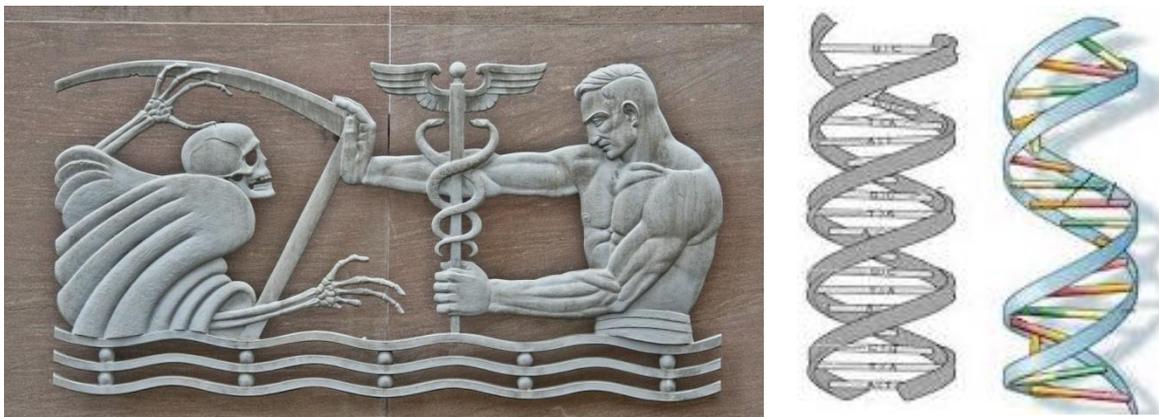


## THE SERPENT AND THE CADUCEUS, EVE AND THE WINGED SNAKE LADY

In Western civilization one of the most repeated images is that of Adam, Eve and the Serpent, and traditionally the spin is that Eve (*hawā*) is to be blamed for listening to the serpent (*hayya*) and then for tempting Adam. Much has been written about this symbolism, out of which perhaps the most insightful is the etymology of the words for Eve and Serpent<sup>1</sup> - looked at later. In the New Testament, snakes instead are associated with wisdom, rather than having evil connotations. Since SPECTRA newsletters are concerned with continuities of tradition from ancient times, this intriguing subject could not be more demanding of our interest.

In working on my *Catalogue E* I came across a chain of images involving a woman whose legs are snakes - and other images showing different combinations of twisted serpents. Already familiar to the reader, I expect, are the images of Minoan priestesses holding up a pair of snakes, but these images from Sumer, Central Asia or India, come from off the beaten track and are their prototypes. After taking stock of these new images from more remote regions, some only quite recently unearthed by archaeologists, whilst dealing with them in relation to my research on the meaning of the lion attacking its prey, I thought it would be worth extracting the main chunk of that material from the catalogue and offering them here, not only to throw oblique light on the matter of Eve and the Serpent, but also to see why entwined serpents are used today to symbolise the medical profession - or why the double helix of the DNA structure is often called 'the molecule of Life'.



[Try as I might, in changing this newsletter to .pdf format I have not been able to prevent picture slippage]

### INTRODUCTION

I have simply joined together excerpts from different sections of the commentary on entries in *Catalogue E: The Forward Attack* from my *CANEA* project, cobbling together separate sections of narrative that by juxtaposition unifies the narrative with welcome continuity. In many cases I have shortened the text, and often have to leave the pictures to speak for themselves (the pictures are sometimes copies of copies and are often clearer in the original on-line version of the Catalogue).

Despite leaving out some technical academic references, much of the material may still be heavy-going for the newcomer to the field and, again, will often only make sense taken within the wider context of the whole Catalogue. Many cross-references only work within the full Catalogue since the illustration numbers and automatic cross-referencing here are in some places out of sequence after being extracted from the main body of the book. Some newly inserted pictures for this piece alone have no captions - but overall the general narrative can be grasped. For those wanting to read the original, go to the [www.layish.co.uk](http://www.layish.co.uk) home page, click on the centre square twice, and then click on the *Catalogue E* link which should be ready for display in full from mid-2017 onwards.

## THE CATALOGUE ENTRIES

In collecting all the evidence that showed a lion confronting or attacking its prey from the front, the following (in shortened form) are the 4 entry numbers with twisted snakes also in the design. Most of our attention is given to *ForAtt-22/ForAtt-29* and any material that relates back to them.

### FORATT-2 (4<sup>TH</sup> MILLENNIUM BC)

On this stamped clay bulla from Uruk, the entwined snakes - and griffin - are diagnostic markers for the Susa-Egypt interchange period. It is important to note its prehistoric beginnings.



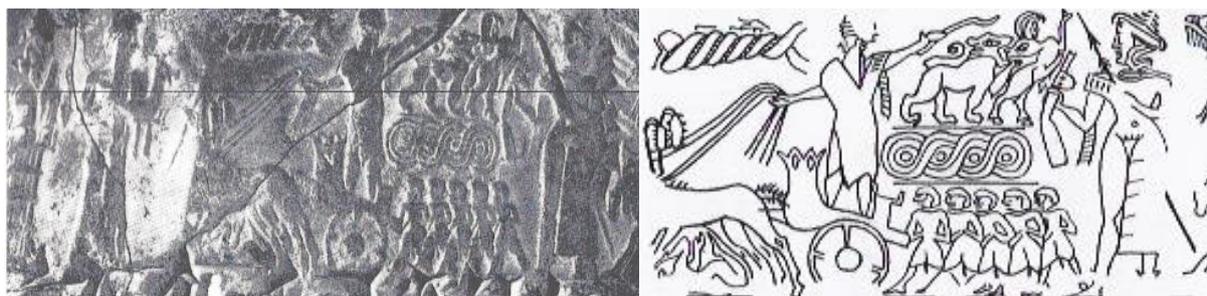
### FORATT-20 (EARLY 2<sup>ND</sup> MILLENNIUM BC)

The seal below of haematite (*YaleCat-1218/WardCat-860*) shows the adoption of Egyptian motifs on a Syrian petty ruler's seal: Ishtar is shown as horned Hathor holding a snake, and the local ruler wears a pharaonic helmet with uraeus, and also holds a snake with a Horus bird perched on top. The snakes held upright as staffs or trophies have strong Syrian mythological overtones, seeming to refer overtly to Mot/Death - the snake featuring in Baal and Ishtar's journeys to the Underworld.



### FORATT-22 (EARLY 2<sup>ND</sup> MILLENNIUM BC)

This entry is so significant that we will spend the next 20 pages on its implications. The sealing below was rolled on an Old Babylonian tablet in the British Museum (BM 16815) next to an ordinary Babylonian sealing (lit up more brightly on the left of the photograph). It is dated to Year 14 of Hammurabi's reign, and is probably from Sippar (for clarity, the design is drawn out on the right).



The seal was rolled in such a way that the heads of the horses (as they pull the chariot over a body next to two scenes divided by a guilloche) only just appear on the other side at the right, next to a half-clothed Venus holding lance and axe. The top scene of the split-level block shows a lion attacking a goat, and the bottom a line of marching soldiers. The charioteer with right hand holds the reins as he flings his whip behind him with the left. Easy to overlook, *sideways over the horse reins is the lower half of the Snake Lady showing her twisted-legs*, her human profile and wings also cut off, just appearing over the horses' heads on the other side. What does this figure mean? It is an early indicator of the influence of Hurrians or Mitanni in the region, whose homeland was Central Asia (present-day Turkmenistan). The Weather/War God, Baal, is given a chariot and horses as his steed, rather than the conventional bull - reflecting the fashion for horse and chariot brought to the ancient Near East by nomadic Mitanni steppe warriors from the mid-2M BC.

#### EMERGENCE OF THE SNAKE LADY ON OTHER OLD BABYLONIAN SEALS AND SEALINGS

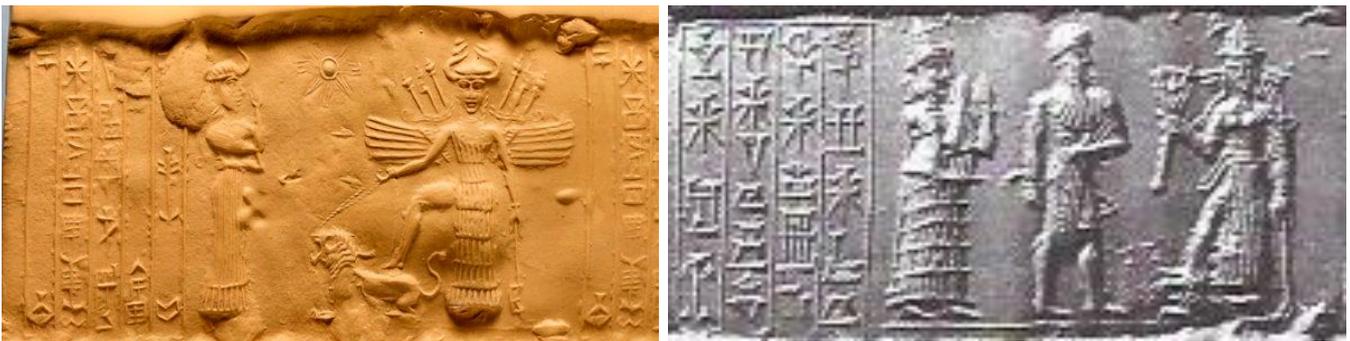
The introduction of the Goddess with twisted snakes as legs, as a sign of Mitanni infiltration into Babylonian culture, has such strong implications as a counter-culture to the body of imagery forming the *Canon of Ancient Near Eastern Art* that we need to look into her origins in a side DIVERSION shortly, but we can lay the ground for it with a few preliminary observations here. In our landmark Old Babylonian sealing above we have in fact a TRIVISUAL for the Goddess Ishtar - in Mitanni, Sumerian and Syrian versions respectively - as the Snake Lady, lion-prey *Forward Attack*, and a half-dressed human female. In other words, I believe the Snake Lady is juxtaposed with more familiar images in order to announce her equivalence to the other two symbols of the Goddess.

The appearance (sideways) of a winged, double-serpent-legged woman with human torso near the head of Baal might at first sight strike us as purely Mesopotamian<sup>2</sup> in character, since it perpetuates the twists and turns of Gudea of Lagash's earlier Ningishzida images described later, but this is the first time she is topped by a winged female torso, with her wind-blown hair expressing that aspect of Baal/Indra-Varuṇa's power as Wind, and the twisting of her serpent legs the Aśvin-Nāsatyau's Vortex (this will make sense after our analysis of the Ṛgvedic Gods revered by the Mitanni as equivalents to Syro-Mesopotamian Gods). On the basis of the following quotation, the Wind Gymnasts who surround her in various poses on other seals we look at later can be omens expressing the full reach of the seal owner/ruler's power in terms similar to those used by the Akkadian kings who boasted of conquering the Four Quarters:

<sup>2</sup> Buchanan was early in spotting in Frankfort's *Cylinder Seals* (pl.XXIXe) the purely Babylonian seal with a tiny version of the serpent woman to one side of the usual conflict groups (Berlin Vorderasiatisches Museum-827) - needing close scrutiny to see it - included under *III.9- 14* - and we have shown other examples establishing the Neo-Babylonian pedigree for this figure, probably taken up through (at this stage) one-off contact with individuals from Central Asia.

*The south wind, Elam; The north wind, Akkad;  
The east wind Subartu and Gutium; The west wind Amurru*<sup>3</sup>

In fact, after the Early Dynastic period it had already become common on Akkadian seals to show Ishtar with wings to augment the usual protrusions sprouting from her shoulders as seen in the old versions of Inanna -as on the seal below left from the Chicago Oriental Institute archives (note the absence of the double row of feathers later so distinctive of Mitanni wings). On a later, Old Babylonian version (as below right) it is not easy to see whether Ishtar has vestigial wings at her neck or whether they are maces: in fact in the Pierpoint Morgan Collection catalogue there are several seals identical to it (*PierMorCat-371-378*). Along with the *harpé* held in her left hand



**Ill.9- 1: (Left) Akkadian Seal impression of Ishtar with wings and maces sprouting at her shoulders - Chicago Oriental Institute A27903; (right) Old Babylonian version of Ishtar with double-lion mace - WardCat-91/PierMorCat-371**

(which in early papers on more clearly defined seals I have identified as Ursa Major<sup>4</sup>, against which constellation Venus is esoterically described as exalted), in the right she brandishes a double lion-headed mace whose shaft, on close inspection with magnifying glass, *consists of a Caduceus-like staff entwined by two snakes*, confirming our association of twisted snakes with Venus. On such seals Ishtar usually holds the *harpé* to emphasise her warrior aspect, or (as above left) is shown with plain maces growing out of her shoulders instead of the original wheat-ears the benign and fruitful 3M Inanna would have displayed.

Then on Old Babylonian seals of the early 2M we see that transition to the Snake Lady when the semi-anthropomorphic version of the deity is introduced, possibly alluding to the Underworld stage of Ishtar's journey. A small handful of seals (including the OB seal below left in *Ill.9- 14*) begin to include the definitive 2M version of the entwined serpents of Ningishzida transformed into the Snake Lady, perhaps to emphasise the message of femaleness and recent differentiation from the male Ninurta (explained later). Different combinations of the animal parts involved are used in different images - so that, for instance, below centre top the magnifying glass reveals the figure on the left (bearded) has bird talons for feet instead of bird wings - and what appear to be lion heads growing out of the shoulders (as opposed to the middle seal showing Ursa Major/Minor upended between Sun-Moon and the Ankh symbol for Life contrasted with the naked Ishtar and Baal pair against a small palm tree with three crouching animals above). The Snake Lady flanked by worshippers on the third (slightly damaged) seal does have wings, and legs in a single twist ending

<sup>3</sup> From tablet 4 of *Šumma Sīn ina tāmartišu*, quoted by U Koch *Mesopotamian Astrology* Copenhagen 1994 , p.106

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.layish.co.uk/venusworship.pdf> -(also in press *RVO IV* 2017

in a fish tail, this time on a 1:2-height-type seal where the double panel is roughly divided by a wriggling snake becoming a guilloche but still looking like a snake. From the latter seal we might



*Ill.9- 2: (Left) Mid-2M Knossos snake priestess figure of ivory and metal - Boston Museum; (centre column) Old Babylonian/Syrian haematite seals that replace the twisted snakes motif either by a woman holding two snakes or as snake lady (with apologies for the poor reproduction): (top) WardCat-118/PierMorCat 386E ; (centre) WardCat-205/ PierMorCat 990; (bottom) also with short, horizontal snakey guilloche and 'sacred marriage' couple in the sex act -WardCat-250/ PierMorCat-961; (right) The Burney Relief, British Museum, from the time of Hammurabi -made of painted clay tempered with straw*

also conclude that the twisted snakes - with or without the winged female human torso - may be a shorthand way of alluding to the Sacred Marriage - which the couple to the Snake Lady's left are clearly performing.

### ***EARLIEST SNAKE LADY ELEMENTS: WINGS, FEMALE TORSO, BIRD TALONS, SNAKE LEGS***

Buchanan *ibid.* was the first (aside from the one citation by Frankfort in his *Cylinder Seals*) to start to notice other Old Babylonian seals bringing in the Snake Lady with the twisted serpent legs, and we have just shown how in Near Eastern contexts (especially on Old Babylonian and Mitanni seals) the Snake Lady is nearly always presented alongside the Lion-Prey *Forward Attack* as a *BIVISUAL*<sup>5</sup> - an instant two-way translation for different cultures living side by side, indicating the same Goddess is being referred to (we can expand further on this later). Possible confirmation of the veracity of my hypothesis is that we can state with 99% accuracy that the Mesopotamian lion-prey motif is not native to the Central Asian territories (and rare in Hittite territories too).

In *Catalogue A: The Belly Landing* we traced the motif of twisted serpents merged with lion heads back to the Protohistoric palettes and seals of Egypt and Susa, where the way lion-heads and snake heads are carved in exactly the same way reminds us snakes were often viewed as 'Underworld lions'. This is seen again in the group of a figure holding up two snakes on the 3M chlorite pot in the

<sup>5</sup> (in the same way ,in textual terms, that the Rosette Stone is a *TRILINGUAL*).



*Ill.9- 3: (Top) View of 3M Iranian chlorite vase said to be from Khafaje (BM ME-128887) showing two snakes held in 'master of the beasts' fashion by a standing figure of neutral sex standing on the rumps of two lionesses with tails upheld like ears of wheat (the rosette is a pointer to Inanna/Venus); (below) the two further heraldic units comprising the scenes further round the pot.*

British Museum above (whose lion-prey attack type features in *Catalogue A* as *Belland-4*). They compares closely with the similar figure over two snakes on the contemporary vase from Jiroft in S-E Iran (*Ill.9- 14*) - a triad we could view as one of the earliest versions of the 'Snake Lady unpacked'. In the same way, the seated figure on the rumps of zebu bulls holding streams of water with plants growing out of them on the Khafaje pot (above bottom left) is a similarly protohistoric visual iconostasis for her consort, the Storm God, whatever his name was then. At this stage there is no hybridisation of animal with human components, and the pot is divided into three heraldic groups: human figure with snakes standing on lions; human figure with water streams *seated* on hump-backed bulls; and *Belly Landing* with the two beasts interlocked, a bird flying over them (and, very importantly, two bears (?Ursa Major and Minor already?) either side of a palm tree squeezed in under the *Belly Landing* - see *Catalogue A* commentary for its significance).

We thus see how the later Mitanni predilection for planning scenes in heraldic units already had distant Iranian/Elamite roots in the regions they later came to occupy - and in the minor group of two bears either side of a palm tree under the lion-bull scene we also have a precedent for their habit of tucking in a miniature group under larger units (e.g. the minor master of the beasts holding two dogs tucked in under the larger Master holding up lions in *ForAtt-24*, or the tiny Storm God on his steed between the huge Wind Gymnasts in *Ill.9- 24*).

### ***THE PROTOLITERATE SNAKE CULT AND THE TWISTED SNAKES IMAGE***

The serpent is such a multivalent symbol that we can only try to pin down the few relevant basic meanings it appears to have had - spanning Heaven and Earth - by looking at its depiction on



**Ill.9- 4: (Left and top centre) Susa I period stamp seal made on the split face of a pebble said to come from Luristan - Keel (*ibid.*) Ill.22/Hildi-Leu no.10. Compare (lower centre) with the theme on other Luristan stamp seals of the man swallowed by a snake<sup>6</sup>-GMA 1583A; (upper right) ivory snake; (lower right) snake swallowing a calf on ivory cosmetic spatula - both from Gonurdepe, Turkmenistan - Sarianidi 2005 figs 104 and 66 respectively (the red colouring of the ivory is in Turkmen taste**

artefacts. Firstly, there is always a literal association between snakes and the Underworld simply because they live in holes in the ground. The counterpoint of the changing seasons in (to the astronomer) the backward and forward winding motion of the Sun and planets moving across the sky - creating cosmic spirals - is part of the earliest content of ancient near-eastern imagery - expressed both geometrically and organically in the form of twisted snakes as early as on protohistoric Egyptian palettes and Susa seals (*ForAtt-2/3*) continuing in different combinations (as our next few illustrations show) in surges throughout history. The Khafaje chlorite vase - probably imported from South-East Iran - can be viewed as emerging from the general context of the preceding millennium's 5-4M snake culture at Eridu and Susa. This period is exemplified by the superb 4M stamp seal above left in the collection of Othmar Keel<sup>7</sup> - illustrated in an enhanced version in Hildi Keel-Leu's original review of the Biblical Institute Collection of 1991 in the *OBO Series Vol. 110*. The boar features as far back as in the sculptural decoration of 10-8M BC Göbekli Tepe<sup>8</sup>, some of whose temples overlap in time with those of Çatal Hüyük further west in Anatolia (8-6M)). It continues to appear later on Ubaid stamp seals in Mesopotamia and Susa<sup>9</sup> including one from Tepe Giyan (also with snake, quoted by Schmidt *ibid.*, *Abb.15b/8*). The boar in later periods was often associated with the circumpolar region - so that particular connotation could go back to protohistoric times. In other examples conveniently cited by Schmidt in the same plate, snakes or pairs of snakes feature on square or round stamp seals from areas surrounding Susa, most notably Tepe Gawra, several showing a Tammuz goat-man holding aloft a pair of snakes. The theme of a man swallowed by a serpent (above lower centre) is less often seen (Winkelman *ibid.*).

Current literature tells us that, at that crucial turning point between the Late Prehistoric period into urban development, as far as archaeology can deduce the more immediate origins of an active

<sup>6</sup> This theme is pursued in Sylvia Winkelman 'Berliner Schlangenbecken, Trichterbecher und Cincinnati-Mann: verkannte Schlüsselobjekte der altorientalischen Archäologie?' in Dittmann, R et al. *Altertumswissenschaften im Dialog: Festschrift für Wolfram Nagel (AOAT 306)* Münster 2003. On Cincinnati Man, see later references by Porada.

<sup>7</sup> Othmar Keel et al. *Altorientalische Miniaturkunst: ein Blick in die Sammlungen des Biblischen Instituts der Universität Freiburg Schweiz* Göttingen 1996

<sup>8</sup> K Schmidt "'Zuerst kam der Tempel, dann die Stadt" - Vorläufiger Bericht zu den Grabungen am Göbekli Tepe und am Gürcütepe 1995/1999' *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* L 2000 5-41 (Ill.12a/b p.27)

<sup>9</sup> To realise just how fully the snake features on Ubaid and Early Dynastic seal imagery, simply turn the pages of Pierre Amiet's invaluable gathering together of the earliest material in *Glyptique Mesopotamienne Archaïque* Paris 1980

snake cult in Mesopotamia can be traced to Eridu, moving on into Susa a few hundreds of years later. Vértésalji<sup>10</sup>'s graphic description sums it up perfectly:

*At Eridu there were obviously massive clay figures of snakes underneath the pavement of the Temple VIII sanctuary, near the western corner of the altar (Safar et al. 1981, 102-3). Furthermore, in the environs of the altar in Temple VII were found 'two parts of a snake in buff clay decorated in chocolate in circles and lines' (op.cit. 230) which may have been originally used for libations. In Temple VI there was a 'simple bowl ornamented with three snakes in relief (op.cit. 160). In Susa, [the] famous beaker painted with the representation of a snake was found (e.g. Hole 1984 fig.4). Snakes may have [sic] appeared also in the Susa A glyptics. [Certainly] later, snakes were often depicted on seals of the Uruk period at Susa (e.g. Hole 1983 fig.2). For chronological reasons it is quite clear that snake representations were at an earlier period at Eridu [and] were most probably later adopted by the priestly élite of Susa engaged in religious acts similar to those at Eridu. From Susa they may have spread out to [places such as] Tepe Gawra... .*

We do not underestimate the early existence of snake cults in India too, where they are still part of Hindu ritual (*Ill.9- 8*), and we should take into account a perennial South Asian dimension seeping into Mesopotamia all the way through, most obvious from Akkadian - and of course Mitanni - times.

#### THE EARLIEST GODS OF ERIDU AND THEIR ASSOCIATION WITH THE UNDERWORLD

For the archaeology of Eridu, Vértésalji (*ibid.*) is again of initial help here in pinning down hard facts about early cult allusions to the serpent (along with the fish) in relation to the God Ea and his consort:

*Almost the whole territory of the Eridu-Ur Survey (fig.2, map A)... could be the possible provenances for the dead who were transported to the Eridu cemetery to be buried there. The extraordinary attraction of this burial place could be explained by the specific role of two gods who were worshipped there, almost certainly from Early Ubaid times ...: Enki/Ea [and his consort] (also known as Damgalnunna/Damkina) (Vértésalji 19894b, 29-33). They were the earliest known Rulers of the Underworld and they possessed 'attributive animals' like the fish and the snake. Specific burial (and worshipping) practices at this site may be connected with these underworld gods: the (earliest) fictitious doors in the temples, offerings of fish and snake figurines, graves dug down to clean sand and water table... ..*

At this early stage, as we shall see was the case with Ninurta also, Ea covered several functions, some of which were later taken on by more specific Gods, so that for instance he covered wisdom and crafts until Nabu and Kothar/Tiṣṭrya emerged to take them over in the 2M. He is seen as the God of Creation and Life (the Semitic root *hyy* means both 'life' and 'serpent'), being the God of semen/builder of the embryo under his epithet as God of Water (which gives life), and thus Creator of the first Man, Etana/Adapa. The name E-A literally means 'Place of the Waters' (probably the actual name of the Eridu temple) - and even at this early time it has been identified as a *Hurrian*

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<sup>10</sup> P Vértésalji 'Were there Supralocal Cemeteries in Southern Mesopotamia in Late Chalcolithic Times?' in E F Henrickson et al. (eds) *Upon this Foundation: The Ubaid Reconsidered* Copenhagen 1989, p.181-194

word! Without dwelling too long on Sumero-Susan cosmology, ‘The Waters’/Apsu mostly referred to subterranean waters - but sometimes also to the earthly waters of rivers and oceans - and even heavenly waters as Neith did in ancient Egypt - meaning the serpent is a primary symbol of The Waters, at whatever level of manifestation. So, looking back to the Khafaje chlorite pot the two snakes could be the symbol of the God Ea<sup>11</sup> and the streams of water held by the second figure could refer either to the Waters of Life or simply to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Perhaps surprisingly, this theme is covered in a recent paper by Archi<sup>12</sup> about BILINGUALS from Ebla, indicating that there the Sumerogram for Ea stood for their God *Hay(y)a*, sometimes invoked in incantations against snakes, while in other passages his connection with the Underworld is clear - confirming the connection we have just made between Water, Life and Snakes. There is mention of an offering to *Nin-ki* performed by the Queen, whose context suggests *Nin-ki* is the updated version of the spouse of Ea/Enki/*Hay(y)a*, arrangements for whose greater and lesser festivals in month XII are described. ‘(This is perhaps the place to mention that ‘Eve’ in the same language is *Hawa*, and for those who know about weak vowels in Semitic languages it means that *Hayya* and *Hawa* are interchangeable.) In Syria the cult of Ea ‘was virtually limited to the city of Ebla itself, where the god had a place of cult’, Archi writes. High points of the festival included the presentation of a man and a woman to Ea; the participation of jugglers; a cloth made from the wool of a she-goat, and ‘an invocation at the gate’ (compare with our account of the Festival of Ishtar at Mari described in *Catalogue C*).

### ***THE ENDURING SNAKE CULT OF ELAM AND THE INDUS***

To expand on our introduction on snake cults as unearthed at Eridu, we have already mentioned the use of the pair of twisted snakes on the back of Protodynastic Egyptian slate palettes - at times with lion heads as in *ForAtt-3* - and their ivory knife handles often had the Susan rosette of the



***Ill.9- 5: (Left) figures holding up snakes appear as early as the 5M on sealings from Susa (RCSCat fig.25); (centre) the twisted double snake motif is rolled several times on a hollow bulla from Susa (RCSCat-22), a sideways boat scene from another seal to be seen on its left; (right) 2M Elamite sealing with enthroned deity on snake throne (RCSCat-76) 17C***

Goddess in the spaces between, as seen on the Susa sealing above centre on a hollow clay ball holding accounting tokens. Clearly snakes took centre stage in Elamite cults from the very

<sup>11</sup> More familiar is the later goat-fish symbol for Ea, in cases where his zodiacal equivalence with Pisces-Capricorn is in play.

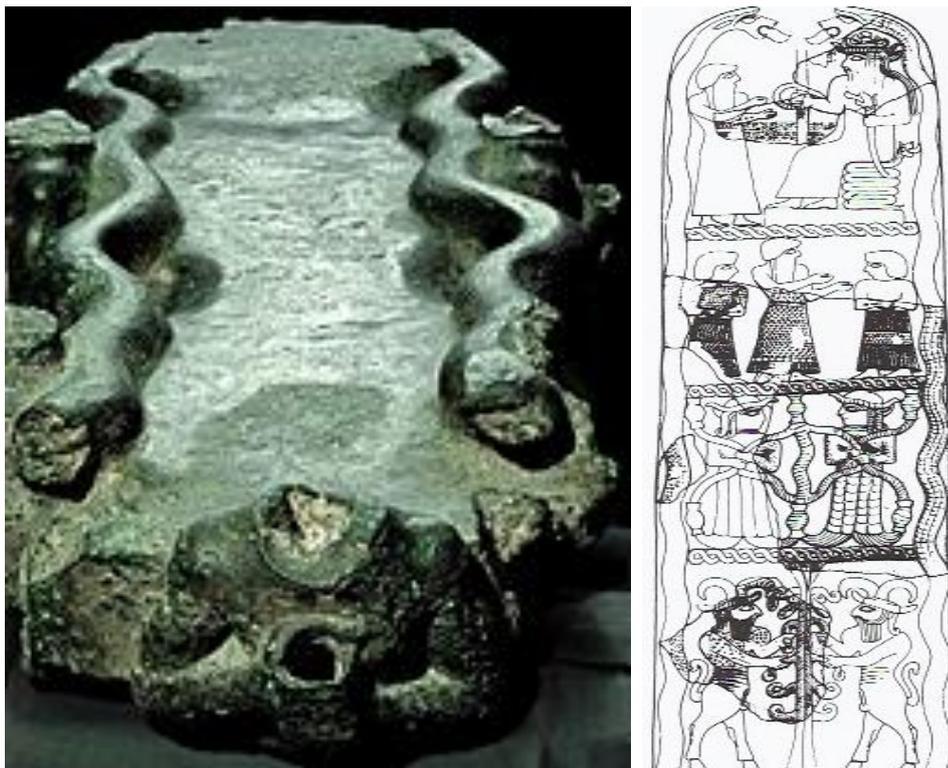
<sup>12</sup> A Archi ‘The God Hay(y)a (Ea/Enki) at Ebla’ in Sarah C Melville et al (eds) *Opening the Tablet Box: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Benjamin R Foster* Leiden 2010 15-36

beginning and are attested several times as early as the 5-4M on other sealings from Susa<sup>13</sup>. The bulla (above left) with an ibex-horned human holding up two snakes is similar to the well-known Tepe Gawra examples. A deity seated on a snake throne (usually interpreted as the main Elamite God, Inshushinak) often appears on 2M Elamite seals - as on the fragmentary legal document from Susa c.17C BC above right - yet it may draw on precedents from Margiana where snakes feature on amulets (below) - a region where the only eagle known to eat snakes is native to the region (the Bactrian design of the man seated on a snake throne could be rated as more sophisticated than the Elamite version in the previous illustration).



**Ill.9- 6: Two typical 2M BMAC metal amulets from Gonurdepe<sup>14</sup>, Margiana/Turkmenistan, c.1700**

Such snake connections in this region are associated with the strongly matriarchal society of Elam: the bronze double serpent altar from Susa in the Louvre (below) was found on its Acropolis with its



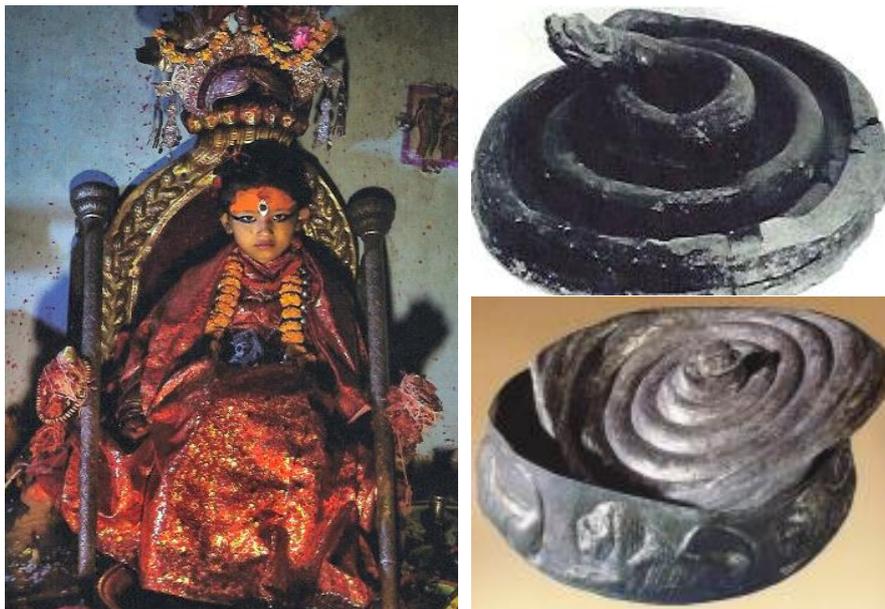
**Ill.9- 7: (Left) Bronze snake altar from Susa 13-12C BC (Louvre) and (right) the roughly contemporary stele of Untash Napirisha from Susa - restoration (compressed, based on fragments drawn in dark lines) by P de Miroschedji (RCSCat fig.42**

back end fixed into a wall and still has the remains of five female figures surrounding it (one at the front and two at each side) holding vases from which water would originally have spouted. It is a

<sup>13</sup> Both illustrations for convenience are taken from P Harper and J Aruz (eds) *The Royal City of Susa* Metropolitan Museum of Art Catalogue 1996 (abbreviated to *RCSCat*)

<sup>14</sup> G Rossi-Osmida (ed.) *Margiana Gonurdepe Necropolis* Venice 2002

masterpiece of bronze-casting from the last decades of the 2M, deemed by Amiet in Harper and Aruz (*ibid.*) to be roughly contemporary with the Stela of Untash-Napirisha (above right) taken to Susa from Choga Zanbil, whose reconstruction based on four fragments shows its border was originally framed by two giant serpents, again with lion heads. The chief deity at the top is seated on the traditional snake throne, offering the rod and ring of kingship to Untash-Napirisha, and holds a snake dagger in the other hand. He is shown again on the next register between two women (?priestesses), while beneath them two goddesses with fish-tails seize and control the writhings of interweaving ropes or snakes - and at the bottom mouflon-horned bullmen support the Tree of Life. Even on into the 2M, the entire stela in its imagery appears to have kept alive that original fish-serpent cult of Ea and Damkina of Eridu, even if under new guises.



**III.9- 8: The Living Goddess at Patan, Nepal, on a throne framed by twisted snakes ending in a crown of seven snake-heads; (right) snake models from Mycenae's Cult Centre, c.1250BC**

Still today in Nepal (especially Kathmandu) young girls are chosen for their divine characteristics to represent the Hindu Goddess *Durgā* (equated by the Buddhist population there with *Vajradevī*) to receive the daily worship of her followers as an embodiment of the Goddess until the onset of puberty - perhaps perpetuating a role the Elamite priestesses used to have. It is interesting to realise from the photograph above that the throne of the newly dedicated living Goddess protects her in the same way as on the Untash-Napirisha stele by an arch of interwoven snakes carved round it, whose seven heads culminate in a crown over her head. We can deem her a present-day incarnation of the Serpent Lady and it is not far-fetched to see the practice as the rare survival of a long tradition once widespread not only in Elam and South-West Iran, but reaching into India in the same way it spread westwards to Crete in the 2M - and indeed to Mycenae (next to the Kathmandu priestess are two examples of the many clay/metal snakes found in the late 2M Cult Centre there).

At Gonurdepe snake or scorpion jewellery of fine workmanship found in the tombs (as below) might only have been worn by ladies involved in ritual, perhaps substitutes for handling actual snakes. The seals centring on a snake goddess indicate by her breasts that she must be female - and we can read the female figure with legs morphed into twisted snakes as a variation on the expression of



**Ill.9- 9:** (left) gold Bactrian necklace with scorpion pendant with (articulated legs); (right) gold necklace from Gonur female grave G.011 with centrepiece of three gold snake-heads on turquoise and carnelian beads. Twisted copper alloy bracelets ending in snake heads were common finds in the area.

the Goddess' power, over both Life (*hayy*) - and Death - (as with the Hindu Kali) - the same message as that conveyed by the lioness-prey group, which is why they dovetail as BIVISUALS. Remnants of the snake cult survive today, not only with the snake charmers of India, but also amongst the Yezidis of Northern Iraq (see the two photographs taken by E S Drower at the end).

#### THE TWISTED SNAKES ON EARLY DYNASTIC SEALS

In the aftermath of the <sup>C</sup>Ubaid period, twisted snakes still appear on a handful of 3M Early Dynastic seals, signposting the primary phase of absorption of an image generated in Eastern Mesopotamia/Western Iran, which on Syrian seals became so mechanical that it was gradually geometrised into the guilloche. The seated, horned god on the seal below left drinks out of a beer pot with long straw, on the other side of which is an upreared *Forward Attack* of the type including an intervening hunter. This is a Ward/Pierpoint seal needing fuller inspection for the detail, but if in the 5-4M the twisted snakes stood for Ea of Eridu, then the way they fill up the sky over the scene (one head each end), even above what appear to be a Crescent and the stars of Ursa Major/Minor, indicates the god worshipped is probably Ea - and in another pointer that the Eridu *koine* is still operative, the seal below right prominently features fish offerings along with inserted hieroglyphs of decapitated heads, fish and a pointed shoe.



**Ill.9- 10:** Sumerian Early Dynastic seals still using twisted snakes, rather than the shorthand stylised guilloche of the Syrians: (left) a drinking scene and upreared *Forward Attack* WardCat-35; (right) with further smaller snakes reared up either side of the two main twists - WardCat-137

We know the twisted serpents at the turn of the 3M (most notably under Gudea) were at times named as the God Ningishzida, with one snake argued as male and the other female, their joint

identity documented as being essentially bisexual. But in the Neo-Sumerian pantheon of the early 2M, Ningishzida became an attribute of Weather and War God Ninurta/Ningirsu (more or less the equivalent of Indra in Proto-Vedic India). The possible mutation of this multivalent God into the Snake Lady - along with a Proto-Avestan change in attitude towards the Sumerian Eagle Sky God - throws so much light on the intensification of Indus-Oxiana penetration into Mesopotamia - probably rooted in new astronomical procedures - that it is timely at this juncture to stop for a DIVERSION and pave the way for an understanding of changes in visualising the Gods and Goddesses.

### **PANTHEON CHANGE -IMDUGUD-NINURTA AND NINURTA-NINGISHZIDA**

The process of anthropomorphisation, or representing the planetary Gods as humans, started in Early Dynastic times: Ningirsu/Ninurta, accompanied by Imdugud as his BIVISUAL (in other words they are interchangeable) is shown as a giant human on the *Stela of the Vultures - Ill.9- 13*, and in *Catalogue C* we had occasion to discuss the large male human statue of Abu, Lord of Vegetation, from Tell Asmar<sup>15</sup> (*Ill.7-49*), on the base of which the tiny carving of lion-headed eagle Imdugud seizing two goats with plants brings in his animal marker to indicate he is to be read as a God. Inanna, too, is the woman with six hair-locks and pointing hand holding the date cluster on the Entemena Stone Vase fragment.

In this catalogue we see in particular how this works in relation to the presentation of the Warrior/Storm God and his bull steed and the self-display of his consort, Ishtar, with her lion - after the lion-prey group went out of currency during the Akkadian administration - in Sumer and Akkad at least. An early exception is the *ForAtt-12* seal exaggerating the association (already signposted on Uruk seals) between plant-life, Bull and Moon - here emphasised by an entire tree<sup>16</sup>. But mature Akkadian seals embarked upon new formulations of mythology, with different priorities accorded to individual Gods of the Pantheon, and their depiction in anthropomorphic form was preferred. Previous animal personae sometimes still accompany the human version in miniature, now less an independent presence, more a reminder of the past form of the God. Again these are BIVISUALS (as opposed to 'bilinguals') because the same divine power is referred to twice, and in our discussion of the emergence of the Snake Lady this concept has already been useful in understanding *Forward Attack* pairings with her on 2M seals that appear to be describing the same concept in different cultural form.

When dealing with the iconography of the *Chronological Focus* material of *Catalogue G: The Crossover Attack* (which concentrates on the Sumerians) it will then be appropriate to draw up a basic *Table of Planetary Gods* for the Early Dynastic period to systematically contrast their animal forms as found on Sumerian artefacts with their Akkadian or 2M Syrian human equivalents. The abandonment of the lion-prey theme could thus partly be due to the complete anthropomorphisation of the Gods following the late 3M hegemony of Akkadian culture. However, in Syro-Anatolia we mostly see increased use of BIVISUALS for the

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<sup>15</sup> See T Jacobsen 'Worshiper or God?' in A Leonard et al. (eds) *Essays in ancient civilization presented to Helene J. Kantor* Chicago 1989, 125-33

<sup>16</sup> W G Lambert 'Trees, Snakes and Gods in Ancient Syria and Anatolia' *BSOAS XLVIII* 1985 435-451

Gods and Goddesses, whereby the old Sumerian animal deities are still harked back to alongside the human types of varying maturity and sex that take over - meaning, for instance, that the Planets were given human counterparts in ascending age the further from the Sun they are (Saturn a grandfather with beard; Jupiter a mature man in his prime, Mars an athletic, fit youth - and Venus a voluptuous, fecund maiden).

### IMDUGUD ON SUMERIAN STAR MAP-TYPE SEALS

Not to lose sight of the primordial astronomical basis of the Pantheon in which each Planet is a God or Goddess, before looking at fully anthropomorphic Ninurta iconography it is worth staying in the Early Dynastic period to finish looking at other seals before the Old Babylonian period that remind us of the 'old way' of representing the sky - by Imdugud's outspread wings. The one below features the seven dots of Ursa Major under the Sun



**III.9- 11: Early Dynastic Diyala sealing from Khafaje (SCSCat 352) showing the familiar Imdugud bestraddling two goats, with Sun, Moon and constellation in the sky, likely to be Ursa Major**

inside Moon Crescent - observationally a realistic (as opposed to symbolic) rendition of seven-starred Ursa Major (close to Draco) as it weaves between Imdugud clutching at two goats. Beneath, a kneeling bowman could, not implausibly, represent Ban/The Bow, or Sirius (we refer to a hymn to *Ninurta as Sirius* later in these pages). In what is also clearly an astral scene, a further Diyala seal (below) again features a scratchy-looking eagle clutching at rearing bull to the right and crossed lions to the left - this time over a literal rendition of the Plough on the back of a bird-headed Leo/griffin) face to face with a small cross-hatched, upreared beast, just about qualifying as a *Forward Attack* facial bite.



**III.9- 12: Early Dynastic Diyala seal (SCSCat 499) also depicting a celestial scene where the group showing Imdugud clutching beasts above Plough and Leo complements the second half of the scene depicting a heavenly boat journey**

The group on this side of the seal runs straight into the second half of the scene showing an animated Sun-Boat, deified by its horned head, with upright Scorpion above, rowed by a further horned god at the stern. Although the boat may refer to a journey, such as that of Ningishzida/Tammuz through the Underworld, there is little doubt this is a celestial scene bringing in the Sky-God eagle itself, in the prime region of sky perennially significant for calculating the Calendar quarters (*Chapter 19*). Where Frankfort in coming to grips with the iconography of Ningirsu/Ninurta on Sumerian mace-heads is clear the Imdugud group

must express abstract symbolism rather than a scene one would see in real life, actually this seal has a mixture of mythical symbolism set against precise sky-geography. This means that if the eagle or lion-headed eagle does represent the Sky, on the seal the lion attack in combination with it is set against a wider expanse of sky in order to show Ursa Major 's position over Leo as it actually appears. Up to now on such artefacts there is no hint that Imdugud is anything other than a God, and only later - in the Myth of Ninurta and Anzu - is a certain aspect of the Sky Eagle demonized - because at the beginning of the Second Millennium the Sky Order had become a problem. If the lion-prey attack associated with Imdugud-Ningirsu-Ninurta is to be linked to Venus/Inanna and the process of intercalation, can we be more precise about Ningirsu/Ninurta's astronomical identity?

#### THE GOD NINURTA-NINGISHZIDA

Frankfort quotes the lines from Gudea's Cylinder A describing how Ningirsu/Ninurta appeared to Gudea in a dream as a giant man accompanied by Imdugud clutching two lions - just as the God is shown (below) on the largest remaining piece of the *Stela of the Vultures* from Tello. On it he seizes a net full of prisoners, with Imdugud gripped in his fist helping to secure it, proving there is both an association and a differentiation to be made



*Ill.9- 13: Detail of Ningirsu on the Stela of the Vultures holding a mace in one hand and prisoners in a net in the other, topped by Imdugud (whose face is damaged) with two lion-heads in his talons*

between Ningirsu/Ninurta and Imdugud, such as there is between a planet or star and the sky it moves through.

In the *State Archives of Assyria Corpus* series we are fortunate to have to hand an up-to-date, in-depth study of Ninurta<sup>17</sup> that brings together key textual references, complementing earliest interpretations built up from artefacts by Frankfort, Jakobsen and Matthiae. A thumbnail summary of Annus' collected data given in his Introduction points to Ninurta's origins in Nippur in the 3M where, although described as 'Son of Enlil' along with Nannar/Moon (and brother Nergal/Mars-Pluto), his powers appear to have been

<sup>17</sup> Amar Annus The God Ninurta in the Mythology and Royal Ideology of Ancient Mesopotamia Helsinki 2002

multivalent and interchangeable with other Gods - much like the more or less contemporary Gods of the Ṛgveda as described by A A McDonnell<sup>18</sup>:

*Having many qualities, such as power, brilliance, benevolence and wisdom, in common with others, each god has very few distinctive traits. This vagueness is increased by the practice of invoking deities in couples, when both gods share characteristics that properly belong to one alone [note this reference to Ṛgvedic pairs - also used by the Mitanni and relevant to us in a later argument]. When nearly every quality can thus be ascribed to every god, the identification of one deity with another becomes easy. (p.12).*

In fact, the Ṛgvedic gods, roughly contemporary with those of the Sumerians, were also grouped under three realms:

- those of Heaven (Dyaus=Anu);
- Atmosphere (Indra=Enlil) and
- Earth and Rivers (Prthvī=Ea).

This suggests interconnection and contemporaneity between the two Panthea at a time when the distinct planetary influences and roles of the different Gods were still being worked out. Since Ningirsu of Tello is mostly mentioned in the same breath as the warrior god Ninurta, Son of Enlil, his closest Rigvedic equivalent is obviously Indra - both described as warrior Gods or weather gods quite distinct from Father Dyaus/the Sky, in the way weather 'happens' in the atmosphere against a remoter Sky background - a sufficient distinction whereby to understand, on the Stela of the Vultures the separate, yet partly interchangeable identities of Ningirsu/Ninurta -v- Imdugud.

Looking at the mentions of Ninurta in the literature, at this stage - as Indra was for society in North-West India - Ninurta does indeed appear to represent facets of other Gods in one God, just as later in the 2M Marduk stood for them all in what Lambert calls 'almost monotheism'<sup>19</sup>, though in fact to start with it is probably more accurate to take the pantheistic perspective and see Ningirsu/Ninurta as an early form of Pan/Tammuz (one text describes him as 'son of a she-goat'), meaning at this initial stage that we should take the Sumerian approach towards Ninurta as uniting most powers into one God (including his opposites) in a single, all-encompassing point of worship, simplifying the process of contacting the Gods. Certainly in the texts Ninurta is appealed to as a War God (like Nergal-Mars); as Weather God (similar to the Syrian Baal/Hittite Teššub or [H]Adad-Jupiter), and even as Scribe of the Gods (the role later given to Nabu/Mercury who seems not to feature in the Pantheon much as a separate planet in this early period, his symbol being a nomadic. pointed shoe). He is also seen as God of Justice - usually Utu/Shamash's role - and God of Wisdom - traditionally Ea's role - *and* sometimes holder of the Tablets of Destiny like his father, God of the Atmosphere, Enlil. At this point, only McDonnell's analysis quoted above can reconcile us with such confusing interchangeability.

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<sup>18</sup> Hymns from the Rigveda Madras 1966

<sup>19</sup> W Lambert 'The Historical Development of the Mesopotamian Pantheon, a Study in Sophisticated Polytheism' in H Goedicke et al. (eds) *Unity and Diversity: Essays in the History, Literature and Religion of the Ancient Near East* 1975

Frankfort himself insightfully interprets the Tello ‘coat of arms’ on the maces and Entemena Vase (**ForAtt-4**) thus: ‘The group with the lions provides the Ninurta aspect, the others (the prey animals) the Tammuz aspect of the God’. Perhaps it is easiest to make sense of Ningirsu as a version of Ninurta-Jupiter as sequestered from the Pantheon by the Girsu administration and endorsed in his role of City God of Girsu/Tello in order to specifically take the city under his wing(s). It thus follows that an intelligible way to understand Ninurta’s central place in the Sumerian pantheon is his apparent role as ‘connective tissue’ holding together all the functions of the Gods - remembering in particular that he was viewed as ally of the king or ruler and thus, with Inanna, bestower of kingship. It is therefore no surprise that he appears frequently on its cylinder seals.

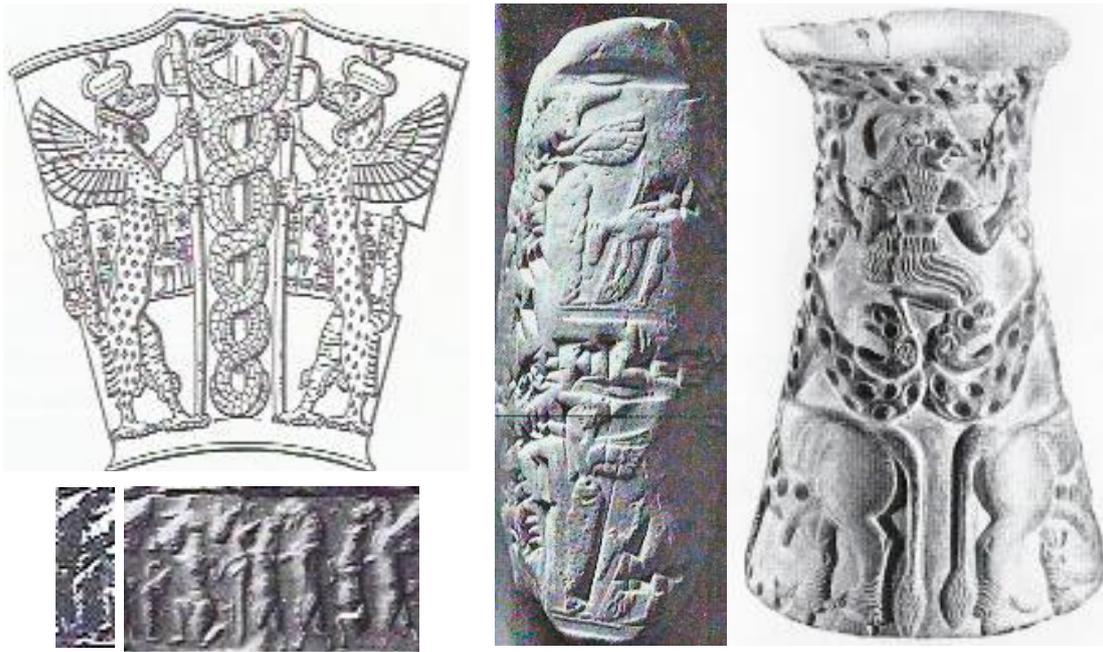
#### NINGISHZIDA, ALTER EGO OF NINURTA

Not only is Ninurta associated with the lion-eagle, but is also sometimes with the *healing powers of Ningishzida, well-known in the form of the pair of intertwined snakes* shown on Gudea’s vase, named so in its dedication (the rolled-out drawing of it below left shows Storm-God-type dragons either side wearing the Crown of Anu and holding the standard of Tammuz). When considering the hybrid demons and winged, twisted-leg Snake Lady of the Mitanni/Nuzi seals of **ForAtt-29** - the next Catalogue entry to be discussed - simply because of changes of formulation and presentation, as in a typical Old Babylonian seal (below lower left) with half-height figure of the winged Snake Lady facing sideways left, fitted in under the lion held in the air by the hero, in turn kneeling next to upreared *Forward Attacks*), we did not at first think to consider Gudea’s Neo-Sumerian masterpiece from Lagash as a precedent, underestimating just how far back such iconography goes. The seal was cleverly noticed by Buchanan<sup>20</sup> (I have tried to enhance the detail sufficiently to bring out the twists of her lower leg area more clearly but cannot improve on poor originals in the original seal catalogues -it really needs close inspection with a magnifying glass and macrophotography.). Buchanan relates it to both **ForAtt-22** and another Old Babylonian tablet illustrated below centre - which we come back to in due course.

At first, in the earliest texts corresponding to the Sumerian Gudea vase, Ningishzida comes over as a chthonic nature god of trees (*gish*) - especially of their underground tree roots - who journeys in a boat to the Underworld<sup>21</sup> - clearly embodying facets of Tammuz as an early form of Pluto/Hades (see again **III.9- 12**). Frankfort points out that the Temple at Asmar (probably the source of the Copenhagen Seven-headed serpent mace) was called ‘House of Abu, Lord of Vegetation’ - a title used equally by Tammuz and Ningishzida. Both God and king have the job of mastering Chaos and misrule: so whilst at first Ningishzida is presented as the *alter ego* of Ninurta/Ningirsu, predecessor of Marduk the monster-slayer of Kassite Babylonian myth, the serpent aspects transmute into his inbuilt opposing force -

<sup>20</sup> B Buchanan ‘A Snake Goddess and her Companions’ *Iraq XXXIII* 1971, 1-13 (Frankfort CS pl.XXIXe, Moortgat VARollCat-472 = VA827)

<sup>21</sup> T Jakobsen and B Alster translate and comment on ‘Ningišzida’s Boat-Ride to Hades’ in A R George et al. (eds.) *Wisdom, Gods and Literature: Studies in Assyriology in Honour of W G Lambert* 2000, 315-26 (a new angle on the boat in **III.9-12?**).



**Ill.9- 14:** (Top left) The double-serpent iconography on the stone vase dedicated by Gudea of Lagash to Ningishzida; (below left) OB cylinder seal VA827; (centre) two Snake Lady impressions with Wind Gymnasts on the OB tablet YBC 5698 - Buchanan *op.cit. pl.1a* (previously shown horizontally in Ill.9- 22); (Right) 3M stone vase with the Elamite version of a female deity holding two lion-faced serpents, seated over the rumps of two bulls (Jiroft, cited in Porada *Festschrift 2014 p.635 fig.14*, but possibly a fake)

whether, as in different stories, manifesting as the unruly waves of the sea, mountain stones hurled at him, or the clash of planetary cycles causing dissonance in the running of the state and its calendar. Snakes are thus always implicit in Ninurta iconography, not always in a divine sense but more and more in the role of the Chaos dragon overcome by that very God, with the Imdugud variant turning into his foe, Anzu, whose story we must relate shortly. (Already in *Catalogue C* we showed Old Syrian seals illustrating the Levantine version of the dragon-killing myth, on which Baal is depicted holding up the serpent he has killed down in the Underworld<sup>22</sup> and brought up from under the mountain - showing how dragon-slaying became an episode in his Journey through the Underworld).

### NINURTA-NINGISHZIDA - AND EMERGENCE OF THE FEMALE VERSION

A third split-off occurs from the original Ninurta/Ningirsu iconography, involving a sex change. It is through the Tammuz event of the Journey to the Underworld that Ningishzida in some texts was identified with Ninurta - but due to ambiguity of the twisted snakes, as likely to be an entwined male and female pair (snake mating in Iraq happens in the Spring), there is in fact no reason to think Ningishzida was necessarily male. Indeed, taking into consideration the prefix 'Nin', Ningishzida might well be taken as the female consort of Ninurta (but then what of the 'Nin' of Ninurta<sup>23</sup>?). It is common knowledge already that throughout their mythology there are several mentions in myth or actual ritual - especially in Syria - of the interchangeability of sex between Baal and Ishtar. We investigate the

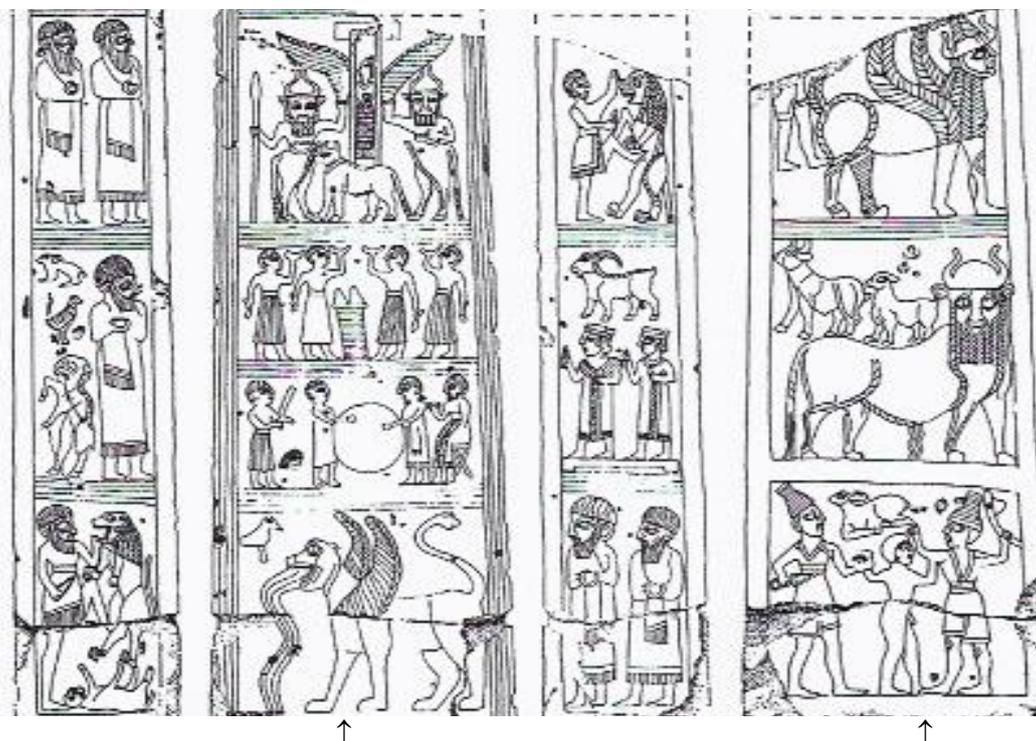
<sup>22</sup> Lambert's paper on Snakes and Trees *ibid.* takes Williams-Forte to task on her analyses of Baal and his Snake (cited extensively in *Catalogue C*) but to me her analyses hold good especially as regards the multivalent Ugaritic version of the myth.

<sup>23</sup> This question is discussed as far as it can be grammatically in W Heimpel 'The Lady of Girsu' in T Abusch (ed.) *Riches Hidden in Secret Places: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Memory of Thorkild Jacobsen* Winona Lake 2002 155-60.

‘Snake as Lady’ iconography fully when considering that preference on pieces connected to Central Asia - indeed, the Jiroft vase above shows precedents for her (unhybridised) as early as the 3M in using the full human female form separately holding a pair of snakes (as she crouches over them her legs are elided, Elamite fashion, under her skirt).

### INCORPORATION OF NINGISHZIDA INTO OTHER HYBRID MONSTERS

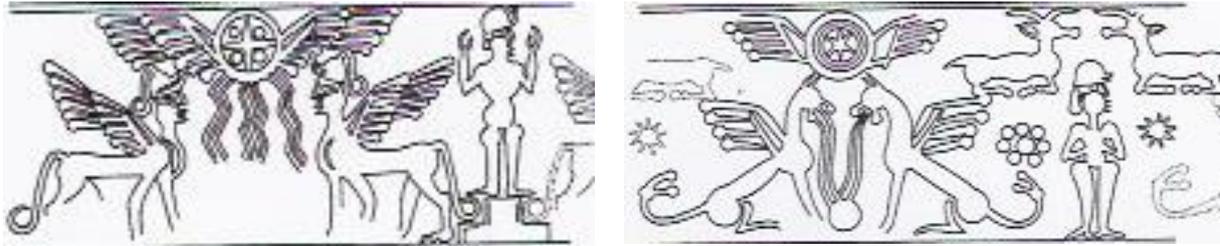
Overall, the Ningishzida motif does seem to interface with the central place given to snakes by the Elamites - and the Central Asian and the Indus cultures beyond - whilst the near-eastern (usually Mitanni-invoked) variation of the winged, corkscrew-legged Snake Lady of *ForAtt-22/29* has most plausibly been explained by several scholars as an Underworld form of Ishtar - explaining why she is shown so often alongside the lion-prey group as a BIVISUAL. The textual references place Ningishzida both up in the sky *and* down in the Underworld,



Ill.9- 15: Ishtar Stela from Ebla -picture Aruz et al<sup>24</sup> - apud. P Matthiae & Pinnock *ibid.* 2014, pl.151

and he/she is described as wearing the crown of the Sky-God Anu (seen on the drawing of the design on Gudea’s vase). This crown, sometimes also worn by kings, can even have a miniature Imdugud on its feathered and horned brim (*Catalogue C, Ill. 7-60/65*) - again indicating connection, but differentiation, between the two. From the serpentine form of Ningishzida and his dragon supporters on the Gudea vase, whether as a single serpent or two entwined, we notice varied combinations of body parts on that hybrid mix repeated on Eblan - or Ebla-related - artefacts of roughly the same time - see the winged dragon’s snake tail, bird claws and crowned head on the end of the double basin of Temple D (*ForAtt-14*) - and on the Ishtar Stela (arrowed above) from the doorway of sanctuary G3 near the same temple (on it (the crown of Anu is this time separately worn by the winged sphinx top right (arrowed) - compare with the sphinxes on the Nuzi seal below left).

<sup>24</sup> J Aruz et al. (eds) *Cultures in Contact: From Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean in the Second Millennium* 2013 fig.9, p.104



**Ill.9- 16: Versions on two Nuzi seals of the Mitanni winged disc held up by (a) helmeted sphinxes with hair locks and (b) Storm God dragons vomiting water, as on the stela - Stein NuziCat<sup>25</sup> 326/237**

### **NINGISHZIDA, THE BABYLONIAN MUSHĦUSHU DRAGON AND NEO-ASSYRIAN ANZU DEMON**

The Babylonian *MušĦuššu* dragon and Neo-Assyrian Anzu demon both have their beginnings in the Ninurta-Ningishzida iconography of snake, bird and lion parts, simply by using alternative parts of snake/scorpion, lion and eagle (the hybrid involving the human face with lion or winged lion seems usually to have been set aside for the more benign figure of the sphinx). The use of the winged lion-serpent dragon vomiting water as alternative steed for the Mitanni version of the Storm God Teššub (instead of the bull) reveals a straight swap of iconography between Central Asia and the Near East. The two Nuzi seals above show how the vomited streams of water from this creature - referring to the waters of the Storm God in Aryan form - are the same for the dragon on the Ebla stone basin and Ishtar Stele - and in this context Stein (*ibid.* 1988) reminds us that Teššub-Baal and Shaushga-Ishtar often swap steeds, weapons *and* gender).

This hybrid beast appears to underlie the more polished *MušĦuššu* of Babylon initially devised by the Kassites (said to be cousins of the Mitanni) and later canonised by the Neo-Babylonians - shown with scorpion tail, reptilian body, half-lion, half-serpent head, eagle claws and lion paws - in a new expression of the Four Cardinal Signs (Taurus-Leo-Scorpio-Aquarius)<sup>26</sup>, a cosmic monster easy to understand as expressing the quartered divisions of the equinoxes and solstices. The strong emphasis on the reptilian components of these hybrids conveys the idea that these constellations are then being tied in with the cosmic twists of the entire sky round the Polar Centre - represented by a synthesis of Ursae Majoris et Minoris plus Draco. Jacobsen and Alster (*ibid.*) refer to a hymn to Ningishzida which describes the God as ‘Grand Serpent’ (*muš-maĦ*), and ‘Terrifying Serpent/Dragon’ (*muš-Ħuš*) - and go on to state unequivocally that ‘his constellation is the Serpent, *mul-muš*, earlier *mul-muš-Ħuš* ‘ (Hydra or Draco), sometimes paired with Imdugud over it. In Neo-Assyrian art (

**Ill.9- 18 & Ill.9- 19)** the same three creatures come into play in the alternative hybrid rendition of the Anzu demon, still with the lion head of Imdugud but with donkey or horse ears added and nearly always shown melodramatically undergoing the onslaught of Jupiter-Ninurta - the human/Aquarian factor usually blended with the sphinx here conveyed by the appearance of Ninurta as a God in human form. We follow this cosmic battle in myth shortly -first we complete the follow through on the Ningishzida theme.

<sup>25</sup> Diana Stein THE SEAL IMPRESSIONS (CATALOGUE) - Das Archiv des Šilwa-Teššup Heft 9 Wiesbaden 1993

<sup>26</sup> Note the winged sphinx on the wide side of the Ishtar Stele has one hoof, one bird-talon, a lion’s paw and a human foot.

### THE TWISTED SNAKES OF NINGISHZIDA

As already suggested, from very early on Ningishzida was approached as a healer God in the form of two entwined snakes (the ancient prototype of the Caduceus, the winged and entwined staff of Hermes - and by devolution the medical profession<sup>27</sup>), so that if Ninurta and Ningishzida are considered to be one and the same, it is not surprising to read Wiggerman's<sup>28</sup> analysis of a Neo-Assyrian amulet seeking help for a sick person which has a procession incised on it of the lion-headed demons who carry out the Gods' commands (in



**Ill.9- 17: General impression of the Demon procession on the amulet (two figures are partial or damaged), led by bearded Ninurta, the only figure with horned helmet (right) -Walter Farber<sup>29</sup> pl.14**

this case those of Ninurta, Marduk, Aššur, Ea and Nabu) led at the front by Ninurta himself, the only full God shown (above right, helmeted). The written incantation accompanying the drawings on the amulet is intended for recitation at night, since it exhorts Sirius (MUL.KAK-SI-SA) to protect the patient from evil because, as Wiggermann writes, 'his name means "Arrow" ... the personification of the star Sirius...[and] in the first millennium "Arrow" is thought of as a war god, and as such ... identified with Ninurta, the traditional war god' - hence Ninurta/Sirius is depicted leading the demons. By association of ideas we are reminded of Burrows'<sup>30</sup> much earlier translation of a diviner's prayer to Ninurta as Sirius, whose rising in certain centuries in its precessional cycle coincided with the season of lamentations for Tammuz (see our *Octane Newsletter* 5).

### WINGED AND WINGLESS: NINURTA AND ANZU

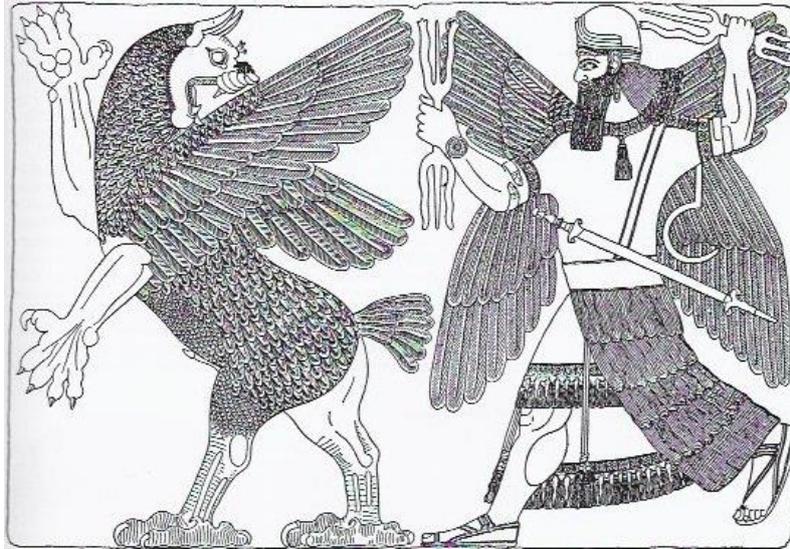
It is best to complete our overview of Ninurta in one piece given the 1M amulet just discussed shows that local God Ninurta's high reputation continued unabated under the Neo-Assyrians many centuries after the Sumerians, reverting to the anthropomorphic appearance of early Sumerian days. On the Assyrian relief below, as on the amulet, he now wears full armour, moving in what was to become a stereotypical lunge towards his foe, and in its inscription is now also called Bel/Baal as well as Ninurta. Significantly, Ninurta is known also to have been relevant to the Mitanni, due to one 2M text which we will consider in relation to the myth of Anzu, only fully developed in art in hybrid demon form on Neo-Assyrian artefacts.

<sup>27</sup> I do not buy the present-day idea that the correct symbol for doctors is a single snake twined round a staff, as used by the WHO.

<sup>28</sup> Frans A M Wiggermann 'Some Demons of Time and their functions in Mesopotamian Iconography' in B Groneberg et al. (eds) *Die Welt der Götterbilder* Berlin 2007, 102-116

<sup>29</sup> Walter Farber 'Dämonen ohne Stammbaum: Zu einigen mesopotamischen Amuletten aus dem Kunsthandel' in A Leonard et al (eds) *Essays in Ancient Civilisation Presented to Helene J Kantor* Chicago 1989

<sup>30</sup> E Burrows 'Hymn to Ninurta as Sirius' *JRAS* 100 1924, 33-40 with 2 plates of cuneiform text.



**III.9- 18: Drawing of the Ninurta-Anzu relief, BM 124571 - Layard's *Nimrud and its Remains* pl.V**

Going back to the theme of the visual language of wings in Mitanni iconography, and looking back again to the different versions of the story of the Storm God who must kill the snake monster of disorder (compare with Indra's title of *Vṛtrahan/serpent demon killer*, his Ṛgvedic equivalent), preceding Neo-Assyrian engagement with the theme in myth, we have documentary evidence of a Mitanni recension of the story where the issue of Anzu's wings is pivotal - and the wings of the Winds a central theme providing us with the textual backup we need for understanding the Central Asian Snake Lady and her Wind Gymnasts - occurring so far in *III.9- 22/III.9- 14*). Stephanie Dalley<sup>31</sup> conveniently sums up how the fragmentary Old Babylonian version of the myth of Ninurta's struggle with the Monster of Chaos, Anzu, dates back to the early 2M because he is still mentioned as God of Girsu. It makes sense here to look closely at the wording of the myth, not only to throw further light on our understanding of Ninurta and the iconography surrounding his later manifestations as warrior -cum-weather god in different territories, but also to pick up on what appears to have been the demonization of Imdugud into Anzu during the Mitanni period. A version of the myth found at Tarbiṣu has a colophon at the end with the name of the Mitanni capital Hanigalbat on it, so we know the written story was known to the Mitanni/Hurrians at the time they controlled Assyria. As Dalley writes, 'Other epic deeds of Ninurta are known only from passing references...[among others]... that he slew the seven-headed serpent'. The fuller, Standard Babylonian version of the myth dates to the first millennium - different parts or repetitions coming from Neo-Assyrian sources, indicating Ninurta was still held in huge respect a thousand years later. In the version of the myth quoted from below (known as *Anzu I*) the presence of personified Winds that help Ninurta overcome the Serpent of Chaos in the form of a scaly-feathery bird-lion demon - much as shown in the above relief - is a recurring theme. If the Mitanni use of wings is a way of referring not only to sky and heaven, but also to Winds, then there are certainly plentiful textual references to their presence, to be drawn upon by both God and Demon. In this first quotation we cannot be

<sup>31</sup> S Dalley in *Myths from Mesopotamia* (revised edn) Oxford 2000 - p.203

sure whether the following broken lines referring to Winds are to those of Anzu or of Ninurta/Indra:

*At his shout  
The South Wind  
The powerful...Wind  
The mass  
Whirlwinds  
They met and...  
The Four Winds (Dalley *ibid.* p.206)*

but certainly later when Mami is renamed Belet-Ili (Mother of the Gods) and calls upon Ninurta as her Son to conquer Anzu and restore order to the Universe, she says:

*Make your evil Winds flash as they march over him - Capture soaring Anzu...  
Make the devastating Whirlwind rise up against him  
.....  
And let the Winds bring his feathers as good news.*

Since we know the amulet referred to above (*III.9- 17*) equates Ninurta with Sirius/*BAN*, and that the bow and arrow is mentioned as another of Ninurta's weapons in this story, it is no surprise that Belet-Ili goads him: *Set your arrow in the bow, coat it with poison! So he set the shaft to the bow, drew it taut [and] aimed(?) the shaft at him... .*

The next passage tells how his arrows are deflected by the powers of Anzu so they cannot pierce him. Ninurta turns for advice to Ea, who says:

*Tire him out so he sheds his pinions in the clash of tempests.  
Take a throw-stick (?) to follow your arrows  
And cut off his pinions, detach both right and left  
When he sees his wings and emits (?) a cry,  
Shouting 'kapp-i, kapp-l (my wing - my [other] wing!) - don't panic.  
Draw taut from your bow-curve, let shafts fly like lightning  
Let his wing feathers dance like butterflies (?)  
Seize him by the throat (?), conquer Anzu  
And let the Winds bring his feathers as good news  
To E-Kur, to your father Enlil's house.*

Ninurta gets moving and

*The Lord marshalled the Seven of Battle<sup>32</sup>,  
The warrior marshalled the seven evil Winds  
Who dance in the dust, the seven Whirlwinds*

At the same time *Even the gales were silent at his side, [poised] for conflict.*

To end the story, surrounded by the Winds Ninurta carries out Ea's instructions exactly, and as Anzu aghast sees his wings dropping off him, Ninurta regains the Gods' *Tablets of Destiny* into his own hands. No doubt these Tablets concern the calculation of planetary and star cycles as codified by the astronomers maintaining the calendar - to allow their order to unravel is of course catastrophic, and the resulting chaos monstrous (we think again of

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<sup>32</sup> In the myth of Erra and Ishum the Seven Gods of Battle are given to Erra (a hero akin to Ninurta) by his father the Sky-God Anu who 'when he impregnated Earth; She bore the Seven Gods for him and he named them Sibitti'.

Ninurta's opposite number in the Vedic tradition, Indra, especially noted for keeping the Order of the Sky).

Looking forward to the seal of Ithi-Teššub (*Ill.9- 26*) or the Spencer-Churchill seal (*Error! Reference source not found.*) we wonder whether the figures with wings pointed in different directions do not have something to do with the Winds of this particular myth - while the seal of Shaushtatar (not shown) makes good sense as representing an avatar of Ninurta himself, with the winged standard representing the Wings of Anzu pinned to the Axis of Heaven, securing the complementarity of the Two Bears in their proper position as anchors of astronomical orientation, with the Sun, prime meter of Time, fixing them together at the effective juncture of the Polar Centre - to proclaim Order Restored. In the closely similar myth, *Erra and Ishum*, when Marduk as king of the Gods has allowed both the Flood and 'the positions of the stars in the heavens to change', Erra/Nergal (in the text at one point equated with Ninurta) declares 'I shall tie the wings of the wicked Wind like a bird', and 'I shall make Anu and Enlil lie down like bulls to the right and left of your (Shamash's) gate'. News gets back to the assembly of Gods and they start praising Ninurta under all his names, amongst which are Shushinak, Ningirsu and Papsukkal (Keeper of the Gate - also a known name of Orion (see *Chapter 19*)).

In the myth as perpetuated on Neo-Assyrian seals (two examples below) Ninurta, accompanied by *The Sibitti* in the sky, attacks Anzu as either feathered bird-lion (much as on the Nimrud relief) - or as a long dragon- headed snake of very much traditional Central Asian form (see *Ill.9- 30*). There is no doubt, whatever the version, that Anzu is Disorder - and no longer a God (otherwise he would not need to be brought under control by Ninurta) but note on the seal below left how close in appearance Ninurta's own steed is to Anzu, the only difference being in the scorpion- (rather than bird) tail. After reading Wiggerman (see *Ill.9- 17*) I am tempted to see Anzu as a Demon of Time - not like those discussed so cogently by the author as spirits carrying out the commands of the Gods - but of Dislocated Time, when the interacting cycles of planets and stars have fallen out of synchronisation, or knowledge of their cycles lost, leaving divine order - and government on earth - in



*Ill.9- 19: (Left) Neo-Babylonian version of Ninurta striding towards Anzu c.700 (mottled pink and brown chalcedony - BM 129560 (1945-10-13,104)); (right) Anzu as the Dragon of Chaos (brown serpentine - BM 89589 (1896-6-19,1))*

disarray. During the Second Millennium, due to Precession, star positions would appear to have slipped from their expected, fixed stations and its disruptive effect would have been

especially apparent as the Vernal point was now definitely observed as no longer taking place with Sun-rise in Taurus but instead entering the early degrees of Aries (see our section on *THE DAWN OF THE AGE OF ARIES* iconography). The Ninurta and Anzu myth appears to reflect this crisis - and the malevolent ophidian or bird imagery for it, along with other monstrous hybrids, appears ultimately to have been inspired by icons of Central Asian origin transmitted via the Mitanni. At the back of our minds resides the principle that, following the split between the Indo-Āryans and Indo-Iranians, to the latter the Vedic Gods became the Avestan demons: that reversal was certainly wrought on the original Imdugud of Sumer that started out as the lion-headed eagle Sky God.

### *RELEVANCE OF THIS DIVERSION FOR THE NEXT ENTRY (FORATT-29)*

In dealing with the emergence during the 2M of the Snake Lady in Mesopotamian art, first on Old Babylonian seals, our DIVERSION - using both images and texts - tried to trace the beginnings of the twisted snakes element of her body that at times was identified with the God Ningishzida, interchangeable with both Ningirsu and Ninurta - a God whom we might characterise as ‘Proto-Baal’ (an early form of Jupiter). We also saw how the early juxtaposition of the lion-headed Eagle-God Imdugud with Ninurta in human form gradually polarised - to the extent that by the time Ninurta enjoyed a renaissance on Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian seals, Imdugud (still part-eagle, part-lion but in more diabolical combination) became the malevolent demon, Anzu, responsible for ‘unstringing the sky’, brought to order losing his wings in a battle with Ninurta, involving the Winds.

### *FORATT-29 (LAST QUARTER OF THE 2<sup>ND</sup> MILLENNIUM BC)*

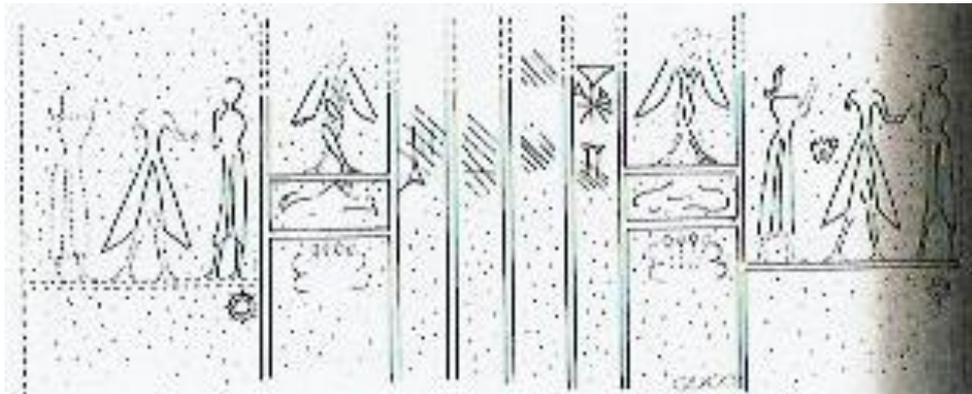
We know enough, now, to be able to make sense, from our fourth and last entry, of a group of Syrian seals using Snake and Wind imagery that begins with a faded rolling on a small Amarna tablet. From it we can make firmer inferences about the gradual infiltration of Central Asian iconography into mainstream Near Eastern art (including Crete), based on the small fact of a damaged Mitanni sealing on the smallest known Amarna tablet: it is written in Hurrian and signed by the Mitanni King Tushratta himself. To discern the design on the tablet, Edith Porada<sup>33</sup> had a



*Ill. 9- 20: (Left) Amarna tablet BM29841 discussed by Edith Porada on which the badly abraded sealing (right) discussed as the main entry under ForAtt-29 appears on the reverse of a short laissez-passer request letter from Mitanni King Tushratta for a messenger travelling through Syria -thus to be taken as his royal seal, and featuring the Snake Lady Goddess herself*

<sup>33</sup> E Porada ‘Die Siegelzylinder-Abrollung auf der Amarna-Tafel BM29841 im British Museum’ *AfO XXV* 1975 132-142, fig.2a/b

drawing made (below), revealing a snake lady over a lion-prey group in two separate columns, and then a figure with bird feet and lowered wings flanked by two figures, also appearing twice in two



wider columns due to the double roll of the seal. Little of the cuneiform text on the sealing remains, other than the *Dingir* sign for God/Goddess.

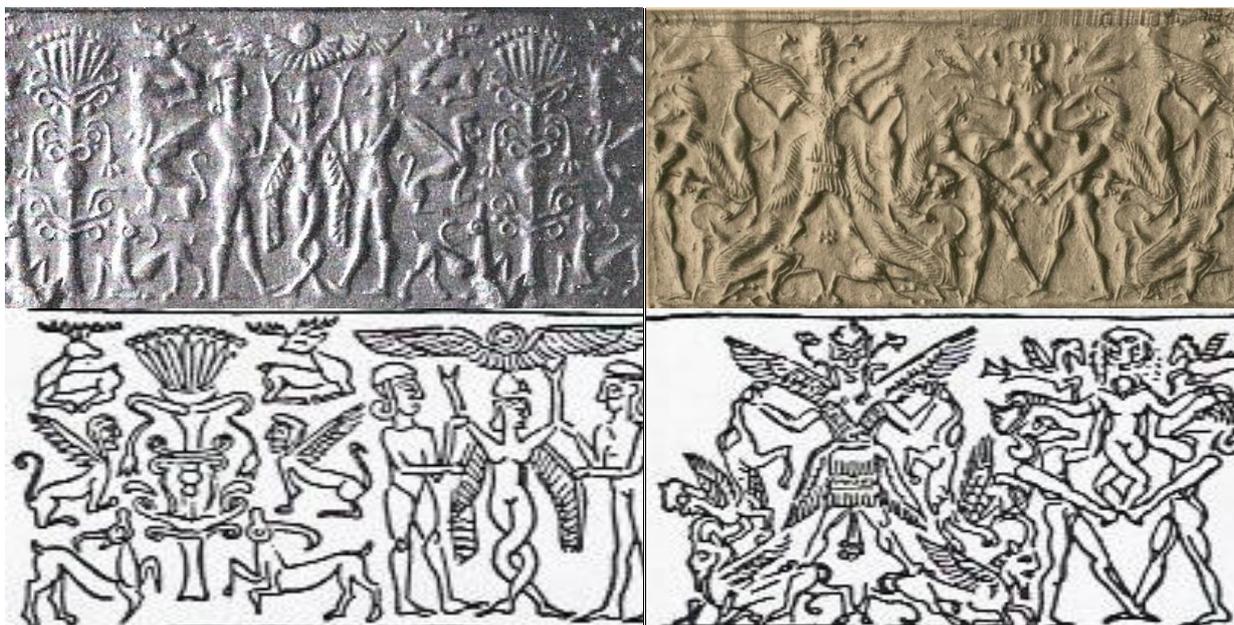
To help make sense of the badly abraded images on this tablet, Porada brought in a second, unprovenanced Mitanni seal also in the British Museum (below, BM 89783) as a piece to compare it with. It is a double-register seal with on the lower level a lion striding above a bull to confront a second bull with lowered head (a pair of winged and helmeted sphinxes float over them); next to them is a pair of ibex either side of a typical Nuzi-type tree of life, the groups separated from each other by a poorly delineated double-headed demon of Central Asian type. Porada then matched the two twisted-serpent-women on the Amarna tablet to that on another seal in the British Museum (below right, BM 893325, her fig.6) where the identity of the double-headed demon is clearer. Ordinarily the two groups on the lower register would have taken up a split level each to one side of a 2:1 seal but here they are spread out, with the scene above including standard Ishtar clothed and unclothed groups (glossed by the animal groups beneath). Badly delineated, the middle group shows the Goddess dressed, with lowered wings, with attendants wearing robes with a line of circles down the centre. Next to her, men with fringed robes and helmets stand either side of the Goddess unclothed as mistress of the beasts - her wings outspread. The third group, on the left, we think is the remains of a snake lady - interpretable as such from other seals, as we shall see shortly.



We noted in our discussion of *ForAtt-22*, dating to the Old Babylonian period, how a woman with twisted snakes for legs appears sideways in front of Baal as chariot rider. The way the seal was rolled - as the drawing of it shows - meant the figure was cut in half, with head and wings to the

right and snake legs on the left of the whole image on the other side, making it difficult to imagine the complete figure. We therefore waited until this later entry dealing with her integrated appearance on other seals or sealings since it also clinches the Mitanni origins we seek to pin down. Remarkably, on both, the Snake Lady again shares company with a *Forward Attack* as BIVISUAL.

The Snake Lady on the cylinder seal above (top register, far left) may be sketchy, but compared against similar compositions it will emerge as highly likely that is what the figure is. Porada's paper did not particularly dwell on the Snake Lady as such, but in a later paper<sup>34</sup> she pointed out other precedents for this hybrid Goddess - such as the typical Mitanni grouping on a seal in the Hermitage (photo and drawing below left - here without the accompaniment of a lion-prey attack). Indeed, the winged figure with twisted snake legs is the axial upright supporting the winged disc on the heraldic unit half of the design, flanked by the usual beautiful young men, helmeted and with curled lock of hair at the nape. Alongside is the expected formulaic secondary scene consisting of a highly elaborate version of the Nuzi Tree of Life supported by pairs of stags, winged sphinxes and goats. Herzfeld<sup>35</sup> had already described this seal alongside others in similar vein, from which the sealing and drawing of one is shown below right, in his category 'Syrian or Mitanni'. It contrasts a double-winged, dressed lady with normal legs and a tail (holding aloft winged griffins and standing on winged, ibex-horned sphinxes) set against a snake lady unclothed, held aloft by two bearded nude males and flanked at her shoulders by the winged fish (here with horse heads) one would



III.9- 21:(Left column) Impression of cylinder seal in the Hermitage (Porada *ibid.* fig.10) and drawing Herzfeld fig.132; (right column) a double heraldic scene in similar vein (de Clercq 357/Herzfeld fig.124b)

normally associate with the Wisdom God Ea of the subterranean waters. The point of these further comparisons is that, in the top left heraldic group of the double register seal, *the blobby figure between two men so difficult to make sense of is, I believe, the undressed Snake Lady of this type, presumably to be imagined in the Underworld.* Let me explain why.

<sup>34</sup> Edith Porada 'Remarks on Mitannian (Hurrian) and Middle Assyrian Glyptic Art' *Akkadica XIII* 1979 2-15 and 16 figs.

<sup>35</sup> E Herzfeld 'Die Kunst des zweiten Jahrtausends in Vorderasien II: Die Mesopotamische Gruppe Anzugliedernde Siegel' *Archaeologische Mitteilungen Aus Iran (AMI) IX* (Old Series) 1938, 1-89 (Part I, two vols earlier, mainly deals with Old Assyrian seals).

### THE SNAKE LADY AS GODDESS OF CHANGING SHAPE IN THE UNDERWORLD

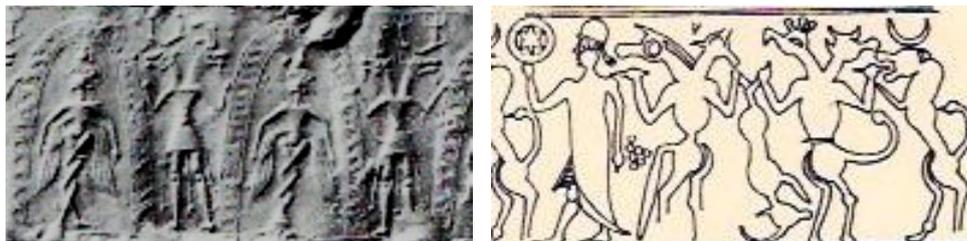
From deeper analysis it emerges how on the one hand the double serpent seems to be a recurring motif in Elamite imagery, not only going back to Protodynastic times in both Iran and Egypt (see *ForAtt-2/3* in this catalogue), but its cult was rooted in even earlier Ubaid funerary practice at Eridu and Susa, then cropping up at times in late 3M Sumer - particularly in the form of the God Ningishzida at Girsu (seen as both male and female - *Ill.9- 14*). Without much of a gap in time, from the material available it appears the pedigree reignites on standard Old Babylonian seals (as we have already shown). One exceptional example appears, not only on our datable example of *ForAtt-22*, but also rolled twice on an OB grain contract dated to Year 9 of Warad-Sin of Larsa



*Ill.9- 22: Snake Lady, with Wind Gymnast leaning sideways, on a seal rolled twice on a grain contract, Larsa (YBC 5695) - Buchanan *ibid.* 1971 pl. Ia, detail (right) of top and bottom Snake Lady profiles (head, back-blown hair and shoulder wings, the second rolling especially well defined (c.f. Error! Reference source not found.))*

- photographed above - for which Buchanan (*ibid.*) gives the date of 1826BC, or 34 years before the start of Hammurabi's reign. We have turned the photo sideways to view the figure horizontally for comparison with *ForAtt-22*, but it is also shown vertically in *Ill.9- 14*. As on the Spencer-Churchill seal (*Error! Reference source not found.* and *Ill.9- 24*) soon discussed, she is associated with one or more winged figures, also female, bending sideways at the waist, and from their long windblown hair I call them 'Wind Gymnasts'. Other examples recur on the Ithi-Teššub seal (*Ill.9- 26*) on which, as with the Snake Lady, they were taken for granted as background by its Mitanni owner.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the badly faded sealing on the Amarna tablet, that also contrasts winged snake ladies with barely visible small lion attack groups in the panels, should be on a passport letter from Mitanni King Tushratta to Canaanite rulers requesting safe passage for the messenger holding it - who must have been travelling to Egypt since it ended up at Amarna. Porada set a third seal against the Amarna design - again showing a similar winged snake lady - here with wings sprouting at her waist - under an arch separating her from a two-headed demon: a fuller rolling of it is shown below left, set against the Nuzi seal on the right, also featuring a Central Asian double-headed demon, in this case attacked by a rampant lioness under a crescent moon.



*Ill.9- 23: (Left) full sealing of Mitanni seal BM 89332 used as further comparandum in ForAtt-29, with two rollings of a double-headed monster of Nuzi type as in (right) - from Stein in Wilhelm<sup>36</sup> fig. 24b - on*

<sup>36</sup> Gernot Wilhelm *The Hurrians* Warminster 1989 (with the chapter on Nuzi seals by Diana Stein)

*this one we should possibly understand Ishtar's lioness as substitute for the Snake Lady on the left-hand seal*

### THE SPENCER-CHURCHILL SEAL

On the Spencer-Churchill seal below, two upright Wind Gymnasts walk towards the Snake Lady standing on the right, resembling her representation on the Warad-Sin sealing. One Gymnast has wings outspread and the other has them folded back: behind them a third bends sideways, again as on the Warad-Sin sealing. Tucked in under the wings of the two standing Wind Gymnasts is the



*Ill.9- 24: Impression of the Spencer-Churchill seal BM 134773 (Buchanan ibid. pl.1e/Porada ibid. fig.3)*

Storm God on the winged Lion-Dragon steed vomiting water, so beloved of the Mitanni, indicating that although he may be the divinity in charge of these Winds blowing in different directions, their prime allegiance in this version is being shown towards the Snake Lady. Despite Buchanan and Porada's speculations about her significance, the obvious conclusion is that She is simply to be read as a version of Ninurta/Baal/the Storm God's consort, Ishtar, in her more unusual apparition in mid-transformation down to, or up from, the Underworld, spanning the realm of ordinary human life in her human torso, the heavens in terms of her wings, and the Underworld in terms of her snake-legs. These are the disassembled parts we see imperfectly (perhaps deliberately) in the ill-defined third figure on the top row left of *ForAtt-29* (reproduced again below for ease of reference). We are thus shown Ishtar unclothed, clothed - and in transition.



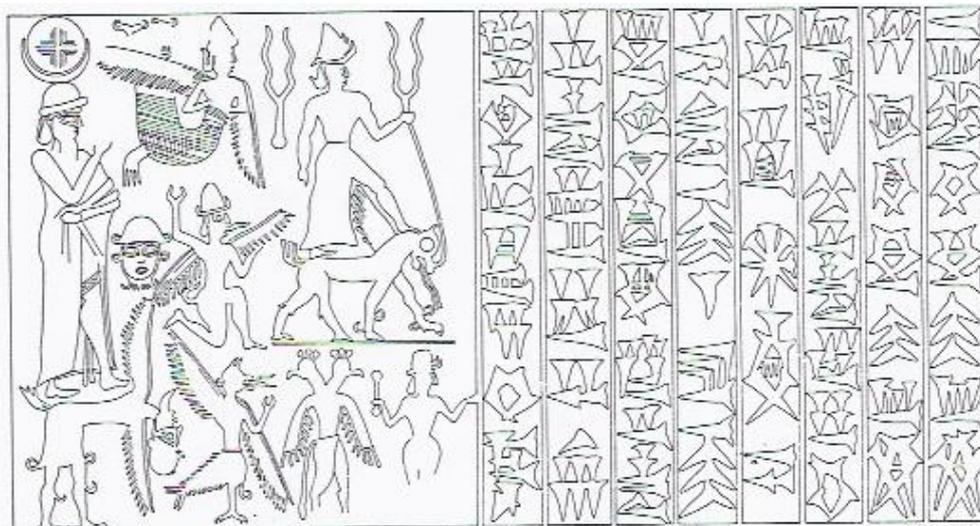
*Ill.9- 25: Top register of ForAtt-29 showing vestiges of the Snake Lady between two courtiers on the left, consisting of birds, snake-heads or wings on the shoulders, a pair of breasts and two indeterminate shapes that could be serpent legs (possibly at the navel is an upsidedown crescent and orb); at centre is Ishtar clothed with wings down, and at right unclothed with wings up*

To understand why this should be so, we go back to our discussion of Ningishzida (*Ill.9- 14*) and remind ourselves that this double-serpent God is described in some texts as a God of roots and underground growth, in a period when he was mentioned in the same breath as Tammuz' journey to the Underworld - and, with Ea, approached as a healer God (the Caduceus survives to this day as the symbol of the medical profession, close in appearance to the double fish symbol of Pisces). At

this period, moreover, Ningishzida is said to be of interchangeable gender, with either both male and female sexual organs or consisting of one male snake, one female snake intertwined. These indicators are reiterated in the Snake Lady version of Ishtar introduced by the Mitanni which now with some perspective on the matter appears to *incorporate Protohistoric versions of the God(dess)* that allude also to her latent bisexuality - its frequent juxtaposition with the lion-prey image simply a determinative confirming she is Ishtar. This is why, in *ForAtt-22*, it would be plausible to read the Snake Lady appearing at the shoulder of the charioteer as the intermediate form of Ishtar alongside her consort, the Storm God, Baal-Teššub, while also shown behind his chariot as the more familiar combined clothed/unclothed standing figure - again spelling out the three-stage process of the Journey. The in-between, hiatus stage of the Snake Lady - more or less imposed on Syria and Mesopotamia by the Mitanni - was the least often shown.

### THE IṬḪI-TEŠŠUB SEAL

The Winds appear again on the IṬḪi-Teššub seal, also a Mitanni design, though without the Snake Lady since Baal on his lion-dragon takes charge here. In much the same way as in the myth of *Ninurta and Anzu*, we will note later in our discussion of Mitanni Gods related to ancient India, how *Varuṇa* is roughly the equivalent of the Mitanni Weather God - and R̥gvedic hymns in his praise specifically mention the Winds that accompany him. Given our analysis of the astronomical representation of Cardinal Signs as separate animals or as lion/bull/man/scorpion hybrid dragons, as suggested earlier the hybrid monster appears equally to refer to Teššub/Ninurta's mastery over all four directions of the sky - revealed in weather by the Four Winds that he reins in and tames as forces that unleashed are inimical to cosmic order.



III.9- 26: *The sealing of IṬḪi-Teššub* (Stein NuziCat-659, its iconography also discussed by Porada<sup>37</sup>)

In her discussion of this Nuzi seal Diana Stein<sup>38</sup> reads it in terms of the Storm God surrounded by local manifestations of Shaushga/Ishtar, his consort, but apart from the worshipper at the left of the scene and the naked Ishtar with mirror in the bottom right corner, I think we again have the Storm God depicted in due Mitanni style at the top right with his lightning fork, followed by a train

<sup>37</sup> E Porada, 'Remarks on Mitannian (Hurrian) and Middle Assyrian Glyptic Art' *Akkadica XIII 1979* 2-25 and figs. 1-14

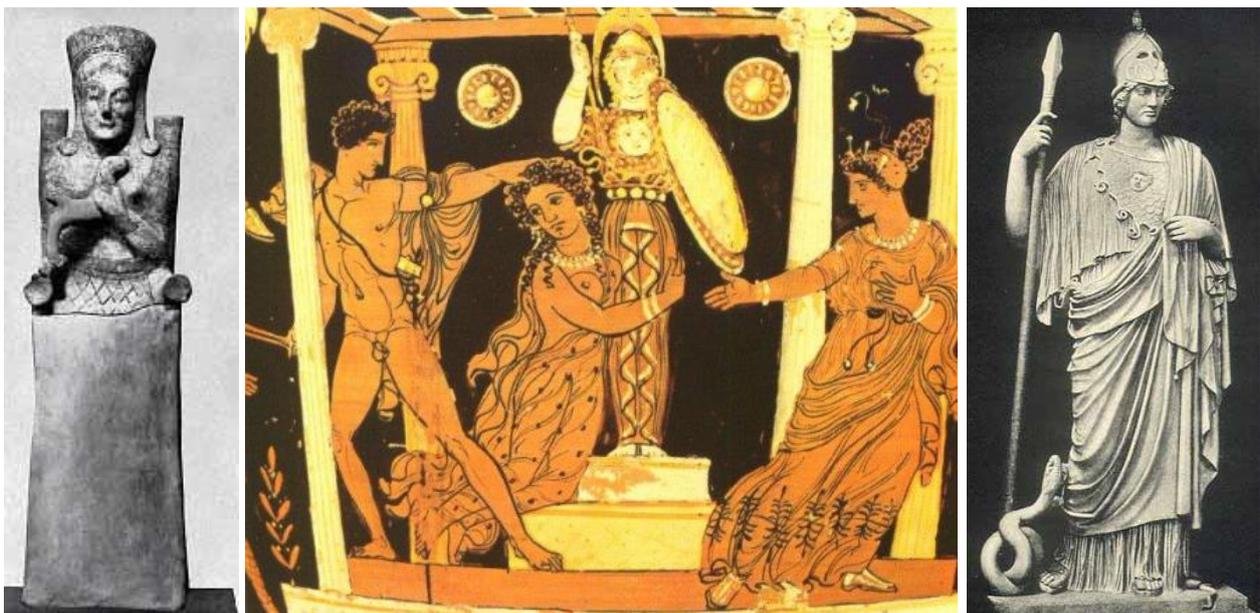
<sup>38</sup> Diana Stein 'Mythologische Inhalte der Nuzi-Glyptik' in V Haas (ed.) *Hurriter und Hurritisch* Konstanz 1988, 173-209

of four double-winged creatures representing the Winds - and again the two-headed eagle-man of the Sky already seen in the seals used by Porada to compare with our *ForAtt-29* entry - and quite possibly representing *Ursae Major et Minoris*. We are reminded of quintessential Āryan cosmology in the Zoroastrian reverence for the purity of the Four Elements of Water, Air, Fire and Earth and ask ourselves whether the variation in winged figures do not bring them into play here. The four seemingly demonic hybrids indicate different orientations or wind directions through their poses and wing positioning, and taken as a group are even more meaningful as winds working through the Four Elements, more or less distinguishable as Water = fish, Air = bird/wings, Fire/lightning=flames and Earth=serpent/human, with the two-headed eagle-man at the Polar Centre.

To follow on with the full implications of the *ForAtt-29* catalogue entry we need to follow one further line of enquiry, starting at the end of the line with snake imagery in the Greek cultic world. In our *ForAtt-29* art historical commentary coming next, we will try to sketch in an intermediate stage of the gradual genesis of the use of entwined snakes in animal (*Ill.9- 10*) and anthropomorphic versions through their non-hybridised forbears on Elamite seals that appear to precede those rare OB examples cropping up early within Mesopotamia itself.

### *CENTRAL ASIAN IMPORTS/BIVISUALS*

From the outset, in processing the material for the catalogues it was more noticeable than usual how images from the Central Asian tradition of the Oxus-Indus-Turanian region were being woven into the Mesopotamian canon - the most immediate 'carriers' being the Mitanni, the new rulers there for 300 years. We picked this up in the figure of the Snake Lady in *ForAtt-22* and tried to trace its links with the Aegean world. Certainly over time much of alternative Aryan iconography became part and parcel of certain key icons in archaic Classical Greek art, presumably inherited through Mycenaean precedents or taken up from abroad during the Orientalising period. The obvious example is in the standing statues of Athena which always show her with a python-sized snake as one of her key attributes - in other words she was in some way the Snake Lady's avatar.



*Ill.9- 27: (Left) Archaic statue of Hera holding a snake; (centre) detail on red figure vase by Lycurgus c.360-70 showing Athena statue with Medusa aegis (right) The Parian marble Athena Giustiniani, an*

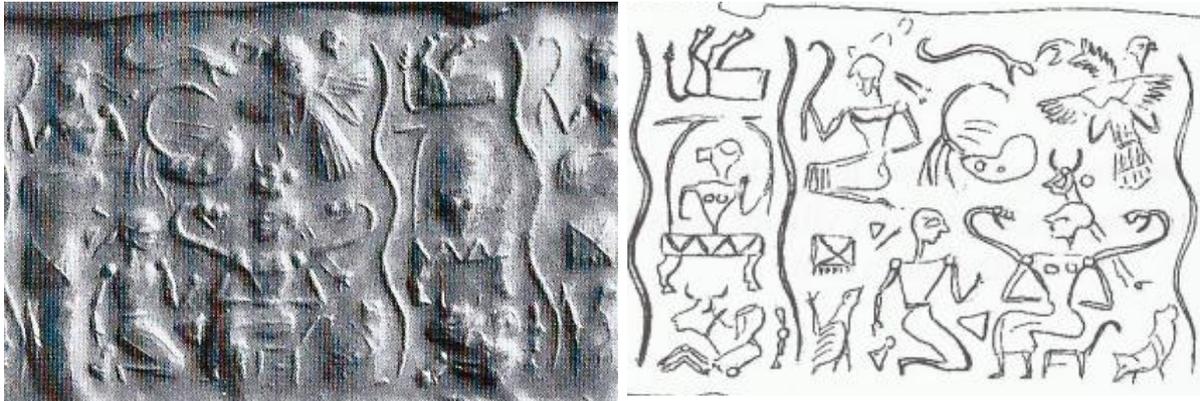
*Antonine Roman copy of an original Greek sculpture showing Athena with her serpent son Erichthonius catastrophically fathered by Hephaistos when he ejaculated on her - Vatican Museum*

Even in the First Millennium BC the earliest image of Hera at the Heraion at Samos (above left) show her holding a snake - and of course at Delphi the primeval oracular deity in the cave was a serpent, usurped by Apollo in a battle much like that between Marduk and Tiamat. Much later, in Athens the massive chryselephantine statue of clothed and armed Athena in the Parthenon (without her lesser attributes of lions or owls) had the snakes of the Medusa head that clasps her aegis crawling all over her shoulders, even though her body is not merged with the huge serpent nestling against her shield, representing her son, the first new era king of Athens (see the statue above right - a snake was kept in a basket at the foot of Athena's statue in the Parthenon to represent his presence). The vase painting (above centre) showing Cassandra seeking sanctuary from Ajax at a local statue of Athena at Troy is interesting for the statue's dress, that echoes the criss-cross twists of her legs on the earlier seals.

We now look back to Central Asia for further information, picking up from where we left off last.

### SNAKE GODDESSES ON SOUTH-EAST IRANIAN SEALS c.2300BC

Both Edith Porada, Pierre Amiet and - following new discoveries - Holly Pittman strung together Oxus Civilization seals with shared iconography that over the decades have gradually emerged from stratified sites such as Shahdad, Tepe Yahya and (much later) Gonurdepe itself that have helped to throw light on a handful of more complex seals looted and sold on the market in earlier decades, with no precise provenance. The next seal (photographic and drawn versions) portrays elaborate rituals involving the Snake Lady centre stage, not with twisted legs but with snakes sprouting from her shoulders that have the same leonine heads as on the Khafaje bowl. On the basis of this one piece that had come into the Faroughi collection in the early 1960s, Porada<sup>39</sup> intuitively reckoned



**Ill.9- 28: Akkadian period Trans-Elamite seal in the Faroughi collection analysed by Porada (her pl.IA).**

its cultural origins to be Iranian (it had been bought from a dealer in Teheran by its Iranian owner). In an admirable leap of instinct<sup>40</sup> she connected it with the story of a king known from the Sumerian

<sup>39</sup> E Porada 'Problems of Interpretation in a Cylinder Seal of the Akkad Period from Iran' in *Compte rendu de XI<sup>ème</sup> Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* Leiden 1964

<sup>40</sup> Already in *Catalogue C I* discussed the dangers raised by leading authorities (such as P Matthiae) about matching texts to images if dated centuries apart and/or created in different territories - a matter Porada broaches herself in this paper - but with the impossible spread of inadequate visual and textual information to hand one must be allowed to use imagination, under caution, as well as hard reasoning.

King-List, *Etana and the Eagle*, already depicted once or twice on Akkadian seals<sup>41</sup> the details of which story are worth recounting for their closeness to the imagery - which we can take in groups:

- (i) Between two upright serpents a small version of the Snake Lady seated on a bull-footed stool crouches between the dismembered halves of an ox;
- (ii) in the next column a seated figure kneeling on its haunches holds up a curved baton (or snake) sitting over a box and a bird lying sideways;
- (iii) the principal scene at ground level shows the Snake Lady enthroned, a bird behind; she wears a bullhead helmet and a kneeling attendant faces her;
- (iv) overhead in the sky soars a baby snake next to an eagle with a tiny human head peeping over one wing. The bagpipe-looking object with several stray strings hanging down could - going by a similar item in the next seal - be a lyre but can be read as an ox rib-cage, trachea and stomach.

Porada gives a summary of the story<sup>42</sup> as follows (with slight editing for better flow, with insertion of the relevant image reference):

*... This eagle... had sworn a pact of friendship with a serpent, confirmed by an oath before Shamash. Both creatures proceed to raise families, the serpent at the foot of the tree, the eagle at its top. The serpent, according to the Old Babylonian and Middle Assyrian versions, supplies the food for all. ... After a time the eagle makes up his mind to devour the serpent's young, though the reason for this decision is not made clear. ... The serpent carries its case to Shamash, who promises to bind a wild ox for the serpent. He advises it to open the inside of the ox, rending its belly, and pitch its dwelling therein (i). Shamash predicts that every kind of bird of Heaven will descend to devour the flesh, the eagle [amongst them]. When he enters the interior of the ox, the serpent is to **seize the eagle by the wings and tear them off**<sup>43</sup> - also his pinions and talons (ii) - and cast all the pieces into a pit.*

*... Events proceed as foretold, and the eagle languishes in the pit until Shamash, who seems to have been the protector of both the eagle and Etana, yields to Etana's entreaties to help him procure the plant of birth for his wife, and directs Etana to the eagle. Etana finds him, feeds him, and helps him out of the pit. There is mention of a dazzling vision seen by Etana of a goddess on a throne (iii), at the foot of which are lions, which greatly frightens him. The eagle, however, reassures him, invites him to place his breast on his, his hand on the eagle's feathers, his arms on his sides (iv). There follows the flight with a description of how the [receding] land appears below in the end [looking] like a garden ditch. [The preserved text ends with the fall of Etana].*

The match between the seal elements and the story are remarkably close, giving high probability for the likely sense of most of it. Moving to a seal in the Louvre similar to it in many ways, the

<sup>41</sup> H Frankfort *Cylinder Seals* 1939 pl.XXIVh pp.95-191; or A Moortgat *Vorderasiatische Rollisiegel* Berlin 1940 no.234/5

<sup>42</sup> Porada uses both R J Williams *The Literary History of a Mesopotamian Fable*, Phoenix 1956 71-2 and E A Speiser ed. J B Pritchard *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* Princeton 1955

<sup>43</sup> Precisely the strategy in the Ningirsu and Anzu story

elements of the Etana narrative is absent but there is no doubting the vision of the Snake Goddess on her double-level platform <sup>44</sup> is the same, again with bird perched next to her. She is accompanied by a fuller retinue of crouching and standing females, and the kneeling attendant and perhaps a lyre player (is he the story teller?) appear again.



**Ill.9- 29: Trans-Elamite seal (formerly Bailey Collection) now in the Louvre (Sb6707) - discussed by Pittman<sup>45</sup> (her fig.4a/b)**

Some 25 years later the kneeling figure leaning back on the haunches holding up a snake (sex indeterminate) as on the Faroughi seal appeared again on a new seal bought by the collector Jonathan Rosen in Vienna - this time depicted inside a circle with 11 pointed petals (below). Porada was again given the opportunity to comment on its iconography<sup>46</sup> and her pls I-III show thorough, close-up details of the seal, with her pl.IV bringing in the Faroughi seal for comparative purposes - seeing both as from the Akkadian period. This is clearly not so much a ritual as an iconostasis, since the figure with snake and bowl is placed symmetrically over a mountain with trees and flanked by two moustached and short-bearded men with long hair seemingly drawn up in a bun, their muscular arms thrown up in adoration and kneeling on lion-dragons. The man on the left wears a bull helmet



**Ill.9- 30: (Left) Jonathan Rosen shell seal inspected by Porada; (right top) impression of a steatite seal from Tepe Yahya<sup>47</sup>; (right bottom) impression of an alabaster seal from Shahdad Grave 163 - rephotographed by Pittman op.cit 2014 fig.7b**

and has two snakes issuing from under his arms (c.f. the Cincinatti male nude Ill.9- 35) whilst the man on the right wears a lion helmet and carries a bow, his quiver ending in an animal tail hanging

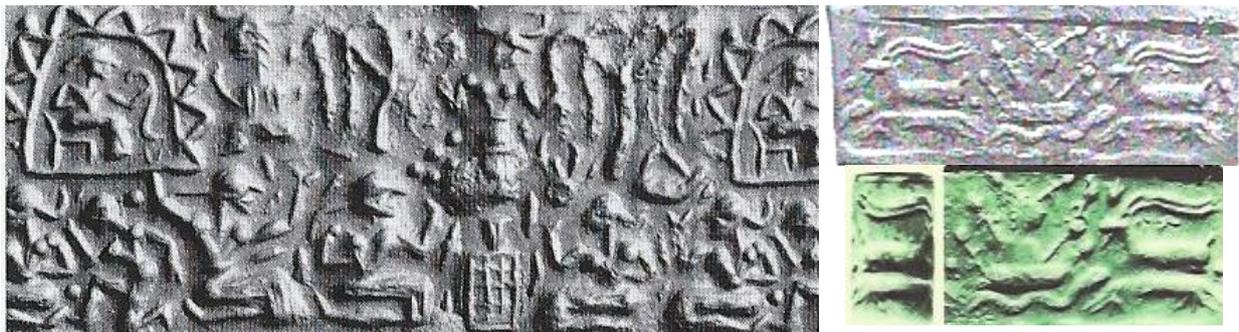
<sup>44</sup> Its hieroglyphic shape suggests the reverse of the Egyptian hieroglyph for Sky = the Earth/Underworld

<sup>45</sup> H Pittman 'Anchoring Intuition in Evidence: A continuing discussion of Cylinder seals from South-Eastern Iran' in E Bleibtreu et al. (eds) *Edith Porada zum 100<sup>te</sup> Geburtstag: A Centenary Volume* Fribourg 2014 375-93 & 629-39 (ills)

<sup>46</sup> E Porada 'Discussion of a Cyklinder Seal, Probably from Southeast Iran' *Iranica Antiqua XXIII* 1988 139-43/Pls I-IV

<sup>47</sup> H Pittman 'Glyptic Art of Period IV' in C C Lamberg-Karlovsky & D Potts *Excavations at Tepe Yahya, Iran 1967-75* Cambridge Mass 2001 fig. 10.48

down his back (matched by a figure on a straightforward Akkadian seal in the British Museum<sup>48</sup>). Between their upraised arms and heads float three tulip-like flower heads. The dragon's tail under the hunter figure is extended and looped (no sign of it being a snake) to form a throne for a horned female figure leaning forward, dressed in *kaunakès* and holding what looks like a wheat-ear, a figure of eight symbol above her head whose serpentine nature (or not) is ambiguous. Porada spotted the shaping of the horns as corresponding to the way they are shown on seals from Tepe Yahya or Shahdad (below, top and bottom right) - seals long known and collected together for study by Amiet in his classic work<sup>49</sup>. We see in the Shahdad seal a repetition of the sprouting flower or wheat ear theme, substituted in the Tepe Yahya seal by a pair of wings on the Goddess, and obvious depictions of serpents either side of her throne.



**Ill.9- 31: (Left) A second seal acquired by Jonathan Rosen discussed by Porada op.cit 1993 pl.31; (right) Female with sprouting shoulders and head crouched on a serpent and flanked by an ibex - Sarianidi<sup>50</sup> fig.10 also published as Sarianidi<sup>51</sup> Seal 1786**

Then Jonathan Rosen bought a second seal in similar vein in Afghanistan (above left), and another of the more common type of seal with truncated crouching figure on the lines of the ones from Tepe Yahya and Shahdad emerged at Gonur-depe (above right), and a closeup of the seal from a further Sarianidi publication (underneath) shows more clearly that there are one or two tulip head-type florets amongst the ball-topped spikes issuing from the female's shoulders. The animal under the ibex is unclear.

Returning to the larger seal, inside the spikey 'cartouche' is the same figure seated sideways holding a serpent, and a retinue of females crouching, others evidently of higher rank seated on low chairs, and the kneeling male attendant in abject obeisance all repeating their body language. They are again arranged as an iconostasis either side of a female goddess with the same flattened horns holding up two serpents and seated between two palm trees or willows (a further female goddess is inserted next to the figure inside the petalled cartouche, bending forward in exactly the same way as the goddess on the first Rosen seal). The principal goddess sits over a box grooved with squares, topped by a floret, and at her feet there seems to be a bull-head on one side and some constellation-looking dots on the other. Again Porada had the opportunity to discuss the seal at a seminar held in honour of V G Lukonin at the British Museum, which now after thirty years she compared against the Faroughi seal (*Ill.9- 28*) and the first Rosen seal (*Ill.9- 30*)! She noticed what

<sup>48</sup> D Collon Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum II London 1982 no.141

<sup>49</sup> Pierre Amiet *L'Âge des Échanges Inter-Iraniens* Paris

<sup>50</sup> V I Sarianidi 'Chamber Graves of the Gonur Necropolis' in K Jones-Bley et al. (eds) *Complex Societies of Central Eurasia from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium BC Vol.II* Washington DC 2002

<sup>51</sup> V I Sarianidi *Myths of Ancient Bactria and Margiana on its Seals and Amulets* Moscow 1998



situated as close to the crossing point of Arabia as Iran can get and in itself explaining why its products should so easily have travelled to India via the Makran Coast - or in some instances accessing Margiana along the riverine way-stations of the Indus. Can we say that the snake cult was imported, or was it as indigenous to Margiana as it is/was to Elam and India? Interestingly the snake cult continues today amongst and the Yezidis of northern Iraq, or the faqirs of India.



*Ill.9- 34: (Left) Snake charmer Yezidi with his daughter; (right) entrance to the principal Yezidi shrine of Sheikh Adi - both photographed by E S Drower<sup>52</sup> in 1941. Many of the markings next to the snake, as recorded by Ussher (see below) are no longer visible, and the entire shrine was destroyed by Da'esh*

#### OPHIDIAN MEN

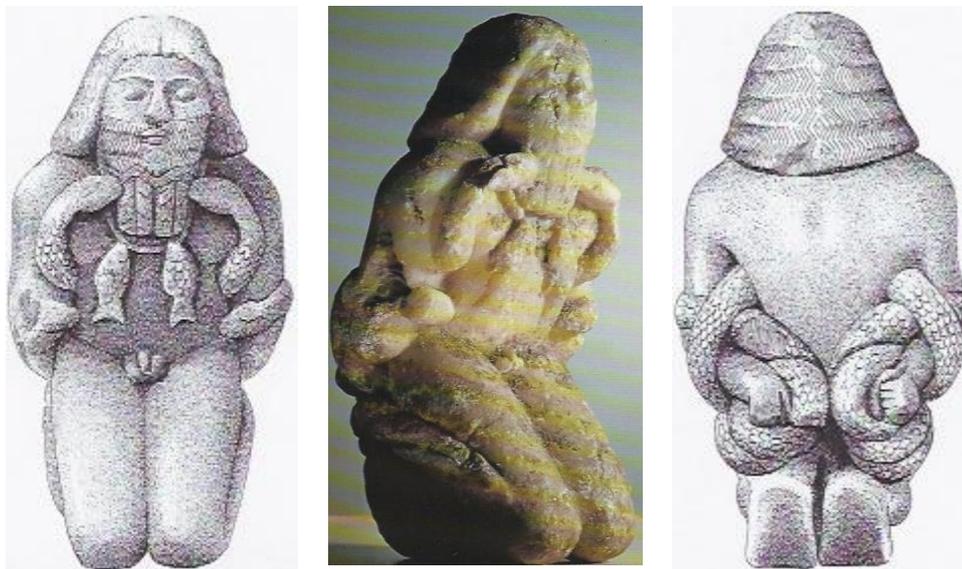
In the seals above, men, too, participate in the snake cult, but we do not have time here to dwell at length on the rarer examples of snake men which now and then have come to recent attention in the Central Asian art and archaeology world (see illustrations below) - though they are given more thought in the full version of *Catalogue E*.

<sup>52</sup> E S Drower *The Peacock Angel* London 1941



**Ill.9- 35 (Left) Ophidian Man from Eastern Iran, Louvre AO 21104; (centre) a version in the Faroughi Collection, Teheran; (right) a third version in a private collection loaned to the MMA NY - photos from AFC-244 and Francfort *ibid.* figs 3/4 respectively**

It is interesting to set them against 'the Cincinnati Man with Snakes' (below) - on two occasions discussed in papers by Edith Porada<sup>53</sup>. Four snakes twine round the man who holds the bodies of two of them behind his back: the heads of one pair meet at the front against his beard, and the heads of the second pair also emerge at the front just above his elbows, nearly touching the tails of the two fish hanging round his neck. There was dispute about its authenticity, but Parrot illustrated



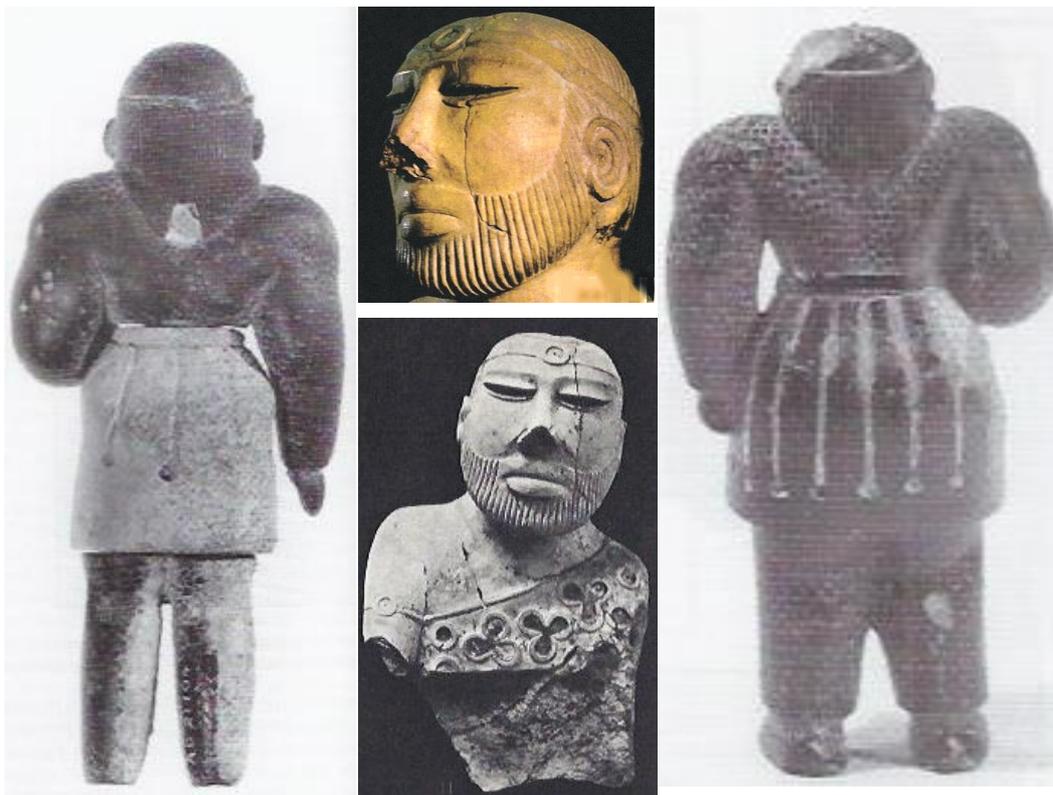
**Ill.9- 36: The Cincinatti Snake Man - selected from Porada 1992 and 1993**

it in his book on Tello since he believed it was not only illegally excavated at the site, but also stolen with a number of other items that later turned up in the shops of dealers in London and Paris. It was eventually bought by the Cincinnati Museum and assessed by Porada as authentic when

<sup>53</sup> E Porada (i) op.cit 1993 (fn. Error! Bookmark not defined.) and (ii) 'A Man with Serpents' in *Von Uruk nach Tuttul: Festschrift Eva Strommenger* Munich and Vienna 1992, 171-5 + pls

compared with two or three other clones of the figure which were very obviously fakes. Of interest is the pair of fish round the nude hero's neck which appears to be a pointer to the God Ea - again bringing serpent and fish together. Indeed, discussion of his iconography led Porada to the conclusion that he represented a guardian of Ea, God of Waters, rather than the Gilgamesh-type hero wrestling to overcome the serpents.

If he does indeed derive from the Sumerian site of Tello, then he predates by almost a millennium the Margiana/BMAC ophidian men in the previous illustration, who in a different blend of symbols have merged with the snakes so that they are now humans with scaly skin. Either they represent a deity, representing the underground version of Baal in the underworld - or they are shamanic priests. Looking at the back views of two of these ophidian shamans - and now bringing in the roughly contemporary priest figure from Mohenjo-Daro (from examples in Sumerian sculpture Parpola<sup>54</sup> points out the trefoil on his cloak refers to the Sky, so he may in the same way be either a Sky God or priest of the Sky God) - we notice all three wear a simple diadem encircling what may be a bald pate but could simply be bare because a head-dress is missing. Francfort noted that on the back of the figure below left was an empty groove for the fixing (he thought) of wings:



*Ill.9- 37: Back views (left and right) of the Ophidian men (left and right) in Ill.9- 35; (centre) the Indus Valley Sky God/Priest*

### ***THE ASTRONOMY OF SNAKES AND THE SNAKE LADY ON KASSITE BOUNDARY STONES***

Does this varied snake iconography point to meanings other than the Underworld Journey of the God and Goddess? Although we could say the 'Underworld Journey' is one and the same as the

<sup>54</sup> A Parpola The Sky-Garment: A Study of the Harappan Religion and its relation to the Mesopotamian and later Indian religions Helsinki 1985

Solar cycle of the Death and Rebirth of nature every year in the seasonal round, it can also apply to the three days of the Lunar cycle when the Moon is dark - and of course to those times when Sun (or Moon) are obliterated during an eclipse (the Sumerians were already aware of what the Greeks later called the Saros Eclipse Cycle of just over 18 years (today known to be 18 years, 11 days and 8 hours). Could the double serpent already refer to the downward and upward nodes of the Moon as it crosses the Ecliptic, its 18+-year synodic cycle vital for predicting eclipses? Certainly in later times the pair was known as the Head and Tail of the Dragon of the Eclipse - see **Chapter 19, Ills 19-20 and 19-215**. Quoting from that chapter, as Duchesne-Guillemin<sup>55</sup> points out, ‘the symbol for the head (or tail) of the dragon of the eclipse (𒍪) appears canonically on Neo-Babylonian boundary stones in a prominent position next to the Moon, Sun and Venus and above the symbols referring to the Tropics of Capricorn, Cancer and the Ecliptic (the Ways of Enlil, Anu and Ea)’. This symbol is what astrologers today use for the ‘fortunate’ North Node glyph (♁), on *kudurrus* mostly placed over the symbol for the Way of Anu (the Ecliptic) which itself, like the Milky Way with the annual winding motion of the Sun North and South of it may also be represented by a single serpent. Bearing in mind how the Luristan stamp seals - or Sumerian and Susan sealings we have looked at so far - so often include a snake in the sky over other groups, implying astronomical meaning (as on the sealing below left from Tepe Giyan - **GMA-97/ BaLu-3**), it is no surprise that snake imagery appears on boundary stones displaying the symbols for all the Gods and Goddesses during the Second Millennium, a convention introduced by the Kassites and copied by the Neo-Babylonians.



**Ill.9- 38: (Left) Cosmic protohistoric seal with Snake, Lion, Sun, Ibex; (right) Herzfeld's drawing (his fig. 126) of the twisted-legged Snake Lady noticed on a back facet the British Museum kudurru (her head, tellingly, rises between the planetary symbols for Venus and Moon)**

The Kassites were cousins of the Mitanni, and one early Kassite *kudurru* features the Snake Lady with twisted legs (drawn above right): we will conclude our study with a close look at this item.

#### **THE MELISHPAK KUDURRU (BM90829)**

It is thought the Kassites had close ethnicity with both the Mitanni and the Hittites, having themselves taken advantage of the power vacuum of around 1500 to install themselves in Hittite-sacked Babylon - when for some reason the Hittites (another fork of the Central Asian diaspora southwards) decided not to stay and rule. By ‘keeping Babylon in the family’ this suggests at least cousinship between the two peoples.

<sup>55</sup> J.Duchesne-Guillemin ‘Origines Iraniennes et babyloniennes de la Nomenclature Astrale’ CRAI 1987, 234-50

A *kudurru* from the time of Melishpak<sup>56</sup> in the British Museum (nearly always displayed from the Sagittarius side - now recently lost to general storage) in this earliest period of *kudurru* use following the Old Babylonian period, it shows the Snake Lady on one of its facets (if Herzfeld *op.cit.* had not noted it in his drawing shown above, I would not have realised it was there). In the light of recent scholarship it has been interpreted as The South Wind<sup>57</sup> but taking into account our discussion of the Winds earlier, this could not be so, and we came to the conclusion she is likely to be a Central Asian version of Ishtar, being, of course, the Planet Goddess Venus. In trying to understand the Mitanni Snake Lady as two serpents attached to a winged female torso suggests a version of Venus as all-encompassing female power absorbing within it all those prehistoric connotations to do with the turning sky and the translation of the cosmic waters of Life to heavenly, earthly or underworld planes, but the fact that on the *kudurru* she is placed between the symbols for Venus and the Moon is an important clue that will lead us to our final conclusion on the last page.

Let us look first at the overall iconography of the *kudurru*, which as a whole the cuneiform text says is dedicated to Adad/Jupiter (translations for Baal). It was originally found in the Temple of

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<sup>56</sup> L W King Babylonian Boundary Stones and Memorial Tablets in the British Museum London 1912 - BM no. 90827 pls XXIII-XXX and pp 19-23

<sup>57</sup> F W Wiggerman 'The Four Winds and the Origins of Pazuzu' in C Wilcke (ed.) *Das Geistige Erfassen der Welt im Alten Orient: Sprache, Religion, Kultur und Gesellschaft* Warsaw USA 154-



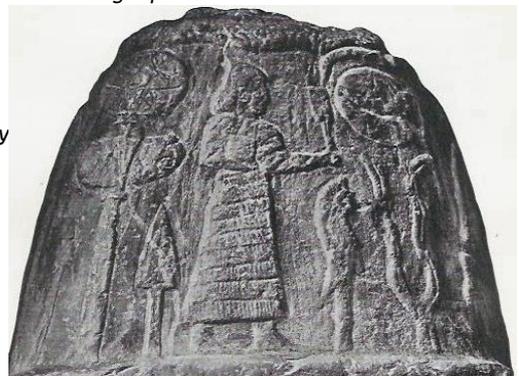
*Marduk is represented by the kusarikku holding a spade, and also by the tasselled spade in front of them (see detail at facet B, right)*



**A: Sagittarius**



*B Behind Marduk's two spades the bow and arrow of the preceding Sagittarian figure flies above, and underneath is the dog of Gula/Sirius; the bird on the perch refers to the Gods Šuqamuna and Šumalia, the Kassite kingship Gods*



**C Analysis of this facet is given in the full Catalogue**



**D The Snake Lady facet, fully analysed in Cat.E**

**Ill.9- 39: (Left top) Boundary stone from the time of Melishpak with its dedicatory text c.1300/1200 BM 90829; (left bottom) coiled snake at top of kudurru (right column) Top facets - photos L W King**

Shamash at Sippar by Hormuzd Rassam. The long text on it describes the assignment of a field to Khasardu in the reign of Melishpak II, witnessed by several high officials. Once the boundaries of the land have been stipulated, the protection of a long list of Gods is invoked, to bring down their curses on anyone who later in time might dare to break the agreement and take the land.

Thirteen gods are named in the text, along with images of the principal Gods represented by 18 images altogether depicted on the four facets. The coiled snake at the top has its separate significance, and could as much stand for The Milky Way, Hydra, Draco - or the Dragon of the Lunar Nodes. (Another Kassite boundary stone (below) evokes Ea as the subterranean waters/*Apsu* - in that one horned serpent encircles the entire stone around its base, while a second, smaller one encircles the circumpolar region at the very top, in the position of Draco):



**Ill.9- 40: 12C Kassite Boundary Stone (probably of Melishihu) found as booty at Susa - Louvre Sb25**

The facets A-D marked on the stone as illustrated on the previous page (using L W King's original labelling) follow each other in anticlockwise order, and are itemised in the full Catalogue on-line.

Just restricting ourselves to the Snake Lady, we realise why it has been used on this *kudurrus*:

- (i) It is a Kassite piece so the culture is akin to that of the Mitanni: Āryan in nature;
- (ii) Marduk is particularly Kassite - and half the officials testifying in the text have names ending in *-Marduk*. As we know, after Marduk has overcome Tiamat 'with the arrows of his winds' and constructed the heavens with the arch of her ribs, his alter ego Enlil places her tail in the sky as the Milky Way - which is possibly the upright serpent running up the length of most *kudurrus*.
- (iii) It is because Ea's mother, Nammu, requests Ea to create Man as servant to the Gods in order to help the Gods keep the Cosmos in order after this great battle that Ea creates the First Man from Water and the blood of Kingu (the first of the Seven Apgallu (Ab = water; gal - great; lu - man). He is named Adapa (the subject of the Elamite seal discussed above).
- (iv) The Melishpak boundary stone with the Snake Lady on it is a dual cultural piece - meaning that the abstract symbols for the stars, planets and Ways of Anu, Enlil and Ea appear to be inserted

as a gloss on the Sumerian anthropomorphic symbols for the pantheon - including the rare instance the Central Asian Ishtar in her Underworld transitional form (her consort Adad's lightning fork is placed immediately to her right on the previous facet - and we remember the entire stone is dedicated to that God (previous names being Ninurta and Baal).

- (v) We can put aside Wiggerman's reading of the Snake Lady as The South Wind figure to be associated with Ea , since she is not, in fact, one of the Winds (in our analysis of seals showing the Winds, they are the winged females that lean in different directions).
- (vi) The Sagittarian figure behind the Snake Lady is also typically Āryan/Central Asian, both in the addition of a horse to the figure, as well as giving it wings. It has a double head, half human/half dog which refers to the Sagittarius-Sirius colure of the Solstices for the Age of Aries (almost exactly coinciding with the Milky Way). The figure also alludes to the constellation Pegasus which along with the Ram of Aries underneath it (the crook in front of the twisted-legged Snake Lady) refers to the start of the Year at the Spring Equinox. The Sagittarian figure has scorpion tail and forelegs which I think is a BIVISUAL pointing to its replacement for the former Taurus-Scorpio opposition for that Spring Equinox Year Beginning. Overall, it implies considerable astronomical sophistication on the part of the Kassites, leaving a question as to whether it is they who were responsible for bringing in the necessary astronomical knowledge to 'retune the sky' in order to realign the Spring Equinox Sun-rise to the new Aries-Pegasus 0° meridian.

### **THE DEEPER CALENDRIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SNAKE LADY**

On the Melishpak *kudurru* the Kassites have simply used their version of the representation of Venus - *they did not use the Forward Attack lion-prey icon from the traditional Canon of Ancient Near Eastern Art to represent Venus* - evidently preferring their own symbol. But there is more to it than that, since her head and shoulders lie between the eight-pointed star of Ishtar and the Sun inside the Moon disc.

Coincidentally, in the *Octane Newsletter 5* posted at the same time as this *Spectra Newsletter*, I looked into the interlocking of the grand synodic cycles of Sun, Moon and Venus, as follows:

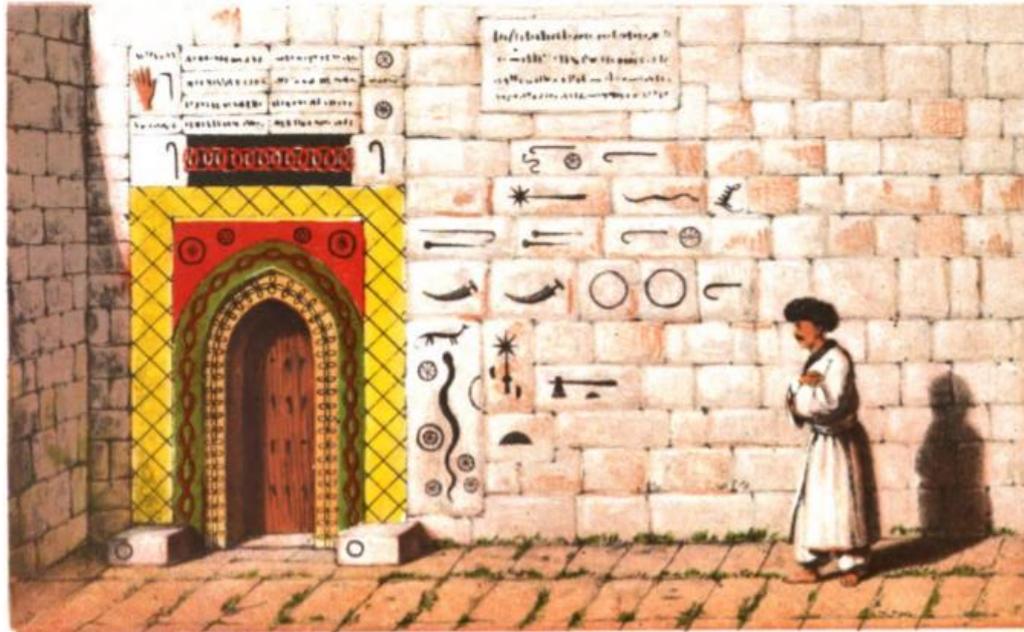
***The exactitude of a precise triple conjunction of Sun/Moon/Venus (to the day and hour) is increased over longer periods if the Saros (just over 18 Solar years) and Metonic cycles (just under 19 years) of the Moon are taken into account: a 47-year period allows an even closer dovetailing of Venus: Moon: Sun to less than a day.***

I therefore believe the Snake Lady could be more than a plain reference to the Planet Venus - because the criss-crossing of the snake legs makes her into the Synodic Venus and its relation to the Moon's Saros Eclipse Cycle to which the twisting serpents - as crossing points on the Ecliptic (thus bringing in the Solar cycle) would refer.

I believe Her appearance on Melishpak's *kudurru* is a strong clue that Central Asian knowledge - transmitted via the Kassites and the Mitanni - contributed towards the recalibration of the state calendar for the Age of Aries in Mesopotamia itself - and that this know-how ultimately percolated through to the kingdoms of the Aegean.

## APPENDIX - THE POSSIBLE AFTER-LIFE OF THE KUDURRU SCHEME

We showed earlier the photographs taken by Lady Drower of Yezidis holding snakes, and of the entrance to the Shrine of Sheikh Adi, one of their principal leaders who claimed descent from the Caliph Omar yet who clearly adhered to pre-Islamic chthonic beliefs. The upright snake at the entrance to his shrine is striking, calling to mind the upright snake appearing on so many Kassite or Neo-Babylonian *kudurrus*. But what is also striking in her photograph is that all the other symbols that were partly carved, partly painted, alongside the snake had faded - we would not know they had been there, were it not for Ussher's<sup>58</sup> watercolour below:



In fact, Kurdish Iraq and onwards up into Central Asia even today has mosques featuring the double serpent - as on the *iwan* of the Anau mosque below - while Lady Drower when visiting churches and monasteries in the Mosul area<sup>59</sup> refers in several places to snakes appearing in their decoration too.



<sup>58</sup> John Ussher *A Journey from London to Persepolis* London 1865

<sup>59</sup> E S Stevens (written under Lady Drower's maiden name) *By Tigris and Euphrates* London 1923