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Reflecting on the Thebes Treasure and its Kassite Findings The Glyptic Art and its Geo-Political Context and Distribution

Giacomo Maria Tabita¹ 

Abstract

Kassites were an Iranian ethnic group and lived in the Zagros Mountains. Although the origin of Kassites is not certain, many scholars, according to archaeological, linguistic studies, and ancient written sources, have tended to target the Zagros Mountains (it is probable Luristan province) as their original homeland. They ruled Babylonia almost continuously from 17/16th to c.1155 BC. The Elamites conquered Babylonia in the 12th BC. Individual Kassites occupied important positions in the kingdom of Babylonia and even Kardunias. In accordance with the history, archaeology, and art of the Kassites, significant studies have been conducted outside Iran and the results have been published in books and articles, but no appropriate research has been done in Iran during this period. The discovery of a Kassite group of seals in Greece probably indicates cultural-political exchanges in that region. This paper studies the Kassite seals reflecting on the so-called Thebes treasure (Greece) and its findings referred to the Kassite group of the Late Bronze Age. The research method is descriptive-analytical (content) which is based on library studies. Many questions are addressed in this research, but the main questions are consisting of 1- Why and how were the Near Eastern Seals imported to Thebes into an Aegean palatial centres? 2 - How were the chronology and the usage of the seals? 3 - Were they also intended to be used as raw material? 4 - Was it because they were considered to be simple jewellery or because of their amuletic character? The seals are coming from various regions (Mesopotamia, Syria, Hittite Anatolia, Cyprus) and perhaps preserved all together in a wooden box. The meaning of this collection is enforced because of the other precious objects found with the seals revealing how this treasure represents the most important finding of Kassite archeology outside the Mesopotamia and its strong impact on the Greek culture.

Keywords: Kassite; Luristan; Greece; Glyptic; Trade; Late Bronze Age.

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Introduction

The domination of the Iranian people on the Mesopotamia had a great influence on the Babylonia when the Kassites were rules in Babylonia for about five centuries. Although not many artifacts have survived from this period, many scholars have studied and identified this people with regard to the same artifacts, including the metalworking industry, cylinder seals, engravings and inscriptions on the kudurru. Seals were produced from the first years of their rule and it contain valuable information about the social, religious and political environment of their society. Although Kassite archaeological finds and evidence are scarce in Mesopotamia (especially Nuzi and Nippur), a significant number of seals have been found outside Mesopotamia, in some remote areas such as which indicates international relations in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, providing a global Mediterranean-Middle East with exchanges and sharing of cultural and artistic elements: in Malta, in Greece (Mayer, 2011: 141-153; Mayer, 1983: 65-132), in Lorestan at Sorkh-dom (Schmidt, *et al.* 1989: n.34), in Metsamur (Khanzadyan and Piotrovskii, 1984: 59-65) in Armenia, in Hasanlu (Marcus, 1991: 549-551) and in Elam at Chogha Zabil (Porada, 1970). Accordingly, in this research, firstly the origin of the Kassites, and then the reflection on the Thebes treasure in Greece and its Kassite findings of several cylinder seals are introduced in this paper. So, the chronology and use of seals will be examined also considering the archaeological finding context, its iconography and the stylistics elements. Many scholars have studied the Kassite archaeology, history, and art, but so far, no significant research has been done by Iranian scholars on the Kassite cylinder seals dated from the late Bronze Age to the early Iron Age period.

The aim of this article is to examine this production abroad of Mesopotamia to understand the use and chronology of this artefacts, trying also to identify the cultural influences of neighbouring regions and to underline its international relations.

Kassite seals are divided into four styles (Tabita, 2021). The most ancient cylinder seals (first style, XVI-XV century BC) are placed in the tradition of the late Paleo-Babylonian glyptic of the XVII century BC. There is also another corpus of Kassite seals carved according to a style of Elamite influence, already defined as “pseudo-Kassite” (Porada, 1970) because it was first identified in south western Iran rather than in Babylon, similar to that of the first style, from which it seems to derive. These seals are engraved in a more schematic style with a lower quality of execution with the use of the drill; also the lower quality of the material (glass paste) well defines the identification of this production. The seals of the so-called second style (Douglas van Buren, 1954a: 1-39; 1954b: 97-113), partly contemporary to those of the first, began to be used perhaps during the mid of the 14th Cent. and, around 1200 BC, it seems to disappear. The second style can be considered between the ancient Babylonian style and the Assyrian-Kassite style and it shows new iconographic subjects with naturalistic and mythological scenes that revive the iconographic repertoire with an elaborated composition of the register. The seals from central Greece, in particular, as a large interesting seal collection are providing data on the use practices and on the international movements of luxury objects at the end of the II millennium BC. The third style (Beran, 1957-1958: 255-278) is the late-Kassite production, which was more similar to

those ones dated to the Middle Assyrian period (14th-13th Cent.). It represents the iconographic repertoire with more linear carving, losing the vivacity of the narrative action. It seems better oriented to the Assyrian contemporary productions because of its stronger influence to it by the Assyrian series of geometric fillers or an animals-parade. Cylinder seals never became popular and they were not used as such in the Aegean area: there are almost no sealings produced by them, with only few exceptions in Crete (Pini, 2005: nn.777-778) and in Cyprus (Smith, 2003: 297), showing a poor sealing use. So why did Aegeans people acquire them and which was the use, considering about the 30% of all the entire findings in the area, coming from Late Bronze archaeological contexts have probably been produced locally. The places with the main concentration of Near Eastern cylinder seals are the palatial centers as Knossos and Phaistos (Crete) but also in the mainland, near Mycenae and Thebes. The cylinders that were found within Early Bronze Age contexts in the Aegean are so few that no certain conclusions can be made considering most of them were locally manufactured, so it seems that Crete played some role to their distribution in the Aegean especially in the Middle Bronze Age contexts when the majority of the imported and the locally produced cylinders is again to be found on Knossos and Phaistos. If no cylinders are known so far from the mainland, this situation changes in the case of the cylinders that were found within Late Bronze Age contexts when the glyptic documentation shows how Crete has the main concentration but in the mainland the best number of findings is in Mycenae and Thebes. In Thebes was found the best Kassite findings of

Mesopotamian archaeology which deserve some considerations from the Near Eastern and Classical geo-political point of view. It's also interesting to see that in Aegean burials no Mesopotamian (Kassite) seals were found even if Mitanni, Syrian, Cypro-Aegean and Aegean cylinder seals were easily discovered in graves. The Kassite and other classes of Mesopotamian cylinder seals were more difficult to acquire in the Aegean, than the Mitannian and Syrian ones; so they were probably considered to be of greater value and were kept to be preserved for a special use in the palace. The Syrian and the Mitannian seals, which were much easier to obtain, were given away as gifts or with a reward use to members of the upper class. In the graves those cylinder seals were considered to be jewellery/amulets (Davaras and Soles, 1995: 32; Aruz, 2005: 753) because of their engraved images, prayer texts (Collon, 1987: 119; Goff, 1956: 23) and raw material they were made (Moorey, 1999: 175). But the artistic language of the imported Near Eastern seals was, in most cases, probably not understood in the Aegean to the new owners of the seals. Most of the imported Near Eastern cylinder seals in the Aegean were not modified by new engravings and they were used as elements for jewellery for necklaces or bracelets in the Aegean palatial workshops (Aruz, 2005: 753-755), as those ones found in Mycenaean warriors' graves; i.e. it is possible to remember the oriental lapis lazuli seal, which was brought to Knossos to be refitted with granulated gold mounts without changing the initial design (Aruz, 1995: 7-11). The classification of the material of the cylinders that were found in Early to Late Bronze Age contexts in the Aegean shows how the great variety of materials of the cylin-

ders found in Middle to Late Bronze Age contexts says that there was no particular preference for a particular stone, although there are relatively more faience, lapis lazuli and haematite cylinders. The fact that the greatest variety of material was used for the production of Aegean and Cypriot cylinders shows that they had to use what was at their availability. It seems there was no particular preference of certain materials in the palatial centers, with the exception of lapis lazuli in Thebes (Porada, 1981-82: 1-78). The Mitannian cylinder seals are the most common class of imported Near Eastern seals in the Aegean (Pini, 1983: 114-126; Salje, 1990: 249-267; Krzyszkowska, 2005: 301; Aruz, 2008: 183). Then there are both the Mesopotamian-Kassite seals and the Cypriot and Cypro-Aegean cylinders. The Aegean manufactured cylinders are also numerous, especially during the Middle and Late Bronze Age. So it seems that the demand for cylinders in the Aegean could not be satisfied only by the imports and local seal-cutters tried to work on it. The distribution of Near Eastern and Aegean cylinder seals from Late Bronze Age contexts shows that they were imported especially at Thebes and Knossos regions but in Mycenae areas there are mainly those ones of Mitannian and Syrian manufacture. Kassite cylinder seals are known in the Aegean only from Thebes and from the Uluburun shipwreck (Pulak, 1997: 233-262). This probably shows that the palatial centers of Thebes and Mycenae obtained their cylinders from different routes. The strong diffusion of both Syrian and Mitannian cylinders especially close to Thebes, Mycenae but also in Knossos suggests the existence of a centralized trade (Pini, 2005: 780). Nevertheless, there have been some exceptions to this

rule, e.g. the seals from the Uluburun ship, which could have been part of a merchant's jewelry stock as supposed by Aruz (Aruz, 2005: 753). The fact that the Mitannian seals were manufactured in various workshops (Pini, 2005: 780) shows that their Aegean owners did not obtain them from a single source. It seems clear that the palatial centers controlled the movement of cylinder seals, understood as manufacture, import, re-cutting and the distribution. The imported Near Eastern cylinders had several secondary or third use (French, 2005: 127). Some pieces as raw materials were useful for manufacturing various jewels, e.g. the not engraved and the abraded ones; other pieces could be gifts to other members of the social elites; some seals could be precious object for re-distribution as valuable amuletic jewels, either as trade objects or as gifts; in other case it could be to advertise their prestige demonstrating the power of encounters with exotic worlds (Aruz, 2005: 753-756). After the end of the Mycenaean palaces there were strong changes in the economic and social life of the Aegean areas and new regional elite classes have been formed and the acquisition of semi-precious stones was no longer centrally controlled (Krzyszkowska, 2005: 301). About this socio-cultural environment is available an interesting Echo from the Egyptian Middle Kingdom (Aldred, 1971: 18).

Methodology

The research method used in this contribution is descriptive-analytical (content) and based on library studies; it includes detailed study and analysis of the seals from the archaeological excavations. Various libraries and catalogues of several museums around the world have been used for this research, considering that

prior to the study of the author (Tabita, 2021), no contributions have been conducted in Iran on the style and use of the Kassite seals found abroad of Iran.

Materials (Table 1)

In this contribution a special focus is on the collection of imported Near Eastern lapis lazuli cylinder seals from a palatial room in Thebes, which still remains a unique find in the Aegean area, considering the heterogeneous finding group. During the 1963, at a rescue excavation (Platon and Stasinopoulou-Touloupa, 1964: p.859-861), a treasure was found within a destruction stratum. According to the excavators, it was originally kept in wooden boxes in the first floor of a palatial complex (Falkenstein, 1964; Platon – Stasinopoulou-Touloupa, 1964; Touloupa, 1964a; 1964b; 1965; 1966; Porada, 1981/1982: 4-6; Demakopoulou, 1990: 31), identified by them as the “New Kadmeion”. It seems that this upper room was originally decorated with elaborate frescoes, since plenty of fragments with decorative and pictorial motifs, including spirals, papyri, and the white foot of an animal, were found scattered in the destruction fill (Dakouri-Hild, 2001: 104). After another excavation during the

1996 in the same room and the close area, several Linear B tablets were also found (Aravantinos, *et al.* 2002: 13-16, Plan 4; Andrikou, *et al.* 2006: 236, 243-245, Plan 3). The archaeological datation still remains disputed in itself: Platon and Touloupa are dating at the end of LH III B, no later than 1270 BC (Platon-Touloupa, 1964: 860), Symeonoglou at the LH III B1 (Symeonoglou, 1973) according to Porada (Porada, 1981/1982: 6, n.6), Dakouri-Hild at the LH III B2 (Dakouri-Hild, 2001: 104, n.121), and Aravantinos at the LH III B2 (Aravantinos, *et al.* 2001: 16; Aravantinos, *et al.* 2002: 13). The urban problematic archaeological context did not let the excavators to understand if there were two chronological subsequent palaces well known as “Early Kadmeion” and “New Kadmeion”, or only one (Symeonoglou, 1973; Rutter, 1974; Hooker, 1976: 103-104; Catling, *et al.* 1980: 95-114; Symeonoglou, 1985: 39-63; Vanschoonwinkel, 1991: 126; Andrikou, 1999; Dakouri-Hild, 2001; Demakopoulou, 1990: 308, fig.1; Dakouri-Hild, 2001: 102, fig.11). Some damages occurred in some palatial buildings (Early Kadmeion?) on the acropolis during the late LH III A2/early LH III B1 (Catling, *et al.* 1980: 100; Dakouri-Hild, 2001: 106; Krzyszkowska, 2004: 296; Andrikou, *et al.*

Table 1. List of Seals Mentioned

Cat. .n	Material	Dimensions (mm)	Provenience	Date	Bibliography
1	Lapis lazuli	41.8x15x7	Mesopotamia	1359-1333 (Burna Buriash II)	Porada 1981-82, n.26
2	Lapis lazuli	49.3x16x6	Mesopotamia	XIV Cent. BC	Porada 1981-82, n.27
3	Lapis lazuli	59x19x6.7	Mesopotamia	XIV Cent. BC	Porada 1981-82, n.29
4	Lapis lazuli	39x12.6x5.8	Mesopotamia	XIV Cent. BC	Porada 1981-82, n.30
5	Lapis lazuli	59.5x21x7	Mesopotamia	XIV Cent. BC	Porada 1981-82, n.28
6	Lapis lazuli	43.5x15x7	Mesopotamia	XIV Cent. BC	Porada 1981-82, n.31
7	Lapis lazuli	(?)43x18.5x	Mesopotamia	XIV Cent. BC	Porada 1981-82, n.36



Fig. 1

2006: 55). Other palatial sites as the New Kadmeion (?) were destroyed towards the end of LH III B1 (Demakopoulou, 1990: 313-314; Catling, 1980: 100; Aravantinos, 1985: 350; Sampson, 1985: 29; Symeonoglou, 1985: 225-229, 232; Andrikou, 1999: 87; Hope-Simpson, 2003: 235); some of these rooms seem to have been abandoned, while others were restored. Then a final destruction followed, either towards the end of LH III B (Platon and Touloupa, 1964: 860; Rutter, 1974: 88-89; Hooker, 1976: 103-104; Vanschoonwinkel, 1991: 127), at the end of LH III B2 (Aravantinos, 1985: 350; Andrikou, 1999: 87; Sheldermine, 2001: 373, n.276; Aravantinos, *et al.* 2002: 13), or between LH III B2 and early LH III C (Mountjoy, 1999: 640-641; Dakouri-Hild, 2001: 104, n.121; 106-107; Andrikou, *et al.* 2006: 56-59). It is unclear that the destruction stratum of the "Treasury Room" is dated to LH III B1 or to LH III B2/C. Although the finds from the so-called Treasury Room are indeed unique throughout the entire ancient world, only the oriental imported seals have been published (Porada, 1965; 1966; 1979; 1981/1982: 4, nn.1-5; Brinkman, 1981/1982; Guterbock, 1981/1982; Weidner, 1966: 193; Opifizius, 1969: 109, n 77; Helck, 1979: 104 n.156; Lambrou-Phillipson, 1990: 297-312, nn.312-350; Cline, 1994; Davaras and Soles, 1995: 48-49, 63, n. 102-146; Smith, 2003). Out of a total of 42 seals, there are

34 engraved cylinder seals of lapis lazuli, three engraved cylinder seals of faience, one engraved cylinder seal of a bluish stone, other than lapis lazuli, one engraved cylinder seal of agate, two engraved half cylinder seals of agate and one engraved stamp seal of conglomerate. There are also 9 non-engraved cylinder seals, several cylinder abraded and various ivory objects, and numerous beads of lapis lazuli, agate and glass. A second hoard found nearby in the same room was characterized by various jewels and numerous lapis lazuli and gold beads (Platon and Touloupa, 1964: 860; Touloupa, 1965: 230-232; Porada, 1981/1982: 4). The great number of lapis lazuli pieces in this room in Thebes' palatial center represents an important reflection of a precious stone from far (Afghanistan or Pakistan) which arrived in the Mediterranean areas through Mesopotamia, in a period (Aegean Bronze Age) when it was extremely rare (Klengel, 1990: 34-35; Muhly, 2003: 149-150; Pini, 2005: 779; Feldman, 2006, 117, 215 n.6).

Analysis

After the iconographic studies (Porada, 1981/1982; Matthews 1990; Stiehler-Alegria Delgado, 1996; Otto, 2000) the seals from the Theban "Treasury Room" can be divided into several groups: the Early Dynastic-Old Babylonian Group (42 cylin-



Fig. 2

der seals) dating from 2300 until 1600 B.C. and another 4 which were re-cut in later periods; the Mitannian one with 8 seals dated to the 15th and 14th Cent., and 1 which was re-cut in a Cypro-Levantine workshop; the Cypro-Levantine group with 4 seals; and the Cypriote group with 4 seals dated to the 14th or 13th cent. There are also 2 Cypro-Aegean seals and 3 Mycenaean seals; 1 Hittite seal from the 14th or 13th cent. and 1 unfortunately of unknown origin. The last group counts 12 Kassite seals dated to the 14th cent. on which this contribution is focusing the discussion, considering the meaning of this collection as the most important Kassite archaeological finding outside the Mesopotamia; at the same time this treasure is the best lapis lazuli concentration in the Late Bronze Mediterranean and on the other hand it is the most important amount of Kassite seals found in the same place. Even if the style and iconography of the seals could indicate their private or official use (Tabita, 2021) the general idea of the geo-politi-

cal context around this treasure was resonated since the contribution by Porada (1981/82) giving us the chance to reconsider all this glyptic production and its geo-political context. This article is offering the Kassite point of view of those materials, reconsidering those seals from Thebes as a 14th Cent. treasure originally belonged to a royal diplomatic gift made by Burna-Buriash II to a king of one of the major powers of the Amarna Age. If seals were artistic and social documents with a strong significance beyond the processes of trade, gift exchange and tribute that may have taken them on their travels for they were signals of prestige and status, to be displayed as jewelry and one may also suggest, worn as amulets in order to absorb the protective powers inherent in their materials, forms, and imagery (Aruz, 2006: 756). The cylinder seals were not used in the Aegean: there are almost no sealings produced by them with only few exceptions in Cyprus (Smith, 2003: 297) and in Crete (Pini 2005: 777-778) and, as a matter of fact, a

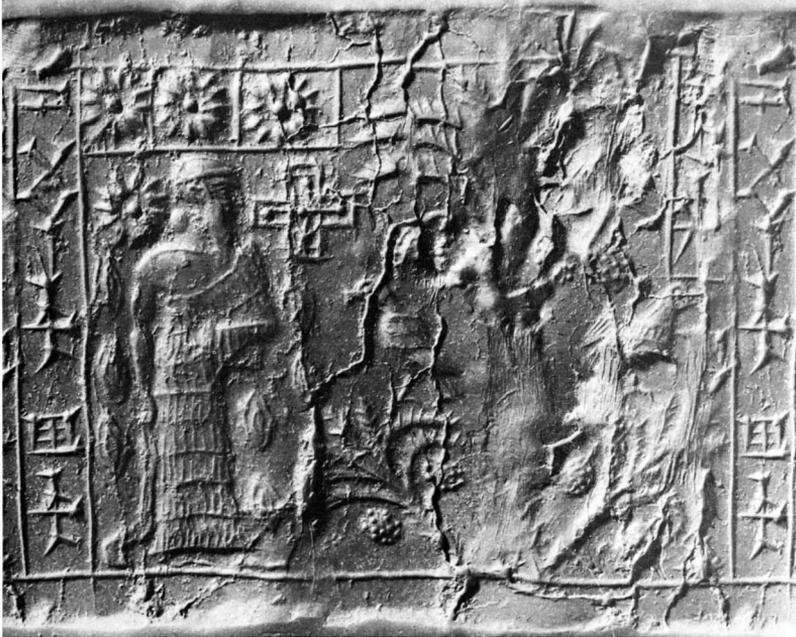


Fig. 3

few cylinders from Crete have even been used as stamp seals (Davaras and Soles, 1995: 33, n.20, n.31, n.39). A must of consideration is that the main archaeological evidence of the cylinder seals were found in vicinity of palatial centers, in the Late Bronze Age contexts. The Kassite cylinder seals were 12 and one of them cut in the Second Kassite style with a cuneiform inscription let to identify its owner as Kidin-Marduk (Fig. 1), an officer of the Kassite king Burna-Buriaš II, during the mid of 14th Cent. BC (Brinkman, 1981/1982: 73-74, n.26; Porada, 1981/1982: 49-50, n.26). This same officer was owner of another seal cut in the first Kassite style (Porada, 1981/82: 50), showing that both styles were used simultaneously and that the development of the Kassite seals was not linear from coarse to the elaborate designs. The result was that the iconographic analysis seems not a reliable criterion for datation as several authors confirmed (Matthews, 1990; Stiehler-Alegria

Delgado, 1996; Otto, 2000). Porada used stylistic analysis to date the remaining 11 Kassite seals from Thebes to the 13th cent., focusing mainly on three seals (Fig. 2, Fig. 3, Fig. 4). She suggested that these 3 seals were manufactured by the same artist and dated the first one (Fig. 4) to the 13th Cent. because of its similarity to the other two in the group (Porada, 1981/1982: 57-58, n.30; Daux, 1964: 779). She compared the second one (Fig. 2) to a Kassite cylinder seal in Oxford (Buchanan, 1966: 102, n.562) which can only be generally dated to the 14th-13th cent. and thus is not very useful for fixing a date. Porada (1981/82: 53) and Matthews (1990: 63, n.85) show that the comparison with the god's headdress on a kudurrū dated to the Meli-Šipak period is not convincing because of their totally different types. Very significant for Porada's datation is the comparison of the third Kassite cylinder seal from Thebes (Fig. 3) with a sealing found in a pit under a house in



Fig. 4

the archaeological site of Nippur (Porada, 1981/1982: 55-56, n.159, fig.p), which contained inscribed clay tablets (mid 13th Cent.). The datation is difficult because this chronology can only be used as a *terminus post quem non* for the pit and the finds in it. Anyway three of those seals are products of the same workshop (Fig. 2, Fig. 3, Fig. 4). The Kassite second style is extremely rare in Mesopotamia (Matthews, 1990: 60-63) and this archaeological finding in Greece (Thebes) is very impressive in itself, considering all the Mediterranean areas. If this style appeared around the mid of the 14th cent. BC, it was attested for a very short period until ending in the 13th cent. (Tabita, 2021; Nijhowne, 1999: 76). The Marduk's name on some Kassite seals (Fig. 2, Fig. 5, Fig. 4, Fig. 6, Fig. 7 shows that it was a common name inscribed within the prayers and also as a part of personal names, especially during the second half of the Kassite period (Stiehler-Alegria Delgado, 1996: 72). Because of this about the

Kassite seals from Thebes is not possible to suppose that they were dedicated for the first use to a Mesopotamia temple as previously supposed (Platon & Touloupa, 1964: 860; Porada, 1981/1982: 69-70). It was also suggested that one of the Kassite cylinder seals from Thebes (Fig. 6) was probably re-cut during a later period, judging the master of animals on the lower seal register. It's hard to understand who was that artist whom is impossible to identify in its ethnicity and in the location of its workshop (Porada, 1981/1982: 58-59, n.31; Smith, 2003: 296). The Kassite seals were not found in the graves as all cylinder seals from the Late Bronze Age contexts in the Aegean. The Kassite second style seem to be preferred in the palatial context because of its raw material but also because of its elaborated cutting style. So it could be understood as an exotic jewellery and probably also an amulets. On the other side, most of precious findings were discovered in sites close to the palatial centers where cylin-

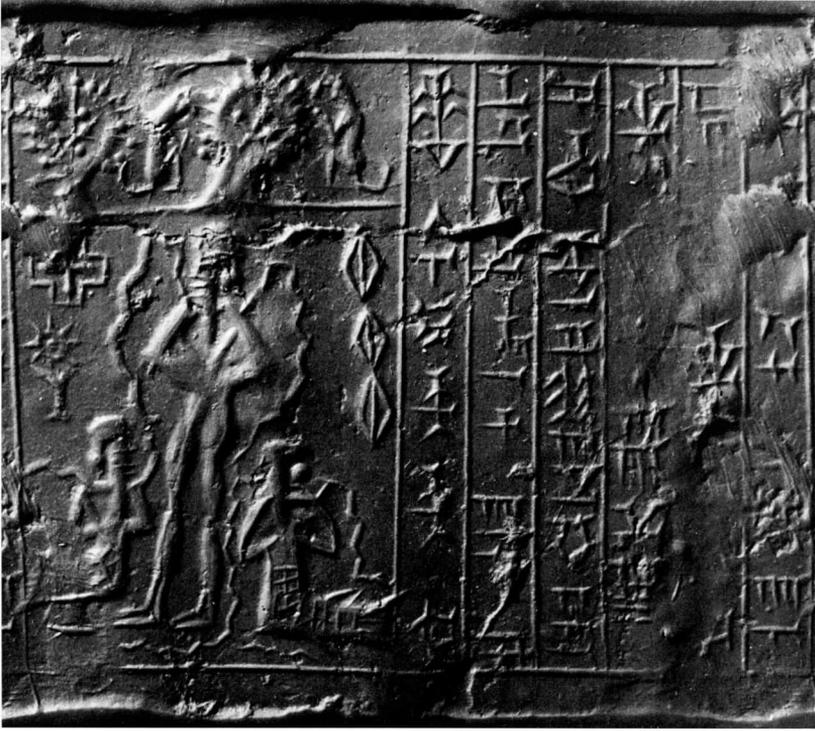


Fig. 5

der seals have been found. The number and quality of the offerings in the tombs show that the dead person was perhaps a member of an upper class very close to the palatial élité group and the precious objects were something like exclusive gifts received from the palatial institution as in Thebes (Cline, 1994: 151, n.163) but also in Tanagra (Cline, 1994: 151, n.162), in Pharos/Dexameni (Cline, 1994: 152-153, n.172-173) and in Chalkis (Cline, 1994: 152-153, n.172-173), considering the Aegean seals and the Near Eastern cylinders after the Aegean re-cut. There is virtually no evidence for the processing of valuable raw materials such as ivory or faience outside palatial sites. Therefore we can be reasonably confident that these highly coveted materials were worked under palatial scrutiny (Voutsaki, 2001: 196-197). It's reasonable that the cylinder seals in

graves around Thebes and Mycenae indicate that these two palatial administration centers had under their supervision the manufacture, the import but also the internal circulation of seals as an ideological distributions of prestige items into the palatial organization (Voutsaki, 2001: 205).

Discussion

Considering the complexity of all the entire archaeological documentation the discussion can be oriented answering to the following questions: why the Near Eastern Seals were imported and how they arrived to Thebes? If the rare attestation of lapis lazuli cylinder seals could be meaningful in Thebes (34 out of 42 seals from the "Treasury Room"), considering that in Greece during the LH I-III a very few amount of lower-quality



Fig. 6

lapis lazuli seals have been discovered (Krzyszowska, 2004: 237 and n.22) the richness and the diversity of the Theban glyptic group seems to be exceptional but not an *unicum*. There are some similarity with the treasure that was discovered in Egyptian Tod town, dated to the reign of Ammenemes II (1929-1895 BC.), where jewels, luxury objects and scraps of lapis lazuli were found together with a diverse collection of cylinder seals, among which were also several broken, erased or re-cut Mesopotamian seals; an inscription found at the site, shows that this hoard may have represented what foreigners and explorers, who travel across the lands, had dedicated (Arúz, 2005: 754 and n.18). If the jewellers' workshops (Andrikou, *et al.* 2006: 56-59) were working into the palatial complex of the New Kadmeion (Demakopoulou, 1990: 313-314, site 5.2; site 9.3; site 12.4; site 13), there was also another jeweller's workshop in a room of the (Early?) Kadmeion, which was destroyed in the Late LH III A2 or during the Early LH III B1, but no lapis lazuli was found in it (Symeonoglou, 1973: 74; Demakopoulou, 1990: 310f, site 1; Krzyszowska, 2004: 239). In one of these workshops (14, Oedipus Street) lapis lazuli was apparently used as raw material, as evident in the numerous scraps, the unfinished jewelry and the finished lapis

lazuli jewelry found in it (Symeonoglou, 1973: pl.90f; Rutter, 1974: 88,f). As told before, the Theban treasury was not discovered in a workshop but in boxes kept in the upper floor of the Mycenaean palace and 9 not engraved lapis lazuli cylinder seals were found together with the Near Eastern cylinder seals, in the same context with other ones very abraded that no trace remains of their original design, as well as some plain lapis lazuli pearls. This archaeological situation seems to suggest that the lapis lazuli beads and the non-engraved cylinder seals from the Theban hoard were certainly imported as raw material for the manufacture of jewels (Helck, 1979: 125f.; Porada, 1981/1982: 6f.; Lambrou-Phillipson, 1990: 78f; Arúz, 1998: 303; Arúz, 2005: 754). The total amount arrived in the palace probably not at the same time (Hooker, 1976: 111; Davaras and Soles, 1995: 49; Pini, 2005: 780) but in different sendings (Porada, 1981/1982: 29) considering the big heterogeneity of the seals. Even if the hypothesis that those lapis lazuli objects arrived in Thebes as raw material to be re-cutted by a local jeweller (Hope-Simpson, 2003: 233; Cline, 1994: 25f; Cline, 2005: 47f) not at all accepted (Pini, 2005: 780) it is valid just for some of the imported oriental seals in Thebes and in the Aegean (Buchholz 1967; Lambrou-Phillipson, 1990;



Fig. 7

Cline, 1994; Davaras and Soles, 1995). The use of a seal connected to a specific person, such that, when he lost his office, his seal returned to the palace or has to be sold as raw material because of a material re-use. The examples are available thanks to a Syrian seal from the Cape Gelidonya wreck and to a sealing produced by an Old Babylonian seal on a document of the 13th Cent. BC in Ugarit (Collon, 1987: 120-122; Buchholz, 1967: 148-150; Galliano and Calvet, 2004: 48, n.35), in Cyprus (Smith, 2003: 297) and also in Crete (Pini, 2005: 778 and n.7). Many imported Near Eastern seals in the Mycenaean graves show their prestigious and precious value more than a raw material in itself e. g. the Assyrianizing Mitannian seal from Perati dated on the Late 14th Cent. (Collon, 1987: n.274; Matthews; 1997: 50) and because of this it seems that the oriental seals, especially the cylinder seals, were not imported to the Aegean in order to be used for sealing but was not rare their use as jewels taking part of necklaces/bracelets, as seen for the oriental lapis lazuli seal brought to Knossos to be re-cut without changing the initial design (Aruz, 2005: 753). Because of the wooden box in the palatial context where the Kassite seals were found it is possible to suppose, that they were used in some official way (French, 2005: 127): as raw materials for manufacturing various jewels – especially the not-engraved or those ones with a badly preserved cylinder design; as

gift for restitution into the palace for a member of the Court, as indicated by the finds from the neighbouring areas of Tanagra (Cline, 1994: 151, n.163), Pharos/Dexameni (Cline, 1994: 151, n.162) and from Chalkis (Cline, 1994: 152, n.172), or as an incoming gift or jewels, either as trade objects received by the royal institution that had also the chance to show its high prestige and power exhibiting exotic object (Aruz, 2005: 753-756). The desired effect of prestigious objects on palatial guests is described in the Homer's *Odyssey* (Homer, *Od.* 4,70-71 and 4,82-86), where the author even if describes the trade routes in the Eastern Mediterranean (Kristiansen and Larsson, 2005: 103) he means that the richness came to him as gifts and not through trade.

How were the Kassite seals brought to Thebes in Greece, so far from Karduniash, considering that the Near Eastern cylinder seals could have arrived at Thebes as royal gifts (Zaccagnini, 1987: 47-56), or thanks to regular trade (Helck, 1979: 104; Hooker, 1976: 111; Lambrou-Phillipson, 1990: 79; Davaras and Soles, 1995: 49)? It was supposed that this trade took place through Ugarit, where lapis lazuli was also found (Yon, 2003: 46): even if it's known that agents of some Ugaritic trade firms traveled to the Aegean (Heltzer, 1988: 7-13; Yon, 2003: 48), it is not certain that trade was only conducted by Canaanite ships (Bass, 1998: 183-185; Wachsmann, 1998: 154; Pulak, 2005: 309). The

Cypriote contribution need to be considered too (Hirschfeld, 1996: 289-297; Lolos, 2003: 104; Yon, 2003: 46), as also the trade between the Aegean and the Levant in general, thanks to several available studies (Knapp and Cherry, 1994: 123-155; Leonard, 1998: 100; Killebrew, 1998; Crielaard, 2000: 51-63; Wijngaarden, 2002). The Near Eastern cylinder seals could perhaps have arrived at Thebes also as a part of war booty - the piracy was common - (Lehmann, 1991: 114; Wachsmann, 1998: 129). All these scenarios for the Kassite seals are quite different. It is possible to confirm that they arrived in Thebes in a single sending as a royal gift but all the seals belong to the not diffused Second Kassite Style, which was characterized by a specific official purpose (Matthews, 1992, 48; Nijhowne, 1999: 76; Tabita, 2021). Our iconographic interest on those seals which seem to arrive from the same workshop because of the stylistic analysis is concentrated to (Fig. 2, Fig. 3, Fig. 4). These pieces could confirm perhaps their contemporary arrival from the same area and from the same committee, especially considering no other Kassite seals have been discovered up to now in the Aegean, excepting the Kassite seal from the Uluburun wreck at the end of the 14th Cent. (Collon, 1987: 135, n.571; Bass, *et al.* 1989: 13, 17-19, fig. 24, 29; Pulak, 2005: 295, n.2). It also seems very strange in Thebes a long period of accumulation of Kassite seals when this kind of treasury was very rare in all the ancient world (Nijhowne, 1999: 40). Another particular aspect of this seals is the weight of 496 grams of the total amount of these Kassite cylinders corresponding about one ancient mina (Porada, 1981/1982: 68; Krzyszkowska, 2005: 304). The Amarna correspondence reveals that even one mina of lapis lazuli was considered to be sufficient for a standard diplomatic gift from

the king of Babylonia to the Egyptian Pharaoh (Porada, 1981/1982: 68). Because of this it's assumed that the Kassite seals from Thebes were part of a king's gift (Aruz, 2005: 754; Krzyszkowska, 2005: 304; Pini, 2005: 780). How sent this gift from Mesopotamia, and who received it? Considering that in Thebes other Kassite imports were not discovered, this exclusive treasure was supposed by Porada originally to be a part of a booty acquired by the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I after his conquest of Babylon around 1225 BC., and then sent to the Theban king aiming to convince him to ignore the Hittite prohibition of trade (Porada, 1981/1982: 68, 77; Collon, 1990: 35; Lehmann 1991, 111; Aravantinos, *et al.* 2001: 16). Her hypothesis was supported by the findings of several Assyrian cylinder seals from the 14th Cent. that have been found in the Aegean areas, showing the existence of an indirect trade contacts between the Aegean and Assyria (Matthews, 1990: 112, n.270) even if no Mycenaean exports have been found at the east of the Euphrates's river (Niemeier, 1998: 25), in the area with the Assyrians. This hypothesis cannot be confirmed at all because of the Hittite treaty with the king of Amurru (Cline 1991b; Lehmann 1991, 110 f.; Latacz, 2005: 156; Miglus 2005, 241), when Tudhalija IV (c. 1240-1215) in a letter sent at c. 1220 BC., ordered his vassal king of Amurru, Šaušgamuwa, to prohibit all trade between the Assyrians and the Ahhiyawans (Southern Anatolia). The treaty can be understood as a *terminus post quem* for this gift; it is also not sure the archaeological periodization of the Kadmeion palatial center which seems to confirm that in few years it was destroyed (Davaras and Soles, 1995: 49; Hope-Simpson, 2003: 233, n.224; Muhly, 2003: 302; Krzyszkowska, 2005: 304; Pini, 2005: 780). If earlier, the king who sent this gift as Porada firstly suppo-

sed (Porada, 1965: 173; Porada, 1966: 194) was Burna-Buriaš II, of whom the name is cutted on one of those seals of the Kassite second style (Fig. 1) found in the Thebes palace. Porada firstly supposed that these 12 Kassite seals were sent by Burna-Buriaš II to the Theban king aiming to a some kind of political or trading useful partnership. Accepting the identity of the sender of the Kassite seals, in the person of the Kassite king in himself, it should be necessary to suppose a secondary use of the cylinders as a royal gift by the first owner of them. About the sender Burna-Buriaš II, it is known that he sent one of his daughters to marry Šuppiluliuma I; after the Hittite king death, she continued to live during the following reigns of Arnuwanda II and Muršili II (Röllig, 1974: 17), and Burna-Buriaš II must have sent a royal gift along with his daughter, which most certainly included other precious objects with lapis lazuli jewels. The reason of this special gift from a father as a king was firstly because lapis lazuli was rare in Anatolia and considered very precious by the Hittites (Moran, 1992: 114, EA 41), thanks to its exclusive and meaningful stone power. It should be considered that Mesopotamia had a leadership in distributing lapis lazuli in the Western areas and because of this reason Kassite royal gifts mentioned in the Amarna correspondence included lapis lazuli. Burna-Buriaš II sent at least one letter to Amenhotep III and it is reasonable to think that the gift was enriched by lapis lazuli, as usual (Moran, 1992: 8-12, EA 6; Giles, 1997: 54). We know for sure that Burna-Buriaš II sent lapis lazuli to Amenophis IV and maybe also to Tutankhamun (Moran, 1992: 11-14, EA 7) and to Amenophis IV (Moran: 1992: 16, EA 8; 18, EA 9; 19, EA 10; 24-27, EA 13), and also his father Kadašman-Enlil sent lapis lazuli to Amenophis III (Moran, 1992: 6,

EA 2). A particular situation deserve a special focus before to continue this discussion. In one letter (KBo II 11 rev. 11-14) sent by Hattušili III to an unknown king the Hittite king says that he took a rhyton of silver and a rhyton of pure gold from the gift of the King of Egypt and he declare to send them to the high receiver of that royal letter (Cline, 1995: 145). The recipient king for sure could be impressed by this gift as he was expecting (Kristiansen and Larsson, 2005: 104) as well known by the mechanisms of royal gift giving from cuneiform tablets (Zaccagnini, 1987: 47) and from Linear B tablets (Feldman, 2006: 139). The letter of Hattušili III, open a new perspective on the use to send a part of other royal gifts received previously – i.e. from Egypt to another king, showing that a successor of a king had always the chance to re-use a part of the gift. The find of the unique lapis lazuli Hittite official seal together with the Kassite seals in the Theban “Treasury Room” could be understood in this way thanks to the archaeological context. Thus, it could be possible that the Kassite seals were sent as a gift by a Hittite king to Thebes, accompanied by this official (Mountjoy, 1998: 48; Heinhold-Krahmer: 2007, 197).

These considerations are useful to think as a possible historical reconstruction of what happened: Hattušili III sent part of the gift which he received from Egypt to another king, showing that Šuppiluliuma I or one of his successors could have re-used a part of the gift arrived from Burna-Buriaš II in a similar way. The historical reconstruction of this complex scenario is not easy especially because of the scarce archaeological documentation even if the meaningful evidence. Because of this it seems there is another interpretative chance. Remembering that the Amarna correspon-

dence, which is now generally agreed, spans at most about thirty years, perhaps only fifteen or so and it begins about the 13th year of Amenophis III and extends no later than the first year or so of Tutankhamun, at which time the court abandoned the site of Akhetaten (Moran, 1992: XXXIV), we know that Amenophis III tried to stay in front of the Hittite danger using the weddings diplomacy (Röllig, 1974; Cline, 1998: 248). The Kassite kings Kurigalzu and Kadašman-Enlil I (Röllig, 1974: 17; Moran, 1992: 1-3, EA 1; Watterson, 1999: 26) had political relations with Egypt giving one daughter to Amenophis III, who married also with two Mitanni princesses (Röllig, 1974: 19; Watterson, 1999: 49-50; Cohen and Westbrook, 2000: 76; Kitchen, 1998: 250-261). Burna-Buriaš II when succeeded Kadašman-Enlil I, he kept up the diplomatic contacts with Amenophis III and his successor Amenophis IV (Röllig, 1974: 17; Giles, 1997: 54). In these very intensive diplomatic relations the area around Thebes and Mycenae was in the middle of this international diplomatic activity and gift-exchanges (Cline, 1994: 121-123; Warburton, 2001: 304). The Amarna texts are fragmentary, because of illegal excavations in modern time (Giles, 1997: 21) and in ancient times from clerks just discarding those tablets that no longer were useful to them (Giles, 1997: 35), especially after moving the capital away from Amarna (Giles, 1997: 39). The fragmentary nature of the archive is shown by the fact that some important categories of letters are absent, such as letters in Hieratic to the court from Egyptian agents, ambassadors, or commanders in Syria-Palestine, and the Hieratic transcriptions of the preserved tablets (Giles, 1997: 39). Even if this fragmentary situation it's not a problem to confirm that diplomatic relations did exist between

Egypt and Mycenaean Greece, during the reign of Amenophis III and IV: the Mycenaean pottery sherds found in Amarna, dating to the end of 1300 BC - LH III A2 (Haider, 1988: 32), and the Egyptian objects bearing inscriptions with the name of Amenophis III in Mycenae seems to demonstrate it. Two studies argued that the entire Egyptian room in Mycenae was a gift of Amenophis III to the king of Mycenae (Helck, 1979: 96-97; Haider, 1988: 13-16; Philipps, 2007: 479-493). The existence of this room could indicate that an Egyptian diplomatic emissary or even an Egyptian princess was living in Mycenae (Haider, 1988: 13-16). In another study (Cline, 1998: 249) it is suggested that the depiction of a figure wearing a Mycenaean helmet on an Amarna papyrus could be seen as proof for such an alliance. Another indication of trade and diplomatic contacts between Egypt and the Mycenaean world is the decoration of a room in the palace of Amenophis III in Malqata with rosettes and bull heads with Aegean forms (Nicolakaki-Kentrou, 2000; Panagiotopoulos 2005, 46). Cretan diplomatic objects were sent to Thutmosis III during the 1448 or 1437 BC (Cline, 1994: 110, A15) and in this diplomatic establishment several Egyptian objects showing the name of Amenophis III were found in some Mycenaean centres (Cline: 1994: 108-120, A1-A59; Latacz, 2005: 157-162). If Egypt had a strong influence on the international trade (Helck, 1979: 96; Haider, 1988: 13), considering that also in Ugarit there were some private traders (Heltzer, 1988), although the palace was the main economic factor (Klengel, 1990: 45; Knapp and Cherry, 1994: 142-146), and the precious diplomatic objects could also have arrived in the Aegean through Syro-palestinian trade in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea (Heltzer, 1988; Cline, 1994: 120, B3). Considering

that many cylinder seals found in Thebes' treasury room are referred between the 14th-13th Cent. BC, it could be an hypothesis to think their arrival through Cyprus island as those cylinders from Mesopotamia. Another possible historical reconstruction is that Burna-Buriaš II did not send them as a gift, but the cylinder seals could have arrived in Thebes through indirect routes. It's useful to remember that the Kassite king, following the historical sources (Moran, 1992: 11-17, EA 7-8), complained to the Egyptian Pharaoh that two caravans with gifts for him had been robbed during the trip in Palestine, and blamed local kings as the perpetrators. This consideration could effectively be one good reason to suppose that those seals have been sent as a gift by this Levantine kings or sold as raw material during the 14th or 13th Cent. (Moran, 1992: 111, EA 38); this or a later Cypriote ruler (Pini, 2005: 780), sent the Kassite seals along with several Cypriote ones to the Theban king in one or more shipments. A recent contributions discusses about the hypothesis that the Kassite seals found in Thebes could come from Egypt, because of the Letters from the Amarna archive, which inform us that on many occasions Burna-Buriaš II sent several minas of lapis lazuli to Egypt perhaps accompanied by cylinder seals. We know that Burna-Buriaš II sent at least one letter to Amenhotep III (Moran, 1992: 8-12, EA 6; Giles, 1997: 54). It is plausible to assume that the accompanying gift was lapis lazuli, as usual. We know for certain that Burna-Buriaš II sent lapis lazuli to Amenophis IV and maybe also to Tutankhamun (Moran, 1992: 11-14, EA 7; 16, EA 8; 18, EA 9; 19, EA 10; 24-27, EA 13), and also his father Kadašman-Enlil I sent lapis lazuli to Amenophis III (Moran, 1992: 6, EA 2). Moreover, the so called Aegean catalogue in the mortuary temple of

Amenophis III, which was possibly an itinerary of an Egyptian trade respectively diplomatic envoy in Kom el Hetan (Hankey, 1981: 45; Cline, 1991a: 40-42; 1994: 38-40, 115, A34; Haider, 1988: 7-13; Dickinson, 1994: 253; Cline, 1998: 245-247; Haider, 2000: 156 f.; 2003, 190; Panagiotopoulos, 2005: 45), probably shows that Egyptian emissaries of Amenophis III or Amenophis IV also visited *Thebais*, i. e. the Theban realm (Lehmann, 1991: 107; Cline, 1998: 237; Latacz, 2005: 161). It was important for Amenophis III and IV to be sure about the friendship of Myceneans, in case the Hittites create interferences in the Levant. The reason of this historical reconstruction seems to assume that the Pharaoh, in his effort to convince the Theban king to join the anti-Hittite coalition, sent him part of the gifts received before from the Kassite kings thereby reminding him of his significant status in the known world. It seems odd at first that the Pharaoh choose to send lapis lazuli, which had to be imported from Mesopotamia, instead of gold, which apparently was abundant in Egypt. Such gifts are indeed attested in several Amarna letters: Cyprus sent ivory to Egypt; Babylon and Mitanni sent gold and ebony to Egypt; Egypt sent silver and lapis lazuli to Babylon (Cohen and Westbrook, 2000: 145-147; Knapp and Cherry, 1994: 148). From the Amarna letters' point of view (Moran, 1992: 8, EA 4) it seems very indicative of Egypt's power that Amenophis III could afford to refuse to offer one of his daughters in marriage to Kadašman-Enlil I, even though he himself had received one of Kadasman-Enlil I's to be his wife. His power is probably based on the fact that Egypt had a near monopoly in gold during the Late Bronze Age. The Amarna correspondence informs us that the Mitanni kings too sent lapis lazuli as a gift to the Pharaoh Ame-

nophis III and later to Amenophis IV (Moran, 1992: 43-45, EA 19; 50, EA 21; 51-61, EA 22; 72-84, EA 25; 86-90, EA 27). It is thus possible that some of the Mitannian and Early Dynastic-Old Babylonian seals of the Theban treasury arrived in Thebes especially through Egypt.

Conclusions

All the historical hypothesis show the great interest of the scholars aiming to understand how and from whom or from where the Theban palatial center received the Kassite seals, perhaps as a royal gift as usual in the Late Bronze Age in the Mediterranean Sea area, understood as a trade route where Hittite kings, Egyptian Pharaohs (Amenophis III/ IV) and Cypriote and Syro-Palestinian rulers were in connection into an intensive and an extensive diplomatic and economical trade. The Theban kings seems to have been important diplomatic partners for the great power centers of the Near East during the Late Bronze Age, (14th-13th Cent.). A very strong indication of foreign affairs was to find the very rare Hittite lapis lazuli cylinder seal in Thebes (Porada 1981/82: 47, n.25), which belonged to a member of a Hittite court. In the hypothesis that the Theban palatial center received the cylinder seals thanks to the ordinary trade or as part of war booty, there is a demonstration of its sea power and the richness to buy lapis lazuli objects characterized by a very elegant and elaborated glyptic style that just a royal workshop can produce by itself (Visser, 1997: 247, n.1). It is considerable also that several workshops were active in the period between LH III A2 and LH III B2 (end of 1300 BC) in the palatial complex of Kadmeia (Andrikou, *et al.* 2006: 56-59); the rich amount of gold but also of ivory and stones (corniola, lapis lazuli, cristal roche, hematite) has been

found, although, right before they were destroyed by fire, some of the rooms seem to have been hastily searched and the larger items were removed (Symeonoglou, 1973: 63). These archaeological contexts are showing that the foreign relations were a normal status of the Theban court and not an isolated or exceptional situation. The Theban rulers as usual during the Late Bronze Age had great interest in foreign affairs because of the several activities (diplomacy, piracy, trade) with the aim to guarantee the incoming flow of the necessary raw materials for their royal workshops which were working to advertise king's prestige as a mean of demonstrating their power in front of their foreign encounters. This situation could continued until the period when several palatial buildings in the Theban citadel were destroyed at the end of LH III B1; in some cases the buildings remained deserted afterwards (Catling, 1980: 100; Aravantinos, 1985: 350; Sampson, 1985: 29; Symeonoglou, 1985: 225-229, 232; Andrikou, 1999: 87; Hope and Simpson, 2003: 235; Shelmerdine, 2001: 372). Although we cannot determine with certainty the cause of this destruction, Thebes was one of the most important Mycenaean centres during the 14th-13th Cent. and several workshops were active in the Theban palace where gold, semi-precious stones and ivories have been found in abundance. The exceptional collection of Kassite lapis lazuli cylinders shows that Thebes acquired them either because it was an important diplomatic or trade partner, or because it was in position to conduct overseas military operations. The archaeological reconstruction seems to confirm that these Kassite seals' finding in Thebes represent a high-level exchange and an international reciprocity (Lambrou-Phillipson, 1990: 297; Cline, 1994: 25, 53; Morris, 1995: 104-

105; Aravantinos, 2001: 94-99; Aruz, 2013: 216-18) in the Ancient Mediterranean Sea during the Late Bronze Age. In this contest from a direct contact from Assyria to the last hypothesis the historical reconstruction let to suppose that the full collection of Kassite seals perhaps could also arrived in Thebes through an unnamed intermediary, who is both receiver of the gift from Burnaburiaš II and giver of the same lapis lazuli to the ruler in Thebes. We can observe that the specificity of these theories depends on textual evidence for trade that goes far beyond the Linear B tablets of Thebes or any other Aegean palace, in particular the diplomatic correspondence known as the Amarna Letters. These letters between Near Eastern rulers show the shipment of goods and people between Egyptian, Babylonian, Mitanni, Assyrian, Hittite, Elamite, and Cypriot kings, and also between imperial powers and small rulers of several dependent states. The Kassite collection provides strong parallels for the idea of Mesopotamian seals reaching the Levant or Egypt as a royal gift, but the texts do not record shipments to Greece. Incorporating Mycenaean kings into the network depends upon arguments that connect surviving artifacts with highly charged, even ritualized, descriptions of exchange. Yet the imported artifacts recovered from Mycenaean palaces (or tombs of the period) rarely rival the opulent gold and ivory artifacts of their Egyptian and Near Eastern counterparts (Lambrou-Phillipson: 1990; Cline, 1994). Even the smaller polities of the Levant boast a series of prestige objects distinguished by a level of sophisticated crafting and a mixture of regional styles rarely achieved in the Aegean. How well the Theban seals evoke ties between Mycenaean and eastern rulers depends on the rare fact that this gift was found

generally intact. Arguments invoking other materials need to reassemble artifacts that were subject to re-use after their arrival. Perhaps a more fruitful connection between Aegean rulers and the eastern network can be found through an approach that recognizes the full range of opportunities rendered through international exchange. Distance is a key aspect of the value of these trade relationships, the items they bring, and the new meanings assigned to both transactions and commodities. The history of individual objects can enforce them with values accumulated from a succession of ownership and increase their status as a mediator with other peoples and different places (Helms, 1988; 1993). The distance of these artifacts from their source, and the less frequent nature of the attendant acts of exchange, create more space for the stories they can carry through the elaborate pedigree of a prized possession and the inventiveness of an owner's claims. Throughout the following consideration of diplomatic letters, material gifts, and political treaties it is interesting to give emphasize on the rhetorical value of the relationships they might foster, which depends largely on the power structure within specific states and the multiple types of economic relationships within each of these regions. Despite the different traditions represented by the Theban seals, their concentration in a single deposit suggests they did not enter into Boeotian area as individual objects. Considering especially the Kassite seals as an act of exchange, it is possible to identify concentrations of artifacts characterized by a common place of origin, and to propose that the Kassite group indicates a single contact (Parkinson, 2010:17-25, Tabita 2021). The method is instructive but at the macro scale, demonstrating that imports to mainland

Greece cluster in significant groups. So it could seem clear that the accumulation of lapis lazuli in Thebes is part of a larger concentration of both production and consumption activities at the palatial center (Bennet, 2008; Burns, 2010: 37-39; Dakouri-Hild, 2012). The ritualized use of foreign goods, such as the ivory works carved with exotic imagery, helped to distinguish who had connections with external networks (Lambrou-Phillipson, 1990: 312-13; Cline, 1994: n.19). Palatial workshops also made exclusive use of imported commodities to produce objects with locally significant imagery

in alluring materials such as ivory, glass, and colored stones, aiming to enlarge the local authority and enforcing its cultural identity underlining its international relations. This cultural and also political propaganda project was planned trying perhaps to identify itself as a strong cultural influence in the area of Beothia (Thebes) on the neighbouring regions underlining its international relations as a tool to build a geo-political hegemony, as usual in the ancient Near East and in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea during the Late Bronze Age.

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