

## Kassite cross

**I. Introduction.** *Mesopotamian symbol.* The K. is an equilateral cruciform with four short arms, a horizontal transom, and vertical upright. It is encountered primarily in Kassite Period glyptic of the second half of the 2nd mill. in Mesopotamia, hence its name. The meaning of the K. is uncertain. Based on a study of early 1st mill. Neo-Assyrian examples of the motif, CALMEYER (1984: 135–154) opines that it is a symbol of the →sun or sun god (→Solar deities) →Shamash, more usually shown as a →winged disk. Because the winged disk is closely associated with Assyrian kingship, CALMEYER explains the occurrence of the K. pendant (which in his opinion appears in place of the winged disk) on the necklaces shown on the stelae of two Assyrian kings, Shamshi-Adad V (824–811; 7) and Adad-nirari III (810–783; 8), as these kings' attempts to dress in a manner acceptable to Babylonians. A recent consideration of the K. that takes earlier and later exemplars into account arrives at the conclusion that the K. is a symbol of supreme divinity in the abstract and of the Babylonian god →Marduk specifically (EHRENBERG 2002: 65–74).

### II. Typology

#### II.1. Phenotypes

The K., usually with straight arms, (1–2\*) can also take the form of a Maltese cross (3\*–5, 6?, 7–10) with outwardly flaring arms. This is the form found in Neo-Assyrian representations. A secondary cross is often inscribed within the outline of the cross (11\*–13; →Fly 2). In Neo-Assyrian representations it can sprout wavy rays and plant-like bands (14; CALMEYER 1984: 140f); a cross shape (same meaning as unadorned cross?) can be depicted within a disk or →winged disk (15).

#### II.2. Associations

##### 1. ASSOCIATED WITH DEITIES/DEMONS

**1.1. Symbols of deities.** As part of a multi-pendant necklace (4–10) the K. may be accompanied by a number of divine symbols. In the case of 1–3\* the K. appears next to symbols of deities in the field of the scene. These symbols include the rhomb (12; Sarpanitu?), star (1, 4–5, 10; →Ishar), winged disk (1, 3\*; →Shamash), crescent (3\*–5, 10; →Sin), horned crown (5?, 6?, 10; →Assur), stylus (1\*–2; →Nabu), and lightning (?) rod (4, 6?, 10; →Adad).

**1.2. Marduk.** Two Kassite cylinders display a juxtaposition of the K. and the

spade standard (11\*, →Fly 2), an accepted symbol of →Marduk. The cross on the cylinders is often accompanied by a rhomb whose meaning is debated, but which may represent a grain of corn symbolizing Sarpanitu, goddess of childbirth and spouse of Marduk (VAN BUREN 1945: 115), thus again pointing to a connection between Marduk and the cross.

**1.3. Lion-man.** On Neo-Babylonian seal impression 1\* the K. is associated with the *uridimmu* lion-man (see § IV).

##### 2. ASSOCIATED WITH HUMANS:

**King.** In Neo-Assyrian times the cross is worn as a necklace pendant by kings as evidenced in relief carvings (4–9) and statuary (10). Ashurnasirpal II (883–859; 4–5; BUDGE 1914: pl. 11) and Shalmaneser III (858–824; 10, 6?) both wear multipendant necklaces, including a cross pendant, at a time when relations with Babylonia were amiable. Shamshi-Adad V (824–811; 7), who on the other hand overthrew successive Babylonian rulers and proclaimed himself “King of Sumer and Akkad,” and his son Adad-nirari III (810–783; 8) wear necklaces with a single large cross pendant rather than multiple pendants. Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727) likewise intervened militarily in Babylonia and partook of aspects of kingship there. In one of his Nimrud Central Palace reliefs (3\*), most likely showing the culmination of the Babylon campaign, the king receives audience before three symbols in the field: crescent (→Moon [ANE], →Sin), inscribed circle (most likely the →sun; →Shamash), and cross, which would fit comfortably as the celestial form of Marduk, the regnant god of Babylon, along with the two other supreme divinities.

### III. Sources

**III.1. Chronological range.** First appearing in protohistoric times, especially in Iran (Susa I pottery and Proto-Elamite seals; see EHRENBERG 2001: 65 n. 2 for references), the K. becomes a regular motif on Kassite cylinder seals (11\*–13, →Fly 2) of the second half of the 2nd mill. In the 1st mill. it appears on Neo-Assyrian monuments (4–10) and Neo-Babylonian cylinder seals (1\*–2).

**III.2. Geographical distribution.** The distribution of the K. as documented is limited to Iran (especially 4th to early 3rd mill.) and Mesopotamia (1\*–10; especially later 2nd and 1st mill.).

**III.3. Object types.** Most often the K. occurs in the upper field of cylinder seals, either alone (13) or accompanied by symbols of deities (1\*–2). On Neo-

Assyrian reliefs (4–9) and statuary (10) the K. appears as one of the pendant symbols hanging from the necklace worn by the Assyrian king. In case 3\* it appears in the upper field of an Assyrian relief along with divine symbols.

**IV. Conclusion.** The K. is the most popular motif on cylinder seals of the Kassite Period, during which time →Marduk became the supreme deity in the Babylonian pantheon and the god most often invoked in cylinder inscriptions, suggesting a connection between the motif and the deity. If the cross is taken as a symbol of Marduk the practice of Neo-Assyrian kings wearing it may reflect these kings' desire to boldly pronounce their suzerainty over Babylon and new affiliation with its god. Aside from a possible Sargonic example (9), the cross does not recur in Assyria, but reappears in two Neo-Babylonian cylinder impressions belonging to a notary in Babylon as a symbol in the field (1–2\*). In both examples it is accompanied by a →stylus, symbol of Marduk's son →Nabu, and in 2\* with the *uridimmu* lion-man, who is likely associated with Marduk (EHRENBERG 1995: 103–105). In the other example a →winged disk also figures among the symbols, arguing against the identification of the cross with the winged disk (see § I). Like the Neo-Babylonian kings, scribes were renowned for archaizing tendencies (LAMBERT 1957: 1–14; FOSTER 1974: 348), so may well have been reviving ancient Kassite symbology, apparently in honor of Marduk.

#### V. Catalogue

1 Seal impression, fired clay, Babylon, 562–560 (1st year of Amel-Marduk—accession year of Neriglissar). BAKER/WUNSCH 2001: 205, fig. 4, seal 1 2\* Seal impression, fired clay, **measurements**, Babylon, 560–549 (3rd year of Neriglissar–8th year of Nabonidus). **Place, institution, inv. no.** BAKER/WUNSCH 2001: 205, fig. 4, seal 2 3\* Relief sculpture, alabaster, Nimrud, 745–727 (Tiglath-Pileser III). BARNETT/FALKNER 1962: pl. 8 4\* Stela, limestone and gypsum, 295 x 138 x 38 cm. Nimrud, 879 (5th year of Ashurnasirpal). London, British Museum, 118 805. BÖRKER-KLÄHN 1982: no. 136 5 Stela, sandstone, Nimrud, 879 (5th year of Ashurnasirpal). BÖRKER-KLÄHN 1982: no. 137 6 Stela, limestone, Kurkh, 853 (6th year of Shalmaneser III). BÖRKER-KLÄHN 1982: no. 148 7 Stela, limestone, Nimrud, 820 (after the 4th year of Shamshi-Adad V). BÖRKER-KLÄHN 1982: no. 161 8 Stela, limestone, Tell al-Rimah, 806 (Adad-nirari III or later). BÖRKER-KLÄHN 1982: no. 164 9 Pillar, limestone, Najafabad (but probably originally from Godintepé), 716 (6th year of Sargon II). BÖRKER-KLÄHN 1982: no. 173 10 Statue, basalt, Assur, 858–835 (Shalmaneser III). STROMMINGER 1970: no. S 3 11\* Cylinder seal, **material, measure**, 14th cent. London, British Museum, WA 89240. Frankfurt 1949: pl. 30k; MATTHEWS 1990: fig. 35; EHRENBERG 2002: fig. 2 12 Cylinder seal, jasper, 14th cent. MATTHEWS 1990: fig. 37 13 Cylinder seal, chalcedony, 14th cent. MATTHEWS 1990: fig. 34 14 Quiver plate, bronze, 9th cent. CALMEYER 1984: fig. 8 15 Relief, stone, 9th cent. CALMEYER 1984: fig. 6

#### VI. Selected bibliography

CALMEYER 1984 • EHRENBERG 2002

*Erica Ehrenberg*

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