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Relief on the ʿAin Samiya silver goblet. The scene depicts a cosmic order emerging from chaos, with figures like serpents and deities (credit: © Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Florika Weiner).

Press Release

4,200-Year-Old Silver Goblet Reveals the World's Earliest Image of the Cosmos

Study finds that carvings on the ʿAin Samiya goblet – snakes, chimeras, and celestial symbols – depict a cosmic order a millennium before the Babylonian myth *Enuma Elish*.

Zurich, Switzerland, 13 November 2025 – A 4,200-year-old silver goblet, discovered in 1970 at the spring of ʿAin Samiya near Kafr Malik in the West Bank, has now been identified as the world's earliest known depiction of the cosmos – predating the Babylonian creation myth *Enuma Elish* by more than a thousand years. A new study, published in the *JEOL – Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society "Ex Oriente Lux"*, sheds fresh light on one of the most enigmatic artifacts of the Bronze Age.

Measuring just 8 cm in height, the silver goblet bears two *repoussé* (hammered relief) scenes filled with snakes, chimeras, deities, and celestial symbols. Long considered an enigma of the Intermediate Bronze Age (c. 2650–1950 BCE), it has finally yielded its meaning.

New Interpretation of an Enigmatic Artifact
The new research, conducted by Eberhard Zangger, Daniel Sarlo, and Fabienne Haas Dantes, challenges earlier views that linked the goblet's motifs to the Babylonian *Enuma Elish,* a creation epic compiled more than a millennium later. Instead, the team demonstrates that the imagery represents

one of the **earliest known cosmological depictions,** illustrating the transition from primordial chaos to ordered cosmos.

> "The goblet does not tell of a violent struggle between gods, but of a peaceful process of cosmic ordering," says co-author Daniel Sarlo. "It shows how the sun is born, banishes chaos, and renews the world – a vision of creation that predates the Babylonian myths *Enuma Elish* by over a thousand years."

Central to the reinterpretation is the identification of a Celestial Boat – a crescent-shaped vessel carried by two deities. This symbol, also attested at Göbekli Tepe and in the Hittite rock sanctuary Yazılıkaya in Türkiye as well as in New Kingdom Egypt, represents the divine mechanism that transports the sun and moon across the heavens.

The authors argue that the goblet was most likely designed by an Akkadian artist in the 23rd century BCE and produced by a silversmith in northern Syria before reaching the southern Levant, where it was placed in an elite tomb around 2200 BCE.

Ancient Cosmology Confirmed by New Evidence
Their case is bolstered by the **first publication of a previously unknown object,** the Lidar Höyük prism (ca. 2000-1600 BCE) from an archaeological site in the northwest of the Turkish province of Şanlıurfa, which carries related cosmological imagery. Together, the two artifacts demonstrate that systematic cosmological thought and visual expression of the ordering of the universe/cosmos out of chaos were already present around 2000 BCE.

> "The symbol at the heart of our interpretation first appeared 11,500 years ago at Göbekli Tepe," says senior author Eberhard Zangger. "Nearby, at Lidar Höyük, a cosmological depiction was found that predates and surpasses the Nebra Sky Disk in precision. The key to understanding the silver goblet came from the Hittite rock sanctuary at Yazılıkaya. Together, these discoveries show that Anatolia was the pivotal bridge between the iconography of Mesopotamia and southeastern Europe."

The study not only repositions the goblet within the intellectual history of the ancient Near East but also offers a vivid glimpse into how early societies conceived of life, death, and the order of the universe.

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Lidar Höyük prism. A previously unknown Bronze Age prism from Türkiye, published for the first time in this study. Its etched symbols mirror the goblet's cosmological themes (credit: courtesy of the Şanlıurfa Müzesi Müdürlüğü; Luwian Studies #5076).