

Research on the Sign of ‘Dragon’ and ‘Light Image Imagination’ in “The Great Sage Prince Nezha Chased and Killed Dragon King Vasuki”- From the Viewpoint of International Exchanges in Liao, Persia and the Central Plains

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Keywords: “Nezha from Qianyuan Mountain Came to This World”, Nozar, Rostam, Sohrab, Zahhak

Abstract: An artwork of “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki” from the Liao Dynasty was unearthed from Chaoyang North Tower, with the theme of “the hero slaying the dragon”, that related one of the motifs in the world's mythology system. A work of art as a sign which the various elements of data in the picture constituted the form and content. The data from which this artwork was discovered had many analogies with Persian mythology. The mythological figure Nazha was similar to Nozar and Sohrab in terms of etymological transliteration or paraphrase. The mythical creatures Vasuki correspond to the thousand-year-old snake (dragon) king Zahhak and the Persian warrior Rostam, both of which had relevant intertextuality with dragons (snakes). Between myths, there was an intertextual context that was as numerous as a constellation. The test results found that although data and symbols had similarities, when exploring the expression of art in reality and imagination, truth and symbolism, revealed greater differences.

1. Introduction

This analysis starts with the Liao Dynasty stone carving image “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki” unearthed from the Chaoyang North Tower. The structure of thesis is as follows Figure 1 (Fig. 1). From the search of many artworks, we found the Liao Dynasty's “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki” (Fig. 2), the Persian “Rostam kills the Dragon” (Fig. 3), the Ming Dynasty's “Nezha from Qianyuan Mountain came to this world” (Fig. 4); the images of the mythical creature (dragon) in these artworks were quite similar, they also had a theme of ‘the hero slaying the dragon’, and these pictures also showed many mythological motifs of the world.

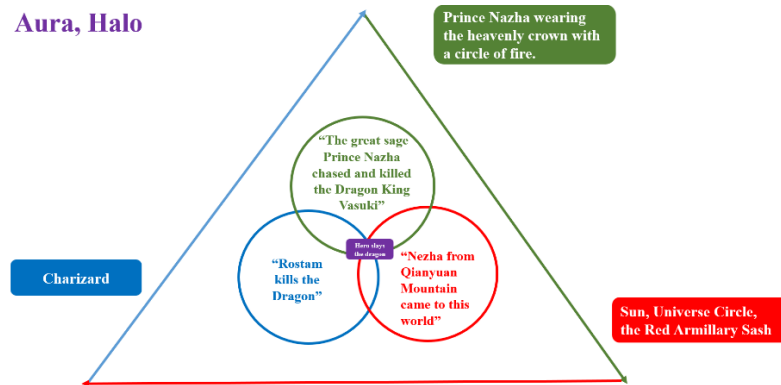


Fig. 1 The structure of thesis.



Fig. 2 “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki” [1].



Fig. 3 “Rostam kills the Dragon” [2].



Fig.4 “Nezha from Qianyuan Mountain came to this world” [3].

2. Persian Miniature, Liao Stone Carving Paintings and Chinese Prints

2.1. The Artwork of “Rostam Kills the Dragon” (Fig. 3)

c.15th A.D.-16th A.D. Persian Miniature reached a peak. It was a common theme that the battles between mythological characters (historical figures) and mythological creatures. The Aga Khan Museum had a painting of “Rostam kills the Dragon” by Sadiqi Beg. The story was taken from the 10th A.D. “Shahnameh” and was presented as an illustrated manuscript. It described the Persian warrior Rustam rescuing King Kay Kavus on his way; he swinging sword and slaying a dragon.

However, King Kay Kavus was also the initiator of the tragedy of “Rustam and Suhrab” later.

2.2. The Artwork of “Nozar Was Killed” (Fig. 5), “Rostam and Sohrab” (Fig. 6)



Fig. 5 “Nozar was killed by Afrasiab” [4]



Fig. 6 “Rostam and Sohrab” [5].

Among the extant Persian Miniatures, there was another painting of “Nozar was killed” which depicted the Persian god of war Nozar was killed during the battle between Persia and Turan (Fig. 5). Nozar was the Persian king whom Rustam devoted all his family's strength to defend. There was also a painting “Rostam and sohrab”, which depicted the Persian warrior Rostam killing Suhrab who led the Turan union of tribes to attack Persia (Fig. 6); Suhrab was Rustam’s biological son who had never met, triggering an intergenerational conflict - between father and son.

2.3. Data of mythical heroes

Judging from the data, Nozar, Sohrab, and Nezha had some similar data. As for the name, there was an etymology (transliteration or paraphrase) to follow. In terms of age, they were all young and frivolous, and appeared as the young heroes. In terms of status, they were all the son of the leader of a clan, tribe or region, and serves as the commander-in-chief. On the hero's journey, they all lead a tribe to conquer, expand, defend or migrate, and were considered warriors. Ethically, whether Ming’s Nezha (Nezhe) or Persia’s Suhrab had an intergenerational conflict - between father and son. Therefore, they were also used as an object of comparative mythology; the archetypes of Chinese Nezha (Nezhe) had also been traced back to Persian Nozar and Sohrab.

2.4. Data of Liao dragon, Chinese dragon and Persian dragon

Economic, trade and cultural exchanges between the Central Plains, Liao and Persia. c.15thA.D.-16thA.D. the painting style of Persian miniature paintings was influenced by Chinese culture, especially in the miniature paintings of Ilhan and Timurid Mongol-Persian myths, the mythical creatures were depicted in a similar style; the depictions of Persian dragons and Chinese dragons had formal similarities. Observe the depictions of Liao dragons, Persian dragons and Chinese dragons in

these three works of art. There were the intertextuality among the Persian artwork “Rostam kills the Dragon”, the Liao Dynasty artwork “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki”, and the Ming Dynasty artwork “Nezha from Qianyuan Mountain came to this world”. From a semiotic point of view, in terms of image (signifier), there were partial similarities in form: the body images of the three dragons all had a raised head, an open mouth, a S-shaped body, four feet, claws, a tail, scales, and side body. From the data analysis, those data showed that the style of painting might have influenced a mutual influence relationship.

2.5. Light image imagination

It was worth noting the ‘Light image imagination’ that accompanied the hero slaying the dragon. In “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki”, we could see Prince Nazha wearing the heavenly crown, and his head was illuminated with a circle of fire. It could be analogized to the Charizard in the Persian “Rostam kills the Dragon”, and the sun in the Ming Dynasty's “Nezha from Qianyuan Mountain came to this world”. These three artworks were all based on the theme of heroes slaying dragons, and they were all accompanied by the ‘natural or humanistic light image imagination’. Just like the mythological motif of ‘Chaoskampf’ - the hero used thunder and lightning to slay the dragon, that was accompanied by the image of fire. To sum up, we could see that these signs between similarities and differences seem to connect the intertextual context.

3. Mythological motif data of ‘Chaoskampf’

Here we couldn't but mention the Mediterranean mythological motif ‘Chaoskampf’. ‘Chaoskampf’ meant a god (representing order) who used thunder and lightning (representing chaos fighting) to split the infinite gap space between the original sky and earth. And the gods defeated the chaos monster (metaphors for chaos, ancestors), which were usually a dragon (or a snake) mother and child (metaphors for matriarchal society, water sources, and treasure) so that gained control of the universe. In other words, ‘Chaoskampf’ - The hero used thunder and lightning to slay the dragon (snake), accompanied by the light, which meant establishing order over chaos. Slaying the dragon (snake) means overthrowing the authority given since creation (including ancestors), thereby triggering intergenerational conflict. Contained the replacement of the old generation by the new generation, and the transition of society.

‘Chaoskampf’ - the hero used the thunder and lightning to slay the dragon, this mythological motif was connected in different regions through simile and metaphor.

The theme of heroes slaying dragons (snakes) covered a variety of data. From the data point of view, in the 16th A.D. Persian Miniature “Rostam kills the Dragon”, the 11th A.D. Liao Dynasty “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki”, c.16-17th A.D. Ming Dynasty's “Nezha from Qianyuan Mountain came to this world”; we could find the relevant data of ‘Chaoskampf’, constructing the signs. The signs included world mythological motifs of heroes, adventure, light, dragons (snakes), and journey. In Europe, Asia and other places, the signs were presented in different ways, reflecting the cultural content of each place.

4. ‘Aureola’ and dragon

4.1. Azi Dahaka

The dragons (snakes) in ancient Persian mythology presented to be both good and evil. “The Avesta” recorded that Adzar, the god of holy fire, represented the good world. Azi Dahaka, the three-headed giant serpent, represented the evil world. Both of them fight for ‘Aura’. Ahri. Dahaka was

defeated and sealed in Demavend Mount. “Shahnameh” (late 10thA.D. - early 11thA.D.) recorded that King Jamshid, who was a king with aura and the Divine right of kings, was overthrown by Zahak, the Serpent King. Zahak was overthrown by Fereydun, a descendant of Jamshid. Zahak was defeated and sealed in Demavend Mount. Fereydun once turned into a dragon (snake) to test his three sons and divided the world into three parts.

4.2. Zahak

Rostam’s maternal genealogical ancestors were none other than the Zahak clan. Rustam’s paternal genealogical ancestors were the Jamshid clan. In brief, the genealogy of the warrior Rustam was a combination of good (Jamshid clan) and evil (Zahak clan), standing at the peak between good and evil. Just like the dragons (snakes) in Persian mythology, they were at the edge of good and evil.

4.3. Simurgh

In Persian national mythology, Simurgh was a sacred bird. In Shahnameh, Simurgh was represented as the guardian bird of Zal and Rostam, father and son. The “Shahnameh” also described that one of the seven tasks of Prince Esfandiyar was to kill a bird named Simurgh, which was an image of evil. In the tragedy of “Esfandiyar and Rustam”, Rustam lighted a feather to summon the divine bird appearing and helping Rustam to kill Esfandiyar; this Simurgh bird was kind image. The bird named Simurgh that mentioned in the story of Esfandiyar had the image of both good and evil.

4.4. Good and evil disappear suddenly, and ‘Aura’ suddenly appears

In Persia, Zoroastrianism was a dualism of good and evil, but it was not an absolute opposition between good and evil. It was the spirit of aureola that emerges from the gap between light and darkness, and leads to infinity. Rustam just stood at the place, where good and evil was disappearing, where aureola was suddenly appearing.

5. Correspondence analysis

5.1. Correspondence of Artworks

“Nozar was killed”, “Rostam kills the Dragon” and “Rostam and sohrab”, those paternal genealogy of the mythological characters in the three paintings: Nozar (a descendant of Jamshid-Faridun), Rostam (a descendant of Jamshid- Garshasp), and Sohrab (a descendant of Jamshid- Garshasp - Rostam). all three are related to the aura-united King Jamshid. The heroic glory of this clan was closely connected with the aura; and the reference conferred upon them divine rights.

The Persian Rustam clan was loyal to their nation and had made great contributions, but they were later massacred by the sixth king, Bahman. The collapse of the king/warrior political structure, and the end of the warrior era foreshadowed the demise of the Kayanian dynasty. Unlike the path to deification in Chinese mythology, the Jade Emperor affirmed the merits of Nezha (“Whole book on searching the deities of the Three Teachings”), Nezha (“The Journey to the West”, and “Investiture of the Gods”), and they were eventually deified or sanctified, revealing the social and political structure of the feudal system. “Nezha from Qianyuan Mountain came to this world” (Fig. 4) corresponded to the social system carried by the dragon sign in the civilization of the Yellow River Basin, as well as the patriarchal bloodline and ritual system on which the feudal society relies.

“The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki” was unearthed from the Chaoyang North Tower, which was originally a Buddhist tower for burying and offering ‘Sariras’.

The dragon sign of Vasuki referred to the sacrifices, rain-praying and burials represented by the dragon in the Hongshan Culture of the West Liaohe River Basin; it carried the historical traces of the “earth dragon rain-praying” to eliminate the obstacles of nature. It was worth noting that performed rituals for favorable weather and peaceful times for the people were the responsibility of the ruling class. Prince Nazha referred to the rulers of the Liao Dynasty, and through the mythological ‘Original Media for Diffusing’, that evoked the prosperous Liao Dynasty; this was represented in “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki”.

5.2. Correspondence of Myths

From ‘the philosophy of language’, to analyze aesthetic of these artworks. In terms of ‘Sense’, they all presented the same data of heroes, Light image imagination, and slaying dragon (snake). However, each references different regional cultures, which resulted in different ‘meanings’ (meaning = reference + sense) of the data, in other words, the ‘terms’ were conveyed differently. Myths from different regions referred to different regional cultures, and it was expressed through different materials from different places and different images. In short, there were corresponding intertextuality between them, but they couldn't be summarized as a parent set model.

Myths correspond to each other like the constellations. If this was the external dissemination about the prototype of the world mythological theme, it would have different cultural results in different regions. It would rather to say, the subject of local culture was intertwined with foreign cultures with similar attributes (including homogeneity and heterogeneity) in the development process, thus presenting the quasi-signs, quasi-myths and quasi-culture of the world mythological theme. Therefore, there were multiple dimensions of meaning.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the test results showed that “The great sage Prince Nazha chased and killed the Dragon King Vasuki” gathered data from multiple cultures; however, its artistic empirical experience primarily came from the emergence of local Liao culture. The ‘constellation’ of connections between its mythology and world mythology indicated a correspondence rather than a relationship of inheritance.

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