The Continuity of the Canaanite Glyptic Tradition into the Iron Age I–IIA

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Abstract

Building upon her work in IPIAO (Die Ikonographie Palästinas/Israels und der Alte Orient. Eine Religionsgeschichte in Bildern, 4 volumes, see footnote 1), the author tries here to relate several recognizable developments in the iconography of the Early Iron Age to the theme of the conference. Iconography is not able to answer the question of whether state formation began in the 10th century BCE. It does indicate, however, that during the 11th and beginning of the 10th centuries BCE the dominant Egyptian influence was on the decline, and other traditions came to prominence: from the north, Syrian influences, and in some places sub-Mycenaean influences. Above all, however, the autochthonous Canaanite heritage experienced a revival, developing new themes and using new media.

KEYWORDS: Canaanite heritage, Middle Bronze Age, stamp seals, iconography

1. Introduction

The conference theme, "State Formation Processes in the 10th century BCE Levant," is a historical topic whose investigation has been strongly influenced by biblical texts and has also been researched extensively from an archaeological perspective. Can early traces of a development toward territorial states in the Levant be found in the archaeological record? As a historian of religion who works primarily with

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iconographic material, I followed the discussions – whether historical, biblical, or archaeological – from a certain distance. After all, connections between state formation in the 10th century BCE, if indeed it took place then, and the production and dissemination of artifacts and iconographic motifs will have left no discernible trace. However, artifacts and iconographic motifs do possibly provide us with information on the origins, cultural orientation, and religious traditions of particular groups of people and on the changes and innovations that took place.

The iconography of the Levant and of other ancient cultures documents long-term developments rather than short-term changes. To identify a particular point in history or to delimit a particular 100-year period based on the material remains of a settlement is a challenge for archaeology and is rarely feasible. Dating iconographic material within a margin of error of 100 years is equally difficult. Artifacts displaying iconographic motifs can be older than the layers in which they are found, since such objects were often handed down or used over multiple generations. Most importantly, however, there were traditional images and motifs that circulated for well over a century and as such do not provide a secure anchor for very precise dating. This is why Othmar Keel and I decided from the very beginning of the now complete IPIAO project[1] not to differentiate between the Iron Age I and the Iron Age IIA. Both of these periods of the Early Iron Age were relatively short and do not allow for a further separation of the iconographic evidence (IPIAO 4: esp. 60–61). Most of the themes and motifs extend from the Iron Age I into the Iron Age IIA. The Iron Age I contains the earliest attestations of new motifs which then become particularly prominent in the Iron Age IIA, some also becoming more widespread. Here, seal amulets are particularly important for reconstructing developments in the Early Iron Age, given their large number and wide geographic and demographic distribution. Up to the end of the 20th Dynasty in Egypt (1070 BCE), Ramesside seals, which already appeared in the Late Bronze IIB, remained widespread. Conoids made of dark limestone appear in the Iron Age IB (mid-12th century BCE). Around the same time or perhaps slightly later, scaraboids with very similar motifs appear and remain popular long into the Iron Age IIA (900 BCE). Their distribution attests to an increasingly supraregional system of exchange and the development of a larger cultural entity (Mazar 2015:

1. The volumes are referred to as IPIAO 1 = Schroer and Keel 2005; IPIAO 2 = Schroer 2008; IPIAO 3 = Schroer 2011; IPIAO 4 = Schroer 2018; the object numbering of the volumes is consecutive. The references to Othmar Keel's "Corpus der Stempelsiegel" are by the alphabetic order of the archaeological places in the volumes. Thanks go to Stephen Germany (Basel) for translating the basic version of this contribution into English.

408, 412), whereas the Egyptian-influenced scarabs decreased in popularity and prestige in the wake of a rebalancing of power in the region (Koch 2017). The post-Ramesside mass-produced ware may have been produced during the 21st Dynasty (1070–945 BCE) and possibly into the 22nd Dynasty (ca. 900 BCE) in both Egypt and the Levant (Keel and Mazar 2009: 65, 109; for a different view, see Münger 2003; 2005). Rather than speaking of post-Ramesside seals, Münger prefers to speak of "Early Iron Age mass-produced seals" (beginning in the early 10th century BCE).

In what follows, when I say Early Iron Age, I mean the entire period of the Iron Age I and IIA. It is likely that after the period of Egyptian dominance and presence in the Levant, the population gradually, rather than abruptly, became more receptive to new impulses from outside, while in some cases taking up local traditions once more. Following an overview of the formative Canaanite culture of the Middle Bronze Age, I will describe three areas that can be distinguished within the iconography of the Early Iron Age. Alongside the foundational but gradually receding Egyptian heritage (1), there were enduring and newly revived impulses from northern Syria and Anatolia (2) and a blossoming and development of autochthonous Canaanite traditions (3). Between these three poles, important developments, including displacement, competition, and mutual influence, took place in the Early Iron Age.

2. The Middle Bronze Age as the Formative Period of a Strong Canaanite Culture

Although the legacy of the Middle Bronze Age in the themes of Iron Age iconography extends beyond the Early Iron Age (goddess and caprids by a tree, snake appliqués on jar shoulders, etc.), I will limit myself here to this period. My perspective on the iconography is religio-historical in nature and will thus focus on continuities and the big picture rather than on specific places or points in time.

Already in the Neolithic period and at the end of the Chalcolithic period, a set of religious symbols that would be of lasting significance developed in Palestine/Israel. This included (figurines of) women holding up their breasts, the constellation of women, pubic triangle, and caprids by a tree, as well as protective snakes on vessels (see Schroer and Keel 2005: 58–65, 109–113; Schroer 2018a).

As Keel and Uehlinger (1998: 16–17) have shown, the MB IIB was a formative period for the development of the religious symbol system. During these centuries, the Canaanite city-states experienced a unique period of political power, including

dominion over Lower Egypt. Unlike in the Late Bronze Age, when the Egyptian symbol system imposed itself on the traditions of the subject region, during the Middle Bronze Age contact with neighboring cultures, especially with Egypt, created something unique (Schroer 2008: 14–57). The strength of a culture can be measured by its capacity for innovation, and the Middle Bronze Age developed and modified religious symbols that would remain central to identity formation for centuries to come. These included the nude, erotic goddess and her partner, the weather god (in association with branches, dance, and the cult of the goddess and god), and the veneration of local princes as well as symbols of Egyptian rule (the Horus falcon, the lion as king, and protective lions), and several Egyptian deities.

3. The Egyptian Heritage at the End of the Late Bronze Age and the Fading of Egyptian Dominance in the Iconographic Record

When it comes to Egyptian motifs, the iconography of the Early Iron Age is largely a continuation of the Late Bronze Age. As was already the case in the Late Bronze Age, the interest lay in Egyptian kingship, in the world of the gods, or in cosmological concepts, but it was selective and concentrated on particular themes. In addition, certain typical Late Bronze Age motifs were in circulation, such as the pharaoh smiting his enemy (IPIAO 4: Nos. 1029–1031). Also popular were royal names in cartouches (IPIAO 4: Nos. 1047–1049), (royal) archers, the veneration of the name of Amun (IPIAO 4: Nos. 1054–1059), and the falcon-headed sun god (IPIAO 4: Nos. 1079–1083). Goddesses such as Sekhmet, Hathor, and Isis, together with Bes and Pataikos, played a role as helpers in private life, appearing more commonly on amulets than on seals. As in Egypt, Baal-Seth and Reshef enjoyed continued popularity; already in the Middle Bronze Age, these two gods had a close connection and also attest to the blending of Egyptian and Western Asian types of gods. They never interact with other deities, but beginning in the Early Iron Age almost always appear as a duo, often with Reshef depicted on a gazelle and Baal-Seth on a lion (IPIAO 4: Nos. 1281–1283). During the Early Iron Age, there were no significant differences between Egypt and Palestine in terms of iconography; that is to say, during the beginning of this period, the southern Levant remained strongly influenced by Egyptian traditions. The increasing significance of Amun, for example, is not unique to the Levant, since in Egypt itself Amun of Thebes took on unprecedented importance for the temple and state during the 21st Dynasty (IPIAO 4: 25–29). This deity, sometimes, albeit rarely,

even in full anthropomorphic form, is attested on scarabs from the end of the Late Bronze Age or the Early Iron Age at sites such as Tell el-Farʿah South (IPIAO 3: No. 654) and Akhziv (IPIAO 4: No. 1064). The "Philistines" played an important role in the spread of the cult of Amun in the southern Levant. The Egyptian cult of Osiris continues to be reflected in burials in clay sarcophagi, which appear at sites on the coastal plain and elsewhere since the Late Bronze Age. Finds that have traditionally been designated as "Philistine" draw on sub-Mycenaean traditions in style and form, yet without departing from the themes of the local Canaanite religion.[2] The presence of the nude goddess in full depiction seems, however, to have persisted at these places somewhat longer than in others. Meanwhile, the problem of defining "Philistines" and identifying sites as Philistine sites has increased so much that the complete set of artifacts, arguments, and interpretation must be reconsidered fundamentally.

Changes in the reception of Egyptian themes can also be seen in glyptic art. Othmar Keel (see Keel, Shuval, and Uehlinger 1990: 290–291, 346; Keel 1994: 28, 46–47, 232; 1995: 63, 100) has spoken of a "de-Egyptianization" with reference to new media and motifs. This can be seen in the fact that the scarab lost its place as the dominant seal shape due to the arrival of conoids and scaraboids made from local materials (especially limestone) on the market. The royal Egyptian names in the cartouches and their devotees became strongly schematized, and the repertoire of royal names melded together. The process of de-Egyptianization can be seen especially clearly through the example of the archer shooting at animals and enemies. The origin of this figure, which was primarily engraved on scarabs, is clear: it is the Egyptian king (Fig. 1), often in a battle chariot, who is depicted as warding off the forces of chaos. During the Early Iron Age, however, the archer quickly lost his pharaonic characteristics (Fig. 2) and thus became the embodiment of a *Chaoskämpfer* without any connection to Egyptian kingship.[3]

There are correspondences between the traditional and new media and the motifs that are engraved on them. Most of the Egyptian themes (Baal-Seth, the lord of the caprids, the pharaoh smiting his enemies, the veneration of Amun-Re, and the falcon-headed deity) continued to appear on scarabs and rectangular

2. Searching for a "Philistine" iconography (Ben-Shlomo 2010) might be an unrewarding effort as long as questions of cultural (mixed) identities are controversially discussed (IPIAO 4: 40–42).

3. Similarly, the symbolism of a lion attacking or hunting a human enemy becomes separated from the pharaonic context after the Late Bronze Age. The associated cartouche with a royal name, for instance, is now missing.

Fig. 1. Early Iron Age scarab from Ashkelon (Corpus I: Aschkelon No. 25).

Fig. 2. Early Iron Age scarab from Tell el-Farʿah South (Corpus III: Tell el-Farʿa-Süd No. 250).

plaques, while some of them found their way onto scaraboids and later onto seals made of bone, which already reflect a renewed interest in Egyptian symbolism (Münger 2018). With a few exceptions (the lion standing over its enemy, archers in a chariot, hunting from a chariot), the conoids of the Early Iron Age, however, contain almost exclusively non-Egyptian motifs.

4. Northern Syrian/Anatolian Traditions and New Impulses

Northern Syrian and Anatolian themes and craft traditions already strongly influenced the iconography of Palestine/Israel in the Middle Bronze Age. It can be demonstrated that the motif of the nude, erotic goddess was transposed onto scarabs from the Classical Syrian cylinder seal tradition; in the process the goddess lost her courtly features and was transformed into an earth goddess and goddess of vegetation (IPIAO 2: 47–48 and Nos. 386–387, 404–419). Weather gods, scenes of the bull cult, and local princes in their Middle Bronze Age form also come from this sphere of influence, not only in glyptic art, but also in metal and pottery art. In the north of Israel, this influence remained strong even during the Late Bronze Age. The dark-colored animal plaques engraved on both sides from the Late Bronze IIA (see the published pieces Corpus I: Akko Nos. 130, 138; Corpus II: Bet-Schean No. 41, Ekron No. 63; Corpus IV: Geser Nos. 105, 127, 355–356, 631), which were produced locally and about 60% of which were found north of the Carmel range, have close connections to groups of finds from Syria and Lebanon (Keel 1994: 226–230, 250; for the finds from Ugarit see Amiet 1992: Fig. 14, Nos. 61–64). In the Iron Age I–IIA, northern Syrian influence can clearly be seen in haematite seals, first in scaraboids and conoids and then, beginning

in the Iron Age IIA, scarabs as well (Keel, Shuval, and Uehlinger 1990: 367–377). These are found from Acco to Tell el- Farʿah South, and not only in the coastal plain. They almost exclusively depict animals such as caprids but above all bovines, and sometimes also scorpions.

From the Middle Bronze Age and continuing into the Iron Age, the link between the weather god and the bull remains intact, despite the success of the Baal-Seth type under Egyptian influence. In the Syrian tradition (see also Winter 1987: Fig. 434), the bull displaces and surpasses the lion, since the bull represents the weather god who overcomes drought, embodied in the lion (Figs. 3–4). As in Old Assyrian, Classical Syrian, and Ugaritic glyptic art, depictions of bulls goring lions – and even weather gods in full depiction standing atop the bull in the same dynamic pose (Figs. 5–6) – are found in the north of Israel down to the Early Iron Age. The dark-colored material from which the conoids are made also evokes the older cylinder seals made of hematite. Consequently, new stimuli from the north (Syria) after the fading of the Egyptian impact must be considered revivals on traditional grounds.

A more precise documentation of the motifs and their distribution in the near future should confirm the observation that conoids from the north clearly reflect a stronger interest in bovines than those from the south. Bovines had a more important place in agriculture as well as in the symbolism associated with the weather god in the north than in the south, where sheep and goats receive more attention (Raban-Gerstel et al. 2008: Table 4, Fig. 13).[4] Nursing caprids are depicted much more frequently on conoids and scarabs in the south than in the north. Apart from biblical references to bull veneration in the north, the mentioning of cattle in general, and of calves and fattened calves (Gen 18:7–8; 1 Sam 28:24; Amos 6:4) in particular, should be considered in this context.

A seal impression from Jerusalem (Corpus IV: Jerusalem No. 450) and a conoid from Qurnat Ḥaramiya (Rosh haʿAyin), both depicting a seated guest at a banquet drinking from a vessel with a straw, could also reflect Syrian influence (see Keel 2018).[5] The conoid from Qurnat Ḥaramiya (Fig. 7) combines the symposium guests with a nursing bovine and scorpion. Outside the Levant, drinking with a straw was regarded as a typical Syrian or Canaanite custom, as a painted stela

4. See also Sapir-Hen 2019. The economic and symbolic significance of flocks and cattle is too wide a subject for discussion here.

5. Other straw drinkers are also depicted possibly on a lost scaraboid from Gezer (Corpus IV: Geser No. 86) and certainly on a hematite scarab of unknown provenance (Keel, Shuval, and Uehlinger 1990: 369–370, Fig. 66).

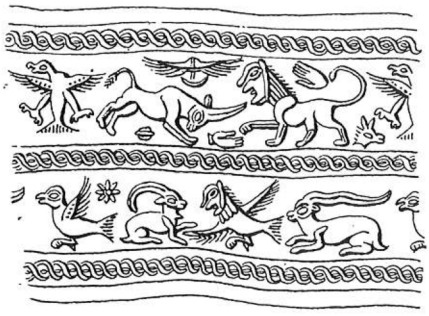

Fig. 3. Classical Syrian cylinder seal from Ras Shamra-Ugarit (Schaeffer-Forrer 1983: R.S. 3.411).

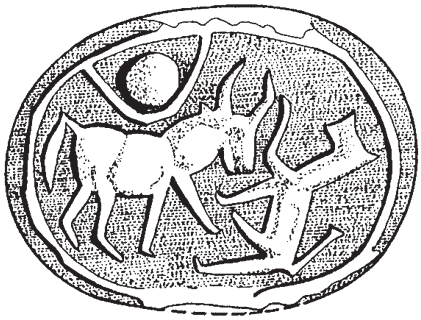

Fig. 4. Early Iron Age scarab from Tel Kison (Corpus IV: Tell Keisan No. 7).

Fig. 5. Old Assyrian cylinder seal from Tel Rehov (IPIAO 1: No. 467).

Fig. 6. Early Iron Age conoid from el-Jib (Corpus IV: Gibeon No. 20).

from Tell el-Amarna, dated about 1380 BCE and now in the Egyptian Museum in Berlin,[6] shows. Indeed, festival participants drinking from a pitcher with a straw rather than from a cup appear on cylinder seals already in the Early Dynastic period. The cylinder seal from Tell Halaf (Fig. 8) combines the two drinking individuals with dancers, a dove, a scorpion, and a bull, above which may be a pedestal with the weather god. Occasionally, drinking with a straw is associated not only with the erotic context of the banquet but also with depictions of sexual intercourse, for example on Old Babylonian pottery plaques (see e.g. Winter 1987: Figs. 347–348). On Classical Syrian cylinder seals, in contrast, the context seems rather to be courtly (see Winter 1987: Figs. 245, 247, 301). Cylinder seals from Ugarit regularly show a person drinking with a straw in both the Middle Bronze (Fig. 9) and Late Bronze Ages (Amiet 1992: Fig. 12, No. 56; Fig. 45, No. 250).

6. Inv.-No. ÄM 14122; Priese 1991: No 80.

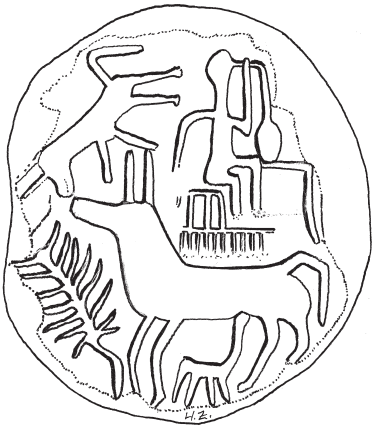

Fig. 7. Early Iron Age conoid from Qurnat Ḥaramiya (Keel 2018).

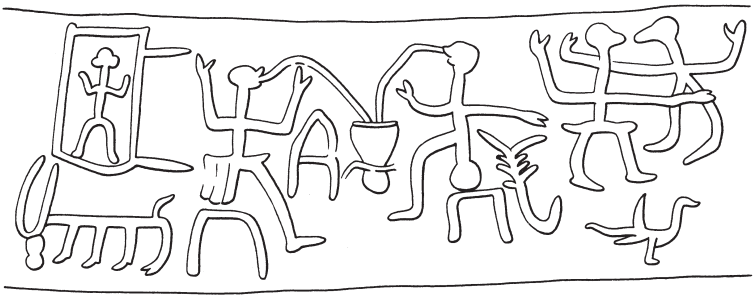

Fig. 8. Early Dynastic cylinder seal from Tell Halaf (Winter 1987: Fig. 367).

Fig. 9. Classical Syrian cylinder seal from Ras Shamra-Ugarit (Schaeffer-Forrer 1983: R.S. 29.116).

5. The Revival and Continued Development of Canaanite Tradition

What does the term "Canaanite" mean? This definition is decisive for the description of the third major area to be discussed here. Returning to the above comments on the formative period of the Middle Bronze Age, I would describe as Canaanite all the iconographic motifs from Palestine/Israel that go back to autochthonous models from the Middle Bronze Age or develop these in new ways. Canaanite religion was focused particularly on the cycle of nature and the productivity of the land; in the biblical tradition, this can be seen in the ancestral narratives in the book of Genesis and in the significance of the temple and of festivals connected to nature (Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 130–131; Staubli 2013).

During the period of Egyptian hegemony, the autochthonous population did not disappear but rather lived under conditions and influences that were different from before. Handicrafts reflect this change in their own way. Egyptian motifs continue to be engraved on the bases of scarabs during the Ramesside period, the engraving now being flat. Keel called them "archaisierend," because they copy the Middle Bronze style (see Keel 1995: §§ 332, 692–694). During the Late Bronze Age important Canaanite motifs find their way onto other media, such as the transfer of the depiction of the nude goddess from expensive metal to terracotta. In contrast, images of bulls in metal, albeit few in number, continued to exist from the Middle Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age. During the Late Bronze Age, caprids with branches were widespread in paintings on ceramics and on scarabs.

Some motifs do not seem to have been passed down during this period; either they were no longer in circulation during the Egyptian hegemony, or else they have not been preserved. However, handicrafts seem somehow to have preserved certain types of knowledge and knowhow, by heirlooms for example, so that at the end of the period of Egyptian dominance the local traditions could be revived. As mentioned above, during the formative Middle Bronze Age both Egyptian and Syrian/Anatolian traditions flowed together into the pool of Canaanite motifs. The revival of Canaanite motifs in the Iron Age is particularly conspicuous in cases where artists did not take up Late Bronze Age conventions but rather jumped back to even older conventions.

Innovations were made, especially in the realm of coroplastic art. Cultic stands and pottery shrines are complex objects that bring together or play with a wide range of Canaanite motifs: the nude goddess (as mistress of the animals), protective lions, protective sphinxes, doves, caprids grazing on trees, branches,

and palmettes. The compositions reflect the old Syrian conception of sanctuaries (Schroer 2017: 153). Among the terracotta female figures, beside a few examples of a woman with a child, female drummers form a new and well-attested group.

In glyptic art, seals in new local shapes and made from local materials (such as limestone) appear on the scene. Most of these conoids and scaraboids bear motifs that can be described as Canaanite. The seals, as far as I could ascertain, are mostly made of limestone or some other stone, but sometimes of a blue composite material, carnelian, or glass.[7]

An example of the revival of a Canaanite motif is that of the lion tearing into a caprid. During the Middle Bronze Age, this motif is not uncommon on finely engraved scarabs from Palestine/Israel (Fig. 10). These scenes are almost always hunting scenes. The movement of the animals, jumping in full stride, is captured exquisitely, and, with a few exceptions, the prey turns its head toward the attacker. The style of the depiction is not inspired by Egyptian models, although in some cases its meaning may be, at least when the lion overwhelms the caprid and a human enemy (both representing chaos) at the same time (Fig. 11). In such cases, the lion clearly symbolizes the ruler. The depiction of the hunting scene draws much more heavily, however, on Classical Syrian and Mitanni glyptic traditions, in which lions attacking caprids can often be found in auxiliary scenes. In these scenes, the caprid always turns its head toward its attacker (Fig. 12). Both the lions and the caprids are depicted in alternating poses of sitting, leaping, or flight. The broader context of these scenes on cylinder seals is not entirely uniform, but in most cases such lion attacks occur in proximity to erotic scenes (see, e.g., Winter 1987: Figs. 72, 98, 141) in which a goddess encounters the weather god or a ruler or in which a prince and princess seem to raise their cups in a toast. Late Bronze Age cylinder seals from Ugarit (Fig. 13) show lions pouncing on caprids or bovines in martial rather than erotic contexts, and here the prey does not normally turn its head toward the lion (RS.9.676; RS.30.259; RS.17.105; RS.26.047). There are also several cylinder seals from Ugarit in which a lion seems to walk peacefully behind a caprid (RS.14.030; RS.5.281; RS.26.046; RS.23.432), but which likewise imply that the lion is stalking its prey. Scarabs from the Early Iron Age take up the motif of the hunting lion. Compared to examples from the Middle Bronze Age, the engraving is rather rudimentary and schematic. The prey sometimes turns its head toward the lion, which seems to be simply walking over its back (see IPIAO

7. Only in Cyprus did conoids exist somewhat earlier, from which fact connections to the Philistines have been proposed (Keel, Shuval, and Uehlinger 1990: 378–196).

4: Nos. 1005–1007 with all parallels). On conoids from Lachish, Bet-El (Fig. 14), Beth-Shean (Fig. 15), and Khirbet Qeiyafa (see Schroer 2018b), the prey always turns its head toward the lion. On these conoids, the lion pounces on its prey (a caprid or perhaps a bovine) from behind. These scenes are once again full of movement, drawing one's attention to both the hunter and the prey.

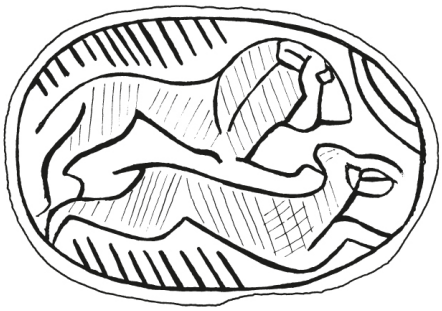

Fig. 10. Middle Bronze Age scarab from Tel Gamma (Corpus IV: Tel Gamma No. 127).

Fig. 11. Middle Bronze Age scarab from Jericho (IPIAO 2: No. 347).

Fig. 12. Classical Syrian cylinder seal from the antiquities market (Winter 1987: Fig. 248).

Of all the motifs that are common on both conoids and scaraboids, by far the most popular is the nursing wild goat or ibex, often combined with a scorpion (Keel 1980; Keel and Schroer 1985: 33–38; Keel et al. 1990: 105–111; Keel and Uehlinger 1998: 125–126). Nursing caprids and bovines appear – once again, often in connection with erotic goddesses – as auxiliary scenes already in Old Babylonian and Classical Syrian glyptic art (Winter 1987: Figs. 102, 185, 207, 413), but not on stamp seals from the Middle Bronze Age. In Syrian art, unlike in

Fig. 13. Late Bronze Age cylinder seal from Ras Shamra-Ugarit (Amiet 1992: Fig. 73, No. 405 R.S. 27.065).

Fig. 14. Early Iron Age conoid from Bethel (Corpus II: Bet-El No. 7).

Fig. 15. Early Iron Age conoid from Beth-Shean (Corpus II: Bet-Schean No. 198).

Egyptian art, the mother animal always turns its head toward the nursing young (Fig. 16). The scorpion can also be found on Old Babylonian and Classical Syrian cylinder seals in proximity to the nude goddess (Fig. 17), although on these seals it is never associated with the nursing mother animal (Winter 1987: Nos. 205–206, 224, 232, 283, 285, 358, 361, 366). Scorpions are attested in the Late Bronze Age on cylinder seals (from Tell Abu Hawam, see IPIAO 4: No. 991; from Ras Shamra, see Amiet 1992: Fig. 14, Nos. 62–63), on the above-mentioned animal plaques (Corpus I: Akko No. 138; Corpus IV: Geser No. 256) as well as in pairs on Late Bronze Age scarabs from Tell el-Farʿah South (Corpus III: Tell el-Farʿa-Süd No. 729), Beth-Shean (Corpus II: Bet-Schean No. 28b), and Akko (Corpus I: Akko

No. 215). The nursing mother animal does not appear on stamp seals from the Late Bronze Age. In the Early Iron Age, the mother animals do not turn their heads toward their young, and standing caprids without young do not normally turn their heads (Figs. 18–20). Already in the Middle Bronze Age, standing or striding caprids that do not turn their heads back are in a significant majority (see Tufnell 1984: Pl. 36). On Late Bronze Age stamp seals, caprids are most often depicted lying down, with their front legs tucked in (Corpus I: Tell el-ʿAgul Nos. 135, 147, 417, 861; Corpus II: Tell Bet-Mirsim Nos. 69, 90, Bet-Schean Nos. 30, 82, 178; Corpus III: Tell el-Farʿa Süd No. 865). It seems that the seal cutters who made these conoids and scaraboids drew on conventions from Middle Bronze Age glyptic art – both Classical Syrian cylinder seals and Middle Bronze Age stamp seals – but combined the motifs in new ways. This is less certain as regards the frequent depiction of two or three dancers on conoids and scaraboids, as well as bone seals.[8] It is conceivable that they have a connection to the numerous processions of worshipers appearing beside erotic scenes on Classical Syrian cylinder seals (see Winter 1987: Figs. 133, 215, 216, 245, 270, 276, 287). Here, the worshipers look rather like little guards walking in lockstep, as they are obviously not dancing. This is the case, however, on Late Bronze Age cylinder seals from Ugarit (Schaeffer-Forrer 1983: R.S. 5.283, R.S. 9.130, R.S. 21.21, R.S. 26.36) and Beth-Shean (Schaeffer-Forrer 1983: 101), which show groups of multiple dancers.

Fig. 16. Classical Syrian cylinder seal from the antiquities market (Winter 1987: Fig. 282).

8. In some cases these figures might be worshipers rather than dancers. See IPIAO 4: Nos. 1264–1266, 1268 and all parallels indicated there.

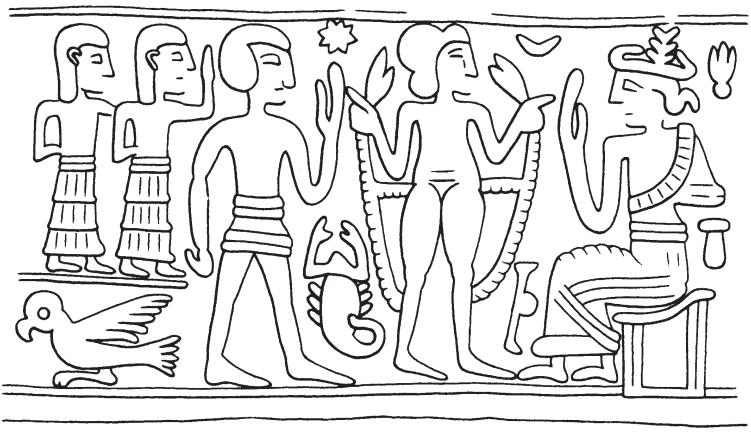

Fig. 17. Classical Syrian cylinder seal from the antiquities market (Winter 1987: Fig. 279).

Fig. 18. Early Iron Age conoid from Taanach (IPIAO 4: No. 1239).

Fig. 19. Early Iron Age conoid from Tell el-Farʿah North (Corpus III: Tell el-Farʿa-Nord No. 6).

Fig. 20. Early Iron Age conoid from Beth-Shean (Corpus II: Bet-Schean No. 9).

The popular rope borders or barred strings on conoids from the Early Iron Age also draw heavily on Middle Bronze Age traditions. Olga Tufnell (1984: Pls. 21–26) collated a number of seals with concentric circles, cross patterns, and coiled and woven patterns. Scroll borders are very popular, and many seals have a rope border (Tufnell 1984: Pls. 33–35; see also the long list in Schroer 2018b: 270, 272 footnote 18). The preference for such rope borders (Keel 1995: §§ 513–514) reappears in the Early Iron Age, and more strongly on conoids (from Khirbet Qeiyafa, Schroer 2018b: 265, Fig. 17.4; and see Corpus II: Bet-El No. 7, Bet-Schemesch No. 144; Corpus IV: Geser No. 653) than on scaraboids.

The prominent themes of the conoids are unmistakable, both quantitatively and in their rich variation. Herd animals, particularly goats and their young, are the main subject matter. In addition, there are the plants from which these animals subsist and scorpions, which probably evoke both the blessing of a goddess of the herd and the constellations in the night sky, which were important for agriculture. Bovines are also important in this group of seals, although they are often not recognized as such due to the nature of the engraving or lack of attention to details like shapes of tails, legs, or head. A third area of focus has to do with motifs depicting dancing and the cult.

On the scaraboids, nursing caprids are less dominant; rather, caprids alongside plants or trees or two caprids grazing on a tree are more common. In many cases, a worshiper is depicted alongside a caprid. Ostriches appear increasingly frequently on scaraboids during this period, whereas bovines do not seem to play such an important role. Lions are much more often present on the scaraboids than on the conoids, as are horses (assuming that this identification is correct) and even riders.

6. Summary

Investigating the regional distribution of particular motifs and seal shapes is one of the goals of the research project "Stamp seals from the Southern Levant: a multi-faceted prism for studying entangled histories in an interdisciplinary perspective," funded by the Swiss National Research Foundation.[9] This project plans not only to complete the publication of Othmar Keel's *Corpus der*

9. https://www.religionswissenschaft.uzh.ch/de/forschung/projekte/SINERGIA-project.html (accessed 16 October 2019) and https://levantineseals.org/

Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästinas/Israel[10] but also to preserve digitally and make accessible all of the information on the seals from the Southern Levant stemming from archaeological excavations.

Building upon my work in IPIAO, I have tried here to relate several recognizable developments in the iconography of the Early Iron Age to the theme of this conference. As I have already mentioned, iconography is not able to answer the question of whether state formation began in the 10th century BCE. It does indicate, however, that during the 11th and beginning of the 10th centuries BCE the previously dominant Egyptian influence was on the decline, and other traditions came to prominence: from the north, Syrian influences, and in some places sub-Mycenaean influences. Above all, however, the autochthonous Canaanite heritage experienced a revival, developing new themes and using new media. There are many indications for the coexistence of these different traditions, such as at Khirbet Qeiyafa, where post-Ramesside scarabs and rectangular plaques (Klingbeil 2018) were discovered alongside conoids and a scaraboid (see Schroer 2018b) in the very same room. At Early Iron Age Beth-Shemesh, the different seal shapes are attested in roughly equal numbers. In the Ophel excavations in Jerusalem, Syrian hematite seals, a Cypriot conoid, and post-Ramesside mass-produced ware have been found. At Beth-Shean, in contrast, conoids and scaraboids make up only a small proportion of the glyptic art from the Early Iron Age.[11]

According to Keel (see already 1994: 231), the production of limestone seals in the Iron Age I began at sites such as Beth-Shemesh and Tell Beit Mirsim. From there, conoids and scaraboids spread throughout the land though much more strongly in the south than in the north, in a proportion of roughly two-thirds to one-third. In Keel's view, scaraboids appear somewhat later than conoids, although this theory is not completely definitive. Both groups share a large number of motifs, although some preferences can be seen. On the one hand, scaraboids, perhaps due to their similarity to scarabs, were more receptive to Egyptian motifs such as cartouche worshipers or lions depicted in isolation. On the other hand,

10. Five volumes of this groundbreaking project are published in print editions under the title *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel. Von den Anfängen bis zur Perserzeit*, Volumes 1–5 (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis. Series Archaeologica 13, 29, 31, 33, 35). In addition, the volume *Corpus der Siegel-Amulette aus Jordanien* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, Series Archaeologica 25) was published in 2006 by Eggler and Keel.

11. These remarks build upon hand counting of pieces in the Corpus volumes and can in future be confirmed by access to the full database.

with their oval surface they offered more possibilities for complex compositions, such as those depicting two or three individuals, animals, or humans and animals together. Conoids, with their small, round seal surface, forced the seal cutters to superimpose figures or to restrict themselves to a single figure, such as one animal.[12] The later bone seals are more closely related to scarabs and scaraboids than to conoids in their choice of motifs (see Münger 2018).

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12. The base of conoids is normally about 15 mm in diameter. Exceptionally large pieces, however, can be found, such as the wonderful large conoid from ʿEn Gev with a suckling bovine, scorpion, and tree with goats on the same surface (IPIAO 4: No. 1237).

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