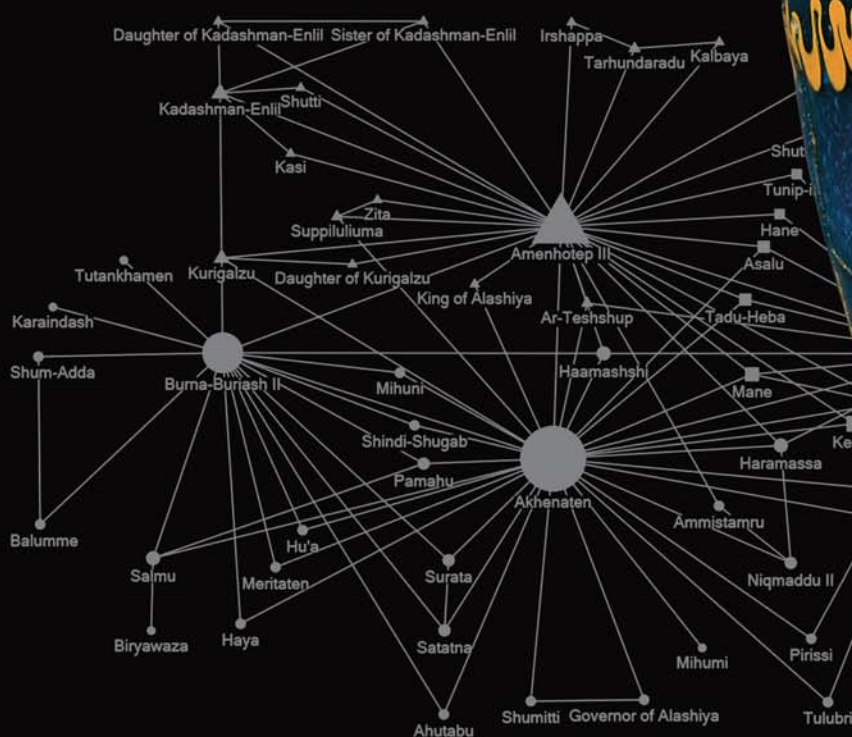
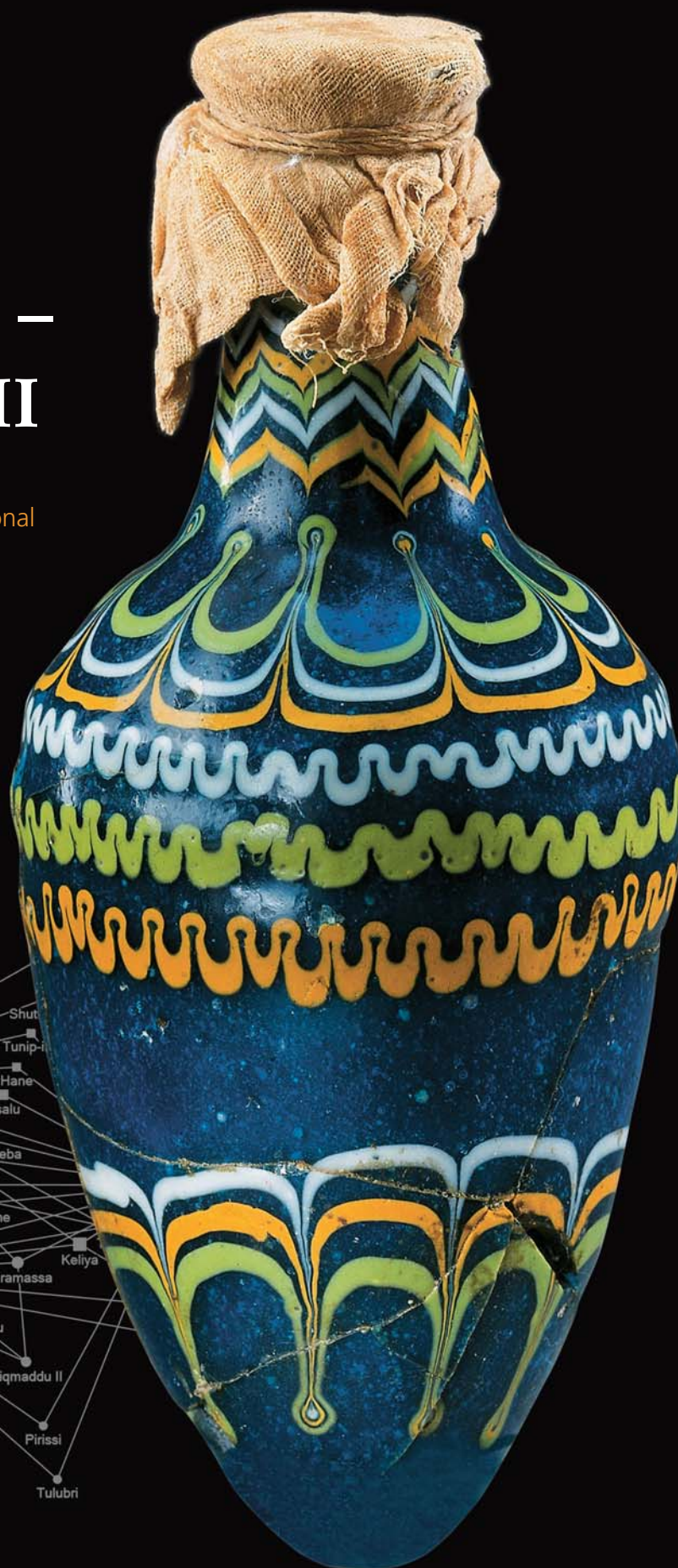


# There and Back Again – the Crossroads II

Proceedings of an International  
Conference Held in Prague,  
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edited by Jana Mynářová,  
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Cover: Glass flask of Maiherperri from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Photo by Andreas F. Voeglin, Photographer Antikenmuseum Basel, Switzerland; the entire Social Network of the Amarna letters with four clusters (© D. H. Cline – E. H. Cline).

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## THE ARRIVAL OF BES[ET] ON MIDDLE-MINOAN CRETE

Judith Weingarten\*

In *The Zakro Master and His Place in Prehistory* (Weingarten 1983: 101–105), I noted some unusual features in the work of the Late-Minoan I glyptic artist known as “the Zakro Master” that could best be explained by his having been familiar with the iconography of the Middle Kingdom demon Bes. His depiction of frontal faces and frontal poses, exaggerated bow-legs which sometimes made his monsters seem to jump and leap, and details such as lion ears on humanoid heads—all essentially without Minoan antecedents—could have been inspired by images of the Egyptian lion-headed demon. However, as I had to admit, no Bes figure had ever been found on Minoan Crete.

That remained the case until 2005, when excavations in House Tomb 2 at Petras in eastern Crete turned up a group of five hard-stone seals (Tsipopoulou 2012: 119–123; Krzyszkowska 2012: 150–156). Although the associated pottery is earlier, this little collection of gems must be dated to Middle Minoan IIB (Weingarten 2012: 373, n. 5), and, thus, roughly contemporary with the early 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty in Egypt (MacGillivray 2009: 189–190).

One of the seals, an unusual rectangular bar-shaped agate,<sup>1</sup> was engraved with a figure strikingly reminiscent of Bes (Fig. 1). However, the creature is amply endowed with long pendulous breasts, depicted in a manner entirely foreign to Minoan iconography; so it is not based on Bes but on Beset, the female counterpart of the Middle Kingdom demon. Though by no means as common as the male Bes—who is known as *ḥ3*, “the fighter”, in the Middle Kingdom—there are well over twenty images of this Beset figure surviving on magic knives, statuettes, and possibly even a painted birth brick (Figs. 2a,b,c). Beset’s Middle Kingdom name is unknown (perhaps *ḥ3.t*; Gnirs 2009: 131). She is only once labelled, and that is as *s3w*, “The one who protects”, which is not a personal name but a generic title. For simplicity’s sake, however, I will continue to use the names Bes and Beset.

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\* I am most grateful to M. Tsipopoulou, excavator of Petras on Crete, for permission to discuss the “Beset” seal and to O. H. Krzyszkowska for the photograph for Fig. 1. My warm thanks, too, to M. Pomadère for permission to reproduce her photograph of the prism from Malia House Pi (Fig. 5). I am also immensely grateful to both S. Quirke and P. Meyrat for sending me still-unpublished chapters of their forthcoming books (see Bibliography). It is my pleasure to thank F. Vink once again for supplying excellent photographs of magic knives to assist my research.

<sup>1</sup> The agate (not carnelian per Weingarten 2013: 373) is a unique banded dark-maroon to purple coloured stone as described by O. Krzyszkowska (email 21 June 2014).





Before examining the new Minoan demon in detail and trying to place it within the context of Minoan iconography, I shall first try to establish: *who* is Beset and what did she look like at the time of her importation into Crete.

### Magic Knives

Middle Kingdom demons can best be studied on the so-called magic knives, that is, ivory crescents generally carved from tusks of the hippopotamus. The knives usually depict processions of real and mythical animals, demons, hieroglyphs and (occasionally) gods, as well as, fairly frequently, short texts. The inscriptions show that most belonged to women and children, and were intended to provide “protection by night and protection by day.” The knives may have been placed either over the bodies of mothers and newborn children while the appropriate spells were recited, or were used to draw a protective sacred circle around them, as perhaps indicated by patterns of wear along their edges. The fundamental studies of the knives are by Hartwig Altenmüller (1965; *id.* 1979; *id.* 1983; *id.* 1985; *id.* 1986; *id.* 2014), who is preparing a new catalogue that will update his dissertation written almost 50 years ago. Contrary to the earlier time-line, the chronology of the knives has been severely compressed. They do not first appear, as previously thought, in the latter half of the 11<sup>th</sup> Dynasty but rather only in mid to late 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, with those from secure archaeological contexts dated ca. 1850 BCE and onwards; and the knives continue to be made until the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty,

**Fig. 1**

Agate rectangular-bar seal from Petras, Crete (TSK/05/261), House Tomb 2 (left: modern impression; centre: obverse; right: reverse). Photograph: O. H. Krzyszkowska.

**Fig. 2a**

Beset images. After Wegner 2009: 466, fig. 10.

[Corrections to Wegner 2009: fig. 10:

(4) now FME 9345;

(5) Ramesseum = Manchester Mus. no. 1799;

(8) now Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig, Inv. Nr. BSAa 991;

(9) now Berlin 14207

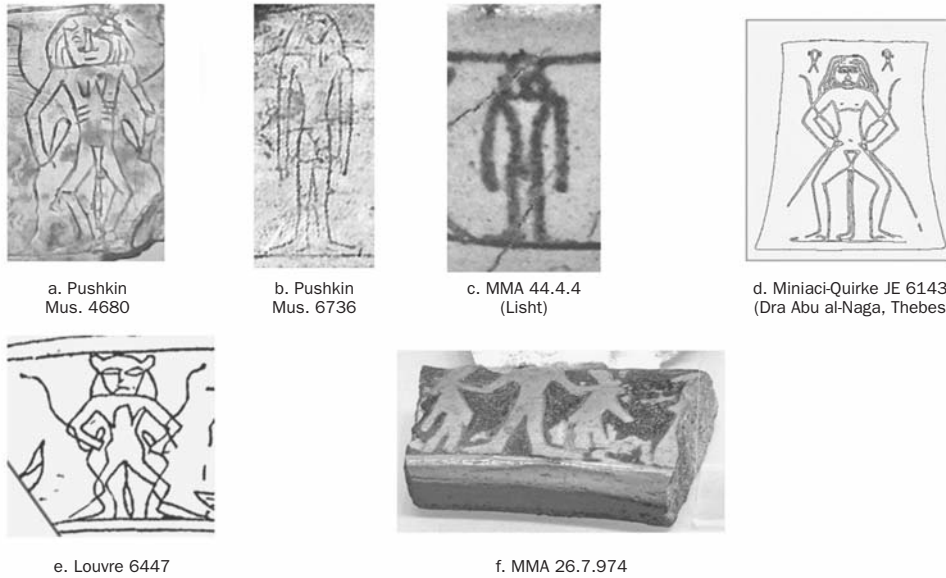
(and Erman 1934: 263, fig. 100)].



gradually becoming less common during the Second Intermediate Period, after which they essentially disappear (Quirke 2015).

The background of the magic knives is the myth of the battle of the Sun-god against his enemies as part of the daily repetition of creation. A spell from the Ramesseum magical papyri (Gardiner 1955: Ram. Papyrus C4, 10–12) reads: “O thou enemy, dead man or dead woman ... thou hast caused Apep [Apopis] to rise up in front of Ra and hast caused him to go up to heaven in place of Ra.”

Such an enemy must be defeated at all costs. The Sun-god’s helpers are shown carrying knives, and an inscription threatens to “cut off the head of [any] enemy”. It is this aggressive protective power that is called up to aid the mother and newly-



**Fig. 2b**

More two-dimensional Beset images.

a. Beset on magic knife: Pushkin Museum, Moscow, no. 4860. Photograph: Pushkin Museum.

b. Beset on magic knife: Pushkin Museum, Moscow, no. 6736. Photograph: Pushkin Museum.

c. Beset(?) with dotted necklace between two Bes figures holding snakes. Detail of blue faience “feeding cup”, Lisht North, late 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. MMA, 44.4.4, Rogers Fund, 1944. Photograph: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

d. Beset on wooden headrest from tomb of Neferhotep at Dra Abu el-Naga (Thebes). After Miniaci – Quirke 2009: 344, fig. 10.

e. Beset on magic knife: Louvre, no. AF 6447 (= Romano 10A).

f. Beset on fragment of faience magic knife: MMA, no. 26.7.974. Edward S. Harkness Gift, 1926. Photograph: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

born child against malignant supernatural forces. The child was thus identified with the newborn Sun-god passing through the caverns of the night. Just as the demons fight against the enemies of the solar child, so they will fight for the life of the infant (Bosse-Griffiths 1977: 103; Aufrère 2010: 12–16; Quirke 2015). In addition to their use in maternal rituals, the knives were also deposited in tombs for the purpose of achieving divine rebirth.<sup>2</sup> Again, as the demons help the Sun-god to *his* daily rebirth, they will also help the newly dead in the crucial period leading to rebirth in the afterlife. In other words, each individual conjuration with the knives is also an imitation and reenactment of the divine mythology.

The most common demons on the magic knives are the lion-demon, Taweret, and Bes, and somewhat less frequently the griffon and serpent-necked panther, usually accompanied by a veritable host of demonic creatures and powerful animals, as well as animal-headed standards and hieroglyphic signs. Despite most of the knives being made of hippopotamus ivory, a valuable material that must have been carved by specialist craftsmen, it is striking that many are poorly or even crudely engraved. The big differences in technical execution from very primitive to highly sophisticated argues that they were not always drawn by professionally trained artisans but by those who performed the magic spells and rites—that is, by the magicians (Vink 2012: 54–55; *id.* 2015; cf. Vivas Sainz 2014). The magician could have been a lector priest schooled in the “House of Life,” and thus a literate member of the elite (Ritner 1993: 220–222), or, as can also be argued, a female healer,<sup>3</sup> perhaps a priestess of Hathor (Ghalioungui 1975; Pinch 1994: 131; Gnirs 2006: 130), such as the women who are labelled as “nurses” and pictured

<sup>2</sup> An introduction concurrent with other changes in burial customs (Bourriau 1991: 13–14).



**Fig. 2c**

Beset three-dimensional images (to which add ivory figurine: Cairo, JE 44958 = Romano no. 51; no image available).

1. Wooden Beset figurine (h. 5.2 cm). Fondation Jacques-Edouard Berger, Lausanne (Page-Gasser – Wiese 1997: 86–87, no. 51). Photograph: F. Vink.

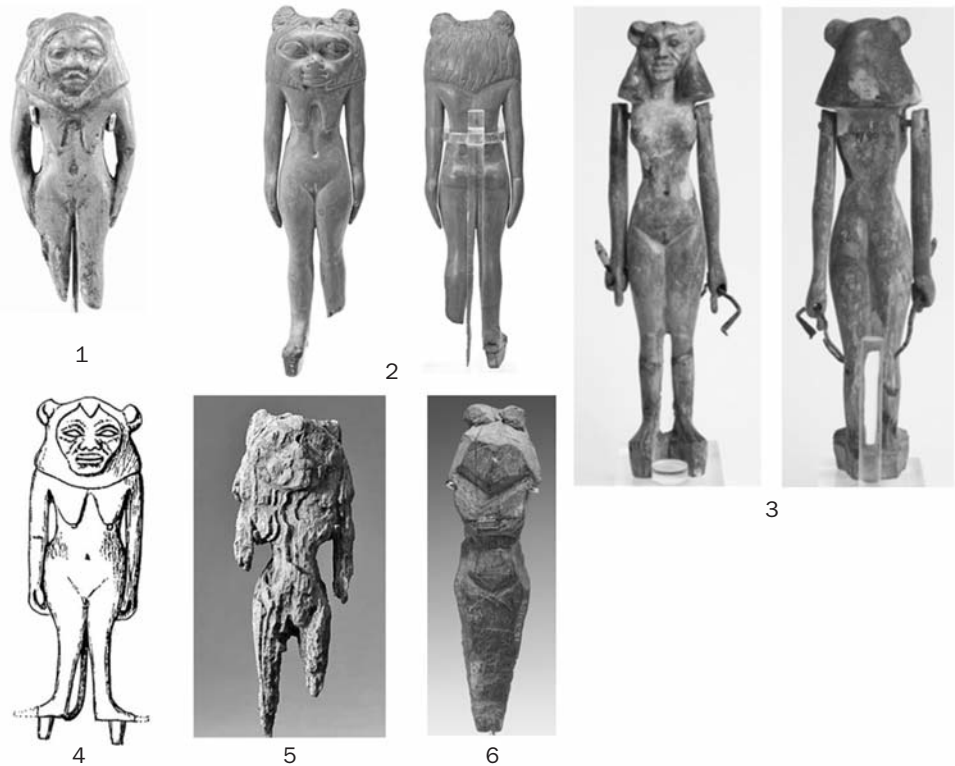
2. Wooden Beset statuette (h. 10 cm): Pushkin Museum, Moscow, no. 5667 (ex-Coll. Golenicheff 1677). Photograph: Pushkin Museum.

3. Wooden Beset statuette holding bronze serpents in hands (h. 20.2 cm): Manchester Museum, 1790. Tomb shaft 5 under Ramesseum, Thebes. Photographs: Manchester Museum.

4. Wooden Beset figurine (missing). Kahun, “in a hole in the floor of a house.” After Petrie 1890: pl. VIII, 14.

5. Wooden Beset figurine: MMA, 15.3.1088. Rogers Fund, 1915. Surface find, Lisht North. Photograph: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

6. Wooden Beset figurine: MMA, 15.3.1105 (unfinished?). Lisht North Cemetery, Pit 449, MMA excavations, 1906–07. Photograph: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

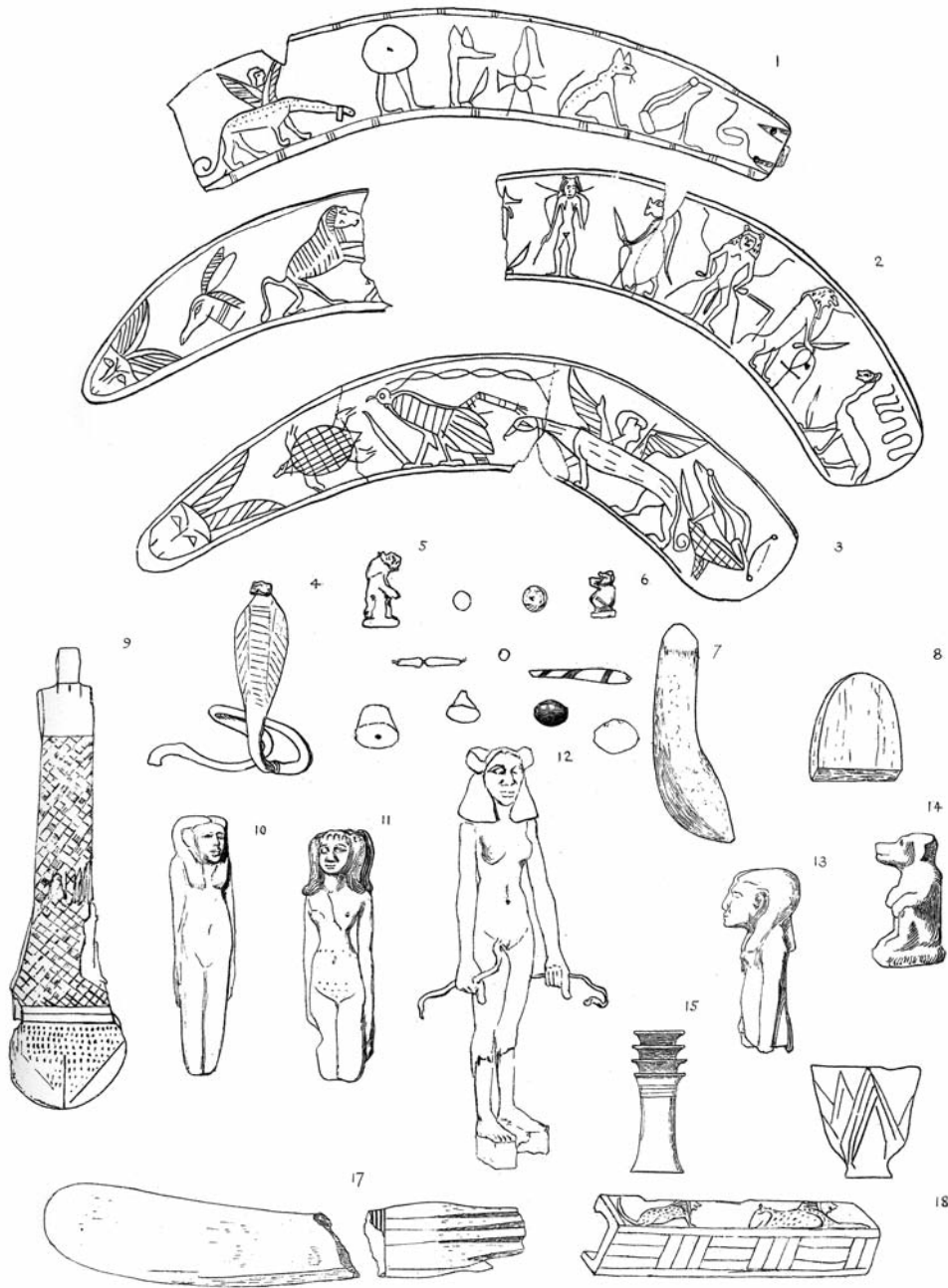


manipulating magic knives and snake wands on paintings in two late-Middle Kingdom tombs (Altenmüller 1985; Ritner 1993: 231).<sup>4</sup> The best evidence for the profession of magician is the magician’s box and implements discovered in a shaft beneath the storeroom at the Ramesseum, probably of 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty date, near the reign of Sobekhotep III in mid-18<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Ritner 2006: 218; Gnirs 2006; Meynat 2012). In the box were 23 fragmentary papyri: all but a few were magical and medical-magical texts. One papyrus of particular interest to us records a collection of spells connected with pregnancy, childbirth and the protection of young children (Töpfer 2014).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cf.: Peseshet, “lady overseer of the female physicians,” whose stela was found in her son’s(?) tomb at Giza; 5–6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (Ghalioungui 1975; Nunn 1996: 124). Possibly also Meritptah, named “Chief of Physicians” in her son’s tomb at Saqqara; 2–3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty (12 October 2014 on EEF-list: Charlotte Booth [www.charlottesegypt.com](http://www.charlottesegypt.com)). Healing papyri use the masculine singular pronoun to refer to the magician but this might be a broader generic use to denote any healer, man or woman, in which case the reader might be either generic “man”, or generic “person” (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums-static/digitalegypt/med/healthexample.html>; accessed on 15 August 2015).

<sup>4</sup> El-Bersha, tomb of Djehutihotep, mid-12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. El-Kab, tomb of Bebi: “Second Intermediate Period” (Davies – O’Connell 2010: 102); early 17<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (Parkinson, Online research catalogue [n.d.]); 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (Ritner 2006: 212).

<sup>5</sup> Ramesseum IV in Nunn 1996: 194: incantation for a woman in labour, to “release a child from the belly of a woman” (column c, lines 28–30); for the neonate, “another thing to be done for [the child] on the day when he is born” (c, 17–24); for “protection to be made for the child on the day when he is born” (c, 15–16).



**Fig. 3**

The Magician's equipment found under the Ramesseum. After Quibell 1898: pl. III.

Close by were objects that appear to be the equipment of a professional magician (Ritner 1993: 222–233; Gnirs 2009), including four magic knives, a pair of ivory clappers, amulets, a “paddle doll” and figurines (Fig. 3). Among the latter were five Type 1 female “fertility” or “potency” figures, a bronze snake wand 16 centimetres long, found “entangled in a mass of hair”, and a wooden statuette of Beset holding bronze snakes in her hands.<sup>6</sup> Although three of the magic knives

are at least partly broken, we still can look at them as a unique *intentional* group.<sup>7</sup> The first thing to notice is that the four knives depict mostly quite different combinations of demons and animals. Could it be that the magician chose to use the magic knife that applied particularly to the case at hand? For example, the knife with Bes and Beset, which also includes Taweret, might have been used in rites connected specifically with protection of mother and child perhaps manipulated while the magician recited the appropriate spells from the above-mentioned papyrus (P. Ramesseum IV).

Second, while snakes very frequently appear in one guise or another on almost every intact knife in the corpus and the great majority of fragments, too, they are relatively rare on the knives in this collection ... except on the knife depicting Bes and Beset which pictures them and the lion-demon as well in their most common role, that is as snake-killers and/or snake-masters. Snakes, of course, have a double nature: they symbolize the terrible dangers against which protection is sought but, at the same time, they are themselves strong magic.<sup>8</sup> Demons are often seen biting snakes, their power in the process of being consumed and absorbed by the demons, or otherwise holding them firmly grasped in their hands. By seizing snakes and other threatening animals, Bes and Beset control and direct the hostile forces that these represent. The subjugated snakes are harmless to the demons (Coffin Spell 885: "The snake is in my hand and cannot bite me") ... while, at the same time, they are turned into "weapons" against inimical forces. In the hands of a magician, they are a powerful force for both good and evil.

The magician's implements thus include three potent images of snakes. Those on the magic knife (Fig. 3, no. 2), grasped and/or devoured by three demons, perhaps boosted by the additional presence of a triple-headed snake. Second, the bronze cobra-snake itself (Fig. 3, no. 4), with elaborately coiled body and hood raised as if to strike, presumably once held as a wand by the human magician. The rearing cobra is also a female divine force whose power is as efficacious against malevolent demons as against the enemies of the pharaoh. Third, the bronze snake wands, smaller versions of the cobra wand, in the hands of the wooden Beset statuette (Fig. 3, no. 12). A remarkable feature

<sup>6</sup> Cf.: the set found in a house in late Middle Kingdom Lahun: a wooden Beset statuette (Fig. 2c, no. 4), a Bes/Beset cartonnage mask (below, fn. 9), hippopotamus-ivory clappers, and a gynological papyrus (Bosse-Griffiths 1977: 104). Text and translation of papyrus UC 3. 2057 by S. Quirke: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums-static/digitalegypt/med/birthpapyrus.html> (accessed on 15 August 2015). Doubt that the "abandoned" mask was necessarily related to the buried statuette and clappers (and suggestion that the statuette perhaps depicted the goddess Sakhmet): Weiss 2015: 170–171, fn. 1451.

<sup>7</sup> The three broken knives all show signs of having been repaired, recut, and reshaped after breakage. Thus, they were not discarded but appear to have continued in use.

<sup>8</sup> A power increased by creating a double-headed snake; and uniquely, on the Bes-Beset magic knife from the Ramesseum (Fig. 3, no. 2), a triple-headed snake.

of this statue is its moveable arms which could be raised so that the metal snakes in each hand would rise up in front of the demon.

## Beset Iconography

Bes and Beset, almost uniquely in Egyptian art, are pictured frontally and full-faced rather than in profile. Most Beset figures have straight or slightly separated legs, in contrast to Bes who is almost always squat and bowlegged. Both the male and female demons usually grasp undulating snakes in their hands, but Beset sometimes masters lizards or hares as well.

While occasionally wearing beads or bracelets, Beset is otherwise entirely naked (Figs. 2 a–c). I think it wrong, however, to think of her as “nude”: she is no more “nude” than Bes or most other demons, for that matter. They are simply “unclothed”, which probably bespeaks their demonic animal nature rather than the nudity of a human or divinity (cf. Asher-Greve – Sweeney 2006: 118–119, 126–136). Her femaleness is usually obvious: her breasts are drawn as pointed or rounded, and the triangle of her sex may be emphasized or not.

The larger wooden statuettes preserve more detailed features (Fig. 2c). She is again entirely naked, with either long pendulous or rounded breasts, and the pubic area is marked with a V and central slit. Despite her female nature, her head is framed by a lion’s mane that properly belongs to the male lion. She has round lion ears but sometimes lacks a tail. Facial features include overly large eye sockets and staring eyes, large flat nose, bulging cheeks, botox lips, and wide, partly open mouths. The Ramesseum statuette retains traces of paint: her body was yellow and her hair or wig was black, which also seem to be the colours of demons other than Beset on the painted birth brick from Abydos. On the brick itself, Beset—if the headless figure is indeed Beset—is painted blue.<sup>9</sup> Blue is closely linked with the concept of solar rebirth and blue-haired deities appear frequently in scenes that depict the daily rebirth of the Sun-god. The colour is particularly associated with Hathor in her role as a goddess of fertility and birth; and, indeed two blue-haired Hathor-headed emblems appear together with mother and newborn child on the birth brick (Wegner 2009: 45; fig. 7).

While the drawings on magic knives are often schematic, Beset’s common bodily characteristics, as also seen on the statuettes, are clear enough. The knife from the late Middle Kingdom tomb of Nakht at Lisht North (Fig. 4a) shows a fairly typical image. Again, she is entirely naked. Her lion’s mane is decorated with striations as if she is wearing a wig. She has round lion’s ears, rounded

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<sup>9</sup> The Bes/Beset cartonnage face-mask from Kahun (above fn. 6), however, was painted black, with red lips, red pupils outlined in green, green eyebrows, green and yellow/brown markings on nose, grey spots outlined in red on cheeks (Petrie 1890: 30, pl. VIII) ; blue is conspicuously absent.

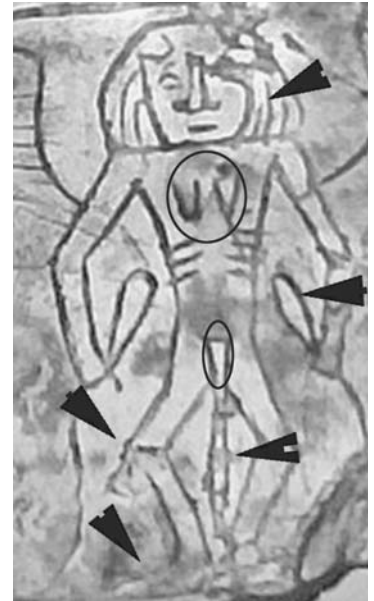


**Fig. 4a**

Beset on ivory magic knife (with emphasis added) from the late-Middle Kingdom tomb of Nakht at Lisht North. Detail of MMA no. 15.3.197.

**Fig. 4b**

Beset on ivory magic knife (with emphasis added). Detail of Pushkin Mus. no. 4860.



breasts, and the triangle of her sex is depicted. She holds a pair of hares in human hands: arms are raised and bent at the elbow—a very uncommon pose for her but one that will later be typical of the Mistress of Animals. Finally, since her legs are not held close together, but separated, she shows off a lion's tail. The Beset on the magic knife now in the Pushkin Museum (Fig. 4b) is similar but is more characteristic in that she holds snakes in her hands; her arms are down and slightly akimbo, breasts are pendulous, and the knees flexed more like the male Bes than her usual position. Features of both Besets have strong parallels on the Beset from eastern Crete.

## Beset on Minoan Crete

### I. The Petras Beset (Fig. 1)

The Cretan version shares Beset's round lion ears, raised arms bent at the elbow, legs separated and flexed to reveal a lion's tail, and splayed feet. The latter's toothy grimace, however, seems a Minoan innovation. Breasts are long and pendulous but she lacks the triangle indicating her female sex. The pubic triangle is virtually never indicated in Minoan art, surely a matter of Minoan decorum: female breasts are exposed but the pubic area is invariably hidden. Quite possibly, the irregular lines engraved across the demon's lower body are meant to screen her genitals, perhaps on its way to becoming a Minoan "skirt". Beset's lion's mane, too, has been altered. Possibly because there were no lions on Crete, the striped mane framing the head made little sense and so turned into striped wings or streamers projecting from both sides of the head. One small but decisive detail



should remove any doubts about this figure's Egyptian ancestry. The Cretan demon retains the snake; its head clearly appears under the left armpit on the impression (Fig. 6, top left) and is just visible also on the right even though the snake itself seems to have become all but meaningless.

The fading away of the snake, the change from striated lion's mane to wings or streamers, as also the alteration of the face which has become less human; goblin-like claws instead of human hands, and bristles of hair added to the face and body all suggest that Beset is not a recent arrival but has been on Crete long enough for the demon to have started on the road to assimilation.<sup>10</sup> Thus, in the case of the Petras Beset, we are probably looking at an image created very near the end of Middle Minoan IIB either ca. 1700 or 1650 BCE, depending on which chronology you prefer.<sup>11</sup>

## II. The Malia Beset

As if not frightful enough, Beset's apotropaic character is still more emphatic on another, recently discovered sealstone. The steatite three-sided prism from Malia House Pi (Fig. 5) is difficult to date precisely but surely is not more than a generation or so earlier than the Petras Beset. This demon, too, is already somewhat Minoanised. The carving is relatively crude, worked with a knife, but the image is clear enough: a full frontal figure with large rounded female breasts, large staring eyes, an open toothless mouth, round lion-ears, and a few rough bristles for hair. Although she is naked, the pubic area is not marked. Her arms are raised at the elbow, with claw-like three-digit hands. In a literal re-interpretation of Beset's main function as protector of mother and child, her legs are raised at the knees so that she appear to be squatting in the universal birth-giving position, a pose that will be used again later by the Zakro Master (Fig. 6). The Malia Beset is not a goddess with upraised arms, as was proposed, but a demon raising her hands in a warding-off gesture—the same gesture made by the Petras Beset. Though this image

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<sup>10</sup> It is not possible to propose any stylistic or chronological development in Beset's Egyptian image since only two magic knives and one headrest with her image come from secure contexts (Ramesseum Manchester 1799, MMA Kahun 15.3.197, and Miniaci – Quirke 2009: Thebes). Thus, the date of her importation must remain vague, unlike that of Taweret (Weingarten 1991). With the forthcoming publications of Altenmüller (2015) and Quirke (2015), however, it might be feasible to study her development by dating some more commonly-depicted demons that appear with her on the same knives.

<sup>11</sup> The craftsman who carved this gem belonged to a workshop that was particularly attracted to her image, especially in abbreviated *pars pro toto* form (Weingarten 2013: 374). I dub it the "Curlicue Monster Workshop", not only for its Beset-heads with curlicue hairstyles but for a range of curlicue designs that are remarkably characteristic of its work. Both this workshop and the later Zakro Master focused on Beset's aggressive full-face frontality—not a motif generally popular in the Bronze Age Aegean. I wonder if it were simply the apotropaic quality of a staring image that appealed to them as seal carvers which, in their minds, turned their gems into amulets.

**Fig. 5**

Steatite 3-sided prism  
from Malia House Pi  
(Anastasaidou –  
Pomadère 2011: 66).  
Photograph:  
M. Pomadère.



has wandered off from that of the imported demon, we can still confirm her Egyptian ancestry. Since she appears on a three-sided prism, two more images are engraved on other faces of the stone: one a typical twisted dog or lion, and the second a pithos or large jar, another frequent motif on prisms. However, the pithos is flanked by two serpents—a unique image, without parallel on any other three-sided prism or, for that matter, probably anywhere in Minoan glyptic. Serpents are simply not illustrated; except here.<sup>12</sup> Why Beset has become detached from

<sup>12</sup> A similar wavy line on a carnelian three-sided prism (CMS VI 93a) might indicate a serpent but it has equal dots at both ends which casts doubt on this interpretation. I am agnostic about the wavy lines floating in the sky on the Isopatra gold ring (CMS II.3 51), one of which does end with a slight swelling. No clear snake appears elsewhere in Minoan glyptic. Serpents have also been cruelly expelled from the Hieroglyphic script (Evans' sign no. 84), leaving only the zigzag sign CHIC 061 as a possible distant relative. Cf.: the snake in relief on a gold amulet from a LM IIIA1 chamber tomb at Ayia Triada (cross-dated by a scarab of Queen Tiy [*Monumenti antichi* 14, 736, figs. 35, 36]): since this clear snake appears together with a scorpion, spider, and human hand, the amulet may have served to avert such noxious creatures rather than having any association with a putative snake cult. The three crude snake vases from a small private house in Knossos ("Snake House", West of the West Court, [not SW of "SW Treasury" per PoM I: 138–139] = PoM I: 155, figs. 118, 119) cannot be closely dated. Images in Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki 2005: 101, where dated to the late Protopalatial period; while possible, stratigraphic evidence is missing: Pendelbury *Stratigraphic Museum* boxes B.III.1, examined on my behalf by Dr. C. F. Macdonald, contain entirely mixed early and later pottery).



**Fig. 6**

Upper row, left to right: Petras Beset (as Fig. 1; with arrow added at snake's head). Zakro Master's seals CMS II.7 133, 145B, 122. Lower row, left to right: Malia Beset (as Fig. 5a), CMS II.7 149, 119, 148. CMS photographs: CMS-ARACHNE.

her snakes, or why they now flank a jar, I do not know and, in the absence of more examples, it is useless to speculate. But, in short, this is another Beset demon, as seen through the eyes of a soft-stone engraver of rather mediocre skills.

### III. Minoan Beset

So it was Beset not Bes who came to Crete, and she probably came along with Taweret somewhat earlier in Middle Minoan II. These were not the only monsters imported in this period, but some of them—Taweret, the griffin, and even the sphinx—stayed and became fixtures in Minoan iconography. Others, like Beset, fell by the wayside.

Beset, it is true, was a first-class snake-killer but there would have been little need for a "Snake-Biter" in a land with no poisonous snakes. Which suggests, too, that the metaphorical idea of the snake as enemy of the Sun-god and symbol of chaos simply did not come across. The only identifiable descendants of Beset, till now, are those seen on a few seals from the hand of the Zakro Master (Fig. 6), which fit within the same "East Cretan monster" tradition as the Petras and Malia demonic images (Weingarten 1983: 122–124). The Zakro Master endowed her with large Minoan-scale breasts and kept the raised arms warding-off gesture as well as the birth-giving squatting pose of the Middle-Minoan Besets. But even these hints of Beset's presence don't really cohere. The ideas behind them remain quite fluid. In short, the demon has not achieved any fixed form. Consequently, and unlike Taweret who is transformed into the Minoan Genius (Weingarten 1991),

the naked frontal female demon leaves no enduring mark on Minoan art or cult. When a deity equally able to harness the powers of nature and master chaotic animals again appears in the Aegean, it will be as the Late Minoan I Mistress of Animals and she will be fully clothed and pictured quite normally in profile.<sup>13</sup> But that is another story for another day.

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<sup>13</sup> This Mistress, however, is never pictured handling snakes. If the essence of the original imported Beset is her frontal pose and a rising writhing snake held in each hand, how would she have appeared had she also developed in a more naturalistic direction, more in tune with central Cretan norms and decorum? Could a figure resembling the Ramesseum Beset have evolved into a Minoanised, glowing faience Snake Goddess, holding a pair of rising writhing snakes in her outstretched hands? Surprisingly, the famous statuettes from the MM IIIB-LMIA Temple Repositories have no other snake-handling ancestresses on Crete. Now that the various forged 'Snake Goddesses' are eliminated (Lapatin 2002), the Temple Repository's figurines are really quite isolated. Did they arise *ex nihilo* or were they, in fact, harking back to the snake-handling skills of imported Beset (Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki 2005: 108–113; cf.: Borrego-Gallardo 2013)? That would be the final ironic nail in the coffin of the imaginary snake cult on neopalatial Minoan Crete.

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