

A man in a dark long-sleeved shirt and dark trousers stands on a rocky, arid hillside, looking out over a vast mountain range. The sky is a clear, bright blue with a few wispy clouds. The terrain is rugged with scattered rocks and sparse, dry vegetation. The mountains in the distance are layered, creating a sense of depth.

TRACING TRANSITIONS & CONNECTING COMMUNITIES IN THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF SOUTHWEST ASIA

Papers in Honour of Roger Matthews

edited by

**CLAUDIA GLATZ, MÓNICA PALMERO FERNÁNDEZ,
AMY RICHARDSON & MICHAEL SEYMOUR**



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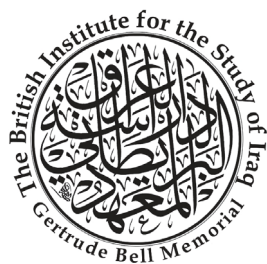
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To change, or not to change... Transitional glyptic styles in ED II Fara / Šuruppak and their relation to officialdom

Adelheid Otto

Introduction

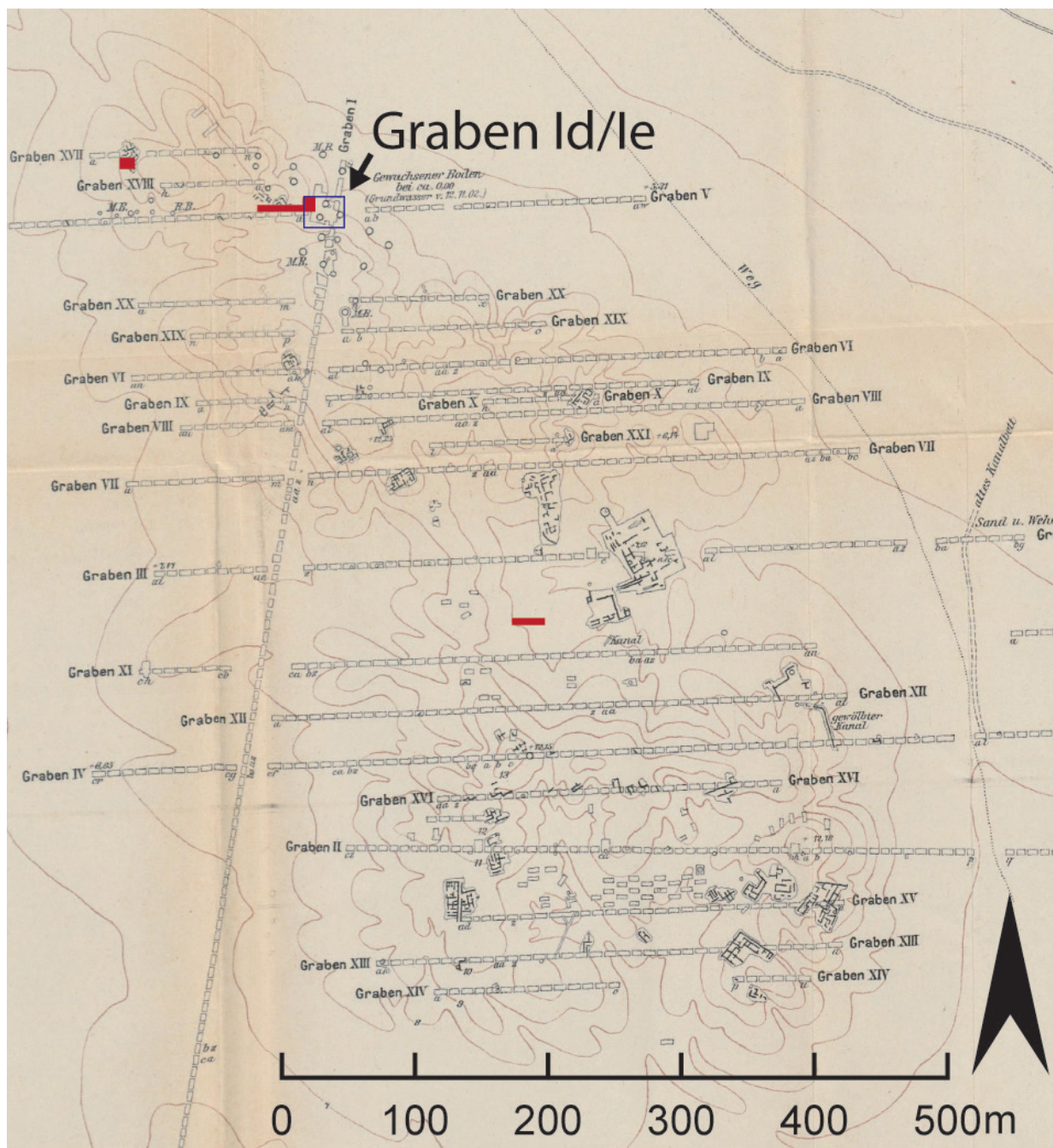
Why does art change? What is the driving force behind and significance of changes in styles, motifs, composition or iconography? While the developments of Mesopotamian art over millennia and the smooth transitions or hard breaks from one style to another are relatively well studied, researchers rarely question whether the changes observed were intentional, whether they occurred simultaneously in one and the same place, and whether the people who either initiated or used the artworks could actively choose between traditional or progressive products of art, or were passive consumers.

These questions can now be reconsidered on the basis of recent finds in Fara (ancient Šuruppak). These considerations require that we move away from art-historical approaches to sealing styles and instead undertake ‘a detailed analysis of functional and contextual aspects of clay sealings from Fara’ (Matthews 1991, 1), as Roger Matthews has done in his seminal research on Early Dynastic sealing practice at the time of the Sumerian city leagues in southern Mesopotamia (e.g. Matthews 1989, 1991, 1993; Matthews and Richardson 2018). He was able to derive essential information on the society of the early third millennium BCE – a decisive but little researched phase of early urban development – by meticulously analysing unspectacular pieces of clay (in my opinion, one of the most thrilling activities in archaeological work). I am delighted to dedicate the following thoughts to Roger, with whom I share a passion for sealings and for Fara.

More Fragments of Officialdom from Fara: the sealings in trench Id/Ie from the 2022 and 2024 seasons

Fara is the key site to understand the so-called Fara period of Early Dynastic (ED) times, usually equated with ED IIIa and dated to around 2575-2475 BCE, as well as the preceding ED II period, also known as late ED I, c. 2700-2575 BCE.¹ This ED II period in particular, one of the least researched phases of the formative period of the southern Mesopotamian city-states, is nowhere better documented than in the northern part of Fara, where trench (‘Graben’) Id/Ie

1 Dates following Sallaberger and Schrakamp 2015. The period, whose designation ED II is controversial due to the well-known problem of hardly congruent phases in widely separated locations (for the latest review, see Renette 2021), is sometimes referred to as ‘late ED I’, which, however, does not seem to make sense in Fara, as the periods can be subdivided more finely with the help of glyptics.



was enlarged and excavated in 1902/03 by the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft (DOG) under the direction of Walter Andrae and Robert Koldewey (Figure 6.1). Although no building remains were found there, 'levels of ash and rubbish' contained early clay tablets, mixed with simple hand-moulded figurines of animals and humans, and in particular more than 1000 sealings with over 500 different seal impressions (Heinrich and Andrae 1931, 92). These sealings are, together with those of the Ur SIS dump, the largest quantity of sealings found together, and similar to Ur and Abu Salabikh, they appear to be the remains of a particular administrative office, perhaps associated with a temple or palace (Martin and Matthews 1993; Postgate 2024).

The curious thing about the sealings from trench Id/Ie is that, from an art-historical perspective, the seal images can be attributed to the glyptic styles Jemdet Nasr, ED I and ED II. Because artistic styles are usually equated with historical time periods, it was

Figure 6.1 Map of the area in 'Graben Id/Ie' where the sealings were found in 1902/03.



Figure 6.2 The 2022 excavation of the dark 'Seal Pit' layers in Id/Ie, cut by the 1902/03 excavation trench which are today filled with light-coloured sand.

tacitly assumed that the area here, on the edge of the town of Šuruppak, was used as a rubbish dump for over 300 years. In fact, however, it is unlikely that hundreds of clay sealings were discarded far from their place of use, especially in the case of door sealings, which we can assume were discarded near the doors they secured in a building with administrative purposes. The search for the origin of the debris found in 1902/03 prompted us to resume excavations in the Id/Ie area 120 years later, in the spring of 2022, and again in the spring of 2024.

The area around Id/Ie is, like the whole mound, severely disturbed by looters' pits. The area of the old DOG excavation itself, however, stands out as a solid, bright area. This is due to the light drift sand that has blown in over the last 120 years. Since the looters had learned that no finds were to be expected in light sand, this very area had been spared from looting. We opened our trench where we expected to find the western edge of Id/Ie and, thanks to Andrae's incredibly accurate map, we found exactly the oblique edge of the earlier excavation, visible as a whitish fill (Figure 6.2). It cuts the continuous bands of debris layers which display different composition and colours, ranging from chocolate brown to reddish, grey and black, but essentially the debris is relatively homogeneous.

Most of the waste layers contain the remains of burnt material, including large quantities of sherds, animal bones, human and animal figurines, pieces of clay with incised drawings, sealings and other items. The composition is almost identical to that of the Ash Tip in Abu Salabikh (Martin and Matthews 1993; Postgate 2024, 75-79), so that here too the architectural context was probably that of a large household, or perhaps a temple.

We excavated a rectangular trench, 4 m long by 3 m wide, to a depth of 2.5 m below the surface, without reaching the bottom of the pit (Otto 2023). The new results not only complement those of 1902/03, but for the first time they can be assigned to sealing contexts, photographs allow a better evaluation of the styles, and the origin of the sealings can also be investigated by means of clay analyses.

Most important, however, is the correlation between the combined analysis of the seal type with the seal image. We are thus continuing the research carried out by Harriet Martin and Roger Matthews on the sealings from the 1902/03 excavations, which are kept in the Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin. Martin primarily analysed the seal images (Martin 1988,

64-76) and Matthews the backs of the sealings (Matthews 1989). He published his functional analysis of 404 identified sealings from the 'Id/Ie dump', as he calls the ash layers, in *Fragments of officialdom from Fara* (Matthews 1991). We call the dump the 'Seal Pit'.

The correlation between iconography and function of sealings in trench Id/Ie

Matthews (1989, 1991) analysed 404 sealings, determining the function for 321 examples and identifying four main types: the largest number (283 = 88.17%) were door peg sealings, while only 28 (8.72%) came from containers, mainly pot and leather bag sealings. Ten sealings (3.11%) in the form of flat clay tongues could not be interpreted at the time, but can now be identified as pot sealings (Otto 2010).

These 404 sealings bear impressions of 70 different seals, the imagery of which Matthews (1991, 6-7) divided into 'Jemdet Nasr design', 'hero and animal scenes', 'deity or banquet', 'miscellaneous animals', and 'pictographic'. His methodology of "searches for correlations between iconographic and functional aspects of sealings" (Matthews 1991, 1) shows that container sealings involve a variety of scenes (50% of which depict 'hero and animal scenes', 20% 'Jemdet Nasr design', 20% 'deity or banquet', and 10% 'miscellaneous animals'). In contrast, 80% of the door sealings show 'hero and animal' and only 20% other scenes. This points to a striking and intentional difference between the seals of those who were responsible for securing the doors in a building and the seals of those who were responsible for sealing containers – further evidence of the difference between institutional and private seals and sealings and a kind of 'official iconography' for people who held high ranking positions in the cities' administration, as can be observed in all periods in Mesopotamia (Otto 2000, 273-78; Otto 2019, 419-21).

Matthews identified one person who was particularly active in sealing doors. Eighty-seven sealings decorated with the same seal (Figs. 6.3 and 6.10a) are kept in the Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin, of which the 72 functionally identifiable are, without exception, door peg sealings. Matthews (1991, 5) argued that the owner of the seal held an important role and was exclusively responsible for securing and opening doors, and – since many sealings had been applied to the same smooth peg – was responsible for one specific door.

In the new excavations, ten more sealings were found with impressions of the same seal, which provide further clues as to this individual's role. They too are all door seals, and those that are still well-preserved reveal a particularly large door peg, which measured as much as 4-5 cm in diameter. Only one other seal, also in the 'Elegant Style', sealed a similarly thick door peg. The other door sealings were associated with thinner pegs, the diameter of which varied between 1 and 3 cm (for example, seals in Figure 6.7, 6.10c-e).

The new finds also provide further information about the seal image now identified on 97 sealings. The imagery, outstanding in every respect, includes one composition of eight figures for which we have no parallels. Even the symmetrical group of five consisting of two bull-men attacking two upright lions, which in turn are attacking a caprid with two heads depicted upside down, is unique (Karg 1984, 55). In addition, there is a group of two bull-men and a lion, as well as a man with two tufts of hair, who is ramming a long dagger horizontally into the hollow of the knee of the bull-man standing in front of him. A star-shaped element, perhaps the Sumerian DINGIR, completes the scene.

In addition, the seal differs from almost all other seals in its extremely high quality, which can hardly be appreciated from the illustration, but is immediately apparent in the original (Figure 6.3). All the figures are masterfully modelled and curved with extremely fine and elongated limbs and very slender waists; the head : body ratio is 1:5. The length of the legs is actually even greater than in the excellent drawing by Alfred Bollacher (Figure 6.10a), which we present here nonetheless, because the new sealings do not yet allow all the figures to be fully recognised.

Martin's labelling of the seal style as 'Elegant Style' is immediately understandable. However, Martin, who in her new edition of the Fara seals also undertook the painstaking task of reproducing all the seal images on a scale of 1:1, made a mistake with this particular

Figure 6.3 Sealing of large door peg with impressions of the 'Boss Seal'.



seal. She depicts it with a height of 2.7 cm, although it measures 3.5 cm in height. This may seem insignificant at first, but in fact many seals in Fara with contest scenes in the 'Elegant Style' measure between 2.0 and 2.7 cm in height, whereas only very few seals are larger, namely this one, Martin no. 260 and Martin no. 238, which is now also depicted on a newly recovered sealing. All of these unusually large seals show particularly complex, multi-figure compositions in an exquisite style with especially elegant, upright figures. As the mentioned seals all sealed thicker door pegs, we postulate that the well-known seal belonged to one of the building's highest-ranking administrators – we have nicknamed him 'the Boss' – and that the two other seals also belonged to high-ranking individuals in the same building.

That the size of the seal clearly indicates the rank of the seal owner became obvious when handling these artefacts. Even if only a fragment of the seal image of 'the Boss' was visible at the time of excavation, it could be immediately assigned to this seal because the dimensions of the individual body parts depicted were so much larger than those of all other seals with animals / contest scenes. Immediately recognising who, or a person of what rank, had sealed the relevant door was certainly the decisive factor at the time in being able to accurately link the sealed goods or rooms with the administrative office responsible, without having to painstakingly study the details of the always distorted and incomplete seal impression.

The large size of the seal also had decisive significance on a secondary level, in that a cylinder seal worn visibly on the body directly signalled status. We have therefore placed the reconstructed sizes of various cylinder seals next to the seal drawings (Figure 6.10). The convention of including fingers in photos is used here to illustrate the size of the seals to the reader.

Iconographic and stylistic analysis of the seal images

The previously known cylinder seal impressions from Fara/Šuruppak were thoroughly studied by Harriet Martin and Norbert Karg in their doctoral dissertations, at the University of Chicago (submitted 1972, published 1988) and LMU Munich (submitted 1983 and published 1984), respectively. In addition to the DOG seals, Martin also included the stratified seals from the University of Pennsylvania 1931 excavation in her study.

Martin (1988, 64-81) analysed the iconography and style of all the impressed seals and added numerous seal images which had been omitted from the earlier publication by Heinrich and Andrae (1931). In her publication, Martin arranged the seals by 'seal style' (Martin 1988, 67, table 13); the 87 different seal images from Id/Ie show styles ranging from Jemdet Nasr (18 pieces) to a few ED I Early (2 p.), ED I Miscellaneous (9 p.) and many ED I Late (17 p.), to a few ED I-II Boats and Banquets (4 p.), ED II Miscellaneous (1 p.) and the largest group which comprises 35 pieces classified as ED II 'Elegant Style'.

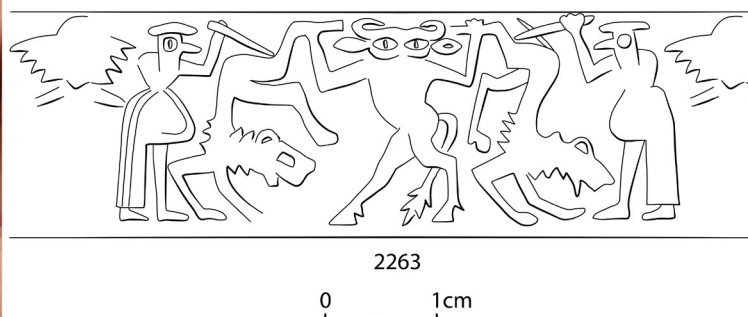


Figure 6.4 Container sealing (2263) with seal impression depicting a typical contest scene with a powerful bull-man and the 'hero with split skirt and flat hat' in the 'Squat Style'.

If I present a few results that differ from Martin's, this is in no way intended to diminish her outstanding achievements. At the time, she had no information on the context of the sealings and was therefore only able to categorise the seal images stylistically. She herself expressly regrets this for seals that she describes as ED I Early: "There is less evidence for dating these seals: possibly some are ED II rather than ED I" (Martin 1988, 69).

In the following I would like to show what new insights the stratified sealings make possible. I will adhere to Martin's above-mentioned classification of seal styles, but will not illustrate the already published ones again, only new pieces corresponding to the defined seal styles. I will proceed in reverse chronological order.

Martin's Early ED II 'Elegant Style' (Martin 1988, 73, nos. 227-361) involves groups of slender animals in combat, often in symmetrical arrangements and delicate compositions. The bull-man is frequently depicted, often in the 'master of animals' pose. Other popular protagonists are the man with two tufts of hair, sometimes wrestling, a naked hero, lions, bulls and goats. Several examples corresponding to this style were found in the old and new excavations, the most typical ones already discussed above (Figures 6.3, 6.10a).

The Late ED I style (Martin 1988, 71, nos. 190-223) is characterised, according to Martin, by flat, massive, and often angular figures. Together with geometric filler ornaments this results in a solid, massive design. The animals are often rendered in a position between walking on all fours and upright. A few duplicates of the mentioned seals were found, including Martin no. 197, for example, which shows a man with a long, split skirt.

This peculiar human protagonist is depicted on a number of newly excavated sealings, and seems to be characteristic of a certain style common for many medium-sized contest scenes. One of the best examples can be seen in Figure 6.4. This seal, impressed on four container sealings, depicts the unique representation of a mighty bull-man, rendered *en face*, who is grasping the hindlegs of two distorted lions in the 'master of animals' pose. The lions of this nearly symmetrical group of five figures are attacked with daggers by two men wearing split skirts and flat caps. Their oversized, bearded heads – missing a neck – consist of a large circular eye and an overly long nose. The proportions of all figures are squat, the limbs are stiff, and the style strongly resembles modern caricatures.² Similar

² Duplicates were found in 1902 and published in a drawing which lacks the important details: Heinrich and Andrae 1931, af. 54d; Martin 1988, no. 239. This is why the seal was mistaken as belonging to the 'Elegant Style'.

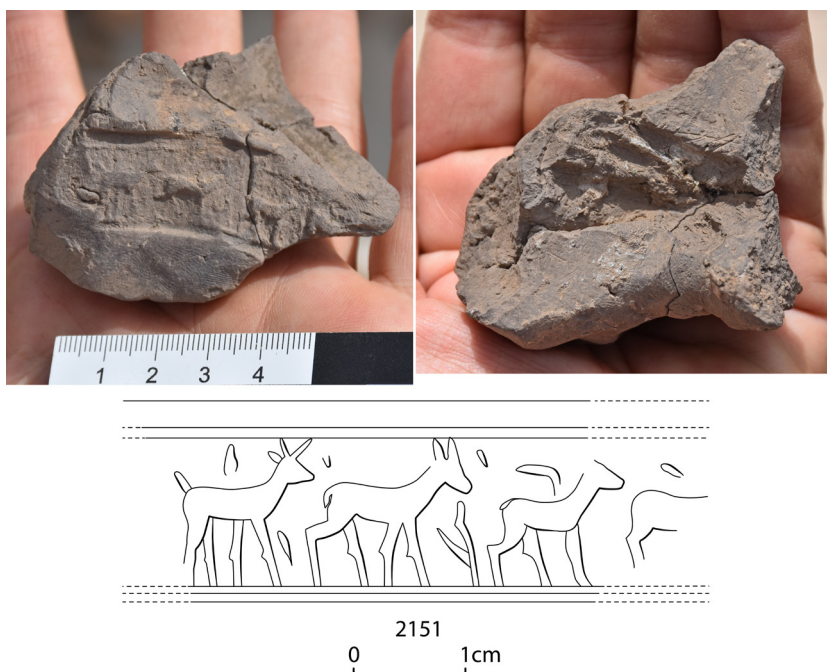


Figure 6.5 Door sealing (2151)
with impressions of a simple seal
with a row of walking animals.

protagonists are also depicted on a banquet scene impressed on a door sealing (2154), and on the spectacular seal with four registers (see below, Figure 6.7). The date of comparable seals has been discussed elsewhere, and there is disagreement about the definition as ED I Late or ED II (Karg 1984; Martin 1988, 71, with fn. 29). In our opinion, this is the traditional style in Fara, named here as the ‘Squat Style’, which begins in the ED I period and continues into ED II, while newer styles such as the ‘Elegant Style’ begin to develop at the same time.

Other seals, mainly depicting animals walking or reclining in rows, all feet on the ground, could be considered as ED I or Jemdet Nasr, while an ED II date cannot be excluded (Martin 1988, 70-71, nos. 131-89). Another example (2151) is depicted here, impressed on a door sealing (Figure 6.5): the small seal, only 1.5 cm in height, shows a simple row of walking sheep and goats, with plant elements in between the figures and above their backs. For stylistic reasons, a date early in the third millennium would be most probable. However, the chemical signature of the door sealing is similar to those of other door sealings, even those with seals in the ‘Elegant Style’ (see discussion below).

An additional argument can be put forward to corroborate the use of this and other traditional seal types contemporaneously with more modern seals. Several seal impressions show standing or reclining animals arranged in rows; however, they are combined with animals depicted upright. Seal 2057 (Figure 6.6), only 2.2 cm high and a rare example of a seal with two registers, shows a row of four walking quadrupeds in the upper register, while the lower register depicts a bird of prey grasping two bulls in antithetical composition. The bulls lift their forelegs from the ground and turn their heads. The left bull is attacked by an upright lion, whose hind body is duplicated in a peculiar way. This technique of depicting two merged bodies in a single figure is typical of original seals and sealings from Fara of the Mesilim period (Moortgat 1940, 11).

The most exceptional seal of Martin’s ED I group is no. 182, the only seal with four registers ever attested in this period.³ Unfortunately, Martin (1988, 242) illustrated her drawing 1:1, which is too small to fully convey the detail, and therefore the seal was neglected in the discussion about ED glyptic. Four more impressions were found during the 2022 season, and we illustrate this spectacular seal in larger scale and with a photo (Figure 6.7).

3 2120, 2153, 2157a, 2157, all door sealings. For the 1902 impressions, see Heinrich and Andrae 1931, pl. 57f, VA 6473; Martin 1988, 252, no. 182.

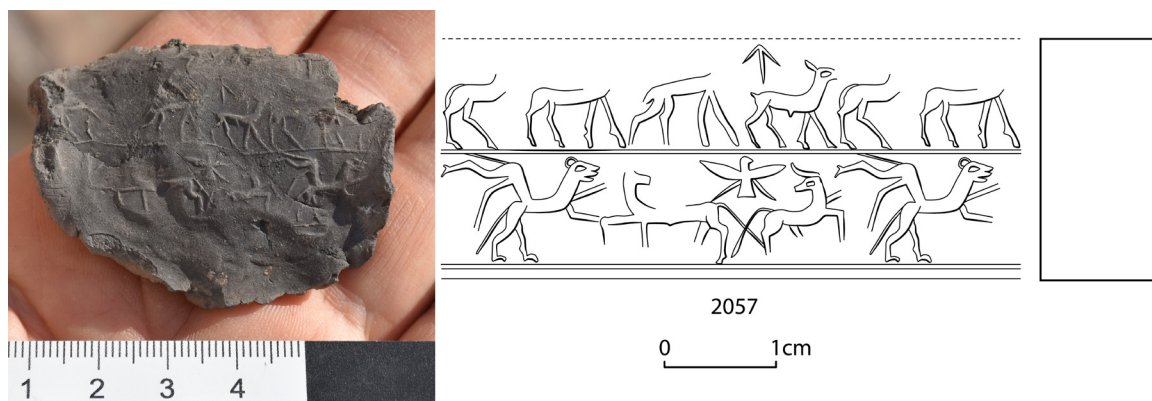


Figure 6.6 Sack sealing (2057) with impression of animal seal in two registers.

Not all of the figures are visible on the new impressions, but we nevertheless present the (unfortunately still fragmentary) drawing here. Please allow me a personal comment: as I was drawing the impression at a scale of 3:1, whereby even the thinnest pencil was too thick and the strongest magnifying glass too weak for the details, my admiration for this seal cutter grew immeasurably. He was able to carve 29 animal and human figures arranged in various positions in four registers that were only between 4 mm and 8 mm high. The entire seal was only 3 cm high and measured about 2.1 cm in diameter.

The bottom register shows eight similar reclining caprids, the second from the bottom seven almost identical striding cattle, the second from the top depicts 13 figures, each individually designed and upright or upside down in groups of two or three. A boat scene fills the upper register. The new impressions show that the boat scene consists of a pair of seated, banqueting figures (the one on the right is clearly holding a cup in her raised hand), two assisting figures, and two further standing figures at the stern and bow of the ship, presumably staking. The boat appears to be pulled by several figures on a rope, and a dog follows the boat. An enigmatic element reminiscent of a human head can be seen in front of the boat. A ritual boat procession is probably depicted.⁴

Martin discussed the seal in length, and already noted the difference in apparently chronological styles between the registers, with the lower two having Late Uruk to Jemdet Nasr antecedents while the upper register is reminiscent of Jemdet Nasr art, and only the second register indicating an ED I rather than Jemdet Nasr date (Martin 1988, 71). However, the new sealings give additional important evidence for iconography and dating. One of the anthropomorphic heroes in the second register can be studied in detail: the man wears a split skirt and has a bearded face without neck and overly large eye. He is stabbing a contorted lion while holding it upside down by the hindlegs. This type of hero links the seal closely to other seals in the 'Squat Style' discussed above.

Norbert Karg concluded in his dissertation that differences in style do not necessarily express a chronological difference ("Verschiedenheit des Stils nicht notwendigerweise einen zeitlichen Unterschied ausdrücken muß", Karg 1984, 4) and dated many seals, which had been labelled as ED I Late before, as ED II. Karg doubted that the stylistic differences were chronological indicators and labelled them Frühdynastisch II (ED II) / Mesilim style and postulated that they were contemporaneous with other styles. His results, published in German, were little recognised or accepted because they questioned seal styles as a dating criterion and were therefore at odds with contemporary discourse.

⁴ A similar boat procession on a sealing was found in trench Id/Ie in 1902/03 (VA 6700), Martin no. 554: A figure with a horned crown is pulling the boat in which two banqueters are seated, one of them wearing an early form of a horned crown, and a naked man punting. Ritual boat processions with the boat pulled by humans and animals are already attested in the Uruk III phase, Matthews and Richardson 2018, 17, Figure 16.



Figure 6.7 Door sealing (2120), obverse and reverse, and new composite drawing of the unique seal in four registers.

However, the new results suggest that Karg's assessment was correct and is now supported by contextual and chemical analysis.

This seal seems to be the 'missing link' that proves how seal cutters in Fara – this seal cutter must have been the absolute master of his profession – were able to work in very different styles. During this period of artistic awakening, the seal cutters experimented with new elements, compositions and styles on the one hand, while continuing traditional motifs on the other. The results were individual masterpieces with unique depictions.

Completely different from the figurative seals are geometric seals with diamond, eye, herringbone, crosshatch and other patterns. Martin refers to them as 'Jemdet Nasr' (Martin 1988, nos. 36-87), whereby she assumes that these were continued into the ED period. In 2022 and 2024, 10 sealings impressed with small seals decorated with geometric patterns were found, including eye, spider and diamond patterns. All but one were rolled on container sealings. A perfect example of a sack sealing is presented here (Figure 6.8): the reverse shows the folds of the leather sack and quadruple cord windings with a knot. On the obverse, the seal with an irregular diamond pattern, measuring only 1 cm in height and 0.85 cm in diameter, is impressed three times.⁵

Correlation of seal image and sealing function

A total of 180 sealings with seal impressions were found in the 'Seal Pit' during the excavations in 2022 and 2024, along with several hundred clay pieces without a seal image,

⁵ Sealing 2069, the same seal was impressed on sealings 2085 and 2061.

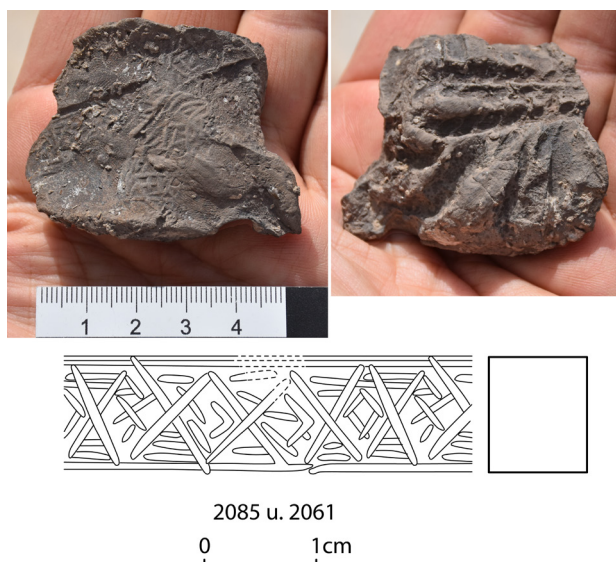


Figure 6.8 Sack sealing (2069), obverse and reverse, with impression of a small geometric seal.

some unsealed fragments of sealings and other raw materials (which will not be discussed here). The type of sealing can be determined for 141 of the seal-impressed sealings, while the rest are too small or their backs are damaged. A total of 129 of these show traces of seal images that are large enough to be classified. These fall into:

- 97 door sealings. On them are impressed: 80 animal / contest scenes, 1 geometric pattern, 3 banquet scenes, 1 other.
- 44 container sealings (jars, sacks, bales, boxes and others). On them are impressed: 26 animal / contest scenes, 9 geometric patterns, 2 banquet scenes, 7 others.

The percentage distribution (Figure 6.9) shows clearly that almost all doors were sealed by people with animal combat seals, whereas containers depict a wider range of themes – quite similar proportions to the 404 sealings previously studied by Matthews.

Within the contest / animal scenes, however, there are marked differences in terms of size, style, composition and protagonists. We have assembled significant representatives of the different styles on Figure 6.10 in the same scale and placed the reconstructed body of the cylinder next to each one to emphasise the enormous differences.

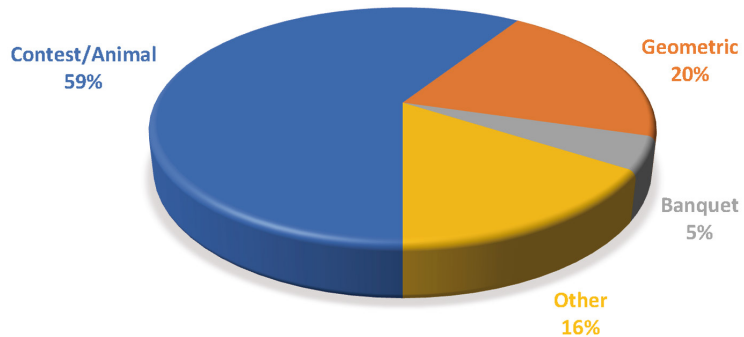
Briefly mentioned here is a box sealing with seal impression 2054, which is only 1.6 cm high and 1.1 cm wide, but shows a symmetrical scene of five consisting of two heroes with split skirt, two lions and a herd animal, plus an isolated human head. It is less than half the size of the 'Boss seal'.

Findspots of sealings

The dating of the sealings depends largely on the context. The sloping pit layers show dozens of different compositions of debris with relatively similar contents (sherds, animal bones, figurines, sealings and others), albeit in slightly different proportions. Theoretically, the debris could really have accumulated here over centuries. However, this is contradicted firstly by the location of the sealings and secondly by the composition of the clay (see below). For example, ten fragments of sealings with the 'Boss seal' were found in layers of different colours, from the uppermost to the lowest layer reached so far, distributed over a height of 2 m.⁶ Between them were all the other sealings, which are therefore definitely not older sealings, but at best bear a stylistically older seal image.

6 Fragments 2119, 2178, 2226, 2262, 2412, 2601, 2687, 2808, 2851, 2947.

CONTAINERS 44



DOORS 97

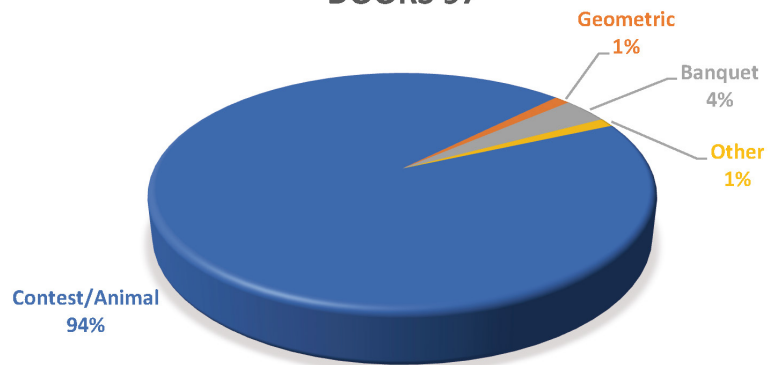
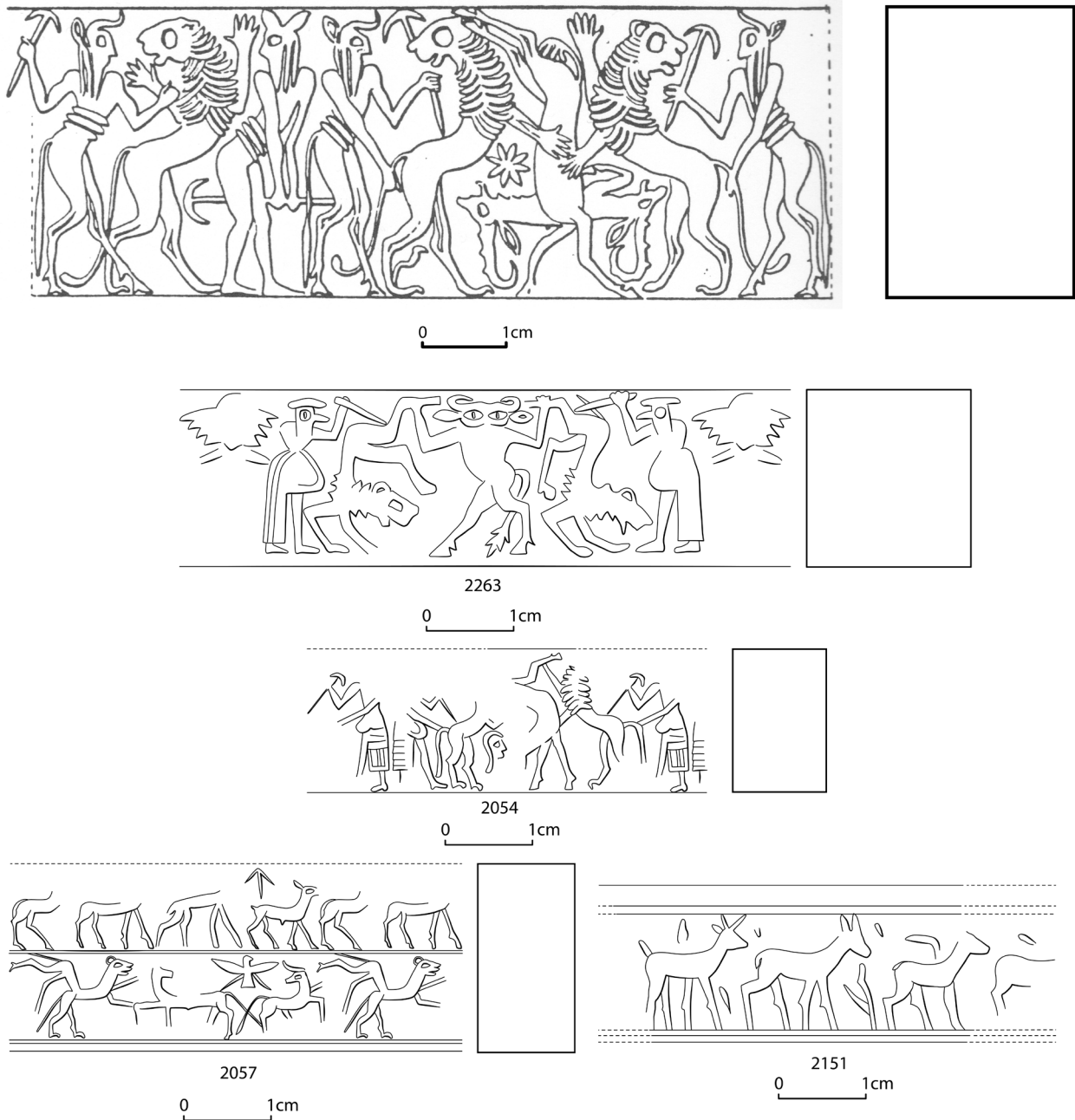


Figure 6.9 Percentage distribution of seal motifs (excavation 2022 and 2024) on door and container sealings.

Not only the ‘Boss seal’, but also 13 other seal images from the new excavations (= 29% of all seal images) are duplicates of seal impressions that were found in the area Id/Ie excavated in 1902. Its size is not explicitly mentioned anywhere, but according to the published plan (Heinrich and Andrae 1931, plate 1) the section measured about 22 × 25 metres, so that the ‘Seal Pit’ could have been over 20 m in diameter with a given depth of 3 m. Our trench has not yet reached the bottom of the pit at a depth of 2.5 m.

Of the 14 seal images already known, 12 depict animal contest scenes. Nine of these were used exclusively to seal doors, while three sealed doors and containers. The only duplicates of known seals that show scenes other than animal contests, namely a typical Jemdet Nasr seal with a temple façade and a seal with a banquet scene (Martin no. 507), were impressed onto container sealings. We interpret this to mean that some people, whose sealings were scattered in many copies and over a wider area in the seal pit, worked for a longer period of time in the building from which the sealings originate, and that the importers with the two other seal images delivered goods in containers over a longer period of time.

35 seal images (71%) are new and in some cases only documented in a single or a few specimens. Those on container sealings can easily be interpreted as relics of imported goods, since container sealings may have been brought in here from somewhere else and therefore are often attested only once or in few specimens. It is more difficult to interpret the new impressions on door sealings. Several fragments of door seals with impressions of the same seal often lay within a relatively close radius, so that it seemed as if a basket full of broken seals had been thrown away. However, this would also mean that some seal owners were only responsible for sealing doors for a short time, whereas others, especially ‘the Boss’, were responsible for sealing doors for a long time.



pXRF analysis of the clay sealings

30 clay sealings from the seal pit, including all the sealings presented in this article, were analysed in March 2023 by Michaela Schauer (LMU) in the Afak excavation house using portable X-ray fluorescence (pXRF; a detailed report will be published elsewhere). For comparison of the clays, pottery sherds and clay animal figurines from the same pit were analysed, as well as four seals and sherds from the ED IIIa house area on Mound B in the southeast, sherds from Abu Salabikh (analysed *in situ* during a visit to the site) and raw clay from the riverbed at Fara. Analysis of the clays from the four different locations has revealed marked differences in chemical composition.

In comparison, the sealings from the seal pit are remarkably similar to each other. The diagram (Figure 6.11) shows certain differences between the sealings of containers (orange diamonds) and those of door pegs (blue triangles), which is an indication that some

Figure 6.10a-e (top to bottom, left to right) Seals depicting animal / contest scenes from the new excavations (10a is a drawing by A. Bollacher in Heinrich and Andrae 1931, taf. 46f; other drawings by the author/M. Lerchl).

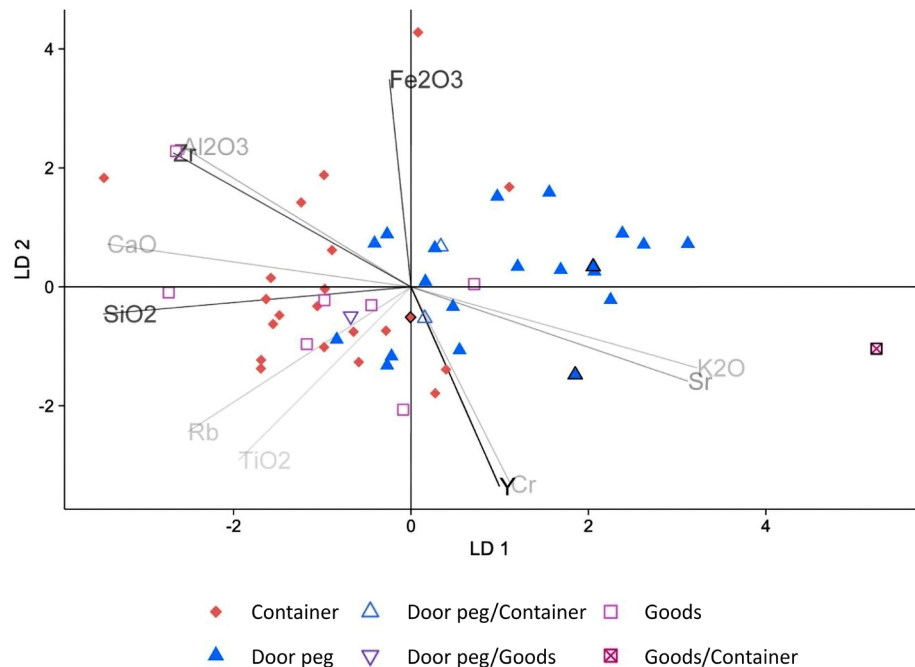


Figure 6.11 Discriminant analysis of pXRF data for sealings from Id/Ie (M. Schauer 2023).

containers were probably imported into the building. However, the distributions overlap to such an extent that similar clay sources must be assumed and, above all, the aggregate differed. In fact, the clays of all the sealings from the ‘Seal Pit’ illustrated in Figure 6.11 are very similar, which makes it highly improbable that the stylistically earlier sealings were made hundreds of years earlier.

The slight differences between the clays of the door sealings and those of sacks and other containers show a similar pattern to that observed in pXRF analysis of the sealings from the earlier excavations at Fara (Matthews and Richardson 2018, Figure 13). They correspond with the differences in the frequency of seal images described above, with 94% animal / contest scenes on door sealings, whereas 41% of the containers bear geometric and other seal images. This can be interpreted to mean that the administrative staff working in the building and those people delivering goods used different clay sources. Possibly, the containers, sealed at origin, would be opened and checked here, the sealings discarded, and the goods stored in rooms which were then sealed. However, these clay sources are still very similar and may point to different origins inside the city (large or small households) or in the immediate vicinity of Fara. Schauer compared it to the clay of the five sealings from the ED IIIa houses on Fara Mound B, which show much greater differences in the composition of the clay than all the sealings in the ‘Seal Pit’.

Conclusions

It has usually been argued that the differences in the style of the seal impressions from Fara – so far understood as a difference in time or period – mean that the sealings in Trench Id/Ie were deposited over centuries. The stratified contexts now provide new arguments against this: firstly, the stylistically oldest and youngest were found mixed together, and secondly the clay analysis by pXRF shows very little difference between sealings bearing stylistically different seal impressions.

Evidently, the staff in charge of the building and sealing the doors used seals in the so-called ED I and ED II styles at the same time. The clay of the sealings applied to delivered goods is slightly different, but likely came from within or nearby Šuruppak. Therefore, it must be concluded that all the sealings in the ‘Seal Pit’ were discarded within a fairly short period and may originate from the same context, probably a building nearby. The

burned debris must have accumulated over several years or decades, but certainly not over centuries.

Stylistically, the Early ED II 'Elegant Style' seals are the latest found in Id/Ie. Therefore, they should be decisive for dating the sealings. It now appears that many different styles existed side by side in Fara in the ED II period and were used contemporaneously: geometric design, walking animal in rows, contest and animal scenes with angular figures in the 'Squat Style', or with slender, elongated figures in the 'Elegant Style', and a few banquet and boat scenes.

The animal or contest scenes became the dominant motif for the staff on duty within the administration, while people delivering goods were less obliged to choose specific seal motifs, and often continued to use simple-style or geometric seals. Size also mattered: the size of the seals with animal or contest scenes was in all likelihood related to the rank of the seal owner within the administration.

Clearly, there was a continuity of seal styles labelled 'ED I' into the ED II period. The differences seem to have been caused by the individual or institutional styles of seal cutters or seal workshops. It seems some seal cutters and seal owners preferred to continue to use well-known, conventional styles. Others experimented with new characters, compositions and styles. The best evidence for the coexistence of styles over time is the four-register seal, which stylistically combines features of the ED I and ED II periods. Clearly, it was possible to have a seal in either a conventional or an ultra-modern style. It seems that the choice – to change, or not to change – was less an individual decision in the modern sense of artistic taste or fashion, but rather that it was directly linked to the position of the seal user, and thus a consequence of officialdom.

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