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# A Persian Period Bulla from Tel Qedesh, Israel, and Its Implications for Relations between Tyre and Nippur

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*In the 1999 season of excavation at Tel Qedesh, in northern Israel, a small, perfectly intact stamped bulla dating to the Persian period was found. The bulla originally sealed a papyrus document. Thanks to its excellent preservation, it is possible to identify a series of key aspects of the object: the motif and type of seal used to stamp it, the way the bulla was created, and even the way in which the original document was folded and tied. These details allow us to identify the probable origin and date of the seal and contextualize its associated bulla within the site of Qedesh. This evidence, in conjunction with information from the late 5th century B.C.E. Murašû archive in Nippur, allows us to suggest that the seal's user may have been a person with Tyrian ties—perhaps a member of the Tyrian diaspora—who acquired his seal in Nippur and traveled to Qedesh where he used it to seal a document.*

**Keywords:** Persian period; sealing practices; Murašû archive; Tyre; Exilic period; Tel Qedesh

*For Linda Bregstein, in admiration*

In this article, we present one small, exceptional object and deploy it as a springboard for reconstructing one facet of the social history of the Achaemenid empire in the Levant. The object—a perfectly intact stamped bulla that had originally sealed a papyrus document—was found at Tel Qedesh, in northern Israel. The bulla had been impressed by a stamp seal carved with a distinctive design: a stylized flower-tree with two opposing animals

propped on either side, and a symbol of a deity above. The motif is Neo-Babylonian; a small group of very similar seals were used by people who lived in Nippur in the later 5th century B.C.E. Most of these people belonged to or had associations with a *hadru*-association of Tyrians, one of many groups of Levantine exiles living in a diaspora far from home. All of the similar seal impressions from Nippur occur on clay tablets—yet, the Qedesh bulla sealed a papyrus document. Here we explore the constellation of details surrounding this find, its context, and the wider social and political circumstances. We conclude by offering a scenario that connects the bulla to a returning member of the Tyrian diaspora, one possible story within a wider saga of people on the move and at home in the Achaemenid Levant.

This article is in four parts. In the first, we describe the bulla itself, its motif and the discernable characteristics of the seal that stamped it, the specific manner by which it was attached to its papyrus document, and the conclusions that these details allow regarding origin, date, and personal ownership and connections. Several key components of the motif—including an unusual stylized central tree, opposing animals depicted with at least one bent foreleg, and a symbol of a deity—appear together only on seals used by agents

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and witnesses working for the Murašû firm. This firm was a well-connected business enterprise that operated between the years 454–404 B.C.E. in the city of Nippur in the Achaemenid satrapy of Babylonia. Further, the imagery links the seal's user to a small group of Tyrians living in Nippur in these years. In the second part, we present the archaeological remains and historical context of Tel Qedesh from the years of Achaemenid rule. The remains of the site reveal that it is most likely an establishment of the Tyrian royal house, administered by well-placed officials with close connections to the mother city. In the third part, we summarize the evidence for relations between Tyre and/or Tyrians and Nippur afforded by six previously little-studied Murašû tablets. In the fourth, concluding section, we pull these various threads together and consider how they shed light on the personal and political networks that continued to bind Tyrians, even across considerable distances, in the expansive world of the Achaemenid west. In the appendix, we present new drawings of all the seal impressions cited in this article, along with an explanation of how we assembled the images.

## The Bulla, Its Papyrus, and the Origin of the Seal Used to Stamp It

By Baruch Brandl

### The Bulla (Figs. 1, 2)

Registration Number K99 1002 (= K99 BL1247)<sup>1</sup>

**Findspot.** The bulla was found in a Byzantine-period pit (Area WB 3.1, Locus WB 31024, basket WB 3.1.097), far removed in time from its original use (for location of findspot see Fig. 13).<sup>2</sup> The pit was located at the far southern end of the lower mound, about 17 m west of the northwestern corner of a large administrative building (see below). It was filled with stones and soil, probably debris from wall robbing somewhere in the vicinity.

**Material.** Well-levigated light brown clay (see further below, “A Note on the Bulla’s Petrology”).

**Preservation and Dimensions.** Complete. Length: 20 mm; width: 18 mm; thickness: 5–7 mm; weight: 2.81 grams.

<sup>1</sup> Herbert and Berlin 2003: 46, fig. 25; for additional publications see Berlin and Herbert 2012: 28; 2013a: 375–76 (photos of top and base), 2013b: 75–76 (photos of top and base).

<sup>2</sup> Herbert and Berlin 2003: 46, n. 21.

**Technical Details.** On the front is a single seal impression, along with fingerprints especially along the lower portion (Figs. 1a, 2a). On the back are the negatives of various elements (Figs. 1c, 2c). First are two different types of papyrus impressions: a checkerboard pattern on the center and right, and shallower horizontal lines on the left. Running horizontally across the lower half is a wide channel made by one thick string. Perpendicular and close to the right edge of that channel is a narrow channel, while close to its left edge appear two short narrow channels, all three made by thin string, along with four string holes. On all narrow sides—right, left, top, and bottom—are fingerprints (Figs. 1b, d–f; 2b, d–f). On both the right and left sides are two string holes (Figs. 1b, d; 2b, d).

**Motif.** The impression depicts a pair of rampant ibexes,<sup>3</sup> heads turned backwards, tautly muscled, standing on hind legs on either side of a “sacred tree” in the form of a tall stylized sunflower-like tree (von der Osten 1934: 108–9, no. 458). The sunflower-like tree is distinguished by two features: a single pair of downward-drooping leaves appearing about halfway down the trunk, just below the animals’ forelegs, one on each side; and a pair of leafless branches rising from either side of the base, each with a small forked end. The two ibexes are each depicted with only a single foreleg, bent downward and propped close to but not directly touching the tree. Hovering just above the tree, between the animals’ horns, is a horizontal, upward-pointing crescent moon. The ibexes and the tree rest on a thick, common groundline. When the bulla was impressed, finger pressure mainly in the lower portion disturbed the lower and outer edges of the motif (Figs. 1a, 2a). We reconstruct the original outline as a complete oval with an empty exergue below the groundline (Fig. 3a).

**Stamping Seal.** The seal used to stamp the bulla (Fig. 3b) was clearly made of hard or semihard stone, due to the crisply delineated details such as the animals’ musculature and their knobbed horns, as well as the concavity of the impression (Fig. 3a). The motif was made by drilling and linear engraving; the quality of workmanship is excellent. The seal’s shape would have been conical with a rounded top and a convex oval base,

<sup>3</sup> The animals can be identified as ibexes due to their elegant and distinctive horns, which are high and curve gently backward, with clearly delineated horizontal ribs (Castelló 2016: 89–91). The animals on similar seals in the Murašû archive have been identified variously as gazelle and goat, but neither of these have the specifically backward-curling horns seen on the Qedesh seal. On the invocation of ibex as a symbol of distant lands in Neo-Assyrian royal hunt scenes see Albenda 2008.



Fig. 1. Tel Qedesh bulla (K99 I002). (Photos by V. Naikhin; courtesy of the Tel Qedesh Expedition)

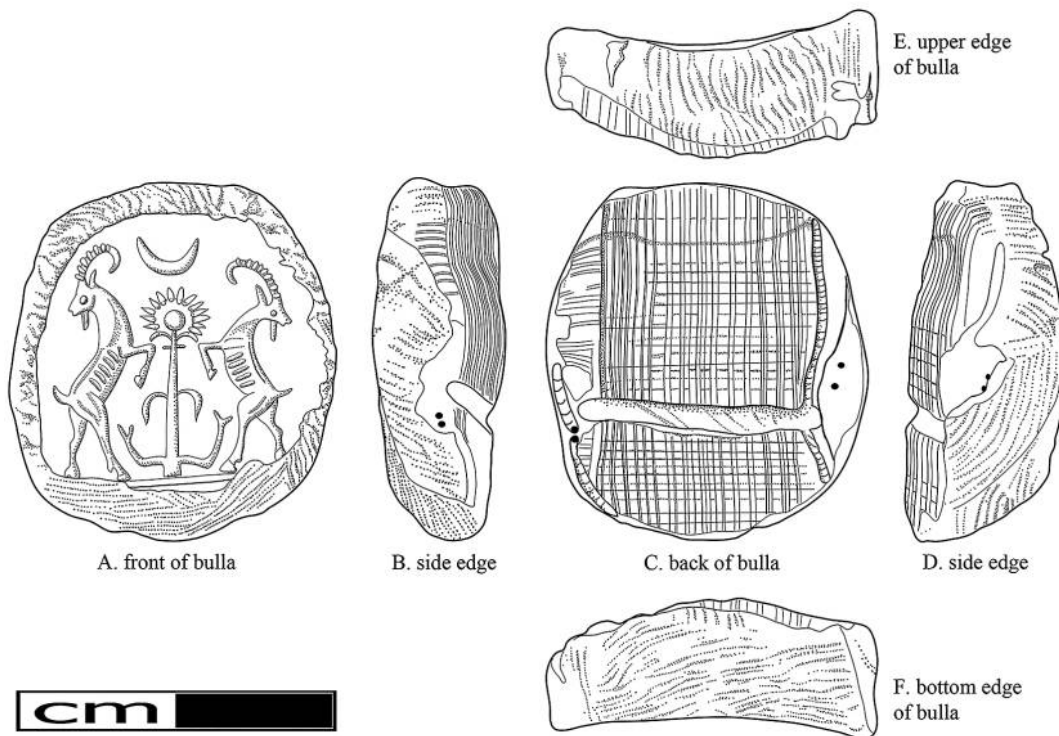


Fig. 2. Tel Qedesh bulla (K99 I002). (Drawings by C. Hersch; courtesy of the Tel Qedesh Expedition)





Fig. 3. Reconstruction drawing of Qedesh bulla impression and its stamping seal. (Drawings by C. Hersch; courtesy of the Tel Qedesh Expedition)

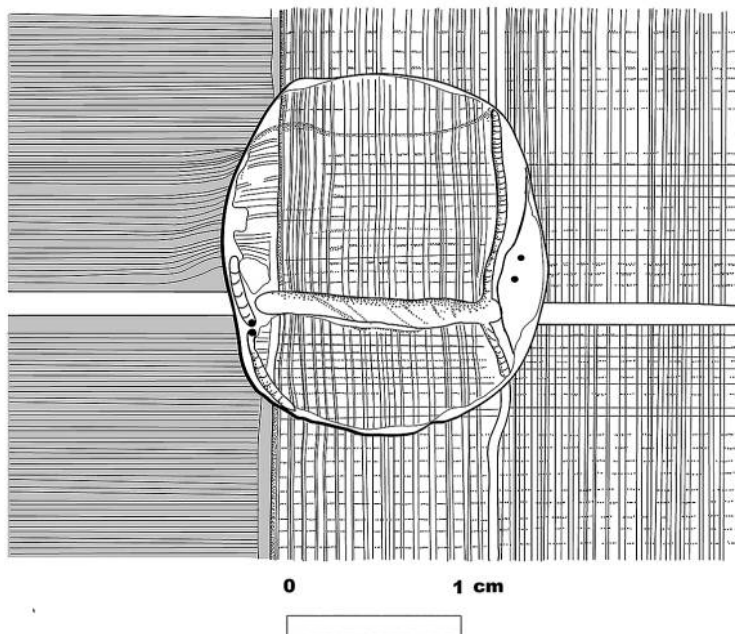
classified by Othmar Keel as Conoid Type V (1995: 101, 103 §254). On the basis of such seals' common proportions, the dimensions may be closely estimated as 19.4 mm long, 16.6 mm wide, and 21 mm high. The conoid stamp seal and its motif are Neo-Babylonian in form and style (see further below). In the modern state of Israel, Neo-Babylonian glyptic is attested from the end of the 7th through the end of the 5th century B.C.E. (Stern 1982: 196).

#### *A Note on the Bulla's Petrology, by Anastasia Shapiro*

In an attempt to determine the bulla's provenance, the clay was examined under a binocular microscope at 20× and 40× magnification. The fabric appears to be a calcareous, apparently foraminiferous, and slightly ferruginous marl, containing some quartz silt. It is well levigated with no visible inclusions. Possible sources for such clay exist in the vicinity of Tel Qedesh itself. Such a sequence occurs ca. 10 km to the north-northeast, at the eastern slope of the Ramim Ridge (Sneh and Weinberger 2014). Here, ferruginous shales and sandstones of the Lower

Cretaceous Hatira and Nabi Sa'id Formations crop out at the lower part of the slope, where they are overlain by calcareous sedimentary rocks of the Ein El Assad, Hidra, and Rama Formations. Another possible source is the Senonian chalk of the Ghareb Formation and marls of the Paleocene Taqiye Formation, both part of the Lower Cretaceous formations that appear to the north of the Manara cliffs, c. 2.5 km to the north-northeast of the site (Sneh and Weinberger 2014).

It is, of course, possible that the Qedesh bulla was formed and stamped at another site where clays of similar lithologies occur. It is worth noting, however, that these are not likely to have included cities located on the southern and central Lebanese coast—including the immediate vicinities of Tyre and Sidon. In these regions, the clays are characterized by foraminifers with iron oxides filling and coating, as well as the presence of *Amphiroa*, a fossil typical to this area. None of these elements could be identified in this bulla. Thus, the petrology strongly suggests it is a local artifact, and that the bulla used to secure the papyrus was impressed at or near Qedesh itself.



**Fig. 4.** Drawing of back of bulla with an imagined view of the papyrus, edges extended. The front (recto) side, in light gray, shows only fine horizontal lines. The reverse (verso) side shows the checkerboard pattern made by the papyrus's vertical and horizontal fibers. Note also the uneven wrinkling of the fibers, which were caused by pressure from a knot (on which see below, "The Strings"). (Drawing by C. Hersch; courtesy of the Tel Qedesh Expedition)

### *The Bulla and Its Papyrus: Technical Discussion*

The excellent condition of the bulla<sup>4</sup> and its many observable features enable us to reconstruct the method of sealing as well as the way in which the document itself was prepared. The manner in which the papyrus was folded and tied, as reconstructed from traces on the back of the bulla, supports a dating to the Persian period and adds complexity to our understanding of the artifact's use and significance.

**Folding the Papyrus.** The back of the bulla shows two sets of papyrus striations: a checkerboard pattern on the center and right side; and, on the left side, a lighter series of fine horizontal lines (Fig. 2c). These two patterns reflect the two sides of the papyrus itself. The checkerboard pattern derives from the reverse (verso) side of the sheet, which remained unsmoothed because it was not meant to be inscribed. The finer horizontal lines indicate the front (recto) side, which must have been lightly shaved or

rubbed horizontally so as to create a smooth surface on which to write.<sup>5</sup> The resulting horizontal striations also created guidelines that worked better for alphabetical scripts. Fig. 4 shows the back of the bulla with an imagined view of the papyrus document extended to either side in order to better illustrate these two sets of striations (the front [recto] side is in light grey).

The reflection of both the front (recto) and back (verso) sides of the papyrus indicates that the document was folded instead of rolled (Fig. 5). Had the document originally been rolled, only the back (verso) would have faced outward (surface *b* in Fig. 5, top). Further, since the back of the bulla came into contact with both sides of the papyrus, this must mean that the document was not folded evenly. It was probably folded into rough thirds, in such a way that the upper fold only partially covered the front (recto) face (surface *a* in Fig. 5, bottom).

The folding of a papyrus document in this way is not attested prior to the Persian period. Examination of the backs of bullae that sealed papyrus documents from Egypt from the Middle Kingdom up until the 26th Dynasty as well as bullae from Judah from the 8th–7th

<sup>4</sup> The bulla, as found, is so evenly fired yet without any trace of burning that we wonder if it was intentionally heated after its disconnection from the papyrus, in order to keep it for some sort of administrative purpose.

<sup>5</sup> On recto and verso, see Porten and Yardeni 1986: 11–23.

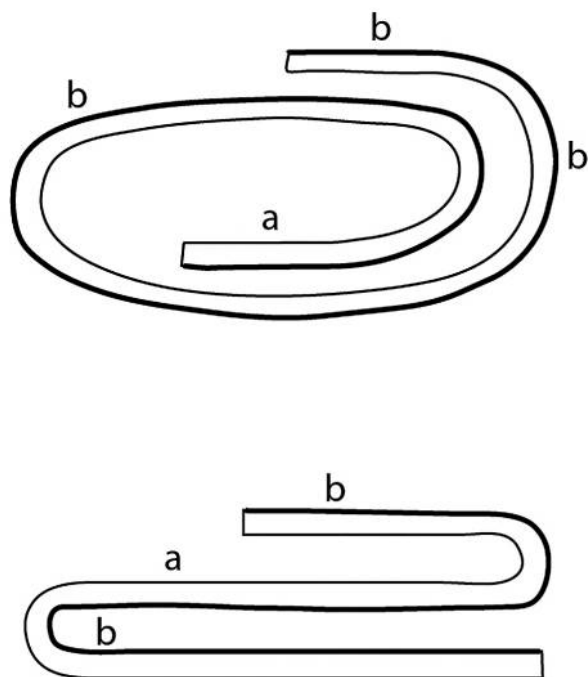


Fig. 5. Top: diagram of a rolled papyrus, in which only the back (verso, or *b* side) shows. Bottom: diagram of a folded papyrus, in which both the front and back (*a* and *b* sides) show. (Drawings by C. Hersch)

centuries (Iron Age IIB) show that all the documents sealed by these bullae were rolled.<sup>6</sup>

**The Strings.** The back of the bulla shows that the document was tied. The various channels and holes reflect two independent strings (Fig. 6a). String 1 is attested by the wide horizontal channel that runs across the lower half. This is the negative for a thick string that initially bound the document. Notably, there is no evidence along this channel for a knot; we can therefore surmise that the knot of the thick string lay beneath the papyrus, rather than under the bulla (Figs. 6a–b, 7). The reason for tying the thick string underneath was probably to preserve the sealing, which likely would have cracked if placed over the thick knot. Another clue to the existence and also placement of the knot may be seen in the slight convergence of both sets of papyrus striations towards the wide horizontal channel (Fig. 4). This “wrinkling” probably reflects pressure from the knot on the underside. A final indication of the presence of the thick underlying knot can be seen in the photograph of the

bullae’s back where the left side is slightly higher than the right (Fig. 1c).

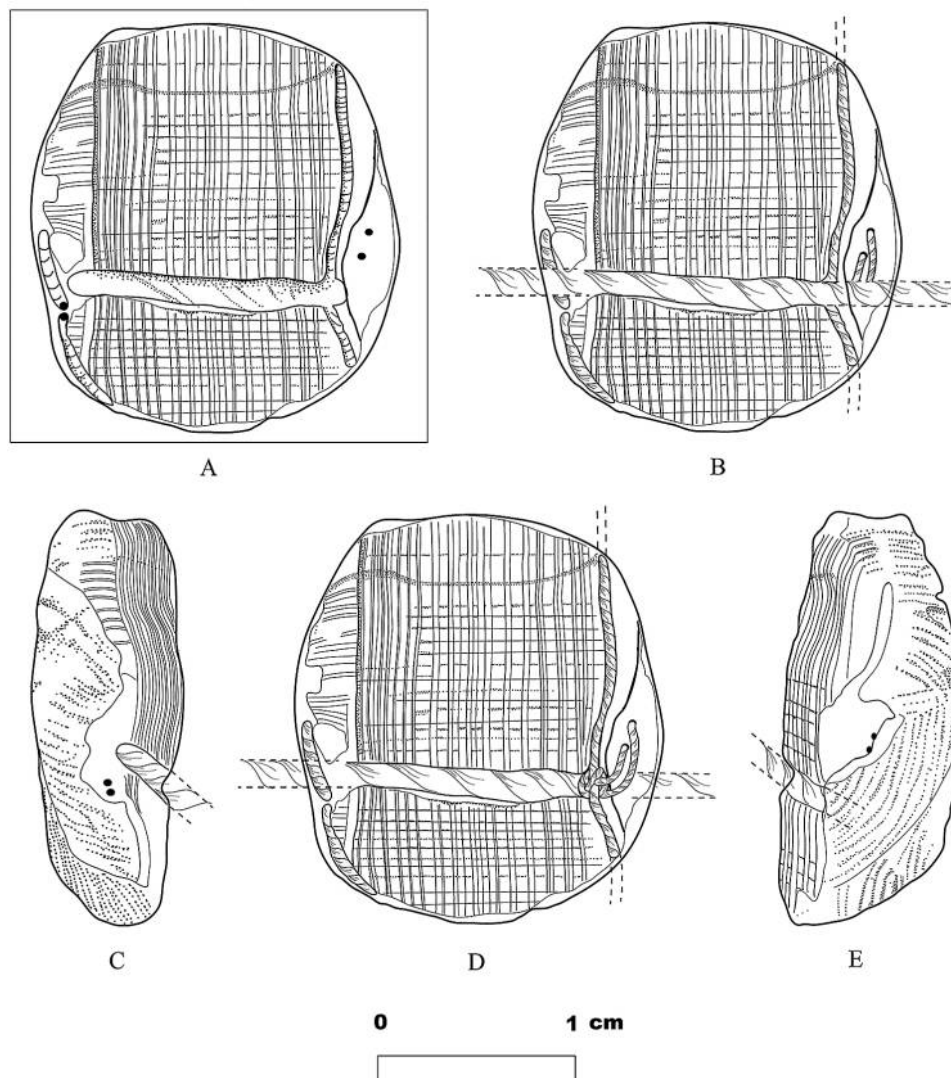
String 2, which was thinner, is attested by a series of narrow channels and small holes, also on the back of the bulla. On the left are two small holes and two short, thin channels extending above and below them. On the right are two more small holes, and two thin vertical channels which appear connected to, and also extend above and below, the wide horizontal channel. At the juncture of the wide channel and two thin vertical channels there is a small but pronounced cavity. The intersection of the wide and narrow channels and the cavity reflects the presence here of a knot made by twining the narrow string around the wide one (Fig. 6d).

The side views of the bulla provide additional information (Figs. 1b, d; 2b, d; 6c, e). First, along each side it is possible to see that clay was folded to make a thick lump. Within the “stratigraphy” of this lump, the thin channels and holes lie *beneath* the wide horizontal channel. After wrapping the thin string around the thick string to make the knot, the two ends of the thin string were embedded within the clay of the bulla, which must have then been folded over to secure them.

**Tying and Sealing the Papyrus.** All of the above information allows us to reconstruct the multi-step process involved in tying and sealing the papyrus (Fig. 8). First the document was folded in such a way that a small portion of the front (recto) face, meaning the side that was used for writing, lay exposed. Next it was bound horizontally by a thick string, which was knotted underneath the papyrus. Next, a thin string was placed vertically around the document, with the two ends looped around the thick string and tied in a knot (Fig. 8a; here we use “horizontal” and “vertical” according to the orientation of the papyrus lines as they appear on the back of the bulla). Once tied, a roughly rectangular strap of clay was placed over the upper, thin knot, leaving free the two ends of the thin strings on the lefthand side. This clay strap lay mostly over the top papyrus fold (the verso side), although a small portion also extended over the inner edge of the exposed, lower papyrus fold (the recto side) (Fig. 8b). The two free ends of the thin strings were then carried back across the clay, each extending beyond it, but bent in opposite directions (Fig. 8c). Next, the lower half of the clay was folded up and over, thus enclosing the two ends of thin string and their bent edges (Fig. 8d).<sup>7</sup> The clay was now effectively a lump placed over the thick string, encasing the ends of the thin string. The conical seal was then used to impress the upper face

<sup>6</sup> For a reconstruction of an Iron Age rolled papyrus whose edge is covering a lower layer, see Brandl 2014: 31, fig. 4.3. For folded papyri from Elephantine, see Sachau 1911: pl. 28; Cooney 1953: 125–26, pl. 21.

<sup>7</sup> For drawn reconstructions of the technical process by which this type of bulla was created, see Brandl 2000: 68, figs. 67.



**Fig. 6.** (a) Back of the bulla. (b–e) Reconstruction of the two strings: (b) shows the thick string on top of the thin string, and (d) shows the thin string knotted around the thick string. (Drawings by C. Hersch; courtesy of the Tel Qedesh Expedition)

of the lump, which the sealer held with his fingertips, applying pressure first on two opposing sides and then on the remaining two sides (**Fig. 8e**).<sup>8</sup> Finally, either in order to stabilize the bulla so as to lift the seal or just afterwards, the sealer applied additional finger pressure along the bottom, thereby erasing a small part of the motif's lower part (**Fig. 8f**).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> From the way the fingerprints appear on the upper and left sides, it seems that finger pressure was applied here during the actual stamping (**Figs. 1a, 2a**).

<sup>9</sup> For another example of this same technical process, see Brandl 2000: 68, figs. 6–7.

Other instances of this same, quite elaborate six-step process for securing a document are known. The earliest evidence comes from a “folded” bulla found in an eighth century B.C.E. context at Tel ‘Eton (Faust and Eshel 2012; Brandl 2014: 31, n. 6), and another, also dating to the Iron Age and perhaps 8th century B.C.E. as well, from Maresha (Brandl 2014). Examples from 7th century B.C.E. contexts have been found in Jerusalem (City of David), Beth Zur, and Lachish (Brandl 2000). Another such papyrus sealing, dating from the Persian period and made using a cylinder seal, comes from Samaria (Crowfoot 1957: 88, pl. 15:42). Two examples of “folded” bullae reflecting this process have been found



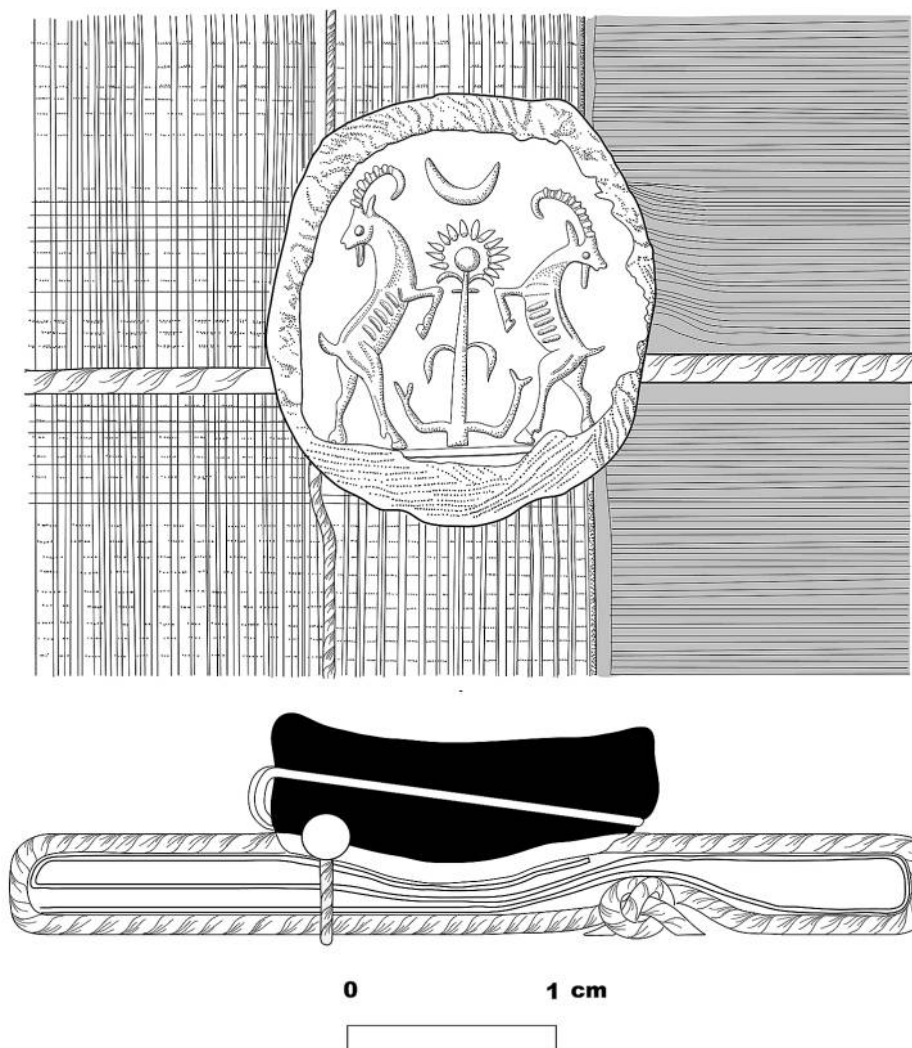


Fig. 7. Reconstruction of bulla on top of the folded papyrus, with cross-section showing the folded papyrus bound by two strings. The thick string is tied horizontally and knotted beneath the papyrus; the thin string is tied vertically and knotted above. The clay of the bulla was folded over the thin string's free ends. Note the slight wrinkling of the papyrus folds, caused by the pressure of the lower knot. (Drawings by C. Hersch)

in Egypt, one dating to the 26th (Saite) Dynasty (Zivie 1978) and one to the 27th Dynasty, the period of Persian domination, from Tell el-Dab'a<sup>10</sup> (Collon and Lehmann 2011: 69–70, fig. 3). A final, Mesopotamian example of a bulla of this type is said to come from an archive at Ishân Hafudh, a tell located south of Nippur (Ehrenberg 2000: 309, 320, 342, no. 49, pl. 13).

<sup>10</sup> This bulla was stamped by a conoid stamp seal bearing the motif of two gazelles or antelopes and a palm tree.

It is reasonable to ask why someone engaged in such a complex process of preparing and folding clay to create such bullae. We postulate that this process offered a technical advantage. In most documents, whether rolled or folded, the piece of unfired clay was placed directly over the knot binding the document. In such cases, it was more likely that the bulla, once it dried out a little, might pop off, whether from the pressure of the knot below or simply because it was no longer caught sufficiently on the string. Folding the clay around the thin string meant that even after the lump dried, the string ends embedded

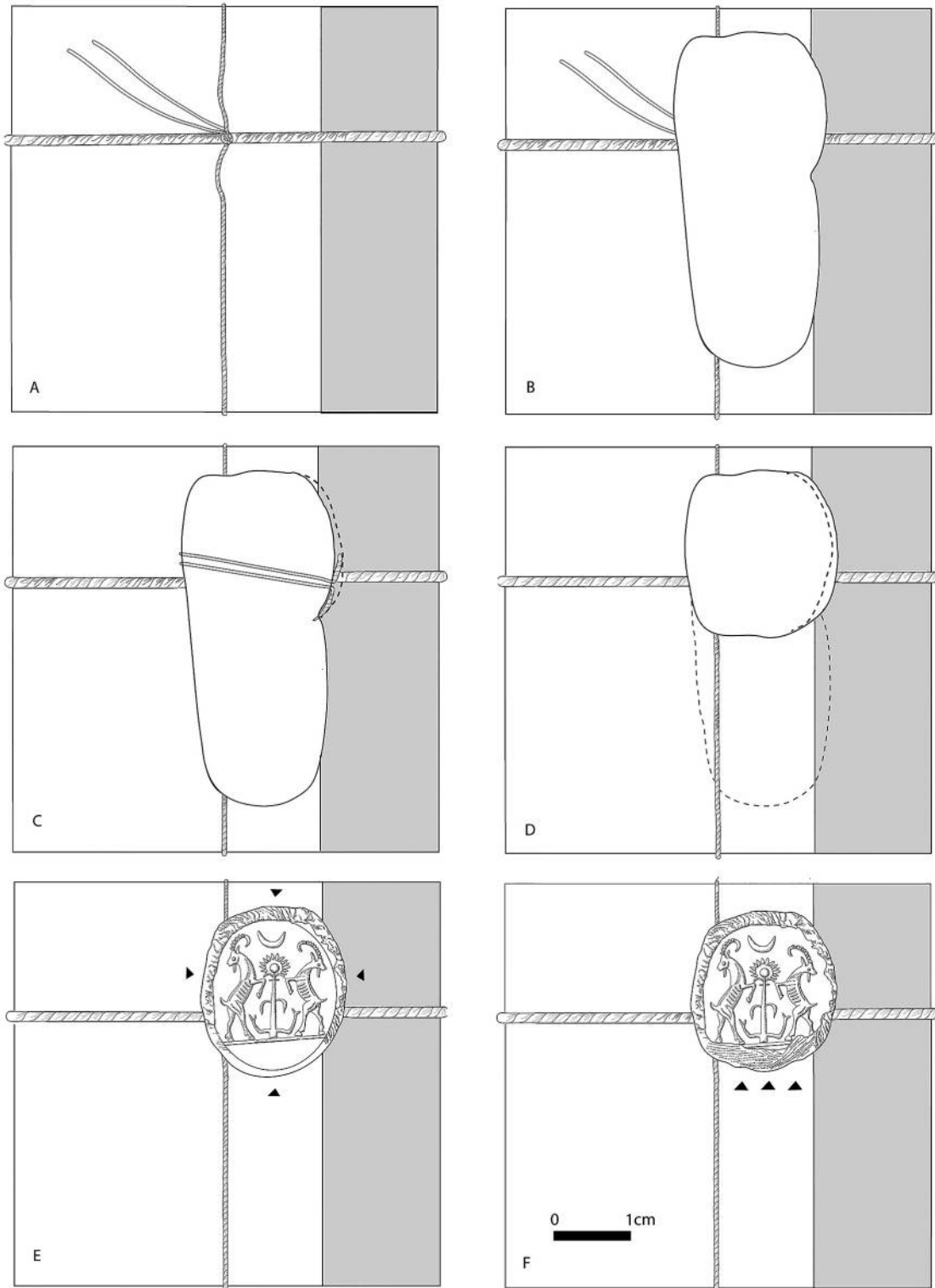
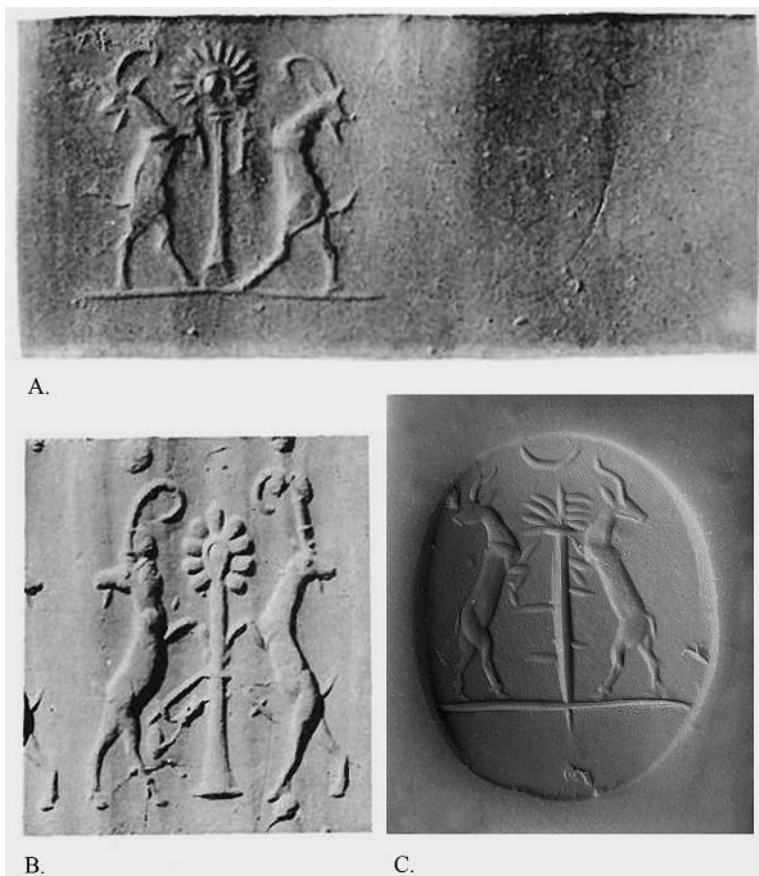


Fig. 8. Diagram of the six-step process by which the papyrus was folded, tied, and sealed. (Drawings by C. Hersch)



**Fig. 9.** Impressions from seals with motifs similar to that of the seal that impressed the Tel Qedesh bulla. (a) No. 458 from von der Osten 1934: 12, pl. 31. (b) No. 98 from Eisen 1940: 54, pl. 10. (a, b, Courtesy of The Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago). (c) Morgan Seal 840 (Courtesy of The Morgan Library & Museum)

inside ensured the integrity of the sealing and the security of the sealed document.

### *The Origin of the Seal*

The motif on the seal that impressed the Tel Qedesh bulla includes three particular, even distinctive, features: the flower-like tree with a single pair of leaves and single pair of branches, the rampant ibexes with heads turned away and a single bent foreleg, and a symbol of a deity. Three seals are known that share these features; unfortunately, all of them are unprovenanced. One is a cylinder seal identified as Achaemenid, with a similar stylized flower-like tree and two ibexes, each with a single foreleg (**Fig. 9a**; von der Osten 1934: 12, no. 458, pl. 31). The second cylinder seal, identified as Neo-Babylonian, has an almost identical motif (**Fig. 9b**; Eisen 1940: 54, no. 98, pl. 10). The third is a Neo-Babylonian conical stamp

seal of blue chalcedony in the Morgan Collection (Ward 1909: 122, no. 289, pl. 37: 289 = Porada 1948: 105–6, no. 840 = **Fig. 9c**).<sup>11</sup> The Morgan seal also depicts an upward-facing crescent, as on the Qedesh bulla; although, the animals are goats (or perhaps gazelles) instead of ibexes and the top of the tree is less flower-like.

These three particular features are all also attested on seal impressions from one place only: the Murašû archive, a business concern of politically well-connected Babylonians that operated in the city of Nippur in the later years of Artaxerxes I and early years of Darius II, from 454–404 B.C.E.<sup>12</sup> Among the 586 individuals and

<sup>11</sup> While William H. Ward identified this seal as Assyrian, Edith Porada identified it as Achaemenid because she believed that this motif did not occur on late Neo-Babylonian cylinders, overlooking Gustavus Eisen's 1940 publication.

<sup>12</sup> Stolper 1985, Bregstein 1993. For more detailed discussion of the archive, see Ouyang forthcoming and also further below.

657 seals represented by impressions in this archive (Bregstein 1996: 54–55), the multiple impressions of three individual seals in particular share the features observed on the Tel Qedes bulla.<sup>13</sup> It must be stressed that no single stamp's impression or impressions contain all three features exactly as they appear on the Tel Qedes bulla: the stylized flower-like tree with a single pair of leaves and a single pair of branches, the ibexes with heads turned away and the single bent foreleg, and the symbol of a deity. Instead, each Murašû example displays small variations of the features seen on the Qedes bulla, with the result that these four seal impressions taken together seem to form a tight group.

The first impression came from a seal that belonged to a man named Iddin-Bêl (**Fig. 10a**). In the context of the Murašû archive, he used his seal just once, on a contract dated to the 37th year of Artaxerxes I (428 B.C.E.). The impression shows two ibexes, lean and muscled, positioned as those on the Tel Qedes bulla, on either side of a central tree (Bregstein 1993: 717, no. 316, where she identifies the animals as goats; Legrain 1925: 336, no. 847; pl. 38). The tree has a single pair of schematized branches positioned just below the animals' downward-bent forelegs. Two small circles below the branches may represent fruit. The animals turn their heads away from each other. Both animals and tree stand on a common groundline. There are two small differences: both of the animals' forelegs appear, rather than only one as in the Tel Qedes bulla, and the deity symbol is a rhombus rather than a crescent moon.

The second impression is from a seal that belonged to a man named Ninurta-nāšir (**Fig. 10b**). Just as Iddin-Bêl, he used his seal only once in the Murašû archive, as a witness to a lease dated to the 11th year of Darius II (413 B.C.E.). The impression again shows two lean ibexes, heads turned away from one another, positioned to either side of a flower-like tree with a single pair of branches just below the animals' downward-bent forelegs (Bregstein 1993: 716, no. 315, where she identifies the animals as goats and the tree as a palm; Legrain 1925: no. 846, pl. 38). Above the tree is an upward-facing crescent moon. Here, as on Iddin-Bêl's seal, both forelegs appear.

The third impression is from a seal that belonged to a man named Erib-Enlil (**Fig. 10c**). The arrangement again includes two animals supporting themselves against a

flower-like tree, with a single pair of leaves about half-way up the stalk (Bregstein 1993: 713, no. 312; Legrain 1925: 45, 48, 336, no. 845, pl. 38). Above the tree is an upward-facing moon. Here the animals are horses rather than ibexes, and they face one another rather than look away; but, as on the Tel Qedes bulla, the animals have only a single foreleg each, poised just above the leaves. Erib-Enlil was one of the busiest people working for the firm as this impression appears on thirteen documents ranging in date from the 36th year of Artaxerxes I (429 B.C.E.) to the first year of Darius II (423 B.C.E.).<sup>14</sup>

In addition to the impressions from the seals of these three men, impressions from three other additional seals on Murašû tablets show at least one of the features seen on the Qedes bulla. Two show rampant goats with heads turned away, propped up against a central tree (Bregstein 1993: 714–15, nos. 313, 314, each impressed only once, both described but not illustrated). In each, the animals are depicted with both forelegs, and the tree does not have a schematic flower-like top. A third impression, from a seal that belonged to a man named Ardija, shows two imaginary creatures—a royal-headed sphinx and a scorpion-man—flanking a central flower-like tree. The lower part of the trunk is a smooth cone shape, while the upper half is rough like a date palm. An upward-facing crescent appears to the left of the tree, above the sphinx (**Fig. 11**; Bregstein 1993: 939, no. 535; Legrain 1925: 336, no. 850; pl. 38: 850; pl. 46: 981; pl. 54: 856).

This collected evidence suggests the work of one engraver or workshop working in Nippur who produced conical stone stamp seals with a “trademark” of a stylized flower-like tree, posed animals with a bent foreleg, and the symbol of a deity. The animals' gesture was probably intended to convey respect and/or adoration for the deity. At least some of the people who owned these seals were involved, one way or another, in the business of the Murašû firm. The dates of the stamped tablets on which these impressions appear range from the 36th year of Artaxerxes I (429 B.C.E., belonging to Erib-Enlil; Bregstein 1993: 713, no. 312) to the 11th year of Darius II (413 B.C.E., belonging to Ninurta-nāšir; Bregstein 1993: 716, no. 315), a period of 17 years.<sup>15</sup> It may be relevant here to note that in subsequent, Seleucid times, seals belonging

<sup>14</sup> Bregstein (1993: 199, 355) notes that Erib-Enlil's name appears on an additional 103 documents, none of which he stamped.

<sup>15</sup> One more seal attested in the archive likely belonged to this same group: Bregstein 1993: 715, no. 314, impressed on the upper edge of Const(antinople) [=Istanbul] Ni(ppur) 564 = PBS 2/1 208 in the 6th year of Darius II. Neither Leon Legrain nor Bregstein give a drawing of the impression, although Bregstein (1993: 715) describes it as follows: “Two rampant goats on either side of a central tree. The goats are rampant to the center but both turn their heads back. Both touch the branches of the tree with one foreleg and raise the other, bent foreleg in front of their bodies. The tree has leaves at the top and on the trunk.”

<sup>13</sup> For the number of people and seals, see also Bregstein 1993: 30, 51–52, table 3.1, 364. The number of seals represented increases to 664 or 665 when including the bullae. On occasion, the same person used other stamp seals (Bregstein 1993: 261–62). This is the case with Erib-Enlil, who had three: the stone stamp discussed further below (Bregstein 1993, no. 312), a finger ring with a striding lion (Bregstein 1993, no. 279), and a conical stamp seal with a winged lion-scorpion (Bregstein 1993, no. 459; she identifies this as a cylinder seal impression).



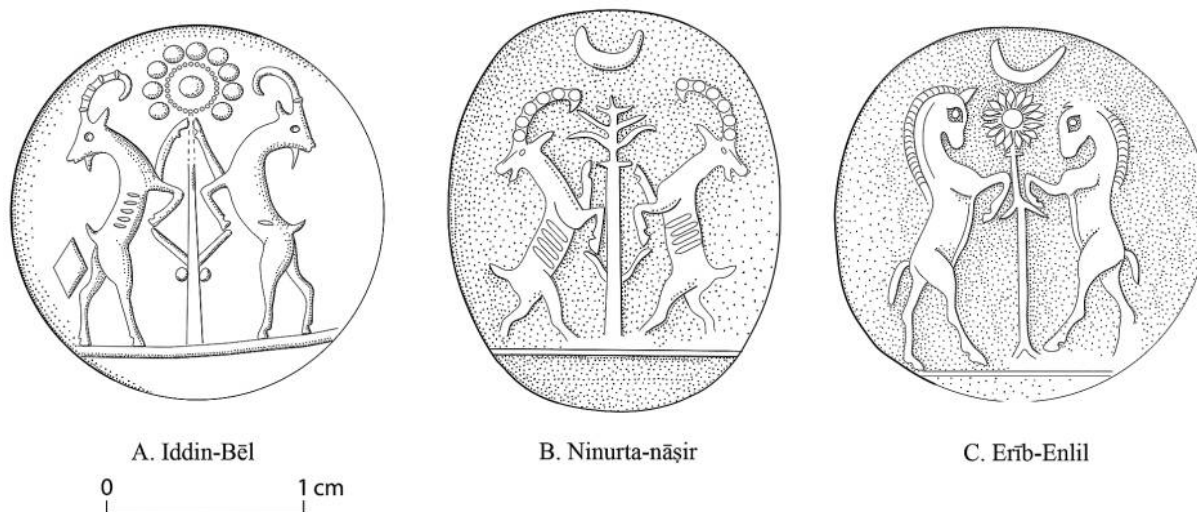


Fig. 10. New reconstruction drawings of impressions from the Murašû archive, made from seals very similar to that which impressed the Qedesh bulla (see **Appendix** for explanation of reconstructions). (Drawings by C. Hersch)

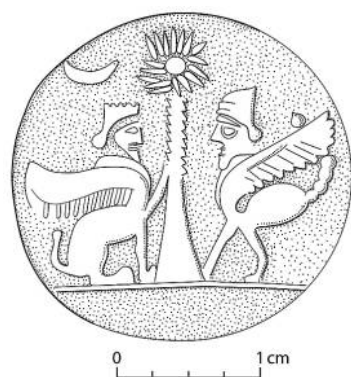


Fig. 11. New reconstruction drawing of impression of seal of Ardija, from the Murašû archive. (Drawings by C. Hersch)

to members of a single family or group regularly show a limited range of images, motifs, and styles, and also that it is overwhelmingly the case that a single seal was used by just one individual (Bregstein 1993: 10; Wallenfels 1994: 144–46; Messina 2009: 180).<sup>16</sup>

In light of the above, we propose that the owner of the seal that impressed the Tel Qedesh bulla also came from

Unfortunately this tablet could not be located in Istanbul, so we are unable to confirm the specifics.

<sup>16</sup> Wallenfels (1994: 144) notes that on the Seleucid-era tablets from Uruk, seals used by more than one individual represent only 0.5% of the total number of seals identified. See also Messina 2009: 180.

Nippur, as did those whose similar seals impressed tablets from the Murašû archive. He did not necessarily have dealings with the Murašû firm (although he may have). However, since he used his seal on a papyrus document, and given that all known records from Nippur of the Murašû archive are either clay tablets or parchment, it is unlikely that the document was written or sealed in Nippur itself.<sup>17</sup> The logical conclusion is that the seal owner travelled from Nippur to a Levantine location where papyrus was in regular use as the preferred writing material for business and communication.<sup>18</sup> While there, the seal

<sup>17</sup> Bregstein says that seventeen bullae were attached to leather or papyrus documents (Bregstein 1993: 226, n. 164) but direct observations by Brandl show that all were attached only to parchments. A *ḥadru*-association of parchment makers is attested in the archive (Bregstein 1993: 164, table 424, no. 19; 637, seal no. 238).

<sup>18</sup> No other Murašû-style seals are known from Israel or Jordan. The only possible candidates are two conoid seals found in Jordan, but while the motifs are similar, close scrutiny shows significant differences. The first is a white stone, identified as marble, from an Achaemenid-era tomb at Tell el-Mazar (Eggler and Keel 2006: 296–97, no. 3, with earlier bibliography). It depicts a triple-animal whorl, with one winged goat (caprid, according to Eggler and Keel), one winged lion, and one winged bull. There are impressions of thirteen similar, winged-animal triplets on tablets, and one on a bulla, but none include a goat (Bregstein 1993: 809–21, nos. 408–20, 1069, no. 664). Bregstein wrote that this Tell el-Mazar seal was “extremely close to the Nippur examples” (1993: 86–87, n. 93), and that is true; but the difference in animal depiction makes this seal more inspired by those examples, rather than from the Murašû archive itself. The second, identified as ebony, comes from a Hellenistic context at Khirbet Salame/Chirbat Salame. It depicts the heads and necks of four lions arranged in a whorl pattern (Eggler and Keel 2006: 134–35, no. 1, with bibliography). There are similar im-

owner participated in the drawing up and/or witnessing of a document and impressed his seal upon the bulla that protected and identified it.

Two questions arise from this chain of reasoning: where, and on whose behalf, did this interaction take place? The information thus far adduced allows us to identify two locales: Nippur, for the origin of the seal; and Tel Qedesh, for the final disposition of the document. It is possible to read this as reflecting a single point-to-point trip, but other evidence from these two end points suggests a potentially more complicated network. Below we present other evidence, from both locales, in order to put this discovery into its wider context, as well as suggest other scenarios that could explain why somebody from Nippur traveled to the Levant to seal a document that ended up at Tel Qedesh.

### Tel Qedesh and the Upper Galilee in the Persian Period

By *Andrea M. Berlin and Sharon C. Herbert*

As stated above, the bulla was found at the southern end of the lower mound of Tel Qedesh, in a pit dating to the Byzantine era, far removed in time from its original use (Herbert and Berlin 2003: 46, n. 21). The pit lay about 17 m west of the northwestern corner of an enormous compound measuring some 2400 m<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 12). From imported Greek pottery found in fills, we can date the compound's initial construction to c. 500 B.C.E.; an occupant here was likely a party to the document which the bulla sealed. The main building was grand, with an eastern-facing,  $\pi$ -shaped colonnaded entry court leading to a hall with two larger columns that framed an entrance to a second open-air courtyard in the building's western half (Fig. 13).

In addition to the bulla, several other finds reflect the character of the building's inhabitants: a beautifully carved green jasper scarab with a helmeted head, and two small, conical glass stamp seals, both likely worn as amulets, each with a version of the "Master-of-Animals" motif long popular in the Near East (Berlin and Herbert 2012: 27, 28). One of the glass seals depicts the Tyrian deity Melqart, holding aloft his traditional scimitar; the second shows the Persian king himself, readily identifiable because of the jagged crown on his head. Fragments of rare hard stone bowls, bronze bracelets with animal

finials, and a silver earring also reflect the residents' wealth and connections.

Qedesh lies at the edge of a high plateau, about 36 km east of Tyre; regular traffic to and from this direction is indicated by the origins, types, and quantities of pottery found at the site. Almost all of the cooking vessels were made in 'Akko, while most of the small juglets and lamps were made in Tyre. The bulk of the ceramic assemblage—over 65% of the pottery—consists of locally manufactured transport jars. Two forms dominate: one suitable for transporting liquids and the other better for dry commodities. These suggest that the compound's primary purpose was the regular collection of agricultural produce: wheat, wine, and oil.

The combination of the building's size and purpose, the residents' apparent social stature, and the multiple indications of connections with Tyre, combine to suggest that the compound was established by and on behalf of the Tyrian royal house, a body which on the evidence of historical and numismatic sources lasted throughout the Achaemenid era (Berlin and Herbert 2013a: 374–76).<sup>19</sup> Of interest is that while almost all non-local material remains come from the west, the colonnaded entry faced east. The Tyrians who lived here probably sent agricultural goods back home, while at the same time making themselves receptive to officials and merchants coming from Damascus and points east.

Other sites along the eastern edge of the Upper Galilee Plateau reveal that Tyre controlled this entire region in the 5th century B.C.E. About 10 km due south of Qedesh is Kerem Ben Zimra,<sup>20</sup> about 10 km south of that is a re-occupied Assyrian-era building at Ayelet ha-Shachar,<sup>21</sup> and about 10 km further south rises the fortified post of Mizpe Yammim, on whose summit was a high watch tower and small shrine (Berlin and Frankel 2012). Offerings here included a few exotic Egyptian objects—a slate

<sup>19</sup> Elayi 2006: 21–25; Kokkinos 2013: 45–49, 60–61. When Cyrus came to power the king on the Tyrian throne was Hiram (Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 1.157–58); this Hiram was the third ruler of that name in the Tyrian line. At the time of the battle of Salamis, in 480 B.C.E., the Tyrian fleet was commanded by its king Mattan, son of Hiram (Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.98). The last Tyrian king was 'zmlk, as attested by various classical authors as well as by his coinage, which carries his initial; see Arrian, *Anab.* II:15.6–7, 24.5, Diodorus Siculus 17.40–45, Plutarch, *Alex.* 24–25, Curtius 4.2–4.

<sup>20</sup> With thanks to the site's excavators, Emmanuel Eisenberg and Alon de Groot, for a tour of the site and a helpful discussion of the area's topography.

<sup>21</sup> Kletter and Zwickel 2006: 179. This building may have formed the center of an extended settlement whose residents used the ancient citadel mound at Hazor as their necropolis; see Bonfil and Greenberg 1997: 161.

pressions of animal heads in a whorl from Murašû but none are solely lions, and all number three instead of four (Bregstein 1993: 735–53, nos. 334–52).





Fig. 12. View of administrative building at southern end of lower mound of Tel Qedesh, looking south. (Photo by SkyView Photography, Ltd.; courtesy of the Tel Qedesh Expedition)

palette; a schist statuette group of Isis, Osiris, and Horus; a bronze Osiris, Apis bull, and situla engraved with a Phoenician dedication to Astarte; and bronze weights in animal forms—and, most tellingly as an indication of just who visited, 100 small perfume juglets all made of clay from Tyre. From the summit of Mizpe Yammim one can see almost the entire width of this expansive region, north towards Qedesh, southeast to the Sea of Galilee, and west to the Mediterranean.

The timing of ca. 500 B.C.E. is significant. All of these Tyrian constructions and the territorial hegemony they delineate are contemporary with the partial Judean return to Jerusalem. This chronological congruity is unlikely to be a historical coincidence. Instead both the Judean and the Tyrian situations should be seen as two components of the broader approach taken under the first Achaemenid kings, one that balanced the remediation of the more severe effects of Babylonian deportations with a strategic need to maintain the power bases of local elites and the particular assistance that each group could make towards larger Achaemenid interests (Kuhrt 1983: 93–94

and n. 49). In the case of the Tyrians specifically, that assistance was surely in the realm of ships, sailors, and naval expertise, vital especially in the context of the war against the Greek city-states waged by Darius and Xerxes from 499 to 449 B.C.E. (Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.98, 8.67–68; Elayi 2006). Herodotus specifically cites the presence of the king of Tyre (and therefore presumably his fleet) with Xerxes at Phalerum, in the preparations for the battle of Salamis (*Hist.* 8.67; Kuhrt 1983: 83–84).

All of these remains reflect the strong position of the Tyrian royal house within the Achaemenid political orbit, along with the crucial administrative and economic role of the compound at Tel Qedesh. This sphere of entwined Tyrian political, social, and business control will have meant that residents of Tel Qedesh would have been in close contact with people back in Tyre. Putting this understanding alongside the bulla, which indicates a direct connection between someone from Nippur, who may also have had some dealings with the Murašû firm, and this region, the next step is to re-examine evidence for Tyrians in Nippur, including those who did business

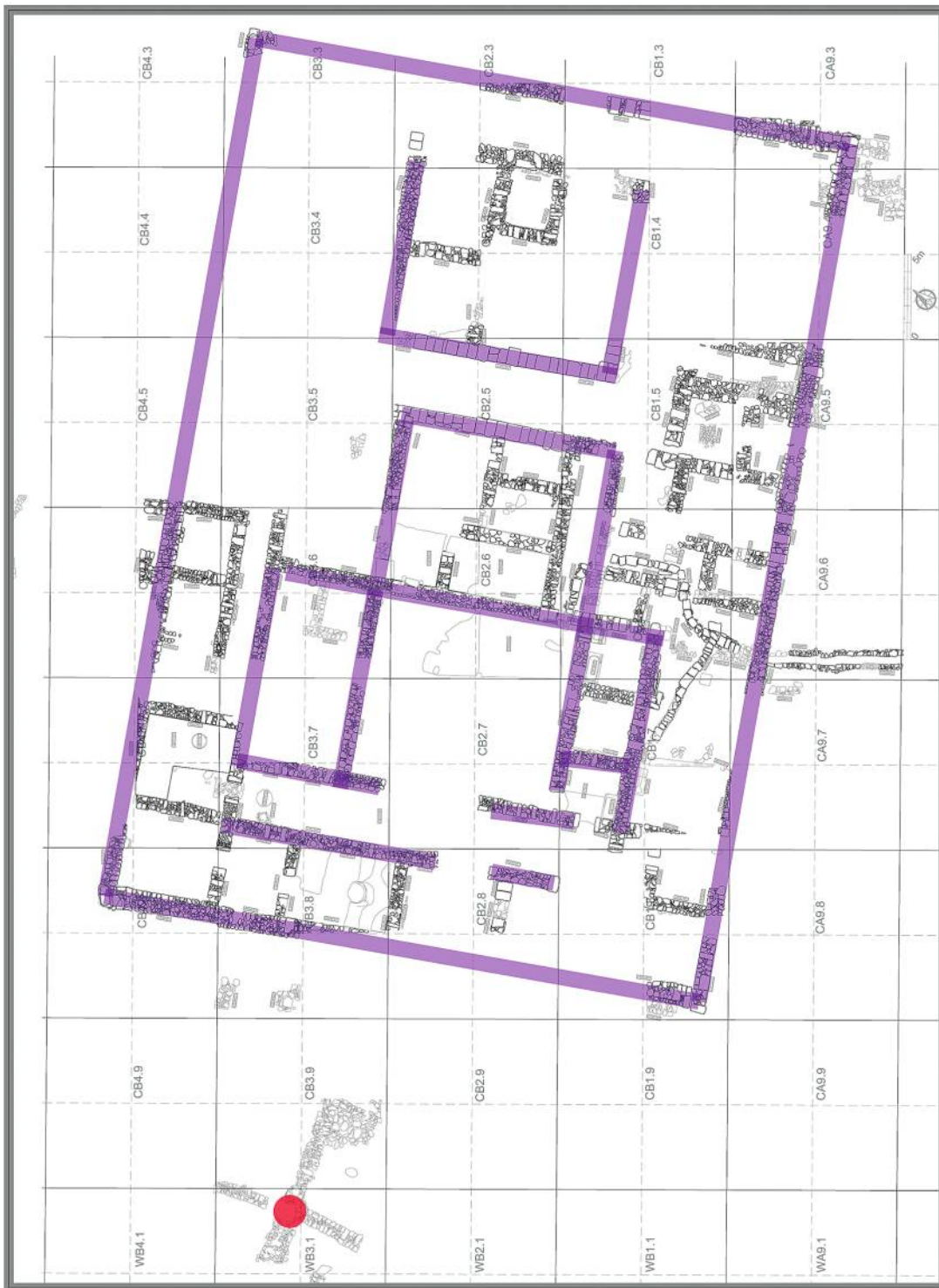


Fig. 13. State plan of the administrative building at end of the 2010 season. Purple lines indicate walls belonging originally to the Persian-period building. The red circle indicates the findspot of the bulla. (Plan by L. Lindorfer; courtesy of the Tel Qadesh Expedition)



with the Murašû firm, in hopes of shedding light on possible networks of either business interests or personal relations between Babylonia and the Levant.

### Tyrians in Nippur and in the Murašû Archive

By Xiaoli Ouyang

Along the Levantine littoral throughout the 1st millennium B.C.E., a recurring historical pattern involved the interests of outside imperial powers and their effects on local lives and localities. The most famous interactions are, first, those between Neo-Assyrians and Israelites in the 8th century B.C.E. and, second, between Neo-Babylonians and Judeans in the 6th century B.C.E.; but these same episodes also affected and eventually swept up other populations, including Tyrians. Towards the end of the 7th century B.C.E., when the Neo-Babylonians defeated the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the city of Tyre became embroiled in the competition between this new imperial power and the rulers of the 26th Dynasty in Egypt for hegemony over the Syro-Palestinian region. Tyre's status as the hub of a widespread trading and commercial network declined, as did its fortune. After King Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562 B.C.E.) warded off the Egyptians from Palestine and destroyed the kingdom of Judah once and for all, he turned north to Tyre and laid a thirteen-year-long siege to it from the 20th to the 33rd year of his reign (585–572 B.C.E.).<sup>22</sup> Although the city survived the siege, an unknown number of residents were deported to Babylonia and settled in a town named “Tyre”<sup>23</sup> after their home city, between Uruk and Nippur, perhaps in the area of Bit-Amukkani (Joannès 1982: 41). This “Tyre” is attested in records from Uruk, Sippar, and Nippur dated between the 31st and 41st years of Nebuchadnezzar II's reign (Joannès 1987: 147).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Zawadzki (2008) published a new text from the Ebabbar temple in Sippar that dates to the 30th year of Nebuchadnezzar II. It records eight shekels of silver and two water bags delivered to two people for a royal campaign against an unnamed target. This text and four other similar ones discussed in the same article may provide the first set of data from Babylonia that corroborates the classical story about the long siege of Tyre laid by Nebuchadnezzar II. For a review of classical, biblical, and cuneiform sources related to this siege, see Katzenstein 1997: 324–27.

<sup>23</sup> For related literature on distinction between the Tyrian settlement in Babylonia and the Tyrian state in the Levant, see Peckham 2014: 370, n. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Kristin Kleber (2008: 141–54) reviewed the references to Tyre, written most often as *uru/kuršur-ru*, in the Neo-Babylonian documents dated from the 31st to 42nd year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. She concluded that the Tyre attested there means the Phoenician city-state in the Levant instead of a village in the Nippur region. Only the Tyre mentioned in the Murašû archive could possibly be the settlement of the Tyrians deported from their home state. See also Vanderhooff 2003:

Evidence from the Murašû archive attests to the continued presence of Tyrians in the Nippur area in the later 5th century B.C.E. They belonged to a *hadru*-association, meaning a group bound variously by occupation, origin, military service, or administrative affiliation. Six tablets ranging in date from 425–420 B.C.E. mention Tyrians or the settlement named after them. They are:

BE 9 77 = CBS 5423 (25/VII/40 Artaxerxes I, 425 B.C.E.)

BE 9 79 = CBS 5342 (4/IX/40 Artaxerxes I, 425 B.C.E.)

BE 10 33 = CBS 5204 (27/IV/1 Darius II, 423 B.C.E.)

BE 10 71 = CBS 5339 (19/VII/ 3 Darius II, 421 B.C.E.)

PBS 2/1 197 = Ist Ni. 592 (14/VIII/3 Darius II, 421 B.C.E.)

PBS 2/1 89 = CBS 6127 (28/IX/4 Darius II, 420 B.C.E.)<sup>25</sup>

The tablets record the rental of fields and loans of dates between the Murašû firm and holders of bow fiefs—land perhaps originally granted in exchange for military service as an archer—including a single Tyrian family. Two of these texts, BE 9 77 and PBS 2/1 197, disclose that one Tyrian family and their colleagues from the *hadru*-association of Tyrians leased their bow fief to the Murašû firm first for ten shekels of silver, and renewed the lease four years later for twelve shekels of silver. The amounts of rent approach the lower end of the spectrum compared to other rents for bow fiefs in the Murašû texts.<sup>26</sup>

Taken together, the six texts reveal the poor economic circumstances of the Tyrians and other groups holding bow fiefs, a consequence of the feudatory system originally established by the Babylonians and extended by the Achaemenids. Originally the system was intended to establish a sustainable source of tax revenue, support a stable reserve of military personnel, and provide a basic means of production for the populace. As time went by, however, the growth of the population and the decreased size of fief plots from division of inheritance led to the gradual impoverishment of the lowest ranks of the fief holders. Many were forced to cash in on their land holdings, a step that allowed families like the Murašûs to buy up land, thereby making a fortune from the commercialization of agricul-

246. Ran Zadok (1985: 280–81) summarizes diverging earlier scholarly opinions on the identification of Tyre in the cuneiform corpus.

<sup>25</sup> The numbers starting with CBS (University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology) or Ist (Istanbul Archaeological Museum) represent the museum numbers of the tablets. In the date formula of a text in the parentheses, the left Arabic number stands for the day of the month, the middle Roman capital letter for the month, and the right Arabic number for the regnal year of the king. Transliterations of and references to the four texts in BE 9 and BE 10 are available online at [www.achemenet.com](http://www.achemenet.com). In addition, Yigal Bloch (2018: 322–24) discusses PBS 2/1 89 in detail. All but PBS 2/1 197 have images available in the database of the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (abbreviated as CDLI, <https://cdli.ucla.edu/>). A study of the six texts as a group is in Ouyang forthcoming.

<sup>26</sup> The rent attested for an individual bow fief ranges between three shekels and one mina of silver (Stolper 1985: 147).

ture (Stolper 1985: 152–54). The Tyrians whose transactions were recorded in the two tablets, BE 9 77 and PBS 2/1 197, were caught in this vicious economic cycle.

Considering the situation of Qedes as an administrative hub and collection center for the Tyrian royal house, one might have postulated that the bulla found here could be evidence of a possible business relationship between the Tyrian king and the Murašû firm, perhaps via the intermediary role of those Tyrians who lived in the Nippur region. However, the meager economic means of the Tyrians attested in the Murašû archive renders such a scenario unlikely. The Nippur Tyrians were in too poor a social and economic situation to have acted as mediators on behalf of Tyrian royalty from their home state.

Other scenarios involving officials, whether Persian or Tyrian, also seem unlikely. The Murašû house dealt primarily in agricultural products such as barley and dates and conducted their businesses at most on a regional level. Their firm was based in Nippur, and the maximum domain of their business may just have reached Babylon and the Tigris in the north, Marad in the west, and Isin in the south (Stolper 1985: 24). They seemed to travel in the vicinity of southern Babylonia as well and expanded their commercial network to Susa.<sup>27</sup> There is no evidence to indicate their engagement in any kind of wider commercial business (see also note 18). Although several Murašû tablets were drafted in Babylon, which was one of the empire's capitals, these still focus on the matters in the Nippur area and were taken back there for filing purposes (Stolper 1985: 24). It is true that Babylonia in general played an intermediary role between the Phoenician-Palestinian world and the regions to the south and east of Mesopotamia, and that an association of merchants is mentioned in the Murašû archive; but, they are cited for their grant of fief land in exchange for tax obligations, not for their professional activities (Dandamaev and Lukonin 1989: 211–19). Thus, a direct relationship between Qedes and/or Tyre and the Murašû firm seems unlikely, as does any scenario involving the Murašû firm with Persian royalty or satrapal officials.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> A group of five texts concerning the activities of Rimût-Ninurta were probably written in Susa, where he was accused of appropriating the harvest worth 102 minas of silver from the fields of some bridge workers for two years in a row (Stolper 1992).

<sup>28</sup> Muhammad Dandamaev and Vladimir Lukonin's suggested interpretation of BE 10 1 as evidence of a special relationship between the Murašû family and the royal household is not convincing because it hinges upon the meaning of one ambiguous expression, "until the appearance of the king." The corresponding Akkadian reads *adi muhhi ašê šarri* (Clay 1904: 22–23). According to them, "[w]hen Darius II ascended the throne and triumphal ceremonies connected with this event were to be held in Babylon, the members of the house of Murashu rented a house in the city for several months ('till the appearance of the king') in order to take part in these ceremonies" (Dandamaev and

### *Tyrian Exiles and Returnees*

As any explicit relationship between the Murašû firm, Qedes, and Tyrian royalty lacks supporting evidence, we here consider the possibility of a different kind of relationship: that between Tyrians in exile and those at home. In the Achaemenid era, Tyrians were one of many West Semitic groups who lived dispersed, with some remaining in the Babylonian diaspora, others still in the ancient homeland, and some seizing the opportunity to return. The Babylonian Exile of the Judeans and their subsequent return to the land of Judah is the best-known episode in this significant wave. Pearce (2016) has compiled an overview of cuneiform sources pertaining to the Judeans in Babylonia under the rule of these two dynasties. The Murašû documents furnish evidence for the participation of the Judeans in the Babylonian economy more than a century after their initial exile from Judah, while the *âl-Yāhūdu* archive fills us in on the Judean history from the Babylonian exile in 587–586 B.C.E. to the beginning of the Murašû archive in the mid-5th century B.C.E.

The *âl-Yāhūdu* archive comprises one distinctive group in a corpus of more than 200 tablets dated between 572 and 477 B.C.E.<sup>29</sup> The tablets are scattered among three collections.<sup>30</sup> So far, about 50 tablets from the *âl-Yāhūdu* archive have been published and feature primarily loan contracts of barley, dates, and silver (Pearce and Wunsch 2014).<sup>31</sup> The archive was found in Iraq and named after a town, URU *ia-a-hu-du/ia-hu-du*, "Judahtown," where most of the tablets were drafted. The town refers to a rural settlement where some of the Judean deportees lived after the Babylonian exile, but its precise location remains unknown.<sup>32</sup>

Lukonin 1989: 218). The rental of the house and the long wait may well be the unilateral action taken by the Murašû house, without necessarily any royal favor from the Persian king.

<sup>29</sup> Between the two other groups in the same corpus, one focuses on the headman of the town named Našar, and the other centers around the royal official Zababa-šar-ušur in the town of Bit-Abī-rām; see survey of the corpus by Wunsch 2013. The three groups of tablets may have been found close to each other in an administrative center of the region.

<sup>30</sup> They are the David Sofer Collection (London-Jerusalem), the Schøyen Collection (Oslo), and the Shlomo and Aliza Moussaieff Collection (London-Herzeliya); see Abraham 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Text number 15 in this volume mentions an anonymous Tyrian with his bow fief and its estimated yield of dates; see Pearce and Wunsch 2014: 118–21. The same volume also publishes texts that focus on the two towns of Našar and Bit-Abī-rām. Waerzeggers 2015 contributes a helpful review of the book. Miscellaneous *âl-Yāhūdu* tablets from the Shlomo and Aliza Moussaieff Collection are published by Kathleen Abraham (2005–2006, 2007, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> "[T]hese indications point to the region to the east and south-east of Babylon, beyond the city of Nippur, delimited to the east by the river Tigris and to the south by the marshlands. This is roughly identical

The case of the Judeans attested in the *āl-Yāhūdu* archive shows that even after their return to Judah during the reign of Cyrus as documented in biblical sources, there were still Judeans who continued to live in Babylonia through the Persian period. We may further assume that the return to their homeland was not a one-time event among the Judeans deported to Babylonia and their descendants. Instead, there was probably a small but continuous trickle of exiles back to their homeland, as circumstances allowed and encouraged.

The discovery of the small Neirab archive illustrates this point. This archive was excavated at a site about 10 km southeast of Aleppo in Syria from 1926–1927.<sup>33</sup> It consists of 27 tablets and spans from the reign of the Neo-Babylonian king Neriglissar (560–556 B.C.E.) to the Persian king Darius I (521–486 B.C.E.), with the majority from the reign of Nabonidus (556–539 B.C.E.). The archive records the activities of five sons and one grandson of Nusku-gabbe, head of the household. It includes twenty promissory notes recording loans of silver (interest-free) and barley (with or without interest), five property documents, and two family records.

The archive receives its name after the Babylonian village of Neirab, where the documents were drafted and whose exact location remains elusive. The Syrians that settled down in Neirab had been deported to Mesopotamia at either the end of Nabopolassar's reign (626–605 B.C.E.) or the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (605–562 B.C.E.). After the Persians annexed Mesopotamia, the Neirab family may have decided to return to Syria thanks to their improved economic conditions.<sup>34</sup> A member from the third generation of the family probably moved the archive with him back to Syria, perhaps to testify to the family's leading role in the exiled Neirab community and to reclaim their former social rank in their hometown in Syria (Tolini 2015).

The *āl-Yāhūdu* and Neirab archives preserve valuable details about the social and economic life of the West Semites exiled to Babylonia and that of their descendants in this region. They indicate that after Achaemenid Persia replaced the Neo-Babylonian dynasty to rule Babylonia, the return of the deportees or their offspring to their homeland seemed to be an ongoing process rather

than a short-term event. In the case of the Judeans, even after their epochal return to the land of Judah as documented in the biblical sources, an unknown number of Judeans continued to live in Babylonia, as attested by the *āl-Yāhūdu* and *Murašû* archives.<sup>35</sup>

The Neirab archive further reveals that when the deportees left Babylonia for their hometown, they carried part of their family archive with them, perhaps as assurance of their social standing (Tolini 2015). If the Neirab people could take some cuneiform tablets back, we may imagine that the descendants of the Tyrian exiles settled in the Nippur region might also have taken their seals, manufactured in local workshops and therefore adorned with Babylonian iconography, back to their Levantine mother city-state of Tyre. As it happens, we may summon one more piece of evidence in support of this very suggestion. This evidence comes via one of the six "Tyrian" *Murašû* tablets and the witness seals impressed upon it.

### *Erīb-Enlil, Tyrians in Nippur, and the Qedesh Bulla*

As mentioned above, one of the individuals who owned a seal very similar to that which impressed the Qedesh bulla was Erīb-Enlil (see **Fig. 18** in **Appendix**; Legrain 1925: 336, no. 845, pl. 38; Bregstein 1993: 713, no. 312), son of Enlil-bānā. He applied this seal on thirteen tablets dated from the 36th year of Artaxerxes I to the first year of Darius II (429–423 B.C.E.).<sup>36</sup> Erīb-Enlil also possessed two other seals: a finger ring with a striding lion, which he used on three tablets (see **Fig. 19** in **Appendix**; Bregstein 1993: 680, no. 279); and a stamp with a winged lion-scorpion, which he used on seven tablets (see **Fig. 21** in **Appendix**; Bregstein 1993: 863, no. 459).<sup>37</sup> Erīb-Enlil used these three seals more or less successively, beginning with the Qedesh-like stamp seal, which he used from 429–423 B.C.E., then the striding lion

to the area at the fringes of the *Murašû*'s sphere of influence" (Pearce and Wunsch 2014: 7).

<sup>33</sup> See Tolini 2014, 2015 for a comprehensive and most recent treatment of this archive, with a review of past literature. The summary below largely follows his study.

<sup>34</sup> Gauthier Tolini (2015: 89–90) attributes the return of the family to Syria to their own initiative rather than their response to an official policy of the Persian authorities, as there exists no Persian or Babylonian evidence to confirm such a policy. For the latter point, see recently, e.g., Pearce 2016.

<sup>35</sup> For a recent review of scholarship on onomastic studies of Judean names in Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid documents, see Bloch 2014. The latest research estimates the total number of people attested in the *Murašû* archive at somewhere between 2,200 and 2,500, about 3% of whom bear Yahwistic names and might be identified as Judeans (Bloch 2014: 123–24). Laurie Pearce and Cornelia Wunsch (2014: 14–15) identify around 120 individuals with Yahwistic names in the *āl-Yāhūdu* archive and discuss the complications of recognizing this kind of name.

<sup>36</sup> The tablets witnessed and sealed by Erīb-Enlil are listed by Bregstein (1993: 713). They are BE 9 48, BE 9 66a, BE 9 69, BE 9 72, BE 9 80, BE 9 86a, BE 9 106, BE 10 14, BE 10 31, PBS 2/1 3, PBS 2/1 13, PBS 2/1 22, and PBS 2/1 164.

<sup>37</sup> Bregstein classified this impression as coming from a cylinder seal but Brandl has determined from an examination of its impressions that it was made by a conical stamp seal, although in a clumsy manner such that the outer edge of the seal itself is missing (**Figs. 20, 21c**).

finger ring from 422–420 B.C.E., and finally the winged lion-scorpion stamp from 421–418 B.C.E.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the 23 tablets that Erib-Enlil stamped, he also appears as a witness on 103 more tablets without his seals' impressions on them. Overall, Erib-Enlil is attested as a witness from the 26th year of Artaxerxes I to the 11th year of Darius II (439–413 B.C.E.), during which time he was the second most active witness in the archive, both in terms of the number of texts that he stamped and also in the number of tablets on which he is named but did not stamp (Bregstein 1993: 355).<sup>39</sup>

Among the records witnessed by Erib-Enlil are two tablets that concern the *ḥadru*-association of Tyrians in the Nippur region. These Tyrians from the *ḥadru*-organization may well have descended from those whom Nebuchadnezzar II deported to the Nippur region after his siege of Tyre from 585–572 B.C.E. The Neo-Babylonian dynast probably assigned them to live in a settlement named after their ethnicity, where they continued to reside after the Persians took over Babylonia.<sup>40</sup> Erib-Enlil testified in BE 9 77 (25/VII/40 Artaxerxes I, 425 B.C.E.) and PBS 2/1 197 = Ist/Ni. 592 (14/VIII/3 Darius II, 421 B.C.E.; **Figs. 14a** and **21a**). Both documents present receipts of silver rent from the Murašû firm for probably the same bow fief held by one Tyrian family and their colleagues in the *ḥadru*-association. Erib-Enlil did not stamp the earlier record, but he did impress the later one with his third seal.

This later tablet (PBS 2/1 197 = Ist/Ni. 592) carried the impressions of two other witnesses in addition to Erib-Enlil. One is Ḥazzia, son of Bel-etir (**Figs. 14b, e, 23**, left). Ḥazzia, whose name is Phoenician, was also a member of the *ḥadru*-association of Tyrians (Bregstein 1993: 688, no. 287). The third sealer was Ardija, whose seal with a sphinx and a scorpion-man flanking a flower-like tree we described above (**Figs. 11, 14c, f, 22**; Bregstein 1993: 939, no. 535; Legrain 1925: 336, no. 850; pl. 38, no. 850; pl. 46: 981; pl. 54: 856).

<sup>38</sup> The multiple seals that Erib-Enlil owned and the large number of tablets he witnessed imply that he may have been attached to the Murašû firm somehow, perhaps as an associate, a colleague, or an employee (Bregstein 1993: 197–98). No title of his is ever attested, but the text identifies him as a *mār banī*, “citizen,” in a settlement of dispute involving the Murašû house (Bregstein 1993: 335). Bregstein notes that “in the Neo-Babylonian period *mār banīs* regularly appeared in judicial contexts as members of the city assembly before whom disagreements over property or family matters were settled” (1993: 335). It is also the case that in the Achaemenid context of the Murašû archive, *mār banīs* served frequently as witnesses to contracts.

<sup>39</sup> In comparison, Aqara, the most active witness in the Murašû archive, sealed and witnessed 42 tablets, and witnessed 108 more tablets, without sealing them (Bregstein 1993: 199). Thus he witnessed 150 tablets in total.

<sup>40</sup> See Ouyang forthcoming for a complete edition of the two tablets and the historical background of their exile.

We thus have a constellation of highly suggestive, albeit circumstantial, items that suggest links between the seal that impressed the Qedesh bulla, Nippur, and the *ḥadru*-association of Tyrians living there. First is the identification of a small group of stone stamp seals showing a stylized flower-like tree and posed animals. Two of these seals were owned by people who had dealings with the Murašû firm: Erib-Enlil and Ardija. Both acted as witnesses to Murašû transactions involving a Tyrian family living in Nippur. A third seal of this group was used to impress a bulla securing a papyrus document that ended up at Qedesh. The fact that the document was papyrus indicates that it was written and impressed somewhere in the Levant. The find spot at Qedesh points to a connection with Tyre; the local petrology of the clay suggests that the owner of the seal himself came to the site, whether on his own behalf or as an envoy. On the basis of all of the above, we suggest that the owner of the seal that impressed the Qedesh bulla was a member of the Tyrian diaspora who returned home, bringing his seal with him, and once there, became involved in some business that brought him to Qedesh.

## Summary and Conclusion

By Andrea M. Berlin

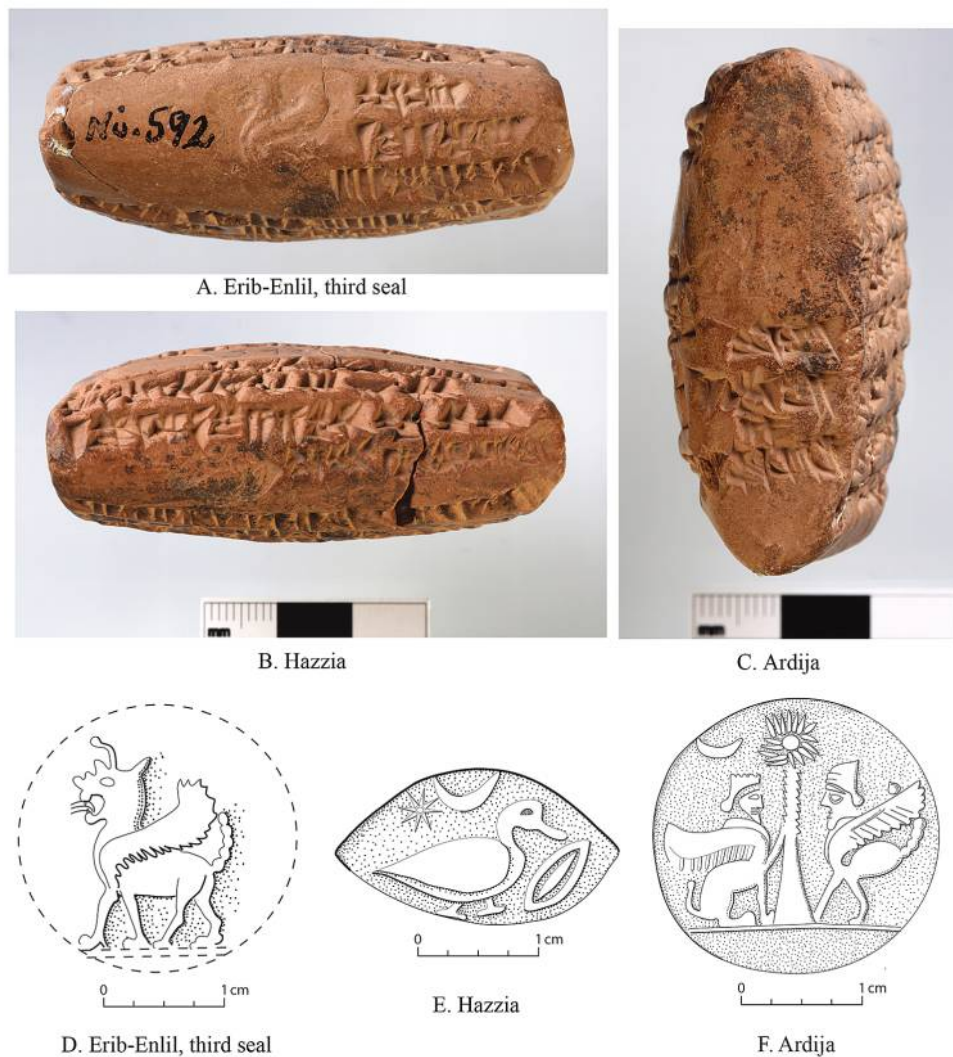
The bulla found at Tel Qedesh is a unique item, something of a stranger in a strange land. It was impressed by a hard stone conical stamp seal carved with a distinctive design that depicted a central stylized flower-tree, two opposing animals with one bent foreleg propped on either side, and a symbol of a deity above. The design belongs to a small group of similar seals used by people who lived in Nippur in the later 5th century B.C.E. (**Fig. 15**).<sup>41</sup> More precisely, such seals were used on tablets dating from 429 B.C.E. (Erib-Enlil) to 413 B.C.E. (Ninurta-nāšir), a period of seventeen years. As no other items with this precise constellation of type, design, and date have been found anywhere else in the Levant, we propose that the seal owner acquired his seal in Nippur, and likely came from there originally.<sup>42</sup> Yet he used his seal to secure a papyrus document, a material for which there is no evidence in Babylonia at this time. Thus, it is probable that the seal owner secured his document somewhere in the Levant, where papyrus had long been in use.

The links between some of the other stylized flower-tree impressions and some tablets from the Murašû archive suggest that the owner of the seal that impressed the Qedesh bulla was an ethnic Tyrian and a member of

<sup>41</sup> For a description of a sixth seal that likely belonged to this same group, see note 15.

<sup>42</sup> See discussion in note 18.





**Fig. 14.** (a–c) Tablet PBS 2/1 197 = Ist/Ni. 592, a receipt of silver rent from the Murašû firm for a bow fief held by one Tyrian family and their colleagues in the *hadru*-association, with views of the witness seals (a–c) and their reconstructed impressions (d–f). Dimensions of (d–f) are according to Bregstein 1993: (d) length: 13 mm, height: 13 mm (Bregstein’s no. 459); (e) length: 14 mm, height: 8 mm (Bregstein’s no. 287); (f) length: 19 mm, height: 19 mm (Bregstein’s no. 535). (a–c, courtesy of the Istanbul Archaeological Museums; d–f, drawings by C. Hersch)

the *hadru*-association of Tyrians in Nippur. The owner of another stylized flower-tree seal, Erib-Enlil, acted as witness on two rental receipts for this *hadru*-association (BE 9 77 and PBS 2/1 197 = Ist/Ni. 592) dating respectively to 425 and 421 B.C.E. A second owner of a similar seal, Ardija, also acted as a witness to the second of these two tablets, as did a third man named Hazzia, whose Phoenician name indicates that he was likely an ethnic Tyrian. As we know from the *al-Yāhūdu* and Neirab archives, West Semites exiled to Babylonia and their descendants lived in tight communities for generations, long after the Achaemenid Persians had become the ruling dynasty in Babylonia. Members of these communities regularly

served as witnesses for one another’s business transactions. The overlap of evidence, although indirect, suggests an association between the owner of the seal that impressed the Qedesh bulla and members of the *hadru*-association of Tyrians in Nippur.

While the lot of the community of exiled Tyrians in Nippur is largely unknown, the six “Tyrian” tablets in the Murašû archive suggest that, in the later 5th century B.C.E., at least one family and their *hadru*-association colleagues found themselves caught in a downward economic spiral. Two tablets show that the Murašû firm increased the rent on the group’s bow fief land; while the relatively low amounts as compared to other rents suggest that the

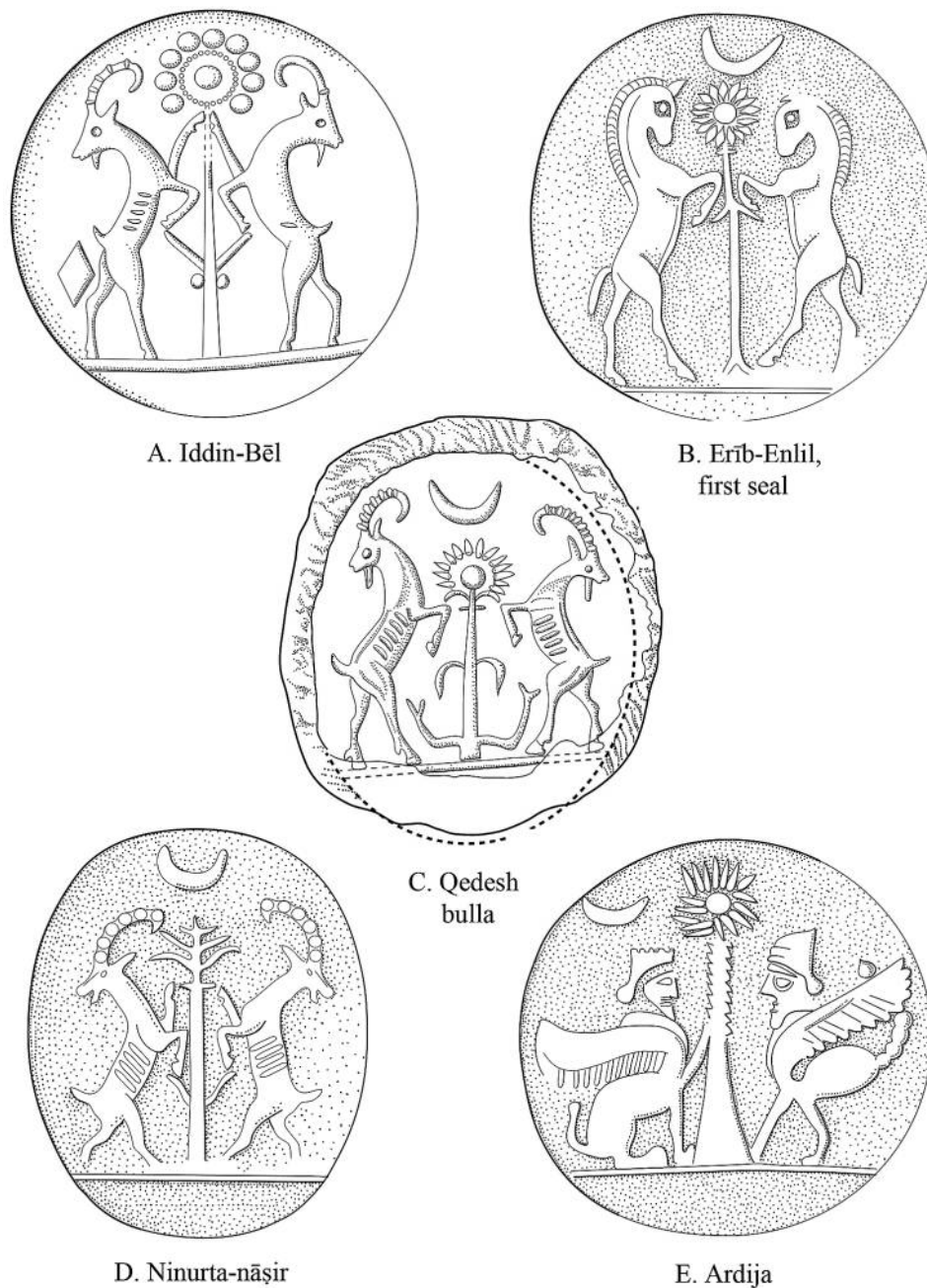


Fig. 15. New reconstructed drawings of impressions from the stylized flower-tree seal group. Drawings not to scale. (Drawings by C. Hersch)

group's overall economic circumstances were quite poor. As with other exiled communities, the Tyrians were victims of the feudatory system that the Achaemenids had established in Babylonia. Over time, population growth, coupled with the decreased size of fief plots from division of inheritance, led to steady impoverishment and the need to cash in on land holdings. This is precisely what happened to the Tyrians who now found themselves having to

rent their bow fiefs to the Murašûs. In such circumstances, it is easy to understand how some individuals and families could have decided to re-migrate, choosing to "return" to a place that still felt like home, and that might offer a chance for a better future.

The above reconstruction is based on lines of reasoning that are historically plausible, even if they are, admittedly, circumstantial. Moving beyond this requires

greater speculation. Below we offer one suggestion for the end of our bulla's story, while realizing that this is merely one of many possible scenarios.

The available evidence regarding Babylonian deportations of West Semitic groups indicates that the majority of those exiled came from elite, well-connected families (Vanderhooft 2003: 246, 255–56). That was the case with the Judeans, and it seems to have been the case with the Tyrians as well (Jigoulov 2010: 166, 172).<sup>43</sup> The evidence also indicates, however, that in both home locales some groups were left in place, with no re-settlement of new groups from outside (Kessler 2006: 93, with earlier bibliography). It may not be entirely far-fetched, therefore, to suggest that in his return from Nippur, our exile might have been able either to re-engage with some well-placed family members back in Tyre or take advantage of newer personal connections made possible by the Tyrian “network” that the exiled community maintained. Evidence that, back in Nippur, he was a member of a higher social class comes from the fact that he owned a seal in the first place, suggesting a level of at least basic literacy of a sort limited in this era to members of elite families, scribes, and perhaps artisans (Jigoulov 2010: 69, 165).

Once returned, those same connections, perhaps along with his skill at writing and also his contacts back in Nippur, may have helped propel him into better circum-

stances. After all, in this period the Tyrian elite enjoyed a certain amount of political freedom, operating under a system that Vadim Jigoulov has termed “managed autonomy” (2010: 168–71). This, along with a series of commercial enterprises, fueled a vibrant local economy and increasing material prosperity. It was the intersection of both of these circumstances, in fact, that allowed the Tyrians to establish their large compound at Qedesh. On the evidence of the finds, that facility's residents seem to have been fairly well-off and also well-connected with their coastal home city, probably via “a pastiche of complex relationships” (to borrow an effective phrase from Kessler 2006: 92).

It may have been one of those relationships that brought our seal owner—and his seal—to Qedesh, where he either drew up or simply witnessed a document that was then folded, elaborately tied, and sealed. While it is not impossible that he will have carried the document to Qedesh from somewhere else, the bulla's petrology, which is consistent with local clays in the vicinity of the site, supports a reconstruction of this final step at Qedesh itself.

We will probably never know who sent him, or for what reason. In the end, what we have is a material reflection of a journey, a suggested return for at least one Tyrian born in exile. Membership in the *ḥadru*-association of Tyrians in Nippur may have nourished a sense of identity and perhaps also furnished a ready-made set of connections with people back in Tyre. Armed with both, one member of the Tyrian diaspora could have returned home, bringing his seal with him, where, upon his return, he found a reason to use it.

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed presentation of the complicated micro-history, see Peckham 2014: 369–71. The records and transactions of residents of Neo-Babylonian *uru/kurṣur-ru*, between Nippur and Uruk, well reflect their wealth and high position (Vanderhooft 2003: 246–47).

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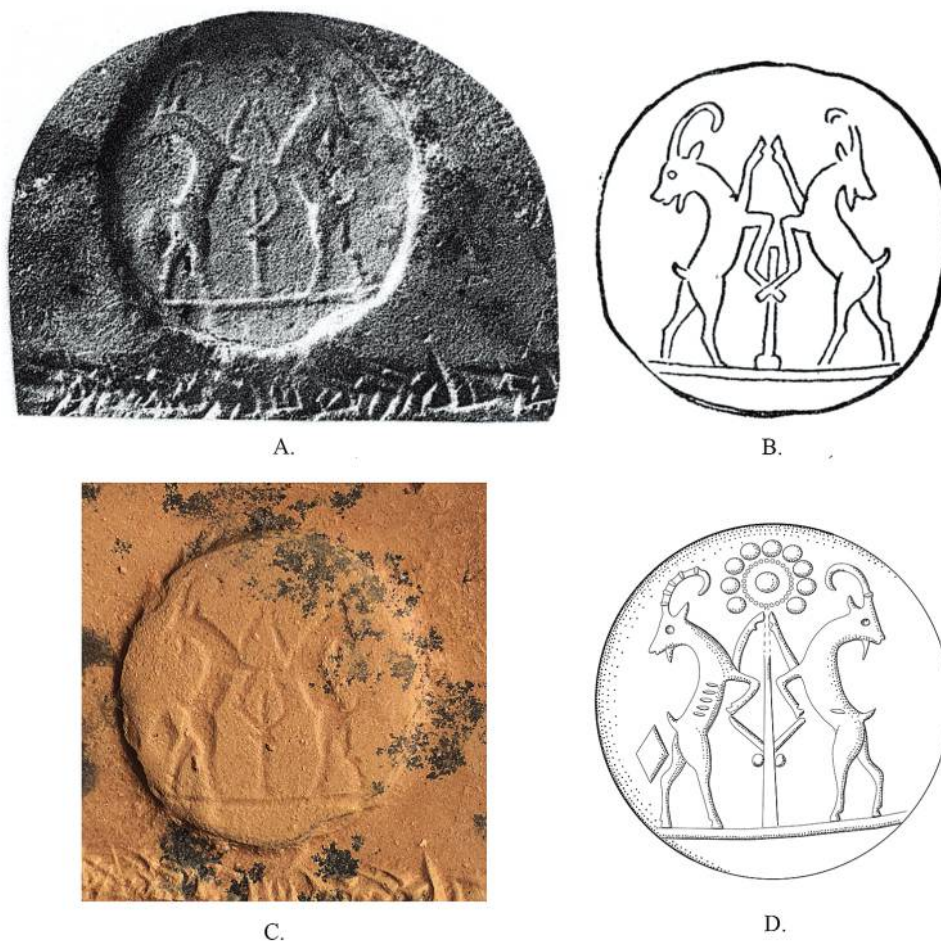
under the guidance of Baruch Brandl. Samuel Wolff offered comments at an early stage. We are most grateful to two anonymous reviewers for many cogent suggestions and corrections. We dedicate this article to Linda Bregstein, whose phenomenal work on the seals and sealing practices of the Murašû Archive was fundamental to our initial understanding of the Qedesh bulla and to our ability to place it within a larger social context.

## Appendix: New Drawings of Some Murašû Seal Impressions

Our analysis of the Qedesh bulla and the reconstruction of the seal that stamped it have entailed detailed re-study of a number of impressions on tablets from the Murašû archive (Figs. 16–23). We began with the fundamental and invaluable studies of Legrain (1925) and Bregstein (1993). Close scrutiny of the representative drawn images alongside the more numerous photographs showed sev-

eral small but significant discrepancies and omissions. One reason for this was that after an individual had impressed his seal, a scribe then wrote the name of the seal's owner as a caption just next to the impression, sometimes partially damaging or obscuring the image. For an illustration of this process, see above, Figs. 14a and 14c, with the partially damaged impressions of Eriḫ-Enlil and Ardija.





**Fig. 16.** Iddin-Bêl; impressions and reconstruction of conical stamp seal design. Dimensions according to Bregstein 1993: no. 316: length: 18 mm, height: 19 mm. (a) Photo of no. 847 from Legrain 1925: pl. 38. (b) Drawing of no. 847 from Legrain 1925: pl. 54. (c) Seal impression on CBS 5414. (d) New reconstruction drawing of Iddin-Bêl stamp seal. (a, b, courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology; c, photo by H. Pittman; courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology; d, Drawing by C. Hersch)

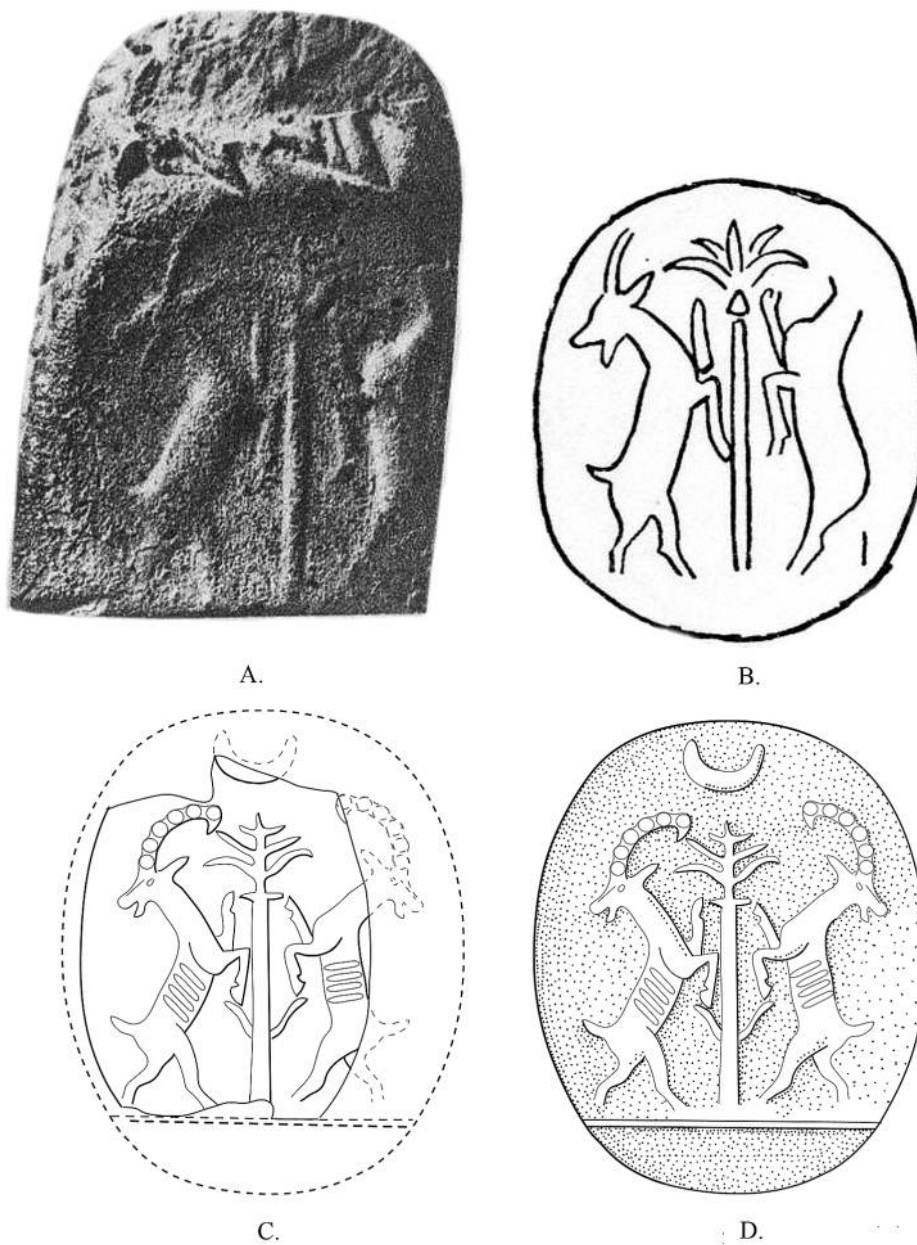
We began by consulting images from the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative (CDLI). We then collected new photographs of the best available impressions of each seal and created new composite drawings which combined the clearest version of each individual element. It will be noticed in the examples of individual impressions below that it was rare for the entire outline of a seal to appear in a single impression. More often, one edge shows up but others are either missing or damaged. A good example of this is Erib-Enlil's first seal (**Fig. 18c–e**). Attention to the recreation of this outline in some cases also allowed a reconstruction of the shape of the

actual seal, as in Erib-Enlil's third seal (**Fig. 20**) and the finger ring of Hazzia (**Fig. 23**).<sup>44</sup>

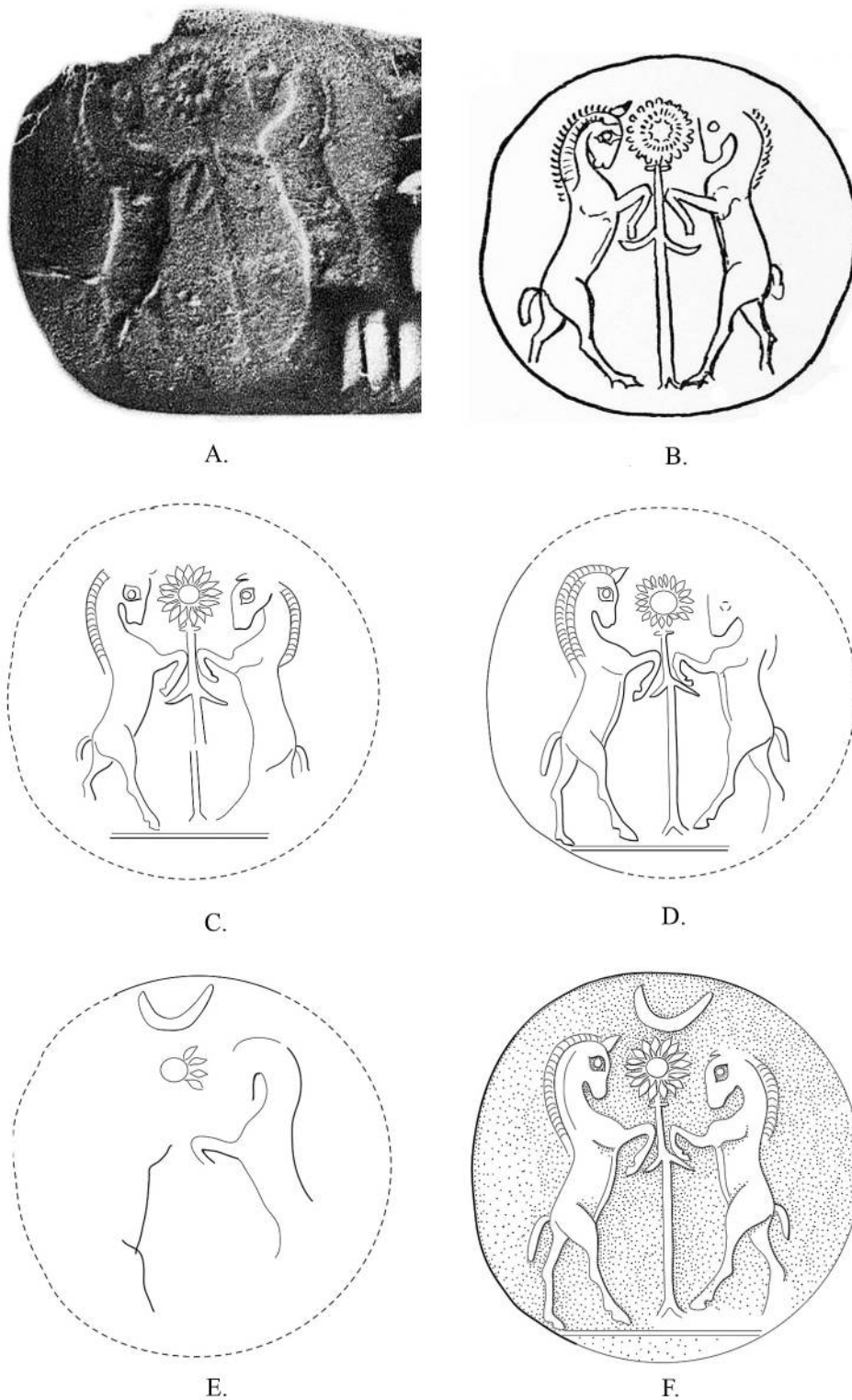
Photographs were acquired from The University Museum at the University of Pennsylvania and the Istanbul Archaeological Museum. The images from Philadelphia are referred to according to their numbers in the Catalogue of the Babylonian Section (CBS). The images from the Istanbul Archaeological Museum are referred to according to their collection numbers (Ni.).

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of impressions from finger rings from the Murašû archive see Brandl 2012: 39\*, n. 13.

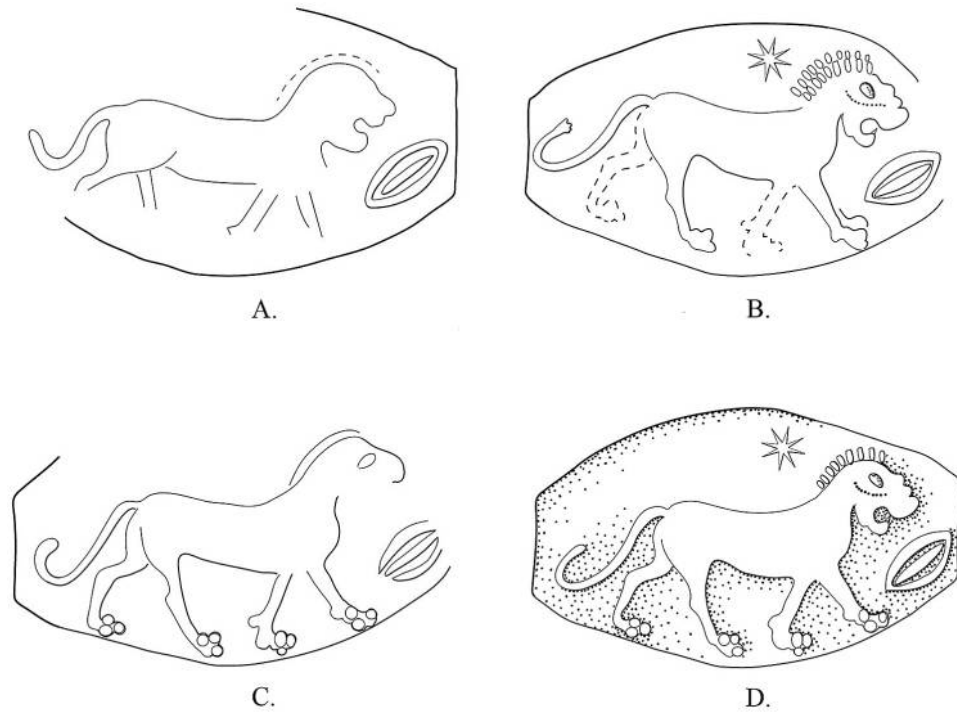




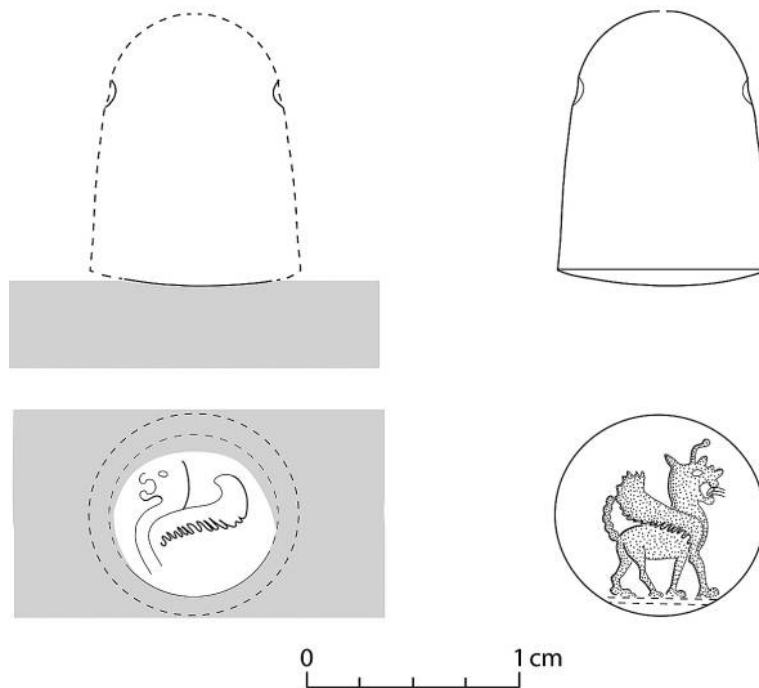
**Fig. 17.** Ninurta-Nāšir; impressions and reconstruction of conical stamp seal design. Dimensions according to Bregstein 1993: no. 315: length: 15 mm, height: 16 mm. (a) Photo of no. 846 from Legrain 1925: pl. 38. (b) Drawing of no. 846 from Legrain 1925: pl. 54. (c) New drawing of impression on CBS 12870. (d) New reconstruction drawing of Ninurta-Nāšir stamp seal. When tablet CBS 12870 was impressed (Fig. 17c, above), not enough pressure was applied, with the result that the image on the right side does not fully appear (see below, Fig. 20 and 21c for a similar situation). As can be seen on the digital photo from the CDLI (P267471), where this impression appears on the tablet's lower edge, the caption added by the scribe almost completely destroyed the crescent moon above the central tree. An additional issue with this seal is that the image itself was not centered properly on the seal face. For an example of an actual seal showing this same situation, see Fig. 9c above. (a, b, Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology; c, d, drawings by C. Hersch)



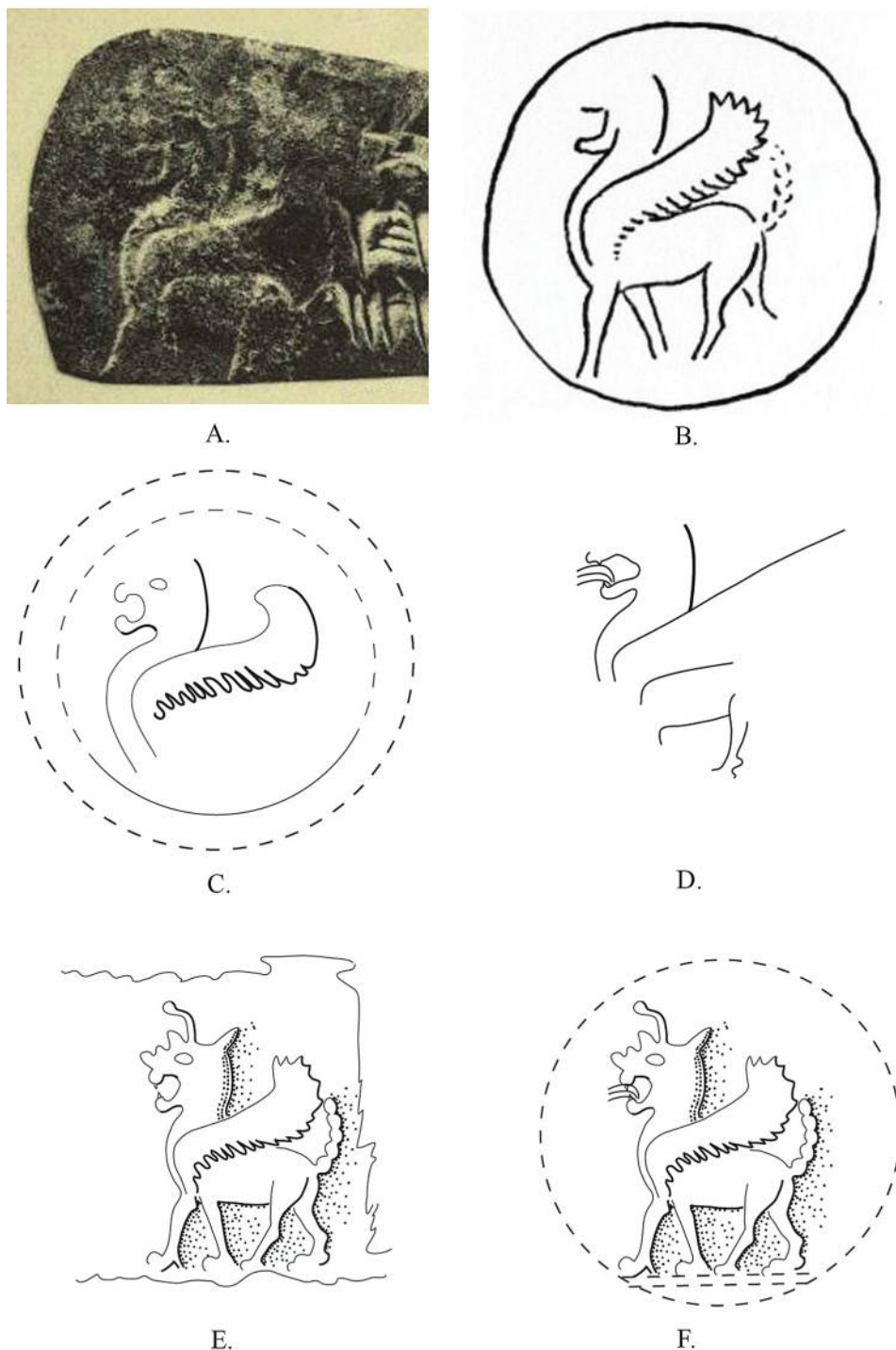
**Fig. 18.** Erib-Enlil; first seal, impressions and reconstruction of conical stamp seal design. Dimensions according to Bregstein 1993: no. 312: length: 17 mm, height: 22 mm. (a) Photo of no. 845 from Legrain 1925: pl. 38. (b) Drawing of no. 845 from Legrain 1925: pl. 54. (c) New drawing of impression on CBS 12973. (d) New drawing of impression on CBS 5295. (e) New drawing of impression on CBS 5356. (f) New reconstruction drawing of first seal of Erib-Enlil. (a, b, courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology; c-f, drawings by C. Hersch)



**Fig. 19.** Erib-Enlil; second seal, impressions and reconstruction of finger ring design. Dimensions according to Bregstein 1993: no. 279: length: 14 mm, height: 10 mm. (a) New drawing of impression on Ni. 595. (b) New drawing of impression on Ni. 552. (c) New drawing of impression on CBS 5333. (d) New reconstruction drawing of second seal of Erib-Enlil. (Drawings by C. Hersch)

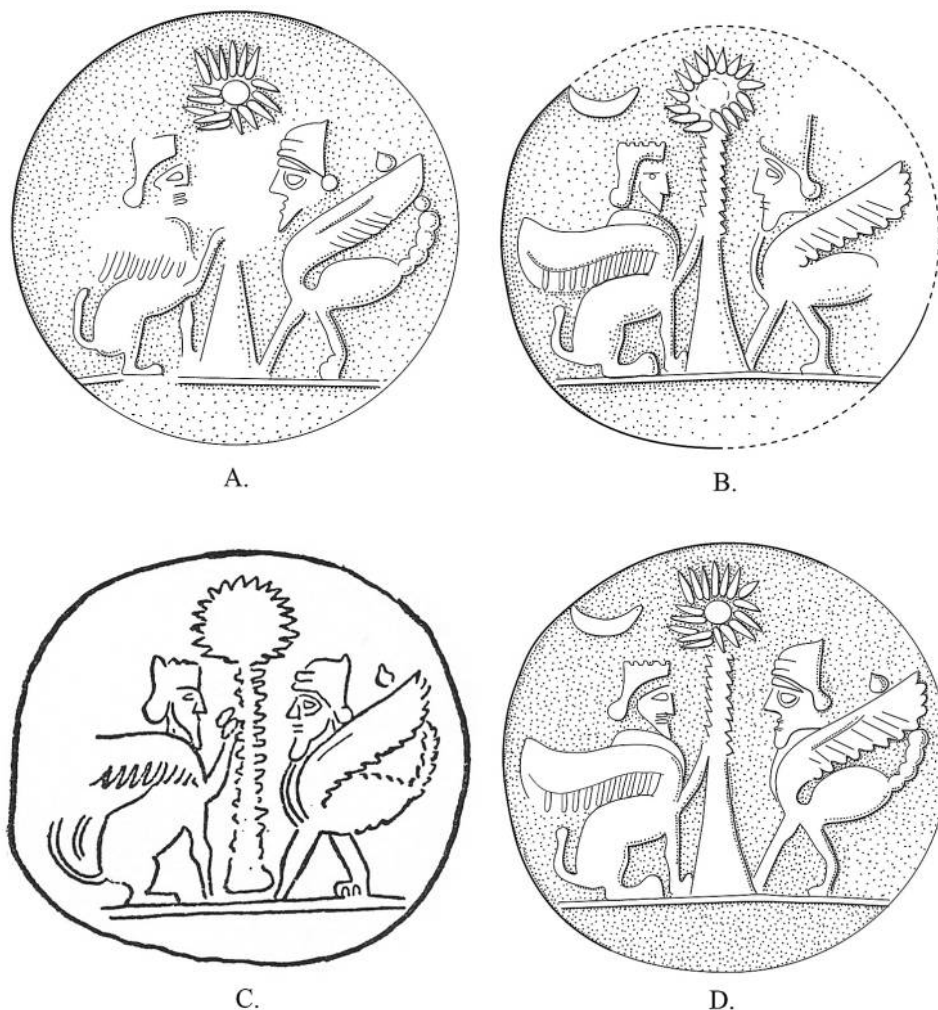


**Fig. 20.** Reconstruction of the third seal of Erib-Enlil based on the impression of CBS 5140. Dimensions according to Bregstein 1993: no. 459: length: 13 mm, height: 13 mm. (Drawings by C. Hersch)

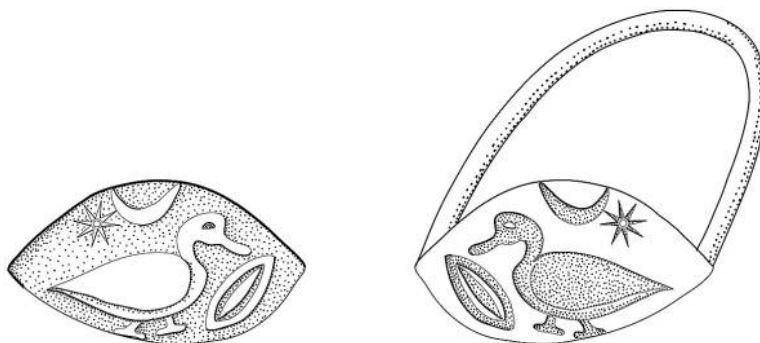


**Fig. 21.** Erib-Enlil; third seal, impressions and reconstruction of conical stamp seal design. Dimensions according to Bregstein 1993: no. 459; length: 13 mm, height: 13 mm. (a) Photo of no. 867 from Legrain 1925: pl. 39. (b) Drawing of no. 867 from Legrain 1925, pl. 55. (c) New drawing of impression on CBS 5140. (d) New drawing of impression on Ni. 563. (e) New drawing of impression on CBS 5369. (f) New reconstruction drawing of third seal of Erib-Enlil. Note that on Fig. 21c, above, there is a partial circular outline, which is evidence that the original seal design was in a circle, and therefore that the seal itself was a conical stamp (Bregstein 1993: 863, no. 459, identified this as a cylinder). When it was impressed, not enough pressure was applied, with the result that no true outer edge was made (see above, Fig. 20, for a reconstruction). (a, b, courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology; c–f, drawings by C. Hersch)





**Fig. 22.** Ardija, impression and reconstruction of conical stamp seal design. Dimensions according to Bregstein 1993: no. 535; length: 19 mm, height: 19 mm. (a) New drawing of impression on CBS 6134. (b) New drawing of impression on CBS 5273. (c) Drawing of no. 856 (= no. 850) from Legrain 1925: pl. 54. (d) New reconstruction drawing of seal of Ardija. (c, courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology; a, b, d, drawings by C. Hersch)



**Fig. 23.** Reconstruction of the finger ring seal of Hazzia. Dimensions according to Bregstein 1993: no. 287; length: 14 mm, height: 8 mm. (a) Finger ring impression drawn from photograph of impression on Ni. 592. (b) A suggested reconstruction of the finger ring. (Drawings by C. Hersch)

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