

The End of Empire: Akkadian and post-Akkadian glyptic in the Jezirah, the evidence from Tell Leilan in context

This paper will outline the glyptic evidence from Tell Leilan and demonstrate how it corresponds to general and specific trends within the Khabur region towards the end of the 3rd millennium BC. The evidence from Tell Leilan, along with contemporary sites in the region, clearly shows an indigenous northern Mesopotamian glyptic style in the mid-3rd millennium Leilan III/Early Jezirah 3 (EJZ 3) period, beginning at 2600 BC (Weiss 1990; Calderone and Weiss 2003; Lebeau *et al.* 2000; Lebeau *et al.* 2011). The development of this glyptic style accompanies the emergence of cities and a complex administrative system that shares some uniform characteristics as a region, indicative of a regionally interdependent economy developing from its roots in the late Ninevite 5/Leilan III period (Weiss 1990; McCarthy 2011). At the same time, there is evidence of glyptic importation and blending of styles that shows extensive and sophisticated linkages with other regions.

Outside of the Jezirah, we know of an emerging Akkadian glyptic style indigenous to central and southern Mesopotamia (Frankfort 1939; Boehmer 1965; Gibson 1982). This Early Akkadian glyptic entered into the repertoire of the Jezirah as one influence among many, probably indicating an increasingly attractive, but not exclusive, relationship between the cities of the Jezirah and the increasingly powerful Akkadian state (Matthews 1997: 143). The local EJZ 3b glyptic began to adapt and take influences from other regions, and incorporate and overlap with seals carved with Akkadian designs. Matthews argues that there was 'almost no provincial or derivative glyptic, indicating that Akkadian art was always seen as foreign' (*ibid.*: 198-9). While this may be true, it is also true that even in the south, closer to the heartland of Akkad, there was an overlap of material culture between the EDIII and the Early Akkadian periods, including glyptic design (Gibson and McMahon 1995: 8). This means that the Early Akkadian glyptic did not appear as a finished product, rather it emerged from amongst an already complex signatory system spread over a wide area, overlapping in time and space with other design styles. In the north, the resulting late EJZ 3b and transitional EJZ 4a glyptic from the Khabur area likewise can be best described as mixed (local designs with occasional foreign imports) along with the incorporation of emulative elements from both EDIII and Early Akkadian designs into the local style.

The development and consolidation of the glyptic style continues well into the Early Akkadian period in the south, probably until the reign of Naram Sin. This is also when we see a profound change in the Jezirah glyptic. The local styles that had been blending and adapting in the Early Akkadian/EJZ 4a seem to disappear at most sites in the EJZ 4b period. The local styles are replaced by what appears to be a rigid, formalized and mostly foreign style (Matthews 1997: 140-1; McCarthy 2011: 269). This change signifies a takeover of the adminis-

trative system and replacement of both its style and substance to one that reflects exclusive relations with southern Mesopotamia. This shift indicates a multi-regional uniformity modeled on the southern Akkadian administrative and signatory system, often called 'Imperial Akkadian' (Weiss and Courty 1993; Weiss 2002; Sommerfeld, Archi and Weiss 2004). In terms of the glyptic, at most sites in the Jezirah the EJZ 4b period signals the replacement of the local glyptic style with an imported Late Akkadian glyptic style, along with accompanying administrative features.

The exact moment when each site in the Jezirah shifted to using Late Akkadian glyptic cannot be defined by the glyptic alone. Because the EJZ 3b period shows signs of increased borrowing and use of Akkadian and other influences, it is not surprising to see Early Akkadian seals alongside persistent local glyptic (McCarthy 2011: 273-5). What is needed at each excavated site is clear stratigraphic and absolute dating evidence that can show when and if the major change to an 'imperial' system occurred. Tell Leilan provides evidence for this, but correlating the transition to other sites is difficult. The exact moment of this 'takeover' could be progressively site-by-site, or it could be regionally simultaneous. While the evidence is not conclusive from glyptic alone, it very well could have been a 'nodal' takeover, with some sites in the Jezirah entering into the exclusive Akkadian domain around the reign of Naram Sin (as suggested at Tell Brak), and others holding on to its local administrative system until slightly later. The Scribal Room at Tell Leilan, stratigraphically and radiocarbon dated earlier than the Leilan IIB2 Palace, is important in this respect (deLillis, Milano and Mori 2007; de Lillis et al.; Weiss, this volume: 1). In any case, while the EJZ 3b local glyptic emulated foreign glyptic, this is not the case in the EJZ 4b period, where there is simple replacement of glyptic styles: Akkadian for local.

The singular exception to this in the Khabur region is the case of Tell Mozan where a unique glyptic style seems to persist throughout the EJZ 3 and 4 periods. This may be the result of a political agreement between Urkesh and Akkad (perhaps by Naram Sin himself) that allowed for some degree of autonomy and self-determination in exchange for partnership. The distinctiveness of the glyptic could also reflect the Hurrian character of the site and its inhabitants, and thus might not be representative of the Jezirah as a whole at this time. While the Tell Mozan glyptic does not seem to have been replaced outright in the Late Akkadian period, it is nonetheless in the EJZ 4b period where we see the synchronous use of Imperial Akkadian sealings and persistent local styles. A sealing cache found at Tell Mozan contained epigraphically and stylistically Naram Sin period sealings alongside two seal impressions with local designs and bearing Hurrian inscriptions (Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 2002: 18-9). Therefore, Tell Mozan follows the timing of the increased contact with Akkad coincident with the region-wide Jezirah changes taking place.

Remarkably, there are fewer glyptic objects in the Jezirah that date to the Late Akkadian period than existed in the preceding EJZ 3b and 4a. It could be that the indigenous glyptic in the EJZ 3b/4a was a flourishing and expanding system (and lengthier) whereas the foreign Akkadian system was restrictive and exclusive, and perhaps more limited in local production. It is also possible that there was greater control of discarded sealings in the Late Akkadian/EJZ 4b period, which would make them less accessible by excavation.

Matthews suggested, based primarily on a limited excavation corpus, that the number of seals and sealings declined in the Late Akkadian period and the range of designs retracts to a subset of the wider Akkadian glyptic. He interprets this as signaling a phased decline in the administrative systems of the Jezirah beginning to decline in the Early Akkadian period, de-

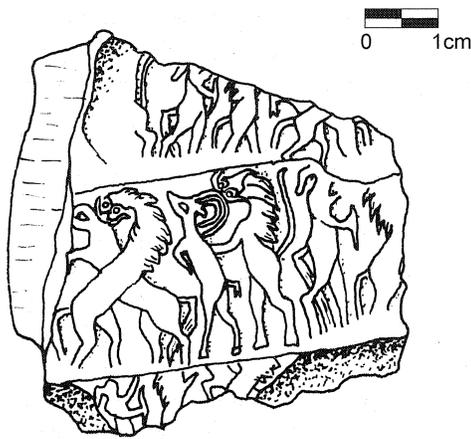


Figure 1: L06-141.



Figure 2: L06-200.

creasing again in the Late Akkadian period and finally collapsing in the Ur III period (Matthews 1997: 199). I see no reason why this should be the case, if the Early Akkadian (EJZ 4a) period is essentially an overlap with the preceding EJZ 3b period, the Late Akkadian (EJZ 4b) replaces this system and there is for the most part no Ur III (EJZ 5) or other post-Akkadian (EJZ 4c) glyptic at all. The significant shift was the transition to the Late Akkadian period, contemporary with the Leilan IIb palatial reconstruction (Phase 3: Ristvet and Quenet, this volume: 193) and the reign of Naram Sin at Tell Brak. There was no decline in activities in Leilan IIb, rather the complete replacement of one administrative system for another. Any observable 'decline' is limited to the complete collapse of any sort of complex administrative activity at Leilan or in the region after the Late Akkadian/EJZ 4b, with the exception of some residual glyptic activity in the TC 'Pisé Building' at Tell Brak (Emberling, this volume: 65) and persistent, but slightly later, glyptic activity from the 'Pusham House' at Tell Mozan (Pfälzner, this volume: 145). This last point is interesting, as the terminal 3rd millennium glyptic from Mozan may indicate opportunism related to an administrative vacuum following the collapse of the Akkadian imperial system.

At Tell Leilan the stratified glyptic evidence is clear: there is a flourishing Leilan IIa/EJZ 3-4a glyptic consisting of local autochthonous designs accompanied by an increasing influx of foreign elements and borrowing and importation and/or hybridizing (Figs. 1 and 2). L06-141 is an ED IIIb contest scene representing direct importation from southern Mesopotamia, and L06-200 is a hybrid incorporating an indigenous animal protome design with a scorpion



Figure 3: L06-18.

the City Gate, there does not appear to have been a co-existence of a *koine* glyptic for the local inhabitants alongside an Akkadian foreign glyptic for an elite administration.

Furthermore, this trend is supported by the glyptic evidence from the Jezirah in general, and specifically at Tell Brak. The so-called 'Brak-style' seal designs (by definition indigenous) continue into the period where Early Akkadian seals are found (Felli 2001: 150). In fact there are an increasing number of 'Brak-style' designs that have Akkadian influences in the EZ 4a period (McCarthy 2011: 274-5), similar to the incorporation of local and foreign elements in the Leilan sealing L06-200. At some point this co-existence of local and foreign ceases, and the foreign style Late Akkadian seals dominate (although sometimes in association with Early Akkadian seals), but in far fewer number than in the preceding Early Akkadian period and earlier (Matthews 1997: 181). At Tell Brak, alongside the disappearance of the 'Brak style' glyptic is the replacement of the pre-Akkadian docket-administration typical of the Early Akkadian/EJZ 3, for one involving Late Akkadian tablets and glyptic (*ibid.*). Interestingly, while the local design style ceases, the preference of a subset of Akkadian design types, such as contest scenes at Brak, does seem to be locally selected.

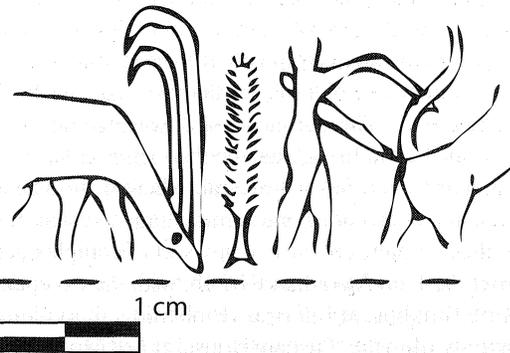


Figure 4: Composite from objects L06-11, L08-415, 416, 417.

god more common in the Diyala and Early Akkadian glyptic. On the Leilan Acropolis Northwest, these Leilan IIa strata continued into the period where an early Akkadian presence began to be felt in the glyptic, but the Akkadian influences were clearly one among many borrowed and emulated elements. The Leilan IIb2 (EJZ 4b) Palace and associated building strata sealed the earlier phase and buried the pre-Akkadian sealings beneath newly constructed floors and newly built walls. There are fewer glyptic objects in Leilan IIb strata, but apart from clear residual glyptic they are wholly different, representing a single foreign system of signification. Where Leilan IIa-IIb3 glyptic reflected wide-ranging influences, the Leilan IIb2-1 glyptic was restrictive and only reflected imported Akkadian style, with no continuation of the local styles (Figs. 3 and 4). At the Tell Leilan City Gate, the trend is the same, suggesting that this was not the result of excavation bias, enclaves or re-districting. Likewise at

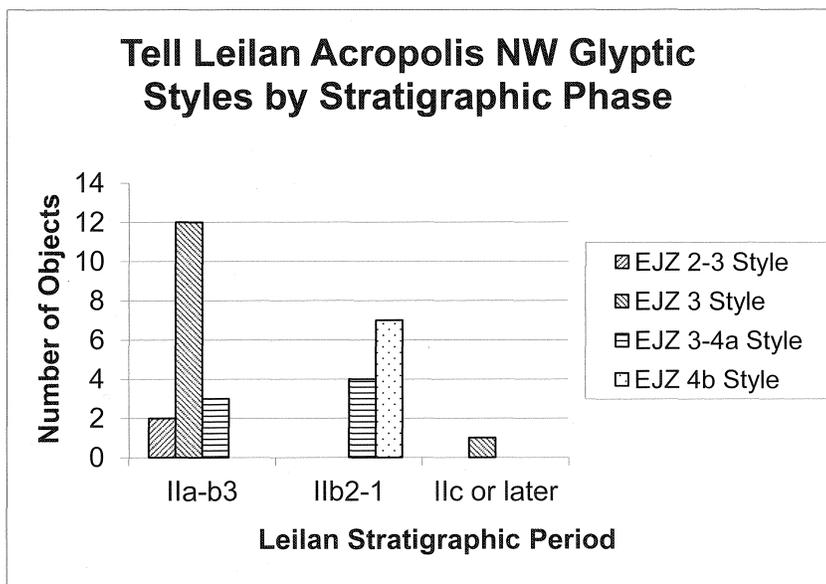


Figure 5: Tell Leilan seal designs by stratigraphic period.

At most sites in the Jezirah the Late Akkadian takeover in the glyptic was as clear as it was short-lived. At Tell Leilan there is a complete replacement of the acropolis structures (albeit along very similar lines to the previous period) in the Late Akkadian, Leilan IIb2 and IIb1 periods (Weiss, this volume: 1). The one phase (with two surfaces) abutting the reconstructed Palace walls were accompanied by sealings representing a single foreign glyptic style: Akkadian. That it is Akkadian is clear, most recognizably in the inscribed seal impression of ‘Hayabum Šabra’ (L93-66: de Lillis Forrest *et al.* 2004), indicating both a foreign glyptic style and an intrusive administrative and hierarchical system controlling the Leilan Acropolis. This seal impression was found on a surface beside ‘The Unfinished Building’, representing both the abandonment of an ongoing construction project as well as the collapse of the administrative system associated with the palace activities. There are other sealings from the Leilan IIb palace that reinforce the exclusivity and exogeneity of the administrative system. For instance, a horned-god design (L06-18, Fig. 3) also found in the Acropolis NW palace is another example of a design type not found in any preceding Leilan period, as well as typically Late Akkadian elements such as the upturned bent elbow in contest scenes, along with a rigid, linear composition and arrangement (Fig. 4). In general, however, whereas the limited exposures of Leilan IIa period on the Acropolis NW produced a great number of seals of various types, the Leilan IIb and IIb-c (residual IIb) strata produced mainly Late Akkadian glyptic, although it is possible some residual Early Akkadian glyptic continued in use beyond Leilan IIa in the hands of co-opted local officialdom (Fig. 5). The one seal impression found in Leilan IIc contexts or later is certainly an intrusive redeposition (L06-22, an EJZ3a-b design on a clay ‘languette’).

That there was a collapse of the short-lived intrusive Akkadian administrative system seems conclusive. At Tell Leilan, as well as across the Jezirah, there ceases to be any glyptic production whatsoever after the immediate post-Akkadian (EJZ 4c) period (see McCarthy 2011: 297, Table 1). Likewise, there is virtually nothing in the entire Jezirah region that could

represent a post-Akkadian glyptic style. The only example from Tell Brak that comes close is Ashmolean 1939.332: 80 (Matthews' #401), but this is Late Akkadian dating from the end of the reign of Sharkalishari or slightly later (Matthews 1997: 142). An Ur III date is not necessary for this object and it is more likely to be Late Akkadian (*ibid.*: 201); furthermore, this was from Mallowan's excavations and the stratigraphic and dating evidence is uncertain. Tell Brak has no evidence for any administrative system whatsoever continuing into post-Akkadian strata (Matthews 1997: 142; Oates, Oates and McDonald 2001: 129-30) apart from the short-lived and scaled-back Pisé Building (Emberling, this volume: 65). At Tell Brak, with the largest collection of 3rd millennium sealings from the Jezirah, there is no true post-Akkadian glyptic, even if some persistent Akkadian seal usage continued into a small-scale post-Akkadian phase. This compels us to ask what we mean by the term 'post-Akkadian' and whether 'post-Akkadian' is the same as 'remnant-Akkadian'. The glyptic evidence from EJZ 4c at Tell Brak shows continued but terminal use of Akkadian-style glyptic, presumably after the general administrative system had collapsed. Whether or not short-lived remnant occupation continued into the post-Akkadian strata is beside the point being made here: at Brak, as at most sites in the Jezirah, the end of the Akkadian period marks the end of glyptic production and a drastic decline in use, ushering in the collapse of any sophisticated administration until the beginning of the Old Babylonian period.

The only unequivocal post-Akkadian or Ur III glyptic objects from anywhere in the north are from isolated and disjointed sites outside of the Khabur: Assur, Byblos, Kültepe, Mari and Nuzi (Matthews 1997: 122-7). The dating of a seal impression (Aleppo Museum 6763) from Mallowan's excavations at Tell Brak remains inconclusive, but it does have some intriguing features that hint at persistent administrative activities into the terminal Akkadian period (Matthews and Eidem 1993). This impression, inscribed with the personal name of Talpuš-atili and the location name of Nagar (Tell Brak), stylistically fits in at the end of the Late Akkadian period, an assertion that is largely backed up by the inscriptional comparanda. With the exception of a set of sealings from Tell Mozan showing Ur III-influence toward the end of the millennium, the Jezirah is completely void of glyptic objects throughout the post-Akkadian and Ur III periods.

There is an appreciable gap in the sequence of glyptic development in the Jezirah at the 3rd-2nd millennium transition, as well as a lack of evidence for complex administrative system at any sites apart from Assur, Byblos, Kültepe, Mari and Nuzi, and further afield, Ugarit (Matthews 1997, 149). Akkadian glyptic influence or cultural memory into the Middle Bronze Age in the north seems unlikely. Cultural echoes seen in the Proto-Syrian style are derived from local northern pre-Akkadian/EJZ 3 banquet scenes, not from the intrusive Late Akkadian glyptic that flourished briefly and disappeared quickly.

The unfortunately named 'Guti seals', alternatively called 'Provincial Elamite' or 'post-Akkad B' seals, have now been firmly placed several centuries prior to the post-Akkadian/EJZ 4c period (Boehmer 1971: 707-8; Matthews 1997: 147). Nowhere do we find a representative glyptic development in the Jezirah and when there is an eventual reappearance of complex administration and glyptic designs in Old Jezirah 2-3, they have little to do with the short-lived Akkadian dominance of the previous millennium.

The Middle Bronze Age sees a resurgence of local EJZ 3 derived designs in the Old Syrian style, the embellishment of a local Hurrian glyptic, and the adoption of an intrusive Old Babylonian administration. When the Old Babylonian glyptic emerges in the Jezirah, the only link between the EJZ 4b and the Old Jezirah (OJ) 1-2 is with the singular example of Ur III-influenced sealings from the 'Pusham House' at Tell Mozan (Dohmann-Pfälzner – Pfälzner 2001:

121; Dohmann-Pfälzner – Pfälzner 2002: 163; Pfälzner 2012: 55; Pfälzner, this volume: 145). Tell Mozan in no way appears to be reflective of the general pattern of occupation and activity in the Jezirah, however. Rather, this evidence seems to show opportunism made possible by the *lack* of local administration, and without further examples can be considered an anomaly as far as the Jezirah glyptic tradition is concerned. Post-Akkadian settlements seem to have had reduced occupancy and short-lived occupations with scant evidence for the continuation of the sophisticated local EJ 3-4a nor the rigid Akkadian EJZ 4b administrative systems. There was no coherent glyptic development throughout the ‘Seven Generations’ after the Fall of Akkad, and this lack of cohesion is at times punctuated by stretches of complete glyptic darkness (e.g. EJZ IVc, OJ 1 - Koliński 2007: 356). At Tell Leilan the post-Akkadian/Leilan IIc and post-post-Akkadian Leilan IId periods lack any complex administrative activities, which is reflective of the overall loss of bureaucratic activities in the Jezirah after the collapse of the Akkadian system.

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