

A DECORATED BOX IN THE COLLECTIONS OF THE BIBLE LANDS MUSEUM, JERUSALEM

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In the mid 1960s, Dr. Elie Borowski, founder of the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem (henceforth: BLMJ), received a small bag containing several dozen bone plaques, most of which bore figurative or geometric motifs. Examinations conducted by conservators O. Cohen and R. Brown confirmed the authenticity of the plaques. The plaques were later identified, by F. Poplin (Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris), as being made of animal – most probably cattle – bone.

The plaques were originally thought to have decorated a piece of furniture or a game box. How-

ever, when a complete container box decorated with similar plaques was uncovered at Tel Hazor in the early 1990s (BEN-TOR 2009), it became clear that the box to which the plaques under discussion belonged was a similar container box (for a discussion of the differences between game boxes and container boxes, see BEN-TOR 2009: 1, 43, 51).

DIVISION INTO GROUPS

The bone pieces consist of 17 rectangular plaques incised with figurative motifs (P1–P17; Fig. 1a-d), 25 ruler-like narrow strips, presumably forming the



Fig. 1 The plaques



Fig. 1a

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Fig. 1b



P/8



P/9



P/10



P/11



P/12



P/13

Fig. 1c



Fig. 1d

borders of the box (B1–B25; Fig. 2a–d), and three small square pieces (B26–B28; Fig. 2e), which probably decorated the inner walls of the box – like the checkerboard motif on the inner walls of the Hazor box (BEN-TOR 2009: 11; see further below).

The narrow strips (B1–B25) can be further classified into four sub-groups:

- i) Eleven non-decorated strips (B1–B11; Fig. 2a), five of which are complete, with both ends preserved (B1–B5), and six of which are incomplete (B6–B11). Strips B9–B11, smaller than the others and irregular in shape, were apparently industrial waste.
- ii) Nine strips decorated with groups of parallel vertical incised lines (B12–B20; Fig. 2b). Four of these are complete, with both ends preserved (B13–B14, B16–B17).

- iii) Four strips (B21–B24; Fig. 2c), differ in height: while B12–B20 are 10–12 mm high, the average height of B21–B24 is 13–15 mm. These higher strips were probably intended to decorate another box

- iv) One strip (B25; Fig. 2d) is exceptional in its incised circle and dot motif; it apparently does not belong to the group under discussion (BEN-TOR 2009: 48; see further below).

THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE PLAQUES

since the box was not preserved in its original form, the arrangement of the various pieces is a matter of conjecture. The arrangement proposed in Fig. 3, serving as our working hypothesis, is based upon the following considerations:

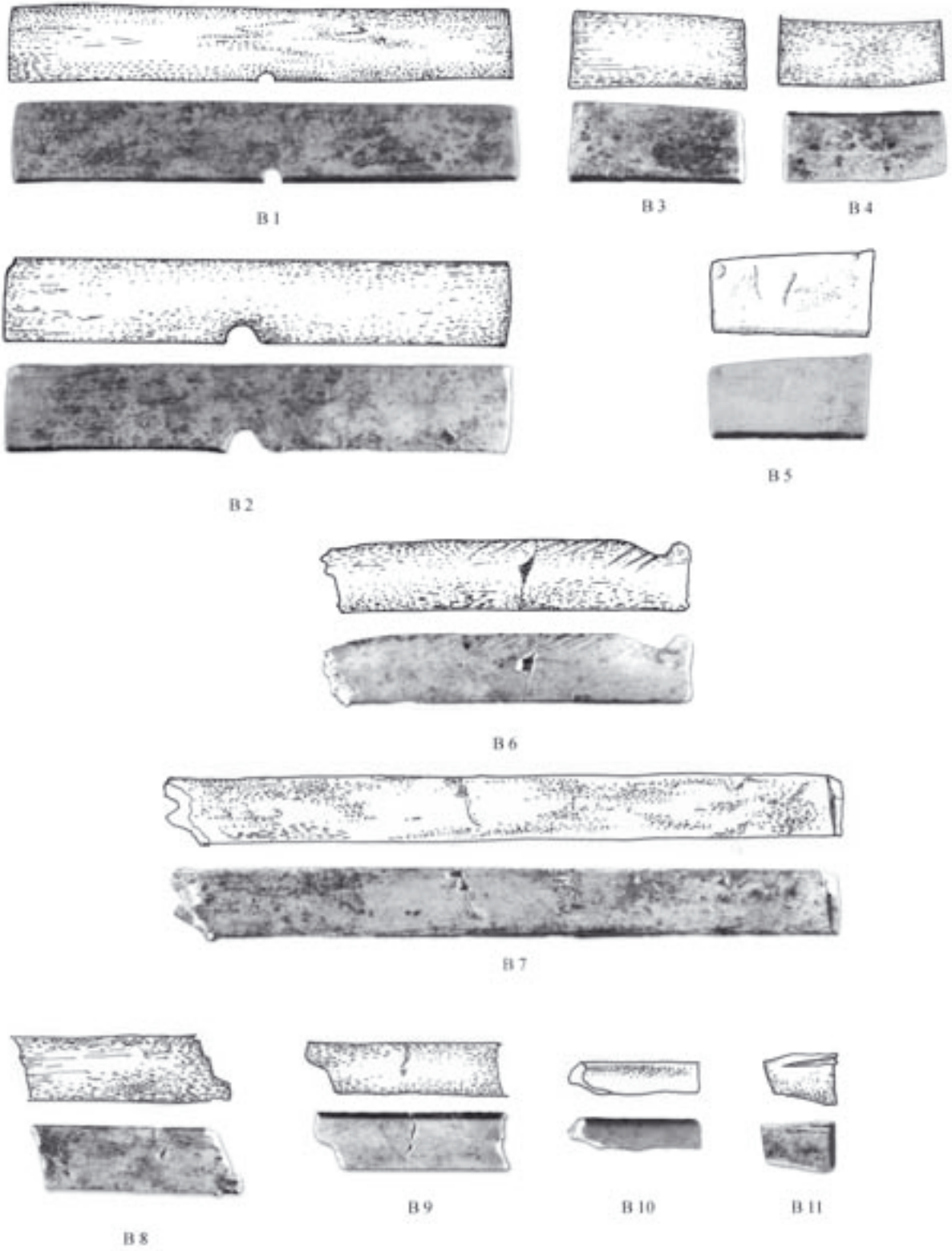


Fig. 2a

Fig. 2 The rulers

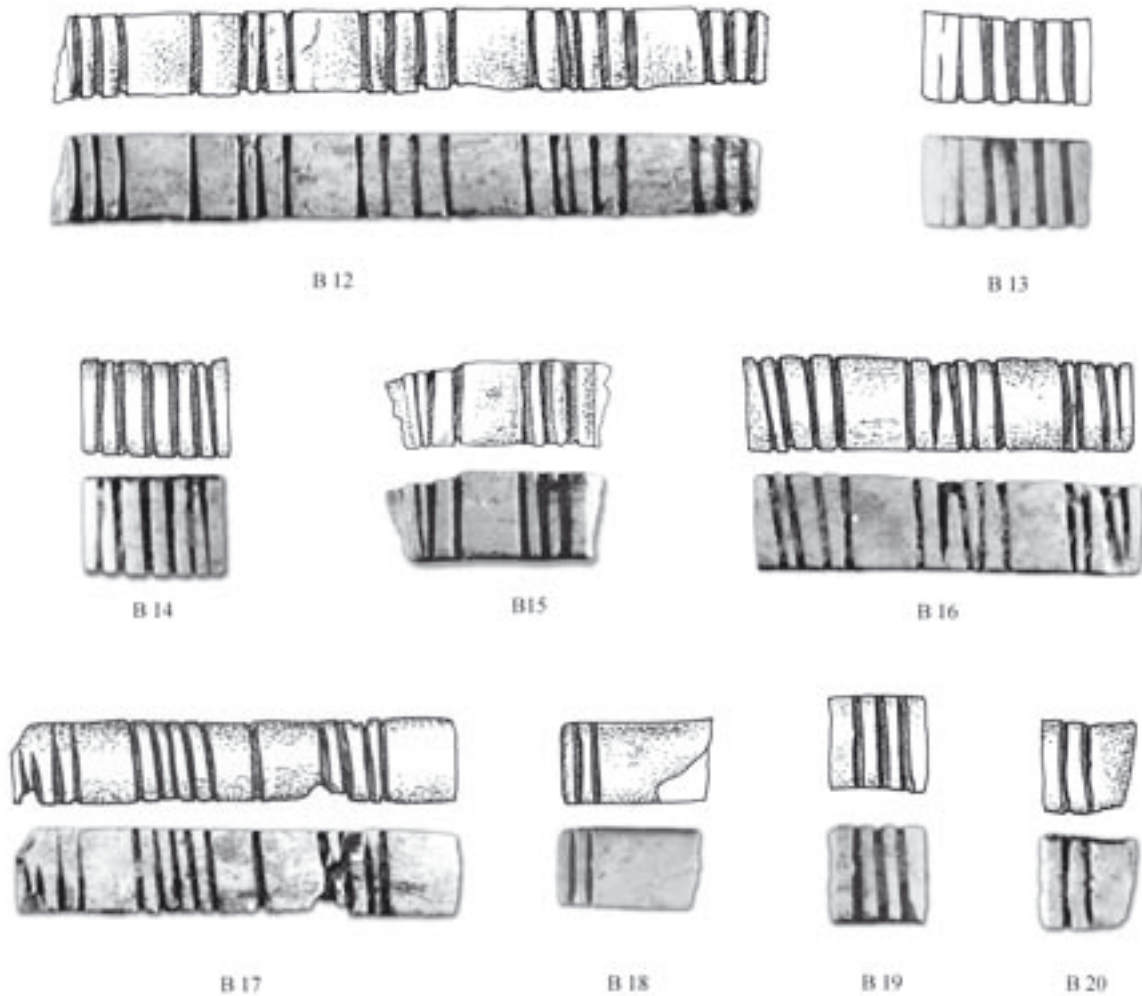


Fig. 2b

The lid

P1, being the largest piece, a rectangle composed of three elongated fragments, clearly served as the lid of the box (side A).

Short side B

P2–P3, depicting the Hathor symbol (see below), have a semi-circular hole in the middle of their upper edges. These holes correspond to similar semi-circular holes cut in the upper edge of strips B1 and B2; placed next to these strips, they form complete holes. The relationship of P2 and B1 and of P3 and B2 respectively is therefore certain.

P4 and P5 portray an almost identical motif, in mirror image; when placed on either side of P2 so

that they face the Hathor symbol, they form a heraldic scene. It thus appears that P2, P4 and P5 (together with B1 and probably B15 and B16) form one of the two short sides of the box (side B).

For the arrangement of the other short side, C, which is more problematic, see below.

Long side D

P8–P11 portray a procession of gift bearers, all looking to their left. Their precise order is difficult to determine, but is of no importance. Their combined length, when placed one next to the other, is one plaque short in relation to the length of the lid; the only logical plaque to make up the sequence appears to be the deity portrayed in P12. The pro-

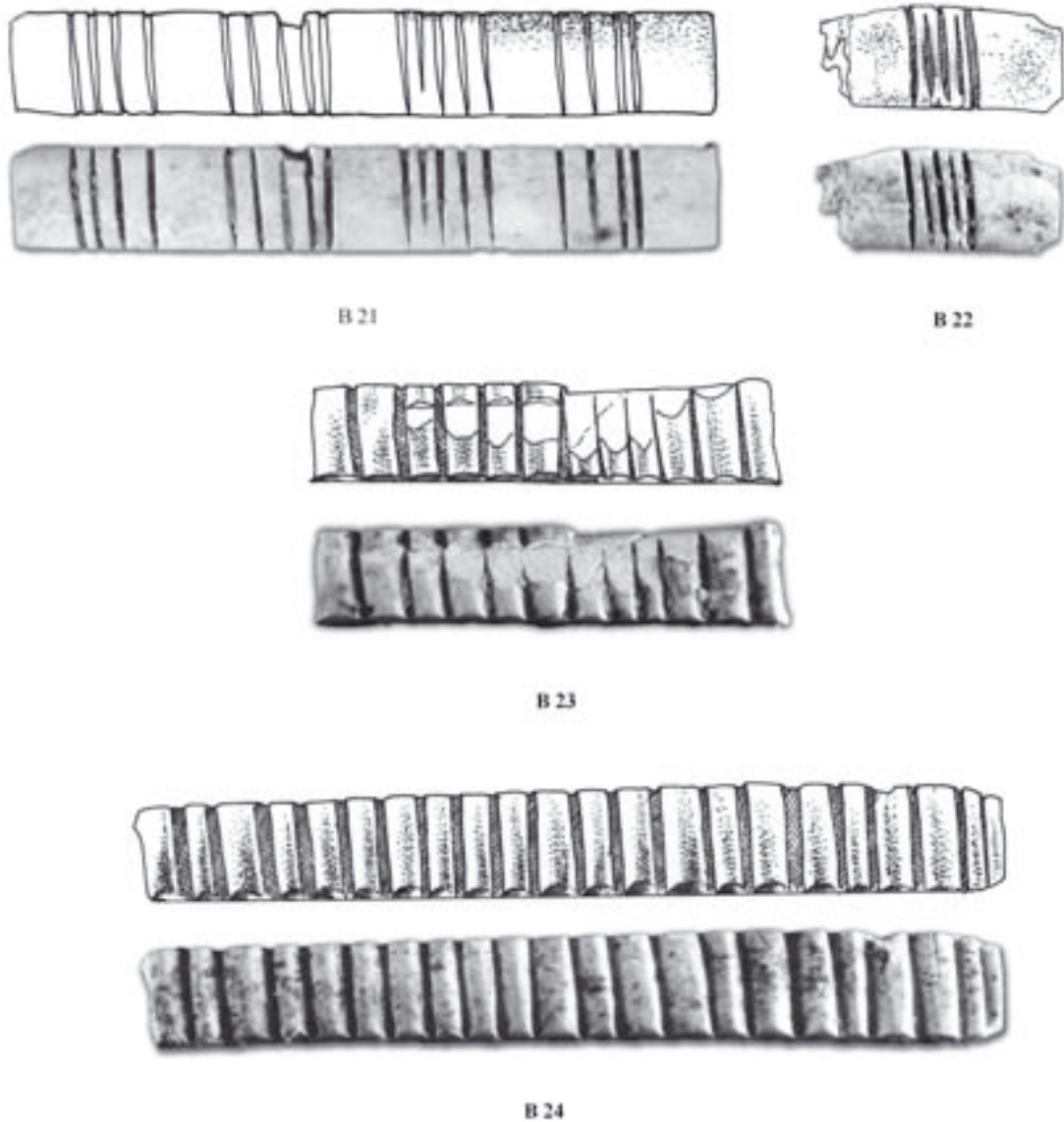


Fig. 2c

cession thus faces this deity, making up one of the long sides (D) of the box.

Long side E

Given that sides B and C of the box consist of three plaques each and side D consists of five plaques, this leaves us with five plaques for side E, the arrangement of which is more complicated. Two of the remaining plaques (P16–P17) depict warriors, both looking in the same direction, which should therefore be placed one behind the other. This leaves three plaques: P13–P15. Since it is inconceivable that the warriors would be attacking the deity (in this case, the lioness depicted in P13), they should be placed at the right edge of side E to allow

other plaques to intervene between them and the deity. The most logical arrangement of the remaining plaques – the lioness (P13), a little girl (P14), and a person holding an unidentifiable object in his hand (P15) – would be to place the lioness at the left edge of side E, with the girl next to it and facing it, and the person with unidentifiable object in the center of the side.

Short side C

Two plaques remain to be placed on side C, flanking the Hathor symbol depicted on P3. P6 depicts a kneeling figure; since such a posture almost always indicates adoration, one may deduce that P6 should be placed either next to one of the Hathor

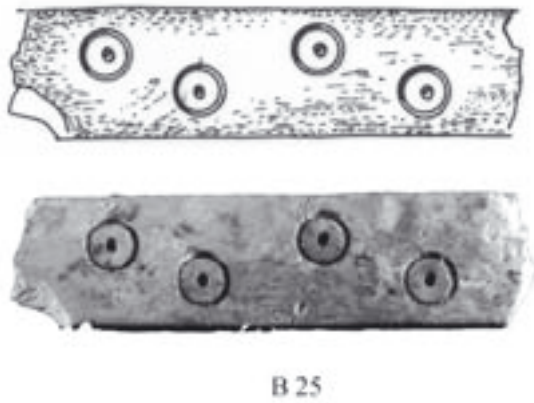


Fig. 2d

symbols (on side B or C) or in front of the deity on side E. We prefer to place P6 on side C, since placing it on side B would result in the breaking of the heraldic arrangement of the scene, whereas placing it in front of the deity P12 on side D would require removing one of the other plaques on that side; this would break the entire scene of gift bearers (P8–P11).

This leaves P7 – the last remaining plaque, depicting a person holding a stick – to be placed on the other side of the Hathor symbol on side C.

The arrangement described above is, in our view, the most logical one, but there are, of course, other options.

The locations of P8 and P15, both of which hold unidentifiable objects in their hands, could, in theory, be switched. However, there is nothing to be gained by switching them, since either make as much (or as little) sense placed on either side D or E. It is possible that the figure depicted on P8 holds

a bunch of flowers in his hand; this would merit its location as part of the procession of gift/offering bearers, tilting the balance in favor of side D. Finally, the two young people in P7 and P14 could, in theory, be interchanged, but it is more logical for P14 to be facing the protective lioness (see below) than P7, who is holding a stick in his hand.

In sum, the arrangement proposed in Fig. 3 is, in our view, the optimal one. The arrangement of three plaques on each of the short sides of the box and five on each of the long sides suggests that even though the box was acquired in a fragmentary state, all the pieces of the original box are there.

THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE BORDER STRIPS

As aforementioned, the semi-circular holes in undecorated strips B1 and B2 require that they be placed on top of plaques P2 and P3 respectively on the two short sides of the box. In order to achieve an even height for all four sides of the box, similar strips should be placed on the two long sides as well. Placed together, B3 and B7, with a combined length of approximately 140 mm (for a calculation of the size of the box, see Tables 1–2 and discussion below), correspond almost perfectly to the width of the plaques forming side D (140 mm); similarly, B4, B6 and B8, with a combined length of 128 mm, correspond almost perfectly to the combined width of the plaques of side E (121 mm). Since two opposing sides of a rectangular box clearly must share the same width, the fact that the width of the plaques on side E is slightly more than 20 mm shorter than the width of the plaques on side D must be accounted for. As shown in Table 1, P14 is 16 mm wide – approximately 10 mm smaller than the average width of the other plaques on our box.¹ To compensate for the “missing” 20 mm on side E, the



Fig. 2e

¹ For the possibility that this was intentional, see below.

artisan who decorated the box may have spaced P13–P17 apart, with some 3–4 mm between them, thus gaining some 15 mm in width.

Since other boxes, such as the Hazor or the Kamid el-Lôz boxes, had border strips placed above as well as below the decorative plaques, the same probably applies to our box. In our suggested reconstruction (Fig. 3), we placed the undecorated strips (B1–B4, B6–B8) above the decorated plaques and the strips decorated with groups of incised lines (B12–B 20) beneath them.

The square pieces, B26–B28, most probably decorated the inner walls of the box (BEN-TOR 2009: 11, 50, 51, Figs. 3, 8).

B-9-B-11 (Fig.2a) were probably wasters, and the higher strips (B21–B24; Fig. 2c), were probably intended to decorate another box (see discussion of the border strips group iii). Consequently those seven border strips were not taken into consideration in the reconstruction of the box

THE SIZE OF THE BOX

The dimensions of the box lid, P1 (135 × 60 mm), define the minimum measurements of the box. The size of the wooden walls of the box, which were decorated by the other plaques, can only be estimated. The measurements given below, therefore, are approximations.

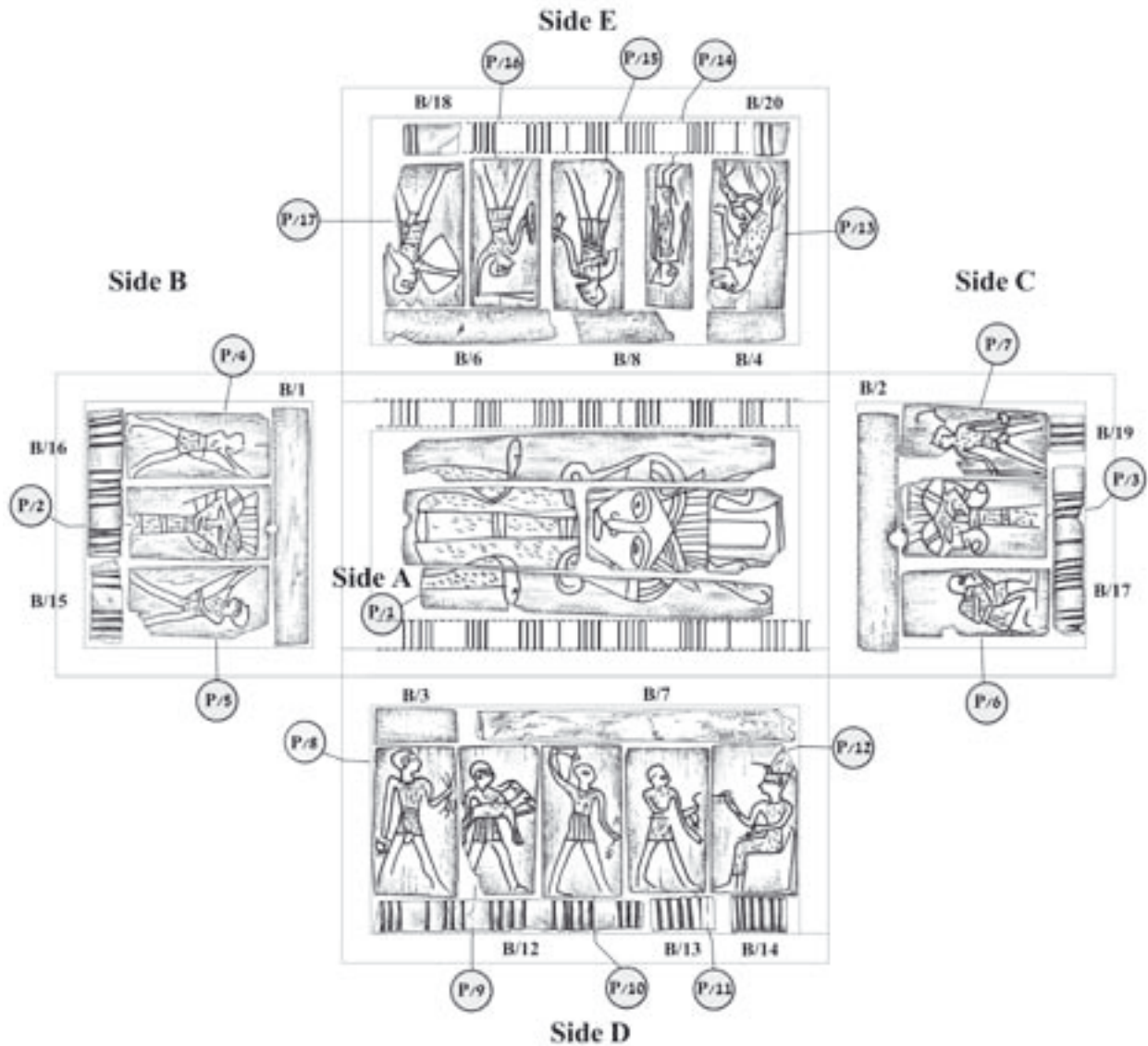


Fig. 3a

Fig. 3 (a) The arrangement of the box; (b) suggested reconstruction of the box



Fig. 3b

Plaque No.	BLMJ Reg. No.	Height (mm)	Width (mm)
P1	6909 / 1, 2, 3, 4	135	60
P2	6909 / 20	52	27
P3	6909 / 19	52	27
P4	6909 / 14	50	24
P5	6909 / 8	50	25
P6	6909 / 10	52	24
P7	6909 / 12	51	25
P8	6909 / 7	53	30
P9	6909 / 11	52	28
P10	6909 / 15	53	28
P11	6909 / 9	52	28
P12	6909 / 16	52	30
P13	6909 / 17	53	28
P14	6909 / 18	50	16
P15	6909 / 6	53	25
P16	6909 / 5	52	24
P17	6909 / 13	51	28

Table 1 Measurements of the plaques

Box height

The average height of our plaques is 50 mm, and the average height of the border strips placed above and below the plaques is 10 mm each. We assume a margin of approximately 1 cm above the upper strip and below the lower strip. Consequently, the height of the box is estimated to have been 100 mm (50 mm [the plaques] + 20 mm [the two strips] + 20 mm [the bare wood] + 10 mm for the spaces between the different components above and below the plaques).

Strip No.	BLMJ Reg. No.	Width (mm)	Height (mm)
B1	6909 / 21	83	12
B2	6909 / 22	80	12
B3	6909 / 25	28	10
B4	6909 / 26	30	11
B5	6909 / 27	28	10
B6	6909 / 24	63	11
B7	6909 / 23	110	10
B8	6909 / 29	35	10
B9	6909 / 32	34	8
B10	6909 / 33	22	6
B11	-----	11	9
B12	6909 / 41, 46, 49	95	10
B13	6909 / 42	22	11
B14	6909 / 47	20	12
B15	6909 / 43	30	10
B16	6909 / 39	50	12
B17	6909 / 38	60	10
B18	6909 / 50	20	10
B19	6909 / 51	12	12
B20	6909 / 48	12	11
B21	6909 / 37, 40	95	14
B22	6909 / 44	32	13
B23	6909 / 36	63	13
B24	6909 / 35	117	15
B25	6909 / 45	55	14
B26	6909 / 28	12	12
B27	6909 / 34	12	12
B28	6909 / 30	10	10

Table 2 Measurements of the border strips

Box length

As aforementioned, each of the long sides consists of five plaques. The average width of the plaques decorating side D is 30 mm; this brings the total width of the plaques on that side to 150 mm. When one takes into consideration an additional 20 mm for the wood left bare on the two extremities of the box, the total length of the box is estimated to have been 170 mm.

As mentioned above, the plaques of side E had to be placed with small spaces between them in order to accommodate for the “shortage” of some 20 mm in relation to the width of the plaques decorating side D.

Box width

The average width of each of the three plaques decorating each short side (B and C) is 25 mm, yielding a total width of 85 mm (including the borders B/1 and B/2). To this one should add 20 mm for the wood left bare, yielding a width of approximately 105 mm for each of the short sides of the box.

The Lid of the Box

Sides and B and C are 105 mm. wide each. Since the width of the decorated plaques of the lid (P/1) is only 65 mm. the lid must have originally been 110 mm. wide, in order to fit the box, this leaves an additional 40 mm. to be accounted for. Since the border pieces are 10 mm. wide each, there are two possibilities: one option is that each side of P/1 was originally adorned with one border piece (now missing) leaving 10 mm. of wood bare on each side (65 mm plaque P/1 + 2X10 mm strip + 2X 10 mm bare wood) and the other option is that P/1 was the only decoration on the lid, with 20 mm. of the wood left bare on each side (65mm plaque P/1 + of 20 mm bare wood on each side (Fig. 3b).

Consequently, our box is estimated to be approximately 170 mm in length, 105 mm in width and 100 mm in height.

CLOSURE OF THE BOX

As mentioned above, holes were drilled into plaques P2 and B1 in side B and into P3 and B2 in side C (see discussion above and Fig. 3). These holes were part of the mechanism for fastening the box, which may have contained valuables. A rod, most probably made of metal, was inserted into the hole on one of the shorter sides of the box, then pushed all the way under the lid and through the hole on the other side. A string could then be tied around one edge of the rod, pulled over the length of the box, above the lid, and tied to the other end of the rod. Once sealed (by a sealing made of clay?), this

mechanism would ensure that the lid could not be opened without authorization.

Of all the container boxes and game boxes found in Canaan (BEN-TOR 2009), the box under discussion is the only one with a fastening method. Although the lid of the Hazor box was not preserved, the two short sides of that box, which were almost completely preserved, show no trace of any such fixture. Not enough was preserved of the container boxes from Tell Beit Mirsim (ALBRIGHT 1938: pl. 34) or Toumba tou Skourou (VERMEULE and WOLSKY 1977: pl. XVIII) to determine whether these boxes were equipped with such a fixture. None of the game boxes from Kāmid el-Lôz (MEYER 1986), Enkomi (DIKAIOS 1969: vol. 3a, pls.149, 156:49) or Thebes (HAYES 1959: 25, Fig. 10), preserved in their entirety, show any indication of having possessed such a fixture. The absence of such fixtures on game boxes, however, is not surprising, given the difference in function: only boxes containing valuables had to be equipped with a fastening method.

This fastening mechanism finds close parallels in boxes containing “jewellery and items of feminine equipment” (HAYES 1935: 29) found in Egypt and dating from the Middle and early New Kingdoms (HAYES 1935: 1736, Fig. 12 on p. 29; KILLEN 1994: 3842, figs. 25, 45, 54, 55). There is, however, a slight difference between the mechanism of these boxes and ours: while the string fastening our box extended all the way along the top of the lid, as described above, the Egyptian boxes were fas-

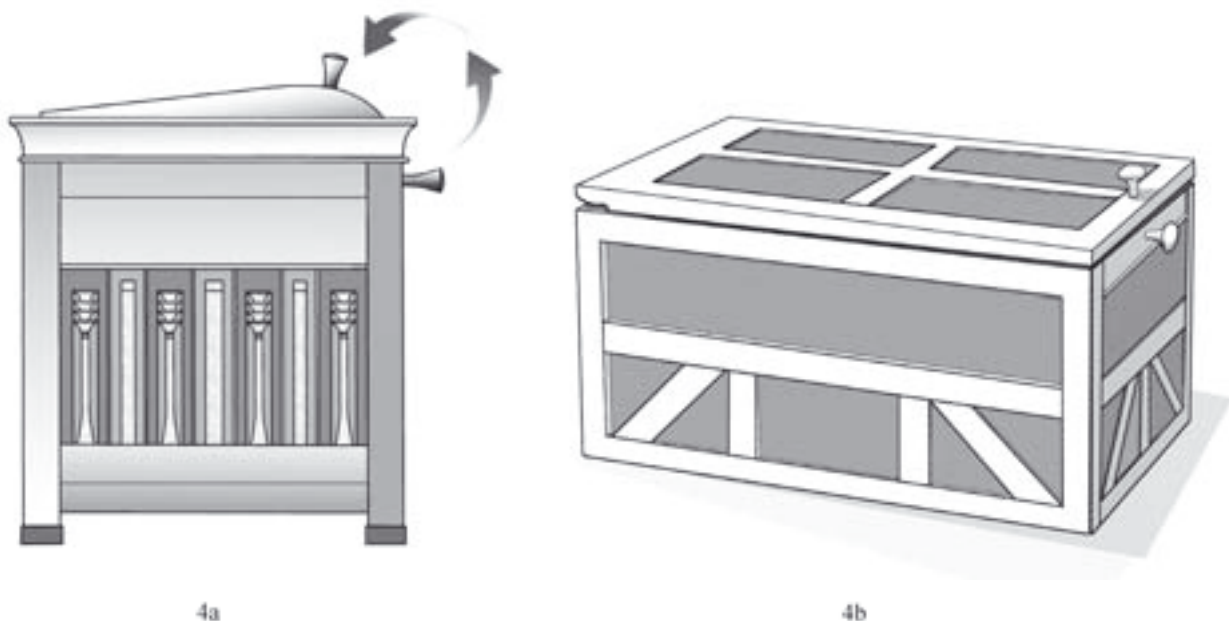


Fig. 4 (a) KILLEN 1994: Fig. 25; (b) HAYES 1935: Fig 12



Fig. 5 (a) KELM and MAZAR 1995: 66, Fig. 4.35; (b) BEN-TOR 2007: Pl. 106:4; (c) TEISSIER 1996: seals 198–203 on p. 103; (d) YADIN *et al.* 1961: Pl. CCXL:10; (e) PETRIE 1934: Pls. XIII, XIV:9

tened by a string tied to two short, sometimes mushroom-shaped, pegs placed on the same extremity of the box, one on the short side and the other on the lid (Fig. 4a-b).

It is noteworthy that a semi-circular hole was cut into the lower edge of the lid of our box (P1), suggesting that another peg may have been inserted there as well. If this was the case, one might surmise that both mechanisms – the one evident in the boxes from Egypt as well as the one proposed above – were in place in our box for extra security.

THE FIGURATIVE MOTIFS DEPICTED ON THE PLAQUES

P1–P3: Hathor

The goddess Hathor is undoubtedly the “heroine” of our box. While all other motifs appear only once, Hathor is depicted three times on the box, and the plaque bearing her depiction on the lid of the box (800 sq.mm: 135 × 60 mm) is seven times larger than the average size of the other plaques (125 sq. mm: 50 × 25 mm; see Table 1 above). Hathor plays an important role on all other container boxes known to date from southern Canaan: she is depicted five times on the complete box from Hazor, mentioned above (BEN-TOR 2009: 27–36, 41–42, figs. 4, 5) and three times on plaques adorning other boxes from Hazor (BEN-TOR 2009: fig 12:B1c–e). Hathor is depicted five times on the container box found at Toumba tou Skourou (VERMEULE and WOLSKY 1977: pl. XVIII; BEN-TOR 2009: 32, 49–52, Fig. 23: a–e), which, despite having been found in Cyprus, is most probably an import from Canaan (VERMEULE and WOLSKY 1977: 85).

Hathor was clearly known and revered in Canaan: all eleven portrayals of Hathor on container boxes found in this country show the goddess being venerated. Symbols associated with Hathor are frequently represented also in figurines made of clay (Fig. 5a), on scarabs (Fig. 5b), on cylinder seals (Fig. 5c), on various objects made of ivory (Fig. 5d) and on jewellery made of precious metals (Fig. 5e).

The introduction of Hathor into Canaan and the Sinai is clearly a consequence of Egyptian economic (timber, copper and turquoise) and political/military interests in the region – from Byblos in the north to Serabit el-Khadim in the Sinai. The bilingual sphinx from Serabit el-Khadem shows that the West Semites referred to Hathor by the name B’lat (M.S. SMITH, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World*, 2010:64). While Hathor was obviously an important goddess in Egypt, the role she played in Canaan is still unclear. Moreover, it is not clear whether the wide array of functions fulfilled by Hathor in Egypt was also recognized in Canaan (BEN-TOR 2009: 41–42), although there are indications that at least some were. Among these functions is the close association of the goddess with music and dance (ANDERSON 1995: 2555–2568). One of the plaques on the complete Hazor box portrays a dancer; another portrays a man playing a musical instrument (BEN-TOR 2009: 21–26). In Egypt, Hathor is associated with the sphinx and with cobras, both depicted on the Hazor box (BEN-TOR 2009: Fig. 7), as well as on scarabs (BEN-TOR 2009: Fig. 35:a–b), on cylinder seals and on a rock carving in the Sinai (BEN-TOR 2009: 38–42, Fig.



Fig. 6 TEISSIER 1996: seal 164 on p. 87

27:a–d; and see bibliography therein). The close relationship between Hathor and cobras is vividly demonstrated in P1, the lid of our box.

The adoption, in Canaan, of various symbols associated with Hathor, and even the assimilation of these symbols into the iconography of the local Canaanite goddess (the nude goddess) is therefore not surprising.

Given Hathor’s role of protectress of the natural resources of Canaan and the Sinai, it is tempting to suggest that her recurrent portrayal on container boxes stems from her role as protectress of their contents. Indeed, the Hazor box certainly contained jewellery made of precious metals, as well as precious and semi-precious stones (BEN-TOR 2009: 6) (although the contents of the other boxes are unknown). This proposal, however, is still merely conjecture.

P4–P5: Men holding ropes

This heraldic scene portrays two men, each holding a rope, with one hand raising the rope towards the base of the naos shown on top of the head of the Hathor symbol. This is one of the most enigmatic scenes in the entire corpus of our plaques; its clear relation to the Hathor symbol, however, lends it particular importance.

Similar scenes known from Egypt and the Levant may be regarded as depicting subjugation to or adoration of the figure to which the ropes are connected. Since the ropes held by the two human figures on our plaque point toward Hathor, the scene should most probably be interpreted as one of adoration.

Ropes tied to the “sign of union”, the other end of which is held by divine figures, are known from several examples in Egypt (BAINES 1985: 50, 60, 160, *passim*; Figs. 23, 38, 98, 107, 123, 129). These scenes always symbolize the unification of Egypt (BAINES 1985: 189). Similar scenes are known from the Egyptianizing cylinder seals found at Alalakh (TEISSIER 1996: 54–55, seals 1j; and 30). One of these seals (our Fig. 6; TEISSIER 1996: 88–90) bears a depiction of two griffins facing one another, each “held” by a rope, the other end of which is held by a human. Interestingly, both griffins wear the Hathor crown.

It is impossible to determine whether the scene depicted on side B of our box is indeed related to similar depictions known from Egypt or Syria, but the possibility cannot be ruled out. The precise meaning of the scene depicted on side B remains unknown.



7a



7b



7c

Fig. 7 (a) TEISSIER 1996: seal 31 on p. 169; (b) GARDINER *et al.* 1955: 193, No. 295; (c) BEN-TOR 2007: Pl. 104:22

P6: Kneeling man

As discussed above, the most logical position of the kneeling man on P6 is in front of Hathor on side C, as determined through a process of elimination.

Depictions of kneeling figures are common in the art of ancient Egypt and Syria, shown in wall paintings, reliefs, scarabs and cylinder seals (Fig. 7a–c).

P7: Man holding stick

Men holding a stick in their hand are often depicted in the art of the ancient Near East and are portrayed in the round (statues and statuettes), as well as in wall paintings and on seals and scarabs (Fig. 8a).

A man holding a stick is an Egyptian hieroglyph meaning “official” or “noble” (GARDINER 1966: Sign List, A 21) (Fig. 8b). Such dignitaries are usually depicted standing in front of kings or deities (TEISSIER 1996: 122–127). As such, it makes sense to place P7 in front of the Hathor symbol.

P8–P11: Procession of gift/offering bearers

As aforementioned, this sequence consists of four plaques: P8, depicting a man holding flowers(?); P9, depicting a man carrying a horned animal; P10, depicting a man carrying a vessel of some sort; and P11, depicting a man holding a bird.

Processions of offering bearers are a very common motif in Egyptian art, depicted exclusively on walls of tombs in which dignitaries or high officials were buried. Bearers of flowers, animals (usually horned), vessels and birds are the most common members of these processions. Such processions are illustrated in Fig. 9a–b (see also NEWBERRY 1893:

vol. II, Pl. XXXVI; EGGBRECHT 1984: 310). Unlike in the Egyptian scenes, where the recipient of the offerings is a dignitary, in our box, the offerings are brought before a deity (P12). Flowers or birds are sometimes offered to kings or deities as well, but in such cases the offering is delivered by a single person and not by a member of a procession (KEEL 1977: abb. 40; 1994: abb. 23 on p. 127; SCHROER 1987: abb. 23 on p. 519). The iconography of Syria also has cases of flower and bird offerings, in this case usually made to deities (Fig. 9c; see KEEL 1977: abb. 20; TEISSIER 1996: seals 19–20 on p. 52).



9a



9b



8a

8b



9c

Fig. 8 (a) TEISSIER 1996: seal 253 on p. 118; GARDINER 1966: 444, A21

Fig. 9 (a) NEWBERRY 1893: Vol. II, Pl. XXXVI; (b) BLACKMAN and APTED 1953: Pl. XXIX; (c) KEEL 1977: abb. 19



10a



10b

Fig. 10 (a) ROWE 1940: frontispiece; (b) DUNAND 1950: Pl.CLXI:7190

P12: Seated deity

The deity depicted here is most probably female, as indicated by her long and tight-fitting dress. She wears elongated, oval, and horned headgear. It is tempting to reconstruct the missing part of the depiction as a flower, like the one on top of the elongated headdress of the (male) deity from Hazor (ORNAN 2011 [forthcoming]), or the one worn by the deity from Byblos (DUNAND 1950: Pl. CLXI: 7190). For several variants of the conical headgear(?) worn by Canaanite deities, see NEGBI 1976: 23–59.

The deity holds an *ankh* in her left hand and an unidentifiable object in her right. A rather similar depiction of a seated female deity, albeit of a much later date, appears on a wall painting from Deir el-Medina. The painting shows a seated Hathor with a cow's head (rather than the more common human head with cow's ears), wearing a long dress and holding an *ankh* in her left hand (OAKES 2001: 167). Two other possible parallels from Canaan are the Beth Shan stele depicting *Mekal*, Lord of Beth Shan (Fig. 10a), and a bronze statuette from Byblos (Fig. 10b).

P13–P14

These two plaques, one depicting a lioness suckling a cub and the other portraying a young girl (see below) facing the lioness, apparently form a pair.

The lioness in P13 is shown standing on her hind legs and suckling her young. Lions assuming this stance are well known from Egyptian portrayals, especially from magic wands, where the lion is in several cases accompanied by Thoeris (Fig. 11a). Thoeris holding a protective sword in her hand is often depicted on scarabs, in Egypt as well as in Canaan (Fig. 11b). Both Thoeris and the lion are considered to be protective demons – protecting the house, nursing women and the young (HELCK 1986: 1355; CAPEL and MARKOE 1996: 64; D. BEN-TOR 2007: 31–32). Fierce and terrifying creatures such as lions often play a dual role, one of them as a protector, as can be seen by their placement at the entrance to temples and palaces. In Egypt, however, neither Thoeris nor the lion² are ever depicted as nursing the young themselves.

It should be borne in mind, however, that despite the clear Egyptian influence evident in the motifs depicted on our plaques, the box was manufactured

² In the Egyptian portrayals, it is a lion, not a lioness.



Fig. 11 (a) PETRIE 1933: Pl. XXVIII:8; (b) KEEL 1997: 752, No. 16

in Canaan (see further discussion below). It is not known to what extent the Canaanites were aware of the precise roles, the full meaning, or even the names of the various deities and demons in Egypt. In our case, it appears that the Canaanite artist was aware of the role played the two Egyptian demons, chose to portray one of them, and in order to highlight its function as protector of the young, portrayed the Egyptian protective lion as a lioness suckling her young.

P14, by far the smallest of the plaques, depicts what appears to be a young girl facing the protective lioness. While in Egyptian portrayals, children are identified as such by the lock of hair resting on their cheek (a “side lock”), in Canaanite depictions, this indication of childhood is placed at the back of

the head, as seen in numerous examples on cylinder seals from Alalakh (Fig. 12). According to TEISSIER, “The back lock appears on Egyptian evidence to be both Levantine and Egyptian, but is more characteristic of the former” (1996: 142). The small dimensions of P14 are probably no accident: this may have been another way for the artist to show that a youngster is portrayed on the plaque. Since the demon is, among other functions, a protector of the young, the placement of P14 before P13 and looking at it is given extra justification.

P15: Man holding unidentifiable object

Little can be said about this plaque, the meaning of which remains elusive. For the rationale for placing this plaque in the middle of side E, see above.

P16–P17: Warriors

These plaques, both depicting warriors, clearly belong together – just like the other pairs cited above. Both the archer and the slinger are unique, since no depiction of warriors is known from any game or container boxes decorated with bone or ivory plaques, uncovered in Egypt or the Levant.³

Depictions of warriors operating slings (P16) are much less common [in the literature] than depictions of archers. Only once is a “unit of slingers” mentioned in Egyptian documents (SCHULMAN 1995: 291). They are, however, depicted in several of the battle scenes portrayed on the walls of the Beni Hasan tombs (Fig. 13) of the late 11th and 12th Dy-

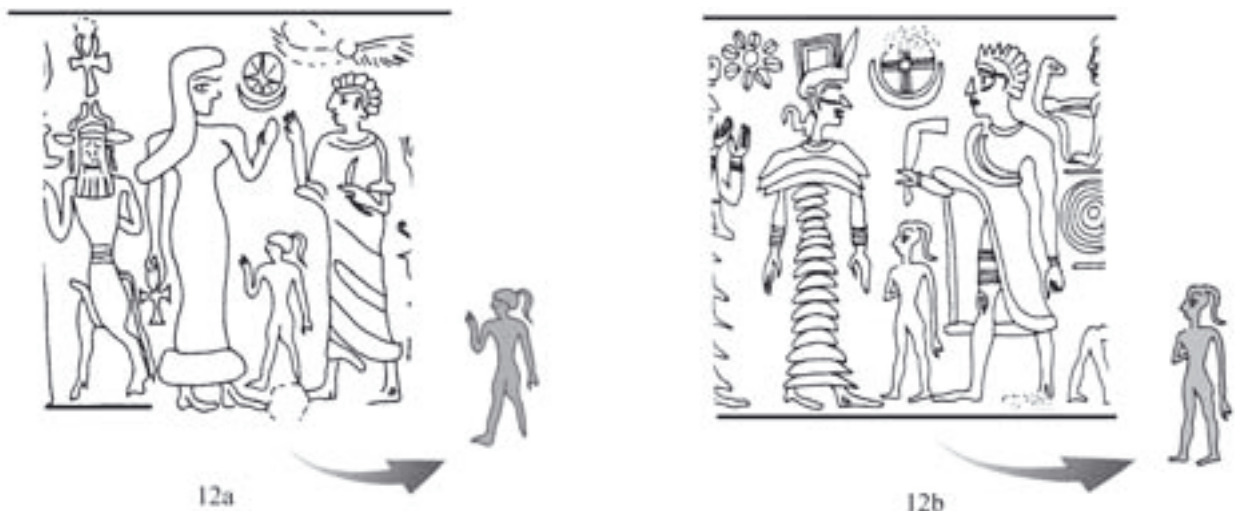


Fig. 12 TEISSIER 1996: seal 85 on p. 67, seal 130 on p. 77

³ The archer depicted on the Enkomi box (MURRAY, SMITH and WALTERS 1900: 12, Fig. 19, Pl. 1), is dated to the Iron

Age I, centuries after the date of the container or game boxes; moreover it belongs to a different type of artifact.

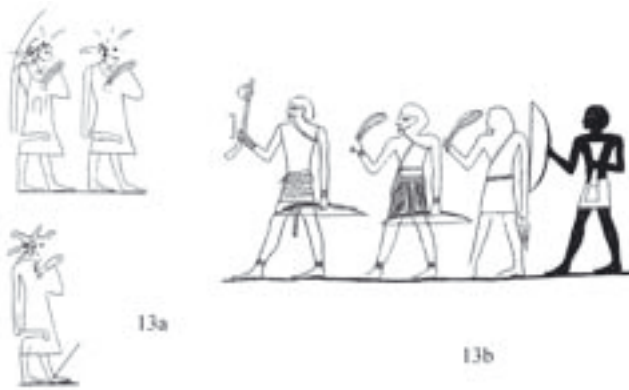


Fig. 13 NEWBERRY 1893: Pls. XLV, XLVII

nasties (NEWBERRY 1893: vol. I: 81–85, Pls. XLV, XLVII; vol. II: 45–50, 53–63, Pls. V, XV). As is evident by their physical features, garments and colors, the slingers are either Libyans or Asiatics. As noted by PETRIE, “the sling is never figured in the hands of Egyptians, but only used by Syrians” (1917: 36). Libyans should clearly be added to this characterization (NEWBERRY 1893: vol. I: pls. XLV, XLVII).

Since “slingers and archers operate long-range weapons, they are always deployed at the rear of the main battle formation. The sling thus complemented the bow, and whenever used in battle, slingers always served close to the archery units” (YADIN 1963: 10; see also SCHULMAN 1982: 169, 171).

In Egypt, archers are usually depicted in battle scenes on walls of temples and tombs (NEWBERRY 1893: vol. I: Pls. XVI, XLVII, XXX; vol. II: Pls. V, XV). Portrayals of Egyptian kings on scarabs sometimes show them shooting a bow while standing in battle chariots (KEEL, in KEEL, SHUVAL and UEHLINGER 1990: 263–267; 285–297). Scarabs with similar scenes have been uncovered at various sites in southern Canaan, such as Jaffa, Lachish, Tel

Qasile and Tell el-Far’ah (Fig.14a) (SHUVAL, in KEEL, SHUVAL and UEHLINGER 1990: 88–91, 285), in contexts dating from the end of the Late Bronze Age and the early Iron Age; in most cases, these are local copies. Archers are sometimes depicted on cylinder seals as well: Ramesses II is shown shooting arrows into a target plate in a seal from Beth Shan (ROWE 1940: Pl. XXXVIII:3; KEEL and UEHLINGER 1992: 100).

Deities holding bows are also depicted on a few of the cylinder seals found at Alalakh (Fig.14b; see TEISSIER 1996: 23, seals 81, 92).

Archers shooting their bows from chariots are depicted on several LB cylinder seals from Ugarit (Fig. 14c; see AMIET 1969: 1–8, Fig. 10; SHUVAL, in KEEL, SHUVAL and UEHLINGER 1990: seals 23, 24, 52, pp. 86–87). Simple and composite bows are depicted on all the above-mentioned examples, as well as on those of Beni Hasan, dating from the Middle Kingdom in Egypt.

CONTEXT AND DATE OF THE BOX

Apart from the box under discussion, the remains of six other boxes are known to date from the Levant (BEN-TOR 2009: *passim*, esp. 52–54). These were uncovered at Kamid el-Lôz, Thebes, Enkomi, Toumba tou Skourou, Tell Beit Mirsim and Hazor. The first three are clearly game boxes, while the Hazor is a container box, as are, most probably, the Toumba tou Skourou box (BEN-TOR 2009: 27, 48–50) and the Tell Beit Mirsim box (BEN-TOR 2009: 43), although their fragmentary state makes it impossible to determine this conclusively (BEN-TOR 2009: 43). A significant feature of the container boxes is the central role of the goddess as protectress of their contents (Fig. 15); the game boxes, in contrast, feature no depictions of the goddess. Another distinction between the two types of boxes lies in their material: the plaques decorating game



Fig. 14 (a) KEEL and SHUVAL and UEHLINGER 1990: 126, No. 5; 127, No. 8; (b) TEISSIER 1996: seal 92 on p. 23; (c) KEEL 1990: 78, No. 23

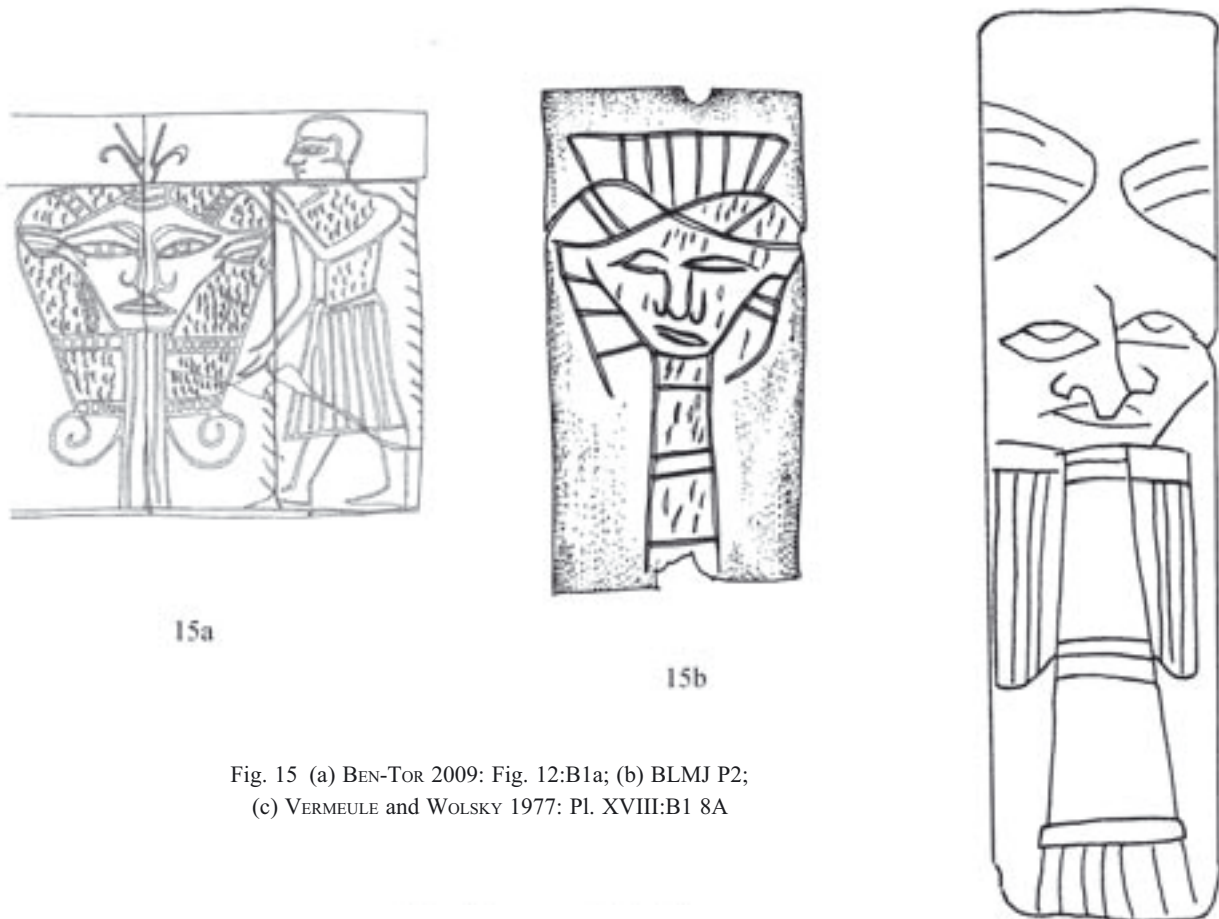


Fig. 15 (a) BEN-TOR 2009: Fig. 12:B1a; (b) BLMJ P2;
(c) VERMEULE and WOLSKY 1977: Pl. XVIII:B1 8A

boxes are made of ivory, while those decorating container boxes are made of bone.

Even though these two types of boxes served different purposes, one should nevertheless bear in mind the fact that they both functioned as containers. Since both types of boxes were produced in the Levant (including the ones from Thebes, Toumba tou Skourou and Enkomi, see BEN-TOR 2009: 49–50) and were roughly contemporary (see below), it is not surprising that there are similarities in the artistic execution of their plaques (BEN-TOR 2009: 37–38, 50).

These similarities notwithstanding, there are clear differences in the quality of the designs, probably indicating the hand of different artists. The container box from Hazor and the game box from Kamid el-Lôz display the highest quality of workmanship, probably since both were produced in important and rich political centers. The game boxes from Enkomi and Thebes are of slightly inferior quality and thus, must be the product of another school or of other artists. Third in line, in terms of quality, are the Toumba tou Skourou container box and the box under discussion. These share simi-

larities in the features of the depiction of Hathor (see Fig. 15b, c), and in the heads of some of the human figures depicted (Fig. 16a-b). The container boxes of Beth Shan and Tell Beit Mirsim, of which very little is preserved (ROWE 1940: Pl. XXIV:25; ALBRIGHT 1938: Pl. 34; BEN-TOR 2009: Figs. 25a, 47), display the lowest artistic quality, probably reflecting a rural workshop.

While little, if any, Egyptian influence can be detected on the motifs depicted on the game boxes, the container boxes clearly display a strong Egyptian connection. First and foremost among those is the dominance of portrayals of the goddess Hathor, discussed above. It is interesting to note, however, that while in Egypt, Hathor is usually portrayed with a young, oft smiling, face (see, for example, ANDERSON 1976: Figs. 94–95; TEISSIER 1996: 157, Fig. 4s; OAKES 2001: 176, 181), on the Canaanite container boxes the goddess is portrayed as an older, perhaps angry, woman (Fig. 15) – to the point that Vermeule at first identified the depiction on the Toumba tou Skourou box as a “Near Eastern divinity, with an intense gaze... a demon with long oval eyes and a full beard” (VERMEULE 1974: Fig. 59),



Fig. 16 (a) BLMJ P15; (b) VERMEULE and WOLSKY 1977: Pl. XVIII:B1 40

before realizing that it was, in fact, a depiction of Hathor.

For a detailed discussion of Egyptian influence on the Canaanite artisans who manufactured the container boxes, see Ben-Tor 2009: 54–60. Among the Canaanite container boxes, the strongest Egyptian connection is displayed by the BLMJ box. In addition to the central role played by Hathor on the box (P1–P3), the following should be noted:

1. The procession of offering or gift bearers (P8–P12), a very common scene depicted on walls of tombs in Egypt.
2. The *ankh* held by the deity, the recipient of that procession (P12).
3. The lioness suckling her young (P13). If we are correct in identifying the lioness on the BLMJ box as the Egyptian protective demon – protecting the house and nursing women and the young (see above), it appears that our Canaanite artist carried the Egyptian concept one step further. In Egypt, that demon is never explicitly depicted as nursing, presumably since this role would have been implicitly understood and the Egyptian artisan would not have needed to resort to explicit depiction.
4. The garment worn by several of the figures depicted on the box (all of them locals, as is evident from their facial features; see P7, P8, P17). This is clearly related to the Egyptian kilt – the so-called *shendyt* (ERMAN 1971: 210; RUSSMANN 2001: 112). The short triangular kilt with horizontal or diagonal lines worn by most of the figures on our box (see, for example, P4, P8–11) could be either Egyptian or local. The kilt with stiff frontward projection, often depicted on Syrian Egyptianizing cylinder seals (TEISSIER 1996: 122), does not occur on our box.

Since the original context of the BLMJ box is presently unknown, a comparison of the motifs depicted on it with those depicted on more securely dated container boxes is, therefore, our only recourse in order to determine its date. The style of workmanship cannot be considered as a criterion for dating, since different boxes were most probably manufactured by different artisans.

The decoration style of the container boxes is very closely related to that of the game boxes, as demonstrated, for example, by the container box from Hazor and the game box from Kamid el-Lôz (BEN-TOR 2009: 37–38, 54). This suggests that both types of boxes were most probably produced by the same school of artisans.

The complete game box from Thebes and the fragmentary container box from Tell Beit Mirsim originate in clear archaeological contexts: the former from a tomb dated to the 17th Dynasty, and the latter from Stratum D, attributed by the excavator to the end of the Middle Bronze Age (HAYES 1959: 25; ALBRIGHT 1938: 60). Both boxes, therefore, date from the late 16th–early 15th centuries BCE, making them the earliest of their respective types. Somewhat later is the fragmentary box from Toumba tou Skourou, which originates from a tomb “the earliest use of which ought to be in the neighborhood of 1560–1550 B.C. and the last close to 1500, or at the outside to 1480 B.C.” (VERMEULE and WOLSKY 1977: 86).

The box from Kamid el-Lôz is slightly later, originating in the *Schatzhaus* (MEYER 1986), in an assemblage containing objects collected over a long period of time. The entire tomb assemblage can be assigned to a period of the “Eighteenth Dynasty before the reign of Amenhotep III, i.e. 1550–1390” (LILYQUIST 1994: 220). It is impossible to narrow

down the date of production any further, or to determine when it was placed in the tomb. The very fragmentary remains of boxes from Beth Shan (ROWE 1940: 10, 79, Pl. XXXIV:25) and Tell Deir ‘Alla (FRANKEN 1992: Fig. 3–10:27) most probably fit within this broad time span as well.

The game box from Enkomi also originates in a mixed context – a pit containing pottery ranging from Middle Cypriote to Mycenaean III A–B (DIKAIOS 1969: 255–266); its date of production cannot be narrowed down any further.

Despite the broad time span of the contexts of the Kamid el-Lôz and Enkomi boxes, it seems likely that both were produced contemporaneously with the ones originating in a more secure context – the boxes from Thebes and Toumba tou Skourou – i.e., sometime between 1600–1450 BCE.

The container box from Hazor was found buried in the destruction level that brought an end to the Late Bronze Age city (BEN-TOR 2009: 5, 52); the date of this destruction, although still disputed, is fixed somewhere within the 13th century BCE. It was thus uncovered in a later context than all the boxes discussed above. This, however, does not entail any conclusion regarding its date of production, but merely shows that this box survived later than all the others discussed.

Since these boxes were considered to be precious items and their contents were no less precious, they may well have been repaired and reused over generations. This is especially evident in the boxes from Kamid el-Lôz and Hazor, in which there is clear evidence of reuse and recycling of the decorative bone plaques (BEN-TOR 2009: 53).

It has been shown above that these boxes all share a similar decoration style. The box from Thebes, the earliest of those discussed, is clearly an import from the Levant (KENDAL 1982: 265), as is the box from Toumba tou Skourou (VERMEULE and WOLSKY 1977: 85). These two clearly mark the starting point for manufacture of this type of boxes by Levantine artisans sometime between 1600–1450 BCE. It is inconceivable that this type of box, which obviously originated in the Levant, would have reached Egypt or Cyprus any earlier.

The decorative style characterizing the ivory and bone inlays of the late 15th–13th centuries BCE

(LOUD 1939; KANTOR 1956) clearly differs from that of the boxes under discussion. The container and game boxes fill the time gap between the period when furniture and boxes were decorated mainly by bone strips with geometric motifs and occasionally by figures of birds – a style common “from the eighteenth to the fifteenth century... it may be that this type of inlay lasted a bit longer but it certainly died out before... the fourteenth century” (ALBRIGHT 1938: 50) – and that of which the Megiddo ivories are a prime example.

The BLMJ box clearly belongs to the group of container boxes produced between 1600–1450 BCE. How long that particular box remained in use cannot be determined.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Batya Borowski and Amanda Weiss, directors of the Bible Lands Museum in Jerusalem, for placing the bone plaques at my disposal and giving me permission to publish them. I am grateful to the staff of the Conservation Department of the Bible Lands Museum for their help and patience. Thanks are also due to specialists Orna Cohen and Rafi Brown for examining the fragments and authenticating their antiquity and Prof. Francois Poplin, Musée National d’Histoire Naturelle, Paris, for the archaeozoological identification of the material of the plaques.

My gratitude is extended to the staff of the library of Egyptology at the Collège de France in Paris, for granting me permission to carry out the much needed research in their library. I am also grateful to Dr. Dorothea Arnold, Lila Acheson Wallace Chairman, Department of Egyptian Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York for her advice and important insights.

The objects were photographed by Gabi Laron, Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the graphic work was conducted by Dalit Weinblatt-Krauz. I wholeheartedly thank them both for their patience.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my wife Daphna, who read the manuscript and made important comments with regard to the cult and culture of ancient Egypt.

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