

# Tall Al-Thahab Seals

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## Summary

Tall Al-Thahab is one of the archaeological sites located in Al-Ta'amim province at the eastern edge of the Tigris. The site inhabited since the Uruk period and the settlement continued during the later ages intermittently. There are six cylindrical seals that were unveiled in this site all of them are dated back to Akkadian period. What distinguishes those seals is that all of them are made of solid and precious materials and were carved with high-tech. They portrayed common topics in the Akkadian seals represented by offering sacrifices to the Gods in two of them, a conflict in two others, a group of scorpions in the fifth seal, and the sixth seal is incomplete made.

These seals mainly seal (No. 4) which is attributed to be made in a royal workshop and used by State employee-illustrated that the site was an administrative center during the Akkadian period. It included State employees. This assumption is reinforced by the discovered architectural remains and artifacts in the site which are dated back to this period.

They, especially seal (No.6), also showed the existence of a local workshop in the site where skilled craftsmen worked on manufacturing seals. This assumption is attributed to the precise seals that have been made therein.

Tall Al-Thahab [1] located in Al-Ta'amin Province, Hawija District at the eastern edge of the Tigris. It is (8<sup>km</sup>) north of Al-Fatha. This hill (Tal) (700<sup>m</sup>) from north to south (600<sup>m</sup>) from east to west. It rises from the neighboring land (26<sup>m</sup>). An Iraqi expedition from the General Authority for Antiquities and Heritage, headed by Mr. Sulaiman, Burhan Shakir, excavated the site in 2001 for three months only within the rescue excavations in Makhoul Dam Basin in the aftermath of a determination to establish a Dam in the area to the north of Al-Fatha near the corridor that separates the Hamrin and Makhoul Mounts (but the Dam project subsequently canceled) with the information that the site is located outside the dam area. [2]

The nature of the rapid rescue excavation witnessed by the site, the short duration, natural and human encroachments all together led to the non-disclosure of all of its themes in an integrated manner. However, the archaeological excavations showed that the site inhabited since URUK 's Jamdat-Nasr period and the settlement continued during the early dynastic period that witnessed broad settlements during the Akkadian and Assyrian and the neo Parthian periods. [3]

The most outstanding artifacts in this site despite its few number are the cylinder seals, five of which were revealed among the rubble of the Akkadian building in the layer II. / 5<sup>th</sup> area. [4] The sixth seal, is incomplete; it was found in

layer II./ area II. All of them dated back to the Akkadian period, this paper subject-matter.

The Akkadian (2370-2240 BC) is an important period of Mesopotamia history. It produced great achievements in political, economic, religious, societal, cultural, architectural and technical spheres. The Akkadian seals documented scenes reflect the nature of the Akkadian society, theology, customs, rites, and wealth. The seals that were collected from Tall Al-Thahab are the most important artifacts that were collected from the site due to the quality materials that were used and high-tech manufacturing, and the diversity of topics carved in. the following illustrate scenes implementing them and the content of each

The 1<sup>st</sup> seal (177537-IM) (Fig. 1) is a religious scene where a worshiper holds sacrifice to God Enki / Ea, who appears sitting on the right side of the scene embracing his left hand to his chest and raising up his right hand in front of him with an open palm, there are two streams flowing from his two sides. The God wearing a horned-crown and dressed in a long robe with horizontal folds. A secondary God raising up his left hand in front of him and the other hand back holds a worship, they approach towards God Enki. This God wearing a horned-crown and long robe with vertical folds. He is followed by a worshiper who hold his left hand and put his right hand to his chest carrying out a small lamb, wearing robe or long dress decorated with diagonal stripes, the vertical stripes decorates the lower bottom of the dress. [5]



Figure 1: (177537-IM)

The second seal (177509 - IM) (Fig. 2) embodied a religious theme also. Offering a sacrifice to a Goddess sitting on the right side raises her right hand holding the branch of a tree or frond hanging to the bottom and has her left hand to her waist, wearing a horned-crown and a long dress with vertical folds reveals her arms. The Goddess sit on a square-shaped simple chair. Approaching towards the Goddess, a big-size male-goat standing on his four legs, followed by bearded man wearing long dress and holding in one hand the horn of the goat and the tail in his another hand. There is also the crescent symbol of God Sin at the top space between the Goddess and the goat. [6]

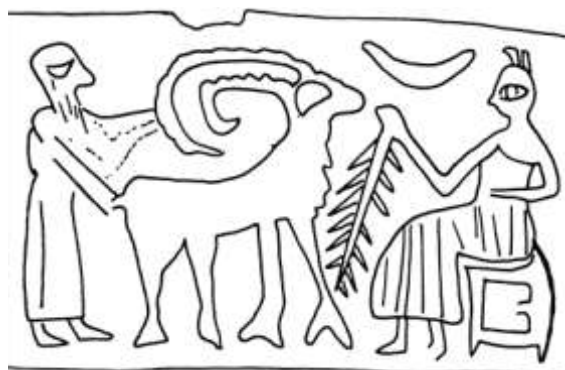


Figure 2: (177509 - IM)

Arts of Mesopotamia portrayed Goddess and Gods in standing and sitting positions carry an ear or twig plants. In most cases, the Throne, where they sit, is replaced by a pile of grain or branches or stems of plants [7]. We cannot determine the identity of the God or Goddess of plant in the scenes portrayed in the Akkadian seals accurately. They probably represents the Goddess (<sup>d</sup> Ezina / Ašnan), Goddess of Grain, or perhaps represent Goddess (<sup>d</sup> NIDABA / Nisaba), Goddess of Writing and Arithmetic, which probably was the Goddess of Grain too, as the sign on her name had taken the form of ear [8]. But if a God appeared in the scene, it probably represents the God Tammuz. Dumuzi / <sup>d</sup> DUMU.ZI, the patron God of Irrigation and Agriculture. [9]

Offerings sacrifice and vow to the God/Goddess are topics commonly portrayed in the Mesopotamian arts since URUK period and the subsequent ages. The commonly used sights in the Akkadian period are God or secondary God holds the hand of a worshiper offering (a lamb) or a pet like a goat or ram or sometimes bull to the God as a kind of worship and away to draw closer to the God/Goddess to gain their satisfaction and enjoy the fruits. Rarely the worshiper approaches the God without offering a sacrifice. [10]

The third and fourth seals carving which the subject of the conflict, embodies (177450 -IM) (Fig. 3) scene include two groups, the first group from the right, is a nude hero holding in his right hand the forehead of a standing buffalo in front of him and his left hand hold the neck of the buffalo which lean his head to the back. The second group is a hero similar to the former wearing a short blouse with the lower edge slanted, holding in his hands the forehead of a lion standing in front of him, his mouth is open and has a thick mane and tail high up.

In the space between the two heroes there is long plant with a straight trunk protrudes from the two upper sides small twigs. The scene made by gradual-depth scraping. It follows the realistic technique and focus on showing the muscles of the body, consistency and movement vitality. [11]

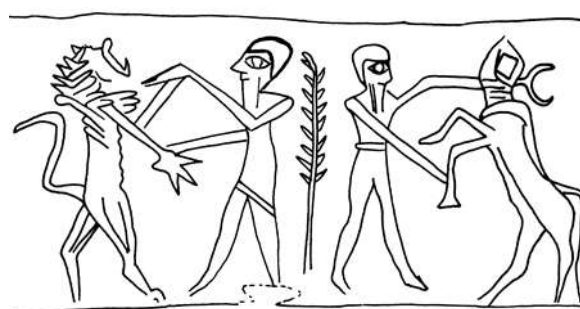


Figure 3: (177450 -IM)

The other seal (177529 - IM) (Fig. 4) consist of two group, the first to the right side shows an bull-man [12] holding the forehead of a lion in one hand and in the other holding his neck. The lion open his mouth, holding his tail to the up, trying to take away the bull-man's hand which grabs his neck. The bull-man wearing a belt of two laps. The second group consists of a nude bearded hero catches, the forehead of a Buffalo stood before him and the other hand holds his neck. The Hero wearing a belt of three laps. [13] A cuneiform inscription consists of two lines between the nude hero and the bull- man and both turn their head towards them. The inscription read the following:

Šid – dù (PN) [14]  
 šu-eš<sub>4</sub>-tar<sub>2</sub> (PN) [15]  
 DUB . SAR (tupšaru) (scribe) [16]  
 IR<sub>3</sub> – su<sub>2</sub> ( arad ) ( his servant ) [17]



Figure 4: (177529 - IM)

We note that the status of the conflict in these scenes the confront between hero (a nude hero and another hero wearing gown and a bull-men), a predator or a wild animal struggling with hands, where the prevalence to the hero who controls over his rivals by catching his front legs and neck. This raised many opinions about the significance of the conflict scenes. The most common view is that they portrayed part of the Epic of Gilgamesh and the hero who is battling predators and protects pets is Gilgamesh and the bull-man is his companion Enkidu. [18]

Another opinion suggest that the conflict view is related to God Dumuzi and reflect the resurrection and immortality of man - the God Dumuzi who is struggling against predators that represent death and protects and takes care of pets, which represents the source of life for man [19]

Many researchers suggest that the scenes of conflict, the presence of a lion attacking pets and a person save them is just a representation of scenes from nature that imparted manifestations of an extraordinary power. [20] The

protection of man to the tamed animal represents the triumph of good over evil. [21]

We do believe that limiting scenes of conflict – which has multi characters and heroes, variety of animals and predators-, various positions, different eras in one legend or epic or in a single figure, raises a lot of questions and sort out a lot of contradictions. For instance, one of the reasons that push us to refuse the concept that the conflict scenes represent part of Epic of Gilgamesh is attributed to the fact that the dignitaries these scenes appeared before Gilgamesh, the King of the First Warka Dynasty (2800 - 2600 B.C.). In addition to that, these scenes precedes the text of the epic, which codification dates back to the second millennium B.C., and the protector hero in those scenes is often naked, while it is known that the Kings of Mesopotamia were never portrayed naked. The epic describes Enkidu as a normal person and not a composite creature of ( Man and bull ) in spite of his living in the wild and this is confirmed by some of the scenes depicting parts of the Epic of Gilgamesh, which portrayed two men fighting humbaba and wearing cloths. [22]

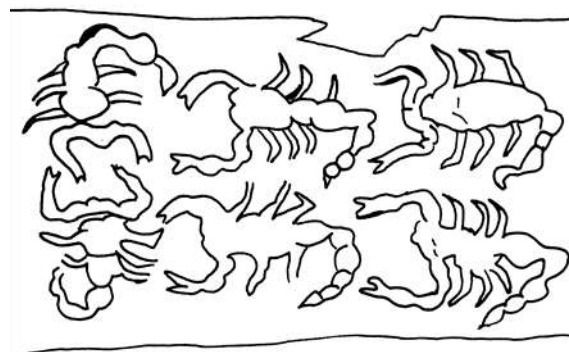
As for the concept that the hero - the protector - represent God Dumuzi, the different positions of the heroes in the conflict scenes, their posture and the presence of more than two different figures like the naked hero and the bull-man in one scene sometimes leads us to rule out that the scenes represent the exploits of God Dumuzi.

We can say that the conflict scenes is a form of struggle good and evil power, the strong against the weak, the life against death. They embodied the concept of protection and show qualities of strength and heroism. The heroes in the conflict scenes have been associated to the protection concept and being protecting souls in the later ages as illustrated in the cuneiform texts that refer to them sometimes and the places where the artistic models that represent them in the other times. The protector hero, who is known as Lahmu is a creature protects the rivers. He is the master of pets and the shepherd of the domestic animals. [23] Some of the royal writings, rites and writings on some property referred to Lahmu as a protector to the palaces. The same applies to the bull-man, as some of the pieces that shows him were found in buried under buildings, palaces and door sills, which suggests that they are souls protect the place. [24]

The predominance of the conflict theme in the cylinder seals during the early dynastic and Akkadian periods and their relative littleness as a key theme in the subsequent periods perhaps referring to the different protection concept, which the population of Mesopotamia seek to achieve through those scenes. Resorting to gods and worshipping to win their satisfaction and enjoy their protecting is clear in many scenes of worship during the Sumerian and subsequent periods him. Perhaps this shift is due to the fact the population of Mesopotamia followed effective means to protect their lives, property and livestock from the dangers they face as a result of the progress and development taking place in methods and means of defense and the defensive fortifications that provide them with the desired protection and drive the danger away. This is particularly with regard

to the threat of predators. These defensive measures perhaps known since the Akkadian period but the cultural exchanges and the continuation of customary inherited from the previous period was the motive for the prevalence of this topic in the Akkadian seals that took another turn in the middle of this era represented by highlighting the strength of the heroes than focusing on the protection of prey and how to save them.

Seal V. (177538 - IM), (Fig 5), carved a six Scorpions arranged by two horizontal rows, four of them heading towards the left, one heading towards the top and the other downward.



**Figure 5: (177538 - IM)**

The Scorpion is one of the animals that had occupied an important place in the Mesopotamia thought since the early ages. It was a symbol of fertility in Mesopotamia and a symbol of the Goddess Ashara during the middle Babylon period [25]. It is Goddess of fertility and sexual fertility. In the new Assyrian period, the scorpion probably took the symbol of the Assyrian Queens as the Female Scorpion that carry their babies on their backs and protect them and defend them fiercely was seen as an ideal mother. Thus it is similar to the care and protection of the Assyrian queens to the crown prince. [26] The scorpions portrayed in various Mesopotamian arts since ancient prehistoric period to the later ages, especially in the cylindrical seals. [27]

Seal VI. (177459- IM), (fig. 6) is a non-pierced cylinder-shaped refined piece. There is only two scrapes on its surface one probably represent a horned-crown out of many pairs. The other scrape may represent a chair, but it was incomplete.

The conclusions:

- 1) This seals made from a variety of materials represented by a marble, shell, diorite, green stone and chert which are available in the mountainous region and often reaches them through erosion with the Tigris River. [28]
- 2) The technique used in the carving of this group of seals is low relief and skimming Althuzeiz way, a method often starts with less-depth external edges of the implemented elements that go deeper to appear when the seal is printed on the soft mud in graded mode. In addition to that, perforation is also used in seal No. V. Set of precise tools was used in carving and polishing.
- 3) The used technology carving is realistic that takes into consideration the diligence, consistency, the anatomical characteristics and dynamic movement in and attention to all detail.



- 4) The used themes are common during the Akkadian period. They reflect number of religious creeds and unified customs that prevailed in the empire .

The unified techniques and themes suggests that they were made by one person in same workshop according to specific standards, mainly the ones that were made with high-technique like seal no IV. , as they are similar to the other samples, on which Collon attributed them to a royal workshop that produces seals to influential figures like monarch staff . [29] Seal IV. Belongs to a state employee called (Šid – dù šu-Eš<sub>4</sub>-tar<sub>2</sub> ) which support the opinion of the excavator that the site was administrative center during

the Akkadian period based on the architectural ruins and artifacts that were found in the location. [30] Seal VI. Is incomplete . it is made of sold material and well-refined with mild craving of the scene that suggest it was made in a domestic workshop. The other seals , probably, were made in a domestic workshop in the same location. This is another prove that the Mesopotamia cities and settlements, even if they are far from the headquarters, were rich with skilled workforce capable of doing the work with high professionalism using precise tools . As found on such model elaborate seals made in many of the archaeological sites in Mesopotamia.

**Table**

No	Picture	Registration No.	Museum No	Season	Location	Material	Colour	Dimesions			Status	Theme and Date
								Height	Upper diameter	Diamater the hole		
1		209	177537- IM	First 2001	Quarter V- Layer II. Room 12 – among the rubble	Green stone	Green	2,5Cm	1,4 Cm	0,5 Cm	V. Good	offering Akkad period
2		181	177509 -IM	First 2001	Quarter V- Layer II.– among the rubble southern	alabaster	White	2.8 cm	1,5 cm	0,06 cm	Good – litte damage	offering Akkadian period
3		121	177450 -IM	First 2001	Quarter V- Layer II. among the rubble	Diorit	Black	2.9 cm	1.8 cm	0,7 cm	Good – littele broken	Conflict Akkadian period
	4	201	177529-IM.	First 2001	Quarter V- Layer II.– among the rubble	Green stone	2.7 cm	1.4 cm	0,05 cm	Excellent	Conflict between bull , oxman and lion – Akkad	
	5	210	177538-IM.	First 2001	Quarter V- Layer II.– room 12 among the rubble	shell	3.1 cm	1,8 cm	0,7 cm	Good , some of its parts are corroded	Two rows of six scorpions – Akkadian Era	
	6	130	177459- IM.	First 2001	Quarter II- Layer II.– room 11 under ground	Chart	2 cm	1,3 cm	No pierce	Very good	No carved Akkadian era	

Plats





## References

- [1] Many archaeological sites in Iraq were known by the name of Tall Al-Thahab like one site in Baghdad in Kadhamiya district, and another one in Diyala in Al-Miqdadiyah District, and Tall Abu Al-Thahab in Babylon – Al Mahawel District and also Tall Abu Al-Thahab in THi – qar in Al-Chibayesh District. see : State Antiquities Directorate, Archaeological sites in Iraq, ( Baghdad 1970), P: 66,100,140,311.
- [2] Sulaiman, Burhan Shakir, Irakische Ausgrabungen im Makhul – Staudammgebiet, Heidelberg Studie Zumm Alten Orient – Band 12, ( Heidelberg Orientverlag : 2010 ),P. 3, 131( in Arabic)
- [3] Ibid, P. 131- 133
- [4] Excavations made in five scattered areas within the site. The finding suggest that the site was a settlement during the Akkadian period and the remaining two buildings of the Level. II., Area. IV, Level II. Area. V. which consist a building from the Akkadian period, in addition to other artifacts that are dated back to the same period that were found in another areas. For more information see: Sulaiman, Burhan Shakir, Irakische Ausgrabungen..., P. 133 ( in Arabic )

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- [11] For comparison see : Boehmer, R.M., Die Entwicklung Der Glyptic.....,pl . vii : 68 ; ; Collon , Dominique , Catalogue of The Western ... , vol. ii , pl.x : 68 – 70.
- [12] This creature known as GUB- ALIM in Sumerian language, and Kusarikku in the Akkadian. It is the picture of an bull-man in Mesopotamia art since the dynastic period II, and continued until the Achaemenid period. See: - Wiggermann , F., " Mischwesen " , RLA , 1993 , 8 , pp.250 , 256.
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