

TILMEN HÖYÜK: AN INSCRIBED *BULLA* FROM THE 1962 CAMPAIGN

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The excavations carried out at Tilmen Höyük from 1959 until 1972 by a team of Turkish archaeologists, under the direction of the late Prof. U. Bahadır Alkım, have yielded only one inscribed object: a clay *bulla*, found in the 1962 campaign, which bears a cuneiform inscription and several impressions of a cylinder seal of Old Syrian style. This artifact, blackish brown in color (cf. Marchetti 2011: 54), is now housed in the Archaeological Museum of Gaziantep, with the inventory number 6184 (Pls. I-II). Its dark color is presumably due to a fire that burnt up the room where it was kept (Alkım 1964b: 5). Its sizes are $2.5 \times 1.5 \times 0.8$ cm (*ibid.*). The two broader sides are flat, while the two narrower sides were squeezed at the ends by the pressure of two fingers when the clay was still wet (*ibid.*). At one of these ends is a half-broken hole (*ibid.*), which suggests that the *bulla* was attached to a bag or some other type of container for merchandise by means of a string (cf. Veenhof 1993).

The object in question comes from the palatial area at the top of the mound, but its precise findspot is not clearly indicated in the previous reports. It was reported to have been found “in the IIC Phase of the Palace” (Alkım 1964a: 504; cf. *id.* 1975: 214); “in the mud mortar of a foundation wall belonging to [Phase] IIB” (Alkım 1964b: 5);¹ “in the debris of the 1st Phase Palace Complex” (Duru 2003: 75); “in the ruins of Building C” (*ibid.*: 77); “in the debris of the 2nd Phase Palace Complex Building C” (*ibid.*: 126). In order to understand these pieces of information, note the following correspondences:

Phase IIC (Alkım) = 1st Phase Palace Complex (Duru) = MB II (Marchetti)

Phase IIB (Alkım) = 2nd Phase Palace Complex (Duru) = LB I (Marchetti)

Judging from these data, it seems that our *bulla* was found in the mud mortar of a foundation wall of Building C, which stratigraphically belongs to LB I (for the latest results of the excavations in this area, see Marchetti 2006: 200). However, since the

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¹ Translated from Turkish. Original text: “II b’nin [...] temel duvarının harcı.”

mud mortar was thought to have been made with reused material from the preceding period, the Turkish team attributed the *bullā* to the previous phase of the palace complex,² which dates to MB II (cf. Alkım 1964b: 5). Additional information about this find was provided by Refik Duru (personal communication). According to Duru, the *bullā* in question comes from the area of the eastern stairway room (L.23) of Palace A. By combining all the information available, the *bullā* can be inferred to have been found in the area once occupied by the stairway room L.23 of Palace A; more precisely, in the foundations of a wall attributed by the Turkish team to the overlying LB I Building C. As a matter of fact, the stratigraphy of L.23 is quite complicated: in this area, several walls of different periods were built and subsequently removed (N. Marchetti, personal communication). Be that as it may, our *bullā* is probably older than LB I and may date back to the 18th century BC (Middle Chronology), as it is suggested by the iconography and style of the seal.³

The iconography consists of a worship scene placed on a *guilloche* (worshipper before a seated deity who holds a flowing vase and a mace or scepter) and animal contest scenes, also involving a sphinx and a man-like figure (cf. Alkım 1964a: 504; Erkanal 1993: 83-84 VII7-G/01; Otto 2000: 94 no. 319).⁴ The seal was impressed on all four sides of the *bullā*. A three-sign cuneiform inscription in Old Babylonian *ductus* –  IB.LA.DU – was then added on one of the two broader sides (Pl. II: 1). On the basis of a comparison with “*tù-ni-pa-du*” (Wiseman 1953: no. *12:6’), interpreted as the name of an individual named after the city of Tunip, Alkım considered the *bullā* inscription to represent a PN “Ibladu” and suggested a connection of this alleged name with the city of Ebla/Ibla (Alkım 1963: 27; 1964a: 504; 1964b: 6; 1969: 286). However, “*tù-ni-pa-du*” most probably does not mean “The Tunipean, He of Tunip;” we should rather read it as *tù-ni-bá-du*, to be analyzed as a hybrid personal name formed of the Hurrian verbal form *tunib* and one of the Semitic names of the Storm God: Tunib-Addu, “Addu Was Able (to Do It)” (cf. Salvini 1996: 7 n. 1; Giorgieri 1999: 80-81; Schwemer 2001: 44). Likewise, in no way can “Ibladu” be interpreted as a gentilic adjective from Ebla. The term “Eblaite” is rather *eb-la-ū(m)*, in Akkadian (Nashef 1991: 38 s.v. *Ebla; Michel, Garelli 1997: no. 109:4;⁵ Tonietti 1997),⁶ or *eb-lânum*, in Amorite (Buccellati 1966: 155; Pettinato 1976-80: 10 §§ 2.4-2.5; Streck 2000: 154 § 2.5; cf. *ibid.*: 348-349 § 5.71).

As an alternative, Alkım (1964a: 504 n. 1) wondered whether “Ibladu” was the same as *i-ba-al-^dIŠKUR* – an Amorite personal name attested at Mari, Tell al-Rimah, and Chagar Bazar (Schwemer 2001: 270, 275, and 289 with n. 2047). The latter is

² Cf. the similar case of the sealed jar stopper AT/48/26 = Antakya 10237 (Collon 1975: pl. LX:2) “found in the concrete and ballast foundations of the South-East wall of the Level VII Temple” at Alalakh and dated to Level VIII (*ibid.*: 4).

³ Related seals in the same Syrian Elaborate Style can precisely be dated by their inscriptions or archaeological context to that period; see Otto 2000: 134-136. Otto assigned our seal (no. 319 in Otto’s catalogue) to her “Gruppe 4a” and considered the seals of this group to be “frühklassisch (c. 1830-1790) – hochklassisch (1795-1760)” (dates according to Middle Chronology).

⁴ A drawing of the seal impression made by B. Devam is published in Erkanal 1993: pl. 33 and Otto 2008: pl. 24.

⁵ Instead of “*eb-lá-i-a-im*”, read *eb-lá-jí-im*.

⁶ Also note the feminine ^a*eb-la-i-tu*, “The Eblaite (Goddess), She of Ebla” (Pettinato 1976-80: 10 § 2.6.b).

probably to be analyzed as Jībal-Addu, “Addu Brought (Him) (i.e., the Child).”⁷ Even if, on the one hand, the spelling IB.LA.DU may well represent a name ending with the theophoric element Addu (like *tù-ni-bá-du* above), on the other, a pronunciation of Jībal-Addu as /jībladdu/ is rather unlikely, if not impossible. IB.LA.DU could still be a *sandhi* spelling for *Ib-la-Addu, “Truly a Fruit of Addu,”⁸ but such a name is not attested.⁹

Since the inscribed object is a *bulla*, one would expect that the inscription either represents a personal name, or refers to some commodity (cf. Veenhof 1993). As a matter of fact, IB.LA.DU does not occur elsewhere as a personal name. Although the possibility that IB.LA.DU represents a *hapax* name cannot be ruled out completely, it is tempting to read *ip-la-tù* = *iplātu* and to connect it with *iplētu*, “exchange equivalent,” in the Nuzi texts (AHw 384 s.v.). In the *bulla* inscription under discussion, *iplātu* might refer to some kind of exchange merchandise. This other meaning of **iplu(m)* is apparently also found in a letter from Tell Munbāqa (ancient Ekalte):

ù ip-la-šu mi-ma-šu la-a i-ha-li-iq

Moreover, with regard to his exchange merchandise (and) anything of him, it must not get lost.

(Mayer 2001: no. 72: 11-12; translation modified).

If such an interpretation of IB.LA.DU is correct, our *bulla* would document trade activities at Tilmen in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC. It is conceivable that Tilmen was an important trading emporium at that time. Thanks to its strategic position toward the northern end of the Kara Su Valley, Tilmen probably controlled some of the communication routes that connected upper Mesopotamia and northern Syria with the Cilician plain and the Anatolian plateau (cf. Alkim 1969: 280-282; Marchesi 2011). Worth noting in this connection is also the 2007 discovery of a door sealing bearing several impressions from the seal of a scribe whose name – Lāgāmal-gāmil – betrays his origins from the city of Dilbat, to the south of Babylon (see Marchetti 2011: 108-111, cat. 21). Even more interestingly, the scribe in question was in the service of Sumu-la-El, king of Babylon. This remarkable find, from a room in Fortress Q, could suggest the existence of a Babylonian trading station or agency at Tilmen since the early Old Babylonian period.¹⁰ Analogous agencies of the Board of Trade (*kārum*) of Sippar are known to have operated at Mari and Mišlān in the Middle Euphrate region, when Sippar

⁷ *i-ba-al* probably represents a *jaqtul* form of the Amorite verb JBL, “to carry, to bring” (Gelb 1980: 21 and 270).

⁸ Cf. Sumu-la-El (*su-mu-la-el/èl*), “Truly Offspring of El” (Streck 2000: 304 § 3.70), also occurring in the contracted form Sumu-lél (*su-mu-le-el*) (*ibid.*).

⁹ Note, however, the existence of a name pattern *Ib-x, “Fruit of ...,” in the onomasticon of the Ebla texts; see *ib-da-mu* (Krebernik 1988: 212), *ib-na-im* (*ibid.*: 215), and *ib-ne-àr* (*ibid.* s.v. “ib--ne-HAR”). One such name, *ib-da-mu*, is also found on a later seal from Kültepe (Tonietti 1997: 226-229). For interpreting *ib* as “fruit,” cf. Ugaritic *ib* (del Olmo Lete, Sanmartín 2004: 4 s.v. *ib* (II)); and Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic *’ev* (*KBL* 2 and 1074). For a different interpretation, see Pagan 1998: 118-119 s.v. *hbb*.

¹⁰ Note that another sealing from an OB seal was found in the same place (see Marchetti 2011: 112-115, cat. 22).

was under the control of Sumu-la-El (Leemans 1960: 106-108; Charpin 1989).¹¹ However, the possible discovery of a contemporaneous Babylonian trading outpost as far as Tilmen, at the foot of the Taurus mountains, is somewhat surprising and, if confirmed, would open new interesting historical scenarios, still to be explored.

¹¹ For the trading network of Sippar in the OB period, see also Marchetti 2003: 166 with n. 20.

ABBREVIATIONS

- AHw* W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1965-81.
AnSt *Anatolian Studies*.
AOAT Alter Orient und Altes Testament.
ARES Archivi Reali di Ebla, Studi.
AS Assyriological Studies.
BBVO Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient.
KBL L.H. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros*, Brill, Leiden, 1958.
MARI *Mari, Annales de Recherches Interdisciplinaires*.
NABU *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires*.
Or *Orientalia*.
RGTC Répertoire Géographique des Textes Cunéiformes.
RIA *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1932 ff.
SMEA *Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici*.
TAD *Türk Arkeology Dergisi*.
TTKY Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları.
UAVA Untersuchungen zur Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie.
WVDOG Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft.

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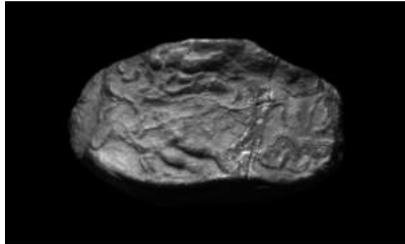
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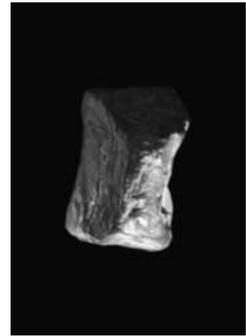
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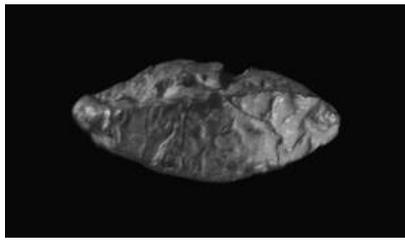
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1 Inscribed *bulla* from Tilmen Höyük (Gaziantep Archaeological Museum, no. 6184)0



3 *Bulla*, side a (after Alkım 1964a: pl. LIII:3)0



4 *Bulla*, side c (after Alkım 1975: fig. 141)0



5 *Bulla*, side d (after Alkım 1975: fig. 140)0