

# **REPRESENTATIONS OF ANTHROPOMORPHIC DEITIES IN ASSYRIAN AND BABYLONIAN ART OF THE FIRST MILLENNIUM B.C.**

## **An iconographical and typological analysis**

### *Post-doctoral thesis („Habilitation“)*

Anthropomorphic depictions of deities as an expression of religious ideas and thoughts are an essential topic in Ancient Near Eastern art; especially in the first millennium B.C. where there appeared an enormous - and at first glance confusing - number of different attributes, insignia, symbols, animals, monsters, gestures and equipment closely connected with the depiction of gods and goddesses in various art styles and techniques which are spread over many image media. There is also a continuity or revival of prior iconographic modes of the early second millennium B.C. that can be seen to a certain degree.

There are a number of different studies dealing with these changes in very different ways as well as surveys focusing on special features or motifs. However, up to now there has been no systematic and comprehensive monograph concerning the fundamental principles of representation of anthropomorphic deities in Assyria and Babylonia for these period.

It goes without saying that this kind of approach needs an extensive and representative basis of adequate material. The study contains the results of the analysis of about 2,000 depictions of anthropomorphic deities as well as symbols which were systematically collected and described in a digitalized database. The research concentrates on Assyria and Babylonia as the most important centres of cultural development and mutual influence in the Ancient Near East which had long-term and widespread effects on the neighbouring regions.

The material gathered allows the reader to focus on the following crucial points:

First of all it is possible to establish a comprehensive typology of gods and goddesses which reveals the most frequently depicted types, their general characteristics and attributes, the combinations of certain anthropomorphic deities, prevailing constellations in which male and female deities appear and their development in iconography.

Based on this typology the conventions in the visualization and recognition of deities were analyzed. This includes a definition of the selected features which were used or *not* used for the identification of a certain deity and the function of the medium of the image. In addition it can be seen in what number these types of deities actually appear.

Finally, the possibilities and the limits in the interpretation of divine images in Mesopotamian art according to current scientific approaches and theories are evaluated.

The research made it obvious that numerous methods and results which were applied in the last years were rather questionable as well as symptomatic for the state of iconographic research in the field of Ancient Near Eastern archaeology. These methods and results are based either on supposed conditions which do not exist clearly in the pictorial and written sources (e.g. aniconism) or presuppose tendencies within the development of Mesopotamian images which do not stand up to a thorough investigation (e.g. anthropomorphism vs. symbolism).