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CLAY TAGS FROM SEYİTÖMER HÖYÜK IN PHRYGIA

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In the 1990s the staff members of Afyon and Eskişehir Museums in Turkey published a series of reports about rescue excavations of a large size mound in Phrygia, 26 km to the northwest of Kotiaieion (modern Kütahya) (Map 1).¹ Among the excavated artifacts were four clay tags bearing seal impressions. This paper addresses the preliminary results of our study of the tags, in particular the seal image, SHS 3 showing an Achaemenid victory scene.²

The mound is named after the nearby town Seyitömer, a town well known for the coal mining enterprise by the Department of Coal Mines of Turkey, which in fact funded the salvage excavations in the hope of its complete removal so that the approximately 15 meters thick seam of coal could be mined. When the funding ended after several seasons

I should like to thank the General Directorate of Monuments and Museums of Turkey for granting me the permit to study the Seyitömer Höyük sealings. I am also indebted to Metin Türktüzün, the director of Kütahya Museum and Farhad Hakimzadeh of The Iran Heritage Organization in London.

¹) Aydın 1991; Topbaş 1993; Topbaş 1994; İlaslı 1996.

²) The abbreviation SHS is used for Seyitömer Höyük Seal. Each seal is given a number, followed by the number of the seal impressions. For example the following abbreviation, SHS 1.2, indicates the second seal impression of the Seyitömer Höyük Seal No. 1. The abbreviation 'Kt' followed by a four-digit number refers directly to the tags. These are the inventory numbers given by the Kütahya Museum.

of excavations, the General Directorate of Monuments and Museums of Turkey overturned the proposition of the Department of Coal Mines and made a decision towards the preservation of the Seyitömer Höyük. As a consequence the mound at present stands majestically in the middle of an open coalmine pit and awaits further archaeological exploration.

Although in the Achaemenid studies this region remains not very well known, there are Achaemenid period-related stelai and tumulus burials within a radius of 100 km around the site. Among these sites are Altıntaş, Seyitgazi (Nakoleia) and the vicinity of Aizanoi.³ The site was continuously inhabited from the Early Bronze Age to the late Roman period, however, so far none of the finds revealed the ancient name of the settlement.⁴

The quantity of the Seyitömer Höyük tags is relatively small, but in the record of seal impressions from western Asia Minor during the Achaemenid period, they constitute a significant group after the several hundred bullae found in Daskyleion, the satrapal seat in the Hellespontine Phrygia.⁵ So far only two sealings, each from a different

³) Altıntaş stele: Pful and Möbius, No. 75. Aizanoi/Akalan tumulus: Arman 1998.

Surveys based on classical sources regarding the region and the Persians: Sekunda 1991: 130-136; Tuplin 1989: 236-237.

⁴) Mitchell 1993 (Rep. 2001): 181, notes the difficulty of archaeologically and epigraphically distinguishing one settlement from the other in the upper Tembris valley: 'As in north-east Lydia, these heavily rural market towns show virtually nothing to distinguish themselves from the larger *komai* or *katoikia* of the region.'

⁵) Akurgal 1956, Kaptan 2002.

archaeological context, have been reported from Gordion, once the capital city of the Phrygians.⁶

Archaeological Context:

The tags come from two separate archaeological contexts. The one showing a bird-headed feline creature (SHS 2.1) and the second with a gorgo-like representation (SHS 1) were excavated in trenches in the northwestern sector of the mound.⁷ In 1993 two more, one bearing a second impression of the seal showing the bird-headed feline creature (SHS 2.2) and the other representing a Persian victory scene (SHS 3) were found together in trench G-14, reportedly just below the Hellenistic period levels in the northeastern sector of the mound.⁸ The architecture of this area to which these two sealings were related was disturbed due to a destructive fire, however, multiple depressions of wooden posts each about 15-20 cm in diameter could still be observed on the floor. The adjacent trenches revealed fortification walls and chambers with plastered walls, which at some sections were preserved up to 1.5 meters high.⁹ Commenting on

⁶) Dusinberre 2005: 69-71 (cat. nos. 55-56).

⁷) Aydın 1991: 195, pl. 12.

⁸) İlaslı 1996: 3-4.

⁹) The excavators note that the fortification system was first built during the Early Bronze Age and then restored and reused during the succeeding periods. The Bronze Age period walls, which appear to be preserved up to 5 meters were made of mud-brick reinforced with wood. Wood samples taken from the Early Bronze Age levels have been included in the Aegean Dendrochronology Project. cf. Kuniholm 1996;

<http://www.arts.cornell.edu/dendro/>.

whether or not this description can imply the presence of a storage area or indications of some economic activity that took place just behind the fortification walls is difficult although the presence of tags in this location reminds of the practice in the ancient Near East that sealings and tablets could be found in rooms close to or within the fortification system, designated as “service areas” near the entry to the city.¹⁰ It is noteworthy that the earlier report from a year before the sealings were unearthed in fact mentions that precisely in this area a total of fifteen pithoi arranged in rows (G-14 alone yielding eight of the pithoi) were excavated and then subsequently removed.¹¹ Several pits, containing a rich assemblage of Greek and late Phrygian pottery and charcoal were also excavated. It is therefore tempting to suggest that the tags might have been associated with this storage area, which was excavated a year earlier on the same spot. Further investigation of the stratigraphy of the mound and pottery analysis of this area may help to unravel this puzzle.¹²

Shape and Description of the Tags

The Seyitömer tags are flattened lumps of clay with a maximum height of 2.50 cm. Three of them are round and the fourth bearing the impressions of SHS 3 is ovoid, 3.00 cm wide. The maximum thickness is 0.9 cm. Fingerprints and markings of the palm of the individual who shaped the soft clay and pressed the seal are visible on each tag, in

¹⁰) Khachatrian 1996:365-366; Manukian 1996: 371-372, fig.1, pl. 77; Root 1996: 6-7; Garrison and Root 2001: 23-34.

¹¹) Topbaş 1993: 3-4, pls. 6 a, b.

¹²) The field notes of the excavations and the other finds from the corresponding levels will be accessible in the 2006 study season.

particular on the backs of Kt 9400 and Kt 8309 (Pl.1). Seal impressions appear on both faces of the other two tags (SHS 3.1 and SHS 3.2 on Kt 9401; SHS 1.1 and SHS 1.2 on Kt 9047). String holes have been observed on Kt 8309 and Kt 9047. No other markings other than fingerprints appear on any of the tags.

Color changes, pits and cracks on the surface of KT 9401 indicate intensive exposure to fire most probably due to the conflagration that damaged the occupation level where the tags were found (Pls.3-4).

Functions

Two of the sealings (Kt 8309 and Kt 9047) found in the northwester sector of the mound bear string holes indicating that they were suspended from some objects.¹³ As no marking other than fingerprints have been observed, we have no clue about what kind items they were.

Those found at G-14 in the northeast bear no string holes (Pls.1-4). They seem to be new additions to the miscellany of bits of clay bearing seal impressions often referred to as '*visiting cards*' or '*trial pieces*' found throughout all periods, the functions of which so far could not be explained convincingly.¹⁴ Kt 9400 and Kt 9401 were perhaps used for accounting purposes, such as a token. The sealed tag may have been left with an official when an item was taken away or brought in. They could also have been used as a

¹³) Henkelman *et al.* 2004: 45-48 pose critical questions about the functions of sealed tags and 'anepigraphic' Persepolis Fortification tablets and sealing practices.

¹⁴) Collon 1987: 119 and *infra* n. 15.

kind of authorization device sent by someone whose message would be delivered orally by the bearer of the seal impression.¹⁵

Seal Impressions

Three seals were used on the tags. Kt 9047 bears the image of the same stamp seal, SHS 1, on both faces. It shows a nude winged figure holding two lions by their tails. Snakes and animal ears emerge from the frontally represented head. The image, which resembles a series of representations on Archaic Greek and Phoenician seals, seems to be a combination of the Near Eastern nude hero and Bes and the Greek gorgon.¹⁶ The second seal image, SHS 2, appears on two tags (Kt 8309 and Kt 9400). The seal must have been a stamp, most probably to the round bezel of a ring. The seal impression, which shows a horned bird-headed feline striding left on a plain ground line, one forepaw raised over a plant (SHS 2.2, Pl.2), is reminiscent of griffin representations on some of the ‘Graeco-Persian’ seals.¹⁷ The overall rendition of the image with its elongated limbs seems to be close to works in Phrygia when compared to the Pazarlı

¹⁵) McGuire Gibson, ‘Hamoukar, 2001-2002 Annual Report’ at http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/AR/01-02/01-02_Hamoukar.html suggests that this kind of function could be a possibility for the sealings excavated at prehistoric Hamoukar.

¹⁶) Boardman 1968: 27-44, nos. 38, 49, 53; Spier 1992: 54, nos. 103-104.

¹⁷) e.g. Boardman 1970: pl. 842, 957-958. Floral designs appear before animal representations on a few gold signet rings from the North Black Sea area tombs (e.g. Chertomlyk) dated to the late fifth and early fourth centuries B.C. (Boardman 1970: pls. 700-701), but stylistically the image on SHS 2 seems not to have much in common with the representations on these rings.

painted terracotta plaques, presumably dated to the sixth century B.C.¹⁸ Perhaps what we see on SHS 2 is an outcome of the same tradition that prevailed in the Persian period.

SHS 3 and the Victory Scene

The last seal, SHS 3 was a cylinder and it was rolled twice on Kt 9401. The measurements reveal that the cylinder rolled on the tag had an approximate height of 2 cm. Its diameter was about 1 cm. The cylinder was rolled on each face of the tag. The process of rolling the seal twice on soft clay was probably not easy, as fingerprints appear over one of the seal impressions (SHS 3.1) that was presumably produced first (Pl. 3). A complete roll had originally appeared on the other side (SHS 3.2), however, the right half was damaged subsequently by fire and chipped off (Pl. 4). Thanks to the duplication of the image we are able to obtain a composite drawing of the entire scene (Pl. 5). The scene on SHS 3 represents two warriors triumphant over a fallen one between them.

On the left of the scene, the seal impression shows a striding man, facing right with the body depicted frontally and clad in the Persian court robe, sleeves pushed up revealing the arms bare. Diagonal folds and a vertical central fold of the lower garment are well defined. He has a long beard rounded at the tip and a rounded coiffure on the forehead and at the back above his neck; perhaps he wears a thin band over his head. Facial details such as the smoothly bulging cheek, lips and part of the mustache are well preserved on the impression. As he is about to thrust his spear he also raises his left hand to seize his opponent by the head. This opponent, represented in the centre of the scene is a defeated warrior facing left, in Greek helmet with a crest. Fallen on his knees with

¹⁸) Koşay 1941; Akurgal 1955: 72-78; Mellink 1984: 171; *The Museum of Anatolian*

Civilizations: 184-185.

raised hands and arms bent he is shown in full profile. He seems to be naked. His shield, rather small in size, is shown on the background behind him. Framing the scene on the right is a striding archer who intimidates the defeated warrior furthermore by aiming the bow directly at him from behind. This figure is in a rather poor state of preservation and can only be observed on SHS 3.1. He has a beard and rounded coiffure resting at the back of his neck; perhaps he wears a domed headdress. The attire, which seems to have consisted of tight-fitting trousers, does not reveal any details other than a doughy line for a belt on the waist. The outline of the legs presents him as a muscular warrior.

Despite the damage on the right portion of seal impression SHS 3.2, the remaining part of the design offers a few clues about the carving style of the seal. Among them, the victor in Persian court robe is the best-preserved one and reveals a smooth relief quality particularly on the face, which shows a slightly bulging cheek and lips and a prominent nose. These stylistic qualities are reminiscent of a royal name seal image from Daskyleion, DS 4, representing the audience of the king, and two seals from Russia, the inscribed Moscow Artaxerxes cylinder and the Zvenigorodsky cylinder both representing a Persian victory scene.¹⁹ The preserved folds of the lower garment also indicate that the engraver worked carefully and he was at ease with the rendition of the Achaemenid image. His opponent displays a rather awkward poise as his legs overlap

¹⁹) a] DS 4: Kaptan 2002.1: 113-115, Kaptan 2002.2: 50-55, pls. 47-59.

b] The Moscow Artaxerxes cylinder: Strelkov 1937: fig. 2; Nagel 1963, no. 5; Root 1979: 122, 182, pl. 34b, Kaptan 2002.1: 87, n. 363.

c] The Zvenigorodsky cylinder: Ward 1910: no. 1049, Root 1979: 182, n. 2; Zazoff 1983: 168, fig. 48a, Boardman 2000: 159-160, pl. 5.6; Kaptan 2002.1, 87-88.

and his arms bend. His hands, however, are remarkably expressive. Both of them are directed towards the victor, palms facing him, and each shown as a thick dynamic line and thumbs bent over. This rendition also brings to mind the same Daskyleion seal, DS 4, mentioned above.²⁰ The representation of the usher's hand, covering his mouth on DS 4, perhaps in a gesture of respect to the king, resembles strikingly that of the defeated opponent's on SHS 3. These are not knob or fork-like hands as seen on many Achaemenid koine and Persianizing seals, but they are rather more carefully represented fingers and the thumb in profile.

Figures in Achaemenid costume triumphant over enemies generally appear in two basic settings in Achaemenid glyptic. In one, they are in battle scenes, in which the victor is shown in the midst of a fight that he is winning, and the inevitable victory is furthermore postulated by various components in the scene such as the winged disk hovering above and on the ground dead bodies lying that wear the same attire as the Persian's main opponent. These scenes do not represent combat in a real sense; they seem to emphasize the Persian superiority over its enemies who are going to be inescapably defeated. Representations of this type on seals were found in various areas of the empire.²¹ The other type shows the final stage of the victory when the enemy is

²⁰) *supra* n.19 a; Compare Kaptan 2002.2: pls. 54, 59.

²¹) *e.g.* DS 63-64 from Daskyleion: Kaptan 2002.1: 87-88, 140-141; Kaptan 2002.2: 86-88, pls. 192-196). The seal of Arshama from Egypt: Boardman 2000: 174, pl. 5.21. A cylinder in the Hermitage: Zazoff 1983: 168, Fig.48 c. A cylinder from the Oxus Treasure: Sarre 1925: pl.52 centre; Collon 1987: no. 574; Boardman 2000: 160, pl. 5.5; Merillees 2005: 70, no. 66; Curtis and Tallis 2005: no. 413. A cylinder in the British

completely defeated, captives taken and all tied to the same rope.²² These scenes bear thematic resemblance to the Behistun relief on which ‘the lie-followers’ were shown captured and tied together by one rope.²³ On seals the victor either leads them or at the same time he plunges his spear into a figure on his knees. A seal image, PTS 28, on several bullae from the Treasury and sealings found in a jar from the Fortifications of Persepolis contributes to this subject.²⁴ In the representation, the Achaemenid victor, who leads three captives tied by a rope attached to his belt, spears a kneeling warrior in Greek helmet while grabbing him by the arm.

SHS 3 shares features with both of these representational types. Like the fallen warrior on PTS 28 the Persian’s enemy on SHS 3 also wears a Greek helmet, but on this seal he faces his foe and raises his arms imploringly toward him. This gesture is rather reminiscent of the Behistun relief where the chief of the rebels stretches out his arms towards Darius who crushes him under his foot. On SHS 3 the emphasis on the further exertion of power is expressed by the position of the victor’s left arm, raised over the

Museum: Collon 1987: no. 747, Merillees 2005: 69, no. 65; Curtis and Tallis 2005: no. 415.

²²) See the Artaxerxes Cylinder and the Zvenigorodsky cylinder above note 19 nos b-c. There are a few more seals showing similar composition: Ward 1910: nos. 1048, 1052; Root 1979: 182, n. 2 b- c.

²³) Sarre 1925: pl.3 (centre); Root 1979: 58-61, 183-226; Jacobs 2002: 354-355, Fig.1; Curtis and Tallis 2005: pls. 4, 6.

²⁴) Schmidt 1957: 10-11, pl. 9 (PT 4 948, 865, 330); Tadjvidi 1976: pls. 140-142; Curtis and Tallis 2005: 231, no. 424.

defeated warrior's head. Similarly, in the heroic encounter scenes the Persian hero often stretches out his left arm to grasp the horn or forelocks of the creature in order to further pacify the beast.²⁵ SHS 3 is not the only seal that shows this kind of contact between the victor and his opponent. There are a number of seals, that display that seal cutters working in western Achaemenid and Greek styles used this pattern widely.²⁶ For example, a fragmentary Daskyleion seal (DS 64) depicts a defeated warrior wearing a Greek helmet and shield as the victor grabs him by stretching out his left hand.²⁷ An Aramaic inscribed cylinder in the Bibliothèque National, Paris, cut in Greek style shows the victor in trousers and tunic seizing the frontally depicted naked warrior on the head.²⁸ A seal from Caria, also in Greek style, represents the same theme: the victor in Achaemenid costume and the defeated warrior on his knees in profile shown in a similar posture to that on SHS 3.²⁹

SHS 3 also displays thematic links to some of the Graeco-Persian reliefs from Asia Minor, for example the recently published Çan sarcophagus from a tumulus burial on the Granicos plain.³⁰ One of the long sides of the painted sarcophagus shows a triumphant horseman clad in Persian riding attire thrusting his spear into a fallen warrior

²⁵) e.g. DS 3 in Kaptan 2002.1: 55-58, Kaptan 2002.2: 5, pls. 9-46; PFS 584, PFS 859, 1264s in Garrison and Root 2001: 297-304.

²⁶) Boardman 1970: pls. 849, 851 and *infra* ns. 26-28.

²⁷) Kaptan 2002.1: 88, 140-141, Kaptan 2002.2: pls. 87-88, 195-196.

²⁸) Boardman 2000: pl.5.7.

²⁹) Boardman 1970: 310, pl. 849; Zazoff 1983: pl. 39. 6.

³⁰) Sevinç *et al.* 2001: 396-397.

sprawling under a tree. The authors note the iconographic associations of the scene, in particular the armor of the horseman, to a seal design from Persepolis Treasury, PTS 30. The Seyitömer seal image provides further evidence that thematic parallels of the representation on the Çan sarcophagus were also available on seal images at home in Asia Minor.

The Seyitömer Höyük seal, SHS 3, is a new contribution to the Achaemenid seal corpus. Stylistically it stands close to the western Achaemenid koine seals, such as DS 4 and the Moscow Artaxerxes seal and Zvenigorodsky seal.³¹ Elsewhere, I have discussed how seals as portable objects could be viewed as a great source for transmission of Achaemenid elements and potential models because they travelled with their owners and their designs on clay travelled even farther.³² The discovery of a seal like SHS 3 shows that Achaemenid seals were circulating even in the rural parts of Anatolia and Achaemenid imagery was available in a broad spectrum. The Seyitömer tags also reveal that Achaemenid koine works could be expected in the region at any site that has levels from the Classical period. The seal impressions on clay found in Phrygia and Hellespontine Phrygia possibly represent only a very small fraction of what was available to people during the Achaemenid hegemony, but they present sufficient evidence that sphragistics could contribute significantly to the diffusion of Achaemenid imagery in Asia Minor.

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³¹) *supra* n. 19.

³²) Kaptan in press.

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LIST OF PLATES AND CAPTIONS:

All the photographs and drawings are by the author.

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Plate 3) SHS 3.1 on Kt 9401. Cylinder seal impression. Kütahya Museum. Scale 3:1.

Plate 4) SHS 3.2 on Kt 9401. Cylinder seal impression. Kütahya Museum. Scale 3:1.

Plate 5) Composite drawing of SHS 3. Scale 3:1



Pl.1



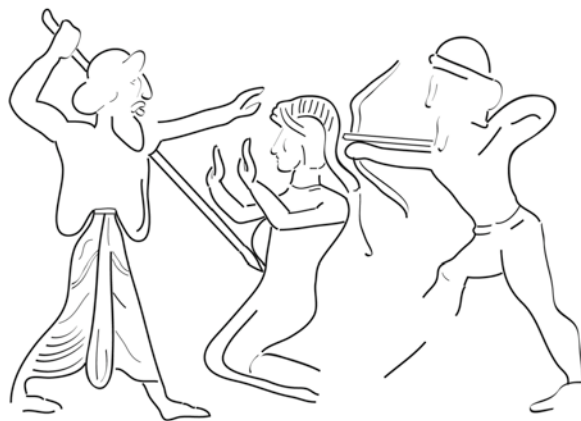
Pl. 2



Pl. 3



Pl. 4



Pl. 5