

Stylus

I. Introduction. *Divine symbol.* The s. (Akk. *qan tuppī*), represented either with a double rod or with a wedge, first appears as symbol of the god →Nabu (see *Nabū bēl qan tuppī*; CAD 13:80) on Babylonian kudurrus of the 12th–9th cent. (SEIDL 1989: 122f). From the late 9th cent. onward (SEIDL 1998: 25; COLLON 2001: nos. 203, 215, 328) its use spreads in Assyria and increasingly in the neighboring regions, enjoying great popularity as a motif on seals (POMPONIO 1978: 211–215). Preferred to the relatively rare anthropomorphic image of the deity, the s. reaches its largest diffusion as an extremely common standard icon in “worship scenes” of Neo-Babylonian glyptic (late 7th–6th cent.). It begins to disappear from the repertoire of Near Eastern iconography during the Achaemenid Period in the course of the 5th cent. (ZETTLER 1979: 266).

The identification of the s. with Nabu is based on Babylonian and Assyrian textual sources. A caption on a kudurru of the 12th cent. provides the oldest, albeit indirect, evidence (SEIDL 1989: 124); the ultimate identification rests on the Bavarian rock relief from Sennacherib’s reign (704–681), where the first line of the inscription (LUCKENBILL 1968: II 148 § 331) enables us to draw a direct parallel between deities and their symbols (BAUMANN 1969: pl. 21:11; BÖRKER-KLÄHN 1982: figs. 189–199).

A corpus of attestations for the s. from the entire ancient Near East has never been compiled and would probably number more than 300 items, mostly seals of unknown provenance (the best published review to date is still POMPONIO 1978: 207f, which also discusses representations on objects other than seals). Here, with the focus being on the “biblical world,” only items from legal excavations in Palestine/Israel and the Levant or bearing a West Semitic inscription are considered. Parallels are drawn to frame them in context without the ambition to be exhaustive.

II. Typology

II.1. Phenotypes

A. DOUBLE ROD (1–26) B. WEDGE 1. Simple (27–28) 2. Replicated (20a) C. DOUBLE ROD AND WEDGE COMBINED (20)

A. DOUBLE ROD. The s. is depicted by way of two close vertical parallel lines (1–20b*, 21–26; most simply: 18*), sometimes connected by one or more shorter perpendicular bars placed at the middle and/or at the ends (e.g., 14*, 19b*, 23; probably also 24). In two cases the upper end sharpens to a triangular tip like that of a

pencil (12–13*); in two other cases it enlarges in a trapezelike manner (16*, 20b*). A fragment of a seal from Carchemish shows a s. with indented end (4).

Generally the double rod is the type adopted in the vast majority of stamp seals (POMPONIO 1978: 214f, ns. 45f), whereas it appears very rarely on cylinder seals (almost invariably worship scenes: COLLON 2001: nos. 253, 281; DELAPORTE 1923: pl. 90:8; GORDON 1939: no. 104; VON DER OSTEN 1957: no. 332; PARKER 1955: 114; PORADA 1948: nos. 782, 786). A simplified version of this type, limited to stamp seals but not definitely attested in Levantine regions, shows only a single vertical line, arguably a measure to cope with reduced spaces (e.g., BUCHANAN/MOOREY 1988: no. 391; DELAPORTE 1923: pl. 92:12; 26; EISEN 1940: no. 93; VON DER OSTEN 1957: nos. 141, 485).

The parallel lines next to what appears to be a standing individual on three crudely cut seals (21, 25–26) also likely represent a s. (see KLINGBEIL 1992: 104, who sees in them a local variant; but see KEEL–LEU 1991: no. 155 for a similar piece of probable Babylonian origin).

B. WEDGE

1. Simple. The s. is depicted as a vertical wedge (reduced to a vertical line on 27) with the narrow end pointing to the bottom and a knob at the middle of the shaft (28*).

In general, the simple wedge is uncommon on stamp seals (POMPONIO 1978: 215, n. 48; KEEL–LEU 1991: no. 145), but abounds on cylinder seals (POMPONIO 1978: 213, n. 42). On two anepigraphic stamp seals of unknown provenance that date to the 7th–6th cent., the wedge has a bifurcated end (VON DER OSTEN 1934: no. 493; VON DER OSTEN 1957: no. 147), a modification well known from cylinder seals (e.g., PORADA 1948: nos. 683, 691–692; TEISSIER 1984: nos. 222, 228, 249; COLLON 2001: nos. 256–258, 280; DELAPORTE 1923: pls. 86:2; 88:12; 89:5).

2. Replicated. A variant of the simple wedge is its replication in two wedges, one above the other. Attested only once in Palestine/Israel (20a*) and rare on stamp seals in general (POMPONIO 1978: 215, n. 47; LAMBERT 1966: no. 68; DELAPORTE 1923: 105:9b), the replicated wedge is very common on cylinder seals (POMPONIO 1978: 213, n. 42).

C. DOUBLE ROD AND WEDGE COMBINED. The double rod and the wedge coexist as equal versions of the s. of →Nabu, from the attestations on Babylo-

nian kudurrus of the late 2nd mill. onward. Both phenotypes can be depicted on one and the same object (20*). It seems unlikely that the two types mirror different theological aspects of Nabu (SEIDL 1998: 25). As opposed to the symbols of other Babylonian deities, the s. has a rather manifold iconic nature. Images of writing scribes on Neo-Assyrian stone reliefs and wall paintings (reviewed in SEIDL 1989: 123f, n. 45–49) show that the double rod and the wedge represent two different kinds of writing implements—the first probably used to write in ink on a scroll or a papyrus (although the depictions on kudurrus suggest a more ancient use on wax tablets), the latter to impress on clay tablets. The massive appearance of the double rod on stamp seals may then correlate with their use in sealing scrolls, or generally with the increasing spreading of ink writing in the late Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian administrations.

II.2. Associations

A. ASSOCIATED WITH DEITIES/DEMONS: Marduk (1–8, 10–11, 20b–21, 28a) B. ASSOCIATED WITH ANIMALS: Mushhushshu (12–15, 20a) C. ASSOCIATED WITH HUMANS: Worshipper (1–16, 19, 20b–28a)

A. ASSOCIATED WITH DEITIES/DEMONS: **Marduk**. The s. frequently appears together with the spade (Akk. *marru*), symbol of →Marduk, father of →Nabu (see below § C).

B. ASSOCIATED WITH ANIMALS: **Mushhushshu**. The s. may be placed on the back of a mushhushshu (see below § C).

C. ASSOCIATED WITH HUMANS: **Worshipper**. The s. is depicted within the context of a stereotyped worship scene, typical of the late Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Periods (see BUCHANAN/MOOREY 1988: 57) and almost always carved in linear style and cut-and-drill technique: a standing man in a long robe is raising his arm(s) before a s. and a →spade, both placed vertically on a pedestal (1–8, 10–11, 20b*–21, 28a*). Alternatively, the symbols may stand on the back of a →mushhushshu dragon crouching on a pedestal (12–15; see also 20a*). On 25*–26 the worshipper seems to stand frontally in the center of the scene; the symbols are placed to his sides. The s. can also be the sole object of adoration (9, 19b*, 22–24, 27). Astral symbols (crescent, star) are usually represented above the scene (14*, 20b*, 28a*). Stamp seal 16* has two antithetic worshippers with s. and spade at the center of the scene (see COLLON 2001: no. 255; ORNAN 1993: 68f). Stamp seal 19a* shows the s. in a crescent-shaped object with animal-headed extremities,

probably a boat; beneath are two antithetic kneeling worshippers. SEIDL (1998: 25) suggests that it could depict the yearly cultic journey of →Nabu to Borsippa. In a “shortened” variant, the worshipper is omitted (20a*, see also 18*; DELAPORTE 1923: pl. 90:19a; 92:22).

III. Sources

III.1. **Chronological range**. Abstracted from its context, each analyzed phenotype on seals could date anywhere between the late 9th and the late 5th cent. Worship scenes on stamp seals, though circulating only from the late 8th cent. onward, quickly spread into peripheral regions. They became a Neo-Babylonian mass product, which continued to be used and produced well into the Achaemenid Period (KEEL 1990: 239; KEEL–LEU 1991: 123, 128; KLINGBEIL 1992; ZETTLER 1979: 266). A closer dating on iconographical grounds is problematic (COLLON 1987: 83; BUCHANAN/MOOREY 1988: 53–57; NAGEL 1963; NUNN 2000: 111).

III.2. Geographical distribution

With the exception of 4, which comes from Carchemish (see also an Egyptian-influenced cylinder seal from Al-Mina: COLLON 2001: no. 204), all provenanced items considered here come either from Jordan (3, 6, 8, 16*, 23, 26–27) or from Palestine/Israel (Galilee: 1, 20*, 24; Judea: 2, 11, 21, 26*; Samaria: 22; *pace* TUSHINGHAM 1992: 16, the Neo-Babylonian stamp seal from the Harvard Samaria expedition does not depict a s.).

III.3. **Object types**. All the objects, aside from the two seal impressions on clay 3 and 5, are cone-shaped stamp seals made of semiprecious stones (mostly chalcedony), whose sides are either rounded (3–5, 9–10, 12–13, 15, 19*–21, 23–28*; see KEEL 1995: 104, type 5) or with octagonal faceting (1–2, 7–8, 11, 14*, 16*–18*, 22; see KEEL 1995: 104, type 6b). Both material and form of these types of stamp seals are characteristically Mesopotamian, although it cannot be excluded that a Levantine seal cutter could produce good imitations.

IV. **Conclusion**. The iconography of the s. originates in Babylonia and reaches the Levant through the import of Mesopotamian seals. All items considered relevant here are of a genre whose diffusion seems to peak in the 6th cent. These seals belonged to individuals; some were found buried with their owner (26*). Speakers of West Semitic languages (not necessarily living in Levantine regions) personalized some seals by adding their name (4–6, 9–10, 12–15, 17–18*, 28*), but these

inscriptions tend to appear haphazardly cut and squeezed into unplanned spaces (ORNAN 1993: 53). Additionally, the inscribed names do not bear a connection with the iconography and appear to have been added at a later time (BORDREUIL 1993: 92f), suggesting that these seals were acquired already cut and then, if need be, modified. Although iconographies appearing together with the s. might have a Western origin (e.g., the crescent standard on **20***, **28***), they are evidence for the Mesopotamian assimilation of peripheral cults rather than a point speaking for a Western seal production (KEEL 1990: 242). As opposed to other motifs (STERN 1994), the s. does not seem to have ever been absorbed into the local iconographic repertoire of Palestine/Israel and the Levant, remaining distinctive of Mesopotamian imports or, at most, close imitations in these regions.

V. Catalogue

1 Stamp seal, chalcedony, Tell Taanach, 750–650. TUSHINGHAM 1992 **2** Stamp seal, Tell eš-Šafi, 750–600. BLISS/MACALISTER 1902: fig. 16.2 **3** Bulla, clay, Tall Safut, 600–500. EGGLEER/KEEL 2006: Tall Safut no. 5 **4** Stamp seal (fragment), chalcedony, Carchemish, 700–500. WOOLLEY 1952: fig. 76 **5** Stamp seal impression, 700–500. GALLING 1941: no. 118 **6** Stamp seal, chalcedony, ‘Amman, 700–600 600–500. EGGLEER/KEEL 2006: ‘Amman no. 3 **7** Stamp seal, chalcedony, 650–600. BORDREUIL 1986: no. 110 **8** Stamp seal, chalcedony, Meqabelein, 600–500. EGGLEER/KEEL 2006: Megabelein no. 1 **9** Stamp seal, chalcedony, 500–400. AVIGAD/SASS 1997: no. 802 **10** Stamp seal, light brown stone, 500. AVIGAD/SASS 1997: no. 826 **11** Stamp seal, chalcedony, En-Gedi, 500–400. MAZAR/DUNAYEVSKY 1967: pl. 31:1 **12** Stamp seal, chalcedony, 700–400. AVIGAD/SASS 1997: no. 1201 **13** Stamp seal, chalcedony, 700–400, AVIGAD/SASS 1997: no. 778 **14*** Stamp seal, chalcedony, 23 x 17 x 30 mm, 700–600. Paris, Louvre Museum, AO 2293 AVIGAD/SASS 1997: no. 1110 **15** Stamp seal, chalcedony or agate, 500. AVIGAD/SASS 1997: no. 806 **16*** Stamp seal, marble, 19 x 6.5 x 24.7 mm, Tall al-Mazar, 600–500. EGGLEER/KEEL 2006: Tall al-Mazar no. 14 **17** Stamp seal, chalcedony, 700–500. AVIGAD/SASS 1997: no. 803 **18*** Stamp seal, jasper, 18 x 13 x 24 mm, 600–500. AVIGAD/SASS 1997: no. 848. Paris, Louvre Museum, AO 2293 **19a–b*** Stamp seal, chalcedony, 20 x 14 x 26 mm, 550–500. Paris, Louvre Museum, AO 2156. AVIGAD/SASS 1997: no. 850 **20a–b*** Stamp seal, limestone, 20 x 17 x 22 mm, Tell Keisan, 700. KEEL 1990: no. 24 **21** Stamp seal, stone, Tell eš-Šafi, 600–400. BLISS/MACALISTER 1902: 41, fig. 16.1 **22** Bulla, clay, Samaria, 600–400. CROWFOOT/CROWFOOT/KENYON 1957: no. 41 **23** Stamp seal, marble, Tall al-‘Umayri, 600–400. EGGLEER/KEEL 2006: Tall al-‘Umeiri no. 44 **24** Stamp seal, black stone, Kabri, 600–400. ORNAN 2002: fig. 9:10 **25*** Stamp seal, chalcedony, Tall al-Mazar, 500–400 (600–400). EGGLEER/KEEL 2006: Tall al-Mazar no. 5 **26** Stamp seal, stone, Tell eš-Šafi, 600–400. BLISS/MACALISTER 1902: fig. 16.3 **27** Stamp seal, carnelian, Tall as-Sa‘idiya, 600–400. EGGLEER/KEEL 2006: Tall as-Sa‘idiya no. 20 **28a–b*** Stamp seal, carnelian, 18 x 13 x 25 mm, 700–600. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Arts, 86.11.29. AVIGAD/SASS 1997: no. 845

VI. Selected Bibliography

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