

# The Iconography of the Ancient Near Eastern Storm-Gods

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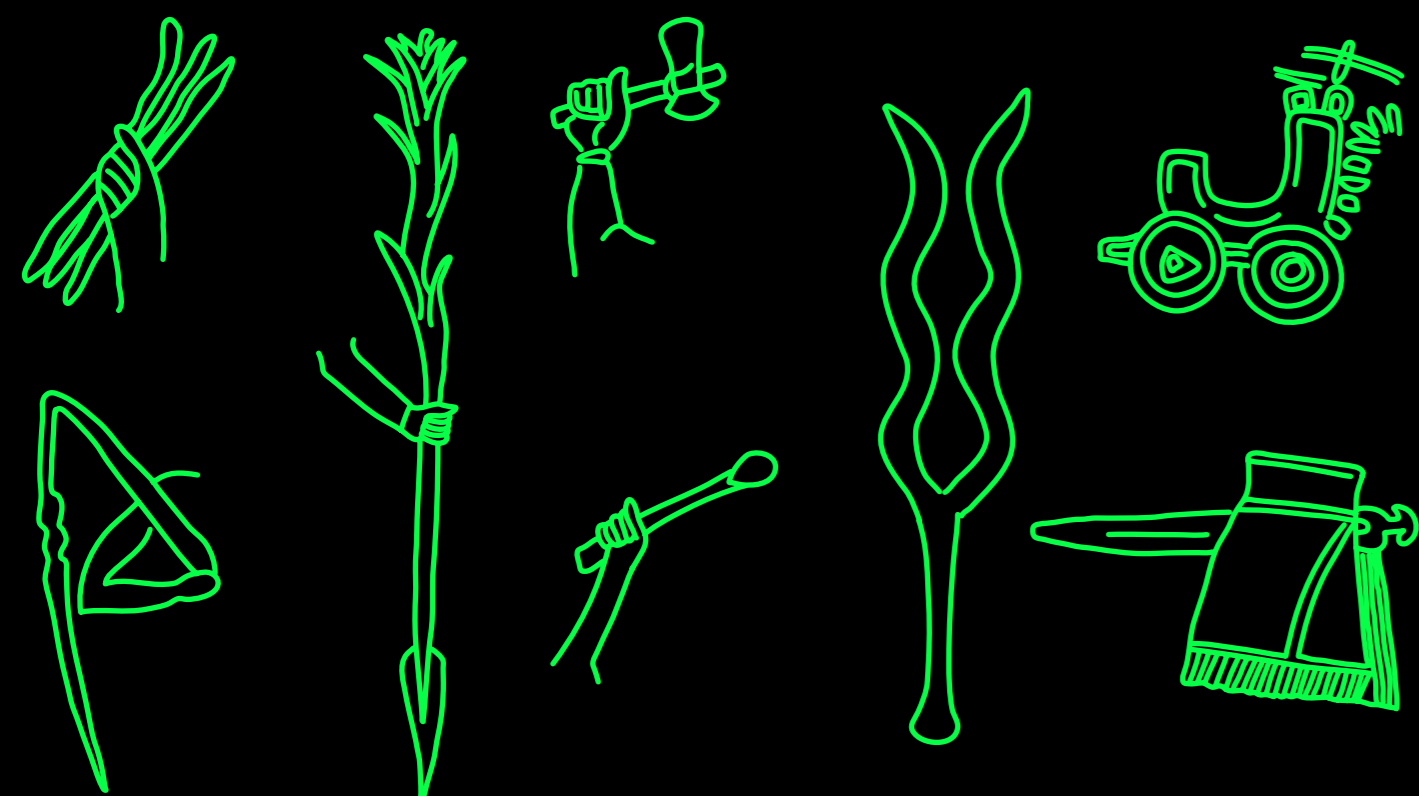
Graduate School Distant Worlds



## Polytheistic belief systems

In the polytheistic belief systems of the Ancient Near East deities were understood according to an aspectiv approach, meaning that single aspects or elements of deities are very important and could act as own entities, up to a point where they became a distinctive deity - whereas in modern western beliefs one tends to completeness, urging for a unity. But because of this additive method, each part stays important for itself and does not get lost in the bigger concept. A deity is also the sum of its parts and builds a constellation of aspects around him.

## WEAPONS AND ATTRIBUTES



## BEARD AND HAIRSTYLE



## POSTURE



## Multiplicity, Fluidity and Translatability

A multitude of one divine figure in the Ancient Near East was a common phenomenon. These manifestations do not weaken a deity. Fluidity means that deities can possess several forms in different contexts at the same time. These can be treated as independent or semi-independent deities. The borders of deities are not defined and always flexible. Furthermore, international translatability plays an important role in religions. Regardless of language, society and/or political system, one can compare deities which show the same or similar attributes, responsibilities or abilities. The translation and transfer of foreign deities and panthea have therefore to be seen in an international network of economic, political and cultural exchange.

## The Storm-Gods of the Ancient Near East

In the Ancient Near East, several deities were venerated by different societies, embodying violent storms, including wind, rain, thunder, lightning and hail. The significance of each Storm-God was dependent on the regional geographic and climatic conditions. In northern Mesopotamia, Syria and Anatolia he was venerated for his powers of bringing rain and fertility to the fields; most of the time leading local and national panthea. However, because of irrigation farming in southern Mesopotamia, people were not as dependent on rain and therefore he was not as highly ranked in the panthea. In the south, the focus was on belligerent aspects. The Storm-God was admired and feared because of his destructive powers, bringing (sand-) storms, drought and flood over the country, endangering the harvest and the lives of the people. Not only the characteristics of Storm-Gods were differentiated over time and space but the iconography of depicted Storm-Gods could vary hugely throughout each period and region. He could wear long or short garments, long, flowy or pinned up hair, hold different attributes (weapons, lightning-fork, snake, etc.) and be accompanied by his consort, a bull or a lion-griffin. In times of frequent cultural contacts and exchange as well as the formation of multicultural societies, situations appear where several Storm-God cults, their images and names, came into contact. The question quickly arises on how societies treated foreign gods, especially ones with similar "duties" as their own.

## Text and Image

By collecting all the depictions of Storm-Gods, a huge bias presents itself. Philologically attested is a multitude of different Storm-Gods: the major Storm-Gods of the great empires leading a pantheon or being one of the great gods, the Storm-Gods representing aspects, and the many local Storm-Gods. It seems the textually attested Storm-Gods outnumber and do not match up with the pictorial representations. However, this does not have to create an inconsistency. Moreover, images of Storm-Gods should be understood as logograms, giving the beholder a chance to see his/her own deity in a consciously vague image.

## HEADGEAR



## CLOTHING



## COMPANIONS AND SYMBOLS



## What's in a name?

By choosing precisely defined Storm-Gods, the question about attributing names to depictions might become clearer. Therefore, a local deity like the Storm-God of Aleppo will help as an example. Due to the far-reaching distribution of his cult, he is known and venerated under several names: Hadda, Teššob, Adad, Ba'lu or Tarhunza of Halab. Because of his link to the city of Aleppo, it is obvious that it is always the same deity who was addressed and depicted. This makes it neither objectively possible nor effective trying to attribute certain depictions to certain attested Storm-God names. As seen in the example above, different names may not mean different gods. Therefore, it seems more useful to sort and type the depictions of Storm-Gods by region and period, without attributing names to them, and analyze these images in a socio-cultural, political and religious frame

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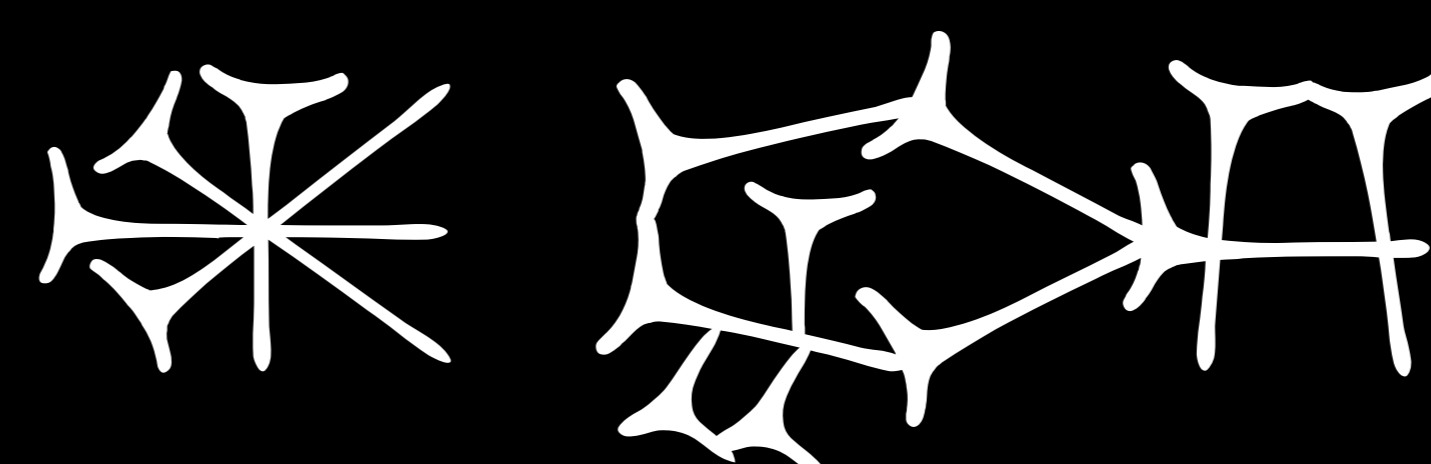
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