

# BULLAE FROM THE MAIN TELL

DOCUMENTS OF UMMĀ'S ADMINISTRATION  
IN THE EARLY OLD BABYLONIAN PERIOD

Nawala Ahmed Al-Mutawalli, Khalid Salim Ismael,  
Walther Sallaberger



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# Cuneiform Texts from the Iraqi Excavations at Umma (Jokha)

Edited by  
Nawala Ahmed Al-Mutawalli, Khalid Salim Ismael,  
Walther Sallaberger

Volume 3

2024

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

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with a contribution by Adelheid Otto

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# Preface

Volume 3 of the series Cuneiform Texts from the Iraqi Excavations at Umma (Jokha) (abbreviation: UmCT 3) presents the publication of 278 bullae found at the Main Tell of Umma during the excavations that were conducted by the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage in the years 1999–2002. The excavations were directed by Dr. Nawala Al-Mutawalli during the first two seasons (1999–2000), and by her together with Hamza Shahad Al-Harbi in the third and fourth seasons (2001–2002), during which the bullae were found in the buildings of the Main Tell.

Most of the Early Old Babylonian bullae stem from a coherent archive of the city administration from a period of little more than 15 years under Sumuel of Larsa and the local rulers of Umma. From an institutional perspective, the bullae edited here thus provide a most welcome complement to the partly contemporaneous archive from Room 21 of the Shara Temple published in UmCT 2 (2019).

The State Board of Antiquities and Heritage in Iraq (SBAH) and the directorate of the Iraq Museum in Baghdad granted permission to publish all cuneiform texts from the Umma excavations to Nawala Al-Mutawalli. Therefore, the authors are most grateful to Dr. Abdulamir Al-Hamdani, Minister of Culture, Tourism, and Archaeology, Dr. Qais Hussein Rashid and Dr. Laith Majeed Hussein, Deputy Ministers of Culture, the presidents of SBAH and of the Iraqi Museums, and to the directors of the Iraq Museum Dr. Amira Edan Al-Dhahab, Luma Yass, and Dr. Ahmed Kamil Mohammed, for their constant support of this project.

With regard to the Umma excavations of 1999–2002, we thank our colleague Hamza Shahad Al-Harbi for his cooperation in directing the expedition in 2001–2002 and for granting permission to publish the cuneiform texts from the third and fourth excavation sessions to Nawala Al-Mutawalli. To Khawla Maarij and Hayat Kadhim, we owe supplementary information about the site.

Nawala Al-Mutawalli invited Khalid Salim Ismael and Walther Sallaberger to cooperate with her in this fascinating publication project. We would like to thank Dr. Margarete van Ess who arranged our first meeting in 2013 at the German Archaeological Institute (DAI) in Berlin.

In the Iraq Museum, we acknowledge the support we received from the members of the Cuneiform Department, Elham Shakir, Dr. Hind Shihab, Dr. Hanan Hamza, Nura Qusay, Shaimaa Abdulzahra, Riem Musa, and others. For supplementary photos, we express our gratitude to Faiza Jumaa, Nawfel Hamood, Safa Abbas, and Rusul Abbas and we are grateful to the members of the Registration Department of the Iraq Museum for their help. Nawala also thanks heartfully her dearest friends Shukran Mahdi Salih and Wafa Hadi, as well as Dr. Ahmed Kadhim and Mohammed Isa for all their help and support.

Our work was made possible by the generous support of the Gerda Henkel Foundation for funding our research. Work on the bullae from the Main Tell occupied us during working sessions in the summers of 2017, 2019, and 2021 at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU) München, with an interruption in 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Walther Sallaberger was able to collate the bullae in the Iraq Museum Baghdad in September 2019, March 2021 and March 2023, when some bullae could be added.

Much diligence was put into deciphering the cuneiform texts and reading and identifying the seal inscriptions. The cuneiform signs were often carelessly written and poorly preserved; heavy sealing compounds the challenges of decipherment. One tiny bulla could bear up to five different seal inscriptions, of which no more than traces might be visible. In the process of decipherment, therefore, close cooperation between the three authors proved to be the most efficient way

to identify signs, discuss critically the proposals for readings and identifications, and ensure a consistent edition. Without our mutual criticism and constant re-checking, the final publication would have contained many more mistakes and over-optimistic readings and interpretations.

The three authors, Nawala Al-Mutawalli, Khalid Ismael, and Walther Sallaberger express their gratitude for the support of this project to the College of Arts at Baghdad University, to the College of Archaeology at Mosul University and to Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, respectively.

We are grateful that Adelheid Otto, professor of Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology at LMU München, was able to analyse the images of the seal impressions also for this volume.

To Dr. Dailam Kahalim Sahal, we are grateful for checking the Arabic texts of this book.

Anne Goddeeris kindly informed us about her work on Umma bullae in the British Museum. More observations on texts from Umma, other bullae and studies were offered by Laurent Colonna d'Istria, Zsómbor Földi, and Frans van Koppen. Anne Löhnert compiled the references for the indexes with great care. To Manfred Lerchl from the Institute of Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology at LMU, we owe the formatting of the plans and the seal drawings. Tatiana Frühwirt, Daniel López Kuczmik, and with admirable commitment, Frans van Koppen helped in preparing the book for publication. To all of them, we are most grateful for their competent support.

At the Institut für Assyriologie und Hethitologie, LMU München, we are obliged to Susan Radwan for organizing the research visits of the Iraqi colleagues to Munich.

Again, we thank Dr. Barbara Krauß and Stephan Specht, and now especially Jens Fetkenheuer from Harrassowitz Verlag for their support of the project.

Baghdad, Mosul, Munich  
2023

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# V The Seal Images on the Inscribed Bullae from the Main Tell of Umma

Adelheid Otto

## Introduction

The excavations on the Main Tell of Umma have brought to light numerous sealed documents from the Isin-Larsa or Early Old Babylonian period, most of them dating to a very short period of 17 years within the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (1891–1875 BCE; see Part I, Introduction, Section 4). This renders these seal impressions an invaluable new source of securely dated and provenanced glyptic of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in Southern Babylonia.<sup>1</sup> Because Umma then partly belonged to the Larsa kingdom, we find it appropriate to label the glyptic products ‘Isin-Larsa seals’ and not ‘Early Old Babylonian’, because the imagery is in many respects the direct continuation of the Ur III one, and has little to do with the Old Babylonian key motifs, compositions and styles that become dominant from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

Although the archaeological context has been discussed in detail above (see Section 1.2), it is essential to mention it here again, because it explains the choice of seal motifs, the way of sealing and the time of seal manufacture. Most of the sealed bullae presented here were found in two rooms of a building appr. 50m south of the Shara temple where offices of the urban administration of Umma were located. Most of the sealed bullae, 235 (or 244, including the 9 unnumbered objects) out of 278, were found in Room 1. The seals impressed are presented here as **Seals 1–5, 7–18, 20–23**. Their context is precisely dated to the period between Sumuel 8 and Sumulael 4 (1887–1876 BCE). Much less bullae were found in Room 24, some of them sealed; to these belong **Seals 16 and 17**. Although impressions of these seals were also found in Room 1, their period of cutting can be dated slightly earlier to the period of Sumuel 4–8 (1891–1887 BCE).

To be separated from this iconographically coherent seal corpus from a chronologically and functionally coherent context are the sealed bullae from Room 17, which was not part of the same urban office and dates slightly later to the Middle Old Babylonian period. The person named in these bullae sealed with **Seals 24 and 25** has no relation to the persons of the other rooms, and also the scene of Seal 24 is clearly Old Babylonian. These bullae were only inscribed with the name of the person using the anepigraphic seals.

One sealed bulla was found in a looting pit and has no secure context at all. The seal impression showing a contest scene (**Seal 19**) probably dates back to the late third millennium.

Only the images of epigraphic seals and all seals on the inscribed bullae published in this volume are discussed in this chapter. Seals on bullae without inscriptions will be published in a separate volume together with the original cylinder seals.

The seals were impressed on clay labels of roughly trapezoidal shape, called ‘bullae’ in the volumes UmCT 2 and UmCT 3, measuring 3.5 to 5 cm in width and height, with a thickness of 1.5 to 2 cm (for their description see the Introduction to this volume, I.1.1 and I.7.1). Unlike labels which

1 I accepted immediately the kind offer by Nawala Al-Mutawalli, Khalid Ismael and Walther Sallaberger to study the images of the seals impressed on the bullae. Due to various circumstances, I was unable to study the sealed bullae in the Iraq Museum Baghdad, but the mentioned colleagues provided all the photos and necessary information to me and read and copied the seal legends – my sincere thanks are due to them. I thank also Manfred Lerchl for transforming my hand drawings into digital form and for composing them with the inscriptions.

were attached to goods, these document-‘labels’, almost all of them inscribed, were tied together on a string and formed part of an ingenious filing system (for this system see also Al-Mutawalli et al. 2019, 21–25). Up to five different seals were rolled on all the possible locations on the label, i.e. on the obverse, reverse the upper and lower edge and two on the left edge (see Introduction, I.8 on sealing practices). The inscription of the cylinder seals was nearly always impressed, but not the image. It is evident that the inscription had much more importance in this bureaucratic context to identify a person. Another reason was that nearly all the seals were adorned with a similar scene, the ‘Standard Audience Scene’.<sup>2</sup> The images of the few anepigraphic seals were impressed with more care.

## General Description of the Seals

Most seals with preserved images, namely 13 (**Seals 1–3, 7, 8, 10–12, 14, 16, 17, 21, 23**) were adorned with the ‘Standard Isin-Larsa Audience Scene’, consisting of three figures: A worshipper (in most cases clean-shaven and not wearing a cap) with clasped hands is standing opposite the seated king on his padded stool, who is holding a cup (**Plate 1**). The suppliant goddess with upheld hands is standing behind the worshipper. A crescent and disc are only rarely depicted between the king and the worshipper, and not a single ‘filling motif’ is attested on the inscribed seals – contrary to what is commonly defined as typical of Isin-Larsa seals, but in perfect continuity of official Ur III seals. Nearly all Isin-Larsa seals were inscribed, with the exception of **Seal 23** (see the edition and catalogue of the seals in the preceding section). The inscription was between two and four lines long and set in a legend case. The rarity of anepigraphic seal impressions on written documents can be observed at Umma already in the Ur III period and does not correspond to the frequency of epigraphic seals within the corpus of contemporaneous seals, but depends on the bureaucratic context of the sealed objects (Mayr 2005, 24).

Only two seals (**Seals 16, 20**) show the audience scene of a seated deity (**Plate 2**). This clear preference for the standard motif adorning the seals of high-ranking functionaries is on the one hand similar to what can be observed at Umma during Ur III times, but on the other hand, the percentage of presentations to a deity and to the king respectively is reversed:<sup>3</sup> While Ur III seals from Umma show 89.4% presentation scenes with a deity as primary figure and only 10.6% with the king as primary figure, our Isin-Larsa seal impressions show 87.5% audiences to the king and only 12.5% audiences to a deity. When an anepigraphic seal shows the audience scene (**Seal 23**), a couple of holes were added. The reason for it could be to make the image more easily distinguishable, or to mark it as a non-official seal belonging to a person of lower rank; however, the latter explanation seems less likely in the administrative context of the Main Tell bullae (see Chapter 1.2).

Only three seals (**Seals 1, 12, 16**) had a cap mounting in the form of two pairs of parallel rings on either side of the seal. These caps, most probably from gold, were markers of status in a double way: when the seal itself was worn, and when the seal was impressed. The Umma bullae evidence this latter function of the cap very well: the deep impressions were a big help for the identification of the individual seals since the cuneiform signs were often difficult to recognize and the scenes are so similar anyway. This was certainly not different in antiquity: the deep grooves produced by the cap were the easiest and the quickest way to identify the individual in charge of sealing, and to signalize immediately the high rank of the sealing party. The size of all the seals varied between 2.0 cm and 3.2 cm in height.

2 We label this scene as ‘standard’ since it is the only type of the numerous presentation scenes common during the Ur period (introduction, salutation, audience) that continues to be depicted on Isin-Larsa seals (Mayr 2005, 78). Interestingly, the Ur III seals from Umma show 89.8% introductions, 5.3% salutations and 5.0% audiences – exactly opposite to Isin-Larsa habits (Mayr 2005, 121, Appendix 5). The term ‘audience’ is best described by Mayr (2005, 54) as a presentation scene where “the worshipper stands by himself and does not make the gesture of salutation. Both arms hang down, folded at the elbows, and the left hand grasps the right wrist.”

3 Mayr (2005, 44) calculated 87.8% presentation, 12% contest and 0.2% other scenes, based on 1129 seal images.

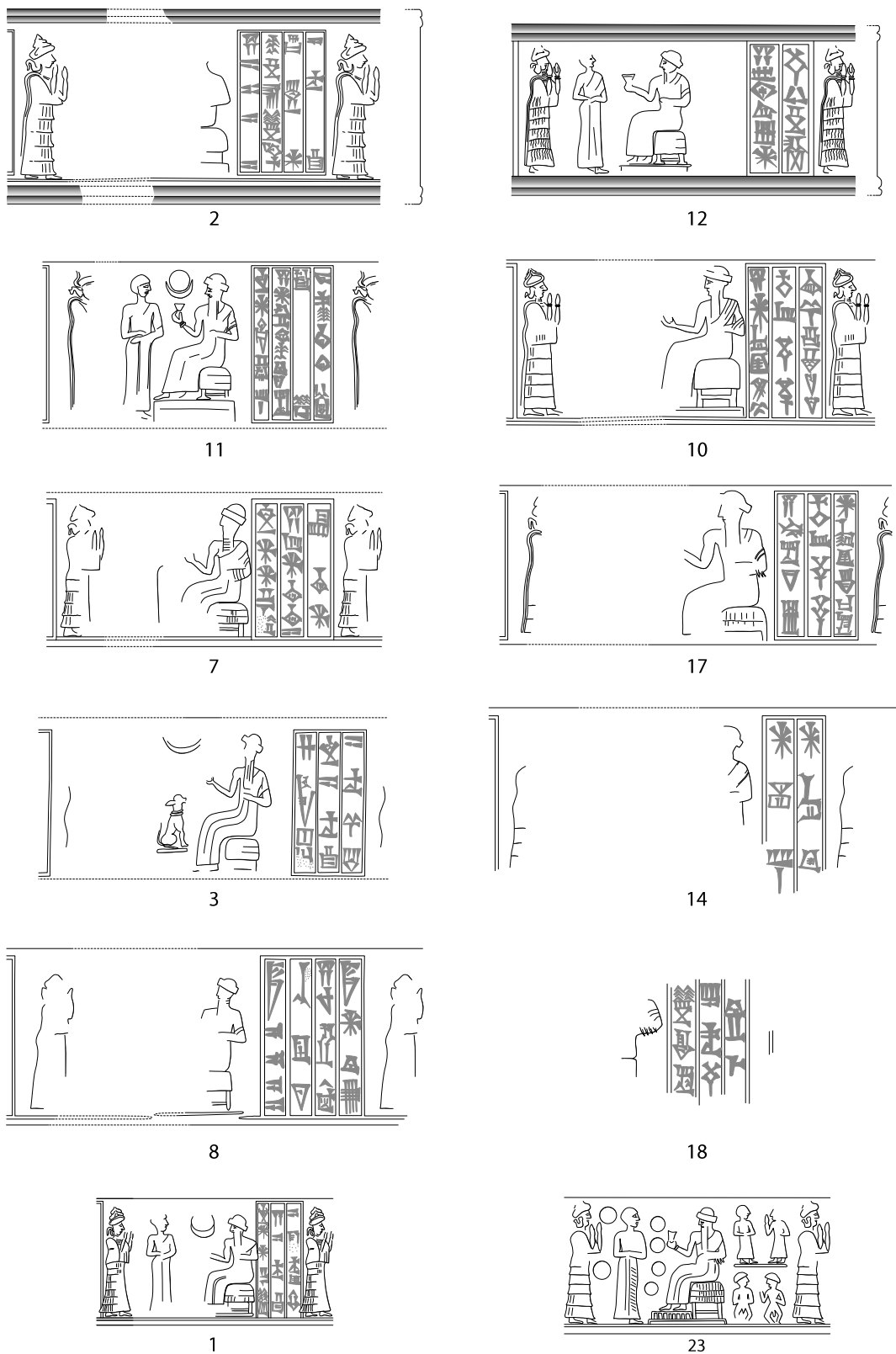


Plate 1, Seals with the standard Isin-Larsa audience scene, depicting a worshipper followed by the suppliant goddess opposite the seated king



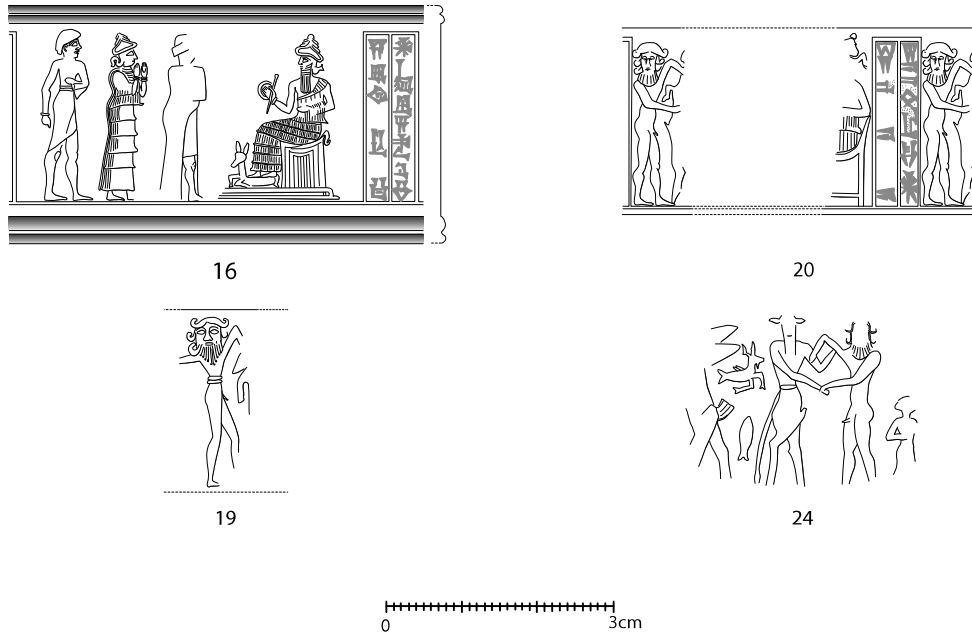


Plate 2, Seals with the audience scene to a seated deity (Seals 16, 20). An Ur III seal (Seal 19) and an Old Babylonian seal (Seal 24) depicting contest scenes

Three seals have to be emphasized because they are exceptional: The seal of Aḫu-waqar (**Seal 3**) prominently depicts a watch-dog and thus emphasizes his profession as the overseer of captives – a rare kind of pictorial allusion to the seal owner's identity. The anepigraphic **Seal 23** illustrates remarkably clear how anepigraphic seals were made easily distinguishable even in fragmentary impressions through the adding of tiny secondary scenes instead of the inscription and ostentatious dots within the main scene. It indicates also to which degree literacy was common in this supreme level of administration, where apparently the officials had no problems to decipher the minute cuneiform signs of the impressions – a challenge for specialists even today.

The seal of Sîn-irībam (**Seal 16**) is the finest seal from Isin-Larsa period Umma so far and is also outstanding from contemporary seals from other sites. It is depicting the king twice, once in his pious appearance, and once in his modern victorious, short-kilted form, which was 'invented', following the model of the legendary Akkadian kings, at precisely this time, and which became the official motif shortly afterwards. The seated god on **Seal 16**, characterized as the supreme god by holding rod and ring, puts his feet on a small quadruped which may be identified as a gazelle. We interpret the god therefore as the supreme god of Umma, Šara. Because this seal was additionally adorned with golden caps, I suggest that Sîn-irībam was a high-ranking official in the temple administration (cf. Introduction, I.8.1).

## Conclusions: The Umma Seals and their Role within the Early Old Babylonian Glyptic

The early 19<sup>th</sup> century BCE in Babylonia is a period for which not many dated seals have been published so far, and – especially when seal impressions were published – these were illustrated only rarely by photos (e.g. Blocher 1992a; 1992b; al-Gailani Werr 1980; 1988); this renders the recognition of style difficult if not impossible.

Additionally, the Umma corpus makes us reconsider the glyptic art of this period which has been underestimated in terms of craftsmanship. While it is commonly assumed that official seals in the Ur III period were of excellent quality and that the most exquisite Old Babylonian seals can be found from c. 1850 onwards, the Isin-Larsa period seals from Umma show exquisite workmanship in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is right that the audience scene continues to be the standard motif for official seals, continuing this tradition since the Ur III period. But the quality of carving and the excellent mode of delicate cutting was by no means less advanced than in the Ur III or the Old Babylonian period. The hypothesis by Frankfort (1939, 147) that Isin-Larsa seals meant a dramatic decline in quality (“The low level to which glyptic art had sunk in the Isin-Larsa period...”) resulted from the fact that mainly original seals had been found from this period so far, both in the Diyala region, and at Ur and other sites, and – a strange fact which still remains to be explained – the original seals which have been left behind (often private seals) are nearly always of inferior quality compared to the impressed seals belonging to members of the (governing) elites. It seems that the political upheavals at the end of the Ur III period had no impact on the glyptic art of Umma which continued to produce seals in the best Neo-Sumerian tradition – as regards both motifs and style – until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Several seals (e.g. **Seal 1**, **Seal 12**) show a markedly different cutting of the image and the inscription (rather crude cuneiform signs, but the very fine carving of figures) or the partial overlapping, indicating that two different hands were at work or that the inscription had been added later. The possibility that a few seal owners reused Ur III seals and recut the inscription only, can also not be totally excluded (see the Ur III heirloom **Seal 22**, albeit without an impression of the seal image).

A few seals, however, implemented modern trends and new motifs. Especially noteworthy is the new motif of the victorious king in his short kilt (**Seal 16**) who is not yet depicted in the later canonical form, but is a prototype of the later victorious king, who – combined with the suppliant goddess opposite him – becomes the standard scene of official seals only fifty years later, replacing the standard audience scene so common in these Umma seals.

The bullae were sealed by officials who controlled the management of Umma’s flocks of sheep and goats.<sup>4</sup> They fall into two groups: The clan of Aḫum, and ‘the others’. Let us first consider Aḫum’s clan. Some seals are explicitly labelled as belonging to sheikh Aḫum himself, his brother, a man of his uncle, his sons, and his servants (**Seals 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 20, 21**). The predilection for seal motifs by the members of this coherent group is evident. With one exception only, they all chose the official ‘Standard Audience Scene’, which is exemplified best by **Seal 1**. The exception is **Seal 20**, belonging to Aḫum’s brother, which shows an audience scene (of the king) to a seated deity. The craftsmanship of all seals of the Aḫum clan is very good, but the seal of Aḫum himself was outstanding: it was the largest one and additionally adorned with a metal cap.

To be separated from this group are the seals from other officials who were named with their professions as “scribes” (**Seals 11, 15**) or “diviners” (**Seals 10, 17**). Some identified themselves as servants of a deity (**Seals 11, 13, 15**). Only a few seals do not mention the name of the seal owner in the inscription (**Seals 14, 22**) or are not inscribed at all (**Seal 23**) – a fact untypical

4 Editorial note: On the urban committee that sealed the bullae see Sections 7 and 8 in Part I. Note that in I.8.1, another distribution is proposed that does not stress the family relationships, but the historical situation leading to different compositions of the committee of sealing officials. On Aḫum’s family see Table 6 in the Introduction, I.4.4.

for Isin-Larsa seals as a whole but caused by the official context of the sealed bullae (we do not take into consideration the Old Babylonian **Seals 24, 25** from later contexts). Nine of these seals show remains of imagery, eight of them depict the audience scene to a king. Only **Seal 16** of Sîn-irîbam depicts the audience to a god. Three of these seals were of outstanding quality as concerns the craftsmanship (**Seals 11, 12, 16**), two of which were additionally adorned with a metal cap (**Seals 12, 16**).

To sum up, the fact that 83.5% of the members of the Aḫum clan, but only 66.6% of the other persons had the audience scene cut in their seals, corroborates the hypothesis that the audience scene was a theme which was favoured by officials and which allowed to immediately recognize the sealing person as a member of a specific administrative body, while non-official seals had a wider range of themes at disposal or were even prohibited to use the audience scene.

The standard audience scene was not only the official motif to be depicted by the members of ruler Aḫum's clan, but also by most of the other persons on duty in this building – a result which was not expected since there would have existed a pool of possible scenes to be depicted in Isin-Larsa seals. Apparently, only one other motif was appropriate to be used by high-ranking officials, which is the audience of the king before a deity. This extreme continuation of Ur III motifs only a few years before the 'explosion' of seal imagery with infinite possibilities of motifs and scenes, is astonishing and must partly be explained by the purely official nature of these filed bullae.

The most evident way of marking status and authority, however, was to furnish the seal with a metal cap, which left immediately recognizable, deep grooves in the clay – not to speak of the impression that a shiny golden cap must have evoked from the audience.

## Catalogue of Seal Images

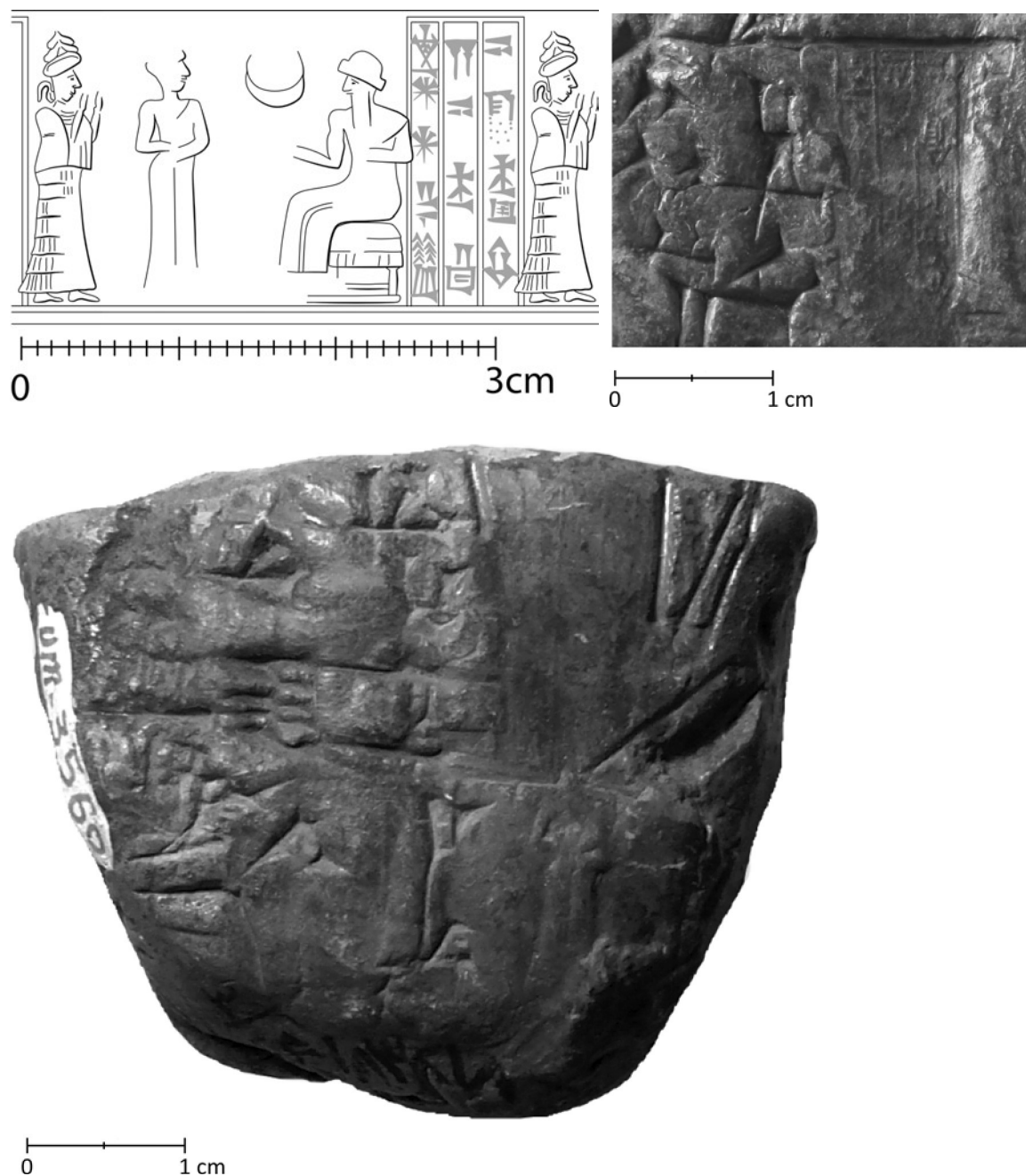
Only those bullae were studied and are mentioned here which show relevant traces of the figurative elements of the seal impression. A full list of references for all seals and seal inscriptions is given in the preceding chapter, but the seal inscriptions are repeated here. I present here the full description, discussion, and illustration of composite drawings of the seal images, and selected photos. For facilitating a later study of the seal impression, I indicate the excavation numbers (Um 3xxx) and mark those bullae in bold which show the most distinctive traces of the image. The impressions with inscriptions only are also listed in the preceding chapter.

The numbering of seals follows the edition of the seal inscriptions and the attestations in the preceding chapter. For the exact dating of the seal owners see Table 24 in the Introduction, I.8.1.

**Seal 1: Abī-ḫullul**

Seal inscription: a-bi-ḫu-lu-ul | dumu a-ḫu-um | urdu<sub>2</sub> AN.AN.mar-du<sub>2</sub> – “Abī-ḫullul, son of Aḫum, servant of Il-Amurrim.” The seal owner is a son of Aḫum (Seal 2; see Introduction, I.4.4).

The study of the seal image is based on Um 3486, 3505, 3509, 3560, 3562, 3565, 3566, 3574.



Seal 1, drawing; photos Um 3486 rev., Um 3560 rev.

Seal image:

Height: 2.0 cm. Length: 3.3 cm.

Description: Standard audience scene. The suppliant goddess and the worshipper with clasped hands are standing in the audience opposite the seated deified king on a padded stool. Inscription of three lines in an inscription case. The whole scene was probably placed on a fine line; remains are visible below the feet of the goddess and under the padded stool of the king, which is not standing on a pedestal.

This is one of the few seals which can be reconstructed nearly completely. The king wears a long beard and a brimmed hat, extends his right arm and holds a little cup. His left arm is partly hidden by the long garment which falls down to his ankles. As usual, the worshipper is the figure which is the least visible, but Um 3560 shows the vertical line of his lower garment. His head is not well preserved, but there are no visible traces of a cap. A large crescent moon and disk are placed midway between the face of the king and the worshipper. Other filling motifs are not visible.

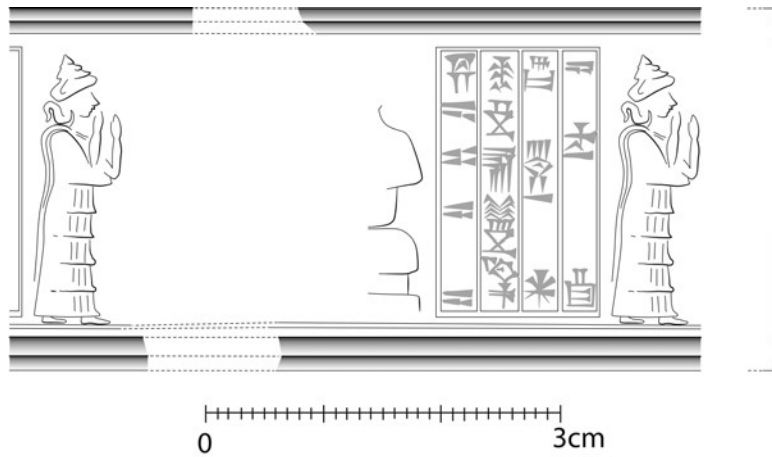
The legend is squeezed into the narrow space between the king and the goddess: The left elbow of the king cuts the outer case of the legend, and the back of the goddess nearly touches the other side of the legend case. It seems that the legend was added later.

Craftsmanship: Very good, although it was one of the smallest seals. The impression on Um 3509 l.e. A allows us to see the quality of the seal with finely modelled muscles of the king and his garment forming a broad fringe on his left shoulder; Um 3486 shows the delicately modelled face, hair and horned crown of the suppliant goddess.

**Seal 2: Aḥum**

Seal inscription: a-ḥu-um | ra-bi<sub>2</sub>-an | mu-ta-sa-li-im | dumu a-za-a-a – “Aḥum, the chieftain of the Muta-salim (tribe), son of Azzaya” (see Introduction, I.4.4).

The study of the seal image is based on Um **3516**, **3545**, 3877, 3880, 3881.



Seal 2, drawing; photos Um 3516 rev., Um 3545 rev.

**Seal image:**

Height incl. caps: 3.0 cm; height of caps: 0.3 cm each. Preserved length: 2.8 cm; reconstructed length: ca. 5.0 cm.

Description: Probably a standard audience scene. Mainly the suppliant goddess is visible. She is standing to the right of the inscription case with four lines. Shallow remains of a seated figure are visible; because it sits on a padded stool, it must be the seated king. The careful impression of the inscription on bulla Um 3545 and the fact that the area of the inscription was spared from the cuneiform writing on the bulla, but not the image, indicates that the image most probably corresponded to the standard scene of officials.

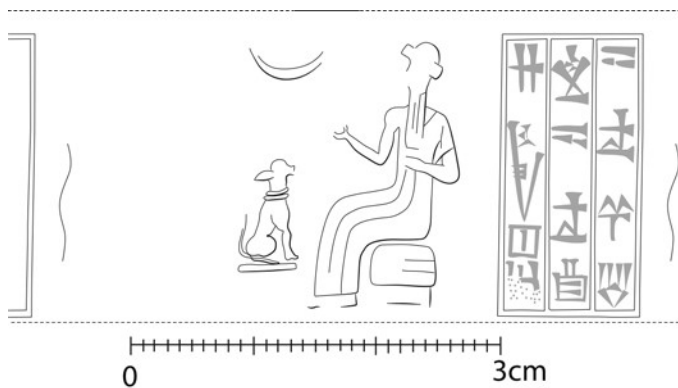
The seal had a 0.3 cm broad metal cap mounting with a horizontal ridge in the middle. The caps and the inscription of four lines correspond well to the high social status of the seal owner (on him see I.4.4).

Craftsmanship: Difficult to judge, but probably good or excellent. The garment of the suppliant goddess is well 3D-modelled with the backside (back leg shining through her long garment) being much deeper cut than the shallower frontside (front leg).

### Seal 3: Aḥu-waqar

Seal inscription: a-ḥu-wa-qar | urdu<sub>2</sub> a-ḥu-um | ugula lu<sub>2</sub> dab<sub>5</sub>-ba – “Aḥu-waqar, servant of Aḥum, overseer of the captives”. The seal owner is a servant of chieftain Aḥum (Seal 2; see I.4.4).

The study of the seal image is based on Um 3629, 3808 (both dated Sumuel 8; see I.9).



Seal 3, drawing; photo Um 3629 rev.

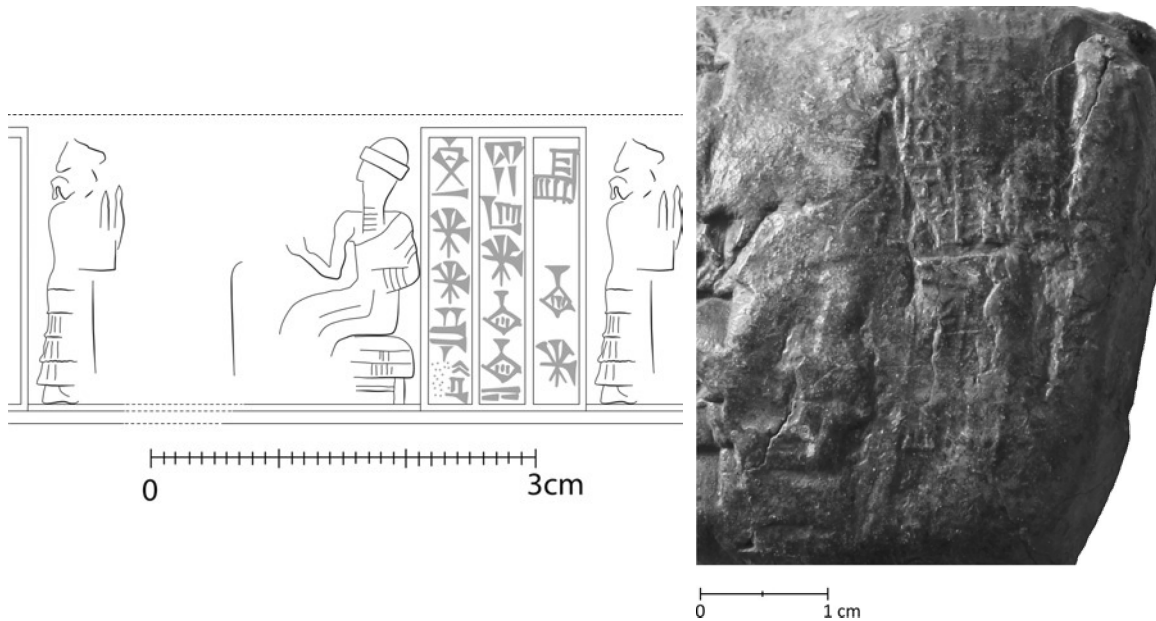
**Seal image:**

Preserved height: 2.4 cm; reconstructed height: 2.5 cm. Preserved length: 3.6 cm; reconstructed length: ca. 4.5 cm.

Description: Probably a standard audience scene. To the left of the case for the three-line inscription, the deified king is seated on a padded stool. He has a long beard and raises his right hand. A fine crescent with a small disk inside is depicted in front of his head. Shallow remains of the garment of the suppliant goddess to the right of the inscription.

The most exciting element of this seal is a dog in front of the knees of the seated king. This dog is sitting on his haunches on a horizontal line or a pedestal and places his fore-paws on the ground. Hatched lines in the area of his neck could indicate either a stylized mane or a heavy dog collar. This is not the dog of Gula supporting a crook, but a normal dog. The depiction of normal dogs is rare on seals of this time<sup>5</sup> and absolutely unique in this position of the image which is the very heart of the scene. Because Aḫu-waqar was the overseer of captives, we suggest that this prominently depicted dog refers to the profession of the seal owner who certainly held watch-dogs among his most crucial 'equipment'. This is a rare allusion of a seal image of this time to the identity and profession of the individual seal owner.

Craftsmanship: Difficult to recognize, because the seal was impressed on too hard clay. But the slim, elongated figures and a still visible certain kind of modelling point to a good quality of the seal.

**Seal 7: Lana-il**

Seal 7, drawing; photo Um 3521 rev.

Seal inscription: la-na-DINGIR | dumu **š**u-na-na-a | urdu<sub>2</sub> AN.AN.mar-tu – “Lana-il, son of Šu-Nanaya, servant of (god) Il-Amurrim”.

The study of the seal image is based on Um 3521, 3561, **3577**.

**Seal image:**

Height: 2.4 cm. Preserved length: 3.5 cm; reconstructed length: ca. 4.4 cm.

Description: Standard audience scene.

5 Collon 1986, 41–42. She remarked that dogs appear most often on Old Babylonian seals earlier than 1800 BCE.



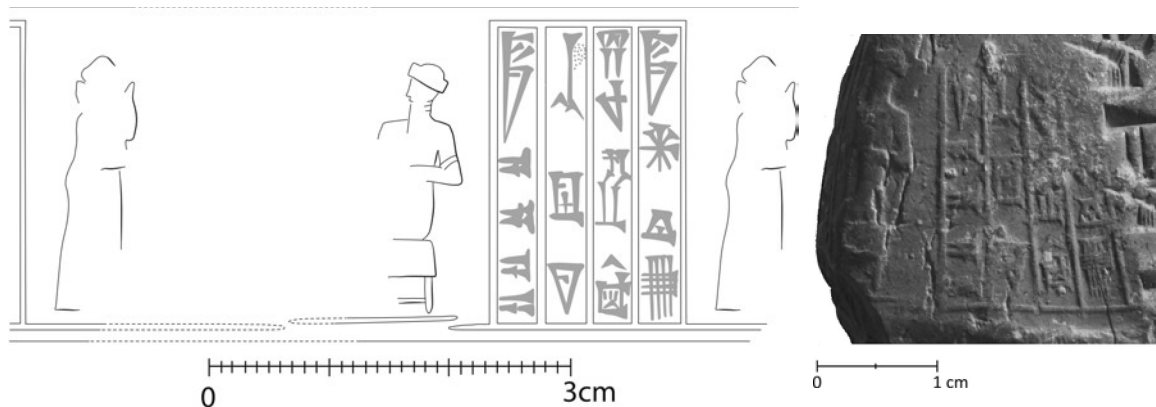
The remains of the suppliant goddess turning right and of the seated deified king turning left are preserved on either side of the inscription of three lines. The padded stool is standing on the baseline of the seal image, not on a pedestal. The back of each figure was carved very close to the inscription. This indicates – accepted that only a worshipper was standing in the middle – that the seal was probably fairly slim.

Craftsmanship: Normal (?) (can be a false impression due to the kind of rolling).

### Seal 8: Lu-Bau

Seal inscription:  $lu_2$ -<sup>d</sup>ba- $u_2$  |  $dumu$  nu-ur<sub>2</sub>-eš<sub>18</sub>-tar<sub>2</sub> | ses-ama-ni |  $lu_2$  a-za-a-a – “Lu-Bau, son of Nūr-Eštar, his mother’s brother (is) a man of Azzaya”. It is not certain if Lu-Bau’s father is the same Nūr-Eštar who is attested in UmCT 2, Seal 6 from the Šara temple. But it is clear that Lu-Bau has a maternal uncle near Azzaya, the father of Aḫum, and thus is closely related to Aḫum’s family (see I.4.4).

The study of the seal image is based on Um 3492 (seated king), 3542 (shallow remains of a goddess), **3731** (seated king), and the uninscribed bullae (not included in this volume) Um **3613** (IM 183451/04), Um **3649** (IM unnumbered; both with cap mountings), Um 3665 (IM unnumbered), Um 3670 (IM unnumbered).



Seal 8, drawing; photo Um 3731 rev.

#### Seal image:

Height: 2.8 cm. Preserved length: 3.5 cm; reconstructed length: ca. 5.5 cm.

Description: Standard audience scene.

Remains of the seated king and of the suppliant goddess on either side of the inscription of four lines. The padded stool is standing on the lower line which is bordering the scene.

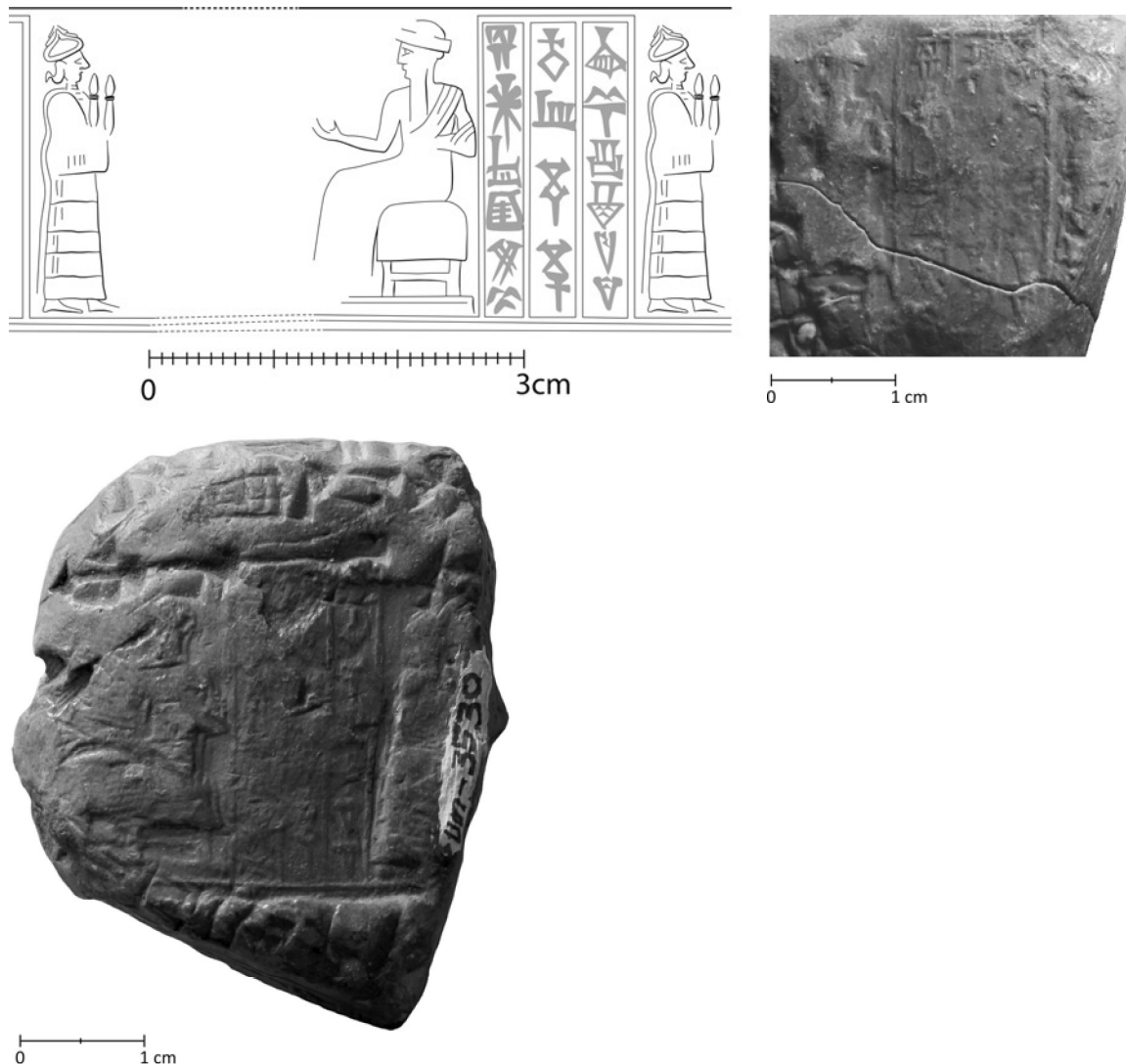
Strangely, the impressions of a seal of Lu-Bau on uninscribed bullae 3613 and 3649 seem to show the deep grooves of a metal cap. However, all the other impressions show that there was no cap mounting. Either Lu-Bau owned two seals, one with and the other without a cap, or his seal was used over a long time and had a cap only earlier or later, or the impressions of the grooves on bullae 3613 and 3649 were made with a knife in order to simulate a cap.

Craftsmanship: Normal. Only one bulla (Um 3731) is good enough to recognize it: The seated king is engraved with rather angular forms, well visible at his elbow and shoulder; even the stool has exceptionally angular forms. The lines are not very fine.

**Seal 10:** Nawram-ilī

Seal inscription: na-aw-ra-am-i<sub>3</sub>-li<sub>2</sub> | maš<sub>2</sub>-šu-gid<sub>2</sub>-gid<sub>2</sub> | dumu <sup>d</sup>EN.ZU-ILLAT – “Nawram-ilī, diviner, son of Sîn-tillatī”.

The study of the seal image is based on Um 3479 (bits of king and goddess), **3515** (seated king and goddess), **3530** (king and goddess), **3542** (with image), **3547** (suppliant goddess), 3639, 3819b, **3821a** (suppliant goddess and inscription).



Seal 10, drawing; photos Um 3515 rev., Um 3530 rev.

**Seal image:**

Height: 2.6 cm. Preserved length: 3.3 cm; reconstructed length: ca. 4.8 cm.

Description: Standard audience scene.

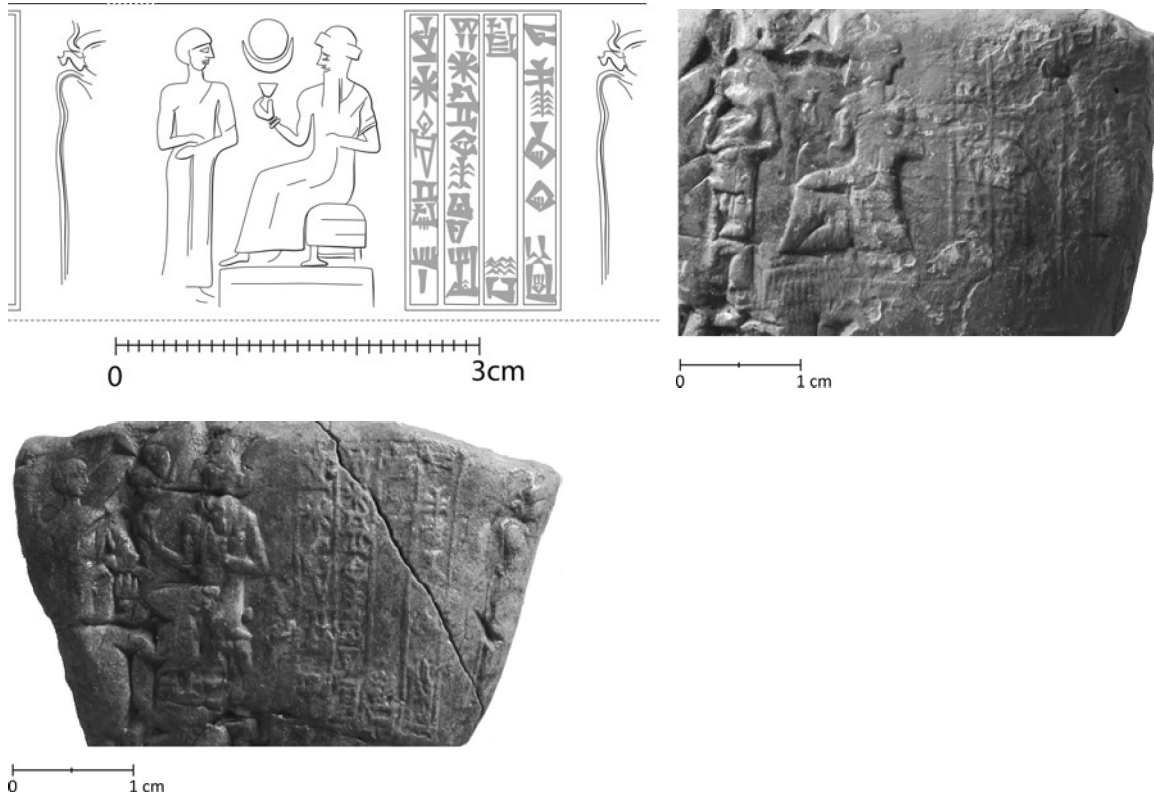
Suppliant goddess, a necklace counterweight pending down her back. The king is sitting on a padded stool which is standing on a dais. Both figures are nearly touching the case of the legend. A horizontal line at the base of the seal image forms also the lower edge of the three-line inscription case.

Craftsmanship: Normal. The king shows rather angular forms and a long neck, similar to the seal of Lu-Bau.

**Seal 11: Niĝgena-kiaĝ**

Seal inscription: niĝ<sub>2</sub>-ge-na-ki-aĝ<sub>2</sub> | dub-sar | dumu <sup>d</sup>ištaran-mu-ba-li<sub>2</sub>-iṭ | urdu<sub>2</sub> <sup>d</sup>nergal – “Niĝgena-kiaĝ, scribe, son of Ištārān-muballiṭ, servant of (god) Nergal.”

The study of the seal image is based on Um **3480** (king and worshipper), **3509** (le.e.A, seated king), **3544** (seated king), **3554** (seated king), **3563** (all figures), and 3632.



Seal 11, drawing; photos Um 3480 rev., Um 3563 rev.

**Seal image:**

Height: 2.6 cm. Preserved length: 4.1 cm; reconstructed length: 4.5 cm.

Description: Standard audience scene, showing all three figures of the suppliant goddess and the worshipper standing opposite the seated king.

This is one of the rare seals showing the head of the worshipper: he is bald and has a finely carved face. The king is holding a conical cup with the tip of his delicately carved fingers, his wrist is adorned with two bracelets. He is bearded, his face is delicately cut with a small mouth and nose, and the muscles of his arms and shoulders are well-modelled. He is sitting on his padded stool above a high double dais (the vertical hatching on 3480 is not the texture of the dais but the impression of a woven cloth on the bulla). The crescent and disc are rendered exactly above the conical cup, midway between his face and the face of the worshipper. The carving of the scene is perfect in every respect, and even the placement of the figures is well-balanced: The king and the goddess are carved at a decent distance to the inscription case of four lines. The goddess is also exquisitely carved, her back slightly curving with a pronounced waist and hips, a long necklace counterweight hanging down.

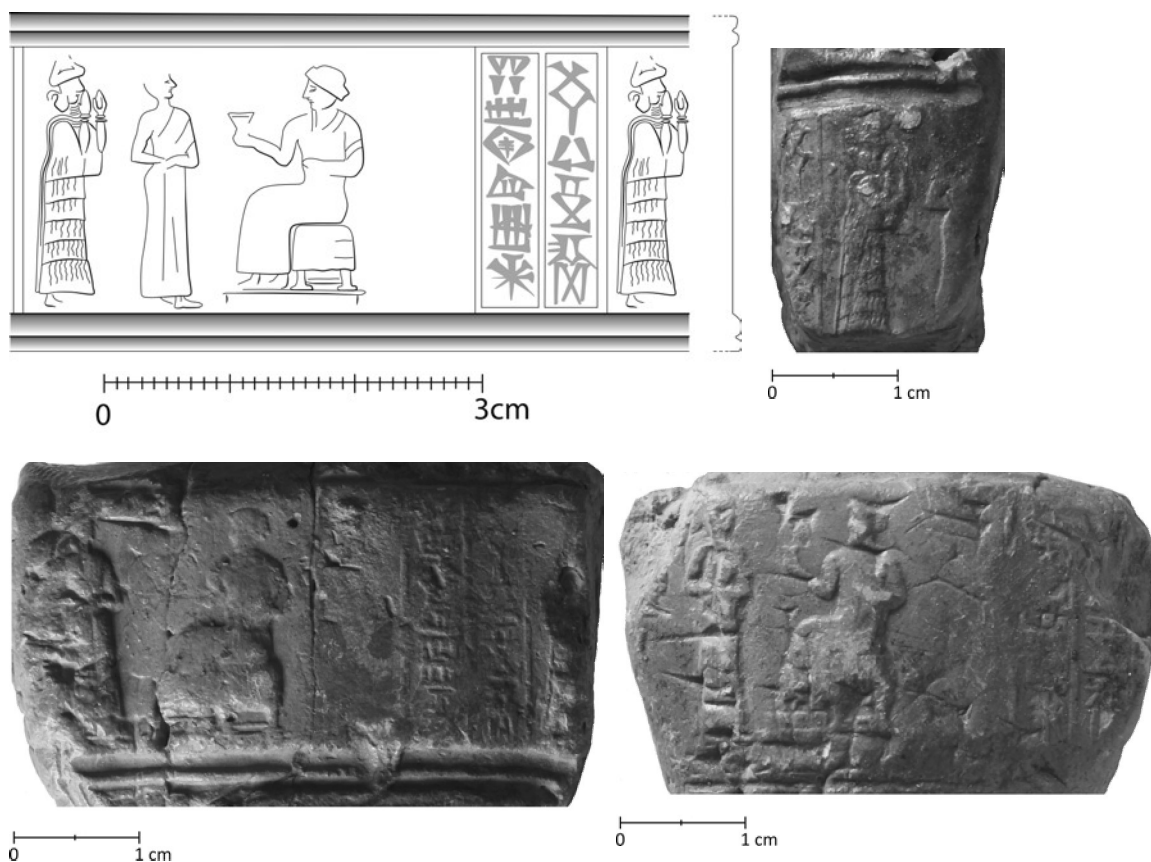
Craftsmanship: Excellent. The outstanding quality may be due to the fact that seals of scribes are often of the highest quality.

**Seal 12:** Puttatum (Seal A)

Seal inscription: pu-ut-ta-tum | dumu e-eḫ-di-iš-DIĜIR – “Puttatum, son of Eḫdiš-il”.

The study of the seal image is based on Um 3316, **3477**, 3491, **3500**, 3517, 3518, **3527**, **3531**, **3546**, 3558, 3645.

Two seals with the name Puttatum are attested (Seals 12 and 13). They differ in the third line of the inscription and in the fact that the standard seal “A” was adorned with a metal cap. Unfortunately, too little remains of the Seal B impressions to recognize any image. Puttatum must have been an important official in the administration of flocks, to judge from the number of seal impressions: He is the person who impressed his seals most often on the bullae found in this building (see Introduction, I.6.2 and I.8). The fact that both his seals were impressed on bulla Um 3316 proves that both were in use simultaneously. It shows also that the seals of these authorities were not personal seals, but office seals which could be used also by other officials in charge.



Seal 12, drawing; photos Um 3477 rev., Um 3518 le.e., Um 3527 obv.

**Seal image:**

Height with caps: 2.7 cm. Length: 4.7 cm.

Description: Standard audience scene.

The suppliant goddess and the worshipper with clasped hands are standing opposite the seated deified king who is holding a cup in his right hand. Inscription of two lines. The seal had a double cap mounting on each side, consisting of two parallel bands of metal, 0.3 cm wide, leaving deep semi-circular impressions in the clay. This metal cap and the extremely fine workmanship of the seal emphasize the high rank of this person.

Some details of the figures can be distinguished: bulla Um 3518, i.e. shows the extremely delicate carving of the suppliant goddess, who has a finely carved face, delicately carved hands showing the palms and double bracelets on each wrist. Her flounced garment consists of superimposed, slightly curved rows of undulating flounces. The necklace counterweight is pending along her back. The worshipper is standing very close to the goddess, and his delicately curved backside shows the excellent modelling of his body which is even shining through his garment. He has a finely carved face, and the head seems to be clean-shaven. The deified king sits on a padded stool on a dais, his feet on a platform, and holds a cup in his right hand. There is no crescent between the king and the worshipper.

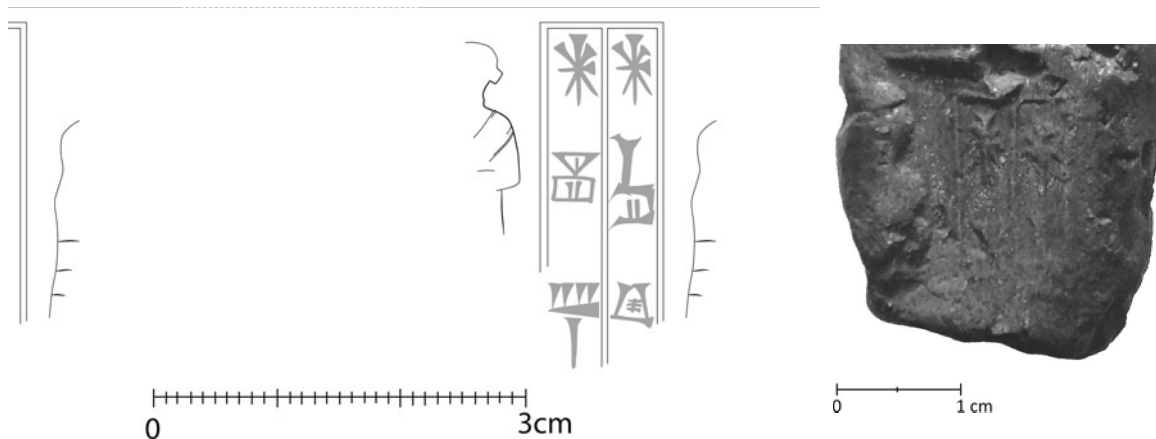
The inscription is remarkable in two respects: Much space is left empty between the back of the seated king and the inscription. Also, the carving of the inscription and image is very different: while the lines of the image are extremely delicate and were carved with very fine instruments, the lines of the inscription case and the signs are rather thick. Evidently, the inscription was carved by a different hand, and possibly it was added later.

Craftsmanship: Image excellent, inscription normal.

#### Seal 14: Sîn & Ningal

Seal inscription: <sup>d</sup>EN.ZU | <sup>d</sup>nin-gal – “Sîn, Ningal.”

The study of the seal image is based on Um 3514, **3544** (suppliant goddess), **3562** (king), and 3611.



Seal 14, drawing; photo Um 3562

Seal image:

Preserved height: 2.7 cm; reconstructed height: ca. 3.0 cm. Preserved length: 2.3 cm.

Description: Probably a standard audience scene.

Tiny remains of the flounced garment of the suppliant goddess are visible right of the inscription of two lines. Bulla Um 3562, i.e. shows the impression of this seal and of the inscription of Seal 15, but only the upper part of the seated king is visible. The seal inscription does not mention the name of a seal owner but the names of the divine couple Sîn and Ningal (see Introduction, I.8.2).

This seal, which does not mention the name of a seal owner but the names of the divine couple of Ur, Sîn and Ningal, was used by a person who participated in the control of the animal herds.

Craftsmanship: On Um 3562 it seems rather crude.

**Seal 16:** Sîn-irībam (= UmCT 2, Seal 7)

Seal inscription: <sup>d</sup>EN.ZU-i-ri-ba-am | dumu e-di-du-um – “Sîn-irībam, son of Edīdum.”

Impressions of this seal were also found in the Šara temple (UmCT 2, Seal 7). The study of the seal image is based on Um 3653, **3875** rev. (figure), **3878** (all figures), **3879** rev. (god).



Seal 16, drawing; photos Um 3875 rev., Um 3878 rev., Um 3879 rev.

**Seal image:**

Height with caps: 3.1 cm. Length: 5.3 cm.

Description: This seal has already been published as UmCT 2, Seal 7 and described by Otto 2019a. It has been argued there that this is an audience scene to the city god Šara, whose feet are resting on a gazelle – quite fitting for a god who may have been associated with the steppe as pasture ground (Otto 2019a, 140). Nevertheless, the seal is discussed and drawn here again, because the new impressions on some Main Tell bullae allow us to recognise this exceptional seal image much better.

The scene is rarely depicted in this period: A king in a long mantle, followed by the suppliant goddess and a man in a short kilt, are approaching a seated male god.

Many more details are visible of the seated god: He is dressed in a flounced garment with compartments of three flounces each. The left arm is hidden by the garment, but the hand is protruding. The right hand holds the rod and ring in such a way that the ball of the thumb is well visible, he wears a bracelet. A long beard hangs in strands on his chest, the face is characterized

by a small straight nose, small lips and a large eye. He is wearing a tall multiple-horned crown, his hair ends in a fine fishtail. Remarkable is also his throne: it has a short curving backrest, is formed as a rectangular block with a multiple-niched façade, but disposes of a slightly concave seat. This throne – certainly referring to the Šara Temple façade at Umma with its sophisticated niches<sup>6</sup> – and the footrest of the god in form of a gazelle (unfortunately not well visible on any of the new bullae) are resting on a double dais. A continuous line forms the lower end of the image, and despite the metal cap, no part of the seal image is cut off. We are aware that we have no definite proof for the identification of this depiction as Šara since it was not even possible to identify his iconography on hundreds of Ur III seals from Umma.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the remains of the animal below the feet of the seated god seem to depict a gazelle, which at the moment is a good guess for the attributive animal of Šara.<sup>8</sup>

Many more details of the man in the short kilt can be seen. He is clearly wearing a cap; not the brimmed cap, but a hemispherical one. He has a finely carved face and wears a long beard. His skirt ends horizontally above his knees and is held at the waist by a triple girdle. The right arm is hanging down behind his back, he makes a fist. The left arm is bent, and he seems to hold something, perhaps an early type of the staff which is usually carried by the later victorious king. Given the date of the impressions (≥1895–1883 BCE), this is one of the earliest representations of the victorious king.<sup>9</sup> It seems that exactly around this time the new idea of the king as a warrior and successor of the legendary kings of Akkade began to be depicted and became the new motif for official seals only fifty years later (Otto 2019b).

Also, the suppliant goddess is better visible (Um 3878): her back is gently undulating, the swing of her hips emphasized by the fine counterweight softly rolling down until her ankles. She is adorned with a multiple necklace and two bracelets on each wrist. The hands show fine fingers, the left hand even the open palm. The only figure which is not well visible, is the king in a long robe who stands with hands clasped opposite the enthroned god.

The inscription of only two lines is in certain contrast to the extremely fine workmanship of the image. The seal had metal caps on both ends. They were 0.4 cm wide and consisted of two horizontal bands each.

Craftsmanship: Excellent. The image was carved with the finest possible tools and in the most detailed way. The proportions of the figures are very elegant with elongated limbs, delicately modelled muscles and fine faces.

Who is this person who owns the finest seal of all the seals known so far from Umma, and one of the finest seals known so far from this period? A seal which does not depict the standard audience scene, but the new formula of the king – depicted twice, once in his pious and once in his victorious form. This seal, adorned with thick golden caps, would be the perfect seal of a high-ranking authority. But was Sîn-irībam a local ruler of Umma? See on him also the Introduction, I.8, arguing from the administrative record.

The startling contradiction between an excellent seal and the absence of a title in the inscription makes us formulate the hypothesis, that Sîn-irībam was such a well-known authority in the

6 Gruber 2019, 105–108.

7 Mayr 2005, 67–68. He wonders if a god carrying a harpé or mace can be identified as Šara, but then follows Fischer (1997, 117) and thinks that these attributes were not the characteristic attributes of Šara, but identified any depicted deity as the city god in general. One Ur III seal from Umma (Mayr 2005, 540 D) shows a seated god whose feet are also resting on an animal with a long neck, whose hind-part is not visible. Mayr interprets it as a goat-fish, but I have never seen such a long neck for a goat-fish, and wonder if this could not be another depiction of Šara with his gazelle-like animal.

8 I thank Joris Peters for checking the image of the animal. He agrees that the form of the head resembles a gazelle, which has very large ears, but not a donkey, because the muzzle and the neck are too slender.

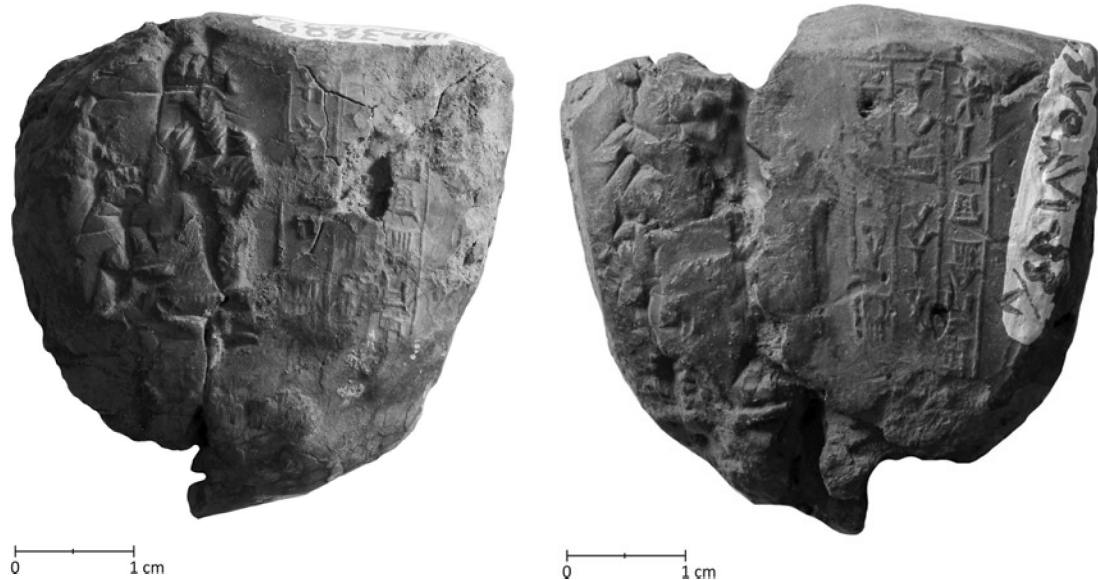
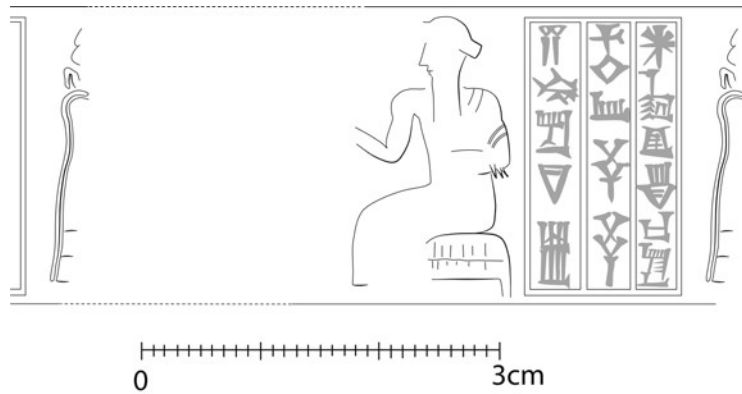
9 The earliest attestation of this figure in its canonic form is on a seal dating to Bur-Sîn of Isin (Legrain 1951, no. 540), who was a contemporary of Sumuel. A seal impression from a servant of Sumuel (from the art market, YBC 13113) shows a similar victorious king in an audience scene, also holding an unusual staff in his hand: Buchanan 1981, no. 753. A slightly earlier depiction of an early “victorious king” in a short skirt was impressed on a tablet dating to Abisarê, the predecessor of Sumuel (Blocher 1992a, no. 24). An impression dated to Šu-Sîn 3 shows perhaps a forerunner of this type in his short skirt (Mayr 2005, no. 591 D).

Šara temple administration that it was not necessary to mention his title, and that this was also the reason why his seal image was so exceptionally carefully and prominently impressed and not only the inscription. Indeed, a few bullae concerning the consignment of grain to the Šara temple mention a certain Ḫunnubum as the recipient but were sealed with his seal, thus pointing to the possibility that he was superior in rank.<sup>10</sup> Therefore we propose that Sîn-irībam was either a local ruler or a high-ranking temple administrator or priest. If our interpretation of the enthroned god as city-god Šara holds true, this would be an exciting match of the profession and seal imagery.

### Seal 17: Sîn-kāšid

Seal inscription: <sup>d</sup>EN.ZU-ka<sub>3</sub>-šī<sub>2</sub>-id | maš<sub>2</sub>-šu-gid<sub>2</sub>-gid<sub>2</sub> | dumu ḫa-da-ni-iš – “Sîn-kāšid, diviner, son of Ḫadāniš.”

This seal is already known from an impression on a bulla from the Šara temple (UmCT 2, Seal 8), but no figures had been visible then. The study of the seal image is based on Um 3518, 3533, 3882 (king), 3885 rev. (king), 3890 (king and goddess).



Seal 17, drawing; photos Um 3882 rev., Um 3890 rev.

<sup>10</sup> I thank Walther Sallaberger for pointing this out to me and for discussing this possibility with me.



## Seal image:

Height: 2.5 cm. Preserved length: 3.3 cm; reconstructed length: 5.5 cm.

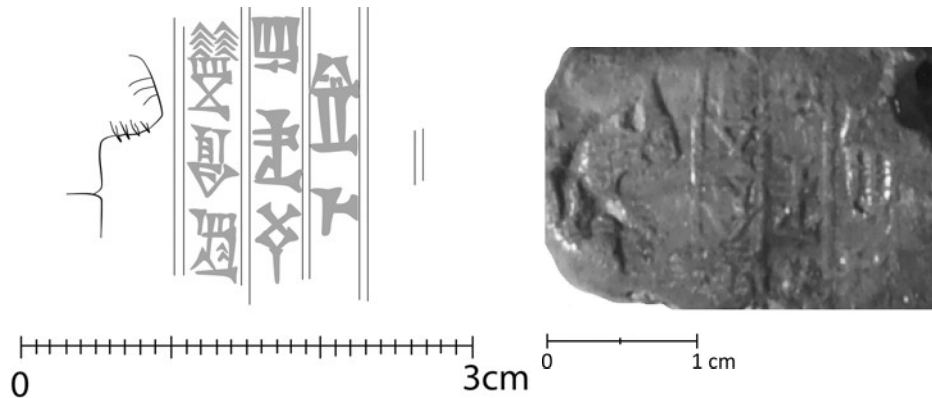
Description: Standard audience scene. On either side of the three-line inscription are the remains of the enthroned deified king on a padded stool and of the suppliant goddess (on Um 3890, below the white writing surface).

Craftsmanship: Normal.

**Seal 18:** *Sîn-muballit*

Seal inscription: <sup>d</sup>EN.ZU-mu-ba-li<sub>2</sub>-it | za-bar-dab | dumu e-ri-bu-ni | urdu<sub>2</sub> li-pi<sub>2</sub>-it-eš<sub>18</sub>-tar<sub>2</sub> – “*Sîn-muballit*, *zabardabbûm* (‘bronze-vessel holder’), son of Erībūni, servant of (king) Lipit-Eštar.” The seal owner was a servant of king Lipit-Eštar of Umma (Introduction, I.4.5) and a high-ranking official (I.6.2).

The study of the seal image is based on Um **3574** (figure).



Seal 18, drawing; photo Um 3574

## Seal image:

Preserved height: 2.0 cm. Preserved length: 2.3 cm.

Description: Probably a standard audience scene.

Few remains of the enthroned seated king. Behind his back the inscription of four lines. The seal must have been one of the largest within the corpus presented here.

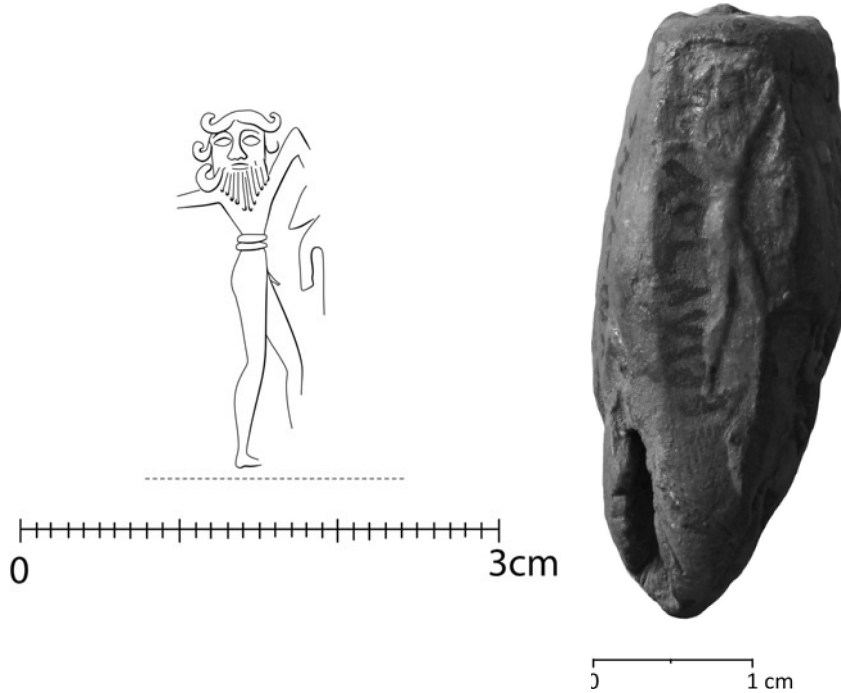
**Seal 19:** Sîn-nāšir (Ur III?)

Seal inscription: <sup>d</sup>EN.ZU-na-[š]i-[ir] | dumu <sup>d1</sup>nanna-[x] – “Sîn-nāšir, son of Nanna-[x].”

The study of the seal image is based on Um 4046 (u.e., lo.e.), the only bulla with this impression (see Introduction, I.9.2).

The bulla shows the impression of a seal legend on one edge and the impression of the *laḫmu* figure on another edge, but there is no proof that both were parts of the same seal.

Seal image:



Seal 19, drawing; photo Um 4046 lo.e.

Height: 2.4 cm. Preserved length: 1.0 cm.

Description: Remains of a slender *laḫmu* figure turning right, in combat with some other figure, which is not preserved. This ‘hairy hero’ (Zartner 2020) has an overly large face with a massive beard depicted *en face*, is wearing a girdle around his extremely slim waist and is characterized by overly long legs which are slightly in forward movement – typical elements for the earliest second-millennium depictions, in the tradition of Akkadian and Ur III contest scenes,<sup>11</sup> and different from the stiff normal-sized legs and normal-sized heads of the Old Babylonian period (e.g. Seal 20).

This seal of a person who is not qualified as a servant of someone is not showing the standard scene, but a contest scene. Due to the style of the hero, it could be earlier and dated to the 20<sup>th</sup> century or the Ur III period.

11 Cf. the seal of a servant of Išbi-erra of Isin: Blocher 1992a, 24–25, no. 9, Taf. Ib. Cf. Seals on Ur III Umma tablets: Mayr 2005, nos. 47 A, 88 A, 134 A, 328, 374 A, 878 A, 895 B. For similar depictions on Akkadian seals, e.g. Porada 1948, no. 268.