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ROUND ABOUT THE *EYA* TREE: TOWARDS SOUTH CAUCASIAN-AEGEAN INTERACTIONS IN THE 2ND MILLENIUM BC

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Introduction

The present South Caucasian region is remarkable for its intensive cultural relations to the Aegean world during the Middle (ca. 23rd-16th centuries BC) but also the Late (ca. 16th-13th centuries BC) Bronze Ages, in which the Central Asia Minor apparently played the role of mediator. Looking for historical and economical backgrounds in ancient myths, some specialists have suggested that the mentioned relations are to be traced among others also in the myth of the Golden Fleece, which could be an abstract reflection of actual economic ties (specifically in context of gold and wool trades), while the fleece symbolizes the method of alluvial gold panning with the sheep hide (e.g. Williams 1972: 214-216; Haas 1982: 20; Sagona 1989: 425; Rubinson 1991: 283; Lordkipanidze 2001). The possibility of such economic relationships can be proved only when comparisons also from other contexts occur. This article aims at presenting such a case however from the spiritual sphere.

The *Eya* Tree

In his interpretation of iconography of the Middle Bronze Age silver goblet of Trialeti the prominent archaeologist Boris Kuftin noticed that the central image of the tree on its upper freeze (Pl. I/1) could be compared to the *Eya* tree of the Hittite texts and homonymous land Aya of Greek sources, where the Golden Fleece was at home (Kuftin 1941: 89). This supposition finds its proof in Hattian-Hittite and Aegean traditions.

So, in Hattian-Hittite sources the story of Golden Fleece is clearly reflected in the myth of Telepinu, where the sacred fleece appears as hung on the *Eya* tree (cf. for details Popko 1974; Haas 1975; 1978). During the *Antahšum* festival the Hittite royal family travelled to various sanctuaries with *huwaši* stelae situated in and beyond the settlements (in cities, groves, mountains) for making rites and sacrifices. Within the program of the mentioned festival was also visiting the *Piskurunuwa* mountain, where sacrifices were realized in front of the *Eya* tree of the god Hasamili dedicated to the hearth and to the fleece (Ardzinba 1982: 9-10, 13-14, 15-17)¹. In the context of the silver goblet of Trialeti it is noteworthy, that during the

¹ Hearth was the ritual centre for the Hittites, in front of which was situated the *Eya* tree with fleece on it. The god Telepinu gathered all goods in the fleece, afterwards passing it to the king (Hmayakyan 2014: 59-61). For *huwaši* stelae cf. Cammarosano 2015. For Caucasian reminiscence towards Telepinu (Telepiya) and perhaps the sacred *Eya* (Aya) cf. Svanidze 1937: 89-90.

mentioned ritual the cup-bearer used to give to the king just a silver vessel filled with wine after which reciting the story of the Hurrian dragon Ulikummi (Ardzinba 1982: 115)². This same type of evidence is present among the archaeological data. So, in the iconography of the Early Hittite silver rhyton from Shimmel Collection, the object hanging on the right side of the tree is interpreted as a fleece. A dragon-like animal is depicted under the tree, two hooved extremities and, probably, a bull or a sheep head to the right of the dragon (Pl. I/2). On an impression of an Early Hittite cylinder seal, there is an image of *Eya* tree along with a trident, a dagger, and people, who wore shoes with a bootleg - attributes of royal power typical also for the South Caucasian cultural world of the same period (the iconography of Trialeti and Karashamb goblets) (in detail, see Alp 1983: 98-101)³.

These data appear to be consistent with the Greek myth of the Golden Fleece, when the Argonauts set sail to the land Aya in order to obtain the Golden Fleece, described as hung from a tree and to be guarded by the dragon. Moreover, the origin of such stories could go back to the Minoan and Mycenaen period. Particularly, another prominent archaeologist – Sir Arthur Evans a century ago demonstrated very well that the tree = pillar cult was essential to the Aegean world of the 2nd millennium BC: it appears as central object of Aegean cult procedures with specific symbols (birds, bulls, goats, daemons, horns of consecrations, labrys) on the tree = pillar or in its surroundings. He underlined also the connection of such pillars to the megalithic world (Evans 1991). From the other hand A. Evans noticed in this context parallels to Caucasia (Evans 1901: 134, 181).

Taking into consideration the mentioned data on connection of *Eya* tree to fleece, to stelae, on mentioning of silver vessels as well as the dragon Ulikkumi story during the rituals in Hittite sources and iconography from the one hand, and the data on Greek story of Golden Fleece (described as hung from a tree and guarded by the dragon) and its Minoan and Mycenaen background (in connection to tree = pillar cult and corresponding symbols - birds, bulls, goats, daemons, horns of consecrations, labrys) and ties to megalithic world, we consider possible to widen comparisons in the context of the sacred tree = pillar in direction of an important phenomenon of the South Caucasian world - the vishap/veshap (dragon) stones, megalithic monumental stelae appearing in lowland and mountainous sanctuaries mainly during the 2nd millennium BC (Pl. I/4: for details cf. Gilibert et al. 2012). The iconography of these stelae finds parallels in the abovementioned Hittite and Greek contexts: specifically,

2 For silver vessels in Hittite rituals cf. also Ardsinba 1982: 193.

3 Similar tree/trees are depicted on the famous Maykop silver vessel of Early Bronze Age (Pl. I/3). This comparison could be considered logical, if we take into account the fact that the environment (mountains, rivers, trees) in the iconography of the Maykop silver vessel is interpreted as reproduction of the region around Tigris and Euphrates river sources (Munchaev 1975: 218). In this context, it would be also logical to consider the object under the tree as a fleece, and two coiling snake images beneath it - as a dragon. Additionally, let us not forget the Maykop-Alacahüyük evident generalities (gold, burial custom, etc.) (Mellink 1991), which is observable in the system of Caucasian-Hattian historical-cultural generalities, in which the south-eastern corner of the Black Sea and, in particular, Chorokh(i) river basin should have played an intermediate role (towards possible Hattian origin of the bearers of Maykop culture, see Munchaev 1975: 413; Bilgi 2001: 43).

we mean the case of depiction of a hanging animal (sheep in the Greek myth and bull or ram/sheep⁴ in the case of vishaps) fleece/hide on the stela as a kind of tree of life (Petrosyan 2015; Martirosyan 2015; Bobokhyan-Gevorgyan 2015)⁵. This parallel is justified not only by the fact that B. Kuftin found a vishap-like menhir on the kurgan, where the silver goblet was unearthed (cf. Narimanishvili *et all.* 2015: 178), but also by the circumstance that the Trialeti epoch coincides with the flourishing period of existence of vishap stones, as well as with the most active period of South Caucasian-Aegean interactions.

The Land of Aya

Another remark of B. Kuftin was towards the land Aya mentioned in the Greek sources to be identified as a rule with Colchis. There is an opinion that this land could be stretched further to the south of Colchis till the upper streams of the Chorokh(i) river (Mikeladze 1973: 138) partly corresponding with the land Hayasa of Hittite sources (Petrosyan 1997: 69) and Day-ani/Diauekhi of Assyrian and Urartian sources (Melikishvili-Lordkipanidze 1989: 201-205; Kavtaradze 2011).

In this context the ideas of another well known archaeologist James Mellaart are noteworthy. Speaking on metal trade of the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC he noticed the importance of Trialeti culture, considering it in the context of Cappadocian trade system. Furthermore speaking on the situation of the mid 2nd millennium BC J. Mellaart underlined that the country Hayasa could have spread its influence not only in the river Chorokh(i) basin, but probably was able to extend its borders up to the South Caucasus. This political unit most likely supervised the main east-west route, stretching to the Iran and the Caucasus, hence the Hittites always aimed to control Hayasa. Similar to the “Trialeti kings”, who managed the political situation after the Assyrians, the “Lchashen dynasties” were able to control the situation after the decay of the Hittite power (Mellaart 1968: 199-201).

This viewpoint of the famous archaeologist, which seemed a priori for its time, has been completely proved now through archaeological data. Chorokh(i) basin, the region between Erzurum and Kars, is a world of cyclopean fortresses, burials with cromlechs and kurgans, paralleling the Bronze and Iron Age archaeological patterns of the present South Caucasus (Köroğlu 2000; Sagona, Sagona 2004; cf. Melikishvili 1959: 209; Melikishvili-Lordkipanidze 1989: 203, 246; Kavtaradze 2011: 143). It confirms that archaeologically the “Hayasa cultural sphere” is very much similar to that of the region between Kura and Araxes rivers. In this specific case Hayasa, by its geographical extension and historical-cultural comprehension partly overlaps Etiuni of a later period, which was a union of various administrative-po-

4 As a rule bull is supposed to be depicted on the vishaps, however sheep/ram images are also possible (Marr-Smirnov 1931: 63; 146; Xnkikyan 1997: 149; Xnkikyan 2002: 114).

5 Tree = stella (*huwaši*) also by the Hittites (Cammarosano 2015: 228). Some of *huwaši*-s are mentioned in mountains (by the town Kammahu) and groves (by the town Sammuha) (Cammarosano 2015: 230) of the nearest neighbourhood to the South Caucasian cultural zone.

litical units and “included the territory from Kars-Erzurum in the west to Sevan Lake in the east” (Melikishvili 1959: 213).

It is not accidental that one of the most important epicenters of discovery of vishap stones is the Chorokh(i) river basin, specifically the region of Tao/Tayk, from where around 30 vishaps are reported (Ziaret, Aighr, Srbahan, Orgot, Paghakatsis, Oltu) (Atrpet 1926: 38-62; Belli 2005a; 2005b). It is noteworthy that in both the South Caucasus and the regions between Erzurum and Kars, the vishap stones have been found in the common environment with cyclopean fortresses, cromlechs and kurgans. So the spreading of vishaps in modern Erzurum-Kars, Trialeti-Javakheti, Aragats-Geghama mountainous regions essentially coincides with area of spreading of mythological and real lands known differently as Aya, Hayasa, Dayaeni/Diauekhi.

It is the place here to mention the point of the Georgian well known historian Georgi Melikishvili stating that the linguistic-cultural contact between the South Caucasian peoples and the bearers of the Hurrian language occurred first of all in the Chorokh(i) river basin: these contacts influenced also the spiritual perceptions of those peoples⁶.

The Gold and the Wool

For location of the story of the Golden Fleece the issue of gold plays a key role. In Greek sources is mentioned that Aya was a land with abundant gold resources. Additionally, beginning with the ancient Greek authors (Strabo, Plinius, Appianus) up to recent period travelers, the Golden Fleece story has been connected to alluvial gold panning using the sheep hide (Gibbon 1909: 398; Scott 1927: 541; Gambaschidze *et al.* 2001: 204). Gold mines in Colchis itself do not exist (cf. Gambaschidze *et al.* 2001: 80, 120). But if we take into account the fact that the Kulkha of Urartian sources is correlated to Colchis and is located in the upper streams of the Chorokh(i) river, on the southeastern shores of the Black Sea, and the land Kulkha constitutes a part or the influence zone of Diauekhi (Melikishvili 1959: 118; cf. Hmayakyan 2007: 156), then this contraposition seems to be logical, because, as evidenced by Urartian sources, Dayaeni-Diauekhi was a region rich in gold with famous gold mines in Sper(i), modern Ispir on Chorokh(i) river (Melikishvili 1959: 80, 207, 233; Melikishvili-Lordkipanidze 1989: 201; Hmayakyan 2007: 155-158), and with evidence of ancient gold processing (Brayley Hodgetts 1896: 119; Atrpet 1926: 51). The gold was most probably the main economic reason why the Hittite, Assyrian, Urartian and Greek (Alexander the Great) kings were eager to conquer these territories⁷. In this case, it is not an accident that many scholars connect Chorokh(i) river basin's abundant metal ores with the myth of Golden Fleece (Hakobyan *et al.* 1991: 618)⁸.

6 In particular, there is an opinion that Armenian *vishap*, Georgian *veshap*, Hurrian *vishaišap* could have common origin (Melikishvili 1954: 113-114; 1959: 178).

7 E. Gibbon suggests that these gold mines were the apple of discord between Byzantine Empire and Persia, especially at the time of Justinian (Gibbon 1909: 398).

8 The significance of these regions for gold is reflected also in the Bible (Genesis 2, 11-12) where the gold is at home in Tigris and Euphrates rivers' sources. In this case, another tradition is not surprising, according to which the king Solomon imported gold from Erzurum and Trabzon regions (Brayley Hodgetts 1896: 119).

The issue of the Golden Fleece makes sense also in another context. Particularly gold dust is mentioned in cuneiform inscriptions of the 3rd and early 2nd millennium BC, as brought to Mesopotamia from two main locations: the land Harali (Haldar 1971: 73) and the town Hahhum (Limet 1960: 90, 93).

Harali was a partially mythical and partially historical territory, which is often identified with the mountainous regions of the South Caucasus, “where Khalybs were engaged in gold mining industry” (Haldar 1971: 73). It is noteworthy that the authors connect the gold-bearing Harali with the land of Khalybs living just in the basin of the Chorokh(i) river. How relevant is this approach? Harali is mentioned as a mountainous country in Sumerian texts, as “the door of Subartu” to be located to the north of Subartu. It is a sacral territory with the main attribute gold (Komoroczy 1972). In the Armenian and Georgian literature Harali has been also often connected to the South Caucasian cultural world (Svanidze 1937: 88; Kapantsyan 1945: 10-12).

Nevertheless what is the connection between these mentioned references and the vishap stones? Primarily, in Sumerian-Akkadian magical texts, Harali is mentioned also as Kuera (Dijk 1978: 97). Here, we should remember the deity Kuera, which appears in the Urartian sources and seems to be preserved in Georgian and Armenian memory (as Kvira, Kuar). The latter was mainly a dragon-like deity of aqua and sources, and its worship was already known before the Urartian invasions (Bardavelidze 1957: 2; Svanidze 1937: 92; Hmayakyan 1980). Thus, if there is a positive interaction between vishaps and gold that are connected to Harali, Kuera and aquatic cult, then another causal connection is created. The question arises, whether Harali is a Mesopotamian variant of Aya?

The case of the town Hahhum is also noteworthy in this context. In contrast to Harali, the evidence on Hahhum is very concrete. In particular, this prominent trade center is mentioned in Akkadian, Ur III, Cappadocian, Mari and Early Hittite texts of the end of the 3rd and early 2nd millennium BC. It was a *karum*, with its palace, market and governor, who was called “king”. Some hypotheses about the location of Hahhum town exist: according to one of these, Hahhum should be in upper Chorokh(i) basin (towards all viewpoints, see Bobokhyan 2008: 151, 176, 298). If so, than another causal connection is traced especially tied to the gold dust. Is it just the dust, which is produced due to gold prospecting by the means of fleece? If there is logic in our observation, than in case of Hahhum (or Harali) we see the oldest commemoration of gold panning with fleece in the Chorokh(i) basin, where centuries later the Greeks had to search for the Golden Fleece. Another argument could be added here, this time in the context of the wool. Hahhum was engaged in the trade of various goods (besides gold, also silver, tin, slaves, clothing, ointments, cornelian and rhyta), among which the wool is noteworthy. The Hahhum wool was so famous, that there was a type of wool called *hahha* (Bobokhyan 2008: 315, 326)⁹. Thus, the succession gold - gold dust - wool, and the Chorokh(i) basin is again represents a kind of system.

⁹ The wool as an aspect in relations between the Aegean and the Caucasus could be important also in earlier periods (Rahmstorf 2010: 271).

The Issue of South Caucasian-Aegean Interactions

The most essential argument which can ground the comparisons mentioned above is the context of common cultural relations during the 2nd millennium BC.

The Aegean-South Caucasian interactions during the Middle Bronze Age were pretty active and are reflected in almost all spheres of material culture. This has been demonstrated in numerous works by Georgian and Armenian scholars (cf. Abramishvili 2001; Puturidze 2002; Areshian 2008; cf. Bouzek 1985)¹⁰. These interactions have been reconstructed based primarily on metal and ceramic artifacts and corresponding iconographic data. Parallels are seen in weapons (daggers, swords, spears, pole-axes, helmets, flat axes), metal (cauldrons) and ceramic (bowls, goblets, ladles, footed jugs, buckets, kyphoi) vessels, their ornamentations (labris, waves) as well as in clothing, which reveal the existence of a cultural network that included the Aegean, Asia Minor and South Caucasus in late 3rd - early 2nd millennium BC (named “Aegean-Caspian” by Areshian 2008).

The interactions seem to be less active during the Late Bronze Age and are mostly expressed in general cultural occurrences rather than on the level of separate artifacts (Martirosyan 1964: 93; cf. Bobokhyan 2008: 201). So, for example, ceramic parallels are rare¹¹. On the other hand, the Late Bronze Age shipwrecks of Uluburun and Gelidonia by the southern shores of Asia Minor reflect the main pathway by which Aegean influences reached the Near East and Asia Minor and then to the South Caucasus¹². Cylinder seals, Near Eastern daggers, flat axes, tweezers, weights recovered from the sunken ships demonstrate similarities with the materials from the sites in Armenia and the South Caucasus (Yalçın *et al.* 2005). Amber was also found in these ships: Minoan and Mycenaean traders were engaged in its trade, sourcing it from the Baltic countries (Yalçın *et al.* 2005: 82, 467; on amber route see Bouzek 2007: 25-26; for Armenian evidence cf. Martirosyan 1964: 91).

If we summarize the issue concerning the interactions between the South Caucasian regions and the Aegean world during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, an interesting picture emerges. During the Middle Bronze Age, the Western, i.e. Asia-Minor-Aegean orientation of cultural interactions of the South Caucasian zone is apparent. In this case, it is appropriate to search for considerable parallels between the developments of South Caucasian and the Minoan and Mycenaean societies (such as by Kuftin 1941: 92). A paradoxical situation is noted during the Late Bronze Age: the archaeological data demonstrate interactions mainly

10 For possibilities of earlier contacts cf. Rahmstorf 2010.

11 Separate fragments of Mycenaean pottery are known in the neighbourhood to the South Caucasian region in such sites as Kuşaklı/Sarisa (Müller-Karpe 2004: 155, Fig. 13; Mielke 2004: Fig. 8), Tile (Summers 1993: 14, 45) and, probably, Van (Frankfort 1927 : 177). Appearance of Mycenaean ceramics in Northern Syrian sites like Emar and Karkemish (Summers 1993: 45) demonstrate the route of spreading of those ceramics to the north.

12 Towards navigation roots from the Black Sea to the Caucasus, see Höckmann 2003.

in southern i.e. eastern Mediterranean direction, whereas on the level of inner development these interactions were oriented not to the eastern Mediterranean, with its Semitic population, but again to Asia Minor and the Aegean. Thus, if the interactions with eastern Mediterranean regions could be considered as a result of trade relations, then the outcome of the relations with Asia Minor and the Aegean are a result of cultural affinity reflected in social and landscape organization patterns. This correlation is visible on the landscape organization patterns or in burial rites (for settlements cf. Claire Loader 1998; for other details cf. Bobokhyan 2012).

The history of the Golden Fleece is more probably the mythical reflection of Aegean-South Caucasian early interactions. According to corresponding data, these relations could be essential since the border of 3rd and 2nd millennia BC, which should be also the “flourishing” period of the Trialeti culture and the vishap stone stelae.

Back to the Eya Tree: Domains of the Sacred

Above mentioned contacts between the Aegean, Central Anatolia and the South Caucasus essentially reveal in the sphere of sacred landscape organization. The *Table 1* demonstrates main types of cult-places in those regions (cf. Hägg 1981; Renfrew 1981; Rutkowski 1986; Marinatos 1993; Zimmer-Vorhaus 2011; Tuba Ökse 2011; Pizchelauri 1984; Shanshanshvili-Narimanishvili 2014: 250-252; Avetisyan-Bobokhyan, in press) from which we can imply the prevalence of the common traits against the alien ones.

The parallels are visible not only in formal (natural, built and shaped cult-places) and spatial (intra-, sub-, extraurban cult-places) but also in social, temporal, functional and behavioral patterns. So, in all three regions the border of the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC is the period of established complexity and rise of elite with its strict ceremonial behavior: this process begins with the Middle Bronze Age and develops into complex state structures during the Late Bronze Age. During this period the sacred landscapes essentially widen their space into the high altitude zones. Economies of those societies seem to be stimulated by production of workshops within sanctuaries. Cult-places are used both for domestic and public services. From behavioral point of view we see cult objects which were treated as areas of concrete ritualistic actions (adoring, sacrifice/offering/libation, divination, feasting, procession, pilgrimage), of memorizing (i.e. transferring information for the living and the dead) and of syncretic actions (where cult was accompanied by production, storing and trading).

Most essentially those parallels deal with the common organization of landscape. The *Table 1* shows almost complete coincidence in using of natural cult-places (mountains, springs, grooves, etc.). As to the built ones two important types should be mentioned here - the peak sanctuaries and sacred enclosures, which were extra-urban open-air places on mountains and their slopes, with minimal constructions or even without them, and were characterized by depositions of votive objects (mainly of metal and clay - human and animal terracotta figurines, terracotta votive limbs, miniature pots, etc.).

	Cult-unit	Aegean	C. Anatolia	S. Caucasus
Natural	Mountain	X ^{2,3}	X ^{2,3}	X ¹
	Rock		X ^{2,3}	X ^{2,3}
	Spring	X ^{1,2,3}	X ^{1,2,3}	X ^{1,2,3}
	Grove	X ^{2,3}	X ^{2,3}	X ^{2,3}
	Cave	X ^{2,3}	X ^{2,3}	X ^{2,3}
Built	Temple	X ¹	X ¹	
	Shrine	X ^{1,2}	X ^{1,2}	X ^{1,2}
	Tomb	X ^{1,2}	X ^{2,3}	X ^{2,3}
	Pond		X ^{1,3}	X ^{1,3}
	Road	X ^{1,2}	X ^{1,2}	X ^{1,2}
	Enclosure	X ³		X ³
	Lustral basin	X ¹		
Shaped	Stela	X ¹	X ^{2,3}	X ^{1,2,3}
	Rock-cuts	X ^{2,3}	X ^{2,3}	X ^{2,3}
	Rock-carving			X ^{2,3}

Table 1. Common typology of cult-places in the 2nd millennium BC Aegean, Central Anatolia and South Caucasus based on archaeological and written sources: 1. intraurban, 2. suburban; 3. extraurban

In Minoan and Mycenaean traditions the palace-temple, bearing also productive and redistributive functions¹³, was situated in a plateau closed from all sides and with its architecture repeating the landscape: V. Scully calls such landscape a “natural megaron”. On the axial line of the palace-temple one can see a hill, and on certain distance a mountain, on which are situated the peak-sanctuaries such of Juktas on the mountain which is on the axes of the Knossos palace, or Ida on the same axes of Phaistos palace (Scully 1962: 11). The first peak-sanctuaries appear in the period of Old Palaces, perhaps a bit earlier. In New Palatial period royal powers begin to be interested in local cult centres. During the time this tendency results in appointment of royal priests in rural sanctuaries¹⁴. So, among peak-sanctuaries appear such

13 Direct association of workshop with temples/shrines is attested both archaeologically (Knossos, Phaistos, Malia, Zakros, Akrotiri, Arkalochori, Mycenae) and in Linear B texts, where the term *oikos* implies a sacred industry connected to shrines. In this regards, the economy of both Minoan and Mycenaean societies must have been stimulated by the production of the “shrine workshops”, and it may well be the case that these societies had “sacred economies” (Hägg, Marinatos 1981: 217).

14 The priesthood appears in the Aegean in Neopalatial period (Marinatos 1993: 127). Just since this time one can speak about clear distinction between official religion (represented by the elite and practicing in palaces) and popular cult (represented by ongoing house shrines and natural sanctuaries) (Hägg 1981: 38-39).

units which turn to be very reach and fortified like the mentioned Juktas or Petsof (by Paleokastro) and Traostalos (by Cato Zakro). In all these sanctuaries the process of transformation of the local cult-centre into public one takes place during the Middle Minoan III period. This is also the period of ripening of palatial architecture, which means that the appearance of peak-sanctuaries and palaces can be considered in the same context, which symbolizes a religious “revolution” the main result of which was the transformation of old public cult into institutionalized and common state cult (Andreev 1989: 127-137; cf. Renfrew 1981: 30). The peak sanctuaries seem to be connected to Mountain and Mountain Goddess cult, sometimes appearing with cyclopean masonry buildings and procession roads over terraces (Karetsou 1981: 152-153; cf. Prent 2005: 161). The juxtapositions of poor and rich votives in peak sanctuaries is general rule and demonstrates that they were comunal cult places, where official and popular religion met in common concerns, such as plentiful harvests or life-crisis rituals (Marinatos 1993: 116-117, 126). Some of them developed into neutral meeting places of interregional importance and were instrumental for early state formations (Prent 2005: 200-209, 311-353, 554-610).

Most importantly for our present topic, the holy tree (= pillar) is one of the basic elements of the mentioned extraurban Aegean sanctuaries, especially in sacred enclosures¹⁵. It is clear from numerous scenes, except some cases, that the tree appears inside the enclosure, although in some of the enclosures may have had no walls around them (Evans 1901; Rutkowski 1986: 207-208; cf. Pl. II/6-14)¹⁶.

The traits of sacred landscape typical for the Aegean world as the palace-temple with also productive and redistributive functions, existence of mountain sanctuaries on the same axis with lowland cult-places, their appearance on the border of the 3rd-2nd millennia BC, transformation of the local cult-centres into public one and institutionalization of the cult earlier than the mid 2nd millennium BC, connection of mountainous sanctuaries to Mountain and Mountain Goddess cult, appearance of sanctuaries with cyclopean masonry and procession roads, coexistence of poor and rich votives in peak sanctuaries defining them as comunal cult places developing to neutral meeting places of interregional importance and with holy tree (= pillar) as one of the basic elements of the landscape especially in sacred enclosures, reveals essential parallels both in Anatolia (Zimmer-Vorhaus 2011; Tuba Ökse 2011; cf. Gurney 1964: 148) and the South Caucasus (Pizchelauri 1984; Narimanishvili 2002; 2003; Narimanishvili 2015: 49-51; Avetisyan-Bobokhyan, in press). Moreover, as the excavations of both Aegean and South Caucasian sacred enclosures and finds of their models (Pl. I/5-8; II/2-3) demonstrate, both spatially (mountainous cult-places) and contextually (finds of similar clay and metal objects) and formally (the constructions) they are very much similar (Esayan 1971; Pizchelauri 1984). Even, the symbolic on some shrine models or images find parallels such as the bull heads and birds on stelae (cf. Pl. II/4, 5) known e.g. on the vishap stones.

15 For sacred trees, tree shrines, groves in Aegean iconography cf. also Marinatos 1993: 58, 180-181.

16 Some of the idols found at Delphi Marmaria had holes in the body, which implies that they could be suspended on trees. Trees grew in the sacred enclosure at Marmaria. On depictions it goes mainly on fig tree or olive tree (Rutkowski 1986: 208).

As mentioned above, the holy tree (= pillar) is the basic element of Aegean sacred enclosures¹⁷. In this regards the logical question arises whether they do not reflect the idea of the tree which is known as *Eya* by the Hittites and is depicted also on the silver goblet from Trialeti. In this regards, perhaps the sacred enclosures could be those sanctuaries which were areas of special rites with corresponding processions (cf. Pl. I/1, 2; 2/1), during which the keeping of social memory (among others, perhaps, also towards the history of Golden Fleece), should be instrumental for identities in those societies.

Conclusions

Considering myths in archaeological context and searching for historical justifications is a complicated work. The conclusions of such kind of researches could be only plausible, but never proven. In this sense, from the point of methodology, only completion of interdisciplinary data could be more or less relevant. This article tried to reveal only an aspect for historical interpretations of the myth. Our goal was only to demonstrate that when multi-lateral arguments are observed together, they make up a context which can result plausible interpretations and reveal also spatial and temporal limits. Coincidences both in social and in landscape organizations, symbolic system, as well as simultaneous appearance of gold/wool (pivotal for our context), together with active cultural and trade relations between the Aegean, Central Anatolia and the South Caucasus during the 2nd millennium BC (Middle and Late Bronze Ages) make possible to insist that during such contacts also abstract knowledge could be transferred. In this regards the center or the intermediary area for such cultural ties should be the Asia Minor, where do the earliest examples of comparable artifacts, contexts and phenomena appear.

17 For various data of Hittite sources on rites taking place near the trees an steles cf. Ardzinba 1982.

Literature

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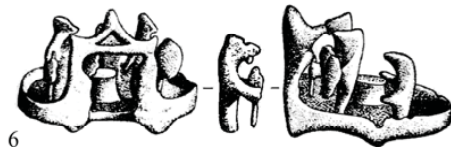
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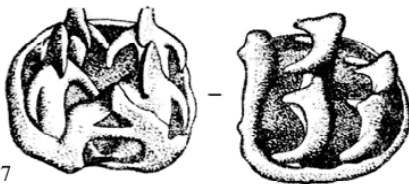
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