

CREATING AN IMPERIAL IMAGE

A Case Study on Composite Seal Imagery from Achaemenid Persepolis

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Abstract

In this paper I aim to explore the process in which a standardized imperial image came to be during the early years of the reign of Darius I¹ by means of a focused case study on the cylinder sealing by the *siglum* PFUTS 0311.² I also incorporate a discussion upon the seal imagery on the tablets within the Persepolis Fortification Archive (PFA) in relation to the wider repertoire of Achaemenid imperial glyptic to provide context and meaning to my seal analysis. PFUTS 0311 is a unique seal in many regards, both within the context of the Fortification Archive and in that of Achaemenid glyptic imagery as a whole. The carving style employed, individual components, and figural composition of this seal come together to display an interesting conglomeration of elements, combining archaizing modes of depiction with more progressive features. Thus, PFUTS 0311 belongs to a fascinating group of seals within the PFA that provide information on the formative period in which the formal Achaemenid Court Style was being developed.³ As is with the rest of the sealings belonging to this group, PFUTS 0311 necessarily prompts questions concerning seal use and meaning, and in particular the question: to what extent has individual creative agency (either that of the patron or artisan) impacted the maturation of the Achaemenid Court Style? Due to the colossal scope of such questions it is not possible to answer them here in full, but rather an analysis PFUTS 0311 will be

¹ Garrison, “The Seals of Ašbazana (Aspathines)” p. 129

² Meaning: Persepolis Fortification Uninscribed Tablet Seal. The tablet categories and contents of the archive shall be further discussed in a brief synopsis of the archive to come further on in this report. See also, Henkleman *The Other Gods Who Are: Studies in Elamite-Iranian Acculturation Based on the Persepolis Fortification Texts* pp. 69-75; Hallock *Persepolis Fortification Tablets* pp. 13-57.

³ Garrison, “Seals and the Elite at Persepolis: Some Observations on Early Achaemenid Persian Art” p. 17.

used as a definitive means to consider the creative process behind the production of Achaemenid glyptic.

OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

In this paper I aim to examine how seals mattered in Persepolis itself,⁴ and in particular how they reflect the environment of the Achaemenid heartland by visual means. I explore the dynamic process of the development of an imperial image through a focused case study. To effectively do so, I first give context to the study by providing a brief outline and history of the PFA followed by a look into seal imagery *qua* imagery in order to define the individual elements of the scene.⁵

In the section entitled *Seal Analysis: Ideas and Themes* I provide an overview of the meaning behind the formal elements and composition of PFUTS 0311 in order to set up my interpretive framework. I then contextualize further how PFUTS 0311 fits into the wider scope of Achaemenid iconography and bring into discussion primary source comparanda from both within the PFA and monumental relief. I offer a discussion on seal iconography in relation to monumental art as a means to conceptualize the Persepolitan social landscape through imagery. Throughout this report I examine the iconography of PFUTS 0311 in attempt to glimpse better the course of Achaemenid image development and to aid in our understandings of the preceding periods leading up to a “complex sharpening of socio-administrative hierarchies among the elite in the last decade of the 6th century BCE.”⁶

⁴ Root, “The Legible Image: how did seals and sealing matter in Persepolis?” pp. 87-89

⁵ Garrison, “The Impressed Image: Glyptic Studies as Art and Social History.” p. 488

⁶ Garrison, “The Impressed Image,” p. 481

As the site of Persepolis was a bustling center at the heart of the empire, the seals housed in its archives therefore reflect the Achaemenid norm of depiction reaching far beyond the borders of the city itself.⁷ Thus, the PFA has tremendous potential to broaden our understandings of not only Persepolis, but of the Empire as a whole. I emphasize the necessity for future study of the archive, as it is a trove of primary source information about a society often described only using foreign classical sources or imperial reliefs burdened by propagandistic messages.⁸

THE ARCHIVE: A BRIEF SYNOPSIS

To give context and meaning to the forthcoming case study of PFUTS 0311, it is necessary first to understand the breadth and history of the PFA itself. Containing between 20,00 and 25,000 edited and unedited tablets and fragments, the archive is the largest known primary historical source from the Achaemenid Empire.⁹ Certainly the portion of tablets with applied seals constitutes the largest known corpus of Achaemenid iconography, although the exact scope of this material is not yet widely known.¹⁰ The archive was unearthed from the northeastern fortification wall of Persepolis proper in the spring of 1933 during a University of Chicago excavation under the direction of Ernst E. Herzfeld.¹¹ Later the following year, Herzfeld lectured on the excavations,

⁷ Garrison, "Seals and the Elite at Persepolis: Some Observations on Early Achaemenid Persian Art" p. 2

⁸ Garrison, "Seals and the Elite at Persepolis" p. 17

⁹ Jones and Stolper, "How many Persepolis Fortification tablets are there?" pp. 37-44; Henkelman, *The Other Gods Who Are*. p. 65

¹⁰ Henkelman, "Persepolis Tablets."; Garrison, "The Uninscribed tablets from the Fortification archive." pp. 149-150

¹¹ Henkelman, *The Other Gods Who Are* pp. 69-75

describing an enormous number of tablets found and his preliminary observations.¹²

However Herzfeld seemed immediately to recognize the massive quantitative impact of the archive's discovery, the vast wealth of information held in the tablets is still being studied to this day.

The tablets were then transported to the University of Chicago, where they began to be studied. For a description of this process, I defer to Henkelman:

Following their discovery, the fragile and uncleaned Fortification tablets were impregnated with paraffin, packed in 2,353 consecutively numbered boxes and shipped, in 1935, to the Oriental Institute where they were studied from 1937 onwards. Initially, the study of the archive was briefly directed by Arno Poebel, with the assistance of George G. Cameron, Pierre M. Purves and Richard T. Hallock. Cameron made preliminary editions of 154 texts... but it was Hallock who would soon become the main and, for many years to come, the only scholar studying the tablets.¹³

Once in Chicago, the archive was categorized by Hallock, who grouped the tablets by the primary "nature of their content" in order to begin synthesis of such a "large and varied body of material."¹⁴ In his initial 1969 publication of the PFA, Hallock described the purpose of the tablets and their role in Persepolitan administration. The contents of the archive, recording a wide range of administrative information having to do with the royal household and spanning the breadth of the Achaemenid hierarchical system, reflect the complex imperial administrative structure set up by Darius I (522-

¹² Ibid; [Anonymous] 1934. pp. 231-232

¹³ Henkelman, *The Other Gods Who Are* p. 72

¹⁴ Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets* pp. 13-57

486 BCE).¹⁵ The tablets are now categorized into three main groups of communicative data:¹⁶

- Clay tags and tablets written in Achaemenid Elamite (cuneiform script)
- Clay tags and tablets with incised and/or inked Aramaic
- Clay tags and tablets that are uninscribed, or anepigraphic¹⁷

Because of the nature of this report, I shall focus my remaining description of the archive on the portion involving material with applied seals. Approximately 87% of all of the tablets and fragments of all types in the archive have one or more applied seal impressions.¹⁸ However there is good evidence to support that seals were being used as a mark of validity or ratification of certain information carried by a tablet, the vast amount of variation in seal imagery necessitates a multifaceted approach to their study.¹⁹ Here, it is also important to note the existence of “cross over seals” named thus because of their occurrence on multiple tablets from different categories. In a preliminary sense, these seals are particularly important in that they further indicate the web-like nature of Achaemenid administration and they provide the possibility for a better understanding of what types of officials were associated with the uninscribed tablets.²⁰

¹⁵ Garrison, “Achaemenid Iconography as Evidenced by Glyptic Art” pp. 117-121

¹⁶ Jones and Stolper, “How many Persepolis Fortification tablets are there?” p. 29; Also note that there are also a few examples of the languages of the Achaemenid Empire attested within the archive; See Henkelman, *The Other Gods Who Are* pp. 86-109

¹⁷ Hereafter in this review, I shall refer to tablets from this group as “uninscribed tablets”

¹⁸ Root, “The Legible Image: how did seals and sealing matter in Persepolis?” pp. 87-102

¹⁹ Garrison, “Achaemenid Iconography as Evidenced by Glyptic Art” p. 129; Root, “The Legible Image: how did seals and sealing matter in Persepolis?” p. 100

²⁰ Garrison, “The Uninscribed tablets from the Fortification archive.” pp. 149-150.

The group of the uninscribed tablets is the most pertinent to this paper not only because it is the category to which PFUTS 0311 belongs,²¹ but also because it contains the potential to shed light upon Achaemenid iconography in a way such that the sociocultural scene of Persepolis may be better understood.²² Although these tablets do not have text preserved on their surfaces, they still serve as an important mode of communication, conveying messages about authority and status while acting as indicators of personal taste.²³ The immense quantity of seals and their wide variation of iconography allows for the altogether unique potential to study such messages and patterns.

The composition of iconography on the seals encompasses a wide array of imagery, and so the uninscribed tablets may be cataloged thematically into distinct “main scene” types.²⁴ The main scene represented on the “terminal field”²⁵ may fall into categories such as: “heroic encounter, scenes of human activity, or images of animals, creatures, plants and geometric devices.”²⁶ Mark Garrison, the editor of all seal impressions on Elamite and uninscribed tablets, is currently directing this process of cataloging as a part of the current PFA Project to unveil the potential held in the seal impressions and facilitate further study.

Not only do the tablets of the PFA have tremendous impact on studies of Achaemenid social history on account of their sheer numbers, the tablets are remarkable

²¹ See the below section, *Seal Analysis: Themes and Style*

²² Garrison, “The Impressed Image: Glyptic Studies as Art and Social History.”

²³ Dusinger, “Anatolian Crossroads: Achaemenid Seals from Sardis and Gordion.” p. 323; Henkelman, *The Other Gods Who Are* pp. 95-99

²⁴ Garrison, Root, and Jones, *Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets*, p. 42

²⁵ Root, “The Cylinder Seal From Pasargadae: Of Wings and Wheels, Date and Fate” pp. 159-161

²⁶ Garrison, Root, and Jones, *Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets*, p. 42

because they are from a single known provenience and discrete span of time.²⁷

Additionally, it is important to note that the individual tablets have been continuously considered to be parts of a larger whole and thus “have not been dissociated from their archival context”²⁸ so that the integrity of the archive as a unit has been preserved. This incredible concentration of imagery in time and space makes the PFA a precious and rare artifact, especially regarding studies of the ancient Near East.²⁹

ICONOGRAPHY OF PFUTS 0311

PFUTS 0311 (Figure 1) is altogether unique in the context of seal imagery in the PFA because it involves the conglomeration of multiple defined scene types,³⁰ and does not merely fit neatly into just one. Thematically, it depicts two human figures engaged in combat with two animals, which are also in combat with each other. Notably, the primary focus of the scene does not appear to be on one particular figure, rather it is a dynamic scene with all of the figures interacting with one another. Although both of the human figures are roughly similar in size, they are large in comparison to their animal counterparts. Each individual figure is oriented in the same direction so that they are facing away from one another towards the left³¹ and thus, there appears to be almost a “line up” of combat and hunting imagery that is rarely found in the context of seal

²⁷ Jones and Stolper, “How many Persepolis Fortification tablets are there?” pp. 28-29

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Garrison, “The Impressed Image.” p. 483

³⁰ For examples of scene types and seal categorization see above section, *The Archive: A Brief Synopsis*. Garrison, Root, and Jones, *Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets* pp. 16-20; Henkelman, *The Other Gods Who Are* pp. 69-75.

³¹ Directions of figures are described as viewed by the audience of the seal. Terms involving bodily planes will be those of the figure itself.

imagery from Persepolis.³² At the very center of the scene there is depicted a heroic human figure who is in direct combat with a lion, which is actively attacking a caprid beneath it. To the right of the scene there is another human figure acting as an attendant,³³ holding out a bow and arrow as if to serve the central human figure in front of him.

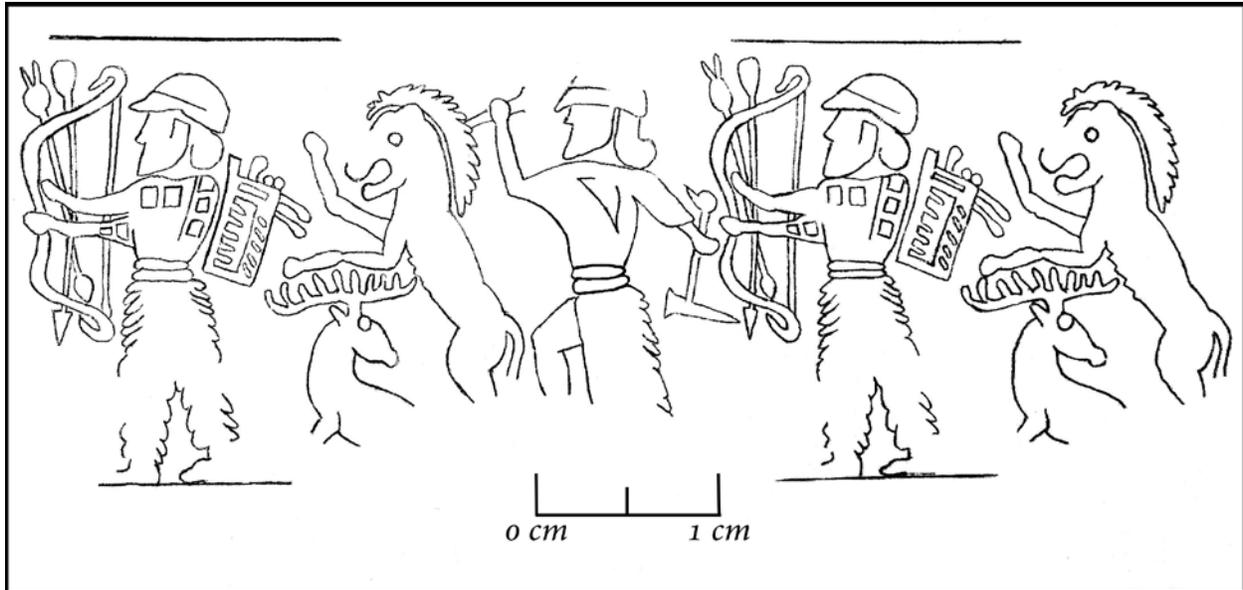


Figure 1: Collated drawing from twelve impressions of PFUTS 0311.

Drawing by author.

The central human figure is depicted completely in profile, standing with his left leg³⁴ straightened in order to support the weight of the body, whereas the right leg is bent at a right angle outwards so that the figure is lunging forwards towards the left. The figure's left arm is held up at a right angle in front of its body and the corresponding hand is grasping a weapon. This weapon appears to be a hunting implement or blade, consisting of one main element that narrows to a point, terminating in the lion's mane.

³² A numerical analysis of PFUTS 0311 in relation to other image types within the PFA is conducted in the section below, *Seal Analysis: Ideas and Themes*.

³³ See Garrison, "Royal Achaemenid Iconography"

³⁴ Unable to determine which leg is bent outwards.

The right arm of the figure is held downwards behind the body and the right hand is also holding a weapon, although different in form and function to the weapon held in the left hand. Here the weapon is a battle-axe, made up of a narrow shaft with a perpendicular pointed blade. The figure is wearing the typical Assyrian garment, consisting of a shawl belted at the waist and a fringed lower hemline.³⁵ Because of the unpreserved bottom edge of the seal, it is not able to be determined what type of footwear, if any, that the figure is wearing. The figure has a sharp, angular beard, coming to a point and resting on his rounded left shoulder. His hair is curled and gathered into a bun at the nape of his neck. On top of his hair is some sort of unidentifiable headgear with a band across the forehead and a short visor near the front.

With eyes moving left, there can be seen an animal combat scene type in and of itself. A lion is depicted in profile, rearing onto its hind legs with his back to the perusing central heroic figure. Only one well-muscled hind leg is shown supporting the upper body of the lion. Its outstretched forelegs are depicted with detailed attention to its musculature and joints as it leans forward in combat with the caprid below. The left forepaw reaches downwards in pursuit of the caprid and the right forepaw flails upward, nearly creating a right angle between the two front limbs. Particular attention to detail is used in carving the mane and facial features of the lion. The thick spiked mane covers the back of the lion's neck from shoulder to snout. A robust rounded snout and lower jawline gives the lion a characteristic open-mouthed snarl.

Below the lion's left forearm the figure of a caprid can be seen from the front limbs upwards; its hindquarters and hind limbs have not been preserved. Like the rest of the figures on the seal, much attention to detailed depiction of musculature can be

³⁵ Porada, E. "Remarks About Assyrian Reliefs"

seen in the caprid's robust neck, jaw, and snout. The lips of the caprid terminate in with the swelling of a small sphere. At the crest of the caprid's head a narrow ear sits to the left of the protuberance of large curved antlers. The antlers span just beyond the length of the lion's forearm above, and are depicted as a singular unit, detailed with ten distinct points.

At the right of the scene, behind the central human figure, a second human is depicted in profile facing left towards the first. He is approximately the same size as the central figure, however depicted at the periphery of the scene and functions to offer aid to his companion. With both arms³⁶ outstretched, he holds forth a strung bow with arrows unnocked. Two arrows are held by the figure parallel to the bowstring. It is possible to discern one arrowhead below the lower portion of the bow and two portions of rounded decorative fletching above the top curve of the bow. The bow itself is large and recurved, with a decorative curled flourish at both ends.³⁷ The figure also carries equipment strapped to his back, possibly a bow case or a bulky quiver, ornamented with woven detail on the side and tassels streaming behind.

The attendant figure has similar facial features and headgear to the other human figure. He has an angular beard resting on the swell of his left shoulder, and his curled hair pulled into a rounded low bun. A pointed nose and singular spherical eye break up the facial field. As with the first figure, a banded piece of headgear with a short visor covers the top his head. Although the lower part of his body is not entirely preserved, it is evident that this figure is wearing the Persian court robe. In order to best depict the elaborate drapery of the robe the seal artist shifts to a frontal perspective from the waist

³⁶ Both arms are depicted however it is not possible to discern which is left/right.

³⁷ Personal communication with Mark Garrison, 18 July 2017.

downwards. Details of the robe are preserved in vertical stripes on the sleeves, banded waist, and rippled fabric of the lower portion of the garment.³⁸

I find it particularly significant that each of the figures actively engages in the events of the scene. I note also the relatively little amount of negative space in the terminal field; each of the figures are closely positioned so that they are neatly interwoven and play a crucial role in defining the dynamics of the scene.

SEAL ANALYSIS: THEMES AND STYLE

The seal PFUTS 0311 is found on each of the six surfaces on two uninscribed tablets in the PFA.³⁹ As these tablets have no text, the imagery “speaks for itself”⁴⁰ and conveys meaningful information to the ancient Persepolitan gaze of its own volition. However, its iconography formulated in such a way that is very unlike what typically fits within the parameters of typical Achaemenid glyptic. Not only does the imagery establish a precedent for the formal elements of Court Style of carving to come, it simultaneously harkens back to the archaic forms and actions of much earlier traditions (*viz.*: Assyrian and Babylonian precursors).⁴¹ Thus, seals have the unique ability to act as a “puzzle piece” as they display the adoption of already ancient glyptic forms adapted to the environment of early Achaemenid Persepolis.⁴²

³⁸ Goldman, “Origin of the Persian Robe.” p. 144

³⁹ Tablets are filed under: PFUT 0133-201 and PFUT 0547-209

⁴⁰ Garrison, “Seals and the Elite at Persepolis” pp. 2-3

⁴¹ Garrison, “The Impressed Image” pp. 484-488

⁴² Garrison, “The Seals of Ašbazana (Aspathines).” p. 120

In the case of PFUTS 0311, the artisan perpetuates a connection with great empires of the past by employing a number of Assyrianizing elements in its iconography in order to reinforce the patron's "own goals or sense of authority and power."⁴³ Here, the artisan is carving within the Persepolitan Modeled Style. This style is significant in that it springs directly from to earlier Near Eastern carving styles however its use is placed firmly within the Achaemenid period.⁴⁴ Each of the figures is characteristically carved with close attention to musculature and a "consistent rendering" of form.⁴⁵ Although the active combat scene of PFUTS 0311 is typical for seals carved in the Persepolitan Modeled Style,⁴⁶ the way in which the figures are positioned and interact with one another is altogether unique in this context. A usual scene arrangement of the Persepolitan Modeled Style involves one central figure exerting control over another creature, but the addition of periphery figures on PFUTS 0311 makes this seal especially remarkable. On the other hand, the central scene type of a heroic figure in direct combat and/or controlling an animal is typical of this style and pulls from much earlier Mesopotamian motifs that depict active scenes of violence in order to best convey power.

The added periphery figures serve to add information, and thus alter the overall meaning of the seal. For example, the caprid plays the role of prey and therefore its presence marks the lion as predator and the hero as protector. This theme, "protector of the herds," is a powerful "age-old Mesopotamian [way of] rendering kingship and

⁴³ Dusinberre, "Anatolian Crossroads" pp. 323-324; Garrison, "The Impressed Image" p. 508

⁴⁴ Garrison, Root, and Jones. *Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets* pp. 16-17

⁴⁵ Garrison, Root, and Jones. *Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets* pp. 16-17; pp. 16-17;

⁴⁶ ⁴⁶ Garrison, "Seals and the Elite at Persepolis" p. 18; Garrison, Root, and Jones. *Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets* pp. 16-17

power” where the ruler is placed within a cosmic context and considered to be a purveyor of peace and prosperity.⁴⁷

Moreover, the unusual presence of the attendant figure is yet another curious element of the seal. This time, the inclusion of the figure is not archaizing, but rather it is a precedent of the periphery figures on imperial reliefs.⁴⁸ During the early years of the reign of Darius the Great attendant figures such as these come to be common inclusions in royal relief, serving to emphasize the power and capability of the ruler. The presence of an attendant figure on seal imagery as seen here indicates the prevalence of personal creativity agency where the patron or artisan of the seal is working both within contemporary imagery conventions and drawing from known traditions to convey a uniquely tailored image.

Further indicative evidence that the attendant figure was created within a formative period of Achaemenid imagery can be found in the in the garment that the figure is wearing: the Persian court robe. In popular in relief and glyptic from the later years of the reign of Darius I onwards, the Persian court robe symbolizes elite status and proximity to the king.⁴⁹ Frequently depicted in the formal style of Achaemenid art, it is clear that the standardized image of the Persian court robe was created to suit the imperial ideologies to come. Moreover, In “Origin of the Persian Robe” Goldman states:

The characteristic dress of the Persians, the draped robe, appears quite suddenly along with the equally sudden appearance of the mature sculptural style of the Achaemenians at Pasargadae, Bisitun, Persepolis, and Susa.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Garrison, “Achaemenid Iconography as Evidenced by Glyptic Art” p. 135

⁴⁸ See section below: *Context and Interpretation*

⁴⁹ Goldman, “Origin of the Persian Robe.”

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Therefore, the depiction of the Persian court robe most often occurs within the context of the fully developed formal Court Style and its appearance outside of this context is highly unusual. As the Persian court robe appears alongside the more archaizing features of PFUTS 0311, its presence here is highly indicative of the early stages of development of the Achaemenid Court Style.

The seal imagery also shows a great deal of emphasis placed on the use of accessory weapons. Even in the thematic categories involving heroic figures, it is indeed unusual that more than one weapon is employed when in active combat with an animal.⁵¹ Although the function of the upper blade is evident and necessary, the inclusion of the battle-axe seems altogether extraneous to the point of being ornamental. However the addition of a battle-axe is entirely atypical in glyptic, it *does* crop up later as a frequent element of monumental relief.⁵² Also notable is the presence of a third and final weapon at the figure's disposal; the offered bow reiterates the seal's overt message of heroic power and control. The repeated depiction of weapons in the seal imagery of PFUTS 0311 is used to emphasize the hero's power by means of his apparent competency in both hunting and battle.⁵³

Overall, PFUTS 0311 displays a complex collage of seal imagery where each individual component is carefully curated to create a specific pre-planned image.⁵⁴ Each individual element serves a particular underlying purpose. Whether to recall upon past conventions of popular discourse or to highlight the seal's sense of modernity, the

⁵¹ For a comparison to another seal where a hero holds two weapons see section below: *Context and Interpretation*

⁵² Garrison, "The Seals of Ašbazana (Aspathines)." p. 116

⁵³ Even foreign Classical sources indicate the impressive ability of Achaemenid peoples to wield weapons such as the bow. See Herodotus, "The Persian Wars" I.136.

⁵⁴ Dusinger, "Anatolian Crossroads"

iconography of PFUTS 0311 acts to convey significance to the gaze of the Persepolitan eye. The seal is, “in many ways, an extension of the individual” and it is undeniable that “seal carving styles...deliver an exceptionally strong message of social status and...momentum to the process of [imperial image] standardization” as can be seen in the example of PFUTS 0311 in relation to the wider repertoire of the PFA.⁵⁵

CONTEXT AND INTERPRETATION

I now introduce a few examples of comparanda in order to understand better the nuances of the PFUTS 0311’s function and meaning. I begin this section by drawing upon evidence from within the PFA and then more broadly consider the rich visual network throughout the whole of the empire.

From within the PFA I first draw upon the seal PFUTS 0359, which shows a similarly composed heroic combat scene as compared to PFUTS 0311. As with PFUTS 0311, PFUTS 0359 shows a centralized hero grasping two weapons and fulfilling the role of “protector of the herds.” In this case, however, the hero is in direct combat with two lions and he has no “attendant” figure to aid him in his pursuit. The two lions are positioned on either side of the central heroic figure, with one lion arching backwards to attack him and the other facing away to attack a caprid. Here, the highly unusual inclusion of two weapons serves a similar purpose to the multiple weapons depicted in PFUTS 0311: to reiterate the hero’s power and competency in hunting and battle. The easily recognizable archaic motif of “protector of the herds” is emphasized such that the hero is shown to be in complete control of the depicted events and thus, the

⁵⁵ Garrison, “Achaemenid Iconography as Evidenced by Glyptic Art” pp. 153-154

communicative ability of the seal effectively renders power understandable to the viewer without the use of corresponding text.

Much additional comparanda for PFUTS 0311 from within the PFA can be found in the thematic type of archer imagery. The motif of “protector of the herds” is much more prevalent in the archer scenes than those belonging to the “heroic encounter” category type. From the currently identified archer scenes, 27% fall into the category of an archer aiming at a creature/animal attacking another. However, in contrast to PFUTS 0311, the seals within the archer seal type do not often include as many elements that are usual from the imperial court style, but rather these seals seem to indicate the prevailing use of already ancient and understood discourses of power.

Outside of the PFA, both glyptic sources and examples of monumental relief serve to place PFUTS 0311 into the context of the wider visual environment of the Achaemenid visual empire. From the satrapal capital of Lydia, the seals from the site of Sardis provide an interesting perspective on the possible purposes and functions of the iconography on PFUTS 0311 as compared to the other seals of the PFA. At Sardis there appears to be the adoption of the formal Achaemenid court style, however it is rendered “with local tastes and preferences”⁵⁶ in accordance to the ethnic background of the Sardis elite. At this site at least, there seems to be a certain amount of accepted personal creative agency used in the creation of personal seals in order to best reflect one’s own “goals or sense of authority and power.”⁵⁷ Although personal agency can be seen in the variability of seal imagery at Sardis and within PFUTS 0311 itself, it is necessary also to acknowledge also the strong connections between these modes of glyptic representation.

⁵⁶ Dusinger, “Anatolian Crossroads” p. 324-326

⁵⁷ Ibid.

The standardization that can be seen in glyptic sources speaks greatly to the creation of a “socially symbolic art of empire”⁵⁸ that began to bind together the Achaemenid elite from across the whole of the empire during the early years of the reign of Darius the Great.

Examples of imperial monumental relief necessarily provide further important context and meaning to PFUTS 0311. The early imperial rock cut relief completed under Darius I at Bisotun (Figure 2) and the later Achaemenid relief of the tomb of Darius I at Naqsh-e Rostam (Figure 3) further help to contextualize the stages of the development of the formal Court Style. At Bisotun, for example, there can be seen the clear utilization of many formal elements from the Court Style to emphasize the prominence of Darius the Great in relation to the procession of prisoners to his front, however the overarching style of the relief is archaizing. Namely, hierarchic scale is employed to depict Darius I as larger than the rest of the figures in the scene and he is outfitted in the Persian court robe with attendant figures behind him. Most importantly, the acting attendant figures offer forth weapons to the king, however he does not actively engage in direct combat with the figures in front of him.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

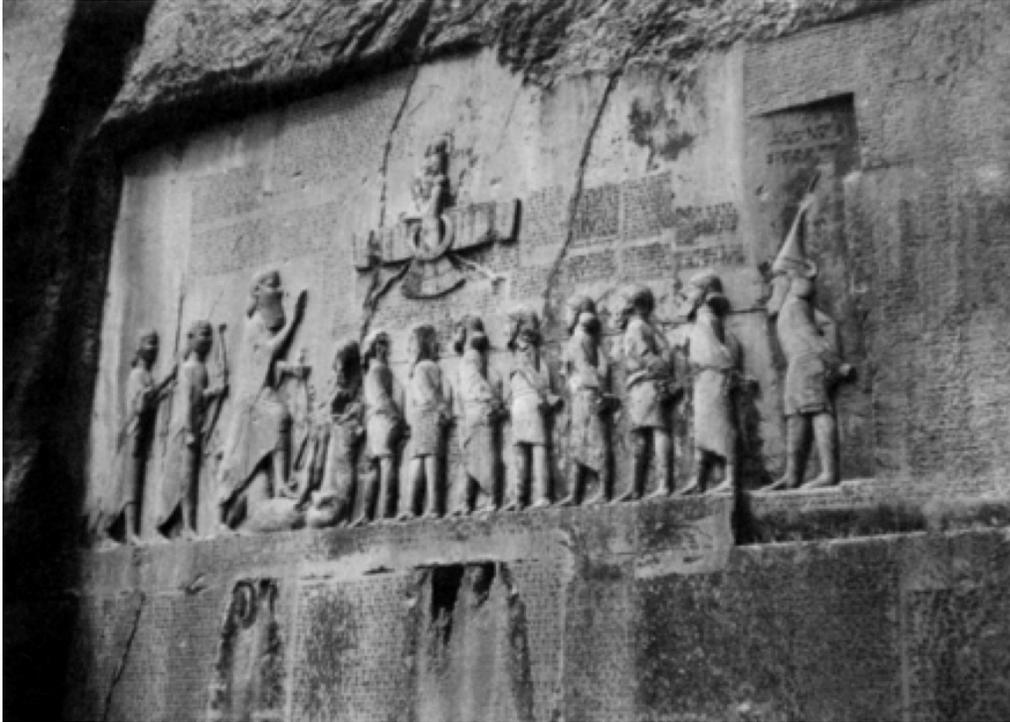


Figure 2: relief at Bisotun⁵⁹

The relief of the tomb of Darius I at Naqsh-e Rostam is a particularly compelling piece of comparanda because it “shows many features of the Court Style: the Persian court robe, dentate crown, and the figure in the winged disk.”⁶⁰ Again, this relief features the inclusion of periphery attendant figures that are superimposed to each side of the relief.⁶¹ To the left of the main scene, there are depicted three attendant figures, two of which are members of the Achaemenid Elite: Gobryas the lance bearer, Asbazana bearing the royal battle-axe, and an unnamed dignitary.⁶² The nature of these weapons and their relation to the central figure relates well to the offered-forth bow and accessory use of the battle-axe on PFUTS 0311, suggesting that such use of additional

⁵⁹ Photo source:

http://www.iranicaonline.org/uploads/files/Bisotun/v4f3a043_f2_300.jpg

⁶⁰ Garrison, “Seals and the Elite at Persepolis” p. 18

⁶¹ Schmitt, *Persepolis: III – The Royal Tombs and Other Monuments* pp. 86-87

⁶² Ibid.

figures and weaponry here acts a precursor to the formal elements of imperial relief to come.



Figure 3: relief of the tomb of Darius I at Naqsh-i Rostam⁶³

The analysis of PFUTS 0311 in relation to the wider visual environment of Achaemenid iconography then necessarily prompts questions regarding their use and perception by the ancient eye. It is undeniable that PFUTS 0311 belongs to a creative period of Achaemenid depiction and acts to convey themes of power and control in a way that is understandable to the specific prospective of the ancient Persepolitan viewer. It should also be considered here who exactly the audience of the seal would likely be. Because of the administrative nature of the PFA, the main seal audience is altogether

⁶³ Photo source: <https://2.bp.blogspot.com/-j8E2KLjb0dk/VaDqTNRodwI/AAAAAAAAASzY/YyfM2gKFAyY/s1600/578%2BNasqi%2BRustam%252C%2BTomb%2Bof%2BXerxes%2BI.JPG>

clear: the seal users and administrators.⁶⁴ Therefore, because of the diversity within the groups of people who were involved in Persepolitan administration, the seal conveyed meaning that was able to cross sociocultural barriers that existed within the expanse of Achaemenid administration. The intricate nature of the administrative structure created by Darius I indicates that the seals acted as an effective discourse between a diverse array of peoples that were “not limited by administrative rank, social status, usage, nor by physical location.”⁶⁵

CONCLUSIONS

The unique sealing PFUTS 0311 aids in our understanding of the formative period in which the Achaemenid Court Style became standardized. Its interesting incorporation of features both archaizing and progressive sheds light on the social processes behind the iconography. There is still much to be further studied on such processes; within the PFA alone, there lies the tremendous potential for future study on seal ownership and usage and patron mandate.⁶⁶ Only through future primary source study may we gain a better understanding of what it means to be a member of the Achaemenid elite from within the empire itself, not just from a foreign classical foreign prospective.

As the development of the Achaemenid Court Style involved a series of “innovations and experiments by a few glyptic specialists within the context of several

⁶⁴ Garrison, “Achaemenid Iconography as Evidenced by Glyptic Art” pp. 151-155

⁶⁵ Garrison, “Achaemenid Iconography as Evidenced by Glyptic Art” pp. 155-157

⁶⁶ Garrison, “Seals and the Elite at Persepolis” p. 19; Garrison, “The Seals of Ašbazana (Aspathines).”

existing seal-carving traditions,”⁶⁷ there is no developmental evidence of this process in monumental relief; thus, an intensive study on glyptic archives is of paramount importance. Only within the context of glyptic archives (such as the PFA), where “inherited and learned”⁶⁸ artistic styles are patronized and adapted to suit the needs of the seal bearer, can developmental stages of ancient power rendition be studied.

⁶⁷ Garrison, “Seals and the Elite at Persepolis” p. 17

⁶⁸ Ibid.

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