

THE MOTIF OF THE DEPICTION OF CADMUS FIGHTING THE DRAGON ON THE GREEK KRATER HAS ANCIENT ARMENIAN ROOTS

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Abstract

The antique Greek vase¹ (350-340 BC), excavated in Sant'Agata de' Goti (Paestum) depicts **Cadmus fighting the dragon** (Fig. 1). Through the comprehensive analysis of the **plot, depicted on the “krater”**, we can detect new content; identify and reveal common features and correlations between the key heroes (**Vahagn the Dragonslyer and Cadmus – the grandson of legendary Hayk**) of Ancient Greek and Old Armenian mythologies.

The authors implement a novel approach to interpret the given data. This approach implies not only its description in the view of the mentioned disciplines, but also reveals its correlation and interconnection with the allied subjects within the universal scientific paradigm of systematic approach. The compositional structure, style and main motifs of the depiction are perceived not as an invariable fact, but as a transitive relation, accompanied by several transformations in the expression plane (sometimes in the content plane) and/or in the stylized marking of the cognitive modality of the depiction under the study.



Fig. 1. The antique vase (Louvre Museum) depicting Cadmus. (a). Cadmus fighting the dragon. Side A of a red-figured calix-krater found in Sant'Agata de' Goti (Campania), ca. 350–340 BC. From Paestum². A krater (in Greek: kratēr, from the verb keránnymi, “to mix”) is a large vase which was used to mix wine and water in Ancient Greece. Cadmus killed the serpent (dragon) and founded the city of Thebes at the site of the battle. Women from both sides of the main scene are allegories of the source of water (symbol of fertility), preserved by the dragon, and the city of Thebes. The upper

¹ Greek - “krater”.

² https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Кадм#/media/File:Kadmos_dragon_Louvre_N3157.jpg

figures are Hermes, Aphrodite, Pan and Satyr, so typical of the school of Paestum, Louvre Museum³. Cadmus is holding an amphora in his left hand, used for the storage of liquids and wine.

Further amphorae were used as containers for the ashes of the dead. Cadmus and the dragon (b), Louvre Museum⁴. The beast, twisted around the column of the fountain-home, attacks the hero. The hero is wearing a high-crest helmet and is holding a spear and a shield, decorated with the visage of Gorgon.

Cadmus's Heroic Deeds

The authors offer a novel content in the interpretation of the motif of Cadmus fighting the dragon, depicted on the antique vase (Fig. 1a). It stems to the original source, to the archaic motifs of the “**Song of the Birth of Vahagn**” [Khorenatsi M.]. The vase illustrates the old Armenian worldview paradigm (the corresponding level of cognition and thinking, revealing emotional, artistic and linguistic phenomenon), **the principles of Natural Philosophy and Metaphysics (the conception of the fundamental four elements – the forces of nature)**. **This conception is visualized through the forms of crosses and swastikas, identified by the authors in the Armenian rock art**. The cognition of our ancestors on the essence, content, characteristics and correlation of the **four forces of nature** are described in the works of both the Greek philosophers and the Armenian scientists M. Khorenatsi and A. Shirakatsi.

The development of culture, speech and thinking processes, the cognitive abilities of the ancient man resulted in knowledge accumulation, which were later encoded (compare with **code, codex** – book, **cadastre, Cadmus, academy**) and preserved in the so-called **Temple of knowledge (Dwelling of the God)**. The legendary patriarch **Hayk Nahapet** founded the first **Temple of knowledge** [Khorenatsi M., History of Armenia]. Hayk handed it over to his grandson **Cadmus**. **Cadmus and his descendants** inherited the lands of **Phoenicia** and **Cilicia**.

According to the Greek records, **Cadmus (Cadm, Kadm/Kadmos) created the Phoenician and Greek alphabets**. He is the mighty ruler of Greece and Phoenicia, the son of the ruler of this country – **Agenor** (compare with Armenian **agheghnavor** – *archer* or **aghavor** – *mighty, powerful, magnificent*).

According to the authors, Cadmus's legendary deeds not only include the foundation of the legendary city of **Thebes** (Egypt), but are also correlated with the chemical element **cadmium** (copper) and the notion **academy**. The ancestors identified knowledge with heavenly forces, with the mind of the Creator (God). Knowledge was treated as the creation of the God, and the **Temple** – as the **dwelling of the God**.

Amphora and the Dwelling of the God, the Krater and the Vase

Amphora (Fig. 1a) is a **vase**/jar with two vertical handles used in antiquity for the storage and transportation of foodstuffs such as wine and olive oil. Significant correlations are revealed while comparing the notion with the Armenian ***vasa, Vaspurakan** (comprising the elements ***vas** and ***asa** – *preserver of life-giving water*), the ceramic vase ***karas** (comprising the elements ***kar** (*stone*) and ***as**), the “krater” of knowledge symbolizing the temple of knowledge, the dwelling of the God, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the tree of life and a carcass.

The motifs of birth, dragonslayer and enlightenment (the models of “**the tree of knowledge of good and evil**” and “**the tree of life**”) are implemented in the concept of **Vahagn** (associated to the concepts of Zeus, Greek Heracles and Roman Jupiter). The following Greek motifs stem to the

³ <http://green-fr.livejournal.com/559825.html>

⁴ <http://www.theoi.com/Gallery/M28.3.html>

motifs of Vahagn's legendary deeds: *Zeus fighting the dragon*⁵; *Prometheus bound in the Caucasus*; *the Golden Fleece abducted from Colchis*; *Jason fighting the dragon in the vicinity of the source, the oak tree, where the fleece was hanging*; *the creation of the Runes on the oak tree by the Aesir Odin*; and *the motif of Cadmus fighting the dragon, preserving the source and the tree with fruitage depicted on the Greek krater/antique vase* (Fig. 1a). It is the very concept of **Vahagn** (*aspet* /Armenian knight/, sage, the diety *as + tvats* /Armenian the gift of the God/given by the God/) that forms the origin and basis of the carcass of the **paradigms of beauty, harmony, heroism, chivalry/knighthood, valour, sacrifice, humanity and love**.

The Greek myths provide records on the **anteriority of the motif of fighting the dragon in the Caucasus** (or in **Cilicia**). According to the Armenian mythology, the **king of the serpent-dragons** lives under the Mount Masis. The big antique vase (Fig. 1a) depicts Cadmus brandishing a stone at the dragon Ares, and the four gods (according to a number of experts, **Hermes/Mercury, Aphrodite/Venus, Pan** and **Dionysus**) are watching or patronizing the hero. It should be noted, that Zeus (Jupiter in Roman period) approved **Cadmus** marry **Harmony**, the daughter of the goddess **Aphrodite/Venus** and the god **Ares/Mars**. According to the authors, the four gods-patrons are associated with the four forces of nature (compare with the birth of Vahagn). This persistent Armenian tradition left its traces in Christian symbolism: e.g. the iconography of Christ, crucified on the Cross, depicts **four angels**, or the **sun** and the **moon**, the **earth** and **blood**, symbolizing the **four classical elements, the four forces of nature**.

Young Cadmus, wearing a cloak, is depicted on the left side of the image on the vase (Fig. 1a). He is holding a vase (vessel/jar for mixing water and wine) in his left hand and is striking the serpent - the dragon living under the mountain (symbol of volcanic eruption) with his right hand.

The dragon inhibits anyone to approach the source and take water to irrigate the "tree of life" with fruitage on it, symbolizing fertility. Cadmus intends to "liberate waters", fill the "krater" with water and irrigate "the tree of life" (Fig. 1a), thus preserving life on the earth. He symbolizes the dragonslayer, the savior of the humanity, liberator of the source of water to irrigate "the tree of life". The whole composition on the krater is an artistic embodiment of the conception of "the tree of knowledge of good and evil", "the tree of life". Figure 1a depicts the "home" of the dragon in the form of a volcanic mountain on small and large stones superposed onto each other. The mountain is inhabited by the royal serpent, having the form of a twisted spiral, symbolizing the forces of magma - volcanic lava. The interrelation between the Greek alphabet (Fig. 1a) and the Armenian rock art (mountain shaped as stones with a huge cross in the heaven, Fig. 2a) indicate common cultural and worldview traditions.

The figures 2e-g illustrate the fragments representing the universal conception of the "**knowledge of good and evil**". The tree is located on the back of the huge serpent - vishap (Fig. 2e). It has a wingless-cross-shaped head, symbolizing death. This unique and valuable composition in a comprehensive and realistic way describes the concept of "**the tree of knowledge of good and evil**". The fragments of the image of volcanic eruptions and man fighting its consequences, are identified in rock art (Fig. 2f, g). Man is the witness of natural disasters, he fights the forces of evil, he describes the observed events in artistic, stylized and at the same time quite realistic forms.

The researchers have identified the analogous motifs in the visual plots of other cultures, such as the cylinder seal from Kassite-Babylonian period (Fig. 2c), the cylinder seal from late Assyrian period (Fig. 2d). According to the Urartian tradition or in the Araratian Kingdom (9-7 centuries BC), the **tree of life** was depicted comprising eight branches, crowned with three short branches atop. The godlike king with the eternal fruits is standing by the tree.

⁵Typhon from Cilicia (Caucasus).

According to the Armenian epos “**Vipasank**”, the descendants of vishaps (the *vishapazunks*, *vishapids*) inhabit the root of Mount Masis. In one of the caves in Masis the hadji bound **Artavazd** with chains. The **king of the serpent with precious gemstone on its head** lives atop Mount Masis.



Fig. 2. Rock Art depicting a mountain and a cross, Armenia (a). Basalt stele with the depiction of an “unknown god”, used as a buttress in the abbey walls (b). Doliche, Коммагена. Asia Minor Research Centre⁶. The depictions of the cylinder seal from the Kassite-Babylonian period (c, d), Armenian rock art depicting “the tree of life”, “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” in the form of a tree on the serpent’s body (e), and the man fighting the forces of nature in the form of a serpent (lava, avalanche), the consequences of the volcanic eruptions (f,g).

According to the Hurrians (10 century BC), the serpents represent the dark world. Vishap is a storm, redoubtable sky, clouds, thunder, presented as a serpent, destroying nature (storm, hurricane). **Saint George of Lydda** fights the dragon. The Phrygians preserved the symbol depicting a rider fighting the serpent/dragon. The old Hittite **Illuyanka** is a serpent, which abducted the heart and the eyes of the god of thunder. The god of thunder manages to revenge, fighting the serpent in a battle.

The “Epic of Gilgamesh” (the first surviving version “Surpassing all other kings”) describes an episode: the **wife of Utnapishtim** persuades his husband to offer a parting gift. Gilgamesh perceives knowledge about the **flower of eternal youth**, which is very difficult to find. Gilgamesh manages to find, but not taste the flower: when he is about to have a swim, a serpent eats the flower, sloughs its old skin and rejuvenates. According to the Armenian legend, A. Shirakatsi (7 century)

⁶ <http://www.pasthorizonspr.com/wpcontent/uploads/2014/11/God2.jpg>, <http://www.doliche.org>

managed to find this flower (hamaspyur), comprising twelve branches of several colors, and used this flower for medical purposes. Medea of Colchis helps Jason, giving him an unguent, made of Prometheus's blood.

The Relief Depiction of Vahagn on the Stele



Vahagn is frequently compared with Zeus, Heracles and Jupiter; and Astghik - with Greek Aphrodite and Roman Venus. The basalt stele (Fig. 2b), preserved in excellent condition, has recently been excavated in Commagene by the German archeologists. It depicts the motif similar to that on the Greek vase and in the “Song of the Birth of Vahagn”. The relief depicts the hero fighting a serpent. The stylized “chalice” gives birth to a bearded man (Fig. 2b). The chalice is covered with leaves and fruitage, which are associated with the sea reed described in the song. The hero is holding the “tree of life” in his left hand. His purpose is to support, save, preserve and protect life. His right hand brandishes at a huge serpent with its mouth open, stretched out to attack. Vahagn's attributes are depicted under the chalice: the stylized symbol of the sun with a centred eight-pointed rosette (the symbol of creation, love, union of the four forces of nature (fire, water, heaven and earth), Vahagn and Astghik). A stylized barque is depicted under the sun – the symbol of perpetual motion on the sea and in the heaven, sunrise and sunset, awakening and sleep. A little star is depicted on the right side of the sun, symbolizing Vahagn's bride – Astghik (literally “little star”).

According to archaeologist Engelbert Winter, the stele (Fig. 2b) “provides information about the ancient Eastern traditions that have survived from the Iron Age to Roman times” ... “All finds from this year's excavation season are important pieces of the puzzle, contributing to reconstruct the long history of this holy place”. Figure 1d shows images depicted on the artifact dating to Kassite-Babylonian period, describing stylized volcanic eruption (double-headed mountain is associated with the peaks of Masis and Sis). The stylized figures of two snakes should be interpreted in two paradigms: as the bodies of snakes (lava) and as an illustration of the stream of heavenly water, rain (the hero clasps the necks of the snakes). The liberated water streams pour into jugs. This motif illustrates the concept of fertility, liberation of heavenly water from the serpent, dragon from the consequences of volcanic eruptions. The image depicts plant motifs shaped as eight-pointed flowers (15 century BC). These images (Fig. 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d and 2e) have a common origin; they represent motifs, describing the transformed forms of the main fundamental motif of the song of “The Birth of Vahagn”.

Conclusion

The motif of Cadmus fighting the dragon, depicted on the Greek vase and on the basalt stele, as well as on a number of other cultural artifacts correlate to the motif of the song of “**The Birth of Vahagn**”.

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