

The Lost Seal of a Tax Collector

Zsombor J. Földi

Abstract: The present contribution deals with the loss of cylinder seals in 3rd and 2nd millennium BCE Mesopotamia. It gives an overview of the official documents drawn up when cylinder seals were lost and presents a hitherto unpublished example. In addition, this article presents a handful of texts from other genres that attest to the loss of seals. The study ends with a discussion of the similarities and differences between the known Old Babylonian documents recording seal loss, and the possible conclusions that can be drawn from them.

Foreword

While working on his PhD research project on Mesopotamian court procedure in the Old Babylonian period (2003–1595 BCE), the author benefitted from being a doctoral fellow at the *Graduate School Distant Worlds* (Nov. 2014–Oct. 2017).¹ One of the main goals of his project was to provide up-to-date editions of Old Babylonian court documents from the city of Larsa (modern Senkereh in southern Iraq) and its neighbourhood. As the Yale Babylonian Collection is particularly rich in ‘Larsa’ material, a visit to New Haven soon turned out to be essential. The financial support of GSDW allowed the author to spend five weeks at Yale in Autumn 2015, and it was during this stay that he came across YBC 11976, a tablet edited in the following contribution. Moreover, it was also due to GSDW that the author came into contact with the DigANES project of A. Otto, A. Kurmangaliev, and E. Roßberger (since then ACAWAI-CS²) –, all of whom offered him

helpful advice in the development of his current research project on Old and Middle Babylonian seal inscriptions.³ It seems therefore appropriate to offer this contribution to the last fascicle of *Distant Worlds Journal*.

Introduction

In ancient Mesopotamia, legal documents were written on clay tablets, and the primary method of authenticating them was to use one’s cylinder seal.⁴ The seal was rolled or impressed on the wet clay to express the seal owner’s acknowledgement of the contents of the document, and/or his presence when it was drawn up. This act could happen either before or after the document was written. Cylinder seals, made of precious or semi-precious stone for the most part, usually depict one or more of a handful of scenes that often feature divine and semi-divine beings, animals, or the king himself. These depictions are frequently accompanied by an

¹ The PhD thesis resulting from this research (Földi 2018) is currently being prepared for publication.

² *Annotated Corpus of Ancient West Asian Imagery: Cylinder Seals*, www.acawai-cs.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/ (accessed 31.12.2020).

³ *Die Götter der Siegelgebete. Gottheiten und ihre Epitheta in den spätaltbabylonischen und kassitenzeitlichen Siegelinschriften*, see www.assyriologie.uni-muenchen.de/forschung/forschungsprojekte/

siegelinschriften/index.html (accessed 31.12.2020). The author’s research is funded by the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung (Az. 40.19.0.033AA) and benefits from cooperation with the MTA–ELTE Lendület *Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Cylinder Seals and Divine World* Research Group (Eötvös Loránd Research Network) in Budapest.

⁴ For an overview of seals and sealing in Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East, see Collon ²2005.

inscription, naming the seal owner as a rule and identifying him/her by paternal name, title, or office etc. The engraved imagery and text on cylinder seals made each one unique and they can be seen as a symbol of the owner's identity. But what happened if one lost one's seal?

Sources

Several 'announcements of lost seals' dating from the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE are preserved. These are legal documents which name the seal's owner and the day the seal was lost, probably in order to avoid legal claims that resulted from the seal's unauthorized use. In one instance, the text seems to be a model exercise composed for the purposes of scribal education. What follows is a brief overview of the available sources.

1) The earliest of such records dates to Ur III times (2012–2004 BCE). BiMes. 6, 55⁵ (Umma; AS 09/(07/19)) is written in Sumerian, and reads: ⁽¹⁻⁴⁾ The tur-ul_x(?)⁶-stone seal of Lu-Ninšuburka has been lost (ú-gu ba-an-dé)

⁵ UT 1599-16 (CDLI P105806); ed. Hallo 1977, 55.

⁶ See Civil *apud* Hallo 1981.

⁷ Apart from this document, the Ur III evidence is scant and is further complicated by the multiple meanings of Sumerian *kišib*, i.e. 'seal' or 'sealed document', depending on the context. (On this ambiguity see below; for an overview of the terminology see Radner 2010, 466–467.) JCS Suppl. Ser. 5, 104 (ed. Studevent-Hickman 2018, 145) deals with the loss of a sealed document *concerning* a ditch and dated to a year of Ibbi-Sîn (2028–2004 BCE); an alternative interpretation as a cylinder seal lost *in* the ditch (Sharlach 2019, 162–163) is artificial and does not account for the date, nor for the remark that the seal(ed document), if found, should be destroyed. For references on lost tablets that should be destroyed see already Hallo (1977, 56 with n. 5) and Kleinerman (2011, 40 with n. 93; apparently interpreting them as seals rather than as sealed tablets), and most recently Widell (2020, 121 with n. 4) with further references.

⁸ VAT 6002 (CDLI -); ed. Klengel 1968 and Charpin 2017, 169. For a photo of the obverse see Stein 1997, 118 fig. 122. The tablet was collated by the author in 2016.

⁹ See already Michalowski *apud* Hallo 1977, 59 n. 23; Stol 1980, 187 n. 6.

¹⁰ Klengel (1968, 218 n. 3), assuming that the scribe skipped the damage of this line, considered *i-bi-* and

since Month VII, the 19th day passed (ba-ra-zal-la-ta). ⁽⁵⁾The year following (the year): 'The en(-priestess) of Nanna of Gaeš was appointed.' The edition does not reveal whether or not the tablet itself was sealed; unfortunately, CDLI does not offer any image.⁷

2) The first known Old Babylonian example of an announcement of a lost cylinder seal was OrNS 37, 217⁸ (Dilbat; Ad 23/11/01), which was published by H. Klengel in 1968. It is in Akkadian and reads as follows: ⁽¹⁻⁵⁾The name seal (^{na}kišib *šu-mi*)⁹ of Šillī-Uraš has been lost (*iḥliq*) since (*ištu*) Month XI, the 1st day. ⁽⁶⁻⁹⁾Before Irībam(?)¹⁰-Uraš, ¹⁰ the deputy; before Ēṭirum, son of Gimil-Marduk; before Iddin-Lāgamāl, son of Ilī-iddinam; before Marduk-muballit, scribe. ⁽¹⁰⁻¹²⁾Month XI, the 1st day; the year: 'King Ammī-ditāna, his images of copper'. Seals: ^(S.1)(uninscribed); ^(S.2)Inbuša, son of Pirḥum, servant of [DN]. ^(S.3)Iddin-Lāgamāl, son of Ilī-iddinam, servant of Lugal-Gudua.¹¹

i-din- as possible readings and called attention to the prosopographical evidence supporting the latter. Pientka (1998, 412 no. 13) and Charpin (2017, 169) accepted Klengel's prosopographical arguments and read Iddin(*i-[d]in*)-Uraš. Although collation cannot fully resolve the matter, the preserved traces make one expect four signs in the first part of the name. Of possible readings such as *i-k[u'-u]n'-pí-*, *i-n[a-q]á'-bé-*, *i-p[i'-i]q'-* or *i-r[i-b]a-am'*, the last one is the most convincing from an epigraphical point of view. That name, either as Irībam-Uraš (e.g., YOS 13, 261: 7) or as Erībam-Uraš (e.g., VS 7, 101: 6 with seal and YOS 13, 371: 19 with seal B), is only infrequently attested in records from Dilbat.

¹¹ For a description of S.1 see Klengel 1968, 219. The remaining two seals, designated by Klengel as illegible, read as follows: S.2 [*i*]n-bu-[ša] / [DU]MU 'pir'-ḥu-[um] / [ARAD] 'dx' [x (x)]. S.3 [*i-di*]n-'la'-[ma-a] / [DUMU] *i-lī-i-d[in-nam]* / [ARAD] 'lugal'-gú-[du]-a]. Inbuša, son of Pirḥum appears to be unknown so far. As prosopographical parallels (Pientka 1998, 412 no. 13) show, Ēṭirum son of Gimil-Marduk had a seal inscribed with his own name. This leads to the assumption that S.1 and S.2 were used by Irībam(?)¹⁰-Uraš and Marduk-muballit; Pirḥum might be the father of one of them. For S.3 see the attestations noted by Pientka (1998, 412 no. 13).

3) AUCT 5, 47¹² (Kiš[?]; date lost¹³) reads: (1-5)The name seal (^{na}KIŠIB *šu-mi*) of the general (UGULA MAR.TU) Warad-Sîn has been lost (*iḥliq*) in/at Bāb-Niraḥ¹⁴ since (*ištu*) Month XI, the 30th day. The remainder of the text is lost; the CDLI image shows no clear traces of seal impressions.

4) AulaOr. 20, 94¹⁵ (Sippar; Aš 09/06/04) reads as follows: (1-7)The name seal (^{na}KIŠIB *šu-mi*) of Ilšu-ibni, the captain (UGULA [ĜIDRU]) of the troops at Šarrum-laba, was lost (*ḥaliq*) in the house of Tarību(m), son of Muti-Sumuqa(?) during the feast of (the god) Šubula, since (*ištu*) Month VI, the 4th day. (8-16)Before Pirḥum, son of Ina-palēšu; before the captain Ina-palēšu, son of Ilšu-nāšir; before Lugalbi-dugga, the chief lamentation priest of Ištar of Akkade; before Marduk-muballiṭ, son of Izza[...]; before Ubār-Nabûm, military scribe; before Šumum-līši, military scribe. (17-20)Month VI, the 4th day; the year: ‘King Ammī-šadūqa, a statue of his sovereignty (with) a curved staff of gold’. Seals: (S.1)Šumum-līši, son of Bēlšunu, servant of Ninsianna and [DN]; (S.2)(uninscribed) ‘seal of [Pirḥum(?)]’; (S.3)(uninscribed) ‘seal of Ina-palēšu’; (S.4)(uninscribed) ‘seal of Lugalbi-dugga’.

5) A further case is provided by collections of Sumerian literary letters and model contracts

studied as part of Old Babylonian scribal education.¹⁶ SEpM 14 is preserved on multiple school tablets from Nippur, but a Mari copy and tablets of unclear provenience are also known, some of them probably from Larsa or its vicinity. The manuscripts show considerable variation in the names of witnesses, which encourages one to question the authenticity of the original case.¹⁷ The composition is to be dated to the late Ur III to early Old Babylonian times. The text tells that a seal inscribed with the name (kišib₍₃₎ mu-sar) of the merchant Ur-DUN was lost, and, at the (Nippur) assembly’s order, the herald sounded the horn throughout the streets, announcing the loss. As a consequence, no one can have any claim against Ur-DUN. Leading officials of Nippur appear as witnesses: a governor, a temple manager, a scholar, a scribe, a steward, a lamentation priest, a mayor and the herald himself.

There has been some debate about whether the crucial sign at the beginning of SEpM 14 and in similar stipulations has to be read as *dub* ‘tablet’, *kišib* or *kišib₃(DUB)*, and whether *kišib* should be understood as a ‘sealed document’ or a ‘(cylinder) seal’ (a question left open by the absence of the determinative ^{na} ‘stone’). In the author’s opinion, whenever the breaking of such lost objects is stipulated, sealed documents rather than cylinder seals are meant:¹⁸ the seals themselves were considered too

¹² AUAM 73.2661 (CDLI P249520); ed. van Koppen 2002, 157 n. 11; Sigrist 2003, 124 and Charpin 2017, 169–170.

¹³ Although the CDLI image shows some traces of signs at the end of the reverse, these do not suffice for a safe restoration of a year-name. As the date of the seal reveals, the tablet was probably dated to 11/30. The palaeography points to a Late Old Babylonian date.

¹⁴ This GN is otherwise known from YOS 13, 205: 2 (see Groneberg 1980, 32 and Pientka 1998, 365 *Bāb-Šaḥan; Charpin 2005, 416 and 2017, 170), a Late Old Babylonian text from Kiš. An origin in the vicinity of Kiš thus seems likely.

¹⁵ BM 97468 (CDLI P512197); ed. De Graef 2002, 78–79.

¹⁶ SEpM 14 (CDLI P478975 = ETCSL 5.7.a); ed. Kleinerman 2011, 154–155 and 269–272 with earlier

literature. Add Peterson 2010, 566–567 (UM 29-13-503; from Nippur) and Spada 2011, 238–239 §41 (in an anonymous private collection; possibly from Isin). The corresponding sections of NBC 7800 and YBC 12074 have been edited meanwhile by Bodine 2014, 123–130 and 138–143 (with Spada 2017, 305 §19).

¹⁷ See Michalowski 2011, 23 and Kleinerman 2011, 45–47 with earlier literature; cf. also Charpin 2017, 170.

¹⁸ See also Hallo 2002, 151 with n. 64 with further attestations. This applies to the corresponding section of YOS 1, 28 as well (cf. Roth 1979, 54 and ²1997, 42; Kleinerman 2011, 41). For a clear case of a sealed document (*kišib*) that should be destroyed, see Spada 2011, 214–215 §5; see also Spada 2017, 305 and Reid – Spada 2020 with some recently published parallels.

expensive to destroy them (instead of re-cutting them etc.).¹⁹ In SEpM 14, where such a stipulation is absent, it seems more likely that a cylinder seal was meant: if a sealed contract were implied, it would have been satisfactory to inform the contractual partner instead of all community members.

6) Further cases of lost seals are known from references in other genres. An example of the first is the letter AbB 11, 77 (Sippar; undated²⁰), the relevant passage of which reads: ⁽²⁴⁻²⁷⁾My seal has been lost (*iḥliq-ma*) at Maškan (or: at the threshing floor), therefore I sealed with another (or: another person's) seal.²¹ Sometimes one sealed a contract with someone else's seal and a corresponding clause explained why,²² as appears to be the case in JCS 5, 80²³ (Šupur-Šubula; Ae 'g'/04/10), the relevant passage of which reads as follows: ⁽⁵¹⁻⁵²⁾The seal of the captain (UGULA ĠIDRU) Ilšu-nāšir was lost (*ḥaliq-ma*), therefore he sealed with a seal (that is) not his (*i-na la ku-nu-ki-šu ik-^rnu*^r-uk*²⁴*). Even if their loss is not explicitly referred to, further cases of lost seals can be deduced using other information, as in the case of the seal of one Sîn-iddinam, an Overseer of Merchants of Sippar: based on prosopographical data and what is known of his activities in Ḥalab (Aleppo), Stol assumed that he 'may have lost his seal in Syria during a business trip'.²⁵

¹⁹ Cylinder seals were usually made of semi-precious or precious stones – in the Old Babylonian period mostly of haematite and goethite but lapis lazuli is also attested – that had to be imported and were expensive. Their value and importance are shown by the fact that they sometimes appear in inheritance division contracts as part of the inheritance (see Kalla 2008, 198 with n. 51) and that a son could continue using his father's seal without any restriction (compare n. 11 above). Some seals are known to have remained in use for more than a century (see, e.g., Van Lerberghe – Voet 1989; compare Colbow 2002, I, 19).

²⁰ The first editor of the letter assumed, probably for reasons of palaeography, that the letter was written in the reign of Ammī-ditāna (Ungnad 1915, 48).

²¹ CBS 1573 (CDLI P258906); ed. Stol 1986, 44–45 no. 77 (with earlier literature); cf. also Kraus 1985, 145.

Finally, the loss of personal seals²⁶ is known from divinatory and magical contexts from the 1st millennium BCE. Dreaming of having one's cylinder seal taken by someone else was a bad omen,²⁷ and there are apotropaic rituals (*namburbi*) with instructions on what to do if someone's cylinder seal was broken, lost, or fell into a canal.²⁸

²² On such instances see Patrier 2017 (with earlier literature).

²³ MAH 15970 (CDLI P423939); ed. Szlechter 1953, 94–95 no. 22.

²⁴ Collation from the CDLI image confirms the final verb's reading as proposed by CAD L (1973, 2). See also Radner (2010, 468 §4): 'he sealed (it) with a seal that was not his own'.

²⁵ Stol 2016, 737 *ad* no. 60; on the seal itself see also Frayne 1990, 410 RIME 4.3.8.2007 and Lambert 2004.

²⁶ On a lapis lazuli seal, allegedly stolen from Assyria and later recovered by Sennacherib, see Casero Chamorro 2017; on the loss of a divine seal from the 1st mill. BCE see most recently Joannès 2019 (both with earlier literature).

²⁷ Oppenheim 1956, 276–277 with Hallo 1977, 58.

²⁸ LKA 110, see Maul 1994, 208–209 with earlier literature.

A new text: YBC 11976

Dimensions: 4.8×3.7×1.9 cm

Mus. no.: YPM BC 25772 = YBC 11976

CDLI no.: P311945

Date: Si 10/07/25

Literature: Beckman 2000, 230 (description)

obv.

1.) ^{na+}KIŠIB *ša-lim-pa-li-iḫ-šu*2.) ENKU *e-mu-ut-ba-lum*3.) *i-na* ⁱⁱDU₆.KÙ U₄ 25.KAM4.) *iḫ-li-iq*

(-)

lo.e.

(-)

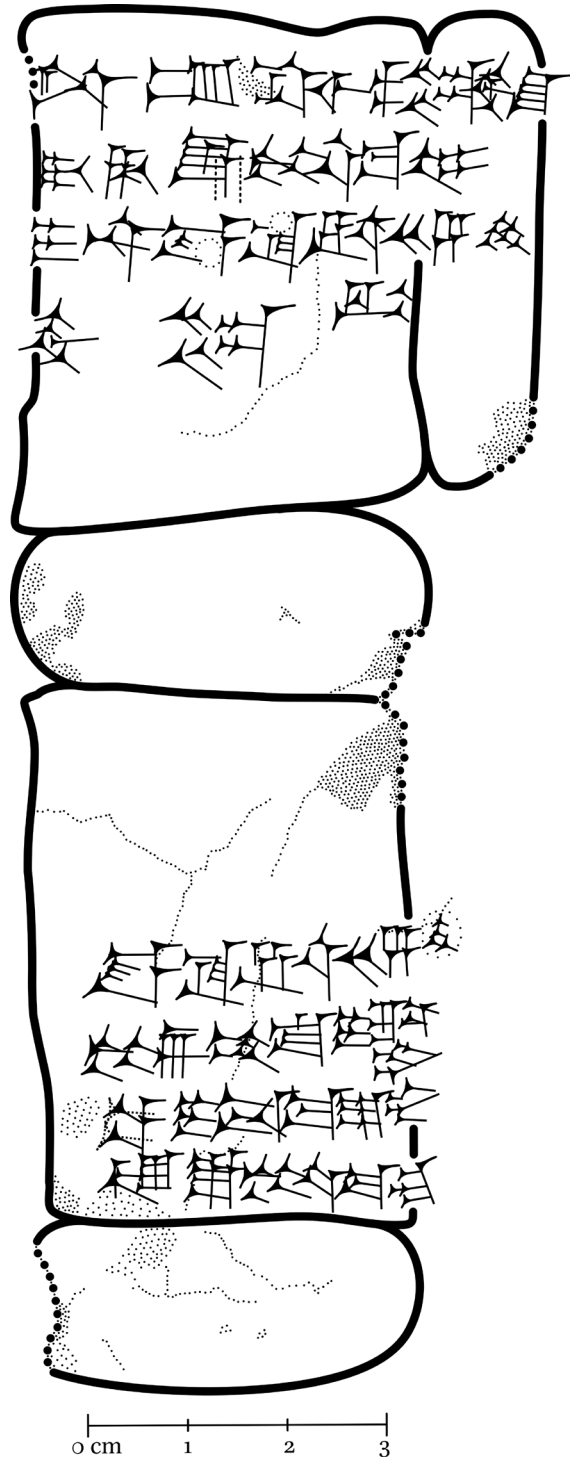
rev.

(-)

5.) ⁱⁱDU₆[!].KÙ U₄ 25.KAM6.) *mu sa-am-su-i-lu-na* / lugal7.) °érin° *i-da-ma-ra-aš*8.) *ù e-mu-ut-ba-la'*

up.e.

(-)

seals²⁹S.1) *pi-ir-ḫu-[um]*DUMU ^dNIN.URTA-*a-bi'*ARAD *sa-am-su-i-lu-na*S.2) *ši-lí-^d[...]*DUMU ^dEN.ZU-*ga-[mil[?]]*ARAD ^dDIGIR.M[AR.TU]S.3) *'x x' [...]*DUMU *zi-ki-ir-[i-lí-šu]*ARAD ^{d?}DIGIR.M[AR[?].TU[?]]

(1-4) The seal of Šalim-pāliḫšu, the tax collector of Emutbālum, has been lost in Month VII, on the 25th day.

(5-8) Month VII, the 25th day; the year: 'King Samsu-ilūna, the army(ies) of Ida-Maraš and Emutbālum'.

Seals: (S.1) Pirḫu[m], son of Ninurta-abī, servant of Samsu-ilūna. (S.2) Šillī-[DN], son of Sīngā[mil(?)],³⁰ servant of Il-A[murru]. (S.3) ..., son of Zikir-[ilīšu(?)],³¹ servant of Il-A[murru(?)].

²⁹ Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has not been possible to collate the seal inscriptions from the original. For this reason, only a transliteration of them can be provided here.

³⁰ Besides *-ga-[mil]*, the less frequently attested *-kà-[ši-id]* might be another possible restoration.

³¹ While the restoration is uncertain, Zikir-ilīšu is by far the most frequently attested name beginning Zikir-.

Discussion

The text records the loss of a seal of a certain Šalim-pāliḫšu, designated as ‘tax collector of Emutbālum’. The name Emutbālum or Yamutbālum, originally a region east of the Tigris, was transferred to Larsa and its neighbourhood under Kudur-Mabuk and his sons Warad-Sîn (1834–1823 BCE) and Rīm-Sîn I (1822–1763 BCE). After Ḫammu-rāpi’s (1792–1750 BCE) conquest of Larsa, the territory of the former Kingdom of Larsa became part of the Kingdom of Babylon and was referred to as Emutbālum.³² In the 8th year of Ḫammu-rāpi’s successor Samsu-ilūna (1749–1712 BCE), several cities of southern Babylonia simultaneously revolted against Babylon. In his 9th year (Si 09), Samsu-ilūna defeated the forces of Ida-Maraš, Emutbālum, Uruk and Isin (and eventually of Ešnunna); this event was commemorated in the ceremonial name of his next year,³³ and an abbreviated form of this appears in YBC 11976.³⁴

It was in this historical context that YBC 11976 was written. Although the text itself does not

reveal where it was drawn up, the appearance of a tax collector of Emutbālum makes an origin in southern Babylonia³⁵ likely. While there are no texts dated to Si 09 from the south, documents from Si 10 are represented in all major southern cities,³⁶ which makes a southern origin plausible. The use of the sign PI for /pi/ in S.1: 1 may be considered an orthographic argument for a southern origin.

The name Šalim-pāliḫ-DN and its short form Šalim-pāliḫšu³⁷ are infrequently attested in southern Babylonian records; most of the known attestations come from the north (especially from Sippar³⁸), from Mari,³⁹ and the Diyāla region.⁴⁰ An attestation in a ‘Larsa’ text (possibly from the neighbouring town Kutalla) occurs in MLC 1858: 35.⁴¹ To sum up, the circumstances point to a tax collector⁴² of northern Babylonian origin who was sent by the Babylonian government to the south where the revolt had just been crushed by Samsu-ilūna’s troops. Considering that even in times of peace it could be necessary to have the tax collector accompanied by soldiers,⁴³ Šalim-pāliḫšu’s task was presumably a challenging one.

³² See Stol 1976, 63–72.

³³ See Horsnell 1999, II, 193–195. For an important new source on Samsu-ilūna’s struggle for the south see now Lambert – Weeden 2020.

³⁴ YBC 11976 is thus one of the YBC texts from the reign of Samsu-ilūna that was not included in S. I. Feigin’s (1979) YOS 12. That volume contains the majority of dated tablets from Samsu-ilūna’s reign between YBC 3315 (YOS 12, 168) and YBC 9101 (YOS 12, 309), but not those with lower or higher numbers. On similar tablets published in the meantime see Földi 2020, 43 n. 3 (with an edition of YBC 10839 in the same study).

³⁵ The text might thus come from Larsa or its neighbourhood, which are particularly well-represented in the Yale Babylonian Collection’s holdings.

³⁶ See Stol 1976, 57 and now Lambert – Weeden 2020, 27. Compare especially two texts from the same month as YBC 11976: ŠumAkk. 192 = St. Louis 223 (Si 10/07/27), a delivery of sesame from the ‘Bad-tibira’ archive and YOS 12, 317 (Si 10/07/21) from the archive of a certain Nabi-Sîn.

³⁷ ‘He who fears DN is doing well’ and ‘He who fears him is doing well’, respectively. That the latter is indeed a short form of the former is shown by

prosopographical evidence; see, e.g., Tanret 2010, 37 n. 25 and 44 n. 4.

³⁸ Cf. Bowes 1987, 1131 and 1202. Especially well-known is one Šalim-pāliḫ-Marduk, (second) temple manager (*šangūm*) of Šamaš (see Tanret 2010, 100–104). For a Šalim-pāliḫ-Marduk in Dilbat see VS 7, 128: 29. A Šalim-pāliḫša occurs in VS 18, 83: 8 (collated), possibly from Kiš.

³⁹ Birot – Kupper – Rouault 1979, 190.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, BIN 7, 80: 16 (Šaduppūm); JCS 9, 118 no. 102: 8 (Tutub); unpubl. FLP 2166: 6 *ša-lim-pa-la-aḫ-ša* (Nērebtum(?); courtesy P. Paoletti).

⁴¹ Földi 2018, 107–110 (edition) and 801 (autograph).

⁴² Generally, the Akkadian term *mušaddinum* has a broader meaning: ‘collecting agent (of dues, taxes, and other payments)’, see CAD M2 (1977), 252–253. However, the genitive construction with the name of a province (‘the collector of GN’) implies that a high official in charge of taxes from an entire province of the kingdom was meant.

⁴³ See AbB 13, 31, a letter sent by Ḫammu-rāpi to his governor Sîn-iddinam, in which the king recounts how Šēp-Sîn, the Overseer of Merchants of Larsa has been complaining to the king about the district governors who obstructed him in his collection of silver for Babylon. In response to this complain Ḫammu-rāpi

What remains is to overview the similarities and differences between the already known Old

Babylonian legal documents and YBC 11976. These are summarized in the following chart:

	YBC 11976	AUCT 5, 47	OrNS 37, 217	AulaOr. 20, 94
seal's description	seal	name seal	name seal	name seal
seal owner	Šalim-pāliḫšu	Warad-Sîn	Šillī-Uraš	Ilišu-ibni
title or office	tax collector of Emutbālum	General	–	captain of the troops at Šarrum-laba
main verb	has been lost (<i>iḫliq</i>)	has been lost (<i>iḫliq</i>)	has been lost (<i>iḫliq</i>)	was lost (<i>ḫaliq</i>)
where?	–	in/at Bāb-Niraḫ	–	in the house of Tarību(m), son of Muti-Sumuqan(?) during the feast of (the god) Šubula
when?	on (<i>ina</i>) 07/25	since (<i>ištu</i>) 11/30	since (<i>ištu</i>) 11/01	since (<i>ištu</i>) 06/04
Date	Si 10/07/25	(lost)	Ad 23/11/01	Aš 09/06/04
Witnesses	–	(lost)	4	6
Seals	3	(not sealed or lost)	3 (at least 1 of a witness)	4 (at least 3 of the witnesses)

All four documents were written in Akkadian and come from the Kingdom of Babylon. YBC 11976's wording almost exactly corresponds to that of OrNS 37, 217, AUCT 5, 47 and AulaOr. 20, 94: they all use the verb *ḫalāqum* 'to disappear, to be/get lost', the former three in the preterite *iḫliq*, and AulaOr. 20, 94 in the stative form *ḫaliq*.

While each of the three late Old Babylonian texts speaks of a 'name seal' (*kunuk šumim*) of PN, YBC 11976 has only 'seal' of PN.⁴⁴ If the wording reflects a deliberate differentiation, this might mean that Šalim-pāliḫšu's seal was uninscribed.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, a parallel case from Larsa shows that a tax collector of similarly high position might very well possess a

seal with an inscription describing him as a servant of the king. 'Šamaš-lamassašu, son of Muḫaddūm, servant of Ḫammu-rāpi': this seal inscription is preserved on CHJ, HE 139 and JCS 31, 140 no. 13 – the former text designates him as tax collector, the latter relates that he was responsible for collecting ca. 50 kg of silver for the Palace, out of the so-called *zigmukkum*-silver of Emutbālum 'that was given to Šamaš-lamassašu for collecting'.⁴⁶ Both texts are dated to the 40th year of Ḫammu-rāpi, and thus they precede YBC 11976 by 13 years. This means that Šamaš-lamassašu had a very similar title and task to Šalim-pāliḫšu. Alternatively, one might consider if the further specification of a seal as 'name seal' in later documents reflects a development within the

orders Sîn-iddinam to have the tax collector accompanied by soldier(s).

⁴⁴ Unlike the above case of BiMes. 6, 55, the material of the cylinder seal is never specified.

⁴⁵ Alternatively, it might have been inscribed with a seal prayer that did not, as a rule, contain the owner's name.

⁴⁶ See Stol 1982, 152–154. On the seal inscription itself see also Frayne 1990, 368–369 RIME 4.3.6.2017.

genre, even if *kišib*₍₃₎ *mu-sar* in the Sumerian text of SEpM 14 has the same meaning as *kunuk šumim*.

Only two of the four documents, OrNS 37, 217 and AulaOr. 20, 94, are witnessed by high officials and/or well-known members of the community; the corresponding section of AUCT 5, 47 is lost. YBC 11976 does not contain a list of witnesses. Yet the sealings on OrNS 37, 217 and AulaOr. 20, 94 show that it was the witnesses who sealed the document, and the sealings on YBC 11976 have the same authenticating function despite the lack of a witness list. It is impossible to tell who the people sealing YBC 11976 were, however their high status may be indicated by the seal inscription of one of them (S.1). While ordinary people described themselves as a servant of a deity, state officials, especially the higher-ranking ones, emphasized their position by referring to themselves as a servant of the king (in Pirhūm's case, of Samsu-ilūna).

In fact, the seal owners might belong to the same professional circle: except for OrNS 37, 217, all these documents reveal that the seal owner was a state official, either in the Palace's service (as a tax collector) or in the army's (as an officer). This in turn suggests that the Babylonian state was interested in having such documents drawn up. It cannot yet be shown if

Šillī-Uraš in OrNS 37, 217 was associated with the Palace in any way.⁴⁷

All four documents name the exact day on which the seal was lost and at least three of them were dated to the very day this happened, resulting in a kind of 'double-dating'. This either means that the loss of a seal was reported immediately and a corresponding document had to be drawn up without delay,⁴⁸ or the documents were dated back to the very day of the loss. This latter date was expressed by means of the preposition *ištu* 'from; since' in the late Old Babylonian documents, whereas YBC 11976 has *ina* ('in; on'). The minor differences in the formulation may suggest that the practice of drawing up such documents was not yet fully established.

Two of the four documents provide more or less precise details as to the circumstances of the loss: AUCT 5, 47 records in which town the seal was lost, and AulaOr. 20, 94 records exactly in whose house the loss took place. Why was it important to name such details? What legal importance did these circumstances have? Unlike 'modern' announcements of similar nature,⁴⁹ the Old Babylonian announcements of lost seals did not, in fact, declare the seal void. If, later on, it happened to turn up, the owner could probably have continued to use it.⁵⁰ This may be a reason why the

⁴⁷ Since all four tablets come from the antiquities market, they lack an archaeological context. Their archival context, which might enable one to find out more about the seal owners, is likewise lost – except for AulaOr. 20, 94. In that case, K. De Graef's (2002) prosopographical analysis allows the identification of Ilšu-ibnišu in a series of documents, several of which contain his seal inscription, which describes him as 'Ilšu-ibnišu, son of Qaqqadu(m), servant of Ammī-šadūqa' (De Graef 2002, 66). Although this relates what the inscription of the lost seal probably was, all secure attestations are later than the announcement of the loss and cannot therefore reveal whether a new seal was made or the old one was found. In the other three cases, the available data does not suffice for a prosopographical identification: even if we knew the seals lost by Šalim-pāliḫšu, Šillī-Uraš and Warad-Sîn, either from the cylinder seals themselves or from their impressions, we would probably be unable to identify

them as such due to the lack of paternal names in the corresponding announcements.

⁴⁸ See De Graef 2002, 67 n. 17 with earlier literature.

⁴⁹ The author allows himself to present the case of a stamp, lost by the author's father more than two decades ago. On the 22nd November 1995, the following announcement was published in the corresponding section of the Hungarian newspaper *Népszabadság* ('Liberty of the People'), p. 16: ELVESZETT 1995. november 17-én az alábbi feliratú bélyegző: FÖLDI SÁNDOR Írószér, Könyv, Ajándék Kereskedő, 2132 Göd, Pesti út 155/A. Adósz.: 50148020-2-33. Használat a fenti időponttól érvénytelen. ('On the 17th November 1995, a stamp with the following text was LOST: SÁNDOR FÖLDI Dealer in stationery, books, gifts, Pesti str. 155/A, 2132 Göd. Tax no.: 50148020-2-33. Its use is invalid from the above date.')

⁵⁰ Note that even the death of the seal owner did not automatically invalidate a seal (see n. 19 above).

above circumstances, as far as they could be ascertained, were recorded. Therefore, the main purpose of drawing up such records was to document the loss and the fact that the leading members of the community were aware of the loss.⁵¹ In this way, the possibility of the misuse that could potentially harm the Babylonian state's interests was also recorded. And whose seal could be misused in a way to do more harm than a tax collector's?⁵²

Acknowledgements

The author expresses his gratitude to Benjamin R. Foster, Ulla Kasten, and Agnete W. Lassen for their permission to publish YBC 11976, as well as for their kind assistance during the author's research stay at the Yale Babylonian Collection (18.09.–23.10.2015). Albert Dietz, Mary Frazer and Sarah P. Schlüter gave useful insights and Mary Frazer also improved the English style. Needless to say, the author

assumes responsibility for any remaining mistakes.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations are those of the *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* (see www.keilschrift.badw.de/reallexikon/abkuerzungslisten.html), to which the following are added: Ad: Ammī-ditāna; Ae: Abī-ešuh; AS: Amar-Suena; Aš: Ammī-šadūqa; HE: École pratique des Hautes Études, museum siglum; S.: seal; SEpM: Sumerian Epistolary Miscellany (see Kleinerman 2011); Si: Samsu-ilūna; St. Louis: Freedman 1975 (text no.); UT: University of Texas; YPM BC: Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History, Babylonian Collection, museum siglum.

Relative dates throughout this paper follow the pattern RN YY/MM/DD.

⁵¹ Unlike the case of SEpM 14, nothing points to a more general, public announcement of the loss.

⁵² Indeed, although sheer speculation, it is possible that Šalim-pāliḫšu's seal was stolen rather than lost.

Bibliography

Beckman 2000

G. Beckman, *Old Babylonian Archival Texts in the Yale Babylonian Collection* (ed. U. Kasten). CBCY 4 (Bethesda 2000).

Biro – Kupper – Rouault 1979

M. Biro – J.-R. Kupper – O. Rouault, *Répertoire analytique. II: Tomes I-XIV, XVIII et textes divers hors-collecion. 1: Noms propres. ARM 16/1* (Paris 1979).

Bodine 2014

W. R. Bodine, *How Mesopotamian Scribes Learned to Write Legal Documents. A Study of the Sumerian Model Contracts in the Babylonian Collection at Yale University* (Lewiston – Lampeter 2014).

Bowes 1987

A. W. Bowes, *A Theological Study of Old-Babylonian Personal Names. Vol. I–II. Unpublished PhD dissertation* (Dropsie College 1987).

Casero Chamorro 2017

M. D. Casero Chamorro, *Stolen, Not Given?*, in: Y. Heffron – A. Stone – M. Worthington (eds.), *At the Dawn of History. Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of J. N. Postgate* (Winona Lake 2017) 85–93.

Charpin 2005

D. Charpin, *Données nouvelles sur la vie économique et sociale de l'époque paléobabylonienne*, *OrNS* 74, 2005, 409–421.

Charpin 2017

D. Charpin, *Chroniques bibliographiques 20. Pour une diplomatie des documents paléo-babyloniens*, *RA* 111, 2017, 155–178.

Colbow 2002

G. Colbow, *Tradition und Neubeginn. Eine ausführliche Bearbeitung der spät[alt]babylonischen Abrollungen aus Sippar und ihres Beitrags zur Glyptik der Kassiten. I: Textteil, II: Katalog und Abbildungen* (München – Wien 2002).

Collon 2005

D. Collon, *First Impressions. Cylinder Seals in the Ancient Near East* (London 2005; 1st ed. 1988).

De Graef 2002

K. De Graef, *Two Išū-ibni's, two ugula gidru's. Šarrum-Laba^{ki}, a Military Settlement at the Irmina*, *AulaOr.* 20, 2002, 61–97.

Feigin 1979

S. I. Feigin, *Legal and Administrative Texts of the Reign of Samsu-iluna. YOS 12* (New Haven 1979[†]).

Földi 2018

Zs. J. Földi, *The Trial Documents from Old Babylonian Larsa in their Legal, Economic, Social and Archival Contexts. Unpublished PhD dissertation* (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München 2018).

Földi 2020

Zs. J. Földi, *The Property of the City, the Property of the King? A New Fragment of YOS 12, 321*, *Hungarian Assyriological Review* 1, 2020, 43–59.

Frayne 1990

D. R. Frayne, *Old Babylonian Period (2003–1595 BC). RIME 4* (Toronto – Buffalo – London 1990).

Freedman 1975

R. D. Freedman, *The Cuneiform Tablets in St. Louis. Unpublished PhD dissertation* (Columbia University 1975).

Groneberg 1980

B. Groneberg, Die Orts- und Gewässernamen der altbabylonischen Zeit. RGTC 3 (Wiesbaden 1980).

Hallo 1977

W. W. Hallo, Seals Lost and Found, in: McG. Gibson – R. D. Biggs (eds.), Seals and Sealing in the Ancient Near East. BiMes. 6 (Malibu 1977) 55–60.

Hallo 1981

W. W. Hallo, Correction to *Seals Lost and Found*, BM 6 (1977), 55 f., RA 75, 1981, 95.

Hallo 2002

W. W. Hallo, A Model Court Case Concerning Inheritance, in: T. Abusch (ed.), Riches Hidden in Secret Places. Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Memory of Thorkild Jacobsen (Winona Lake 2002) 141–154.

Horsnell 1999

M. J. A. Horsnell, The Year-Names of the First Dynasty of Babylon. I: Chronological Matters: The Year-Name System and the Date-Lists. II: The Year-Names Reconstructed and Critically Annotated in the Light of their Exemplars (Hamilton 1999).

Joannès 2019

F. Joannès, « Mettez-vous en quête de ce sceau ! », in: G. Chambon – M. Guichard – A.-I. Langlois (eds.), De l'argile au numérique. Mélanges assyriologiques en l'honneur de Dominique Charpin. Publications de l'Institut du Proche-Orient Ancien du Collège de France 3 (Leuven – Paris – Bristol 2019) 491–506.

Kalla 2008

G. Kalla, Ein altbabylonischer Haushalt aus Ur, in: Á. Szabó – P. Vargyas (eds.), Cultus deorum. Studia religionum ad historiam. I: De Oriente antiquo et regione Danuvii praehistorica. In memoriam István Tóth. Ókortudományi dolgozatok 1 (Budapest 2008) 183–202.

Kleinerman 2011

A. Kleinerman, Education in Early 2nd Millennium BC Babylonia. The Sumerian Epistolary Miscellany. CunMon. 42 (Leiden – Boston 2011).

Klengel 1968

H. Klengel, Eine altbabylonische Verlustanzeige, OrNS 37, 1968, 216–219.

van Koppen 2002

F. van Koppen, Redeeming a Father's Seal, in: C. Wunsch (ed.), Mining the Archives. Festschrift for Christopher Walker on the Occasion of His 60th Birthday 4 October 2002. BabA 1 (Dresden 2002) 147–176.

Kraus 1985

F. R. Kraus, Altbabylonische Briefe mit Siegelabrollungen, in: J.-M. Durand – J.-R. Kupper (eds.), Miscellanea Babylonica. Mélanges offerts à Maurice Birot (Paris 1985) 137–145.

Lambert 2004

W. G. Lambert, Some Thoughts on Fakes, NABU 2004/61.

Lambert – Weeden 2020

W. G. Lambert[†] – M. Weeden, A Statue Inscription of Samsuiluna from the Papers of W. G. Lambert, RA 114, 2020, 15–62.

Maul 1994

S. M. Maul, Zukunftsbewältigung. Eine Untersuchung altorientalischen Denkens anhand der babylonisch-assyrischen Löserituale (Namburbi). BagF 18 (Mainz am Rhein 1994).

Michalowski 2011

P. Michalowski, The Correspondence of the Kings of Ur. An Epistolary History of an Ancient Mesopotamian Kingdom. MesCiv. 15 (Winona Lake 2011).

Oppenheim 1956

A. L. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East. With a Translation of an Assyrian Dream-Book*, TAPS 46, 1956, 179–373.

Patrier 2017

J. Patrier, *Entrusting One's Seal in the Ancient Near East in the First Half of the 2nd Millennium BC*, *Ash-sharq* 1, 2017, 40–47.

Peterson 2010

J. L. Peterson, *Sumerian Literary Fragments in the University Museum, Philadelphia II. Eduba Compositions, Debate Poems, Diatribes, Elegies, Wisdom Literature, and Other Compositions*, UF 42, 2010, 535–572.

Pientka 1998

R. Pientka, *Die spätaltbabylonische Zeit. Abiešuḫ bis Samsuditana. Quellen, Jahresdaten, Geschichte*. *Imgula* 2 (Münster 1998).

Radner 2010

K. Radner, *Siegelpraxis (sealing practice)*. A. *Philologisch.*, RIA 12, 2010, 466–469.

Reid – Spada 2020

J. N. Reid – G. Spada, *From Oslo to Atlanta: An Old Babylonian Prism Collecting Model Contracts*, RSO NS 93, 2020, 37–58.

Roth 1979

M. T. Roth, *Scholastic Tradition and Mesopotamian Law: A Study of FLP 1287, a Prism in the Collection of the Free Library of Philadelphia*. Unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Pennsylvania 1979).

Roth ²1997

M. T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (ed. P. Michalowski). SBL WAW 6 (Atlanta ²1997; 1st ed. 1995).

Sharlach 2019

T. M. Sharlach, *Review of Studevent-Hickman 2018*, JNES 78, 2019, 160–163.

Sigrist 2003

R. M. Sigrist, *Old Babylonian Account Texts in the Horn Archaeological Museum*. AUCT 5 = IAPAS 8 (Berrien Springs 2003).

Spada 2011

G. Spada, *A Handbook from the Eduba'a: An Old Babylonian Collection of Model Contracts*, ZA 101, 2011, 204–245.

Spada 2017

G. Spada, *Review of Bodine 2014*, ZA 107, 2017, 290–306.

Stein 1997

D. L. Stein, *Siegelverwendung in Wirtschaft und Verwaltung*, in: E. Klengel-Brandt (ed.), *Mit Sieben Siegeln versehen. Das Siegel in Wirtschaft und Kunst des Alten Orients [anlässlich der Sonderausstellung «Mit Sieben Siegeln versehen», Vorderasiatisches Museum 30.5. – 28.9. 1997]* (Mainz – Berlin 1997) 104–123.

Stol 1976

M. Stol, *Studies in Old Babylonian History*. PIHANS 40 (Istanbul – Leiden 1976).

Stol 1980

M. Stol, *Review of D. Charpin, Archives familiales et propriété privée en Babylonie ancienne. Étude des documents de «Tell Sifr»*, RA 74, 1980, 185–188.

Stol 1982

M. Stol, *State and Private Business in the Land of Larsa*, JCS 34, 1982, 127–230.

Stol 1986

M. Stol, *Letters from Collections in Philadelphia, Chicago and Berkeley*. AbB 11 (Leiden 1986).

Stol 2016

M. Stol, Review of R. Feingold, Engraved on Stone. Mesopotamian Cylinder Seals and Seal Inscriptions in the Old Babylonian Period, *BiOr.* 73, 736–739.

Studevent-Hickman 2018

B. Studevent-Hickman, Sumerian Texts from Ancient Iraq. From Ur III to 9/11. *JCS Suppl. Ser. 5* (Atlanta 2018).

Szechter 1953

É. Szechter, Les tablettes juridiques datées du règne d'Abī-ešuḫ conservées au Musée d'Art et d'Histoire de Genève, *JCS* 7, 1953, 81–99.

Tanret 2010

M. Tanret, The Seal of the Sanga. On the Old Babylonian Sangas of Šamaš of Sippar-Jahrūrum and Sippar-Amnānum. *CunMon.* 40 (Leiden – Boston 2010).

Ungnad 1915

A. Ungnad, Babylonian Letters of the Ḫammurapi Period. *PBS* 7 (Philadelphia 1915).

Van Lerberghe – Voet 1989

K. Van Lerberghe – G. Voet, A Long Lasting Life, in: H. Behrens – D. M. Loding – M. T. Roth (eds.), *DUMU-E₂-DUB-BA-A. Studies in Honor of Åke W. Sjöberg.* *OccPubl. S. N. Kramer Fund* 11 (Philadelphia 1989) 525–538.

Widell 2020

M. Widell, Ur III Economy and Bureaucracy: The Neo-Sumerian Cuneiform Tablets in the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College (I), *Orient* 55, 2020, 117–154.