A complex system of religious symbols:
The case of the winged disc in Near Eastern imagery of the first millennium BCE

Tallay Ornan

The age-old motif of the winged sun disc is one of the most prominent Egyptian symbols that was adopted into the visual traditions of the ancient Near East. The frequent appearance of the motif in the arts of Anatolia, Syria, Israel/Palestine and Mesopotamia may serve as a case study for tracing the mechanisms of transfer of ancient visual symbols. Tracing the migration and transmission of the emblem can be useful for illuminating methods of artistic borrowing and transference of meaning and may shed light on wider issues of the mechanisms of inter-cultural exchange. When discussing the transfer of this prominent motif from Egyptian into western Asiatic imagery, a distinction should be made between the borrowing of a specific visual form and a possible change of its original meaning. Whereas the borrowing, adaptation or imitation of a visual form may testify to external connections of a commercial, political, or cultural nature, a conjectural new meaning assigned to a borrowed form may reflect regional particularity. This adopted newly charged motif should, therefore, be analyzed as an almost unknown form, which is to be comprehended first and foremost in the context of its specific cultural surroundings, its historic set-up and its own legacy. Since the exclusiveness of the solar association of the Egyptian emblem must be questioned in Near Eastern imagery, a somewhat “objective” term, devoid of solar connotation – the winged disc – is used here.

The present contribution will focus on first millennium depictions of the winged disc in ancient western Asiatic art. My aim is to shed light on the idea that during this period the winged disc represented various deities, both male and female, and was not exclusively and necessarily associated with a solar deity. I also wish to endorse the suggestion that in first millennium iconography it could signify major gods functioning as heads of pan-
theons,\(^1\) who were furnished with characteristics of other deities, including solar ones.

In the Near East, the winged disc is first attested on Syrian cylinder seals dating to the middle of the eighteenth century and on local Middle Bronze IIb Canaanite scarabs.\(^2\) The depiction of the winged disc on local Palestinian scarabs precedes its representation on Egyptian Middle Kingdom scarabs. Thus, the first use of the winged disc in western Asia was inspired by other Egyptian artifacts, probably imported to Byblos. The later appearance of the emblem on Egyptian scarabs, only after its appearance on Levantine scarabs, exemplifies the complex reciprocal transmission of motifs already attested in the initial contacts between Egypt and western Asia in the early second millennium. When copying the Egyptian winged sun onto locally-made seals, the artisans of Syria and Israel/Palestine not only dismissed, at times, some of the original Egyptian features, e.g., the two flanking uraei or the two extending legs clutching a cartouche, but they also transferred them onto a different medium.\(^3\) Moreover, from its earliest representations on Syrian cylinder seals, the winged disc was charged with a multi-faceted meaning and was not exclusively confined to the solar aspect.\(^4\) During the second part of the second millennium, the winged disc appears on seal impressions from Nuzi, on Mitannian seals and on Middle Assyrian cylinder seals dating to the fourteenth and early thirteenth century. Through the latter it probably reached Neo-Assyrian art.\(^5\) The absence of the winged disc from Middle Assyrian seals dating to the second half of the thirteenth and to the twelfth century\(^6\) may be explained by the dependence of Middle Assyrian imagery on Babylonian iconography,\(^7\) in which the emblem symbolizing the sun deity was the \(nip\)\(\) or \(šamšatum,\) the traditional wingless disc decorated with four groups of wavy lines.\(^8\)

The divergence of the Asiatic winged disc from the Egyptian prototype is further demonstrated by the compositional context in which the emblem occurs in Syrian glyptic: it often surmounts a tree-shaped column or a

\(^{1}\) Dalley 1986: 85.

\(^{2}\) The seal of Matrunna, daughter of Aplahanda, king of Carchemish is considered the earliest dateable depiction of the winged disc on Syrian cylinder seals (Otto 2000: 35, 270). For local Palestinian scarabs representing the winged disc see Ben-Tor 1998: 7.

\(^{3}\) Mayer-Opificius 1984: 191; Teissier 1996: 158. These two features, however, usually appear on Phoenician or Phoenician-inspired representations of the winged disc (e.g. the Taima monuments discussed below), which reveal a closer affinity, at least on the formal visual level, to the Egyptian prototype.


\(^{7}\) Marcus 1991: 555-557; Freydank 1976-80: 455; Matthews 1990: 108 (with regard to the fish-garbed figures).

\(^{8}\) Seidl 1971: 485.
stylized tree, and occasionally a rosette is depicted within the disc. These modifications support the proposition that already in its initial occurrences in the Near East the emblem was associated, among other entities, with sky and natural phenomena of a celestial nature, such as rain, and not only with the sun. This is a reasonable interpretation if one considers the perpetual need for rain in the regions of Northern Mesopotamia, South-East Anatolia, Syria, Lebanon and Israel/Palestine, in contrast to Egypt and Southern Mesopotamia. Such a meaning for the winged disc in Near Eastern iconography thus exemplifies a case in which the original meaning of a borrowed symbol was extended in order to match specific conditions as, for example, natural environment. The adaptation of the winged disc into the imagery of Syria and the Levant testifies to wide-range connections stimulated by specific political circumstances, while the modification of the original meaning of the symbol mirrors regional particularity.

It has been argued that the relatively frequent representation of the winged disc on Syrian royal seals indicates that it also served as a royal emblem. It has been further suggested that such symbolism reflected Egyptian inspiration, which was emulated by Syrian imagery. Indeed, in Egypt the emblem was charged, in addition to its divine symbolism, with a royal connotation, as suggested by the use of the winged sun disc among the emblems representing Ra, the sun god of Heliopolis, of whom the Egyptian king was regarded as a son. Thus, the Egyptian king or kingship could have been represented or referred to at times by the winged disc. However, the role of the emblem in Near Eastern imagery was different, as hinted at by its multi-faceted meaning. Because of its multivalent character the winged disc was a most suitable symbol for several divine images, each representing a specific deity. This may account for the repeated occurrences of the motif on various royal seals representing a distinct deity worshipped by the ruler who commissioned or owned the seal. Indeed, some divine-royal connotation can also be observed with regard to the winged disc in Hittite art, where it was used, among other contexts, in the hieroglyphic writing of the royal name, referred to as “my sun”. This probable divine touch of Hittite regal symbolism ties in, it seems, with other visual attestations of the somewhat blurred borders between divinities and royalties in Hittite iconography. As a result of this Hittite trait, divine attribution was probably ascribed to the figure of the Great King of Hatti sur-

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9 Teissier 1996: 98, 158.
11 Frankfort 1939: 212.
15 Cf. the ‘signe royal’ on the conical tiara of Puduhepa on the Fraktin rock relief (Alexander 1977: 199-200, 205), and the parallelism between the figure of the king appearing as a mountain god with that of the queen (Börker-Klähn 1996: 49-50).
mounted by a winged disc, as articulated in the Late Bronze glyptic of the Hittite protectorates in Syria, namely on seals found at Ugarit, Carchemish and Emar.\textsuperscript{16} Although the term \textit{dUTU} (\textit{šamši}) “my sun” was also employed as an epithet by Mesopotamian kings such as Šulgi and Hammurapi,\textsuperscript{17} general, clear-cut evidence of the winged disc representing royalties in Mesopotamia cannot be established.

It seems, therefore, that another distinction between the Egyptian winged sun and the Asiatic winged disc can be drawn, namely the lack of royal symbolism in the latter. This is corroborated by the reluctance of ancient Near Eastern visual art throughout its history in granting an earthy ruler an unclouded divine image or attribution.\textsuperscript{18} This contrasts with written sources, mainly Mesopotamian, in which kings were sometimes given divine signifiers,\textsuperscript{19} and it illuminates a divergence in pictorial and written traditions. The bursting, revolutionary Old Akkadian image of the deified king epitomized by the Naram-Sin stele was continued only to a limited extent in the Neo-Sumerian period and was followed with at least ambiguity and reluctance in later Mesopotamian imagery.\textsuperscript{20} A similar attitude can be observed with regard to Syrian, Anatolian, and Levantine iconography. The visual history and modification in meaning of the originally Egyptian images of the sphinx and the suckling cow in the art of these regions may serve as an example: whereas these motifs signify royalty in Egyptian imagery, they were probably deprived of any regal association in western Asiatic imagery and became emblems of supernatural protection or blessing and symbols of divinities.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{17} Dalley 1986: 98.
\textsuperscript{18} Mayer-Opificius 1984: 190.
\textsuperscript{19} E.g. the divine origin or parenthood attributed to Šulgi (Klein 1987), or the radiant \textit{melammu} used for both deities and kings (CAD 10, \textit{melammu}, 10-11).
\textsuperscript{20} See the selective use of divine features in royal imagery of Sargonic and Ur III periods and their disappearance during the first dynasty of Babylon, Hallo 1983: 6; 1988: 59-63. For the seated image of Gudea functioning as cultic object, see Winter 1992: 29. The notion postulated by Matthews (1990: 109), that the revival of the winged disc in Middle Assyrian glyptic is taken by the Assyrians from Hittite iconography for conveying royal connotations, needs more solid evidence.
\textsuperscript{21} For the sphinx, see Canby 1975: 234. The suckling-cow was regarded among the Egyptian motifs, which entered Syrian imagery through twelfth-dynasty royal Egyptian artifacts found at Byblos (Barnett 1957: 143-145). However, in the Syrian representations the suckling cow feeds its young and not a human being as is shown in the Egyptian prototype. The appearance of a suckling animal as an isolated symbolic-group already in the late fourth millennium in western Asiatic imagery (van Buren 1945: 87; Keel 1980: figs. 51-54) without royal association stresses its benevolent symbolic nature (rather than its regal symbolism as suggested by Parpola 1997: xxxvi-xl). The use of the motif as a divine mount on the Aramaic cylinder seal of \textit{t'mr} (Ornan 1993: 63) emphasizes its role as a divine emblem in first millennium glyptic.
The first occurrence of the winged disc in monumental Assyrian art is probably on the Broken Obelisk (fig. 1), which was found in the vicinity of the Ištar temple at Nineveh and is attributed to the reign of Aššur-bel-kala (1073–1056). A prominent typically Assyrian modification of the symbol is already apparent here in the combination of anthropomorphic components within the emblem: the addition of the divine arms presenting a bow and arrows to the king. A later version of the anthropomorphized winged disc is depicted on the glazed tile of Tukulti-Ninurta II (890–884), in which a shooting feather-tailed deity is placed in the center of the emblem (fig. 2). The portrayal of the deity holding weapons on these two monuments is an additional and significant alteration of the winged disc, since it heralds another typically Neo-Assyrian trait: the warrior aspect attributed to the emblem, which hints at the belligerent nature of the deity it signified. The positioning of the armed and winged god above the royal chariot on the above mentioned glazed tile strengthens the military aspect of the deity. The scene predates similar representations on the wall reliefs of Ashurnasirpal in the North-West palace at Nimrud, on which the emblem hovers above the heroic king. Although the anthropomorphized winged disc is

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23 Andrae 1925: 27, pl. 8; Frankfort 1939: 211. Cf. a ninth century (?) cylinder seal depicting an encircled shooting deity (Collon 2001: 86, no. 150).  
24 Layard 1849: pls. 13, 21.
Fig. 2  Winged shooting deity on glazed tile of Tukulti Ninurta II (British Museum, London, WA 115706) [after Frankfort 1939: fig. 64].

less frequent in later Assyrian wall reliefs, the symbol retained, at times, its bellicose meaning, as demonstrated, for example, by the symbol decorating the elliptical draft-pole of the war chariot of Tiglath Pileser III (fig. 3). 25

An elaboration on the anthropomorphized winged disc is the addition of two heads facing the central figure on the wings in the late eighth and seventh century (e.g., fig. 15). If indeed these heads "are a later contraction ... and represent lesser astral deities," as suggested by Collon, 26 we are faced here with a fusing of several images into one visual icon.

The two modifications of the winged disc in Neo-Assyrian art may serve as an example for illuminating the process of visual borrowing, in which a well-known, almost "international" ancient Near Eastern emblem is charged with a new and distinct meaning that is adjusted specifically to a particular religious and political system. The martial aspect of the Assyrian winged disc enables, at least in some cases, its identification with Aššur, the head of the Assyrian pantheon, who lacked an iconographical history of his own 27 and was thus represented by "newly" adopted imagery. The position of the warrior god represented by the winged disc which accompanies the king at the focal point of the throne room of the North-West Palace at Nimrud 28 accords very well with the highest rank of Aššur among Assyrian deities. It reinforces the identification of the emblem with Aššur, head of the Assyrian pantheon, as initially postulated by Frankfort. 29 However, the identification of the winged disc with Aššur encounters difficulties, since the symbol is identified with Shamash in texts, as evidenced by the stele of Bel-Harran-bel-ušur, the stele of Sargon from Larnaka, and Sennacherib’s Bavian and Judi Dagh rock reliefs. 30 No such written confirma-

26 Collon 2001: 80. With this regard see Parpola (1993: 185, note 93) who explains the winged disc as a fused icon portraying Aššur as a sum total of several divine figures: Marduk in the center flanked by Nabu and a female deity.
27 Lambert 1983.
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Fig. 3  Winged disc decorating a draft pole on the wall relief of Tiglath Pileser III from Nimrud depicting the capture of Astaratu (British Museum, London, WA 118908) [after Madhloom 1970: pl. III 2].

tion is known with regard to Aššur. Moreover, the disc is sometimes adorned with a cross, one of the symbols of Shamash, as exemplified by the stele from Nimrud dating to 879. Thus, the identification of the emblem with Shamash held by many scholars can be corroborated.

Interpreting the Neo-Assyrian winged disc in two different ways may, of course, reflect the limitation of modern scholarship in understanding the system of ancient symbols. Alternatively, it may mirror a dualistic interpretation of the emblem in antiquity. A somewhat similar conclusion was reached by Lambert, who postulated that the winged disc, when depicted in monumental art as a sole emblem with the king, usually represented Aššur, when appearing in combination with other symbols, mainly on rock reliefs and on steles, it stood for the sun deity Shamash.

The possibility that one symbol could signify more than one deity is not surprising, when one bears in mind that polytheistic religions considered their surroundings as being governed concurrently by several deities. Thus, it is not improbable that the winged disc usually connected with Shamash could, at least in some cases, represent the god Aššur. This reconstruction would tie in with the process of promotion and building-up of the image of the head of the pantheon revealed in a few first millennium

31 Calmeyer 1984: 140-141.
33 Lambert 1985: 439 and n. 27.
documents, in which Marduk or Aššur figure as a manifestation of a number of different gods.\(^{35}\) The same process is also reflected by the fifty divine names with which Marduk is praised in the epilogue of enûma eliš, lately considered to have been composed in the first millennium.\(^{36}\) The fifty epithets of the head of the Babylonian pantheon represent various deities amalgamated into his image, each representing a distinct aspect of his persona. Admittedly, the exaltations of Marduk and Aššur may have been exceptions, given their unique status as head of the pantheon of an empire. However, one may conjecture that such a phenomenon was not unknown with regard to other deities as well, and that it may have occurred in other areas of the ancient Near East during the first half of the first millennium (see below with regard to Yhwh). Consequently, heads of other pantheons may also have encompassed traits of various deities that were embedded into their image.

The winged disc became a most common emblem in various contexts on Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals. On a prominent group of cylinder seals, the emblem is shown conflated with a stylized tree. These seals are inspired by wall reliefs depicting either the Assyrian monarch in front of his supreme god represented by this symbol or the emblem flanked by two genii.\(^{37}\) The possibility that they were used by Assyrian officials “to signal state office,” as postulated by Winter,\(^{38}\) supports the interpretation of the winged disc on these images as symbolizing Aššur, supreme god of māt Aššur. On another group of Assyrian cylinder seals mainly depicting devotional scenes – exemplified here by the seal of Nabu-šarru-ūṣur (fig. 4) –, the winged disc appears without the stylized tree and is usually accompanied by other astral symbols.\(^{39}\) Since portrayals of worshippers facing anthropomorphic deities appear only very rarely on palace reliefs,\(^{40}\) a reference to monumental themes cannot be demonstrated with regard to these seals. Hence, identifying the emblem as symbolizing Aššur is highly improbable in this case.

Lambert’s suggestion regarding the double meaning of the emblem in monumental Assyrian art may enhance the understanding of the role of the emblem on these two Neo-Assyrian groups of seals. Thus, we may explain the representation of the winged disc in combination with a tree on Neo-Assyrian seals as signifying Aššur, while its appearance without the tree but together with other symbols, in particular the star, the moon-crescent or the sibitti, may have stood for Shamash (e.g. figs. 5, 6). The identification


\(^{36}\) Abusch 1999: 547.


\(^{40}\) Ornan 2004.
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of the emblem with the sun deity is also plausible in some cases, in which the emblem appears in conjunction with specific features, e.g., when it is supported by the scorpion-man, girtablullū (fig. 7), and the bull-man, kusarikku (fig. 8), fantastic creatures associated with Shamash in earlier Mesopotamian imagery,\(^{41}\) or when the emblem surmounts a horse, which is associated with Shamash on the Maltai rock relief\(^{42}\) (figs. 10, 11).

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\(^{42}\) Boehmer 1975: 52; see also Herbordt 1992: 227, no. 87 (a seventh century impression depicting a girtablullū and an equid).
Nonetheless, a clear-cut definition of the deity referred to by the winged disc on the devotional seals is not always possible, as demonstrated by two seals belonging to eunuchs. Although a stylized tree does appear on the seal of Aššur-bellu-usur⁴³ and might be an allusion to Aššur, it is not physically attached to the winged disc. Thus, a direct reference to Aššur cannot be established. On the above mentioned seal of Nabu-šarru-usur (fig. 4), the winged disc appears without the stylized tree, thus purportedly signifying Shamash. With regard to both examples, however, one may question whether a pictorial theme omitting Aššur would indeed befit the

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decorum of a high Assyrian official. As a result I am inclined to see at times a deliberate ambiguity that enabled the emblem to allude to both Aššur and Shamash.\footnote{Cf. Ornan 2001a: 24-25.}

*The winged disc in Babylonian imagery*

As mentioned above, the south Mesopotamian emblem of the sun deity was the wingless disc filled with a four-pointed star combined with four groups of rays. Developed in the Ur III period, the emblem is well attested in the imagery of the Old Babylonian period, on Middle Babylonian *kudurrus*,\footnote{Collon 1986: 48; Seidl 1989: 98-100.} and continues into first millennium Babylonia as, for example, on the Sippar tablet, where old visual traditions are mingled with a new composition and set-up.\footnote{Seidl 2001.} Because the winged disc is not a traditional Babylonian emblem and because its Assyrian associations were presumably well established in first millennium Mesopotamian art, one wonders how to interpret the role and meaning of the symbol in Neo-Babylonian iconography. Though not common, the winged disc is represented on Neo-Babylonian early-cut-style cylinder seals dating to the ninth and eighth centuries,\footnote{Porada 1948: 88, nos. 726-731; Moortgat 1940: nos. 632, 634; Wittmann 1992: 223, nos. 152-157.} which imitate the above mentioned Assyrian seals that conflate the winged disc with a stylized tree. Since these Babylonian seals mirror contemporary Assyrian ones, which reflect themes rendered in monumental art, they should be regarded as a second-in-line group of objects referring to the motif represented on ninth century reliefs. Consequently, a modification of their original meaning is conceivable.\footnote{MacGinnis 1995: 174.} I assume that, especially in Babylonian imagery, the winged disc would receive a modified meaning and would signal a deity other than Aššur. The reluctance in accepting the
winged disc into Babylonian glyptic is perhaps manifest in some Assyrianizing Babylonian cylinder seals that depict the typical Babylonian rosette-tree flanked by *apkallûs*, but do not display the winged disc.\(^{49}\)

Albeit not frequently, the winged disc is also depicted on Babylonian stamp seals dating mainly to the sixth and fifth centuries after the fall of Assyria and thus a reference to Aššur is even less conceivable. Interpreting the winged disc on these seals as Shamash, however, is problematic, too, since Shamash is traditionally represented by the wingless disc in Babylonia. As mentioned, it seems that only in instances in which the emblem appears supported by two bull-men, *kusarikkus*, or animal-shaped *girtab-lullus*, a reference to Shamash can be sustained (e.g. *figs. 7-9*). On some seals the symbol surmounts the most popular Neo-Babylonian divine emblems: the *marrû*, the triangular-headed spade and the wedge, symbolizing Marduk and his son Nabû.\(^{50}\) On an imported Neo-Babylonian schematized stamp seal found at Samaria, the emblem hovers above the *marrû* of Marduk and the dog of Gula.\(^{51}\) An association of the winged disc with Aššur on these Neo-Babylonian seals representing Marduk is unlikely and, since reference to Samash cannot be sustained, one is inclined to see in the winged disc on such seals either Marduk or another deity, or else to understand it as a general mark of divinity. Either way, the meaning of the winged disc is again modified.\(^{52}\)

Another kind of iconographic transformation reflecting not only an alteration of content, but also one of form, can be observed with regard to the manifestation in Neo-Babylonian glyptic of the Assyrian motif of the winged disc conflated with a tree. A conoid stamp seal found in the *merkes*

\(^{50}\) Jakob-Rost 1997: nos. 242, 243 (from the vicinity of El Hiba); Buchanan & Moorey 1988: no. 380.
\(^{51}\) Crowfoot et al. 1957: 87, pl. 15:19.
\(^{52}\) For this matter see also a rare depiction of a winged disc on a Neo-Babylonian impression of a cylinder seal, Baker & Wunsch 2001: 205, fig 4, 209.
of Babylon depicts a winged disc above a small, bush-like plant that is composed of a globular stem from which three branches grow.\textsuperscript{53} A variation of this Neo-Babylonian theme is found on an pyramidal cut-style seal imported to Ein-Gedi in the Judean Desert; it depicts a worshipper in front of a winged disc, below which there is a more schematic version of the bush-like plant with five branches (\textit{fig. 12}).\textsuperscript{54} This small plant was a common motif on Neo-Babylonian stamp seals (see \textit{fig. 9}), as shown by Porada, who called it the "cactus-like" plant.\textsuperscript{55} The compositional resemblance between the Assyrian winged-disc-and-tree and this Babylonian representation – in particular the fact that in both cases the element below the winged disc is a floral motif – may suggest that some correspondence existed between the two themes. It may be postulated that the role of the "cactus-like bush" on Babylonian seals parallels that of the tree on Assyrian seals. The existence of Babylonian seals on which the "bush-plant" resembles a tree (\textit{figs. 13a, 14a}),\textsuperscript{56} may offer additional support to the above suggestion. Bearing in mind that the Assyrian tree commonly displayed traits typical of date palms,\textsuperscript{57} it may be argued that the "cactus-like" plant is to be understood as the small offshoot of the date palm that grows around the trunk of the tree. One method of reproducing the date palm is by removing and replanting its offshoot; herein lies the symbolic value of the design, which probably conveyed some aspect of fertility, as is the

\textsuperscript{53} Jakob-Rost 1997: no. 190.
\textsuperscript{54} Mazar & Dunayevsky 1967: 139, pl. 31:2; cf. Buchanan & Moorey 1988: no. 396.
\textsuperscript{55} Porada 1948: 94. See Collon 2001: 12, for additional examples.
\textsuperscript{56} Compare a similar tree with no winged disc: Jakob-Rost 1997: nos. 278, 279 (Babylon); Buchanan & Moorey 1988: no. 390. A variant of the ‘offshoot plant’, articulated as a tree, is depicted on cylinder seals found at Tell es-Sa’idiyeh and Tell el-‘Umeiri in Jordan, and on an unpublished cylinder seal found in an Iron Age tomb at Jerusalem. These three seals may represent a distinct local workshop, inspired by Babylonian glyptic, located in the vicinity of the Jordan Valley (Ornan 1997: nos. 126, 127 and illustration no. 47).
\textsuperscript{57} Porter 1993.
Assyrian tree. Such an interpretation would fit the meaning of Akkadian *libbi* *gišimmari*, *liblibbu* or *libbu*, “the offshoot of the palm”, and also accords well with the figurative meaning of *liblibbu*, “human offspring” or “descendant,” mainly referring to royal genealogy. The symbolic value of the *liblibbu* or *libbu* is reflected by the object identified with the *libbu*, sometimes decorated with floral motifs, which is held by the king performing the Babylonian *appa labanu* gesture, a gesture adopted by Assyrian kings from the reign of Sennacherib onward. The combination of the winged disc with a different, though related, palm motif on Babylonian stamp seals demonstrates the transmission of a symbol through emulation, yet with modifications determined by particularity. The late Neo-Babylonian seal cutter imitated the group of symbols used to represent the head of the Assyrian pantheon, which had become so common in Neo-Assyrian art. While transforming the Assyrian stylized palm tree into the Babylonian offspring of the palm, he probably also gave a new interpretation to the winged disc, the exact meaning of which yet eludes us.

In contrast to the ninth and eighth century cylinder seals, it is the traditional wingless sun disc that is represented in monumental Babylonian art as, for example, on *kudurru*. The winged disc is portrayed only on two Neo-Babylonian monuments attributed to Nabonidus: on a stele housed in the British Museum and on a rock relief near Sela (in the vicinity of Petra in Jordan), which has recently been identified. Although these renderings of the winged disc are unique to Nabonidus, it should be noted that Babylonian appropriation of Assyrian themes took place already during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, as evidenced by two rock reliefs from Wadi Byrsa in Syria, on which the Babylonian king is depicted combating a lion and standing next to a large tree. It is more than reasonable to assume that official Babylonian imagery could use these highly esteemed and prestigious themes conveying power only after the fall of Assyria. And it is perhaps not a mere coincidence that such “new” Babylonian themes were found outside Babylonia proper. Even if Nabonidus’ introduction of the winged disc continued a process of iconographic borrowing initiated by Nebuchadnezzar II, it nonetheless also accords with his introduction of other “revolutionary” visual features, of which he was accused in the Verse Account.

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58 The term also refers to the bud, leaf, or trunk of a palm tree: CAD 9, *libbu* (7), 175, *liblibbu*, 79-180.
60 Börker-Klühn 1982: no. 266; Dalley & Goguel 1997; Raz & Uchitel 2001: 35.
61 Börker-Klühn 1982: nos. 259, 260 and perhaps no. 268
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Fig. 15 Winged moon god on cylinder seal of brkhdd (Harriet Otis Cruft Fund, 34.208) [drawing N. Zeevi, Jerusalem; courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston].

Probably inspired by the imagery used by Nabonidus, later depictions of the winged disc appear on fifth century monuments found at or attributed to Taima in northwest Arabia. A stele with an Aramaic inscription in the Louvre and a cubic stone pedestal found at Taima bear depictions of the winged disc that are similar to the typical representations in ancient Near Eastern art: astral symbols accompanying a devotional scene. Based on the inscription of the Louvre stele, Dalley suggested identifying the winged disc on these monuments as representing the god $almu, who is mentioned in the text as a deity installed in Taima. This identification seemingly exemplifies another shift in meaning of the emblem that occurred in the process of transforming the visual theme of the Nabonidus monuments and adapting them to the fifth century iconography of Taima. If there was a correspondence between text and image on the two Taima monuments, it would perhaps, however, be preferable to identify $almu, the main protagonist in the text, with the central element depicted on the two monuments: the bull despite the fact that there are no cuneiform attestations extant for associating $almu with a bull.

63 Börker-Klähn 1982: no. 265. Bawden, Edens & Miller 1980: 83-84, pl. 69. The figurative part of the Louvre stele is arranged in two registers on the narrow side of the monument. When compared with the representation on the stone pedestal-cube, it becomes evident that a similar composition of a priest in front of a bull’s head (with the addition of a “royal” figure on the Louvre stele) is portrayed on both monuments. 64 Dalley 1986: 85-86. 65 The god $almu appears as the main divine protagonist in a second Aramaic inscription from Taima, on which a winged disc and other astral emblems are part of a representation of which only the upper part survived (Bawden, Edens & Miller 1980: 84. For a photograph see Abu Duruk 1995: 72). 66 Cf. Knauf 1990: 212, n. 49. 67 Dalley 1986: 88.
The possibility that the winged disc symbolizes two or more deities is further demonstrated by the cylinder seal of *brkhdd* (fig. 15) and a Moabite scaraboid (fig. 16); they depict a winged god standing within a disc that surmounts a stylized tree. The composition as well as the details of these seal images – the deity’s feathered tail, the two smaller gods seen on the wings and the bucket-holding fish-*apkallu* – clearly imitate the image of Aššur on Assyrian palatial decoration and on cylinder seals inspired by the latter. Yet, it is neither Aššur nor Shamash who is being represented here, but rather the moon god Sin, as indicated by the crescent. The assimilation of the image of Sin with that of Aššur can be further exemplified by late eighth and seventh century Assyro-Babylonian cylinder seals, on which the disc consists of a globe in a crescent, and by a seventh century stamp seal, on which the iconography of Aššur is mirrored by the flanking *apkallus* (e.g., fig. 17).

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69 Both seals are non-provenanced. The cylinder seal of *brkhdd* is pinkish chalcedony (h. 2 cm). The Moabite seal is also made of chalcedony (h. 1.2 cm; l. 2.6 cm; w. 1.9 cm), Ornан 1997: no. 219 (Columbia University, New York, no. 51, kept in the Pierpont-Morgan library). The seal is inscribed with a private name, of which *lamed*, *kof* and *mem* have survived; they are probably part of the theophoric component *kmś* pointing to its Moabite origin (cf. Avigad & Sass 1997: 407). Another local version of the winged-disc-and-crescent above a stylized tree is shown on a non-inscribed seal found at Shechem (Keel & Uehlinger 1998: 257, fig. 258b).
70 Collon 2001: 80, 92 (no. 157); see also 181 (no. 361) for Sin within its crescent above a tree. See Parpola 1993: 176, note 66 and 184, note 89.
The insertion of lunar symbolism in depictions of the winged disc is further exemplified on North Syrian monuments from Til Barsip (fig. 18), Sakçagözü (fig. 19), Körkun and Kürtül. Similar winged disc-and-moon-crescents appear on a bronze helmet from Zincirli (fig. 20) and on an ivory plaque attributed to Toprakkale. The winged moon crescent depicted on the Körkun, Kürtül and Til Barsip steles hovers above a storm deity sometimes carrying an axe and a thunder-bolt and mounted on a bull, his sacred beast. Not only do the wings depicted on these steles play a role in representing lunar symbolism, but this doubly fused emblem refers here to a third divine entity: that of the storm god. The amalgamation of the sun and moon symbols into one icon is apparent in earlier Mesopotamian art, namely in representations dating to the Ur III period, in which the rayed, quadrupartite disc representing Shamash is inscribed with a crescent moon. The depiction of this sun-and-moon emblem linked with various deities – and not specifically with the images of the sun and moon gods – is well attested in second millennium imagery by sealings from Kültepe-Kanish and by the basalt sculpture of the storm deity found at Hazor. Although the earlier (wingless) disc-and-crescent emblem was sometimes used in such first millennium emblematic combinations as, e.g., on a stele found at Amrit in Lebanon and on an Egyptianizing Levantine stele from Tell Defenneh in Egypt, it is usually the winged disc that is shown with the crescent moon on first millennium representations. This accords with the increasing popularity of the crescent moon in those times.

71 Parayre 1987: 333, 335-336, pl. III: 5, 6-8, 10-12, 14; Orthmann 1971: pls. 38:e f, 49:a, 50:c, 53:c e. For the new stele from Tell Barsip (Bunnens 2001: 67-68), see fig. 18 here.
72 Von Luschan 1943: 75, pl. 40:a, b; Barnett 1957: 228, pl. cxxv (v 12).
75 Amiet 1983: 222-223; Bossert 1951: 74, no. 960. However, on both the Amrit and the Defenneh steles, on which a lion-mounted male deity is shown, a winged disc is depicted above the disc-and-the-crescent.
On the Sakçagözü reliefs (fig. 19), another element is added to the winged emblem: a rosette shown within the central boss above the crescent turns it into a tripartite symbol composed of wings, a central rosette and a crescent moon. These three components are fused into one icon depicted above a stylized tree that is flanked by two Assyrianizing human *apkallus*. A rosette depicted within the central boss of the winged disc was one of the modifications of the Egyptian emblem already in its initial employment in Syrian art of the early second millennium, as mentioned above. The rosette embedded within the disc is documented on other first millennium representations as, for example, on a stele from Malatya, on which a winged rosette hovers above a seated goddess, probably Kubaba, who
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Fig. 21 Winged rosette hovering above Kubaba and a storm god on a stele from Malatya (The Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara, 10304) [after Winter 1983: fig. 6].

faces a storm god (fig. 21). In this case, an association with solar symbolism is not likely. A winged rosette is shown above an enthroned female on a stele from Hilani I at Zincirli, whose plausible use as a grave stone makes allusions to solar symbolism somewhat doubtful. Although the Hittite winged disc, which was also adorned with a rosette, probably served as an inspiration for the first millennium North Syrian images, the Hittite emblem was not exclusively used for solar symbolism. Since the rosette is associated with fertility goddesses and with specific goddesses such as Ishtar or Kubaba, its appearance within the winged disc may hint at gender-oriented symbolism and signify a female deity. It should be stressed that the insertion of a rosette within a winged disc representing a male deity, as exemplified on an orthostat of Bar-rakib from Zincirli (fig.

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77 Bonatz 2000: 191-192. The woman can be identified as a royal figure by the cup and the lotus flower she carries (Ziffer 2001: 43).
79 Winter 1976: 46. For earlier depictions of the rosette in association with female figures see van Buren 1939 and Porada 1977. See also the rosettes that that fill the vacant areas on the Megiddo ivory, alluding probably to the figure of Shaushka depicted at the center of the panel (Alexander 1991: 161).
does not exclude a feminine aspect of the winged rosette, but only emphasizes the **highly** complex character of the winged disc and its multivalent nature. A different version of the winged rosette made of only four petals combined with thin curved lines is depicted on a ninth century bronze horse ornament from Samos, which mentions Hazael, king of Aram, in its inscription (*fig. 22*). The nudity of the figures and the lions accompanying them make no specific reference to a solar deity, but rather associate the emblem with fertility. Given the equestrian nature of the object, a bellicose *goddess* is probably alluded to here. That some of the winged discs adorning the Syrian ivory panels from Fort Shalmaneser at Nimrud

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80. Probably representing *rkb ‘l* (Yadin 1970: 206, 210, figs. 4, 7, see below).

(room SW 7) represent female deities,\textsuperscript{82} strengthens the possibility that the symbol transcended gender boundaries and could have referred to both male and female deities.\textsuperscript{83} Depictions of nude goddesses identified with Shaushka surmounted by a winged disc on earlier Syro-Anatolian artifacts\textsuperscript{84} corroborate the idea that the symbol could refer to a female deity as well and may have been understood as a general sign of divinity.

\textit{The winged disc in first millennium Syrian art}

The suggestion that the winged disc could have stood for various deities, yet was also used as a general mark of divinity, in this dual purpose continuing second millennium traditions, does not exclude the possibility that solar symbolism was at times still intended. A connection with Shamash is, for example, more than probable on a ninth century relief from Tell Halaf depicting two bull-men supporting a winged disc (fig. 23).\textsuperscript{85} The same interpretation was suggested above with regard to similar images on seals.\textsuperscript{86} Representations of bull-men supporting celestial bodies appear in Hittite art, and when one considers the location of Tell Halaf, it is probable that

\textsuperscript{82} Winter 1976: 47-49.
\textsuperscript{83} Compare the winged disc surmounting the goddess carrying a mirror on a stele from Bireçik, Orthmann 1971: pl. 5: c.
\textsuperscript{84} For a terracotta plaque from Alalakh and a serpentine mould allegedly from Kültepe see Alexander 1991: 168-169, fig. 4; van Loon 1985: 5, 38, pl. IIId.
\textsuperscript{85} Orthmann 1971: pls. 10; g, 12: b.
\textsuperscript{86} The composition of the relief – depicting a stool below the winged disc – conveys a continuation of Mittannian and Middle Assyrian representations (Seidl 2001: 123-124).
Fig. 24 Orthostat of Kilamuwa from Zincirli (Staatliche Museen, Berlin, VA S 6579) [after Bossert 1951: 256, fig. 887].

Fig. 25 Orthostat of Barrakib from Zincirli (Staatliche Museen, Berlin, VA) [after Encyclopedia Biblica, 8, Jerusalem, 1982, col. 319].
Hittite solar symbolism is reflected here as well. Furthermore, an earlier solar symbolism of the winged disc in Syria is attested, as mentioned above, by the emblem surmounting the figure wearing a long mantle and holding a *lituus* in Late Bronze glyptic of Emar, Carchemish and Ugarit.

However, the frequent combination of the winged disc with various emblems or images such as the crescent moon, the rosette, a storm deity or a nude goddess – images that represent major deities – implies that the winged disc sometimes signified deities other than the sun god. It may well be argued that because the winged disc representing the sun god had great “prestige,” wings were added to other symbols, such as the rosette or the crescent moon, which “traditionally” were not depicted with wings. This addition was intended to elevate the deities represented by these other emblems and increase their status and popularity. The fusion of different symbols into one emblem may, however, also convey the formation of a supreme deity, perhaps that of the head of a pantheon, who could absorb features of many other deities, like Aššur and Marduk.

Indeed, a similar explanation can be offered with regard to the role and meaning of the winged disc on inscribed royal monuments from Zincirli. The three monuments in question – the late ninth century Phoenician stele of *klmw* and two Aramaic monuments of *brrkb br pmnw*, a contemporary of Tiglath-Pileser III – depict the king of Sam’al gesturing toward divine emblems (*figs. 24-26*). The juxtaposition of the king with inanimate divine emblems recalls that of the Assyrian king gesturing toward divine symbols on the *salam šarrutiya* steles and may betray Assyrian inspiration on the Zincirli monuments. The different gestures of the Syrian rulers on these monuments and the specific royal attributes they carry – a flower and a cup – demonstrate, however, that the process of cultural borrowing seen here was, at the same time, accompanied by particular modifications adjusting to the local set-up of the monuments. The same holds true for the

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87 Van Loon 1985: pls. 27:b (bull-men supporting a crescent on a relief at Yazilikaya), 42:c (bull-men supporting a winged disc on a bronze amulet from Alaca Höyük).
selection of emblems that the king of Sam‘al faces; they represent a mixture of symbols common in Assyrian imagery (e.g. the horned mitre) with local ones (e.g. the horned Janus head or the yoke).

Comparing the symbols depicted on the monuments with the deities invoked in the inscriptions of the steles, Yadin has postulated that Rakib-El, the patron god of the ruling dynasty at Zincirli attested only at Sam‘al, was represented by two emblems displayed on these monuments: the popular and most common winged disc and the hitherto unknown emblem of the yoke. Yadin corroborated his suggestion with the observation that it was these two emblems that were specifically selected for the official seal of Barrakib (fig. 27), in whose reign Rakib-El gained higher status.

Bearing in mind the recognition of Assyria’s suzerainty by the rulers of Sam‘al and that the winged disc represented the chief deity of Assyria in Assyrian art, it may be suggested that the use of the winged disc as a symbol of the local deity of Zincirli was motivated by the Assyrian model, not unlike the composition of these monuments. While the adaptation of the winged disc may reflect external inspiration, the ingenious, exclusive use of the yoke mirrors local innovation. Rakib-El, the “charioteer of El,” is mentioned on most of the inscribed monuments of Zincirli (including those

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90 Yadin 1970: 202-203, 209 (who identifies the winged disc as representing EL); Millard 1972: 8. See, however, Tropper 1993: 22, who identifies the yoke as the emblem of Rakib-El, while maintaining the traditional interpretation of the winged disc as representing Shamash.

91 Tropper 1993: 22.

92 Already during the reign of Kilamuwa in the second half of the ninth century (Kuhrt 1995: 460-462).

93 Parayre 1993: 36-37 for the Assyrianized winged discs at Zincirli. See also Yadin 1970: 211 (and bibliography therein) for interpreting the cult of Sin of Harran in Zincirli as an outcome of Assyrian influence.
with no divine emblems). The appearance of his name following the names of Hadad and El in the texts from Zincirli suggests that the three formed a triad crew of a divine chariot, of which, as deduced from his name, he was the charioteer. Although the name Rakib-El implies that it was El’s vehicle he was driving, other references connecting the sun god with a chariot suggest that an allusion to the sun god was also implied. Thus, in Sam'al, too, the winged disc as an emblem of the head of the pantheon alluded to the sun god, following the Hittite solar symbolism of the winged disc and reflecting the probable double meaning of the symbol in Assyria.

*The winged disc in Judah*

The employment of the winged disc in state imagery manifest in both monumental and minor art from Zincirli brings to mind the winged disc impressed on jar-handles from Judah dating to the latter part of the eighth century (fig. 28). Although no royal figure or name appears on these impressions, their affiliation with royal state administration is evidenced by the very use of the word *lmlk*, “belonging to the king,” as well as by their distribution in Judah. In this respect, a comparison between the role of *lmlk* impressions and the contemporary use of seals in state administration outside Judah is in order. The most plausible candidate for this comparison, albeit much more sophisticated, is the so called Assyrian royal stamp seal. The fact that the *lmlk* impressions date to the period of the Assyrian conquest may suggest that it was the Assyrian model that stimulated the use of seals in the state administration of Judah. Since a similar date is also suggested for the *brrkb* bulla, one may assume that Assyrian stimulation was also involved in the phenomenon at Zincirli.

Bearing this in mind, I would like to reconsider the meaning of the winged disc on the *lmlk* impressions, which is usually interpreted as either representing an earthly royalty or an exclusive solar symbol. This understanding is based on Egyptian iconography, in which, as mentioned above, these two entities are mingled. Since the emblem did not stand for kings in contemporary Assyrian and Syrian imagery and was associated with royalty only in earlier Hittite iconography and in some of its Syrian reflections, it is, however, hard to ascribe such a meaning to the Judahite example. Ancient Israelite and Judahite iconography should first of all be examined by rules applicable to ancient Near Eastern art in general. Only after the delineation of similarities with other cultures, can the particularity of Israelite and Judahite imagery be studied. An explanation of the winged

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95 Lipinski 1999: 765; Schroer 1987: 286-293.
96 Vaughn 1999: 81-82 and bibliography therein.
97 Millard 1972: 8; Winter 2000: 54-60.
disc in Judah as a regal symbol contradicts our understanding of the symbol in other contemporary Western Asiatic iconographies. Though royal affinities occurred in Egypt, I find it hard to relate such a meaning to the eighth century Judahite phenomenon, particularly in light of the close correspondence between the Judahite emblem and that of Zincirli. Stylistic similarities are manifest in the upper line and up-curving tips of the winged disc. 98 The resemblance between Judahite and Syrian imagery is further supported by additional iconographic and stylistic similarities in other small finds 99 and may be echoed in the biblical account of the religious innovations King Ahaz brought from Damascus (2 Kings 16:10-18).

Considering the long history of the winged disc in the Levant and western Asia and its role in contemporary Assyrian and North Syrian imagery, it is unlikely that the winged disc on the lmlk impressions signified royalty. It should rather be interpreted as a divine emblem employed in official glyptic by virtue of the deity it signified. 100 As in Zincirli, it probably represented a high deity, presumably that of Yhwh, the patron god of the ruling dynasty at Jerusalem. 101 Such a conclusion is suggested by the use of the symbol in the state administration centered in Jerusalem and is reinforced by contemporary extra-biblical epigraphic evidence testifying to the worship of Yhwh as a prominent local deity from the late ninth to the sixth century. 102 The interpretation of the winged disc as a divine emblem em-

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98 Parayre 1990: 288-291; 1993: 31; Tushingham 1971: 33. The resemblance of the Judahite winged disc to those from Zincirli is valid only with regard to the lmlk impressions. On the other rare occurrences of the emblem in Judah, Egyptianized and Phoenician inspiration is apparent, e.g. the seal of sbyw 'bd 'zyw, see Avigad & Sass 1997: 50, no. 3. Parayre 1990: 35, fig. 23 (see below).

99 Cf. the resemblance between a crescent moon mounted on a wide pole depicted on a bulla from Jerusalem and a crescent-on-a-pole engraved on a gold pendant found at Zincirli (Brandl 2000: 64). See also the close affinities in iconography and the type of objects manifested by the silver pendant from Miqne and similar ornaments from Zincirli (Ornan 2001b: 246-248).


101 Tushingham 1971: 33, n. 87.

102 Ahituv 1992: 19-20 (Ketef Hinnom, Jerusalem), 34-52 (Lachish, ostraca nos. 2-6, 9), 70-72, 74-77 (Arad, ostraca nos. 16, 18, 21, 40), 153-160 (Ajrud, pithoi A, B and wall
ployed in royal imagery is corroborated by the near exclusiveness of the winged disc for royal usage in Judah, apparent only on a small number of Hebrew seals, among which is, not surprisingly, that of a royal official sbnyw 'bd 'zyw.103

To the apparent correspondence between the winged disc of Sam'al and that of Judah in role and style, we should add that both appear in conjunction with another symbol: a yoke at Zincirli and a four-winged scarab in Judah (though not on the same item). The meaning of the four-winged scarab in this context is rather complex and is beyond the scope of the present contribution. Nevertheless, if the winged disc on lmlk impressions is to be understood as a divine emblem, the same should be applicable to the winged scarab.104 As in Zincirli, the use of two divine emblems in royal imagery is double-faceted: while the winged disc possibly reflects external inspiration in this particular period, the choice of the Egyptianizing winged beetle – probably introduced by Phoenician intermediaries – mirrors cultural particularity.

As for the exclusive Egyptian solar connotation often assigned to the Judahite winged disc,105 it should be stressed that when the symbol was employed within eighth century Judahite state administration it was already one thousand years old, a widely spread ancient Near Eastern emblem representing solar as well as other deities. Since the emblem depicted on the lmlk jar handles is stylistically associated with north Syrian examples,106 a direct exclusive Egyptian inspiration cannot be sustained. The specific period in which the emblem was appropriated into Judahite imagery – at the end of the eighth century when the encounter with the Assyrian empire was almost at its peak – also adds weight to a “northern” inspiration. Like the assumed Assyrian influence reflected in the imagery of Zincirli, the use of the winged disc on the lmlk impressions may reflect a process of cultural emulation reviving an old, highly charged symbol.107

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103 Sass 1993: 238-239. For other examples of the winged disc on inscribed Hebrew seals, see Avigad & Sass 1997: nos. 298 (’z’ bn bts), 343 (qnyw), 685 (nr’, impressed on a lmlk-type jar).
104 See Millard 1972: 6, for a similar understanding of the scarab beetle in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and Taylor (1993: 46) for suggesting that “the emblems are in some way alternative expressions of essentially the same idea.”
106 Contrasting for example the Egyptianized sun symbol depicted on the seal of Ushna servant of Ahaz (Avigad & Sass 1997: 51, no. 5).
This is not to say, however, that the Judahite emblem did not also contain solar connotations. These can be deduced from its combination with the Egyptianizing four-winged beetle, already attested in earlier northern Israelite glyptic, which, in turn, is probably related to late eight century Nubian amulets.\textsuperscript{108} Like in Assyria and Sam‘al, the employment of the emblem in official state imagery does not preclude an allusion to solar deities. Like Assyria and Sam‘al, Yahweh is a supreme deity. In his image, characteristics of various deities, including the sun god, are embedded.\textsuperscript{109} These Yahwistic solar affinities are apparent in biblical references – some, however, later than the Judahite jar impressions – as, for example, Mal. 3:20, where a unique reference to the winged disc as a solar emblem is implied by the conjunction of “sun,” “righteousness,” and “wings.”\textsuperscript{110}

Conclusions

The proposition that the winged disc stood for various male and female deities or represented heads of pantheons, as it was postulated with regard to Assyria, Sam‘al, and Judah, is corroborated by the fact that in Achaemenid art it symbolized Ahura-mazda, the universal, supreme and only god of the Achaemenid dynasty.\textsuperscript{111} Following earlier Near Eastern traditions, the crescent moon appears in conjunction with the winged disc in Achaemenid imagery and thus emphasizes the multi-faceted aspects of the deity it signified.\textsuperscript{112} The choice of the winged disc for representing major deities in the petty kingdoms of Syria and the Levant during the ninth to sixth centuries can be considered an emulation process in which an age-old local symbol was revived by the impetus of the Assyrian dominion and hegemony.\textsuperscript{113}

Perhaps due to its origin in Egypt, where it signified the sun god, and to its celestial role in the ancient Near East, the winged disc is usually placed atop all other visual components in the scene. High positioning of an element within a given image implies high rank in ancient Near Eastern art. Therefore, the winged disc seems a perfect choice for representing major deities, who served as heads of pantheons. It may even be postulated that it was its position within the image that determined the choice of this symbol for representing major deities. The possibility that a visual form and the specific manner in which it is rendered could have inspired or contributed to the articulation of its function and meaning, and thus to the religious

\textsuperscript{108} Taylor 1993: 51 and fig. 6; Keel & Uehlinger 1998: 274 and fig. 258a.
\textsuperscript{111} Cool Root 1979: 170, 172, 211, 214.
\textsuperscript{112} Moorey 1978: 148.
\textsuperscript{113} Cf. Mazzoni 2000: 49, 50, 53.
idea it conveyed, underscores the importance of imagery for our comprehension and reconstruction of ancient religious history. If the same visual form could have represented several deities, as suggested here, it can be proposed that the visual phenomenon of representing several deities by one and the same icon may have contributed to – perhaps even catalyzed – first millennium theological concepts of fusing several deities into one. The probability of such a process in the visual media, which was gradual over time and complex, seems to reinforce our understanding of the emergence of monotheism as a gradual evolutionary process rather than a revolutionary outburst.

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