

Arabian Seals and Bullae Along the Trade Routes of Judah and Edom

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A number of seal and seal impressions have been found in Palestine, Israel and Jordan, whose owners have been identified as ancient Arabians. Only two seals are currently known from the region, which were written in ancient Arabian scripts. Other specimens, however, reveal onomastic and iconographic aspects which may have derived from ancient Arabia. But does that mean that the seal owners were Arabs themselves, or could it be that they merely bore Arabian names as these had become popular at that time? Is it possible that Arabs had become a vital population element within the Judahite and Edomite bureaucratic societies during Iron Age II – III? Last but not least, could it be that these individuals had been involved with Arabian trade between the Kingdoms of Judah and Edom and their ancestral Arabian homelands? By examining the existing provenanced seal material, we shall seek to find answers to these stimulating questions.

The Seal Corpus

I. Arabian Seals and Seal Impressions

Inscription 1: [... ...] / m y [n '?] y / f d

This stamp seal was found at Beitin in 1957, NE of Ramallah. This is a very large clay stamp (7x8 cm; originally 10,5x11 cm?) with the remains of a loop handle on its back¹. Only the lower half has been preserved. Two registers of text are separated by a single field divider. There are the remains of another line, which probably belong to another register above it. At the bottom the remains of a single border line can be seen. The clay is hand-burnished and has a reddish-brown surface. The seal was studied by W. F. Albright, G. van Beek and A. Jamme². Its script has been identified as South Arabian of the early first Millenium BC and has tentatively been translated by A. Jamme as: „amiyan the delegate”³. The seal was not found in a stratified context. It was recovered from mixed debris in a dump near the Middle Bronze Age (IIB) western city wall of Beitin⁴. A stamp seal of a South Arabian official at Beitin



Fig. 1. Stamp seal from Beitin.

1. Albright and Kelso 1968, p. 89, Pl. 118; Kelso 1993, p. 194.

2. Van Beek and Jamme 1958, pp. 9-19; idem. 1961, pp. 15-18.

3. Ibid. Jamme tentatively relates yfd to wfd > Arab. wafid = 'ambassador', 'envoy', 'messenger', see p. 13.

4 Kelso 1970, p. 65 1993: 194; Köhlmoos 2006, p. 68.

would of course support strong ties between the Kingdom of Israel and/or Judah and the Arabian Peninsula during Iron Age II. However, serious doubts about its provenance have been expressed by Y. Yadin as an identical piece from Hadramawt (near Meshhed in Wadi Dukan) had been published by Th. Bent long before in 1900⁵, who either had found the piece himself or had acquired it from a local antiquities dealer in South Arabia⁶. Yadin felt that the South Arabian specimen could have been dropped at Beitin after 1926 AD⁷. By using squeezes and good photographs the editors subsequently presented several arguments trying to prove that both stamps are not the same (although they may have been impressed by the same mould in antiquity)⁸. But as a) both stamps are broken at exactly the same point (both times the left edge and the upper register are missing) and b) as the tiny differences in the execution of the letters could be explained by the use of different lighting for both specimens, the issue must remain unsolved⁹ and as the current location of the stamp is unknown (last seen at the National Museum of Amman), the issue will not likely be resolved in the near future.

Naturally, if indeed the seal originates from Beitin (as the excavator claims¹⁰) and if it had arrived there during the Iron Age, it could have been used for stamping soft materials (as the editors suggest) and perhaps it was used in connection with the frankincense trade between South Arabia and Palestine during the Israelite and/or Judahite Monarchy period. The editors dated the seal to the 9th cent. BC.¹¹ A late 8th-7th century date, however, is suggested by E. Stern in the light of other South Arabian inscriptions from late Iron Age in Palestine and Southern Trans-Jordan (e.g. engraved on vessels from the Silwan Village, Area G (Str. 10C - B) and from Tall al-Khalayfi Str. IV)¹². Even though this seal has been used as important evidence of Arabian trade with Palestine during the first half of the first Millennium BC¹³, its relevancy for the study of ancient Arabian seals in Iron Age Palestine and Trans-Jordan must be seriously called in to question in the light of its doubtful provenance.

Inscription 2: Nrt/nrl

This stamped jar handle was found in 1986 at the 7th-6th century BC Iron Age Edomite site of Ghrareh, "at the head of the Wadi Delaghah"¹⁴. This strategic site was well-defended and its architecture may have served some political purpose¹⁵. Several luxury items found at the site such as finely painted Assyrian influenced "Busayra" ware and a cosmetic limestone palette also suggest some political significance¹⁶. The stamped jar handle was discovered in Area D above the pit in the NW corner of the southern defensive wall and one of its towers, where several large store vessels were uncovered¹⁷. No

5. Bent 1900. A squeeze of the seal was kept in the Glaser collection in Tübingen (sq. A 727). See Höfner 1944, p. 69.

6. Yadin 1969: 37-45.

7. Although this may seem far fetched, examples of this practice in recent time have been noted in connection with the current investigation of a forgery ring in Palestine and Israel.

8. Kelso 1969, p. 69; van Beek and Jamme 1970, pp. 59-65; Jamme 1990, pp. 89-91.

9. Cleveland 1973, pp. 33-36; Köhlmoos 2006, p. 68. J. Blakely quite rightly describes the object as the «infamous Bethel seal» - Ancient Near East List: 28th of March, 2000.

10. Kelso 1970, p. 65.

11. Van Beek and Jamme 1958, pp. 14-16. Also see: Köhlmoos 2006, p. 68.

12. Stern 2001, p. 297. For more details, see: Höfner 2000, pp. 26-28. Höfner suggests a Safaitic origin. For a South Arabian (proto-Dedanite) monogram from Tall al-Khalayfi: see Divito 1993, p. 219: 80A+B. Also Zadok 1998, p. 787.

13. Ephal 1982, p. 15.

14. Hart 1988, pp. 89-99. For its precise location see: *ibid*: p. 90, Fig. 1.

15. *Ibid*: 98.

16. *Ibid*: 95-96, Figs. 7 and 8A and B.

17. *Ibid*, pp. 94-95, Fig. 6. For some of the vessels see Fig. 7. Unfortunately there is no further indication to which type of vessel the impressed jar handle belongs.

exact measurements are given for the jar handle impression, but the 1:1 scale on the photograph suggests that the rectangular seal measures c. 2x1.8 cm. The inscription has been engraved width-wise. The impression has a single border line and no field dividers. The inscription has been studied by E. A. Knauf¹⁸. Its script may be identified as Hijazi-Thamudic¹⁹. One letter (the final lam), however, is found to be Proto-Arabic²⁰. Knauf reads the inscription in boustrophedon order 1, 2, 3 underneath which from right to left one must read the letters 6, 5, 421. If this is justified, the inscription can be deciphered as follows: register 1) nrt, register 2) nr'l, i.e. 'Nūrat (daughter of) Nūr'il.' Whereas the female name Nūrat is not attested so far in ancient Northern Arabic, the name of her father Nūr'il is found in the Safaitic language and has virtually the same connotation ("Light of [DN]").²²



Fig. 2. Jar handle from Ghrareh.

Not only are high ranking females attested in Neo-Assyrian and local ancient Arabic inscriptions of the 8th-7th centuries BC²³, as will be seen below, the same name (possibly also of a high ranking female) is found on a 7th century BC jar handle from Tall Jurn. As the vessel on which the Ghrareh seal impression is found was probably brought to Ghrareh from elsewhere (presumably from the Hijaz), it not only suggests with Knauf "that Edom controlled the northern Hijaz with Dedan (el-^cUlā near Māidan Sālih...) politically in the first half of the 6th century B.C."²⁴, but also indicates some role played by women in these trade transactions. Alternatively of course, the Arabian female owner of the vessel could have been an immigrant living in or near Edomite Ghrareh. No more can be said.

18. Knauf 1988, pp. 98-99.

19. This pushes the Hijazi-Thamudic script back in time by many centuries and Knauf suggests that the script, therefore must have developed directly out of Proto-Arabic and not 'out of another Thamudic script.' *ibid*, p. 99. An alternative interpretation of the inscription as a local imitation of Egyptian hieroglyphs has also been suggested. However, no convincing interpretation has so far been proposed. Pers. communication with E. A. Knauf, August 2008.

20. Also see: Sass 2005, pp. 119ff. and Table 8. Sass suggests considerably lower dates (950-800 BC) for the adoption of Proto-Canaanite «lām» by Proto-Arabic scribes (e.g. at Yala SW of Marib) and at Raybun in the Hadramawt) bringing this type closer to the date of the Ghrareh jar handle.

21. This is suggested by the orientation of the «nun» in the top left and the top right.

22. Knauf adduces an interesting parallel from an inscription from Jabal Qurma where both father and son bear names composed of the element «Light»: "By Nuri son of Nuran is this camel", *ibid* 99. See also Hübner and Knauf 1986, n. 6.

23. For detailed literature see Knauf 1989, pp. 1 ff., 24-25, n. 105.

24 Knauf 1988: 99. Though Hart refrains from an exact date for the site, the finds indeed do suggest an occupation during the 7th and 6th centuries BC. Hart 1988: 98.

II. Arabian Names and Iconographic Features on Seals and Seal Impressions from Palestine and Jordan

Inscription 1: 1 ^cbhkm / [`]zwl

This stamp seal was found in 1986 during the fifth excavation season at Khirbet Ghazze in the Arad-Beersheba-Valley region. It was found “on the surface at the foot of a dump of excavation debris” from the eastern end of the late Iron Age fortress of Stratum III (the pottery of which belongs to the same archaeological horizon as Lachish Str. II, Silwan Village (Area G) Str. 10, Khirbet Ghara Str. VI, Tall Arad Str. VII-VI)²⁵. The stamp is rectangular and measures 2x1.7 cm. A handle is found on the back of the seal and the mushroom shaped specimen is completely made of limestone. The inscription was executed in positive relief and not in the negative as is usual (to produce the expected positive impression on bullae and jar handles). The inscription has been engraved length-wise. The seal has one border line and two more or less parallel field dividers terminating in simple dots. The individual letters, border and dividing lines are crudely executed and it has been rightly assumed that though the engraver knew the letters, he must not have been very experienced²⁶.

Although the individual characters reveal late Iron Age Trans-Jordanian palaeographic traits (such as Ammonite ‘kaph’ and Edomite ‘mem’)²⁷, some characters are just poorly engraved (e.g. in the first register: the squeezed ‘lamed’, the bent vertical shaft of ‘het’, as well as the short vertical shaft of ‘aleph’).²⁸ All in all the seal is of low quality and it may be assumed that the owner was not of very high rank. Beit-Arieh adduces a possible parallel for the second element of the name ‘^cAbhakam’, which is found on an unprovenanced Moabite or Edomite seal of a man named ‘Hakam’²⁹. One could also compare the ancient South Arabian names ‘hkm’ and ‘hkmt’³⁰. The first element ‘^cb’ is uncertain and Beit-Arieh suggests that it may be a shortened form for ‘^cbd’³¹. R. Zadok also assumes an Arabic origin for this name and compares the name ^cAbdulahakim and suggests that hakim originated as an epithet³². The second name ‘Azwal has been compared

25. See the pottery study by Freud in: Beit-Arieh 2007, pp. 77ff. This can be clearly seen also by the late Iron Age household pottery from the site such as the closed cooking pots with one ridge at the neck, the small degenerated decanter juglets, the sack-shaped storage jars and the high-footed oil lamps, which also have been discussed by the author: van der Veen 2005.

26. Beit-Arieh 2007, p. 179. Even so, crudeness not always proves the lack of experience. Sometimes seals were used for impressing mass commodities and this may be compared with some letters found on the Judahite official store jar seal impressions (of the Lachish 484 store jar type), which are sometimes also crudely executed, even though the jar distribution was ordered by the royal court at Jerusalem.

27. The triangular head of kap in register 1 resembles some Ammonite kap on seals (provenanced WSS 860. 886. 981 (stylized?); Eggler & Keel 2006: 339: 46; unprovenanced 926.939.963; the Bacalis seal: Deutsch/ Heltzer 1999, p. 54; and perhaps on an Aramaic seal: WSS 779?, and on a Judahite seal WSS 265). It is not found on Edomite and Moabite and certainly not on those retrieved from legal excavations. For examples of the broad headed mem on provenanced Edomite seals: WSS 1048-1051. 1054. Also see the En Hazeva seal below. For a provenanced Moabite (?) specimen: WSS 1011.

28. Scratches in front and after the final lamed in register 2 seem to be mere attempts by the engraver.

29. WSS 1058. The reading of the final mem is not entirely certain due to damage of the seal and may be a shin.

30. Sholan 1999, p. 120.

31. Note however that the word cb was also found on a jar handle from Busayra and although it has been interpreted as an abbreviation for the content of the jar, it could perhaps alternatively be read as a personal name, but no sensible connotation comes to mind. For cb see: Puech 1977, pp. 13-14; Millard in: Bienkowski 2002, p. 434. Its meaning, however, is unknown.

32. Zadok 1998, p. 786. He refers to another name published by A. Lemaire, where indeed the dalet of cb d had been dropped: cf. PN cb nbw. See Lemaire 1996, p. 57 ad 59:2. Zadok has mistakenly interchanged the names of father and

with the Arabian desert town 'Azalla' mentioned in the annals of Ashurbanipal³³. Both names therefore could have an Arabian origin. As the script of the seal reveals Ammonite and Edomite traits, one may ask how this item eventually ended up at Khirbet Ghazze, a town belonging to the Judahite Kingdom. But as the seal was not stratified it could also have arrived there after the fall of Jerusalem and the annexation of the area by the Neo-Babylonians, when Edomite or Edomite related pastoralist groups settled there during the 6th century BC³⁴. Alternatively, could the seal have belonged to an Arabian official working for the Edomite government, who had been involved with trading with the Judahite court towards the end of the Iron Age period? Several pieces of evidence of international trade, 'Edomite' presence, as well as contacts further south such as with the Arabian Peninsula were discovered at the site: a Neo-Assyrian bulla³⁵, locally produced painted 'Busayra' (Assyrian imitated) ware³⁶, wedge impressed pottery³⁷.



Fig. 3. Stamp Seal from Khirbet Ghazze.

Inscription 2: lmlklb^c cbd hmlk

A bulla with this inscription (divided into 4 registers: with a depiction of three buildings or altars in the first register³⁸ and an inscription in the lower three registers) was uncovered by C.-M. Bennett's team in western Area B at Busayra during the 1972 excavation season³⁹. According to the most recent reinterpretation of the strata at Busayra by P. Bienkowski, the stratigraphical locus of the bulla belongs to Phase 7 associated with the phase 6 structures of the site⁴⁰. This archaeological horizon is now, based on the discovery of late 4th century BC imported Attic Ware (all from Area A), reattributed to what appears to be Persian period occupation, overlying Phase 4-5 (integrated Stage 2) with their Iron Age II structures, which are believed to have been destroyed by king Nabonidus in 553/2 BC. The palaeography suggests a 7th date for the bulla. The inverted 'dalet', bent 'kaph' and broad-headed

son on the Khirbet Ghazze stamped seal.

33. See ANET 299.

34. Also see the Edomite ostrakon found at the site: Beit-Arieh 2007, pp. 133ff. Also Beit-Arieh in Edelman 1995, pp. 33ff. Also: Bienkowski & Sedman in: Mazar 2001, pp. 310-325.

35. Beck in Beit-Arieh 2007, pp. 194-196 where she points out that similar seals and seal impressions (with a depiction of the lunar crescent on a stand) have been found at different sites in the northern and southern Levant and that these may be related to international trade, esp. on p. 196.

36. Freud in Beit-Arieh 2007, esp. Figs. 3.19:1; 3.24:3; 3.38.5; 3.46. For a typical Trans-Jordanian cup with loop handle see Fig. 3.16:1 and for Edomite type cooking pots: Fig. 3.23:4; 3.26:11.

37. E.g. Zorn 2001, pp. 689-698. Also van der Veen 2005, pp. 67-68. Zorn suggests a connection with the Mesopotamian controlled Arabian trade (esp. pp. 693-95) during the 7th-5th centuries BC.

38. Millard in Bienkowski 2002, pp. 430-431; Puech 1977, pp. 12-13. The text on this seal here is an altered version of the longer discussion in van der Veen 2005: 227-229.

39. Millard, *ibid*: 430.

40. Bienkowski 2002, p. 123.

‘mem’ identify the script as Edomite⁴¹, ‘bet’ and ‘cayin’ are still closed (atypical for Ammonite and Edomite 6th century BC ‘Aramaizing’ scripts)⁴². The name of the seal owner ‘mlkb^c’ is unattested and its etymology is unclear. Suggestions have been made concerning its correct reading, however. A. Lemaire⁴³ suggests that the scribe mistakenly transposed ‘lamed’ of Ba^cal to precede its initial ‘bet’. Although a name such as Melek-Ba^cal would make perfect sense within the West Semitic onomasticon, it is difficult to conceive such a serious mistake, especially on a seal of a royal minister⁴⁴. E. Puech compares ‘lb^c’ with feminine lb^ct in Thamudic inscriptions from Wadi el-^cAin (3rd century AD), but its etymology remains unknown⁴⁵. Alternatively lb^c may perhaps be compared with South Arabic ‘lb^cm’, ‘(my) heart is ^cAm’ (consequently this would be shorter name for ‘mlk-lb^c [m]), but such an abbreviation for (DN) ^cAm remains unattested⁴⁶. Due to so many unanswered questions, an Arabian etymology can therefore only be one possibility among others.

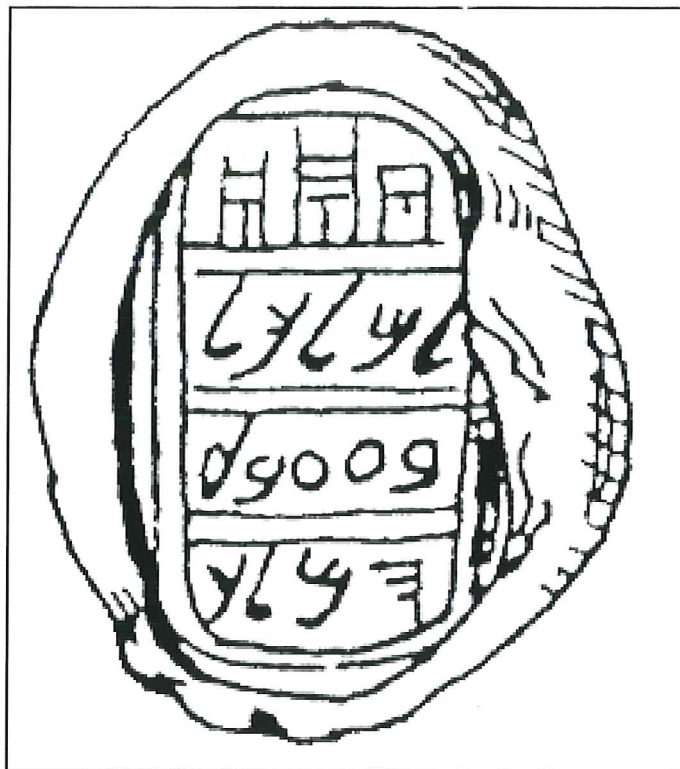


Fig. 4. Plasticine Impression made from cast of the Busayra Bulla (line-drawing: courtesy of Dr P. Bienkowski; photo and impression by the author)

The schematic representation of hatched buildings or altars in the top register recalls a similar depiction on an anepigraphic seal from Busayra⁴⁷.

So *if* the bulla indeed has any relevance for the study of Arabian names on Judahite and Edomite seals and seal impressions and *if* the bulla belongs to the archaeological context from which it was recovered⁴⁸, it now post-dates the demise of the Edomite monarchy in the light of the stratigraphical reinterpretation suggested by Bienkowski. Whether or not the people who were responsible for the

41. For a full discussion of inverted ‘dalets’ see Vanderhooft in Edelman 1995, pp. 146ff. Also: van der Veen 2005, pp. 191-192, Table 33.

42. cayin is open on the Tall al-Khalayfi jar handles or on the unprovenanced seals WSS 1052 allegedly from Petra, 1062 and 1064 (from nearby Busayra?), which were acquired before 1945. The same letter is also open on the provenanced late Iron Age ‘Edomite’ ostrakon from Khirbet Ghazze: Beit Arie 2007, pp. 133-137. The first cayin on the Tall al-Khalayfi jar handles has recently been reinterpreted by Zuckerman as *fet*, but this author is not convinced by Zuckerman’s arguments (nor is R. Zadok, pers. communication, October 2006). See Zuckerman 2004.

43. Lemaire 1975, pp. 18-19.

44. Layton, who criticises Lemaire’s view on the grounds that theophoric ‘Baval’ remains unattested within the Edomite onomasticon (this, however is no longer true see Zadok 1998), also suggests a scribal error. According to him, the name would have been Malki’el (with alep in ,l lacking, for which he lists multiple examples), followed by a „meaningless“ element bc, a potential misspelling for cbd, ‘servant’. According to Layton, rather than rejecting the seal, the engraver left the mistake unchanged and started the same word afresh, this time correctly. Layton 1991, pp. 37-43.

45. Puech 1977, p. 13.

46. See: Sholan 1999, p. 130.

47. See the detailed discussions in Eggler / Keel 2006, p. 104:7 and 106:9 where further parallels are listed. Though these are similar, none of them are truly identical. Compare also the two «altars» on an unprovenanced seal: WSS 1056.

48. Small items like seals and bullae easily end up in secondary contexts, as is the case with so many of them. For a detailed discussion on the stratigraphical position of seals and bullae from Israel and Jordan: see van der Veen 2005.



Fig. 5. Stamp seal from 'Ain al-Husb
(Photo and line-drawing: Courtesy of Prof. I. Beit-Arieh).

reconstruction of the buildings in Integrated Stage 3 were local Edomite 'client-sheikhs' working for the Persian government (as Bienkowski suggests⁴⁹) or Edomite officials working for a semi-independent Arabian king, remains unknown. The latter would of course be relevant for our discussion here. Interestingly, as the owner of the seal is called an 'bd hmlk' ('official/minister of the king'), he was a high ranking individual. If indeed he was of Arabian descent, his position in the Edomite monarchy (or post-Edomite monarchy period) could be important evidence for the increasing impact of Arabs on the state bureaucracy in that particular region towards the end of the Iron Age (i.e. during Iron Age III).

Inscription 3: Mškt / Whzm

This round stamp seal⁵⁰ was found in a terrace fill underneath the late 7th century fortress of Stratum IV at 'Ain al-husb during the 1994 excavation season⁵¹. The seal depicts two antithetic worshipers or priests raising one arm in worship and flanking a horned altar or more likely so an altar mounted by the lunar crescent symbol of the god Sin of Harran. The first part of the inscription ('lmškt bn') is engraved above two dividing lines above the priestly scene whereas the rest is engraved above the altar and in between the two priests. The palaeography reveals Southern Trans-Jordanian traits such as the broad-headed 'mem', which we encountered on the stamp seal from Horvat 'Uza [Khirbet Ghazze]. 'kaph' also has close parallels on Edomite provenanced seals and seal impressions, notably on the royal Qosgabr bulla from Umm al-Bayyara, the mlklb^c bulla from Busayra (see below), the Qos^canal stamp jar handles from Tall al-Khlayfi⁵². The straight stance of 'taw' and 'nun' (in the first

49. *ibid*: 482.

50. The seal was published by Naveh 2001.

51. Discussion by R. Byrne (with the author on the BAR website), who excavated the seal himself in 1994: 'below one meter of extrinsic clay terrace fill (otherwise aceramic) intended to manufacture an upper surface (above which there was mid-seventh-century detritus, in turn below additional used (sic) phases).'

52. WSS 1049-1051. This type of kap is also found on Moabite seals, see e.g. the provenanced WSS 1011 from Umm Udheina.

register), as well as of 'waw' (in the second register) finds good parallels on Ammonite, Moabite and Edomite seals from the 7th-6th centuries BC⁵³. Both names have been identified as Arabian and have been translated with the words 'steadfast' and 'violent' respectively⁵⁴.

Its iconography may be compared with a number of similar seals from the Southern Levant, e.g. from Cis- and Trans-Jordan⁵⁵. A derivation from North Syrian/Aramaic glyptic has been suggested⁵⁶. We also want to refer here to a similar seal recently uncovered by E. Mazar at Silwan Village – above Area G (with the personal name 'Shlomit').⁵⁷ This iconographic representation appears to be a local ('Aramaizing') adaptation of Mesopotamian prototypes found mainly on cylinder seals with "two figures flanking a divine motif"⁵⁸. Many of these can be dated to the 7th century BC, which indeed fits the stratigraphy at ^cAin al-husb. This Edomite (or Edomite related) seal with Arabian names either reflects the mixed population of the northern Negev in general or may specifically relate to Arabian traders who were active in the northern Edomite region working for the Edomite bureaucracy.

Inscription 4: l-tw

This small (1.4x1.1x0.8 cm) scaraboid of brown stone was uncovered at the Edomite site of Busayra⁵⁹. It is engraved length-wise. It bears three letters 'ltw'. The seal has a single border line, but has an atypical angular frame above the inscription. In the upper part between the single border line and the frame ten oblique antithetically oriented strokes are depicted⁶⁰. The seal was found in area B of Phase 5 and appears to have come from the late Iron Age Integrated Stage 2, which was destroyed during the middle of the 6th cent. BC. This date is also supported by the shape of the letters 'waw' and 'taw'⁶¹. We probably must translate the inscription with 'belonging to Tw'. Various proposals have been suggested for the etymology of the personal name (incl. Anatolian or Indo-Aryan origins⁶²), but Millard is probably right when he suggests an Arabian origin, even if he list no concrete examples⁶³.

53. E.g. nun: WSS 859, and Egger / Keel 2006, p. 338:46, 421:2; waw WSS 860. 988. 1048. 1049. 1051; taw WSS 870. 923. 927.

54. Naveh 2001, pp. 197-198. Also: Zadok 1998, p. 786, Lipinski 2006. Zadok refers to the frequency of m_lkt in Safaitic, Thamudic and Sabeian inscriptions.

55. From Moab WSS 1026, 1043, 1044?, 1047; from Moab or Edom WSS 1058, 1048. Provenanced examples from Samaria and Ashkelon are also attested, see: Keel and Uhlig 1998, p. 319.

56. E. g. Timm in Sass & Uhlig 1993, p. 181; Ornan in Sass and Uhlig 1993, p. 67; Keel 1994, pp. 174-176 figs. 15-17. 32-33 and the local adaptations figs. 85-93.

57. <http://bib-arch.org/debates/seal-controversy-01.asp>.

58. Ornan *ibid*, p. 68.

59. Millard in: Bienkowski 2002, pp. 429-430. Also: Egger / Keel 2006, pp. 108-109: 11.

60. A geometric but dissimilar zigzag pattern can also be seen on a seal from Khirbet Ghazze: Beit Arie 2007, p. 199:1.

61. As based on the B2.7.4 location cf. Bienkowski 2002: figs. 5.3 and 14.1. The stratigraphy of the site is very complex (pers. communication with P. Bienkowski on several occasions). Millard 2002, p. 430.

62. Puech 1977, p. 18.

63. Millard 2002, p. 430. This author was also unable to find any parallel for the name.

Inscription 5: l-nrt

One seal impression, which has not hitherto been considered as part of the “Arabian seal corpus” (except by this author in his own PhD thesis⁶⁴) is found on a jar royal type jar handle⁶⁵. It was discovered by B. Mazar at Tall Jurn [EN-Gedi] during the 1961/62 excavation season. The jar handle was excavated in the earliest stratum at the site, namely in Stratum V, in locus 31, on the southern slopes of the mount⁶⁶. Uniform buildings and courtyards with a great number of barrel shaped vats were uncovered here and it has been suggested that this area was an industrial quarter. Several pieces of evidence have led to the conclusion that the vats could have been used for the production of balsam/ perfume⁶⁷. A great quantity of late Iron Age diagnostic pottery found at the site clearly dates Stratum V to the second half of 7th - early 6th centuries BC. Previous suggestions that the site had already been occupied prior to 701 BC, is not supported by the material evidence found in this stratum⁶⁸.

This author not only had the opportunity to closely study the jar handle during his visit at the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University in 2001, but was also allowed to take plasticine impressions⁶⁹.

The seal impression depicts a 2-winged sun disk and bears a short inscription. This 2-winged sun-disk differs from those that are normally found on so-called royal lammelek jar handles. The type presented here is unique in the royal jar handle corpus, in that it lacks the upper rays above the central sun disk. Whereas the other 2-winged royal emblems are always associated with the inscription ‘lmlk’ (‘belonging to the king’) and in most cases also with a geographical name (Hebron, Zip, Sokoh, Mamshit), the sun-disk here is associated with a personal name as we shall see below. D. Parayre

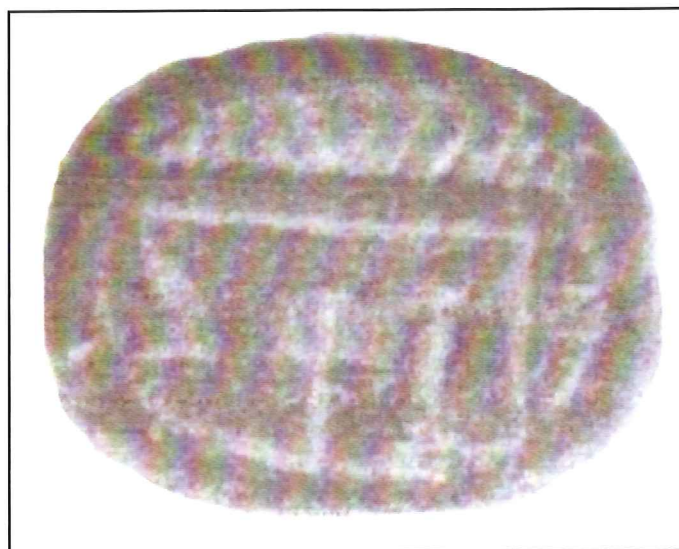


Fig. 6. Stamp seal from Busayra (Photo and line-drawing: courtesy of Dr. P. Bienkowsky)

64. Van der Veen 2005: Excursus I, pp. 128-136.

65. Other 484-type jar handles (of the royal type) were also found at the site. One bears the stamp of a 2-winged sun disk + the geographic name zyp, the other has an emblem with a prancing horse: Barkay 1995, pp. 41-47.

66. Mazar 1993, p. 401; Mazar et al. 1966.

67. Besides vats, the discovery of mortars and ovens also seems to support this view. In a gloss on Jeremiah 52:6 Rabbi Joseph (B.T. Shab. 26a) states that vinedressers and husbandmen left in the country by Nebuzaradan in 586 BC, were balsam gatherers, who worked among other at En-Gedi (Tall Jurn).

68. Unlike Barkay, who dates the early phase of the site to before 701 BC, Stern (the editor of the final excavation report on Tall Jurn) and this author agreed in a conversation in 2004 that the site cannot have been occupied much before 650 BC. This author has argued on several occasions (a long discussion will also appear in his post-doctoral dissertation at Mainz University) that the vast majority of 2-winged royal jar handles as well as the prancing horse emblem belong predominantly to the first half of the 7th cent. BC (i.e. to the reign of king Manasseh). Also: van der Veen 2005, p. 131: n. 632.

69. The author wishes to express gratitude to T. Dothan for her kind permission to study the jar handle and take plasticine impressions. During his second visit in 2004, the jar handle had mysteriously disappeared, but it may have been misplaced due to preparations for the final publication on Tall Jurn.

has shown in her in-depth study of winged sun disks that the solar symbol shown on the Tall Jurn jar handle belongs to a type which reflects schematic 'Assyrianising' tendencies which seem to date squarely to the 7th century BC⁷⁰. She presents several examples which lack the upper rays⁷¹. Interestingly, one of the examples listed appears on an Aramaic scaraboid from the Hecht Museum in Haifa, where the inscription with the name of the owner is also engraved above the solar symbol⁷². Although unprovenanced, the name of the seal bearer has been interpreted as of Arabian origin, i.e. 'whbdh' (cf. 'whb', 'to give')⁷³. Several parallels of that Arabian name are found on Aramaic ostraca from 4th century BC Beersheba⁷⁴. An Arabian ruler by the name Uabu/Wahb is also attested in the annals of the Assyrian monarch Esarhaddon⁷⁵. Schematized 2-winged sun disks are also attested on seals from South Arabia⁷⁶.



Fig. 7. Stamp seal impression on jar handle from Tall Jurn (courtesy of Prof. E. Stern; impression and line-drawing by the author)

Although the inscription has been read in different ways ('lmrt', 'lnrt', 'lmr', 'lnr', 'lkrt'), close examination of the original and of the plasticine impressions proves positively that only 'lnrt' is to be read here. Although the second letter could just possibly be reconstructed to 'mem', the limited space underneath the grit shows that 'nun' is the best choice by far. The final letter cannot be 'aleph' (as some have suggested) and the remains of the upper left stroke of the 'X'-shape of 'taw' can still be seen clearly. The reading 'lnrt' therefore seems to be virtually indisputable⁷⁷. The name 'nrt' is as yet unattested in the ancient Israelite/Judahite onomasticon⁷⁸. As we have seen above, however, the name Nurat is attested on a jar handle from Edomite Ghrareh, whose seal impression was written in Hijazi-Thamudic. Could it be that the seal owner of the Tall Jurn jar handle was a lady of Arabian descent working for the Judahite state bureaucracy during the 7th century BC (at the time of kings Manasseh, Amon or Josiah)? Notably, an official seal impression on a royal type jar handle of yet another woman named Hannah (?), daughter of ^cAzaryah, was excavated in Jerusalem in 1976 south of the Dome of the Rock⁷⁹. As the jar handle was found at Tall Jurn in an industrial quarter where to possibly balsam oil/perfume was produced (as has been suggested by several scholars), could there be a connection here with between the Judahite state and trade with balsam resin from Southwest Arabia (1 Kings 10:2,10; Ezekiel 27:22)?

70. Parayre in Sass/Uehlinger 1993, pp. 37-38. Although Parayre dates this type to the late 7th- early 6th centuries BC, this author believes that it has a wider range and is found in the 8th – 6th centuries BC, also within the Neo-Assyrian homeland, cf. Herbordt 1991: Table 4:1.13-14, 7:9; 8:1.15; 10:1-6.9-10 etc.

71. *ibid.*: figs. 43-48.

72. *ibid.*: fig. 43.

73. Avigad et al. 2000, p.130: 107. The ending dh may be an inversion of hd/ Hadad.

74. E.g. Zadok 1998, pp. 790-791.

75. ANET 292.

76. See Parayre 1993, p. 38 and fig. 48.

77. Note that an unprovenanced bronze seal with the name Nuri'el together with a 2-winged sun disk (classified as Ammonite) is housed in the S. Moussaieff collection: Deutsch & Lemaire 2000: No. 176.

78. To the knowledge of the present authors, the modern Hebrew floral name 'Nirit' (translated as 'flower cup'), does not find parallels during the Iron Age in Palestine.

79. WSS 664.

As with the jar handle from Ghrareh the owner of the store vessel was a woman and the question may be asked which role women (both times bearing the same name) played in relation to the commodities that were contained in the store vessels bearing their names.

Conclusions

The seals and seal impressions studied here do not often yield the information we might expect from them. Although written in Ancient Arabian and possibly engraved with the name of an Arabian dignitary, our first example from Beitin, proved to be a disappointment, as the provenance of the seal is not certain. Our second true Arabian specimen from Edomite Ghrareh does not yield positive evidence of trade between the site where it was found and the Hijazi homeland of the seal bearer, as we do not know whether she was involved with trade or was simply a citizen of that region. The other seals and seal impressions were not written in ancient Arabian, but some of the owners might possibly have been of Arabic descent (especially the stamp seals from Khirbet Ghazze and ^cAin al-husb come to mind). One bulla from Busayra, whose owner may have been an Arab, was a high official either at the Edomite court or at the court of a local Arabic ruler after the annexation of Edom by the Neo-Babylonians in 553/2 BC. The royal store jar from Tell Jurn of a high ranking lady may well be related to the production of balsam perfume, the resin of which was imported from Southwest Arabia.

Unfortunately too little is known about the circumstances of these individuals to be able to assume a direct connection with the Arabian trade at the end of the Iron Age. Nonetheless such a connection is likely. Further research and hopefully the discovery of additional seals and seal impressions will shed further light on the subject.

Abbreviations

AASOR = *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research*

ANET = *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* by J. B. Pritchard, Princeton (1969)

BAR = *Biblical Archaeology Review website*

DN = *Divine Name*

WSS = *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* by N. Avigad/ B. Sass, Jerusalem (1997)

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