

## 4.8. Early Bronze Age Cylinder Seal Impressions and a Cylinder Seal

WOLFGANG ZWICKEL

### 4.8.1. Early Bronze Age Cylinder Seal Impressions

During the excavations of the Kinneret Regional project four Early Bronze Age seal impressions were found since 2003 (Figs. 4.8.4.–4.8.11.).<sup>1</sup> They can be added to another three impressions found during the excavations in the 80's (Fig. 4.8.1.–4.8.3).<sup>2</sup>

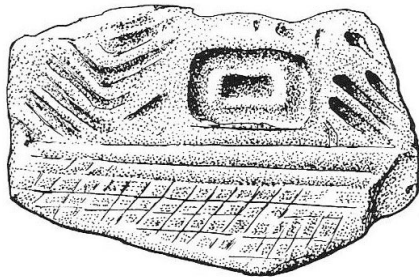


Fig. 4.8.1. reg. no. 2219/1.

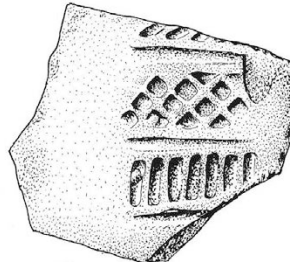


Fig. 4.8.2. reg. no. 1745/1.



Fig. 4.8.3. reg.no. 191/1.

Palestinian sealed sherds are predominantly, but not exclusively, found in northern Palestine. Several centers can be observed. One is the northern coastal area of present-day Israel, the other one is the Carmel ridge, and many items were also found on both sides of the Jordan River between Dan/*Tell el-Qādī* in the north and *Tell Umm Hammad* in the south, including the northern Transjordanian Hill Country.<sup>3</sup>

Such seal impressions were normally impressed in North Canaanite Metallic Ware typical for the Early Bronze Age II periods<sup>4</sup> and the seal should be dated to the same period.<sup>5</sup> The seal impressions were usually found at the shoulders of large pithoi (cf. Fig. 4.8.12.) normally used for to store olive oil.

Unfortunately, all seal impressions from *Tell el-'Orēme* were found in layers postdating the Early Bronze and were thus out of original context. Several reasons may be responsible for the dislocation of the sherds. Because of the steep slope, soil easily eroded and sherds were washed down. Terracing aggravated the dislocation of earlier material. Especially in area R, where three of the four seal impressions were found, later cuts were made when the Iron Age I city wall, Mameluke/Ottoman road and Mekorot road were built; this brought many older sherds to the surface. Intensive agricultural activities on the *tell* may have destroyed layers too.<sup>6</sup>

All seven sealed sherds from *Tell el-'Orēme* present geometric decorations; no processions or cultic scenes were yet found.

<sup>1</sup> Due to a finished, but still unpublished PhD written by VALENTINA TUMOLO, which refers to all Near Eastern Early Bronze Age seals (including the items presented here), we will not discuss elaborately our finds. Unfortunately, the thesis was not available for us. She will offer a complete catalogue of motifs. Therefore, we do not present here parallels, but only publish the impressions from *Tell el-'Orēme*. Cf. for general discussions of the Palestinian seals especially BEN-TOR 1978; FLENDER 2000 (best overview of Palestinian, Mesopotamian and Mediterranean sites known in 2000); JOFFE 2001. The main site for dating Palestinian seal impression will be *Hirbet ez-Zeraqōn* in northern Jordan, where 155 different seal impressions were found, some of them well stratified, but many found on surface. This huge corpus is part of the PhD thesis of TUMOLO. For a preliminary information to this site cf. TUMOLO 2019.

<sup>2</sup> FRITZ 1990, 23–24 Tf. 54:1–3. All of them were discovered in Iron Age strata on the acropolis, but they can definitely be ascribed to the Early Bronze Age period.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the map in FLENDER 2000, 297.

<sup>4</sup> New research attributes the earliest ones already to the late Early Bronze Age IB period, cf. PAZ et al. 2018, 285–298. H. GENZ, who calls the Metallic Ware “Ware g”, stresses: “Waren g und I kommen zwar in allen Phasen [= Early Bronze Age II and III; WZ] vor, doch verringert sich ihr Anteil zu den späteren Phasen hin” (GENZ 2002, 39).

<sup>5</sup> In older reports the impressions are often dated to the Early Bronze Age III period. Impressions found within Early Bronze Age III layers can likely be considered as residual pots produced already in the Early Bronze Age II (pers. communication R. GREENBERG). Since no Early Bronze Age III settlement existed in *Tell el-'Orēme* an Early Bronze Age II context is safe.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. for a similar situation in *Tell el-Qādī* GREENBERG 1996, 148. Only one of all together 26 seal impressions was found in an Early Bronze Age context.

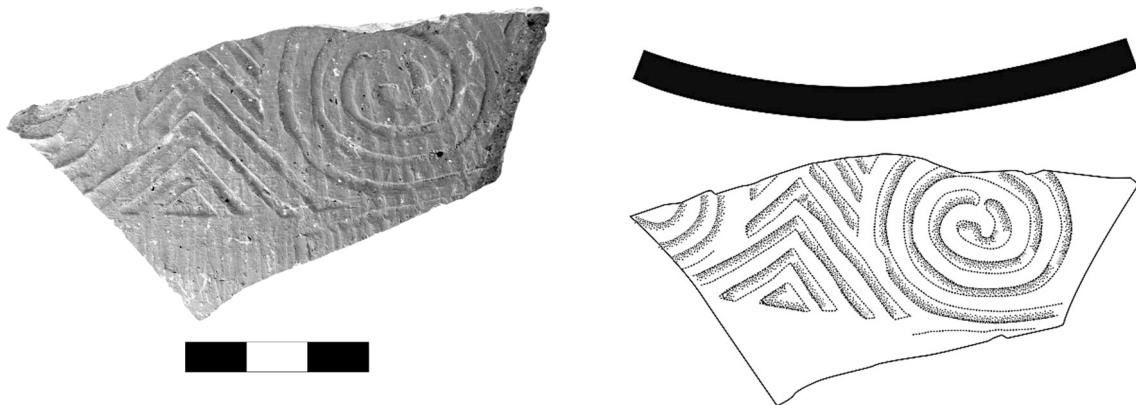


Fig. 4.8.4. and 4.8.5. Cylinder seal impression no. 1, reg. no. 12206/1.

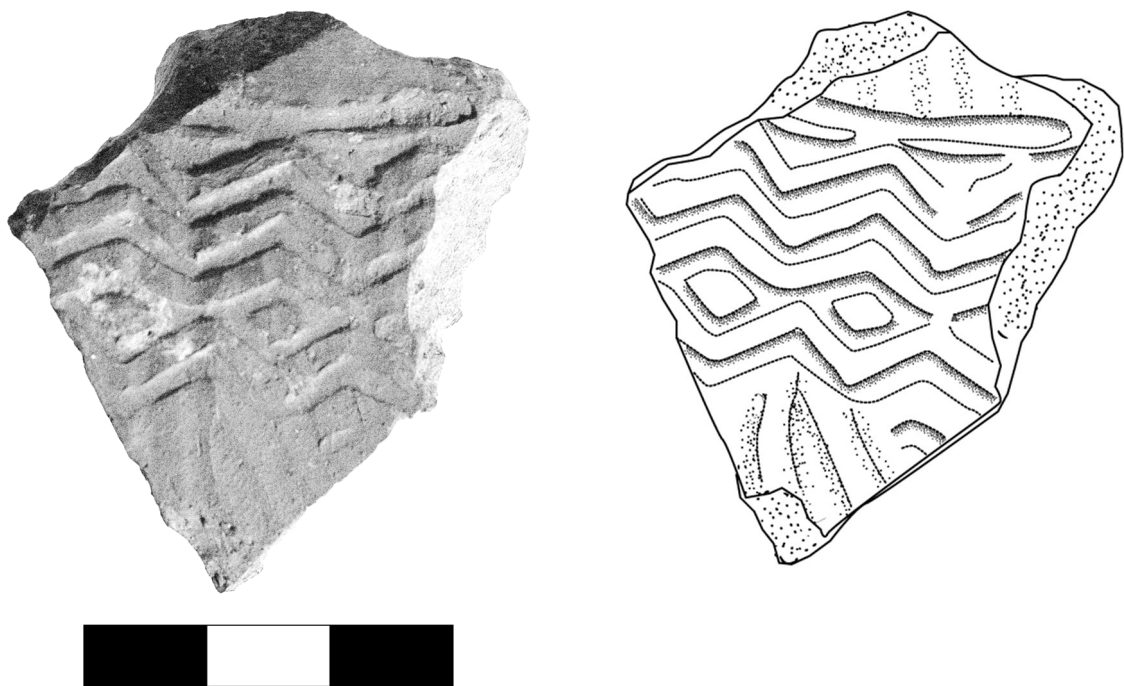


Fig. 4.8.6. and 4.8.7. Cylinder seal impression no. 2, reg. n. 11142/13.

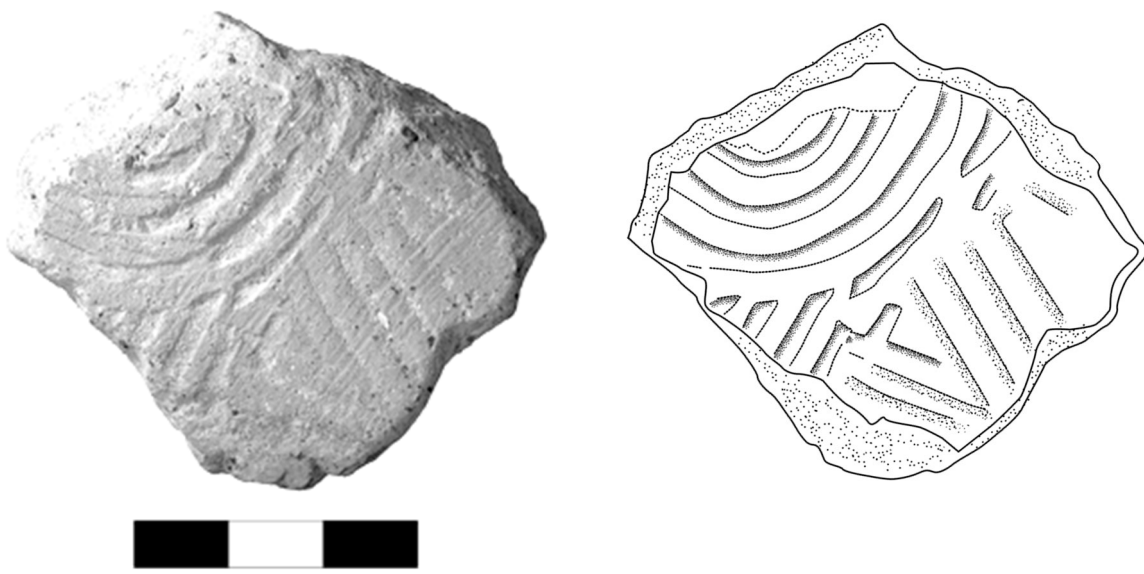


Fig. 4.8.8. and 4.8.9. Cylinder seal impression no. 3, reg. no. 11085/17.



Fig. 4.8.10. and 4.8.11. Cylinder seal impression no. 4, reg. no. 11054/1.

The following seal impressions were found during the newer excavations at *Tell el-'Orēme*:<sup>7</sup>

*No.:* 1      *Reg.No.:* 12206/1      *Area/Square:* N/BT 13      *Stratum:* IV–VI      *Locus:* 3900  
*Context:* L. 3900 is attributed to the Iron Age I levels. Therefore, this sherd was not found *in situ*.  
*Size:* 48 mm x 87 mm x 8,1 mm

*Description:*

*Color:*<sup>8</sup> *exterior:* 10R 5/6 red      *core:* N 5/0 gray      *interior:* 2.5YR 5/1 reddish-gray

*Motif:* Herringbone, flanked by spirals (cf. group IE of BEN-TOR 1978).

*No.:* 2      *Reg.No.:* 11142/13      *Area/Square:* R/CE 14      *Stratum:* R6/IX?      *Locus:* 9939

*Context:* This item was found when the balk was removed. It can likely be attributed to Stratum R6/IX (Middle Bronze Age IIBC), maybe also to R5/VIII (Middle Bronze Age II/Late Bronze Age I). Definitely, it was not found within the Early Bronze Age layers.

*Size:* 47 mm x 42 mm

*Description:*

*Motif:* Three zigzag-lines, one above the other. A fourth zigzag line is oriented in opposite direction. The free space between the two lines is filled with small rhombs. Below the lower line, some vertical lines (?) are visible.

*Color:* *exterior:* 2.5YR 6/6 light red      *core:* N 6/0 gray      *interior:* 10YR 6/6 light red

*No.:* 3      *Reg.No.:* 11085/17      *Area/Square:* R/CE 14      *Stratum:* R5/VIII      *Locus:* 9921

*Context:* The sherd was found during the removal of the balk and can be attributed to stratum R5/VIII (Middle Bronze Age II/Late Bronze Age I). It was definitely not found within Early Bronze Age contexts.

*Size:* 55 mm x 47 mm x 12 mm

*Description:*

*Motif:* Spiral and lines in different directions (cf. group ID in BEN-TOR 1978).

*Color:* *exterior:* 5YR 7/6 reddish yellow      *core:* 7.5YR 6/4 light brown      *interior:* 5YR 7/4 pink

<sup>7</sup> For colored pictures of three of the four seal impressions cf. PAKKALA et al. 2004, 15.

<sup>8</sup> All colors according to Munsell Soil Color Charts.

No.: 4 Reg.No.: 11054/1 Area/Square: R/CF 14 Stratum: R0 Locus: 9887

*Context:* The sherd was found in the destruction layer attributed to the Middle Bronze Age and therefore completely out of an Early Bronze Age context. Not in original context. Possible foundation of the Mameluke/Ottoman road.

*Size:* 40 mm x 34 mm

*Description:*

*Motif:* Three rhombs one including the other. Lines or other rhombs adjoining (cf. group ID in BEN-TOR 1978).

*Color:* exterior: 7.5YR N5 gray core: 2.5YR N gray interior: 7.5YR N7 light-gray

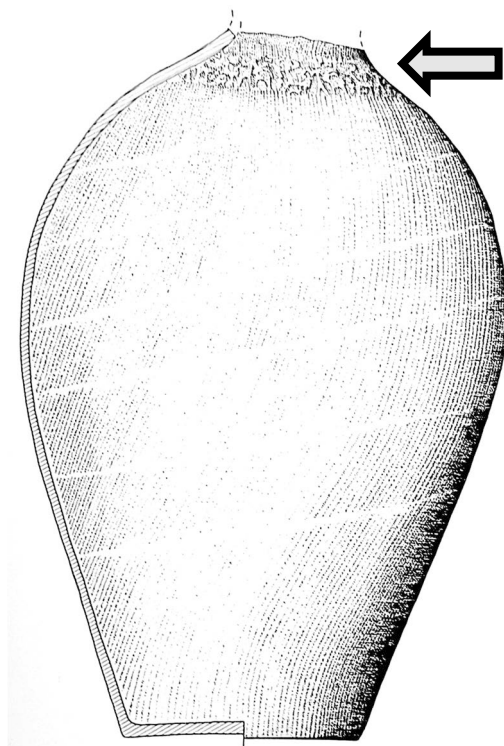
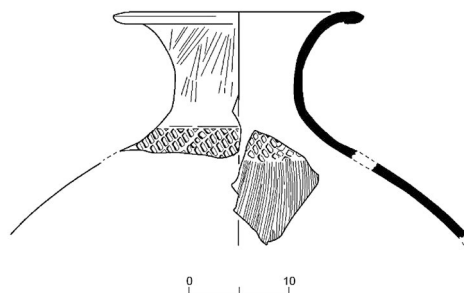


Fig. 4.8.12. Nearly complete pithos with seal impression on the shoulder (see arrow), found at *Hirbet ez-Zeraqōn*.<sup>9</sup> The pithos is more than 80 cm high (estimated height ca. 90 cm).

Fig. 4.8.13. Cylinder Seal impression on the shoulder of a pithos from *Hirbet el-Kerak*.<sup>10</sup>



#### 4.8.1. A Cylinder Seal

Additionally, a cylinder seal was found in area R, unfortunately not in a well-stratified context. Cylinder seals are relatively rare in Palestine. In 1995, O. KEEL estimated that in Palestine approximately 400 to 450 cylinder seals or impressions had been found<sup>11</sup> and only a few additional pieces have been documented since 1995.

No.: 5 Reg.No.: 11029/1 Area/Square: R/CF 14 Stratum: - Locus: 9887

*Context:* The locus may be part of a stone package, built in connection with Mameluke/Ottoman road. There was mixed pottery in this locus with sherds from the Iron Age I period, but also from Roman-Byzantine times.

*Size:* Height 18 mm, diameter 10 mm

*Description:*

*Motif:* The quality of the seal's engraving is poor. Clearly visible are two structures similar to a tree or branches, one upside-down, the other one in the opposite direction. Additionally, there is a vertical structure with few scratches on either side. This could be a dividing line, but also a poorly engraved zoomorphic figure or any other structure. Possibly, on the right side of this vertical structure a standing person is presented. The quality of its presentation is not very good, but the lower part of its clothes looks like a person wearing a wrap-around garment ("Wulstsaummantel").

*Material:* Darkish stone<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> GENZ 2002, Tafel 27.

<sup>10</sup> PAZ 2014, 265 Fig. 6.18.

<sup>11</sup> KEEL 1995, 8.

<sup>12</sup> For a colored picture of the seal cf. PAKKALA et al. 2004, 16 Fig. 7.

This seal is definitely too small to be connected with the Early Bronze Age seal impressions, and the depicted motif is not known among impressions of this period, but it partly resembles other seals from later periods. Due to the primitive or poorly made engraving it is hard to date. The engraving was probably not done by an experienced craftsman working with cylinder seals.

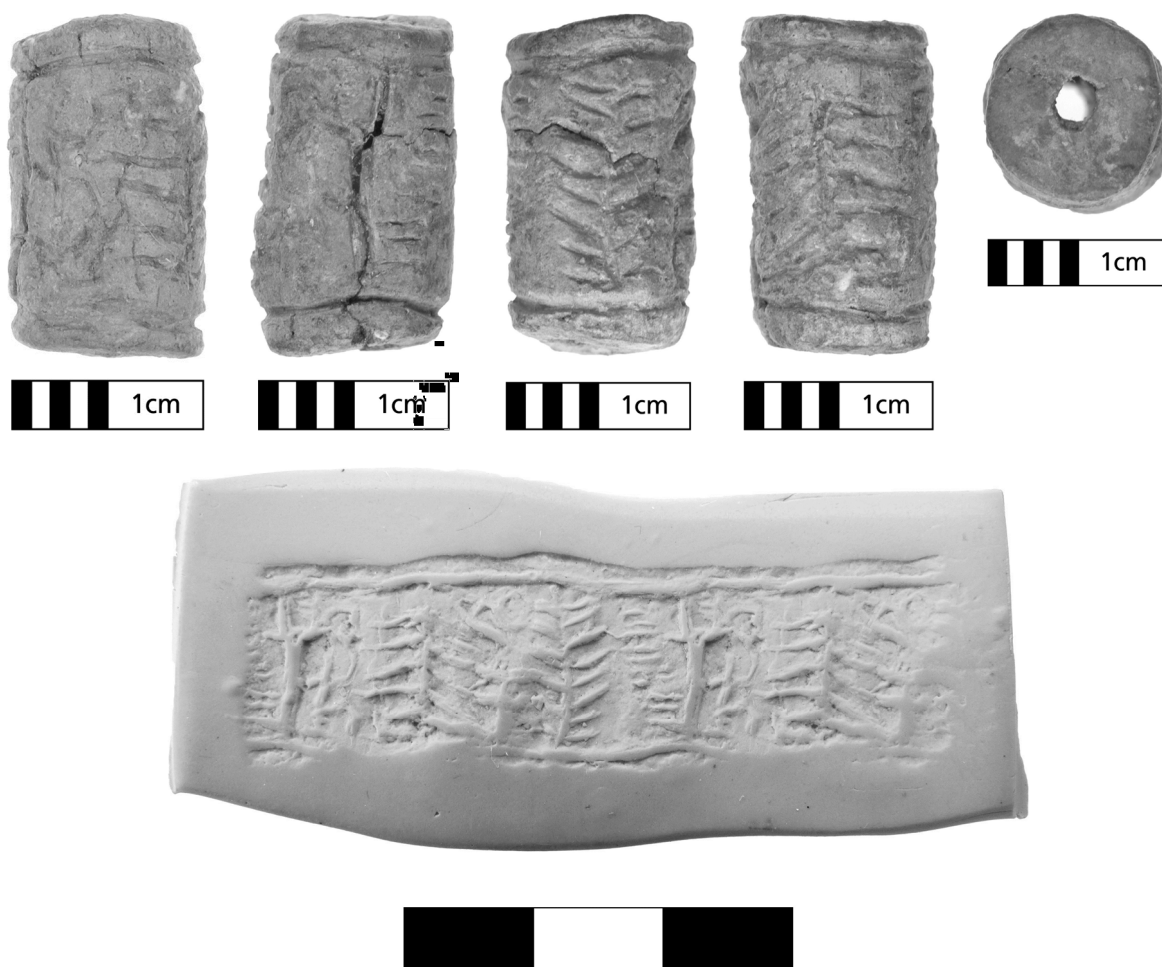


Fig. 4.8.14. reg. no. 11029/1

Though very similar, a more carefully worked cylinder seal was found from the cemetery (Tomb 15) in *el-Ġīb/Gibeon*<sup>13</sup> and it has been dated to the Middle Bronze Age II/17<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>14</sup> A little bit more elaborately worked is a cylinder seal from *Tell Ġezer*, Tomb 28 II (Middle Bronze Age IIC), showing a person between two trees.<sup>15</sup> Another cylinder seal with trees and a human figure was found in *Manahat* south of Jerusalem within a Middle Bronze Age II courtyard (building 8210).<sup>16</sup> A faience seal found in *Bēsān* (level VII; Late Bronze Age IIB/13<sup>th</sup> century BCE<sup>17</sup>) presents trees in different directions together with four fishes.<sup>18</sup> Another seal from the same site and the same level shows bands of rough designs cross-hatching, a six pointed star-pattern and diagonal hatching<sup>19</sup> – a little bit similar to the seal under discussion. If we accept the presentation of a standing honorable person in a wrap-around garment, we have some more parallels for this kind of clothing. On stamp seals this garment is attested at least since the Middle Bronze Age IIB period but is not attested anymore during the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty (= Late Bronze Age).<sup>20</sup> The simple shape of the face resembles a seal found in Megiddo/*Tell el-Mutesellim* dated into the Middle Bronze Age period.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, several items with similar simple decoration exist in

<sup>13</sup> PRITCHARD 1963, Fig. 24:101.

<sup>14</sup> PRITCHARD 1963, 33.

<sup>15</sup> MACALISTER 1912, Pl. 31:15.

<sup>16</sup> EDELSTEIN et al. 1998, 25–26; MILEVSKI 1998, 97–98 Fig. 8.2:1.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. for actual absolute chronology MAZAR 2009, 13.

<sup>18</sup> PARKER 1949, 32 no. 144.

<sup>19</sup> PARKER 1949, 32 no. 145.

<sup>20</sup> SCHROER 1985; KEEL 1995, 206–208.

<sup>21</sup> PARKER 1949, no. 133.

private collections and are dated to the 14<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century BCE, but this dating is always problematic, because archaeological contexts are missing.<sup>22</sup>

Summarizing the parallels, a date of the Middle Bronze Age II period is most convincing, although the poor quality of the decoration has some similarities in the 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE, when *Tell el-'Orēme* was not settled. Since the object was found together with Iron Age and later pottery, it may have been a heirloom originally made in the Middle Bronze Age II period.

### Bibliography

- BEN-TOR, A.  
1978 Cylinder Seals of Third-Millennium Palestine (BASOR Supplement Series 22; Cambridge).
- DOUMET, C.  
1992 Sceaux et cylindres orientaux: La collection Chiha (OBO.SA 9; Fribourg/Göttingen).
- EDELSTEIN, G. et al.  
1998 The Excavation, in: EDELSTEIN, G. et al., The Rephaim Valley Project. Villages, Terraces, and Stone Mounds. Excavations at Manahat, Jerusalem, 1987–1989 (IAA Reports 3; Jerusalem), 14–36.
- FLENDER, M.  
2000 Cylinder Seal Impressed Vessels of the Early Bronze Age III in Northern Palestine, in: PHILIP, G./BAIRD, D. (Eds.), Ceramics and Change in the Early Bronze Age of the Southern Levant (Levantine Archaeology 2; Sheffield), 295–313.
- FRITZ, V.  
1990 Kinneret. Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen auf dem *Tell el-'Orēme* am See Gennesaret 1982–1985 (ADPV 15; Wiesbaden).
- GENZ, HERMANN  
2002 Die frühbronzezeitliche Keramik von *Hirbet ez-Zeraqōn*. Mit Studien zur Chronologie und funktionalen Deutung frühbronzezeitlicher Keramik in der südlichen Levante (ADPV 27,2; Wiesbaden).
- GREENBERG, R.  
1996 The Early Bronze Age Levels, in: BIRAN, A. et al., Dan I. A Chronicle of the Excavations, the Pottery Neolithic, the Early Bronze Age and the Middle Bronze Age Tombs (Annual of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology; Jerusalem), 83–160.
- JOFFE, A.H.  
2001 Early Bronze Age Seal Impressions from the Jezreel Valley and the Problem of Sealing in the Southern Levant, in: WOLFF, S.R. (Ed.), Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and Neighboring Lands in Memory of Douglas L. Esse (SAOC 59/AASOR Books 5; Chicago/Atlanta), 355–375.
- KEEL, O.  
1995 Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina-Israel. Von den Anfängen bis zur Perserzeit. Einleitung (OBO.SA 10; Fribourg/Göttingen).
- MACALISTER, R.A.ST.  
1912 The Excavations of Gezer 1902–1905 and 1907–1909. Volume III (London).
- MAZAR, A.  
2009 Introduction and Overview, in: PANITZ-COHEN, N./MAZAR, A. (Eds.), Excavations at Tel Beth-Shean 1989–1996. Volume III. The 13th–11th Century BCE Strata in Areas N and S (Jerusalem), 1–32.
- MILEVSKI, I.  
1998 The Small Finds, in: EDELSTEIN, G. et al., The Rephaim Valley Project. Villages, Terraces, and Stone Mounds. Excavations at Manahat, Jerusalem, 1987–1989 (IAA Reports 3; Jerusalem), 94–99.
- PAKKALA, J. et al.  
2004 Kinneret Regional Project: Tel Kinrot Excavations (Proceedings of the FIME 2/2004; Vantaa).
- PARKER, B.  
1949 Cylinder Seals from Palestine, Iraq 11, 1–43.
- PAZ, S.  
2014 Bet Yerah. The Early Bronze Age Mound. Volume II: Urban Structure and Material Culture. 1933–1986 Excavations (IAA Reports 54; Jerusalem).

<sup>22</sup> DOUMET 1992, nos. 131–135.

PAZ, Y. et al.

2018 Geometric Motifs and a Scene on Cylinder Seal Impressions Found in Early Bronze IB Towns of the Southern Levant, *UF* 49, 285–298.

PRITCHARD, J.B.

1963 The Bronze Age Cemetery at Gibeon (Philadelphia).

SCHROER, S.

1985 Der Mann im Wulstsaummantel. Ein Motiv der Mittelbronzezeit II B, in: KEEL, O./SCHROER, S., *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel. Band I (OBO 67; Fribourg/Göttingen)*, 49–115.

TUMOLO, V.

2019 The Early Bronze Age Seal Impressions on Jars from Ḥirbet ez-Zeraqōn. Preliminary Remarks on Pottery and Images, *Studia Eblaitica* 5, 35–56.

ZWICKEL, W.

2017 Settlement History around the Sea of Galilee from the Neolithic to the Persian Period (*ÄAT* 86; Münster).