THE SYRO-HITTITE ORIGIN OF BACTRIAN-MARGIANA GLYPTICS

V.I. SARIANIDI

In the last two decades one of the most momentous discoveries in the archaeology of Central Asia has been that of a highly-developed culture of an Ancient Eastern type in Bactria and Margiana relating to the Late Bronze Age. The provisional name which it has been given is BMAC (the Archaeological Complex of Bactria and Margiana).1 Characteristic finds connected with this culture are the unusual seals, which occupy a special place in the glyptics of the Ancient East. Apart from these finds in Bactria and Margiana copper-bronze cloisonné seals and amulets with engraved designs on both sides (the threesided prisms and the cylindrical seals to a lesser extent) of this type were also widespread in Eastern Iran and Baluchistan. To the West of the Tepe-Hissar — Shahdad — Tepe-Yahya line they are virtually unknown. Isolated finds of such seals in the territory between Elam and Mari in Syria can be explained away as imports.2 The first scholar who researched Bactrian glyptics, P. Amiet, noted its Western origins straight away, pointing out at the time that the amulets from Bactria resemble more closely examples of Syro-Anatolian rather than Mesopotamian glyptics.3 D. Collon, after examining the compositions found on certain cylindrical seals from Margiana, also noted that they had been inspired by scenes of a similar date from Syria.4 The accumulation of more material of this kind both as a result of the looting of ancient graves in Bactria and of archaeological investigations in Northern Bactria and Margiana has made it possible to draw further conclusions which bear out the suggestions previously put forward by the above-mentioned scholars. 5

At the beginning of the 20th century W. Ward suggested that Syro-Hittite glyptics should be divided into two main stylistic groups: the 'Babylonian' and

1 V.I. Sarianidi, Drevnosti strany Margush (Antiquities from the Land of Margush), Ashkhabad, 1990.
2 Ibid., pp. 88f.
Fig. 1. 'Master' or 'Mistress' of the Animal World.

Fig. 2. Impression of a cylindrical seal on a vessel from the temenos at Gonur.

Fig. 3. A winged man with two bird's heads sitting astride panthers (Bactria).

Fig. 4. A kneeling anthropomorphic figure (Bactria).

Fig. 5. A silver seal with a depiction of a kneeling figure.

Fig. 6. A stone amulet with a depiction of a kneeling figure.