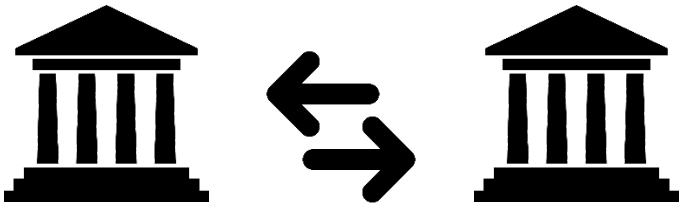

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TYPE:	Article CC:CCG
JOURNAL TITLE:	The pomegranate
USER JOURNAL TITLE:	The Pomegranate : the international journal of pagan studies.
ARTICLE TITLE:	The Shaymaran: Philosophy, Resistance, and the Defeat of the Lost Goddess of Kurdistan
ARTICLE AUTHOR:	Deniz, Dilşa
VOLUME:	22
ISSUE:	2
MONTH:	
YEAR:	2020
PAGES:	221-248
ISSN:	1528-0268
OCLC #:	741251610

Processed by RapidX: 9/27/2022 2:12:55 PM

[*The Pomegranate* 22.2 (2020) 221–248]
https://doi.org/10.1558/pome.38409
ISSN 1528-0268 (print)
ISSN 1743-1735 (online)

The Shaymaran: Philosophy, Resistance, and the Defeat of the Lost Goddess of Kurdistan

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Abstract

This article analyzes the myth of Shaymaran, represented as a half-human and half-serpent. The significance of this representation is, I argue, two-fold: it is significant for her recognition as a goddess, and it is an important testament to the existence of polytheistic religious traditions of goddess-worship among the people of Kurdistan. I analyze the content of such myth that supplies us with important non-material archaeological evidence, particularly relating to the ideology and practice of goddess-worship. By deconstructing this representation and analyzing the content of this myth using a comparative approach vis-à-vis the Abrahamic genesis, I offer important information on the often-overlooked parts of unwritten history of goddess worship, which is continuously sustained through the circulation of this myth and the image. The myth of Shaymaran can therefore also be considered as a counter-narrative, one forged by the oppressed, to a post-colonial dominant monotheistic history and philosophy.

Keywords: Shahmaran; Shaymaran; monotheism; goddess worship; Kurdish religion, Kurdistan; snake goddess, serpent, gender and religion, myths and religion.

1. Dilsa Deniz is a lecturer in the Department of Anthropology, University of California, San Diego.

This article has been dedicated to (Kurdish) Êzidi women who has been brutally attacked by ISIS and similar organizations, armies, and other Kurdish women who are fighting for freedom, the one who had lost their life in fighting against them. I would like to thank to both reviewers of the journal who had kindly went through the article, and provided me with very valuable feedbacks, recommendations. I also would like to thanks to my colleague and friend, Svetlana Peshkova, for her great contribution by reading the article and providing me with great feedbacks. I also would like to thank to IIE-SRF and SAR for their great supports.

Like any other Kurdish child, I was born in a home in Dersim, a Kurdish city in eastern Turkey where Shaymaran's story and image thrived in memories of its occupants. I grew up looking at a picture of a semi snake-semi woman deity which hung from one of our walls. I remember my mother letting us children know from a young age about Shaymaran, the *sha[h]* or the queen of the snakes.

Shaymaran's image was painted on a mirror and hanging on our guest room wall as in many other Kurdish houses. Her physical features matched those of women considered beautiful in the Kurdish society I grew up in. She had big black eyes, long nose, very elegant lips and wore a somber look. Her long and strong tail was almost airborne, as if protecting her head and nicely ornamented neck. And her six legs, bizarrely represented by snake heads, made her seem like she was frozen in time. Roses framed her head. Shaymaran's sad look was complemented by an even sadder mythical story. In this article, I argue that Shaymaran is a goddess, a vestige of the living system of Kurdish spirituality.

The Myth of Shaymaran

She lives in the underground world with her people, the snakes. One day, a young man stumbles upon a cave—in some versions he falls

Figure 1: Traditional and anonymous image of *Shaymaran.*

into a hole or was digging the honey in a cave who was abandoned by his three other friends, who wanted his share—and enters her world. When he regains his bearings after the fall, he realizes he is surrounded by snakes and is taken to Shaymaran. Shaymaran welcomes him and tells him that nobody is supposed to know about her world and, as a result, he could never go back because this could bring harm upon her and her people. She assures him that he would be safe living with them.

As the years pass, the man becomes homesick. At the same time, Shaymaran falls in love with him. He asks to be set free because he does not belong there, but Shaymaran rejects his request. He becomes very upset and unhappy. Noticing this, Shaymaran worries that he will die. She eventually decides to let him go, but with some conditions. She forbids him from ever bathing in public, because the body of any person who has ever seen Shaymaran in person would become covered with distinctive marks every time they touched the water. He agrees to heed this warning and thanks her many times before returning to the world. He keeps a low profile and moves to live away from the city, in the countryside, away from the other people's sight.

At that time, the country was led by a cruel king who had a fatal disease. The king was examined by nearly all the doctors in the country, but no doctor was able to cure him. One day someone told the king that the only remedy for his illness was the blood (in some versions, flesh) of Shaymaran. Therefore, the palace made a public announcement that anyone who had seen Shaymaran must inform the authorities. One day someone sees the young man bathing in the river and notices the marks on his body and calls the authorities (in another version, the king made everybody bathe). The man is captured and asked about Shaymaran's whereabouts. He refuses and is tortured but still would not say (in some versions of the story he confesses, while in others, he is offered a post as vizier). The authorities were afraid that the young man will die in custody, and since they could not risk it because he was the only person who knew where she was, they released him, but had him followed. For a while the man did nothing, waiting until, he thought, the authorities were no longer watching him. One midnight he decides to go to the place in order to warn Shaymaran. Since he was followed, Shaymaran was eventually captured and brought to the palace of the King. The young man was devastated by sorrow and blamed himself for her capture and certain death. When she was taken to

the palace to be killed and give her blood to the king for curing his illness, Shaymaran asked for a favor. She says that since this man had caused her death, she would like to take revenge. She tells the King that the blood (flesh in other versions of the story) from the left side of her body was poison, while that from the right side had medicinal properties (in some versions the sides are reversed, and in some versions the head and bottom, side flesh or blood). She told the king, "You need my blood as medicine in order to recover from your illness. Drink it. But I would like the blood from the poison side to be given to the man who disclosed my location." The king accepted her proposal with pleasure. Shaymaran was slaughtered right after (in some versions of the story, the man was made to do it), and the blood of her left side was given to the young man while the blood of the right side was given to the king. After a while, the king started choking, turned purple, and died, but the young man survived. Thus, it is understood that Shaymaran killed the tyrant king on purpose and saved her beloved. She also transferred her wisdom to him through her blood. As a result, the young man became a medicine man and left the palace to enhance his medical wisdom in the countryside. At the end of the story, this young man became an immortal doctor called *Loqmanê Hekîm*. [2]

The Myth and the Knowledge

For both small, extinct ancient communities and those which have survived until the present day, myths and mythological stories augment the scant repertoire of written and recorded historical narratives. Drawing from mythology, linguistics, ethnology, folklore, comparative religion, and historical documents, Marija Gimbutas argues that mythological tales can be considered as non-material archaeological remnants.[3] As traditional stories that chronicle small changes within an unchanging framework, myths are often passed on from generation to generation orally. Richard Caldwell describes myths as "bearers of important messages about life in general and life within society in particular,"[4] while Nimet Yıldırım, an expert

2. Compare this to the story of Adam, Eve, and the serpent in Genesis 3.

3. Maureen Murdock, "The Goddess and Marija Gimbutas." *Jung Society of Atlanta* (2016), 11.

4. Richard Caldwell, *The Origins of the Gods: A Psychoanalytic Study of Greek Theogonic Myth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 4.

on Iranian mythology describes them as "a treasury, a store accumulating the activities and expressions of society."[5] Robert Graves describes myths as powerful stories that provide a sacred prerogative, containing the institutions, traditions, and belief practices of a distinct region and functioning as a tool for their continuity and metamorphosis.[6]

Myths can be thought of as elements with connections to a timeless and infinite past. They serve as vessels which contain valuable information about social structures, and can help scholars in reconstructing information about an undocumented time and place. In doing so, myths also establish an important interrelation with sacredness. Sacredness serves as the "principal structure on which the continuity of society is built as a fictive formation encapsulating all elements necessary for the continuity of that society."[7] Consequently, any institution necessitating continuity maintains an accumulation of religious content that is based on unusual events—miraculous or tragic—shrouded in a mantle of sacredness and bolstered by myths. Historian of religion and philosopher Mircea Eliade regards the inception of myth to be at a moment outside of time. The scholar treats myths as the stories of events that occurred in a more sacred period and that become a historical text in a sacred form.[8] Therefore, the mythic narratives can be consid-ered as the sacred stories of religion.[9]

Myths, created/produced, whether as a language or an archival technology, received strong attention among scholars representing various disciplines, including anthropology.

The founder of structural anthropology, Claude Levi-Strauss, contends that "myth is language: to be known, myth has to be told; it is a part of human speech. In order to preserve its specificity we must be able to show that it is both the same thing as language, and also something different from it."[10] Edmund Leach's definition, that

5. Nimet Yıldırım, *İran Mitolojisi,* (Istanbul: Pinhan, 2012), 76.

6. Robert Graves and Raphael Patai, *İbrani Mitleri: Tekvin-Yaratılış Kitabı*(Hebrew myths: the book of Genesis) trans. U. Akpur. (İstanbul: Say, 2009), 23.

7. Dilşa Deniz, D*ersim İnanç SembolizmiL Antropolojık Bir Yaklaşım*, (Istanbul: Iletişim, 2012), 86.

8. Mircea Eliade, *İmgeler Simgeler,* Translated by Mehmet Ali Kılıçbay. (Ankara: Gece Yay, 1992), 43-44.

9. David Leeming, *Myth: A Biography of Belief,* Oxford Scholarship Online (November 2003).

10. Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology,* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1963), 209.

"mytho-logical statements conflict with the logical rules of ordinary physical experience but they can make sense 'in the mind' so long as the speaker and his listener, or the actor and his audience, share the same conventional ideas about the attributes of metaphysical time and space and of metaphysical objects"[11] supports Levi-Strauss's definition. However, Christopher Johnson believes that it is "more than a language, more than simply information, from the point of view of its function, myth would therefore seem to be a kind of information technology, an instrument, a 'logical model' or 'logical tool.'"[12] Robert Segal takes the myth to be "the ancient and primitive counterpart to modern science,"[13] to answer the one who consider myths as only folk tales. And majority of myths are, as Hassan explains, "often sacred and often treating transcendental themes like death, afterlife, creation, and gods"[14] also goddesses.

In the goddess-based religion women are the center of human sexuality, and the fertile potential of animals and plants is the surrounding earth.[15] Shaymaran is an important example of that. Considering the defeat of goddess-based religions, as depicted in the *Shaymaran,* myths have often recorded important social transformations brought about by unforeseen and/or tragic events in which the metamorphosis of the nuclei of these fantastical stories into myths is influenced by the community's defeat or suffering, rather than victory.

Kurdish History and Its Relationship with Shaymaran

Kurds are the largest stateless group in the world, despite their strong ethnic identity for over two thousand years. Historian Mehrdad Izady states that "there are no 'beginnings' for Kurdish history and people. Kurds and their history are the end products of

11. Edmund Leach, *Culture and Communication, the Logic by which Symbols are Connected: An Introduction to the Use of Structuralist Analysis in Social Anthropology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 70.

12. Christopher Johnson, *Claude Levi-Straus:The Formative Years*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2003), 102.

13. Robert A. Segal, "The Myth and Ritual Theory: An Overview." *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 6, (1997): 4.

14. Ihab H. Hassan, "Towards a Method in Myth," *Journal of American Folklore* 65, no. 257 (1952): 206.

15. David Leeming, "Religion and Sexuality: The Perversion of a Natural Marriage" *Journal of Religion and Health* 42, no. 2 (2003): 103.

thousands of years of continuous internal evolution and the assimilation of new peoples and ideas introduced sporadically into their land."[16] Therefore, they are considered to be the descendants of all those who ever came to settle in Kurdistan, such as the Guti, Kurti, Mede, Mard, Carduchi, Gordyene, Adianbene, Zila, and Khaldi, and also migrated Indo-European tribes to the Zagros Mountains some four thousand years ago.[17]

The earliest evidence shows that a unified and distinct culture (and possibly, ethnicity) by people inhabiting the Kurdish mountains dates back to the Halaf culture of 8,000–7,400 years ago. There are also traces of record-keeping, pottery-making and glazing, weaving, metallurgy, and urbanization dating back between 8,000 and 12,000 years ago in Kurdistan.[18] The first mention of the Kurds in historical records, according to Barbara Robson, is from Sumerian cuneiform writings about "the land of the Karda "in 3000 BCE. From the earliest times the Kurds obeyed their tribal leaders with very limited interference from outside. The lack of interference was mostly due to the inaccessibility of the area in which they lived, and also their

16. Mehrdad Izady, "Origin of the Kurds," *Kurdistanica 1992*, http://kurdistanica.com/origin-of-the-kurds/.

17. Kerim Yildiz and Mark Muller ,*The European Union and Turkish Accession: Human Rights and the Kurds* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 4.

18. Izady, "Origins of the Kurds."

reputation as fierce warriors.[19] As such, Kurdish culture and mythology can be considered comparatively to be quite well preserved through the history, as argued about the myth of Shaymaran.

The use of title of *Sha[h]* is mainly known after Cyrus II's conquest of Medea, an early Kurdish state. The term, believed to be descended from Old Persan *xšāyaθiya* (king),[20] which also is considered to be borrowed from the Median language and compared to Avestan *xšaϑra-*, "power" and "command,"[21] means "royal, king".[22] Median was spoken in northwestern Iran and has numerous loanwords in Old Persian. Avesta is the religious form thus "king" should not be understood in the present perception of king but a religious title as well. The term *sha[h]* was first used by a Persian ruler, Cyrus II, after he conquered the Median kingdom, and its etymological connection with the old Median language could, therefore, mean that is is an appropriated Median title—thus we could trace it back to an older Kurdish origin.

The name Shaymaran is made up of two words: *sha[h]* which appears in Kurdish as "Shâ," and *mar*. In Kurdish *Shâ,* means the ruler and *mar* means snake, while *an* is a suffix that makes words plural. In other word *Shâ+(y)+mar+an* means the sha[h] of the snakes. As mentioned above, in the Old Median language, Shâ[h] most probably has a religious content, which positions her not just a ruler, but a sacred ruler. *Shaymaran* should therefore be considered not an ordinary myth, but a religious one. Composed of an image and a story, perceived as a valuable, semi-sacred being, and always having, a dynamic and intense relationship with the Kurdish people permits us to consider her position as not an ordinary tale, but something more connected, committed, crucial. Accordingly, despite thousands of years of monotheist Islamic pressure, her image and myth, transmitted from generation to generation, and continues to be part of Kurdish home and everyday life. In that regard, other peoples such as Persian, Assyrian, Armenian Arabs, and Turks might be familiar with the myth, however, the Kurdish connection

19. Barbara Robson, "Iraqi Kurds, Their History and Culture," *Cultural Orientation Resource Center,* 1996, http://www.culturalorientation.net/learning/backgrounders,7.

20. Prods Oktor Skjærvø, "An Introduction to Old Persian," *Harvard.edu*, 2016, 105. https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~iranian/OldPersian/opcomplete.pdf.

21. "Median language," Wikipedia, *https://en.wiakipedia.org/wiki/Median_language.*

22. University of Texas, "Old Iranian Online,Lesson 8: Old Persian, Reading Textual and Analysis 27," https://lrc.la.utexas.edu/eieol/aveol/80.

with the myth; is much more particular. Thus while the myth can be a folk tale for other nations/peoples, for the Kurds, it is something deeper and more connected at both the historical and contemporary levels.[23]

Shaymaran's dynamic presence in daily Kurdish life prevails despite the conversion of the majority of Kurds to Islam and Islamic prohibitions and punishment (including the death penalty) for displaying this type of artistic work that shows a human image. According to Islam only God can create a human [image].[24] Despite that, Kurds have not stopped painting, engraving, printing, and embroidering her image or displaying it on their walls. Even the predominant depiction of woman and snake as evil in the Abrahamic Genesis and Islam has failed to alter the Kurds' positive regard for Shaymaran. Moreover, even though "the goddess myth was debased and devalued, it did not go away, but continued to exist in disguise"[25] as in the case of Shaymaran. Therefore her importance in Kurdish daily life continued as an amulet to summon her mystic power, and that is why her image has continued to be in great demand. This might be the reason that Kurds are not seen as "proper Muslims" by other Muslims and the reason their Arabic and Turkish Muslim neighbors denounce them as "the children of evil." "Evil" in this case most probably refers to their previous worshipping of a goddess and to the position of women in Kurdish society.

The situation of women in Kurdish society today still retains important traces of traditional women's power in both daily life and the sacred realm. For instance, Kurdish women have always been untouchable in the public sphere despite the domestic violence and unequal position of women in the society due to patriarchal domination. Kurds are known to have bloody conflicts—blood

23. As mentioned above, contemporary Kurds are consisted of various ancient communities. In that case if we accept her as goddess, that means she was worshipped widely among these communities—but not by all—and thus conserved by those groups that contemporary Kurdish ethnicity emerged from. Except for the Turks—they are from the central Asia and arrived more recently after conquering Anatolia—the other ethnic communities such as Persian, Assyrians, Armenians, and Arabs are the autochthon peoples of the region; thus it is quite possible for them to have knowledge about her, even they did not worship her.

24. Spahic Omer, "Islam's Prohibition of Drawing Images and Erecting Statues," *Islamicity,* June 19, 2019, https://www.islamicity.org/20587/islams-prohibition-of-drawing-images-and-erecting-statues/.

25. Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image* (London: Penguin Group, 1991) xiii.

feuds—among themselves. If any woman comes upon such a scene and takes off her veil—the white thin cover called *lecheg* – and drops it on the ground, all men engaged in the fight must stop. This can be evaluated an example of woman's sacred role in society from a deep past, and most probably, a symbolic representation of the goddess' command that society still obeys.

Kurdish women's involvement in the fight against ISIS is another example of this tradition. Although they have no state behind them, Kurdish society continues to fight against the most criminal power created in the name of religion, who are widely involved in committing crimes against women. While other Islamic countries keep their silence, Kurds, a stateless nation in the Middle East, have fought with female combatants against ISIS. Thus, it can be argued that the Kurds still have a strong connection with their past faith.

I therefore argue that, despite a decrease in attention, particularly among young generations, Shaymaran is a goddess, a vestige of the living system of Kurdish spirituality, brought into existence by a story and visual symbols. In the following sections, I demonstrate how Shaymaran is not only an archeological remnant in a classical definition, but also a goddess whose presence is evident in Kurdish art and myth, which has permeated the society for centuries and "a living symbol of indigenous spirituality today."[26]

Methodology Matters: How To Do It?

As is the case of Shaymaran, goddess-worshipping and the symbolism of relationship between women and animals constitute an important subject in the history of religion and, therefore, need to be carefully explored. The persistent association between animals and women creates links between goddesses and animal/plant world, "has been discovered in Scandinavia, in Siberia, in the Caucasus, among the North American Indians and the ancient Celts"[27] and, in the case of Shaymaran in Kurdistan, in the Near East, Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia.

From her observations on material unearthed during excavations, Marija Gimbutas concludes that "often-repeated forms of

26. Such as glass painting, copper handcrafts, embroidery, ceramics, and recently classical painting depicting Shaymaran among the Kurds.

27. Sandra Bilington and Miranda Green, *The Concept of the Goddess* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1996).

symbolism, such as bird and snake imagery, are associated with these female goddess forms."[28] Further, representations of hybrid forms of half human and half animal are found cross-culturally within sacred mythologies (e.g., a centaur in Greek mythology). However, the representations of a figure consisting of a half woman and half snake seem to be relatively restricted in number. According to Gimbutas, "from the seventh millennium B.C. and throughout Neolithic times, the Snake Goddess is invariably portrayed."[29] Like Shaymaran, Cihuacoatl, a pre-Conquest Peruvian deity,[30] Manasa in Indian mythology, and Medusa in Greek mythology, and the Snake-Goddess Eileithyia[31] at Gournia in the East Crete are considered examples of divinities represented by hybrid women and snake figures.

The representations of half-animal and half-human (or creatures that are the union of more than one species) recur repeatedly and cross-culturally throughout history, thereby establishing a connection with the extensive unknown past of these communities and cultures and their mythic, societal, and religious (spiritual) ties. For this reason, it is thought-provoking to consider the nature of this relationship and trace the historical trajectory of the religious belief starting from totems, the first deific constructions, to animal gods, to gods/goddesses, and to a banishment of women and animals from the public sphere of religious dogma.

I suggest that the survival of the union of the two creatures, and their representation, has special meaning in the context of a modern day religio-cultural codex, particularly in the post-colonial era, and therefore needs special attention.

The two sides of this bodily union, the snake as a species and the woman as a gender, bring together two separate creatures each of which is cursed, stripped of power, and expelled from all spaces associated with political power. Both snakes and women are

28. Carmen Blacker, "The Mistress of the Animals in Japan: Yamanokami," in *The Concept of the Goddess*, ed. Miranda J. Green and Sandra Billington, (London: Routledge, 1996), 178.

29. Marija Gimbutas, "The Temples of Old Europe," *Archaeology* 33, no. 6 (1980): 45.

30. Kay A. Read, "More Than Earth: Cihuacoatl as Female Warrior, Male Matron, and Inside Ruler," in *Goddesses Who Rule*, ed. Elizabeth Bernard and Beverly Moon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 51–67.

31. E. O. James, *The Cult of the Mother Goddess: An Archeological and Documentary Study* (New York: Praeger, 1959), 129.

described as potentially bad, evil, and cunning, in keeping with the creation of evil or deviltry within folk culture under the influence of newer monotheistic religious traditions. With a frequency that cannot be coincidental, the continued existence of both creatures is validated by influential religious and political discourses. Therefore, the obvious question is why the representation of union of these two cursed creatures, continues to be sanctified and arguably venerated within the Kurdish community? Are these practices of veneration related to the philosophy of a Goddess-worship? Are these persistent vestiges of the past connected to the present cultural understanding?

To answer these questions, I use deconstructive content and discourse analysis of the myth and rich symbolism of the image. Jacques Derrida's deconstruction approach looks at the relationship between the text and meaning, yet Clifford Geertz stresses the meaning as cultural and interpretative.[32] As an insider of such culture, I aim, as Schier expresses, "to understand and interpret the past situation through culturally transmitted image -and the narrative- of the past"[33] in the present time.

In such a situation I am looking into both ethno-cultural and religio-cultural aspects of the myth. Thus, I am using a comparative approach with the Abrahamic myth of Genesis also an important part of this analysis. Such comparison helps me to unearth information about the philosophy and the history of women-deities in general, *Shaymaran* in particular.

As mentioned above, despite the long history of the Kurds, the history, culture, art, mythology etc. of Kurds have been purposefully blocked and made invisible by the colonizers until recently. The involvement of Kurdish scholars is quite recent and in small numbers, with countless obstacles raised against Kurdish scholars due to the ongoing colonialization by the colonizers. For instance, Kurdish cultural artifacts have mainly been registered in the name and language of the occupying states as their own. Thus, the deliberate translation hindered the etymological connection of Kurdish language, and thus culture. Changed spellings often disguise origin, which leads to syntactical corruption. Although the term

32. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

33. Kerstin Schier, "The Format of Cultural Memory," in *The Goddess's Embrace: Multifaceted Relations at the Ekāmranātha Temple Festival in Kanchipuram* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2018), 187.

"Shahmaran" is widespread, I prefer "Shaymaran," as used by Kurdish Alevis. My reason is that this group of people had less contact with other religious traditions, as they persisted in their original religion and lived in remote highlands. I find this spelling preferable for etymological reasons.

Languages are not only the means of communication, but more importantly cultural and historical archives of the society. The words that have been translated to another language thus become an important obstacle for the scholars of Kurdish studies. In the case of this study, to be able to analyze the myth, the etymology of which is the main connection to the culture and history, the original spelling among Kurdish Alevis plays a crucial role. Thus the concerns about separating myth with its constitutive "political, historical, and cultural contexts,"[34] in the case of this study, have so far aimed to safeguard meaning, both diachronically and synchronically. The Kurdish original pronunciation and spelling, which is crucial for content and discourse analyses and establishes the cultural connection, has been the starting point. As such, the term is used as Shaymaran instead of the more widespread "Shahmaran."

Shaymaran is a Goddess: Deconstruction, Dualism and Balance

Dualism is a characteristic of goddess-worship. This characteristic appears in Shaymaran as womanhood-manhood, nature-human, death-life, love-hate, and compassion-oppression among other dualisms. In the presence of the snake, poison and antidote in the same body—in other words pain and cure, problem and solution in one vessel—continues the intertwined dualist imagery. Similarly, it appears in representations of earth and the underworld, division of the universe into humankind/men (the lords of the earth), and women/snakes (rulers of the underworld). Through the transference of immortality/wisdom from the realm of underworld to earth, this inverted multiple narrative can be seen from another, different, angle.

The two-headed nature of the figure of Shaymaran and the meaning categories attached to one head as human and one as animal are striking. They question the association of the human part with a female quality, and the animal part with a male quality.

34. Jenna Reinbold, "Sacred Myth, Political Myth," in *Seeing the Myth in Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 24.

When viewing the image from a psychodynamic perspective, the question of whether this should be seen as antagonism or amity, between humankind and nature is not readily available. Considering the balance of intellect and power, another question arises: is it an intentional reference to the alliance of male/physical strength—war/resistance/military might—with the female intelligence, management, and willpower, as part of an administrative division of labor in Kurdish communities? Dwell on the image is a bit more: look at the feet. The image's numerical equality in the feet carrying Shaymaran's body should be noted, together with the use of footless snakes as a base, while utilizing the snake heads as feet and thereby, in some way, making the heads the feet.[35] We could also say that the lower heads "represent either lower members of the divine or hierarchy or human or divine life issuing from her womb."[36]

View the image more carefully. With the lower and upper part of the *Shaymaran* consisting of heads, the body becomes a framework of an absolute head (of logic and information) and therefore, of wisdom. While the decoration of the upper heads with crowns symbolizes the absolute power of intellectualism, the mouflon horns or phallic-tip attachment to the head are the symbol of fertility[37] as goddess quality.

The heads of both the woman and the snake can therefore be seen as symbolic essences of knowledge and wisdom as well as symbolic representations of the societal architecture and social hierarchy. In such a reading, while authority/power can be seen represented by the top heads, the subjects/basis/principal carriers have been symbolically designed in the image by the lower heads. This can also be considered as the foundation of the societal structure consisting of imagery and discourse. Thus in this imagery we can locate an expression of *unity*, which represents the joining of the subject and administrative power. The usage of a "principal head" adds another layer of meaning, showing the importance of humankind to animal, and female to male which can be evaluated as the goddess's main quality.

35. A derogatory concept explaining how the lower class joined the decision-making process.

36. Reinbold, "Sacred Myth," 24.

37. William Culican, *Ancient Peoples and Places: The Medes and Persians*, (New York: Praeger, 1965), 24.

Let's move to the neck area of the image. A necklace indicates the value of the neck on which it is placed and therefore adds another layer of meaning to the imagery of Shaymaran. The necklace is both a symbol of value in itself and also gives value to the neck on which it is worn. Moreover, necklaces or jewelry are the symbol of power and status, but they also are used as amulets by the goddesses for personal and communal protection. According to Isaac Mendelsohn, "when the mother-goddess Ishtar descended to the nether world … she attired herself in all the jewelry in her possession, not forgetting her amulets—charms which she wore on her body to protect herself from evil spirits in the nether world."[38] Nancy Serwint quotes from Wolkstein and Kramer (1983) and states that despite that the nude figures of goddess on the clay plaques, significantly these females were usually wearing heavy necklaces, which was a reference to the goddess readying herself for lovemaking [to Dumuzi], with the agate necklace of fertility."[39] Artemis, a Great Mother Goddess "was wearing a necklace with constellations of the Zodiac as well.[40] The Aztec goddess Coatlicue has a necklace of hands, hearts, and a skull,[41] and Shaymaran has a very distinctive heart-shaped necklace with lots of beads, which supports her goddess quality. This is possibly an amulet as well as a symbol of value. In any case, it is clear that it has been used as symbol of the value of both the woman and the snake. Thus, women and men's necklaces reinforce the symbolism of [goddess] feminine and masculine energy, both containing and giving value to their wearers.

The more elaborate nature of the female necklace and use of a plainer, bracelet-like necklace on the snake, might point to a level of relative importance of the duality. This might also be a reference to the art of gender-based decoration, i.e. the act of attributing relative

38. Isaac Mendelsohn, *Religions of the Ancient Near East: Sumero-Akadian Religious Texts and Ugaritic Epics*, trans. S. N. Kramer (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1955), xvii.

39. Nancy Serwint, "Aphrodite And Her Near Eastern Sisters: Spheres of Influence," in *Engendering Aphrodite: Women and Society in Ancient Cyprus*, ed. Nancy Serwint and Diane Bolger (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2002), 325–50.

40. Mara Lynn Keller, "Divine Mistress of Nature, Plants and Animals in Ancient Greece: An Ecofeminist Perspective," in *The Land Remembers Us, Women, Myth and Nature,* by Mary Jo Neitz and Sid Reger, 83-100, (New York: Women and Myth Press, 2020), 87.

41. "Coatlicue," *Encyclopedia Britannica,* https://www.britannica.com/topic/Coatlicue.

value on the basis of ornamentation, also acts as an indication of gender. In this light, a good question to ask is whether historically the art of personal ornamentation has always been more acceptable among women and not men? The answer for that could be positive, since it is obvious from the dress of the snake segment which is a natural scaly skin, whereas the woman segment of Shaymaran's body is dressed in a costume revealing the necklace—the token of femininity and womanhood. Perceptions of women's sexualities and snake figures are governed by these factors as well. In the image, because of the controlled dress of the woman, the viewer's attention is also drawn to the snake (and subsequently masculinity) and its nakedness. The clothed and naked state of womanhood and manhood are redefined on the basis of this naturalness. Therefore, the representations of the woman and the snake are gendered. Yet, this gendered difference is constructed on a balance that differs from Abrahamic monotheist religions' approach.

Unlike Abrahamic monotheist religions, goddess-worship is characteristically based on a strong gender duality, not as an opposition (male vs. female) but androgynal co-constitutive, symbolizing fertility. According to E. O. James, "in the concept of deity male and female elements have always been essential features, and divine androgyny has been a recurrent phenomenon in the Goddess cult everywhere reflecting the primeval cosmic unity from which all creation has been thought to have emerged."[42] Similarly, Erich Neumann argues that "the unshapely figures of the Great Mother … as cult object not only of women, but also of men, represents archetypal symbol of fertility."[43] Joan Goodnick Westenholz underlines that "it has even been suggested that deities originally had no gender and were only differentiated in this way during this period, when they took on human form."[44] Carl Olson notes that Ishtar, the most popular goddess of ancient Mesopotamian religion, "was responsible for fertility and for victory in war, neither of which was viewed as a particularly feminine or masculine trait."[45] Likewise Kay Read expresses that "the sixteenth- century Nahua (Aztec) goddess

42. James, *The Cult of Mother Goddess*, 245.

43. Eric Neumann, *The Great Mother* (University of Princeton, 1955), 129.

44. Joan Goodnick Westenholz, "Goddesses of the Ancient Near East 3000-1000 BC," in *Ancient Goddesses: The Myths and the Evidence,* ed. Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris (Madison: The University of Wisconsin, 1998), 68.

45. Carl Olson, *The Book of the Goddesses Past and Present: An Introduction to Her Religion* (New York: Crossroads, 1983), 1–6.

Cihuacoatly (snakewoman) … appears in both female and male roles."[46] William Culican mentions the metal work figurines from Luristan,[47] and states that "over fifty of these standards are known, and in the majority of pieces the characteristic of the anthropomorphic central figure are female, or at least androgynous."[48] Hence, gender duality is an important trait of the divinity of fecundity, particularly in ancient Near Eastern and Mesopotamian religions. As Westenholz points out, another manifestation of the androgyny of goddess representation was "the conception of pairs of divinities, male and female."[49] The androgynist character that is particular to the fertility goddess, the Mother Goddess cult, as ina large part of the Near East, in Kurdistan, becomes more meaningful in the form of Shaymaran and offers evidence for her being a fertility goddess/Mother Goddess. Margaret Ehrenberg points out the several thousands of years of worshiping the fertility goddess in Anatolia and further states that the variety of the earlier Anatolian figurines could possibly be the representation of the same goddess,[50] which we can also argue that *Shaymaran* represents ancient Kurdish geography.

Paganism/Polytheism and Monotheism: Signs of Confrontation on the Body of Shaymaran

The common creation myth shared by the Abrahamic monotheistic religions contains a narrative of an alliance between snake and woman, which can be seen to represent the conflict between monotheistic belief systems and polytheism. This Abrahamic narrative transpired during the building of the monotheistic dominant discourse following a time of poly-goddesses and gods. This narrative, which can be read as an expression of the codification and control of women, is interesting in its representation of men, particularly with regard to perceptions of nudity. Here, attention should be drawn to the fact that nakedness—naturalness—is thought to be bad and shameful by a constructed social judgment and that of the deity (e.g.,

46. Read, "More than Earth," 51–67.

47. The Lurs are a tribe of Kurds of Iran with branches among Kurds in Turkey; they are called Lori. Interestingly, in recent sources, Lurs are shown as different from Kurds.

48. Culican, *Ancient Peoples and Placeser,* 24.

49. Westenholz, "Goddesses of the Ancient Near East," 65.

50. Margaret Ehrenberg, *Women in Prehistory* (London: British Museum, 1989), 73.

the Judeo-Christian God), showing very clearly the efforts to build and establish the founding policies of a new ideology. In Abrahamic monotheist mythology, nudity is conflated with wrongness/badness/shame (Genesis 3:8), and women and snakes are singled out as the fomenters of guilt and sin. Subsequently, in these myths, by describing the *opening of the eyes* (Genesis 3:7), or in other words *gaining consciousness,* as bad, affirm the desirability of an obedient, unconscious human model. Thus with the detailing of punishment for those who make the wrong choice (sin), there is a discourse legitimizing the desire to stay unconscious of one's own nakedness or to stay away from obtaining knowledge and transforming oneself into a mortal divinity. Likewise, in the story of Adam and Eve, contrary to that of Shaymaran, the snake becomes a symbol of sin, playing the role of deceiver and becoming a symbol of hatred.

In the constructed hierarchy in the Abrahamic myth of creation, divinity/superiority is reserved for masculinity. Yet the image of Adam does not appear to be of someone who possesses this quality. Although defined as less intelligent than the woman and the snake in the story, he fits the envisaged human typology as malleable and obedient. On the basis of this characteristic, he (Adam) is promoted and rewarded by God (Genesis 3:20–22) even if, at first, he is somewhat rebuked. Despite "the crime"[51] committed by Adam, he is seen to have been enticed by woman (read "Satan"); he is therefore excused, based on his passivity in this context, when God tips the balance in favor of Adam (read "men"), demonstrating the powerful moment when the strands of monotheist religion and male-dominant discourse interlink.

Set against this backdrop, the depiction of women as the carriers of knowledge, the declaration of female intelligence as dangerous, and the enactment of a series of measures to prevent women from using any of their skills to assert their position in the public realm (reaching horrific proportions)[52] reveal the psychology behind the persecution, torture, and execution of thousands of women as witches, including men accused of witchcraft in smaller numbers compared to women. Those women, who dared to access and produce knowledge using the human effort and logic forbidden to them—witches—were punished, pre-empting the creation of

51. Reaching for the forbidden fruit.

52. During the late Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Early Modern Periods, particularly the 1500s–1600s.

feminist ideals posing a threat to patriarchal rule, thereby consolidating the power of a male dominated social structure. In the story of Shaymaran, a forcefully created hierarchy of power supplanted a social structure which allowed women equal access to knowledge. From here on, we can trace the emergence of a process of determination of social status based solely on physical/masculine strength.

While constructing contrasts, the juxtaposition of the mortality of Shaymaran's body with the immortality of knowledge validates the role of intelligence as the path to goodness. This story also shows how the threat of bodily harm or death is a way in which the story of creation encapsulates the institutionalization of the sovereignty of physical strength. Therefore, in the myth of creation, the immortality of Shaymaran is negated through her punishment (for her transgressions) by death, through which death and mortality get sanctioned as a punishment in religious cosmology. In this way, instead of the myths of immortality and eternity attained through reincarnation, the belief in a *single discourse of another world* is imposed, while the inverse of a situation that is meant to contradict Shaymaran*'s* story is established through the imagery of a woman, snake, and a man. Thus there is a reversal of the hierarchy of power embodied within Shaymaran's myth. In this myth, the most positive imaginary construct is the forgiving goddess/snake/woman, and the negative qualities are the attributes of the cruel king/male/ruler. On the contrary, the monotheist power hierarchy positions the harsh, punishing god/force at the top, followed by the tricked (innocent/pure) Adam/man and the woman who evidently occupies a much lower status, and at the very bottom the sly/demonic snake. By moving away from the balance of contrasts, the order/gradation, which goes from top to bottom and reconstructed form of "good" to "bad," is instituted.

The god (placed) at the top is the sole owner of everything—the underworld and earth. A defined arena of the god's force/power, detailing what will be done and what will not be done, is created by subjecting the four beings (god, Adam, woman and snake) to a harsh evaluation. This evolution limits them to a categorization of either good or bad and negates the possibility of the existence of grey areas. The discourse of prohibitions, transmitted with specific orders for punishment (by God), which was dealt out to perpetrators according to the degree of crime, is vigorously imposed, in a manner completely counter to the more tolerant dualism embodied in the myth of Shaymaran. Seen in comparison to this myth, these

impositions create a powerful and distinct contrast between the discourse of the two stories. The most important of these can be seen in the concepts of this earth, the afterlife.

In the discourse of faith surrounding the myth of Shaymaran, the emphasis on eternity means that the world inhabited by Shaymaran is both above ground—in this world—and in an underworld. The contrast is in the form of the next life: whereas in the Abrahamic tradition we see the existence of *another world,* separate from this world, which is established as principal. This principal world is divided into two sections: the heaven in which the submissive/obedient subjects are rewarded; and the hell in which those who carry out prohibited acts, especially those trying to attain knowledge, are punished. Thus, the conflicting point of both of these myths comes into play here. Whilst one angle defends the eternity of the one world/life in this cosmic universe between the life forms, the other formulates the eternity of life as a kind of free passage between the two worlds. In this sense, the interpretations and conflicts of the two beliefs on the subject of the journey of the spirit emerge as another area where these two opposite religious philosophies/powers struggle against each other.

For example, in Shaymaran's myth the blood from the part of her body containing wisdom remains eternally on earth in another body. This is in fact the main premise of the belief in reincarnation, a belief that is contrary to Abrahamic tradition. Consequently, within the Shaymaran myth, it is possible to discern a religious discourse that effectively preserve the belief in reincarnation and fostered resistance to the idea. While in Paganism, the attainment of eternal life through reincarnation is a fundamental part of the religious and mythological discourse, in the shared myth of Abrahamic monotheism this belief slowly became defunct (the resurrection of Jesus for example) and was later rejected completely, especially within Islamic theology. Zehra Arat, a Turkish scholar, argues that Islam is more spiritually egalitarian compared to the Judeo-Christian tradition. For instance, the Pagan tradition, which believed that the angels were female, is challenged by the Islam theology in favor of both sexes[53] This theology also made Adam and Eve equally responsible

53. Zehra F. Arat, "Women's Human Rights in Islam: Revisiting Quranic Rights," in *Human Rights, New Perspectives, New Realities*, ed. Adamantia Pollis and Peter Schwab (London: Lynne Reiner, 2000), 76.

for the "the guilt."[54] Yet both these examples are problematic from the viewpoint of equality, for they still criticize the man who obeys the woman's idea or command. This is a typical reaction against the existence of women in the sacred realm and a refusal of any sacred position that is reserved for women. Accordingly the named angels who had particular duty and power in Islam, and also Judaism and Christianity are all male.[55] Moreover, in the Abrahamic tradition "it is not from woman's body that man is born. Rather, woman is birthed from a rigid, elongated part of a masculinized androgyne—a phallus,"[56] Adam's ribs, which is a symbolic seizure of the women's womb and a removal of goddesses from the regeneration process.

The continuity of wisdom in another body can, therefore, be considered as symbolic of the persistence and resistance of goddess worship and belief in reincarnation within the monotheist mythology. Since wisdom is an important characteristic of goddesses, in particularly, Shaymaran, as the carrier of the wisdom and a transformer, thus shows further evidence of being a goddess. The evidence for her being as a transformer in the myth is that whoever sees her displays patterns on their body after touching water. This is her mystical power of transformation—a quality of goddesses—by which she automatically creates patterns on bodies and also transforms mortal to immortal.

The knowledge of healing is another typical characteristic of goddesses, symbolized in Shaymaran's serpent part. The snake is a symbol of medicine[57] and thus the action of the knowledge of healing, the life. The serpent's venom, the killing power, is another important quality of goddesses, the power of death. Marija Gimbutas states that "in the cycle of life, the feminine force—the goddess—not only manifested in birth, fertility and life sustenance, she also embodied death, decay, and regeneration. As death wielder, she loomed as a terrifying raptor, a poisonous snake,"[58] as is perfectly seen in

54. Ibid, 74.

55. Osama Youussef, "Muslim Belief in Angels," August 26, 2019, https://www.alazharquranteaching.com/muslim-belief-angels/.

56. Eric K. Silverman, "The Waters of Mendangumeli: A Masculine Psychoanalytic Interpretation of a New Guinea Flood Myth—and Women's Laughter," *Journal of American Folklore* 29, no. 512 (2016): 176.

57. As such, the serpent has always been the symbol of pharmacy, the action of the knowledge of healing as later shown in the image of Greek god Asclepios.

58. Marija Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), 19.

Shaymaran's image and the myth. As a goddess she has the power of life and death: regeneration.

The Power of God (Gods) and the Sacrificed Goddesses

The most important part of Shaymaran's myth is her death. Her death is an important narrative element referring to a process. We learn from the myth that despite her efforts, Shaymaran was unable to withstand the attacks brought against her brethren by new malicious forces. With her acceptance of defeat, male dominance reaches its peak and the era of polytheistic religious rituals (particularly with regard to female goddesses) comes to an end. From here on, all rulers worthy of mention are men who figure as kings or gods on earth. Therefore, the legend of the her killing, the process it describes, and her expulsion from the realm of influential deities, demonstrate how the power and knowledge are transferred to men (only). The myth of Shaymaran becomes a microcosm, a narrative and visual representation of the historical and political process that led to the erosion of polytheism and the removal of women from the sacred realm.

The death of Shaymaran also sets a start to a new historical period in which governance passes to the male ruler or king paired with dominance of the monotheist (male) God, which, in turn, leads to the dominance of one gender over others. The discourse constructed by this myth ends the era of goddesses with a sacrifice of one of their last goddesses to male power over others by the passing Shaymaran's medicinal and scientific knowledge into the hands of the males. By loving the world and saving her beloved, this goddess loses her sacred status. The forced sacrifice of Shaymaran, in order to cure the illness of the male king, also intimates the loss of value of the female element in her own right. By positioning the male king as "more valuable" the narrative of this sacrifice positions a female (goddess) as "less valuable/less worthy" one.

This valuation of worth superimposed on the relation of power means that although both Shaymaran and the male king are rulers, he is the stronger one and as the latter seizes the body, knowledge, and therefore, sovereignty of the former. As Motz indicates, as a result of the power struggle between the matriarchal and patriarchal forces in the Middle East, the noble goddess[es] was dethroned.[59] This institutionalization of the idea that seizure of authority and

59. Motz, *The Faces of The Goddess*, 97.

body is an issue of "worthiness"—some are worthier than others—comes hand in hand with the entrenchment of the absolute authority of monotheistic religions—the most important representation of male power. In this sense, the withdrawal of animals/nature and woman from sacred spaces, and moreover their being symbolically constructed as cursed and dangerous, can be understood through a reading and exploration of the monotheistic religious texts. On the basis of the hierarchy with a single god at the top, a relationship of bottom-up sacrifice is built with the establishment of a ranking of god, man (son/king), woman, and lastly animal with their "worthiness" descending and decreasing as pertaining to each rank.

The ritual of sacrifice within monotheist religions is built by the discourse of "worthiness": it is understood on the basis of the "worth" defined by the relationship of the one who is making the sacrifice and the one for whom the sacrifice is being made. In the Shaymaran myth, the meaning of the sacrifice of a goddess/woman to god/king/man is an exposition of the period in which monotheistic religions oppressed and overpowered Paganism/polytheism with a parallel devaluation of women. Hence, the Shaymaran myth can be read as a historical account of the specific process through which female deities were expelled from the realm of religious worship in human societies in general and in Kurdistan and Anatolian communities in particular.

The "deception"of Adam by the alliance of Eve and the snake/Satan, which is contained within the creation myth of the three Abrahamic religions, is particularly meaningful in this context. Based on this myth, we can understand that women (along with nature, snakes, animals) were almost entirely excluded from spaces defined as public or symbolizing some degree of political power. As a result, all public spaces turned into male domains which men could freely inhabit freed of snakes, nature, animals and women who had fallen from grace. At the same time, all mention of nature and animals and women's power, and agency were purged from religious texts, but survived and continued to exist in folklore and myth. These developments led to the oppression of and attack against knowledge created and curated by women and women's achievements in the scientific field and their subsequent devaluation, such as the accumulation and eventual devaluation of medicines as "folk remedies."

By locating this gendered transformation in the existing image and story of Shaymaran, the discourse of her myth becomes a center

of resistance to the demotion of women and snakes to accursed status that was institutionalized with the emergence of hegemonic monotheist religious practices. In this sense, the myth and image of Shaymaran can, in fact, be considered a valuable historical document. Based on the guidance given by Shaymaran as a leader, the belief that the snake serves as a guide is still alive in different cultures.[60] As the new beliefs were taking hold, there still remained a connection between female deities and religious discourses often located in domestic space—the only space preserved for these narratives. In such belief, the creation of the binary gendered spheres and the building of a new male supremacist system in the countries that dominated Abrahamic religions excluded women from public space, and the functional advent of religion was almost the sole determinant. Accordingly, in the contemporary Near East, Kurdistan, and Anatolia, goddesses/women lost status within the monotheistic religions such as Islam. The patriarchally determined interpretations of her myth did not succeeded, however, in recasting her as a "demonic and accursed" creature but did succeed in degrading her sacred status.

In the construction of the new system, the designation of women as "cursed or dangerous" was a shrewd strategy to effect the withdrawal of women from public spaces. The privileging of one gender and the construction of a *preferential alliance* based on gender institutionalized male supremacy. Concentrating and organizing the superior physical strength of male individuals in one place as a priority created conditions for the systematic appropriation of women's labor and reproductive power and the perpetuation of this order. This newly established dominance of men over women was a means of exalting all men to positions of power within this newly created social system. The larger system where only males were wielding political power in all social institutions and spaces has replicated its smaller societal constituents—the systematic positioning of men as heads of households. The presence of Shaymaran's image and myth in a Kurdish home thus is both a reminder of a different past, and a resistance to the existing power dynamics in the society.

60. For example, in the Dersim region, some snakes are viewed as the guides of the house and are treated like members of the household. They are not only left alone but also protected. See Deniz, *Dersim Inanç Sembolizmil*.

Conclusion: A Total Failure or Resistance in Defeat?

Based on the myth, image, the ruler title *sha[h]*, and the related literature, I therefore offer that Shaymaran is not a folk tale heroine but an ancient ruler. As mentioned above, Gimbutas argues that "from the seventh millennium B.C. and throughout Neolithic times, the Snake Goddess is invariably portrayed in a squatting position with crossed legs; her arms and legs often lose human form,"[61] as is exactly the case in the Shaymaran image. Considering the public engagement and interest, love and respect, with which she has been transferred from generation to generation, it is conceivable to declare her not being just a ruler, but a sacred ruler. Her qualities such as protector, healer, transformer, and her androgynist dualist nature, ownership of the healing knowledge including power of death, and her role in fertility strongly suggest that she is in fact a goddess, and most likely a form of Mother Goddess in the region. As Motz expresses, these Mother Goddesses may be rulers and guardians of nature, more importantly of a geographic region or species and also of human settlements."[62] Remembering that the process of gods and goddesses taking on human form is believed to have occurred sometime in the third millennium BCE,[63] Shaymaran as a pre-human form has therefore been survived more than five thousand years as the guardian among the communities in Kurdistan.

Her image as an *agglomerate symbolic figure*[64] is a dense imagery map in which a series of contrasts are represented, collated, balanced, and set out with multiple layers of meaning. Both the image and the myth of Shaymaran contain a series of meanings that answer important questions about goddess worshipping and constructions of hegemonic social systems from multiple angles.

The myth's hypothesis explains the disappearance and retreat of female deities into domestic space. This removal of the most unwanted symbol of polytheism, like Shaymaran, is a further consolidation of the power of monotheistic structures and, hence, male dominance in Kurdistan, the Near East, and Anatolia. Shaymaran is

61. Gimbutas, *The Temples of Old Europe*, 45.

62. Lotte Motz, *The Faces of Goddess,* (New York: Oxford University Press. 1997), 49.

63. Oracc Museum, "Ancient Mesopotamian Gods and Goddesses," February 11, 2013, http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/amgg/technicalterms/index.html#abzu.

64. This expression was conceptualized to describe the existence of multiple symbolic discourses/layers/images within one symbol.

inconspicuously absent in the texts of the new hegemonic monotheist belief systems, together with the newly institutionalized connotation of both women and snakes as dangerous, poisonous creatures that must be kept under control.

Shaymaran narrates and exemplifies the imposition of a new and powerful discourse, ideology, or organization on the pre-existing social mechanisms and a consequent upsetting of the balance, as well as the building of a discourse of counter-resistance engendered by these dynamics. The core message of the myth is its exposition of the removal of the goddess[es] from public discourses and places. The myth constructed around the Shaymaran exemplifies the story of the forced destruction of a social order, belief, and ideology and the construction of a new contrary belief or ideology and administration in its place. Thus, the text, the myth, and the image are a kind of manifestation in which we can read and understand the core point of conflict between the old and the new social systems, which was fueled by different gendered spiritual values.

Our closeness to the natural and animal divinity is precisely because Shaymaran is scorned by the current Islamic leadership, who argue that she and other Pagan symbols should be left behind. But by her presence in domestic spaces, she continues offering an alternative resistant to the dominant discourse on human gendered relations and on human and non-human relations alike.

The death of Shaymaran can, therefore, be read as an attack on and defeat of goddess worship. At the same time, her killing, symbolically and physically, supports the idea of her being a powerful goddess in the region. Her killing, therefore, symbolizes the erasure of in that geography as well as an ideological attack against women's social achievement in the pre-monotheist Near East, Kurdistan, and Anatolia, stripping them of power and knowledge. Yet the Shaymaran myth' survival in this region is evidence of its continued existence and resistance to its defeat.

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