

## A CONE-SHAPED STAMP SEAL FROM QURNAT ḤARAMIYA (ROSH HA-‘AYIN)

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A cone-shaped stamp seal was found at Qurnat Ḥaramiya (see Torgē and Avner 2018).<sup>1</sup> It was unearthed in the southeast corner of a Stratum II, Phase 2 room (L48) in Area A, among pottery sherds from all the periods that are represented at the site, from Iron Age I to the early Hellenistic period. The room was one of three elongated rooms belonging to a building consisting of a fourth, broad room, possibly comprising a Four Room House. Its construction was dated by the excavators to the Iron Age II. Two bronze vessels with shapes that are typical of Iron Age pottery—a cooking pot and a jug—were found in the same room, at the base of a wall.

### THE SEAL

The seal (27 mm high, 25–27 mm in diam.) seems to be made of local chalk, black and highly bituminous, which was treated with oil (cf. Amorai-Stark, Rosenfeld and Minster 2005). It is a Type III conoid according to Keel (1995: §248 and 251, with 25 examples). This type is characterized by an approximately identical height and base-diameter; a cone that is even and regular, pierced at about mid-height, probably to pass a string through; and a base that is perfectly circular or—as is the case of the present seal—slightly oval. The edge of the base of the seal is damaged and chipped on the left upper side.

### THE SEAL'S BASE (Fig. 1)

#### *Decoration*

The decoration on the base is divided horizontally in two. The lower half depicts a standing animal with horns, facing left and suckling her young. To the left of these two figures is a scorpion, head pointing downwards. Suckling animals in conjunction with a scorpion on a conoid of this type and period are usually *caprids*, as for example on conoids from Bet Shemesh (Grant 1934: Figs. 3–16; Keel 2010a:286ff, Nr. 161), northern Tell el-Far‘ah (de Vaux 1955:581; Keel 1980:115, Abb. 89; Keel 2010b:4ff, Nr. 6) and Gezer (Keel 2013:446f, Nr. 653).



Fig. 1. Stamp seal: (a) base; (b) impression.

The schematic rendering makes it impossible to distinguish between the closely related species of the *caprid* genus: the domestic and the wild goat, and the ibex. Typically, *caprids* have very short tails and arched horns, long ones for the male, short for the female. However, the impressive horns of the male were held in such high regard that even a suckling animal was sometimes shown with the horns of a mature male. This is the case, for example, on a conoid from Ta'anakh (Lapp 1967:34, Fig. 24; Keel and Uehlinger 1998:148ff, Fig. 175a; Keel 2015:149ff, No. 10). In the present case, however, the animal should be identified as a cow rather than a *caprid*. This is suggested by the relatively long tail and by the shape of the horns, which resemble more closely the U-shaped horns of cattle (cf. Keel and Uehlinger 1998:142, Figs. 165a–c; 145, Fig. 169b) than the arched horns of *caprids*. A very similar representation of a suckling cow was found on a conoid from Gezer (Macalister 1912 [II]: Fig. 437:6; Keel and Uehlinger 1998:148, Fig. 173; Keel 2013:180ff, No. 34).

As for as the meaning, or significance, of this group of animals, it should be emphasized that the scorpion is closely related to sexuality, probably because of its very conspicuous 'mating-dance'. It appears in similar scenes, and in association with different 'love-goddesses', particularly the Mesopotamian Ishkhara who is most probably of Syrian origin (cf. Keel and Schroer 1985:26–38). In Deuteronomy 7:13 and 28:4, 18 and 51, suckling cows and goats/sheep have the name of goddesses (and cf. the Latin *veneres gregis*, an expression which denotes suckling animals as manifestations of the goddess Venus). A goddess Ishtar of small livestock is mentioned in the correspondence between Ramses II and Chattushili III (Edel 1997:70, 72, 100). In polytheistic contexts, suckling animals were seen as manifestations of a mysterious divine power, and in later Yahwism—as symbols of divine blessing (Delcor 1974; Görg 1993; Keel and

Uehlinger 1998:142–144, 147–154). Without contesting this already well-established interpretation related to fertility, Zernecke (2008) and Staubli (2009/2010) showed that there is probably an additional connection to the astronomical constellation of Scorpius seen in the autumnal night sky. Autumn was the period of the new year celebrations, and fertility was one of its main concern. This interpretation is supported by the main motif of the upper half of the seal: the drinking figure.

The upper half of the decoration is much less common. It depicts a striding animal and a sitting human. The striding animal, on the left, approaching the head of the suckling animal at a right angle, may be an additional symbol of fertility, associated with motherhood. The sitting human—an unusual motif—is depicted in a schematic style, with its arms and legs bent at right angles. These stylistic features occur on a group of cylinder seals dating from the end of the Late Bronze Age, and are most typical of a group of scarabs and similar seals found mainly in the southern Levant in late Iron Age I and early Iron Age II contexts (the group with “eckig stilisiertem Thronenden”; Keel 1994:53–134). A figure of this type on a conoid is, as far as I can tell, unique. The figure sits on a square throne set on what seems as a podium. The action of the figure, which seems to drink from a vessel through a straw, is as unusual as its presence on a conoid. This motif is common on Mesopotamian Early Dynastic cylinder seals (Keel-Leu and Teissier 2004: Nos. 45–48, with parallels; see also Ziffer 2005:133–136, Figs. 2, 3, 5, 6) and on seals of the Akkadian period (Boehmer 1965: Nos. 668f, 677–682; cf. Selz 1983), but it became exceedingly rare after the third millennium. Symposiasts on Old Syrian cylinder seals do not drink with a straw from a vessel, but rather out of beakers/goblets (Otto 2000:241f). One exception is an Old Syrian cylinder seal found at Tell el-‘Ajjul, which most probably dates from the eighteenth century BCE. It depicts two figures drinking through straws from a common vessel (Keel and Uehlinger 1998:46, Fig. 41). However, at least seven centuries separate this seal from the one from Qurnat Ḥaramiya. Another iconographic exception—probably more or less contemporary with the present conoid—is a bulla discovered by Eilat Mazar in the 2012 Ophel excavations (Register No. 10135). It shows a schematic anthropomorphic figure sitting on a chair with a back rest. In front of the figure is a vessel set on a shelf. The figure apparently drinks from the vessel through a straw. Drinking from a vessel using a capillary tube is also shown on a haematite scarab of unknown provenance in the collection of University College London (Keel 1994:128, Fig. 26). Haematite scarabs are typical of the Iron Age IIA (see Keel 1995: §359–360).

### *Technique*

Some elements of the engraving are linear, as for example the legs of the animals and of the human figure. Other elements are hollowed out, and seem to show traces of drill holes, as for example the body of the cow, with its V-shaped engraving (for the difference between “linear” and “hollowed out” engravings, see Keel 1995: §326-334).

## DATE

Rare and isolated conoids appear in Canaan in the Late Bronze Age and become a common type in Iron Age I. The shape is not of European origin, as suggested at times (Kempinski 1989:87). It was, at least in the southern Levant, an autochthonous development (Keel-Leu 1990: 378ff). Conoids of Type III are most common in late Iron Age I and early Iron Age II (Keel 1995: §251). Their prime was thus slightly earlier than the group of the “Eckig Stilisierten Thronenden” (Keel 1994:86–91; Schipper 2003:260–265). Since the human figure with its arms and legs bent at a right angle is hardly imaginable without the influence of the Rechteckig Stilisierten, it may belong to the late eleventh or the tenth centuries BCE.

## NOTE

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