

THE POTNIA THERON: ADAPTATION OF A NEAR EASTERN IMAGE*

In the late nineteenth century, the title *Potnia Theron* was assigned to a particular composition which generally consists of a centrally placed, standing female figure, flanked by two animals or grasping an animal in each hand (Pl. CIIIa).¹ It is commonly considered to represent a deity demonstrating “control” or “mastery” over animals.² The composition appears in the art of the Bronze Age Aegean, mainly on seals and sealings, and later is adapted into the art of Iron Age Greece. In both eras, the inspiration for the composition comes from the Mesopotamian glyptic motif of a “Hero” struggling with animals.

Fundamental studies of the *Potnia Theron* composition in the Bronze Age Aegean include those of Edith Spartz and Janice Crowley.³ Spartz discusses the various types of composition and attempts to trace the Near Eastern models for each type.⁴ She concludes that, though there are obvious Near Eastern elements and influences at work, the Minoan-Mycenaean composition is an indigenous creation.⁵ Crowley, on the other hand, includes the Mistress of Animals among those motifs that are used in common by the cultures of the Aegean and the Near East. She argues that the composition is based on Mesopotamian models and suggests that its reception into Minoan culture was prompted by the Minoans’ “need of an artistic motif expressing divine power over animals” and that “the ready-made motif from the eastern artistic traditions fitted the requirements.”⁶

The Mistress of Animals composition was certainly adapted from its Near Eastern models to reflect Aegean stylistic canons. There may however be more social significance behind the reception of this composition than a mere comparative artistic analysis would suggest. A fresh examination of the use and significance of the Near Eastern models and the function of the

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1 F. STUDNICZKA, *Kyrene: Eine Altgriechische Göttin* (1890) 153-165. Studniczka was the first to label the composition “Potnia Theron,” choosing the phrase from the *Iliad*, where it is used to describe Artemis (XXI.470-1). The choice of this adjectival phrase with its associations with the goddess of the hunt has led to the common assumption that the majority of compositions entitled *Potnia Theron* are, in fact, representations of the goddess Artemis. Artemis may be a *Potnia Theron*, but the iconographic and contextual evidence suggests that the composition actually depicts a variety of deities whose precise identities are still unknown. Generally, see E. SPARTZ, *Das Wappenbild des Herrn und der Herrin der Tiere in der minoisch-mykenischen und frühgriechischen Kunst* (1962); D. CHRISTOU, *Potnia Theron: Eine Untersuchung über Ursprung, Erscheinungsformen und Wandlungen der Gestalt einer Gottheit* (1968) and A. BARCLAY, *Mastery of Animals: Reception of an Oriental Image in Archaic Greece*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto (2001).

2 This concept has not been formally defined and so tends to be used to suit individual interpretations of various compositions. The main components necessary for a depiction of the “mastery of animals” concept are: a male/female figure accompanied by one or two animals who, through the combination of stance, gesture, the type of animal (lions, bulls or other large or fantastic animals one would not expect to see a mortal handling), and the attitude of the animals (rampant and flanking the central figure, held by a limb, etc.), create a symbolic representation of control or power, either in a generic sense or possibly specifically over the forces of nature.

3 SPARTZ (*supra* n. 1) 8-39 and J. CROWLEY, *The Aegean and the East: An Investigation into the Transference of Artistic Motifs between the Aegean, Egypt and the Near East in the Bronze Age* (1989) 34-39; 271-272 (Master of Animals, pages 28-33).

4 Spartz’s composition types are based on the sex of the central figure, the species of animals (for example, Masters of lions or birds and Mistresses of lions, griffins or birds) and the manner in which the animals are held (rampant and held by a front leg, held upside-down by a hind-leg, etc.).

5 SPARTZ (*supra* n. 1) 22-39.

6 CROWLEY (*supra* n. 3) 272.

composition in the Bronze Age Aegean may give us insight into the ideological significance that led to the choice of this particular composition and its incorporation into Bronze Age Aegean culture. I propose first to outline the symmetrical composition-types of the Master and Mistress of Animals in the Near East, then to summarize briefly the Aegean material, and finally, to discuss issues which arise from the fact of its reception. Charts I and II summarize the archaeological evidence for the composition in the Near East and the Aegean.

The Near East

The model for the Mistress of Animals in Near Eastern art is the Master of Animals (Pl. CIIIb), a symmetrical variant of the “contest scene,” one of the most popular subjects in the glyptic art of the east, especially Mesopotamia.⁷ The Master of Animals appeared in Western Iran and Southern Mesopotamia as early as the fourth millennium (Chart I),⁸ but the “contest scene” and the Master of Animals became very popular in the third millennium, specifically in the Early Dynastic and Akkadian periods in Mesopotamia. Two main types of central figure are represented as Masters: the “Hero,” characterized by an elaborate hairstyle and long beard (Pl. CIIIb, center), and the “Bull-man” (Pl. CIIIb, right and Pl. CIIIc).⁹ The stance and gesture (upraised hands) of the “Hero,” illustrated in Pl. CIIIb, is maintained from the earliest period through the Iron Age. The “mastered” animals include lions, bulls and herd-animals, usually grasped by a limb. Alternatively, the arms of the Master are draped around the necks of the animals, as with the Bull-man and his Human-headed bulls in Pl. CIIIc. This “hugging” gesture can be interpreted as one of protection.¹⁰ None of the Masters of Animals in the fourth and third millennium bear any attributes or identifying features, such as the horned crown, to indicate that they are divine.¹¹ The so-called “Hero” became the standard character for the contest scenes in this region down through the Achaemenid period.¹²

The Master of Animals continues in use through the late third and early second millennium, but occurrences are rare (Chart I).¹³ During the 15th and 14th centuries there is a resurgence of the composition in Mesopotamia, particularly in the glyptic art of the Kassite Babylonians (Pl. CIIId) and the Assyrians (Pl. CIIIE).¹⁴ The central figure now also appears as a griffin-demon or a genius - a winged male figure; moreover, the first divine Master of Animals occurs on Kassite Babylonian seals in the form of the genius wearing a horned crown.¹⁵ Fantastic animals begin to appear as attributes in addition to lions, bulls and caprids.

7 BARCLAY (*supra* n. 1) Ch. 1; D. COLLON, *First Impressions: Cylinder Seals in the Ancient Near East* (1987) 193-197 and “Nimrod, the Mighty Hunter, and his Descendants: Contest Scenes on Cylinder Seals” in *Seals and Sealings in the Ancient Near East* (1995) 23-38; M. GARRISON, *Seal Workshops and Artists in Persepolis: A Study of Seal Impressions Preserving the Theme of Heroic Encounter on the Persepolis Fortification and Treasury Tablets* (Volumes I-III) Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan (1988) 24-160. There are two main types of “contest scene:” the Master of Animals and the more common combat scenes in which the “Hero” fights one animal.

8 For some fourth millennium examples, see GARRISON (*supra* n. 7) 30-36 and BARCLAY (*supra* n. 1) Ch. 1.

9 For third millennium contest scenes, see COLLON (*supra* n. 7, 1987) 27, 197, GARRISON (*supra* n. 7) 37-58 and BARCLAY (*supra* n. 1) Ch. 1.

10 GARRISON (*supra* n. 7) 26.

11 For divine attributes, see A. GREEN, “Ancient Mesopotamian Religious Iconography” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (1995) 1837-1855. The Early Dynastic “Heroes” have long, curly hair that sticks straight up from their heads, as in Pl. CIIIb. The hairstyle is not considered an indicator of divinity.

12 The fourth and third millennium examples of the Master of Animals in Egypt, Anatolia and Syria-Palestine (Chart I) reflect strong Mesopotamian influence, both in composition and choice of central figure. For example, a depiction of the “Hero” on a gypsum relief plaque from Mari is copied directly from Early Dynastic glyptic art (Damascus Museum S 2380, in A. PARROT, *Supplément Sumer-Assur* [1969] 18 Fig. 38). For other examples, see BARCLAY (*supra* n. 1) Ch. 1.

13 BARCLAY (*supra* n. 1) Ch. 1 with references and GARRISON (*supra* n. 7) 58-66. See COLLON (*supra* n. 7, 1987) Ch. 4, The age of Hammurabi, 2000-1500 B.C.

14 GARRISON (*supra* n. 7) 66-82 and D. MATTHEWS, *Principles of Composition in Near Eastern Glyptic of the Later Second Millennium B.C.* (1990).

15 For examples, see MATTHEWS (*supra* n. 14) Assyrian griffin-demons: #280-282 and #470-471 (Early Atlantid style); Kassite genius with horned crown: #145, 147.

Despite the spread of the composition towards the west, where it occurs in the glyptic art of the Mitannians, Syro-Palestinians and Cypriotes (Chart I),¹⁶ the main concentration of the Master of Animals continues to be in Mesopotamia.

In contrast, although representations of goddesses with animals occur in glyptic and other arts dating back at least to the early third millennium, these goddesses tend to be depicted accompanied by or standing on only one animal and in non-symmetrical compositions.¹⁷ This is not the true Mistress of Animals type, which, in my opinion, first appears in the second millennium with the symmetrical composition. The Mistress is usually depicted nude, standing in a frontal view with upraised hands and is both winged and wingless. The most common animals held are goats, but there are examples of lions, gazelles, snakes and griffin-demons (Chart I). The Mistress of Animals never gains the same widespread popularity as the Master, appearing mainly in the Syro-Palestinian region. The examples listed in Chart I represent the entire corpus of Mistress of Animals compositions known to me whereas the Masters are a representative sample of a much more popular composition.

The earliest examples of a possible Mistress of Animals type appear in Babylonia. A terracotta plaque, said to be Babylonian and dated between 2004-1763 (Pl. CIIIg), and a terracotta jar from Babylon, dated to c. 1700 (Pl. CIIIh), are decorated with winged, naked goddesses with upraised hands. These goddesses are often interpreted as Mistresses of Animals because of the gesture, frontality and the presence of animals. The frontal stance seems to be a standard way of depicting naked goddesses in Near Eastern art. But we should ask whether these goddesses really represent the same “mastery of animals”? The symmetrical scheme is suggestive of a Mistress of Animals. Yet, the goddesses stand on the backs of two lions (Pl. CIIIg) and two goats (Pl. CIIIh) rather than holding them. Instead, the goddess in Pl. CIIIg holds Babylonian symbols, the presence of which raises the suspicion that the “mastery of animals” is not the main point of the composition.¹⁸ I suggest that these goddesses are not “controlling” the animals as such - the animals function as divine attributes, like the horned crown.

The Mistress of Animals is more common in the second half of the second millennium, but extant examples are still rare (Chart I). There are now two types of composition. The first, perhaps the “true” Mistress of Animals type, now appears in the glyptic art of the Mitannians, Middle Assyrians, Syro-Palestinians and Cypriotes. In this type, the goddess replaces the

16 Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Aegean iconographic elements are all present in the glyptic art of the Mitannians, Syro-Palestinians and Cypriotes and are often combined in one composition. Masters of Animals occur, but they are not common. For some examples, see MATTHEWS (*supra* n. 14) #590, 591, 607 (Mitannian), #553-555 (Cypriote) and COLLON (*supra* n. 7, 1987) 61-65, #274 (Mitannian), possibly #309, #873 (Syro-Palestinian), #519 and #317, 323-324 (Cypriote, these seals depict a variation of the composition which is not strictly symmetrical); also CMS V, 2.657 (Cypriote). There is some dispute over the stylistic attribution of Thebes Museum #213 (Matthews' #607 and Collon's #873). Matthews describes the seal as Assyrianizing Mitannian while Collon includes it among her Syrian examples.

17 For a summary of Near Eastern goddesses, see J.G. WESTENHOLZ, “Goddesses of the Ancient Near East 3000-1000 BC” and K. VAN DER TOORN, “Goddesses in Early Israelite Religion” in *Ancient Goddesses: The Myths and the Evidence* (1998) 63-82, 83-97. Goddesses with animals include, Akkadian period: the consort of the Akkadian storm god stands on the back of a winged lion-dragon in COLLON (*supra* n.7, 1987) 160-161, #725-726 and Narundi is seated on a throne carved with lions (Louvre Sb 54, Susa) in P.O. HARPER, J. ARUZ, and F. TALLON, *The Royal City of Susa: Ancient Near Eastern Treasures in the Louvre* (1992) 55; *Old Babylonian period and later: a seated goddess holds birds* (Louvre Sb 6559, Iran) in P. AMIET, *Elam* (1966) 299 #223, Inanna (Ishtar) in her warrior aspect holds a lion on a leash and has one foot resting on its back (COLLON [*supra* n. 7, 1987] 160, #26i, 772, 773) and in her fertility aspect she stands on the back of a bull “unveiling” (COLLON [*supra* n. 7, 1987] 160-161, #778).

18 Pl. CIIIg. The symbols may be the ring and rod of power which the goddess to the king to confirm his right to rule. The ring and rod of power are very old, Mesopotamian symbols of kingship. See J. BLACK and J. GREEN, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary* (1992) 156. On the terracotta jar (Pl. CIIIh), the surface is worn in the region of the goddess' hands but it is very possible that she also held symbols of some sort. There is no evidence that she held animals.

“Hero” in the basic symmetrical composition (Pl. CIII^f and CIV^a). Of the ten glyptic examples I have found, nine depict this type of Mistress.¹⁹ On four of these, she is illustrated not as the main subject, but with several other motifs, almost as filler decoration. The focal point of the Mitannian seal in Pl. CIII^f, for example, is the deity standing on the back of a lion. The winged Mistress of Animals appears immediately to his left, in the upper register.²⁰ The six remaining seals, on the other hand, show her as the main subject (e.g. the 15th-century, Middle Assyrian seal impression from Assur, illustrated in Pl. CIV^a).²¹ Apart from Pl. CIII^f, which may come from Nuzi in Northeastern Mesopotamia, the Middle Assyrian seals are the only examples of Mistresses of Animals from Mesopotamia. They have been attributed to a Mitannian-inspired, Assyrian style.²²

The other composition-type in the second half of the second millennium is that combination in which the Mistress holds an animal - most often a goat - in each hand and stands on the back of a lion. This type seems to be a conflation of the symmetrical composition and the common Near Eastern motif of a deity standing on the back of one animal (Pl. CIV^b).²³ The extent of use of the Mistress of Animals in early Syrian and Cypriote glyptic is unclear, but she seems to be an extraordinary, local Syrian adaptation of the Mesopotamian Master of Animals.²⁴ This hypothesis is supported by the fact that this composition type appears most often on non-glyptic media in Syrian art. Specifically, she appears on gold plaques from Minet el-Beida (Ugarit) and the Ulu Burun shipwreck and on limestone stelae from Egypt.²⁵ The gold plaques, possibly amulets, date to the 15th – 13th centuries and are decorated with a goddess

- 19 The tenth example is a Middle Assyrian seal (14th-century) depicting a goddess standing on the backs of two goats and holding two goats. See O.W. MUSCARELLA, *Ladders to Heaven. Art Treasures from the Land of the Bible* (1981) 80-81, #81 and MATTHEWS (*supra* n. 14) 104, #429. This composition is very similar in style to the Kassite seals of genii with goats (MATTHEWS [*supra* n. 14] #145 and cf. Pl. CIII^{g-h}).
- 20 The winged variant of the goddess in Pl. CIII^f is similar to the Babylonian deities in Pl. CIII^{g-h}. The other examples of Mistresses of Animals as added motifs are: two Mitannian cylinder seals, one depicting a very similar goddess depicted in the upper right corner. This seal has two registers of decoration (from Akko, Israel in COLLON [*supra* n. 7, 1987] #276). The other Mitannian seal depicts a presentation scene as its main subject. A winged Mistress of Animals “floats” behind the seated deity (no provenance, see E. STROMMINGER, *5000 Years of the Art of Mesopotamia* [1964] Pl. 179, bottom row). For a 13th-century Cypriote example, see Thebes Museum #192 in E. PORADA, “The Cylinder Seals Found at Thebes in Boeotia,” *AJO* 28 (1981/82) #4.
- 21 The other examples are: two fragmentary Mitannian seal impressions from Alalakh (N. Syria) in COLLON, *The Seal Impressions from Tell Atchana/Alalakh (Alter Orient und Altes Testament, 27)* (1975) 118 #215, 216; one Syrian seal from Ugarit (Ugarit Recent 2) in P. AMIET, *Corpus des cylindres de Ras-Shamra-Ugarit II: Sceaux-cylindres en hématite et pierres diverses. Ras Shamra-Ugarit IX* (1992) #153; two goddesses holding three animals depicted on a seal found at Thebes in Boeotia (Thebes Museum # 176) may be the only Cypriote example. See PORADA (*supra* n. 20) #1. The sixth seal is the Middle Assyrian cited *supra* n. 19.
- 22 MATTHEWS (*supra* n. 14) 106-110: Early Atlantid style. The very limited glyptic evidence suggests that it was the Mitanni who adapted the Mesopotamian Master of Animals composition to create the “true” Mistress of Animals. This variant does seem to be the more common one on Mitannian seals (*supra* n. 20 and 21). The Master of Animals may have entered the Mitannian glyptic repertoire via earlier Mesopotamian examples (heirlooms or regional) or contemporary Syrian and Northern Mesopotamian adaptations of the Hero struggling with animals. For a general discussion of Mitannian art, see COLLON (*supra* n. 7, 1987) 61-65 and *Ancient Near Eastern Art* (1995) 110-114.
- 23 This seal impression appears to be from an 18th century Syrian seal. However, the style of the Mistress of Animals composition suggests that she was added to the seal at a later date, possibly re-cut on Cyprus in the 14th century (D. COLLON, personal communication). Another 14th century Cypriote example appears in C.F.A. SCHAEFFER-FORRER, *Corpus I des Cylindres-Sceaux de Ras-Shamra Ugarit et d'Enkomi-Alasia*, 1983: 59, Chypre A3. (D. COLLON, personal communication regarding the attribution and date of the seal.)
- 24 For developments in Syrian glyptic, see COLLON (*supra* n. 7, 1987) 52-55.
- 25 A very similar goddess holding plants appears on four more gold plaques from Syria-Palestine. See O. NEGBI, *Canaanite Gods in Metal* (1976) 99-100, #1697 (Acre), 1698-1699 (Minet el-Beida) and VAN DER TOORN (*supra* n. 17) 86, Fig. 32 for a 12th-c. plaque from Lachish. There are also terracotta plaques depicting this deity: M. TADMOOR, “Female Cult Figurines in Late Canaan and Early Israel: Archaeological Evidence” in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays* (1982) 139-173 and VAN DER TOORN (*supra* n. 17) 91-96. A naked, female figure wearing an Egyptian-style crown and flanked by sphinxes is carved into an ivory tusk which was also found at Ugarit (LBII-III): CROWLEY (*supra* n. 3) 35 #83.

holding caprids and standing on a lion (Pl. CIVd).²⁶ A similar, Syrian-derived goddess appears on at least five limestone stelae from Egypt, dating to the New Kingdom. On one example, the goddess holds a snake in each hand,²⁷ but she is more frequently depicted holding a lotus plant in one hand and a snake (or two) in the other (Pl. CIVc).²⁸ The stela in Pl. CIVc has an inscription identifying the figure as the Syrian deity Qudshu, giving us a name for at least one manifestation of the nude goddess and perhaps also suggesting an identity for the goddesses on the gold plaques.²⁹

This detailed summary of the surviving examples of the symmetrical composition in Near Eastern art reveals that although she is a feature of Near Eastern art, the Mistress of Animals is a very rare feature and is of Mitannian and Syrian rather than Mesopotamian origin. There also seem to be two variants of the Syrian composition: a direct adaptation of the Master of Animals (Pl. CIIIf and CIVa) and that conflation of the symmetrical composition with the motif of a deity standing on the back of one animal (Pl. CIVb-e). The evidence outlined above very clearly indicates that the composition with a male as the central figure is by far the oldest and most common version in the Near East. To understand its reception in the Aegean world, therefore, we need to examine the function of the Master of Animals in its own cultural context.

The significance of the Master of Animals in Near Eastern iconography is not very clear, except that it is generally recognized as a symbol of control and power, and possibly also of protection. Only occasionally are attempts made to identify the composition with a particular hero from literature, usually Gilgamesh.³⁰ The appearance of divine and fantastic “Masters” around the 15th-century would seem to indicate a change in the traditional concept behind the composition in Mesopotamia. This is supported by the contemporary interest in “controlling” fantastic, rather than earthly animals.³¹

The Master of Animals composition had been in use since the fourth millennium, moving in and out of fashion according to the tastes of the various city-states and empires of Mesopotamia. It was transmitted via Mesopotamian art and other contacts to the Levant, Egypt and eventually the Aegean. The antiquity of this motif in Near Eastern iconography contributes to the modern uncertainty over the interpretation of the composition. The original function of the motif - heroic figure or symbolic protector of domestic animals - would have been all but forgotten by the mid-second millennium.³² Yet, despite the fluctuations in its popularity and so in its specific function, the Master of Animals remained a standard subject in Mesopotamia, especially in glyptic art, and a powerful symbol of control.

26 There are two examples of gold plaques on which the goddess holds rams and stands on a lion, both from Minet el-Beida, Pl. CIVd and NEGBI (*supra* n. 25) #1700. A third plaque, found in the Ulu Burun shipwreck, depicts the goddess standing on a lion and holding gazelles: G.F. BASS, C. PULAK, D. COLLON and J. WEINSTEIN, “The Bronze Age Shipwreck at Ulu Burun: 1989 Campaign,” *AJA* 93 (1989) Fig. 3. Divinity for these figures is indicated by the Hathor-wig as well as other attributes such as headdresses and horns. For the Hathor-wig as a mark of divinity, see M.T. BARRELET, “Deux Déeses Syro-Phéniciennes sur un bronze du Louvre,” *Syria* 35 (1958) 27-44, especially 33-36.

27 Berlin, Ägyptische Museen 21626. For a photo, see J. PRITCHARD, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures* (1969) 304 and #471 (19th Dynasty - c. 1350-1200).

28 PRITCHARD (*supra* n. 27) 304, #470-474: dates for #470, 474 - c. 1550-1090, for 473 (my pl. CIVc) no date is given for #472. The function of the stelae is not clear - possibly votive monuments.

29 The similarities between the goddesses on the seals, the gold plaques and the stelae are very striking. As stated above, this composition may be a conflation of two motifs - the Master of Animals and a deity standing on the back of one animal that is associated with his/her power and divinity. For discussions on the identity of this goddess, see NEGBI (*supra* n. 25) 99-100, with references, I. CORNELIUS, “Anat and Qudshu as the ‘Mistress of Animals’,” *SEL* 10 (1993) 21-45, P. DAY, “Anat: Ugarit’s ‘Mistress of Animals’,” *JNES* 51 (1992) 181-190 and WESTENHOLZ (*supra* n. 17) 79-81.

30 GARRISON (*supra* n. 7) 25-30. COLLON (*supra* n. 7, 1995) outlines the history of the contest scene as a development from hunting scenes into a symbol of kingly, national and divine power. Collon sees changes in political power of the Mesopotamian states reflected in the variations of the contest scene compositions.

31 GARRISON (*supra* n. 7) 73-74 and BARCLAY (*supra* n. 1) Ch. 1.

32 GARRISON (*supra* n. 7) 25 and A.D.H. BIVAR, “A Persian Monument at Athens, and its Connection with Achaemenid State Seals” in *W.B. Henning Memorial Volume* (1970) 43-61, esp. 45-46.

The large number of occurrences of the motif on seals, rather than in other media, is not entirely due to accidents of preservation. The “Hero” as Master of Animals does appear in other media in the third millennium,³³ but despite its potential versatility for use in a wide variety of media, the composition does not seem to have been commonly used for jewelry, reliefs, figurines, stone vessels or for decoration on monumental architecture.³⁴ Nor is there evidence of use of the Master of Animals in the popular arts. Seals were a major medium for artistic expression in the Near East and the symmetrical composition is a design that is easily adapted to the rectangular field of a cylinder seal. But it is those who are commissioning the seal designs who are important to understanding the function of the motif. Seals were used for administrative purposes, usually made of precious stones and were high status objects. There is a clear association between the “Hero” as Master of Animals and royalty, or at least the upper classes and so, again, an association with power.

When the Mistress of Animals appeared in Near Eastern art, it was as a deity rather than a female equivalent of the “Hero.” As a deity she may be a symbol of protection on the seals or pendants, or an object of devotion on the stelae. Which deity she represented is debatable: she has been identified with Ishtar-Inanna, who was often depicted with a lion;³⁵ with the Syrian goddess Anat, who, in the Ugarit texts, is a huntress and warrior;³⁶ and with Qudshu, the deity who is identified on the Egyptian stelae. The symmetrical scheme has clearly been adapted for a Syrian goddess from the Master of Animals composition, but whether the Mistress is a feminization of the Mesopotamian motif in concept as well as composition has yet to be determined.³⁷

The Aegean

The symmetrical composition of the *Potnia Theron* first appears in Aegean glyptic art in LMI. Judging by the extant examples, which are admittedly few in number, the Mistress of Animals is initially much preferred over the Master (Chart II). She wears Minoan-style dress and tends to stand with her head and torso facing front, her feet and lower body in profile and her hands upraised (Pl. CIIIa, CIVE). She occurs in two types of composition – one in which she “controls” her animals passively, without touching them; the second in which she subdues the animals through physical force, holding them by a body part. In LMI, the less aggressive “mastery” of animals is the more common. The Mistress is depicted supporting a “snake frame” above her head, and there is often a double-axe centered between the bows of the frame (Pl. CIIIa, CIVE). In this variation, although she is accompanied by lions or griffins, she does not touch them. Two seal impressions from Knossos, on which the Mistress touches two lions on the chin, may be examples of the second type.³⁸

33 For example, on two lyre boxes from Tomb of Queen Pu-abi, Royal Tombs of Ur (British Museum WA 1211981 and Philadelphia University Museum U.10556) and on a stone cup from Uruk (British Museum WA 118465). All three examples can be found in COLLON (*supra* n. 22, 1995) Figures 53, 192 and 36.

34 BARCLAY (*supra* n. 1) Ch. 1.

35 See WESTENHOLZ (*supra* n. 17) 72-76, for a study of Inanna-Ishtar.

36 WESTENHOLZ (*supra* n. 17) 79, DAY (*supra* n. 29) and CORNELIUS (*supra* n. 29).

37 WESTENHOLZ (*supra* n. 17) 79: “Anat in her character of perpetual *btlt* was forever on the threshold of adulthood with its defined sexual roles. This lack of complete gender separation was expressed mythologically by a ‘confusion of categories’, the absence of a boundary between male and female spheres of activity, leaving her free to participate in the culturally masculine pursuits of warfare and hunting.” This may account for the adaptation of a predominantly male symbol of power for a female, Syro-Palestinian deity.

38 Knossos seal impressions: HMs 158 + 662. See M.R. POPHAM and M.A.V. GILL, *The Latest Sealings from the Palace and Houses at Knossos* (1995) 47-48, Pl. 29 #R32. The LMI date is taken from J. YOUNGER, “The Iconography of Rulership: A Conspectus” in *Ruler* 183, #204. The gold diadem from the Zakros region noted in Chart II depicts a Mistress of Animals holding goats by their hind legs, the more violent method of controlling animals that is much more common in LBIII. The diadem was a surface find, part of the “Zakros Treasure” (Archaeological Museum, Herakleion formerly part of the Giamalakis Collection) and so it is not possible to give it an exact date. Platon suggests that the diadem belongs to the ‘flowering of the palace period’: N. PLATON, *Zakros. The Discovery of a Lost Palace of Ancient Crete* (1985) 22-23, photo page 11. If this diadem belongs to LMI, it is the only extant example from this period of a Mistress of Goats and of the more aggressive method of subduing the animals.

The Mistress of Animals continues to appear in glyptic art through the end of Late Bronze IIIB, though she seems to become less popular (Chart II). She also goes through a few transformations with the addition of birds and dolphins to the types of animals she controls and a preference for depicting the more aggressive gesture, as in Pl. CIVf.³⁹ The composition type in which she bears the “snake frame” is now rare, occurring on an LMII seal from Knossos, where she is depicted with griffins in a composition very similar to the LMI examples.⁴⁰ The only other examples of a Mistress with a “snake frame” are on a seal from Menidi (LHIIIA2-B) and a group of LHIIIB seal impressions from Pylos.⁴¹

The Master of Animals composition was known in LBI-II (Chart II) but does not seem to have been very popular. The Master was generally clothed in a codpiece or kilt and stood, like the Mistress, in partial profile. He has a wider variety of gestures than the Mistress - hands upraised, arms outstretched from the shoulders or lowered - and tends to be depicted in fairly aggressive relationships with his animals.⁴² The LHII jasper seal ring found at Mycenae is a good example of the typical stance of the Master (Pl. CIVg). In LBIII, there is a remarkable increase in the number of representations of the Master of lions (Pl. CIVh and Chart II). Very intriguing is the newly discovered rhyton from Pylona on Rhodes, which is dated to LHIIIA. The Pylona rhyton is the only extant ceramic example decorated with the Master of Animals and the only object with a clearly ritual function.⁴³

The extant Mistress and Master of Animals compositions in the Aegean appear almost exclusively in glyptic art. Because so many of the seals are surface finds, without a clear provenance, or are found in contexts which date later than the stylistic attribution, it is impossible to determine a geographical pattern of distribution for the composition (Chart II). Examples appear mainly on Crete and on the Mainland in palace or tomb contexts. There is no evidence - from domestic contexts, cave or peak sanctuaries - that the composition was used on anything but high status media.⁴⁴

The Mistress of Animals evidently represents a divine or at least a superhuman power. The stance, gesture and association with or mastery of lions, griffins and even dolphins and birds supports this identification. The presence of symbols such as the “snake frame” and double-axe may also suggest divinity. The use of the composition as part of the decoration in the throne room at Knossos or many of the other adaptations in glyptic art that have been labeled *Potnia Theron* may also support a divine connotation.⁴⁵ Without epigraphic evidence, we will never know whether the Mistress of Animals is meant to represent a specific deity or whether the different attributes signify several goddesses or different aspects of one.

The identity of the Master of Animals is a bit of a puzzle as well. Is he a god in his own right, a male counterpart to the Mistress of Animals; or does he represent a hero or a king? The discovery of the Pylona rhyton may support an identification as a divinity or perhaps someone in the service of the deity, such as a priest. Again, without some sort of written identification, it is not possible to determine his identity.

39 See also CMS I.344 (Pylos, LHIIIB) where a female figure is flanked by dolphins but does not touch them. Mistresses of Birds: CMS VII.134 (no provenance, LHIIIA) and CMS IX.154 (no provenance, “Mycenaean”).

40 CMS II.3.63

41 CMS XI.112 (Menidi) and CMS I.379 (Pylos).

42 The LMI and LMII Masters with genii are not as violent in their exertion of control. In CMS XI.36 he appears to hold them by the tongue and in CMS XI.290, he holds his outstretched hands above their heads. For other LBIII examples, see BARCLAY (*supra* n. 1) Ch. 2 with references, CROWLEY (*supra* n. 3) 28-33 and SPARTZ (*supra* n. 1) 99-105.

43 E. KARANTZALI, “New Mycenaean Finds from Rhodes” in *MELETEMATA* II, 403-408 (esp. 406-407) and Pl. XC.

44 BARCLAY (*supra* n. 1) Ch. 2 and SPARTZ (*supra* n. 1) 99-105 (catalogue).

45 BARCLAY (*supra* n. 1) Ch. 2: non-glyptic media and “other examples”; CROWLEY (*supra* n. 3) #79, 80, 87.

Some Conclusions

There are no exact models for the Aegean Mistress of Animals in Near Eastern art. She was adapted in LMI to suit Minoan tastes, perhaps from the Mitannian variant of the goddess as Mistress of Animals (Pl. CIII^f) or from the prevalent “Hero” as Master of Animals (Pl. CIII^{d-e}). There are obvious similarities and differences between the Near Eastern and Aegean compositions. The similarities lie in the symmetrical scheme, the stance and upraised hands gesture of the central figure, the preference for lions and griffins⁴⁶ and for the use of the composition as a design in glyptic art. The upraised hands gesture does have a long tradition in Minoan art, but the combination of elements in this composition suggests its adoption as a whole from the Near East.

The Aegean Mistress differs from the Near Eastern model most obviously in the preference for a female as the central figure and the addition of Minoan style dress and symbols. These are the adaptations made to the composition to make it more intelligible to its Minoan audience. The decision to depict a more passive form of control over the animals, as in the case of the Mistresses with the “snake frames,” is also interesting and recalls the Old Babylonian relief (cf. Pl. CIII^a and CIII^g). Here too there is an ambiguity in the relationship between goddess and animals and in the main concept behind the image. In the Minoan examples, the rampant lions and attentive griffins suggest a definite connection between Mistress and animals, but it is a different sort of control than that represented through touch or brute force (cf. Pl. CIVE^f).

I do not think that the adoption of the composition-type is simply a case of the transfer of elements for iconographic convenience. The association of the composition with glyptic art is deliberate. Those commissioning the seals wanted them to fulfill specific (administrative?) functions. A primary function of the seal in the Aegean, as in the Near East, was to denote status. When the symmetrical composition was adopted by Minoan society, or rather, a certain stratum of Minoan society, radical changes were made in the details, revealing a different specific concept behind the image. But the overall concepts of power, control and protection on a high status object lie behind the initial reception of the composition.

In LBIII, there was a significant switch in interest from the Mistress of Animals to the Master, possibly indicating a reinforcement of the “heroic” aspect of the composition. There is also a preference for the “aggressive” manner of controlling the animals. This adaptation is much closer to the Near Eastern model of the Master of Animals. Both the Mistress and Master of Animals may have passed into Mycenaean culture with the adoption of Minoan iconography or simply through copying LM I or 15th and 14th century Near Eastern seals still in circulation - the heirlooms and imports found in many tombs of upper-class Mycenaeans.⁴⁷ But in this period of international relations and expansion in both the Aegean and Near East, the importance of the Master of Animals composition in Kassite and Assyrian glyptic would not be lost on the status-conscious elite in the Mycenaean world. The combination of these factors - heirlooms and imports, the use of the composition for seals in Minoan palace culture and in the Near Eastern administrative hierarchy, and the popularity of the Master of Animals for the contemporary powers of the Near East - probably contributed to the preference for the Master of Animals in LBIII. Perhaps the “heroic” or “royal” figure mastering lions was more suited to the interests of Mycenaean palace society. In any event, the composition continues to appear on objects with palace associations. Most significant is the virtual disappearance of the symmetrical composition by the end of LHIIIB.

46 The griffins, as can be seen on Charts I and II, were popular mainly in LMI. The interest in Masters holding fantastic animals happens around the same time in Mitannian and Assyrian glyptic (following Low Chronology). Note that the Syrian Mistress tends to hold goats, a species that does not seem to have appealed to the Minoans or Mycenaeans for this composition.

47 Chart II: context dates are much later for many of the LMI seals (stylistic attribution). For some Near Eastern models found in Greek contexts, see PORADA (*supra* n. 20) and COLLON (*supra* n. 7, 1987) #274 (= MATTHEWS [*supra* n. 14] #471).

Was the Aegean Mistress of Animals adapted from the Mitannian or the Mesopotamian composition? Based on the evidence offered above, the reception of the composition was different for the Minoans and Mycenaeans. Chronologically, the Minoan examples are contemporary with the Mitannian Goddesses as Mistresses of Animals and it is possible that these were the inspiration for the LMI variant of the composition. But we must not forget the antiquity of the Mesopotamian “Hero” nor its presence in Mitannian and Kassite glyptic.⁴⁸ The extensive adaptations made by the Minoans could have easily been based on either model. In the case of the LBII-LBIII variant of the composition, the existence of a goddess as Mistress of Animals in North Syria, the Levant and on Cyprus in the 14th and 13th centuries does suggest that the coast of Asia Minor was a point of transmission. However, the Syrian goddess is most often depicted standing on an animal, as well as holding animals. It was not this variation of the composition that appealed to the Mycenaeans. The greater parallels with the Mesopotamian type of Master of Animals, the retention of the glyptic medium and the fact that the Master of Animals was adopted at the same time, even if he was not incorporated as readily as the Mistress,⁴⁹ seem to make a very strong case for the direct adaptation of the Mesopotamian Master of Animals into the Aegean world.

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- 48 The chronology is, of course, very general for these seals. Those Aegean seals attributed to LMI (on stylistic grounds) may date anywhere between 1600 and 1425 (Low Chronology according to P. WARREN and V. HANKEY, *Aegean Bronze Age Chronology* [1989]). The dates for the Mitannian kingdom, which controlled the regions from Northeastern Mesopotamia to Northern Syria, are c. 1500/1480-1350/1340 and for the Kassites in Babylonia c. 1595-1155 (A. KUHRT, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 B.C.*, I [1995] 289-296 and 332-334 and Tables 19 and 21). The question of when, where and how the Minoans were exposed to the composition is complicated by the chronological problems of the period – in the Aegean as well as the Near East – and the necessity of relying on stylistic attributions for the dates of the LMI seals found in LBII and III contexts. Until examples securely dated to the first half of the second millennium come to light, I do not believe we can solve the problem. I don’t believe that the Minoans introduced the idea of the Mistress of Animals composition to the Mitannians. The Mitannians did incorporate Aegean iconographic elements into their glyptic art, but the Mistress of Animals composition on Mitannian seals, as discussed above, seem to have kept the basic composition of the “Hero” as Master of Animals and simply made the central figure female – perhaps inspired by the Babylonian goddesses depicted in Pl. CIIIg and CIIIh. Furthermore, the Minoans made a much more extensive adaptation of the composition, not only changing the central figure to a female but also altering the concept by including the “snake frame” and representing a more passive control. This variant was not transmitted to Mitannian iconography, at least as the evidence stands to date.
- 49 Chart II: LMI-II, the Masters with Genii (*supra* n. 42) and LHI-II, Master of Lions (CMS XI.177 and Pl. CIVg).

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Pl. CIIIa Mistress of Animals, drawing of a seal from Mycenae, Grave 515: Athens, National Archaeological Museum Inv. Nr. 6442Ç; *CMS* I.145.
- Pl. CIIIb “Hero” and “Bull-man,” EDII cylinder seal (modern impression): British Museum, WA 89538, © of the Trustees of the British Museum from D.J. WISEMAN, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum I: Cylinder Seals, Uruk – Early Dynastic* (1962) Pl. 14a.
- Pl. CIIIc “Bull-man,” Ur I cylinder seal (modern impression): Berlin Museum, VA 3407 from A. MOORTGAT, *Vorderasiatische Rollsiegel. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Steinschneide-Kunst* (1940) Taf. 19 #116.
- Pl. CIIId “Hero,” Kassite cylinder seal found at Thebes, Greece (modern impression): Thebes Museum #199 from F. DEMAKOPOULOU and D. KONSOLA, *Archaeological Museum of Thebes Guide* (1981) 52.
- Pl. CIIIe “Hero,” Middle Assyrian cylinder seal (Boston 25-67), line drawing from MATTHEWS (*supra* n. 14) #290.
- Pl. CIIIf “Goddess” with animals, Mitannian Cylinder seal (modern impression): British Museum, WA 89745, © of the Trustees of the British Museum from D.J. WISEMAN, *Cylinder Seals of Western Asia* (1959) 50.
- Pl. CIIIg “Goddess” with animals, Old Babylonian terracotta plaque with relief decoration. © H. FRANKFORT, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, Yale University Press (1996) Fig. 119, “Relief of Lilith” (Norman Colville Collection).
- Pl. CIIIf “Goddess” with animals, Old Babylonian terracotta jar from Babylon: Louvre AO 6501, photo © Pierre et Maurice Chuzeville/Musée du Louvre; Christian Larrieu/Musée du Louvre; Département des Antiquités orientales/Musée du Louvre.
- Pl. CIVa “Goddess” with animals, Middle Assyrian seal impression from Assur: Berlin, VAT 9035, line drawing from MATTHEWS (*supra* n. 14) 477.
- Pl. CIVb “Goddess” with animals, cylinder seal from Syria: Louvre AO 1857, photo © Pierre et Maurice Chuzeville/Musée du Louvre; Christian Larrieu/Musée du Louvre; Département des Antiquités orientales/Musée du Louvre.
- Pl. CIVc “Qudshu,” Limestone stele from Deir el Medina, 19th Dynasty: British Museum, EA 191. Photo © of the Trustees of the British Museum.
- Pl. CIVd “Goddess” with animals, Syrian gold plaque from Minet el Beida: Louvre AO 14717, photo © Pierre et Maurice Chuzeville/Musée du Louvre; Christian Larrieu/Musée du Louvre; Département des Antiquités orientales/Musée du Louvre.
- Pl. CIVe Mistress of Animals, seal from Ialysos, Makri Vounari, Grave 20: Rhodes Museum Inv. Nr. 3632; *CMS* V, 2.654.
- Pl. CIVf Mistress of Animals, seal from Aidonia, Chamber Tomb Grave 8: Nemea Museum Inv. Nr. 622; *CMS* VS.1B.116.
- Pl. CIVg Master of Animals, seal from Mycenae, Grave 58: Athens, National Archaeological Museum Inv. Nr. 2852Δ; *CMS* I.89.
- Pl. CIVh Master of Animals, seal from Prosymna, Grave 33: Athens, National Archaeological Museum, Inv. Nr. 11058; *CMS* IS.27.