



# Von Syrien bis Georgien – durch die Steppen Vorderasiens

Festschrift für Felix Blocher  
anlässlich seines 65. Geburtstages

Herausgegeben von  
Michael Herles, Claudia Beuger,  
Jörg Becker und Simone Arnhold

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Studien zur Vorderasiatischen Archäologie  
Studies in Near and Middle Eastern Archaeology

Band 13

Herausgegeben von  
Ellen Rehm und  
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Zaphon  
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Illustration auf dem Einband: Blick in die Shiraki-Ebene (Georgien).  
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# The Robert Wilson Collection of Cylinder Seals

*Kai Kaniuth*

## Introduction

This paper presents five Mesopotamian cylinder seals kept at Aberdeen University Museum. They were collected 200 years ago by Dr. Robert Wilson in Babylon and brought to Scotland in the mid-1820s. Apart from the objects themselves, the context of their acquisition will be discussed. It is a particular pleasure to dedicate this small token to Felix Blocher, who chaperoned my first steps in Near Eastern Archaeology.<sup>1</sup>

Aberdeen University Museum curates several thousand ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian artefacts<sup>2</sup>. The core of its Near Eastern holdings consists of objects collected between April and June 1821 by Robert Wilson, M.D., during an overland journey from Aleppo to Basra. Robert Wilson (1787–1871)<sup>3</sup> was an archetypal early modern traveller, erudite, of independent means and with an unquenchable thirst for the knowledge gained from empirical observation. He had earned a

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<sup>1</sup> For their help in the preparation of this contribution I would like to thank Anne Löhnert, Adelheid Otto and Elisa Roßberger. The discussion of Old Babylonian seal motifs was greatly aided by the use of the ACAWAI-CS database (see <https://www.acawai-cs.gwi.uni-muenchen.de>).

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to the authorities of Aberdeen University Museum for permitting the study of this group of artefacts. The Aberdeen University Museum Collections can be accessed via <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/museums/collections/index.php> (last accessed 10 January 2020). A print catalogue of objects was compiled by Robert Reid in 1912, listing more than 1600 Egyptian artefacts or casts, while 50 entries relate to the Near East. Both figures record only a fraction of the holdings. An overview of Egyptian collections in Scotland puts the Aberdeen University Museum holdings at more than 4000 (<https://www.nms.ac.uk/national-international/sharing-collections/national-projects/egyptian-collections/north-east-ae-collections/>; accessed 20 May 2020). No comparable figures exist for Near Eastern artefacts yet.

<sup>3</sup> Not to be confused with his contemporaries General Sir Robert T. Wilson (1777–1849), a distinguished participant and chronicler of the Napoleonic Wars, and the Rev. Robert Wilson, A.M., D.D. (1795–1858), author of an 1822 description of Aberdeen.

small fortune during his time as surgeon in the service of the East India Company (to which some trading in opium may have contributed) which enabled him to undertake extensive travels in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. The acquisition of curiosities appears a favourite pastime *en route*, with the number of objects in his possession going into the thousands.<sup>4</sup> This way of cultural and physical appropriation was typical of an age – before the invention of photography – when insight into the foreign was sought primarily through objects collected, ordered and displayed in a true antiquarian spirit.

Between 1805, the first of five trips to India in the East India Company's service (not counting one shipwrecking off the English coast) and 1826 – the date of his final return from the “Orient” – Wilson spent no less than 180 months abroad from home, mostly on board of Company ships or on the Indian subcontinent. After the conclusion of his great oriental journey he continued his lifestyle in tempered form, making excursions to the Iberian Peninsula and Scandinavia until the age of 68, when he undertook his last trip to continental Europe. Following his death and the endowment of his large private collection to Marischal College<sup>5</sup>, Wilson was all but forgotten outside Aberdeen and is not considered a major protagonist in Ancient Near Eastern historiography since he never published any of his copious notes<sup>6</sup>.

### The travel narrative

Wilson's account of his great overland trip to India is impressionistic and enriched by numerous ethnographic and historical annotations. His manuscripts follow the mandatory journal form of 18<sup>th</sup> century travel accounts, developed over the preceding two-hundred years in apodemic literature and instructions.<sup>7</sup> Compared to

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<sup>4</sup> The former Wilson collection within the Museum comprises 579 objects according to the online catalogue and 33 manuscripts (curated by the University of Aberdeen Special Collections): MS. 411–443 (travel journals and other manuscripts). Further, major additions to the museum are owed to Wilson Fund contributions to the cost of excavations by Garstang at Jericho and Woolley at Ur.

<sup>5</sup> Marischal College, founded in 1593, was merged with King's College, Aberdeen, to form the University of Aberdeen in 1860. Wilson's bequest, initially called the Wilson Museum of Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology, and, later, the Wilson Archaeological Studio, was united with the other collections of both universities in the Aberdeen University Anthropological Museum (Reid 1912), which in 1990 reverted back to the name of Marischal Museum. The Wilson endowment included a library (catalogued in MS 443) and some money to establish a travelling scholarship.

<sup>6</sup> The bibliography on Wilson is, accordingly, short: Hargreaves 1970; Hunt 1982; Watt 1995; 1998; 2010; Kaniuth 2012; Stocker 2014. Mention of his bequest was made in the context of Reid's (1912) publication of the Aberdeen Egyptian collections.

<sup>7</sup> Travel writing and the curiosity feeding it (Leask 2002; Stagl 2002) were important elements in the development of the early modern scientific disciplines (nicely illustrated by the image of a ship returning home on the frontispiece of Bacon's *Novum Organon*). On

other travelogues of the time (Kinneir 1813; 1818; Morier 1812; 1818; Ker Porter 1821/22; Keppel 1827 etc.) his notes place less emphasis on primary observation and the verification of historical sources. While Wilson is at pains to stress his acquaintance with the sources (MS 425; Watt 1995, 347), he eventually did not pursue a publication. A practical man rather than one of letters, as his slightly forced style of writing indicates, Wilson only finished transcribing his diaries in the 1830s, more than a decade after his exploits (Kaniuth 2012, 265). He may have been deterred by the increasingly critical reception of much current travel writing in the second quarter of the century: The great days of the scientific travelogue, from 1775 until 1825, were over by the time of his return to Scotland (Brown 1936, 73–77).<sup>8</sup> Literary qualities became more important in travel writing, which had bifurcated into a strictly professional, scientific and another, more impressionistic, picturesque or “romantic” branch (Leask 2002). The latter was not Robert Wilson’s game. There is an audience implicit in the prolegomena of his work and Wilson took measurements of the width and depth of streams, and recorded rivers’ flow rates, thereby affirming his scientific aspirations. His will contained detailed instructions for travellers funded by his endowment and the instruments to be taken along would have graced any early-19<sup>th</sup> century scientific expedition. On the other hand, certain inaccuracies in his descriptions make it plain, that there was a certain tension *vis-à-vis* the neutral observer’s stance and the rigorous programme of meticulous observation it implied.

Wilson’s journey from Aleppo to Basra is described in MS 419. The manuscript consists of 347 pages and an accompanying map of Upper Mesopotamia (covering 35°–39° N / 35°–44° E), drawn by G. Smith. Some sheets bear the watermark ‘Robert Weir 1830’, narrowing the date of the clean copy.

### The Mesopotamian journey

The sequence of events in the spring of 1821 is not easy to follow from Wilson’s diaries. Dates are rarely noted in his manuscripts, so letters and especially the notes left by his travel companion John Hyde are invaluable to reconstruct the pair’s itinerary.<sup>9</sup> It is not clear when the two had decided to tackle the overland

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the *ars apodemica* and its impact on travel practice see the works by Stagl (1983; 2019), Collini / Vannoni 2005 and, most recently, McGeough 2015.

<sup>8</sup> By the 1820s, the range of uncharted territories had diminished dramatically, and stock was being taken of the massive production of previous ages in multi-volume oeuvres (see, for example, Kerr 1811–1824 and Murray 1820 for Asia). As the *Eclectic Review* noted in 1824 (XXI, 306–307): “No one can now pretend to have seen the world who has not made one of a party of pleasure up the Nile or taken a ride on camel back in the Syrian desert”.

<sup>9</sup> John Hyde is thought to be a merchant from Manchester whose aims for journeying through the East remain opaque. In Egypt, he was introduced to dignitaries as an “Englishman travelling for his amusement” (Ree 2016, 13). His travel papers are now held by the British Library (Add. MS. 42102–42108). In Paris, Hyde had met William Rae Wilson

journey together. Wilson appears to have considered Hyde a mere follower in his quest for antiquities, and at times a liability, claiming a lead role in all organizational matters for himself (MS 419, 3–4; Kaniuth 2012, 267). While Wilson is more informative on the social side of their partnership, it is Hyde whose notebooks offer precise travel dates. The itinerary and residence times are shown on Farbtafel 3.

On 11 April 1821 Wilson and Hyde departed from Aleppo with a caravan comprising no less than 300 horses for Antep, Urfa, Mardin and Mosul, from where they planned to descend on the Tigris to Basra. The timing for embarking on the overland route to India was abysmal. Shortly before the war with Russia internal conflicts shook the Ottoman Empire. In Northern Mesopotamia power was wielded by local dynasts, often of Kurdish descent, who acted out their own rivalries. In March 1821, an insurrection had broken out in Greece, leading in turn to reprisals against the Sultan's Christian subjects, of which the travellers learned *en route*. Adding to this were the growing tensions with Iran: The execution of the Iranian-backed Sadiq Pasha, claimant to the position of Pasha of Baghdad, was finally answered with an attack by troops under the command of Crown Prince Abbas Mirza on the eastern provinces of Van, Kars and Erzurum in September 1821.

At Antep, they passed the camp of the Pasha of Maraş, who had for three months besieged the city (MS 419, 23–26). Beer (Birecik) was reached on 17 April, and Urfa four days later (all dates after Hyde, Brit.Lib. Add.MS 42103). They found the city in a state of turmoil, with factions fighting for control. Wilson proudly relates how he faced the danger, visiting the citadel and the Ibrahim el-Khalil mosque. His thirst for adventure apparently fuelled, Wilson then split company with the caravan, negotiating his way via Harran to Mardin, only accompanied by a local guide. After a wound in the thigh, capture by Kurdish tribes and a narrow escape from his hosts, he rejoined the caravan and Hyde just before entering Mardin on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May. There, Wilson claims to have avoided with difficulty the implication in an interreligious murder plot.<sup>10</sup> After four days they descended into the Mesopotamian plain. Travelling via Dara, where Wilson gathered up an antique marble zodiac (ABDUA:61887), and Nuseybin they reached Mosul on 11 May 1821. From here, the two accounts diverge. Wilson claims three

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(1772–1849), who aided greatly in the organization of his trip and with whom he left from Marseilles on 26 October 1818 for Alexandria (British Library Add. MS 42102, f.19; Wilson 1823, 27). After extensive travels in Egypt and the Holy Land, Hyde arrived in Aleppo on 8 April 1821.

<sup>10</sup> The name of their host and purported instigator of the plot, Michel Ibn-Shaade, is confirmed by Hyde (Brit.Lib. Add.MS 42103, f. 93 obv.). According to Wilson (MS 419, 112–123) Ibn-Shaade suggested to poison Muslim dignitaries in revenge for the particularly harsh treatment of Christians in the city – with poison to be supplied by the Doctor (Kaniuth 2012, 269).



weeks of survey at Nineveh and a trip to Akhlat on the northern shores of Lake Van (MS 419, 215–252), itself a trip that would have taken no less than two weeks. Hyde's notes make it clear that the pair left Mosul already on 19 May. What is more, Hyde refers to only four trips to Nineveh during this time, on the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> (Brit. Lib. Add. MS 42103, 93 rev.). The journey downriver in a raft took them to Nimrud (which they visited), past Ashur, Tikrit and Samarra to Baghdad, where they arrived on 24 May. This sequence of events, and the onward journey to Hilleh on 28 May, is vindicated by Honoré Vidal, interpreter at the French consulate, who accompanied the two Britons to Babylon and whose dates for the week from May 24 until 1 June are in perfect agreement with Hyde's (Vidal 1822, 70–71). It is therefore impossible that Wilson made a return trip from Mosul to Lake Van, and his description of his exploits and investigations at Nineveh are at least exaggerated.<sup>11</sup> On 31 May, all three went to Borsippa, and on the following day continued to Babylon. The reference points for both Wilson's and Vidal's accounts of the ruins are Claudius James Rich's memoirs and on the major controversy between Rich and James Rennell on the topography of Babylon, Wilson squarely sides with the former.<sup>12</sup> In Wilson's manuscript, the group first targets the Mujelibé,

*the most unsatisfactory relic, of the olden time I have ever met with. The measurement of its different parts stands thus: The north, in feet, 689 – the East 621 – the South 700 – the west 625. In all 2638 feet<sup>13</sup>. The greatest height, about 140 feet including the obliquity, which may lessen its perpendicular height to 120 or 118 ft; but the western side is some 25 feet lower, and has been much defaced by time, and spoliation. The latter is still going on rapidly – 100 bricks selling for two piastres ... (MS 419, f. 296)*

before turning their attention to the Kasr, summing up their results thus:

*That the whole is most unquestionably of Babylonish [sic] origin, there cannot be a doubt, from the Cuneiform inscriptions, being found on the materials, and probably before the period of Xerxes invasion. ... There was no difficulty in getting people to dig here, as they were already employed, in carrying away the bricks to embark them on the river for Hillah; and I got some rather curious articles, such as pateras of blue and green glazing – the face of a woman in clay – a sort of brick seal with letters upon it –*

<sup>11</sup> There is no need, however, to doubt events such as the visit to the Damlamaje well, or the purchase of some stamp seals from villagers at Nebi Yunus and Kujuncik.

<sup>12</sup> Rennell was of course wrong in assuming that the Birs Nimrud was a natural mound (Rennell 1817, 259–260), but he proved right in disassociating the site from Babylon. Since the expedition of Jules Oppert (1859) it has been securely identified with Borsippa (pace Rich 1818b, 44–45).

<sup>13</sup> These measurements are identical to the ones related by Vidal (1822, 79).

*curious bits of glass, and brass instruments – with an agate seal [299] or cylinder, very prettily engraved, having human figures, and a cunieforn inscription, upon it. Some parts of the rubbish are curiously striated, as if washed by the sea, where I found a part of a stone sarcophagus, and a square mass of marble, as if it had formed the pedestal to some statue. (MS 419, f. 298–299)*

At Borsippa, measurements diverge only slightly from Rich's<sup>14</sup> but his disappointment is clear, when he sees the perfect pyramidal form compromised by the Ezida temple at the *ziqqurra*'s eastern base. Also, he is doubtful whether the structure could be reconstructed to the height required for the "Tower of Belus" proper. After some digging at the flanks of the Birs, they turned their attention on the Ibrahim al-Khalil mound:

*Long and laborious was my research after antiquities at Birs Nimroud. My Arab companions at first were only lookers on, but when they saw Hyde, myself, Johannes, and Joseppe working with our adze sort of shovels, they laughed heartily at us, but ultimately worked most willingly although without much success. We were at first directed to the great triangular mound, where there was an opening near one of the Koubbes that promised fair for antiquities; but we literally got nothing that was worth carrying away; and a corroded bronze bust, about nine inches high, and weighing 4 lbs, which we beheaded in the act of digging, is all that I rescued from oblivion. It was found at the eastern termination of the mound and is unlike any image I ever saw. A collar of five rows has ornamented the neck, and breast. The back of the head is wanting, but the ears project an immense way out, like Bengale Children's, so mutilated that it is impossible to conjecture, whether it had been a Chaldaean Idol, or a human likeness. One however treasures any relic from such a place, and it commanded my special care, along with a black basaltic sort of stone, and a very perfect brick, with a septilinear inscription on its face. I was also fortunate in procuring some curious cylinders composed of black paste, in which antimony seems to play a part. They are from a ½ to 3 inches in length<sup>15</sup>, and have strange figures engraved upon them. (MS 419, f. 309–310).*

6 June saw them back in Baghdad. The onward journey on the river to Basra is not precisely datable but must have taken place later in the same month. In Basra, Rich convinced him to curb his ambition of retracing Alexander's route to Samarkand, and Wilson instead boarded a boat bound for India, breaking the journey in

<sup>14</sup> Wilson notes a circumference of 2460 ft (compared to 762 ft in Rich 1818a, 36) at a height of 229 ft (against Rich's 235 ft).

<sup>15</sup> These measurements exactly conform to the sizes related by Rich (1818b, 57). None of the cylinder seals Wilson owned exceeded 30 mm in height.

Bushehr for a two-week excursion to Shiraz and Persepolis, where his *imitatio Alexandri* found expression in the deprecation of Royal Grave VI.<sup>16</sup>

***The identification of the seal cylinders***

Apart from their mention in MS 419, there are several other sources relating to Wilson's Babylonian cylinder seals:<sup>17</sup>

- I. An undated document is held in the Aberdeen Museum, entitled "List of Antiquities Collected by Robert Wilson, Esq.". This small booklet lists, in Wilson's own hand, artefacts in his possession with their provenance. An introductory note cautions the reader that "this is by no means a correct list as many of the articles have been abstracted. RW [Robert Wilson]". The list is not dated. It contains mostly Egyptian, but also some Mesopotamian artefacts. The mention of drawers in which several of them were kept suggests, that this is an inventory of the private collection.
  1. "2 seals or amulets of agate found at D.to" (f. 10) – The context of these discoveries are objects "dug from the great tumulus at Nineveh".
  2. "5 cylinders found among the ruins of Babylon" (f. 20) – listed among objects from Nubia, India, Ctesiphon, the Arbil Plain and Nimrud. Since Wilson considered the mounds of Borsippa part of (greater) Babylon (s. above), he most certainly referred to the pieces mentioned in MS 419.
- II. Also inscribed in Wilson's hand is a small wooden box, ABDUA 63432 (Farbtafel 4), containing plaster casts of 14 seals: "Antiques found at Thebes Nineveh Babylon & Ctesiphon by Robt. Wilson". Impressions of five Near Eastern pieces are affixed in the upper three rows of the box.
- III. Reid's Illustrated Catalogue of the Anthropological Museum, University of Aberdeen of 1912 contains the following seal cylinders:
  1. p. 149 (from Egypt): "978. Cylinder, inscribed with spiral designs, in glazed steatite. Fine example of Middle Kingdom work and design. L. 50, D. 12. XII<sup>th</sup> dynasty. – Grant Bey Collection."
  2. p. 154 (from North Africa): "1038. Cylinder, Babylonian, in serpentine. Inscribed with representation of struggle between Merodach and the dragon of Chaos. Cylinders such as this have been found in Egypt in tombs of the Old Kingdom, but are rare. L. 25, D. 12. – Grant Bey Collection."
  3. p. 208 (from Asia): "Seal-cylinders, five, Assyrian, engraved with hu-

<sup>16</sup> This incident has been discussed in Kaniuth 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Several more seals or gemstones are mentioned from Nineveh (MS 419, f. 207), but these are mostly Hellenistic in date (ABDUA 59794–59796, Reid 1912, 207 nos. 13–15). A single Neo-Babylonian stamp seal, famous for its Cypriot inscription, ABDUA 59799, has already been discussed (Reid 1912, 208 no. 18; Masson 1961, no. 353 fig. 109).

man figures and inscriptions. One in chalcedony. L. 24, B. 13. Two in iron ore. L. 20, B. 12, and L. 27, B. 20. Two in jasper. L. 18, B. 9. Babylon. – Wilson Collection.”

Again, these five (of which four are apparently identical in material and size) must be the same as the ones previously referred to (under I.2).

IV. The online catalogue of Aberdeen University Museum contains the following five entries for cylinder seals formerly in the possession of Wilson:

1. ABDUA 59800 — Seal-cylinder — Asia, Mesopotamia, Babylon — Seal-Cylinder, this one in chalcedony, engraved with human figures and inscriptions.
2. ABDUA 59801 — Seal-cylinder — Asia, Mesopotamia, Assyria, Babylon — Seal-Cylinder, engraved with human figures.
3. ABDUA 59802 — Seal-cylinder — Asia, Mesopotamia, Assyria, Babylon — Seal-Cylinder, engraved with human figures.
4. ABDUA 59803 — Seal-cylinder — Asia, Mesopotamia, Assyria, Babylon — Seal-Cylinder, engraved with human figures.
5. ABDUA 59804 — Seal-cylinder — Asia, Mesopotamia, Assyria, Babylon — Seal-Cylinder, engraved with human figures.

It is apparent that documents II and III – Wilson’s own list and casts of antiquities – were the basis for entering the provenance of his five Babylonian cylinder seals in all subsequent catalogues. When compiling his inventory, Reid measured the five pieces, which were at a later stage incorporated into the museum database and given the inventory numbers ABDUA 59800–59804.

In March 2016, the seals were studied by this author. S. Speck (Heidelberg University) used a purpose-built automatic rotating device and SFM photogrammetry to create 3D models of the entire collection at our disposal.<sup>18</sup> As can be seen below, the results are impressive, but the weakness of the method when dealing with reflecting surfaces or transparent objects meant, that in one case photographs of the seal impression produced better results and will be used here. The seals were contained in small cardboard boxes. Two boxes were marked with the numbers 19–3 and 19–4, referring to the entries in Reid’s catalogue (1912, 208).

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<sup>18</sup> The method is succinctly described in Reh / Seitz / Speck 2016.

**The Near Eastern Cylinder Seals of the Wilson Collection (see Farbtafel 5)**

ABDUA 59800

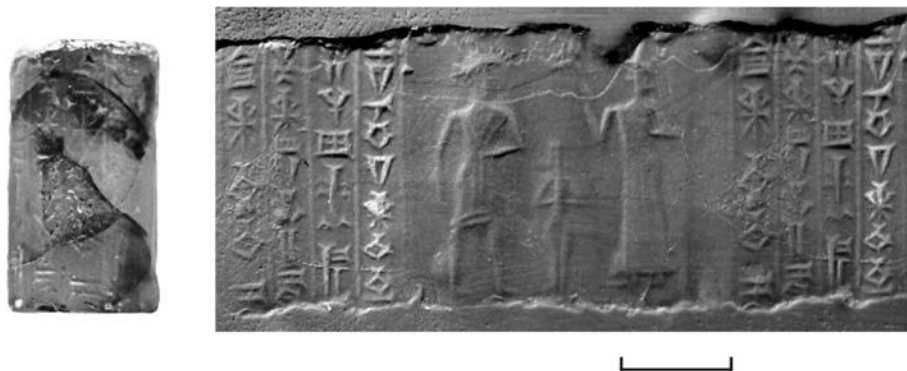


Fig. 1: ABDUA 59800. Scale = 1 cm

The seal measures 24,4 mm in height and 13,6 mm in diameter. It had been made from translucent, veined stone, probably chalcedony. Due to the optical qualities of the stone, the 3D documentation with the rotating device did not produce the desired results. The perforation is almost straight. The cylinders' ends are chipped. An Old Babylonian two-figure scene is complemented by a four-line seal legend.

On the left we recognize the 'king with a mace' in short dress and brimmed cap, an element originally derived from royal iconography.<sup>19</sup> On the right, a deity in long dress and with a pointed hat raises one arm towards the king. Both their dresses are decorated with faint vertical striations. Between them stands a naked woman with her hands folded.<sup>20</sup> The king wears a rather unusual skirt with straight hem.<sup>21</sup> The deity with its pointed hat already foretells Kassite representations of the major deities and points to a Late Old Babylonian date.<sup>22</sup> The naked woman has her primary distribution in the reigns of Sin-muballit and Hammurabi, but is attested from Apil-Sin until Ammi-saduqa.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Blocher 1992b, 65–66.

<sup>20</sup> For the composition cf. Delaporte 1923, pl. 113 figs. 1 (= al-Gailani 1988, no. 195g – reign of Sin-muballit). 2 (Rim-Sin); Collon 1986, nos. 506–509.

<sup>21</sup> Attested on slightly later seals – Colbow 1995, no. 7.1 (on YBC 6069, dated to the reign of Samsu-iluna); Colbow 2002, nos. 8,3 (Abi-ešuh). 80,2 (Ammi-ditana). 249,1 (Ammi-saduqa). Comparable also Porada 1948, nos. 469E–471; Collon 1986, no. 442.

<sup>22</sup> Collon 1986, no. 506. 511. 515; Colbow 2002, no. 201,1 (Ammi-saduqa).

<sup>23</sup> Blocher 1992b, no. 185 (Apil-Sin 5) and Colbow 2002, no. 395,3 (Ammi-saduqa 18). See also Blocher 1987. For her continuation into the Kassite period see Stiehler-Alegria 1996, nos. 149. 150 (and the discussion of this piece in Stiehler-Alegria / Hölscher 2002).

The seal legend is certainly original<sup>24</sup>:

1	<i>a-lí-me-ḫi-ir-<sup>d</sup>na-na-a</i>	Ali-meh̄ir-Nanaya
2	DUMU.MUNUS <i>lu-mu-ur</i>	daughter of Lumur
3	GEME <sub>2</sub> <sup>dr</sup> LUGAL-GU <sub>2</sub> <sup>1</sup> -DU <sub>8</sub> -A <sup>ki</sup>	servant of Lugal-gudua
4	<i>ù<sup>d</sup>na-na-a</i>	and of Nanaya.

The deities named in the inscription might give us a further clue as to the seal's provenance and date: Lugal-gudua (Nergal) is attested almost exclusively in Northern Babylonian sites<sup>25</sup>, he is the city god of Kutha, situated 50 km north-east of Borsippa. Nanaya, on the other hand, has her cult at Uruk, at least until it was relocated to Kiš in Late Old Babylonian times.<sup>26</sup> The mention of both deities in the inscription would therefore also fit best a historical situation not before the late years of Samsu-iluna.

#### ABDUA 59801



Fig. 2: ABDUA 59801. Scale = 1 cm

The seal measures 20,1 mm in height and 12,5 mm in diameter. It was cut from a homogenous dark stone. The seal bears a typical presentation scene with (from left to right) a devotee, led by an interceding deity and a major deity seated on a stool. The latter lifts a cup in her right hand. The scene terminates with a six-branched, undulating tree. Altogether, the style is rather cursory, with clear and deep incisions, and not many details are worked out. The devotee is bareheaded. The fringe of his long dress falls down to his ankles. The interceding deity wears a single-tiered horned crown and a girded long robe with simple frontal fringe. The seated deity also wears a simple horned crown. Its robe is worn over the left

<sup>24</sup> I am indebted to A. Löhnert for the reading of the legend.

<sup>25</sup> Stol 1987, 140–141; but see Richter 2004, 319 for a single reference to Lugal-gudua from Warka.

<sup>26</sup> See Stol 1998 for Nanaya; for the movement of the cult cf. Pientka 2002, 195.

shoulder, the right appears free. Vertical striations on the upper body reference a flounced dress, but the lower part of the garment is plain, with a high fringe similar to the adorants'. The composition, dresses, the simple horned crowns and the pincer-like stylization of the trees' leaves and hands suggest a (very) Late Akkadian or Post-Akkadian date for this seal.<sup>27</sup> A Northern Babylonian provenance is most likely.

ABDUA 59802

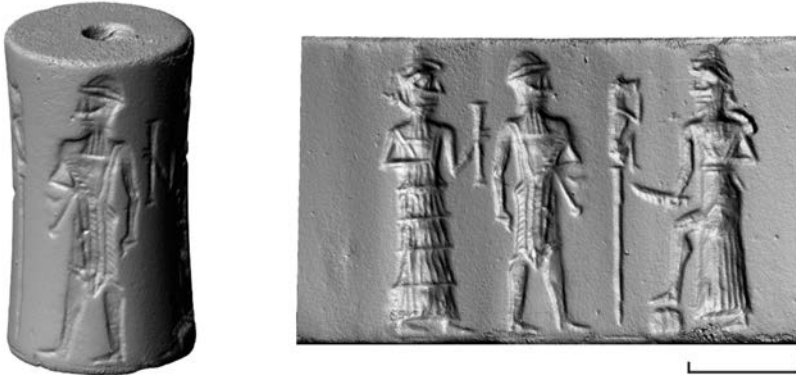


Fig. 3: ABDUA 59802. Scale = 1 cm

Made from a dark stone, probably hematite or goethite, this seal measures 27,3 × 15,4 mm. The central borehole is off-centre and was drilled from the two ends of the cylinder. The three-figure presentation scene consists of an interceding deity in flounced robe and the king with a mace, facing the god Šamaš to their right. Between them, a monkey is depicted squatting upon a waist-high staff. Between the two deities' backs there would have been room for a short (two-line) inscription. A typical Old Babylonian scene, there are some peculiarities which deserve mention: The interceding deity is not the omnipresent 'suppliant goddess', but a bearded (and therefore male) god with a baton, the divine messenger or vizier, Nin-šubur.<sup>28</sup> The king, in his typical kilt, a mace held tight in his left hand, and

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Collon 1982, nos. 148. 287. 288; VA 2141 (Moortgat 1940, no. 205; Boehmer 1965, no. 1470; Rohn 2011, no. 549); Boehmer 1965, nos. 305. 686 (for the trees and hands). 545; Collon 1982, nos. 288. 307. 309; Frankfort 1955, nos. 677 (As.32:201, see also Dittmann 1994, Abb. 2) from Houses IVa is the best fit from Ešnunna. The dating of Houses IVa has recently been affirmed as Late Akkadian by Gibson (2011, 71–72). For a discussion of the "Post-Akkadian B"-group see Boehmer 1971; Collon 1982, 109–127; Dittmann 1994.

<sup>28</sup> The "suppliant goddess" is invariably shown in Old Babylonian glyptic art with two hands raised. Only a handful of Old Babylonian seals (Collon 1986, no. 287 – BM 89844, with a long staff; no. 381 – BM 102543; Blocher 1992a, nos. 303 and 179 – both dated to

here with a straight, as opposed to wind-blown beard, is only in very rare cases paired with Šamaš.<sup>29</sup> Lastly, the monkey, one of the most popular animals on Old Babylonian seals, but in absolute terms a rather infrequent motif, is placed above a staff only in isolated instances, so this may be a fortuitous combination.<sup>30</sup> All comparanda listed suggest a provenance from Northern Babylonia and a date in the 19<sup>th</sup> c. BC.

#### ABDUA 59803



Fig. 4: ABDUA 59803. Scale = 1 cm

The seal measures 16 × 9 mm. It is made of a dark stone, probably hematite or goethite. The perforation was drilled from both sides. The scene features a row of three male persons walking towards the right, their forward hands raised, and the hind ones held across the body. There is no beginning or end to the scene (*Figurenband*). One appears to grasp a staff with knob, the next holds a long staff crowned by the crescent moon while in front of the third a knee-length crooked staff and a crescent moon are depicted. All wear knee-length garments, and round caps or hair.

The simplicity of the arrangement and the schematic rendering of the figures are not very diagnostic, and comparisons could be found from many regions and

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the reign of Apil-Sin; Colbow 2002, no. 39,1 – dated to Abi-ešuh) show a deity in interceding posture with a staff, compared to hundreds of “suppliant goddesses”. The deities with short staff are invariably labelled as male (*Gott*) in these publications, but none of the other seals clearly shows a bearded deity in flounced robe, as ABDUA 59801 does. Other Old Babylonian deities, however, identified with Nin-šubur through seal inscriptions and/or staffs, the sign of the vizier, appear usually male (Braun-Holzinger 1996, 302; for the iconography of the deity see Wiggermann 1985).

<sup>29</sup> The closest parallels are Blocher 1992a, no. 183 and 189, also from the reign of Apil-Sin; Collon 1986, nos. 317–322; Moortgat 1940, no. 384 (VA 2055).

<sup>30</sup> According to the ACAWAI-CS database 4,43 % of Old Babylonian seal images contain monkeys. Examples for monkeys on staffs are Collon 1986, no. 367; As. 3040 (rolled on four tables from the reigns of Bilalama and Ipiq-Adad I. – Frayne 1990, E.4.5.13.2001) and Porada 1948, no. 331 (a seal going back at least to the 19<sup>th</sup> c. BC).



periods.<sup>31</sup> The crooked staff, moon standard and crescent moon, however, are three symbols which appear together only on seals of the Old Babylonian period.

ABDUA 59804

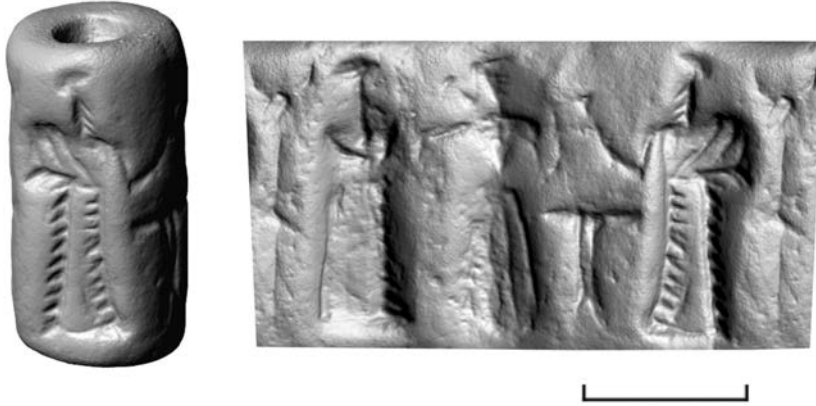


Fig. 5: ABDUA 59804. Scale = 1 cm

This seal of black stone (possibly another iron oxide) measures 18,4 mm in height and 9,4 mm in diameter. The piece is worn, and only the more deeply incised details of the dresses' tasselled fringes, heads, headdresses and extremities remain visible. It shows a presentation scene of two standing figures, a man and an interceding goddess, facing a third on the right. The leftmost person wears a long dress with a frontal fringe and a hemispherical cap. His left arm seems to be folded across the belly, and the right one raised to the right. He is led by the central figure, also in long dress, with very narrow waist, her hair tied up in a "fishtail". This feature is worn under a horned crown by deities in contemporary Anatolian seals. The rightmost, male figure raises a cup (?) in the extended right hand at shoulder height above a table or altar. The folds of his dress fall over the left shoulder and elbow, while two fringes are marked by deep incisions from the waist down. This figure has been given more space than either of the others, resulting in a slightly elongated right forearm. The entire composition is dominated by deep linear incisions, which are particularly noticeable in the rendering of the heads. A vertical element (a staff or standard), crowned by a half-moon terminates the scene.

The stylisation of the faces and the pronounced vertical lines of the garment fringes liken the piece to Old Assyrian seals of the "Cappadocian Group", as does the small size of less than 20 × 10 mm (Lassen 2014, 115 for her OA2-Group).<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> For example Porada 1948, nos. 551 (Old Babylonian). 892 (Provincial Old Babylonian); Keel-Leu / Tessier 1996, no. 120 (Isin-Larsa period); Frankfort 1955, nos. 725. 741 (Larsa period).

<sup>32</sup> Presentation scenes are well-attested in Cappadocian seals. The hemispherical caps, the gesture of the presentee and the headdress of the interceding goddess are further hallmarks

The documented period of use of Cappadocian seals is restricted to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. BC (Lassen 2014).

### Discussion

The small corpus of seals collected by Robert Wilson in 1821 is highly interesting. If one is to believe Wilson's description of events, he "procured" the five seals at Borsippa, either during or subsequent to his exploratory dig on the Ibrahim el-Khalil mound. This provenance would make them unique, since no other archaeological finds from that place dating back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC (or earlier) have yet been published. The city is, however, well attested at the time, starting with two texts (Isin Craft Archive, BIN IX, 391. 414. 415. 479) from the reign of Išbi-Erra of Isin (2017–1985 BC) (Mieroop 1987). In the 19<sup>th</sup> c. BC, Borsippa is frequently referred to in texts of the Babylon I dynasty (Charpin 2004; Frayne 1990). ABDUA 59800, 59802 and 59803 are well at home in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> c. BC. Chronologically within the same horizon, but from a distant place, is ABDUA 59804, an Anatolian seal of the Cappadocian / OA 2-Group. While rare, Cappadocian seals do appear in isolated instances on Cyprus, in the Southern Levant and in Babylonia, where they are considered proof for the wide-ranging commercial relations of the Assyrian traders (Collon 2008). The early date of ABDUA 59801, on the other hand, is surprising. Although the existence of a substantial Ur III construction at the site has been suggested by the excavators<sup>33</sup> and might be inferred from Old Babylonian literary sources<sup>34</sup> there is as yet no proof for a 3<sup>rd</sup>-millennium settlement at Borsippa. The same, to be sure, holds for Babylon itself.<sup>35</sup> What is even more intriguing is the fact that Wilson was in the possession of a group of more-or-less contemporaneous seals, which again lends some support to the possibility, that he excavated them from a single spot.

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of the group (see Porada 1948, 846–848 for some very typical pieces). The long moon standard is depicted on Buchanan 1966, 830 (see also Collon 2008, Fig. 1). At Kültepe, the sun and moon are more popular, to be sure. For offering tables of the type shown here see Porada 1948, no. 877E (note, however, that the feature is known also in Old Syrian Popular Style seals: Porter 2001, nos. 15. 27).

<sup>33</sup> Trenkwalder 2003 and Allinger-Csollich / Heinsch / Kunter 2010 both compare details of the earliest ziqqurat discovered at Borsippa to Ur III constructions. Sandra Heinsch has kindly informed me, that Old Akkadian and Old Babylonian seals (the latter in situ) were discovered in soundings at the northeastern flank of the Ibrahim el-Khalil mound (Heinsch in prep.).

<sup>34</sup> CKU 23 and 24 mention a governor of Bad-zi-ab-ba (a later writing for Borsippa; but see the doubtful comments by Michalowski 2011, 198–199).

<sup>35</sup> Here, the historical information is much more abundant: After its mention in a year name of the Old Akkadian king Šarkali-šarri governors are attested at Babylon throughout the Ur III period, from Šulgi to Ibbi-Sin (these early references are summarized in Lambert 2011).

## Summary

As with many old collections, there is no certainty in the contextualisation of the Wilson seals from Aberdeen University Museum. Despite that, the close reading of the Wilson journals has the potential to cast light not only on the circumstances of travel in early 19<sup>th</sup> c. AD Mesopotamia but can yet provide important information on the ancient history of the region. As the honoured knows best, museum finds may conceal just as exciting information as those taken from the field.

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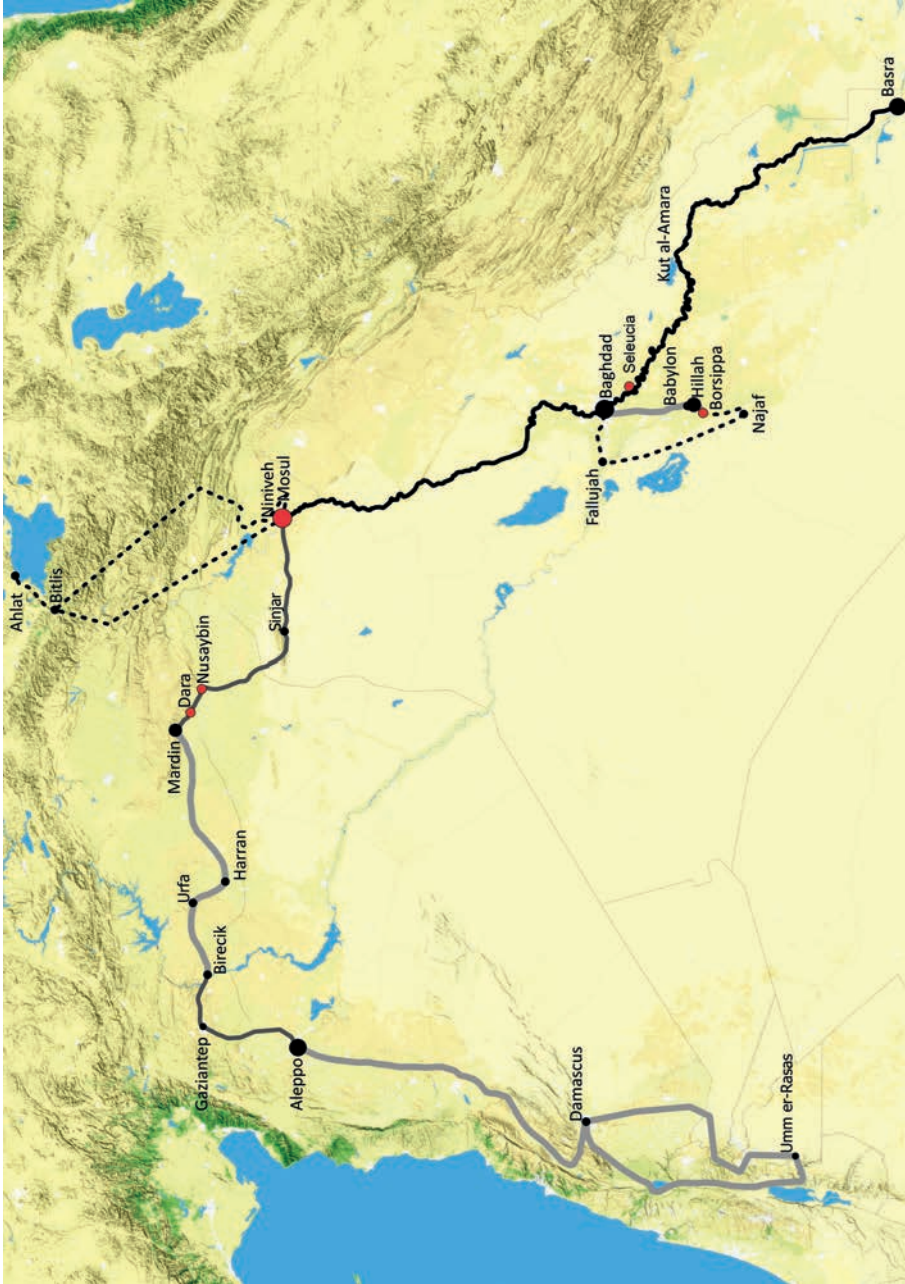
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Kai Kaniuth — The route of Robert Wilson and John Hyde in April and May 1821 (K. Herbst; base map: OSM). The dot size indicates the length of stay, the route shade the approximate travel speed.

Sites where antiquities were collected are marked in red.



Kai Kaniuth — ABDUA 63432. The casts of seals in the possession of Robert Wilson (courtesy Aberdeen University Museums). First row, from left: ABDUA 59802, ABDUA 59801; second row, from left: ABDUA 59803, ABDUA 59800; third row, on the left: ABDUA 59804.



ABDUA 59800



ABDUA 59801



ABDUA 59802



ABDUA 59803



ABDUA 59804

Kai Kaniuth — Photographs of the Wilson seals at 1,5 magnification  
(K. Kaniuth, arr. by L. Seyfried).