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# Petroglyphs and Sepulchral Contexts

## Preliminary Note on Late Chalcolithic/ Early Bronze Age Findings at Qulban Beni Murra, Wadi as-Sahab al-Abyad

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### The Site and the Culture

The megalithic burial grounds of Qulban Beni Murra (also called Biyar Beni Murra; first reported by Kirkbride and Harding 1944; cf. also Stekelis 1945) are located c. 130 km east of al-Jafr, along the Wadi as-Sahab al-Abyad, and north of Jabal Tubayk on the Jordanian side of the border (Fig. 1). Excavations and surveys of the site were undertaken (Fig. 2) by the *Eastern Jafr Joint Archaeological Project* of Mu'tah University and the Berlin Free University (Gebel and Mahasneh 2008, n.d.; Mahasneh and Gebel 2009) and directed by both authors.

Qulban Beni Murra comprises concentrations (Areas A-F, Fig. 2) of various types of cairns with ashlar rows and trilith groups (e.g. Figs. 7-8), chamber graves, and circular structures (Figs. 3-5) of standing stones. Further, all flanks of the wadis in the area feature sepulchral occupations, allowing us to speak of a sepulchral landscape. The present-day landscape is a typical *ard as-suwwan* belonging to the al-Howaitat tribe; the *hamad* is drained by NNE - SSW running wadi systems of which Wadis as-Sahab al-Abyad and al-Aswad are the major outlets draining into one of the basins (770 m a.s.l.) between the northernmost outcrops of Jabal at-Tubayk.

Qulban Beni Murra attests the presence of a potentially complex shepherd society which occupied the area with its aquifers and lacustrine habitats during the moister phases of the Mid-Holocene. A similar site might be located at Rajajil (Zarins 1979), and possibly at Rizqeh (Kirkbride 1960, 1969; Underbjerg 2003). We have to expect that the Arabian Peninsula in this period was characterised by extensive steppes with lakes and waterholes (Gebel *et al.* 1989, cf. also Noblet-Ducoudré *et al.* 2000 or Claussen and Gayler

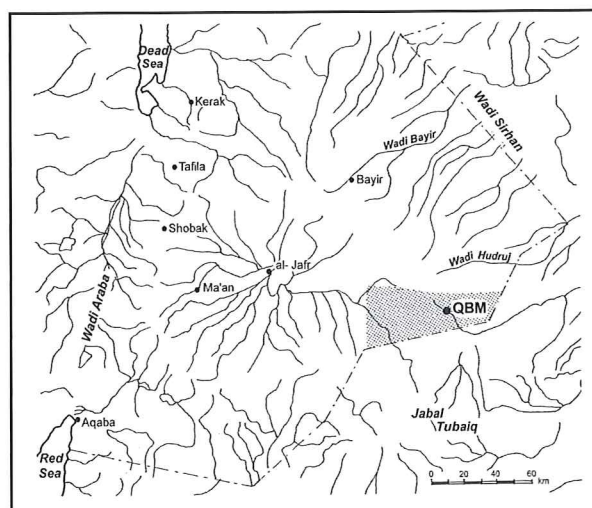


Fig. 1. Location of Qulban Beni Murra and the survey area of the *Eastern Jafr Joint Archaeological Project*. (drawing, Eastern Jafr J.A.P., H.G.K. Gebel).

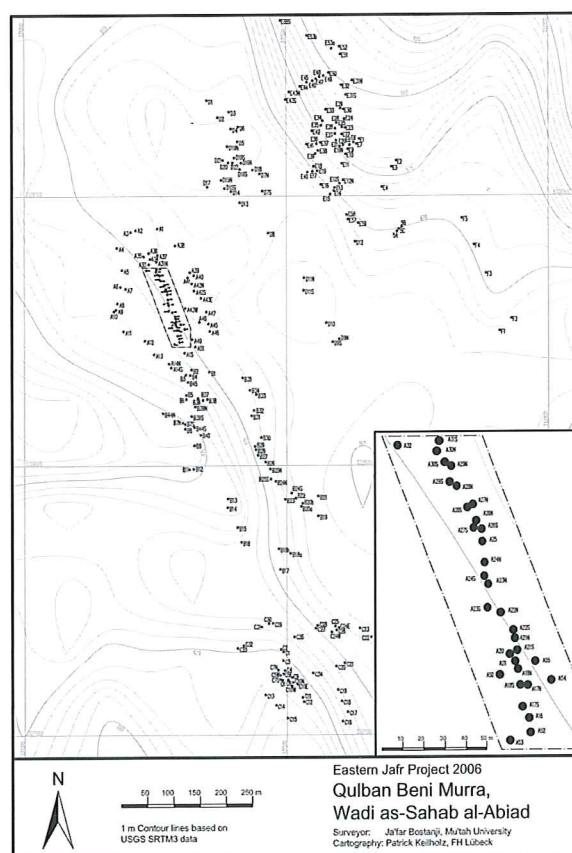


Fig. 2. Qulban Beni Murra. Topographical map and distribution of structures in Areas A-F. Based on USGS SRTM3 data.

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1997 for the Sahara), and featured comparatively high water tables. These environments hosted large groups of mobile pastoralists who dug wells into the wadi floors and in the proximity of lake shores, fed their flocks at (purposely built) watering places, constructed pens and human shelters, and gathered at burial grounds to perform their funeral practices.

The surprising discovery of unknown and possibly complex shepherd cultures dating into either the Late Chalcolithic or to the transition from the Late Chalcolithic to the Early Bronze Age (*cf.* also the recent findings of G.O. Rollefson and A. Wasse in northeastern Jordan) immediately leads to a discussion of the origins of the Arabian oasis cultures at around the mid-4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC, if not earlier. It is the hypothesis of one of the authors (H.G.K.G.) that the origin of Arabian oasis economy was not triggered by the aforementioned Mid-Holocene climatic optima, but was in fact quite the opposite: The oasis economy with its shadow horticulture – enabled by the microclimate created by the “roof” of the newly domesticated date palm and the channel irrigation – rather represents the forced adaptation of local shepherd populations to this new sedentary

life-mode, following the loss of pasture land due to increased aridity. Thus, according to Gebel’s hypothesis, the shepherd cultures, together with their well-building technology, are the origin of oasis cultures. It was these communities that first contracted and settled down in hydrologically favourable locations and became sedentary farmers at these locations. The fortified well may have been the central element of the Arabian Peninsula’s first oasis living quarters in the Early Bronze Age (*e.g.* Hili 8, al-Ain/ Buraimi Oasis, Abu Dhabi Emirate; Cleuziou and Constantini 1980, Cleuziou 1989). In a way, the introduction of the oasis economy completed the sedentary life trajectory in the Arabian Peninsula which had its roots in the Near Eastern Neolithic. Be this as it may, this hypothesis, which sees the transition from pastoral well cultures of the early 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC to the oasis cultures at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age (recently linked to the so-called 5.200 calBP drought event, *cf.* Staubwasser and Weiss 2006) must be substantiated by our future research.

The petroglyphs discussed here, however, represent with some certainty depictions of the Late Chalcolithic/ EB shepherds’ green desert well culture (Gebel and Mahasneh n.d.).



**Fig. 3.** Qulban Beni Murra, Area A, Structures A15-31: line of megalithic circular room clusters of unknown function, from SSE. photo: Eastern Jafr J.A.P, M. Bshesh.



**Fig. 4.** Qulban Beni Murra, Area A, Structure A27 (looted): megalithic circular room cluster with animal petroglyphs, from SW. (photo: Eastern Jafr J.A.P, M. Bshesh).



**Fig. 5.** Qulban Beni Murra, Area A, Structure A27 (looted): ashlar with animal petroglyphs. (photo: Eastern Jafr J.A.P, H.G.K. Gebel).



**Fig. 6.** Qulban Beni Murra, Area A, Structure A27 (looted): broken/ fallen ashlar with animal and other? petroglyphs. (photo: Eastern Jafr J.A.P, H.G.K. Gebel).

### The Date

Two main problems are related to the dating of the petroglyphs discussed here. The first is the common difficulty encountered when dating petroglyphs that could have been applied at any time to an exposed rock surface or ashlar/ standing stone. The other is our lack of dating evidence for Qulban Beni Murra other than its fan scrapers (Quintero *et al.* 2002) which are time markers for the Late Chalcolithic/ Early Bronze Age. These fan scrapers can be found in large numbers near pens in the region, but are comparatively rare in Qulban Beni Murra, although clearly attested in its deflated surfaces. Fan scrapers were most probably tools for cutting wool/ hair and for working hides.

Our conviction that the ibex/ animal petroglyphs discussed below represent a Late Chalcolithic/ Early Bronze Age feature derives from a number of considerations:

1. The depictions on a central ashlar of Cairn B39 (**Figs. 8-9**) and on the ashlar of the Round Structure Cluster A27 and other Area A circular structures (**Figs. 3-6**) show an identical style resembling Hecht's Fig. 4e (Hecht 2009). They must have been

applied in around the same period.

2. The depictions are not randomly distributed like the *wasms* (sub-recent – recent tribal tags in the area) and occur in confined structural contexts; they are also related to basic functional elements of the structures (B39: central ashlar of the cairn; A27 and others: ashlar wall of circular structure). This indicates that they must be contemporary with the use of the cairn and the circular structures.
3. Techniques and patination differ clearly from those of the *wasm* (Mahasneh and Gebel, in prep.) that are found on many of the standing and fallen ashlar at the site.
4. The depicted wild animalscape of Qulban Beni Murra's ashlar has a good analogue in the well-dated mural decorations found in Tall Hujayrat al-Ghuzlan (first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC), a site situated upon the alluvial fan of Wadi al-Yutum that enters Wadi 'Araba to the north of 'Aqaba (Schmidt 2009).

Therefore, on the basis of the above evidence, we conclude that the petroglyphs discussed here are related to the function of the structures and date to the Late Chalcolithic / Early Bronze Age, around 4000 BC or slightly later.

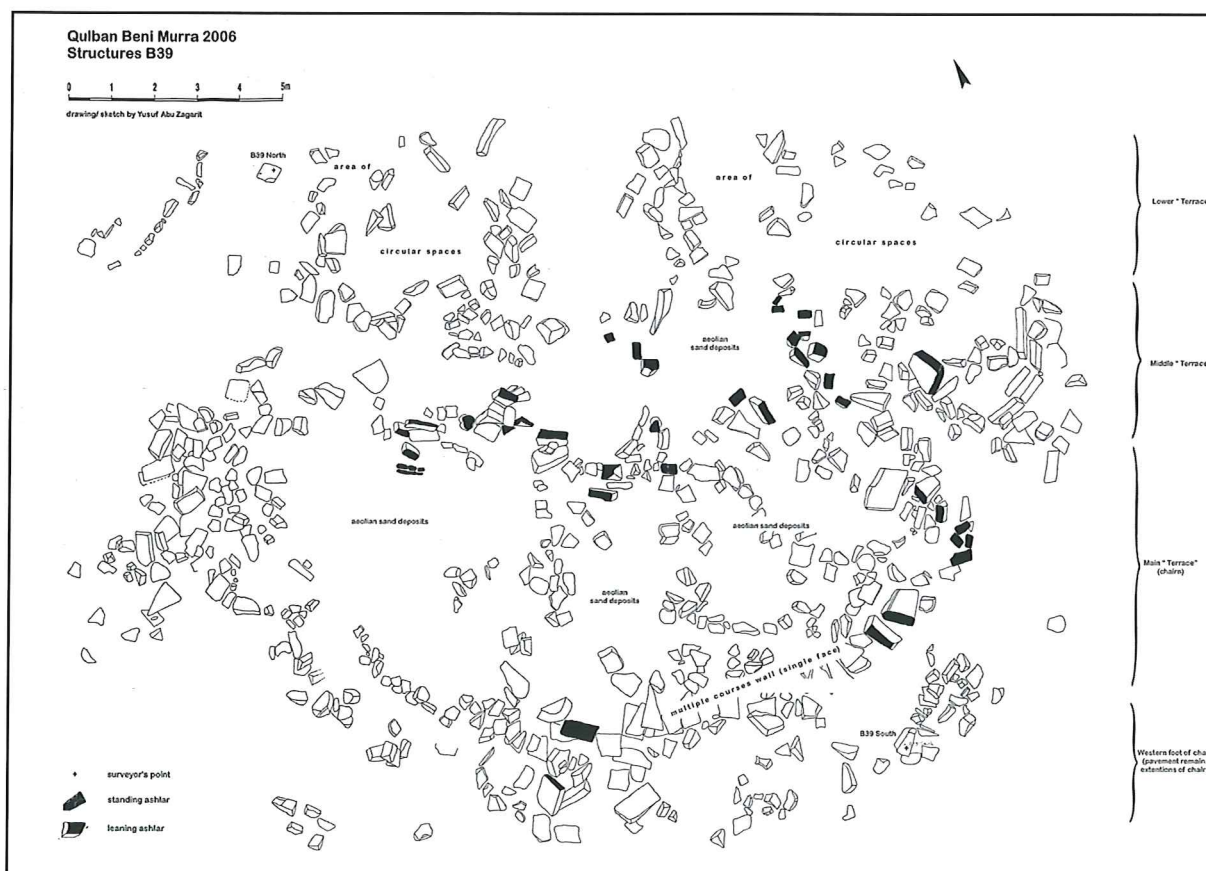
### The Contexts

Petroglyphic art is rare in Qulban Beni Murra and is confined to specific buildings. Two major discoveries from Structures A27 and B39 are presented here. However, isolated depictions are also found upon other structures (especially on ashlar of the circular structures in Area A), but these are sometimes difficult to identify due to their poor state of preservation. Quite numerous, on the other hand, are the later tribal tags, or *wasm*, which can be expected on any of the Late Chalcolithic/ EB structures. One tag found in Area E was applied by the Royal Air Force, presumably in the 1940s.

The first of the two evidences to be presented

here is related to a broken but still standing ashlar belonging to the central row of 4-5 standing stones of Cairn B39 (**Figs. 7-9**); the depictions were applied to the eastward facing side of the ashlar/structure. B39 is the largest of the cairns at Qulban Beni Murra; it feature a successive occupation, a central row of standing ashlars, peripheral terrace pavements, and groups of three standing stones (triliths) in its SE part.

The second occurrence of petroglyphs is associated with the 130 m long chain of circular structures in Area A (**Fig. 3**); each of these circular structures has an interior diameter of between 3 and 5 metres and features interior stone pavements and chipping floors. While B39 clearly represents a burial mound, the circular structures in Area A may not have been graves. Our current interpretation follows the idea that these structures were related to the accommodation of the mourners and/ or the practice of funeral rites at the site. Circular



**Fig. 7.** Qulban Beni Murra, Area B, Structure B39: successively used cairn with a central row of standing ashlars, peripheral terrace pavements, and standing ashlar clusters to the E. (drawing: Eastern Jafr J.A.P., Y. Abu Zagrit).

Structure A27 displays ibex/ animal depictions on two standing ashlar (Fig. 5) as well as upon the fragment of a fallen ashlar (Fig. 6); their depictions face inwards, i.e. towards the interior of the structure. Isolated animal petroglyphs have also survived on standing and fallen ashlars from other circular structures in Area A.

### The Petroglyphic Imagery

Unfortunately, the overall preservation of the imagery at Qulban Beni Murra is relatively poor. This poor preservation is particularly due to the state of the exposed upper layers of the local tabular sandstone bedrock (after Bender 1975: Ks1, “white sandstone/ silicified sandstone/ brown coarse-grained sandstone” of the Lower Cretaceous/ Santonian) that tends to erode in layers; the raw materials used for the ashlar was taken from the banked bedrock exposed on the flanks of the wadi. The other major negative impact to preservation are heat cracks affecting the ashlar (Fig. 9); Fig. 10 shows the current *in situ* destruction as a result of both the aforementioned factors.

No scenic or group motifs were found in Qulban Beni Murra; rather the individual depictions are unrelated and populate more or less densely the surfaces of the ashlar (Figs. 5 and 9). Apart from the well-identifiable ibex (*Capra ibex nubiana*, Bennecke 2009: 351), all other animals are difficult to identify. In many cases, it is only evident that they represent four-legged creatures shown in a “squatted style”. However, some depictions are very close to Schmidt’s “predators” (Schmidt 2009). In addition to the animals, unknown signs were also applied to the surfaces. No hand motifs or “worshippers” (*cf.* below, Hujayrat al-Ghuzlan) are attested. It has to remain speculation as to whether other ungulates, *e.g.* gazelles, are among the unidentifiable four-legged animals.

Technically, the petroglyphs were made by extensive picking and engraving.



**Fig. 8.** Qulban Beni Murra, Area B, Structure B39: successively used cairn with a central row of standing ashlars, peripheral terrace pavements, and standing ashlar clusters to the E, from SE. (photo: Eastern Jafr J.A.P., H.G.K. Gebel).



**Fig. 9.** Qulban Beni Murra, Area B, Structure B39: ashlar with animal petroglyphs standing in the cairn’s central row of ashlar, facing E. (photo: Eastern Jafr J.A.P., H.G.K. Gebel; black scale is 50 cm).

Hecht's stylistic overview on ibex depictions from the 'Aqaba area serves as a very useful formal tool to address style, although the question is to what extent style is influenced by the bedrock type/ quality upon which it is used: indeed, our ibexes from Qulban Beni Murra come close to his Style Fig. 4e. They differ clearly from the slender animals of Wadi as-Sahab al-Abyad 38 of the area ("Ibex Rock"; Mahasneh and Gebel 2009: Figs. 3-4) which we date to the Neolithic (*cf.* also Rhotert 1938); the ibex findings of Qulban Beni Murra do not show an over-sizing of the horns' diameters as is the tendency in the Neolithic.

### The Commonsensical Ibexscape

Qulban Beni Murra lies at the junction of the *badiya* (*e.g.* Betts 1968), the northwestern Arabian, and the Wadi 'Araba/ Sinai/ Negev rock art regions (*e.g.* Rhotenberg 1972; Anati 1999; Otto 2002; Avner 2002; Pinkett and Mithen 2007; Hecht 2009). In all these regions, a prevailing ibex symbolism is attested, also for the Late Chalcolithic/ Early Bronze Age. From these findings – and more recent discoveries from the settlement of Hujayrat al-Ghuzlan (Schmidt 2009) – one may conclude that an ibex iconography was common in this period not only to shepherd cultures but also to sedentary communities (Schmidt 2009).

In his recent thorough study, Klaus Schmidt (2009) has presented well-dated evidence (first half of the fourth millennium BC) of ibex/ predator/ "worshipper"/ hand palm wall decorations from a spacious building in Tall Hujayrat al-Ghuzlan north of Aqaba; they are the first of their kind ever to have been found. These murals were applied using a simple technique: simple or parallel lines were impressed into the still wet mud plaster using the tips of the fingers; a second simple "technique" of decoration is the impression of the palms of the adult hand. Five groups of depictions have so far been identified, normally observed in the upper parts of the walls. Ibexes and a predator (leopard?) are also represented; whereas the former measure between 29 and 52 cm in height and are between 31 and 42 cm long, the latter are some 20 cm in height and 67 cm long. Human beings with



**Fig. 10.** Qulban Beni Murra, Area A, Structure A21: example of petroglyphic art eroding *in situ* by heat fracture. (photo: Eastern Jafr J.A.P., H.G.K. Gebel; scale is 30 cm).

upraised arms ("worshippers", heights 26-31 cm) also occur. A potential scenic character of the depictions is not clear: the depictive elements have no obvious relationship to each other, although Schmidt (2009: 100) assumes such a relationship with regard to the combination of the elements. In terms of archaeozoology, the ibex plays no role in the wild animal diet of Hujayrat al-Ghuzlan, as is also the case with gazelles and any other types of game (Bennecke 2009). Schmidt affirms that the ibexes of Tall Hujayrat al-Ghuzlan appear in a sacred milieu, concentrating in a building complex which he names, albeit with slight hesitation, "temple". In his article, Schmidt opens the discussion by presenting a "dance of ibexes" hypothesis (Schmidt 2009: 110), supported by the idea that humans with the upraised hands might be dancers (original idea from Y. Garfinkel).

The ibex depictions of Qulban Beni Murra should not – at least – reflect an element of the actual animalscape of the former site's steppic environment, particularly since these animals are inhabitants of mountainous areas such as Jabal at-Tubayk to the south; predators, however, would do. Thus, the ibex rather represents a motif of the mindscape of the people using the area. Since the animal petroglyphs are attested in primary (B39) or secondary (A27) sepulchral contexts, the question has to be approached whether these depictions reflect an association with funeral behaviour. Furthermore, the question also arises

as to whether we are dealing with popular motifs representing a general veneration of these wild animals, i.e. whether they had a specific magical meaning, and/ or whether they were part of the ritual/ belief system of the Qulban Beni Murra shepherds.

A specific sepulchral background of the Qulban Beni Murra ibex/ animal depictions should be excluded since these motifs also occur in many other Late Chalcolithic/ EB contexts. As such, they must rather reflect a common but restricted animal symbolism that was confined to the ibex and (a) four-legged animal(s), but not to a specific ritual context. This means that such depictions can simply also appear in burial contexts. This leads to the careful interpretation of the Qulban Beni Murra petroglyphs as reflecting a dominant commonsensical symbolism which can show up in, among other areas, burial contexts, but which – for unknown reasons – was used/ survived in only two/ a few specific locations at the site. The use of the imagery in the Late Chalcolithic/ EB may already have lost its connection to the original (Kilwa, Rhotert 1938) and transformed Late Neolithic meanings and magic or ritual contexts, representing a more unspecific commonsensical decorative iconography of veneration.

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Khirbat as-Samra Project**

The village of Rihab, in north Jordan, between al-Mafraq and Jarash, is a very promising archaeological site. After European teams had conducted surveys and excavations there, systematic archaeological research on behalf of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan has been directed since the 1990s by Abdelqader Al-Husan, who discovered a number of buildings, artefacts and inscriptions dating from the Bronze Age to the Mamluk period. Among these discoveries that now make Rihab a site of exceptional interest, a Byzantine church has been first mistakenly dated to the early third century, a claim that was immediately rejected by the whole academic community, in Jordan as well as abroad, but reached the international media. An important site like Rihab, and the research and restorations made there by Abdelqader Al-Husan, deserve better than this. The St. George oratory inscription, which is the root of the claim and of the subsequent controversy, has been discussed in literature several times since 2002, but mostly by scholars who had not seen the mosaic itself, or a good detailed photograph.

This paper intends to synthesize the academic literature on the inscription, provide accurate photographs, a facsimile drawn after the original, and a regular edition of the text.

**I - A Too Much Debated Inscription**

In December 2000 the Department of Antiquities excavated a church in Rihab that looked like many other Byzantine churches of the sixth or seventh century in the area: it is a basilica with three naves paved with geometric mosaics, with a sanctuary behind a chancel made of marble slabs, an apse with an altar on four feet in the centre. In front of the chancel a Greek dedicatory mosaic inscription written in 6 lines within a *tabula ansata* indicated the church had been built in honour of Saint George. A photograph of the excavated ruins was published soon afterwards,<sup>2</sup> with a comment about the alleged date of the building being 230 AD, a date that would make this church the oldest in the world.

In 2002 two new articles were published, one in Arabic in *ADAJ* 46 (Amman)<sup>3</sup> and one in English in the *Architectural Science Review* 45.4 (Sydney).<sup>4</sup> Both provided a clear photograph of the mosaic inscription, of which the *ADAJ* Arabic article contained an inaccurate Greek transcription; both articles proposed a translation (in Arabic in *ADAJ*, in English in *ASR*), but because it was unfortunately founded on the inaccurate transcription, it contained many errors. The main problem was the apparent date, in Greek “PKΔ”: 124. Given the fact that all dated church inscriptions in north Jordan refer to the era of the Province of Arabia starting in 106 AD, it would have meant that the mosaic (and the church itself) were made in 230 AD. Such a date is absolutely unacceptable and the scientific community rejected it unanimously for a number of obvious reasons.

1. I am deeply indebted to Mr. Abdelqader al-Husan, in charge of the Rihab excavations, for giving us access to the site and collection of recovered artefacts, and for discussing with us this text at length. I am glad to express my gratitude to Dr. Fawwaz Khraysheh, Director General of the Department of Antiquities, who proposed this publication to the Khirbat as-Samra Project. I wish also to express all my thanks to Dr. Fawzi Zayadine who discussed this paper with me and confirmed its conclusions. Alain Desreumaux, Louis de Lisle and Khalid Mahfoud, of the Kh. as-Samra Project, made the facsimile drawing.

2. Abdelqader Mahmud AL HUSAN in *ADAJ* 45 (2001), Arabic section, p. 10-11, and fig. 13.

3. Abdelqader Mahmud AL HUSAN, “The New Archaeological Discoveries of the al-Fudayn and Rihab al-Mafraq Excavation Projects, 1991-2001”, *ADAJ* 46 (2002), Arabic section, p. 71-93.

4. Samer ABU-GHAZALAH, Abdel-Kader AL-HISSAN, « Discovery of the Oldest Church of the World », *Architectural Science Review* 45.4 (Sydney, 2002), p. 295 sq.

There is no need here to develop at length what is presently known about the oldest places of Christian worship. The text of the Rihab inscription provides by itself clear evidence against a third century date. For example, the late Father Michele Piccirillo noticed that no church could have been dedicated to Saint George 50 years *before* this saint, who served in Diocletian's army, was born. The date also mentions the indiction, and indictions only began in 312 AD. The inscription mentions 1.1 the Holy Trinity, which is unlikely before the Council of Nicaea and the theological debates of the fourth century. Of course the style of the mosaic, the palaeography, the architecture of the church itself, so similar to all the other churches in Rihab and north Jordan, everything pointed to a sixth or seventh century date.

On the basis of the photograph in *ADAJ* 46, the mosaic-inscription was re-interpreted in *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* which proposed a first scholarly edition of this text,<sup>5</sup> but did not understand the end of 1.2 and the beginning of 1.3. *SEG* correctly read the eighth year of the indiction,<sup>6</sup> but seemed to endorse the *lectio* "PKΔ", with this comment: "(it) seems to be supported by the (photograph); the numeral 124, however, cannot refer to the era of the Province of Arabia used in other inscriptions from the same site (...); consequently the reading can hardly be correct."

Independently, and from the same photograph in *ADAJ* 46, Denis Feissel and Pierre-Louis Gatier proposed in 2005 another reading of the inscription in the *Bulletin Epigraphique* of the *Revue des Etudes Grecques*.<sup>7</sup> They did not understand the second word of 1.1 ( ὁ(νό)μ(α)τι ), but were positive about the rest of the text. Confronted with the puzzling beginning of 1.3, (where Abdelqader al-Husan and Samer Abu-Ghazalah had created the word "*mohok*" otherwise unattested), they themselves reluctantly created another Greek word "μονοκτίστ(ης ?)", never heard of before, with this comment: "*hapax de sens douteux*". For the date, they clearly decided against the problematic P and correctly read <υ>κδ' (<4>24), noting that the apparent P is absurd and must have been a mistake, while an eighth year of the indiction coincides very well with the year 424 of the Province. The date of this inscription was then clearly established: in the month of Apellaios, indiction 8, in the year 424 (of Arabia) = November-December 529 AD.

In spite of this note in *REG* which should have closed the case, much ado about this church reached national and international media in 2008. Two scholars from Toronto, Lincoln Blumell and Jennifer Cianca, then proposed a paper about this inscription to the *Biblical Archaeology Review*.<sup>8</sup> Their reading of the text combines those by Tybout (*SEG*) and Feissel-Gatier (*REG*). For the date, Blumell-Cianca of course follow the Feissel-Gatier interpretation, and accurately notice (after a close examination of the *ADAJ* photograph) that the letter P is not really a mistake, but that "the supralinear stroke that marks the *upsilon* as a number touches the two up diverging stems of the letter (Y) so that at first glance it looks like a *rho* (P)".<sup>9</sup> They also endorsed Feissel and Gatier's neologism "μονοκτίστ(ης)" with much less caution than the two French scholars, proposing a translation as "the sole founder". This paper was taken in consideration by the editors of the *BAR* but could not be published in the regular printed edition, so it was made available online on their website as a PDF file<sup>10</sup>. Lincoln Blumell then published a short article in *Zeitschrift für Papyriologie und Epigraphik* about the word Μονοκτίστ(ης), in which he publishes in fact what was supposed to be the definitive edition of the Rihab Saint George

5. *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 51 (2001), p. 629, n° 2045 (Tybout).

6. And not the 18th as in the first publication.

7. *Revue des Etudes Grecques* 118 (2005), p. 565.

8. Lincoln BLUMELL, Jenn CIANCA, "The Oratory of St. George in Rihab: The Oldest Extant Christian Building or Just Another Byzantine Church?", paper submitted in July 2008 to *Biblical Archaeology Review*, PDF version available online on the *BAR* website.

9. Blumell-Cianca (2008), p. 5.

10. Cf. "Scholars Skeptical About World's Oldest Church", *Biblical Archaeology Review* 34.5 (September-October 2008) p. 14.

church dedicatory inscription.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the case is not completely closed. There is a general consensus about the date of the inscription being Apellaios 424 of the era of Arabia, that is to say November-December 529 AD. But there is no such thing as a μονοκτίστ(ης), not more than any “*mohok*”. Line 3 is full of blunders, as it often happens in sixth century village Greek inscriptions, but one can easily recognize the standard formula “ἐκτίσθη καὶ ἐτελιώθη” (was founded and completed) that can be found in several contemporaneous

church inscriptions in the area, with various spellings.<sup>12</sup> The first three letters MOH are to be read μον(αχοῦ) and apply to Thomas, son of Gaianos; moreover after the mosaic-maker omitted the abbreviation mark, he confused the probable lunar *epsilon* with an *omicron*.

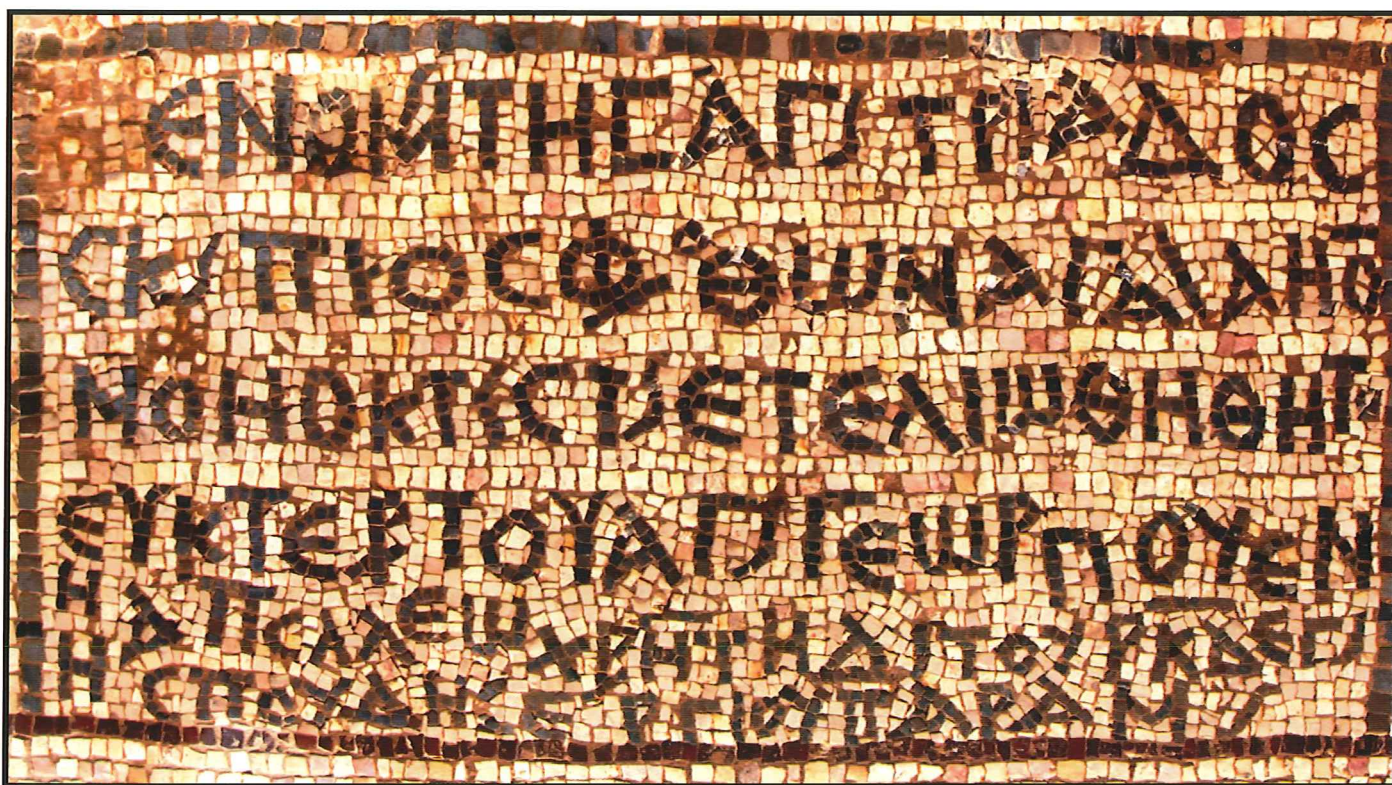


Fig.1. The inscription.

## II – The Inscription (Fig. 1)

Mosaic inscription in six lines of black tesserae within a tabula ansata. The rectangular frame is 104 x 54 cm. Letters 7-5.5 cm high (ll. 1-4), 4-3 cm (ll. 5-6), interl. 4 cm. Seen, photographed, reproduced on a transparent sheet. The rectangular frame had obviously been prepared for lines 1-5 only, and the general composition of the inscription was disturbed in the end by the addition of line 6.

[+] Ἐν ὀ(νό)μ(ατι) τῆς Ἀγ(ίας) Τριάδος, / ἐκ προσφ(ορᾶς) Θωμᾶ Γαιανοῦ / μον(αχοῦ), ἐκτίστ(η) καὶ ἐτελιώθη <τῇ> τὸ / εὐκτέρ(ιον) τοῦ ἀγ(ίου) Γεωργίου ἐν / μῆ(νι) Ἀπελλέω, χρ(όνων) ἡ' ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος), τοῦ (ἔτους) υκδ' (τῆς) ἐπ(αρχίας), / σπουδῇ Σεργίου παραμ(οναρίου).

11. Lincoln BLUMELL, “A Note on the Meaning of the Term Μονοκτίστ(ης)”, ZPE 166 (2008), p. 22.

12. In Mekhayyat: IGLS XXI 97: (...) ἐκτίσθη καὶ ἐτελιώθη ὡς ἅγιος τόπος (...); 100: (...) ἐκτίσθη καὶ ἐτελιώθη ὁ ἅγιος τόπος (...) dated 535-536; see also in Ma'in IGLS XXI 162, with the same formula.

“ + In the name of the Holy Trinity, from offerings by the monk Thomas, son of Gaianos, this oratory of Saint George has been founded and completed in the month of Apellaios, in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of the indiction, the year 424 of the Province, by the efforts of the paramonarion Sergios.”

L.1: + Ἐν ὀ(νό)μ(ατι) τῆς Ἀγ(ίας) Τριάδος (Tybout *SEG*); . εν... τῆς ἀγ(ίας) Τριάδος (Feissel-Gatier *REG*); ἐν ὀ(νό)μ(ατι) τῆς ἀγ(ίας) τριάδος (Blumell-Cianca; Blumell *ZPE*).

L.2: ἐκ προσφ(ορᾶς) ΘΩΝΑΓΑ\ΑΗΟΙ (Tybout *SEG*); <ἐ>κ προσφ(ορᾶς) Θωμᾶ Γαιανοῦ (Feissel-Gatier *REG*).

L.3: ΝΩΝΟΚΤΙCΤS ἐτελιώθη {θη} τὸ (Tybout *SEG*); μονοκτίστ(ου) ἐτελιώθη {θη} τὸ (Feissel-Gatier *REG*, Blumell-Cianca, Blumell *ZPE*).

L.5: τοῦ ρκδ' (?) ἔτ(ους) (Tybout *SEG*); τοῦ <υ>κδ' <ἔ>τ(ους) (Feissel-Gatier *REG*); υκδ ἔτ(ους) (Blumell-Cianca; Blumell *ZPE* who forgot the τοῦ).

On L. 1 there is an empty space at the beginning, and it seems the mosaic has been restored there; there was probably an initial cross. The word ὀ(νό)μ(ατι) is abbreviated and written OM with an abbreviation mark above the M.

On L. 2 misspellings and confusions of letters occur. The beginning is obviously the very frequent formula ἐκ προσφ(ορᾶς): the mosaic maker made a confusion between an Ε and a C, and added the abbreviation mark for no reason. προσφ(ορᾶς) is abbreviated, followed by a small o that could be the second o of the word. Θωμᾶ is the name Θωμᾶς (Thomas) in the genitive form. The following letters ΓΑΙΑΗΩ must be read Γαιανοῦ (genitive form of the name Gaianos): on the whole inscription the letter N is always written H, except for the last letter on l. 4, (like in the Cyrillic alphabet), and the stroke on top of the O must not be taken as a numeration mark, but as a cursive form of the OY monogram.

On L. 3 one can recognise the standard formula ἐκτίστ(η καὶ) ἐτελιώθη (*was founded and completed*) used in similar inscriptions from Mukhayyat and Ma'in.<sup>13</sup> In this respect, the first three letters on this line, MOH, must be an abbreviation for μον(αχοῦ) (*monk*) with omission of the expected abbreviation mark. The first Ε of ἐκτίστη (*was founded*) has been confused with an O, while the last letter of this verb is replaced by an abbreviation mark and the conjunction καὶ is omitted, a frequent omission on this kind of church dedications. The second verb, ἐτελιώθη (*was completed*) is correctly written and spelled, but the mosaic maker (or the model he was copying) added a redundant θη. At the end of the line the article τὸ is written with a very small o due to lack of space.

On L. 4 one can easily read the abbreviated term εὐκτέρ(ιον) (*oratory*) with an abbreviation mark crossing the P. It is not difficult to read the rest of the line, with the classical abbreviation ΑΓ(abbreviation mark) for ἀγ(ίου), as on l. 1. In the name Γεωργίου the mosaic maker wrote Π for ΠΙ. The last letter, N, is the only *nu* on this inscription to be noted N and not H.

On L. 5 the two H in a vertical line that are on the bottom left of the text are the frequent abbreviation for μην(ὶ) (*in the month*). The following name is Ἀπελλέω, an alternative spelling for Ἀπελλαίω. In the Macedonian calendar, the month of Apellaios is November-December.

The rest of the line must be the year in which this *eukterion* was built, and the date is indicated with

<sup>13</sup>. IGLS XXI 97, 100 (dated 535-536), 162 ; see above.

a classical formula: XP(abbreviation mark) for χρ(όνων), the numeral H (numeration mark) and ΙΗΔ(abbreviation mark). Χρ(όνων) ἡ' ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) means “*in the eighth year of the indiction*”. There follows the year of the provincial era. After the article τοῦ, the word (ἔτους) is omitted, and there is the numeral which could be read at first glance PKΔ, of which only the K and the Δ seem to be topped by a horizontal stroke marking the letters as numerals. As Blumell and Cianca first noticed, the apparent P is in fact Y but its horizontal stroke touches the top of the letter, which is of the same size (5 black *tesserae*) than the two others (**Fig. 2**). The two last letters, ΕΓ(abbreviation mark) mean nothing and have been read ἔτ(ους) with a confusion between T and Γ. One may as well read ΕΠ for ἐπ(αρχίας): “*of the province*”, which makes more sense. In l. 6 there is neither misspelling nor confusion of letters.

The meaning of this inscription is clear and it is very much like many other Byzantine church dedications already known in the area: thanks to the generosity of a pious monk who funded the project, an oratory dedicated to Saint George was built by the local paramonaire and dedicated in November or December 529 AD. The beginning of the text, “*In the name of the Holy Trinity*”, sounds like an invocation that prefigures the “*bismillah*” of the later Muslim inscriptions. The building itself is called an *eukterion* (and not an *ekklesia*): this is unusual but paralleled by a religious inscription from Bostra under Justinian and Theodora.<sup>14</sup>



Fig.2. Detail - the date on the inscription

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14. IGLS XIII n° 9137.

## Fragments of Carved Stones

from Tulul adh-Dhahab in the Lower Wadi az-Zarqā

Thomas Pola, Mohammad al-Balawnah, Wolfgang Thiel,  
Emmanuel Rehfeld, Tobias Krause

The interdisciplinary joint project of Dortmund University of Technology (TU Dortmund/Germany) and the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (DoA) found pieces of fragments of carved stones firstly in the second season of excavations (2006) on the Western of the Tulul adh-Dhahab in the lower Wadi az-Zarqā /Jordan (Pola 2006). One fragment shows the head of a lion, another one shows a person standing behind an animal (goat?). This essay is the first publication of these drawings.<sup>1</sup> Othmar Keel (Fribourg University/Switzerland) stresses the relevance of these finds: “The carved stones from Tall adh-Dhahab al-Gharbi are unique under several aspects. First, it is unusual to have iconography of this size from this region. Second, it is unusual for this period and region to have work in stone which shows only the contours. Third, the iconography, particularly the small human person with a goat is unusual<sup>2</sup>. According to Keel the carved stones found in 2006 should be dated into the time between 800-700 BC, i.e. the Assyrian time within Iron Age II.

### The Setting

The Tulul adh-Dhahab are located eight kilometres eastwards of the Abu az- Zighan crossing in Dayr ‘Alla /Jordan Valley. The only archaeological work done before the start of the joint project was the survey by R.L. Gordon in 1980 and 1982 in the lower Wadi az-Zarqā region (Gordon 1983 and 1984). It included the Tulul adh-Dhahab. According to the conventions given by Gordon the carved stones were found on terrace I (= the top plateau of the hill, 80 x 60 metres) in a quite clumsily constructed wall (sq. 161/162; **Figs 1 and 2**). A sondage in the third season (2007) proved the theory that this wall was constructed in Late Roman time (obviously before the earthquake of 363 AD) in order to protect the buildings eastwards of the wall.

### Periods of Settlement on the Western of the Tulul

The main periods of settlement as known after the fourth season (2008) are as follows:

- Neolithic period
- Late Bronze Age (two radiocarbon samples from the foundation of a building at the bottom of a Hellenistic-Roman tower in the city wall of terrace II indicated the time between 1.300 and 1.000 BC)<sup>3</sup>.
- Iron Age I and II.
- Late Hellenistic time (about 150-100 B.C.) to Late Roman (until 363 AD) period.

1. A report of the five seasons (from 2005-2009) by Th. Pola, F. Siegmund, and M. al-Balawnah is forthcoming in ADAJ. The project was realized because of the kind permission of the Director General of the DoA, Dr. Fawwaz al-Khraysheh and because of the generous support by the TU Dortmund, the Society of Friends of the TU Dortmund, Weckbacher Security Systems (Dortmund; Dirk Rutenhofer), Dr. med. Wolfgang Pola (Fehmarn/Germany), Dr. med. Roswitha Batereau-Neumann (Dortmund), Dr. med. Eugen Floren (Marl/Germany), Dr. Rüdiger Stolle (Meerbusch/Germany), and other private donators.

2. In a written statement from May 16th, 2007.

3. The authors thank Prof. Dr. Manfred Bayer (Faculty of Physics of the TU Dortmund) for his support.



**Fig. 1.** The carved stones found in 2006 *in situ*, partly collapsed after removal of the carved stones (2007).



**Fig. 2.** The wall in which the carved stones of 2006 were found,

Artefacts from the Persian period and from the Islamic time have not been detected yet.

## How the Carved Stones of 2006 Were Found

In 2006, while surveying the stones on the surface of the upper terrace III one piece pertaining to the lion fragment was found (later called “fragment B”). It must have tumbled down from the above mentioned wall in sq. 161/162 of the western end of terrace I. This piece matched exactly one of the bigger stones in the wall which contains the main part of the carving of the lion head. While cleaning it for documentation one of our sponsors, Dr. Roswitha Batereau-Neumann another carved stone under the stone with the carving of the lion. It shows a person behind a domestic animal (goat?). A drawing *in situ* was made by Wolfgang Thiel (**Fig. 3**) in addition to photographs by Emmanuel Rehfeld. It is clear that the carved stones were taken from any ancient building on terrace I in order to be reused in the wall. The carved stones are presently kept in the archives of the Archaeological Museum of as-Salt.<sup>4</sup>

In 2008, in sq. 94 on terrace I (towards the eastern slope) a fragment with three parallel bended lines was found. Although it is a carved stone, too, it seems to pertain to a fragment independent from the carved stones found in 2006.

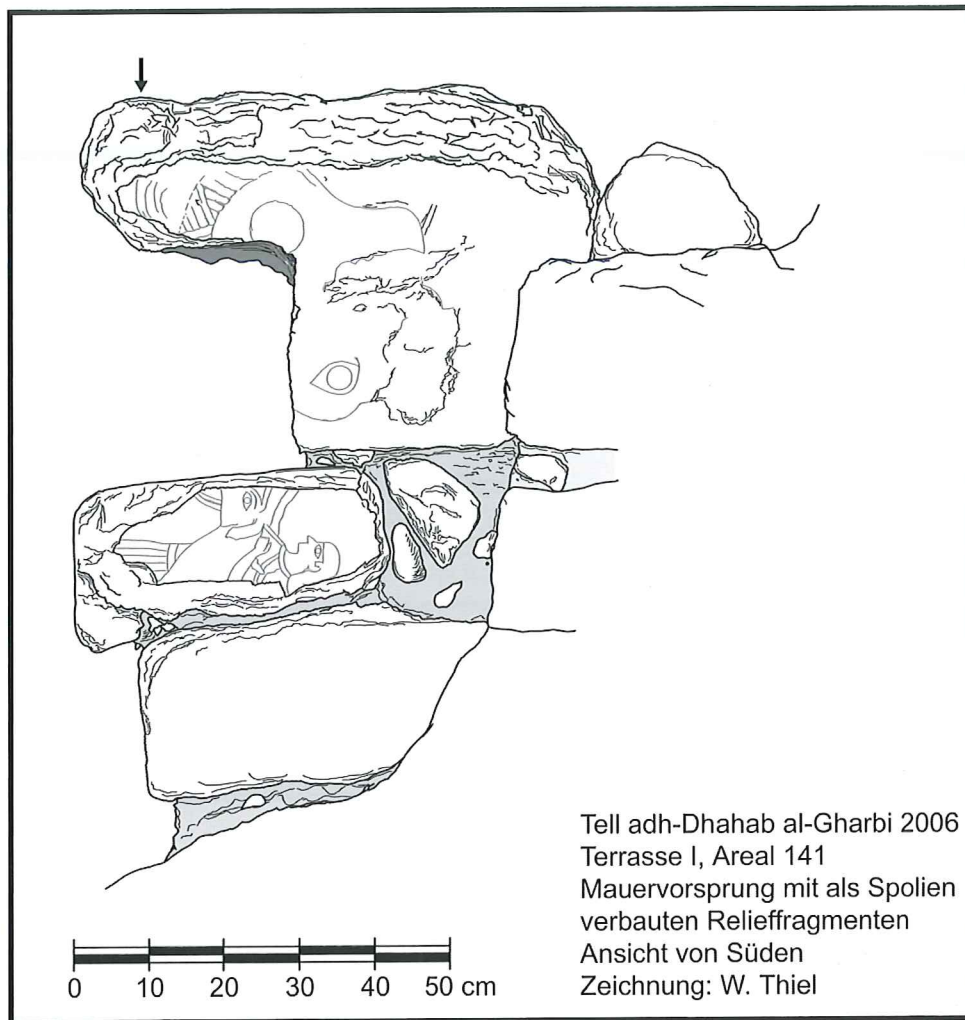
## Descriptions and Possible Parallels

As the “drawings” are no reliefs but *carved* there has been no parallel found yet in the literature concerning the iconography of Ancient Syria in the second and first millennium B.C. The carved stones found on the Western of the Tulul adh-Dhahab are obviously *unique*. Consequently it is difficult to determine its place within the history of iconography in Ancient Syria.

### A. The Lion Head

The yellow, partly reddish sandstone showing the roughly carved silhouette of a lion head (**Fig. 4**)

<sup>4</sup> The lion head was registered in the files of the excavation with the number TDW06.I.161/62.1500/1502, the person with the animal was registered with TDW06.I.161/62.1503.



**Fig.3.** Drawing of the carved stones of 2006 *in situ* (without fragment B) by Dr. Wolfgang Thiel.

weighs about 300 to 400 kilogram and was obviously was taken from the local bedrock. It consists of three exactly matching pieces: Fragment “B” was found on the upper terrace III, fragments “A” and “C” (formally *one* piece) were found in the above-mentioned Late Roman wall near the west slope of terrace I, in sq. 161/162. In 2007, unfortunately it broke into two pieces while moving it in the Museum of as-Salt. The drawing as a whole covers 45 x 35 centimetres.

The head of the lion is directed towards the left. Fragments “A” and “C”: The lion’s nose is not preserved. Although it is a silhouette the eye is carved from frontal perspective like the multiplicity of approaches in Egyptian Art. The lightly opened mouth with visible teeth and the throat make it plausible to identify it with a lion. Moreover, there are only few depictions from leopards known until now. The motif of the lion is much more frequent for apotropaic purposes. Fragment “B” shows the ear and a kind of stripe leading downwards and obviously continuing in fragment “C”. Iconographic parallels demonstrate that this stripe is not a kind of decoration but typical for depicting the hair of a male lion (Strawn 2005)<sup>5</sup>. It must be presumed that the lines right of the stripe belong to the hair of the lion, too. Among the parallels which can be found in the monograph of Strawn (2005) there are also some concerning the eyes,<sup>6</sup> the mouth,<sup>7</sup> and the ears.<sup>8</sup> Although striking parallels are the seal of “Shema, the servant of Jerobeam” from the eighth century B.C. (Strawn 2005: Fig. 3.96) and the Baal stela from al-Qadibun (kept in the museum of Tartus) from 1.200 to 1.000 BC

5. Strawn fig. 4.112; 4.179; 4.198; 4.254; 4.315, and photograph 1015.

6. Strawn fig. 3.23; 3.96; 4.122; 4.235; 4.254 (= ANEP 471).

7. Strawn fig. 3.92; 3.96; 4.122; 4.235.

8. Strawn fig. 3.92; 4.112; 4.198; 4.235; 4.254.



**Fig. 4.** Photograph of the stone showing the silhouette of a lion.

(Strawn 2005: Fig. 4.235) it is very difficult to find hints for the date of the carving. In view of the weight of the stone it is almost sure that it was taken from an ancient ruin on terrace I in order to be reused in the Late Roman wall.

### **B. The Person behind an Animal**

Compared with the carving of the lion the “drawing” of the person behind an animal on yellow local sandstone (**Fig. 5 and 6**) shows much smoother lines. It cannot be excluded that the side to be carved was prepared with a thin layer of plaster in which the carving was achieved (**Fig. 7**). This explains why the carving is slightly damaged. The stone, however, is as big as the stone showing the lion. It weighs about 300-400 kilogram (**Fig. 1**). It was broken before its removal from the wall but the carving has not been damaged. The carving covers 35 x 11.5 centimetres.

The stone fragment depicts the silhouette of a human standing behind an animal which is carved as a silhouette, too. Regarding the animal only its head (the mouth is incomplete) and its throat are visible. The head contains an eye, a lop ear, and a horn. The horn and especially the lop ear direct towards an identification with a *goat*. Not typical for a goat is the shape of the throat. Consequently, the identification with a goat is not completely sure.

The person behind the animal has his/her hair covered, his/her eye is directed towards the viewer (like the lion's eye) in accordance with the rules of Egyptian iconography, and is beardless. As there is nothing known about eunuchs (in the literal sense) in Ancient Syria the person should be identified with a woman or a child. An adult woman appears to be too small in comparison with the goat (provided there is no hierarchic scaling in this carving)<sup>9</sup>. This leads to the conclusion that it might be a child, female or male. The person's dress is characterized by pleats visible under the goat. The right hand is possibly seized over the goat's head; the left hand possibly lies on the neck of the animal.

<sup>9</sup> The opposite case (a person too big compared with the associated animal) can be seen in a bronze plastic from Syria depicting a person on a donkey (Staubli 1991, 103-104 and fig. 21).



**Fig. 5.** Photograph of the stone showing a person behind an animal, front view.



**Fig. 6.** Drawing (1:1) of the stone showing a person behind an animal (by Emmanuel Rehfeld and Tobias Krause).

A person before an animal is known from a group of persons “bearing offerings and making gesture of the upraised hands” (ANEP) on a relief on the Ahiram sarcophagus.<sup>10</sup> But the carved stone from the western of the Tulul adh-Dhahab can not have been part of the depiction of a political tributary scene because in these only adult *men* would have been presented in this context (Bär 1996: 57-213). Moreover, a goat was not valuable enough to be depicted within a tributary scene. Consequently, the alternative to a tributary interpretation is a *cultic* one: The carving is a fragment of a scene depicting a family with many persons of different age and gender bringing an animal (or several animals) for a sacrifice (compare the Ahiram sarcophagus<sup>11</sup>). This leads to the conclusion *that this carved stone was primarily created for a sanctuary*<sup>12</sup>



**Fig. 7.** Thin layer of plaster on the stone showing a person behind an animal.

The dress<sup>13</sup> of the person shows a type of pleats (in German: “Quetschfalten”) added to a textile fragment without pleats below the hips which can be found in Neo-Assyrian art in the time of Tikulti-Ninurta II. (early ninth century BC; Wäfler 1975)<sup>14</sup>. Another parallel can be found in the Neo-Hittite art (1.000-600 BC; Watson 1987: 41 with fig. 77). The third parallel is a relief from Zincirli (Sam'al) from the grave of a rich woman depicting a woman sitting on a throne and dressed by a garment with pleats covering the legs of the person. Moreover, Reimpell demonstrated that this kind of dress with added pleats at the bottom is also known in Late Babylonian time (Reimpell 1921)<sup>15</sup>.

To sum up, as there are no direct parallels to the technique of carving stones on the one hand and to the motif of the cultic scene on the other hand it must be concluded that the carved stones were made by *local* craftsmen who only show little influence from Egypt (eyes of the lion and the person) and from Mesopotamia including Ancient Syria (dress of the person).

## Conclusions

The carved stones from sq. 161/162 point to a settlement in the ninth or eighth century BC. As the stones have an approximate weight of about 400 kg it is likely that they were taken from a ruin on the plateau for constructing a protective wall at the boarder of the settlement of the plateau. Moreover, as these fragments possibly were not taken from different but from *one* building it is possible that the lion head had apotropaic function at an entrance construction. The other fragment (goat with woman or young person) seems to belong to a *cultic scene*. The iconography of the presentation of tribute in the Assyrian and Babylonian (even Persian) time (Walser 1966) is restricted to depict adult male.

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διαγράψω (“to draw a line”).

13. The authors thank Ms. Petra Waterman (Dortmund) for her kindly investigation concerning the dress.

14. Page 206 and in the plates volume, map no. 3 from Nimrud, central palace, room F.

15. Page 28, 64, 66-67.

Consequently it is quite unusual to show a woman or a male/female child. As the person behind the goat is too small for an adult person (even a beardless adult man) it seems to be a young person, male or female. As the depiction of children is only known from Elamite art of the second millennium, which is geographically and chronologically really far from the az- Zarqā Valley the depiction of a goat and a child behind it might have been part of a *cultic scene* originally comprising a whole family walking towards (or within) a sanctuary. *This implies the possibility that there was a sanctuary on the top of the mountain in Iron Age II time.* Of course, further investigation in the site is necessary in order to find more fragments of the carved stones, hopefully.

## Appendix (August 2009)

After this manuscript had been kindly accepted by the DoA new fragments discovered in the fifth campaign (2009) confirm the analysis given above. Five fragments simply show carved lines which can only be interpreted within their primary context<sup>16</sup>. Another fragment was found by Miguel Ximénez-Carillo in the slope near sq. 161/162 on terrace I (Fig. 8). Its smoothed surface is partly covered by ornamental lines which can be interpreted as fire (?), water (?), or a botanical motive<sup>17</sup>. Its style is comparable with the style of the lions hair from the finds of 2006. Another fragment<sup>18</sup> reveals the technique of the carving: A chain of small pits was made with the help of an iron pencil. In a second working step these pits were linked with each other. Another fragment was found on terrace I in a square pertaining to the roman building(s) east of the southern peristyle court (Fig. 9). Two smoothed surfaces are situated in a rectangular way (270°). This proves that the carved stones pertained to a *composition of motives* within a room (cf. above Ez 8:10: “all around”) or several rooms. On one surface there are only three parallel lines visible. The other surface shows the silhouette of the head and the upper part of the breast of a young and beardless person carved in a manner comparable with the person behind the goat found in 2006 (esp. hair, eye, nose, and mouth are very similar). In contrast to the find of 2006 the person is directed towards the right margin (this supports the thesis that the carved stones found until now belong to a composition of motives). Moreover, the person is closely directed to an item which can be interpreted as a kind of musical instrument (of a cultic scene or ornaments of a palace?). What is very peculiar is that there are three parallel lines between the mouth of the person and this instrument. The carved stones found in 2006 and 2009 doubtless need further investigation and intensive scholarly discussion.



Fig. 8. TDW09.I.93.23.7062 (preliminary photograph). Fig. 9. TDW09.I.77.21.7022 (preliminary photograph).

16. TDW09.I.177.0.10000, TDW09.I.177.0.10008, TDW09.I.109.0.7040, TDW09.I.0.0.10010, TDW09.I.0.0.10011.

17. TDW09.I.93.0.7062.

18. TDW09.I.109.0.7040.

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# 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 back<sup>1</sup>. 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. Jamme<sup>2</sup>. 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”<sup>3</sup>. 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 Beitin<sup>4</sup>. 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 1900<sup>5</sup>, who either had found the piece himself or had acquired it from a local antiquities dealer in South Arabia<sup>6</sup>. Yadin felt that the South Arabian specimen could have been dropped at Beitin after 1926 AD<sup>7</sup>. 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)<sup>8</sup>. 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 unsolved<sup>9</sup> 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 claims<sup>10</sup>) 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 9<sup>th</sup> cent. BC.<sup>11</sup> A late 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> 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)<sup>12</sup>. Even though this seal has been used as important evidence of Arabian trade with Palestine during the first half of the first Millennium BC<sup>13</sup>, 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 7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century BC Iron Age Edomite site of Ghrareh, "at the head of the Wadi Delaghah"<sup>14</sup>. This strategic site was well-defended and its architecture may have served some political purpose<sup>15</sup>. Several luxury items found at the site such as finely painted Assyrian influenced "Busayra" ware and a cosmetic limestone palette also suggest some political significance<sup>16</sup>. 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 uncovered<sup>17</sup>. 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. Knauf<sup>18</sup>. Its script may be identified as Hijazi-Thamudic<sup>19</sup>. One letter (the final lam), however, is found to be Proto-Arabic<sup>20</sup>. 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]").<sup>22</sup>

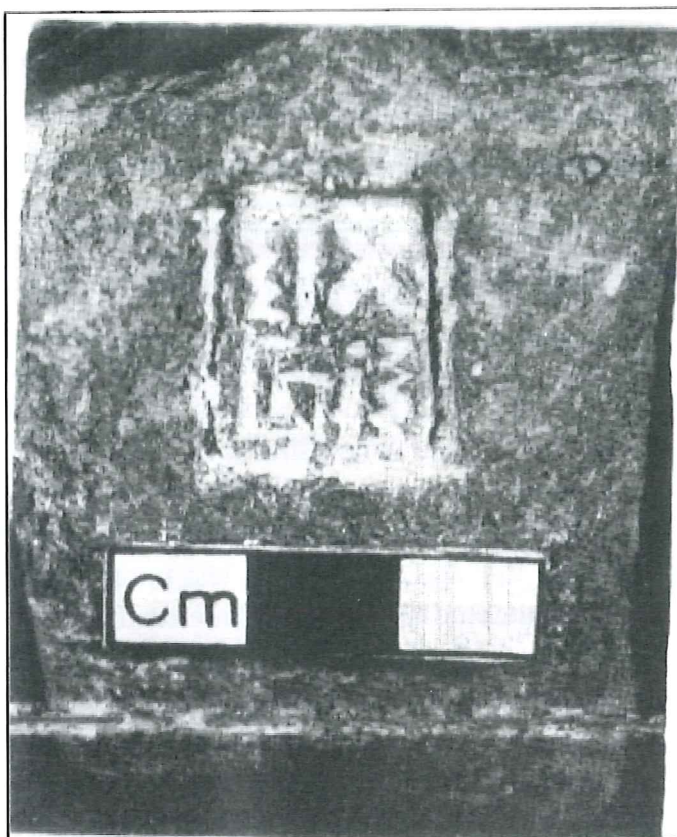


Fig. 2. Jar handle from Ghrareh.

Not only are high ranking females attested in Neo-Assyrian and local ancient Arabic inscriptions of the 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC<sup>23</sup>, as will be seen below, the same name (possibly also of a high ranking female) is found on a 7<sup>th</sup> 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-<sup>c</sup>Ulā near Māidan Sālih...) politically in the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C."<sup>24</sup>, 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 <sup>c</sup>bhkm / <sup>`</sup>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)<sup>25</sup>. 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 experienced<sup>26</sup>.

Although the individual characters reveal late Iron Age Trans-Jordanian palaeographic traits (such as Ammonite ‘kaph’ and Edomite ‘mem’)<sup>27</sup>, 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’).<sup>28</sup> 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 <sup>c</sup>‘Abhakam’, which is found on an unprovenanced Moabite or Edomite seal of a man named ‘Hakam’<sup>29</sup>. One could also compare the ancient South Arabian names ‘hkm’ and ‘hkmt’<sup>30</sup>. The first element <sup>c</sup>‘b’ is uncertain and Beit-Arieh suggests that it may be a shortened form for <sup>c</sup>‘bd’<sup>31</sup>. R. Zadok also assumes an Arabic origin for this name and compares the name <sup>c</sup>‘Abdulahakim and suggests that hakim originated as an epithet<sup>32</sup>. 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 Ashurbanipal<sup>33</sup>. 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 6<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>34</sup>. 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 bulla<sup>35</sup>, locally produced painted 'Busayra' (Assyrian imitated) ware<sup>36</sup>, wedge impressed pottery<sup>37</sup>.



Fig. 3. Stamp Seal from Khirbet Ghazze.

Inscription 2: lmlklb<sup>c</sup> c<sup>b</sup>d hmlk

A bulla with this inscription (divided into 4 registers: with a depiction of three buildings or altars in the first register<sup>38</sup> 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 season<sup>39</sup>. 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 site<sup>40</sup>. This archaeological horizon is now, based on the discovery of late 4<sup>th</sup> 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 7<sup>th</sup> 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 Edomite<sup>41</sup>, ‘bet’ and ‘cayin’ are still closed (atypical for Ammonite and Edomite 6<sup>th</sup> century BC ‘Aramaizing’ scripts)<sup>42</sup>. The name of the seal owner ‘mlkb<sup>c</sup>’ is unattested and its etymology is unclear. Suggestions have been made concerning its correct reading, however. A. Lemaire<sup>43</sup> suggests that the scribe mistakenly transposed ‘lamed’ of Ba<sup>c</sup>al to precede its initial ‘bet’. Although a name such as Melek-Ba<sup>c</sup>al 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 minister<sup>44</sup>. E. Puech compares ‘lb<sup>c</sup>’ with feminine lb<sup>c</sup>t in Thamudic inscriptions from Wadi el-<sup>c</sup>Ain (3<sup>rd</sup> century AD), but its etymology remains unknown<sup>45</sup>. Alternatively lb<sup>c</sup> may perhaps be compared with South Arabic ‘lb<sup>c</sup>m’, ‘(my) heart is <sup>c</sup>Am’ (consequently this would be shorter name for ‘mlk-lb<sup>c</sup> [m]), but such an abbreviation for (DN) <sup>c</sup>Am remains unattested<sup>46</sup>. Due to so many unanswered questions, an Arabian etymology can therefore only be one possibility among others.

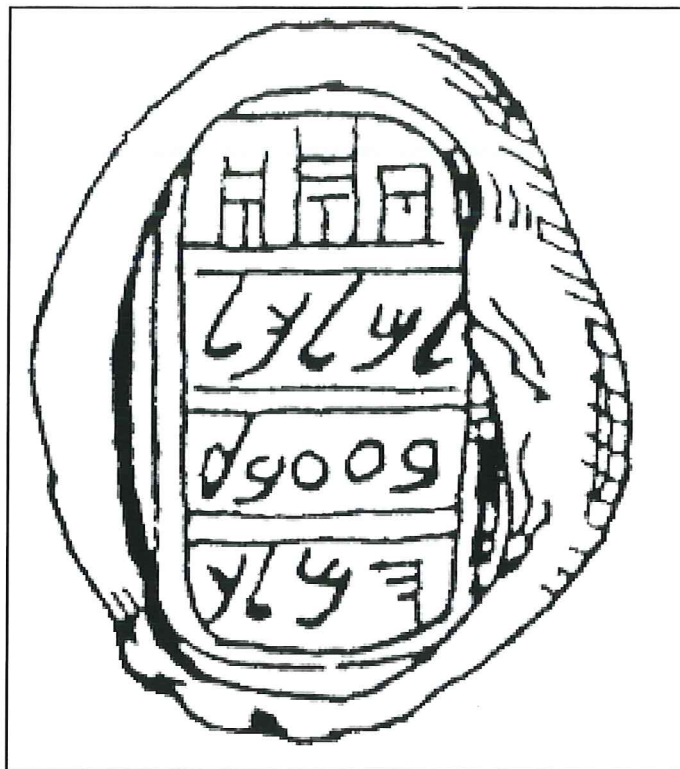


Fig. 4. Plasticine Impression made from cast of the Busayra Bulla (line-drawing: courtesy of Dr P. Bienkowski; photo and impression by the author)

The schematic representation of hatched buildings or altars in the top register recalls a similar depiction on an anepigraphic seal from Busayra<sup>47</sup>.

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 recovered<sup>48</sup>, 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 suggests<sup>49</sup>) 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 seal<sup>50</sup> was found in a terrace fill underneath the late 7<sup>th</sup> century fortress of Stratum IV at 'Ain al-husb during the 1994 excavation season<sup>51</sup>. 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<sup>c</sup> bulla from Busayra (see below), the Qos<sup>c</sup>anal stamp jar handles from Tall al-Khlayfi<sup>52</sup>. 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 7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC<sup>53</sup>. Both names have been identified as Arabian and have been translated with the words 'steadfast' and 'violent' respectively<sup>54</sup>.

Its iconography may be compared with a number of similar seals from the Southern Levant, e.g. from Cis- and Trans-Jordan<sup>55</sup>. A derivation from North Syrian/Aramaic glyptic has been suggested<sup>56</sup>. 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').<sup>57</sup> 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"<sup>58</sup>. Many of these can be dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, which indeed fits the stratigraphy at <sup>c</sup>Ain 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 Busayra<sup>59</sup>. 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 depicted<sup>60</sup>. 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 6<sup>th</sup> cent. BC. This date is also supported by the shape of the letters 'waw' and 'taw'<sup>61</sup>. 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 origins<sup>62</sup>), but Millard is probably right when he suggests an Arabian origin, even if he list no concrete examples<sup>63</sup>.

53. E.g. nun: WSS 859, and Eggler / 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<sub>l</sub>kt 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 & Uehlinger 1993, p. 181; Ornan in Sass and Uehlinger 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: Eggler / 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.

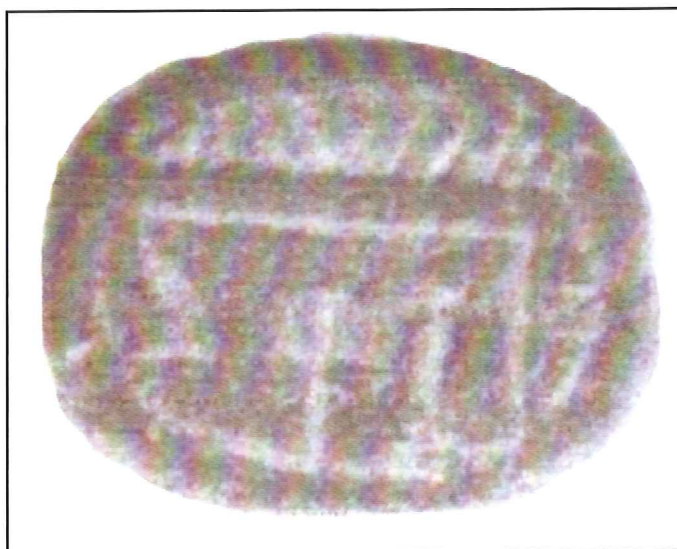
63. Millard 2002, p. 430. This author was also unable to find any parallel for the name.

## 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 thesis<sup>64</sup>) is found on a jar royal type jar handle<sup>65</sup>. 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 mount<sup>66</sup>. 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/ perfume<sup>67</sup>. A great quantity of late Iron Age diagnostic pottery found at the site clearly dates Stratum V to the second half of 7<sup>th</sup> - early 6<sup>th</sup> 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 stratum<sup>68</sup>.

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 impressions<sup>69</sup>.

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 7<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>70</sup>. She presents several examples which lack the upper rays<sup>71</sup>. 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 symbol<sup>72</sup>. Although unprovenanced, the name of the seal bearer has been interpreted as of Arabian origin, i.e. 'whbdh' (cf. 'whb', 'to give')<sup>73</sup>. Several parallels of that Arabian name are found on Aramaic ostraca from 4<sup>th</sup> century BC Beersheba<sup>74</sup>. An Arabian ruler by the name Uabu/Wahb is also attested in the annals of the Assyrian monarch Esarhaddon<sup>75</sup>. Schematized 2-winged sun disks are also attested on seals from South Arabia<sup>76</sup>.



**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 indisputable<sup>77</sup>. The name 'nrt' is as yet unattested in the ancient Israelite/Judahite onomasticon<sup>78</sup>. 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 7<sup>th</sup> 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 <sup>c</sup>Azaryah, was excavated in Jerusalem in 1976 south of the Dome of the Rock<sup>79</sup>. 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 <sup>c</sup>Ain 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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