For Joan Mertens

IN HONOR OF HER YEARS OF DEDICATION TO THIS PUBLICATION
AND HER EXEMPLARY ERUDITION, GENEROSITY, AND WIT
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ABBREVIATIONS
MMA The Metropolitan Museum of Art
MMAB The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin
MMJ Metropolitan Museum Journal

Height precedes width and then depth in dimensions cited.
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The Kassite dynasty ruled Babylonia, in the south of Mesopotamia, or modern-day Iraq, for nearly four centuries, beginning after 1595 B.C. and collapsing finally in 1155 B.C. The Kassites were not themselves native to the region but may have come from the east, near the region of the Zagros Mountains. They quickly adopted the native Mesopotamian culture of their new home, which qualities are reflected in their art, including cylinder seals. This article is concerned with the sixteen Kassite-period cylinder seals in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. These seals, cylindrical beads that were carved in intaglio with images and text, were rolled across damp clay to create a raised impression. They served as administrative tools in the ancient Near East, used to mark clay cuneiform tablets to provide verification of the content of the text or to invoke the seal owner’s presence. They were also personal
ornaments and talismans, the inscriptions of which provide an invaluable source of personal names and information about family relationships in that period.

The Kassite seals in the Museum are carved in valuable stones that were imported into Babylonia. They are inscribed with their owners’ names, familial relationships, and the gods to whom they were devoted. It is notable that four of the sixteen seals belonged to women. Throughout the history of the ancient Near East, including the Kassite period, most seals were owned by men. Many also bear inscriptions that do not identify the owner’s gender. The Museum’s group of four Kassite women’s seals represents a significant sample, constituting nearly a quarter of all women-owned seals from this period. Including these four, we know of seventeen seals that belonged to women out of the entire Kassite-period glyptic corpus. The Museum’s four seals may therefore be treated as useful examples rather than as potential outliers. This article investigates the seals for insights that can be gained by examining the text together with the image on each seal. The article is thus a departure from previous analyses of the material, for those usually focus on either the text or the image over the other.

Cylinder seals from the Kassite period are inscribed in the cuneiform, or wedge-shaped, script that was used to write both the Sumerian and the Akkadian languages. Sumerian, the oldest written language, is a linguistic isolate unconnected to any other language, and by the mid-second millennium B.C., it was purely a written language. At that time, the lingua franca of Babylonia was Akkadian, a Semitic language related to such later languages as Arabic and Hebrew. The Kassites took their own language with them into Mesopotamia, but it is undocumented except for personal names and a disparate assortment of words. The majority of the inscriptions on the Museum’s Kassite seals are written in Akkadian and feature a heavy use of Sumerograms, or cuneiform signs carrying logographic, rather than syllabic, readings. Determinatives are signs that are not vocalized but which provide information on the category of the word to which they are connected. For example, the divine determinative diĝir, written in transliteration as  {	ext{d}}, indicates that the word immediately following it is the name of a deity. The inscriptions on the four seals of Kassite women in the Museum’s collection identify their owners’ gender by marking their
names with either the determinative munus, used exclusively for women, before their name, or by the word for female servant, GEME.\(^3\) The names of the four women are Lamassani, servant of an unnamed deity (fig. 1); Kunnaatum, whose seal is dedicated to the goddess Gula (fig. 2); Naramtum, servant of the divine couple Nergal and Mamitum (fig. 3); and Manbaši, servant of the divine couple Marduk and Šarpanitum (fig. 4). The inscriptions on these four seals vary in length and format. These seals, along with the rest of the group of sixteen at the Museum, are catalogued in the Appendix; the entries include their material, a transliteration and translation of their inscriptions, and a brief description of the image on each seal.

The Museum’s sixteen seals are all stylistically representative of the First Kassite Style. Kassite glyptic art is traditionally separated into three categories: First, Second, and Third Style. First Style, the earliest, is often indistinguishable from the glyptic style of the Old Babylonian period, which preceded the Kassite.\(^4\) This style is easily identifiable, featuring one or more figures, most often human worshippers or divine figures, set beside an inscription presented in clearly divided vertical registers, both figure and inscription occupying the full height of the seal. Divine beings may be recognized by their typical horned headgear, and they are often larger and grander in physical stature than mortal figures depicted on the seals. The inscription is the clearest marker of the First Kassite Style. By far the most prevalent among the three seal types, we see nearly three times as many seals attributed to the First Style as to either the Second or the Third Style.

The four women-owned seals, while united in style, have fundamental differences, including the stone used for each, which provides information on the social status of the seal owners. The stones are carnelian (figs. 1, 3), jasper (fig. 2), and agate (fig. 4), semi-precious stones that had to be imported into Babylonia from elsewhere, often through the Persian Gulf.

Furthermore, the seals of Lamassani and Naramtum (figs. 1, 3) are the only carnelian seals from the Kassite period in the Museum’s collection. Carnelian, the product of long-distance trade with the Indus region, was especially prized in the ancient Near East, and carnelian ornaments are well represented among the grave goods of the so-called royal tombs of Ur dating to approximately 2600-2500 B.C.\(^7\)
All the Kassite seals at the Museum with inscriptions that remain legible refer to deities of the Babylonian pantheon to whom the seal owner offered prayers and devotion. It is notable that all four of the women’s seals are inscribed with the names of female deities. Two of the four are dedicated to divine couples: Nergal and his spouse Mamitum (fig. 3), and Marduk and his spouse Šarpanitum (fig. 4). In these instances, the male deity is by far the better known of the two. Nergal, who represented death and, more specifically, plague and pestilence, was invoked as protection against those ailments, and was usually represented as a striding male figure, often holding a mace. Regarding his consort Mamitum, we know little about the goddess save her connection to fate or oaths, indicated in the similar meaning of her name—the Akkadian word māmītu being translated as an oath or a vow—as she is seldom found independently of her spouse. Marduk, linked strongly with Babylon, his cult city, was a complicated deity who rose to power during the later second millennium B.C. and, in the first millennium B.C., headed the Mesopotamian pantheon. He was the central figure in several literary texts from Mesopotamia, including the Akkadian creation epic Enûma Eliš (When on High), which describes his defeat of the deified ocean, Tiamat, to establish the world and the ordered workings of the universe. The identity of his consort Šarpanitum is also closely tied to her far more famous spouse, and she had few independent appearances. References to her separately from Marduk indicate the specific importance put on the goddess in those instances. Although independent references to her are rarely seen in the Kassite period, in the first millennium B.C. she acquired greater independence. She had a shrine of her own at this time, located within Marduk’s Esagil temple complex in Babylon, and the name of a processional way within the city invoked her name as the one who “made firm the base” of the king’s throne.

On the two women-owned seals that list only a female deity in their inscriptions, Šarpanitum appears without reference to Marduk on figure 1, and the goddess Gula appears on figure 2. Gula, the goddess of healing, is attested as early as the mid-third millennium B.C., gaining prominence from the Old Babylonian period onward. Linked to several male consorts, Gula was a prominent figure in incantations and was invoked for her abilities as a healer. Her symbolic animal was the dog, a connection that was cited in textual and artistic sources from the second
Although she also had a violent and destructive side, her most common titles focus instead on her healing qualities, and an early second millennium B.C. hymn to the goddess extols her soothing hands and her ability to heal wounds. These qualities are attributed to Gula in the Museum's seal's inscription (fig. 2), where she is described as “sparing,” “merciful,” and “preserving.” With the goddess Gula very much the focus of the inscription, the name of the seal’s owner, Kunnaiatum, seems nearly an afterthought on the seal. In fact, Kunnaiatum’s name was fragmented, with the signs split into the last two lines of the inscription, suggesting that it is of less importance than the other text on the seal.

Neither Mamitum nor Şarpanitum shared the popularity of Gula, who was a well-known and widely represented deity. That Şarpanitum appears twice within this group of four seals, once with Marduk and once as an independent figure, suggests that she had a particular significance for women that seems at odds with her relatively infrequent depiction in other areas of Kassite art. The inscriptions of the four Kassite seals owned by women give clear emphasis to the power of female deities. In contrast, none of the seals in this group either owned by men or whose owner is unknown refers to divine couples. The divine pair of Šamaš and his consort Aya, for example, is represented on cylinder seals in the Museum’s collection, but the Museum has none from the Kassite period. As with other divine pairs mentioned here, Šamaš, the sun god linked to justice and divination, was far more famous than Aya, but the goddess does have her own independent identity. As these two deities are attested on cylinder seals in periods that both precede and follow the Kassite, their absence within this group may be due only to chance.

There is also a pairing of two male deities on a Kassite seal at the Museum. In the inscription on the seal of Adad-gamil (fig. 8)—“Adad-gamil, Son of Raimkiti, Servant of Sin and Amurru”—are the moon god Sin and the god of the west, Amurru. Amurru’s epithets often connect him to mountains, and the deity was both linked to and worshipped in particular by the Amorites, for whom Sin was also an important deity, a fact that may explain the association of the two deities. Sin is by far the more prominent and widely represented of the two deities, who are often seen together.
and even sometimes appear conflated, sharing iconographic attributes such as a curved staff or shepherd’s crook (gamlu). The deities are also together on cylinder seals in the earlier Old Babylonian period, and the connection continues into the first millennium B.C., with the two invoked as a connected figure in a major incantation series against witchcraft. The appearance of the two deities together in the inscription on the seal of Adad-gamil is thus in keeping with what is, by the Kassite period, fairly well established practice.

Among the twelve Kassite seals at the Museum that were owned by men or whose owner’s gender is unknown, only one (fig. 11) names a female deity, Inanna, a goddess who crossed boundaries and was undoubtedly the most powerful female deity in Mesopotamia: “O Inanna of Agade, / The lady who embraces the rites of heaven and earth, / Your speech, your lordly gaze, / [On] Nur-Šamaš, your servant, / Look truly, look favorably [upon him]. / May he acquire wealth, may he acquire abundance. / May those days be bright. / May those joyful thoughts be established.”

This long inscription is a prayer for Inanna’s favor and extols her virtues and powers, asking her to secure the good fortune of Nur-Šamaš, the seal’s owner. Though Nur-Šamaš’s name is more carefully integrated into the prayer than is Kunnaiatum’s on her seal (fig. 2), the text of both seals demonstrates the same essential intent. Both seal owners lavishly praise a goddess, hoping to ensure her benevolent attention through the means of dedicating an important, precious personal object to her. Inanna was one of the most prominent Babylonian deities, making her worthy of Nur-Šamaš’s prayers. The goddesses that appear on the other seals owned by men within the Museum’s Kassite group do not receive such detail. We cannot say whether this is because of a perceived affinity between goddesses and their female worshippers that did not extend to male worshippers, or whether it is a result of lower esteem for female deities among men in Kassite Babylonia, or other possible reasons.

The imagery on several of the cylinder seals complicates the picture of direct female identification between the seal owner and the deity named in the inscription. Although the four seals belonging to women all refer to female divine figures in their inscriptions, only one depicts exclusively female imagery, the seal of Lamassani (fig. 1), dedicated to Šarpanitum. On this seal, a supplicant figure with upraised hands,
wearing a long robe with an elaborate hem, is shown in profile. She wears a headdress and her hair is gathered in a round mass at the nape of her neck. The image of the supplicant goddess, or protective Lama figure, appears frequently in the Kassite period. A stele from Uruk dating to this period, also in the Museum’s collection (fig. 15), depicts a supplicant goddess in profile, hands upraised, with divine headdress and long robe. The stele’s inscription on her tiered robe reinforces her role as a protective figure, indicating it was dedicated for the life of the Kassite ruler Nazi-Maruttaš.18

The seal of Kunnaiatum (fig. 2), dedicated to Gula, features imagery that is not distinguishable as either male or female. Instead, we see the nine lines of the seal’s inscription bordered by a column of four fly-like objects. From the early second millennium b.c. onward, flies are represented on cylinder seals as simply a pair of crossed wedges; earlier seals also depict them, though more rarely, as fully detailed and truer to life.19 In addition, flies are represented in texts with connections to the gods. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, arguably Mesopotamia’s most famous literary text, the mother goddess Bēlēt-ili clutches a necklace of flies, swearing that she will never forget the flood that the gods inflicted upon mankind.20 There are also necklaces from the Royal Tombs of Ur that were strung with fly pendants among their gold, lapis lazuli, and carnelian beads, in an earlier echo of this literary motif.21

On the seal of Manbaši (fig. 4), dedicated to Marduk and Šarpanitum, there is prominent masculine imagery. One of the figures, clearly male, bears a weapon, most likely a mace. The figure of a man holding a mace is well represented on cylinder seals from earlier periods, particularly in the Old Babylonian period, and it was often accompanied by a supplicant Lama figure. While the male figure may occasionally be identified as a deity, he most often lacks visible markers of divinity such as a horned headdress. Instead, he is usually presented as a king, a position that is either inferred from the visual iconography in his representation or revealed directly in the seal’s inscription when there is one. In seals from the Old Babylonian period, the figure of a “king with a mace” appears particularly on ones that belonged to individuals who had significant social or bureaucratic standing.22

The seal of Naramtum (fig. 3) illustrates another level of complexity in which specific deities’ names
are juxtaposed with imagery associated with other deities. The inscription on the seal of Naramtum names the gods Nergal and Mamitum, yet the image shows a male worshipper in profile behind a seated dog, the animal closely affiliated with the healing goddess Gula. The polelike element rising from the dog’s head indicates that it is not a living creature but is instead a divine manifestation or a piece of temple statuary, such as the guardian lions paired in front of many Babylonian temples. Although Nergal was the god of plague and pestilence, he also protected against these ailments, and his appearance in the seal’s inscription could be considered to be reinforced by the presence of Gula. The composition is deliberate, with text and image intended as a coherent whole, for none of the seals in this group of sixteen shows evidence that inscriptions were added after the seal’s initial carving or that images were recarved at a later date. It is difficult now to see how Nergal and Mamitum, their female devotee Naramtum, and a male worshipper approaching a dog of Gula were connected, but the entire composition undoubtedly communicated important aspects of the owner’s family and religious affiliations.

The inscriptions on the four seals owned by women are among the most elaborate of those on the Museum’s group of sixteen Kassite seals and are here considered alongside the detailed imagery also present on the seals. The inscriptions focus on divine figures and the lineage of the female owners rather than providing information about these women as individuals, but the extensive length and complexity of the inscriptions indicate that the owners occupied an elite position in the society of Kassite Babylonia. It is not known whether these seal owners actually used their seals as administrative tools or whether the seals were intended primarily as personal ornaments. Women did not, by and large, occupy the economic and legal roles that would require them to impress their own personal seals on such documents, a common use of cylinder seals that belonged to men. In order to begin to contribute to our understanding of aspects of this important but little-documented period in Babylonian history, we must consider the texts and images on these seals as part of a coherent whole, as did the artisans who made them and the Kassite women for whom they were made. Though we do not know to what extent the owners of the seals specified materials, inscriptions, and
imagery, both the textual and the visual elements of each seal were selected deliberately and thoughtfully with the intent that they work together to convey meanings of individual significance.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
I completed the initial catalogue and drawings of the Kassite cylinder seals during my time as a fellow in the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art at the Metropolitan Museum. I am grateful for assistance from members of the department on both the catalogue and the early drafts of this article, particularly Sarah Graff and Elizabeth Knott, and to the department as a whole for giving me access to the files on these seals, which include important notes and comments by Edith Porada.

GINA KONSTANTOPOULOS
Postdoctoral Researcher, Faculty of Theology, University of Helsinki
APPENDIX

Catalogue of the Inscribed Kassite Cylinder Seals in The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Beyond the broad identification of the Kassite period and First Kassite Style to which these sixteen cylinder seals all belong, no specific date can be attributed to any one. For several seals, particularly MMA 47.115.1-4, the style blurs with that of the late Old Babylonian, and thus even this dating is not absolute. The seals are listed in order of their date of accession; MMA 47.115.1-4 represent the only clearly connected group of seals in the catalogue.

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLITERATION OF INSCRIPTIONS

The cuneiform inscriptions on these seals were inscribed vertically within clearly defined registers over the full height of the seal. When the seals were rolled onto damp clay, the text they inscribed was read from top to bottom and from right to left. The majority of the inscriptions are written in Akkadian and feature the heavy use of Sumero-grams, or cuneiform signs carrying logographic, not syllabic, meanings that align to Sumerian words. The few inscriptions that are entirely in Sumerian are transliterated in expanded spacing, as seen in the first lines of MMA 74.51.4301 (fig. 5), for example, to differentiate the language employed, according to standard Assyriological practices. Generally, Akkadian is transliterated or transcribed in italics, while Sumerograms within an Akkadian text appear in small caps.

Regarding other conventions of transliteration, superscript is generally used to indicate determinatives, signs that are not vocalized but provide information on the category of the word to which they are connected. On the seals here, the divine determinative dišiš is most often seen written simply as ʾ. Other common determinatives and their meanings include ʾušu before a female name; ʾešu before a male name; ʾtušu to indicate stone; and ʾušu, which follows a word, to indicate a location or place.

Cuneiform signs have phonetic as well as logographic readings, and, particularly when a line is fragmentary, signs may be read as phonetic values without their meanings being able to be understood or interpreted. Since most cuneiform languages, including Sumerian and Akkadian, are polysemic, with a particular sign having several possible phonetic readings, the correct reading is tied closely to the meaning of the sign in its particular context. Thus it is difficult to write an accurate transliteration in either Sumerian or Akkadian when the translation is unclear. In these circumstances, the most common phonetic value of the sign is written in lowercase without alterations, to indicate the sign that is present but that its meaning could not be accurately determined (as in MMA 47.115.2, MMA 47.115.3, MMA 1999.325.58). If the sign is entirely unclear and cannot be read at all, an x is used to indicate the presence of a sign that cannot be deciphered.

MMA 74.51.4301 (fig. 5)
The seal image shows, in fine detail, a standing bearded male supplicant figure wearing a fringed robe. He faces the eight-line inscription with his right hand raised. Above him, in a register set off by a dividing line, two sphinxes crouch facing each other. Chalcedony, H. 1 7/16 in. (4.3 cm)

The Cesnola Collection, Purchased by subscription, 1874-76
Inscription:

"ša-zu en alim u-ki
di-ku, kur-kur si-sa, sa-a an-ki-a
si-ša nam-til diširi-diširi ġidru niš-tuku
di-ni arad niš-tuku-zu
he₂-ši he₂-nun mu he₂-tuku
"tu-na-mi-sah
dumu "ša-a-ri
lu₂ mu-ni-pa₂-d« he₂-ša₂-ti₁

Marduk, the lord, the bull, the light of the land
The judge of all the lands,
[who] sets right [all] in heaven and earth,
Giver of life [to] the gods,
[who] holds the scepter,
Exceedingly great,
your reverent servant,
May he be lustrous, may he be princely, may [his] name endure.
Tunamisah,
Son of Pārī,
The one called forth by name, may he prosper!

Comment: The use of the epithet of ʾša₂-uzu, “knows the heart,” for Marduk is later seen in the fifty names of Marduk listed in Enûma Eliš VII:35 and is repeated in several other cylinder seal inscriptions as well as within larger texts. The fine detail in carving is observed in all aspects of the seal—the bearded figure, the two sphinxes, and the inscription itself—and sets it apart from MMA 47.115.1-4.

This cylinder seal entered the Museum’s collection in 1874, well before the other seals discussed here, giving it the oldest publication history of the group.

Publications: Sayce 1877, pp. 441–43; Ward 1895, nos. 391–96; Price 1908, no. 6; Ward 1910, pp. 185–86; Limet 1971, no. 6.5; Imai 1983, no. 132; Paulus 2014, p. 182n331

MMA 41.160.314 (not illustrated)
On this badly worn seal, a figure wearing a long fringed robe faces a seven-column inscription that is illegible except for various signs.
Chalcedony, H. 1 7/16 in. (2.8 cm)
Bequest of W. Gedney Beatty, 1941

Comment: The seal is First Kassite Style, with a single figure facing the inscription in a manner similar to MMA 1985.357.29. It is worn and broken along the top edge of the seal; the upper torso, shoulders, and head of the figure are missing.

MMA 47.115.1 (fig. 6)
Two supplicant figures stand with hands raised; they wear horned headdresses and flounced robes. The figures flank a three-column inscription with their hands raised toward it, as if praising both the inscription and the individual it names.
A supplicant figure with raised hands, wearing a headdress and tiered robe, stands facing the initial line of a four-line inscription. Behind the figure is the symbol of the storm god Adad/Iškur, a lightning fork on the back of a standing bull.

Banded brown and white agate; H. 1 1/8 in. (2.8 cm)
Gift of Georg Hahn, 1947
Inscription:
pa-ar'-ga
DUMU a-ge-ya
ARAD 'EN.ZU

Parga, Son of Ageya, Servant of Sin

Comment: The names of the two individuals on this seal, Parga and Ageya, are attested in sources from the period, although both, particularly the former, are uncommon personal names. Parga is also attested in the corpus of Akkadian letters found at Ras Shamra as a topographical name that is clearly unconnected to the individual who appears in this inscription.26 The second name, Ageya, is attested more frequently than Parga, most often appearing as a patronymic.26
Publication: Lilyquist 1994, pp. 16–18, 35–36

MMA 47.115.2 (fig. 7)
A supplicant figure with raised hands, wearing a headdress and tiered robe, stands facing a four-line inscription. The robe ends at the hem in a distinctive wide double border.
Carnelian, H. 7/8 in. (2.2 cm)
Gift of Georg Hahn, 1947
Inscription:
′na-bi-um
[DUMU]′SA BI GAL
TUKU.NIR di še
ME AB.TUKU.TUKU

Nabû, ... The foremost son, Authoritative ... Possessing all the rites.

Comment: Although the signs on this seal are clear, the meaning of the middle two lines is uncertain. The initial sign in the second line is only partially preserved, and although traces of a vertical may be interpreted, the reading of DUMU.SAĜ, or “firstborn or foremost son, the eldest,” is more intelligible than “PA SAĜ,” the other possible reading of the initial two signs in that line.”27 The use of DUMU.SAĜ on seals is relatively infrequent, however, and is very rarely seen in texts as a whole after the Old Babylonian period, which may push the dating on this seal earlier into the transitional and early periods most often represented in seals of the First Kassite Style.28
Publication: Lilyquist 1994, pp. 16–18, 35–36

MMA 47.115.3 (fig. 1)
A supplicant figure with raised hands, wearing a headdress and long robe, stands and faces the closing line of a four-line inscription. The figure faces toward the final line of a four-column inscription.
Feldspar, H. 7/8 in. (2.2 cm)
Gift of Georg Hahn, 1947
Inscription:
′na'-pa-ni-tum
NIN ŠA LÃ SU₂
la-ma-sa-ni
GEME₂ uh? la an

Servant of Sîn
Son of Ageya, Merciful lady, Lamassani, Female servant of ... Comment: Lamassani is a name seen primarily in the context of nādītu women from Sippur in the Old Babylonian period, a context that lists six different women with this name.29 šarpanitum, consort of the god Marduk, is a far less-well-known deity than her more famous spouse, and she rarely appears independently of him. The final line of this seal is problematic: the middle sign is partially obscured and may be traces of an “uh” sign, though this does not resolve into any common name. Other potential reconstructions of the sign are similarly unhelpful. Lacking other possibilities or options, I follow W. G. Lambert’s initial comment that “the title is a mystery,” and may well be an illegible royal name, in lieu of an illegible divine one.30
Publication: Lilyquist 1994, pp. 16–18, 35–36

MMA 47.115.4 (fig. 8)
A supplicant figure wearing a robe, bordered near the bottom edge, stands with hands raised, facing a four-line inscription. The inscription and the figure are both badly worn.
Gift of Georg Hahn, 1947
Inscription:
′[i]m ga-m[i]
DUMU ra'-im-ki-ti
ARAD 'EN.ZU
[i]2 MAR.TU

Adad-gamīl, Son of Raimkiti, Servant of Sin And Amurru

Comment: The name of this individual, Adad-gamīl, is clear despite the somewhat obscured signs, though the most prominent other attestation of this name is found in agricultural texts from Mari dated to the reign of Zimri-Lim.31 His father’s name, though more unusual, is attested from the Temple Archives at Nippur.32
Publication: Lilyquist 1994, pp. 16–18, 35–36

MMA 56.81.24 (fig. 9)
The male figure wears a long robe and holds a scimitar; there is a fish behind him. In front of the figure’s lower body is a rearing animal, with another animal crouching at the height of his head. The figure faces toward the final line of a four-column inscription.
Rogers Fund, 1956
Inscription:

The god Šamaš, the great lord,
Foremost [in] heaven and earth,
Revealing plenty,
[The one] who is compassionate.

Comment: Although many of the Kassite seals are written in Sumerogram-heavy Akkadian (with often only the inclusion of personal possessive markers in phonetic Akkadian), this seal is entirely in Sumerian, without even the personal name of the owner. Instead it is focused upon and dedicated entirely to the invoked deity. The seal’s inscription is fairly straightforward, with the exception of the third sign in the first line: the traces clearly suggest a large winkelhaken, or single hook-shaped sign, as the only sign present. The only possible reading of “u” here would be umun, the Emesal reading for en, or lord. In Kassite seals, the equation of “u” for “umun” is also well attested. The presence of Emesal, a dialect of Sumerian most often used in ritual texts, in cylinder seal inscriptions is not unattested, and we see similar readings of umun elsewhere, from locations both inside and outside Mesopotamia.

Publication:

Herzfeld 1923–46, no. 2893

MMA 1984.383.14 (fig. 10)

A supplicant female figure with hands raised and another female figure flank a three-line inscription; the space around each of the figures is otherwise undecorated. Part of a gold mount is lodged in the hole of the cylinder seal.
Jasper breccia, H. 1 1/4 in. (3.2 cm)
Gift of Martin and Sarah Cherkasky, 1984
Inscription:

The seal of Kunnaiatum.

Comment: The most minimalistic of the Kassite seals, MMA 1985.357.25 is the only seal in this group without a figural drawing in addition to its inscription, and the only seal that is predominantly in Akkadian, with just the exception of the Sumerograms in the penultimate line. In regard to the fly-like objects that accompany the seal’s inscriptions, we can compare them to similar flies on Kassite seals at the Musée du Louvre, Paris, and the Morgan Library and Museum, New York. The long Akkadian inscription on this seal features the unusual sectioning of the owner’s name, Kunnaiatum, in its two final lines. Given the vertical arrangement of the seal’s composition, along with the length of Kunnaiatum’s name, this seems a planned layout—corroborated by the indentation of the final line of the inscription.

Publications: Eisen 1940, no. 70; Metropolitan Museum 1985, p. 16

MMA 1985.357.26 (not illustrated)

Two male figures on this seal face a five-line inscription that is no longer legible. Both figures wear caps and long, fringed robes and hold staves or crooks in their right hand, with their left arm bent across their chest. A vertical arrangement of three reclining animals, likely ibex, separates the two figures.
Microline feldspar, H. 1 3/8 in. (3.5 cm)
Gift of The Right Reverend Paul Moore Jr., 1985
Comment: This seal displays all the hallmarks of the First Kassite Style. The figures holding a staff or crook in their hands are similar to representations of the god Ninšubur that are seen in this period.

Publications: Eisen 1940, no. 69; Metropolitan Museum 1985, p. 16

MMA 1985.357.29 (fig. 11)

A solitary male bearded figure in a long fringed robe stands with right hand raised, facing an eight-line inscription in even registers.
Milky chalcedony, H. 1 1/2 in. (3.4 cm)
Gift of The Right Reverend Paul Moore Jr., 1985
Inscription:

Inanna a-ga-de
gašan me-me an <ki-a> ur-e
di-di-zu igi nir-zu
ud-<atu me-m-e-za
igi-zi igi-bar-ba
he₂-nun niĝ₂-tuku he₂-tuku
u₄ dadag he₂-nam-bi²
inim-ĝar hul₁, he₂-ĝar-bi²

O Inanna of Agade,
The lady who embraces the rites of heaven and earth,
Your speech, your lordly gaze,
[On] Nūr-Šamaš, your servant,
Look truly, look favorably [upon him].
May he acquire wealth, may he acquire abundance.
May those days be bright.
May those joyful thoughts be established.

Comment: The goddess referred to in the opening lines of this inscription is the particular representation of Inanna linked to the ruling kings of the Sargonic period (ca. 2234–2113 B.C.) and their capital city of Agade. As a personal name, Nūr-Šamaš is attested multiple times in the Kassite period. The third line of this seal is unquestionably the most difficult to interpret, but the Sumerian di-di has lexical equivalents with the Akkadian words dabābu and atmû, both of which may be translated as speech or utterance.

Publications: Eisen 1940, no. 68; Limet 1971, no. 6.13; Metropolitan Museum 1985, p. 16

MMA 1999.325.56 (fig. 12)
A male figure, possibly divine, wearing a round cap and a short fringed garment, stands holding a mace (or short staff) at his waist. Facing him is a figure wearing a long fringed robe and pointed cap; he has both hands raised in supplication. A monkey surmounted by a standard crouches behind the second figure. To the right of the monkey is a two-column inscription.

Hematite, H. 1 in. (2.4 cm)
Gift of Nanette B. Kelekian, in memory of Charles Dikran and Beatrice Kelekian, 1999

Inscription:

nin-šubur
sukkal zi-an-na

Ninšubur,
True vizier of An.

Comment: We see this inscription repeated in the first two lines of a late Old Babylonian/Early Kassite seal at the Morgan Library and Museum. The two-line inscription is repeated exactly on a worn seal of similar style, also at the Morgan Library and Museum. By the Kassite period, Ninšubur has merged with the figure of Papsukkal, and absorbed the latter’s close connections with Anu, as opposed to his role and connection to the goddess Inanna. Given Ninšubur’s recognizable iconography as a god bearing a staff, the figure bearing a weapon, which is either a mace or short staff, on the present cylinder seal may represent this deity.

Publication: Metropolitan Museum 1999

MMA 1999.325.58 (fig. 13)
A bearded male worshipper and a non-bearded worshipper face each other, both wearing caps and long fringed robes. The figure with the beard raises his right hand and the other raises both his hands. Another bearded worshipper stands to the right, facing the closing line of the four-line inscription, his right hand raised.

Rock crystal, H. 7/8 in. (2.3 cm)
Gift of Nanette B. Kelekian, in memory of Charles Dikran and Beatrice Kelekian, 1999

Inscription:

ab ud ma
a-a-ba-aš
‘mes
igi-<tab>-a-ni arhuš tuku

... Abaš,
Marduk,
His gaze bears mercy.

Comment: This inscription’s poorly preserved initial line is difficult to read and translate.

Publication: Metropolitan Museum 1999

MMA 1999.325.60 (fig. 14)
Two figures, possibly divine, stand with both hands raised in supplication. They flank a staff (or spear), which is surmounted by a hedgehog. A goatfish is above the hedgehog, and a fly, a fish,
and a monkey are arrayed beside the staff. There is a two-line inscription.

Hematite, H. 1 1/16 in. (2.7 cm)
Gift of Nanette B. Kelekian, in memory of Charles Dikran and Beatrice Kelekian, 1999
Inscription:
šú·ma·nu·um
ARAD ṣi·šu·um

Šumanum,
Servant of Išum.

Comment: Though little attested during the Kassite period, the name Šumanum does appear in earlier economic records, dating to the reign of Ur III ruler Amar-Sîn, in texts from the administrative center of Puzrish-Dagan. In these texts, Šumanum is referred to as one of a number of Amorite individuals (identified by the formula of personal name [PN] mar-tu) who appear in the texts. Though entirely distinct from the Kassites, the Amorites were similarly foreign to Mesopotamia.44
Publication: Metropolitan Museum 1999

NOTES

1 On the Kassites and their rule in Babylonia, see Brinkman 1976, which remains a major compilation of the published cuneiform texts relating to the Kassite period. On the ruling monarchy, particularly its foreign nature, see Brinkman 1974 and Malko 2014.

2 The single example that is not stone is MMA 56.81.24 (fig. 9), which was carved in faience. For a discussion of that material, see Riccardelli 2017.

3 Serdar Yalçın (2016, p. 130) reports that within the Kassite-period corpus just fourteen seals can be “securely attributed” to women. Of the seals belonging to the Metropolitan Museum, he cites only MMA 1985.357.44 (fig. 3), omitting the other three. In the case of MMA 47.115.3 (fig. 1), this exclusion is based on the difficulty in identifying the seal definitively as late Old Babylonian or early Kassite.

4 On the Kassite language, see Ancillotti 1981.

5 Here the term “servant” is primarily metaphorical, indicating a connection and devotion to a particular deity rather than a particular religious or social position. For information on transliteration conventions and determinatives in Sumerian and Akkadian, see “A Note on the Transliteration of Inscriptions” in the Appendix of this article.

6 Styles of Kassite glyptic art were laid out first, with just two styles, in Van Buren 1954; then expanded in Beran 1957–58; and presented most recently in Collon 2007. They are described in depth in Matthews 1990, p. 55. Donald Matthews also identifies a fourth, pseudo-Kassite, style derived from First Kassite style.

7 Carnelian cylinder seals from other periods are present in the Museum’s collection; see, for example, MMA 41.160.317 and MMA 1999.325.71, both from the first millennium B.C. On the grave goods at Ur, see Reade 2001, pp. 23–26.

8 A general overview of Nergal may be found in Wiggermann 1998–2001.

9 Šarpanitum’s shrine and her association with a processional way are both later attestations, but they may point to her developing significance as a deity independent of her spouse Marduk. See George 1992, pp. 414–15.

10 For an overview of Gula, see Böck 2014, pp. 7–44.

11 On Gula and her connection to dogs, see Ornan 2004.

12 Römer 1969; note that this text refers to Gula by the Sumerian name Ninisina.

13 For earlier cylinder seals with representations of Šamaš and Aya, see MMA 41.160.329 and MMA 1999.325.13.

14 For example, in the Akkadian Epic of Gilgamesh, Ninsun, the mother of the text’s titular hero, appeals directly to Aya to protect her son on his adventures, asking her to ensure that her husband Šamaš will protect him.

15 For an overall comprehensive look at Amurrū, see Kupper 1961 and Beaulieu 2005.

16 Regarding the curved staff associated with a number of deities, including Amurrū, see Ambos and Krauskopf 2010.

17 As seen in the incantation series Maqlû Tablet VI/4, in which a number of deities are invoked in reference to the protection of specific body parts: “My arms are the crook (gamlu) of Sin and Amurrū!” See Abusch 2016, p. 339.

18 On this stele and its inscription, see Becker 1993, p. 59, no. 791.

19 Perhaps the best example of a more lifelike image of a fly on a cylinder seal is found at the British Museum, BM 128843, an early third millennium B.C. cylinder seal that is uninscribed but is carved with images of two ibex and a recumbent gazelle, with a precisely detailed fly above it.
21 See, for example, Pittman 1998.
22 See a listing of such seals in Tanret 2010, p. 220.
23 Although we see that this is true for most periods in Mesopotamian history, there are several periods during which we see women participate in economic activity, such as the long-distance trading networks between Mesopotamia and Anatolia of the early second millennium B.C.
24 See Hurowitz 2010, p. 91. The use of dša3.zu for Marduk also appears on a seal inscription found in Megiddo: *dša3zu / [ ]-li-i / AR铭记 TUKULMAŠ; Šazu (=Marduk), my lord, have mercy on me;* see Oshima 2014, pp. 40–41. This inscription is repeated on an early Kassite seal in the Morgan Library and Museum; see Porada and Buchanan 1948, no. 576.
26 In particular, we see a listing for four attestations of Ageya (read as a-gi-a-qi-ia) even within Albert T. Clay’s collection of Kassite-period personal names: a ruler; the father of one Enmaštu-nādin-šum; the father of one Mindi-iballu; and appearing once in texts from Amarna. See Clay 1912, p. 50, and Hölscher 1996, p. 22.
27 The reading is suggested in Lilquist 1994, p. 36. The First Kassite Style is defined in Van Buren 1954, p. 4.
28 On the Sippar cloister, or Gagûm, and the women who lived there, see Richardson 2010, p. 340.
29 On the Sippar cloister, or Gagûm, and the women who lived there, see Richardson 2010, p. 340.
30 Lilquist 1994, p. 36. We see attestations of a female name, Lammassûtu, in Kassite personal names from Nippur; see Hölscher 1996, p. 130.
32 Clay 1912, p. 120.
33 In particular, J. A. Brinkman presents the use of Emaral on one of a group of seals found at Thebes, with the use of umun = en and i-bi, as the Emaral for i Gi and e-re as Emaral for arad. See Brinkman 1981–82, p. 76, no. 34. The use of umun-gal is attested several times on Kassite cylinder seal inscriptions; see the Kassite seal inscription beginning *EN.ZU UMUN.GAL* (Porada and Buchanan 1948, no. 579, and ibid., nos. 584, 585, which also begin *UTU UMUN.GAL*).
34 See Bahani 2006, p. 54.
35 Delaporte 1920, no. 22. See also Morgan Library and Museum seal no. 121, http://corsair.themorgan.org/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?BBID=83743.
37 Wall-Romana 1990.
38 This name is more frequently written zalag-;utu in Sumerian, rather than ud-utu, as seen here; Hölscher 1996, p. 162.
39 Regarding this seal of Ahuni as the cupbearer of Šu-Šin, see Fischer 2008, pp. 72–73.
40 We see, for example, “Ahuni, son of Šamaš-rabi, servant of Šamaš” (a-hu-ni / duma u-tu-zi-bi / a-raad u-zi-zi) on an Old Babylonian seal in the Morgan Library and Museum (Porada and Buchanan 1948, no. 315), and other attestations in Hölscher 1996, p. 25.
41 There is little information specifically about Mamitum, who decided the fates of those entering the netherworld. See Lambert 1973.
42 Porada and Buchanan 1948, no. 429.
43 Ibid., no. 527.
44 Liu 2015, pp. 94–97. Concerning this and other Amorite personal names during this period, see Buccellati 1966, p. 182, and Owen 1995. Šumanum in particular was awarded three sheep, and was thus integrated into Ur III bureaucracy despite his foreign origin.
45 Among the Kassite names found inscribed on objects in the collection of the Museum, we see most prominently the king Nazi-Maruttash on an inscribed stele of a protective Lama goddess (fig. 15).
46 The pairing of Marduk and Šaрапanitum is far more common in cylinder seal inscriptions than Sarpanitum’s appearing alone as she does in figure 1. I am grateful to Piotr Michalowski for his help with this seal’s inscription.

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