

# Intellectual Dimensions of Narrative in the Sumerian Cylindrical Seals

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This paper deals with the intellectual dimensions of narrative in the Sumerian Cylindrical Seals, that intellectual system of the individual, which contains values, principles, inherited traditions and collective and individual behaviours and their relations with social, economic, political and religious aspects. It also tackles the extent to which the narrative affected the lives of Sumerian individuals. The first chapter of the paper includes the problem of the study, which can be summarised by the following questions: What is the nature of intellectual dimensions of the narrative? How does that affect subjects in the Sumerian Seals? This chapter also includes the significance of the study, objectives, terminology and limitations. The second chapter is divided into two topics; the first topic discusses the intellectual system of Sumerian civilisation, and the second topic explores the narrative in Sumerian art. The third chapter is dedicated to analysing the Sumerian Cylindrical Seals. Finally, the fourth chapter includes the conclusions; the main conclusion is that the Sumerian has produced a renewed civilisation and cultural monuments to build the Sumerian civilisation. This cultural monument has been transformed into a formal relationship performed on a small area which is replete with poetic and literary achievements, from which the narrative has emerged.

**Key words:** *Narrative, Story, Seals, Sumerian art, Thought.*

## Chapter One: Methodology *First: Problem of the Study*

Narrative is a modern critical approach which plays a significant role in revealing aesthetic qualities of art and literature. The narrative of a story, novel, poem, movie or play has always had a dramatic impact on reception criteria and on re-imposing control of aesthetic elements from a new point of view. This prompted workers in this field to develop and spread rules,

via communication, among successive civilisation roles within the structure of the Mesopotamian civilisation. An artist used the cylindrical seals and its printed products as a tool for the narrative, in order to organise packages of the intellectual system and dynamic concepts in formalism. Consequently, the problem of the study can be set as follows: What are the intellectual dimensions of the narrative? How has this inflected in the subjects of the cylindrical seals?

### ***Second: Significance of the Study***

This paper studies the intellectual dimensions of the narrative in the artistic products of the Sumerian cylindrical seals. This paper's subject represents a cognitive excavation in the critical study, highlights features of the narrative and changes of the story over time, and tries to frame it in a manner that is fit with the Sumerian individual. This paper also provides insights to researchers and critics and those concerned with the old Iraq art as a civilised heritage rich with its innovations, intellectual, philosophical, religious and authoritative orientations.

The significance of the paper lies in the fact that it represents the only vessel that carries many aspects of the Sumerian life, such as legends, spiritual topics, and symbols and signs that represent the originality of ancient civilisations as well as the intellectual, historical, aesthetic, artistic, stylistic and technical importance.

### ***Third: Objective***

The paper aims at exploring the intellectual dimensions of narrative in the Sumerian cylindrical seals.

### ***Fourth: Limitation of the Study***

The paper is limited to studying the intellectual dimensions of narrative in the Sumerian cylindrical seals to understand the intellectual dimensions in the old Sumerian stories.

### ***Fifth: Terminology***

1. Dimension (linguistically): "Dimensions" is the plural of 'dimension,' and it means an opinion or assertiveness (*Bantani, p.37*). "Dimension" as an idiom is a mathematical concept meaning an extent that can be measured. Originally, it denotes length, width and depth. It can be used in personal research to indicate high factors, since many personal features are described at a two-polar dimension such as control and submission.

2. Thought (linguistically) means thinking or contemplating (*Al-Razi, 1981: 509*). As an idiom, 'thought' means the shift of a man from things present in their mind to things that are not present in mind. This shift is not without arrangement (*Wahbah, 2007: 466*).
3. Narrative: linguistically, it means fluent conversation and reading (*Bustani, 1972: 916*). Idiomatically, it mean the art of organising and structuring an event or a series of events as a systematic artistic form using relationships, rules and internal structures that organise the narrative (*Ismael, 1986: 178*). Procedurally, the narrative indicates a Sumerian artist's description of an idea or a story, describing an event within a real or imaginative time and place on the surface of a Sumerian cylindrical seal.

## **Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework**

### ***Topic one: Intellectual System of the Sumerian Civiliation***

#### ***First: Thought and Religion***

The Sumerian society made a significant shift in the history of human thinking, creating the first civilised society of incomparable energy, vitality and movement of thought which is full of innovation. It can be compared to the nineteenth century, by which modernity starts. The first pillars of thought are laid in the early Sumerian Era which has resulted in the invention of pictograph writing (picture words), which later become symbolic when starting to express different walks of social life (*Zuhair, 2017: 30*).

The creation of a system of concepts regarding religious beliefs and evolution of the early Sumerian religious thinking is connected to the principle of animism. According to their way of thinking, they divided existence into: a world that was tangible and perceptible and another world which was full of spirits and invisible forces. In their golden ages, the Sumerians developed the notion of 'illusion' as a system of symbols and gave it a spiritual dimension in their rituals and religious observances.

The notion of worshipping natural phenomena started as pure sayings that were circulated in the Sumerian thought when they saw them interacting with the surface and walls of their temples and beautiful palaces. Those were means to invoke imaginary forces which had controlling roles in dramas of religious legends and observances (*Zuhair, 2017: 236*). The Sumerian society left behind many legends that reflect early times. First inhabitants did not consider their institutions and way of living as evolution to more primitive forms; rather, they considered them as something ordered by deities (*Saggs, 2009: 54*).

The Sumerian thought was coupled with beliefs that are based on anthropomorphism. The Sumerians attributed human activities such as eating, drinking, mating, holding feasts and Shura councils and running and organising the universe to deities. According to them, deities

get happy and sad and dispute. The divine deity community is depicted by the Sumerians as another version of the human community on earth (*Kramer, p. 150-155*).

The Sumerian religious thought was based on polytheism. They, however, singled out and favoured some deities, but without abandoning other deities (Al\_Hasnawi, 2011: 30). Each deity was depicted by the Sumerians with different shapes and symbols. The deity Anu, for example, was responsible for conferring power on other deities. His son Enlil was the lord of wind, and Inanna (Ishtar) was the goddess of love and beauty. Her symbol was an eight-pointed (or sixteen-pointed) star. She was the wife of Tammuz and sister of Ereshkigal, goddess of the underworld. Other deities included Adad, god of rain, who mounted an ox with horns on his head and the symbol of thunder on his head, and Anki, the god of earth and groundwater. He is symbolised by a bird with a lion or billy-goat's head. There was also Utu, the god of sun, whose symbol was a disc of sun beside his human shape (Rashid, 1985: 150-158). The god Sin with the sun god Shamash and Adad, was part of a triad of divinities. Sin was also the god of justice, wisdom, and power and was symbolised by a crescent (*Al-Dabagh, 1983: 21*).

### ***Second: Mythical Thought***

The myth is a story or a collection of stories that tell the actions of the gods or the heroic adventures of ancestors. In general, the myth underlies two things; first, the myth is a collection of thoughts, beliefs and theoretical judgments; second, the myth is a turbulent fabric of threads that falls outside history (miracles). This, however, does not mean that a myth is out of the empirical world; rather, it contradicts it and it seems that it has its own 'imaginary' world, positioning itself outside time and place (*Ziyad, 1986: 67-68*). Mythical thought is constantly following the creation of new myths. A myth has no particular author, because it is not the product of an individual imagination, but it is a social phenomenon created by the collective imagination of a group of people with their emotions and reflections.

Gods and demi-gods play the main roles in a myth. The myth takes place in a holy time that is different from the present time. However, its contents are more truthful for the believer than the contents of historical novels. A myth is linked to a particular religious system and works to clarify its beliefs and enters into the core of its rituals; it loses its foundations if this religious system is collapsed. The myth has great sanctity and power over the minds and souls of the people; this power enjoyed by the myth in the past is matched only with the power of science in modern times (Al-Sawah, 2001:12-14). The mythological structure of religion would not have turned to art if it had not connected to real life. The mythical structure of religion has established symbolic relationships between similar objects and treated these implications as existing 'facts.' This symbolic generalisation in their intellectual

structure has activated the characteristic of interpreting concepts into symbols, effectively turning cognitive abstracts into artistic generalisations (Sahib, 2005: 111).

### ***Third: Sumerian Authoritative, Political, Economic and Social Thought***

The temple was the centre of Sumerian political, economic and social life. It was the main organiser of trade and undertaker of public works (*Locas, 1980:12*). This indicates that the temple was an economic and social institution besides its religious purpose. It was the main driver of city life and agricultural, labour and irrigation projects, as well as the centre of worship of gods and sacrifices offered to them and predictions and religious rituals; it was also the location of the royal palace, treasury, court and public crops. The temple sought assistance of workers, farmers, herdsman, bakers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and tanners to handle all works necessary to maintain the needs of this institution. The temple secured all requirements for practicing religious rituals and running and maintaining the temple (*Amhez, 2010: 119-120*).

When the Sumerian village system shifted to a city system in their early era (3500-2800 BC), temples increased in all Sumerian cities. This shift was the result of the development of religious beliefs and economic activities in the Sumerian cities. A so-called temple institution, which used arts and harnessed them to publicise its activities, was established (*Sahib, 2017: 61*). In other words, the temple played a significant role in the areas of administrative, economic and social organisation, including the work of planning and control, codification and documentation. The Sumerian society at the dawn of the dynasties was far from primitive; rather, its activities were in full swing and the Sumerian people were strict and bureaucratic, a concept which denotes enforcing of laws in organised societies (*Rou, 1994: 185-188*).

### ***Authoritative and Political Thought***

The earliest human efforts at the level of regulation of life emerged from the laws and codified laws dating back to Age of the Dawn of Dynasties. Transactions and personal status were conducted in accordance with well-known provisions and strict laws. They considered the source of the laws was from the gods. When the kings used to issue laws and canons, they would put in their minds the desire and will of the gods. In other words, the ancient laws are derived from the gods and the old laws, whether issued by custom or based on the rulings issued by the king or priests, and are the provisions of gods because the ruler represents God in this land; his judgments are revealed to him by the gods (*Baqer: 280-281*).

The laws of Mesopotamia are the oldest recorded laws in the history of human civilisations. They represent an advanced step for tribal customs and traditions and they had a clear impact

on many of the laws of neighbouring countries, because they were designed to regulate economic and social relations as a main source in the history of ancient Iraq. Sumerian, Hammurabi, and other laws are important sources for examining aspects of civilian, military, and religious powers as well as the judicial and penal systems and other aspects of life in Sumer and other Iraqi cities (*Dellu, 1989: 396*). The Sumerian law also included marital and commercial relations, regulation of loans and contracts, sale and purchase, and adoption and wills of all kinds. (*Durant: 28*).

### ***Economic Thought***

The economic system, especially the notion of ownership, evolved considerably in the land of Sumer. It replaced the few movable properties owned by the desert inhabitants, such as grains, gold, silver, and boats, and fixed properties such as houses, gardens and fields. Immovable real estates were registered and there were contracts related to the sale and purchase of estates and deposits. In addition to the system of loans and leasing and partnership, agriculture was the main work of the population and was one of the main activities of the Sumerian economic life.

Fertile soil was watered by a network of canals and water was controlled and distributed. Palm trees, which were the largest source of wealth of the country, were irrigated in addition to barley, which was the main crop in Mesopotamia (*Moscatti, 1986: 99*). Wine was well-known by Sumerians and cultivation of sesame, pomegranate and berries, and breeding of cattle, butter and cheese was also practiced by the Sumerians (*Moscatti, 1986:100*). Study shows a cylindrical seal from Jemdet Nasr.

### ***Social Thought***

The mental life of the individual in the Sumerian society was strongly socially and strongly adapted. The lifestyle which was predominantly participatory was the first adapted element. The individual's life was subject to group evaluation since all perceptions were dominated by the group and emerged from a spirit of strong social participation which dominated his feelings and mental functions. The Sumerian society was interested in the arts, including music, and excelled in the use of many musical instruments such as drum, flute, bell, trumpet, and oboe, in addition to the guitar (*Sukar, 1999: 84*). As evidence, Images of drums, trumpets and bells were found on clay tablets, some of them in the form of holed cylinders with some Arabic symbols on them. Some researchers believe that they are musical notes, and one of them represents the tone of a Sumerian hymn of human creation (*Baqir, 1955: 485*).

### ***Topic Two: The narrative in the Sumerian artistic achievements***

Narration is an important tool in narrative construction, a process where a narrator produces a narrative text (Al-Marzouki, 1986: 73-74). In addition, narration is a tool to weave artistic elements of a story structure. A story is not determined only by content, but also by form or manner by which that content is presented (Al-Hamdani, 2000: 46). Narration, then, is all the tools and means a narrator chooses to present a story to readers (Al-Hamdani, 2000: 46); this is the real function of narration. There are several types of narration:

**First, Objective narration.** The narrator presents events as news without explaining how he knew about these events. The narrator knows everything, even the private thoughts of heroes (Al-Khatib: 189). This type of narrative is characterised by the narrator's position, which is independent of the narrated events (Prince, 2003: 163). This is incarnated in the Warka Votive Vase, which is almost a cylindrical white marble (wax-alabaster) vessel that occupies one of the pillars of the temple of the goddess Inana in Warka. The vase consists of seven horizontal fields. An image may have cosmological connotations, referring to the seven layers of the sky and seven underworld walls. Thus, Sumerian thought has its connotations in the structure of art.

**Second, Self-narration:** In this type, the narrator is present as a character in the story that tells the events and this narration uses the personal pronoun 'I.' We follow the events of the story through the eye of the narrator, who provides his personal point of view in the interpretation of events, self-narrative style with its different structures, and multiple visions and implications. This type allows the character to face the reader directly. The character talks and converses without interference and guidance of other personalities and reveals themselves absolutely freely, without expecting anyone to obscure their thoughts and positions from the reader (Ibrahim, 1988: 176). In the myth of creation, we find from the beginning the gods doing all the work, but they got tired and began to complain to the Wise Anki who, being lying far away in deep waters, does not listen to their complaints; so, they went to Nammu, goddess of water, who addressed Anki "son, get up from your bed and make a wise thing and assign servants to the gods.

Anki thought about it and said to his mother: "The creatures that I have intended to create will come into existence; so prepare a mixture of mud from the depths of water and then create the organs and you will determine the destiny of the newborn, O mother" destiny .....) (Syrian researchers, myths of creation, 2014). Thus, we find that the self-narration is done by the hero himself; but he does not talk about himself; rather, he only introduces other characters and speaks about them and the pronoun 'I' controls this type of narrative (Biden et al., 2016: 192).

**Third, Interpolated Narration.** It occurs when the objective narrative overlaps with the self-narrative. The narrative starts with a well-informed narrator who follows the characters and story events; then, he turns to self-narration and gets involved in the story by expressing his concerns. This mode may be used to attract the attention of the recipient, or to change the mode and diversify narration from time to time to avoid monotony (*aaaza*), as shown in the stele of vultures, which immortalised the victory of the Sumerian City of Lagash over the nearby Uma city. Thanks to the entry of writing it is possible to read the main pages in the narrative of the battle, which is related in an objective narrative. The self-narrative is embodied through the heroic actions of the warriors and the intervention of the god in knowledge. The stele is divided into four horizontal layers of equal and regular size, in order for the artist to achieve the geometry of the meaning of the text.

In the first layer at the top, Lagash forces, led by the ruler, advance in a coherent squad, carrying leather gears. They are about to attack with their spears. The battle is won as the soldiers of Eannatum march on the bodies of falling enemies whose bodies are ravaged by vultures; hence the name of the stele. If we follow the narrative, we find that the battle of infantry has been finished, to be followed by the battle of armour. In the second layer, the soldiers of Lagash walk with bare chests, carrying spears on their shoulders and the king takes command (riding a chariot) and waves with a long spear in his left hand and a short curved sword in his right hand. The battle is still heated and once the soldiers of Lagash win they start to count their dead on the battlefield and, more importantly, to give them a decent burial.

There is also the scene of the prisoners and presence of the god NIngirsu, with a sceptre of stone in his hand, with which he is about to attack wretched warriors who have been entrapped in a net with large holes. At the end of this net is the framed slogan of the immortal Lagash, a legendary symbol consisting of a falcon body with a lion's head. The objective narrative lies in the fact that the artist hides his uniqueness and becomes part of the audience. This stele also shows political powers (the character of the ruler) as well as the importance of religion, (website 2).

**Means of Narration:** description and dialogue. The narrator needs description to describe everything related to the story; he also resorts to dialogue to reveal the characters and contribute to event development. Description has three functions: aesthetic, interpretative and symbolic. The picture depicts shapes of the characters and descriptions of clothes and furniture and that leads to the revealing of the psychological composition of these characters (Fadhil and Salah, 1998: 294-295).

As for **dialogue**, it is an important part in the formation of the character and outlining the event and the historical moment undertaken by the of the historical and life moment of the

storytelling process. It is also defined as the exchange between story characters and it leads the event from one point to another within the text (*Abdul Salam, 1999: 29*). The function of the dialogue is to reveal the characters, and push the event forward (*Al-Khateeb: 189*). There are two types of dialogue: external dialogue and internal dialogue (monologue). The external dialogue is an alternative and direct conversation between two or more characters within the framework of the story. Its functions are to present characters directly, which in turn shows the event within the framework of time and space, seeks to reveal the relationship among different characters, and unfolds values, denotations and visions (*Obeid, 2008:23*). The internal dialogue (monologue), on the other hand, is a way to introduce the reader directly to the internal life of the character; it is an independent presentation where no one interferes and the character speaks to her/himself, which in turn leads to giving these characters an ample textual space to reveal their intentions and social relations. For this, dialogue is considered an important expressive technique in a presentation (*Bedan, et al., 2016, pp. 198-205*).

An example of this type of narrative is the instance when a worshipper is standing in front of a seated god, lifting up his right arm and left hand bent and bound to the abdomen. Behind the worshipper is the god Lamma, lifting her arms to beg the god as a kind of intercession for the worshipper to be pardoned for a mistake he had committed (*Mitwali, 2017: 29*).

#### **Elements of the narrative.**

They are as follows:

**First, time:** it is associated with existence; time is subject to several factors. For each work of art there are two dimensions: realistic/social and individual/imaginative (*Kazem, 2013:191*).

**Second, place:** It is a constructive system that responds to intertextualities with several images that ultimately lead to the maintenance of the spatially significant narrative act.

**Third, language:** a system or code that governs the production of meaning.

**Fourth, character:** It is the most important thing in an art work, and there are two types of character in an art work: major or minor.

**Fifth, event:** it is the temporal and spatial characterisation by describing the characters and identifying them through their movement. Events begin to evolve to reach the climax, and then fall into the middle and then to the end to reach the solution (*Kazem, 2013: 191*).

#### **Chapter Three: Sumerian Cylindrical Seals (Analytical Chapter)**

Cylindrical seals were an amazing innovation in the history of human thought when they replaced flat seals. They are the result of the development of thought and economic activities and sophisticated systems in that early stage of the Iraqi civilisation's history (*Sahib, 2017: 92*), since they contain reliefs and paintings of different topics; there are also images of animal and human forms carved with high accuracy. This is followed by religious themes represented by bulls sacred to gods, next to the spikes of wheat (*Allam, 2010: 50*). All go

parallel to the picture writing, at the beginning of the writing era. The Sumerians, however, did not like the limited pictorial surfaces of the flat seals, and their invention of cylindrical seals was a solution to provide opportunities to represent many subjects with many pictorial units that might meet their needs (*Sahib, 2017: 95*).

A cylindrical seal consists of a piece of hard material in the form of a cylinder where certain designs. These seals have become distinctive in the Iraqi civilised thought (*Sakz, 2009: 75*). The product of impression is the main subject which is engraved inversely on the outer surface of the cylindrical seal as a tape that ultimately meets its beginning. It is rolled on clay to produce a continuous frieze (*Fadhil, 2006: 23*). These seals are made of stones or shells and are delicately carved with different shapes on their convex end when rolled in soft clay. The diversity of the subjects and the ingenuity of the decorative treatment proves that they have achieved an achievement that has not been matched by any other achievement (Lloyd, 1939: 81).

The most common material for making seals is fine stones, such as marble, or limestone. After overcoming the technical problems of cutting and refining hard stones, hard stones such as hematite ( $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ ), a raw material used for iron production, volcanic glass, and lapis lazuli, as well as gold and silver are used in the work of making cylindrical seals. The reason for the use of precious materials is that these stones remain as inherited assets for generations. These cylindrical seals are furnished with a means to be hung by making a hole at one end of the seal.

These seals are characterised by simplicity and ultimate perfection through the scenes pictured by the artist on the cylindrical seals of that era. We can also note that the artist is able to reconcile the proportions in a good way, showing simple expressions. The cylindrical shape prompted the artist to be restricted when picturing characters on the surface of the cylinder.

The artist pictured all scenes in a vertical position as if they were standing on their hind legs. Inscription to form shapes was a feature of Mesopotamian art in the early periods. The artist paid great attention to the composition, which played an important role in the organisation of multiple characters of a scene (*Faris et al., 1980: 41*).

Sumerian thought belongs to realism and surrealism; a tangible (virtual) world and a world of spirits and illusory imaginary forces. It turned perceptions into symbols. The main intellectual means of the Sumerians was to convert chaos of illusion and imagination into a tangible image. The Sumerian brought together the two truths: the materialistic truth and that of the soul.

In the legend of Gilgamesh, Enkidu is portrayed as having a body of a bull and a human head. The artist invoked spiritual and metaphysical doctrines, imposing a tendency to depict these metaphysical structures as visible structures by not adhering to space-time relationships in developing the scene. The scene here is not out of the religious objective; forms are portrayed from the side. This feature is associated with the art of ancient Sumerian painting; the side view contributes to highlighting the parts of the body in the fullest and with the most beautiful images, along with achieving the aesthetic background of the work, represented by the Sumerian pictograph, which is hard to distinguish from painting.

Also, simplistic features that characterise this scene are due to consciousness and intent in the mechanism of the artist's mental image of the presence of Gilgamesh, which is a semi-god, with (Enkidu) in the scene of conflict with animals, not delving into details of visual forms, but conveying the meaning and understanding.

Thus, the artistic text between the natural manifestations, in the form of (Enkidu), and the spiritual world, in the form of Gilgamesh, is a vital interaction between the object and its essence. This scene is a kind of interplay between the eternal celestial qualities and the mortal human image as a means of attaining and demonstrating the ideal structure of the forms of kings.

Embodiment of the forms of kings and gods is ideal; it is associated with the characteristic of unity, since the king can unite with his peers from the gods and become one of them. The artist used the glimpse of immortality in the formation of the king and what is heavenly replaces what is mundane in order to reach absolute perfection, where the human is liberated from the human form to unite with the forms of the gods. The vision presented by the scene is like an anecdotal drama, where an interactive system is repeated forming a climate where a group of beings struggle to create an interactive system between two forces: forces that seek survival and other forces that seek annihilation and non-existence. Each seeks its goal for power and influence in the physical existence.

The concepts of survival and existence are eternal concepts emanated from the emergence of man in an attempt to control the items of existential forces.

The stylistic treatments of the form of the image Enkidu are closer to surreal forms, where many forms are combined in one body. That is, the form is close to the metamorphic beings. We can see that the mythical form is closer to the superstitious, a hybrid form of two objects. We also notice that the eyes of Enkidu and his friend Gilgamesh and other pets and predatory animals are all circular. The whole scene represents a dramatic narrative struggle to protect a number of pets, since the subject of Sumerian thought has connotations of class discrimination of individuals in the social structure.

The visual scene in its pictorial structure represents a conflict of two forces: the life force represented by Enkidu and Gilgamesh and pets; and the power of annihilation or death symbolised by the lions. The whole scene depicts in an accurate way the true law of life. It is a kind of transcendence that expresses beliefs of magical nature related to men and their ideas. It serves as a distinct and important cultural landmark in the structure of Sumerian civilisation.

We also note that there is symmetry between the epic of Gilgamesh and the Banquet of Plato which lies in the fact that man is able to develop himself and achieve his goal to attain true happiness through his commitment to virtue and search for knowledge, rather than pursuit of pleasures. In this epic we see the seeds of an absent moral view similar to the process of the three steps of evolution included in the Banquet of Plato. The three phases in the Banquet are: sensory phase (pleasure), practical phase, and philosophical phase. These three phases of Plato are evident in the context of the evolution of the events of Gilgamesh. At the beginning of the epic, Gilgamesh lives a life full of pleasures, which provokes hostility and hatred of the people. After meeting Enkidu, he embraces a practical life. After Gilgamesh meets Enkidu his life becomes practical, embarking on leading a virtuous life and seeking fame through work. In the end, he is appalled by the death of Enkidu, since this means the inevitability of his death. He starts to lead a life that is not really philosophical, but it generates the necessary results for a philosophical life, that is, wisdom and knowledge. The refusal of Gilgamesh to Ishtar, which is based on pleasures, is evidence of his abandoning his previous life and an indicator of advanced behaviour. His refusal to Ishtar is similar in form and function to Socrates rejection of Alcibiades in the Banquet.

Consequently, the products of cylindrical seals as an aesthetic and utilitarian function have been associated with the essence of Sumerian themes and concepts. They are like dialogues circulated among individuals. The epic of Gilgamesh also represents the struggle of mind (Shamash), who is a deity that does not reveal himself and appears through dreams and is the one who directs Enkidu. Ishtar, on the other hand, takes on the subjective and sensuous experiment. The epic thus has become a structural form that combines what is natural and what is cultural.

The importance of cylindrical seals is also evident in clarifying the features of the ancient Iraqi religion and its great history. Many of these seals portray Babylonian deities, in addition to the sacrifices offered to the deities or to their symbols. We see offerings such as deer, lion, lamb, goat and fish. In another seal we find a lioness without a leg offered as a sacrifice.

From the seals of Jamdet Nasr, we can see a group of people, mostly women with braids, make pots and most of them sit on mats or on the floor. Other seals contain topics such as peasants and agricultural tools such as a plow dragged by two oxen with three farmers. One

of the farmers is painted in a larger size than others; perhaps he is their chief. Some of the seals also include a Sumerian plow drawn by a bull led by a bearded man, and the plow pulls another bearded man (*al-Ahmed, 1981: 305-307*). Topics of the cylindrical seals have contributed much to the development of many religions, beliefs and philosophies. Legend has established symbolic relationships between similar things, and dealt with these implications as realities. In the Sumerian culture appears the principle of the ability of achieving even what is difficult to achieve, by creating a mental example of this ability. This means that the symbolic generalisation in their intellectual structure has the feature of interpreting concepts into symbols, transforming mental abstractions with the same effectiveness to art generalisations.

The impression on this cylindrical seal with its legendary, ideological and magical nature tells us of a mythical social theme and a story that carries a kind of strangeness and suspense in the course of the events. The story, with its social significance, reveals the rise of King Etana, King of the city of Kish in north Sumer, to the sky with a sacred eagle in order to obtain the plant of fertility because his wife was barren. The phenomenon of fertility in nature has two elements: male and female; accordingly, they classified the forces of their natural existence and the kind of relations between them. They made a symbol for each power and turned what existed into symbols and concepts that had wide social connotations, in addition to their association with roles of the magic act.

During the flight, the eagle asked Etana to look at the size of the Earth and its landmarks several times; Etana sees the land as if it was a hill and the seas like small rivers. He continues to rise until the entrance to the sky god Anu. There are indications that the King Itana obtained the plant of fertility that helped in reproduction. There is a mention of Baleekh, so of Etana who assumed power after him; this is indicative that he could obtain the plant of fertility. Time here declares only in the light of results and actions, and if time affects the narrative act in legends, the impact of the act is more important than the duration of its lifetime.

The mythological structure and religious concepts occupied an important role as a powerful intellectual force that decided the royal image on this impression. The character of the king-god Itana is seen as full of sacredness by the people, as evidenced by great titles bestowed on the gods. The physical expressions of Itana are painted elegantly and gracefully. The artist tried to get rid of the system of realistic pictures to deepen the intellectual content that exceeds the limits of the sensory form, trying to express the internal emotions. The surface structure of this text shows the geometric shapes of the style such as the square and circle, creating a kind of simplification and reduction in qualities to keep it away from its natural form in order to reach absolute spiritual connotations of symbolic images that are to communicate with invisible worlds.

The artist also focused on the formal details such as the movement of the god sitting on the sacred bird and the movement of everyone in this formation with their attention directed to the god. The image system appears in this artistic representation characterised by a divine touch. In the system of shapes, the Sumerian artist seeks to destroy the iconic image and intentionally to expand the system of the symbols inherent in the structure of the relationship between form and content, in an attempt to blend idealism and realism. There is a belief that the kingdom has descended from the sky, denoting its association with deities. Consequently, the kingdom is not a mundane institution established by human civilisation; rather, it is a sacred institution created by the gods. The king is not like any other people; he is chosen and trusted by the gods and so he governs and runs peoples' affairs on behalf of the gods.

The surface of the narrow impression of the seal is similar to the wall of one of the primitive mud-brick houses, on which many of the objects the king uses in his household are hung. The impression of the seal also represents different topics, including the struggle between the king and hidden forces controlling his offspring. Additionally, it represents a popular scene emanating from emotional forces.

The Sumerian artist represents the narrative of the goddess Ishtar in her meeting with Tammuz, in addition in the presence of lions which always accompany Ishtar and deer which belong to Tammuz, since he is a shepherd. There are also some decorative tapes. In addition, some compound legendary objects are found, including the guards who have come with the god Ishtar, the daughter of the god Sin, the moon god, and her mother, the god Ninkal, and her brother Otto, the sun god, and his sister Ereshkigal, the goddess of the underworld, who plays an important role in the epic of Gilgamesh.

Ishtar and her husband Tammuz are so splendid and beautiful as they stand together. The artist gives them many expressions of anatomical details, trying to give the characters of Ishtar and her husband Tammuz images closer to the truth. The artist resorted to depicting their profiles, with emphasis on their eyes which are painted in full, not heeding the natural relationship between parts of the body.

The chest and arms have been painted from the front in order to highlight their full characteristics in the synthetic style. The artist also distinguishes the characters of Ishtar and Tammuz with dignity and honour, featured in the way of dressing their heads and the attire of kings they wear. All this confirms the desire of the artist to reach the truth about his personality. The artist spares no effort to achieve because he believes that it is the means to ensure their immortality in the afterlife world.

The proportions of both Ishtar and Tammuz are determined according to the social status of each of them, depicted with total disregard for facts. The image of the goddess Ishtar in this impression is graceful and beautiful; this is what Ishtar is characterised as. As for the stature of Tammuz, he appears to be a shepherd, which is shown from the rough clothes he is wearing.

This highlights the religious bond between the husband and wife to indicate the importance of such a bond, which is the reason behind continuity of nature life in all forms. The fertility and reproduction cult continues in the Sumerian society despite foreign interferences appearing on this text. We can also see that the formal structure is not a mere copy or imitation of reality; rather, it is laden with symbolic content circulated among the ancient Sumerian society, due naturally to an element replacing another element in the painted symbols. The artist succeeds in breaking the monotony of void surrounding Tammuz and Ishtar in the impression by painting images of animals and decoration, which makes the scene integrated. Accuracy of painting indicates that the artist imitated real life. The artist seeks perfection in painting the image, prompting him to remove the effects of mundane negative manifestations like weakness and ageing. The scene reveals two forces: the force of existence represented by the bird and the annihilation force represented by the lion. The Sumerian artist carried these scenes in his consciousness and awareness to be in a dynamic interaction with them. He turned them into formal systems dealing with diverse intellectual interpretations and eventually became the intellectual reference for members of society. The diversity in the techniques of achievement revealed the diversity in the methods of forming the painting units, which has led to the richness of the Museum of Sumerian cylindrical seals with these creative scenes. Some of them were implemented in a realistic way using sharp stone or metal blades, while other scenes were carved with the predominance of the simplification and reduction properties without going into the details of its pictorial units (*Sahib, 2017: 111*).

#### **Chapter Four: Conclusions, Recommendations and Suggestions**

##### ***First: Conclusions***

In light of what has been discussed in the theoretical framework and the analytical chapter, the researchers reached a number of conclusions, including:

1. The Sumerian artist produced a renewed civilisation, consisting of those important cultural landmarks of the Sumerian civilisation structure which has been transformed to formal relations carried out on a small area, filled with poetic and literary achievements that emerged as a narrative literature.
2. Cylindrical seals were represented by intellectual spiritual narratives which prevailed at the expense of the physical aspect of form structure in the impressions of Sumerian

cylinder seals. This stems from the spirituality of Sumerian thought which believes in metaphysical forces.

3. Cylindrical seals are represented by the religious narrative, which is directly linked to the life of the Sumerian man through form and content, where the gods are given great importance. Gods appear in multiple shapes. The Sumerian artist also worked on the structure of mythical narrative as an important subject in the ancient Sumerian thought system.
4. Political narrative has been linked to the issues of conflict and power. Since birth, man revives struggle in his life for authority and power.
5. The Sumerian society was characterised by its direct link with the commerce represented by transportation of goods in addition to the importation of precious stones. The Sumerians were interested in agriculture and all that was related to the economy.
6. The Sumerian artist was interested in family organisations represented by the subject of marriage and other interest in the arts, including music, dance, singing and all that was related to society.

### ***Second: Recommendations***

In light of the research conclusions, the researchers recommend the following:

1. Due to the difficulty facing the researchers in collecting accurate information on the works of cylindrical seals, we recommend that competent authorities issue periodic letters with photos of ancient Sumerian seals documented and published electronically.

### ***Third: Proposals***

For further research, the researchers recommend the following studies:

1. Aesthetics of narration in the Assyrian seals.
2. Transformations of narrative in the Mesopotamian and Egyptian arts (comparative study).



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### The Appendices ( Research Forms)



(1form)



(form2)



(3form)



( 4form)



(5form)



(form6)



(form7)



( 8form)



(9form)



(10form)



(11form)



(12form)



(13form)



(14form)