

LOCAL, REGIONAL, AND INTERNATIONAL:
SEAL IMPRESSIONS FROM THE PALACE OF ŠAMŠI-ADAD
IN TALL BI'A/TUTTUL

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The excavations in Tall Bi'a / ancient Tuttul directed by Eva Strommenger uncovered among other things a palace from which Šamši-Adad I and his son Jasmaḥ-Adad ruled in turn. Within the empire of Šamši-Adad, which extended from the Baliḥ to the Tigris and from the Taurus mountains to Mari, Tuttul was the westernmost point and marked the border with the kingdom of Jamḥad. The destruction of the palace was part of the reconquest of the middle Euphrates by Zimri-Lim¹.

Fortunately for us, the entire inventory and the archives — over 200 cuneiform tablets so far — survived. Also part of the extravagant trappings of government are the hundreds of clay fragments bearing seal impressions found in the rubble of the rooms and the rubbish pits within the palace. The seal impressions, like the written findings, represent a very short period, namely more or less the last 15 years of the reign of Šamši-Adad and Jasmaḥ-Adad — in absolute terms, from 1790-1776 B.C. They clearly demonstrate the cultural diversity in a central Euphrates city of that time: the purely local element, the variety of currents coming together there, and the foreign connections.

Almost no original seals were found in the palace of Šamši-Adad, but altogether about 80 different seal impressions. Here only three groups will be studied (fig. 1):

- 1) Simple seals used by palace employees; some show stick figures ("Strichmännchen"); still simpler are cylinder-seals made of clay decorated with geometrical patterns. They were undoubtedly made in or around Tuttul (figs. 2-7).
- 2) The servants' seals, used by the functionaries of Šamši-Adad and his son, which identify them as such. In 80% of these servants' seals the

¹ In contrast to hundreds of tablets bearing Eponym-dates of the period of Jasmaḥ-Adad, only two tablets were found mentioning Zimri-Lim. They refer to "The year Zimri-Lim entered Tuttul", an otherwise not attested year-name: STROMMINGER, 1995, 6.

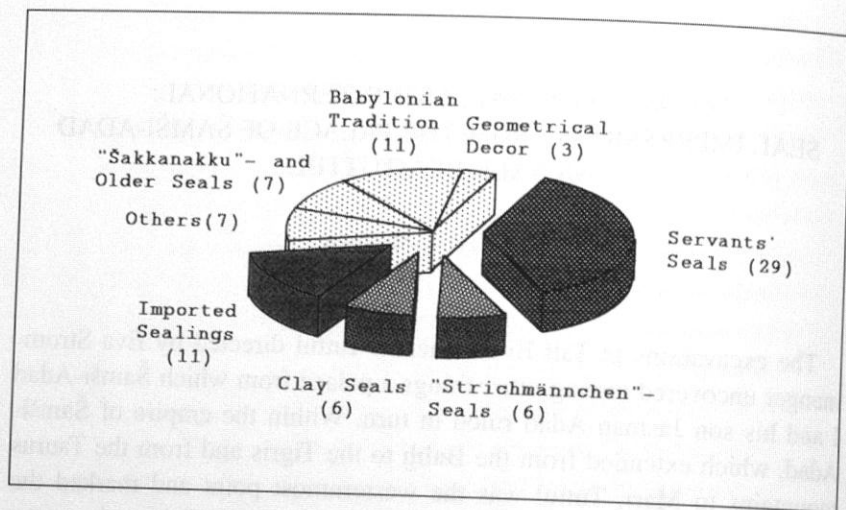


Fig. 1. Diagram 1: The Glyptic from the Palace of Šamši-Adad in Tall Bi'a/Tuttul (Total: 80).

pictorial motif is the same, but they differ stylistically, thus providing some idea of the variety of seal styles which existed within Šamši-Adad's empire (figs. 10-17).

- 3) Imported sealings which accompanied goods imported into the palace of Tuttul. They indicate the city's wide-reaching trade relations (figs. 18-24).

Simple seals (figs. 2-7)

Among the seals most often used to lock doors within the palace are two which show simple stick figures walking or dancing (figs. 2, 3). On the first seal three figures are holding hands; on the second some of the very elongated figures have raised arms and seem to be dancing. The figures consist only of lines and drill holes, the latter being a technique used continuously from the early third millennium in this area, though not in Babylonia. The third seal shows a man kneeling behind a gazelle and a stag; above it are a star, a bird and a crescent moon (fig. 4). The illustrations on all three seals relate directly back to Syrian models of the Early Bronze Age; many comparable seals are further known in Late Bronze Age Syria. Only from the Middle Bronze Age is there no known or published evidence of such pieces, but these impressions from Tall Bi'a prove that in Syria, local styles continued uninterruptedly from the

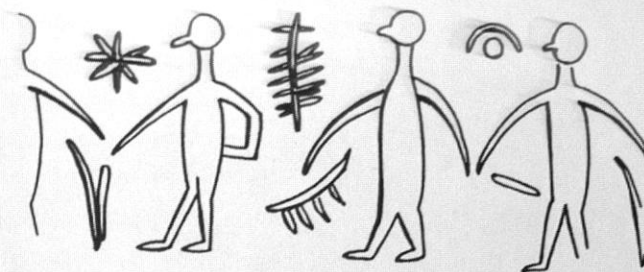


Fig. 2. "Strichmännchen"-Seal 1 (2:1).

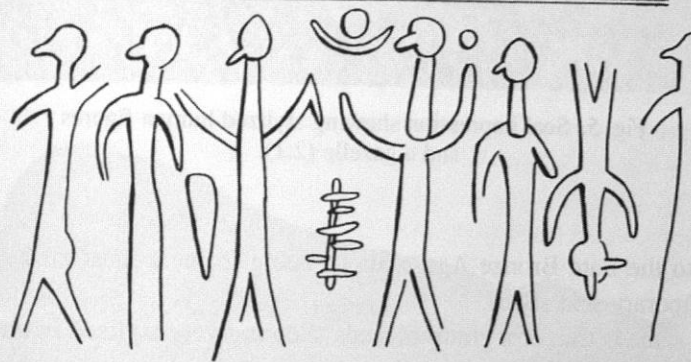


Fig. 3. "Strichmännchen"-Seal 2 (2:1).

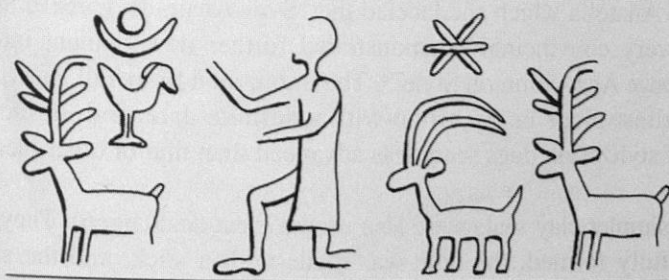


Fig. 4. Seal showing a man kneeling behind wild animals (2:1).



Fig. 5. Seal impression showing stylized human figures and a gazelle (2:1).

Early to the Late Bronze Age without being influenced at all by other contemporary seal styles.

The same is true of a group of seals showing very stylised figures distinguished by overly large heads formed by circular depressions, shoulders exaggerated toward the rear, and raised spear-like hands. The examples of this group, which were already assembled by Stefania Mazzoni, come from Tall Açıana, Tall Mardih, Karahöyük, Kültepe, and other places; in this group of seals, Mazzoni saw a popular style originating in northern Syria and Anatolia which she labeled the "Syro-Anatolian Cursive Style", and she very convincingly demonstrated further development into the "Late Bronze Age Common Style"². The impression from Tall Bi'a (fig. 5) is the earliest piece in the group with a definite date, and, in fact, the degree of stylization does seem less advanced than that of other pieces in the group.

Much simpler clay seals were also used a great deal (fig. 6). They were less carefully formed, the hole was made with a stick, and the simple

² MAZZONI, 1975; MAZZONI, 1986.

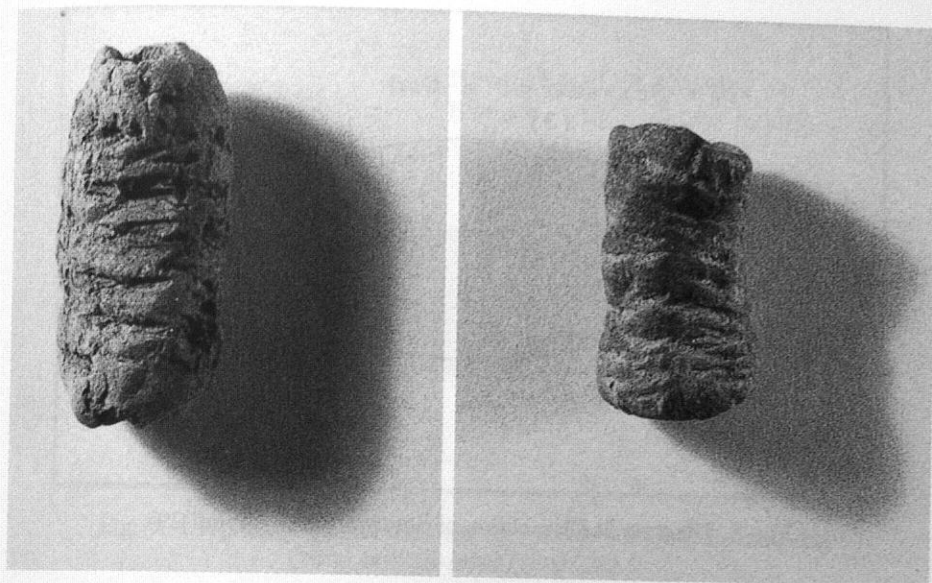


Fig. 6. Two clay cylinder seals (2:1).

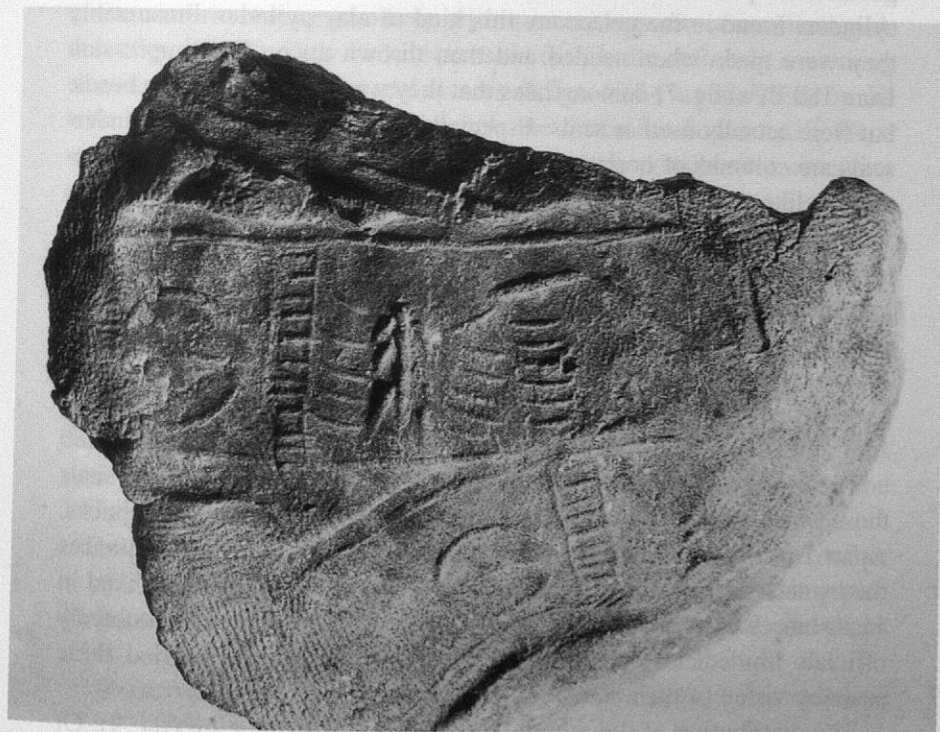


Fig. 7. Impressions of a clay cylinder seal (2:1).

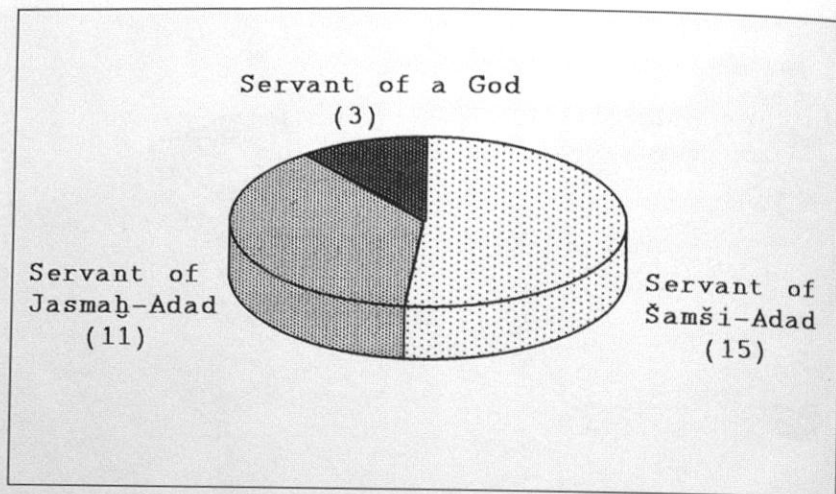


Fig. 8. Diagram 2: Distribution of Servants' Seals (Total: 29).

geometrical patterns were made with a fingernail. Most of the original cylinders found in the palace are this kind of clay cylinder. Presumably they were made when needed and then thrown away. One impression from Tall Bi'a (fig. 7) demonstrates that they were not simply clay beads, but were actually used as seals. Especially typical of these clay cylinder-seals are columns of horizontal fingernail marks. In this case some eye- and treelike elements were added.

Impressions of both groups of seals discussed so far were always found on door sealings, never on written documents. We may conclude, therefore, that the seals were produced locally and were used by less important, probably native palace employees.

The servants' seals (figs. 10-17)

The servants' seals provide a sharp contrast. I am calling servants' seals those which attest to the servant status of the seal owner in their inscriptions. Apart from a few seals depicting allegiance to a god, in 15 instances the owners of the seals call themselves "servant of Šamši-Adad" and in 11 instances "servant of Jasmaḥ-Adad" (fig. 8). These were undoubtedly officials immediately subordinate to the two rulers and carried these seals by virtue of their status.

The distribution of the motifs on these seals is interesting (fig. 9): Of the 22 seals of which we have pictorial impressions, 18 include the motif

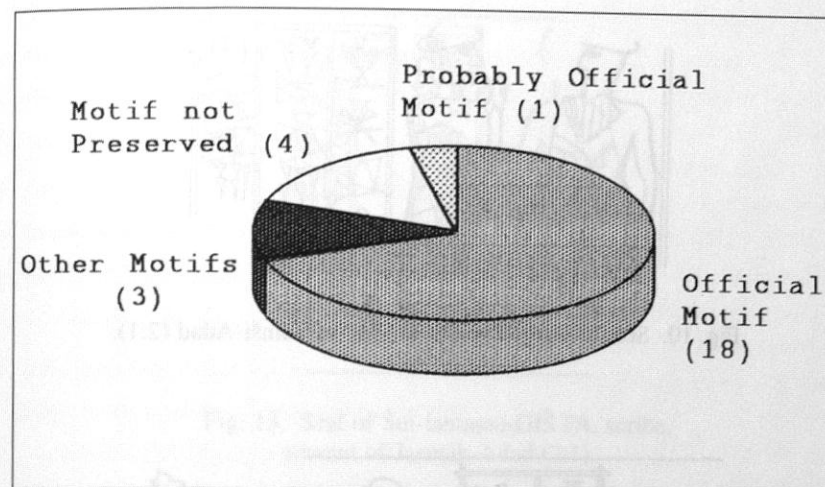


Fig. 9. Diagram 3: Motifs depicted on Servants' Seals of Šamši-Adad and Jasmaḥ-Adad (Total: 26).

of the victorious king (the king with a mace) opposite a suppliant goddess (figs. 10-14). Only in 3 instances is the picture definitely something else (fig. 17). Some of the seal owners of figs. 10-14 are identified by the texts found in the palace, for example the scribe Šut-lamassu-GIŠ.PA, a servant of Jasmaḥ-Adad (fig. 13), who was responsible for receiving grain deliveries at the entrance of the palace³.

The same predilection for this motif is true of comparable seals belonging to officials found in Mari, Šubat-Enlil, and elsewhere. Apparently Šamši-Adad's ideology began to change when Mari and the middle Euphrates Valley were conquered, as Dominique Charpin has already concluded on the basis of inscriptions⁴. This change in ideology is also evident in the iconography on seals belonging to officials. The motif of the victorious king, which originated with Naram-Sin of Akkade, thus achieves the status of a state coat-of-arms. Hence I am calling this the "official motif"⁵.

Despite the common motif, the servants' seals differ from each other in style. Clearly they were not the work of a single court workshop producing seals for the entire royal household, but rather of several workshops

³ KREBERNIK, 1993, 54-59. My thanks are due to M. Krebernik for his help reading the seal inscriptions.

⁴ CHARPIN, 1984, 51-53.

⁵ OTTO, 1992 b.

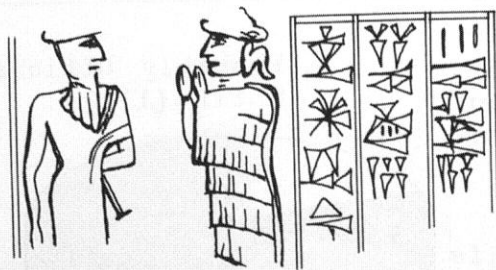


Fig. 10. Seal of Iali-[Dagan?], servant of Šamši-Adad (2:1).

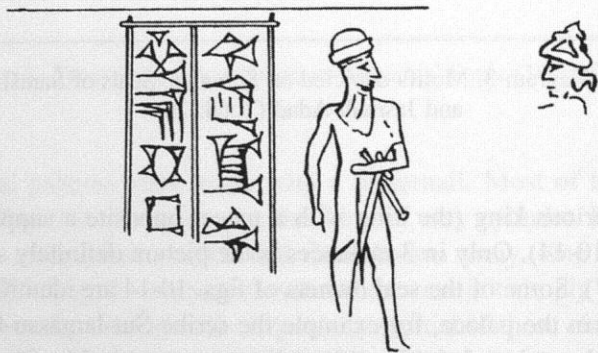


Fig. 11. Seal of Šikib-wari, servant of Samsi-Adad (2:1).

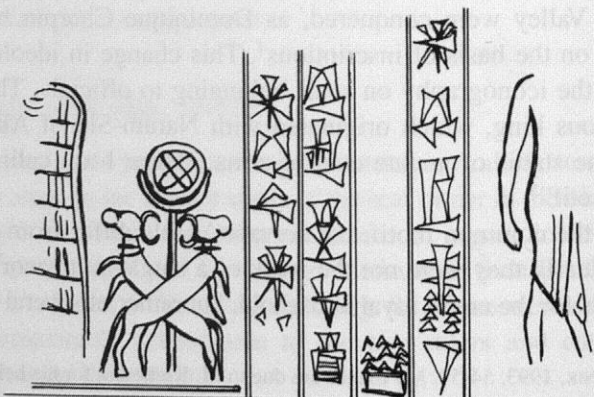


Fig. 12. Seal of Šamaš-magir, scribe, servant of Šamši-Adad (2:1).

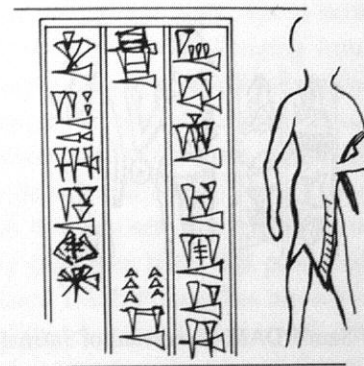


Fig. 13. Seal of Šut-lamassu-GIŠ.PA, scribe, servant of Jasmaḥ-Adad (2:1).



Fig. 14. Seal of Jazilu, servant of Jasmaḥ-Adad (2:1).

definitely distinguishable by regional peculiarities. One example is the seal of Jazilu, servant of Jasmaḥ-Adad (fig. 14), who often sealed doors in room 23 of the palace. Typical is the frequent use of drill holes, particularly noticeable on the king's limbs and the rosette. This technique seems to be popular in workshops at Mari and Tall Rimaḥ. On this seal, as well as on the seal of Šamaš-magir, the scribe (fig. 12), the secondary motifs are placed between or beside the main persons like a cliché.

One exceptional seal which may have included the official pictorial motif, as well belonged to a servant of Jasmaḥ-Adad (fig. 15). Besides a two-line inscription it shows the victorious king followed by a goddess

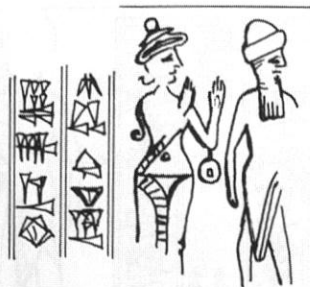


Fig. 15. Seal of Šamši-DAM-X, servant of Jasmaḥ-Adad (2:1).

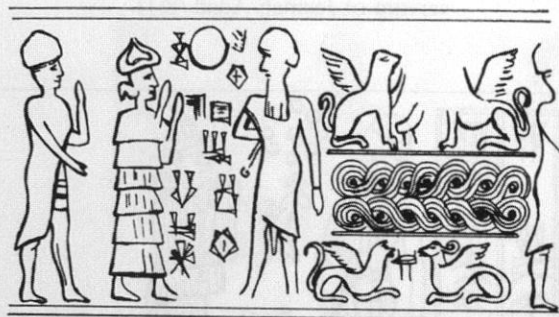


Fig. 16. Seal of X-erah, servant of Samsi-Adad (2:1).

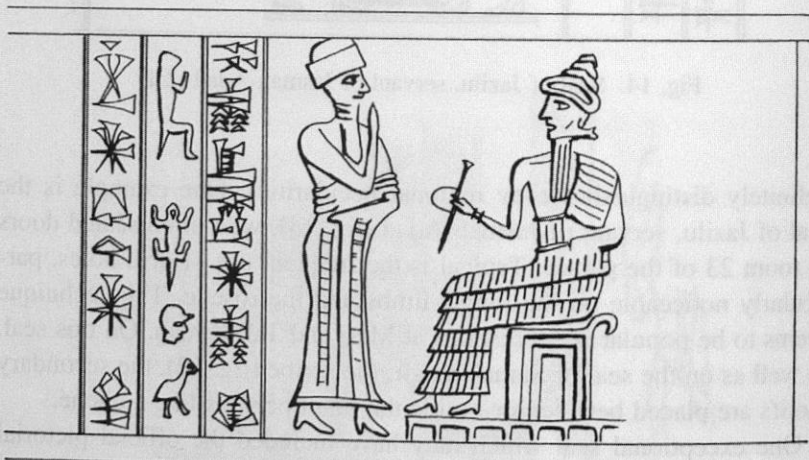


Fig. 17. Seal of Ḥazip-Aranziḥ, servant of Šamši-Adad (2:1).

in a half cloak baring part of her body. She is raising both hands, and a round object, probably a mirror, is hanging from one elbow⁶. A long curl falls down her back. This fragment is particularly important because it is partially identical to the seal of Ana-Sin-taklaku, a servant of Zimri-Lim of Mari⁷; it shows exactly the same semi-nude goddess which otherwise is differently depicted in Syria⁸. The inscription on the impression from Tuttul suggests that the seal was engraved in Mari under Jasmaḥ-Adad, and surely by the same hand that produced the seal of Ana-Sin-taklaku somewhat later. Edith Porada has already designated this seal as a typical example of the classical Syrian style⁹, which has been assumed to have been fully developed at the time of Šamši-Adad; however, until now there had been no definite proof.

One seal differs considerably from any other example within the corpus of Šamši-Adad's servants' seals (fig. 16). Even with its cap setting, the seal was only 1.8 cm high and was engraved with microscopic delicacy. It shows the usual two figures but in reverse order, and a worshiper in a short coat has been added. The secondary scene is divided by a double plait and shows two pairs of antithetical winged creatures, probably two sphinxes in the upper and two griffins in the lower register. The inscription consists of tiny cuneiform signs scattered between the central figures.

The seal resembles strongly other seals of a workshop which I locate in Qatna¹⁰. Typical of the workshop are the reverse order of the main persons, the addition of a third person, and the secondary scenes with strong Egyptian influence and beautifully carved plaits; this is by the way the earliest dated example of a double plait in Syria. The king of Qatna, Išḫi-Adad, was by then the ally of Šamši-Adad. In 1781 Šamši-Adad sent him some 20,000 soldiers to end the troubles in the region of Qatna¹¹. This could have been the moment when a skilled seal-cutter of Šamši-Adad set up a workshop in Qatna. His seals show a perfect combination between local characteristics of western Syria and the official motif.

⁶ This goddess was taken over from Karkemiš and can probably be identified with the goddess 'Kubaba', see A. Otto, *Die Entstehung und Entwicklung der Klassisch-Syrischen Glyptik*, forthcoming.

⁷ COLLON, 1987, Nr. 191.

⁸ This goddess normally does not wear a horned crown; this seems to be an addition from the Mari seal cutter.

⁹ PORADA, 1980, 16ff.

¹⁰ See OTTO forthcoming. Other products of this workshop are VON DER OSTEN, 1936, Nr. 87; FRANKFORT, 1939, Pl. 42j; PORADA, 1983, fig. 354, Pl. 38d, and others.

¹¹ CHARPIN, 1993, 146-147.

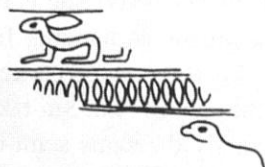


Fig. 18. Fragmentary seal impression with rope pattern and animals.

Probably he produced seals mainly for participants of the enduring war campaign as is suggested by the present seal from Tuttul¹² and a second one found in Jericho in the grave of a young soldier¹³.

Yet another theme is found on the seal of Ḫazip-Aranziḫ, a servant of Šamši-Adad (fig. 17): the king as worshipper before an enthroned god holding staff and ring. The middle column of the inscription is decorated with an ape, a lizard, a human head with a forlock, and a bird. The seal was extraordinarily well cut, and, at 2.8 cm high, it is among the largest seals in use at that time. The unusual hurrian name of the seal owner, which more or less means “the Tigris has heard with favor”, could indicate that he came from northern Mesopotamia. In the Mari texts a Ḫazip-Aranziḫ is mentioned as leader (formerly a king?) of a group of Idamaras, which was approximately the region of the Ḫabur triangle as far as the Taurus mountains.

On several grounds it is probable that the seal originated in or near Šubat-Enlil. The scene portrayed is unusual for seals of that time but is strongly reminiscent of what is found on the Ḫammu-rapi law-code. It is possible that the motif goes back to a similar monument which existed within the kingdom of Šamši-Adad, too. This possibility is also supported by the fact that the seal of Šamši-Adad himself looked very similar¹⁴. As some other seals with this motif suggest, this could have been the official motif prior to the king with the mace opposite the suppliant goddess. This seal therefore was probably made in or around Šubat-Enlil before the extension of Šamši-Adad’s empire to the middle Euphrates.

¹² The tiny little cuneiform signs testifying the servants’ status were apparently later added by demand of the seal owner. The close connections between Tuttul and Qatna during this war campaign are also attested by one of “les trois routes de l’Euphrate à Qatna à travers le désert”, DURAND, 1987, 159-167.

¹³ PORADA, 1983, fig. 354, Pl. 38d; this war campaign led the troupes until the Libanon mountains and further to the south.

¹⁴ Courtesy of D. Charpin; see also the drawing: OTTO, 1992b, 161, seal 4.

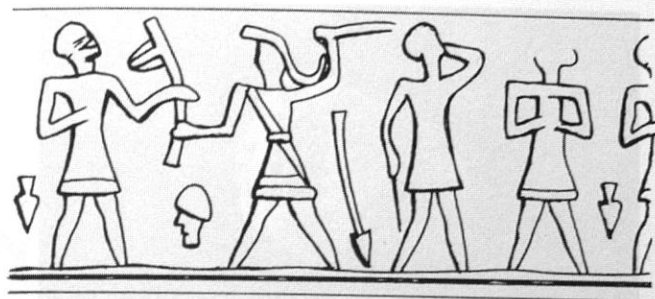


Fig. 19. Seal with the Weather-god (2:1).



Fig. 20. Seal with the moon god (2:1).

This Ḫazip-Aranziḫ was apparently in Tuttul — far away from his home — as an official of Šamši-Adad and with a very specific function: he sealed only containers or vessels. In 1994 in a room of the palace we found hundreds of clay lumps shaped like skull-caps and inlaid by strips of fine clay which bore impressions of his seal. This clarifies the function of the sealed tongues of clay, which have been the subject of much speculation, but that is another story¹⁵.

Imported sealings (figs. 18-24)

The third group to be discussed here consists of sealings which accompanied goods imported into Tuttul. They can be distinguished immediately

¹⁵ OTTO, 1995.

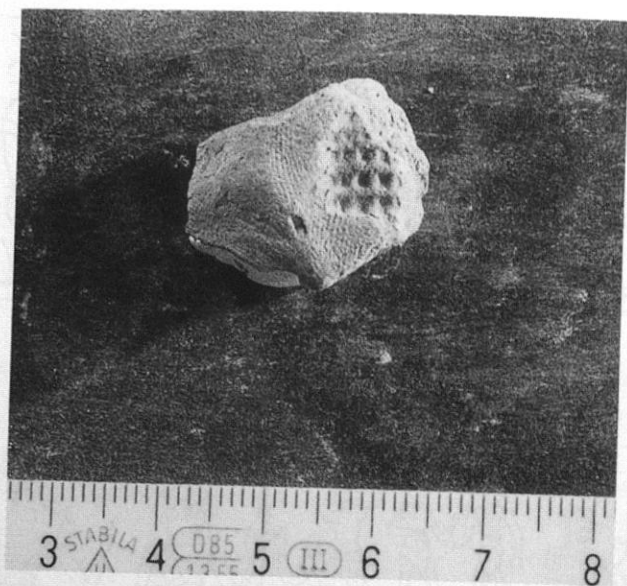


Fig. 21. Stamp seal impression (2:1).

from the impressions of seals used in the palace by the nature of the piece of clay: imported sealings are found on the closures of sacks and on labels of various kinds, while those used in the palace are found primarily on door- and chest sealings¹⁶.

The first two impressions definitely came from the North-West and are purely Syrian. The tiny fragment (fig. 18) shows a rope design; above it is a row of rabbits and under it a row of other animals. It belongs to a group of seals which was very popular in northern Syria in the late 19th and the early 18th century. At approximately the same time, however, the rope was replaced more and more often by the horizontal cable pattern. Along with an impression from Achemhöyük¹⁷, the fragment from Tuttul is the only dated piece in the group, and at the same time it is the proof that the group was still current at that time.

The next impression (fig. 19), which is only 1.7 cm high, is also of Syrian origin. It shows a man in a short coat opposite as striding warlike figure. The latter is swinging a weapon over his head and is holding a fenestrated axe in front of himself; his hair is falling in a long curl onto his shoulders. In a second scene two people are standing opposite each

¹⁶ OTTO, 1992a, 47-52, 76.

¹⁷ ÖZGÜÇ, 1980, III-19.

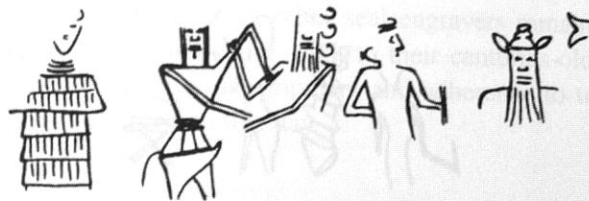


Fig. 22. Fragmentary seal impression coming from Sippar (2:1).

other, perhaps worshipping. Other scattered elements include a human head — perhaps a victim — under the hand of the warrior. Undoubtedly he can be identified as the Weather-god named “Adad”, “Baal”, or “Tešub” who was popular in Syria and Anatolia. The seal is without parallels and represents well the process of canonization of the Weather-god with one of the earliest representations of the “striding pose”.

Impressions of the next seal (fig. 20) were found frequently in the palace of Tuttul. The main scene shows a god holding in his hand a staff crowned by the moon. He (very probably the moon god) is flanked by two interceding goddesses. The two-level secondary scene shows two men boxing and a man holding a goat by the neck. The three main figures are distinguished by stylistic peculiarities, for example the strongly schematized faces and the god’s cross-hatched garment with the V-shaped upper part which were typical for late Old-Assyrian seals. Since seals in this group very often portray the otherwise unusual moon god, I suggest localizing the group near his cult city of Ḥarran.

One single impression of a stamp seal was found on the closure of a leather sack (fig. 21). The simple rectangular seal shows a lattice pattern. Similar seals were used in Karum Kaniš and Karum Hattuš, and we can presume that these goods came from a trade colony in Cappadocia.

Several sealings came with goods imported from Babylonia (figs. 22-24). One tiny sealing (fig. 22) was formerly attached to a leather sack and probably came from Sippar. The seal shows many figures, including several female and male gods and a bull-man battling a hero with three pairs of curls. The seal could have been a product of Lamia al-Gailanis “Workshop II” in Sippar¹⁸. The tiny seal that shows a sacrifice scene beside a double lions-club (fig. 23) has parallels on simple Early-Old-Babylonian seals from Tall Dibai and could have come from the Diyala region¹⁹.

¹⁸ GAILANI, 1988, 37-43.

¹⁹ GAILANI, 1988, Nr. 130j, 131s.

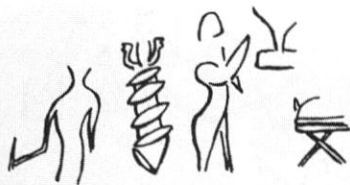


Fig. 23. Fragmentary seal impression coming from the Diyala region (2:1).

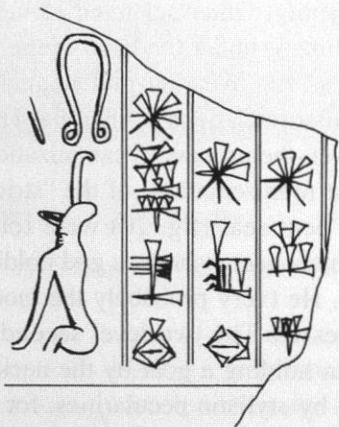


Fig. 24. Fragmentary seal impression coming from Southern Babylonia (2:1).

The last sealing (fig. 24) presumably came from Isin or Larsa, a possibility supported by the dog of Gula and the omega-shaped symbol, as well as by the inscription, which may be completed as follows: [d NANNA], [ù?] d NIN.GAL, [ù?] d EN.KI, [ù?] d DAM.GAL.NUN.NA.

Conclusions

This last group of seal impressions accompanying imported goods demonstrates Tuttul's extensive trade relations, ranging from western Syria to northern Mesopotamia and from Anatolia to southern Babylonia.

With respect to the seals of palace employees, we have been able to distinguish two large groups. The enormous difference rests essentially on the contrast between courtly and private artistry. While the royal seal engravers had to follow the official prescriptions and constantly tried to

do justice to the current mode, other seal engravers remained uninfluenced by changing fashions and stuck to their centuries-old repertoire. This co-existence of rapid development and adherence to tradition can still be observed in Syria to this day.

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