

Drinking Scenes in Ancient Mesopotamia in the Light of the Seals from Tall al-Faras

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Abstract

At the site of Tell al-Faras in Iraq a hole was found in the floor of one room, which contained a number of artistic objects, including 23 cylinder seals, dated to the third Early Dynastic period (2600–2350 BC). Eight of those seals depict drinking scenes. Seven of them are studied in this article, in which we clarify the importance of drinking in ancient Mesopotamia, the occasions in which drinking councils are held, who the drinkers were, and the purpose of depicting these scenes. Based on a corpus of 160 known seals engraved with scenes of drinking, we explain the design of the artistic scene in the seal, the numbers of drinkers and those in charge of their service, and the means of drinking in them.

Keywords: Banquet Scenes; Drinking Scenes; Tall al-Faras; Cylinder Seals; Ancient Mesopotamia.

INTRODUCTION

Tall al-Faras¹ is located in Iraq in the al-Ta'mim governorate, Hawija district, two km from the village of Shajara. It is located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River within the Makhoul basin (plate 1). The archaeological site of Tall al-Faras is circular in shape with a diameter of 110 m and a height of 11 m above the neighboring land (Sulaiman 2010: 23). An Iraqi mission from the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage headed by Mr. Burhan Shaker Sulaiman excavated the site for two seasons, the first in 2001 and the second in 2002 (Sulaiman 2010: 3, 23-37).

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¹. The ancient name of the site is not known. Its modern name is derived from a local resident whose horse was buried here (Sulaiman 2010: 23).

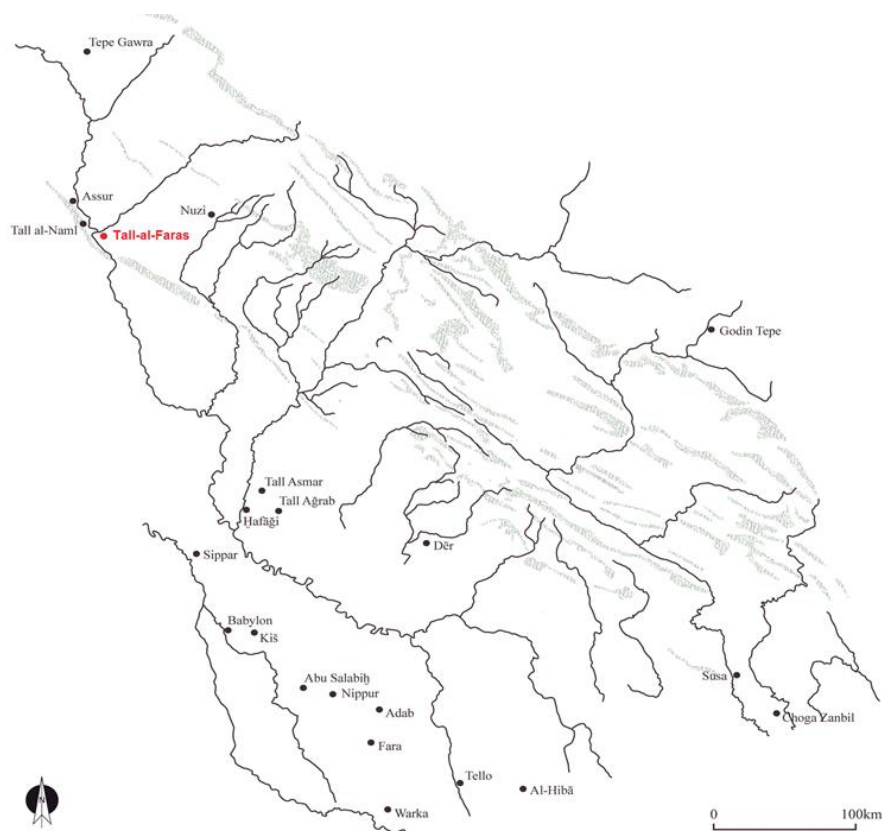


Plate 1: A map of archaeological sites, with the location of Tell al-Faras marked in red (Heil 2011: 1).



Plate 2: Google Earth image of Tell al-Faras.

The excavations at the site uncovered five strata, numbered from top to bottom. The fifth and fourth strata were uncovered in soundings in different areas of the site and were represented by a few floors and walls built of mud bricks, and artifacts, especially pottery dated back to the Early Dynastic I and the Nineveh V periods (Sulaiman 2010: 31-32, pl. 47).

The third stratum occupied a large area of the site, and its architectural remains were represented by a circular building with a diameter of approximately 36 m, consisting of a large number of rooms of irregular shape and area, constructed in successive irregular and incomplete rows, around a wide courtyard in the southeastern part of the building (Plate 2). In this stratum, fire places, kilns and a narrow watercourse dug by the residents of the building were found. The building had several floors. The building was built of mud bricks 39 cm x 18 cm x 7 cm in size, and clay was used as a binder to fill the walls and smooth the floors, as well as plaster and coarse gravel in some places. Remnants of colors were discovered in some rooms (Sulaiman 2010: 24-26, pl. 44). In this building, ash marks were found in large quantities of various materials, as well as artifacts, including pottery. The building was dated to the beginning of the Early Dynastic I period and perhaps was used for religious purposes (Sulaiman 2010: 26).⁽²⁾

The second stratum was subjected to a lot of destruction, and the architectural remains were represented by the remains of a wide terrace built of mud brick, with a group of architectural facilities on top, most of which were destroyed. The excavator believes that these facilities were part of a religious or secular public building, a temple or a palace. In this stratum, other building units were uncovered on the northwestern side of the site; most of them were separate rooms, which made it difficult to determine the type of building. Many of the buildings of this stratum used the buildings of the older strata as their foundations (Plate 3) (Sulaiman 2010: 24, pl. 26).

In this stratum, a group of pottery vessels and a number of tombs that included various artifacts were uncovered. The most important discovery was a group of artifacts found in a hole in the floor of one of the rooms. The second stratum was dated to the Akkadian period (Sulaiman 2010: 24).

The first upper stratum of the site, which was the most damaged, was represented by some architectural facilities that constitute a number of rooms for separate houses constructed of adobe brick and mud, and some walls constructed of stones. In this stratum, a number of kilns, large pottery basins, various pottery vessels, clay tablets and other materials were discovered. This stratum was dated to the Neo-Assyrian period (Sulaiman 2010: 23).

Among the distinctive discoveries in Room No. 12 of the circular building, is a small circular brick capsule 40 cm in diameter and 25 cm deep covered with mud and in which there are marks of burning and ash, that dates to the third stratum (Sulaiman 2010: 23; Muhl and Sulaiman 2011: 372, fig. 1). This brick capsule contained a small treasure consisting of 23 cylinder seals, a gold amulet of a naked man catching two lions, a plaque representing the

². This type of circular building is known in several locations, including Tall al-Faras, Tall al-Namil in the Makhoul Basin, Tall Salima, Tall al-Kubba, Tall Sankar, Tall Abu Qassem, Tall Razzuq, Tall Mazhor, Tall al-Shawk al-Saghir in the Hamrin Basin, and Tall Medina in the Great Basin, meaning that it extends along the northeastern line of Mesopotamia, around the Hamrin hills and the Makhul Basin. Most of the circular buildings have been dated to the Early Dynastic I Period. Opinions differ about the function of these buildings, including that they were defensive forts or were used for social or economic purposes or buildings of a religious nature or even residential houses). (See Heil 2011:37-45; Al-Adami 1992). It is also believed that they were collective warehouses for non-sedentary groups in the region, in addition to providing them with shelter in the event of hostilities, and some religious facilities might also have been present there (See Renette 2010: 93-94).

upper half of a man, the upper half of a statue of a woman of lapis lazuli, two human faces of ivory, a statue of a cow crouching made of lapis lazuli, pieces of lapis lazuli on which were engraved grooves, a human face, and a small hollow statue of a gold fish. It also included jewelry represented by necklaces, beads of lapis lazuli, onyx and mother of pearl in various sizes, various pendants, including Sidr leaves of lapis lazuli and gold, and part of a chain of gold. After these artifacts were put in the hole, the hole was covered from the top with a layer of clay (Muhl and Sulaiman 2011: 372-4; Sulaiman 2010: 30, 35).

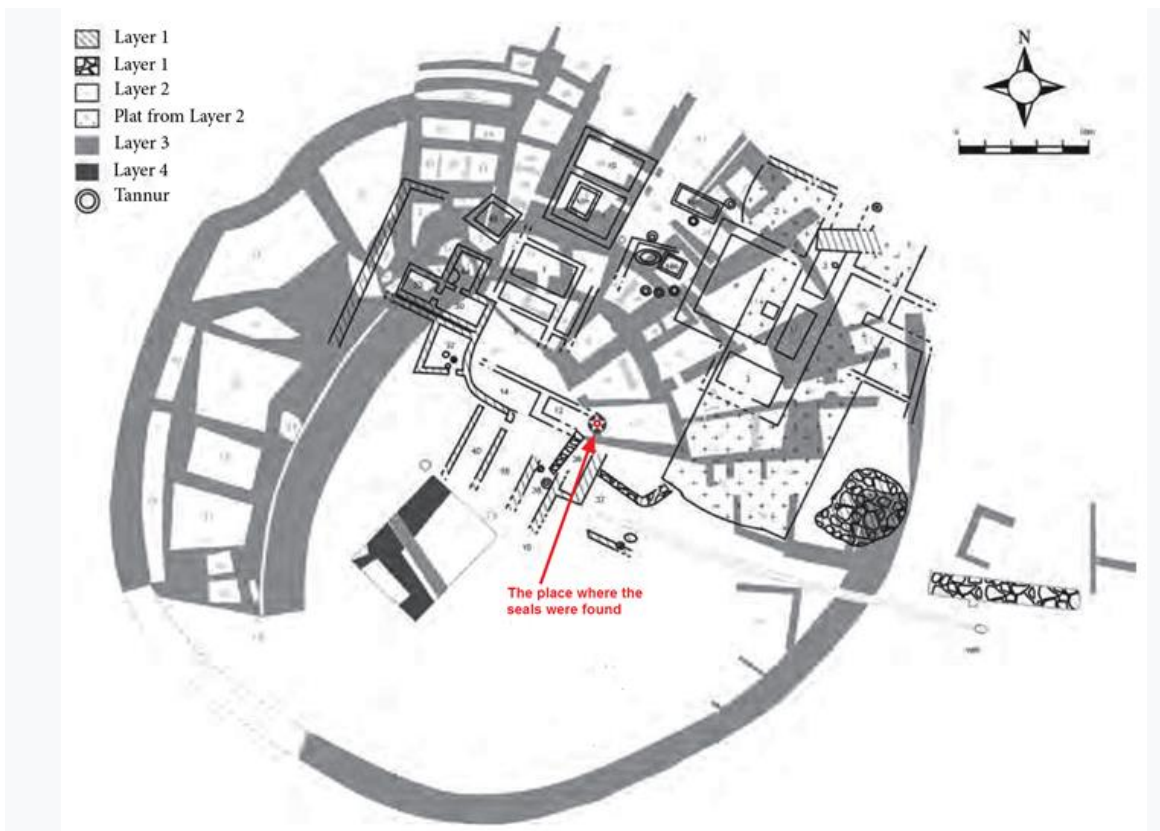


Plate 3: Tall al-Faras. Sketch of Strata 1-4. The starred area indicates the find spot of the hoard (Muhl and Sulaiman 2011: 373, fig.1). Hoarding was a common habit in the third millennium BC, examples of which were found in many locations, and these treasures represented personal wealth hidden under the floors (Muhl and Sulaiman 2011: 376).

The scenes that were engraved on the seals from Tall al-Faras varied, but it was dominated by scenes of drinking, contests and various animals (Muhl and Sulaiman 2011: 374-6). We have chosen seven seals³ that contain drinking scenes as the topic of this article.

³ - Eight of the seals of Tell al-Faras had a drinking scene, but unfortunately we were not able to examine the eighth seal, which bears the museum registration number 181415 IM. That seal, however, was included within the statistics.

The Drinking Scenes on the Seals from Tall al-Faras



Iraq Museum



Figure No. 1 (IM-181423)

A cylinder seal engraved with a drinking scene consisting of a man sitting on a chair on the right side, raising a goblet with his right hand, a man stands in front of him; it is likely that he is serving him.

On the left side of the scene, a person (perhaps a woman) sits on a chair and is faced by a standing person, serving him, and between them is a large jar in which six straws are placed. The seated person drinks from one of them.

The empty spaces in the scene were filled with various elements, including a small animal (perhaps a goat) on the right side, standing in a vertical position, with its head facing down. And something unclear is depicted in the middle between the man sitting and the man standing, and there is something like a stick between the two standing people, as well as a spherical object in front of the sitting person (For comparisons see: Woolley 1934: pl. 193: 14; Buchanan 1981: fig. 325).



Figure No. 2 (IM-181410)

The surface of the seal is divided into two registers, separated by two horizontal lines. In the upper register, there is a drinking scene consisting of a large jar in the middle, and a man sitting on a chair on the right side, holding a straw in his right hand coming out of the jar, behind his head is a long line that looks like a snake or plant. On the left side, there is a person (perhaps a woman) sitting on a chair, who holds a straw coming out of the jar in his left hand, and behind his head is a long wavy line that looks like a snake or plant.

The representation of the lower register is completely similar to the scene in the upper register, the only difference between them is that the person sitting on the left side of the upper register is sitting on a chair with a flat base, which has a horizontal wooden beam. As for the rest of the chairs, they have a flat base and crossed legs in the form of the letter X. (For a comparison see: Fales 2017: 212, fig.149; Frankfort 1955: 32, 322; Buchanan 1981: fig. 336).⁴

⁴. This seal is quite similar, the only difference is the existence of a plant that may represent a spike behind the man, and it was dated to the Third Dynastic Period.

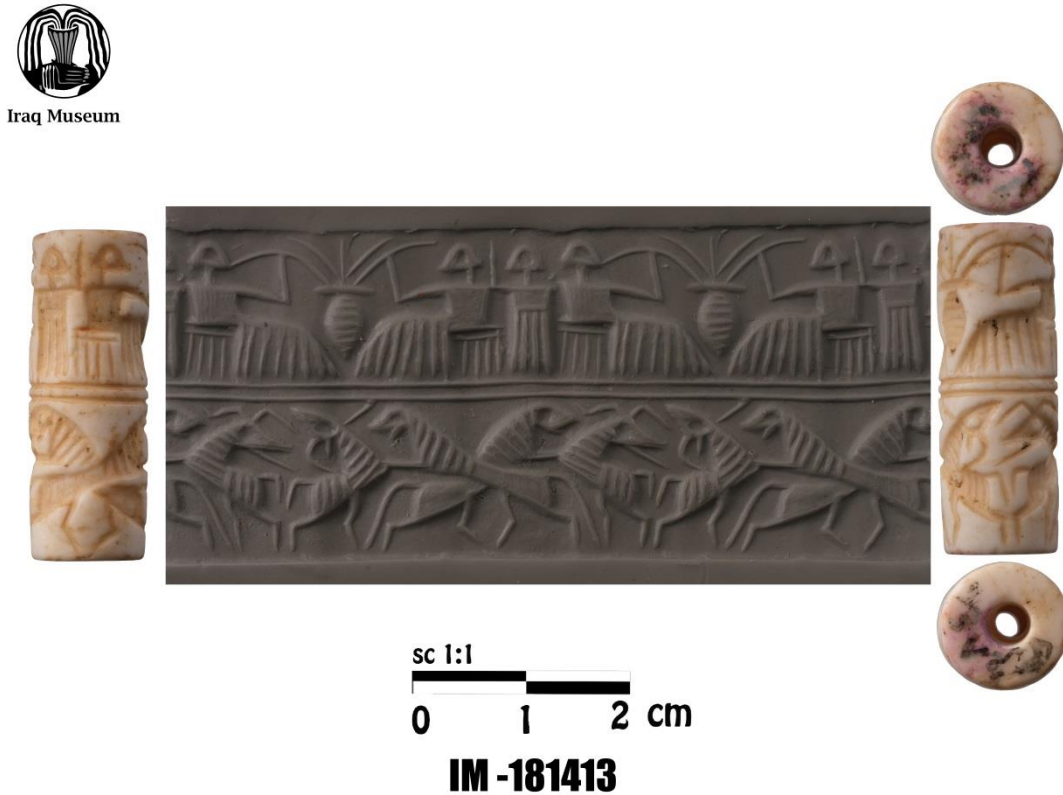


Figure No. 3 (IM-181413)

The surface of the seal was divided into two horizontal registers separated by two parallel lines. In the upper register, a drinking scene was depicted consisting of two people facing each other, each sitting on a chair. Between them is a large jar from which five straws protrude, each man holds a straw and drinks from it. Behind the person sitting on the right side, a third person smaller than them stands with his right hand raised. The three figures are depicted in a similar form.

The lower register depicts a combat scene consisting of two lions facing each other standing on their hind legs, their bodies intersecting in what looks like the letter X and each attacking a goat standing in front of it and turning its head back (For comparison see: Buchanan 1981: fig. 334).

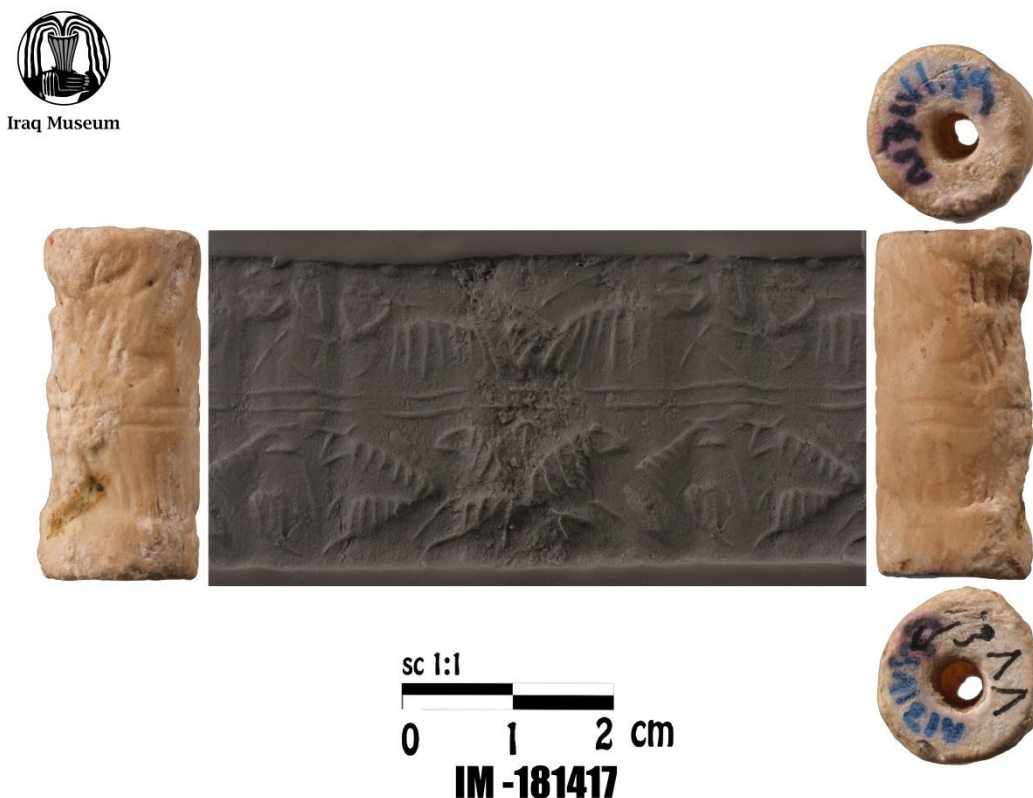


Figure No. 4 (IM-181417)

The surface of the seal is divided into two horizontal registers separated by two parallel lines. In the upper register, there is a drinking scene consisting of two people facing each other, each sitting on a chair, with a large jar between them. They drink by using a straw, the rest of the scene details are unclear.

The lower register depicts a combat scene consisting of two opposite lions standing on their hind legs, their bodies intersecting in what looks like the letter X and each attacking a deer standing in front of it and turning its head back (For comparison see: Woolley 1934: pl.194: 33; Lambert 1966: pl. 15:12).



Figure No. 5 (IM-181428)

The surface of the seal is divided into two horizontal registers separated by two parallel lines. In the upper register, a drinking scene depicted two people sitting opposite each other, each holding a straw out from a small jar placed between them, and there are two other straws out from that jar. A person stands behind each of them to serve them. All the figures are depicted in a similar shape.

In the lower register, there is a row of three goats in the position of walking to the right (For comparison see: Legrain 1951: pl. 8: 119, 121).



Figure No. 6 (IM-181427)

The surface of the seal is divided into two horizontal registers separated by a horizontal line. In the upper register three crossed pairs of animals are shown, although it is not clear which species they are. The two on the right and the animal shown furthest to the left have long tails. The body of the front ones turned to the right is patterned with parallel transverse lines. Whether they are lions is not sure, also whether they all belong to the same species or whether there are also herbivores cannot be seen. However, based on the other examples of this theme, it seems likely. Between the groups of animals there is a naked hero on the right and a bull-man on the left. The end of the scene is formed by two vertical lines running slightly together towards the bottom with a cross connection about in the middle. As for the lower register, it is represented by a drinking scene consisting of two groups, the first from the right side consists of two people sitting on chairs, each of whom raises his hand forward, carrying a goblet, and behind each of them stands a person to serve him.

As for the second group on the left, it consists of two people sitting on chairs, each of whom raises his hand in front of him, holding a goblet, and a third person stands in the middle, directing to the right, raising his hand in front of him, perhaps to offer a drink to the person sitting opposite him. There is a diagonal line in front of the person sitting on the left side and behind him a vertical line (For comparison see: Buchanan 1981: fig. 243).



Figure No. 7 (IM-181406)

The surface of the seal is divided into two registers separated by two lines. The upper register is represented by a drinking scene consisting of four people. A large jar is depicted in the middle, from which five straws stick out. On the right side, a person sits on a chair while drinking by using one of the straws inclined towards him. Another person sits behind him on a chair who raises a goblet. On the left side of the jar, a third person sits drinking with a straw, and a fourth person sits behind him on a chair while he raises a goblet. Behind him, a jar is placed on a high stand.

As for the lower register, it is engraved with two scenes, the first on the right side is represented by a crescent-shaped boat, in which two men sit opposite each other and in the middle of them is a goat. Above them there is a crescent, and below the boat is a straight line representing water, below which two fish are heading to the left.

The second scene on the left side is represented by the combat of two opposite lions, each of them attacking an animal. The animal on the right side is a cow, while the animal on the left side is a goat (For comparison see: Porada 1948: pl. 19:118E; Woolley 1934: pl. 193: 20).

General Notes on the Seals from Tell Al-Faras Depicting Drinking Scenes

We note that this group of seals from Tall al-Faras is dated to the Third Early Dynastic Period (2600–2350 BC), and is carved in a stylized art style. The outer lines tend mostly to be straight, and all figures are carved in a similar shape, each of them has a head carving in what is known as the style of a bird's head, which has a circular or semi-circular shape

with an almond eye and a prominent triangular nose, and without hair or a beard, so it is difficult to distinguish between men and women. As for the bodies, they are fit, harmonious, and devoid of details. The clothes are represented by a long dress or garment with vertical folds except Figure No. 1.

The chairs on which the figures sit are simple without armrests, and they have four legs, some of them long, supported by horizontal beams and some short with horizontal beams as well. There is another type whose legs are crossed in the form of the letter X.

The shapes of the jars for drinking varied between a large spherical jar with a wide rim that rests on a stand, and a large oval jar with wide rim and tapered base, as well as a jar with a triangular body, narrow rim and bell-shaped base, and relatively small jars with wide rim, a triangular body and a tapered base. In each of these jars, a group of straws are placed, numbering between three and six.

Although they are devoid of details, the drinking scenes in the seals from Tall al-Faras vary in the number of drinkers between two types. The first type commonly has two or three drinkers, while in the second type four drinkers are distributed into two registers. The manner of drinking and the drinking material vary. It is most likely that the figures who drink from a goblet are drinking wine, and those who drink from a jar through a straw are drinking beer, although the two drinks might be combined in one scene as in Figs. 1 and 7. We also note that in the seals that are engraved with two registers, the registers sometimes relate to each other, such as Fig. 2, in which the scene of drinking is repeated in all its details, as well as Fig. 7. Perhaps there is a relationship between the two registers represented in the depiction of the drinkers as they reach the place of the drinking through the boat. This scene is repeated in the votive plaques, as we see figures riding in a boat or chariot in the lower register of some of these plaques, and in the upper register of the plaque itself a scene of drinking (Garrison 1989: 12-13).

As for other scenes that often depict combat between animals, there is no apparent link between them and the scenes of drinking that occupy one of the two registers, unless the intention of these scenes of conflict is a rhetorical image of protection or a combat of good against evil, which is the responsibility of the ruler towards his people. Most probably, the person in the drinking scene is the ruler himself (Ziffer 2005: 134).

Most of the drinking scenes are on cylinder seals, excluding many seals that are found the royal cemetery of Ur (Woolley 1934: pl. 193-195). We note that they are devoid of the details that we can see in the drinking gatherings that are carved according to other arts, especially votive plaques and the standard of Ur, such as the presence of a musician and people carrying jars or preparing for a banquet. Perhaps the scenes depicted on the cylinder seals embody special occasions for their owners, such as wedding celebrations, family occasions, or as part of daily life.

Drinking Scenes

Drinking scenes have been defined as a symbolic subject, in which one or more persons are depicted sitting drinking from a goblet in his hand or from a jar in front of him through tubes of cane (Pinnock 1994: 15; Zajdowski 2013: 2). Drinking scenes have been depicted in the Mesopotamian arts since early times. The first appearance was in the Late Protoliterate Period, and the scenes spread on other kinds of objects in the Early Dynastic Period, and continued to be depicted on cylinder seals in the Akkadian Period (Hansen 1963: 161).

What is the purpose of the drinking gatherings, what are the occasions on which they are held, who are the people who drink, what drinks are served to them, and who serve the drinkers, and what were these gatherings embodied in the Mesopotamian arts? All these questions will be answered in this paper.

The Purpose of the Drinking Gatherings

The purpose of the drinking gatherings, as embodied in the artistic productions and enhanced by cuneiform texts, is celebration, enjoyment and relaxation. This is evident in the position of the drinkers, as they are sitting facing each other, raising their goblets, or holding a straw that reaches the drinking jar. They are often accompanied by a number of people who serve them and prepare everything for the celebration. Also the presence of a male or female musician creates an atmosphere of joy through singing and playing musical instruments (Renette 2014: 61-86).

Drinking beer is considered one of the blessings of civilization, and the gods used to drink beer to feel happy (Paulette 2021: 8; Bienkowski and Millard 2000: 46). Moreover, drinking makes the drinkers feel comfortable and joyful, as occurred in the epic of Gilgamesh and described the state of Enkidu after drinking alcohol for the first time:

“He drank from the intoxicating drink seven times, his soul rejoiced, and his heart cheers up” (Parpola 1997: 75: 45-48).

For this good effect of drinking for the souls of the drinkers, it is stated in a proverb: *“He who does not know liquor does not know what is good; liquor makes the house pleasant”*, “pleasure from liquor; weariness from a journey” (Saggs 1962: 430).

In some cuneiform texts, beer is described as *“The liquid that makes the liver and the heart happy and the goddess Inanna rejoices”* (Civil 1964: 74: 70-79).

Occasions that Require Holding Banquets and Drinking Gatherings

There are many occasions in which drinking gatherings are held, and cuneiform texts and artistic scenes that depicted these events on various types of arts indicate them (Paulette 2021:7), especially in the Early Dynastic Period, as there are many religious and mundane rituals accompanied by holding banquets and drinking gatherings (Zwaid and Cripps 2020: 105:4, 6; Renette 2014: 71; Pollock 2002: 24; Bienkowski and Millard 2000: 46-47).

Banquets were associated with rituals associated with the dead, including offering them food and drink (Pollock 2002: 26-27).

The completion of the construction of a temple, a palace, or a city is a reason for holding celebrations and preparing banquets (Bienkowski and Millard 2000: 47), in which various types of food and drinks including wine, are served to the guests. One of the best known examples of a feast in the context of temple construction is the votive plaque of Ur-Nanshe, which shows his celebration with his family members after he finished building a temple (Hansen 2003: 31, fig. 16). It is also believed that the sacred marriage rituals of the gods Inanna and Dumuzi were held by their representatives on earth, the queen and the king, as annual rituals at least since the Ur III period and its aftermath (Sallaberger und Westenholz 1999: 155-156). In the rites, offerings are made, and wine is poured, as stated in the writings of Prince Gudea (van Buren 1944: 45-46). A text from the reign of the king of the first Isin dynasty, Iddin-Dagan, states that what is happening in the sacred marriage ceremonies is establishing a banquet that includes large quantities of food and drink, and on this occasion a ritual takes place by pouring black beer and barley beer (Reisman 1973: 186-191).

One of the occasions that require holding banquets and drinking gatherings is the

wedding, as such banquets are held in the house of the bride's family, and the groom's family and friends are invited to these banquets (Ellison 1978: 332). It is customary for the groom's family to bring some food with them, represented by bread, beer jars, and oils (Ellison 1978: 264). The scenes depicted on the votive plaques in which a group of people carrying food and jars of wine is seen moving towards the place where the celebrants sit while drinking (Hansen 2003:75, fig. 3). This may indicate that these scenes represent a celebration of the wedding.

There are many rituals that are accompanied or followed by holding banquets and drinking gatherings. Banquets are suitable occasions for taking decisions and taking an oath of allegiance (Bienkowski and Millard 2000: 47).

Victory in the battle or returning from a hunting trip are reasons to hold a celebration that includes a banquet for drink and food, as in the two events the royal hero appears as he performs his task in keeping order and protection from enemies and the forces of nature. The Standard of Ur is the best evidence for the celebrations that followed victory in battle by holding drinking gatherings, preparing banquets and playing, which are embodied in detail in it (Winter 2016: 36: 1; Renette 2014: 84; Hansen 2003: 97-100, fig. 52). This tradition continued in later periods, and one example is the scene carved on a stone tablet in which King Ashurbanipal is depicted celebrating with his wife after his victory over Elam (Adam 2014: 247, fig. 3).

Harvest celebrations are also accompanied by drinking beer, and perhaps the large number of artistic scenes, especially found on votive plaques from the Early Dynastic Period, as scenes of drinking appear, are likely to represent a celebration of the harvest (Bahar 2013: 417, fig. 2).

The Purpose of Embodying Drinking Gatherings in Artistic Scenes

Several opinions have been presented about the purpose of embodying drinking scenes in the arts of Mesopotamia, including:

The artistic scenes are an embodiment and documentation of the actions carried out by the rulers, including participation in the celebration of the harvest, fertility and growth. The presence of animals and people holding good things and the main figures shown sitting with a bundle of ears of wheat or a date bunch (in some scenes, especially those carved on votive plaques) reflect the nature of this occasion. The participants of the celebration must be members of the ruling family (Bahar 2013: 417, fig. 2).

Some researchers interpret the scenes of the drinking gatherings as a celebration of the sacred marriage that takes place between the goddess Inanna and the god Dumuzi or those who represented them such as the ruler of the city and the high priestess. They support their opinion by the presence of plant branches held by the main figures; moreover, the presence of domestic animals is evidence of fertility and growth (Frankfort 1939: 77).

Among the opinions about the purpose of depicting the ruler in the banquet scene is that it represents the best appearance for him, and it is a symbolic image of the wealth of his people. The appearance of the ruler in such scenes is a reduced image of the ruler who is responsible for the system (Ziffer 2005: 133-134).

Another opinion explained the banquet scenes served as a constant reminder of the lavishness and exclusivity of the ritual feasts of a group of people participating in power (Renette 2014: 75).

Zajdowski indicates that the act of drinking in the banquet scenes shows the loyalty and

status of subordinates to their boss (Zajdowski 2013: 3), The meaning of drinking scenes developed in the Akkadian and Neo-Sumerian Periods into a scene of presentation, as the owner of the seal is depicted as he is presented by a secondary god to a seated chief god holding a goblet in his hand (Zajdowski 2013: 4; Collon 2003: 6).

Frankfort and Porada agree that the significance of the banquet scenes is religious or ritualistic, because the artistic objects with the banquet scenes are found in temples or royal tombs (Frankfort 1939:77; Porada 1948: 15).

The banquet scene motif is interpreted to represent deceased individuals dining in the afterlife (Renette 2014: 70).

Another opinion indicates that the banquet scenes in the Early Dynastic Period represented agricultural festivals, while in the Akkadian Period it became a celebration of the New Year and tended to be simplified, being satisfied with depicting two people sitting opposite each other without the presence of other followers (Zajdowski 2013: 3).

The Identity of the Figures in the Drinking Gatherings

As for the figures depicted in the drinking gatherings, the opinions presented about them varied. Ward considers that the figures who are drinking are gods and goddesses, and the figures who serve them are worshipers (Ward 1910: 36), while Collon finds it difficult to determine the identity of the figures participating in the drinking gatherings, since the rulers in the Early Dynastic Period occupied priestly positions. Since distinguishing the gods from humans is not easy, she suggests that the participants in the banquet may represent the gods or more likely a priest and priestess or rulers and their consorts (Collon 1990: 44).

Furlong indicates that the woman who holds a conical bowl depicted in the drinking gatherings may represent the priestess ENTU who plays the role of the goddess Inanna in the sacred marriage rituals. Such a vessel is found in the tomb of the priestess Antiochia at the site of Abu al-Salabikh (Furlong 1987: 32-33) while Lion and Michel believe that the depicted figures represent typical icons of banquets and served to commemorate political or social events (Lion and Michel 2016: 117).

Ziffer sees that the goblet and the twig that people hold in the drinking gatherings have a royal symbolism like the mace and that the person who holds them is a king (Ziffer 2005: 138).

Zajdowski confirms that the seated person who carries a goblet in the drinking scenes is the ruler who is considered at the top of the social pyramid, as sitting on the throne means rule and the goblet is a symbol of authority (Zajdowski 2013: 3-4).

Alcoholic Drinks

The people of Mesopotamia were familiar with alcoholic drinks since early times, and perhaps the most important one is beer of various kinds (Al-Nidai 2022: 44-46; Paulette 2021: 5; Reiner 1974: 69-71). Beer is known in the Sumerian language as (KAŠ) meaning beer or alcoholic drinks, and in the Akkadian language it is known as šikaru (CAD,š:420:a). The goddess (^dNIN.KA.SI) is the main goddess of beer, and that name means Lady of the Mouth or Lady of the Goblet (Bottéro 2004: 91; Civil 1964: 69-73).

In addition to beer of all kinds, the Mesopotamia people were familiar with wine, for which they used the Sumerian word (GIŠTIN) and the Akkadian word (karanu) (CAD,K:202:b).

It is believed that alcoholic drinks in early times may have contained quantities of sediments, so they are drunk through special straws whose ends are perforated with small

holes (Collon 2003: 5; Fulong 1987: 31; Frankfort 1939: 78) and that such straws are placed at the end of a metal filter or that they are all made of metal (Frankfort 1939: 78).

The probability of the presence of sediments in the drinking is weak, because the drinks are filtered, and the presence of sediments would lead to closing the small openings of the straw and make drinking through them unpleasant, but it is more likely that the beer is drunk from the straw to eliminate or avoid the foam that formed on its surface.

Beer is of great importance in the lives of people in Mesopotamia, because drinking it is part of many religious rituals, and it is poured on special occasions. For example, the rituals of removing and renovating the ruins of ancient temples is accompanied by offering sacrifices and drinks, including beer, along with honey, oil and milk (Pritchard 1969: 340-341).

Beer is the most common drink consumed by all classes of society (Hornsey 2003: 77) in celebrations of all kinds, as well as the main drink served in the daily meals of the gods (Civil 1964: 88; Bottéro 2004: 92), and good types of beer are among the offerings offered to the gods in the harvest season (Maeda 1979: 19ff; Berger 2012).

Offerings to the dead also included wine and beer (Bayliss 1973: 124), as the funeral offerings include various types of food and drink, including beef, lamb, bread, beer, milk, drink, sesame oil, honey, and all kinds of fruits. These offerings are made at the end of every lunar month (Bayliss 1973: 124).

The sacred pouring was one of the important rituals in Mesopotamia, which was held on many religious and secular occasions, and the pouring drinks varied including water, wine, beer, oil, among others (Black and Green 1992: 117).

Beer had a great importance in the daily life in Mesopotamia, as it was drunk during daily meals as well as on official occasions and celebrations (Al-Nidai 2022: 64). It was given as part of the rations to workers and employees (Pollock 2002: 28) and it was also among the things provided as a dowry for a bride. Soldiers and clerks receive bread and beer on occasions as a reward, in addition to the fact that alcoholic drinks were a refreshing and intoxicating drink. These drinks, especially beer, entered the medical field and the preparation of medicines, as they were mixed with medicine to improve its taste and used as an anesthetic for the patient (Al-Nidai 2022: 46, 56). Beer was also used to flavor some food recipes (Alwash 2020: 277; Bienkowski and Millard 2000: 48).

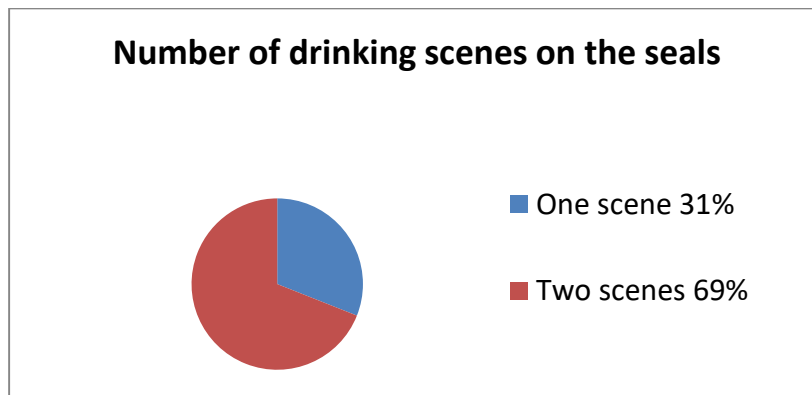
General Statistics for 160 Seals Depicting Drinking Scenes

In order to find out the details of the drinking scenes engraved on the seals in terms of the surface design of the seals and the location of the drinking scenes and the accompanying scenes and to know the number of drinkers and companions, the way of drinking and its tools, about 160 published seals are studied that include scenes of drinking found at a variety of sites, the most important of which are Ur, Tall Asmar and Khafaji, Kish, Shuruppak and other separate sites⁵, as well as the unpublished Tall al-Faras seals, all of which dated to the Early Dynastic III Period and may clarify the following:

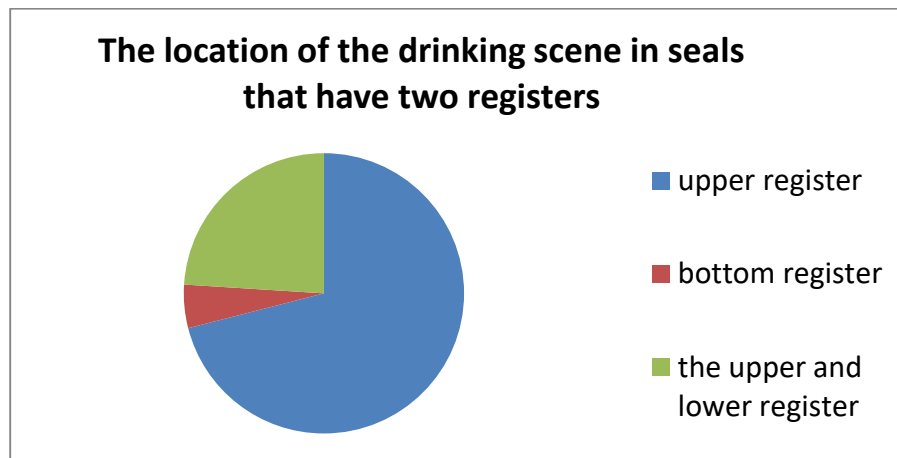
The Design of the Seal and the Location of the Drinking Scene on It

⁵ Buchanan 1981: fig. 317, 326, 327, 332-336; Collon 1995:73:c; Eisen 1940: pl. 4: 25, 26; Frankfort 1939: pl.15: a, b, c; Frankfort 1955: fig. 248, 316, 322, 334, 336, 351, 358, 359, 416, 465, 545, 968; Furlong 1987: 249: E2, 287: J1, J2, J3, J4, 291: J5, J6; Karep 1974: pl. 181: 1, 4, 5, 9-17, pl. 194: 19, 21-23, 25, 28-30, pl. 212: 12, 15, 18, 22, pl. 236: 19, 22; Kist 2003: fig. 68, 69, 109, 110; Lambert 1966: pl. 15: 11, 12; Legrain 1936: pl. 30: 521-525; Legrain 1951: fig. 119-121, 123-129, 131-132, 138-139, 141-142; Porada 1948 fig.105-114, 118; Wiseman 1962: pl. 23: h, 24: a, b, c, d, e, f, 25: a, b, c, d, e, 26: a, b, c, d, e; Woolley 1934: pl. 193: 14-21, pl. 194: 22-33, pl. 195: 34-40, pl. 200: 94, 95, 98-105).

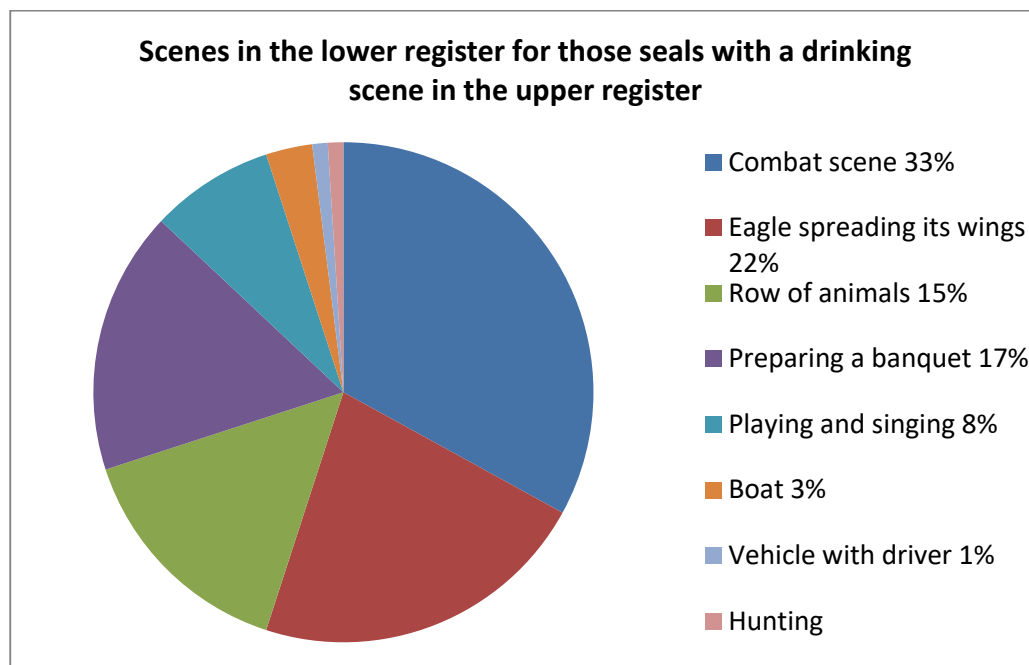
As for the surface design and the location of the drinking scene on the seals, 31% of the seals are carved with one scene that occupies the entire surface of the seal and 69% of the seals are engraved with two registers.



As for the location of the drinking scenes in the arrangement of the registers on the seals that included two registers, 71% of the seals had the drinking scene depicted in the upper register, 24% had drinking scenes depicted in the upper and lower registers, and only 5% of the seals had the drinking scene occupying the lower register. While 3% of the seals had a scene of struggle depicted in the upper register, 2% have a scene of an eagle spreading its wings and laying its claws on two animals that have turned their backs to the other.



As for the subjects of the scenes that are depicted in the lower register of the seals that had a drinking scene in the upper register, their subjects varied, including 33% a conflict scene, 22% a scene of an eagle spreading its wings on both sides, 17% a scene of preparing for a banquet, 15% a scene of a row of animals, and 8% a scene of playing and singing, 3% a boat scene, 1% a vehicle scene with a driver, and 1% is hunting scene.

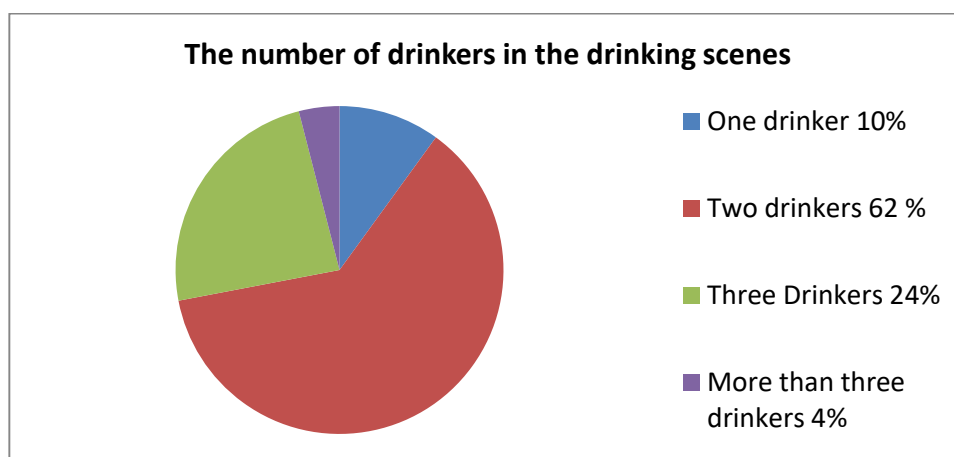


The Number of the Participants in the Drinking Scenes

The selected seals have approximately 188 drinking scenes, which include the scenes depicted in one register and the scenes that depicted in both the upper and lower registers. The number of participants in them varied from one scene to another, as follows:

A-The number of the drinkers in the drinking scenes

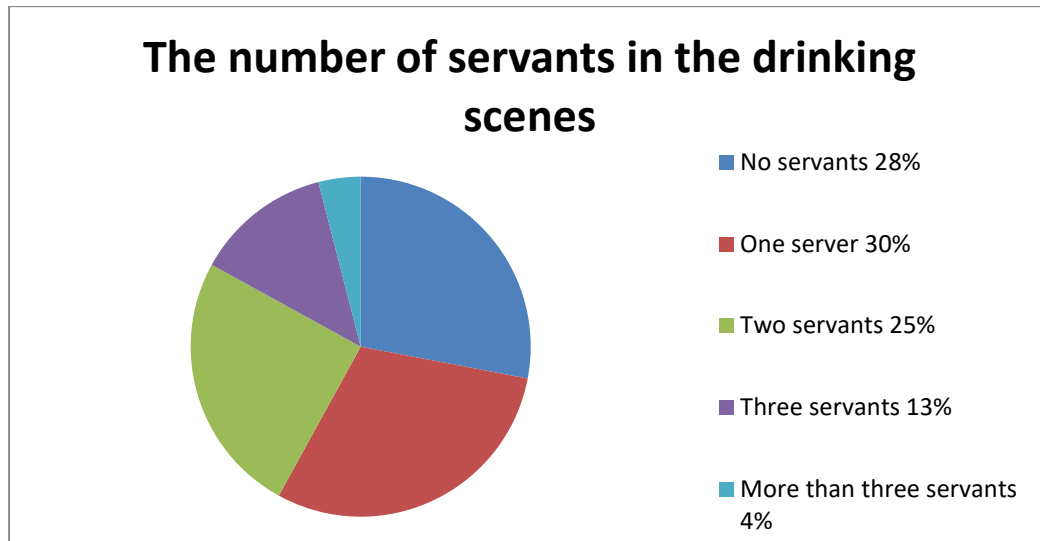
The number of drinkers in the drinking gatherings, who are always depicted sitting, varied from one scene to another. In 10% of the scenes one person, who is often a god, drinks, in 62% two drinkers face each other, in 24% there are three people, and in 4% there are more than three drinkers.



B. The number of the servants in the drinking scenes

The servants who accompany the drinkers stand in front or behind them and serve them drinks with the goblet. Their numbers differed from one scene to another, and some scenes

have no servants. In 28% of the scenes there are no servants and only drinkers are shown, 30% include only one servant, in 25% two servants are depicted, and in 13% there are three servants, while only in 4% of the scenes more than three servants depicted, who are placed in front and behind the drinkers.



Third: Drinking ways and tools:

Two ways of drinking are shown. The first way is through a straw from a jar placed in front of the drinkers, and the second way is by using a goblet. The two ways are used in the same number of scenes, and many scenes combine the two ways together, perhaps for two types of drinks represented by beer and wine. The proportions are as follows:

In 51% drinking is by a goblet, and in 49% drinking is from a jar through a straw.



CONCLUSIONS

The distinctive location of Tell al-Faras, its large area, the huge circular building built in it, and the large number of artifacts excavated in it and dated to the Early Dynastic Period, indicated that the site was an important settlement or a thriving city that was economically and prosperous in this period.

Many of the seals of Tell al-Faras are distinguished by the quality of the materials used

(see the table of seals) represented by lapis lazuli, alabaster and steatite, as well as a group made of limestone. The seals were also characterized by the quality of their manufacture and carving, which indicates that they were made with high craftsmanship, perhaps in a workshop belonging to the palace or the temple. What supports that they were made locally is the discovery of a seal of alabaster stone pierced longitudinally, but not engraved with a scene, meaning that it was incomplete (This seal was found in the treasure box and has the excavation number 121, which is specified for studying).

The seals from Tall al-Faras seals with drinking scenes dated to the period of the dawn of the Early Third Dynastic Period EDIIIa, by comparing them with similar scenes at sites from Ur and Tall Asmar. The similarity in the technique of engraving seals, the artistic style, and the carved subjects represented by scenes of conflict, drinking and rows of animals (which are common scenes in the seals of Mesopotamia in the Early Third Dynastic Period), indicates the existence of a cultural connection between the site of Tall al-Faras and other sites in the central and southern region, especially with the city of Ur. That is supported by the great similarity between what was discovered in the treasure hole at Tall al-Faras and in the royal cemetery of Ur, from pendants, especially a fish-shaped pendant made of gold and leaf-shaped pendants made of lapis lazuli.






The presence of 23 seals with statues and ornaments in one hole indicates that the ownership of these seals was for a religious or secular institution or for one large family, or that they were for a sculptor. This possibility is enhanced by the presence of an incomplete cylinder seal, as well as the absence of writing on any of them, as well as the diversity in its scenes and models, and the presence of some damaged seals may indicate the intention to re-sculpt or renew them.

That reason also leads us to exclude the idea that the finds in the hole were a gift presented to a ruler or a distinguished person, because the seals in it were used and some of them were damaged. The drinking scenes carved on the seals of Tall al-Faras were characterized by their simplicity and limited to the drinkers and servants only, that is, they are drinking scenes and not a complete banquet, which is likely to embody an aspect of the daily life or special occasions of their owners, who are likely to have a prominent position in society due to the presence of the servants.

The drinking scenes in the seals of Tall al-Faras are similar to the majority of the drinking scenes carved on the seals of the period of the dawn of the Third Dynastic Period from various sites, as most of them include two registers. Seven of eight seals were carved with two registers, depicting the scene of drinking in the upper register in seven of them, and in one seal on the lower register. As for the second register, five of them depicted a scene of conflict, one of which included a boat in which two people were sailing alongside the scene of the conflict, and in one seal the drinking scene was repeated, and another seal contained a row of animals. The number of drinkers also varied from one scene to another, ranging from two to four figures accompanied by followers standing in front or behind to serve them. The means of drinking varied between drinking from a jar through a straw and drinking with a goblet.

The drinking scenes carved on cylinder seals and other artistic productions, in conjunction with the written evidence, revealed a set of cultural aspects of the Early Dynastic Period, as they revealed an important aspect of practices with religious and secular connotations of rituals and celebrations that prevailed in that period.

Table

No.	Picture	Registration No.	Museum No.	Season	Location	Material	Colour	Dimesions		Theme	Date
								Height	Diameter		
Fig. 1		94	181423 IM	First 2001	Layer 2, West corner of room 52 is inside a hole	Alabaster	creamy	31mm	17mm	Drink scene	EDIII
Fig. 2		81	181410 IM	First 2001	Layer 2, West corner of room 52 is inside a hole	Alabaster	creamy	30mm	8mm	upper and lower: Drink scene	ED III
Fig. 3		84	181413 IM	First 2001	Layer 2, West corner of room 52 is inside a hole	Alabaster	creamy	32mm	10mm	upper: Drink scene lower: combat scene	EDIII
Fig. 4		88	181417 IM	First 2001	Layer 2, West corner of room 52 is inside a hole	limestone	creamy			upper: Drink scene lower: combat scene	EDIII
Fig. 5		99	181428 IM	First 2001	Layer 2, West corner of room 52 is inside a hole	limestone	creamy	43mm	12mm	upper: Drink scene lower: animal scene	EDIII
Fig. 6		98	181427 IM	First 2001	Layer 2, West corner of room 52 is inside a hole	Lapis lazuli	blue	34mm	14mm	Upper: combat scene lower: drink scene	EDIII
Fig. 7		77	181406 IM	First 2001	Layer 2, West corner of room 52 is inside a hole	Alabaster	Wait	28mm	11mm	upper: Drink scene lower: combat scene and boat	EDIII

مشاهد الشراب في بلاد الرافدين القديمة في ضوء أختام تلّ الفرس

أوسام بحر*

ملخص

عُثِرَ في موقع تلّ الفرس في العراق على حفرة في أرضية إحدى الغرف ضمت عدداً من النّاتجات الفنيّة، من بينها 23 ختمًا أرخت لعصر فجر السلالات الثالث ونُقِشت بمشاهد متنوعة؛ ثمانية منها صُوِّرت فيها مشاهد شراب، درّس هذا البحثُ سبعة منها، مُبيِّناً أهميّة الشراب في بلاد الرافدين والمناسبات التي تُقام فيها مجالسُه، ومُعرِّفاً الشاربين، وذاكِراً الغاية من تصوير تلك المشاهد، وواصفاً مشاهد الأختام، ومُوضِّحاً عناصرها الفنيّة. واعتماداً على إحصائيّة مُكوّنة من 160 ختمًا نُقِشت بمشاهد الشراب، وَضَّحَ البحثُ تصميمَ المشهد الفنيّ في الختم، وأعدادَ الشاربين والقائمين على خدمتهم، ووسائل الشراب فيها.

الكلمات الدالة: : مشاهد المأدبة، مشاهد الشراب، تلّ الفرس، الأختام الأسطوانيّة، أختام فجر السلالات، بلاد الرافدين.

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