

Letter to Editor

The Oldest Image of a Woman During Vaginal Delivery in the Continental Shelf of Iran

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The plateau of Iran, an ancient landmark dating back to 7000 years ago, has realized various civilizations, each of which has had its unique art, culture, and therapies. Despite the remarkable geographical distribution of Iran and the multiplicity of its civilization, many aspects have remained neglected. Hence, investigation and presentation of the mentioned aspects is of great value and can shed more light on the cultural roots of these civilizations.

The first image demonstrating a woman during her vaginal delivery has been carved on a hair pin, which is now kept in the Louvre Museum (Figure 1). According to the specifications presented by the experts of the museum and provided on the Louvre Museum official website, the mentioned hair pin belongs to the Lorestan civilization and dates back to 700 BC.¹ Regrettably, no further archeological information is available regarding this hair pin; however, investigation of its image can reveal significant cultural and therapeutic aspects in this regard.

First, the medical aspects are dealt with. The image illustrates a woman giving birth naked. The baby's head is out of the birth canal. Two points are of great importance in this regard. The first point is concerned with the woman's delivery position medically called as "upright sitting position".² The mentioned position is a common position in childbirth and assists the mother in taking advantage of all her abdominal and pelvic floor muscles to deliver the baby through the birth canal. The second point in the mentioned image is stimulation of the woman's breasts performed by the woman herself. Recently, it has been documented that breast stimulation can stimulate the labor and facilitate the natural release of oxytocin. The mentioned technique used in the traditional medicine is now employed as an alternative technique to oxytocin injection.^{3,4} To the best of the author's knowledge, the present image is the first indication of using this technique for childbirth in Iran.

Apart from the mentioned points that are medically worthy of consideration, this bronze disk also presents rich cultural information. As the present photograph indicates,

the image of the childbirth is considerably decorated. First, symmetry has been attempted in this illumination and imaging that has greatly enhanced the magnificence of this work. In other words, the artists who have created this disk have made their attempts to portray a natural and medical issue as an artwork. The next issue is related to highlighting the female sexual and reproductive organs. In addition to the medical aspects related to breast stimulation, it can lead to their accentuation and consideration in the mind of the audience. Moreover, it has been attempted to display the female genitalia, although delivery of the fetus through the birth canal naturally makes it impossible to precisely display the female genitalia. Considering the delicacy used in this disk, it is unlikely to suppose that its creators had not paid attention to the mentioned issue. In other words, demonstration of the female organs has been performed deliberately. Such an intentional use of female organs has been observed in the *Venus figurines* or fertility goddesses.⁵ The mentioned point can be regarded as a common theme amongst various cultures. Hence, the following question is put forth: Is this disk far beyond the demonstration of a delivery and does it present the fertility goddess while giving birth?

Although the mentioned issue is unusual in the remaining depictions of fertility figurines such as the Venus of Sarab (Figure 2), the other issue strengthens the association of this image to the fertility goddess as represented by the decorations around the woman. Four lotus flowers can be observed on the four sides of the disk, revealing the eminence of this woman. The lotus flower is a symbol of Anahita in Iranian culture and has a long-lasting history.⁶ As it is well-acknowledged, Anahid or Anahita is the goddess of water and fertility.⁷ Moreover, the lotus flower has been of great significance in Mithraism as Mitra was born out of the buds of a lotus flower.⁸ The remarkable significance of the lotus flower in Iran can be grasped by considering its presence in all parts of Persepolis including its columns.

Moreover, two rams are symmetrically depicted on both sides of the woman. Additionally, there is something

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Figure 1. The Oldest Image of a Woman during Vaginal Delivery in the Continental Shelf of Iran. Source: <https://raeeka.wordpress.com>.



Figure 2. Venus of Sarab. Source: <http://iranvailamcells.blogfa.com>.

over the woman's head, which can be interpreted as her hair. The unconventional style of her hair may represent and remind the structure of a plant considering that the same design can be observed on the abdomen and upper parts of the woman's thighs. The mentioned designs indicate the woman's fixation with the plants and perhaps more significantly with the earth, which is somehow reminiscent of fertility. However, although the presented

piece of evidence reveals very chief aspects of a culture and civilization, it is believed that confirmation of such a hypothesis requires presentation of further evidence obtained from Lorestan and other pertinent civilizations.

Conflict of Interest Disclosures

None.

Ethical Statement

Not applicable.

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