

Edited by
Kateřina Šašková, Lukáš Pecha and Petr Charvát

SHEPHERDS OF THE BLACK-HEADED PEOPLE:



THE ROYAL OFFICE VIS-À-VIS GODHEAD IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA



FACULTY
OF PHILOSOPHY AND ARTS
UNIVERSITY
OF WEST BOHEMIA

**Shepherds of the Black-headed People:
The Royal Office vis-à-vis godhead in
ancient Mesopotamia**

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Department of Middle Eastern Studies
Faculty of Philosophy and Arts

University of West Bohemia in Pilsen

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Preface

The one-time Department of Near Eastern Studies, now the Centre for Near Eastern Studies of the Department of Anthropological and Historical Sciences of the Philosophical Faculty of the University of West Bohemia at Plzeň (Pilsen), is a very young institution. It saw the light of day only in the year 2006, and by this time we are completing not yet a five-year jubilee of the centre with which we have linked our fate and our highest aspirations.

Yet, we feel that our institution can already look back on an academic record that is not entirely negligible. We have been teaching subjects relevant to the history, cultures and languages of the ancient Near East even before the establishment of an independent facility in the Department of Anthropology of the Pilsen University, for which the credit goes entirely to the first two scholars who made this possible, Ivo Budil, the person who was instrumental in the foundation of the Philosophical Faculty at Pilsen, and Lukáš Pecha, who first took up the task of teaching courses relevant to the ancient Orient. Our students are now many, and they have given us great satisfaction, having gone far and wide, pursuing their studies in other academic institutions, and, in some cases, to the joy of their teachers, dedicating themselves to the knowledge of ancient Near Eastern languages and cultures.

With this volume of studies, the Centre for Near Eastern Studies submits to the academic community the first major research contribution born within its premises in the Sedláčková street in the friendly neighbourhood of the historical core of the city of Pilsen. The three scholars whose signatures appear below this Introduction give due praise to the fact that our colleagues and friends from cities and scholarly establishments abroad were kind enough to accept our invitation, to come to Pilsen and to share with us their expert knowledge and deep wisdom. Academic cooperation between specialists working in institutions of learning and of the pursuit of high studies has always belonged to one of the traditions of this part of the world, and it gives us a great pleasure to refresh these contacts, severed for a considerable time by the adversities of the history of twentieth century A.D.

The scholars who exchanged their views during a common academic session which took place on the premises of the Philosophical Faculty of the University of West Bohemia at Pilsen

from October 5th to October 7th, 2010, submitted contributions included in this volume of studies. The individual papers neatly fall into contributions focusing on the third, second and first pre-Christian millennia.

For the third millennium we were fortunately able to thoroughly discuss some topics linked with research on texts, seals and sealings found at the Sumerian city of Ur in strata datable to the early third millennium B.C., with our colleagues from München (Munich), Berlin and Mainz. The scholarly exchange on issues of the second millennium and especially on the demise of the Old Babylonian state, brought forth remarkable results also thanks to the paper by our colleague from Ghent. Finally, the first-millennium themes received a most welcome supplement in a review paper on the University of West Bohemia archaeological exploration of the huge site of Erbil in northeastern Iraq. In the last-named case, the effort of the Pilsen scholars enriched our knowledge of the site by most welcome information on the post-Assyrian history of Erbil.

How, then, can we envisage the position of the Mesopotamian rulers vis-à-vis their gods and goddesses? This is hardly fitting into the popular *clichés* pertinent to the ancient Oriental rulers. Kings and queens of ancient Mesopotamia did not grovel in the dust below the feet of their deities, slavishly executing what they deemed to have been "celestial orders". Neither, however, can they be likened unto Sardanapal the tyrant of the famous painting by Eugène Delacroix, who, when he felt his own death approaching, put to death and destruction all that belonged to him including his harem. Should we choose a modern simile that may seem shocking, we propose that the relations among the Mesopotamian kings, their subjects and their deities may be figuratively compared to a soccer match in which the royal and the non-royal sectors of Mesopotamian society represent the two player teams, while the playground and the rules of the game are defined and provided by the divinity institutions.

Though the political courses of ancient Mesopotamian states might have sometimes led them into dire straits, the Sumerians, Babylonians and Assyrians learned well that what had always to remain stable and unmoved, was the underlying cultural pattern, the "blueprint" on which their civilization rested, defined, by and large, by religion. Much the same role was played by religion with respect to the set of rules regulating supra-kinship ties within Mesopotamian societies. Bearers of the ancient Mesopotamian civilizations felt no need for any office of high priest, a papal curia, or an Inquisition office, though religious institutions they did know

well. To a certain extent, it might be said that for the ancient Mesopotamians, religion was society and society was religion.

Prague and Pilsen, in this month of October 2010.

Kateřina Šařková

Lukáš Pecha

Petr Charvát

The third millennium

**Signs from silence: The archaic texts, seals and
sealings from Ur
A workshop**

Adelheid Otto
Walther Sallaberger
Petr Charvát

Introduction

Archaeological data concerning the seals and sealings of archaic Ur

Petr Charvát, University of West Bohemia, Plzeň

Several authors have recently commented on the finds of the sealings of archaic Ur of the incipient third millennium B.C. and their archaeological context.¹

These assessments bring arguments for dating the SIS 8, (and possibly also -7?), layers into the early ED I period.² Layer(s) SIS 7 and 6 are related to the latest graves of the "Jemdet Nasr cemetery", still within the ED I age;³ it seems that SIS 7 underlies these interments, and SIS 6 accumulated over them.⁴ The SIS 6 may thus belong to the early ED II period.⁵ After an interval, comprising obviously a prolonged period of time, the SIS 5-4 strata were deposited.⁶ Dietrich Sürenhagen dates these into the ED II - ED IIIa transition period.⁷

On the other hand, Richard Zettler, who has investigated the pottery profiles impressed into the jar sealings of the SIS 8-4 layers, suggests a date in ED I and/or ED I-II.⁸ The question is obviously a tricky one, and we will probably do best to date the SIS 8-4 strata to a time before the early ED IIIa.

¹ Published as UE III, on the find context see Woolley, in UE III pp. 1-2, most recently Sürenhagen 1999, 180-187, and section drawing on Taf. 47, as well as Zettler 1989, Dittman 2006, 38-39, and Marchetti 2006, 71-83, esp. pp. 72-76.

² Sürenhagen 1999, 183 and 207 (occurrence of solid-footed goblets).

³ Sürenhagen 1999, 210-211 and 224 (continuity of solid-footed goblets throughout the cemetery).

⁴ Sürenhagen 1999, 236, and Conclusions, 242-243.

⁵ Sürenhagen 1999, summarizing table on p. 250.

⁶ Sürenhagen 1999, table on p. 208.

⁷ Sürenhagen 1999, summarizing table on p. 250.

⁸ Zettler 1989, 379.

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Discussion

Sallaberger: From my own experience I can say that the texts from SIS 8-4 display the same orthography, metrology and prosopography. I am convinced that they were written over a relatively short period of time. How does that accord with the long intervals assumed to have separated the particular strata?

Charvát: I must say this is a puzzle to me. There appear to be quite massive layer sequences separating the individual SIS, like those

between SIS 6 and 5 which comprise two layers of house débris. But my impressions are rather close to yours - I also believe that the individual sealing groups are not very much apart in time. So either the rate of accumulation of natural and anthropogenous strata within the SIS area was fairly quick, or there is something wrong with the stratigraphical data at our disposal.

The iconography and use of the Ur SIS 8-4 seals reconsidered

Adelheid Otto, Johannes-Gutenberg-Universität Mainz

Abstract

In this paper the author attempts to find the position of the seals of archaic Ur (cca. 3000 - 2700 B.C.) vis-à-vis the general development sequence of the Mesopotamian glyptic art from the Late Uruk to the mature Early Dynastic period. Most of the Ur motifs are derived from Late Uruk glyptic, and few relations to those of the ED II period can be observed, which may give us a hint for the dating of the SIS 8-4 seals. The SIS 8-4 art represents a local development of Late Uruk creations, and it may thus constitute a "missing link" between Late Uruk *oeuvres* and the fully fledged style of ED I-II periods. A major change is the ushering in of the man-in-the-kilt (sovereign) figure who kills people and participates at banquets.

Keywords: History of ancient Mesopotamia, Early Dynastic period, Sumer, Ur, seals, glyptic art.

This contribution will focus on the iconography, administrative background and dating of the sealings from the SIS 8-4 levels of the Sumerian city of Ur.

A considerable number of scholars have approached various questions pertaining to the seals and seal impressions of archaic Ur. Among others Pierre Amiet, Donald Hansen, Norbert Karg who wrote his dissertation on them, Harriet Martin, Roger Matthews, Holly Pittman and Richard Zettler. Most of them did, however, concentrate on questions linked with the dating or the iconography of the seal images or the reverse of the sealings.

The questions that I am going to tackle in this contribution are the following:

What are these lumps of clay, and how did they come here?

What does the apparent similarity of many seal images mean?

What evidence of contacts between the city of Ur and other sites or regions do they give?

What informations on the organization and administration of the city do they offer?

In order to stress the peculiarity of the SIS 8-4 seals, let us have a quick look at the earlier and the later glyptic motifs and styles. Let me begin with pointing out some of the chief iconographic themes of the glyptic art confined to the Late Uruk period. The main themes of the usually large seals in a (mostly) well modelled style are

- 1) the *Mann im Netzrock*, possibly the king,
- 2) victims of military actions, domineered by this very personage,
- 3) facades of monumental buildings,
- 4) files of persons walking,
- 5) files of animals walking.

In addition to these narrative compositions, where the figures behave in a relatively natural way, there exist completely different compositions involving heraldically, symmetrically disposed animals or composite creatures on their hindlegs.

Another group of clearly contemporary seals, which were formerly understood as posterior crude seals of the Jemdet Nasr period, differ in style (mechanically executed with drill and cutting wheel), size of the cylinder (small, squat seals) and the themes depicted, before all the "pigtailed women". They are named here the Late Uruk "simple seals".

As against this, later seals of ED II-III date depict mainly (except for banquet scenes and few other motifs) animals in an upright position on their hind legs, artificially arranged and forming continuous bands ("*Figurenband*"), while stylistically there is (at least in some sites) a certain development from elongated and narrow figures to those with a marked complexity of forms which tend to be somewhat swollen and have more bodily character (*Körperlichkeit*).

It can thus be observed that a complete break opens between Late Uruk and ED II seal iconography in terms of the depiction of humans and animals. In between these two units, at least some examples of seals datable to ED I-II are known from such sites as Nippur, Fara or Kiš. Specific features displayed by this ED I-II "interim phase" are

- 1) animals walking on its four legs, with only the attacking lions on their hind legs (in cases),
- 2) depictions of a male person wearing a flat cap and a kilt reaching down to the ankles, the front part gathered in front and tucked up behind the girdle.

In fact, such depictions have little in common with Late Uruk imagery either, concerning the motifs and the style, the figures being clumsy and squat and the field crowded with secondary (or "filling") motifs.

The above described differences - animals in a relatively "natural" position or upright on their hind legs, the type of hero and the style - led Dominique Collon (1987) to replace the quite sophisticated earlier divisions of the ED glyptic periods by a simpler division into two broadly conceived phases, ED A (= ED I-II) and ED II (= ED II-III).

Let us return to the Late Uruk "simple seals", differing from the high-standard products by their cruder execution, displaying mostly the motifs of the "pigtailed women" and various animals and geometric motifs. The reasons for this difference have been sought in various factors:

- 1) the traditional explanation seeing in them chronologically later products belonging to the Jemdet Nasr age has been disproved, as it transpired that these run parallel to the high-standard quality seals in time;
- 2) the idea that these might have been collective seals as against the high-standard individual seals has also been refuted, because the seal impressions from various administrative units at Uruk-Eanna (Boehmer 1999) speaks against this explanations.

Another explanation could be that the difference lies in the regional diffusion of these seal types: the simple seals turn up in northern Mesopotamia, Syria, Anatolia and the Zagros range while high-standard seals constitute a mark of southern Mesopotamia.

In our reasoning about the stylistic transformations of seal iconography and imagery, a crucial role obviously falls to the site of Jemdet Nasr. The Langdon expedition of 1926 and 1928 has uncovered remains of a substantial building on mound B of which it is now believed that it was once a palace. Interestingly, the seals

and seal impressions found therein belonged to three distinct groups:

- 1) high-standards seals parallel to the *Mann im Netzrock* series with depictions of herds, processions and monumental architecture,
- 2) simple seals, mechanically executed with drill and cutting wheel,
- 3) and finally, ornamental seals coming from most diverse sources including the Zagros- and Taurus-related items, "Brocade-style" items, "Piedmont Jemdet Nasr" pieces, "Glazed Steatite" seals, of which Holly Pittman observed a great variety and a considerable diffusion sphere reaching as far as southeastern Iran (Shahr-i Sokhta), as well as those displaying links with Proto-Elamite glyptic.

These seals show, that the two different glyptic branches - the elaborate and the simple seals - were developed further in the Jemdet Nasr period, and additionally a great variety of North-Eastern local styles appeared, including those of Nineveh V, "Brocade", "Piedmont Jemdet Nasr", Glazed Steatite, Proto-Elamite and, finally, also the Early Dynastic glyptic of Mesopotamia proper. In answering the question what were the peculiarities of this last category, the seals and sealing of archaic Ur are of prime importance.

Given the nature of the strata in which the SIS were encapsulated, I wish to point out that any archaeologist supervising a sounding proceeding deeper and deeper in a refuse area, will have considerable difficulties in defining the stratigraphy, because there are no horizontal strata he or she is taking off, but numerous pitlike structures, often one intrusive in the other. My impression is that the SIS 8-4 strata cannot be effectively subdivided or differentiated, and that their mutual stratigraphic relations cannot be firmly fixed. Materials from these strata definitely include some later intrusions, such as UE III: 298 which must be much later, of ED IIIa or even ED IIIb date, with parallel from Tells Beydar or Brak.⁹ In total, there may be some twenty intrusive sealings in the SIS 8-4 sequence. The rest is then fairly homogenous.

The largest corpus of sealings with one common theme are the often-commented "City-league seals". There seem to be about 180

⁹ See Matthews (D.) 1997.