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THE INTERVISUALITY OF ANZÛ IN NEO-ASSYRIAN MYTHOLOGIES OF KINGSHIP

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Intertextual linkages between Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions and mythological narratives have significantly contributed to our understanding of royal self-presentation and historicization. Less explored, however, are how such linkages may be interpreted and visualized within royal art. In this paper, I propose an intervisual connection between Ninurta mythologies and Assyrian royal lion hunts by unpacking modes of display and interaction embedded between image, text, and lived experience in the palace art of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh. Intervisuality was arguably deployed as an innovative strategy to craft a sophisticated connection between royal and divine kingship. I explore how Anzû, a mythological adversary of Ninurta that embodies chaos and disorder, was conceptualized and manifested across media, including cylinder seals and in relief art. Consequently, the paper displaces the typical focus given to the Assyrian king by instead investigating the roles of animals and monsters in upholding royal narratives. I argue that the form and actions of Anzû as embodied and performed in objects act as powerful symbolic referents that anchor its transformed image in royal hunt narratives. In conclusion, I consider why Ashurbanipal may have employed visual references to Anzû in his palace art.

Introduction

In her foundational paper on Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals, Irene J. Winter (2000) proposed a hierarchical image-system for iconography found on both cylinder seals and royal palace reliefs, where seal-holders operating in official political or administrative capacities choose visual motifs found on palace reliefs in order to reference the kingly person.[1] Such a formulation for the Neo-Assyrian period was likely influenced by arguments of earlier scholars who wondered whether the narrative scenes on cylinder seals were adapted from paintings or reliefs in palaces and temples[2] (Barrelet 1970; Paley 1986: 217; Porada 1980:10; 1993: 568). While it is certainly compelling for particular cases, Winter's proposal somewhat masks the semiotic influence of cylinder seal iconography and perhaps overemphasizes the role of palace relief art across the roughly three centuries of Neo-Assyrian visual culture[3] (934-612 B.C.E). The primacy at times attributed to monumental objects can implicitly perpetuate traditional Western art historical expectations placed on Mesopotamian art.[4] Scholars have since shown that the visual imagery strategically employed by royals and officials in their self-presentation was borrowed from across media types regardless of scale.[5] This widening interpretation invites further analysis on the roles and uses of images in Neo-Assyrian visual culture, specifically as it affected the planning and execution of that icon of monumental art *par excellence*: the palace relief programme. Rather than focusing on the self-presentation of Assyrian kings, instead I consider here how non-human actors, specifically animals

[1] Abbreviations follow CDLI. Most recently accessed on 22 July 2025 at https://cdli.earth/abbreviations.

[2] Henri Frankfort's (1939: 308) essay on cylinder seals famously argues that "the inventions of the seal-cutters" were the driving inspiration throughout the decorative arts.

[3] The deliberate use of the term 'visual culture' in this paper highlights "the culturally specific ways in which visual images are both bearers of meaning and themselves participate in making meaning" (Graff 2019: 159).

[4] Most notably, lingering Western hierarchical classifications of the monumental and non-monumental, or the 'major' and the 'minor'. As tracked by Thomason (2014), Neo-Assyrian sculpture and wall reliefs were neatly slotted into a 'major' conception of relative artistic value and stacked (subconsciously or otherwise) at the apex of period-specific mid-20th century surveys of Mesopotamian art (Amiet 1977; Frankfort 1954; Moortgat 1969). General surveys of Western art history, such as Gardner's *Art Through the Ages*, favor 'iconic' selections of Mesopotamian art that overwhelmingly fall into sculptural or architectural categories (Gansell and Shafer 2020: 15). Other objects such as cylinder seals, clay figurines, ivory plaques, and ceramics were coded as 'minor', either by virtue of smaller scale or mode of creation, sometimes designated as 'craft' (Moortgat 1940: 76; Suter and Uehlinger 2005: xix, note 4). This artificial coding meant that 'crafts', as opposed to true 'works-of-art', were evaluated on the basis of "production and utility" rather than as objects to be approached for their aesthetic or affective value (Thomason 2014: 137).

[5] For example, see Gaspa (2018: 145-155) on Assyrian textiles and the royal image; Niederreiter (2008) on visual symbols utilized by Sargon II and particular members of his court.

and monsters,[6] inform the production and reception of the royal image. As a case-study, I explore the visualization of a famous mythological being in Neo-Assyrian court culture, the Anzû, and its thematic and formal connection to lions in royal hunt narratives.

The Anzû and the lion appear throughout this period on various media and at multiple scales: from miniature renditions on cylinder seals to over life-size reliefs complementing royal architectural programs. Despite the concomitant appearance of lions and the Anzû in similar contexts of image consumption and proposed intertextual parallels between descriptions of royal lion hunts and the Ninurta-Anzû myth, comparatively little has been done in considering any concrete visual relationship between the two subjects. Lion imagery as a visual corpus has a rich history in Mesopotamia, extending back into the Uruk period (ca. 3900-3100 B.C.E.). In the Neo-Assyrian period, the evolving relationship between royal administrative stamp seals depicting the king stabbing a lion and similar compositions found on the palace reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II (r. 883-859 B.C.E.) and Ashurbanipal (r. 668-631 B.C.E.) indicate that this motif was conceptualized at multiple scales (Nadali 2010). Anzû imagery is less studied for the Neo-Assyrian period, with greater attention paid to its appearance in textual sources (Annus 2001; Vogelzang 1988). Its sole surviving appearance in monumental form is from a pair of reliefs located within a doorway of the Ninurta Temple at Nimrud (Reade 2002). Despite a general hesitancy in its identification, many scholars have nevertheless labelled it as such on cylinder seals in which this creature appears (Annus 2001; Green 1997).[7] Its Early Dynastic predecessor is the Imdugud, which appears as a heraldic lion-headed bird across southern Mesopotamia, including the 'Stele of the Vultures' at Girsu (modern Telloh) and on a copper frieze adorning the Temple of Ninhursag at Tell al'Ubaid. It is still unclear exactly when and why the form of this monster shifted between the third and first millennium BCE (Watanabe 2018).

From a thematic perspective, both creatures signify the chaotic environment located outside of ordered urban society, and feature prominently in narratives which reaffirm divine and royal authority. To that end, I suggest that Ashurbanipal and his court administration knowingly drew upon mythological imagery when designing his palace relief programme, specifically that which depicted Ninurta battling the Anzû. Mostly known from glyptic examples, this mythological scene was a recurring choice on officials' seals (Watanabe 1999). It arranges the hunted figure of Anzû in a rare physical position, which is echoed by particular lions on the reliefs. Tracking this reciprocity via visual composition and figural gesture, I explore the reliefs as a polysemic[8] and intervisual product that crafted deep links between temporal and mythical narratives of kingship.

New image studies and Neo-Assyrian visual culture

While the influence of the portable arts has long been established elsewhere in Mesopotamian art history,[9] such studies on the Neo-Assyrian period were initially slow to form, perhaps due to the early framing of how visual culture production works in imperial polities. Many of these foundational arguments were formulated in the late 1970s and 1980s, and understood Neo-Assyrian political history as primarily rooted in the actions of a single individual (the king),[10] and its visual

[6] 'Monster' here is defined as a being who predominantly interacts with divine figures and heroes, usually in geographic extremes far away from human habitation (Sonik 2013a: 107). Their inherent abnormality may be expressed in various ways, such as via an atypical physical form or in their aversion to established societal norms.

[7] On the front cover of the State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts vol III on the Standard Babylonian Epic of Anzû is the cylinder seal BM 129560, which arguably depicts the myth (Annus 2001). In her catalogue of cylinder seals from the British Museum, Collon (2001: 11) instead uses the term 'lion-griffin' to describe this figure.

[8] Polysemy is a term often employed in textual studies, used to describe the simultaneous co-existence of multiple yet related meanings to a given word or phrase.

[9] For an early example from the Uruk period, see Pittman 1996.

[10] The impact of this formulation on Neo-Assyrian art history from the late 80s to early 00s arguably supported hierarchical frameworks whereby monumental works of art located in royal spaces (e.g. reliefs and statuary) were thought to influence artistic output in non-monumental art categories (Reade 2001/2: 160; Winter 1989: 321). While Winter's (1989) paper on North Syrian 'luxury' ivories on reliefs and sculpture from Tell Halaf and Tell Fakhariyeh actually argues the opposite, it is here where she first proposes the visual directionality of Neo-Assyrian art from the 'major' to the 'minor'. She later upholds this argument, examining multiple types of seal motifs ranging from bull hunts to attendants flanking a sacred tree to suggest that they originated from Ashurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace at Nimrud (2000: 79, note 38). However, Nadali's (2010: 222) work on royal administrative stamp seals instead shows that the depiction of certain lions on Ashurbanipal's North Palace hunt reliefs directly borrow

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expression best elaborated by royal sculpture and architecture. Consequently, studies on palace relief programs and visual communication focused on the relationship between propaganda, historical narrative, and royal ideology (Reade 1979a; Winter 1981). While more recent treatments focus on other aspects such as narrative strategies (Gillman 2015; Watanabe 2014), the depiction of non-Assyrians (Cifarelli 1998; Reed 2007), or artistic production (Aker 2007), they nevertheless build on these earlier iconographic interpretations. Studies that problematize the outright political functioning of palace reliefs have since emerged from the mid-2000s (Ataç 2010; Portuese and Pallavidini 2022).

Similarly to how scholarship on Neo-Assyrian relief art tends to preserve its own autonomy, Stein (2020: 172) argues that seals have also historically been treated as a "canonical, self-contained body of evidence"; moreover, she maintains that seals remain "separate but occasionally useful to the study of archaeology, texts, and other types of art." This is despite common consensus that cylinder and stamp seals are incredibly useful vehicles for spreading highly specific visual motifs and compositions, arguably more than imagery stationed inside temples and palaces.[11] The infinite possibilities of its replication via sealings distributes agency of not only the image itself but also—in the case of inscribed seals[12]—the person to whom the seal is attached (Winter 2007). It is curious that direct comparisons between Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals and palace reliefs are rare (Winter 2000; Nadali 2010), when identifying the roles and tracking the durability of images across media in time and space has always been an interest to scholars of ancient Southwest Asia.[13] The wide variety of terms applied to the articulation of connections between images—ranging from metaphor to quotation, appropriation to adaptation—underlines the effort to show how images both contribute to and are shaped by intricate visual networks. With the emergence of the so-called 'iconic turn' in the late 1990s and early 2000s,[14] new theoretical frameworks to discuss image relations have emerged under the designations of intervisuality (Mirzoeff 1999), interpictoriality (Isekenmeier 2013), and intericonicity (Arrivé 2015).[15] Interpictoriality and intericonicity in particular have been used rather interchangeably to describe the relatedness of images to each other and the mechanism(s) and rationale(s) by which their relation occurs. Applications of these particular frameworks to Mesopotamian art are a recent and highly productive endeavor[16] (Eppihimer 2019; Nadali and Portuese 2020; Portuese 2020), and there is further scope for its exploration in Neo-Assyrian visual culture.

Utilizing an intervisual framework expands interpictorial or intericonic perspectives to the entire intermedial field of visual culture (Isekenmeier 2013: 27). It is inherently multimodal, reflecting how when images are encountered in different media contexts, they exploit multiple resources to construct meaning (Bruhn and Schirrmacher 2022: 3). Examples of multimodal communication in Mesopotamian art abound, from statues and reliefs accompanied by captions or narratives to cylinder seals inscribed with dedicatory and/or genealogical information. The intervisual explication of such objects can thus be formulated from the aesthetic and sensorial qualities of their materials, the spatial and temporal contexts which they inhabit, and the semiotic significance ascribed to them. With such examples in mind, intervisual studies work to frame the act of visuality as a product of multiple perceptive modes[17] that stem from simultaneous interactions with texts, pictures, and

from the arrangement and pose of lions found on these seals. In fact, certain impressed examples of this motif appear almost 60 years earlier on clay bullae found at Nineveh (e.g. Sm. 2276; Mitchell and Searight 2008: 35).

[11] See, for example, Scott's (2018) study on the changes in pictorial imagery on seals of the Uruk period. There are other media, equally capable of transmitting visual motifs, that are either ephemeral or less robustly attested in the archaeological record, such as wall paintings, metal vessels, furniture fittings, and clothing.

[12] Personal inscriptions on cylinder seals appeared to be a rare practice in the Neo-Assyrian period, with even fewer impressions of inscribed seals surviving in the archaeological record (Paley 1986).

[13] For a discussion of the 'pictorial stream of tradition', see Sonik 2015.

[14] See Bredekamp (2003) and Mitchell (1994) for German and Anglophone approaches to the 'iconic turn'.

[15] These frameworks are heavily influenced by the development of intertextuality studies in philology and literary criticism.

[16] Studies on the use of 'visual formulae' (Ataç 2006) and 'symbolic technologies' (Pittman 1996) in Mesopotamian art anticipate these newer efforts. For an intericonic perspective on ancient Egyptian art, see Laboury 2017.

[17] In this sense, intervisual studies could be brought into closer dialogue with sensorial approaches, particularly those that focus on synesthetic perception where the visual is merged with the haptic or olfactory. The *melammu*, or 'awe-inspiring radiance' wielded by various beings and inanimate objects is a well-known example of haptic visuality in Mesopotamian art (Scott 2022).

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materials (Isekenmeier and Bodola 2017), media which themselves are subject to "different conventions and channels of transmission" (Wolf 2010: 253). This acknowledgement of the inherent modal entanglement between text, image, and material is a fruitful framework for the study of Mesopotamian objects, which are still at times subject to logocentric or purely iconographic frameworks of analysis (cf. Bahrani 2022: 129-131).

As Melissa Eppihimer (2019: 21) notes in her study on the interpictorial and intervisual possibilities of Akkadian imagery in later Assyrian art, an intervisual product may contain within it any degree of specific reference to another image or general association with a conceptual model intended by its maker. While a viewer might successfully identify some of the maker's original intent, the product instead might invoke specific images in the viewer's mind that may not be related but were nevertheless triggered by a small component or its entire schema. Such invocations could be informed not only by memories of other objects or textual sources, but also via recollections of oral performances or similar lived experiences. Thus, while Eppihimer (2019: 187) doubts the direct interpictorial quotation of Akkadian contest imagery into the palace art of Sargon II, she does suggest the prospect of an intervisual allusion more generally made between heroes and lions from Akkadian into Assyrian art. This does not preclude, however, the possibility that Neo-Assyrian palace relief programmes may have encoded esoteric references to the visual past, particularly since their layout and content were planned and executed via the intellectual and skilled efforts of court scholars and master craftsmen (Ataç 2010; Moorey 1994: 34-35; SAA XIII: xiii-xiv). As their comprehension was affected by varying levels of social experience and cultural knowledge, Neo-Assyrian palace relief programmes are a particularly rich avenue for intervisual study.

Intervisuality is also strategic in the sense that its modalities may uphold or reject convention as well as negotiate relationships to identity and memory, in the circumstances between and including its production and reception (Arrivé 2015: 11). Successful comprehension of its visual code might serve as a criterion of social inclusion, marking shared cultural and/or intellectual knowledge. Exploring differing modes of visual comprehension, Karen Sonik (2014: 284) discusses the image of Ninurta battling Anzû on the doorway relief panel from Nimrud as a polysemic image that simultaneously embodies multiple versions of Ninurta from written sources, including his appearances "as a famous monster-wrangler, a hero-god extraordinaire, and also as a model of human kingship." The production of palace reliefs can also activate temporal and geographic scales across royal visual programmes: Nadali and Portuese (2020) compare the lion hunt reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II and Ashurbanipal and track how Ashurbanipal, a 'known antiquarian',[18] preserved, modified, and substituted earlier motifs to create his own unique version of royal hunting ritual. They acknowledge that these correspondences "can be diverse, shifting from simple to complex quotation, transformation and re-adaptation of images" (2020: 141). For Neo-Assyrian art, this fluidity is one that is equally informed by gesture and pose as much as it is by the flexible use of accoutrements in determining these correspondences. Far from being solely applicable to humans and the gods, monsters and animals also participate in this flexible making of meaning. As a monster emblematic of disorder, Anzû is a productive figure to consider as an intervisual motif embodied though image, text, and experience.

Anzû in the time of Ashurbanipal

By the Neo-Assyrian period, the Old Babylonian Ningirsu myth known as *Bin šar dadmē* 'son of the king of habitations' had received an extended revamp to some 720 lines of text and shifted the protagonist's role to Ninurta (Dalley 1989: 203). In the Standard Babylonian version of the myth, Anzû is described as a lion-bird with the head, forelegs and body of a lion and the wings, hind leg talons, and feathered tail of a bird. At first a trusted doorkeeper of the god Enlil, one day Anzû steals Enlil's Tablet of Destinies and carries the tablet away to its mountain lair. As a symbol of cosmic

[18] Nadali and Portuese (2020: 143) rekindle an idea earlier expressed in Reade 2005: 24.

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order and divine rulership, the Tablet of Destinies embodies the gods' legitimate right to rule (Sonik 2012). Anzû's theft thus creates a crisis within the divine hierarchy, as whoever possesses the Tablet of Destinies can claim authority over the gods. Enlil asks Adad, then Girra, then Šara, to retrieve his tablet and they all refuse before finally Ninurta agrees to go. After losing their first battle,[19] Ninurta defeats Anzû by calling the storm wind to make Anzû's wings falter, which allows Ninurta to cut off Anzû's wings and pierce its heart with an arrow. He retrieves the Tablet of Destinies for Enlil, thereby restoring divine order (Watanabe 2002: 131). The updated Standard Babylonian version contained multiple repetitive sections to aid in the mnemonic recall and possible oral performativity of key plot points in the story, such as the search among the gods for a worthy opponent to Anzû. Neo-Assyrian versions of the text were found at Nineveh, Tarbiṣu, and Sultantepe, all of which Dalley (1989: 203) dates to the 7th century BCE. Other mythological attestations of Anzû at this time include its appearance in *Erra and Ishum*, as well as via the preservation of the Sumerian *Lugal-e* and *Angim* myths, both of which were present in the 'library' of Ashurbanipal (Watanabe 2002: 78-79). The preservation and circulation of myths involving Anzû could have thus become part of the wider scholarly and ritual environment at Nineveh, expressed not only through continued cuneiform production and oral performance, but also perhaps visually through the royal body and palace relief programmes.

Furthermore, some scholars have identified connections between Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions and Ninurta mythology to suggest that some Assyrian kings may have deliberately emulated aspects of the god (Maul 1999: 210; Portuese 2020: 131). For example, Ashurbanipal describes his conquest over Elam with the phrase 'I flattened (it) like the Deluge' (Akk. *abūbāniš aspun*), a power otherwise only given to Ninurta or to other storm deities (RINAP 5: 227, r. 2; Annus 2001: xxi). The king's body and image in Assyrian texts can also be described as of 'the flesh of the gods' (Akk. *šēr ilāne*) (Gansell 2016: 90). According to a ritual commentary,[20] Ashurbanipal symbolically reenacted some of Ninurta's own exploits as part of his royal investiture (Maul 1999: 211). Other aspects of Ninurta mythology were made visual, as Anzû was a recurring choice of doorkeeper for Ashurbanipal's temple renovations, including at the Ešarra (Assur), Emašmaš (Nineveh), Eḫulḫul (Harran), and Egašankalamma (Arbela) temples (RINAP 5: 3, i. 18-20). Perhaps at first glance an atypical choice of apotropaic being for stationing at entrances, Anzû was clearly deemed an appropriate choice to guard the homes of multiple deities. It is unclear whether Anzû was also specifically associated with guarding the Tablet of Destinies in this context (Pongratz-Leisten 1995: 554). Regardless, new images of Anzû were actively produced as part of visual programmes sustaining divine beneficence via the royal obligation to maintain temple complexes.

Ashurbanipal's famous self-identification as a scholar[21] may have played out in subtle ways in his own visual programme at his 'North Palace' at Nineveh. Built between 646 and 643 B.C.E, it was the last in a series of Sargonid capital palaces built on the Nineveh citadel (Reade 2000: 417). While it is only partially excavated and remains somewhat poorly understood, the North Palace nevertheless retained the royal Neo-Assyrian aesthetic tradition of lining its corridors and rooms with relief panels. Reliefs depicting scenes of lion hunts are located in Room C, which was a connecting corridor from the central courtyard, and in the western portico that included entrance Room S, and S^1, which was some type of architectural space possibly located above Room S at ground level (Kertai 2015a: 179). While these rooms were 'visible' in the sense that viewers would have presumably encountered this imagery when either entering the palace from an external area or inner courtyard,[22] it remains difficult to pinpoint the actual or intended audience(s) of the North Palace reliefs. There were certainly many different kinds of people present in a Neo-Assyrian palace at any given time beyond the royal family, from foreign dignitaries and envoys bearing tribute (Winter 1993: 36; Gansell 2016: 90) to magnates and scribes conducting administrative and/or economic

[19] Anzu is able to initially deflect Ninurta's arrows due to his possession of the Tablet of Destinies (*Anzû* II: 75-85; Heinrich 2022).

[20] SAA 3: 39, r. 20-22.

[21] RINAP 5/1: 220, I 10'-18'. Beyond claims of literacy, Ashurbanipal also purports to understand the meaning behind esoteric texts and 'secret' knowledge.

[22] Kertai (2015b: 347) argues that the 'basement' area, which includes room S, formed part of the king's residential suite, which would suggest a quite limited audience in this area.

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Figure 1. Gypsum wall relief from room S[1] of the North Palace at Nineveh (645-635 B.C.E.), which shows successive phases of the royal lion hunt. In the second register, Ashurbanipal hunts on foot. BM 124886-7. Author's own photo

activities (Russell 1991: 231-2; Kertai and Groß 2019). However, using a conceptual distinction between 'outsiders' and 'insiders' in the palace, Ataç (2010: 89) has postulated that in Ashurnasirpal II's earlier Northwest palace reliefs at Nimrud,[23] the primary audience was the king and court officials who were responsible for creating and shaping the imagery itself. By the time of Ashurbanipal, relief art had at least 200 years to develop in complexity (Larsen 2020: 123), and it is possible that esoteric interpretations remained throughout the development of visual historical narratives (Collins 2014: 624),[24] albeit articulated differently than in previous palace programs.

To that end, scholarship on Ashurbanipal's lion reliefs has mainly sought to establish how best to 'read' and understand this imagery. The visual construction of Ashurbanipal's role(s) in the lion hunts has been broadly examined (Aker 2007; Reade 2005; Watanabe 1998, 2002, 2014). Chikako Watanabe (2014: 345-6) suggests that continuous interplay between 'linear' and 'centric' narratives are intended to create a semi-historical, strategically constructed picture of Assyrian kingship and royal ritual. Visual accounts of Ashurbanipal's lion hunts reflect both a linear progression of events, such as in sequences of caged to killed lions, and centric arrangements composed of multiple events performing outside of historical time, which emphasize the king's divinely bestowed ability to impose order over a chaotic environment, here personified by the lion [fig. 1]. Weissert (1997a) suggests these reliefs narrate a particular royal lion hunt that took place in a Nineveh arena.[25] Lions

[23] The traditional formulation of a Neo-Assyrian palace that is architecturally organized according to public and private spaces has been recently questioned and reimagined (Kertai and Groß 2019).

[24] For example, Ataç (2016: 71) has proposed that military narratives could have referenced a 'sacral history' belonging to the memory of 'mythical or epic' events from the Late Bronze Age, re-enacted through visual tropes that were used to depict contemporary events.

[25] While Weissert discusses how such images could evoke memories of actual lion hunts, they could equally invoke associations with other famous hunts, such as the one conducted by Ninurta against Anzû.

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are described as 'tragic heroes' in emotional relation to the king in the hunt narrative (Watanabe 2002: 146), invoking empathic human response (Sonik 2017: 242). Additional attention has been drawn to the 'imaginative' portrayal of defeated lions, in which they are shown bleeding out onto the earth or coughing up blood, relating this to a uniquely Assyrian brand of 'comic-horror' also seen in the torture of Assyrian prisoners (Reade 2005: 23-4). Negative, violent imagery in general—in which Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs are well-versed—can also act as neurological stimuli, capturing the attention and recollection of viewers (Nadali & Portuese 2020: 138).

Regarding the thematic interpretation of Ashurbanipal's lion reliefs, Watanabe (2002: 79-81) and Annus (2002: 102-8) have drawn connections to Ninurta-Anzû mythology. While this paper proposes that there are intervisual relationships between hunted lions and the hunted Anzû, Watanabe and Annus instead ground their thematic comparison by focusing on intertextual relationships between the Anzû myth and Assyrian royal inscriptions.[26] There are three suggested connections: firstly, a ^{giš}*nar'amtu,* a special weapon used to kill lions, is attested on the so-called 'Broken Obelisk' from Nineveh that is attributed to the Middle Assyrian ruler Tiglath-Pileser I (r. 1114-1076 B.C.E.).[27] *Nar'amtu* stems from the verb *ru"umu* 'to cut off', which is used in the Akkadian version of the Anzû myth to describe Ninurta's action of cutting off Anzû's wings (*Anzû* II: 110, III: 11; Watanabe 1998: 442). Secondly, Assyrian kings hunted lions in special 'open' chariots (^{giš}GIGIR *pattūte*), described in numerous royal inscriptions,[28] mimicking the actions of Ninurta in the *Angim* hymn,[29] who returned to Nippur in his chariot with the bodies of eleven conquered monsters. Thirdly, Ashurbanipal is shown on his palace reliefs hunting on foot,[30] and earlier Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions describe hunting lions *ina šēpīya lassamāte* 'on my swift feet'.[31] The use of the word *lassamātu* is associated with the cultic *lismu*-footrace that commemorates Ninurta's victory over Anzû (Watanabe 1998: 444, 2018: 34). These intertextual examples suggest that beyond merely hunting lions, Ashurbanipal is also connecting his exercise of kingship to that of Ninurta's actions in the Anzû myth. Watanabe (2002: 145) mentions that the lion can represent mythological figures along the lines of Anzû and other enemies of Ninurta, as a scapegoat whose defeat endorses the overarching royal narrative of imposing order over chaos. It is also argued that such allusions to mythological literature are found elsewhere among palace reliefs at Nineveh, for example the parallel between the treatment of Humbaba's head from Tablet 5 of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the transport of the Elamite king Teumman's head in Ashurbanipal's Battle of Til-Tuba reliefs from Sennacherib's Southwest palace (Bonatz 2004).

One common thread throughout these iconographical and intertextual explanations is the central importance of Ashurbanipal, from his explicit actions to minute changes in dress and accoutrements between relief panels, as informing and driving the overall meaning of his lion hunt reliefs. But what about the other main protagonist on these reliefs, or, from an Assyrian perspective, the antagonist? Apart from describing these lions as comically horrific or heroically emotive, how else might artistic decisions of physical gesture or motion and compositional arrangement inform our understanding of these reliefs?

Anzû as an intervisual subject

The visualization of the Anzû myth has been proposed as one of the few identifiable mythological scenes in Mesopotamian art (Green 1997). When scholars do point out any visual examples of the Anzû myth, they cite its appearance generally on Neo-Assyrian linear-style cylinder seals of the 9th and 8th centuries and specifically on the relief from the Ninurta temple at Nimrud

[26] Elsewhere, intertextual links between Assyrian military narratives and mythological narratives are attested within Sennacherib's account of the Battle of Halule, in which the Babylonians are equated with the 'evil demons' (Akk. *gallē lemnūti*) from *Enūma eliš* (Weissert 1997b).

[27] Grayson 1991: A.0.89.7. For a discussion of the dating of this monument, see Shibata 2023: 169-171. It is not clear if any of the weapons that Ashurbanipal used to kill lions on his North Palace reliefs was in fact a ^{giš}*nar'amtu*.

[28] See Watanabe 2002: 79-80 for an extended discussion including bibliographic references.

[29] For the Sumerian *Angim* hymn, see Black, J.A. et al. 2005: 181-186.

[30] Barnett 1976: pl. XLIX (BM 124875), pl. LI (BM 124878), pl. LVII (AO 19903, BM 124886)

[31] Following Watanabe 2002: 80; for Aššur-dan II, see AfO 3: 160, lines 24-26; for Adad-nērārī III, see KAH 2: 84, lines 123-124.

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Figure 2. Gypsum wall relief (BM 124572) from the Temple of Ninurta at Nimrud (Kalḫu) which likely depicts Ninurta battling Anzû (865-860 B.C.E.). H: 240.7 cm, W: 362.7 cm. Drawing by Kyra Kaercher

(Watanabe 1998: 442; Winter 2000: 74) [fig. 2].[32] Additionally, the temple relief has been previously regarded as the blueprint for cylinder seals depicting the myth (Kolbe 1981: 75).[33] Again, the citations of Anzû imagery in relation to the lion reliefs are seemingly made at a thematic level, but when compared to visual examples of Anzû on cylinder seals with the Ninurta temple relief, they are actually quite different. The Ninurta temple relief, which likely depicts Ninurta[34]

[32] I have so far located forty-two cylinder seals with components of the Ninurta-Anzû mythological scene and one partial seal impression: Brooklyn Museum: 80.173.3; Buchanan 1966: no. 639 (AN 1913.767); Collon 2001: no. 232 (BM 119426), no. 288 (BM 89533), no. 291 (BM 135752), no. 292 (BM 129560); Collon 2006: fig. 173; Delaporte 1909: no. 100 (AO 22699); Delaporte 1910: no. 314, no. 315; Delaporte 1923: A.644 (MNB 1354), A.645 (AO 1162); Hammade 1987: no. 222 (Aleppo M 6046), no. 223 (Aleppo M 1026), no. 224 (Aleppo M 6290); Herbordt 1992: pl. 5, no. 11; Hussein and Abdul Razaq 1997-8: no. 40 (IM 127813); Keel and Uehlinger 1990: no. 17 (BIF 173a); Kist 2003: no. 379; Klengel Brandt et al. 2014: no. 17 (VA Ass 1695); Legrain 1925: no. 610 (CBS 1051); Metropolitan Museum of Art: 41.160.318, 65.135.2, 1999.325.69, 1999.325.72; Moortgat 1940: no. 595 (VA 5180), no. 615 (VA 3885), no. 616 (VA 7544); Muscarella 1981: no. 88; Porada 1948: no. 689, no. 690, no. 719, no. 720; Porada 1981: no. 1218 (LACMA M.76.174.409), no. 1223 (LACMA M.76.174.414); Porada 1993: fig. 46; Teissier 1984: no. 256, no. 257; Ward 1910: no. 569; Watanabe 1993: 8.3, 8.7, 8.18 (Penn L-29-494A); Watanabe 1999: 1.1.4. Of these, seven are inscribed. A recent PhD dissertation examines this grouping of seals from the perspective of divine combat (Richey 2019), arguing that the figure of Ninurta on such seals might equally be associated with the figure of the Assyrian ruler, further deepening the theological beliefs and political commitments of the seal owner to the ruling body.

[33] Elsewhere this relationship is not expressly stated, but the relief is introduced first in the text, e.g. Green 1997: 142 lists the relief first, then the seals; Watanabe 1998: 142; 2002: 78 also lists the relief first, then the seals.

[34] Kolbe 1981: 68-74 argues that this winged figure is a benign demon related to the god Adad, but it does not make sense to show an attendant of Adad at the entrance of a temple dedicated to Ninurta. Adad is associated with a winged lion-dragon in Akkadian period glyptic but is regularly associated with a bull in Neo-Assyrian iconography, and Assyrians could have adapted aspects of Adad's iconography to use in constructing Ninurta's distinctly Assyrian identity (see fig. 4a where both Ninurta and Adad appear on the same seal). Collon (2006: 102) points out that Ninurta was also considered to be a storm god. Moortgat-Correns (1988: 120) supports the identification of this scene as Ninurta in 'seiner mythologischen Erscheinungsform' combating Anzû. Moreover, a winged rendition of Ninurta would not be too unusual for this period either- Ištar could also be winged, as seen in glyptic examples. More recently, Shehata (2017: 191) has upheld the deity's identification as Ninurta.

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Figure 3. Impression of chalcedony cylinder seal. 9th-7th centuries B.C.E., unprovenanced. H: 4.05 cm, D: 1.6 cm. BM 135752. After Collon 2001: no. 291, pg. 151. © The Trustees of the British Museum

battling with the Anzû[35], arranges the Anzû such that its body is in profile, wings behind its body and forelegs in front, as its twists its neck backwards to roar at its assailant. This particular pose[36] also occurs on a Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal inscribed with the name of Ištar-balāṭa-ēreš, governor of Kilizu, a province in the Assyrian heartland [fig. 3].

However, the composition of Anzû on most linear-style cylinder seals[37] diverges slightly from the oft-cited Ninurta temple example and could represent an alternative conceptualization of Anzû's actions in the Ninurta-Anzû myth. On these seals, the Anzû's hind legs are shown in profile, and its wings and forelegs separate from each other and fully extend outwards [fig. 4a-c]. The presentation of wings on either side of the body is normally reserved for figures that appear in fully frontal form, such as female divinities, or *en face* (front+profile), such as daimons who act as beneficent protectors and gatekeepers (Asher-Greve 2003; Bahrani 2001; Sonik 2013b).[38] Its twisted profile, complete with its outstretched paws and roaring maw, highlights its monstrous nature in comparison to the orderly figure of Ninurta, who appears in full profile.[39] This juxtaposition in body language between a god (whose actions are sanctioned) and a monster (whose actions were subversive) can serve to evoke distinctions between the familiar and the 'Other' in the experience of the viewer (Sonik 2017). Moreover, the positioning of Anzû's body is now ambiguous- are we supposed to be looking

[35] This figure has also been interpreted as Tiāmat (Reade 1979b: 43), a general embodiment of chaos, or an *asakku*-demon. Since the figure on the relief is male, its attribution to Tiāmat has been disputed (Green 1994: 258). The *asakku*-demon, or Sumerian á.sàg, generally causes disorder and/or disease (*CAD* A2: 325-6).

[36] Ninurta's running pose in Neo-Assyrian imagery may itself have been an intervisual innovation meant to connect his image with the *lismu* footrace, particularly since *Anzû* does not mention Ninurta running during his battles against Anzû (Watanabe 2018: 34).

[37] Twenty-five examples follow this composition, whereas only six examples could be said to directly replicate the example from the Ninurta temple in Nimrud. The remaining Anzûs either completely face or run from their pursuer.

[38] The frontal form in general is rare, and can denote hierarchical rank and/or a charged engagement with the viewer (Asher-Greve 2003: 13).

[39] Twisted forms can also denote the transgressive or metamorphic nature of particular beings, such as Inana/Ishtar (Bahrani 2001: 130-3) as well as those that are inimical or socially alienated (Sonik 2013b: 293) like the Anzû.

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Figure 4 a, b, c: Examples of 9th-8th centuries B.C.E. impressions of chalcedony cylinder seals which show Ninurta battling Anzû. 4a: VA 5180, H: 4.2 cm, D: 1.7 cm from Assur. ©Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Vorderasiatisches Museum. 4b: BM 119426, H: 3.45 cm, D: 1.5 cm, unprovenanced, after Collon 2001: 123, no. 232. ©The Trustees of the British Museum. 4c: BM 129560, H: 2.9 cm, D: 1.1 cm, unprovenanced, after Collon 2001: 152, no. 292. ©The Trustees of the British Museum

at its chest or its back? The presentation of the entire back would be highly unusual in Neo-Assyrian art.[40] There appears to be limited attempts to render shoulder blades on fig. 4b, and a later 8th century example shows Anzû's left wing clearly emerging from its back [fig 4c].

While each cylinder seal with this scene is inscribed with its own composite image, there does appear to be some general overlap. Anzû's twisting pose heightens the tension in the overall scene, capturing the moment just before Ninurta surprises Anzû with the decisive arrow. In Tablet II of the Standard Babylonian version, Anzû locks eyes with Ninurta (line 36) before roaring like a lion[41] (line 38). This locked gaze is present on a majority of examples, where the faces of Anzû and Ninurta are fixed at the same height. On others, Ninurta shoots an arrow tipped in lightning,[42] echoing Ea's advice to Ninurta to shoot arrows like lightning (II: line 111). The striding figure of Ninurta usually stands on similar-looking creature who is differentiated from Anzû by a scorpion-tail. Seidl (1998) argues this is the *abūbu*, a creature representing the Deluge who aids Ninurta in his hunt.[43]

In comparison to other hunt or combat scenes on Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals, the hunted creature is typically shown in full profile [fig. 5]. Its neck will often twist around to look over its shoulder away from (or at the back of) its pursuer, which is akin to the physical arrangement of the hunted Anzû from the Ninurta temple. On the above seals, however, Anzû appears to twist its entire upper body in order to present its back, emphasizing its impressive wingspan as if to foreshadow their impending doom. To my knowledge, the only other creatures to be composed in such a way, and perhaps mirroring or referencing this rather unique pose, are particular lions on Ashurbanipal's relief program.[44] Indeed, the

[40] Apart from sculpture and clay figures in the round, fully frontal figures are rarely found on Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals but see Collon 2001: no. 156 (BM 89382), as well as the four-winged male figures that appear as 'master-of-animals' on three-figure contest scenes from this period (Collon 2001: no. 336, no. 343, no. 349). See also cylinder and stamp seals from Assur with a four-winged goddess, for example Klengel-Brandt et al. 2014: no. 176, no. 294, no. 295. The profile form is typical for human figures in relief, e.g. Ashurnasirpal II and his attendants on the Northwest Palace reliefs, see Budge 1914: pl. XIX, 2 (BM 124535); whereas apotropaic daimons can appear in a twisted profile form to show the torso and face frontally, or the torso frontally but face in profile. On clay plaques from Assur, the lower half of *laḫmu*s appear in profile and fully frontal from the waist up (Rittig 1977: 2.2.4; VA 4894). Winged animals that appear in hunt and contest scenes on cylinder seals are typically in full profile with wings arranged on one side of the body (as on fig.3), and at times twist their neck to look behind at their pursuer, e.g. Klengel-Brandt 2014: no. 212 (VA 4233), no. 252 (VA Ass 1685).

[41] Anzû also bares its teeth like an *ūmu* 'storm demon' (line 37). Other storm demons, such as the *ugallu* (u_4.gal), are also lion-headed. Such physical similarities and shared behaviours between these figures may have triggered visual recollections in the minds of encultured viewers.

[42] For example, see Porada 1948: no. 689; Collon 2001: no. 288 (BM 89533), no. 291 (BM 135752).

[43] This creature appears to be associated with Ninurta, Sîn, and arguably Aššur (Seidl 1998: 107-8); however, its relationship to Anzû isn't as yet fully understood. As tracked by Kertai (2015b), Hormuzd Rassam (1897: 32) mentions a relief located in the niche between rooms S and T in the North Palace whose description could indicate either a standing Anzû or *abūbu*, but we have neither a drawing nor the relief itself to study. Kertai (2015b: 347) supports its identification as an *abūbu* (as an Anzû might be considered dangerous) but acknowledges that other examples of a standing *abūbu* are unknown.

[44] Other possible visual precedents are the lions that fight mythological beings in Akkadian glyptic (most similarly, see Collon 1982: no. 74 (BM 89165) and no.114 (BM 89147)), but it should be noted that the scholars and officials responsible for Neo-Assyrian relief programs may not have had immediate access to such imagery and instead looked to more familiar sources for inspiration. For a critical discussion of the reception of Akkadian imagery in the Neo-Assyrian period, see Eppihimer 2019.

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Figure 5 Impression of a stone cylinder seal from Assur which shows a typical Neo-Assyrian hunting scene. 9th–8th centuries B.C.E. VA Ass 1685, H: 2.3 cm, D: 1.1 cm. ©Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Vorderasiatisches Museum

rampant and splayed dying lion between two chariots in room C shows this correspondence at its largest scale [fig. 6]. Taking up the majority of the Southwest wall, this composition is described by Watanabe as "difficult to make sense of […] from the point of view of time and space in reality" (2014: 353). Ashurbanipal, who is shown twice in separate chariots on either side of this lion, is practically a supporting character along with his charioteers. The arrangement of this lion between two chariots echoes other heraldic compositions in Neo-Assyrian art, including three-figure contest scenes on cylinder seals and the sacred tree relief from Ashurnaṣirpal II's throneroom. Its body twists aggressively at its middle, presenting its back and modelled shoulder blades to the viewer. The strong articulation of each digit of the forepaws as they spread out in empty space is also paralleled in Anzû seal imagery (e.g. fig. 4c). Although Ashurbanipal is hunting from each approaching chariot with either a sword or a spear, it is an arrow through the face that is the principal demise of this particular lion, in this specific case perhaps another reference to the defeat of Anzû beyond hunting lions with arrows.

Intervisuality as a mnemonic device in Neo-Assyrian visual culture

Exploring intervisual relationships between cylinder seals and palace reliefs can help unpack social relationships between aesthetic producers and consumers. To what extent did individuals, either loosely or directly affiliated with the institution of Assyrian kingship, interact with and/or contribute to the ongoing production and development of motifs within Neo-Assyrian art? Among inscribed seals and extant impressions of inscribed seals, Ninurta is the most frequently depicted deity (Collon 2006: 104). Watanabe (1999: 322) similarly noted the popularity of Ninurta imagery for seals of officials, which she attributed to an ideological connection between royal lion hunts and Ninurta

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Figure 6. Series of gypsum reliefs from the Southwest wall of room C in the North Palace at Nineveh (645-635 B.C.E.). BM 124851-4, H: 160 cm. Author's own photo

hunting Anzû. Of the inscribed examples,[45] most belonged to individuals either involved in political administration and governance, or whose skills were used in the Neo-Assyrian courtly milieu: Ninurta-bēl-uṣur, *ša rēši* to Ninurta-ašarēd [fig. 4a], eponym in 812 B.C.E.; Ištar-balāṭu-ēreš, *rab ālāni* of Kilizu [fig. 3]; Bēl-ēmuranni, who is perhaps identified with one of three eponyms (Raṣappa-737 B.C.E., Karkemiš- 691 B.C.E., or as *turtānu* in 686 B.C.E.); one Marduk-šumu-ibni; and Yapa-Haddu, whose Aramaic inscription names them as a *mpšr*, or 'dream interpreter'.[46] One rather interesting Babylonian example belonged to Nabû-ēṭir, a *paqdu*-official, with a later inscription added by Erība-Marduk, who was either father or grandfather to the Babylonian ruler Marduk-apla-iddina II (r. 722-710 B.C.E.).[47]

Whether this mythological scene was the personal choice of these individuals, or perhaps indicative of a more widely adopted composition among those involved in political administration, it is not yet known, but it is the impressed version of Anzû on these seals that particular lions on the North Palace reliefs match most closely. Winter (2000: 65) argued that cylinder seals with imagery complementary to palace reliefs often show the same scene in reverse, as if the seal maker saw (or even heard about) a relief and copied it directly onto the seal surface, which then produced a reverse impression. If the planners of Ashurbanipal's reliefs previously experienced this Anzû type impressed into clay, the near exact copying of pose from seal impression to palace relief would suggest conscious emulation of the seal impression—using Winter's logic. This would also seem to complement Nadali's (2010) argument that the North Palace reliefs directly copied or indirectly referenced older images of the king hunting lions from stamp seals for the layout of various lions in the hunt scenes. Although no full examples of inscribed cylinder seal impressions containing the Anzû scene as yet appear on surviving documents,[48] it does seem to suggest that this particular image of Anzû must have been circulated to some degree, to the point where those determining the figural composition of lions on the North Palace reliefs were perhaps familiar with its unique pose.

[45] Of the uninscribed examples which have worshippers depicted, eight are bearded and five are beardless. Watanabe (1999) would consider the seals depicting the latter as seals of court eunuchs.

[46] *mpšr* could also be Aramaic shorthand for the Babylonian *mupašširu* 'dream interpreter' (CAD M2: 210).

[47] In order: VA 5180 (Klengel-Brandt *et al* 2014: no. 219); BM 135752 (Collon 2001: no. 291); Watanabe 1993: no.8.3, 8.18; Penn L-29-494A (Watanabe 1993: 8.7); Collon 2006: 105.

[48] A seal impression on a tablet from Tell Halaf appears to depict Anzû and a partial Ninurta (Herbordt 1992: Tf. 5, 11). Millard (2005: 6) remarks that tablets with seal impressions from before about 725 BCE are practically non-existent, in part due to the increased use of Aramaic on papyrus, upon which cylinder seal impressions would be neither feasible nor practical.

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A fragmentary limestone plaque found at Nineveh, tentatively dated to the 9th-8th centuries B.C.E., could be an example of such a vector. Originally perhaps 30 by 18 cm, its portability could have eased the distribution of its visual program and recalls the oft-cited hypothesis of 'pattern books' (Moorey 1994: 34) to explain how motifs were circulated among artisans and workshops. Depicting on one side the lower half of a striding god atop the remaining upper half of a winged creature, with a smaller figure to the right in a similar striding pose, Reade (2001/2: 158-160) interprets this scene as the Ninurta-Abūbu-Anzû composition found on cylinder seals of the same period (e.g. fig. 4a).[49] He argues that the plaque "implies the existence of larger versions of the Ninurta-Abūbu-Anzû scene, from which the makers of cylinder seals could have drawn their imagery" (2001/2: 160). Ranked notions of media aside, it is unfortunate that we are missing the entire Anzû on this plaque, to see whether its form matched the posture found on the majority of relevant cylinder seals, or whether it was arranged more in line with the one from the Ninurta temple at Nimrud. Regardless of whether such larger examples may have once existed, the total breadth of possible mental and material references to such imagery was likely much wider.

If this were indeed an image associated with the personal and/or professional actions of government officials, its metaphorical inclusion on Ashurbanipal's reliefs could suggest a strategic choice in coopting a pose identifiable to particular members of his court. The composition of Anzû on cylinder seals could have communicated a powerful visual message complementing familiarity with Anzû in textual and oral settings, and thus resonating with the community responsible for the design of relief programmes. Utilized in this way across multiple visual scales, this imagery had the capacity to create and activate specific relationships between the gods, the Assyrian king, and members of his court (Collins 2022). Indeed, the king and his court complex, composed of family members, scholars, and political officials, would have understood this type of imagery in a more nuanced way than outside visitors (Collins 2014: 621). While the occasional outsider might read these lion reliefs as a series of lion hunts, those who frequent the palace might recognize the message of Assyrian kingship, and still others might identify a relationship to Ninurta and Anzû through recognition of this visual covalence between certain lions and the Anzû, or even via recollection of the myth. The visual affinity between both battles could stimulate shared perceptions about the nature of combat as it relates to the maintenance of royal authority and divine order. Gansell's (2016: 86-7) notion of 'elite ideological memory' is helpful here; as individuals enculturated in the intellectual milieu of the palace encountered relief narratives, they would have re-experienced their own participation in the 'political and sacral events portrayed'. While this collective memory could have served to prop up notions regarding embodied divinity in the visual portrayal of the Assyrian king, elevating their mortal actions into mythological stages, it also could have applied to the perception of 'supporting characters' in the narrative. Consequently, I suggest that the rear-facing pose of Anzû establishes an intervisual paradigm between the pursued Anzû and hunted lions within particular vignettes amongst the wider lion hunt relief program. The composition of 'Ashurbanipal-chariot-lion' crafted on the Southwest wall of Room C and 'Ninurta-Abūbu-Anzû' on 9th and 8th century linear-style cylinder seals carry the same visual structure, allowing for an implicit connection that is bolstered by the distinctive posture of certain lions and the Anzû.[50]

Interestingly, this type of mnemonic device also arguably occurs among cylinder seals at a compositional level, in which figures are substituted in mythological scenes. Anthony Green (1997) cites an example of this substitution from another of the few identifiable mythological scenes in Mesopotamian art, that of Gilgamesh and Enkidu slaying the monster Humbaba. On a 9th-8th century B.C.E. chalcedony cylinder seal from Assur (VA 4215),[51] Gilgamesh and Enkidu flank Humbaba on either side, and Humbaba is shown kneeling, facing frontally [fig. 7a]. A later 8th-7th century cylinder seal (Met 1983.314.13) shows a strikingly similar composition, except that each

[49] The other side of the plaque depicts a fragmentary image of the king as he typically appears in royal stelae. If Reade has correctly identified both faces of the plaque correctly, then it is interesting that the object closely locates the images of an Assyrian king and Ninurta.

[50] A simpler example of visual quotation is the repetition of gesture within the same scene: for example, as Ashurnasirpal II returns from campaign on a relief from the Northwest palace, he mirrors the pose of a god in a winged disk located directly above him (Collins 2019: 297).

[51] This cylinder seal is unfortunately now lost.

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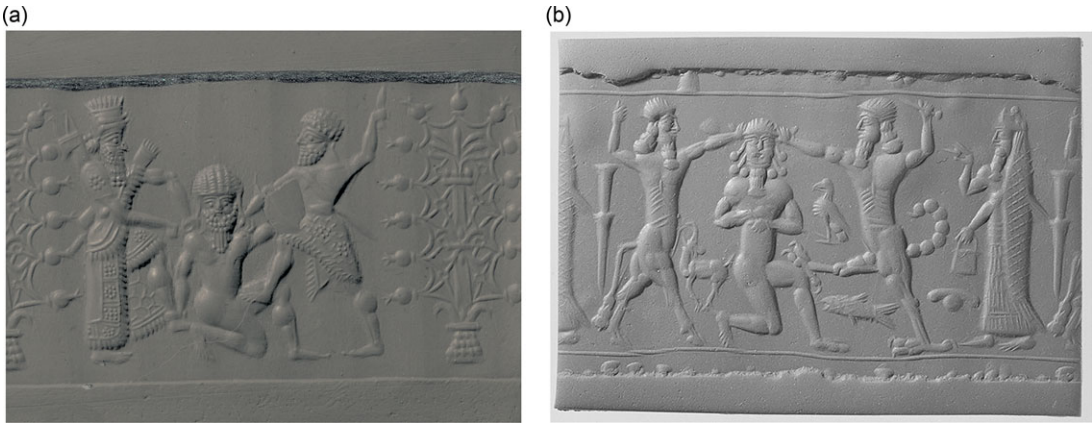

Figure 7 a, b: On the left, impression of a chalcedony cylinder seal from Assur which shows Gilgamesh and Enkidu slaying Humbaba. 9th-8th centuries B.C.E. VA 4215, H: 3.2 cm, D: 1.9 cm. ©Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Vorderasiatisches Museum. On the right, impression of a chalcedony cylinder seal (unprovenanced) showing a *kusarikku*, *laḫmu*, and *girtablullû* mimicking the figural composition of fig. 7a. Late 8th-7th centuries B.C.E. Met 1983.314.13, H: 3.6 cm. 2025 © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence

figure is substituted by a *kusarikku* 'bull-man', *laḫmu* 'hairy one' and *girtablullû* 'scorpion-man' respectively [fig. 7b]. Green (1997: 138) suggests that this substitution is a sort of humorous visual play, one that would have been recognizable to and enjoyable for ancient viewers who were familiar with Gilgamesh's exploits. Viewed thusly, the correspondence between particular lions and Anzû in Ashurbanipal's lion reliefs may have even been an esoteric visual pun for members of Ashurbanipal's inner court. What is particularly curious is that neither Neo-Assyrian 'royal' seals nor 'bureau' seals seem to use mythological iconography, but rather it is found on the seals of court officials. Beneath the upper echelons of activities conducted by/on behalf of royals and high officials, there appears to be a dynamic visual landscape constituted by the personal seals of officials and courtiers, likely influenced by and contributing to the production of court-centered art, which by extension includes the play and display of scholarly knowledge.

The suggested intervisual relationship between Anzû imagery and particular lions on Ashurbanipal's North Palace reliefs aims to widen frameworks of visual transfer in the Neo-Assyrian period. Intervisual approaches can help disentangle the complex origin and interpretative range of a given motif or composition among different social groups. The transposition of Anzû into Ashurbanipal's lion hunt reliefs implies a strategic adaptation of imagery across media that worked to craft deep links between narratives of mythological order and royal authority. It also points towards a coded system of visual representation which knowingly engaged with composition, visuality, and gesture across human and animal categories. The production and reception of Ashurbanipal's relief programme was contingent upon a web of social, intellectual, and material communication, and there are likely more semiotic interpretations yet to be revealed.

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التداخل البصري لأنزو في الأساطير الآشورية الحديثة عن الملكية

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لقد ساهم تحديد الإشارات النصية إلى السرديات الأسطورية في النقوش الملكية الآشورية الحديثة بشكل كبير في فهمنا للعرض الذاتي الملكي والتوثيق التاريخي. والأقل استكشافًا هو كيف تم تفسير مثل هذه الإشارات وتمثيلها في الأعمال الفنية الملكية. في هذه الورقة، أقترح وجود صلة بين أساطير نينورتا وصيد الأسود الملكية التي تم تصويرها بصريًا في فن قصر الملك آشور بانيبال في نينوى. يمكن القول إن هذا الارتباط استخدم لإنشاء استعارة بصرية عميقة تدعم الملكية الملكية والإلهية. ولكن، بدلاً من التركيز فقط على الملك، أقوم بالتحقيق في دور الوحوش الأسطورية والحيوانات الخطيرة في التحقق من صحة التصوير البصري للقوة الملكية والملكية الآشورية. كما أستكشف كيف يظهر أنزو، العدو الأسطوري لنينورتا الذي يمثل الفوضى، في الفن الآشوري الرسمي، بما في ذلك الأختام الأسطوانية والنقوش البارزة. وأنا اقترح بأن شكل وأفعال أنزو كما نراها في مثل هذه الأشياء تعمل كرموز قوية ترسخ صورتها المتحولة في سرديات الصيد الملكية. وفي الختام، أناقش الأسباب التي قد تكون قد دفعت آشور بانيبال إلى استخدام الإشارات البصرية إلى أنزو في فن قصره.

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