



Mythological composite figures implemented on cylinder seal scenes from the Old Babylonian period

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ABSTRACT

Cylinder seals are among the most prominent artistic artifacts left behind by the Mesopotamian civilization. They have appeared since the dawn of this civilization, closely linked to the daily life of ancient Iraqis, which they recorded in various ways. Different scenes were depicted on the surface of these seals, reflecting the individual's thought at that time. When we speak of the most prominent scenes executed on the surface of the seals, they often feature complex mythological creatures. My first thoughts go to mythology and the profound intellectual dimension that inspired people to document myths through artistic representation. All ancient civilizations were creative in their myths, and among them was the Mesopotamian civilization, which blended mythological thought with ancient religious beliefs. In this research, we will focus on one of the most significant periods of Mesopotamian history: the Old Babylonian period. This era extends from the fall of the Third Dynasty of Ur (2004 BCE) to the end of the First Dynasty of Babylon (1595 BCE).

Introduction:

The mythical creatures are a product of the ideas emanating from ancient Iraqi thought, which were called myths. The myth is a popular or literary tale produced by humans, as it includes within it heroes, supernatural beings, and imaginary events⁽¹⁾, or it is a group of intellectual records resulting from every human civilization. Professor Firas Al-Sawah sees it as a supernatural

tale or a narration of the reality of historical events carried out by individuals or groups of peoples⁽²⁾.

The myth arose from religious belief and was a natural extension of it, as it is the imaginative intellectual product of that peoples⁽³⁾.

The myth was directly linked to religion and to interconnected ideas through stating the importance of the gods and their role in protecting man and embodying the truth he

knew, and explaining the phenomena surrounding him⁽⁴⁾. When we talk about the mythical dimension of the complex creatures that distinguished a group of ancient civilizations, including the civilization of Mesopotamia, we mean by complex creatures the mythical creatures or forms that consist of several parts composed of various creatures with each other in the form of any part of a human body and another part of one or more animals or part of an animal's body with another animal⁽⁵⁾.

The people of Mesopotamia viewed their extensive and great civilizational prosperity as a result of their belief that the gods created them and determined their destinies, especially if they believed that the universe was governed by sacred divine laws, in addition to their management of cosmic rules and natural phenomena and the emergence of complex mythological thought to protect man from those phenomena⁽⁶⁾. This is what we see in some creatures that were granted the quality of holiness and sometimes the authority or ability to make sudden movements such as flying quickly or taking on various appearances in addition to their

original or primary form. These forms reflected the religious concepts and beliefs in the lives of the inhabitants of ancient Mesopotamia, and the struggle of some complex creatures with the gods is one of the important features that distinguished works of art and mythological literature⁽⁷⁾.

Composite creatures:

1- The bull man:

The bull man was known in the Sumerian language by the formula (**GUD.DUMU.dUTU**) and its equivalent in the Akkadian language is (**ku-sarikku**)⁽⁸⁾. This creature appeared in the ancient Sumerian period and continued in the Akkadian period and the Neo-Sumerian period, except that the horns were replaced by the horned divine crown in the Old Babylonian period⁽⁹⁾. These creatures consist of two parts. The upper part, consisting of the head, arms, and chest, is that of a human, while the lower part, consisting of the abdomen and lower limbs, is that of a bull⁽¹⁰⁾. He often wears a crown with two horns, and is sometimes depicted with one horn protruding forward, expressing the two horns. It appears most often in scenes of conflict, and is accompanied by some human forms.



In some scenes, this creature was depicted with many subjects, especially predatory animals, including the lion⁽¹¹⁾. The appearance of the bull man wrestling with lions in many artistic scenes executed on the surface of cylinder seals is evidence of the defense of domestic animals and livestock⁽¹²⁾, in addition to his depiction in sculptures and pottery panels as well. Thus, he is considered a protective spirit for domestic animals from wild animals⁽¹³⁾.

Opinions differed about the origin of the bull man. Mr. Taha Baqir believes that the scene of the bull man's struggle with the naked hero has a close connection to the epic of Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu, as he believes that their character and fame were not limited to ancient world literature, but were depicted in artistic scenes, especially cylindrical seals. We see in the period of the dawn of dynasties the representation of the hero wrestling with predatory animals, and this hero was designated as Gilgamesh, in addition to the name of the seal's owner being mentioned as (Ur Gilgamesh), and the depiction continued until late periods. In addition, there are those who believe that En-

kidu, who was represented in art, is the bull man⁽¹⁴⁾.

As for Dr. Nael Hanoun, he came with a different opinion, as he saw that the goddess of love and sex. Inanna, must practice sex and love that ends in marriage, as long as the husband has the ability to do so.

The Sumerians did not find anyone better than the shepherd god Dumuzi to be her husband, because he was viewed as the strong and wild bull. Thus Dumuzi became the person who satisfied the sexual desires of the sex goddess Inanna and had no role in the divine authority other than this⁽¹⁵⁾.

Mr. Fadhel Abdul Wahid agrees with this opinion, in addition to what he found of material deficiency associated with the depiction of the mother goddess Inanna in the ancient Mesopotamian beliefs of prehistoric images of stone pendants, in the form of a bull's head, in addition to the drawings depicting this head on pottery vessels. He noted that the bull is one of the titles of the goddess of fertility, Dumuzi (Tammuz)⁽¹⁶⁾. The influence of this creature continued in other later periods, as it moved outside Mesopotamia to be depicted in other arts,



including Hittite scenes in the empire period, where it was depicted on a group of cylindrical seals. Dr. Mallowan believes that the bull-man found in the chest founded in the burned Assyrian palace may be the hero Gilgamesh, whom the Assyrians glorified greatly⁽¹⁷⁾.

1- A bull with a human head:

This creature was known on cylinder seals since the beginning of the third millennium BC, and some believe it is older than that, It appeared in the Sumerian language with the term (^dALAD3. ^dLAMMA)⁽¹⁸⁾, and its equivalent in the Akkadian language is “**aladlammû**”⁽¹⁹⁾. It also appeared in the Akkadian language “**ditānu**”⁽²⁰⁾. This creature was composed of the body of a bull, the head of a human and the periods of a bull. This creature was depicted since the dawn of dynasties, often in a conflicting position, and continued until the Akkadian period⁽²¹⁾.

2- Fish Man:

The fish man was widely known in the arts of Mesopotamia and came in the Sumerian language with the term (KU₆-LÚ-U₁₇-LU) and its equivalent in the Akkadian language is (**kulullu**)⁽²²⁾. The

fish man’s form consists of a head, arm, and torso of a man with the body and tail of a fish⁽²³⁾. The fish man wears the horned crown on his head, a symbol of divinity in Mesopotamia, in addition to being considered a symbol of the goddess Ea (**Enki**)⁽²⁴⁾.

This type appeared since the Neo-Sumerian period and its depiction continued until the Old Babylonian period until the Assyrian period, especially in the Neo-Assyrian period, and it appeared in the statues and sculptures of Nimrud, and this is evidence of its origin in Assyrian art, especially in the scenes of the Assyrian palaces⁽²⁵⁾.

The depiction continued in the Greek period until the Middle Ages in Europe, which indicates that it is one of the symbols that continued to be depicted until the last few centuries⁽²⁶⁾.

3- The mythical dragon:

The dragon, which is one of the mythical creatures in Mesopotamia, has been widely known since ancient times, and has been implemented on artistic scenes in the civilization of Mesopotamia, but it is linked to the ancient Mesopotamian



myth, as it came in the Sumerian language with the term (MUŠ-HUŠ) and its equivalent in the Akkadian language is 'mušhuššu, and Professor (Van Born) believes that its first appearance was on the seals of the Uruk period⁽²⁷⁾.

The body of this creature was made with the claws of an eagle, the head of a snake, the body of a leopard, and the tail of a scorpion⁽²⁸⁾. Like the dragon in Mesopotamia, "Humbaba" who lives in the forest and is mentioned in the Epic of Gilgamesh, is associated with the great serpent Kore, as he is associated with the sea waters and the waters of the underworld, and he is the god of the underworld, who is mentioned in the Sumerian flood story. The Sumerian myth of the dragon is not only one of the causes of death, but there is a close connection between the dragon and the mystery of death⁽²⁹⁾. In addition, he was mentioned as the guardian of mountains and fire⁽³⁰⁾.

4- The winged lion:

The winged lion is one of the most prominent composite figures executed on the scenes of cylinder seals. It was known in the Sumerian language by the Sumerian term

(MUŠ.UŠUM)⁽³¹⁾, and its synonym in the Akkadian language is (ušumgallu)⁽³²⁾. It was formed from a mythical figure, its front on the head and its front legs are like a lion, while the back and tail appear to be like an eagle⁽³³⁾. It was depicted in some artistic scenes with its head lowered and a god ascending on its back in some scenes of cylinder seals. As for later periods, its representation came in different positions, including in the Third Dynasty of Ur, when it appears in scenes of the struggle with the goddess⁽³⁴⁾. It appeared for the first time in the seals of the Akkadian period, and then it continued until the Neo-Babylonian period, It was depicted in more than one different position, most of which was in the position of the wrestler with the goddess or the bull man⁽³⁵⁾.

5- Goatfish:

A composite creature that appeared on artistic images of cylinder seals in a small way since the Third Dynasty of Ur, consisting of a goat's head with its front legs and the body of a fish, known in cuneiform texts by the term "suḫurmašû", This creature was first associated with the god of the bubbling ves-



sel, the god Ea, where it became its symbol since the Kassite period⁽³⁶⁾. The goatfish appeared as a unit to fill the gaps, meaning a secondary creature, especially in the Old Babylonian period, and to a small extent, an image in the Kassite period⁽³⁷⁾. Similarly, its depiction continued in the Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian periods in a clear way, and its role in filling the gaps went beyond that in the Seleucid period until the Hellenistic period.

In addition, the Romans considered it an important symbol as a sign of the zodiac during the reign of Augustus⁽³⁸⁾.

6- Eagle with a lion's head:

This composite creature has been known since the dawn of sculpture in Mesopotamia. It was known in the Sumerian language by the term (AN.ZU) and its equivalent in the Akkadian language is the term "anzû"⁽³⁹⁾. It was known as the Anzu bird, written in the Sumerian language as (AN.IM.DUGUD.MUŠEN), It is a creature composed of the body and claws of an eagle and the head of a lion⁽⁴⁰⁾. This creature appeared at first on the seals of the Jemdet Nasr period and is a symbol of the god Nankar-Su⁽⁴¹⁾.

In addition, it was used in the texts of omens, magic, incantations and charms⁽⁴²⁾. It was depicted in several positions, including in a sideways position, spreading its wings, and another time, joining them⁽⁴³⁾.

Description of the study seals:

1. The Taurus man:

A cylinder seal from the Old Babylonian period depicting two scenes, one main and the other secondary.

In the middle of the main scene, there is a person who is closer to being a warrior man in front of the god. The god stands in the middle of the scene facing left, wearing a long robe with vertical lines, his right foot sticking out of it and placing it on a bench. He folds his left hand to his chest, and with the other he holds a saw, which is the symbol of the god Shamash. He wears a conical crown. The warrior man stands facing towards the god, wearing a short apron with an opening in the front, he folds his left hand to his chest and the other facing down, wearing a helmet on his head, Behind him stands the secondary goddess, who wears a long robe with



horizontal folds, raising both of her hands up to mouth level to supplicate and pray before the main god, and she wears a conical crown on her head, In the middle of the scene between the god and the warrior man, there are two men in the form of a dwarf, the first standing in the first half of the scene facing towards the god. He is a man who is closer to being a priest, wearing a short apron, holding a cup in his right hand and holding a bucket, and in the lower half of it is a dwarf man sitting in a squatting position, and the secondary scene depicted on the left side of the scene is a depiction of a bull man in the lower half of the seal standing on his feet and holding in his hand a column ending with two snake heads wearing a conical crown, and in the upper half of the scene is a scene of a struggle of a man kneeling on his knees wrestling with a dragon standing on his legs, and behind the man is another person with his arms extended upwards⁽⁴⁴⁾.

This is a cylinder seal from the Old Babylonian period. It depicts a main scene and a secondary scene, The main scene, on the right, depicts the appearance before the

sacred king, who is seated on an unbaked chair. He wears a long robe that reaches his ankles, from which his right shoulder protrudes. He is holding a cup in his right hand and holding his other hand to his chest, He is wearing a turban headdress, In front of him is the worshipper wearing a long robe that reaches to the feet, and behind him is the secondary goddess, most likely the goddess "Lama", wearing a long, decorated robe. Behind them is the secondary scene of a male bull fighting a naked her⁽⁴⁵⁾.

Old Babylonian cylinder seal depicting a scene of offering sacrifices to a god seated at the beginning of the scene on the right, He wears a long fringed robe, folds his left hand to his chest, and holds a sceptre with the other, and wears a crown, In front of him is a worshipper wearing a short robe, and in his hand is an animal close to a goat. Behind him is a worshipper depicted in a small form, and behind him is the secondary goddess Lama wearing a long robe, offering her hands up, and behind her stands a bull's leg holding each other, He wears a headdress with a dwarf in the middle, and there is a star at the top of the scene⁽⁴⁶⁾.



A cylinder seal from the Old Babylonian period depicting a scene of two men fighting with the body of a bull, with a goat in the middle. Both men are depicted in the same position: the lower part of the body is depicted in profile, and the upper part is depicted in a frontal position. He has a long beard and wears a long-horned crown, with cuneiform inscriptions on either side. On the upper side, the goddess Ishtar is depicted in reverse, wearing a long, vertically striped dress, holding a scepter and a column in one hand, and a war flag on her back, in addition to wearing a conical crown⁽⁴⁷⁾.

Old Babylonian cylinder seal depicting two main and secondary scenes, such as the president offering a sacrifice to the main god, the god Shamash. He stands in the middle of the scene facing left wearing a long robe with his right foot sticking out and placing it on a bench, bringing his left hand to his chest, and with the other he holds a saw, which is his symbol, and wears a horned crown. In front of him is the person carrying the sacrifice, most likely a goat, wearing a long, pleated robe reaching the ankles, wearing a headband. Behind the

god stands the secondary patron goddess, most likely the goddess Lama. She wears a long, pleated robe, wearing a conical crown, and behind her is a bull-man holding a long banner. He wears a short robe, his body facing left, and his head is depicted in a forward position with a conical crown above his head, in addition to the presence of a fish in the middle of the scene and a crescent above it⁽⁴⁸⁾.

A cylinder seal from the Old Babylonian period. It depicts a scene depicting the goddess Ishtar standing at the beginning of the scene on the right side, wearing a war whip in her left hand and a scepter in the other. Behind her is a quiver of arrows and a bow. She wears a conical crown, a long robe that reaches down to her ankles, and vertical lines. She places her foot on a crouching lion. In front of her is a bearded man wearing a robe that reaches halfway down his leg, clasping both hands to his chest and with water spurting from both ends in lines downwards. Behind him is a bull man carrying a column banner ending in a sun disk. He wears a robe that reaches halfway down his leg, his body facing right and his



head in a forward position wearing a conical helmet. This seal is decorated with the goddess's symbol, a sun disk in the middle of the crescent moon at the top of the scene⁽⁴⁹⁾.

2- A bull with a human head:

A cylinder seal from the Old Babylonian period. It depicts a scene of a human-headed bull fighting a lion. The human-headed bull stands in the center of the scene, facing left, with its body depicted in profile and its head in front. It sports a beard and a crown with two horns. It raises its front end toward the lion, which is also standing on its hind legs. The same scene is repeated behind it. In the center of the scene are two columns of cuneiform inscriptions⁽⁵⁰⁾, read it as follow:

ᵈšamš The god Shamash

ᵈA-a The god Aya

3- fish man:

A cylinder seal from the Old Babylonian era depicting a scene of standing before a god. The god initially stands on a fish man, wearing a long robe, standing on a bench, holding his left hand to his chest, and holding a column with the other. In front of him is a person who is also closer to being a god, stand-

ing on a fish man, holding his right hand and the other downwards. In front of him is a worshipper wearing a long guardian robe, holding his left hand downwards and raising the other upwards. Behind him is a scene of a lion man holding in his hand a dwarf man, reversed upwards, and at the top of the scene is the crescent moon⁽⁵¹⁾.

A cylinder seal from the Old Babylonian period depicting a scene before a god. It is most likely a lama goddess standing on the right side of the scene, wearing a long, pleated robe, raising both hands upwards, wearing a conical crown, In front of her is a worshipper wearing a short apron, holding his left hand to his chest and the other down, wearing a helmet with a fish man between them in the middle of the scene. His head is depicted in a frontal position, with unclear features, and on the right side there are two columns of cuneiform inscriptions⁽⁵²⁾, Read it as follow:

1- ᵈEN, KI

2- ᵈDAM, GAL, NUN, NA

4- winged dragon:

A cylinder seal from the Old Babylonian period depicting a main



scene and a secondary one, The first is a scene of a struggle between two animals, a lion and a bull. The lion seizes the bull by jumping on its back and placing its mouth on the bull's head. It stands on its hind legs and the bull raises its front legs up in an escape position. On the left side of the scene, there is a dragon standing on its hind legs with two large wings, standing in a predatory position. In front of it, there is a person in a kneeling position wearing a short robe, holding in his right hand something that looks like a sharp god, and the other is facing the ground, giving his back to the dragon facing the right. At the top of the seal, there is a sun disk in the middle of the crescent⁽⁵³⁾.

A cylindrical seal from the ancient Babylonian period depicting two scenes, the first of which is a struggle that represents the struggle of two men, with the bull man standing at the beginning of the scene facing left, placing his right foot on a crouching bull. His body is depicted in a side position and his head in a forward position. He has a long beard and wears a two-horned cap. As for the bull, it is reversed upwards, his feet upwards

and his head downwards, facing the bull man holding the crouching bull. In the other scene, there is a scene of a dragon struggling with a lion. The dragon stands on its back legs in a struggle position, spreading its wings backwards and opening its mouth towards the lion that also stands behind it, with an animal resembling a gazelle between them⁽⁵⁴⁾.

5- winged lion:

A cylinder seal from the Old Babylonian period depicting a main scene and a secondary one, representing a person appearing before a sacred king. The king sits in the center of the scene on a chair facing the left side. He wears a long robe and a skullcap, extending his right hand forward and bringing his left hand to his chest, In front of him is an animal. In the secondary scene, which represents an animal fight, the scene begins on the right side with two animals fighting: a winged lion and a dragon, facing each other. There are also some writings and other decorations. The inscriptions are unclear. Above them, there are some plants with branches pointing downwards, and above the scene is the sun disk in the middle of a crescent moon⁽⁵⁵⁾.



6- goat fish:

A cylinder seal from the Old Babylonian period depicting a scene of an appearance before a god. The secondary goddess Lama stands at the beginning of the scene on the right, facing left, wearing a long fringed dress, raising both hands upwards, wearing a conical crown. In front of her is the worshipper, who is most likely a warrior king, wearing a short robe and a headband, holding his right hand to his chest and the other facing downwards, and between them is a male worshipper, depicted in a small form, Behind the king stands the god Adad on the back of a bull, holding his symbol, a bundle of lightning, in his left hand, and a large whip in the other. The spaces on the surface of this scene are filled with a scorpion in the middle of the scene, topped by a hedgehog, a composite goatfish, and the crescent moon in the middle of the sun disk⁽⁵⁶⁾.

A cylinder seal from the Old Babylonian period depicting a main scene and a secondary scene. The scene begins with the king sitting at the beginning of the right side wearing a long robe and a headband, and

in front of him is the first person wearing a long robe and a headband. He folds both hands towards his chest, between them is a vessel in the form of a small vessel and the other in the form of a long tube, and behind him is the patron goddess Lama, who is wearing a long, pleated robe and a horned crown. A dwarf stands between the patron goddess and the worshipper, opening his legs, and at the top is the sun disk in the middle of the crescent, The secondary scene is a mythological scene, the form of a vehicle of an eagle with a lion's head seizing a goat, and at the bottom the scene is reversed upwards, representing a naked man with shaved hair, in addition to the presence of a fish in it and a goat next to it⁽⁵⁷⁾.

conclusions:

1- The Old Babylonian period is the most prominent and famous period in the civilization of Mesopotamia that left a great artistic achievement that helped researchers to study these monuments in a large and broad way.

2- The composite figures are one of the most famous artistic scenes that were executed in the Old Babylonian period.



3- The scenes combined between religious scenes and composite mythological scenes are large in this period due to the craftsmanship of the artist who made those scenes and covered more topics in the same seal.

4- The composite figures varied in the seal scenes, the most prominent of which were the bull man and the naked hero, i.e. the mythical creature and the winged dragon, those are the most prominent figures.

5- The multiple implementation of the goddess, whether primary or secondary, with the possibility of implementing some of her or his symbols at the top and middle of the scenes of the cylindrical seals.

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Figure No. (1)
Material: Hematite
Dimensions: 1,2 x 2cm



Figure No. (2)
Stone type: Hematite
Dimensions: 21×12cm



Figure No. (3)
Material: Hematite
Dimensions: 25×4cm



Figure No. (4)
Material: Hematite
Dimensions: 2,4×1,1cm

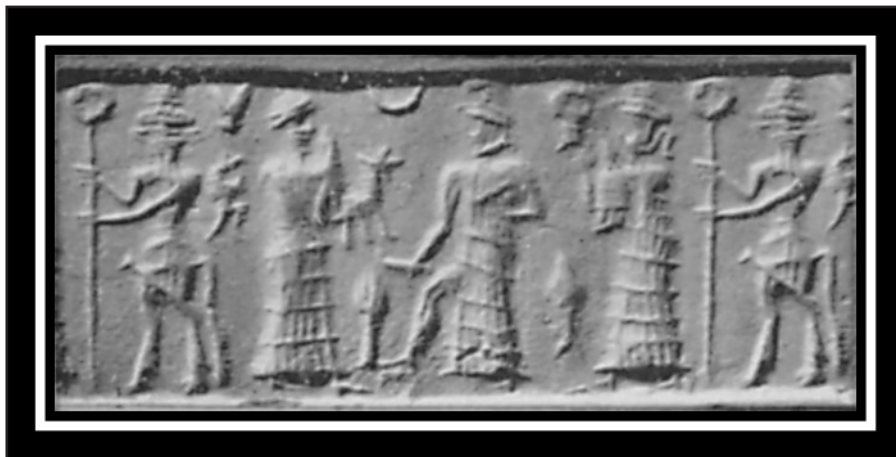


Figure No. (5)
Material: Hematite
Dimensions: 2,6×1,4 cm



Figure No. (6)
Stone type: Hematite
Dimensions: 2,4×1,4 cm



Figure No. (7)
Stone type: Hematite
Dimensions: 25×15cm



Figure No. (8)
Stone type: Hematite
Dimensions: 26×14cm



Figure No. (9)
Stone type: Hematite
Dimensions: 2,7×1,1 cm



Figure No. (10)
Stone type: Hematite
Dimensions: 20×13cm