



## The Typology of Rusa II's Seal Impressions on the Urartian Bullae of Bastam

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(39-70)

### Abstract

Urartians ruled over the shores of Urmia, Van and Sevan Lakes in from about 9<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E. Bullae are among the smallest but most significant pieces of information they have left. The Urartian bullae of Iran are only discovered in Bastam and Ziwiye. There are about 1416 damaged Urartian bullae discovered in the excavations of Bastam and are in National Museum of Iran. They are mostly sealed with stamp and cylinder seals. The seals sometimes bear an inscription or a number of inscriptions were directly written on the bulla. Some contributions have been fulfilled regarding the bullae from Bastam but less has taken place on their exact number, different seal impressions, some inscriptions and their difference with the bullae from other sites. They have different stamp and cylinder seal impressions but the cylinder impressions were mainly Rusa II's or an official called *aşulis*. Rusa's impressions contain his name, his father's name and a scene of a servant with the shade, king, lion and trident. The author has recognized the different details in the inscriptions, the size of the depicted elements and the place of the signs comparing to the elements. Therefore, she proposed two categories and three subgroups of this sort of seal impression. The first and the second group of inscriptions differ only in *a* in the first line and two subgroups of the first group of bullae differ in the size and detail of the elements of the scenes. There also is a challenging group that the author could not recognize their details due to severe damages. She also compared Rusa II's seal impressions in Bastam with his impressions on the bullae from Ayanais and Ziwiye. Also, a number of possible symbolic interpretations of the elements of the scenes are provided. It is possible that some seal bearers used many similar seals of Rusa for the administrative acts or the seals were even used after Rusa's reign.

**Keywords:** Urartu, Rusa II, Bullae, Seal Impression, Bastam.

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## Introduction

Urartians ruled over the regions mainly around the shores of Urmia Lake in Iran, Van and Çıldır Lake in Turkey and Sevan Lake in Armenia from about 9<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E (Zimansky, 1985: 12). They left a numbers of monuments, objects and inscriptions. The Urartian inscriptions include rock, stone, metal and ceramic inscriptions and are as large as tomb rock inscriptions or as tiny as a small bulla. Bullae are tiny but of the most significant pieces of information they have left. These small pieces of clay lump are excavated and discovered from many Urartian sites and are simple or brought different seal impressions and inscriptions. Bastam and Ziwiye are the only sites that Urartian bullae are discovered from.

Bastam (<sup>m</sup>Rusa=i URU.TUR), close to Gharezyaeddin and Maku in the North West of Iran (Fig 1), is the third most developed of all the Urartian sites and the biggest Urartian fortification in Iran built by Rusa II (the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C) (Piotrovski, 2014: 358-359). There are about 1416 Urartian bullae discovered in the excavations of Bastam fortification (Fig. 2) and are kept in The National Museum of Iran at present which the author sorted, organized and studied. The bullae are mainly excavated in the Bone Room of the fort and are very much damaged by the corrosion, sediment, breaks and losses that caused many problems during the study. Most of them are fired and kept safe but still very fragile. These tiny pieces of information- all less than 5 cm long- are mostly sealed with different stamp and cylinder seals. The seals sometimes bear an inscription or a number of inscriptions were directly written on the bulla when they were still wet. Sometimes more than one cylinder and stamp seal impression is recognized on the bullae. Their inscriptions, seal impressions or seal inscriptions provide us with various data as the names of persons or places, weights, officials and different administrative subjects.

Previously, some contributions have been fulfilled regarding the Urartian bullae in the different Urartian sites but less has taken place on the bullae, their inscriptions and their seal impressions from Bastam including the contributions of Seidl (1976, 1979, 1988), Zimansky (1979, 1988), Salvini (1979, 1988, 2012) and Dara (2017). There still stood the question of the number of the bulla, all the seals, inscriptions, seal inscriptions and the techniques of producing such bullae. Also the comparison and the difference between the bulla from different Urartian sites is less studied.

The author has studied the whole collection of Bastam Urartian bullae in The National Museum of Iran. Her research was mainly focused on the bullae inscriptions and their seal impressions. The significant data mentioned on the inscriptions and seal impressions of these small pieces of evidence were the reason the author fulfills such a study as a field and library research from 2018.

There are different stamp and cylinder seal impressions left on the bullae in Bastam but the cylinder impressions were mainly inscribed by the name of Rusa II's or *ašulis'* (the princes or the crowned prince or a specific official in Urartian reign).

Rusa II's impressions on the bullae from Bastam contain his name and his father's name in two lines. Additionally, a scene of a servant holding a shade, the king, the lion and the trident from left to right are depicted between the two lines of the inscription.

The author has recognized the slightly different details in the inscriptions, the place of the Urartian cuneiform signs comparing to the illustrated scene and the elements. Also, the size of the same elements in the scenes of different seal impressions are different on the bullae.

The author proposed two categories with three subgroups of Rusa II's seal impression in this paper. She provided a number of figures and illustrations to demonstrate the detail of the scenes and the differences in the details. The author also mentioned their inscriptions and the reconstruction of their texts in this regard.

The first group of the bullae contains the inscription of 1. <sup>m</sup>ru-sa-i i-ni KIŠIB 2. <sup>m</sup>ar-giš-te-ḫi-ni-i (This is the seal of Rusa, son of Argišti) (Fig. 3-7). The second group includes 1. <sup>m</sup>ru-sa-a-i i-ni KIŠIB 2. <sup>m</sup>ar-giš-te-ḫi-ni-I (Fig. 8).

The two inscriptions are the same except for *a* in the first line of the second group. Two subgroups of the first group of bullae differ in the size and detail of the elements of the scenes. There also is a challenging group that the author could not recognize the detail of the seal impressions due to the severe damages including the corrosion, sediment, loss and fractures. Therefore, she did not put this small number of bullae in any above-mentioned main or subgroups and instead in another group to be studied in the future (Fig. 9).

The author also compared Rusa II's seal impressions in Bastam with his impressions on the bullae from Ayanais (Salvini, 2001) (Fig. 11) and Ziwiye (Fig. 10) which seem to be a shorter version of the whole scene in Bastam seal impressions. Only the king figure was depicted in these stamp seal impressions not his servant nor the lion and the trident.

Additionally, a number of possible symbolic interpretations of the depicted factors and element on these seal impression scenes are provided in the paper. The servant or the shade holder seems to have the role of introduction of the other person before him as the king. It seems that his role is only to prove that the shade is over the king's head and to demonstrate the king in this method. Also, the lion could be the symbol of the power of the king and his kingdom and the trident possibly represented the every-day life of the ordinary people as the farmers or craftsmen. Perhaps the lion and the trident are only illustrated as the king's power over the kingdom and the people.

Also, there are recognized stamp seal impressions that are not the depiction of the king and his servant but are probably related to an Urartian cult as there is an alter and a winged disc before them. The seal impression from Toprak Kale and another impression from Bastam are as examples in which the scene contains two persons but not the king and his servant (Dara and Shirzade, 2017) (Fig. 13).

It seems that Rusa II did not himself use these seals but some seal bearers or officials with the permission of the king or probably under the speculation of a head used them for the administrative acts.

The difference between the seal impressions bring this to mind that it is possible that there were several seals to be used as the seals of Rusa II. The differences in the details illustrate that there could not be only one seal as the seal of the king. There were many seal bearers or officials who made and used the seal of the king simultaneously or in different periods. It is possible that the seals of Rusa II were even used after his reign.