

Inscribed Sasanian Bullae at the National Museum of Iran^{*}

Daryoush Akbarzadeh & Touraj Daryaee

National Museum of Iran & University of California,
Irvine



e-Sasanika 12
2012

Sasanian bullae are important objects in understanding the economic and administrative history of *Ērānšahr*. The bulla which is a seal impression onto clay was used as a signatory device for commodities and letters.¹ Until now a large number of collections from both museums and private collectors have been published,² and with each publication our knowledge of economic, social and administrative history of *Ērānšahr* deepens. The collection under study here provide further evidence to different localities, some known and others of unknown provenance. However, these collections provide a microcosm of economic history of several provinces of the Iranian Plateau. By studying these collections one is able to gather detailed information on the administrative function of the specific Zoroastrian priests, religious endowments, accountants and other personalities who were traders and businessmen.

^{*} We would like to thank the National Museum of Iran and the American Institute of Iranian Studies for their support for the publication of project. We would like to thank Kh. Rezakhani for photographing the entire collection and Dr. Judith Lerner for her work on the project. We hope that a complete catalogue of the entire collection be published as our joint project. This is a preliminary survey of our readings of the inscribed bullae.

¹ Most recently the 260 Pahlavi letters found, now housed at the Bancroft Library has some 82 letters with their bullae still attached to them, see G. Azarpay, "Bullae from the Pahlavi Archive at the University of California, Berkeley", *Ērān ud Anērān: Studies Presented to Boris Ilich Marshak*, Matteo Compareti, Paola Raffetta, Gianroberto Scarcia, Eds., Buenos Aires, 2003, p. 61.

² Some of these studies include, A.D.H. Bivar, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Stamp Seals in the British Museum. Stamp Seals II: The Sassanian Dynasty*, London 1969; R.N. Frye, "Sasanian Seal Inscriptions," *Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte und deren Nach-leben, Festschrift für Franz Altheim zum 6.10.1968*, eds. R. Stiehl und H.E. Stier, Berlin: Zweiter Band, Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1970, pp. 77-84; R.N. Frye, "Sassanian Clay Sealings in the Baghdad Museum," *Sumer*, Vol. 26, 1970, pp. 237-240; R. Göbl, *Der Sasanidische Siegelkanon*, Braunschweig 1973; R.N. Frye, *Sasanian Remains from Qasr-i Abu Nasr*, Cambridge, MA, 1973; G. Gropp, "Some Sasanian Clay Bullae and Seal Stones," *The American Numismatic Society, Museum Notes* 19, New York 1974, pp. 119-144; R. Göbl, *Die Tonbullen vom Tacht-e Suleiman*, Berlin, 1976; J. Lerner, *Christian Seals of the Sasanian Period*, Istanbul 1977; J. Lerner & P. Oktor Skjaervo. "Some Uses of Clay Bullae in Sasanian Iran: Bullae in the Rosen and Museum of Arts Collections," *Res Orientales*, Vol. X, 1997; and D. Akbarzadeh, C.G. Cereti, F. Sinisi, "Preliminary Notes on the Collection of Sasanian Bullae held in Khoy," in *Iranian Identity in the Course of History: Proceedings of the Conference Held in Rome, 21-24 September 2005*, eds. C.G. Cereti et. al, Roma, pp. 11-22; Ph. Gignoux and R. Gyselen have published and studied the Sasanian bullae most exhaustively in various volumes. For the bibliography of all of these see R. Gyselen, *Sasanian Seal and Sealings in the Saeedi Collection*, Acta Iranica 44, Leuven, 2007, pp. ix-xviii.

Of course this type of material culture serves as a primary source and for understanding Iranian onomastics in late antiquity among other matters.

The National Museum of Iran holds a large number of Sasanian seals and bullae from different collections and archaeological finds. Between 2005 and 2007 we were able to gain access to these objects to photograph and study them. The team included D. Akbarzadeh, J. Lerner, Kh. Rezkhani and T. Daryaei. Out of the hundreds of the existing bulla at the museum some twenty one bullae are inscribed which mainly belong to the administrative and economic sphere. The three collections under study here are inscribed bullae from: I) The Mehrābād Collection: These are the bullae that were confiscated from collectors and smugglers at the old international airport in Tehran. There are three inscribed bullae from this collection. They are catalogued under the 2892 Exc. series at the museum; II) The Susa Collection: The Susa collection is of course from Khūzistān in Southwestern Iran. There are six bullae with multiple imprints from this collection; and III) The Kabūdān Collection: The Kabūdān collection are the bullae found from an archaeological context and thus it is important for understanding the local economy of a particular province. Kabūdān is an archaeological site east of the city of Gorgān which was first reported by M. Bayani.³ There are twelve bullae with multiple imprints of individuals and officials. Some of the bulla have been studied by Ph. Gignoux and R. Gyselen which is indicated, while others were from other finds.⁴

I. The Mehrābād Collection:

The Mehrābād Collections consists of administrative seals belonging to priests (*Mow*) and the priests who held the office of “The Protector of the Poor and the Judge.” Lastly, there is a personage by the name of Dād-Gušnasp who has chosen a ram as the central design for his seal. One of the common administrative seals is that of the *Mow* / مغ (*mgw*), which attests to the connection between the Zoroastrian church and the state in the late Sasanian period.⁵ The office of “The Protector of the Poor and the Judge,” / مدافع درویشان و دادور (*drīyōšān jādaggōw ud dādwar*) is an interesting religious office

³ M.Y. Kiani, “Gorgān iv. Archaeology,” Encyclopaedia Iranica, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gorgan-iv>; M. Bayani, “Études sur quelques bulles sassanides,” in Akbar Tajvidi and Muhammad-Yusof Kiani, eds., *The Memorial Volume of the Vth International Congress of Iranian Art and Archaeology 11th-18th April 1968*, 2 vols., Tehran, 1972, I, pp. 218-21.

⁴ Ph. Gignoux & R. Gyselen, *Bulles et sceaux sassanides de diverses collections*, Studia Iranica, cahier 4, Paris, 1987, Pp. 217-236.

⁵ For a survey of this office see R. Gyselen, *La Géographie Administrative de L'Empire Sassanide - Les Temoignages Sigillographiques*, Res Orientales I, Paris, 1989, pp. 38-40.

that we know was created from the ranks of the *mowbeds* (chief priests) to help the poor and the downtrodden which was not only a reaction to the Mazdakite movement, but a general trend in Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and later Islam.⁶ The bullae appear to be from an archive from the Caspian region of Daylamān.⁷ On the bullae the name of the region is given as *dyl'n* / *dēlān* / دیلان.⁸

1. Exc. 2892a
55x40mm
6 imprints



There are six imprints on the bullae which are mostly illegible. Two of the imprints with legends are illegible, but three other contain images of a boar, ram and bird. The most important part for us is the official imprint which reads:

⁶ T. Daryaei, "Modafe' Darvīshān va Dāvar dar Zamān-e Sāsānīān," *Tafazzolī Memorial Volume*, ed. A. Ashraf Sadeghi, Sokhan Publishers, Tehran, 2001, pp. 179-188.

⁷ Ph. Gignoux & R. Gyselen, *Bulles et sceaux sassanides de diverses collections*, Cahiers de Studia Iranica, no. 4, Paris, 1987, MFT 4; Gyselen, *La Géographie Administrative*, p. 45, ft. 40.

⁸ R. Gyselen, *La géographie administrative de l'Empire sassanide: Les témoignages sigillographiques*, Res Orientales 1, Bures-sur-Yvette, 1989, p. 45.



Margin: *dyl'n*
 Center: *dyl'n mgw*
dēlān mogw / dēlān
 "Mow of Dēlān"

2. Exc. 2892b
 51x50mm
 4 imprints

There are four imprints on the bullae with images of a boar, a bird and two inscribed imprints. The two imprints are identical to the above bullae (2892a). The two imprints are as follows:



Margin: *dyl'n*
 Center: *dyl'n mg[w]*
dēlān mo[w] / dēlān
 "The Mow of Dēlān"



d'd-gwšnsp / 'pzw'n'
dād-gušnasp / abzōn
 "Dād-Gušnasp" / "Increase"

3. Exc. 2892c
 67x64mm
 3 imprints

There are three imprints on the bullae with images of a lion and two inscribed imprints. One of the legible imprints are identical to the above bullae (2892b).





Margin: *dyl'n dlgwš['n y'tkwb' W d'twbl*

Center: *dyl'n*

dēlān / dēlān dryōšān jaddagōw ud dādwar

“Protector of the Poor and Judge of Dēlān”

مدافع درویشان و دادور گیلان



mgw'n ...

mowān ...

“Mow”

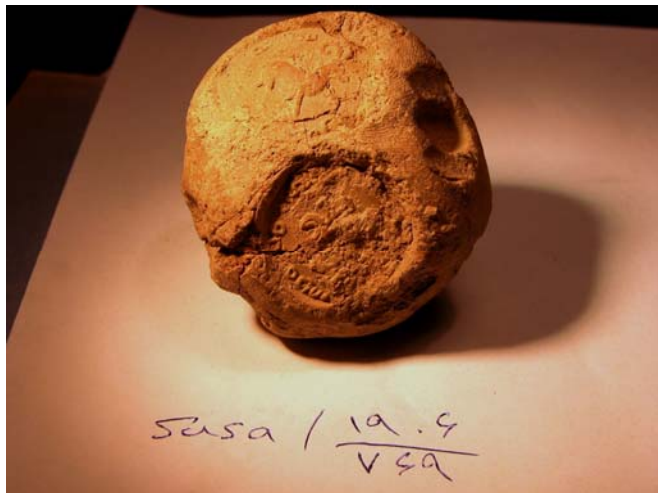
II. The Susa Collection:

The Susa collection contains diverse administrative bullae, from Ērān-xwarrah-Šābuhr which is indeed from southwestern Ērānšāhr. Gyselen has noted that there exists a seal of an accountant (*āmārgar*) for the Wahman-Ardaxšīr, Rēv-Ardašīr and Tarm with Ērān-xwarrah-Šābuhr which is identified as ancient Susa.⁹ The toponym Ērān is also present which based on the numismatic evidence with the mint signature of AYLAN, which Gyselen has also shown to refer to the Khūzestān province.¹⁰ Here we have a priest (*mow*) who is in charge of Ērān. There is also the “Protector of the Poor and the Jude” from this province.

There is an interesting administrative bullae belonging to priest of Šīyāk. Šīyāk appears to be from a district of Šērāz. In terms of officials, again the priests (Mow) are mostly present, but also the “Protector of the Poor and the Jude.”

1. Exc. 1906/769 / IBT 2
50x46
6 imprints

Two imprints where one is illegible but has a lion at the center.



⁹ Gyselen, *La Géographie Administrative*, pp. 46-47.

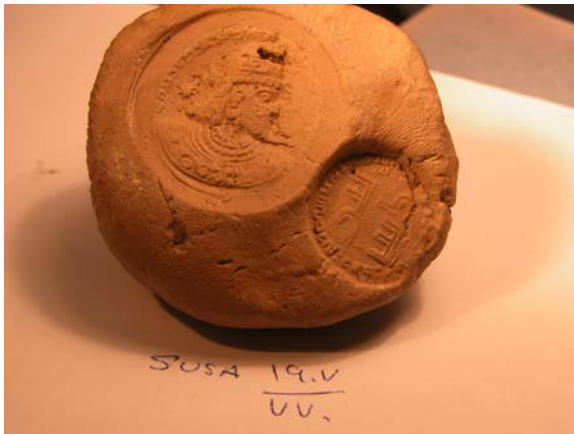
¹⁰ R. Gyselen, “Ateliers monétaires et cachets officiels sasanides,” *Studia Iranica*, vol. 8, no. 2, XXX p. 207.



Margin: 'twrp't Y mgw Y
 Center: 'y[l'n]
 ādurbād ī mow ī ērān
 "Adurbād, Mow of Ērān"¹¹
 آتورباد مغ ايران

2. Exc. 1907/770 / IBT1
 68x64
 5 imprints

Two imprints with legends.



¹¹ Ērān here refers to Ērān-xwarrah-Šābūhr, R. Gyselen, "Ateliers Monétaires et Cachets Officiels Sasanides," *Studia Iranica*, vol. 8, 1979, p. 206.



Margin: ...GDH š'hpwhly dl[*gwš'n y'tkwby W d'tbl*

Center: 'yl'n

... xwarrah-šābuhr drīyōšān jaddagow ud dādwar / ērān

"[Ērān]-Xwarreh-šābuhr Judge and Protector of the Poor" / "Ērān"

مدافع درویشان و دادور ایران خرّه شاپور



(šhp)[whly] ZY mgw ZY ...st'n

'yl'n mgwh b....

šābuhr ī mow ī ...stān

ērān mow b...

Šābuhr, the Priest of ...

Ērān-mow ...

شاپور مغ...ستان

ایران مغ ب...

3. Exc. 1906/6

48x45

3 imprints

There are two imprints with legends, one with the image of Gopadśāh.



Margin: *BB šhpwly*
Center: *šyd'ky mgwh*
dar-šāhbuhr
šīyāk mow
"Bēšābuhr Court"
"Priest of Šīyāk"
شیدیاک

R.N. Frye had already published a bullae from the Qasr Abu Nasr with the priest of Šīyāk (D12), which he associated with the province of Bēšābūhr, but more importantly and probably with the modern western district of Šērāz called Sīyākh.¹²



d'dgwšnasp
dād-gušnasp
"Dād-Gušnasp"
داد گشنسپ
The rest illegible

4. Exc. 1909/11
58x55
3 imprints

¹² *Sasanian Remains from Qasr-i Abu Nasr. Seals, Sealings, and Coins*, ed. R.N. Frye, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1973, p. 6..

Two of the imprints have legends, with one with the image of a ram.



Margin: šyl'zy **XXX**

Center: šyl'zy mgw

šērāz mow

"Mow of Shiraz"

مغ شیراز



mgwh'n Y... bwht...

mogān ī ...boxt...

"Mow of ..."

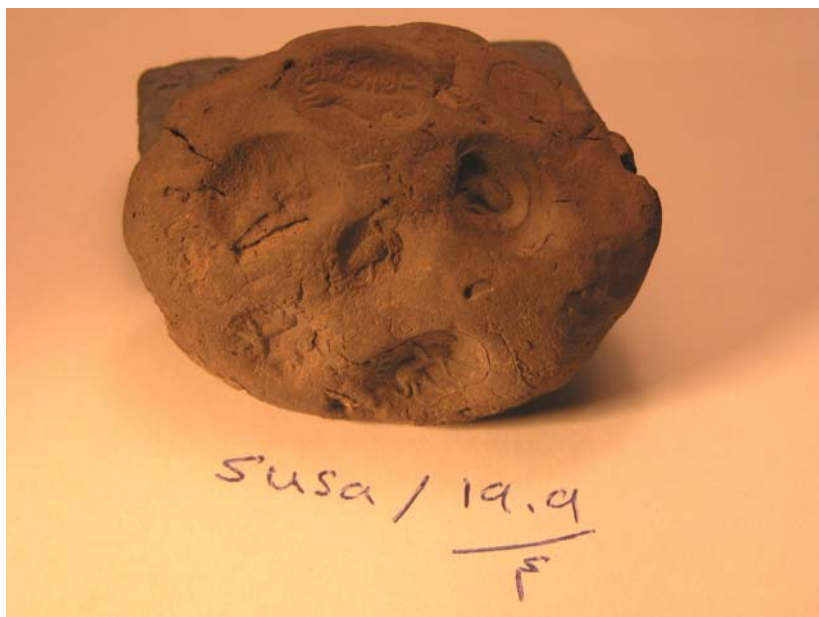
...مغ...بخت...

5. Exc. 1909/4

37x48

7 imprints

Of the seven imprints, two contain legends.





plhw'pylwc
 farrox-pērōz
 "Farrox-Pērōz"
 فرّخ پیروز



'bzwn'
 abzōn
 "Increase"
 افزون

6. Exc. 1909/10
45x44
3 imprints



Margin: *m'd kwst Y ['hm]t'n*
Center: ... *wwd magw?*
...mow / *mād-kūst ī [ahme]dān*
"Mow ..." "Mād-kust of Hamedān"
مغ ماه کوست همدان

3. Kabudān Collection:

1. Exc. 1.4 / IBT 9

61x62

5 imprints

Of the five imprints with small symbols and animal design, one has a legend which belongs to the administrative sphere.



Margin: *gulg'n*

Center: *wlwšk mgwh*

warūšag magwh / gurgān

وروشک مغ / گرگان

2. Exc. 10.2 / IBT 12

65x58

5 imprints



wlwšk mgwh / gulg'n
 warūšag magwh gurgān
 Tīrin ... d...
 وروشک مغ / گرگان

3. Exc. 12.1915 / IBT 4
 69x67
 6 imprints

gwlg'n
 dlgwš'n y'tkwby W d'tbl

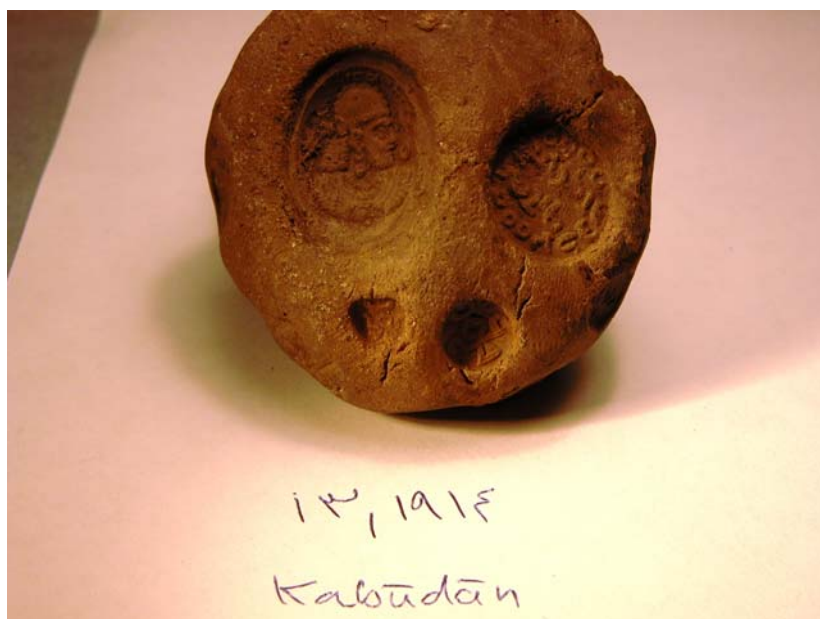
d'bzwn 't
gwlgān
drīyōšān jaddaggow ud dādwar
abzōn 't
 “Judge and Protector of the Poor / Gorgān”
 “Increat at”
 گرگان
 مدافع درویشان و دادور
 افزون آت

4. Exc. 11.778 / IBT 13
 60x58
 6 imprints



wlwšk mgwh gulg'n
warušag maguh gurgān
 “Priest of Warušag / Gorgān”
 وروشک مغ گرگان
 wr... bād

5. Exc. 13.777 / Gignoux IBT 8
 62x58



'twr'n Y...
ādurān ī...
آتوران



Center: *wlwšk mgwh*
 Margin: *gwlḡ'n*
warušag mow
gurgān
 "Priest of Warušag / Gorgān"
 وروشگ مغ / گرگان

6. Exc. 113.776 / Gignoux IBT 3
 58x58
 5 imprints



Center: *gwlǵ'n*
 Margin: *drgwš'n y'tngwby W d'twbly*
gurgān
drīyōšān jaddaggow ud dādwar
 "Judge and Protector of the Poor / Gorgān"
 مدافع درویشان و دادور گرگان



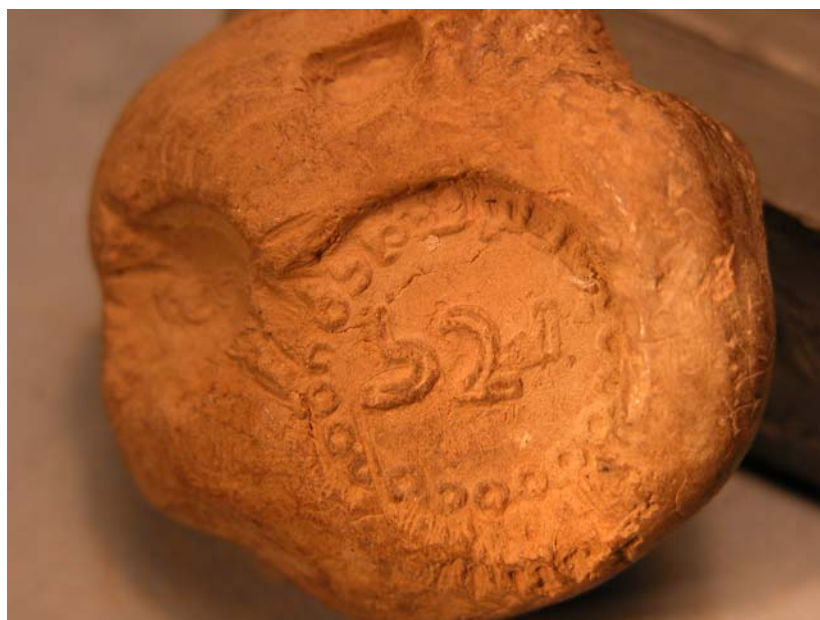
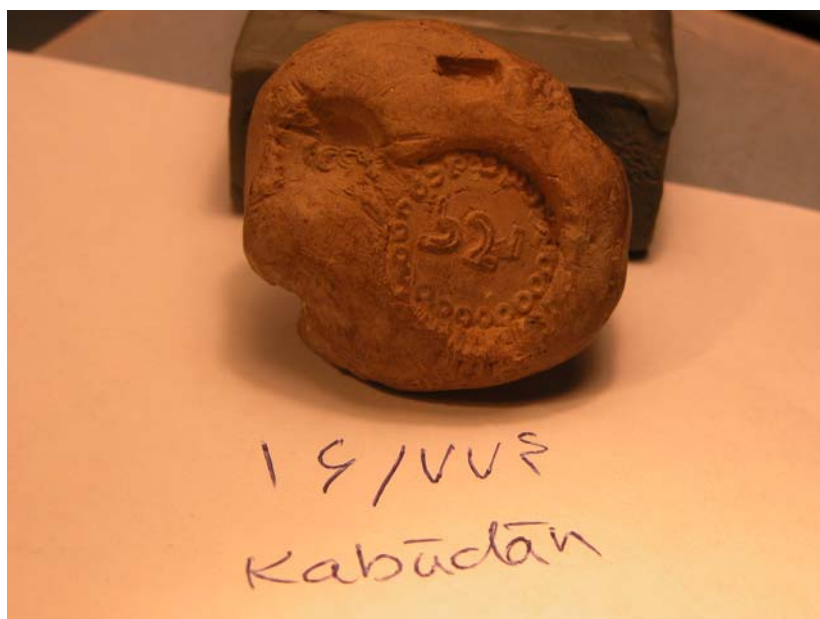
'twrb't Y mgw Y ...
adurbād ī mow ī ...
 "Adurbād the priest"
 آتوربادِ مَع...

7. Exc. 1912.775 / Gignoux IBT 7
 65x61
 7 imprints



wlwšk mgwh
 warušag mow
 "Priest of Warušag"
 وروشک مغ

8. Exc. 1911.774 / IBT 6
 41x36
 3 imprints

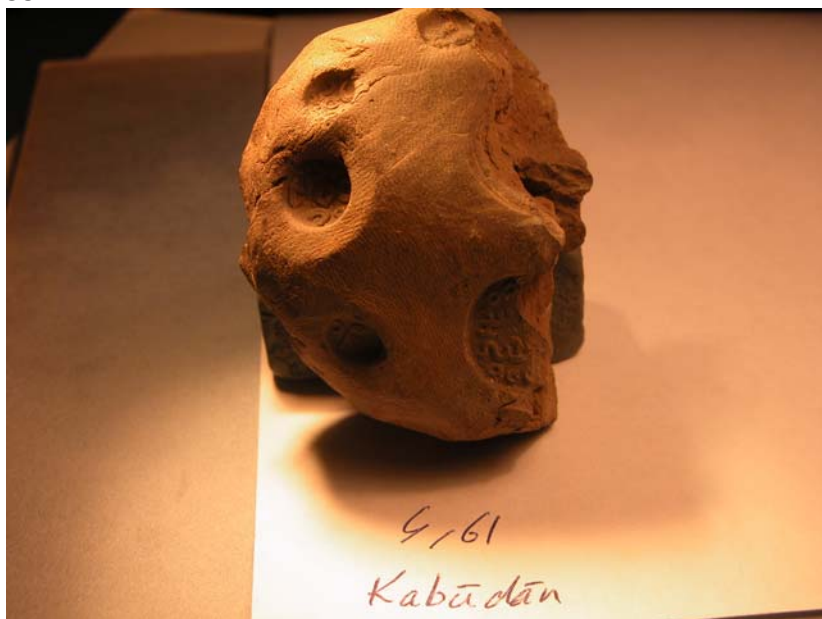


Center: *gwl*
 Margin: *gwlg'n štlp*
gul
gurgān šahrab
 "Šahrāb/Governor of Gōrgān / Gōr"
 گل
 گرگان شهراب



ŠLM
Drōd
"salutations"
درود

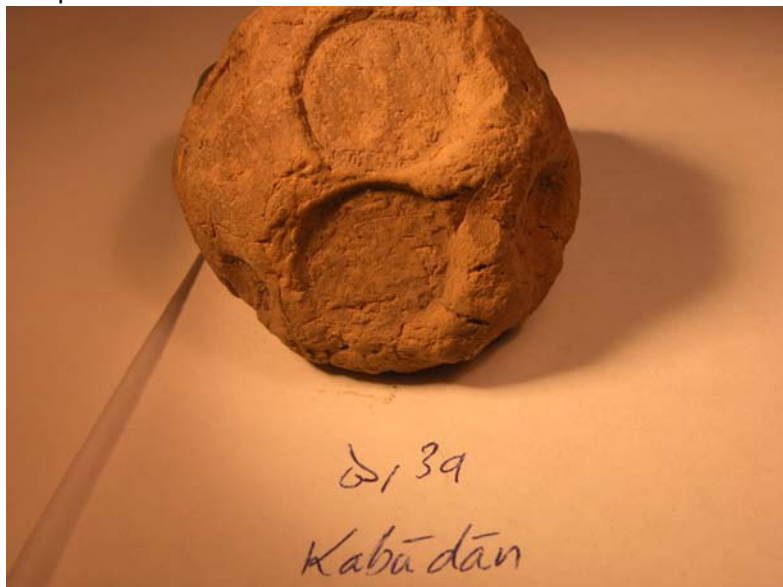
9. Exc. 6.61
58x44





[wlw]šk [mg]wh
 warūšag mow
 "Mow of Warūšag"
 وروشک مغ

10. Exc. 5.39
 50x47
 5 imprints



...lw...
 bw/z... 't mgwh
 burz ..'t mow
 "Priest burz..."
 برز ... مغ



11. Exc. 14.6
46x40



gwl štlp
gōr šāhrab
"Šāhrāb / Governor of Gōr"

12. Exc. 15.14
41x34

2 imprints



'zn'[l]?
āznā[r]?
"Āznār"¹³
ازنار

¹³ Reading is uncertain, but it may be a proper name associated with āznār "noble," see Ph. Gignoux, II/52, no. 168.