

The Origin and Form of the Concept of Scepter in a New Discovery of a Paleolithic Stone Structures Uncovered in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Dr. Eid Al-Yahya* & **Dr. Qusay Mansoor Al- Turkey**

lu.galqusay68@gmail.com

* Anthropological researcher in the archaeology and history of the Arabian Peninsula.

**Archaeological Researcher in the archaeology of the Arabian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula - West Coast Education Support Centre (WCSESC) WA, Australia.

ملخص عربي:

تشهد الكشوفات الأثرية أعمال ميدانية استثنائية في المملكة العربية السعودية، خلال السنوات الأخيرة وبدعم واهتمام حكومي بارز. ودراستنا هذه واحدة من الدراسات الميدانية التي سنحاول تسليط الضوء فيها على واحد من أهم المكتشفات الأثرية التي لها علاقة بالمنشآت الحجرية والتي تصل أعدادها بمئات الآلاف، منتشرة في عموم المملكة العربية السعودية، ومنها نمط اسميناه مدفن الصولجان ليكون هو اللفظ العربي لهذا النوع من المدافن وباللفظ اللاتيني "Sawljan"، وذلك لأن تصميم المدفن يشبه الصولجان المعروف في الحضارات الشرقية المجاورة للجزيرة العربية، ولا يزال يستخدم في المناسبات الدينية والملكية، حيث يحمله الملوك ورجال الدين في العالم العربي والغربي. وسنحاول في البحث، إعادة تحليل وتأسيس تصميم هذه المدافن وربطها بالشكل التصويري لأقدم كتابة مصورة عرفت شرق الجزيرة العربية في المنطقة المعروفة بجنوب بلاد ما بين النهرين، حيث تم اكتشاف أولى علامات الكتابة من المرحلة الصورية من قبل السومريون. وسنحاول أيضًا إعادة تحليل تصميم المدفن من الناحية الفنية وإعادته إلى فن حضارة مصر القديمة وبلاد ما بين النهرين حيث وجدنا نماذج من شكل الصولجان في الفنون والرسوم الجدارية تحديدًا. وما يثير الدهشة هو أن تفسيرات شكل الرموز ومعناها كانت في الغالب متطابقة من حيث الغرض والتصميم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المدافن، مدافن الصولجان، مدافن ثقب المفتاح، بلاد الرافدين، مرحلة الكتابة الصورية، شبه الجزيرة العربية، المملكة العربية السعودية.

Abstract:

Archaeological discoveries have witnessed exceptional field work in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in recent years, with prominent government support and interest. Our study is one of the field studies in which we will try to shed light on an important archaeological discovery related to stone structures, which

number in the hundreds of thousands, spread throughout the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including a type we called the "Sarcophagu burials", because the design of the burial resembles the scepter known in the eastern civilizations neighboring the Arabian Peninsula, and it's still used on religious and royal occasions, where it is carried by kings and clerics.

We will try to re-analyzed and rooted the design of these burial and linked it to the pictorial form of the oldest pictorial writing known to the eastern Arabian Peninsula in the region known as southern Mesopotamia, where the first formal signs of writing were discovered by the Sumerians. We will also try to re-analyzed of the design of the vault from an artistic standpoint and return it to the art of ancient Egypt civilization and Mesopotamian. What is surprising is that the interpretations of the symbols' form and meaning were mostly identical in terms of purpose and design.

Keywords: Sarcophagu burials, burials, pictorial symbols, Ideogram, Arabian Peninsula, Saudi Arabia. Mesopotamia.

Introduction:

Throughout most of Saudi Arabia, there are large collections of stone burials with unique layouts, designs, and distinctive architecture. Some are concentrated in specific regions, numbering in the thousands. This phenomenon appears as if each region has its own unique features, with various patterns and forms carrying ambiguous and intriguing meanings simultaneously.

The majority of the burials are located in volcanic highlands and plateaus, making access to them arduous. It is difficult to accept that the builders of these tombs would implement such a design, while they face harsh living conditions, such as building tombs using thousands of huge volcanic rocks, some of which weigh half the weight. tons or more. This means that these individuals lived in abundant conditions with an abundance of food resources, both from abundant animal and plant life.

Therefore, it is unlikely that a person would build a personal or collective burial ground hundreds of meters long, using thousands of huge rocks, and with a precise design, on the roofs of mountains and in volcanic heats, while he was in a period of drought and desertification in which water and food were scarce and not easy to obtain, so that he could live a life in which he thought about building such burial places.

Despite not reaching a final conclusion on the date and period of construction of the burials, our field observations and discoveries of the ancient stone axe as we will see in one of the Sarcophagus Burial, indicate clearly that the history of the burials goes back to the paleolithic, because these axes date back to the paleolithic and their manufacture stopped made during this era, and then the Bronze Age began around 4000 BCE in the Arabian Peninsula (Magee P, 2014). The study highlights distinctive to the Sarcophagus Burials (in Arabic Sawljan) patterns, this pattern is connected to their meanings through the design and symbolism of ancient languages, including the two ancient civilizations in Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt.

In terms of symbolism and design the architectural structure known as the "sarcophagus burial" shares a significant resemblance to the well-known sarcophagus used until now by kings, princes, and religious figures. It also served as a symbol for many deities in ancient Eastern civilizations.

Through field research, it was determined that the sarcophagus burial consists of a meticulously constructed circle from which extends a row of closely arranged stones representing remnants of a vertical wall rising over a meter above the ground. The anthropologist Eid Al-Yahya was the first to term it "sarcophagus" (Sawljan), having encountered hundreds of such models during his fieldwork. Their estimated count now reaches tens of thousands in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

1- Examples of Sarcophagus Burials:

The most significant example, worthy of discussion, is the "Harat Al-Ha'it" sarcophagus burial located south of Hail, northwest of Riyadh. It measures a length of 215 meters and was constructed with precise engineering. It consists of a massive circle with the sarcophagus placed at its centre. Surrounding the sarcophagus is a lined wall with two sides connected by stone beams. The structure ends in a straight line, resembling a laid-down sarcophagus (see image number -1-). For more visuals, you can watch the episode dedicated to sarcophagus burials, prepared and presented by Eid Al-Yahya.":

[YouTube - على خطى العرب | الرحلة السابعة | الحلقة العاشرة: سلاح يحرس أمواتنا](#)



(Image number -1-) The Sarcophagus Burial at Al-Ha'it, measuring 215 meters in length, with the burial chamber in the centre of the circle.

The interpretation that can be envisioned is that the architecture of this construction sought to mimic the sky. Without aerial imaging, we wouldn't have been able to obtain this image and understanding. It is likely that this style reflects the people's perception of falling comets from the sky, often characterized by a curved head and a tail resembling the design of a sarcophagus. This burial style has several adjacent models constructed in different orientations (see image number -2-)."



(Image number -2-) A group of tens of thousands (around 50.000) of Sarcophagus Burials in different orientations (Burials at Al-Ha'it).

2- Expected Historical Period of the Sarcophagus Burial:

As for the historical period of these burials that haven't yet been explored by excavators, we need to rely on the surface findings discovered by Eid Al-Yahya in the burial chamber at the centre of one of the sarcophagus burials. These findings included stone forks and grinding stones (see image number -3-).



(Image number -3-) Stone tools held by researcher Eid Al-Yahya, discovered in the burial chamber of the sarcophagus burial.

When compared to similar artefacts discovered in the Kingdom, they date back to the ancient Stone Age. Numerous examples of such artefacts have been found

in the Arabian Peninsula, in what is known as the "Shuwaheitian" civilization in the Al-Jawf region, north of Saudi Arabia, as well as the "Sakaka" civilization, which is only 46 km away from "Shuwaheitian," along with other regions in Saudi Arabia (see map -1-). Archaeological discoveries from a decade ago indicated that evidence of human presence in the Nafud Desert, for instance, dates back to at least the Middle Palaeolithic era (Michael D; et al., 2011, pp.1-5).



(Map-1-) Archaeological and geographical sites in Arabian Peninsula.

3- Symbols and Meanings of the Sarcophagus Burial:

One common aspect of Mesopotamian civilization, for instance, is that ancient inhabitants assigned symbols and meanings to deities, which have been found since the early fourth millennium BCE and subsequent periods (Al-Shaker F M, 2002). Some of the major deities had a symbol, often taking the form of a "Sawljan" (sarcophagus), representing that deity in various art forms. The top

part of the "Sawljān" differed according to each deity. Among the important deities and their sarcophagus-related symbols often associated with the sky and the earth are as follows:

A- The symbol of the sky god "Anu" and the goddess Inanna- Ishtar: - Their symbols were found in sculptures and seal scenes, typically depicting a bundle of hooked reeds in the shape of a column, resembling the columns placed on either side of a gateway. The god Anu is often associated with his beloved daughter Inanna, the Sumerian counterpart of the Akkadian goddess Ishtar, and their symbols include the bundle of hooked reeds inspired by the form of the "Sawljān." Her symbol appeared above the famous scene of the votive vase from Ur (see image -4-) (Antoine Mortkat, no date, p. 50).

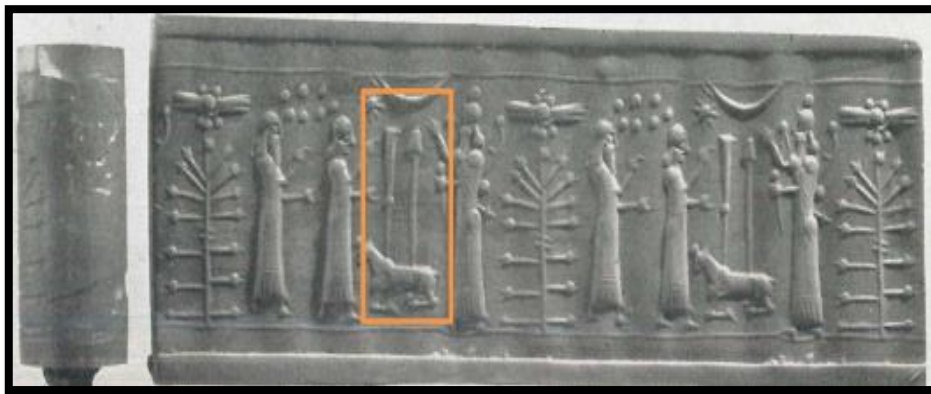
Sumerian myths, such as the "Epic of the Descent of Inanna," tell us that among the responsibilities that the goddess Inanna assumed was the throne of kingship and the great "Sawljān." She was also responsible for the "Sawljān" and the shepherd's crook (Samuel Noah Kramer, 1973, pp. 154, 253).



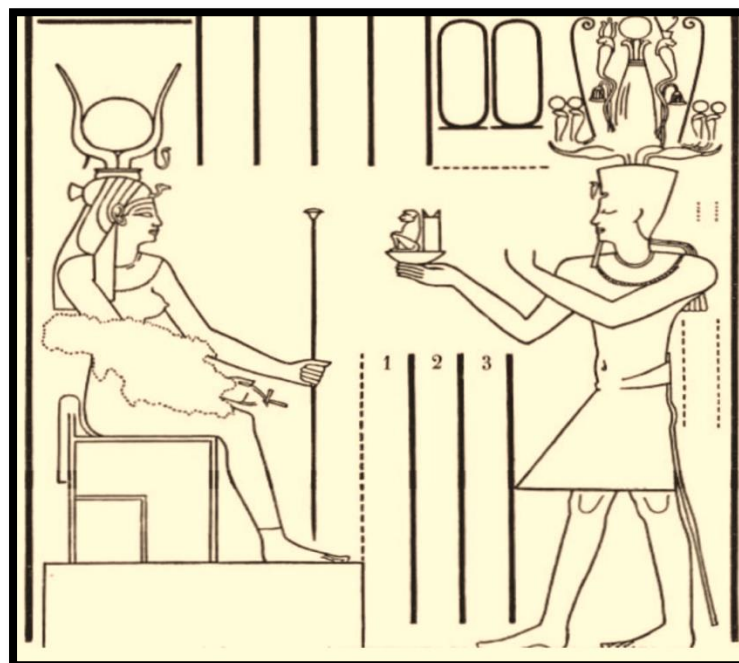
(Image number -4-) The upper part of the votive vessel discovered in the city of Ur, showing the symbol of the goddess Inanna, according to Antoine Mortkat, n.d., p. 50, Plate 21.

B- The symbols of the two deities Nabu (the god of knowledge and writing) and Marduk, the great god of Babylon: - The presence of the "sawljān" is often seen alongside both deities in artistic depictions,

especially on seals (see image -5-The same can be said about the use of the ankh symbol associated with the deity in ancient Egyptian civilization. Artistic depictions show scenes of an Egyptian king offering the ankh symbol to the goddess Isis, who is depicted seated with the ankh in her hand (refer to Image -6-). (Karim Ahmed Abdel Fattah, 2021, p. 22).



(Image number -5-) A seal and its impression depicting the symbol of the Sawljan for the gods Nabu and Marduk from the 1st millennium BCE, discovered in the Temple of Nabu in the city of Nimrud, northern Iraq, according to Helena Costas, 2014, Fig. 95, p. 65.



(Image 6-): Goddess Isis holding the ankh in her hand, taken from: Karim Ahmed Abdel Fattah, 2021, page 22, Figure 3.

C- Symbol of kingship in Mesopotamia: - Numerous artistic depictions show Mesopotamian rulers adopting the Sawljan as a symbol of kingship and power. In a wall relief at the palace of King Ashurnasirpal II, known as the "Relief of King Ashurnasirpal II's Triumph," (883-859 BCE), in the city of Kalkhu (Nimrud), the bearded king stands accompanied by two figures—one behind him and one in front—alongside a winged deity raising his hand in a peaceful gesture. The king holds symbols of authority in both hands and wields his sword, while his attendant follows him with the Sawljan and other offerings. (Kim Benzel; et al, 2010, p. 88-89) (see image -7-).

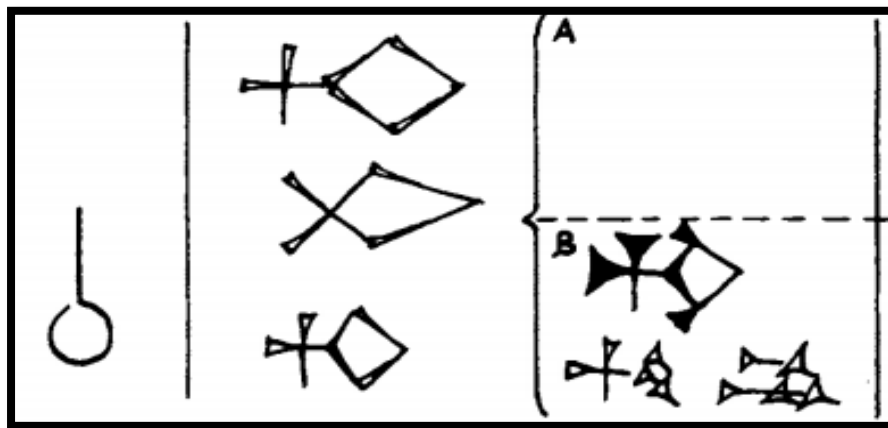


(Image number -7-) Wall relief at the palace of King Ashurnasirpal II in the city of Kalkhu (Nimrud) showing the sawljan being carried by the king's attendant who accompanies him, according to Kim Benzel; et al., 2010, p. 88-89.

It is worth mentioning that the Sawljan symbol has transcended history to different successive civilizations and societies, even reaching Islamic civilization, where it remains a symbol representing religious leaders who lead Muslims in their prayers and sermons.

4- The Symbol of the Sawljan in Cuneiform Pictographic Writings:

By tracing the cuneiform pictographic symbols that share similarities in shape, design, and linguistic meaning with the sawljan design, it becomes evident that the symbol and its design are connected to worship, whether in relation to the temple or to an important figure in the temple, such as the diviner. The term for "diviner" in the temple or any role associated with divination is symbolized by "MAŠ" in Sumerian and "baru/biru" in Akkadian. It is also linked to the animal sacrifice offered to the deceased in their burial, symbolized by "DUB.BA" in Sumerian and "mašhulduppu" in Akkadian (Labat, 2002, p.72, no.76). (See image -8-). In terms of design, a pictorial symbol has been found representing these meanings, resembling the architectural structure of the Sawljan—a circle with a straight line extending from it as seen in the model we presented for the Sawljan burial, and one of the meanings of the symbol is a reference to the soothsayer and the profession of fortune-telling.



(Image number -8-) The pictorial sign and the stages of its development into cuneiform of the Sawljan symbol, one of the meanings of the symbol is a reference to the soothsayer and the profession of fortune-telling according to: Labat, 2002, p.72, no.76.

Conclusion:

It is important to note that original homeland in Arabian Peninsula constitutes a vast repository for the peoples of the Ancient Near East in general, not just the peoples of Mesopotamia. Most historians and anthropologists agree that migrations from the Arabian Peninsula to various parts of the Ancient Near East began in ancient times, the climate change caused many peoples to leave their original homeland in the heart of the Arabian Peninsula and spread to areas outside to the north and east.

The research, whose model was the Sarcophagus Burial, showed that the first symbols and connotations in the beliefs of the ancient East region, at the very least, came from the Arabian Peninsula, and the design idea for the Sarcophagus Burials was built by man in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia since the Stone Ages. Then, after thousands of years, shapes were found in the symbol of the sceptres in the arts of Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt, and that these symbols have connotations that match the meaning and general concept of the idea of building a Sarcophagus Burial. Also, taking this symbol, up to the present time, as a symbol of the ruling religious and civil authority in some countries and religions, confirms that the origins of the idea have come from the source of the first for human civilization in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Finally, it should be noted that in a number of countries of Western civilization now, the scepter is an ornamental rod that a king or queen carries on ceremonial occasions as a symbol of his or her power, also the sceptre in some of parliament have a similar function.

Reference:

- Al-Shaker F M (2002), Symbols of the Most Important Gods in Ancient Iraq - A Semantic Historical Study, unpublished master's thesis submitted to the Council of the College of Arts at the University of Mosul.
- Antoine Murtakat, Art in Ancient Iraq, Part 1, translated by Issa Salman and Salim Taha Al-Takriti, Art Book Series 21, Baghdad, undated.
- Helena Costas, 2014, An analysis of the "allstaff" and ross symbols in Mesopotamian glyptic art from the Isin/Larsa to Neo-Babylonian periods, Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA in Artefact Studies of University College London.
- Karim Ahmed Abdel Fattah, (2021), the idolize Jahjah in ancient Egypt, Journal of the College of Tourism and Hotels, No. 9, Cairo.
- Kim Benzel; et al, 2010, Art of the Ancient Near East, A Resource for Educators, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
- Labat R, (2002), Manuel D'épigraphie Akkadienne, société Nouvelle librairie orientalist, Paris.
- Magee, P. (2014). The Archaeology of Prehistoric Arabia: Adaptation and Social Formation from the Neolithic to the Iron Age. Cambridge World Archaeology, Bryn Mawr College.
- Michael D; et al, 2011, Middle Paleolithic occupation on a Marine Isotope Stage 5 lakeshore in the Nefud Desert, Saudi Arabia, Quaternary Science Reviews, vol.xxx.
- Samuel Noah Kramer (1973), The Sumerians, Their History, Civilization, and Characteristics, translated by: Faisal Al-Waeli, Kuwait: Dar Gharib Printing.