

H. Neil Richardson

Uncovering Ancient Stones

Essays in Memory
of
H. Neil Richardson

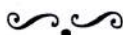
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Eisenbrauns
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1994

Notes on the Development of Stamp-Glyptic Art in Palestine during the Assyrian and Persian Periods

E. Stern



DURING THE EXCAVATION of Area B1 at Tel Dor, Israel, directed by H. Neil Richardson, a unique find was uncovered: an imported Assyrian Cylinder Seal made of red granite. The seal is 26 mm. long and has a diameter of 13 mm. A hole 3 mm. in diameter pierces it from side to side. It depicts the King of Assyria struggling with two monsters (fig. 1). Some time later another stamp made of glass and a few coins displaying the same motif but belonging to the later Persian Period were found in other areas at Tel Dor (fig. 7).

In the following discussion I attempt to sum up the history and development of these stamps and others, as well as their significance in understanding the cultural changes that occurred in Palestine during these periods.

Introduction

The conquest of Palestine by the Assyrian armies from 733 B.C.E. to the end of the century opened, for the first time in the history of Palestine, a new era of direct influence from Mesopotamian culture. It is due to this conquest that so much Assyrian influence is evident in the cultural finds: in architecture,

Author's note: This paper is dedicated to the memory of H. Neil Richardson, a distinguished scholar, a colleague, and a friend, who for eight years directed the Richdor group in the excavation of Tel Dor.

burial customs, cult objects, pottery vases, and glyptic art.¹ It is clear that this influence had already begun as the result of direct import of items, but during the eighty or so years of Assyrian rule in the country, Assyrian culture was adopted by the Israelites, who also adapted it to their own tastes. When Palestine was later conquered by other Mesopotamian empires, namely Babylon and Persia, this tendency to assimilate increased, and we may confidently assume that during the entire period, which continued for about 400 years (730–330 B.C.), the country was under continuous homogenous cultural influence.

I have recently analyzed the penetration of Mesopotamian burial customs into Palestine during the Assyrian Period, continuing into the Babylonian and Persian Periods.² In a separate study I intend to deal with Assyrian "palace-ware," its appearance in the country, and its continued use into the Babylonian and Persian Periods. In this study I concentrate on the art of Assyrian stamp-glyptics as represented in the Palestinian finds within these three periods, its continuity during this era, and its influence on the style of stamps and coins of the time. This study is limited in three ways: (a) only a few typical examples out of all of the finds of this type in Palestine will be used as illustrations; (b) only a few common motifs among many are analyzed; and (c) the discussion is confined to style of motif, leaving the analysis of cultic meaning for another paper.

The Hero Struggling with Two Monsters

The first motif to be dealt with is that of the hero (a king or perhaps a mythological figure) struggling with two monsters. This motif was already well known in Mesopotamian glyptic in the earliest periods. It was derived from the Gilgamesh Epic, where he is depicted grasping two monsters, and arrived in Palestine with the Assyrian conquest. The best known Assyrian example is the cylinder seal discovered in Richardson's area at Tel Dor (fig. 1). The stamp was found in a locus with other finds that included an "Assyrian"

1. See E. Stern, "Israel at the Close of the Period of the Monarchy: An Archaeological Survey," *BA* 38 (1975) 26–54; R. Amiran and I. Dunayevsky, "The Assyrian Open-Court Building and Its Palestinian Derivatives," *BASOR* 149 (1958) 25–32.

2. E. Stern, "Achaemenian Tombs from Shechem," *Levant* 12 (1980) 90–111. Since the publication of this article, more Assyrian-type clay coffins have been uncovered, some in Jerusalem in the excavations of Ketef Hinnom (see G. Barkay display, "Ketef Hinnom Facing Jerusalem's Walls," in the Israel Museum, 1986, and other coffins from Tell El Mazar in Jordan). Also see K. Yassine, *Tell El Mazar I: Cemetery A* (Amman: University of Jordan, 1984).

pottery vase as well as other pottery vessels of the time.³ It depicts a bearded man in Assyrian dress struggling with two gryphons standing on each side. The gryphons have the shape of horned and winged bulls(?). As is typical, the area between the three figures is filled with fire altars and a pair of fish facing each other at the feet of the king and the gryphons. On both sides of the scene, a schematic branch was added in order to form a border. Another stamp, executed in a similar method but from a later stage, the end of the Babylonian Period or the beginning of the Persian (sixth century B.C.E.), was discovered at Jericho.⁴ From the small drawing published in the final report, it is hard to study the details, but it appears that the animals on both sides of the hero are of different types, though both are winged.

While the seals of the Assyrian and Babylonian Periods are still uncommon, this motif became very popular during the later part of the Persian Period, undoubtedly because it was used continually by the empire's officials themselves. The examples that follow were collected from quite a large number of seals and may be classified by shape, origin, and material.

Type A

Some of the local seals (both cylinder and stamp) are almost identical in shape to those discovered in Iran or the major urban centers of the empire. The type of stone used to manufacture the seals is not local; the stamps are of chalcedony, cornelian, agate, jasper, or other minerals not common to this area. I have chosen two examples of this type: one cylinder seal and one stamp seal. The cylinder seal was discovered at Tel el Heir⁵ and depicts the king wearing the *kidaris* (the royal crown), holding two winged lions by their necks. The lions are standing upright on one hind leg, kicking the king with the other hind leg (fig. 2). The second is a stamp seal made of agate, discovered by R. A. S. Macalister at Gezer at the beginning of the twentieth century in one of the tombs that he labeled Philistine but which actually should

3. The seal's number is 28029. It was found in Locus no. 2815 in Area B1; A. Gilboa, "The Assyrian Pottery of Tel Dor," an unpublished M.A. Thesis presented to the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1992.

4. K. M. Kenyon and T. A. Holland, *Excavations at Jericho, vol. 4: The Pottery Type Series and Other Finds* (London: British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, 1982) 557, fig. 226:7; 558, fig. 201; and cf. analogies there.

5. E. Oren, "Migdol: A New Fortress on the Edge of the Eastern Nile Delta," *BASOR* 256 (1984) 7-44.

be dated to the Persian Period.⁶ The agate seal, which was imported from Mesopotamia, depicts the Persian king holding the horns of two standing, winged sphinxes. The king himself is standing on a gryphon, and above him is the emblem of the winged sun-disc in its Assyrian-Persian version (fig. 4).

Another variation of type A (fig. 3) was published by N. Avigad, who describes this stamp as follows:

The central scene represents a Persian king in combat with two roaring lions, each of which is standing upright on one of its hind legs and kicking with the other. The king wears the billowy Persian garments and is standing on a couchant animal, probably an antelope. Above the scene is represented the winged sun of the Assyrian type, and on the very top, at the edge of the seal, are incised the three 'Pmn', i.e., the name of the seal owner.

Avigad dates the seal to the fifth century B.C.E.⁷

Seal-impressions depicting upright, roaring lions from the Persian Period were also found in Judea at Ramat Raḥel and Gibeon.⁸ Originally I considered them to be part of another Assyro-Persian motif, that of the king shooting lions with bow and arrows. After further thought, I have decided that they should probably be classified as belonging to our type A.

Type B

This version of the first motif is known to us mainly from three bullae dating to the fourth century B.C.E. discovered in a cave at Wadi ed-Daliyeh in Samaria to which the citizens of a nearby town had fled in 332 B.C.E. The three seals are identical and are described by F. M. Cross as follows: "The King or hero wearing the 'Kidaris' and Persian dress holds in either hand at arm's length a twisting animal upside down. On the right is a lion; the animal on the left seems also to be a lion" (fig. 5). The scene, which is slightly different from type A, which depicts a hero struggling with two monsters, is also well known among the Achaemenian seal repertoire at Persepolis. In the Wadi ed-Daliyeh cave, a few bullae depicting similar scenes were found attached to a

6. R. A. S. Macalister, *The Excavation of Gezer* (2 vols.; London: John Murray, 1911) 1.292, fig. 153. The seal was found in grave no. 2 of the "Philistine graves," which was also the richest in objects. In the same grave, a cylinder seal was found, which, according to Macalister, had "a conventional Assyrian pattern." Unfortunately, this seal disappeared before being photographed or drawn. The "Philistine graves" are from the Persian Period, as is well known.

7. N. Avigad, "Three Ornamented Hebrew Seals," *IEJ* 4 (1954) 236-37, pl. 21:B:3.

8. See E. Stern, "Seal Impressions in the Achaemenid Style in the Province of Judah," *BASOR* 202 (1971) 6-16.

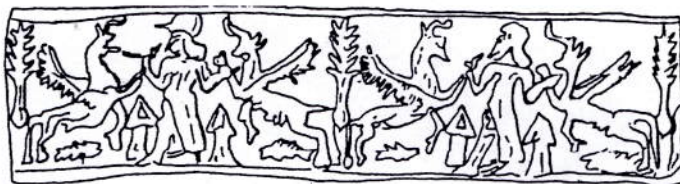


Fig. 1.

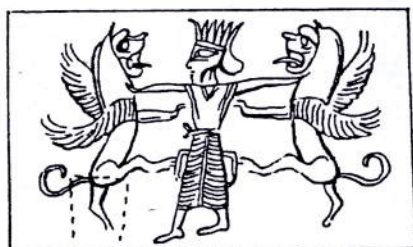


Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.

preserved papyrus document, and although they were undoubtedly influenced by the Persian motif, none of them has a Persian name, nor are they Persian.⁹ In the fourth century B.C.E., these motifs were indeed common among the local inhabitants in general and among the Phoenicians in particular. Seals of this type evidently were mass-produced during this period, and many have turned up in various digs.

Type C

One group of stamps that were mass-produced were conoid stamps, which are distinguished on their upper part by a hole pierced for a thread, allowing the seal to hang around a person's neck. They are made of blue or green glass. Of this type only a single example is presented here, a stamp discovered in the excavations of Samaria.¹⁰ This stamp also shows the king of Persia struggling with two animals, the nature and identification of which are not clear (fig. 6).

Type D

These conoid stamps, although their overall number is quite large, are only a minority of the recently found stamps, which are usually in the shape of scaraboids or scarabs, sometimes made of semiprecious stones, but more often of glass or steatite and blue or green faience. These have been found by the dozens in the coastal sites of the country and were mainly in the service of the Phoenician population. During this period the Phoenicians borrowed from three different sources, and I categorize the stamps accordingly.

The first source was *Persian*: the hero was depicted wearing Persian dress. One example of this type is a glass stamp discovered at Dor.¹¹ This type of scarab stamp is rare, because heroes from two other traditions are more prominent. The *Egyptian* hero who struggled with an animal was usually the Egyptian-Phoenician god Bes. In the local Phoenician cult he played a decid-

9. F. M. Cross Jr., "The Papyri and Their Historical Implications," in *Discoveries in the Wadi ed-Daliyeh* (AASOR 41; Cambridge, Mass.: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1974) 28–29, pls. 62:17, 36, 51; cf. now also M. I. W. Leith, *Greek and Persian Images in Pre-Alexandrian Samaria* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); E. Stern, "A Hoard of Persian Period Bullae from the Vicinity of Samaria," *Mikmanim* 6 (1992) 7–30 [Hebrew].

10. J. W. Crowfoot, G. M. Crowfoot, and Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Samaria-Sebaste III: The Objects from Samaria* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1957) 397 no. 80; 393 fig. 92:80.

11. The seal was found in Area D1 at the southern end of the mound. Its number is 55339, and it was uncovered in Locus 5620.

edly apotropaic role.¹² A typical example is a Persian Period scarab-stamp discovered in the Atlit tombs (fig. 10).¹³ The third influence, *Greek* mythology, has also been discovered on stamps dating from the end of the fifth century B.C.E., and this influence reached a peak during the fourth century. On these stamps, the figure of the Greek hero Herakles replaced that of the Persian king or the Egyptian Bes, for he was identified with Melqart, the main Phoenician god. A whole group of this type was uncovered in some of the Atlit tombs.¹⁴ Herakles is usually depicted lifting his club in one hand and holding a lion on his hind legs in the other (figs. 8–9, 11).

Type E

In the fourth century B.C.E., during the last stage preceding the final victory of Greek-Hellenistic culture over Palestinian culture, another motif appears in different variations on coins that were later known as "Philisto-Arabian" or "Palestinian."¹⁵ Many of these coins depict either the Persian king or the god Bes.¹⁶

In this section I have traced the Assyrian motif from the time of its introduction into Palestine, the coming of the Assyrian administration, through its immediate use for glyptics by the local officials, its continued use during the Babylonian Period, and on to the time of the Persians, when it was mass-produced on stamps and coins.

The King Stabbing a Lion

Next let us turn our attention to the use in Palestinian glyptic of a second motif that, from the standpoint of distribution and popularity, is the best known of all. Here too the various stages illustrated above are represented,

12. See E. Stern, "Bes Vases from Palestine and Syria," *IEJ* 26 (1976) 183–87; Veronica Wilson, "The Iconography of Bes in Cyprus and the Levant," *Levant* 7 (1974) 77–103; W. Culican, "Phoenician Demons," *JNES* 35 (1976) 21–24.

13. C. N. Johns, "Excavations at Atlit (1930–1931): The South-Eastern Cemetery," *QDAP* 2 (1933) 41–104; 99 fig. 85; pl. 14:935.

14. *Ibid.*, 70–71, fig. 30, pl. 14:496; 85, fig. 59, pl. 14:687; 86, fig. 62, pl. 14:705.

15. See G. F. Hill, *Catalogue of Greek Coins of Palestine* (London: British Museum, 1914) 83–89; A. Kindler, "The Greco-Phoenician Coins Struck in Palestine in the Time of the Persian Empire," *Israel Numismatic Journal* 1 (1963) 2–6, 25–27.

16. Y. Meshorer, *American Numismatic Society SNG*, vol. 6 (1981) nos. 39–40; and cf. now Y. Meshorer and S. Qedar, *The Coinage of Samaria in the Fourth Century B.C.E.* (Jerusalem: Numismatic Fine Arts International, 1991).

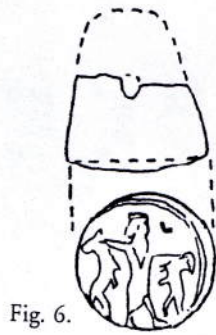


Fig. 6.

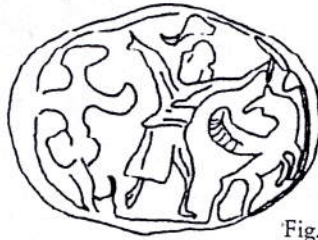


Fig. 7.

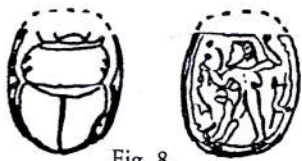


Fig. 8.

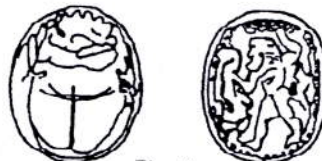


Fig. 9.

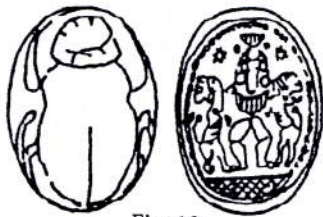


Fig. 10.

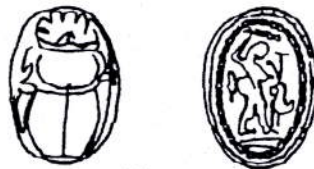


Fig. 11.

but I wish also to point out additional details. This motif depicts the Assyrian King holding an upright lion by the head or neck with his left hand and stabbing it with a dagger held in his right hand.

In its original form, this stamp (which also has very old Mesopotamian prototypes) represented the Assyrian royal house itself. A. J. Sachs and A. R. Millard have devoted special discussions to it, proving that it was the "royal Assyrian seal."¹⁷ It has been found stamped on bullae attached to documents registering shipments to or from the royal house throughout the entire period of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (from the days of Shalmaneser III, 859–824, to the late seventh century B.C.E.). During this long period, the motif achieved an almost standard form, and it was used often as a decoration on stone orthostats in the Assyrian royal palaces. Sachs also includes among the "royal stamps" one impression on a clay bulla found at Samaria by the Harvard Expedition (fig. 12).¹⁸ The bulla from Samaria must be an impression either from a "royal" stamp that was used to seal documents sent to the governor of the province or a stamp that belonged solely to the Samarian governor himself. In either case, this is the first appearance of the motif in Palestine. It is not surprising, therefore, that it served as a model for local imitation, first of all by the exiles returning from Assyria. One stamp, while slightly different in style and technique of execution, depicts a similar motif: a hero holding with his left hand the head of a winged monster standing upright.¹⁹ This motif is one of two appearing on a stamp attributed by N. Avigad to an Ammonite official from the Assyrian Period who borrowed both his name and motifs from the Assyrian repertoire (fig. 13). The Ammonites were not the only people who adopted this motif at an early date. The first were (as usual) the Phoenicians, who made extensive use of it on their stamps, decorated metal bowls, stamped clay vessels,²⁰ and pottery vases, all of which were common in Phoenician contexts, especially during the seventh to sixth century B.C.E., in Palestine, Transjordan, and Cyprus.²¹

The main period during which this motif flourished in Palestine was the Persian Period, as was the case for the first motif. There is no doubt that the

17. A. J. Sachs, "The Late Assyrian Royal Seal Type," *Iraq* 15 (1953) 167–70, pls. XVIII–XIX; A. R. Millard, "Royal Seal Type Again," *Iraq* 27 (1965) 12–16.

18. G. A. Reisner, C. S. Fisher, and D. G. Lyon, *Harvard Excavations at Samaria: 1908–1910* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1924) vol. 2, pl. 56:a; Sachs, "The Late Assyrian Royal Seal Type," pl. 19:3.

19. N. Avigad, "Seals of Exiles," *IEJ* 15 (1965) 222–32, pl. 40:B.

20. E. Stern, "New Types of Phoenician Style Decorated Pottery Vases from Palestine," *PEQ* 110 (1978) 11–21.

21. G. E. Markoe, "A Terracotta Warrior from Kazaphani, Cyprus, with Stamped Decoration in the Cypro-Phoenician Tradition," *Rivista di Studi Fenici* 16 (1988) 15–19, pls. 1–4.

Assyrian royal motif was adopted by the Persian administration also, as proved by many finds at Ur, Persepolis, and other major Achaemenian sites.²² This motif was used by Persian officials in Palestine and is found on a number of bullae; four from Samaria—two from Samaria itself and two from the cave at Wadi ed-Daliyeh—deserve special mention here.

One variation of this stamp motif was found by the Harvard Expedition to Samaria, an impression in which the Assyrian king is replaced by a Persian king, with his typical crown and cloth. It is important to note that this impression survived on the edge of a clay tablet (it is not a bulla), perhaps sent from Persia to Palestine (fig. 15).²³ The same motif is also depicted on a bulla found at Samaria by the Joint Expedition.²⁴ On the other side of the bulla, traces of papyrus can be seen (fig. 14).

Two similar impressions were found on bullae in the cave in Wadi ed-Daliyeh and published by F. M. Cross (fig. 16).²⁵ Both were found attached to a papyrus document that had been preserved. Judging by the contents and the names of the witnesses preserved, none of the individuals was Persian. In the same cave, a coin with the same motif was also found (fig. 18).

A good example of the mass-produced stamps is the one found at the Phoenician site of Tell Keisan in the 'Akko Valley (fig. 17).²⁶

The primary use of the motif during the Persian Period was on coins, because the motif was adopted by the city of Sidon (fig. 19).²⁷ A large quantity of coins from Sidon depicting the stabbing of a lion by the Persian king have been found at all of the major coastal cities of Palestine: 'Akko, Tell Abu-Hawam, Dor, Jaffa, and elsewhere.²⁸

22. L. Legrain, *Ur Excavations X: Seal Cylinders* (New York: British Museum/University Museum, 1951) nos. 752–55; E. F. Schmidt, *Persepolis* (OIP 69; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957) vol. 2, pls. 3:1, 11–37, 13:50–59; G. Richter, "The Late Achaemenian or 'Greco-Persian' Gems," *Hesperia Supplement* 8 (Shear Volume; Athens: American School of Classical Studies, 1949) pl. 31:3. K. Ballkan, "Inscribed Bullae from Daskyleion," *Anatolia* 4 (1950) pl. 33, 9, b.

23. See Reisner, Fisher, and Lyon, *Harvard Excavations at Samaria*, 378, pl. 57h; J. Nougayrol, *Cylindres-Sceaux et Empreintes de Cylindres Trouvés en Palestine* (Paris: Geuthner, 1939) 61, pl. 6.

24. Crowfoot, Crowfoot, and Kenyon, *Samaria III*, 88, pl. 15:42.

25. Cross, "Papyri and Their Historical Implications," 28, pl. 62:4, 22a.

26. Jacques Briand and Jean-Baptiste Humbert, *Tell Keisan: Une cité phénicienne en Galilée* (Paris: Gabalda, 1980) 277, pl. 89:21.

27. G. F. Hill, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Phoenicia* (London: British Museum, 1910) pls. XVIII:5, 7; XIX:9–11; XX:5; XXI:3.

28. C. Lambert, "Egypto-Arabian, Phoenician and Other Coins of the Fourth Century B.C. Found in Palestine," *QDAP* 2 (1932) 1–10; pl. I:21–34 (from Tell Abu-Hawam).



Fig. 12.

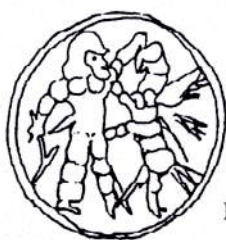


Fig. 13.



Fig. 14.



Fig. 15.



Fig. 16.



Fig. 17.



Fig. 18.

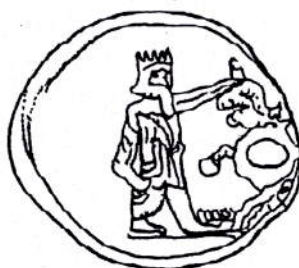


Fig. 19.

It should be pointed out that Sidon was not the only city to borrow the second motif for coins. Some Palestinian coins with the motif have recently turned up as well. The most interesting of these add the name of the city of Samaria.²⁹ I have pointed out in a previous study the strong Sidonian influence on Samaria from the Assyrian Period through the Persian era.³⁰

Conclusion

The two motifs discussed above are but a few of many, and many more could have been adduced. For the purposes of this discussion, the two are sufficient to show the following:

1. The Assyrian occupation of Palestine opened a new chapter in its material culture, and the resulting changes can be observed in many of its artifacts, including relics of glyptic art. Mesopotamian glyptic appeared suddenly in Palestine, and shortly afterward local people—from all the region's different nations—started to imitate Assyrian motifs.
2. The continued occupation of the land of Palestine by the two succeeding Mesopotamian empires, Babylon and Persia, resulted in continual influx of new motifs. For this reason, we should regard the three historical periods as one cultural unit.
3. The imported seals and later imitations were absorbed into local repertoires all over the country. In addition to accurate imitations of Mesopotamian glyptic, some seals were altered according to the special tastes of the local nations. The changes took place mainly in "cultic" motifs, less often in official ones.
4. At the end of the period (fifth to fourth centuries B.C.E.), these stamps were mass-produced from cheap materials, glass or faience, and also appear on Phoenician and Palestinian coins. At this stage some Greek and Egyptian motifs were added to the old Assyrian and Persian motifs, and this combining of motifs was consistent with the mixed culture of Palestine during the period.³¹

29. Meshorer and Qedar, *The Coinage of Samaria*.

30. E. Stern, "A Phoenician Art Centre in Post-Exilic Samaria," *Atti del I Congresso Internazionale du Studi Fenici e Punici* (Rome: Herder, 1983) 1.211–12.

31. On the peculiarity of this cult, see E. Stern, *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period* (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1982) 158–95; idem, "A Favissa of a Phoenician Sanctuary from Tel Dor," *JJS* 33 (Essays in Honour of Yigael Yadin; 1982) 35–54; idem, "The Beginning of the Greek Settlement in Palestine in the Light of the Excavation at Tel Dor," *AASOR* 49 (1989) 107–24.