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### Mesopotamia, early Akkadian period

**Cylinder seal: the sun god rising**, about 2330–2284 B.C.  
Serpentine

Musée du Louvre, Department of Near Eastern Antiquities, AO 2261

This seal illustrates the crucial moment of daybreak, announcing the return of the sun god. Starting on the right, two attendants to the god open the doors of the East, where the sun rises. The conquering sun, portrayed as a human figure, emerges between two mountains in a blaze of fire. The figure at the far left is a repeat of the first attendant on the right. Although the images convey the concept, they lack artistic finesse.

Photo: © Réunion des Musée Nationaux / Art Resources, NY

### Mesopotamia, early Akkadian period

**Cylinder seal: contest scenes**, about 2330–2284 B.C.  
Green porphyry

Musée du Louvre, Department of Near Eastern Antiquities, AO 22307

This expressive seal was made in the royal workshops of the Akkadian kings. Mythic combat was a favorite theme of Akkadian engravers, but here all conflicts seem to have been resolved. On the right, a lion, the greatest of predators, is being stabbed by a bull-man, the traditional ally of humankind. Next, a man with curly hair and beard confronts a human-headed bull that likely represents a kindly earth spirit. Another human-headed bull stands beside the last figure, a man in profile. In this masterly rendering, the artist lavished attention on fine details and the figures’ swelling musculature.

Photo: © Réunion des Musée Nationaux / Art Resources, NY

### Mesopotamia, Isin-Larsa period

**Cylinder seal: contest scenes**, 2000–1800 B.C.  
Hematite

Musée du Louvre, Department of Near Eastern Antiquities, AO 6250

This seal repeats the familiar scene of confrontations between humans and human-headed bulls, but here it almost seems the carver has forgotten the original models. The heads of the human-headed bulls, side by side in the center, are reduced to square cartoons weirdly detached from their bull-bodies. The human heroes are barely more than stick figures. The lack of care and artistry suggests that this seal is the work of a provincial workshop.

Photo: © Réunion des Musée Nationaux / Art Resources, NY

### Mesopotamia, late Akkadian period

**Cylinder seal: seal of Ibni-sharrum**, about 2217–2193 B.C.  
Diorite

Musée du Louvre, Department of Near Eastern Antiquities, AO 22303

A masterpiece of Near Eastern art, this was the seal of Ibni-sharrum, scribe to the last Akkadian sovereign. At the right and left edges kneel two nude, curly-headed heroes holding vases from which life-giving water flows. Drinking from the vases are buffaloes, whose horns frame a cartouche that identifies the owner of the seal and the king he served, Shar-kali-sharri. Below the figures, a river winds through stylized mountains. The carver’s precise and controlled rendering of muscles, tendons, hair, and horns in the extremely hard diorite stone is remarkable, as is the monumentality he manages to convey, despite the object’s small size.

Photo: © Franck Raux / Réunion des Musée Nationaux / Art Resources, NY

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