Spade

I. Introduction. Divine symbol. The s., Akk. marru, Sum. GIS.MAR (see CAD 10:287), depicted with a long handle and triangular blade, represents the Mesopotamian god →Marduk. The s. as a divine symbol is first attested on Old Babylonian legal documents (RITTI 1987–1990: 372; CHAPIN 1980: 142; SOMMERFELD 1982: 55; GRONEBERG 2004: 86). Iconographically it first appears on Old Babylonian cylinder seals from the reign of Samsu-iluna (1749–1712), son of Hammurapi (COLLON 1986: 54). An inscription on a Kassite kudurru (1*) identifies it as symbol of Marduk: the surface of the blade bears the Sum. term for Marduk, ₄AMAR.UTU (SEIDL 1988: 29; HERLES 2006: 46). The s. was also occasionally used as symbol of the Mesopotamian god →Nabu, who has close relations to Marduk (GRONEBERG 2004: 120; HERLES 2006: 239f). Similarities between images of incense burners and s.s has frequently led to confusion, particularly concerning images on cylinder seals (26, 66; SEIDL 1989: 117; MATTHEWS 1990: 65, n. 101; see also →Apkallu 34). The meaning and function of the s. as symbol for Marduk are unknown, but may reflect an origin of the god as a primal local agricultural deity (BLACK/GREEN 1992: 129; ORNAN 2005: 46).

II. Typology

II.1. Phenotypes

3. WITH GLOBE AND PIKE (43–57) 4. TASSELED (58–78)

1. BASIC (1–18*) 2. WITH CROSSBEAM (19–42)

1. BASIC. Depictions of s.s are extensively harmonized and differ from each other only in details. The listed phenotypes can all be tracked back to a basic type, consisting of an upright standing handle of narrowed or broadened shape and a triangular blade (1–18*). Variations of this elementary form range from tapered to rounded, and from blank to framed blades. The position of the s. can vary but, unlike the →stylus of →Nabu, it is always represented upright. The s. stands directly on the ground (2–3, 15, 18*), above an artificial baseline (10, 16), on pedestals and stands (1*, 4–6, 12), atop a back of a crouching →Mushushu (13–14*), or in the field without any contact with other objects (7–9, 11). On a Kassite kudurru from Susa the blade of the s. bears a cuneiform inscription (1*).

2. WITH CROSSBEAM. A variant of the basic s. has an elongated small handle and a horizontal crossbeam situated directly beneath the blade (19–42). The shape of the crossbeam can be small and short (21–23, 25–31, 34, 36–37*, 39–41), bulging (19–20, 24, 33, 35, 42), or even duplicated (38). Depending on style and technique of seal cutting, the blade of the s. appears blank or as a framed hollow triangle (23, 29, 31, 35, 37*, 38). S.s with cross-beams appear primarily on cylinder and stamp seals of Babylonian or Assyrian provenance, but depictions are also attested on seals from Palestine/Israel and Jordan (34–38, 40–41).

3. WITH GLOBE AND PIKE. A couple of very roughly cut Neo–Babylonian stamp seals of conical and pyramidal shape bear another variant of the basic s. (43–57): the handle is elongated but extremely slight in shape, and its upper end is reduced to a sharp pike. A globe is situated in the middle of the upper third of the handle (47*). The s. with globe and pike always appears together with a simple double rod →stylus on a pedestal in front of a worshipper. Usually the s. is also surrounded by a →star, →crescent, or →winged disk (44–47*, 51–53, 55–57). A flattened conoid with Aramaic inscription depicts a pedestal with s. and stylus in front of the god →Sin in a crescent above a plant (54; see also BORDREUIL 1993: 95f).

4. TASSELED. The tasseled s. represents the most elaborate phenotype and consists of an elongated handle, a triangular blade, and tassels situated directly beneath the top on each side (58–78). The tassels are represented as ribbons, fringes, globes, or beads. The shape of the handle is broad, its surface blank or chevron decorated (64, 71*–72). A Neo– Assyrian cylinder seal indicates that the handle of the tasseled s. was completely wrapped in textile, the fringy tassels being the upper ends of a strip of cloth, bandaging the whole handle in chevrons (71*). Depictions of tasseled s.s appear primarily on Neo–Assyrian cylinder seals, stelae, and rock sculptures from at least the end of the 9th cent. to the later part of the 6th cent. The meaning of the tassels is unknown; they perhaps symbolized oath taking and visualized the Akk. term rikšu (band, bond, ritual arrangement; see also SEIDL 2000: 93f; CAD 14: 91–105, 347–355).

II.2. Associations


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1. Associated with Deities/Demons

1.1. Nabu. The s. is usually depicted alongside the → stylus of → Nabu on cylinder seals and on nearly every Assyrian and Babylonian stamp seal (10, 12–16, 22, 24–25, 27–39, 41–57, 63–66, 70–78), but also appears together with the stylus on kudurrus, stelae, and rock sculptures (4–6, 58–59, 61; ORNAN 2005: 47). The first depictions of a s. together with the → stylus on a common pedestal date to the 9th cent. (WITTMANN 1992: 230).

1.2. Sin. On some cylinder and stamp seals of Babylonian and Levantine provenance, the s. appears in front of anthropomorphic → Sin standing in a → crescent (23, 54, 74), or alongside the standard of Sin together with other divine symbols (76–78).

1.3. Ea/Enki. The ram–headed staff of → Ea/Enki appears together with a s. on some kudurrus (2, 4, 19, 21) and rarely on cylinder seals (7).

1.4. Adad. Less frequently the s. is associated with the → lightning of → Adad (8, 28, 37*, 58–59). On many stamp seals the s. of → Marduk, the → stylus of → Nabu, and the lightning of Adad are represented side by side in front of a worshipper. Unlike the s. and the lightning, the position is determined right beside the pedestal or the Mushushu, although not directly on it (28, 37*).

1.5. Nusku. A few stamp seals from Babylonia and Jordan depict the s. on a pedestal and the → lamp of the god → Nusku right beside it (47*).

1.6. Warrior deities. On a couple of Assyrian cylinder seals the s. appears behind or between an armed male and female anthropomorphic deity of uncertain identity. A Neo–Assyrian cylindrical seal shows the male deity in front of a s. and a stylus on elaborate, paneled stands, wearing a sword and holding a mace with a beaded handle. The female deity holds a beaded circle with star–tipped rays encircling her body (71*; see also HERBORDT 1992: 112). The deities may also hold axes, beaded rings, or an arch (12, 62–66, 68–69; COLLON 2001: 130).

1.7. Others. Depictions of s.s with other deities or divine symbols are less frequent. On a kudurru from Susa (1*) the s. appears alongside a → scorpion and the symbol of the god Zababa (BLACK/GREEN 1992: 187). Old Babylonian cylinder seals depict the s. alongside or above a crook (7), the symbol of the god → Amurru. Furthermore, a s. can be placed next to → Lakhmu (14*), a suppliant goddess (7, 9), girtab–lulu (65), or another minor deity. On a Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal from Dor s.s. flank a master–of–winged–bulls (18*). On numerous kudurrus, stelae, and seals, the s. is flanked by distinct → astral symbols such as a → star and → crescent or winged disk (6, 10–15, 22, 27–31, 37*–38, 41–42, 47*, 50, 71*).

2. Associated with Animals

2.1. Mushushu. On seals the s. is usually placed on the back of a crouching Mushushu (13–14, 23, 26–27, 29–30, 32–33, 36–37, 40, 55, 57, 64–65, 70, 72, 74, 78), which is associated with Mar– duk. An exceptional but only partly preserved incense burner from Babylon shows two symmetrically composed Mushushu standing on their hind legs and holding an erected s. with both hands (17*).

3. Associated with Humans

3.1. Worshipper. Depictions of a worshipper facing a pedestal with the s., usually on the back of a → Mushushu and accompanied by the → stylus, are very common on seals of the late Neo–Assyrian and, above all, the Neo–Babylonian period (37*, 47*). A bearded man dressed in a long robe is represented standing, arms raised in front of a s. and stylus. Most seals are cut in cursory techniques (15–16, 35, 38, 40–57), but qualitative depictions of the worship scene are also preserved (12–13, 15–16, 23–31). A Neo–Assyrian cylinder seal shows a midget worshipper standing on top of the horns of a Mushushu and turning toward the comparatively monumental s. and stylus (14*) inside a frame, flanked by → Lakhmu on each side.

3.2. King. Particularly on Old Babylonian (7–9) but also Neo–Assyrian (11) cylinder seals, the s. appears in a standard theme: the king with a mace before a suppliant goddess. Between or behind them is a s., sometimes accompanied by other divine symbols, animals, or minor deities.

III. Sources

III.1. Chronological range. The earliest depiction of the s. dates to the Old Babylonian period (18th–17th cent.) and appears on cylinder seals (7–9; COLLON 1986: 54). The majority of objects represent the first two phenotypes. The same phenotypes are also predominant on kudurrus and cylinder seals of the Kassite period (16th–12th cent.; 1*–5; HERLES 2006: no. 349–354). The s. and other Babylonian divine symbols penetrate the Assyrian imagery at least from the late 9th cent. onward (ORNAN 2005: 149f), appearing on seals, stelae, and rock sculptures (6, 10–15, 18*–20, 21, 27–28, 30–32, 34, 36, 39, 41, 55, 58–
78. In the Neo–Babylonian period (6th cent.) stamp seals with a worshipper facing a pedestal with s. and stylus become a mass product, dominating the Mesopotamian imagery and spreading quickly into peripheral regions (16, 25, 33, 37*, 38, 40, 42–53, 74). In the Achaemenid period, depictions of s.s become rare, but many impressions from the Murashu archive in Nippur and some Achaemenid cylinder seals and seal impressions from Persepolis (26, 57) present a worshipper facing pedestals surmounted by a s. and other divine symbols (Bie̬rstein 1993: 82ff).

III.2. Geographical distribution. More than half of the items discussed in this lemma are without recorded provenance. The iconography of the s. comes from Babylonia, and most provenanced objects were found in cities like Babylon, Nippur, and Uruk (5, 17*, 42). Beyond Mesopotamian images of s.s were found in Persepolis (39, 57) and Susa in Iran (1*), as well as in some sites in Syria (30, 67). Jordan (40–41, 52*, 53, 77), and Palestine/Israel (18*, 34–38, 78). Hübner 1993: 114; Ornan 1993: 63f).

III.3. Object types. Like most Mesopotamian divine symbols, designations of the s. are preserved on a limited range of object types. The s. regularly appears on stamp seals in the shape of cones, pyramids, or scaraboids, predominantly microcrystalline quartzes and garnets like chalcedony, cornaline, agate, and Jasper (15–17*, 27–38, 40–57, 72–78). Shapes and materials of these seals are characteristic of Mesopotamian stamp seals of the 1st mill. and also appeared in Iran, Syria, Palestine, and Jordan. On cylinder seals the s. appears much less frequently (7–14*, 18*, 22–26, 39, 62–71*). Further depictions of s.s are preserved on Babylonian kudurrus from the 12th to the 9th cent. (1*–5, 19–21) (Seidl 1989: 119f), Neo–Assyrian stone stelae (6, 58, 60*–61), and Neo–Assyrian rock sculptures (59; Bachmann 1927: 21). The stelae were erected in different cities inside the Neo–Assyrian empire between Assur and Zincirli (60*). Depictions on other objects, such as in the case of an incense burner from Kassite Babylon, are very rare (17*).

IV. Conclusion. The s. belongs to the most common divine symbols of the 1st mill. in Mesopotamia and beyond. It reflects the importance of the god Marduk and the impact of the Babylonian pantheon on other regions. From its first occurrence to the very last known depiction, the phenotypes of s.s stay relatively homogenous. The s. appears independently as well as associated with other deities, demons, and divine symbols of Mesopotamian provenance. From Babylonia the s. reached the neighboring regions through stamp seals, which became a mass product during the Neo–Babylonian period.

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