Our study of the attestations of the different sangas and their seals has provided us with a precise indication of the places on the cases and tablets where their seals were rolled. These were of course not haphazard and certain patterns were described for individual sangas. We can now summarize all these separate findings and, since our corpus spans over two centuries, see if general patterns emerge, evolving through time. It is clear that if these patterns exist they are part of the general sealing practices of their times. Our study can only contribute in a modest way to such a broader view.

Previously sealing practices have been studied and the basic work in this respect is of course the 1977 collection of contributions on seals and sealings published by McG. Gibson and R. D. Biggs.

The chapter by P. Steinkeller in this volume (41-53) allows us to gain some chronological perspective. He collected 123 Ur III sale documents, of which 63 have preserved their sealings. On all of these documents a party, a guarantor, an official or—astonishingly—even the object of a sale (being a slave) are the only sealers. No witnesses seal. This, then, is how it all started. In the same volume, R.M. Whiting comments on sealing practices on house and land sale documents at Ešnunna in the Isin-Larsa period (67-74), where he singles out a sale between private persons but sealed by a palace official. He remarks that in this case the witnesses do not witness the sale but the sealing by the official. Here too the witnesses do not seal the document. Which means that the sealing of documents by all or a substantial number of the witnesses is a characteristic feature of the Old Babylonian period.

C. Wilcke published a number of contracts in his 1983 article and compared the order of the names in the document with the order in which the sealings appear on it. One of his conclusions (p. 63) was that the ‘verpflichtete Partei’ sealed on the upper part, followed by the witnesses. E. Kengel-Brandt (1986) had likewise concluded that on VAT 712, dated by the oath to Sin-muballit, some of the heirs had sealed on the upper edge whereas the sealing witnesses did so on the left margin of the obverse and on the lower edge. As a result of her study of sealed documents from the collections of the British Museum dating from Hammu-rabi’s time, B. Teissier (1988) was able to specify this further: “The place and order of sealing by witnesses can be followed approximately in certain documents [...] but there appears to be no designated place or order for non-witnesses to seal. In sales, the seller’s seal(s) can be found on the lower or upper edge of the tablet, but not necessarily so” (p. 111), and “... in long term documents persons of high status sealed first, but not necessarily in strict order” (p. 114). There is one pattern that seems to be described here as a rather unchanging one: the party seals on the top edge or the top of the left margin, the others seal below without any set order.

The sangas can add something specific here. In the texts of our corpus there are two kinds of sealing instances: the party/parties to the transaction described in the text and the witnesses. Within this last category the sangas clearly occupy a very specific place. In nearly all cases they are the most important witnesses, listed first and sealing first. Their easily observable presence will allow us to further specify the general sealing practice.

1. Stage 1: Upper Edge or Top of Left Edge

At first, there is only one sanga of Šamaš. He appears in the witness lists at the head of a group of temple personnel. Most often the person
immediately following him is an overseer of the nadītum priestesses.

We only have two cases with the seal impression of the first sanga Annum-pī-Šamaš. On one of them, VS 8, 5, he seals on the upper edge. On the other one, BDHP 14, he might also have sealed there, but this part of the case is lost, we only have his seal on the top of the left edge. The other witnesses follow under him on the same left edge. It is of course possible that we find the sanga at the top of the left edge because someone else, maybe a party to the contract, sealed on the upper edge. A third case, MHET 7, might have added something to this, were it not that both its upper and lower edges are lost.

Of Šamaš-tappašu, the next first sanga, we have no impressions of his seal by himself. The case of CT 45, 2, the only one we have for this sanga, has lost its upper edge but the top of the left edge is sealed by the overseer of the nadītum, which implies that the sanga must have sealed on the upper edge.

2. Stage 2: Upper and Lower Edge, Lower Edge Alone Sle–Sa–AS–Sm

With the next sanga, Lipit-Ištar, who starts his career under Sumu-la-El, our documentation improves. We have no less than fourteen cases with seals.

Until somewhere in the reign of Sabium, we still have one sanga, mostly followed by the overseer of the nadītum. We have six sealed cases from this period and, although not all of them are complete, enough remains to conclude the following.

The sanga still seals on the upper edge, but the second witness, the overseer, now seals on the lower edge. This means that the ‘natural’ order, from the upper edge downwards, is abandoned in favour of the two opposite edges for the two main persons witnessing and sealing the document. This might indicate that the second witness position became more important and was consciously singled out.

This, in turn, leads to a new development.

Within the reign of Sabium, the function of ‘second in command’ after the sanga has now gained so much in weight that a second sanga position is introduced. It is perhaps no coincidence that, at this same time, Sippar is definitively made part of the kingdom of Babylon. This may have boosted the importance of the Šamaš temple, necessitating an enlargement of its administration. It may also mean that Sabium (re)organized this powerful institution.

The second sanga continues the practice of the former second witness, and seals on the lower edge. The main point is that the two sangas seal on opposite sides of the case. The fact that their order is inverted a few times under Apil-Sîn, with the second sanga on the upper edge and the first one on the lower, simply means the scribe (unintentionally) held the tablet upside down when sealing and has no special meaning. On two cases, one dated under Apil-Sîn by the oath and one precisely in his thirteenth year (out of his eighteen year reign), this opposition seems to be abandoned and both sangas seal on the lower edge. What happened here is that the upper edge was sealed by the party to the contract, in these two cases the testator and the seller. There was no more room there, so the first sanga went down to the next best place: the lower edge. This way, the contrast with the other witnesses was maintained. The implication is that both sangas sealed on the lower edge only when there was no sealing room on the upper edge because a party to the contract had sealed there.

The next first sanga, Warad-Sîn, son of Lipit-Ištar, is well documented too with no less than fifteen sealed cases. The opposition between upper and lower edge is maintained during the rest of Apil-Sîn and the beginning of Sin-muballit. Of the three preserved examples two are inverted, with the first sanga on the lower edge.

Already under Apil-Sîn, however, another pattern emerges.

3. Stage 3: Back to Upper Edge and Top of Left Edge or Upper Edge Alone AS–Sm–Ha 30

Still during the career of the sanga Warad-Sîn, the two sangas start sealing on the upper and the left edge or both on the upper edge. The lower edge is abandoned. Two cases show this pattern under Apil-Sîn and nine others under Sin-muballit.

In one instance the sanga’s daughter (not mentioned in the text) seals with him on the upper edge, pushing the second sanga to the top of the left edge and margin.

Under his son, the sanga Annum-pī-Aja, this practice is continued. This is our best attested sanga of all: we have 61 texts mentioning him,