

The Origin and Evolution of Sphinx Motifs and human-animal imaginary creatures on the seals of ancient Elam

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Abstract

Sphinx is a Latin word with the Arabic equivalent of the Sphinx, which in ancient Greek art refers to creatures a combination of the human head and the body of a lion. Archaeological evidence on the seals it shows that the history of the role of sphinx in the Iranian plateau, especially in the art of Elam, dates back to at least the middle of the third millennium BC and as part of the religious beliefs of the ancient Elamites. They are shown on religious-mythological seals. The role of these creatures may have reflected the belief in the worship of deities in human-animal forms and as guardian beings. Although the first millennium BC and subsequent periods can be considered the peak of the prevalence of this type of motifs, but this role has existed in the previous millennia. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the origins of sphinxes and human-animal creatures in Elamite culture based on seal designs in a descriptive-analytical method and then compare them with similar designs in other regions. According to this study, the origin of the designs of sphinxes on Elamite seals to the southeastern part of Iran in areas such as Tepe Yahya and Iblis and related to the middle of the third millennium BC. Therefore, the role of sphinx and hybrid creatures on Elamite seals was not an art imported from other regions than the Iranian plateau, and it is possible that it went from ancient Elamite to art of other regions such as Mesopotamia and Syria.

Keywords: Ancient Ilam, Sphinx, Human-Animal Creatures, Seal, Southeastern Iran.

Citation: Behroozi M., Noori mojiri M., Eghbal Chehri M., 2021. The Origin and Evolution of Sphinx Motifs and human-animal imaginary creatures on the seals of ancient Elam. 5(2): 31-44.

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Received: 2021/05/10

Accepted: 2021/07/27