



Babylonian Cylinder Seal with War Goddess Ishtar

Date

c. 1800 BCE

Primary Maker

Unidentified artist

Medium

Hematite

Description

The seal comprises three figures and an inscription at right. The leftmost figure walks rightward with her hands raised in a gesture of prayer or approval. She wears a triangular hat and a long garment divided into horizontal segments. The central figure also faces right, wearing a round cap and a long mantle revealing one leg. This figure carries an animal, most likely a calf, as an offering to the figure at right. The frontal figure at right is the war goddess Ishtar, identified by the crouching, snarling lion on which she places one foot, the two quivers rising above her shoulders, the multi-pronged mace in her raised right hand, and the curved scimitar in her lowered left. She wears an open-legged skirt with vertical pleats and a top with diagonal folds across the chest. The frontal face of the goddess draws the viewer into the worship scene. Precise details in the garments and clear rendering of volume make this small carving exceptional. A two-column inscription between vertical lines at right gives the names of two female divinities, Nisaba and Ashnan.

Dimensions

1 3/16 x 3/4 in. (3 x 1.9 cm)