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Research paper

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ON THE ICONOGRAPHY OF LIONS AND LEOPARDS ON THE GOBLET OF KARASHAMB

Abstract. The Goblet of Karashamb (c. 22nd-21st centuries BC, stored in the History Museum of Armenia, HMA 3183-206) is considered one of the most renowned archaeological artifacts in Armenia. The iconographic features of the goblet have already been discussed by researchers. Various opinions, parallels, and comparisons mentioned by them highlight that the Goblet of Karashamb synthesizes the iconography and jewelry styles distinctive to Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, and the South Caucasus. While concurring with this assessment, this study focuses specifically on the depictions of lions and leopards on the goblet, exploring potential parallels in Asia Minor culture. For the first time, these depictions are examined within the context of preserved Hittite sources, correlating their role with the attributes and proceedings of the Hittite KI.LAM festival (the “Festival of the Gate”) of Hattian origin. Certain aspects of the Goblet of Karashamb’s iconography suggest connections to early Hittite or pre-Hittite periods. The iconography of lions and leopards represents an ancient tradition in Asia Minor, exemplified by the Lion Gate of Hattusa. A notable instance of royal association with these animals appears in the Annals of Ḫattušilis I (c. 1650-1620 BCE), one of the earliest Hittite kings. The analyzed attributes of the KI.LAM festival, contextualized within the goblet’s iconography, have ancient Hattian roots and likely trace back to the early Hittite period. This interpretation is further supported by Anitta’s text (c. 1790-1750 BCE) from the early Hittite period, which scholars have compared to the KI.LAM festival description. Notably, the animals captured during the royal hunt in this text correspond to those depicted on the Goblet of Karashamb.

Keywords: Goblet of Karashamb, iconography, lions, leopards, Hittites, KI.LAM festival, Hattian

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Исследовательская статья

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К ВОПРОСУ ОБ ИКОНОГРАФИИ ЛЬВОВ И ЛЕОПАРДОВ НА КУБКЕ ИЗ КАРАШАМБА

Аннотация. Кубок из Карашамба (XXII–XXI вв. до н.э.) – один из самых значимых археологических артефактов, найденных в Армении. Иконографические особенности кубка затрагивались также другими исследователями, и приведенные параллели, сравнения и высказанные ими мнения позволяют нам утверждать, что кубок из Карашамба является синтезом иконографии и ювелирных стилей, присущих Месопотамии, Малой Азии, а также Южному Кавказу. Полностью соглашаясь с их точкой зрения, мы рассматриваем изображения львов и леопардов на карашамбском кубке, указывая на их возможные параллели в культурах Малой Азии, впервые анализируя их в контексте материалов, сохранившихся в хеттских источниках, а также делая некоторые сопоставления их изображений с ходом и атрибутами хеттского праздника KI.LAM – «Праздника ворот», имеющего хеттское происхождение. Некоторые аспекты, относящиеся к кубку из Карашамба восходят к ранне- и дохеттскому периодам. Иконография львов и леопардов – древняя традиция Малой Азии (напр. Львиные ворота Хаттусы), а самым ярким примером сравнения царя со львами и леопардами является Летопись Хаттусили I (ок. 1650–1620 гг. до н.э.), одного из первых хеттских царей. Атрибутика хеттского праздника KI.LAM, которую мы рассмотрели в контексте иконографии кубка, имеет древние хаттские корни и, вероятно, также восходит к раннехеттским временам. То же самое верно для текста царя Анниты (ок. 1790–1750 гг. до н.э.), относящегося к древнехеттскому периоду, который ученые сравнивают с описанием праздника KI.LAM, в ходе которого царские охотники вылавливали животных, сопоставимых с изображениями на кубке из Карашамба.

Ключевые слова: кубок из Карашамба; иконография; львы; леопарды; хетты; праздник KI.LAM; хеттский

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The iconography of leopards and lions was widespread in the ancient world, with particularly deep-rooted traditions in the Armenian Highlands. These animals feature prominently in archaeological artifacts from various epochs and in rock art throughout the region. In rock paintings of Armenia, leopards are often depicted masked and adorned, surrounded by hunters wielding large bows and arrows or surrounded by other animals [1, p. 22]. Notably, these representations display remarkable accuracy in the animals' proportions, with leopard tails depicted as longer than half the body length [1, p. 43]. Lion imagery is also abundant in Armenian rock carvings, predominantly featured in hunting scenes [1, p. 34].

Depictions of various figures on bronze belts wearing lion masks as well as other archaeological objects found from Armenia are also noteworthy [2, p. 166, 42b].

Figurines of lions have been found from a late bronze burial No. 17 in Shirakavan [3, p. 40], a sculpture from Oshakan (c. 17-16 BC) [4, p. 117] (Fig. 1), a gold goblet dating to c. 17-16 BC from Vanadzor with a row of three pairs of lions [4, p. 109] (Fig. 2). An illustration of a winged-lion on a sheath was excavated from Lori Berd [5, p. 169–176] (Fig. 3).

The Goblet of Karashamb (Fig. 4) features depictions of lions and leopards, which will be the focus of exploration in this article.

The iconography showing leopards and lions has been an ancient tradition in Asia Minor starting from the neolithic times [6, p. 82], evidenced by a depiction of a pair of lions/leopards near a sitting goddess of Çatal Höyük [7, p. 54, Plate XII, Figs. 7, 8], images of leopards facing each other [8, Plate 2/a-c; 9, p. 141–142]. Illustrations of leopard furs from the neolithic period are also of interest [10, p. 4]. There was a customary tradition of sacrificing various animals in Hatti, including leopards [11, p. 9], which also is characteristic for Armenia's culture: leopard and lion furs have been found from various burials across Armenia, particularly one found on the floor of Nerkin Naver royal tomb No.1 [12, p. 47].

The images of lions were far more numerous in the Hittite culture. While having no intention to cover them all, we would like just to mention that according to the Hittite beliefs the gods endow kings with mystical abilities and strength: "His body was made of pewter, with eyes of an eagle, his teeth of a lion" [13, p. 33; 14, p. 553–554]. The kings were associating themselves with lions, even with their actions. A remarkable example is the Hittite king Hattušili I who writes in his annals that he overthrew Hassuwa like "a lion with its paws" [15, p. 44]. As Hoffner justly states, the lions were inseparable part of the Hittite royal ideology [16, p. 297]. In some Hittite texts the lions are called *šunnaš hūitar* ("animals of the gods"), only Hattušili I calls himself a lion [17, p. 131]. And this has its reasons as this king still paid a great tribute to Hattian traditions [18, p. 19] and faced a challenge of consolidating his power.

The Hittite beliefs associated lions not only with kings but also with some gods. It should be emphasized that they were associated but not depicted as lions, with the exception of "dagger god" [19, p. 210] carved among the rock reliefs at Yazılıkaya. Among different views expressed, Gurny believes that the dagger god symbolizes "Nergal, the god of war and of the nether world" [20, p. 168; 21, p. 238]. Collins also points out to another god which is described as Waššezzili [18, p. 19–20].

As mentioned, lions and leopards were associated with king and his power, and this symbolism denoted the elite, who compared themselves with powerful predators of nature, and this was the way how kings accentuated their military power [15, p. 43].

In this article, we are particularly interested in the inter-connection of leopard and lion

and their link with the king and royal power that appear in a number of the Hittite rituals, which can be seen in the iconography of the Goblet of Karashamb excavated in Armenia.

For instance, the Hittite written sources preserve descriptions of the rite linked with the construction of the New Palace. The first of these describes the one performed on top of the mountain prior to the king's settlement in the new palace. The rite was accompanied by the following expressions: "Come you eagle. Go! My one charm has died out. Go to the funeral pyres and bring a pottery vessel. In the pottery vessel intertwine a lion's *sisai* – and a leopard's *šišai* – and hold them. Unite them and make them one and take them to the heart of the man. (Thus) let the soul of the king with his heart be united" [18, p. 18]. Here the lion and the leopard clearly symbolize king's heart and soul. Medicine made from animal hair, blood and excrement for a particular disease or phenomenon were common in the Hittite society. For example, medicine made from lion or horse hair were believed to be able to cure fever. Another medical recipe includes a medicine made from the blood of several animals such as lion, dog and wolf and others [22, p. 68].

Other undated group of Old Kingdom texts, called the Benedictions of Labarna, according to Collins, shows significant commonalities with the above rite in this part: "Take that of the lion. Take that of the leopard. Bring [...]. What Labarna, the king, desires with respect to his soul (and) [h]is [heart], let those (things) be brought to him. [And wha]t Tawananna, the queen desires with respect to her soul (and) her heart, let [those] (things) be brought to her" [18, p. 19; 23, p. 46] Here, too, the connection of the lion and the leopard with the king's soul and heart can be noticed.

As mentioned, lions and leopards are depicted together on the Goblet of Karashamb (c. 22-21 BC), which is considered one of the most remarkable Armenian archaeological finds, discovered in autumn of 1987 by Vahan Hovhannisyan, a researcher of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of Academy of Sciences of Armenia. He made the first extensive study on the goblet addressing its iconography peculiarities, its possible ancient Eastern and ancient Indo-European parallels, analysis of composition and scenery, mythological context. He then concludes that it is a "local produce, typical of the Armenian Highlands and Asia Minor culture region" [24, p. 161]. It should be noted that Vahan Hovhannisyan views the iconography of the goblet as the iconography of an ancient Indo-European mythological narrative related to the Indo-European myth of boar hunting, which has its parallels in the myths of a number of peoples [24, p. 156-160], and this viewpoint has been also accepted and discussed by other researchers [25, p. 55; 26, p. 132]. Boehmer and Kossack, who addressed in details the iconographic features of the goblet, noticed the influence of Mesopotamian and, in some respects, of the Hittite iconography [27]. As a result of the different points of view expressed, the parallels and comparisons drawn allow us to observe the synthesis of the stylistic features of Mesopotamian. An evident Sumerian influence on the goblet iconography is out of question: we can see among other details a depiction of Sumerian-Accadian bird-god Anzû on the third frieze standing en face [28, p. 92] and Asia Minor iconography and the jewelry designs of the Caucasus region in the iconography of the Goblet of Karashamb [28, p. 92].

Turning to the depictions of lions and leopards on the goblet, it should be noted that the latter not only have common iconography with that of Asia Minor culture, which the above-mentioned researchers¹ have referred to, but also, in our opinion, ideologically, relat-

1. Hovhannesyan V. has compared the iconography of lions and leopards on the Goblet of Karashamb with those found in Çatal Höyük, Hacilar, which is justified in our opinion

ed to the royal power. Their depictions appear on the first frieze of this six-frieze decorated goblet, the main scene of which is a boar-hunt. In it, a hunter kneeling on his right leg shoots an arrow that hit the boar's body, a lion is depicted in front of the wounded boar, a leopard behind it, while a dog on a leash stands behind the hunter.

The third frieze shows a lion tearing apart a goat; in the fourth frieze, four lions and five leopards march leftward, while the sixth frieze of the goblet demonstrates a single lion and pairs of lions as well as leopards behind him (Fig. 5).

We assume that the simultaneous appearance of leopards and lions in the the Goblet of Karashamb iconography is not accidental, especially the depiction of a lion in a leopard's fur (Fig. 6), which seems simply repeating the idea of fusion of the two in the above-mentioned Hittite text. We should also notice that the third frieze of the goblet reveals the king himself, sitting on the throne, holding an ax, and a disk symbolizing the sun and power above his head, which again leads us to the Hittite perceptions and presents a royal symbolism, a reference to royal symbols in the Hittite world. Exploring the storyline as a single narrative we can see the themes of struggle, royal victory, where those securing the victory, the guards of heart and soul just as in the Hittite rite above appear to be lions and leopards, the symbols of the royal power.

As appears, the second frieze of the Goblet of Karashamb is a proof of the above formulations, where a lion tears apart a goat, a king on throne, with an axe on his hand and trophies in front of him, enemy's decapitated heads with the scenes of enemy's disarmament and a strike against it displayed on the left and right sides (Fig. 7). It is also noteworthy that the iconographical narrative of the goblet starts with the boar hunting scene, where lions and leopards are placed next to the boar wounded by the king, while the sixth frieze similarly ends with their images.

In general, the royal hunt is an important iconographic theme being common across the ancient world and had both household and symbolic connotations. Interestingly, the animals present in the iconography of the Goblet of Karashamb appear in the earliest Hittite text attributed to King Anitta, one of the plots of which is the royal hunt, in which Anitta boasts: "On the first day I brought to my city Nesa two lions, seventy pigs, sixty wild boar, and 120 (other) wild animals, (among them) bears, leopards, lions, deer, gazelle and [wild goats]" [29, p. 250].

The researchers have drawn attention to the fact that almost all of same animals get involved in KI.LAM festival [29, p. 250].

According to our observations, the course, ritual features of the above-mentioned KI.LAM festival of Hattian origin [30, p. 748; 31, p. 42–43] performed by the Hittites resemble a number of iconographic and narrative attributes of the goblet to a great degree. This festival dedicated to fertility was probably celebrated during the springtime [32, p. 31]: it was a tour by the royal family through the capital of the Hittite kingdom.

Here we would like to describe the main features and attributes of the festival by separate points, regarding the latter in the context of the Goblet of Karashamb iconography.

The main features of the festival were as follows:

1. The use of many sculptures of wild animals, including a silver leopard, a golden lion, wild boars made of silver and lapis lazuli, and a silver bear [31, p. 42], wild ram/wild goat [33, p. 60–61], images of the latter, with the exception of bear, are also met on the Goblet of Karashamb.

2. The role played by the leopard during the festival. As mentioned, figures of various

animals were carried during this ritual, the first of which was the leopard, then as narrated by the description, the ritual dances were performed in front of the king, who was standing at the gates, while these ritual dances resembled the leopard dance. “They were spinning in place and dancing like a leopard, raising their hands and clapping their hands” [34, p. 29].

3. The role of spear and axe. When the whole procession would pass through the big gates with the animal figures, the chariot would approach the king, but before the king’s getting into it, “the son spearman of the court” would hand a ritually clean spear to the king, and the chief of the sons of the court would hand him what literally means “the iron spear-axe” showing a side with the image of the Thunder God [34, p. 30]. As it can be seen from the scenes of duels and fights on the Goblet of Karashamb, the spearmen win over the swordsmen, especially this is seen in the third frieze, which shows the victory culmination where the spearman defeats his rival (Fig. 8). Then there come the images of weapons and severed heads of the defeated, probably severed by the enthroned king himself with the same ax in his hand, as mentioned in the text, while the sun disc above his head symbolizes the royal power (Fig. 7).

4. According to the researchers, the KI.LAM festival structurally resembles the king’s coronation ceremony, during which the three ritual actions performed by him are similar to the king’s three sittings during the KI.LAM festival, which ends with a visit to the “fiefs” and taking oath from his subordinates [34, p. 39]. Also, officials from a number of towns get introduced to the king in front of their warehouses as a sign of symbolic loyalty to the king and the royal control over the state redistributive system [35, p. 113].

The theme of struggle and victory presented on the Goblet of Karashamb, in addition to the ritual content, to all probability is to assert the king’s hegemony over his subjects, who initially shown seated without the royal symbols while after the victory he is shown ascended the throne, this time with the symbolic heads and defeated enemies’ heads in front and the captured weapons in front of him with an ax in his hand. The symbolic sun above his head symbolizes his royal power. In this regard, it is interesting to mention that the researchers who have explored the objects with a good deal of iconography on them, i.e. depicting ritual feasts, sacrifices, war scenes, including the Goblet of Karashamb, believe that these objects have been crafted in different places and by different societies at the times when major social changes took place in them and new forming elites were in strong need of legitimization and strengthening their authority in this manner [36, p. 185].

The iconography of lions and leopards trace back to the ancient traditions of Minor Asia. The most remarkable case of comparing king with lion and leopard is linked with Annals of Hattušilis I (c. 1650-1620 BC), who was one of the first Hittite kings.

The various ritual aspects of the KI.LAM festival that we have considered in the context of the Goblet of Karashamb also rooted in ancient Hattian traditions and can be traced back to early Hittite times. The iconography of the goblet having Mesopotamian and Caucasus characters, according to our observations, indeed carry the traces of Asia Minor and particularly showing Hattian and Hittite influences.

As known, the Hattians are considered to be the most ancient natives of Minor Asia, while the Hittite peoples, according to widely accepted views, emerged in the Hittite State already at the end of 3rd millennium BC. The preliminary region from where the Hittites spread into Minor Asia is believed to be the vast area between Cilician Gates to Upper Euphrates, where the first Hittite state – Kussara Kingdom – might have existed [37, p. 13]. According to the researchers, during the Bronze or Minoyan Age, the regions of Aegean Sea, Minor Asia and

South Caucasus have been involved in very active inter-relations which is reflected in all fields of the material culture. These inter-relations come to the light mainly due to iconography on the metallic and ceramic objects, such as silver goblets of Trekk' and Karashamb [38, p. 246–247].

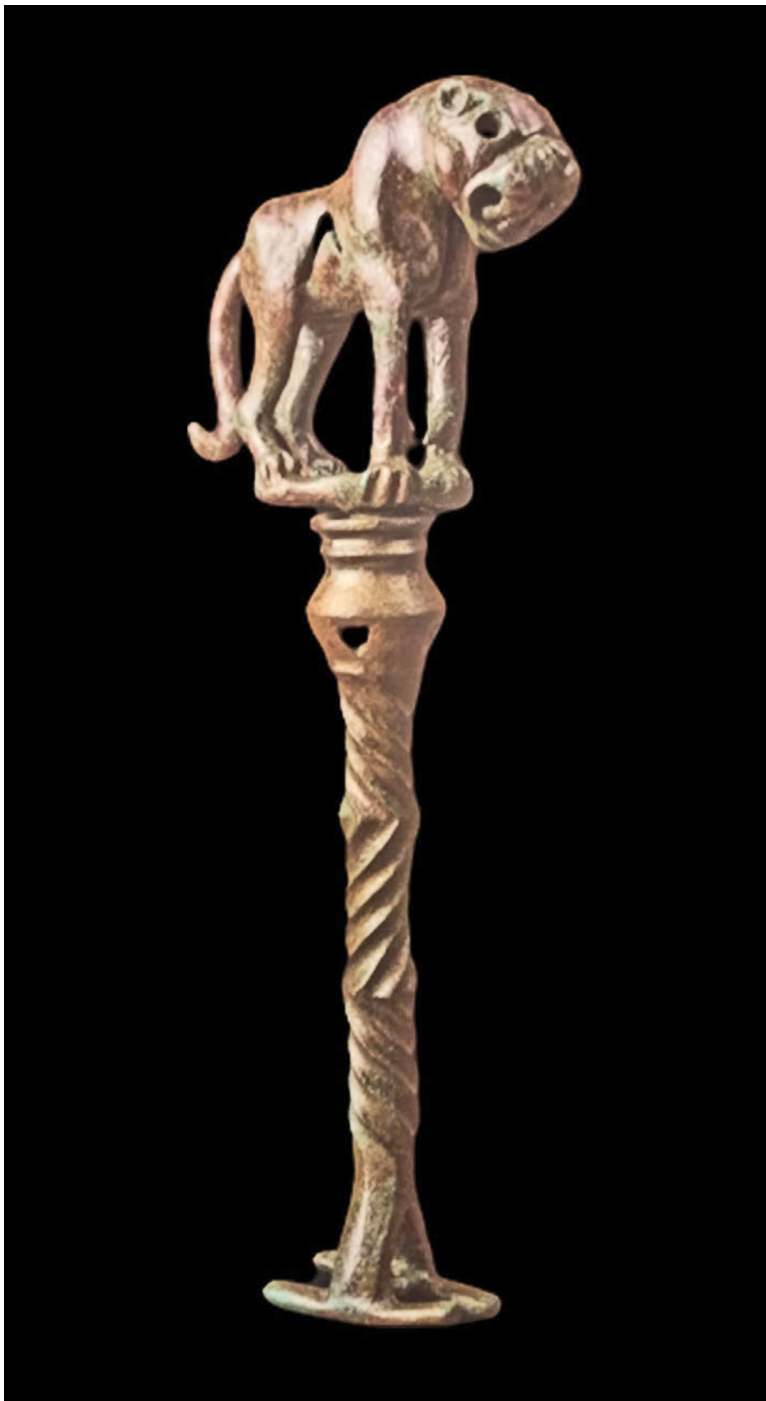


Fig. 1. A bronze statuette of a lion (c. 17-16 BC). Oshakan, Armenia // Source: [4, с. 69]

Рис. 1. Бронзовая статуэтка льва, Ошакан, Армения (XVII–XXVI вв. до н.э.) // Источник [4, с. 69]



Fig. 2. A row of three pairs of lions. Gold Goblet, Vanadzor, Armenia (c. 17-16 BC) // Source [4, с. 16]

Рис. 2. Группа из трех пар львов. Золотой кубок, Ванадзор, Армения (XVII–XXVI вв. до н.э.) // Источник: [4, с. 16]

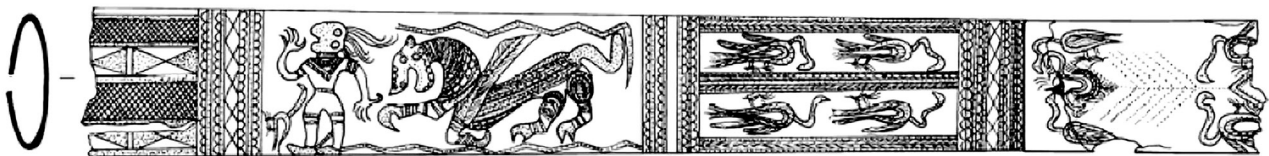


Fig. 3. A winged-lion on a sheath. Lori-Berd, Armenia (c. 7-6 BC). Source: [5, p. 174]

Рис. 3. Крылатый лев, изображение на ножне, Лори-Берд (Гробница 62), Армения (VII–VI вв. до н.э.).
Источник // [5, с. 174]



Fig. 4. The Goblet of Karashamb, Armenia (c. 22-21 BC) // Sources: *a* – [27, p. 41, Abb. 4]; *b, c* – Armenia. Legend of life: a country radiating all circles of history: [exhibition: catalogue]. Moscow: Editorial and Publishing Department of the State Historical Museum, 2016

Рис. 4. Кубок из Карашамба, Армения (XXII–XXI вв. до н.э.). Источники: *a* – [27, p. 41, Abb. 4]; *b, c* – Армения. Легенда бытия: страна, излучающая все круги истории: [выставка: каталог]. Москва: Редакционно-издательский отдел ГИМ, 2016.

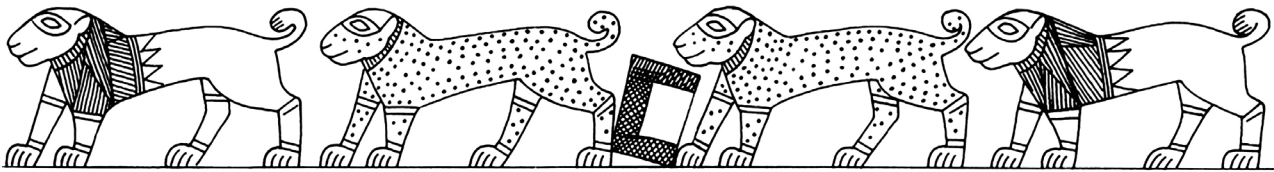


Fig. 5. Pairs of lions and leopards. Goblet of Karashamb, Armenia (c. 22-21 BC) // Source:[27]

Рис. 5. Пары львов и леопардов, Кубок из Карашамба, Армения (XXII–XXI вв. до н.э.). // Источник [27]

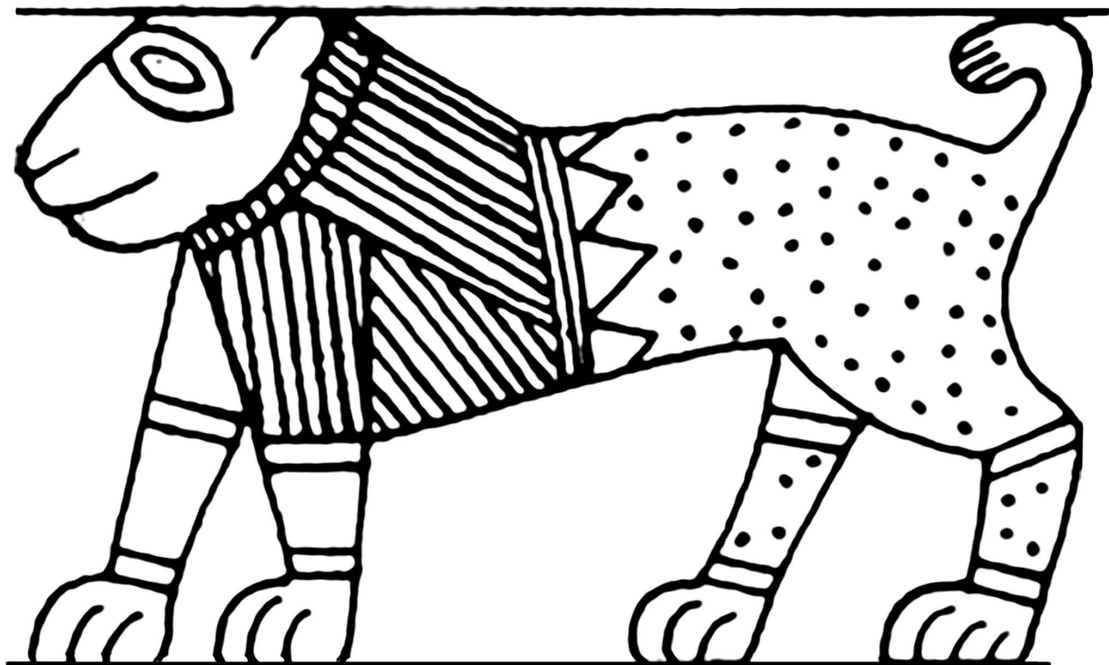


Fig. 6. A lion in a leopard's fur. Goblet of Karashamb, Armenia (c. 22-21 BC). Source: [27]

Рис. 6. Лев в шкуре леопарда, кубок из Карашамба, Армения (XXII–XXI вв. до н.э.). Источник: [27]

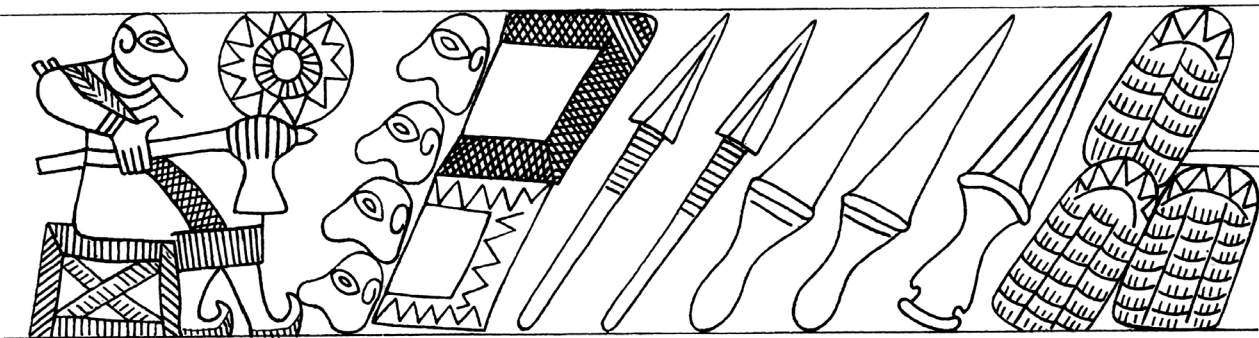


Fig. 7. A king sitting on a throne with an axe in his hand. Goblet of Karashamb, Armenia (c. 22-21 BC) // Source [27]

Рис. 7. Царь, сидящий на троне с топором в руке. Кубок из Карашамба, Армения (XXII–XXI вв. до н.э.) // Источник [27]

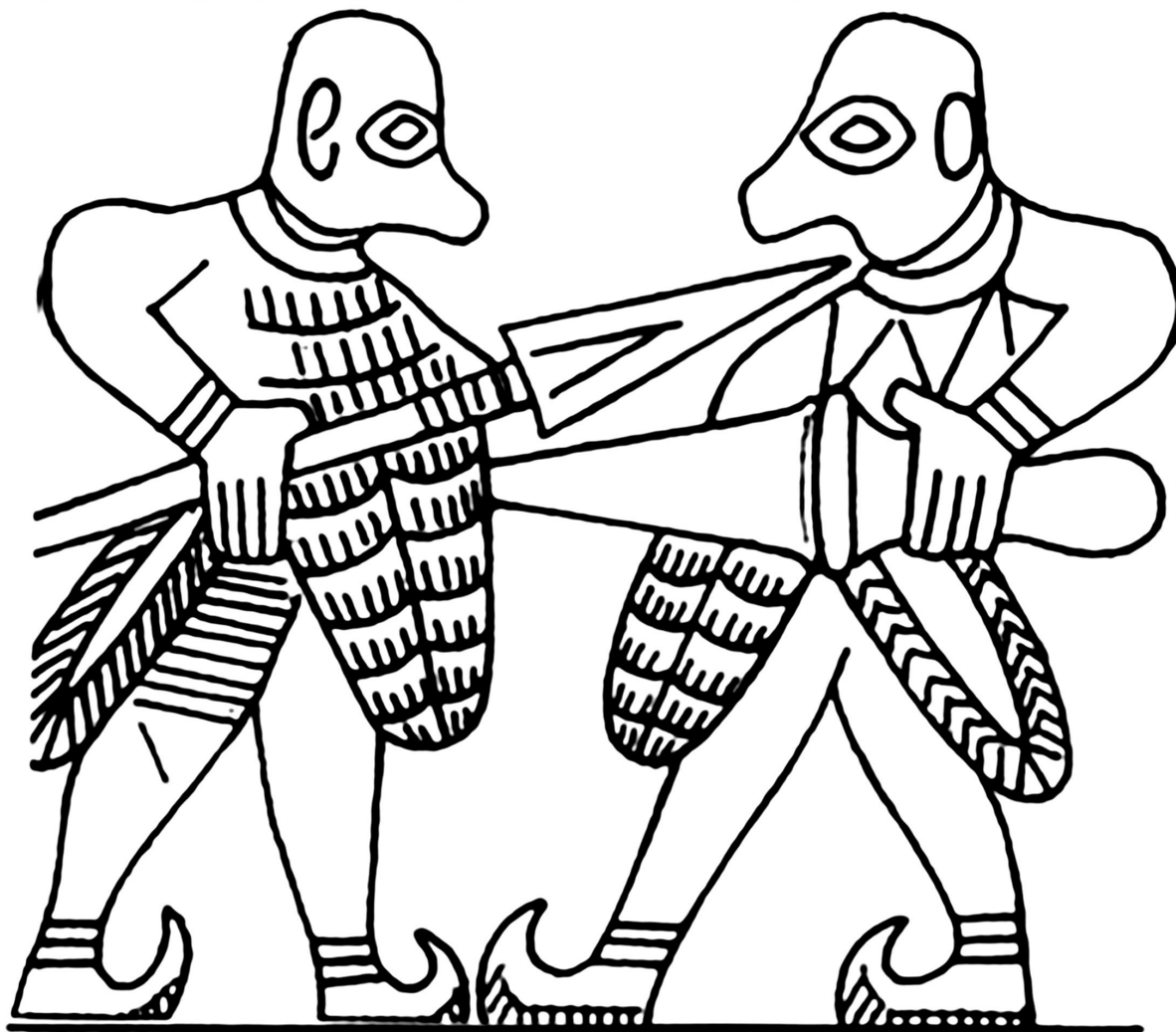


Fig. 8. A spearman defeating a swordsman. Goblet of Karashamb, Armenia (c. 22-21 BC) // Source: [27]

Рис. 8. Копьеносец побеждает меченосца, кубок из Карашамба, Армения (XXII–XXI вв. до н.э.). // Источник: [27]

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