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Two Phoenician Glass Seals from Tel Dor

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Tel Dor, the site of biblical Dor, is one of the largest mounds in the northern coastal plain of Israel, extending over an area of approximately 30 acres. In the Persian period it was a major Phoenician center and the capital of a province.

According to the well-known inscription engraved on the black-stone anthropoid sarcophagus belonging to Eshmunazar, king of Sidon (from the late sixth century B.C.E.), the city was granted to this king together with Jaffa and the entire Sharon plain by the "lord of kings," the king of Persia.¹ The city of Dor is mentioned as a "Sidonian city" also in the *Guide to Seafarers* attributed to Scylax, from about the middle of the fourth century B.C.E.²

In recent years large-scale excavations have been conducted at Tell el-Burj (Tel Dor) under the auspices of the Archaeological Institute of the Hebrew University and the Israel Exploration Society, and directed by the author. Among the remains uncovered at the site were extensive residential quarters, fortifications, and an extremely well-preserved city gate of the Persian period.³

The remains of the city attest that in the Persian period Dor was a well-planned city laid out on a classic Hippodamian plan. Several strata uncovered from the Persian period contain abundant evidence that the material culture of this harbor city was predominantly Phoenician in character and intermixed to a large degree with numerous Greek elements.⁴

In this brief article we will describe two glass seals found in Persian period strata at Dor: one conical shaped and the other in the form of a scaraboid.

Numerous anepigraphic seals of the Persian period have been uncovered in Israel, both in settlement strata and in tombs. On the basis of shape, they can be divided into four groups: 1) scaraboid seals which continue the style of the Iron Age and are imitations of Egyptian scarabs; 2) conical-shaped seals which were produced in various

1 And see N. Slouschz, *Thesaurus of Phoenician Inscriptions* (Tel Aviv, 1942), 24-25 [Hebrew]; and also H. Donner-W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften* (Wiesbaden, 1964), 1:3 (No. 14); 2:19-23; M. Dunand, *BMB* 18 (1965), 105-9.

2 See K. Gallinger, *ZDPV* 61 (1938), 70-79.

3 For the latest season of excavations at Tel Dor, see E. Stern, "Tel Dor 1985," *IEJ* 36 (1986), 101-4.

4 On the Greek inhabitants of the city of Dor in the Persian period, see now E. Stern, "On the Beginnings of the Greek Settlement at Tel Dor," *Eretz Israel* 18 (N. Avigad Volume) (Jerusalem, 1985), 419-27 [Hebrew].

types of stones; their shape is typical of Babylonian-Persian seals; 3) oval stamp seals of Greek origin; and 4) scarab seals which imitate Egyptian seals in shape.

The motifs engraved on these seals are generally rendered in a mixed style: either a combination of Phoenician and Greek motifs, Phoenician and Persian designs, Phoenician-Egyptian designs, etc. The entire group of the above four types should thus be considered local, probably Phoenician copies of Babylonian, Achaemenian, Egyptian and Greek seals.⁵

The two seals found at Dor apparently belong to the above group, that is, although some of their motifs are typical of the so-called Persian repertoire, others are clearly Phoenician. The seals probably belonged to two officials employed in administrative positions in the province of Dor, which was under the rule of the Sidonian kings in that period.⁶

One seal was uncovered in a Persian period stratum in Area A.⁷ Conical in shape, it was made of a translucent dark-green glass. As was usual with seals of this type, it was worn around the neck on a band that was drawn through a hole pierced in its upper, pointed tip (Fig. 1, Photos 1-2).⁸

The seal depicts a mythological figure that has its origin in Assyrian and Babylonian seals,⁹ of which some Persian period examples have also been found in Israel.¹⁰ This figure is known as the "scorpion man," and it is rendered as a sphinx on the upper part of the body with a bird body and legs and an Assyrian-bearded human face; the tail is a scorpion's, and it is raised in readiness for stinging. In our specimen the tail and body have been transformed in typical Phoenician manner into a lion's tail and body, though the Assyrian head is retained. We thus have before us the standard sphinx of Canaanite-Phoenician glyptics, with the addition of several foreign elements. It apparently also represents the biblical cherub,¹¹ which is also a very common motif on ivories, ornamented metal bowls, and seals, as well as in Phoenician sculpture and reliefs both in the East and in the Punic Colonies in the West as far as Spain.¹²

In front of the sphinx two sacred emblems are shown. Above is a clear representation of the crescent and sun, which are the standard emblems of Baal and Astarte found on many Phoenician seals,¹³ tombstones, column capitals, masks, and temple models.¹⁴

5 On seals of this type discovered in Israel, see E. Stern, *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period* (Warminster, 1982), 196-200.

6 On the province of Dor and its borders, see Stern, *ibid.*, 237-39.

7 It was found in the floor of locus L-1219 of the Persian period (excavation registration number, 11811). The drawings of the seals presented here were made by Sara Shpilman-Zeiri.

8 Cf., e.g., N. Avigad, *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (Jerusalem, 1958), 3:68-76, s.v. "seal" [Hebrew], and especially the photo in col. 74.

9 As, e.g., on the Babylonian cylinder seal from Tell Jemmeh; W. F. M. Petrie, *Gerar* (London, 1928), Pl. 19:29.

10 Especially on seal impressions of the province of Samaria found in the Wadi Daliyeh Cave; F. M. Cross, in P. W. Lapp and Nancy L. Lapp, eds., *AASOR 41* (1974), 28 (seal 25), Pl. 62:e.

11 And see M. D. Cassuto, *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (Jerusalem, 1963), 4:cols. 238-43, s.v. "cherub" [Hebrew].

12 D. Harden, *The Phoenicians* (Harmondsworth, 1971), Pls. 46-47, 68; S. Moscati, *The World of the Phoenicians* (London, 1973), Pls. 3, 11; p. 101, Fig. 20; p. 106, Fig. 24.

13 And see, e.g., G. A. Reisner-C. S. Fisher-D. G. Lyon, *Harvard Excavations at Samaria 1908-1910* (Cambridge, Mass., 1924), 2:Pl. 57:6.

14 Moscati, *The World of the Phoenicians*, Pls. 2, 6-7, 23; p. 107, Fig. 26.

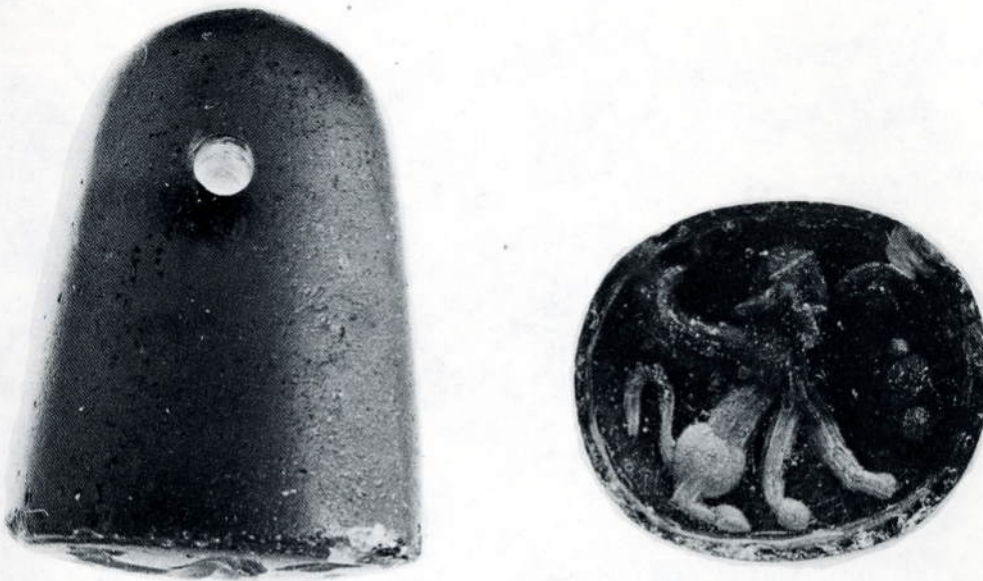


Fig. 1

Below is an unclear object or emblem which we have interpreted as a very schematic rendering of the Achaemenian fire altar, a very widespread motif on seals of this type.¹⁵

The second seal (Fig. 2, Photo 3) was discovered on the mound on surface level before the excavations began. It too is made of glass (bluish) and is scaraboid in shape with a smooth back. It is without doubt part of a signet ring of the type known in Israel from earlier periods, too.¹⁶

The seal depicts the well-known scene of the Persian king being led in a horse-drawn chariot by a charioteer. A spear is apparently shown in front of the driver.

This scene is well known as it appears on many Sidonian city coins of the Persian period.¹⁷ On the obverse of these coins, which are generally of quite large denominations, a warship is usually engraved in front of a fortress-with-towers that represents the city of Sidon. A similar warship riding over the waves also appears on other coins. On the reverse, the Persian king is frequently shown in his chariot drawn by four horses and led by a charioteer. Another man, usually wearing the tall Egyptian "Osirian" crown, often talks by his side. In the opinion of several scholars (Harden), this figure represents either the king of Egypt or the king of Sidon himself, dressed in Egyptian fashion.¹⁸ According

15 For a general discussion of this subject, see E. Stern, "Lion Seals of the Province of Judah," *BASOR* 202 (1971), 6-16.

16 This seal was discovered by Mr. Kurt Raveh of Kibbutz Nahsholim and given to the Department of Antiquities (archives number 562-79; registration number 5174). I wish to thank Mr. Sheli Wachsman and Mrs. Varda Sussman who handed the seal to the Tel Dor Expedition for study (registration number 5482).

17 Harden, *The Phoenicians*, Pl. 109:b.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 167.



Fig. 2

to an explanation of this scene proposed by H. Seyrig,¹⁹ the figure in the chariot was not the Persian king but represented the statue of the god Baal Eshmun, the chief deity of the city of Sidon in this period, and the accompanying figure walking behind is the king of Sidon in the role of a priest participating in a religious procession.

Our seal, however, differs from the above Sidonian coin in that the king of Persia (or Baal Eshmun) in the rear part of the scene is depicted turning around and grasping the hind legs of an animal. This is part of another widespread motif in which a god or mythological hero usually lifts up two similar animals by their hind legs. This scene too is derived from early Mesopotamian art and is very common on Phoenician coins. It is also found very frequently on "Persian-style" Phoenician seal impressions which have also come to light in fifth and fourth century B.C.E. assemblages in Wadi Daliyeh and Atlit.²⁰

In all events, there is no doubt that the scene depicted on our seal, whether it portrays the king of Persia in his chariot or the Sidonian national deity Baal Eshmun, is identical with that on the city coins.

We have recently suggested elsewhere that the coins issued in Israel in the Persian period were in fact the private seal impressions of the rulers of the provinces or of the various "states" existing in Israel in that period: Samaria, Judah, Ashdod, etc.²¹ If this theory is correct, the above find should probably be interpreted as the possession of a high-ranking official, perhaps even of the Sidonian king's representative in the city of Dor, who used it to seal documents with the emblem of Sidon, just as the king of Sidon did on its coins. In any case, we have here further contemporaneous evidence that the city of Dor in this period was under Sidonian rule.²²

19 H. Seyrig, *Syria* 36 (1959), 52ff.

20 Stern, *Material Culture* 200, Fig. 325 (first on right); Fig. 326 (on right); Cross (above, n. 10), 26-29.

21 Stern, *Material Culture*, 221-24.

22 For a similar phenomenon of Sidonian domination of the city of Samaria in the Persian period, see E. Stern, "Phoenician Art Centre in Post-Exilic Samaria," *Milat, Studies of the Open University* 1 (1983), 65-73 [Hebrew].