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Mythological Analysis of Form and Shape in Achaemenian Rhytons

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Abstract

Problem statement: Rhytons were used for drinking water or the holy wine in shape of a forepart of an animal body or a combination of the head and the horn of the animal. People believed that the strength of the animal would be transferred to them while drinking in the Rhyton. It is assumed by most scholars like Hertsfeld, Ghirshman, Porada and Amiet that Iranians were the first people to use the rhytons and they made the vessel a common type all around the ancient Near East. The Achaemenian rhytons are mostly made from gold or silver and were found from treasures. This research is studying 135 Achaemenian Rhytons.

Research Purpose : The results of this study show that two types of rhytons were more common during the Achaemenids': conical and cylindrical. The animals used in making the rhytons were lion, bull, ibex, and antelopes. These animals are the attendants and comrades of four Persian gods and goddesses including Anahita, Mithra, Tishtar, and Bahram. The cosmological figure of these four is venerated as the divinity of 'the Waters' and associated with fertility, healing, and wisdom.

Besides, Bahrām is the most considered god between the king and his soldiers. In Avesta, Bahrām has all the characteristics of an ancient warrior god, the personification of a force that shatters and overcomes any resistance or defense. The goat, antelope or even the horned ibex are the comrades for Bahram. Mithra is the moral sense of the contract, promise, friendship, and alliance. The alliance is more important since an alliance can include a mutual benefit which is binding. The alliance is very well suited to be the moral foundation of a society whose welfare depends on peace. Therefore, it is definitely obvious why the lion and winged bull are mostly used as the representations for Mithra.

Conclusion: In conclusion, it is obvious that the Achaemenian rhytons were used as a mythological vessel especially in ritual ceremonies to gain the gods' protection and potency.

Keywords: *Rhyton, Mithra, Bahram, Anahita, Achaemenian.*

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Introduction

The Achaemenids in Iran had a profound cultural background. The religious and cultural developments during this era that was the result of their vast geographical and political territory had affected the art of this period effectively. This could be seen obviously in the processes of making artistic objects among which are rhytons.. Although rhytons were commonly used in ancient Iran, but they are not well known nowadays and few studies have been done about these objects. These vessels can represent cultural beliefs as well.

The rhytons were used in Iran since the 4th millennium B.C. They were used commonly in ancient Iran up to the end of the Sasanian era, (Dadvar & Mesbah, 2010:2-15). The major use of these vessels maybe was the result of two main reasons: first, the importance of using decorated and adorned vessels during the ritual ceremonies (governmental or religious), and second the strong faith in which they believe that the mythological power of mythical strengths would be transferred to their body while drinking in such vessels. The general methods of making the rhytons were based on a combination of an animal body shapes (head and foreparts of the body with horns) with the vessel shape. The diversity of rhytons shows that they were acceptably used in ancient times. The strong belief in their function, which says that they could transfer mystical powers, was the main reason for their variety. A careful study on their form, shape, and function, can accurately convey the cultural credence and mythological beliefs.

Literature Review

Unfortunately, although rhytons are of important kinds of vessels, few research have been found about them. Archeologists just mentioned the vessels as a kind of object found in the archeological reports. And most of the researchers had just described any kind. The form and shape of the rhytons and the differences between the structures of different

kinds which affect their function have never been considered accurately. The most important studies in recent years are as follows:

-Omid, Hootan (2005), The Persian Rhytons from the 4th millennium B.C. to the end of the Sassanid era, M.A thesis in archeology, supervisor: Mohammad Rahim Saraf, Islamic Azad University of Tehran, central branch.

In this thesis, the researches tries to diagnose the real rhytons from other kinds of drinking vessels in Iran.

-Dadvar, Abolghasem, Mesbah, Bita (2010), a study of the form and shape in Persian Rhytons, Honar-Ha-Ye-Ziba, 41:5-12

This research studies all kinds of rhytons and classifies the different kinds of rhytons based on their form and function.

-Dadvar, Abolghasem, Mesbah, Bita (2012), studying the impact of two different cultures -the Hellenistic and Persian- on the Parthian rhytons in accordance to the diversity of cultural factors influencing the form of rhytons,21:47-58.

This article studied the Partian rhytons in accordance with the diversity of cultural factors influencing the form of rhytons.

In spite of all the mentioned research, this study aims to investigate a brief classification of Achaemenid rhytons according to the forms used in the basic construction of the rhytons and their decorative motifs.

Research Methodology

The present study carried out a content analysis. The main data were collected by documentary methods from books, catalogs, the archive of Iran national museum and the electronic (online) archive of different museums all over the world.

135 Achaemenid rhytons are studied in this research. These contain 110 metal rhytons (silver, gold or other alloys like bronze), 24 pottery rhytons, and one glass rhyton. The rhytons were first classified according to the date of each piece. In the second stage, they were categorized into

three main groups (conical, horn-shaped and jug shaped) based on their form and structure. The study finally categorises the rhytons of the Achaemenids.

In the third stage, the rhytons were again categorized according to the decorative motifs and the material in order to make the symbolic and mythical study possible.

Scope

The main idea of this study is to figure out the basic structure of rhytons during the Achaemenid era. And also because the rhytons were used as the ritual vessels in ancient time, this study tries to clarify the main gods and mystic Achaemenid creatures according to the symbolic analysis of these vessels.

Theoretical Basics

• Rhyton

The word Rhyton is derived from the Greek word "Rhytos" that means to flow. However, it is hard to make a special definition for this kind of vessel. Some scholars have defined a kind of definition: "they are called rhyta because of the larger opening for filling the vessel on the back of these animals and a smaller spout for pouring out the liquid which is often located at the mouth of the animal", (Ghirshman, 1963: 219-230). Ghirshman and Edith Porada both define a rhyton as: "the Greek word rhyton means liquid or flow. The word defines a kind of vessel by which a stream of water or any kind of drinking is poured out", (Porada, 1965:165).

All the explanations emphasize on pouring a stream from these vessels. Another important characteristic of the rhytons is the persistent use of animal figurines in their form. Some scholars believe that all kinds of animal-shaped vessels are rhytons, (Pope, 1939:367; Vandenberg, 1959:156; Melikian-Chirvani, 1982:265; Dadvar & Mesbah, 2010: 2-15).

Therefore, according to the general view, the

rhytons are animal-shaped vessels that are used for drinking or pouring liquids. Depending on the type of the rhyton they may have a large opening for filling the rhyton and a smaller spout for pouring the liquid out; or, even they may have just a spout for both filling the vessel and pouring out the liquid (Dadvar & Mesbah, 2010:2-15).

Ghirshman and Porada both believe that Rhytons first appeared in Iran, and during the Iron period western and north-western people of Iran were specialized in making rhytons (Melikian-Chirvani, 1998:88).

One of the most significant reasons for the importance of Achaemenid rhytons is their role in transferring this tradition to the post-Achaemenid periods, (Alvarez, 2010:308).

The general structure of Achaemenid Rhytons

In studying each rhytons, three main parts could be recognized: the main structure, form, and decorations. The structure is made up of the cup, the shaft and its decorations. The cup and the shaft are mostly joint together and make the main structure of a rhyton. The cup is the part that is filled with liquid. The shaft is the forepart of an animal which is connected to the cup and sometimes it is hard to distinguish these two parts. The form of the conjunction of the cup and the shaft may create a special structure in rhytons. The structure of rhytons can be classified into three general categories:

1. Conical or cylindrical rhytons
2. Horn-shaped rhytons
3. The jug-shaped rhytons, (Dadvar & Mesbah, 2010:2-15). Any kind of rhytons can be categorized in one of these three groups.

The form of the rhytons depend on the kind of animal used in making the rhytons and the way in which the animal body is connected. It may be only the forepart of an animal body or maybe two wings being added to the body. The animal's body always connects to the rhytons in two general ways:

1. The head of an animal with a horn
2. The forepart of the body including: the head, the neck, the horns (if any), the hands and breast of the animal.

How the animal torso is connected to the cup & shaft may change the final structure of the rhyton. The decorative motifs are used all over the rhytons. These motifs include floral designs, abstract motifs, and forms, which were commonly used in Persian art from the 4th millennium to the end of Sassanid period (Dadvar & Mesbah, 2010:2-15).

Findings

According to the information given, the Achaemenid rhytons are analyzed and categorized as follows:

A-The structure of Achaemenid Rhytons:

Based on the examples of rhytons studied in this research, the Achaemenian rhytons are in two types: the conical or cylindrical type and the horn-shaped type. The-jug shaped rhytons were not common during the Achaemenids¹. It can be declared that the Achaemenian rhytons are those types of drinking vessels which end to the head and torso of an animal. The most important difference between the Achaemenian rhytons and the rhytons of other eras is one opening which is used for both filling the rhyton and pouring the liquid out. The conical and cylindrical rhytons have great resemblance to each other. They are categorized in one group but the great variety and the mass production of them ended up in a new classification:

1. Conical rhytons
 2. Cylindrical rhytons
 3. Horn-shaped rhyton.
- Each group description is as follow:
1. Conical Rhytons: The conical rhytons were commonly used in central parts of the Iranian plateau. They are composed of a large cones and a circles. The shape leads to the tip of the cone in the form of an animal head or forepart of its body. Two examples seen are in Fig. 2A & B. these These rhytons were made of metal (gold or silver), glass and pottery. In some kinds of the conical rhytons

the cup is connected to the forepart of an animal body in an acute angle (less than 90 degrees) or in a right angle which provides a good stand for the vessel, (Fig. 3 A - D).

2. Cylindrical rhytons: In cylindrical rhytons, two structures can be distinguished. In some, the cup is designed as a cylinder which at the tip ends to a horned protome at the tip (Fig. 4A, B, D). In other types in the connection between the cup and the protome a complete right-angled arch is used. On the contrary to the conical rhytons, this arc is always right-angled² and straight. So the rhyton is divided into two obvious parts on two both sides: in one side is the cup, and on the other is the protome. Especially in these kinds of the rhytons, the protome includes head, torso, legs, horn and the wings (if any), (Fig. 4C). The conical and cylindrical rhytons are the most popular rhytons during the Achaemenids, and the golden ones belong to the kings' treasures.

3. Horn-shaped rhytons: In these rhytons, the shaft is elaborated and must be developed out of the form of real horns which were used as drinking vessels. They vary in the size but mostly are large and elongated. In smaller ones, a simple arc connects



Fig. 1. Different parts of a rhyton: 1. the edge, 2. the cup, 3. the arc, 4. the shaft. Source: www.cias-soas.com



A



B

Fig. 2. The conical rhytons ending to the protome, Achaemenid, source: A. www.cias-soas.com, B. The catalog of golden object in the national museum of Iran, 2008.



A



B



C



D

Fig. 3. Different kinds of conical rhytons with the right angle (A.B.C), the acute angle (D), connected to the protome. Source: A. smallseotools.com, B. www.asia.si.edu, C&D. www.cias-soas.com.

the horn part to the protome with an obtuse angle. But in bigger ones, there is no arc and the horn ended to a sculpted forepart of an animal. The arc used in the connection of the cup and the protome may cause the mistaken wrong categorizing horn-shaped rhytons in the conical types. It should be considered noted that the difference between these two groups is in the type of the angles: the acute angles in conical types and the obtuse angles in the horn-shaped types are used in order to make the connecting arch. In the cylindrical rhytons, the right angle is used in this arc (Fig. 5).

The horn was a kind of ritual instrument for thousands of years. In Hittite art and also in some other parts of Asia, minor Asia and even Near Eastern it was regarded as the religious and divinity implement (Behzadi, 2004: 160-162). In Iran and Mesopotamia the horns symbolize the sacred or holy concepts and as a sign of strength for gods. Besides, it was also a powerful sign of masculinity. "From the early third millennium B.C. onwards, a cap with up to seven superimposed pairs of horns is the distinctive head-dress of divinity. It is seen as a separate symbol, from the late Kassite period down to the Neo-Babylonian and continued to be represented as a mark of divinity in Achaemenid art." (Black & Green, 1992: 170)

The horn of the goat symbolizes fertility and rain. Many potteries from prehistoric or historic regions in Iran like Susa, Tal-e-Bakun, Tal-e-Melyan, Sialk, Tepe Giyan and Shahr-e-Sukhte are decorated with abstract motifs of horns or the goats with elongated horns.

In the myths related to Zoraster, he was thrown to the lair of a wolf. But Wahuman and Soroush sent the ewe, named "koroshak" into the lair to suckle him. The wolf is a symbol of Ahryman and the ewe is the symbol for Ahuramazda (Bahar, 1999: 490). In Bahramyasht, the eighth emanation of Bahram is a horned ewe and the ninth emanation is as a goat (Pourdavoud, 2015: 124-125). According to the big size of the horn-shaped rhytons, it is considered that they may not be used for ordinary use. All kinds

of horn-shaped rhytons from the Parthian time were found from temples.

B. The form and decorations

The visual features which contain the motifs and decorations engraved on the rhytons are a result of the special function of each rhyton. These decorations are studied in two parts: the form and the decorations.

• The Form

The mythological and ritual functions are the main purpose of making rhytons. So that is the main reason why they are connected to the forepart of an animal body. During Achaemenid era different kinds of animal shapes were used, such as the feline types (lion and tiger), domestic animals (cow, goat, ram), birds and mythical creatures (winged lion, Griffin, and Phoenix³). In some rare kinds, the eagle and also the duck were used. (Fig. 2 C, Fig. 5).

The way in which the animal is connected to the vessel structure makes the basic changes in the final form. During the Achaemenid era two main styles were used A-The use of head and horn (if any) at the final tip. (Fig. 1; Fig. 3 A, B, C), this was a more common way in making the rhytons.

B- The protome (Fig. 2 & 5), and if the animal was a mystical creature, the wings also were used.

In the cylindrical rhytons, both types are used but in the horn-shaped ones, the rhytons are mostly ended in the tip to a protome (group B).

In most types, the emphasis is on the head of the animal which bends forward gracefully. The horns are also of great importance and in some kinds, the horns bent backward and decorated the cup of the rhytons delicately (Fig. 1 A & 3 A).

Another interesting technique in the Achaemenian Rhytons is the combination of sculpted head and torso with delicate hands, while the hind legs are engraved on the body of the cup. This method continuously was also used in Parthian rhytons, (Fig. 5 A).

• Decorations

The Achaemenid style in artworks is dominant in



A



D



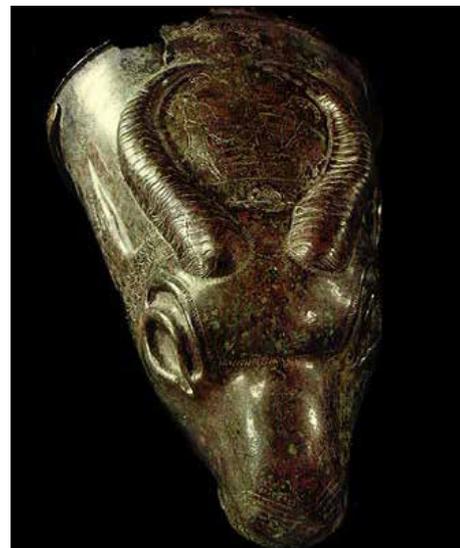
B



E



C



F

Fig. 4. The cylindrical rhytons ending to the head of animals, Source: A&B. www.asia.si.edu, C. www.cias-soas.com, D. www.metmuseum.org, E. www.molon.de, F. www.metmuseum.org.

the decorations of the rhytons. They are so simply decorated with minimal decorations. Horizontal

grooves are the most common decorations used on the cup body. The parallel rows of two or



Fig. 5. The horned-shaped rhytons ending to the goat protomes. Source: A-E: www.parso.wanadoo.fr.

three groups of grooves together cover all across the body (Fig. 2 B,C), (Fig. 3) and (Fig. 5). This may be a characteristic of the Achaemenian art that especially decorates the fluted columns in Achaemenian architecture. Such decoration does not appear on the rhytons in next periods, (Ghirshman, 1963:130)

In comparison to the other periods' styles, the Achaemenid rhytons have a wider edge . They do not have any kind of decorations or simply decorated with floral motifs like the lotus buds. The decorative grooves start right after the edge ends (Fig. 1 & 2; Fig. 5). In some rare kinds, the

little-sculpted heads of animals decorate the edge, (Fig. 3 B & 5 D).

In rhytons ending to the protome, a lot of emphases is used in sculpting the body. Most of the decorations are used on this body representing the detailed characteristics of the body. The parts of the body are carefully designed and developed. Lions are represented with open mouth and anger in their faces with the elaborate circle and spiral-shaped mane, just like the Achaemenid reliefs. (Fig. 5 A, B)

The decorations on the body of other animals like cows include harness and floral designs. The



A



B



C



D



E



F



G

Fig. 6. Different kinds of rhytons ending to the head or protome of animals (lion, cow, ram, eagle, griffin). Source: A. The catalog of golden object in the national museum of Iran,2008, B. joannlansberry.com, C. www.metmuseum.org, D. www.essentialhumanities.net, E. www.fotolibra.com, F. www.mihoo.or.jp.

protome of cows also resembles the Achaemenid columns' capitals, bending forward elaborately with crescent-like horns, (Fig. 2 & 5). But the horns of goats are more elongated and sometimes cover all parts of the cup body. In some kinds, the horns themselves have horizontal grooves like those used on the body of the cup, (Fig. 1 A& 3 C). During the Achaemenids, the metal rhytons (silver and gold) were more common. Pottery rhytons were also made but the stone and glass kinds are rare. Gold is the most popular material although silver is used as well, but the most significant Achaemenid rhytons were made from gold. The combination use of gold and silver also became a distinctive method of Achaemenid rhytons.

Discussion (Title) Symbolic Analysis (Subtitle)

As aforementioned, in this research the most common animals in Achaemenid rhytons are lion, tiger, cow, goat, ram, birds, phoenix, winged lion and griffin. According to the examples studied in this research four animals were more popular: lion, the cow, goat and ram.

The symbolic meaning of these animals is an icon of the ritual concepts of the rhyton:

The lion: lions are used more than any other animals. The motif of lion in Iran has profound symbolic meanings. It is the symbol of Mithra, the sun, summer, the heat, victory, power and the light. It also symbolizes fire. In Iran the lion is deeply connected to the power of sun (Samadi, 1988:25).

In myths, the lion draws the chariot of earth goddess, the cow draws the chariot of the rain and thunder god, and the horse draws the chariot of the sun god. The lion is the symbol of the sun on earth and the eagle is its symbol in the sky. The combination of lion and the eagle shows the connectivity of the sky and the earth (Jobes, 1962:61). So the wings of an eagle attached to the lion, symbolizes this combination.

In some parts of Iran, the sun shows immortality.

It is said that during the night, the sun goes down to the underworld, the world of the deaths. There he would guide the souls through the limbo, and at the dawn he helps the souls meet the light (Dadvar & Mansouri, 2006:53). The lion with or without wings is a common motif in the Achaemenian art. It was also used as a kind of ornament pinned to the clothes, (Ghirshman, 1963:366). The lion during Achaemenid era is related to Anahita and Mithra. In Mithraism mythology, the lion symbolizes Mithra and since Mithra is related to the king, this motif -the lion- is related to the manifestation of the all blessings in the king, (Bahar, 1996:126).

The Bull: the bull is a horned animal and therefore is a symbol for the moon. In Avesta, the bull refers to all kinds of useful animals, (Amoozegar, 2002:78). It is said that Thistriya emanated as a bull (Ibid: 17-20). Thistriya is the bright star, the first star at the dawn, and the fountainhead of all waters, (Hinnells, 1941:36-37). In Bundahishn he is the creator of the rain, rivers and all the seas. The second form of Bahram is also a bull. Thistriya and Bahram have three same forms: a man, a bull and a horse.

The Goat (Antelope): The ninth emanation of Bahram is as a warier goat, the antelope with sharp horns. Anahita also has an emanation as the antelope. The enthusiastic to use the antelope and the goat in making rhytons is at the third place after the lion and the cow.

The goat has been recognized as the national animal in Persian arts. It has been mentioned as the sun animal and always has a lotus in between his horns. Since the ancient time, the animal represents power because he is always leading the flock. It should be mentioned that the goat is also the symbol of blessing and plenitudes. while he is in the deep need of plants, thus lives in the mountains where the plants come from.

Mythological Analysis

According to the symbolic meanings all the three animals show outstanding connections to the gods

Mithra, Bahram and Anahita. Mithra is mentioned in the Achaemenid inscriptions. This name was first used in the 4th century B.C. and was reduplicated five times, (Pourdavoud, 2015: 295). In the late inscriptions, Bahram and Anahita are also mentioned. The king asks for their accompany beside Ahuramazda. In fact, Mithra, Anahita, and Ahuramazda gain power at the same time in the inscriptions (Bahar, 2009: 46).

Two Achaemenid kings, the Artaxerxes I and Artaxerxes II, obviously mentioned Anahita and Mithra and prayed them. The Artaxerxes II says in an inscription that: "it is with the help of the Urmazd and Anahita and Mithra, I build this palace which was ruined before me". He repeated this concept in another inscription and added I pray the Urmazd and Mithra and Anahita who guard me and the country and save us from any animosity and hatred they won't ruin what built. (Pourdavoud, 2015: 158)

In Avesta, Mithra is one of the greatest goddesses. She was also worshiped in the Pre-Avestian periods. She was regarded as the most important goddess. She demonstrates the true kindness, sodality, fraternity, bravery, heroism, integrity, fidelity, and veracity. The king and the people pray her who is the supporter, who protects the land and the army. Mithra is the most powerful goddess. Everybody worshiped her besides Zaotra, Haoma along with the Barseman, singing the hymn. On the contrary to what is believed, Mithra is considered as the brightness and golden rays of the sun, not the sun itself. The longest Yašt, which is Farvardin Yašt, is dedicated to Mithra. The parts 13& 95 of this Yašt talk about Mithra, her rise before the sun and setting down after the sun, (Pourdavoud, 2015: 303).

Two important characteristics could be concluded from Mihr Yašt about these two goddesses; first integrity, and second courage. Mithra was created by Urmazd and become the almighty guardian of alliance. So, the shine angle is inside his character which made nothing invisible to him. Urmazd

gave her a thousand ears and ten thousand eyes, bravery, vision, and honesty are her characters. She is sitting on her golden chariot. Having thousands of golden arrows, thousands of spears, thousands of battle axes, thousands of blades, thousands of maces. She would punish the liars and the traitors in this world. Besides, she would praise the religionists, loyal and the allegiances (Yašt, MihrYašt: chapter 1-10).

Mithra is also responsible for many of duties subscribed to other gods. She is the goddess of war, lightning and the shine. The guardian of the alliance, family, city, and the land. The merciful and the magnificent of all blessings; the god of victory, the judge in the resurrection day. She is the goddess of truth, honesty, veracity, loyalty. The only goddess that all the nation pray and worship (Hertel, 1927: 187). If anybody prays her sincerity, Mithra would rescue him from any injuries from enemies. Ctesias mentioned that Mithra's feast was the only ceremony in which the king had the right to get drunk and dance in front of people, (Benveniste, 1929: 76).

So, it is obvious why Mithra's symbols evidently were used in making the rhytons. Besides that, the lion is also strongly connected to the symbolism of the great goddess, Anahita.

The form of lions used in the kings' drinking vessels express the power of the king, and on the other hand, convey the relations between the lion and symbolic concepts of Anahita. The goddess Anahita is the goddess for the flow of waters, the rivers. Her complete name is Aredvisur Anahita which is "Aradvī sūra" in Avesta. This name is a combination of three words, each an adjective, although this is the only proper name in Avesta. The first part is "aradvī" that came from the word "ared" which means to grow in glory. The second part is "sūra", which means powerful. This adjective is dedicated to humans, Mithra and Sraosa (Souroosh).

The third part is "Anahita" which itself is a combination of "An" and "Ahita" that means

defiled and fity, so Anahita means clean and pure. In Avesta, the adjective Anahita is used for Mithra, Tishtriya, haoma, baresman, absurd and the light as their characteristic, (Pourdavoud, 2015: 155).

Anahita causes the rain, snow, hail and the dew. She cleans the man's semen and the placenta in women. She makes the birth easy, purifies the milk, and increases the bearing in the flock. The land earns glory, happiness and blessing under her almighty beam (Avesta, chapter 1-7).

In the 21st Fargard of Vandidad, the adoration of waters and the cow is combined together (Vandidad, Fargard 21). The god Bahram emanated as the cow, the antelope and the goat. The word Bahram is mentioned as *vərəərayan* in Avesta, the first part means invasion (Farvardin Yašt, chapter 38, Yasna, chapter 58) and also conquer or victory (Hormozd Yašt, chapter 22; Farvardin Yašt, chapter 24; Zamyad Yašt, chapter 54, Yasna 68). The second part means fatal, and repellent. The complete word *vərəərayan*, means conquer and victory. So, the god Bahram is the almighty power of victory and the guardian of triumph. All the warriors pray him while in the wars.

His ten emanations are: an impetuous wind, an adolescent of fifteen years of age, a bull with golden horns, white horse with ears and a muzzle of gold, a camel in heat, a boar, a bird of prey (*veregna*), a ram, a wild goat and an armed warrior, (Yašt 14, chapter 1-27).

In Bahram Yašt, his companions are Rashnu, the angel of justice, with Mithra, the force angel of excellence, (Bahram Yašt, chapter 1-27), (Pourdavoud, 2015: 527).

Bahram is the agent for persistence powers. He is the protector of veridiction (Avesta, 5-17); if he were prayed truly no enemies would enter the land, no disaster would treat the nation. He defeats the devils and malfeasance in humans. He is the most powerful, the most victorious and the great almighty of gods. Therefore, it is obvious why Bahram was the most popular god among the armies and it were the soldiers who always celebrate and pray

for him (Hinnells, 1941: 42 - 43). Bahram was the protector of arrows, (Pourdavoud, 2005: 73 - 74). In Avesta also, he is the victorious angel who owns the pungent and trenchant arrows (Farnbagh Dadegi, 2016: 112).

All his characteristics relate to his power and victory. At last, his final form is the victorious warrior man, who appears with a golden dagger. He is the symbol of strength, energy and vigor in humans, (Rastegarfasaei, 2004: 175).

Thus, the characteristics and functions of all mentioned gods (Mithra, Anahita and Bahram) significantly describe the symbolism of the animals used in making rhytons. The cow symbolizes Bahram, the victorious warrior god. The lion is deeply connected to the light and shinings of Mithra. Lion is the main protector of the king's drink. The ancient people believed that using an animal in the structure of the rhyton may transfer the animals' power to them. So the lion is the symbol of power, ability and dignity which may transfer to one's soul and body in this way. Besides, the lion is also connected to the goddess Anahita who is also a symbol of power and ability while she is considered as the almighty immaculacy and purity. It is concluded that Anahita owns the purest drinks. The king is under her protection. The antelope and ram are dedicated to Bahram. Victory belongs to him. The victory which under the protection of Bahram is in the hands of the king while he carries a rhyton in his hand. This drink also brings strength, energy and vigor to the king's body. Therefore, all these vessels are not just a kind of drinking vessel, but the ritual ones. Each time, drinking in rhytons, would connect the king to the almighty powers, and would convey these powers to the king who is the symbol of everyone in the nation.

Conclusion

The rhytons were of high importance as the drinking vessels during the Achaemenid era. The excessive use of gold in making these vessels

reflects their importance as well. Most of the samples have unique construction quality. This is because of the special accuracy that was used for making them. Overall, it seems that the remained examples belonged to the king or the royals.

The Achaemenid rhytons are conical, cylindrical or horn-shaped. Ending to the head-winged or horned (If any) or the protome of animals.

These rhytons show 3 major differences in comparison to the other periods:

1. The Achaemenid Rhytons have one spout for filling liquid or pouring it out. In fact, the opening for the cup of the rhyton is the only spout.
2. According to the samples of this study (135 samples), maybe the jug-shaped rhytons were not common during this era. The conical and cylindrical rhytons were more popular.
3. In the Achaemenid rhytons, the edge of the cup was made obviously recognizable and as an independent part. The edge is wide and segregated from the body. It could have decorations or not.

The research shows that the form and structure of Achaemenid rhytons are dependent on the religious and mythological concepts.

The animal shapes used in this era are the lion (winged, if any), the bull, ram and the goat. As previously mentioned these animals are related to the Persian gods, Anahita, Mithra, Bahram, and Tishtriya.

These gods all convey the symbolism and concept of power, stability, unpolluted, purity and innocence. Anahita is the guardian of clean and pure waters. This concept is conveyed in the form of a lion decorated on the kings' rhyton. It seems that Anahita is protecting the king's drink. Similarly, Tishtriya is the source of headwaters that is manifested in the bull's symbol. He is the guardian of the Arians' land and the symbol of eternity. Therefore, he transfers his power through a drink to the king who is the protector of the land. Tishtriya is the one who supports fertility and childbirths and then he is the one who symbolizes the king's fertility.

Bahram is the god of wars, warriors, and soldiers. It is not strange for the king to drink in bull-shaped rhytons or horned-goat rhytons in ritual ceremonies. Drinking in such vessels puts the king in the midst support of the most righteous God, the God of gods, Bahram.

Mithra is the god of all blessings. He may cause all the blessings for the land. Mithra is the goddess of victory. The king dances in ritual ceremonies for Mithra. She is also symbolized as the winged lion in the kings' rhytons. Mithra supports the victory of the king and his soldiers. She is the one and the only goddess that all the people, the peasants, the soldiers, and the king can worship. She is the guardian of the family, the city, the land, and the kingdom. It seems that the king asks for her support by drinking in rhytons which symbolize her symbols.

So, as the name of Mithra and Anahita are mentioned besides Ormazd in the Achaemenian inscriptions, the vast usage of their symbols shows their importance during the Achaemenids. In addition to these two goddesses, Bahram and Tishtriya also should be mentioned as important gods of the Achaemenid period.

Finally, it should be noted that four gods Anahita, Mithra, Bahram and Tishtriya with characteristics of fertility, power, victory, the guardian and innocence were the most notable gods of the Achaemenid era. The rhytons of this period symbolize the concepts representing these gods.

Endnote

1. During the study, the researchers did not encounter such examples belonging to the Achaemenids. It seems that this kind was not common during this era. But since the complete examples of Achaemenid rhytons are not studied, the researchers do not insist on this opinion.
2. This research is based on documentary methods. For some kinds of analyses, the accurate measurements of the rhytons are required especially about the angels.
3. The animals named and categorized are those used in the Achaemenid era. In other periods, other kinds of animals were also used such as wildcat (Parthian period) or the peacock (Sasanian period) and even camel (Sasanian period). For more detailed information see: Dadvar, Aboulghasem, Mesbah, Bitá (2010), studying the form and shape of the Persian Rhytons (4th millennium B.C. to Sasanian period), Honar-Ha-Ye-Ziba, 41:5-12.

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