THE SEAL IMPRESSION NR. 313 FROM KAFİR KALA

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KAĞİR KALA KATMANINDAN ÇIKARILAN 313 NUMARALI MÜHÜR BASKISI

Abstract

The seal impression nr. 313 from Kafir Kala depicts a naked figure and a short inscription rywδ’tc xwβw 'Rēwδāt Beyi' and therefore provides evidence for the Sogdian placename in the stratum in Kafir Kala dating from the conquest of the fortress to the south of Samarkand at the end of the Sogdian era.

Öz

Soğdiana Çağ’ın sonunda Semerkant’ın güneyindeki kalenin fethine kadarki dönemi kapsayan Kafir Kala katmanından çıkarılan 313 numaralı mühür baskısı, üstündeki çıplak bir figür tasviri ve rywδ’tc xwβw 'Rēwδāt Beyi' şeklindeki kısa yazıyla burada bulunan yerin Soğda adı için kanıt sunar.

In 'Sealings from Kafir Kala: Preliminary report', by Sara Cazzoli and Carlo G. Cereti, in: Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia 11, 2005, 133-164 the authors include the seal impression nr. 313 with an illustration on p. 152 (reproduced here):

Fig. 20 in Sazzoli/Cereti 2005, 152.

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They provide the following description on p. 148:

'A very fine impression is that of an oval convex seal set in a dotted mount showing a nude female figure, frontal, head in profile to the left, left knee bent and right knee straight; her right hand holding a cornucopia to her breast and her left grasps a long slender branch. An inscription – not easily readable and rather supposed to be a pseudo-inscription – runs on the left from 12h to 6h.'

While I had the pleasure of being the guest of the Italo-Uzbek mission in Samarkand in June 2006, for which I would like to thank A. Berdimuradov, M. Tosi, A. Panaino, F. Franceschini, B. Rondelli and S. Mantellini, I was shown sealing nr. 313 and, starting with the clear letter c in the middle to the left of the figure, I came to the conclusion that the inscription could be a genuine Sogdian one. The inscription is damaged but that seems to be because some of the strokes were so thin that they fell off when they dried or when the sealing was thrown with its letter into the courtyard or when the letter and sealing were burned (destroying the letter but baking the sealing).

In the following drawing line 1 contains a representation of the strokes visible to me. Lines 2 and 3 contain possible reconstructions.

The inscription seems at first sight to contain 10 letters. Letters 1, 2, 6, 8, 9 and 10 are visible; letters 3, 4, 5 and 7 are damaged, but letter 4 is so characteristic that the damage does not matter. Since the beginning is fairly clear and can be read as ry.δ and letter 6 is c after which there may be a space, it seems reasonable to suppose that the first word is a place-
name with a suffix -c, cf. \textit{sm'rkndc} \textit{MR'Y 'ywy'stye} 'Samarkandian lord, Δēwāštīč' = 'Δēwāštīč, the lord of Samarkand', attested in letters from Mount Mug. The name on this sealing could be \textit{rywδ't} (introducing a letter between δ and t, which increases the number of letters in the inscription to eleven) or \textit{rywδt}. This is the place-name Rēwōāt quoted by Cazzoli/Cereti on p. 136 and 156 with reference to Grenet's and de la Vaissière's suggestion that it may refer to Kafir kala itself. The name Rēwōāt must mean 'Created' or 'Given by Rēw'; Rēw 'the rich (one)' is used for Mithra or the Moon.\textsuperscript{1} The name \textit{rywc} /rēwč/ is attested on a bone found in Panjikand; it and \textit{ryw'kk} /rēwak/ are attested in documents from Mount Mug\textsuperscript{2}, though Rēwōāt is not attested there. Rēwōāt is not a likely place-name, but it is clearly attested as such in Arabic accounts of Sogdiana in the 8\textsuperscript{th} c. Assuming that \textit{c} is the last letter of the first word, the occurrence of \textit{MR'Y} immediately following \textit{sm'rkndc} in Δēwāštīč's titulature quoted above suggests that the following word could be a title. I therefore assumed the partial loss of a \textit{x} and read the last four letters as \textit{xwβw} 'lord'. This necessitates a slight re-interpretation of the second last letter which looks like a š. However, in cursive Sogdian it is not unusual for š and β to be very similar and, in the case of this sealing, perhaps the scribe had difficulty forming the letter on the seal-ring as he turned it around to follow the rim. The partly reconstructed reading \textit{rywδ'tc xwβw} 'Rēwōāt-ian lord' = 'The lord of Rēwōāt' is given in the reconstruction in line 2.

I presented this reading at a small workshop 'Sogdiana' on the 28\textsuperscript{th} of November 2007 in the Berlin Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Berlin. Pavel Lurje rightly objected to the latter part of this reading, suggesting that that \textit{kw} be read instead of \textit{xw} and that it might refer to the dynastic name Kay. Rather than this I tentatively suggest in line 3 a reconstruction that yields \textit{rywδ'tcykw xwβw}, i.e. with an adjectival suffix -cyk (and a purely graphical -w) and in the last two letters visible just the first two letters of the title which will have continued on a now damaged part of the sealing. The sense is the same: 'Rēwōāt-ian lord'.

If this reading is correct this seal impression would be of the seal of the lord of the very fortress where the impression was was found. However,

\textsuperscript{1} See N. Sims-Williams, \textit{Sogdian and other Iranian Inscriptions of the Upper Indus II}, 1992, 49 under δ't, δt and p. 68 under ryw.
\textsuperscript{2} V. A. Livšic, V. G. Škoda, Soydijskie nadpisi iz xrama I v Pendžikente, in: \textit{Narody Azii i Afriki} 5, 1982, 133 and n.133. The piece of bone is reproduced on p. 134.
of the more than 500 sealings found it seems unusual that only one should be that of the lord of the place. Sara Cazzoli in Cazzoli/Cereti 2005, 148 lists the seal impression nr. 313 as being unique amongst the sealings found in 2001 and 2002. Rita Dimartino of the Italo-Uzbek team working in Samarkand in 2006 kindly reported to me that no other sealings of this kind have been found since then. She showed me a photo of a damaged sealing (inventory nr. 425), excavated in 2005, which has a figure without an inscription. The figure is definitely not the same as in sealing nr. 313. The incidence of names in the Mug documents, the most important collection of Sogdian documents from Sogdiana, clearly has its own reasons. The eighty documents range from economic documents (administrative notes, even 'receipts') to 'diplomatic' letters and reports from Δēwāštīč's allies and spies as he tried to avoid and then escape the disaster that was to overcome him in 722 when he was forced by the pursuing Arabs to come down from the outpost on Mug, to where he had fled as a last resort. Kafir kala had already fallen years before so there was no reason to refer to it.

In the description given above, Cazzoli/Cereti identified the figure as female. Does the figure have any significance in relation to the inscription? If the figure on the seal is female it could perhaps represent a figure such as Tyche, 'fate'. However, there is not much reason for regarding the figure as female. The prominent chest may not be a breast but simply a strong chest. In this and in other points (stance, possibly some of the attributes), the Hellenistic coin with a Hercules figure reproduced below can be compared. The use of the iconography of a coin would support the interpretation of the seal as that of a ruler.

In a discussion with me on the 21st of July 2007, Gunvor Lindström kindly added the following points:

The size of the seal suggests that it was made for an important person.

The placing of the figure, slightly off-centre, indicates that the inscription was not added later, but was planned for, i.e. seal and figure belong together. The resemblance to the depictions on coins is hardly accidental and is another indicator of the importance of the person for whom it was made.

The figure does indeed hold a cornucopia but is not recognizably female or male. After a certain point within the late Hellenistic period it simply becomes impossible to distinguish.

She also kindly pointed out that, if the seal belongs to the ruler of Kafir Kala this would not mean that more documents sealed with this seal should be expected in Kafir Kala. Rather they would have been sent elsewhere.