

# A SEAL IMPRESSED HANDLE IN THE COLLECTION OF THE ERETZ ISRAEL MUSEUM, TEL AVIV

By Irit Ziffer

Cylinder seal sealings from Palestinian sites are rare. From the Middle Bronze Age three excavated cylinder-seal impressed jar handles, one bowl handle and one sealing are known. The dearth of cylinder seal impressed handles stands in contrast to the use of scarabs which was widespread: these we find on the upper part of jar handles, now over 120,<sup>1</sup> jar stoppers, clay conoids and miscellaneous sealings.<sup>2</sup> The present article adds yet another, though unprovenanced, cylinder-sealed jar handle to the list. The handle (Fig. 1) in the collection of the Ceramics Pavillion, Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv (reg. no. MHP 53.68) was purchased in Jerusalem in 1968 by Dr. Arie Kindler, at the time curator of the Kadman Numismatic Pavillion, in the period of the late Professor Pirhiya Beck's tenure as curator of the Ceramics Pavillion.

Petrographic analysis by Y. Goren proves that the jar was manufactured of soil of the central hill regions.

## DESCRIPTION

The impression is located on the upper part of the broken handle, therefore there is no way to tell how many times the seal was rolled over it. However, it seems that the preserved impression, (measuring 16 × 25 mm) contains the entire seal design of the Old Syrian period (first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century), showing a scene of an audience or a

presentation, consisting of two figures approaching a seated figure.

The enthroned male figure facing left wears a



Fig. 1 Cylinder seal impressed jar handle, Collection Ceramics Pavillion, Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv MHP 53.68 (Photos: Leonid Padrul)

<sup>1</sup> O. KEEL, *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel*, OBO SA 10, Freiburg and Göttingen 1995, 119; D. BEN-TOR, A Scarab Impression, in A. BEN-TOR, D. BEN-AMI and A. LIVNEH, *Yoqne'am III: The Middle and Late Bronze Age*, Qedem Reports 7, Jerusalem, 2005, 361–362; S.J. BOURKE and K.O. ERIKSSON, Pella in Jordan, Royal Name Scarabs and the Hyksos Empire: A View from the Margins, in: E. CZERNY, I. HEIN, H. HUNGER, D. MELMAN and A. SCHWAB (eds.), *Timelines: Studies in Honour of Manfred Bietak 2*, OLA 149.3, Leuven-Paris-Dudley MA, 2006, 403–410.

<sup>2</sup> B. TEISSIER, Seals and Communication in Middle Bronze Age Palestine, in: A. CAUBET, (ed.), *De Chypre à la Bactriane, les sceaux du Proche-Orient ancien*, Actes du colloque international organisé au musée du Louvre par le Service culturel le 18 mars 1995, Paris, 1997, 233.

long garment and a tight fitting cap. His extended right hand perhaps holds a cup. The seated figure receives two others wearing long robes and raising their left hands towards him. A vertically set fish is depicted between the two figures.<sup>3</sup> In the field behind the throne there is a perched bird facing left above a crouched hare also facing left. The wedge shape in the field is the bird's fan-spread tail typical of doves.<sup>4</sup> The combination of bird and hare is fairly frequent on Syrian seals.<sup>5</sup> The vertically extended fish is an abbreviated form of fish leaping along streams of water,<sup>6</sup> symbolizing plenty.

The overall shape of the fish is reminiscent of the fish in Collon's North Syrian style cylinder seals.<sup>7</sup> The throne is a version of the temple double portal popular in the *šakkanakkus* era at Mari (derived from Ur III thrones) – Old Syrian period,<sup>8</sup> which may have rested on a platform.<sup>9</sup> The robes

worn by the figures may have been fringed. The robe of the figure furthest from the seated figure seems to have a swelling, which could be related to the fringed robe hems in Collon's North Syrian style,<sup>10</sup> which is related to Kültepe Ib, and therefore securely datable to the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.<sup>11</sup>

#### COMPARATIVE MATERIAL: CYLINDER SEAL IMPRESSIONS FROM PALESTINE

One of the sealed jar handles from Shechem (Tell Balatah) was found by Sellin in the earliest Middle Bronze Age building phase of the SW Temenos area (Fig. 2). A Syrian cylinder seal was rolled five times over the jar handle and a 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty scarab was stamped onto the upper part of the handle, close to where the handle joins to the body of the jar.<sup>12</sup> It shows two figures with

<sup>3</sup> Vertically set fish between worshipping figures: Impressed jar handle from Shechem, see below; O.E. RAVN, *Oriental Cylinder Seals and Seal Impressions in the Danish National Museum*, Copenhagen 1960, no. 138, attributable to Collon's North Syrian style.

<sup>4</sup> For a parallel, almost identically styled bird see B. TEISSIER, *Ancient Near Eastern Cylinder Seals from the Marcopoli Collection*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1984, no. 462; also A. KEMPINSKI, A Syrian Cylinder Seal at Tel Kabri, in: M.E. MELLINK, E. PORADA, and T. ÖZGÜÇ (eds.), *Aspects of Art and Iconography: Anatolia and Its Neighbors. Studies in Honor of Nimet Özgüç* Ankara 1993, 333–337, nos. 3. (Jericho), 5 (Alalakh), 4 (Bruxelles).

<sup>5</sup> See below, the second Shechem handle, as well as, A. KEMPINSKI, note 4 above: nos. 3 (Jericho), 5 (Alalakh) with a separating guilloche.

<sup>6</sup> Leaping fish: N. ÖZGÜÇ, *Seals and Seal Impressions of Level Ib from Karum Kanish*. Ankara 1968, pl. 11C; Louvre A. 914: P. AMIET, *Bas-reliefs imaginaires de l'ancien orient d'après les cachets et les sceaux-cylindres*, Paris 1973, no. 363 = M. DIJKSTRA, The Weather-God on Two Mountains. *UF23* (1991), pl. 2:3. Swimming fish – see Ugarit, RS 9.300: C.F.-A. SCHAEFFER-FORRER, *Corpus I des Cylindres-Sceaux de Ras Shamra-Ugarit et d'Enkomi-Alasia*, (Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations Synthèse n° 13), Paris 1983, 30. North Syrian Style, see D. COLLON, A North Syrian Cylinder Seal Style: Evidence of North-South Links with <sup>c</sup>Ajjul, in: J.N. TUBB, (ed.), *Palestine in the Bronze and Iron Ages. Papers in Honour of Olga Tufnell*, London 1985, 58–68. nos. 11, 13, 16 and below; G.A. EISEN, *Ancient Oriental Cylinder and Other Seals Collection Mrs. William H. Moore*, OIP 47, Chicago 1940, pl. 15:166.

<sup>7</sup> COLLON, note 6 above.

<sup>8</sup> M. METZGER, *Königsthron und Gottesthron*, AOAT 15, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1985, 154–155, 235–237; B. TEISSIER,

A *Šakkanakku* Seal Impression from Kültepe, *MARI 6* (1990), 649–653; T.M. SHARLACH, 'Beyond Chronology: The *Šakkanakkus* of Mari and the Kings of Ur, in: W.W. HALLO and I.J. WINTER (eds.), *Seals and Seal Impressions. Proceedings of the 45<sup>e</sup> Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, Bethesda 2001, fig. 2.

<sup>9</sup> As, for example, E. PORADA, *Corpus of Ancient Near Eastern Cylinder Seals in North American Collections: The Pierpont Morgan Library Collection*, Bollingen Series 14, Washington D.C. 1948, no. 913E; B. TEISSIER 1984, note 4 above, nos. 456, 463, 470 (no platform).

<sup>10</sup> D. COLLON, note 6 above, no. 14 (Kültepe Ib), A. KEMPINSKI, note 4 above, fig. 1, seal from Kabri, Tomb 984, dated to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, N. SCHEFTELOWITZ, *Stratigraphy and Architecture*, in: A. KEMPINSKI, *Tel Kabri 1986–1993 Seasons*, Tel Aviv 2002, 32–33.

<sup>11</sup> ÖZGÜÇ note 6 above, pls. 20C, 20:1; P. BECK and U. ZEVULUN, Back to Square One, *BASOR* 304 (1996), 72–73. Level Ib started with the reign of Shamshi-Adad I. A text from an archive from Level Ib, found in 2001 (Kt.01/k 287) lists the names of 143-year eponyms, which means that the end of Ib is approximately 1723 BCE. See, N. ÖZGÜÇ, More Cylinder Seals Found in Level Ib of Karum Kanish, in: J.G. DERCKSEN (ed.), *Assyria and Beyond, Studies Presented to Mogens Trolle Larsen*, Leiden, 2004, 436.

<sup>12</sup> E. SELLIN, Die Ausgrabung von Sichem. Kurze vorläufige Mitteilung über die Arbeit im Sommer 1927, *ZDPV* 50 (1927), 266267, pl. 30; A. ROWE, *A Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs, Scaraboids, Seals and Amulets in the Palestine Archaeological Museum*, Cairo 1936, pl. 26:S4; D. BENTOR, The Historical Implications of Middle Kingdom Scarabs Found in Palestine Bearing Private Names and Titles of Officials, *BASOR* 294 (1994), 10, Appendix A no. 10; KEEL, note 1 above, 119.



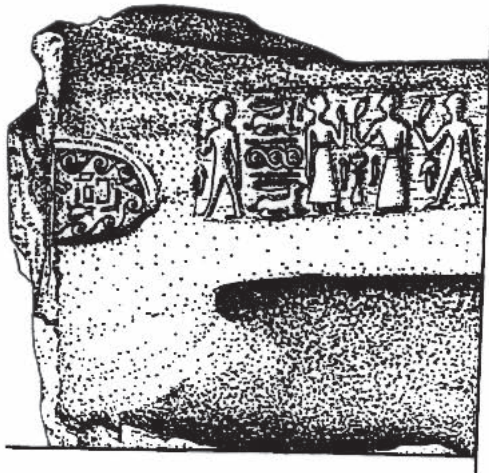


Fig. 2 Impressed jar handle, Shechem Sellin Excavation, PAM I.982  
a) from KEEL 1995: fig. 230; b) from ROWE 1936: pl. 26:S.4



Fig. 3 Cylinder seal impression on jar handle from Tell el-Farah (N), F 3863 (from: AMET 1996: pl. 1:3)



Fig. 4 Cylinder seal from Tell el-Farah (N), F 140 (from AMET 1996: pl. I:4)



Fig. 5 Cylinder seal from Kültepe Ib a) from COLLON 1985: no. 14;  
b) The same cylinder seal from Kültepe, drawn by AMET 1996: fig. a

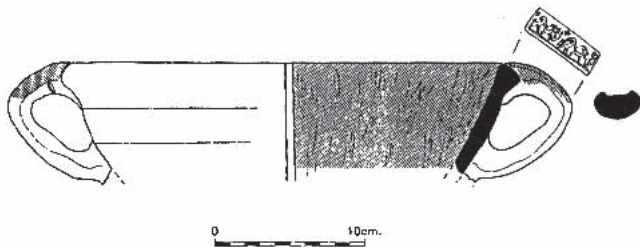


Fig. 6 Seal impression on bowl rim and handle from Lachish (from BECK 2002:298, fig. 1)

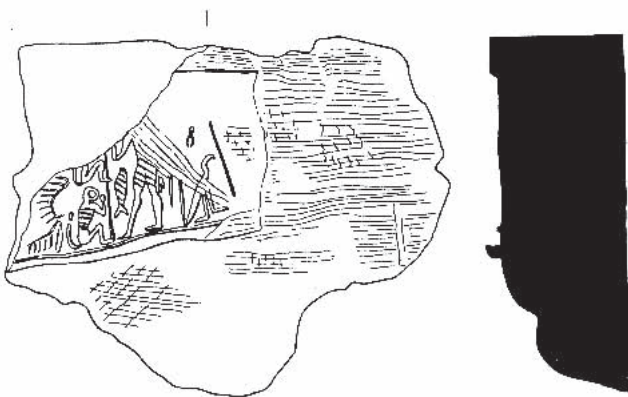


Fig. 7 Sealing from Aphek (from BECK 2002: 289, fig. 1)

raised hands, the outer one naked holding a leaf shape as they approach a third figure who stands behind an altar. Between the worshippers is a fish form. Two super-imposed hares with a separating guilloche band between them comprise the terminal of the scene. The scarab impression bears the name of the steward (*Imy-rꜥ pr*) Amenemhat (*Imn-m-h3.t*). There is a steward by the same name known from the reign of Amenemhat II.<sup>13</sup> Or, this steward could be identified as the Egyptian official of Shechem, who is associated with the events following Egyptian hostility in parts of Palestine during the time of Senusert III.<sup>14</sup> The cylinder seal used to impress this handle is attributable to Collon's North Syrian style<sup>15</sup> and dates to the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century BCE. It could therefore coincide with the late 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.<sup>16</sup>

The other jar handle from Shechem was found by the American expedition.<sup>17</sup> It is from the make-up of the first MB IIB building and therefore possibly dates from the MB IIA.<sup>18</sup> The seal used to impress the second Shechem handle was also impressed on a jar handle discovered at Tell el-Far'ah (N), several kilometers to the south of Shechem. The Tell el-Far'ah (N) handle was found in a room constructed against the base debris of the Early Bronze Age rampart.<sup>19</sup> It is most likely that the two handles originated from the same workshop. The design, collated from the two handles (Fig. 3), shows a group of three bare round-headed, elongated figures: a male

wearing only a belt, holding a lance, kneels before a woman(?) holding a flask(?), while another figure, grasping an object with the right hand(?), stands behind the kneeling man and also pays homage to the woman. The terminal motifs include a hare and a perched bird separated by a guilloche band. The kneeling figure relates the seal to Collon's North Syrian cylinder seal style, particularly to a cylinder seal from Kültepe Ib (Fig. 5), and therefore may be securely dated to the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Kültepe seal depicts a male figure also wearing only a belt, holding a spear, kneeling before a long-haired female figure, while another male, holding a throw stick, stands behind him.<sup>20</sup> The Kültepe seal figures are again gracefully elongated. A cylinder seal from Tell el-Far'ah (N), found in a pit dug through Tomb A (attributed by the funerary goods in it to 1750 BCE) belongs to the same style (Fig. 4).<sup>21</sup>

The cylinder seal impressed bowl from Lachish (Fig. 6) was found in a MB IIA context, sealed by the MB II palace floor.<sup>22</sup> Twice repeated in the impression, which covers the upper part of the handle from its join with the rim, the scene features a line of two striding caprids facing a scorpion to the right, with a star to the right of the scorpion.<sup>23</sup> So far, the Lachish impression of animal group file, mostly known from LB I–LB II seals of a local Syro-Palestinian style,<sup>24</sup> is the earliest of its kind. Petrographic analysis performed by

<sup>13</sup> ROWE, note 12 above, 234–235.

<sup>14</sup> A. KEMPINSKI, *The Middle Bronze Age in Northern Israel, Local and External Synchronisms*, *Ä&L* 3 (1992), 71; note 4 above, 335.

<sup>15</sup> COLLON, note 6 above.

<sup>16</sup> Daphna Ben-Tor argues that the jar handle is of a MB IIB type, and that the scarab impressed was an heirloom and had no association with the particular official, see n. 12 above and D. BEN-TOR, S.J. ALLEN and J.P. ALLEN, *Seals and Kings*, *BASOR* 315 (1999), 54. It should, however, be noted that in order to demonstrate the approximate position of the sealings on the jar, Rowe used a drawing of a whole MB IIB storage jar from 'Atlit.

<sup>17</sup> E.F. CAMPBELL JR. and J.F. ROSS, *The Excavation of Shechem and the Biblical Tradition*, *BA* 26 (1963), 4–5.

<sup>18</sup> P. AMIET, 'Les sceaux et empreintes de sceaux de Tell el-Far'ah', in: P. AMIET, J. BRIEND, L. COURTOIS and J.-B. DUMORTIER, *Tell el Far'ah: Histoire, glyptique et céramologie*, *OBO SA* 14, Fribourg and Göttingen 1996, 19.

<sup>19</sup> J. MALLET, 'Tell el-Far'ah près de Naplouse l'empreinte de cylindres-sceau F 3863,' *RB* 84 (1977), 108–112 = J.

MALLET, *Tell el-Far'ah: le Bronze Moyen*, Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations 66, Paris 1987–1988, pl. 84:1; P. AMIET, n. 18 above, 18–20.

<sup>20</sup> COLLON, n. 6 above, no. 14, ÖZGÜÇ 1968, n. 6 above, 70 pl. 29:1.

<sup>21</sup> AMIET 1996, n. 18 above, F 140, 20–21.

<sup>22</sup> P. BECK, *Imagery and Representation. Studies in the Art and Iconography of Ancient Palestine: Collected Articles*, in: N. NA'AMAN, U. ZEVULUN, U., and I. ZIFFER, (eds.), Tel Aviv 2002, 297–300 = P. BECK, 'Section B: Cylinder Seals,' in: D. USSISHKIN, *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973–1994)*, Tel Aviv 2004, 1525–1527, fig. 23.33:1.

<sup>23</sup> The scorpion is the symbol of Išhara, the star – a symbol of Ištar. The two were goddesses of love, and equated in that aspect: W.G. LAMBERT, *Išhara*, *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 5 (1976–1980), 177. Haas has suggested that Išhara was a Syrian form of Ištar (V. HAAS, *Hethitische Berggötter und Hurritische Steindämonen*, Mainz 1982, 102).

<sup>24</sup> P. AMIET, *Corpus de cylindres de Ras Shamra-Ougarit II: Sceaux cylindres en hématite et pierres diverses*, Ras Shamra – Ougarit 9, Paris 1992, 41–49.

Y. Goren shows that the jar was made of local clay from the southern Shephela.<sup>25</sup>

The Tel Aphek sealing (Fig. 7) was uncovered in a rubbish pit, which contained potsherds from the Iron Age as well as Late and Middle Bronze Ages in area A on the western slope of the mound.<sup>26</sup> Fabric impression covers most of the upper surface of the sealing. The flat back bears the imprints of packed stalks of grain. The impression shows a kilted figure to the left raising right hand in a gesture of greeting, while the left arm is held against his body. Superimposed monkeys flank a staff from the left. Behind the kilted figure, covered by the fabric, are a vertical line, a bird(?) and a looped band. The fragmentary state of the sealing shows affinities with Collon's Green Jasper Group (Teissier's Levantine Group).<sup>27</sup> Characteristic of this group are the vertical guilloche and the 'segmented style' of animals, Egyptianized motifs and hieroglyphs, some of which were intended to be read.

Petrographic analysis indicates that the sealing was prepared from clay alluvium or clay soil identical to the clay used for some storage jars from Tel Gerisa on the Yarkon River, 14 kilometers west of Aphek. Consequently it was assumed that the package with the Aphek sealing was sent either from Tel Gerisa or from some other site near Aphek.<sup>28</sup>

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

All the jar handles were impressed with 'Classical' North Syrian seals, dating to the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century BCE. In subject matter, the seal used to impress the Eretz Israel Museum jar handle is closely related to the seals impressed on the Shechem/Tell el-Far'ah (N) handles in that all three show audience/presentation scenes. Stylistically, the figures of these three seals are elongated. The terminal of hare and perched bird is also shared by the museum handle and the second Shechem/Tell el-Far'ah (N) seal. Fish between

the worshippers appear both on the Sellin Shechem sealing and the museum handle. Petrographic analysis of the museum handle indicates that it was made of central hill country clay, of which the Amarna Shechem tablets were prepared.<sup>29</sup> The Shechem and Tell el-Far'ah (N) handles have not been subjected to petrography. The fact that two handles, from Shechem and from Tell el Far'ah (N) were impressed by the same seal indicates that the handles must have originated from the same workshop, which presumably operated somewhere in the vicinity of Shechem. In all likelihood, the Shechem Sellin handle also originated from the same workshop. Since the seals used to impress the three provenanced jar handles, as well as the unprovenanced – though analyzed museum handle – may all be ascribed to Collon's North Syrian style, I suggest that the museum handle originated in the same workshop as well. This would mean that the workshop used (at least) three seals, all of North Syrian style (which, judging from the seal found in the pit, Fig. 4, could reflect the penchant of its governing authority for this style), to impress an output of storage jars with a mark of ownership. The impressed bowl handle from Lachish is the product of a local workshop, as it belonged to a vessel manufactured of local southern Shephela soil. The seal used to impress the bowl is of Syro-Palestinian style.

From the meager evidence of cylinder seal impressed handles, two pottery workshops that marked vessels with cylinder seals emerge – one operating in the central hill country, where North Syrian cylinder seals were popular, the other in the Shephela, where the Syro-Palestinian style was favoured. Other dispatched goods were packed and sealed, as evidenced by the Aphek sealing.

<sup>25</sup> P. BECK 2002, n. 22 above 297.

<sup>26</sup> P. BECK 2002, n. 22 above, 288–290.

<sup>27</sup> D. COLLON, 'The Green Jasper Cylinder Seal Workshop,' in: M. KELLY-BUCCELLATI, P. MATTHIAE and M. VAN LOON (eds.), *Insight Through Images: Papers in Honor of*

*Edith Porada*, Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 21, Malibu 1985, 57–70; B. TEISSIER, n. 2 above.

<sup>28</sup> SHOVAL and GAFT in: P. BECK 2002, n. 22 above, 291.

<sup>29</sup> Y. Goren, personal communication, June 5, 2005.



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