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Ancient Mesopotamian Seals in Erzurum Archaeology Museum

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Abstract This study examines 22 seals of Mesopotamian origin, which were acquired by the Erzurum Archaeology Museum and are currently held in its collection. The artifacts were photographed in the museum's laboratory, impressions were made, and X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analyses were performed. The seals were evaluated through stylistic analysis, referencing established academic publications. Seals are a vital component of Mesopotamian culture. While stamp seals were used from the Neolithic period onwards, the peoples of Mesopotamia adopted cylinder seals with the rise of the Sumerians, using them continuously until the Persian period. These artifacts often find their way into museum collections through both legal and illicit means. Consequently, thousands of Mesopotamian stamp and cylinder seals are preserved in major museums worldwide. Because southeastern Turkey is part of this cultural sphere, seals are regularly brought to museums in the region.

Keywords Erzurum Archaeology Museum · Glyptic of Mesopotamia · Mesopotamian seals · Stamp seals · Cylinder seals

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Introduction

In ancient Anatolia, seals were objects used to determine ownership, ensure the security of goods, and formalize commercial and political correspondence between different cultures (Özkan, 2011: 148). Seals have provided information about the socio-cultural, administrative, and political aspects of these civilizations, as well as the positions and lives of individuals in society (Crawford, 2004, p. 214; Özkan, 2007, pp. 93-94, Fig. 8, 10). These archeologically valuable artifacts could be made of various stones, especially soft stones such as steatite, serpentine, and limestone, semi-precious stones, or materials such as metal, ivory, bone, and glass (Özkan, 2022, pp. 7-8).

These small objects first appeared during the Neolithic Period, and their use increased as the concept of property became more prominent (Crawford, 2004, p. 208). The hierarchical social order that emerged in this period, when settled life began and commercial activities intensified, led to both the wider use of seals and their increasing diversity (Coşkun & Karatekin, 2020, pp. 149-151).

In the ancient Near East, around 7500 BCE, the first stamp seals with pyramidal or conical bodies were used in settlements such as Ugarit, Bukras, and Tell Shir (Wickede, 1990, pp. 152-173; Duistermaat, 2012, p. 4). In the following periods, they spread over a wide geographical area extending to Northern Syria, Southeastern Anatolia, and Central Anatolia.

With the arrival of the Sumerians around 4100 BCE, cylinder seals were introduced to social life in Mesopotamia, Syria, and the Elam region, which led to the creation of relief impressions. The surfaces of the cylindrical seals, which vary between 3 and 6 cm in height and 1-2 cm in diameter, were carved with pointed tools to create geometric or figural decorations. These were then rolled onto soft clay to create an impression, such as on a bulla or tablet.

The seals, known as “Kishib” in Sumerian, “Kunukku” or “purkullu” in Akkadian, and “Şiyatar” in Hittite (Pittman, 1995, p. 1593; Özkan, 2010, p. 148), were used across a wide geographical area, with each culture adapting them to its own artistic conventions (Özkan, 2001, p. 16; Özkan, 2022, p. 1). These artifacts, which first emerged in the Late Uruk Period, were made in unique styles in each subsequent period and were used for centuries until the fall of the Persian Empire (Frankkfort, 1939, p. 15).

After Mesopotamia, cylinder seals were also used in regions such as Syria, Iran, Palestine, Cyprus, Anatolia and, to a lesser extent, Egypt and Arabia (Özkan, 2010, p. 149). During the Assyrian Trade Colonies Period, as a result of commercial activities between Assyrians and the Central Anatolian principalities, cylinder seals were used in Kültepe, Alişar, Boğazköy, Acemhöyük, and Konya-Karahöyük (Alp, 1972; Özgüç, 2015). In the Late Bronze Age, cylinder seals were also found in Hittite centers such as Boğazköy and Alacahöyük and in contemporary settlements close to Syrian and Mesopotamian cultural regions, such as Tilmen Höyük, Korucutepe, and Gözlükule (Bittel, 1941, Fig. 39; Goldman, 1956, Fig. 393, 20-21; Fig.397, 6-8; Güterbock, 1980; Marchetti, 2011). Seals with religious decorations were carried as amulets for divine protection (Özkan, 2022, p. 26).

Cylinder seals were engraved with scenes of worship, combat, rows of animals, gods, mythical creatures, and hunting, often supported by various filling motifs. During the Early Dynastic Period (2600-2350 BCE), there were some differences in surface decoration. During this period, when the entire seal surface was often filled, the most popular subjects were the struggle of lions with animals like goats and oxen, and scenes of a naked hero (Gilgamesh) and a bull-man (Enkidu) fighting antelopes, lions, and human-headed bulls. The richness of the subject matter on the seals and the fact that they reflect each region’s unique qualities made these objects even more important. Over time, cuneiform inscriptions revealing the owner’s identity became more common; especially in the Third Dynasty of Ur and Old Babylonian Periods, as the inscriptions gained prominence, the figures became smaller.

Archaeological evidence indicates that cylinder seals were an integral part of daily life in Ancient Mesopotamia and Anatolia, but their use declined at the end of the Persian period, and they were replaced by stamp seals (Özkan, 2011,

p. 149). Cylinder seals, especially the best examples from royal dynasties, have been a mirror of daily life and beliefs, often in greater detail than stamp seals.

It is important to publish the collections of ancient Syrian and Mesopotamian seals that have come to museums and private collections in Turkey through various means, so that this rich heritage can be known. Apart from the Istanbul Museum of Ancient Oriental Works, Southeastern Anatolian museums have the most seals from ancient Syria and Mesopotamia. The number of seals available includes 3000 in the Malatya Archaeology Museum, 1400 in Gaziantep, 850 in Hatay, 227 in Elazig, 185 in Şanlıurfa, 139 in Diyarbakır, 90 in Mardin, and 60 in Adıyaman. In addition to official excavations, museum seal collections are growing thanks to local villagers bringing in their finds. However, there are very few such seals in Eastern Anatolian museums. Most of the seals, approximately 190, in the Van Museum, which has the highest number in the region, belong to the Urartian period. According to both statistics and publications, 12 seals are found in Kars, 9 in Ahlat, 2 in Erzincan, and 1 in Bayburt. This scarcity makes it difficult for these museums to exhibit Mesopotamian glyptic art. Very few seals in these museums have been published.

This article discusses 22 ancient Mesopotamian seals in the Erzurum Archaeology Museum and aims to contribute to the study of ancient Mesopotamian glyptic art. In addition to those examined here, the Erzurum Museum also holds 46 Urartian, 18 late period, and 15 Sassanid ring seals, for 101 seals. We are continuing our work on these collections. As the seals were acquired through purchase, their exact origin is unknown.

Stamp Seals of the Prehistoric Periods (Neolithic-Late Chalcolithic)

Figure 1

1. *Inv. No: 244-81*



The height of the black serpentine seal is 2.5 cm, and its face is 2.5x1.3 cm. The pyramid-shaped seal has a rope hole. The roughly rectangular print face is divided into squares and rectangles with straight lines.

The seal appears to be of Neolithic age in the Amuq region, which is made of soft stones such as steatit, serpentine, and limestone (Wickede, 1990, Fig.31-40; Amorai-Stark, 1997, no.37-38).

Figure 2

2. Inv. No: 209-2003



The seal made of steatite is 2.5 cm long, 1.8 cm wide, and 1.0 cm thick.

Triangles are formed with straight lines on the face.

Although the perforation of a seal is typically on the back, the fact that it passes through the engraved face suggests that it was used more as an amulet than as a functional seal. Indeed, many Halaf seals with forms such as hands, feet, and crescents were made to be worn around the neck like an amulet. This artifact is one such amulet-type seal belonging to the Halaf period (Wieckede, 1990, p. 102).

Figure 3

23. Inv. No: 38-88



The thickness of the steatite seal is 1.7 cm, and the print face is 2.0x2.1 cm.

Two L's or V's are engraved inside each other on the print face in the areas divided into four parts by a cross.

Hemispherical seals, such as this one, are characteristic of the Chalcolithic era (Türkteki, 2022, Cat. No. 24). The motif known as the 'Sun Course' first appeared in the Chalcolithic age and is very common on clay stamp seals in Anatolia, especially during the Early Bronze Age (Özkan, 2001, K.95.74; Yağcı, 2010, K.5 6; Keel-Leu, 1991, nr.19-20). Also see: Bademağacı Höyüğü Early Bronze II Age seals, Duru & Umurtak, 2009). This seal is made of stone and has a hemispherical shape, which is consistent with the Late Chalcolithic period.

Figure 4
Inv. No: 3-38-74



The thickness of the steatite seal is 1.7 cm, and the seal face is 2.8x2.2 cm.

The seal face is rectangular with slight indentations on each side. On its face, three parallel lines are engraved across the width, and one line is engraved along the length. Four short lines are engraved in the spaces created between them, each pointing toward the center.

This seal can be placed in the Late Ubaid period based on dated counterparts (Türkteki, 2022, Cat. No. 24).

Figure 5
Inv. No: 39-88



The thickness of the steatite seal is 1.0 cm, and the print face are 2x1.7 cm.

The hemispherical seal depicts a horned animal on its face with V-shaped decorations around it. Seals that are similar in both form and decoration are found in the Ubaid period (Yağcı, 2020, K.21; Keel-Leu, 1991, nr.16; Türkteki, 2022, Cat. No.14-15; Esin & Harmankaya, 1985, Pl.12; Laurito et alii, 2008, No. 18 and 20).

Figure 6

6. Inv. No: 2020-472



The height of the steatite-made seal is 1.2 cm, and the seal face is 2.4-1.4 cm.

Two walking animals are depicted on the face of the roof-shaped seal in a symmetrical, inverted arrangement. Based on comparisons with other examples, the horned gazelles were identified.

Roof-shaped seals are commonly found in the region from Adıyaman to Aleppo and in centers in Çukurova (Girginer & Collon, 2014), and they are dated to the Late Uruk period (Özkan, 2022, p. 226, Picture 29). Similar seal (Türkteki, 2022, Cat. No. 30). Because no ancient impressions from these seals have been found, they were widely believed to have been used as amulets rather than for sealing (Collon, 1997, p. 20).

Early Glyptic Art of Late Uruk and Jemdet Nasr Periods

Figure 7

7. Inv. No: 35.83



The length of the stone work is 1.5 cm, and its width is 1.6 cm.

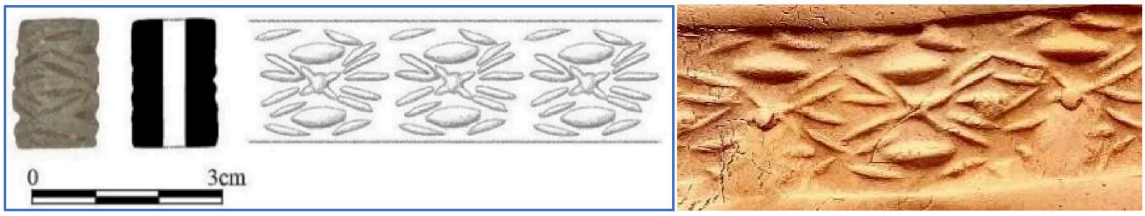
The seal's suspension hole, which is shaped like a bird with open wings, is drilled through its width. The clothing of two people standing opposite each other under a line is depicted with short, parallel lines on the engraved face.

Small, stone objects with suspension holes in the form of birds, ducks, pigs, or lions are known from various collections (Doumet, 1992, no.13-14).[1] It is unclear whether such objects were actually used as seals. Therefore, they are generally interpreted as jewelry, perhaps for a pin, and are dated to 3000-2900 BCE (Parker, 1955, p. 107, Pl. XVIII-3; Delaporte, 1920, Pl. 21.15 Late Uruk period.). In addition, functional bird-shaped seals are very rare, although examples have been found at İzmir-Baklatepe and Malatya-Arslantepe (South, 2014, p. 44 and 95, Pl. XV-1 and 2.). The Arslantepe and Baklatepe examples were dated to the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze II periods, respectively. We propose dating our example to about 3000 BCE.

[1]There are two artifacts of this work in the Yaşar University Collection.

Figure 8

8. Inv. No: 35-88



The height and diameter of the cylinder seal made of steatite are 1.8 and 1.3 cm, respectively.

An eye motif is engraved on its surface in a band with a wide, rounded tool. Common motifs on cylinder seals of the Uruk and Jemdet Nasr periods included scenes with weaving women arranged in bands, as well as decorative elements like eyes, fish, or spiders, which were used individually or together (Frankfort, 1939, p. 293, Pl. XLVI (b, u); Frankfort, 1955, Pl. 43 (454), Pl. 32 (329), Pl. 20 (211), Pl. XXI (34); Buchanan, 1966: Pl. 5: 66a, 67; Collon, 1987, pp. 15-16; Özkan, 2022, p. 26, Res.30-a). The eye motif is thought to be related to "eye idols" (Black & Green, 2003, pp. 90-91).

Although rarely found in official excavations, many cylinder seals with geometric decorations from the Jemdet Nasr period are in museum collections (Delaporte, 1920, Lev. 18.6, 12-14, Lev.19.1; Wiseman, 1962, 11, Pl. 10f, 12g; Teissier, 1984, no. 18; Collon, 1987, no.32; Doumet, 1992, nos.47-49; Batıhan, 2014, Pl.25 (Başur Höyük); Özkan, 2022, p. 26, Fig. 30a Tille).[2] In addition, the discovery of such seals across a wide region, from Siirt's Başur Höyük to the Birecik Early Bronze Age Cemetery, is important for demonstrating the region's trade network with Mesopotamia (Sağlamtimur, 2017, pp. 6, 16).

Therefore, this seal is dated to the Jemdet Nasr period.

Figure 9

9. Inv. No: 28-88



The seal, which is made of grey stone, has a height of 1.9 cm and a diameter of 2.9 cm. Three spiders are engraved side by side on the seal, which has concave edges. The body of each spider is formed by two drill holes, with two L-shaped legs extending upward and two downward.

Seals like this one are characteristic of the Jemdet Nasr period's art (Delaporte, 1920, Pl. 21.6; Frankfort, 1955, nos. 64, 249; Collon, 1987, 16, seal 16; Eisen, 1940, no.3; Borowski & Mode, 1947, no.44).

Because the spider figure is associated with weaving, it is often engraved alongside weaver women on seals. Influenced by Sumerian mythology, some scholars have identified the spider figure within this iconographic tradition with the goddess Uttu (Collon, 1987, p. 16).

[2]There was one in the old exhibition of the Gaziantep Museum and two examples in the Yaşar University Collection. See the most extensive information on this subject, Quenet 2007.

Seals from the Bronze and Iron Ages

Figure 10

10. Inv. No: 23-82



The height of the seal, which is made of ash-colored stone, is 2.8 cm, and its diameter is 1.7 cm.

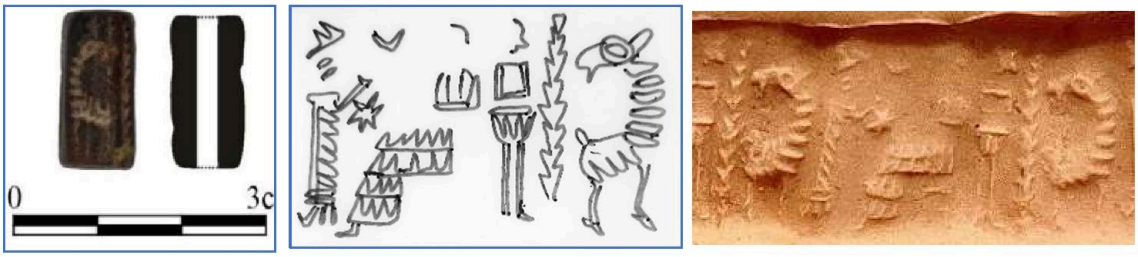
The suspension hole is drilled horizontally near the top edge. Short vertical lines are engraved between two parallel horizontal lines on its cylindrical surface. There is one small drill hole between the lines and two larger drill holes above the top line. A pattern of intersecting lines is engraved on the circular stamp face at the base.

The simplicity of such linear seals suggests that they were easy to produce and possibly inexpensive (Girginer & Collon, 2014, pp. 64-65, Fig. 8. Seal A.3, Fig. 10. Seal A. 5). It seems likely that they were used as amulets rather than for sealing.

Cylinder-stamp seals, first seen in the Assyrian Trade Colonies Period, are decorated on both the cylindrical surface and the stamp base (Collon, 1987, p. 112; Özkan, 2010, Fig. 8, 150-151). Although such seals were rare among the Hittites, some Urartian cylinder-stamp or bell-shaped seals were also decorated on both surfaces (Piotrovsky, 1950, p. 72; Seidl, 1976, p. 61; Abay, 2001, p. 321). A cylinder seal with thin lines and drill marks found in Tilmenhöyük dates to the Late Bronze Age (Marchetti, 2011, p. 88). Another parallel was found at Abamor Höyük, and an example from Deve Höyük is dated to the Iron Age (8th–5th centuries BCE). Although it is dated to the 1st century (Mutlu, Mutlu, Uludağ, 2023, p. 135, Fig. 7), we consider it appropriate to date it to the Late Bronze Age because of the use of a drill in this seal.

Figure 11

111. Inv. No: 60-79



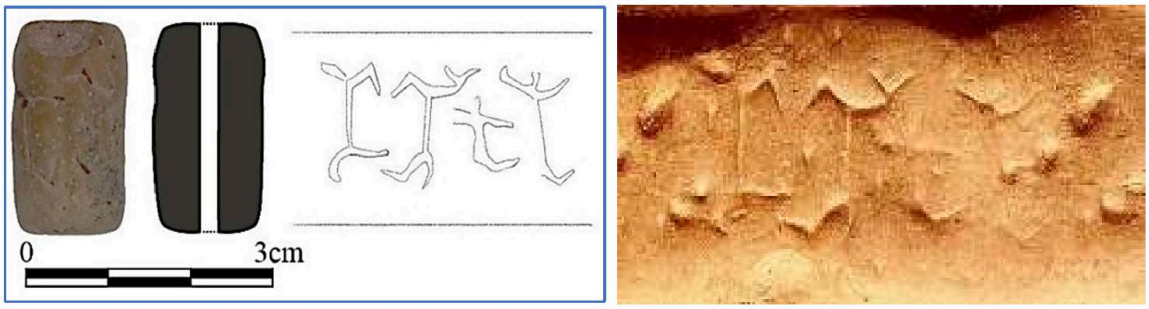
The height of the seal made of black stone is 1.6 cm, and its diameter is 0.7 cm.

An approaching deity comes before a seated deity dressed in layered, pleated clothes. The tassels on the garment of the seated god are finely detailed. There is a star symbol near the knee of the god and a crescent moon above his head. Behind the approaching god are several figures: a naked goddess holding her breasts, an oleander plant with short leaves, and an antelope with its head turned back.

The simplified engraving style suggests that the seal was made in the Old Assyrian tradition, whereas the small number of figures shows the influence of the Old Babylonian style. Therefore, the seal can be dated toward the end of the Assyrian trading colony period (Özkan, 2022, pp. 45-46).

Figure 12

12. Inv. No: 16-81



The stone seal has a height of 2.2 cm and a diameter of 0.7 cm.

Although the figures on the surface of the cylinder seal are eroded, it depicts asymmetrically arranged and vertically oriented short-tailed antelopes. The animals are rendered in a linear manner.

Seals depicting people and animals in a linear style have been found at sites such as Harput, Tille, and Tatarlı Höyük (Abay, Demir, Sevin, 2021; Collon, 2016, no.3; Girginer & Collon, 2014, 68, fig.13).[3] Similar seals with vertically oriented figures have been found at Tell Açana, Tell Sabuniye, and Alacahöyük and are dated to the second millennium BCE (Bittel, 1941, Abb. 3; Frankfort, 1955, Pl. 9 (61-73); Collon, 1987, p. 71, Figs. 305-306; Teissier, 1984, no. 676; Pamir, 2013, p. 176, Fig. 6; Erin, 2023, no.42 Mardin Museum).[4] An example from Kuriki Mound, dated to the Neo-Assyrian period, shows that this style continued (Genç, 2017, 135, Fig. 6a-b). Seals with linear, vertically oriented figures are common in the region from Adana to Palestine (Kühne & Salje, 1996, no.11, 47-48). Based on these examples, this seal most likely dates to the second millennium BCE.

Figure 13

13. Inv. No: 10-12-74



This frit or stone seal has a height of 2.6 cm and a diameter of 0.8 cm. A scorpion is depicted attacking an insect with open wings between two parallel lines. A ringlet is above the scorpion.

The scorpion is characterized by wide, crescent-shaped pincers, a linear body, and a curved tail. The crescent-shaped pincers are a feature frequently seen on seals, particularly in works dated to the late 7th century BCE (Parker, 1955, Pl. XVII-4, 107; Collon, 2001, Fig. 39, 46).

Scorpions were frequently depicted on seals and were considered an auspicious symbol of fertility and prosperity (Van Buren, 1937-1939, 1, Figs. 24, 18, 20; Özkan, 1991, p. 26.). During the Kassite period, the scorpion was the symbol of the goddess Ishara on kudurru stones (Black & Green, 1992, p. 160).

[3] Collon, 2016, no. 3 had been found in the Iron Age stratum but dating back to the second millennium BC.

[4] It is similar to the seals found in the Levant region.

A seal with a similar engraving style was found at Kinet Höyük (Gates, 2008, p. 289, Fig. 11). Following Porada, Gates stated that such seals belonged to the Neo-Assyrian Linear Style and date to the 9th–8th centuries BC. Another example from Kuriki Mound, depicting three scorpions on a cylinder seal, has also been dated to the Neo-Assyrian period (Genç, 2017, p. 124, Fig. 5a-b).

This seal can be dated to the Neo-Assyrian period 9th–8th centuries BC).

Figure 14

14. Inv. No: 52-84



The cylinder seal made of agate is 2.9 cm high and 0.8 cm in diameter.

The composition is framed by two parallel lines at the top and bottom, with registers of cuneiform inscriptions above and below the main scene. A god sits on a stool. Before him, a worshipper in a long dress with a high hood and exposed feet stands with his torso frontally, his left hand raised, and his right hand at his waist. The worshipper holds a mace in his left hand and raises his right hand in a gesture of devotion. He wears a layered, pleated dress. Between the god and the worshipper is a composite demon sitting on a short-legged pedestal at the bottom and a winged sun disk at the top. The head of the demon is raised, with prominent horns, an open mouth, and a forked tail like that of a bird. The winged sun disk symbol is above this demon. A crescent moon on a short standard is behind the seated god. This monster is interpreted as Asakku (Asag) or Anzu (Imdigud), which is related to Ninurta/Ningirsu (Black & Green, 1992, pp. 107, 111; Wiggermann, 1992, pp. 147-148, 150, 159, 161).

On the surface of a cylinder seal in the Ashmolean Museum, dated to the 8th century BCE, a seated god, a standing worshiper, and a winged sun disk show similar features (Moorey & Gurney, 1978, Pl. VII, (44), 52; Özkan, 2022, Fig. 137 (i), 129). What is most striking here is the figure of the composite demon. The way this animal sits is not how animals, such as cattle or deer, typically sit, with their feet tucked under them.

In the Achaemenid era, it was common for human figures to have their hair in a bun and to be depicted in a position of worship (Yücel, 2020, Fig. 10, 8; Yücel & Parlıtı, 2023, p. 36, Cat. No. 11). The seated god's headdress resembles the striped hats (*tiara*) worn by Achaemenid soldiers or nobles. Although we were unable to read it, the cuneiform inscription is also reminiscent of inscriptions from the Achaemenid period (Dusinberre, 1997, Fig. 10; Dizaji, 2021, p. 232, Fig. 17). Thus, this seal can be dated to the Achamenid period, although Late Assyrian influences are also observed.

Figure 15

15. Inv. No: 141.78



This frit-made seal has a height of 2,7 cm and a diameter of 0.8 cm. Two composite creatures are depicted fighting between two parallel lines and under a crescent, with their wings spread toward each other.

Such seals, made in the "late drilled style" of Neo-Assyrian seal art, are commonly found (Lloyd, 1954, p. 108, fig.8.2; Parker, 1955, Pl. XV-4; Teissier, 1984 nos.178-183; Gates, 2008, 297, fig.11; Niederreiter, 2020, pp. 64-65).[5] This monster is interpreted as an Asakku or Anzu (Wiggermann, 1992, p. 160).

This seal also dates to the Neo-Assyrian period, 10th–9th centuries BCE.

Figure 16

16. Inv. No: 3-37-74



The length of the marble (?) seal was 2.2 cm, its width was 1.6 cm, and its height was 1.7 cm.

While such stamp seals are often shaped like a sleeping duck, this example is a rabbit with two prominent ears. An eight-pointed star is depicted above a crescent moon on the engraved face, with a drill hole in the center of the star and another below the crescent.

Neo-Babylonian seal art is characterized by stamp seals featuring an eight-pointed star above a crescent moon (Von der Osten, 1934, nos.500-510; Yağcı, 1996, nos.57-85; Schachner, 2011, Farbtaf.2.1). Therefore, this seal belongs to the same style and period.

[5] For similar seals, see footnote 181. Özkan, 2022, 131.

Figure 17

17. Inv. No: 32-82



This seal, made of yellow quartzite, has a thickness of 0.8 cm and measures 1.8 x 1.6 cm. The engraved face of the scaraboid seal depicts a scorpion-like insect with four pairs of legs.

Stamp seals with scorpion motifs are generally interpreted as protective objects, and this seal likely served the same function. The seal can be dated to the Iron Age.

Figure 18

18. Inv. No: 29-88



The seal, made of greenish-blue frit, is 3.0 cm high and 1.3 cm in diameter.

The scene depicts a seated, winged composite creature, a worshipper, and two tall symbols. Because the seal is not well preserved, a complete comparison cannot be made. It is possible that the work can be dated to the Neo-Assyrian period.

Late Period Seals and Forgery Issues

Figure 19

19. Inv. No: 27-88



The cylinder seal made of agate is 2.8 cm high and 1.2 cm in diameter.

A pair of figures flanks a central tree of life. Each figure touches the tree with one hand and extends the other hand toward the next figure. The hair of the figures extends to the nape of their necks, and their eyebrows, eyes, and beards are indicated with simple lines. They wear garments decorated with a diamond pattern on the upper body and vertical stripes on their skirts, which leave their feet exposed.

The headdress is reminiscent of the Persian tiara, a type of felt cap with cheek-pieces (Thompson, 1965, pp. 125-126; Head, 1992, p. 21; Goldman, 1993, p. 66, fig. 13; Tekçam, 2007, p. 226). The scene recalls depictions of the Persian priests, the Magi, who held a bundle of rods called a *barsom* during rituals (Razmjou, 2005, p. 152). Thus, although the seal has features of the Achaemenid period, it may be a forgery.

Figure 20

20. Inv. No: 2014-2(A)



The agate seal is 4.2 cm high and 1.3 cm in diameter.

A goddess is depicted sitting on a chair with a backrest wearing a long garment with linear decoration that extends to her feet. The goddess holds a crescent moon symbol in her hand, which likely represents her. Her shoulder-length hair is tied in a bun. In front of her stands a female figure (a woman or another goddess) who has a similar headdress and long, braided hair despite wearing a different style of clothing. A Tree of Life emerges from a vase, similar to the one in the previous example.

The engraving style reflects the Sasanian period, according to counterparts in the Rize and Kars Museums (Çakır, 2001, Fig. 4; Aydemir, 2024).[6] However, because the Sasanians did not use cylinder seals, it is highly likely that this seal and the previous one are forgeries.

[6] I saw this seal, which was not included in the thesis.

Figure 21

21. Inv. No: 231-78



This red agate cylinder seal measures 3.1 cm in length and 0.8 cm in diameter.

The engraved scene, framed by two horizontal lines, depicts a worshipper approaching a seated god. Between them stands a high table-altar. The approaching figure presents an offering of bread or food, holding it out horizontally toward the altar. The enthroned, bearded god makes a reception gesture with his right hand (a salutation) while his left hand rests on his chest.

The seal is meticulously carved. The presenting figure's notable details include his headdress, beard, a hair bun falling to his back, and a long, tasseled garment reaching the knee. Although the seated god shares a similar headdress, beard, and hair bun with the worshipper, his long garment, which leaves the feet exposed, is of a different style.

As no direct parallel exists for this seal, it may be either a modern forgery or a unique local production.

Figure 22

22. Inv. No: 33-88



The steatite seal is 2.8 cm high and 1.0 cm in diameter.

This seal is engraved with a worn or possibly unfinished hunting scene. A figure in a long robe holds a waterfowl by the neck while carrying a bow. The bird is depicted with detailed feathers and long, thin legs. Two other figures, wearing hats and robes, also appear in the scene, depicted in a walking posture.

The style of the figures, particularly their clothing and headdresses, reflects characteristics of the Persian (Achaemenid) period (Dusinberre, 1997, Figs. 12-13, 112; Dizaji, 2021). Despite this stylistic attribution, this work may also be a forgery.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the detailed analysis of the 22 Mesopotamian seals from the Erzurum Archaeology Museum collection provides several critical insights for glyptic studies. This study has demonstrated that even small collections in regional museums, such as those in Eastern Anatolia, can yield significant data, revealing a wide chronological and stylistic range from the Neolithic to the Achaemenid period. The acquired artifacts enrich the corpus of known Mesopotamian glyptic art and offer valuable material for scholarly comparison.

The identification of potential forgeries among the acquired seals is a principal finding of this research, underscoring a significant challenge inherent in collecting unprovenanced artifacts. This study argues for the necessity of publishing these forgeries alongside authentic pieces. Such a practice is invaluable, providing a crucial reference that enhances the scholarly community's ability to identify and understand the characteristics of modern imitations, thereby aiding efforts to curtail their circulation. The publication of the full collection, including both common types and exceptionally rare examples, such as the unique Jemdet Nasr period spider-motif seal (Figure 9), is essential for advancing our understanding of ancient trade networks, cultural interactions, and stylistic chronologies.

Ultimately, this research serves as a call to action for increased and sustained scholarly engagement with the regional museums' seal collections. The findings highlight the urgent need for dedicated academic projects and graduate theses focusing on these materials. Fostering a new generation of specialists is paramount for conducting the first-hand analysis required to authenticate unprovenanced artifacts and fully leverage their scholarly potential. Although the examination of the Erzurum seals represents a modest step, it makes a meaningful contribution by not only presenting new material but also illuminating the rich, complex, and sometimes problematic nature of these collections. Through continued, rigorous study and publication, we can expand the material available to glyptic scholars and ensure the integrity of the field.

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