

THE SEAL IMPRESSIONS FROM ʿEZBET RUSHDI, AREA R/III OF TELL EL-DAB^CA: PRELIMINARY REPORT

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The excavation of area R/III¹, situated south-east of the modern village of ʿEzbet Rushdi, began in the fall campaign of 2010, and continued – though at a smaller scale- in spring 2011, when a test trench was made in order to reach the lowest settlement layers. This has shown that the area was used during the whole 15th dynasty and was first occupied in the beginning of this period. The excavations brought to light quite a large city compound, made up of housing units, presumably arranged along a

parallel road network (fig. 1). The uppermost layer can be dated to the late Second Intermediate Period (first half of the 16th century B.C.).

Among the archaeological finds, such as pottery, lithics, faience objects and pumice fragments, seal impressions on lumps of clay constitute a significant group of discoveries, totalling 470 pieces². Due to the extreme difficulty of sieving muddy soils, systematic recovery of such small finds at Tell el-Dab^a was not possible until the development of

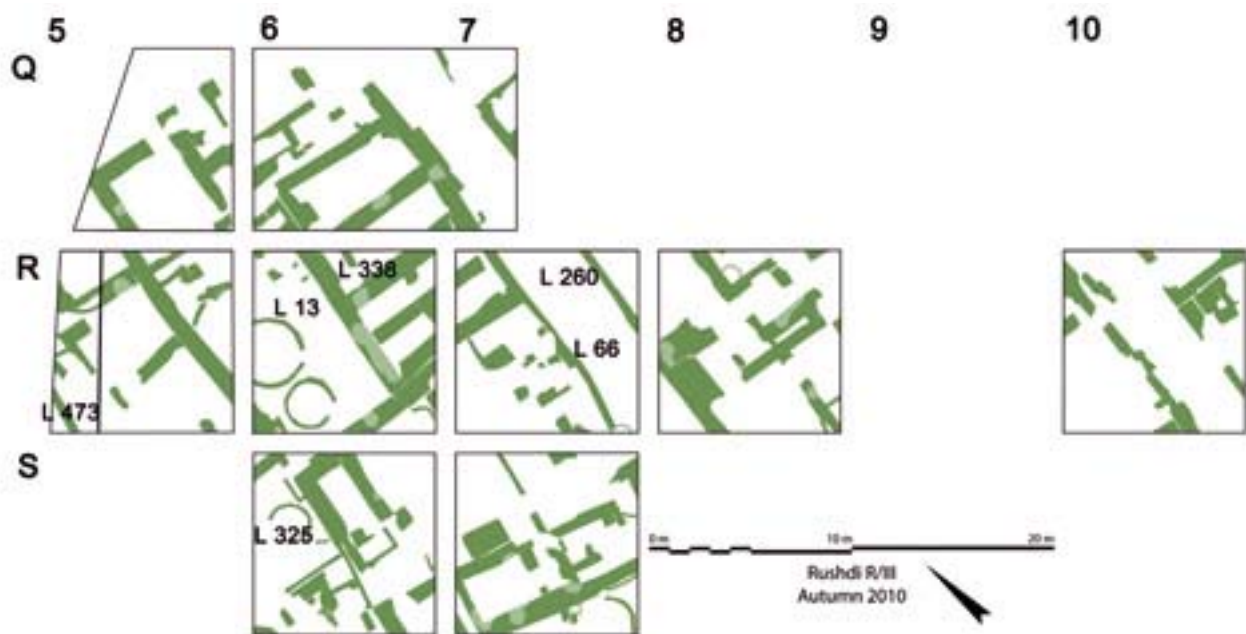


Fig. 1. Plan of R/III with the indication of the discussed loci

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This manuscript was submitted for publication in 2011, since then, further fieldwork and study of the material has been done, allowing reconsidering and revising some of the previous conclusions. For recent interpretations concerning the chronology of the area R/III s. FORSTNER-MÜLLER – ROSE, 2012, 184; FORSTNER-MÜLLER – ROSE, in preparation, “*Vorbericht über das Areal R/III in ʿEzbet Rushdi*”, E&L.

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¹ See FORSTNER-MÜLLER – ROSE same volume.

² The excavated area, in which the 470 sealings were found, corresponds to 9 squares (10 x 10 m each). The investigation of the complex was completed in spring 2012, excavating 13 more squares. During this campaign more than 600 further seal impressions were recovered which will not be taken into consideration in this paper because their documentation is ongoing.



Fig. 2, Inv. Nr. 9467 X, obverse and reverse



Fig. 3, Inv. Nr. 9445 O, obverse and reverse

a new sieving method³. Thereafter, the percentage of seal impressions among the other finds increased⁴, and the group from R/III constitutes the largest group of seal impressions ever found in an excavation area at the site.

Seal Impressions⁵

The seal impressions found at Tell el-Dab^a are made using stamp seals, incised on the bases of scarabs.

The number of *matrices* found is small in relation to their impressions. Nineteen scarabs have been recovered, but only 13 were carved and used as stamps⁶.

Apart from sealings and scarabs there are also other kinds of *cretulae*. The first (Inv. Nr. 9467 X) is a multi-stamped *solid ovoid cretula*⁷, originally surrounding a rope; the other two (Inv. Nr. 9445 O and Q) are round and flat lumps of clay with no trace of suspension and both bear the impression of the same seal (figs. 2–3). These objects were also used in the accounting system but, for the persons

in charge of it, they probably had a different purpose and meaning from the more common seal impressions and they were likely not used to preserve the integrity of containers but to *register* a transaction⁸.

For the entire group of 470 impressions, the majority of them can be ascribed to the buildings of the later Second Intermediate Period and later, and a smaller percentage (9,4%) can be attributed to earlier *strata*, only reached in the test trench mentioned above.

Interesting results emerged from counting unstamped lumps of clay. The *loci* with a higher percentage of unstamped sealings fragments showed only few (2 or 3 pieces) or no seal impressions. This could suggest that after opening the sealed container and breaking the *cretula*, the part with the impression was kept, probably as a receipt, and the rest was thrown away and possibly periodically collected and removed. Otherwise, it could suggest that, in certain areas of the complex, occurred more frequent administrative operations than in other sectors and that, in order to advance rapidly, the containers were secured only affixing an unstamped lump of clay.

Patterns and designs of R/III seal impressions

The majority of the seal impressions from R/III – many only fragmentary – shows typical scrolls and spirals (both unlinked and interlocking)⁹ patterns. Other motifs include floral designs¹⁰, concentric

³ Consisting in letting the soil of each *locus* (archeological deposit) dry for 3–4 days before sieving it.

⁴ 230 Sealings in F/II and 70 in H/VI; BIETAK, 2004; SARTORI, 2009; ZEGGER, 2009.

⁵ “Seal impression” is a synecdochical term used (among many others, used in more or less specific meaning, such as [lat.] *cretula*, *bullae*, [engl.] sealing, clay sealing, [germ.] Siegelabdruck, Tonverschluss, [fr.] empreinte de sceaux/sur bulle, [it.] impronta su bolla, sigillatura) to define an object made of ductile material – usually clay – bearing the impres-

sion of a seal. FRANGIPANE, 2007, 16; KEEL, 1995, 116–117.

⁶ For the scarabs of Avaris s. the detailed study of MLINAR, 2001a, b, 2004, 2006.

⁷ FRANGIPANE, 2007, 19.

⁸ *ibidem*.

⁹ Design classes 2A–B, TUFNELL, 1984, Pl. IV–VI; BEN-TOR, 2007, 12–14, 74, 124, 159.

¹⁰ Design class 1E, TUFNELL, 1984, Pl. II–III; BEN-TOR, 2007, 10–12, 72–74, 122–123, 157–158.



Fig. 4, Inv. Nr. 9464, obverse and reverse



Fig. 5, Inv. Nr. 9466, obverse and reverse

circles¹¹, coiled and “woven” patterns¹², *sm3-t3wy* designs¹³, *formulae* and cartouches¹⁴ often in association with the so-called *anra*-motif. Beyond these subjects, seal impressions displaying human, royal and divine figures (both masculine and feminine), and real and imaginary animals¹⁵ typical of the late Palestinian series¹⁶ are also part of the assemblage.

A group of 7 sealings bearing two Hyksos rulers' names and/or their titulary deserves particular attention and will be discussed here in detail. Six of them can be referred to the king Khyan and one possibly to one of his successors, Apophis.

Inv. Nr. 9464: R/III – q/6-7, *Planum 2, Stratum b*¹⁷, L¹⁸ 338 (fig. 4¹⁹)

This is the best-preserved seal impression of Khyan in R/III. It shows three fields delimited by two pairs

¹¹ Design class 4, TUFNELL, 1984, Pl. XXI–XXII; BEN-TOR, 2007, 22–23, 87, 136–137, 168–169.

¹² Design class 6, TUFNELL, 1984, Pl. XXIV–XXVII; BEN-TOR, 2007, 24–26, 89–90, 138–140, 169–171.

¹³ Design class, 3A1, TUFNELL, 1984, Pl. VII; BEN-TOR, 2007, 15–16, 75–76, 125, 159–160.

¹⁴ Design classes 3C-D, TUFNELL, 1984, Pl. XVI–XVII; BEN-TOR, 2007, 20–22, 83–85, 133–134, 165–166.

¹⁵ Design classes 9B-F, TUFNELL, 1984, Pl. XXXVI–XLI; BEN-TOR, 2007, 175–178.



Fig. 6, Inv. Nr. 9465, obverse and reverse



Fig. 7, Inv. Nr. 9446 N, obverse and reverse

of thin vertical elements²⁰. Two of the three columns are almost entirely preserved, while the upper part of the third one is missing. The two lateral fields both show the *formula whm ʿnh* “live again”²¹, and the central one contains the royal-name *h3n* “Khyan”, surmounted by the Hyksos titulary *hk3 h3swt* “Ruler of the foreign countries”. The upper part of the *hk3* sceptre and the “foreign land” hieroglyph are missing. The clay used is red and fine, and the sealing was fired after being removed from the container. The reverse of the sealing shows the impressions of a rope and a wooden peg, while one other side of the sealing reveals the impression of a wooden surface. In all likelihood, a wooden box or chest, provided with a pair of knobs (one on the cover and one on one side), that were tied up together with a rope to close the container and seal it.

Inv. Nr. 9466: R/III – r/7, *Planum 3-4, Stratum c*, L 260 (fig. 5)

This sealing seems to have been made using the same *matrix* as Inv. Nr. 9464, although here the

¹⁶ The Late Palestinian Series dates back to the later phases of the Middle Bronze Age, more precisely to the late MB IIB (generally referred to as MB IIC). BEN-TOR, 2007, 155.

¹⁷ For the stratigraphy of the area, see FORSTNER MÜLLER-ROSE, same volume.

¹⁸ L is abbreviation for *locus*.

¹⁹ The pictures of seal impressions are all at a scale 2:1.

²⁰ TUFNELL, 1984, Pl. LVI: 3215; KEEL, 2013, Gezer n. 247.

²¹ Though the half of the right *formula* is missing, it can be likely so reconstructed.



Fig. 8, Inv. Nr. 9452 R, obverse and reverse



Fig. 9, Inv. Nr. 9466 N, obverse and reverse



Fig. 10, Inv. Nr. 9467, obverse and reverse

preserved stamped surface is more damaged than the former piece: the left column is almost entirely preserved, the central one with the titulary is damaged at both extremities, and the right column shows the ζnh at its bottom and the lower part of whm in the middle. The clay used is brownish and fine, and seems to have been fired after the sealing was broken. The reverse and upper sides show the same kind of impressions as Inv. Nr. 9464 and could be interpreted as above.

Inv. Nr. 9465: R/III – r/5, *Planum 12, Stratum g*, L 473 (fig. 6)

The third sealing shows only the lower part of the impression. It consists of a paired scrolls border, interrupted at the bottom by part of the royal ascription $di \zeta nh$ “given life”²². The border is fully preserved only at the lower left side of the seal impression; the opposite side preserves only traces of two

scrolls. The central field is occupied by a cartouche, whose upper part is lost. What remains is the lower rounded portion of a hieroglyph, followed by two ii and n at the bottom. It is plausible to read the first hieroglyph as a h^{23} and to assume that the royal name in this cartouche is that of Khyan. The lack of an β^{24} in the name may be considered a short form or a mistake. A similar example is provided by a scarab in the Egyptian Department of the British Museum²⁵: if we consider the lower part of this seal, the only difference is the lack of n instead of β . The seal Inv. Nr. 9465 is different from the first two and it is stylistically comparable to the seal of Khyan found on 40 impressions from the recent excavation of an administrative complex at Tell Edfu, where it was recovered together with 6 seal impressions bearing the name of Sobekhotep IV and a ceramic assemblage of the 13th dynasty²⁶.

The clay used is fine and dark grey, and the sealing seems to have been fired. On the reverse of the *cretula* there are linear impressions from a wooden surface.

Inv. Nr. 9446 N: R/III – q/6-7, *Planum 2, Stratum b*, L 338 (fig. 7)

The place of origin of this seal impression is the same *locus* in which Inv. Nr. 9464 was found. Judging from the part of the sealing preserved (the upper left sector of the impressed surface), the seal used for both impressions seems to have been the same. The clay is fine and grey and the reverse of the sealing shows rope impressions.

Inv. Nr. 9452 R: R/III – r/7, *Planum 2-3, Stratum b*, L 66 (fig. 8)

Only the upper part of this sealing is preserved. It could have been stamped using the same *matrix* of the other Khyan seal impressions found at R/III (except Inv. Nr. 9465). Nevertheless – if it is not the result of a deformation occurred on the moist *cretula* – a slight difference in the dimensions and in the distance between the two paired vertical elements, dividing the field into three columns, suggests the – though remote – possibility that a second very similar *matrix* was in use for the same ruler. The clay is the same fine type used for the other

²² Design class 7B3 (ii) or 7C3 (ii), TUFNELL, 1984, Pl. XXXI–XXXII; BEN-TOR, 2007, 143–144. On this seal impression, the royal ascription is misspelled postposing di after ζnh .

²³ Aa 1 in the list of hieroglyphic signs, GARDINER, 1957, 539.

²⁴ G 1 in the list of hieroglyphic signs, GARDINER, 1957, 467.

²⁵ TUFNELL, 1984, Pl. LVI: 3217; BEN-TOR, 2007, Pl. 43, 5.

²⁶ MÖLLER – MAROUARD, 2011. The seal impression from R/III seems to differ from the ones recovered at Tell Edfu only in the absence of β and in the inversion of the $di \zeta nh$ formula.

sealings, brownish in colour and it has been fired. The reverse of the *cretula* shows rope impressions and a rounded wooden surface.

Inv. Nr. 9466 N: R/III – s/6, *Planum 3, Stratum c*, L 325 (fig. 9)

This seal impression is the last one of this group of materials that can be attributed to king Khyan. It belongs to a group of 15 sealings found in the same layer. Although, in this case, the impression is clearly altered by the deformation – probably caused by the removal of the still moist *cretula* – the *matrix* used to seal might be the same as Inv. Nr. 9464, 9466, and 9446 N. Here only the upper part of the tripartite sealing is preserved, with the whole titulary, the first hieroglyph of the royal name and the two uppermost *ḥnh* of the *formula whm ḥnh*. The clay is fine, grey and possibly fired. The reverse shows rope impressions, and features indicating the sealing of a wooden object: a wooden box or chest.

Inv. Nr. 9467: R/III – r/6, *Planum 0-1, Stratum a*, L 13 (fig. 10)

This consists of only the upper half of the impression. It shows two cobras addorsed and linked²⁷ with a cartouche between them. Above the cartouche appears a decorative motif made up of two *šwt* “feathers” flanking a papyrus stem. The cartouche seems to bear the prenomen of Apophis *ḥ3-wsr-rḥ*²⁸, written with a corruption of *ḥ3* in *n*²⁹. The closest parallels for the cartouche are TUFNELL, 1984, Pl. LXII: 3456-9, 3460 and especially 3441 and 3453, though none of these displays addorsed and linked cobras in connection with Apophis’ royal name. Cobras appear – though not as part of a pair – on some Apophis’ seals (TUFNELL, 1984, Pl. LXII: 3437, 3442, 3443, 3446), but the scarab design class *cobras addorsed*³⁰ shows closer parallels for

this iconography in association with cartouches, although usually containing only *formulae* or pseudo-hieroglyphs³¹.

The clay used for Inv. Nr. 9467 is fine and grey. The sealing could have been fired, possibly not intentionally, judging from the varying colour of the surface. The reverse of the *cretula* shows traces of use for textiles.

Conclusions

The seal impressions bearing the name of Khyan or part of his titulary (9464, 9466, 9446 N, 9452 R, 9466 N) as well as the possible one of Apophis – both rulers of the 15th dynasty – represent *termini post quos* for the dating of the building. Likewise, a preliminary study of the pottery showed that *strata b-c* may be dated to the late Second Intermediate Period³². From these *strata*, not only 15th dynasty but also some 13th dynasty seal impressions were found. The 13th dynasty material could be interpreted as residual or, on the other hand, it may suggest that *older* seals remained in use into later periods³³, showing either the continuity of administrative practices from the 13th to the 15th dynasty at Avaris – which somehow referred to earlier usages – or the appropriation/use of older seals³⁴. On this subject, the recent discoveries at Tell Edfu need to be taken into consideration for the interpretation of the archaeological contexts related to the Khyan seal impressions at both sites³⁵.

The seal impressions from *Strata b-c* bearing the name of Khyan seem to come from dumping layers and to be in secondary deposition contexts. Similarly, royal Hyksos sealings were found in secondary contexts in the Tuthmoside layers of the palace district of 'Ezbet Helmi. Nine *cretulae*, bearing the impression of the Hyksos ruler Yaquubhar, countersealed one time by a 13th dynasty official’s seal, and one other by a seal representing a crocodile

²⁷ Design class 3B1b, TUFNELL, 1984, Pl. IX; BEN-TOR, 2007, 128, 161.

²⁸ About the identification of *ḥ3-wsr-rḥ* with Apophis and its rejection s. respectively: BEN-TOR – ALLEN – ALLEN, 1999, 64–65; BEN-TOR, 2007, 108-109 and RYHOLT, K. 1997, 64 (quoted in BEN-TOR – ALLEN – ALLEN, 1999, 64–65).

²⁹ N 35 in the list of hieroglyphic signs, GARDINER, 1957, 490; parallel for a similar spelling of this royal name is TUFNELL, 1984, Pl. LXII, 3441, where *n* replaces *ḥ*. One other possibility, to interpret the sign replacing the two phones *ḥ3*, could be reading it as a corruption of N 31 of the list of hieroglyphic signs: GARDINER, 1957, 489, §205.

³⁰ Design class 3B1b/d according to TUFNELL, 1984 and 3B1a-b/d according to BEN-TOR, 2007.

³¹ BEN-TOR, 2007, 128; *ivi* PL. 77.

³² See FORSTNER MÜLLER, ROSE same volume.

³³ For seals of the 12th and 13th dynasties used during the Hyksos period: BIETAK, 2004, 43–55.

³⁴ For different stances about appropriation and reuse of older seals s. BIETAK, 2004, 54; RYHOLT, 2010, 124.

³⁵ MÖLLER – MAROUARD, 2011, 106–109.

beside a standing anthropomorphic figure with crocodile head³⁶, were found in the same Tuthmoside context, together with other seal impressions from the 13th dynasty³⁷. Such examples could suggest the practice of (re)using *older* stamp seals or the possibility that some sealed containers were kept in the store houses of the city and unsealed only when there was a demand for the material they contained³⁸. The seal impression from the *Stratum g* (Inv. Nr. 9465), which was reached in the test trench, comes from a layer that, according to a preliminary study of the ceramic assemblage, may be dated to the early 15th dynasty³⁹. If compared to the other sealings of Khyan recovered at R/III, it shows a different design: three paired scrolls along each side⁴⁰ substitute the three signs in the panels delimiting the central field⁴¹ and the royal name is inscribed in a cartouche. One possible interpretation for the two seal types of the same king is that, they were used for two different administrative operations. One other possibility is that, they were not

in use at the same time. In this case, Inv. Nr. 9465 could have been in use before the adoption of a new royal-seal, the one attested on the most of the impressions described above.

The high number of seal impressions recovered at R/III may suggest that the area was an administrative/economic quarter, and the presence of seal impressions bearing names of two Hyksos rulers would speak in favour of an administrative district in some way connected to the centralized power. Assuming that the sealing activity testifies to transactions involving goods, the quarter could have been part of a redistribution centre of the city of Avaris.

Of course this study is still far from complete. The seal impressions presented here are only a small part of the total and these results represent simply the first steps in a comprehensive study. Many different strands of research need to be undertaken to achieve a fuller understanding of the sealings and the area in which they were found.

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³⁶ Design class 9D, BEN-TOR, 2007, 177. The seal is described as bearing a Late Hyksos Period motif, (BIETAK, 2004, 49). According to BEN-TOR, it is attributable to the Late Palestinian Series (late MB IIB generally referred to as MB IIC) BEN-TOR, 2007, 155. For a different interpretation and dating of this seal: RYHOLT, 2010, 124.

³⁷ BIETAK, 2004, 49.

³⁸ *ivi*, 54. This interpretation was considered the most probable one by the author.

³⁹ See FORSTNER MÜLLER -ROSE same volume.

⁴⁰ Design class 7B3, BEN-TOR, 2007, 143.

⁴¹ Design class 3E1, BEN-TOR, 2007, 86–87.

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