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CIRCLES OF LIGHT AND ACHAEMENID HEGEMONIC STYLE IN GORDION'S SEAL 100

Elsbeth R. M. Dusinberre

It was Crawford H. Greenewalt, jr., who first introduced me to Turkey, to the Achaemenid Persian period that has since become my scholarly passion, to Sardis, to stories of Gordion, and to the joy that can come from excavation. His careful tutelage and guidance have been the best possible gift. His remarkable eye for art, for excavation, and for detail, his lyrical but clear style of writing, and his meticulous scholarship have long served me as models to try to emulate. And it was Greenie who first set me upon an overnight bus from Sardis to Gordion in the midseason break of 1994 so I might begin to experience both of these sites, in whose excavation histories he himself played such a crucial role. It is an honor and a privilege to contribute to the *Festschrift* that celebrates his career an article about an artifact that he knows well: a cylinder seal excavated from the site of Gordion (Fig. 1).

Seals can provide a unique entry into understanding ancient societies: used by individuals or offices for ratification, identification, and ornamentation, they functioned simultaneously as official insignia and indicators of personal taste. The seals from Gordion come in a wide variety of shapes and materials. A significant number were imported from places far to the east, west, and south. They exhibit tremendous variety in artistic style and imagery.¹

In the Achaemenid period, the use of seals at the site exploded. During the time of the Achaemenid empire, fully 29 seals and impressions were left at Gordion in deposits that have been uncovered by archaeologists—a tremendous increase over earlier numbers. It is important to note that most of the Achaemenid period seals from Gordion were found in Hellenistic period deposits; the number is probably too great to be accounted for by residuals and suggests that a number of Achaemenid tombs may have been found and looted during the Hellenistic period. The seal that forms the focus of this study is an exception to this rule, however, as it comes not from a Hellenistic tomb but rather from a disturbed context on the city mound itself that includes Achaemenid as well as later materials.

Unlike the earlier eras at Gordion, when the few seals made were predominantly crafted from local stone, during the Achaemenid period the seals were made from remarkably varied materials, including glass, bone, ivory, agate, lapis lazuli, chalcedony, faience, rock crystal, and meerschaum. They came from all over the Empire, from as far east as Afghanistan and south as Egypt, from the outcrops of wildly banded agate found near Sardis and from the heartland of the Achaemenid empire itself. It seems thus that Achaemenid presence at Gordion led to greatly increased mobility of glyptic artifacts and possibly artists and patrons, so that the raw materials available for seals (not to mention the seals themselves) were suddenly more varied than they had been.

The iconography that decorated the Achaemenid period seals was as varied as the materials available for use. Instead of the striations and nondescript imagery

¹ The following overview is adapted from a presentation at the British Museum in September 2005, at the conference accompanying the exhibit "Forgotten Empire." For the Achaemenid seals from Gordion, see Dusinberre 2005, 24–26, 49–68, from which elements of this overview are excerpted. For those from Sardis, see Dusinberre 2003, 158–71, 264–83.



FIG. 1. Sardis, Gordion, Anatolia, and surroundings.

that characterize some of the sealstones from the pre-Achaemenid period and many of those from the post-Achaemenid period, the seals dating to the Achaemenid period at Gordion have instantly recognizable and often highly idiosyncratic imagery. The seals suggest a change in administrative practice during the Achaemenid period. They also demonstrate that Achaemenid ideology and practices penetrated to less administratively significant sites in the empire, such as Gordion, as well as to important satrapal sites like Sardis. This study will focus on one of the Achaemenid seals from Gordion in an attempt to highlight the ways in which it expands our

understanding of Achaemenid presence at the site and Achaemenid hegemonic practices in Anatolia.

AN ACHAEMENID CYLINDER AND ITS CONTEXT AT GORDION

In May of 1952, a remarkable red agate cylinder seal was excavated by G. H. McFadden from the Citadel Mound at Gordion.² Building A, a large, multiroomed building near the Middle and Late Phrygian City Gate, was a complicated structure dating to the Middle Phrygian period. In addition to robbed walls and layers of disturbed fill, it boasted some walls remaining in situ and a distinctive red clay fill that the excavator took to be the undisturbed deposits associated with the original use of the building (Fig. 2).³

An elaborate Achaemenid period structure, the so-called Mosaic Building, was built above this one. The cylinder seal that forms the focus of this study (2342 SS 100) was found in excavating the Mosaic Building.⁴ With the seal were found some of the architectural tiles of the Mosaic Building as well as potsherds that date to the fifth and the first half of the fourth century.⁵ The most recent date suggested for the building is the second



FIG. 2. Plan of New Citadel at Gordion. Building A is at the south of the plan.

2 Young 1953, 11–14, fig. 10.

3 Gordion fieldbook 30, 131–33.

4 Dated by R. S. Young to the end of the fifth or the beginning of the fourth century B.C.E. (Young 1953, 11).

5 Fieldbook 30, 133 and Glendinning 1996, 23–25.

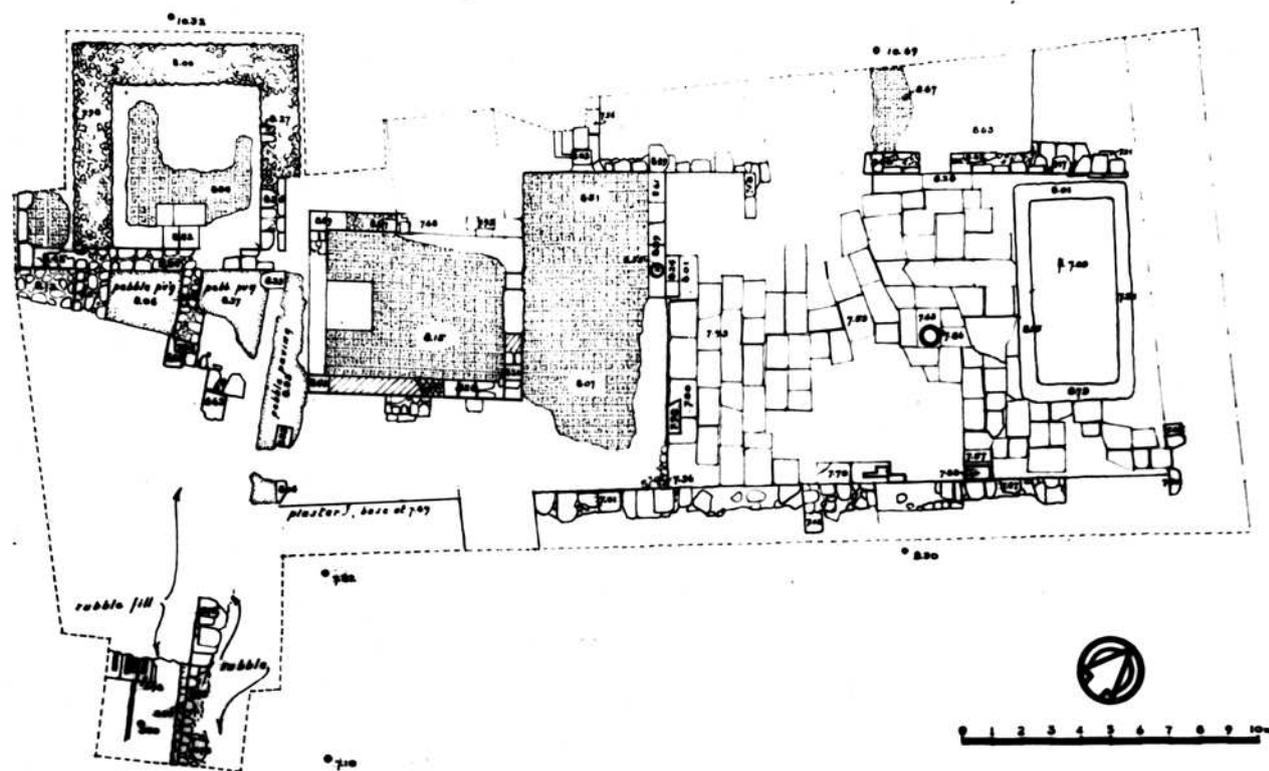


FIG. 3. The Mosaic Building.

quarter of the fifth century.⁶ The seal itself was probably carved sometime in the fifth century B.C.E.⁷

Young in his initial publication of the seal describes its excavation context:⁸

The extent of the Mosaic Building and the elaborateness of its decoration in mosaic and tile prove that it was no common house. It was the successor, moreover, of an even larger and extremely massively built structure which cannot have been other than a public building. Built on the same site, the Mosaic Building undoubtedly took over the function which its predecessor had served. What that function was we cannot be certain, though the finding of a beautifully and precisely carved cylinder seal of carnelian [*sic*] in the pillaged debris of its foundations may be significant. ...Thus it seems quite possible that the Mosaic Building may have been the official residence of the representative of the Great King at Gordion.

The Mosaic Building was indeed grand; recent re-examination of the excavation records by M. R. Glendinning shows that the complex had a large (11 by 17 m)

stone-paved forecourt with a stepped and colonnaded porch on one side that measured fully 4.25 by 12 m (Fig. 3).⁹

The porch was paved with a pebble mosaic, from which the building takes its name, showing a geometric meander pattern in blue, yellow, and white. A door at the back of the porch led to a room that was paved in the same pattern for most of its floor. Glendinning concludes his description of the room: “a square area against the back wall is void of mosaic, suggesting the presence of something like a throne dais, altar or statue base.”¹⁰ Seal 100 comes from a later, disturbed context, having been found amongst the stones left in a robber’s trench that removed one of the walls of the Mosaic Building, so the connection to the building suggested by Young’s commentary cannot be substantiated.¹¹ But the probable date of its carving (see below) places it contemporary with the building itself, which—as mentioned—has been dated on the basis of external criteria to the fifth or fourth century B.C.E.

The seal is of particular interest for a number of reasons. It is the most elaborate of the Achaemenid period seals and sealings found at Gordion, and the only inscribed example. It shows heartland Achaemenid religious and kingly iconography, but it is carved in one of

6 For a suggested date of the second quarter of the fifth century for the Mosaic Building, see Glendinning 1996, 23. For the late fifth and late fourth centuries, see Sams 1994, 825 and Roller 1991, 134 n. 37.

7 See below and discussion in Dusinberre 2005, cat. no. 33; Gordion fieldbook 30, 133. Found May 24, 1952.

8 Young 1953, 14, fig. 10.

9 Glendinning 1996, 23–24.

10 Glendinning 1996, 24.

11 Fieldbook 30, 133.

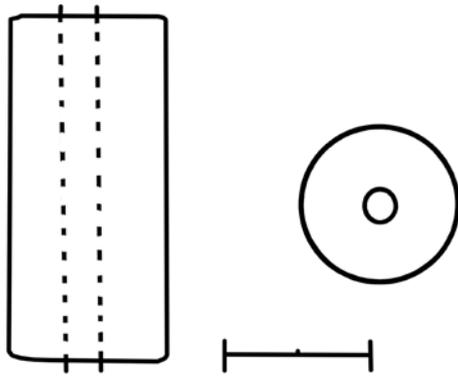


FIG. 4. Gordion 2342 SS 100, author's drawing.

the so-called Graeco-Persian styles, one that is common at Sardis but very rare at Gordion. And it is inscribed in Aramaic, the administrative lingua franca of the Achaemenid empire, perhaps by someone who was ill acquainted with that tongue (see below).

Seal 100 thus provides insight into the cultural milieu that existed at Gordion during the Achaemenid period, suggesting that the Achaemenid presence at Gordion coincides with a change in seal type and iconography.¹² It demonstrates the presence of iconography from the imperial heartland, united with elite provincial style, at this site. This is of particular interest when Gordion is held up in apposition to such sites as Sardis, Memphis, or Daskyleion, sites that served as primary imperial satrapal court installations.¹³ Gordion, once the capital of mighty Phrygia, was at this time a large and prosperous town that saw much commerce with areas elsewhere within and without the empire.¹⁴ It may have been the residence of elite personages, a regional fortified setting that did not have the status of a satrapal center but still replicated at least some of the status markers of the high court.¹⁵

THE SEAL

Gordion's Seal 100 is a cylinder seal of dark red orange translucent agate, drilled through the center for suspension (Fig. 4).¹⁶ Intact except for a few chips, it is 0.024

m long, with a diameter of 0.011 m. The ends are flat, although it may at one time have had caps. Its imagery consists of an impressive worship scene that takes up about three-quarters of the seal's circumference. An Aramaic inscription partially fills the terminal field.

At top and bottom of the seal are bud-and-lotus borders, with the floral elements facing away from the center of the scene (Fig. 5). The border at the top was apparently carved beginning in the empty field just to the left of the central scene and then carved to the right all the way around the seal (that is, clockwise on the seal, to the right on the impression), for a slight misjudgment of the final measurements led the carver to squeeze the buds and put two lotus flowers right next to each other at the end of the circle. The bottom border may have been begun under the rightmost sphinx, based again on a slight crowding at that point in the bud-and-lotus motif. The bud-and-lotus border is exceptionally rare on Achaemenid seals; its appearance here may be related to the overall message of the seal's iconography, as will be shown.¹⁷

In the main scene, two heraldic figures frame a tripartite central element (Pl. D1). A figure emerging from a winged disk hovers facing right over a slightly attenuated altar, which is in turn above a half-length figure facing left, inscribed within a disk. The half figure in the disk at the bottom of the element wears the Persian court robe and a crown with five vertical elements suggesting crenellations. Small squares may suggest bosses on the crown. His hair is coiffed in a bun at the back, like a king's, and he has a beard. He raises his left hand horizontally, with thumb on top; in the right, he holds a lotus flower.

Resting on the circle of the disk is a fire altar, with a striated vertical pedestal resting on two horizontal lines.¹⁸ The top element of the fire altar resembles a sim-

Dusingberre 2005, no. 33. As is customary, descriptions are based on the impression rather than the seal itself.

17 The bud-and-lotus border finds its only parallel known to me in the sealings from the satrapal palace of Egypt in Memphis: Petrie et al. 1910, no. 46, preserves a border like Seal 100, if somewhat more ornate and with the floral elements pointing in toward the central imagery rather than out, as on the Gordion seal. For a very fine color image, see <http://www.digitalegypt.ucl.ac.uk/memphis/archive/uc58385.gif> (accessed March 2007).

18 I call this a fire altar following Moorey 1979, 220, 223, fig. 2A. Margaret Root raises an interesting question of interpretation, however (pers. comm. August 2005): could it be that we are meant to see the figure emergent from the winged symbol as emanating from the altar in some sense? The altar on PFS 11*, discussed below, is quite similar in form to the one on this seal—and it also has no flame. There are three Persepolis Fortification seals that do show altars with clear flames, to be published in Garrison and Root forthcoming a, PFS 75 (discussed below), PFS 578s, and PFS 790. In each of these cases, the altar on which the flame sits is much like those on the royal tombs at Naqsh-e Rostam,

12 Dusingberre 2005, 12–14 and 24–26.

13 For Sardis, see Dusingberre 2003, esp. 196–217; for Memphis, see Petrie et al. 1910, 41 and pl. 36, and Petrie 1917, esp. pl. 57; for Daskyleion, see Kaptan 2002, 1–27.

14 See, e.g., DeVries 1997, 447, and 2005, esp. 36, 44.

15 For the extent and prosperity of Gordion during the Achaemenid period, see Voigt and Young 1999, 220–36.

16 The seal is agate, not carnelian as initially thought. This description and some of the discussion of comparanda are adapted from



FIG. 5. Gordion 2342 SS 100, two views of seal.

ple crenellated altar with solid steps. It consists of facing blocky parts, with a narrow V between them and ledges to the inside that form a kind of rectangular cup in the middle. Above this is a bearded figure facing right, rising out of a disk with wings and a tail. Feathers are indicated by vertical lines on the wings and tail. The figure again has hair coiffed in a kingly bun, but his crown is made up of a rectangle with four short lines protruding from its top rather than of vertical striations. As was the case in the bottom figure's crown, small squares may suggest bosses. He raises his right hand to the right, again with thumb on top. No left hand is shown, and clothing is not indicated.

To the left and right of the central scene stand worshippers facing inwards, standing on sphinxes that act as pedestal animals (Fig. 6).¹⁹ The worshippers wear embossed crowns indicated by a horizontal line with five vertical lines sticking up from it. The vertical lines may represent crenellations. Their hair is caught back in a bun at the nape of the neck; their beards are long and pointed. Their noses are straight, their lips are indicated by two lines below the nose, and their eyes are shown prominently by a single drill hole. Each worshipper wears a Persian court robe. They hold their right hands up, holding a lotus blossom toward their noses. Their left hands are down, with thumb on top, holding something thin, flat, and about twice as long as their hands; this may perhaps be a flat dish for libations, such as a phiale. Each figure stands with the leg closest to the viewer on the upraised wing of a sphinx, while the farther leg is raised and rests on the sphinx's crown. Slight crowding of the image at the left suggests the figured imagery on the seal was carved beginning with the cen-

with the top shown as an open platform for the fire. I do not have a neat answer to this problem but continue to consider this rendition a fire altar like the others illustrated in Moorey 1979. For actual fire altars, see Stronach 1966.

19 For the importance attached to pedestal animals and their indication of the high status of seal users, see Dusinberre 1997a, 106–9.

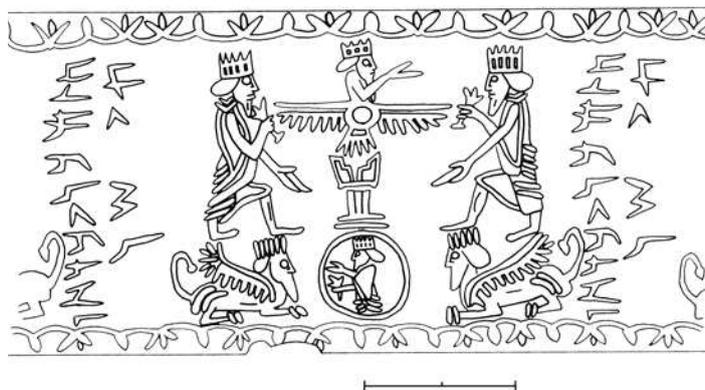


FIG. 6. Gordion 2342 SS 100, author's drawing of impression.

tral, tripartite element, moving to the right and ending at the left: the lotus blossom clutched by the kingly figure at the left is so crowded that it almost touches his beard, rather than being held aloft under the nose like that held by the figure at the right.²⁰ There is ample room behind the left figures: this miscalculation involves the placement of the left figures relative to the central element.

The sphinxes lie facing in, wearing crowns formed by vertical lines protruding upwards that may indicate feathers.²¹ The sphinx on the left has a crown with six striations, while that on the right has five. Both sphinxes are bearded and have faces and hairstyles like those of the figures standing on them. They lie directly on the bud-and-lotus border pattern. Only one hind leg and one foreleg are shown on each sphinx. Their tails are curled up over their haunches, with a slight thickening at the end; the haunches are clearly picked out with two lines at the juncture with the body. Front and hind paws are shown by two parallel lines that suggest claws.

In the terminal field is an Aramaic inscription in two lines, reading downward from the top of the seal, right to left, as is usual.²² It is carved directly against the right sphinx's tail, as if the carver were afraid of running out of room. This led to another spatial miscalculation, so that the second line of the inscription has more than enough room allocated to it. An erasure on the second line, after the first two letters, may suggest the carver was copying a written inscription handed to him—and

20 The worshippers and the half-length figures are in tiny form all wearing crenellated crowns with bosses. Such crowns are known from various other seals, as well: from Persepolis, for instance, PFS 7*, 79, and 301 all show the hero with this type of crown. See Garrison and Root 2001, nos. 4, 83, and 54 respectively. See also Anderson 2002, 178–82.

21 Cf. the feathered (?) crown worn by the sphinx on the reliefs of the palace of Darius at Persepolis in southwestern Iran (Schmidt 1953, pl. 127).

22 Charles E. Jones, pers. comm., March 2004.

may not have read Aramaic himself. This may be significant: the person who carved the seal with such virtuosity, incorporating central Achaemenid iconography and ideology and using a highly charged Achaemenid hegemonic style (see below), may have been unfamiliar himself with the language that was the lingua franca of the Achaemenid administration. Perhaps the language was not widely used in the part of the empire where the seal was carved? Or perhaps it suggests the carver spoke a local language but not Aramaic? Or, perhaps, he simply had a slip of the hand or a bad day.

The inscription, carved in the negative on the cylinder so that it reads positive in the impression, reads:

htm bn' br ztw
h(.) [X(?)] sn

"Seal of Bn', son of Ztw, (hyashana)."²³

These are names that are not otherwise attested in the Aramaic inscriptions of Asia Minor.²⁴ The last word may perhaps be an indication of office, or it might be a name; Pierre Briant, recapitulating from Lemaire and Lozachmeur, suggests the reconstruction "Seal of Banaya son of Zatuvaahayashna."²⁵ These are Iranian names and, if they are accurately rendered, may link the seal owner by name as well as iconography to the Persian heartland.

STYLE

Gordion's Seal 100 is carved in one of the various styles described as "Graeco-Persian," with deep, flat, broad volumes that are precise but unmodeled, transitions between volumes often indicated by lines rather than modeling, and undisguised use of the drill for clear, rather thick lines and drill holes. I have argued elsewhere, based on seals from Sardis, that this style should be identified with Achaemenid Anatolia, perhaps more specifically western Anatolia.²⁶ The seal found at Gordion and a number of the sealed tags from Daskyleion

make the picture more complex and demonstrate that Achaemenid Phrygia, as well as Achaemenid Lydia, should be woven into the argument.²⁷ But the issue is significantly more knotted than this glib observation might suggest.

In her perceptive article of 2002, J. E. Gates argued not only that the "persistent and tortured use of the term 'Graeco-Persian'" should be abandoned, but that "style... was one element in a tool kit for communicating a fluid notion of identity in the Achaemenid empire."²⁸ She dissected notions of "Persianness" and "Greekness," highlighting the ways in which these ethnic determinants obscure useful discussion of artifacts as culturally situated and cultures as situationally fluid. She made a compelling case for regarding artistic style as an inadequate indicator of ethnicity, for the relationship between style and ethnicity is not simple or direct. In most cases we have no idea if seals of "Graeco-Persian" style were carved by Greeks for Persians, by Persians for Persians, or by artisans of completely different ethnic and social identities for patrons of equally unknown and/or fluid identities. The seal from Gordion, like seals from Sardis, shows the importance of considering seals within a relational framework, rather than simply as products in a particular style or as works by artists of particular ethnic heritage or self-ascription.²⁹ A quick review of the seals from Sardis will illustrate this point.³⁰

The majority of the Achaemenid seals from Sardis were also produced in one of the styles that has been called "Graeco-Persian."³¹ The seals from Sardis carved in this style are almost all linked with heartland Achaemenid iconography and indeed often with iconography

23 I am grateful to Charles E. Jones, of the Oriental Institute, for providing this translation and a helpful confirmation of names and reconstructions in July 2005. A transliteration is also provided at <http://www.achemenet.com/pdf/arameens/phrygie01.pdf> (accessed March 2007), which reads "HTM BNY BR ZTW HY SN." That source suggests that the paleographic evidence would imply a date in the fifth century for the carving of the seal.

24 See the archive collected on <http://www.achemenet.com> (accessed March 2007).

25 See <http://www.achemenet.com/pdf/arameens/phrygie01.pdf> (accessed April 2008). See Briant 1997, 24; Lemaire and Lozachmeur 1996, 107. For the suggestion the word might be a title, see Collon 1987, 90.

26 Dusinger 1997a, 110 and 115, and 2003, 163–64, 167, 171.

27 For the Daskyleion sealings, see Kaptan 2002.

28 Gates 2002, 105.

29 Dusinger 1997a, 104–105, Gates 2002, 118.

30 As Gates emphasizes (2002, 119), the fact that many of the "Graeco-Persian" seals are unprovenanced has previously crippled much intelligent discussion of the style. Even of those "Graeco-Persian" seals used by Moorey in his discussion of ritual and worship on Achaemenid seals, only that from Gordion has an excavated context (1979, 223). A similar situation describes the few inscribed "Graeco-Persian" seals, most of which are inscribed in Lydian (Boardman 1970, and 1998b). In order to understand the significance and impact of the style, it is essential to develop a discussion based on those seals with proven context. We are fortunate indeed that Gordion's Seal 100 and the seals from Sardis allow us to weave this discussion into the ongoing discourse being developed by such scholars as D. Kaptan, working with the Daskyleion sealings, and J. E. Gates, working with the Persepolis sealings. See Kaptan 2002, esp. 13–27, and Gates 2002, esp. 110–20. For the status of at least one seal user at Sardis, see the arguments in Dusinger 1997a, 112–14.

31 For the Sardian seals, see Dusinger 1997a and 2003, esp. 158–71 and 264–83. See also Curtis 1925.

associated with high status. They provide compelling support for the suggestion that this style should be seen not as any kind of ethnic indicator, but rather as a newly crafted style designed to indicate the elite status of the user in the Achaemenid hierarchy.³²

The seals from Sardis demonstrate the cohesion of the Achaemenid elite and the adoption of Achaemenid imperial ideology at this satrapal capital (Fig. 7, Pl. D2). At Sardis, we repeatedly see an important phenomenon: official iconography rendered in a specific style, with local tastes and preferences perhaps reflected in the selection of imperial images.³³ This provides support for the suggestion that we rename this style at last. I would like to suggest “Achaemenid hegemonic” as a name that is neither ethnically nor geographically situated but rather emphasizes the meaning of this style in its various and fluid sociopolitical contexts.

If, as I have argued elsewhere, the style should be seen as a newly composed and socially symbolic art of empire, perhaps with specific geographic reference to western Anatolia, it demonstrates at Sardis the network of artistic and sociopolitical connections that united the Persian and Persianizing elite. This polyethnic group of patrons at Sardis clearly had different options to choose among when they had their seals made. The preponderance of the “Achaemenid hegemonic” style here is therefore significant. The observation takes on added significance when we consider the frequent use on seals of this style of iconography linked directly to imperial iconography of the Achaemenid heartland. The seals of Sardis thus become real citations of power, an affirmation of connections to the Achaemenid elite across the empire expressed in a style that can be linked to the new regime and its supporters wherever they happened to be.

Gordion's Seal 100 demonstrates that seals of this style were not confined to western Anatolia alone, or to such maritime entrepôts as Kertch, on the Black Sea.³⁴ It demonstrates that seals of this style could be inscribed not just in Lydian but also in Aramaic. It shows that the artistic style might provide a semiotic link between the Achaemenid elite at sites of great satrapal import, like Sardis and Daskyleion, and those at sites of lesser impe-



FIG. 7. Seals from Sardis: modern impressions.

rial significance, such as Gordion. Thus, these excavated seals carved in the “Achaemenid hegemonic” style demonstrate the nuanced connections that bound together the Achaemenid elite at its ruling centers—and also the strong impact of Achaemenid hegemony on second-tier cities within the cosmopolitan and polyethnic empire.

ICONOGRAPHY

It is with these important concepts in mind that we now turn to consider the seal's imagery. In this discussion, I seek to situate the seal not within an ethnic context, but within the ideological and practical landscapes of Achaemenid worship and ritual. The seal found at Gordion was created by an artist for a patron who lived in a deeply pluralistic Achaemenid imperial milieu—pluralistic in terms of religion, society, tradition, and artistic creation. Its style is certainly intended to convey meaning and import within its social context, perhaps particularly in Anatolia. At the same time, the language of its inscription and the specificity of its imagery forge links with heartland Achaemenid ideology that highlight the complexity of the social mix that characterized Gordion at this time.

32 Dusinberre 1997a, 109–15, and 2003, 158–71 and 264–83.

33 The large number of seals found (34 in total) is partly a reflection of the enormous number of tombs excavated at Sardis (well over a thousand). It is particularly interesting, therefore, that, to my knowledge, no seals found at Sardis predate the Achaemenid period. For the Sardian tombs of the Achaemenid period, see Dusinberre 2003, 128–57 and 239–63; for the tombs in general, see McLaughlin 1985.

34 See illustrations in Boardman 1970, pls. 1 (Kertch), 2–8 (western Anatolia); pl. 4 includes one seal from the Syrian coast and one from the Great Bliznitsa tumulus, while pl. 5 includes two seals from Egypt).

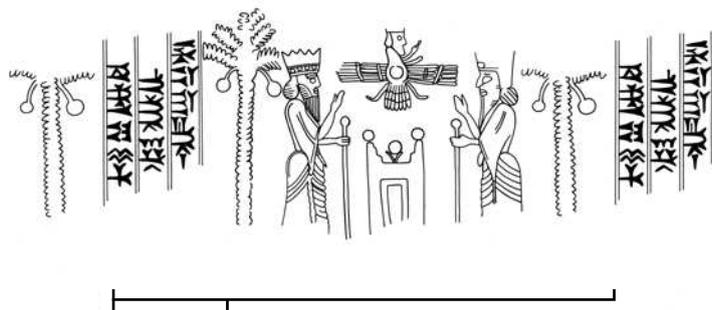


FIG. 8. Collated drawing of the impression left by PFS 11*.

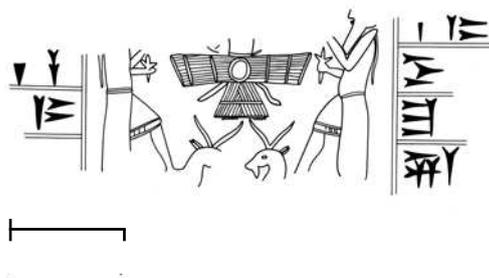


FIG. 9. Collated drawing of the impression left by PFS 1567*.

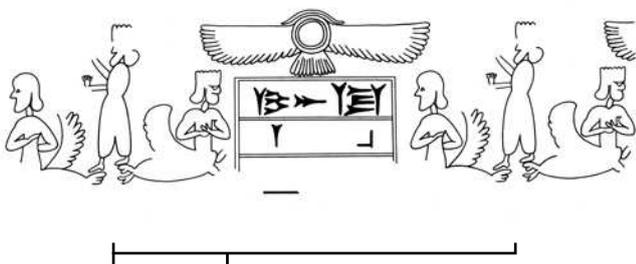


FIG. 10. Collated drawing of the impression left by PFS 389*.

Worshippers

Worship scenes showing heraldic human or anthropomorphic figures and a central figure in a winged disk had a long history in the Near East, most recently expressed before the Achaemenid period in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian seals.³⁵ In the Achaemenid period, heraldic worshippers are repeated in glyptic art to a remarkable degree, so that the seal from Gordion may be seen to fit into a kind of koine featuring the kingly figure that was reiterated throughout the empire. An overview of similar seals from just one excavated heartland corpus will serve to make the point here.

35 See, e.g., examples collected in Paley 1986, esp. figs. 7–10, and for Achaemenid period Neo-Babylonian style seals, Nunn 2000, no. 266 and discussion.

The Persepolis Fortification seals, known from impressions on the Persepolis Fortification tablets, provide an enormous corpus of glyptic evidence for worship scenes from the heartland of the Achaemenid empire for comparison with this cylinder seal from rural Anatolia.³⁶ One of the best parallels for Gordion's Seal 100 is PFS 11*, a royal name seal of Darius I, with its mirror-image kingly figures worshipping at a central element that includes an altar and a figure in the winged disk, with date palms and an inscription acting as terminal (Fig. 8).³⁷

The balance and stability of such a heraldically arranged image of worship are emphasized through the frequency of its use in Achaemenid glyptic. Thus, for instance, we see PFS 1567*, the seal of an important official known to Herodotus as Aspathines (Fig. 9). This seal was replaced by another seal Aspathines used on the Persepolis Treasury tablets, PTS 14*, with similar iconography but in a different style: it shows two figures standing on pedestal animals worshipping before a half figure in a winged disk, while an inscription acts as terminal.³⁸ PFS 82* also shows the balancing images of two figures on pedestal animals, facing a figure in a winged disk, who also hovers above a pedestal animal.³⁹

Other Fortification seals show pedestal animals in worship scenes that include only one worshipper. PFS 211 has both worshipper and deity on pedestal animals, with a winged disk as terminal. PFS 389* has a figure standing on two pedestal creatures; both the worshipper and the pedestals themselves make gestures of wor-

36 I am deeply grateful to Margaret Cool Root and Mark B. Garrison for allowing me to include discussion and illustrations of the Persepolis Fortification seals in this article. Tables listing the tablets on which particular seals were impressed may be found in Garrison 2000, with ongoing updates published on www.achemenet.com. Translations of the texts of those tablets are available in Hallock 1969. The information available today about seal users at Persepolis, as gleaned from the use of a seal in this archive, is collected in Garrison and Root 2001, "Introduction."

37 See Garrison 2000, fig. 18, Root 2003, fig. 5, and see also the worship scenes illustrated in figs. 3, 4, and 8. Achaemenid religion has been discussed at length and presents ongoing problems to scholars; recent evidence is summarized in Briant 1996, 105–6, 253–65, 567–70, 695–98, 941–43, 1024–27, and Briant 1997, 71–77. As is usual in the discussion of seals, an "s" at the end of a PFS number indicates a stamp seal, while an asterisk denotes an inscribed seal. All drawings of Persepolis Fortification seals include Garrison and Root's conventional scale bar indicating one centimeter at left as well as the length of one complete roll of the cylinder seal.

38 For these seals, see Garrison 1998, 117–26.

39 See n. 37 above and Garrison 2000, fig. 18, for PFS*; fig. 21 for PFS 68, with heraldic figures at a deity surrounded by a nimbus; fig. 22 for PFS 389*, with a kingly figure on heraldic pedestal animals facing a winged disk over an inscription; and 141 n. 60 for queries and references concerning Achaemenid religion.

ship before a winged disk over an Aramaic inscription (Fig. 10).⁴⁰

These comparisons from Persepolis demonstrate that Gordion's Seal 100, with its balanced and ordered composition, finds reiterated parallels to its kingly worshippers in heartland Achaemenid glyptic art. The mirrored kings worshipping before a central element are often associated with exceptionally high-status glyptic imagery at Persepolis. The notion of the king worshipping at a fire altar with a figure emerging from the winged disk overhead is also repeated in monumental art on the royal tombs at Naqsh-e Rostam, where the king is shown only once, but in an exceptionally prominent position and in the highly charged, symbolic action of worshipping before a fire altar.⁴¹

Even the objects the kings hold may have meaning. The lotus blossom is ubiquitous on the reliefs at Persepolis and is held by the king himself on the famous Treasury reliefs that once formed the central element of the Apadana staircases; it also features in the reliefs at Naqsh-e Rostam.⁴² In these cases, it seems to represent or be associated with kingly piety. The presence of the phialai on the Gordion seal is particularly interesting, given the interpretative issues concerning the use of phialai as drinking vessels at the Achaemenid court and their alternative use in Greece as libation vessels.⁴³ The most recent interpretation of the inscription on the four phialai of Artaxerxes translates the self-reference in the inscription as a "wine-drinking cup."⁴⁴ The two functions of the phiale, drinking wine and pouring it as a libation, are not mutually exclusive, and the presence on the famous stele from Egypt of a Persian figure in courtly raiment holding a phiale suggests these cups might be used for libations in the Achaemenid world as well as the Greek. The lotus and phiale may thus be read as symbols of the king's piety on the Gordion seal, underscoring and emphasizing the worshipful and righteous nature of this mirrored image.

Altogether the images on Gordion's Seal 100 are exceptionally charged. The seal's mirrored worshippers on pedestal animals, with their lotus blossoms and their outstretched phialai, are particularly potent images of worship, of balance, of harmony, and ultimately of cosmic control. The connections discussed here link the

owner of this seal, with its worshipping kingly figures, to the uppermost echelon of the Achaemenid elite—to those in the innermost circle of the king's supporters, to a royal name seal, and even to the king himself.

The Sphinxes

In the Achaemenid period, the repertoire of anthropomorphic figures performing a ritual function below a winged symbol was expanded to include sphinxes as well as humans, not only in monumental relief sculpture as at Persepolis or on the glazed bricks at Susa, but also in glyptic art.⁴⁵ Indeed, it is clear that sphinxes often serve a specific function: they seem to symbolize cosmic harmony in Achaemenid art.⁴⁶ They are manifestations of the Light and guardians of the truth and harmony brought about by appropriate balance. In this manner, the pedestal animals that support the worshipping kings on this seal reflect and reify both their actions and their consequences in a virtuosic artistic shorthand.

The Central Element: Figure Emergent from the Winged Disk

The figure emergent from the winged disk is a very common one indeed in Achaemenid worship scenes. This image is traditionally associated with the god Ahuramazda, although the interpretation is a matter of dispute.⁴⁷ Some scholars have argued for an identification with the god Chvarnah, or Fate.⁴⁸ It is my own sense that the seal from Gordion supports the association with Ahuramazda, the Zoroastrian god of Light and Truth, traditionally associated with the Sun. As we will see, the other elements of the central emblem on this seal are associated with the Light in its manifestations as fire and moonlight: the figure emerging from the winged disk at the top is therefore most probably to

45 The scenes at Persepolis are found on the stair facade reliefs from the Palace of Darius and that of Xerxes, from the Council Hall and the Apadana. For Persepolis, see Schmidt 1953; for Susa, see Muscarella 1992. For glyptic examples, see, e.g., von der Osten 1934, no. 457; Nunn 2000, no. 269; Kaptan 2002, DS 5; and for the Murashu seals, Bregstein 1993, nos. 496, 497, 499, 502–5; and Legrain 1925, nos. 953, 954. See also Dusinger 1997a, 116–17, with discussion and references; and now the Persepolis Fortification seals, Garrison and Root forthcoming a, PFS 69, 746, 848, and 1678.

46 Dusinger 1997a, 116–17.

47 Garrison and Root 2001, 69, summarize, esp. n. 2, "Root (1979) advocates the identification with Ahuramazda, reinforced, for example, by Lecoq 1984 and Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1993 but disputed most notably by Shahbazi 1980. Brief reviews of the problem include Kaim 1991; D'Amore 1992, pp. 210–11." See also Jacobs 1991, 59–65.

48 See, e.g., discussion in Jacobs 1987, 230–43; Jacobs and Nagel 1989, 337–89.

40 Garrison 2000, fig. 22.

41 For Naqsh-e Rostam, see Schmidt 1970, 77–118.

42 For the king holding a lotus at Persepolis, see, e.g., Schmidt 1953, pls. 96–99, 105–7, 121–23, 138–39, 179–80.

43 Gunter and Root 1998, 23–29.

44 Gunter and Root 1998, 23.

be associated with the Sun. Ahuramazda was the main deity of Achaemenid court life, judging from imperial inscriptions, and it is not at all surprising to find him represented here in this scene of kingly worship and communication.⁴⁹

The seals with winged disks (both with and without emergent figures) from Persepolis alone are too numerous and nuanced to discuss in this context; M. B. Garrison is currently preparing the detailed discussion that they merit.⁵⁰ Another figure in a winged disk, on a conoid stamp from Troy, shows that Gordion was not the only site in Anatolia to embrace this overtly Achaemenidizing imagery.⁵¹ Moreover, a complex seal from Daskyleion, DS 14, combines many of the elements of the Gordion seal: a winged disk over a half figure in a disk over a crowned, bearded sphinx—not, as on the Gordion seal, with heraldic kingly worshippers, but with an archer in court dress shooting across the central element towards a rampant, winged, horned lion-griffin.⁵² Thus we see that the figures on the seal from Gordion, and the inclusion of the figure emerging from the winged disk, fit into a kind of Achaemenid koine with parallels not just in Persia itself but also elsewhere in Anatolia.

The appearance of the half figure emerging from the winged disk in the context of Gordion is important. Its presence on this seal—with its heartland Persian imagery, its lingua franca Aramaic inscription, and its “Achaemenid hegemonic” style—is particularly interesting. Indeed, the worship scene here seems intentionally to combine in one image many of the most characteristic forms of Achaemenid religious portrayal, perhaps in a self-consciously overt assertion of affiliation.

The Central Element: Figure in Celestial Disk

The figure in the disk at the bottom of the central element has a complex group of associations. The celestial divinity of the figure is made clear by the impressions left by PFS 105s, a stamp seal that has a part human, part animal figure in the “Atlas” pose holding up the half figure in the disk (Fig. 11).⁵³ Floral elements flank the figures and suggest fecundity. The implication is that the gods, and worship of the gods, lead to a fertile existence.

Interestingly, Gordion is not the only Anatolian site to see imagery of this nature during the Achaemenid period: Daskyleion has also produced a worship scene at a celestial disk.⁵⁴ The identification of the figure may be made clear by comparison with other seals.

The arrangement of the figural scene on the Gordion seal has close parallels. A seal from Susa shows a figure in a winged disk above the figure in a disk, with worshipping sphinxes (Egyptianizing rather than Achaemenidizing).⁵⁵ The two figures on this seal may represent the Sun and Moon, respectively.⁵⁶ A seal from the Murashu archive shows a winged disk over a half figure in a disk, with rampant horses on either side;⁵⁷ two others also preserve winged disks, with one showing it between mirrored sphinxes.⁵⁸ Unexcavated seals or seals with uncertain provenance also combine the figure emergent from winged disk or a simple winged disk with the half figure in the celestial disk.⁵⁹ One example has winged bulls instead of sphinxes acting as pedestals.⁶⁰ Thus the association of winged disk with wingless disk is attested by many examples.

A large number of Achaemenid period seals show a crescent moon (sometimes identified with the god Sin) instead of a disk, and such crescent moons are often combined with elements of the imagery on the Gordion seal. For instance, a strikingly large number of seals inscribed in Aramaic also show worship of figures in crescent moons.⁶¹ Other worship scenes combine a winged disk and crescent.⁶²

The comparanda suggest, therefore, that the figure in the celestial disk on Gordion’s Seal 100 is meant to represent the Moon.⁶³ And this realization reaffirms the notion that the figure hovering overhead represents the Sun, or Ahuramazda, balancing the Moon below.

49 For the Achaemenid inscriptions, see Lecoq 1997.

50 Garrison forthcoming.

51 Published in Miller-Collet and Root 1997.

52 Kaptan 2002, vol. 2, 62, pls. 83, 84.

53 For the Atlas pose, see Root 1979 esp. 150, Dusinger 2000, 159, Dusinger 2004, 78–79

54 See Kaptan 2002, DS 5 (Vol. 2, 55–57 and pls. 61–64), and for a combination of winged disk with figure in solar disk, DS 14 (vol. 2, 62 and pls. 83, 84).

55 Demange 1997, fig. 9.

56 Demange 1997, 43.

57 Bregstein 1993, no. 202.

58 Bregstein 1993, nos. 203, 204; 204 has sphinxes. See also Legrain 1925, no. 955.

59 Porada 1948, nos. 817, 818; also Ward 1909, 275 and Ward 1910, 1134; Collon 1987, no. 574; and Dalton 1964, no. 114.

60 Keel and Uehlinger 1990, pl. 4.

61 See, e.g., Avigad 1997, nos. 767, 779, 795, 803, 816, 838, 856; Vattioni 1971, 44, 45; Ledrain 1892, 143; Delaporte 1920, 733, 736; Pilcher 1921; and Bordreuil 1986, 305–7.

62 See, e.g., Avigad 1997, no. 783; Buchanan and Moorey 1988, no. 371.

63 I am grateful to Bruno Jacobs, pers. comm., September 2005, for confirming this suggestion.



FIG. 11. Collated drawing of the impression left by PFS 105s.

The Central Element: Fire Altar

In 1979, P. R. S. Moorey published an article suggesting that Achaemenid seals might be valuable in considering aspects of Achaemenid worship and ritual.⁶⁴ He used them to expand the previously rather narrower perspectives through which the religion(s) of the Achaemenid empire had been seen. In his discussion of fire altars on seals, he pointed to the eclectic diversity of iconography, a range of imagery that showed not only several different styles of altar but also several different types of worship (including the sacrifice of whole beasts at the altar).⁶⁵ At that time, the Persepolis sealings were not available for study, but they underscore the importance of his comments about the diversity of worship. The Gordion seal, which Moorey includes in his discussion,⁶⁶ is the most complex of the worship scenes with fire altars known to me.

It is significant that the altar on Gordion's Seal 100 connects the two celestial figures. The altar has been attenuated and is decorated with more vertical striations or flutings than Moorey's other examples. Indeed, it resembles the columns of the Apadana at Persepolis, which hold aloft the roof with double-animal capitals that represent cosmic figures.⁶⁷ On the Gordion seal, the fire altar plays a similar role, serving as a column that unites the celestial figures with a strong vertical element while raising the Sun aloft. The connection to the columns is suggestive. The fire altar is here the connective element between the celestial Lights of day and of night, the Sun and Moon. Light is the element that can be raised, controlled, maintained, and shaped by human effort.

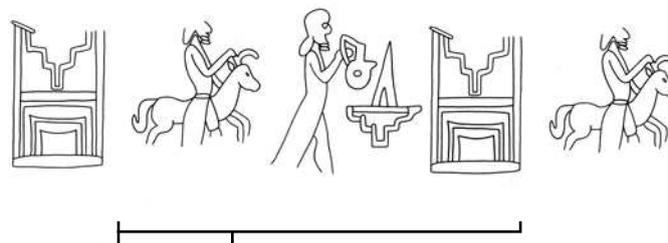


FIG. 12. Collated drawing of the impression left by PFS 75.

Ritual

The scene of worship on the seal from Gordion is complex and nuanced. It may suggest that libations had ritual functions in ceremonies other than banqueting. Gordion's Seal 100 falls into the category of seals that show rituals for which we have little or no other evidence. The Fortification seals give an indication of the variety of ritual that might be found in Persepolitan glyptic. On PFS 75, for instance, one figure apparently pours a libation at a fire altar, while another brings a horned quadruped as if for sacrifice (Fig. 12).⁶⁸ PFS 91 shows direct interaction between worshipper and worshipped: a figure in the winged disk, hovering over a pedestal figure comprised of a double-protome horned lion like the column capitals at Persepolis, hands over a studded ring to a worshipper; a goat acts as terminal. The continuity of Assyrianizing imagery is demonstrated by PFS 310, with Assyrianizing winged genies at worship by a tree below a figure in the winged disk held up by two figures in the Achaemenid "Atlas" pose.⁶⁹

CONCLUSION: WORSHIP AND HEGEMONY IN THE ACHAEMENID EMPIRE

The seal from Gordion thus combines the figure in the winged disk, a fire altar, and a figure in a celestial disk to make a tripartite image that forms the center of homage. The heraldic arrangement of the worshipping figures creates a visual sense of balance. It seems that imperially charged Achaemenid art at all scales sought to invoke this sense of balance and "rightness" and to suggest that appropriate worship—and appropriate kingliness—were responsible for creating it. Indeed, the king in Achaemenid art maintains and represents harmony

64 Moorey 1979.

65 Moorey 1979, 220–23. For real fire altars, see Stronach 1966 and 1967.

66 Moorey 1979, fig. 2A.

67 For the significance of the Persepolitan columns, see Root 1979, 86–94.

68 Garrison 2000, 142, fig. 19.

69 For the seals, see Garrison and Root 2001 with references, and Garrison and Root forthcoming a and forthcoming b. I am grateful to Margaret Root for making available to me preliminary drawings of the collated seal impressions from the entire corpus.

and balance on earth.⁷⁰ The lotus blossom, known from many other images, is neatly balanced by the bud-and-lotus border at top and bottom of this seal. The phiale is less usual but should not surprise us, given the diversity of ritual attested on Achaemenid seals. The pedestal animals that raise the kingly figures aloft probably indicate the high status of the seal's owner.⁷¹ As sphinxes, they underscore and support the overall message of the seal with its indications of cosmic and earthly balance and harmony. The imagery of the seal thus makes a unified and powerful claim for the benefit of Achaemenid rule, the harmony of Achaemenid religion, and the benevolent power of the Achaemenid king.

The central element of this seal is a combination of images representing the different manifestations of the Light: the Sun, Fire, and the Moon. The celestial figures on the Gordion seal face in opposite directions, one towards each of the heraldic kings who make gestures of worship towards them. And the king figures, too, are supported by symbols of the Light. The beards

and hairstyles of all human heads on the seal, and the crowns of worshippers and deities, connect them to the king. The nature of all the non-kingly figures proclaim them representations of the Light. And the interaction of the kingly figures with all the other elements of the seal's imagery show them to be in worshipful communication and harmonious balance with the symbols of the Light.

Seal 100 from Gordion represents a worship scene that combines the kingly figure who maintains the harmony of the world with the sphinxes that evoke cosmic balance, both worshipping at a triad of images that represent the Light. It shows the Light at the center of evenly balanced heaven and earth. Its imagery suggests that it is the Achaemenid king who maintains harmony and balance. And interestingly, its style and its inscription intimate that it is the Achaemenid elite who bring this harmony and balance to the various regions of the empire. Indeed, the very strength of the empire in its heyday may well have been founded in its assertive incorporation of just such secondary layers of establishments as Gordion, and the families who ran them, into the ideology as well as the administration of the Achaemenid empire.

70 Root 1979, 131–61, and Dusingberre 2004, 78–79.

71 Dusingberre 1997a, 106–9.