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DINARS AND DIRHAMS

Festschrift in Honor of Michael L. Bates

Edited by Touraj Daryaee and Judith A. Lerner
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— 2020 —

ANCIENT IRANIAN STAMP SEALS IN THE ROSICRUCIAN EGYPTIAN MUSEUM

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Introduction, Acknowledgments, Technical Comments

According to the master artifact record sheet for each item, all these stamp seals were purchased on Thursday July 28, 1955, by the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum (REM), founded as the Rosicrucian Egyptian Oriental Museum in 1928, at San Jose, California. The purchase price was \$350.00 for Lot 146. Provenance was “the collection of Mr. Rahner, a former naval merchant marine officer in Baghdad.” These stamp seals were added to the Egyptian and Babylonian antiquities at the REM. Most of these seals have been exhibited in gallery C, case 3, of the museum; others have been exhibited in gallery B, case 18.

Professor Edith Porada of Columbia University had begun studying seals in the REM at the latest by 1941, in connection with the Corpus of Ancient Near Eastern Seals project—as noted in correspondence dated October 1, 1941, October 29, 1943, June 24, 1946, July 11, 1946, August 9, 1946, September 11, 1946, November 21, 1946, December 4, 1946, December 12, 1946, April 2, 1952, and April 8, 1952, between REM curators Kendal I. Bower, Jay R. McCulloch, and James C. French, REM secretary, director, and imperator Ralph M. Lewis, Yale University Babylonian Collection professor Albrecht Goetze and curator Ferris J. Stephens, and professor Porada. On April 8, 1952, Porada wrote back to French that she had not published any of the REM seals in the *Corpus* volumes (Porada, Goetze, and Buchanan 1948). Subsequently, Porada did examine these Iranian stamp seals, shortly after they were acquired in 1955, as noted on the master artifact record sheets for each seal. Porada continued her association with the REM, assisting in its acquiring Babylonian seals for which she was thanked by French through letter dated June 3, 1959.

Choksy first visited the REM on November 10, 2001, while an Andrew W. Mellon Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University, and began studying these seals in the museum's collection. He is most grateful to Lisa Schwappach Shirriff curator and assistant director of the REM from 2001–2006 and Julie Scott director of the REM for granting access to these stamp seals and the relevant museum records, facilitating photography, and providing permission to publish—as noted in extensive correspondence particularly from November 11, 2001 through March 24, 2003. Choksy and Dubeansky are grateful as well to James Dewrance for photographing the stamp seals.

The images reproduced in this article are of the faces of the actual seals, not of the sealings/seal-impressions which, however, are described as they would look after stamping. Measurements are width by length of the stamping surface, followed by height, if available, in centimeters. Record numbers (RC new/old) are given where available.

1. Human Figures



Figure 1: Man Facing Altar

Seal: 2.2cm x 1.7cm x 1.1cm. Milky quartz. RC 1308.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Stick figure, standing, facing to the right, hand raised, with palm turned toward the face in *proskynesis*-type gesture of deference. In front of the figure is a drawn-back curtain and incense burners. Similar to sealing/seal-impressions found in the Treasury at Persepolis.

Image: Cf. Choksy, 1990, fig. 1; Porada, Goetze, and Buchanan 1948, pl. CXXI figs. 805 and 808; Schmidt 1957, pl. 13 figs. PT4 774 and PT6 215.

Period: 550–300 BCE, Neo-Babylonian-style Achaemenian.

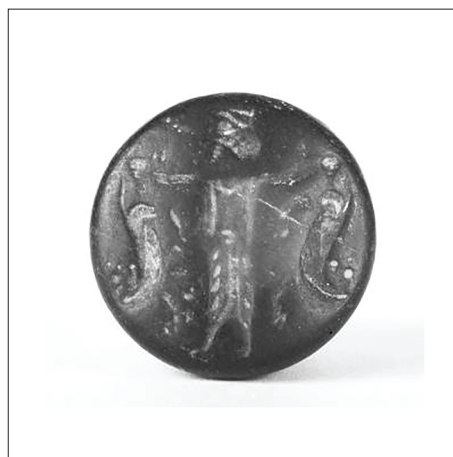


Figure 2: Royal Hero

Seal: 2cm x 1.7cm. Jasper. RC 1316/1822F.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Robed king standing, facing to the right, holding a lion by the hind legs in each hand.

Image: Cf. Garrison and Root, 2001, pl. 96 figs. d–e and pl. 97 figs. a–b; Porada, Goetze, and Buchanan 1948, pl. CXXIV figs. 824e and 825.

Period: 550–400 BCE, early to middle Achaemenian.



Figure 3: Male Bust

Seal: 1.5cm x 0.9cm. Jasper. No RC number.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Stylized bust of helmeted male, facing to the right. Edges of the seal are beveled.

Image: *Cf.* Gans nd, fig. 20.D.02. For helmet *cf.* Brunner 1978, p. 58 fig. 148. For chest design *cf.* Bivar 1969, pl. 4 fig. AG 9.

Period: 300–500 CE, middle Sasanian.

2. Hands



Figure 4: Hand Holding Object

Seal: 1.4cm x 1.6cm. Milky quartz. RC 1324/1822L.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Family crest with hand holding crescent or bull horns and an inverted chalice.

Image: *Cf.* Brunner 1978, pp. 121–122 fig. 9a; Gans nd, figs. 10.F.01 and 30.Y.17.

Period: 100–300 CE, late Parthian or early Sasanian.



Figure 5: Hand Holding Object

Seal: 1.2cm x 1.8cm x 0.7cm. Carnelian. RC 1357/1823R.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Hand holding a crest or an inverted chalice. Edges of the seal are beveled.

Image: Cf. Bivar 1969, pl. 9 figs. CH 3 and CI 1; Gans nd, fig. 10.F.01.

Period: 300–500 CE, middle Sasanian.

3. Fantastic Creatures



Figure 6: Winged Man

Seal: 2cm x 1.7cm. Jasper. No RC number.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Abstract winged male figure, walking to the right, carrying a diadem with ribbons. Figure-type originally based on representations of Nike.

Image: Cf. Brunner 1978, pp. 67 fig. 7; Gans nd, fig. 40.A.01; Gignoux and Gyselen 1982, pl. XX fig. 40.3.

Period: 500–651 CE, late Sasanian.



Figure 7: Lamassu

Seal: 1.6cm x 2.0cm x 1.4cm. Brown banded agate. RC 1318/1822H.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Lamassu, composite creature with a crowned man's head on a winged bull's body, standing, facing to the right. Triple beading at 11 and 4 o'clock.

Image: *Cf.* Gans nd, fig.80.06; partially Harper 1973, pl. I.9, fig. D.9.

Period: 200–300 CE, early Sasanian.



Figure 8: Sphinx

Seal: 1.6cm x 1.3cm x 1.6cm. Milky quartz. RC 1314/1822E.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Sphinx, composite creature with bearded king's head and winged feline body, seated, facing to the right, beneath a crescent. A crenellated crown is worn by the sphinx, with its hair gathered in a bun.

Image: *Cf.* Schmidt 1957, pl. 17 fig. PT7 67.

Period: 550–400 BCE, early to middle Achaemenian.



Figure 9: Winged Horse

Seal: 1.3cm x 1.6cm. Blue-green jasper. RC 1320/1822J (1822M).

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Pegasus, winged horse, walking to the right; or more likely a horse and rider, trotting to the right. Beading at 10, 11, 1, 4, and 5 o'clock.

Image: For beading *cf.* Bivar 1969, pl. 13 fig. EE 7. For winged horse *cf.* Frye 1971, pl. XLVIII figs. 152 and 155; Gans nd, fig. 40.A.12. For images with both wings shown *cf.* Harper 1973, fig. D158. Alternatively, for horse and rider *cf.* Frye 1971, pl. XXXVIII fig. 66.

Period: 300–500 CE, middle Sasanian.



Figure 10: Griffin-like Creature

Seal: 0.8cm x 1.4cm. Carnelian. RC 1347/1823I.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Griffin-like composite creature with feline legs and tail, equine body and mane, and crested avian head, walking to the right.

Image: For tail position and eye *cf.* Brunner 1978, p. 87 fig. 180. For body and beak *cf.* Gans nd, fig. 30.G.03.

Period: 300–500 CE, middle Sasanian.

4. Animals



Figure 11: Lion

Seal: 1.2cm x 1.6cm x 0.9cm. White and tan banded agate. RC 1343/1823E.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Abstract stylized lion, crouching to the right.

Image: *Cf.* Bivar 1969, pl. 10 figs. DD 6 and DD 3; Gans nd, figs. 30.E.12 and 30.E.06.

Period: 500–651 CE, late Sasanian.



Figure 12: Lamb

Seal: 0.9cm x 1.3cm x 1.1cm. Jasper. RC 332.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Seated lamb, head turned to the left, with a ribbon around its neck.

Image: *Cf.* body position and ribbon Bivar 1969, pl. 16 fig. EQ 1; Gans nd, fig. 30.L.10.

Period: 300–500 CE, middle Sasanian.



Figure 13: Antelope

Seal: 1.1cm x 1.3cm x 1.1cm. Carnelian. RC 1352/1823M.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Stylized antelope standing, facing to the right.

Image: *Cf.* Bivar 1969, pl. 19 fig. FH 1.

Period: 500–651 CE, late Sasanian.



Figure 14: Stag

Seal: 0.9cm x 1.2cm x 1.1cm. Carnelian. RC 1355/1823P.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Stylized stag kneeling, facing to the right.

Image: For body position and style *cf.* Bivar 1969, pl. 17 figs. FA 8 and FB 11; Gignoux and Gyselen 1987, pl. XIX fig. 30.17. For antlers *cf.* Gignoux and Gyselen 1987, pl. VIII fig. 30.33

Period: 500–651 CE, late Sasanian.



Figure 15: Bird of Prey

Seal: 1.4cm x 1.8cm x 1.1cm. Jasper. RC 1348/1823J.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Bird, possibly a crow, vulture, or eagle, facing to the right.

Edges of the seal are beveled.

Image: For style and type of bird *cf.* Brunner 1978, p. 112 fig. 98. For type of bird *cf.* Bivar 1969, pl. 24 fig. HI 9.

Period: 300–500 CE, middle Sasanian.



Figure 16: Eagle

Seal: 1.0cm x 1.1cm x 0.9cm Carnelian. NO RC number.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Eagle standing with wings displayed, head turned to the right.

Image: *Cf.* Gans *nd*, figs. 30.S.26 and 30.S.20

Period: 200–300 CE, late Parthian or early Sasanian.



Figure 17: Fish

Seal: 1.2cm x 1.5cm x 0.8cm. Milky Quartz. RC 1363/1823X.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Fish with two upper and lower fins, swimming to the right.

Image: *Cf.* Bivar 1969, pl. 24 fig. JA 1; Brunner 1978, pp. 112–113 fig. 5a.

Period: 200–300 CE, late Parthian or early Sasanian.



Figure 18: Fish

Seal: 1.7cm x 1.8cm x 0.9cm. Chalcedony. RC 1327/1822O.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Fish with two upper and lower fins, swimming to the right.

Image: *Cf.* Bivar 1969, pl. 24 fig. JA 1; Brunner 1978, pp. 112–113 fig. 5a. For style *cf.* Bivar 1969, pl. 24 fig. JA 2.

Period: 400–651 CE, middle to late Sasanian.



Figure 19: Fish

Seal: 1.8cm x 2.0cm. Milky quartz. RC 1824O.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Fish with two upper and three lower fins, swimming to the left.

Image: *Cf.* Bivar 1969, pl. 24 fig. JA 1; Brunner 1978, pp. 112–113 fig. 5a. For style *cf.* Bivar 1969, pl. 24 fig. JA 2.

Period: 400–651 CE, middle to late Sasanian.

5. Plants



Figure 20: Date Palm

Seal: 1.8cm x 2.3cm x 1.7cm. Milky quartz. RC 1335/1822W.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Date palm.

Image: *Cf.* Brunner 1978, pp. 93–94 fig. 65; Gignoux and Gyselen 1982, pl. XVI fig. 30.65 and pl. XVII fig. 30.99.

Period: 400–651 CE, middle to late Sasanian.



Figure 21: Pomegranate

Seal: 1.3cm x 1.7cm x 1.1cm. Carnelian. RC 1340/1823B.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Pomegranate flower with a bulbous unopened calyx and two leaves at the base.

Image: For unopened calyx *cf.* Brunner 1978, p. 118 fig. 127. Contra Brunner 1978, altars pp. 120–121 figs. 107, 101, and 139.

Period: 500–651 CE, late Sasanian.



Figure 22: Pomegranate

Seal: 1.1cm x 1.6cm. Milky quartz. No RC number.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Pomegranate flower with a bulbous unopened calyx and two leaves at the base.

Image: For unopened calyx *cf.* Brunner 1978, p. 118 fig. 127. Contra Brunner 1978, altars pp. 120–121 figs. 107, 101, and 139.

Period: 500–651 CE, late Sasanian.



Figure 23: Pomegranate

Seal: 1.3cm x 1.6cm. Carnelian. RC 1366.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Stylized opened pomegranate calyx.

Image: Cf. Bivar 1969, pl. 25 figs. LB 5 and LB 6; partially Brunner 1978, p. 118 fig. 170.

Period: 500–651 CE, late Sasanian.



Figure 24: Tulip

Seal: 1.3cm x 1.7cm. Smokey quartz. RC 1320/1822J.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Tulip with short leaves on either side.

Image: Cf. Gans nd, figs. 50.A.03, 50.A.06; Gignoux and Gyselen 1987, pl. XXII fig. 50.1.

Period: 224–651 CE, Sasanian.

6. Altars



Figure 25: Fire Altar

Seal: 1.6cm x 1.9cm x 1.0cm. Jasper. RC 1321/1822K.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Traditional Zoroastrian fire altar with triple steps, pillar, triple-ringed bowl and flames, with a crescent below a star on the right and a plant on the left. A Pahlavi inscription surrounds the altar. Edges of the seal are beveled. Front and sides have spiral decorations.

Image: Cf. Gignoux and Gyselen 1982, pl. XXV fig. 60.1.

Inscription: Damaged and largely illegible.

Period: 224–300 CE, early Sasanian.



Figure 26: Cruciform Altar

Seal: 1.5cm x 1.8cm x 0.8cm. Banded agate. RC 1326/1822N.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Stylized cruciform altar, probably Christian.

Image: Cf. Gyselen 2006, p. 48, fig. 30.

Period: 500–651 CE, late Sasanian.



Figure 27: Altar with Star

Seal: 1.6cm x 1.8cm. Carnelian. RC 1321/1822K.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Six-pointed star rising above altar. Possibly Christian, based on Zoroastrian box-altar representations. Edges of the seal are beveled.

Images: *Cf.* Brunner 1978, p. 120 fig. 111.

Period: 500–651 CE, late Sasanian.

7. Symbols



Figure 28: Monogram

Seal: 1.0cm x 1.4cm x 1.3cm. Jasper. RC 1339/1822Z.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Common monogram type composed of crescent on triangular base with curved scrolls. This monogram appears to represent the *āmārgar* [ʾmʾrgr], “tax collector, fiscal officer,” series of seals, where the inscription is abstracted with duplication of letters along the vertical axis.

Images: *Cf.* Adhami 2003, pp. 386–389, fig. D.351. *Cf.* partially Gans nd, fig. 70.01; Harper 1973, pl. I.84, fig. D.351.

Period: 500–651 CE, late Sasanian.



Figure 29: Monogram

Seal: 0.9cm x 1.1cm x 0.9cm. Carnelian. RC 1359/1823T.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Line passing vertically through two mirror-image rising crescent arms, with two crescents and a cross nestled together at top and bottom.

Paired beading at 2, 4, 8, and 10 o'clock positions. Tassel border surrounds the image.

Images: *Cf.* partially to Gans nd, fig. 70.02; Harper 1973, pl. I.5, fig. D.3. For cross *cf.*

Gyselen 2006, fig. 42.

Period: 400–651 CE, late Sasanian.



Figure 30: Cruciform

Seal: 1.0cm x 1.1cm. Jasper. RC 1822F.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Flower-like cruciform shape with small rays between petals.

Image: *Cf.* Gans nd, fig. 80.06.

Period: 224–651 CE, Sasanian.

8. Composite Scenes



Figure 31: Griffin and Fish

Seal: 2.6cm x 2cm x 1.7cm. Chalcedony. RC 1306.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Griffin seated, facing to the left, under a pillared arch bearing ribbons, with a fish laying on the ground.

Images: For pillared arch *cf.* Brunner 1978, pp. 120–121 fig. 139.

Period: 300–100 BCE, late Seleucid or early Parthian.



Figure 32: Bull and Bird

Seal: 1.4cm x 1.8cm. Milky quartz. RC 1319/18221.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Bull head, turned three quarters to right, beneath a standing bird, possibly an eagle or vulture, with its wings folded, facing to the right.

Images: For bird positioned above an animal *cf.* Frye 1971, pl. XLVII fig. 143. For bull head *cf.* Bivar 1969, pl. 23 fig. H1 7; Brunner 1978, p. 80, fig. 67.

Period: 300–500 CE, middle Sasanian.



Figure 33: Ram and Palm Tree

Seal: 1cm x 1.4cm. Jasper. RC 1337/1822Y.

Sealing/Seal-Impression: Depicts ram, standing, facing a date palm to the right. Beading at 1, 4, and 10 o'clock.

Images: For ram with date palm *cf.* Gignoux and Gyselen 1982, pl. XVI fig. 30.65; Gignoux and Gyselen 1987, pl. X fig. 30.105. For ram *cf.* Gignoux and Gyselen 1987, pl. III fig. EL10.

Period: 300–500 CE, middle Sasanian.

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