ELAMITE AND OLD IRANIAN AFTERLIFE CONCEPTS

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1. Introduction: Elamite Funerary Cult and Afterlife Ideas

In ancient civilisations, death was as much part of life as it is in modern societies. Various sources inform us on the afterlife thoughts of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome, as a result of which we have a fairly nice image of how these ancient people thought about death and the netherworld. In striking contrast with this relatively high amount on information on death and afterlife in the major ancient civilisations, the information on the Elamite “au-delà” is extremely poor. In other words, very little is known on Elamite afterlife concepts or on the Elamite funerary cult. Nevertheless, the available information suggests that death was, not surprisingly, an important preoccupation of the Elamites (Vallat 1998: 339–340; Grillot 2001; Henkelman 2005: 140, with reservations):

(1) Some principal gods played a role as netherworld deity. According to Vallat, three gods are particularly interesting: Inšušinak, the lord of the netherworld, Išmekarāb and Lāgamāl. Grillot adds Kiririša. It will be demonstrated, however, that Išmekarāb was not a pure netherworld god and that his primary task was to uphold justice, also in the netherworld.

It is also possible that Inšušinak was not the netherworld’s lord in all of Elam, but only in Susa and that each deity was responsible for the netherworld in his/her own town (ex. Kiririša in Liyan [EKI 57] or Upurkupak in Tchogha Pahn [Stolper & Wright 1990: 158–161; Vallat 1997a]). This remains, however, hypothetical.

Part of the discussion on the infernal character of Inšušinak and Kiririša are four epithets:%

1. DN temti kukunnum lahakra (for Inšušinak; Atta-hamiti-Inšušinak): EKI 86:7.
4. Tel[pti alimelu] lahakram (for Inšušinak; Šilhak-Inšušinak).

The crucial word in this phrase is lahak, a participial form of laha-, a stem attested from the Old Elamite (Siwe-palar-huhpak) till the beginning of the Achaemenid period (Atta-hamiti-Inšušinak) and whose meaning is still under debate. Various translations have been proposed:


% Abbreviations are cited according to the system used in Northern Akkad Project Reports 8, 1993, 49–77.
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1 The epithet DN temti ahpir lahakrame (for Inšušinak) in an inscription of Šilhak-Inšušinak (IrAnt 19 21–22:18–19) has another structure. In addition, ahpir is not an indication of a place.
2 Reconstruction by Steve, based on the formula Inšušinak tepti alimelurra “Inšušinak, Lord of the Acropole” (EKI 35:12–13, 36:5–6, 45, 13–4; all are inscriptions of Šilhak-Inšušinak).
Forms of *laha*—are attested in different contexts, which, unfortunately, do not really exclude one of the above proposals. Anyhow, in some texts the meaning of *laha*- is quite clearly "to kill (transitive); to die (intransitive)".

(1) First of all, in the Elamite Omen Text (Obv. 10–11) Eḫšana *lahan* is the Elamite equivalent of Akk. *lugal ʾūš-ma* "The king will die" (Iqqr īpuš § 71.2; cf. Tavernier 2010: 213–214) in the omen ITU G(U) KIMIN *Eḫšana la-ha-an a-ak *ga* *pu-hu* *Eḫšana-pé G(U)ZA*a* ad-da a-pi-ri-na-ba mu-ur-da-am-pi "Month Ayaru: The king will die and the sons of the king will sit on the throne of their father" / DIŠ INA G(U), LUGAL ʾūš-ma DUMU.MES LUGAL AŠ.TE AD-šu-nu SĂ.SĂ "If it is in the month Ayaru, the king will die and the sons of the king will take the throne of their father" (Steve 1987: 39).

(2) An Old Elamite inscription of the sukkalmah Siwe-palar-huhpak (EKI 3.28; first half 18th century BC) has *hit* *lahakna* "May the army be killed" in what is most likely a series of curses (e.g. line 30 has *petip* *luh* limašpi "May the fire/lightning burn the enemies"). As the form is passive, a translation "May the army reside" or "May the army enter" is not acceptable.

(3) A text of Shīkak-Inšāši-nak (ca. 1155–1125 BC) mentions that someone (text is broken here) should be *kazzak* *lahak[na]* "May he be smitten, may he be killed" (EKI 54 iv 24).

(4) In a curse formula Šutruru mentions *hiše* Nahhunte lahašīni "May Nahhunte destroy (kill) his name" (EKI 74 § 43; end of 8th century BC).

(5) Not entirely sure, but very likely *laha*- has the same meaning in an inscription of Tepti-Huban-Inšāši-nak (c. 550 BC). There this king claims that *pap* 31 GUD*a* *Pap* 186 UDUNTA*a* *la-ap-ma* *hu-sa* *as* *išk* *sa* *na* *a-hi* *la-ha-na* "Total: 31 head of cattle (and) total: 186 head of sheep/goats, for the officiants, which is to be brought to the grove and there to be slaughtered" (EKI 85:23; cf. Henkelman 2008: 448). Nevertheless, a meaning "lord of the dead in the *kukunnun*" does not fit all too well with regard to the divine epithets. One would rather expect a form *tepti* *lahakpe-ra* (plural). The solution to translate "lord of the netherworld" is not correct either, since forms in -k normally are past participles. In addition, a substantive "death" would rather be *lahame* or *lahan*.

In other words, *laha*- does not mean "die" in the divine epithets. It is, however, clear that in the epithets *laha*- is always associated with a deity (Inšāši-nak or Kiririša) and a place (*alištu*, *siyan* *kuk*, Liyan, *kukunnun*). In fact, *laha*- expresses the relation between the deity and the place. For this reason Hüsinsk adopted a meaning "live, reside", which was accepted by Pézard (1914: 81). Such a translation can indeed not be excluded, but it is not the only possible solution. Various authors have proposed a meaning "secret, hidden, invisible". Vallat & Grillot (1984: 23) have "Lord of the Renown and of the Secret", whereas Grillot herself (1986: 178) translates "Lady of secret Liyan".

It is Steve (1987: 39) who has proposed another syntactical relation within this group. He proposes a translation "DN, the lord/lady who is hidden in GN" for the epithets.