

## THE RISING OF THE SUN-GOD AS A MYTHOLOGICAL MOTIF: OLD AKKADIAN SEALS IN RELATION TO THE GILGAMESH EPIC\*

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Old Akkadian glyptic remarks various representations of the sun-god Utu/Shamash in the aspect of its rise. This cosmological moment is definable not only on the basis of attributes which the sun-god disposes, but also other visual features are presented which complete the colour of the rise. Presented elements have analogical versions in the text namely in the Akkadian Gilgamesh Epic. Other Mesopotamian texts with cosmologic elements are used as a supplement in the practise in the comparison of seals with Epic. Seals and Epic content have in common mythological motifs in the representation of (two-)mountain, cosmic gate and the figure of a scorpion-man. The topic of the article is the rate link between glyptic and the text in the way of listed motifs. Some of influences cannot be totally excluded mostly if we speak about the scorpion-man. If these influences had occurred they were caused only from the sides of seals on the Epic because the latter is about one millennium younger. It seems that the analogical appearance of motifs is possible to assign to the dent of cosmological and mythological imaginations retold in Mesopotamia which were used for texts and glyptic.

**Key words:** sun-god rising, the Gilgamesh Epic, seals, glyptic, mythology, cosmology, Utu/Shamash, Mashu Mountain, scorpion-man, Mesopotamia, Old Akkadian period

The solar cult is, in the ancient Near East, documented from various regions, and also as a part of cosmological ideas. Miscellaneous source texts fundamen-

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Abbreviations: ARET = Archivi Reali di Ebla. Testi, Roma, 1981 –; Bo = Inventory numbers of Boğazköy tablets excavated 1906 – 1912; KBo = Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi, Leipzig – Berlin, 1916 –; KTU = Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit I, Kevelaer – Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976; KUB = Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi, Berlin, 1921 –; OIP = Oriental Institute Publications, Chicago, 1924 –.

tally indicate their versatility. They most probably date back to the prehistoric period and are linked to observations of the sky and heavenly objects. The observers must have been conscious of the solar cycle and they must have realised, how the sun, in its morning phase, gradually rises over the horizon, crosses the sky, and in the evening sets in the west. From this perspective, an explanation for this repeated appearance and disappearance of the sun needed to be found within cosmology. The interpretation, according to which the solar disc rises from the underworld and returns into it again, was, for those days, judging by supporting documentation, an acceptable explanation. The sun's crossing of the sky was seen as something of a contrast to its journey through the underworld.<sup>1</sup> The whole cycle gradually became a part of various, often independent, religious-mythological ideas.

In the Mesopotamian environment, the sun-god was the Sumerian Utu, or the Akkadian Shamash, who played an important role in the pantheon of that area.<sup>2</sup> Among other things, he was the guarantor of rights and justice, which was connected to the sun's journey across the sky, and therefore its ability to see everything. Cult centres of the sun-god were the towns of Isin and Larsa, he is featured in many Mesopotamian texts and plays a significant role in the Gilgamesh Epic, as the protector of Gilgamesh and Enkidu. One of many panegyric hymns dedicated to Shamash demonstrates the importance attributed to him:

O Shamash, noblest of the Anunna-gods, most lordly among the Igigi-gods, sublime leader, guide, Judge of heaven and earth, not changing in his command, O Shamash, who controls darkness, who provides light for the people, O Shamash, when you set, the peoples' light is darkened, O Shamash, when you rise, the four quarters brighten. The destitute, widow, waif, female companion, At your rising, all humanity is warmed.<sup>3</sup>

Another text describes the rising of Shamash from the underworld from behind "the great mountain" into the sky:

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<sup>1</sup> For the opposite opinion, see HEIMPEL, W. *The Sun at Night and the Doors of Heaven in Babylonian Texts*, p. 151. According to this researcher "the sun and the other heavenly bodies remained at all times in heaven and did not pass into the realm of earth upon setting." However, this opinion is hard to defend (cf. HOROWITZ, W. *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, pp. 248 – 249, n. 6), which is proved by several texts mentioned in this article.

<sup>2</sup> Even though there is an interesting opinion that the position of the god of moon Nanna/Sin got stronger at the expense of Utu/Shamash in the last third of the 3rd millennium B.C. (see FISCHER, C. *Twilight of the Sun-God*).

<sup>3</sup> FOSTER, B.R. *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, p. 637, lines 1 – 7.

O Shamash, when you come forth from the great mountain, When you come forth from the great mountain, the mountain of the deep, When you come forth from the holy hill where destinies are ordained, When you [come forth] from the back of heaven to the junction point of heaven and earth...<sup>4</sup>

The originally Sumerian composition “Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Underworld,”<sup>5</sup> which later became part of the Akkadian Gilgamesh Epic,<sup>6</sup> describes the relationship of Utu/Shamash and the underworld. Enkidu, after having entered the underworld to recover Gilgamesh’s lost objects, did not heed Gilgamesh’s words about observing the rules of the underworld. He broke the norms of the land of the dead, and therefore had to remain there. Following Gilgamesh’s pleas, Enki finally helped through Utu/Shamash:

Father Enki helped him in this matter, he spoke to Young Hero Utu, the son born of Ningal: “Now, when you make an opening in the Netherworld, bring his servant up to him from the Netherworld!” Young Hero Utu, [the son born of Ningal,] he made an opening in the Netherworld, by means of his phantom he brought his servant up to him from the Netherworld.<sup>7</sup>

This topic proves, that the underworld was not foreign to the sun-god, it formed a part of his cosmological journey across the skies, and that is the reason he was the one with the power to save Enkidu’s spirit from the underworld.

In contrast with the Sumero-Akkadian tradition, the sun in the West Semitic environment and the Hittite area was feminine. In Ugarit, such a goddess was Shapsh, and her Semitic etymology of the theonym is at once an appellative and proprium, just as the Akkadian Shamash and the West Semitic Shemesh. The cosmological aspect of Shapsh is most compactly represented by several passages in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle.<sup>8</sup> She is depicted in an underworld context identically in three places by means of the form *parallelism membrorum*.<sup>9</sup> She

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<sup>4</sup> FOSTER, B.R. *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, p. 644, lines 1 – 4.

<sup>5</sup> See GEORGE, A.R. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, pp. 743 – 777; BLACK, J. et al. *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, pp. 31 – 40; BLACK, J. et al. *The Electronic Corpus of Sumerian Literature*, “Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the nether world.”

<sup>6</sup> See GEORGE, A.R. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, pp. 726 – 735, tab. XII.

<sup>7</sup> GEORGE, A.R. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, pp. 773 – 774, lines 238 – 243.

<sup>8</sup> For the Baal Cycle, see WYATT, N. *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, pp. 34 – 146.

<sup>9</sup> See KTU 1.3 v, KTU 1.4 viii, KTU 1.6 ii (see WYATT, N. *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, pp. 85, 113, 134).

acts as a psychopompos here when she transports the dead into the underworld. Beside the sun-goddess' chthonic aspect, another side presented here is her function as an astral deity. This is expressed by the epithets "Luminary of the gods" and "Burning One, strength of the heavens."<sup>10</sup> In another part of the myth, Shapsh also descends into the underworld, but for a different purpose – to bring out the dead body of Baal after his lost duel with the god of the underworld Mot.<sup>11</sup> Shapsh as a psychopompos, then, does not accompany the dead only into the underworld, but in this specific case, he can also bring the dead body of Baal out. In a sense, this is a free parallel with the return of Enkidu's spirit from the underworld – in both cases, there is assistance from the solar deity. Passages from the Ugaritic composition are a very good example of the fact, that the solar deity can enter the underworld, but also exit it. The myth ideally reflects the ancient ideas about the solar cycle.

In religious texts from ancient Anatolia, too, the underworld aspect of the sun is documented in the form of the Sun-goddess of the Earth. A literary composition from the first half of the 2nd millennium B.C. describes the journey of the human soul into the underworld, with this goddess occupying a significant role therein.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, the Sun-goddess of the Earth often plays a role in Hurro-Hittite rituals dated from the 14th – 13th century B.C., in which communication with the underworld occurs, and applicants turn to her with their prayers.<sup>13</sup> One such ritual is the rite of purification which rids of evil in the home, consisting of several acts.<sup>14</sup> In one part of the ritual, a prayer is addressed to the Sun-goddess of the Earth to open the gate to the underworld, to enable the goddess herself, or her male variation, and other Primordial Deities, to ascend from the underworld. They are to guarantee rectification and take evil back into the underworld.

The mentioned source texts indicate, that the solar deity in Mesopotamia, as in other neighbouring regions, had its representation in two contradictory cosmological spheres – uranic and underworldly. Both have common features, which can be attributed to its versatility, but also to various cultural influences.

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<sup>10</sup> Likewise in Hurrian composition "Song of Silver," Sun and Moon are called "the luminaries [of heaven] and [earth]" and "the torches" (see HOFFNER, H.A. Jr. *Hittite Myths*, p. 50, §7.3).

<sup>11</sup> See KTU 1.6 i (see WYATT, N. *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, p. 129).

<sup>12</sup> See HOFFNER, H.A., Jr. *Hittite Myths*, p. 34, §3.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., KUB 7.41, KUB 55.45 + Bo 69/142 ii 1 – 23 with duplicate Bo 3916 + KUB 12.20 : 11 – 18, KBo 11.14 iii 6 – 10, 28 – 31, KUB 24.9 ii 17' – 30', KUB 17.28 i 1 – 24, KUB 43.23 rev. 19' – 22', 57' – 58' (see COLLINS, B.J. *Necromancy, Fertility and the Dark Earth: The Use of Ritual Pits in the Hittite Cult*, pp. 227, text 2, 229, text 4, 233, texts 11 – 12, 234, text 13, 235, text 15).

<sup>14</sup> See KUB 7.41 (see COLLINS, B.J. *Necromancy, Fertility and the Dark Earth: The Use of Ritual Pits in the Hittite Cult*, p. 227, text 2, §12; COLLINS, B.J. *Purifying a House: A Ritual for the Infernal Deities*, pp. 168 – 171, §12).

There is, however, no region in the ancient Near East, for which iconographic depictions of the rising sun are as typical (if at all) as for the Mesopotamian grounds, as can be seen from well documented visual material, which is also complemented by texts.

The presented article focuses on answering the following three research questions:

1. What are the *common features* of glyptics and the tablet IX of the Gilgamesh Epic, as concerning the motif of the rising sun-god?
2. Could a (two-)mountain, on one hand on the seals, and, on the other hand in the Epic, represent the point of rising and setting of the sun *simultaneously*, or were there different ideas about the (two-)mountain in the *east* and the (two-)mountain in the *west*?
3. What is the concrete *relation* between Old Akkadian seal scenes depicting the rising of the sun-god and tablet IX of the Epic? Is it possible to assume a common source or mutual influences, or is it the case of autonomous ideas?

The interpretation of visual elements through text is, from the point of view of methodology, a difficult task, but, in my opinion, not impossible.<sup>15</sup> At the same time it may be remarked that contrary attitudes also exist.<sup>16</sup> The methodological process will consist of the comparison and identification of as many common features present both on seals and in text as possible. In other words, the same idea can be expressed visually, by means of glyptics, and verbally by means of text. The more common features across glyptics and texts will be identified, the higher the probability of a connection between the seals and texts. The visual elements will need to be interpreted within the context of the whole scene depicted on the seal.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Cf., e.g., STEINKELLER, P. Early Semitic Literature and Third Millennium Seals with Mythological Motifs, p. 245.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., HALLO, W.W. in BUCHANAN, B. Early Near Eastern Seals in the Yale Babylonian Collection, p. xv. For the correlation between iconography and texts, see also AMIET, P. The Mythological Repertory in Cylinder Seals of the Agade Period, especially pp. 35 – 38, 47; MATTHIAE, P. Figurative Themes and Literary Texts, especially pp. 219 – 223; CRAWFORD, C.D. Relating Image and Word in Ancient Mesopotamia, pp. 241 – 264; SONIK, K. Pictorial Mythology and Narrative in the Ancient Near East, pp. 265 – 293.

<sup>17</sup> For the methodology that was used, see also SEDLÁČEK, T. The Mythological Background of Three Seal Impressions Found in Urkesh, especially pp. 32 – 33.

### **Description of the seal scenes depicting the sun-god**

A number of documented seals dated from the Old Akkadian period depict the sun-god,<sup>18</sup> while several of these also present the cosmological aspect of his rising (Pl. 1 – 8).<sup>19</sup> The visual motif of his rising is not completely unified, there are certain variations of several visual composition types. The uniform idea is, however, detectable. The variations are determined by the presence of specific iconographic features in combinations and on the basis of these, the motif itself can be identified as the rising of the sun-god. In some cases, the glyptics maintain these more closely, others less closely. These features may be divided into four groups:

1. The typical character is the figure of Utu/Shamash identified through the solar rays flowing from his arms. There is a headwear with horns on his head, a demonstrational feature of all gods in the ancient Near East and there is a handsaw in his hand that he cuts his way through with.
2. He comes out of the two-mountain or there is one mountain only and his left or right leg is put on the hill. As an alternative there are the seals with two bison with human heads and the sun-god rising from behind.
3. There is the double-leaf gate added to his rise. The exception is the single-leaf gate.
4. There are two god-servants (rarely only one) in the scenes, proved by their headwear with the horns on their heads. Both of them assist the gate and the god sunrise. Exceptionally they are replaced by the semi-god hybrid beings.

### **Motif of sunrise and sunset of sun-god in the Gilgamesh Epic**

There were older Sumerian compositions<sup>20</sup> before the Akkadian Gilgamesh Epic.<sup>21</sup> Their storylines were independent, but in connection with the character

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<sup>18</sup> For the commentary to glyptic with the sun-god, see FRANKFORT, H. *Gods and Myths on Sargonid Seals*, pp. 17 – 21.

<sup>19</sup> See COLLON, D. *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum: Cylinder Seals. Vol. 2: Akkadian – Post Akkadian – Ur III Periods*, pp. 85 – 87, 92, pl. XXIV, No. 169 – 171, pl. XXV, No. 172 – 177, pl. XXVIII, No. 190; STEINKELLER, P. *Early Semitic Literature and Third Millennium Seals with Mythological Motifs*, pl. 8.

<sup>20</sup> See KRAMER, S.N. *Gilgamesh and Agga*; KRAMER, S.N. *Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living*; KRAMER, S.N. *The Death of Gilgamesh*; GEORGE, A.R. *The Epic of Gilgamesh: A New Translation*, pp. 141 – 208; BLACK, J. et al. *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, pp. 31 – 40, 343 – 352; BLACK, J. et al. *The Electronic Corpus of Sumerian Literature*, “Gilgameš and Aga;” “Gilgameš and the bull of heaven;” “The death of Gilgameš;” “Gilgameš, Enkidu and the nether world;” “Gilgameš and Ĥuwawa (Version A);” “Gilgameš and Ĥuwawa (Version B).” See also GEORGE, A.R. *The*

of Gilgamesh and partly with his servant Enkidu.<sup>22</sup> The Sumerian compositions are dated back from the 20th to 17th century B.C. although they may be dated back to 21st century B.C. or even earlier. That was the basement for the Old Babylonian version of Epic from the 18th to 17th century B.C. which was later completed by the “standard” version. Its editor was Sin-leqe-unnini, the priest living at the end of the 12th century in Uruk. The best remained final version is from the 7th century B.C. of the Neo-Assyrian period and comes from Niniveh. The “standard” version of Epic is known under the name *ša naqba īmuru* “He who saw the Deep”<sup>23</sup> and it was made of the twelve tablets with approximately 3000 verses.<sup>24</sup>

The important point of the Epic is the friendship between Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk and Enkidu. The main theme of the Epic is Gilgamesh’s looking for immortality after the death of his close friend Enkidu. Gilgamesh decides to search Utnapishtim, the only person who survived the great flood together with his wife and were gifted eternal life. To get to him is a very complicated and demanding way though and it is settled at the very end of the world behind the waters of deaths.

The key part of the Epic from the point of the established matter is tablet IX. Its introduction represents the sorrow of Gilgamesh for the lost of his friend. The hero of Uruk is afraid of death too. The following verses reflect how Gilgamesh gets to the mountain crossing, an unsafe place and the text is as follows:

The name of the mountain was Mashu. When [he] arrived at Mount Mashu, which daily guards the rising [of the sun,] – their tops [*abut*] the fabric of the heavens, their bases reach down to Hades – there were scorpion-men guarding its gate, whose terror was dread and glance was death,

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Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts, pp. 4 – 17; TIGAY, J.H. The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic, pp. 23 – 38.

<sup>21</sup> See SPEISER, E.A. The Epic of Gilgamesh; KOVACS, M.G. The Epic of Gilgamesh; GEORGE, A.R. The Epic of Gilgamesh: A New Translation; GEORGE, A.R. The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts; DALLEY, S. Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others, pp. 39 – 153. For the Epic, see also JACOBSEN, Th. The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion, pp. 193 – 219; GEORGE, A.R. Gilgamesh and the Literary Traditions of Ancient Mesopotamia. For the development of the Epic, see TIGAY, J.H. The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic.

<sup>22</sup> In Akkadian version, both of them were tantamount and there was a great friendship between them.

<sup>23</sup> GEORGE, A.R. The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts, p. 28; GEORGE, A.R. Gilgamesh and the Literary Traditions of Ancient Mesopotamia, p. 452.

<sup>24</sup> For the historical background of the Epic, see TIGAY, J.H. The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic; GEORGE, A.R. The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts, pp. 3 – 70.

whose radiance was terrifying, enveloping the uplands – at both sunrise and sunset they guard the sun...<sup>25</sup>

When Gilgamesh saw the hybrid beings – scorpion-men, man and woman, felt “fear and dread,” but said hello to them and explained his journey. A scorpion-man replies him:

“There was not [ever], O Gilgamesh, [...] like [you,] [no] one ever [...] ... of the mountain. For twelve double-hours its interior [.....] the darkness is dense and [light is] there none. For the rising of the sun [.....] for the setting of the [sun .....] For the setting of the [.....] they sent forth [.....]”<sup>26</sup>

The next part of the text is fragmentary, however, eventually the scorpion-man encourages the hero to go:

“Go, Gilgamesh! [.....] *May* the mountains of Mashu [.....] The mountains and hills [.....] in safety may [.....] The gate of the mountain [.....]”<sup>27</sup>

Gilgamesh set off for the journey through the dark mountain tunnel that the sun goes through and after the twelve two-hour journey he finally saw the light. He found himself at a place full of semiprecious stones where he saw the ale-wife Siduri who he starts a discussion with. The story keeps going on, however, the following parts of the Epic are not relevant to solve the set issue and are left out.

### **Common features of seal scenes and of the Gilgamesh Epic**

The primary and certainly the central common feature is the participation of the sun-god in both types of sources, on the seals and in the text. The common attribute also is to notice the sunrising as an important cosmological aspect of this deity. What is more the Epic states the solar dichotomy when considering sunrising and sunsetting as two levels of the celestial solar cycle.

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<sup>25</sup> GEORGE, A.R. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, p. 669, tab. IX, lines 37 – 45.

<sup>26</sup> GEORGE, A.R. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, p. 671, tab. IX, lines 80 – 87.

<sup>27</sup> GEORGE, A.R. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, p. 671, tab. IX, lines 131 – 135.



The next basic feature is a mountain formation. The glyptic presents a two-mountain or one hill mountain. The mountain in the Epic is named Mashu<sup>28</sup> which is in close connection with Shamash as it does not guard only his sunrising, but probably also his sunsetting. At the same time it presents *axis mundi* that goes from heaven to the underworld and joins both cosmological spheres. The name Mashu is interpreted as the “Twin”<sup>29</sup> (hence Twin Mountain). The etymology of the name suggests the twinning of the mountain and that is why it is likely to express the parallel to the two-mountain as the seals present it<sup>30</sup> (for more details, see below).

The visual material as well as the text material works with the gate providing the cosmic function. In the Epic there is the fear evoked by the scorpion-men (*girtablullû*)<sup>31</sup> guarding the gate nearby the mountain. Through the gate the sun-god sets off for his every day journey while the scorpion-men guard him during his sunrising and sunsetting. It is obvious that the tunnel which Gilgamesh goes towards immortality through is exactly the same as Shamash walks through. It is a dark and unpleasant place. On the seals there are not any depictions of the scorpion-men but there are two other figures instead of them, the god-servants assisting the gate. The question is the relationship between the scorpion-men and the god-servants if there is any parallel in between. The reason is that in none of the texts where the god crosses the gate are god-servants.<sup>32</sup> It seems to be obvious that both types of the figures have got different functions. Even glyptic disposes with the hybrid beings, not the scorpion-men in this case, but the bison-men (*GUD.ALIM/kusarikku*)<sup>33</sup> with the same account as the god-servants, standing by the gate to alternate the god-servants. On some of the seals there are two bison-men as an alteration for the two-mountain. The importance of the visual motif may explain the Mesopotamian literary composition about Shamash from the Early Dynastic period from Tell Abu Salabih and Ebla dated

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<sup>28</sup> For the mountain of Mashu, see EDZARD, D.O. *Māšu*, p. 531. See also GEORGE, A.R. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, pp. 492 – 493, 863 – 864.

<sup>29</sup> E.g., EDZARD, D.O. *Māšu*, p. 531; WIGGERMANN, F.A.M. *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts*, p. 180; GEORGE, A.R. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, pp. 492, 669, n. 2, 863.

<sup>30</sup> For the opposite opinion, see HEIMPEL, W. *The Sun at Night and the Doors of Heaven in Babylonian Texts*, pp. 145 – 146.

<sup>31</sup> For the scorpion/scorpion-man, see VAN BUREN, E.D. *The Scorpion in Mesopotamian Art and Religion*; WIGGERMANN, F.A.M. *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts*, pp. 180 – 181; HUXLEY, M. *The Gates and Guardians in Sennacherib’s Addition to the Temple of Assur*, pp. 119 – 133.

<sup>32</sup> HEIMPEL, W. *The Sun at Night and the Doors of Heaven in Babylonian Texts*, p. 133.

<sup>33</sup> For the bison/bull-man, see WIGGERMANN, F.A.M. *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts*, pp. 174 – 179; HUXLEY, M. *The Gates and Guardians in Sennacherib’s Addition to the Temple of Assur*, pp. 119 – 133.

approximately the first half of the 3rd millennium B.C.<sup>34</sup> Piotr Steinkeller connects the composition with some of the seals depicting Shamash and one of the parts matches with the seals with the bison-men instead of the two-mountain; the passage is translated as follows:

The bisons of Shamash make visible (his) divine radiance.<sup>35</sup>

In the whole text this animal has been mentioned four times.<sup>36</sup> The antiquity of the composition proves the association of the bison/bull with the sun-god from the early 3rd millennium B.C.

The last important part is the expression of “the gate of the mountain” in the Epic as the entry/exit part of the tunnel.<sup>37</sup> Even the text in this part is fragmentary, it shows the connection between the gate and the mountain. A similar connection is found on a visual level too. The glyptic frequently depicts the two-mountain together with the gate.

On the basis of the common features it is correct to state that the previously mentioned mythological motifs correspond with the Old Akkadian glyptic depicting the sunrise of the sun-god. The analogies between the written text and the visual form are in some ways very immediate and in some of them they are in a larger context. Even though there is the assumption of mutual connection, deep analysis is necessary.

### **Two-mountain location in cosmological context**

In the various Mesopotamian texts there are some remarks about the mountains in association with the sunrise and sunset. These sources are from the 2nd to the 1st millennium B.C. and point at the seemingly united cosmological imagination of the solar cycle during the day and night.

Sumerian hymn to Enlil describes the mountain of sunrise and sunset sufficiently explicative:

Lord, as far as the edge of heaven, lord as far as the edge of earth, from the mountain of sunrise to the mountain of sunset.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See KREBERNIK, M. Mesopotamian Myths at Ebla: ARET 5, 6 and ARET 5, 7.

<sup>35</sup> ARET 5, 6 iv 6 + OIP 99, 326 iii 6 – 7 (STEINKELLER, P. Early Semitic Literature and Third Millennium Seals with Mythological Motifs, p. 266).

<sup>36</sup> STEINKELLER, P. Early Semitic Literature and Third Millennium Seals with Mythological Motifs, pp. 258 – 259.

<sup>37</sup> More detail to the heaven’s gate in Mesopotamian texts, see HEIMPEL, W. The Sun at Night and the Doors of Heaven in Babylonian Texts, pp. 132 – 140.

<sup>38</sup> HOROWITZ, W. Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography, p. 331.

In the next Sumerian text devoted to Utu it is noted:

Utu, the upper sea is yours, Utu, the lower sea is yours. Utu, the mountain of cedar, the mountain of Hashur is yours.<sup>39</sup>

The “upper sea” and the “lower sea” which are in opposition may indicate that “the mountain of cedar” and “the mountain of Hashur” should be considered in the same contrast intensified by the fact that the mountains belonged to the sun-god. They would epitomise the mountain of sunrise and sunset<sup>40</sup> which is more likely to be.

The bilingual Sumero-Akkadian incantation against the demons refers to fourteen demons in the same number at each of the mountains, the Mountain of Sunrise and the Mountain of Sunset:

They are seven (demons) who were born in the Dark Mountains (The Mountain of Sunset). They are seven demons who were raised in the Bright Mountains (Mountain of Sunrise).<sup>41</sup>

The cosmological allusion about the places of sunrise and sunset are implicitly present in *Enūma Eliš*.<sup>42</sup> After Marduk defeated Tiamat, he began to organise the cosmos and also from half of Tiamat’s body created heaven. His creative action kept on going:

He opened up gates on both (side of her) ribs, He made strong bolts to left and right.<sup>43</sup>

Even though there is no remark of the mountains of sunrise and sunset, this short extract of Babylonian myth points that opening the gate on the left and right side actually epitomises the place of sunrise and sunset. At these places we assume to expect the mountains as it is in previous texts.

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<sup>39</sup> HEIMPEL, W. The Sun at Night and the Doors of Heaven in Babylonian Texts, p. 144. Similarly mentioned in the mountain of cedar (scent), see HOROWITZ, W. Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography, p. 331, including n. 14.

<sup>40</sup> HEIMPEL, W. The Sun at Night and the Doors of Heaven in Babylonian Texts, pp. 144 – 145.

<sup>41</sup> HOROWITZ, W. Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography, p. 332. For a brief commentary in this passage, see HEIMPEL, W. The Sun at Night and the Doors of Heaven in Babylonian Texts, p. 145.

<sup>42</sup> For *Enūma Eliš*, see FOSTER, B.R. Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature, pp. 350 – 401.

<sup>43</sup> FOSTER, B.R. Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature, p. 377, tab. V, lines 9 – 10.

The interesting thesis in the contrast with the text noted above is according to Margaret Huxley who presented her view of a single rotating two-mountain with the gate and serving the sun-god at sunrise and sunset at the same time.<sup>44</sup> In this context she mentioned:

In the ninth tablet Gilgamesh came to Twin Mountain and encountered the scorpion-man and his wife, who were said to be guardians of Shamash at his rising and setting. Initially, this seems an impossible proposition, for the places of sunrise and sunset are at opposite sides of the world, so surely the same beings could not guard both. If heaven rotates, however, the eastern gate through which Shamash entered the world in the morning would be waiting for him, together with its guardians, on the western horizon at the end of the day.<sup>45</sup>

According to Huxley the Mesopotamian night sky observers watched the constellation steadily flow from the Sumerian times. The constellations wandered slowly from the east to the west with the stars keeping their constant positions. The ancient inhabitants may have understood this apparent movement of the stellar system in two ways: either as the rotation of heaven or as the rotation of the earth. It was simpler to believe in the rotation of heaven as it was believed that the planet earth stood still and did not move.<sup>46</sup> In written sources there exist several examples concerning the rotation of the cope of heaven.<sup>47</sup>

It seems to be irrational for the scorpion-men who Gilgamesh met to guard both sides at the same time in the east and in the west. The same beings cannot be at two cardinal points in parallel. It might have come into consideration in case of the heaven rotation or the existence of two pairs of these guards. Or according to Andrew R. George as two mountains with their fixed positions. His opinion is diametrically different to Huxley's argument. According to George, the etymology of the name Mashu may be understood in two ways: either it was one object with two mountains or it was a mountain out of a couple of mountains. However, the author is inclined to find the second option correct.<sup>48</sup> One of the mountains was situated on the eastern side, the other one on

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<sup>44</sup> HUXLEY, M. *The Shape of the Cosmos According to Cuneiform Sources*, p. 193; HUXLEY, M. *The Gates and Guardians in Sennacherib's Addition to the Temple of Assur*, pp. 124 – 125.

<sup>45</sup> HUXLEY, M. *The Shape of the Cosmos According to Cuneiform Sources*, p. 193.

<sup>46</sup> HUXLEY, M. *The Shape of the Cosmos According to Cuneiform Sources*, pp. 192 – 193.

<sup>47</sup> HUXLEY, M. *The Shape of the Cosmos According to Cuneiform Sources*, p. 193, including the sources cited in n. 11 – 15. The key part of the Gilgamesh Epic with the Mashu Mountain is not left out.

<sup>48</sup> GEORGE, A.R. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, p. 492.

the western side. The mountain where Gilgamesh got to should be perceived in singular whereas the mountains as a pair are supposed to be in plural.<sup>49</sup> In Babylonian texts George calls attention to the cosmic function of the two-mountains located at the opposite cardinal points figuring as a pair.<sup>50</sup> In the context with the Epic he adds:

Since the scorpion-men are envisaged as sentries and ... as male and female pairs, we can assume that one couple is stationed at each of the two mountains to guard the doorways through which the sun enters and leaves the visible sky.<sup>51</sup>

Huxley's model based on the rotation was qualified by George as "ingenious but unnecessary" for the following reasons: (1) In fact the name of the mountain implicates a pair of mountains. (2) In line 39 of the Epic it is recorded how the hero came to the mountain guarding the sun-god sunrising which is contra to line 45 depicting the scorpion-men as the guards on both sides (that is guarding the sun-god sunrising and sunsetting too). George also points at the myth *Enūma Eliš* where Marduk in his act of creating located the doorways at both cosmological sides<sup>52</sup> (see above).

George's reservations towards the revolving model I consider absolute up to a certain point. Toponym Mashu suggests the two-mountain – a pair of mountains, but from the passage it is not obvious whether there is *one* mountain with two hills in *one* place or there are *two* bipolar mountains in *two* different places. Even George tends to support the latter, there is no reason to deny the former. The fact is that Gilgamesh wandered to the mountain in the east (line 39) where the scorpion-men guarded. Several lines further we find the information that the beings guard the sun-god sunrise and sunset too (line 45). George feels contrary about these two lines, but they may not have that effect. The Epic considers Gilgamesh's arrival to the eastern mountain with the hybrid beings as the first priority and then he points at the sun-god sunrising and sunsetting and the guards. The argument of the great importance is that the content of both lines refers the *same* pair of scorpion-men keeping guard on the eastern and western side. There is no remark about two pairs of guards separately in the east and in the west. In other words, George's opinion about two pairs of beings "at each of

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<sup>49</sup> GEORGE, A.R. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, p. 863.

<sup>50</sup> GEORGE, A.R. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, pp. 492 – 493, including the references to Babylonian texts in n. 169.

<sup>51</sup> GEORGE, A.R. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, p. 493.

<sup>52</sup> GEORGE, A.R. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, p. 493, n. 170.

the two mountains to guard the doorways” is not sufficiently evidenced and from the Epic it is not obvious.

In the context with the cosmological topic in *Enūma Eliš* it is necessary to agree that it is expressly contra the revolving model and it is in line with George’s concept. The other independent Mesopotamian texts stated above support that idea. According to these sources in ancient imaginations there were mountains in the east and the west at the same time. However, again we are getting to the controversial issue how to explain the passage in the Epic which explicitly did not incorporate such twinning? Contradictions are becoming in the texts. Huxley’s model of the rotary heaven seems to be the relevant explanation. The same beings might have guarded *one two-mountain* in the east and the west in dependence on the heaven rotation. If this model is accepted immediately the next question to raise is: how can be explained the antagonism of the cosmological imaginations in Mesopotamia? The answer is necessary to find in the cosmological tradition, better to say *traditions*. I assume there were not only one homogeneous and doctrinal imagination for the whole territory of Mesopotamia, but there could be more of them. In addition, it should be taken into consideration that the traditions written or oral might have been independently evolved and influenced through the times, existed in parallel in dependence on location, historical context and ideological intentions. The contradiction in written sources is generally nothing abnormal actually it may be expected. It was natural that the scribes working for the elite’s needs became the authors of the texts which served as the ideological tool. There were minimally two such imaginations following the introduced hypothesis which seems to be realistic and the analysed passages from the Gilgamesh Epic and the other texts prove it. Gilgamesh’s tradition was able to cover the model based on the rotary heaven with one two-mountain into the text. There was not any known reason of this action. The following texts then worked with the imagination of the mountain in the east and the mountain in the west.

### **The relationship between the seals and the Gilgamesh Epic**

As already mentioned, there are perceptible common elements between the seals and the Epic and at the same time they open a discussion about the potential connection of both of the sources. While Old Akkadian seals are about a thousand years older than the “standard” version of the Epic (passage about Mashu Mountain was not recorded by the Old Babylonian version), the question is that whether the text about the rise of the sun-god behind the two-mountain was influenced by the glyptic or not. However, I find this expectation overexposed. Sunrise and sun cycle itself is such a universal motif that there is no justification to assume that in this connection, the influences must have occurred.

Of course, the connection is obvious and cannot be denied, but the problem is the essence of mutual influences. The rise of the sun-god behind the two-mountain is not sufficient in both types of sources for genealogical connection. While motif of the mountains connected with both sunrise and sunset does not occur just in the Epic, but also in other texts, does this necessarily mean that these texts drew from the seals too? It is unlikely. It is obvious that traditions working with this (general) motif existed and found its place in the Akkadian Epic. On top of that, it is not sure if the author of the Epic was acquainted with the existence of the distinctive Old Akkadian glyptic recording the rise of the sun-god behind the two mountain. These iconographic motifs are specific for the Old Akkadian period of the 3rd millennium B.C. and very rare in later historical stages. Even if the author was informed of the glyptic, it does not necessarily mean that it was an inspirational source for him as this iconographic element was significantly marginalised during the time of his activity. Wayne Horowitz, on the margin of the above quoted verses of the hymn to Enlil, mentioned:

These passages may be related to Old Akkadian cylinder seals that picture the sun-god rising by a gate over a hillock. The gate may be identified as a gate of sunrise, and the hillock may represent the mountain of sunrise.<sup>53</sup>

Although the relation between the glyptic and the hymn is at the right place, nothing suggests mutual influences between these two sources. Neither Horowitz specifies what he meant by the term “related.”

In contrast with the scenes of sunrise of the sun-god, its sunset did not find its place on the glyptic. I do not know about any of these representations. Wolfgang Heimpel highlighted that although there is a motif of a hill of sunset in Mesopotamian texts, it was not as much developed as the motif in the case of the hill of sunrise. He gives geographical conditions as a reason – while the west of Mesopotamia is surrounded by flat steppes, the east was surrounded by mountains.<sup>54</sup> The well-grounded reason may be applied to the seals too. For another possible reason, I regard the fact that the motif of the sunset was not as popular as sunrise and the visible position in the sky and was negatively perceived. The sun was leaving its strategic and primary position in the sky so that it could overcome the dangerous journey through the underworld. The important meaning of its sunrise is proved by the verses about Shamash that are presented in the introduction. Furthermore, it is important to consider the fact

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<sup>53</sup> HOROWITZ, W. *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, p. 331.

<sup>54</sup> HEIMPEL, W. *The Sun at Night and the Doors of Heaven in Babylonian Texts*, p. 145, including n. 52.

that so-called one-shot iconographic record cannot be so dynamic in comparison with the text record in which there is no problem to express the sequence of the story. In this case it is the most important moments of the sun cycle. On the contrary, seals had a tendency to record only the most significant moment – sunrise of the sun-god.

It is noteworthy to mention the seals with a representation of double-leaf gate out of which the sun rises. These representations may also include the (two-)mountain. The integral connection of the gate and the mountain of the sunrise comes to the foreground. The connection is even more interesting because its verbal form is also included in the Epic where in one of his fragmental parts “the gate of the mountain” (line 135) is mentioned. Although this parallel is a bit more specific, I do not consider it to be extraordinary enough to be possible to talk about the influence of the seals on the text. I would also rather ascribe it to the notch of cosmological tradition(s) circulating in Mesopotamia.

The next element, that occurs in the glyptic and Epic, is scorpion-man. One of the oldest representations, that is without anthropomorphic features in a form of scorpion, is supported by the seals that come from Syria and dates back to 3200 – 3000 B.C.<sup>55</sup> Subsequently, the next Syrian representations of scorpions are dated around 2900 – 2200 B.C.<sup>56</sup> Until 2700 – 2200 B.C. there are the first representations of scorpion-man.<sup>57</sup> Scorpions were also a part of Mesopotamian art during the Early Dynastic period which is proved by seal material.<sup>58</sup> The anthropomorphic features are disposed in this period when scorpion/scorpion-man was associated with astral symbols<sup>59</sup> in a form of star or moon. It was associated with a boat of the sun-god in its anthropomorphic form.<sup>60</sup> Also, on the seals from the Old Akkadian period, the sun-god appears together with the scorpion-man.<sup>61</sup> As far as I know, he never participates at its rise behind the (two-)

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<sup>55</sup> See TEISSIER, B. *Ancient Near Eastern Cylinder Seals from the Marcopoli Collection*, pp. 52 – 53, 184, 185, No. 298.

<sup>56</sup> See TEISSIER, B. *Ancient Near Eastern Cylinder Seals from the Marcopoli Collection*, pp. 57 – 58, 190, 191, No. 320; 192, 193, No. 326 – 27.

<sup>57</sup> See TEISSIER, B. *Ancient Near Eastern Cylinder Seals from the Marcopoli Collection*, pp. 59, 194, 195, No. 335.

<sup>58</sup> See TEISSIER, B. *Ancient Near Eastern Cylinder Seals from the Marcopoli Collection*, pp. 11, 126, 127, No. 64 – 65.

<sup>59</sup> TEISSIER, B. *Ancient Near Eastern Cylinder Seals from the Marcopoli Collection*, pp. 11, 59.

<sup>60</sup> See FRANKFORT, H. *Cylinder Seals: A Documentary Essay on the Art and Religion of the Ancient Near East*, pl. XV:j.

<sup>61</sup> See AMIET, P. *The Mythological Repertory in Cylinder Seals of the Agade Period*, fig. II-20. It seems that in the Mesopotamian glyptic, transfer occurred between scorpion to the character scorpion-man (cf. WIGGERMANN, F.A.M. *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts*, p. 180). The whole process is probably related to the anatomical development of deities and mythological beings, which originally non-anthropomorphic, zoomorphic features are combined with anthropomorphic features



mountain even though the connection to the boat suggest that he might have assisted the sun-god through the underworld journey. It is not sure how far its antiquity extends, but according to the iconography it served as an “adjunct of the sun-god” already in the 3rd millennium B.C.<sup>62</sup> It means, that live tradition integrating both figures in Mesopotamia at least from this period and was also accepted to the “standard” version of Epic (which is absent in the Old Babylonian version). The connection of scorpion-man and sun-god is a rather specific element, not general, than pilgrimage of the sun and that is why it may seem that it was possible that the author was inspired by the seals. Seals are significantly older than Epic which is proved by the fact that scorpion or scorpion-man occurs in Mesopotamian glyptic continually for long-term from the 3rd until 1st millennium B.C.<sup>63</sup> Iconographic tradition was live the time of formation of the “standard” version. The connection of scorpion-man and sun-god is not common in the texts and Epic is rather an exception which would serve as proof of the influences of glyptic on text. Pierre Amiet stated:

The Gilgamesh Epic ... which remained more faithful to the original tradition of Early Dynastic cylinders, made of the scorpion-man the guardian of the path of the sun.<sup>64</sup>

On the other hand it is necessary to mention that as the tradition connecting the hybrid being of scorpion and sun-god, was ancient enough, it is likely to expect that it was firmly established out of iconographic circle. Although scorpion-man is in relation with the sun-god on the glyptic, but not part of its rise. I suppose that the influence of the seals on the Epic in the case of connection of scorpion-man with the sun-god is a little bit more likely than parallel influence in the case of the rise behind the two-mountain or a cosmic gate. It is necessary to add that it is not so likely for us to prove direct parallel conclusively.

## **Conclusion**

Comparison of glyptic material with Akkadian Gilgamesh Epic, revealed in both groups of sources three significant, mutually nurtured features into which

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(cf. JACOBSEN, Th. *Formative Tendencies in Sumerian Religion*, pp. 2 – 5; JACOBSEN, Th. *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion*, pp. 9, 14, 20).

<sup>62</sup> WIGGERMANN, F.A.M. *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts*, pp. 180, 181. At this place, the author briefly discusses about the character of scorpion/scorpion-man in Mesopotamian sources.

<sup>63</sup> For its representations from 1st millennium B.C., see TEISSIER, B. *Ancient Near Eastern Cylinder Seals from the Marcopoli Collection*, pp. 34 – 35, 150, 151, No. 144; 154, 155, No. 166; 35, 156, 157, No. 177, 184, 186.

<sup>64</sup> AMIET, P. *The Mythological Repertory in Cylinder Seals of the Agade Period*, p. 40.

belong the rise of the sun-god behind the (two-)mountain, cosmic gate/“the gate of the mountain” and a figure of scorpion-man. The first two features are general motifs to circulate autonomously within ideas in Mesopotamia during long centuries. It is likely to expect that it was happening via different traditions which mutual relationship fades nowadays. Especially the rise of the sun-god, many times with the references of the mountain or mountains, occurs independently in several texts. Scorpion-man is a more specific mythological motif, but its direct connection between the two sources has its own for and against. I admit that in this case the Epic could have been influenced by the seal material, but nowadays there is not enough of explicit evidence to prove this.

Seals recording the sun-god together with the (two-)mountain offer only its rise as the most important part of the sun cycle, however, texts clearly refer of the sunrise and the sunset together with the mountains. For Mesopotamian glyptic, the sunset was not as interesting probably because of the fact that it was perceived as unfavourable or from the geographical point of view. Non-dynamics of glyptic could also have played a role. Written sources offer a clearer view on this matter. Several text references allow present a hypothesis according to which the cosmology in Mesopotamia was heterogenic which means that it had various forms dependant on individual traditions. At least two of them may be taken into consideration: the majority of known texts embedded one mountain in the east and the other in the west by which the sun overcame the journey between the sky and the underworld, however, Epic could have manipulated with the model of a revolving sky.

According to the analogies between the seals and the Epic, a question rises whether it is rightfully to look for a mutual parallel. The only way for the direct influences to happen is from glyptic on the text. It is ruled out to the contrary because the Epic is about one millennium younger and the discussed passage was not even a part of Sumerian compositions about Gilgamesh. In relation to the mutual features which represent the general elements, I would exclude the influences. Perhaps only the figure of scorpion-man represents the exception, however, this influence is hard to prove. At the same time it is probably not completely about independent imaginations in a sense that the seals as well as the Epic derived out of the sources in a form of live cosmological-religious traditions in Mesopotamia.

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