



The Inscription:

Transliteration

Ilu-šu-illat-su
DUMU Anum-en-nam
îR dEN.ZU
ù dNin-EZEN

Normalization

Ilšu-illassu
mār Anum-ennam
warad Sîn
u Nin-gubla¹

Translation

Ilšu-illassu
son of Anum-ennam
servant of Sîn
and Nin-gubla

The seal was purchased by the author in August 1969 from a dealer in Beirut.

The dimensions of the seal are:
Ht. 31.5mm, Dia. 20.5mm,
narrowing to 20mm at centre;
a 5mm hole was drilled through the seal
from each end.

Photographs by author.

John Piet is a graduate student
in the Department of Middle East
Languages and Cultures.



¹ Dr. Edmond Sollberger, Assistant Keeper of the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities, The British Museum, was kind enough to help the author read the names in the inscription, particularly Nin-gubla; for Dr. Sollberger's discussion of the name Nin-gubla, cf. UET 8, No. 80, p. 17. Nin-gubla is taken as the reading for ^dNin-EZEN or the variant ^dNin-EZEN+LA. The author appreciates Prof. Edith Porada's valuable criticisms, which she offered after reading the article. The author wishes to thank Howard Wohl for his help with the article.

This rock crystal (clear quartz) cylinder seal² exemplifies fine seal carving from the Old Babylonian period.³ The careful execution helps one to recognize details in more summarily cut seals and aids comparison of the figures represented with the same figures in other works of art, such as wall paintings or statues. The modelling of the figures and the engraving of the signs are outstanding and may be all the more admired when one considers the technical difficulty presented by the gem stone, the hardness of which is 7 on Moh's scale. The vitreous lustrous transparent mineral (SiO_2) is very brittle,⁴ and presumably, when someone knocked off the original gold caps, he chipped the upper and lower edges and fractured the seal internally. The fractures now reflect an iridescent light.

Ištar in her aspect as war goddess,⁵ "...the lady of battle and conflict who unsheathes my weapon,..."⁶ stands on the right. Her face and torso appear in frontal view, her hips and legs in profile. She holds in her right hand the spirally decorated handle of a lion club,⁷ which is often associated with the protective power of Nergal, god of the nether world.⁸ With her left hand Ištar grasps a scimitar, the top of which rests on the ground line beside her. The deity wears the multiple horned mitre, probably a sort

² See caption.

³ The origins and development of the glyptic style of the Old Babylonian period have not been completely worked out; however, the style reached its height before the reign of Hammurabi of Babylon, 1792-1750, probably during the reign of Apil-Sîn of Babylon, 1830-1813, cf. Porada, "Critical Review of Corpus," JCS 4 (1950), pp. 155-162. The earliest example of this style comes from the reign of Bur-Sîn of Isin, 1895-1874, cf. Wolfram Nagel, "Ein altassyrisches Königssiegel," AfO 18 (1958), pp. 97-103. The origins of the style have to be sought in the Dynasties of Isin, Larsa, Babylon, Ešnunna, Mari, and perhaps Assur. On the basis of dated seals and impressions, the development and termination of the style have to be traced through to the end of the reign of Samsuditana of Babylon, 1625-1594, cf. Wolfram Nagel, "Glyptische Probleme der Larsa-Zeit," AfO 18 (1958), pp. 319-327, and Wolfram Nagel, "Datierte Glyptik aus Altvorderasien," AfO 20 (1963), pp. 125-140.

⁴ Richard W. Berry, "Cylinder Seal Mineralogy and Petrology," AJA 73, No. 1 (1969), pp. 67-69; cf. also Richard M. Pearl, Gems, Minerals, Crystals and Ores (New York, 1964), pp. 211, 214.

⁵ Edzard, Mythologie, p. 84.

⁶ Driver & Miles, BabL II, p. 105 (Epilogue of the Code of Hammurabi, Col. XXVIIb, lines 92-95).

⁷ Porada, Corpus, pp. xxiv, xxv.

⁸ Porada, "Nergal in the Old Babylonian Period," Sumer 7 (1951), pp. 66-68.

of tunic, and a tight girt-up kilt, as well as an ankle-length skirt with many folds.⁹ The three strands of her necklace almost completely hide her neck. On her left wrist she wears two bracelets. From behind her shoulders appear arrows in two quivers strapped across her bosom and around her girdled waist, from where the straps hang loosely at her side. Her right leg extends out of her skirt and rests on the neck of a small crouching lion with open jaws.

A male worshiper approaches Ištar bearing a kid in his arms. The bearded figure wears a round cap, two necklaces over his bare chest, and a long robe draped across his left shoulder and opened in front to reveal his left leg, which is probably covered by a kilt to the line just above his knee. The pattern in the border of his robe contrasts nicely with the vertical lines of Istar's skirt and the dress of the suppliant deity.

This female deity follows the worshiper with her hands raised before her face in supplication for him. She, like Ištar, wears the multiple horned miter and bracelets, but on both wrists. Her flounced dress has received particularly fine execution in the undulating lines between the horizontal tiers. Appearing from under her hair, which is looped and tied in a chignon, and falling down her back one sees the long counterweight to her necklace, which is just discernible as several parallel lines across her throat.¹⁰

Behind the suppliant goddess stands a figure called the "god with a mace."¹¹ His splayed beard sweeps across his chest; three horizontal lines of the beard cover his chin and cheek. Across the base of his neck the traces

⁹ This ankle-length skirt has been referred to as having pleats, cf. Von der Osten, *Newell*, pp. 128-131. Prof. Porada would like to replace this terminology with "skirt with many folds." (Oral communication)

¹⁰ This necklace with a counterweight was peculiar to the Old Babylonian period. For a full description, cf. Agnes Spycket, "Un élément de la parure féminine à la Ire dynastie babylonienne," *RA* 42 (1948), pp. 89-97. For other examples of the bracelets, the looped and tied chignon, and the dress, cf. Parrot, *MAM* II/2, pp. 56-57, 61, Pls. X-2, XI, XII, XIII, XIV-2; II/3, pp. 22-25, Figs. 20, 21, Pls. XIII, XV.

¹¹ Henri Frankfort called this figure the "god with a mace, because he is occasionally represented as the recipient of sacrifices," cf. Frankfort, *CS*, p. 168. Prof. Edith Porada in an oral communication informed the author that she considers this figure to be a "king in warrior garb." A question remains, however, as to whether the representation is not that of a statue of a "king in warrior garb," for he occasionally stands on a pedestal similar to that of statues, cf. Frankfort,

of two necklaces can just be seen before they disappear under his beard. The round cap covers half his ear and his hair. His shawl with its delicate fringes hangs from his left shoulder and almost covers his bordered kilt, which is knotted at his side. In his left hand he grips his mace, its head pressed against his waist. He holds his right arm rigidly by his side, fist clenched. This arm balances Iṣtar's left arm, which holds the scimitar.

The artist cut the four-line inscription in clear Old Babylonian signs. One line of the enclosure appears to be covered by the arm of the "god with a mace." This effect was produced by the fact that the inscription and its enclosure were added after the figures were cut. The uniform diameter of the seal and the lack of visible evidence for recutting suggest that this is the original inscription.

The provenance of the seal remains unknown except for the clues afforded by the names of the deities, the personal names, and the style of the engraving.

From currently available textual evidence one finds that Iṣtar, Sîn, Nergal, and Nin-gubla were all mentioned in only two cities during the Old Babylonian period, Larsa and Ur. The four deities had temples in both cities, except for Nin-gubla.¹² The É-gá-bur-ra, Nin-gubla's temple, was located in Ur. Besides, the great cult center for Sîn, the moon god, was Ur.¹³

CS, p. 159. For a seal illustrating this with the same arrangement of figures as the crystal seal, cf. Von der Osten, *Newell*, No. 205. The seals and the terracotta plaques and figurines often share a comparable repertory of figures, cf. Marie-Thérèse Barrelet, *Figurines et reliefs en terre cuite de la Mésopotamie antique. I: Potiers, termes de métier, procédés de fabrication et production*. Institut français d'archéologie de Beyrouth, bibliothèque archéologique et historique, Tome LXXXV (Paris, 1968), p. 326. The clay plaques, as copies, reflect the lost, "... images of deities, worshipers, and other cultic statuary in local temples." cf. Porada, "Review of Barrelet, *Figurines et reliefs*," *AJA* 73, No. 3 (1969), pp. 376-378. One must consider the evidence of the seals as well as that of the terracottas when visualizing the lost statues. The several figures included on seals may be taken to be participating in a ceremony, perhaps within the temple itself. The study of dedicatory inscriptions from statues and the detailed comparison of the "king in warrior garb" with the figure of Narām-Sîn on his stele may make it possible to guess that Narām-Sîn dedicated a statue of himself to Nin-gubla in Ur, cf. text below, which could have inspired later artists to create the image of the "king in warrior garb."

¹² Johannes Renger, "Götternamen in der Altbabylonischen Zeit," *Heidelberger Studien zum Alten Orient* (Wiesbaden, 1967), pp. 137-171.

¹³ Edzard, *Mythologie*, p. 102.

The worship of Nin-gubla in Ur dates from at least the reign of Narām-Sîn, King of Akkad (2260-2223 B.C.), when his daughter Enmenana was high-priestess of Nanna in Ur. A dedicatory inscription to Nin-gubla for the life of Narām-Sîn, god of Akkad (dingir a-ga-dè^{ki}-ka-še), and for that of Enmenana was found in Ur.¹⁴ Another Ur inscription, a copy from the Larsa period, indicates that Narām-Sîn had a statue made, and that he dedicated it to Nin-gubla.¹⁵ Ur-nammu of Ur, who reigned ca. 2111-2094 B.C., dedicated a mace head for his life to Nin-gubla(?).¹⁶ Lipit-Ištar of Isin (ca. 1934-1924 B.C.), when he controlled Ur, built the é-gi₆-pàr or House of the Priestesses for his daughter Enninsunzi, who was the en-Priestess of Nin-gubla in Ur.¹⁷ In the same text Lipit-Ištar mentions the gá-bur-ra-ka of Nin-gubla of Ur (^dNin-EZEN uri^{ki}-ma).¹⁸ In the Old Babylonian period a son of Kudur-mabuk, Warad-Sîn, built, or rather rebuilt Nin-gubla's temple in Ur, the É-gá-bur-ra, which is the only known temple for the deity in this period.¹⁹

Personal names like those of this seal appear at Ur. Ilšu-illassu is attested ten times in various forms; the dated tablets come only from the reign of Rim-Sîn.²⁰ The name means "His god is his family or clan."²¹ Ennam is a particle meaning "see,"²² so Anum-ennam means "Behold Anum." Sîn-ennam and Ilī-ennam, names of similar structure, appear at Ur, whereas names with the structure Ennam-Sîn or Ennam-ilī are not attested at Ur during this period.²³

The temples of Sîn and, particularly, Nin-gubla

14 Edmond Sollberger, "Sur la chronologie des rois d'Ur et quelques problèmes connexes," AfO 17 (1954/6), pp. 10-48.

15 Hans Hirsch, "Die Inschriften der Könige von Agade," AfO 20 (1963), pp. 1-82.

16 Gadd & Legrain & S. Smith, UET 1, No. 49, pp. 10-11. Also cf. Sollberger, op. cit., p. 12, where Ur-nammu is identified as the one who named a year for the laying of the foundation stone of Nin-gubla's temple.

17 Edzard, ZwZw, pp. 20, 94.

18 Gadd & Legrain & S. Smith, UET 1, No. 106, p. 24.

19 Sollberger, UET 8, No. 80, p. 17. In Larsa a Šalliya ša bīt Nin-gubla (^dNin-EZEN), or Šalliya of the temple of Nin-gubla is attested; he presumably came from Ur, cf. Faust, YOS 8, No. 141, line 37. Also in Larsa, an oath was taken before the weapon (gištukul) of Nin-gubla, cf. Renger, "Götternamen," p. 147.

20 Figulla, UET 5, p. 44.

21 Stamm, Nameng., p. 299.

22 Ibid., p. 133.

23 Ennam-ilī is attested at Ur in the Ur III period, cf. Legrain, UET 3, No. 46 and No. 1414.

and the personal names make it probable that Ilšū-illassu was a citizen of Ur, and his seal could very well have been carved in Ur. One might expect a particularly fine example of the seal carver's art to come from an ancient cultural center.

To date the seal one would want to place it at the height of the Old Babylonian style, which apparently was reached during the reign of Apil-Sîn of Babylon (ca. 1830-1813 B.C.).²⁴ The reign of Apil-Sîn is contemporaneous with that of Warad-Sîn of Larsa (ca. 1834-1823 B.C.). Warad-Sîn and his brother Rim-Sîn (ca. 1822-1763 B.C.) controlled Ur, and Warad-Sîn rebuilt the temple of Nin-gubla in Ur. Dated seal impressions from the reign of Warad-Sîn are stylistically similar to this seal.²⁵ The author would, on the basis of the reasons discussed above, postulate a probable place and date for the manufacture of the seal: Ur during the reign of Warad-Sîn.

²⁴ Porada, "Critical Review of *Corpus*," JCS 4 (1950), pp. 155-162.

²⁵ Delaporte, CCL II, pp. 138-139, Pl. 112, Fig. 10 a/b/c (A 485); Pl. 113, Fig. 1 a/b/c (A486). The tablets come from Larsa, and the seals are all smaller than the crystal seal. The heights of the seals are: A 485 a. 25mm, b. and c. 24mm; A 486 a. 25mm, b. 24mm, c. 20mm, and d. 22mm.