

26) The impression of an inscribed Middle Assyrian cylinder seal on a Late Babylonian cuneiform tablet — The cuneiform tablet TCL 13 182 (AO 6919) is a rental contract in dialogue form, dated 13/IV/2 Darius I = 13 July 520 BCE¹. The tablet measures 10.5 cm wide by 7.0 cm high. It was issued and sealed by Bēl-iddina *šatam E-ana*, son of Sîn-ēreš, and by two of his deputies, Nergal-šar-ušur *qīpu* and Bārīk-*’El šar-rēš šarri*, bēl-piqitti E-ana. The tablet’s three seal impressions—Bēl-iddina’s on the upper edge, the remaining two on the lower, each captioned in cuneiform NA₄. KIŠIB PN—were first published by DELAPORTE 1923, p. 175; pl. 121, 1a–1b (A. 795). The two impressions on the lower edge were left by contemporary stamp seals (see now, EHRENBURG 1999, nos. 53 and 74) and need detain us no further. Bēl-iddina’s impression (Fig. 1), on the other hand, appears to have been produced by an heirloom, a centuries-old cuneiform-inscribed and figured cylinder seal. The seal, some 4.3 cm in circumference (*diam. 1.4 cm), was rolled through one-and-a-half rotations, more or less centered on the inscription. The impression is preserved to perhaps half its original height at 1.6 cm, with neither its upper nor lower edges evident. DELAPORTE (1923, p. 175), who did not remark on the seal’s antiquity, described it simply as depicting “[u]n archer diadémé bande son arc et s’apprête à tirer sur un bouquetin dressé, dont il est séparé par un arbre chargé de fruits”. The cuneiform seal inscription (Fig. 2), consisting of a personal name and patronym inscribed so as to be read in the impression in three horizontal, ever-briefer lines inserted in the space between the backs of the hunter and his prey, does not, however, name its user, Bēl-iddina, rather, it reads (following Delaporte, for the moment, in modern notation) ^dUTU-ŠEŠ-SUM-na A ^dPA-DA, “Šamaš-aḫa-iddina son of Nabû-lē’i” (ibid.).



Fig. 1. AUWE 18 no. 217 (author’s composite, 2:1).

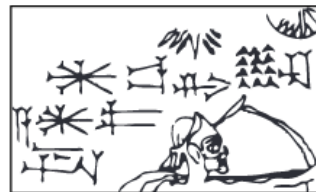


Fig. 2. Cuneiform hand copy (E. Ehrenberg).

MATTHEWS 1990, in his computer-aided comprehensive examination of Middle Assyrian seal styles, included a life-size line drawing of this impression (no. 312), identifying it as an example of the “Adad-nirari I style” of the ca. early thirteenth century BCE. He observed that a scene featuring a tree with a twisted trunk (and globular crown) on a hill marked by a scale pattern (here, not preserved) and a kneeling archer aiming at an animal (lower half of neither preserved) on the other side of the tree is one of the most characteristic scenes of this period (ibid., p. 95; cf. nos. 311, 313–14).

EHRENBURG 1999, as part of her study of the seal impressions on E-ana tablets in the Yale Babylonian Collection (AUWE 18), published a more detailed photograph and line-drawing revealing new iconographic details (pl. 28, no. 217). She particularly noted the “superb, highly modeled quality of the seal” (ibid., p. 39), citing by their publication sigla the same three examples for comparanda as had MATTHEWS (1990, p. 102): MOORTGAT 1942, figs. 16 and 17 from Aššur, the latter with the remains of two similar rayed field fillers as seen partially impressed here above the inscription, and fig. 18 (de Clercq no. 311). Not noted by previous commentators is the treatment of the hair held in place by a diadem, which is wider above the forehead, narrower above the ears, and tied in a knot behind the head with the loose ends pointing downward toward the drawn right hand. These features are closely paralleled by the (standing) archer on the cylinder seal BN 367 (= MATTHEWS 1990, no. 308), also in the “Adad-nirari I style”; in both cases the bowstring and arrow-shaft pass impossibly out of sight behind the hunter’s head while the hand drawing the bow is placed to the left of his head and above the right shoulder, conventions regularly seen in comparable contemporary Egyptian New Kingdom representations. Perhaps an idealized image of Adad-nīrārī I, himself, (r. ca. 1305–ca. 1274 BCE²) was intended to be seen here.

EHRENBURG (1999, p. 39) further observed that at the presumed time of the carving of the original intaglio, Uruk would have been subject to Kassite control, thus it is likely that the seal made its way to Uruk only later. She also suggested (ibid., p. 102) that the present seal inscription was a later addition; nevertheless, the script of the inscription, despite two slightly oddly carved signs (SUM, NA), which may be nothing more than an illiterate seal cutter’s infelicities, is still within the range of Middle Assyrian lapidary sign forms.

Today, in light of the seal impression's signature motif and style and the currently accepted conventions for normalizing Middle Assyrian personal names, the three signs comprising Šamaš-aḫa-iddina's patronym, first read ⁴PA-DA = Nabū-lē'i by Delaporte (followed by Ehrenberg), would now be typically read DINGIR-pa/ḫad-da = Ilī-(i)pa(d)ḫaddā, or the like³). A like-named historical figure, son of Aššur-iddin, grandson of Qībi-Aššur, great-grandson of Ibašši-ilī, and a great-great-grand-son of king Adad-nīrārī I, is known from several sources dated to the later Middle Assyrian period (WIGGERMANN 2006). In a Neo-Assyrian copy of a Middle Babylonian letter (K. 1109+K. 3045), the contemporary Babylonian king Adad-šuma-ušur addressed his derisive missive to both the *de jure* king Aššur-nīrārī III (as per his place in the Assyrian King List) and to Ilī-ḫaddā, calling them together “kings of Assyria” (ll. 1–2)⁴). Ilī-ḫaddā was in fact *sukkallu rabīu* “grand vizier” and šar Ḫanigalbat “king of Hanigalbat”⁵), as were his father and grandfather (SZUCHMAN 2007, p. 213); he was also the father of Assyrian king Ninurta-apil-Ekur (r. ca. 1191–ca. 1179 BCE), the progenitor of the remainder of the main line of Middle Assyrian kings reigning beginning shortly after Tukulti-Ninurta I's murder, ca. 1207 BCE⁶).

Šamaš-aḫa-iddina, should he be accepted as the son of Ilī-ḫaddā, son of Aššur-iddin, would be reunited with his other brothers, the king Ninurta-apil-Ekur and the *limu*-official Mardukīya *šakin Qutmuḫi*⁷). Further, it would appear that the seal in question, perhaps one of the finest examples of ca. early 13th c. BCE Middle Assyrian cylinder seals depicting a royal hunting scene, somehow came, a century later, into the hands of Šamaš-aḫa-iddina who then had it inscribed for himself. How and when this seal then reached the hands of Bēl-iddina in E-ana in Uruk some six centuries later also remains to be determined⁸).

Notes

1. For an edition of the text, see MOORE 1935, pp. 186–89, CNB 182; cf. J ANOVIĆ 2013, p. 239 and n. 878.
2. All Middle Assyrian regnal dates cited herein follow BRINKMAN 1977, without prejudice.
3. E.g., UNGNAD 1938, p. 448, “kaum d PA-DA = Nabū-le'i”; also note the variant IDINGIR-i-ḫad/pa-da in two exemplars (B, C) of the Assyrian King List (GRAYSON 1980–83, p. 111), suggesting here a case of crasis wherein in pronunciation and spelling the –ī of the preceding pronominal suffix was assimilated to the following i- prefix of the predicate yielding the form *Ilīḫaddā, or the like; cf. III R 4 no. 5 (K. 3045): 5 DINGIR-ḫad-da a [...].
4. cdli.ucla.edu/P393862; for a modern edition, and lists of previous editions, translations, and discussions, see FRAZER 2015, pp. 208–25. Contrast HARPER 1909, no. 924, where the unmarked restorations of the signs at the ends of ll. 1 (-d[a-a-ni]) and 5 (-[a-ni]) (cf. W ATERMAN 1930, p. 142, no. 924) are not supported by earlier copies, e.g., III R 4 no. 5, ROST 1897 245 no. 5 (courtesy Mary Frazer, personal communication).
5. The impression of Ilī-ḫaddā's cylinder seal on a clay envelope from Tell Sabi Abyad (T93-36) is also known; it depicts, presumably, Ilī-ḫaddā himself seated on a horse facing left, half-rearing on its hind legs, in front of a city- gate-like structure to the right (W IGGERMANN 2006).
6. Cf. Eponym List Ce (KAV 19), l. 6: IDINGIR-pa-da DUMU SAG [...], whose broken patronym is irreconcilable with the patronym (Aššur-iddin) of the grand vizier; UNGNAD (1938, p. 437) stated categorically that most of the names in List Ce, including the name in question, are not eponyms.
7. ANDRAE 1913, p. 85, no. 129; cf. UNGNAD 1938, p. 438, II 129; SZUCHMAN 2007, p. 213, fig. 4.
8. Also note AUWE 18 no. 216, another incompletely rolled, ca. thirteenth century BCE figured Middle Assyrian cylinder seal impression, this one depicting, from the left, a beardless figure, forearms raised as in adoration, and a bearded mountain goat both profile left, their backs to a few leaf-tipped branches of a tree; it is the only seal impression on NCBT 551 rev., an unpublished, undated, Late Babylonian E-ana archive tablet fragment in the Yale Babylonian Collection, listing nine individuals by name and the [quantity] of silver each received (courtesy of Elizabeth E. Payne, personal communication).

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Ronald WALLENFELS,
New York University <rw35@nyu.edu>