THE BEARDLESS WINGED GENIES
FROM THE NORTHWEST PALACE AT NIMRUD*

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Over twenty-five chambers, corridors and courtyards of the Northwest Palace at Nimrud, dated to the reign of the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.) were faced with limestone blocks, about 3 meters in height¹. Among the many secular and religious-mythical subjects carved upon those blocks were 200 or more anthropomorphic winged genies of variant types, identified as *apkallû*². From among this large assemblage three known *apkallû* are unusual since, unlike all the others, they are beardless. Two figures appear on the lower portion of a slab originating from Room I of the palace (Fig. 1). The third figure appears on a large slab originating from Room L (Fig. 2). At the time of discovery each stone slab was set up in a shallow niche of the respective chamber³; presently, the two reliefs are on permanent display in the British Museum. The appearance of the beardless genies on the wall reliefs leads to questions of their gender and possible identity, which are addressed in the present study.

¹) This is an expanded version of a paper read at the 1995 Annual Meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research, held in Philadelphia. Figures 1 and 2 are reproduced through courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum; figures 3 and 4 are the author’s.


*Relief from Room I (BM 124581)*

On the slab from room I, the two beardless genies flank and face a stylized tree — the so-called sacred tree⁴. Both genies are two-winged and their divine aspect is indicated by the two-horned headdress worn by each figure. They are modelled in shallow relief and meticulous attention is given to the rendering of details. Each genie wears an identical costume that consists of a short-sleeved, long plain dress bordered with tassels at the bottom. Over the garment is a flounced skirt kept open at the front. At the waist, paired daggers are kept in the strap of an exceptionally broad belt. Both genies are barefooted.

The facial features of the genies are crisply delineated and in the areas of the cheek and chin there is a softness of modelling. Suspended from the visible ear is an earring of the pendant-type and around the neck is an elaborate necklace composed of several elements. They include a chain of oval beads, a narrow pectoral with raised rim, and two rows of discs which are linked to one another by small rods. The decoration on the discs consists of an eight-pointed star. Below the horned headdress the long wavy hair reaches to the shoulders and ends in several rows of tight curls. In addition, a thick strand of hair falls pendant down the back, and above the curled ends is a ribbed band from which two tassels extend. The long tress seems to be an artificial attachment to the coiffure and possibly functioned as the counterweight for the heavy necklace.

The two genies are posed the same. The right arm is raised and the open palm is directed towards the stylized tree. The left arm is lowered and in the clenched hand is a large ring composed of alternating round and disc-shaped beads (Figs. 3 and 4). The bracelet on each wrist shows a wide band and a large rosette mounted in a circle.

*Relief from Room L (BM 124578)*

The third beardless genie, turned to the left, is four-winged and carved across the body is the standard cuneiform inscription of Ashurnasirpal II⁵. The nearly flat carving of the figure reveals the workmanship of a different craftsman, but with respect to costume, jewellery and pose, this *apkallu* is similar to those from Room I. In the present work several differences may be noted, in addition to the two pairs of wings.

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Firstly, the genie is adorned with two necklaces. The necklace around the neck consists of two strands of beads that connect to a flat disc at the front. The second necklace covers the chest and it is composed of a thin chain to which are linked two rows of decorated discs. The upper ones show rosettes and the lower ones show multi-rayed stars. Secondly, a bead-and-fringe counterweight, probably for the beaded necklace, is suspended below the hair at the back. The counterweight appears over the long strand of hair that falls pendant. Thirdly, open sandals are worn on the feet.

Male Figures and the Beardless Genies

Among the bearded-type *apkallū* displayed on the wall reliefs from the Northwest Palace, one may be singled out as closely paralleling the beardless version. The obviously male genie is two-winged and he wears a horned headdress and the knee-length tunic that is characteristic for bearded human genies. The male genie extends the open palm of the raised right hand and holds a branch of flowers in the lower left hand. Elsewhere on the wall reliefs from the Northwest Palace, there are beardless male figures who are all shown to be attendants associated with the king’s retinue. In every instance these clean-shaven persons are attired in costumes suitable for the royal court and the objects they hold, as well as the gestures they take, pertain to specific activities and functions.

Some of the clean-shaven officials may be identified with the *ša rēši*, a eunuch. However, Oppenheim demonstrated from the textual material that not all *ša rēši* were eunuchs; some may have been young men or clean-shaven men in high positions. A pictorial example on a Neo-Assyrian cylinder centers on a beardless worshipper facing two goddesses, and the inscription on the object identifies the person as the “son of the sceptre-bearer of Adad-nirari.” In her study of the rendering on the cylinder, Porada suggests that the beardlessness of the worshipper may characterize the youthfulness of the figure.

As for the beardless genies on the wall reliefs, their mature appearance and long dress, the absence of a beard which all males possess with the above noted exceptions, and the ring held in the lower left hand (see presently), together support the conclusion that the genies are feminine. Although the inclusion of the female winged genies on the wall reliefs is unusual, the figure type does recur on the eighth century Assyrian wall paintings from Til Barsip, where it is featured within a larger decora-
The winged female also appears on several ivory panels used for chair decoration, which were discovered at Fort Shalmaneser, the outer town of Nimrud. Carved in Syrian style, the bareheaded female is four-winged and her long dress with trailing hem is made of a delicate material represented by fine parallel lines.

**Winged Female Deities**

The iconography of the winged female can be traced back to the third millennium in Mesopotamia, and in the course of time variants of the type developed in several regions of the Near East. Apart from stylistic criteria, the image of the winged female depended upon how one or more distinctive features and hand-held objects were combined in a single figure, and they include the paired wings, horned head-dress, flounced garment, large hand-held ring, and long tress of hair. In their descriptions of the winged females in the visual arts, modern scholars generally identify the winged females with specific goddesses, among whom are Inanna/Istar (Mesopotamia), Anat (Ugarit/Syria), and Šausga (Anatolian/Late Hittite sites).

The earliest known examples of the winged female occur on late third millennium Akkadian style cylinder seal designs. In two of these works, the winged female stands upon a range of mountains and she wears the horned headdress appropriate for deities and a full-length flounced garment. As goddesses of battle the winged female is represented on an Akkadian style cylinder seal impression and on a seal impression from Mari, dated by an inscription to the reign of the eighteenth century king, Zimri-Lim. An unusual adaptation of the image of the winged goddess occurs

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on a basalt stele excavated in situ at Tell Mardikh, ancient Ebla. One upper register of the stone monument, dated to about 1800 B.C., shows the goddess standing atop a platform in a narrow winged shrine or temple set upon the back of a standing bull. Equally unusual, a winged feminine figure turned to the right and seated on the back of a couchant bull turned to the left is represented on a cylinder seal design from Ras-Shamra, ancient Ugarit, attributed to the fifteenth century. She is attired in a long plain dress and on her head is a tall horned headdress, a mark of divinity.

In the art of the Hittite empire of the mid-thirteenth century, the winged goddess originally appeared twice among the procession of gods and goddesses on the rock reliefs of the open air sanctuary at Yazilikaya. The one extant image of the goddess is distinguished by a tall peaked cap and a long dress which shows folds in curvilinear pattern. The garment is raised to expose one leg. A late Hittite version of the winged goddess appears on a stone relief from the Syrian site of 'Ain Dara, and she is also depicted on an orthostat relief from Malatya, which once adorned the face of the city wall close to the main gate.

Among the corpus of seal designs showing the nude, fertility aspect of a female, winged types occur infrequently. The design on an eighteenth century cylinder seal discovered in a Roman grave near Vicenza shows a two-winged Syrian goddess whose garment is pulled back to reveal a partially exposed lower torso. She is armed with weapons, thereby disclosing two aspects of her divinity: goddess of fecundity and battle. Several mid-second millennium seal designs carved in Mitannian style show a two-winged nude female grasping in each hand an animal held by one hindleg. An exemplary variant of the two-winged nude goddess type appears on a stone orthostat discovered along the long wall of sculptures at Karkemiş (ca. 1000-950). She is frontally posed and clutches both breasts in her hands.

17) See Alexander, *cit.* (see fn. 12, above), pp. 172-174, fig. 8; Akurgal, *cit.*, (see fn. 17, above), p. 128, pl. 104.
A fourteenth century Assyrian version of the frontal goddess type occurs on a fragmentary alabaster vase found in a tomb at Assur. The four-winged female, who wears a conical cap decorated with a rosette, has both arms outstretched in a downward direction and the lower part of her body is naked. The frontal goddess type recurs on a ninth century Assyrian style ivory plaque discovered at Nimrud. There, she is clad in a tight-fitting garment that opens at the front to reveal her lower body. In the glyptic art of the Late Assyrian period, the frontally posed winged and naked goddess seems to have enjoyed some popularity, since representations of her occur in several designs.

Goddess with Hand-held Ring

An Akkadian style cylinder seal design provides an early example of a goddess holding a large ring. Dressed in the flounced garment typical of the period, the goddess stands passively and flames, rather then wings, emanate from her shoulders. A large ring is held in her lowered right hand. The significance of the ring as a symbol of divine authority is demonstrated on a rock relief of slightly later date, at Sar-i-Pul in the Kurdish mountains. In the scene Anubanini, the triumphant king of the Lullubi tribes, confronts the Sumerian goddess whose warlike aspect is revealed by the three maces that project from each shoulder. The goddess extends to the ruler a large ring held in her raised right hand.

A similar compositional arrangement occurs in the central panel of the eighteenth century wall painting from Mari, which depicts the investure of a Syrian king, probably Zimri-Lim. Iconographically, the representation of the goddess is similar to the one at Sar-i-Pul, but in this example the goddess extends to the Syrian king the rod and the ring described in the ancient texts as the haṭtu and kippatu. The wall painting reveals that these are separate objects, and that the king touches the ring.

A fine cylinder seal design from Mari, a Syrian style eighteenth century example, shows a partly nude female without wings whose arms are raised in supplication, and

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22) Moortgat, cit. (see fn. 10, above), p. 113, figs. 81, 82.
28) CAD K, pp. 397-398.
attached to her left arm is a large ring. Her divine aspect is indicated by the horned headdress. However, Moortgat gives another interpretation for this female, whom he describes as a dancing woman carrying a tambourine on her left elbow. The tambourine has also been identified with a circular object held in similar manner on a fragmentary cylinder seal design from Nuzi. Still another seal design shows in the field between an en face goddess and a female worshipper holding a goat, a large ring attached to a rope that rests upon a small stand or altar.

In Assyrian art of the first millennium, goddesses of the first rank are generally depicted without wings and occasionally they possess hand-held rings. This is represented by a poorly preserved bas-relief discovered at Nimrud, dated to the reign of the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727). The restored drawing, made at the time of the relief's discovery, depicts Assyrian soldiers carrying off statues of one god and three goddesses who grasp a ring in one or both hands. One goddess stands half-hidden in a shrine and the other two, seated upon high-backed chairs, are distinguished by their tall headcovering decorated with a large rosette disc.

Four panels of rock reliefs at Maltaya, in northwestern Iraq, show similar processions of seven deities mounted on animals, and at each end is the figure of the Assyrian king Sennacherib (704-681), who stands and faces the procession in amorous pose. Five of the deities are gods who hold the rod and the ring and the other two are goddesses, one seated on a decorated throne carried by a lion and the other standing on a lion, who hold the ring. Among the Late Assyrian seals depicting the enthroned goddess and the armed goddess, several include a hand-held ring of the

30) Moortgat, cit. (see fn. 10, above), p. 82.
31) E. Porada, "Of Professional Seal Cutters and Nonprofessionally Made Seals", in M. Gibson - R.D. Biggs (Eds.), Seals and Sealings in the Ancient Near East (Bibliotheca Mesopotamica, 6), Malibu 1977, p. 11.
beaded type; in one example the armed goddess stands in front of a large spiked nimbus — a circle of radiant light and astral brilliance. 

Mention may be made of a Syrian style ivory panel from Fort Shalmaneser, on which is carved a seated woman who holds a bead-decorated ring aloft, towards a large winged disc. The woman is adorned with jewellery and her dress is made of a fine pleated material, but she lacks the attributes of divinity. She may be a person of queenly authority or a protective guardian.

The Beardless Genies from Nimrud

The narrative and religious-mythical repertoire of the wall reliefs from the Northwest Palace emphasize a male world which excludes women. Rarely are women represented, and they are always foreigners distinguished by their costume and wailing gesture. It is hardly surprising that the fully clothed, beardless winged genies do not exhibit the physical aspects of femininity although Layard, the discoverer of the palace reliefs, could observe a feminine character in their features, which included the long tress of hair.

Among the objects associated with the beardless genies, the daggers kept in the belt are items appropriate to the masculine sphere, while the hand-held beaded ring is appropriate to the feminine sphere. As iconographic markers, these objects belonging to the same figure suggest a duality of gender, male and female. In the divine sphere, duality of gender has been attributed to Ištar, the goddess of battle and fecundity. Emblems of the same goddess, the multi-rayed star and the rosette, decorate the pendant discs on the necklace worn by the respective beardless genies, and may

35) See Heroldt, cit. (see fn. 24, above), pp. 214, 243, pl. 2, nos. 3, 9; A. Moortgat, Vorderasiatische Rollensiegel. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Steinschneidekunst, Berlin 1940 (repr. 1966), pp. 139-140, nos. 596-598, 605. On another seal impression of about 800 B.C., in a scene showing the double image of a worshipper between two statues of deities, the fully armed goddess stands with her right hand raised and in her lowered left hand is a beaded ring; see R. Mayer-Opificius, "Zwiesprache zwischen Gott und Mensch", <<Mitteilungen für Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte» 10 (1995), p. 105, figs. 24a, b. The pictorial evidence suggests that in the 9th and 8th centuries the beaded ring, as distinct from the solid type, was the attribute of a particular goddess. One possible identification is Ištar of Kalhu (Bēlet Kidmūri), whose temples in Nimrud and Nineveh were renovated by Ashurnasirpal II; see Grayson, cit. (see fn. 5, above), nos. 698, 718. On the other hand, Ištar of Arbela (Bēlet Arba-il) is represented on a stele from Til Barsip holding a rein attached to the lion upon which she stands; see Thureau-Dangin - Dunand, cit. (see fn. 10, above), pp. 156-157, pl. XIV, 1.

38) See the thought-provoking analysis of R. Harris, "Inanna-Ishtar as Paradox and Coincidence of Opposites", <<History of Religions» 30 (1991), pp. 261-278.
indicate an association with the cult of Ištar. The pictorial evidence has led Kolbe to label the genies "Ištar-genies"\textsuperscript{40}.

However, there seems to be no mention of an Ištar-genie type in texts describing the making of prophylactic figures of clay or wood. The sole female figurine described is Narudda, who is crowned in a red headgear and clad in a red uniform with a yellow sash around her waist. She holds a \textit{timbutu}, an unknown object tentatively translated as a harp\textsuperscript{41}. Since Narudda is described without wings, her identification with the beardless winged genies ("winged goddesses", according to Wiggermann) seems improbable; however, Wiggermann does note that lesser gods of Late Assyrian art can occur with or without wings\textsuperscript{42}. Although the art and the texts do not agree on the matter of description — artistic creations executed at different times and destined for different clientele (royal vs. common) may appear dissimilar — the possibility remains that the texts furnish an identity for the beardless winged genies.

\textsuperscript{40} Kolbe, \textit{cit.} (see fn. 2, above), pp. 55ff.
\textsuperscript{41} Wiggermann, \textit{cit.} (see fn. 2, above), pp. 47-48, 62, 78-79.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 79.
Fig. 1. Wall relief from the Northwest Palace (BM 124581).
Fig. 2. Wall relief from the Northwest Palace (BM 124578).
Fig. 3. Detail of BM 124581.
Fig. 4. Detail of BM 124581.