

# **Title: Analysis and review of rhytons of the first millennium BC in northern Iran**

## **Ryton lexicography and introduction of its types in ancient Iran**

In terms of terminology, the word rhyton in ancient Iran is derived from the Greek word rhytos "flow" from rhein "to flow" plural rhyta, which is sometimes interpreted as a drinking horn (Wissowa, 1935: 643-645). Its name is investigated from two perspectives: 1- its horn-like shape and its appearance 2- the curved structure similar to a cow's horn. The rhyton had an opening for pouring liquids, while the early rhytons did not have a base. Figure 1 shows an example of an early rhyta used in the 4th century BC by Scythian warriors in southern Russia. As shown in the figure, two Scythian warriors drinking from the same horn was interpreted as a ritual of brotherhood.



Figure 1 - An example of rhyta in the 4th century BC: preserved in the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (Shiltz, 1994, p. 181, p. 132)

Rhytons underwent changes in shape and form over time compared to the beginning of their construction. Other rhytons or rhyta were not formed from horns; Rather, the lower part of the

horn was reshaped and made with a jug-shaped section at the bottom and the symbolic figure of the animal in front of it. Such rhytons are clearly seen in the 100-year-old vessels found in Amlesh, North and Central Iran. Fig. 2 shows an example of Rhyta dating back to 1000 BC. Rhyta's difference over time was in addition to appearance in terms of name. The deformed Rhyta was called Aquamanil. This word is derived from the Latin words water, blue and hand, manus, animal or human vessels for pouring water to wash hands in medieval society (Berghe, 1952).



Figure 2- Aquamanyl dating from 800 to 100 years BC discovered in Iran, Amlesh, 9th-11th century BC

### **Types of rhytons discovered in Iran**

Forms 3 and 4 of the discovered rhyton samples were found in the Dilmun region of Iran, in the south of the Caspian Sea, and it dates back to the 6th century BC. At this time, the lower part of many rhyta's heads, including the mouth, was shaped like a horned animal such as a cow or a goat. These two types of Rhyta form formed the main forms of Rhyta. In addition to this, there was another type that has the shape of a complete animal. In the Dilmun region, a silver rhyton is one of the best Sasanian examples of the 5th and 6th centuries AD, in the form of a kneeling horse, thus a vessel capable of standing (held at the Cleveland Museum of Art; Shepherd, 1966).. Most horse-shaped rhytons have been attributed to the court Sculpture of the center of the Sasanian Empire, but it is also possible that some details of its decorations refer to a more eastern Sculpture.



Figure 3- Rhytai discovered from the south of Turkmenistan attributed to the Parthian Empire of the 2nd to 1st century BC

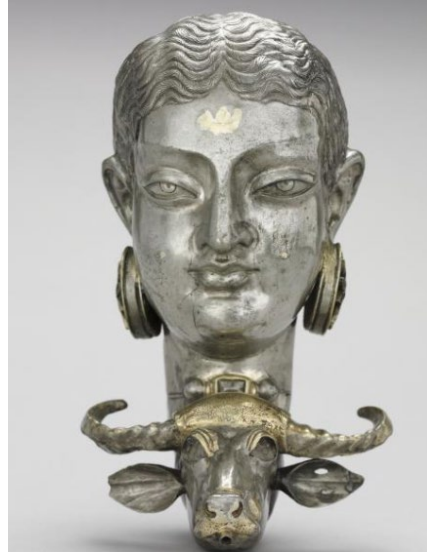


Figure 4- Rhyton woman and water buffalo attributed to the Sasanian period

Regarding the variety of rhyta forms in general, there are other vessel forms that are often called pseudo-rhyta, including vessels such as the gold vessels from Panagyurishte discovered near Plovdiv, Bulgaria (4th century BC). Two other amphora-shaped vessels from Thrace should be added here: one of gilded silver, undoubtedly of the Achaemenid period (6th/5th century BC) in style and decoration, with two horned lion-griffin handles. It may have been a gift from an Achaemenid king to a Thracian chieftain. The reason for this gift seems to be its social background in the ritual exchange of gifts (Hoffmann, 1961; 1966, 1989).

Another container in the form of an amphora can be attributed to the 4th century BC. The handles are shaped like fighting centaurs. The opening is on a solid gold base. The vessel depicts the legend of the Seven Against Thebes (known from Aeschylus' play), and overall, this object is a large piece produced by a Thracian master of the Hellenistic period (Foll and Marazov, 1977:75).

### **Introduction of Rhyton by Iran to neighboring countries**

In Eurasia, pseudo-Rhyta can also be seen in the Old Kingdoms of Kaya and Silla in Korea between the 5th and 7th centuries AD. Two of them are ceramic, with curved Rhyta forms with horse heads, but with bases and no openings. Another has a large pedestal with a full horse mounted on it. A drinking trumpet is fixed on its saddle blanket (Jäger, 2006a, pp. 199-201 and p. 220).

## **A review of the types of Rhytas in ancient Iran**

In short, it can be proved that Rhyta must have developed in the cultural sphere of Iranians, i.e. Iran and Greater Iran, and they have made their way to all parts of the ancient world where Iranian influence can be traced. From Thrace and Greece in the west from Achaemenid times to Korea. This was either through the extensive political influence of the Iranian empires from the Achaemenids to the Sassanids, exerted through nomads riding on Iranian reserves, or through trade through Oriental Iranian merchants, diplomats, and artists such as the Sogdians between the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD to 8th century was possible.

**Uses of Rhyta** The first Rhyta was not only used for drinking. Regular cow horns are much easier to drink. One fills them and empties them through a large hole. Such drinking horns were popular in the world of the Germanic tribes of Western Europe from prehistoric times to the early Middle Ages. The next step in development should be to cut off the tip of the pointed end of the horn and make a small hole there. The liquid poured into the open end could now only run out when the finger that was supposed to close the horn at the lower end was detached from it. This natural horn ship was the first Proto-Rhython, but no such Rhyta survives. Once these horns were copied in their curved form, either in ceramic or later in metal, the animal protome was added. The pseudo-Rhyta Amlesh in the form of complete animals, mainly cows, should be seen in direct connection with the newly developed animal protomes of the curved Rhyta.

## **Achaemenid Rhyta**

Rhyta can be found in the Achaemenid Empire (700-330 BC) on ceramics, in precious metals such as gold and silver, or gilded silver. Numerous examples of Achaemenid Rhytas have been exhibited in museums around the world. Achaemenid rhyta without exception are curved in shape, that is, they consist of an upper or horned part and a lower part in the shape of an animal protome. Some of these Achaemenid rhytons can stand like cups, Figure 5 shows one of these rhytons. This rhyton, winged lion piece kept in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art (Porada et al., 1962, p. 163) found in Hamadan (Wilkinson, 1955, p. 321). This rhyton of pure gold, a figure in the shape of a rhyton, can be added to the pseudo-Rhyta. This Rhyta first appeared in Iran, that is, in the geographical area where the Iranian people lived in ancient times (Svoboda, 1956; Frye, 1962, pp. 9-35; Frye, 1984, pp. 1-20).

The use of rhyta was common in part of the Achaemenid Empire, in the Eurasian steppes, the Scythians and later the Sarmatians and peoples living in the Caucasus (Kohl, 2006; Manasru, 2007).



Figure 5- Rhyton with horned lion protome of the Achaemenid period discovered in Hamedan

The rhyton with an animal protome was one of the most common rhytons of the Achaemenid period (about 538) in the Near East. This rhyton was as shown in Fig. 5, a horn for liquids to which was attached the image of the front part of the beast, at right angles. The protome of this rhyton depicts the front of a fantastic composite creature, a leonine beast with curved horns and upright ears, probably meant to represent a wingless lion-griffin.

This extraordinary vessel can be compared with a similar Achaemenid silver-gilt rhyton with a griffin protom found in Erzingan, Armenia, now in the British Museum. We can also mention a rhyton with a calf protome, two rimmed bowls, a flask with a lid, a ladle with milk decorations and a large lobed bowl. The last name has inscriptions in ancient Persian and late Babylonian, which show that it was built for King Ardeshir. This may refer to any of the three Achaemenid rulers known by this name who reigned in the 5th and 4th centuries BC. The horned lion fits well into the tradition of the Achaemenid style of sculpture. Its roaring face reminds of similar beasts in the capitals and reliefs of Persepolis.

Although the horned lion is animal in nature, not human, it must represent a powerful supernatural being. The most dramatic scenes found at Persepolis show royal figures attacking an array of hybrid beasts, among them a winged lion. Similar motifs can be seen in the decoration of the Achaemenid silver bowl in the museum collection (Figure 5). . It seems that such fantastical creatures can act as powerful protectors in some cases, and in other cases, represent dangerous enemies of the king.

The material used for the rhyta must originally have been the natural horn of animals such as cows, oxen, and buffalo, and possibly goats, ibex, and others, but no such rhyta has survived archaeologically. From the first millennium BC, ma rhyta made of ceramics is seen (Kawami, 1992; Haerinck, 1983). From the Achaemenid period, pieces in gold and silver and from the time of Alexander the Great to the end of the Parthian period (Pfrommer, 1993; Giumlia-Mair and La Niece, 1998, pp. 45-139) can be seen. If we analyze the rhytons of the Achaemenid period, it should be said that the metal rhyton consists of two main parts: the upper part, that is, a container that is hammered from one or more pieces, and the lower part, the protome, which is made up of a number of pieces. The two parts were then soldered together. Engraving and gilding were added to the finished pieces. Such techniques can still be found in Isfahan (Westphal-Helbusch and Bruns, 1974, pp. 115-52).

### **Types of Rhyta in the Achaemenid period**

There are basically three main types of rhyta: bent rhyta, head rhyta and full rhyta. Most curved Rhytas have an elongated upper part and a lower part in the shape of an animal forehead. The opening is always depicted between the front legs of the animal. From these curved Rhytas, another type emerged, Rhytas whose upper part is designed in the shape of a human or animal head (Walser, 1980, pl. 82; Frankfort, 1954, pl. 180c) (Figure 6).

All Achaemenid rhyta have the typical court style of Achaemenid imperial art, i.e. they have a special animal forehead effect and a special solidity. Their decorations are limited to the usual decorations of the general style of Achaemenid art, which used palm trees for decoration, and the muscles of the animals' foreheads are shown in the form of drops.

With the conquest of the Persian world by Alexander the Great to the Indo-Persian borderlands in the late 4th century BC, the arts of the entire region changed dramatically (Schlumberger, 1960;

1969). Greek and Eastern art, especially Iranian art, intermingled in a most fruitful exchange that transformed the image of Rhyta in the most beautiful way. An example is a silver rhyton in the shape of a winged eagle, found in 1905 in Tokh al-Qaramos, Lower Egypt.

### **Rhyta Parkhani**

One of the most interesting Rhytas, in the Miho Museum, is in the shape of a lynx (*Felis caracal*) catching a chicken. It is made of gilded silver from Central Asia or Afghanistan and dates back to the end of the 2nd to the 1st century. BC, it is of Parthian or Hellenic-Bactrian origin (Umehara and Meyers, 1997, no. 47, pp. 101, pl. 101). -2; Description of the head, p. 103. Recent research has shown that the Parthians always and throughout their rule had extensive connections with their ancient, nomadic background in the steppes (Olbrycht, 1995 and 1998).

Examining the reliefs carved around the edges of the entire Rhyta, he found no traces of Parthian religiosity in them, but only pure Greek religious concepts. If this is true, the origin of Nysa Rhyta can be traced back to the ancient Indo-Greek Bactria. Instead of being made by Parthian artists, these vessels may have reached this Parthian city as spoils of war with the Greeks of Western India. It is also possible that they were made by artists who were transferred to the Parthian kingdom as a result of the war.

Gilded silver rhyton from the Parthian period (ca. 2nd to 1st century BC) in the Arthur M. Gallery. Sackler, Washington, DC. It is a curved rhyton with a protome resembling a bull or a zebu with curved horns, in its vitality we can see the Hellenistic Greek influence in the art of silversmiths of this period. Such an expression clearly derives from the Greek understanding of the arts, as also shown by an earlier bronze rhyton in the Mayhoe Museum, which depicts a stag (Umehara and Meyers, 1997, pp. 31-130).

The last example for the Parthian rhyton in the 2nd to 1st century BC is the one with the protomus of a silver lion. The lion's mane, mustache, eyebrows, pupils and tongue are gilded. Today, this piece is kept in the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery (catalogue S.1987.130; Melikian-Chirvani, 1996, p. 102, Fig. 5-6; Figure 16). This piece has a certain stylistic tendency towards the style of old Achaemenid art, but this impression may be influenced by the fact that the lion looks very calm. On the other hand, it is clear that the silversmith who worked on this piece aimed for elegance when designing the upper part of the vessel by hammering the outer edge, like a trumpet.

## **Rhyta Sassani**

Compared to the Achaemenid, Hellenistic, and Parthian periods, the number of surviving Sasanian rhyta is relatively few and not comparable in number to other Torotic products, such as decorated plates, jugs, and rams (Harper et al., 1978). Protome is the head of a young gazelle. It seems that its vitality originates from the Hellenistic past of Iran's silver works between the time of Alexander and the Parthians. Around the vessel there are reliefs of moving lions and other animals. Here one can feel a renaissance of the Achaemenid court style and can be compared to the moving lions of Achaemenid Susa now in the Louvre Museum in Paris (Saar, 1923, p. 39). If this comparison is accepted and the Hellenistic modeling of the head is also taken into account, this rhyton can be dated a few centuries earlier, to the 3rd to 4th centuries AD.

According to the mentioned contents of the present research, the main question will be the form and shape of the rhytons of the first millennium in Iran, which symbols follow.

## **Research purposes**

- Typology and stylistics of rhytons of the first millennium BC in northern Iran
- Comparison of rhytons of the first millennium BC in northern Iran with regions outside Iran and Central Asia
- Determining the shapes of rhytons of the first millennium BC in northern Iran
- Determining and classifying the symbols used in the first millennium AD in Iran
- Analysis and mythology of rhytons of the first millennium AD in Iran
- Investigating the material used in rhytons of the first millennium AD in Iran

## **Research questions**

- What shape and form were the rhytons of the first millennium in Iran?
- What kind of symbols are used in the 1st millennium AD in Iran?
- What is the mythological purpose of the symbols used in the rhytons of the first millennium AD in Iran?
- What is the material used in the rhytons of the first millennium AD in Iran?

## **literature review**

- Hekmatabadi (1400) stated in a comparative study on rhytons of the Achaemenid and Parthian periods. The art of rhyton making is one of the most prominent and valuable arts that existed in the Achaemenid and Parthian periods. These vessels show themselves in different forms in the Achaemenid and Parthian periods. The results were based on that; In terms of 1-Formic, conical shape, the use of animals and human heads, variety of sizes, in terms of 2-Decorations, the use of lotus flowers, grape leaves and artichoke leaves, the influence of Iranian natives and Hellenic arrays, and in terms of 3 - Application, they have had a practical aspect in non-religious rituals (coronation of the king) and non-religious and ritual rituals. In the Achaemenid and Parthian periods, the art of rhyton-making was considered to represent the social status and a symbol of the power of their owners, and due to their relationship with ritual beverages, they are of special importance.

- Misbah and Dadour (2018) investigated the mythological analysis of concepts affecting the form of Achaemenid rhytons. Rhytons are drinking vessels, in the shape of the upper half of the body or in the shape of the head and horns of an animal. According to the opinion of archaeologists such as "Girshman", "Prada", "Hertzfeld" and "Pier Amieh", rhytons were used in Iran more than other ancient civilizations. The purpose of their use was to transfer the mythical forces of the animals used in their construction to people's bodies through drinking liquid. In the Achaemenid period, rhytons were made using precious metals such as gold and silver, and most samples were discovered from Persepolis or valuable Achaemenid treasures. According to the results of this research, in the Achaemenid period, the use of cylindrical and conical rhytons was more common than other types. Mythological animals commonly used in the making of rhytons are lions (with or without wings), cows, goats and rams (animals associated with Tishtar and Bahram). His work has been done. The spread of belief in the gods "Anahita", "Seal (Mitra)", "Tishtar" and "Bahram" has greatly influenced the use of these animals, and among the above gods, Bahram and Mitra, as the most victorious, are more than other gods. have been noticed and their symbols (lion, antelope with wings or without wings and ram) have cast a shadow on the making of rhytons. Finally, according to the results of this research, the four gods Bahram, Anahita, Mehr (Mitra) and Tishtar are considered the most important gods of the Achaemenid era with the characteristics of fertility, revitalization, victory and protection.

- Dadour and Misbah (2011) investigated the influence of two Hellenic and Iranian artistic cultures on the shape and decorations of Parthian rhytons. Containers that are animal-like and have openings for the entry and exit of liquid are classified under the name Rhyton. Rhytons are drinking vessels that are very visible in Iranian art. The creatures used in making these rhytons include all kinds of real and imaginary animals. In the Parthian period, due to the vastness of the Parthian territory, different methods and styles can be considered influential in making these rhytons. The variety of styles in the shape and decorations of Parthian rhytons shows well the variety of artistic methods in the Parthian realm. By carefully analyzing the artistic effects of making rhytons and analyzing the shape, structure and decorations, it is possible to recognize the artistic footprints of different peoples, including the inhabitants of Central Asia, Iranian and Hellenic artists in these objects. The most important methods that can be identified are the Hellenic and Iranian styles. The representation of the Hellenic culture is manifested through the representation of the Olympian gods and the myths related to them, the naked busts of women and the faces of the gods. The influence of Iranian art is related to the use of busts of imaginary animals, domestic animals, and the war between animals. The present study investigates and analyzes Parthian rhytons and tries to propose a logical classification for Parthian rhytons according to this artistic and stylistic diversity.

- Dadour et al. (2009) investigated the shape and form of Iranian rhytons (fourth millennium BC to the end of the Sassanid period). Rhytons are drinking vessels that are very visible in Iranian art. In general, containers that are animal-like and have openings for the entry and exit of liquid are classified under the title of Rhyton. The creatures used in making these rhytons include all kinds of imaginary and real animals. The use of rhytons has been common in Iran since the fourth millennium BC until the end of the Sassanid period. The variety of shape and form in the rhytons shows the various artistic styles in their construction, while the precision in the type of motifs and decorations of these dishes shows the mythological and ritual beliefs that are effective in their formation. The present study, while examining more than 140 samples of Iranian rhytons obtained from different places, studies the structure of rhytons and their shape. Based on this, three categories of cone-shaped, horn-shaped and jar-shaped rhytons can be distinguished. The main decorations of rhytons in different groups are: decorating the end body in the form of different creatures, carving motifs on the body or using decorative rings.

## research method

The present research will be done using the content analysis method. The method of collecting information is documents. This means that the images of rhytons and the historical information related to them will be extracted from various sources such as books, catalogs, the archives of the Cultural Heritage Department or the electronic archives of museums and art collections of the world. For symbological and mythological studies, the studied samples will be classified in the third stage based on the components of age, gender and type. After this division, the analysis of the mythological decorations will be done again regarding rhytons.

## Research schedule

Basic library and teaching studies: 3 months

Collecting images of Raytons from available sources: 4 months (3 parallel with library studies)

Riton symbology: 2 months

Analysis of shape, material, form and decorations of rhytons: 2 months

Final summary: 2 months

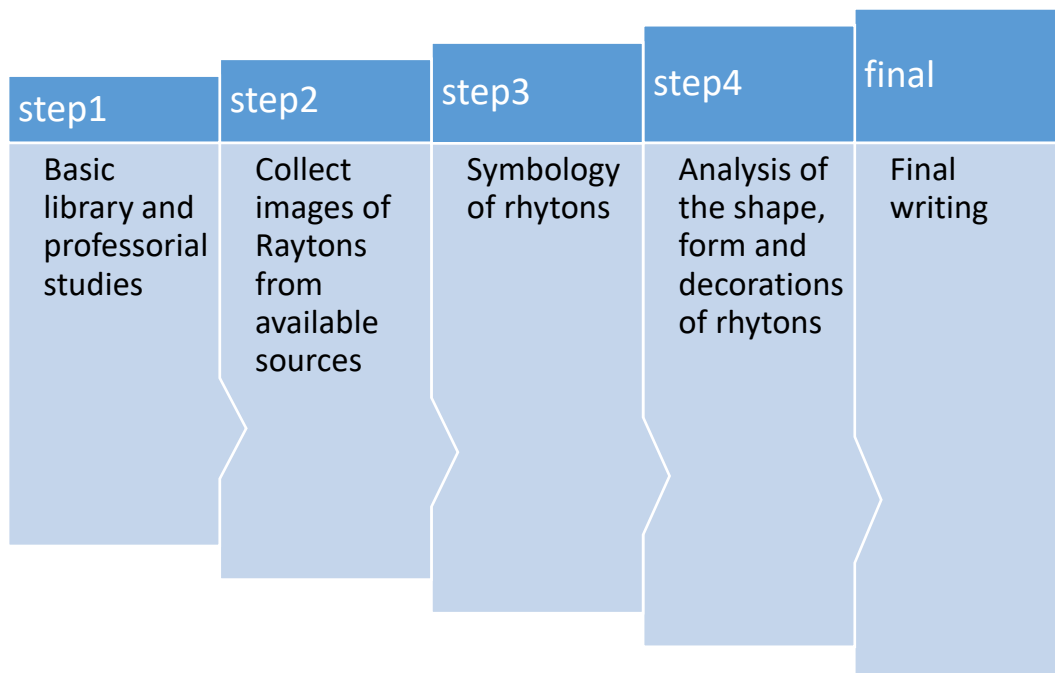


Fig6- Study diagram

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