

Seal impressions and seals: seasons 2018–2020¹

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Sealings rank among the most numerous finds from all excavated parts of the ancient town of Kom Ombo.² They are of different stages of fragmentation depending on their original supports, different opening techniques, disposal methods, as well as site formation processes. So far, 994 pieces have seal impressions or incisions and are distributed over the excavated areas as follows:³

area	Sealings with		
	cylinder seal impressions	stamp seal impressions	incisions
S/3	1	-	1
S/9-N	524	2	5
S/9-M	17	8	4
S/9-S	49	258	88

Tab. 1: Distribution of the sealings over the excavated areas.

Area s/9-N

The 2nd Dynasty settlement waste layers of phase 19 contained exclusively sealings fixed on portable objects, e.g. jar caps, jar-neck sealings, and triangular labels.⁴ They were impressed by officials' seals (*'Beamtensiegel'*) whose owners bear the epithet *swdⁱ-jb* "the one who causes to rejoice" (FIGURE 20.a)⁵ or the title *hm-nzw* "royal dependent" (FIGURE 20.b&c).⁶ In some cases, the inscriptions contain only the name of the seal owner (FIGURE 20.d). Interestingly, the title *hm-nzw* appears on seven seals, two of which are attested on two different sealings.⁷

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² This large number is not due to the particular richness of the site, but to the specific sieving technique which involves drying all excavated material in the sun and sieving it thoroughly with fine sieves. Cf. the description in SARTORI 2009, p. 283. Previously, a good number of Old Kingdom seal impressions – mostly of officials' seals – was found by the Kom Ombo Ground Water Lowering Project (JONES 2019).

³ The small sealing fragments which could not be assigned to one category with certainty do not appear in the following table. The same is true for simple mud sealings which were neither impressed with a seal nor marked by incisions.

⁴ The shape of the latter is comparable to those found at Elephantine (PÄTZNICK 2005, p. 53 & 241 middle: type Tb. 3 "Vorhängeverschluss").

⁵ KO-KF 1810, 1821, and 1832; cf. the contemporary evidence from nearby Elephantine (ENGEL 2021, p. 36). PÄTZNICK (2005, p. 105–107) interprets the group as title *hry-s(w)dⁱ(w)* "Oberster Bewahrer"; that is, however, contradicted by the form of the last sign.

⁶ Translation after PAPAŽIAN 2021, p. 208. Note that *hm-nzw* and *swdⁱ-jb* do not both appear on one single seal according to our current evidence.

⁷ KO-KF 1823, 1834, 1841, 1849, 1852, 1853, 1854, 1857, 2220.

As all nine sealings were attached to jar necks, this evidence points toward a practice of regular deliveries, which was organised, supervised or checked by these royal agents.⁸

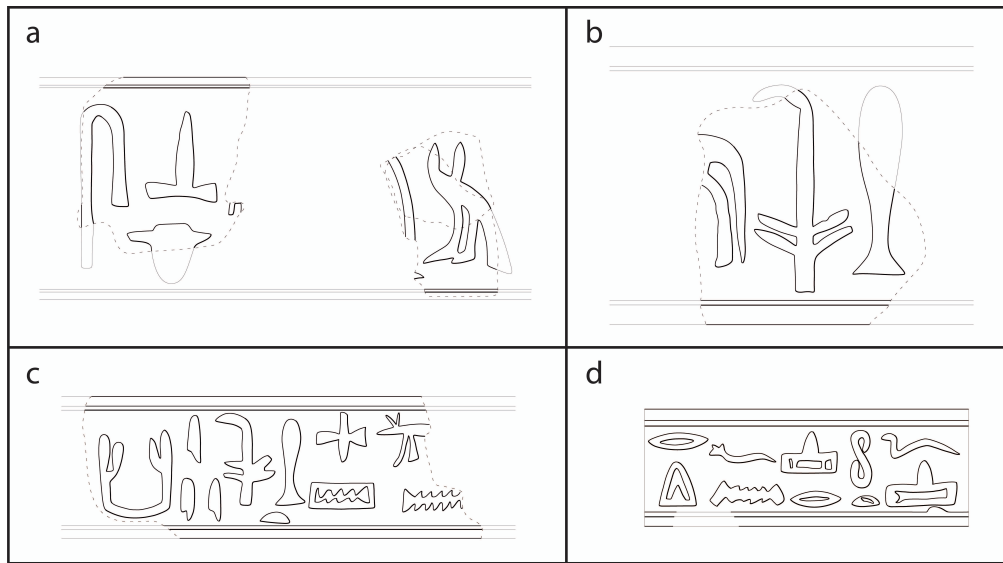


Fig. 20a: Seal impressions of phase 19, S/9-N: (a) KO-KF 1810 + 1821; (b); KO-KF 1852 (c) KO-KF 1823 + 2200; (d) KO-KF 1827. Drawings: P. Seyr.

The sealings from the Old Kingdom settlement of phases 18–15 were mostly fixed on containers such as jars, baskets, chests or sacks, and only occasionally on wooden doors. Some levelling layers, streets and dumping spaces outside the buildings contained especially high quantities of broken sealings (e.g. L1121 with 24 pieces), while interior spaces are generally devoid of them. According to their inscriptions, officials' seals also dominate this corpus. In theophoric names, the ram gods Khnum, Ba and Kherty⁹ as well as Anubis appear, and in addition to names, the Neith-standard is also attested.¹⁰ However, in contrast to the earlier material, these sealings mainly feature the titles *mjtr* (20×)/ *mjtr.t* (4×), *rnw* (6×)/ *rn.ty* (5×), *s'ḏ* (2×), *hbn(.y)* (3×), and the epithet *nfr-ḳd-m's.t* (12×) (FIGURE 21.a-d).¹¹ As such, they seem to form a quite homogeneous group indicating that the area did not undergo any significant change in function during this period. Among them, scattered impressions of seals of office ('*Amtssiegel*') were found only rarely and in most cases royal names are lost.¹² Two of them from 5th Dynasty

⁸ Only three other attestations of this title on Old Kingdom seal inscriptions have been published so far: Elephantine Chufuanch/32250 (ENGEL, in press), the unprovenanced seal London, UCL 11069 (ENGEL 2021a, p. 25, 111 no. 8.2.16: "frühestens in die Mitte der 3. Dynastie"), and possibly the seal impression Elephantine 14945f (PÄTZNICK 2005, p. 309 Cat. 75: "frühestens 3. bzw. 4. Dyn.") that was kindly pointed out to me by E.-M. Engel. Yet, the title is abundantly attested in the Gebelein papyri of the 4th dynasty (PAPAZIAN 2021, p. 208; ANDRÁSSY 2021, p. 234). Therefore, one might wonder whether the provincial setting at the middle–end of the 2nd Dynasty Kom Ombo was comparable to that of 4th Dynasty Gebelein, at least in terms of resource management.

⁹ ENGEL 2021a, p. 47.

¹⁰ Cf. ENGEL 2021a, p. 42–43; ENGEL 2021b.

¹¹ ENGEL 2021a, p. 22–23 (*mjtr/mjtr.t*), 25 (*rnw/rn.ty*), 29–31 (*hbn.y* and *s'ḏ*) & 35 (*nfr-ḳd-m's.t*).

¹² E.g. KO-KF 1623 that shows a crudely sculpted perched falcon on top of a *serekh*.

deposits, however, bear the Horus name of the 3rd Dynasty king Khaba and parts of the laudatory phrase *jrr dd.t=f* “who does what he says” (FIGURE 21.e).¹³ In view of this evidence, it is especially noteworthy that institutional sealings of Khaba were also found at nearby Elephantine¹⁴ and at Hierakonpolis.¹⁵

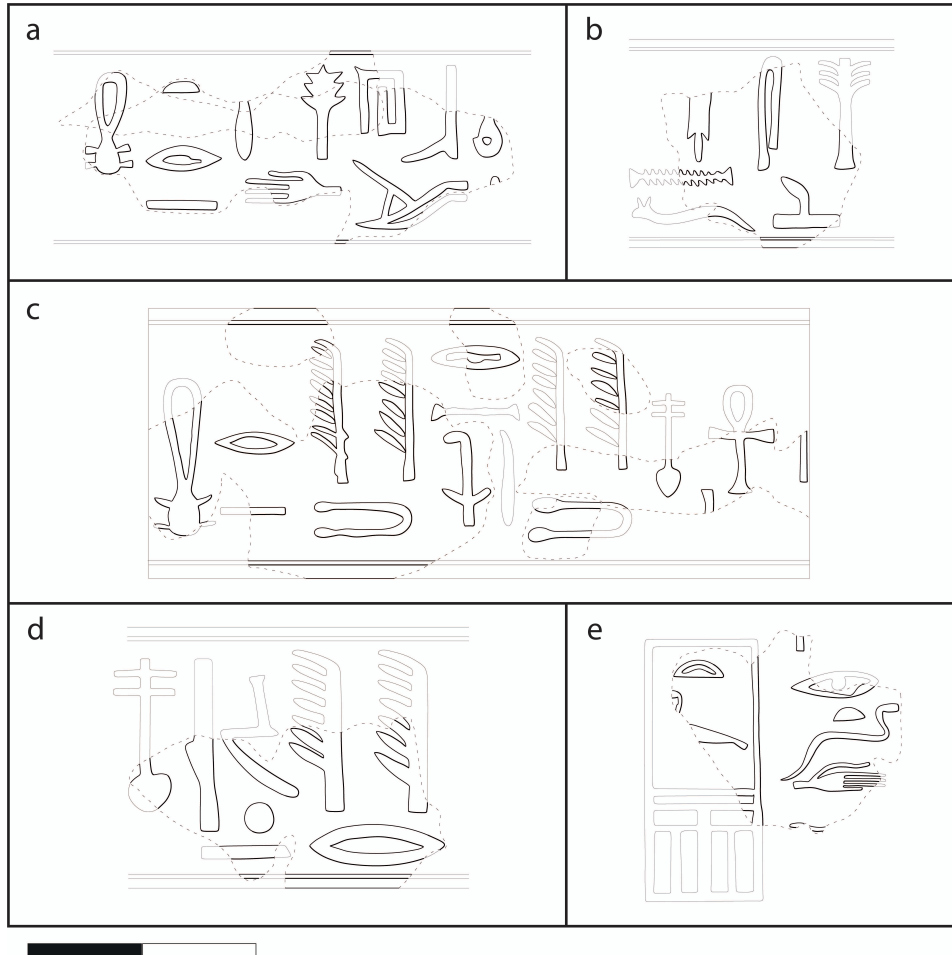


Fig. 21. Seal impressions of phases 18–15, S/9-N: (a) KO-KF 1705; (b) KO-KF 1306; (c) KO-KF 1317 + 1320; (d) KO-KF 1741; (e) KO-KF 1528. Drawings: P. Seyr.

Of paramount importance for the historiography of the town are the sealings from the massive levelling layers (phase 14) that underlie the early phase of the First Intermediate Period cemetery. On the one hand, these deposits yielded fragments of officials’ seals with titles which are known from previous phases as well as – for the first time – the epithet *twt-n-mrw.t*¹⁶ and

¹³ KO-KF 1528 preserves the whole epithet while KO-KF 1583 has only *jri* [...]. This phrase is paralleled in the unprovenanced seal impression London, UC 11755 (KAHL *et al.* 1995, p. 160, Ch/?/3).

¹⁴ Exc. Nos. 143001 (PÄTZNICK 2005, p. 413, Cat. 280), 16355d (*Ibid.*, p. 512, Cat. 469), 21311e (*Ibid.*, p. 578, Cat. 578), 21329 (*Ibid.*, p. 616, Cat. 651), 32101 K/e-1 (ENGEL 2009, p. 372), and 38901G/c-11 as well as 38901G/c-12 (ENGEL 2018, Kat. 128 Nr. 248, fig. 59).

¹⁵ Nr. 168 in QUIBELL, GREEN 1902, p. 51, pl. LXX.1. Another seal impression of this king was recently found at Qesna in Lower Egypt (ROWLAND, TASSIE 2017, p. 377–378, fig. 4).

¹⁶ ENGEL 2021a, p. 36.

the so-called ‘offering scene’ (FIGURE 22.a).¹⁷ On the other, parts of the debris appear to come from the waste of one or more early 5th Dynasty institutions.¹⁸ Indeed, they contain a substantial number of sealings impressed with seals of office which mention the first three kings of this dynasty.

King Userkaf is attested by 16 sealings that were made with ten different seals, as an outside estimate.¹⁹ Most bear the king’s Horus name *jri-m^c.t*, other parts of the royal protocol,²⁰ royal epithets, and laudatory phrases referring to the seal owner (FIGURE 22.d). Only in one inscription is a partly readable title preserved, namely *hry-‘jmy-r^s’* [...] “assistant of the overseer of [...]”.²¹ Two additional sealings come from more ‘informal’ seals of this kind and display the name of the Userkaf alternating with royal epithets (FIGURE 22.b).²²

From the reign of king Sahura, six sealings that were impressed by five different seals were identified.²³ On them, the royal epithets *mrr ntr.w* “beloved of the gods”, *mry shm.t* “beloved of Sekhmet”, and [*mry?*] *hnm.w* “[beloved?] of the Khnum” are mentioned.²⁴ A scribe (*zš*) with the epithet [*jrr*] *wḏ.t* [...] “[who does] what the [the king?] orders” appears on KO-KF 365, and the impression joins with KO-KF 77 from the 2017 season.²⁵ The most interesting inscription from this reign is on a barely readable sealing that bears the title [...] *sp^s.t jmy-r^s hḳw.t* [...] “[...] of the nome, overseer of the domain [...]” (FIGURE 22.e).

The impressions of one of the two seals of office from the reign of king Neferirkara provide the most telling evidence for the Old Kingdom infrastructure at Kom Ombo. This seal belonged to a [...] *zš(.w?) pr-šn^c bw-nzw nbw.t* “[overseer(?)] of the scribe(s?) of the *pr-šn^c* of the royal repast (at) *nbw.t*” and is the first surely identified attestation of the name of the ancient town

¹⁷ The three examples from Kom Ombo (KO-KF 384, 558, and 563) augment the corpus of sealings with this scene from settlement contexts that was recently collected by SPECK 2021.

¹⁸ FORSTNER-MÜLLER 2019, p. 84.

¹⁹ As for Upper Egyptian sites, sealings with the name of king Userkaf were recovered at Abydos (KAPLONY 1981, p. 146–148, pl. 51, *Wsr-k^s-f* 4–5), Buhen (KAPLONY 1981, p. 163–164, pl. 55, *Wsr-k^s-f* 29–31), and Elephantine (ENGEL 2009, p. 371–372 fig. 6.1).

²⁰ An already published example is the sealing KO-KF 566 (SEYR 2022, p. 227 fig. 128).

²¹ KO-KF 366, 367, 1292 stemming from one seal.

²² KO-KF 378 and 381. Cf. seals with the name of this king but without titles of officials that were purportedly acquired at Elephantine (KAPLONY 1981, p. 147, pl. 51, *Wsr-k^s-f* 1) and Elkab (*Ibid.*, p. 146, pl. 51, *Wsr-k^s-f* 3). Furthermore, this example proves that ‘Ringnamensiegel’ were indeed used for sealing commodities (*contra Ibid.*, p. 11–12, §4, 61–62).

²³ Others sealings with the name of this king from Upper Egypt come from Abydos (*Ibid.*, p. 171–172, pl. 56, *S^hw-R^c* 5–6) and Buhen (London, UC 21808, 21812, 21844, 21852, 21871 and 21921 = *Ibid.*, p. 183–185, pl. 58–59, *S^hw-R^c* 15; *Ibid.*, p. 200–206, pl. 62–64, *S^hw-R^c* 36–48).

²⁴ KO-KF 536 + 537, 517, and 555. Could this the mention of Khnum relate to the setting next to the town of Elephantine? The similar epithet of Sahura *mry hnm.w hnty znm.t* “beloved of Khnum, lord of Zenmet” is found on a seal used at Buhen (*Ibid.*, p. 183–185, pl. 58–59, *S^hw-R^c* 15).

²⁵ For KO-KF 77 see FORSTNER-MÜLLER *et al.* 2019, p. 84 fig. 33.

(FIGURE 22.f).²⁶ More importantly, it is evidence for the existence of a *pr-šn*‘ institution that was subordinated to the royal installation of the *bw-nzw*. It is not clear if this is the same *pr-šn*‘ which is mentioned on several other fragments as part of the title *jmy-rʿ pr-šn*‘ “overseer of the *pr-šn*“ because the royal name is lost on them (FIGURE 22.g).²⁷ Finally, a small fragment mentions the overseer of a fortress (*jmy-rʿ* 𓂏) the name or location of which is not preserved (FIGURE 22.c).²⁸

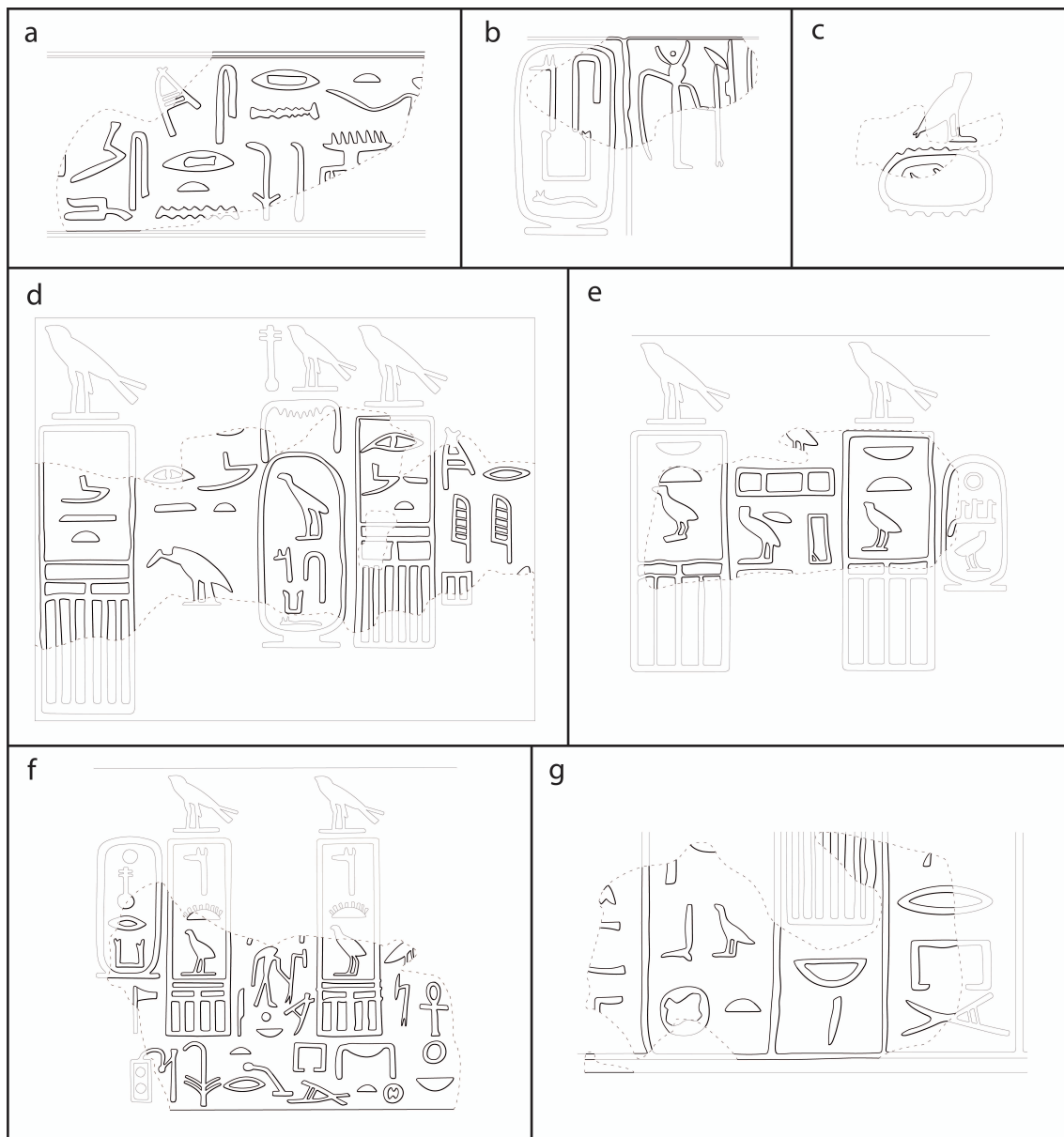


Fig. 22: Seal impressions of phase 14, S/9-N: (a) KO-KF 384; (b) KO-KF 381; (c) KO-KF 374 + 376 + 512 + 532 + 540 + 582; (d) KO-KF 526; (e) KO-KF 535; (f) KO-KF 568. Drawings: P. Seyr & L. Pantalacci.

²⁶ The reconstructed seal inscription is discussed in FORSTNER-MÜLLER, SEYR, ROSE 2022. Other possible attestation of *nw.t* are found on KO-KF 535 (Fig. 22.g) and KO 2018 Object No. 586 from the Ground Water Lowering Project (JONES 2019, p. A2-180)

²⁷ KO-KF 369: *jmj-rʿ pr-[šn]*; 524: *jmj-rʿ pr-[šn]*; 535: *[j mj]-rʿ pr-šn*‘.

²⁸ KO-KF 568.

Area s/9-Central

The small and unhomogeneous corpus of sealings from the large early First Intermediate Period mastaba in area s/9-Central (L329)²⁹ and its surroundings (phase 13) comprises scattered fragments of Old Kingdom seal impressions, as well as a few incised sealings and stamp seal impressions from the early First Intermediate Period. The decoration of the stamped sealings is characterised by animal motifs and geometric patterns with thick lines (*'Kerbschnitt'*) that are generally dated to the late Old Kingdom and the early First Intermediate Period.³⁰ A case in point are six impressions of a large rectangular seal with rounded corners decorated with two lizards in tête-bêche composition (FIGURE 23.a).³¹ While four of them come from deposits within area s/9-Central, one was recovered in the foundation layer of silo 4 in room 5 (L1157) in area s/9-S and thus links the areas chronologically.

Additionally, a small group of cylinder seal impressions which was found scattered in this context provides first evidence for the 6th Dynasty at Kom Ombo. One contains a *serekh* of Pepy I (FIGURE 23.b), and a second mentions an *jmy-rʿ pr-šn' ḥw.t jri.t=f* “overseer of the *pr-šn'* of the domain that he^{king} made” (FIGURE 23.c). A third sealing from the fillings of room 9 in area s/9-S bears the names of Pepy II and the epithets [*mry*] *bʿ.w* “beloved of the *Bau*” [*mry*] *pt[h]* “beloved of Ptah” (FIGURE 23.d).

²⁹ For the seal KO-KF 1529 which was found in this tomb see §xxx above.

³⁰ SEIDLMEYER 1990, p. 190–194; WIESE 1996, p. 81–83.

³¹ We know no direct parallels on stamp seals for this composition (cf. WIESE 1996, pl. 35) but it is represented on figurative cylinders from Balat (PANTALACCI 2001, p. 108 fig. 111 no. 4784).

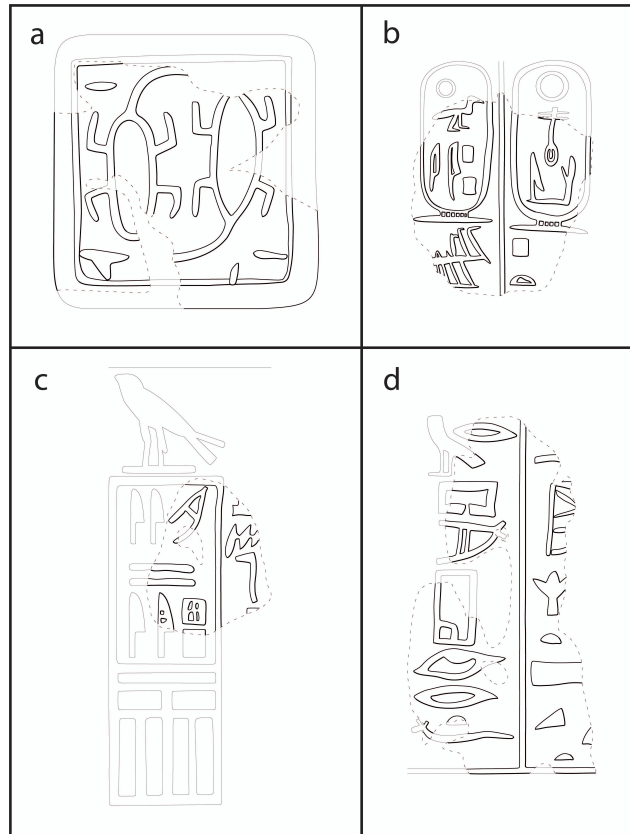


Fig. 23: Seal impressions of phase 13, S/9-M: (a) KO-KF 329 + 353 + 354 + 355 + 2088; scattered Old Kingdom seal impressions of phase 13–12, S/9-M: (c) KO-KF 1608; S/9-N: (b) KO-KF 1526; (d): KO-KF 1861. Drawings: P. Seyr & L. Pantalacci.

Area s/9-S

The administrative area s/9-S yielded mainly sealings impressed with stamp seals or incised with pens of reed or wood, all of which were baked during the large fire covering the late First Intermediate Period town (see §xxx). In comparison to those from area s/9-N, the sealings from this area are less fragmented but also smaller in size and belong mostly to one archaeological phase, namely the process of filling up the large administrative buildings and levelling the area (phase 12). Apart from a few jar-neck sealings, most of them were originally fixed to wooden planks or pegs of varying diameters (*c.* 1–4.4 cm) that were most probably parts of closing mechanisms for doors and granary shutters.³²

Although four stamp seals of faience and stone were recovered from area s/9-S, no matching impression could be identified. Yet, many stamp seals are attested through impressions on multiple sealings and thus allow the association of different actors to specific sealing practices and spaces within the administrative buildings. For instance, an oval seal that probably depicts the façade of a building (FIGURE 24.a) was impressed on sealings of smaller pegs (*d.*: 1.8 cm)

³² This type corresponds to Elephantine ‘Typ A’ of VON PILGRIM 1996, p. 234–237 and DORN 2015, p. 85–88; see SEYR, [in press](#).

in room 2 and 9 (FIGURE 3). Impressions of figurative cylinder seals (sometimes countersealed) are also virtually limited to ‘room 9’, and sealings with reed pen incisions³³ are concentrated in that space. Conversely, the most common ellipsoid seal with a bipartite ‘labyrinth’ pattern (FIGURE 24.b)³⁴ is attested on about 40 small door or shutter sealings from rooms 11, 12, the area north-west of the large wall M270 and scattered in the fillings of rooms 6, 9, and 15 (FIGURE 3).³⁵ In term of motifs, so-called ‘labyrinths’ (FIGURE 24.c) outnumber all other patterns, e.g. abstract, human or animal figures. The typologically most recent seal impressions – that were not baked during the fire – come from scarabs or cauroids with a double-spiral pattern (= SM-M; FIGURE 24.d) and a papyrus plant with two *ankh*-signs on baskets (= SM-H; FIGURE 24.e). They were recovered in the modern surface debris and have their closest parallels at late First Intermediate Period Elephantine.³⁶

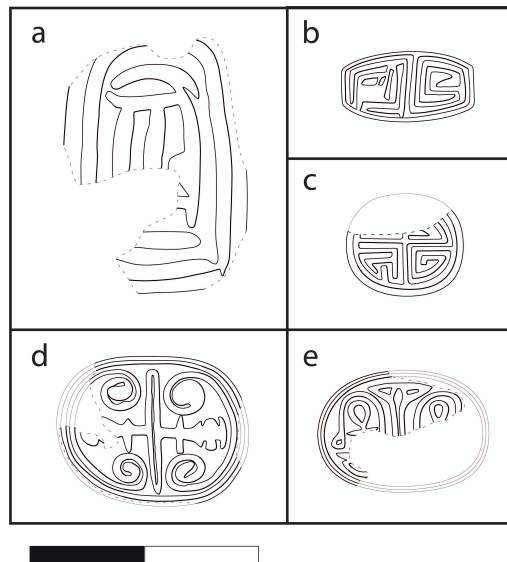


Fig. 24: Seal impressions of phase 12, S/9-S: (a) KO-KF 2036 + 2139 + 2149 + 2165 + 2166 + 2167 + 2178; (b) KO-KF 259 etc.; (c) KO-KF 313 + 1936 + 2092; (d) KO-KF 1428; (e) KO-KF 1432. Drawings: P. Seyr.

³³ Due to their fragmentation, it is not yet clear whether they are hieratic writing or a non-textual writing system. Interestingly, some signs find parallels in other sites: for example, at least three sealings (KO-KF 1920, 2082 & 2114) feature a schematized bee that is reminiscent of the incisions on mud sealings from First Intermediate Period Elephantine (DORN 2015, p. 89–90, fig. 50) and Balat (PANTALACCI 2005a, p. 428: as part of the noun *bj.t* “honey”).

³⁴ Parallels are generally dated to the 11th Dynasty (WIESE 1996, pl. 41, L.4).

³⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the distributional patterns that takes in account the stratigraphic record see SEYR, in press.

³⁶ For KO-KF 1432 see DORN 2015, p. 93, type 382. As for KO-KF 1428, we are not aware of any corresponding patterns but compare the similar disposition of the spirals in *Ibid.*, p. 93, type 388b and 458 with spirals. SM-H and SM-M are generally attributed to phases IIIA–IIIB (SEIDLMAYER 1990, p. 193; DUBIEL 2008, p. 100–102), but *caveat*: PANTALACCI (2005b, p. 234) highlighted that spiral patterns (SM-M) appear at Balat already in the first half of the First Intermediate Period.