

A Cylinder with a Storm God and Problems

Just at the time at which I received the invitation for the meeting in honor of Maurits van Loon on the theme of "Natural Phenomena", Jonathan P. Rosen showed me a cylinder in his collection that portrays two gods, one of whom holds lightning symbols, which are taken to identify him as a storm god (Fig. 1). The cylinder closely resembles a seal impression on a tablet from Nuzi (Figs. 2 and 3), which provides a framework for the Rosen cylinder within the Mitannian style of the fifteenth to fourteenth century BC. This was an apparently unproblematic and very welcome subject for the theme of the meeting.

The cylinder is said to have been found in a rich tomb in an unidentified location. In the impression the storm god is on the left and holds up two lightning symbols while standing on a lion that has the tail of a bird and water flowing from his mouth. Globules seem to rise from the liquid, forming a column that reaches to the upper field, leaving a space, above which a further group of globules creates a form like a cloud which terminates in the head of a bird with a prominent beak. Facing the god with the lightning symbols is another god, identically robed in a bordered garment. With both hands that god holds a stick on his neck and shoulders and stands on the hindmost part of a gigantic rearing bull-horned serpent with open leonine mouth and a projecting pointed tongue, that may extend to one of the globules. There is some damage to the surface of the cylinder at that point. The bends in the body of the serpent were carefully adjusted by the engraver to the figure of the god, with the slight changes in direction occurring at the elbow of the god, at his knee and at his foot. Visually, this results in stressing the association of the god with the monstrous serpent. Beside this god are a leaping mountain goat, a standing goat with twisted horns, that are indicated by drillings along the straight upward pointing shafts (perhaps meant to

represent those of a markhor, the largest type of goat);¹ and a fallen stag, who is being attacked by a lion. A damage in the seal which created a line between the neck and one of the hind legs of the stag, appears to have been used by the engraver to place one of the lion's paws upon it,² while the other paw rests on the nose of the stag.

The first god has a symmetrical posture that makes him appear more like an icon than an active deity. The lightning symbols, which contribute to this effect, have a bulbous form where the prongs of the symbol meet and another at the end of the handle. They do not look like the more naturalistic Old Babylonian representations of lightning, from which they are derived,³ but rather like objects carefully turned on a lathe by an expert craftsman.

The representation of gods, as in this seal, and in the impression Fig. 2, is not frequent in this style. This is due to the change in the iconography of most of the seal designs in the Mitannian period from the Old Babylonian subject of gods with or without worshippers to worshippers alone, often with a sacred tree or with a sacred tree flanked only by animals or composite creatures. The elaborate designs found in several of the seal impressions from Nuzi showing deities may indicate that the original cylinders were made at the special request of the seal owner or that they had been carved in some other center. We may assume a similar situation for Figs. 1 and 2, which are so far unique in the Mitannian repertory. Perhaps we should ascribe to the rarity of the demand for such representations the divergence from the usual representation of the storm god's mount, the lion dragon, which seems to lack the traditional bird claws on the hind feet, although these have only three digits while one of the forefeet has four digits. Even though this difference may have been intended to indicate the nature of the hind feet, it does not conform to the common stylization of bird claws seen in seal designs from the Akkade to the Old Babylonian period.⁴ I was unable to determine from extant publications whether or not the lion dragon of the storm god in other Mitannian seals had bird claws on the hind feet.

The bubbles, which I assume are what the globules rising from the liquid spewed out by the lion dragon are intended to be, are reminiscent of the bubbles rising from the streams spewed out by

the bull pulling the chief god's chariot on the Hasanlu bowl.⁵ Instead of bubbles, however, the drillings could also indicate hailstones, as Pierre Amiet suggests for the Hasanlu bowl and the vase from an Iranian site.⁶ The bird, whose head terminates in what looks like a cloud of globules, is most likely associated with an element in the sky, such as a rainstorm or hailstorm. Is the bird associated in some way with the god whose head he almost seems to touch? This problem must remain unanswered.

The fact that the second god is represented similarly to the first makes one wonder about the relationship of the two gods. Are they closely connected in some mythological context, as yet unknown? That they do not represent one and the same deity seems certain because of the slight differences in their attire that can be noted in the related seal impression from Nuzi (Figs. 2 and 3) discussed below.

The posture of the god holding a stick on his neck and shoulders is encountered occasionally in cylinder seals of Syrian style. In connection with such a representation on a cylinder, Dominique Collon suggested that the stick - or bar, as she calls it - was meant to be a yoke. She gave several examples where the object does indeed appear to have had such a function.⁷ However, it seems to me that the stick, strongly bent like a cane in Fig. 1,⁸ had some other meaning, perhaps that of a symbol of authority. The way in which it is being held, however, suggests to me a posture of relaxation.

There is also a question about the three horned animals and the lion. Usually Mitannian seals show such animals in a symmetrical secondary motif of unknown significance. However, here the goat jumping up close behind the god seems to indicate an intimate relationship, as if there were a connection between the god and the animals beside him.

Relatively little help for the interpretation of the god is provided by the seal impression from Nuzi, Figs. 2 and 3.⁹ The storm god with his two lightning symbols stands on a winged lion or lion dragon; its feet are not preserved. Unlike the lion dragon of the cylinder, it is not this monster that spews a liquid, but a second one from whose mouth seems to hang a downturned lightning fork with a point in the center, which might be the monster's

tongue. Though there are some lines descending from the lowest globule, of what I originally took to be the body of the serpent, it seems unlikely that there could have been a connection between that feature and the lines descending from the second monster's mouth. Perhaps the column of globules was independent of the serpent as in the cylinder and ended on top in a bird's head, which I believe I see in the impression above the heroic god's raised dagger, which he is about to thrust into the neck of the serpent as drawn by Diana Stein. For her drawing she had three additional, though fragmentary impressions of the same cylinder.¹⁰ The present enlargement, Fig. 2, shows two additional features which should be added to the drawing and which were not seen in the poor reproduction in my publication, the suggested bird's head in the upper left corner and the three cords of the belt hanging between the legs of the heroic god.

Regardless of these minor points, Diana Stein convincingly interprets the scene of Figs. 2 and 3 as an illustration of the Hedammu story,¹¹ which is closely related to the Ullikummi story assumed by me to be underlying the principal scene of the Gold Bowl of Hasanlu (Figs. 4 and 5).¹² Both stories relate the creation of monsters, with the help of which the old god Kumarbi attempted to regain power over the young weather god Teshshup.

In both types of scenes, in the Gold Bowl and in the seal designs, occurs the same column of globules, probably to be associated with the weather god's elements: rain, hail and clouds. Both types of representations (Figs. 2, 3 and 5) also share a serpent monster which is attacked by a heroic personage. In the seal impression and the bowl the battle is shown being waged, not being won, thereby retaining the interest of the viewer. In the cylinder, Fig. 1, the stance of the god on the tail of the serpent, however, may mean that he was the victor in a battle which is in the past. His relaxed posture would fit such a situation very well.

While the cylinder, Fig. 1, if correctly interpreted, portrays the victory over the serpent monster, the later Neo Assyrian artists of the ninth century BC followed the prototype of the seal impression, that is, the dramatic battle against the bull-horned serpent, for the subject of their representations. An example of

many such renderings is the frequently reproduced cylinder in the Pierpont Morgan Library, Fig. 9.

The identification of the heroic god of Figs. 1 to 3 is difficult because Teshshup, who features in the Hedammu and Ullikummi myths, is a storm god, whose role is filled by the god carrying two lightning symbols on Figs. 1 to 3. One should therefore look for some other heroic god, who may have been pictured in these two scenes. For example, F.A.M. Wiggermann, in an article dedicated to Maurits van Loon, "Tishpak, His Seal and the Dragon Mušhuššu"¹³ points to the *Göttertypentext* published by F. Köcher,¹⁴ in which the god Tishpak, the chief god of Eshnunna, is described as carrying a mace, and a bow and arrow and, most characteristic, as standing in a walking pose with both feet on a *bašmu*, a horned serpent according to the CAD.¹⁵

Since Wiggermann shows very clearly, however, that the god Tishpak lost his importance after Hammurabi had defeated Eshnunna,¹⁶ it is unlikely that the god represented on our cylinder is to be identified with that deity. Probably the special stance of the god and his adjunct lived on in the imagery of the region of North Mesopotamia as the characteristics of other heroic gods. For example, one might think of Ninurta whose symbol, as brandished on the relief of the Ninurta temple of Assurnasirpal II (883-859 BC)¹⁷ seems to be spewed by the riderless dragon of figs. 2 and 3. However, a popularity of that god in the fifteenth or fourteenth century BC, which would have caused his representation on our cylinder seals, would have to be proved.

As to the storm god in these scenes, if we identify him with the supreme god Teshshup, his function remains to be explained. He merely seems to have been an onlooker, perhaps he was meant to be a supporting presence, like the great gods in their chariots in the topmost register of the Hasanlu bowl (Fig. 4). This is the extent to which we can go in the interpretation of these scenes.

We may now attempt to explore the pictorial origin of the bull-horned serpent in our Figs. 1 to 3, for which there is no prototype known in the earlier art of Syria¹⁸ or Mesopotamia. In Mesopotamia the dangerous monster is the lion dragon *ugallu* (translated by Wiggermann as "big weather beast").¹⁹ I wonder to what extent this is due to the geographical situation of Mesopotamia. Natural

dangers are largely brought along by storms for which the howling, roaring leonine mouth and body and the great wings of eagles and vultures were a perfect pictorial embodiment from the Uruk period onward.

Serpents have not been the subject of extensive studies²⁰ but we may assume that those of which the population was aware were mostly small and poisonous vipers. Large non-poisonous serpents, however, exist in Iran along with small vipers. In early Iranian art the undulating bodies of serpents can be recognized as having been identified with watercourses;²¹ hence they were beneficial symbols as well as symbols of power because of the ability of the more poisonous types to cause death. Therefore serpents are more frequently associated with deities in the art of Iran than in other countries. In the Middle Elamite art of the thirteenth and twelfth centuries the serpent often has a single horn on its head,²² but none shows the pair of bull's horns depicted on our Fig. 1. Only on the stamp seals of the Persian Gulf, dated from the twentieth to perhaps the seventeenth century BC, are two-horned serpents a regular feature of an iconography (Figs. 6 and 7). Four examples of bull-horned serpents could be identified.²³ Even more have the head of a goat. In an article published before his volume on the seals from Failaka, Kjaerum indicated the relative dates of the stamp seal styles.²⁴ The deeply engraved style I and the style continuing the same technique but producing somewhat more linear forms, IB, belonged to the earlier phase, for which Kjaerum gave dates of about 2025 to 1945 BC in a subsequent publication.²⁵ It is in these styles that the representations of horned serpents are found. Many have the bodies marked by a continuous series of short parallel lines that closely resemble the continuous chevrons on the body of the bull-headed serpent in Fig. 1. In the chronological survey given in his article Kjaerum says: "Most cylinder seals, however, belong to the final enterprising building period. These are Mitanni seals of brown and greenish faience, and Kassite and pseudo-Kassite seals, mostly of deep blue glass, of steatite and a single one of ivory: most of the latter are of Elamite origin, belonging to the Isin II period".²⁶

What is important here is the building period in which Mitannian

seals were found. We may assume that like the Mitannian seals brought to Failaka some stamps from Failaka, even though from an older period, could have come north at the same time. Therefore, the bull-horned serpent could have been brought to Mesopotamia on one of those seals.

The derivation of two-horned serpents from prototypes brought in by seals from the Gulf can be more convincingly demonstrated with another example of horned serpents on a Mitannian style cylinder belonging to Jonathan Rosen,²⁷ Fig. 7. On that cylinder two bull-horned serpents appear beside two worshippers who flank an object on a stand that looks more like a flaming altar than the usual tree. Such a flaming altar replacing the tree is unusual, as is probably the rest of the scene, with the smaller figures approaching from the right, one of them raising a hand in worship to one of the bull-serpents, while a sphinx confronts the second bull-serpent on the other side. The only parallel which can be established is with the flaming altar.

A related object appears in the field of a sealing on a tablet from Nuzi, from the archive of Prince Shilwa-Teshshup, who can be roughly dated two generations after King Shaushtatar.²⁸ The latter's date was long thought to be about 1450 BC, based on a letter sealed with a cylinder inscribed with the name of Shaushtatar and found in the archive of Prince Shilwa-Teshshup. This date has been seriously questioned by Diana Stein-Wünscher, who suggests 1395-1370 BC for the time at which the letter could have been written.²⁹ This may indicate a date after the middle of the 14th century BC for the representation of a censer on a Mitannian style cylinder like Fig. 8.

The fact that the bull-headed serpents of the cylinder, Fig. 8, are related to that of a stamp seal from the Persian Gulf (Fig. 7) and that the scene is so unusual, indicates that this cylinder was not made within the range of Nuzi iconography, but rather at some other site, as was also suggested for Figs. 1-3. The location of the motif of the god with the *bašmu*, therefore, is still to be found.

Moreover, the transition to the scenes of the Neo Assyrian period in which the bull-horned serpent appears horizontally, displaying its impressive length and opposing the divine attacker

(Fig. 9), is not known. In fact, the actual meaning of that motif is still a subject of discussion.

Thus, many of the problems raised in connection with the scene on our cylinder remain as question marks and should invite Maurits van Loon, who has a wide knowledge of cylinders of Iran³⁰ and has also made some very interesting suggestions for the interpretation of the imagery of second millennium Anatolia,³¹ to find the answers.

Notes

1. That the animal, *Capra falconieri*, is called *markhor*, which is Persian for "snake eater", indicates the esteem in which it is held by the population of the mountainous regions of its habitat in eastern Iran and Afghanistan. Comment on the markhor is found in Richard Ettinghausen, "The 'Snake-Eating Stag' in the East", in Kurt Weizmann (ed.) *Late Classical and Mediaeval Studies in Honor of Albert Matthias Friend, Jr.* (Princeton 1955), pp. 272-285.

2. Otherwise the lion's gesture which does not touch the fallen animal, cannot be explained.

3. Dominique Collon, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum. Cylinder Seals III: Isin-Larsa and Old Babylonian Periods*. (London 1986, British Museum Publications), nos. 436-452, 455.

4. R.M. Boehmer, *Die Entwicklung der Glyptik während der Akkad-Zeit* (Berlin 1965), pl. XXXI: nos. 367-373, and Ali Abou Assaf, "Die Ikonographie des altbabylonischen Wettergottes", *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 14 1983 pl. 6.

5. Drawing by Maude de Schauensee, in E. Porada, *The Art of Ancient Iran* (New York 1965), p. 99, fig. 64, and p. 95, pl. 23.

6. "Un vase rituel iranien", *Syria* XLII (1965) pp. 235-51.

7. *The Alalakh Cylinder Seals* (Oxford 1982, BAR International Series 132), no. 18, pp. 52-53.

8. This observation was made by Robert Merrillees in the discussion with him of the photograph of Fig. 1. He used the term cane to describe his impression of the object.

9. Fig. 2: E. Porada, *Seal Impressions of Nuzi* (Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research 24, 1947), no. 738, impression of Puhišenni son of Maitta (time of Tarmitilla). Fig. 3: Diana L. Stein, "Mythologische Inhalte der Nuzi-Glyptik", in Volkert Haas (ed.), *Hurriter und Hurritisch* (Konstanzer altorientalische Symposien, Bd. II (1987), Abb. 11.

10. Diana L Stein, *op.cit.*, p.186 note 23.
11. Stein, *op.cit.*, pp. 176f., with reference in note 20 to J. Siegelova, *Appu-Märchen und Hedammu-Mythus* (Studien zu den Bogazkoy-Texten 14, 1971).
12. "The Hasanlu Bowl", Expedition, no. 3 (Spring, 1959), pp. 19-22.
13. O.M.C. Haex et al. (eds.) *To the Euphrates and Beyond* (Rotterdam/Brookfield 1989), pp. 117-133.
14. Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung 1 1957 p. 52ff.
15. Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, vol. 2B, s.v. *bašmu* 1.a (mythological, p. 141). The monster is described as having been created in the sea, "his length is sixty 'double miles'" KAR 6 ii 21.
16. Wiggermann, *op.cit.*, in note 13, p. 123.
17. A.H. Layard, *A Second Series of the Monuments of Nineveh* (London 1853), pl. 5. See also the reproduction in the article by U. Moortgat-Correns, "Ein Kultbild Ninurta's aus neuassyrischer Zeit", Archiv für Orientforschung 35 1990, p. 120, Abb. 3.
18. In Syrian iconography of the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries BC a youthful heroic weather god battles victoriously with a serpent. See Elizabeth Williams-Forte, "The Snake and the Tree...", in L. Gorelick and E. Williams-Forte (eds.), *Ancient Seals and the Bible* (Malibu 1983) pp. 18-43, and W.G. Lambert, "Trees, Snakes and Gods in Ancient Syria and Anatolia", Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies XLVIII-3 1985 pp. 435-451. None of the serpents, however, have bull's horns; in fact only one, on the cover of the book by Williams-Forte, has clearly discernible horns, and they are those of a goat. The horns of a serpent on a cylinder from Cyprus in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (American Journal of Archaeology 52-1 1948, pl. VIII:4 (74.51.4309), cannot be identified.
19. F.A.M. Wiggermann, *Babylonian Prophylactic Figures: The Ritual Texts* (Amsterdam 1986) p. 77 and the listing of the relevant pages in the index, p. 331.
20. So far I am aware of the doctoral thesis by Diana Krumholz-McDonald, *Serpent Imagery and Iconography* (Dissertation, Columbia University 1989), and K. Guy Stevens, "Eine ikonographische Untersuchung des Schlange im vorgeschichtlichen Mesopotamien," in *Archaeologia iranica et orientalis miscellanea in honorem Louis Vanden Berghe*. Ed. L. de Meyer et E. Haerinck, Gent 1989, pp. 1-32.
21. See especially the relief carving on the chlorite vase in the British Museum: Eva Strommenger, *5000 Years of Art in Mesopotamia* (New York 1964) pl. 38. A drawing of the representations was published by Henri Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the*

*Ancient Orient*⁴ (Baltimore 1969. Pelican History of Art) p. 19 Fig. 9. On one side a deity holds two large undulating serpents, and on the other side, the same undulating outlines obviously signify watercourses.

22. For example, Pierre Amiet, *Elam* (Auvers-sur-Oise 1966), p. 407 Fig. 307. See also P. de Miroschedji, "Le dieu élamite au serpent et aux eaux jaillissantes", Iranica Antiqua XVI 1981 p. 1-25 and pls. I-XI, *passim*.

23. Poul Kjaerum, *Failaka/Dilmun: The Second Millennium Settlements*, vol 1:1 *The Stamp and Cylinder Seals* (Jutland Archaeological Society Publications XVII:1 1983) nos. 54, 86-88. The monstrous teeth of the serpents on no. 54 are not paralleled elsewhere in Failaka or on the Mitannian seals, Figs. 1-3.

24. "Seals of 'Dilmun-Type' from Failaka, Kuwait", Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies 10 1980, pp. 45-53.

25. P. Kjaerum, "The Dilmun seals as evidence of long distance relations in the early second millennium B.C.", *Bahrain through the Ages* (eds. S.H. Ali al Khalifa and M. Rice), London 1986, p. 269.

26. See Kjaerum, "Seals of Dilmun Type" cited in note 24, p. 45.

27. I gratefully acknowledge that this second Mitannian style cylinder with horned serpents was discovered for me by Sidney S. Babcock in the Rosen Collection. Subsequently, Jonathan P. Rosen kindly permitted its publication together with Fig. 1 in the present article.

28. I was able to compare the altar to the one on sealing no. 404 in the manuscript of the seal impressions of the Shilwa-Teshshup archive by Diana Stein-Wünscher, which is in press at Harrassowitz. The altar appears in the upper field of a sealing which has a storm god on his lion dragon in the left part of the impression.

Another altar with flames is represented on impression 16 in Diana Stein's article "Mythologische Inhalte der Nuzi Glyptik," cited in Note 9 above. It is again placed before the storm god on his mount. It is tempting to assume that the flaming altar in the center of the scene in Fig. 8 represents the storm god in the absence of that deity's image, but at present the evidence is insufficient.

29. Diana L. Stein, "A Reappraisal of the 'Shaushtatar letter' from Nuzi." Zeitschrift für Assyriologie 79/1 (1989), pp. 36-60.

30. His publication on the seals from Surkh-i Dum in Luristan has recently appeared in E.F. Schmidt, M.N. van Loon and H.H. Curvers, *The Holmes Expeditions to Luristan* (The University of Chicago, Oriental Institute Publications 108), Chicago, 1989, pp. 121-124, 209-211, and 413-451.

31. Maurits van Loon, *Anatolia in the Second Millennium* (Iconography of Religions XV,12, Leiden 1985).

List of Illustrations

FIG. 1

Cylinder seal: stormgod and god with serpent monster. Collection, Jonaathan P. Rosen, New York. Photograph, E. Porada. Blue-glazed faience (sintered quartz), height 27.6 mm, diameter 12.2 mm, stringhole 2.3 mm.

FIG. 1a

Drawing of the impression of Fig. 1, by E. Porada.

FIG. 2

Seal impression: stormgod and god with serpent monster. E. Porada, *Seal Impressions of Nuzi*. (Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research XXIV [1947]) No. 738. Seal of Puhisenni son of Maitta, JEN 27, JENU 25. Assigned to the fourth generation of Tehiptilla (his grandson, Tarmitilla).

FIG. 3

Drawing of the seal impression, fig. 2, by Diana L. Stein, "Mythologische Inhalte der Nuzi Glyptik" in V. Haas, *Hurriter und Hurritisch*, (Konstanzer Altorientalische Symposien, Bd. 2, 1987) No. 11.

FIG. 4

The Gold Bowl of Hasanlu. Photograph, courtesy of R.H. Dyson, Jr.

FIG. 5

Detail of the serpent monster on the Gold Bowl. Photograph, courtesy of R.H. Dyson, Jr.

FIG. 6

Seal from Failaka, P. Kjaerum, *Failaka/Dilmun, the Second Millennium Settlements, the Stamp and Cylinder Seals* (Jutland Archaeological Society Publications XVII:1, 1983), p. 31, No. 54. Photograph, courtesy of P. Kjaerum.

FIG. 7

Seal from Failaka, as above, p. 63, No. 137.

FIG. 8

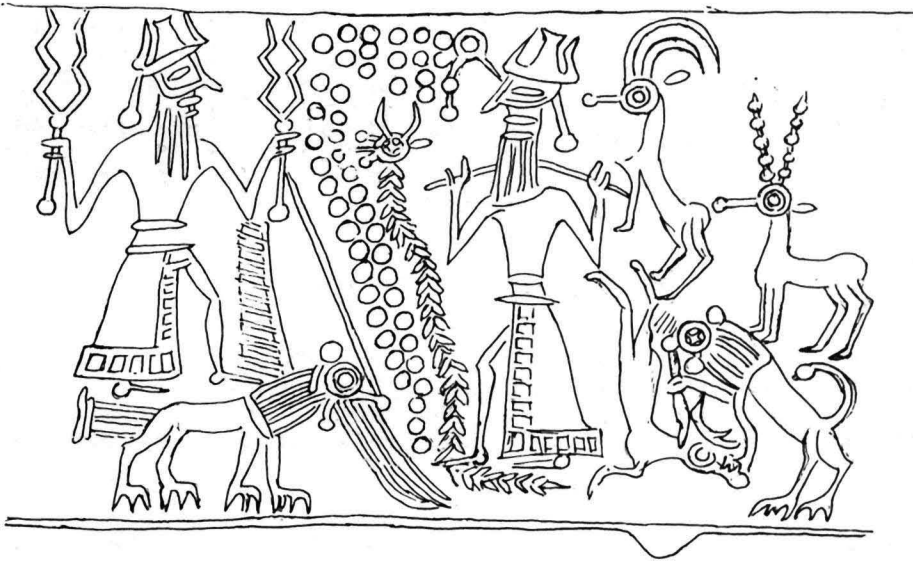
Cylinder seal, two worshippers flanking a censer, two bull-horned serpents, two other worshippers and a sphinx in the field. Collection Jonathan P. Rosen, New York. Blue glazed faience (sintered quartz), height 28.9 mm, diameter 14.3 mm, stringhole 3.2 mm.

FIG. 9

Cylinder seal. *Corpus of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in North American Collections. I The Collection of the Pierpont Morgan Library*, Washington, 1948, no. 688.



1

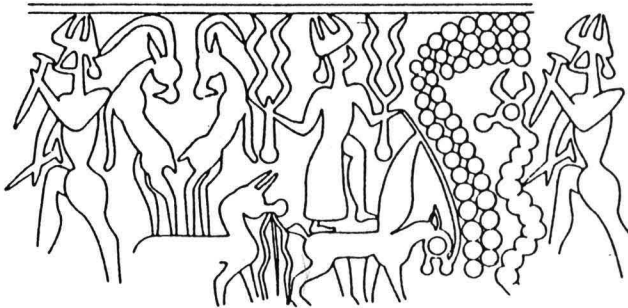


1a

2

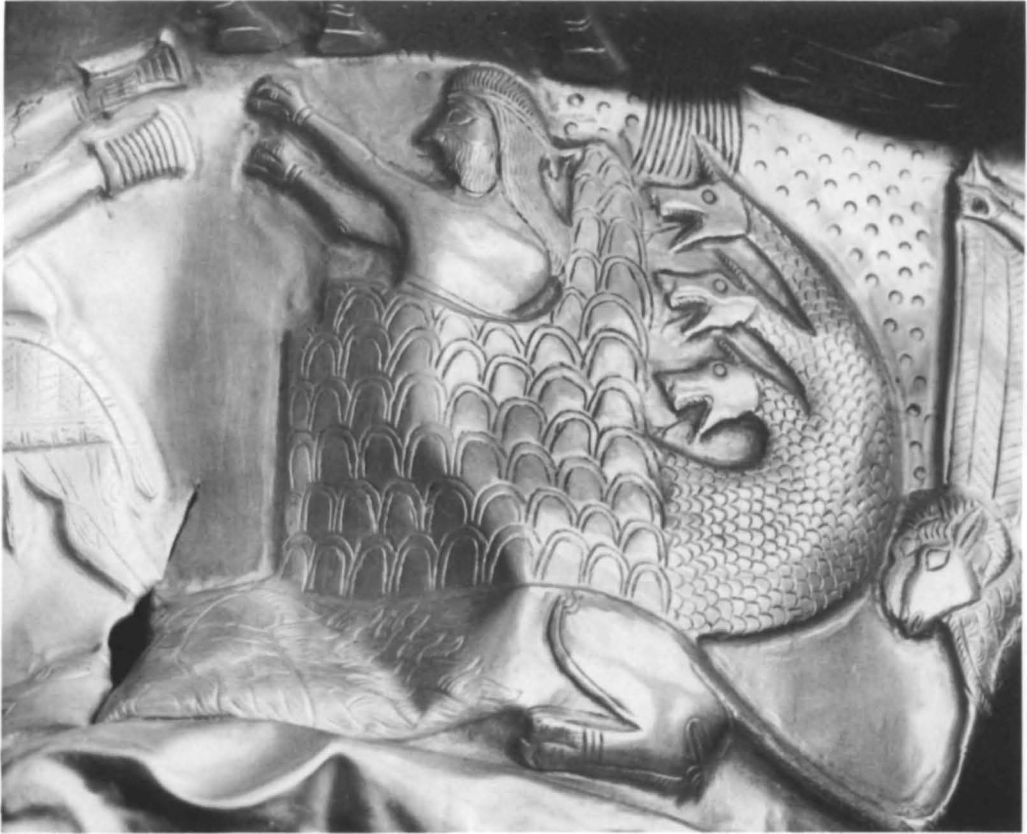


3





4



5

6



7





8



9

