A Preclassical Stamp Seal From Perge[1]

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Perge is one of the most important cities of Pamphylia. The excavations conducted on the west necropolis of the city, has revealed simple pit burials, various types of sarcophagi, tombs and rock-cut tombs with some in situ finds, which give a date between 1st century BC and 4th century AD. In the present article, it is examined a stamp seal which was found in tomb from late Hellenistic-early Roman era. The stamp seal has an octagonal pyramidal body and tapering base an octagonal convex surface, on which an offering scene before a deity's symbol. The find is dated to the Neo-Babylonian period, which is one of the earliest finds from the city.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Perge, Damga mühür, Yeni Babil, Kalkedon taşı, Roma öncesi

Antik Pamphylia bölgesinin önemli kentlerinden biri olan Perge'nin Batı Nekropolisi'nde yapılan kazı çalışmalarında sayısız tipte mezarlar in situ buluntularıyla birlikte açığa çıkarılmıştır. Makale, geç Hellenistik-erken Roma dönemine tarihlenen bir lahit içinde bulunmuş bir mührü konu almaktadır. Mühür, sekizgen gövdeli, yukarı doğru daralan formda olup, hafif dışbükey tabanında tanrısal semboller önünde sunu yapan, uzun giyimli ve sakallı bir rahip betimine sahiptir. Benzerleri Yeni Babil Dönemi'ne tarihlenen bu buluntu, Perge'nin Roma öncesi dönemlerine ait sınırlı sayıdaki buluntulardan biridir.

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Perge is one of the most important cities of Pamphylia, a region that covers the modern Antalya plain. The first work at the site was conducted by Prof. Arif Müfid Mansel in 1943 and followed by those of Prof. Jale İnan between 1970-1980, and Prof. Haluk Abbasoğlu between 1988-2011. The long term excavations by the members of Istanbul University revealed that the lower city was adorned by magnificent structures especially in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, when the city lived its heyday[1]. At the same time, the association of "Parrha", a settlement name included in a border agreement between the Hittite king Tudhaliya IV and Kurunta with "Perge", has led to a number of other studies dealing with the early history of the city. Thus, between 1994 and 2007, a joint venture at Perge acropolis with Prof. Wolfram Martini of Justus Liebig Univesity in Giessen, lowered date for early human presence in Perge to the Chalcolithic Period (Martini 1999). It seems that in the Hellenistic period the residents descended the plain below and fortified the settlement to include the acropolis, where the settlement continued in spite of building activities in the lower city.

The work by Prof. Abbasoğlu concentrated on the study of social life in the city. To that end, excavations were conducted first at the residential quarters then the necropolis. The city has three necropoleis, one outside the walls on the acropolis, others to the west and east respectively. The west necropolis, systematically excavated from 1997 following several sporadic excavations, revealed simple pit burials, various types of sarcophagi, tombs and rock-cut tombs with some *in situ* finds, which give a date between 1st century BC and 4th century AD.

Findspot and Context of the Seal

The diverse types of burials in the west necropolis were laid out as a street in line with the slope of the terrain. The seal was found here, in one of the three adjacent sarcophagi, which were placed in east-west direction and bonded with mortar. The long eastern side of the easternmost sarcophagus is beneath the peribolos wall of a monumental tomb. The lids of the sarcophagi adjacent to the tomb including the one with the seal were deliberately broken and then reclosed. Skeletons are badly damaged due to the soil slide, hence the original locations of the finds.

The sarcophagus with the seal is of limestone with a low and flat roof. It is undecorated and without any inscriptions. These plain types are defined as local Late Hellenistic-Early Roman sarcophagi (Turak 2011: 511). Bones belonging to three individuals and skulls have been reported along with two unidentified bronze coins, a base fragment of an unguentarium and the seal in question.[2] The unguentarium fragment has a large foot with a conical base and an everted body. In this type, the body widens to form a shoulder and then narrows to form a high neck, and finally opens outwards creating a wide mouth. Similar finds have been dated to the 1st century BC (Tuluk 1999: 147-148, no. 146). The coins, however, are unintelligible due to the heavy corrosion.

The Seal

It has an octagonal pyramidal body and is made of chalcedony with sporadic cracks on the surface and flaking on the sides. Its dimensions are 2.3 x 1.5 x 1.2 cm. The tapering base has an octagonal convex surface and the top a suspension hole cutting the seal longitudinally. On the base is a standing male figure looking left made with a drill. He wears a long dress covering the body down to the ankles and tightened at the waist. Both arms bend up at a 45 degree angle. In front of the figure is a spade on a platform with four horizontal lines and a motif composed of two vertical stylus. Below the spade a short horizontal line draws attention. The scene depicts a figure praying or making an offering before divine symbols.

General Assessment

As is known, use of stamp seals began around 6500 BC in North Syria and Mesopotamia (Porada 1993: 563). Following these earliest examples that are presumably amulets, cylindrical ones appear in 3500 BC in Uruk (Porada 1993: 563). The use of seals, which took shape in accordance with certain social statuses, become popular for economic and religious reasons. The depictions they bear offer valuable insights on the political and cultural aspects of the period they belong to. Ample areas on the cylindrical seals allowed desired motifs to be applied more freely, while stamps seals have limited space for this. Our example is notable for its above-mentioned religious.

Earliest offering scenes before a deity or his/her symbol are dated to the 9th century BC (Gane 1990: 11-12). They were remodelled and abridged in the Neo-Babyonian Period, substituting symbols for deities. Offering before symbols was a dominant subject in Neo-Babylonian period (625-539 BC) and remained in use until the reign of Darius I (521-486 BC) (Gane 1990: 20; Zettler 1979:257 ff.). On the other hand, the documents stamped with the seals bearing worshipping scenes are usually of legal or commercial nature (Gane 1990:26 vdd) and it is thought that they might have been used by men of high status (Gane 1990:31).

Octagonal pyramidal Neo-Babylonian stamps seals like the Pergean example are numerous.[3] They are usually of limestone, quartz, hematite, lapislazuli, agate and chalcedony

[1] I am grateful to Prof. Dr. H. Abbasoğlu for his support and the permission to study the material. Also thanks to H.Garan for drawing of the seal. For historical description of the city see Abbasoğlu 2001; Abbasoğlu 2006; Özdzibay 2012, 5-20.

[2] Contextual finds from the west necropolis of Perge is the subject of another work by the author.

[3] eg. Vollenweider 1967; Porada 1948; Osten 1954.

with some unique examples (Glass -Schachner 2008:74 and terracotta -Gane 1990: 33).[4] Most of them bear a figure making an offering before various symbols. Motifs were modelled or drilled, and the figures become simpler and more schematic towards the end of the period. Their widespread geographical distribution is attributed to the simplicity, hence easier imitation. Thus their local production is quite intensive (Ornan 2010; Porada 1948: 96) and it would be more accurate to describe the seal as "it is made in the Neo-Babylonian style".

The workmanship of the Pergean seal suggests that it is not one of the later examples. Despite its schematic appearance, a closer look reveals some details. For instance, the figure rests on a ground line which is not seen the majority of the seals of this type. Detailed craftsmanship can also observed on the beard which is down from his chin to the belly, nose and on the lips. Although the round head makes the figure look like bald, it is clear from the round groove on the shoulder that he wears a head dress and sports long hair. In fact, in certain examples with similar motifs the figure already has a headdress. This is supported by Herodotus' passage on Babylonians: "For clothing, they wear a linen tunic, reaching to the feet; over this the Babylonian puts on another tunic, of wool, and wraps himself in a white mantle; he wears the shoes of his country, which are like Boeotian sandals. Their hair is worn long, and covered by caps; the whole body is perfumed. Every man has a seal and a carved staff, and on every staff is some image, such as that of an apple or a rose or a lily or an eagle: no one carries a staff without an image" (Hdt. 1.195).

The figure on the seal too wears a plain long dress reaching down to the ankles as Herodotus mentions. Presence of a belt is implied by two horizontal lines. Some seals with similar features bears figures with two layers of dress, but Pergean example do not offer any hint of dress other than the belt.

The figure stands before a spade which has an ovoid in shape on a sceptre with a horizontal line in its centre, standing on a base made of four horizontal lines. This motif is interpreted as "marru-spade", the symbol of Marduk, one of the most important deities in Babylonian pantheon (Ornan 2010:54; Gane 1990: 54). Behind it is two styluses, attributes of Nabu, the god of writing and wisdom (Ornan 2010:54; Gane 1990: 54). Contrary to most of the examples of this type, the Pergean sean does not have star and crescent motifs.[5]

A significant findspot for similar seals in Anatolia[6] is Dülük Baba Tepesi, which was later transformed into sanctuary of Zeus Dolichenus. It yielded finds dating back to the 3rd millennium BC, which included cylindrical, stamp and scaraboid seals. They were probably brought here by the visitors (Schahner 2008: 69-96; Schahner 2014: 33-48). Similar finds has not yet occurred in the neighbouring regions of Perge[7], though one example is known from the Burdur Uylupınar necropolis.[8]

It has been concerned that the Neo-Babylonian era covering roughly the 7th-5th cent.B.C., the Pergean seal bears a new data for Pamphylian region which belongs to very early date before Roman times. The pottery finds from the acropolis of Perge showed strong influence of Cyprus since 1st thousand B.C. After the end of the 8th cent B.C., some Lydian wavy pattern and marblising decorated vessels and their imitations has been found; but it is observed that much more dominant effects of Rhodes at the same period. Altough it has been proposed in terms of the intensity of the Rhodian amphoras, the presence of the elite people in the area. After 5th cent BC and onwards, it is seen strong Attic influences both on pottery and the architecture (Recke 2003:252-253). A remarkable amphora piece depicted a bird-man was also dated to the 700 B.C., bears strong influence Hittite and eastern effects (Martini 2010:39-42; Recke 2003: 252). Thus, it has been suggested that after the end of the 8th cent.B.C. yet slowly growing western influence, for example on the ruling class itself, or on elite, but also oriental influences continue.

We have noted above that the seal was found along with an unguentarium fragment dating to the 1st century BC. The Neo-Babylonian seal appears as a burial gift in a much later context, which indicates multiple uses.[9] Similar cases are reported in other regions: They appear in a Roman tomb at Tell eş-Şafi (Ornan 2010: 54-56) or in a second century BC kurgan in north Caucasia (Kacharava 2005:300, ftn.26). It is conventionally suggested that these seals were found by the grave owners and used in their lifetime, though it is equally possible that they were valued as family heirlooms. The seal is a new find that sheds further light on the history of Pamphylia in the 7th-6h centuries BC. Although its provenance remains unknown, the seal is as yet a weak indicator of city's ties with east, be it personal or commercial. Future research and new finds will contribute greatly to the understanding Perge and Pamphylia in general.

[4] For various and semi-various stamp/gemma stone types in Anatolia see Hatipoğlu-Güney 2013: 165-168.

[5] They are known to represent Sin and Ishtar.

[6] Some others from Gordion, Dusinberre 2010: 331, fig.31.9; from Daskyleion Bakır 2011: 101-102.

[7] For similar ones from the Near East, see Ornan 2010: 54; Tushingham 1992:15-18; Gane 1990.

[8] Personal communication with Asst. Prof. Eray Dökü of Burdur Archaeology Museum, for which I am indebted.

[9] Multiple burials and broken sarcophagus lid might point to secondary or perhaps tertiary use of the grave.



Fig.1
Octagonal surface of the stamp seal.



Fig. 2
Imprint.

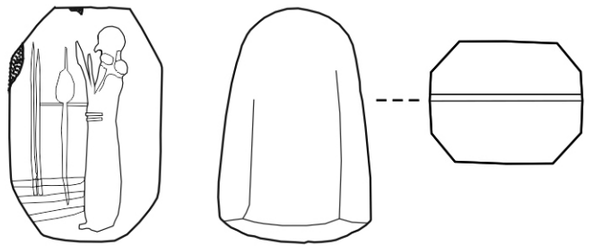


Fig. 3
Drawing of the seal.

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