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THE EARLIEST COSMOLOGICAL DEPICTIONS: RECONSIDERING THE IMAGERY ON THE ʿAIN SAMIYA GOBLET

EBERHARD ZANGGER, DANIEL SARLO, AND FABIENNE HAAS DANTES

Abstract

The ʿAin Samiya goblet, an 8 cm tall silver goblet from the Intermediate Bronze Age (2650–1950 BCE), was discovered in the tomb of a high-ranking individual in the Judean Hills. Its unique decoration features two mythological scenes involving chimeras, snakes, and celestial symbols. This study challenges the prevailing interpretation linking these scenes to *Enuma Elish*. By comparing the goblet's iconographic elements with known motifs from neighboring cultures, we propose that the goblet's decoration represents the creation and maintenance of cosmic order, a recurring theme in ancient Near Eastern cosmology. The scenes depict a transition from chaos to a structured universe, protected from chaotic disturbances by deities. There is a particular focus on the birth of the sun deity and its subsequent journey through the cosmos, which in the context of the tomb may serve to facilitate the rebirth of the soul of the dead. Our interpretation is supported by another cosmological depiction that has not been published until now: the Lidar Höyük prism.

Leveraging the Celestial Boat

The purpose of this article is to reinterpret the illustrations on the silver goblet from ʿAin Samiya in light of what has been learned since its discovery over half a century ago, and to place it in its proper religio-historical context. The goblet in question (Figs. 1 and 2) was discovered in 1970 during excavations in an Intermediate Bronze Age (2650–1950 BCE)[1] tomb near the village of ʿAin Samiya, west of the Jordan Rift Valley.[2] The goblet's exterior is decorated with unique mythological scenes executed in *repoussé* and incision.[3] It is considered the only example of genuine art from this period in the Levant (Fig. 3).[4]

The publication and discussion of the ʿAin Samiya goblet suffers from fragmentation in the form of many short comments scattered throughout the scholarly literature. This exceptional object from an unusually rich in artefacts valley certainly deserves more comprehensive treatment. Therefore, we aim to provide a synoptic review to facilitate access to the topic of discussion for experts from a broad spectrum of disciplines.

Immediately after the discovery of the goblet, Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin wrote a short essay comparing the unusual depiction of snakes, chimeras, plants, people, and astral

[1] Chronology after Regev *et al*. 2012; Höflmayer 2017.
[2] Shantur and Labadi 1971.
[3] Israeli and Tadmor 1986, 100.
[4] Mazar 1990, 167–168; Dever 2011, 97.

symbols with passages from *Enuma Elish*.[5] He emphasized that his preliminary findings were by no means exhaustive, and that he intended only to offer suggestions that would later be challenged or supplemented by other scholars.[6] Despite numerous attempts to provide a more comprehensive explanation, it has been said that "no satisfactory interpretation of the scenes depicted on the ʿAin Samiya goblet has been established,"[7] a statement that remains true to this day.

We do not find sufficient indications that the scenes depicted on the cup are specific references to *Enuma Elish*. In fact, there is considerable evidence to the contrary. We argue that the scenes represent the divine process of ordering the cosmos, specifically with regard to the birth and journey of the sun – a central motif in the standard cosmological and mythological worldview of the ancient Near East.[8] By comparing iconographic elements of the goblet with known motifs from neighboring cultures, we identify the crescent-shaped object held by two anthropomorphic figures as a Celestial Boat (a.k.a. "boat of light," "boat of heaven"), an iconographic symbol with an evolving meaning, the earliest known example of which comes from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic context of Göbekli Tepe, c. 9500 BCE (enclosure D, pillar 18; Fig. 4).[9] The horizontal crescent and circular body must be seen as two separate signs, basically referring to the celestial-divine realm, but with somewhat different meanings in each culture. In various Near Eastern cultures this boat symbolized the journey of celestial bodies, especially the sun and moon, and as such was part of the socio-cultural context of Bronze Age belief systems. The two most vivid examples cited here are the closing scene on the sarcophagus of Seti I (1279 BCE)[10] and the bull-men relief from the Hittite sanctuary of Yazılıkaya (c. 1230 BCE) in central Anatolia. The ʿAin Samiya goblet reflects an early source for this originally Mesopotamian iconography.

Our analysis leads us to conclude that the imagery found on the goblet was designed by an individual from southern Mesopotamia and was produced in northern Mesopotamia or northern Syria sometime in the twenty-third century BCE. The artist enriched long-standing narratives about the creation of the world with innovative components, producing a unique vessel with a harmonious, self-contained representation of a familiar cosmological theme.

The Archaeological Context

The village of ʿAin Samiya[11] is located 2 km southeast of Kafr Malik,[12] a modern Palestinian town in the Ramallah and al-Bireh governorate, 17 km northeast of Ramallah in the northern West Bank. Kafr Malik is an Aramaic settlement at the northeastern foot of Tell Asur, with an elevation of 1016 m one of the highest peaks in the Judean Mountains (Fig. 5). Until the Middle Ages the town was located near the Samiya spring (which is the meaning of ʿAin

[5] Yadin 1971.
[6] Yadin 1971, 82 n. 1.
[7] Prag 2009, 87.
[8] Bittel 1970, 96; Cohen 1993, 141–142; 2015, 222; Pizzimenti 2013, 267.
[9] Schmidt 2016, 172, fig. 80.
[10] Also recorded in its entirety, e.g., in the tomb of Thutmose III, or in individual excerpts elsewhere in the royal tombs of the New Kingdom.
[11] aka Samiyeh, Sâmieh, ʿAin Es-Samiyeh, Ein Samiya.
[12] Arabic: كفر مالك.

Samiya), one of the most water-rich springs in the region (Fig. 6).[13] ʿAin Samiya is part of a larger area known as Wadi Samiya, which contains three major settlements and eight cemeteries within a 3 km area (Fig. 7). The valley appears to have been a central burial site for the inhabitants of a large area of hill and steppe country.[14] The archaeological sites in the valley are: (1) Dhahr Mirzbaneh, a rocky mound about 1 km long and 300–450 m wide, bounded on three sides by steep wadis. On the ridge are the remains of an Early Bronze Age IV settlement, as well as cemeteries reported to contain over a thousand graves, making it the largest such cemetery in Palestine.[15] The settlement covers an area of about 4 ha and has remains of simple dwellings and a possible cult site.[16] (2) Khirbet el-Marjameh is an extensive site on a rocky spur northeast of the spring. It contains pottery assemblages from the Early, Middle, and Late Bronze Ages, as well as coins from the Iron Age I–II.[17] (3) Khirbet Samiyeh, 275 m southeast of the spring, where there are mainly Byzantine and Arab settlement remains.

In his capacity as director of the American School of Oriental Research, David Gordon Lyon acquired pottery from looted shaft tombs of Wadi Samiya in 1906–1907, while other finds from the region appeared in collections in Jerusalem and elsewhere. Lyon visited the only two cemeteries known at the time in ʿAin Samiya on four occasions from January to March 1907 and concluded that they were "probably the most important necropolises yet found in Palestine."[18] The cemeteries are located on the gentle slopes at the edge of the built-up area (Fig. 8). The extensive looting produced "a large mass of pottery and bronze objects … much of it of excellent quality." The pottery consists of jars, jugs, vases, bowls, and lamps. Bronze objects were also found, including spearheads, arrowheads, and battle axes. While Lyon and his team excavated, measured, and photographed the tombs, it was not until 1972, when William G. Dever published *Middle Bronze Age I Cemeteries at Mirzbâneh and ʻAin-Sâmiya*, that this work became available.[19]

In 1922, a team from the American School explored Kafr Malik and ʿAin Samiya to better map the valley and its remains.[20] William Albright concluded that the valley contained "some of the richest deposits of antiquities in Palestine."[21] He proposed identifying the area with the biblical Ephraim[22] and suggested that the site had been considered sacred in a much earlier period.[23] The cemeteries he discovered dated from the Bronze Age, the Israelite and Greco-Roman periods, and the Byzantine and Arab periods, leading him to remark that "the wadi seems to have played a very important role at the dawn of Hebrew history."[24]

In September and October 1970, 44 tombs were excavated on the two mounds, Khirbet el-Marjameh and Khirbet Samiyeh, under the direction of Bakizah Shantur, the Inspector of

[13] Albright 1923, 38, 132.
[14] Finkelstein 1991, 41.
[15] Finkelstein 1991, 30; Dever 1997, 35.
[16] Dever 1997, 36.
[17] Dever 1997, 35.
[18] Lyon 1907, 46.
[19] Albright 1922, 131–132; 1923, 38; Dever 1972.
[20] Albright 1923, 39.
[21] Albright 1923, 38.
[22] 2 Samuel 13.23.
[23] Albright 1923, 39.
[24] Albright 1923, 39.

Antiquities in the Ramallah district. Sixteen of the excavated tombs date from the Roman-Byzantine period, one from the Iron II period, and the rest from the Middle Bronze II A–B period. The silver goblet from ʿAin Samiya was found in the double tomb 204/204a, located near the road between Kafr Malik and ʿAin Samiya (Fig. 9). This tomb was excavated under the direction of Yusuf Labadi and surveyed by H. Abu Hillal.[25] The burial chambers are accessible through a circular shaft with a diameter of 1.6 m and a depth of 3.7 m. Chamber 204 measures 4.6 × 4.6 m and is 1.9 m high. Although it had been partially looted in ancient times, it still contained thirteen ceramic vessels: two four-spout pottery lamps (one fragmentary) and eleven hand-made jars.[26] The exact number of people buried in this tomb cannot be determined because the bones are completely decomposed. Chamber 204a, in which the goblet was discovered, measures 4.2 × 3.6 m and is 1.6 m high. This tomb had been sealed and was therefore found in an undisturbed state. In addition to the goblet, sixteen ceramic vessels, three four-spout lamps, an arrowhead, a spear shaft, and amber beads were discovered.[27] The pottery and weapons date to Middle Bronze Age I, now commonly called the Intermediate Bronze Age, c. 2650–1950 BCE.[28] No other pottery was found, except for a type of lamp that was quite common throughout the Middle Bronze Age.[29]

In a sense, the Levant geographically forms a transition zone and interface between the powerful early civilizations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and later Anatolia. Egyptian colonies in the Levant appear as early as the Naquada II period (fourth millennium BCE). There may also have been a mutual exchange of religious elements during this time. By the middle of the third millennium BCE, northern Syria had undergone extensive urbanization, reflected in monumental architecture and the emergence of a sophisticated bureaucratic apparatus as evident by the use of seals and sealings.[30] In the southern Levant, however, the second half of the third millennium BCE saw an opposite cultural development. The Intermediate Bronze Age (IBA) is characterized by a retreat from cities, even the long-established and well-located ones.[31] The urban societies of the Early Bronze Age III period thus disintegrated and were replaced by small-scale kinship, clan, or tribal communities, accompanied by a significant shift in the use of pottery.[32] During the IBA the population seems to have expanded into new areas. Nearly 2000 sites of this period are currently known from all parts of the Levant and Sinai. It was not until the beginning of the second millennium BCE that these small communities again developed into population centers with pronounced social and functional stratification.

The communal commemoration of the dead had been suppressed for several centuries during the preceding period of urbanization. As a result, IBA communities faced the challenge of reinventing their burial practices. Clearly, the memory, if not the presence, of the dead was of great value to IBA communities. They filled vast landscapes with extensive burial grounds outside their settlements. More than 100 shaft cemeteries are known from the region, each

[25] Shantur and Labadi 1971, 73.
[26] Shantur and Labadi 1971, 73.
[27] Shantur and Labadi 1971, 73; Yeivin 1971a.
[28] Yeivin 1971a; Dever 1971, 197.
[29] Shantur and Labadi 1971, 73.
[30] D'Andrea 2015, 269.
[31] e.g., Lapp 1966, 86–116; Dever 1971; 1980; Weinberg 1979; Weippert 1988, 185; Gophna 1992; Finkelstein 1991, 43; Prag 1974; 2009; 2014, 391; Greenberg 2019, 136–179; Cohen 2019; Ahn 2020, 298–99.
[32] Bunimovitz and Greenberg 2004, 20; 2006, 28.

containing hundreds of graves. The cemetery at ʿAin Samiya and Dhahr Mirzbaneh alone contains 1100 tombs.

The contrast between the modest settlements and the massive cemeteries on their periphery has captured the imagination of archaeologists, who have proposed several interpretive models.[33] One such model recognizes the IBA as a period of extensive nomadization, in which people from a mobile, pastoral society became sedentary only in death.[34] The shaft graves contain mostly single burials of prominent men, each of whose articulated skeletons were placed on their right side in a fetal position. This may indicate that death was seen symbolically as rebirth.

The Imagery

The most outstanding find from tomb 204a at ʿAin Samiya is the *repoussé*-decorated conical goblet made of silver sheet, now on display in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, registered as item K2919 (Fig. 10). It is the only luxury or elite grave good to have ever been found in the southern Levant.[35] The goblet, which was reportedly found in near-perfect condition[36] (it is currently about 80 percent preserved), is a maximum of 8.2 cm high. Its circumference is about 25 cm at the top and about 23 cm at the bottom. Regarding the shape of the cup, Prag sees similarities to a red-burnished, slightly bulbous terracotta cup from Tell Iktanu (Phase I) in the southeast end of the Jordan Valley, whose outer rim is corrugated in the derived Syrian style.[37]

Today, the cup is in the possession of the Israeli-run Civil Administration in the West Bank. It is part of a special department supervised by the interim government/military and does not fall under the jurisdiction of the civilian Israel Antiquities Authority. Rather, it is part of a group of archaeological artifacts from disputed areas of the West Bank controlled by the Israeli military. As a result, the cup is on long-term loan from the Israeli Civil Administration to the Israel Museum.

The value of the ʿAin Samiya goblet was probably derived from both its material (silver) and its decorative representation. While silver is not a material suitable for practical objects or tools, it was important in works of art, which were often used as trade goods in the Near East from the fourth millennium BCE.[38] Silver ore is abundant in the Caucasus, Anatolia, and the Aegean. In the Caucasus, the mining and processing of metals, including silver, and the lost wax casting technique were widespread in the second half of the fourth millennium BCE.[39] Silver objects from this period are found in Egypt, Anatolia, and the Levant. They also appear in graves north of the Caucasus from 3800 BCE.[40] Around 2300 BCE, Sargon of Akkad boasts of having conquered the "mountain of silver," probably referring to mines on

[33] Prag 2009; 2014; D'Andrea 2014; Cohen 2019 discuss the proposed models.
[34] Kenyon 1957, 187; Dever 1971, 220.
[35] Cohen 2019, 191.
[36] Yeivin 1971b, 424.
[37] Prag 1974, 82, fig. 20; 2009, 87; 2014, 391, fig. 26.2.
[38] Sherratt 2019, 98.
[39] Piotrovsky 2003, 292; Sherratt 2019, 100.
[40] Chernykh 1992, 67–72; Courcier 2010, 79, fig. 3; S. Hansen 2014.

the upper Euphrates or in the Taurus region. Perhaps this conquest increased the value of silver as a commodity in Mesopotamia.[41] Nevertheless, it is unusual to find a silver goblet as a burial offering in the southern Levant around 2200 BCE. From a modern perspective, it may seem counterintuitive to place such a valuable object in a tomb with the dead, rather than use it as currency. However, there is little evidence for the accumulation, let alone expression of wealth in the southern Levant at the time.[42] Valuable grave goods were believed to reciprocate nature's generosity in distributing its bounty, thereby strengthening the bond between the dead and the living.

The goblet depicts several mythological figures arranged in two vertical scenes, each occupying about half of the frieze (Fig. 3). There is a general thematic symmetry that allows the image on the broken part of the goblet to be at least partially extrapolated.[43] The bottom 2 cm of the goblet is decorated with geometric patterns – a band of chevrons surmounted by a band of herringbones. The scene conventionally described as being on the right shows two anthropomorphic figures in profile facing each other. The left figure is completely preserved, while only the tip of an elbow and part of a tunic remain of the right figure. The preserved anthropomorphic figure wears a domed headdress with a fillet. His nose and eye are exaggerated, while his ear is depicted in the form of two circles. His left arm is outstretched and raised, while his right hand rests across his chest. The tunic is held up by a shoulder strap and covers the lower part of his torso to above the knees. Each figure holds one end of a crescent-shaped object decorated with 20 circles (20 are preserved, but there were undoubtedly more originally). Above the concave arch of the crescent is an eleven-petalled rosette with a human face in *en face* representation. Between the two figures and below the crescent is a fat snake with large eyes and a wide mouth, facing to the right, its tail folded first upward and then downward. The skin on the serpent's head ends in a herringbone pattern, while the skin behind it is represented by dense hatching.[44]

The other scene, conventionally described as the one on the left, is about the same size. In its center is a chimera with a conjoined twin bull's lower body and a single naked human torso.[45] His nipples are prominently transposed with two concentric circles and a central dot, while the navel is indicated by a smaller dot in a circle. Below its waist, which appears to be encircled by a belt, the figure is divided into two lower bodies of hoofed animals, possibly oxen, with four strong hind legs; the fur of these bodies is densely hatched. The head of the figure is often described as "Janus-faced," although its left side is not preserved. The nose, ear, lips, and eyes of the (single) preserved face are cartoonishly accentuated, while the neck is richly hatched. The two arms extend far to the left and right, each hand holding a large upright plant in the form of a stylized palm frond. Between the figure's four animal legs is an eight-petaled rosette that appears to be a smaller version of the sun found in the other scene, but conspicuously lacking a face. On the right side of this (left) scene appears a snake, similar in shape to the one in the right scene, but this one stands upright on its tail, its skin covered with circles. Its large head is at eye level with the head of the chimera and touches one of the plants it is holding.

[41] Sherratt 2019, 92.
[42] Greenberg 2019, 17–18.
[43] Yeivin 1971a, 78.
[44] Yeivin 1971a, 79.
[45] Schroer and Keel 2005, vol 1: 324.

The two snakes have much in common, sharing the same kind of body, head, and facial features. One key difference, however, is the pattern on their skin. The tiny, curved lines (almost semicircles) that cover the entire body of the snake in the right scene only appear on the back of the neck, just behind the head, of the snake in the left scene. The dot-in-circle pattern used for the snake's skin in the left scene does not appear at all in the right scene. It appears that the artist was attempting to distinguish the two snakes either by their species or, perhaps more likely, by their symbolic value. They also differ greatly in their posture and position in relation to the stylized sun. In the right scene, the snake is completely below the sun, while the left scene is dominated by the snake. This may suggest that the snake on the left is the same as the one on the right, albeit in a different role or at a different moment, just as the two suns seem to represent two phases of the solar life cycle.

Soon after the discovery of the goblet, its excavator, Ze'ev Yeivin, showed the object to his colleague, Yigael Yadin. Yadin immediately developed a hypothesis for its interpretation, which he published in a short note to stimulate discussion,[46] arguing that the scene shared themes with Mesopotamian mythology. He also suggested that the two scenes on the goblet represented two moments along the passage of time: the left scene occurred first, and the right scene represented a later time. According to Yadin, it was a depiction of the cosmic battle between order and chaos described in *Enuma Elish*. In the left scene, the monster of chaos, Tiamat, stands upright at the beginning, ready to fight Marduk. However, Marduk is prepared, holding a plant that will neutralize the monster's venom. The scene on the right illustrates Marduk's final victory over Tiamat: two guardians now hold a rod made from part of Tiamat's body, which seals off her face (apparently represented by a sun disk). Yadin concludes: "We have in the ʿAin-Samiya goblet the earliest evidence for a proto-version of the Creation Epic,"[47] citing the following passages from *Enuma Elish* to support his argument:

- "In the heart of Apsu was Marduk created. He rendered him perfect and endowed him a double godhead."
- "[There were] roaring dragons … with their bodies reared-up."
- "A plant to put out poison was grasped in his hand."
- "Then the lord paused to view her dead body, that he might divide the monster and do artful works. He split her like a shellfish into two parts: Half of her he set up and ceiled it as sky, pulled down the bar and posted guards."

Many scholars have since echoed Yadin's interpretation of the image.[48] Others, however, have raised important objections. Most recently, Ayali-Darshan noted that Yadin's identification of the scenes with the *Enuma Elish* "has no foundation."[49] Gates pointed out that the characters depicted on the goblet are static representations, "not, as Yadin would suggest, actors in a narrative," let alone engaged in battle.[50] Dever argued that the cup "depicts the familiar scene of the 'new year' god Janus, flanked by representatives of the old and new

[46] Yadin 1971; Yeivin 1993, 378.
[47] Yadin 1971, 84.
[48] Shantur and Labadi 1971; Grafman 1972, 49; Mazar 1990, 167–168; Mundkur 1983, 286 n. 74; Gophna 1992, 154; Negev 2001, 338; Schroer and Keel 2005, vol. 1: 324; Lisman 2013, 184 n. 897; Miller 2014, 238; Alderete 2017.
[49] Ayali-Darshan 2020, 156.
[50] Gates 1986, 77.

years."[51] Liebowitz noted that there are no surviving comparable scenes from Mesopotamia proper but chose to reserve judgment on Yadin's theory.[52] Lisman said that the depiction on the chalice "is more likely to represent an unknown mythological scene, but possibly a predecessor or antecedent (or a Western Semitic parallel) of the battle described in *Enūma Eliš*."[53] The ultimate criticism of Yadin's theory, however, came from Wilfred Lambert, who stated the following (referring to himself as the reviewer): "The reviewer rejects these interpretations outright because the object predates *Enūma Eliš*, the main materials on which *Enūma Eliš* is based do not involve a battle with Tiāmat, and because the details of the depictions clearly contradict what is known from textual and other evidence."[54]

The ʿAin Samiya goblet is at least a thousand years older than the *Enuma Elish*, which is widely believed to have received its present form in the late second millennium BCE (perhaps as late as 1100 BCE).[55] Therefore, it certainly cannot be said that the Babylonian creation myth directly influenced the imagery of the goblet. Furthermore, the *Enuma Elish* is thought to be a composite myth based on various cosmogonies. It is widely believed that the author composed the story to theologically justify and strengthen Babylon's claim to political hegemony over all of Mesopotamia following Hammurabi's conquests.[56] As a result, Marduk was empowered and glorified as king of the gods,[57] while his city of Babylon became the *axis mundi* at the expense of Enlil and his city of Nippur.[58] In the second millennium BCE, the mythological motif of *Chaoskampf* was popular, describing the struggle between the creator deity, the god of order, and his archenemy, the underworld monster of disorder. The *Enuma Elish* is the best-known Babylonian version of the *Chaoskampf* myth and, as a delicate blend of several pre-existing mythological components, is a unique literary work in its own right.[59]

There are a few problems and errors in some previous publications of the ʿAin Samiya goblet that, we think, should be acknowledged so that they are not repeated in the future. First, the line drawing in the original publication of the cup by Yeivin shows the rosette in the right scene with twelve compartments or rays.[60] This was then interpreted as having astronomical significance. Shantur and Labadi, as well as Yeivin, speak of a "twelve-petalled rosette,"[61] while many others subsequently accepted this as an accurate description of the image.[62] However, in reality, the sun in question contains only eleven sections. A second objection concerns the rendering of the alleged Janus head on the bull-man chimera, which also appears in the line drawing of the original publication.[63] While the right half of the face is fully preserved on the chalice, the left half is completely missing and has therefore been reconstructed purely on the basis of conjecture.

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[51] Dever 2011, 97.
[52] Liebowitz 1976, 92.
[53] Lisman 2013, 184 n. 897.
[54] Lambert 1980, 74.
[55] Maul 2015, 17.
[56] Batto 2013, 32; Maul 2015, 31.
[57] Krebernik 2019, 79.
[58] George 2016, 19.
[59] Maul 2015, 31.
[60] Yeivin 1971a, 79, fig. 2.
[61] Shantur and Labadi 1971, pl. 10A; Yeivin 1971a, 79.
[62] Yadin 1971, 83; Mazar 1990, 168; Yeivin 1993, 378.
[63] Yeivin 1971a, 79, fig. 2.

Questions have also been raised about the circumstances of the find and its restoration. The original condition in which the goblet was found has never been properly documented. While on one occasion Yeivin stated that it was found in near-perfect condition,[64] this description is rather imprecise and does not match its state. Certain pieces of the physical goblet were clearly added after the fact, though restorations have never been formally announced.

The Origin of Cosmic Order

From our point of view, an important element for the classification of the representation on the ʿAin Samiya goblet has so far received little attention, namely the crescent-shaped bow carried by the two anthropomorphic figures in the scene on the right. This shape corresponds to the Celestial Boat that appears in the iconography of the ancient Near East, especially in Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt (sun and moon boat), but also in Hittite Anatolia.[65] The Celestial Boat is a vehicle that the ancients believed carried the celestial bodies, especially the sun and the moon, on their journey across the firmament. How exactly this iconographic element was integrated into the cosmological ideas of the time can be seen in later representations that were either accompanied by text or had a technical function. The 40 m long sun barque on the south side of Khufu's Pyramid shows that this type of ship was considered indispensable for the ascent of the resurrected king to the sun god Re as early as the Fourth Dynasty, around 2500 BCE. Spells have been preserved from the Coffin Texts of the Middle Kingdom, which in turn were derived from the Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom. In one significant later collection, the papyrus of Khonsu-mes, the sun barque is depicted in the hand of Nun.[66]

A particularly detailed and well-preserved iconographic representation of the Celestial Boat is found on the alabaster sarcophagus of the Egyptian king Seti I. This object, however, was made 1000 years after the silver goblet of ʿAin Samiya and was found 1500 km southwest of the tomb in which the goblet was deposited – yet it illustrates a tradition that was already an important part of Egyptian cosmology in the first half of the third millennium BCE. Seti I (1290–1279 BCE) was buried in the Valley of the Kings in western Thebes, where the entrance to his royal tomb (KV17) was discovered by Giovanni Belzoni in 1817. The large vaulted burial chamber (Hall K) of Seti's tomb, with its famous astronomical ceiling depicting stars and constellations, contained the king's richly decorated sarcophagus.[67]

In addition to numerous scenes from various books of the underworld and the *Book of the Dead*, the sarcophagus contains a complete version of the *Book of Gates*, which divides the underworld into twelve parts according to the hours of the night. Each hour of the journey is depicted in three horizontal registers. It was believed that the sun god Re crossed the underworld in a boat to be reborn each morning on the eastern horizon. The dead king accompanied Re on this journey in his quest to unite with the sun god and live forever.[68] On board the boat were other gods and goddesses equipped with various special abilities to help Re defeat all the

[64] Yeivin 1971b, 424.
[65] Bittel 1970, 96; Cohen 1993, 141–142; 2015, 222; Pizzimenti 2013, 267.
[66] Dynasty 21, c. 1000 BCE; Piankoff and Rambova 1957, 49.
[67] Brugsch 1891; Budge 1908; Schäfer 1935; Hornung 1991a; 1991b; Taylor 2017.
[68] Dodson 2019, 79.

hostile entities, led by the serpent Apophis, who symbolized chaos and was the ultimate threat to cosmic order. Apophis had to be defeated endlessly by the sun god and his companions during each nightly voyage of the solar barque.[69]

The conclusion scene is depicted on the inside of the coffin and extends over its entire height (Fig. 11).[70] The background of the lower half is covered by a watery surface. A bearded male figure labeled "Nun" rises from the depths of the water, his arms and hands outstretched to carry the sun barque. A total of eight male and two female deities appear on the sun barque. In the center, the goddesses Nephthys (left) and Isis (right) lift a dung beetle representing the sun god Khepri, who pushes a round disk in front of him. The disk is received by the sky goddess Nut, whose feet rest on the head of Osiris, the god of the underworld, whose body is bent backward so that the tips of his feet touch the back of his head.[71] The picture can be divided into four elements: (1) the lower god with outstretched arms, (2) the sun barque and its occupants, (3) the goddess receiving the sun, and (4) the underworld. Together these figures form a vertical chain with a large solar disc at the center. The lower half of the image represents sunrise (i.e., the eastern horizon), while the opposite, upper half represents sunset (i.e., the western horizon). The sequence of primeval waters/barque of the sun/underworld thus corresponds to the rise of the sun, its journey across the sky, and the sunset. According to the mythology of creation, when the universe came into existence, the sun god emerged from the watery abyss of Nun. Therefore, each new dawn symbolized a new creation. The pre-cosmogonic state is still present in the created world and is referred to here as the "accumulated primordial eclipse."[72] These cosmogonic energies rest in the primordial waters and are present during the ascension of the sun. The ancient Egyptians, fascinated by the mystery of time, iconographically represented infinity in the eleventh hour of the Amduat as a coiled serpent from which the hours of the day originated and from which man emerged rejuvenated after symbolically passing through the body of the reptile.

The conclusion scene on the sarcophagus of Seti I illustrates the decisive moment in the solar cycle when the deceased king, having already traversed the underworld, sets sail with several deities in the Celestial Boat on the journey to heaven. In later iconographic representations from ancient Egypt (e.g., the Papyrus of Anhai from Deir el-Bahari),[73] one or two deities hold a crescent-shaped Celestial Boat above their heads. It symbolizes a barque that allows a celestial body and its respective astral deity to travel across the celestial dome. The iconographic emphasis is on the cosmic laws that stabilize the cosmic order and ensure perpetual renewal.

Other Iconographic Elements

Building on the conclusion that the crescent held by two deities in the right scene on the goblet represents the Celestial Boat, we examined possible antecedents and successors of

[69] Hornung 1991b, 27.
[70] Brugsch 1891, 215–221; Schäfer 1935, 20–21; Assmann 2011, 41–43; Taylor 2017, 71–72.
[71] Hornung 1991b, 32.
[72] Assmann 2011, 43.
[73] Budge 1899, 22–23, pl. 8; Blacker and Loewe 1975, pl. 3.

the other unusual objects and figures depicted on the goblet to better contextualize its illustration, beginning with the left scene and its depiction of a bull-man chimera.

Generally speaking, bull-men are indicative of a strong Mesopotamian influence, as they appear early in Mesopotamian iconography. Depictions of bull-human hybrids are found as early as the Early Dynastic I period (2900–2750 BCE). A bull-human scene is prominently depicted on the Bull-Headed Lyre from the "King's Tomb" in the royal cemetery at Ur, dating to the Early Dynastic III period, 2550–2450 BCE (Fig. 12). At the top of the panel, the largest tablet shows a naked male figure intertwined with two rearing bulls with bearded human faces. Donald Hansen comments: "[It is] aiding to develop an ingenious, interlocked design of man and animal that is fully engaging aesthetically … The intertwined hero and human-headed bulls [are] a concept not fully comprehended today."[74] This characterization of the scene on the Great Lyre could also be applied to the bull-human scene on the ʿAin Samiya goblet.

A twisted profile bull-man holding a standard (or staff) also appears on a terracotta plaque from the Old Babylonian period, c. 2000–1600 BCE.[75] In later times, bull-human hybrids become even more prominent. Colossal twin statues of bull-man hybrids, known as *lamassu* and *šedu*, are well known from the Neo-Assyrian period. On the baked-brick facade of the temple built by Kutir-Nahhunte and Shilhak-Inshushinak at Susa c. 1150–1120 BCE, the kings of Anzan and Susa are both depicted with hooves.

If we shift the geographic focus to Anatolia in the second millennium BCE, we find more parallels for the goblet's iconography. Gates points out that the right-hand scene depicted on the silver goblet finds a symbolic equivalent in the Hittite rock sanctuary at Yazılıkaya,[76] built in its present form around 1230 BCE, where a bas-relief of two bull-men holding the crescent-shaped object in their raised hands is depicted. It has been suggested that the sanctuary symbolizes four static levels of the cosmos: the underworld, the earth, and two levels in heaven, the upper of which corresponds to the celestial circumpolar region.[77] Among the over 90 basreliefs, the pair of bull-men occupies a prominent place in the center of the sanctuary's chamber A (Fig. 13). They stand on a pedestal that takes the form of the Luwian hieroglyphic sign for "earth." In their outstretched arms, which reach above their heads, they hold a crescent corresponding to the Luwian hieroglyphic sign for "heaven." This crescent almost certainly represents the Celestial Boat. The reliefs in Yazılıkaya's Chamber A are arranged in groups to display a perpetual lunisolar calendar.[78] The two bull-men holding the Celestial Boat indicate the night of the full moon – in perpetuity (Fig. 14). Other cycles of the cosmos (day and night, seasons, years), are also emphasized in the sanctuary; they symbolize and display the constant rebirth of the cosmic order, a recurring theme in Hittite cultic texts.[79]

As is well known, iconographic elements could travel and be adopted and modified by other cultures. In Early Dynastic palettes from Egypt (e.g., Narmer Palette, Scorpion Macehead), we clearly see Mesopotamian-inspired mythical creatures and iconography. Turning to the serpents depicted on the goblet, we find that the serpent as the enemy of the sun god

[74] Hansen 1998, 55.
[75] British Museum inventory number 103225.
[76] Gates 1986, 77–78.
[77] Zangger *et al*. 2021, 72–75.
[78] Zangger and Gautschy 2019.
[79] Taggar-Cohen 2025.

seems to have an ancient pedigree in both Mesopotamia and Egypt. In ancient Egyptian culture, the serpent often appeared in a solar context. The primeval serpent of the underworld, Apophis, embodied the chaos that threatens the existence of the sun.

A magical wand ("Zaubermesser") from the Middle Kingdom, of unknown Egyptian provenance, has been described (Fig. 15).[80] Carved from the bisected lower canine of a hippopotamus, it features a frontal depiction of the goddess Ahat, who exhibits distinctly female attributes while holding a snake in each hand.

Another prominent object with two snakes comes from second millennium BCE Hazor in the Upper Galilee. Hazor is known to have been the site of a Canaanite snake cult.[81] Ophidian iconography was found at locus 6211 in the form of a silver-plated bronze cult standard dating to Late Bronze Age II.[82] The main elements depicted are two large snakes, an *en face* depiction of a human, and a crescent above, positioned horizontally.[83] The image seems to be of a woman holding a snake in each hand,[84] thus it likely represents a patron goddess of serpents.

One design element on the silver goblet that immediately catches the eye is the large round shape with a human face. Figures with frontal views of faces have survived on Mesopotamian cylinders since the Uruk period, and subsequently on various other media until the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods.[85] A wall painting with an *en face* representation of a human face from the middle of the third millennium BCE was found at Tell Halawa, about 100 km east of Aleppo.[86] Human faces depicted *en face* without any further context were also found in nearby sites during this excavation, so it appears that this depiction had some significance in the worldview of the Halawa people at the time.[87]

Perhaps the clearest indication of the origin of the motifs on the silver goblet in a Sumerian context, i.e., the third millennium BCE of Mesopotamia, can be found in the depiction of the physiognomy and clothing of the anthropomorphic deity in the right scene. The caricature-like profile of the preserved humanoid deity can be found on numerous roughly contemporary seals and seal impressions, including those from Kültepe-Kaniš. One particular example (Fig. 16) appears on an unopened clay envelope of a debt note attributed to the Assyrian merchant Aššur-imitti, son of Ikuppi-Aššur, dated 1886 BCE.[88] Interestingly, the crescent Celestial Boat and a celestial body also appear between them, as on the goblet. In other words, the way the human face is depicted on the goblet seems to be a standard way of depicting a humanoid deity. Gates previously argued that the facial features and headdress of the twins were comparable to examples in Hurrian art.[89] However, these could be interpreted as later derivatives of older Mesopotamian models.

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[80] Altenmüller 1986, 3 and pl. 1; Billing 2006, 52.
[81] Yadin 1961; Keel 1992, 202.
[82] That is, the 14th–13th centuries BCE.
[83] The object is currently on display at the Israel Museum, Room 307, Case 4, Object 3.
[84] Charlesworth 2010, 70.
[85] Sonik 2013, 285.
[86] Lüth 1989, 101–103; Orthmann 1992; Meyer and Orthmann 2016.
[87] Orthmann 1992, 218.
[88] Excavation number Kt c/k 428; AMM 154-422-64; Özgüç 1965, pl. X, seal 30; White 1993, 430: pl. 1a; 453, 24a; Özgüç 2006, 201, as CS 613 pl. 56201.
[89] Gates 1986, 77.

The humanoid deities depicted on the goblet appear to be wearing a diagonally wrapped, banded garment known as the *gunakku* (Greek *kaunake*). Such a tunic was commonly worn by the royalty and priesthood from the Early Dynastic period to the Ur III period. Three-layered *gunakku* similar to the one depicted on the preserved humanoid figure on the ʿAin Samiya goblet are shown on several statues from the Nintu Temple VI at Khafaje, dating to the Early Dynastic II period (Fig. 17).[90]

Stylized images of plants are also common across the ancient Near East. An Early Dynastic III pottery stand from Ur depicts two triangles beside a tree and what looks like a reed emblem and a comb.[91] Another pottery stand shows a tree incised along its stemmed foot that rises above several triangles.[92] A close association between plants, serpents, and in this case a mother goddess can also be found in an inscription from Ugarit.[93] There, the goddess is referred to as the daughter of the sun goddess, Shapshu. The plant motif is also reminiscent of the Egyptian renpet palm tree, which is often presented by gods to the king and in this context symbolizes the wish for a reign lasting many years. Decorative Egyptian images of goddesses holding plants or serpents occur at least since the Middle Kingdom.[94]

A New Interpretation of the Scenes

Based on the numerous parallels in depictions that predate the creation of the cup, as well as those of a later date that explain the scenes with partly rudimentary (Yazılıkaya) and partly detailed (Seti I) texts, we believe we can develop a comprehensive new interpretation of the iconography of the ʿAin Samiya goblet. According to the interpretation recently proposed by Greenberg,[95] the two scenes represent two successive states within a single narrative. Similarly, we interpret the left scene as representing the initial state of creation and the right scene as representing the outcome of the process. Identifying the crescent held by the two anthropomorphic figures in the right scene with the Celestial Boat strengthens the interpretation proposed by Schroer and Keel,[96] according to which the right scene shows the balance of power. By holding the Celestial Boat with their strong arms, the two anthropomorphic deities separate the heavenly world from the underworld, thus creating and maintaining cosmic order. The focus seems to be on the temporary disappearance of the sun at night and its resurrection in the morning. The fear that the sun might not return to the upperworld was pervasive in the ancient Near East, a danger symbolized by the serpent as the leader of the creatures of chaos.[97] The sun god, however, banishes the monster to the underworld, where its power is latently present, but limited.

The left scene is more complex because it represents the chaos that existed before the static levels and celestial regularities were formed. In the primeval times, the elements necessary for

[90] Frankfort 1943, 60: sculpture no. 217, pl. 9.
[91] Schroer 1989, fig. 13; Ziffer 2010, 412.
[92] Ziffer 2010, 412.
[93] KTU 1.100, Levine and de Tarragon 1988, 513–515.
[94] Altenmüller 1986, pl. 1; Billing 2006, 52, fig 1.
[95] Greenberg 2019, 176.
[96] Schroer and Keel 2005, vol. 1: 324.
[97] In Egypt, the giant serpent Apophis.

life on earth existed, but their power could not be fully realized. Even the gods could not perform their duties because they were fused together. In addition, the gods were fused with the animal and plant worlds. Apparently, the sexes had not yet been distinguished, as evidenced by the chimera, which has both male and female features. Animals were fused together and could not move properly. Even plants could not fulfill their intended function, as indicated by the drastically stylized plant. At that time, the serpent, the symbol of chaos, ruled the cosmos. What was missing was the separation of heaven and earth, and subsequently the separation of all living things on earth, which would create cosmic order. The iconography chosen by the artist emphasizes the predetermined breaking points, where simple cuts create functioning structures and order emerges from chaos. A horizontal cut along the belt line separates the deities from the animals, while a vertical cut along the center makes both the world of the deities and the world of the animals functional. A cut along the plane of representation may be intended to separate the sexes. These divisions and distinctions became reality thanks to the birth of the sun, which appears here as a rosette: the sun banished evil to the underworld and set in motion the process of regular renewal.

Therefore, the scenes on the goblet do not depict the violent aspects of the *Chaoskampf*, but rather the peaceful process of ordering the cosmos. The artist has effectively depicted the passage of time through a series of simple stylistic choices. For example, on the left the sun appears quite small, demonstrating its recent birth, while on the right it appears to have grown and radiates strength and happiness with its *en face* depiction. As might be expected, the deities appear roughly the same size in both scenes, since they are immortal. However, they have evolved over time – instead of bare skin, they later wear an elegant tunic, their headgear is more modern, and their ears are adorned with earrings. A few wrinkles on their necks may indicate that even the gods are aging. The serpent also seems to have visibly aged over the many years since chaos was subdued. When the serpent ruled the cosmos, it stood tall and looked assertive. But now, thanks to the strength and efforts of the great gods who actively maintain cosmic order, the subdued serpent appears bent over.

The ʿAin Samiya goblet thus offers a pictorial narrative of the creation of the universe, a motif that can be traced to Sumerian textual traditions dating to the late fourth millennium BCE. This standard cosmological concept remained intact and largely unchanged in the approximately 2500 years between the appearance of the first known written cosmogonies and the end of the cuneiform tradition.

The Provenance

Any scholarly interpretation of the ʿAin Samiya goblet must address the question of when and where the object was made. Since there are no comparable representations and no texts discussing its ritual purpose in the immediate vicinity of the site, it is likely to have traveled a long way.

The considerations presented so far regarding the origin of the goblet cover the entire ancient Near East. In his initial description of the cup, Yadin suggests that the scenes depicted are an adapted version of the (later) southern Mesopotamian creation myth,[98] also using

[98] Yadin 1971.

themes from Syrian glyptic art.[99] The garments depicted on the cup undoubtedly bear stylistic similarities to those common in Mesopotamia at the time.[100] Accordingly, the jar could have been made in Ur, Akkad, Ebla, or Hama, and reached the southern Levant by transhumance or via trade with northern Syria. Dever notes that there were Mesopotamian colonies in northern Syria during the Ur III period.[101] He argues that the cup originated in a provincial workshop in northern Syria in the late third millennium BCE. At that time, the southern Levant was linked to the textile economy of Ebla and the neighboring city-states. In this area of interaction, a small object could have traveled great distances along with perishable trade goods. Mazar and Gophna also suggest that the mythological scene on the cup is a Syrian rendering of a Mesopotamian motif.[102]

Gates too acknowledged stylistic influences from northern Syria, but also recognized elements of Hurrian iconography.[103] According to her model, the chalice originated in the Caucasus. We disagree with her main conclusion that the depicted figures cannot have come from a Mesopotamian context,[104] as the style in which the humanoid deity is depicted reflects a standard form found elsewhere in the ancient Near East. Indeed, the shape of the cup resembles Mesopotamian pottery,[105] bronze cups are known from northeastern Mesopotamia, the iconography of the cup is reminiscent of clay tablets found in both official and domestic contexts in ancient Mesopotamia,[106] the dress and headdress of the human figure are common types in third millennium BCE Mesopotamia,[107] and the stylized plant appears almost identically in Early Dynasty III at Ur. Thus, many of the iconographic elements of the ʿAin Samiya cup are known from the late third millennium BCE in Mesopotamia and appear to be representations that had long been established by that time.[108]

In our opinion, the composition of the scenes in the depiction on the silver goblet is an almost ingenious design, which stands in stark contrast to the rather crude execution of the silverwork. It is therefore conceivable that the sketch for the scene did not come from the silversmith. We find it most plausible that the designer of the iconography was from the Akkadian Empire (Fig. 18). Whether he commissioned the production of this object there or had already traveled some distance to the northwest cannot be determined, but the production of the goblet may well have taken place in northern Syria. From there, the goblet probably reached the southern Levant along with textiles and other goods. At its point of origin, in transit, or at its destination, the goblet may have been passed down through three or four generations[109] until it was finally deposited in the tomb, presumably in a slightly damaged state,[110] from which it was recovered in its current form.

[99] Prag 2009, 87–88.
[100] Prag 2009, 87–88; Sonik 2014, 273.
[101] Dever 2011, 97.
[102] Mazar 1990, 168; Gophna 1992, 154.
[103] Gates 1986, 80–81.
[104] Gates 1986, 77.
[105] Yeivin 1971a, 78.
[106] Sonik 2014, 273.
[107] Yeivin 1971a, 79.
[108] Yeivin 1971a, 79.
[109] Greenberg 2019, 176.
[110] Israeli and Tadmor 1986, 101.

The Lidar Höyük Prism

The model proposed here thus traces the migration of the motif on the ʿAin Samiya goblet from its origin in the iconography of southern Mesopotamia along the Fertile Crescent to northern Mesopotamia or Syria, where the goblet was presumably produced, and further southwestward with trade commodities toward the Jordan Valley. While this reconstruction remains largely hypothetical, it is supported by a previously unpublished object adorned with cosmological motifs from Lidar Höyük, near Bozova on the Euphrates, approximately 60 km northwest of Şanlıurfa in present-day Türkiye. Excavations at the site were carried out between 1979 and 1987 under the direction of Harald Hauptmann by the DAI Istanbul, in collaboration with the University of Heidelberg. Today, the tell lies submerged beneath the Atatürk Reservoir. Aside from brief preliminary reports and a monograph on Middle Bronze Age pottery,[111] the excavations remain unpublished, and consequently, this object has not been documented either.

The Lidar Höyük prism (Fig. 19) is a rectangular block of creamy, soft limestone, now housed in the Şanlıurfa Museum under inventory number Li 87/19. Measuring 13.1 × 7.0 × 6.1 cm, the object entered the museum's collection in 1987. The excavators have attributed it to the Middle Bronze Age, and the museum guide dates it to 2000–1600 BCE.[112] However, precise details regarding the stratigraphic horizon and exact find coordinates cannot be reconstructed. The object is compact and ergonomically shaped, with rounded and smoothed edges. These edges exhibit clear signs of wear: while some damage, likely caused by repeated dropping, is apparent, the overall erosion suggests prolonged handling. Based on these traces of use alone, the prism appears to have been an everyday item, possibly carried in a pocket or bag for an extended period.

It is evidently an instrument of some kind, bearing a distinct cosmological reference. The crescent-shaped Celestial Boat is depicted on both of the prism's larger surfaces. Notably, the larger version on side 3 is rendered with a degree of precision that implies the use of an instrument in its execution. In both instances, the circular object within the Celestial Boat is divided into four quadrants, each marked by small, punctiform indentations. The lines on side 3 are remarkably straight, whereas those on side 1 appear to have been incised freehand. The overall execution of the figures is rudimentary, lacking the refinement characteristic of professional artistry.

The museum inventory describes the prism as follows: "The lower part of the object is broken, and images are carved on all four broad sides. On the first side, a sun symbol appears above the head of a figure with a raised right hand. This side also contains three holes, two of which are deep. The second side depicts a figure raising its left hand. On the third side, two figures stand beneath a large sun symbol. The fourth side features a single figure with a raised right hand."

There is no doubt that this is a cosmological depiction – indeed, to our knowledge, it ranks among the oldest known cosmological representations in the world, predating even the Nebra Sky Disk. The round holes, varying in depth and positioned differently in relation to the figures, suggest a connection to cosmic divination and exorcism. In some respects, the holes are

[111] Kaschau 1999.
[112] Karul *et al*. 2021, 277.

reminiscent of the *parapegmata* used in ancient Greece for weather forecasting based on Babylonian astronomy. However, the Lidar Höyük object predates these by more than a millennium and is correspondingly more rudimentary in execution.

Ada Taggar-Cohen kindly informed us that the depiction of figures – standing or seated, with hands raised upward or extended forward – recalls the iconography of the Ur III period. In her view, the arc featuring the solar disk belongs to the early second millennium BCE. We interpret the division of the celestial body into four quadrants as a representation of the cardinal directions, which in turn, when translated into a spatial representation of the passage of time, suggest the four seasons.

The parallels with the depiction on the right side of the ʿAin Samiya goblet are unmistakable, particularly when considering side 3 of the prism. Here, two figures – possibly deities – are distinctly connected to the Celestial Boat by means of a bow, suggesting their role in supporting the transport mechanism that structures the cosmos. The execution of the imagery is cruder than that on the ʿAin Samiya goblet, yet the astronomical reference, emphasized by the division of the celestial body, is quite clear.

This comparison implies that the ʿAin Samiya goblet is no longer as singular as previously assumed. Moreover, our interpretation of its imagery – depicting chaos before creation and order emerging through creation – is, to some extent, further substantiated. In terms of chronology and geography, the Lidar Höyük prism and its motifs fit perfectly into our reconstruction of the journey of the goblet.

Conclusions

The ʿAin Samiya goblet does not depict scenes from the *Enuma Elish*, as the goblet predates the Babylonian creation myth by more than a millennium and is notably devoid of violent imagery. Rather, the *Enuma Elish* synthesizes several variants of traditional Mesopotamian cosmogony, one of which is also depicted on the goblet. The illustration fits harmoniously into the notions of cosmogenesis that were prevalent in the ancient Near East during the third millennium BCE, even though the goblet was found outside Mesopotamia with no direct connection to the production of the object.

The design of the goblet can be divided into two scenes along a vertical axis, representing two stages within a coherent narrative. The left scene symbolizes the primordial chaos when heaven and earth, animals, and plants were fused together so that they could not develop their potential. At that time, chaos, symbolized by a snake, ruled the universe. After the creator deity subdued the chaos monster, the birth of the sun followed, and with it cyclic regeneration and renewal. The scene on the right shows the ultimate result of the birth of the sun: the emergence of cosmic order. The cosmogony prevalent in Sumerian and Akkadian thought models involves a clearly structured universe with two hemispheres, the upperworld, the realm of the living, and the underworld, the realm of the dead to which chaos is now banished. Both hemispheres undergo a process of cyclic renewal. The periodic death and rebirth of the sun, moon, and seasons attest to the functional efficacy of the divine design. Cosmic order is maintained via certain mechanisms, such as the Celestial Boat that transports the heavenly bodies across the firmament at the direction of the great gods. These essential elements of a unified concept of creation in the Near East are reflected in later times in

prominent archaeological objects, such as the ones described above from New Kingdom Egypt and Hittite Anatolia.

Thus, our reinterpretation of the illustrations on the silver goblet from ʿAin Samiya in the context of other well-preserved cosmological representations harmoniously places the object in a plausible religious-historical context more than half a century after its discovery and more than 4200 years after its manufacture. The design elements reflect Early Dynastic III iconography from Ur. However, the production of the cup may have taken place in northern Syria. Our analysis suggests that the silver goblet was most likely designed by an Akkadian illustrator who traveled to northern Syria in the twenty-third century BCE. The designer of the depiction achieved a great feat by adding certain new components to the long-standing narratives about the creation of the world, thus creating a unique vessel. From Syria, the goblet reached the southern Levant along well-traveled caravan routes. There, around 2200 BCE, it found its final resting place in a tomb (Fig. 20). The purpose of the burial object was to connect the soul of the deceased with the journey of the sun, ultimately to heaven.

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Fig. 1. The preserved right scene on the ʿAin Samiya goblet, inventory number K2919 (Staff Archaeological Officer in the Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria, photo ©The Israel Museum, Jerusalem by Ardon Bar Hama; Luwian Studies #5048a).

Fig. 2. The left scene on the ʿAin Samiya goblet (©The Israel Museum, Jerusalem by Ardon Bar Hama; Luwian Studies #5048b).

Fig. 3. A newly drawn and corrected rendering of the scenes depicted on the ʿAin Samiya goblet (Luwian Studies #5037).

Fig. 4. Celestial Boat depicted on pillar 18 in enclosure D at Göbekli Tepe, c. 9500 BCE (courtesy of ©Haldun Aydıngün 2008; Luwian Studies #6501).

Fig. 5. The topography of the Levant with important settlements of the Intermediate Bronze Age (after Greenberg 2019; Luwian Studies #5054).

Fig. 6. The spring of ʿAin Samiya from above
(©Todd Bolen/BiblePlaces.com; Luwian Studies #5060).

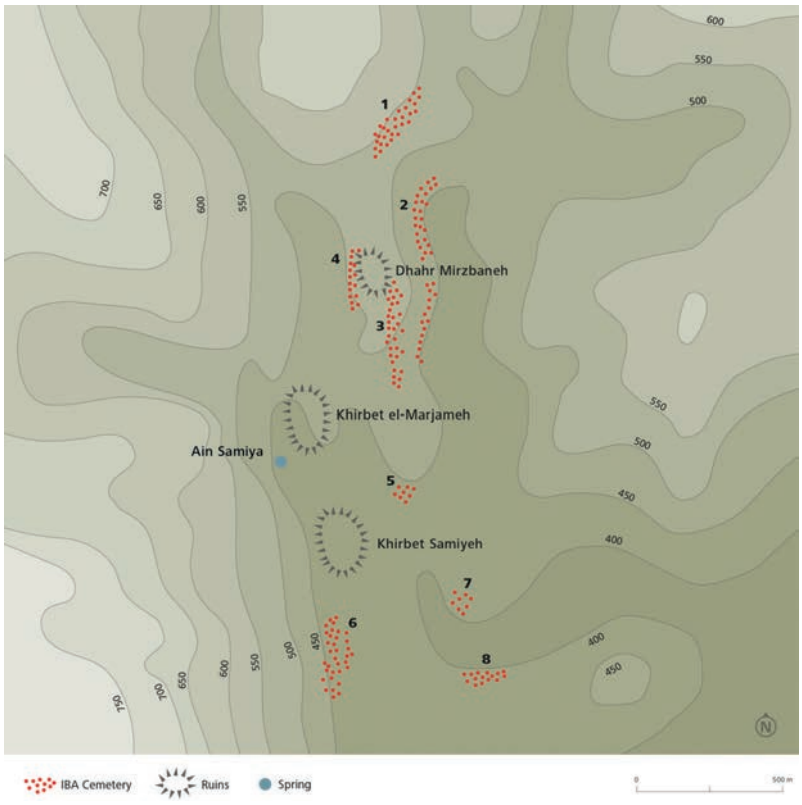

Fig. 7. Map of Wadi Samiya indicating the locations of former settlements and cemeteries (after Finkelstein 1991, 30; Luwian Studies #5050).

Fig. 8. Photograph of the Samiya West cemetery from south, taken on February 28, 1907, by David Gordon Lyon during the Harvard excavations at Samaria, colorized (Sequence 153, photo 275; Luwian Studies #5061; https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:50425907$171i).

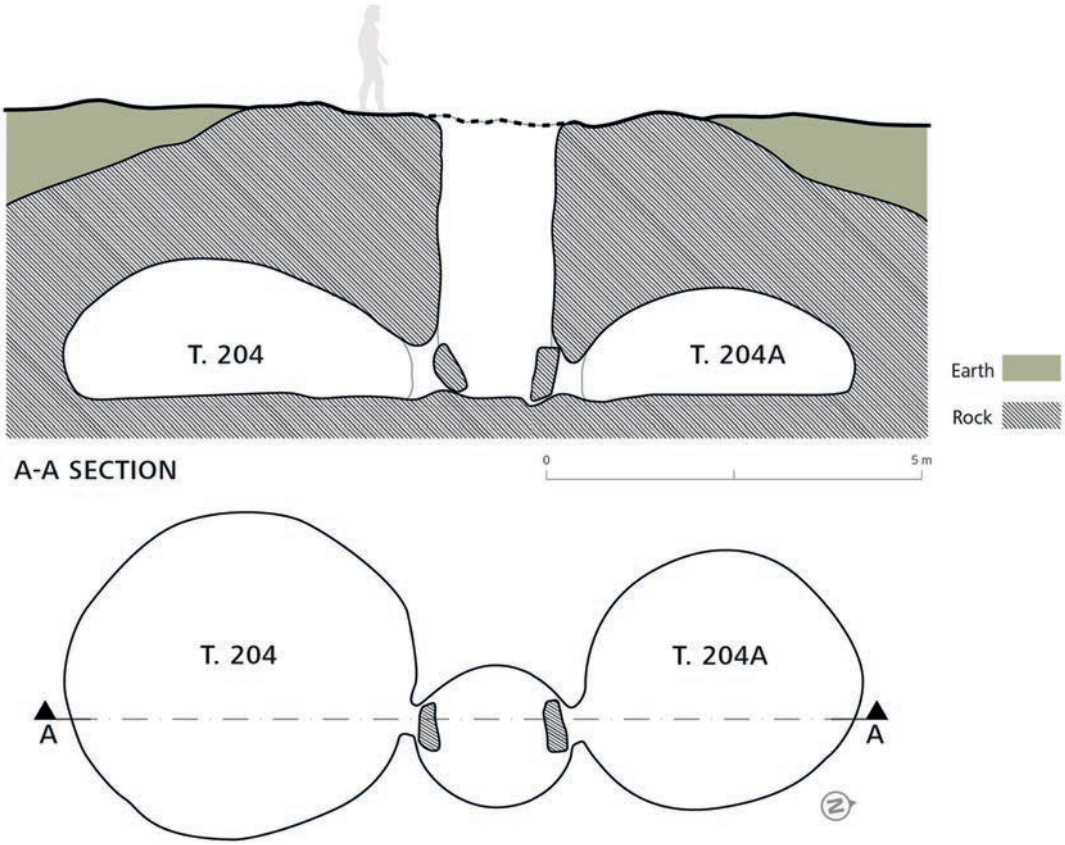

Fig. 9. Section and plan of tomb 204/204a in which the ʿAin Samiya goblet was found (after Shantur and Labadi 1971; Luwian Studies #5051).

Fig. 10. Artist's reconstruction of the ʿAin Samiya goblet (Luwian Studies #5053).

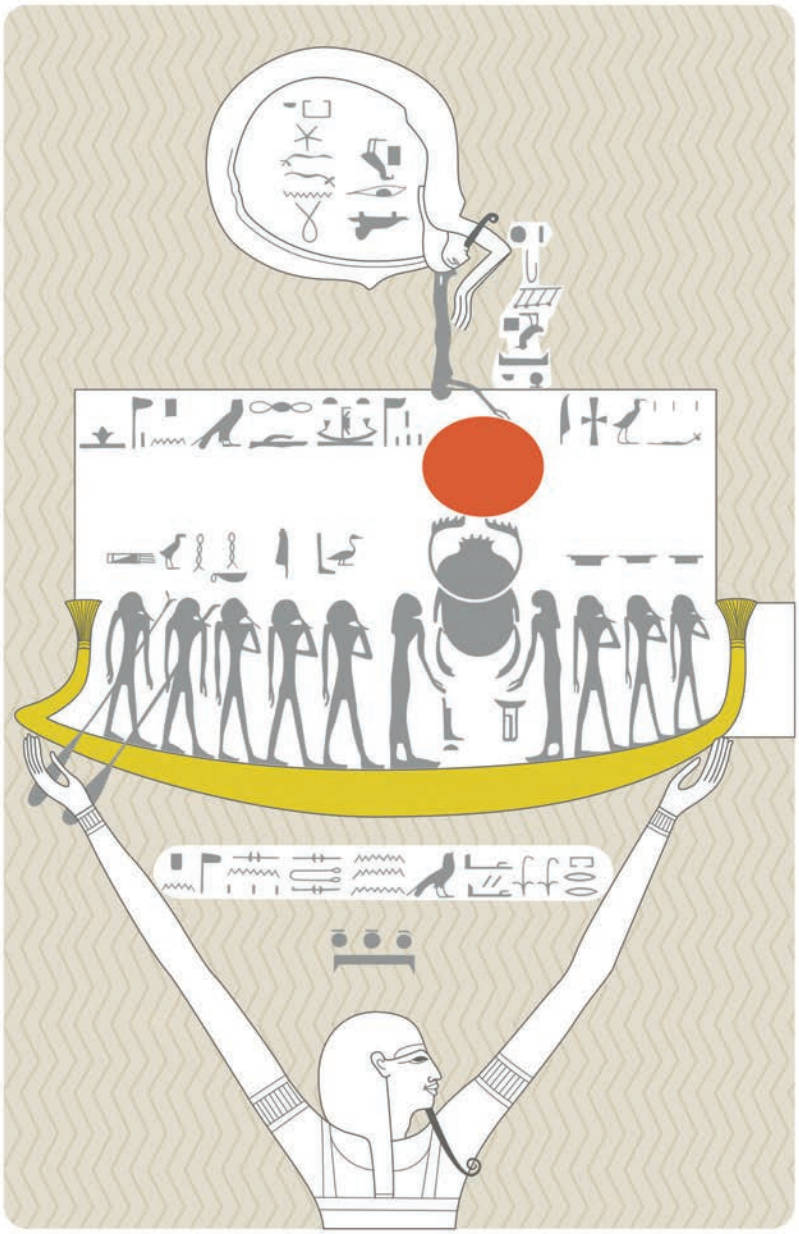

Fig. 11. Graphic rendering of the conclusion scene on the sarcophagus of Seti I, emphasizing the Celestial Boat which is carrying the sun (red) as the principal celestial body (after Bonomi and Sharp 1864, plate 15; Luwian Studies #5038).

Fig. 12. Detail of the front panel of the bull-headed Great Lyre from the "King's Grave" in the Royal Cemetery of Ur (courtesy of the ©Penn Museum, Object Number B17694B; Luwian Studies #5055).

Fig. 13. The bull-men in a central position of the bas-reliefs in Yazılıkaya's Chamber A (Luwian Studies #1213).

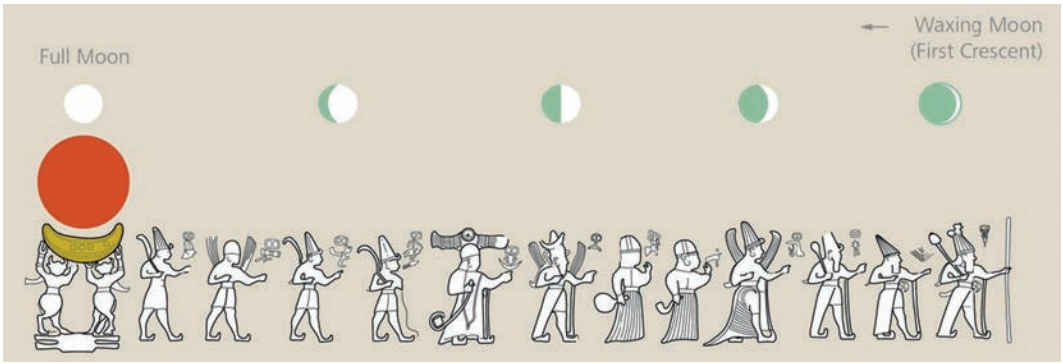

Fig. 14. Waxing days of the lunar month depicted as Hittite deities in Yazılıkaya's Chamber A with an emphasis of the full moon to coincide with the day marked by the Celestial Boat (Luwian Studies #5028).

Fig. 15. Middle Kingdom magical wand made of ivory with an *en face* representation of the goddess Ahat holding a snake in each hand (after Altenmüller 1986, 3 and plate 1; Billing 2006, 52; Luwian Studies #4036).

Fig. 16. Seal impression on an unopened clay envelope from Kültepe-Kaniš of a debt-note, excavation number Kt c/k 428 (AMM 154-422-64). Published by Nimet Özgüç, 1965, seal no. 30, plate X (photos and details by courtesy of J.G. Dercksen; Luwian Studies #5067).

Fig. 17. A 30 cm tall alabaster sculpture showing a *gunakku* tunic, found in the Nintu Temple VI in Khafaje and dating to the Early Dynastic II period (Frankfort 1943, sculpture no. 217, plate 9; Luwian Studies #5071).

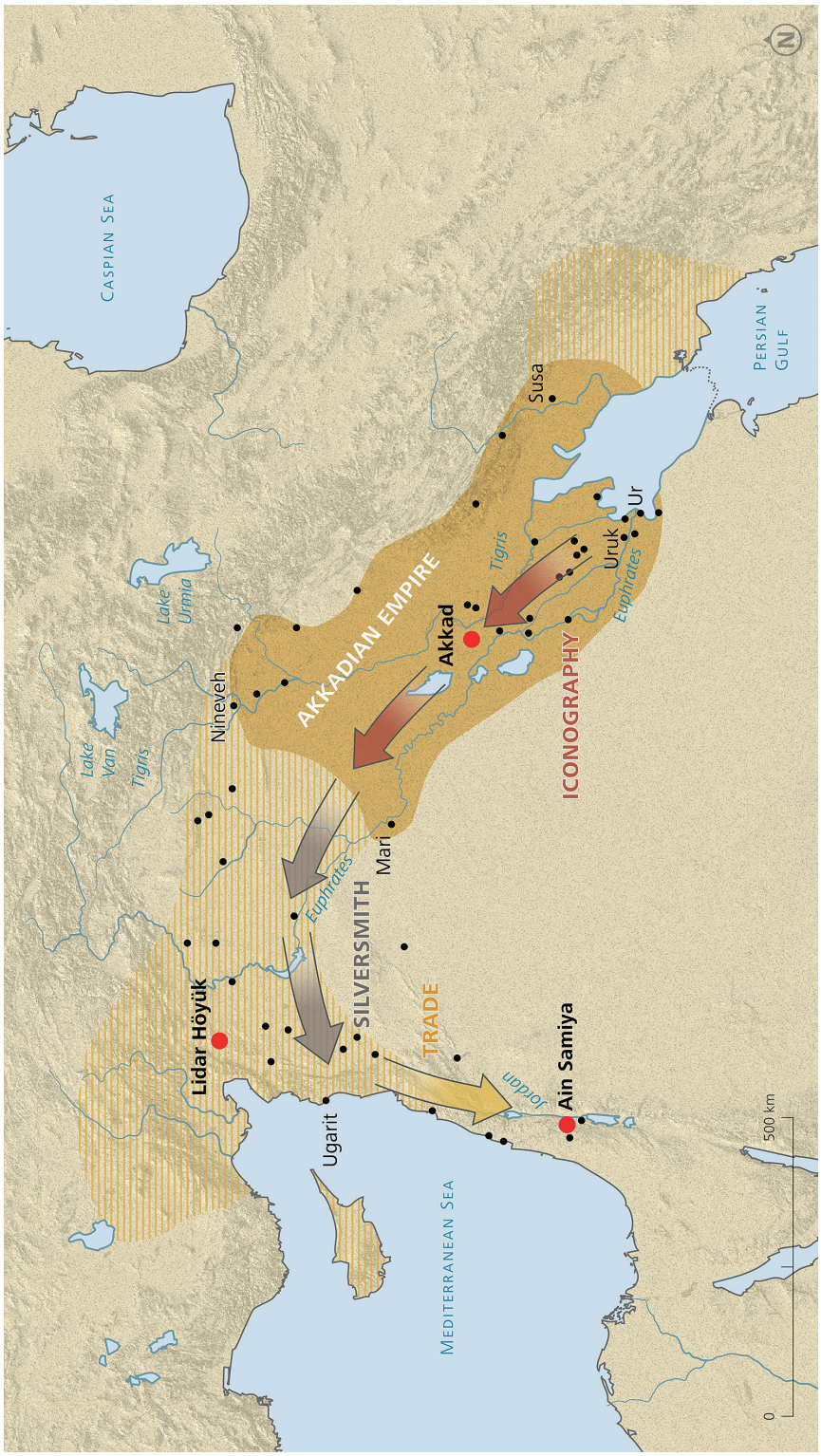

Fig. 18. Map of Akkadian Empire (c. 2334–2218 BCE) indicating the possible journey of the illustrator of the scene depicted on the ʿAin Samiya goblet, the home and/or travel of the silversmith and the transport of the object (Luwian Studies #5065).

Fig. 19. Lidar Höyük prism, c. 2000–1600 BCE (courtesy of the Şanlıurfa Müzesi Müdürlüğü; Luwian Studies #5076).

Fig. 20. Artist's reconstruction of the burial during which the ʿAin Samiya goblet was deposited (Luwian Studies #5062).