

ASSYRIAN-STYLE SEALS OF THE SILK ROAD AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO TIES BETWEEN IRAN AND MESOPOTAMIA

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This essay first describes seals from Qazvin, Kermanshah and Zanzan and compares them with some similar examples. That specific evidence poses interesting questions, treated in part two, about the relationship of these seals to historical developments during Iron Age III (ca. 800–600 BCE) in Iran, among them patterns of trade and issues in historical geography. Apart from some slight differences in the depictions on these seals from what we would expect in Assyrian art, the combination of elements from local arts in Luristan and some attributes of the Elamite style of seal making lead us to conclude that the seals described here are local products. However, they were influenced by the Neo-Assyrian style as a result of substantial trading and political-military relations between Iran and Mesopotamia.

Introduction

The Department of Numismatic Collections in the National Museum of Iran (Iran Bastan Museum) has a group of seals catalogued as “purchased from Qazvin” and assigned the register number 2666, with subdivisions such as 2666.5. This paper examines only some of the seals in this collection; those whose traits do not classify them as belong to Iron Age III are discussed in another article. The seals from Qazvin were bought by the National Museum of Iran in 1964. Another seal in the museum, from Kermanshah and given to the museum on 7 October 1961, with the registry number 1674 (introduced as Seal No.1 in the present paper), has some traits analogous to those on the seals from Qazvin. All these seals were studied in the author’s M.A. thesis entitled “The Seals of the Northern Central Plateau of Iran.” In addition to the

seals discussed in the thesis, another seal from Zanzan, discovered at the Gelabar Dam, is included in the present analysis. Because the thesis study investigated the seals’ contexts (settlement areas and cemeteries) without identifying them by name, we have emphasized the seals as individual cases. Even when the site names were known, comparative studies could not be trusted due to a lack of management during excavations.

Description and comparison of the seals

Seal No.1, depicting a scene of fighting with a dragon. On this seal, an archer is targeting a horned dragon. Bodies of the dragon and archer have been carved in the linear style along with several curved indentations in different sizes. The archer is wearing a long robe coming down to the knees. He has a thin waist similar to that depicted on the seals from Qazvin (Nos. 2 and 3), Chogha Zanbil (Porada 1970, Nos. 22, 27, 28 and 29), and Surkh Dum-i-Luri (van Loon 1989, Pl. 233:44). There is a tall shrub between the dragon and the archer. The bow has been drawn, and the archer’s arm has been depicted in an exaggerated way. Between the head and the arm drawing the bowstring at the man’s back are two bulges, possibly suggesting some part of the archer’s hair. The dragon is coiled and has a noticeably large head and muzzle. Three dots have been inscribed under the upper horizontal line. The partially preserved Seal No. 39 from Khurvin has a somewhat parallel design (Saed Mucheshi unpub.).



A similar scene on a seal in the Ashmolean Museum's Neo-Assyria collection portrays a simpler design of a bowman who is targeting a standing dragon with an upward-curving tail (Buchanan 1966, Fig. 624). In another example which belongs to the Neo-Assyrian era, there is a similar representation of the bow and the arms (featured in *Ibid.*, Fig. 625). During the excavations carried out at the Dam of Chelleh Village in Gilan Gharb Township, led by Hassan Rezvani in 2004, an Assyrian seal was found which attests to the influence of Assyrian culture on western Iran and the route through which the Assyrians could enter the Iranian Plateau (personal interview with Rezvani).

Another similar scene has been observed on an Urartian seal where there is an archer who is shooting an arrow at a dragon in the same position as that of the dragon on the seal from Qazvin (Piotrovsky 1969, Fig. 43). The depiction of the dragon – its physique, tail, head, mouth and the body's subdivision into smaller pieces using tiny lines – is similar to that on a seal from Tell-ol-Rimeh which has been classified as Neo-Assyrian (Parker 1977, Fig. 54). The seal which bears the closest resemblance to that in the Museum is one found in Nimrud, which also depicts an archer shooting a dragon. The dragon's body, particularly its back, has been decorated by several bands, as is the case on the seal from Qazvin. Another similarity between these two seals is the existence of the lines which form a triangle on the archer's back with the neck and foot as the other two points (Parker 1962, Fig. 6029). A more abstract example is on another seal (*Ibid.*, Fig. 6023).

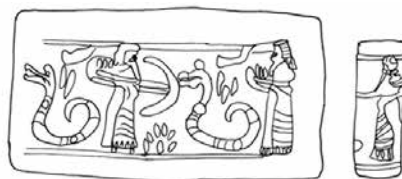
This motif of the shooting archer is one of the most common ones throughout the 7th century BCE but could date back to the 9th and 8th centuries. This design has been observed on many other seals from Nimrud discovered during managed excavations (Parker 1955, Figs. 1007, 1009).

Seal No. 2, a scene of fighting with a dragon. In this scene, an archer is targeting a dragon. The dragon is opening its mouth, and its tail curves up and forward, in a position similar to that of a scorpion. In this design the string of the bow is not clearly articulated, and the two lines perpendicular to the bow delineate the arm and the arrow. The archer has a long beard covering



arrow at a horned animal from a curved bow. The two lines perpendicular to the bow delineate the arm and arrow. A division is observed on the standing man's robe below the knee, through a horizontal, curved line that marks off the lower part of the picture. The archer's hair reaches his shoulders. The knees and hooves of the beast are clearly illustrated. Two horizontal lines form a border.

The archer's bow is comparable to that of the archers on the seals from Chogha Zanbil (Porada 1970, Figs. 27, 33, 34, 35 and 38), but his garment, in contrast to that on Seal No. 4, is not decorated. There are similarities in some regards, such as the horizontal line under the knee and the waist on the robe. The animal



on the seal has horns bifurcated at the back and front. The only seal which has a roughly analogous design on it – i.e., the same distinctive kind of horn – is one discovered in the excavation conducted at Hasanlu by Rad and Hakemi. The animal in that design is also targeted by a hunter – just like case 3 – but in neither case does the beast express fear or seem to be trying to escape (Hakemi and Rad 1950, p. 97, No. 3). The lower part of this person's gown is similar to that found in Hasanlu except for areas at the waist and above the knees. On a seal in the Ashmolean Museum, there is a beast with a horn at front of its head like that on Seal No. 3 (Buchanan 1966, Pl. 39, Nos. 587, 589). These seals all belong to the Neo-Assyrian era. There are several similar cases among seals from Sialk as well (Ghirshman 1939, Pl. XCVII, S.1577). However, none of them bear as close a resemblance as do images on the Cemetery of Sialk B potteries. Some seals from Sialk are bifurcated at the back and front. In addition, there is a clay seal impression on which is the image of an animal's head with a bifurcated horn, like that on Seal No. 3. This impression is in fact similar to the examples from Sialk B. The thin waists of the people are an Elamite seal trait (such as on Seal Nos. 3 and 4). This style of depicting waists is seen on some seals of Haft Tepe as well (Negahban 1994, Fig. 308).

Given the similarities between the design of the animal inscribed on this seal and the design on the goblet of Marlik, we can conclude that the figure is very probably a bull. An image of a winged bull is an ancient decoration in the Middle and Near East (Negahban 1999, p. 221). If John Curtis is correct in suggesting (1995, p. 41) that the designs on the goblet of Marlik originate in Babylon, the figure of the single-horned beast on this seal implies interrelations with Babylon.

The design of a single-horned beast accompanying a standing archer can also be seen on seals from Neo-Assyrian Tell-ol-Rimeh. This scene is repeated as well on the ivories of Hasanlu IVB (800 BCE) (Muscarella 1980, p. 215; Marcus 1990, p. 132). In a general sense, the design is the same in both periods of time (Neo-Assyrian and Hasanlu IVB); even so, there is neither a wing for the single-horned animal nor an eight-petal flower above the scene on the Hasanlu seal. Furthermore, the diameter of the Tell-ol-Rimeh seal is larger, and the operative lines for the designs are thinner (Parker 1975, Fig. 51). The standard Assyrian stars have eight points (Marcus 1990, p. 136). There is another analogue among the seals of Tell-ol-Rimeh which Parker classified as Assyrian (1961, Pl. XL17), and one unearthed in Ziwieh in 2000 (Lakpour 2001, kept in the Museum of Sanandaj, Registry No. 716).



Seal No. 4, a scene of hunting a bird. This seal depicts a standing archer shooting a running ostrich. It seems that there is a flat hat on the man's head. Two vertical lines at the front and back of the person's head represent his beard and hair, respectively. He is wearing a very long garment which extends to his ankles and has a decorative fringe on the lower part. Some kind of decoration along the back of the skirt (feathers?) extends up to the waist, which is very thin, represented by two vertical, parallel lines. Unlike in the similar designs of this group, the bowstring is clearly indicated. The bird's feathers are clearly shown around its wing as well as its head and neck. There is a shrub between the archer and the ostrich. Two lines, one on the top and the other at the bottom, frame the scene.

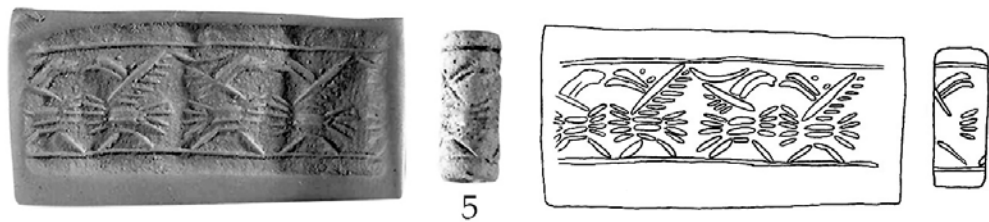
A seal from Sarm Tepe portrays an ostrich with widespread wings standing opposite a tree (Pourbakhshandeh 2003, p. 70). They have approximately the same style, although on the seal from Sarm, the bird's body has been drawn more delicately and naturally than what we see on Seal No. 4. There was a dramatic increase in the number of seals illustrating the figure of an ostrich in Anatolia and Mesopotamia during Neo-Assyrian and Urartian eras. Examples are seals from Nipour (Parker 1962, Fig.1) and ones from Mousasir, all of which date back to the 8th century (Collon 1990, Pls. 4.1.1, 4.1.3). The figure of an ostrich is also to be found on several seals in the former Colville collection, on one seal in Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), one in London (British Museum), and two seals in the Hardy collection. Most of these seals belong to The Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian eras (Collon 1998).

The archer's clothes resemble those of the Elamites. For example, the clothes are similar to those of individuals inscribed on the seals from Chogha Zanbil (Porada 1970, Nos.28, 29, 32, 46, 84 and 87). One of the fascinating elements in this design is the depiction of the bow which has no equivalent in the Northern Central Plateau during the Iron Age. According to Zutterman's research on bows from the middle of the second millennium to the late Achaemenid Empire, curved bows are not to be found across this region. The existing bows are exclusively a triangular shape. Zutterman's research is based on the seals from Hasanlu and Marlik in the first millennium (Zutterman 2003, p. 137). He subscribes to the view that convex bows with a curved end were unknown in Iran, and adds

that whether the triangular bows were imported from Northwestern Iran to Assyria or the other way round is still obscure. With regard to the size of the different bows from various areas during the indicated period, the bow in the archer's hand is, at most, one meter long, whereas the convex bows or the ones with an Elamite curved end are 140 cm and the Assyrian ones are 120 cm in length, all of them different from the example on Seal No. 4. Thus, that bow is more similar to the ones from Luristan, which are 80 cm long (Ibid., p. 165), and hence the best equivalent for our example could be a seal from Surkh Dum-i-Luri (van Loon 1989, Pl. 233:43). While many aspects of what Zutterman covers, from the regions represented in his sample, are relevant here, we would note that many seals from Chogha Zanbil correspond closely to what Seal No. 4 from Qazvin suggests concerning the dimension of the bow (Porada 1970, Nos. 27, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, etc.). Hence, Seal No. 4 has many attributes in common with Elamite culture. The depiction of the bow on Seals Nos. 2, 3 and 4 from the Central Plateau is significant, since such bows are not native to the Iranian Plateau but rather must have appeared there due to interactions with neighboring lands. The suggestions of decoration on the archer's garment resemble closely such depictions on seals found in Hasanlu, which Marcus has classified as influential, local Assyrian ones (1991, Figs. 3, 4). On those two seals, the form of the beard and hair style differ from what we see on our Seal No. 4, in that the man's hair on the Hasanlu examples is positioned in a right-angled direction from his shoulder. As Zutterman emphasizes, the seals from Hasanlu have three sides, while those from Khurvin are semi-circular (Hakemi and Rad 1950, Fig. 3). However, the engraving style and general motifs are similar in both cases.

Among the seals from Mesopotamia, in the collection of Hutchinson, is one formed in the Elamite style, characterized by its particularly large heads drawn using some simple geometric lines. The servant's head on the one Dalley discusses (1972, p. 36), is akin to what we see on Seal No. 4.

Seal No. 5, a linear style seal. The seal depicts two pairs of birds, inscribed so that their feathers touch. In each pair, one bird faces left and has a distinct tail consisting of four feathers somewhat angled to one another. The second bird in the pair seems to be fac-



5

ing front, with outstretched wings, but with its head turned to the left. Each bird's legs are formed by lines angled down from the body. Horizontal lines form a frame at the top and the bottom of the figure. Because the stone of the seal is porous, the engraved design is not very well-defined.

Among the seals classified by Dr. Negahban is one group he terms the linear style seal, which he describes as follows: "This group of Haft Tepe seal impressions introduces a particular style in which each body part and object have been represented as individual units adjoining each other. This is the common style in Haft Tepe with slight variations: they are differentiated in that they are not very symmetrical (Negahban 1994, Design 97). There is also a similar seal from Surkh Dum-i-Luri (van Loon 1989, Pl. 233:51).

The designs of Seals Nos. 5, 6, 7 and 8 are similar, and all have repeated the same figure with trivial differences. The design conveys a somewhat abstract sense of birds' parts, with outspread wings. There are six such seals registered under the number 2666 in the collection of the National Museum. One of the unusual features among the designs is the depiction of a small circle at the top, which is seen on some other seals from Sialk as well.

The linear style seals were formed using particular augers responsible for a new style in the Neo-Assyrian period (Dalley 1972, Fig. 29). Dots were used to fill the backgrounds of the seal designs. The drilling of holes on seals can be seen from the Jamdat Nasr era onwards. Such designs persist into the period of Iron Age III, as well as the Elamite period (Haft Tepe) (Negahban 1994, p. 210).

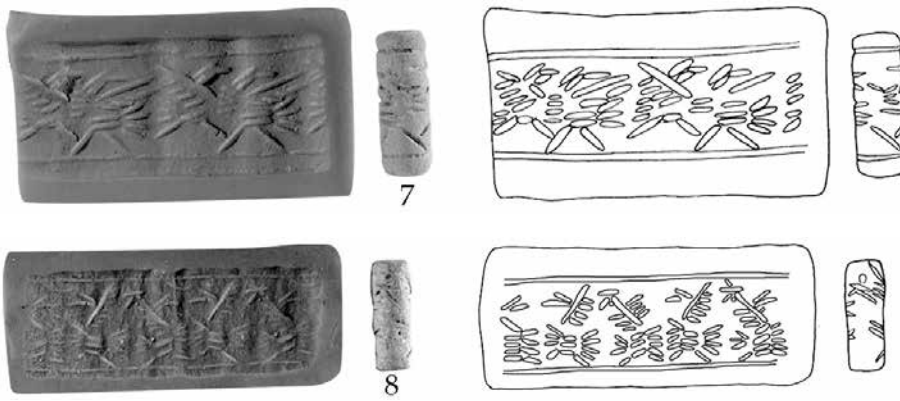
Seal No. 6, a linear style seal depicting two running birds.



6

Seal No. 7 (next page), a linear style seal similar to Nos. 5, 6 and 8.

Seal No. 8, a linear style seal. This style, which was also common in Assyria, sometimes shows extra tails for the compound animals and even the humans (Parker 1962, Fig. 7835). There are a few cases of seals unearthed by Parker at Nimrud (1949-1953) which are very similar to those from Qazvin, but for which



no analogous example has been reported from any other site (Parker 1955, Fig. 1686).

This seal was made of terracotta, just like some of the other Qazvin seals, which in their designs depict some big birds with feathers on their chests. Parker believes this figure indicates a monster or perhaps a huge bird. This design was quite common throughout the 9th and 8th centuries, particularly during the reign of Shalmansar III. In Palestine, a similar seal was discovered which is the oldest amongst those belonging to the Assyrian period (Ibid., p. 104). Some other seals of this style are also among the collection of Ashmolean Museum where they have been classified as Neo-Assyrian (Buchanan 1966, Figs. 623 and 616).

A seal found during Hakemi and Rad's excavation in 1950 depicts a sphinx, asterisk and moon (1950, Fig. 4). The upper part of the sphinx's body, which bears close resemblance to images on seals of Khurvin, has been made in this style. This style is also observed in western Afghanistan: some similarities can be observed with a seal showing a man standing opposite a compound animal, which has a lion's body, eagle's wings and a human head, and which has been classified in the Assyrian style group by Sarianidi (2000, Fig. 4, No. 2). On this seal the man's waist has been depicted using three horizontal lines under which is a fringed decoration. One of his legs is naked up to the knee as in the Assyrian seal figures, which indicates a continuation in the use of this design into the Neo-Assyrian period. This design is seen on some Elamite seals as well (Malek Zadeh Bayani 1996, Fig. 13).

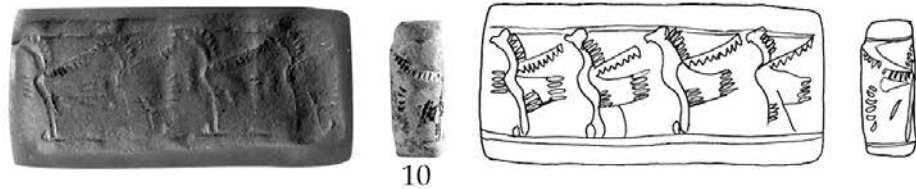


Seal No. 9, with the design of a sphinx. In this scene a sphinx faces a bird with widely opened wings. The wing of the bird on the right is very simple and appears like a thick line, and its chest is the continuation of the wings. The sphinx on the right has a bird-like body, a human head, long hair and something suspended from its neck. In fact this might also be a depiction

of some sort of bird. It has a tail with four feathers and spread legs as is common for the style in Qazvin. In contrast, the other bird has more clearly articulated wings and feathers on its chest, similar to the other seals of Qazvin. Just as with the other birds of this style the legs and wings are spread wide. A shape similar to an ear of wheat is between the neck and wings. One of the striking features on this seal is its depiction of a pendant dangling from the horizontal line above it. Clearly this pendant is tied to that line.

The engraved sphinxes on the Iron Age seals, except for one which has not yet been dated, have no analogues. That example, from Hamedan, is registered as No. 1636 in the National Museum of Iran. On it is the figure of a bird-man. The suspended crescent is engraved on seals from Sialk and Qazvin that are of the same date. The style in which the birds are illustrated, using curved lines, dots and feathers, can be observed on Seals Nos. 4, 9 and 10.

Animal figures engraved with human heads also exist among the Hasanlu specimens. Such a figure is on a seal classified under the Assyrian group depicting a compound creature with a lion's body, eagles' wings and a bearded head of a person (Marcus 1989, Fig. 17). Some seals with quite similar designs have been discovered at Tell-ol-Rimeh and classified by Parker as Neo-Assyrian (1975, Fig. 54).



Seal No. 10, a row of opened-winged birds. These designs comprise several eagles of similar appearance. They spread their wings while turning



to the left. The eagles have feathers on their heads, necks, wings and tails. As on all the other seals with bird figures, some feathers are attached to the front part of the bird's body as well. The wide open wings and the spread legs are also common features. Two horizontal lines, at the top and the bottom, enclose the scene. Such a design is found as well among the seals of Hasanlu (Marcus 1989, Fig. 15). The linear style of Seal No. 10 resembles that on Assyrian examples.

Seal No. 11, depicting a battle with a sphinx. This seal was unearthed during a rescue excavation in an area 35 km from Gelabar Dam, located to the southwest of Zanjan. The seal was found in grave I, trench A2, mound A. This mound is situated on the western Sereh Ji hills overlooking the plain and located 850 m from Ye'een village and 1400 m from Soha village (A'ali 2008, p. 269). Grave I is of a simple shaft form, 70 x 120 cm in size and containing a burial in the fetal position oriented NE to SW. In addition to the cylinder seal, the grave contained gray, red and buff potsherds and a piece of iron wire (Ibid., p. 274).

This seal depicts an archer shooting an arrow at a winged sphinx. However, he is shooting from behind, not in front of the beast. In general, it appears that the described scene is largely symbolic and makes little effort to portray the event realistically. In depicting the archer, the designer has dispensed with all but some simple lines, the exception being his head. He has a thin waist demarcated by three horizontal lines. The extra line adjacent to the man's leg might suggest the existence of a garment like a skirt but could also be an adaptation from the hanging shawls in Assyrian designs. There are lines on the chest of the sphinx similar to those of the linear style on Seals Nos. 5-10 described in this paper. An archery scene with roughly the same style is on Seals Nos. 1-4 described above as well as on a seal from the collection of Bakhtar in Afghanistan (Sarianidi 2000, Fig. 4), cylinder seals of Nimrud (ND. 1009, ND. 2153, ND. 1007), and a number of other seals from this period.

Discussion and conclusion

The described features of these seals and the comparative examples suggest that it is appropriate to date them to Iron Age III, when we find specific local attributes spread over different areas in Iran, Elam and Neo-Assyrian territories. There are distinct changes in style which can be observed between the seals of this

period and those of the early Iron Age (I, II), which are more localized and coarse as well as simpler in design and details of the figures (Saed

Mucheshi unpublished). One of the chief changes in seal making compared to the early Iron Age is the increase in the number of seals made of terracotta. Moreover, the Elamite people had no influence on the production of seals during the first years of the Iron Age (Maras 2004, p. 144). This could be related to the ambiguous position of the North Central Plateau in the Assyrian and Elamite inscriptions. Moreover, from an archaeological perspective, the cultural material from the Iranian Plateau's neighboring lands such as Elam and Mesopotamia is not as abundant for the earlier period as that found later in the Iron Age (Calmeyer 1995; Negahban 1977; Mehrkian 2003). During the Neo-Assyrian period, Assyrian military expeditions toward the eastern borders increased in number, and subsequently, several attacks on Iran occurred during the reign of Shalmansar III (858-824 BCE) (Abdi 1994, p. 20). As a result, the influence of the Assyrian style became more prominent (Barnett 1977, p. 3000). The Assyrians had many other ties with Iran, and their relations were not limited to belligerence and wars. That Assyrian artifacts or artifacts of this style crossed a vast area in Western Iran (from Azerbaijan to Khuzestan) is evidence of this. Assyrian-style seals have been discovered from many archaeological sites such as Hasanlu (Marcus 1989), Noushijan (Maras 2005), the cemetery of Changbar in Ziwieh (Motamedi 1994, p. 82), Chelleh in Gilan, Gharb in Kermanshah (Rezvani 2003) and numerous others. Assyrian influence on the seals are even observed among those from Sialk B (Ghirshman, 1939), Zanjan (A'ali 2008) and southern Bakhtar (Badakhshan in Afghanistan). The seals of Bakhtar in Afghanistan were produced under the influence of Assyrian art, and the fact that they are very numerous has led to the conclusion that they had been made there (in Bakhtar) and were not imported (Sarianidi 2000, p. 26).

The northern parts of the Central Plateau are one of the most important prehistoric areas in Iran: its advantageous geographical location made it throughout history a crossroads on routes connecting Mesopotamia to western Iran, then eastern Iran, Afghanistan and eventually China. This route maintained its importance during the Islamic era too as the essential commercial route in Iran, when we come to term it the Silk Road or the Great Road of Khorasan (Majidzadeh 1987, p. 3). This road passes the desert and enters Ray in the Central Plateau of Iran; then it branches in var-

ious directions to the south and west. From the west onwards, after passing Qazvin plain, it subdivides into two important parts, one of which goes to Azerbaijan and the other to the southwest where it finally reaches Baghdad (Malek Shahmirzadi 1994, p. 66; Roaf 1995, Map 22).

The trade in lapis lazuli had existed on the “Silk” Road since ancient times, this semi-precious stone found on sites located in areas such as western Iran and Mesopotamia. Georgina Herrmann believes that lapis lazuli merchants travelled the Great Road of Khorasan initially from the north and then the south of Mesopotamia to Badakhshan (Afghanistan) during the late Ubid and Uruk periods in northern Mesopotamia and during the Jamdat Nasr and Early Dynastic and Akkad periods in southern Mesopotamia (Majidzadeh 1987, p. 4). It seems that this route maintained its functions as well as its importance over the next periods as well, which meant that it was vital for the monarchs and governors not to lose their control over it. The Babylonians would traverse the Great Road of Khorasan to trade grains, luxuries, copper or iron (Calmeyer 1995, p. 40). During the Neo-Assyrian era, because of the frequent conflicts between Assyrians, Elamites and Babylonians (Potts 1999), special attention was given to the Great Road of Khorasan owing to the fact that during this period one of the most important tributes exacted from people, particularly the Medians, was lapis lazuli. The Medians had pledged to support the successor of Assarhaddon (Curtis 1995, p. 23) and as a mark of respect gave horses and lapis lazuli as tributes to Senakhrib (704–681 BCE) and his son, Assarhaddon (669–680 BCE) (Roaf 1995, p. 61). Successive military expeditions to this area show its importance for the Assyrians: they had been attacking Western Iran, Luristan (Vanden Berghe and Tourovets 1995, p. 53), and the Medians (Roaf 1995, p. 59). According to imperial documents, Assyrians attacked and climbed Bikni Mount in 737 BCE, and Tiglet Pilezar III (744–727 BCE) defeated the city of Zakirto and exacted tribute from the Median councilors. Some researchers think that Bikni is modern day Mt. Damavand, while others, like Levine, believe that it is Alvand in Hamedan (Roaf 1995, p. 59). Some evidence favors the identification of Damavand with Bikni: this mountain has been described as huge and wonderful in Assyrian historical texts, adjectives that are appropriate only for Damavand. Furthermore, Bikni Mount was described as “lapis lazuli mount,” which evokes Damavand’s snow-covered summit and was situated on the route to the lapis lazuli mines. However, Louis Levine views these arguments as inconclusive; he offers other reasons for concluding that Alvand is the mountain identified as Bikni. Firstly, he argues, Damavand’s fame has cast a shadow on the other moun-

tains in Iran and impeded our judgment. Secondly, the view that Damavand was on the route to lapis lazuli mines cannot be correct as it is not located there. Finally, if the phrase “azure mount” is a symbolic word for a snow-covered mountain; there are many other snowy ones situated between the Karind mountains and Afghanistan that fit the description (Levine 1974, p. 119). Levine also subscribes to the view that while Sargon had the most power and influence on the East, he had not succeeded in gaining ascendancy over the lands beyond Nadjaf Abad. He adds that Tiglet Pilezar III and Assarhaddon had never had permanent control over this area (this means the Zagros), and there is nothing to support those rulers’ claims.

The discovery of completely Assyrian-style seals in Badakhshan (published by Sarianidi in 2000) and other Assyrian seals of Qazvin and Kermanshah, raises the following important question: Did the Assyrian style of seal making, those seals essential in the commerce of the time, embrace such a vast geographical area? An essential point to take into account is that Badakhshan – the source of lapis lazuli – Qazvin and Kermanshah are all located on the Great Road of Khorasan, where the Medians and the Iron Age tribes would carry their imposed tribute, one part of which in the eastern Zagros was probably under Assyrian control. The wide-ranging trade of the Assyrians and their profound effect on seal making mean that we should not assume that they would have been ignorant of Bikni Mount at a time when they had long-term interactions and bonds with the Iranian Plateau. In general, as this paper emphasizes, the Great Road of Khorasan was important in the Neo-Assyrian period, and there is much evidence of similar seals both in Iran and Mesopotamia.

Because of the increasing conflicts between Iranian residents and Assyrians or the people of Urartu, during Iron Age III the inhabitants of Iran built many fortifications to guard against their enemies. Based on the conducted surveys, among the sites which have been surveyed, those such as Hasanlu (Dyson 1989) and Ziwieh (Motamedi 1995 and 1997) are situated the farthest to the west, and thus their people were the most likely to face enemies. There are many other examples of these kinds of sites, but without their having been excavated, they cannot be mentioned in this paper. I am thus left with a question: if the Assyrians had dominated this area, does it have any architectural structures similar to those in western Iran? If Sialk is considered a fort (Malek Zadeh 2004), is it likely that it was constructed for protection against enemy attacks (particularly from the Assyrians)?

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Mr. Aboufazel A'ali for providing me with valuable information relating to Seal No. 11. I also am grateful to Khalil Ollah Beig Mohammadi for drawing some of the seal impressions.

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