

## The Nuzi Elite: Iconography of Power and Prestige

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Three impressions of an extraordinary cylinder seal on an unusual “Nuzi Tablet Fragment” (NTF) caught the eye of the Assistant Curator, Dr James Armstrong, as he searched for representative objects to display in the permanent exhibit on Nuzi and the Hurrians at the Harvard Semitic Museum.<sup>1</sup> There was no caption to identify the owner of the seal, but the content and quality of its design prompted him to display the sealed object together with the famous sealings of Sauštatar, king of Mittani, and Ithi-teššup, king of Arrapha, as examples of Mittanian Elaborate Style, beside a collection of frit seals attributed to the Mittanian Common Style.<sup>2</sup> His hunch proved to be correct. Not only does the seal impressed on NTF 655 epitomize the Mittanian Elaborate Style, but its other associations on Nuzi tablets suggest that it may also serve as a further example of Mittanian royal iconography.

The following examination of NTF 655 and its sealings is offered to Gernot Wilhelm as a token of appreciation for our many years of collaboration on the Hurrians, Nuzi and, in particular, “das Archiv des Šilwa-teššup” (AdŠ). NTF 655 adds a new category to the corpus of sealed objects from Nuzi, while its seal impressions help to restore the design of one of two seals associated with prince Šilwa-teššup himself. Together, his two seals highlight certain aspects of iconography that mark Nuzi’s elite and set Šilwa-teššup above his peers. Their difference is also significant. When compared with the seals used by his royal forefathers, Sauštatar and Ithi-teššup, the contrast suggests

<sup>1</sup> The exhibit “Nuzi and the Hurrians: Fragments from a Forgotten Past” opened at the Harvard Semitic Museum (HSM) in April 1998 just prior to the *XLV<sup>e</sup> Rencontre assyriologique internationale* at which the same subject was the focus of two special sessions organized by Gernot Wilhelm and published in *SCC/NH* 10. I owe particular thanks Drs James Armstrong (Assistant Curator) and Joseph Greene (Assistant Director) for providing me with photographs and a detailed description of NTF 655, which I was able to draw during my visit to the museum in May 2005. Stuart Laidlaw of the Photographic Department at the Institute of Archaeology (UCL) kindly prepared the photographs for publication. For permission to publish NTF 655 thanks are due to Professor Piotr Steinkeller, Curator of the Tablet Collection.

<sup>2</sup> For the conventional definition of these terms see Porada 1947, 12.

that Šilwa-teššup's status at the end of Nuzi's Stratum II ought to be reconsidered. Viewed within a wider frame, the evolution of imagery on royal Mittanian period seals is diagnostic of emerging cultures, dynasties and rulers throughout the ancient Near East, and the iconography of power and prestige that marks Nuzi's elite, though idiomatically distinct, is essentially the same as that encountered in other mainstream traditions.

### Nuzi Tablet Fragments and Bullae

NTF 655 comes from a subset of the "Nuzi Tablet Fragments", itself a subgroup of the unpublished Nuzi tablets housed at the Harvard Semitic Museum.<sup>3</sup> The organization of the NTF collection, which is stored in small boxes, is unclear as the fragments contained in one box rarely belong to the same tablet or originate from the same locus. During the 1970s, as part of the "glyptic" project launched by the Museum, numbers were assigned to Nuzi Tablet Fragments that bore seal impressions. These sealed fragments were subdivided into two groups: those without inscriptions (nos. 1-750) and those with inscriptions (nos. 751-1498). While the latter group of inscribed fragments retained its NTF designation, the former uninscribed fragments, including NTF 655, were reclassified as "clay bullae". Inasmuch as this subset also contains uninscribed fragments of sealed tablets and envelopes, the label is inaccurate,<sup>4</sup> but in the case of NTF 655, it certainly seems apt.

NTF 655 resembles a segment of a thick disk with convex sides that was sliced off-center to produce a cross-section (Pls. 3 and 6). The curved outer edge and the splayed upper and lower sides constitute the front or obverse of the bulla (Pl. 1), while the flattish base forms the back or reverse (Pl. 2). The front bears three impressions of the same seal, all of them oriented in the same direction. The most complete impression runs along the curved outer edge of the bulla. It is framed by impressions on the upper and lower sides that are curtailed or distorted by the bulla's shape. The surface of the reverse is well preserved and appears to be still largely covered by a thin layer of chaff-filled plaster. One can clearly see the line of adhesion along the edge of the reverse, at the center and right end of the upper side (Pl. 5). Also visible on the surface of the reverse are two linear depressions that run perpendicular to one another (Pl. 2). While the upper one (NE/SW) may be linked to the circular shadow that can be seen at the left end of the bulla's upper side (Pl. 5), the lower one (NW/SE) definitely corresponds to the string hole that exits the bulla at the left end of its lower side (Pls. 3 and 4). This string hole runs between the clay of the bulla and the adhering plaster. In all likelihood, therefore, the bulla had been pressed over the string (and knot) that secured a straight-sided plaster-covered container made of a perishable material. When the container and string disintegrated, the bulla remained intact, with the plaster from the container now stuck to its bottom surface, covering the indentation left by the string.

<sup>3</sup> See J. Fincke 1999 for an account of the history and organization of the Nuzi tablet collection at the HSM.

<sup>4</sup> Fincke 1999, 19.

In common with the rest of the "clay bullae" collection, we have no record of a findspot for NTF 655. Fortunately in this case, however, the seal provides a clue, and it also allows us to hazard a guess as to the contents of the container that NTF 655 was meant to protect.

### The Sealings on NTF 655 and Their Implications

Of the three seal impressions that cover the obverse of NTF 655, the middle one along the curved outer edge of the bulla is the longest and best preserved, providing over two full rotations of the design (Fig. 1 and Pl. 1). The sealing is framed by deep impressions of seal caps, which were secured within the horizontal grooves that appear in relief above and below the seal design. The field is divided into two registers; the main one devoted to imagery of a mythical nature above a narrower one containing animals from the natural world. The mythical scene depicts an offering. To the left stands a winged deity with a human head and torso, tufted legs and bird talons. His mitre or helmet of divinity has two horns and he wears a skirt with curled or tufted ends. Flames emerge from the deity's mouth, and in his hands he holds a three-pronged lightning fork. Before him stands an upright winged demon composed of a lion head, a human torso, feathered legs and bird talons. His left hand extends forward, while the other holds an offering kid, whose head faces backwards between the demon's open jaws. Both figures approach a winged monster,<sup>5</sup> part raptor part wildcat, which stands semi-upright with wings aloft and one hindleg implanted on the back of a bearded goat, whose neck is strained back as it buckles underfoot. In the lower register is a frieze of three recumbent animals: a bearded goat, a stag and a lion, which are not aligned with the three figures above.

This seal matches and, indeed, allows us to complete the hitherto fragmentary design published as **AdŠ 258**,<sup>6</sup> which occurs on two tablets from the archive of prince Šilwa-teššup. In one case, on HSS XIX 17 (**AdŠ 637:A**), it is identified by caption as the seal of Šilwa-teššup *mār šarri*, who witnessed the testament (*tuppi šimti*) of Arap-papni sometime during the last two scribal generations SG4-5. The second impression on HSS XIII 386 (**AdŠ 451:A**) has no caption. However, the text records a debt of livestock and assuming that the obligor signed it, like all such statements of *muddu*-obligation,<sup>7</sup> **AdŠ 258** was used here by Warim-mušni. It would appear that when HSS XIII 386 was written, Šilwa-teššup was present and leant his seal to Warim-mušni. Unlike most signers of *muddu*-statements, Warim-mušni was not a herdsman.<sup>8</sup> He appears in early ration lists

<sup>5</sup> Following Edith Porada's definition, a demon is a mythical being that is partly human, whereas a monster is composed of real and fantastic animals (Porada 1987, 1).

<sup>6</sup> The photograph of NTF 655 that was taken in the 1970s (Pl. 5) and shows the upper side of the obverse with its fragmentary impression, was consulted for the original drawing of **AdŠ 258** and is, in fact, reproduced in *AdŠ 8* (Stein 1993a, Pl. 22). At the time, however, the object itself was not examined, and I was unaware of the more complete impressions on its other sides.

<sup>7</sup> Stein 1993a, 46.

<sup>8</sup> HSS XVI 427 (**AdŠ 437:32**) records the receipt of livestock by Warim-mušni in the capacity of administrator. Unfortunately, his seal impression is not preserved.

among Šilwa-teššup's household staff in Šilliawe and Nuzi, bears the titles *inkaru*-steward and *alahhennu*-official(?), and was entitled to an interest free loan.<sup>9</sup>

Seal **AdŠ 258** links bulla NTF 655 to the archive of Šilwa-teššup and House A, its provenance on the northeastern mound outside the citadel, where most of the tablets were stored in two adjoining rooms A23 (which opens off the courtyard) and A26. Both archival rooms had door sockets and could be sealed shut, but the intact condition of NTF 655 argues against its identification as a door sealing. More relevant, perhaps, is the mass of copper nails found scattered among the documents, particularly in the back archival room A26, because this implies that the tablets were stored in wooden boxes<sup>10</sup> and that bulla NTF 655 could have been affixed to one of them, as its appearance suggests.

In view of the fact that **AdŠ 258** occurs on a standard *muddu*-statement from room A23 and was used by the administrator Warim-mušni, we cannot rule out the possibility that Šilwa-teššup was again present at Nuzi and leant his seal to an administrator for the purpose of sealing a box of tablets. However, NTF 655 is unique, and although no systematic study has yet been made of the "clay bullae" collection, genuine bullae appear to be comparatively rare. So *scaled* boxes were not the norm, and the presence of NTF 655 suggests that we are dealing with an unusual delivery of tablets from another location, which was sealed closed with **AdŠ 258** by Šilwa-teššup himself or with his authorization.

The archive of Šilwa-teššup is largely comprised of records pertaining to the management of his household at Nuzi as well as three other principal estates at Šilliawe to the northwest, Zizza to the south, and Tašenniwe, a suburb or district of the capital *āl ilāni* / Arrapha (Kirkuk) to the northeast.<sup>11</sup> *Āl ilāni* is most likely to have been the main residence of prince Šilwa-teššup, a direct descendant of the ruling family of Arrapha. This, one might then presume, would be the logical center of his administration rather than Nuzi, at least for those records concerning his current affairs in Tašenniwe. While the relocation of Šilwa-teššup's administrative and personal business records to Nuzi can have several explanations, the presence there of royal decrees and official records of state belonging to the archives of his forebears,<sup>12</sup> is a clear indication that the capital was no longer considered to be a safe haven for the storage of key family documents. Interestingly, most of the so-called "Forerunner archives", including the archive

<sup>9</sup> For references to Warim-mušni see catalogue entry for **AdŠ 258** in Stein 1993b. Although Warim-mušni figures in some of the oldest ration lists of Šilwa-teššup's administration (HSS XIII 349+SMN 1702 / **AdŠ** 6, HSS XIII 214 / **AdŠ** 24, HSS XIII 287 / **AdŠ** 45, HSS XV 211 / **AdŠ** 46 and HSS XVI 382 / **AdŠ** 47), open records such as the signed *muddu*-statement and consignment receipt (HSS XIII 386 / **AdŠ** 451 and HSS XVI 427 / **AdŠ** 437) as well the ledger of interest-free loans (HSS XIII 132 / **AdŠ** 251) date to the last decade of Nuzi's Stratum II, between c. 1340-1330 BC. Interest-free loans were normally extended only to seasonal employees, staff and close family associates (Stein 1993a, 52 ff.).

<sup>10</sup> Starr 1939, 341.

<sup>11</sup> See Müller 1999 for the location of provincial sites mentioned in the Nuzi texts.

<sup>12</sup> **AdŠ** tablet nos. 645-692 (Stein 1993a, 28 ff.).

of Šilwa-teššup's parents, Hišmi-teššup and Amminaya, which contains the famous "Sauštatar Letter"<sup>13</sup> and land grants issued by king Ithi-teššup,<sup>14</sup> come from the back archival room A26, where the majority of copper nails were found. It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that bulla NTF 655, which bears the impressions of **AdŠ 258**, covered the string (and knot) that secured a plaster-covered wooden box of family heirlooms, which Šilwa-teššup had sent for safekeeping to his house at Nuzi shortly before its destruction or abandonment c. 1330 BC,<sup>15</sup> when Arrapha was no longer secure. No doubt he expected or hoped that the box would eventually be returned to the royal palace in Arrapha. This would explain why it was left unopened and NTF 655 remained intact, to be found by Edward Chiera during the 1927/28 season of excavation,<sup>16</sup> perched – one can only surmise, on top of the royal family documents that lay in a heap following the disintegration of the wooden box in which they had been stored.<sup>17</sup>

### Šilwa-teššup's Seals and Class Distinctions

**AdŠ 258** is the second and apparently younger<sup>18</sup> of two very different seal impressions attributed to Šilwa-teššup *mār šarri* by an accompanying caption. The first is **AdŠ 13** (Fig. 2), which occurs on two older administrative records,<sup>19</sup> and a gift payment (*tuppi magannūti*)<sup>20</sup> that coincides with SG4. **AdŠ 13** depicts an adoration scene in which a male figure wearing a round cap and long open mantle, stands with one hand raised in homage before a star-in-winged disk standard that is flanked by two human heads above two seated griffins.

Unlike the design of **AdŠ 258**, which stands out because of its craftsmanship as well as its subject matter, there is little about the design of **AdŠ 13** that would strike the untrained eye. The quality of engraving appears unremarkable, although this could be due to the hardness of the actual seal stone. The content too seems typical of the late Nuzi court style with its axial arrangement and focus on the winged disk standard between two mythical beings.<sup>21</sup> As I have discussed elsewhere,<sup>22</sup> this focal point of the late Nuzi court style bears a striking resemblance to later biblical descriptions of divine rev-

<sup>13</sup> On the significance and date of the "Sauštatar Letter", see Stein 1989.

<sup>14</sup> See Wilhelm 1981 on the context and purpose of Ithi-teššup's seal, and Stein 1988 on its iconography.

<sup>15</sup> On this distinction see Bjorkman 1999, whose arguments referring to the abandonment of Nuzi's temple precinct have implications for the entire site. See Lion and Stein forthcoming for publication of the so-called "Temple Archives".

<sup>16</sup> Lyon 1928, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Starr's published account of Chiera's excavation of the archival rooms in House A does not provide information on the location of individual tablets. I have not been able to consult the daily field notes or tablet ledgers. However, according to James Armstrong (pers. comm.) these also contain no reference to the find-spot of NTF 655 or its association with tablets.

<sup>18</sup> Based on its appearance on records dating to scribal generation SG4-5 and the last decade of Stratum II.

<sup>19</sup> HSS XIII 287 (**AdŠ** 45) and HSS XIII 277 (**AdŠ** 500).

<sup>20</sup> HSS IX 34 (**AdŠ** 555).

<sup>21</sup> For discussion of the late Nuzi court style see Stein 1993a, 89 ff. ["Group 3"] and idem. 2001.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of the background and development of the winged disk motif, see Stein 2009.

elation. There are many variations on this theme at Nuzi, but the one represented by **AdŠ 13** is unusual in representing a male figure, presumably Šilwa-teššup himself, paying homage to this vision without an intermediary. This distinction is shared by Akap-tukke son of Kakki, a noted Nuzi judge, whose seal **AdŠ 413** (Fig. 3) shows him in a comparable position. Both seals are related to a distinct subtheme of the late Nuzi court style that represents a select Nuzi clique.

Apart from the winged disk, the defining component of this subtheme is the nude female (Fig. 4)<sup>23</sup>. The winged disk often contains a star-and-rosette and may appear on its own (**AdŠ 237**), hovering above a tree (**AdŠ 164**), or (with or without wings) mounted on a pole that sometimes rises from a mountain (**AdŠ 417**) or is embellished by volutes (**AdŠ 583**). One unique example of the winged disk emits three sets of undulating rays (**AdŠ 326**). The nude female may be pigtailed and generally wears a plain brimmed cap, although occasionally it has horns of divinity (**AdŠ 15** and **326**). On two examples, she wears an open or diaphanous cloak (**AdŠ 297** and **417**). Usually she stands frontally with out-turned feet on the ground, but on one occasion she is raised on a tiered platform (**AdŠ 326**). Her head is shown in profile facing left or right, and her arms are generally bent with hands at the waist, beneath her breasts, or raised on either side (**AdŠ 326**). When raised on either side, she can also be seen holding birds or inverted quadrupeds (**AdŠ 583**)<sup>24</sup>. These two staple components of the subtheme are flanked by a variety of motifs. In the case of the winged disk, they include an assortment of antithetical animals, monsters or demons as well as symbols. The nude female too is often framed by pairs of monsters, animals (animal protomes) or birds as well as the star and rosette.

Based on Nuzi sealings published so far,<sup>25</sup> this “nude female” variation of the late Nuzi court style comprises over twenty examples. In the majority of cases, where the seal owner’s position or family connections can be adduced, they are concentrated at the upper end of the professional and social spectrum.<sup>26</sup> In fact, the correlation between iconography and rank is so consistent in this case that the “nude female” subtheme can be taken as a reliable social indicator.

If **AdŠ 13** and **413** depict their owners’ direct encounter with the divine, this related subtheme represents an exclusive group of individuals at Nuzi, whose experience of the same is defined by or channeled through the nude female, be she mortal or divine. Similar encounters with the divine, as epitomized by the winged disk motif, are the hall-

<sup>23</sup> Fig. 4 serves as an example. For a larger selection see Stein 1988, figs. 24-32.

<sup>24</sup> See also Stein 1998, fig. 29.

<sup>25</sup> Porada 1947, Stein 1987, 1988 and 1993, Lion and Stein 2001 and forthcoming.

<sup>26</sup> **AdŠ 15** [Ḫašip-apu son of Tahirišti, *ḫašuhlu, šakin māti ša Šilwa-teššup*], **164** [Turar-teššup son of Kel-teššup, scribe], **237** [Ḫutiya son of Kuššiya, *mār šipri ša šarri*], **297** [Ḫutiya], **326** [Ipša-ḫalu son of Irrike], **417** [Kauri son of Tulia, judge], **583** [Šeḫel-teššup son of Šilwa...], **756** [Akiya, trustee]; **Xenia 21, fig. 24** [Zike son of Muš-teya, brother-in-law of Šilwa-teššup], **fig. 29** [Ut-andul son of Hamanna], **fig. 31** [Pui-tae, *ḫazammū*], **fig. 33** [Tarmi-teššup son of Rim-sin, scribe]; **Temple Archive (TA) 17** [Muš-teššup son of Ḫutiya, scribe]; **Porada no. 849** [Aḫu-šeya son of Wantiya].

mark of the late Nuzi court style.<sup>27</sup> Experiences of such depth are rarely the subject of Mittanian “Common Style” designs, which were generally available to a larger cross-section of the population.<sup>28</sup>

### The Seals of Šilwa-teššup and his Royal Forebears

The contrast between Šilwa-teššup’s two seals, **AdŠ 13** and **258**, could not be more striking. Not only does the arrangement and execution of the design on **AdŠ 258** reflect the work of a superior craftsman, but its subject matter also presupposes specialist knowledge. The axial layout of motifs on **AdŠ 13**, which is so typical of the standard late Nuzi court style, is much easier to execute than **AdŠ 258**’s linear sequence of motifs that are arranged on two registers. Furthermore, the design on **AdŠ 13** lacks the attention to detail (although some of it may be lost due to the poor impressions) and the pathos that distinguishes the engraving on **AdŠ 258**, in particular, its treatment of the distressed goat. Finally, the subject matter of **AdŠ 13** is generic, referring to Šilwa-teššup’s social standing by means of his privileged access to the divine (however this is defined by the symbols and antithetical creatures that modify the winged disk standard). By contrast, the scene on **AdŠ 258**, makes a mythological reference and has clear political overtones. The figure of a bird-taloned Storm god recalls Teššup, who heads the Mittanian pantheon and also features prominently in the official cult of Arrapha, at least from the Old Babylonian period, if not before.<sup>29</sup> Whereas the design on Iṭhi-teššup’s seal **AdŠ 659** is dominated by the figure of this deity on his customary lion-dragon mount,<sup>30</sup> **AdŠ 258** shows Teššup in a conciliatory position, behind a bird-legged lion-demon shown offering a sacrificial kid to the monster, who crushes the same or similar victim underfoot. This possible allusion to Teššup’s mythological past as a young contender to the throne, who had to fight his way to the top and prove his worth,<sup>31</sup> could reflect the unstable climate of Šilwa-teššup’s day, when his family’s political control over Arrapha hung in the balance and the official religion was perhaps no longer unchallenged.

Our evidence for royal iconography of the Mittanian period is limited to four or five seal impressions associated with the Mittanian court<sup>32</sup> and several seals belonging to the extended royal family of Arrapha.<sup>33</sup> In only two cases do we have a succession of

<sup>27</sup> This corresponds to Porada’s “fully grown Mittanian style”, which is a subgroup of her “Elaborate Style” (1947, 80 ff., Group XXV).

<sup>28</sup> On the correlation between glyptic style and social class, see Stein 1997.

<sup>29</sup> Deller 1976, 38. Teššup’s standing in the Mesopotamian pantheon was previously gauged by the frequency with which his name featured as part of personal names (Wilhelm 1989, 49-50). However, it is now argued that as theophoric name elements were dictated by fashion rather than by the popularity of a given deity, Teššup may have headed the Hurrian pantheon of northern Mesopotamia before the Old Babylonian period (Schwemer 2001, 445-6). For a reassessment of the Nuzi temple precinct, see Stein in Lion and Stein forthcoming.

<sup>30</sup> See Stein 1988.

<sup>31</sup> Hurrian myths relating Teššup’s struggle for supremacy include the “Song of the kingship in heaven”, the “myth of Hedammu”, the “Song of Ullikumme” (Wilhelm 1989, 59 ff.).

<sup>32</sup> See Stein 1994. To the four examples mentioned there, one might add the seal of Šattiwaza on HSS XV 105 (Stein 1989, fig. 7).

seals linked to the same person. Sauštatar of Mittani and Ithi-teššup of Arrapha are known to have used two seals, and in both cases interestingly, their seals contrast each other in the same manner as Šilwa-teššup's two seals. Whereas, the first seal complies with existing conventions of royal iconography, the second breaks with tradition and makes an altogether individual statement of piety and prestige. In Sauštatar's case, the first seal actually is an ancient heirloom that dates from the late 3rd millennium BC.<sup>34</sup> Recut sometime in the second millennium BC, it shows two figures combating a lion in a reinterpretation of the contest scene, a favorite theme among the upper classes since Early Dynastic times.<sup>35</sup> Ithi-teššup's first seal, which refers to the king as "Ithiya", echoes Old Babylonian confrontation scenes. Instead of appearing before his tutelary deity, however, Ithiya / Ithi-teššup stands before an undefined standard of divinity that rises between two mountains and is surmounted by symbols of the sun and moon (star-and-rossette in disk and a crescent). By contrast, AdŠ 711 – inscribed with the name and title of Sauštatar, king of Mittani – dispenses with royal custom and presents the ecstatic experience in a radically new composition using some of the older imagery (humans combating lions).<sup>36</sup> Likewise on AdŠ 659, which Ithi-teššup commissioned for the purpose of signing real-estate grants, the ruler abandons his previous (noncommittal?) stance and confirms his allegiance to Mittani by supporting the official religion in which Teššup outranks his consort, the popular goddess Istar-Šawuška.

In the case of both kings, Sauštatar and Ithi-teššup, the radical second seal coincides with the peak of their careers.<sup>37</sup> Šilwa-teššup's second seal is no less radical. Could it signal his imminent accession to the Arraphaeen throne? His father Hišmit-teššup (husband to queen Amminaya), who is presumed to have succeeded Ithi-teššup sometime around 1360 BC (SG3), was conspicuously absent for his daughter Šuwarhepa's marriage arrangements (HSS IX 24 / AdŠ 548).<sup>38</sup> Instead, these were left to her brother Šilwa-teššup. This and the fact that Šilwa-teššup was in possession of the family documents that were found in his house at Nuzi suggest that the answer is yes.

### The Wider Context of Mittanian Court Iconography

Radical revisions of official court iconography also occur in other areas and periods of the ancient Near East, and rarely do these mark the arrival of a new culture, regime or king. Instead, as has been noted in the case of the Mittanian period, they generally correspond to a political or personal peak and often accompany the introduc-

tion of sweeping changes to the organization and administration of the state, kingdom or empire. To name but two well-known examples, this observation applies during the Akkadian dynasty, when the so-called classical era begins with the reign of Narām-sin, grandson of Akkad's founding father, and a similar phase during the Ur III dynasty coincides with the reign of its second king Šulgi.

The iconography that modifies Nuzi's social and professional elite and sets them apart from their subordinates is also not unique to this particular place and time. The ability to communicate with the gods (or the spirit world), once the preserve of the village shaman, healer or prophet, is widely portrayed as an attribute of the reigning king. In the so-called "Investiture of Zimrī-līm" painted on the palace wall at Mari, this king appears before Istar, who hands him the royal insignia, and the famous Law Code of Hammurbi is crowned by a representation of the Old Babylonian king receiving his insignia and instructions directly from Šamaš. Already in the Akkadian and Ur III periods, we see governors and palace officials being led into the presence of gods,<sup>39</sup> and this prerogative also seems to be preserved on mainstream seals of the Isin-Larsa and Old Babylonian periods.<sup>40</sup> Inevitably, given the overall bias of our database towards seals belonging to functionaries, we know comparatively little about the iconography on private seals. The 19th-18th cent. BC merchant archives from Kültepe *kārum* afford one exception, but the identity of the seal owner / user is often difficult to establish.<sup>41</sup> In the case of the Nuzi corpus, comparisons between official and private ("inner" and "outer") seals range throughout the five generations spanned by the archives (SG1-5, c. 1425-1330 BC), whereas social distinctions between "upper" and "lower" class seals are largely confined to the last two generations (SG4-5, c. 1360-1330 BC).<sup>42</sup> When we encounter the once exclusive confrontation scene of the early Nuzi court style or the winged disk formulae of the late Nuzi court style on the seals of ordinary herdsmen from

<sup>39</sup> E. g., the two seals of Lugal-ušumgal, a scribe in the service of Narām-sin and a governor under Šar-kali-šarri (Collon 1987, no. 537), the seal of Abba, the scribe of Gudea of Lagas (ibid., no. 114), and the seal of Egissu, the carpenter (ibid., no. 116). The worshiper on Ur III seals is generally understood to be the seal owner (Winter 1987 and Braun-Holzinger 1996, 240).

<sup>40</sup> A preliminary perusal of Collon 1986 indicates that the majority of seals belonging to people, who are not explicitly affiliated with the court, show the protective spirits, *u d u g / šedu* and *Lamma* (e. g. Pls. XIV-XXIV). For identification of these protective spirits, see Wiggermann 1985-6, 24-6. The long-robed figure, who appears with and without animal offering before various gods, is usually described as a representation of the king rather than the seal owner (e. g. Pl. XXV). However, his identity is unclear (Braun-Holzinger 1996, 240). See Collon 1987, no. 544, which shows the seal owner, a servant of Hammurabi of Yamhad, behind the "king" who approaches the deity. Regarding Syrian court styles during the 18th-17th cent. BC, see Otto 2000, 173 ff., who also discusses the institutional bias of Old Babylonian period seals. See Teissier 1998, for sealings from Sippar, which include examples belonging to merchants (ibid., 118, nos. 3-10).

<sup>41</sup> Teissier 1994, 12.

<sup>42</sup> Stein 1993a, 106 ff. The closed, mainly legal records of the older SG generations provide the seals of judges, scribes, high ranking administrators and witnesses, many of whom are close associates of the prevailing party. Records of open contracts are concentrated in the last two scribal generations and provide us with the additional seals of herdsmen, seasonal employees and other laborers.

<sup>33</sup> In addition to king Ithi-teššup and his grandson, Šilwa-teššup, there are a handful of other royals, whose seals are preserved in the Nuzi archives.

<sup>34</sup> The seal of Šuttarna, son of Kirta, king of Mittani, occurs on two tablets from Alalah level IV: AT 13 and 14 (Collon 1975, no. 230 with n. 3). See Stein 1989 for the relative chronology of Sauštatar's two seals.

<sup>35</sup> E. g., the seals of Mesanepada, king of Kiš, Eanatum, king of Lagas, Barnamtara, wife of the prince of Lagas, and Lugalanda-nuḫunga, prince of Lagas (Collon 1987, nos. 522, 524-526, respectively).

<sup>36</sup> See Stein 2009 for interpretation of this seal.

<sup>37</sup> For the dates of these seals relative to their owners, see Stein 1989.

<sup>38</sup> See Stein 1993a, 27 regarding Šilwa-teššup's position as heir apparent to the Arraphaeen throne.



the youngest generation (AdŠ 176, 185 and 213),<sup>43</sup> is this merely a case of meaningless imitation or does it signal a breakdown of social barriers? Future collaborations on sealed archives of a similar nature may provide the answer.

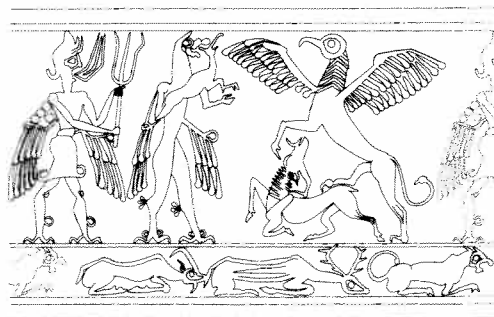
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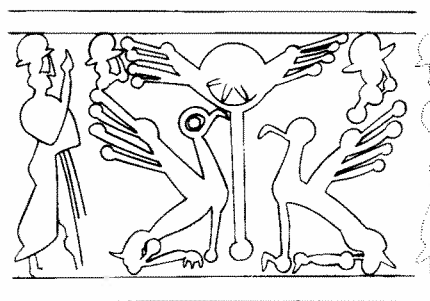
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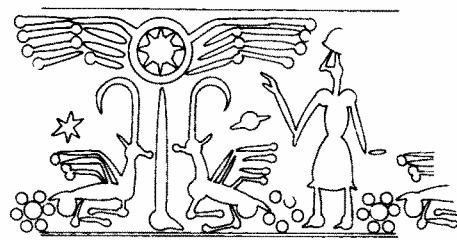
<sup>43</sup> Stein 1993a, 123.



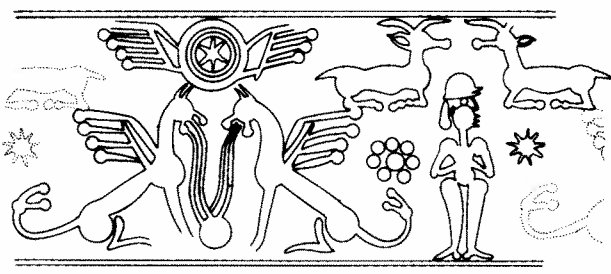
Seal of Šilwa-teššup  
AdŠ 258 (28 × 20.5 mm. with caps)  
Fig. 1



Seal of Šilwa-teššup  
AdŠ 13 (26 × 18.5 mm. with caps)  
Fig. 2



Seal of Akap-tukke son of Kakki  
AdŠ 413 (22.5 × 15 mm.)  
Fig. 3



Seal of Hutiya son of Kuššiya  
AdŠ 237 (33 × 17 mm.)  
Fig. 4



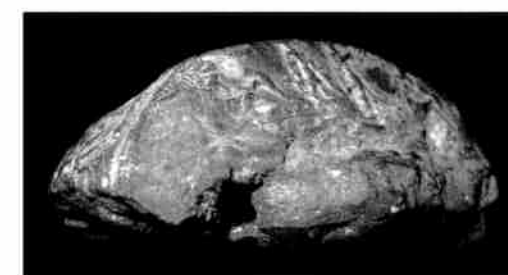
NTF 655 (front center)  
Pl. 1



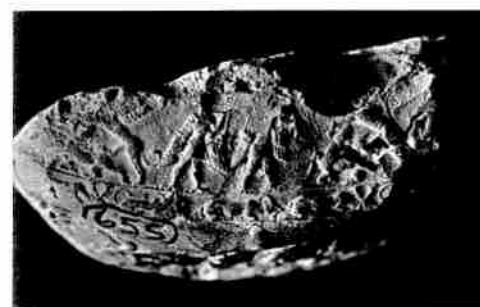
NTF 655 (back)  
Pl. 2



NTF 655 (front lower side)  
Pl. 3



NTF 655 (front lower side with string hole)  
Pl. 4



NTF 655 (front upper side)  
Pl. 5



NTF 655 (front edge)  
Pl. 6