

Persian translation of this paper entitled:

بن‌مایه‌های کهن اسطوره ضحاک در ایران
براساس نقوش روی مهر دوره عیلامی (هزاره سوم قبل از میلاد)
is also published in this issue of journal.

Configuring the Roots of Zahak Myth according to the Elamites' Cylinder Seals (3rd Millennium B.C.)

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Abstract

What is different about Iranian art is the use of hybrid motifs which is a characteristic of the Iranian art. The hybrid forms show the impact of the mythological beliefs. These beliefs also have changed a lot so it is hard to recognize the exact meaning of these motifs. Shahnama is the source of great myths in Iran and is the main source for tracing myths between the Islamic periods and the mythological beliefs before Islam. This research is based on studying the snake-man which is known as Zahak in Shahnama. The research focuses on three cylinder seals (the impressions found) which show the snake-man. These cylinder seals were found in Susa, Tepe Yahya and Tepe Shahdad. All three date back to the third millennium B.C. The snake-man which has two snake or dragons on the shoulders was well-known in Iran and Mesopotamia. The god of the dead is basically showed by this motif in Mesopotamia. Especially, Ningišzida is a Mesopotamian deity of the underworld. His name in Sumerian is translated as "the lord of the good tree". The city of Lagash had a temple dedicated to Ningišzida, and Gudea, patesi of Lagash in the 21st century BC, was one of his devotees. Moreover, what is so different about the Susa seal is the scene which shows a man flying to the sky. This reminds the myth of Etana in Mesopotamia. The results of this study show that a of myth was known in Iran during the 3rd millennium which may reflect some influences of Etana myth and the myths related to the snake-man known as Zahak in Shahnama. Although there is not much known about the Elamites' gods, Inshūshinak, the great Elamite god, may be more connected to this motif than other deities in Iran because he is also best known for his reliance to the dead bodies and underworld. What is so interesting is that the most outstanding characteristic of Zahak is connected to his power of death through killing the young men in his myth. So the study believes that the man with snakes on his shoulders has been the god of underworld and death in the history.

Keywords

Snake-man, Zahak, Shahnama, Mesopotamia, Etana.

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Introduction

The story of Zahak in Shahnama is one of the best and most fearsome epics in Iran. Several examples of Zahak story can be found in ancient Iranian texts, including Pahlavi inscriptions which have remained from 3rd century A.H. (Rouhani&Ghanbari, 2012:148). Mēnog- ī -Kherad is one of these texts. Beside Pahlavi inscriptions, several examples of Zahak story are also mentioned in Avesta and Rigveda with clear indications of him as Three-headed devil with three jaws and six eyes. Azidahāk, the horrible demon of the myths and Avesta, converts to Zahak – the dragonfly- in Shahnama which preserves his evil desires (Ibid: 149). The purpose of this study is to compare the oldest image of Zahak preserved on a cylinder seal found in Susa with two similar seal impressions found in south-east of Iran, at Tepe Yahya and Tepe-Shahdad. The research aims to recognize the basic form of Zahak story from the massive myths and stories.

Research Methodology

This research is based on a comparative study. The content analysis is a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Documentary information from various resources like books, catalogs and even digital resources are used to prepare the data of the research.

Initially, a clear description of the images is made at the first step. In the second step, a comparative comparison is made between the Data of the research (Images of Zahak) and similar examples in Mesopotamia. The most important part of the article is devoted to the analysis of these images by referring to the ancient texts like Avesta, Pahlavi literature and also ancient myths

Literary review

The story of Zahak has been impressively studied due to its importance in Shahnama.

Due to the historical backgrounds of Shahnama and its reliance on Pahlavi literature, many scholars have explored this story. More than 20 different articles

have studied the story of Zahak based on its' story, linguistic conflicts, literary and linguistic systems of the text in the story or even the comparison of the story with similar myths in foreign pieces of literatures.

Some of the researches that have been used as a source of information in this article are:

- Mozafari, Ali, Zarei, Aliasghar (2014), Zahak and Mesopotamia, mytho- mystic literature. Persian Language and literature Journal, (33): 87-115.

- Rouhani, M. & Ghanbari Kenari, F. (2012).The comparison of Zahak characteristics in Shahnama, Mēnog ī kherad and Pahlavi Rivayat from the Aspect of mythical heroic function, journal of the Iranian studies.

-Mehrfarin, R. Tavousi, M. Anthropology of Zahak myth, mytho- mystic literature, Quarterly Journal (Persian Language and literature Journal).

The present research tries to analyze and re-examine the characteristic features of Zahak based on remaining images of him on cylinder seals.

Scope

The main idea of this study is to figure out the identity of the snake-man's Image on the cylinder seals in Iran. The purpose of the research is to clarify the relations of these images with the character of Zahak in Persian mythology.

Introducing the Seals

The main issue in this project is to discuss the image of snake-man on cylinder seals. These seals come from southeast and south of Iran, Tepe Yahya, Tepe Shahdad and Susa. Edith Porada discovered these seals. She introduced a new artwork in making cylinder seals in the southeast of Iran around the second half of the third millennium B.C. Obviously these seals could be dated back to 2400-2200 B.C and contemporary with the Akkadian period in Mesopotamia (Scalone, 2008:364).

All three seals represent a snake-man who has two snakes emerged from his shoulder (Fig. 1&2) or emounted from his underarms (Fig. 1). The seal in

Fig. 1 which is found in Susa is the principal piece in this study. The principal figure on the seal is a snake-man with two snakes emerging from his shoulders and probably wearing a bull's head as a hat. Edith Porada believes that she may be a snake goddess sitting on the throne (Porada, 1965: 45).

Another figure is kneeling in front of him raising his hand toward the goddess respectfully. Two birds are represented on both sides of this scene and on the upside right corner of the seal the same kneeling figure is shown holding a snake in his hand.

At the top of the figure, an eagle is drawn which is probably taking a man to the sky. A kind of musical instruments is shown at the middle of the scene. Two wavy lines or perhaps snakes without heads separate a combination of unspecified images like a female torso which had no hands and scattered pieces of a bull body from the central scene.

Fig. 2 represents another seal which was first published by Pierre Amiet. The same snake-man is sitting on a throne, (Pittman, 2008:57-62). The eagle is in front of him. The scene is completed by a group of figures, holding snakes or musical instruments. Some of the figures hold some kinds of plant branches. The seal belongs to a personal collection that is exhibited at Metropolitan Museum of Arts. Edith Porada studied this seal and dated it to the middle of 3rd millennium B.C. According to her idea the seal belongs to ancient Persia based on iconographical studies. The seal is made from hard stone and represents two heroes kneeling in front of a central circle surrounding another figure. The figure can be identified as the sun god. Due to its position at the central point of the seal he wears a horned hat. He holds a plant branch and sits on the back of a winged lion.

The Susa seal has the complete scene among the three seals introduced here. In order to understand the full meaning of the scenes and the role of snake-man, a complete analysis of the figures should be done.

The Analysis of Patterns on the Seals

A complete anthology of images used on these three

cylinder seals is presented in table 1. These images include: the snake-man, eagle, kneeling figure, the figure holding snakes, female figure holding plants, harp, snake, the figure flying on the back of an eagle, the female torso, winged lion, the pieces of a bull's body and unknown geometric images. The assembled story of the seal images could be obtained through the detailed study of the principal images of the snake-man and eagle. The study is focused on snake-man, harp and snakes

Harp & the bull corps

Using the image of a harp is one the most important reasons for the religious and mythological theme of these stamps. All the religious ceremonies in Elam included music. Kûtik Inshûshinak¹ pays the musicians to play in front of the main entrance of the temple early in the morning and at nights. In various occasions, scarifications also were included in the ceremony. The animals that were sacrificed were bull, ibexes, goat etc (Koning, 1923: 14).

Two ceremonial feasts were held in Elam: The guardian goddess of the capital who probably was Pinîkir or kirisha. The feasts were set up at the beginning of autumn, in which the ibexes were sacrificed for the goddess and in her gardens (Hinz, 1972: 57). The other special feast was for the god named Shimût². This annual ceremony was supposedly held in the middle of May and a bull sacrificed for the god.

Shimût was the 1st god named in Hittite treaty of alliance after Inshûshinak. And this shows the importance of his supreme place to the Elamites. He was regarded as a sign of power between gods and was the god of all Elamites (Koning, 1923:56)

According to the mentioned details, the religious ceremonies in Elam have been accompanied by music and scarifications, especially the bulls and ibexes. So, based on the images of the bull body and harp on the seal, they confidently represent the mythological and religious theme.

Eagle

The eagle is represented on the seal in two ways:

Sitting in front of snake-man and flying to the sky while holding a man on his back. An interpretation of this scene can be suggested based on Etana's myth.

Besides the stories of god's traveling to the underground world, there are stories about the ones flying to the sky. Whose main ones are Adapa, the first wise man of seven gods and Etana, the legendary shepherd, king of Kish, after the Flood. The tale begins as a fable. The snake and the eagle lived peaceably together in a tree, until one day when the eagle eats the serpent's children. The crying serpent went to šamaš³ (Utu) who suggested him a course to actions. Concealed in the belly of a bull, the snake lays in wait for the eagle to come. He then wrought a terrible revenge, catching the bird, breaking his heel, plucking him and hurling him into the deep pit.

Etana meanwhile had his own problems being childless, he was in search of the plant of birth (a fertility drug) which grew only in the heavens. Šamaš counseled him to rescue and be friend the eagle and to make use of him in flight (Black & Green, 2004:78)

Etana followed this advice and the eagle carried him on his back, soaring the skies. As the earth began to disappear, Etana lost his nerve, on this cliffhanger the extant text becomes fragmentary. We may assume, perhaps, Etana was rescued and probably that he acquired the fertility plant (Black & Green, 2004:78) cylinder seals of the Akkadian period commonly depict scenes of a man flying on the back of an eagle, which may be interpreted as representations of Etana's journey (Ibid: 78). Porada believes that the torso without hands which is represented on the bench may refer to Šamaš who counseled the snake to lay in the belly of a deal bull (Porada, 1965: 45). In the myth of Etana, Šamaš guards the covenant between the eagle and the snake. He is also the personal god of Etana.

Snake- man

The combined forms of a snake with the human

body which was called the snake- man, was ordinary used in both Iran and Mesopotamia. In both region it represents different concepts.

● Mesopotamia

Representations of snakes are naturally frequent in iconography from prehistoric periods onwards, but it is not always easy to decide whether or not they carry any religious value. They have seen associated with both gods and goddesses. The snake appears on kudurrus and by the inscription on one, symbolizing the minister of the god Ištran⁴. Snakes continued to be portrayed in religious and secular art in later periods. The figure of the man with snakes on his shoulders is well known in Mesopotamia Ningišzida was an underworld deity, son of the god Ninazu⁵. His name may etymologically mean "lord of the good tree". In the Sumerian poem," the death of Gilgamesh", Gilgamesh meets Ningišzida and Dumuzi in the underworld. The animal symbol for Ningišzida was Bešmu⁶. Babylonian incantations name Ningišzida as a guardian over demons who live in the underworld. The god's name is also mentioned in laments over the death of Dumuzi (Black & Green, 2004: 194).

Gudea the Sumerian ruler of Lagaš regarded Ningišzida as a personal protective deity. Sumerians and Akkadians have expressed the origins of mankind in various ways. According to their beliefs, each human being relied on a special god and called himself as the son of god. While Gudea⁷ rebuilt the temple of Anuna⁸, he holds the hand of his protective deity Ningišzida while the feast, (Black&Green, 2004:192,193). This religious scene was repeatedly carved on cylinder seals and reliefs (Majidzadeh, 2000: 182). In the near eastern collection of Berlin museum a relief belonging to Gudea is preserved which was first reconstructed by Meyer⁹ (Oppenheim, 1972: 34). But Moortgate believes that these pieces belong to two memorial stones. The carved scene can easily be reconstructed according to another cylinder seal preserved in the Louvre Museum

(Gwendolyn, 1991: 108). This image represents Ningišzida.

In this scene Gudea is shown without any hats or coverings for his head. He holds a branch of a palm tree. Meanwhile he is introduced by Ningišzida to another god whose image is severely damaged. With regards to the waters flowing from his shoulders, he is likely to be Enki (Fig. 5). Another example is a personal cylinder seal of Gudea himself. On this seal Gudea is again introduced to Enki with the help of Ningišzida. Another seal in this collection belongs to Ibi- sin the god of Tišpak¹⁰, who was also worshiped in Ešnunna¹¹. He is also represented with two snakes on his shoulders, while this kind of deity represents Ningišzida in south of Mesopotamia.

Ningišzida is the symbol of immortality in the underworld and this is the reason for showing two snakes in his images. The snake always was considered as the soul of the earth and always appeared as the symbol of this god (Burney, 1934: 36)

● Snake and snake-man in Iran

The religion of the Elamites had a certain kind of individuality. A part of this individuality was a special kind of unconventional respect for eternal femininity and worship of snakes. Snake was an important symbol in Elam. The image of snake was used on the jars or the coverings of the dishes, as a sign of protection against the devil, (Hinz, 1992: 48- 47).

The snake was also the symbol of fertility, love and life. In other places it was the sign of the eternal life. As the only symbol of universal fertility, it had the essences of femininity, unity and temperament in order to make the world spiritually eternal (Pelasaëidi, 2002: 547).

According to researches, the center for worshipping the snake was the Dez city which was called Nirah (Mehrafarin, 1996: 77).

Elamite artists in Susa began to make artifacts symbolizing the snake. In other words, the snake was also worshiped in Susa. That is why the temple of Inšhûshinak¹² was built in Susa. His temple was decorated with two snakes (Pelasaëidi, 2002: 544).

Among all the gods Inšhûshinak had the deepest influence on Elamites.

Inšhûshinak had been well described in Assyrian texts:” he is the mysterious god, living in an unknown place, where no one can understand his divine existence. He is the ruler of the dead’s world. Išnikarab¹³ is his closest partner in the other world, the world in which everything is judged.

In the early Babylonian period, Inšhûshinak gradually replaced Nergal, the Sumerian god of the underworld, and sat himself as the ruler of the underworld in Elam (Hinz, 1992:52- 53).

Atahamti Inšhûshinak was the last king of Elam dynasty, he believed in Inšhûshinak and named him as “the grave god” on the stele found in Susa (Koning, 1965: 72, 86). This name was used for Inšhûshinak as the first and last time on this stele (Saraf, 2008:77).

On another clay tablet which was found from a grave in Susa (from the same period) it is mentioned that Išnikarab receives the dead’s with the help of the goddess Lāgāmal. In another line on this tablet, it is mentioned that Išnikarab and Lāgāmal, both guide the dead to Inšhûshinak throne (Hinz, 1992: 39).

At least during this era, Inšhûshinak was the god of the dead world, the same role as the Sumerian god, Nergal. The people and the kings of Elamites worship Inšhûshinak from the early periods of Elamite era to the ends of the Elamites. Inšhûshinak was the god of Susa, god of the dead and god of the oath. So that the Elamites swore in front of the judge in his name and Išnikarab (Saraf, 2008: 70- 71)

In the later millenniums, the most resembled creature to snake- man is known as Zahak. Tree-headed, tree jaws, six eyes serpent who would destroy everything on earth.

Theoretical basics

● Zahak name

In Pahlavi manuscripts, historical documents and also in Avesta, “Zahāk” or “dahāk” or “the dragon” is mentioned (Amoozegar, 2007: 56).

“Ažidahāk” or “aži dahāka” is made of “aži” which

means “dragon or serpent” and “dahāka” which is a special name. Snake and its spines are evil creatures and Avesta mentioned it.

Dahāka means devil creature. Zahak is also an Arabic translation of “Deh Ak” or “AK” which means “sins”. The name obviously represents his ten sins (Sedighian, 1996: 128).

Today the world Zahak is originally derived from the Sanskrit word “dasā” which means devil, wild and sinful (Pourdavoud, 2015: 5112, Lorson et.al 1974: 196).

In Yasna, section 9, in the story of hūm, it is Feyredon with his divine radiance of kings who defeated dahāk. In some hymns of the Yashts, a simple form of the story of Zahak is recognized. In hymns, Zahak is mentioned as “Aži Dahāk” or “Aži”.

Zahak is also known as “Bivar asp” in most of historical documents and even in Shāhnāma and Mēnog-i- Kherad (Rouhani & Qanbari, 2012: 150) Bivar in Pahlavi and Dari means ten thousands, and Bivarasp means he who owns ten thousands of horses (Razi, 2002: 455). It is mentioned in Aban Yasht that Zahak sacrificed one hundred horses and one thousand cows and one thousand ibexes for Anahita. So he is named as Bivar asp (Table 1).

Etymology of Zahak

Aži Dahāk is an evil figure in Persian literature, a demon (div) and son of Angra Mainyu, who has three heads, six eyes and three jaws. He is the most

significant of the aži's, full of the desire for burning. In Avesta he is a serpent or dragon who wants to kill all the humans and destroy everything on earth (Bahar, 1996: 190). This shows a complete picture of Zahak.

Avesta

In Avesta Zahak is the most powerful lie or sin that was created against the whole creatures by angra mainyu, (Bahar, 1996: 192). In Avesta he is not the king or the successor or of Jamshid, but the devil who devastates the true creatures, and the one who competes with Azar (Jamshid's son) over the reign, after the Farr departed Jamshid (Zamyad Yasht, verse 7: 493). He is described as the dragon with three jaws, three heads, six eyes, a thousand thriller the devil created to destroy the world , (Hum Yasht: 8, Bahram Yasht, verse 4:40, Zamyad Yasht verse: 137). It is also mentioned in Ram Yasht that he desires to destroy the world in Kvirinta (Ram Yasht, verse 5: 19- 21).

This Avestan dragon is able to sacrifice for gods, Prey them and asks them to win the victory in battle (Bahar, 1996:191). Zahak is first mentioned in Aban Yasht. There, he is sited on the throne, like a king, asking victory from Ardwi Sûrâ Anâhitâ, the goddess of waters (Aban Yasht, verse 8:29-31), although the Goddess did not benefits his wills, Zahak finally attaches Iran. Then Ardwi Sûrâ Anâhitâ helps feyredoon to defeat the dragon of anger and lie (Yasht 5, verse 33-35).

Pahlavi Literature

In Pahlavi literature Zahak is an- Arab man who fought Iran, defeated Jamshid (Jam ī xšēd) and gained kingly rule. After one thousand years, Feyredoon chained Dahāk up and imprisoned him on mount Donyavand (Damavand). At the end of the world, Zahak would try to destroy the world but Kirsāsp (Garshasp) will wake from death to destroy Dahāk and save the world. According to Mēnog ī kherad, Ahriman shouted to Zarathushtra thus: “ If thou desist from this good religion of the Mazda-

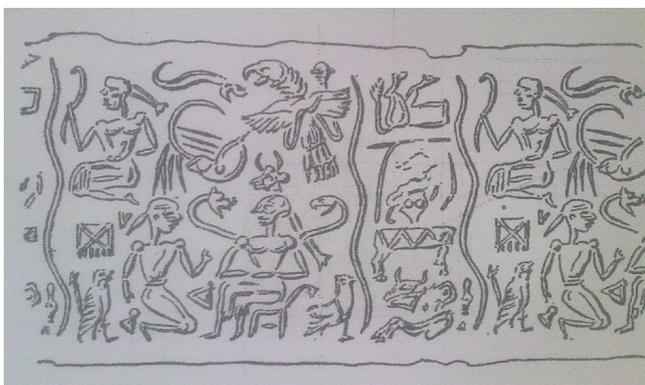


Fig. 1. Cylinder Seal, 2400-2200 B.C., found in Susa, Mohsen Froughi's Collection. Source: Porada, 1965:75.

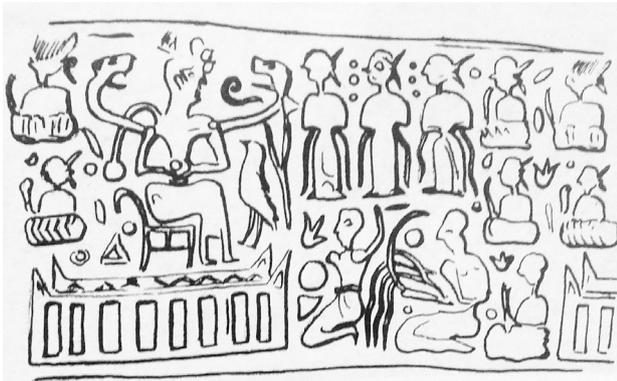


Fig. 2. Cylinder Seal Impression, Tepe Shahdad, 3rd millennium B.C., Louvre collection. Source: Ittman, 2008:98.



Fig. 3. Cylinder Seal Impression, Unknown Origin, 3rd millennium B.C. Source: Pittman, 2008:105.

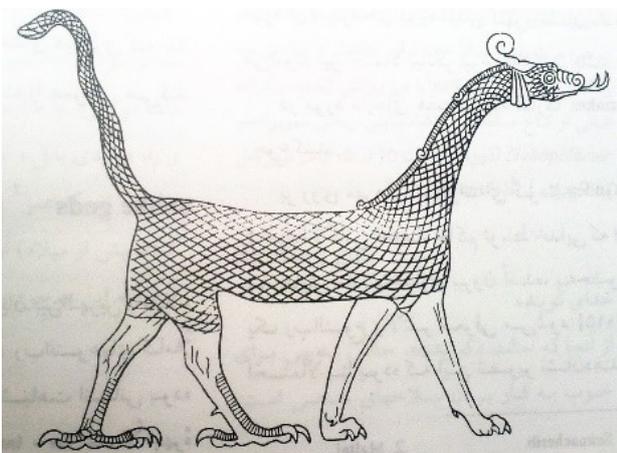


Fig. 4. Animal Symbol for Ningišzida. Source: Blake & Green, 2004:276.

worshippers, then I will give thee a thousand years dominion of the worldly existence as was given to Dahak” (Chapter 56, verse 24-25:66).

The point in Pahlavi literature is that he (Zahak) would live an eternal life in his prison at Mount Damavand. This makes him the everlasting person in Persian Mythology (Razi, 2002:455) and of course this is of one of the differences between *Mēnog ī kherad* and other texts (Rouhani & Qanbari, 2012:163).

In Pahlavi literature snake is a kind of demon and killing a snake is rewarded according to texts (Pahlavi Rivayat, 1988: 33-49) In *Bundahishn* winged snake causes death (Dādagi, 1369: 99). Besides that in *Bundahishn*, Zahak is a Babylonian man and his house is in Babylon (Dādagi, 2016:138).

But in Pahlavi Rivayat and *Mēnog ī kherad* the ancestry of Zahak is unknown (Rouhani and Qanbari, 2012:151). It could be assumed that a mythological-historical character is combined with the dragon evil form of Zahak. The snake-man may be the result of this combination (Bahar, 1996:191).

Shahnama

In *Shahnama* the story of Jamshid, his two sisters Shahrnaz and Arnavaz are related to the story of Zahak, Feyredoon and his mother Faranak. *Avesta* does not mention this relation clearly but in Pahlavi Rivayat the relations are obviously mentioned.

In *Shahnama*, Zahak is the son of an Arab ruler named Merdās. Ahriman convinced Zahak to kill his father, so did Zahak. After killing Merdās, Zahak became the king and replaced Jam (Jamshid) at the same time.

Ahriman now took another guise and presented himself to Zahak as a marvelous cook. After he had presented Zahak with many days of marvelous feasts, Zahak was willing to give Ahriman whatever he wanted. Ahriman merely asked to kiss Zahak on his shoulders. Zahak permitted, once Ahriman kissed his shoulders, two black snakes grew out of Zahak’s shoulders. The *Avestan* evil dragon with three jaws, six eyes and three heads is flourished. The food for the snakes was human brains (Amoozegar, 2002:56). Zahak ruled for a thousand years, and during his



Fig. 5. A-Gudea Stella, Mesopotamia, Akkadian period, (Moortgate, 1998:pic.189), B&C-Gudea Cylinder Seals, Mesopotamia, Akkadian period. Source: Black&Green, 2004:230.

Table 1. Analysis of images used on the seals. Source: author.

	Susa seal(Fig.1)	Tepe Shahdad seal(Fig.2)	Tepe Yahya seal(Fig.3)
Snake-man	*	*	*
Eagle	*	*	
Snake	*	*	
Bull body	*		
Harp	*	*	
Sited Female		*	*
Figures Holding Snakes	*	*	
Kneeling Figure	*	*	*
Hat in form of bull's head	*		*
Other Images	Geometric signs, Female Torso	A building, Floral Images, Geometric Signs	Mountain, Sun, Winged Lion, Floral Images

reign the young men were killed to feed the snakes (Shahnama, 1982: 32-53).

Forty years before the end of his reign, Zahak dreamed of three warriors attacking him. The youngest knocked him down with his mace, tied him up in the mountains.

Soon a boy was born named Feyreduon. Feyreduon was nourished on the milk of a marvelous cow named Barmāyeh (Shaygan Fard, 2001: 162-168)

Feyreduon was the son of Faranak and Abtin. His father was killed in order to feed the snakes on Zahak's shoulder. After his death, Faranak took Feyreduon to the Alborz Mountains. There Feyreduon grew up under the protection of an old man and the almighty Maynus. Zahak found their place at the mountains, but Faranak rescued his son. At last, Kāva (Kaveh) stood against Zahak. He proclaimed himself in support of Feyreduon as a ruler. Soon many people

followed Kāva and proclaimed Feyreduon as the ruler who defeated Zahak and freed all of Zahak's prisoners, (Shahnama, 1982: 32-51).

Discussion

Describing and interpreting the story behind the seals is difficult, even though we try to describe the images used on the seals. As much as it is difficult to relate them to the story of Etana, finding a link between Zahak's story and these images is also very sophisticated. But a set of hypotheses is possible:

- **Etana myth:** The first and closest story to the collection of images on the seal is the myth of Etana due to the image of an eagle holding a man on his back, while flying to the sky. Etana story is one of the few myths in Mesopotamia that was pictured well in Mesopotamia (Majidzadeh, 2000: 305); (Fig. 6). But these pictures differs the seals in this study. The seals here, just represent the flying eagle and the other characters of the story are not shown.

Besides that, the image of the man with snakes on his shoulders makes a big difference. Etana was one of the mythical kings in Kish. His name was mentioned in the list of Kish dynasty. The only spectacular point of the story is the character of this king. It may be Etana who transforms to Zahak character. In Zahak story, he represents a farmer society while Feyreduon is a symbol of a rancher society. In Bundahishn all Feyreduon's ancestors are shepherds and herd cows. This fact shows how that cow became a totem to his ancestors (Bahar, 1996:142).

Zahak, even represents droughts. He was the one who killed the cow, Barmāyeh, and it was a symbolic sign to the end of his reign and the beginning of fertility (Qaemi, 2012:95). In the story of Etana, it was Etana who sacrificed a bull for Šamaš in order to become fertile. The great controversy between Etana and Zahak story is the fly of Etana to the sky. In Persian myths it was Keyumart (Kayōmart) who flies to the sky, sitting on his throne, four eagles took his throne to the sky.

● **The God of underworld and the dead's:** The snake-man is the central image on the seals, Zahak essentially appears as a devil force. He dominated the death and destroying force more than anything else.

At first, Killing his father to gain the reign, and later killing young men to feed the snakes on his shoulders, both represent his connections to death. As previously mentioned, snake-man in Mesopotamia is the god of underworld. In Iran also, the snake is connected to the underworld. The snake was worshiped basically in southern Iran, so snake-man may be a king in the list of Elamite's Gods ش among all the worshiped gods, the character of Inšušinak resembles snake-man and especially Zahak.

● **Historical king (Assyrian):** Some scholars believe Zahak myth reflects the severe battles between Aryans and Samis' like Assyrians, Sumerians or Babylonians (Bahar, 1996: Rastegar Fasaee, 1986; Safa, 2000; Koobaji, 2009; Kazazi, 1991). Historical reports mentioned Zahak as a Semi-mythical, semi-historical creature; Just like Gilgamesh, whose name was mentioned as a Sumerian king.

In Pahlavi literature Zahak is mentioned as a king. According to these facts another hypothesis is that Zahak could be a Mesopotamian king, oppressor, cruel and bloodthirsty whose character reincarnated into the three-headed dragon with six eyes and three jaws, known as Dahāka or Zahak. some scholars believe that

Considering both seals it is obvious that Etana story always is represented completely and snake-man is never used in pictures of the epic.

this Mesopotamian king maybe Tiglat Pilaser who attacked Elam in 8th century B.C. (Bahar, 1996: 150-157). But Tiglat Pilaser rule over Elam was very short and the historical facts do not support this idea. Mehrdad Bahar explicitly explains:

“On the contrary to this idea, the Avesta and Vedic documents are not compatible with these historical facts during the 7th and 8th centuries. And even the history of Sargon's attacks to Iran do not match the story of Jamshid, Zahak and Feyreddoon (Ibid: 150-157).

In fact there is a story about an Assyrian king who had a mysterious disease. The cure to him was human meat. In this way he killed Elamite young men in order to cure his disease. Although the story seems exaggerated but the date of our seal is concurrent with the wars of Elamites and Assyrians. In 2325 B.C. Sargon, the Akkadian king attacked Elam. He allowed the Elamite king to rule Elam. After Sargon his son ruled Elam, but Elamites upraised against him during 2037-2316 B.C. although, Akkadians ruled Elam during 2306-2292 (Hinz, 1991: 81-90).

Regarding the fact that if the snake-man represents a historical character or not, another point should be mentioned: on both seals the snake-man wears a horned hat resembling to the head of a bull.

The world of deities in Iran is known through the cylinder seals and the reliefs on stone artifacts. The gods with highest positions, always wear a hat in the form of bull's head but they never have wings. They may had a human body or bird's body or even the scorpion's body.

Holi Pittman studied the cylinder seals of southern Konar Sandal and mentioned that the main god did not have a hat. He is inside a circle resembling the sun, and he probably was the Iranian sun god during the Bronze Age. He is sitting on his throne holding a stick which shows his power. There is another figure worshipping this sun god, on the contrary this figure wears a hat. Pittman emphasizes that this man may be a hero and believes that he may be the image of a ruler who became a god after his death. If this would be true, then the seal image may represent the rulers of Halil

Rood around the 3rd millennium B.C. (Pittman, 2008: 51-62).

We can describe the cylinder seal from Tepe Yahya in the same way (Fig. 3). Two kneeling figures who are worshipping the sun god, both are wearing a hat. The figure on the left wears the hat in the form of a bull's head. His religious position is shown by representing two snakes coming out of his arms. In front of him is another kneeling figure but he wears a hat in the form

of a lion's head. Both figures are recognized through their animal hats. We can mention them as rulers or even god-rulers who reigned Iran during Bronze Age. This shows that they themselves were worshiped by people while they worship the heavenly gods (Pittman, 2008:57-62). According to this idea, the king gained a higher position because he worships heavenly gods. In fact the God-king is the ancestor to the king.



Fig. 6-A-Cylinder seal from Mesopotamia showing the story of Etana.
B-Cylinder seal showing the story of Etana.
Source: Moortgate, 1998.

Conclusion

After studying the cylinder seals, it is obvious that their images may represent a combination of different myths such as Etana, Ningišzida and even Gilgameš.

Although the story of these images cannot be accurately restored due to the lack of written documents from Elamite period, it can be concluded that a kind of conflict is represented in order to gain power. The connections to the other life (life after death), eternal life and the attempt to gain the life plant are the main sources for the story of the seals. In conclusion, the seals refer to the religious themes.

But among all is the story of Zahak. Different versions of this story in Iranian texts represent the significance of this character in Iran's mythology. There are some differences between the old versions and the final form of the story in Shahnama which indicates the changes over time. These changes can be traced in Avesta and Pahlavi literature. The most notable traits of Zahak could be found in his combination with anger and violation of a treaty, which turned him into a symbol of perfidy, deceiving the devil and becoming a devilish worker on earth.

In the story of Etana šamaš protects the contract between Eagle and snake but the eagle eats the Childs of snake later like Zahak who treason his father and killed him.

In Etana story he wishes to have children. Although in the story of Zahak, his children are not mentioned, but the concept of fertility is hidden in the story. He would be overthrown with a child to be born, Feyredoan. His birth and his growth in a meadow symbolize fertility, goodness and life. The devil deceives Zahak to eat the brains of young men. So he became the god of the dead. Although the mutation of concepts has made important changes to Zahak story, but this story offers a collection of all previously discussed features including Etana and the gods of underworld.

Endnote

1. Kûtik Inshûshinak: Elamite king of Avân dynasty.
2. Shimût: Intelligencer of power.
3. Šamaš: Sumerian Good of sun.
4. Ištran was continuously worshiped in Elam almost till the middle Babylonian era. He was the guardian of the city “Der” which was located near the borders of Elam. Gudea talks about him as the justice God.
5. Ninazu: Son of Ereškigal, queen of the underworld, she was related to the underworld.
6. Bešmu: Snake with horns on his forehead. It was used as a symbol on kudurus. In neo Assyrian art, Bešmu was a magical guardian.
7. Gudea: The king of the city Nin-girsu.
8. Anuna: Anuna means “Kingly born”. In the Sumerian tablets, it was used for all the gods. During the middle Babylonian it may only refers to the underworld gods.
9. Meyer: Archeologist.
10. Tišpak: He may be the Hurrian God of Storm.
11. Ešnunna: The city located in tell Asmer, northeast of Babylon. It is near Diala River, at the south of Hurrians’ country.
12. Inshûshinak: The national God of Elamites
13. Išnikarab: Elamite Goddess, her temple is near Choghazanbil.

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