

## SYRIAN SEALS AND THE EVIDENCE FOR CULTURAL INTERACTION BETWEEN THE LEVANT AND CRETE

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Recent spectacular finds of Minoan-style painted floors and walls at the sites of Tell el-Dab'a and Tell Kabri have focused attention on relations between Crete and other eastern Mediterranean sites toward the end of the Middle Bronze and the beginning of the Late Bronze Age. They add to the evidence for not only a Minoan presence on the Levantine coast and the Egyptian Delta, but also for the high value placed in these areas on Minoan art — already suggested in the imagery and style of some Levantine seals.

The glyptic documentation for interconnections between Crete and the Levant in the Middle to early Late Bronze Age occurs on both sides of the Mediterranean. Here I shall concentrate on two different phenomena. First I will discuss Syrian cylinder seals imported to Crete, which seem to have had some status for Minoans, valued enough to have been collected, in some cases re-cut to hide flaws, and deposited with their new owners in their graves alongside Minoan seals.<sup>1</sup> The second category of evidence includes 'eclectic' works of Syrian glyptic art displaying Aegean and Levantine features. These cylinder seals demonstrate the strong impact of Minoan style and iconography on the Levantine artistic tradition.

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\* Source of illustrations: *Fig. 1a*: I. Pini, AA 1982, 601 Fig. 1; *Fig. 2*: A. Lembessi, Prakt 1967, 208 Pl. 192a. γ; *Fig. 3a*: J. and E. Sakellarakis, Archanes (1991) 107 Fig. 81; *Figs. 3b. 7b. 14 (photograph); 16a.b.*: by courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art; *Fig. 3c*: by permission of the Adana Museum; *Fig. 4b.*: by permission of the Heraklion Museum; *Fig. 5*: P. Amiet, La glyptique mésopotamienne archaïque (1980) Pl. 130 No. 1758; *Fig. 6*: K. Emre, Anatolian Lead Figurines and their Stone Moulds (1971) Pl. VII,1a; *Fig. 8a*: I. Pini, MarbWPr 1977/78, Pl. 3; *Fig. 9*: H. Weiss (ed.), From Ebla to Damascus. Art and Archaeology of Ancient Syria (1985) Fig. 119 (Aruz photograph); *Fig. 10b*: O. Negbi, AJA 82, 1978, 144; *Fig. 11*: H. Seyrig, Ugaritica VI (1969) 479 Fig. 1 (Aruz photograph); *Fig. 12a*: Marinatos, AaR 62 Fig. 40; *Figs. 13–15*: D. Collon, UgaritF 13, 1982, 41 Figs. 1,6,7; 10; *Fig. 17*: B. Buchanan, Catalogue of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in the Ashmolean Museum I. Cylinder Seals (1966) Pl. 56 No. 897 (E); *Figs. 1a; 2; 8a.b.*: from the archives of the CMS. Remaining photographs by the author.

<sup>1</sup> Two other phenomena shall not be discussed in this paper: Near Eastern imagery in Minoan art and the Minoan use of the Near Eastern cylinder seal form; see J. Aruz, The Aegean and the Orient: The Evidence of Stamp and Cylinder Seals (1986); H.-G. Buchholz in: G. Bass, Cape Gelidonya: A Bronze Age Shipwreck (1967) 148f.





*Fig. 1a* Mochlos cylinder seal. Heraklion Museum, Precious Metal Inv. No. 380.



*Fig. 1b* CMS II.3 No. 128.



*Fig. 2* Heraklion/Poros cylinder seal. Heraklion Museum, Inv. No. 2347.



## SYRIAN IMPORTS TO CRETE

The earliest known Syrian cylinder imported to the Aegean is made of a precious material and, while of rather crude execution, seems to be unflawed. This well-known silver seal was found in an Early Minoan context in a chamber tomb at the east Cretan site of Mochlos.<sup>2</sup> With its Syrian parallels in Early Dynastic Tell Chuera and Hama, it provides early evidence for Near Eastern contacts with an area of Crete that may have played an important role in east-west relations.

The Middle and early Late Bronze Age evidence, pertinent to our topic, includes two Syrian seals of late 19th—early 18th century B.C. manufacture that reached eastern and central Crete — Mochlos and Tylissos — in good condition. The Mochlos seal (*Fig. 1a*), showing little wear, was found in a disturbed tomb that had EM II—MM IB/II pottery, indicating that it arrived close to the time of its manufacture; however, one cannot be sure when the unstratified seal from Tylissos (*Fig. 1b*) came to the Aegean.<sup>3</sup>

There is a wide distribution of seals with similar imagery and figure style in northern Syria at Alalakh, Chagar Bazar and Ugarit; in central Anatolia at Bogazköy, and in Palestine at Gaza and Balata, the latter an impression on a Canaanite jar.<sup>4</sup> Some of these seals were isolated by Schaeffer and later by Collon as members of a group that Collon attributes to Ugarit.<sup>5</sup>

An unfinished green jasper Syro-Palestinian seal, probably damaged in manufacture, came to Crete at a time relatively close to its production in coastal Syria-Palestine (*Fig. 2*). Found in a rock-cut chamber tomb at Heraklion Poros that also contained gold jewelry and a number of Minoan seals, it came from the bottom of an ossuary pit in the thalamos dated by its pottery to the MM III—LM IA period.<sup>6</sup> This seal is of interest both because it belongs to a

<sup>2</sup> I. Pini, *AA* 1982, 599f.; J. Aruz, *Kadmos* 23, 1984, 186f.

<sup>3</sup> The main occupation of the site occurred in LM I, but there is also habitation in LM II—III. The seal is reported to have been found "in the late phase of the excavation through sieving of the earth": J. Hazzidakis, *Les villas minoennes de Tylissos*, *EtCrét* 3 (1934) 106f.; E. Möller in: J.G.P. Best and N.M.W. de Vries (eds.), *Interaction and Acculturation in the Mediterranean: Proceedings of the Second International Congress of Mediterranean Pre- and Protohistory* (1980) 94; Buchholz (*supra* n. 1) 156 No. 40.

<sup>4</sup> D. Collon, *The Alalakh Cylinder Seals — A New Catalogue of the Actual Seals excavated by Sir Leonard Woolley at Tell Atchana, and from Neighboring Sites on the Syrian-Turkish Border* (1982) 56f. No. 22; H. el Safadi, *UgaritF* 6, 1974, Pl. XII Nos. 86. 89; T. Beran in: Bittel et al. (eds.), *Vorderasiatische Archäologie. Studien und Aufsätze. Anton Moortgat zum 65. Geburtstag gewidmet* (1964) 35 Pl. 8,4; A. Rowe, *A Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs, Scaraboids, Seals and Amulettes in the Palestine Archaeological Museum* (1936) 4. 234f. Pl. 26; J. Nougayrol, *Cylindres-sceaux et empreintes de cylindres trouvés en Palestine* (1939) 49f. Pl. 8 S.B.1; Schaeffer-Forrer, *Corpus I* 30. 34 RS 9.888 for females, 9.300 for nude belted male; W.M.F. Petrie, *City of Shepherd Kings. Ancient Gaza V* (1952) Pl. IX,33; see now also the seal found at Tell Kabri in northern Israel, which bears some features similar to the examples found on Crete: A. Kempinski in: M. Mellink — E. Porada — T. Özgüç (eds.), *Aspects of Art and Iconography: Anatolia and its Neighbors. Studies in Honor of Nimet Özgüç* (1993) 334f.

<sup>5</sup> D. Collon in: J. Tubb (ed.), *Palestine in the Bronze and Iron Ages. Papers in Honour of Olga Tufnell* (1985) 58.

<sup>6</sup> A. Lembessi, *Prakt* 1967, 195f. 201. 208; according to the excavator the seal comes from an undisturbed layer of MM IIIA pottery, although the pit also contained MM IIIB—LM IA material; P. Warren — V. Hankey,



well-known Levantine seal workshop and because of its imagery. The three-figured scene with gods flanking a king has suggested to the Egyptologist Ogden Goelet the Egyptian ritual of purification where, just as the sun god was washed (by the waters) before appearing each morning, his living embodiment, the Pharaoh, was washed by lustrators who impersonated the divinities Horus and Seth (or Thoth), wearing animal masks.<sup>7</sup>



*Fig. 3a* Archanes cylinder seal.  
Heraklion Museum, Inv. No. 2374.



*Fig. 3b* Syrian cylinder seal.  
(ex Moore collection)



*Fig. 3c* Cylinder seal in Adana Museum.

Aegean Bronze Age Chronology (1989) 63, assign MM IIIB–LM IA phase – known from a deep level in the pit and from the forechamber – as the time of the construction of the tomb; architecturally the tomb type, with a narrow dromos, prothamos and large main chamber, seems to fall between MM burials at Mavrospelio and chamber tombs of LM II type; other finds in this tomb include gold ornaments (one ring has a geometric design like one in the Aigina Treasure), necklaces of gold, sard, rock crystal, faience and glass paste beads, a number of Minoan seals, a bronze knife, and boars' tusks.

<sup>7</sup> H. Blackman, *JEA* 5, 1918, 117, who notes that the chief embalmer wore a jackal mask, impersonating Anubis; for the Egyptian gesture of address, see E. Brunner-Traut in: *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* II (1977) 575 1c.



This Syrian translation of an Egyptian theme is one of a number of variations of similar figures on the distinctive group of green jasper cylinder seals — some with royal themes, some with Egyptian hieroglyphs. On the Poros seal, the king wears a robe with rolled borders, which is wrapped diagonally around his body, related to garments worn by figures on Alalakh sealings, a Canaanite plaque, and Hyksos scarabs.<sup>8</sup> Next to his hand is an object resembling a Syrian MBA crescent-hafted dagger.<sup>9</sup>

The 'Green jasper' group was first isolated by William Ward as Syro-Palestinian and later attributed by Dominique Collon to a coastal Syrian workshop, perhaps at Byblos.<sup>10</sup> While the seals are widely distributed in time and space, with examples found in Syria (Alalakh VII, MB Byblos), Palestine (Tell Beit Mirsim, 17th century context, Tell Ajjul with one example in 18–19th Dynasty context), Cyprus (Kition in a 13th century tomb, Klavdia), and as far as Carthage, the latter found in a first millennium Punic tomb, the date for the manufacture of the group may be the early 17th century B.C. — a date within one or two generations of the time of deposition in the grave at Poros.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to seals imported both in good condition and in unfinished, flawed condition, there are some that appear to have been recarved on Crete. A small lapis lazuli cylinder seal (*Fig. 3a*) was found in Funerary Building 5 of the Phourni necropolis at Archanes, occupied probably through the protopalatial period, with many of its seals datable to EM III–MM I.<sup>12</sup> The cylinder seal was discovered along with a large number of pithoi containing skulls and two larnakes, a bronze pin, gold and stone beads, and an ivory(?) amulet.<sup>13</sup> The material of the seal, a medium blue lapis lazuli stone with white calcite inclusions indicating lesser quality, together with the proportions of the cylinder seal and string hole persuade me that it was originally a Syrian cylinder. Nearly identical Syrian pieces exist.<sup>14</sup>

Depicted on the seal is a single male figure, facing left in the impression. He may be wearing a cap on his head and his short kilt-like garment is marked with two diagonal lines. He strides forward with his right arm extended, elbow slightly bent, holding a staff. His left

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<sup>8</sup> D. Collon in: M. Kelly-Buccellati et al. (eds.), *Insight through Images: Studies in Honor of Edith Porada* (1986) 66f.; P. Beck, *IsExpJ* 33, 1983, 78f.; P. Matthiae in: W. Orthmann, *Propylaen Kunstgeschichte* 14, *Der Alte Orient* (1975) 486 Fig. 157; O. Tufnell, *AnatSt* 6, 1956, 68; for the figure in conical cap, see D. Hansen, *AJA* 73, 1969, 283.

<sup>9</sup> Y. Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands I* (1963) 140f.; A. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar* (1988) 511 T8.

<sup>10</sup> W. Ward, *Syria* 42, 1965, 35f. who, in relating these seals to SIP scarabs, recognized similar combinations of hieroglyphic signs in both groups; Collon (*supra* n. 8) 57f.

<sup>11</sup> MM III–LM IA; I. Ström in: Best and de Vries (*supra* n. 3) 105, is more prudent in calling the context for the cylinder LM I, with a 15th century B.C. terminus; she then concludes — perhaps erroneously — that we could have a two hundred year gap between the date of manufacture and the date of deposition in the tomb. See also n. 57 for discussion of chronology.

<sup>12</sup> J. and E. Sakellarakis, *Archanes* (1991) 106f. Fig. 81; J. Sakellarakis, *Prakt* 1967, 159f. Pl. 152; *Prakt* 1972, 319f.; see Pini (*supra* n. 2) 603.

<sup>13</sup> Sakellarakis (1991 *supra* n. 12) 106; Sakellarakis (1967 *supra* n. 12) 159f. Pl. 152: in one of these were found beads of gold, sard, and probably imported amethyst.

<sup>14</sup> H. 1.5 cm; for a seal of nearly identical material and proportions, see M. Noveck, *The Mark of Ancient Man. Ancient Near Eastern Stamp Seals and Cylinder Seals — the Gorelick Collection* (1975) 38 No. 22.



arm is bent toward the waist and he holds in this hand a crook-like object, perhaps for ritual or ceremony, visible over the left shoulder. The rest of the field is taken up by a geometric pattern of an X filled with tiny palm leaves and a vertical lattice pattern filled with discs.

Sakellarakis has suggested a Syrian source for such a representation.<sup>15</sup> Both in MBA Syria and Anatolia we find striding male figures carrying staffs, crooks or spears and wearing kilts or robes (*Fig. 3b*).<sup>16</sup> We also find a similar X pattern dividing the field, filled with small chip-carved incisions, on a Cilician seal in the Adana Museum (*Fig. 3c*). Certain details, however, have no foreign parallels. In particular, the tiny palm leaves that fill the X motif can be paralleled on a number of Minoan late prepalatial seals, for instance a loop-handled cylinder seal from Archanes.<sup>17</sup> The slight arch of the man's back and the angle of his head add a dynamic thrust to his stride and are consistent with Minoan rather than Near Eastern style.<sup>18</sup> However, the allusion to Syrian imagery, added to the poor state of the surface, could point to the re-cutting of this seal.<sup>19</sup>

Our best evidence for the re-working of a Near Eastern seal by a Minoan craftsman comes from Knossos, where a lapis lazuli cylinder seal with gold caps was discovered during the excavations of the northwestern area of the palace (*Fig. 4*).<sup>20</sup> The dating of the findspot is controversial, due to discrepancies in the original reports and the evidence of later sherds mixed with MM IIIA material.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Sakellarakis (1991 supra n. 12) 106f.; Sakellarakis (1967 supra n. 12) 159f.; Sakellarakis (1972 supra n. 12) 319f.

<sup>16</sup> For other Syrian seals with a male figure striding with a staff or spear in hand, see E. Williams-Forte, *Ancient Near Eastern Seals — A Selection of Stamp and Cylinder Seals from the Collection of Mrs. William H. Moore. The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (1976) No. 25; H. von der Osten, *Ancient Oriental Seals in the Collection of Mr. Edward T. Newell* (1934) Pl. XXII No. 309 (second figure with crook). In Anatolia we also find later Hittite renderings of a male figure in a very similar posture: D.G. Hogarth, *Hittite Seals* (1920) No. 313.

<sup>17</sup> Sakellarakis (1967 supra n. 12) 160, mentions these tiny leaves; for parallels, see CMS II,1 Nos. 226. 242. 311. 450; II,2 No. 70.

<sup>18</sup> Evans, PM IV 414 Fig. 343c; a male may be represented with a spear or staff on the Knossos Town Mosaic: Evans, PM I 309 Fig. 228t; for another discussion of the Archanes lapis lazuli seal, see V.E.G. Kenna, *KretChron* 21, 1969, 352f.

<sup>19</sup> Two other cylinder seals were found in the upper stratum of tholos E at Archanes, one a hematite seal with a geometric design paralleled on Minoan stamp seals, and the second a faience seal with traces of a linear pattern; both may have been foreign seals, the former probably carved or re-carved on Crete: J. Sakellarakis in: *Pepragmena* 4, 523 Fig. 6. 10. 11 Pl. 177; 178,1.2; Sakellarakis (1972 supra n. 12) 319f.

<sup>20</sup> CMS II,2 No. 29.

<sup>21</sup> In the Palace of Minos, Evans says that the seal was found "...40 centimetres deeper than the M.M. IIIa stratum, in the 'Initiatory Area' just beyond the western border of the 'North Lustral Basin'..." (Evans, PM IV 423). The lustral basin floor "was covered by a stratum containing remains of clay and stone vessels of forms which...must be regarded as characteristic of M.M. IIIa" (Evans, PM I 411). Evans also mentions the discovery of the stone lid with the cartouche of the Hyksos king Khyan, "...which stands in inseparable connexion with the actual contents of the Lustral Basin" (Evans, PM I 417f.). Whereas the chronology of the seal appears relatively certain in the publication, this is not so clear in Evans' earliest report of these finds in BSA 1901, where a Late Bronze Age rubble wall is described as 40 cm above the Khyan lid stratum; the seal is reported to come from rubble at the base of the western side of a cistern behind the bath, and two and a half meters from the spot where the lid was found. L. Palmer, *The Penultimate Palace of Knossos* (1969) 54f.; L. Palmer, *Kadmos* 20, 1981, 112f. 127, gives a different account of the pottery belonging to the same lot as the Khyan lid, and assigns one sherd to



The cylinder seal's appearance poses as many problems as its context. Evans, early on, astutely recognized that the seal "while fitting on to the 'Syro-Hittite' class, shows certain early traditions that go back to the days of Sargon of Akkad".<sup>22</sup> Collon, like myself, has recognized features related to the school of Ebla,<sup>23</sup> and Möller has concluded that it is a product of "one of the Anatolian cities during the Old Assyrian colony period", noting "the confusing medley of elements from different contemporary styles".<sup>24</sup> The seal merits closer attention.

It is made of high quality purple-blue lapis lazuli, without visible white calcite inclusions. This particular shade of lapis lazuli was favored in Mesopotamia, as Porada has pointed out,<sup>25</sup> and the material is most frequently used in the Early Dynastic period — although examples also occur in later periods.<sup>26</sup> The large dimensions of the seal (H. 2.8 cm; D. 1.3 cm) are more characteristic of the third than the early second millennium B.C.

Fitted onto the ends of the Knossos cylinder seal are two finely-made gold caps of unusual design (*Fig. 4*), probably replacements for original Near Eastern caps. They are distinguished by a circle of granulation around the string hole and by a short tube that extends part-way into the hole to strengthen the fastening. Neither of these features, to my knowledge, occur on Near Eastern gold caps. We do, however, have Late Bronze Age parallels on the Greek mainland for a much thinner gold tube that fits into the string hole for attachment to two separate gold caps that may have granulation.<sup>27</sup>

LM IIIA, while the others are MM III. On this basis, he dates the stratum which Evans calls MM IIIA to the time of the late sherd, making the Khyan lid, Egyptian stone vases, and the cylinder seal heirlooms, which were deposited much later than their dates of manufacture. M. Popham, *The Destruction of the Palace at Knossos, Pottery of the Late Minoan IIIA Period*, SIMA XII (1970) 41f., confirms that the deposit is mixed and in his list of pottery from the final phase of the palace, notes LM IIIA material in a lot from this area. The matter of stratigraphy is extremely confusing, with the possibility of foreign goods coming in during the Hyksos period or sometime in the New Kingdom.

<sup>22</sup> Evans, PM IV 424.

<sup>23</sup> Aruz (*supra* n. 1) 632; Collon, *First Impressions* 38f. No. 130.

<sup>24</sup> Möller (*supra* n. 3) 97ff.

<sup>25</sup> E. Porada, *AfO* 28, 1981/82, 6.

<sup>26</sup> Two Syrian (or 'Syrian Colony' style) seals, which should date to the 19th century B.C., are examples from the Tôd Treasure: E. Porada in: M.A. Dandameyev et al. (eds.), *Societies and Languages of the Ancient Near East – Studies in Honour of I.M. Diakonoff* (1982) 286 Fig. 3, and one example is in the Gorelick Collection: Noveck (*supra* n. 14) 38 No. 22; lapis lazuli is a rare material for Anatolia (see N. Özgüç in: *Ancient Anatolia. Aspects of Change and Cultural Development. Essays in Honor of Machteld J. Mellink* (1986) 48, for a lapis lazuli example from Acemhöyük), where in the early second millennium, as in Syria, the favored material is hematite.

<sup>27</sup> E. Porada in: *Acts of the International Archaeological Symposium 'The Relations between Cyprus and Crete, ca. 2000–500 B.C.'* (1979) 111f. Fig. 2, has already noted this type of Aegean gold mount in her study of a Cypriot lapis lazuli cylinder seal from Thebes; she lists Late Bronze Age parallels for this type on two glass seals, one a cylinder seal from Kasarma; there are a number of stamp seals embellished in this manner (for a list of seals with gold tubes and caps, see J. Younger, *Chronology* 197, and we have two sets of caps and tubes preserved in the Vapheio and Menidi tombs, without their seals: H. Lolling et al., *Das Kuppelgrab bei Menidi* (1880) Pl. V,1; for caps with granulation, see CMS I No. 205; for a gold seal with granulation near string hole, see CMS I No. 274.



This evidence persuades me that a Minoan craftsman, seeking to restore the seal to its original beauty, made a fine sturdy set of caps and created a method for holding them in place — a method which is related to but differs from the system I know of on the Greek mainland. As we shall see later in the discussion, this may not be the only Minoan addition to this foreign cylinder seal.

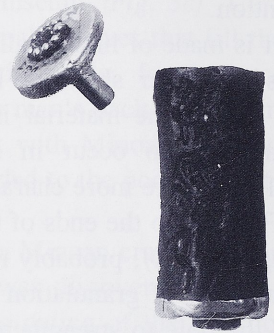


Fig. 4 CMS II,2 No. 29 with detail of gold caps.

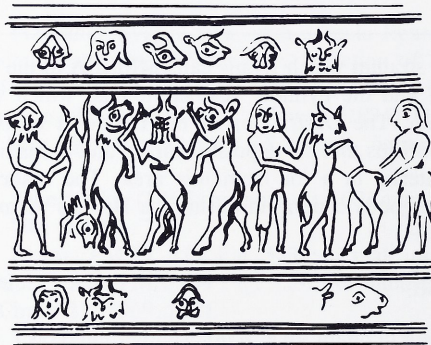


Fig. 5 Ebla sealing.

Fig. 6 Anatolian stone mould.

The design on the Knossos cylinder seal is composed of two registers in an orderly scheme achieved without use of a dividing line. Larger figures below have their feet on the bottom border, and smaller figures above barely fit into the area that is not covered by the gold caps. A similar syntax of rows of figures organized with or without added horizontal lines occurs on Syrian seals and sealings, both in the third and early second millennia.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Noveck (supra n. 14) 38 No. 22; E. Porada, *Corpus of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in North American Collections. The Collection of the Pierpont Morgan Library* (1948) No. 936; P. Amiet, *La glyptique méso-*



The main scene consists of a rather incoherent juxtaposition of bulls, lions, a bullman, and a frontal deity in a flounced garment. Although based on the Early Dynastic contest, inconsistencies in both style and composition lead to the conclusion that the scene was re-cut, perhaps a number of times.

The original layout must have resembled the composition on sealings from Ebla (*Fig. 5*). The lions and two bulls in profile, however, have the ample proportions and body treatment that may be more characteristic of an early second millennium re-cutting.<sup>29</sup> This re-cutting may have occurred in Syria or in central Anatolia,<sup>30</sup> based on the evidence of the head of the bullman, which looks like one of the heads of figures preserved in Anatolian stone moulds for lead figurines. Female figures on these moulds, as well as on some Syrian seals, resemble the female deity depicted on the seal (*Fig. 6*). Faint curls appearing near her head may belong to an earlier design over which the figure was re-cut.

The small figures in the upper register include a sphinx paralleled on Syrian-style seals from Kültepe IB;<sup>31</sup> a Syrian griffin-demon;<sup>32</sup> a winged lion griffin — a creature of the weather god both on Akkadian and MB Syrian seals;<sup>33</sup> the lion protome, paralleled both on Anatolian and Syrian seals;<sup>34</sup> a tiny human head; and a Near Eastern sun disk.

While the design and most figural elements can be accounted for in the art of Syria and Anatolia,<sup>35</sup> there is an exception. This is the frontal bull that crosses behind one lion (*Fig. 7a*), its forequarters next to the frontal deity — one of the most enigmatic figures on the Knossos cylinder. The animal's enormous head seems unrelated to the body below it and

potamienne archaïque (1980) Pl. 130,1756. 1758; this contrasts with many Anatolian-style seals where motifs are usually dispersed all over the field: N. Özgüç, *The Anatolian Group of Cylinder Seal Impressions from Kültepe* (1965) Pl. XIX,56 and Pl. XXI,63 for example; one early second millennium seal in the Erlenmeyer Collection: M.-L. and H. Erlenmeyer, *Kadmos* 4, 1965, Fig. 5 opp. p. 3, combines the Early and Old Syrian-type syntax of an upper register of small figures with the lower main scene, but also has animal and human protomes all over the field to create the typical busy picture that we find on Anatolian-style seals.

<sup>29</sup> LION HEAD TYPE: P. Amiet, *Syria* 40, 1963, Pl. VI,1; Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals* 243 Fig. 76; FUR AND MANES: Buchanan, *YBC* Nos. 969. 980. 1110 (Cappadocian); Porada (supra n. 28) Nos. 356. 364. 366. 367E; P. Garelli — D. Collon, *Cuneiform Texts from Cappadocian Tablets in the British Museum Part VI* (1975) 54; Özgüç, *SSI* 41 Pl. XIXA; STRIATIONS ON BODY: F. von Luschan, *Die Kleinfunde von Sendschirli. Ausgrabungen von Sendschirli V* (1943) Pl. 39a; Özgüç (supra n. 28) passim; Möller (supra n. 3) 99.

<sup>30</sup> For parallels, see Özgüç, *SSI* Pl. XXII,2; H. de Genouillac, *Ceramique cappadoçienne I* (1926) Pls. A4 (A.O. 9390). B2 (AO 8750). B4 (AO 9384); Möller (supra n. 3) refers to B. Hrozný, *Inscriptions cunéiformes du Kultépé I* (1952) Pls. LVII,21a. LXII,27a side b; HORNS: Collon, *SITA* Pl. XI; Safadi (supra n. 4) Pl. XIV,105.

<sup>31</sup> Özgüç, *SSI* Pl. XVD.

<sup>32</sup> This figure was misinterpreted by Platon — Pini — Salies, *CMS* II,2 S. 37f.; the correct identification is made by Möller (supra n. 3) 98; it is possible that the undecipherable figure between the sun disc and lion protome on the Knossos seal, with wing-like appendage and curl, could also be a griffin-demon.

<sup>33</sup> Frankfort (supra n. 29) 174f.; in its ferocious aspect, the lion-griffin may have its mouth open, roaring or biting, and is a rampant combatant with both human and animal adversaries: B. Goldman, *AJA* 64, 1960, 321 Pl. 89.

<sup>34</sup> Möller (supra n. 3) 98.

<sup>35</sup> Möller (supra n. 3) 99, suggests Karahöyük as the place for this style: see Alp, *ZSK* Pls. 44. 107; for a similar treatment of the hands on Old Assyrian style sealings from Kültepe, see for example, Garelli and Collon (supra n. 29) Pls. 50,21.23; 55; 60; 64.



makes little sense as an image.<sup>36</sup> The outline formed by the incurved horns can be found on Near Eastern divine headgear and bovine divinities.<sup>37</sup> It is likely that this head was re-cut on Crete, perhaps over an original Near Eastern head of a human-headed bull (*see Fig. 7b for one example*); its beard may have been transformed into the elongated Minoan muzzle, which is placed directly above the foreleg. There is no neck in this re-cut version. Traces of an earlier design appear in the lines that resemble an animal limb, extending from below the elbow of the female to the bovine front leg.



*Fig. 7a* CMS II,2 No. 29. Detail.



*Fig. 7b* Early Dynastic cylinder seal (ex Moore Collection, Metropolitan Museum, Anonymous Loan, 1992: No. L.1992.23.3)

<sup>36</sup> The closest parallels in the Near East for this head are small clay sculptures from Byblos: M. Dunand, *Fouilles de Byblos I*, 1926–32 (1939) Pl. LXXXIII, 4377. 5261 (considered by Dunand to be Middle Minoan imports to Syria); LM Aegean bucrania on seals include CMS X No. 68; K. Mavriyannaki, *AAA* 10, 1978, 203 Fig. 8.

<sup>37</sup> C.L. Woolley, *Ur Excavations II. The Royal Cemetery* (1934) Pl. 121; for Anatolian bulls with profile human heads and incurved horns, see I. Spar (ed.), *Cuneiform Texts in The Metropolitan Museum of Art I* (1989) MMA 66.245.21b: seal No. 33 Pl. 129.



To summarize our findings, we begin with a good size lapis lazuli cylinder seal of fine quality and a color preferred in the Near East, certainly in the third millennium. It bears a later echo of the standard contest frieze and subsidiary register seen on Ebla sealings, and it is possible that a nude bearded hero or bullman once stood in place of the frontal female, confronting a human-headed bull. Re-cutting could have occurred in central Anatolia, but damaged areas may have required Minoan re-working and the addition of the incongruous bucranium. The seal was further beautified with replacement Minoan gold caps — work of the MM or LM period.



*Fig. 8a* Hagia Triada Sealing.  
Heraklion Museum, Inv. No. 508.



*Fig. 8b* Chania Sealing.  
CMS V Suppl. 1A No. 130.

In attempting to understand the significance of these Syrian imports to the Aegean, I illustrate two sealings: one from Hagia Triada (*Fig. 8a*) with an impression of a foreign seal and one from Chania (*Fig. 8b*), impressed by a Minoan cylinder seal. Both were not rolled in the oriental manner but rather, like Aegean seals, were stamped, so that the cylindrical outline and one face of the carving is visible. Therefore, there was no particular appreciation in the Aegean of whatever functional requirements prompted the shift from stamp to cylinder seal in Mesopotamia and Syria. There was also no dominating foreign presence in Crete as there was in central Anatolia during the Assyrian Colony period, to influence local merchants to switch to the use of cylinder seals — and while the cylinder seal form was used sporadically by Aegean seal carvers, Near Eastern seal compositions had no major impact on Cretan seals.

Some imports, such as the hematite seal from Mochlos, are good quality seals in good condition and came to Crete close to the time of their manufacture — perhaps with Syrian traders, who may have also brought similar seals to Palestine and Anatolia.<sup>38</sup> Others were either re-cut, noticeably chipped, or unfinished — and were perhaps easier for Minoan

<sup>38</sup> A seal with figures related to those on the Tylissos example was possibly used by a Syrian merchant at Kültepe: Özgüç, SSI Pl. XXVI.3.



travellers to acquire.<sup>39</sup> The seal from Heraklion-Poros belongs to a large group of seals from one workshop that were distributed over great distances and in some cases retained for centuries.

Imported cylinder seals on Crete were considered fitting grave goods, and placed in burials.<sup>40</sup> They may have been valued as exotica and appreciated for their materials. The Mochlos silver cylinder seal is one of a number of silver objects found in the tombs at that site. The Knossos seal is made of a very desirable lapis lazuli (a material known to have been collected in antiquity) and was restored to an impressive piece of jewelry on Crete.

I now turn to our second category of evidence.

#### MB—EARLY LB SYRIAN CYLINDER SEALS WITH MINOAN ELEMENTS

Whereas on Crete we have imported Syrian seals that do not seem to have fundamentally affected Minoan style or composition, the situation is different in Syria. Here we have no known imported Minoan seals. However, there are numerous Syrian seals bearing 'eclectic' imagery and styles that may indicate cultural interaction between the two regions, however hard to interpret. I shall discuss only a few. Nylander, in his study of artistic interaction between Greeks and Persians at Pasargadae, makes the distinction between similarities in iconography and stylistic elements that can be borrowed and modified by local artists, and structure or underlying principles that are conditioned by "the entire mental set of a culture" and are "most difficult to transmit unchanged to another context".<sup>41</sup> In analyzing Achaemenid and archaic Greek drapery folds, he sees a structural difference "of fundamental attitudes" where the relationship between body and drapery in Greek art was never of interest to the Persian artist.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, an essentially Minoan structure is lacking on most 'eclectic' Syrian seals; however, these seals are of interest for the way in which they juxtapose foreign elements with the more Mesopotamian-derived Syrian repertoire.

One particularly interesting example demonstrates the excerpting of an Aegean motif by a Syrian seal carver.<sup>43</sup> This seal, found at Ugarit (*Fig. 9*), is not published with any specific findspot or associated finds and has been stylistically dated to ca. 1700—1500 B.C. It is made of white stone<sup>44</sup> and is fitted with plain gold caps of Near Eastern type. Its design shows a juxtaposition of oriental and Minoan motifs.

<sup>39</sup> The Platanos cylinder seal, CMS II No. 306, an early Old Babylonian import, may also have been chipped.

<sup>40</sup> Found in treasuries or graves, cylinder seals throughout history have been collectible objects — with examples found in Mycenaean Thebes, alongside Aegean stamp seals, and in Punic and Roman graves in North Africa and Italy, and even as part of the treasure brought back to Italy by the Crusaders: Collon (*supra* n. 23) 138.

<sup>41</sup> C. Nylander, *Ionians in Pasargadae* (1970) 75.

<sup>42</sup> Nylander (*supra* n. 41) 137.

<sup>43</sup> H. Weiss (ed.), *From Ebla to Damascus. Art and Archaeology of Ancient Syria* (1985) 279 No. 120.

<sup>44</sup> Measurements: H. 2.2 x 0.85 cm; there is some question about the material identification and there seems to be an impression of woven cloth on the surface (noticed by Terry Drayman-Weisser, Director, Division of Conservation and Technical Research, The Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore) that has yet to be explained.



The entire body of the cylinder is ringed by an alternation of open and closed lotuses forming a chain. While the pattern has been compared with refined LBA Mitannian-style examples,<sup>45</sup> the motif, in a less delicate and less elegant form, is introduced on a sealing from Alalakh VII, filling the entire field.<sup>46</sup> A Kamares ware sherd from Ugarit has a similar design — perhaps itself an eclectic piece.<sup>47</sup>



Fig. 9 Ugarit cylinder seal.

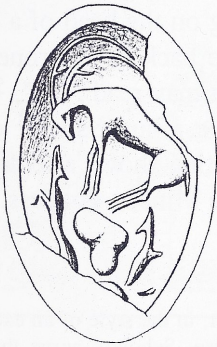


Fig. 10a CMS II,5 No. 258.



Fig. 10b Jug from Toumba tou Skourou.

Perched above the pendant lotuses on the Ugarit cylinder seal are two animals: a griffin and a goat. The former has a crest, a raised wing with bent profile, and a couchant posture which could relate it to the Aegean, but in the case of the goat there can be little uncertainty.

<sup>45</sup> B. Parker, *Iraq* XI, 1949, Pl. II,12; H. von der Osten, *Ancient Oriental Seals in the Collection of Mrs. Agnes Baldwin Brett* (1936) Pl. IX,99; see Weiss (*supra* n. 43) 279 No. 120.

<sup>46</sup> Collon (*supra* n. 30) 90 No. 164.

<sup>47</sup> C. Schaeffer, *Ugaritica* II (1949) 256 Fig. 109a.



Similar goats with heads bent downward and legs placed close together occur already in the MM II period on a Kamares pot and on a sealing from Phaistos (*Fig. 10a*). A Minoan cushion seal depicting a dog below a cliff on which stands a goat in similar posture probably dates to the period of the Ugarit seal.<sup>48</sup>

The scheme of composition, with animals balancing on a lotus chain devoid of stems, finds its closest parallel on a Tell el Yahudiyeh ware jug of the pictorial class, from Toumba tou Skourou on Cyprus, where waterbirds are depicted (*Fig. 10b*). This site is important for its LM I imported pottery and other evidence of foreign contacts, such as Syrian pottery and ostrich eggs. The vessel relates to examples from both the Levant and Egypt, particularly to the well-known el Lisht vase with waterbirds and dolphins (of MB IIB Syro-Palestinian shape and datable to Dynasties XIII–XV).<sup>49</sup> Negbi attributes the Cypriot find to Levantine or Cypriot manufacture.<sup>50</sup> While the decoration on these pictorial vessels may relate to the designs on the Ugarit seal, the carver did not place Egyptian or Syrian birds on flowers, but chose from the Minoan repertoire.

Other better known Syrian seals, as has been pointed out in the literature, depict Minoan-looking subjects in lively postures — such as long-haired figures in loin cloths and bull-leaping scenes in the context of bull-hunting and bull-sport. One hematite Syrian seal now in Vienna (*Fig. 11*), depicts two young warriors with well-modelled bodies, long hair, wasp-waists, broad shoulders, in striding postures, one figure with a hyper-extended back leg.<sup>51</sup> They are clad in loincloths with belt tassels hanging between their legs. Armed with daggers and spears, they approach an enthroned figure with feet resting on the head of a lion. Behind the seated figure is a rampant griffin, with its hindlegs on the back of a throne and forelegs on a goat. In the field are a crescent moon and a cartouche that may read "Gb".<sup>52</sup>

With the publication of the frescoes from Thera Xeste 3, we have a surprisingly close parallel for the composition on the Vienna seal (*Fig. 12a*).<sup>53</sup> The painting shows a female in a long flounced skirt, seated on a rectangular stool. She is probably the Minoan goddess. The

<sup>48</sup> Boardman, GGFR Pl. 61.

<sup>49</sup> Like a piece from Byblos, its design shows the flower extracted from its stem but, in the style of an example from Abydos, the rendering is graceful and elegant rather than geometrically precise. Scholars agree that the motifs of papyrus and waterfowl are Egyptian — Goelet noting how un-Egyptian some waterfowl look, but differ in their judgment regarding the place of manufacture of individual pots found in Egypt and the Levant: R. Amiran, *IsExpJl* 7, 1957, 93f.; *Ancient Pottery of the Holy Land* (1969) 118f.; R.S. Merrillees, *Levant* 4, 1976, 193f.; for the Lisht jug, see B. Kemp — R.S. Merrillees, *Minoan Pottery in Second Millennium Egypt* (1980) 220ff., who date the jug to Dynasty XIII/early Dynasty XV; H. Kantor, *Chronologies in Old World Archaeology* (1965) 23f.; V. Hankey — P. Warren, *BICS* 21, 1974, 145; P. Warren — V. Hankey (*supra* n. 6) 135f., who compare it to a pictorial juglet from stratum E2 at Tell el-Dab'a, dating it to the early Hyksos period; J. Weinstein, *JARCE* 19, 1982, 159f. n. 2, who dates the form to MB IIB.

<sup>50</sup> O. Negbi, *AJA* 82, 1978, 143f.

<sup>51</sup> H. Seyrig, *Ugaritica* VI (1969) 479 Fig. 1; E. Bleibtreu, *Rollsiegel aus dem Vorderen Orient* (1981) 69f. No. 83 (H. 1.6 cm; D. 0.8 cm); Seyrig points to a closely related second seal on which long-haired hunters attack a lion; here their extended legs produce more exaggerated postures.

<sup>52</sup> I thank James Allen and Marcia Hill of the Egyptian Department, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, for suggestions on the reading. I hope to look further at the cartouches of this and other seals of similar style.

<sup>53</sup> Marinatos, *AaR* 62 Fig. 40.



setting is architectural, with the figures raised on a series of platforms. The deity extends her hand toward an attendant monkey, who ascends from the lowest platform; behind her is a rampant griffin with a sickle-shaped wing, its hindlegs on a low platform and forelegs on the back of her seat. Other human attendants approach from left and right.



Fig. 11 Vienna cylinder seal.

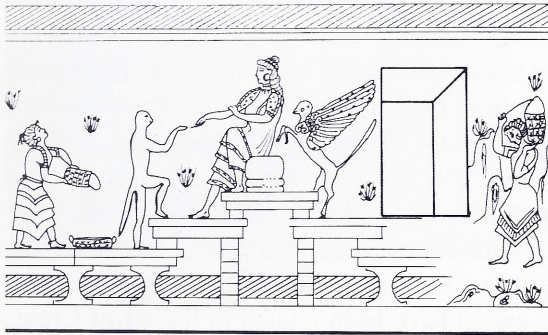


Fig. 12a Drawing of fresco detail from Thera, Xeste 3.



Fig. 12b CMS II,3 No. 328.

Regarding the imagery on the seal, the youths may be designated as foreigners, with their Minoan hairdos and garments. They are carved in a style that recalls Egyptianizing figures in Syrian art. In particular, their squared shoulders and slender bodies relate them to the human and divine figures that appear in the 'green jasper' group discussed above. One member of this group, the seal imported to Poros, has a monkey-hybrid figure that has been cited by Nanno Marinatos as a parallel for the monkey figure on the Thera Xeste 3 fresco.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>54</sup> College Art Association Symposium 2 (1986).



The youths on the Vienna seal have long strands of hair over their shoulders, and a 'topknot'; on Crete we usually see short curly forelocks. The squared-off mass of hair that falls down the back recalls Egyptian wigs and representations of the men of Keftiu. A number of 18th–early 17th century Syrian seals depict related figures.

After the youths on the Vienna seal, the griffin comes closest to Aegean prototypes. This creature is extended with forelegs on the throne. Its posture finds parallels on an LM I cylinder seal (*Fig. 12b*) and on LM I palatial seal impressions, where we also find the three-pronged plume, spiral chest curl and bent wing — all diagnostic features of the Minoan griffin.<sup>55</sup> The Vienna griffin stands on a very Syrian-looking goat with its head reversed. It counters the seated figure with feet on a lion. Such a placement of figures on their animal attributes is well known on Near Eastern seals.

The seated warrior deity on the Vienna seal holds a drawn sword with blade raised in an unusual gesture and has long strands of hair hanging both over the shoulder and down the back — recalling Aegean hairdos. The figure wears a Near Eastern-looking wrapped long garment, however, with an unusual zigzag pattern.

The new evidence of Minoan-style miniature paintings from Tell el-Dab'a provides us with nearer chronological parallels<sup>56</sup> for well-known representations of bull sport on Syrian seals than we had previously. One example was impressed on a tablet envelope fragment found in room 11 of the palace of Alalakh VII and is datable to the late 18th–17th century B.C.<sup>57</sup> The partially rolled image on the left side of the envelope is from one of two impressed seals (*Fig. 13*).<sup>58</sup> A personal name (-]bi-ti-m[i-(d) H[épat]), is written across the impression (a practice seen also later in Mycenaean times). Unlike its companion seal rolled on the right side, which has standard Old Babylonian imagery, this seal design is unusual both in theme and composition. It consists of three groups of figures. One group is familiar on Mesopotamian-derived seals: a standing bearded robed figure on one side of a sacred tree below a winged disc. The other two provide a stark contrast to this scene, however, showing a bull facing right, surmounted by two acrobats flanking an ankh, with their hands on the bull's back and their legs in the air; and a large ibex in partial gallop to the left with a lion and griffin above. While the tauromachy and the gallop have been related to the art of Crete,

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<sup>55</sup> For a discussion of the Near Eastern origin of the Minoan griffin (and some of these features), in the protopalatial period, see J. Aruz in: Mellink – Porada – Özgüç (supra n. 4) 38f.

<sup>56</sup> Earlier known examples date to LM IB.

<sup>57</sup> Collon (supra n. 30) 60 No. 111; D. Collon, *UgaritF* 13, 1982, 36 No. 6; 41 Fig. 1 No. 6; for the most recent review of Alalakh chronology and the destruction date for level VII, see T. McClellan in: A. Leonard Jr. – B. Williams (eds.), *Essays in Ancient Civilization Presented to Helene J. Kantor* (1989) 182f.; Collon (supra n. 4) 3, seems to entertain a destruction date in the late 17th century, yet prior to the Hittite destruction of Babylon in ca. 1595 B.C.; this could then overlap with MM IIIB–LM IA: see W.-D. Niemeier, *Aegaeum* 7, 1990, 191f.; regarding the correlation with the Hyksos period, which extends from ca. 1640–1550 B.C., there may also be some overlap, although 'Hyksos' scarabs are said to come from Alalakh VI: A. Kempinski, *Syrien und Palästina (Kanaan) in der letzten Phase der Mittelbronze IIB-Zeit (1650–1570 B.C.)*, *Ägypten und Altes Testament* 4, 1983, 88f.; M.-H. Gates in: P. Aström (ed.), *High, Middle or Low? II* (1987) 80f., disagrees with Kempinski on this evidence.

<sup>58</sup> Collon (supra n. 30) 160 No. 122 rolled from a seal depicting the Old Babylonian theme of a 'god' with a mace and a suppliant goddess.



this ornamental and rather static rendering of bull acrobatics owes little to Minoan style and composition.



Fig. 13 Alalakh sealed tablet (drawing).



Fig. 14a.b Syrian cylinder seal. (ex Erlenmeyer Collection, Metropolitan Museum, Anonymous Loan, 1992: No. L. 1992.43).

A closely related seal, formerly in the Erlenmeyer collection and now on loan to the Metropolitan Museum (*Fig. 14*), has a similar underlying Syrian structure.<sup>59</sup> In this case, the acrobats are symmetrically arranged over a bull charging to the left in an unconvincing static posture, its horns held by another human. Above this scene is another bull before a seated lion with its head reversed. Adjacent to the taumachy scene is a smiting weather god approached by a worshiper wearing a fleecy garment with thickly rolled borders. This

<sup>59</sup> D. Collon, *UgaritF 13*, 1982, 36 No. 7; 41 Fig. 1 No. 7; H. 2.15 cm; D. 1.05 cm; Collon attributes the seal to a 'Cappadocian craftsman' and the Alalakh example to a 'Mari craftsman', both working in Aleppo, and both their styles derivative from Sippar (*UgaritF 13*, 1982, 35).



juxtaposition of Classic Syrian II style imagery and the scene of animal combat and bull leaping that extends all over the field with no framing devices characterizes this and other related seals. There is no attempt to fuse these elements and we have two distinct scenes derived from two different traditions.



Fig. 15 Syrian sealed tablet dating to Samsu-iluna (drawing).



Fig. 16a Syrian cylinder seal (Metropolitan Museum, Gift of M. and S. Cherkasky, No. 1989.361.2).



Fig. 16b Syrian cylinder seal (ex Moore Collection).

Porada has stated that the posture of the bulls, the unconventional relationship of figures — with the upper bull's horn in the lion's mouth, the goat pawing at the god, and the worshiper holding the ankh, may indicate a non-Syrian origin for the seal.<sup>60</sup> She suggested a possible Cypriot origin, based on a comparison with a seal found in a tomb containing a LM I cup at Ayia Irini, on the northwest coast of the island.<sup>61</sup> However, unlike the Ayia Irini seal, with

<sup>60</sup> E. Porada in: *Acts of the International Archaeological Symposium 'The Mycenaeans in the Eastern Mediterranean'* (1973) 270f.; one could also add the holding of the bull's horns to this list.

<sup>61</sup> P. Pecorella, *SMEA* 15, 1972, 51 Fig. 13; V. Karageorghis (ed.), *Archaeology in Cyprus 1960–1985* (1985) Pl. XIV,4: depicted are two figures and central ankh adjacent to a scene with a charging bull. A bird



its misunderstood headgear, garments and postures, the carving on both the Metropolitan Museum seal as well as the Alalakh seal, which we have already discussed, is consistent with carving on a large number of seals considered to be Syrian and may demonstrate the versatility of the craftsman and the diversity of his repertoire to suit patrons and function.<sup>62</sup>

One further closely related design, as pointed out by Porada and later Collon, occurs on a cylinder seal impression on a tablet envelope dated to the seventh year of the last Old Babylonian ruler, Samsu-ditana (ca. 1625–1595 B.C.) (*Fig. 15*).<sup>63</sup> The envelope, from Sippar in Mesopotamia, contained a document recording a loan of silver. Two witnesses to this transaction use traditional Old Babylonian style seals while a third witness is the secondary user of the Syrian-style seal, his name added in an awkward spot between the legs of two nude bearded wrestlers.<sup>64</sup> On this Syrian seal, this Mesopotamian-derived scene is juxtaposed with a dynamic, more Mediterranean-looking scene<sup>65</sup> with smaller figures including two males with long hair and loin cloths attacking a rampant goat (its horns shown in 3/4 view), above a charging or fallen goat attacked by a lion. At right is a striding human figure.

On previously discussed seals, Mediterranean and Classic Syrian stylistic features are juxtaposed in the same work. On two seals with similar imagery in the Metropolitan Museum, we see these styles separated, making even clearer the contrast between the more restrained Classic Syrian II style (*Fig. 16a*) and a freer, more Mediterranean style (*Fig. 16b*).<sup>66</sup>

### *'Eclectic' Syrian seals : Style and society*

At present, we can only note the different ways in which foreign elements are appropriated. The eventual aim of the study of 'eclectic' Syrian seals is to learn about the craftsmen producing them, the patrons using them and their function – information difficult to recover, however, from the existing evidence. As we have seen, the carver of the seal from Ugarit excerpts a very specific Cretan image and places it within a Syrian design. Scenes of bull-leapers and figures wearing long hair with topknots, and loincloths with tassels

replaces the acrobats and a guilloche is placed above. Despite its posture, the bull lacks a dynamic quality. Its head is not lowered, nor is there tension in its body. The figure is rooted to a ground line in a way that is distinctively un-Aegean; it may be a local Cypriot seal – produced in the 17th century B.C.

<sup>62</sup> Syrian parallels occur for the fleecy (?) garment, the figure standing before the bull, and the smiting weather god: see D. Collon, *UgaritF* 13, 1982, Fig. 1,2.5.10.

<sup>63</sup> E. Porada, *JNES* 16, 1957, 42f.; Porada (*supra* n. 60) 268f. Fig. 4; B. Buchanan, *JCunSt* 11, 1957, 47f.; Collon (*supra* n. 62) 36 No. 10 Fig. 1,10.

<sup>64</sup> Buchanan (*supra* n. 63) 48: naming I?-l?-i-d?-nam.

<sup>65</sup> Porada (*supra* n. 60) 269, attributes postures, hair and garments, as well as the lion's profile and the goat's horns to Aegean inspiration; similar headgear, hair, dress and lion type occur on the Alalakh and Erlenmeyer seals.

<sup>66</sup> For a LB example of such a scene from Tyre, see H. Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (1954 reprinted 1970) 260 Fig. 301.



in exuberant postures, seem to illustrate the impact of Minoan art, yet they are also clearly Syrian in style. These scenes are juxtaposed with more traditional, static Near Eastern figures. As already mentioned, there is nothing in the inscriptions of the seals or sealed tablets to indicate any of the seal users were foreigners.



Fig. 17 Cylinder seal reportedly from Membij, Syria.

Collon believes that these seals, part of her 'Aleppo group', were probably made in Syria for Syrian clientele, indicating the "international character of Syrian relations and contacts" in the late 18th and 17th centuries B.C.<sup>67</sup> In fact, the employment of Minoan fresco painters in the Levant and Egyptian Delta suggests that the visual information needed to transform aspects of Syrian art may have been readily available in Syria itself sometime in the 17th century.

Unlike seals produced in peripheral Mesopotamia by local carvers under circumstances of intense economic and cultural interaction and domination, such as the Colony period local Anatolian style seals and Persian Gulf seals, there is no attempt at synthesis on the 'eclectic' Syrian seals of the late Middle Bronze Age.

Finally, I would like to mention one additional cylinder seal (*Fig. 17*) that may indicate another phenomenon: the work of a Minoan carver in Syria. Purchased in Membij, Syria and now in the Ashmolean Museum, this seal is carved with animal attack scenes. While some of its filler motifs are Syrian, the modelling and the dynamism of the figures, the extension of bodies that are not rooted to the ground, and the variety of postures and intricate limb positions, accord well with Minoan images of animals in combat.

The Ashmolean seal has been dated to Buchanan's Late Old Syrian period (ca. 18th–16th century B.C.);<sup>68</sup> its Aegean aspects date to MM III–LM I. In its mixture of styles as well as motifs from east and west, the Membij seal is an early example of the type of fusion we find

<sup>67</sup> Collon (*supra* n. 30) 141.

<sup>68</sup> B. Buchanan, *Catalogue of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in the Ashmolean Museum I. Cylinder Seals* (1966) 167. 175 No. 897: H. 2.4 cm; D. 1.2 cm.



later on the 'Cypro-Aegean' cylinder seals of the 14th century B.C. — indicating not simply awareness of foreign art but the work of foreign artists abroad.

To conclude, the study of glyptic offers us many avenues for the exploration of the relationship between the Levant and Crete. I have elsewhere examined the foreign-derived motifs in Minoan art. A study of extant Syrian imports to Crete provides evidence for the value placed on such foreign objects that were at times embellished and buried with their new owners but which had no profound influence on Minoan seal styles and compositions and may never themselves have been used as seals in the Aegean. In Syria we have no present evidence for the collecting of Minoan seals. However, Minoan art seems to have been greatly admired in this region, and to have exercised an important influence on certain schools of Syrian seal carving that perhaps will become clearer with future studies.