when there is an inscription, in addition to the names of their owners, one very often finds a prayer addressed to the god Nabû asking for good health. In other words, the four-winged deity might be Nabû.

The god Nabû is a bit of mystery. In the early second millennium, Nabû did not have a temple of his own — he was a vizier or scribe of Ezida in Borsippa which belonged to the god Tutu. However, when Hammurabi of the First Dynasty of Babylon put Borsippa under his control, Marduk, the chief deity of the city of Babylon, also took over Tutu's divinity and Tutu became an aspect of Marduk. At the same time, Nabû became the son of Marduk and the scribe of Esagil, the temple of Marduk. He also gained his own temple, Ezida, in place of his former master. During the second half of the second millennium, Nabû came to be identified with Mu'ati, the consort of the goddess Nanaya. Through this Nabû = Mu'ati syncretism, more specifically, because of the significance of his spouse Nanaya, Nabû's position was further elevated in the pantheon. In the first millennium, we witness an additional elevation of Nabû's position. In the first half of the eighth century, during the reign of Nabû-šuma-iškun, the king of Babylon, a governor of Borsippa, Nabû-šuma-imbi called Nabû "Lord of the

³⁵ Annus 2002, p. 5 and *passim*. Cf. Parpola 1997, p. XLI.

³⁶ Cf. Parpola *ibid.*, p. CI note 197.

³⁷ E.g., Maul 1999, p. 211; Annus 2002, pp. 94–101; Beaulieu 2007, p. 157.

³⁸ It seems that, before Marduk's rise to supremacy in the late second millennium BCE, Ninurta acted as the guardian of the regalia of the mortal ruler and bestowed the sceptre on the king. He was, so to speak, the patron of the kingship. See George 1996, pp. 384–385.

Sazonov 2007 observes that Šar-kali-šarrī, a king from the line of the Dynasty of Akkad, is called the son of Enlil, probably because "hat man ihn im Status von Ninūrta/Ningirsu gesehen", (*ibid.*, 338). It is an interesting interpretation. Nonetheless, the problem of deification of a god and the royal ideology behind it is very complicated and thus requires a thorough study.

Lands and the Lord of the Gods”, the titles normally addressed to Enlil and Marduk.³⁹ By the Neo-Babylonian period, he was even regarded as the co-ruler of the world with Marduk.⁴⁰

Nabû’s exact divine nature or qualities are difficult to determine, mostly because of his multi-layered divinity. Nabû took over not only aspects of Marduk, his father, but also those of Enlil, the traditional Mesopotamian supreme deity,⁴¹ and of Ninurta, Enlil’s son. Of particular interest in the present discussion is the Nabû = Ninurta syncretism. It seems that the equation of the two deities occurred mostly because of syncretism between their fathers, Marduk and Enlil respectively.⁴² The ancient thinkers came to attribute to Nabû the epithets and victories of Ninurta.⁴³ For example, a cultic commentary states that Nabû, not Ninurta, defeated Anzû.⁴⁴ The above-mentioned inscription of Nabû-šuma-imbi calls Nabû by the name Utulu, (lit.: the South-Wind).⁴⁵ As discussed above,⁴⁶ this was one of the most important by-names of Ninurta and frequently appears instead of/alongside his main name, i.e. ^dNin-urta, in ancient texts. In addition, in Assyria, ^dMAŠ, the very common logogram for the name of the god Ninurta, was also used for the god Nabû in Assyria.⁴⁷

During the Neo-Babylonian period, it seems that Nabû was worshipped as the patron of the dynasty.⁴⁸ The god Nabû was also the god who bestowed the sceptre in the temple E-nig-gidar-kalama-suma, “House which Bestows the Sceptre of the Land”, in Babylon.⁴⁹ This role was played by Ninurta in Assyria in E-gidru-kalama-sumu, “House which Bestows the Sceptre of the Land”, the Assyrian Nabû *ša harê*.⁵⁰ Put differently: the ancient thinkers might well have identified the four-winged deity, the most typical representation of Ninurta, with Nabû.

Conclusion

³⁹ Lambert 1978, p. 79; Frame 1995, p. 124, i 13’.

⁴⁰ Lambert *ibid*; Da Riva 2010.

⁴¹ Nabû probably took over Enlil’s attributes not from him directly, but instead by means of the Marduk = Enlil syncretism. Put differently: initially Marduk took over Enlil’s attribute when he was syncretized with him in the late second millennium and eventually Nabû then came to possess Enlil’s attributes when Nabû became the co-ruler of the universe alongside Marduk, his father, in the first millennium.

⁴² For the Marduk=Enlil syncretism, see, e.g., Maul, 1999; Lambert 2013, pp. 273ff.

⁴³ Pomponio, *RIA* 9, p. 21. See also Beaulieu 1993, p. 70; Annus 2002, pp. 47ff.

⁴⁴ Livingstone 1989, p. 96: 13.

⁴⁵ Frame 1995, p. 123, i 3.

⁴⁶ See Fn. 16 above.

⁴⁷ E.g., Frahm 2009, no. 73, line 1.

⁴⁸ Beaulieu *op. cit.*, p. 70.

⁴⁹ George 1996, pp. 377; 383–385. Cf. Oshima 2014, pp. 474ff.

⁵⁰ Pongratz-Leisten 1994, pp. 93–105; Annus 2002, p. 89. For E-gidru-kalama-sumu, see George 1993, p. 94, no. 397.

Thus, as seen on the slab relief at the entrance hall of the Ninurta Temple at Calah, the four-winged deity might be Ninurta. However, textual evidence, i.e. the prayers engraved on the seals, suggests that he is Nabû. If indeed the four-winged deity can positively identified, one may take the iconography of BLMJ 2700 to depict the human king battling against the chaos together with the god Nabû as the South-Wind (Utulu) at a mythological level. Beaulieu has observed that the Babylonian thinkers regarded their king as being Nabû's "earthly counterpart".⁵¹ This interpretation also well explains why the crowned anthropomorphic figure braces his foot on an ibex (or goat) which the four-winged deity also tramples. The ancient thinkers apparently believed that Nabû and the human king, his earthly deputy, shared the same divine attributes.

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⁵¹ Beaulieu 1993, p. 71.

⁵² I follow the abbreviations of the *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (=CAD).

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Fig. 1: BLMJ 2781



Fig. 3: BLMJ 2611



Fig. 4: BLMJ 2531



Fig. 5: BLMJ 2697



Fig. 6: BLMJ 2511



Fig. 7: BLMJ 3169



Fig. 8: BM 124572 © The Trustees of the British Museum



Fig. 9: BM 124560 © The Trustees of the British Museum