

Iraj DADASHI \* (University of Art, Tehran, Iran)

Milad JAHANGIRFAR\*\* (University of Art, Tehran, Iran)

Saeed SEYYED AHMADI ZAVIEH\*\*\* (University of Art, Tehran, Iran)

## Creation in Ancient Elam based on Royal Elamite Inscriptions and Rock Reliefs

<https://doi.org/10.34739/his.2023.12.08>

**Abstract:** *Royal Elamite inscriptions offer valuable insights into a range of themes related to ancient Iran. However, to date, no Elamite creation myth has been recovered. Nonetheless, there exist indirect references in the inscriptions and rock reliefs that can be used to reconstruct such an account. This study aims to partially reconstruct the Elamite genesis by examining the linguistic and iconographical clues. It is important to note, however, that this primary investigation provides only limited insights into the creation myth in ancient Elam.*

**Key words:** Archeology, History, Iran, Ancient Elam, Religion, Creation, Royal Inscriptions, Kurangun

### Introduction

The creation of divinities and humans has always been a significant topic. One reason for its importance is that “creation” denotes the act of bringing beings into existence and placing them within temporal and corporeal limitations. Humans, being composed of material as well as spiritual elements, experience this constraint between two points in time and within certain locations. Understanding the different stages of creation, how it occurred, and the characteristics of the gods involved in creation can provide insights into the worldview of ancient societies and part of the intellectual legacy they passed down to the next generations. Creation is generally understood as the act of creating the universe and all the living creatures and objects in it either by a single god (as taught by monotheistic religions) or a group of deities (as in ancient myths).

---

\* Corresponding Author. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0353-1232>. [dadashi@art.ac.ir](mailto:dadashi@art.ac.ir)

\*\* ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8027-8082>. [miladjahangirfar@hotmail.com](mailto:miladjahangirfar@hotmail.com)

\*\*\* ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1550-7878>. [szavieh@art.ac.ir](mailto:szavieh@art.ac.ir)

Thus far, detailed accounts of creation have been found within, for instance, the Zoroastrian and Manichean corpora. Creation myths are also widely known from Mesopotamia, the western neighbor of Elam. However, such an account is absent from the Elamite texts. Elamite inscriptions, in general, form a group of crucial sources for studying a significant part of ancient Iranian history, spanning from approximately the 23rd century BC to the 4th century BC; however, the Achaemenid Elamite may not be so helpful in reconstructing Elamite beliefs prior to the rise of the Achaemenid Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> These inscriptions speak about various themes such as temple (re)construction in different parts of the kingdom, military campaigns, and royal genealogy. Yet, to date, no creation myth from ancient Elam has been found. Nonetheless, the lack of such an account can be compensated for, to some extent, by examining theonyms and personal names, the importance of “name”, and the iconographical clues provided by rock reliefs. To these one should add some of the concepts and beliefs shared among ancient societies.

Although there is no Elamite creation myth available, we have a better understanding of their beliefs regarding the afterlife. Most of our knowledge about the Elamite hereafter is based on archaeological findings, particularly from tombs, and seven Akkadian tablets found in a vaulted baked-brick tomb on the Apadana in Susa.<sup>2</sup>

Evidence suggests that there were likely multiple creation myths in ancient Elam.<sup>3</sup> Also, creation was not *ex nihilo* (see below), instead, it was believed to have emerged from primordial waters. In this article, we will first examine a few verbs and lexemes that signify the act of creation. This will be followed by discussions on the potential roles of particular deities in the Elamite creation account. Finally, we will analyze the Kurangun rock relief in relation to the creation narrative, offering insights into how this relief may have reflected the Elamite worldview and beliefs surrounding the origins of the world.

## Creation

In general, most of the verbs in Middle and Neo-Elamite that denote “to build” may be also understood as “to create”. The most frequent of these verbs is *kuši-*. In royal inscriptions, this verb has been used in relation to the (re)construction of temples. For instance, Šilhak-Inšušinak (ca. 1150-1120 BC) states that (EKI 35 §2-4):

---

<sup>1</sup> While it is possible to argue that certain Elamite beliefs may have persisted or resurfaced in later periods, it is essential to acknowledge that what was valid during one period might not necessarily be valid during another. This is particularly true when considering the Achaemenid period, which is characterized by significant Iranian influence on religion, worldview, and the Elamite language employed by the Achaemenids.

<sup>2</sup> For these tablets see, among others, Scheil, 1916; Steve & Gasche, 1996; Tavernier, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Jahangirfar, 2018: 113.

*si-ia-an*<sup>AN</sup> *In-šu-ši-na-ak-me ú-pa-at-im-ma ku-ši-ik a-ak mi-ši-ir-ma-na ù e-ri-en-tum<sub>8</sub>-im-ma ku-ši-ih a-ak si-ip hu-ti-e ú-pa-at ak-ti-ia-ma ku-ši-ih*  
 “The temple of Inšušinak was built with [sun-dried] bricks and as it was becoming dilapidated, I (re)built [it] with [kilned] brick and (re)built its door sill (?) with glazed brick.”

Of the same root is the nominal form *kuš* “offspring”.<sup>4</sup> In a few Middle Elamite inscriptions (e.g. IRS 47-49), the king states that:

*ta-ak-ki-me ku-uš hu-hu-un ni-ka<sub>4</sub>-me hi-nu-un-ka<sub>4</sub> in-ti-ka<sub>4</sub>*  
 “For the life of our future posterity (which) we will have.”

It can therefore be assumed that the original meaning of the word is “to create”. Another word with the possible sense of “to create” is *pe-*.<sup>5</sup> In many of the royal inscriptions *kuši-* and *pe-* occur together. An example is provided by an inscription (IRS 34) of Šutruk-Nahhunte I (ca. 1190-1155 BC) stating that:

*AN hu-ban-nu-me-na si-ia-an AN ki-ri-ri-ša AŠ li-ia-an-ir-ra-me ha-la-at-im-ma ku-ši-iš a-ak mi-ši-ir-ma-ma ù sar-ra-ah e-ri-en-tum<sub>8</sub>-na pè-ep-ši-ir-ma-ah a-ak ku-ši-ih*  
 “Humpan-u-mena<sup>6</sup> built the temple of Kiririša of Liyan with [sun-dried] brick and as it was becoming dilapidated I restored [it]. I (re)made its bricks and (re)built [the temple]”.

Another verb with a similar sense is *hali-*. According to Malbran-Labat, it has been used less frequently than *kuši-* though it is found in similar contexts.<sup>7</sup> Thus, it is understood as “to make, create”. Additionally, *hut-* means “to make”. For instance (EKI 47 §21):

*su-uh-mu-tú ma-al-ši-in-ni hu-ut-tah a-ak a-ha ta-ah*  
 “I made a stela of alabaster and placed it here”.

The word *hut-* is frequently found in the compound term *hutak.halik* and in contexts pertaining to the king’s construction and achievements. One example is found in an inscription of Kutir-Nahhunte II (ca. 1155-1150 BC; EKI 29 §4-5):

*e AN in-šu-ši-na-ak na-pír-ú-ri hu-ut-ta-ak ha-li-ik-ú-me li-ma nu te-la-ak-ni*  
 “O Inšušinak, my god! May what was done and achieved by me be accepted by you!”

<sup>4</sup> See Tavernier, 2018: 436.

<sup>5</sup> Grillot-Susini (1994: 5) suggests that the root is *pe-*. Zadok (1995: 248) lists the stem as *piši-*.

<sup>6</sup> Following Tavernier (2023), we have adopted Humpan and Humpan-u-mena respectively as divine and royal names.

<sup>7</sup> Malbran-Labat, 1995: 182.

Another lexeme that seems to be associated with creation is *rate-*, which appears in a couple of theonyms including Ruhurater and Napratep, as well as in some personal names such as Kuri-rate, Kup-rate, Hišep-ratep and Temti-rater.<sup>8</sup> The two theonyms just mentioned respectively mean the “[god] who created man” and “creator gods”. It is noteworthy that in a brick inscription from Chogha Zanbil, Nap.rate.p are called *nulkippi* “the protectors”.<sup>9</sup>

### Creator Gods

The inscriptions in question provide evidence that several gods were involved in creation. One such god is Ruhurater whose name is understood as the god “who created man”. Additionally, a group of eight deities named Napratep can be viewed as “creator gods”. Furthermore, Inšušinak is mentioned as the god who “grants us [the] name” (*hiš.hu li.ra*; for instance in EKI 44a and EKI 45 by Šilhak-Inšušinak). Giving a name is equated with giving life. The importance of “name” is highlighted in the royal Elamite inscriptions. Indeed, the significance of “name” and “name-giving” has been widespread among various societies throughout history. A good example is provided by the much quoted Babylonian creation myth *Enūma Eliš* (I, 1-4):

“When the heavens above did not exist,  
And earth beneath had not come into being,  
There was Apsû, the first in order, their begetter,  
And demiurge Tiāmat, who gave birth to them all”.<sup>10</sup>

What has been translated here as “to exist” and “to come into being” are *nabû* and *šuma zakāru* meaning “to call/give a name”.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the heavens and earth did not exist yet because they were not given a name.<sup>12</sup> This passage underscores the significance of the “name” and its power. *Enūma Eliš* also signifies the interplay between “name” and “form”. While the same concept is shared among many cultures, an example from Sanskrit should suffice in this regard. The Sanskrit term *nāma-rūpa* refers to the concept of *nāma* or “name” (or “that which can only be named”, and *rūpa* as the corporeal or physical component of an entity.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, it suggests that our experience of reality is shaped by our conceptualization of names and forms. *Enūma Eliš* shows two stages for creation where it states that (I, 10): “Laḥmu and Laḥamu

<sup>8</sup> According to Steve (1967: 38), in both theonyms, *rate-* is related to *ruhu* “man” and *nap* “god”, while taking *ruhu* as the subject of the term is out of the question. See also Henkelman, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> For *nulkippi* see Vallat, 1987.

<sup>10</sup> After Lambert, 2013: 51

<sup>11</sup> CAD A 1b, s.v. *nabû*; A 2a 5' s.v. *zakāru*.

<sup>12</sup> See also Radner, 2005: 15.

<sup>13</sup> Siderits, 2007: 36.

were formed and came into being”. These two stages are marked with *uštāpû* (“were formed) and *izzakru* (“were called [by name]”).<sup>14</sup>

In general, “names” represent the individuals they are associated with.<sup>15</sup> The Akkadian word *šumu* can be translated as “name”, “fame”, or “offspring” which implies that a name not only helps to determine identity but is also connected to the concept of “continuity”.<sup>16</sup> The preservation of the names of the deceased was seen as crucial in order to ensure their connection with the world of the living. Akkadian incantation texts mention some services offered to the dead, including “making funerary offerings” (*kispa kasāpu*), “pouring water” (*mê naqû*), and “calling the name” (*šuma zakāru*). It was believed that neglecting any of these services could lead to a ghost haunt the living.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if the name of a deceased person was forgotten, his ghost would no longer provide assistance to the living relatives.

In Elam, the association of the “name” with “existence” can be found in the constant efforts of kings to preserve the names of their predecessors. Moreover, Elamite curses were often directed at the “name” and “offspring” of malefactors.<sup>18</sup> An example of this is the inscription on the statue of Queen Napir-asu (EKI 16), in which she warns that anyone with malicious intentions of destroying her statue, inscription, and name will be subjected to the curse of Napiriša, Kiririša and Inšušinak. This highlights the belief in the power of one’s name and the importance of preserving it, even after death, to ensure the continuation of one’s existence and legacy. The queen then continues:

*na-ah-hu-un-te ir-ša-ra-ra hi-iš a-ni pi-li-in pa-ar a-ni ku-tu<sub>4</sub>-un*  
“May he have no name under the sun (= in the world). May he cherish no child”.

It seems that any evidence or lasting memory of the perpetrators would be erased, including their names and descendants. Thus, considering the significance placed on the “name” and “name-giving”, it becomes clear that Inšušinak, the bestower of names, has also the divine power of granting life.

Moreover, the phonetic similarity between *hiš* and *hiši* is noteworthy, although it is challenging to establish whether they are cognates or not. While *hiš* means

---

<sup>14</sup> CAD A/II, s.v. *apû* A b.

<sup>15</sup> For the significance of “name” and its preservation in ancient Mesopotamia see Radner, 2005. According to Annemarie Schimmel, who has written a readable book on Islamic names, “The name is part of the person; rather, it is really the person; therefore, to know someone’s name means to have power over that person. Did not God teach Adam the names of all things so that he might ‘rule over them’? [...] Names are surrounded by a taboo; they carry *baraka*, blessing power, but can also be used for magic” (Schimmel, 1989: ix).

<sup>16</sup> See CAD, s.v. *šumu*.

<sup>17</sup> Bayliss, 1973: 116.

<sup>18</sup> For Elamite curses see Jahangirfar, Dadashi & Seyyed Ahmadi Zavieh, 2022.

“name”, the contexts in which *hiši* is employed suggest a meaning like “grandeur” or “splendor”. The proposed meaning for *hiši*, however, is not without reservation.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the above-mentioned deities, one may find a group of eight deities called *Paha-hutti* related to creation. Some of the interpretations about them include “protectors of the earth”,<sup>20</sup> “provider of protection”,<sup>21</sup> and benefactors or protectors responsible for creating the world and life.<sup>22</sup>

Some scholars, such as Malbran-Labat and Quintana, believe that the divine couple formed by Ruhurater and Hišmitik was responsible for the creation of human beings and their fate.<sup>23</sup> Such a view stems from the name of Ruhurater that is understood as the “[god] who created man” (see above), and the first component in the name Hišmitik that seems to be *hiš* “name”.<sup>24</sup>

Another deity worth mentioning is the one represented by MÙŠ (IRS 4). Malbran-Labat is of the opinion that the ideogram represents the Sumerian goddess Inana who is known in Akkadian literature as Ištar. MÙŠ has been called the “lady of the Acropole” while Inšušinak, whose name has been also recorded as MÙŠ.EREN, was the “lord of the Acropole”.<sup>25</sup> Thus, these two deities can be considered a divine couple, at least in the Old Elamite period. Since Inšušinak seems to have been a life-giving deity, one is tempted to assume a creative role for MÙŠ as well. However, this is pure speculation. Also, if this name really represents a Sumerian (or more generally, a Mesopotamian) god, one may doubt whether a Mesopotamian deity played a role in a genuine Elamite creation myth.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> For instance, EKI 54 §1 reads: *e*<sup>AN</sup>*Na-an-na-ra hi-ši ki-ki-ir-ra*, “O Nana, the brightness/radiance (?) of the sky!”

<sup>20</sup> Malbran-Labat, 1995: 59, 60.

<sup>21</sup> Tavernier, 2011: 341.

<sup>22</sup> Quintana, 2018: 730.

<sup>23</sup> Malbran-Labat, 1995: 196; Quintana, 2018: 730.

<sup>24</sup> The second component is also found in some personal names, e.g. in Atata-mitik (Zadok, 1984: 29). It is likely that *mitin* is another form of the word. If so, then the shared root might be *mit* (?). McAlpin’s proposition that the Middle Elamite *mit* means “power or symbol of life, heart” sounds appealing, though the etymological connection with the Proto-Dravidian *\*mit* (McAlpin, 1981: 146) may be questioned. Inscribed bricks of Untaš-Napiriša from Susa and Chogha Zanbil state that this king built two temples (*siyan*), a *huhin*-temple, and another construction (*ha-di-en ha-ap-ši-ir su-kar-táh*, possibly a ritual basin) for Ruhurater and Hišmitik (see Steve, 1967: 79-80; Potts, 2010: 488-9).

<sup>25</sup> Malbran-Labat, 1995: 195; see also Potts, 2010: 54.

<sup>26</sup> Of course this does not mean to completely rule out the possibility as some of the Mesopotamian gods were accepted in the Elamite pantheon, particularly during the earlier times.

## Destiny

In a Middle Elamite inscription of Humpan-u-mena (EKI 4C §III-IV<sup>27</sup>), this king boasts that the gods Napiriša and Inšušinak had already chosen him even before he was born:

*am-ma tu-ur-na* <sup>AN</sup>GAL *un ha-ni-iš un ha-ih-pu-uš si-it tak-me en piši-ik* <sup>AN</sup>In-šu-ši-na-ak *su-un-ki-me un du-ni-iš*

“[Even] in [my] mother’s womb, Napiriša loved me, he heard me (= my prayer). [As] my destiny was established, Inšušinak gave me the kingship”.

The main point in this passage is “my life’s destiny” (*sit tak(-ú)-me*) that was already decided by the gods.

In the same regard, mention should be made of Humpan, another Elamite god who might have been responsible for deciding upon destinies; however, the main Elamite evidence concerning his involvement in determining destinies comes from the Neo-Elamite period, and not from Susa but from Izeh.

In a collection of Sumerian and Akkadian incantations known as *šurpu*, Humpan is equated with Enlil, a deity with a significant role in the Mesopotamian pantheon alongside such prominent gods as Ea and Anu. Enlil appears to have enjoyed several epithets and carried out different roles, such as being the lord of wind and the one who has the Tablet of Destinies in his possession.<sup>28</sup> The latter point gains in significance. Perhaps the concept of “fate” could be one of the possible meanings of the Elamite *kiten*.<sup>29</sup> This word, found in inscriptions of different periods, has a wide range of meanings including such concepts as “(divine) protection, aegis, and exemption”. In addition to its significance in legal and civic matters, *kiten* seems to have been a legitimate power, privilege, or special attributes bestowed by a number of gods upon rulers. Although Inšušinak had the upper hand regarding *kiten* in legal texts, in royal inscriptions the greatest *kiten* would be conferred by Humpan (EKI 75: the inscription states that the strongest *kiten*, under which a king would stand, belonged to Humpan).<sup>30</sup>

Hinz and Koch proposed “magical protective spell” and “divine power /presence”. Hinz and Koch also believed that *kiten* not only had the mentioned abstract meaning, but it also represented a concrete taboo symbol. Those who violated a contract were exposed to the taboo emblem of the deity and then executed if the individual did not die from the shock of the experience. Additionally, Hinz and

---

<sup>27</sup> For a recent edition and translation see Mäder, 2019.

<sup>28</sup> See, among others, Nötscher, 1938.

<sup>29</sup> Already suggested, for instance by König, 1965: 46, 161.

<sup>30</sup> See also Hinz, 1962: 106; Hinz, 1972: 50-1; Henkelman, 2008: 364-71.

Koch assumed that the word *kiten* also designated the room in the temple in which the taboo emblem was kept.<sup>31</sup> However, this hypothesis may be questioned due to the lack of supporting evidence.

Additionally, a personal name in Achaemenid Elamite suggests a role for Humpan in creation. The name *Hu-pan-un-be-iš* is understood as “Humpan has created me”.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, one may suppose that Humpan was a creator god at least in the Neo-Elamite period, with some traces of this role in the Achaemenid period.

### The Order of Creation

The fact that different gods were involved in the creation process could indicate that multiple creation myths existed in Elam. Alternatively, it could be interpreted that the gods associated with creation played a role in one or more stages of a multi-stage creation process. One may consider at least two stages in Elam in which gods and humans were created. Indeed, the order of creation is observed in both ancient myths and theological texts. For instance, according to *Enūma Eliš*, first there were Apsū and Tiāmat. They mingled their waters together before any of the gods had been formed, and before their fate had been decreed. Then the gods were created within them (*Enūma Eliš* I, 5-9).<sup>33</sup> Only later we read about the creation of man (*Enūma Eliš* VI, 6-7):

*lu-uš-ziz-ma lul-la-a lu-ú a-me-lu šum-šu*  
*lu-ub-ni-ma lullā* (lú-u<sub>18</sub>-lu-a) a-me-lu  
 “I want to create the *lullū*(-man).  
 His name (means) ‘He may be an *amēlu*’”.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> EW, pp. 461, 488. It is noteworthy that in the so-called Daiva Inscription (XPh), Xerxes relates that he placed *kiten* “ban” upon the worship of the *daivas* (see, for instance, Cameron, 1959: 474, 476).

<sup>32</sup> See Zadok, 1991: 232. In Achaemenid Elamite, the verb *peši-* recurs in other occasions. For instance, in XPc: <sup>AN</sup>*na-ap ir-šá-ir-ra* <sup>AN</sup>*u-ra-maz<sub>e</sub>-da ak-ka<sub>4</sub> hi* <sup>AS</sup>*mu-ru-un pe-iš-tá ak-ka<sub>4</sub>* <sup>AN</sup>*ki-ik hu-pè pe-iš-tá*, “A great god [is] Auramazda who created this earth, who created that sky”. Compare with DNa in which the verb *ta-* replaces *peš-* and note the word order: *na-ap ir-šá-ir-ra* <sup>AN</sup>*u-ra-maz<sub>e</sub>-da ak-ka<sub>4</sub>* <sup>AS</sup>*mu-ru-un hi da-áš-tá* <sup>AN</sup>*ki-ik hu-pè da-áš-tá*, “A great god [is] Auramazda who created this earth, [who] created that sky”. It is noteworthy that the Old Persian versions of XPc and DNa have employed the verb *adā* from the verbal root *dā* “to make, create”.

<sup>33</sup> For the text and translation see Lambert, 2013: 51.

<sup>34</sup> Translation after Gabriel, 2018: 206-7.

In the Elamite pantheon, the goddess Kiririša is the consort of Napiriša. This couple has a child called Hutran who is likewise a deity. In this regard, an inscription of Šilhak-Inšušinak is informative (EKI 45 §17):

<sup>AN</sup>*hu-ut-ra-an ru-hu ha-ni-ik* <sup>AN</sup>*ki-ri-iš-ša* <sup>AN</sup>*GAL-ri*  
“Hutran [is] the beloved son of Kiririša [and] Napiriša”.

In addition, Kiririša is also referred to as the “mother of gods” (*amma nappipir*; for instance in EKI 49 §III, EKI 54 §1, EKI 68 §III). While this information about divine motherhood may not be conclusive, it suggests the possibility that in Elamite thoughts, one or more goddesses gave birth to some deities before humans were brought into existence.

### Kurangun

To date, several rock reliefs have been discovered within the Elamite territory.<sup>35</sup> Among these rock reliefs is the Kurangun relief which is located on the bank of the Fahliān River, in Fārs province (some 140 km, as the crow flies, west of the Persepolis). Standing at approximately 80 meters high atop a mountain, the central panel of the relief depicts a divine couple flanked by two trios of royal figures. Below the central panel, a basin has been sculpted with 26 fish swimming in different directions. In later expansions of the relief, further individuals were sculpted in the side panels and along a set of actual stairs. It is generally believed that the central panel, the staircase, the basin, and the fish were created during the Sukkal.mah period, i.e. ca. the 17th century BC.<sup>36</sup>

Ernst Herzfeld was the first to inform Western academia about the Kurangun rock relief. He reported that the relief was located near Tolespid, an area where a few cuneiform inscriptions had previously been found which Herzfeld dated to around 1500-1000 BC.<sup>37</sup> Now, based on EKI 41a, we know that Kilah-šupir, an Elamite deity, had a temple there during the reign of Šilhak-Inšušinak I and possibly prior to that time.

The male deity depicted in the central panel of the relief is seated on a coiled-serpent throne and seems to be holding a pair of snakes (?) in his left hand, and a ring and a rod in his other hand. Life-giving waters flow out of the objects in his right hand. The water is associated with the basin carved below the scene and symbolically linked

---

<sup>35</sup> For a detailed, recent study on the Elamite reliefs see Álvarez-Mon, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Álvarez-Mon, 2019: 18-9.

<sup>37</sup> Herzfeld, 1926: 259.

to the Fahliān River flowing at the foot of the mountain.<sup>38</sup> The eroded relief suggests that the female deity, seated on an animal-shaped throne, may be holding an object.

The basin, which measures approximately 2 by 5 meters, has been carved on the horizontal platform beneath the central panel. When viewed from the platform, the scene appears to take place in the middle of the life-giving waters. The stairs provide access to the horizontal platform from atop. Henkelman and Khaksar draw attention to the remnants of a few steps on the lower register of the right lateral panel overlooked by previous commentators. Therefore, it seems that the stairs on the left were used for descent onto the basin and the stairs on the right for ascent back top. Henkelman and Khaksar interpret this movement as “a symbolic descent from the summit to basin, representing the deep, pure waters over which the seated god rules”.<sup>39</sup>

Several scholars have proposed different identities for the sculpted deities. For instance, Hinz identified them as Humpan and “the ‘great goddess’ whether she be called Pinikir or Kiririsha”.<sup>40</sup> In another publication, Hinz suggested that the central panel of the Kurangun relief represents Humpan and Kiririša or Parti (an older reading of Mašti).<sup>41</sup> A few years later, Miroschedji<sup>42</sup> posited that the male god is Inšušinak, whereas Grillot-Susini and Vallat contended that the relief represents Napiriša and Kiririša.<sup>43</sup>

Based on an Akkadian inscription by Temti-Agun, François Vallat has suggested that Ea and Enzag, in addition to being divine names, also served as two epithets for Inšušinak.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, in the *šurpu*<sup>45</sup>, Ea is equated with Napiriša. A corollary of this is that, at least at some point in history, Napiriša and Inšušinak were regarded as one god. Since in Mesopotamian mythology, Ea was associated with sweet waters, Napiriša and Inšušinak had presumably the same capacity in Elam. One may conclude that the Kurangun relief represents Napiriša/Inšušinak as the male god, and Kiririša as she is the consort of Napiriša.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Álvarez-Mon, 2019: 21, 105. For the identification of the objects in the god’s left hand see, for instance, Vanden Berghe, 1986: 159. The waters at Kurangun might be compared with the seasonal waterfall at Eškāft-e Salmān (near Izeh in Khuzistān province) where another Elamite open-air sanctuary, with four rock reliefs, is located.

<sup>39</sup> Henkelman & Khaksar, 2014: 214.

<sup>40</sup> Hinz, 1971: 673.

<sup>41</sup> Hinz, 1972: 53.

<sup>42</sup> Miroschedji, 1980: 139.

<sup>43</sup> Grillot-Susini & Vallat, 1984: 27-9.

<sup>44</sup> Vallat, 1997, note 111.

<sup>45</sup> See Reiner, 1958: 50-51.

<sup>46</sup> See also Potts, 2004: 147-8, 152-4; 2013: 133-5; Álvarez-Mon, 2019, 19-20. Grillot-Susini (1986: 176, n. 3; 2014: 105) has argued that probably due to some political and religious reasons, Inšušinak assumed some attributes of Napiriša while at the same time the two deities retained their own identities. In this regard, it is noteworthy how, from a grammatical point of view, these two gods were treated as one in several inscriptions from Chogha Zanbil (see Jahangirfar, 2018: 115, n. 23). For doubts cast

Be that as it may, the Kurangun relief suggests that creation occurred through water and therefore it was not *ex nihilo*, or from nothingness, as expected in almost all creation accounts. In other words, the creator used a primordial matter to initiate creation.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

Although no relevant texts about the creation myth in ancient Elam have been discovered thus far, linguistic, archaeological, and iconographical details can be utilized to partially reconstruct such an account. However, some of the arguments presented here are hypothetical and therefore subject to further discussion.

The names of a few deities suggest that beings would be composed of physical and spiritual elements. In other words, a physical body would come to life only after being named. A few royal inscriptions relate the kings' fates were already determined before they were born. The gods involved in deciding upon "fate" may have been creator gods too.

There was probably more than one creation myth in Elam. As this study demonstrates, a few gods could be the main creators in various versions, or possibly in charge of certain creatures in a single canonical account. One may assume a hierarchy in the pantheon: one all-important god at the top of pyramid who would be the begetter of other deities, and below this omnipresent god, a demiurge or a consort.

The role of Inšušinak as a name-giving deity is noteworthy, as he was also a prominent underworld deity and a god who decreed fate. Therefore, he can be regarded as a significant deity who brought people to life by bestowing names upon them and, and the one who would judge them in the hereafter.

---

on the identification of the sculpted deities at Kurangun with any of the known Elamite gods, see Potts, 2013: 134. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that the inscriptions from Chogha Zanbil date back to the middle of the 14th century BC, that is, the Middle Elamite period whereas the central panel of the Kurangun relief is believed to have been created in the 17th century BC. Thus, one may question the presence of Inšušinak in such a location far from Susa during the Old Elamite period. Indeed, the existing evidence indicates that the two deities shared temples in the Middle Elamite period. Therefore, it is more plausible that the Kurangun relief represents the Anzanite divine couple Napiriša and Kiririša.

<sup>47</sup> *Creatio ex nihilo* is a concept developed by the early Christian theologians, most notably Athanasius and Augustine, in response to pagan philosophy and Manichaean critique of the biblical scriptures (Anatolios, 2018; Cavadini, 2018). However, even in the Bible, there is no explicit mention of an absolute lack of substance at the beginning as *there are* the formless and void earth, darkness being over the surface of the deep, and the waters over which Spirit of God hovers (*Genesis*, 1:2).

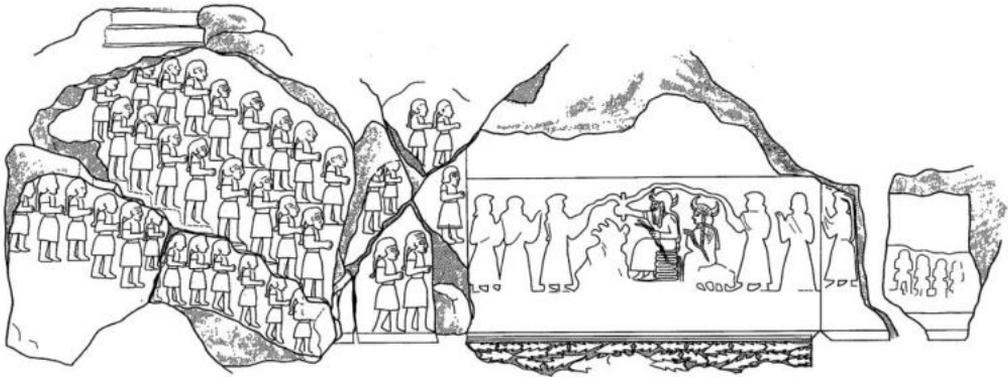


Fig. 1. A line-drawing of the Kurangun relief (adapted from Vanden Berghe, 1986: Fig. 2)

#### Abbreviations:

**CAD:** Chicago Assyrian Dictionary

**EKI:** Royal Elamite inscriptions published in König, 1977 (first edition 1965).

**EW:** Elamite dictionary by Hinz & Koch, 1987.

**IRS:** Royal Elamite inscriptions from Susa published in Malbran-Labat, 1995.

**PF:** Persepolis Fortification tablets published in Hallock, 1969.

#### Bibliography

Álvarez-Mon, J. (2019). *The Monumental Reliefs of the Elamite Highlands: A Complete Inventory and Analysis (from the Seventeenth to the Sixth Century BC)*. Pennsylvania: Eisenbrauns.

Anatolios, Kh. (2018). Creatio ex nihilo in Athanasius of Alexandria's. In G.A. Anderson, M. Bockmuehl (Eds.), *Creation ex nihilo: Origins, Development, Contemporary Challenges* (pp. 119–49). Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Bayliss, M. (1973). The Cult of Dead Kin in Assyria and Babylonia. *Iraq*, 35(2), 115–25. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4199959>

Cameron, G.G. (1959). The 'Daiva' Inscription of Xerxes: in Elamite. *Die Welt des Orients*, 2,(5/6), 470–6.

Cavadini, J.C. (2018). Creatio ex nihilo in the Thought of Saint Augustine. In G.A. Anderson, M. Bockmuehl (Eds.), *Creation ex nihilo: Origins, Development, Contemporary Challenges* (pp. 151–71). Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Gabriel, G.I. (2018). An Exemplificational Critique of Violence: Re-Reading the Old Babylonian Epic *Inūma ilū awīlum* (a.k.a Epic of Atramḫašis). *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History*, 5(1/2), 179–213. <https://doi.org/10.1515/janeh-2018-0011>

Grillot-Susini, F. (1986). Kiririša. In L. de Meyer, H. Gasche, F. Vallat (Eds.), *Fragmenta Historiae Elamicae: Mélanges offerts à M.-J. Stève* (pp. 175–80). Paris: Éditions Recherches sur les civilisations.

Grillot-Susini, F. (1994). Une nouvelle approche de la morphologie élamite: racines, bases et familles de mots. *Journal Asiatique*, 282, 1–18.

- Grillot-Susini, F. (2014). De vie à trépas. In M. Kozuh, W.F.M. Henkelman, C.E. Jones, Ch. Woods (Eds.), *Extraction & Control: Studies in Honor of Matthew W. Stolper* (pp. 105–7). Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Grillot-Susini, F., Vallat, F. (1984). Dedicace de Šilhak-Inšušinak a Kiririša. *Iranica Antiqua*, 19, 21–9.
- Henkelman, W.F.M. (2007). Ruhurater. *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, 11(5/6), 449.
- Henkelman, W.F.M. (2008). *The Other Gods Who Are: Studies in Elamite-Iranian Acculturation Based on the Persepolis Fortification Texts*. Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten.
- Henkelman, W.F.M., Khaksar, S. (2014). Elam's Dormant Sound: Landscape, Music and the Divine in Ancient Iran. In L.C. Eneix (Ed.), *Archaeoacoustics: the Archaeology of Sound. Publication of Proceedings from the 2014 Conference in Malta* (pp. 211–31). CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Herzfeld, E. (1926). Reisebericht. *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 80(4), 225–84.
- Hinz, W. (1962). Die elamischen Inschriften des Hanne. In W.B. Henning, E. Yarshater (Eds.), *A Locust's Leg: Studies in Honour of S.H. Taqizadeh* (pp. 105–16). London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co.
- Hinz, W. (1971). Persia c. 2400-1800 B.C.. In I.E.S. Edwards, C.J. Gadd, N.G.L. Hammond (Eds.), *Cambridge Ancient History I* (pp. 644–80). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hinz, W. (1972). *The Lost World of Elam: Re-creation of A Vanished Civilization*. London: Sidgwich & Jackson.
- Hinz, W., Koch, H. (1987). *Elamisches Wörterbuch*. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer.
- Jahangirfar, M. (2018). The Elamite Triads: Reflections on the Possible Continuities in Iranian Tradition. *Iranica Antiqua*, 53, 105–24. <https://doi.org/10.2143/IA.53.0.3285480>
- Jahangirfar, M., Dadashi, I., Seyyed Ahmadi Zavieh, S. (2022). Barresie Neveshteyah “Nefrini” dar Kartibehaye Shahi-e Ilami [‘Curse’ in Royal Elamite Inscriptions]. *Journal of Ancient Culture and Languages*, 2(2), 65–93. <https://doi.org/10.22034/aclr.2022.254674> (in Persian)
- König, F.W. (1965). *Die elamischen Königsinschriften*. Graz: Ernst Weidner.
- Lambert, W.G. (2013). *Babylonian Creation Myths*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
- Mäder, M. (2019). Die Texte Humbannumenas. *Iranica Antiqua*, 54, 127–53. <https://doi.org/10.2143/IA.54.0.3287448>
- Malbran-Labat, F. (1995). *Les inscriptions royales de Suse. Briques de l'époque paléoélamite à l'Empire néo-élamite*. Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées Nationaux.
- McAlpin, D.W. (1981). *Proto-Elamite-Dravidian. The Evidence and Its Implications*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society.
- Miroschedji, P. de. (1980). Le dieu élamite Napiriša. *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale*, 74(2), 129–43.
- Nötscher, F. (1938). Enlil, *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, 2, 382–7.
- Potts, D.T. (2004). The Numinous and the Immanent: Some Thoughts on Kurangun and the Rudkhaneh-e Fahliyān. In K. von Folsach, H. Thrane, I. Thuesen (Eds.), *From Handaxe to Khan: Essays Presented to Peder Mortensen on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday* (pp. 143–56). Aarhus University Press.
- Potts, D.T. (2010). Elamite Temple-Building. In M.J. Boda, J. Novotny (Eds.), *From the Foundations to the Crenellations. Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible* (pp. 49–70, 479–509). Göttingen: Ugarit-Verlag.
- Potts, D.T. (2013). In the Shadows of Kurangun: Cultural Developments in the Highlands between Khuzestan and Anšan. In K. De Graef, J. Tavernier (Eds.), *Susa and Elam. Archaeological, Philological, Historical and Geographical Perspectives: Proceedings of the International Congress Held at Ghent University, December 14-17, 2009* (pp. 129–38). Leiden & Boston: Brill.

- Quintana, E. (2018). Elamite Religion and Ritual. In J. Álvarez-Mon, G.P. Basello, Y. Wicks (Eds.), *The Elamite World* (pp. 729–40). London & New York: Routledge.
- Radner, K. (2005). *Die Macht des Namens. Altorientalische Strategien zur Selbsterhaltung*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.
- Reiner, E. (1958). *Šurpu: A Collection of Sumerian and Akkadian Incantations*. Graz: Selbstverlage des Herausgebers.
- Scheil, V. (1916). Textes funéraires. *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie Orientale*, 13(4), 165–74.
- Schimmel, A. (1989). *Islamic Names*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Siderits, M. (2007). *Buddhism as Philosophy: An Introduction*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett /Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Steve, M.-J. (1967). *Tchoga Zanbil (Dûr-Untash) III: Textes élamites et accadiens de Tchoga Zanbil (MDP 41)*. Paris: Paul Geuthner.
- Steve, M.-J., Gasche, H. (1996). L'accès à l'au-delà, à Suse. In H. Gasche, B. Hrouda (Eds.), *Collectanea Orientalia: Histoire, arts de l'espace et industrie de la terre: Études offertes en hommage à Agnès Spycket / Civilisations du Proche-Orient 1, Archéologie et environnement 3* (pp. 329–48). Neuchâtel & Paris: Recherches et publications.
- Tavernier, J. (2011). Élamite: analyse grammaticale et lecture de texts. *Res Antiquae*, 8, 315–50.
- Tavernier, J. (2013). Elamite and Old Iranian Afterlife Concepts. In K. De Graef, J. Tavernier (Eds.), *Susa and Elam: Archaeological, Philological, Historical and Geographical Perspectives: Proceedings of the International Congress Held at Ghent University, December 14-17, 2009* (pp. 471–89). Leiden & Boston: Brill.
- Tavernier, J. (2018). The Elamite Language. In J. Álvarez-Mon, G.P. Basello, Y. Wicks (Eds.), *The Elamite World* (pp. 416–49). London & New York: Routledge.
- Tavernier, J. (2023). Kings (and Others) with Too Many Names: An Elamite Onomastic Imbroglío. In J. Tavernier, E. Gorris, K. De Graef (Eds.), *Susa & Elam II: History, Language, Religion and Culture* (pp. 182–206) (MDP 59), Leiden & Boston: Brill.
- Vallat, F. (1987). Elamite nulkippi. *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires*, 3, 48(88).
- Vallat, F. (1997). Inšušinak, Ea et Enzag. *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires*, 3, 103–4(111).
- Vanden Berghe, L. (1986). Données nouvelles concernant le relief rupestre élamite de Kūrangūn. In L. de Meyer, H. Gasche, F. Vallat (Eds.), *Fragmenta Historiae Elamicae: Mélanges offerts à M.-J. Steve* (pp. 157–73). Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations.
- Zadok, R. (1984). *The Elamite Onomasticon*. Naples: Istituto universitario orientale.
- Zadok, R. (1991). Elamite Onomastics. *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici sul Vicino Oriente*, 8, 225–37.
- Zadok, R. (1995). On the Current State of Elamite Lexicography. *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici sul Vicino Oriente*, 12, 241–52.

**To cite this article:** Dadashi, I., Jahangirfar, M., Seyyed Ahmadi Zavieh, S. (2023). Creation in Ancient Elam based on Royal Elamite Inscriptions and Rock Reliefs. *Historia i Świat*, 12, 139–152. <https://doi.org/10.34739/his.2023.12.08>



© 2023 The Author(s). This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-ND) 4.0 license.