

TWO ANCIENT WEST SEMITIC SEALS

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We present here two West-Semitic seals from the collection of Mr. Sh. Mousayeff in London¹

1. A small seal made from a mother-of-pearl in the form of a scaraboid.

The seal is 19 mm wide and 13 mm high. It has one double dividing line.

The inscription seems to be slightly damaged by a vertical line passing over some letters but not making them illegible. The reading (Figs. 1 and 2):

- 1) *lyrhm'el* «Belonging to Yerahme'el
2) *bn hmlk* the king's son».

The inscription is clearly seen as a Judaeic one which we have to date back to ca. 600 BCE. This can only be the original seal of Yerahme'el, the king's son, known from the book of Jeremiah 36:26. It is not a surprising new feature, however. Avigad published a bulla of this Judaeic prince². Despite the shape of all letters which are identical and the fact that both seals might have been made by the same seal cutter, the bulla was not stamped from this seal, as the different size of both specimens shows. (The bulla, published by Avigad measures 12 x 10 mm).

The relatively rare material of our seal can be a good proof that the seal belonged to the real king's son, known from Jer. 36:26.

2. A seal of reddish steatite in the form of a duck. Its surface measures 48 x 34 mm and it is divided into 3 registers.

On the lower register a winged scarab is depicted. On the second register we see the inscription, and on the upper one we see a crescent. Both elements, the winged scarab and crescent are not so rare found on seals. But what is really rare, is their combination. Separately both figures frequently appear on Moabite and Aramaic seals, but not together.

The inscription (Figs. 3 and 4):

- lb 'lšm* «Belonging to Ba'alšem».

¹ Deep thanks for the permission to publish are expressed to him. For the photographs the thanks are given to Mr. R. Deutsch.

² N. Avigad, *Hebrew Bullae from the Time of Jeremiah*, Jerusalem 1988, No. 8 with the literature of former publications given; and Y. Avishur - M. Heltzer, *Studies on the Royal Administration in Ancient Israel in the Light of Epigraphic Sources*, Jerusalem 1996, 49, No. 8, fig. 143 (Hebrew).

The / (lamed) shows us that without any doubt it is followed by a personal name, and in this case a theophoric name, where the name of the god B'1 is the first part of it.

The second part is *šm* «name». Such personal name is unknown to us from the ancient West-Semitic and other Semitic texts. If the second element of the name were the first part of the name it would make sense. Therefore we can only suppose it is a hypocoristicon or simply the omission of the last letter and the name had to be originally **b'šm*³, like *'šm*⁴, frequently appearing in Hebrew epigraphy as also in Phoenician, where we find *b'šm*³ instead of *b'šm*⁴, «Ba'al listened, heard».

The shape of the letters is rather archaic. Especially the š (šin) and the m (mem) should be pointed out. Therefore the seal should be dated back to the 8th cent. BCE, even to the first half of it.

The seal is most probably an Aramaic one (or Moabite [?]).

³ F.L. Benz, *Personal Names in the Phoenician and Punic Inscriptions*, Rome 1972, 100, CIS, I 87, 3; 656, 3; 669, 3 etc.

⁴ Benz, CIS, I, 3358, 2-3, 3440, 2.



Fig. 1-2

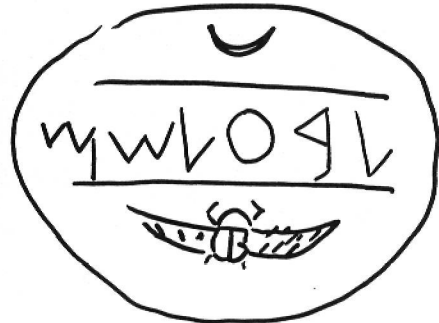


Fig. 3-4