


A NEO-BABYLONIAN SEAL FROM AMMAN

This seal was found in 1958 by a stonecutter in the S. E. slopes of the Citadel of Amman in a place facing the Roman Theatre.

The seal was found in the debris at a depth more than 2.50 m. It is conical in shape of blue chalcidony, of round top, perforated crosswise and a convex circular base 2.5 cm., in diameter and 4 cm. high.

The impression shows a worshipper stands before a cult object, probably an altar, carrying in his right hand an offering object. His beard is long and on his head is a skull-cap and wearing a long wrapper. The altar before him is raised on four legs in the middle of which is a pole ended with the typical Assyrian Neo-Babylonian "Maru". The typical Neo-Babylonian creature is sitting at the altar beside the "Maru" (a pole with a broad spearhead shape), raising its head towards the worshipper. Two cuneiform letters are inscribed behind the figure; they are in reversed form  in the seal. The possible reading for these two Neo-Babylonian letters, as Dr. Bade' Keeper of the Western Asiatic Department in the British Museum concluded "AN PAP." (illu, usur) The translation of which is "O God give victory to, or protect!". (Plate IV Fig. 1).

To the right side of the altar there is another cult object, the two legs of which resemble animal legs, probably of a bull; the body above is represented by a pole with five coils and ends with a cross bar on which two horns are projecting upwards. At the top, there is a dove standing and turning its head towards the worshipper.

CONCLUSION

This seal adds to the evidence of the Iron Age settlement in Rabbath Ammon during the Neo-Babylonian period (612-539 B.C.). It gives indication of the use of the cuneiform script in Ammon, side by side with the use of the Early Hebrew-Phoenician script in which the Mesha stone (835 B.C.) and other inscriptions are written.

The seal was cut elaborately; the art of carving is very accurate and explicit. The enclosure in this seal with four legs is one of the characteristics of the Neo-Babylonian period. The winged sun disc in this seal was used during the Assyrian Neo-Babylonian and later during the Persian period with some development.

The "Maru" was the emblem of the God Marduk¹ and the dove was the emblem of the God Nebo. This seal probably was the seal of the Governor of Rabbath Ammon during the Neo-Babylonian period. It was the first Seal of its kind, discovered in Amman carries a cuneiform characters. Its importance as an evidence of the Neo-Babylonian period in Transjordan, is very important, not only from the archaeological point of view, but also from the historical point of view.

The possible date for this seal on the evidence of the cuneiform letters, the Neo-Babylonian creature on the altar, the head dress, the beard, the uniform of the worshipper and the four legs of the altar is the 6th century B.C., which coincide with the use of these characters in this period.

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¹ Cylinder Seals of western Asia by D. J. Weismann.