

Glyptic Styles at an Isin-Larsa Minor Settlement: Seals and Seal Impressions from Tell Wares 2

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At the beginning of 1990, the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage carried out rescue excavations under the directions of Muhammad Yahya Radhi at the site of Tell Wares 2 in the Al-Qadisiyah province. The reason for these excavations was the digging of the Main Drain Canal, also known as the “General Estuary” or “Third River”. Eventually, these hydraulic works led to the partial destruction of the site, which yielded interesting finds, of which some are published and studied here: two clay tags bearing impressions of the same seal, and five cylinder seals, all dating to the Isin-Larsa period.

The first phase of the Main Drain Canal project started in the last decades of the 20th century with works in the region between Ishaqi (north of Baghdad) and the Musayyib area (north of the Babil province). Years later, another phase was completed, from Nasiriyah to northern Basra. The last phase (1989-1990) concerned the region between the Musayyib area and Nasiriyah, where Tell Wares 2 is located (Fig. 1).

1. The excavations at Tell Wares 2

Tell Wares 2 (Fig. 2; UTM 38 S 532261.73 m E, 3561401.12 m N) is situated 12 km north-east of Nippur. The site lies just across the northern edge of the survey area of the recent Iraqi-Italian QADIS project (Marchetti et al. 2017). First visited by Adams (1981: no. 1031), Tell Wares 2² was one of the most important archaeological sites excavated during the series of rescue excavations connected with the Main Drain Canal project in the period between 1989 and 1990. The site in question appeared as particularly promising due to the large number of archaeological artefacts scattered on its surface and the visibility, especially in winter, of architectural remains such as the outline of buildings³. The expedition at Tell Wares 2 started its field work on January

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² The site was eventually designated as “Tell Wares 2” after Tūlūl Werrish (Adams 1981: no. 983), situated about 3 km to the south-west. The latter site had been named after Wares Al-Eli, a sheikh of the al-Hamza tribe, which was one of the clans around Afak.

³ Adams (1981) described this site (no. 1031) as follows: “(measurements) 140 NW × 90 × 3. Lower debris tails off SE. Traces of Late Uruk, Early Dynastic. Mainly Ur III-Larsa. The debris to the SE is Early Islamic”. In its immediate vicinity Adams also identified additional sites (Adams 1981: nos. 1030-1051). After visiting the area (when drone images, from which Fig. 3 has been obtained, were taken), it

28th 1990 and continued until the end of April 1990, when the topographic work was finished and a contour map of the site was drawn (Fig. 3).

2. The glyptic finds

The most important finds were located in the north-eastern area of the site, where a large rectangular building dating to the Isin-Larsa period was excavated (Fig. 4; Al-Hussainy forthcoming). The seals and sealings published here were found in different rooms of this building together with Isin-Larsa pottery and other artefacts of the same period such as terracotta plaques and figurines. In addition, this building yielded a significant number of cuneiform tablets, mostly legal documents, but also receipts and letters. In particular, the find of a clay jar containing 29 tablets that bear year names of four kings of Larsa — Abi-Sare, Sumu-el, Nur-Adad, and Sin-iddinam — is extremely remarkable in that it attests Larsa's control over this centre in the vicinity of Nippur for about half a century between the end of the 20th century BC and the mid-19th century BC (Muhammad 2013; Al-Hussainy, de Boer and Jawdat 2019: 59–60). While these tablets still await to be published, additional tablets from Tell Wareshe 2 that have already been published (Al-Hussainy, de Boer and Jawdat 2019) substantially confirm this chronological frame, as the few dated tablets bear year names of Sumu-el and, perhaps, even Gungunum.

Because of their findspots (see above), the glyptic documents detailed hereafter must be ascribed to the same time span (20th-19th centuries BC). Their stylistic diversity testifies the variety of glyptic types circulating and employed in a peripheral centre of the kingdom of Larsa at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC.

2.1 Sealings

No. 1 (IM 221125) (Figs. 5a-d)

Triangular tag with three cord holes
Sealed on the obverse, reverse, and lower edge
4.2 × 2.7 × 1.4 cm, 13.34 gr
From Room 4

No. 2 (IM 221124) (Figs. 6a-c)

Triangular tag with three cord holes
Sealed on the obverse and reverse
3.7 × 3 × 1.2 cm, 14.87 gr
From Room 4

appears to the present author that all these sites formed a larger settlement whose exact size still needs to be established. SBAH excavations identified two main levels at Tell Wareshe 2, the more recent of which dates to the Early Islamic period and the older one (with two sub-phases) to the Isin-Larsa (or early Old Babylonian) period.

These two sealed tags come from Room 4, where they were associated with the seal of Daqqatum (No. 7). They bear the same seal impression, which shows a presentation or audience scene in front of a deified king, who is sitting on a padded stool lying on a pedestal with vertical supports. He holds in his right hand a cup, which is remarkably shallow. This may be due to the presence of a large crescent moon with a sun disk immediately above it. Before the king there is a clean-shaved, bald worshipper in a fringed robe with his hands clasped. Behind him we see a suppliant goddess with both hands raised, dressed in a flounced garment with a long counterweight hanging down her back. The seal is bordered by a line on its lower edge. Behind the seated king there is a two-line inscription. The style and craftsmanship of this seal are of a good quality and are typical of the Isin-Larsa period (cf. Collon 1986: nos. 38, 42, 44; Collon 1987: 44). Similar Isin-Larsa sealings are known from several southern Mesopotamian sites, such as Umma (Otto 2019), Ur, Nippur, etc. (see Fischer 1997; Mayr 2002; Seidl 2016). The cuneiform inscription reads as follows:

1. *i-a-wi-DINGIR* Yaḥwi-el,
2. *DUMU tu-úḫ-ši-um* son of Tuḫšium.

Yaḥwi-el is a well-known Amorite personal name (Gelb 1980: 607 no. 3591). The name means: “The god has shown himself alive” (root *ḥwy; see Streck 1999). The name of the father, Tuḫšium, is here attested for the first time. It looks like a *nisbe*-adjective, “The one of the *tuḫšum*”, but what *tuḫšum* denotes is uncertain. Cf. the possibly related feminine PN *tu-ùḫ-ša-tum* (UET 5, 290:2), which Gelb (1980: 645) analyses as *Tuḫš-at-um* (meaning unknown; see *ibid.*, p. 35). The latter is also written *du-uḫ-ša-tum* (*ibid.*, p. 577 no. 1586).

2.2 Cylinder Seals

No. 3 (IM 126470) (Fig. 7)

Gray stone, worn

2.8 × 1.4 cm

From Room 27

A *lamma*-goddess in a flounced robe greets the sun god Šamaš, who is holding a saw with his right hand while his right knee is raised. There is a seated personage (either royal or divine) behind him. The object behind the *lamma*-goddess is perhaps a ball-staff and pot. This looks like a standard audience scene: a *lamma*-goddess behind a worshipper in front of the seated king. What may seem the knee and saw of the sun god are probably small filling motifs.

No. 4 (IM 126471) (Fig. 8)

Baked clay

3.1 × 2 cm

From Room 17

This seal shows schematic motives typical of the so-called “common style” executed on clay: a pair of human figures with highly schematized limbs are sitting opposite of each other, probably performing a banquet scene. Between them there are motifs of unclear nature (perhaps a standard topped by a crescent, a servant, and a quadruped placed

vertically). Cf. the similar clay seals from the Diyala region, Suleimeh and Susa discussed by Al-Gailani (1988: nos. 80-91).

No. 5 (IM 126472) (Fig. 9)

Baked clay

3 × 1.5 cm

From Room 37

This is a standard presentation scene. A bald worshipper is introduced by a standing deity (in a striped robe) to another, higher-ranking deity wearing a horned cap and sitting on a stool that replicates an architectural façade. The execution is rather poor.

Probably it is not an Isin-Larsa presentation scene, since the worshipper in Isin-Larsa scenes is always raising the other hand in front of his nose in a praying gesture. It is very rare that the introduced person has the rear arm backwards. This is the case either when women are introduced (but here it is clearly a man), or in Akkadian or early Ur III seals (e.g. Moortgat 1940: nos. 205-207, and 251).

No. 6 (IM 126473) (Fig. 10)

Green stone, top chipped

2 × 1 cm

From Room 42

We have here a contest scene with a central figure dressed in a knee-long dress who masters two caprids with angled bodies turning their heads back. Each caprid is attacked by a lion. The left lion is chased by a bull-man who grasps the lion's tail. The style is quite schematic and the motive recalls late ED III or early Akkadian seals in composition. It is not uncommon to find revivals of Akkadian stylistic and thematic features in early seals of the Isin-Larsa period; however, as any later stylistic trait is lacking here, this seal is more likely an original centuries-old heirloom.

A closely comparable seal found at Khafajah (but unfortunately in a surface layer) was dated by Frankfort to the ED III period (Frankfort 1955: no. 386); additional comparable seals come from Tell Asmar, from Proto-imperial (ibid., no. 561), early Akkadian (ibid., no. 515), and Akkadian (ibid., no. 601) levels.

No. 7 (IM 126645) (Fig. 11)

Red agate, chipped

1.8 × 0.6 cm

From Room 4

Presentation scene before a deified king with brimmed cap sitting on a stool, greeted by a taller figure clad in a fringed robe, possibly a royal personage, since he wears a brimmed cap as well. Between them is a smaller figure with hands clasped. An inscription on two lines reads:

- | | | |
|----|---|------------------------------------|
| 1. | <i>da-qá-tum</i> | Daqqatum, |
| 2. | GEME ₂ ^{<d>} A.BA | (female) servant of (the god) Aba. |

Daqqatum is the feminine form of *daqqu*, “minute, fine”. The latter is well attested as a personal name but its feminine counterpart is attested here for the first time.

The scene and the gestures of the standing figures are uncommon in Mesopotamia. Moreover, the headdress in form of a flat cap, the style of the cutting, and the material

(red agate) are also unusual. As comparable seals were found at Susa (Amiet 1972: nos. 1703 and 1858), it is likely that also the seal in question comes from some region to the east of the Tigris.

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CAPTIONS

Fig. 1 – Location of Tell Waresch 2 (Adams 1981: no. 1031) and other sites in its vicinity

Fig. 2 – UAV orthophoto of Tell Waresch 2, taken in 2019

Fig. 3 – 1990 topographic map of Tell Waresch 2

Fig. 4 – Isin-Larsa buildings at Tell Waresch 2

Fig. 5 – Tag with seal impression (No. 1): a. recto, b. verso, c. edge, d. detail of the legend

Fig. 6 – Tag with seal impression (No. 2): a. recto, b. verso, c. detail of the legend

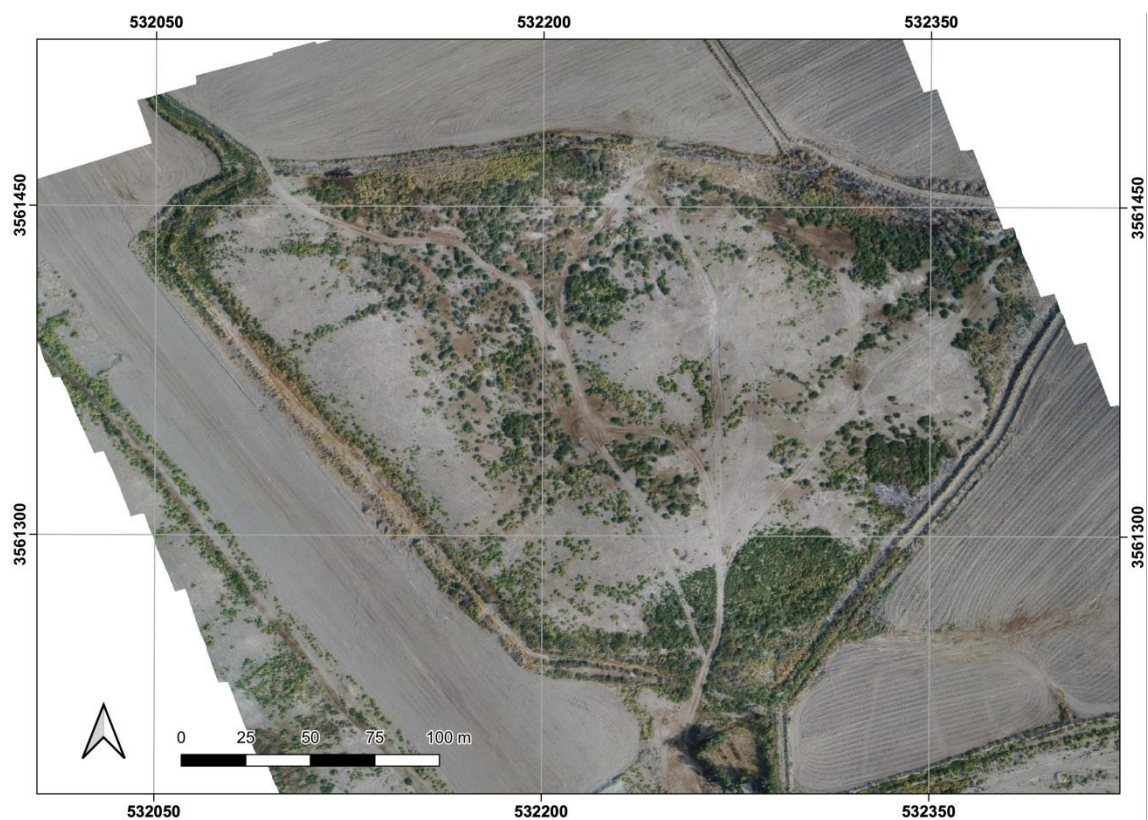
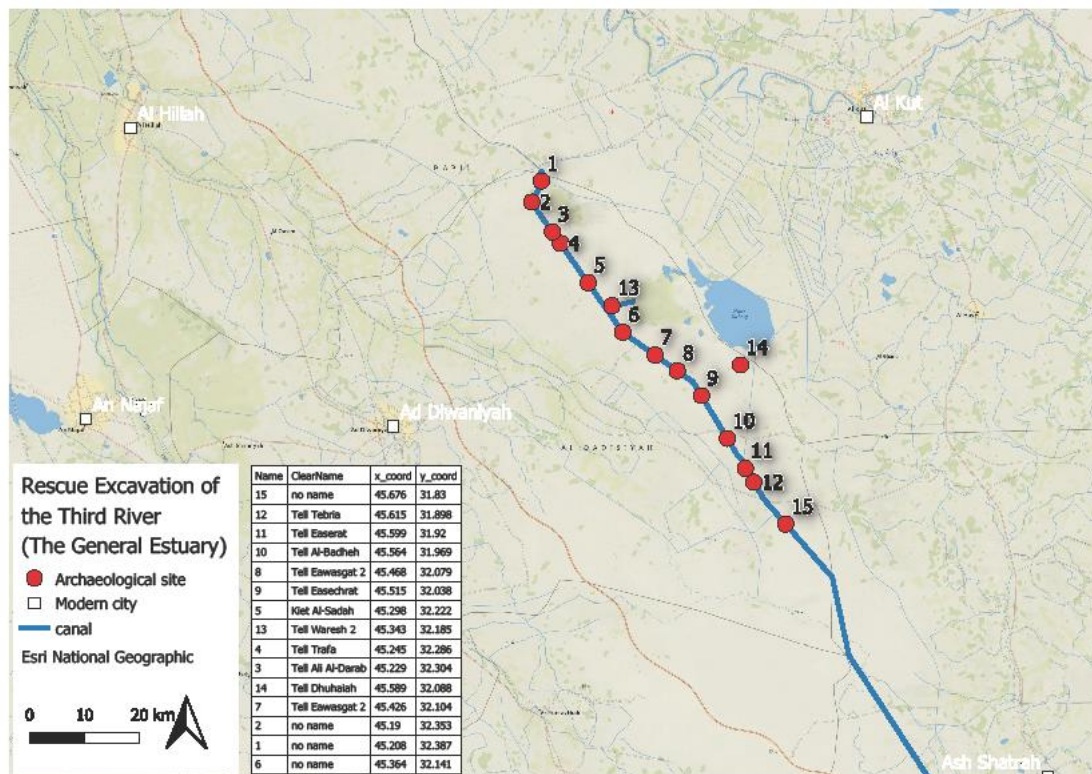
Fig. 7 – Cylinder seal (No. 3)

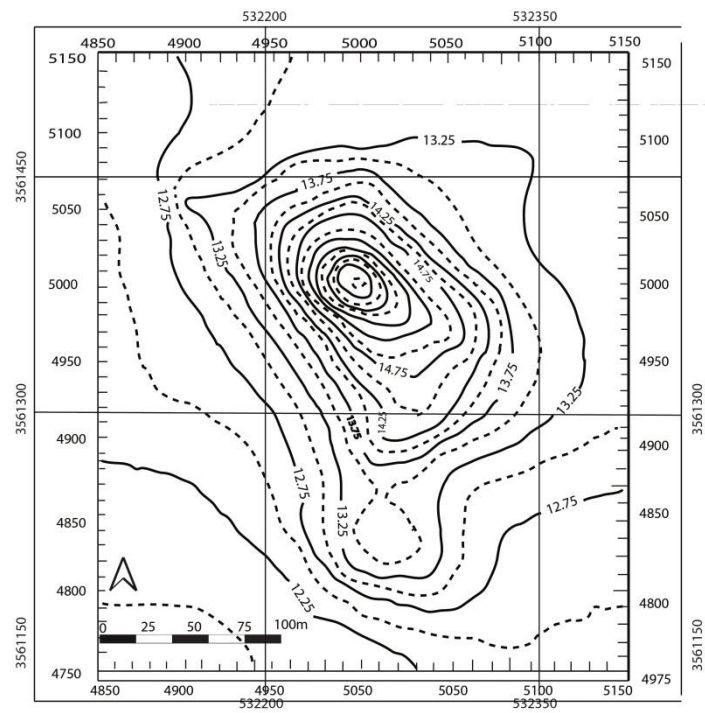
Fig. 8 – Cylinder seal (No. 4)

Fig. 9 – Cylinder seal (No. 5)

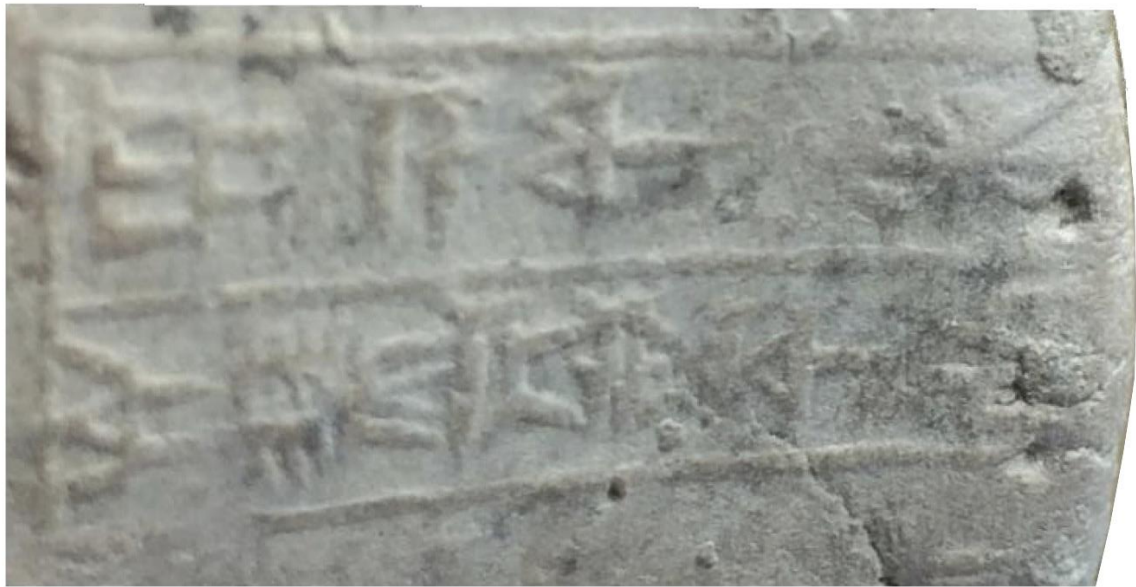
Fig. 10 – Cylinder seal (No. 6)

Fig. 11 – Cylinder seal (No. 7)





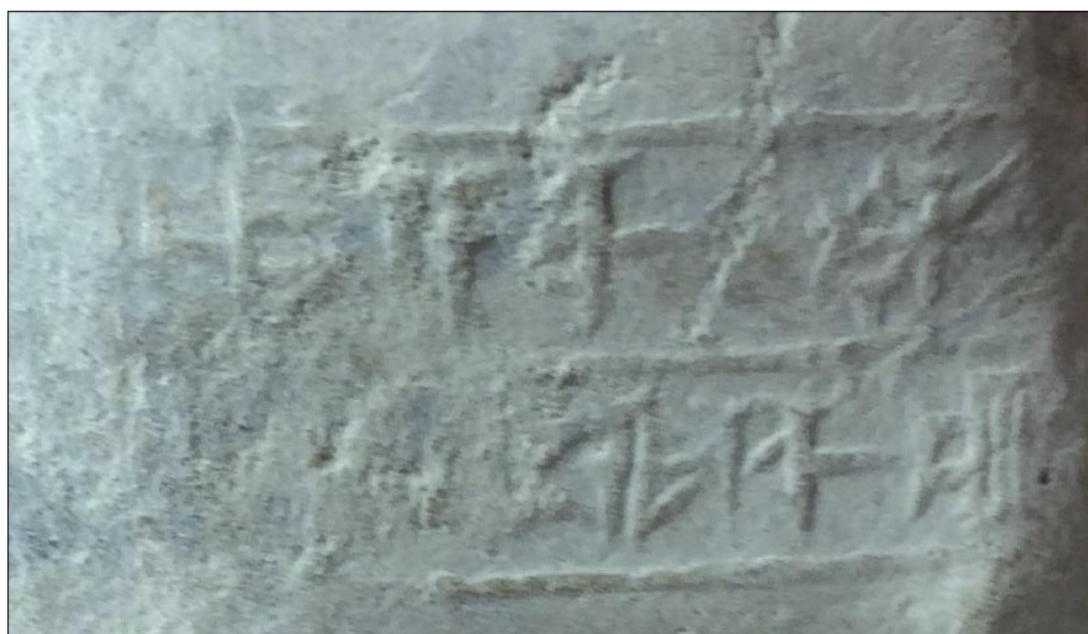






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