

**STUDIES IN THE CHRONOLOGY AND REGIONAL STYLE
OF OLD BABYLONIAN CYLINDER SEALS**

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Primary sources and interpretive analyses for the study of Mesopotamian civilization and its influences from late prehistory to the end of the cuneiform tradition

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ABSTRACT

Time spans for cylindrical seals used during the Old Babylonian period, c. 2000-1600 B.C., have not been clearly established. This work uses dated tablets from sites with stratified levels—Tell Harmal, Tell Dhiba'i, Larsa, Ur, and Sippar—to identify chronological and regional styles. A catalogue lists (A) seal impressions by museum number, catalogue number, and date, and (B) seal impressions in iconographic categories, by site. A pictorial index to the iconography is furnished by 44 plates of drawings, keyed to the catalogue, and 58 pages of photographs arranged according to tablet and envelope placement.

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To the memory of
DR. FARAJ BASMACHI

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
1. THE DIYALA REGION	3
1.1 Tell Harmal	3
1.1.1 Contest Frieze of Fighting Figures	4
1.1.2 Worship of an Enthroned Deity	6
1.1.3 Enthroned God	7
1.1.4 The God with Ring and Staff	8
1.1.5 The Sun God	10
1.1.6 The Goddess Ishtar	11
1.1.7 The God with Scimitar and Other Warring Gods	12
1.1.8 The Weather God	15
1.1.9 The Water God	16
1.1.10 The God with Mace	17
1.1.11 The Figure with Mace	17
1.1.12 The Suppliant Goddess	19
1.1.13 The Nude Female	20
1.1.14 Embracing Couple	21
1.1.15 Small Figure of a Worshipper	21
1.1.16 Old Assyrian and Other Peripheral Impressions	22
1.2 Tell Dhiba'i	23
1.2.1 Worshipping and Presentation Scenes of the Local Group	24
1.2.2 Elaborate Presentation and Worshipping Scenes Not of Local Origin	28
1.2.3 Contest and Fighting Scenes	30
1.3 Conclusion	30
1.3.1 Local Style	31
1.3.2 Regional Style	32
2. AKKAD	
2.1 Tell Ed-Der and Sippar	35
2.1.1 Impressions of the pre-Hammurabi Era	36
2.1.2 Impressions of Sin-muballit and Hammurabi Date	37
2.2 Workshop I	37
2.2.1 The God Shamash	38
2.2.2 The Goddess Ishtar	38
2.2.3 The Water God	38
2.2.4 The God with Mace	39
2.2.5 Minor Deities	39
2.3 The Styles and Characterizations of the Sippar Workshops	40
2.4 Workshop II	42

2.5	The Drill Style of the Late Old Babylonian Period	43
2.5.1	The Reign of Abi-eshuh	45
2.5.2	The Reigns from Ammiditana to Samsuditana	45
3.	SUMER	47
3.1	Larsa	47
3.1.1	The Goddess Ishtar	48
3.1.2	The God Shamash	48
3.1.3	Other Gods	49
3.1.4	The Figure with Mace	49
3.2	Ur	50
4.	CONCLUSIONS	53
4.1	The Diyala Region	53
4.2	Akkad	54
4.3	Sumer	56
4.4	Use of Seals	57
4.5	Final Remarks	58
	Chronological Table	59
	Abbreviations	60
5.	APPENDIX A: List of the Seal Impressions	63
5.1	Tell Harmal	63
5.2	Tell Dhiba'i	64
5.3	The Archive of Nurshamash	65
5.4	Tell Ed-Der	65
5.5	Sippar	65
5.6	Larsa	67
5.7	Ur	67
6.	APPENDIX B: Catalogue of the Seal Impressions	69
6.1	Tell Harmal	69
6.2	Tell Dhiba'i	80
6.3	The Archive of Nurshamash	83
6.4	Tell Ed-Der	85
6.5	Sippar	88
6.6	Larsa	100
6.7	Ur	103
7.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	107
	PLATES	after p. 110
	ILLUSTRATIONS	after Plates

INTRODUCTION

The Old Babylonian period, including the dynasties of Isin and Larsa lasted approximately 400 years, c. 2000-1600 B.C. The style of the seals produced during this time is easily distinguishable, but the criteria for dating them within this period, such as R. M. Boehmer has produced for Akkadian seals, have not yet been established. The purpose of this work is to use certain groups of tablets, which I was fortunate to be permitted to study by courtesy of the Iraq Directorate General of Antiquities, to make some contribution toward the chronology of seals within this period and to attempt a preliminary identification of the products of some of the local seal cutters.

H. Frankfort¹ was misled by the seals he found in the excavation at Tell Asmar, for he believed that inferior works exhibiting an intermediate phase between the seals of Ur III and the full Old Babylonian style were characteristic of the Isin-Larsa period. This was disproved by Edith Porada when she published impressions on tablets from Larsa, dating to Sin-iddinam (c. 1849 B.C.),² which showed that the Old Babylonian style was already fully developed by that date, and, in fact, that the finest work was produced before the reign of Hammurabi.

W. Nagel³ published a very useful list of Old Babylonian seals dated by inscriptions which referred to known rulers and demonstrated that the change of style from that of the Third Dynasty of Ur to that of the Larsa Dynasty began early in that dynasty. An outstanding example of a fine seal of early Larsa in the Iraq Museum refers to King Abisare (c. 1905).⁴

The glyptic art of the latter part of the First Dynasty of Babylon from Ammiditana onward is characterised by much use of the drill, as recognised by H. Frankfort and A. Moortgat.⁵ This evidence comes principally from Sippar. In view of the widespread use of the drill after the end of the Old Babylonian period, however, it seems unlikely that the style of Sippar differed greatly from that of other contemporary cities.

A study of seal impressions found on dated tablets that come from archives or from sites with stratified levels is the best means of clarifying both chronology and regional styles. The material available to me were groups of tablets from Tell Harmal, Tell Dhiba'i, Larsa and Ur, mostly dating to the Isin-Larsa period. The material dating to Hammurabi and later is

¹See *Diyala*.

²*Porada*, pp. 155-162.

³Nagel, *AFO* 18, pp. 321-327.

⁴Porada and Basmachi, *Sumer* 7, pp. 66-68.

⁵*Cyl. Seals*, p. 180; *VR*, p. 44.

largely restricted to Sippar and its suburb Sippar-Amnanum (Tell ed-Der), the latter excavated by the Iraq Antiquities Department.⁶

I am aware that in my study the lack of material from other sites in Babylonia dating to Hammurabi and later leaves several questions unanswered particularly the geographical distribution of the drilled style mentioned above. The drawings in this study are intended to provide a pictorial index to the iconography of the Old Babylonian sealings. Certain types, like the bull-man, are represented in the drawings in a more or less uniform way without indication of the specific stylistic characteristics of the respective sealing. Such characteristics can only be seen in the photographic reproductions. The seal inscriptions are only sketched in to complete the design and may not be entirely accurate.

On Plates I-XLIV the drawings of the impressions are arranged in conjunction with the iconographical observations in the text. On Illustration pages 1-57 the photographs are arranged according to their placement on the tablets and envelopes and in the Catalogue.

The tablet number under each impression on Plates I-XLIV (in parentheses) and under each photograph on Illustration pages 1-57 directs the reader to the Catalogue description where the museum number and other information are given.

⁶T. Baqir, M. Mustafa, *Sumer* 1, pp. 37-54.