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IDEOLOGY IN NORTHERN MESOPOTAMIA

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Source: *Iraq*, Vol. 71 (2009), pp. 115-124

Published by: British Institute for the Study of Iraq

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20779006>

Accessed: 16-09-2019 12:43 UTC

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THE LION, THE KING AND THE CAGE: LATE CHALCOLITHIC ICONOGRAPHY AND IDEOLOGY IN NORTHERN MESOPOTAMIA

By AUGUSTA McMAHON

Recent excavations at Tell Brak, northeast Syria, have included exploration of Tell Majnuna, one mound in the ring of sub-mounds that define the edge of the site's Outer Town.¹ The Brak Suburban Survey (Ur *et al.* 2007) has dated the initial creation of this sub-mound to the Late Chalcolithic 2 Period (c. 4200 BC) based on surface ceramic types, and this survey indicated that both the sub-mound and the area between it and the high mounded centre of Brak were further developed and in-filled during the Late Chalcolithic 3 Period (c. 3800–3600 BC). The presence of a ring of small mounds around the central main mound is a key element in the reconstruction of the creation of an urbanized landscape at Brak. The surface survey implies that some of these small mounds were initially independent village-type settlements, which ultimately merged with the larger central mound.

Damage to the Tell Majnuna sub-mound from the expansion of an adjacent grain storage area in 2006 led to this part of the site becoming a focus of the 2007 and 2008 excavations. The most significant discovery there has been a series of four mass graves, primarily of young adults, all belonging to the Late Chalcolithic 3 Period (McMahon *et al.* 2007 and in prep.). The bodies exhibited signs of violence, they had been stripped of possessions, and the skeletons were partially disarticulated from both post-death exposure and haphazard transport to the burial site. The “corpse abuse” implied by the lack of respect at both death and burial indicates these were defeated enemies, not local victims. These graves, occurring episodically over approximately two centuries, are stark evidence for recurrent violent conflicts coincident with the regional development of urbanism.

During 2007 and 2008, sixteen trenches and soundings were excavated at Tell Majnuna, in a northeast to southwest line across the centre of the mound. Unusually, other than a probable Neo-Assyrian mud-brick platform and silo near the surface at the southwest, no architecture was present in any of the trenches and soundings, despite four trenches reaching virgin soil. Instead, steeply sloping soil layers dense in rubbish (particularly ceramics, clay seal impressions, clay tokens, squeezed clay lumps, clay figurines and tools and debitage of both flint and obsidian) were present in all trenches. Similar sloping rubbish layers were also visible in two areas in the northwest portion of the mound, where modern house-foundation excavations provided windows into parts of the site where we did not formally excavate. The pottery assemblage indicates a date in the Late Chalcolithic 3 Period, c. 3800–3600 BC, for the majority of the accumulation. The mound is c. 140 × 170 m, or approximately two hectares; its maximum height is seven metres above the modern plain, with an additional two metres of below-plain deposits. Even given the diachronic span of the mound's creation, this quantity of rubbish is impressive and has intriguing implications for the contemporary scale of industrial production and community consumption.

The speed of deposition of this rubbish, in particular at the mound's southwest edge where it is more than five metres deep, is indicated by the presence of two unbaked clay container sealings separated by just over a metre's depth of material, bearing the same stamp from a large rectangular seal with rows of lions and goats. We propose that each of the four mass interments was followed by a short-term episode of large-scale rubbish dumping, in a deliberate effort to raise and then expand the burial mound. The conscious creation of the Majnuna sub-mound, marking the city's border and mimicking a settlement, yet commemorating a victorious battle, is an unexpected complication. Without an original village settlement, this mound does not fit the reconstruction

¹ For a preliminary report on the 2006–2007 excavations at Tell Brak, including the initial excavations at Tell Majnuna, see McMahon *et al.* 2007. Publication of the expanded work in 2008 is in preparation. Thanks are due to the Directorate

General of Antiquities in Damascus, the Department of Antiquities in Hasseke, the British Institute for the Study of Iraq, the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research in Cambridge and the Tell Brak excavation team.

of small settlements merging towards a centre (Ur *et al.* 2007). However, all the Brak sub-mounds need not have been created by the same activities.

Tell Majnuna sealings

The assemblage of sealings collected from the rubbish layers during our work at Tell Majnuna numbers almost one thousand. Most of the sealings are from containers, including coiled baskets in two sizes, woven baskets, woven reed boxes, leather bags, cloth sacks and jars (the latter usually covered with cloth and tied with string). All the impressions are from stamp seals. The images on the seal impressions are extraordinarily diverse; very few images derive from the same stamp. The great majority shows scenes of animal combat, usually lions — singly, in pairs or in packs — attacking gazelle, goats or deer. There is, however, a wide range of less common motifs, including vultures attacking gazelle or deer, copulating snakes, hybrid human-animal figures, unusual animals shown singly or in groups (e.g., turtles, hedgehogs), geometric or floral designs and complex images involving lions alone or in combat with human figures. In contrast with the slightly later organized “archives” of sealings from Arslantepe (Frangipane 2007), the Majnuna sealings do not exhibit any evidence for curation, sorting or clustering.

Here I focus on the complex lion images, particularly on a small group of sealings that bear two distinctive scenes: a lion in close combat with a human, and a caged lion. These two motifs have implications for both the iconography and ideology of early Mesopotamian leadership. There are seven sealings from Majnuna that bear the caged-lion motif, of which two sealings possibly have impressions of the same seal. Two additional examples of caged-lion images were recovered from the Late Chalcolithic 2–3 levels in Area TW on the main mound.² A smaller number of images, only two, shows close-range combat between a lion and a human figure who in one uses a spear, and in the other a dagger. The spearing image was found on separate sealings six times,³ while the dagger-stabbing image appears twice.

The lion and the king

The lion-spearing seal is a large perfect circle almost 5 cm in diameter. One of the sealings (Fig. 1, from Area EM, Locus 30) preserves the entire stamp, while the other five sealings preserve only parts of the scene.⁴ One of these bears two adjacent impressions of the same seal, while another sealing has the lion-spearing seal and a second, square or rectangular, seal with a probable animal combat motif.⁵

The lion-spearing image presents two strong vertical axes, the rearing lion on the left and the lunging human on the right; a less-strong near-horizontal axis is represented by the spear, held at shoulder height and across the body of the human. This figure appears to be naked and is probably male (although gender is not articulated). His right leg is forward, slightly bent, while the left leg is tightly bent with the foot raised high behind, introducing the idea of lunging or running. A large eye, large nose, and possible small pointed beard (or pointed chin) distinguish the face. The scene incorporates schematic birds around the seal's border, three seen “head-on” as a dot with two elongated extensions for wings (behind and above the lion and below the human's feet), the other two seen from the top as a tri-lobed shape (between the figures' heads and feet). These birds could be dismissed as filling motifs, but they may be designed to emphasize the sudden violence of the spearing, the flock of birds rising chaotically around the central figures acting as a supporting symbol for surprise and alarm. An elongated blob between the lion and human probably represents a stream of blood gushing from the lion's chest below the spear's point of

² An additional sealing assemblage has been recovered in the Late Chalcolithic levels of Area TW, an industrial area near one of the entrances to the main settlement.

³ This frequency makes the lion-spearing image probably the most common of the Majnuna images; although the assemblage is still undergoing analysis, preliminary study indicates that those few images seen more than once were usually only seen two or three times.

⁴ The additional partial impressions of the lion-spearing seal comprise: TB 15321, from EM Locus 2.5; TB 16264,

EM Locus 24; TB 17227, EM Locus 30; TB 17259, EM Locus 30; TB 17263, EM Locus 30.

⁵ The LC 2–3 sealing assemblage from Area TW and Tell Majnuna at Brak bears out Algaze's statement (based on data from Arslantepe and Tepe Gawra) that northern Mesopotamian sealing practice in the Late Chalcolithic rarely involved use of more than one seal or, presumably, more than one administrator (Algaze 2008: 135). There are examples within the Brak sample of two different seals used on the same object, but these remain rare.



Fig. 1 Lion-spearling sealing, TB 16859.

entry. The carving is smooth and deep but not particularly sharp. The best-preserved example of this scene comes from a large jar sealing whose reverse preserves impressions of the jar's leather cover and three strings round the neck.

The lion stabbing-scene is smaller in scale, more finely carved and more elaborate (Fig. 2*a*, from EM Locus 31; Fig. 2*b*, from EM Locus 53; and Fig. 2*c*, composite). The full stamp is not preserved on either of the two fragments that bear its impression, but a straight left edge is preserved on the larger fragment and the seal was either rectangular or square, at least 4 cm high and *c.* 3 cm wide. The two primary figures are the rampant lion on the lower left and an unusually slender human figure on the lower right. As in the spearing scene, the human figure appears to be naked, its gender is not articulated, and its most distinctive features are the large, articulated eye, large nose, and pointed beard or chin. He thrusts a long curved dagger below the lion's raised left foreleg. Instead of a gush of blood, a six-petalled rosette fills the space between lion and human. An extremely rare landscape background is depicted above the human and lion pair: on the left, mountains (represented by three inverted chevrons) bear a schematic tree with a few straight branches ending in pointed, arrow-like leaves; these are nibbled by a goat to its right. A vulture (its head, neck and feet are the only parts preserved) attacks the goat from above. The carving is

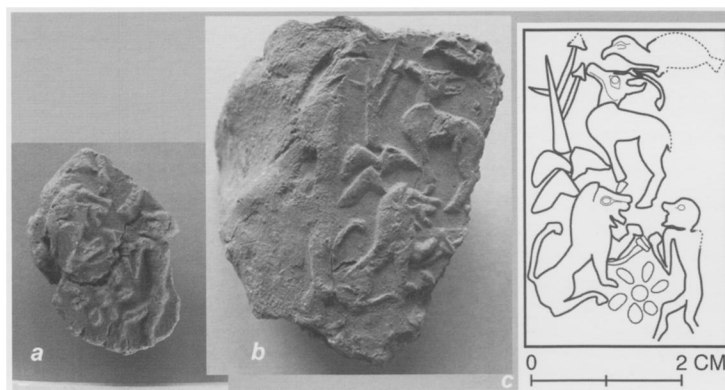


Fig. 2 Lion-stabbing sealings: *a*) TB 17040; *b*) TB 17300; *c*) composite drawing.

smooth, with some internal details and sharp edges; this stylistic difference, and the difference in scale, between the stabbing and spearing seals hints that they were the work of different artisans.

In the spearing scene, the lion and human figures are almost equal in size, their heads are at the same level, and the balance of the scene is strong. By contrast, in the dagger-stabbing scene, the balance is less perfect; the human figure is slightly lower than the lion and his body is less massive. The goat and tree above almost overpower both figures, and the goat's rear hoof actually dangles between their faces. In the weapons utilized, both scenes include a "vector" (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 40 *et passim*), a directional element that is contiguous with the human figure and connects him, as main "Actor" (ibid. 50 *et passim*), to his object. But in both cases, the directionality of movement is downplayed and a simple connection between the figures is the primary impression. In both scenes, the equality or near-equality of volume and presence prevents the reading of the scene simply as human actor versus powerless lion object (although the human victory outcomes are clear) and anticipates visual and verbal metaphors of the lion as the near-equal rival of the king in later Mesopotamian art and texts.

The lion in the cage

The caged-lion seal impressions show a wide range of variability in details, skill and scale. Where the shape of the stamp seal could be reconstructed, both rectangular or square and circular stamps were present.⁶ The most impressive image of the caged lion comes from Level 19 in Area TW (Fig. 3, from Area TW Locus 2725).⁷ The cage bars are indicated by oblique crossing lines, faint over the lion and very deep in the open spaces, suggesting that these lines were carved first and the lion carved subsequently. The lion's tufted mane is designated by groups of fine lines at varied angles, the eye is a large circular void and the mouth is open, with pointed teeth. The reverse of the sealing was flat and it had been lightly burned.

A second sealing from TW is provisionally included in the caged-lion category. The portion of the seal preserved shows the cage only, as shallow crossed lines (Fig. 4, from Area TW Locus 3051).⁸ An unclear blob at the upper right may be part of the lion's head, tail or foot or perhaps simply damage to the seal or sealing. Without the lion preserved, the identification of a caged-lion image is necessarily tentative, but there are few other plausible options for this pattern of lines among the known motifs of the Late Chalcolithic Period. The geometric motifs, for instance, generally are denser than this; although similar patterns of crossed lines are found on the slightly later lion-shaped bone seals from Tell Hamoukar (Gibson *et al.* 2002: Fig. 9; Reichel 2002: Fig. 3). The sealing is a small disc, a possible jar sealing or tag, with the impression of a textile and strings on the reverse.

The remaining caged-lion sealings come from Tell Majnuna, particularly from rubbish deposits in the southwest quadrant, in Areas MTW and EM. These deposits are provisionally dated by associated ceramic assemblages to early within the Late Chalcolithic 3 Period, or c. 3800–3700 BC. Three sealings come from Area MTW, at the edge of the mound and partly below the surrounding fields; three sealings come from Area EM, some ten metres away to the northeast and within the mound; and a final sealing comes from slightly later deposits in Area EMS, adjacent to and just south-east of Area EM. The first sealing (Fig. 5a, from MTW Locus 30) shows a high-relief lion, of which only the neck, torso, part of the rear legs and tip of the tail are preserved. The bars are oblique and are shallow in the background and very faint over the lion; this indicates that the lion was probably carved first and the cage added subsequently. The sealing is broken on all sides and the shape of the stamp is unclear. The reverse preserves an impression of a convex jar shoulder and neck, with strings on the neck.

The lion in the latter impression is identical in scale to an example from the adjacent Area EM (Fig. 5b, EM Locus 32). The latter impression is a circular stamp which preserves the rear legs

⁶Square and rectangular seals are relatively rare in the full Tell Majnuna sealing assemblage; most of the impressions are oval or lozenge-shaped.

⁷This sealing has previously been published in McMahon *et al.* 2007: Fig. 15b and Oates *et al.* 2007: Fig. 10 (there mistakenly rotated 90 degrees counter-clockwise).

⁸Given how little of the scene is preserved, it is difficult

to determine whether the cage bars are oblique or a rarer horizontal/vertical. The preserved edges of the sealing are parallel to the bars, creating the optical illusion that they are horizontal/vertical. But internal angles between the bars are acute or obtuse, as appears with oblique cage bars, unlike the right angles of horizontal/vertical bars.

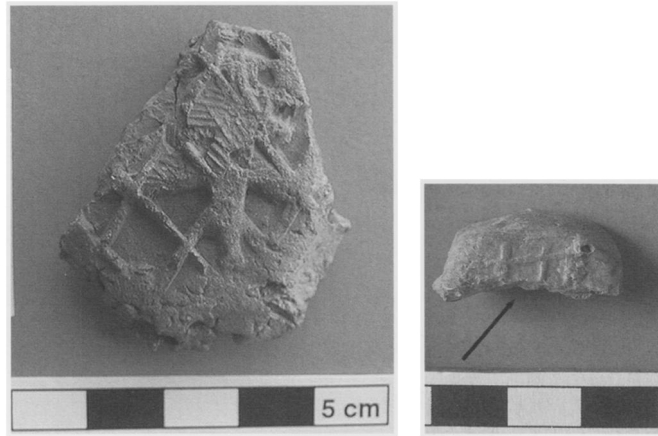


Fig. 3 (*left*) Caged-lion sealing from Area TW, TB 15112.
 Fig. 4 (*right*) Possible caged-lion sealing from Area TW TB 15987 (arrow shows probable correct orientation).

of the lion, with large hooked claws, in a cage represented by fine shallow oblique lines. As in the majority of the other sealings, the lion appears to have been carved first. It is a jar sealing, bearing the impression of a rippled cloth and strings on the reverse. The closeness in scale and details between these two sealings hints that they may have derived from the same stamp. Unfortunately there is only a small area of overlap in the impressions, as preserved; but a potential reconstruction of the seal can be made (Fig. 5c).

The next caged-lion sealing is very worn (Fig. 6, from MTW 2 Locus 3). The impression preserves the rear end of a lion in a cage of oblique bars; the stamp shape is unclear. Like the previous sealings, the lion figure is in higher relief on the impression than the shallow lines of the cage and would have been carved first. The reverse of the sealing bears the impression of a flat-weave reed box.

The final sealing from MTW is from a square or rectangular stamp. The reverse indicates it was a jar sealing, while the obverse preserves a firm impression of the rear legs and base of the

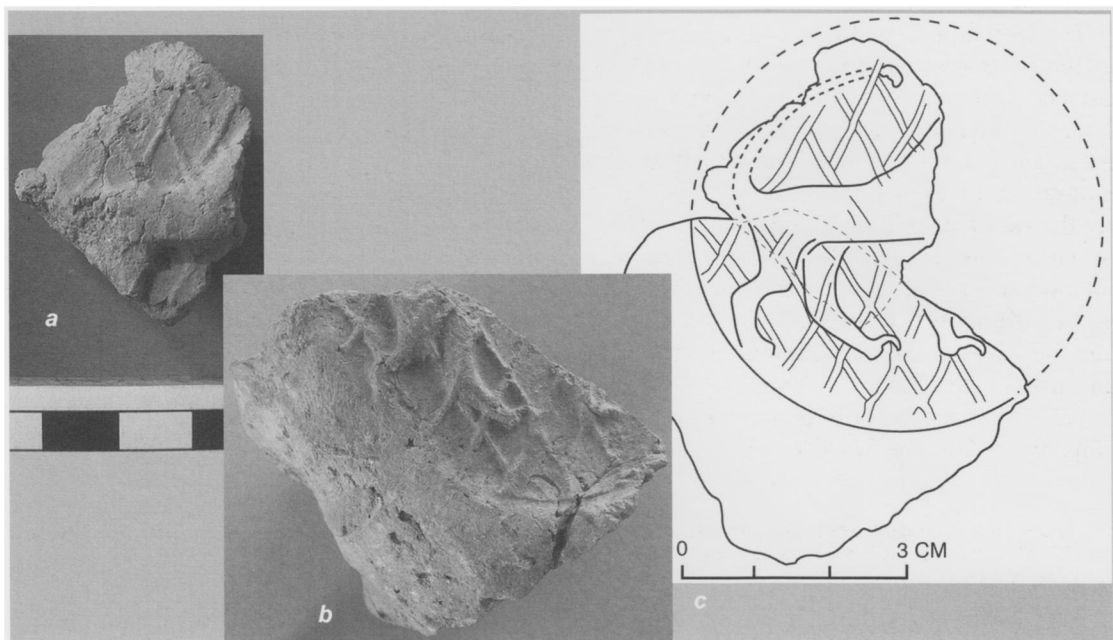


Fig. 5 Caged-lion sealings a) TB 15884; b) TB 16941; c) composite drawing.

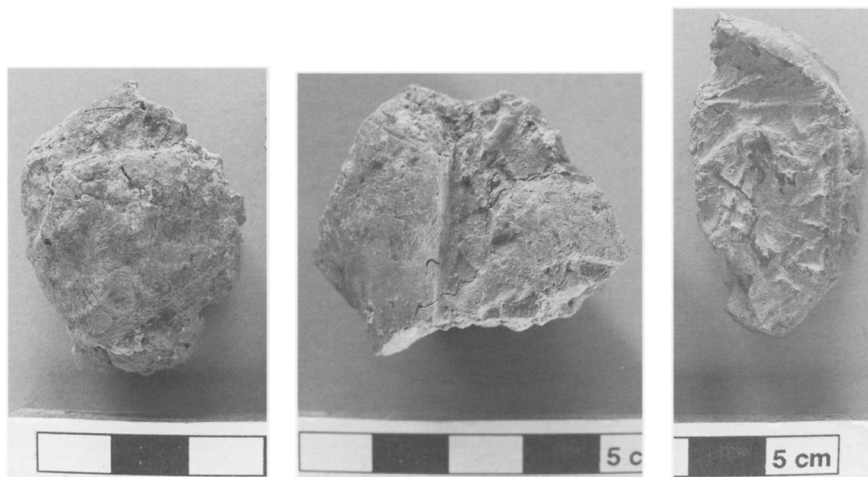


Fig. 6 (*left*) Caged-lion sealing, TB 16357.
 Fig. 7 (*centre*) Caged-lion sealing, TB 16826.
 Fig. 8 (*right*) Caged-lion sealing, TB 16148.

raised tail of the lion and the straight left edge of the stamp just behind (Fig. 7, from MTW 3 Locus 33). The cage has oblique bars, again much shallower than the lion.

The next two sealings come from rubbish deposits in Area EM, also among the earliest deposits in the southwest quadrant of the Majnuna sub-mound and approximately contemporary with those from Area MTW. The first has a lion in a rectangular cage within a rectangular stamp (Fig. 8, from EM Locus 21). The upper right corner of the impression, with the shoulder and head of the lion, are preserved. The lion's mouth is open, like that in the first Area TW sealing (Fig. 3), but it is less detailed. The cage is represented with crossing lines over the body and radiating lines around the edges, all oblique. The sealing is a circular disc and its reverse preserves the impression of a large coiled basket.

A second sealing from Area EM is provisionally included in the caged-lion group because only the bars of the cage are preserved and not the lion figure (Fig. 9, from EM Locus 22). The diagonal bars show an unusual regular sequence of overlap/underlap that is not seen on any of the other sealings. This may represent a hunting net rather than a cage. Although no trapped figure is preserved, it is likely that a lion was present, as in Fig. 4, and the difference in meaning between cage and net is not great. The reverse bears the impression of a reed container and string.



Fig. 9 (*left*) Sealing with net or cage, TB 16229.
 Fig. 10 (*right*) Caged-lion sealing, TB 15738.

The final sealing is slightly later than all the above examples, provisionally dated by stratigraphy and associated ceramics to c. 3700–3600 BC. The deeply impressed stamp was square or rectangular, and the cage has unusual vertical and horizontal bars (Fig. 10, from EMS Locus 8). The lion is preserved from shoulder to tail; both body and legs are unusually attenuated and the legs are disproportionately long. The relationship of the cage bars to the lion's body is variable, with the bars showing faintly on the torso and left rear leg but overlapped by the right rear leg. The bars were probably carved first and the lion added later, but the rear leg was accidentally too deeply carved. The scrawniness of the lion and this irregular carving depth indicate a relatively unskilled artist. The sealing is a possible jar stopper with an irregular reverse surface.

Kings and lions in iconography and ideology

Lion hunts and close-range combat between kings and lions are among Mesopotamia's most striking and enduring icons, appearing in official artworks from the fourth millennium BC, such as the Uruk Lion Hunt Stele, and from the first millennium BC, in Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs at Nimrud and Nineveh, Aramaean reliefs from Tell Halaf, Achaemenid reliefs from Persepolis; on Neo-Assyrian royal stamp seals and on Achaemenid cylinder seals. The near-total gap in preserved visual representations of king and lion combats between the fourth and first millennia BC is partly filled by extensive metaphors in third and early second millennia BC texts and by descriptions of royal lion hunts from the later second millennium BC. For instance, Shulgi is frequently equated with a lion in most versions of the "Praise Poems" to Shulgi, and Hammurapi is similarly described, although less often (Sjöberg 1961); the extended Neo-Assyrian lion hunts are anticipated by records of the hunts undertaken by Middle Assyrian kings.

The metaphoric association of the king and the lion in Mesopotamian text and art has been discussed extensively elsewhere (e.g., Albenda 1972, Cassin 1981, Watanabe 2002, Weissert 1997).⁹ Lions are paradoxically the equal and the opposite of kings; they are the only creatures powerful enough to be considered worthy opponents of kings, yet they are wild and vicious as contrasted with the kings' reliable strength, protective abilities and place in civilization. Combat with (and assumed victory over) powerful lions exhibits the incomparable strength and unsurpassable heroism of the king.

Until now, the earliest known representation of a (priest-)king in combat with a lion was the well-known basalt Lion Hunt Stele, found at Uruk in Eanna Level III.¹⁰ The stele may have been carved slightly earlier than its depositional context, potentially during the occupation of Eanna Level IV, but it probably dates to c. 3300 BC at the earliest. The scene is episodic, the priest-king appearing twice with different weapons (spear and bow-and-arrow). This redundancy of representation reappears in more subtle and extended form in the Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs of the hunts of Ashurnasirpal II and Ashurbanipal. Under the latter king repeated images of close-range, hand-weapon combat of king and lion are integrated but distinct features.

In our two examples from Tell Majnuna, we have repeated images of human and lion combat from c. 3800 BC, five or six centuries earlier than previously known. And, more importantly, we have the images in a northern Mesopotamian context prior to a southern one. Like their later southern counterpart, our images are found at a site undergoing urban expansion and socio-economic elaboration. More permanent leadership can be part of such developments, and the human figure in our seals most probably represents such a leader. Human representations are few within the glyptic imagery of this period and thus, to be chosen for depiction, the figure must have a strong significance. Although it can be risky to stretch analogies across centuries, the close similarity of the images in our Majnuna sealings and the Late Uruk depictions of the priest-king surely justify the equation of their primary figures and meanings.

⁹Symbolic use of lion imagery and conceptual links between kings and lions in other cultures are common; see e.g., Collins 1998 for discussion of the lion-king simile in the Hittite world, Thomas 2004 for lion symbolism in Mycenaean Greece, Wilkinson 2000 for images of rulers as wild animals, including lions, in late Predynastic Egypt, and Saunders 1998 for the ideology of power as expressed by

jaguar/feline imagery in the Americas.

¹⁰An earlier lion facing a lunging or running human figure with a bow appears on the interior of a bowl from Arpachiyah (Hijara 1980: Fig. 10), but as an isolated image in the pre-urban Halaf Period, the association of this figure with strong permanent leadership is tenuous.

The message of the lion in the cage is equally strong but more subtle, requiring an intermediate interpretative step. The presence of a cage alters the nature of the lion-human interaction from the pitting of equal but opposite forces against each other to a more formal and stylized event in which the (assumed) battle is over and victory is already achieved.

The denoted or “literal image” (Barthes 1964: 26) is “just” a lion and a cage. But the next unavoidable and unconscious step in reading the image is to think and combine the individual meanings of “lion”, “in” and “cage”. The lion has a long later history in Mesopotamia of connoting power and uncontrolled aggression, but here in 3800 BC we are surely at the birth of that meaning. How was such meaning generated? Repetition may have been a key factor, and the lion’s frequent presence on other contemporary seals, attacking animals, hunting in packs and striding majestically and alone,¹¹ would have been part of the creation and packaging of its symbolic meaning. The cage is a much less common motif, although the connotation of the cage as a means of control is instinctively and possibly globally strong.¹² The combined meaning carries a message: Barthes’ “rhetoric” or “signifying aspect of ideology” (ibid: 38).¹³ The message is one of domination and total control, specifically control over a powerful force, emphasizing and reflecting the strength of that domination. In the seals, both lion and cage are reduced to a minimal set of elements sufficient for recognition. The cage is represented as crossed lines and (sometimes) a surrounding frame. The lion is more variable, sometimes a spindly and undetailed creature (Fig. 10); in other examples a fierce, open-mouthed and toothy animal with richly-textured mane (Fig. 3). But in each case, identification as a lion is easily achieved, even if the figure is only partly preserved; the upward-curved tail and high arched neck are distinctive of this animal alone.

Iconography can be the material expression of ideology, whether ideology is considered a conscious creation by a privileged elite to maintain power or a set of normalized and unconsciously accepted cultural beliefs. The theme in both human-lion combat and caged-lion seals is the conflict between a leader and a powerful wild animal, whether as near-equals (active combat) or after the animal is already conquered (the caged lions). The lion may reflect physical strength, represent powerful but abstract natural forces and/or portray an enemy vanquished or to be vanquished. The close-range and dangerous killing of the lion is a heroic deed that glorifies the leader but is limited to a single moment. By contrast, the trapping and caging of a living lion represents control, and control that has an implied back-story and persists through time into an abstract future. This encapsulation of time-elapse and implication of things unseen is, perhaps unfairly, unexpected in a miniature artwork and at this early date.

These leader-lion seals were produced in an environment in which urban expansion and socio-economic elaboration were accompanied by violent conflict and large-scale death. The very existence of sealings implies the presence of economic controls, and the large and varied assemblage of sealings from Tell Brak (and, for example, from contemporary Tepe Gawra, see Rothman 2002, 2004) indicates that these economic controls were well articulated and widespread. But as Tell Brak and other sites in the region (e.g. Tell Hamoukar) became urbanized, they acquired not only larger, denser and more diverse populations, but also internal and external stresses and inequalities. Leadership may have most often coped with socio-economic complexities, but violent conflict, though episodic, may have been a more dangerous problem. This earliest iconography of leadership thus addressed both conflict and violence.

¹¹ See, for instance, the striding-lion sealing from Brak Area TW: McMahon *et al.* 2007: Fig. 15a (= Oates *et al.* 2007: Fig. 9).

¹² The only other preserved representations of cages in Mesopotamian art appear in the lion hunts of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh: the lion is held in an elongated cage with horizontal bars and released at the beginning of the hunt (e.g. Barnett 1960: Pls. 90, 93; Curtis and Reade 1995: Fig. 28–9, pp. 86–7). Control of the animal may be part of the message implied, but it is secondary to the message of the cage’s opening: the release of power, the anticipation of danger, the moment just before combat. A flexible net

carried by hunters with dogs and used for trapping deer, also in the reliefs of Ashurbanipal, is probably more functional than symbolic. The enemy-filled nets held by the gods on the stelae of Eannatum and Sargon are related but distinct symbols.

¹³ Similarly, Peirce’s “icon” looks like that which it represents (lion, cage), while a “symbol” or symbolic reading incorporates an interpretive layer which may be experience- or culture-specific (cage as controlling mechanism); the “indexical sign” requires a more subtle and often causative interpretation (lion in cage as representative of control of a powerful force) (Peirce 1932).

Most past iconography preserved for us in a selective and biased archaeological record necessarily comprises those motifs and symbols which were successful and widely adopted. However, in the caged-lion seals we may be seeing failed experiments with the iconography of control and the resolution of conflict. These particular images are variable in style, skill and scale; the scene does not have a long life and apparently was not widely adopted, even within the immediate region. Were the images too complex to be read at such a small scale? Were the intended time depth and back-story too difficult to impart? Without a human figure in the scene, was the intended symbolism too distant or opaque? Whatever the reason, the caged lion vanishes from Mesopotamian artistic repertoire until its first-millennium BC reinvention. However, the clearer leader-lion combat succeeded as both readable icon and eloquent symbol and surely already in the Late Chalcolithic Period bore the meaning of power that it later retained.

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Abstract

Recent excavations at Tell Brak, Syria, have explored the site's early urban expansion, including excavation of Late Chalcolithic mass graves in a small mound at the site's outer edge. This mound built up rapidly and is primarily composed of industrial rubbish, particularly ceramics and flint

debitage. The rubbish layers also contained nearly one thousand clay container sealings bearing stamp-seal impressions. The most important images represented are human figures in combat with lions, and caged single lions. These images date to *ca* 3800 BC and are evidence for the early development of the iconography and ideology of power and leadership.

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