A box decorated with engraved flat rectangular bone panels and dating to the Middle Bronze Age IIIB was found in burial 100. The Sidon box served as a container for five Egyptianizing scarabs (S/4571, 4601, 4602, 4603, 4604/6037) (see p. 116-120) and a blue faience cylinder seal (S/4606/6037) all of which were part of the deceased’s personal belongings. The five scarabs included three which had a gold setting.

Twenty-two bone panels decorated with single or double rows of centredot circles and incised with vertical and diagonal lines as well as a criss-cross design also found in Palestine, and more rarely in Syria, were flattened and smoothed, affixed with nails or pegs, and inlaid along the sides of the wooden box. Despite the recovery in situ of numerous panels it has not been possible to estimate its size nor has it been possible to undertake its reconstruction. Most of the bone strips measured between 3.0 and 5.7 cm in length. Some were cracked in places, others were noticeably shorter. They all fall into two groups of heights ranging approximately between 0.7 and 1.2 cm, and they vary in thickness between 0.1 cm and 1.1 cm. Strips of incised bone inlay deco-
rated with geometric patterns are amply represented in Palestine where examples are found in MB II contexts at almost every excavated site, but only a few examples have ever been found in coastal Syria. Aside from the double rows of centre-dot circles and the criss-cross pattern, geometric motifs included in the Sidonian repertoire consist of longitudinal lines, diagonal lines, centre-dot circles and guilloches formed by connected concentric centre-dot circles and running spirals, but so far no silhouettes typical of the Palestinian repertoire depicting animals, birds or humans, have been found.

Cylinder seal S/4606/6037

The blue faience cylinder seal found in the box is 2.1 cm high and 1.3 cm in diameter. The existence of different seal workshops operating in Syria in the Late 18th and 17th centuries have been identified on the Levantine coast and Palestine by numerous scholars. This seal does not belong to either the haematite North Syrian group, nor to the Green Jasper workshop. Instead, it is comparable to a Palestinian style which developed from the linear technique employed in engraving of scarabs during the Hyksos period. However, the general theme on the Sidon seal, as it is now known, is very similar to the haematite North Syrian group with a principal figure being a deity, worshipping figures and a blend of Egyptian and Anatolian motifs.

This principal figure (fig. 4-5) is schematized to a high degree and its facial features are drawn with a circle for the eye and a downward line veering to the right for the nose; this technique is reminiscent of the way eyes were depicted on Early Dynastic III seals from Mesopotamia and northern Syria. The body, also very schematic, evokes a tree trunk or a long garment reaching down to the ground and shown in two parts. The shoulders protrude from either side of the trunk. No arms or hands are shown; instead, from the protruding left shoulder, a hare to the right of its neck moves from right to left. A small seated child (see below), raising its right hand in front of one of the creatures, is shown with its left arm merging into its left shoulder in the same way as the animal protruding from the right shoulder of the principal figure. Two curved lines rising from the top of the central figure’s left shoulder can probably be interpreted as wings or rays of the sun.

This central figure is flanked by two creatures depicted vertically in profile and facing each other. Both have elongated muzzles with an eye and most probably an ear or a horn rising from the back of the head. Their forelegs are attached to their torso like a horizontal V, with their paws or hands turned upwards at a right angle to the legs. They stand on one hind-leg with the other leg extended at an angle in front, as though dancing, with the feet also pointing upwards at right angles to the legs. Both have a tail. The creature on the left is leaning backwards.

The remaining space is filled with secondary motifs. Above to the left behind the creature’s head is a curving line ending in what resembles the head of a cobra. Between the creatures and the principal figure are a series of motifs including, on the left, a Horus hawk with folded
Deity: The principal figure - a deity - is depicted in the same manner as the male deity from Karum Kanesh level Ib and the lead figurine found in Oumm el Marra in Syria. In both cases the antelopes seem to emerge from the torso or from the shoulders underlying the theme of the god merging with the animal. Özgüc compares the male deity from Karum Kanesh to three other moulds from Kültepe, Bogazköy and the Yale University museum whereby the degree of schematization reaches abstraction with the right hand of the god represented by a hook-like outward extension of the raised arm. In general this master of animals of the Mesopotamian repertoire was not portrayed as a god and was not himself an object of cult. In the case of Sidon and Kültepe it is a god that is depicted with two dancing animals on either side with hands raised and palms to the front as a sign of respect. It remains difficult to assign a name to this god whose identity lies within the combination of symbols and before whom a dance is executed (fig. 6).

The box: The box appearing on the Sidonian seal could be interpreted as a Levantine interpretation of a serekh which refers to a rectangular frame surmounted by the Horus falcon with the Horus name wearing a double crown standing in a right-facing profile on a box (see below). Horus hawks are commonly represented on scarabs from the early second millennium. What seems to be a plant emerges from the box and a small bird or hawk turned to the left is perched on it. The association of the hawk with plants is exceptional in Egypt. A stringed instrument is depicted before the creature on the right. This is probably either a type of "arched harp" already found in Egypt in the Middle Kingdom but becoming more common in the New Kingdom, or the "bow harp" attested at Choga-Mish in the late 4th millennium BC and at Mari in the mid-3rd millennium BC. On top of the instrument, in the field, is a curved stem with a forked end. Underneath the instrument is a loop, a probable sa symbol. One of the creatures has an ankh sign behind it and the other the djed pillar and two reclining antelopes set at a right angle to the remainder of the scene and following each other from the top to the bottom of the seal. Their body is depicted in a fluid undulating line very similar to the antelopes found on the seals belonging to the Green jasper workshop. Above the ankh sign, a pillar topped by vegetal volutes ending in a double curl which is probably an early form of the "sacred tree", is comparable to pillars which support the winged disc on the first half of the 17th century Alalakh seal impressions.

Dancing: Rhythmic dancing appears on Chalcolithic pottery and seals from the 5th to the 3rd millennium BC and the Sidon excavation has yielded an example depicting rhythmic dancing in a row of dancing men on a 3rd millennium seal impression. The posture of the dancers on the Sidon Middle Bronze Age cylinder seal S/4606 differs from the Palestinian posture which consists of having one leg on the ground and the other leg bent at the knee. Instead the Sidon creatures have one raised leg with the foot in the upright position very similar to the manner in which young girls are depicted on Egyptian wall paintings. Another familiar Egyptian posture is the "crossed arms" stretched forward in a horizontal V-shape. Ben Tor discusses this arm posture, commonly found on Egyptianizing Syrian cylinder seals of the Middle Bronze Age. It normally portrays adoration or, in the Sidon case, the veneration of a deity depicted in the middle. The position of the pad or palm raised to the front is also an Egyptian posture.

Hunting: There is a visual allusion to the hunt illustrated on this seal by the bow with a small figure raising one arm in front of it. Although hunting had ceased to be a major form of food occupation in Sidon by the 9th millennium BC it may well have been illustrated only to perpetuate the memory of the hunter.

The child figure: On Egyptianizing seals diminutive figures identified as children are closely associated with male rulers and/or their patron goddesses. The child is generally placed between the rulers and the deity and raises one arm towards the adult. In the Sidon case the child with one arm raised faces one of the creatures.
ten in the serekh 35. On Syrian cylinder seals the box is identified as being a structure. A Syrian ivory cylinder seal in the Louvre (AO 96697), dating to the Early Dynastic period, features a box identified as a structure in which a small creature is depicted crouching facing right 37. Amiet discusses the Louvre seal showing two creatures inside a structure, and with further creatures on the roof depicted with one raised hand as if they were addressing prayers towards the sky. On the Louvre AO 6667 seal, the worshippers are replaced by two warriors, and the cultic scene is portrayed with a less well-defined mythology of “heroes and fighting animals.” According to P. Amiet, the structure is a rare motif which belongs to a specific “North Syrian ritual tradition” 38. Another similar box is shown on a cylinder seal belonging to the Marcopoli Collection, with a procession, a ceremony and dance before a frontal deity 39. One or two individuals in the structure are identified as possible deities 40 and part of a Levantine ritual theme. The triangular head in the Sidon box is either a human being seen in profile facing left with a long neck or the head of Horus transcribed here as a triangle with a dot on a stem.

Conclusion

The Sidon cylinder seal reflects a novel creativity. It deserves attention in that it has provenance and it does not belong to workshops identified in either Syria proper or on the coast or even in Palestine 41 but rather reflects a new dynamic artistic production of the then contemporary Sidonian society. With the numerous Egyptianizing filling motifs, the dancing posture of the creatures and the position of their arms with their close parallels in Egyptian portrayals of protection and adoration 42 the Sidon seal compares to the southern Palestinian group 43. The combination of Syro-Anatolian and Egyptian symbols accompanying the deity were absorbed by Sidon’s artisans who integrated and reinterpreted all of them, creating their own single distinctive style and thus revealing the extraordinary extent of the circulation of images along the Levantine coast.

This seal and the Egyptianizing scarabs, all dating to the end of the twelfth and beginning of the 13th dynasty around 1750 BC, were deposited in a box and placed in the constructed grave of a high ranking woman at the beginning of Middle Bronze Age IIIB. On the basis of the dating of the scarabs, of the pottery which is currently still under study and of the stratigraphy which shows that the burial was cut from Sidon’s level 5, the cylinder seal, which may well have been in use for some time, was deposited in the grave around 1700/1680 BC.

NOTES

1 For a much more elaborate decorated box from Hazor containing 10 cylinder seals, see A. Ben-Tor, 2009, p. 5-6.
2 A. Ben-Tor, 2009, p. 51.
3 B. Parker, 1949, p. 4. "The earliest specimen of the Syrian group, assigned to a Mycenaean context by Roeve, is dated even earlier by Schafer (1900-1750 BC)."
4 K. M. Kenyon, 1960, fig. 203, tomb H 6; K. M. Kenyon, 1965, fig. 84, 6.
5 K. M. Kenyon, 1960, fig. 172, 3, tomb J 9 and fig. 203, 9, 8, 9, fig. 299-303, K. M. Kenyon, 1965, fig. 84, 1.
6 W. F. Albright, 1938, p. 49, pl. 36, str. E & D.
7 P. R. S. Moorey, 1999, p. 197.
8 D. Ben-Shlomo & T. Dothan, 2006, p. 5.
10 For an example in the Late Bronze Age see J. Gachet-Biziolon, 2007, pl. 43, 371, p. 296, on ivory in Ugarit.
12 D. Collon, 2008, p. 95 on the miniature faience stamp seals dated between 1800-1740 BC and which fall into two groups according to their geographical distribution and shape, the northern examples and p. 96 the southern group from Palestine.
15 O. Keel, 2006, p. 65 and 79.
17 D. Collon, 1987/fig. 87, 91, 93.
18 I thank Dominique Collon for drawing my attention to this,
20 The antelope can be replaced by the hare without a change in the meaning, see R. Tefnin, 1990, p. 313.
21 Compare a stone mould from Kültepe Level Ib T. Ozgüç, 1979, fig. 5, p. 293-294.
26 O. Tufnell, 1984, pl. IX, 1446, for example from Tell el Ajjul.
31 B. Teissier, 1996, p. 166 for floral motifs ending in a was-like forked end. For similar very stylised floral motifs on scarabs see O. Tufnell, 1984, pl. XII A, 2695 and pl. XLV, A 2782 from Ajjul.
35 D. Collon, 1986, in the Green Jasper Workshop, the animals are facing up, nos 2, 5, 8, 9, 16, 18, 23 whereas on the Sidon seal they are facing down, see also p. 91.
36 D. Collon, 1975, p. 45 and note 5, fig. 78 and p. 194-195, the standard on sealing 76.
40 A. Ben-Tor, 2009, p. 93, fig. 11 A4.
41 P. Spencer, 2003, p. 113, top scene of the throne of Ina at Dra Abul Nagha.
42 A. Ben-Tor, 2009, p. 27.
43 For the position of the arms D. Collon also suggests acomparison with Nephtys and Isis, see B. Teissier, 1996, p. 140, 97, p. 175 and p. 195; B. Teissier, p. 55, On Isis and Nephtys on either side of a Pharaoh-like figure on Middle Bronze Age seal is very significant, for to date winged anthropomorphic females with characteristics of Isis and Nephtys have not been attested in Middle Kingdom Egypt.
44 D. Collon-Sehal, 1992, p. 144.
45 D. Collon, 1984, p. 54. The bow is not particularly at home in Mesopotamia where it occurs in the Urkuk, Alqasdan and Neo Assyrian periods. The bow distribution centre was Syria-Palestine... It disappears completely from its former centre of distribution in the 4th millennium BC but this is precisely when the composite bow appears in Mesopotamia, p. 55, the bow as a prerogative of royalty; D. Collon, 1995, p. 24.
46 P. Amiet, 1995, p. 490, Urkuk IV.
47 B. Teissier, 1996, p. 78 and 149.
48 T. Ozgüç, 1979, p. 296.
49 D. Collon, 2008, p. 98-99... the surviving evidence for the existence of a Levantine trade route south of Kültepe consists of Mesopotamia... It disappears completely from its former centre of distribution in the 4th millennium BC but precisely when this is the case, D. Collon, 1995, p. 24.
50 A. Ben-Tor, 2009, p. 27.
52 R. Tefnin, 1990, p. 313, for a composite figure compare the lion-armed demon with human torso from the Early
Dynastic period connected to some mythological concept; E. Porada, 1948, p. 11, fig. 61.

65 O. Keel, 2006, p. 60. For examples, see A. Otto 2000, n° 157-9, 309, 340, 349, 355, 357. Note that Otto uses the term “North Syrian” to designate one of many specific geographical areas, and the centralised scheme is not confined to any particular part of Syria. The locally made Canaanite scarabs which are mostly provenanced, dating to between 1800-1740 BC fall according to D. Collon into two groups, the northern and the southern, thus reflecting the Egyptian sphere of influence, D. Collon, 2008, p. 95-96. D. Collon, 2008, p. 98-99, it is clear that we have much to learn about Cappadocians in various directions.

66 D. Collon, 2008, p. 95-96. D. Collon into two groups, the northern and the southern, thus reflecting the Egyptian sphere of influence, D. Collon, 2008, p. 95-96.


68 D. Collon 1987, fig. 755, p. 164, period II d.

69 A. Ben-Tor, 2009, p. 54.

70 D. Collon, 2008, p. 96.

71 See O. Keel, 1995 p. 95, fig. 4-5.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


A. Ben-Tor, 2009, “A Decorated Jewellery Box from Hazor”, Tel Aviv, 36, p. 5-67.


