Dominique Collon

The Near Eastern Moon God

The Mesopotamian moon god Nanna or Sin was indisputably one of the major deities in the Sumerian and Semitic pantheons. It is interesting, therefore, that although his symbol the moon's crescent, sometimes set on a standard, is ubiquitous, the moon god in anthropomorphic form is rarely identifiably depicted. This is in direct contrast to the situation as regards deities representing other heavenly bodies or natural phenomena, such as the sun god, the morning star Ishtar, the storm god and, though for a limited period, the god of subterranean waters. In this paper I propose to investigate some of the representations of the moon god and to seek an explanation for their sporadic occurrence and I have much pleasure in dedicating this "natural phenomenon" to Maurits van Loon in gratitude for over twenty years of friendship.

With our background of Greek and Roman mythology we tend to consider it more normal for the lunar deity to be a goddess, particularly as the moon's phases operate on roughly the same time-scale as a woman's menstrual cycle. However in world religions and myths the moon is more often male and the sun female (Hastings, 1921). Despite paucity of identifiable representation, the Mesopotamian moon god was indeed a major deity, the son of Enlil and Ninlil, and the father of the Sumerian sun god Utu and goddess of reproduction and war Inanna (Jacobsen, 1987, p. 226 n. 25; Hall, 1985, p. 148). The names Nanna and Suen (later Sin) were used by both the Sumerians and the Akkadians but the former was preferred at Ur and by the Sumerians generally, and the latter by the Akkadians (Hall, 1985, p. 41). Nanna first appears in the late 4th millennium BC and Suen (written Enzu) is attested from c. 2600 BC in Fara period texts from Fara and Girsu (Hall, 1985, p. 36). It is interesting to note that Eannatum (c. 2450 BC) used the name Suen on the Stele of the Vultures and calls him "the frisky calf of

Enlil" thus affirming that he was already thought of as Enlil's son.

Nanna had temples at Tuttub, Girsu, Sippar and Susa but at Ur, where he was the city god, his temple was preeminent and in the last centuries of the 3rd millennium BC other temples to Nanna were built in that city. Various priests and priestesses administered his cult but the most famous were the en-priestesses at Ur. Enheduanna, daughter of Sargon of Akkad (2334-2279 BC), was the first of a series royal princesses to hold this post, but Irene Winter has drawn attention to earlier representations of similarly dressed priestesses (Winter, 1987) and the title **munus-zi-nanna**, attested at Fara, was "probably a forerunner of the title of the En-priestess" (Hall, 1985, p. 99). Royal princesses were installed as en-priestesses at Ur at least until the reign of Rim-Sin of Larsa (1822-1763 BC), probably as a political move to unite the country; the title was revived in the 6th century BC by Nabonidus for his daughter. Rim-Sin and Sumuabum (1894-1881 BC) built temples to Nanna at Larsa and Babylon respectively, although the name Sin was used in theophoric names, and temples built at Mari by Iahdun-Lim and at Ischali were dedicated to Suen (Hall, 1985, pp. 209-10).

We have descriptions of many precious objects dedicated to Nanna at Ur by kings from the Ur III period onwards, but why Ibbi-Suen (2028-2004 BC) should have thought that the "likeness of a red dog of Meluhha" was an appropriate dedication is not clear (Hall, 1985, pp. 117-26). Statues of the god are frequently referred to and Shuilishu (1984-1975 BC) records bringing back the statue of Nanna from Anshan whither it had presumably been taken at the time of the fall of Ur in 2004 BC (Hall, 1985, p. 199).

The crescent moon was the moon god's most common attribute, and the clearest representations of the moon god are those which show him with a crescent on his head-dress, although this should not be confused with the horns of the divine tiara. He was also associated with a complex series of other attributes and imagery discussed by Stol (this volume). The shape of the crescent moon in the latitude of Iraq is not sideways-on as in Europe but looks, when it is

waxing, like a boat. Although Stol has shown on the basis of mathematical texts that the boat represents the gibbous moon, in public imagination it was certainly a boat viewed from the side and is so depicted (nos. 7 and 12). When it is waning the Mesopotamian moon appears as an inverted boat and this is the shape adopted, presumably for practical reasons, in amulets and jewellery.

It was in the Akkadian period that the iconography of deities first developed and Boehmer, in his study of Akkadian glyptic (1965, p. 130), drew attention to the fact that the earliest certain representations of the moon god in anthropomorphic form dated to this period. Seal impressions from Tello (No. 1) bearing an inscription naming Enmenanna, daughter of Naram-Sin of Akkad (2254-2218 BC) and *en*-priestess at Ur,[1] depict the moon god and his consort seated facing each other and holding shallow cups. Behind each deity stands a goddess with one hand raised. The moon god is identified by the crescent between the single pair of horns of his divine head-dress; he is bearded, wears a flounced robe and sits on a throne consisting of a series of indentations which are probably meant to represent a mountain (cf. Boehmer, 1965, Abb. 725 and Abb. 250, 300, 302, 405). His consort has her hair in a long curl beneath a head-dress with multiple horns, wears a flounced robe and sits on a low-backed chair. A green 'marble' seal of much the same date has recently been found in a grave at Nippur (Gibson, 1989, pp. 1, 4). It is inscribed with the name of the owner, Lugal-dur, a scribe. The scene depicts a seated god who faces left and is approached by the moon god, the storm god and a male figure, presumably Lugal-dur himself; all the figures raise one hand. The moon god is bearded, wears a flounced robe and is identified by a crescent between the horns of his head-dress. He carries a lion-scimitar over one shoulder and stands between two mountains; on the foremost mountain is a lamp-stand - presumably denoting night - to which is fastened an enigmatic object which the excavator, McGuire Gibson, thought might be a sandal.[2] Another seal of less good quality (No. 2) comes from Ur and depicts the seated

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[1] See addendum.

[2] See addendum.

moon god facing two approaching gods and a worshipper(?). Boehmer has also suggested that a deity grasping a crescent standard on another Akkadian seal from Ur may be the moon god (Boehmer, 1965, Abb. 437)[3] and so might the seated god beneath a huge crescent moon on a seal in the British Museum (Boehmer, 1965, Abb. 507) where he faces a small lute player, the vizier of the water god, and Ea himself; however the identification of the moon god in both these cases is open to doubt.

The most famous monument purporting to depict Nanna is the stele of Ur-Nammu (2112-2095 BC) found in fragments during excavations at Ur. It was reconstructed in the University Museum in Philadelphia but a recent study by Vorys Canby (1987) has demonstrated that the crescent on the head-dress of the figure generally taken to be the god (No. **3a**), does not in fact belong there and no satisfactory position for it has so far been found. Furthermore the god holds a figure on his knees and although a plaque from Girsu (Vorys Canby, 1987, Fig. 11) provides a parallel for a scene in which a goddess sits on her divine husband's lap, the scene on the stele is fragmentary (No. **3b**) and could illustrate the divine parentage of the king. The inscription on the stele names Ningal as Nanna's consort and "Mother of Ur".

Representations of the moon god from southern Mesopotamia in the 2nd millennium BC are rare. No. **4** is a seal impression identified as Columbia 216 (Porada, 1950) dating to the reign of the Old Babylonian king Apil-Sin (1830-1813 BC). Here the figure is not clear, nor are the animals on which it stands, but despite its flounced robe and crescent-topped horned head-dress it is obviously subsidiary to the main scene. The second example (No. 5) is a fragmentary impression (Delaporte, 1923, Pl. 117:6) on a tablet dating to the thirty-seventh year of Ammiditana (1683-1647 BC); preserved are a deity with a crescent-topped head-dress and the smiting storm god, standing back to back and depicted in the late Old Babylonian drilled style. Although Sin was the most popular theophoric element in Old Babylonian names, very few cylinder seal inscriptions name him. Interestingly enough, some of the exceptions

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[3] See addendum.

are stylistically related presentation scenes with generally a worshipper led before a seated goddess, and "^{d}suen" framed as a terminal; they are unfortunately unprovenanced but were probably the products of the same workshop which must have been active in the first century or so of the 2nd millennium BC (Collon, 1986, p. 23 and Nos. 97, 98; Porada, 1948, Nos. 335-6; Buchanan, 1981, No. 695; Lambert, 1979, No. 16, and an unpublished seal in the Israel Museum, no. 65-178 R-123). The inscriptions of the seals of "Enanedu, en-priestess of Nanna at Ur, daughter of Kudur-Mabuk, sister of Warad-Sin, King of Larsa" and of "Ur-Nanna, the gudu-priest of Nanna's abzu, son of Kunigal, Nanna's Keeper of Accounts, servant of Warad-Sin" have been published but not, alas, their respective designs (Kärki, 1980, pp.117-8).

Surprisingly northern Mesopotamia and Syria seem not to have suffered from the same apparent reluctance as southern Mesopotamia, as regards depicting the moon god in the 2nd millennium BC. The famous wall painting from the Audience Chamber, Room 132, at Mari has two main registers depicting rituals before the seated Ishtar above and the seated moon god below. The moon god (No. 6) is identified by a large crescent on his cap-like head-dress. His seat is cut into the mountain-side and behind him stands a huge black bull. There is a libation scene before him and an enigmatic panel showing a black figure with outstretched arms against a starry background. This part of the palace and the painting have variously been dated to the late 3rd millennium BC or to the reign of Iahdun-Lim of Mari in the 19th century BC (Parrot, 1958, pp. 76-81, Pls. XVII, E). A so-called "Cappadocian" seal in the British Museum (No. 7) shows a mixture of Old Assyrian and Syrian motifs of the 19th century BC (Collon, 1987, No 141). A seated deified king, with a nude goddess standing behind him, is approached by a suppliant goddess, by the moon god standing in a boat - identified by a crescent on his head-dress and by the crescent-topped axe and crescent standard he holds - and by the storm god on his bull. On one of the fragmentary seal impressions from Tell Leilan (No. 8; Parayre, 1988), the seal of Shamash-ilum-dannum, servant of Himdiya (king of Andariq c. 1765 BC), the moon god wears a cushion-like cap topped by a crescent (similar to that on the Mari painting) and sits on a throne on the back of a bull, facing the king; the bull,

however, is facing the other way towards a second bull which supports a kneeling hero who holds a lion above his head. A seal at a dealer's in Beirut early in 1989 (No. 9) shows a worshipper before the moon god. The god wears a kilt, a crescent-topped head-dress and holds a crescent-standard. The crescent on this standard is interesting in that it has the pairs of lines that appear later in Hittite texts as the Hittite phonetic complement -mi attached to the inverted crescent. The standard ends in a trident spearing a fish.[4] A seated deity on a seal impression from Alalakh holds a similar trident spearing a fish but the upper part of the standard is missing and so is the deity's head-dress so that he or she cannot be identified (Collon, 1975, No 135). Both seals probably belong to the second half of the 18th century BC. A somewhat later seal in the Pierpont Morgan Library Collection (Porada, 1948, No. 1011) shows a god in a flounced robe, standing on crossed bulls and holding a crescent-topped trident spearing a fish. A female and male worshipper stand on either side and a storm god on a bull faces another worshipper or male deity.

A series of Syrian seals of haematite, probably dating to the latter part of the 18th century BC, depict the moon god in a variety of costumes, with a variety of attributes, and associated with a variety of deities and figures, many of them royal. In every case it is the crescent on the head-dress which identifies the moon god. On a seal in the Ashmolean (No. 10; Buchanan, 1966, No. 871) the moon god seems to be the king's tutelary deity; he holds a cup and wears a mantle with heavy rolled borders. He wears a similar garment on an unpublished seal in the Seyrig Collection, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris; here he is the focus of the scene and is approached by figures with bird, animal and plant offerings but he holds, unexpectedly, an Egyptian adze. He is again the focus of the scene on a seal in the Moore Collection (Williams Forte, 1976, No. 63; Metropolitan Museum, New York, L.55.49.201) where a small seated figure, a winged deity and an Egyptian goddess face him; however he is kilted and holds a bow. On a seal in the Marcopoli Collection (Teissier, 1984, No. 446) the moon god wears yet another type of dress: a fringed mantle over a

[4] See addendum.

horizontally-ridged kilt. He holds a curved weapon and faces a similarly-dressed figure who wears the tall, oval head-dress of Syrian kings; between them is a goddess who is revealing her nudity. The moon god and king also appear on a seal in the Pierpont Morgan Library Collection (Porada, 1948, No 959); the king wears a flat cap, the god brandishes a mace and holds a curved weapon and behind him stand a winged deity and a small Syrian goddess. According to the latest study by Boehmer (1988, pp. 37-8), the famous Tyszkiewicz stamp-cylinder (No. 11) would date to approximately this period. The moon god, wearing a crescent-topped head-dress and a flounced robe, and carrying a short sword and a lituus, is the last in a procession of gods approaching a cult scene.

A most unusual seal was recently found at Samsat (No. 12; Özgüç, 1987, pp. 436-8, Fig. 13). Its style is Middle Assyrian of the late 13th century BC but its iconography is unparalleled. It shows a worshipper before the moon god who is in a boat. The god is identified by the small crescent-standard he holds and, apparently, by a reference to him in the unpublished inscription. He also holds the enigmatic omega symbol - perhaps confirmation of Duchesne-Guillemin's somewhat doubtful suggestion that the omega symbol was a representation of the lunar nodes (Duchesne-Guillemin, 1986). However the omega symbol is also associated with the goddess of childbirth and, as we shall see, the moon god appears in childbirth rituals at precisely this period. The boat is particularly interesting because it is not crescent-shaped as we would expect but has the same scroll-like ends as No. 7. Both seals probably originated in much the same area and may illustrate a local myth.

By the second half of the 2nd millennium BC the Hittites had developed a standard iconography for the moon god (the Hittite Arma and Hurrian Kushuh). He is depicted winged, wearing an open robe, shoes with upturned toes and a pointed head-dress with a superimposed crescent. He is identified by a hieroglyph resembling an amulet-shaped crescent with points downwards and a suspension loop. This is his appearance in the 13th century BC rock-cut sanctuary at Yazılıkaya (No. 13) where he follows Shaushga and her

handmaids but comes before the sun god in the procession of deities (Akurgal, 1962, Pl. 79, bottom left). He is also depicted in this way on 13th century seal impressions - one of a stamp seal from Boğazköy (Boehmer and Güterbock, 1987, No. 176) belonging to Arma-wa+ra/i the scribe (No. **14**), and the other of the cylinder seal of Matkali-Dagan from Emar on the Euphrates (Beyer, 1982, p. 67 Fig. 12) where he stands on a lion and faces the storm god on his bull (No. **15**). On a relief from Malatya (Akurgal, Pl. 104, top), recently redated by Hawkins (1988) to either the mid-12th or the mid-11th century BC, the moon god is also winged, his trapezoidal, decorated head-dress is topped by a crescent, and he wears a long, fringed robe and shoes with upturned toes (No. **16**). He holds a club over one shoulder and an unidentifiable triple symbol (also held by the sun and storm gods) in his right hand which he extends towards king PUGNUS-mi-li (whether the first or second of that name is not known) who wears a horned head-dress and pours a libation for him. Here again he comes in front of the sun god. Further east, however, the figures on the Hasanlu gold bowl from Marlik in north-western Iran, generally dated to the 12th-11th centuries BC, belong to another tradition. Here a figure with a horned filet around his head (No. **17**) is probably to be identified as the moon god since he and the sun god form a pair and both ride in what are probably horse-drawn chariots (Porada, 1965, pp. 98-9 and Figs. 63-4). However here the moon god follows the sun god.

In the 1st millennium BC the Hittite preeminence of the moon god over the sun god survives in a 10th century BC Neo-Hittite relief from Carchemish where both deities stand on the back of the same couchant lion (Hawkins, 1972, Fig. 4c and cf. p. 70 Fig. 7; Akurgal, Pl. 116). Again the moon god is winged and he wears a horned head-dress topped by a crescent above a disc, his robe is long and he holds an axe and some other weapon or symbol, now unidentifiable (No. **18**). Subsequently Assyrian iconography was adopted but it is surely significant that one of the two Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals from Bogazköy (Boehmer and Güterbock, 1987, No. 318 and cf. 319) should depict the moon god (No. **19**). It probably dates to the late 8th century BC.

In the 1st millennium BC the Assyrians and Babylonians frequently depicted the moon god. Sennacherib's rock reliefs at Maltai show Sin (No. **20**) with a crescent inscribed on a disc on his head-dress, standing on a creature resembling a winged lion with bull's horns, holding a curved weapon (also held by Assur) and the rod and ring which are symbols of divinity (Boehmer, 1975, Abb. 30-33, 51, 65, 83, 87). He stands immediately behind the national god Assur and his consort Ninlil, and in front of the other deities (Anu or Enlil, Shamash, Adad, Ishtar). This prominent position, together with the practice of carving a pantheon on a rock face, may indicate that the representation of the moon god was revived as a result of contact with the Neo-Hittite kingdoms of north Syria.

Five seals in the British Museum which depict the moon god (Nos **21-25**) can be taken as representative of the iconography of the moon god in the first half of the 1st millennium BC. No. **21** shows him with a crescent on his head, and holding a crescent and a curved weapon as at Maltai. On No. **23** he stands on a lion-dragon and wears a cylindrical head-dress topped by the lunar disc while the sun god, identified by a winged disc, faces him and stands on a couchant bull. Three other seals show his body rising from a crescent, as it does on numerous stamp seals (e.g. Porada, 1948, No. 811), and he wears a cylindrical head-dress topped by a crescent or a lunar disc. The latest of these seals is probably No. **25** which must date to the period of Neo-Babylonian domination when, under the impetus of Nabonidus (555-539 BC) the cult of the moon god was particularly in favour, both at Ur and at Harran. Yet here again the representations of the moon god's symbols are far more numerous than representations of him in anthropomorphic form.

We cannot attribute the scarcity of representations of Nanna or Sin to a representational taboo since the texts bear witness to numerous cult statues. It may be that the moon god was identified by symbols or attributes, other than the crescent, which lack any particular meaning for us. In Old Babylonian times, for instance, there are frequently-represented deities, such as a god with an extended arm and another god in a ladder-patterned robe, of whose identity we are in ignorance (Collon, 1986, pp. 25 and 27). Nevertheless, in view of the fact that the crescent head-dress was

used to identify the moon god, at least on the earliest monuments (Nos 1-3) which are all connected with Ur, we would expect this obvious symbol to be prominent in other representations. W. G. Lambert (personal communication) has pointed out to me that deities are frequently identified by hand-held symbols and it may have been the lack of such a symbol in southern Mesopotamia that led to Sin's absence from the represented pantheon - an absence which he shares with other great gods. However crescent standards were a symbol of the moon god from Akkadian times onwards and a hand-held version appears on Nos 7, 9, 12, 19 and 21).

The sun god's early iconography relates to his mythology but it is hard to think of an equivalent, prevalent, mythology-based and so far unidentified representation of a deity which could be applied to the moon god.[5]

Although it is difficult to explain why the moon god was so rarely identifiably depicted in Mesopotamia, his relative popularity in the Hittite world may be due to his being linked there with birth rituals - an aspect which is not generally stressed in extant literature from Mesopotamia before the second half of the 2nd millennium BC. In this context it is interesting to note that the Mesopotamian myth of Sin and the Cow, used in childbirth incantations, is first attested in a version found at Boğazköy in about 1300 BC (Lambert, 1969). It may have been the growing importance of Sin in childbirth rituals which was responsible for the comparative abundance of representations of him in Mesopotamia in the first half of the 1st millennium BC.

ADDENDUM

As a result of discussions with Eva Braun-Holzinger I have come to the conclusion that some Akkadian cylinder seals previously thought to depict the sun god should, in fact, be seen as representing the moon god. For instance Boehmer (1966), Abb. 548 (another seal of Enmenanna - see No. 1) shows a god with a tripod-candelabrum and "slipper" similar to those on the Nippur seal (Gibson, 1989, pp. 1, 4), and a gazelle; Abb. 376 and 427 show him

[5] See addendum.

with a gazelle-horned altar, resting one hand on a tripod or stick, and on the latter seal he is associated with a gate. It is therefore proposed that gods resting on a tripod or stick, sometimes with gates and rays like the sun god (e.g. Abb. 430, 437, 488) are, in fact, the moon god. I have developed the argument more fully in the *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, s.v. "Mondgott" (forthcoming). This iconography does not seem to have had any impact in later periods with the possible exception of the tripod which may be echoed by the trident on No. 9 and related seals.

Note

I should like to thank I. L. Finkel, J. D. Hawkins and W. G. Lambert for their helpful comments and suggestions; A. R. Millard sent me details of the Nippur seal and B. Teissier drew my attention to some of the Syrian examples of the moon god. Dates are according to Brinkman, 1977.

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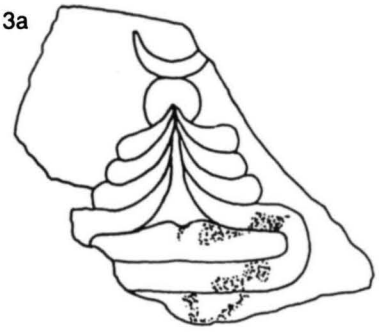

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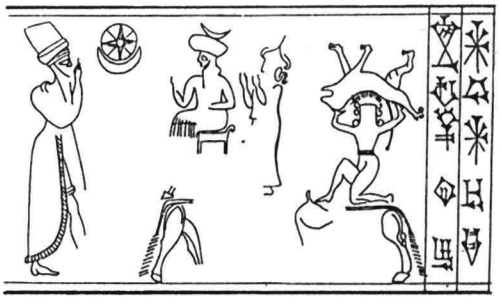

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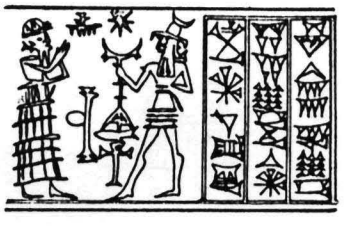

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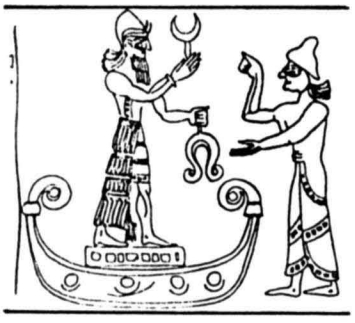

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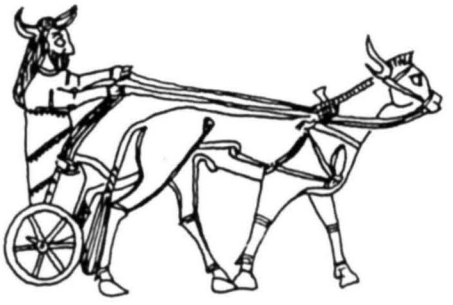

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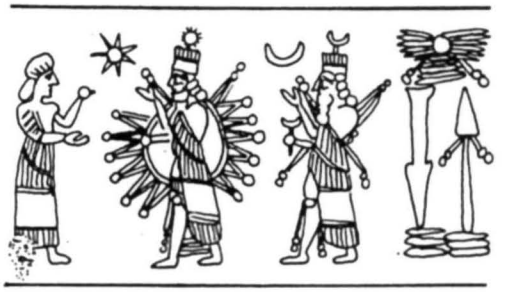

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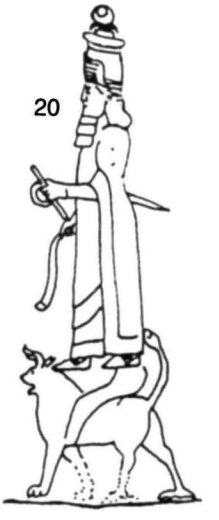

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