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*Araştırma Makalesi/Research Article*

The Serpent-Fighting Imagery of Anatolia in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC  
and Malatya Serpentine Monster in the Light of Newly Published Old  
Assyrian Seal Impression from Kültepe\*

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**Abstract**

The present work deals with serpent-fighting motifs from Anatolia of the second millennium BC reconsidered in the light of recently discovered composition with a serpent-fighting scene on an Old Assyrian seal impression from Kültepe kept at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow (I 2 6 1591). Besides this sealing, the famous representation at the Malatya Relief H (the orthostat AMM 12250) and myths of Illuyanka and Hedammu are compared to each other according to various criteria of depicting the hero, the monster and the fighting scene itself. The scholars often regarded Malatya Relief H as representing the plot of Illuyanka myth, but the discovery of dragon-slaying scene on the Pushkin Museum's sealing gives grounds for its re-analyzing. It is revealed that the pictorial monuments from Anatolia in contrast

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to the textual ones depict the hero acting alone; most of Anatolian dragons have front paws.

The ultimate fighting is shown in iconography as a close combat struggle while in the narratives the close combat seems to give more advantage to the serpent. The composition similarity of Malatya Relief and the Pushkin Museum's sealing is demonstrated in general as well as in concrete details. This fact allows to trace the development of the Neo-Hittite dragon-slaying imagery and plots to pre-Hittite times (the dragon-slaying motif as depicted in the orthostat AMM 12250 roots back at least to the 18th century BC when similar features were reflected at the Old Assyrian sealing from the Pushkin Museum I 2 6 1591) and to solve some problems of interpretation for the Malatya Relief H (number of monster's heads, identification of monster's parts stretched up to the hero's figure, possible role of the dagger, etc.).

**Keywords:** Neo-Hittite reliefs, Malatya-Arslantepe, Kültepe, serpent-fighting, Storm-God.

## MÖ 2. Bin Anadolu'sunda Yılan Dövüşü Tasviri ve Yeni Yayımlanmış Kültepe'den Bir Eski Assur Dönemi Baskı Mührü Işığında Malatya Yılanlı Canavarı

### Öz

Bu çalışma, MÖ 2. binyıl Anadolu'suna ait yılan dövüşü motiflerini Moskova'daki Puşkin Devlet Güzel Sanatlar Müzesi'nde yer alan Kültepe'den bir Eski Asur baskı mührü (I 2 6 1591) üzerindeki yılan dövüşü sahnesi ile yakın zamanda keşfedilen benzer bir kompozisyonun ışığında yeniden değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Kültepe Mührü yanı sıra Malatya Kabartması H'deki (Ortostat AMM 12250) ünlü betim ile İlluyanka ve Hedammu mitolojisi, kahramanı, canavarı ve dövüş sahnesini betimleme açısından çeşitli kriterlere göre birbirleriyle karşılaştırılmıştır. Araştırmacılar her ne kadar Malatya Kabartması H'yi İlluyanka mitinin olay örgüsünü temsil ediyor olarak görüyor olsa da Puşkin Müzesi mühründeki ejderha öldürme sahnesinin keşfi, yeniden analiz edilmesi için zemin sağlamaktadır. Anadolu kaynaklı betimli anıtlarda kahraman, yazılı olanlardan farklı olarak tek başına hareket ederken betimlenir ve yine ejderhaların çoğunun ön pençeleri vardır.

Mücadele ikonografide bir yakın dövüş sahnesi olarak gösterilirken, anlatılarda yakın dövüşün yılanı daha fazla avantaj sağladığı görülüyor. Malatya Kabartması ile Puşkin Müzesi mührünün kompozisyon benzerliği genel olarak ortaya konulduğu gibi detaylarda da somut olarak gösterilmiştir. Bu durum, Geç Hitit ejderha öldürme imgesinin ve olay örgüsünün gelişimini Eski Hitit Dönemi'ne kadar izlememize (Puşkin Müzesi I 2 6 1591'deki Eski Asur mührüne benzer özelliklerin yansıtıldığı ortostat AMM 12250'de tasvir edildiği şekliyle ejderha öldürme motifinin kökleri, en

azından MÖ 18. yüzyıla kadar uzanır) ve Malatya Kabartma H için bazı yorumlama problemlerini çözmemize imkân tanır. (Canavar başlarının sayısı, kahraman figürüne kadar uzanan canavar gövde parçalarının tanımlanması, hançerin olası rolü, vb.)

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Geç Hitit kabartmaları, Malatya-Arslantepe, Kültepe, yılan dövüşü, Fırtına Tanrısı.

## Introduction

The (Early) Neo-Hittite reliefs decorating the orthostats of the Lion Gate at the Arslantepe-Malatya site are regarded for long as masterpieces of ancient Anatolian art and attract intensive scholar attention since their discovery in 1894 by a peasant who had begun excavating the hill in search of stones suitable for use in building. The most large-scaled study of these orthostats in situ was carried out in 1907, when the Cornell University expedition first discovered a serpent-slaying scene on the relief H<sup>1</sup>. The discoverers considered potential parallels of the scene with several then-known snake-fighting myths of ancient world and refused to associate this scene with any of them<sup>2</sup>.

In 1914, the orthostat with the relief H was transported to the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, wherefrom, after 1940, together with other Lion Gate orthostats, it was transferred to the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara<sup>3</sup>, where it is kept under the number AMM 12250<sup>4</sup>. Contemporary researchers date this relief to the second half of the 12th century BC, attributing its creation to the reign of the king Allummali I of Melid-Malatya<sup>5</sup>. After the first translation of

- 1 This relief had been preliminary studied even before the expedition of Cornell University in the same 1907 by S. Ronzevalle by photograph (Sébastien Ronzevalle, “Monuments hittites d’Arslân-tépé”, *Mélanges de la Faculté orientale de l’Université Saint-Joseph*, t. 3/fasc. 2 (1909), pp. 799-800) and by J. Garstang de visu [John Garstang, “Notes on a Journey through Asia Minor”, *Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology*, Vol. 1, 1908, p. 4], but since two parts of its serpent-slaying scene were found on different blocks located while being discovered not in their original order, these researchers could not then establish the integral nature of the scene.
- 2 Albert Ten Eyck Olmsted - Benson Brush Charles - Jesse Erwin Wrench, *Travels and Studies in the Nearer East. Vol. 1. Pt. 2: Hittite Inscriptions*, New Era Printing Company, Ithaca 1911, p. 43.
- 3 John David Hawkins, *Corpus of Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscriptions. Vol. 1: Inscriptions of the Iron Ages*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin - New York 2000, p. 306.
- 4 Winfried Orthmann, *Untersuchungen zur späthethitischen Kunst*, Rudolf Habelt Verlag, Bonn 1971, p. 520.
- 5 Alessandra Gilibert, “Religion and Propaganda under the Great Kings of Karkemiš”, *Sacred Landscapes of Hittites and Luwians: Proceedings of the International Conference in Honour of Franca Pecchioli Daddi: Florence, February 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> 2014*, Firenze University Press, Florence 2015, pp. 143-144.

the mythological Anatolian texts of Hittite epoch<sup>6</sup>, the plot of the Hittite serpent-fighting myth on Illuyanka became known, and was soon compared with the scene on the relief H from Malatya<sup>7</sup>. Comparison or identification of these two scenes of the struggle between the Storm-God and the serpent in Hittite art and literature took profound root in later works on the Illuyanka myth and Malatya reliefs and was fixed in reference books<sup>8</sup>. At the same time, although A. Özyar's most detailed study of the mythological scene depicted on relief H reveals a number of parallels between the relief and the text of the Illuyanka myth, she prefers to talk about the similarity of plots rather than about their identity<sup>9</sup>. Until recently, these two pieces and the Anatolian myth about Hedammu have in fact constituted all the available material for discussing serpent-fighting plots in the mythology of Anatolia of the 2nd millennium BC<sup>10</sup>. This situation, nevertheless, has partly changed when an impression of a small Old Assyrian sealing from Kültepe with a serpent-fighting composition was re-discovered in the collection of the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow (Museum number I 2 6 1591). This sealing was identified by our team at the little fragment of an envelope of a clay tablet that entered the Museum in 1911 as a part of the collection of V. S. Golenishchev, who probably had purchased it in Constantinople along with other tablets and fragments of tablets of the Old Assyrian period<sup>11</sup>. It allows us to take a fresh look at the nature

- 6 Archibald Henry Sayce, "Hittite legend of the war with the Great Serpent", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 54/Issue 2, 1922, pp. 177-190.
- 7 John Garstang, *The Hittite Empire, Being a Survey of the History, Geography and Monuments of the Hittite Asia Minor and Syria*, Constable and Company, London 1929, p. 207; Émile Benveniste - Louis Renou, *Vřtra et Vř Oragna; étude de mythologie indo-iranienne*, Imprimerie nationale, Paris 1934, pp. 185-186; Georges Dossin, "Le dieu Gibil et les incendies de vegetation", *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, Vol. 109, 1934, p. 43, n. 4; Louis Delaporte, *Malatya. Fouilles de la Mission Archéologique Française. Arsilantepe. Fasc. 1: La Porte des Lions*, E. de Boccard, Paris 1940, p. 35.
- 8 Heinrich Otten, "Illujanka", *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie*. Bd. 5, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin - New York 1976, p. 61; Trevor Bryce, *The Routledge Handbook of the Peoples and Places of Ancient Western Asia. The Near East from the Early Bronze Age to the Fall of the Persian Empire*, Routledge, London - New York 2009, p. 504.
- 9 Ash Özyar, *Architectural Relief Sculpture at Karkamish, Malatya, and Tell Halaf: A Technical and Iconographic Study*, PhD Thesis, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr 1991, p. 156.
- 10 Another possible example of the similar scene has been identified at the Karatepe relief (Helmut Theodor Bossert - Uluğ Bahadır Alkım, *Karatepe: Kadırlı and its environments, second preliminary report*, Pullhan Basimevi, İstanbul 1947, p. 26, fig. 137), but it was composed in I millennium BC, and is so fragmentary that we cannot be sure that the animal adversary is a snake and not a lion, by which reasons we should exclude it from our analysis.
- 11 Alexandre Arkadyevich Nemirovsky - Vladimir Yuryevich Shelestin - Anastasia Alexandrovna Yasenovskaya, "Сцена борьбы со змееморфным демоническим персонажем на оттиске

of the serpent-fighting plot from Malatya and to contribute to determining its place in the mythology of Asia Minor. Let us consider the main components of the serpent-fighting scene in each of the four named cases.

### The Serpent-Fighter

On the relief from Malatya, the serpent-fighter is presented on the left as two similar anthropomorphic figures facing towards the monster and shown in profile. The clothes of both figures are identical, consisting of a conical cap, the pattern of which resembles the Anatolian ideogram DEUS, a short belted tunic and shoes with upward-turned toes. Both figures have daggers stuck in their belts. The left figure located farther from the snake holds a spear in his left hand, and a mace in his right hand, while the second figure, shown nearer to the snake, holds a spear with both hands striking the snake in a diagonal direction. Even before the serpent-fighting nature of these figures was understood, their clothing had been firmly identified as characteristic of the Hittite Storm-God on the monuments of the New Kingdom<sup>12</sup>. However, there is no consensus among researchers whether two personages should be recognized in these two serpent-fighting figures<sup>13</sup> or it was presumed by the authors of the composition that it was one and the same hero depicted twice at different successive moments of his actions, the so-called dynamic composition<sup>14</sup>.

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печати староассирийского периода из собрания ГМИИ им. А.С.Пушкина (I 2 B 1591)", *Scripta Antiqua*, Т. 8, Sobranie, Moscow 2019, pp. 62-95; Anastasia Alexandrovna Iasenovskaya - Alexandre Arkadyevich Nemirovsky - Vladimir Yuryevich Shelestin, "Змеборческий сюжет на оттиске староассирийской печати из коллекции ГМИИ имени А.С. Пушкина: мифологический контекст", *Вестник Московского университета. Серия 8. История*, №6, 2019, pp. 3-24; Alexandre Nemirovsky - Vladimir Shelestin - Anastasia Iasenovskaya, "Scene of Fighting with Serpent(s) on the Old Assyrian Seal Impression from Kültepe (Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, I 2 b 1591)", *Antiquo Oriente* 18, 2020, pp. 207-234.

- 12 Garstang, "Notes on a Journey through Asia Minor", p. 4.
- 13 Özyar, *ibid*, p. 154; Maurits Nanning van Loon, "Mythology in Visual Art of Asia Minor", *Realexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie*. Bd. 8. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin -New York 1997, p. 589; Benedetta Bellucci, "I serpenti nel mito. Alcune possibili traduzioni nell'arte", *Traduzione di tradizioni e traduzioni di traduzione. Atti del quarto incontro "Orientalisti" (Pavia, 19-21 aprile 2007)*, Qu.A.S.A.R., Milano 2008, p. 148.
- 14 Hans Gustav Güterbock, "Narration in Anatolian, Syrian and Assyrian Art", *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 61, 1957, p. 64; Orthmann, *ibid*, p. 437, n. 5; Brian Ashley Brown, *Monumentalizing Identities: North Syrian Urbanism, 1200-800 BCE*, PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley 2008, p. 148.

Those scholars who identify here two different characters, emphasize such differences between two figures in question as the carrying a mace by the left figure only and the presence of the ribbon, in turn, on the right figure's hand only. In our opinion, these differences are not sufficient to refuse from identifying here a dynamic composition, i.e. one and the same character depicted at different stages of the action, in view of other strict similarities between these figures: their clothes are identical in all details, up to the trimming of the dressing's wrap over and edges and the tracery on the headdress. The very differences in character and disposition of weaponry underline, to our mind, the possibility to see here a dynamic composition rather than two different warriors: the left figure is armed not only with a spear, but also with a mace as a well-recognized symbol of the Storm-God, as known from the Yazılıkaya pantheon (where, it must be emphasized, only this god has a hat similar to those of both Malatya figures<sup>15</sup>). The right figure has no mace, that can be better explained by the fact that the protagonist holds the spear with both hands, so the mace seems to be useless at the moment and its depiction would be superfluous (while he could still keep the mace with the above-mentioned ribbon hanging from his raised hand, though the mace itself is not shown; regardless of this possible connection with the mace, this ribbon could be used after the victory over the serpent to tie the latter<sup>16</sup>). The visual dissimilarity in the length of the left and right figures' head queues can be explained by purely visual aims of seal maker or/and different positions of the figure's right shoulder (in one case this shoulder is down, giving enough space to show the queue above it, in other case it is up in the backswing, so that it could be inconvenient to depict the queue's ending still above this shoulder) and just by the supposition that the queue is shown as curled and picked up before the fighting and as unwound and hanging loose in course of it. Thus, in our opinion, the same hero is presented by both figures and has most of the signs of being the Storm-God.

On the seal impression from the Pushkin Museum, the serpent-fighter is shown schematically on the left as three anthropomorphic figures looking towards the serpent (one figure is shown larger and directly engaged in battle). The sketchiness of the silhouettes (especially of the rear two figures at the left) does not allow to discuss the details of their dressing, however, it can be noted that the dressing

15 Cf. Kurt Bittel, *Die Felsbilder von Yazılıkaya. Neue Aufnahmen der Deutschen Boğazköy-Expedition 1931*, Bamberg 1934, fig. 42.

16 Özyar, *ibid.*, p. 155.

looks like a dress or a coat reaching to the ankles. The left and right figures hold identical-looking daggers in one hand (the corresponding part of the central figure is preserved bad so that nothing can be said about its possible dagger): the corresponding hand of the left figure is extended forward, and the dagger is directed to the ground; the hand of the right figure, engaged in battle, is raised and the dagger is aimed horizontally at the snake-like monster trying to hit it. The similarity of daggers allows us to admit the possibility of their identification as depicting the same hero, thus assuming the dynamic nature of the composition as well.

The personality of the serpent-fighting hero is unclear. The Storm-God has a characteristic horn-shaped cap on the seals of the Old Assyrian period, but the poor preservation of the head contour of our hero does not allow us to judge the shape of his headdress. On the other hand, the dagger in the Old Assyrian glyptic was a characteristic attribute of Aššur, who was sometimes depicted as the Storm-God too<sup>17</sup>, although from time to time, the dagger is also found in hands of the War-God or the two-faced god Usmu<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, we cannot tell whether the serpent-fighter in this scene was the Storm-God, or (and it seems to be more likely) he should be identified as Aššur.

In the Illuyanka Myth (CTH 321)<sup>19</sup>, the main antagonist of the serpent Illuyanka is the Storm-God. In the first battle, the serpent overcomes the Storm-God (KBo 3.7 I 9–11), then the mortal Hupašiya binds the monster, and the Storm-God finishes it off (KUB 17.5 I 14–18).

In another version of the myth, the serpent, having defeated the Storm-God, takes away his heart and eyes (KBo 3.7 III 1–2), after that the Storm-God gives these organs back with the help of his son, the serpent's son-in-law, and then defeats the serpent in a new battle, killing the said son along the way (KBo 3.7 III 18–32).

17 Grace Kate-Sue White, *The Religious Iconography of Cappadocian Glyptic in the Assyrian Colony Period and Its Significance in the Hittite New Kingdom*, PhD thesis, University of Chicago, Chicago 1993, p. 347.

18 Nimet Özgüç, *The Anatolian Group of cylinder seal impressions from Kültepe*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 1965, p. 53.

19 Elisabeth Rieken et alia, *CTH 321 - Der Drachenkampf oder „Illuyanka“* (2010) [https://www.he-thport.uni-wuerzburg.de/txhet\\_myth/intro.php?xst=CTH%20321&prgr=%C2%A7%201&lg=DE&ed=](https://www.he-thport.uni-wuerzburg.de/txhet_myth/intro.php?xst=CTH%20321&prgr=%C2%A7%201&lg=DE&ed=) (accessed: 02.12.2020).

In the Song of Hedammu (CTH 348)<sup>20</sup> the serpent Hedammu is generated by Kumarbi to struggle against the Storm-God. Unfortunately, the fragmentation of the song's preserved part does not allow to say whether it even described the battle in which the Storm-God overcomes Hedammu<sup>21</sup>. From the moments of confrontation, only one scene is preserved where Hedammu was enchanted by Anzili, the sister of the Storm-God, with love magics (KUB 33.84+).

Thus, of three traced cases the Storm-God wins the struggle against the serpent by his own efforts only on the relief from Malatya. In the Illuyanka myth, an only face to face battle of the Storm-God with the serpent ends unsuccessfully for the former. On the sealing from the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, the hero, apparently, fights alone against the serpent, and he is shown as definitely victorious, but there is no certainty that this hero is the Storm-God. In the Song of Hedammu, such a battle is not described at all and, perhaps, the Storm-God here only finishes off the snake, as in the Illuyanka myth<sup>22</sup>.

### The Serpent's Shape

The serpent depicted on the right side of the relief from Malatya has a long torso curling in rings. Along its entire length, wavy lines ending in circles descend from the sky towards the serpent's body, apparently representing rain and hail<sup>23</sup>. Early researchers understood these lines and circles as fire splashes spewing out by a fire-breathing serpent<sup>24</sup>, or like water (according to another version, grass), where

20 Rieken et al., *CTH 348 - Das Hedammu-Lied* (2009) [https://www.hethport.uni-wuerzburg.de/txhet\\_myth/intro.php?xst=CTH%20348.I.1&prgr=&lg=DE&ed=E.%20Rieken%20et%20al](https://www.hethport.uni-wuerzburg.de/txhet_myth/intro.php?xst=CTH%20348.I.1&prgr=&lg=DE&ed=E.%20Rieken%20et%20al) (accessed: 02.12.2020).

21 This victory is assumed by all researchers, see Volkert Haas, *Die hethitische Literatur*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin - New York 2006, p. 155; Mary Bachvarova, "The Hurro-Hittite Kumarbi Cycle", *Gods, Heroes, and Monsters: A Sourcebook of Greek, Roman, and Near Eastern Myths in Translation*, ed. C. López-Ruiz, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford University Press, New York - Oxford 2017, p. 158.

22 Although with a static interpretation of Malatya relief it should be assumed that the Storm-God had a helper here too (some researchers interpret the second figure at the scene as the Storm-God's son or brother), none of written records of the serpent-fighting myths describe the God's helpers in battle as persons similar to him, while in Malatya relief the figures of serpent-fighter(s) are quite similar to each other. And as for the Storm-God's son, in the battle he fights not on his father's side, but on the side of his father-in-law – the serpent – and this fact causes the son's death.

23 Garstang, *The Hittite Empire*, p. 207; Özyar, *ibid*, p. 154-155

24 Garstang, "Notes on a Journey through Asia Minor", p. 4; Ernst Herzfeld, "Hethitica (Schluß)", *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, Bd. 2, 1930, p. 180.



a monster hid<sup>25</sup>, or as the ground where his burrow is located<sup>26</sup>. The absence of other similar images in relevant art does not allow to establish any certain interpretation of these lines and circles by analysis of known iconography, but the fact that there is no any special representation of water at all even on the relief with a ship from Karatepe<sup>27</sup> permits us to exclude the interpretation of elements in discussion as water. The interpretation of elements as fire splashes can be discarded on the grounds that neither fearlessness of the hero closely approaching the serpent at Malatya relief, nor the description of serpents and serpent-fighting in myths allow to suppose that Anatolian serpentine monsters were fire-breathing.

The next subject of discussion is the number of serpent's heads. Initially all visible left ending of the torso was understood as the single head with the wide open mouth<sup>28</sup>, but further examination of the image turned later researchers to the idea of two- or multi-headed serpent<sup>29</sup>.

Basing on the relief's study in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in November 2019 V. Yu. Shelestin has confirmed by visual inspection the idea (corroborated by the best photographs as well), that the doubled "protuberance" (seen to the left of the deep crack), belonging undoubtedly to the serpent's figure, and stretched towards the serpent-fighter's figure, with its bifurcated endings, should rather be considered as two (claw-like?) stretched forward paws of the monster than as its head(s) (this idea is also confirmed by similar paws of a snake-like monster on the aforementioned Kültepe sealing from the Pushkin Museum, see below). In this case, the elements visible on the relief to the right of the crack (see Fig. 1) (an extended protuberating section of the neck, adjacent to the body at an acute angle; the branching of the torso in two parts which is visible clear enough just in front of the crack and strongly deviates upward; and remaining of another

25 Olmsted et al., *ibid*, p. 43.

26 Garstang, *The Hittite Empire*, p. 207.

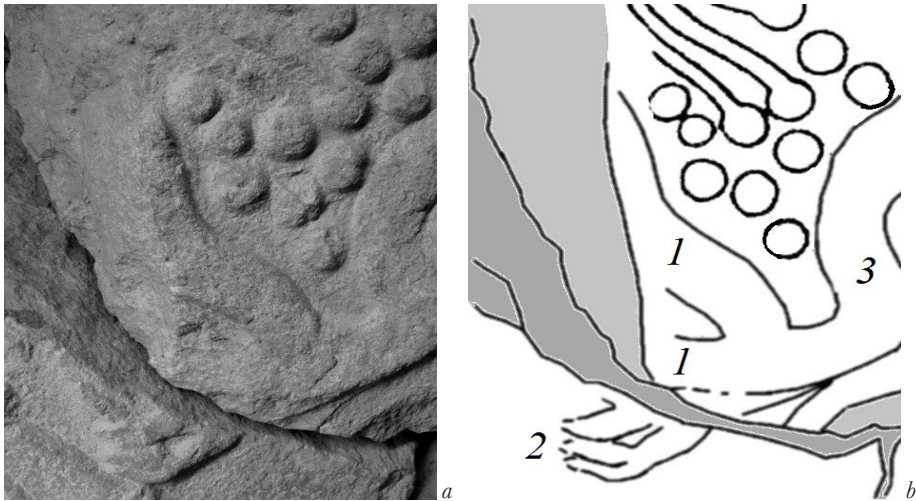
27 Halet Çambel, "Karatepe: An Archeological Introduction to a Recently Discovered Hittite Site in Southern Anatolia", *Oriens*, Vol. 1, 1948, p. 155-156; Paolo Matthiae, *Studi sui relievi di Karatepe*, Centro di studi semitici, Istituto di studi del Vicino Oriente - Università, Roma 1963, p. 126; Halet Çambel - Aslı Özyar, *Karatepe-Aslantaş. Die Bildwerke*, Philipp von Zabern, Mainz am Rhein, 2003, pp. 84-89.

28 Garstang, *The Hittite Empire*, p. 207.

29 Édouard Dhorme, René Dussaud, *Les religions de Babylone et d'Assyrie. Les religions des Hittites et des Hourrites, des Phéniciens et des Syriens*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1945, p. 345; Özyar, *ibid*, p. 154; van Loon, *ibid*, p. 589.

protuberating extended element which goes from the said branching to the crack more directly and lower than the long extension mentioned above) do not allow to treat them as a depiction of a single neck of the serpent, but speak in favor of the multi (two)-headed monster. The branching marked above in this case depicts the splitting of the monster's torso into two necks, and the two extensions which continue this branching would be these necks themselves. The lower one of them could be continued for considerable length within the area, which is now fully damaged by the crack, or may be represents a short stump of neck cut by the hero<sup>30</sup>.

30 It should be noted that if we assume that the serpent is depicted here according to the principle of dynamic composition (as well as the hero who is probably depicted in such a manner), then the indicated visual multi-headedness (two-headedness) of the monster could be understood as a reflection of two subsequent positions of a single-headed serpent: at one stage it throws up his neck, preparing to fight the hero, while at another stage the neck is already stretched or inclined forward, and both these sequential positions of the neck are combined in one image, while the position of body and extended paws remains unchanged at both stages. However, there are some obstacles to such a supposition. First, we see only one figure of the serpent on the relief. Meanwhile, if the dynamic composition exists here at all, i.e. if at least the hero is presented on the relief twice, in various moments of his actions, then we must admit that the dynamic composition supposes the usage of two independent figures of the hero, each of them presents him at the corresponding stage of action. Thus, if the relief maker did really presume the dynamic composition, he, as it can be seen from the two hero's figures, chose to express every depicted stage of a personage's action by independent figure in a corresponding position. Why, then, he would use quite another method for depicting various stages of the serpent's actions, i.e. to show these stages through one and the same figure of the serpent with combined consequential positions of its necks, fully contrary to the manner in which he expressed the consequential positions of the hero? This consideration leads us to recognize that independently of interpretation of two serpent-fighting figures the figure of the serpent itself presents it at one and the same moment. Then, we think that if the same neck in two different positions had been shown here, the upper one would have been depicted with more natural and obtuse angle of connection to the torso. Moreover, if we had assumed that two visible necks of the serpent reflected two different positions of one presumed neck, it would have not been very clear, what a real difference in stages of action the relief maker wanted to express by this mean. In both cases, the neck(s) go(es) forward and upward, just at slightly different angles. Why, then, would the relief maker have wanted to highlight and portray specifically these positions of the monster's neck? Was there anything significantly different in these positions to make them present as two successive phases of the whole action? For all these reasons we think that the serpent's figure with all its details reflects a single position of the serpent, and not two different ones in combination.



**Fig. 1:** Relief AMM 12250: **a.** The neck(s) (1), the paws (2) and the front part of the serpent's body (3) before this body begins to split in two branches/necks (1). **b.** Contour outline of the same part of the relief; the vast crack and the main chips are highlighted in gray.

Photo by V. Yu. Shelestin. Drawing by A. A. Nemirovsky.

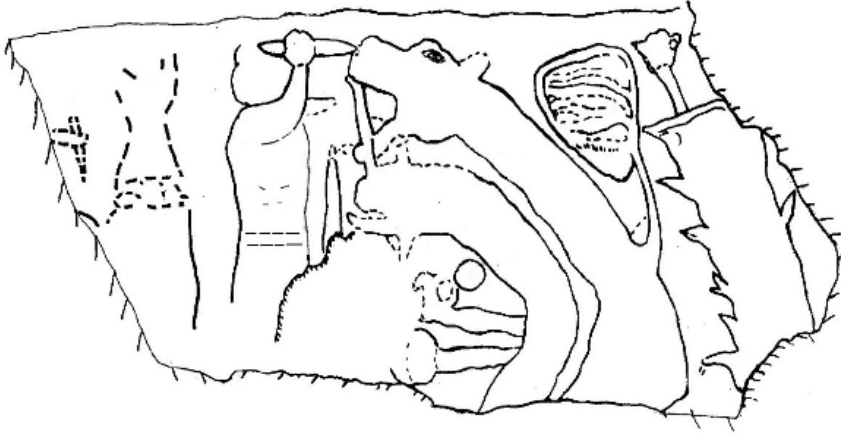
As for the Kültepe sealing from the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts I 2 6 1591 (see drawing in fig. 2), on its right side one can see a depiction of several (apparently two) serpentine torsos/bodies that are not connected to each other within the limits of the preserved part of the impression; each torso is continued by one neck and one head with backward protrusion (crest? horns? ears?) in its occipital part. The torso carrying the head hit by the hero's weapon has a protruding element which seems to grow from its back and ends with a massive element (visually resembling, up to some degree, a crown of a tree); it is apparently not another head (and it is not quite clear whether it is really a part of the serpentine body). From the second torso, whose head is situated at the level of the hero's abdomen, two paws with something like pincers protrude forward. In shape and position they are very reminiscent of those elements of the Malatya monster which are stretched forward, to the left of the crack, at the Malatya relief (let us repeat, that this very similarity supports the interpretation of these elements of the serpent from Malatya as similar paws).

While assessing whether the seal in question depicts a binary (two-bodied, two-headed) serpent-like monster, or two similar one-headed monsters (or even one one-headed monster in two different phases of action, as might be assumed if a hypothesis of dynamic composition would be applied here too), it is difficult to establish categorical conclusions. However, there are clear differences between the two bodies/necks. This fact supports the idea that they belong to the same creature with two necks. Only one of the bodies has front paws, while another one lacks them, but, in turn, seems to have a large dorsal element, which the first body has not. This difference means that it hardly can be the same creature shown twice in two consecutive moments of its action (as in case if the dynamic composition would have been applied here to the monster), otherwise the appearance of both figures would be identical. And it seems more probable that the hero confronts one two-headed serpent with two paws extended forward and a dorsal element, than two single-headed serpents, which are shown differently – one has paws, but no dorsal outgrowth, while the other has this outgrowth, but no paws, and in all other aspects they are very similar.

This supports the idea of the monster from Malatya (which has elements analogous to the paws on our Kültepe sealing, and details that can be reliably interpreted as two necks) as two-headed serpent in many ways similar to the monster on the Kültepe sealing under discussion. Note, by the way, that Kültepe is regionally close enough to Malatya within the Anatolian space.



*a*



b

**Fig. 2:** The image on the seal impression from the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts I 2 6 1591<sup>31</sup>.

In the Illuyanka myth, the appearance of the serpent is virtually not reflected. It is known that Illuyanka, together with his children, lives in a burrow, whereto he does not want to return after a feast at Inara (KUB 17.5 I 5-6, 13-14). In another version of the myth, the last battle takes place by the sea, which may indicate the serpent's marine origin or connotations (KBo 3.7 III 22). Nothing is known at all about the number of Illuyanka's heads, but the existence of its paws can be confirmed by the fact that Hupašiya tied him with a rope (KUB 17.5 I 15) - such a method of trapping is used for reptiles such as lizards. Paws are also mentioned in other Hittite texts for creatures designated by the Sumerogram MUŠ 'snake', for example, MUŠ[-aš] GIR.MEŠ 'snake paws' in the Pittei ritual (CTH 767: KUB 44.4 + KBo 13.241 obv. 33), because this Sumerogram could cover the entire range of reptiles<sup>32</sup>.

The Song of Hedammu pays more attention to the appearance of the serpent, although, apparently, much of the description of its appearance has been lost. This is a heat-loving sea monster (KUB 8.67 9-11), oviparous (KBo 19.109+ IV 17) and having an irrepressible appetite (KUB 8.67 12-22). It "gathers a bunch

<sup>31</sup> After Nemirovsky - Shelestin - Iasenovskaya, "Scene of Fighting", pp. 211-212.

<sup>32</sup> Billie Jean Collins, *The Representation of Wild Animals in Hittite Texts*, PhD thesis. Yale University, Ann Arbor 1989, p. 208.

of heads” (KBo 19.109+ IV 19: *ḫar-pu-uš* SAG.DU-*aš* [*ḫ*]*ar-pi-ia-a*[*ḫ*]), which may serve as an indication of its multi-headedness, although in other variant of this Song Hedammu sticks out of the waves only one head to look at the charms of Anzili (KUB 33.86 II 8). It is fully unknown whether Hedammu has paws.

Thus, in several studied cases of Anatolia the serpent is almost always depicted as a reptile with paws (except, may be, Hedammu: there are no unequivocal indications in texts *pro* or *contra* the presence of this monster’s paws). Only the serpent from Malatya is undoubtedly multi-headed, while the serpent on the sealing from the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts is highly likely multi-headed (in frames of a static interpretation of the scene), though, since the serpentine bodies do not connect to each other within the preserved part of impression, perhaps we are dealing with not a single creature but two snake-like monsters, acting together). Textual descriptions of mythological serpent-like monsters do not allow to determine the number of their heads.

### **The Fighting**

On the relief from Malatya, the serpent-fighter hits the monster with a spear held in both hands and directed towards the monster’s head. Since we consider this serpent to be multi-/two-headed, we can specify that the blow is inflicted on the lower head closest to the hero, while more distant head is apparently raised up to throw at the fighter who is busy with another head. Thus, the monster is depicted as not fully defeated but still trying to resist, though the hero’s victory is already obvious. The serpent also extends its paws towards its antagonist in the same attempt to continue the fighting; the paws almost touch the hero’s clothes, however, they look sluggish and seem already unable to inflict any significant harm to the hero. It can be that lines and circles shown above the serpent’s figure represent rain and hail caused by the Storm-God and directed by his assistants from heaven just onto the monster as an additional weapon against it. The dagger tucked into the hero’s belt will be used, probably, to finish off the serpent at the last stage of the confrontation.

On the seal impression from the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, the hero makes the main blow to the serpent with a dagger, stabbing monster in the front part of its muzzle. The open mouth of the monster’s head struck by a dagger is crossed from up to down by some elongate element that can be understood as a dart that pierces the jaws of the upper monster’s head (or hits the muzzle of the

lower monster's head), or as the fang(s) of the upper monster's head, or even as a horn of the lower monster's head. However, it seems that it would be of little use for a serpent-fighter to pierce the jaws of a monster; therefore, the first of the said interpretations should not be given much importance. Rather, it can be supposed that the relief maker wanted to convey here the serpent's unsuccessful attempt to bite the hero with its large fang(s). The serpent seems to try to use its paws against the hero and extends them towards him, however, they are far from reaching the figure of the serpent-fighter and thus turn out to be useless now because of their insufficient length.

The Illuyanka myth (CTH 321) contains several descriptions of struggle with a serpent. In the first episode it is said: *ma-a-an* <sup>d</sup>IŠKUR-*aš* <sup>MUŠ</sup>*il-[lu]-ia-an-ka-aš-ša I-NA* <sup>URU</sup>*Ki-iš-ki-lu-uš-ša ar-ga-ti-[i-e]-er nu-za* <sup>MUŠ</sup>*il-lu-ya-an-ka-aš* <sup>d</sup>IŠKUR-*an* [*tar-u*] *h-ta* “When the Storm-God and the serpent fought in Kiskilušša, the serpent defeated the Storm-God” (KBo 3.7 I 9-11). It is noteworthy that the process of struggle is described here by the hapax verb *argatiya-*. According to J. Puhvel<sup>33</sup>, it consists of the verb stem *ark-* ‘to copulate with, to mount’ cognate, e.g., to Russian verbal stem *yorz-* ‘to fidget’, and the auxiliary verb *tija-*; i.e. the usage of this verb presumes that the struggle took place in the form of a close-combat, when fighters’ bodies make progressive contact movements and hits against each other. In the next episode, the main job on overcoming the serpent was conducted by Inara who got it drunk and by Hupašiya who bound it (this latter action of bounding is one of the most important in the context of the possible influence of the Hittite myth on the ancient Greek serpent-fighting tradition<sup>34</sup>), after which the Storm-God simply “came and killed (*kuenta*) the serpent” (KBo 3.7 I 17-18). In the second version of the myth only a mention of the victory over the serpent is preserved from the first battle’s description (KBo 3.7 III 1). The second fight is described here as follows: *na-aš nam-ma a-ru-ni za-a[h]-hi-ia pa-it ma-a-an-ši za-ah-ha-i[n p]a-a-iš* “And he (the Storm-God) went to the sea for battle. When he gave him a fight ...” (KBo 3.7 III 22-23). The word used here for designating the battle is *zahhai-* which serves broadly to name the battles between the gods as well as the battles involving the Hittite troops, so we can assume that here the text is talking not about a close contact scramble (like a fight lost by the Storm-God in the first version of the

33 Jaan Puhvel, “Baltic-Anatolian Lexical Isoglosses”, *Investigationes philologicae et comparativae. Gedenkschrift für Heinz Kronasser*, ed. E. Neu, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 1982, pp. 182–183.

34 Calvert Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon. Aspects of Indo-European Poetics*, Oxford University Press, New York - Oxford 1995, p. 457.



myth), but about a battle with the use of distant weapons and, may be, even troops. Since the son of the Storm-God asked the latter not to spare him and to include (*anda ep-*) him in the strike zone, as a result - he was killed together with the serpent (KBo 3.7 III 29-31), it can be again assumed that the decisive blow was made by a low-precision destructive distant weapon, presumably a projectile one (and most likely, mythological, like a lightning).

Since there is no interaction between the Storm-God and the serpent in the Hedammu song (interaction between the latter and Anzili is reduced to the fact that the goddess demonstrates her charms to the monster, fills the sea with love potions and makes “romantic” conversations), the comparison of the fighting process is possible only for the previous three plots. The iconography of the struggle between the Storm-God and a serpent (Malatya relief and the Pushkin Museum seal impression) demonstrates a high degree of direct contact in battle. On the relief, the Storm-God strikes the monster with a spear during close combat and has a dagger, and on the seal impression, the dagger is the main weapon of the serpent-fighter. In both cases, the serpent extends its paws towards its enemy, but cannot cause him any serious damage. In the first version of Illuyanka myth, on the contrary, the Storm-God kills the already bound drunken serpent, and in the second version the fight does not look like a close contact one, although the use of lightning (or other distant weapon) for a decisive blow brings it closer to the probable usage of rain and hail as secondary weapon against the serpent on the Malatya relief. And the presumed close combat referred to in the first version of the Illuyanka myth by the verb *argatiya-* ended in the Storm-God’s defeat by the serpent (while the pictorial representations, of course, show only victories of the serpent-fighter over the monster).

## Conclusions

Let us bring together information about the main elements of the iconographic and textual serpent-fighting Anatolian plots of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC Anatolia in the following table.



**Table 1.** The main elements of the serpent-fighting plots in the monuments considered above.

<b>The Source</b>	<b>The Serpent-Fighter / Antagonist of the Serpent</b>	<b>The Serpent</b>	<b>The Fighting</b>
Old Assyrian Seal Impression Pushkin Museum I 2 5 1591 from Kültepe (XVIII c. BC)	Aššur (or another deity), may be presented as a Storm-God	Multi(two)-headed reptile with two front paws <sup>35</sup>	Close combat resulting in the serpent-fighter's victory; the serpent-fighter's dagger vs. the serpent's paws and jaws
Illuyanka Myth (XVI–XV cc. BC)	The Storm-God	Reptile, most probably with paws	Close combat resulting in the serpent-fighter's defeat; killing of a bound drunken snake; distant combat resulting in the serpent-fighter's victory (presumably, by the lightning strike as decisive blow)
The Song of Hedammu (XIV c. BC)	The Storm-God	One-headed (less probably, multi-headed?) reptile	(–)
Malatya orthostate relief AMM 12250 (later XII c. BC)	The Storm-God	Multi(two)-headed reptile with two front paws	Close combat resulting in the serpent-fighter's victory; the serpent-fighter's spear vs. the serpent's paws and jaws (likely with additional usage of rain and hail against the serpent)

35 Or, less probably, two single-headed reptiles, one of them with two front paws.

Thus, the study confirms that all four monuments, being rather different in their elements, present *different* snake-fighting plots of the mythology of Asia Minor in the 2nd millennium BC. At the same time, all these differences seem to be not more significant than those between the two versions of the Illuyanka myth, while the latter are united by the same pair of main protagonists and the same conflict, being variants of one myth. Majority of details of all these compositions and plots fits into a single and coherent canvas united by many common and repeated motifs. We also have to take into account the time difference between their fixations, as well as the diversity between the languages of literature and the visual arts of the region. This united “pool” of motifs used in different serpent-fighting plots of Anatolia is especially noticeable in the common features shared by the compositions on the seal impression from Old Assyrian Kültepe and on the relief of Neo-Hittite Malatya, in spite of over half-millennial time distance between them. Both seem to involve multi(two)-headed serpent with two front paws extended forward and without hinder ones; this creature is shown to the right from the serpent-fighter; the victorious hero, straightened to full height, is engaged in close combat with the monster and has a dagger (though the role of the latter is different). This similarity seems even more striking when we take into account that the same combination of details cannot be traced in the material of literary monuments recorded in the time interval between the creation of these images (though some elements of this combination can be seen there too).

The recent discovery of the serpent-fighting scene on the seal impression from the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts can also give a probable confirmation to the previously proposed “dynamic” interpretation of the composition of the Malatya relief H, because three figures of serpent-fighters on the seal can be well understood as the same hero depicted in different moments of action. Both objects represent the fighting as a hit of the hero in the monster’s muzzle by a close combat weaponry, and show probably the hero (but not the serpent) in the form of several figures presenting successful stages of his preparation for battle and the fighting itself. Apparently, this technique is not uncommon in the art of ancient Anatolia. On the other hand, use of the dagger as the main weapon on the sealing from the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts suggests that the last blow to the snake during the battle depicted in Malatya relief H could be also inflicted by a similar dagger tucked into the serpent-fighter’s belt. Although it was not considered as a serious weapon by the previous researchers on the relief, it must be added that the dagger is depicted on both figures of serpent-fighter,

contrary to the mace at only one figure has it. Thus, it seems that the relief maker saw the dagger as a rather important weapon for the depicted scene. With all the differences in the heroes' iconography on the relief and on the seal, largely caused by the changes that took place in the pantheon of Asia Minor in connection with the emergence, development and crush of the Hittite kingdom, it can be argued that the serpent-fighting imagery on the orthostat AMM 12250 goes back at least to the imagery already reflected in our sealing from the Pushkin Museum I 2 6 1591, i.e. at least to the beginning of the 18th century BC.

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### **Abbreviations**

AMM. Anadolu Medeniyetleri Müzesi [Museum of Anatolian Civilizations].

CTH. Kořak S., Müller G. G. W., Görke S., Steitler Ch. Catalogue des textes hittites <http://hethiter.net> (accessed: 31.08.2021).

KBo. Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi. Leipzig-Berlin, 1916-2020.

KUB. Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi. Berlin, 1921-1990