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Circles of Light and Achaemenid Hegemonic Style in Gordion’s Seal 100

Elspeth 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

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.

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
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 pe-
riod. They also demonstrate that Achaemenid ideology
and practices penetrated to less administratively signi-
ficant sites in the empire, such as Gordion, as well as to
important satrapal sites like Sardis. This study will fo-
cus 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
evacuated by G. H. McFadden from the Citadel Mound
at Gordion. Building A, a large, multiroomed build-
ing 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 dis-
turbed 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). 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. 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. The
most recent date suggested for the building is the second

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

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

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).

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.” Seal 100 comes from a later, disturbed context, having been found amongst 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. 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

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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.


11 Fieldbook 30, 133.
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.\textsuperscript{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 considered in the context of other imperial sites that served as primary imperial satrapal centers.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{14} It may have been the residence of elite personages, a regional fortified setting that did not have the status of a satrapal court but still replicated at least some of the status markers of the high court.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{16} Intact except for a few chips, it is 0.024 m long, with a diameter of 0.01 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.\textsuperscript{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 straited vertical pedestal resting on two horizontal lines.\textsuperscript{18} The top element of the fire altar resembles a sim-
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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).

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 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:

\[ \text{htm bn’ br ztw} \]
\[ \text{ht(.) [X(?)] sn} \]

“Seal of Bn’, son of Ztw, (hyashana).”

These are names that are not otherwise attested in the Aramaic inscriptions of Asia Minor. 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 Bany son of Zatu-vahayashna." 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. 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. 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." 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. A quick review of the seals from Sardis will illustrate this point.

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

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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/phrygien.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.


27 For the Daskyleion sealings, see Kaptan 2002.


30 As Gates emphasizes (2002, 19), 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 Persopolis 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 Dusinberre 1997a, 112–14.

31 For the Sardian seals, see Dusinberre 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.\(^2\)

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.\(^3\) 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.\(^4\) 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 import, 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.

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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 McLauchlin 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 Bliznitza tumulus, while pl. 5 includes two seals from Egypt).
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 Gordian’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-

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.

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.

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.
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-i Rustam, 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-i Rustam. 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 phialae, 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

40 Garrison 2000, fig. 22.
41 For Naqsh-i Rustam, see Schmidt 1970, 77–118.
44 Gunter and Root 1998, 23.
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 1945, nos. 953, 954. See also Dusinberre 1997a, 116–17, with discussion and references; and now the Persepolis Fortification seals, Garrison and Root forthcoming a, PFS 69, 746, 848, and 1678.
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 Gordian seal: a winged disk over a half figure in a disk over a crowned, bearded sphinx—not, as on the Gordian 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 1055, 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 Gordian 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 Gordian 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.
53 For the Atlas pose, see Root 1979 esp. 190, Dusinberre 2000, 159, Dusinberre 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.
58 Bregstein 1993, nos. 203, 204; 204 has sphinxes. See also Legrain 1925, no. 995.
59 Porada 1948, nos. 817, 888; also Ward 1909, 275 and Ward 1919, 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; Ledraion 1892, 141; Delaporte 1920, 733, 756; Pilcher 1921; and Bordreuil 1986, 305–7.
63 I am grateful to Bruno Jacobs, pers. comm., September 2005, for confirming this suggestion.
In 1979, P. R. S. Moorey published an article suggesting that Achaemenid seals might be valuable in considering aspects of Achaemenid worship and ritual. 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). 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, 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. 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 connecting 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.

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). 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.

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.
and balance on earth.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{70} Root 1979, 131–61, and Dusinberre 2004, 78–79.

\textsuperscript{71} Dusinberre 1997a, 106–9.