

KRONIEK — CHRONIQUE

The Iranian Collection of Sasanian Seals in the Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels. Epigraphic Notes

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The Iranian collection of the Royal Museums of Art and History includes more than 140 Sasanian engraved stones and seals. The greater part of it was published in 1987 by Philippe Gignoux and Rika Gyselen: Ph. Gignoux & R. Gyselen, *Bulles et sceaux sassanides de diverses collections*, *Studia Iranica Cahier 4*, Paris, 1987, p. 238-279, pl. XVII-XXII.

The aim of the present small article is to reconsider some of the readings of the Middle-Persian inscriptions on the seals suggested by the authors of this publication and to describe two seals with inscriptions not mentioned in it. The sequence in which the seals are described here follows the order in their publication, referred to hereafter as “Gignoux, Gyselen, 1987”.

IR.1329

Gignoux, Gyselen, 1987, p. 243, MCB 10.2, pl. XVII.

Grey light-brownish agate. Ellipsoid, 19.2 x 23.2 x 15.4 mm.

Woman standing to right, holding flower. Inscription in front. The reading suggested by the authors of the publication: *b'tky* = *Bādag* — is quite probable from the point of view of palaeography. However, the actual meaning of the word in this transcription would be “wine, must” — which does not sound good enough for a person's name. The image of a woman can not be taken as a clear proof that the seal belonged to a lady, but even if we accept that “wine” (in a figurative sense — “intoxating, charming”) could be some woman's name, some less technical word, like *may*, rather than *bādag*, would have been expected. At the same time, taking into account that in Middle-Persian lapidary script the letters *'aleph* and *h* were often drawn in the same way, it is possible to suggest another reading (which makes the inscription look more like a name): *bḥtky* = *Baxtag*, from *baxt* “fortune, destiny”.

IR.883

Gignoux, Gyselen, 1987, p. 244, MCB 10.10., pl. XVII.

Grey agate. Irregular dactyloïde, 15.5 x 23.8 x 20.8 mm.

* (Hermitage Museum, St.-Petersburg)

This seal or amulet representing three schematized human figures, a cockerel, a snake, a scorpion and some quadruped, belongs to one of the most enigmatic groups of Iranian engraved gems. Similar amulets, with basically the same set of creatures depicted on them, are present in many museum collections (¹). Some of them bear inscriptions in Middle-Persian script, often illegible. The back of the seal is undecorated. The Arabic inscription mentioned by Gignoux & Gyselen belongs to another seal in the collection: IR.975 (MCB 40.10). There is an inscription of four letters, in what looks like blundered Middle-Persian: *n/wkdl* (?).

IR.952

Gignoux, Gyselen, 1987, p. 261, MCB 33.8., pl. XX.

Cornelian. Cabochon, 4.7 x 14.1 x 11.3.

Eagle to right, attacking ibex. Small cross above. Inscription along the right side. The reading suggested by the publishers: *zšwḥ/nšwḥ* (*yšwḥ?*). The first letter is damaged; it was more likely *y-* than *z-* or *n-*, judging by what is left of it. The last character is, however not *-h* but the ligature *-dy*, which makes us read the name of the owner of the seal as *yšwdy* = *Išōy*, a Semitic, not Iranian name. The cross probably indicates that the owner was a Christian. In the same transcription the name is present on another Sasanian Christian seal (representing a man holding a large cross) as the first component of its owner's name: *yšwdbndk* 'Išōy-bandag' = slave of Jesus (²).

IR.899

Gignoux, Gyselen, 1987, p. 263, MCB 40.4., pl. XXI / B. Overlaet, in M.C. Lucidi, ed., *La Seta et la sua Via*, Roma, 1993, p. 168, 228, cat. 36.

(¹) — A.D.H. BIVAR. *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum. Stamp Seals II. The Sasanian Dynasty*. London, 1969. Pl. 6, BF.5; Pl. 8, CG.10-11:

BF.5 — Gayomard, figures on the back side, side inscription: *wyn'lwky* or *nyw'lwky* — probably some personal name, its first component either *new* — “good” or *wen* — from Av. **vaina*, the meaning of the second one — *arog*, *arug* or *arwag* — is not clear yet.

CG.16 — inscription: *bwhwtw[.]ky* = *Būxt-w[.]Jag* — some personal name, its first component *būxt* — “saved”, — Ph. GIGNOUX. *Catalogue des sceaux, camées et bulles sasanides de la Bibliothèque Nationale et du Musée du Louvre. II. Les sceaux et bulles inscrits*. Pl. XXV, Nos. 9.1-3:

9.1 — inscription on the side: *drwty(h) pl(h)wy(h)* — “health and happiness”,

9.2 — inscription on the side: *ws y'wyt š(')tyh* — “much eternal happiness”, another side inscription remains undeciphered;

— R. FRYE. *Sasanian Seals in the Collection of Mohsen Foroughi*. London, 1971, *Corpus inscriptionum iranicarum*, Pt. III, Vol. VI, pl. XXXVII, Nos. 58 (a Gayomard seal), 59, 61:

No. 58a — seems like the word *hwl* = *xwar* “sun” written twice symmetrically, so it makes no difference from which end to read the inscription. Could be a name.

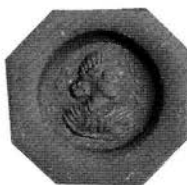
No. 59 — *dyn'twr d'l'dy* = *Dēn-Ādur* (son of) *Dārāy*, the name of the owner. Ph. Gignoux suggests a different reading:

dt'twr d'l'dy = *Dād-Ādur-Dārāy* — in Ph. Gignoux, R. Gyselen. *Sceaux Sasanides de diverses collections privées*. Leuven, 1982, p. 49, No. 10.53.

(²) Ph. GIGNOUX, R. GYSELEN, 1982, p. 39-40, 10.14 — *yšwdbndk'kšyš[']* = *Išōy-bandag*, priest.



IR. 1329



IR. 1764



IR. 1249



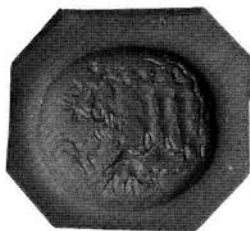
IR. 899



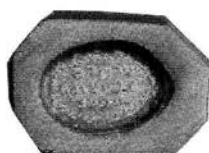
IR. 1006



IR. 952



IR. 883



IR. 1757



IR. 937

Sardonyx. Ellipsoid, 13.5 x 16 x 12.3 mm.

Winged horse walking to right. Inscription above, described by Gignoux & Gyselen as “cursive ou pseudo-épigraphique (?)”. Actually it is slightly blundered *’pst’n ’L yzd’n* “reliance on the gods” — one of the most widely used formulas among those represented on Sasanian seals.

IR.1006

Gignoux, Gyselen, 1987, p. 263, MCB 40.5., pl. XXI.

Jasper. Dactyloïde, 10.9 x 14.9 x 13.7 mm.

Protome of winged horse to right, crescent in front, inscription between 12 and 6 o’clock. The reading suggested: *yzyp w l’st* “..., juste”. The first word, however, is in fact *yzd’n* “gods”. It had been intended, most probably, to write: *zyd’n W l’st (yh)* “gods and truth”.

IR.937

Gignoux, Gyselen, 1987, p. 269-270, MCB 70.14., pl. XXII / B. Overlaet, *in Splendeur des Sassanides, L'empire perse entre Rome et la Chine (224-642)*, Bruxelles, 1993, p. 292-293, nr. 165.

Light grey chalcedony. Dactyloïde, 7.7 x 10 x 9.5 mm.

Device (*nišan*), inscription above, between 4 and 8 o'clock. Gignoux and Gyselen suggest the reading: *'t(w)lḥwlwsty ZY mgw* "Ādur- (Hūrūst) (?) mage". In my opinion, the way the inscription is drawn suggests another reading: *'twr ḥwlšyt ZY mgw* "Ādur-Xwaršēd, magus", moreover that the second component of the name — *xwaršēd* "sun" — makes more sense than the enigmatic *-hūrūst*.

IR.1249

Ph. Gignoux, *Sceaux chrétiens d'époque sassanide*, *Iranica Antiqua* XV, 1980, p. 310, nr. 15 / Gignoux, Gyselen, 1987, p. 246, MCB 20.2., pl. XVII / B. Overlaet, *in Splendeur des Sassanides, L'empire perse entre Rome et la Chine (224-642)*, Bruxelles, 1993, p. 282-283, nr. 139. The inventory number of this Sasanian Christian seal with a Syriac inscription is IR.1249, not IR.945 as in Gignoux & Gyselen 1987 (the last number belongs to another Christian seal of the same collection — Gignoux, Gyselen, 1987, p. 247, MCB 20.3).

Not included in Gignoux & Gyselen 1987:

IR.1757

R.N. Frye, ed., *Sasanian Remains from Qasr-i Abu Nasr, Seals, Sealings, and Coins*, Cambridge, 1973, p. 49-50, note 14 / B. Overlaet, *in Splendeur des Sassanides, L'empire perse entre Rome et la Chine*, Bruxelles, 1993, p. 292-293, nr. 166.

Decorated dactyloïde. 18.6 x 22.1 x 12.2 mm.

Epigraphic seal. Inscription (three lines in the centre):

<i>'wḥrm-</i>	"Ohrm-
<i>zd'twrt</i>	azd-Ādur,
<i>ZY mgw</i>	magus"

(above): *dly mgwḥ* "the council of the magi of Dar" (or: "of the court")

The name Ohrmazd-Adur is a quite common Middle-Persian theophoric name ⁽³⁾. The

⁽³⁾ Ph. GIGNOUX. Noms propres sassanides en moyen-perse épigraphique. *Iranisches Personennamenbuch*, hrsg. von M. Mayrhofer und R. Schmitt. Bd. II, Fasc. 2. Wien, 1986, p. 138, No. 703.

word *dly* = *Dar* can be either some place-name or the open (phonetic) transcription of the word *dar* “court”. In the last case the ideogram *BB*’ = *dar* could have been expected, like in the case of Sasanian coins issued by the “court mint” and marked with this very ideogram.

IR.1764

Agate. Dactylioïde. 11.4 x 25.5 x 25 mm.

Male bust to right. Inscription: *s/dyl^hn/w ym* (?). The first component could be either *sl* = *sar* “head” or *dyl* = *dil* “heart”. So far no Middle-Persian names beginning with these components have turned up.