

KÜLTEPE AT THE CROSSROADS
BETWEEN DISCIPLINES

SUBARTU LI

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KÜLTEPE AT THE CROSSROADS BETWEEN DISCIPLINES

SOCIETY, SETTLEMENT AND ENVIRONMENT
FROM THE FOURTH TO THE FIRST
MILLENNIUM BC

Edited by

Fikri Kulakoğlu & Cécile Michel

(With the collaboration of Guido Kryszat)

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For the opening day of KIM 5, several events took place in Kayseri. An exhibition sponsored by the Metropolitan Municipality of Kayseri and directed by Siret Uyanık was opened, featuring works of art inspired by Kültepe, objects and cuneiform tablets discovered there. We thank them warmly for this event. Afterwards, in the auditorium of the new Kayseri Archaeological Museum, conference participants were invited to the premiere of the Turkish version of the documentary

film *Thus Speaks Tarām-Kūbi, Assyrian Correspondence*, a film by Cécile Michel and Vanessa Tubiana-Brun, CNRS, 2020 (English version online: <<https://images.cnrs.fr/en/video/7315>>; Turkish version online: <<https://lecture2go.uni-hamburg.de/en/l2go/-/get/v/67290>>).



Having just completed this manuscript, on 28 July 2023, we were deeply saddened to learn of the death of Klaas Veenhof. With Klaas, we have lost a great scientist who inspired several generations of Assyriologists and a very dear friend.



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3. LAW AND JUSTICE IN KANEŠ AND ITS DEPICTION ON CYLINDER SEALS

A New Interpretation of the Motifs ‘Ball-Staff’ and ‘Pot’

Adelheid Otto

Introduction

Kültepe seals have such an amazingly rich iconography and are so extremely elaborate and detailed that they can deliver more than one clue for understanding ancient social, cultural, religious, and economic concepts. Some original seals but especially thousands of seal impressions on tablets from the Lower Town of Kaneš level II constitute by far the most important source of Anatolian, Assyrian, and Syrian imagery of the nineteenth century. Step by step, the iconography can be better understood and more depictions deciphered. Nevertheless, many elements of the extremely varied and dense depictions on these masterpieces of art are still difficult to be interpreted.

The period investigated in this paper is Karum Kaneš level II or more precisely the rather short period from which the majority of sealed tablets originate. This corresponds more or less — due to the chronological distribution of the texts in the merchants’ archives — to the first half of the nineteenth century (c. 1900–1860 BC), roughly corresponding to the Isin-Larsa period in Babylonia and to the Late Šakkanakku period in Syria.¹

The majority of the seals impressed on Karum Kaneš II tablets, tablet cases, or clay closures depict adoration, introduction, and audience scenes where mor-

tal and immortal men and women were approaching or standing in front of a seated person, who is evidently the ‘supreme authority’ in this scene.² These veneration scenes are attested in a multitude of styles which indicate numerous origins of the seals and many workshops in various regions that were involved in cutting these seals, today classified roughly into Anatolian, Assyrian, Syrian, and Babylonian styles.

However, contrary to what has been commonly assumed, seals were not only depicting narrative scenes, but there was much more depicted on a seal’s surface despite its tiny size. This indicates that seal images must be understood today and were meant in ancient times as statements, wishes, prayers, or markers of identity — sometimes all this together encapsulated in a single seal. Seals were the mass media of the ancient Near East, disseminating pictorial motifs and ideas over vast areas. They were small, easy to transport, worn close to the body, and every legal person possessed at least one, not to speak of institutions (Otto 2019).

1 Kulakoğlu 2011; Barjamovic et al. 2012.

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2 This designation ‘supreme authority’ is chosen, because in our opinion it expresses well the hierarchical position, but does not want to commit itself in the interpretation of the main person, because this is not always completely clear. A figure wearing a horned crown can be identified without doubt as a deity. A figure wearing only a flounced garment and no horned crown could be either a deity or a deified ruler or ancestor. If the depiction is an (often modified) form of the motif of the (deified) king, which was popular in the Ur III period, it also cannot be said with certainty that this concept was also intended to be expressed here.

Therefore, the meaning inherent in a seal was not only embedded in the main scene usually depicting human or divine protagonists, but also in the countless tiny motifs which are especially frequent on seals attested at Kültepe. These are often called ‘filling motifs’ (Collon 1995), but they were clearly no meaningless fillers of free space, but implied an added value for the seal owner. Some of them even contained information about the seal owner’s profession, belief, or major concern. Since many ‘filling motifs’ were rarely depicted on large-scale works of art, they must have had a symbolic or amuletic meaning specific for the seal owner. Even so-called decorative bands expressed the concerns of the seal owner and were not merely decorative adornments, e.g. the guilloche, frequently attested also on stamp seals from Kültepe (Özgüç & Tunca 2001, pls 18–19) served as a symbol of fertility (Otto 2016).

The choice of a seal motif was dependent on the status and position of the seal owner, and it was particularly influenced by whether the person acted as part of an institution or as a private person. The motifs for private seals could obviously be freely chosen, whereas official or institutional seals had to follow the motif commanded by the institution, which was given the value of an official coat of arms.³

The ‘Ball-Staff’ and ‘Pot’ on Assyrian, Anatolian, Syrian/Syro-Cappadocian, and Babylonian Seals

Let us focus on a pair of these small motifs which was depicted frequently on seals dating to the first half of the second millennium, but has not yet been understood properly: the ‘ball-staff’ and the ‘pot’. The enigmatic object called in English literature most frequently ‘ball-and-staff’ or ‘ball-staff’, but which carries many other names as well (see below), is a vertical bar with a round or semicircular excrescence halfway up the staff, nearly always depicted as a lateral protrusion, rarely as a central protrusion. The ‘pot’ is a small globular object with a narrow neck. Its lower body and the opening of the top are sometimes rendered as linear, smooth surfaces, sometimes as wavy lines. These two objects occur nearly always as a pair, only sometimes alone, on numerous seals of every style group in Kaneš. In the following, I will analyse these objects on the basis of the seal impressions

from Kültepe published so far, focusing especially on the two major ‘source books’ by Teissier (1994) and Özgüç (2006).

Figure 3.1 illustrates examples of the varying depictions of every style. The adoration scene of the Syrian style cylinder (Fig. 3.1a) shows the ball-staff and pot placed horizontally above the altar between the supreme authority and the worshipper, i.e. in the centre of the scene. The Anatolian style cylinder seal (Fig. 3.1b) depicts both motifs in a similarly central position at the focal point of the scene, beside and above the altar. Note that the ball-staff bears a kind of loop at its upper end, and that the upper edge of the pot is rendered as a zig-zag line. The recut Old Babylonian seal with an original audience scene (Fig. 3.1c) had the ball-staff added immediately in front of the face of the supreme authority, i.e. in a most prominent position. The Anatolian stamp seal (Fig. 3.1d) shows a large female and smaller male worshipper in adoration towards the seated goddess, between them only the ball-staff and the pot. Also the Assyrian style cylinder seal had the objects placed in direct connection to a female and a male worshipper, both of them being introduced by a goddess (Fig. 3.1d).

However, the meaning of these objects has been a matter of debate over the past decades. Common interpretations include:⁴ a vertical loom and a comb, a gatepost and aryballos (connected with water deities); while the pot alone has most often been interpreted as a small vessel, called pot or vase, the interpretations of the ball-staff are varied and sometimes imaginative: a balance, a measuring instrument, a dropping tube for removing wine from a container, a case for holding drinking tubes, a spouted jar for libations, toiletry equipment, or even a water-pipe for smoking. Nimet Özgüç used to call them an elixir vase and a vase.

None of these previous interpretations is convincing. This is also because most scholars studied only the representations on Old Babylonian seals, most of which are much more stereotypical and abbreviated than Old Anatolian or Old Syrian ones. Because ‘ball-staff’ and ‘pot’ were placed as isolated elements between figures without any relation to the scene, this led to the general belief that these objects were more or less irrelevant filling motifs. In contrast, on Kültepe seals of the Anatolian and Syrian groups, these objects were depicted in a much more varied way, often as relevant elements of whole scenes, which sheds new light on their meaning.

³ The contrast between motifs on official and private seals has already been discussed several times for Old Syrian and Old Babylonian seals (Otto 2000, 173–78; 2013; 2017, 30–33), but it needs to be studied systematically for other periods and regions.

⁴ The basis of this enumeration are the collections by Dominique Collon (1986, 49–51) and Elisa Roßberger (2018, 120–21).



Figure 3.1: Kültepe seals and sealings depicting the ball-staff and pot.



3.1a: Impression of Syrian style cylinder seal, Ktd/k 22D, 34A, g/k 6B, n/k 8. CS 292. Özgüç 2006, pl. 8.



3.1d: Impression of Anatolian stamp seal, Ktn/k 1740C. St 110. Özgüç 2006, pl. 28.



3.1b: Anatolian style cylinder seal. Özgüç 2005, 271, fig. 358.



3.1c: Impression of recut Babylonian cylinder seal, Ktn/k 1698A, 1709A*. CS 73. Özgüç 2006, pl. 21.



3.1e: Impression of Assyrian style seal, Ktn/k 1845B. CS 629. Özgüç 2006, pl. 58.

Three main questions will be addressed in the following: What are these elements, what is their meaning, and where and when did they originate?

The usual explanation for nearly every element which occurs on Assyrian, Anatolian, and Syrian seals and on Babylonian seals, is that this element originated in Babylonia.⁵ Indeed, there were a few Old Babylonian seals with this motif impressed on Kültepe tablets where the

motifs could have belonged to the original seal (e.g. Kt n/k 1814A; CS 548; Özgüç 2006, pl. 195). However, it is visible in most instances that these elements had been added later when the Old Babylonian or Ur III seal was recut in Kültepe, see e.g. Fig. 3.1c. Another example is CS 560 (Kt n/k 1818), a recut Old Babylonian seal which was used by the Assyrian Aššur-idī, son of Amur-Aššur (Özgüç 2006, 182, pl. 48). But is this pair of enigmatic objects just another motif which was taken over by Assyrian, Anatolian, and Syrian seal-

⁵ The appearance of 'ball-staff' and 'pot' on Mesopotamian seals is considered one of the surest indications that a seal with an introduction or presentation scene dates to the Isin-Larsa and not to the

Ur III period. Nevertheless, the occurrence on Isin-Larsa seals is much rarer than on seals from Kültepe.



Figure 3.2a: Impression of Assyrian style seal Ktn/k 1949. CS 806. Özgüç 2006, pl. 82.



Figure 3.2c: Impression of Assyrian style cylinder seal, Ktn/k 1966B. CS 822. Özgüç 2006, pl. 84.



Figure 3.2b: Impression of seal of Puzur-Ištar, son of Šu-Anum, the steward, Ktn/k 1811B, 1961–2009. Özgüç 2006, pl. 46.



Figure 3.2d: Impression of Assyrian style seal in two registers, Ktn/k 1793A. CS 518. Özgüç 2006, pl. 42.

cutters from Babylonian prototypes? Isin-Larsa and Old Babylonian seal impressions originating from the Diyala region, Sippar, Larsa, Isin, and Ur show the motif, but not very frequently.⁶ On Ur III period seals the motif was usually not depicted⁷ (for Akkadian seals see below).

Many Assyrian style seals depict the ‘ball-staff’ and ‘pot’. On some seals the motif occurs several times, between each worshipper and the supreme figure, thus emphasizing the importance of the objects (Fig. 3.2a). Another Assyrian style seal depicts ball-staff and pot between the supreme figure and the inscription case, thus emphasizing the close connection of the central figure and the two

objects (Ktn/k 1718*, 2056; CS 79, Özgüç 2006, 318, pl. 20). This seal is property of the famous Ušur-ša-Ištar, son of Aššur-imittī, whose house delivered the large archive of which the sealings were published by Nimet Özgüç in 2006. The seal CS 545 (Fig. 3.2b) belonged to Puzur-Ištar, son of Šu-Anum, the steward (nu-bandā) overseer and was used by his brother Buziya, son of Šu-Anum (Özgüç 2006, 176). It is interesting to note that possibly the steward himself — holding a position of high authority⁸ — and his father or brother are depicted, both framing the adoration scene. The fact that ball-staff and pot are directly placed in front of one of them, possibly the steward, could indicate the relevance of these objects for his profession.

On some Assyrian style seals the ‘ball-staff’ and ‘pot’ are depicted in direct connection with the peculiar bull-altar with the cone on his back, placed exactly below or in front of him (Figs 3.2c, 3.2d). This bull-altar, frequently depicted on Assyrian and Anatolian style seals, can be interpreted today — following the suggestion by Agnete Lassen (2017)

6 Only a single Isin-Larsa period seal impression out of 112 ones from Isin, Larsa, and Ur collected by Blocher (1992a, 54, dated to year Sumu-el 14) shows the ball-staff. Contemporary seal impressions from Sippar show the ball-staff and pot more frequently (Blocher 1992b, 131–32); nevertheless, the percentage of 10 per cent (twenty out of approximately two hundred impressions which are reasonably well preserved) is considerably lower than on Kül-tepe seal impressions.

7 The motifs are found on only two Ur III seals from the very large Umma corpus comprising several thousand seal impressions: Mayr 2005, 73, fig. 47; 384, no. 834C; 444, no. 1081A.

8 Cécile Michel informs me that the nu-bandā, written as logogram, usually worked for the city hall and held a post of authority, in a rank perhaps just below the eponym.





Figure 3.3a: Impression of Anatolian style cylinder seal, Ktd/k 13A, v/k 150B. CS 270. Özgüç 2006, pl. 4.



Figure 3.3b: Impression of Anatolian style seal, Ktn/k 1786E. CS 502. Özgüç 2006, pl. 40.

— as the supreme Assyrian god Aššur. The position of the objects in the scenes' focal point and next to the bull-altar shows that they were of highest relevance and were visibly placed under the protection of the god Aššur.

Ball-staff and pot on Anatolian style seals are often depicted in the centre of the scene, placed in front of the enthroned supreme authority (Fig. 3.3a) or in front of the bull-altar (Fig. 3.3b). Several Anatolian style seals show a small worshipper next to ball-staff and pot directly in front of the bull-altar, while more of these objects were depicted in front of other, larger worshippers (e.g. Fig. 3.3b).⁹ These seals show that the emblem of the god Aššur was deliberately placed in close connection with these enigmatic objects. It is clear that these objects were of major importance also for the owner of Anatolian style seals. Even a seal of purely Anatolian iconography, certainly not originating from Kaneš but from a trade station somewhere else in Anatolia, depicts the ball-staff with a loop handle between the supreme authority and the loaded altar in front of him (Özgüç 2006, pl. 34, CS 453).

9 A similar seal showing one small and two large worshippers worshipping the bull-altar with a ball-staff in front of each, is Ktd/k 32A, g/k 1E; Özgüç 2006, 82, Lev. 11, pl. CS 310.



Figure 3.4a: Impression of Syro-Cappadocian style cylinder seal, Ktn/k 1837B, 1898A. CS 609. Özgüç 2006, pl. 55.



Figure 3.4b: Impression of Syro-Cappadocian style cylinder seal, Ktn/k 1911A. CS 744. Özgüç 2006, pl. 73.

Ball-staff and pot appear also on Syrian style and Syro-Cappadocian seals. On these seals they are most frequently placed directly in the centre of the scene between the supreme authority and the first worshipper (Figs 3.4a, 3.4b). The Syro-Cappadocian and Syrian seals are specifically inventive as concerns the position of the ball-staff: it can be depicted horizontally in front of the main god, floating over his lap, with the globular protrusion either turned up or down;¹⁰ sometimes it is depicted lying on the altar in front of the supreme authority (see Fig. 3.1a),¹¹ or is depicted above the hand of the seated figure (Özgüç 2006, CS 308).

The quantitative distribution of these motifs on seals of the different style groups which is presented here certainly needs to be revised in future, since it is based on the seal impressions which have been published to date — clearly only a part of what has been brought to light so far. Nevertheless, the relations may be relatively reliable since the study is based on a fair number of impressions (Figs 3.5, 3.6).

10 e.g. Özgüç 2006, CS 390, 744, 608.

11 See also Özgüç 2006, pl. 55, CS 608.

Ball-staff on Karum Kanish II Seals (Teissier 1994)

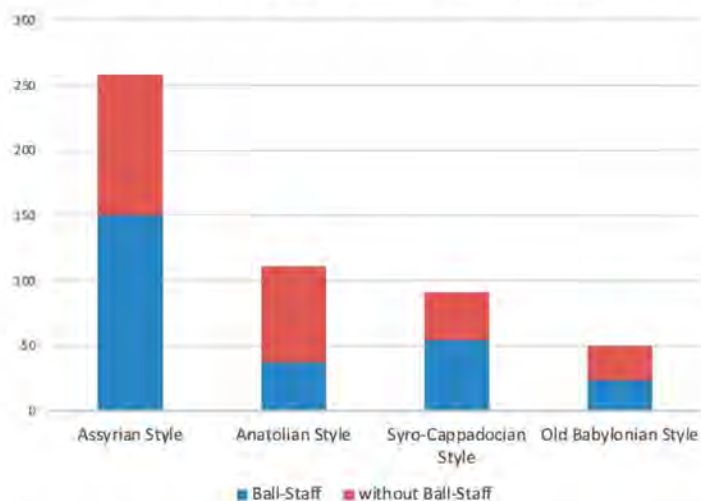


Figure 3.5: Number of depictions of the ball-staff on seal impressions from Karum Kaneš II, collected by Teissier 1994.

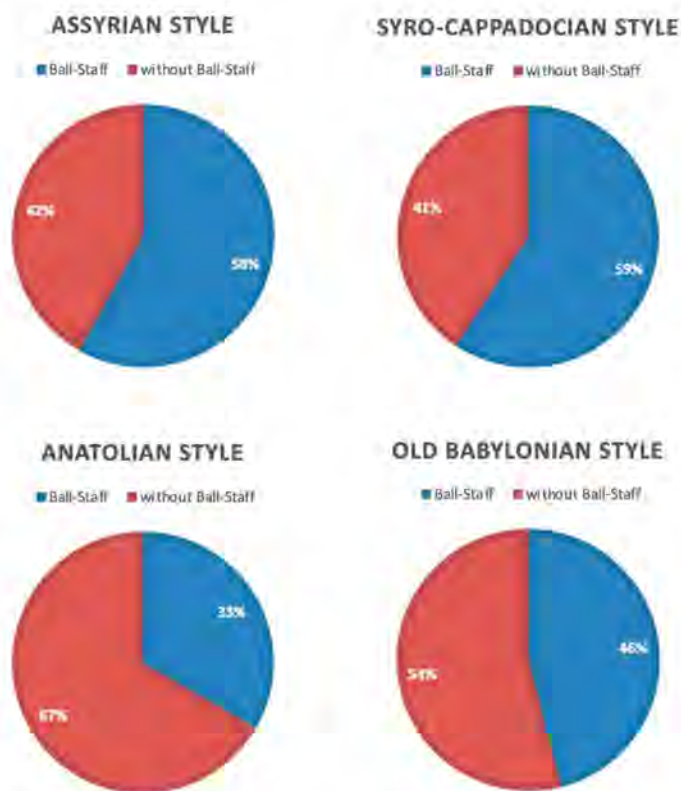


Figure 3.6: Percentage of depictions of the ball-staff on seals of various styles.

In total, if we count only the depictions of the ball-staff on the 677 seal impressions on Lower Town Kaneš level II texts, which Beatrice Teissier collected in 1994, we see that the motif is extremely frequent and occurs on approximately 50 per cent of the seals (Fig. 3.5).

The majority of the Assyrian style seals, i.e. 58 per cent show this motif (Fig. 3.6).¹² Twenty-nine of these seals show it in front of the seated figure, eleven behind the seated figure, three in front of the bull-altar, the remaining show it between the worshipper and the goddess. On many Assyrian seals, the ball-staff and the pot are the only 'filling motifs'.

This number is approximately the same or even slightly higher on Syrian and Syro-Cappadocian seals where the ball-staff appears on 59 per cent of them (Fig. 3.6).¹³ Of these, three show the ball-staff behind and twenty-seven in front of the seated figure.

The percentage on Anatolian style seals is lower, but still a third of those seals shows this motif.¹⁴ Seventeen of these seals show it in front of the seated figure, two behind the seated figure. Four show it in front of the bull-altar of which two seals show the ball-staff before both the seated figure and the bull-altar.

The occurrence of the ball-staff on 46 per cent of the Old Babylonian seals seems quite high at first glance; however, a careful consideration shows that most of the motifs had been added when the seals were recut in Anatolia or Assyria.¹⁵ Four of these seals show the ball-staff in front of the seated figure, two behind the seated figure.

The Identity of 'Ball-Staff' and 'Pot': New Clues from the Seals from Kaneš

Let us come back to the crucial and often discussed question: What are these objects, what do they stand for? The Syrian and Anatolian seals, which are much more elaborate and detailed in their depictions than Babylonian seals, can possibly provide the clue to this enigma.

Since the ball-staff is sometimes depicted placed horizontally on top of an altar, some scholars interpreted it as a balance (see lastly Müller-Karpe 2021). Seals like

12 The catalogue of Teissier 1994 lists 282 Assyrian style seal impressions in total. Twenty-four are too fragmentary. Of the remaining 258 seal impressions, 150 show the ball-staff = 58 per cent.

13 Teissier 1994 lists 102 Syrian and Syro-Cappadocian style seal impressions. Eleven are too fragmentary. Of the remaining ninety-one seal impressions, fifty-four show the ball-staff = 59 per cent.

14 Teissier 1994 lists 137 Anatolian style seal impressions. Twenty-six are too fragmentary. Of the remaining 111 seal impressions, thirty-seven show the ball-staff = 33 per cent.

15 Teissier 1994 lists sixty-three Old Babylonian style seal impressions. Thirteen are too fragmentary. Of the remaining fifty, twenty-three show the ball-staff. Most of them seem to be recut, but only the study of the original or the photo will make it possible to distinguish in every case between an original ball-staff or one added later.

Figure 3.1a show a central protrusion and thickened ends. They are interpreted as a balance beam with a central loop for hanging it and attachments for the pans.

However, the Kaneš archives have provided the image of one of the finest Old Syrian seals which clearly shows that the ball-staff cannot be a balance (Fig. 3.7). This delicately carved seal must have originated in a north Syrian town and belongs to a group of seals which has been attributed to the Syrian Šakkanakku rulers of the first two centuries of the second millennium (Teissier 1993). Two scenes are depicted, one shows the Syrian Šakkanakku king pouring a libation to the rain goddess, and the second scene illustrates — in an exceptionally elaborate manner — the process of weighing by the supreme authority. The seated supreme authority wearing the royal broad rim cap and a flounced garment is holding with his right hand a balance. This consists of two balance-pans being attached with three strings each from the ends of a balance beam — the most detailed depiction of weighing which has been reported so far from the second millennium.

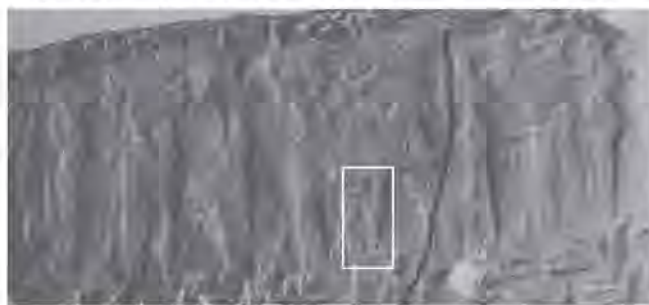
However, the interest of this seal goes much further. A small worshipper is standing below the balance act. He is holding in one hand the pot, and the ball-staff is hanging down from the wrist of his other hand. If the ball-staff was a balance, it would not have been depicted in the same scene in two completely different ways.

Another question arises from the depicted scene: Why is this small man equipped with ball-staff and pot depicted directly below the weighing procedure and not somewhere else between the three large figures of the audience scene? This certainly had a meaning in a carefully designed seal image like this, and I will argue in the following that the balance, the pot, and the ball-staff are objects closely related to each other.

Additional arguments against the identification of the ball-staff as a balance is the fact that the object never shows balance-pans at the two ends, that it is nearly always depicted vertically, and that one loop for hanging is frequently seen at one end, but never at both ends.

The depiction of a man carrying ball-staff and pot is not unique on the Syrian seal (Fig. 3.7), but occurs on several other seals of Syrian, Syro-Cappadocian, and Anatolian style. There are several seals where the mortal or the divine worshipper approaching the supreme authority is holding the ball-staff in his hands (Teissier 1994, nos 521, 522, 523). Other Syrian style seals depict a worshipper holding both ball-staff and pot in his hands and standing in front of the supreme authority (Teissier 1994, no. 472).

Figure 3.7: Impression of Old Syrian (Šakkanakku style) seal.



3.7a: Özgüç 2006, pl. 263, CS 767.



3.7b: Teissier 1994, no. 533.

The Syrian style seal impression Kt n/k 1861C (Fig. 3.8a) shows again a small man holding the pot in the right hand and the ball-staff in the left hand standing immediately in front of the supreme authority, who is in this case a bearded god associated with birds.

The Anatolian style seal Kt c/k 1636A (Fig. 3.8b) shows two worshippers approaching the bull-altar. The first one is raising both hands in adoration, the second one is holding the pot in his right hand, the ball-staff is hanging down the wrist of his left hand, suspended by a cord.

A seal cut in a different Anatolian style which is characterized by tall and slender, finely cut figures, depicts two worshippers advancing towards the seated supreme authority in front of which stands a table loaded with bread and meat. The first worshipper is raising both hands, the second holds a large, globular 'pot' in his left hand. Hanging down from the wrist of his same hand is a ball-staff, attached with the help of a leash or loop (Fig. 3.8c). A very similar seal, probably cut by the same artist, depicts a similar scene and shows even better how the hanging ball-staff was suspended at his wrist.¹⁶

The Anatolian style seal in the Louvre¹⁷ (Fig. 3.8d) shows again two worshippers approaching the bull-

16 Ktb/k 305a. Özgüç 1965, 84, pl. XXV:75a.

17 Bought in 1911, primary publication by Delaporte 1923, 188–89, pl. 94:25 (A.871; AO 4796).

Figure 3.8: Worshippers carrying 'ball-staff' and 'pot' on Syrian and Anatolian seals.



3.8a: Kt n/k 1861C. Özgüç 2006, CS 662.



3.8b: Kt c/k 1636A. Özgüç 2006, CS 345.



3.8c: Kt n/k 1865B, Özgüç 2006, CS 668, drawing and photo.

3.8d: Anatolian style cylinder seal in the Louvre, AO 4796
(<https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010165593>
[accessed 1 July 2022]).3.8e: Syrian style haematite seal in Fribourg, Institut Biblique,
ex-Schmidt Collection. Collon 1987, 42, no. 139.

altar, the first one raising his hands in adoration and the second one presenting the 'pot' in his left hand and firmly holding the 'ball-staff' in his right hand. The slaughtering of a bull accompanying the scene underlines the ritual act and the seal owner's concern for the divine protection of the presented objects.

The Syrian style cylinder seal (Fig. 3.8e) shows, besides a second scene with divine protagonists, two human figures approaching the supreme authority. In this case the large bearded worshipper is carrying the 'ball-staff' in his left hand, while the small worshipper in front of him is carrying a small 'pot' in his left hand and a staff in his right hand.

These are just a few examples of numerous Syrian and Anatolian seals showing worshippers carrying 'ball-staff' and 'pot' towards the supreme authority. One of the worshippers is depicted larger than the other on some seals, but the meaning of this eludes us. However, it is evident that both elements are real, stable objects which can be held in both hands and which are presented by humans to the supreme authorities for a certain purpose.

A fascinating seal impression was recently published in an excellent photo by Cécile Michel (2020a, 192) (Fig. 3.9) which allows to recognize more details than an earlier



photo.¹⁸ The Anatolian style seal depicts a worshipper holding a staff-like object in his hand, followed by a suppliant goddess, approaching a seated god. The 'ball-staff' and 'pot' are rendered below the raised hand of the god. The 'pot' shows horizontal lines around its neck, which can in all probability be interpreted as cords strung around the neck of the object (for a similar depiction e.g. Fig. 3.1b).

The figure which is of prime interest for this research is the bearded god standing on a bull and holding it on a leash attached to a nose-ring. He is holding a saw in his right hand. In front and above his hands is a rectangular case which contains three objects: a 'ball-staff', a 'pot' with cords strung around its neck, and another elongated object with horizontal striations (Fig. 3.9b).

The god on the bull, holding the saw, and the case with these enigmatic objects, are clearly a coherent unit. But who is this god and what is the case? In Mesopotamia, the saw was associated with the Mesopotamian Sun God and god of justice since the Akkadian period. Among the Kültepe seal impressions there are several Syrian and Babylonian ones depicting the Sun God with his saw associated with ball-staff and pot.¹⁹ But the bull was associated in Anatolia with weather gods and with the god Aššur. The meaning of the saw has been often debated, but most probably it expressed the act of decision and the sphere of jurisdiction.²⁰ Therefore, whatever god is depicted here, he was associated with justice, and it is reasonable to assume that the 'tool kit' in front of him was part of his seminal equipment. If this explanation seems too simple at first sight, we must take into account that Anatolian and Syrian seal imagery is much more narrative and explicit than the highly condensed and symbolic Babylonian imagery.

Hints for the Interpretation of the 'Ball-Staff'

The seal of Erum, the merchant, gives further hints (Fig. 3.10). It shows the supreme authority weighing silver on a balance. The first god with a saw in his hand, probably the god associated with justice, is standing in front of this weighing procedure, thus indicating his concern with the correctness of this economic proce-



Figure 3.9a: Seal impression on envelope Kt 93/k379. Michel 2020a, 192, fig. 10.2; photo courtesy C. Michel / Kültepe Archaeological Mission.



Figure 3.9b: Sketch of the detail of the god with saw and the case containing ball-staff, pot, and another object. A. Otto / M. Lerchl.

18 The seal was also impressed on Kt n/k 1847A and published by Özgüç 2006 as CS 631, but the photo on pl. 224 cuts the upper edge and the drawing omits this important detail.

19 Seal impression on a bulla, Kt 86/k 158: Özgüç & Tunca 2001, 210, pl. 90, CS 136. Özgüç thinks that ball-staff and pot were recut, but the style seems very similar and could be original. A seal that was definitely recut with an elaborate depiction of the enthroned Sun God is CS 644 (Özgüç 2006, pl. 60).

20 For the saw as judicial tool see Woods 2009, 218.

dure. Behind him, another deity is introducing a worshipper who is holding the 'ball-staff' in his right hand.

It is certainly not by chance, that merchant Erum stressed his concern about the correctness and the righteousness of metrological procedures in economic transactions in this very elaborate way, since this is the heart of any successful economic system. The Assyrian trade and the connected financial affairs meant in the first place: counting, weighing, and measuring goods; paying (i.e. weighing silver), guaranteeing and checking (i.e. writing and sealing) (Veenhof 1999). This seal is another hint for the meaning of the 'ball-staff': it must be somehow related to the concept of righteousness and justice.



Figure 3.10: Seal impression of Erum, the merchant. Teissier 1994, no. 532.

These detailed renderings of weighing on two Kültepe seal impressions are remarkable (Figs 3.7, 3.10), since this type of economic action was extremely rarely depicted in every period and in any kind of imagery. It can only be explained by the fact that the merchants of Kaneš were so very much concerned about the correctness of the financial transactions that they had their concern expressed in their seals' imagery.

Weighing metal on a handheld balance with the help of weight stones originated in the Near East in the late fourth millennium and spread throughout the Old World in the Bronze Age (Rahmstorf & Stratford 2019; Hafford 2019). Unfortunately, too few weight stones have been identified in the archaeological record because not every weight had the sphendonoid or conical shape which is considered typical for Near Eastern weight stones (Peyronel 2019). One of the earliest depictions of the act of weighing with a handheld balance can be found on an Akkadian cylinder seal (Fig. 3.11a). The scene shows two bearded men approaching the seated Sun God and god of justice Šamaš, characterized by the sun-rays and the saw in his right hand. One of the two men is holding a balance above the altar in front of the Sun God, with the

other hand he is holding a staff. The man behind him is carrying a kid and raising one hand in adoration.

Not only the handheld balance, but also the 'ball-staff' was depicted for the first time on Akkadian cylinder seals, although not frequently. On this seal from the art market (Fig. 3.11b), the worshipper carrying a kid is introduced by a deity to the Sun God, in front of which the ball-staff is placed vertically. Clearly the object is deliberately associated with the god of justice already on this early representation. A very similar seal (Fig. 3.11c) is said to have been found at Kültepe and was purchased by the Kayseri Museum (Öztürk 2019, seal 6). The lapis lazuli seal may have belonged to a Mesopotamian merchant who was actively involved in the trade with Anatolia already in the late third millennium. It also shows the introduction of a kid-carrying worshipper to the ascending Sun God with the saw in hand. The ball-staff is this time depicted between the worshipper and the introducing goddess, but again it is related somehow to the god of justice. In fact, the first depictions of the ball-staff in the Akkadian period are always connected with the Sun God.

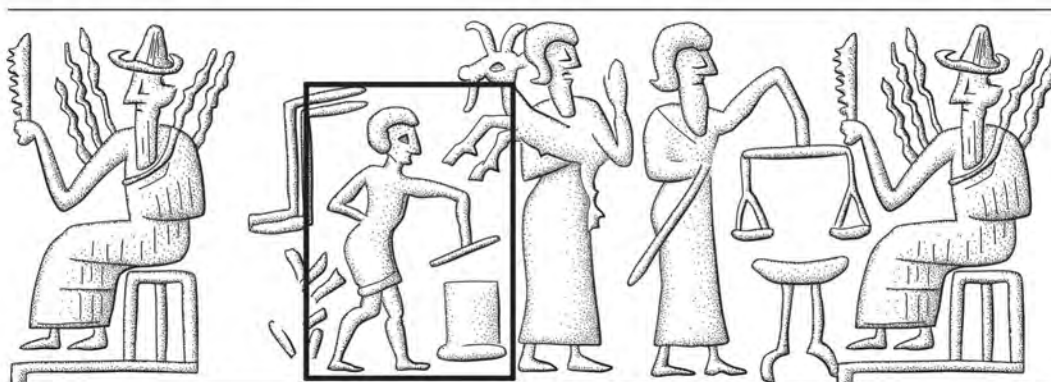
But let us come back to the fascinating and so far unique seal Figure 3.11a. The scene shows as the fourth person another man, depicted much smaller, behind the two larger men. He is bent forward and seems to take a step forward, in this way expressing his involvement in the action. But what is he doing? He is holding a staff-like instrument and is busily working with it above a cylindrical vessel. This scene has not been understood so far, but we will propose in the following a new interpretation.

Similar cylindrical vessels appear on Akkadian seals in direct relation to the harvesting of grain and the grain measuring procedure (Fig. 3.11d): a female grain goddess (possibly Nisaba) sitting on top of a grain heap is approached by a god carrying a plough and two male gods, characterized by ears of grain sprouting from their shoulders; they carry on a barrow a large cylindrical vessel which must be understood as the measuring vessel for grain. A slightly earlier seal (Fig. 3.11e) shows a similar vessel involved in the elaborately illustrated grain measuring procedure: two individuals measure together grain from a large heap between them, other people are bringing more grain in containers which they are carrying on their heads (Amiet 1972, 80, pl. 196c).

Therefore, we can assume that the cylindrical vessel was used for measuring grain. There have been no archaeological remains of those capacity measuring vessels because they were made of organic substances. However, they are well known from countless texts, which mention the *sūtu* or the *bariga* in use, the cor-



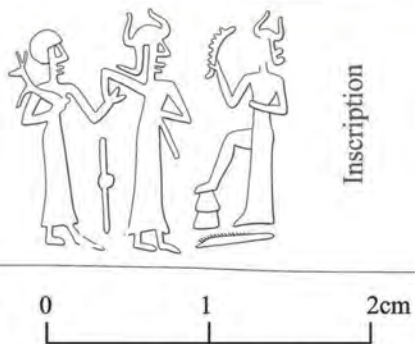
Figure 3.11: Akkadian/Post-Akkadian cylinder seals.



3.11a: Seal depicting weighing and measuring. Drawing A. Otto & M. Lerchl after Boehmer 1965, no. 1105, fig. 458.



3.11b: One of the first depictions of the ball-staff: introduction scene to Shamash. Porada 1948, no. 254.

3.11d: Seal depicting grain deities carrying the capacity measuring vessel towards the grain goddess. Collon 1987/2005², no. 106.

3.11c: Lapis lazuli seal Kt 82 t. 224. Öztürk 2019, fig. 7.



3.11e: ED III-early Akkadian cylinder seal depicting the grain measuring procedure. Amiet 1972, pl. 196c.

rectness of which was frequently guaranteed by civil authorities such as the palace, the city house, or the market overseer, or by deities, e.g. 'the *bariga* of (the Sun God) Šamaš' (Veenhof 1985).²¹ The capacity measures which were in use in Syria at that time have also been studied in detail (Chambon 2011), the capacity measures from Ur III Mesopotamia by Sallaberger (2022).

In Anatolia, the Assyrian merchants were dependent on the regular supply of the staple food barley, from which their main diet, bread and beer, was produced. Grain, especially barley and wheat, was traded by Assyrians and Anatolians (Veenhof 2008, 87–88). But grain also had another meaning in Kültepe: the merchants' payment terms were designated after the agricultural year with a special focus on grain, from the ploughing of the fields until the growing, harvesting, and threshing (Veenhof 2008, 238–45). Wheat and barley were the most frequently mentioned foodstuffs, and in addition to their consumption in large quantities as the staple foods, they also functioned as capital in payments, interest in loans, and object of debts (Atici 2014, 238; Dercksen 2008). The 'chief of the barley' (*rabi še'ē*) was among the high-ranking officials at Kaneš (e.g. Dercksen 2004, 166–67) and even a *limum ša še'im* is attested (Veenhof 2008, 88).

But what was the small man on Figure 3.11a doing with the staff on top of the grain measuring container? Grain was measured in Europe until the nineteenth century AD in a wooden cylindrical measuring container, and was either heaped, or smoothed flat with a strickle, consisting of an elongated tool of hard wood with a handle in the middle. A cord was added on one side, which served as an easy means of suspension when the tool was out of use.²²

This method was apparently also used in the Near East. As J. N. Postgate shows in a recent article (Postgate 2023), Old Babylonian and Middle Assyrian texts indicate that measuring grain needed a measuring container and the implement *mešēqum*, known in English as a strickle, with which the grain was smoothed flat, level with the rim.²³ The texts mention a thick (*kabrum*), medium (*birūyūm*), or thin (*raqqum*) strickle which refers to the size of the wooden tool.²⁴ There were actually different ways of filling a grain container: either the grain was horizontally

flush with the rim, or it was heaped up to a conical mound, which explains the differences in measuring procedures.



Figure 3.12: A strickle from the eighteenth century AD in use
<https://fdmf.fr/les-mesures-a-grains-du-xviiieme-siècle>
 [accessed 1 July 2022].

Egyptian measuring vessels in the Old and Middle Kingdom (i.e. the third and early second millennium) are known from depictions, models of granaries and original measuring vessels (Pommerening 2005). These cylindrical vessels were usually made from wood or leather. Capacity measuring vessels were made from stone only if they were kept in temples as reference vessels, e.g. the stone measuring vessel with inscription of Thutmosis III from the Karnak temple.²⁵

In the Roman economy, the measuring container (*modius*) and the strickle (*rutellum*) were important tools for measuring capacities. Numerous depictions — the one illustrated here covering the floor in the 'hall of the grain measurers' in Ostia — show a man with a staff (strickle) in one hand working on the capacity container (Fig. 3.13).



Figure 3.13: Mosaic from the Aula dei Mensores in Ostia, AD 230.
 Berg 2020, 85, fig. 4.

21 For more details, see Chambon & Otto 2023.

22 I owe this idea to Grégory Chambon with whom I have been working on metrological issues for a long time. The results have been published recently, see Chambon & Otto 2023.

23 For the Old Babylonian texts see Wilcke (1983, 55–56) who translates it as 'Glattstreich-Holz'.

24 For the discussion see Postgate 2016 following Veenhof 1985.



25 Volume 1 oipe = 19.2 litres. Pommerening 2005, 363–64, M09.

This depiction on the Akkadian seal (Fig. 3.11a) is to our knowledge unique in showing the act of weighing with a small handheld scale and the filling and levelling of a measuring container. Because scenes on cylinder seals from the third millennium sometimes have clear allusions to the task or profession of the seal owner, we may assume that this seal (unfortunately without provenance) belonged to a merchant or to a weighing office which was either associated with a temple of the Sun God or made allusion to the guarantee of the procedures by the Sun God. In any case, this seal shows in a very explicit way the Sun God's role as the protector of weighing and measuring.

To sum up: there is ample evidence that the 'ball-staff' was an instrument like the staff called a strickle today which was used to smooth the contents in capacity measuring vessels. The capacity units at Kaneš are well known (Michel 2020b, 43 with further literature), and also the method of measuring with measuring pots *karpatum* (Dercksen 2021, 333), and certainly a designation similar for *mešēqum* will be found in the Kültepe texts in future.

The Interpretation of the 'Pot'

In Babylonia, weighed and sealed silver (*kaspum kankum*) was the obvious early currency the weight and quality of which had been checked and guaranteed by the relevant authorities (Marti & Chambon 2019, 59). Evidently, the silver itself was not sealed (this was invented later, in the first millennium, in the form of minted coins), but silver pieces were stored in little pots, when deposited, and in sacks, when transported. The silver sack was closed with a cord, then weighed on a balance, and clay labels or clay were attached to the knot of the cord closing the sack. These clay pieces were then impressed with seals, and this was described as *kīsum qadum kunukkiša*.²⁶ There is one archaeological proof for it: an Old Babylonian clay pot filled with scrap silver and gold, sets of weight stones, and sealed sack closures, which was found in the Ebabbar of Larsa (Fig. 3.14a) (Arnaud et al. 1979). It contained the equipment of the office for weights and measures (*bit kittim*) which was housed in the temple of the Sun God (Charpin 2017). Every leather sack had contained a few shekels of silver the amount of which was written on the clay sealing which had been sealed by the responsible weighing officer. We propose that the sacks would have looked like the reconstruction on Figure 3.14b.

In the Assyrian trading colonies in Anatolia the controlling institutions were different ones, but clearly they existed. Silver is mentioned as 'refined' (*šarrupum*), 'good' (*dammūqum*), 'checked' (*ammurum*), or in various other forms; possibly the checking meant the establishment of the correct weight which seems at least in some instances to have been checked by the 'House of the Market'; possibly also 'marked, verified' (*uddu*) silver designates silver which had been controlled by the local trade office at the Karum; Dercksen (2021, 334–35) summarized: 'It is never stated who marked or verified the silver, but it is possible that this was done on behalf of the local Office of the Colony.' Silver and gold could be packed in packets (*nēpišum*) containing between 10 and 20 mina or 'bundles' (*riksum*) containing between 1 shekel and 1 mina, to which sealed clay tags were attached (Dercksen 2021, 335). Jars containing hacksilver were excavated in contemporary levels at Acemhöyük (Öztan 1997).²⁷

If we compare the visual appearance of the sacks filled with silver with the depictions of the 'pot' on Kültepe seals, we can see striking similarities. The horizontal striations around the very narrow neck and the serrated upper end (Figs 3.14c, 3.14d) can be much better explained if we assume that a sack was depicted rather than a pot. The objects contained in the sack, i.e. the numerous, often angular pieces of hacksilver, could have caused the uneven, wavy outline of the sack on some seal images, which led to the not infrequent interpretation of the 'pot' as a serrated 'comb'.

Sacks containing silver, i.e. money purses, were the subject of many letters from Kaneš. One letter (Kt 01/k 219) mentions that someone's purse or sack of silver (obv. 4: *ki-sí-i*) was stolen in the palace (Günbattı 2014, 101–04). However, there are more possible identifications for the sack depicted on the seals. The term 'leather bag' (*naruqqum*) in fact meant a long-term joint-stock capital — one of the innovations of the bankers and traders at Kaneš (Dercksen 2022, 85–86). Some of these 'bags' are reported to have contained up to 30 pounds of gold, the equivalent of 120 pounds of silver. Silver was not only a crucial commodity but also the central currency of Old Assyrian trade (Veenhof 1999). Dercksen (2022, 88–89) calculated that 600 kg on average was shipped to Aššur every year and that about 1000 kg silver was yielded through the sale of tin and

²⁷ Marked moulds for producing metal ingots and nipples for easier division of such ingots were found in Kültepe and other Anatolian sites, Müller-Karpe 1994, 138–41.



Figure 3.14a: Larsean pot containing scrap silver, weight stones, and sealed closures of sacks. Arnaud et al. 1979, fig. 5.

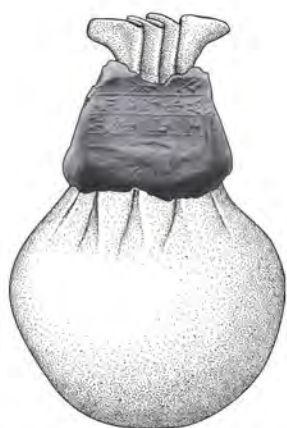


Figure 3.14b: Tentative reconstruction of a 'sack of sealed silver'. Closure: Arnaud et al. 1979, pl. 1,2; reconstruction by A. Otto / M. Lerchl.

textiles, which underlines the fundamental importance of silver for these trading communities.

Taking all the evidence together, we are inclined to interpret the 'pot'-like element so frequently depicted on the Kültepe seals as a silver sack or purse.

The Kültepe Merchants' Concern for Legal Regulations Expressed in Seals

Law and justice were the backbone of the Assyro-Anatolian trading system and the century-long success of the merchants' community at Kaneš with a sophisticated administrative and economic structure



Figure 3.14c: The sack with horizontal striations and serrated upper end. Detail from Fig. 3.1b.



Figure 3.14d: Seal impression Kt n/k 1870B showing the sack closed with a cord in front of the supreme authority. Özgüç 2006, CS 679.

All commercial activities of the inhabitants of Kaneš such as credit and investment, securities, cooperation with the business partners, regulation of taxes and wages, and much more depended directly on the legal regulations and their control (Veenhof 2008, 93–96), as well as family legal affairs such as marriage, adoption, divorce, and inheritance (Michel 2020b), which were more complicated than in Babylonia due to the considerable distances between the parties involved. Countless texts from Kültepe dealing with all aspects of legal affairs have been reported and studied over the past decades.

The merchants' houses of the Lower Town contained many artefacts connected with economic transactions, the most stable ones being weight-stones of stone and metal. Fikri Kulakoğlu, who published many weight stones and scale-pans from Kültepe, recently stressed the importance of standardized units and their correctness for the inhabitants of Kaneš in these words:



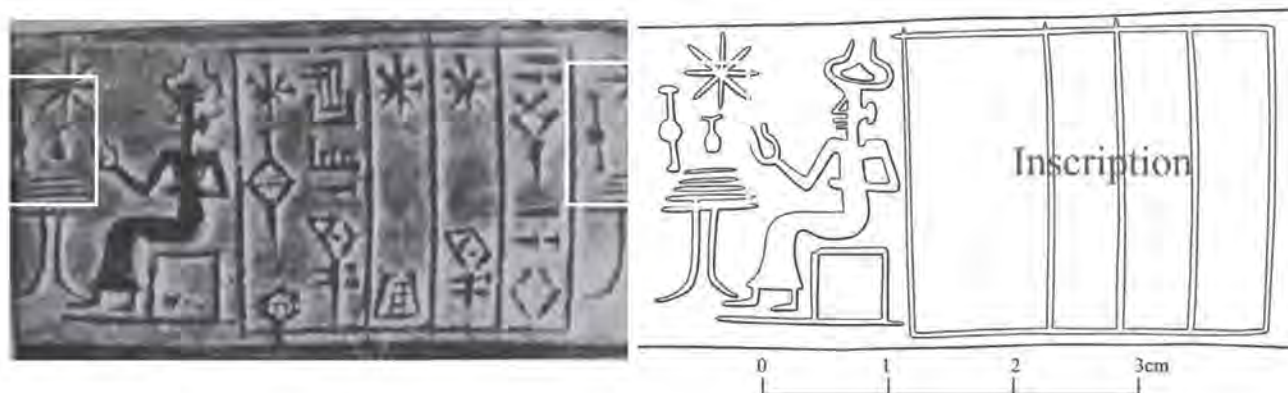


Figure 3.15: Lapis lazuli cylinder seal Kte/t 180 belonging to a high-ranking Assyrian officer. Öztürk 2019, fig. 5.

Artifacts and written documents provide important information about weighing procedures and the importance of standardized units in trade. Almost every tablet concerning business activities documents units of weight, which differed according to owner, institution, or region. The texts also indicate the existence of official standard weights in Anatolia as well as in Mesopotamia. (Kulakoğlu 2017, 341)

The currencies in use were metal, especially silver which was the general standard of value, but also gold, copper, and tin on the one hand and grain on the other hand (Dercksen 2021). The control of their mass and quality was of utmost importance for everyone.

The concern for law and justice — including on the social and on the commercial level — was expressed also in the seals of the people at Kaneš, Aššur, and other areas involved in the Assyro-Anatolian-Syrian trading system. Seals were foremost legal tools crucial in testifying the correctness of legal processes and written contracts. Sealed legal documents and closures of goods are the archaeological remains of these procedures.

However, the depiction of abstract concepts is a most difficult task for any artist. In Greek and Roman iconography there existed a whole set of symbols, attributes, and personifications which expressed positive abstract concepts of the society and its ruling class, e.g. for illustrating *pax*, *libertas*, *spes*, *virtus*, *securitas*, *concordia*, *justitia*, and many more (Hölscher 1967). Until today, the icon for justice or a law-court is the balance; but no one seems to have investigated how far back the origin of this motif might go.

In the Near East, rod and ring symbolize divine order and were depicted when a deity symbolically awarded it to a ruler (Wiggermann 2006–2008). This motif was also derived from a concrete set of simple instruments which were used to measure length. Rod and ring expressed —

not unlike ‘ball-staff’ and ‘pot’ — the humans’ concern for divine protection of the correctness of juridical and economic procedures.

The ultimate guarantee for the righteousness of trade and exchange was only possible with the support of the supreme authorities in the divine sphere. This explains why the strickle and the purse, the symbols for law and justice, became such extremely important motifs on seals within this trade-centred community, and why they were often prominently depicted in front of the supreme authority, or more precisely under its direct protection.

Most remarkable in this respect is a lapis lazuli cylinder seal found in a late third-millennium context on the Kültepe mound (Öztürk 2019, fig. 5). The image is outstanding (Fig. 3.15): only an enthroned god and his most essential tools or symbols — strickle and purse — are depicted above an altar and below a star. The name of the seal owner, designated as ‘the beloved of (the city of) Aššur’²⁸ must have been a high-ranking Assyrian officer on duty in Kaneš in order to monitor compliance with law and order.

Conclusions

Legal certainty has been the basis of most functioning societies. In Near Eastern societies of the Bronze Age, texts on the one hand and depictions in various pictorial media on the other hand emphasize the role metrology played with respect to the ancient concepts of law, justice, and righteousness. Since every economically active person at ancient Kaneš owned at least one cylinder or stamp seal in order to sign and validate written docu-

28 ‘Abu-ahī, Adad is his god, beloved of / who loves (the city of) Aššur’, Schwemer 2001, 238.

ments and letters and the closures of goods and doors, it is not too far-fetched to claim that the concern for justice may also have entered the imagery of their seals.

We suggest to identify the ‘ball-staff’ with the strickle which was an essential tool in capacity measuring procedures, and the ‘pot’ with the purse or sack containing silver. Gradually these motifs, which were initially depicted as actively used tools and commodities, developed into abstract symbols of law and justice. More than 50 per cent of the seal images known from Kaneš so far contain these symbols, most frequently depicted under direct protection of the supreme authority or in close connection with a worshipper, i.e. with the seal owner who perpetuated his concern for legal processes in these little symbols.

These pictorial motifs — for the first time attested in the Akkadian period in clear connection with Šamaš, god of justice — may have come to Assyria or to Kültepe via Syria already in the Anatolian Early Bronze Age, and were developed here further, depicted in lively actions on seals. An impressively high number of seals of all styles — Assyrian, Anatolian, Syrian, and even recut Old

Babylonian seals — show these symbols. They may have returned into the Babylonian imagery from Anatolia or Assyria in the Isin-Larsa period. But in Babylonia they never became equally important icons or symbols like in Assyria and Anatolia, where the lives of the vast majority of those people who used seals revolved around private trade, and where the plea for law and justice was therefore a major concern.

Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks are due to Professors Fikri Kulakoğlu, Cécile Michel, and Guido Kryszat for inviting me to participate at the 5th Kültepe International Meeting which was not only enriching in every respect but showed clearly the added value of interdisciplinary cooperation. My interest in Kültepe seal impressions goes back to the time when, writing my dissertation, I was fascinated by the endless ideas present in Old Syrian and Anatolian seals; my fascination has endured ever since, and I am glad that I can contribute here a token to this most meaningful art in miniature.



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