

Earliest Palestinian Seal Impressions

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RECENT publications and reports have added three seal impressions to the seven listed by Nougayrol¹ from his 'énéolithique' period. There are in addition the impressions from Tell Jamid² and Tell Qurs in the Yarmuk Valley.

(a-b) In the course of excavations at Tell el-Far'a near Nablus, a collared-rim pithos decorated with stamped impressions in the form of a coiling snake and another impression in the form of a scorpion (?) were found in the Early Bronze Age IIa level³ (Fig. 1). The collared-rim pithoi which are Wright's types VIIIc-d⁴ are very common at Beth Shan XIII,⁵ and Megiddo stages V-III, strata XVIII-XVII.⁶ It is noteworthy that in the same level at Tell el-Far'a metallic sherds with combed decoration were beginning to appear. The impressions were arranged vertically on the storage jar and were apparently made by a wooden matrix repeatedly stamped on the wet clay from the neck of the jar down to the shoulder. The design, the scorpion and particularly the coiling snake, are exceptional in Early Bronze Age Palestine. Similar designs are reported from Elam and Tepe Gawra. The coiling snake also appears on the well known protodynastic knife-handle from Gebel Tarif, Egypt.⁷

(c) At et-Tell ('Ay) two sherds⁸ were found with a stamped impression. Sherd No. 63 was found in the centre — 'fouille G, chambre 6' — of the palace. From the stratigraphical point of view it is a moot question whether these

¹ J. Nougayrol: *Cylindres-sceaux et empreintes de cylindres*. Paris, 1939; B. Parker: *Cylinder Seals from Palestine, Iraq*, 11, 1949, pp. 1-43.

² G. Schumacher: *Unsere Arbeiten im Ostjordanlande, ZDPV*, 40, 1917, p. 170, Fig. 3.

³ R. de Vaux & A. M. Steve: *La seconde campagne de fouilles à Tell el-Farah, près Naplouse, RB*, 55, 1948, p. 552, Fig. 3.

⁴ G. E. Wright: *The Pottery of Palestine from the Earliest Times to the End of the Early Bronze Age*. New Haven, 1937, p. 75, Pls. B, G.

⁵ G. M. Fitzgerald: *The Earliest Pottery of Beth Shan, Museum Journal* (Univ. of Pennsylvania), 24, 1935, p. 14.

⁶ R. M. Engberg & G. M. Shipton: *Notes on the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age Pottery of Megiddo*. Chicago, 1934, p. 38, chart No. 16.

⁷ J. E. Quibell: *Archaic Objects, Catalogue Général... Musée du Caire*, I, Cairo, 1905, p. 237, No. 14265.

⁸ J. Marquet-Krause: *Les Fouilles de 'Ay (et-Tell)*. Paris, 1949, p. 39, Pl. LXVIII, Cat. No. 63.

sherds belong to the layer of ashes and destruction or to the layer beneath. Yet there are indications that they belong to that remarkable group of finds which includes No. 68, a stone axe, No. 104, a pear-shaped mace-head, and possibly No. 218, a pithos, again of Wright's type VIII d. The design is a scroll akin to the fourfold spiral (Fig. 2). This ornament has parallels at Byblos among

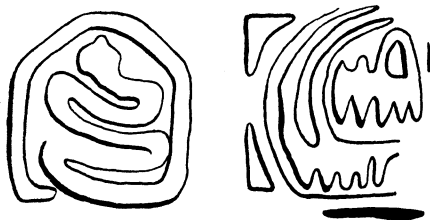


Fig. 1. Tell el-Far'a

(From de Vaux & Steve, *op. cit.*, n. 3, p. 522, Fig. 3)

the 'empreintes éneolithiques'⁹ and at Tell Judeideh (level XII); Frankfort compares the Judeideh spiral ornament with impressions from Susa.¹⁰ The spiral, so common in the Late Bronze Age, is not known from any other Early Bronze Age site in Palestine.

(d) The Tell Jamid impression (Fig. 3), a surface find, was described by Schumacher¹¹ as 'stamped on a biggish vessel of reddish clay well fired'. Glueck, who visited this tell in 1942, reports: 'The very numerous sherds... belonged almost exclusively to EB I-II, with some of them perhaps belonging to EB III.'¹²



Fig. 2. 'Ay

(From Marquet-Krause, *op. cit.*, n. 8, Pl. LXVIII, Cat. No. 63)



Fig. 3. Tell Jamid

(From Schumacher, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 170, Fig. 3)

The sherds illustrating this description have collared rims, face combing, platters, hole-mouth rims, and semi-elliptical ledge handles, an assemblage typical of the first half of the Early Bronze Age. The geometric pattern of the

⁹ M. Dunand: *Byblia Grammata*. Beyrouth, 1945, p. 38.

¹⁰ H. Frankfort: *Cylinder Seals*. London, 1939, p. 231. ¹¹ Schumacher, *op. cit.* (supra, n. 2), p. 170.

¹² N. Glueck: *Explorations in Eastern Palestine, IV*. *AASOR*, 25-28, 1951, p. 123.

Tell Jamid impression reminded Frankfort of similar patterns from Byblos and Judeideh, layer XII.¹³

The Jamid impression was made by rolling a cylinder seal along the surface of the vessel. It therefore differs in type from stamped seals. The distinction is of geographical as well as chronological significance. The cylinder seal has always been associated with Mesopotamia and the region of the Upper Euphrates. The stamp seal, on the other hand, is common in Persia, in Anatolia, and in the Aegean area.

(e) A similar rolled impression was found by Glueck on Tell Qurs overlooking the Yarmuk Valley. The sherd is described as hand-made, having a dark brown surface and a dark grey core. A lattice pattern was rolled on it.¹⁴ The pottery from Tell Qurs belongs 'to the first part of Early Bronze and fit(s) into the same picture as the early pottery of Tell Jamid'.

The other Palestinian seal impressions from Megiddo and Jericho¹⁵ belong to the rolled cylinder seal type. They have been compared to Early Dynastic seals from Far'a and Khafaje,¹⁶ on the basis of design and glyptic technique. The archaeological context agrees with an Early Dynastic date. The rolled seal impressions from Jericho were found on a storage jar, apparently an Early Bronze Age pithos. The Megiddo excavators believed that the vessels with rolled impressions belonged either to type 12 N (a hole-mouth jar) or 16 G (a storage pithos with upright neck). Fortunately one rolled impression was found afterwards on the jar photographed as a prototype of 16 G.¹⁷ This pithos has parallels as late as Beth Shan XIII.¹⁸ It is described as hand-made, light brown ware, orange to yellow wash, well finished, usually with undulating and straight raised rope designs of type 15 E, F, and H.¹⁹ It has a low collar neck. One plastic rope decoration goes round the middle of the jar. Other plastic rope decorations are arranged in semicircles on the shoulder. The range of this jar is given as stages V-VII; but as the excavators state that all seal impressions were found in stage V (stratum XVIII), this pithos should be assigned to the beginning of EB II.

¹³ Frankfort, *op. cit.* (supra, n. 10).

¹⁴ Glueck, *op. cit.* (supra, n. 12), Pl. 84:10, p. 130.

¹⁵ E. Sellin & C. Watzinger: *Jericho*. Leipzig, 1913, p. 97, Fig. 66.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.* (supra, n. 6, p. 38, and n. 10, p. 230).

¹⁷ R. M. Engberg & G. M. Shipton: Another Sumerian Seal Impression from Megiddo, *PEFQSt*, 1934, pp. 90-93.

¹⁸ Fitzgerald, *op. cit.* (supra, n. 5), p. 14, Pl. IV, Figs. 11, 17, 18.

¹⁹ Palestine Archaeological Museum, Inv. No. 34.2587.

The impression on jar 16 G was rolled horizontally along the shoulder as well as vertically from near the rim to about the middle of the vessel. This resembles the Tell el-Far'a stamped impressions which were also placed vertically. The Tell el-Far'a pithos has a range at Megiddo covering stages V-III (strata XVIII-XVII).

Later EB cylinder seal impressions found in Syria and Palestine belong, however, to the horizontal cylinder seal rollings only. These remained in use throughout the Early Bronze Age. At Hama²⁰ rolled impressions, exclusively horizontal, were found as late as Niveau J, which is later than Kh. Kerak. At Kh. Kerak itself a complete rolling on a pithos with flaring rim (Wright's type VIII d) was found. The date given is EB IV.²¹

The earliest Palestinian seal impressions must thus be divided into stamped impressions and cylinder rollings. They have been found as far south as Jericho and 'Ay. Their number increases gradually as we turn to Syria. In Palestine the stamped impressions appear at the beginning of EB II and do not seem earlier than Beth Shan XIV-XIII. The earliest cylinder rollings, both vertical and horizontal, appear on pithoi with upright rims and rail rims, which are also characteristic of the beginning of EB II. Cylinder rollings continue, however, as horizontal friezes (to the exclusion of stamped impressions) on jars with flaring or splaying rims until the end of the Early Bronze Age.²²

²⁰ H. Ingholt: *Rapport préliminaire sur sept campagnes de fouilles à Hama en Syrie*. Copenhagen, 1940, pp. 42-43, Pls. XIV-XV.

²¹ J. Perrot: *Nouvelles découvertes en Israël, Syria*, 29, 1952, p. 297. The author is indebted to Mr. P. Bar-Adon of the Department of Antiquities for having shown him the seal impressions he found at Kh. Kerak.

²² My thanks are due to Mr. N. Zori and Mr. Y. Aharoni of the Department of Antiquities for showing me seal impressions found at the foot of Mount Gilboa (el-Karm), and on Tell Hor (Kh. 'Ein Hor) near Ḥanitah, and to Mr. J. Leibovitch for many valuable suggestions.