

Scene of Triumph Over the Stretched Enemy Next to an Anatolian Sacred Tree on One Old Assyrian Sealing from Kültepe (the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, I 2 b 1598)

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Scene of Triumph Over the Stretched Enemy Next to an Anatolian Sacred Tree on One Old Assyrian Sealing from Kültepe (the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, I 2 b 1598)

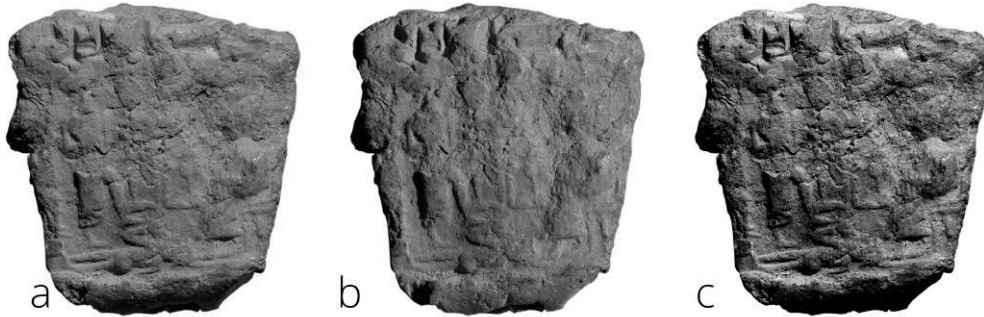
Alexandre Nemirovsky, Vladimir Shelestin and Anastasia Iasenovskaia

The research presented in the article is sponsored by the Russian Science Foundation, project no 19-18-00369 “The Classical Orient: culture, world-view, tradition of research in Russia (based on the monuments in the collection of the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts and archive sources)”.

- 1 The collection of the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow includes a clay envelope fragment with sealing (Inv. No. I 2 b 1598, dimensions: 2.15 x 2 x 0.42 cm, Fig. 1) from Kültepe (Kanish) dated to the period of the Old Assyrian colonies (early 2nd millennium BC). This artefact occurs to be of undoubted interest, but has not yet been introduced in the international scientific activities, and was not studied at all until recently, by present authors. When N. Yankovskaya published the corpus of Old Assyrian material from Kültepe kept at the Pushkin Museum (Yankovskaya, 1968), no attempt was made to present this sealing (unlike other similar impressions on seals and envelopes) – obviously, because of difficulties with recognition of details on this artefact (very small and highly damaged). Only some modern technologies of high-resolution digital photography with magnification without loss of quality, combined with shooting from different angles and different lighting with further computer processing of acquired images with contrasting and other modifications, together with collation with original, also examined under magnification and contrasting, made it possible for us to recognize the preserved part of the image and to give it a quite reliable drawing (Fig. 2¹). Here, we present the most representative photographs²

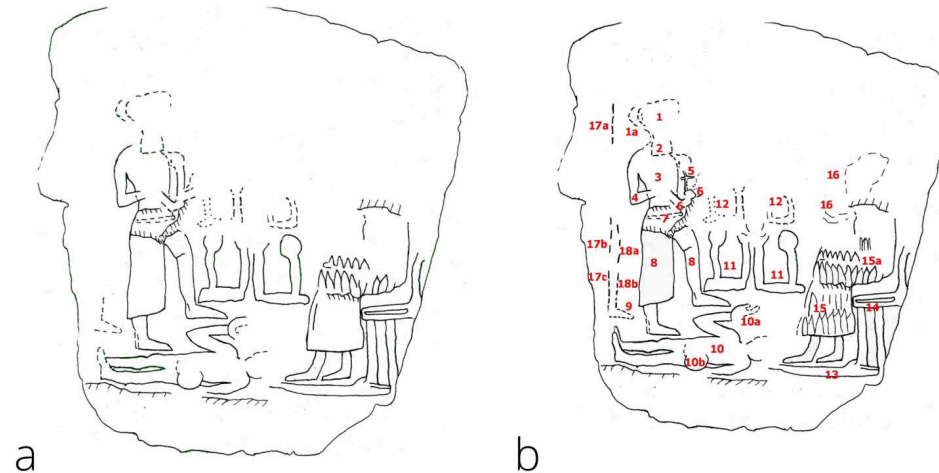
(different details are best seen in different photos taken with different lightings from various angles), including one in a contrasted variant (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1a-c Fragment of a clay envelope from Kültepe (Kanish) with a sealing



The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts (Moscow), No. I 2 b 1598

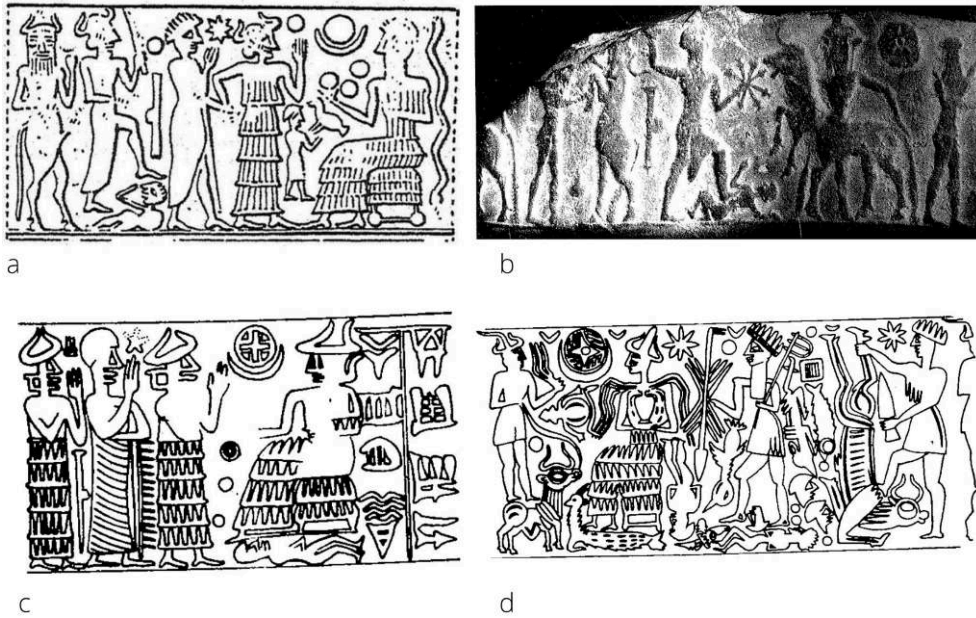
Fig. 2a-b a – drawing of the sealing in study; b – drawing of the sealing in study, details



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- 2 The preserved fragment of the envelope includes the entire space of the sealing's composition, but the upper part of this space is badly damaged, and the edges of the image may have been chipped. Nevertheless, the composition as a whole is revealed clearly – it is fulfilled in a style artistically vivid and rather rare for seals from Kültepe and presents the scene of the triumph of a hero or god over a defeated enemy in the face of a deity sitting on his throne.

Fig. 3a-d The scene of trampling the enemy in Kültepe seals



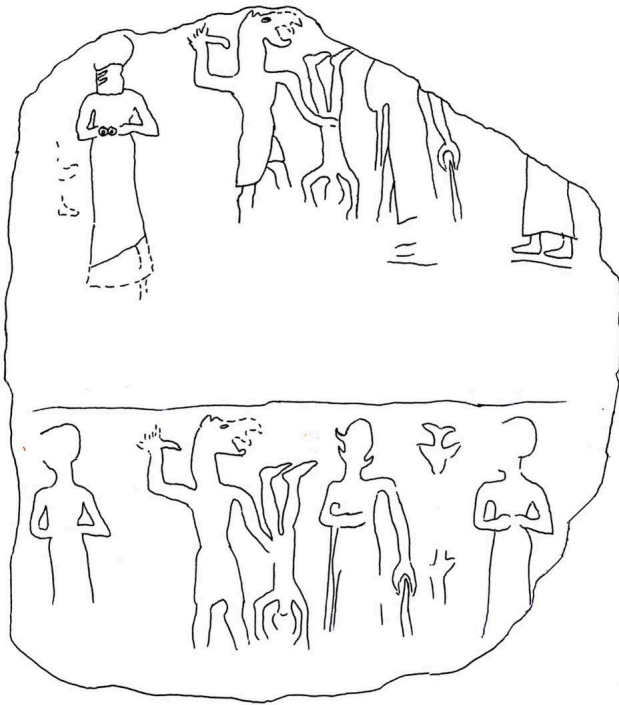
a – Frankfort, 1939, p. 243, fig. 73; b – Kienast, 1960, Abb. 24, Siegel 35; c – Cuneiform texts, 1975, Pl. 48, No. 1; d – Cuneiform texts, 1975, Pl. 48, No. 4

- 3 Elements of the recognized (partly thanks to the parallels with similar seals, especially to Fig. 3a) image are numbered in Fig. 2b. They are:
- 4 1 – hero’s headdress (horned hat (?));
- 5 1a – the horn marking hero’s divinity (?);
- 6 2 – hero’s beard;
- 7 3, 4, 8 – the outlines of the figure, its right arm, the robe’s hem and legs of the hero trampling on the enemy;
- 8 5 – a vertical oblong element to the right of the hero’s torso; it can be interpreted as an object held by the hero in his left hand (may be a mace or other weapon?);
- 9 6 – details which seemingly represent the left arm of the hero and its wrist / fist;
- 10 7 – chip line or unclear detail;
- 11 9 – outlines of a possible human foot (?). Perhaps the foot of a certain hero’s assistant (whose image was almost entirely chipped off), or a random chip trace;
- 12 10 – enemy trampled by the hero. It is possible that the position of his right hand implies an attempt to shield himself with this hand from the victor, thus indicating that the defeated person is still alive;
- 13 10a – outline of the defeated enemy’s hand;
- 14 10b – some “circular” element on the figure of the defeated enemy (10) – it conveys either the pelvic-femoral zone of this enemy, or, much less likely, the fist of his left hand;
- 15 11 – “staple”-like elements;
- 16 12 – clearly distinguishable “staple”-like elements of the same type. Probably branches of a tree, see below;

- 17 13 – platform on which the deity’s throne stands;
- 18 14 – a throne with a back;
- 19 15 – figure of the sitting deity;
- 20 15a – characteristic elements of typical Mesopotamian clothing, resembling scales;
- 21 16 – traces of the deity’s head and arm (?);
- 22 17a, 17b, 17c, 18a, 18b – probable traces of vertical lines, some of which may be accidental chips. Their interpretation is connected with the possibility to perceive in some of them the trace of the vertical (left) edge of the entire impression of the composition (such a border can, of course, dissect the image vertically). Visually, the lines 18a + 18b could be perceived as remains of such an edge; however, we do not consider this probable, since if we continue their line down, it would cut off the feet of the lying enemy. Meanwhile, firstly, the contours of these feet are visible as such rather clearly; secondly, if one would nevertheless see in part of these outlines not the contours of the feet, but the part of the supposed left vertical edge of the impression, the part which continues in the lines 18a + 18b and cuts off the feet of the lying enemy (then this cutting will continue as a curved rounded line), it would turn out that the edge perceived in this way rounds the lower left corner of the image (as it would cut off the feet of the lying enemy by the curved rounded line discussed above). Meanwhile, such an edge of impression cannot be rounded at its corners. Therefore, in lines 18a + 18b, we see rather the remnants of the contour of the same figure of the hero’s assistant to whom the foot 9 belongs (if all these elements are not accidental chips). The remnants of the vertical left edge of the impression (if it can be seen at all), could rather be recognized in the combination of traces 17a + 17b + 17c (though 17c can belong to the same possible leg contour as elements 18b + 9).
- 23 On the whole: the hero tramples on an enemy lying on his back and making a shielding (or pleading, Ward, 1910, p. 55) gesture with his hand; the scene takes place in front of a seated deity, a tree is depicted between him and the hero.
- 24 The very motif of a standing hero trampling on a lying enemy in front of a deity is undoubtedly of Mesopotamian origin (Mazzoni, 1986, p. 74). Vivid examples of it are seen in Old Akkadian art and its echoes in Zagros: the famous stele of Naram-Sîn, Louvre Sb. 4, depicting his victory over the Lullubeans, presents him trampling an overturned and lying enemy; four rock reliefs from Sarpol-e Zahab of the late 3rd – early 2nd millennia, imitating the monuments of Naram-Sîn (Glatz, 2014, pp. 123-129, with bibliography), including relief II, left by the Lullubean king Anubanini, and relief I, left by Zaba[zuna], the king of the Lullubeans or Simurrum, depict a hero trampling on an enemy lying on his back and shielding himself with the same gesture as on the seal under discussion, all of this having place in front of the deity). On Mesopotamian seals, the overturned enemy with the same gesture appears so frequently that later this image was used to depict even a victim slain by an attacking horseman (Ward, 1910, fig. 137b), and not only as a victim of a foot warrior. On the Old Assyrian seals from Kültepe, analogies to our scene of trampling appear too³, though infrequently, and sometimes the lying enemy is trampled not by the hero, but by the very throne of the deity sitting on it, e.g. the seals as follows:
- 25 Frankfort, 1939, p. 243, fig. 73 (= VAT 9228) – the hero tramples on the enemy lying on his back in front of the sitting deity (the composition as whole and the poses of all

- three figures are almost identical to our sealing, but VAT 9228 has several other figures between the hero and the deity, where our sealing has the sacred tree);
- 26 Kienast, 1960, Abb. 24, Siegel 35 — a hero in a round headdress (cf. the figure on our sealing tramples on an overturned enemy, shielding himself with his hand);
- 27 Garelli & Collon, 1975, Pl. 48, No. 1 (= BM 113465 etc.) — the deity sits in the same posture and the same “scale-like” clothing as on our seal, on a similar throne with legs, while under the throne an enemy shielded by his hand is stretched out on his back, and in front of the throne there are an adorant and leading deities;
- 28 Garelli & Collon, 1975, Pl. 48, No. 4 (= BM 113580 etc.) — the hero tramples on the enemy lying on his back, while a deity is sitting nearby (but with his back turned to the hero) on a throne with legs in “scales-like” clothing (this seal reproduces the motives of Mesopotamian seals of the Old Babylonian period, which were formed, apparently, not without the Syrian – Amorite influence, see Frankfort, 1939, p. 244, No. 72).
- 29 It should be noted, that on the Old Babylonian seals with the scene of trampling the enemy, the role of the triumphant hero can belong to Nergal, god of the Underworld. The most famous example of such compositions (Black & Green, 1992, 19, ill. 13): Nergal, holding a two-headed sceptre and a crooked sabre, tramples with his foot an enemy lying on the mountains with his hand bent at the elbow for protection or pleading with the same gesture as at most of the above images.
- 30 The figure of Nergal is found on one more fragment of the Old Assyrian envelope from the Pushkin Museum (Inv. No. I 2 b 1589). The deity here should be undoubtedly interpreted as Nergal holding a two-headed sceptre in his hand, and the scene almost exactly repeats the scene of another Old Babylonian seal (Black & Green, 1992, p. 67) where Nergal sends a lion-like demon (“lion-demon” similar to *ugallu* of the Neo-Assyrian period) over the sinner to inflict his punishment, that is some human illness (visualization of the scene of “sending illness”; in Akkadian the expression “hand of god DN” – *qāt ḏDN* – meant illness, with the wrath of a deity as the cause of illness). Thus, a certain circle of seal owners was interested in the seals with image of Nergal in the aforementioned role, and it cannot be ruled out that it was the same Nergal who was depicted as a triumphant figure on our sealing I 2 b 1598 (since the area of the latter one’s hands is damaged, it cannot be determined whether he is holding the double-headed sceptre of Nergal), though the interpretation of this figure as a hero or king seems more probable. The researchers of VAT 9228 usually identify the similar figure as Nergal or his Anatolian counterpart too (Mazzoni, 1986, p. 89).

Fig. 4 Drawing of the sealing the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts (Moscow), No. I 2 b 1598



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Fig. 5 Hittite Empire seal, 13th century BC

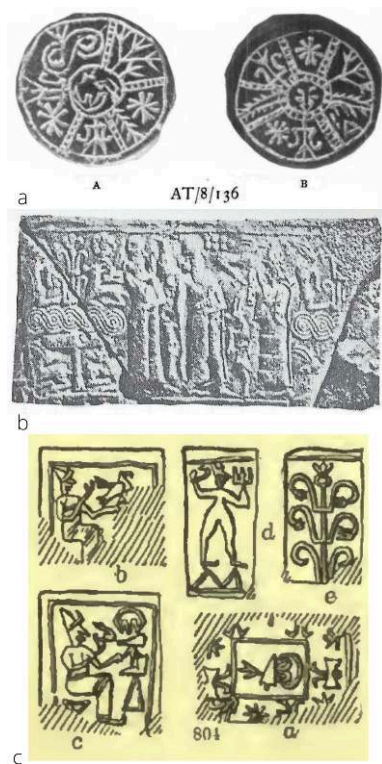


After Alexander, 1975, p. 115

- 31 The most distinctive feature of our seal is that a certain object consisting of symmetrical “staple”-like elements is placed between the triumphant hero and the sitting deity, in the face of whom the hero tramples the enemy. There are no such objects in traditional Mesopotamian scenes of triumph over a defeated enemy and in the aforementioned examples of such scenes on seals from Kültepe. It seems that an

object of form in discussion appears very rarely in general; we will note one of its obvious examples, on the late Hittite Empire seal from the collection of the Fitzwilliam Museum (Cambridge), studied in (Alexander, 1975) (our Fig. 5). Here the object of the relevant form is the sacred tree, however, it is depicted in an original manner, quite unlike other images of the sacred tree common in Mesopotamian and other Ancient Near Eastern glyptics' traditions, taking into account all the variability of iconography of the tree in Ancient Western Asian art⁴. Besides our sealing and the Fitzwilliam Museum seal, the sacred tree has the U-shaped volutes only in three examples from Alalakh, Nuzi and Anatolia in the 2nd millennium BC (Kepinski, 1982, p. 54) (our Fig. 6a-c). Thus, apparently, this manner of depicting the sacred tree is to be attributed to some local Eastern Anatolian origins.

Fig. 6a-c The sacred trees with U-shaped volutes in Ancient Near Eastern seals



a – Woolley, 1939, Pl. XIII (from Alalakh V, now BM 126186; see Kepinski, 1982, No. 602); b – Porada, 1947b, Pl. VI, 95 (from Nuzi, now in Chicago; see Kepinski, 1982, No. 315); c – Ward, 1910, p. 269, No. 804 (from Anatolia; see Kepinski, 1982, No. 1097)

- 32 On the aforementioned Hittite seal, the Storm god (on the left) stands before the Sun god (on the right; it is the latter who appears here as the most authoritative character, and the Storm god comes to him), and behind each one of them an accompanying figure stands: the Storm god is accompanied by some younger deity following him, and the tree of the form in discussion stands behind the Sun god. Thus, this tree is associated on the seal with the deity (of the Sun), before whose face the Storm god appears. Meanwhile on our sealing from the Pushkin Museum, the similar object (= the tree) stands between the deity sitting on the throne (the supreme character in all the scene) and a hero coming victoriously before him, which in fact constitutes one more general parallel to the aforementioned Hittite seal. Thus, it can be supposed that the sitting deity on the Pushkin Museum's sealing is also the Sun god. Indeed, it is known

that the sacred tree was constantly depicted in connection with the symbol of the winged sun in the Neo-Assyrian glyptics and was closely associated with the Sun god Shamash⁵.

- 33 For the tree's appearance on the aforementioned Hittite Empire seal, R. Alexander finds common Syrian and Mitannian (that is, Hurrian) analogies, but at the same time emphasizes that the tree's shape still remains "highly unusual" (Alexander, 1975, p. 116-117), which refers equally to the similar form of tree in the Pushkin Museum's sealing. Thus, this seal impression presents another example of a tree of this "highly unusual" form, and this example also originates from the east of Asia Minor. On the basis of aforesaid, one can think that our sealing demonstrates a rare combination of Mesopotamian motifs (the very scene of triumph over an enemy overturned on his back and shielded by his hand, in front of a deity), with an Eastern Anatolian (Hurrian) motif of the sacred tree of a special form (associated with the Sun god?). Such a synthesis is not surprising for an artefact originating from a multi-ethnic trading colony located in Eastern Anatolian region and inhabited to a large extent by merchants from Assur, who headed it.
- 34 Let us add, finally, that comparison with the aforementioned Hittite seal, where the tree is associated with the character in front of whom the other main protagonist appears, while behind the back of this protagonist the latter's own companion is shown, makes us suppose that the line 9 in our drawing is really not a chip line, but the remainder of the leg of such a companion of the triumphant hero, which was depicted standing behind him.

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NOTES

1. The dotted lines in Fig. 2b show details visible without certainty, the solid lines show clearly recognizable details. Shaded lines represent the boundaries of the chipped areas.
2. They were obtained within the framework of a joint project of the Pushkin Museum and CJSC “EPOS Group” meant to create a digital archive of the cuneiform collection in 2014-2017.
3. The comparison involved primarily seals and their impressions from Kültepe published in (Contenau, 1922; Özgüç, 1965, 1968, 2006; Özgüç & Tunca, 2006; Teissier, 1994). Also, seal impressions are found on tablets, the editions of which are catalogued in Michel, 2003. This corpus contains a little less than two thousand seals (1779 seals, according to calculations of Palmisano, 2018, p. 73, who takes into account only finds from the regular excavations) and is representative despite the fact that most of the approximately 23 thousand tablets found at Kültepe, remains unpublished (Lassen, 2014, p. 117). When looking for more distant analogies, the comparison was primarily drawn from the seal corpuses of individual collections (Collon, 1986; Delaporte, 1910, 1920, 1923; Eisen, 1940; Frankfort, 1939; Keel-Leu & Teissier, 2004; Porada, 1947a; Porada, 1947b; Porada & Buchanan, 1948; von der Osten, 1934; Ward, 1909), as well as regional corpuses of seals from adjacent regions (Alp, 1968; Amiet, 1992; Collon, 1982; Erkanal, 1993; Frankfort, 1955; Marchetti, 2011; Otto, 2000; Tunca, 1979). Cf. also (Collon, 2005; Ward, 1910).
4. Cf. in addition to the literature named in note 3, some summaries of various images and perceptions of the tree in ancient Mesopotamia, Syria and Anatolia (Ward, 1910, p. 219-238; York, 1975; Alexander, 1975, p. 116, No. 10; Collon, 1982, p. 11; Williams-Forte, 1983; Lambert, 1985).
5. See Collon, 2001, Nos. 151-155, 157-163.

ABSTRACTS

The paper presents a study of a seal impression from Kültepe (Kanish, Old Assyrian period) from the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts (Moscow, inv. No. I 2 b 1598). The authors were first to prepare the drawing of the damaged image, using modern methods of computer processing and modifying digital photographic material, to recognize in detail its plot and to trace its place within the context of concepts and iconography of the Ancient Near East. It was revealed that the seal depicts a scene of triumph over a defeated enemy in front of a deity sitting on the throne and the sacred tree of some rarest form; the imagery seems to be a fruit of synthesis of Mesopotamian motifs (the pose of both the enemy and the triumphant) with the Eastern Anatolian ones (the tree of the above-mentioned rare form and other parallels provided by one Hittite Empire seal).

INDEX

Keywords: seal, Kültepe, scene of triumph, sacred tree

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