

Uqnitum and Tar²am-Agade Patronage and Portraiture at Urkesh

Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati (Los Angeles)

1. Introduction

With the excavation of two complementary groups of seal impressions from Urkesh, those of Uqnitum and Tar²am-Agade, we now have sufficient data to analyze the style and iconography of these two royal women who succeeded each other in a short period of time. The study is taken with a view toward discerning something of the messages they sought to convey through their seals and gaining some insights into the position of these two women and their unique role in their personal social and political setting. In these two cases, text and image are combined so as to transmit their messages in a direct manner but at the same time to elicit a broad and subtle impression regarding their special political and social role in the world in which they lived. This article is dedicated to Gernot Wilhelm who has always generously shared with us his vast knowledge of all things Hurrian thereby helping to put into focus the importance of the earliest known Hurrian city and the individuals who lived there.

As we focus on the seals of these two women at Urkesh, an important point of departure in analyzing their messages is the fact that their seals were rolled either on container or door sealings. The distributional analysis of these sealings gives us an insight into the methods whereby the intended and possibly unintended levels of communication contained within them were disseminated in a wider setting within the palace, and probably an even broader audience within the city and surrounding areas. While the seals of Uqnitum give us the possibility to delve into the deeper meanings of her text and design, the limited repertoire of the Tar²am-Agade seal and those of the two men associated with her (Ewrim-Atal and Ishar-beli), restrict us to a discussion of fewer facets of her specific message. However the fact that she was a part of a southern royal family with numerous seals connected with it helps us to place her within a wider royal context, a context so far lacking for Uqnitum.¹ Consequently our evidence for each of these two

women varies both in the type of data we have and in the fact that it is unequal in coverage. But the very difference in our evidence points to a wider fact, given that they are both royal women, and presumably both foreign in a Hurrian court, there is the distinct possibility that their participation in the social and political environment of the Urkesh court and the wider Akkadian world was both different and unequal as well.

A close correlation between scene and legend, practically unheard of in the south, is common in earlier Urkesh seals, especially those of one of the kings, Tupkish as well as his consort Uqnitum and their court. In these inscribed seals both the text of the seals and the iconography are loaded with the same political and social meanings, a message that is both unified and specific. Furthermore it is the only excavated body of evidence from a context within which these seals were actually employed by those individuals and their servants and therefore the only example of how the message was specifically promulgated.²

Let me here review some characteristics of the seals of Tupkish and Uqnitum. The scenes are set in a specific and identifiable context. In one of the seals of Tupkish we see him seated with a lion at his feet (Fig. 1). This scene has been interpreted by us as a depiction of Tupkish and the crown prince in the throne room or some other important room in the palace. Uqnitum too has herself depicted in her part of the palace surrounded by women attendants (Fig. 2). The distinctive setting includes musical entertainment by a singer and lyre player. Singers and musicians in the entourage of a royal figure are viewed in Syro-Mesopotamia as status symbols. The position of a musician is important enough that they can be of high social status, as for instance the granddaughter of Naram-Sin, Lipush-iaum, who is mentioned in an inscription on a slate plaque from Girsu as a lyre player for the god Sin.³ In some of Uqnitum's seals a characteristic table with legs in the shape of birds is shown. This table must have been important in the

¹ The initial publication of the seal of Tar'am-Agade can be found in Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn-Kelly Buccellati, "Tar'am-Agade, Daughter of Naram-Sin, at Urkesh," in L. Al-Gailani Werr, et al, eds, *Of Pots and Plans, Papers on the Archaeology and History of Mesopotamia and Syria presented to David Oates in Honour of his 75th Birthday*. London: Nabu Publications, 2002, pp. 11-31 with references (cited hereafter as *D. Oates Volume*). For the full on-line text of most of the Urkesh publications see WWW.Urkesh.org.

² The Akkadian monumental stele also conveyed a specific political message but we have none of them in their original context, so we are unsure of the exact setting within which this message was transmitted. For a reconstruction of one of these monuments see G. Buccellati, "Through a Tablet Darkly. A Reconstruction of Old Akkadian Monuments Described in Old Babylonian Copies," *The Tablet and the Scroll Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo*, (1993), pp. 58-71. See also J. Goodnick Westenholz, "Objects with Messages: Reading Old Akkadian Royal Inscriptions," *Bibliotheca Orientalis* LV No. 1/2 (1998), pp. 44-59 and L. Nigro, "The Two Steles of Sargon: Iconography and Visual Propaganda at the Beginning of Royal Akkadian Relief," *Iraq* LX (1998), pp. 85-102. For a recent study of Early Dynastic royal statues and their political and religious significance see N. Marchetti, *La Statuaria Regale nella Mesopotamia Protodinastica*. Rome: Bardi Editore, 2006.

³ D. Frayne, *Sargonic and Gutian Periods*. RIME Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993, pp. 159-160. Also see P. Steinkeller in E. C. Stone and P. Zamansky, *The Anatomy of a Mesopotamian City: Survey and Soundings at Masqan-Shapir*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004, p. 32 who uses the fact that a singer accompanied Kudur-marbuk to indicate his high status.

palace setting since it is seen on other contemporary seals and in one Post Imperial Akkadian seal⁴. She also has a distinctive hair braid and hair ornament; the only other person who has this hair style is her daughter (Fig. 3). In these seals both dynasts are projecting images of political power with a widespread dispersion within the court as shown by the large number of seal impressions found on the floors of the administrative sector of the palace. Uqnitum in addition is so closely linked to individual characteristics and setting that I am proposing to call this an early type of portraiture, which will be discussed below.

Tar²am-Agade exhibits a contest scene on her seal (Fig. 4). We have argued elsewhere that this is one of the indications of her political position as queen in the Urkesh court and furthermore signifies her importance in the political schemes of her father Naram-Sin.⁵ The cache of seal impressions where we excavated the sealings of Tar²am-Agade also contained door sealings of two other courtiers carved by a seal cutter with great skill. One courtier, with the Hurrian name of Ewrim-Atal, does have as his seal iconography the typical Akkadian motif of political power, which is the contest scene (Fig. 5). What is unusual about this is that the royal chancery in the south appears to have controlled who could use this contest scene and only one other foreigner is known to have this scene in the period of Naram-Sin. Water buffalos too may have been symbols of political power in the dynasty.⁶ A water buffalo is also found in the unique imagery of Ishar-beli who has depicted on his seal a god offering something perceived with pleasure by the prancing equid (Fig. 6). Placed under the inscription and extending into the main scene, the water buffalo connects compositionally the inscription with the principal scene.⁷

A second aspect that marks the study of the two groups of seal impressions is, precisely, that they are the *impressions* on sealings, and thus they attest to the use of the seals and the practices of the seal owners and their agents. This increases immeasurably our understanding of the “Sitz im Leben” of these documents, something which is completely absent when one only has the actual seals available, especially if divorced from their archaeological setting. In Urkesh we have hundreds of impressions, often from the same seal (up to 72 for one seal of the cook), from different containers or from doors, found mostly in accumulations above the living floors of the Palace of Tupkish. The

⁴ Our reasoning in using this term is explained in *MDOG* 133 (2001) p. 61, n. 2.

⁵ G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati, *D. Oates Volume*, pp. 11-31.

⁶ See H. P. Uerpman, *The Ancient Distribution of Ungulate Mammals in the Middle East*. TAVO (A):27 (1987), Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reinhardt, p. 78 ff.

⁷ *D. Oates Volume*, pp. 22-25. In my opinion these seals were not royal gifts to these two men because the motif of Ishar-beli is very specific to this area and no other similar motifs or compositional designs are found in the south. It appears that in his case at least, the seal carver was trained in the south but carved this seal after absorbing the rarified atmosphere of the very special iconographic tradition of Urkesh. For a discussion of texts and objects connected with equids from Brak, Beydar and Ebla see J. Oates, “Equid Figurines and Chariot Models,” in D. Oates, J. Oates and H. McDonald, *Excavations at Tell Brak*, Vol. 2 *Nagar in the third Millennium B.C.* London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 2002, pp. 279-294.

seals that pertain to Uqnitum are all small (about 2 cms in height), with scenes that describe various settings of her life at court; they give her name, or that of retainers whose profession is linked specifically to the queen. We may consider her the seal owner, but certainly not the seal user. There must instead have been several users who sealed goods on her behalf for storage in the Palace, and it seems logical that these users would have been her agents in locations outside the Palace from where the goods were shipped to the Palace. The sealings with the impression of the seal of Tar³am-Agade, on the other hand, are door sealings, found as part of a discard containing the seal impressions of other courtiers, in the period following that of Uqnitum. Her seal and that of the other courtiers are larger (about 3 cms in height), and more finely carved.

2. Uqnitum and Tar³am-Agade – Visual Communication at Urkesh

The socio-political messages underlying the iconography of these two women associated with the Urkesh court are clearly aspects of what is being communicated, both intended and possibly not intended. First we must take up the question of what groups were the targets of these messages, i. e. the intended audience. Within the political context one group was the king and his immediate advisors, i. e. the most influential members of the court. In addition the communication must have been projected for the wider group of palace residents and royal servants. In the case of palace officials they could have been working inside the palace itself or outside the palace and even outside the city in dependant work places, such as agricultural establishments or similar economic extensions of the palace system of production and its administration. This latter group would have been especially of concern to Uqnitum whose seals rolled on many containers of various types and sizes indicate a widespread administration under her control. Thus her message would have been known in a wider social context than just the palace itself. Did Uqnitum know these workers who had the right to use her seal personally? It seems unlikely that she would have had much contact with them since they must have been sending the containers they were sealing from outside the palace. However she must have known well Zamena and Tuli who would have focused their activities inside the palace. This level of intimacy is stressed in the seals of Zamena both because she is allowed to have herself depicted with Uqnitum and because she is furthermore shown in the hair-braiding context (see below)⁸. From the evidence we presently have for Tar³am-Agade, those found on door sealings, she communicated, through her seal design and her seal inscription, more narrowly with palace residents and a restricted circle of palace officials. We can view her audience on another level too, that of the household of the king. Uqnitum's message was also aimed at other wives of Tupkish who would have been in competition with her both for personal power and for the success of their own children.

⁸ M. Kelly-Buccellati, "Urkesh and the North: Recent Discoveries," *SCCNH* 15 (2005), pp. 29-40.

The main concern expressed in the Uqnitum seal iconography and seal inscriptions is that she be viewed as the most important woman in the court of Tupkish.⁹ To communicate this, she is shown in one of her seals seated opposite him. Furthermore she is depicted at the same height and surrounded by her children (Fig. 7). The fact that she is also seated and is the same size as her husband indicates a level of consequence for her as queen and mother of the future generation of rulers, rarely seen in Mesopotamian art. Following on this but no less prominently she intends to establish a connection between the king, her young son and the succession to the throne.

Tarʿam-Agade through her iconography and seal inscription emphasizes her origins in the royal court of Akkad, specifically as the daughter of Naram-Sin. She has a politically charged image in the contest scene rendered on her seal. Moreover, as if emphasizing this political message and her status as a daughter of the reigning king in Akkad, her seal has been carved by one of the finest seal carvers in the kingdom. We see this in the compositional innovations of the Ishar-beli seal, in the nuanced modeling and carving details of the seals of all three. The quality of the seal carving shown in the seals of these three courtiers is important since it indicates that these three individuals could command the services the finest artists to come out of the training in the royal workshops. This is also the case for the seal of Ukin-Ulmash, her brother (Fig. 8). An additional point to consider is that these Urkesh seals are owned directly by these three individuals. A different type of ownership pattern can be seen in the seals used by the servants of other Akkadian members of the dynasty such as Tuta-napshum (Fig. 9), Enmenanna (Fig. 10) and Tuta-shar-libbish (Fig. 11). The seals they employ are not carved by artists with this skill and imagination. Nor, it should be noted, was it the case for Uqnitum or her servants who all have a unique iconography but were carved by artists of less advanced training.¹⁰ The workshop where the finest artists were trained must be in the south since in the north we have few seals carved in such a masterful style. However in my opinion these seals were carved in Urkesh given the unique iconography in the seal of Ishar-beli.¹¹ This is supported by the discovery of a finely carved unscribed cylinder seal near the formal courtyard of the Urkesh palace (Figs. 12-14)¹². The scene of a ritual enactment depicting a moment just after the sacrificial animal has been slaughtered and the head placed at the base of a palm column is unique both in composition and iconography; it too must have been carved in Urkesh by an artist trained in the south but with knowledge of local northern traditions.

⁹ Interestingly, the mother of Tupkish never appears in the corpus of inscribed seals we have excavated thus far in Urkesh.

¹⁰ It is always possible that Uqnitum has another, more personal, seal carved by artists of a high skill level. It is clear that she allowed the seals we do have with her name written on them to be used by her servants and therefore may have thought a lesser artistic output was sufficient for them and for the containers that they were sealing.

¹¹ The seal of a scribe from Tell Brak had a similar and equally unusual iconography but a composition closer to other Akkadian seals, J. Oates "The Evidence of Sealings," in *Excavations at Tell Brak*, Vol. 2, pp. 121-150.

¹² *Op. cit.* "Urkesh and the North".

3. Economic and Social Roles

Clearly connected with the messages of these two women is their respective role in the palace in Urkesh. While Uqnitum was active in the circumscribed social context of Urkesh, Tar³am-Agade functioned in two parallel spheres, both south and north. The double context of the influence of Tar³am-Agade is revealed by a number of signs. Of course, as she so prominently points out in her seal inscription, she is the daughter of Naram-Sin and as such has certain privileges and clear high status in the court in Akkad but also in her new home in the northern city of Urkesh.¹³ In Urkesh she is closely connected with two men; door sealings of all three were found together in a cache in the palace dependency. These men appear from all the evidence we have for them, to be of high status in both north and south as well, shown by their names, seal iconography and the style in which their seals are carved. What continued contact Tar³am-Agade had with the palace and her family in Akkad is unknown, but on the basis of texts from the Ebla court we have evidence that princesses who went to other cities did have continued contacts with their family and their original home; they could return to Ebla on important occasions.¹⁴

The seals of both women give us insights into the economic and social role they played within the palace and the palace administration.¹⁵ Both these women must have been the most important female figure in the Urkesh court in their own time.¹⁶ This appears inevitable in the case of Tar³am-Agade since she was the daughter of the most powerful king of the time; her high rank in the court of Urkesh would be the same whether or not she was queen rather than chief priestess (which we feel is less likely).¹⁷ In the case of Uqnitum, her social position with respect to the other wives of Tupkish is

¹³ For a comprehensive review of the role of the queen in Ebla see A. Archi, "The Role of Women in the Society of Ebla," in *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East. Proceedings of the XLVIIe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki*. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus, 2002, pp. 1-9. For an indication of the status of a royal princess of Ebla on her marriage to the king of Kish see the list of garments and jewelry given to Keshdut on this occasion, A. Archi and G. Biga, "A Victory over Mari and the Fall of Ebla," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, 55 (2003) pp. 1-44, especially pp. 26-29.

¹⁴ M. G. Biga, "Femmes de la Famille royale d'Ebla," in J.-M. Durand (ed.), *La Femme dans le Proche-Orient Antique*. Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1987, pp. 41-48. The position of the queens of Ebla is also discussed in M. G. Biga, "Donne alla corte di Ebla," *Memoria di Ebla, La Parola del Passato* 46 (1991), pp. 285-303 and "The Marriage of the Eblite Princess Tagrish-Damu with the son of Nagar's King," *Subartu* IV, 2 (1998) pp. 17-22.

¹⁵ Women had important administrative functions in the Akkadian and Ur III periods, see Van De Mieroop "Women of Sumer," in B. S. Lesko (ed.), *Women's Earliest Records*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989, pp. 53-66 and I. J. Winter, "Women in Public: the Disk of Enheduanna, the beginning of the Office of EN-priestess and the Weight of Visual Evidence," in J.-M. Durand (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 189-201. While the few seals of prominent Ur III women we know of fail to reflect their position, at least some have female figures in their presentation scenes. This is very far from the articulate messages being communicated in the seals of Uqnitum.

¹⁶ Their relative chronological position is discussed in G. Buccellati and M. Kelly-Buccellati, "The Royal Palace of Urkesh. Report on the 12th Season," *MDOG* 132 (2000) pp. 133-183.

¹⁷ See our discussion of this question in the *D. Oates Volume*.

not as obvious. What is clear from the palace as excavated thus far is that she is the only woman of prestige we know of and that she has a circle of women courtiers closely associated with her who also have inscribed seals. With the exception of Tuli and Zamena, there are no inscribed seals of other women in the Urkesh palace and no hints from the iconography of any of the uninscribed seals that they belonged to women. Uqnitum's sealings are for the most part distributed on the floors of a large room (B1) near the main working courtyard (area A9) and the kitchen (sector D see Fig. 15). In addition, her sealings were scattered in various other nearby rooms with preserved floor deposits. Moreover in area A7 they were grouped in a single deposit, as if collected in the usual manner for registration to fulfill administrative requirements. The preliminary distributional analysis of the large number of her sealings found on jars, bags and baskets leads us to the conclusion that these excavated sealings are part of the activities of the queen's administration and that this is evidence of the fact that these containers were sent to the palace from various parts of that administration.

For Tar^{am}-Agade the seal impressions found were rolled on door sealings discovered grouped in a cache along with those of Ewrim-Atal and Ishar-beli. While this type of evidence does not tell us about her role in the palace economy, it does point to an important function within the palace administration, namely that she had control of doors leading to various sectors of the palace dependency. Therefore her sphere of influence must have extended to circulation patterns within this building and therefore to the flow of some of the goods and people within it. From the text and iconography of her seal we may at this point conclude, notwithstanding the fact that the picture may change with further excavations, that she did not assimilate into the Urkesh court environment but rather emphasized her foreign origins.

4. Patronage

A major aspect of the communication in the case of Uqnitum, is that she is, in my opinion, both subject and patron of her seals. That is, she was the subject since she is depicted in all her seals and is shown in various settings connected with her. That she was also the patron of the artist or artists who carved her seals I deduce from the fact that she is always explicitly both depicted and named in her own seals and those of Zamena. This is a unique circumstance in that both in the scenes where she is the only important figure (and these include most of the iconography connected with her) and even in the one seal where she is shown sitting opposite Tupkish (Fig. 7) she is always identified in the text as the seal owner. In the case of her two servants Tuli and Zamena, their seal inscriptions identified Uqnitum as their queen. Her role as patron must have included the choice of images - such specific and intimate images (for instance the hair braiding scene on a seal of Zamena Fig. 16-7) could only have come from her or at the very least with her approval. In my opinion the obvious conclusion is that she was indeed the artistic patron of the inscribed seals connected with her. And this patronage allowed her and

the artists associated with her to develop a new visual language – one in which she would be clearly recognizable within a web of images since the comprehension of her message can only come with the recognition of her image.

Since control over use of the seals and their display within the administrative functions of the palace are important factors in validating social claims, being the patron and subject of both the text and the iconography brought great advantages to Uqnitum in her public role as the most important wife of Tupkish with respect to the communication of her message. First there is the aspect of control – in her position as patron she was fully capable of managing the content and imagery to be transmitted, i.e. what images were best suited to her purpose and what precise nuance to give in the text. Second she could control the dissemination of the message by controlling exactly who had the right to employ these seals. Since a number of them were in use at the same time they must have been utilized by officials in her administration. This is a different approach to palace administration than the use of seals in southern palace administrations where different seal iconography and text are employed by the various palace administrators. In Uqnitum's administration her servants had the right to seal in her name and not in their own names' with the exception of two women: Uqnitum's cook, Tuli and her wet nurse Zamena. This privilege may have come about because the activities of Tuli and Zamena were focused inside the palace and so Uqnitum would have known them and valued their relationship to her.

Uqnitum's choice of the medium to disseminate her message is also significant; cylinder seals rolled on door and container sealings were the most widespread vehicle for the spread of this message. Especially the container sealings must have been seen by numbers of individuals working for the palace at various levels. So for instance those who filled the containers, the officials who sealed them, the porters who loaded them onto vehicles, the drivers of those vehicles, etc would have seen directly or known about the seals, their importance in the administrative routine, their iconography, who they belonged to and who had the right to use them. Thus the message was as varied as those who received it. The consequence of her methods of distribution of the message is that her social position and her economic role in the palace are all part of the constructed identity she intends to project to a wide public audience.

If we consider the Akkadian royal seals in the south, are we able to make some statements about patronage with regard to the seals of the servants of Enmenanna, Tutanapshum and Tuta-shar-libbish (Figs. 9-11). In these three cases the close link between their name in the inscription and the iconography of the seals is the strongest argument for the idea that they determined the text and iconography for their servants. But the concept of patronage is more inclusive than a single event or object. In their cases the messages they carry are neither clear nor sustained. Is it an accident that most of our evidence comes from seals connected with royal women? Clearly the iconography emphasizes their profession – Enmenanna and Tuta-napshum as priestesses and Uqnitum

and Tuta-shar-libbish as queens. But were the southern women artistic patrons and did they determine the iconography and inscriptions carved on the seals of their servants? Or was the growing artistic professionalism of the seal cutters such that they would be able on their own authority to choose such scenes? At this point these questions cannot be answered directly due to lack of a clear stratigraphic context for comparable seals outside of Urkesh and knowledge of the environment within which the seal cutters worked. It is an important consideration however that the distant geographical location of these women of Urkesh combined with their important social and political positions may have encouraged them to make statements about themselves not needed by others in the dynasty.

All of this gives us confirmation of Uqnitum's unique power within a Hurrian court. Her power may have stemmed from the fact that she came from an important household in the south, perhaps even the royal house of Akkad; a parallel then with the later arrival of Tar³am-Agade from the south. But we have no evidence of a southern connection other than the fact that Uqnitum has an Akkadian name. Her power may reflect in some way the openness of the king, Tupkish, and his court to the innovations initiated by a queen with a unique personality and vision carried out with great originality. Was this only played out between Uqnitum and Tupkish? Was such a relationship only possible in a Hurrian setting? Could the fact that Zamena and Tuli, high officials in the Urkesh court with Hurrian names, with unique scenes connected directly with their professions, mean that this was a Hurrian custom? It is certainly interesting that as yet there is no evidence that the relationship of patron to artist continued beyond Uqnitum and may never have developed into a system that could be emulated by other patrons and artists. The caveat in all this is that we have not finished the excavation of the palace and also that we have not as yet the palace where Tar³am-Agade resided; therefore in the future the picture may expand dramatically.

5. Portraiture

What other nuanced messages can we discern from the seals of these two royal women? In my opinion part of Uqnitum's message is carried by the fact that she herself is depicted on her seals. These seals carry her portrait if we define portrait not so much as a specific physical representation of individuals in all their details but rather extend the definition to include a figure, identified in the text and prominently placed in a specific and identifiable context. The placement of Uqnitum in an associated context in all her seal designs (i. e. in her own seals and those of her nurse, Zamena) combined with the portrait-like elements in her depiction adds a level of more intimate communication between her and the viewer. In all her seals she is seated with her children, surrounded by female attendants, in a specific setting often including a lyre player, a singer, and less often a distinctive bird-legged table. That she wanted to establish this intimate connection with the viewer is confirmed in my mind by the iconography of the seal of her

nurse Zamena where she is portrayed as usual surrounded by her female attendants, and she is holding a younger child on her lap, but, in this case she is in the midst of a very personal moment; she is having her hair braided (Figs.16-7). Only Uqnitum and her daughter wear their hair in this distinctive style. That this intimate communication is played out on the seals of Zamena and show Uqnitum in her unique setting within the palace could not have been lost on those who viewed these seals.

An interesting question can be asked with regard to the iconography of these two women. If officials were confronted with a new seal impression belonging to Uqnitum, would they be able to recognize it as hers without the need of the inscription? And if the answer is positive, what about possible new seals of Tar³am-Agade, would they recognize them? If iconographic patterns already established hold, then the answers would be respectively yes and no. While these questions are hypothetical they do reveal the sharp contrasts between the seals of these women. Uqnitum is identifiable through artistic imagination while Tar³am-Agade through the use of certain controlled images.

Portraits, as has been discussed in an insightful book by Hans Belting, establish a link with the viewer at a deeper level than any other type of image.¹⁸ He points out that while symbols also obviously carry meanings, and juxtapositions of images furthermore often carry meanings on many registers, portraits speak to us, the viewers, individually and on a very personal level. They can spark in us memories, moods, feelings, and private images, even those not connected in any way with the person being portrayed. Portraits make present those absent and through this connection the absent can be perceived intellectually and felt emotionally on many different levels. Portraits create a new kind of presence achieved by making the absent, present. But on some deep level the viewer appropriates aspects of the portrayed and thus is established a more personal connection. In the case of Uqnitum the fact that we “see” her as she is having her hair braided allows us to participate in an intimate part of her life (albeit one rich in symbolism regarding her socio-political status). The resulting connection is one played out not only on an intellectual level but also on an emotional level.

The impact that Uqnitum’s portraits have on the world of her viewers is felt in a different way from that of the symbol of power of the contest scene used by Tar³am-Agade. While some symbols, as even perhaps the contest scene, also communicate on an emotional level, few do this in such a personal manner as that chosen by Uqnitum. Tar³am-Agade, in having a contest scene displayed on her seal and this connected with a seal inscription bearing her name and that of her powerful father, is clearly emphasizing the political power of the dynasty and her participation in it. She is not empha-

¹⁸ H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. For an indication of portraiture in the Ur III period possibly influenced by the Urkesh iconographic traditions see R. H. Mayr and D. I. Owen, “The Royal Gift Seal in the Ur III period,” in H. Watzoldt (ed.), *Von Sumer nach Ebla und zurueck. Festschrift fuer Giovanni Pettinato zum 27. September 1999 gewidmet von Freunden, Kollegen und Schuelern*. Heidelberg Studien zum Alten Orient Bd. 9, Heidelberg, p. 154.

sizing her personal role in that politically charged world through her iconography but only through her inscription. Tar²am-Agade seems to eschew the intimate connection established by Uqnitum. She is apart, surrounded by the aura of the power of her father, and not only her father but the whole extent of Akkadian political strength. Her seal speaks this power to one part of her audience through her inscription and another through her iconography. Ishar-beli does branch out with a scene closely connected with the local environment; this we can see from his seal design reflecting the local passion for equids. He has branched out in his use of a unique iconographic motif but he still commands the services of a very highly gifted seal cutter. Ewrim-Atal, bearing a Hurrian name, must have been honored to have a combat scene on his seal and also to have it carved by such a gifted artist.

Alternatively it may be that this evidence can also be viewed differently. That what we are seeing here is not a contrast between Uqnitum and Tar²am-Agade but evidence based on a queen's seals used by her agents in outlying production centers, and a queen's seals used by her or her agents within the palace or an area closely associated with it, i.e. the dependency. In this view what we are seeing here is a household vs a public image. In this scenario it is likely that we are missing the more formal seal of Uqnitum on the one hand and the various administrative seals of Tar²am-Agade on the other. We do not know that this set of two types of seals ever in fact existed in Urkesh; but in the south we do have a similar seal with a contest scene of Ukin-Ulmash and seals of various administrators who as a rule include their own name and their connection with the specific royal person in their inscription. Nowhere in the south do we have both types connected with one figure in the dynasty. Did both Uqnitum and Tar²am-Agade have both types of seals – those used by administrators in their name and the one used personally for official acts? Another question concerns the administrative seals of Uqnitum. Those we have are all inscribed only with her name. Is there another level of administrators who had the prerogative to seal in their own names while at the same time mentioning her? If there is an answer to these questions in the ground at Urkesh we should find it as we continue to excavate the palace.

Another part of the question addressed in this paper involves a discussion of the messages possibly not intended. While Uqnitum is certainly unique in being the artistic patron and subject of her seals and for the clarity of her message, the very concentration of her message may have communicated a certain weakness in her position at court and especially in front of the problem of who would succeed Tupkish on the throne. In the case of Tar²am-Agade, her message is so specific and not personally associated with her that she had a limited number of levels her message could be interpreted. In addition her seal impressions would have been seen by fewer individuals. Perhaps she never intended or needed, for that matter, her message to be multi-registered and widely distributed.

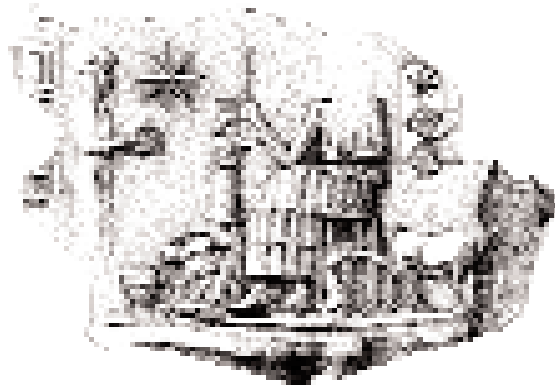
6. Conclusions

The distribution of the seal impressions of these two royal women of Urkesh affords us a unique glimpse into the use of glyptics as a system of communication and a mechanism for public outreach. On the one hand there is the typology. One group of seals is characterized by an interest in the portrait-like detail of scenes from the daily life in the palace, all revolving around the queen seen as the pivot of courtly life and affirming as a given her pre-eminent role as the primary wife and the queen mother. These seals address the vast audience of palace retainers whose livelihood depends on their patron. The other group of seals displays a heraldic style that affirms the political power of the seal owner vis-à-vis outsiders as well as insiders. The size and quality of the seals differ for each of the two types: those used by agents in the countryside are smaller and lesser quality, those used in the palace are larger and of high quality, reflecting the high standards of southern seal cutters.

The vehicles chosen for the transmission of their messages and the methods of transmission give us insight into their economic and social roles in the Urkesh court. In addition they allow us a glimpse at their methods of constructing their identity within a new and different social group. That they do this through the linkage of texts and iconography channeled via their role in the Urkesh administration is significant in that it allowed a large number of individuals at various social levels to receive these messages.

Since possession of certain highly esteemed objects and their display through use in an administrative setting are important factors in affirming their social claims, the use of text and iconography by both of these women in the Urkesh court milieu signals their unique methods of transmitting to others their own self-definition in this environment.

But it is not only the wealth of typological details contained in the two diverse corpora that makes this a highly informative body of evidence. It is also the stratigraphic context and what can be inferred from it. The two sets of seal impressions are complementary in this respect as well. Uqnitum's corpus is found especially in relationship to the storage of goods in the palace, Tar²am-Agade's instead in relationship to doors that were sealed. It is from the integration of stratigraphic and typological information that such a rich narrative emerges, detailing in largely unsuspected ways the interaction of personal and political ambitions, the nature of the mechanisms available for the proclamation of such ambitions, and the skillful and innovative use of a deeply established art form. That this has been made possible by the careful excavation of thousands of seemingly insignificant clay lumps is as gratifying as the realization that this wealth of information comes from probably less than one third of the total extent of the Royal Palace of Urkesh – leaving wide open the possibility that the eventual inventory of stratified sealings be considerably larger than already available at.



1. A seal of Tupkish in his throne room showing a lion at his feet.



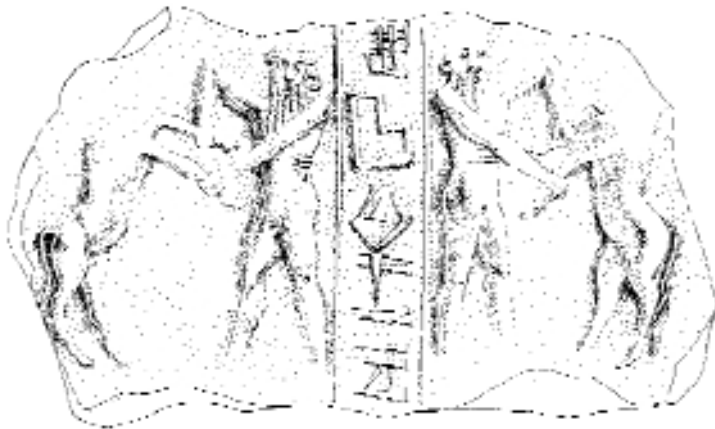
2. Uqnitum surrounded by her female attendants and a table with decorative birds on the legs



3. Uqnitum and her daughter both with a long braid and braid ornament



4. Seal of Tar'am-Agade



5. Seal of Ewrim-Atal



6. Seal of Ishar-beli



7. A seal of Uqnitum depicting a seated figure of Tupkish and her children



8. Seal of Ukin-Ulmash (R. M. Boehmer, *Die Entwicklung der Glyptik während der Akkad-Zeit*, 1965, Taf. LXIII:725f.)



9. Seal of a servant of Tuta-napshum
(D. Frayne, *Sargonic and Gutian Periods*, RIM, Vol. 2, No. 2017)



10. Seal of a servant of Enmenanna (R. M. Boehmer, *Die Entwicklung der Glyptik während der Akkad-Zeit*, 1965, Taf. LXIII:725f.)



11. Seal of a servant of Tuta-shar-libbish (op. cit., Taf. LV:657)



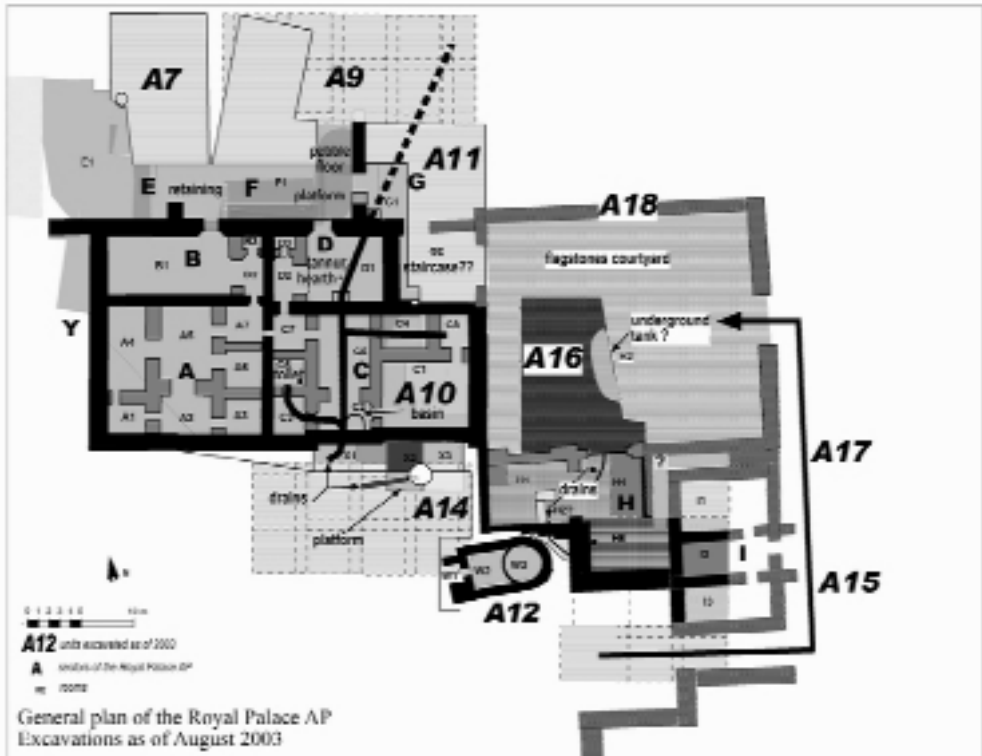
12. Cylinder seal (A15.270) from near the formal courtyard of the palace depicting a ritual enactment



13. A detail of Fig. 12 showing the two priests with the sacrificed bull



14. Detail of Fig. 12 with the head of the bull and the base of a palm column



15. Plan of the palace



16. A seal of Zamena



17. Detail of Zamena seal showing Zamena with Uqnitum as she is having her hair braided

Festschrift für Gernot Wilhelm

anlässlich seines 65. Geburtstages am 28. Januar 2010

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