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Mme E. P. Mier  
hommage de l'auteur.

A JASPER GROUP OF A LION AND BULL  
FIGHTING, FROM EL-'AMARNAH,  
IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

BY

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*Reprinted from*

THE JOURNAL OF EGYPTIAN ARCHAEOLOGY

Volume XI, Parts III and IV, 1925.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

Bibliothèque Maison de l'Orient



135798



Jasper group of a lion and a bull fighting. From Tell el-'Amarnah.  
*Natural size.*

## A JASPER GROUP OF A LION AND BULL FIGHTING, FROM EL-'AMARNAH, IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

By H. R. HALL, D.LITT.

With Plate XVII

Twenty-four years ago, in 1901, I published in my *Oldest Civilization of Greece*, p. 303 ff., with two excellent line drawings by the late Mr. Anderson (Figs. 70, 71), the remarkable jasper group of a lion and bull fighting, which I now republish with photographic illustrations (Pl. XVII). As the object seems still to be little known, whereas it is in many ways one of the finest objects in the Egyptian collection of the British Museum, I wish again to draw attention to it, in the hope of eliciting opinions as to its origin, which is a matter for discussion. In describing it I cannot do better than reproduce with slight modification what I have already said about it in my book.

It was found at El-'Amarnah "with the great collection of cuneiform letters, despatches, etc., from the governors and chiefs of Western Asia to the Egyptian kings Amenophis III and IV" (Akhenaten) "and the copies of their letters to Asia. Its date is then presumably about 1380-1370 B.C.

"Only a few objects unconnected with the diplomatic correspondence of the royal cabinet were found with the El-'Amarnah tablets; of these some are in the Museum of Berlin, and two are in the British Museum; one of them, bearing the number 22866, being the group of which we are speaking. What it was doing with the royal diplomatic correspondence it is hard to say, as its use is not clearly apparent. It might be the 'cover of a vase or jar,' as it is described in BUDGE-BEZOLD, *Tell el-Amarna Tablets*, p. 2 [this was the first reference to it], or it might be a simple *objet d'art*, designed to stand by itself, like a group by Barye," of which it reminds us not a little. "That unofficial objects did occasionally stray into the royal 'office' is also shown by that tablet relating the surprising adventures of the Babylonian goddess Ereshkigal, of her messenger Namtar, and of her unedifying quarrel with her husband Nergal, which had somehow slipped into the royal despatch-boxes and is now with our animal group in the British Museum.

"The material of the group is a hard deep-red stone with a few lighter spots, apparently a jasper. It is a representation of a fight between a lion and a bull. The lion has seized his antagonist by the neck with his left paw and is holding him down with his right, which grips the back and shoulder of the bull, so that his right leg has been forced into a kneeling position. The teeth of the lion are buried in the neck of the bull, who has twisted his head to the left, and, with wide open mouth and lolling tongue, is bellowing vehemently. In his struggle to escape he has forced his hindquarters on to the back of the lion, whom he appears to be vigorously kicking. Originally his tail was lashing his sides. It has been broken off in ancient times, and only the traces of its presence remain, but these are enough to show that it was for a portion of its length cut free from the body of the group. The bull's horns are also broken off. A curious feature is that the lion has upon his back

an ornament consisting apparently of a shoulder- and belly-band, decorated with incised squares, and joined together on the shoulder by an oval buckle (?).

"The group stands upon a low elliptical base roughly grooved to represent rocks (?), measuring  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches (8.9 cm.) long by 2 inches (5.1 cm.) broad. The height of the group is  $2\frac{1}{8}$  inches (5.35 cm.), and its interior is hollowed out to a depth of  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch (1.9 cm.). This last fact may show that it was a vase-lid: in this case the loop of the tail probably served as a handle.

"The energy of this small group is very remarkable; the attitude of the bull is eloquent of rage and pain. But, while the composition is good and parts of the bodies of the combatants are well designed, there are also many faults which show the artistic limitations of the sculptor—*e.g.* the forelegs of the lion are far too long and his hindlegs are absurdly short and stumpy. Generally speaking, the bull is better than the lion.

"Of what art is this group a product? It is not Egyptian, not even Egyptian of the artistic development under Akhenaten. For this its execution is far too faulty, as also its composition is perhaps too refreshingly vigorous and energetic. It has been thought to be Mesopotamian, but here many objections are apparent. There is nothing particularly Assyrian about it; the mane of the Assyrian lion is disposed differently. It might appear to have a Persian look, but here again on close inspection the bull, though he has short fat legs with huge hooves, is no Persian bull. And, besides, it is a thousand years older than Persepolis."

I went on to suggest that it might be "Mycenaean," that is to say Minoan. "Many Mycenaean traces are visible in it; not only its vigour of composition but also the inequality of its execution," I thought, seemed "to indicate a Mycenaean origin; the violent upheaving of the hindquarters of the bull and his vehement bellowing remind one strongly of the Vaphio bulls, while the over-emphasized muscles, the exaggerated length of the bodies and stumpiness of the legs" confirmed, I thought, "the aptness of this reminiscence." Also the head of the lion reminded me strongly of the usual type of lion's head on Minoan gems.

If this surmise were correct, this group would be one of the most interesting examples of the Minoan art of the fourteenth century B.C. that we possess, and it was for this reason that I published it in my *Oldest Civilization of Greece*. But I am by no means so certain now that it is correct: the further knowledge of a quarter of a century, derived from Crete, does not altogether confirm a diagnosis made in 1901. Despite the fact that the group has a Minoan look, there are in it also elements that give a non-Minoan impression, and point rather to Asia for its home than to Greece. In fact, from its style, North Syria would seem to be indicated roughly for its place of origin, rather than any other part of the world, and this artistic judgment is confirmed by the circumstance of its discovery with the 'Amarnah tablets. I think now that it must be the lid of a jar of jasper, as Budge and Bezold originally supposed, and such an object from Syria might well have been kept with letters from Syria, perhaps with a letter actually accompanying it as a gift to the Pharaoh, like the *kuhku* (𐎧𐎠𐎢𐎠𐎧) vases mentioned both in the cuneiform letters and in the inscriptions of Tuthmosis III. Animal heads and groups are represented as ornamenting the lids of Syrian vases sent as tribute (W. M. MÜLLER, *Asien u. Europa*, 308, 348; in the latter case mixed with Minoan objects from Cyprus or Crete; WAINWRIGHT, *Liverpool Annals*, VI, Pl. XIII). These were no doubt generally executed in gold, but we need not doubt that the same idea was often carried out in fine stone. The Minoan suggestion in this lion and bull may not

impossibly be due to the very probable Minoan influence which we often seem to be able to trace in Syrian art as the Egyptians represented it for us: we have very few actual relics of it. I have already supposed a Minoan-Syrian *Mischkunst* at this time in Cilicia ("The Land of Alashiya," *Manch. Eg. and Or. J.*, 1912-13, 33-45), to which I would attribute such objects as the ivory mirror-handles from Enkomi in Cyprus in the British Museum, with relief representations of combats between lions and bulls, the Arimaspians fighting a gold-guarding griffin, and so forth, which were found in the same place as the purely Minoan remains of the Aegean immigrants into Cyprus to the time of Amenophis III, and the Egyptian imported objects that they prized. These are more Minoan-looking than our group is: they have more of the naïf angularity of the Cretan art, while our group is too squat and too "curly"; note the tail of the bull, which is oriental enough, and not at all Minoan. They are from further west than our group, I take it.

This Cypro-Cilician (?) art again must have been related to the Phoenician art of the time, which we cannot yet distinguish from its neighbours, though no doubt it was already marked by the eclecticism and by the specially strong Egyptian influence to which it had been continuously subject since the days of the Old Kingdom. Our group however shows no sign of this, and for this reason I do not believe it to be Phoenician, even of the fourteenth century B.C. Little though we know of the characteristics of Phoenician art at that time, I believe the Egyptian touch would always be more visible in it than it is here.

The harness of the lion may give a Mesopotamian impression. Though it is not Assyrian as we know the Assyrian lion in later art, yet this harness makes us think of an Assyrian half-tame lion let loose from his cage, as in Ashurbanipal's time, to do battle, in this case with a bull. The bull is not Mesopotamian at all, and I would not go further east or south than Mitanni for the place of origin of this sculptured vase-lid, and preferably not east of the Euphrates at all. It should be a work of North Syrian or Cilician art, and more probably the former, since, while it has something of the Minoan look in it, the probable Cypro-Cilician works have much more. They might be taken for aberrant Minoan work: this can hardly be so regarded nowadays. It is Syrian, in my opinion.