

Old Babylonian clay bullae from Lagaba in the Australian Institute of Archaeology and other collections

Luis R. Siddall, Wayne Horowitz and Peter Zilberg

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Abstract: The paper identifies 16 bullae held by the Australian Institute of Archaeology, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, the Otago Museum, Dunedin, and Nicholson Museum at the University of Sydney that have a shared date and provenance. It discusses the nature of the Institute's bullae and identifies the provenance and accession paths to their respective institutions. They date specifically to either year 6 or 7 of the reign of Samsuiluna, King of Babylon (1744–1743 BC, middle chronology) and they come from the Old Babylonian city of Lagaba.

The Australian Institute of Archaeology (the Institute) currently holds 12 clay bullae that date to the Old Babylonian period, eleven of which are the focus of this study. They have been the subject of translation and study by the Cuneiform of Australia and New Zealand (CANZ) group of scholars.

In general terms, the inscribed bullae under discussion functioned as docketts for transactions of goods from one party to another. Docketts could be recorded on different styles of kneaded clay, usually on tablets or bullae. When bullae were used, they were formed by pressing a lump of clay on the knot of a cord that was attached to the goods being distributed. The shape of a bulla could be quite different and depended not on the goods to which they were attached, but came down to the choice of the scribe.¹

In the case of the bullae under discussion, the variation in shape seems to be consistent with the year in which they were made. That is, those bullae dating to Samsuiluna 6 are in the shape of a three-sided pyramid and those from Samsuiluna 7 are shaped like a three-sided Cornish pasty (see Figures 1, 2 & 3).

Samsuiluna was the 7th king of the Amorite dynasty of Babylon. He was the son of Hammurabi and succeeded him in 1750 BC (middle chronology). During his 38-year rule the empire he inherited from his father reduced in size with the loss of provinces in the south.

Accession

Letters kept in the Institute's archives show that Walter J. Beasley, founder of the Institute, purchased the bullae from Edward Jawahery, a Baghdad-based antiquities dealer, in August 1935 (AIA Docs 3514a and 3516b). The correspondence relates to Beasley's second trip to Iraq in which he purchased four consignments of antiquities for his collection (AIA Doc 3517; Davey 2012: 73–74). The bullae formed a part of the third consignment of 54 items including cuneiform tablets, coins, and cylinder seals (AIA Doc 3514d). In a letter from Jawahery to Beasley dated to 10 August 1935, he refers to the bullae as 'inscribed clay amulets (as from Hillah)'.

In 1944 Beasley donated five cuneiform texts from those he had procured from Jawahery in 1935 to the Nicholson Museum, namely two Old Akkadian tablets (NM44.16 and NM44.17), two Ur III tablets (NM44.18 and NM44.19) and a bulla (NM44.20).

The date of purchase in 1935 and Jawahery's general description of their style is more useful for reconstructing the possible provenance of the bullae than what may be thought at first blush. The CANZ study of the triangular bullae in the Institute and the Nicholson Museum has revealed that they are from the same archive as two other bullae located in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem published by Oded Tammuz (1994). In his research, Tammuz recognised that the two bullae he studied originally came



Figure 1: Bullae from the Institute collection, from the left IA7.883, IA7.880, IA7.882, IA7.878, IA7.884, IA7.879, IA7.885, IA7.886, IA7.881, IA7.877 and IA7.887. Photo: the Institute.



Figure 2: An example of the 'Cornish pasty' shape.
Bulla IA7.886, 28 mm x 18 mm 19 mm.
Photo: the Institute.



Figure 3: An example of the 'Three-sided pyramid' shape.
Bulla IA7.880, 28 mm x 29 mm 28 mm.
Photo: the Institute.

from the Babylonian city, Lagaba, which was located on the watercourse between the ancient cities of Cutha and Babylon (1996) and belonged to the dossier of Ilī-ū-Šamaš (1993: 239–255) within the archive of Marduk-muballit (1993: 222–453).

This same Ilī-ū-Šamaš is named as the conveyor of the perfume in the docketts of the Institute and the Nicholson Museum. Indeed, Ilī-ū-Šamaš is also attested in two further bullae (E47.285 and E47.540) in the collection of the Otago Museum in Dunedin, New Zealand. Hence, on the basis of the named conveyor in these docketts, we are able to link 14 bullae in Australia and New Zealand to those in Jerusalem and, ultimately, identify their original provenance as the Old Babylonian city of Lagaba. It is also worth noting that a provenance of Lagaba legitimises Jawahery's statement that the bullae resembled others he had seen on the antiquities market from the region of Babylon, where the main modern-day city is Hillah.

The date of Beasley's purchase of the bullae also correlates with other texts understood to have originated in Old Babylonian Lagaba. It seems that all the known texts from this era were illicitly excavated and bought from the antiquities market in the 1930s. Indeed, texts from the site are now housed in collections in Leiden, Oxford, and Yale (Tammuz 1993: 1–11). Further, all these collections have similar sources of acquisition: Iraqi antiquities dealers in the early 1930s. F. M. Th. de Liagre Böhl purchased the Leiden collection from an Iraqi dealer in 1932 and 1939,

the Oxford collection was purchased from the same dealer in 1932 and it seems that some of the Yale collection was purchased from an Iraqi dealer named E. S. David in 1934 (Tammuz 1993: 1–8).

The two bullae from the Lagaba archive in the Otago Museum were acquired during a similar period. Dr Lindsay Rogers, the donor of a large collection of cuneiform texts to the Otago Museum, purchased the bullae and the other items in his collection while serving in the Royal Army Medical Corps during WWII and then as Professor of Surgery at the Royal School of Medicine, Baghdad, until his return to New Zealand in 1950 (Horowitz, Reeves, Stillman, White, & Zilberg 2015b; Horowitz, Stillman & Zilberg 2015a). Hence, the bullae in New Zealand were purchased not long after Beasley obtained his collection. It remains unclear whether the two bullae in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, were also purchased in the 1930s. These bullae were donated from the collection of Joseph Ternbach, a noted art restorer and antiquities collector (Tammuz 1994: 46). Most of Ternbach's collection was donated to the Israel Museum, Jerusalem (Merhav 1981). Unfortunately, there is no published record of the date on which Ternbach purchased his collection.²

The purpose and date of the Bullae

All of the docketts in the different collections are receipts for the delivery of a type of perfume (Tammuz 1994; CAD R, 369). In each case Ilī-ū-Šamaš is the one who distrib-

uted the perfume to either Bēlšunu or Sīn-muballissu. As noted above, there is a clear correlation between the shape of the bullae and the year in which they were produced. Those dated to the ‘New Year’, probably the 6th year of Samsuiluna’s reign are pyramid shaped, while those dated to the seventh year of the same king’s reign are in the style of a three-sided Cornish pasty.

Tammuz (1993: 59-64) examines the use of MU GIBIL, which in the case of the archive of Marduk-muballit, of which Ilī-ū-Šamaš’s dossier was a part, uses this formula as ‘New Year’ during the period of Samsuiluna 6-8. Tammuz’s initial examination (1993, 59-64) of the use of the dating formula, MU GIBIL, in the archive of Marduk-

muballit found that it was used during Samsuiluna 6-8. Tammuz (1994, 171) later narrowed the date of its use to either Samsuiluna 6 or 7. Given the uniformity in shape and date formula of the ‘Cornish pasty’ bullae, we suggest a Year 6 date for these texts.

Hence, it is likely that either the fashion of forming bullae changed in Samsuiluna 7, or that there was a different scribe from the one operating at Lagaba in the previous year. The following table lists the 17 bullae from Lagaba in chronological order housed in the Institute (IA), the Israel Museum, Jerusalem (IMJ), the Otago Museum (E), and the Nicholson Museum (NM). We also note the shape of each bulla and the quantities of perfume recorded.

Museum no.	Shape	Size mm	Date	Transaction - Receipt for
IA7.883	Three-sided pyramid	32 x 29 x 24	16 Ayyaru (II), The New Year	x litres of <i>riqqu</i> -perfume
E47.540	Three-sided pyramid		6 Simānu (III), The New Year	20 litres of <i>riqqu</i> -perfume
IA7.880	Three-sided pyramid	28 x 29 x 28	20 Simānu (III), The New Year	30 litres of <i>riqqu</i> -perfume
IA7.882	Three-sided pyramid	30 x 22 x 27	20 Simānu (III), The New Year	20 litres of <i>riqqu</i> -perfume
IA7.878	Cornish pasty	29 x 19 x 20	1 Dūzu (IV), Samsuiluna 7	40 litres of <i>riqqu</i> -perfume
IA7.884	Cornish pasty	28 x 18 x 17	16 ² Dūzu (IV), Samsuiluna 7	40 litres of <i>riqqu</i> -perfume
IA7.879	Cornish pasty	31 x 20 x 19	16 Abum (V), Samsuiluna 7	40 litres of <i>riqqu</i> -perfume
IMJ 87.196.652	Cornish pasty		4 Elūlu (VI), Samsuiluna 7	40 litres of <i>riqqu</i> -perfume
IA7.885	Cornish pasty	30 x 18 x 19	12 Elūlu (VI), Samsuiluna 7	40 litres of <i>riqqu</i> -perfume
IMJ 87.160.653	Cornish pasty		13 Elūlu (VI), Samsuiluna 7	40 litres of <i>riqqu</i> -perfume
IA7.886	Cornish pasty	28 x 18 x 19	26 Elūlu (VI), Samsuiluna 7	40 litres of <i>riqqu</i> -perfume
IA7.881	Cornish pasty	30 x 20 x 19	20 Arahsamnu (VIII), Samsuiluna 7	40 litres of <i>riqqu</i> -perfume
IA7.877	Cornish pasty	29 x 19 x 18	1 Kislīmu II (IX/2), Samsuiluna 7	40 litres of <i>riqqu</i> -perfume
E47.285	Cornish pasty		4 Kislīmu II (IX/2)	40 litres of <i>riqqu</i> -perfume
NM44.20	Cornish pasty		16 Kislīmu II (IX/2), Samsuiluna 7	40 litres of <i>riqqu</i> -perfume
IA7.887	Cornish pasty	27 x 18 x 19	10 Tēbētu (X), Samsuiluna 7	40 litres of <i>riqqu</i> -perfume

Table 1: A table in chronological order the 17 bullae from Lagaba housed in the Institute (IA), the Israel Museum, Jerusalem (IMJ), the Otago Museum (E), and the Nicholson Museum (NM), also noting the shape of each bulla and the quantities of perfume recorded



Figure 4: Bulla IA7.888 35 mm x 25 mm x 21 mm, which is not from the dossier of Ilī-ū-Šamaš at Lagaba.
Photo: The Institute

Postscript:

In addition to the 17 dockets discussed here, there are two further bullae from the region, one in the Institute and the other in the Otago Museum. They have not been included in this study because they are not from the dossier of Ilī-ū-Šamaš at Lagaba. The Institute's bulla IA7.888 (Figure 4) is in the shape of a rugby ball and records a receipt for barley. At this stage it is not possible to offer a more specific date for it than the Old Babylonian period. The Otago bulla (E47.15) dates to the 7th year of the reign of Amar-Suen of the Ur III dynasty (c. 2039 BCE).

Luis R. Siddall
Research Fellow,
Australian Institute of Archaeology

Wayne Horowitz
Professor of Assyriology,
Hebrew University, Jerusalem

Peter Zilberg
Hebrew University, Jerusalem

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Endnotes

- 1 Keiser (1914, 10) made these comments in relation to the Ur III period, but this point seems appropriate to the bullae under discussion here.
- 2 It is tempting to wonder if Ternbach had purchased the bullae before his migration from Vienna to the United States of America in 1938-39.