A New *lmlk* Jar Handle from *Ḥirbet Qīla*

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The first season (August 7th – September 7th 2014) of a joint project of archaeological surveys and excavations at *Ḥirbet Qīla* was undertaken by Birzeit University, the Palestinian Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, and Montpellier University. In search for archaeological remains and in order to carry out a site-assessment study for the destruction at the site, two areas were chosen for excavations. Area A is located on the western part of the top of the hill. Three squares (5 × 5m each) were opened in Sector 14 in Area A. Area B was set on the southeastern slope of the hill and contained 4 squares (5 × 5m each). After excavating in Square 1 in Area A, the data gained from that square indicated that the area served for food production or was part of an industrial area. A grain silo, part of a wine press and grinding mortars have been uncovered here in addition to twenty loom weights found scattered in the fill. In Area B a section of 20m of the city wall as well as a rectangular tower (5 × 4m) were unearthed. The preliminary investigation of the material from the survey and the excavations at the site date the material to the Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age, Iron Age II as well as to the Classic and Islamic periods.

1. The Jar Handle

During the excavations, on the 17th of August 2014, a stamped jar handle with a *lmlk* seal impression was found on the surface near the southwest corner of Square 1 in Area A (Fig. 1; Taf. 15). The handle fragment was partially covered with plaster material indicating that it once may have been embedded in a layer like the nearby Locus 14 (1.5m below the surface) containing light grey soil mixed with plaster material and Iron Age II pottery sherds.

The handle fragment is 8.5cm long and 7.0cm wide. It was well-fired and made of light grey clay mixed with coarse white and grey grits. The surface color of the handle is light red. The cross section of the handle corresponds to the two ridged type separated by a shallow or double ridge extending over the whole length of the handle.

1 *Ḥirbet Qīla* is located at the western side of the town *Bēt Ūlā*, about 14km northwest of Hebron. The site was probably known as *uru Qīltu* (< *Qīltiu*) in Amarna tablets (EA 279:12; 280:10 – 11; 287:11?; 289:28; 290:10, 18; cf. Moran 1992, 391). It is identified with biblical Keilah (*q̄yli̇āh* [q̄ylh/q̄lh]; Josh 15:44; 1 Sam 23:1 – 23; 1 Chr 4:19; Neh 3:17; Koehler/Baumgartner 2001, 1116; Albright 1925, 51; Lux 1974, 193 with n. 40; Rainey 1983, 3 – 5, 11; DeVries 1992). The team of the University of Montpellier was directed by Dr. Sylvie Blétry.

2 Investigations of the damage caused by antiquity looters have shown that the site is heavily destroyed. Many pits of different depths (1.5 – 3.0m) and sizes (2 – 5m. in diameter) can be clearly seen everywhere on the site. The looters in many cases have refilled the pits. It seems that in many places the remains of the Islamic, Classic, and Iron Age II layers have been totally destroyed or removed. This was confirmed by the data from squares in Area A where plastic pieces and other recent finds were unearthed until a depth of 2.5 – 3.0m.

3 On the *lmlk* seal impressions cf. for example the comprehensive bibliographies in the recent publications Young 2012, 50 – 58; Na’aman 2016.

4 Cf. for example Diringer 1949, 73 – 74; Lapp 1960, 14.
The stamp seal was 20mm wide and approximately 27mm long. It was impressed longitudinally on the jar handle\(^5\) leaving an oval seal impression which contains a two-winged symbol in the center. The displayed symbol is a representation of a protrusive two-winged figure (two-winged solar disc). The head and the tail are clearly visible. In contrast, the impression of the seal did leave no traces of the wingtips. It is evident however, that the seal belongs to Type H IIB 1 according to the typology of Peter Welten\(^6\).

Letters were applied in two lines framing the two-winged symbol at the top and at the bottom. The upper line displays the word \textit{lmlk} which is divided in two parts. Each part contains two letters written above the spread wings of the symbol. Below the tail of symbol the word \textit{hbrn} occupies the lower line of the inscription. The two lines of the inscription must be read separately\(^7\):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{\textit{lmlk}} & \quad \text{“Belonging/of/to the king”, “royal”} \\
\text{\textit{hbrn}} & \quad \text{“(from) Hebron”}
\end{align*}
\]

Fig. 1. Jar handle with \textit{lmlk} seal impression from \textit{Hirbet Qila}.

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\(^5\) Cf. for example Pritchard 1959, 20.

\(^6\) Welten 1969, 37; cf. Grena 2004, 21 with table 17 for cross references to other typologies.

\(^7\) Cf. Welten 1969, 8.
2. Epigraphic Description

The script on this seal impression which belongs to class 3 shows more advanced forms in comparison with the script on classes 1 and 2. This observation is mainly notable in regards to the form of the ꞌmēm ꞌ8.

Upper register: The stem of the ṣāmed is inclining towards the right. Its bottom is rounded and is hook-like ꞌ9. The ꞌmēm has three diagonal strokes without crossbar ꞌ10. The main leg of the ꞌmēm is bent leftwards ꞌ11. The lower stem of the kaf is curving left, while the central stroke is inclining to the left side ꞌ12.

Lower register: The vertical strokes of the ṣēt go beyond the horizontal ones ꞌ13. The head of the ḫet is triangle in form but slightly elongated. Its leg is hardly to be seen because of the curvature of the handle. The ṭēṣ has an approximate triangular head and – as far as it is visible – a vertical leg ꞌ14. The nūn has an open squared head. Its leg is curving slightly leftwards ꞌ15. Due to the incomplete impression of the seal, the lower parts of the letters ṣēt, ḫet and ṭēṣ are not completely visible ꞌ16.

3. Date and Distribution

Since the archaeological context of the sherd is uncertain, it is difficult to determine the exact date of the handle. If we rely on epigraphy and analogy from other similar examples, we can say that the seal impression is of the two-winged symbol which has a longer period of use than the four winged symbol ꞌ17. Therefore it can be placed in the late 8th until the early 7th cent. B.C.E. This type is widely distributed in the hill country and the lowland and has been discovered in many sites from Tell en-Nasbe in the north to the Negev in the south, and from Tell el-Gazarı / Gezer and Tell es-Šeḥ Ahmed el-‘Areṇı in the west to Ḥirbet Qumran and Engedi in the east. As Ḥirbet Qila is located in the lowland, the discovery of the stamped jar handle there is not surprising. The site is not far from Tell ed-Duweṣ / Lachish that produced the most remarkable collection of lmlk seal impressions. The lmlk seal impressions

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8 Cf. Diringer 1953, 343.
10 Cf. Diringer 1953, Pl. 46b:4–6; Cross 1962, 22 nos. 16–17, 21, 26; Diringer 1941, Pl. 7:5; Wältjer 1969, 39 ERR II 38.12.
11 Cf. Diringer 1941, Pl. 7:4–6.
13 Cf. Diringer 1941, Pl. 7:4–5.
14 Cf. Diringer 1941, Pl. 7:4–5.
15 Cf. Diringer 1941, Pl. 7:4–5.
16 Cf. Diringer 1941, Pl. 7:5–6.
17 Cf. Diringer 1953, Pl. 46b:4; 1941 Pl. 7:4; Pritchard 1959, fig. 9:521.
18 Cf. most recently Na‘aman 2016, 122. Cf. also older studies like Diringer 1949, 76–77; Lapp 1960, 15. Comparable seal impressions are known from Tell ed-Duweṣ/Lachish (Diringer 1953, 346 table a), from el-Ǧib/Gibeon (Pritchard 1959, 18), from Jerusalem, from Tell el-Batṣiš (TUSHINGHAM 1992, 62–63) and from other sites.
21 Where the majority of stamped jar handles have been found from Tell ed-Duweṣ/Lachish, Tell Sandahunna/Maresha, and Tell Zakariyye/Azekah (cf. Na‘aman 1986, 11 and 14; Diringer 1953, 347 table b).
bear short and stereotyped texts composed of two lines, one line over a symbol (four or two winged symbol) and the other line below it. The upper line consists of four letters lmlk “to the king/of the king/belonging to the king”, “royal”. The characters of the word lmlk are written either together or divided into two parts. While the lower line is occupied by one of the following four place names: hbrn “Hebron”, z(y)p “Ziph”, šwk “Socoh” and mnṣṭ (which is unknown).

It is noteworthy to mention that, despite of more than a hundred years of research on this topic, the scholarly debate is still ongoing about the typology, the date of the lmlk seal impressions, symbolism of the two-winged figure, and the location and the function of the four place names associated with lmlk seal impressions. Hopefully further finds of lmlk seal impressions from archaeological excavations will help clarifying the major issues of this glyptic tradition.

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21 Cf. for example WELTEN 1969, 4.

22 The most important division of the lmlk seal impressions falls into two types: 1. Impressions with the four-winged symbol (representing the Egyptian motif of a flying scarab); 2. Impressions with the two-winged symbol. See most recently NA’AMAN 2016 with further references. For older studies see for example DIRINGER 1949, 73–74 and 76; PRITCHARD 1959, 23; LAPP 1960, 21; AHARONI 1967, 342–343; LANCE 1971, 316.

23 For a recent assessment of the scholarly debate on the dating of the lmlk seal impressions see NA’AMAN 2016, 111–113. It seems evident that the lmlk sealing system was introduced by King Hezekiah (714–686 B.C.E.) and that after Sennacherib’s campaign of the year 701 B.C.E. only the two winged symbol remained in use.

24 Many proposals have been set to interpret this symbol, e.g. a flying or winged scroll (ALBRIGHT 1943, 74; DIRINGER 1949, 74; 1953, 342) or a winged solar disk (LAPP 1960, 12). TUSHINGHAM 1992, 61 considers a two-winged solar disk which was used as the emblem of the official seal of Judah. He assumed that the use of two-winged figures (two winged solar disks) was abandoned during the reign of Josiah because of its foreign mythological connotations (cf. also most recently NA’AMAN 2016, 122).

25 Four place names appear on lmlk seal impressions: hbrn “Hebron”, šwk “Socoh”, z(y)p “Ziph”, and mnṣṭ (which remains unknown). Except for Hebron, the location of these sites is still disputed between scholars; see for instance KLETTER 2002, 136–139.

26 For the function and role of these four places various proposals have been made, e.g. capitals of four districts with store houses in which oil and wine was collected as a form of taxes (cf. for example ALBRIGHT 1925, 51–52; cf. also most recently NA’AMAN 2016, 122); royal pottery production centers (DIRINGER 1949, 80, 82); royal vineyards with winery in Hebron under royal control (LAPP 1960, 22); royal estates (WELTEN 1969, 133–142 and 173–174).
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