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Winkelmann, Sylvia

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Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Zentrale, Podbielskiallee 69–71, 14195 Berlin, Tel: +49 30 187711-0

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Deciphering the Intercultural Style?

This article is a short abstract of a number of results of a larger work on the Bronze Age art of Southeast-Iran, which also deals with the problems of understanding the function, meaning and system of symbols of the "intercultural style"-vessels¹. Using the step by step analysis of the single picture elements, motives and motive-groups by the method of synchronic and diachronic comparisons, and the analysis of the context in which the single elements as well as motives and motive groups appear together², the following results can be presented here.

1. POSITION INSIDE NEAR EASTERN ART

1.1. The single picture elements used in the "intercultural style" go back partly to the Neolithic depictions of Greater Mesopotamia, Iran and Anatolia. The strongest similarities exist with those on Iranian pottery and stamp seals of the 5th/4th millennium BC. The bird of prey that always was interpreted as an eagle (motive: "eagle with two serpents") was not an eagle, but clearly a vulture³. For stylistic reasons the greater number of depicted figurines are to be dated to the time span between Jemdet Nasr and early Early Dynastic II.

1.2. The motives of the "intercultural style" are part of a fixed corpus of motives that is typical of the 4th and first half of the 3rd millennium BC in the art of Mesopotamia and Iran⁴. From this corpus of motives all except two have been found in the "intercultural style". The objects of art, which generally carry the most motives of this corpus, are seals and stone vessels. The strongest parallels to the "intercultural style" in the manner and way of representation and the combination of the motives is found on Early Dynastic I-II-seals from Ur and the Proto-Elamite art.

2. PRINCIPLES OF DEPICTION

It is necessary to appreciate the following principles that the artists used to depict one and the same motive in different ways in order to understand

the semantic meaning of the typical motives of the "intercultural style" and the objects adorned with them. These characteristic principles are:

2.1. Two forms of ligatures are used: a) Interacting groups of men and animals are contracted into mixed beings to depict an actual happening in abbreviated form. For instance, a man sitting on an eagle appears reduced to a bird-man (fig. 1)⁵. b) Such created mixed beings are used to express a previous event⁶. For instance: A bird-man striding in a cultic scene and carrying a twig expresses the fact that the man with twig was previously flying on an eagle (fig. 1, bottom row).

2.2. The use of substitutes is employed in three recognisable shapes to express the same motive: a) The biological species within a genus can vary, e. g. hoofed animals appear as goat, ram, zebu or stag, felines as lions, leopards or tigers. b) Lion and snake appear in identical contexts as substitutes⁷.

¹ Winkelmann: „Untersuchungen zur bronzzeitlichen Kunst des Südostiran“, still unpublished. A longer abstract appeared as Winkelmann 2003.

² I follow the method presented by Keel 1992.

³ "Bearded vulture" = "*Gypaetus barbatus*", the only vulture species with an appearance of an eagle.

⁴ 1. Eagle in a tree, 2. Eagle feeding his children with a snake, 3. Lions or snakes flanking a tree, 4. Feline or snake attacking a hoofed animal, 5. Battle between eagle/vulture and snakes, 6. Bird of prey attacking or landing on a hoofed animal, 7. Mountain with water streams, plant and hoofed animal(s), 8. Man attacked or killed by snakes or lions, 9. Man holding snakes or lions (master of animals), 10. Man walking into the mountains, 11. Man kneeling before a goddess, 12. Man sitting on an eagle, 13. Man bringing a vessel or twig, 14. Woman giving birth or pregnant woman, 15. Woman holding scorpions, 16. Woman giving a cup or twig, 17. Drinking woman, 18. Dance or combat before a temple, 19. Coitus.

All motives in their different appearances in different cultures and periods are presented in Winkelmann 2003.

⁵ Winkelmann 2003, fig. 10b-c.

⁶ Winkelmann 2003, fig. 10a.

⁷ A man is fighting with or killed by two snakes or two lions, the hoofed animal is attacked/killed by snakes or lions, an eagle eats a snake or a lion-baby etc.



Fig. 1. The principle of the use of ligatures: depictions of a bird-man coming from the ligature of man and eagle. Left: Early Dynastic Mesopotamian seals, middle: seal from Kerman-culture, intercultural style-vessel, right: intercultural style-objects. After: Amiet 1961, no. 1397, 1264, 1402; Porada 1962, fig. 14; Amiet 1986, fig. 73 c; Porada in: Curtis 1993, fig. 19; Majidzadeh 2003, fig. p. 172; Meissner 1920, fig. 72.

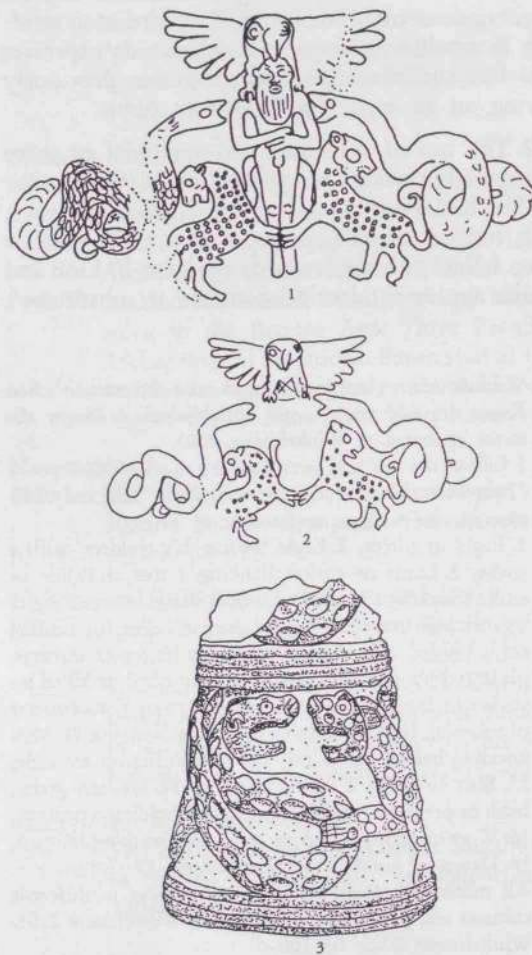


Fig. 2. Reduction of a complex motive from human into the acting animals only. After: Müller-Karpe 1993, no. 1581; Durrani 1964, pl. VI.1.

c) Gods or goddesses appear in the same connotation in anthropomorphic or zoomorphic manner as well as in form of inanimate objects (fig. 4 a)⁸.

2.3. The use of the principle of *pars pro toto*. An often very complex multi-figural motive can be reduced to several typical elements or to only one characteristic element of the concerning motive in two different ways: a) A composition containing originally anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures becomes reduced from humans to acting animals only (fig. 2), or b) a new motive is created being a part of a more complex original picture (fig. 4 a bottom row)⁹.

2.4. The use of one characteristic element of a motive to create an endless repeating pattern.

Bearing in mind these principles, which are also to be found in the Early Sumerian and Proto-Elamite art it, is possible to trace back the depictions on "intercultural style"-objects to their

⁸ These inanimate objects are: mountain, tree, vessel or star/rosette.

⁹ The motive: "woman with bulls holding water-streams" appears reduced from the "woman as bulls with water-streams" only. Compare fig. 4 bottom row and Majidzadeh 2003, figs. p. 49, 53.

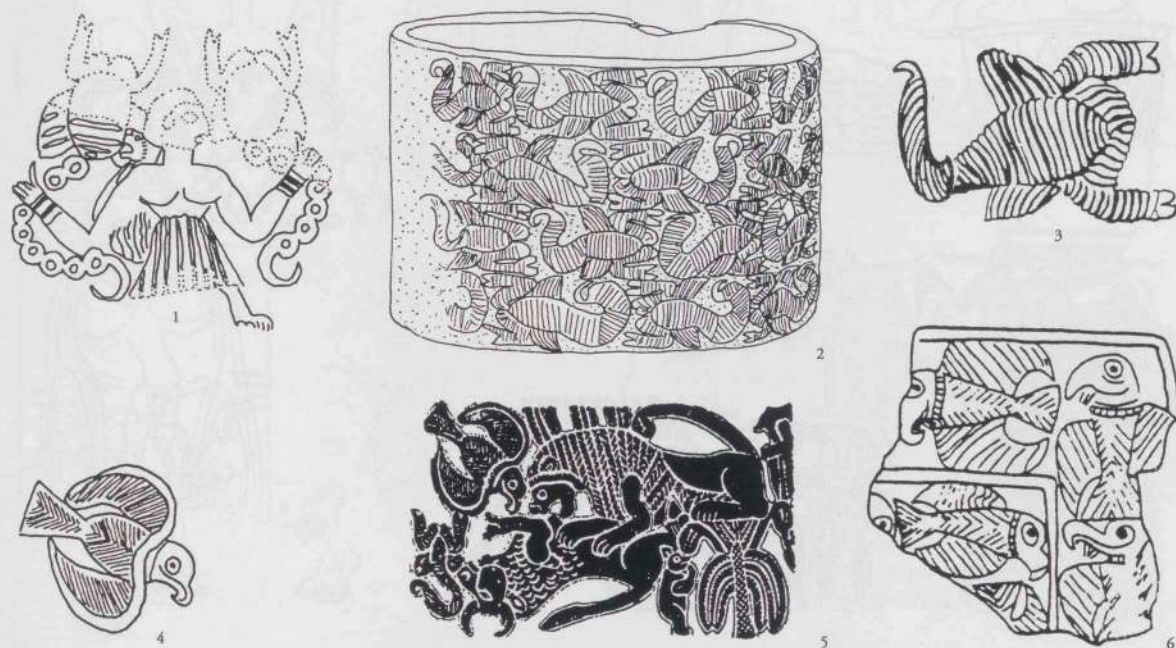


Fig. 3. Examples for the reduction of motives into repetitive patterns (scorpion, diving vulture). After: Christies 1997, no. 178; Durrani 1964, pl. II.5; Bothmer 1990, no. 25; Frankfort 1970, fig. 33; Zarins 1978, pl. 68.62.

original forms. Thus the motive of the “scorpion with fins” which is often used as repetitive pattern is a reduced form of the motive “woman holding two scorpions”, which appears normally in the context of a cultic scene (fig. 3 top), the “diving vulture” is part of the motive of “hoofed animal killed by a lion with diving bird of prey” (fig. 3 bottom), the “entwined serpents” are a version of the motive “man attacked by two snakes” and the “battle between feline and snake” comes from the complex picture of a “man attacked by snakes and protected by felines” reduced from the man into the acting animals only (fig. 2). Many other typical motives of the “intercultural style” repertoire are reduced forms of a very complex picture, too, e. g. of “the water spending mountain” whose basic form is a mountain with water-streams, and a plant and a hoofed animal (the latter a date palm and zebu in “intercultural style”). It can appear reduced to a mountain with water-streams, to a zebu on a mountain, a zebu with water-stream and plant, water-stream with plants only, or further reduced to water whirl, date palm, scales with zigzag lines, or scales alone (fig. 4 a. b). The motive of a “zebu with water-streams and plant” also appears at the first sight as the reduced form of another complex picture: “kneeling woman on two bulls holding water-streams with plants arising from the streams which flow over the bulls” (fig. 4 a)¹⁰. This is no contradiction, but really the key to decipher the mythological world of the 4th/3rd millennium BC-Iran and Mesopotamia, and an excellent example for the principle of using

substitutes for depicting a numinous higher force or god. On the one hand, we find a woman with zebus (hoofed animal) holding water-streams with arising plants, a woman who gives water, and in this way fertility, for the growth of plants, but, on the other hand, we find the same constellation in the “mountain with bull, water-stream and plants”. Here the mountain replaces the woman, or better, the woman is represented instead of the mountain, as anthropomorphic and female incarnation of the origin of water (fig. 4 a)¹¹. Thus we do not err in equating the “water-giving mountain” and the “water-giving woman” and we should include in the same semantic context a third form of a water-giving force, mainly appearing in the late Uruk-period glyptic, but also in Proto-Elamite art: a “vessel with water-streams”

¹⁰ Another appearance of this picture is a woman holding two goats (substitutes of zebu) with fishes as substitutes for waterstreams flowing out from her body (Wolley 1955, pl. 36). For the development of this motive see Winkelmann 2003, figs. 4b, 26b.

¹¹ The combination of the “woman with two zebus/goats” corresponds to the development of the appearance of the motive “mountain with plant and hoofed animal”: In the 4th millennium BC, the mountain with plant is mainly associated with one hoofed animal, but from at least since Proto-Elamite times onward the mountain is flanked by two animals as does the woman in the “intercultural style”-depictions, a process which is to be seen in the whole Early Dynastic-time in Elam and Southeast-Iran. See Winkelmann 2003, fig. 4a-b.

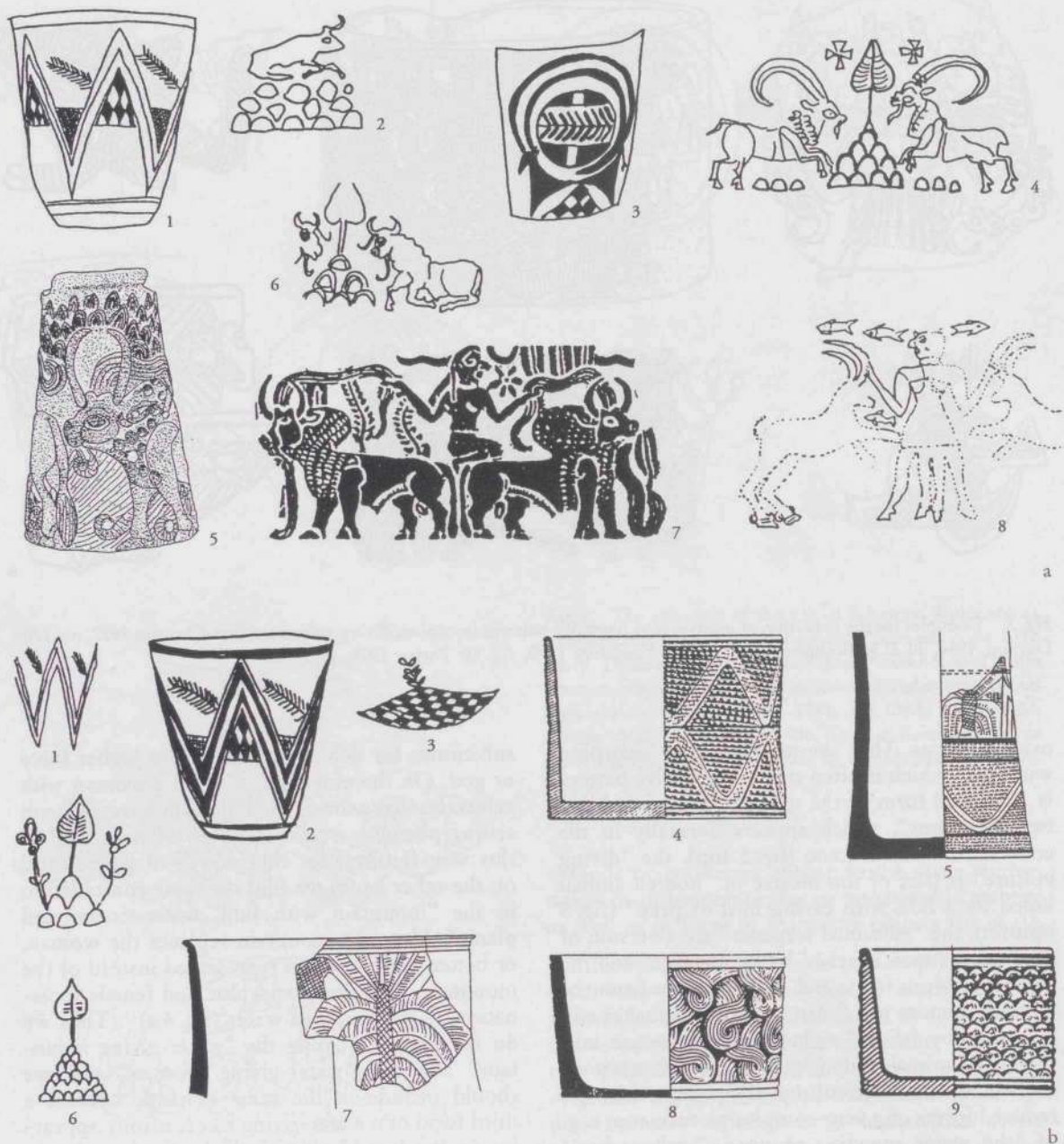


Fig. 4. Different "intercultural style"-motives as derivatives of the motive of the water-giving mountain with plant and hoofed animal. – a. Water-giving mountain with plant and hoofed animal and variations with anthropomorphic appearance. 1st row: Susa-pottery and seal 4th millenium BC., 2nd row: Proto-Elamite glyptic. Remaining illustrations: "intercultural style". After: Pottier 1912, pl. I.2, I.4; Amiet 1961, no. 312, pl. 38 bis, G, no. 537; Gluck/Gluck 1977, 29; Frankfort 1970, fig. 33; Woolley 1955, pl. 36. – b. Reductions into inanimate forms. After: Pottier 1912, pl. I.2; Miroschedji 1974, fig. 11; Zarins 1978, pl. 69. 39; Amiet 1961, no. 547, 542; Zarins 1978, pl. 69. 51; Kohl 1979, p. 12.

flowing down from it, or a mixed form of both: a female figurine with the vessel growing from her head, out of which water streams which the woman is holding (fig. 5). A specific appearance of such a motive in Proto-Elamite art is a "lioness with water streams" flowing down from her head and body (fig. 5 bottom row)¹². This same semantic content of the water-giving force for the mountain, the vessel, the lioness and the woman

is a very decisive evaluation for the interpretation of the "intercultural style"-vessels as a whole. We will come back to it later.

¹² 4th mill. BC: Amiet 1961, no. 117; Delougaz/Kantor 1996, pl. 153 A, 143. E, G. Protoelamite: Amiet 1961, no. 577, 580. Early Dynastic-Iran: Amiet 1986, fig. 71; Pottier 1912, fig. 117; Porada 1962, fig. 12.

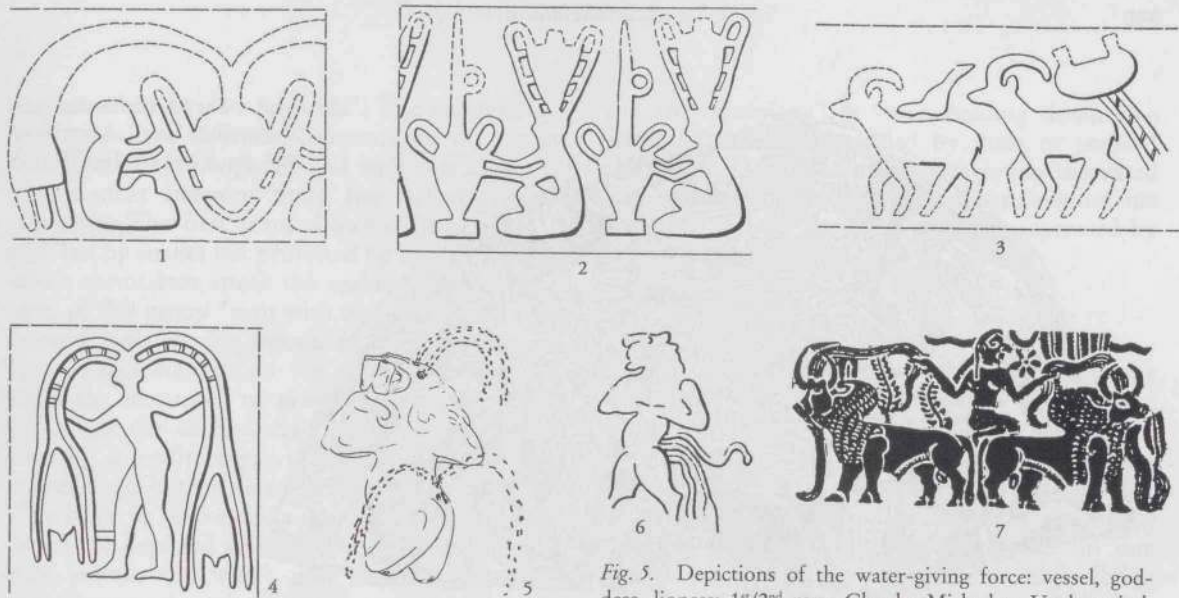


Fig. 5. Depictions of the water-giving force: vessel, goddess, lion: 1st/2nd row: Chogha Mish, late Uruk-period, 3rd row: Proto-Elamite art, intercultural style. After: Delougaz/Kantor 1996, pl. 147 G, H, pl. 143 G, pl. 153 A; Amiet 1961, no. 579, 580; Frankfort 1970, fig. 33).



Fig. 6. Different appearances of the motive of a raptor feeding its children with a snake/lion-baby in the top of a tree which is flanked by lions/snakes. 1st row: Luristan 4th mill. BC., late Uruk/Jemdet Nasr., left: "Berlin Beaker", Ur, SIS-seal ED I-II; middle: ED III-seal Mesopotamia; "intercultural style"-vessel, Akkadian seal, Bactrian seal, right: seal of Kerman-cultur, Bactrian seal. After: Rashad 1990, no. 339; Nagel 1966, fig. 6; Amiet 1961, no. 641; Connan/Deschesne 1996, fig. 129; Amiet 1961, no. 1268; Catalogue 1996, Shumei collection no. 3; Boehmer 1965, no. 701; Gluck 1988, no. 124; Brunswig/Parpola/Potts 1983, pl. I. 5.

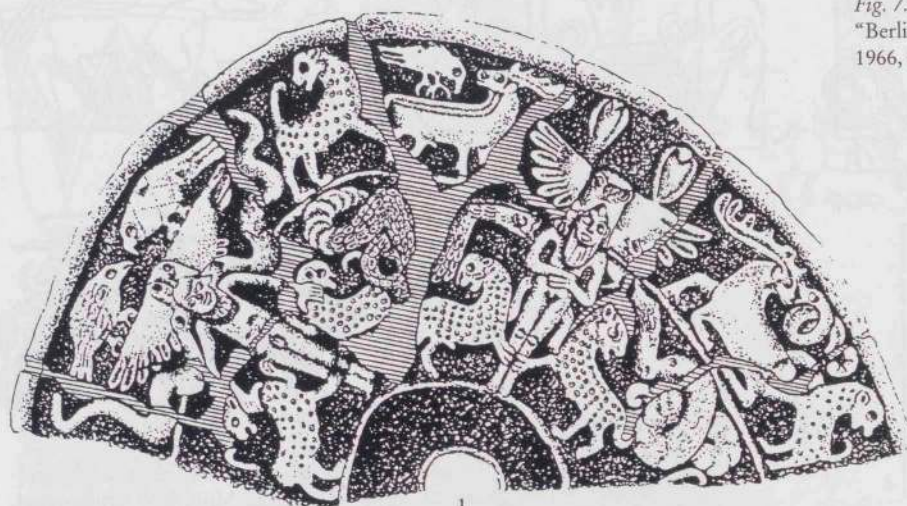
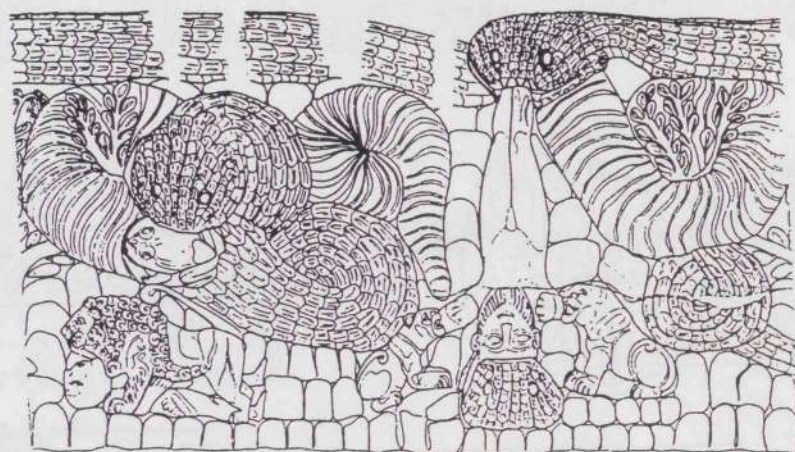


Fig. 7. The "Berlin beaker" and "Berlin snake basin". After: Nagel 1966, fig. 6 and pls. II-VIII, 1-3.



A second complex picture appearing in the art of 4th and 3rd millennium BC in different reduced versions is "the bird of prey in top of a tree feeding its children with a snake or lion-baby, while the tree is flanked by lions or snakes"¹³. Reduced versions of this multi-figural picture are the following motives: "Eagle in the tree", typical especially of the Early Dynastic Mesopotamia (fig. 6, 4. 9), "eagle with chicken", typical for Iran and Bactria (fig. 6, 1-2. 6), "eagle with snake in the beak" in Southeast Iran and Bactria (fig. 6, 5. 8), "eagle with lion-baby", depicted on an Akkadian seal (fig. 6, 9), and "snakes or lions flanking a tree or mountain with tree". Especially the latter, "lions on a tree", is a motive which is used continuously from late Uruk period onwards and is also to be seen on vessels produced in "intercultural style"¹⁴.

3. THE PROBLEM OF SEMANTIC CONNECTION

The questions now arising are: does any connection exist between all these different motives and their appearances and which semantic meaning and

world view are concealed in these depictions characterising the ancient art? The best evidence for a really existing connection between the discussed motives is provided by the "Berlin Beaker" and the "Berlin Snake Basin", which combine nearly all motives found on "intercultural style"-objects (fig. 7)¹⁵. The "Berlin Beaker" is adorned with two rows of motives. The upper register shows "the bird of prey with chicken", "the snake and feline attacking a stag (hoofed animal)", "the bird of prey landing on a stag", and the "bird of

¹³ Here the principle of substitution for lion and snake is clearly visible. One of the decisive key-examples for this substitution can be seen on an Akkadian seal showing lions flanking a tree, while an eagle is holding the lion-baby. The reduced version appears as lions flanking the tree only.

¹⁴ See Winkelmann 2003, figs. 11a-b, 12.

¹⁵ See Winkelmann 2003, figs. 16, 17, 23, 24, 26, 29, 31, 6b, 8a bottom. The "Berlin Beaker" and the "Berlin Snake Basin" were first published by Nagel 1966, 15, 26-41, pls. II-VIII, 1-3, IX.3, X, and figs. 1 and 6.

prey attacked by two serpents". The second register bears two different compositions of a man with two felines (leopards) and with two snakes¹⁶. The context between these five acting figures alternates: The first form shows a "man who is attacked by snakes but protected by two leopards", which themselves attack the snakes¹⁷. The second form of this group "man with two snakes and two leopards" shows the figures in another context: The "snakes start to eat the man while the man holds the leopards" to prevent an attack of the felines on the snakes. And he does not defend himself, it really appears he wishes to be devoured¹⁸. In both forms the same man is shown. That leads us to conclude that here two different events are depicted which are connected with the same person and which may also be related in some form to the other motives to be found here. Thus, there are strong reasons to believe that semantically all motives belong to one group. This is underlined by the facts that the man himself is shown in such a manner that he reaches into both registers, thus connecting them, and that the animals acting in the first register act in the second too. Some motives adorning this object are also to be found on the "Berlin Snake Basin" and connect both. This concerns the "man killed by snakes" (or "man killed by lions" as substitute) and the "passive man flanked by felines". These motives are combined with others known from the "intercultural style": the vessel adorned with scales (i. e. a vessel in the form of a "mountain"), the "mountain with plant (tree)", and "the man killing serpents arising from the mountain"¹⁹.

4. THE PROBLEM OF THE SEMANTIC MEANING – THE PROPOSED "DECIPHERING" OF THE "INTERCULTURAL STYLE"

We can group the motives of the "intercultural style" as well as of early ancient art into three thematic circles: a) The depiction of a cultic scene (ritual), b) the various appearances of a goddess, and c) an old myth which was transformed into a specific Mesopotamian form in the beginning 2nd millennium BC. All these three circles are strongly associated with one another.

The ritual

The substantial elements of the cultic scenes depicted in Mesopotamian art from Uruk period to Early Dynastic II and Iran from Uruk to "intercultural style" art are nearly identical. We find a "bull in a temple", "dance or competition of men" and "worshipping of a statue" before a temple, a "man leaving the place", a "man entering the place holding a twig or vessel" in his hand and, often, "(man) adorned with bird-elements" like feathers, wings or a raptor-mask, "public intercourse", a "pregnant woman" or "woman giving birth, hold-

ing two scorpions", a "man holding down two felines", and a "man killed by lions or snakes" (fig. 8 b)²⁰. Here, a lot of the previously discussed motives reoccur and it is reasonable to assume that the ritual reflects the myth which is expressed by the motives discussed.

The myth

The myth symbolised in my opinion by the depictions of the "intercultural style" is in written form first known from the beginning 2nd millennium BC onwards, and named "*Etana-myth*". Its earliest pictural representation was up to now dated to the Akkad period²¹. The main reasons for this late dating are three: 1. The focus on one motive only- the man sitting on an eagle flying into heaven, which often appears on Akkadian seals, thus neglecting all the other motives that can be related to this myth. 2. It was overlooked that the man sitting on an eagle and the ligature of both figurines, the bird-man, already appear in Early Dynastic I-times at the latest²². 3. Some parts of the written texts so far exist only as fragments and did not seem to make any sense. But when one correlates these fragments with the motives illustrated together with those that we can with certainty associate with the myth, it seems possible to reconstruct the myth and the ritual related with it. In the following, I summarise the main events of this myth²³ and add in brackets the specific form in which this event is presented on "intercultural style" objects (fig. 8 a).

Eagle and snake live together in a tree in the mountains. The eagle lives on the top, the snake

¹⁶ Winkelmann 2003, fig. 2a-b.

¹⁷ Taking away the man results in some famous motives of the "intercultural style"-repertoire: the "struggle between feline and snake", "struggle between eagle and serpents" and "struggle between eagle, felines and snakes". The group of "man with two felines and two attacking snakes" also appears in reduced form as "snakes attacking the man" and "man holding down felines" only, see Winkelmann 2003, fig. 8b.

¹⁸ This man being attacked by snakes and not defending himself, reoccurs as man with his hands held in front of his stomach in the "intercultural style" as well as in the Early Sumerian, the Proto-Elamite and Southeast Iranian art (see Winkelmann 2003, figs. 7c, 8a, 19, 3rd row). He also occurs in another reduced form as "man holding down felines without the snakes", see Winkelmann 2003, fig. 8a.

¹⁹ Winkelmann 2003, fig. 1a-b.

²⁰ See Winkelmann 2003, figs. 21, 22, 33. Best representations on "intercultural style"-vessels: Durrani 1964, Tf. II.6 and Meissner 1920, fig. 72.

²¹ See Bernbeck 1996.

²² Winkelmann 2003, figs. 10c and 10 a-b too, bearing in mind the principle of the use of ligatures to depict a previous event = principle 2.1, above.

²³ Following the summary of Kinnier-Wilson 1985.



in the roots. Both agree to live together in partnership and to care for their children (motives: "mountain with tree with snakes/lions", "bird of prey in a tree"). In reality the snake hunts and the eagle acts as carrion-eater of the food brought by the snake. One day, when the snake was absent, the eagle, which is a vulture in "intercultural style",

decides to break the agreement and feed its own children with the children of the snake (motives: "bird of prey with chickens", "bird with snake in the beak, bird with lion-baby", "lions flanking the tree")²⁴. When the snake comes back, she missed

²⁴ See Winkelmann 2003, figs. 12 and 11 a.



b

Fig. 8. Depictions of "intercultural style" connected with the basic myth (fig. 8 a) and ritual (fig. 8 b). b. bottom row: SIS-seal from Ur with comparable depiction. Fig. 8 a after: Majidzadeh 2003, 41; Gluck 1977, p. 29; Frankfort 1970, fig. 33, RLA I, pl. 6; Muscarella 1993, fig. 7 b; Frankfort 1970, fig. 33; Majidzadeh 2003, p. 66; Catalogue Boisgirard 19.10.2003, no. 94; Nagel 1968, pl. XXII. 3; Majidzadeh 2003, p. 15, 98. – Fig. 8 b after: Durrani 1964, pl. II.6; Meissner 1920, fig. 72; Porada in: Curtis 1993, fig. 19; Zarins 1978, pl. 70. 47, 48; Legrain 1936, no. 368.

her children and complains to the god about the eagle, the murderer. The god, who is Shamash in the 2nd millennium BC version, recommends the snake to kill a wild bull and to hide itself in its stomach. The snake attacks a bull and kills it (motive: "snake attacking a hoofed animal")²⁵. The animals of the forest come to eat. The eagle comes, too, and dives, despite the warning of its cleverest child (motives: "diving eagle", "dead lying bull")²⁶. When the eagle reaches the stomach of the bull, the snake(s) come(s) out and break(s) the wings of the eagle, and put(s) him into a pit in the mountains where he is sitting and waiting for help (motive: "battle between eagle/vulture and snakes")²⁷.

Change of scene: There is a king named Etana whose wife is childless. Every day he prayed to the highest god to give him and his wife a son. One day, the god told him: Follow the road, go into the mountains, search for the pit in which an eagle is sitting. He will show you the plant of birth. Etana goes and finds the eagle (motive: "man going into the mountain")²⁸. He feeds him and

²⁵ See Winkelmann 2003, fig. 13.

²⁶ See Winkelmann 2003, fig. 14.

²⁷ See Winkelmann 2003, fig. 15.

²⁸ See Winkelmann 2003, fig. 19. Sometime shown only as foot or feet, often between triangles as symbol of a mountain, as a reduced form of the man, too.



Fig. 9. Man or bird man asking the goddess: Lapislazuli-discs from Jiroft and seal from Kerman-culture. After: Majidzadeh 2003, p. 170; Catalogue Boisgirard 19.10.2003, no. 94; Majidzadeh 2003, p. 172, Porada 1962, fig. 14.

frees him from the pit and makes new wings for him. Here we should add the motive of the “snake-holder”: a “man fighting with two snakes” and winning²⁹. Etana has to win over the snakes which do not want the eagle to be freed. This has a clear background: When eagle and snake made their pact they agreed: “If one of us breaks the pact, the other must ensure the punishment by Shamash. If he does not do this, the sacrilege will come over him as if he had committed the sacrilege himself.”³⁰ When the eagle is strong enough, he flies with Etana into heaven to look for the plant of birth (motive: “bird-man” as ligature of the “man sitting on an eagle”)³¹. They try three times to obtain the plant, but only at the fourth time do they get it from Shamash with the help of a goddess associated with felines which was Ishtar in the Mesopotamian version (motives: “man kneeling before a goddess asking for a vessel/twig”, “goddess giving twig/vessel”, “man or bird-man bearing a

twig/vessel”)³². Here, the written sources end. But we know from the Mesopotamian kings-list that Etana had a son, Balih. Thus we can assume that he returned successfully and his wife was able to bear him the wanted son (motives: “pregnant woman”, “woman giving birth”).

What remains is to integrate the other motives, which always appear together with those discussed above. I try to use the fragments whose contents were up to now not clear. They refer to three

²⁹ This motive is also known as “master of animals” (ibid., fig. 18, 29) and as “struggle between snake and feline” as reduced form of the “man protected by leopards against the serpents”. See Winkelmann 2003, fig. 8b.

³⁰ Freydank 1971, 5.

³¹ See Winkelmann 2003, fig. 10a bottom left, fig. 18, 2nd row left.

³² Winkelmann 2003, fig. 9a, 3rd row left, fig. 19, 2nd row, fig. 22.

dreams of Etana and his wife, which possibly are related to the other typical motives of the art of the 4th and early 3rd millennium BC: The first fragment is Etana's second dream about which he spoke to the eagle: "Etana spoke unto him spoke unto the eagle, saying: My friend I saw a second dream... then... evil snakes they were... they bowed over me... like slaves bowed down before me... The eagle calmed Etana and advised him to accept the dream the god sent him: My friend, this dream is favourable"³³. That fragment tells us two facts: 1. The journey goes well, 2. Etana will be confronted by terrible snakes, which (later) entwine him. The second fragment is the lamentation of Kish: "Etana spoke unto him and said unto the eagle: My friend, I saw a third dream. The city of Kish wept. In the midst... I sang. O Kish, giver of life... Etana."³⁴ This fragment tells of a tragic loss, which took place in Kish, making the inhabitants lament. But this loss did not concern Etana directly because he is moaning together with the others. The third fragment is the dream of Etana's wife, a dream of an impending tragedy: "His wife spoke unto him, and said to Etana:... (the dream god) has sent me a dream, saying: Like Etana... somebody will die the death of... Like you he will die... Etana, the king... His ghost body... And his... body will not be buried."³⁵ This fragment tells us firstly that somebody, who is not Etana, but instead of him, will die or has to die and secondly, that the body of this man will not be buried in the earth, because his body will disappear.

How can this information be related to the motives discussed? The winning of the plant of birth and the birth of the son are connected with the appearance of snakes entwining Etana. It seems that this appearance of coiled snakes is clearly shown in the motive "man killed by snakes", a motive which is wide-spread in the 4th and beginning of the 3rd millennium BC. We should see here the sacrifice of Etana who is devoured by the snakes as the prize for the favourable end of his journey³⁶. The lamentation over the death of Etana may be reflected in the lamentation of Kish. But this fragment informs us that Etana was not killed, since he was lamenting with the others. The key to understand this contradiction may be found in the dream of Etana's wife: another person should die instead of Etana, somebody who symbolises him, who is his substitute, somebody whose body will not be buried. The latter is obvious: when he is killed and devoured by snakes nothing is left to be buried.

Going back to the cultic scenes of the 4th and beginning 3rd millennium BC, including the scenes depicted on "intercultural style" objects, it seems that we can now reconstruct the ritual reflecting this myth in the following way: The inhabitants pray for fertility before a statue of a god, like Etana who

prayed for a son. The men of the city fight with one another and the winner goes into the mountains like Etana, to win the plant of birth. When he comes back, he brings a twig, or sometimes, also a vessel bearing the drink of fertility. He is adorned with elements of a bird, symbolising the mythological flight to heaven. After his return, public intercourse takes place, symbolising the begetting of Etana's son (and, in my eyes, also the predecessor of the Holy Marriage), and a pregnant woman symbolises the birth of a son. After these acts the man will be killed, not by snakes, but by lions, as we see on nearly all complex cultic scenes. Here it is evident that lions and snakes act as substitutes.

And it is now possible to differentiate between two semantic meanings which are connected to both. The killing of a man by snakes is a rendering of the mythological death of Etana. The killing by lions is the ritual transposition within actual cult events. In the same way, we can differentiate between the walking man adorned with bird-elements, and the walking bird-man with twig or vessel: The one is the participant of a ritual, the other a mythological figure, the mythological man who flew to heaven and returned with the plant. We thus can solve the often discussed problem whether the early art represents myths or rituals. It portrays both: the myth and the rite.

The origin of the myth

But is it really the Etana-myth we are dealing with here? The Etana-myth is written down in the early 2nd millennium BC, while the Sumerian Etana, if he really did exist, lived in the first half of the 3rd millennium BC; the motives depicting this myth, however, appear long before this time. And we have no indications whatever of sacrifices of men in written sources. Therefore it seems that here a far older myth is depicted which already moulds the spiritual world of the inhabitants in the large regions of Mesopotamia and Iran in the 4th millennium BC before the onset of writing. And it seems that this old myth was linked to the name of Etana during the 3rd millennium and was converted into the present known form of the Etana-myth at the latest at the beginning 2nd millennium BC, in which it has survived until today. This assumption appears to be confirmed if one considers the depictions of the cultic scenes during the 3rd millennium BC. Some decisive

³³ After Kinnier-Wilson 1985, 67, Middle Assyrian version, lines 17-21.

³⁴ Kinnier-Wilson 1985, 109, Late Assyrian version, pl. IV A.

³⁵ Kinnier-Wilson 1985, 125, pl. VA.

³⁶ Motive "man attacked/killed/eaten by snake(s) or lions", see Winkelmann 2003, fig. 7c, for "intercultural style", and figs. 1-3, 7a-b generally.

motives, like the "man killed by lions or snakes" as well as the "pregnant woman" or the "woman giving birth" or the "public coitus", come to an end with Early Dynastic II times. And, it is also precisely at this time that great changes in the social structure of Mesopotamia appear which also involve alterations of rituals, laws, the position of women, the form of ruler ship, and many other aspects. Thus, the depictions discussed, including those of the "intercultural style", point to another, a different and older social structure and a ritual world, which existed before the Early Dynastic II-times³⁷.

The goddess

A last remark concerns the god to whom the man, who later carries the name of Etana, flies, in order to make my interpretation of the "intercultural style"-vessels as a whole more understandable. In the later Mesopotamian version, Etana flies to Shamash. However, the analysis of the depictions shown on "intercultural style"-objects as well as on other Iranian objects from Susa and Southeast-Iran verifies that no male, but always a female goddess is represented (fig. 9)³⁸. And there exists a seal from the Kerman area that shows us the portrayal of an entreating man kneeling before a goddess with a vessel in her hands together with the Etana-motive (fig. 9 bottom row)³⁹. Thus, we have reason to assume that originally the mythological man was flying to a goddess. This goddess, from whom the man is begging a twig or vessel, is flanked by or associated with snakes, a raptor, a tree or plant, and a mountain symbol, and represents in this way the female and human personification of the "mountain with tree, snake and water-streams", confirmed by the fact that this goddess is exhibited in the form of a "woman holding water-streams", too.

THE MEANING OF "INTERCULTURAL STYLE"-VESSELS

Let us remember the fact, discussed at the beginning, that the mountain, the goddess and the vessels possess the same semantic meaning as water- and fertility-giving forces: It seems that we can now link the "intercultural style"-vessels (which are completely ornamented with motives of the later Etana-myth) with this water-giving goddess: We can regard these vessels as an an-iconic representation of the goddess and as symbols of this fertility-giving force which plays a decisive role in the myth and rituals of the early Iranian and Mesopotamian society.

³⁷ Concerning this problem see Winkelmann 2003.

³⁸ Porada 1962, figs. 12, 13; Amiet 1986, fig. 71, 132.12; Wolley 1955, pl. 36; Porada 1993, fig. 19.

³⁹ Porada 1993, fig. 19; Amiet 1986, fig. 71; Porada 1962, fig. 13.

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