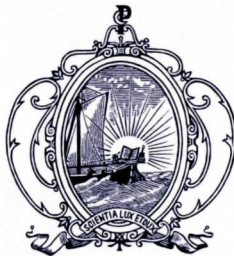


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NEW MIDDLE BRONZE AGE
FUNERARY EVIDENCE FROM TELL AHMAR
(SYRIA)

A MIDDLE BRONZE AGE CYLINDER SEAL FROM THE JAR BURIAL F167 AT TELL AHMAR

BY

ADELHEID OTTO

The cylinder seal TAH 94/S2+3/F167/O.179 was discovered in a jar burial at Tell Ahmar in 1994. It is now in the Aleppo National Museum as Tell Ahmar inv. No. 131. I am very grateful to the excavators G. Bunnens and A. Roobaert who offered me the opportunity to publish this seal.

My drawing is based on two photographs of an impression of the seal, which were generously provided by G. Bunnens. Additionally, I was able to examine the cylinder seal itself in April 1998 in the National Museum of Aleppo with the kind permission of W. Khayata.

Description (Fig.7)

The cylinder seal is of black stone, very probably haematite. It is 2.35 cm high, the diameter of the cylinder with slightly concave flanks measures at both of the ends 1.2 cm, in the middle 1.1 cm. The perforation, drilled from both ends, is not exactly central and has a diameter between 0.4 and 0.45 cm. The surface of the seal is chipped in several places and a major piece is missing from the lower edge of the seal. The surface is also quite worn, which makes the originally good modelling appear quite flat. The image on the seal consists of a primary scene and a secondary scene; the primary scene occupies twice as much space as the secondary scene.

The primary scene shows three principal figures. On the left stands a male figure wearing a mantle with slightly rolled borders going down to the knee. Under the mantle the figure wears a short kilt, of which the lower border is in the form of two horizontal strokes visible above the left knee. The head is covered with an oval cap. In front of this cap and at the calf and the thigh there are several major chips of the surface. The figure's right hand is held up in front of its mouth and its left hand carries an animal with long ears and a long tail which seems to have two ends. This animal, which at first sight seems to be a hare because of the long ears, is more probably a goat kid. This tame young animal is apparently being carried to one of the two female figures standing on the right.

One of these female figures is standing on top of a bull. She is naked except for a multiple necklace and has a distinctly marked navel and a slim waist. She is slightly knock-kneed and her legs are rendered in three sections: an oval thigh, a spherical knee and an elongated oval lower leg. She is lifting with both hands her skirt or veil which is rendered as a line of dots, hanging down as low as her knees. A second row of dots level with her hips may indicate the top of this garment. The upper ends of the line of dots, which appear above her hands, are almond-shaped.¹ The nude female figure is rendered *en face*, except for her calves and probably also her feet: her head appears to be turned to the left, towards the male figure. Unfortunately her head is damaged and only the back of her hair is visible, which is rendered as a high knot. Above her head there are two partly damaged objects visible, which are probably parts of a winged sun disc.² The bull, on which she is standing, has a hump and a distinctive mane rendered with short parallel strokes. The bull has a huge eye, a distinct muzzle and horns rendered *en face*. As far as it is visible, the bull is standing.³ In front of it is a Y-shaped object which might be a plant.⁴

On the other side of the primary scene stands a female goddess wearing a flounced garment and a horned crown and holding up her hands in front of her face. Unfortunately the seal is very worn in this part, so that many details of her face and costume have vanished.

Above the bull, between the legs of the naked woman and the goddess there is a V-shaped object, consisting of a broader and a narrower part. It is very worn but is probably a hand with a narrow palm and a long, stretched out thumb. A better preserved hand can be seen on the other side of the naked woman, approximately at the level of her knees. This hand is marked by very fine fingers and a long curved thumb. Between the heads of the

¹ These almond-shaped objects may be lotus buds and birds sitting on them are sometimes shown (Fig. 8); see also a terracotta-relief from Alalakh, AT/39/240, L. Woolley, *Alalakh. An Account of the Excavations at Tell Atchana in the Hatay 1937-1949*, Oxford 1955, pl. 440.

² Since the left part of the object is badly damaged, it seems unlike the right element. It is, however, most probable that the left object is the second wing of a winged sun disc, and not a part of a flying bird, since the head of the bird is not visible.

³ On some seals the bull, who carries the naked woman, is shown crouching; see B. Teissier, *Ancient Near Eastern Seals from the Marcopoli Collection*, Berkeley-London 1984, No. 477; E. Porada, *Corpus of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in North American Collections I. The Pierpont Morgan Library*, Washington 1948, No. 967 (here: Fig. 9).

⁴ A similar object in front of a bull is found on a seal from the Borowski Collection (Fig. 8). There it is tentatively interpreted as an altar, E. Williams-Forte, "Rollsiegel aus der Periode Altsyrisch II," *Archäologie zur Bibel. Kunstschatze aus den biblischen Ländern*, Mainz 1981, p. 257.

nude female and the male figure are a crescent and a sun disc, in which a double cross is inscribed.

The secondary scene is divided in two registers by a guilloche, which is enclosed by a horizontal line above and below. This guilloche has three cords and five coils. The lower register shows a squatting sphinx, turning to the left and raising one paw. Unfortunately the major part of the body is destroyed by a big chip. Nevertheless it is certain that the sphinx has a human head and a lion's body with a raised up, finely curved tail. A wing protrudes between the head and the tail. In the upper register two people are sitting face to face on two chairs, which are rendered with three legs and a distinct backrest. The seated figures are both dressed in flounced garments which leave one shoulder free, have short-cut hair rendered as several vertical strokes,⁵ and look quite similar. They are each holding a vessel in one hand, shown with an oval lower part and a separate upper part. From each of these vessels curved lines, leading into a larger jar, join together in the middle. The larger jar is shown with wider mouth and a large oval body above a smaller circular base or stand. There is a V-shaped element above the mouth of the jar.

Interpretation

The primary scene shows two figures on either side of a naked woman. These two figures belong to the standard repertoire of the Classical Syrian glyptic of the 18th century B.C. The male figure on the left, dressed with a mantle going down to the knee and an oval headdress, can be interpreted as a king. The female figure to the right, standing opposite him and lifting both hands, is usually called the suppliant goddess or goddess Lama.⁶

The scene of a king facing a goddess was a common motif in Babylonia, North Mesopotamia and Syria during the 18th century B.C. In the Classical Syrian glyptic of Syria and North Mesopotamia this motif was used only by members of the royal family and high officials. The motif of a king opposite a goddess is first encountered as the official motif on seals of Samsi-Adad's kingdom of North Mesopotamia,⁷ and was probably then adopted in the other Amorite kingdoms in Syria and North Mesopotamia, especially in the kingdoms of Yamhad, Carchemish, Qatna and Mari, to become the

⁵ Sometimes this is also interpreted as a cap.

⁶ A. Spycket, "La Déesse Lama," *RA*, 54 (1960), pp. 73-84.

⁷ A. Otto, "Zur offiziellen Ikonographie auf Siegeln aus der Regierung des Königs Samsi-Adad I," *APA*, 24 (1992), pp. 159-171.

standard motif for officials of these kingdoms. The motif was changed in the different kingdoms according to local traditions, but the depiction of this pair was clearly reserved for the administrative apparatus of the kingdoms.⁸

In North Mesopotamia and at Mari the left hand figure is always the king with the mace, that is, the king in his victorious aspect, with the suppliant goddess on the right. In Qatna, too, the same pair is depicted, but often in reversed direction and always expanded by a third figure and an elaborate secondary scene. In Yamhad the king is mostly depicted with one hand held in front of his mouth, carrying a sickle-sword in his other hand; here the aspect of a worshipper is mixed with that of a victor. Until the High Classical period he is dressed in a mantle, which may be plain or from fur and his hair is often long and falls down his back.⁹ In the Late Classical period he continues to be shown as a worshipper with victorious traits, but his dress changes: on many seals from the art market and on the seal impressions from Alalakh VII he wears most frequently a slightly higher, oval cap and a plain mantle with thickly rolled borders (*Wulstrandmantel*) (Fig. 11). These borders become thicker and thicker over time and the cloth is later wrapped two or even three times round the body.¹⁰ In the kingdom of Carchemish between the Early and the High Classical period the king wears a mantle reaching down to his calf with patterned borders and a *Breitrandkappe* (see for example the king on Fig. 8). He is not depicted in his aspect as a warrior, but as a worshipper. He can stand opposite the suppliant goddess or other goddesses, and sometimes the direction is turned around compared with the ones usual in Mari

⁸ This and the following statements are based on my investigation of Classical Syrian cylinder seals, submitted as a Ph.D. thesis in Berlin in 1995; it will be published soon in the UAVA-series (Berlin): A. Otto, *Die Entstehung und Entwicklung der Klassisch-Syrischen Glyptik*. Therefore not all statements will be discussed in detail here.

⁹ Kings with mantles of fur appear only on seals from Yamhad: E. Porada, *op. cit.* (n.3), No. 945; D. Collon, *First Impressions. Cylinder Seals in the Ancient Near East*, London 1987, No. 647; L. Delaporte, *Catalogue des cylindres orientaux et des cachets assyro-babyloniens, perses et syro-cappadociens de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, Paris 1910, No. 435; one seal impression, found in room 11 of the palace of level VII at Alalakh (D. Collon, *The Seal Impressions from Tell Atchana/Alalakh*, Kevelaer-Neukirchen-Vluyn 1975, No. 26) must derive from an older seal of the High Classical Syrian period, which precedes the glyptic of Alalakh VII. The depiction of the mantle of fur on a Late Bronze Age seal (D. Collon, *op. cit.* [n.9], No. 266) shows that this dress survived after the end of the Middle Bronze Age, and was presumably the royal dress of Yamhad. As will be shown below, the "Wulstrandmantel", which is the main royal dress worn from the time of Alalakh VII onwards, was probably taken over from South-West Syria or more precisely from Qatna.

¹⁰ On the late impressions of Alalakh VII the shawl is wound at least three times around the body of the king: D. Collon, *The Seal Impressions from Tell Atchana/Alalakh*, Kevelaer-Neukirchen-Vluyn 1975, No. 19.

and North Mesopotamia.¹¹ Here, too, a third figure is often added, another king, the weather god, or most frequently a naked woman, shown frontally with her head in profile and with her hair worn in a bun, depicted as three globes attached one to another (*Kugelfrisur*).¹²

We can thus state that during the first half of the 18th century B.C. in every Syrian and North Mesopotamian kingdom the motif of a pair, consisting of a king opposite a goddess, has the function of a state emblem, and was apparently reserved for state officials.¹³ Therefore one can suppose that the seal from Tell Ahmar also belonged to a state official. In which kingdom he could have been an official, will be discussed below.

Let us now consider the central figure of the primary scene, the naked woman standing on top of a bull. She is more difficult to identify than the two other figures of the main scene. First of all is she a mortal being or a goddess?

Because no horned crown is shown, her divine nature is not immediately evident. One of the peculiarities of North Syrian glyptic is the absence of headdresses for most of the figures, so that the nature of any person (divine, royal or other) cannot be distinguished immediately. In favour of her divine nature, however, is her position standing on a bull. Standing on top of animals is a privilege of deities, especially, though not exclusively, in North Syria and Anatolia (Figs. 7-10). The fact that she is standing on a bull, which is usually the animal associated with the weather god Baal / Adad / Teshub, is also a strong indication of her divine nature; furthermore it points to a connection with this god. Often the naked woman and the weather god are depicted together¹⁴ and on some

¹¹ See for example the seal of Matrunna, daughter of king Aplahanda of Carchemish: G.A. Eisen, *Ancient Oriental Cylinder and Other Seals with a Description of the Collection of Mrs William H. Moore*, OIP 47, Chicago 1940, No. 130.

¹² 1. Louvre AO 21116 (D. Collon, *op. cit.* [n.9], No. 190): this seal, found in Minat al-Baida, bears the inscription of a servant of Aplahanda. 2. Heeramanek Coll. M.76.174.396 (P.R.S Moorey, E. Porada *et al.*, *Ancient Bronzes, Ceramics and Seals. The N. Heeramanek Collection*, Los Angeles 1981, No. 1199). 3: Marcopoli 440 (B. Teissier, *op. cit.* [n.3], No. 440). 4: Seal from Develi near Firaktin (A. Erkanal, *Anadoluda Buluman surije kökenli mühürler ve mühür baskilari* [Die in Anatolien vorkommenden altsyrischen Siegel und Siegelabdrücke], Ankara 1993, pl. 29). 5: On seal LI 82/1 found in Lidar Höyük the king even embraces this naked woman (A. Erkanal *op. cit.*, pl. 34).

¹³ A. Otto, *art.cit.* (n. 7); *ead.*, "The collapse of the balance of power in the middle of the 18th cent. B.C. and its reflection in Syro-Mesopotamian glyptic," *Acts of the First Archaeological Congress, Rome, 1998*, forthcoming.

¹⁴ A. Schmidt, *Die Sammlung des Herrn Baron Guillaume Poche, Consul von der Czekoslovakie*, Aleppo, No. 37, No. 42, No. 43; A. Schmidt, *Rollsiegel im Museum der schönen Künste in Moskau (ehem. Slg. Golenischeff)*, Copenhagen 1930-33, No. 115, No. 116; *Geschnittene Steine der Antike*, Katalog Münzen und Medaillen AG, Basel/Schweiz 1968, No. 40; C.H. Gordon, "Western Asiatic Cylinder Seals of the Walters Art Gallery," *Iraq*, 6 (1939),

seals the weather god holds on a leash the bull, on which the naked woman stands (Fig. 9).¹⁵

What is the meaning of this naked goddess?

A naked woman with head in profile and a *Kugelfrisur* hairstyle, but otherwise rendered frontally, was depicted in North Syria in three main variants (not including the most simple variant, where she stands with her arms hanging down or folded in front of her breasts).¹⁶

Variant 1: The naked woman lifts a cord-like object, which can be interpreted as a skirt or as a veil.¹⁷

Variant 2: The naked woman stands on a bull.¹⁸

Variant 3: The naked woman stands below an arch-shaped object.¹⁹

On many seals the different variants are combined. On the seal from Tell Ahmar Variants 1 and 2 are present, as is also the case on many other seals

pl. V.38, V.39; from Karum Kaniš Ib: N. Özgüç, *Seals and Seal Impressions of Level Ib from Karum Kanish*, Ankara 1968, pl. XXII 2. Already in the 19th century B.C. this motif appears in North Syria, as earlier, Old Syrian variants show: e.g. A. Schmidt, *Sammlung ... Poche*, No. 38; on the seal WAG C57 a woman, lifting her skirt and standing on a bull, stands opposite a figure, which E. Porada called "the warrior with plumed helmet" and who is an early form of the weather god: C.H. Gordon, *art. cit.* (n.14), pl. V.36; see also E. Porada, "The Warrior with Plumed Helmet," *Berytus*, 7 (1942), pp. 57-64.

¹⁵ E. Porada, *op. cit.* (n.3), No. 967; compare B. Teissier, *op. cit.* (n.3), No. 477.

¹⁶ These simple variants do not provide direct indications about her function, in contrast to the three other variants. However, when the forms of representation of the other variants are understood and when the contexts of these naked women are compared, the same character and the same meaning of the figures is evident.

¹⁷ I know about fifty examples, of which only one has a known provenance (from Tell Sukas: P.J. Riis, "L'activité de la Mission Archéologique Danoise sur la côte phénicienne en 1959," *AAAS*, 10 [1960], p. 129, fig. 20); the earliest examples date from the period of Kültepe, Karum Kaniš II (E. Williams-Forte, *art. cit.* [n.4], No. 129; A. Schmidt, *Sammlung ... Poche* [n. 14], No. 38).

¹⁸ B. Teissier, *op. cit.* (n. 3), No. 477. From Karum Kaniš Ib: N. Özgüç, *op. cit.* (n.14), pl. XXII 2. The motif of a naked woman standing on a bull is already attested in the 19th century B.C., as is shown by a seal impression from Acemhöyük with the so-called "warrior with plumed helmet" (see footnote 14): A. Erkanal, *op. cit.* (n.12), pl. 1; compare also H.H. von der Osten, *Ancient Oriental Seals in the Collection of Mrs Agnes Baldwin Brett*, OIP 37, Chicago 1936, No. 85.

¹⁹ I know about twenty-five examples, only one of them with a precise find spot (from Ebla: H. Hammade, *Cylinder Seals from the Collections of the Aleppo Museum, Syrian Arab Republic*, 2. *Seals of Known Provenance*, BAR 597, Oxford 1994, No. 351), and three seals, which were bought in Jerablus, Gaziantep and Hatay (B. Buchanan, *Catalogue of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in the Ashmolean Museum*, I: *Cylinder Seals*, Oxford 1966, No. 881; A. Erkanal, *op. cit.* [n.12], pl. 12. 13). A remarkable local variant from Lidar Höyük shows a dressed woman under a toothed arch (M. Mellink, "Archaeology in Anatolia," *AJA*, 94 [1990], pp. 134sq, fig. 11).

(Figs. 7-10).²⁰ Other seals combine Variants 1 and 3,²¹ others Variants 2 and 3.²² A rare example combines all three variants (Fig. 10). This seal proves, as well as the alternative combinations of Variants 1-3, that all the variants are but different forms of depictions of the same figure, that is to say the same goddess. Her interpretation as a rain goddess, proposed by M. van Loon,²³ appears clearly in all three forms of depictions. An (often winged) arch consisting of a guilloche, toothed, ladder-like, rope-like or other cord is easily understandable as an arch of water. Equally the lifting of the skirt or veil may be understood as a symbol, especially as the ends have the form of flower buds: because she is revealing her nudity in this way, this act may be interpreted as bringing fertility, arising from favourable weather or, more precisely, rain. The figure may therefore be interpreted as a goddess associated with the weather god, having the aspect of a fertility or rain goddess. A hare or a bird, which appears frequently in front of her face, may stress the aspect of fertility. The connection with the weather god leads one to speculate whether this goddess could be identified with Shala, the companion of the weather god.²⁴

The rain goddess appears on Syrian seals of the 18th century B.C. most frequently together with the weather god or with a king. This is very understandable in North Syria, where in the dry farming region the well-being of the people was immediately dependent on the amount and timing of the rain fall. The frequent depiction of the king together with the weather and rain gods may perhaps be seen as an attempt by the royal court to win the

²⁰ I know about twenty-five examples, all from the art market (except perhaps a half cylinder from Hazor; it was, however, found in a hoard in the Late Bronze Age level Ia: P. Beck, in: Y. Yadin *et al.*, *Hazor III-IV*, Jerusalem 1961/1990, pl. 319.1); e.g. B. Buchanan, *op. cit.* (n.19), Nos. 883, 884, 885; E. Porada, *op. cit.* (n.3), Nos. 942, 943; B. Buchanan, *Early Near Eastern Seals in the Yale Babylonian Collection*, New Haven-London 1981, No. 1241; G.A. Eisen, *op. cit.* (n.11), No. 157. For seals where she additionally faces the weather god, see footnote 14.

²¹ For example H.H. von der Osten, *Altorientalische Siegelsteine der Sammlung Hans Silivius von Aulock*, Uppsala 1957, No. 297; H.H. von der Osten, *op. cit.* (n.18), No. 90.

²² B. Teissier, *op. cit.* (n.3), No. 500; W.H. Ward, *Seal Cylinders of Western Asia*, Washington D.C. 1910, BM 930; the naked woman on a bull and below an arch appears already on Old Syrian seals, where the arch is rendered as a rectangular box, clearly derived from the winged doorway of the Akkadian period.

²³ M. van Loon, "The Naked Rain Goddess," in P. Matthiae, M. van Loon, H. Weiss (eds.), *Resurrecting the Past. A Joint Tribute to Adnan Bounni*, Leiden 1990, pp. 363-378. See also M. van Loon, "The Rainbow in Ancient West Asian Iconography," in D.J.W. Meijer (ed.), *Natural Phenomena*, Amsterdam 1992, pp. 149-168.

²⁴ M. van Loon, *art. cit.* 1990 (n. 23), p. 363, correctly argues against an identification with Ishtar. Usually in the ancient Near East it is assumed that the naked women have a sexual aspect, and often they are interpreted as the goddess Ishtar; this is certainly an unjustified oversimplification, which obstructs the view on more differentiated interpretations.

favour of these gods. The presence of the rain goddess facing the king on the seal from Tell Ahmar may have had the same purpose: to secure good conditions for the kingdom of this particular royal official.

The meaning of the secondary scene on the seal of Tell Ahmar cannot be interpreted with certainty. The two people in the upper register, depicted in the course of a symposium, could perhaps be an abbreviated rendering or a symbol for certain ceremonies. The two figures, sitting opposite each other, most frequently hold vessels in their hands, while between them stands a table with bread loaves (Fig. 10). On a few seals only the symposiasts hold beakers in their hands, from which drinking straws lead into an huge jar, like that on this seal from Tell Ahmar.²⁵ Because the rendering of such symposia are often found on seals, where weather or watergods (Figs. 7, 8, 10)²⁶ or the goddess in a half cloak are depicted, one could assume that these ceremonies were perhaps connected to religious feasts, perhaps taking place during the annual return of the rainy season. The geographical distribution of this scene can be determined quite clearly: it appears rarely in Yamhad or in South West Syria, but often in North Syria.²⁷

The meaning of the sphinx in the lower register is equally difficult to determine. Normally the sphinx on seal designs is described merely as a Syrian filling motif.²⁸ One should consider the fact, however, that the male sphinx in Egypt symbolizes kingship or royal power.²⁹ Since Egyptian influence during this period is especially strong on Syrian glyptic,³⁰ the very common rendering of a sphinx on Syrian seals could point to a similar symbolic value and could perhaps stand for the royal power.

²⁵ See for example E. Porada, *op. cit.* (n.3), No. 968; L. Delaporte, *Musée du Louvre, Catalogue des cylindres, cachets et pierres gravées de style oriental*, II. *Acquisitions*, Paris 1923, A. 897.

²⁶ See also B. Teissier, *op. cit.* (n.3), No. 478; E. Porada, *op. cit.* (n.3), No. 968; L. Delaporte, *op. cit.* (n.25), A. 897.

²⁷ From Achemhöyük: N. Özgüç, "Seal Impressions from the Palaces at Achemhöyük," in E. Porada (ed.), *Ancient Art in Seals*, Princeton 1980, pl. III-14; from Alishar Höyük: H.H. von der Osten, *The Alishar Höyük Seasons of 1930-32. Part II*, OIP 29, Chicago 1937, pp. 207-209, fig. 246; from Tell L/Iedis near Alalakh: D. Collon, *The Alalakh Cylinder Seals*, Oxford 1982, No. 16; especially similar is the secondary scene on a seal from Oylumhöyük, a Tell between Carchemish and Aleppo: A. Erkanal, *op. cit.* (n.12), pl. 30.1.

²⁸ For a general discussion of the so-called filling motifs, see D. Collon, "Filling Motifs," in: U. Finkbeiner *et al.* (eds.), *Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte Vorderasiens, Festschrift für R.M. Boehmer*, Mainz 1995, pp. 69-76.

²⁹ B. Teissier, *Egyptian Iconography on Syro-Palestinian Cylinder Seals of the Middle Bronze Age*, OBO 11, Fribourg 1996, pp. 192-195.

³⁰ See B. Teissier, *op. cit.* (n.29).

The date of the seal

The iconography and style are the most important features for dating this seal. The style of the seal is very distinctive. The figures are slender and have quite elongated limbs. They are finely carved, with well modelled bodies on which many fine details are rendered with great care. The lines are rounded and sharp edges are rare. A further stylistic peculiarity is the frequent use of the drill, which appears here in three sizes: bigger drillholes can be seen on the cheeks of the king, of the goddess and of the sphinx and at the muzzle of the bull; smaller drillholes appear at the foot of the big jar in the secondary scene, and at the knee of the naked goddess; and tiny drillholes are found at the skirt of the naked goddess, at the front border of the king's mantle, and between the coils of the guilloche. A further important indication for the dating of the seal is the way the edges of the king's mantle are depicted as rolled borders, which are not very wide. Behind the shoulder they are marked only as a narrow line.

Comparable cylinder seals come from the antiquities market except for one example.³¹ The closest comparison in every respect (primary scene, secondary scene, and style) is a cylinder in the Louvre.³² Another similar seal belonged to a servant of unknown rulers named Tarikila and Kik-Teshub,³³ names which could point to a Hurrian and possibly North Syrian origin. The only provenienced piece (Fig. 11) was found in the Middle Bronze Age II grave LVII in Ugarit, together with a second clearly North Syrian seal.³⁴ These seals differ distinctly from those of Alalakh VII. In the seal from Tell Ahmar and the comparable pieces, the rolled borders of the mantle of the king are much thinner, the oval headdress is less high, the forms are less compact, and the stylisation of the bodies is less mannered. They are evidently older than the seals from Alalakh VII, where the oldest ones were aptly nicknamed "baroque".³⁵

³¹ E. Porada, *op. cit.* (n.3), Nos. 951, 954; B. Teissier, *op. cit.* (n.3), No. 452.

³² L. Delaporte, *op. cit.*, (n.25), A. 932 (AO 7296), haematite 19 x 9. Because it was a gift of Thureau-Dangin, I first supposed that it could have been acquired in the vicinity of Til Barsib or Arslan-Tash. But the seal was given already in 1919 to the Louvre, before Thureau-Dangin's contact with this region.

³³ L. Delaporte, *op. cit.* (n. 9), No. 495.

³⁴ R.S. 9.889: P. Amiet, *Corpus des cylindres de Ras Shamra-Ougarit*, II. *Sceaux-cylindres en hématite et pierres diverses, Ras Shamra-Ougarit IX*, Paris 1992, No. 41; the second seal found in the same grave is clearly North Syrian and Classical Syrian, too: P. Amiet *op. cit.*, No. 36.

³⁵ D. Collon, *op. cit.* (n.10), p 140; according to her a development of style is observable within Alalakh level VII, "which leads away from solid shapes and figures towards thinner, more spidery ones".

Most of the motifs of this seal have their best parallels in the Classical Syrian period of about the middle of the 18th century B.C., that is during the time of Zimri-Lim of Mari and slightly later. These are mainly the secondary scene, the suppliant goddess and the nude goddess standing on a bull. Other elements of the seal, especially the mantle and headdress of the king, however, show stylistical peculiarities, which date slightly later within the Classical Syrian glyptic. They belong to the latest phase of the Classical Syrian style.³⁶ Therefore this seal should be attributed to the third quarter of the 18th century B.C. (Middle Chronology).

Reflections about the provenance of the seal

As discussed above, the seal must have belonged to a state official of a Syrian kingdom. Now we may ask the question of which kingdom was the owner of the seal from Tell Ahmar an official?

Several indications point to an origin in Carchemish for this seal, mainly the rain or fertility goddess and the secondary scene. These two elements can hardly be imagined to occur in this way outside the North Syrian region surrounding Carchemish. In Yamhad for example there are nearly no examples for a naked woman, as D. Collon already has stated.³⁷ The king, however, finds the closest parallels to the rendering of his clothes, his pose and his style in Yamhad, shortly after the High Classical period, that is after the end of the reign of Zimri-Lim of Mari³⁸ and before the period of Alalakh VII; this corresponds approximately to the time of the king Hammu-rapi I and the early years of king Abban in Yamhad. The above mentioned seal from grave LVII in Ugarit (Fig. 11), on which the king's robe is depicted like that on the seal from Tell Ahmar, is attributed by D. Collon to her Aleppo workshop³⁹ and may be one of the earliest pieces within her group.

Since on the one hand the rendering of the king on the seal from Tell Ahmar is typical for Yamhad in the third quarter of the 18th century B.C., and since on the other hand the seal shows many characteristics for the region around Carchemish, we may consider two hypotheses concerning the

³⁶ For the term "Classical Syrian glyptic" see E. Porada, "Syrian Seals from the Late Fourth to the Late Second Millennium," in: H. Weiss (ed.), *Ebla to Damascus, Art and Archaeology of Ancient Syria*, Washington 1985, pp. 90-104. The further subdivisions are the results of my thesis, see footnote 8.

³⁷ D. Collon, "The Aleppo Workshop," *UF* 13 (1981), p. 34.

³⁸ Only afterwards the court of Yamhad seems to have taken over the royal dress of Qatna.

³⁹ D. Collon, *art.cit.* (n.37), No. 1.

provenience of the seal. Both are closely connected with the political situation in North Syria. These hypotheses can hopefully be solved in the future, when we have better information about the fate of North Syria and Carchemish after the destruction of Mari in 1759 B.C. At the moment we know only that in Carchemish, after the long reign of king Aplananda (from at least 1795 to 1765), first his son Yatar-ami reigned for three years (1764-1762) and then a second son named Yahdun-Lim came to the throne. How long he reigned, is not certain. But since after the fall of Mari an increasing predominance of Yamhad over the whole of North Syria can be supposed, its influence reaching even into the Habur-triangle as far as Tell Leilan-Shehna, one could speculate whether Carchemish was also subject to Yamhad or was perhaps even administratively incorporated in the kingdom of Yamhad. In this case the iconography of the seal could be interpreted in the following way: the seal was cut for a state official of the kingdom of Yamhad, who had close connections to Carchemish. Since the seal was found in a grave only twenty kilometres south of Carchemish, one could postulate that the seal belonged to an official of the kingdom of Yamhad, who worked in Carchemish in the third quarter of the 18th century B.C.

If the kingdom of Carchemish remained independent after 1759 B.C., there is a second possibility: one could suppose that the royal dress of Carchemish (or at least the way it was depicted) changed in the second half of the 18th century B.C., apparently at the same time as the robe changed in Yamhad, too.⁴⁰ Why this change occurred is still an unanswered question.

Conclusions

The cylinder seal TAH 94/S2+3/F167/O.179, which was found in a grave in Tell Ahmar, is probably the seal of a royal official, who resided in Carchemish or in its surroundings. He could have worked – depending on the political situation of Carchemish at that time – either for the kingdom of Yamhad or for the kingdom of Carchemish. These circumstances would explain, too, why the cylinder was deposited in a grave here, only twenty kilometres downstream of Carchemish. The seal was quite certainly cut in Carchemish during the period between the destruction of Mari and before the beginning of Alalakh VII, that is between 1759 and c. 1720 B.C.

⁴⁰ Perhaps these two kingdoms took over the royal dress, which may occur earlier in Qatna and South West Syria; or perhaps the standardization of the royal dress occurred in the whole of Syria at the same time.

Since we cannot hope that the layers of the early second millennium B.C. in the capital city of Carchemish will be excavated in the near future, since from Carchemish and other settlements of the kingdom very few seals have been recorded,⁴¹ and since in general provenanced seals from this period and region are extremely rare, this seal from Tell Ahmar becomes especially important for the history of the third quarter of the 18th century B.C. in North Syria.

⁴¹ It can be supposed that many seals sold in Aleppo came from the Carchemish region, such as those now in the Museum of Aleppo or in the Marcopoli, Poche and other collections. There are probably other seals from the kingdom of Carchemish in the museums of Gaziantep, Marash and Urfa; see also the seal from Oylumhöyük (footnote 27), a site which either belonged to the kingdom of Carchemish or to Yamhad.



Fig. 7. Impression of seal TAH 94/S2+3/F167/O.179 from Tell Ahmar (drawing: A. Otto, inked by C. Wolff; photograph G. Bunnens).

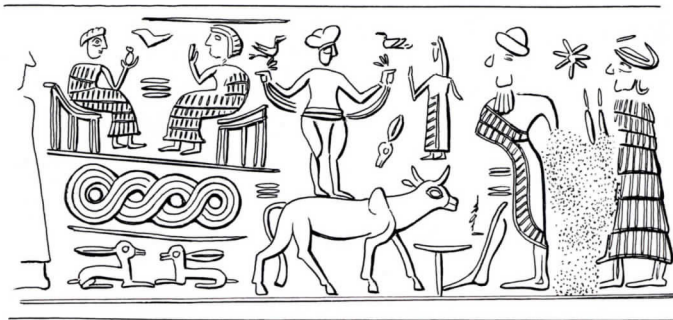


Fig. 8. Borowski Collection: Williams-Forte, *art. cit.* (n. 4), p. 257, fig. 209. Haematite, 22 × 11.6 mm; Early Classic, Carchemish-group (drawing: C. Wolff).



Fig. 9. Porada, *op. cit.* (n. 3), No. 967. Limonite, 25 × 13 mm; Early Classic, North Syria (drawing: C. Wolff).

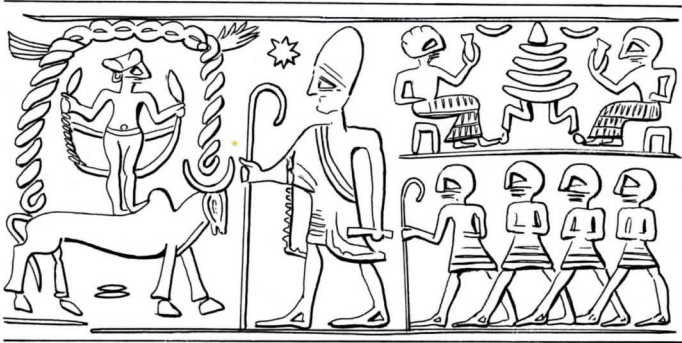


Fig. 10. Porada, *op. cit.* (n. 3), No. 944. Haematite, 17 × 11 mm; Late Classic, North Syria (drawing: C. Wolff).

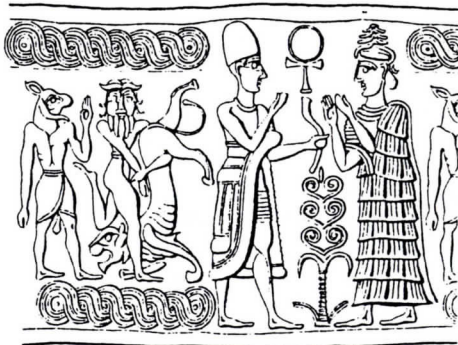


Fig. 11. Amiet, *op. cit.* (n. 34), No. 41. Haematite, 24.5 × 11 mm; Late Classic, Aleppo workshop.

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