

The Brief but Typographical Legend of the Whit Anzu

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The signs are everywhere. - Plotinus
Interpret the signs. - Galileo

The story of the Whit Anzu begins buried deep in a publication of Stanford University entitled Cultural Heritage Resource. Through its archeology center and the Cultural Heritage Resource, Stanford attempts to get and keep the word out about conflicting claims made on the world's cultural heritage. Stolen art and artifacts, illegal importing and exporting of art and artifacts, forgeries, that sort of thing is reported in the Resource.

Chronicling events occurring in September and October of 2008, the Resource wrote, "On September 15, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) returned 1,046 artifacts to Iraq at a ceremony held in the Iraqi embassy. Twelve of the artifacts were described as foundation cones from the city-state of Lagash, in Sumer, (now called Iraq), dating to 2141-2122 BC."

The Resource reports that, In cuneiform text, each cone is inscribed with the following message:

**For Ningirsu,
Enlil's mighty warrior,
Gudea,
ruler of Lagash,
made things function as they should
 (or, made shine what is fit for the cult /
 made everything come forth),
built
and restored for him
his eninnu, the whit Anzu.**

There it is, the '*whit Anzu*'. But Stanford didn't originate the story, or the Anzu; they were quoting from a lengthy press release issued on the same day by ICE. It begins:

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Julie L. Myers, Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), completed the repatriation of 1,046 cultural antiquities to the Government of Iraq that were seized in four separate investigations dating back to 2001.

No explanation as to the meaning of the text is provided, nor is the translator's name given. We know only that the Department of Homeland Security of the United States of America chose to translate a 4,000 year old artifact that originated in ancient Sumer, reminiscent of the Germans who researched anything and everything dealing with weapons, flight, rocketry, aliens from space, ancient astronaut myths, and you name it during World War 2. The Germans photographed and sent back images from Tasili-n-Ajjer in southern Algiers. The images were of rock drawings of characters sometimes claimed to be space aliens. Some of these photos were found when the war ended. The drawings date back 8,000 years and are still visible on the cave walls in Tassili.

The Homeland Security translations didn't mention space, or aliens, or myths, or ancient astronauts. Instead, they mentioned the Whit Anzu.

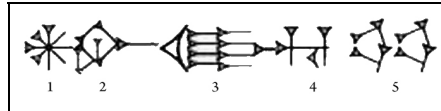


Fig 1. Sumerian Cuneiform Inscription, now frequently translated either as *White Anzud*, *White Anzu*, or *Shining Imdugud Bird*.

There are five symbols of Sumerian invention in the Fig. 1 inscription. The second, third and fourth say “Im Dugud Bird” in their original Sumerian tongue. The first symbol may be ignored, but when translated, it is generally rendered as “heavenly”. The fifth one tells us what we need to know. It says *shining*, or *white*. *Whit* is just a typographical error, accidentally dropping off the e. White Anzu, not Whit Anzu. He, or she, or it, the whit, never existed. The Whit Anzu is simply a mistake, committed by the US Department of Homeland Security. ¹

The term Anzu is itself problematic, being Akkadian in origin, not Sumerian. As the Akkadians achieved political control of Sumer, the spoken language became Akkadian, but the written language remained Sumerian. The translated object is dated to the period of Akkadian control of Sumer, making it virtually impossible to verify – in this case - which meaning, Sumerian or Akkadian, was intended by the engraver. Consequently, the terms Anzu and Imdugud are often treated as equivalent. and as we have no need here to decide whether there were two different meanings but only one bird, or two different birds and either one or two meanings, or whether there were competing groups of gods each in possession of its own version of bird, we will ignore all arguments of this nature and treat the Imdugud and the Anzu as the same mythological entity, calling it Anzu, since that is the term used by Homeland Security.)

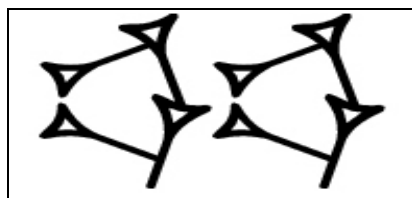


Fig 2. White, or shining.

Alas, my friends, there is only one thing that may be positively claimed for the Whit Anzu: whether it was an Anzu or an Imdugud, it was a shining one. Nothing else may be said.

But there is so much more to be said of the *White* Anzu. First, there is the issue of heritage: he or she or it had a mother, the primordial goddess Siris. She is described as a *bird who could breathe fire*, and among her attributes was a lapis lazuli vessel within which she stirred the drink of regeneration. Among her titles were *The Goddess of Fate* and *Mistress of the Heavenly Tree of Life*. Under other names, she was also the *Wife of Anu (the God of Heaven)*; the mother of mankind; Aphrodite (the goddess of love); and the source of the fertility of the earth;. This is heritage par excellence, (but impossible to present in a single image - See Fig. 3 below).



Fig. 3 Siris, the Mother of Imdugud, the Mother of Anzu. Also known as Inanna, Ishtar, Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love, the Goddess of Fertility, the Goddess of Fate, and the Mother of Mankind. (Image © by John Yonko.)

All of which gives rise to the question: *who or what is an Anzu?*

A review of many both ancient and modern documents reveals that in half of all references to *Zu*, or *Anzu*, "bird" is the describing term. But there are many other descriptives:²

- | | | |
|------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| i. | storm, thunder, cloud, wind, rain | (6 mentions) |
| ii. | chaos, evil, mischief | (2 mentions) |
| iii. | lion headed, lion bodied | (2 mentions) |
| iv. | stars, planets | (2 mentions) |
| v. | bird | (15 mentions) |
| vi. | god, gods | (2 mentions) |

vii.	eagle	(3 mentions)
viii.	half man	(1 mention)
ix.	thief of the tablet of destinies	(2 mentions)
x.	rebel	(2 mentions)
xi.	loving father	(1 mention)
xii.	benign	(1 mention)
xiii.	Son of Siris	(1 mention)
xiv.	invincible	(1 mention)
xv.	knowledge	(1 mention)

Although Anzu ironically means *knowledge*, or *heavenly knowledge*, “Anzu” is an Akkadian ³ word, not Sumerian; it sheds no direct explanative light on the Sumerian symbol which is frequently translated differently by different experts. Of the Sumerian symbols shown in Figure 1 above, none is ever directly translated as “knowledge”. We can only surmise that the “knowledge” of which the Akkadians were speaking was *a type of knowledge* dealing with the heavens, or the universe, or life and creation, or warfare, or atmospheric flight, or interplanetary flight. All of these are reasonable possibilities derivable from the ancient tablet texts.

What the cuneiform symbols literally say, on the last line of the inscription below, in their Sumerian mother tongue, is: *Heavenly Im Dugud Bird Shining (White)*.

**For Ningirsu,
Mighty warrior of Enlil,
Gudea, ⁴
ruler of Lagash,
brought forth all that was needed, and
made things function as they should,
and built and restored for him
Eninnu,
*his shining imdugud bird.***

There are many descriptives associated with the the first four symbols engraved in Figure 1, ranging from *deity, god, goddess sky and heaven, to rain, mist, fog, clay, mud, storm, heavy, important and tablet*. It is possible to translate the *im dugud* symbols as heavy rain storm, or *Thunderbird*. Based on the wealth of translation possibilities, it would not be unreasonable to translate *im dugud* as "spitfire". It is equally valid to render the translation as *important tablet*. An “important tablet” might by inference mean “knowledge”, as the Akkadians preferred.

There are too many translation options, and as a consequence of this abundance, we are not likely to ever know with certainty what the *im dugud* was before it became mythological - unless - perhaps, buried in the sand - there's a spitfire thunderbird Imdugud Anzu patiently awaiting rediscovery. Certainty notwithstanding, we can see why the Germans and the Russians pursued these same mythological questions; and why the U.S. Department of Homeland Security pursued them as well: technologies of the Sumerian gods as referenced and described on thousands of clay objects and tablets. Of course, the Sumerians may have invented the art of Science Fiction as well as cuneiform writing - the question is still open,

Footnotes:

1. Of course, not the entire Department, but someone in the Department, although that cannot be said with absolute certainty. Perhaps it was someone outside the Department. It doesn't matter who did it, or why, or if it was purposeful – it was done. That's verifiable fact.
2. Based on the following lengthy list of Anzu descriptions, it can only be said that it does not appear that the Anzu has been too well defined in the literature
 1. A mythological bird who rears his young amid the mythological branches of the mythological Huluppu Tree;
 2. a large bird, eagle or vulture, who lived in the realm of the gods;
 3. the Zu-bird, a mythological creature which at times wrought mischief;
 4. a storm bird;
 5. a thunder bird;
 6. storm demon Zu bird represented among the stars by Pegasus and Taurus;
 7. a worker of evil who raised the head of evil and aspired to rule the gods;
 8. The Zu bird who escaped with the Tablet of Destinies and found shelter on a mountain top in Arabia;
 9. monstrous bird Anzu (also Zu), who brings chaos in the world of the gods by stealing the tablet of destinies;
 10. The Zu-bird, known as the Planet Mars.
 11. the Planet Mars whose "nest" or "house" -- or ORBIT! -- was "taken away";
 12. a *jealous rebel* against the current head of the gods;
 13. chaos god;
 14. a loving, forgiving father taking care of his fledgling;
 15. a benign creature who rebelled against the gods.
 16. a brilliant lion headed eagle demon;
 17. a mythological eagle;
 18. heavy rain;
 19. a type of bird;
 20. a massive bird that can breathe fire and water;
 21. Son of the bird goddess Siris;
 22. The southern wind;
 23. A demon, half man and half bird;
 24. a flesh eating bird with a sharp beak;
 25. the knowledge of heaven;
 26. A demonic but friendly beast having the body of a lion, the wings of a bird; and an eagle's head that walks upright like a man;.
 27. The mythopoetic expression of a thunder cloud;
 28. A bird that looked like a bat;
 29. Invincible;
 30. Thief of the Tablet of Destinies.

3. The Sumerian writing system was adopted and modified by other contemporaneous Mesopotamian peoples such as the Akkadians and the Babylonians. As a spoken language, Sumerian died out around the 18th century BCE, but continued as a "learned" written language (much like Latin was during the Middle Ages in Europe). In this way, Sumerian was used continually until the 1st century CE, making it one of the longest used writing systems in history.

4. Of Gudea himself, we believe that he more enjoyed building and restoring temples, and placing statues of himself inside of them, than he did conducting military campaigns. He placed twenty seven known statues of himself, complete with inscriptions, in various temples in at least five cities in Sumer during his twenty year reign. Materials for his buildings and statues were brought from all parts of western Asia: cedar wood from the Amanus mountains (Turkey), quarried stones from Lebanon, copper from northern Arabia, gold and precious stones from the desert between Canaan and Egypt, diorite from Magan (Oman), and timber from Dilmun (Bahrain). Over the same period, he conducted only two military campaigns, both successfully. He called himself *ensi*, governor, rather than the more prestigious *lugal*, king. If Gudea had had anything to do with building or restoring the kind of birds that fly, metallic or biological, stone or clay, his statues would have told us about it.

5. For reasons having to do with academic credibility, the "5th Footnote" is missing, and must remain so. However, in its place, as mollifiers, are presented the following two substitutes:

i. a special version of the rule of Occam's Razor:

"Alieni non est ponenda sine necessitate"

ii. the *dugud* portion of Imdugud, set vertically, as it would have appeared in the original Sumerian cuneiform configuration, before it became customary to engrave the symbols horizontally:

