Stamp seals likely represent our earliest and most common examples of powerful inscriptions that could operate on a personal and a social level.[7] These were small carved seals intended to create impressions in clay or other materials to mark ownership or to "sign" a transaction or contract. Most stamp seals had primarily administrative or legal functions, but there were also personal seals that in many cases could be more accurately described as "seal amulets."[8] Frequently inscribed with the names or symbols of deities, and likely worn on rings or threaded on necklaces, seal amulets could have been understood as perpetual invocations of divine agency. The use of particularly precious, reflective, or transparent ores for some seals supports the conclusion that they may have been seen as appropriate media for conducting divine agency. These were likely used throughout life and were commonly included in grave goods, suggesting their power was thought to extend into the afterlife. In support of this conclusion, some scholars (Hallo 1985; Uehlinger 1993, 274; Vermeulen 2010, 9) have highlighted a reference to sealing in Song 8:6, in which the narrator compares herself to a seal amulet that can protect her lover from death: "Place me like a seal upon your heart, / like a seal upon your arm. / For as strong as death is love, / as resilient as Sheol is passion."

While anthropomorphic divine imagery is known from the seals of broader ancient Southwest Asia, in Israel and Judah, the preference was for symbols or symbolic animals (Ornan 1993, 63). For instance, the Egyptian *uraeus* cobra—an apotropaic symbol that became associated with the biblical seraphim and with divinity in general—commonly occurs in Hebrew iconic seals from the eighth century BCE (Vermeulen 2010, 56–57). The sun disk also appears on a number of seals from the end of the eighth century, including on multiple seals bearing the name of the Judahite king Hezekiah (Vermeulen 2010, 64–66). In the seventh century BCE, however, the appearance of Yahwistic theophoric elements on Hebrew seals began to correlate significantly with an *absence* of iconography on the same seal (Golub 2018; cf. Vermeulen 2010, 57–69). Despite the development of a more programmatic aniconographic tradition, there is still ample evidence for the power of seal inscriptions to presence divine agency. Keel and Uehlinger (1998, 24–26), for instance, highlight the use of a Greek omega (Ω) symbol on seals ranging from Mesopotamia to Judah. The symbol was associated in Old Babylonian iconography with miscarriage, and seals bearing the symbol were commonly included in the graves of children. The symbol may have represented

[7] Because of their commonality, Keel and Uehlinger (1998, 10) suggest, "they can virtually serve as the standard by which religious history is documented, particularly because they are more or less public artifacts and can thus serve as a sensitive seismograph to detect subtle shifts in religious history." See also Münger 2003.

[8] See Uehlinger 1993, 273–74; Vermeulen 2010. As Uehlinger notes, "seal-amulet" was coined by Hornung and Staehelin 1976.