

# *HISTORY*

## BÉRCZI, Szaniszló

### Mesopotamian Arts<sup>1</sup>

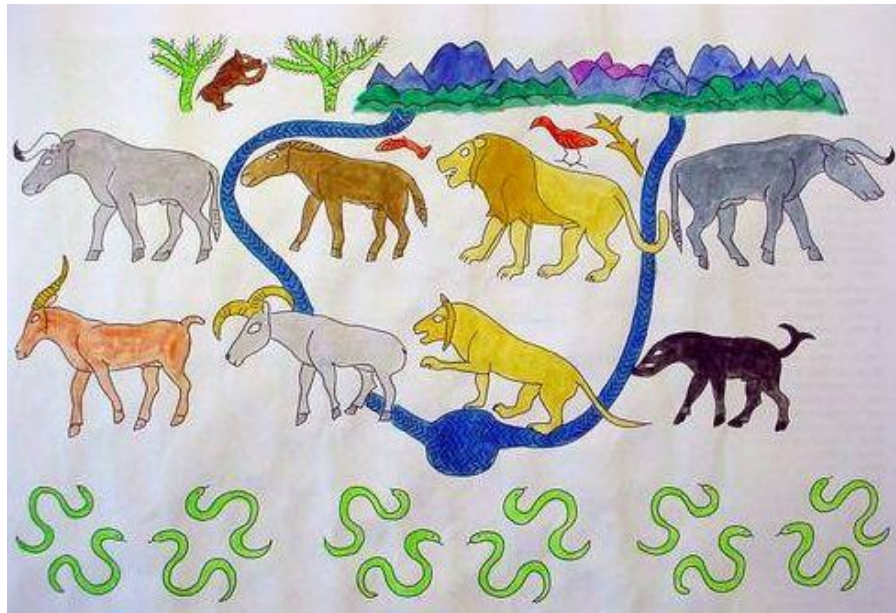
In ancient times, between the broad valleys of two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, pioneering civilisations had been formed, several times. The historical assembly of the Sumerian City States had been gradually organized by the Sumerians in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C. As we know from the history of the Assembly of the Greek City States, there was a second stage of development, that one city state collected enough power to control other states and finally to govern all of them. In Sumer, Ur, Uruk, Kis, and Lagash were such ruling city states. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium Akkadians gradually conquered the Sumerian cities and later the Assyrians and Babylonians organized the rule in Mesopotamia. Although, the new states preserved the benefits of the earlier city organisations of Sumerians and even the language of Sumerians survived until the time of Jesus Christ.



Fig. 1. The front cover of the booklet shows the symbolic ruling position of a princeps (upper figures) and animal fight scene (lower figures).

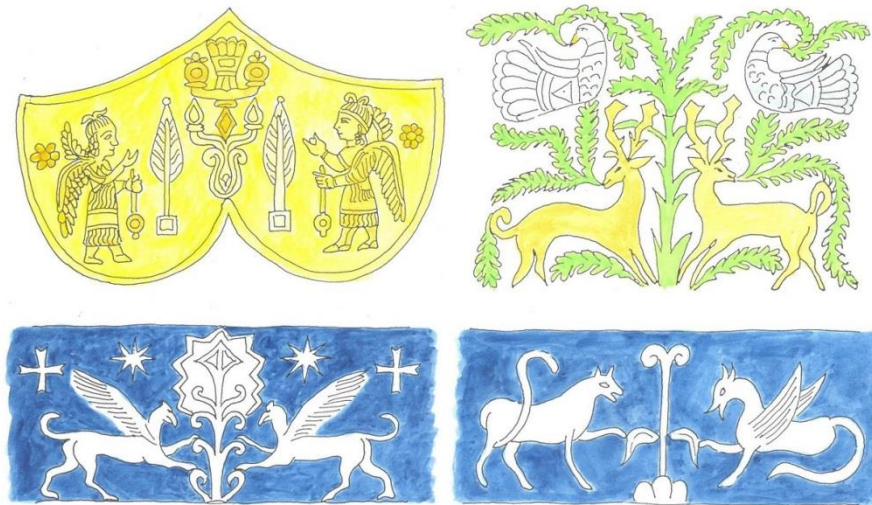
<sup>1</sup> Example issue from the Coloring Booklet Series of Eurasian Arts No. 20. (with the drawings of the author)

The American historian Samuel Kramer listed in 27 points the pioneering achievements of Sumerian inventions of these early times. Some of them in the city civilisation belong to the fields of city organisation, language and writing, astronomy (calendar), and technologies. In industry they used the following: dam building for flood control, water storage for irrigation in agriculture. They were good in craftsmanship of copper-working, glass-making, textile weaving, pottery making on the rolling disk. The Sumerians had also a good school system. Their architecture is also worldwide known by the zikkurats. However, till today the most well-known achievements of Sumerians are writing and astronomy based on calendar.



*Fig. 2. A famous archaeological find: a cup exhibits the map of ancient Mesopotamia: the two great rivers of Tigris and Euphrates. In the background we can see the Caucasus Mountains.*

László Götz summarized the roots of distribution of these inventions in great distances in Eurasia. In his book *The Sun Rises in East* he tells us that the society developed high production power in agriculture which resulted in increased population. Sumerian cities launched settlements for commercialism of rare resources. Their expeditions frequently visited the chains of merchant settlements and transported the metal ores, minerals, and even wood. The settlements launched by the high population explains also the distribution of the cultural achievements to far distances.



Életfajelenetek 2500 évvel ezelőtt a keletkezési kardmarkolaton és közelmúltban készült himzésen. Az ősi kultusz kecskéinek, vagy más patás állatainak, a palma-délfát megporzó királyainak vagy szárnyas griffjeinek helyét később ragadozók, szarvasok és madarak vették át. Az alsó jelenetek pecsétengerekről valók.

*Fig. 3. Life tree scenes from rolling seals and from a sword scabbard found in a Royal Scythian Tomb.  
The life-tree scene has been always a popular topic in the Hungarian folk art.*

László Götz also explains the fact that large regions of Eurasia are populated by peoples speaking agglutinative languages, by the fact that the Sumerian language is an agglutinative language. The most well-known of these languages are: Hungarian, Finnish, Chanty-Manyshi, the Türk languages, Mongolian, and Japanese. Archaeology did not reveal till today the time-sequence relations between the great irrigation cultures in Eurasia. It is known that the Sumerians arrived from Northern Mesopotamia and settled in the delta of the two main streams of Tigris and Euphrates (Hassuna and Samarra Cultures in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> millennium, B.C.). The famous Russian archaeologist, Tolstov investigated the Central Asian irrigation city cultures and he described them as also very old, maybe equally old as the Sumerian cities (Margiana).

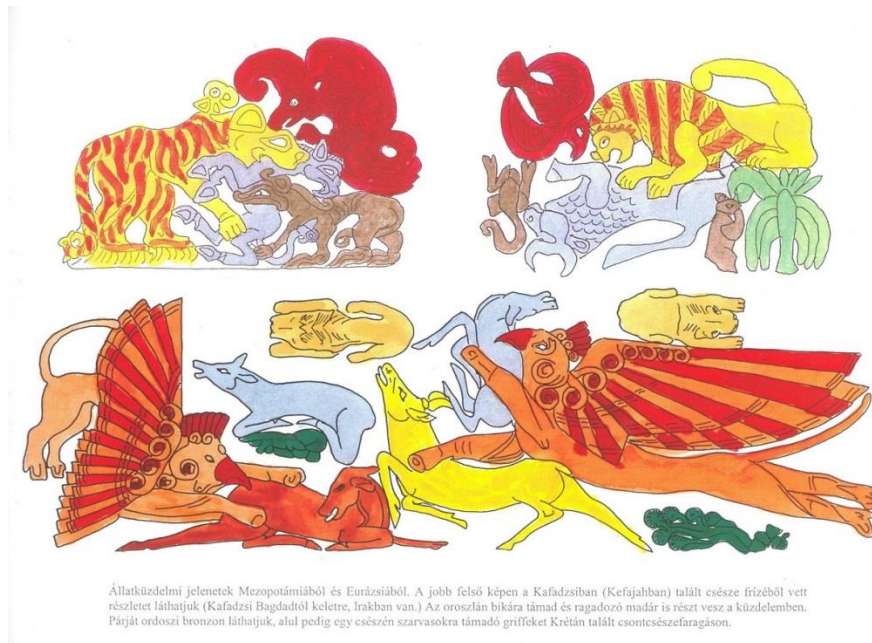


Fig. 4. Artistic representation of the animal fight had dispersed in Eurasia. The upper pair consists of a B type belt buckle of Hun (Xiongnu) Scythian art, the thematic pair to this was found by Sergey Miniaev, a Russian archaeologist, in Khafajah, Iraq, the ancient Mesopotamia. In the lower image the animal fight scene is from Crete.

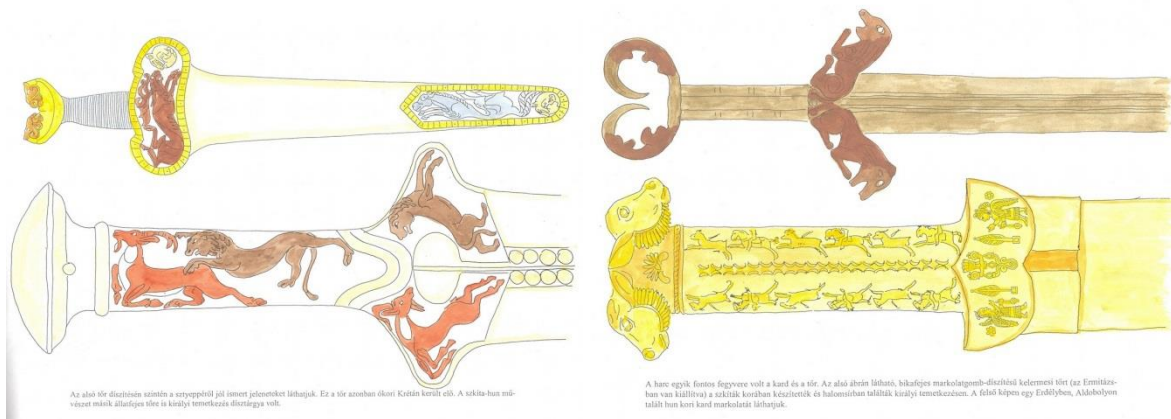


Fig. 5. Innin, the Shumerian goddess with bird legs is standing on animals (lions), between owls (birds of knowledge). A little bit similar arrangement was found in Magyargyerőmonostor, Transylvania, excavated from the church wall. There the young lady with birds legs nurses two snakes.

The Sumerian achievements dissaminated in Eurasia, and that is the reason why there are so many artistic traditions of our days which have roots in the Sumerian world. These are the animal fighting scenes, the life-tree arrangements, the mythology, and one interesting funeral tradition, the gold face-masking. The most ancient car-funeral ritual was also in Sumer, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C. Use of cars in funeral tombs are also known from the Carpathian Basin. The disc excavations from Tatárlaka, Transylvania display and prove that such writing style was present also in the Carpathian Basin.



*Fig. 6. The figures of gods and goddesses frequently occur as shown standing on the back of an animal in the Sumerian cylinder seals. This style and representation had been taken over by later cultures. Even in the cathedral of Pécs (Hungary), in the romanesque old building there were sculptures where angels were standing in this position. Cavalier sport riding is also present represented by postmen standing on the back of two horses, guiding also 3 or even 8 other horses strapped together, which is the descendant of this ancient ruling arrangement.*



Az alásó tőr díszítésén szintén a sarknyéppőrlől jól ismert jeleneteket láthatjuk. Ez a tőr azonban ókori Krétán korábbi. A székely-hun művészet másik alkalmas sere is királyi temetőzés díszítégy volt.

A harc egyik fontos fegyvere volt a kard és a tőr. Az alásó ábrán látható, bíborfényes markolatgomb-díszítésű kelemesi tőr (az Erdmárában van kiállítva) a székely korban készítették és halomsírban találták királyi temetőzésén. A felső képen egy Erdélyben, Áldobolyon talált hun kori kard markolatát láthatjuk.

Fig. 7. Animal fights and life-tree scenes representations on ancient Scythian and Hun (Xiongnu) swords. The Aldoboly Sword (upper right) we could admire in the Scythian Treasures Exhibition of the Hungarian National Museum at Budapest.



A kelemesi szkita halomsírban egy bronz tükör hátsó lapján nyolc jelenet látható. Ezek részben életfajelenetek, részben állatküzdelmek vagy tükörszimmetrikus helyzetben álló alakok. Ezeket különválasztva mutatjuk be itt, de a következő laptükörön a tükört egészben a Szeged-tápei szép keresztelőkút lerajzolt öt jelenetével hasonlítjuk össze.



*Fig. 8. Animal fights and life-tree scenes representations can be seen on the backside of the famous mirror from the Kelermes Scythian Royal Tomb.*

Gradually we can identify which traditions survived till today and can be found as a living tradition emanating from the Mesopotamian culture. The Franciscan priest Árpád Daczó found living traditions in the vicinity of Csíksomlyó of the old Babba Mária tradition. Babba Mária also represents the Moon, and the old Mesopotamian fertility goddess.

The Hungarian Posta, a well-known horse riding sport preserves the times and traditions when the duke of the community exhibited his rule as standing on the back of animals, as known in sculptures from the ancient Eastern cultures of Mesopotamia and even from Urartu. In the London British Museum exhibition the fertility goddess also stands on the back of lions. In Magyargyerőmonostor, Transylvania the young lady nurses two serpents. Lions are carved on the scepter of the Hungarian crowning arms, and this scepter was also known as ruling arm in Sumerian times. The old pair (3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C.) of these lions adorned a "modern" (1<sup>st</sup> millennium A.D.) scepter, which was found in Kis, originating from 2600 B.C.

We can see the old strata of cultural and artistic traditions which go back to the Sumerian art and other arts from Mesopotamia. Our 20<sup>th</sup> booklet of the Eurasian Art series displays some of them. We wish good inventions while painting the drawings and we wish you to find new readings in this extraordinary exciting historical topic.



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