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Shua AMORAI-STARK, *Wolfe Family Collection of Near Eastern Prehistoric Stamp Seals*. Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, Series Archaeologica 16. Fribourg, Switzerland: University Press & Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997. ISBN 3 7278 1136 6 (Univ. Press); 3 525 53897 9 (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht). Pp. 205. S.Fr. 75.

While archaeological context is indisputably the most important to preserve for any class of artefacts it is always welcome to have more published material. Amorai-Stark's reference publication of the Wolfe Family collection (WFC) seals provides a useful catalogue of types, from Syria, south-east Anatolia and North Mesopotamia. A few examples have closer parallels with seals excavated in Israël, Lebanon, southern Mesopotamia and south-west Iran. Most WFC seals originated in western, north-east or southern Iran and come from such archaeological sites (or their horizons).

After a few brief introduction, the catalogue is divided into just four sections following a certain logic of groupings; earliest stamp seals, early chalcolithic pendant-seal amulets and seals, later prehistoric stamp seals and unusually shaped or problematic seals. One could argue that "unusually shaped or problematic seals" could have been divided into two different sections. Within each time period the seals are organized by shape and design. Amorai-Stark's efforts to date seals by comparison are quite convincing and references demonstrate a command of sources.

Although photographs are clear and well represent the items a drawing of these seals would be clearer for the sake of detailed comparison of the material with other published sources. Measurements are given in each case but the illustrations have no scale. While most WFC seals have at least two views depicted, some only have one view, such as objects 227 and 460. The placement of the photo in relation to the text is a little confusion in a few places. This is clearly a factor of the editing. Spacing sometimes places the illustration in the preceding column to the text, without an object reference number. Pages 175-7 in particular illustrate this problem.

Comments for individual seals could have been organized together in topical sections, as the seals are already arranged chronologically and typologically. This could have cut a considerable amount of repetition and provided space for some more detailed analysis. The lack of such analysis is the main fault of the work. The seals are discussed without

much reference to their possible usages, despite the fact that this point has been a focus of seal research in the Near East for quite some time. In recent years, the importance of prehistoric seals and sealings has been recognized to provide considerable insights into early administrative and cultural developments. While acknowledging their importance, Amoraï-Stark fails to incorporate the most recent scholarship in this field, such as the work of R.J. Mathews, as published in excavation reports of Tell Brak (in *Iraq* 56 (1994), 181; *Iraq* 57 (1995), 90, 92, 97; *Iraq* 58 (1996) 74). Comparisons with research in seals and sealings in general is lacking as well, so the work comes across as little more than a well identified "butterfly" collection, rather than as a scholarly work.

These shortcomings noted, we must applaud the publication of this useful study collection. We can always use more research resources. Amoraï-Stark's attempts to date the WFC seals was quite successful. Such a publication can also provide more information for the treatment of tokens, which has received more attention in the past two decades. The existence of some numerals within one pattern presented here may refer to such accounting systems.

Sheldon Lee Gosline  
IHAC