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LMLK SEAL IMPRESSIONS ONCE AGAIN: A SECOND REJOINER TO ODED LIPSCHITS

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Summary: *Lmlk* Seal Impressions Once Again: A Second Rejoinder to Oded Lipschits

This article deals in the main with claims made by Lipschits *et al.* that the *lmlk* stamps were partly manufactured after Sennacherib's campaign in 701 BCE. It forms specifically a rejoinder to Lipschits' claims published recently. Finally, in the epilogue, are presented the data dealing with the suggestions of Lipschits, which have already been published by Stern, Grena and Van der Veen.

Keywords: *lmlk* Stamps – Rosette Stamps – Kingdom of Judah – Lachish

Resumen: Impresiones de sellos *lmlk* una vez más: Segunda réplica a Oded Lipschits

Este artículo trata principalmente sobre las afirmaciones hechas por Lipschits *et al.* de que las impresiones *lmlk* fueron manufacturadas en parte después de la campaña de Senaquerib en 701 a.C. (Lipschits *et al.* 2010; 2011). Constituye específicamente una réplica a las afirmaciones de Lipschits publicadas recientemente (Lipschits 2012). Finalmente, en el epílogo se presenta la información con respecto a las sugerencias de Lipschits, que ya habían sido publicadas por Stern, Grena y Van der Veen.

Palabras Clave: Impresiones *lmlk* – Impresiones de roseta – Reino de Judá – Lachish

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Following two articles published in *Tel Aviv* by Oded Lipschits, Omer Sergi and Ido Koch on the chronology and function of the *lmlk* seal impressions,¹ I have written a detailed rejoinder in the same journal.² Professor Lipschits has now responded to my rejoinder in the *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*.³ His rejoinder warrants the following comments.

The essence of the discussion is as follows. Lipschits *et al.* claimed in their two papers that the *lmlk* and rosette stamped storage jars, as well as those bearing incised concentric circles marks, were manufactured and stamped in several successive chronological stages from ca. 730 till 586 BCE as parts of the same, continuous administrative system. As to the *lmlk* stamps—Lipschits *et al.* dated the four-winged stamps and the two-winged Type IIa (as defined by Lemaire⁴) to before 701 BCE and referred to them as “early *lmlk* types” and dated Types IIb, IIc and X II to after 701 BCE and referred to them as “late *lmlk* types”. In my view all the *lmlk* stamped storage jars, as well as incised concentric circles marks, date to shortly before 701 BCE and all the rosette stamped storage jars to shortly before 586 BCE.

In his rejoinder Professor Lipschits repeats in the main the argumentation presented before by Lipschits *et al.*⁵ There is no need to discuss here afresh these issues, as they were discussed already in my 2011 rejoinder.⁶ Let me briefly comment only on four points.

First, Professor Lipschits now quotes my first article on the dating of Level III at Lachish, in which I stated that on the basis of the stratigraphical evidence from Lachish Level III it is impossible to decide whether *lmlk* stamped jars were produced elsewhere in Judah already before the reign of Hezekiah or still after the destruction of Lachish in 701 BCE.⁷ This statement, made in 1977 and focused on Level III in Lachish, is essentially correct even today. But evaluation of the issues in question at the present time should be based on the vast corpus of archaeological evidence covering the entire kingdom of Judah which is available at present, 35 years after 1977.

Second, Professor Lipschits criticizes me for ignoring the theory that the same administrative system which in his view is responsible for the production

¹ Lipschits *et al.* 2010; 2011.

² Ussishkin 2011.

³ Lipschits 2012.

⁴ Lemaire 1981.

⁵ Lipschits *et al.* 2010; 2011.

⁶ Ussishkin 2011.

⁷ Ussishkin 1977: 56–57.

of the *lmlk* and rosette stamped storage jars continued in Judah after 586 BCE. In his own words:⁸

Ussishkin did not connect the 6th to 2nd century stamped jar handles to the lmlk, concentric circle and rosette jars, and he ignored the continued use of the same system of stamping handles of the same type of jars for an additional 450 years.

The assumption that the same administrative system continued after 586 BCE till the Late Hellenistic period, and that this is indicated by the successive and continuous use of differently stamped pottery vessels, is at best a working hypothesis. Let me just mention the “lion stamps” which are assigned by Lipschits⁹ without reservation to the Babylonian period although the archaeological evidence clearly indicates their date in the Persian period.¹⁰ In any case, all this is irrelevant to the question of dating the *lmlk* and rosette seal impressions which should be decided on the basis of the archaeological evidence related to them.

Third, Professor Lipschits repeats his claim that within the phase of the “early *lmlk* types” the four-winged *lmlk* stamps are earlier in date than the two-winged stamps of Type IIa, although storage jars impressed with both types of stamps were found sealed by the destruction debris of Level III at Lachish. In support of his suggestion Professor Lipschits adds in the rejoinder:¹¹

The main archaeological argument in support of this suggested dating is that (...) at Lachish, many more (...) four-winged handles were found than Type IIa two-winged handles. This may indicate that storage jars bearing a four-winged emblem were in use for a longer period of time than those bearing a two-winged emblem.

This suggestion, as I discussed already in my 2011 rejoinder,¹² contradicts the generally accepted archaeological principle that pottery uncovered beneath a destruction level dates in the main to a short period of time before the

⁸ Lipschits 2012: 2.

⁹ Lipschits 2012: 2.

¹⁰ E.g., Stern 2007b.

¹¹ Lipschits 2012: 9.

¹² Ussishkin 2011: 223.

destruction. To illustrate the difficulty in the above suggestion: Let us assume, for instance, that 100 cooking-pots of Type A and 50 cooking-pots of Type B were uncovered beneath the destruction debris of the same stratum. Can we claim that the Type A cooking-pots have been produced earlier than the Type B cooking-pots?!

Fourth, with regard to the “private” stamps Professor Lipschits repeats his arguments discussed in length in the 2010 article.¹³ Significantly, the conclusions reached by Lipschits *et al.* regarding the connection of the “private” stamps to the *lmlk* system, regarding the dating of the “private” stamps to shortly before 701 BCE, and regarding the distribution of the various stamps in Lachish and the rest of Judah, have been presented by Professor Lipschits as the results of independent research. However, all these conclusions have previously been reached in the studies of Barkay, Vaughn and Ussishkin,¹⁴ and the contribution of Lipschits *et al.* is minimal, if at all.

Finally, I was surprised that Professor Lipschits did not respond at all to four of my main arguments supporting the conclusion that all the *lmlk* stamped jars as well as the incised circles marks are earlier than 701 BCE.

First, Lipschits *et al.* suggested that the system of stamping jars with *lmlk* seals was introduced as the result of Assyrian domination of Judah sometime after 732 BCE. This system “was encouraged by the imperial rule in order to increase the empire’s revenues, and as one of the main sources of supply for the Assyrian administration and its local garrisons”.¹⁵ Significantly, no such system is known from Assyria proper, or from other countries dominated by Assyria, this being a clear indication that the introduction of the *lmlk* stamping system in Judah was not due to Assyrian inspiration and influence.¹⁶

Second, several two-winged stamped handles of the so-called “late” type as well as several handles bearing a concentric circles mark were found at Lachish but not in a stratigraphical context. As Lachish was destroyed and abandoned in 701 BCE, and settlement there was renewed in Level II many decades later when new types of storage jars were introduced, these stamped handles must predate the destruction of 701 BCE.

Third, two stamped handles, one with a *lmlk* stamp of the so-called “early” type and one with the so-called “late” type bore also a “private” stamp belonging to the same person, Nera son of Shebna.

¹³ Lipschits *et al.* 2010: 22–27; Lipschits 2012: 8–9.

¹⁴ See Barkay and Vaughn 2004; Vaughn 1999a; 1999b; Ussishkin 1976; 2004.

¹⁵ Lipschits *et al.* 2010: 7.

¹⁶ Ussishkin 2011: 222.

Fourth, based on the neutron activation studies of Mommsen, Perlman and Yellin,¹⁷ and the petrographic studies of Goren and Bunimovitz¹⁸ it appears that all the *lmlk* stamped storage jars were manufactured in a single production center in the Shephelah. It seems impossible that this workshop continued to function in the first half of the 7th century when the Judean Shephelah was mostly devastated by the Assyrians and partly cut off from Judah.

EPILOGUE

Professor Lipschits starts his rejoinder with the following statement:¹⁹

*In two essays (...) **two of my students and I suggested a new chronological scheme for the lmlk stamped jars in Judah. In this study we challenged a 30-year scholarly consensus (...) We based this new chronological scheme on a careful study (...) three types of two-winged lmlk stamp impressions (Lemaire's IIb, IIc and XII) (...) we assumed that these types were produced after the 701 campaign, defined them as "late types," and dated them to the beginning of the 7th century B.C.E. (...)***

The “we” aspect is summarized in the last paragraph of the paper:²⁰

*Future reconstructions of the history of the late First Temple period should use the chronological scheme of the lmlk and rosette stamped handles **as presented by Lipschits, Sergi and Koch.***

In a challenge to the above clear-cut claim to originality of research and conclusions, the writings of Prof. Ephraim Stern, Mr. George M. Grena and Dr. Peter G. van der Veen from the University of Mainz should be mentioned.

The main idea of Professor Lipschits' articles, that some Types of the two-winged *lmlk* stamps were manufactured after 701 BCE; and his secondary

¹⁷ Mommsen, Perlman and Yellin 1984.

¹⁸ Referred to in Goren and Halperin 2004: 2556.

¹⁹ Lipschits 2012: 1; **bold italics** are mine – D.U.

²⁰ Lipschits 2012: 12; **bold italics** are mine – D.U.

idea that there was a government administrative system which produced successively the so-called “early types” of *lmlk* stamped jars, then the so-called “late types”, then jars bearing the concentric circles mark, and then the rosette stamped jars, and that this administrative system continued in the period following 586 BCE, were already published by Ephraim Stern in 2001:²¹

But before discussing the rosette and concentric circle seal impressions, the impressions of the winged sun disk seals should be considered again (...) It is still probable that this one type of the lmlk seal impressions was still being produced after 701 BCE, as King Hezekiah himself, the creator of these impressions, continued in power for some years after 701. It is now absolutely clear that the lmlk jars impressed and incised with the rosette and concentric circles continued until the destruction of the Judaeian kingdom. This means that this royal system endured and only the types of seals changed. Moreover, the same system continued even into the Persian period (see below).

This text is repeated nearly verbatim in Stern’s report of the En Gedi excavations.²² Prof. Stern assured me in an oral conversation that the two texts have the same meaning and that he did not change his views since 2001.

Professor Lipschits does not refer to Stern’s two suggestions in the above books which are well known to him, suggestions which in fact embody the main idea of his papers and its follow up.

In 2004, George M. Grena published a detailed book presenting his study in depth of the *lmlk* seal impressions.²³ Grena divided the *lmlk* stamps to two chronological groups—“B.S.”, that is “before Sennacherib”, and “A.S.”, that is “after-Sennacherib”,²⁴ identical to the later in date chronological division of Lipschits *et al.* to “early” and “late” *lmlk* Types. Lipschits *et al.* do not refer to Grena’s book and conclusions although Professor Lipschits is familiar with the book (Lipschits *et al.* cite Grena’s web site only as a source for several

²¹ Stern 2001: 174–175.

²² Stern 2007a: 140–141.

²³ Grena 2004.

²⁴ Grena 2004: 333–346.

unpublished impressions, mistakenly referring to him as “Garena”). Ignoring Grena’s commendable work Professor Lipschits states:²⁵

Surprisingly, 30 years passed before a careful and exact study of the exact location, stratigraphy, and distribution of each type was published (Lipschits, Sergi and Koch 2010).

In a forthcoming article Dr. Peter G. van der Veen and Prof. F. Bron write as follows:²⁶

Although an early seventh-century BCE date for some of the royal jar handles has been argued for recently by O. Lipschits et al., a separation of pre- and post-701 BCE royal stamp impressions was first proposed by G. M. Grena in his very useful volume on the royal jar handles (2004, pp. 333–338). Subsequently, this view was adopted by P. G. van der Veen in his PhD thesis (2005a, pp. 70, n. 336, 96 and n. 457, pp. 130–131 and n. 632, where the terms “continued” and “manufactured” were used synonymously), examined by O. Lipschits (as external assessor of Part 1 on Judahite seals) and by E. Lucas and P. Pitkanen (as final examiners of the dissertation). Also see van der Veen 2005b, p. 51; 2009, pp. 33–34). This view was also presented at international seminars (SBL in Vienna 2007 and EABS in Lisbon in 2008), as well as during seminar lectures held at Ramat Rachel (2006). Unfortunately no reference is made to any of the above publications by Lipschits et al. (most recently so Lipschits 2012; see also Grena 2012, more specifically <http://lmlk.blogspot.de/2012/03/hebrew-scriptures-vs-historical.html>).

Finally, the question of the drawings of the *lmlk* stamps should be presented. On the back cover of his book²⁷ Mr. Grena published a chart of the *lmlk* seal impressions summarizing his classification and chronological division

²⁵ Lipschits 2012: 4.

²⁶ Van der Veen and Bron, forthcoming: note 80. It is quoted here with the kind permission of Dr. van der Veen.

²⁷ Grena 2004.

which is mentioned above (see reproduction here in Figure 1). The drawings of the stamps are those presented by him in the body of the text,²⁸ and form the result of a scrupulous, methodical and meticulous effort to reach accurate drawings of the *lmlk* seals. For instance, the two types of four-winged *lmlk hbrn* stamps are based—one on the study of 33 stamps and the other on 55 stamps.²⁹

Lipschits *et al.* present a chart of all the *lmlk* stamps showing their chronological division which, as discussed above, is identical to Grena's division.³⁰ As a matter of convenience the chart is printed in *Tel Aviv* on two adjoining pages, each presenting one of the two chronological groups. The drawings of the stamps are described by Lipschits *et al.* as "Schematic drawings of ... *lmlk* types ... Drawings by Ido Koch".³¹ (Ido Koch is a doctoral student and a research assistant of Professor Lipschits). The "schematic drawings" published by Lipschits *et al.* in 2010 are similar, with the exception of some slight differences, to those prepared and published by Grena in 2004. This is described by Grena himself:³²

I drew the 21 LMLK seals using computer-aided tools after examining and photographing hundreds of actual handle impressions ... Lipschits et al. made minor modifications, and deleted two of them ... Then they applied the classification system published by André Lemaire in 1981.

Figs. 1 and 2 credit Ido Koch with the drawings, which contain these modifications to my own: 1) my dotted lines ... were removed or made solid, 2) all word-divider dots and slashes were erased, 3) thicker lines were added to give a more isometric appearance.

Lemaire included in his classification an un-inscribed, two-winged Type O II.³³ Grena did not include this type in his own classification and chart (Figure 1),³⁴ and likewise Lipschits *et al.* did not include it in their "schematic

²⁸ Grena 2004: 59–70.

²⁹ Grena 2004: Figs. 33–34.

³⁰ Lipschits *et al.* 2010: Figs. 1–2.

³¹ Lipschits *et al.* 2010: captions of Figs. 1–2.

³² Grena 2010: 5–6, and note 21.

³³ Lemaire 1981: 57*–58*, 60*, Pl. VIII.

³⁴ Grena 2004: 60–61.

drawings” (arranged according to the classification of Lemaire). Lipschits states, without a reference to Grena’s observation, that “a careful study... demonstrated” that the stamps attributed to Type O II are in fact of Type XII.³⁵

Very graciously George Grena relinquished the copyrights to his work in order to encourage research by other scholars.³⁶ However, this does not mean that the fruits of his work, or those of Ephraim Stern and Peter van der Veen, should be used without proper acknowledgement and authorization. In this Epilogue, I scrupulously limited my discussion to presentation of the data without any interpretation. The readers should draw their own conclusions.

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³⁵ Lipschits 2012: 4, note 1.

³⁶ Grena 2004: 2; 2010: note 20.

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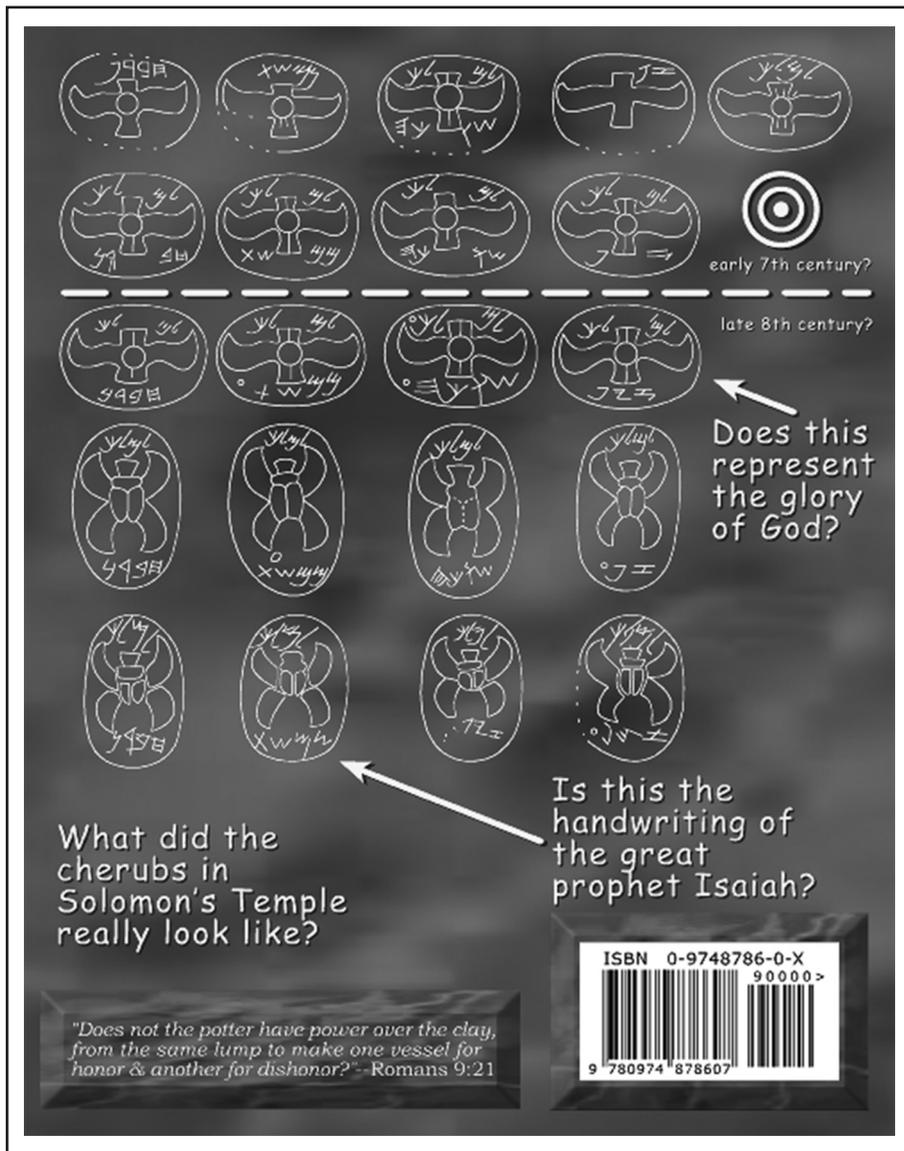


Figure 1.

Chart of *lmlk* seal impressions drawn by George M. Grena.

(Reproduced from Grena 2004, back cover, with the kind permission of Mr. Grena).