

The iconographical and mythological contexts of serpent(s)-fighting scene on the Old Assyrian seal impression from Kültepe (the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts I 2 b 1591)

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Abstract. *An impression of an Old Assyrian seal from Kültepe from collection of Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow carries an image that was not recognized but by present authors and is of great interest as it depicts a scene of a hero's battle with a serpent-like demonic character (most likely, this is a double or two-headed monster). Rarity of serpent-fighting scenes in the Ancient Near Eastern art makes it important to study the composition and plot of the impression in its traceable iconographical and mythological contexts, in order to establish its cultural connotations (Anatolian, Syrian, Mesopotamian), considering that Kültepe was the center of interaction and synthesis of several cultural traditions. It turns out that the closest iconographical and mythological parallels to the image in study can be found in Eastern Anatolia and its main roots can be assigned to local (Hattian-Hittite-Hurrian) cultural symbiosis.*

Rezumat. *Pe replica unui sigiliu provenit din Vechiul Regat Asirian și aparținând colecției Muzeului de arte frumoase Pușkin, din Moscova, figurează o imagine care nu a fost recunoscută decât de către autorii articolului și care deține un interes major întrucât reprezintă scena unei bătălii dintre un erou și un personaj demonic, asemănător unui șarpe (cel mai probabil, este vorba de un monstru cu două capete). Raritatea scenelor care descriu lupte cu șerpi în arta Vechiului Orient Îndepărtat conferă o importanță sporită studiului structurii și evoluției replicii în contextele ei iconografice și mitologice reperabile, astfel încât să se poată stabili conotațiile sale culturale (anatoliene, siriene, mesopotamiene), având în vedere că Kültepe a fost centrul de interferență și sinteză a numeroase tradiții culturale. Se pare că paralele iconografice și mitologice cele mai apropiate de imaginea studiată pot fi găsite în Estul Anatoliei, iar rădăcinile sale pot fi atribuite unor simbioze culturale locale (Hatti-Hitite-Hurrite).*

Keywords: two-headed serpent, hydra, Kültepe, Malatia, Illuyanka, Hedammu.

Introduction and methods

A fragment of a seal impression on a little clay envelope fragment from Old Assyrian Kültepe (kept in Moscow at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, inv. No. I 2 b 1591) contains a scene recently recognized by the authors of present work and presenting a significant

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interest: it is a scene of the hero's battle with a serpent-like monster (apparently, double or two-headed one), see below in details. The rarity of serpent-fighting scenes in the extant Ancient Near Eastern material makes this artifact worth of detailed study, especially since it is one of not numerous seals from Kültepe which bear rather original motifs not repeated on other seals of the region. The fragment was acquired by the Museum in 1911, but due to its small size (1.77x2.62x0.62 cm) and a number of damages the depiction could not be recognised for decades; it was studied only recently by the present authors and is only now being introduced by them into the international scientific activities⁴. Here we present the most representative photographs of the whole artifact and its main part, including the photo with contrasting (Fig. 1, 3), and the impression's drawing (Fig. 2). The solid lines represent clearly recognizable outlines, the dashed lines represent outlines distinguishable without full confidence, the shaded lines represent lines of chips).

⁴ An only previous attempt to present its drawing (YANKOVSKAYA 1968, 306, № 119) remained inutile because only a few lines from among those actually present on the sealing were reflected in the drawing (sometimes with errors) and the result did not allow to understand either the general plot of the scene, or the sense of separate outlines. Only the possibilities of high-resolution digital photography with magnification, shooting at different angles with different lighting, further computer processing of the obtained images (contrasting etc.) and collating the results with a detailed study of the original under high magnification provide us an opportunity to recognize the main part of the details and the scene for the first time (though some of them remain obscure). The photographs were made due to the joint project of the Pushkin Museum and CJSC "EPOS Group" on the digital archive of the Museum's cuneiform collection.



Fig. 1, 1-3. Photographs of fragment in study (the Pushkin Museum, I 2 b 1591): 1 – the entire surface of the envelope; 2, 3 – its main part (3 – with contrasting).

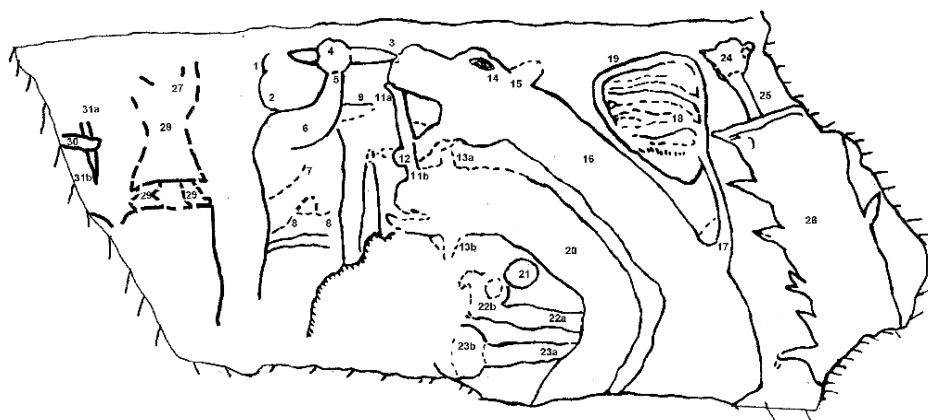


Fig. 2. Drawing of fragment in study (the Pushkin Museum, I 2 b 1591).

What appears to be recognizable quite clear is a scene of fighting with a serpent-like monster: an anthropomorphic hero (left) stabs it. This hero (1 – head or accidental chipping, 2 – back of the head, 4 – fist squeezing a dagger, 5 – wrist (?), 6 – body and raised hand with a dagger, 7 – lines on clothes (?), 8 – lines on clothes or legs (?), 9 – clearly prominent element, perhaps an outline fragment of the hero's other arm extended forward which strikes a serpent-like monster (16) in its muzzle with a dagger (3) – the monster has a head with a muzzle, neck / torso (16), eye (?) (14), a horn, protrusion or ear on the back of the head (15), 12 is possibly the edge of its lower jaw. There are no extremities at the neck / torso (16). From the back of this neck / torso, a tree-like outgrowth (17) extends, crowned with a large rounded element resembling the crown of a tree and encircled with a rim (19). Without certainty, outlines (18) resembling branches are distinguishable. Cf: the very shape of the monster's body (16) resembles a trunk. The tree-like element growing from the monster's body can seem strange but in fact has parallels in relevant traditions (see below).

Below and to the left of the neck / body of the monster (16) we see an object (20) quite similar and parallel to the object (16) in shape, location and bending one along another. From this object (20) two similar sets of elements (22a+22b and 23a+23b) protrude forward. Given the position of object (20), its similarity in shape with the monster's torso / neck and the head (16) and their parallel and close bending, it seems that either the figure (2) represents one more serpent (similar to 16) or it is the second head and neck of a two-headed snake (16+20); the damaged left extremity of element 20 will be then the head, and elements 16 and 20 should have been connected somewhere below the chip edge. Elements 22 and 23 are most likely the forward paws of the serpent-like creature to which element 20 belongs: just similar protruded paws of a serpent / dragon without hind legs constitute a common feature of one of the types of the Ancient Near Eastern (and specifically Mesopotamian) dragon iconography (e.g., Mesopotamian serpent *bašmu*). Such dragons are also characterized by a protrusion on the back of the head, similar to our element 15 (see below for details). The same extended paws, apparently, are shown in the serpent (also without hind legs) fought by a hero on the famous Neo-Hittite relief from Malatya (see below). It seems that our sealing shows rather a two-headed / two-necked monster to which, on the one hand, paws 22+23, and, on the other hand, an outgrowth 18 belong, than two monsters, one of which has the paws 22+23, but no outgrowth 17, while the other has this outgrowth, but no paws. The great serpent from Malatya is also regarded by many authors as two-headed, and different two-headed creatures were generally a fairly common motif in Ancient Near East and, in particular, in Syro-Anatolian art (see below).

To the right of the monster(s), there is a large object 24+25+26 with a trunk-like element (26), stem-like element (25) protruding from it and a petal-like element 24 seeming to crown this “stem”. The monster is placed between the hero and this object in a way that might presume that the hero fights monster(s) in order to pave his way to this object 24+25+26. The

latter, both in its elements and general structure, resembles to a certain extent the sacred tree, which has a very variable iconography in the Ancient Near Eastern art (including very rare specimens), see Fig. 3 and Note 2. However, this interpretation is somehow hindered by the fact that the "trunk" of the "tree" (26) is much wider than its "flower-shaped crown" (24), while no images of a tree with such a ratio of the trunk and the top have been found by us among many hundreds of checked examples. In the leftmost, heavily damaged part of the image, the traces of two more anthropomorphic figures can be supposed without certainty (27 – 31). Some other elements of the image are clearly visible but obscure in meaning for us.

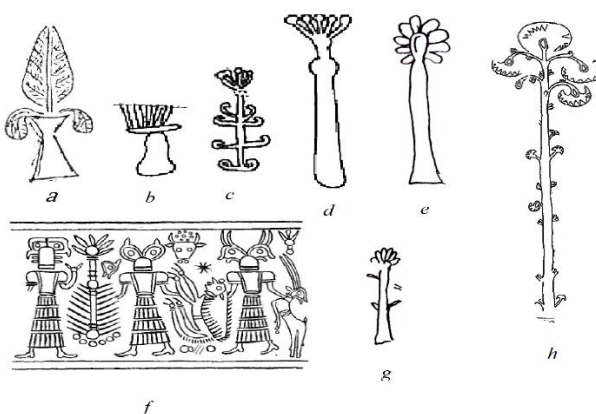


Fig. 3. Some Ancient Near Eastern images of trees⁵.

The serpent-fighting plot of the scene gives the composition under study a special value, since such scenes (especially involving not snakes but serpents/dragons without hind legs) repeat in the Mesopotamian and Syro-Anatolian traditions in course of ages, but only a few of such examples preserved for us, and the images with two- or multi-headed monsters of the kind ("hydras" in widespread terminology), with or without hind legs, are even more rare⁶. In any case, our artifact belongs to a not large group of seals from Kültepe bearing highly original plots and elements (the overwhelming majority of Kültepe seals contain, on the contrary, elements which are massively repeated on other seals from the same Kültepe and

⁵ a – Ur-Nammu stele (YORK 1975, Fig.9); b, c, d – seals from Alalakh IV (15–14th centuries BC), (COLLON 1982, No. 71, No. 108, No. 112); e, g – Neo-Babylonian seals (EISEN 1940, No.98, No. 99), f – "Syro-Hittite" seal of the Cypriot style (OSTEN 1934, No. 359), z – fresco from Mari (18th century BC) (after BLACK, GREEN 1998, 23, Fig. 16). Cf. with our object 24+25+26: a flower-like or leaf-like top and a trunk clearly separated from it: a, b, c, f; massive trunk with boughs or short branches: c, f, g, z; just massive trunk – a, b, d; stem-like element connecting the top and the trunk – d; top of the tree as a multi-petal corolla – e, cf. c, d.

⁶ On the Ancient Near Eastern hydras see FRANKFORT 1934, 8–11, 22–24; LEVY 1934, 49–50; FRANKFORT 1935, 105–108; FRANKFORT 1939, 71–72, 121–122; VAN BUREN 1946, 18–20; BISI 1964–1965; ORTHMANN 1975; PARAYRE 2003, 276, 294–295; AMIET 2006.

other centers in different combinations)⁷; snakes and similar creatures rarely are presented at Kültepe seals and when this takes place nonetheless, we see just snakes⁸, not serpent-like monsters as at our sealing.

Results and discussion

All the aforesaid incites us to trace the iconographic and mythological parallels and possible context for our image, in order to evaluate, as much as possible, which of Mesopotamian and / or Syro-Anatolian serpent-fighting plots and iconographic traditions could be reflected in composition in study (though one's ability to answer this questions is limited by the fact that many sources are lost for us). Taking into account that Kültepe was the center of interaction and synthesis of the traditions of Anatolia, Lower Mesopotamia and the Syrian-Upper Mesopotamian region, it would be reasonable to suggest to what extent our image is the fruit of Mesopotamian or of Syro-Anatolian traditions, and or their synthesis. Thus we have to compare it with relevant artifacts of a wide chronological range, not limiting ourselves to the region and time of the Old Assyrian colonies in Anatolia⁹.

Indeed, important analogies can be found for a number of motives of our image in relevant material (see Figs. below):

(1) The struggle with a (hind)-legless and / or two-headed / multi-headed serpent-like creature: see Fig. 4 (the hero strikes a snake in its muzzle with a dart, the snake is placed near a tree – an analogy to our image in several aspects at once); Fig. 5 (the hero with a spear attacks the snake); Fig. 6 (the hero shoots from a bow at a horned, legless serpent, and a small “sacred tree” is between them);

(2) cf. Figs. 7, 8, 9: the heroes fight with multi-headed hydras, including the legless one (Fig. 8; the hero hits this hydra in the muzzle of one of the heads, similarly to our image).

⁷ Cf. main publications of seals and seal impressions from Kültepe: CONTENAU 1922; ÖZGÜÇ 1965, 1968, 2006; ÖZGÜÇ, TUNCA 2001; TEISSIER 1994.

⁸ ÖZGÜÇ 1965: pl. XI, no. 31; pl. XVIII, no. 54; pl. XXI, no. 64; pl. XXV, no. 76; pl. XXVI, no. 77.

⁹ Publications of seals used for comparison include primarily: COLLON 1986; DELAPORTE 1910, 1920, 1923; EISEN 1940; FRANKFORT 1939; KEEL-LEU, TEISSIER 2004; PORADA 1947; PORADA, BUCHANAN 1948; VON DER OSTEN 1934; WARD 1909; WARD 1910, as well as regional corpora of seals of selected regions: ALP 1968; AMIET 1992; COLLON 1982; ERKANAL 1993; FRANKFORT 1955; MARCHETTI 2011; OTTO 2000; TUNCA 1979; the role of serpents in mythologies and relevant images of snakes and serpents were highlighted, in particular, in: AFANASYEVA 2007; BELLUCCI 2008; BUCHHOLZ 2000; IVANOV, TOPOROV 1974, 142–144; LAMBERT 1985; STEVENS 1989; SVYATOPOLK-CHETVERTYNSKY 2005; VAN BUREN 1946, 1947; WILLIAMS-FORTE 1983. Attraction of artifacts of several epochs for comparison is justified by the fact that here is so little data on serpent iconography in Ancient Near East that it does not allow to determine certain stages in its development, presuming the possibility of admitting the same, continuously reproducible motifs in objects that have come down from the same regions, but dated to a different time, including the previous and next millennia; in very deed, in a number of iconographic topics, the Syro-Anatolian and Mesopotamian glyptics reproduce the same motifs (with all their variations) for millennia.

Noteworthy is the similarity in the depiction of curved parallel necks of the hydras in Fig. 7 and 8 with the parallel curved necks / bodies 16 and 20 on our image, which fact reinforces the possibility of seeing elements 16+20 as a two-headed monster;

(3) cf. Fig. 10 a, b – in the famous relief H from Malatya AMM 12250, a god/hero fights with a serpent (without hind legs), which was often, but without concrete grounds, identified as *Illuyanka*¹⁰ or a similar mythological creature¹¹ (now this scene is more often understood as the battle of the Storm god with the serpent¹²). A number of authors believe that this snake has two or many heads¹³. Unfortunately, just that part of the relief that would show if it is really so is extremely damaged by a fissure. Nevertheless, upon a detailed examination of the relief based on the best photographs, primarily according to the publication of L. Delaporte (Delaporte 1940: Pl, XXII), it seems that the serpent is really two-headed (both necks are shown to the right of the fissure) and protrudes forward paws with weapons (shown to the left of the fissure and touching the kilt of the hero), cf. our drawing in Fig. 10, b. An alternative understanding would be that the protrusion(s) to the left of the fissure represents one neck and head, and the visible lines to the right of it represent the second (as suggested in van Loon 1997: 589) or even the second and third heads, but the best old photographs (cf. Fig. 10, a) seem to make the previous option preferable.

In both cases, the presumably double-headed serpent on this relief provides additional evidence for seeing the two-headed serpent-like monster in our image, especially since two "offshoots" of Malatya serpent more or less visible to the right of the fissure and the element (or elements) of the same serpent extended forward to the left of the fissure (Fig. 10, b) constitute a very close visual analogy to the two neck-like elements 16 and 20 and the elements 22-23 set forward from element 16 in our image. Thus we anew tend to see in elements 22-23 and in the protruding element of Malatya serpent seen to the left of the crack on AMM 12250 as well, the paws of two-headed serpents with necks shown bent parallel to each other (similar

¹⁰ GARSTANG 1929, 207; GÜTERBOCK 1957, 64 (doubtful due to the paucity of our knowledge of other similar subjects); AKURGAL 1961, 116.

¹¹ DELAPORTE 1940, 35; ÖZYAR 1991, 156; BROWN 2008, 159.

¹² AMIET 2001, 7; BUNNENS, HAWKINS, LEIRENS 2006, 129; POLI 2007, 306. The main argument against identifying this serpent with *Illuyanka* is the connection of the *Illuyanka* myth with the North Anatolia in the Hittite tradition (BACHVAROVA 2016, 257, n. 171), which forms a large spatial gap with East Anatolian Malatya (the time gap between the time of the fixation of the myth of *Illuyanka*, i.e. 14th century BC, and the time of the construction of the "Lion Gate" of Malatya, however, is not as great as it was previously thought: stylistically, the reliefs continue the traditions of the Neo-Hittite kingdom and are now dated usually to the 11th century BC, (GILBERT 2015, 144). This allows us to choose for the interpretation of the relief other plots of Hittite mythology, first of all, relating to the Hurrian cycle "Song of the Hedammu" and "Song of the Sea" with its Ugaritic-Egyptian parallels (van Loon 1997, 589), although in the fragments of these texts that have come down to us many-headed monsters are not mentioned.

¹³ DHORME, DUSSAUD 1945, 345; ÖZYAR 1991, 154; VAN LOON 1997, 589 (possibly two-headed, with the second head supposed to be seen in the protruding element touching the kilt of the hero to the left from the fissure); BOARDMAN 1998, 32 (two-headed); BELLUCCI 2008, 149 (possibly two-headed).

to the necks of the Mesopotamian hydras in Figs. 7 and 9). The parallelism between our image from Kültepe and the relief from Malatya is all the more revealing since they belong to the same region (Southeast of Asia Minor).

(4) The duality of the serpent-like enemy / character, including its two-headedness / doubled body: cf. Fig. 10 a, b; Fig. 11 (the hero appears before the deity with two intertwined snakes captured by him); Fig. 12 (a two-headed serpent next to a vertical element representing the "sacred tree" or a standard, see van Buren 1946: 7, 13)¹⁴. The two-headedness of various creatures was generally a fairly widespread motif in Near Eastern, in particular Mesopotamian and Syro-Anatolian art (Collon 1982: 41), including the seals from Kültepe.

(5) Presumable growth of a plant/tree-like element 17+18+19 from the body of the monster (16) finds analogies in a visual "fusion" of a tree and a legless monstrous serpent (with a dragon's head, similar to the head of our monster 16) on one seal (Fig. 13) and, however in a more distant way, in the standard iconographic motif of plants growing from the shoulders and backs of Mesopotamian fertility deities (see, e.g. Frankfort 1939: 106, 107, 114, 115, 124).

(6) The front paw-like elements 22+23 extended forward by a serpent without hind legs. One of the common iconographic types of Mesopotamian dragons and serpents, namely the *bašmu* (Figs. 14-15) and, possibly, a feature of the Malatya serpent, Fig. 10, see above.

(7) The shape of the head and muzzle of our monster (16) and the horn-like protrusion at the back of its head – cf. the same usual iconographic types of the Mesopotamian dragon (Figs. 14-15).

Thus, all the features of the serpent-like antagonist(s) of the hero in our image (in the light of the above parallels, this is rather a two-headed serpent than two different monsters) find, both separately and in some combinations, more or less close analogies within the relevant Near Eastern imagery. Only the specific combination of all these features offered in our image turns out to be unique (and not repeated fully on the objects known to us), but the same can be said about the majority of other (rare in themselves) images of serpent-like legless monsters.

As for the hero on the left, it should be noted that on the seals of Mesopotamia and Syro-Anatolia, a character attacking the enemy with a dagger is a very rare figure, although in Kültepe it is more often found on the seals of the "local" or Old Anatolian style¹⁵. On the whole, according to a number of features, our sealing should also be attributed to this style. It turns out that the closest iconographical parallel to the serpent on our seal is presented by Malatya

¹⁴ On the closely related image of double snakes (from which the image of a two-headed and two-body snake may have developed), see VAN BUREN 1935-1936. Cf. also the fight with the three-headed snake on the Early Dynastic Mesopotamian seal BM 123279 (VAN BUREN 1946, 6-7), our Fig. 8 a.

¹⁵ E.g., Kültepe seal Kt. b / k 134 (ÖZGÜÇ 1965, Pl. XVII, Fig. 51): the hero to the right of the Storm god kills the defeated enemy with a dagger.

serpent, and the alleged interpretation of some details of the scene on the seal also finds similarities with Syro-Anatolian motifs.

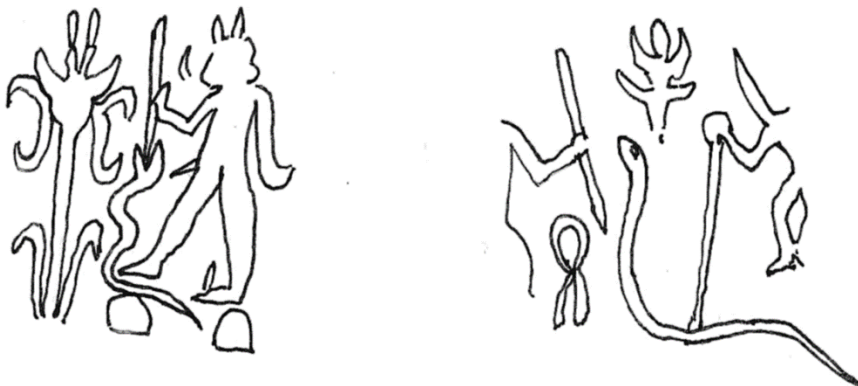


Fig. 4 (after EISEN 1940, No. 158), Fig. 5 (after EISEN 1940, No. 159). The Storm god kills the snake in serpent-fighting scenes on the seals of the so-called "the second Syrian group" (Syro-Anatolian seals of the middle 2nd millennium BC, EISEN 1940, 37).



Fig. 6 (after FRANKFORT 1939, Pl. XXIV, g). Serpent-fighting scene on the Neo-Assyrian seal of the 10-7th centuries BC. The horned serpent is probably *bašmu*.

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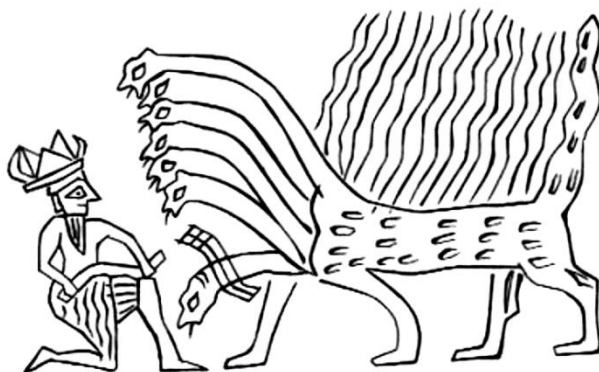


Fig. 7. God (Ninurta?) struggles with the seven-headed hydra: Sumerian plaque from the Early Dynastic period (after GREEN 1997, 155, Fig. 13). Cf. hydra in Fig. 7a.



Fig. 7a. The image of the seven-headed hydra on the top of the mace. Sumer, Early Dynastic Period (FRANKFORT 1935, Fig. 4).



Fig. 8. The hero struggles with a hydra without hind legs, a seal fragment dated to the Early Dynastic period from Tell Asmar (Eshnunna) (FRANKFORT 1939, 72, Ill. 27 = VAN BUREN 1946, Fig. 16 = FRANKFORT 1955, No. 497, cf. Pl. 45, preface).



Fig. 8. Three-headed legless hydra / snake on the Early Dynastic seal BM 123279 (AMET 1961, Pl. 105, Fig. 1389).

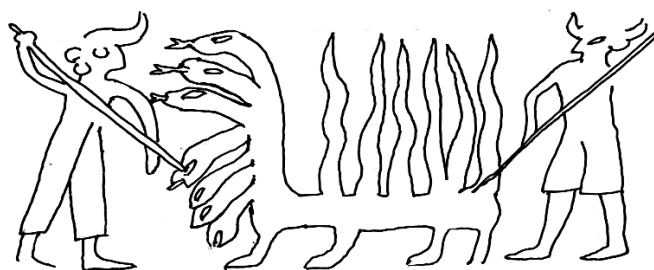


Fig. 9. Heroes slay the seven-headed hydra, schematic representation of a scene on a seal fragment dated to the early Old Akkadian period from Tell Asmar (Eshnunna) (after FRANKFORT 1939, Pl. XXIII j = VAN BUREN 1946, Fig. 17 = FRANKFORT 1955, No. 478).

The iconographical and mythological contexts of serpent(s)-fighting scene on the Old Assyrian seal impression from Kültepe (the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts I 2 b 1591)



Fig. 10a. Detail of the Neo-Hittite relief with a snake-fighting scene from Malatya, detail (DELAPORTE 1940, Pl. XXII, Relief H).

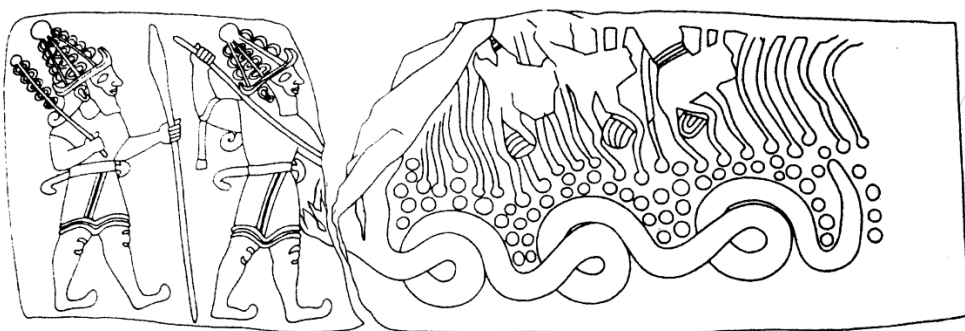


Fig. 10 b. Drawing of the Neo-Hittite relief from Malatya (DELAPORTE 1940, Pl. XXII, Relief H).



Fig. 11. "Syro-Hittite" seal of the 2nd millennium BC (WARD 1910, no. 823).



Fig. 12. Two-headed snake on the Old Akkadian seal VA 3303 (= VAN BUREN 1946, Fig. 5).



Fig. 13. The serpent is depicted as if "growing" from the tree (Neo-Assyrian seal, WARD 1910, No. 710).

The iconographical and mythological contexts of serpent(s)-fighting scene on the Old Assyrian seal impression from Kültepe (the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts I 2 b 1591)



Fig. 14. Neo-Assyrian seal BM 89589 (WARD 1910, No 579 = COLLON 2005, Fig. 850). God (probably Ninurta) and the serpent *bašmu*.



Fig. 15. Neo-Assyrian seal AO 30255, Louvre 33¹⁶. God (probably Ninurta) and the serpent *bašmu*.

¹⁶ Online publication of the Louvre Museum:

The next question is about which of Mesopotamian or Syro-Anatolian mythical and literary motifs could be reflected by our image. Thus, it seems useful to review the serpent-fighting plots known in the Near Eastern mythological tradition¹⁷. The most important serpent-fighting character in Mesopotamia was undoubtedly the god Ninurta. The story of his struggle with serpentine monsters is given in Sumerian texts, in particular, about the battle of Ninurta with Asag ("Lord in great radiance") and about his return to his hometown of Nippur ("Created alike Anu"). The concepts of these battles continued to exist in Mesopotamia for millenia and were vividly reflected in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian glyptics. (E.g., in the 1st millennium BC the plot of Ninurta's struggle with Asag was extremely common, as well as the confrontation between a god, most like the same Ninurta and the serpent *bašmu* (with horns and front paws).

The question of identification of the *bašmu* (muš-ša-tur) with Sumerian terms and pictorial material is rather vague. It is believed that this term denoted a horned viper and that it was reflected in the iconography of this creature. The Akkadian word *bašmu* was also used to denote the Sumerian *ušum*; the dragon *ušumgal* (*ušumgallu*) should also be close to this creature. The myth of Ninurta's return to Nippur mentions eleven monsters that Ninurta defeated. Among them is the "valiant serpent" (*ušum ur-saĝ*), probably corresponding to *bašmu* from *Enuma eliš*. In the Babylonian poem of creation, Tiamat also created eleven monsters, one of which was *bašmu*. However, the image of this monster by this time was undergoing significant changes, as if combining the features of *ušum ur-saĝ* and *muš-saĝ-7* from the myth of Ninurta – it has now six mouths, seven tongues and seven [...] on his belly¹⁸.

Muš-saĝ-7 is a seven-headed serpent living in the mountains and also mentioned in the list of Ninurta's trophies. Ninurta struck him down and hung him on the lapis lazuli rail (tum) of his chariot. Apparently, the images of "hydras" discussed above (on the Sumerian plaque of the Early Dynastic period, on the Early Dynastic seal from Tell Asmar (Eshnunna) and on the early Old Akkadian seal from Tell Asmar (Eshnunna)) reflect this plot.

http://cartelfr.louvre.fr/cartelfr/visite?srv=obj_view_obj&objet=cartel_26740_68486_SH037151_001.jpg_obj.html&flag=true

¹⁷ The role of serpent-like characters in mythologies and imagery of these regions was highlighted, in particular, in: AFANASYEVA 2007; BELLUCCI 2008; BUCHHOLZ 2000; IVANOV, TOPOROV 1974, 142–144; LAMBERT 1985; STEVENS 1989; Svyatopolk-Chetvertynsky 2005; van Buren 1947; WILLIAMS-FORTE 1983.

¹⁸ Although the Sumerian text on Ninurta's return to Nippur does not provide a detailed description of the creature's appearance, it can be assumed that, unlike the seven-headed serpent mentioned in the same text, it had only one head. The hymn contains the following lines about the snake *ušum*: [*ušum ur*]-*saĝ* *bàd gal kur-ra-ta nam-ta-an-è* – "He brought forth the Warrior dragon from the great fortress of the mountains" (line 33); *ušum ur-saĝ saĝ dūr-ra-ka bí-in-lá* – "He hung the Warrior dragon on the seat (of the chariot)" (line 56).

The text about the return of Ninurta also mentions the seven-headed serpent *mušmaḥḥu* (muš-maḥ) which, most likely, should be identical to the seven-headed serpent *muš-saḡ*-7. Ninurta's weapon is compared with the seven-mouthed serpent (the defeated creature becomes an attribute of its winner). Later, according to *Enuma eliš*, Tiamat gave birth to the *mušmaḥḥu* serpents, which had sharp teeth and venom instead of blood. These seven-headed beasts also participated in the battle of the gods. Ninurta's other weapon, the battle-ax, has been compared to the serpent *ušumgallu* (ušumgal) (line 133). Ninurta himself is also called the serpent (ušum) in "The Deeds of Ninurta".

The main feat of Ninurta is the victory over the dragon-like monster Asag, but it is presented in the form of a winged lion-griffin, which does not at all correspond to the appearance of the monster from our image.

Another famous dragon in Mesopotamia is the *mušhuššu*, best known through the images on the Gates of Ishtar in Babylon. In the IIInd-Ist millennium BC *mušhuššu* became an attribute of the Babylonian deities Marduk and Nabû, but in the IIIrd-IIInd millennium BC in the territories of northern Mesopotamia (in particular, in Eshnunna), *mušhuššu* was considered an animal of the Eshnunna patron deities Ninazu and, subsequently, Tishpak, as well as of Ningishzida, Ninazu's son venerated in Lagash¹⁹. There is an Old Akkadian myth about the struggle of the god Tishpak with the sea serpent and the establishment of world order [CT 13, 33-34]. According to this text, Tishpak fights with a serpent called *bašmu* (^{MUŠ}*bašmu*) and *labbu* (lion / the raging one²⁰) in order to restore order in the country and reign over it. T. Lewis notes that this creature should have had the features of both a serpent and a lion²¹. Since ancient times, dragons have combined the nature of these two animals, which is reflected in many Near Eastern artifacts (for example, images of lions with snake necks²²). By the way, Tiamat and her army were also described with usage of the term *labbu* in *Enuma eliš* (which fact once again indicates the proximity of the images of Tishpak and Marduk and their opponents in Mesopotamian mythology). However, it should not be forgotten that the serpent fought by Tishpak is called "sea-born", which casts doubt on its interpretation as a half-lion-half-serpent.

Tishpak was the Storm god, and some scholars believe that he was identified with the Hurrian Teshub²³. Teshub himself was also a serpent-fighting deity in both the Hittite and Hurrian traditions. We know an Anatolian myth of Illuyanka, a snake-like monster who firstly overcame the Storm god in battle, but later was defeated by him) and the Hurrian myth of

¹⁹ Tishpak succeeded Ninazu as the city deity of Eshnunna during the Old Akkadian period or the early Old Babylonian period (BLACK, GREEN 1998, 166). Cf. more on the connection between Tishpak and *mušhuššu* in LEWIS 1996, 29–30.

²⁰ According to WIGGERMANN 1989, cf. with *labābu*.

²¹ LEWIS 1996, 34–35.

²² FRANKFORT 1939, Pl. IV d, h.

²³ JACOBSEN 1932, 52; BLACK, GREEN 1998, 178.

Hedammu, an insatiable sea serpent, pacified by the beauty of Ishtar (CTH 348); the variant of the latter myth may be told in the “Song of the Sea” (KBo 26.105). It is believed that the Anatolian *purulliya*-festival, during which the myth of Illuyanka was recited, had been borrowed by the Hittites from the Hattians, the preceding ethnic group of Central Anatolia assimilated by them²⁴. Thus, in the Old Assyrian time (the time of the creation of our image), this mythological concept had to be well known in the region.

The above discussed scene of the Storm god's battle with the serpent on the Malatya relief was often defined as the battle of Teshub with Illuyanka²⁵ or a mythological creature similar to it²⁶. Of course, the interpretation of the serpent as Illuyanka seems to be the most acceptable, since Malatya (along with other Neo-Hittite kingdoms but clearly standing out among them) was the successor of the Hittite traditions of the Empire period, and it was myth of Teshub and Illuyanka that played a major role in the ritual life of the Hittite rulers (i.e. in *purulliya*-festival). The other known Anatolian myth of struggle with serpent, i.e. of Hedammu, was of Hurrian origin and not Teshub but his sister Ishtar played a decisive role in the victory over it. The struggle of the Storm god with the sea serpent was also reflected in Ugaritic mythology (the myth of the battle of Hadad-Baal with Lotan (Temtum), the servant of the Sea god Yamm).

Conclusions

Thus, we can distinguish two clusters of serpent-fighting motifs known in Eastern Asia Minor in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC: the Sumero-Akkadian tradition of the struggle of the hero-god Ninurta with the dragon and with the seven-headed hydra and the North Mesopotamian and Anatolian traditions about the fight of the Storm god with a serpent (usually associated with sea), which later became especially widespread in the Eastern Mediterranean and Anatolian regions. It should be noted that in none of the known texts explicit mention of the two-headed serpent or dragon appears (though it seems that just such a serpent is seen on the Malatya relief).

Taking into account all of the above, we can conclude that at present moment the precise identification of the mythological plot on the sealing from the Pushkin Museum seems difficult, as no detail of the image directly indicate this or that mythological plot. However some more general conclusions can be made: as the interpretation of the serpent at our sealing as a seven-headed hydra should be ruled out, it can hardly deal with reflections of the Mesopotamian concept of Ninurta's struggle with the seven-headed serpent; despite of some

²⁴ HOFFNER 1998, 9.

²⁵ GARSTANG 1929, 207; GÜTERBOCK 1957, 64 (with doubt due to the scarcity of our knowledge about other similar subjects); AKURGAL 1961, 116.

²⁶ DELAPORTE 1940, 35; ÖZYAR 1991, 156; BROWN 2008, 159.

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iconographical features of the monster(s) on our sealing common with some *bašmu* representations, the general appearance of these monster(s) is far from that of *bašmu*. Thus, the Syro-Anatolian origin of the composition's plot is still more likely (and confirmed by parallels with the Malatya serpent). It seems that the sealing from the Pushkin Museum contains an image of the struggle of a hero with doubled or two-headed serpent, and such a scene could well relate to the circle of plots belonging to the second of aforementioned mythological clusters, tied to the concept of fight between the Storm god and the serpent (usually the monster from the sea).

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