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The Mythological Background of Three Seal Impressions Found in Urkesh

TIBOR SEDLÁČEK*

Archeological work on the Syrian Tell Mozan site began in the year 1984 under the lead of Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati. The site was convincingly identified with the ancient northern Mesopotamian city of Urkesh. A significant part of the archeological evidence found at this site has Hurrian characteristics¹ and can therefore be used to complement the image of early Hurrian history and culture.² As

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1 See especially Giorgio Buccellati, “Urkesh and the Question of Early Hurrian Urbanism”, in: Michaël Hudson – Baruch A. Levine (eds.), *Urbanization and Land Ownership in the Ancient Near East: A Colloquium Held at New York University, November 1996, and the Oriental Institute, St. Petersburg, Russia, May 1997*, (Peabody Museum Bulletin 7), Cambridge: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University 1999, 229-250; id., “The Semiotics of Ethnicity: The Case of Hurrian Urkesh”, in: Jeanette C. Fincke (ed.), *Festschrift für Gernot Wilhelm anlässlich seines 65. Geburtstages am 28. Januar 2010*, Dresden: Islet Verlag 2010, 79-90; id., “When Were the Hurrians Hurrian? The Persistence of Ethnicity in Urkesh”, in: Joan Aruz – Sarah B. Graff – Yelena Rakic (eds.), *Cultures in Contact: From Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean in the Second Millennium B.C.*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art 2013, 84-95; Giorgio Buccellati – Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, “Urkesh and the Question of the Hurrian Homeland”, *Bulletin of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences* 175/2, 2007, 141-150; Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, “Andirons at Urkesh: New Evidence for the Hurrian Identity of the Early Trans-Caucasian Culture”, in: Antonio G. Sagona (ed.), *A View from the Highlands: Archaeological Studies in Honour of Charles Burney*, (Ancient Near Eastern Studies 12), Herent: Peeters 2004, 67-89.

2 For the early history of the Hurrians, see, e.g., Gernot Wilhelm, *The Hurrians*, Warminster: Aris and Phillips 1989, 7-12; Piotr Steinkeller, “The Historical Background of Urkesh and the Hurrian Beginnings in Northern Mesopotamia”, in: Giorgio Buccellati – Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati (eds.), *Urkesh and the Hurrians: Studies in Honor of Lloyd Cotsen*, (Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 26: Urkesh/Mozan Studies 3), Malibu: Undena Publications 1998, 75-98; Mirjo Salvini, “The Earliest Evidences of the Hurrians Before the Formation of the Reign of Mittanni”, in: Giorgio Buccellati – Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati (eds.), *Urkesh and the Hurrians: Studies in Honor of Lloyd Cotsen*, (Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 26: Urkesh/Mozan Studies 3), Malibu: Undena Publications 1998, 99-115.

part of this archeological evidence, a number of seal impressions and some seals were also discovered,³ some of them with short inscriptions but most of them uninscribed. The seal motifs generally reflect Syrian and Mesopotamian influences known from the Early Dynastic and Old Akkadian periods.

Impressions without inscriptions were found together with the inscribed ones in the palace storehouse. The inscribed ones belonged to a local ruler, his wife, and people from the court.⁴ The images on several seal impressions even signalize the type of container they were used to seal.⁵ Sealing was performed by authorized officials, who probably sealed containers elsewhere in the city or at adjacent farms and transported them to the storehouse for further redistribution.⁶ Different kinds of commodities were

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- 3 See especially Giorgio Buccellati – Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, *Mozan I: The Soundings of the First Two Seasons*, (Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 20), Malibu: Undena Publications 1988, 67-81; iid., “The Royal Storehouse of Urkesh: The Glyptic Evidence from the Southwestern Wing”, *Archiv für Orientforschung* 42-43, 1995-1996, 1-32; iid., “The Seals of the King of Urkesh: Evidence from the Western Wing of the Royal Storehouse AK”, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 86, 1996, 65-100; iid., “Urkesh: The First Hurrian Capital”, *Biblical Archaeologist* 60/2, 1997, 77-96: 80-89; iid., “Mozan/Urkesh: A New Capital in the Northern Djezireh”, in: Michel Al-Maqdissi – Maamoun Abdul Karim – Amr Al-Azm – Moussa Dib Al-Khoury (eds.), *The Syrian Jezira: Cultural Heritage and Interrelations: Proceedings of the International Conference Held in Deir ez-Zor, April 22nd-25th*, 1996, Damascus: Direction générale des antiquités et des musées de la République arabe syrienne 2002, 127-133: 129-132; iid., “Tar’am-Agade, Daughter of Naram-Sin, at Urkesh”, in: Lamia al-Gailani Werr – John Curtis – Harriet Martin – Augusta McMahon – Joan Oates – Julian Reade (eds.), *Of Pots and Plans: Papers on the Archaeology and History of Mesopotamia and Syria Presented to David Oates in Honour of His 75th Birthday*, London: Nabu Publications 2002, 11-31; Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, “Nuzi Viewed from Urkesh, Urkesh Viewed from Nuzi: Stock Elements and Framing Devices in Northern Syro-Mesopotamia”, in: David I. Owen – Gernot Wilhelm (eds.), *Richard F. S. Starr Memorial Volume*, (Studies on the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians 8), Bethesda: CDL Press 1996, 247-268; ead., “The Workshop of Urkesh”, in: Giorgio Buccellati – Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati (eds.), *Urkesh and the Hurrians: Studies in Honor of Lloyd Cotsen*, (Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 26: Urkesh/Mozan Studies 3), Malibu: Undena Publications 1998, 35-50: 41-50; ead., “L’Arte di Urkesh”, in: Sophie Bonetti (ed.), *Gli Opifici di Urkesh: Conservazione e restauro a Tell Mozan*, (Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 27: Urkesh/Mozan Studies 4), Malibu: Undena Publications 2001, 47-60: 47-55.
- 4 See, e.g., G. Buccellati – M. Kelly-Buccellati, “The Royal Storehouse of Urkesh...”; iid., “The Seals of the King of Urkesh...”; iid., “Urkesh: The First Hurrian Capital...”.
- 5 See G. Buccellati – M. Kelly-Buccellati, “The Royal Storehouse of Urkesh...”, 7.
- 6 G. Buccellati – M. Kelly-Buccellati, “Urkesh: The First Hurrian Capital...”, 84; M. Kelly-Buccellati, “The Workshop...”, 41. See also ead., “Uqnitum and Tar’am-Agade: Patronage and Portraiture at Urkesh”, in: Jeanette C. Fincke (ed.), *Festschrift für Gernot Wilhelm anlässlich seines 65. Geburtstages am 28. Januar 2010*, Dresden: Islet Verlag 2010, 185-202: 187-188, 191, 192.

stored, and after the opening of the containers the broken impressions were left on the ground.⁷

Some elements in the iconography and style of the uninscribed impressions appear to make them converge with the inscribed ones,⁸ which demonstrates their local tradition and origin.⁹ Therefore, as Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati put it, “it is possible that even those seals which follow closely southern models were carved in Urkesh given the lively seal cutting tradition exhibited in the city”.¹⁰ It is impossible to identify their owner, but most probably they belonged to officials in the service of the palace.

In this study, I will focus on three of the uninscribed seal impressions (fig. 1, 5, and 7). Each of them bears a different motif: (1) the motif of a man flying on a bird, which can be identified as the “Etana” type, (2) a double-faced figure, which is easy to identify as a god thanks to the horned headress, and (3) a figure in the mountains. The seal impressions bearing the first two motifs were found, along with other impressions, within the area of the Urkesh royal palace and date from the Old Akkadian period.¹¹ The first two motifs are very similar to the glyptic documented from the Akkadian/southern environment.¹² In the case of the third motif, Akkadian influences are debatable.

The particular interest of these three seal impressions lies in the fact that the motifs seem to be mythological; this is almost certain in the case of the first two, and worth examining in the third.¹³ Written sources dealing with Urkesh mythology are not extant, and traces such as these three seal impressions are, therefore, rare remnants allowing a tentative reconstruction of at least some fragments of the mythological ideas current in Urkesh in the last third of the third millennium B.C. This reconstruction will be the aim of my analysis. In addition, these findings can have some impact on

7 G. Buccellati – M. Kelly-Buccellati, “The Royal Storehouse of Urkesh...”, 6; M. Kelly-Buccellati, “The Workshop...”, 41. See also G. Buccellati – M. Kelly-Buccellati, “Urkesh: The First Hurrian Capital...”, 84.

8 G. Buccellati – M. Kelly-Buccellati, “Urkesh: The First Hurrian Capital...”, 85; M. Kelly-Buccellati, “The Workshop...”, 42.

9 See G. Buccellati – M. Kelly-Buccellati, “Urkesh: The First Hurrian Capital...”, 84-85; M. Kelly-Buccellati, “The Workshop...”, 41-50.

10 G. Buccellati – M. Kelly-Buccellati, “The Royal Storehouse of Urkesh...”, 24 and 26. For the seal cutting tradition in Urkesh, see M. Kelly-Buccellati, “The Workshop...”.

11 G. Buccellati – M. Kelly-Buccellati, “The Royal Storehouse of Urkesh...”, 6.

12 Cf. *ibid.*, 7, 24. Similar influences are also documented, e.g., from Habur location Tell Brak (see Donald M. Matthews, *The Early Glyptic of Tell Brak: The Cylinder Seals of Third Millennium Syria*, [Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis: Series Archaeologica 15], Fribourg: University Press – Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1997).

13 There may be mythological motifs also on other glyptics from the same site but they are less pronounced.

our understanding of the early mythological imagination of the Hurrians,¹⁴ and on our understanding of intercultural communication in the region; as mentioned above, the first two impressions bear noticeable traces of Akkadian style, which supports the hypothesis of southern Mesopotamian influence on the cultural environment of Urkesh.¹⁵ The questions to be answered in this article are, therefore, the following: (1) With what mythological evidence can the discussed motifs be associated? (2) Apart from mythological motifs known in Urkesh, can they also be used as a source of early Hurrian mythology? (3) Which are the specific thematic and stylistic elements representing Akkadian influences on these seal impressions?¹⁶

I will interpret the visual material using textual evidence and draw comparisons with some Akkadian glyptics. When analyzing the seal impressions, possible variations should be taken into consideration. What seems as a deviation of iconography from the text or *vice versa* may be the result of, for example, parallel traditions, transformation over time, or idiosyn-

14 The oldest known Hurrian mythological texts date from the second half of the second millennium B.C. (see below).

15 Cuneiform writing and the Akkadian language are evident in the seal impressions themselves. In addition, southern Mesopotamian influences are documented, for example, on a school tablet discovered in Tell Mozan (see Giorgio Buccellati, “A LU E School Tablet from the Service Quarter of the Royal Palace AP at Urkesh”, *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 55, 2003, 45-48). Another important piece of evidence is a Samarra tablet from Urkesh, written in Akkadian (see Douglas Frayne, *Ur III Period (2112-2004 BC)*, [The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Early Periods 3/2], Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press 1997, 461-462, E3/2.7.2; M. Salvini, “The Earliest Evidences of the Hurrians...”, 105-106). For the spread of southern Mesopotamian scribal art in regions of the ancient Near East, see, e.g., Alfonso Archi, “Transmission of the Mesopotamian Lexical and Literary Texts from Ebla”, in: Pelio Fronzaroli (ed.), *Literature and Literary Language at Ebla*, (Quaderni di Semitistica 18), Firenze: Università di Firenze, Dipartimento di Linguistica 1992, 1-39; Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000-323 BC*, Malden: Blackwell 2007, 59-62, (Czech translation: Marc Van De Mieroop, *Dějiny starověkého Blízkého východu, okolo 3000-323 př. Kr.*, [Orient 8], trans. Jiří Prosecký, Praha: Academia 2010, 70-72); Wilfred H. van Soldt, “The Adaptation of the Cuneiform Script to Foreign Languages”, in: Alex de Voogt – Irving Finkel (eds.), *The Idea of Writing: Play and Complexity*, Leiden – Boston: Brill 2010, 117-127.

16 Apart from these three artifacts, a miniature fragmentary relief is also documented from Urkesh, upon which, according to Kelly-Buccellati, Gilgamesh and Enkidu, known from the Sumero-Akkadian tradition, are depicted (Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, “Gilgamesh at Urkesh? Literary Motifs and Iconographic Identifications”, in: Pascal Butterlin – Marc Lebeau – Jean-Yves Monchambert – Juan Luis Montero Fenollós – Béatrice Muller [eds.], *Les espaces syro-mésopotamiens: Dimensions de l'expérience humaine au Proche-Orient ancien: Volume d'hommage offert à Jean-Claude Margueron*, [Subartu 17], Turnhout: Brepols 2006, 403-414). However, this article will focus only on seal impressions and seals, with only a casual reference to the reliefs from the Yazılıkaya shrine.

crasy. The aim will be to identify as many parallels as possible using visual material as well as its probable written analogies. Obviously, the greater the number of features that constitute such a network of parallels, the more likely the link between visual representation and the text will appear. It is important to see the partial motifs as parts of a whole – in this case the whole scene – without removing them from their context.

Of course, the project of searching for correlations between visual and textual material is not unequivocal and has raised some criticism.¹⁷ On the other hand, it is clear that some of the visuals are supported by their written counterparts, and to refrain from using at least the available possibilities of comparison would mean giving up an important possibility with respect to understanding the scene. Facing the assumption that no connection between iconography and text can be attested for southern Mesopotamian material in general, Piotr Steinkeller stated:

[T]here is no reason why Third millennium mythological seals should not be studied and compared with texts ... [T]he mythological motifs which appear on these seals reflect, by and large, the early Akkadian mythology, of which precious little survived into the Second millennium. ... [S]ome of these motifs involve genuinely Sumerian myths or, at the very least, ... they incorporate elements of such myths.¹⁸

There is no reason to suppose that this interaction between iconography and text was restricted to southern Mesopotamia. I indeed think that it is also relevant for Urkesh (and far beyond) and will take Steinkeller's statement as a point of departure for my view of seal impressions from this site.

Of course, there are various possible relations between texts and visual material. Seals can be iconographic records of myths which are not preserved in the written form, or whose written form has not yet been discovered. It is also possible that the corresponding myths were only transmitted

17 See, e.g., William W. Hallo in: Briggs Buchanan, *Early Near Eastern Seals in the Yale Babylonian Collection*, New Haven – London: Yale University Press 1981, xv. For the correlation between iconography and texts, see also Paolo Matthiae, "Figurative Themes and Literary Texts", in: Pelio Fronzaroli (ed.), *Literature and Literary Language at Ebla*, (Quaderni di Semitistica 18), Firenze: Università di Firenze, Dipartimento di Linguistica 1992, 219-241, especially 219-223.

18 Piotr Steinkeller, "Early Semitic Literature and Third Millennium Seals with Mythological Motifs", in: Pelio Fronzaroli (ed.), *Literature and Literary Language at Ebla*, (Quaderni di Semitistica 18), Firenze: Università di Firenze, Dipartimento di Linguistica 1992, 243-283: 245. Davide Nadali and Lorenzo Verderame even consider the "development of mythological themes" as the principal function of Akkadian glyptic: Davide Nadali – Lorenzo Verderame, "The Akkadian 'Bello Stille'", in: Robert D. Biggs – Jennie Myers – Martha T. Roth (eds.), *Proceedings of the 51st Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale Held at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, July 18th - 22nd, 2005*, (Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations 62), Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago 2008, 309-320: 311.

orally, without any textual counterparts. Furthermore, visual material need not always correspond exactly with texts, but may only reflect a shared tradition. On the other hand, it is possible to suggest that visual material, including seals, could also affect literary compositions, not just the other way round, particularly if iconographic evidence precedes the literary text chronologically. Finally, visual material could have had an impact on oral tradition. The kinds of relations and interactions between texts and visual material are multiple, and a comparative approach to the three Urkesh seal impressions with reference not only to visual material but also to texts clearly offers at least the bones of an interpretation of the motifs represented on these seal impressions.

The “Etana” type motif

On the first seal impression (fig. 1; A5q680.o), four animal figures are depicted in the middle. From the left, the first three represent animals of the species *Caprinae*; the fourth represents a dog,¹⁹ which is watching a scene of flight upright with tail erect and muzzle open. On the right, a part



Fig. 1. Seal impression of the “Etana” type from Urkesh.

© Reprinted from Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati, “Gilgamesh at Urkesh? Literary Motifs and Iconographic Identifications”, in: Pascal Butterlin – Marc Lebeau – Jean-Yves Monchambert – Juan Luis Montero Fenollós – Béatrice Muller (eds.), *Les espaces syro-mésopotamiens: Dimensions de l’expérience humaine au Proche-Orient ancien: Volume d’hommage offert à Jean-Claude Margueron*, (Subartu 17), Turnhout: Brepols 2006, 403-414: 411, fig. 1.

19 G. Buccellati – M. Kelly-Buccellati, “The Royal Storehouse of Urkesh...”, 26. In other work, M. Kelly-Buccellati (“Gilgamesh at Urkesh?...”, 404) states that the first three animals are sheep.

of a bird's tail and a part of a wing are engraved. Under the tail, in the bottom righthand corner, another part of a wing is visible.²⁰ The positions of the wings relative to the tail suggest that they belong to two different birds. On the far left we can see a partially obscured human figure with the left arm slightly raised.



Fig. 2. Old Akkadian motif of the “Etana” type I.

© Reprinted from Piotr Steinkeller, “Early Semitic Literature and Third Millennium Seals with Mythological Motifs”, in: Pelio Fronzaroli (ed.), *Literature and Literary Language at Ebla*, (Quaderni di Semitistica 18), Firenze: Università di Firenze, Dipartimento di Linguistica 1992, 243-283, pl. 1, fig. 1.

The motif clearly represents a theme known from other Old Akkadian seals from southern Mesopotamia (fig. 2-4).²¹ They are associated with the Akkadian text entitled the *Legend of Etana*,²² in which the ruler Etana

20 M. Kelly-Buccellati, “Gilgamesh at Urkesh?..”, 404.

21 See Dominique Collon, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum: Cylinder Seals II: Akkadian – Post Akkadian – Ur III Periods*, London: British Museum Publications 1982, 78-81, pl. XXII, fig. 151-156; P. Steinkeller, “Early Semitic Literature...”, pl. 1-3, fig. 1-12.

22 See Ephraim A. Speiser, “Etana”, in: James B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament: Third Edition with Supplement*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1969, 114-118; Jana Součková, “Etana”, in: Blahoslav Hruška – Lubor Matouš – Jiří Prosecký – Jana Součková, *Mýty staré Mezopotámie: Sumerská, akkadská a cheititská literatura na klínopisných tabulkách*, (Živá díla minu-

undertakes a flight to the heavens on an eagle. Despite the similarity of the key motif there are also several differences, which raise questions about the precise nature of the connection between the “Etana” type motifs and the legend. The Old Akkadian scenes are found on twenty one seals known today²³ (excluding the Urkesh impression).



Fig. 3. Old Akkadian motif of the “Etana” type II.

Drawing © by Peter Ličko based on Dominique Collon, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum: Cylinder Seals II: Akkadian – Post Akkadian – Ur III Periods*, London: British Museum Publications 1982, pl. XXII, fig. 151.

Iosti 83), Praha: Odeon 1977, 218-228, 347-348; Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* I, Bethesda: CDL Press² 1996, 437-457; Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*, (Oxford World’s Classics), Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000, 189-202; James Kinnier Wilson, *Studia Etanaica: New Texts and Discussions*, (Alter Orient und Altes Testament 338), Münster: Ugarit-Verlag 2007; Jiří Prosecký, *Slova do hlíny vepsaná: Mýty a legendy Babylonu*, (Orient 9), Praha: Academia 2010, 337-363.

23 P. Steinkeller, “Early Semitic Literature...”, 248.



Fig. 4. Old Akkadian motif of the “Etana” type III.

© Reprinted from Piotr Steinkeller, “Early Semitic Literature and Third Millennium Seals with Mythological Motifs”, in: Pelio Fronzaroli (ed.), *Literature and Literary Language at Ebla*, (Quaderni di Semitistica 18), Firenze: Università di Firenze, Dipartimento di Linguistica 1992, 243-283, pl. 2, fig. 7.

According to the *Sumerian King List*, Etana ruled in the Mesopotamian city of Kish as the thirteenth ruler of the First Kish Dynasty after the flood:

Etana, a shepherd, the one who to heaven ascended, the one who consolidated all lands, became king and reigned 1560 [var. 1500?] years.²⁴

The list records Etana’s ascent to heaven as well as his name etymologized as “Ascending to Heavens” (ED₃-AN-A).²⁵

The most complete composition on Etana is the above-mentioned legend preserved in several versions dating from the 18th up to the 7th century B.C., in varying states of conservation. The authorship is attributed to Lu-

24 Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List*, (Assyriological Studies 11), Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1939, 81, lines 16-19. See also A. Leo Oppenheim, “The Sumerian King List”, in: James B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament: Third Edition with Supplement*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1969, 265-266: 265; “The Sumerian King List” [online], in: *The Electronic Corpus of Sumerian Literature*, <<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>>, [30 April 2014], lines 64-67.

25 J. Prosecký, *Slova do hlíny vepsaná...*, 337, n. 2. See also Th. Jacobsen, *The Sumerian...*, 80-81, n. 67.

Nanna, who is supposed to have lived in the 21st century B.C.,²⁶ but it is necessary to assume that the composition underwent long-term development. Besides this text, Etana's name appears in several (unrelated) sources, but always only in brief allusions.

The introduction to the composition recounts how the gods established Etana as the ruler of the city of Kish. To his regret, Etana was childless and therefore without a successor. Later on, the text speaks about Muanna, Etana's wife, having a dream, but the composition is fragmentary from this point on and this part of the story cannot be reconstructed. Probably, she learned in dreaming how to remedy the situation and give birth to an offspring.²⁷ Every day Etana implored Shamash, the sun-god, as well as other gods, to give Muanna the "plant of birth" (*šammu ša alādi*). One day, in a vision, Shamash showed him an eagle imprisoned in a hole by a serpent as a punishment for having eaten all the serpent's children. If Etana succeeded in setting the eagle free, he would obtain the plant as a reward. Etana released the eagle, who searched for the plant in the mountains, but without success, and decided therefore to ascend with Etana to the heavens, where the goddess Ishtar kept the plant. But as they flew to a height of three miles, Etana asked the eagle to return him to his city; thus, the mission was not successful. The text is damaged from this point but fragments allow us to conclude with certainty that Etana had a dream in which he passed, on the eagle, through the gate of Anu, Enlil and Ea and also through the gate of Sin, Shamash, Adad and Ishtar. He then entered the residence of a beautiful maiden (probably Ishtar) sitting on a throne with two lions lying beside her. As Etana entered, the beasts rushed at him and he woke up. The eagle considered the dream to be a good sign and they ascended to the heavens for a second time. The events from the dream began to come true, but the rest of the composition is not preserved. It is possible that Etana was believed to have acquired the plant²⁸ because the *Sumerian King List* mentions his son Balich/Walich as his successor, who

26 Jiří Prosecký, "Etana", in: id. (ed.), *Encyklopedie starověkého Předního východu*, Praha: Libri 1999, 98; Blahoslav Hruška, "Když království sestoupilo z nebes: Nový výklad akkadského Eposu o Etanovi", *Religio: Revue pro religionistiku* 10/1, 2002, 85-94: 85-86; Jiří Prosecký, "Etana", in: Jiří Prosecký – Blahoslav Hruška – Jana Součková – Klára Břeňová, *Encyklopedie mytologie starověkého Předního východu*, Praha: Libri 2003, 78; J. Prosecký, *Slova do hlíny vepsaná...*, 337-338.

27 J. Prosecký, *Slova do hlíny vepsaná...*, 339. James Kinnier Wilson (*Studia Etanaica...*, 15-20) reconstructs the dream as an integral part of the composition. Benjamin R. Foster (*Before the Muses...*, 449) disagrees with Wilson.

28 This is, however, questioned by Bendt Alster, "The Textual History of the Legend of Etana", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109/1, 1989, 81-86: 84.

is said to have ruled 400 (or 410) years.²⁹ Kinnier Wilson tried to reconstruct an engaging continuation to the composition from fragments³⁰ but no version is yet authoritative.

A figure sitting on an eagle commonly appears on seals and, interestingly, the flight is often observed from the ground by mostly two, occasionally one, dog.³¹ On several scenes a bucket is placed between the two dogs, probably abandoned by the flyer.³² Another typical feature is a herd of three or four sheep and goats (possibly also rams), usually led by shepherds or one shepherd. Sometimes the herd looks straight ahead, apparently not noticing the flight, while in other cases their gaze is directed towards the eagle with the person upon him. There are several instances where the shepherd theme is complemented with other scenes. For example, one or two figures are displayed sitting and probably churning milk or cream in the bucket; in other scenes a person climbs up to the roof of a herdsman's hut, just to lay out some "round objects, which, through modern ethnographic parallels, can be identified with a milk-product called *kushuk* or *kashk*: round balls of fermented sour milk or butter milk that are left to dry on the roofs, and then stored to be used in winter".³³ On some seals, buckets probably connected with the shepherd context appear. The same is true for the aforementioned round-shaped objects, but, in this case, no human figure is present. The scene can also be supplemented by the figures of sitting deities or the figure of a single sitting deity.³⁴

Comparison of the Urkesh scene with its Akkadian counterparts reveals some common attributes: (1) The torso of a flying bird, on which a dog is staring in amazement. This motif is very often documented in Akkadian glyptic. The bird is not wholly preserved in the Urkesh scene, but it is

29 Th. Jacobsen, *The Sumerian...*, 80, 81, lines 20-22. See also A. L. Oppenheim, "The Sumerian...", 265; "The Sumerian King List...", lines 68-70.

30 See J. Kinnier Wilson, *Studia Etanaica...*, 43-70.

31 In one rendering (fig. 3) there are two animals, sometimes interpreted as lions (see Geoffrey S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures*, [Sather Classical Lectures 40], Cambridge – Berkeley – Los Angeles: Cambridge University Press – University of California Press 1970, 127; Marie-Paule Baudot, "Representations in Glyptic Art of a Preserved Legend: Etana, the Shepherd, who Ascended to Heaven", in: Jan Quaegebeur [ed.], *Studia Paulo Naster Oblata II: Orientalia Antiqua*, [Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 13], Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters 1982, 1-10: 5; D. Collon, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals... II...*, 79). They try to reach the other eagle sitting on the tree, which has a prey in its talons. The identification of these two animals with lions is disputable (cf. P. Steinkeller, "Early Semitic Literature...", 250). Geoffrey S. Kirk (*Myth: Its Meaning and Functions...*, 127-129) offers a highly unusual interpretation of this representation.

32 P. Steinkeller, "Early Semitic Literature...", 249.

33 *Ibid.*, 249, including n. 13-14.

34 For the above-mentioned visual elements of Old Akkadian "Etana" type seals, see fig. 2-4 and references in n. 21 above.

probable that he carries a human on his back, as in the case of the Akkadian pattern. The argument for this is a dog or dogs from the “Etana” type of scene looking up in amazement at a flying man. Another feature of the “Urkesh” dog that corresponds with the Akkadian motifs is its erect body, erect tail, and open muzzle. (2) The three animals displayed along with the dog are a part of the shepherd context, which corresponds to the herd on Akkadian glyptic, where the animals are also three or four in number. (3) The figure on the far left perhaps represents the shepherd leading the herd, as on several Akkadian glyptics. (4) The last important parallel motif is a part of another bird’s wing situated under the torso of the flying bird. The relation between the two birds remains uncertain³⁵ but there is a parallel on at least one Akkadian seal that also shows two birds (fig. 3).

In spite of bigger or smaller variations among them, these common features show a homogeneity allowing us to include the seal impression from Urkesh into the group of seal motifs of the “Etana” type. The next step is to raise the question of its meaning, and its relationship with the Akkadian *Legend of Etana*.

Steinkeller correctly draws attention to the gap between the content of Akkadian seals and that of the literary composition, assuming that the seals are referring to a different story, an idea which he supports by means of his own reconstruction of the plot.³⁶ According to his version, which does not have any parallel in the extant texts of the *Legend of Etana* and is based on a direct interpretation of the Akkadian seals instead, Etana was returning in the evening to the sheepfold with his herd, which was attacked by an eagle or eagles. Trying to protect his herd, he caught the eagle, which subsequently flew with him to the heavens. This event was observed by Etana’s companions. It is possible, Steinkeller adds, that the later legend only preserves a part of the original story and that the episode with Etana’s wife, the eagle and the serpent can be later additions to the story.

Yet another interpretation was suggested by Nadali and Verderame, who mentioned that seal cutters did not focus only on the “‘culmination scene’, that is the final part of the text and story reproduced in a sole image – but several episodes within the whole event”.³⁷ Two aspects of Etana’s life come to the fore – daily shepherd activities and the event of his flight (the authors call this technique “synoptic” or “simultaneous” narration).³⁸

35 M. Kelly-Buccellati, “Gilgamesh at Urkesh?..”, 404.

36 P. Steinkeller, “Early Semitic Literature...”, 252-255. Also, Marie-Paule Baudot (“Representations in Glyptic Art...”, 5) connects one of the seals with an unknown episode from Etana’s story; see also n. 31 above.

37 D. Nadali – L. Verderame, “The Akkadian...”, 311, including the sources cited in n. 11-12.

38 *Ibid.*, 311, including the sources cited in n. 13-16.

According to the interpretation by Reinhard Bernbeck, there is essentially a project of legitimization behind the “Etana” motif on the seals. Etana’s elevation into heaven means, for Semitic nomads, taking him out of the pastoral environment and legitimizing his rulership by his subsequent enthronement and return to earth.³⁹ Blahoslav Hruška opposes Bernbeck at this point and affirms that in such a case the flight on the eagle and the search for the “plant of birth” would be a meaningless episode, difficult to harmonize with this interpretation: only Etana’s return to the earth would play the primary role.⁴⁰

Steinkeller’s reconstruction of the story is intriguing, but does not find sufficient support. Bernbeck’s interpretation has the merit of bringing the concept of rulership into the interpretation in an interesting way, but Hruška’s objection is strong. Nadali and Verderame’s interpretation accounts well for the flight as well as for the pastoral environment.

Based on these interpretations, we can assume that the first seal impression from Urkesh represents Etana’s flight, though with major iconographic modifications. However, it does not have to be directly related to the legend as it is known from written evidence and perhaps only plays the complementary role of a pastoral setting, in which the key moment of ascending to heaven is set.⁴¹ The shepherd scenes could have been part of the oral tradition not included in the text but preserved in the glyptic. The scenes could probably be part of the so-called *Proto-Etana*, which might have been written down, but this is unknown to us. The Akkadian composition of the *Legend of Etana* could have been inspired by these older traditions, since the oldest extant version dates from the 18th century B.C. and is therefore younger than the seals. I also do not exclude the possibility that the pastoral settings on the seals are related to the character of Etana and his function, which is corroborated by the *Sumerian King List* mentioned above, where Etana is described as “a shepherd, the one who to heaven ascended”, and by the *Legend of Etana*, where the shepherd aspect of Etana is also mentioned, again in the context of his role as ruler.⁴² The identification of the ruler with the shepherd had a metaphorical meaning in the ancient Near East. Just as a shepherd takes care of his herd, the ruler should take care of his people. If this interpretation of the pastoral settings on the seals is correct, their motifs are not so far from the extant textual composition.

39 B. Hruška, “Když království sestoupilo z nebes...”, 94.

40 *Ibid.*

41 Cf. M.-P. Baudot, “Representations in Glyptic Art...”, 7-8.

42 See B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses...*, 439, lines 6-14; 448, tab. I, lines 6-7 and lines 20-29; J. Prosecký, *Slova do hlíny vepsaná...*, 348, lines 6-15; 354, tab. I, lines 6-8 and lines 20-29.

Apart from its importance for the interpretation of the seal impression discovered at Tell Mozan, the whole scene also conveys valuable information about external influences on the material culture of ancient Urkesh, as it represents a finding which reflects Akkadian influence – in this case, including both the content and stylistic aspects. If the scene was the work of a local seal cutter – there is, however, no proof of a local origin –, he plausibly reproduced the Akkadian pattern. The client and also the seal cutter could have been familiar with the presented theme, whether as part of the *Legend of Etana*, part of an oral tradition or part of a *Proto-Etana* story. A second possibility is that the choice of the scene was inspired by the curious nature of the motif of a man flying on a bird⁴³ and that the client and the seal cutter were not familiar with the story but only with similar seals. A third alternative is that the seal was produced in the southern Mesopotamian environment. Nevertheless, it is possible that the story of Etana was well known in Urkesh,⁴⁴ possibly through a scribal tradition originating in southern Mesopotamia.

The double-faced god

The key figure of the second seal impression (fig. 5; A1.483) is a god with two visually identical faces, represented on the right side of the motif. His divinity is manifestly represented through the horned headdress: horns were the typical visual attribute of deities in the ancient Near East.⁴⁵ Only the figure's head and parts of the torso and of the arms are preserved. To the left there is another horned deity turned towards the double-faced god. His left hand is slightly raised and holds a scepter. He is wearing a skirt, which is commonly documented in the glyptic of this period (cf., e.g., fig. 6). It seems that on the far left there is another figure, but the impression is very damaged here.

43 Cf. P. Steinkeller, "Early Semitic Literature...", 253.

44 Cf. M. Kelly-Buccellati, "Gilgamesh at Urkesh?...", 404.

45 Representations of gods with horns are also documented on three other Urkesh impressions (ca. 23rd century B.C.) belonging to the rulers Tupkish and Ishar-kinum and, apparently, to some official named Ishar-beli (see G. Buccellati – M. Kelly-Buccellati, "The Seals of the King of Urkesh...", 99, fig. 6, k4; iid., "Urkesh as a Hurrian Religious Center", *Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici* 47, 2005, 27-59: 52, fig. 6; iid., "Tar'am-Agade...", 23, fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Seal impression of a double-faced god from Urkesh.
 © Reprinted from Giorgio Buccellati – Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati,
 “The Royal Storehouse of Urkesh:
 The Glyptic Evidence from the Southwestern Wing”,
Archiv für Orientforschung 42-43, 1995-1996, 1-32: 25, fig. 9e.

Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati interpreted the double-faced deity as Isimud, a vizier of the important Mesopotamian god Enki/Ea,⁴⁶ but without further clarification or arguments. Their interpretation seems probable, and can be supported with the following arguments: (1) There are significant Akkadian influences on Urkesh glyptic. (2) This deity is portrayed not only on Mesopotamian seals but also on seals from Syria and Asia Minor (from the second half of the third millennium to the second half of the second millennium B.C.),⁴⁷ which shows its dissemination beyond the Akkadian context and, thereby, makes its presence in Urkesh more plausi-

46 G. Buccellati – M. Kelly-Buccellati, “The Royal Storehouse of Urkesh...”, 26.

47 Jiří Prosecký, “Isimu”, in: id. (ed.), *Encyklopedie starověkého Předního východu*, Praha: Libri 1999, 151; Blahoslav Hruška, “Isimu”, in: Jiří Prosecký – Blahoslav Hruška – Jana Součková – Klára Břeňová, *Encyklopedie mytologie starověkého Předního východu*, Praha: Libri 2003, 104-105: 104. See also Rainer M. Boehmer, “Isimu”, in: Dietz Otto Edzard (ed.), *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* V, Berlin – New York: Walter de Gruyter 1976-1980, 179-181: 180.

ble. (3) As far as I know, there is no evidence of a double-faced representation of another god than Isimud in the ancient Near East.⁴⁸

The etymology of the Sumerian name Isimu(d) is not known; however, Akkadian Us(u)mu means “(man) of two faces”.⁴⁹ There are several seals from the Old Akkadian period representing Isimud/Usmu together with the god Ea (fig. 6).⁵⁰ Some of them could represent mythological scenes. Isimud also appears in two Sumerian mythological compositions conventionally known as *Inanna and Enki*⁵¹ and *Enki and Ninhursag*,⁵² where he is featured as Enki’s faithful servant. However, there is no parallel to the Urkesh motif in any of these myths.

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- 48 Possible exceptions to this are two Mesopotamian bronze statuettes – however, of four-faced deities – dated to the Old Babylonian period (see <<http://oi.uchicago.edu/museum/highlights/meso.html>> [21 April 2014]). Another exception is the part of a text from Babylonian myth *Enūma Eliš* where Marduk is represented with four eyes and four ears (tab. I, lines 95, 97-98); the context is that of the exaltation of Marduk’s physical perfection, however, and does not make Marduk a typical double-faced god such as Isimud/Usmu, Roman Janus or Old Slavic Triglav. For *Enūma Eliš*, see B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses...*, 350-401; J. Prosecký, *Slova do hlíny vepsaná...*, 21-68.
- 49 B. Hruška, “Isimu”, 104. For the etymology of his name, see also Wilfred G. Lambert, “Isimu”, in: Dietz Otto Edzard (ed.), *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* V, Berlin – New York: Walter de Gruyter 1976-1980, 179; Jeremy Black – Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary*, London: British Museum Press 1992, 110 (Czech translation: Jeremy Black – Anthony Green, *Bohové, démoni a symboly starověké Mezopotámie: Ilustrovaný slovník*, trans. Jana Novotná, Praha: Volvox Globator 1999, 95); J. Prosecký, “Isimu...”, 151.
- 50 See D. Collon, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals... II...*, 92, 95, 97-98, pl. XXVIII-XXIX, fig. 190, 197-199, 201, 203-204.
- 51 See Blahoslav Hruška, “Inanna a Enki”, in: Blahoslav Hruška – Lubor Matouš – Jiří Prosecký – Jana Součková, *Mýty staré Mezopotámie: Sumerská, akkadská a chetitská literatura na klínopisných tabulkách*, (Živá díla minulosti 83), Praha: Odeon 1977, 133-141, 336-338; Gertrud Farber, “Inanna and Enki”, in: William W. Hallo – K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (eds.), *The Context of Scripture I: Canonical Composition from the Biblical World*, Leiden – Boston: Brill 2003, 522-526; “Inanna and Enki” [online], in: *The Electronic Corpus of Sumerian Literature*, <<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>>, [30 April 2014].
- 52 See Samuel N. Kramer, “Enki and Ninhursag: A Paradise Myth”, in: James B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament: Third Edition with Supplement*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1969, 37-41; Blahoslav Hruška, “Enki a Ninchursag”, in: Blahoslav Hruška – Lubor Matouš – Jiří Prosecký – Jana Součková, *Mýty staré Mezopotámie: Sumerská, akkadská a chetitská literatura na klínopisných tabulkách*, (Živá díla minulosti 83), Praha: Odeon 1977, 102-108, 333-334; “Enki and Ninchursag” [online], in: *The Electronic Corpus of Sumerian Literature*, <<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>>, [30 April 2014].



Fig. 6. Old Akkadian motif of a double-faced god.
 Drawing © by Peter Ličko based on Dominique Collon,
*Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum:
 Cylinder Seals II: Akkadian – Post Akkadian – Ur III Periods*, London:
 British Museum Publications 1982, pl. XXVIII, fig. 190.

The appearance of Isimud/Usmu on the Urkesh seal impression is further evidence of Akkadian glyptic's thematic and stylistic influence in this city. However, a question arises as to how widely this god was known in this Hurrian city. If the seal was created in Urkesh – which is uncertain – it is probable that the representation was familiar and comprehensible to the client and the seal cutter as one showing Isimud/Usmu. The same applies if the seal originated in an Akkadian environment. The southern Mesopotamian scribal tradition could again have played the key role. Another question is whether the mythological compositions in which Isimud/Usmu plays a part also circulated in Urkesh. There is no evidence of this at present, but we should not exclude this possibility; the impression could represent a mythological scene not known to us today from textual evidence.

A figure in the mountains

The last of the three seal impressions represents an enigmatic figure in the mountains (fig. 7). As in the previous cases, the impression is fragmentary. When interpreting the impression, it is quite problematic to anchor it to a specific mythological background.

At the bottom, there is a mountain range with an anthropomorphic figure in a skirt, standing with legs apart in a pose reminiscent of a boxing stance. It probably represents a deity since there is a horn-like object on its head. The interpretation is, in this case, uncertain due to the absence of specific characteristics with respect to the figure's anatomy and physiognomy, and the environment. On the right, there is an animal standing on the top of the mountain range. Its exact identification is also problematic. The animal probably represents some kind of wild mountain ungulate; it could be a chamois, gazelle, or goat.⁵³ There is perhaps another figure on the left, but only part of it is preserved. It seems as if the first figure is fighting with the other, but the fragmentary state of the seal impression does not allow further interpretation.



Fig. 7. Seal impression of a figure in the mountains from Urkesh.

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"Urkesh: The First Hurrian Capital",

Biblical Archaeologist 60/2, 1997, 77-96: 93.

⁵³ Some terracotta figures of the wild goat (*Capra aegagrus*), a species still found in southeast Turkey, were discovered in Tell Mozan (see Rick Hauser, *Reading Figurines: Animal Representations in Terra Cotta from Royal Building AK*, [Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 28: Urkesh/Mozan Studies 5], Malibu: Undena Publications 2007).

Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati suggest that the first figure is the Hurrian god Kumarbi.⁵⁴ The basis for their hypothesis is a mythological passage from the Hurrian composition *Song of Silver* included in the so-called *Kumarbi Cycle*.⁵⁵ It originates from the 14th-13th centuries B.C. and it comes from Hattusa (now Boğazköy), the capital city of the Hittite state. Silver personified appears here as a boy who does not know his father, and he is criticized for it by other children. He comes home to his mother in tears. She explains:

“The city(?) [you inquire about] I will tell/describe it to you. [Your father(?) is Kumarbi], the Father of the city Urkes. [He...s], and he resides in Urkes. [...] the lawsuit of all the lands he [satisfactorily] resolves(?). Your brother is Tessub. He is king in heaven. And he is king in the land. Your sister is Sauska, and she is queen in Nineveh. You must [not] fear any [other god]; only one deity [must you fear. He (i.e., Kumarbi) stirs up(?) the enemy land(s), and the wild animals. From top to bottom [he...s]. From bottom to top [he...s.” Silver] listened to his mother’s words. He set out for Urkes. He arrived in Urkes, but he did not find [Kumarbi] in his house. He (Kumarbi) had gone to roam the land(s). He wanders about up(?) in the mountains.⁵⁶

Silver did not find his real father at home, because at that time he was on patrol in the mountains. This allusion led the two scholars to the conclusion that on the fragmentary impression Kumarbi himself is portrayed patrolling in the mountains. Their interpretation is also corroborated by the fact that Kumarbi was believed to reside in Urkesh.⁵⁷ There is an element that I can add in order to strengthen Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati’s hypothesis. In the quoted part from the *Song of Silver*, where fearsome Kumarbi is mentioned, we read about “the enemy land(s)” and “the wild

54 G. Buccellati – M. Kelly-Buccellati, “Urkesh: The First Hurrian Capital...”, 93; G. Buccellati, “Urkesh and the Question...”, 247, 250; id., “An Architectural ‘Logogram’ at Urkesh?”, in: Paola Negri Scafa – Salvatore Viaggio (eds.), *Dallo Stirone al Tigri, dal Tevere all’Eufrate: Studi in onore di Claudio Saporetti*, Roma: Aracne 2009, 23-29: 28.

55 For the *Song of Silver*, see Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., *Hittite Myths*, (Writings from the Ancient World 2), Atlanta: Scholars Press ²1998, 48-50. For the *Kumarbi Cycle*, see *ibid.*, 40-65.

56 *Ibid.*, 49, § 4.1. See also Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., “Hurrian Civilization from a Hittite Perspective”, in: Giorgio Buccellati – Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati (eds.), *Urkesh and the Hurrians: Studies in Honor of Lloyd Cotsen*, (Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 26: Urkesh/Mozan Studies 3), Malibu: Undena Publications 1998, 167-200: 191, lines 8-22.

57 Urkesh is implicitly mentioned as Kumarbi’s residence also in the Hurrian composition the *Song of Ullikummi* (see Jana Součková, “Zpěv o Ullikummin”, in: Blahoslav Hruška – Lubor Matouš – Jiří Prosecký – Jana Součková, *Mýty staré Mezopotámie: Sumerská, akkadská a chetitská literatura na klínopisných tabulkách*, [Živá díla minulosti 83], Praha: Odeon 1977, 303-319, 356: 303, tab. I, line 15; H. A. Hoffner, Jr., *Hittite Myths...*, 57, § 4).

animals”, which fits quite well the scene on the Urkesh impression. Mountain regions, particularly those unexplored, were the subject of various speculations in the ancient Near East – for example, the Mesopotamian ideas of chaotic forces which ruled in the mountains. Mountains were thought of as inhabited by different demonic creatures and/or wild mountain tribes constantly threatening urban civilization and thus the “divine order” (GIŠ-ĤUR) and the “cult order” (GARZA).⁵⁸ The mountain range on the Urkesh impression could therefore represent this kind of “enemy land(s)”, which would also explain the fighting posture of the anthropomorphic figure. If the seal was really produced in Urkesh, which is possible, it is likely that the mountain range on the impression alluded to or could have been understood as the mountainous region Tur Abdin, situated in contemporary southeastern Turkey, and clearly visible in the north from Urkesh. Wild mountain ungulates live in the mountain areas of Tur Abdin, and it could be one of these which is represented by the animal appearing

58 I will invoke only two examples. The first is found in the Sumerian-Akkadian myth *Ninurta, Asag and stones* describing the fight between Ninurta and the demon Asag assisted by stone creatures (see Jeremy Black – Graham Cunningham – Eleanor Robson – Gábor Zólyomi, *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004, 163-180; J. Prosecký, *Slova do hlíny vepsaná...*, 162-198; “Ninurta’s Exploits: A šir-sud [?] to Ninurta” [online], in: *The Electronic Corpus of Sumerian Literature*, <<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>>, [30 April 2014]). According to Jiří Prosecký (*Slova do hlíny vepsaná...*, 165), Asag represents “the personification of all evil and danger posed by the attacks of various hostile and ‘barbaric’ populations from the northeastern and eastern mountain areas ... a kind of personification of a chaos threatening the once provided divine order”. Asag even impregnated the Mountain and his descendants were born in the form of various devastating stones, which elected him a ruler (lines 34-45). Jiří Prosecký (*Slova do hlíny vepsaná...*, 165) adds that “stone forms or personified stone beings are in fact the tough and offensive inhabitants of the mountains whose appearance had unhuman and demonic features in many Mesopotamian literary texts”. The second example comes from the Sumerian composition *The Cursing of Akkad*, where the god Enlil visits various disasters on Akkad as a punishment (see Blahoslav Hruška, “Prokletí Akkadu”, in: Blahoslav Hruška – Lubor Matouš – Jiří Prosecký – Jana Součková, *Mýty staré Mezopotámie: Sumerská, akkadská a chetitská literatura na klinopisných tabulkách*, [Živá díla minulosti 83], Praha: Odeon 1977, 33-41, 327-328; J. Black – G. Cunningham – E. Robson – G. Zólyomi, *The Literature...*, 116-125; “The Cursing of Akade” [online], in: *The Electronic Corpus of Sumerian Literature*, <<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>>, [30 April 2014]). The unfavorable situation is described as follows (J. Black – G. Cunningham – E. Robson – G. Zólyomi, *The Literature...*, 121-122, lines 149-156): “Enlil, the roaring (?) storm that subjugates the entire land, the rising deluge that cannot be confronted, was considering what should be destroyed in return for the wrecking of his beloved E-kur. He lifted his gaze towards the Gubin mountains, and made all the inhabitants of the broad mountain ranges descend (?). Enlil brought out of the mountains those who do not resemble other people, who are not reckoned as part of the Land, the Gutians, an unbred people, with human intelligence but canine instincts and monkeys’ features.”

on the motif. In addition, “wild animals” and “enemy land(s)” are easily thought of as related to each other.

Commenting on the mysterious figure on the seal impression, Buccellati states that “no such *topos* seems to be known from Akkadian glyptic”.⁵⁹ However, Mesopotamian seals from the Old Akkadian period displaying hunting scenes⁶⁰ could constitute a parallel worthy of consideration. Landscapes with mountain hills, flora, and wild fauna, such as mountain lions and ungulates, are depicted here, with hunters playing an essential role.⁶¹ The question is, however, whether the Urkesh impression could depict a hunting scene. Since the figure depicted is likely to be a deity, this is probably not the case⁶² and either the Akkadian influence is not thematic but only stylistic, used to express a different theme, or there is no Akkadian influence at all.

There is one more element worth considering if we attempt to locate this Urkesh seal impression. It bears a remote similarity to the reliefs of the Hittite cult complex known as Yazılıkaya (“inscribed rock”),⁶³ which was situated about two miles northeast of the metropolis Hattusa. It is divided into two main chambers (known as A and B), which contain reliefs of several gods and goddesses along with two reliefs of the Hittite ruler Tudhaliya IV. (1250-1220 B.C.). Importantly, there is a consensus among scholars that these deities are of Hurrian origin,⁶⁴ which encourages comparison with the Urkesh impression. On these Yazılıkaya reliefs, there are four depictions of figures standing on the mountains. In the bigger chamber (A) a relief of sixty four deities in procession is found. Male deities are walking on the left, female deities on the right. The procession is led by the Hurrian storm-god Teshub standing on two figures personifying mountains.⁶⁵ Right behind him the weather god of the land of Hatti can be

59 G. Buccellati, “Urkesh and the Question...”, 247.

60 See Helene J. Kantor, “Landscape in Akkadian Art”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 25/3, 1966, 145-152, fig. 7-9.

61 For a brief description of such representations, see H. J. Kantor, “Landscape...”, 148-149; Irene J. Winter, “Tree(s) on the Mountain: Landscape and Territory on the Victory Stele of Naram-Sin of Agade”, in: ead. (ed.), *On Art in the Ancient Near East II: From the Third Millennium BCE*, (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 34), Leiden – Boston: Brill 2010, 109-131: 111-112 and n. 9.

62 I do not know of any hunting scenes representing gods on Akkadian glyptic.

63 For this Hittite shrine, see, e.g., Robert L. Alexander, *The Sculpture and Sculptors of Yazilikaya*, Newark: University of Delaware Press 1986; Trevor Bryce, *Life and Society in the Hittite World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002, 195-199.

64 See, e.g., Oliver R. Gurney, *The Hittites*, London: Penguin Books 1975, 134, 141, 144; H. A. Hoffner, Jr., “Hurrian Civilization...”, 184; Billie Jean Collins, *The Hittites and Their World*, (Archaeology and Biblical Studies 7), Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature 2007, 139.

65 See O. R. Gurney, *The Hittites...*, 141, 143, fig. 8, no. 42.

seen⁶⁶; the third deity has a grain-cob⁶⁷ and is identified as Kumarbi.⁶⁸ There are twin hills which serve as pedestals for their legs. The other parallel of the Urkesh impression can be seen in one of king Tudhaliya's two reliefs in Yazılıkaya.⁶⁹ It is also situated in the bigger chamber, at a height of three meters. Just like Teshub, the weather god and Kumarbi, the king is standing on two mountains, which most likely indicates his deification.⁷⁰

A short exposition on the two scenes extant in the Yazılıkaya sanctuary indicate that the Urkesh impression of a deity on the mountains is not exceptional but has, on the contrary, its parallels. Most likely, these are not linked genealogically with the Urkesh impression. Moreover, there are major differences between the Hittite reliefs on the one hand and the Urkesh impression on the other: the Yazılıkaya reliefs manifestly represent cultic scenes, with different characteristics of gods and their attributes. Differences are therefore more important than similarities in this case, but the comparison is still useful because it shows that, unlike the Yazılıkaya reliefs, whose context is a cultic one, the Urkesh motif rather represents a god in a spatial context – as a figure moving in a mountainous landscape inhabited by wild animals. This would make sense in connection to the Hurrian mythological passage about Silver, but at the moment the idea is rather tentative.

If the seal impression really represents Kumarbi patrolling in the mountains, as he is portrayed in the composition *Song of Silver*, we can draw the following conclusions: (1) At least one part of this myth might extend back to the period of Urkesh, approximately the second half of the third millennium B.C. (2) The motif might represent one of the oldest iconographic pieces of evidence of Hurrian mythology.⁷¹

66 See *ibid.*, 143, fig. 8, no. 41.

67 See *ibid.*, 143, fig. 8, no. 40.

68 H. A. Hoffner, Jr., "Hurrian Civilization...", 184; B. J. Collins, *The Hittites...*, 140.

69 See O. R. Gurney, *The Hittites...*, 143, fig. 8, no. 64.

70 *Ibid.*, 144.

71 An example from a later period is the seal impression from Nuzi (14th century B.C.) and gold bowl from Hasanlu (ca. 1000 B.C.). Depicted motifs recall or tend to be associated with the Hurrian mythological set of texts about Kumarbi. For the impression, see Diana L. Stein, "Mythologische Inhalte der Nuzi-Glyptik", in: Volkert Haas (ed.), *Hurriter und Hurritisch*, (Xenia 21), Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz 1988, 173-209. For the bowl, see, e.g., Irene J. Winter, "The 'Hasanlu Gold Bowl': Thirty Years Later", in: Robert H. Dyson, Jr. – Mary M. Voigt (eds.), *East of Assyria: The Highland Settlement of Hasanlu: Expedition 31/2-3, 1989*, 87-106. On the polemic regarding the connecting of these motifs with the Hurrian cycle, see Diana L. Stein, "Nuzi Glyptic: The Eastern Connection", in: William W. Hallo – Irene J. Winter (eds.), *Proceedings of the 45th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale II: Yale University: Seals and Seal Impressions*, Bethesda: CDL Press 2001, 149-183: 154-156.

Conclusion

Of all three above-mentioned seal impressions, the “Etana” motif is the closest to textual evidence, and allows plausible alternative interpretations. Either these scenes are a direct echo of the *Legend of Etana*, with the modification of some complementary iconographic elements, or they reflect an unknown *Proto-Etana* tradition. Oral traditions could have played a vital role in both cases. A human figure flying on a bird is a representation interesting enough to become the subject of glyptic. There is also the possibility that the shepherd scenes convey the metaphor of the ruler (Etana) as shepherd, a well known feature of rulership ideology in the ancient Near East.

The second impression with the double-faced figure most likely represents the Mesopotamian god Isimud/Usmu. Arguments supporting this identification are based on other evidence of Akkadian cultural influences in Urkesh, on the expansion of seals portraying this deity in different regions of the ancient Near East, and also on the fact that no other god is known to be represented as double-faced in the Near East. Isimud is known mainly from Sumerian mythology. There is no reason to exclude the possibility that the Urkesh impression could represent this deity as part of a further unspecified myth. If the identification with Isimud/Usmu is correct, the motif, along with the “Etana” impression, shows Akkadian influences, both thematic and stylistic, on the Urkesh environment.

The origin of the first two seals is unknown. The continuity of iconographic and stylistic elements of the unscribed impressions with the inscribed ones, which show a local origin, is not sufficient proof. Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati suppose that the seals found in Urkesh but close to Akkadian models were carved in the Hurrian city, but the arguments in favor of Urkesh provenance are indirect and unpersuasive. It is possible that the seals could have been brought from the Akkadian region to Urkesh, for example, as a gift. It is even possible that the seals were never brought to Urkesh and that only the seal impressions migrated thanks to commerce from southern Mesopotamia to the north. Even in the case that neither seal was made in Urkesh but was imported from the Akkadian cultural environment, it is possible that the content would have been understood in the Hurrian center if we consider the expansion of scribal art from the south. Scribal culture was an additional channel to transport also the meaning associated with particular visual representations, which makes the possibility of a purely formal imitation of a motif less likely.

Also, the last motif, the anthropomorphic figure in the mountains, may bear Akkadian influence. But if this is the case, the influences are apparently not thematic but only stylistic. In any case, it has fewer common



features with Akkadian glyptic than the previous two, which allows us to think that it was quite probably produced in Urkesh. Among the three seal impressions analyzed here, this one is the most difficult to link to any known mythological tradition. I consider its connection with the Hurrian myth the *Song of Silver* as possible, but the evidence is not compelling due to the scantiness of iconographical motifs on the impression.

SUMMARY

The Mythological Background of Three Seal Impressions Found in Urkesh

This article interprets the iconographic motifs on three seal impressions discovered at the north Syrian Tell Mozan site, which are dated to the last third of third millennium B.C. In ancient times, the city was known as Urkesh and the population of Hurrians played an important role there. The motif on the first seal impression is that of a herd and a dog gazing at a bird. The seal impression is damaged, but it is likely that the bird bore a human figure, which allows us to associate this scene with the *Legend of Etana*. The motif on the second impression is a double-faced god, most likely Isimud/Usmu. These two motifs show numerous thematic and stylistic Akkadian elements, which demonstrate southern Mesopotamian influences on the culture of Urkesh. The third motif is an anthropomorphic figure in the mountains. Even here some comparisons can be considered but no close textual parallel has been found. All three impressions are analyzed and interpreted through a comparison with parallel themes in mythological texts and in Akkadian glyptic. A mythological background seems very likely in the case of the first and second motifs but cannot be ascertained regarding the third one. The provenance of the first two motifs is uncertain and there is no conclusive proof of Urkesh origin. The seals could come from the Akkadian cultural environment, but it is possible that their content was known in the Hurrian city because of the spread of scribal tradition. There are fewer common features between the third motif and Akkadian glyptic, which makes its origin in Urkesh more probable.

Keywords: Urkesh; Hurrians; seal impressions; seals; glyptic; mythology; Etana; Isimud/Usmu; Kumarbi; Akkadian influences; Mesopotamia.

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