

THE BALL STAFF REVISITED: INSIGHTS FROM OLD SYRIAN POPULAR STYLE CYLINDER SEALS

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In the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000-1600 B.C.), an object which has come to be called the ball staff in English was introduced with some frequency into the iconography of various cylinder seal styles¹. Insights on this object which are to be shared here stem from a study undertaken of seals of this period that are attributed to Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey and are classified as Old Syrian popular styles². Modern impressions of a few of these ancient cylinder seals depicting the ball staff have been selected as illustrative material (Figs. 1-5)³. Each scene also contains a seated male figure associated with a drinking tube which emerges from a vessel. Various other seemingly cultic or ritual objects are incorporated in the designs, such as a bull on a canopied altar (Fig. 1); large offering stands (Figs. 2-4), as well as smaller ones (Fig. 5), and a stack of vessels (Fig. 4). The new theory to be elaborated on below is that the ball staff should be considered part of drinking paraphernalia.

The ball staff is usually an upright, straight-shafted device with a globular form positioned at approximately midpoint and placed to one side. Earlier scholarly literature often referred to it as the *libra* (the Latin word for a type

of measure), arm of the balance, or simply balance and similar usage is reflected in the French terms *bâton de mesure* or *barre de justice* and German *Waage* or *Waagbalken*⁴. Simple descriptive terms are also used in other languages, such as *bâton renflé en son centre*, *bastone a globo centrale*, and *Stab mit Kugel*. The ball staff is often accompanied by a small vessel, which has sometimes been identified differently, namely a *Kamm* (comb), based on a stylized form more common on Old Babylonian cylinder seals. That attribution is not maintained here, and indeed is not favored in most current scholarly discussions of the ball staff.



1 Impression of Pierpont Morgan Library 1094, 25.4 x 13.0 mm (Porada 1948, n° 1094).

1 For some estimates of the frequency of the ball staff in contemporary styles, see footnote 53 below.

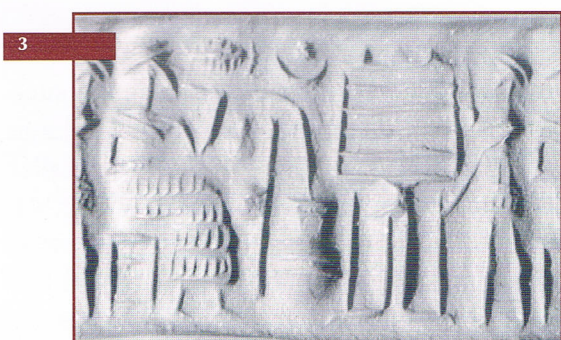
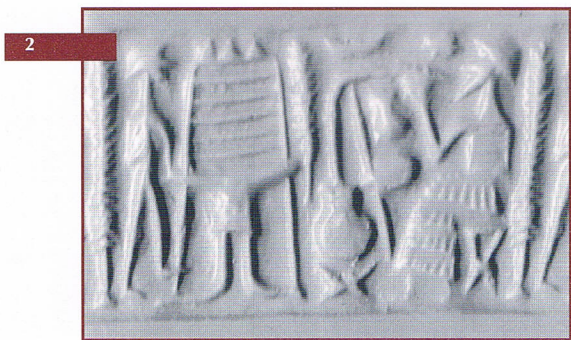
2 My Columbia University dissertation entitled *Old Syrian Popular Style Cylinder Seals* (Porter 2001) was defended at Columbia on December 1, 2000 to a committee of five including my advisors Dominique Collon and John M. Russell. This as yet unpublished thesis includes several chapters on various objects incorporated in the seal designs. Within Chapter 10, "Drinking Paraphernalia and Related Objects" is a section on the ball staff, from which this article extrapolates the essential points and elaborates further. The corpus that formulated the core of the dissertation numbered 396 seals and impressions from varied sources. When Porter 2001 catalogue numbers are referred to, the citation will often be simplified to Porter.

3 The seals chosen are designated in the captions with basic information and primary place of publication (only Fig. 2 was previously unpublished). The sources of the illustrations and the acknowledgements are given in this note along with Porter 2001 catalogue numbers. Each modern impression is rendered at a consistent scale of 2:1 with photographs printed by me from various sources. Fig. 1: Pierpont Morgan Library 1094, after Porada 1966, pl. 17, fig. a (Porter n° 1), courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library; Fig. 2: Louvre AO 10916, from impression on loan from E. Williams (Porter n° 91), courtesy of Musée du Louvre, Département des Antiquités Orientales; Fig. 3: Rosen 1953, from impression made by S. Babcock (Porter n° 93), courtesy of Jonathan and Jeannette Rosen; Fig. 4: Ashmolean 1913.312, from impression on loan from E. Williams (Porter n° 87), courtesy of the Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum by Oxford; Fig. 5: Ras Shamra RS 9.024, from photo lent by P. Amiet (Porter n° 52), courtesy of Pierre Amiet. I wish to thank all of the museums, collections, and scholars responsible for publication for being able to include these seals in this article.

4 Examples of an actual scale or balance on seal images can be found on some Syro-Cappadocian impressions (Teissier 1994, nos. 532, 533) and they resemble an old-fashioned pan weighing machine.

Before turning to the history of perceptions of the ball staff itself, a brief introduction will be made to Old Syrian popular style seals. Old Syrian has been used in various ways in the scholarly literature. Here it is primarily a chronological indicator for Middle Bronze Syria reflecting parallelism with Old Babylonian and Old Elamite, and the stylistic qualifier is embedded in the word "popular". Edith Porada first used the term Old Syrian in her study of three cylinder seals retrieved from the Montet jar in Byblos in 1922⁵. This jar contained many other objects including a number of Egyptian scarabs and amulets⁶. In 1985 Porada published a revised terminology for Syrian glyptic,

article by the seal in the Pierpont Morgan Library (Fig. 1)⁷. She stated therein that Old Syrian I seals represented a "genuinely independent style in northern Syria" and "its most frequent motif" is the seated figure, whom she considered to be a deity, "drinking through a tube from a vessel"⁸. It should be mentioned that the seated figure may not be a god. None wears the horned crown, the insignia of divinity in the ancient Near East, but instead caps, either with a brim or flat in shape, or they appear to be bare-headed. Thus, it cannot be ruled out that they may be local rulers. The manner of carving the seals, often deeply gouged with linear patterns, is another attribute of popular styles. Seals of this type are frequently made of chlorite, a soft stone, as opposed to haematite, the material most likely to be used for more elite seals. The nature of the material is another telling characteristic⁹.



in which Old Syrian cylinder seals incorporated two groups, Old Syrian I and Old Syrian II. The former constitutes those of concern here that belong to popular styles, inclusive of those found in the Montet jar, and illustrated in Porada's 1985

- 2 Impression of Louvre AO 10916, 18 x 9 mm (Musée du Louvre, Antiquités Orientales; Don Vroilleaud 1927).
- 3 Impression of Rosen 1953, ex-coll Esmerian, 21.4 x 11 mm (Porada 1966, pl. 17, fig. e) .

5 Porada 1966, p. 243-258. Thirty-one of the seal images in my corpus of 396 were documented in Porada's 1966 article in various ways including Figs. 1, 3, and 4.

6 Montet (1928/29, p. 111-125, pl. 60-71) published the varied group of objects (nos. 394-603) from the jar which was given his name; of them nos. 397-399 were the three cylinder seals and nos. 413-535 were the larger group of Egyptian amulets and scarabs which have received even more scholarly attention. See the recent study by Daphna Ben-Tor (1998), with previous bibliography, in a memorial volume for William A. Ward, whose career centered for many years in Lebanon and encompassed many studies on the Egyptian scarabs from the Montet jar of Byblos.

7 Porada 1985, p. 93-95, fig. 1. Her Old Syrian II style seals are ones that were previously often called Syro-Cappadocian. The history of the terminology for Syrian glyptic of the Middle Bronze Age is covered in a chapter of my dissertation. Having been a student of Professor Porada's, her work on Syrian seals has had a profound effect on my own research and perceptions. For another recent assessment, see Otto 2000, p. 24-35, whose study was concerned with classic style Syrian seals. In Otto's group 1a are six seals, (Otto 2000, nos. 6, 12, 13, 18-20), included in my own work, which was cited by her (Otto 2000, p. 111, n. 252) as dealing with seals of "Common Style", a term I have eschewed given its usage for Late Bronze Age Mitannian seals. Popular style is reflective of Amiet's group of seals from Susa called "Élamite populaire". See Amiet, 1972, p. 239-257, nos. 1825-2014, pl. 166-175.

8 Porada 1985, p. 93-94.

9 Of the seals depicted in Figs. 1-5, only Rosen 1953 (Fig. 3) has been scientifically analyzed with regard to material. It is chlorite. This mineral has proven to be the most common one used for popular style seals which have been scientifically analyzed. The other four seals have a dark slightly mottled dark green hue and are probably chlorite although referred to in the published record as 'steatite' or 'serpentine'. That chlorite seems to be the preferred material was not determined until a large body of seals from the corpus was analysed by Dr. George Wheeler, Research Chemist in the Sherman Fairchild Department of

In 1910 the seal scholar William Hayes Ward noted that he did not believe that the ball staff, then called the "libra", was a balance, and he further stated that because of its frequent appearance, it "should be easy to discover what it is the emblem of, but" that he was "unable to offer any sure conclusion" while still noting various ideas, such as a stand as suggested by W. Max Müller¹⁰. Decades later, the sum of the scholarly assessment of the ball staff led Edith Porada to comment in her 1985 diachronic study of Syrian seals that the meaning of the ball staff and small vessel had "not been convincingly determined"¹¹. Much the same opinion has been expressed by other scholars, for example, Pierre Amiet in his publication of the



seals from Susa¹² and Rainer Michael Boehmer in his entry on Old Babylonian seals for the *Propyläen Kunstgeschichte*, in which he lists a wide range of "filling motives", including the

"Kamm" and "Waage", for which no meaning can be given¹³.

In his seminal seal study of 1939, Henri Frankfort wrote that with regard to the "libra"

*It may be the arm of a balance and symbolise the justice of the god's judgment, but that is mere surmise. It quite often occurs together with a small jar. It should not be confused either with the ancient "doorpost" emblem or the "ring and staff"*¹⁴.

Another interpretation of the ball staff is that it is a type of libation vessel. Hans Henning von der Osten was one of the first to present this idea, albeit with caution, when he suggested that they ("libra-shaped" objects) may be "conventionalizations" of spouted vessels, such as one depicted on an Ur III seal from the Newell collection¹⁵. Although she refuted the comparison made by von der Osten, Elizabeth Douglas van Buren also considered the ball staff to be a vessel and she thought that the ball part could be a handle in the form of a loop or handle attachment, an idea more recently mentioned briefly by Önhân Tunca¹⁶. Van Buren stated in 1945 that

The slender vessel [i.e. the ball staff] served as a receptacle to replenish the little vase. ... If the explanation of it as a ritual vessel is correct, the logical deduction would be that its value as a symbol was derived from the fact that it was the vessel used by the divinity to pour the initial elixir of life into

Objects Conservation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The question of material is extensively discussed in my dissertation and referred to in an article in honor of Edith Porada (Porter 1994, p. 15, n. 6, p. 19).

10 Ward 1910, p. 409.

11 Porada 1985, p. 93-94.

12 Amiet 1972, p. 239, n. 3.

13 Boehmer 1975 (1985 reprint), p. 337.

14 Frankfort 1939, p. 179. Frankfort illustrated five other examples of Old Syrian popular style seals depicting seated figures with drinking tubes and ball staffs. See Frankfort 1939, pl. 40: (b): Çatal Hüyük b-1622 (Porter no. 73); (d): Bibliothèque Nationale 58 (Porter no. 90); (f): Tell Judaidah z-1153 (Porter no. 29); (k) Yale 1174, ex-coll Newell 279 (Porter n°. 16); and pl. 41(d): Çatal Hüyük a-2512 (Porter n°. 49).

15 Von der Osten 1934, n°. 121, p. 24, 121-122, fig. 14, pl. 12; for same seal see Buchanan 1981, no. 566 [not illustrated]; von der Osten was linking the vessel on Newell 121 to vessels depicted on an Early Dynastic plaque from Ur which are interpreted as libation vessels. For this plaque (U. 6831, British Museum 118561), see Woolley 1955, p. 45, 173, pl. 39C, Pritchard 1969, fig. 603, p. 198, 322, and During Caspers 1971-72, pl. 35B.

16 Tunca 1981, p. 93, suggested it was probably a *poteau ansé*.

*the vase, which then gushed forth in miraculously ever-abounding streams of water*¹⁷.

This idea of an "elixir-vase" was subsequently adopted by Nimet Özgüç in her 1965 study on Anatolian style impressions from Kültepe Level II (c. 1920-1840 B.C.). Özgüç

does suggest however, that they were functional objects, not simply filling motives. The only example known to me of a ball staff depicted in another medium is an Old Babylonian period plaque from Aššur displaying a standing figure facing right and holding in his raised left hand the top of a ball staff and in the lowered right hand a handled vessel²¹. The absence of the ball staff in other art forms remains something of a mystery.



also felt that it was intended to be a type of vessel and noted it was often associated with a small jar. On two of the published Anatolian impressions incorporating the ball staff and small vessel, these two objects are physically connected by a horizontal extension from the top of the staff to the neck of the vessel¹⁸. Among these impressions are also a few ball staffs with loop attachments mostly held at the top¹⁹. This phenomenon of the ball staff actually being held is documented on seals of other styles as well, and of course would need to be considered in terms of the function of this device²⁰. It

Contrary to the opinions cited above, Elizabeth During Caspers felt strongly that the ball staff could not be a vase nor a balance but rather related to a gate post, and she concluded in her 1971-72 article that

*The "libation vase" or "balance" is nothing else but a plastically modeled gate-post, the solid, round protuberance half way down the vertical pole representing the former; open ring, which has been turned en profile either to the left or to the right, or is shown en face as a complete circle, in order to be seen*²².

4 Impression of Ashmolean 1913.312, 19.8 x 10 mm (Buchanan 1966, n°. 842).

5 Impression of Ras Shamra RS 9.024, ex-coll Erlenmeyer, 24 x 13 mm (Amiet 1992, n°. 8).

17 Van Buren 1945, p. 139.

18 Özgüç 1965, p. 12, fig. 5, p. 57, n°. 26 and 59. These two impressions were cited by Porada 1966, p. 255, as examples of the ball staff functioning as a "pipette", an idea which was not pursued further.

19 Özgüç 1965, p. 57, n°. 29 [not held], 36, 79, 89.

20 There are some other examples of the ball staff being held, usually by the main seated figure. On another Anatolian impression, one in Munich, this phenomenon is displayed (Teissier 1994, n°. 332). On an Old Assyrian impression from Kültepe (Teissier 1994, n°. 34), it seems to be a ball staff although some other object is possible given its length and angled terminal. However on another Old Assyrian impression, it is clearly the standard type of ball staff (Teissier 1994, n°. 75). Occasionally a standing figure can hold the ball staff, as on two Old Assyrian examples and five Syro-Cappadocian/Old Syrian II images (Teissier 1994, n°. 177 and 212, former, and n°. 472, 521-523, 532, latter), or more rarely a kneeling figure as on a Syro-Cappadocian impression showing it held from the bottom (Teissier 1994, n°. 557). One Syro-Cappadocian seal, Fribourg 112, also depicts the ball staff held by the bottom and presented to the seated deity (Collon 1987, n°. 139, p. 42-43). Other seals (versus ancient impressions) documenting the holding of the ball staff are seals in the Louvre (Delaporte 1923, A. 865, p. 188, pl. 94/19; A.871, p. 189, pl. 94/26) and one in the Pierpont Morgan Library (Porada 1948, n°. 907).

21 This plaque was published by Opificius (1961, n°. 623, p. 170, 236, 268) and although she only tentatively identified the object as the *Waage*, based on the published drawing, it certainly seems to me to be a ball staff.

22 During Caspers 1971-72, p. 220, 226 (cited text). She illustrated (her pl. 39B) an important Old Syrian popular style seal fragment from Hama (3 A 380) which depicts a ball staff and vessel set beside the front part of a bull (remaining part of seal missing). It was excavated in Hama Level H 4 which is dated to Middle Bronze I (Ingholt 1940, p. 62, pl. 19:1; Fugmann 1958, p. 91-92, fig. 110; Porter n°. 28).

The gate (ring) post idea, already rejected by Frankfort in 1939, has not been widely accepted and was refuted again by Dominique Collon in 1986 when she suggested that the ball staff might be associated with weaving and the "pot" be a carding tool²³. Other ideas have included the possibility that it may be a water pipe²⁴ or a lamp on a stand²⁵. The only instance which I have documented in which a scholar posits that it is a divine attribute is Eckhard Unger's idea that it might be the *Rundmesserdolch* of the god Aššur²⁶. This does not seem likely and as simply stated by Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, "which deity (if any) it represents is unknown"²⁷.

On many Old Syrian popular style seals there is a close association of the ball staff – often paired with the small vessel – and the large vessel with the drinking tube (Figs. 1-4). In four of the illustrated examples the drinking tube is actually held in the hand of the seated figure (Figs. 1-4) and on one example it reaches the mouth but is not held (Fig. 5). The mouthpiece of the tube is close to the lips in all these examples except for Fig. 4. Sometimes the vessel with the tube can be small and there may not be an associated jar with the ball staff (Fig. 5). Of the 396 seal images catalogued in my dissertation study (Porter 2001), 70 of the 121 catalogued examples depicting single seated figures include a drinking tube and 53 of them in turn depict the ball

staff while 27 of those have a small associated vessel (i.e. the latter is also not an absolute necessity). Only three seals within this narrow group (numbering 53 seals) with single seated figures do not depict the ball staff below the curved drinking tube near the raised arm of the seated figure²⁸. Thus, these numbers suggest that the propinquity of the drinking tube set and ball staff is quite well established for some of these seals, a fact already noted by Porada²⁹.

In light of these comments, one particularly interesting Syro-Cappadocian impression on a tablet from Kültepe Level II shows the ball staff in the very place usually occupied by the drinking tube, that is within the vessel in front of the seated figure³⁰. This rare instance, perhaps unique, provides a very specific ancient visual link between the ball staff and the drinking tube.

On the seal from Ras Shamra (Fig. 5)³¹ there are three ball staffs in the design, one below the curved drinking tube which is also above the hand of the seated figure, one behind him, and another just behind the attendant who faces the seated figure (and also just in front of the squatting monkey). Multiple ball staffs are not displayed on any other seal image with a main seated figure on the Old Syrian popular style seals documented so far. This Ras Shamra seal might indicate that each of the three full-sized figures (one seated and two standing) could be considered to have the ball staff near them to use. This seal is also of interest in

23 Collon 1986, p. 49-51.

24 Noveck 1975, n°. 20, p. 36, n. 43, p. 94.

25 Otto 2000, p. 270.

26 Unger 1965, p. 424-431, figs. 1-4 and Unger 1966, p. 12.

27 Black and Green 1992, p. 39.

28 Of those three seals, two are unpublished and the third is in the Aleppo Museum, M.6082 (Hammade 1987, n°. 62, p. 32-33; Porter n°. 58, 68 [Aleppo], 101).

29 Porada 1985, p. 93-94.

30 Teissier 1994, n°. 520, p. 232.

31 This seal was published by Amiet 1992, n°. 8, p. 16, 19 as a seal excavated in 1937 by the French team at Ras Shamra, ancient Ugarit. At some point it became part of the Erlenmeyer collection in Switzerland and was sold at auction by Bonhams in London in 1999 (Bonhams 1999, n°. 368, p. 104).

terms of the placement of the ball on the staff, be it right or left. It seems that the location is probably determined by where there is the most room within the design³². There have been some suggestions in the past that the position of the ball on the staff has a chronological meaning, but that idea needs further work³³.

The ovoid jars depicted on the seals are not dissimilar to jars documented at sites in Syria, such as Tell Mardikh, Tell Hadidi, Hama, and Tell Baghouz³⁴. In some ceramic vessels, metal cone-shaped tips for the end of drinking tubes have been found. At the Middle Bronze cemetery of Baghouz in eastern Syria, five ovoid ceramic jars in different burials contained perforated metal cone-shaped tips and 29 other metal tips were retrieved although not always in ceramic vessels³⁵. At Chagar Bazar in the Khabur, Mallowan also found in Middle Bronze burials, metal tips in jars (flat bottomed ones, i.e. no stand would be needed)³⁶. Thus from the archaeological record there is also an association of jars and drinking tubes, albeit the perforated metal ends that would be attached to them and inserted into the jar. There are some perforated bone examples from sites in Israel which may also be tips for drinking straws³⁷. Based on their full comparanda, Maier and Garfinkel suggest that

The possible explanation as to why many of

these strainers (bone and metal) were not found in jars is that many of the receptacles for brewing and serving beer were of perishable materials (Civil 1964, 87), and thus only the strainers survived the post-depositional process³⁸.

This idea is based in part on Civil's earlier comments "that most of the receptacles used in brewing and serving beer could be made of bitumen-coated basketwork or wood, instead of clay"³⁹. In another context Civil mentioned that "travelers carried brewing supplies to make beer on the road"⁴⁰ and they would presumably have favored lighter or at least less fragile and more flexible containers. In the seal images under discussion the vessels all seem to be ceramic, but that is not necessarily the case for the rest of the drinking paraphernalia.

It seems very likely that the liquid accessed from the large jars by drinking tubes is beer (versus wine)⁴¹. An ancient account of drinking through tubes was given by Xenophon whose travels around 400 B.C. in Armenia gave him the opportunity to observe the custom of consuming

Barley-wine in large bowls. Floating on the top of this drink were the barley-grains and in it were straws, some larger and others smaller, without joints; and when one was thirsty, he had to take these straws into his mouth and suck. It was an extremely strong drink unless one diluted it with water, and

32 In this group of seals with seated figures and drinking tubes and ball staffs, there are more seals with right-sided ball staffs (64%) than left-sided ones (36%) but what the significance of the difference is remains uncertain and as suggested in the text, it may just be a matter of space.

33 Porada noted that some late third millennium examples of the ball staff tended to have the ball placed in the middle (Porada 1948, p. xxiv and p. 38; Porada 1966, p. 254-255, pl. 18h).

34 For ceramic types found at sites in Syria that are similar to ones depicted on the seals, see for Tell Mardikh, ancient Ebla, Matthiae 1981, p. 142, fig. 35; for Tell Hadidi, Dornemann 1992, p. 79-80, fig. 3; for Hama, Fugmann 1958, p. 90, fig. 110; and Tell Baghouz, Mesnil 1948, p. 41-42, pl. 68-72.

35 From the final excavation report on Tell Baghouz by the Comte du Mesnil du Buisson, one can ascertain in which burials metal tips (his *grilles de chalumeau*), ranging in size from 3.5 to 9.5 cm in length, were found and for the most part their circumstances. Based on Buisson 1948, p. 51-52, 63-93, pl. 57, the distribution pattern is 4 metal tips found as singles in jars (tombs Z 49, 66, 68, 75) and one pair together in a jar (tomb Z 47) and 29 additional tips/cones of metal (copper or bronze or in one example perhaps silver). Metal cones/tips for drinking tubes have been found at several other places including in Syria at Alalakh and Meskéné-Emār in Late Bronze contexts and at Deve Hüyük in Iron Age levels and in Palestine in Middle Bronze levels at Tell el-Ajjul, Megiddo, and Gezer (for full bibliography, see Maier and Garfinkel 1992, p. 219-221).

36 Mallowan 1937, p. 99-100, pl. 14C, fig. 21, n°. 10 (for associated ceramic vessel). Mallowan thought that the liquid being consumed was wine and called these objects "wine strainers".

37 Maier and Garfinkel 1992, p. 218-223. The bone examples discussed in the article cited included examples from Middle Bronze contexts at Gesher in the central Jordan Valley and Kabri, Sasa, and Megiddo.

38 Maier and Garfinkel 1992, p. 222.

39 Civil 1964, p. 87.

*extremely good when one was used to it*⁴².

The barley wine (οἶνος κριθίνος) is generally considered to be barley-based beer, and as Marvin Powell has pointed out "barley is an ideal cereal for malting and has been

the favorite for beer brewing whenever it was available"⁴³. The drinking tubes were seemingly employed in order to allow the unfiltered/unsieved beer to be consumed, so as to avoid the hulls or the chaff floating at the top⁴⁴. Other suggestions for their use include the avoidance of bugs⁴⁵ or herbs and other additives⁴⁶ or because the beer was thick⁴⁷.

From the iconography displayed on Old Syrian popular style seals and the archaeological record, it seems possible that the small vessel with the ball staff may have been intended to be a container to hold tips or instead an additive for the liquid in the larger vessel. More importantly, the ball staff itself could be a case for storing drinking tubes. The tubes could have been made of reed as shown by residual parts in some of the tips found at Baghouz and Chagar Bazar⁴⁸ or metal as attested in a Middle Bronze context at Hammām et-Turkmān⁴⁹ and at other sites in the Near East from various periods, the most renowned being those from the Royal Cemetery of Ur⁵⁰. Moorey pointed out that the metal versions of drinking tubes "would be vital utensils where supplies of reeds were not readily available and were probably always preferred for their length of life by those able to afford them"⁵¹. Whether the tubes depicted on Old Syrian popular style seals were meant to be of reed or metal cannot be determined, and both types of material are entirely feasible, both alone and some combination of the two. Most of the examples as rendered in the miniature seal designs have a gentle, consistent curve but occasionally there is a very angular form, perhaps indicative of metal⁵².

The additional part of the ball staff, the protuberance, could also be a sack or container for storing tips (metal or bone) for the drinking process or again some additive for the liquid itself. If the various original objects were made of reed or other organic materials, i.e. leather or wood, then their

40 Civil 1991, p. 2.

41 Dayagi-Mendels, 1999, p. 115.

42 This passage is from Xenophon's *Anabasis* Book IV, v. 26-27 as translated in 1922 by C. L. Brownson (p. 55). This passage has been referred to in virtually all discussions of ancient drinking habits, most recently by Powell 1996, p. 102-103, and there is of course some variation in the translations.

43 Powell 1994, p. 94.

44 The drinking tubes have been suggested as ways to avoid the hulls (Oppenheim 1950, p. 12) or a layer of chaff (Dayagi-Mendels 2000, p. 115).

45 Dalley 1984, p. 89.

46 Beyer 1996, p. 21.

47 Bottero 1957/71, p. 306.

48 Mallowan 1937, p. 99; Mesnil 1948, p. 51.

49 Van Loon and Meyer 1989/90, p. 254, make reference to three 'copper' drinking tubes found near a Middle Bronze I house at Hammām et-Turkmān.

50 Gold and silver drinking tubes were found in the mid-third millennium B.C. Royal Cemetery at Ur (Selz 1983, p. 298, n. 1 and Weber and Zettler 1998, p. 139-140 also with earlier bibliography). One example is made of reed with gold leaf overlay and it is L-shaped and 1.23 m long (U.10855). The late third millennium copper tube found in a hoard of metal objects at Tell Asmar (L. 71 cm) was described by Frankfort as "a copper tube 28 inches long and 1/2 inch in diameter with perforations at one end – a drinking tube such as the Sumerians used for drinking some unclarified liquid which we believe on Phrygian analogies to have been beer" (Frankfort 1934, p. 38, fig. 35). A fragment of a curved silver tube was found in a third millennium burial at Terqa/Tell Ashara in eastern Syria (Thureau-Dangin and Dhorme 1924, p. 288; Selz 1983, p. 298, n. 5).

51 Moorey 1980, p. 183.

52 The seal from Tell Judaidah in the Amuq (Antakya Museum) published by Frankfort 1939, pl. 40 f (Porter n°. 29) depicts a very angular drinking tube.

absence in the archaeological record is understandable. There is also the possibility that ball staffs were at least partly made of metal (bronze or copper) and that the metal was recycled in antiquity. These reasons would help explain why no object resembling a ball staff has been recognized during the excavations of the last hundred years or so.

In no other contemporary seal style is there the same propensity of scenes of seated figures drinking through tubes. Whether this type of scene was considered unsuitable in the iconographic repertoire of contemporary seal styles or that method of drinking itself was not actually favored remains unknown. However, it cannot be ignored that the ball staff is frequently incorporated in the other seal styles for which no drinking tube is employed⁵³. Because these styles do not depict drinking through tubes, it is difficult to prove the theory postulated here for this relatively short-lived artifact⁵⁴. However the idea that it is a case of some kind, and specifically for a drinking tube, would allow it to be held. It also explains, at least for Old Syrian popular style cylinder seals, why the drinking tube in a large vessel is so often depicted with a ball staff in the adjacent field.

The popularity of the ball staff diminished considerably in the Late Bronze Age (c. 1600-1200 B.C.). It is on a few Late Bronze Age seals from Syria. Some examples are a seal and several impressions from Alalakh and a seal from Ugarit as well as Mitannian seals used at Nuzi in northern Iraq⁵⁵. Interpretations of the nature of the ball staff will have to address questions of function and distribution during its florescence as well as its obsolescence. Some of the factors brought up here will remain on the table for future discussion and thought. Further work may pinpoint the first extant example of its depiction as well as its ultimate place of origin. Its beginnings may prove to lie in the west (Syria and Turkey) versus the east (Babylonia and Assyria) sometime before the beginning of the second millennium B.C.⁵⁶.

53 Using various sets of data, the following comparative figures can be stated for the ball staff. The percentages given here have been calculated by me and are certainly intended to be as accurate as possible. However a small margin of error may exist. For the whole corpus of 396 catalogued Old Syrian popular style seals, 36% of them include a ball staff. Among seal impressions from Kültepe as quantified by Beatrice Teissier (1994), it can be shown that the ball staff was most frequently in the designs of Syro-Cappadocian style seals (56%) and Old Assyrian ones (54%) and only slightly less so for Old Babylonian impressions (42%) and elaborate Anatolian ones (32%). In Kültepe Level II impressions, the ball staff is clearly very favored and may even have been deliberately added to earlier designs. For Old Elamite popular style seals 20 (11%) of 189 seals included it (Amiet 1972, see n^o. 1825-2014). For the 479 classic Middle Bronze Syrian seals assembled by Otto and dated to ca. 1800-1730 B.C., a mere 7% include a ball staff (Otto 2000, p. 269). A similar figure comes from the group of Middle Bronze elite Syrian seals with Egyptianizing motifs which were studied by Teissier (1996) as only 16 (6%) of her 268 seal images have a ball staff in the seal design. Old Babylonian impressions from Mesopotamia (versus the trading colonies of Anatolia), on the other hand, also do not often include the ball staff as proven in part by the data compiled by Felix Blocher, 1992, p. 131, for which only 6% (18 of 325 impressions) included it. For a fuller range of actual Old Babylonian seals, the cylinder seals in the British Museum catalogued by Collon (1986, 49) also show that only 7% (98 or 656) incorporate a ball staff. There were certainly regional preferences that cannot be quantified here but merit further study.

54 Ironically the one other contemporary style which includes many drinking tube scenes, namely the Persian Gulf stamp seals from Failaka, depict no ball staffs. See Kjaerum 1983, n^o. 170-189. The absence of the ball staff in these seals at least confirms the point of regional preference.

55 The Alalakh seal is published by Collon 1982, n^o. 47, p. 74-75 and Salje 1990, p. 198, pl. 1:6. The Alalakh seal impressions from Level IV are in Collon 1975, p. 195, n^o. 201, 204, 215, 224, and 227, not all of which have the regularized shape of most Middle Bronze ball staffs. The Ugarit seal is Amiet 1992, n^o. 50, p. 35, 37 and Salje 1990, pl. 19:322. The Nuzi impressions were made available by Diana Stein, 1987, n^o. 49, 50, 68. Stein's extensive study of the seal impressions from the Šilwa-Teššup archive shows that of the 812 documented seal designs, only 37 (4.5%) included a ball staff in the design (Stein 1993, p. 232-233). For unprovenanced Late Bronze seals depicting the ball staff, there is an example in Brussels (O.1394), which places it below the curve of a drinking tube (Matthews 1990, no. 538, p. 112).

56 Porada already hinted at a non-Mesopotamian origin, that is Anatolia or an area west of the Euphrates, in her 1966 article on the Montet jar seals (Porada 1966, p. 255), and this idea seems highly likely to me and is strengthened in my mind by the pronounced favoritism of this object on sealings from Kültepe Level II in virtually all styles.

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