

APPENDIX II

A CYPRIOTE CYLINDER SEAL FROM LACHISH

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The seal (Reg. No. 31509/50) was found in 1980 in Level VI of Area G at Tel Lachish in Locus 4584, a trench cut beneath the foundations of the Iron Age gate. Level VI was destroyed by fire some time during the first half of the 12th century B.C.E.

Description*

The seal (Fig. 1; Pl. 44:1) is made of haematite (height: 30 mm.; diameter 1.25 cm.). It is chipped on the ends; possibly they were gold capped. The engraving of the design, which is of excellent workmanship, was done with a fine graver and drills of varying sizes.

Bordered by horizontal lines, the design is divided into two registers. The upper register, which occupies about three-quarters of the height, is composed of two scenes. On the right (as drawn in Fig. 1) is a group of three: a goddess facing left is approached by another goddess and a lion demon, each holding one of the hind legs of a horned animal. On the left is a bull demon facing a goddess, who together are holding a winged sphinx by its hind leg and tail; with his other hand, the bull demon is holding another horned animal by the hind leg, together with the goddess at the far right (as depicted in Fig. 1). A horned animal stands on his hind legs between the two groups and another one between the lion demon and goddess

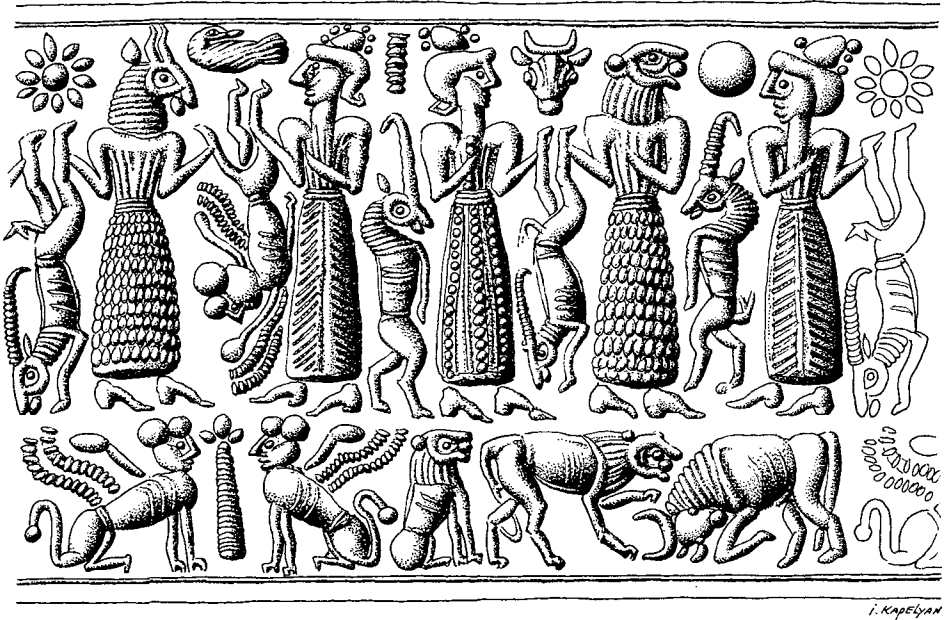


Fig. 1. Cylinder seal from Lachish.

* Figs. 1-2 were drawn by Iosef Kapelyan.

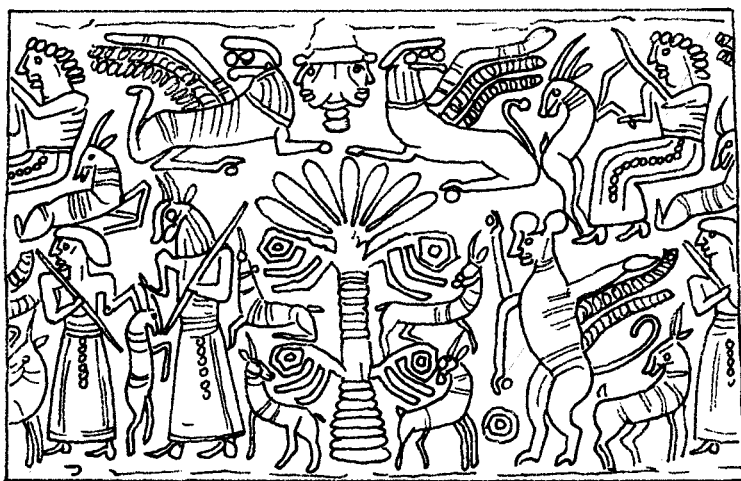
at the far right. In the upper field, above the animals, there are several elements, including a bucranium, a disk, a ten-petalled rosette, a bird with back-turned head and an unidentified oblong object.

The lower register is a frieze composed of winged sphinxes crouching on either side of a tree and a scene consisting of a lion seated behind another lion that is attacking a bull.

Origin, style and date

The iconography and style of the seal point to Cyprus as its place of origin. It is closely related to the fine haematite seals of Porada's Group II, particularly those of its latter part (Porada 1948b:184-188), later classified as Cypro-Minoan by Boardman (1970:64-65; 106: Pl. 206; Porada 1973:260 ff.). According to Porada (1948b:184), this group is distinguished by "exquisite engraving with use of a fine drill, the frequent occurrence of animal-headed figures, the broad-shouldered, narrow-waisted silhouettes of the human figures and the variety of patterns on their robes."

The seal from Lachish shares several features with the Cypriote seals, among them the engraving of many of the details, of which the following are of particular interest: the two drillings representing the upper part of the head of the sphinxes is paralleled exactly on a seal from Hala Sultan Tekké, Tomb 4, in Cyprus (Fig. 2; Porada 1948b: No. 16 = Kenna 1971:No. 71). The groups of vertical lines on the haunches and chests of the animals are also seen on the seals from H.S. Tekké and Ashur (*ibid.*: No. 15 = Moortgat 1940: No. 584) and on a seal from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (Frankfort 1939: Pl. XLV:g; Boardman 1970: Pl. 206 = Porada 1973: Pl. 32:1). The heads of the lions and lion demons, outlined by the graver with details such as ears, eyes and muzzle pointed by minute drillings, are seen on the seals from Ashur and the Boston museum. Most significant is the similarity in the techni-



0 1 cm.

Fig. 2. Cylinder seal from Hala Sultan Tekké, after Kenna 1971: no. 71.

que of engraving the wings, giving "an impression of granulation," as Porada describes it (1948b:185), on the sphinxes on the Lachish seal and the winged figures on the seals from Ashur and Boston. Another similarity is the close horizontal hatching of the tree trunks on the Lachish and H.S. Tekké seals. Significantly, the design of the latter seal is also divided into two registers, although less clear-cut than ours, where the distinction between main and secondary scene is clearly demarcated. Composition in two registers is not found on other seals of this group. The workmanship of our seal is superior to that of the seals from H.S. Tekké and Ashur, and is comparable to the best products of Porada's Group II.

The seals from H.S. Tekké, Ashur and the Boston museum were attributed by Porada to a later phase in Group II (Porada 1948b:188), dated early in the 14th century (Porada 1971:789, No. 4).

Iconography

Porada has pointed out the variety of patterns on the robes of the figures in the seals of this group as one of its distinctive features. For example, the waist is usually circled by a belt "that seems to be part of a long, patterned skirt" (Porada 1973:360). On the Lachish seal the bull and lion demons wear the same type of long skirt usually seen on demons of Group II (Porada 1948b:185). A tiered skirt is worn by the goddesses restraining and dominating lions and griffins on seal No. 2 from Thebes (Porada 1981:13, No. 2); two of the Lachish seal goddesses wear the same type of robe, patterned with diagonal lines on each side of a vertical line, of the type seen on a seal in the British Museum (Kenna 1971: No. 68), also assigned to the latter part of Group II (Porada 1948b:188, n. 68). The pattern on the skirt of the third goddess has vertical lines alternating with lines of drilled dots, similar to the robe of the bull demon on a seal in the British Museum (Porada 1948b: No. 11 = Kenna 1971: No. 77). However, the headgear of the three figures is identical. It consists of a conical form surrounded by minute drillings and is reminiscent of the headgear on late Old Babylonian seals, as for example, on one from the reign of Ammişaduqa (Porada 1981:24, Fig. d; and see comments there). The hair style of the goddesses, curling up at the back of the neck, is considered characteristic of Cyprian goddesses.

Winged griffins and sphinxes appear among the creatures dominated by the goddesses and animal demons on the Cypriote seals (e.g., Porada 1948b: No. 22). On a seal in the British Museum (Kenna 1971: No. 78) a griffin with outspread wings is held upside down by a lion demon; another griffin with its wings spread out is seen on seal No. 1 from Thebes in the upper field of the scene (Porada 1981:9-10). As for the significance of such scenes, Porada suggests (1971:790) that "the animals held up by their hindlegs were probably regarded as noxious creatures or as symbols of noxious powers which the demons had overcome — doubtless for the benefit of the owner."

The elements in the upper part of the field — rosette, bucranium, bird and disc — are well known from Cypriote seal cylinders (e.g., Kenna 1971: Nos. 68, 71, 77-79).

Of the two groups in the animal frieze of the lower register, the lion attacking a bull is of interest. Similar scenes of attack being watched by a second lion are known from other seals, e.g., the Mitannian seal in Porada and Buchanan 1948a: No. 1029 (Elaborate Style). The back-turned head of the demon bull seen in frontal view and its stance with bent foreleg recall the Mycenaean style stamp seals, where the body of the bull is curved to fit the circle

of the field (Boardman 1970: Pl. 123, 130-131). It therefore seems that the Lachish bull betrays the hand of a seal-cutter familiar with the Aegean style. Although Cypriote cylinder seals have been found in various Palestinian sites (see Porada 1948b; Beck 1977), those of our particular group are rare in local excavations.

The pottery of Locus 4584 was dated by the excavator to Level VI (12th century B.C.E.), although he notes that it might be even earlier (see Chapter D of Second Preliminary report). Amongst the sherds in this locus there were a few of Cypriote origin; there was also a small scarab of Thutmose III. If with further digging, it is not clarified that Locus 4584 is indeed earlier than Stratum VI, we shall have to assume that our cylinder was a heirloom that was treasured and kept for several generations.

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