

A SEAL IMPRESSION OF THE GREEN JASPER WORKSHOP FROM TELL EL-DAB^cA

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Abstract: Amongst the hundreds of seal impressions which were found in recent years at Tell el-Dab^ca only a handful were made by Near Eastern cylinder seals. One of these impressions was found in a heavily burnt storage room from the pre-Hyksos palace of area F/II. It belongs to the so called “Green Jasper Workshop” and carries a hieroglyphic inscription. Text and depictions hint strongly at a connection of its owner to the religious and political sphere of the city of Byblos.

Keywords: Middle Bronze Age II, cylinder seal, Green Jasper Workshop, Byblos, Tell el-Dab^ca, 14th dynasty

Written evidence concerning the connections between Egypt and the Levant during the Middle Kingdom (MK) and the succeeding Second Intermediate Period (SIP) are scarce. Thus, most of our knowledge about contacts between these two regions are based mainly on material culture. During the last 50 years, the material evidence from the excavations at Tell el-Dab^ca have added substantially to our understanding of these political and economic interactions. Unfortunately, the high water table and the moist soils of the Nile Delta have precluded the preservation of any kind of organic material such as papyri, leather or linen, etc. and the changing ground water level has erased any written evidences on other non-organic materials such as pottery or stone. However, during the last two decades, owing to special treatment and a drying process of soils retrieved from excavation, an additional type of artefact that served as a carrier of information has been retrieved from the Nile mud: hundreds of mud seal impressions that, when not burnt and fired, are difficult to recognize in the water-soaked soil and cannot be retrieved by sieving as long as the material is water-logged. Following a requisite drying process, the seal impressions can be found by

carefully knocking the lumps of soil. Some of these sealings carry titles and names of high officials of the late MK and SIP administration. Occasionally, sealings of Near Eastern origin are among these impressions,¹ but until recently none of them has named any foreign official or ruler.

In Area F/II, a large palatial complex dating to the Hyksos period was excavated between 2006 and 2011 under direction of Manfred Bietak (Fig. 1).² Below the northern part of this complex, remains of an older palace were excavated, which was destroyed by a massive conflagration.³ A series of storerooms was identified in the northern part of this older building, the easternmost of which (L1421) (Fig. 2) was filled with a collapsed ceiling that buried various kinds of material beneath it. Numerous pits that cut into this part of the building indicate that precious materials were stored inside these rooms. The excavated finds support this assumption: embedded between fragments of stone vessels, pottery and small finds were raw materials such as lumps of quartz, obsidian, ochre and flint as well as storage jars filled with Egyptian blue. Beautiful crafted objects such as furniture parts and inlays made of bone, ivory and metal, a Hathor head in faience belonging to a sistrum, a handle in the shape of a Djed-pillar decorated with gold leaf and bracelets made of ivory, as well as fragments of a magic wand were discovered. A calcite lid originally belonging to an ointment jar of a princess of the 12th Dynasty⁴ – very likely looted from one of the Memphite tombs – was stored here for further use. Small bowls were found, as if fallen from a shelf, among them a large zir containing delicate fish bones. Among the pottery were imports from Upper Egypt and the Levant, such as Canaanite storage jars, which were lined up against the walls. Local imitations of Cypriote White Painted Pendant Line Style juglets and dipper juglets with ring bases were found in this store

¹ See PORADA 1984; COLLON 2006; HEIN 2006; COLLON and LEHMANN 2012; FORSTNER-MÜLLER et al. 2015.

² BIETAK 2010A; BIETAK 2010B; BIETAK and FORSTNER-MÜLLER 2007; BIETAK et al. 2010

³ BIETAK et al. 2012/13.

⁴ BIETAK et al. 2010: Fig. 29.

⁵ BIETAK et al. 2010: Fig. 30. For the Term “Green Jasper Workshop” see COLON 1986.



Fig. 1 Hyksos palace from Area F/II

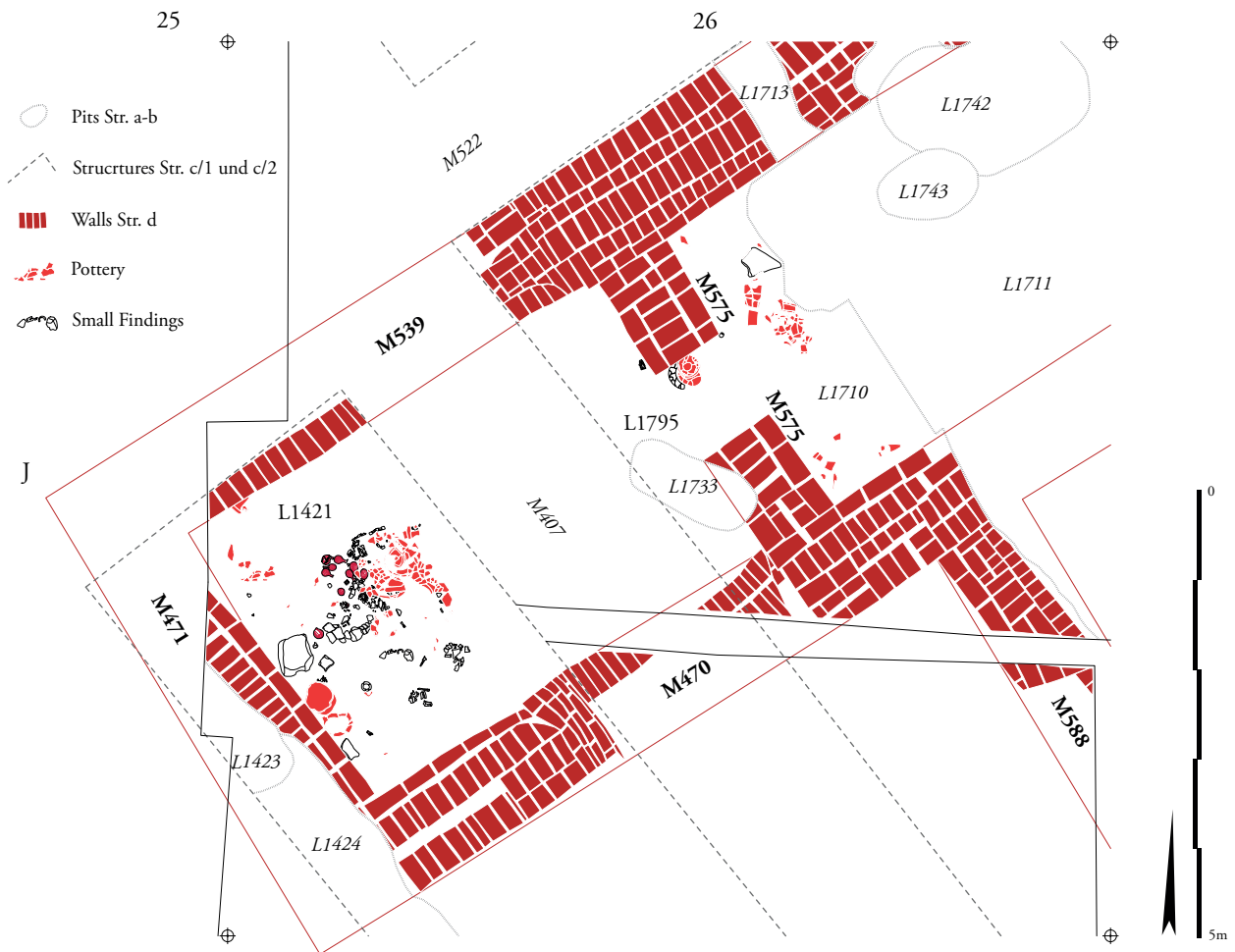


Fig. 2 Detail of Pre-Hyksos Palace, storeroom L1421 (str. d) (after BIETAK *et al.* 2013, Fig. 16A)

room. The latter are characteristic for the Lebanese coastal regions between Sidon and Byblos during the MB IIB and IIC periods.

Squeezed in between all these finds was the impression of a cylinder seal (TD 9402H) belonging to the 'Green Jasper Workshop' (Fig. 3).⁵ This seal impression made of local clay is 2,8 cm wide, 2,4 cm high and 1,2 cm thick and slightly damaged at its edges. Its back shows that it once sealed a piece of papyrus (Fig. 3). During the process of sealing, the cylinder seal must have slipped slightly to the right and changed the orientation of the impression by about 10° half-way through the seal motif. While at the upper part, the seal was somehow restricted by a straight wooden object, its lower part was compressed by a counter pressure, possibly made with a thumb. String impressions are visible at the lower end as well as on the left and right side of the sealing (Fig. 3), indicating

that the seal is broken at these three sides. It is evident from the impression that the process of sealing was executed in the following steps:

- A piece of mud was put on the papyrus, which left its imprints on the back of the sealing. This imprint shows that there was an overlap on the papyrus, which is visible at the upper end of the sealing. This could come either from a joint of two sheets or from the end of the papyrus itself. The latter would support the theory that this sealing once secured a letter or document.⁶
- In a second step the object was wound with a string, which probably was even knotted above this piece of mud.
- In a third step, covering the knot, a second piece of mud was added, into which the impression was finally imprinted.

The two layers of mud are clearly visible in the section of the sealing (Fig. 3).

⁶ The fact that it bears the impression of a person, who was very high in the administrative and/or political hierarchy, probably even with a royal association, supports this theory (see below).

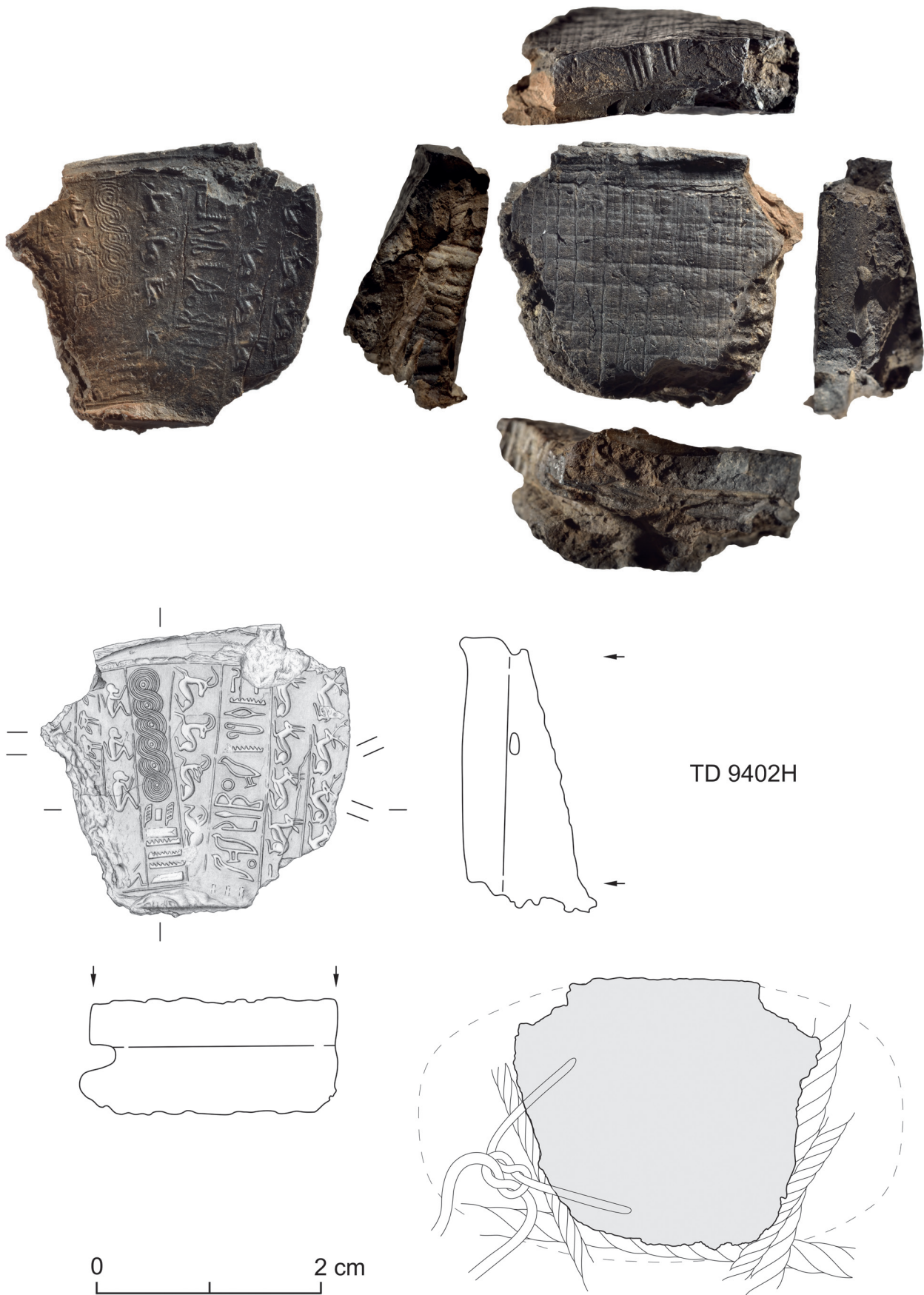


Fig. 3 Seal impression TD 9402H and reconstruction of the string impressions for the binding of the sealed object (photos by A. Krause 2008/ÖAI; drawings by M. Negrete-Martinez/OREA)

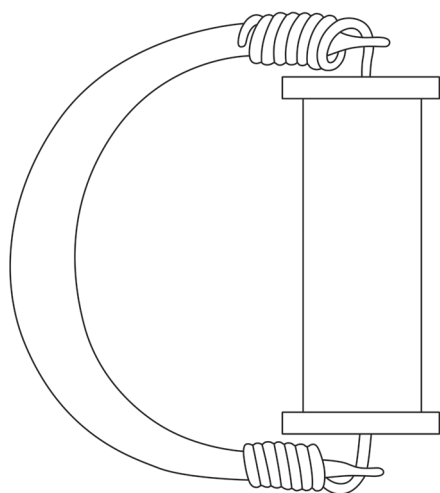


Fig. 4 A Reconstruction of the seal-setting 2:1
(drawing by M. Negrete Martinez/OREA)

The seal itself had a height of 2,05 cm and a diameter of 0,78 cm and was encased at both ends by some kind of frame, maybe in the shape of metal caps, similar to the ones of an example from Jericho (see below Fig. 14). It seems that in contrast to the Mesopotamian cylinder seals, which were generally larger, the smaller size examples from the Green Jasper workshop were mounted on rings similar to scarabs (Fig. 4).

The seal used for TD 9402H was divided into seven vertical columns (Fig. 3), of which five depict rows of animals and two bear hieroglyphic signs. In the fragmentary first column (counting starting from the left), parts of the antlers of crouching stags are visible. These are followed in the second column by a strip of left-looking (towards the upper end of the column) animal heads of what are very likely Dorcas gazelles.⁷ The third column is occupied by ‘worshipping’ baboons, which are shifted by 90°. Column four depicts a vertical guilloche above the Western Semitic name Ipy-Shemu (see below) in Egyptian hieroglyphs. In column five, the orientation is shifted again by 90° and shows a strip of crouching caprids, probably ibex-

es, oriented left and looking backwards. Column six bears the titles of the seal owner and is followed by the final column seven, which displays a strip of crouching gazelles with horns, probably male Dorcas, again oriented to the left in a strip; it is succeeded by row one with its stags.

Representations of animals in columns in changing orientation are very typical for the early products of the ‘Green Jasper Workshop’ as are guilloches.⁸ Dominique Collon postulated the Byblos area as the origin of this seal group,⁹ while others suggest various other production centres.¹⁰ Typical for this group is their small size, as well as the way the guilloche is very skilfully executed around central dots.¹¹ Alternating rows of animals and a guilloche indicate that this seal belongs among the oldest examples of this group, according to Collon.¹² Adelheid Otto states that vertical rows of crouching animals as well as the animal heads are typical of West Syrian glyptics.¹³ The motifs on the Tell el-Dab’a piece fall between Otto’s Groups 1c “Senkrechte Spalten” with animal heads¹⁴ and 5a “Westsyrische Spalten und Reihen”.¹⁵ She places the latter group in her late classical period.¹⁶ One of the characteristics for this period are the turned heads of animals as is the case with the ibexes on the seal impression from Tell el-Dab’a.¹⁷

Stags and ibexes on cylinder seals are already known from the Uruk period in Arslantepe and Jebel Aruda, and are seen as Syrian influence.¹⁸ In the MB period, the stag is an uncommon motif in the Syrian glyptic, however on the seals of the Green Jasper Workshop it appears frequently, as can be seen on another seal impression from Tell el-Dab’a (see Fig. 9) and on the impression from Ia’ush-Addu, king of Buzuran (Fig. 13). The appearance of deer is rather uncertain for Egypt; however it is known throughout the Near East.¹⁹ If these animals ever occurred in Egypt, as Do. Arnold suggested,²⁰ then they would inhabit the environmental margins, in the bushes that border

⁷ For the identification of Dorcas gazelles see: OSBORNE and OSBORNOVÁ 1998: 175–180. Dorcas gazelles have very large, but elegant ears and the tips of their horns curve slightly forwards. Females have smaller and straighter horns.

⁸ COLLON 2001: Fig. 1.

⁹ COLLON 1986: 62f.

¹⁰ BOSCHLOSS 2015: 298.

¹¹ COLLON 1986: 61.

¹² COLLON 1986: 62.

¹³ OTTO 2000: 114.

¹⁴ OTTO 2000: 113f.

¹⁵ OTTO 2000: 143f.

¹⁶ Following the Middle Chronology, this period dates between 1760–1730 BC.

¹⁷ OTTO 2000: 143.

¹⁸ COLLON 1988: 14, Figs. 11, 22.

¹⁹ OSBORN and OSBORNOVÁ 1998: 152–155.

²⁰ ARNOLD 1995: 15.



Fig. 5 The Stag diadem from the Salhiya treasure. Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 1968 (68.136.1). (Photo with the courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Arts. URL: www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544073)

the agricultural land. In any case, they were associated with the desert animals and, thus, were seen by the Egyptians as foreign. In two cases bones of *dama mesopotamica* were discovered at the site of Tell el-Dab^a, both dating into the first half of the 13th Dynasty.²¹ One of these bones was obviously used as a tool, which raises the question, whether these animals lived in the vicinity of the site and were brought to it live or if only their bones were imported to be used as tools. Occasionally stags were depicted in hunting scenes from the Old to the New Kingdom.²² However, more often they are connected to foreign motifs or with objects of Near Eastern association such as the beautiful golden diadem belonging to the so called “Salhiya treasure” (Fig. 5; MMA 68.136.1), a hoard purchased by the Metropolitan Museum in the late 1960s. At that time, the antiquities dealers named the vicinity of Salhiya as its place of origin, an area about 18 km east of Tell el-Dab^a in the northeastern Nile delta. As this place was a wetlands region in antiquity and unfit for living, it seems more likely the diadem originates from a burial of a very-high born person or even a royal at Tell el-Dab^a.

The diadem consists of a golden band onto which a protome of a stag head is flanked on both

sides by two pairs of alternating lotus flowers and heads of what might be male Dorcas gazelles. Plain head bands made of sheet metal, either gold or silver, appeared in the burials of Tell el-Dab^a from the late MB IIA until the early Hyksos periods.²³ They have been found with both sexes. As Christine Lilyquist has already stated, the depicted animals on the Salhiya stag diadem are all male²⁴ and, thus, it is highly likely that this diadem once belonged to a male burial.

Such a diadem, although only with a gazelle head is shown on representations of the Canaanite god Resheph on Egyptian reliefs of the New Kingdom (Fig. 6).²⁵ We do not have any depictions of this god from earlier periods, but his name appears for the first time in P. Brooklyn 13.1446, where an *ꜥpr-Ršpw* is mentioned in his function as a brewer.²⁶ This papyrus was written in the first regnal year of king Sekhem-Re Sewadj-tawy Sobekhotep III, predecessor of Neferhotep I and thus dates to the first half of the 13th Dynasty.²⁷ It was bought on the antiquities market in Thebes²⁸ and lists the servants of a larger estate, very likely located in Upper Egypt.

Apart from bulls and lions, the stag is among a core group of particular large mammals which

²¹ BOESSNECK and VON DEN DRIESCH 1992: 34.

²² NEWBERRY 1893b: Pl. IV, upper row, Tomb of Baqet III, 11th Dyn.

²³ KOPETZKY 2012: 34.

²⁴ LILYQUIST 2003: 159–160.

²⁵ For examples, see: CORNELIUS 1994.

²⁶ HAYES 1955: 94, Pl. VIII, line 9.

²⁷ HAYES 1955: Pl. XIII, lines 3 and 4.

²⁸ HAYES 1955: 16, 31.

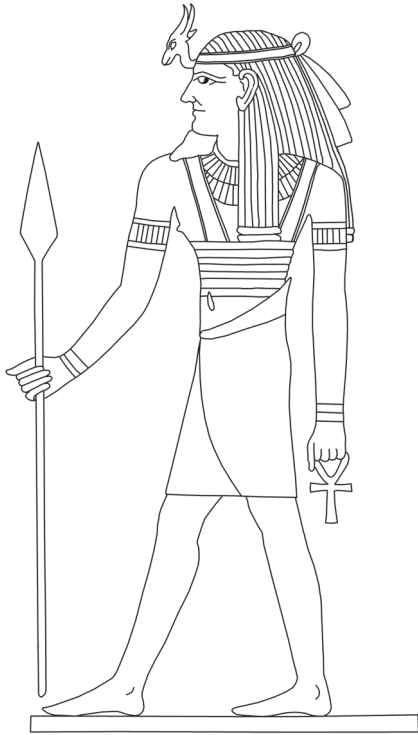


Fig. 6 God Resheph
(drawing after British Museum stela EA 191)

symbolize or accompanied native Anatolian deities and can be traced over several millennia.²⁹ It seems that all three are also associated with kingship. Stags are known from the Hattian Empire dating to the Early Bronze Age. In Alaça Höyük, bronze standards in the shapes of a stag were found inside the Royal Tombs.³⁰ In the Hittite Empire, they were the animal of the hunting and war god Nubadig, who was named Runtiya in Luwian texts of the Iron Ages.³¹ There, the hieroglyph to determine this god was a stag or antlers.³² Nergal, the Mesopotamian god of the underworld, bears the same attributes of bow, arrows and quiver as Nubadig, which identified them both as war gods.³³ These attributes are associated with Nergal at Ugarit, where he is identified with Resheph.

There, he was also called by the name “Resheph of the shield”, the latter again pointing to his belligerent character.³⁴ At Ebla Rašap/Resheph is, on the one hand, equated with the underworld god Nergal³⁵ and, thus, his temple (Temple C) is located next to the Western palace (Palace Q), which housed the royal burials. On the other hand, this palace was also identified by the excavators as the palace of the Crown prince,³⁶ who very often was responsible for warfare.

In Egypt, Resheph is equated with the war god Monthu, one of the main gods of the Middle Kingdom.³⁷ The aspect of an association of the crown prince with warfare is also visible in the sphinx-stela of Amenhotep II, where Resheph is mentioned beside Astarte in association with horses and chariots.³⁸ Resheph’s close connection with warfare, especially with chariots, is found throughout the New Kingdom.³⁹ In the city of Piramesse/Qantir, which housed during the 19th and 20th Dynasties one of the largest garrison of chariots and horses of the Egyptian army,⁴⁰ a surprisingly large amount of deer bones was found. The archaeozoologists concluded that these animals were held there in captivity.⁴¹

Dorcas gazelles are at home in the deserts of Egypt, but also in certain regions of the Near East.⁴² In Egypt, they were also held in captivity, as can be seen on reliefs from the Old Kingdom,⁴³ while in hunting scenes of the Middle Kingdom they are depicted as animals of the desert.⁴⁴ Since fawns are easy to catch, these animals were often depicted in tomb paintings as pets.⁴⁵ In the tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hassan, the leader of Asiatic nomads is walking a tamed ibex (clearly recognizable by a collar around its neck), while the man following him is leading a tamed Dorcas gazelle on a leash.⁴⁶ At Tell el-Dab’a, over 60 bones of gazelles, most of them limbs of Dorcas, have been found in the excavation.⁴⁷ In one case, the hind feet of a fawn were found inside a tomb.⁴⁸

²⁹ GUNTER 2002: 81.

³⁰ AKURGAL and HIRMER 1976: 13.

³¹ For MÜNNICH 2013: 149; Collins 2010: 59–74.

³² SIMPSON 1953: 88.

³³ BARRÉ 1978: 466.

³⁴ BARRÉ 1978: 466.

³⁵ STRECK 2006–2008: 251–253. For the reading of Reshef gn, see: DEL OLMO LETE and SANMARTIN 2003: 302; “gn”-garden in the sense of cemetery.

³⁶ PINNOCK 2001: 17, Fig. 10.

³⁷ SIMPSON 1960: 64, Fig. 1.

³⁸ HELCK 1955: 1282; MÜNNICH 2013: 112–115.

³⁹ MÜNNICH 2009; IDEM 2013: 111–115.

⁴⁰ HEROLD 2006: Fig. 13.

⁴¹ BOESSNECK and VON DEN DRIESCH 1992: 34.

⁴² OSBORN and OSBORNOVÁ 1998: 176.

⁴³ DUELL 1938: Pl. 153.

⁴⁴ NEWBERRY 1893b: Pl. 4.

⁴⁵ OSBORN and OSBORNOVÁ 1998: 177.

⁴⁶ NEWBERRY 1893a: Pl. XXX.

⁴⁷ BOESSNECK and VON DEN DRIESCH 1992: 33.

⁴⁸ BOESSNECK and VON DEN DRIESCH 1992: 17.

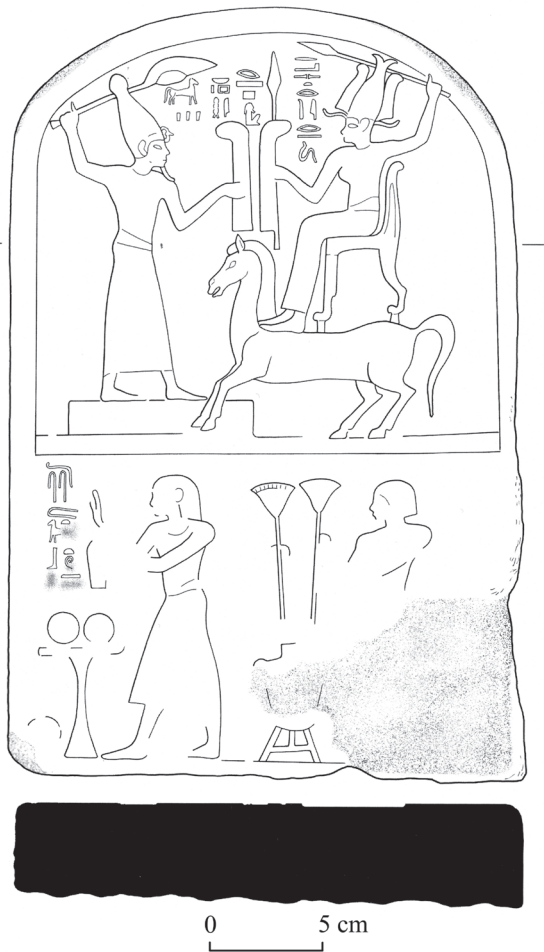


Fig. 7 Stela from Tell el Borg (after HOFFMEIER 2007, Fig. 1b)

From Iron Age texts, it is known that gazelles were sacrificed to Resheph. The fact that, in most cases, only the skinny extremities were found among the tomb material, indicates that the parts with the meat were either consumed or sacrificed. It seems that, in the North Syrian Kingdom of Ugarit, a gazelle signified a young noble or warrior.⁴⁹

The Egyptians always depicted the god Resheph with a human face, a pointed beard and a

diadem with a gazelle head and pointed horns; very often he carries a shield⁵⁰ and a spear (Fig. 6). In a stela from the first half of the 18th Dynasty found at Tell el-Borg in the Sinai, Resheph is called “Lord of the estate of the stable of the horses” (Fig. 7) and the owner of the stela himself carried a foreign, probably Hurrian name.⁵¹ The close connection of this god with horses is evident in this inscription. It has been suggested already in the past that the horse was brought to Egypt in association with the new warfare technique of chariots by the Hyksos. Indeed, the oldest archaeological evidence in Egypt for a horse found in proper stratigraphic excavation comes from Tell el-Dab^a where osteological evidence of horses is attested safely from the early Hyksos Period onwards.⁵² A fragment of a horse femur was even retrieved from a 13th Dynasty context. As it is a single occurrence, this evidence should still be considered with caution.⁵³ A complete burial of a 5-year old mare was uncovered in the Hyksos Palace in Area F/II, attributed to the Hyksos ruler Khayan.⁵⁴ Another horse burial attributed to the Hyksos is known from the excavations of Mohamed Abdel-Maksoud from Tell Hebwa (personal communication). The claim of a late Middle Kingdom date of the Buhen horse,⁵⁵ based on radiocarbon results, can be dismissed.⁵⁶

In summary, it seems that the stag diadem is to be associated with royalty, as are the animals depicted on it. Caprids including also ibexes, are a symbol of strength and virility⁵⁷ and are found in Near Eastern art from very early times onward.

Monkeys are already known as a motif in Byblian art since the Early Bronze Age, but Egyptian representation of baboons in adoration is not found in the Levant before the Middle Bronze Age, when it became a very popular motif in the glyptic and other art.⁵⁸ Some of the best examples come from a mace found in the Tomb of the Lord

⁴⁹ ALDRED 1971: 204; DEL OLMO LETE and SANMARTIN 2003: 1003; “zby”—Gazelle was a term for nobles and warriors.

⁵⁰ MÜNNICH 2013: Fig. 3.

⁵¹ HOFFMEIER and KITCHEN 2007: 131f., Figs. 1a, 1b.

⁵² Teeth and bones of horses have been found within the stratigraphy of Tell el-Dab^a from the early Hyksos Period onwards (BOESSNECK 1976: 25; BOESSNECK und VON DEN DRIESCH 1992: 24f.)

⁵³ BOESSNECK und VON DEN DRIESCH 1992: 25.

⁵⁴ BIETAK 2010a: 976 f., Fig. 5; BIETAK et al. 2010: Fig. 8.

⁵⁵ Last: RAWLING and CLUTTON-BROCK 2009.

⁵⁶ The burial of a cadaver on top of a Middle Kingdom fortress wall can only have been achieved many years after the abandonment of the fortress and after the walls were completely covered by windblown sand. Taking the height of a fortress wall into consideration, this sand accumulation would have required centuries. This process could have started only after the abandonment of the fortress during the late 13th Dynasty (*terminus post quem*). The horse burial was covered by a 18th Dynasty fortress (*terminus ad quem*).

⁵⁷ KEEL and UEHLINGER 2010: 21.

⁵⁸ COLLON 1988: Fig. 189.



Fig. 8 Detail of Hotepibra mace from Tomb of the Lord of the Goats from Ebla (after MATTHIAE *et al.* 1995, Cat. 384)

of the Goats in Ebla, where representations of two baboons are placed as inlays on its shaft (Fig. 8).⁵⁹ There they flank the throne name of pharaoh Hotepibre, who is attested in the first half of the 13th Dynasty. However, although it seems that baboons and hieroglyphs, both made of gold foil, are most likely of Egyptian production, the way they were arranged is rather atypical for Egyptian art. Neither was the name of the king set into a cartouche nor were the hieroglyphs positioned in proper order with the *htp*-sign of the name being upside down. It seems that the inlays were once mounted on another object, from where they were taken off and rearranged in a new setting on the shaft of the mace, appealing more to the taste of a Near Eastern ruler.

A sitting baboon with raised arms is known as a classifier for the *ḥd-wr* the “great white one”, since the First Dynasty.⁶⁰ As such, he is seen as a

divine royal ancestor and protector of dead kings.⁶¹ This function, it seems, was soon extended to all deceased.⁶² Amongst the many variations of baboon depiction in the art of that period,⁶³ no image of baboons in veneration are known. No such examples are yet known to the present authors for the Middle Kingdom. During that period baboons are very often found in sitting positions with their hands resting on their knees as symbol of alertness, but also as guardians of justice. In the latter function, they are involved in the judging of the dead. Only Middle Kingdom coffin texts baboons are shown worshipping the sun god Ra in Egypt.⁶⁴ It is assumed that this association is connected with the habit of baboons in the wild to screech at sunrise and sunset, which is interpreted as the veneration of the sun god.⁶⁵

Archaeological evidence from at least two areas at Tell el-Dab'a is connected in some way to baboons. In Area A/II, a limestone statue of a baboon (TD 8642) was found in a cemetery in the vicinity of early MB IIB tombs. Its discovery there is very likely to be seen in association with the world of the dead and with an ancestor's cult.⁶⁶ The statue is of a sitting baboon with a bowl balanced on its head. In all likelihood this statue was used during cult ceremonies performed at these tombs. However, apparently, it seems that baboons had to fulfil their function as guardians and protectors not only in the afterlife, as a find in Area H/III demonstrates. There, a burial of a male baboon was found in a small room next to the entrance to New Kingdom Palace G, where he was considered to have been guarding this building.⁶⁷ However it seems that it was the religious concept of the baboons worshipping the sun god Ra that was the most attractive one to the ruling classes of the Near East and was, as such, adapted to their religious beliefs and needs. Thus, we find it again on the seal impression presented here from Tell el-Dab'a.

Heads of humans or animals are already known from Early Bronze seal impressions at Ebla,⁶⁸ but become more common in Acemhöyük during the late MB IIA.⁶⁹ Cut-off heads symbolize

⁵⁹ MATTHIAE *et al.* 1995: Cat. No. 384; SCANDONE-MATTHIAE 1997a: Fig. 15.4.

⁶⁰ KAHL 1994: 488.

⁶¹ KAPLONY 1966: 93f.

⁶² DREYER 1986: 69.

⁶³ DREYER 1986: Pls. 24–31

⁶⁴ ALTENMÜLLER 1975: 15f.

⁶⁵ SCHROER and EGGLEER forthcoming

⁶⁶ FORSTNER-MÜLLER 2008: Pl. 22.

⁶⁷ BIETAK *et al.* 2001: 79, 83, Fig. 40

⁶⁸ COLLON 1988: Fig. 129.

⁶⁹ COLLON 1988: Fig. 188.

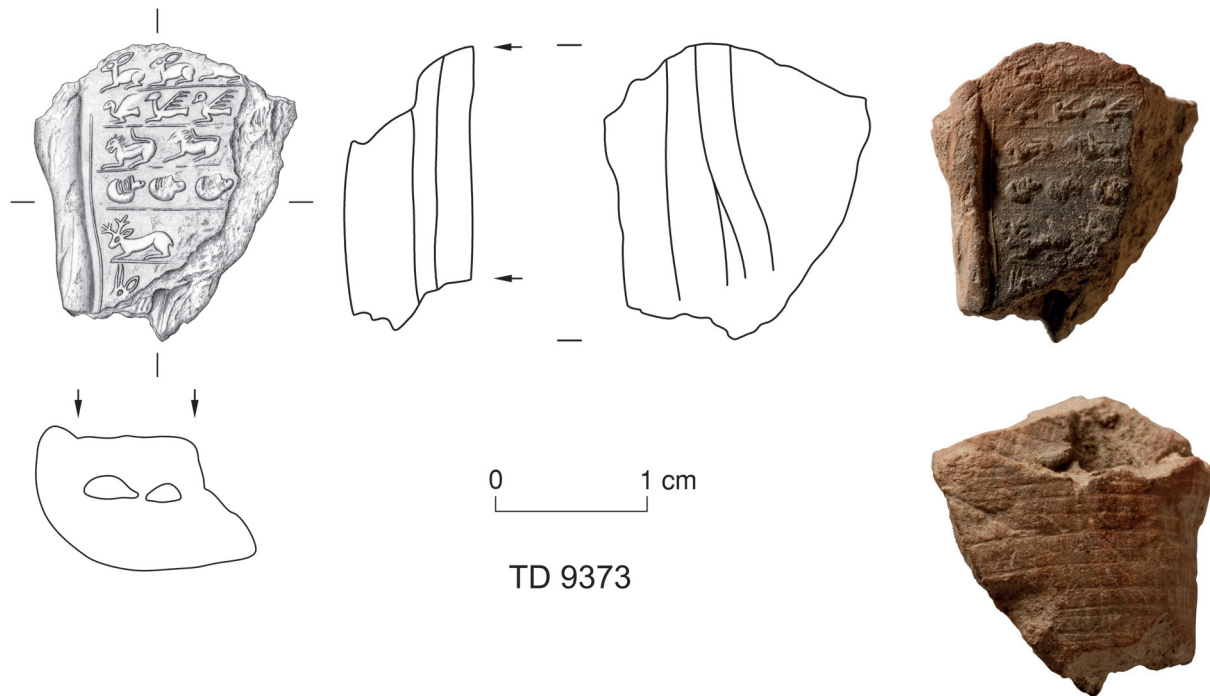


Fig. 9 Seal impression TD 9373 (photos by A. Krause 2008/ÖAI; drawings by M. Negrete-Martinez/OREA)

since ancient times in Egypt⁷⁰ and the Near East, the triumph over enemies.

According to Dominique Collon, the guilloche is particularly at home in Syria and appears there already on Early Dynastic steatite vessels from Mari.⁷¹ Generally, it is associated with water and fertility.

Comparative Material

There are only a handful of seals and seal impressions that have a decoration similar to the Tell el-Dab^a example and, of these, only three, one from Tell el-Dab^a,⁷² one from Alalakh⁷³ and one from Klavdia-Tremithos⁷⁴ derive from excavations; the rest come from museums and collections. Not surprisingly the piece from Tell el-Dab^a and one from Byblos⁷⁵ are the closest parallels for TD 9402H.

The Tell el-Dab^a sealing was found in one of the westernmost courts (Court D) of the same palatial complex in Area F/II (Fig. 1) in which TD 9402H originated. In that area, immediately under the surface were waste deposits (L637) consisting

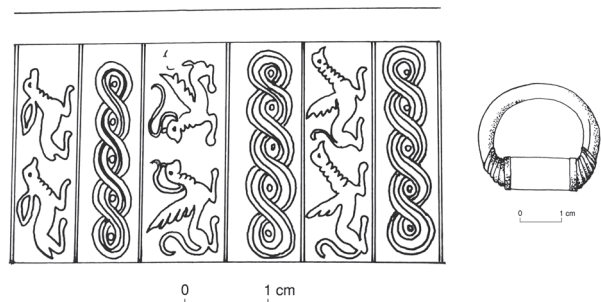


Fig. 10 Seal from Byblos (after COLLON 1986, Fig. 18)

mainly of pottery that dates to the second half of the Hyksos period.⁷⁶ Among the sherd material was the impression of another cylinder seal (TD 9373) belonging to the 'Green Jasper Workshop', which also had sealed a papyrus (Fig. 9). It is 1,7cm long, 1,5cm in width and 0,7cm thick. Although the impression does not show a repetition of the scene, we think that all of the columns are preserved.⁷⁷ The scene comprises six columns in strips, of which five depict crouching animals facing to the left: three hares, three birds, two crouching felines (lions?), one or perhaps two

⁷⁰ See the famous Narmer palette CG 14716, where the heads of the enemies had been cut off and were positioned between the legs of the slain adversaries.

⁷¹ COLLON 1986: 193f.

⁷² SARTORI 2009: 288f., Fig. 12.

⁷³ COLLON 2001: Fig. 1:2.

⁷⁴ COLLON 2001: Fig. 1:5.

⁷⁵ CHEHAB 1937: Figs. 2–4.

⁷⁶ SARTORI 2009: Fig. 2.

⁷⁷ The seal from which this impression was made would have had a diameter of about 0,6cm and, thus, fits the measurements of the other seals of this workshop perfectly.

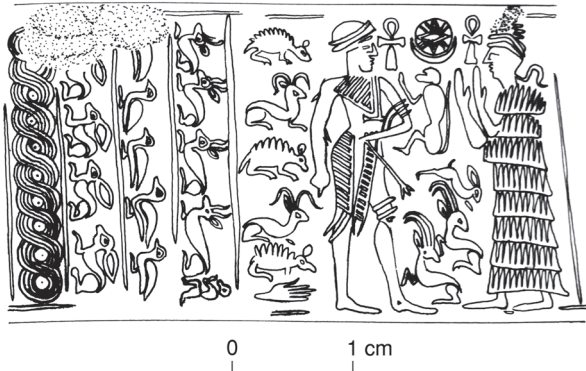


Fig. 11 Seal impression from Klavdia-Tremithos
(after COLLON 2001, Fig. 1:5)

crouching stags and at the damaged lower end one could recognize a male Dorcas gazelle. The fourth column, separating the strips of animals, has a vertically-oriented column with human heads bearing a mushroom-shaped coiffure, facing right. This combination of designs falls again into Otto's Groups 1c and 5a and thus into her late classic period.

The same motifs of hares and, in this case, of winged griffins alternating with guilloches are known from a small cylinder seal, which very likely originated from Byblos (Fig. 10).⁷⁸ It is made of green jasper and set in an elaborated gold ring. In 1925, this seal was retrieved from an antiquities dealer in Jerusalem as part of a hoard of precious objects. All the other objects retrieved from this hoard date to the MB period. Five years later the whole hoard was repatriated to Lebanon from where it was most likely originally stolen.⁷⁹ The seal depicts six columns arranged in vertical strips with two crouching hares, facing right, two winged sphinxes facing each other and two winged griffins facing left, each separated by a guilloche. The seal was mounted on a ring in a very unusual way and, as the setting is unparallelled, it raises questions whether it is a later addition done either in antiquity or in modern times. The typically setting of rings during that period looks different.⁸⁰ Therefore, it is possible that the antiquities dealer in Jerusalem added the ring hoping to achieve a better price for this object. Scien-

tific investigations of this ring might help to resolve this issue.

A hematite seal (BM 1899, 1229.34) (Fig. 11) belonging to this group comes from an old excavation at the site of Klavdia-Tremithos, where tombs from the late Middle Cypriot till the Late Cypriot III period have been uncovered.⁸¹ Unfortunately, the precise tomb assignment of this piece is unknown, but it was assigned by Collon to the 'Green Jasper Workshop' and provides the best parallel for the Tell el-Dab'a impression's motifs, with its crouching gazelles and ibexes with turned heads as well as 'worshipping' baboons. Not only the rows of animals, but also the similarity of the guilloche illustrate the close connections between this seal and the Tell el-Dab'a impression. Two additional *ankh* signs also point to a production date in the MB IIB period.⁸² The seal is divided into two parts. Beginning on the left side is a vertical guilloche, followed by three vertical strips of recumbent animals: four hares, five ducks and four Dorcas gazelles all facing left, with a worshipping sitting baboon completing the gazelle strip. The right part of the impression shows two standing figures facing each other. The figure at the very right is facing left, wears a crown on her head – very likely a 'Hörnerkrone' – and is clad in a tiered dress. Both arms and hands are raised. Facing this figure is a male wrapped in a knee-length kilt (god-king) holding a flower-shaped object (scepter?) in his bent left hand. On his head he wears a cap or crown. At the top of the impression, in between these two figures, a sun disk and a moon sickle flanked by two *ankh* signs are visible. Below it is another worshipping baboon, beneath which a running hare and two crouching caprids with turned heads are depicted. Finally, behind the standing male figure there is a strip of three standing hedgehogs (?) alternating with two recumbent mouflons, arranged in a vertical order and all facing to the right. This strip is finalized by a hand and a horizontal line below it.

The seal impression (Antakya 7761 = ATT 39/183) from Alalakh⁸³ (Fig. 12) comes from Palace VII, Room 11. Together with the impressions of several other seals it is part of an envelope.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ CHEHAB 1937: 11, Figs. 2–4.

⁷⁹ CHEHAB 1937: 7.

⁸⁰ LILYQUIST 1993: 43.

⁸¹ F.B. Welch excavated in 1899 on behalf of the British Museum 33 tombs. Most of the material was not assigned to specific tombs.

⁸² TEISSIER 1996: 12f. notes that the first Egyptian influences on Syrian glyptic occurred late in the MB IIA and was predominately in the MB IIB period.

⁸³ COLLON 2001: Fig. 1:2.

⁸⁴ COLLON 1975: Seals Nos. 85, 139, 155 and 181.

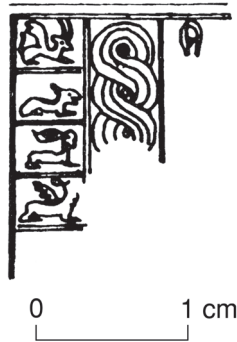


Fig. 12 Seal impression from Alalakh
(after COLLON 2001, Fig. 1:2)

Room 11 is the last in a series of three rooms and according to Leonard Woolley lacked windows. An undulating “concrete” floor and beam holes at floor level together with a thick layer of ash indicate that this room was once used as a storeroom. Its function as such is supported by the finds of several other inscribed tablets, five elephant tusks, a cylinder seal, two bronze daggers and two spearheads.⁸⁵ It seems that part of the palace correspondence was stored here, conveniently at hand when needed, since Room 11 was situated right behind the large Reception Hall 9. The seal impression is fragmented. It shows a guilloche in the middle, followed on its left by another vertical column with four horizontally depicted crouching animals among them a hare and a griffin, all looking right. Palace VII of Alalakh dates in the MB IIB period.

Although not from an excavated context, the seal of Ia’ush-Addu, king of Buzuran (Fig. 13) also belongs to this group and is of chronological significance.⁸⁶ Buzuran is known from Mari texts of the time of Zimri-Lim (ARM XVI/1 9,236) and, it is suggested, that this kingdom was in the vicinity of Mari. The right half of the seal has a composite scene that includes Egyptian motifs. The center of the scene has a walking Egyptianized, bearded, male sphinx with a lion’s mane and ears and wearing an *atef*-crown flanked by corkscrew ram horns. The sphinx moves with a wide gait towards the left, trampling two Asiatics with mushroom-shaped coiffures. It appears that the sphinx is being helped by a long-tailed baboon moving towards the trampled enemies. The sphinx is surrounded in its upper part and above it by animals, mostly looking left. In front of it is an undefined



Fig. 13 Seal of Ia’ush-Addu, king of Buzuran
(after COLLON 2001, Fig. 2:1)

column with a crouching lion reaching out with his right paw, below it a recumbent Dorcas gazelle, then a recumbent stag in front of and looking back at the sphinx’s head, and the aforementioned baboon. Above the sphinx’s back is a pair of anti-thetical baboons at the same level as the stag, above it another gazelle, and in between the two, behind the Atef feathers, at a slightly higher level, a duck; behind the second gazelle is another recumbent gazelle oriented in the opposite direction, looking, however, backwards to the left. In the middle of the uppermost undefined register is a sun-disk and the moon; to its left is a recumbent ibex on the same level as the lion. More animals are depicted behind the sphinx, such as a vertically-oriented Dorcas gazelle with the head turned backwards and a hare, on top of the platform dominated by a large figure which occupies the entire right part of the design. It is a male with a round coiffure ending in a long youth lock. On top of his coiffure is a kind of tiny head gear or bun. It seems to be the representation of a youthful royal or divine figure holding a *Was*-sceptre in front of him, in his other hand he holds a situla under which probably a ‘ball staff’ is depicted.⁸⁷ He wears a short kilt with horizontal stripes, well-known at that time in glyptic art. This figure stands on a podium that shows its constructional features. The left side of the motif consists of six defined columns. In the first three columns on both sides of a detailed guilloche are arranged birds: on the left, three vultures seem to dive down on two ducks and, on the right, there is a row of five sitting falcons, all oriented to the left.

⁸⁵ WOOLLEY 1955: 102.

⁸⁶ COLLON 2001: Fig. 2:1.

⁸⁷ PORTER 2001: 25–34.

Then follow two columns with cuneiform writing disclosing the owner of the seal:⁸⁸ ‘Seal of Ia’ush-Addu, king of Buzuran’. Above the two hares one finds a short column divided in the middle by a papyrus stem with two pairs of hanging umbels and, in the lower part, the stem is flanked by intersected S-spirals and on the right side by an ‘*ankh*’-sign and a crouching baboon with raised arms in adoration facing towards the left. Again, according to Teissier, all indications support a late MB IIA to early MB IIB date.⁸⁹ The mentioning of this kingdom in the Mari texts seems to put this seal impression at the beginning of this period.

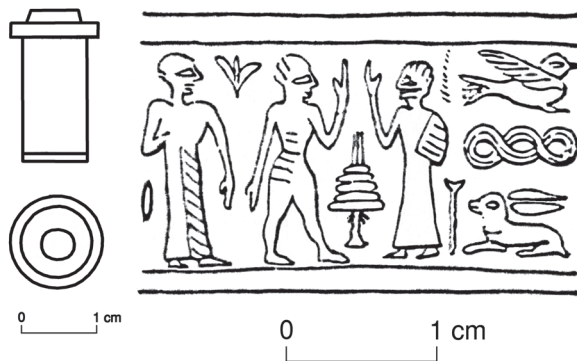
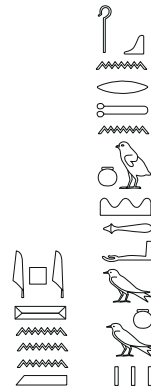


Fig. 14 Seal from Tomb D9 at Jericho (after PORADA 1965, Fig. 304/3)

Tomb D9 at Jericho, which is assigned by the excavator to her Group II, produced an albeit hematite cylinder seal (Fig. 14), which shows elements that fit the ‘Green Jasper Workshop’.⁹⁰ This tomb contained skeletons of at least 10 individuals and was in use during the MB IIB period. The seal was found in Layer 3, the lowest of the tomb, together with pottery dating early in this period.⁹¹ The seal depicts three male figures with two anti-thetically arranged on both sides of an altar. Both raise an arm with the backs of their hands to each other as if in greeting. One wears a short kilt with horizontal stripes, the other a long toga-like gown with one end over the left shoulder. Another male, also with a long gown, but of a different fashion,

stands behind the man with the kilt. Between him and the kilted man a bud of a plant hovers at height of the heads. To the right of this scene are in vertical succession, a bird looking right, a horizontal guilloche and, at the bottom, a crouching hare looking left – all three are favoured motifs on Old Syrian seals and especially of the ‘Green Jasper workshop’.



What makes seal impression TD 9402H unique are its two rows of text written in hieroglyphs and not, as expected, in cuneiform.⁹² They display the title and name of the seal’s owner and are carved in a peculiar style not to be found in Egyptian contemporary productions.⁹³

From right to left it reads *ḥq3 n Rtnw c3 wr njw wrw Ipy šmw [m^c3 ḥrw?]*⁹⁴ ‘Ruler⁹⁵ of Retjenu, greatest of the great, Ipy-shemu, justified (?)’. This name is known to us as part of the name of one of the rulers of Byblos. The owner of Tomb II of the Royal Tombs of Byblos has the name Ipy-shemu-Abi. He was the son and possible direct successor of the *ḥ3tj-c n Kpn* Abi-shemu. Two objects were found inside of Tomb II, which carried inscriptions naming their owner. One was a scimitar with a gold and silver inlaid inscription on both sides of its blade (Fig. 15), the other one is a shell-shaped inlaid gold pendant.⁹⁶ The contents of this tomb dates the burial to the first half of the MB IIB period, one generation later than the one of his father Abi-shemu, who in all likelihood was the owner of Tomb I.⁹⁷ However, the name of the owner of Tomb II and the one from the Tell el-Dab^a seal impression is only identical in the first part of its name. In a previous article, Karin Kopetzky has proposed that the name on the Tell el-Dab^a seal impression is possibly a diminutive of the owner of Tomb II from Byblos and that they are one and the same person.⁹⁸ Manfred Bietak sees this issue more cautiously and suggests that they are not the same person, but due to the similarity

⁸⁸ TEISSIER 1996: 26.

⁸⁹ TEISSIER 1996: 26.

⁹⁰ PORADA 1965: Fig. 304/3; KEMPINSKI 1993.

⁹¹ KENYON 1965: Figs. 133/5, 12, 14; 135/2.

⁹² We are indebted to Marian Negrete-Martinez for her excellent drawing and to Roman Gundacker for his help concerning linguistic intricacies.

⁹³ For example, the *mw*-pot is written as a circle and the birds are compressed to fit into the space.

⁹⁴ *m^c3 ḥrw?* after the name is otherwise not known from princes of Byblos; The only doubtful parallel is prince *Int3*, otherwise read *Intyn* (BEN-TOR 2007; Pl. XXIII/1).

⁹⁵ About the writing of *ḥq3* in the MK see DZA 27.368.390.

⁹⁶ MONTET 1928: 174–177, Pl. C/653, 165f., Pl. XCVII/618.

⁹⁷ For the problem of the ownership and dates of the Royal Tombs of Byblos see KOPETZKY 2016.

⁹⁸ KOPETZKY 2016: 154.



Fig. 15 Detail of the scimitar of Ipy-shemu-Abi (photo with the courtesy of the National Museum Beirut)

in the names, possibly with a yet unknown member of the ruling family of Byblos of the first half of the MB IIB period.

The title *ḥq3 n Rtnw* is known from various other MK sources, but we still do not know precisely which region comprises Retjenu. It appears in the famous Tale of Sinuhe, a story most likely composed originally during the second half of the 12th Dynasty,⁹⁹ where a “ruler of Upper Retjenu” named ʿAmunenshy granted Sinuhe asylum after his flight from Egypt. The story tells us that Sinuhe was leaving Byblos and reached Qedem, where he stayed for 1½ years, before he was approached by ʿAmunenshy who married him to

his eldest daughter and granted him the land Yaa within his realm.¹⁰⁰ While the location of Byblos is known, that of Qedem is still questionable. In general, Qedem means “East”.¹⁰¹ However, from the courtyard of the cachette at Karnak blocks from a door were retrieved,¹⁰² which depict personifications of places with crenelated rectangles on their heads. Qedem is mentioned next to the city of Tunip on the left door jamb,¹⁰³ suggesting that one is indeed dealing more likely with a town rather than a region. Tunip has been identified, based on petrographic analysis, as Tell Acharna in the Orontes valley.¹⁰⁴ On the right door jamb of the same gate at Karnak is a city called *D3iwny* mentioned next to “Upper Retenu”.¹⁰⁵ Le Saout wants to identify this town with Tyre at the Lebanese coast.¹⁰⁶ Due to stylistic and orthographic reasons she suggests that a date for the gate into the Middle Kingdom should be considered.¹⁰⁷ Scandone-Matthiae locates the city in northern Syria, because of the title of the ruler of Qedem as *mki*.¹⁰⁸ It is a title that was used for the rulers of Ebla in Old Syrian texts. Since Qedem is mentioned together with Tunip, Redford also sees this place in Syria,¹⁰⁹ while Hans Goedicke suggests the Negev as the area where Qedem is situated.¹¹⁰ Both scholars date the Karnak gate to the early New Kingdom. Thomas Schneider reads Qedem as *q-d-nw-m* and sees it as ancient Qatna.¹¹¹

We also have evidence for the region of Yaa, which according to the Sinuhe story lies in Upper-Retjenu.¹¹² On a scarab found in an MB IIB level at Sidon a “*Dd-k3-rʿ, beloved of Seth/Baʿal, Lord of I3y*” is mentioned.¹¹³ Gubel and Loffet suggested that this land of *I3y* is identical with the Yaa from the Sinuhe story and was situated either in the Akkar plain or in the region south of Tunip,¹¹⁴ while others want to locate it in the Beqaʿa valley.¹¹⁵ Khu-Sobek talks on his stela about a campaign against Asiatic Bedouins. It took place late in the reign of Senwosret III. Here the ‘wretched’ *Rtnw* is mentioned next to the region of Sheke-

⁹⁹ According to PARKINSON (2002: 298) the earliest preserved papyrus (P. Berlin 3022) with the story of Sinuhe was not written before the reign of Amenemhat III.

¹⁰⁰ Pap. Berlin 3022, Frag. A Row 29.

¹⁰¹ ERMAN and GRAPOW 1931: 82. On Qedem, see recently MOURAD 2013: 72–77.

¹⁰² LE SAOUT 1987: 325.

¹⁰³ REDFORD 1979: Pl. 1.

¹⁰⁴ Goren et al. 2004: 118–121.

¹⁰⁵ REDFORD 1979: Pl. 2.

¹⁰⁶ LE SAOUT 1987: 331.

¹⁰⁷ LE SAOUT 1987: 335.

¹⁰⁸ SCANDONE-MATTHIAE 1997b.

¹⁰⁹ REDFORD 1979: 271.

¹¹⁰ GOEDICKE 1986: 46.

¹¹¹ SCHNEIDER 2002: 261f.

¹¹² P. Berlin 3022, Frag. B, Column 8.

¹¹³ GUBEL and LOFFET 2012: Fig. 1; see also GOLDWASSER 2006: 123, No. 24 and MOURAD 2013: 78–81.

¹¹⁴ GUBEL and LOFFET 2012: 87.

¹¹⁵ MOURAD 2013: 78–81.

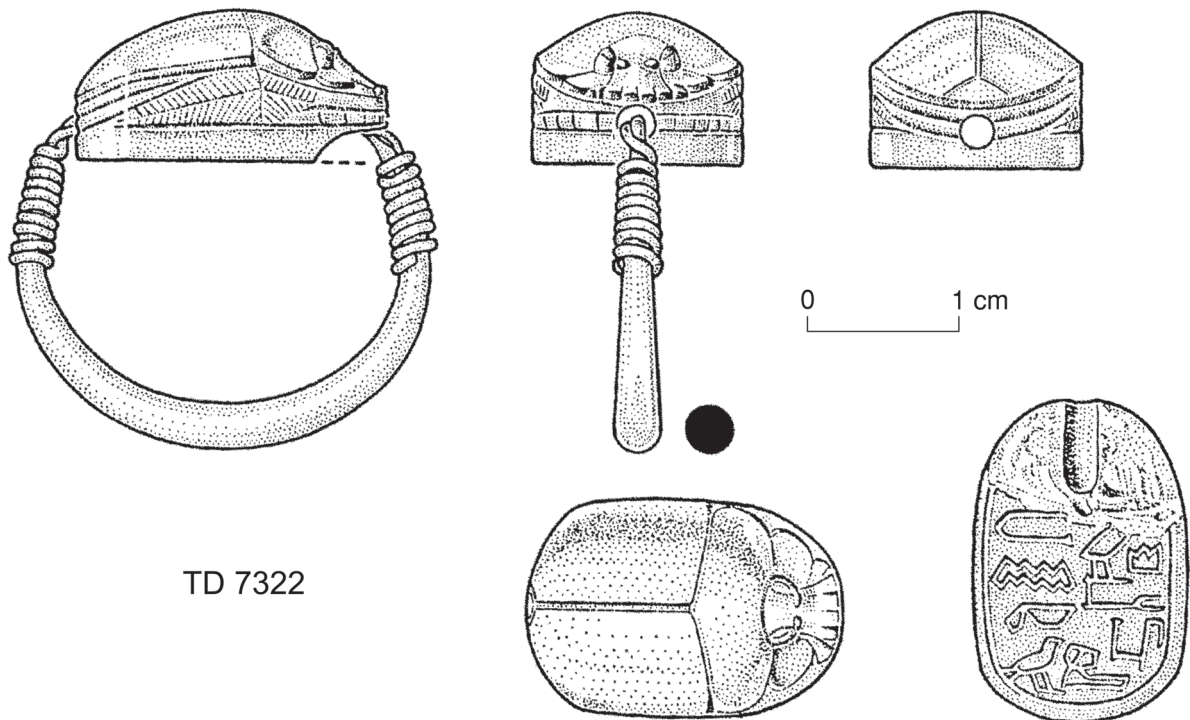


Fig. 16 Amethyst and gold ring TD 7322 (after SCHIESTL 2008, Fig. 48/1)

mem.¹¹⁶ If the identification of the latter with Shechem is correct the area of *Rtnw* extended during the later 12th Dynasty until the hill country in Palestine. Moreover, the depiction of a “number of cattle of *Rtnw*” found in the tomb of Djehutihotep in El-Bershe falls in the reign of the same king.¹¹⁷ A brother of a *hq3 n Rtnw* is mentioned on several stelae found in the Hathor temple at Serabit el Khadim, dating to the Years 4 to 13 of king Amenemhat III.¹¹⁸

Another object found at Tell el-Dab'a, which names *Rtnw*, dates to the beginning of the 13th Dynasty: it is an amethyst scarab mounted on a golden ring (Fig. 16) from a looted, but nevertheless very wealthy burial.¹¹⁹ It bears an inscription naming an Egyptian official with the name Sobekemhat. Unfortunately, the upper part of the inscription, which carried the title is badly damaged, but the traces of a *r* (?) -sign followed by a *t* and a *n*-signs are still visible next to an *w* and the classifier for foreign countries. G.T. Martin suggested a reading of [*hq3 n*] *Rtnw* for this lacuna.¹²⁰ This suggestion is most interesting, but poses a problem. We know of Asiatics using Egyptian

names during the MK, but the adoption of Egyptian names was never taken over by rulers or their close family members in the Levant. In all preserved hieroglyphic texts they kept their Semitic names. Even the brother of the above mentioned *hq3 n Rtnw* Khebeded(em),¹²¹ obviously in service to the Egyptian king, kept his foreign name. Thus the title of a *hq3 n Rtnw* on the Tell el-Dab'a scarab with an Egyptian name requires a convincing explanation. It must have been a dignitary in charge of the relations with Retjenu, but who was residing at Tell el-Dab'a in service of the Egyptian king. This hypothesis is also convincing as the region of *Rtnw* is too big for a single ruler. It would also be fitting for an extraordinary large town like Tell el-Dab'a, which was inhabited largely by people of western Asiatic origin and seemed to have had a quite independent status already during the late 12th Dynasty culminating later in an independent 14th Dynasty residing in Avaris.

It seems that for Egyptians of the Middle Kingdom, the region of *Rtnw* comprises the northern Levant as far south as the Samarian hill country,

¹¹⁶ PEET 1914: Pl. II, line 2.

¹¹⁷ NEWBERRY 1894: Pl. XVIII, lowest register.

¹¹⁸ GOLDWASSER 2012/13: 354–364.

¹¹⁹ SCHIESTL 2009: 90–92, Fig. 335.

¹²⁰ MARTIN 1998.

¹²¹ GOLDWASSER 2012/13.

with the mountains of Lebanon belonging to Upper Retjenu. It is also evident that this area was governed by more than one ruler. Furthermore, it seems that the title *ḥq3 n Rtnw* does not appear before the reign of Amenemhat III.¹²² It is possible that in the second half of the 12th Dynasty this title was granted by the Egyptian king. A title, which might have gone hand-in-hand with a political change, possibly in connection with the status of the city of Byblos, as Ryholt has already suggested.¹²³

Not only was the title of *ḥq3 n Rtnw* a political exaggeration, but also by using the title *ʿ3 wr njw wrw* “Greatest of the great” the owner of our seal wants to position himself above all other rulers of this region. In Egypt, such a title is very rare and is known only from the Tomb I in Siut, which dates into the reign of king Senwosret I.¹²⁴ However, we find a similar phenomenon in another of the royal burials of Byblos, in Tomb IV. On a stone vessel found inside this heavily robbed tomb, the owner calls himself *ḥq3 ḥq3w* “ruler of rulers”.¹²⁵ The remains of this tomb suggest a date in the MB IIB period, maybe shortly after the burial of Ipyshemu-Abi.¹²⁶ As on the Tell el-Dab^a seal impression, this title appears in Byblos at a time when the power constellations in the Eastern Mediterranean had shifted after the collapse of the Middle Kingdom and the destruction of Mari.

Conclusions

The seal for the impression TD 9402H of Tell el-Dab^a was most likely cut in the Byblos area for a person who seems to have had close connections to this town and, owing to his name, was perhaps closely related to or even a member of the royal family of this important center of commerce in the Levant. We know from the seal of the king of Buzuran that seals belonging to the ‘Green Jasper Workshop’ were made for other rulers either by order or given as a gift. The fact that the text was written in hieroglyphs and not in cuneiform shows its use in a community which was at home in Egypt or within a sphere of strong Egyptian influence, whether this may have been of a political or

religious nature. Its inscription emphasizes the unique position of its owner amongst his equals. The animals lined up in rows were specifically chosen to underscore the strength, virility and power of the owner of the seal. With stags and gazelles as animals of the god Resheph and the association of the latter with horses and chariots, as well as an identification of this god with the Egyptian war god Monthu, a military function for the seal’s owner could be suggested amongst his other functions. The official and symbolic character of the seal indicates that it was very likely used only at the highest official level. This is supported by a papyrus imprint on its back, which in all likelihood derives from a document that was important enough to be kept together with other valuable goods in a store room of the palace. Name as well as style of the seal puts it into the early MB IIB period which is contemporary with the 14th Dynasty and into which the older palace of Area F/II is dated. It is the same period of the Royal Tombs I and II of Byblos, which are rich in Egyptian and Egyptianizing finds.¹²⁷ This contemporaneity suggests that one is most likely not dealing with an heirloom but with a piece of correspondence, which found its way into the store rooms of the palace only shortly before it was destroyed by a massive fire. The fact that this seal was used on Egyptian mud leads to the conclusion that the carrier of the seal had a close connection with Tell el-Dab^a.

From a historical point of view, it seems that the earlier palace at Tell el-Dab^a/Avaris from the time of the 14th Dynasty, which is largely unexcavated, may have been the seat of the Ruler of Retjenu. It is still unclear what his relationship was to the 14th Dynasty. The most likely hypothesis is that he was an official or a dignitary of this and the preceding late 12th and 13th Dynasties. What we have at hand seems to suggest that he had a special tie to Byblos – a relationship already built by the pharaohs of the second half of the 12th and the first half of the 13th Dynasties. That strong evidence of conflagration in the palace could be a sign of political turmoil at the transition to the 15th Dynasty.

¹²² With the exception of the possible “cattle from *Rtnw*” from the tomb of Djehutihotep all other mentioning of this region seem to fall into the reign of this king. Khu-Sobek died early in the reign of Amenemhat III (PEET 1914: 13).

¹²³ RYHOLT 1997: 86–89.

¹²⁴ GRIFFITH 1889: Pl. X, row 6.

¹²⁵ MONTET 1928: 196.

¹²⁶ KOPETZKY 2016: Fig. 4.

¹²⁷ KOPETZKY 2015 and 2016.

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